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On the culture-specificity of linguistic gender differences: The case of English and Russian apologies¹

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Abstract

The present paper analyzes the influence of gender and culture on speech act performance. Although culture as a factor shaping gender roles can be regarded as being implicitly addressed by the growing number of speech act studies analyzing gender differences in various languages, results from such studies are difficult to compare. This study examines responses to offensive situations produced under identical contextual conditions by English and Russian women and men, thus ensuring comparability across groups and allowing for statements on the culture-specificity of linguistic gender differences. The first part of the paper offers a contrastive analysis of English and Russian responses to offensive situations, sketching some culture-specific differences in dealing with them. The second part is devoted to an investigation of gender-based differences in English and Russian, their comparison and interpretation. Apart from apology strategies and intensifying devices, the study also examines the use of downgrading strategies and the effect of strategy combinations on the illocutionary force of the responses.

1. Introduction

1.1. Feminist linguistics

Ever since Lakoff's pioneering work on women's language, the field of feminist linguistics has been continuously gaining in popularity and broadening its scope. Early work described women's language as insecure and ineffective (Lakoff 2004 [1975]) and linked linguistic gender differences with unequal distribution of power (e.g., Thorne & Henley 1975; Fishman 1983).

Whereas these studies have been criticized for portraying women as "merely aberrant or defective copies of men" (Bergvall 1999: 278), research into girls' and boys' socialization patterns no longer measured

women against a male norm. It was shown that interactional styles are forged in early childhood and suggested that women and men are members of different “sociolinguistic subcultures” (Maltz & Borker 1982: 200). Numerous studies confirmed this theory by providing empirical evidence for gender-specific language usage (e.g., Tannen 1994; Holmes 1995; Coates 1994, 1996).

It did not take long, however, before research focusing on differences between female and male communicative styles met with criticism for ignoring diversity among women and similarities between women and men. In their seminal paper introducing the framework of communities of practice, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1998 [1992]) pointed out that generalizations about female and male language abstract gender from other aspects of social identity. Subsequent research increasingly challenged the concept of gender as a presupposed and stable category that determines linguistic choices. Instead, it came to be regarded as a dynamic concept realized through language use and interacting with other aspects of social identity in particular communities of practice. In the attempt to “move beyond the binary oppositions of male and female” (Mills 2003: 169) and break down “destructive dichotomies” (Freed 2005: 704), the field has inevitably shifted its focus from the prototypical to the untypical and exceptional (see e.g., McElhinny (1998) on female police officers or Bucholtz (1999) on female nerds).

It is, therefore, not surprising that several researchers voice the need for studies establishing gender-specific patterns, while arguing that they are indispensable in identifying and interpreting individual uses (e.g., Bergvall 1999: 288, Holmes 2005: 111). Bergvall maintains that the study of language and gender involves the analysis of “what is innate, what is socially constructed locally, and what is ideologically constructed” (1999: 285). Differentiating between these aspects of gender identity clearly illustrates the limitations of the communities of practice approach, and even linguists adopting this framework identify “constraints on what linguistic and pragmatic resources are available to women as opposed to men” (Christie 2005: 4).

1.2. *Feminist linguistics in Russia?*

Western feminists who took interest in Eastern Europe were disappointed to see that most East European women reject the ideas of the feminist movement (Temkina & Rotkirch 1997). In a survey conducted in Poland, some women even pointed out that there were more important problems in need of reform in Poland than language (Koniuszaniec & Błaszowska 2003: 277).

While women in the West were fighting for equal opportunities, those behind the Iron Curtain were “emancipated to subordination” (Temkina & Rotkirch 1997) by socialist ideology. As early as 1901, twenty-six percent of Russian industrial workers were women, while in 1917 the female proportion of the workforce reached forty percent (Comrie & Stone 1978: 160).

Women in the Soviet Union were not only expected to be both workers and mothers, but also had to spend a considerable amount of their time queuing in front of badly supplied shops to be able to feed their families. The introduction of a market economy has not improved the situation of Russian women. It deprived working mothers of the help the state used to provide in child care, and the discrepancy between male and female salaries has considerably increased (Ažgichina 2000).

Russian linguists take a rather critical attitude towards Western work on language and gender, arguing that, having originated in the feminist movement, this discipline is necessarily subjective (Zemskaja et al. 1993: 94). Studies discussing the relationship between gender and the Russian language tend to focus on female forms of professional terms (e.g., Comrie & Stone 1978; Tafel 1997) and the representation of women and men in proverbs and idioms (Tafel 1997; Doleschal & Schmid 2003).

The edited volume entitled *Slavic Gender Linguistics* (1999)—a collection of papers examining linguistic gender differences in several Slavic languages—remains an exception. In the introduction to the book, the field is described as one that has “become a research focus for Russian and Western Slavic linguists” (M. H. Mills 1999: vi), but little has been published on the subject since.

Russian studies examining gender-specific language use are largely limited to those conducted by Zemskaja and her colleagues (e.g.; Zemskaja et al. 1993). What makes Zemskaja’s work exceptional is that she started assembling a corpus of spoken Russian in the 1970s—at a time when most Western researchers relied on introspection, and in a country where, up to the present day, linguists show little interest in spoken language.

Although she does identify differences between female and male speech in her data, she regards them as negligible and defines the preferences for certain grammatical forms by one of the genders (e.g., diminutives by females) as mere tendencies of language usage. She does not attribute them to gender *per se* but to the different roles women and men fill within Russian society: The dual role of a working mother, for instance, enables Russian women to split their attention and switch between topics more easily than men.

Zemskaja maintains that factors such as the speakers’ age, character, education, profession and social role are more decisive in shaping their

speech than gender, and she rejects the idea that Russian women and men have distinct conversational styles (1993: 132).

2. The present study

Although gender has been recognized to interact with other aspects of social identity, such as class, age, and culture, most feminist linguists analyze the language of Western, middle class women (but see Bucholtz 1996; Mendoza-Denton 2004; Goodwin 2005).

The present study compares gender-specific language use in two countries: Britain, where, partly as a result of the feminist movement, gender roles have considerably changed over the past decades, and Russia, where linguistic gender differences have never been perceived as significant or problematic. Accordingly, the study illustrates the importance of culture as a factor responsible not only for differences between female and male conversational styles but also for attitudes towards these differences.

Whereas significant gender-specific differences in both languages would support Western research, their lack would confirm Zemskaja's doubts concerning the objectivity of Western feminist linguistics. A marked discrepancy in the extent to which gender-specific differences materialize in English and Russian, in contrast, can be attributed to cultural factors.

2.1. *Gender and apologies*

The present study focuses on gender- and culture-specific use of apologies. This speech act, perhaps due to its vital social function of restoring and maintaining social harmony, has received ample attention in previous research. It was one of the speech acts examined in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989), and the framework developed in this project was adopted in numerous studies analyzing apologies in various languages. Despite the recent criticism of Brown and Levinson's (1987) speech act theoretical approach to politeness (e.g., Eelen 2001; Mills 2003; Watts 2003), apologies remain a popular and insightful unit of analysis, as evidenced by an issue of the *Journal of Politeness Research* (2007) devoted entirely to this speech act.

Previous studies on gender-specific apology behavior, analyzing various languages and types of data, tend to agree in reporting differences between female and male apologies, while generally portraying women as more apologetic than men. The most influential contribution to the study of gender-specific use of apologies has been made by Holmes (e.g., 1995). In her corpus of ethnographically collected apologies offered by New

Zealand women and men, seventy-five percent of all apologies were offered by women and seventy-three percent to women. Holmes suggests that apologies have gender-specific functions: while for women, they express solidarity and concern for others, men regard them as “admissions of weakness, inadequacy or failure” (1995: 175).

Tannen’s analysis of conversations at work (1994) also shows American women more willing to apologize than men, and so does Meyerhoff’s study of a speech community of Vanuatu (1999). In her data, the word *sore* (sorry) occurs almost exclusively in female speech, where it assumes a wider range of functions than it does in male speech.

The multifunctional nature of apologies has also been illustrated by Christie’s analysis of parliamentary debate (2005). Although British male Members of Parliament (MPs) apologized more often than female MPs, they mainly did so in order to be able to perform a Face-Threatening Act (FTA). The function of the few apologies uttered by female MPs, in contrast, was to take responsibility and express concern (2005: 24). Similarly, Bean & Johnstone (1994) found that American males apologized twice as often as females during telephone interviews, where apologies served the function of discourse managing devices.

Researchers analyzing apologies on the basis of linguistic corpora (e.g., Aijmer 1996; Deutschmann 2003) do not report significant gender-differences in the use of apology formulae. It should be borne in mind, however, that while formulaic apologies can be easily located in a corpus, it is virtually impossible to identify indirect apologies and offenses for which no apology was offered, making it difficult to compare apology behavior across groups (compare Ogiermann 2004). Incidentally, this problem also affects the reliability of observational data (Holmes 1995: 157), but it can be avoided by employing experimental data elicitation techniques, such as role-plays and written discourse completion tests (DCTs).

Studies based on role-play data, e.g., Cordella’s study of apologies in Chilean Spanish and Australian English (1990) and Márquez Reiter’s analysis of British English and Uruguayan Spanish (2000) report an overall higher frequency of apology strategies in the female data. DCT studies confirm this tendency, and since they generally rely on large samples of data, the findings allow for fairly reliable generalizations about the apology behavior of the examined groups. Studies using DCT data show that women employ more apology strategies than men in a variety of languages, among them: American English (Bataineh & Bataineh 2005), British English (Ogiermann 2002), Peninsular Spanish (Stapleton 2004), Russian (Shardakova 2005), Hungarian (Suszczyńska 2005), and Jordanian Arabic (Bataineh & Bataineh 2006).

3. Method

Although the studies discussed above agree in portraying women as more apologetic than men, the results are difficult to compare, since the reported differences are not always equally significant. Moreover, these studies look at different communities of practice, different functions of apology formulae, and use different data collection methods.

The large corpora of comparable and replicable data that can be assembled by means of a DCT make this method indispensable for contrastive pragmatic research. What makes this instrument particularly useful for the present study is that data produced under identical contextual conditions by women and men in different languages can yield valuable insights into the culture-specificity of linguistic gender differences.

3.1. *Data collection instrument*

Despite the criticism DCT data have received for not adequately reflecting natural speech, there seems to be a consensus that DCT responses “accurately reflect the content expressed in natural speech” and “the values of the native culture” (Beebe & Cummings 1996: 75) and “indicate what strategic and linguistic options are consonant with pragmatic norms” (Kasper 2000: 329). Kasper even suggests that “authentic data may just not be a viable option when (. . .) the research goal is to compare the use of specific pragmatic features by different groups of speakers” (320).

The DCT developed for this study consists of ten scenarios, eight of which depict offensive situations, while two serve as distracters. The scenarios include selected combinations of the variables of social distance and power and hearer gender², so that the situations describe encounters with friends, strangers, socially more powerful acquaintances, and authority figures of both genders (see appendix for a copy of the questionnaire).

3.2. *Subjects*

The subjects participating in the study were all students—a group sharing various practices and fairly homogenous in terms of age, occupation, education, and social class. Since this description applies to British as well as Russian students, the present study can be said to compare similar communities of practice in different cultures.

Although students constitute a mixed-gender community of practice, it has been long acknowledged that academic men’s language is not

representative of what is generally associated with typical male speech (Lakoff 2004: 47 [1975]). In addition, the data were collected in departments with high proportions of female students, where gender differences can be expected to be even less significant than in other academic communities of practice.

The English DCT was distributed at universities in London, Cardiff, and Swansea, and the Russian version at two universities in Moscow. The corpus is comprised of 100 English and 100 Russian DCTs, with equal distribution between genders. Accordingly, the data consist of a total of 1600 responses elicited under identical contextual conditions from comparable population groups. The average age is 20.4 for the British and 17.9 for the Russian subjects—the younger age of the Russian students being due to the fact that they can enter university at the age of 16.

4. A contrastive analysis of English and Russian apologies

An analysis comparing gender-differences in English and Russian apology realizations cannot be conducted without knowing what it means to apologize in these languages. Hence, the present chapter is devoted to briefly outlining the differences between English and Russian apologies established in the data. Simultaneously, it describes the taxonomy used to categorize the data, which is a modified version of Olshtain and Cohen's speech act set of apologizing (1983).

4.1. Direct apology strategies

The most evident differences between Russian and English apologies appear in connection with linguistic realizations of Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs). Although both languages offer several formulaic expressions potentially serving as apology strategies (for a detailed discussion see Ogiermann 2006, 2007), each language exhibits a marked preference for one IFID realization.

My English data display an extraordinarily strong focus on the expression of regret, with 635 out of 645 IFIDs (= 98%) taking the form of (I'm) sorry. The full form "I'm sorry" is slightly more frequent, amounting to 336 instances, while the short form "sorry" occurs 299 times.

The most conventionalized Russian IFID is the request for forgiveness, which is performed by means of the verbs *izvinit'* and *prostit'* (to forgive). *Izvinit'* contains the word *vina* (guilt), so that by using the imperative *izvini* (T-form) or *izvinite* (V-form), the speaker literally asks to be freed from guilt. The formula *prosti-te*—etymologically going back to the

permission to stand up after bowing—is associated with religious contexts and forgiving sins. This might be the reason why it is used to apologize for more serious, even unpardonable offenses (Rathmayr 1996: 66).

In my data, *izvini-te* is more frequent than *prosti-te*, with 404 occurrences of the former and 125 of the latter. Among the remaining IFID realizations, there are 27 apology expressions containing infinitive forms of these two verbs or nouns derived from them, so that they can be regarded as stylistically marked variants of the request for forgiveness. With a total of 586 IFIDs in the Russian data, the various forms of the request for forgiveness make up ninety-five percent of all IFIDs.

Although IFIDs are highly routinized and speakers employing them are more likely to be aware of their function than their meaning, the focus on one IFID form in a particular language allows an insight into its culture-specific concept of apologizing. In English, apologies are generally viewed as formulae expressing regret, and have thus been assigned to the category of expressives. In Russian, the concept of guilt is central to the speech act of apologizing, and since the main IFID realization has the form of a request, Russian apologies have been classified as belonging to the category of directives (Rathmayr 1996).

Another factor distinguishing requests for forgiveness from expressions of regret is the degree to which they threaten both interlocutors' face. In requesting forgiveness, the offender not only places her- or himself at the hearer's mercy, but also threatens the hearer's negative face by assigning her or him an active role in the process of forgiving. The expression of regret, on the other hand, implies a much lower degree of face-threat for both parties involved. The focus on this IFID in English seems to be in accordance with the preference for negative politeness in Anglo-Saxon culture (Brown & Levinson 1987), whereas the use of requests for forgiveness in Russian confirms the classification of Russian culture as a positive politeness culture (Rathmayr 1996).

4.2. *Intensification*

Since the expression of regret is “relatively ‘weak’ in its apologetic force” (Suszczyńska 1999: 1060), it requires more intensification than other IFIDs. Another reason why the Russian subjects used fewer intensifiers than did the British ones might be that the imposition inherent in the request for forgiveness increases with intensification.

The total number of intensifiers in the English data amounts to 273 instances, which means that the English respondents intensified forty-two percent of all their IFIDs. The frequency of intensifying devices in Russian is considerably lower, for they come to only 136 instances, thus

Table 1. Total numbers of IFIDs and intensifying devices in English and Russian

N = 800	English	Russian	χ^2 (df 1)	
IFIDs	645	586	2.74	n. s.
Intensifiers	273	136	45.22	p < .0001
Exclamations	166	112	10.01	p < .0015

accompanying twenty-three percent of Russian IFIDs. A chi-square analysis shows this difference to be highly significant, but one should bear in mind that the intensifying devices preferred in the two languages are not fully comparable. While nearly all English intensifiers take the form of adverbials, such as “really”, “so” and “very”, in the Russian data, due to the strong focus on the request for forgiveness, eighty-six percent of intensifying devices are represented by the word *požalujsta* (please).

Exclamations also have an intensifying function, though they primarily serve as expressions of surprise. They are more frequent in the English data, where they occur 166 times and center around expressions such as “oh”, “oh shit”, “oh my God”, “oops”, etc. The Russian subjects used 112 exclamations, most of them taking the form of *oj*, occasionally *oops* and *gospodi* (Lord). However, since the data have been elicited by means of a written DCT, which is not a reliable instrument for examining linguistic devices expressing spontaneity and emotionality, these figures should be regarded as indicative only.

4.3. Indirect strategies

Whereas strong agreement on a particular IFID realization among speakers of one language illustrates the culture-specificity of formulaic apologies, indirect strategies are more likely to reflect conscious pragmatic choices.

Although the classification of the data largely adheres to the speech act set of apologizing suggested by Olshtain and Cohen (1983), some changes were considered necessary to meet the requirements of this study, one of them being the addition of the strategy “concern for hearer”. A more substantial change consists in replacing the strategies “explanation” and “taking on responsibility” by a group of account strategies categorized according to the degree of responsibility acceptance and the corresponding face-threat inherent in them.

4.3.1. *Positive politeness apology strategies.* The strategies “offer of repair”, “promise of forbearance” and “concern for hearer” are all contextually restricted to particular offensive situations. Repair is generally

Table 2. *Total numbers of positive politeness apology strategies in English and Russian*

N = 800	English	Russian	χ^2 (df 1)	
Offer of repair	365	381	0.3	n. s.
Promise of forbearance	47	53	0.26	n. s.
Concern for hearer	55	20	15.42	p < .0001

offered in situations in which material damage has been caused, forbearance is an important element in apologies for recurrent offensive behavior, and concern for hearer is likely to be expressed when physical or psychological damage may have occurred.

What these three strategies have in common is not only that they are indirect realizations of the speech act of apologizing, but they also exhibit a stronger orientation towards positive face needs than IFIDs. Incidentally, they all appear in Brown and Levinson's chart of positive politeness strategies as "offer", "promise" and "attend to H" (1987: 102).

Considering that Russian has been classified as a positive politeness language while British English favors negative politeness, the preferences for the three positive politeness strategies are surprisingly similar, "concern for hearer" even being significantly more frequent in the English data.

Most offers of repair consist of formulations in the future tense, naming the measures that will be taken in order to compensate for the damage, e.g., "*Ja kuplju tebe novych rybok*" (I will buy you new fish). These direct realizations express a high degree of obligation on the part of the speaker. Indirect realizations of offers of repair, in contrast, generally take the form of questions and suggestions, such as "Would you like me to tidy up?" or "*Možno ja kuplju tebe drugich?*" (May I buy other ones for you?). Indirect offers can convey consideration for the hearer's wishes but also reluctance, depending on the exact formulation or prosodic features, but also the interlocutors' cultural background.

Although one would expect a stronger preference for direct forms in a positive politeness and indirect forms in a negative politeness culture, direct offers of repair are only slightly more frequent in the Russian data, where they amount to 289 instances as opposed to 274 in the English data. Indirect realizations, in contrast, were used by 91 English and 92 Russian respondents.

However, differences do appear in connection with the use of intensifying devices emphasizing the willingness to repair the damage. Whereas 40 offers of repair formulated by Russians include the adverb *objazatel'no* (definitely), in the English data, there is only one instance of "definitely" and two of "of course".

Furthermore, both sets of data include formulae aiming at appeasing the hearer, which can also be defined as positive politeness strategies. In the English data, there are 16 instances of the expression “don’t worry” and one of “no worries”. The Russian respondents, in contrast, used 30 appeasing formulae consisting of negated imperatives of four synonymous verbs: expressing the state of being restless (*bespokoit’sja* and *volnovat’sja*), the process of worrying (*pereživat’*) and getting in a bad mood (*rasstraivat’sja*). Hence, Russian not only shows a stronger preference for this positive politeness strategy, but also makes use of a broader range of formulae.

Generally, there seems to be a tendency for the British to use routinized formulae and for Russians to favor individually phrased strategies. When promising forbearance, 33 English and 33 Russian subjects used stereotypical phrases applicable in any offensive situation with a potentially recurring character, such as: *Bol’she etogo ne povtoritsja* / “It won’t happen again”. Promises of forbearance explicitly addressing the circumstances of the offense, in contrast, appear 20 times in the Russian and 14 times in the English data.

The English speakers’ preference for formulaic expressions is even more marked in the case of concern for the hearer. Although the English informants used nearly three times as many expressions of concern as did the Russians, most of them consisted of two variants of only one formulaic expression, namely “Are you OK?” and “Are you alright?”. The Russian respondents, in contrast, resorted to various individual formulations aimed at ascertaining that the victim was OK (*S vami vse v porjadke?*) didn’t get seriously hurt (*Vy ne sil’no udarilis’?*), and asking how she felt (*Kak vy sebja čuvstvuete?*). Consequently, although the Russian data exhibit a relatively low frequency of expressions of concern, the linguistic realizations are more varied than the English ones, showing Russians more attentive to contextual features.

4.3.2. *Accounts.* The category of accounts encompasses the strategies explanation and taking on responsibility originally distinguished by Olsh-tain and Cohen (1983). The reason why this distinction was abandoned is that it has proved problematic in previous research, for these strategies tend to overlap: While expressions of responsibility often refer to the circumstances of the offense, explanations tend to reveal the speaker’s willingness to accept responsibility for the situation.

Furthermore, discussions of taking on responsibility often include strategies downgrading and denying responsibility, thus covering the entire spectrum of strategies related to responsibility. What is generally overlooked, though, is that explanations may also refer to circumstances

either linking the speaker with the offense or delegating the responsibility elsewhere. Therefore, these two strategies have been put together and divided into upgrading and downgrading accounts.

Table 3 provides examples illustrating the account types distinguished in the present study. Although they have been placed on a continuum of increasing responsibility acceptance and face-threat, the exact order is

Table 3. *Account types*

	English examples	Russian examples
Downgrading		
Deny	I wasn't me.—S.6. I did return them on time.—S.2	<i>Ja tut ni pri čem.</i> —S.1 [lit. I am here not with anything.] <i>Obratites' v sosednjuju dver'.</i> —S.6 [Turn to the neighboring door.]
Act innocently	I've no idea what happened.—S.1 I just found them floating in the morning.—S.1	<i>Ponjatija ne imeju!</i> —S.1 [I have no idea.] <i>Ne znaju kak èto ko mne popalo.</i> —S.7 [I don't know how this got to me.]
Minimize	It was only one party. It doesn't happen that often.—S.6	<i>Raz v god—možno.</i> —S.6 [Once a year—it's allowed.]
Excuse	The ticket machine had broken in the station.—S.6	<i>Čto-to slučilos's zamkom.</i> —S.1 [Something has happened to the lock.]
Admit facts	Your fish died.—S.1	<i>Tvoi rybki sdochli.</i> —S.1 [Your fish died.]
Upgrading		
Justify	I didn't realize how frail they were.—S.1	<i>Ja prosto vas ne zametila.</i> —S.4 [I simply did not notice you.]
Lack of intent	It was a genuine mistake.—S.7 I had no intention of stealing it.—S.7	<i>Èto vyšlo slučajno.</i> —S.4 [This happened accidentally.]
Embarrassment	This is really embarrassing.—S.5	<i>Mne tak neudobno.</i> —S.2 [lit. This is so unpleasant to me.]
Accept	That was totally my fault.—S.2 I don't think I fed them enough.—S.1	<i>Ja vinovata pered toboj.</i> —S.2 [I am guilty before you.] <i>Ja plocho uchažival za rybkami.</i> —S.1 [I badly looked after the fish.]
Self-Criticism	I'm completely useless.—S.2	<i>Ja byla očen' neostorožna.</i> —S.4 [I was very inattentive.]

open to re-arrangement, being dependent on the exact linguistic realization and contextual factors.

While excuses, admissions of facts, and justifications necessarily refer to the circumstances of the offense, the remaining account strategies comprise formulaic expressions focusing on the offender's responsibility as well as situation-specific realizations focusing on the contents of the offense.

Downgrading accounts include strategies denying responsibility directly, e.g., by negating one's involvement in the offense, and indirectly, e.g., by acting innocently. The category further contains expressions minimizing the offensiveness of the situation and excuses providing external factors leading up to the offense. Admissions of facts can be defined as distancing devices referring to the offense in a neutral way. By resorting to this strategy, the speaker neither accepts responsibility nor attempts to reduce or deny it.

Although justifications name circumstances which are face-saving for the speaker, they do not deny responsibility for the offense and generally add to the illocutionary force of the apology. Many of the realizations of this account type emphasize the accidental nature of the offense, which is exactly the function of the slightly more face-threatening account type termed lack of intent. What distinguishes this strategy from justifications is that it does not contain any information making the offense more pardonable.

Expressions of embarrassment indirectly convey a negative evaluation of one's behavior, whereas direct admissions of responsibility clearly link the speaker with the offense. Responsibility can be accepted by means of formulaic expressions of guilt as well as confessions critically portraying the offender's behavior. Expressions of self-criticism only indirectly accept responsibility, but they are highly face-threatening for the speaker and clearly have an upgrading function.

The frequency of upgrading accounts in the two languages is surprisingly similar, with 605 instances in the English and 607 in the Russian data. Furthermore, justifications, the least face-threatening and most frequent upgrading accounts, occur 440 times in the English and 441 times in the Russian data. The only notable difference is that the Russian respondents show a stronger preference for expressions of lack of intent and the English subjects for expressions of embarrassment (see table 7 for all frequencies).

Downgrading accounts, in contrast, are significantly more frequent in the English data, where they amount to 294, as opposed to only 182 instances in the Russian data ($\chi^2 = 25.88$ [df 1], $p < .0001$). This significant disparity is mainly due to a higher frequency of accounts

admitting facts, acting innocently and denying responsibility in the English data.

Consequently, the main difference between the two languages in the use of account strategies is that Russians seem less protective towards their face when apologizing. This is not only reflected in the lower frequency of downgrading accounts in the Russian data but also in the choice of linguistic realizations. Whereas British responses tend to consist of brief expressions, such as: “I forgot”, Russian responses are more likely to contain an explicit reference to the offense, as in: *Ja sovsem zabyla, čto disk ostalsja u menja v rukach* (I totally forgot that the CD has remained in my hands).

4.4. *Strategy combinations*

The inclusion of downgrading accounts in the analysis—even though they do not serve the function of apology strategies—proved indispensable for the interpretation of the data. Since the English data contain more IFIDs and more downgrading accounts than do the Russian responses, one could hypothesize that combinations of these two contradictory strategies are more likely to occur in English. Moreover, the expression of regret can easily merge into a mere expression of sympathy, as in: “I’m sorry, I’ve no idea what happened”. Hence, comparisons of total numbers of particular strategies across groups are problematic in that they do not account for the effect strategy combinations may have on the illocutionary force of the entire response.

Since responsibility acceptance is an indispensable element of an apology (see, e.g., Fillmore 1971: 287 or Holmes 1990: 161), the responses were classified into four categories according to two factors: whether they contain an IFID and whether they accept or deny responsibility (see table 4). Whereas an apology formula accompanied by strategies denying responsibility will not result in a successful apology, combinations of upgrading accounts with one of the positive politeness strategies generally do, even though they do not include an IFID explicitly marking the response as an apology.³

The distribution illustrated in table 4 exhibits a significant difference between the English and the Russian data ($\chi^2 = 33.62$ [df 3], $p < .0001$).

Table 4. *IFIDs vs. responsibility acceptance in English and Russian*

	+IFID/+Resp	-IFID/+Resp	+IFID/-Resp	-IFID/-Resp	Total
English	507	81	81	131	800
Russian	506	150	56	88	800

The most remarkable result of this classification is that although IFIDs are more frequent in the English data, the frequencies of apologies including an IFID (+IFID/+Resp) are almost identical in both languages, and the total number of responses accepting responsibility (+IFID/+Resp & -IFID/+Resp) amounts to 656 in Russian and to only 588 in English.

In other words, whereas my Russian subjects show a greater tendency to apologize without resorting to an IFID, the British produce more responses in which the apologetic attitude conveyed by an IFID is cancelled out by the addition of face-saving strategies.

5. A contrastive analysis of male and female apologies in English

Before analyzing the apology strategies employed by English women and men, I would like to devote some attention to a stereotype associated with female speech, namely that women talk more than men. Provided that elaborate apologies are more polite than short ones, the length of the responses may indicate that women are particularly concerned about maintaining social harmony.

My data seem to confirm this hypothesis as the total amount of words is 5931 in the female and only 5067 in the male data. However, one should be careful when interpreting this significant difference ($\chi^2 = 67.72$ [df 1], $p < .0001$) since the data also include downgrading strategies.

The distribution of IFIDs confirms the tendency for women to formulate more explicit apologies than men, for the number of IFIDs amounts to 348 instances in the female and to only 297 instances in the male data ($\chi^2 = 3.88$ [df 1], $p = 0.0489$). An additional distinction that can be made is that between short and long forms of the expression of regret, the elliptic character of the former making them slightly less apologetic. The male subjects show a stronger preference for short forms: There is a total of 164 instances of the elliptic “sorry” and only 128 of the full form in the male data. The female respondents, in contrast, used 208 full forms and 138 short forms. This significant preference ($\chi^2 = 13.76$ [df 1], $p = 0.0002$) for long forms in the female data becomes even more important when considering that this variant of the expression of regret is more likely to be intensified.

Accordingly, the preference for full forms in the female data is paralleled by a high frequency of adverbial intensifiers: Whereas women employed 184 intensifiers, men used only 89 ($\chi^2 = 32.36$ [df 1], $p < .0001$). The differences in the repertoire of intensifying devices, in contrast, are rather negligible. Whereas the range of adverbial intensifiers in the male

data was restricted to the four variants: “really”, “so”, “very” and “terribly”, female respondents occasionally also used “truly” and “ever so”.

The frequencies of exclamations are even more discrepant. With 118 instances in the female and 48 in the male data ($\chi^2 = 28.68$ (df 1), $p < .0001$), British women not only seem to be more concerned about their apologies sounding particularly sincere, but also appear more emotional than British men.

The three positive politeness strategies are all slightly more frequent in the female data, but none of the differences reaches statistical significance (see table 7). An analysis of offers of repair according to the level of directness underlying their linguistic realizations indicates that, contrary to common expectations, British women tend to use more direct forms than men. Whereas direct realizations occur 147 times in the female and 127 times in the male data, indirect formulations were favored by 46 British women and 45 British men. A possible reason for the slightly higher degree of directness in the female data is that offers are beneficial to the hearer. The gender-specific preferences for appeasers, however, do not render the female respondents particularly hearer-supportive, for these linguistic devices are nearly equally frequent in both sets of data.

A look at the distribution of upgrading and downgrading accounts in the English data shows women a little more willing to accept responsibility and risk losing face than men. Upgrading accounts occur 285 times in the male and 320 times in the female data, whereas downgrading accounts amount to 155 and 139 instances, respectively. Since the slightly higher number of upgrading accounts in the female data is mainly due to a stronger preference for justifications—that is for the least face-threatening upgrading account type—this difference can be dismissed as negligible. The higher frequency of expressions of embarrassment in the female data, in contrast, can be interpreted as confirming previous findings portraying female apologies as more other-oriented than men’s (e.g., Holmes 1995).

Further interesting—even though not statistically significant—differences materialize in the use of downgrading accounts, one of them being that men seem to be more inclined to provide excuses than women. When refusing to accept responsibility, men favored direct denials while women resorted more often to indirect realizations of this strategy. Their preference for a more defensive way of denying responsibility may be interpreted as an example of female lack of assertiveness.

An analysis of combinations of IFIDs and strategies accepting and denying responsibility shows that apologies including an IFID are slightly more frequent in the female data, while the numbers of responses that cannot be defined as apologies are similar for both groups.

Table 5. IFIDs vs. responsibility acceptance in the English data

	+IFID/+Resp	-IFID/+Resp	+IFID/-Resp	-IFID/-Resp	Total
Female	266	31	41	62	400
Male	242	50	39	69	400

Although the different distributions in the female and male data do not reach statistical significance, an interesting pattern emerges in connection with responses that are likely to be accepted as apologies even though they do not include an IFID and those denying responsibility despite the inclusion of an IFID. British men apologized without resorting to routinized apology formulae more often than women, while the frequencies of responses combining an IFID with an unapologetic attitude are comparable in both sets of data.

As a result, although IFIDs were used significantly more frequently by British women, the numbers of responses classifying as apologies are similar for both genders, as they amount to 297 in the female and 292 in the male data.

6. A contrastive analysis of male and female apologies in Russian

Not surprisingly, the stereotype of women being more talkative than men also exists in Russia (Zemskaja et al. 1993), and the data indicate that Russian and British women are very similar in this respect. Incidentally, the discrepancy between the lengths of responses formulated by male and female Russians is nearly identical with that established for the English data. In both languages, fifty-four percent of the words were uttered by females and forty-six percent by males. Since the Russian responses are generally shorter, the total number for each gender is lower, with the female data comprising 4,094 and the male 3,536 words ($\chi^2 = 40.66$ [df 1], $p < .0001$).

The number of IFIDs is slightly higher in the female data, where it amounts to 308 instances. With a total of 278 IFIDs used by Russian males, this discrepancy does not reach statistical significance. As I have argued earlier, requests for forgiveness are the preferred Russian IFID realization, making up ninety-five percent of all IFIDs in the data. The imperative form of the verb *izviniť* occurs 206 times in the female and 198 in the male data. The overall higher frequency of IFIDs in the female data is, therefore, mainly due to preferences for the form *prosti-te*, which was used by 80 females and 45 males ($\chi^2 = 9.24$ [df 1], $p = 0.0024$).

Analogously to the divergent illocutionary forces of the full and short forms of the English expression of regret, the two verbs available for performing the request for forgiveness in Russian have different implications. The religious connotations of the verb *prostit'* make it more self-humiliating than the more common *izvinit'*. Hence, both British and Russian women favor the apology form with the stronger illocutionary force. However, out of the 27 instances of the stylistically marked requests for forgiveness found in the Russian data, 20 were employed by men.

Although Russian women used more intensifiers than Russian men, the discrepancy is less marked than in the English data. Out of the 136 intensifiers found in the Russian material 87 were used by women and 49 by men ($\chi^2 = 10.06$ [df 1], $p = 0.0015$). Another element occasionally accompanying the request for forgiveness with a potentially intensifying function is the direct object *menja*. Whereas English requests for forgiveness normally include the pronoun *me*, identifying the speaker as the person to be forgiven, this element is often omitted in Russian. According to Rathmayr, “the added *menja* makes the expression sound more serious” (“*das hinzugesetzte menja verleiht der Äußerung Ernst*”) (1996: 72), whereas Formanovskaja argues that it “makes the formula (...) more personal” (“*delaet formulu (...) bolee ličnostnoj*”) (2002: 125).

In either case, it can be regarded as a form of intensification. In the present data, *menja* occurs 38 times, that is with only seven percent of all requests for forgiveness uttered by my Russian respondents. Interestingly, this intensifying device was used almost exclusively by women, with only six instances in the male data.

Rathmayr’s claim that the exclamation *oj* is characteristic of female speech (1996: 92) cannot be confirmed by my results, though the difference between the 72 exclamations appearing in the female and the 40 instances in the male data is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 8.58$ [df 1], $p = 0.0034$).

The distribution of positive politeness apology strategies in the Russian data mirrors the pattern emerging from the English data, with females exhibiting a slightly stronger preference for positive politeness strategies than males. The most marked difference arises in connection with expressions of concern, whose low occurrence, however, does not allow for generalizations (see table 7).

Differences concerning linguistic realizations of the three positive politeness strategies are greatest in the case of offers of repair, the distribution of direct and indirect formulations resembling that in the English data. Whereas Russian men used 139 direct and 43 indirect realizations, in the female data these figures amount to 150 and 49, respectively—

Table 6. *IFIDs vs. responsibility acceptance in the Russian data*

	+IFID/+Resp	-IFID/+Resp	+IFID/-Resp	-IFID/-Resp	Total
Female	261	70	33	36	400
Male	245	80	23	52	400

again showing women slightly more direct when performing a speech act which is beneficial to the hearer.

Disparities in the use of intensifiers and appeasing formulae accompanying offers of repair further confirm this tendency. The intensifying adverbial *objazatel'no* appears 26 in the female and only 14 times in the male data, showing Russian women more determined to compensate for the damage. Appeasers were also more popular among Russian women, for they employed them 18 times, while resorting to all four verbs identified in the data. In the male data, in contrast, there are only twelve instances of three variants of appeasers.

The distribution of account strategies resembles that established for the English data. Russian men used 281 upgrading and 99 downgrading accounts whereas women used 326 of the former and 83 of the latter, thus showing an overall greater willingness to accept responsibility. This is mainly due to the statistically significant differences in the distribution of excuses and expressions of lack of intent, while the frequencies of the remaining account strategies are comparable.

Excuses appear 45 times in the male and 25 in the female data ($\chi^2 = 5.16$ [df = 1], $p = 0.0231$), fully confirming the pattern emerging from the English data. Expressions of lack of intent, in contrast, were used 59 times by women and 26 time by men ($\chi^2 = 12.04$ [df = 1], $p = 0.0005$), which stands in opposition to the distribution in the English data, where men expressed lack of intent more often than women.

A classification of the Russian responses according to whether they contain an IFID and whether they accept responsibility yields findings partly confirming those emerging from the English data.

Russian responses including an IFID are slightly more frequent in the female data, where they amount to 294 instances, as opposed to 268 in the male data. The total numbers of responses accepting responsibility are even closer, with 331 instances in the female and 325 in the male data, thus considerably narrowing down the discrepancy in the use of IFIDs.

On the whole, Russian men and women show a stronger agreement in apologizing without resorting to a formulaic apology strategy than do the

English respondents—though Russian men tend to deny responsibility in an unambiguous way, whereas women seem more inclined to disguise their unapologetic attitude by using an IFID.

7. Evaluation: Comparing the differences

Generally, the results of the present analysis can be evaluated as confirming the existence of gender-based differences in apologizing. However, while some tendencies appear in both languages, the discrepancies are not always equally significant and, in a few cases, preferences associated with one of the genders in one language seem more characteristic of the other gender in the other language.

As table 7 illustrates, there are more statistically significant differences between languages than between genders, while significant gender-specific differences are slightly more frequent in Russian but reach a higher level of significance in English.

In both languages, women used more IFIDs and opted for the form with the stronger illocutionary force more often than men. The English women used the full form of the expression of regret 1.6 times as frequently as did English men, whereas Russian females employed the imperative form of the verb *prostit'* 1.8 times as often as did Russian males. The stronger preference for these IFID realizations by females can be interpreted as confirming Brown and Levinson's thesis that "there is a systematic higher rating of FTAs by women" (1987: 32). The Russian men's preference for stylistically marked IFIDs, however, stands in opposition to this pattern.

Although English and Russian women agree in using more intensifiers and exclamations than men, the discrepancies are less marked in Russian. Whereas English women used 2.1 times as many intensifiers and nearly 2.5 as many exclamations as did English men, in the Russian data, these differences amount to 1.8 in both cases. However, the much higher frequency of the pronoun *menja* in the female data increases the discrepancy in the use of intensification by Russian men and women.

The consistently, though only slightly, higher frequency of positive politeness apology strategies in the female data seems to confirm the thesis that women put more effort into maintaining relationships than men. Since offers of repair are beneficial to the hearer, the English and Russian women's preference for direct realizations of this apology strategy can be interpreted as rendering further support to such an explanation. Furthermore, Russian women also used more appeasers and adverbials emphasizing the speaker's commitment.

Table 7. Frequencies across genders and languages: *N* = 400 for gender groups, *N* = 800 for language groups

	English ♂	English ♀	ENGLISH	Russian ♂	Russian ♀	RUSSIAN
IFIDs & Intensification						
IFID	*297	*348	645	278	308	586
Intensifier	***89	***184	***273	**49	**87	***136
Exclamation	***48	***118	**166	**40	**72	**112
Positive politeness strategies						
Repair	172	193	365	182	199	381
Forbearance	19	28	47	25	28	53
Concern	23	32	***55	7	13	***20
∑	214	253	467	214	240	454
Accounts						
Downgrading						
<i>Opt out</i>	6	6	12	5	4	9
Deny	34	22	**56	13	13	**26
Act innocently	25	36	***61	11	7	***18
Minimize	16	14	30	11	11	22
Excuse	42	25	67	*45	*25	70
Admit facts	32	36	**68	14	23	**37
∑	155	139	***294	99	83	***182
Upgrading						
Justify	206	234	440	214	227	441
Lack of intent	37	33	70	***26	***59	85
Embarrassment	4	12	*16	2	2	*4
Accept	36	35	71	36	34	70
Self-criticism	2	6	8	3	4	7
∑	285	320	605	281	326	607

* = *p* < .05, ** = *p* < .01, *** = *p* < .001 (chi-square test)

Although English and Russian women agree in using more upgrading and fewer downgrading accounts than men, their choices of the various upgrading and downgrading account types are partly contradictory. While both English and Russian men used more excuses, the distribution of lack of intent is diametrically opposed in the two languages, with English men and Russian women displaying a particular preference for this strategy. Furthermore, English women employed expressions of embarrassment and acted innocently more often than men. The former may be associated with female speech due to their emotional character, and the latter may be interpreted as displaying a more defensive attitude than the explicit denials of responsibility favored by English males.

Interestingly, the classification of the responses according to whether they entail responsibility acceptance considerably reduces the differences

between genders. In both languages, the numbers of apologetic responses are nearly equal for both genders. Russian women accepted responsibility 331 times while Russian males did so 325 times. In the English data, where the differences in the use of individual apology strategies between genders are even statistically significant, there are 297 responses accepting responsibility in the female and 292 in the male data.

Clearly, an analysis of the illocutionary force of entire responses calls for a re-interpretation of the seemingly more apologetic attitude derivable from the women's stronger preference for individual apology strategies. In contrast to comparisons of total numbers of strategies identified in the data, generally portraying women as more polite, the proportions of responses accepting responsibility reveal a self-protecting tendency. Perhaps female "politeness" reported in previous research reflects concern for adhering to social norms and appearing polite rather than concern for the other.

I am aware of the constraints on my analysis imposed by the written medium with which the data were collected. Any investigation of the speaker's intention, in particular, will never be fully reliable without taking into account prosodic and kinesic features. Nevertheless, my results suggest that an analysis of written data going beyond the provision of frequencies of politeness strategies can provide valuable insights into the speakers' attitude and the potential perlocution of the speech act under investigation.

8. Conclusion

The analysis clearly shows that there are differences between male and female use of apology strategies in both English and Russian, though not as many as there are between the two languages. Nonetheless, these results could be viewed as rendering support to the theory that men and women represent different sub-cultures and providing counterevidence to Zemskaja's claims that Russian women and men do not have distinct conversational styles. On the other hand, all four groups resorted to the same range of strategies—the differences being mainly quantitative, so that the results could be interpreted as merely confirming the universal character of Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) speech act of apologizing.

The fact that British women used particularly many routine strategies and intensifying devices rendering their behavior apologetic and polite even when accompanied by face-saving strategies seems rather striking if one considers that feminist linguists argue against the existence of gender-specific differences (e.g., Freed 2005).

It is certainly true that the position of women in British society has considerably changed over the past decades; that they have gained access to the same educational and employment opportunities as men, and that this has affected their communicative styles. However, the reason why “the media continue to characterise women’s and men’s language as different” (Freed 2005: 700) may well be that they still are. Even though recent research in feminist linguistics has amply illustrated that there is variation in women’s speech, Lakoff’s characterization of women’s language “continues to be accepted by diverse groups of speakers as a valid representation of their own discursive experiences” (Buchholz & Hall 1995: 6).

While the women’s liberation movement has contributed toward more equality between genders, the changes Russia has been undergoing since the fall of the Iron Curtain have led to the development of new gender roles (described in Temkina & Rotkirch 1997). While some Russian women take on additional jobs in private companies, focus on their career, and let their parents and (remarkably less often) husbands care for their children, those whose husbands happen to have a well-paid job become housewives. Although most Western feminists would regard this development as a step back, many Russian women appreciate the time they can spend with their children and do not expect any help in the household from the family’s breadwinner. These new gender roles can be expected to affect their conversational styles.

The present study has examined apologies uttered by members of a predominantly female community of practice in two cultures, and it has identified a number of differences between female and male use of apologies. These differences can be expected to be greater in other communities of practice and across various communities of practice. Furthermore, gender roles are more distinct in some cultures than they are in others and societal changes tend to affect gender roles and women’s language.

Many more studies examining the relationship between language and gender as well as other aspects of social identity are necessary before the gender-specific language patterns established so far can be described as universal. While quantitative research on apologies provides valuable insights into gender-specific ways of restoring social equilibrium, qualitative studies can also shed light on the various functions apology formulae assume, and how women and men differ in employing them.

Appendix

English version of the questionnaire (the order was randomized for data collection)

Your native language(s):

Your age:

Your gender:

The subject(s) you study:

Imagine yourself in the situations below and try to react as spontaneously as possible (don't think). Please, use direct speech.

Example:

You are returning a book at the library and the librarian notices that you have spilled coffee over it.

I am terribly sorry. My little brother pushed me when I was reading in the kitchen.

1. When going on holiday your friend gave you his flat keys and asked you to feed his fish. You have not always had the time and some of the fish have died. When you return the keys your friend asks what happened.
 2. Your friend had asked you to return some video tapes for her. You totally forgot and she has just received a call from the video shop, saying that the films are required by another customer and she owes a week's fees.
 3. You see a friend of yours in the crowd, run up to him and hit him on the back. Only then you realize that it's not your friend, but a complete stranger.
 4. When leaving a crowded shop you let go a heavy door and it hits a woman behind you.
 5. You have borrowed a book from a professor. Now you are supposed to give it back to him, but you cannot remember where you put it.
 6. You had a party at your flat. The next day you meet the landlady, who lives in the same house. She complains about the noise and the dirty staircase.
 7. You are at a shopping centre and having an interesting conversation with your friend. You are so engaged in it that you don't realize that you are holding a CD in your hand that you were going to buy. You leave the shop and the alarm goes off. A security guy comes up to you.
 8. You are just in time to catch your train and have neither a ticket nor money with you. You have just taken a seat when the ticket inspector enters the compartment. She asks you for your ticket.
- Distrafter 1.* You have lent a book to a friend of yours and she returns it in a bad condition.

Distracter 2. You got ill and cannot attend an important lecture. You ring up a fellow student to ask if you can copy his notes.

Notes

1. A provisional version of this paper was pre-published as: A Contrastive Analysis of Gender-Based Differences in English and Russian Apologies by LAUD (eds.), Series A: General & Theoretical Papers, Paper No. 669. Duisburg-Essen University and presented at the 31st International LAUD Symposium. The preparation of the final version involved a new categorization of the data. I would like to thank the conference participants who attended my lecture for the interesting discussion and the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. The remaining errors are all mine.
2. For methodological reasons, addressee gender was not included in the analysis. An examination of DCT data collected in languages in which gender is encoded morphologically, such as Russian and Polish, has shown that addressee gender can be easily misinterpreted. Moreover, the situations used in the questionnaire are all different and include several factors other than gender, making it difficult to extract it as the variable responsible for strategy choice. In retrospective interviews conducted with some of the subjects, gender was seldom named as the variable leading to the preference of one strategy over another.
3. For classification criteria, examples and discussion of problematic cases see Ogiermann (2007).

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