

# Pragmatic Fossilization of Apology Speech Act in Chinese EFL Learners

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## Abstract

Fossilization has generally been a focus in the study of interlanguage. Previous studies are mostly concerned with fossilization in its semantic, phonological and syntactic aspects, with but a few discussions made on fossilization from a pragmatic perspective. In this thesis, we will investigate the pragmatic fossilization of the apology-making speech act in the Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners based on Han's (2009) selective fossilization theory. We will identify the differences of apology-making in China and Western countries by comparing two typical sitcoms chosen from China and the US respectively, trying to find out the deep cultural factors that may trigger the occurrence of pragmatic fossilization in apology-making on the part of the Chinese EFL learners. The pedagogical implications of our study for EFL teaching in China are also analyzed, and some measures for the avoidance of interlanguage pragmatic fossilization suggested as well.

## Keywords

Interlanguage pragmatics; Pragmatic fossilization; Speech act of apology.

## 1. Introduction

As a universal phenomenon and typical feature of second language acquisition (SLA), fossilization has been a focus that attracted great attention of scholars for a long time, so far, a large number of achievements have been made in terms of its process and causes. However, a large proportion of the previous studies are mainly concerned with fossilization on the levels of semantic, phonology and syntax, with only a few discussions on the pragmatic fossilization. As for Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, the pragmatic fossilization frequently occurs in their language learning process, for example, using inappropriate linguistic forms in a certain context.

This thesis attempts to investigate the deep cultural factors behind this pragmatic fossilization in the course of English learning for Chinese learners, with the apology speech act being the scope of the discussion. Based on Han's (2009) selective fossilization theory, this thesis will find out some measures available to learners of English in China for reducing the pragmatic fossilization as well as some pedagogical implications for EFL teaching.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Interlanguage Pragmatics

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) which is regarded as a new branch of pragmatics mainly studies the pragmatic competence of second language learners.

Interlanguage pragmatics is concerned with the relationship between the acquisition of the target language and its actual use in certain context, that is, the relationship between acquisition and pragmatic behavior, corresponding respectively to two manners of interlanguage use: comprehension and production. In the field of ILP, pragmatic interpretations

will be found for comprehension and production based on the cross-cultural factors. Although the theories and practices of interlanguage pragmatics are derived from the cross-cultural pragmatics, ILP is always in connection with the process of second language acquisition, concerning how learners understand and interpret the speech acts of target language and the actual behavioral patterns of interlanguage under particular conditions. From a static perspective, the study of interlanguage pragmatics can show how the pragmatic knowledge of the target language can be acquired and understood by learners influenced by their first language. And from a dynamic perspective, the study can describe the process of the development of the pragmatic knowledge of target language.

## 2.2. Pragmatic Fossilization

Pragmatic fossilization is by definition the fossilization that occurs in the pragmatic level. The correctness of the expression in terms of meaning largely depends on the specific social context. Many factors will lead to the pragmatic fossilization in the coding and decoding the process in specific social contact, such as the lack of practice, the knowledge of target language, common language or first language interference. If, when what a speaker intends to convey is not the same as what the hearer receives and understands, a failure in the cross-cultural communication may occur. This kind of failure or deviation is termed by Thomas as “pragmatic failure” (Thomas, 1983).

Pragmatic fossilization is not always caused by the grammatical errors, sometimes it is caused by the incorrect expression of meaning which will lead to misunderstandings in the social communication, though it is totally right in the pragmatical level.

## 2.3. Apology

Speech act is a linguistic term which is generally regarded as the minimal unit of discourse. Based on the view of “the minimal units of discourse are not linguistic expressions, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts” (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, 1989:2), some scholars have developed and proposed speech act theory, such as the well-known and influential Austin’s speech act theory and Searle’s indirect speech act theory.

Apology, as a kind of speech act, is usually made by the offender who did incorrect behaviors to show his or her feeling of sorry and regret. In the dictionary, the definition of apology is defined as: apology is a word or statement saying sorry for something that has been done wrong or has caused a problem (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 7th edition, 2005). For the definition of apology, the opinions vary in different linguists.

The apology speech act has aroused huge interest of many linguists and they have given various definitions to apology. We can easily find several common points among those different definitions. For example, there are always four basic components: the offender, the offended, the offense and the remedy. Besides, the purpose of apology is to offer a remedy to the offense and reestablish the harmony of the relationship between the offender and the offended.

According to Austin’s speech act theory (1962), apology is an illocutionary act which attributes to the category of “expressive”, conveying the attitude and feeling under a specific situation. Expressive is mainly related to the speaker’s inner psychological states instead of the outer physical world, based on the action of the speaker and the hearer.

Upon the observation that people attempt to maintain the social order in public, Goffman (1971) has defined the speech act of apology as a kind of “remedial interchange” which can reestablish the social harmony broken by the offence.

According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), apology is regarded as a speech act which is generally taken when the speaker realized the violation of some social norms as well as the responsibility shouldered on him. Besides, the apology consists of two parts: the speaker’s loss of face and the support of the hearer. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) have first introduced the

project: Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) which aims to compare the differences and similarities of realization method of the speech act of request and apology among various languages and cultures.

Brown and Levinson (1987) believed that the act of apology needs the hearer's support who has been offended. Besides, the speech act of apology can be regarded as a kind of insultation made by the speaker to himself, to some degree, the hearer can benefit at the cost of the speaker. To conclude all the definition above, the speech of act is based on what the speaker and the hearer have done. Usually the speaker admits his mistakes and takes responsibilities, while the hearer can benefit from it. The goal of apology is to offset the influence of the offence and reestablish the balance between two parties.

### 3. Theoretical Frameworks

#### 3.1. Han's (2009) Selective Fossilization Hypothesis

Han (2009) has proposed a selective fossilization hypothesis which contains two variations: the L1 markedness and the L2 input robustness, that is to say, whether the L1 is marked or unmarked and whether the L2 is robust or not will be considered in a selective fossilization hypothesis. Meanwhile, both of two variations are influenced by two factors: the frequency and the variability. From the following Figure 1 and Figure 2, the relationship is clearly exhibited.

If the feature of L1 is both frequent and invariable, it is unmarked; contrarily, it is marked if it is both variable and infrequent; if the feature of L1 is both frequent and variable, it is quite unmarked; if it is regarded as quite marked, it is invariable and infrequent.

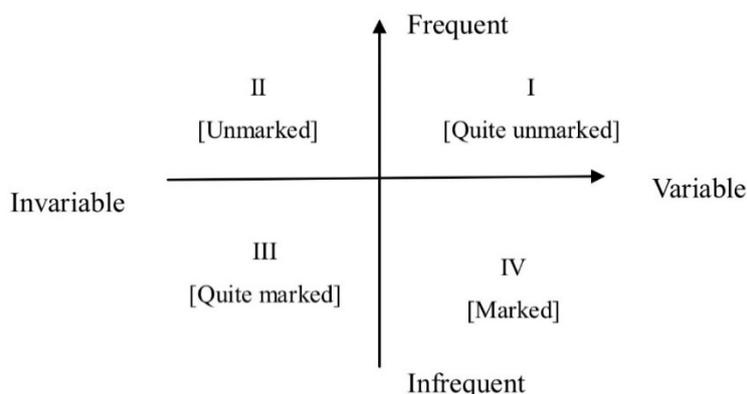


Figure 1. L1 Markedness (From Han 2009:143)

The frequency and variability also determine the input robustness of L2 with the similar way determining the L1 markedness, it is as follows:

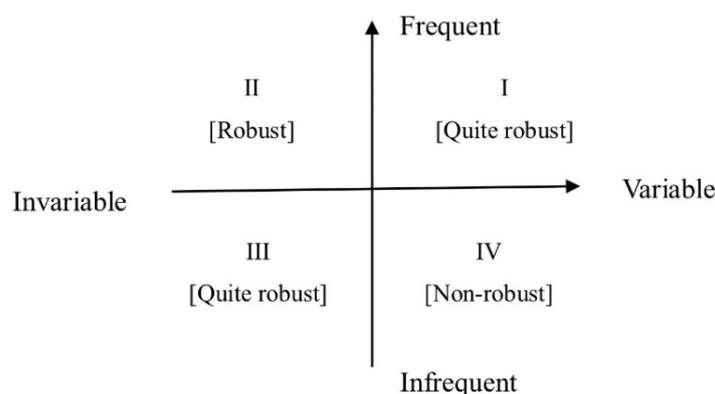
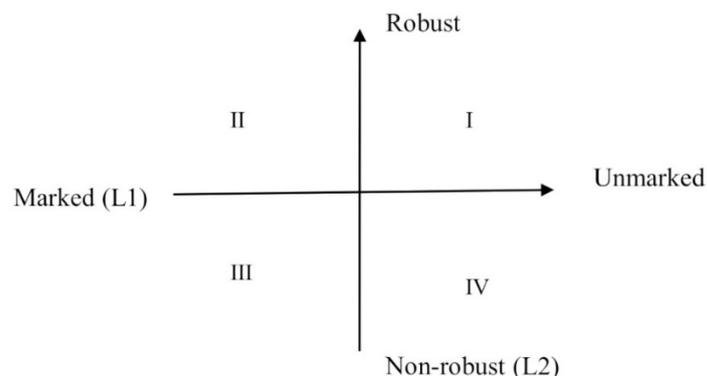


Figure 2. L2 Input Robustness (From Han 2009:144)

When we combine the figure of L1 markedness and L2 input robustness, there can be four possible types of second language acquisition as we can see in the Figure 3:



**Figure 3.** Interaction of L2 Input Robustness and L1 Markedness  
(From Han 2009:145)

The four scenarios in Figure 3 exhibit various possibilities of features in the target language acquisition. There are four types: the features of type 2 which are related to L1 markedness and L2 input robustness will be acquired, while those features which have L1 unmarkedness and L2 non-robustness will tend to be fossilized, corresponding to type 4. As for the other two types of features, both of them have two possibilities: acquired or fossilized, which is determined by other factors such as the learning ability, the faculty of memory or sensitivity, and so on.

According to these two factors of L1 markedness and L2 input robustness, we can make a reasonable prediction about which components in the interlanguage tend to be fossilized or have a higher sensibility of fossilization. Besides, Han (2009:156-157) has produced a numerical model of selective fossilization which contains two variations: L1 markedness and L2 input robustness. It can be simply expressed by the following formula:

$$P_{foss} = \alpha / M1 - \beta R12 \quad (\alpha > 0, \beta > 0) \quad (1)$$

$P_{foss}$  stands for the possibility of fossilization,  $M1$  stands for L1 markedness and  $R12$  stands for L2 input robustness. According to this formula, we can easily find that  $M1$  has a positive promotion to the occurrence of the fossilization while the effect of  $R12$  on the possibility of fossilization is in the reverse ratio. That is to say, the more unmarked the first language is, the more likely the fossilization can occur; and the input of second language is more robust, fossilization will be less likely to happen.

### 3.2. Speech Act Theory

Speech is not only used to convey meaning or deliver information, but also for speakers to “do things with words”, those acts such as apologizing, promising, requesting or threatening and so on. That’s why utterances are called as “speech acts”. It is defined as the act which is performed in the form of speech and is regarded as the basic unit in communication.

The Oxford philosopher John L. Austin has proposed a famous theory in her work “How to Do Things with Words (1962)” which has a great impact on the field of linguistic philosophy and pragmatics. It is a philosophical explanation of the nature of linguistic communication and aims to answer the question “What do we do when using language?”

Traditional philosophers usually pay attention to the truth-value of the sentence and aim to judge whether the sentence is true or false. Therefore, they insist that a sentence is used to make a statement or to describe facts or affairs. However, Austin found that some sentences

could not be simply judged as true or not, so he classified the utterances into two types: “constatives” and “performatives”. The former refers to the statements that either state or describe, and are thus verifiable; the latter, on the contrary, refers to the utterances that do not make a statement or describe a fact but rather do things in the form of speech, therefore, “performatives” cannot be judged as true or false. Afterwards, the dichotomy theory was given up by Austin due to some problems with his initial classification. So, he has developed a new theory later. According to his new model, there are three acts simultaneously performed when speaking: namely, locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act.

(1) locutionary act: to convey literal meaning by means of syntax, lexicon and phonology.

(2) illocutionary act: to express the speaker’s intention by making an utterance. i.e. asking someone to open the window, or lending a pen.

(3) perlocutionary act: refers to the effect of the utterance, depending on the particular circumstances. i.e. the hearer understands that speaker means to ask him to open the window, thence opening the window, it means that the speaker has indeed made a immediate change in the physical world and thus performed the perlocutionary act.

(Levinson, 1983:236)

The illocutionary act is the most interest to the linguists because the speaker’s real intention can be fully exhibited in this type of speech act. Later on, Austin has divided it into five categories: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, expositives and behabitatives. And our apology is falling to the category of behabitatives which is the reaction made by the speaker to the hearer’s attitudes or behaviors.

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

Based on the brief introduction of Han’s selective fossilization theory and Austin & Searle’s speech act theory, in this chapter, the present study will analyze the differences between the apology types and strategies in China and English-speaking countries to find out the deep cultural factors behind the pragmatic fossilization in terms of apology speech act. It turns out, except for two factors of L1 markedness and L2 input robustness proposed by Han (2009), other cultural factors exist which influence the effect of apology. In the discussion of apology comparison, this thesis will pick up several episodes of two sitcoms as the corpora respectively from China and the United States: namely, Home with Kids and Friends.

### 4.1. A Comparison of Apology-making in China and the United States

#### 4.1.1. The Types of Apology

##### 4.1.1.1 Home with The Kids

There are various conditions of apology-making in this sitcom, and the present thesis will pick some typical examples as corpora.

(1) Save the face of the offended:

Brown & Levinson (1987) has proposed the Face-saving theory (FAT). “Face” can be equivalent to a kind of “individual image” which is expected to be obtained among social members when they’re in public. There are two types in the FAT: positive face and negative face, that’s to say, the individual’s positive image and negative image. Some speech acts such as criticism, disagreement and misidentification will threaten the hearer’s positive face while the speech acts such as orders, compliment and requests will threaten hearer’s negative face. As for the speaker, some acts like apology, responsibility commitment and acceptance of compliment will harm his positive face while his negative face will be threatened by the speech acts such as accepting apology or expressing thanks. It means when the speaker makes an apology to the hearer, it is an act to reestablish the equilibrium by the means of threatening the speaker’s own face.

Take examples in Home with the Kids:

[1]夏雨：我认错还不行吗？哥，对不起，我不应该把牛奶倒进你球鞋里。

[2]刘梅：成，刘星，明天晚上罚妈妈不吃饭光做饭，行了吧？

In case one, Xia Yu poured the milk into the shoes of Liu Xing for retaliation and later he realized his mistake and apologized to Liu Xing by means of threatening his positive face. Similarly, in case two, Liu Mei has misunderstood Liu Xing which threatened his positive face, so she chose to apologize by threatening her own positive face to get his pardon.

(2) Asking for help

The examples:

[3]张氏夫妇：不好意思，今天是想来借你家的梯子用一下.....

[4]夏雨：姐，姐，嘿嘿，不好意思，打扰你一下，我想用用你的文具盒。

In these two cases, both of them are the matter of borrowing, an act of asking for help. In China, when people need others to offer the assistance, they are used to take an apology, such as “不好意思” or “打扰一下”，as a beginning of the request.

(3) Showing gratitude to the hearer

The examples:

[5]朵朵爸爸：不好意思，这几天麻烦你们家了啊。

[6]夏东海：小马老师，真是不好意思啊，又让您跑一趟。不过小雪多亏了您呐。

In case five, parents of Duoduo were so busy that they entrusted their daughter to the Xias for several days, so the real meaning beneath the expression of apology is to show thanks to Xia Donghai; similarly, in case six, the teacher Ma brought the injured Xiao Xue home, in order to convey the feeling of gratitude, Xia Donghai also used the expression of apology.

(4) Expressing sympathy for bad news

The example:

[7]小尚：对不起，老夏，我要告诉你一个不好的消息。

夏东海：什么事？剧本又出了问题？

In this case, Xiao Shang had a piece of bad news about updating the script to tell Xia Donghai, the expression of apology here functions as a way of conveying bad news and showing sympathy of the speaker.

(5) Minimizing the offence degree

The examples:

[8]夏雪：妈妈，对不起，我不能跟您一起去美国了。

[9]刘梅：(对客人说)对不起啊，稍等，我去开门。

In case eight, Xiao Xue's natural mother attempted to bring her to live in the United States, while Xiao Xue was loath to leave her new family, so she firstly apologized to her mother in order to minimize the offence degree and gain her forgiveness. Similarly, in case nine, somebody's visit has interrupted the talk between Liu Mei and her guests, in order to save the guests' face and decrease the offence degree to the least, she chose to apologize before she opened the door.

(6) Expressing the speaker's politeness

The example:

[10]刘梅：您看，张老师，我这也没准备什么，不好意思，您就随便吃点吧。

In this case, actually, Liu Mei has prepared a big meal for the teacher Zhang, the expression of apology is a set of polite formula and modesty which is a traditional expression in China but rarely in the western culture.

4.1.1.2 Friends

In this part, the present thesis will pick up several typical episodes as linguistic materials to demonstrate the conditions of apology in the western culture.

#### (1) Troubling or inconveniencing others

In the western culture, when doing something wrong or offering inadequate information or services, people will apologize due to the discomfort brought up to the hearer. Here is the example:

[11] Jill: Would you like some gum?

Chandler: Um, is it sugarless?

Jill: (checks) Sorry, it is not.

Chandler: Oh, then no thanks.

In this case, Chandler and Jill were trapped in the lobby of ATM. The gum that Jill offered to Chandler was not the favored flavor that she wants, therefore Jill felt sorry for that and apologized to Chandler.

#### (2) Invading other's personal space

In the western inertia thinking, the personal space is the center of attention. Therefore, when they inadvertently touch others in a crowded street, they will make an apology for an invasion to other's personal space. Here is the example:

[12] Rachel: Ross! Excuse me, pardon me, excuse me...

In this case, it was in the airport that Rachel wanted to keep pace with Ross to keep him, while it was so crowded that Rachel cannot avoid touching others, so she headed with a mix of apology followed.

#### (3) Wasting other's time

When we're late due to certain reasons, in some degree, we have kept the other in a condition of behavior restriction which has threatened people's positive face, so we are supposed to make an apologize. Here is the example:

[13] Rachel: Hi! Sorry, sorry we're late. We, uh, kind of just, you know, lost track of time.

In this case, Rachel was late to the party and then said sorry to her friends for wasting their time.

#### (4) Showing regret and sympathy

In West, people are used to convey their feelings and attitudes by means of the expression of apology which shows a feeling of regret or sympathy rather than admitting faults and seeking forgiving. Here is the example:

[14] Phoebe: Oh, I couldn't go in.

Rachel: Honey, I'm sorry. Are you OK?

In the case, Phoebe got the address of her natural father while she was in the inner entanglements. Her friend Rachel expressed the feeling of sympathy and solicitude for Phoebe by means of saying "I'm sorry".

### 4.1.2. The Apology-making Strategies

There are many linguists investigating the apology strategies such as Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984), Fraser (1981), Owen (1983) and so on, while concerning the classification of apology strategies, there is no consensus about that.

This thesis is mainly based on the taxonomy model for apology proposed by Cohen & Olshtain (1981, 1983). There are mainly six categories involved: illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), taking on responsibility (RESP), explanation (EXPL), an offer of repair (REPR), promise of forbearance (FORB) and concern for the hearer (CONC).

#### (1) Illocutionary force indicating device

The example from Home with the Kids:

[15]刘星：对不起，对不起。

夏东海：你要把我耳朵震聋了！

刘星：对不起嘛。

### (2) Taking on responsibility

It refers to an apology method that the offender is aware of his or her own fault and actively admits the mistake. Here is the example:

[16]夏雪：妈，都是我不好。

刘梅：你怎么不好了？你最乖了，你是妈妈最乖的孩子。

### (3) Explanation

One of the strategies is explaining the objective reason of the offence which is generally beyond the control of the offender. Here is the example:

[17] Ross: Chandler, can I just say something? I know you are still mad at me, I just want to say that there were two people there that night, okay?

In this case, instead of directly acknowledging the faults, Rose intended to explain the causes of offence and hoped Chandler can understand and forgive him.

### (4) An offer of repair

Besides an apology, sometimes the offender will afford redress to the offended. Here is the condition where Xia Xue realized that she has misunderstood her brother Liu Xing:

[18]夏雪：（对夏雨）给，把这个(考试通关秘籍)给刘星。

### (5) Promise of forbearance

The offender assures to the offended that he or she will never do it again in order to reestablish the equilibrium and maintain the harmony of interpersonal relationship.

[19]夏雨：妈，对不起。我以后再也不撒谎了。

### (6) Concern for the hearer

It refers to the apology strategy of showing the concern and sympathy in the facing of other's misfortune out of courtesy.

[20] Joey: Let me get the father. We need a father.

The pregnant woman: There's no father.

Joey: Oh, sorry.

This thesis has calculated the frequencies and proportion of apology strategies from the first two seasons of Friends and the first season of Home with the Kids, and roughly made an induction and calculation. The results are shown in the table below:

**Table 1.** The comparison of apology strategies in Home with the Kids and Friends

Apology Strategy	Home with the Kids		Friends	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
IFID	41	44.6%	173	70.9%
RESP	8	8.7%	6	2.4%
EXPL	18	19.6%	44	18%
REPR	12	13%	6	2.4%
FORB	7	7.6%	4	1.6%
CONC	6	6.5%	11	4.5%
Total	92		244	

Based on the table, illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) which tends to be more formal is the method that is used most frequently in both sitcoms. And explanation is also a common approach adopted as an apology strategy. Besides, we can see that the total frequency of apology in Friends is much higher than that of Home with the Kids. Actually, except for the frequency, the area in which apology is applied in English-speaking countries (such as the USA and the UK) is also wider than that of China. For example, in a crowded environment where people cannot avoid touching each other, people in West will unconsciously make an apology such as "I'm sorry" and "excuse me", while as for Chinese, it is just a normal and inevitable matter which is not to such an extent to make an apology.

Apologies in both sitcoms appear in different social relationships. Through comparison, we can find slight differences between the distribution of apology in these two sitcoms.

**Table 2.** Apology-making frequency of the superior and the elder in both sitcoms

Apology Maker	Home with the Kids		Friends	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
The Superior	1	1%	15	6.1%
The Elder	7	7.6%	29	11.9%
Total	8	8.6%	44	18%

These data are also based on the first two seasons of Friends and the first season of Home with the Kids. From the table 2, we can see that the apology from the superior or the elder in Home with the Kids is obviously less than that of Friends especially apology from the superior.

## 4.2. Cultural Factors Leading to Fossilization In Apology-making

In essence, language and culture are interdependent and co-evolved through history, which can be verified in the process of human civilization and human communication. Along with language, culture also includes ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, symbols, etc. It is not exaggerated to say the total way of life of a people in a community are reflected on culture. The language a speaker uses can embody a person's culture identity and background, because when one acquires his mother tongue, what he learns simultaneously includes the language-specific culture and he will inevitably be socialized in certain ways.

So, when we intend to identify the differences between apologies in China and the United States, the factors of culture cannot be ignored.

### 4.2.1. High and Low-context Culture

The concept of high and low-context culture is first introduced by the American anthropologist Edward Twitchell Hall Jr which is used to demonstrate the diversity of culture. In a high-context culture, the carrier of communicative information mainly depends on the communicative context instead of the language itself, such as Chinese culture, Japanese culture and so on. On the contrary, the so-called low-context culture such as the culture in the UK, the USA and Canada, the carrier of communicative information mainly lay on the specific communication language itself rather than the context.

In a high-context culture, there is no need to make the sentence contain all of the communicative information. For example, in China, people won't apologize directly and formally if not necessary, inversely, in those countries with low-context culture such as the USA, people lay much emphasis on the communicative information contained in the language itself. So, when offence occurs, apology is a must. Here is the example from these two sitcoms: Home with the Kids and Friends.

[21] Rachel: Honey, I am sorry, but I told you on the phone, I don't have time to stop.

Ross: Okay, you don't have to stop, I'm invisible, I'm not here.

In this case, Rachel has neglected her boyfriend Ross due to busy work, a boy named Mark who is an admirer of Rachel has answered her phone from Ross by mistake. In this part, Rachel has said "sorry" for four times in total to express her guilty.

There is a similar situation in Home with the Kids. One day, Xia Donghai was trapped in the elevator with a young girl. After being saved, the girl was so excited that she kissed Xia Donghai, leaving the lipstick on his face which misunderstood by his wife, Liu Mei. Later on, Xia Donghai tried to express his sorry:

[22]夏东海: 梅梅啊, 你知道吗, 犬类的目光透露出的都是一种凶光, 而你的目光透露出的是无限的温柔, 还有成熟的美丽。你是不是还是不相信我被关在电梯里了啊?

刘梅: 无理取闹的人是什么也不会相信的。

Xia Donghai chose another way to express his feeling of guilty instead of apologizing directly. Though without a direct apology, Lui Mei still can receive the information of his seeking forgiving, because China is a country with high-context culture in which communicative information is mainly depended on the context. That's why the frequency of apology in West is much higher than that of China. In West, apologies nearly occur in everywhere among different states of social relationships, such as parents, the elders, the superiors or strangers. An apology needed as long as the offense occurred. While in China, if it is not serious enough, there is no need to be magnified and over analyzed, so the frequency of apology in China is much lower than that in West.

#### 4.2.2. Individualism and Collectivism

In Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, individualism and collectivism is the dimension to identify whether social focus is in individual interests or collective interests and measure the degree of connection between society and individual. In individualistic society, people place a higher value on themselves instead of the whole society, therefore the social relationship is comparatively loose. In a strong ethnic relationship, people will attain continuous protection provided they show their definite loyalty to the ethnic groups.

The western countries such as the USA and the UK are part of individualism-culture country while China is a country with collectivism culture. The Chinese have come under the profound influence of Confucianism which advocates people to lay emphasis on the interpersonal relationship. Therefore, when a Chinese is making a decision, he will take groups, community or others into consideration. On the contrary, individual need weighs more to the western mind. In terms of response to apology, Chinese will tend to accept the apology and forgive others out of maintain the harmony in social relationship, so people will directly express the meaning of accepting the apology. While in West, apology is viewed as the duty of the offender and the offended has the right to accept it or not. Here is the example:

[23] Monica: I am sorry...

Chandler: Oh, she's sorry! I feel better!

[24]刘梅: 小雪, 对不起啊, 给我五分钟, 我保证把你的房间收拾得干干净净的。

夏雪: 老妈, 没关系。老妈, 谢谢你。

In case 23, Monica has broken up with her boyfriend Alan. Chandler, as a mutual friend of Monica and Alex, cannot accept their break-up message. In this case, Chandler did not convey the meaning of accepting the apology, rather she expressed her own feeling. We can see that the inner feeling weighs more to the western mind. However, in case 24, when Liu Mei apologized to Xiao Xue for decorating her room without permission, Xiao Xue immediately and directly expressed her attitude of forgiving.

### 4.2.3. Social Status and Power Distance

As we know, China is a country historically with strict and impartial hierarchy, the ethical morality of respect for seniority has been praised highly and concerned. By this thinking, in China, it is rarely seen that the elders apologize to the junior generation. While as for the western country such as the USA, the consciousness of social status is dim, and they advocate the preposition that all men are created equal, so no matter who cause an offense, he or she should apologize.

Besides, many Asian countries like China is in a high-power distance culture. Power distance is used to show people's acceptance of the unequal distribution of power in organizations. Generally speaking, in the Eastern culture, the power distance index is relatively high. People tend to be indifferent towards the inequality of power, so even if the elders make the offense, they usually won't choose to apologize; while in the Western culture, the consciousness of individual right is deeply rooted in people's hearts, which makes them have a strong spirit of resistance to the inequality of power distribution. Therefore, the differences occur in apology-making among groups of different levels in China and the western countries.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Implications for Learners

#### (1) Promotion of cultural awareness

When we attempt to raise the cultural awareness during the communication with the target language, it means we're taking the culture factors into consideration. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, language and culture always intrinsically correlate and interdependent with each other, therefore, aiming to reduce pragmatic fossilization of interlanguage, cross-culture awareness must be one of the learning goals.

There is a strange phenomenon among Chinese college EFL learners. That is, the improvement of students' pragmatic competence is not in consistence with their language proficiency. That is to say, comparing the pragmatic competence of the first-year students with that of the third-year students, the level remains nearly the same. The lack of adequate cross-culture awareness has hindered the development of the pragmatic competence which leads to frequent pragmatic fossilization.

According to Hymes (1971, 1972), there are two aspects contained in the cultivation of social competence: commanding the rules of the language as code and the conventions governing the use of the code. The latter one exactly refers to the rules of the language concerning cultural factors. Therefore, it is quite necessary for learners to acknowledge the culture of target language and foster the understanding of native speaker's perspective so that Chinese EFL learners can accurately interpret the behaviors of target language. In the previous chapter, we explored the deep cultural factors of fossilization to display how cultural factors influence the effect of apology speech act. According to Liu Aizhen (刘爱真, 2000: 9-13), she has introduced several ways to raise learners' cultural awareness. That is, from a macro perspective: acknowledging the value system, ways of thinking and so on; and from a micro perspective: identifying the cultural connotation of words, sentences and texts.

Here is the example: in the Qing Dynasty, Li Hongzhang who visited the United States as a goodwill messenger invited several local officials for meal. According to the Chinese conventions, he made some ritual noises on the banquet in a restaurant such as “承蒙各位光临，没有准备什么大餐，聊表寸心，不成敬意，请大家多多包涵……”。The next day, the local paper translated his words into English and then published it. However, the restaurant owner was so angry at the comment that he asked Li Hongzhang for an apology due

to the detriment made to the restaurant. In this case, it is the different culture that makes the misunderstanding.

## (2) Contacting authentic materials

Authentic materials are not identical to those fabricated artificial language in the textbooks, rather it refers to the language used in the real situation, that is to say, the language used by native speakers in daily life.

However, as for Chinese EFL learners, it is a rare chance for them to expose themselves in an English environment which is one of the biggest obstacles of acquiring the target language. Textbooks become the primary media to acquire the language while the language in textbooks is not so-called authentic materials. A good textbook requires various themes and topics related to the learners' real needs. However, in fact, most of our existing textbooks is designed to improve students' grammatical competence rather than pragmatic competence. Therefore, in addition to the learning from textbooks, learners are still in a need of other learning materials such as literature works, magazines and newspapers which contain the most vivid and authentic information of target language. Only when people get contact with native-like materials, learners may acquire native-like pragmatic competence.

There is a "classical" conversation in the English textbook of Grade seven in China:

[25] Cindy: Good afternoon, Dale!

Dale: Hi, Cindy! How are you?

Cindy: I'm fine, thanks. And you?

Dale: I'm OK.

It is nearly formed as a stereotype of salutation to a Chinese mind which leads to the pragmatic fossilization in this part without knowing the authentic saluting ways in the real conversation.

## 5.2. Implications for Teachers

Nowadays, acquiring the pragmatic competence is more and more attracting attention of public, and the goal of English teaching is not only concerned with grammatical competence but also pragmatic competence. Based on this study, some implications for English teaching can be made.

One of the roles of teachers is to identify the factors of fossilization, and then change the pertinent conditions, such as L2 input. For example, against the certain feature which is marked in L1, teachers can enhance the L2 input to make it robust, leading the feature fall in the second zone of Figure 3 which can be acquired.

The improvement of teachers' fossilization awareness is also crucial to the guidance for learners, because only when we know clearly which conditions may cause fossilization, we can effectively prevent it. If a teacher is not equipped with adequate pragmatical knowledge of target language, the wrong instructions or teaching may also bring about fossilization.

As for reducing pragmatic fossilization, the teaching of fossilization knowledge is a crucial part in pedagogical teaching. For example, in terms of apology-making, if the influence factors such as social status and power distance are not mentioned to learners, they will be in a confusion when choosing the apology strategies. Gradually, the pragmatic fossilization of apology is formed. Therefore, English teachers should be familiar with the culture of the target language and equipped with the ability to identify the pragmatic fossilization with sufficient teaching practical experience.

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