From Universal Perceptions to Diverging Behaviors: An Exploratory Comparison of Responses to Unreasonable Accusations among People from the United States, Japan, and South Korea

Sachiko KIYAMA[1], Yuki TAKATORI[2], Hyunjung LIM[3] & Katsuo TAMAOKA[4]

Abstract

The current study conducted a survey of how people from the United States, Japan, and South Korea select responses to unreasonable accusations as an example of *face work* in conflict situations in terms of 1) culture 2) situations of accusation differing on the locus of responsibility, 3) the balance of power in relationships, and 4) familiarity between the accuser and the accused. Results of decision tree analyses demonstrated that the intrinsic content of the situation was the crucial determinant of responses to unreasonable accusations while interpersonal relationships had the next-strongest influence on the responses. The findings suggest that perception of conflict situation appears to be universal, whereas how to assess interpersonal relationships and the value placed on language expressions suitable for the given interlocutors may differ depending on culture.

Keywords: Responses to unreasonable accusation, conflict management, face work, Japan, Korea, the United States

1. Introduction

The challenge of dealing with conflict resolution has dogged human society since time immemorial. In every society, regardless of cultural diversity, humans differ in their needs. It is easy to be nice to another person when both parties share the same needs. However, once a conflict occurs in everyday encounters, difficulty arises in coping with the situation because the needs of both sides cannot be concurrently satisfied. As a result, accusations sometimes take over. The conflict-managing process involves sorting out the priorities from the incompatible and competing needs two people may have, in accordance with the values cultivated in each culture. In order to reveal the universality and cultural variability of how to manage conflict situations, the present study stems from an exploratory cross-cultural survey of responses to unreasonable accusations in the United States, Japan, and South Korea.

1.1. Goffman's (1955, 1967) Face and Face work

When incompatible needs of individuals cannot be reconciled, there may be no choice for a person but to sacrifice his or her own needs in order not to hurt the interlocutor. In such a situation, a person may seek to restore the interlocutor's pride and thus dissipate that person's feeling of losing. The process of conflict management therefore entails the negotiation of *face* among individuals (Goffman, 1955, 1967; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

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[1] College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Mie University, Japan. 1577 Kurimamachiya-cho, Tsu-shi, Mie-ken, 514-8507, JAPAN.

[2] College of Arts and Science, Georgia State University, the United States. P.O. Box 3965, Atlanta, GA 30302-3965, the U.S.

[3] Faculty of Intercultural Studies, Yamaguchi Prefectural University, Japan. 3-2-1 Sakurabata, Yamaguchi-shi, Yamaguchi-ken, 753-8502, JAPAN.

[4] Graduate School of Languages and Cultures, Nagoya University, Japan. Furo-cho, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya-shi, Aichi-ken, 464-8601, JAPAN.

Goffman (1955, 1967) defines *face* as the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself" and emphasizes that negotiations of face between two people (i.e., *face work*) are regulated by the principle of reciprocity. According to Goffman, it is universal that every individual has face, and that he or she wants his or her face satisfied by other members of the society. Because satisfaction of personal face can only come from others, a person makes an effort to fulfill the faces of other people with the expectation that his or her own face will be satisfied in return.

Goffman (1955, 1967) distinguishes manners of everyday encounters by using the terms *demeanor* as supporting one's own face and *deference* as supporting the other person's face, with the assumption that acting with demeanor entails acting with deference. Hence, when a conflict between two parties occurs, threatening the interlocutor's face simultaneously threatens one's own face, in that the threatening person violates the expectation of mutual concern with face and thus damages his or her own reputation. For this reason, individuals, as social beings, need to be motivated to resolve conflict as often as possible and to whatever degree possible.

1.2. Value systems across cultures behind coping with conflict situations

Despite the universality of the desire for face assumed by Goffman, value systems about what behaviors are expected or preferred to satisfy individual face seem to differ from culture to culture. The cultural variety in such social behaviors has often been discussed in terms of the dichotomous characterization between Western (e.g., North American and European countries) and Eastern (e.g., Asian countries) cultures, such as Hall's (1976, 1984) *low* versus *high context*, and Hofstede's (1980) *individualism* versus *collectivism*. Hall (1984) distinguishes between low and high contexts in Western and Eastern cultures: People in the high context Eastern cultures convey information implicitly while people in the low context Western cultures state information explicitly. Likewise, the dichotomy of individualism versus collectivism (Hofstede, 1980) is often cited in cultural studies (e.g., Dalsky, 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988; Wierzbicka, 1991). Individualism is characterized by self-reliance and accordingly corresponds to behaviors of low context, in which statements are explicit. On the other hand, collectivism is characterized by interdependence, which assumes that people expect others to understand them without communicating any specific expressions to those others. As a result, collectivism corresponds to behaviors in high context cultures.

Several empirical studies have supported the dichotomous concepts that Western cultures are generally characterized by low context and individualism whereas Eastern cultures indicate characteristics of high context and collectivism (e.g., Bond, Wan, Keung, & Giacalone, 1985; Cousins, 1989; Hofstede, 1980; Kim-Jo, Benet-Martinez, & Ozer, 2010; Leung, 1988; Merkin, 2006; Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trubisky, Yang, Kim, Lin, & Nishita, 1991; Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989). However, there is also some counter-evidence to this claim (e.g., Dalsky, 2010; Sofue, 1979; Takano & Osaka, 1999; Tanaka, Spencer-Oatey, & Cray, 2000).A closer look at previous cross-cultural comparisons among the three cultures of the United States, Japan, and Koreahas shown that Japanese people are more likely to take other-oriented behaviors, compared to both Koreans (e.g., Ide & Yim, 2004; Yim, 2004 for refusal; Ozaki, 2005 for request and thanking) and Americans (e.g., Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990 for apology; Beebe & Takahashi, 1989 for disagreement; Nomura & Barnlund, 1983 for criticism). In contrast, comparisons between Koreans and Americans have produced inconsistent results: Some studies have indicated that Koreans are more other-oriented than Americans (e.g., Kim, 1994 for request), but others have shown no significant difference between the two cultures (e.g., Holtgraves & Yang, 1990 for request). Given the variations in the aforementioned cross-cultural comparisons, this study attempts exploratory examination of face work behaviors seen in responses to other people's *unreasonable accusations* across the United States, Japan, and Korea, considering these responses as examples of conflict situations.

1.3. Responses to Unreasonable Accusation: A Conflict Situation

The occurrence of an accusation means that the accuser conveys some dissatisfaction with the accused. However, it is often the case that the accuser and the accused have conflicting views about the cause of the accusation. In other words, some sorts of accusation could be considered unreasonable from the viewpoint of the accused. In this study, we define "unreasonable accusation" as a statement by the accuser, expressing their dissatisfaction with the accused, and which the accused believes is unjustified. Responses to the unreasonable accusations can be viewed as examples of conflict situations. In such situations, the accused wants to disagree with the accuser's claim. According to Brown and Levinson's framework (1978, 1987), which extended Goffman's view, if the accused chooses to refute the accusation, he or she will select *face-threatening* responses to the accuser.

On the other hand, if the accused decides to tolerate or accept the accusation in order to maintain interpersonal relationships, it follows naturally that he or she will select *face-saving* responses to the accuser, such as agreement and apology.

Tanaka, Spencer-Oatey, and Cray (2000) have observed that the Japanese are likely to refuse to apologize unless they accept responsibility for having committed a fault. Although Tanaka et al. (2000) do not clarify the reasoning behind this response; one possible interpretation is that the more Japanese people value social harmony, the more they will require the interlocutor to adopt a cooperative attitude. If that is the case, Japanese people who are certain about their innocence may take great offense at unreasonable accusations and unleash a strongly negative response. Even though the Japanese are said to be eager to seek social harmony, not all Japanese people have the same needs, interests, or behaviors (Kiyama, Tamaoka, & Takiura, 2012). To the extent to which Japanese people are incompatible with each other, conflict over the question of responsibility will be inevitable in their interactions (Krauss, Rohlen, & Steinhoff, 1984). Consistent with Tanaka et al.'s (2000) finding, Gudykunst and Nishita (1993) also reported that Japanese people, guided by honor and traditions, are likely to mention duties and obligations to persuade others. South Koreans in a collectivistic high-context culture as well as the Japanese may also feel and use social norms and pressure to guide and convince others. Korean culture generally demands that more deferential language (more so than Japanese) be regularly used in referring to anyone older; including an elaborate system of addressee honorifics to indicate the interpersonal relationship between the addresser and the addressee, regardless of the utterance content (Brown, 2015). Saving face in Korean society, therefore, can be a difficult task in situations involving age and power. Americans in an individualistic low-context culture, contrarily, seem to differ greatly from their Asian counterparts in matters of responses to accusations. As for accepting responsibility, Americans may believe that each person is responsible for him- or herself and try to disassociate themselves from situations where they feel that they are being forced to accept unwarranted responsibility for something that has gone wrong (Westerhof, Whitbourne, & Freeman, 2012).

1.4. Multiple Factors Influence Responses to Unreasonable Accusations as an Example of Conflict Situations

People try to keep a balance among multiple faces in social encounters, a very challenging process. If face work is based on the principle of reciprocity, as Goffman (1967) notes, it is difficult to weigh two competing faces, namely, one's own face and the interlocutor's face. Regardless of which face gets sacrificed, people have to be motivated to redress that face by using many different strategies. Beyond that, a realization of face work should be the result of interactional effects caused by multiple factors. As noted above, culture is frequently reported as a major factor influencing interpersonal relationships (e.g., see Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Gudykunst, ed., 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2009). Yet, even people who have been raised in the same culture may exhibit varying responses. Because people usually desire to maintain smooth interpersonal relationships with other members of a given society, they may respond less defensively to the interlocutor with greater social standing or more familiar parties by hiding their feelings of displeasure in conflict situations (e.g., Becker, Kimmel, & Bevill, 1989; MacGeorge, Lichtman, & Pressey, 2002 for advice; Holtgraves, Srull, & Socall, 1989 for assertion; Holtgraves, 1986 for questions). The content of a situation also leads to different reactions (e.g., Leichty & Applegate, 1991; Sharkey & Stafford, 1990).

The factors that plausibly fluencing a person's face work behaviors are efficiently summarized by Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model in which a person estimates the degree of his or her face-threatening act (FTA) to the interlocutor. Brown and Levinson, following Goffman's (1955, 1967) conceptualization of face work, assume that a person selects a face-redressing (i.e., politeness) strategy appropriate to the degree to which an act is face-threatening to the interlocutor. Further, in order to estimate the degree of an FTA, they propose three factors as follows:

$$W_x = D\ (S, H) + P\ (H, S) + R_x$$

W_x is the weight of an FTA, D refers to a distance (D) between one and the interlocutor, P refers to the power (P) the interlocutor has over the other, and R refers to a value that measures the degree to which the FTA(x) is rated as an imposition in that culture (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 76-77). They explain that these factors can be viewed in various ways. P (power) is assessed as greater when the interlocutor is eloquent and influential, and D (distance) is usually measured by social distance based on stable social attributes.

In this exploratory study of unreasonable accusations, we shall assume P corresponds to differences in the social statuses of the accusers and D corresponds to the differences in familiarity between the accuser and the accused. The conceptualization of R (ranking of imposition) is abstract, because Brown and Levinson subsume all variables influencing face work (other than P and D) into the factor of R. From their explanation of R as "culturally and situation ally defined ranking of impositions," it is clear that R includes situational factors together with cultural factors. Their intention behind such an abstraction of R seems to allow their formula to make clear the universal phenomena of face work processes, on the basis of Goffman's (1967) original view that actual realizations of face work differ according to culture whereas its motive stems from universal human nature.

The feature of this formulation deserves a generative model that accounts for face work (Holtgraves, 2002, 2009; Kiyama, et al., 2012) and at the same time receives criticisms from linguistic pragmatists (e.g., Kasper, 1990), and sociologists (e.g., Psathas, 1995). For the purpose of analyses of the interactional effects among multiple factors influencing face work behaviors, the effect of cultural factor needs to be investigated independently from that of situational factor. In this study, then, we assume R to be the situational factor and set the cultural factor as an independent predictor candidate of responses to unreasonable accusations. Taken together, the current study conducted a questionnaire survey of responses to unreasonable accusations as an example of face work in conflict situations in terms of 1) culture, 2) the accusation situation differing on the locus of responsibility, 3) the power of the accuser, and 4) the familiarity between the accuser and the accused.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A total of 785 undergraduate and graduate students (380 male and 405 female)participated in the current survey. Of these students, 201 were from the United States (85 male and 116 female), 271 were from Japan (163 male and 108 female), and 313 were from South Korea (132 male and 181 female). None of them participated in the manipulation check (described in 2.3). The native languages of the participants in each country were English, Japanese, and Korean, respectively. They volunteered to fill out the questionnaire in approximately 20 minutes, without compensation. All of the American participants were enrolled at a public university located in the State of Georgia, and all of the participants from Japan were enrolled at a private university in Tokyo. The Korean participants were from several private universities in the metropolitan area of Seoul. The ages of the American participants ranged from 18 years and 7 months to 40 years and 0 months (M = 23.37 years, SD = 4.37 years).The ages of the Japanese participants ranged from 18 years and 4 months to 25 years and 8 months (M = 20.07 years, SD = 1.57 years). The ages of the Korean participants ranged from 18 years and 1 month to 29 years and 0 months (M = 21.24 years, SD = 2.31 years). Participants over 40 years old were eliminated from the analysis.

2.2. Material

Two scenarios using different situations concerning unreasonable accusations were originally created for the present survey. The situations differed depending on whether the accused (i.e., a participant) recognized his or her own fault clearly or not, in order to generate a difference in the locus of responsibility in a given conflict situation. Each scenario consisted of a brief description of a situation involving two people, the accuser and the accused. The participants were asked to imagine that they were the accused in the situation and had to respond to an accusation about something that was their fault, even though the hypothetical accuser had previously made the same mistakes several times. This was intended to make the participant (i.e., the accused) feel that the accusation was unreasonable. However, in order to avoid the participants being aware of our intentions, the words 'fault' and 'unreasonable' were not used throughout the questionnaire.

In Situation 1, where the accuser's (i.e., the participant's) fault was unclear, an accusation occurred due to a misunderstanding about the time of an appointment. The participants were first asked to imagine a situation in which they had an appointment with a person (i.e., the accuser) and had arrived at the agreed location on time. However, the accuser (who was habitually late) had arrived early, and accused the participant of arriving late.

In Situation 2, in which the accuser's (i.e., the participant's) fault was clear, an accusation occurred due to a mistake by the accused, which was in charge of the cash accounts of a tour group. Participants were then asked to imagine that they had been carefully doing the accounting work for their seminar class tour group but had made a mistake. One of the seminar members, who had also made similar mistakes with accounting work previously, accused the participant of being irresponsible.

For each scenario, participants were presented with five possible responses per situation and asked to select the one they felt was closest to what they would say in the situation. As shown in the appendix, each scenario was paired with examples of two types of face-saving responses towards the accuser, two types of face-threatening responses towards the accuser, and an avoidance of explicit response. This approach allowed us to compare response choices concerning face work across the three different cultural groups using frequencies of choices. Five responses were created for each of the two situations resulting in a total of ten possible responses. The scenarios and the responses to the two situations were first created in Japanese and then translated into Korean and English by highly-advanced bilinguals with many years of research experience. The translations were later back translated into Japanese, and no significant problems were found. (The material is provided in English in the Appendix.)

2.3. Manipulation check

We asked 81 college students, not overlapping with the main survey, to evaluate the *severity* and *unreasonableness* of the two accusation situations. We also asked participants to evaluate the *disagreeability* of the ten responses (i.e., five responses per situation) to the accusation situations, knowing the situations and responses might be evaluated differently across the three cultures. The 81 students consisted of 30 Americans (19 male and 11 female), ranging from 18 to 35 years (M = 22.3 years, SD = 4.4), 28 Japanese participants (16 male and 12 female), ranging from 18 to 23 years (M = 20.0 years, SD = 1.1), and 23 Koreans (10 male and 13 female), ranging from 18 to 24 years (M = 21.0 years, SD = 1.8). The native languages of the participants were English, Japanese, and Korean, respectively.

Participants were asked to read the scenarios and responses and then decide whether or not each situation was *severe* and *unreasonable,* in addition to whether or not responses disagreed with the accuser. They did this by filling in specific numbers, based on how they felt, ranging from 0% (totally disagree) to 100% (totally agree). The degrees of unreasonableness were analyzed using a linear mixed effects (LME) methodology (see Baayen, 2008; Baayen, Davidson, & Bates, 2008; Bates, 2005; West, Welch, &Gatecki, 2007) implemented in PASW Advanced Statistics ver. 18.0J (SPSS, 2006). This methodology is advantageous in that it tests the significance of predictor variable(s) as fixed variable(s) over effect of random variable(s). The present study set factors of situation and culture as fixed variables, and participants as a random variable.

Table 1 provides mean degrees (i.e., the percentage) of unreasonableness of the two accusations evaluated by students from the United States, Japan, and South Korea. The LME analysis revealed that the main effect of situation was significant ($F_{1, 78}$ = 35.695, $p<$ .001.), while the main effect of culture was not significant ($F_{2, 59}$ = 1.873, p = .163, ns.). The interactive effect between situation and culture was significant ($F_{2, 78}$ = 5.403, $p<$ .01.). The significance of interaction may be because American participants showed a relatively larger average difference (25.1%) between the two situations, compared to their counterparts from Japan (16.3%) and South Korea (15.7%). Nevertheless, participants from all of the three cultures in general perceived Situation 2 (where the accuser's fault is clear; involving the cash account) as more unreasonable than Situation 1 (the accuser's fault is unclear; involving the appointment).

Table 1: Perception of unreasonableness of accusation in situations

	Situation 1 (Appointment)		Situation 2 (Cash account)	
	M %	*(SD* %)	*M* %	*(SD* %)
The U.S.	44.0	(36.1)	89.0	(36.1)
Japan	50.0	(31.7)	66.3	(23.7)
Korea	61.3	(31.2)	77.0	(27.2)
Total	51.0	(33.6)	77.7	(25.4)

Table 2: Perception of severity of accusation situations

	Situation 1 (Appointment)		Situation 2 (Cash account)	
	M %	(*SD* %)	*M* %	(*SD* %)
The U.S.	53.0	(33.2)	71.5	(30.5)
Japan	53.1	(32.1)	55.9	(27.6)
Korea	60.7	(29.6)	68.3	(30.9)
Total	55.3	(31.6)	65.2	(30.1)

Table 3: Perception of disagreeability expressed in responses to accusation

Situation 1 (Appointment)

	Response 1 *M*% (*SD*%)	Response 2 *M*% (*SD*%)	Response 3 *M*% (*SD*%)	Response 4 *M*% (*SD*%)	Response 5 *M*% (*SD*%)
The U.S.	13.0 (25.0)	41.1 (30.0)	27.3 (29.6)	71.1 (34.0)	63.4 (32.5)
Japan	41.6 (42.6)	54.4 (35.4)	47.8 (35.4)	73.9 (34.3)	74.6 (33.3)
Korea	46.7 (43.5)	57.3 (41.7)	49.0 (41.9)	37.6 (37.0)	54.2 (40.5)
Total	33.6 (40.3)	50.8 (36.5)	41.2 (37.2)	59.5 (38.7)	63.2 (36.4)

Note: Responses 1 to 5 say "Sorry for the trouble," "I may be confused," "avoiding explicit comment," "It might be two-thirty," and "I'm not irresponsible," respectively.

Table 4: Perception of disagreeability expressed in responses to accusation

Situation 2 (Cash account)

	Response 1 *M*% (*SD*%)	Response 2 *M*% (*SD*%)	Response 3 *M*% (*SD*%)	Response 4 *M*% (*SD*%)	Response 5 *M*% (*SD*%)
The U.S.	20.0 (31.3)	32.5 (30.7)	31.6 (29.2)	53.6 (27.1)	66.4 (30.9)
Japan	58.0 (36.1)	45.9 (36.5)	42.0 (33.1)	55.7 (34.0)	43.9 (24.8)
Korea	40.0 (36.2)	29.0 (41.7)	42.0 (40.0)	32.0 (35.0)	41.3 (36.9)
Total	38.2 (37.4)	35.0 (36.9)	38.4 (34.5)	46.2 (33.6)	50.7 (33.4)

Note: Responses 1 to 5 say "Sorry for the trouble," "I might be careless," "avoiding explicitcomment," "It's only my first mistake," and "I'm not irresponsible," respectively.

Table 2 shows mean degrees (i.e., the percentage) of severity of the two accusations evaluated by students from the United States, Japan, and South Korea. The degrees of severity, like unreasonableness, were analyzed using the LME method. Results revealed that the main effect of situation was significant ($F_{1, 79} = 6.036$, $p< .05.$), whereas no significance was found for the main effect of culture ($F_{2, 61} = 1.243$, $p = .296$, ns.) and the interaction effect between the two factors ($F_{2, 79} = 1.537$, $p = .221$, *ns*.). Our participants perceived Situation 2 (where the accuser's fault is clear; involving the cash account) as more severe (65.2%) than Situation 1 (the accuser's fault is unclear; involving the appointment). (55.3%), regardless of the participants' culture.

Lastly, the LME method was used to compare mean degrees of the disagreeability (i.e., percentage) of the responses to accusations among the three cultures (i.e., a fixed variable), setting participants as a random variable. Table 3 provides the mean degree of disagreeability of the responses in Situation 1 concerning an appointment. The same analysis revealed that cultural differences were significant for Response 1," Sorry for the trouble" ($F_{2, 62} = 8.386$, $p< .001.$), Response 4, "The agreed time might be two-thirty" ($F_{2, 61} = 4.280$, $p< .05.$), and Response 5, "I'm not irresponsible" ($F_{2, 64} = 5.556$, $p< .01.$), whereas no significance was found for Response 2,"I might be careless" ($F_{2, 60} = 1.344$, $p = . 268$, ns.), and Response 3, avoiding explicit comment ($F_{2, 62} = .901$, $p = .411$, ns.). Table 4 shows the disagreeability in Situation 2.

The same LME analysis revealed that significant cultural differences were found for Response 1, "Sorry for the trouble" ($F_{2, 61}$ = 8.322, $p<$ .001.), Response 3, "avoiding explicit comment" ($F_{2, 62}$ = 3.658, $p<$ .05.), and Response 4, "It's only my first mistake" ($F_{2, 62}$ = 8.966, $p<$ .001.). By contrast, no significance was found for Response 2, "I may be confused" ($F_{2, 63}$ = 1.947, p = .151, ns.) and Response 5, "I'm not irresponsible" ($F_{2, 63}$ = 1.792, p = .175, ns.).

In the light of the results of this manipulation check, we should assume that a participant's evaluation of disagreeability of responses to accusation to be culturally specific. Evaluations of unreasonableness and severity of the accusation situations, however, were essentially the same among the three cultures. Therefore, perception about which strategy is more face-saving/face-threatening in each situation should not be treated as a continuous variable. Instead, the main analyses of the present questionnaire were conducted in an exploratory way in which the hypothetical responses were treated as categorical (i.e., qualitative) data separately for each culture.

2.4. Analysis

We employed a decision tree analysis to examine how responses to accusations within each culture were influenced by interactional effects caused by the four candidate factors (i.e., culture, power, distance, and situation). This analysis aims to select a useful subset of predictors in descending order from a larger set of candidate factors, with respect to a dependent measure. Since the dependent measure in the present study is categorical data of the participants' response selection, we utilized a *classification tree analysis is* to seek qualitative significant differences. This classification tool is built on the basis of the algorithm *chi-squared automatic interaction detector* (CHAID) which was originally proposed by Kass (1980). CHAID automatically chooses the candidate factor that has the strongest interaction, followed by the next-highest one (SPSS, 2006). In the tree-growing process, each parent node representing a factor split into child nodes only if a significant difference is found among any of other factors. Every node splitting step uses Bonferroni's adjusted *p* values to avoid Type I Error (i.e., false positives). In this study, we examined the participants' response selections in terms of two candidate factors: (1) the hypothetical accuser's power (teacher, peer, and junior) and (2) familiarity (familiar and unfamiliar) between the accuser and the accused. We used SPSS Classification Trees ver. 15.0J (SPSS, 2006) for this analysis.

3. Results

3.1. Situation 1: Concerning an Appointment

Situation 1 describes an accusation situation concerning an appointment, but whether it was the accuser's (participant's) fault or not remains unclear. The situation was perceived as less unreasonable and severe, according to the manipulation check. Figures 1 to 3 show classification trees that predict the participants' selection of responses to the accusation presented in Situation 1. Influences of the two independent variables (i.e., power and familiarity) on the response selection differed among participants from the United States, Japan, and South Korea. The response selection of American and Korean participants was principally influenced by the accuser's power (i.e., whether the accuser was a teacher, peer, or junior). On the other hand, the principal factor influencing the choice of Japanese participants was familiarity (i.e., whether the accused were familiar or unfamiliar with the accuser).A classification tree for American participants (Figure 1) showed that their selection of responses to the accusation was significantly different depending on whether the accuser was a teacher or not (χ^2_4 = 209.659, $p<$ .001). 59.2% of the participants chose Response 2,"I have gotten confused," to the accusation uttered by teachers (Node 1) versus 42.3% (Node 2) for the more preferred response, the one to the accusation by peers and juniors, which was Response 4, "The agreed time might have been two-thirty". The factor of familiarity also influenced the participants' response selection (χ^2_4 = 13.801, $p<$ .01 for teachers; χ^2_4 = 29.848, $p<$ .001 for peers and juniors).

As shown in Figure 2, in contrast to the Koreans and Americans, the majority of Japanese participants selected Response 4, "The agreed time might have been two-thirty," regardless of the interpersonal relationship between the accuser and the accused. Although the dominant response did not change for any type of accuser, the strongest predictor of the Japanese participants' pick was familiarity (χ^2_4 = 139.444, $p<$ .001). For a familiar accuser (Node 1), 69.5% of Japanese participants selected Response 4, "The agreed time might have been two-thirty."

In contrast, for an unfamiliar accuser (Node 2), the ratio of Response 4, "The agreed time might have been two-thirty," to Response 2, "I may have gotten confused," was relatively low, 46.7%, to 31.2%. Additionally, the Japanese response selection was influenced by the factor of power (Nodes 3 to 7) (χ^2_4 = 54.417, p< .01 for familiar; χ^2_4 = 92.815, p< .001 for unfamiliar).

Korean participants, like Americans, revealed that the strongest predictor of response selection (Figure 3) was the accuser's power (χ^2_4 = 116.857 p< .001). Likewise, similar to Americans, they chose Response 4, "The agreed time might have been two-thirty" for peers and juniors (43.3%, Node 2). However, the preferred response to teachers was distinct. Unlike Americans, Koreans were almost evenly divided between those who selected Response 4 (28.9%) and those who selected Response 1, "Sorry for the trouble," (28.8%), shown in Node 1. The factor of familiarity was the second predictor of responses to peers and juniors (χ^2_4 = 10.028, p< .05), generating Nodes 3 and 4, although it had no significant influence on responses to teachers.
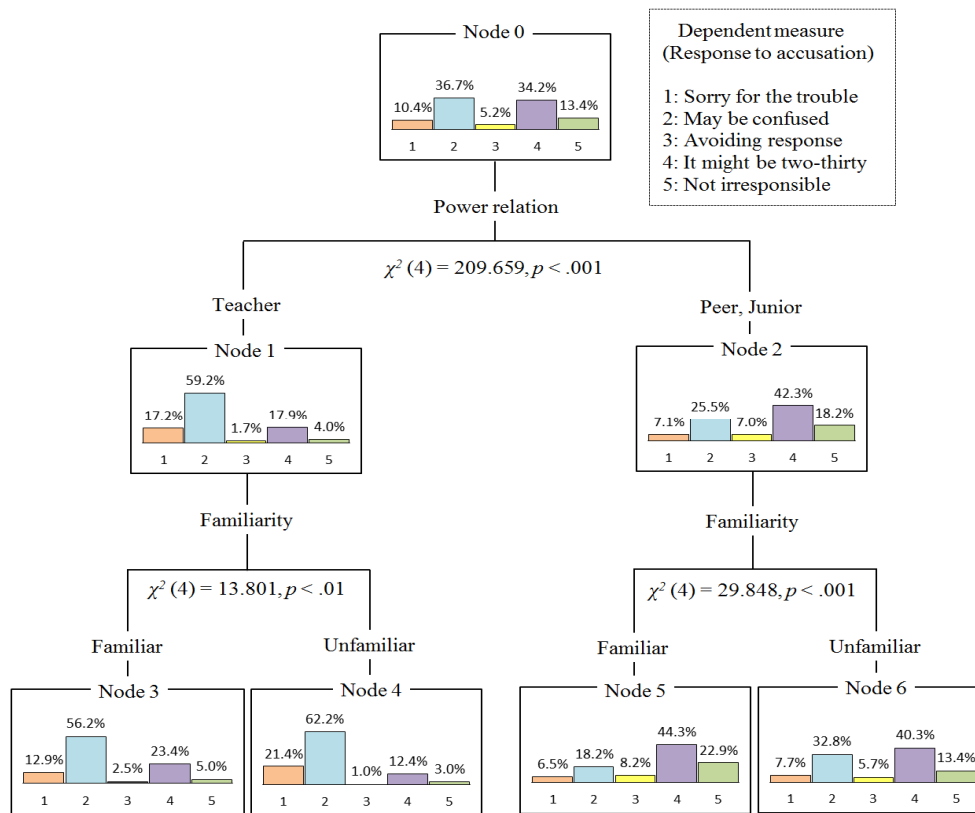

Figure 1: **Classification tree of responses in Situation 1 concerning an appointment (less unreasonable and severe): The United States (*n* = 201)**
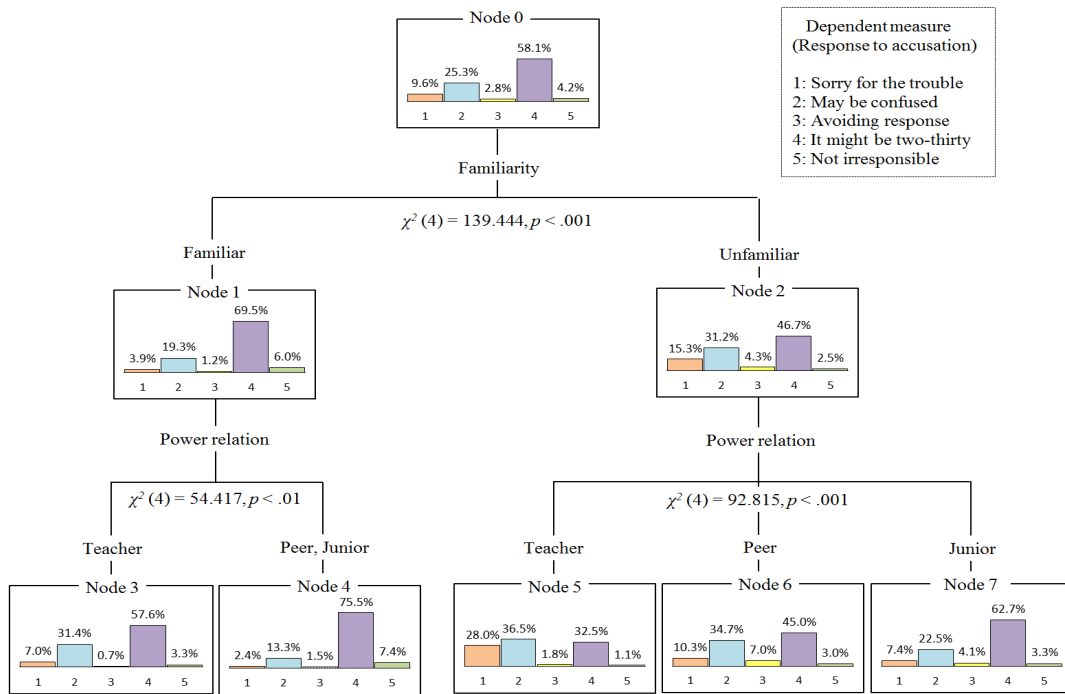
Figure 2: Classification tree of responses in Situation 1 concerning an appointment (less unreasonable and severe): Japan (*n* = 271)
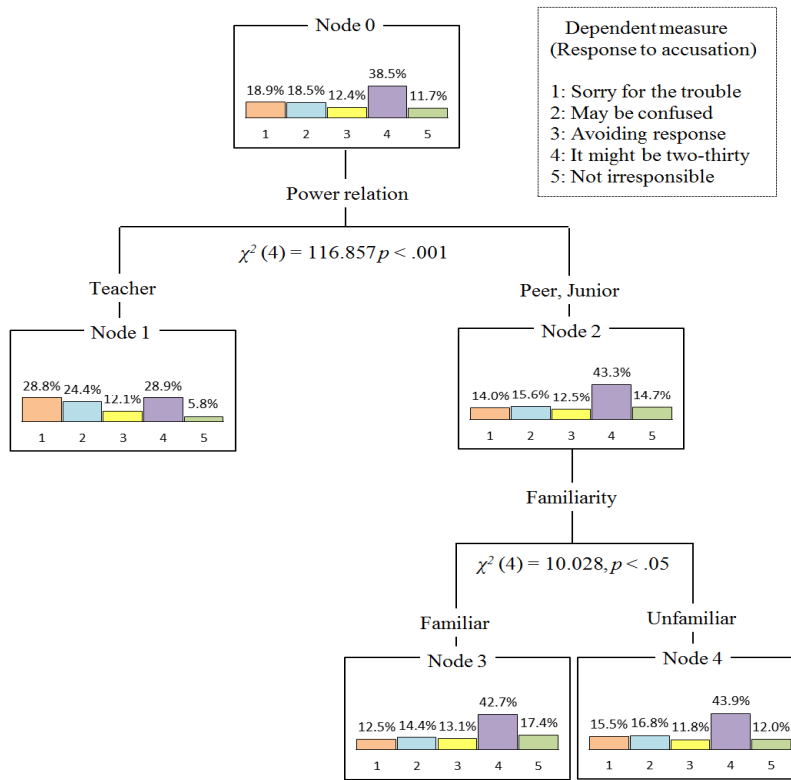

Figure 3: Classification tree of responses in Situation 1 concerning an appointment (less unreasonable and severe): Japan (*n* = 313)
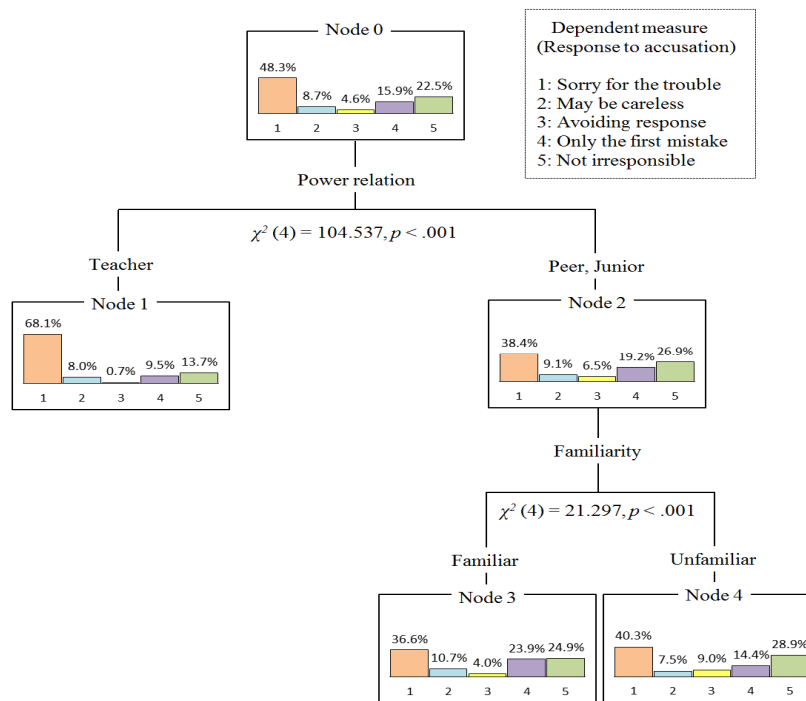
Figure 4: Classification tree of responses in Situation 2 concerning an appointment (highly unreasonable and severe): The United States (*n* = 201)

3.2. Situation 2: Concerning Cash Account

Situation 2 involves an accusation about the accuser's (participant's) error in accounting work. The manipulation check indicated this accusation was perceived as highly unreasonable and severe. Figures 4 to 6 present results of the classification tree analyses of the participants' response selection, which was the same across the three cultures: The most selected response was Response 1, "Sorry for the trouble." Nevertheless, the three cultures showed different patterns in which the factors of power and familiarity influenced the participants' response choice. As revealed in Figure 4, the strongest predictor of American participant response selection was the factor of the accuser's power (χ^2_4 = 104.537, p < .001). Response 1, "Sorry for the trouble," was the principally selected response to teachers (68.1%, Node 1). When replying to peers and juniors (Node 2), Response 5, "I'm not irresponsible," also yielded a considerable ratio of 26.9%, in addition to 38.4% for Response. Moreover, the familiarity factor influenced responses to peers and juniors (χ^2_4 = 21.297, p < .001) generating Nodes 3 and 4, but it had no significant influence on responses to teachers.

The response selection of Japanese participants (Figure 5) was, like Americans, principally influenced by the power factor (χ^2_4 = 100.009, p < .001). The most preferred response to teachers was Response 1, "Sorry for the trouble" (70.5%, Node 1). Both Responses 1 and 2 were found to be popular choices in answering accusations by peers and juniors as shown in Node 2. Unlike Americans, Japanese seldom picked Response 5, "I'm not irresponsible," when addressing the teacher (2.8%, Node 1), peer, and junior situations (7.8%, Node 2). The factor of familiarity also consistently influenced Japanese participant responses, as the second predictor of their responses (χ^2_4 = 30.326, p < .001 for teachers; χ^2_4 = 40.962, p < .001 for peers and juniors), generating Nodes 3 to 6.

For Korean participants (Figure 6), the significant predictor was only the power factor (χ^2_4= 73.445, p < .001), and no significant influence of familiarity was found on any responses, different from both the Americans and Japanese participants. For any accuser type, the most preferred response was Response 1, "Sorry for the trouble" (49.2% for teachers, Node 1; 35.8% for peers, Node 2; 29.2% for juniors, Node 3). Nevertheless, response selection to juniors tended to vary: 29.2% for Response 1, 23.0% for Response 2, 17.4% for Response 3, 17.7% for Response 4, and 12.6% for Response 5.
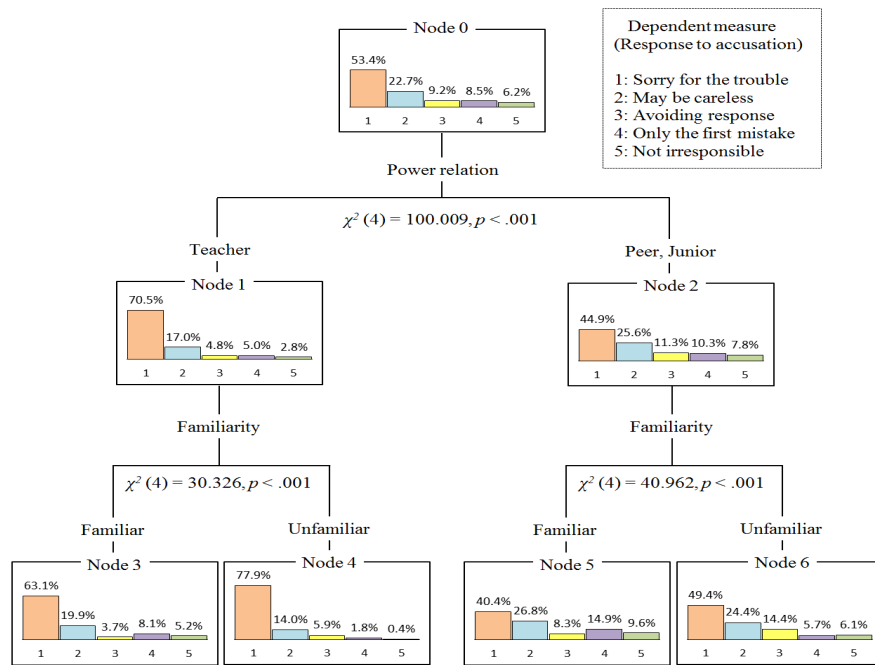
Figure 5: Classification tree of responses in Situation 2 concerning an appointment (highly unreasonable and severe): Japan (*n* = 271)
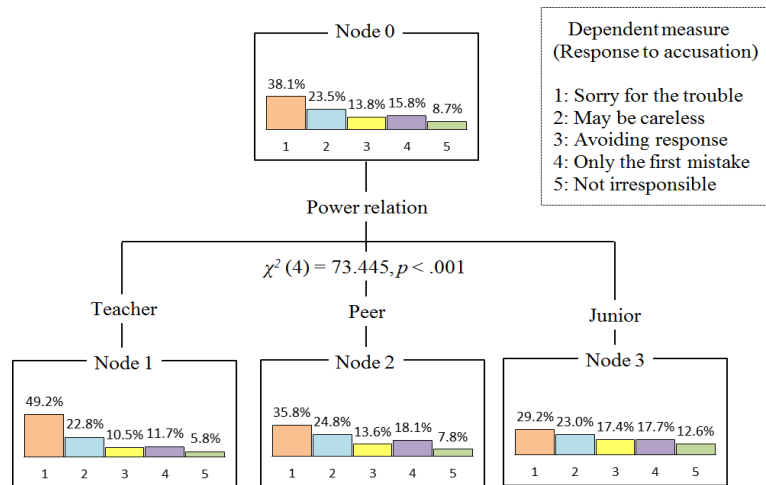

Figure 6: Classification tree of responses in Situation 2 concerning an appointment (highly unreasonable and severe): South Korea (*n* = 313)

4. Discussion

To investigate universality and cultural variability of face work behavior in conflict situations, this study conducted a survey about how people from the United States, Japan, and South Korea selected responses to unreasonable accusations. Specifically, we examined the accusation situation, the accuser's power, and the familiarity between the accuser and the accused. Results revealed several similarities and differences among the participants' perception to unreasonable accusations across the three cultures. First, a manipulation check showed no significant differences in the participants' evaluation of the unreasonableness and severity of a situation of accusation among people from the United States, Japan, and South Korea.

The reasonable and "right" things seemed to be universally accepted. However, there were significant differences of culture in the participants' evaluation of disagreeability in responses to accusation. This suggests that the concept of values regarding specific language expressions is culturally specific. Many cross-cultural miscommunications may occur, not caused by differences in how to perceive the same situation, but instead led by different ideas about what to say and how to behave in the same situation.

Second, the results of the classification tree analyses revealed that the response selection by our participants from the three cultures differed depending on the situation. In the more unreasonable and severe situation concerning the cash account (i.e., Situation 2), it seemed to be common sense in each culture that anyone accused of his or her own mistake should apologize, even if the accuser had previously made similar mistakes several times. On the contrary, to less unreasonable and severe accusations, such as the one concerning the time of appointment (i.e., Situation 1), participant responses were relatively diversified among the three cultures. There was no consensus on how to manage accusations in a situation that was not that unreasonable and severe.

Third, the relationship of power, and the familiarity between the accuser and the accused, had differing influences on the participants' response selection to accusation across culture of origin. This implies that cultural differences play a role in assessing interpersonal relationships and in structuring value systems that affect language expressions suitable for given interlocutors. For instance, in the less unreasonable and severe accusation situation (involving an appointment), power, followed by familiarity, was the strongest predictor of American and Korean responses, while familiarity, followed by power, was the strongest for Japanese participants. By contrast, in the highly unreasonable and severe accusation situation (involving a cash account), power, followed by familiarity, was the strongest predictor of American and Japanese responses while only power only the predictor of Korean responses.

Finally, to sum up the characteristics of the three cultures, American participants clearly changed their responses depending on the accuser. It should also be noted that some Americans tended to select the assertive response of "I'm not irresponsible" to the highly unreasonable and severe accusation, if the accuser did not have more power than they did. This response was rarely selected by Japanese and Koreans, regardless of who the accuser was. This may be viewed as a dichotomy of western individualistic (i.e., American) and eastern collectivistic (i.e., Japanese and Korean) cultures (e.g., Hall, 1976, 1984; Triandis, 1995; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). The Japanese response selection was most strongly influenced by both the balance of power in the relationship and the familiarity between the accuser and the accused. Whether power or familiarity became the first predictor changed, depending on the situations. This suggests that Japanese culture may have more complex ways of assessing interpersonal relationships, compared with American and South Korean culture. In the Korean responses, the relationship of power consistently had the strongest influence across the three cultures, while the influence of familiarity was the weakest. Also, many Korean participants responded to teachers with an apology in both accusation situations. As revealed in previous studies (e.g., Ide & Lim, 2004; Ozaki, 2005; Tamaoka, Lim, Miyaoka, & Kiyama, 2010), teachers may be given a stronger status in Korea.

It is possible that response selection differs according to interpersonal relationships because individuals in a social encounter do not necessarily receive equal treatment regarding face. This phenomenon can be seen in real-world encounters. For instance, in a conversation among three or more people, a person may treat a closer interlocutor (e.g., spouse or friend) differently from a distant interlocutor (e.g., stranger or person in a higher position). The idea of interactional imbalance in face work is not a new concept. Goffman (1967) promoted the idea in his conceptualization of the ritual of demeanor, which refers to behaviors that convey the self as a desirable quality, and deference, which deals with behaviors that convey respect for others. According to Goffman, acting with demeanor entails acting with deference. This means that the self should incur a slight loss when interacting with other people. In other words, sometimes individuals have to save the interlocutor's face in order to save their own faces. This imbalance of face work can clearly be seen in our findings of responses to unreasonable accusations selected by people from the United States, Japan, and South Korea.

The present study has revealed some insights into similarities and differences in conflict management processes across three cultures. However, a possible methodological limitation lies in the fact that participants were asked to select their responses from a list, instead of generating their own responses. Since there have not been any common indices to measure the degrees of face-saving/threatening expressed in responses in previous studies, we explanatorily prepared unstandardized hypothetical responses to accommodate each situation of unreasonable accusations.

Due to the irregularity of perception about degree of disagreeability of the responses among the three cultures, the main analysis was limited in comparisons of frequency of response selection per situation for each culture. In future research, a standardized schema needs to be developed for conflict situations, if we are to investigate more complex and elaborative expressions in actual encounters. of course, many determinants and consequences are embedded within any social interaction. Further investigations on other candidate factors and on other various cultures are needed if we are to move towards a more complete understanding of face work in conflict situations.

5. Conclusion

The decision tree analysis for response selections of unreasonable situations in the present study have demonstrated that the intrinsic content of a conflict is a crucial determinant of responses by the accused and that the interpersonal relationship between the accuser and the accused has the next-to-strongest influence on the responses. Beyond that, the details of the effects of the distance factor differ according to culture. To conclude, while perception of conflict situations appears to be universal, the assessment of interpersonal relationships and the value placed on language expressions suitable for the given interlocutors appear to differ according to culture.

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Appendix: Scenarios of Two Settings Concerning Unreasonable Accusation Settings

Participants read the following scenarios and selected one of the five alternatives for six hypothetical accusers per situation. Notes in parentheses were not presented to participants in the actual questionnaire.

Setting 1: Concerning appointments (less unreasonable and severe)

You have made an appointment with a certain person to meet at two-thirty in the afternoon. You tried not to be late and arrived at the agreed location at two-twenty five, five minutes ahead of time. The other person had already arrived and said to you "The time we promised to meet was two o'clock. You are twenty minutes late. You are irresponsible." However, in two prior arranged meetings, this person had been late, but you had never been late.

Alternative responses to the above statements by the hypothetical interlocutors:

1. You say you are sorry for the trouble, admitting that you are late. (Face-saving)
2. You say you might have been confused about the time of the appointment. (Face-saving)
3. You say nothing of importance. (Avoidance of response)
4. You say that the agreed time might be two-thirty. (Face-threatening)
5. You claim you are not irresponsible because you are not late. (Face-threatening)

The hypothetical interlocutors (The above alternatives of response are presented per interlocutor. The interlocutors are randomly presented per setting in the actual questionnaire)

Case 1: A teacher with whom you have talked much. (Familiar teacher)
Case 2: A teacher with whom you have not as yet talked much. (Unfamiliar teacher)
Case 3: A classmate of the same age with whom you have talked much. (Familiar peer)
Case 4: A classmate of the same age with whom you have not as yet talked much. (Unfamiliar peer)
Case 5: A younger person with whom you have talked much. (Familiar junior)
Case 6: A younger person with whom you have not as yet talked much. (Unfamiliar junior)

Setting 2: Concerning a mistake in the cash account of a group tour (highly unreasonable and severe)

Suppose a group of students attending the same seminar class went on a group tour, and you were appointed to manage its cash account. You did your job carefully so as not to make mistakes in dealing with the money you were entrusted with by your classmates. Unfortunately, however, you did make a mistake. As a consequence, one of the members said, "You are irresponsible for making a mistake in the money account." However, this was the first time you had made such a mistake while your accuser had made similar mistakes on two previous occasions.

Alternatives of response to the above statements by the hypothetical interlocutors

1. You say you are sorry for the trouble, admitting your mistake. (Face-saving)
2. You say you might have been careless. (Face-saving)
3. You say nothing of importance. (Avoidance of response)
4. You say that it may be only your first mistake. (Face-threatening)
5. You say you are not irresponsible because you have done the job carefully up to that point. (Face-threatening)

The hypothetical interlocutors

Identical with Setting 1.