Apology as a Crisis Response Strategy: a Genre-Based Analysis of Intercultural Corporate Apologies

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Abstract

Corporate apologies made after an alleged wrongdoing or transgression could well be considered as an independent genre given that they are one of the most frequent and central crisis-related activity types. This article examines intercultural corporate apologies within the framework of genre analysis to discuss whether transnational corporations (TNCs) accommodate to cultural expectations of intended addressees and how the communicative purposes are achieved through the schematic structuring and linguistic realization patterns. The data collected for this study consists of 16 apologies delivered publically by TNCs of low-context cultures with an American or European root to Chinese people after having been accused of an alleged wrongdoing. The study shows that intercultural corporate apologies are made not only for reputation and trust repair, but also for illocutionary negotiation and discursive struggle. It will also be demonstrated that TNCs rarely accommodate to the cultural expectations of Chinese people in terms of the content of apology and its style. The implications of the study are then highlighted, with suggestions on the methodology of genre studies and the political dimension of genre, and the practice of intercultural apologies for crisis management practitioners.

Keywords: Corporate apology, intercultural communication, crisis management, genre analysis, rhetoric moves, intention

1. Introduction

Compared to denial, diminishment, bolstering and no response, apology, being victim-centered or accommodative, is conventionally claimed to be a desirable crisis response for corporations to repair reputation and trustworthiness, although apology increases the perceived responsibility of the corporation for the crisis (e.g., Benoit, 1995; Coombs et al., 2010; Hearit and Brown, 2004; Kerkhof et al., 2011; Patel and Reinsch, 2003; cf. Coombs and Holladay, 2008). Hearit (2006) developed a normative and practice oriented model against an ethical standard in terms of both the manner and the content for describing and evaluating corporate apologies as a crisis response to allegations of wrongdoing or transgression. It should be noted, however, apologizing is primarily and essentially a social behavior, guided by social norms in any given society or culture (see Holmes, 1990, 1991). Hearit's model, as illustrated by Frandesn and Johansen (2010), is unable to offer a culture-sensitive account for often more complicated, contextualized practices of cross-/inter-cultural corporate apologies.

Although concentrating almost exclusively on the interpersonal and interactive behavior of individuals, copious linguistic studies of a multitude of apologies have also proved cultural differences as a key to understanding and adaption to cross-/inter-cultural situations that call for apologies (e.g., Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; Gries and Peng, 2002; Li and Okumura, 2000; Lingley, 2006; Park and Guan, 2006, 2009). On the other hand, cultural differences are conducive to different styles of apologies and their strategies for interpretation (Suszczynska, 1999).

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With regard to cultural variations in the practice of apology, Sugimoto (1998), for instance, observes that Americans, in contrast to Japanese, more often than not offer explanations to justify their acts and adapt their manner of apologizing less to the status and face to their partners, although both prefer to apologize directly. Several questions of relevance emerge, one of which is whether corporations make adaptions to the cultural expectations of intended addressees when making an apology for allegations of wrongdoing or transgression. Despite extensive interest in examining apologies as a crisis response strategy in the area of crisis communication and a number of intercultural studies on apologies of various types in the area of linguistics, little research, however, has been conducted to study corporate apologies as intercultural communicative behavior to date.

This paper is dedicated to a textual analysis of intercultural apologies transnational corporations (hereafter TNCs) addressed to Chinese people of mainland China. Here TNCs refer exclusively to foreign ventures of low-context cultures (Hall, 1976) with an American or European root that are operating in China too. The main objective of this study is to offer some useful insights into social interactions of the intercultural corporate apology between institutionalized language use and communicative purposes. The basic assumption here is that cultural differences wield a considerable impact on the practice of corporate apologies, which might become particularly apparent if the demand for an apology is caused by the conflict between a set of sociocultural orders. The findings are believed to offer some useful suggestions on the practice of intercultural apologies for crisis management practitioners.

Because of its special focus on examining text-based discourse, genre analysis, as developed by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), will be used to examine intercultural corporate apologies. In the field of linguistics, apologies of various types seem always to be studied either as speech acts (e.g., Abadi, 1990; Fillmore, 1971; Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Olshtain, 1987) or as broader social interactions (e.g., Holmes, 1990; Norrick, 1978; Owen, 1983; Trosborg, 2003). Corporate apologies made after an allegation of wrongdoing or transgression could well be conceived as an independent genre, given that they are one of the most frequent and central crisis-related "activity types" that is "goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded events with constraints on participants, setting, and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions" (Levinson, 1992[1979]: 69, italics original). Besides, as observed by Page (2014),[1] the information components and moves of corporate apologies likely make them an identifiable event, despite cultural variations in practice.

The main communicative purpose of corporate apologies in crisis communication is widely believed to restore positive image of the corporation. Goffman's (1971) seminal work defines apology as the offender's device to remedy a social breach and to reestablish social harmony; to apologize is to acknowledge the offense, express remorse and request forgiveness from the offended person. Coincident or not, in the Chinese context an apology, suggested by the Chinese meaning of *daoqian* (lit. apologize), i.e., "to express the feeling of being sorry, referring in particular to admitting a fault" (Modern Chinese dictionary, 1985), should be accompanied both by an explicit statement of responsibility and an explicit display of remorse or regret to increase its creditability. When evaluating the corporate apologies by TNCs in the analysis, this study takes accepting responsibility and expressing regret as its centerpiece.

The Chinese context nowadays is an excellent site for such a study. Chinese people are increasingly sensitive to public issues as well as aware of their right to be informed, if transgressed, to be apologized. For example, in 2013 China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) was demanded to make an apology for its immediate denial with no appraisal on the merits of the accusation of corruption against Liu Tienan, a deputy director of NDRC. And the past decade has witnessed in China a growing emergency of highly mediated apologies by a number of TNCs who tried to defuse a situation after having been accused of a wrongdoing or transgression. In 2007, Wrigley has apologized for the use of China's national anthem in its TV commercials and Mattel for toy recalls; In 2010, Google has apologized for scanning Chinese authors' literary works without permission and KFC China for the sudden cancel of last-minute sale activity; In 2011, Chinese stories of Carrefour and Walmart have apologized for overcharging Chinese customers; In 2012, Coca-Cola China has apologized for some of its products alleged contaminated with chlorine and Volkswagen China for problems with DGS gearbox-powered VWs and Skodas; In 2013, Apple CEO Tim Cook has apologized for the deficiency of product warranty and support, Bausch & Lomb China for the possibility of fusarium keratitis caused by ReNu with MoistureLoc, Fonterra for the trace of dicyandiamide and clostridium botulinum in the batch of whey powder exported to China, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) for the involvement in a series of corruption breaches, and Walmart China for fake products; In 2014, McDonald has apologized for rotten meat and US food purveyor OSI Group for giving expired meat products to US-based fast-food restaurants in China; In 2015, Philips has apologized for the false advertisement for its air cleaning products; and so on.

2. Genre analysis as an approach

Genre analysis is one of the most well-established frameworks for the study of professional discourse. Defined by John Swales (1990: 58), genre is "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes… In addition to purposes, exemplars of a genre exhibits various patterns of similarities in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience." The clear implication is that, although several aspects can be studied in the analysis of a genre, the essence of a genre lies within its communicative goal, as it points us toward its ideological functions (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990). Every text of the same genre has a similar communicative goal, which is fulfilled by different rhetorical functions and lower-level functions, the so-called "moves" and "strategies" (Swales, 1990). A move is an element of a text used for a certain function, for instance, of acknowledging receipt of a message. A strategy is the way by which this move is realized, for example, by drawing the attention to something. Moves may have "steps" (Bhatia, 1993), which are essentially different strategies for the fulfillment of a move. Just as each step's function works toward fulfilling the larger purpose of a move, each move works towards achieving the larger communicative purpose of a genre. An analysis of moves, steps and strategies would be efficient and productive not only in unravelling the hidden or "private intentions" (Bhatia, 1995) as in "promotion in grant proposals and book reviews" (Bhatia, 2002, 2004) and "stances in news reporting" (Fairclough, 1992), but also in describing how the textualization of them is fulfilled within the realization of socially recognized communicative purposes. Genre analysis, therefore, provides a useful framework for establishing the link between generic structure, real intention and language strategy, suggesting its applicability to the examination of communicative purposes of corporate apologies.

Genres, as frequently emphasized, mediate between the unique features of individual contexts and the features that recur across contexts which in themselves are embedded in the broader historical and socio-political context (e.g., Bhatia, 2004; Martin, 1992; Miller, 1984, 1994). Since contextual factors call for the deployment of repertories of different structures of the same genre for the communicative purposes, it is compelling to view genres as emerging, varying and changing rather than imposing constraints. The affordance of genres for contextual variations in practice implies the potential for genres to be orchestrated for redefining the situation where variables are deployed, circumscribing style and information, creating stylistic and informational equivalence, and similar. In light of "generic versatility" (Bhatia, 2008a), it makes sense to reinterpret the communicative purposes of a genre in contextual specificities as "repurposing" the genre for a "stabilized-for-now" set of social purposes (Askehave and Swales, 2001: 209). The extension of the analytical scope of genre studies from schematic structure to social structure and cultural ideology is particularly useful for the study of intercultural corporate apologies as a purpose-driven genre. This is because the intercultural corporate apology as a new genre is relatively "local" in scale, associated with the relatively delimited network of business, and relatively "global" interactions across networks including organization, institution and society. An examination of the textual and organization, and of linguistic and discursive strategies deployed for the realization of communicative purposes of the intercultural corporate apology is anticipated to unravel the real intention of TNCs and to be useful for discussing whether the strategies, as usual, are objectified by the Chinese society. In this sense, genre analysis as an approach of textual analysis provides a strong theoretical underpinning for the discussion of the dynamic nature of intercultural corporate apologies and the interplay of micro and macro practices and norms.

3. Material and research questions

This study emerges from data of 16 authentic apologies in the form of letter, statement or announcement openly delivered by 16 TNCs of low-context cultures to Chinese people as consumers during the years of 2000-2015. Collected from an array of media sources including the press, broadcasting, and the Internet, the data has the following key features. It excludes those apologies addressed by the TNCs of high-context cultures, for example, Asia Symbol, Mitsubishi, Nikon, Samsung, Sony, and Toyota. Secondly, they refer exclusively to those addressed in Chinese after the proved accusation of doing something wrong to Chinese consumers or transgressed their right. Except the first apology, those continuously delivered by the same TNC for the same wrongdoing or transgression are also excluded. The data could be categorized into a number of types according to the crisis themes: after-sale service, copyright infringement, fake products, food safety, poor oversight, price fraud, product quality, and product recalls.

With their roots in America, UK, German, New Zealand or Sweden, the TNCs include Bausch & Lomb, Coca-Cola, Fonterra, Google, Hewlett-Packard, IKEA, Mattel, McDonald, Metro, Nike, KFC, Siemens, Volkswagen, Walmart, and Yum! Brands. Clearly the apologies are diverse both in crisis type and the home country of the TNCs. In the service of the objective mentioned above, research questions are:

- RQ1: What communicative purposes do the TNCs aim to fulfill through an apology?
- RQ2: How are they linguistically realized?
- RQ3: Do the TNCs adjust forms and strategies of apology to meet the cultural expectations of intended addressees, in this case Chinese people?

The data will be first analyzed to enumerate the rhetorical moves of this genre and discuss linguistic or discursive strategies used in the realization of them. Since textual boundaries of a genre are not rigidly indexed by framing devices in Bateson's (1972) terms or markers of "footing" (Goffman, 1974), in this study the identification of textual boundaries is made in accordance with the criteria proposed by Paltridge (1994). In Paltridge's words, "the search for structural divisions in texts should be seen as a search for cognitive boundaries in terms of convention, appropriacy, and content rather than as a search for linguistically defined boundaries; that is, there are non-linguistic, rather than linguistic, reasons for generic staging in texts" (1994: 295, italics original). After the identification of the moves, the hidden intentions of the TNCs will be discussed in light of the operation of linguistic or discursive strategies in realizing them. As noted earlier, in the analysis this study takes both responsibility acceptance and regret expression as the essence for evaluation. Following this is a brief discussion of whether the rhetorical moves in this genre are objectified by the sociocultural values of China. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of the following examples analyzed are mine. The names of TNCs are indicated in brackets and within parentheses contain the literal translation of the original Chinese.

4. Analysis and findings

Only a few of the apologies in the data have a heading or title in bold and in a large font size (larger than the rest of the text) which states the company's name and helps the reader identify what the message is about. With four exceptions, all of the apologies have an opening salutation fulfilling the greeting act of saying "hello" to Chinese people. Observed in the identification of intended addressees is the frequent usage of the honorific, zunjingde (lit. honored), to elevate the status of Chinese customers and denigrate that of the TNCs. By accommodating the Chinese way of addressing, this linguistic strategy adopted is believed not only to express respect but also to right away placate Chinese customers. The general structure of rhetorical moves can be summarized as follows:

Move 1: Establishing the crisis chain
Move 2: Downplaying the impact
Move 3: Offering an explanation
Move 4: Apologizing
Move 5: Promising rectifications and/or reminding
Move 6: Ending

These six moves define and structure the features of intercultural corporate apologies, which is exemplifies in Appendix 1. Moves 1 and 6 work as a frame for the other moves which are responsible for the content of the message. The apology takes place in the central moves 2, 3, 4 and 5 as they work as a stage where the TNCs addressed the message, that is, they account for the communicative purposes that establish the genre. In some cases, the order of Moves 2, 3 and 4 is not always so rigorous. Rarely did a statement or announce of an apology appear straightforward and at the very onset of the message. ESTABLISHING THE CRITIS EVENT, located after a headline or an opening salutation, is the first move found in this genre. This move mainly introduces and sets the communicative chain in motion; that is, it offers the reference information that links the message to an alleged wrongdoing or transgression by reviewing the crisis event and updating the status of this event. The example below illustrates this communicative purpose.

(1) *Kendeji 'chaozhi xingqier' di'erlun, disanlun miaosha huodong youyu zai huodong kaishi qian chuxian le daliang feishouquan tujing qude de wuxiaoquan, Kendeji budeyi linshi quxiao le gai lianglun huodong.* (lit. A large number of invalid coupons were found to have been obtained through illegal means prior to the second and third rounds of KFC's last-minute sale activity of Tuesday's Premium Value Pack. KFC has decided to cancel the scheduled activity. Until further notice.) <KFC>

The second move, DOWNPLAYING THE IMPACT, is set to minimize any possible negative impact caused by or related to the wrongdoing or transgression

(2) *Genji yonghu sousuo de guanjianci zhi xianshi san diao xiao pianduan de zhaiyao. …. zhiyou zai guge you shouquan de qingkuang xia, caineng xianshi tushu de renhe yi zhengye neirong.* (lit. Only three small extracts will appear according to key words inputted by consumers. … Without Google's permission, the content of any page cannot be read.) <Google>

In Example 2, the use of the adverbial intensifier "only", of the number "three" and of the adjective intensifier "small" clearly suggests the great endeavor Google was making to minimize the impact of the copyright infringement on the Chinese writers involved. The offence was alleviated to such an extent that Google appeared to be vindicated exempt from this accusation. By listing possible reasons for the happening of the alleged wrongdoing or transgression, the third move, OFFERING AN EXPLANATION, provides information of why it happened or what had caused it. This move, though not related directly to the apology itself, was found essential in all of the data. It is set to seek not simply to mitigate the anger of Chinese customers, but, more importantly, to free the corporation from responsibility, fully or partially. This is normally realized by scapegoating or blaming a third-party, as shown by the following four examples.

(3) *Tongguo chubu jiantao, women duiyu zai gongsi jinqi kuaisu chengzhang qijian, chuxian le gebie xiaoshou renyuan meiyou wanquan zunshou ji zhixing gongsi de zhengce ji guiding de qingkuang gandao shiwang.* (lit. After an initial investigation, we are disappointed to discover that a few salesmen didn't adhere to the company's policies and rules during the recent speedy development.) <Walmart>

(4) *Youyu zuichu de renshi butong he dui zhongmei liangguo banquan falv zhidu de butong liaojie, women de xingwei yinqi le zhongguo zuojia de buman. jingguo zuijin jige yue de danpan he goutong, women deque renwei women yu zhongguo de zuojia de goutong zuode buguo hao.* (lit. Because of different interpretations between us and Chinese writers about the Chinese copyright law and the American copyright law, our behavior has caused the complaints of Chinese writers. After negotiation and communication in the past months, we believe that we haven't communicated well with Chinese writers on this.) <Google>

(5) *Huibu tongguo daliang neibu diaocha, queren shi Huibu fuwu zhengce yu zhixing de chayi taozhi de wenti.* (lit. After a careful investigation within the company, it can be confirmed that there exists the discrepancy between the company's service policy and the real practice.) <Hewlett-Packard>

(6) *Jing diaocha faxian ci pichi bingxiang shengchan gongduan cunzai bu an'zhao gongsi de neibu biaozhun jinxing shengchan de shishi, ye queren le Ximenzi youxiangongsi jingyingceng he guanli jiandu renyuan shuyu lvxing zhize de shishi.* (lit. After an investigation, we find that the production of this series of refrigerators was not made in accordance to the standard set by the company. We can also confirm the oversight of our managers and administrative staff.) <Siemens>

According to Bhatia (2004), the recontextualization of possible reasons for the cause of the wrongdoing may not necessarily be true, but intended addressees are less likely to question them. This is because both explaining and apologizing as two different discourses share the same "socio-pragmatic space" (Bhatia, 2004), which incorporates the discursive construction of professional genres as part of specific professional practice to achieve disciplinary as well as professional goals and objectives of a professional community. In this case, two different kinds of discourses are skillfully combined to bend the norms and conventions of apology to evade responsibility. More specifically, by integrating the discourse of explaining into that of apologizing and by strategically placing them in textual proximity to each other, a complex interdiscursive relationship between them is established, which is likely to lend the explaining genre "the same factual reliability and hence credibility" (Bhatia, 2008b: 168). The exploitation of the interdiscursive socio-pragmatic space within the genre of intercultural corporate apologies is meant to indicate that the occurrence of the wrongdoing is not the fault of the corporation.

In doing so, the linguistic device of epistemic modality has often been applied to describe the extent of corporation's propositional attitude. For instance, the verb "discover" put into the higher clause of Example 3 above signals a stronger commitment to, or belief in, the truth of the proposition, and so is the use of "believe" and "confirm" in Example 4 and Example 6, respectively. In some cases, the linguistic realization of taking no responsibility was accomplished through the choice of particular words like "inescapable" and "unavoidable" highlighting that the happening of the event was fated. This strategy can well be illustrated by the following example.

(7) *Suiran cici shijian shi you "bu ke kangli" suo daozhi, dan shengchu ruci e'lie de da huanjing, women you zeren, ye you biyao yufang zheyang de "bu ke kangli".* (lit. Although the happening of this event was caused by some inescapable factors, we, being a responsible provider, must take heed of such unavoidable events.) <McDonald>

Within the explanation for the cause of the alleged wrongdoing or transgression, the TNCs aimed at clarifying what had happened and explained why it happened, but this was frequently done through rather vague evidence. In the data terms such as "a large number of", "some", "certain", "a few", and "third-party" are frequently employed to gloss over lack of concrete evidence. In the way stated by Examples 3 and 7, no exact information was provided of how many people had broken Walmart's rules, and what the inescapable factors were, respectively. In sharp contrast, when it comes to mitigating the negative impact the wrongdoing or transgression is causing or will cause, explicit terms such as "only" and "three", as already shown in Example 2, were often used.

Two more interesting findings observed in Move 3 are also worthy of a discussion. Although this move exhibits clear form-function relations, it is far less formulaic than the other moves in this genre. Evidence for this is that the TNCs, as Example 7 shows, in the meanwhile tended to remind Chinese consumers of their positive image when explaining the occurrence of the wrongdoing. This extra intention Move 3 implies will become fairly apparent when we come to discuss Move 5 later on. Secondly, in this obligatory, often extended move concerned with the cause of a wrongdoing or transgression, sometimes the TNCs even took it as an opportunity to beg for mercy, as well as to denounce the wrongdoing of such, by portraying themselves as a victim as well. A good case in point is the apology made by Yum! Brands. After blaming its supplier (i.e., Shanghai HuSi Food Co. Ltd.) for the food crisis involved, Yum! Brands positioned itself as a victim of HuSi's illegal and dishonest behavior in food processing.

(8) *Zhe dui women shi yici kekuomingxin de shanghai he jiaoxun* (lit. This is a never-forgotten damage and lesson to us.) <Yum! Brands>

Strategies like this one were often observed in the corpus. The integration of another genre, in this case the promotion genre, with the intercultural corporate apology genre plainly also illustrates the complexity of interdiscursive practice this move bears.

In Move 4, APOLOGIZING, as the name suggests, the TNCs made an apology to Chinese customers. As noted earlier, rarely did the apologetic statement appear until an account of the cause of the wrongdoing or transgression had been made. Another observation of this move is that all of the apologies in the data were delivered in a fairly direct and explicit manner.

(9) *Guge yuanyi wei ci xingwei xiang zhongguo zuojia biaoshi daoqian.* (lit. Google is willing to apologize to Chinese writers for this behavior.) <Google>

(10) *Women dui zhongguo he shijie gede shoudao cici shijian yingxiang de renmen biaoshi zui chengzhi de qianyi.* (lit. We would like to express our most cordial apology to everyone in China and other countries involved in this event.) <Fonterra>

(11) *Meitai chengdan zhexie zhaohui shijian de quanbu zeren, bing qinzi xiang nin Li Changjian, zhongguo renmin he suoyou shoudao women wanju de guke daoqian.* (lit. Mattel takes full responsibility for these recalls and apologizes personally to you, the Chinese people, and all of our customers who received the toys.) <Mattel>

As illustrated by the above four examples, the majority of the apologies were often accompanied by either an adjective or adverbial intensifier such as chengzhi (lit. sincere), shenbiao (lit. deeply), zhencheng (lit. heartfelt), zhengzhongde (lit. solemnly), wanfeng (lit. extremely), and zhongxinde (lit. cordially). Like the formal, respectful address term, zunjingde, used for defining the intended addressees, the choice of these words for delivering the apology seems to be largely motivated by, or related to, the value of long-term relationships and face-saving stressed by the local Chinese culture.

The direct and explicit way adopted for the delivery of intercultural corporate apologies is ostensibly divergent from the normal practice of indirect and subtle communication in the high-context culture of China (Hall, 1976). This, though, does not suggest that all the TNCs were ready to take responsibility for the crisis event. In Move 4 rarely was there an explicit acknowledgement of wrongdoing or transgression identified as an essential component; instead, it was not infrequently employed as an opportunity for shirking responsibility once more. Otherwise stated, despite being conventionally accepted in terms of generic norms, this move has lost its initial function and is often deployed to corroborate the real intention already detectable in Move 3.

Take, for example, Google's apology (see Example 9) immediately following the two statements as reproduced in Examples 2 and 4 in order. The context in which *ci xingwei* (lit. this behavior) appears conceivably indicates its reference to little communication with Chinese writers involved rather than to the copyright infringement in question, whereby the agent of the transgression is shifted from Google into the realm of agentless behavior. What is clear is that neither did Google have the intention to acknowledge the transgression nor did it accept responsibility for it. Modality is another favored linguistic means of realizing this indirectness. In some cases of Move 5, the apology was not expressed in terms of certainty, but rather of possibility and conditionality. Example 12 below offers a good example, in which the use of the modal verb "might" allows the corporation to indicate its weak belief in the factuality of the disruption and difficulty caused by the wrongdoing.

(12) *Wo xiang jiu cici shijian keneng gei guke he hezuozhe dailai de kunhuo he kunnan biaoshi daoqian.* (lit. I want to apologize for the disruption and difficulty this issue might have brought to our customers and our partners.) <Coca-Cola>

What might be construed as apology is therefore expressed only tentatively.

Although positioned in the late section, Move 5, PROMISING RECTIFICATIONS and/or REMINDING, also occupies an obligatory position in defusing the crisis event and purifying the damaged image of the corporation. A few of the apologies in the data detailed the remedial actions to be taken in the form of bullet points. By accentuating the interests of Chinese customers to show an attempt to prevent the reoccurrence of similar incidents in the future, this move sometimes also works to beg Chinese consumers' forgiveness and regain their faith and trust, as suggested by Example 13 below.

(13) *Women Ximenzi bingxiang jiang jinxing renzhen zhengai, xiwang neng dedao guangda xiaofeizhe de liangjie he zhichi.* (lit. We will take actions to improve this and hope to get your understanding and support.) <Siemens>

Where no corrective actions (in the minority of the data) are presented, there is an alternative, signaled in a substitutive move labelled REMINDING, allowing the TNCs to remind Chinese people of the company's positive image of the past and/or good deeds it has done. Only in the Nike's apology is observed of the follow-up of the company's positive image in the past after the remedial actions.

(14) *Women zaici shengming zhong zhichu gaichanpin fuhe Naike pinpaide chanpinxing zhibiao ji zhongguo dalude xiangguan zhiliang jinayan biaozhun.* (lit. Here we declare that the ZOOM HYPERDUNK 2011 products meet Nike's standards and the relevant Chinese quality control standards.) <Nike>

Like the use of interdiscursive "socio-pragmatic space" (Bhatia, 2004) drawing on the explanation genre discussed above, the recontextualization of the positive image may not necessarily be a true expression of the corporation. In this case, the conflation of the promotion genre with the intercultural corporate apology genre is surely meant to reassure Chinese people that the performance of the corporation has been reasonably good in the past and will be even better in the future than at present. On a few occasions, an expression of gratitude and/or good wishes is added just after Move 5, as the following example shows.

(15) Women haiyao ganxie Chenbao he xiaofeizhe faxian le women gongzuo zhong de wenti, zheyang women caineng jishi gaizheng (lit. We thank Morning News and the consumers for discovering the problem existing in our work, which is helpful for us to correct it.) <Coca-Cola>

Although this is optional, another extra communicative purpose of this genre is implied---to establish a long-term relationship with Chinese people as stressed in the high-context culture of China. As such, the apologies encompass both the levels of organizational and interpersonal relationships within the Chinese business mentality. Connected to this emotional approach is the respectful image as part of the cultural protocol that the TNCs attempt to achieve, which highlights the cultural convergence intended in the practice of intercultural corporate apologies in China.

All of the apologies in the data end in Move 6 with the following information: a signature, position status, the company's name or the name of the department or sector within the company, the date, or a seal.But not all of these elements are included in this move; the first and the second, for example, occur only if the apology was delivered by a top manager like CEO or president on behalf of the company.

5. Discussion

As suggested by the findings, the genre of intercultural corporate apologies in China like other genres is relatively formulaic in that it has an identifiable organizational structure that aims to achieve a multiplicity of communicative purposes. Some of the communicative purposes are achieved through direct communication regarding the current status of crisis events, the impact of alleged wrongdoings or transgressions, their cause(s), apology, remedial measures, and the accomplishments of the corporation and/or good deeds it has done. The others are indirectly communicated by producing an impression of minimum impact, being responsible but meanwhile with the implication of taking no responsibility, and the desire for a long-term relationship with Chinese people. The former are realized through the move structure and the types of information conveyed, including situation update, impact evaluation, cause detection, prostrate apology, remedy, and the convergence of a positive image. The indirect effect of conveying an impression of negligible impact, of taking no responsibility but being responsible, and of desire for long-term relationships is achieved by individual uses of the whole range of the linguistic and discursive resources of the genre and, in particular, the mobilization of the explaining and promotion genres.

The findings of the data suggest further that, in addition to the diversity of communicative purposes, the genre under discussion demonstrates the ambivalence at its heart. The communicative purposes are discernibly intertwined to such an extent that they cannot be easily figured out. As a particular apology genre, the intercultural corporate apology genre appears to have the ostensive aim of making an apology in ways that look as "truthful, sincere, and voluntary" (Hearit, 2006: 64) as possible within the scope of Move 4. However, an adjunct, subliminal aim seems to be the simultaneous process of the TNCs to shirk their responsibility through explanations and to restore reputation and trustworthiness through self-promotion. To be specific, although the direct and explicit saying of "We/I apologize …" sounds apologetic in and of itself, the immediate context proves it to be neither an admission of wrongdoing or transgression nor an expression of remorse or regret. It makes sense to argue that the explicit verbal apology with no expression of remorse or regret is stretching the rubber band between Western and Chinese cultures, a signal of the negotiation of apologies indeed. Such language strategies used are an attempt to free the TNCs from responsibility and guilt or as an effort to manipulate Chinese people.

In locating this study within the wider field of crisis communication and apology as a crisis response strategy, the findings indicate that the intercultural corporate apology genre, despite being relatively new in China, are observed of continuity and creativity in terms of move structure. It is of continuity because some moves are essentially maintained as in the Western practice, such as an expression of an apology and an explanation for the cause of the alleged wrongdoing or transgression (Cohen, Olshtain and Rosenstein, 1986), lending support to the existence of a corporate apology genre. It is creative in that the TNCs sometimes adapt their manner to the status and face of the Chinese culture, for example, through the use of honorifics in defining Chinese people, emphasizing the impact of local context on the activity type of corporate apologies (Kadar, 2007). In contrast to efforts made to accommodate the value of long-term relationships and face-saving stressed by the local culture, the transnational practice of offering an explanation indicates that the sociocultural expectations of Chinese people are defied or definable indeed. This way adopted for assessing responsibility, it is worth noting, focuses more on the culpability of others than on the consequences, to which Chinese people usually pay much attention (Cohen, 1997). This deliberate practice of intercultural divergence, as analyzed above, is helpful for probing into the real intention of the TNCs---not to accept responsibility but to find a scapegoat or make up an excuse. Other than the cultural differences in assessing responsibility, the East and the West are different in causal reasoning.[2] As cross-cultural psychologists have observed, Western reasoning tends to focus on objects and categories, and is driven by formal logic; in the East, by contrast, reasoning embraces contradictions among objects in a yin-yang field of constant change (Peng, Ames and Knowles, 2001). The search for a single cause of the alleged wrongdoing or transgression by shifting the blame to either employees or the third-party, or both, must strike most Chinese people as odd. The focus of this study has been on the linguistic and discursive resources employed to achieve these purposes; however, because of the small number of the apologies (16 in total) analyzed, the findings may be considered to be indicative rather than generalizable.

6. Conclusion

This study into the genre of intercultural corporate apologies---a field that has thus far been little explored as compared to other professional genres---has examined how multiple communicative purposes are achieved by the systematic schematic structuring and linguistic realization patterning of the genre.

Of particular concern in the study is whether or not this genre is objectified by the sociocultural values of China, although it is not set to systematically document its forms and strategies that may converge and diverge across particular cultural milieus. The analysis of move structure shows that a particular set of generic resources are being creatively exploited to bend some of the socially shared generic norms to achieve some of the real intentions, for instance, to avoid taking responsibility and to set up a long-term relationship with the Chinese people. However, the TNCs didn't always craft their apologies according to their understanding of Chinese culture, especially in reasoning the cause of an alleged wrongdoing or transgression. On the other hand, the fluidity of this genre under discussion observed reinforces the belief that even conventionalized genres may be open to change when manipulated by influential or powerful individuals or institutions. This finding not only brings to the fore the social nature of this genre, but also resonates for the argument that genre analysis should place emphasis on individual creativity and generic consciousness-raising rather than the conventional nature of form-function relations at the clause level (Johns, 2002).

Three implications of importance arise from this study. First, it is necessary to take a holistic method to examine the examples of intercultural corporate apologies. In intercultural corporate apology research, the present study is essentially an analysis of specific form-function interrelations. In support of the principle of holism when investigating professional discourses, it is crucial to look beyond "typical communicative practice" and to also consider "typical participants and their stock of knowledge of how to deal with typical situations in their typical social community" (Yeung, 2007: 158; see also Askehave and Swales, 2001) by "adopt[ing] a multi-perspective and multi-dimensional framework" (Bhatia, 2008b: 170). The next step in this type of research for a fuller understanding of the genre of intercultural corporate apologies, further advancing the principal of holism, the linguistic analysis of the genre would have to be accompanied by both a cultural perspective, considering differences in national culture, and a contextual perspective, using ethnographic techniques such as the reflective in-depth interview with the TNCs as the producer of the apologies and with Chinese people as the recipient (Swales, 1998).

The argument for an ethnographical approach to genre studies, to a large extent, is motivated by its ability to discover how genre works as situated social practice and how it is tied to social organization and "rhetorical community" (Miller, 1994). Following this is the second implication of this study, that is, the political dimension of genres is worth an inquiry in future research of the intercultural apology genre in general. With regard to the intercultural corporate apology genre under scrutiny, it has to be understood as developing across space in ways that are empirically observable by following the trajectories of such apologies and participation of TNCs and intended addressees. The trajectories of genre's participants and of generic resources invite us to define genres in terms of "semiotic mobility", with all sorts of complex effects on their meanings and functions requiring new analytical instruments (Blommaert, 2003: 611; Coupland, 2003). Under the conditions of globalization featured with the intensification of time-space distantiation, generic resources such as reasoning and explanation have transcended the Western countries and come to be techniques that are deemed usable in China's context. In light of Giddens' (1995) understanding of power as the "transformative capacity" of social action, the TNCs with an American or European root who act to transform the apology genre of the Chinese culture via the agency of reasoning and explanation have domination, a particular form of power. As such, processes of distribution and flow of generic resources are accompanied by processes of "hierarchical ordering"; that is to say, access to generic resources "need to be imagined as stratified, layered and unequal phenomena that reveal systemic features of (unequal) social structure" (Blommaert 2007: 15). In the future much work needs to be conducted to critically investigate how values and functions of generic resources are reshuffled for recontextualization in intercultural corporate apologies.

The third, practically significant, implication concerns the application of the findings by crisis communication practitioners who are actually engaged in crisis management. The findings of the study provide a range of insights into the practice of intercultural corporate apologies, such as the multiple communicative purposes achieved through the rhetoric features that characterize it as well as the approaches to establishing a long-term relationship with intended addressees, achieved through the use of linguistic and discursive devices, which vary among the different moves. In order to help restore reputation and trustworthiness of TNCs, it is suggestive for crisis management practitioners to align the manner of performing apologies and their content with sociocultural expectations of the intended addressee that allow for local variations (Oliveira 2013), while it raises a requirement for situated genre knowledge as part of professional competence.

Notes

1. It should be noted that Page (2014) took corporate apologies as a remedial speech act in response to customer complaints.
2. Note that cross-cultural psychologists do not use the very terms 'East' and 'West' to reify them as exclusive categories; instead, their experimental work quantifies differences of degree. Hence my uses of probabilistic phrases like "more likely" and "tend to".

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