

## **Concepts of Face and Apologies in Korean**

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### **Abstract**

Through the analysis of Korean apologies, this paper suggests broadening the concepts of face beyond Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive and negative face to include a third type of face termed here covenant face. Covenant face is the sense of self as manifested in a person's societal roles and is inspired by neo-Confucian notions of the self. We also suggest that positive, negative, and covenant face can be attached to both individuals as well as culturally defined groups, such as the family, company, or nation. Covenant face does not replace notions of positive and negative face, but complements them. We finish by demonstrating that positive, negative, and covenant face are also useful in understanding apologies in other languages, such that covenant face need not be restricted to Korean, East Asian, or broadly "collectivist" societies, but is universal.

## **1. Introduction and Research Background**

### **1.1 General Introduction**

Hahn (2006) conducted a primarily ethnographic study of apologies in Korean, revealing many facts about the linguistic forms of apologies as they naturally occur, the social context affecting the forms, and the social functions of apologies. The current paper starts with the data from this study as a corpus of Korean apology use and examines the implications of the data for broader politeness theory. In particular, we will propose a modified version of Face theory as derived primarily from Brown & Levinson (1987; henceforth, B&L). B&L proposed two primary types of face to explain politeness behavior, positive face and negative face, defined thus:

- (a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition.
- (b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants (B&L, 1987, p. 61)

From examining Korean apologies and apology data in other languages, we propose adding a new type of face to the list, which we will call Covenant Face.

Covenant face is derived from the social roles that an individual wishes to inhabit and is often best expressed with the phrase, individual-as-an-X, where X is a role that a particular individual adopts, such as mother, boss, student, or customer. Covenant face is not intended to replace the other types of face—positive and negative face still have their roles to play—but such an addition is necessary to understand Korean apology use. Moreover, we hope to formulate covenant face such that it can become an explanatory tool in politeness research generally, not just in a Korean or East Asian context.

A second modification to face theory is to allow face to be possessed by culturally defined groups, not just individuals. We encountered several examples in which

apologies act to preserve the face of a family, business, or ethnicity, not just that of an individual. Societies do not agree on what is and is not a face-bearing group, and we will briefly explore those differences. This change in face theory is not a fourth type of face. Instead, the same three types of face, positive, negative, and covenant, can be borne by individuals and groups. Previous research that introduced the notion of group face (Nwoye, 1992; Obeng, 1999) interpreted group face as a different type of face or an alternative to B&L's approach. For this paper, there is no separate idea of group face, only a difference in what entities can bear face. While we will not provide evidence for this in Korean, this theory predicts negative, positive, and covenant face offenses against groups. Further work will have to determine the accuracy of this prediction.

Our focus here is on the question of when apologies occur, and less on their linguistic realization. The first research direction focuses upon the environments in which a certain linguistic behavior is realized, while the second focuses upon the form and function of the speech act and its relationship to the context. These two broad research questions necessarily interact with one another. Despite this constant interaction, certain methodologies are better suited to explore the question of *when* versus the question of *how*. We agree with Holmes (1990) that an ethnographic approach is best for getting a broad look at apology use in a society, and the data here is largely ethnographic, supplemented by both fictional TV dramas and media broadcasts.

In what follows, we first discuss theories of apology use with a focus upon face theory, criticisms of the theory, and our additions to it. We then analyze Korean apologies by applying the modified face theory to key examples. We will show that, contra B&L, apologies are not just used to reduce an offense against negative face, but against positive and covenant face as well. We wrap up by looking briefly at face concepts in other societies, both collectivist and individualist, in order to show the utility of the concepts outside of Korean culture.

## 1. 2 Concepts of Face

Brown and Levinson's most general description of face is as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (1987, p. 61). This notion is closest to Goffman's (1967) conception of face as a "public property," which B&L say is one of the primary sources for their analysis. However, B&L immediately refine this face concept into the positive and negative faces already mentioned. These conceptions of face have been quite enlightening in the three decades since their introduction, and we believe they remain so, despite limitations noted by many other scholars. Perhaps the greatest criticism of the B&L theory is that the notions are too ethnocentric, based upon the atomistic, individualist societies of the West (Barghiela-Chiappini, 2003; Gu, 1990; Ide, 1989; Nwoye, 1992; Obeng, 1999; Pizziconi, 2003; Werkofer, 1992; Yu, 2003; among even more).

Matsumoto (1988, 2003), for instance, is careful not to argue against the usefulness of face theory in general, but argues that the B&L definitions of face do not correctly predict Japanese politeness. She describes face as an inherently social concept in a way not easily allowed for in B&L. "Since a person's self-image in Japan is not as an independent individual but as a group member having certain relations to others, his concept of 'face' is understandably fundamentally different from that of, say, Europeans,

who define themselves as individuals, with certain rights and a certain domain of independence" (1988, p. 423).

Whether this limitation of B&L's approach is a fundamental flaw to face theory itself, or simply an issue to be overcome with a better, revised face theory, is not clear. While some researchers have proposed entirely different theories of politeness behavior (see Eelen, 2001; and Watts, Ide, & Ehlich, 1992, for good overviews and criticisms of various possibilities), others have continued to see real benefits to retaining a modified face theory (de Kadt, 1998; Obeng, 1999; O'Driscoll, 1996). Matsumoto (2003), for instance, explicitly states that while B&L's conceptions of face might be overly restricted, some notion of face might form the basis of a universal framework (p. 1517).

A different reaction among many politeness researchers has been to use a culture's own indigenous conceptions of politeness as the interpretive framework with no attempt at universality. Yu (2003) employs the Chinese dual notions of *lian* 'the respect of a group for a man with a good moral standard' and *mianzi* 'prestige or reputation' to analyze compliments in Taiwan. Similarly, Gao (1996) while not directly assessing the face conception of B&L nevertheless finds it necessary to employ several native Chinese notions to understand interpersonal communication. The central theme in Gao's assessment is a Chinese notion of the self in which the self is not "atomistic" but is instead fundamentally relational. This definition of the self is also critical to our definition of covenant face.

Lim and Choi (1996) compare "Western" face and Korean face or *che-myon*. They identify two conceptions of *che-myon*, personalized and normative. Personalized *che-myon* is similar to the Western notion, they state, in that it is for the individual and not for a member of a group. It is also negotiated in individual social interactions and is highly dynamic. On the other hand, normative *che-myon* "is the social worth of a person, not as an individual but as an occupant of a social position" (p. 126). It varies from personalized *che-myon* in a variety of ways: it is stipulated by society and is absolute; it is part of the position itself, not the individual specifically; it cannot be negotiated by the individual; it is static and one either fulfills the role or does not without the role itself changing (pp. 127-128).

An obvious limitation to such emic perspectives is the difficulty in applying them cross-culturally. To put it another way, if a problem with B&L's face theory is unintended ethnocentrism, then the same problem will occur with culturally-specific concepts such as *mianzi* or *che-myon*. This is not a criticism of the cited papers because they were never purported to be universal systems of politeness. Regardless, if we wish to use face theory to explore politeness generally in societies and their languages, the problem remains.

Another frequent response to the difficulties in B&L's face theory has been to advocate a return to Goffman's notions of face, which are arguably more social and ritual-based (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003). Yu (2003) believes that the Chinese conception of face is closer to Goffman's, as does de Kadt for Zulu (1998), Obeng for Akan (1999), and Matsumoto (2003) and Pizziconi (2003) for Japanese. However, while Goffman's conception is rich and nuanced, it might also be too general to easily guide research. The narrowed positive and negative faces concepts from B&L are so direct and straightforward that once can quickly apply the concepts to a given politeness phenomenon and gather corroborating or falsifying evidence. We will try to run the

gauntlet between overly narrow conceptions of face and overly general conceptions by retaining the B&L notions and then adding to them.

### **1.3 Covenant Face and Face-Bearing Groups**

The definition of "covenant" face used here has its roots in a Confucian conception of self. As discussed by Gao (1996), one conception of the self is essentially relational in which the self is defined by its relations to others. Tu Wei-Ming (1985), a contemporary scholar of neo-Confucianism, provides one of the fullest and most rewarding interpretations of this idea. In Tu's explication, the ultimate concern of the Confucian tradition is that of self-transformation, a process by which a person become fully, authentically human (p. 52). This process of self-transformation is fundamentally a communal act. The humanization of the self cannot be comprehended without the other. The Confucian, communal self is a center of relationships (p. 113), and the community acts as a scaffold upon which people can ascend and grow their own deepest humanity (p. 143).

While the focus in Tu's interpretation of Confucianism is on the self as a center of social relationships, such as the classic Confucian roles of father-son, ruler-minister, husband-wife, etc., it does not amount to simply taking on any number of externally-defined social roles. The self and its growth must remain at the center of social relationships or they lose their purpose (p. 134). The primary Confucian relationships assume a principle of reciprocity. In the father-son relationship, both father and son (or parent and child) are engaged in the process of self-transformation into true fathers and sons. Growing into a father is something a man practices throughout his life within the dynamic relationship with his son (pp. 139-141). Tu defines such relationships as a "covenant" since self-transformation is a "joint venture" between the self and the other.

While, to our knowledge, Tu only uses the term "covenant" once as a description of relationships, Oh (2005), in a work attempting to incorporate Tu's explication of the Confucian self into a revision of Korean Christian theology, which he argues has been too individualistic, takes the term "covenant" and expands it into discussions of the covenant self. We are in turn borrowing the term covenant self from Oh. We take covenant face to be the locus of a public desire to support and enable an individual (or face-bearing group) to realize a self-transforming social relationship. It is self transforming because the party inhabiting that social role, or becoming that role, considers the role a part of their identity (cf. Spencer-Oatey, 2007). This is the critical way covenant face differs from earlier social norm approaches. Covenant face is always based in the web of relationships for the individual who is defining herself through social roles. In practice, most people naturally incorporate their own culture's conception of a role, such as mother, teacher, customer, wife, etc., into their own conception, but it is ultimately a personal identity and not a merely external one. If an individual does not believe that some action is part of the role they inhabit, then they will not typically demand an apology if that part of their face is threatened. One of the better ways to discern covenant face in action, is that it deals precisely with an individual's face, not as just an individual, but as someone in a particular social role, Mary-as-mother, Mary-as-student, Mary-as-boss, etc.

Positive, negative, and covenant face concepts are all needed to understand the use of apologies in Korean. Our theory also predicts that all three types might be borne

by culturally-defined groups, such as the family or an ethnicity. A family's face might be threatened if someone interferes with its autonomy (negative), does not endorse its desires (positive), or obstructs the role it wishes to play in its society (covenant).

## 2. Apologies in Korean

### 2. 1. Identification of Apologies

The primary source of data for this study originates in Hahn (2006), which conducted a primarily ethnographic study of apology use in Korean, supplemented by additional sources such as television dramas and interviews. Any ethnographic approach to the study of speech acts requires some definition of the act under study, so as to decide what to record and what to ignore. In this case, a working definition of apologies was required to select which utterances were taken as the performance of an apology.

A review of previous studies provides several approaches to identifying apologies such as: (1) by recognizing speaker's psychological status (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Hickson, 1979; Ide, 1998; Jaworski, 1994; Lakoff, 2001; Sugimoto, 1998) (2) in terms of felicity conditions (Fraser, 1981; Holmes, 1990) (3) in terms of sequential structure where the surrounding utterances tell us what type of act occurred (Coulmas, 1981; Edmondson, 1981), (4) in terms of a set of semantic formulae (mainly studies in cross-cultural pragmatics such as Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Kim, 2000; Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, & Kasper, 1996; Olshtain, 1989; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Trosborg, 1987; Vollmer & Olshtain, 1989), and (5) by associating with certain words and expressions (Aijmer, 1996; Bean & Johnstone, 1994; Borkin & Reinhart, 1978; Tannen, 2001).

Goffman (1971) noted that apologies are likely to occur as recognition that a person has broken a social norm and is responsible for whatever harm this has caused. Recognizing social breach or broken social norms can be a starting point. In Hahn (2006), examples were collected by recognizing situations where someone offends another physically or psychologically. After these offenses, utterances which convey a speaker's regret are taken as examples of apologies. This approach, combined with the use of semantic formulae, resulted in the following definition of apologies used for data collection:

An apology can be defined as verbal or nonverbal behavior (1) occurring after an offense and either (2) involving at least one lexical item directly signaling apology or (3) expressing regret and responsibility even though lexical items associated with apology are not included.

The use of a set of lexical items (e.g., *mianhata*, *coysonghata*, *sakwahata*) closely associated with a speech function is a primary indication that some section of speech is explicitly an apology. In the following example, B21 (male, age: 50s)<sup>1</sup>, while walking down the street, physically bumps into a woman who looks to be about the same age as he is.

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<sup>1</sup> Hahn (2006) coded all speech event participants with a letter for gender (A for female, B for male) and a meaningless, sequential number.

- (1) Personal observation  
 B21: aywu mian-hay-yo  
*EX sorry-be-POL*  
 B21: Oh, I'm sorry.

In example (1), B21 uses the *mian* expression, which can be replaced with the *coysong* expression with little difference. Example (2) shows the use of the *coysong* expression in a similar situation to example (1) where B22 (male, age: 20s) physically bumps into a young woman as he is leaving an elevator.

- (2) Personal observation  
 B22: coysong-ha-p-nita  
*sorry-be-AH-DEF*  
 B22: I'm sorry.

In the course of data collection, it was discovered that the lexical items associated with apologies turned out to be optional while the two other features are obligatory. Regardless of form, what is said can be taken as an apology if the elements of regret and responsibility can be perceived in the utterance. Sometimes, responsibility and regret can be inferred from the context when these elements do not appear in surface forms. Example (3) illustrates this. A5 (female, age: 60s) spills something at a snack bar. A5 approaches the waiter (B57) clearing the table and says:

- (3) Personal observation  
 A5: amwuli takk-ato ciweci-ci anh-un-ta  
*how much wipe-but get removed-VS not-VS-DC*  
 B57: (nodding)  
 A5: It does not get removed no matter how hard I wipe.

With A5's explanation, the waiter listens and nods his head as a sign of acceptance. This explanation may be taken as an apology in itself depending on the situation, without the use of linguistic items associated with an apology (cf. Holmes, 1990, p. 163).

An ethnographic approach to studying a speech act is certainly not the only possibility and it has its limitations. Research on apologies shows diverse methods of data collection: discourse completion tasks in cross-cultural pragmatics (Ahn, 2005; Olshtain, 1989; Vollmer and Olshtain, 1989.), role-playing (Garcia, 1989; Marquez Reiter, 2000; Trosborg, 1987), and corpus studies (the London-Lund Corpus by Aijmer, 1996, and the British National Corpus by Deutschmann, 2003). The number of different methods is in part due to the methodological difficulties with collecting natural speech, as apologies can occur in a range of situations within a short time, and their occurrence is hard to predict. Besides the above popular approaches, more methods include TV programs (Lipson, 1994), e-mail texts (Le Couteur, 2001), and etiquette books (Sugimoto, 1998).

To elicit apologies, it is common to fabricate an offense and set up situations where someone may apologize. The popularity of discourse completion tasks is associated with the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Performance project (CCSARP) (Bergman and Kasper, 1993; Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989; Kim,

2000; Olshtain, 1989; Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Vollmer and Olshtain, 1989; Wouk, 2006). The CCSARP is designed to provide an analytical framework for massive comparison to study speech acts empirically in the same social situations across a variety of cultures to see the linguistic realization of speech acts. The problem with such tasks is that speakers of different languages may have different situations in which they believe they should apologize. It is possible to collect data about how people apologize, but it is not possible to find what kinds of situations make people apologize. One of our hopes is that by focusing here on when apologies occur, we might provide useful data to improve future discourse completion tasks.

Most studies on Korean apologies before Hahn (2006) are found in the fields of cross-cultural pragmatics and second language acquisition (e.g., Ahn, 2005; Byon, 2005; Jung, 1999; Kim, 2000; Lee, 2000; Park, Chang, Lee, and Ko, 2000; Park and Nakano, 1999; Yang, 2002). Studies in this area are mainly comparative, examining Korean speakers use of English in comparison with native speakers' use and rely on elicited data. The data in Hahn (2006) was collected primarily through fieldwork in Korea from 2003 through 2004 while this paper's first author stayed in Korea. In order to overcome difficulties with genuine use of ethnographic methods in studying apologies, some revisions were made. Alternative methods were attempted in order to collect data as natural as possible, such as note-taking (Gracie, 1994; Holmes, 1990; Labov, 1972), hiring research assistants (Herbert, 1985; Holmes, 1990), dramas (Sifiano, 1992), and using recollections (Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Isaacs and Clark, 1990).

More examples were gathered from television dramas, as well as from natural situations, by taking notes. While there are clear limitations to the use of dramas due to the fact that they are fictional stories created by writers and a team of performers, dramas frequently focus upon situations that are extremely difficult to encounter in any other way, such as arguments within a family or between lovers; i.e., severe offenses that in many societies are considered private. A fictional drama is very much like a type of discourse completion task with the primary change being that the writer both creates the situation and provides the completion. However, while in a typical discourse completion task, the participant only has a few sentences of context, many fictions are quite extended stories with rich characters developed over weeks, months, or years. So, while fictional material from dramas is clearly not as natural as true ethnographic material, excluding it completely also comes with a significant cost. Most studies of apologies must work with situations like missed appointments, impertinent requests, or bumps on the street (see, for example, Aijmer, 1996). Dramatic material provides a window on divorces, relationships ending, physical violence, job loss, and family dynamics.

More than 250 examples were gathered over a year's time. Out of the 250, examples gathered by personal observation amount to approximately 180. The other data comes from informant recollection, television dramas, and television news broadcasts. In the analysis that follows, examples are drawn from the data to support the theoretical points.

## **2.2 Application of Face Concepts to Korean Data**

We will focus first on examples that require covenant face as that is the less theoretically established notion. This is followed by positive face and negative face examples, and then face belonging to groups.

### 2.2.1 Offenses against social relationships and roles

Covenant face offenses are most often identified by noting that the offense (or the precise character of the offense) occurs only when the offended party is in a certain social role. When a person is insulted as a mother, as a son, as a professor, as a CEO, or as a husband, that offense threatens covenant face. If the offense is against an individual regardless of their social role, such as an accidental bump in the street, then it is most likely an offense against negative or positive face, neither of which references social roles. We will often express this distinction by using the construction individual-as-X versus individual-as-individual.

One of the clearest examples of covenant face in practice is from a television drama. In example (73), B18 (male, age: 20s) has argued with his father. He later returns to apologize.

(4) From television drama

B18: cey-ka            apeci-kkey    pelus-eps-i            kwu-n-ke  
*I-NM            father-to            behavior-not-with    act-that-fact*  
 nekulepkey    yongse-hay            cwu-sey-eyo  
*generously    forgiveness-do            give-SH-POL*

B18: Please forgive me with your generosity for I have acted spoiled towards you, father.

B18 indicates in his apology that how he has acted towards his father in particular was incorrect. The relationship between the two has been violated and must now be restored by requesting forgiveness and accepting blame. B18's self-perceived fault is acting *pelusepsi* 'spoiled'. While acting spoiled might indirectly harm the father's negative or positive face, it is acting in a certain way within this exact relationship that is the offense. A son should not act this way towards his father. If these were two individuals and not specifically a father and son, the offense, if there were one at all, would be quite different. This speech event then cannot be understood without an examination of social roles and the reciprocal responsibilities that each participant accepts for themselves. This notion of reciprocal responsibilities between father and son recalls the earlier discussion of the Confucian self that went into our explanation of covenant face. B18-as-son has caused an offense, not B18-as-individual.

In example (5), which is a naturally occurring speech event, A4 (female, age: 30s) is sitting at an outdoor café with a man and woman who appear to be middle-aged and a couple. During the conversation, the middle-aged man quietly leaves the table and returns with food and drinks. A4 becomes embarrassed as the man brings the meal. A4 gets up and says:

(5) Personal observation

A4: coysong-hay-yo  
*sorry-be-POL*

A4: I'm sorry.

At first look, this apology might appear due to an offense against the man's negative face, as he has been mildly inconvenienced by having to get refreshments. However, the offense is more accurately described as a violation of social roles based on age in Korean society. A4 must apologize because she, as the younger member of the group, should have gotten food for the older couple. If A4 had gotten the food herself, the couple would not have felt a need to apologize to her for her inconvenience. The offense would appear to be age-related and not gender-related, because A4 would likely have apologized to the older woman as well, and the older woman would not have apologized to her male partner. This reversal diagnostic is also useful for distinguishing negative or positive face offenses from covenant ones. If only certain individuals might need to offer an apology where other parties would not, it is often due, not to the negative and personal face that every individual possesses, but to the role that an individual has taken on in the culture. In this case, the man-as-an-older-man has been inconvenienced. It is not the man-as-individual who requires an apology.

This type of analysis should be carefully distinguished from using social factors—power, age, distance, etc.—that has been long studied in the realization of speech acts. In the more traditional analysis, as for instance discussed by B&L, the starting point is a face threatening act with a culturally-defined severity. After such an act is committed, the linguistic realization of the remedial speech act will be affected by power and distance. However, in the current theory, it is the social role itself, the covenant face, which has been violated immediately, before issues of realization are brought into play. Of course, social factors remain important to the realization of apologies; covenant face is simply a distinct concept.

A methodological point must be made here as well. Example (5) was collected ethnographically and represents naturally occurring conversation. The counterfactual situation where we stated that the older couple would not have apologized is a counterfactual based upon one of the authors' emic perspective as well as speaking with other Koreans. It would clearly be better to have the exact hypothetical event in natural data, though this can be extremely difficult to obtain in practice. Speech events are so variable that it will be very difficult to naturally encounter the precise context again with only one variable changed. Moreover, if a researcher were collecting speech act data, such as apologies, a lack of a speech act, which is the prediction for the counterfactual, would not be noted unless the researcher was looking for null acts. Other methodologies, such as discourse completion or role-playing, would be a natural complement to ethnographic data to test counterfactuals. (This precisely echoes Holmes, 1990, p. 165.)

In the example (6), we can see violations of both negative face and covenant face in play for a very serious offense concerning domestic violence. B8 (male, age: 40s) was charged with domestic violence for beating his wife with a stick. It became a very famous case, as his wife is a well-known entertainer on TV. The next day, while being arrested, the man apologizes.

## (6) Television interview

B8: nemwu coysong-ha-ko mom twu-l pa-lul  
*very sorry-be-and body put-VS place-AC*  
 molu-keyss-sup-nita  
*not.know-VS-AH-DEF*

B8: I'm so sorry and I don't know where to put my body.

There is no clearer violation of negative face than physical violence; however, it is the additional play of social roles and the concomitant responsibilities that make this even more egregious. A husband is supposed to protect a spouse and provide security for his entire family in Korean society. It is a primary duty of a spouse. When the man, in a drunken rage, violates both types of face so completely, he is so ashamed that he uses an extremely strong apologetic form. *Not knowing where to put one's body* means that you wish you could disappear from society or even not exist anymore.

The importance of covenant face is seen frequently in public apologies, which are apologies to unidentified individuals – a sort of role apology. In example (7), a TV announcer makes a slight speech error during a broadcast, for which he quickly apologizes.

## (7) Television news

B31: taykwu-eyse sey-sal elini-ka.... coysong-ha-p-nita  
*Taeku-at three-year child-NM sorry-be-AH-DEF*  
 taykwu-eyse sey-sal elini-ka kongwen-eyse  
*Taeku-at three-year child-NM park-at*  
 nol-taka  
*play-VS*

B31: A three-year-old child at Taeku (a city name)...I'm sorry. A three-year-old child at Taeku is playing in the park...

The announcer, B31 (male, age: 20s) has merely paused for a moment or stumbled a bit when speaking. While such a pause might be a slight negative face violation to his listeners, the apology seems more likely due to an announcer making an error in his role as an announcer. TV reporters are supposed to speak clearly and precisely, and so a minor error warrants a minor apology.

Example (8) is also from a television interview, but for a much larger offense. B32 (male, age: 40s) is a film star who has been charged for having an illegal sexual relationship with a minor. At a press conference, he apologizes.

## (8) Television interview

B32: kkuth-kkaci chwalyengha-ci mos-hay phayn-tul-kwa  
*end-to shoot-to not-do fan-s-and*  
 khaysuthing<sup>2</sup> yelepwn-kkey cengmal coysong-ha-p-nita  
*staff you-to really sorry-be-AH-DEF*  
 manhi panseng-ha-ko iss-sup-nita  
*a lot reflection-do-and is-AH-DEF*

<sup>2</sup> In this example, the English loanword *khaysuthing* 'cast' refers to actors and staff instead of the act of selecting actors and directors which is the actual meaning of the word *casting* in English.

B32: I'm sorry for not finishing the film for fans and the staff. I am deeply repenting my mistake.

The immediately note-worthy item is that the primary charge is not addressed in the apology. Instead, the actor apologizes to his fans and co-workers for being unable to finish a film. At this point, then, the relationship that has been violated is that between an actor and his viewers. The actor tries to repair that entirely role-defined social relationship with an apology.

### 2.2.2 Positive and Negative Face Apologies

In this section, we will look at some examples that require positive or negative face and cannot be explained easily with the covenant face concept. These are important in the essay to establish clearly that all three conceptions of face are required in understanding Korean apology use.

In example (9), B26 (male, age: 50s) is a storeowner who, while cleaning his store, accidentally splashes water on B27 (male, age: 10s) passing by the entrance.

(9) Informant recollection

B26: aikwu haksayng nemwu mian-hay manhi  
*EX student very sorry-be a lot*

cec-ess-e

*get.wet-PST-Q*

B27: kwaynchanh-ayo

*okay-POL*

B26: Oh, student, I'm really sorry. Did you get wet?

B27: That's okay.

The offense in this case appears to be against the student's negative face and not covenant face. It is not particularly relevant what roles the student participates in. He is simply an individual whose autonomy is inconvenienced. Social status plays a role in the realization of this apology, marked in part by the address term *haksayng* 'student', but the root offense does not particularly reference any such roles.

Other generic bumps and physical inconveniences are most naturally viewed as negative face violations. In example (10), A1 (female, age: 30s) accidentally bumps into B2 (male, age: 30s) at a ski resort. A1 immediately apologizes.

(10) Informant recollection

A1: ah mian-hay-yo  
*EX sorry-do-POL*

B2: ani-y-eyyo cey-ka te coysong-ha-ci-yo  
*no-is-POL I-NM more sorry-be-VS-POL*

A1: Oh, I'm sorry.

B2: No. I'm the one who should be sorry.

In example (11), we see both positive and covenant face in action. A18 (female, age: 50s) was accompanied by her son, B24 (male, age: 20s), to a meeting with acquaintances. While at the meeting, B24 frequently disagrees with her in public. On the way home, A18 expresses her embarrassment at the party.

(11) Television drama

- A18: kulehkey          mwuanha-key          ha-ni  
*like.so*          *embarrassed-ly*          *do-Q*
- B24: mwuanha-sy-ess-ta-myen          coysong-hay-yo  
*embarrassed-SH-PST-DC-if*          *sorry-be-POL*
- A18: How could you embarrass me so?  
 B24: If you are embarrassed, I'm sorry.

On the one hand, this is as a violation of A18's positive face, as B24 did not publicly express his support for A18's desires and beliefs. At the same time, it is additionally a violation of A18's covenant face. It is the fact that her son-as-a-son was contradicting his mother that is the deeper embarrassment. Such embarrassment might not occur if B24 had been a stranger or acquaintance. However, children should support their parents in public.

When two or more types of face are in conflict, it triggers some of the most interesting apology events. In example (12) from a television drama, we have a newlywed couple, B18 (male, age: 20s) and A37 (female, age: 20s). B18 is a highly educated doctor and his family wants A37 to go to college and quit her job in a beauty salon, as most women of her age and social status would attend college. In the social position A37 has taken on by marrying a doctor, this is expected of her. A37, however, refuses to do so as she enjoys her job as a hairdresser. One day, B18 suggests she quit her job and go to college. He will be able to support her financially and expects her to be pleased. However, A37 is offended as she wants B18 to respect her career and not be judged deficient due to lacking a college diploma. When B18 sees how upset she is, he apologizes.

(12) Television drama

- B18: mian-hay-yo          nay-ka          silswu-hay-ss-na          pw-ayo  
*sorry-be-POL*          *I-NM*          *mistake-do-PST-VS*          *seem-POL*
- onul il-un          mos          tul-un-ke-llo          hay-yo  
*today thing-TC*          *not*          *hear-RL-fact-as*          *do-POL*
- A37: ani-yo          na-n          imi          tul-ess-eyo  
*no-POL*          *I-TC*          *already*          *hear-PST-POL*
- B18: I'm sorry. I seem to have made a mistake. Just forget what I said.  
 A37: No, I can't forget it. (Literally, 'I already heard.')

There is clearly a violation of positive face occurring here, for which B18 must apologize. A37 wants her wants to be supported by others. The offense is compounded with two types of covenant face at play. First, if she were to simply follow her new social role as a wife of a certain economic status, she would attend college as her family pushes her to do. However, A37 rejects that this is indeed her duty. For her, this is simply not a

duty of her covenant role as wife, and so she feels no need to apologize for it. Secondly, however, A37 is particularly offended because it is her husband, one who should be supportive compared to the world at large, who is suggesting she leave her hairdressing job.

At this point, we hope to have provided evidence that all three conceptions of face – negative, personal, and covenant – are critical to understanding the types of events that can trigger apologies in Korean society. In the next section, we will argue that face does not belong only to individuals, but to culturally-defined groups as well. As a shorthand, we will often call this "group face", but there is no new, fourth type of face. Instead, the same three types of face already explicated can attach to a variety of social entities.

### 2.2.3 Face-Bearing Groups

One situation that appears common in modern Korean dramas is the breaking of a marital engagement, and the resulting effects of this upon face. In example (13), B6 (male, age: 20s) was engaged to the daughter of A8 (female, age: 50s), but he broke off the engagement after meeting another woman. B6 meets with A8, the former fiancée's mother, to beg forgiveness.

(13) Television drama

- B6: ce-nun            ha-l                    mal-i                    eps-sup-nita  
*I-TC                say-VS                words-NM            none-AH-DEF*
- A8: coysongha-ta-myen ta    y-eyyo?  
*be sorry-DC-if        all            is-Q*
- B6: mwuluph-ul    kkwulh-ula-myen    kkwulh-keyss-sup-nita  
*knee-AC            kneel-IM-if            kneel-will-AH-DEF*
- A8: kulem            mwuluph-ul    kkwulh-eyo  
*then                kneel-AC            kneel-POL*
- B6: I have nothing to say.  
A8: Is it enough just to say sorry?  
B6: If you want me to kneel down, I will do it.  
A8: Then kneel down.

The first thing to be noted is the unusual, from an English-speaking perspective, apology *cenum hal mali epsupnita* 'I have nothing to say.' In English, such an expression is frequently the opposite of an apology. The person refuses to accept responsibility and refuses to say anything. However, in Korean, this is a ritualistic expression indicating that words are insufficient to express the depth of regret and is similar to the previous apology of 'not knowing where to put one's body', where the shame is so great as to warrant disappearance. The outsider can see that this is in fact an apology by A8's immediate response, *coysonghatamyen ta yeyyo* 'Is it enough just to say sorry?' A8 takes B6's as an apology, though an insufficient one.

What sort of face has been threatened by B6's actions? When B6 broke off an engagement with A8's daughter, he threatened the face of the entire family of which A8 is a member. B6 does not owe an apology only to the individual with whom he ended the relationship, but to all members of the family. It is an open, empirical question to

determine the exact dimensions of the family, but in our examples, it clearly covers at least individuals, their siblings, and immediate parents or children (cf. Obeng, 1999, p. 729).

It is possible to see that the offense is indeed an offense against an entire group, and not merely a derivative effect passed from one group member to another, in example (14). In this case, B7 (male, age: 50s) has a daughter who was engaged to A9's (female, age: 50s) son. However, the daughter ended the relationship with the son despite her father's protests and now B7 must apologize to A9.

(14) Television drama

A9: ettehkey wuli kacok-eykey ilehkey ha-l swu-ka  
*how our family-to like do-VS means-NM*  
 iss-eyo  
*is-Q(POL)*

B7: mwusun malssum-ul tuly-eya ha-l-ci  
*what words-AC give-VS do-VS-whether*  
 molu-keyss-sup-nita  
*not know-will-AH-DEF*

A9: How can you do this to our family?

B7: I don't know what to say.

Of primary importance here is that A9 accuses B7 of hurting A9's family, not of hurting A9's son. Moreover, note that neither A9 nor B7 were ever engaged in the romantic relationship, of course, and B7 tried to prevent the end of the relationship, yet B7 is still responsible for the threatening of A9's family's face. This is most easily seen as a face threatening act between one family and another family. Face, in Korean culture, is attached to familial units as a whole, as well as to individuals.

Not all offenses directed towards a group of people are face threatening acts against face-bearing groups. Example (15) involves the case of Dr. Hwang Woo Suk of Seoul National University who had gained fame and honor with research on therapeutic cloning and stem cells. When an academic panel investigated, however, they discovered that many of his breakthroughs were faked. Hwang then apologized in a public press conference. One of his statements contains an apology to a group of people, but it would appear to be a countable group of individuals and not a face-bearing group as a unit.

(15) Newspaper (*Menithwutei* 2006-01-12)

kwicwunghan nanca-lul ceykong-hay cwu-si-n  
*precious eggs-AC donate-VS give-SH-RL*  
 pwuntul-kkey sacoy-ha-p-nita  
*people-to apology-do-AH-DEF*

'I apologize to those who donate precious eggs.'

We have no evidence for a group of egg bearers with face. Instead, each member of this ad hoc group has been hurt and therefore warrants face repair work.

However, Hwang's case does offer evidence of groups that do possess face in Korean society. When Hwang apologizes for the falsified research, he also offers an

apology to the nation as a whole and explains that, "all I could see was whether I could make Korea stand in the centre of the world through this research" (Highfield, 2006). Hwang then hoped to exalt the entire Korean nation through his work and then must apologize to the nation when his wrongdoing threatened the face of the entire people.

Further, evidence of a face-bearing group for many Koreans comes from the tragic case of a mass murder at Virginia Tech University in 2007 at the hands of someone who had immigrated to the United States from Korea at the age of eight. After this event, many Koreans and Korean-Americans expressed the idea that the murderer's actions brought shame to all Koreans. For instance, the South Korean Ambassador to the United States, Lee Tae-sik, stated that Korean-Americans were shamed and should repent with a day of fast for each victim. (Brewington, 2007). State Senator Paull Shin of Washington State publicly apologized in the senate chambers, adding "it hurts me deeply, knowing what happened to Korea and how much the U.S. helped. This is not the way to pay back the blessings we received" (Iwasaki, 2007). Shin associates the attacking student's actions with what the entire Korean people owe to the United States.

These comments reinforce the notion that groups that can bear face are indeed culturally defined, as anecdotal questioning of Americans of European heritage drew a unified response that they would not have apologized in similar circumstances. In fact, the concept that Koreans as an ethnic group do share a single group face is highly controversial in the Korean-American community. Professor Kyeyoung Park of the University of California at Los Angeles' Center for Korean Studies, for instance, was publicly quoted as saying, "Some of them [Korean-Americans] feel truly responsible, even though it is ridiculous to think they are responsible for the actions of this person" (Brewington, 2007).

Indeed, even Korean-Americans at the same university and of the same approximate age expressed opposing views on the matter. Jihye Kim, president of the Korean Student Union at the University of Washington, stated, "Personally, after hearing about the criminal's racial background, I felt as if I am the one who caused the tragedy. I couldn't make eye contact with others. I greatly apologize for those who are closely related to the victims." Meanwhile, his fellow student at the same university, Kiwon Suh, president of the Korean Student Association, stated a completely different sentiment. "Just because he's Korean or Korean American doesn't mean I have to go around apologizing for what he did. He didn't do anything representative of Korea by his horrible doing" (Iwasaki, 2007).

It would appear from these statements that the idea of Koreans as an entire ethnicity bearing face varies greatly among Korean-Americans, a variability seemingly much greater than in Korea itself. This assertion, however, is based simply upon the sort of evidence presented here, not from a designed socio-linguistic study of face concepts among Koreans and Korean-Americans and so awaits stronger empirical support. Indeed, the quantification and documentation of the variability, and change through time, of which groups can possess face, perhaps using traditional Labovian sociolinguistic methods, appears like a largely unexplored subfield. In sum, while the types of face, positive, negative, and covenant, might be universal; the entities that bear face are cultural and variable.

### 3. Discussion

B&L (1987) suggested that apologies are in response to negative face threatening acts. Many other researchers on apology have maintained this focus. Our look at a Korean corpus matches this tradition in that negative face threats compose the majority of our apology speech events. However, negative face alone was insufficient to explain all occurrences of apologies. We join other researchers (Holmes, 1990) in also finding threats to positive face. However, these two face concepts were still insufficient. There were many occurrences that required the development of a third type of face, which we have called covenant face. These speech events largely mirror the type of events that previous researchers used to argue for politeness based upon social norms. However, we suggested covenant face instead (1) to fit more easily in the B&L's larger politeness framework, which still seemed useful when analyzing Korean apologies, and (2) to prevent politeness from becoming a purely social, external phenomenon; covenant face is about how an individual defines herself by adopting roles in society and not how society defines her, even though in practice individuals internally adopt the external cultural norms as the basis of their own identity.

Despite the fact that we have found all three types of face vital to understanding Korean apology use, it is natural to want to simplify the theory in some way. For instance, perhaps covenant face might be derived from positive face, or vice versa. If this could be done, we might have a simpler set of primitives in the theory. This would be inappropriate at this point in time, and we turn to this issue next.

#### 3.1 Simplification of Face Theory?

In an earlier stage of research, this paper's authors were exploring the idea that covenant face was a rich enough notion to encompass other types of face. Indeed, with one twist, covenant face can stand in for positive and negative face—just allow "person" or "individual" to be a role that someone can inhabit and which has its own responsibilities and relationships, including those spelled out in the definitions of positive and negative face by B&L. One advantage of such a solution, beyond simplicity, is that it provides an explanation for societies in which not all persons are equally a person as far as face is concerned, since personhood is publicly granted. This sort of solution also brings covenant face closer to Goffman's original notion of face, a conception which several researchers have recently advocated is a richer notion than that of B&L. Moreover, as covenant face inherently incorporates both the individual and the other, one can imagine finding a way to have the social roles of covenant face describe the group face phenomena we have explored.

While this approach remains plausible to us, the problem is that one can come up with equally plausible explanations in which covenant face is derived from positive face, or the individual group faces are derived from group face. For instance, if we simply state that certain social roles are desires that an individual wants others to support, then covenant face suddenly becomes a variety of positive face. Additionally, if a group has a face, then perhaps any individual is granted a face in that culture only by being a member of that group. In such an explanation, the individual face concepts are just corollaries of the more primitive group face.

Apart from these issues of theoretical ambiguity, it is not clear that a simplification of face concepts to one or two types would buy researchers much other than simplification itself. One thing we hope that this paper will encourage is continued research on the types of offense that trigger remedial work in the form of apologies. Therefore, almost hiding certain types of face offenses under derivations from other types of face is counterproductive. Instead, we hope to highlight a small number of nuanced but productive face concepts, which researchers can then employ to conduct their own primary research on other cultures' politeness notions.

If one looks at several of the discourse completion tasks that researchers have used, often inspired by the CCSARP paradigm, the sorts of offenses used to trigger apologies in study participants are usually restricted to negative face threatening acts, with the possible exception of some student/professor situations (for example, Olshtain, 1989; Wouk, 2006). A limited set of face threatening acts doesn't undermine the purpose of CCSARP work, but it does restrict it to only investigating certain types of offense, which might in turn affect the sorts of linguistics realizations we discover.

In sum, we are deliberately keeping all three types of face in order to encourage further research. After further research, it might be possible to do perform theory simplification. Promising approaches include Haugh and Hinze's (2003) metalinguistic approach and Spencer-Oatey's (2007) identity theory.

### **3.2 Application of Face Concepts in Other Languages**

Do other cultures warrant three different types of face, as well as the licensing of face to groups? We will provide evidence here that the answer is yes, though the full extent of universality is a question for future research.

Korean society is often considered collectivist (Bailey, 1997; Hinkel, 1997; Hwang, 1975; Sohn, 1999; Yum, 1987) and we will first turn to another collectivist society to further the analysis. In what follows, we re-analyze the data presented in Obeng's (1999) work on apologies in Akan, a people located in Ghana. Obeng opens his article arguing for the need for group face. He presents the case of a cousin, KG, who borrowed money and did not repay it before dying. Obeng states that "KG's behavior was seen as having brought disgrace to the entire extended family including KG himself" (p. 710-11). Obeng goes further to state that the disgrace was first and most importantly on the family, and only secondarily upon KG who committed the fault.

While Obeng frames his later examples within discussions of group face and social norms, the precise apology events he provides do not appear to be strictly issues of a group enduring some offense, which is the sense of group face in this paper. In one example (extract 6), the speaker apologizes for forgetting to bring some wine that had been promised. While this is not a prototypical example of interfering in someone's autonomy, it is indeed a mild inconvenience that neither involves any particular social role (covenant) nor relates to confirming the hearer's desires (positive) nor references any group larger than the individuals involved (group). As such, we classify it as essentially a negative face violation against an individual. Two other examples, however, are most easily understood as covenant face violations. In extract 2, AKP has received money from KO but does not immediately go to thank KO "as tradition demands," and so she later apologizes for not fulfilling her role properly. In extract 3, one friend apologizes to

another for accompanying him to a funeral. This latter example seems only understandable with some notion like covenant face, as it is explicitly an expected part of being a friend that establishes the duty of attending the funeral. No apology would be needed if there were no friendship role.

Data in previous research also shows that covenant face offenses can trigger apologies in non-collectivist societies as well. Jaworski (1994) presents a small ethnographic corpus of apologies in Polish. Many of the examples again are naturally understood as negative face offenses, including a bump on a train, stepping on someone else's bag (though Holmes, based on her 1990 paper, might interpret this as a positive face violation as it doesn't respect the person's possessions), or taking someone's seat on a train. The longest example in the article, however, example 15, addresses an argument between three roommates studying temporarily in the U.S. One of the roommates never returned the previous day and only comes home around dinnertime the following day. The two roommates at home are very angry with him and the late roommate eventually apologizes. This is not a negative face violation as no particular violation of autonomy or even personal inconvenience need be attached to the offending roommate's actions. If this had simply been a friend down the hall, there may have been no offense at all. However, as one roommate argues, when the three of them are in another country as they are, they, as roommates, have responsibility for each other with "rules to follow." By neither returning nor phoning to say where he was, the late roommate had made it impossible for the other roommates to follow their proper roles successfully.

Holmes (1990) and Aijmer (1996) analyze English apologies, and their data also shows limited use of all three types of face. Both studies involve a large number of negative face violations with bumps and bruises all around. As already mentioned, Holmes (1990) particularly argues that positive face violations can also trigger apologies in New Zealand English. As for covenant face, Holmes' example 29 involves a radio announcer apologizing for a mispronunciation, which is in parallel with examples above in Korean that we analyzed as involving covenant face. Example 27 contains a mother who apologizes to her daughter who overheard an argument between the mother and her husband. Holmes presents possible negative and positive face interpretations of this speech event, but it seems that covenant face is also involved. According to typical family relationships, a child, even an adult one, should not be exposed to arguments between parents. As such, allowing the daughter to see the argument is a flaw in the mother's role as mother (1990, p. 180).

Re-interpreting Aijmer's apology data is difficult as very little context is present. We must infer the details of an apology event from the apology act itself. That said, a single page in her chapter on apologies would appear to contain negative, positive, and covenant face examples. One apology is for a piece of writing that is hard to read in some way, which would appear to be a negative face offense. Another apology thanks the hearer for a "nice letter" and apologizes for not having had time to answer. This would seem to be a positive face violation as the speaker is not appropriately valuing the work of the original letter writer. A third apology is for being unable to attend the hearer's father's funeral. This cannot help but recall the same sort of apology in the Akan data above, which we analyzed as a covenant face violation. While we have no idea of the roles involved in the English example, one must presume that there is some special

relationship between the speaker and hearer that creates the obligation of attending a funeral (1996, p. 90).

#### **4. Conclusion and Further Research.**

Brown and Levinson proposed in their classic work that positive and negative face are universal conceptions that explain politeness across cultures. We are continuing in this tradition by preserving those two conceptions of face and adding a third, covenant face. Covenant face is certainly not a completely new idea in politeness theory, and we reviewed many of the predecessors of the notion earlier. However, covenant face differs from earlier conceptions by focusing not on the expectations of the society and its external norms, but on how the individual chooses to inhabit that society. In Tu Wei-Ming's terms, the person is a center of a web of relationships and grows as a unique individual through those relationships.

While the introduction of the covenant face idea came about in an attempt to understand our Korean apology corpus, we also gave evidence of the concepts at work in both "collectivist" and "individualist" societies. We certainly expect, however, variability in the proportion of use of each face concept (Triandis, 1989). A "collectivist" society might employ covenant face concepts more than negative face ones, perhaps, and this might reverse for "individualist" cultures. However, the hypothesis is that no culture can be reduced to any one type of face. Indeed, we have already provided evidence that positive and negative face remain important to understanding Korean apology use, which is typically labeled a collectivist society.

The evidence that we have presented for universality, however, is obviously truncated. This is partly because of space considerations, but also because the data looking specifically at positive and covenant face offenses in apologies is limited. This could be because of a lesser importance of these conceptions in generating apology speech acts, but the limited data might also be a result of previous methodology. We hope that future politeness work that involves researcher-designed scenarios, be they discourse completion or role-playing, will specifically look for covenant and positive face violations. There is a problem in designing scenarios to look for covenant face, though, as by definition each role may not exist as one moves across cultures. A likely approach would be to concentrate on more common cultural roles, such as family relationships or, since so much work takes place in an academic setting, student/teacher roles.

In the end, our notion of universality is more practical than theoretic. We assume that a continuing task of researchers will be to interpret politeness practices across cultures. As such, we need some sort of concepts to guide research so that the researcher does not start from scratch each time they look at a new culture's politeness practices. To such a researcher, we hope that the concepts presented here will be of practical use. Apart from such practical applications, we only hope that these face concepts are universal due to the assumption that humans generally wish to participate in social relationships (covenant), have their desires supported (positive), and act of their own wills (negative). Further work will determine if these three desires are sufficient, or theoretically superfluous.

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