Apologies – The Montenegrin way of dispreferred

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Abstract: The paper investigates the pragmatics of apologies in Montenegro; it claims that two broad groups could be identified: 'to say is to do' and 'to do is to say'. Apologies are highly conventionalised with a wide range of verbal and non verbal (emotional) redressive devices. The variety of illocutions, partly due to the compensating phrase, has showed that apologising in Montenegro is a normal part of the social register insofar as it is not face threatening. But being highly FTAs, apologies for Montenegrins are more power-related than politeness related. It turns out that the universality of politeness comes second to the universality of power. Generally, they constitute dispreferred seconds.
Key words: apologies, politeness phenomena, FTA, IFID, cultural script, CA, face

1. Introduction

In a previous paper (Perović 2008), we examined the speech act of apology as a politeness phenomenon and applied the theory of cultural scripts of Anna Wierzbicka supported by Goffman's theory of face. In this paper we would like to test our results through the postulates of CA (*Conversational Analysis*), primarily through preferred and dispreferred responses or seconds. Our hypothesis is that the two approaches of analysis can individually give the same results and that they are also complementary in creating a more reliable apparatus for detecting the high sensitivity of apology to culture and its specific linguistic realisation.

This research of apology has been triggered by a frequently-heard phrase in Montenegro which goes like this: "I never apologise". The statement in itself implies either that apologising is not a part of the social register, and consequently is not universal, or that this particular feature of interpersonal rhetoric has some other interpretations. To test this we applied a questionnaire based on a DCT (*Discourse Completion Test*) with the aim of finding out, first, to what extent the students in Montenegro apologise, second, what redressive device they apply, and finally, which verbal and non-verbal strategies of apologising they use.

Redressive devices in the cultural scripts of a negative politeness society tend to transcend categories (the linguistic is combined with the emotional, even the (un)ethical (lies)) to lessen the high potential of FTA in apologies. The results show that there are two major strategies of apologising in Montenegro: *to do is to say* which comprises the absence of a speech act and/or the absence of any compensating act, and *to say is to do* with the presence of a speech act and/or presence of a compensating act. How is this reflected in CA analysis? How does it verify?

2. Position of apologies in adjacency-pair sequence

CA analysts say that conversation contains frequently occurring patterns and that the utterance of one speaker makes a certain response on the part of the next speaker very likely (conditionally relevant). Conversationally, apologies can occupy a number of different sequential positions other than the first parts of adjacency-pair sequences, with

different implications for the organization of apologising as an action (Robinson 2004). Basically, their sequential position defines their relevance for the organisation of apologising as an action. One sequential position that apologies can take is the initial turn-constructional unit; in this position apologies prospectively index a possible offence, but it is typically subordinate to the adjacency-pair action being pursued in the remainder of the turn. When analysed as initial turn-constructional unit their seconds can both be preferred and dispreferred responses. However, in this research we have the situation that apology is sequentially positioned as the second-pair part of an adjacency pair sequence and operates like a complaint to which an apology may be a specifically relevant response because it raises the relevance of someone having (possibly) committed an offence. Conversationally, such apology constitutes a closure of a sequence of talk and the sufficiency of apology as a response (Robinson 2004). DCT captures this position in eliciting an apology.

3. Apologies as dispreferred responses

Each first pair-part of the adjacency pair has its preferred second. This is known as preference structure. In the literature, apologies are classified both as preferred and dispreferred responses depending on whether they are observed within the occurring pattern in discourse or pragmatically. In Joan Cutting's classification apologies constitute preferred actions or turns because a certain speech act is best complemented by another, for example, a complaint is best remedied by an apology (cf. Cutting 2003). Yet, pragmatically, apologies tend to be classified as dispreferred responses. The high level of FTA to the individual occurs in the speech act of apologising, especially in a society which cultivates collective values of pride and non-humiliation. Apologies as an act of communication belong to a strategy of negative politeness, and Montenegrin society is a society that cherishes negative politeness. It is especially obvious through apologies, gathered in the corpus, which not only exhibit all characteristics of despreferreds but also acquire some elements of accounts.

One of the most striking characteristics of dispreferreds is that they tend to be longer, more elaborate and that they take more time when delivered. Yule says: "The overwhelming effect of a dispreferred is that more time and more language are used than in the preferred. (…) Generally speaking, when participants have to produce second-part responses that are dispreferred, they indicate that they are doing something very marked" (Yule [1996] 2003: 80-82). Levinson is more specific regarding this most striking feature of dispreferreds:

> This is a general pattern: in contrast to the simple and immediate nature of preferreds, dispreferreds are delayed and contain additional complex components; and certain kinds of seconds like request rejections, refusal to offers, disagreements after evaluative assessments, etc., are systematically marked as dispreferreds" ([1983] 1985: 308).

Most interesting apology dispreferreds would be those that constitute "non-minimal turns" recognised both by Yule and Levinson, but also "minimal" or even verbally non existent second turns, which were a peculiarity of our corpus. Namely, the cultural scenario,
       Scenario 1
       [people think like this]:
       When I feel I am doing something that threatens the face of another,
       it is good for people to know what to expect;

it is good for people to not expect me to do something
which will threaten my face even more.
(Perović 2008)

generally defines all apologies in the corpus as dispreferred with a lot of nuances among them.

3.1 Minimal turns as dispreferreds

Semantically, the content of "*sorry*-based unit"" propositions relate to preconditions which must be true for apology to be possible. So statements relating to: the cause of X, the speaker's responsibility for X, the speaker's willingness to repair damage for X or to promise that X will never again be repeated, all function as apologies (cf. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984). The most direct apology realisation is in the form of an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), which functions as a routine, formulaic expression of apology. Next, there is the statement without IFID or with it, containing mention or reference to one or more elements from the aforementioned collection of specified propositions, but not containing an explicit performative verb of apology. A third way, very common in our corpus, was the non-verbal or affective mode. Although apologies belong to preferred responses to complaints, their discoursal preference turns into conversational or pragmatic dispreference because apologies are culturally conditioned and closely ingrained into a mentality which results in different linguistic realisations. One good third of the responses resorted to evasive strategies to transform the verbal speech act of apology into a non-verbal one (emotions), and that is the reason of affective gesturing in the form of kisses, hugs and tears. As Levinson indicates, the two essential features of dispreferred actions are thus: that they tend to occur in a marked format, and that they tend to be avoided ([1983] 1985: 333). Our corpus offers evidence for both.

Table 1. Emotions /(non verbal) as minimal/non existent dispreferreds
a) *Tenderness* - hug, kisses
(1) I just approach and kiss her
(2) I hug and kiss her
(3) Here's a kiss. There you go!
b) *Bodily reaction*
(4) I stand there with tears in my eyes
 c) *Gesture* - disarming smile, slap my forehead, start to wring my hands, start pacing on the spot
(5) I apologise in an endearing tender voice and wring my hands
(6) Slap your forehead, hug your mother (or girlfriend)
 d) Significant look (and statement)
(7) Nothing! I would just look at her significantly and maybe (depending on my mood) say: "You're having fun, aren't you?" ('smiley' added)
 e) Direct act
(8) going into own room with the intention of offering a film from own personal library
(9) finding another film from the same genre in the home collection
 f) Written apology and act
(10) I don't say anything, rather I go and buy a present the following day and write an apology on a little piece of paper
 g) Plan
(11) I don't apologise, I take him to dinner, I think up something interesting

(12) If all else fails, I postpone the meeting
The above rests on the following scenario:
> Scenario 2
> Something happened to part Y of X's body
> people could see this
> because of this, people could know:
> this person feels something now
> because this person thinks something now
> (Wierzbicka 1999: 54-55).

These strategies, in terms of apologising, mean that the offender has an awareness of his wrongdoing and a feeling of contrition as well as a readiness to undergo a process of abasement or mortification on the road to seeking forgiveness for the wrongdoing and to undo the harm as much as possible. The corpus provided evidence that students try, through their apologies, to find a way of avoiding apology according to a rigid scenario but to nevertheless be polite. Emotional compensation in the service of the speech act of apology has shown to be very functional in the family environment and sentimental relationships, where social distance is almost non-existent and the degree of imposition, be it hierarchical or some other power-related form, is, in principle, negligible. This is in compliance with Yule, who says that "conversations between those who are close familiars will tend to have fewer elaborate dispreferreds than conversations between those who are still working out their social relationship" ([1996] 2003: 82).

3.2 Non-minimal turns as dispreferreds

To say is to do is another large group, the majority of which belongs to preferred seconds because they comply with the requirement to be redressive and undo the harm. Nevertheless, a significant number of them could be classified as dispreferreds because of their non-minimal nature. They exhibit a significant amount of written language even though apology is performed in the familial setting. According to Yule, more language would represent more distance between the end of the first part and the end of the second part. The expression of a dispreferred would represent distance and lack of connection. From a social perspective, it is easy to see why participants in a conversation might try to avoid creating contexts for dispreferreds. It must follow, then, that conversations between those who are close familiars will tend to have fewer elaborate dispreferreds than conversations between those who are still working out their social relationship (Ibid., 82). Our results show exactly the opposite. It is between the members of the family and in emotional relationships that the majority of students performed dispreferred seconds with a particular pragmatic and conversational purpose in mind: to undo the harm and obtain absolution. The following is the working proportion: in the majority of instances, the closer the students are, the harder they try and the more lavish dispreferreds they perform. They accumulate, augment, and intensify the speech act of apology and combine them with other speech acts which pragmatically function as apologies, elaborate on the redressive phrase composed to various degrees of conventionality by IFIDs. The high level of conventionality in the apology led to a highly elaborate speech act of apology, which had many of the characteristics of hedging, as well as exaggeration in compensatory phrases, all of which was directly connected with the need for the listener not to feel offended and for the relationship between the listener and the speaker to remain unaffected. A high degree of conventionality and indirectness usually coincides with dispreferred seconds. The higher the place on the conventionality scale the greater the possibility that the second turn of the adjacency pair will be dispreferred.

Table 2. Degree of conventionality of IFID – degree of despreferred

a) *Intensification of illocution*

(13) Pardon me, pardon me, I'm really sorry.

b) *Augmentation of illocution*

(14) I love you. Kiss. I'm getting a big surprise ready for you tomorrow.

c) *Accumulation of illocution*

1. Explanation and promise

(15) Honey, the eighth wonder of the world just happened! I didn't buy a present today, but I'll do it tomorrow.

(16) I didn't buy you anything, but tomorrow I'm taking you to dinner.

2. Command or advice

(17) Never mind presents, love is what matters.

3. Promise instead of apology

(18) Mother, I'm bringing you the film tomorrow.

(19) Oh man, I forgot to bring you the film again. Here, I promise I'll do it tomorrow.

(20) I tell her I forgot and that I'll bring it when I remember.

(21) I'm bringing you the film tomorrow.

4. Excuse instead of apology

(22) I say, "the shop was closed."

5. Apology and explanation

(23) Pardon me, I'm in too much of a rush, the book got left on the table.

6. Apology with intensification + explanation + promise

(24) I'm *really* sorry, I forgot. I'll definitely bring it next time.

7. Advice and promise

(25) After Bruce Willis you don't need a melodrama. We'll do that tomorrow.

d) *Promise*

(26) It won't happen again, I promise.

(27) Honey, forgive me this once.

(28) I promise it won't happen again, at least till next time.

e) *Action and speech act*

(29) I kiss her and say, "we'll do it tomorrow".

f) *Type is token*

(30) I'm your present.

(31) I've got some red ribbons at home. I get one, tie it round my head and say, "I'm your present".

(32) What better gift do you want than me!

g) *Self-deprecation*

(33) I can't believe it! This is the most stupid thing I've done in my life!

(34) I'm a real hopeless case.

(35) Boy, I'm really stupid!

h) *Self-reflection*

(36) I forgot. What can I do! I'll get it for you tomorrow for sure.

i) *Meta-apology*

(37) I feel so bad that I can't even apologise.

j) *Awareness of the situation*

(38) Mother, 'Die Hard III' is a better film.

(39) Excellent film!

(40) Well done Mum!

(41) What do you want melodrama for when you've got Bruce Willis!
k) *Wit*
(42) If Bruce Willis had played in 'Titanic' he would have saved all the passengers.
l) *Exclamation*
(43) Ooops!
m) *Meta-discourse*
(44) I try and think of something where I won't have to apologise, and if not… ???
Man, tough question!
(45) There's no apology needed there, loves understands all if it's sincere.
n) *Propositional optionality*
(46) I lie, what else can I do?

Such a variety in apologising is the product of the peculiarities of interpersonal rhetoric and social norms of politeness which in the speech act of apology recognise a multitude of forms typical to this cultural pattern. Indirectness is probably universal and is inversely proportional to the action of FTA: the greater the indirectness (longer the 'non-minimal' turn), the less the threat to face of the person apologising. Since the awareness of the existence of wrongdoing is fairly strong, one gets the impression that those doing the apologising cannot iron things out with just one speech act and feel the need for some kind of reinforcement. Intensification, augmentation and accumulation of illocution were examples of the need to offer adequate atonement through apology, but there was also slight overstatement and in this overstatement non-verbal and verbal elements were frequently combined.

4. The syntax and lexicon of apology

While preferred responses tend to be briefer, linguistically simpler, supportive or compliant and oriented towards disclosure, dispreferred responses are linguistically more complex and involve non-compliance or conflictual action which is linguistically reflected in features like syntactic diminishers (cf. Edmondson 1981; Edmondson and House 1981; House and Kasper 1981; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984). They signal indirectness and it is one of the most obvious signs of non-minimal turns or dispreferred. Indirectness of apology and hedging in this speech act arise, among other things, from the need not to dramatise the responsibility of the speaker and for it not to threaten him/her, while at the same time appeasing or placating the listener.

Table 3. Syntactical diminishers – indicators of dispreferreds
a) *repetition*
(47) *Sorry, sorry.*
b) *mood - indicative (rarer)*
(48) I *apologise.*
c) *mood – imperative (more frequent)*
(49) *Pardon me.*
(50) *Pardon me, forgive me, excuse me*
d) *intensifier*
(51) I deeply *apologise.*
e) *clausal complements*
(52) You do know *I'm sorry*, don't you?
f) *interrogative phrase*
(53) You do know I'm terribly sorry, *don't you*?
g) *politeness*

(54) *Please,* forgive me.
e) *presence of pronoun **I***
(55) *I* apologise.
g) *question, negation, interrogative phrase*
(56) *You're* not angry with me, *are you?*
h) *Presence of indirect object **to you***
(57) Mother, I apologise *to you*.

We would specially emphasise the presence of the universal concept of the substantive *I* (*ja*), which in Serbian/Montenegrin is not obligatory since the person of the speaker is indicated by the verb ending, yet the speakers have found it necessary to include it and in so doing emphasise the sincerity of the wish for forgiveness by way of the apology and the connection between 'think-feel', that being 'to be sorry'. The imperative and the indicative as two grammatical universals, raise awareness of the difference in usage of the compensatory phrase, which at the level of lexical semantics and in the domain of the individual word is of particular importance. Thus, the most common verb is left in the sieve, so to speak, in two moods, indicative – '(I) apologise' and '(You) forgive/pardon me'. The pragmatic realisation of these two semantic variants of the compensatory phrase in Serbian/Montenegrin depended on the principle of sincerity and the level of FTA. Although they are interchangeable and play an equal discursive role of the same performative type and the same illocutionary power, they do not have the same relevance or the same degree of readiness to satisfy the demands of the negative face of the listener. 'I apologise' as a statement of apology means, "through the implied universal substantive *I*, I acknowledge my guilt and all that proceeds from that action", while 'forgive me' by the same mechanism of the implied substantive (*you*) takes on the meaning of including the listener in the communicative act of apology, whose negative face is otherwise under threat. The listener, by his or her own accession, is meant to contribute to this interaction and in some way to increase his or her own threat to face. In other words, the speaker shares his or her guilt with the listener and the listener accedes to this cooperation. An analysis at the level of lexical semantics shows that the truly relevant phrase is the first, 'I apologise' but that in the research the second, '(You) forgive me' was more, much more common, as the expression which implied somewhat less loss to face.

5. The structure of the IFID
The speech act of apology was frequently an elaborated structure with clearly identifiable parts: the sequence of apology was divided into the 'head act', which bore the largest part of the illocutionary force of apology, the introduction to the head act, most often represented by an address term of some kind, and adjuncts to the head act, which had different linguistic realisations. Contrary to the findings of Blum-Kulka and Olstein, who were able to express and present this speech act with a performative verb wherever there was an IFID, we came to see that we had a situation where our speech act went beyond the varieties of a single performative verb. The head act itself was often a combination of a number of speech acts, and equal heed had to be paid to the address term as well as to the adjunct to the head act, since those illocutionary extensions presented a pragmatic peculiarity of the speech act of apology in our corpus. Thus the rigid scenario, which found a way out in hedging, resulted in a high level of conventionalisation, and so pragmatic augmentation of the illocution at the syntactical level appeared as a highly dilute head act.

The head act (which would be a preferred second) is expanded by an introductory speech act which is most often an invocation (Mum!) or an exclamation (oh, no!) as well as by the addition of a head act which is some form of elaboration of a proposition relating to the conditions of the apology. Lightening the "blow" to face is contributed to by the dislocation of the discursive focus from the FTA, which contains some IFID, to adjuncts to the head acts, which take on the pragmatic function of the act of apology itself. Reduction of FTA is thus achieved through the extension of illocution and especially through the elaboration of the explication of IFID, which is the most common extension of the speech act of apology. In the Montenegrin scenario, the apology, in accordance with the difficulty of the task it sets before the negative face of the speaker, is equal to the difficulty that is appropriate in the English scenario to requests and demands under the same interactive circumstances. Apart from non-minimal turns, we had all the additional characteristics of dispreferred seconds: *delays, prefaces,* even *accounts* (Levinson [1983] 1985: 334) or *pre-sequence* (Yule [1996] 2003: 82) represented through *introduction to the head act* and *adjuncts to the head act* and their combinations.

Table 4. Structure of the IFID
a) head act
(58) Pardon me!
(59) Forgive me!
(60) I'm sorry.
b) introduction to head act + head act
(61) Honey, pardon me!
(62) *Ummm*, oh boy, I'm really sorry.
(63) Marija, I'm really sorry that...
(64) Mother, forgive me...
c) introduction to head act + head act + adjunct to head act
(65) Honey, forgive me, I'll give it to you tomorrow.
d) head act + adjunct to head act
(66) I'm sorry, I didn't get round to buying you a present.
(67) I'm sorry, I honestly forgot.
(68) I'm sorry, I didn't have any money to buy you a present today.
(69) I'm sorry dear, you'll get your present tomorrow – anyway, my love for you is the greatest present.

The following is an example given by a female student that combines all the aforementioned elements of the speech act of apology:

Table 5. Maximal 'non-minimal turn'

Introduct. to head act	*head act x 2*	*intensifier/ head act again*	*adjunct to head act*
(70) Oh, Mum,	sorry, sorry,	I'm *really* sorry,	it's just not our day today.

In order for verbal non-apology to be accepted as a social norm it needs to have the same significance for both the speaker and the listener. If the listener (mother, girlfriend, boyfriend) accepts the omission of an explicit apology phrase and accepts as its valid replacement every conventionalised indirect statement with the illocutionary force of an apology, then it is important that we expand the definition of an apology. This means that the listener in the role of speaker in a similar situation probably would equally apologise. This analysis of the corpus of apologies offered us evidence that an environment produces such forms and formulae as are acceptable to it. All the

aforementioned examples that function as apologies, and we assume they function, can be presented by a universal cultural scenario:

   Scenario 3
     [people think like this]:
     When I want to say/show I am sincerely sorry for something
     I can express/show this through the words/emotions
     that would be directed to me in the same situation.

6. Conclusion

CA confirmed all our findings anticipated in the theory of cultural scenario and the category of face where apologies constitute a high degree of FTA. Pragmatically, that was a fertile ground for apologies to be analysed as dispreferreds.

First, dispreferred seconds were obvious through non-minimal turns which meant elaborate phrases of apologies, very often apologies combined with accounts, especially obvious in what we labelled as adjuncts to the head act. Non minimal turns covered highly conventionalised apologies, indirectness and hedging.

Second, there was accumulation, augmentation and intensification of speech act of apology as well as a combination of different speech acts to function as apology.

Third, syntactic diminishers demonstrated elements of dispreferreds on the linguistic level.

Fourth, the structure of IFID in our research, especially, introduction to the head act, covered most of Levinson's delays and prefaces and Yule's pre-sections

Fifth, they constitute dispreferred seconds because they "try hard" to undo the harm and provoke absolution which would be preferred responses in naturally occurring English in a less rigid cultural scenario.

All these findings of CA analysis are in compliance of our previous findings. Apologies as dispreferreds confirm high conventionalisation and indirectness, but they also confirm the social norm of apologies as preferreds as they are normally delivered in everyday interpersonal communication. The cultural script revealed that they are more dispreferred seconds in Montenegrin scenario than they are dispreferred in the Anglo-Saxon one.

The form of students' answers revealed the existence of several different cultural scripts in apologising. If apologies were a part of everyday etiquette or if the compensating phrase through an explicit IFID had a low degree FTA, the students apologised routinely. When apologising meant a high degree FTA they apologised reluctantly and in a highly conventionalised way, often through emotional compensation or not at all. People apologise as they are apologised to. The problem may arise interculturally, but that is another issue.

'To do is to say' saves face, and is in accordance with the cultural norm and the principles of politeness for the given cultural scenario and is equally acceptable to the listener and the speaker. 'To say is to do' is shared as a cultural norm both among the Montenegrins and among all those who have apology as a universal.

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