

## Chinese Children's Acquisition of Apology Strategies<sup>\*</sup>

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The present study aims to analyze the developmental patterns of Chinese children's apology strategies by investigating their perception of punishments and their production of apologies in terms of two contextual variables, viz. the degree of their own responsibility and the severity of their offence. A comprehension task and a production task were assigned to 120 Chinese children (aged 4-8) and a control group of 24 Chinese-speaking adults. The subjects were further divided into five age groups, each of which consisted of 24 subjects. The results showed that Chinese children as young as four or so were able to take into account both the degree of their own responsibility and the severity of their offence, when assigning punishment. Furthermore, the data yielded a trend in the children's use of apologies. The children under seven employed more direct apologies than indirect apologies, while the older children and the adults tended to respond in the opposite way. With regard to sub-strategies, all the children were found to use more Offering than Acknowledging, and more Acknowledging than Requesting strategies, and there was a three-stage development in the use of these sub-strategies. These findings can be accounted for by children's unsophisticated linguistic skills and adults' greater awareness of the need for politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987).

**Key words:** apology, responsibility, severity, offence, L1 acquisition

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## 1. Introduction

Apologies are ubiquitously employed in different languages. As shown in a number of previous studies, apologies function to retain social equilibrium by minimizing negative repercussions and restoring apologizees' damaged identity (e.g., Darby & Schlenker 1982; Leech 1983). They are a type of illocutionary force, a type of speech act (Austin 1962) which addresses positive face needs and preserves negative face when people are confronted with face-threatening acts (FTAs) (Brown & Levinson 1987). Like that of the compliment, Holmes (1998) refers to the speech act of making an apology as an instance of a "face-supportive act" (FSA). In Holmes (1998), an apology is defined as follows:

*An apology is a speech act addressed to B's face-needs and intended to remedy an offense for which A takes responsibility, and thus to restore equilibrium between A and B (where A is the apologizer, and B is the person offended).*  
(Holmes 1998:204)

This definition implies that there are certain minimal conditions that must be met for a speech act to be an apology. That is, an act has occurred, A believes the act has offended B, and finally, A takes some responsibility for the act (Holmes 1998:204).

Although apologies have long been one of the important speech acts discussed in pragmatic studies, there seems to be a dearth of research on the acquisition of apology strategies, especially those used in Chinese. The pragmatic studies on apologies to date mainly focus on adult usage with emphasis on gender differences (e.g., Holmes 1993), cultural norms or values (e.g., Suszczyńska 1999), cross-cultural comparisons (e.g., Olshtain 1989), and interlanguage usage (e.g., Cohen & Olshtain 1981; Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein 1986; Trosborg 1987). Moreover, studies on children's apologies mainly discuss the development of English-speaking children's use of apologies (e.g., Ely & Gleason 2006) and their use of apologies in natural discourse (e.g., Kampf & Blum-Kulka 2007). The authors have found no research to date which investigates how Chinese-speaking children acquire apologies and how they develop their use of apology strategies.

In the literature, several social or contextual factors affecting adults' choices of apology strategy have been widely discussed (cf. Cohen & Olshtain 1981; Holmes 1998; Olshtain 1989). Little is known; however, about which social or contextual factor is the most dominant when several factors are involved in an offence. It may be that there is a hierarchical order of these factors which we face when we need to choose a particular form of apology. It is also not clear to what degree children as well as adults can recognize these social and contextual factors, and accordingly employ appropriate apology strategies. Therefore, the goal of this study is to probe into Chinese children's acquisition of apology strategies, including the degree to which this involves their perception of the degree of their offence.

Motivated by the aforementioned lack of a focus on this topic in the literature, the present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- (1) Do their own sense of responsibility and their perceived severity of their offence affect children's judgments on whether or not they should be punished? If they do, which variable is more dominant?
- (2) What is the developmental pattern of Chinese children's use of apologies?
- (3) Is children's use of apology strategies subject to both their sense of responsibility and their perception of the severity of the offence?

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces a classification of Chinese apology types and reviews several empirical studies on the acquisition of apology strategies in English. Section 3 introduces the research design of the present study and Section 4 presents the results and discussion. Finally, some limitations of the study and pedagogical implications are presented in Section 5.

## **2. Literature Review**

In the literature, relatively little research has focused on Chinese apologies. Tsai (2002) is probably the earliest study on apologies in Mandarin Chinese, followed by other researchers. These studies will be reviewed in this section. In addition, since no study to date has been found to investigate Chinese children's

apologies, how children acquire and produce apologies in other languages may help to serve as a foundation for the present study. Thus, some previous empirical studies on apologies in L1 acquisition will be discussed in this section as well.

## 2.1 Previous Studies on Chinese Apologies

Tsai (2002) revised the felicity conditions for apology proposed by Thomas (1995) to examine her data, which was collected from five sources: the Internet, TV shows, face-to-face communication, telephone conversations and radio programs. Adopting Holmes' (1998) classification, Tsai (2002) found that when the offence was related to time, apologizers tended to employ the strategy of apologetic formulae followed by explanations (32.97%). The combinations of apologetic formulae followed by remedial supports appeared most in the offence-type of possession (30.67%). These results clearly demonstrated how apologetic strategies might vary according to offence types. As Tsai (2002) pointed out, since the offence-type of time often pertained to wasting another's time, a single Illocutionary Force Indicating Device<sup>2</sup> (IFID hereafter) might not suffice and an additional explanation was often provided. In the possession type of offence, which often refers to damaging or losing one's possessions, apologizers might offer repair or compensation to the addressees, showing that the choices of Chinese apologies may be influenced by the type of offence, as Holmes also found (1998).

Three social factors were discussed: seriousness of the offence, relative degree of social power, and the social distance between apologizers and addressees. It was found that more elaborate apologetic strategies were likely to be applied when an offence was more severe. As expected, the more social power the addressees had, the more elaborate the apologetic strategies that were employed. However, when the social distance between the apologizers and addressees increased, less elaborate apologetic strategies were used. Whereas the results for the first two social factors supported Brown & Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness model, the result for the last social factor, as Tsai (2002) found, contradicted

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<sup>2</sup> An Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) is a piece of language that signals what kind of speech act is being performed (Searle 1969), as in (i):

(i) Would you open the door, please?

this model. Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) contended that the weightiness of a face-threatening act (FTA) increases with the increasing severity of the offence, the relative degrees of social power, or the relative social distance. A "heavier" FTA may require more elaborate or polite apologies. The discrepancy in the data regarding social distance, as explained by Tsai (2002), may result from the following ambiguity: apologizers may employ the simplest and most conventional apology strategies with strangers because they do not usually fear the power of strangers or worry about what they might think, but they may sometimes also use the simplest strategies with good friends (less social distance) as they know the latter would not really blame them. Though Tsai (2002) has shown some incongruities in Thomas' (1995) felicity conditions of apology and Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, she did not further account for why speakers employed FTA only in situations where there were different degrees of social distance but not in situations where other factors were also present (e.g., social power). Moreover, her data collection methods rendered her results controversial (Chang 2005).

Chang (2005) examined one hundred subjects' apologizing strategies in order to offer a comparison of formulaic apologies in Mandarin. The subjects of her study were university students, half of whom were male and half female. They were asked to fill in a questionnaire designed in the Discourse Completion Task (DCT)<sup>3</sup>. In addition to providing their natural responses to each scenario, the subjects were told to rate the severity of the offence described by each of the scenarios from one (least offensive) to five (most offensive). Each scenario was designed based on two major factors, namely, severity of the offence and the social status of the addressees. The severity of the offence could be low, medium, or high on the basis of the degree of the "damage" itself. The relative social status of the addressee could be low or high depending on his or her job (e.g., a street cleaner would be ranked "low" when compared with a teacher). According

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<sup>3</sup> The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and role play are two elicitation methods frequently employed in studies on speech acts. DCTs are written questionnaires which require subjects to fill in their intuitive response to a prior brief situation. Role plays require subjects to play a specific role and orally respond to other characters and situations.

to Chang (2005), the Chinese concept of *li*-‘politeness’ (Gu 1990) needed to be incorporated into the “preparatory condition.” Thus, she revised Tsai’s (2002) felicity conditions into “With the purpose of expressing his regret or in the hope of demonstrating his modesty, the speaker believes or pretends to believe that the act must be in some way taken to be an act which may not be in the hearer’s best interests” (Chang 2005:23).

In terms of the frequency of employment of the three formulaic apologies *duibuqi* ‘sorry,’ *baoqian* ‘sorry,’ and *buhaoyisi* ‘excuse me’ in Mandarin, Chang (2005) pointed out that she found *duibuqi* ‘sorry’ to be most frequently used. *Duibuqi* was frequently employed in all offensive situations, and most frequently in those where the offence was more severe; Tsai (2002) had a similar finding. Although the other two IFIDs, *baoqian* and *buhaoyisi*, appeared in all offensive situations, they were used relatively less frequently. Chang (2005) also discussed how the severity of the offence affects people’s choices of apologizing strategies, and found that more IFIDs with intensifiers were applied in situations with a less severe offence, a result which differed from the previous researchers’ findings. She attributed this difference to the experimental design. Since the scenarios featuring a medium and high severity-of-offence in her study all involved physical injury of the addressee, the apologizer might be eager to check to see if the addressee was hurt and s/he might not have time to offer prolonged apologies. However, her explanation is *ad hoc*, since other studies (e.g., Holmes 1989) have found that offenders might also employ complex apologizing strategies even when the offendees were injured.

Tsai (2007) probed into various apologetic strategies collected from a DCT and an open-ended role play to pinpoint possible methodological differences. The data were collected from a corpus constructed as part of a broader research project with which Tsai (2007) was affiliated. Four identical situations were elicited from the DCT and the role play, respectively. The subjects participating in the DCT were sixty native speakers of Chinese (NS-C), half of them English majors (NS-C-EM) and half non-English majors (NS-C-NEM). The same subjects were re-categorized as EFL-H (the English majors) and EFL-L (the non-English majors) in data elicited in English in order to observe possible impact of the sub-

ject's language proficiency. In the role play, the number of subjects was different from that in the DCT. Some similarities and differences were found in the employment of apologizing strategies in the role play and DCT. Overall, more apologizing strategies were employed in role plays than in the DCT. All the groups used similar strategies in the DCT, but different strategies were used in the role play. These differences might be due to the fact that an open-ended role play<sup>4</sup> involves more interactions among subjects. Whereas the subjects only had one turn or chance to apologize in the DCT, in the role play they would have more than one chance to apologize. Tsai (2007) further found that Direct Expression of Apology, Acknowledgement of Responsibility, and Offer of Repair were the three apologetic strategies most frequently employed, irrespective of which group was involved or which method was being used.

Of the three strategies, Direct Expression of Apology was employed most frequently in the DCT by all the subjects and in the role play by the EFL groups. However, the NS-C groups involved in the role play used Offer of Repair most frequently. Furthermore, some strategies, such as the Opt Out and Evasive Strategies, occurred only in the performance of the role play. These between-group inconsistencies were explained by a methodological difference, since the role play might allow speakers to interact with each other in such a way that each participant had more than one "turn." That is why apologizers might employ additional remedial strategies if their previous apologizing strategies failed or were found to be ineffective. Although there were strategic differences in the use of apologies in the role play and the DCT, none of these differences were statistically verified. Generally speaking, Tsai (2007) clearly demonstrated the methodological differences which might contribute to the different choices and internal modifications of apologies. Agreeing with the findings of many studies (e.g., Holmes 1998; Tsai 2002), she also supported Brown and Levinson's politeness model by showing that more polite or formal apologies would be required of speakers who needed to mitigate severer offences.

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<sup>4</sup> Role plays can be divided into open role plays and closed role plays. Open role plays, unlike closed role plays, are not limited to the one-turn response.

To conclude, the studies on Chinese apologies reviewed above have yielded some intriguing findings. Except for Chang (2005), all these studies indicated a positive correlation between the type of apologizing strategy employed and the severity of the offence. When an offence is more serious, apologizers are apt to employ more elaborate, emphatic apologies or apologies with more modality markers. The choice of apologizing strategy also depends on social factors such as social distance, social status or gender, contextual factors like the type of offence, and methodological differences (DCT vs. role play).

## 2.2 Previous Empirical Studies of Apology Use in L1 Acquisition

Darby & Schlenker (1982) examined children's reactions to an actor who committed a transgression under different conditions. Two experiments were conducted in their study. In the first experiment, the subjects were requested to judge whether the main character, Pat, in the designed vignette should be blamed, forgiven, and punished, and also if he expressed regret in tested situations. The first overall experiment design was a 3 (grade) x 2 (responsibility) x 2 (consequences) x 4 (actor's response: three types of apologies plus no reaction) factorial. In the second experiment, which looked at older children's ability to infer the internal states of the offender, Darby & Schlenker incorporated the offender's motive into their design with a 3 (grade) x 2 (intention) x 2 (motive) x 4 (actor's response) factorial. The overall findings showed when apologies were most needed and how apologies could mitigate a transgression from the perspective of children. The transgressor incurred the greatest punishment when both his responsibility and the consequence of his action had a high rating. To reduce the repercussions of the transgression, more elaborate apologies were more likely to be effective. This was because the subjects considered the transgressor to be less blameworthy and more forgivable when a more elaborate apology was offered. The issue of age also revealed some interesting results. The major difference between the younger and older children lay in the factors influencing how sorry the transgressor felt. While the younger children judged the degree of the transgressor's sense of regret merely in terms of responsibility, the older children also took the effects of the following remedial apologies into consideration. The



younger children's neglect of subsequent apologizing strategies indicated their less sophisticated use of information. Nevertheless, these results all pinpointed children's ability to integrate various criteria in order to judge a transgression even when less than eight years old, contrary to the general finding that children only rely on consequences when judging.

Sell & Rice (1988) investigated English-speaking girls' production of excuses directed to an offended party with different degrees of severity. The participants were 50 girls, 15 of whom were in the first grade, 17 in the fourth grade, and 18 in the seventh grade. The mean age for each age group was 7;2, 10;2, and 13;0. The materials used in their study were sixteen vignettes in which a child offended a man by transgressing social or moral standards. Each subject was asked to respond to the victim. Their responses were divided into five categories: apologies, excuses, restitutions, other repairs, and "no repair; their responses could be either single responses or two-part combinations. The results showed some general patterns. While the first graders most frequently employed the same apology, the fourth and seventh graders apologized using a variety of strategies. Elaborate apologies were directed more often to best friends than to parents, and more often concerned serious violations than less serious ones. The subjects used the most elaborate apologies with serious violations where their best friends were offended, indicating that children might realize that friendship is the center of their social world (cf. Kampf & Blum-Kulka 2007).

Using the longitudinal data from nine children's spontaneous responses in CHILDES corpora, Ely & Gleason (2006) reported on children's use of apology-terms found in parent-child discourse. The developmental patterns of children's use of apologies were scrutinized in terms of the onset, frequency, prompts, and elaborations of children's apology-terms. It was found that 2;4 was the average age at which children first started using apology-terms. This relatively late average "onset" age supported Ely and Gleason's claim that the use of apology-terms should be a more complex pragmatic skill than the use of other terms (e.g., politeness terms) acquired earlier. After the onset of apology-term use, there was found to be an unbalanced U-shaped curve in the development of children's use of these terms, with a drop in the rate for three-year-olds and then a rising rate

for four-year-olds. This developmental pattern also changed with age. The younger children's apologies were found to result from direct prompts. Furthermore, at age two the children's use of apology-terms was often (89%) confined to explicit acknowledgment of remorse, while the older children tended to use more elaborate apology-terms. Although as they grew older the children used increasingly complex apology-terms, their overall rate of usage of complex terms (16%) was notably lower than that of mothers (43%) and fathers (54%). Moreover, while parents acknowledged the apologies directed to them, their children rarely did so. That children's use of apology-terms as a result of indirect prompts increased with age no doubt reflected the parent's role in shaping children's understanding and production of apology terms.

Based on their data collected from observations of peer interactions in a younger group of Israeli preschoolers and an older group of young adolescents, Kampf & Blum-Kulka (2007) explored several issues regarding children's use of apologies. Their study was part of a larger longitudinal project. The period of data collection was three years (2001~2003). They found that the keyword *slixa* (literally "forgiveness" or "pardon" but it also can mean "excuse me") was used as a formulaic IFID not only by adults but also by children. With age, the children could identify more types of offence and more apologizing strategies involving various functions and key meanings. In this study it seemed that adult intervention might facilitate the children's conflict management but it might not really help. Interestingly, the children's social norms were found to be based on their friendships. Repairing damaged friendships might be the most important goal of a remedial apology in these children's social world.

Various researchers have noted the correlation between age and both comprehension and production of apologies. Although children are able to integrate criteria in order to judge a transgression, older children have been found to display a more complete grasp of the available information (Darby & Schlenker 1982). Furthermore, it has been found that elaborate or extended apologies are more likely to be employed by older children than by younger children (Ely & Gleason 2006; Kampf & Blum-Kulka 2007; Sell & Rice 1988). Whereas adults' choices of apologizing strategies hinge upon different social-pragmatic factors,

friendship might be the pivotal point of children's world, so that for them transgressions of the friendship bond require a more elaborate apology than do damaged child-parent relations (Kampf & Blum-Kulka 2007; Sell & Rice 1988).

### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1 Subjects

One hundred and twenty subjects participated in the present study. They were further divided into five groups according to their age<sup>5</sup>. Each group consisted of twenty four children (12 males, 12 females), as shown in Table 1:

Table 1 A Summary of the Subjects

Group	Number	Mean age
Group 1 (4-year-olds)	24 (12 males, 12 females)	4;2
Group 2 (5-year-olds)	24 (12 males, 12 females)	5;1
Group 3 (6-year-olds)	24 (12 males, 12 females)	5;10
Group 4 (7-year-olds)	24 (12 males, 12 females)	7;0
Group 5 (8-year-olds)	24 (12 males, 12 females)	7;11
Control (25-year-olds)	24 (12 males, 12 females)	25;3
Total	144	

The children of Groups 1-3 were preschoolers, and the children in Groups 4 and 5 were first and second graders. In addition, a group of twenty-four native Chinese controls with a mean age of 25;3 participated in the experiment.

#### 3.2 Methods

In this section, we will first introduce a new classification of Chinese apology use, and then describe the tasks employed in the present study according to the classification. It is hoped that Chinese children's comprehension and production of apology terms can be better understood.

<sup>5</sup> According to the pilot study, the subjects aged 5;1 performed differently from those whose mean age was 5;10. Thus, the latter was put into the six-year-old group. The same logic applied to those subjects whose mean age was 7;11; they were considered eight-year-olds.

### 3.2.1 An Analytical Framework

Although previous researchers have pinpointed the correlations between social or contextual factors and adults' selecting an appropriate apology strategy, whether Chinese children possess these socio-pragmatic perceptions when they apologize remains a mystery. In order to provide a better picture of children's acquisition of apology, Chinese apologies are classified into the following types in the present study.

#### 3.2.1.1 Direct Apologies

This strategy pertains to apologies offered in a formulaic way and is categorized as "an (explicit) expression of apology" in the literature (Holmes 1998; Trosborg 1987). Two sub-categories can be further differentiated: Offer and Request.

##### Type 1-1: Offering an apology

Apologizers may offer an apology term in Mandarin. As shown in (1), similar to 'sorry' in English, B may employ any one of the three direct apologies to signal his/her regret. Apologizers' choices of employing formal or informal apologies toward addressees may hinge on differences in variables such as social distance and severity of the offence, etc.:

- (1) A: Ni chidao rang wo hen bu kaixin.  
you late let 1SG very not happy  
'I am unhappy about your being late.'  
B: Duibuqi/Baoqian/Buhaoyisi!  
sorry/sorry/embarrassed  
'Sorry!'

##### Type 1-2: Requesting for forgiveness

Apologizers may request addressees to forgive them or accept their apologies, as in (2), where B requests A to accept the apology s/he previously or subsequently offers when A does not want any explanation of the offence from B:

- (2) A: Ni buyong zai shuo le.  
 2SG no.need again say PART  
 'Don't say anything more.'  
 B: Qing jieshou wode daoqian.  
 Please accept my apology  
 'Please accept my apology!'

### 3.2.1.2 Indirect Apologies

Indirect apologies, in contrast to direct apologies, do not serve to explicitly express apology. They can be divided into three sub-categories: Acknowledgement, Offer, and Request.

#### Type 2-1: Acknowledging responsibility

Apologizers may acknowledge their responsibility of performing or causing an offence, as shown in the following two types.

##### Type 2-1-1: Expressing responsibility

Apologizers can acknowledge explicitly or implicitly. An explicit acknowledgement involves expressions that directly indicate apologizers' responsibility as in (3); by contrast, in implicit acknowledgment, apologizers do not directly admit their responsibility as in (4):

- (3) A: Tianna! Shi shei ba zheer gaode zhemo luan de?  
 God COP who BA here make so messy DE  
 'My God! Who made such a mess here?' (Tsai 2002:47)  
 B: Shi wo nongde la.  
 COP 1SG make PART  
 'I did.'
- (4) Wo yinggai zai chumen qian queren xuyao de dongxi  
 1SG should ZAI out.door before affirm need DE thing  
 Dou meiweni le.  
 all no problem PART  
 'I should have checked everything needed is fine before we left.'  
 (Shih 2006:47)

### Type 2-1-2: Expressing embarrassment or self-blame

Expressions that apologizers may employ to acknowledge responsibility can be embarrassment or self-blame, as illustrated in (5):

- (5) Duibuqi!    Wo bushi                 guyi                 de.  
sorry          1SG not              intentional       DE  
'Sorry, I didn't mean it.'  
(Tsai 2007:59)

### Type 2-2-2: Giving an explanation

Explanations can also be offered as indirect apologies mitigating apologizers' guilt. This strategy, according to Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper (1989:293), "covers any external (+/- human) mitigating circumstances offered by the speaker, i.e., "objective" reasons for the violation at hand," as shown below:

- (9) A: Ni    zenmo    zhemo    wan cai    dao?  
          2SG why        so            late just arrive  
          'Why are you so late?'  
       B: Lushang saiche    a!    Duibuqi la!  
          road.up jam.car    PART sorry    PART  
          'Because of a traffic jam on my way! Sorry!'            (Tsai 2002:50)

### Type 2-2-3: Giving promise of forbearance

In English, promise of forbearance is often indicated by the performative verb promise, while in Mandarin, apologizers can signal this strategy with or without verbs such as baozheng 'promise' or fashi 'vow' to, as in (10):

- (10) A: Ni    you        pian wo    le.  
          2SG again    lie    1SG ASP  
          'You lied to me again!'  
       B: Wo    baozheng    xiaci        wo bu hui    le.  
          1SG promise        next.time 1SG NEGwill    PART  
          'I promise that I will never do it again next time.'

### Type 2-3: Requesting for punishment or support

In addition to Type 2-1 (Acknowledging responsibility) and Type 2-2 (Offering further remarks), apologizers may request addressees for punishing themselves or for any support.

#### Type 2-3-1: Requesting for punishment

When apologizers need to remedy an offence, they may hope addressees can punish them, as illustrated in (11):

- (11) A: Ni rang wo shen shangqi ye.  
2SG let 1SG sad angry PART  
'This time, you have really let me down.'  
B: Ma, ni da wo la.  
Mom 2SG beat 1SG PART  
'Mom, please beat me!'

Type 2-3-2: Requesting for support

Some apologizers may not request for punishment but request for support from addressees, as in (12).

- (12) A: Mei ci ni dou zheyang.  
every CL 2SG all this.way  
'You always don't do it this way.'  
B: Duibuqi la! Zai gei wo yi ci jihui ma?  
sorry PAR again give 1SG one CL chance PART  
'Sorry! Please give me one more chance!'

3.2.2 Instruments

Given that this study aims to investigate children's comprehension of transgressions and production of apologies, a comprehension task and a production task were designed<sup>6</sup>. The comprehension task was based on a self-created story about the main character, Little Bear, who (un)intentionally committed several acts of transgression against other animals. In other words, two factors were involved in the story: responsibility and the severity of the offence. When Little Bear (un)intentionally committed a transgression, his level of responsibility was low/high. The severity of the offence was high when addressees were angry or depressed about Little Bear's offensive deeds; conversely, the severity was low

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<sup>6</sup> The comprehension task designed for the present study mainly examined children's reactions to the main character's misbehavior, a method adopted in Darby & Schlenker (1982). To get a better picture of children's comprehension of Little Bear's wrongdoings in relation to their production of apologies (i.e., apology use), their reactions were further compared with their use of apology terms with respect to two factors: responsibility and severity of the offence (cf. Ely & Gleason 2006; Sell & Rice 1988).






when addressees showed no strong emotional reactions and considered the offence trivial. The offences were all related to one's body or possessions (Holmes 1998)<sup>7</sup>. In the designed story, there were four other characters: Little Dog, Little Pig, Little Rabbit, and Little Monkey.

To avoid an experimental bias, four test items were employed for each possible combination of the two factors. In addition, four fillers were designed. Thus, each task consisted of 20 test items. The experiment design was then a 6 (age groups)  $\times$  2 (responsibility)  $\times$  2 (severity of the offence) factorial, with the first factor a between- group variable and the last two factors within-group variables.

In the experiment, each subject saw animations created by Microsoft Office PowerPoint 2007 on a computer screen and meanwhile he/she was told a recorded story comprised of the designed test items. A sample scenario or story was told to the subjects in Chinese, for example: "One day, Little Bear met Little Dog on his way to school. Little Bear walked up to Little Dog and loudly said 'Good Morning' to him. When Little Bear opened his mouth, he **unintentionally** spat on Little Dog's hands, but Little Dog was not angry." A test animation and questions are shown in Table 2:

Table 2 A Test Scenario Used in the Comprehension Task

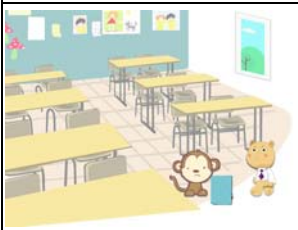
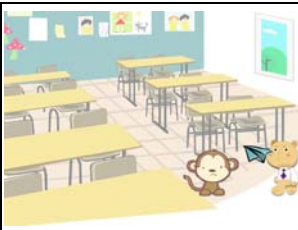
The subject saw:				
	→		→	
The subject heard: <i>Ni juede women yinggai chufa Xiaoxiong ma?</i> 'Do you think we should punish Little Bear?'				

<sup>7</sup> The transgressions in the story were only related to one's body or possessions because previous studies (e.g., Holmes 1998; Tsai 2002) have shown that one's choice of apology could be influenced by different offence types.

After listening to the story, each subject was asked whether or not Little Bear should be punished by choosing one of the three lights (red, yellow, and green). The green light meant ‘no punishment’; the yellow light, ‘moderate punishment’; the red light, ‘severe punishment’. In order to make sure that the subjects understood the meaning of each light, general classroom rules were used in the practice demonstration. The formal experiment did not commence until all the subjects fully understood the meanings of the lights. During the experiment, after all the subjects chose lights, each subject was asked to provide a reason for his/her choice. All of the subjects’ responses were audio-recorded.

The production task and the comprehension task shared the same devised story. No matter which light the subjects chose and what reasons they gave in the comprehension task, each of them was subsequently requested to help Little Bear speak to the addressees because they were told in advance that Little Bear could not speak fluently. To illustrate, the following scenario was given to the subjects in Chinese: “*Little Bear borrowed some colored paper from Little Monkey, but he **intentionally** made a paper plane with the colored paper. The paper plane got stuck in a tree. Seeing this, Little Monkey said, “**Never mind**. I still have plenty of colored paper.”* Each subject was immediately asked a question like “*Ni yao bang Xiaoxiong gen X shuo sheme?*” ‘What do you want to help Little Bear say to X?’ to assist Little Bear as illustrated below:

Table 3 A Test Scenario in the Production Task

The subject saw:		
	→	
The subject heard: <i>Ni yao bang Xiaoxiong gen Xiaohouzi shuo sheme?</i> ‘What would you like to say to Little Monkey to help Little Bear?’		

Each subject was told in advance that there were no correct answers. They might just respond by saying what they wanted to say to the addressees. All of their responses were audio-recorded.

### 3.3 Procedure

Before the experiment, consent forms were given to the kindergarten and elementary school administrators for them to distribute to the subjects' parents. The parents were informed that all the collected data would be used only for research purposes. In the trial session, the answering device used in the comprehension task, i.e., the three lights, was introduced to the subjects, followed by some examples of violations of general classroom rules. After the subjects understood how to use the three lights, the story was played for them. When the recorded story commenced, each scenario was read with an emphasis on the key words/phrases regarding Little Bear's degree of responsibility and the severity of the offence. The children participated in the experiment individually in a quiet classroom in their schools, while the adults were tested in a quiet place in a public university.

After all the data were collected, it was statistically analyzed by SPSS (17th edition). In the comprehension task, two points were given to the subjects when they chose the red light (i.e., severe punishment), one point for the yellow light (i.e., moderate punishment), and no point for the green light (i.e., no punishment). In the production task, the subjects' responses were coded by two raters according to the classification mentioned in Section 2. No disagreements occurred after the raters discussed some problems that had appeared in their first coding session. Descriptive statistics were first employed to show the overall mean scores for the comprehension data and the distribution of apologizing strategies for the production data. Three-way ANOVA was executed to examine the interrelations among the three variables in the comprehension data, viz. severity of the offence, degree of responsibility, and age. The "production" data were statistically tested by Chi-square analysis.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Factors Affecting Children's Judgments Regarding Punishment

The first research question addressed in the present study concerns the effects of the three variables, namely, age, responsibility, and severity of the offence, on the subjects' perceptions of what would be a proper punishment. Table 4 shows the overall scores for the subjects' judgments on punishment for the character Little Bear, under all the stipulated conditions:

Table 4 Mean Scores of the Subjects' Judgments on Punishment<sup>8</sup>

Group	Type	[+R, +S]	[+R, -S]	[-R, +S]	[-R, -S]
Group 1	Mean	1.76	1.22	1.58	1.09
	SD	0.28	0.33	0.27	0.24
Group 2	Mean	1.81	1.19	1.66	1.04
	SD	0.20	0.42	0.34	0.41
Group 3	Mean	1.97	1.53	1.67	1.10
	SD	0.08	0.40	0.34	0.29
Group 4	Mean	1.97	1.65	1.42	0.91
	SD	0.08	0.34	0.22	0.27
Group 5	Mean	1.95	1.47	1.49	0.90
	SD	0.10	0.39	0.38	0.22
Control	Mean	1.95	1.33	1.24	0.27
	SD	0.13	0.49	0.45	0.31

Note: +R = Responsibility was high; -R = Responsibility was low; +S = Severity of the offence was high; -S = Severity of the offence was low. The mean scores range from zero to two.

As shown in Table 4, all the subjects punished Little Bear most heavily when both the severity of the offence and his own level of responsibility were high (Ms = 1.76, 1.81, 1.97, 1.97, 1.95, and 1.95 for Groups 1 to 5 and the control group, respectively). Conversely, when both variables were low, Little Bear

<sup>8</sup> The mean score in each cell was an average of the scores for four questions. This average number was further divided by 24 (n=24).

received the least punishment from the subjects ( $M_s = 1.09, 1.04, 1.10, 0.91, 0.90$ , and  $0.27$  for Groups 1 to 5 and the control group, respectively). Interestingly, when one of variables was high and the other was low, the subjects differed in their judgments regarding punishment. While Groups 1, 2, 3, and 5 assigned more punishment when severity of the offence was high and degree of responsibility was low (G1:  $1.58$  vs.  $1.22$ , G2:  $1.66$  vs.  $1.19$ , G3:  $1.67$  vs.  $1.53$ , and G5:  $1.49$  vs.  $1.47$ ), Group 4 and the control group punished Little Bear severely when severity was low and degree of responsibility was high (G4:  $1.65$  vs.  $1.42$  and Control:  $1.33$  vs.  $1.24$ ).

The results revealed a significant difference in all interactions among the variables, indicating that the manipulation was effective. The statistical analyses yielded significant main effects for severity of the offence,  $F(1, 138) = 514.07, p < .001$ , responsibility,  $F(1, 138) = 267.75, p < .001$ , and age,  $F(5, 138) = 10.652, p < .001$ . Significant effects were found in the interaction between severity of the offence and age,  $F(5, 138) = 4.527, p = .001$ , the interaction between responsibility and age,  $F(5, 138) = 18.251, p < .001$ , and the interaction between severity of the offence and responsibility,  $F(5, 138) = 9.724, p = .002$ . The three-factor interaction, namely, the interaction among severity of the offence, responsibility, and age also reached a significant level,  $F(5, 138) = 2.396, p = .041$ . With regard to the between-group differences, the Tukey HSD post hoc analysis indicated that there was a significance difference between the mean scores for the control group and those for any other experimental groups,  $ps \leq .001$ . Except for this significant difference between the control group and the experimental groups, none of the pairwise comparisons between the experimental groups yielded a significant difference.

Although the interaction between group and severity of the offence was significant, it is still not clear whether our young children may have already been adept at distinguishing different degrees of severity of an offence. To further compare within-group differences in judging severity of the offence, Figure 1 shows the mean scores of each group:

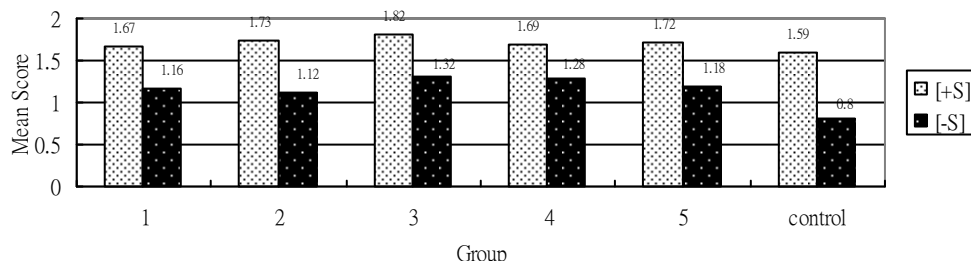


Figure 1 Mean Scores for Severity x Group Interaction

All the within-group differences were highly significant (all the  $p$ -values were under .001). As shown in Figure 1, when degree of severity was rated higher, all the subjects thought Little Bear should receive a severe punishment. These results showed that our children, even as young as four, understood well the idea of distinguishing between and among different degrees of severity of an offence (cf. Darby & Schlenker 1982, Helwig, Zelazo, & Wilson 2001).

In addition to scrutinizing the within-group differences between group and severity, the within-group differences between group and responsibility also require a further investigation. Figure 2 shows the mean scores of each group when level of responsibility was judged to be high or low:

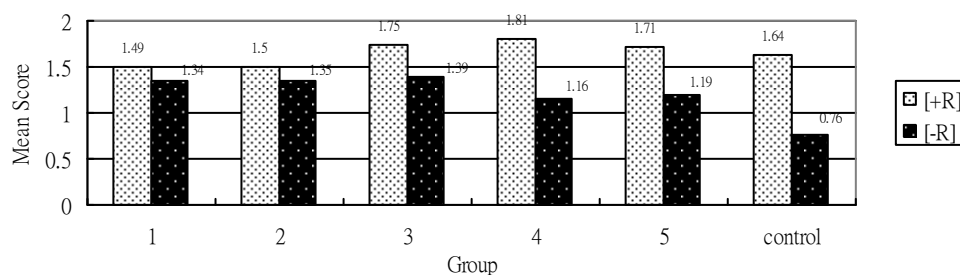


Figure 2 Mean Scores for Responsibility x Group Interaction

Similarly, all the within-group differences were significant: G1:  $p = .02$ , G2:  $p = .037$ , G3:  $p < .001$ , G4:  $p < .001$ , G5:  $p < .001$ , Control:  $p < .001$ . As shown in Figure 2, all the subjects punished Little Bear severely when the responsibility level was high. However, compared with the older children and the adults, the four- and five-year-olds were less sophisticated in judging responsibility, since

their results were not highly significant ( $ps = .02$  and  $.037$ , respectively), implying that our preschoolers already had the basic ability to take into account the offenders' intentions and accordingly exert different punishments. These findings are consistent with the results of a substantial body of literature (e.g., Ferguson & Rule 1982; Surber 1977). For example, Surber (1977) contended that children's ability to judge subjective information increased with age. In other words, younger children are less proficient in integrating subjective factors into their judgments.

Figure 3 shows the mean scores of each group when both severity of the offence and degree of responsibility were high:

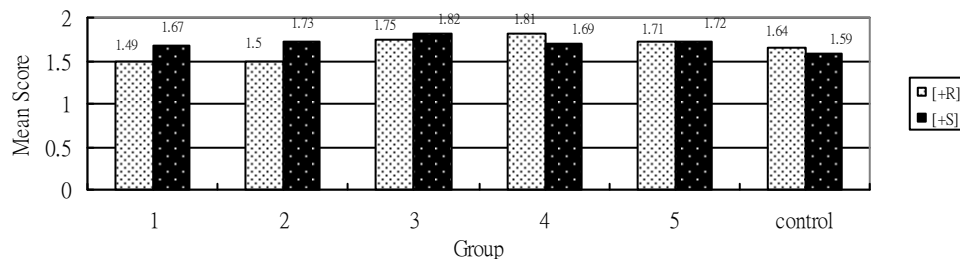


Figure 3 Mean Scores for [+R][+S] x Group Interaction

The within-group differences were found to be significant in Group 1,  $p < .001$ , Group 2,  $p < .001$ , and Group 4,  $p = .011$ . The same differences in Group 3, Group 5, and the control group were found to be not significant:  $p = .30$ ,  $p = .873$ , and  $p = .443$ , respectively. These results showed that our children at the ages of four and five might judge whether one should receive a heavier punishment more by the severity of the offence than by the degree of responsibility. However, when they became older they might also place more emphasis on responsibility and so sometimes the two factors were given an equivocal weight. These findings are consistent with the general pattern according to which "children younger than eight have generally been found to give greater weight to salient objective factors such as the magnitude of an act's consequences" (Darby & Schlenker 1982:743). As Helwig, Zelazo, & Wilson (2001) pointed out, younger children tend to use an outcome rule when assigning punishments, whereas older

children may judge more by an intention rule or a mixture of the two kinds of rules (e.g., a conjunction rule) (also cf. Zelazo, Helwig, & Lau 1996).

The prior comparisons yielded some findings pertaining to the children's conception of punishment within each age group, but not pertaining to the differences between the adults' and the children's perceptions. To help us further examine these differences, Table 5 shows the between-group comparisons for the control group and the experimental groups:

Table 5 Significance of p-values for Differences between the Control Group and the Experimental Groups

Group Type	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
[+S]	.765	.163	.003**	.540	.275
[+R]	.212	.285	.569	.129	.911
[-S]	.000**	.001**	.000**	.000**	.000**
[-R]	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**

As indicated in Table 5, when the severity of the offence or level of responsibility was high, only Group 3 showed a very significant contrast with the control group. One possible reason is that Group 3 (i.e., the 7-year-olds) had just begun their formal schooling, and so they were at the stage of establishing moral judgments. When one of the variables was low, the control group performed significantly differently from all the other experimental groups. These results demonstrated that our children were harsher than the adults in gauging the proper punishments. As Piaget (1932) said, "children tend to advocate a more severe punishment when the transgression meets some minimal, simple criterion (qtd. in Darby & Schlenker 1982:748)." Also, Shultz, Wright, & Schleifer (1986) contended that the tolerance of wrongdoing increases with age. Whereas most of the adults forgave the offender when the offence was light or not intentional, the children were more oriented towards retaliatory punishment. Some reasons for assigning punishment provided by the children and adults in the present study may bolster this argument. For example, when the adults answered Question 1, in which Little Bear unintentionally spat at Dog, who was not angry, they might



choose not to punish Little Bear because of the low severity as in (13), low responsibility as in (14), or both as in (15):

- (13) Yinwei ta meiyou shengqi.  
because 3SG not.have angry  
'because he (Dog) was not angry.' (taken from GC-4, Q19)
- (14) Yinwei ta buxiaoxin pendao de.  
because 3SG unintentionally spit.to DE  
'because he (Little Bear) unintentionally spat.' (taken from GC-19, Q1)
- (15) Yinwei ta buxiaoxin de, erqie xiaogou ye meiyou  
because 3SG unintentionally DE and small.dog also not.have  
shengqi.  
angry  
'because he was not intentional and Dog was not angry.'  
(taken from GC-19, Q1)

However, regardless of whether Question 1 was a low-severity and low-responsibility design, our children still thought that Little Bear deserved a medium-level or even a severe punishment because of his behavior, as shown in (16):

- (16) Yinwei ta penkoushui.  
because 3SG spit  
'because he (Little Bear) spat.' (taken from G1-110, Q1)

By and large, the overall results show that the degree of responsibility and of the severity of the offence had pronounced effects on our children's judgments. When these factors were rated higher the subjects assigned more punishment. However, the four- and five-year-olds were likely to be influenced more by the severity of the offence than by the level of responsibility. Generally, the children aged four or so were competent at judging by different criteria and could discount punishment when the actor seemed not responsible or when the outcome of

<sup>9</sup> GC-4 means the fourth subject of the control group. Q1 means the first question in the story.

<sup>10</sup> G1-1 means the first subject of Group 1.

the offence was not severe. However, compared with the adults, they were more inclined to assign punishments rather than to forgive, even when the offence was not intentional or the outcome was not severe.

#### 4.2 Developmental Patterns of Children's Use of Chinese Apologies

In addition to exploring the children's comprehension of the idea of punishment, the present study probed into the subjects' production of apologies. The second research question attempts to delineate the developmental patterns of the children's use of Chinese apologies. Table 6 shows the distribution of the subjects' use of direct vs. indirect apology strategies:

Table 6 Distribution of the Subjects' Use of Direct vs. Indirect Apology Strategies

Type Group	Direct Apologies	Indirect Apologies	Total
Group 1	358 (94.5%)	21 (5.5%)	379 (100%)
Group 2	370 (75.1%)	123 (24.9%)	493 (100%)
Group 3	362 (70.0%)	155 (30.0%)	517 (100%)
Group 4	315 (53.0%)	279 (47.0%)	594 (100%)
Group 5	301 (45.3%)	364 (54.7%)	665 (100%)
Control	245 (36.2%)	432 (63.8%)	677 (100%)

As shown in Table 6, Groups 1 to 4 employed more direct than indirect apologies (G1: 94.5% vs. 5.5%, G2: 75% vs. 25%, G3: 70.0% vs. 30.0%, and G4: 53.0% vs. 47.0%). Although the percentage of direct apologies decreased with age, that of indirect apologies increased. This means that although our children at age four employed more direct apologies than indirect apologies, as they grew older more indirect apologies were elicited, as can be seen with Group 5 and the control group (G5: 54.7% vs. 45.3% and Control: 63.8% vs. 36.2%). Both the within-group and between-group differences were statistically significant:  $2(5) = 480.427$ ,  $p < .001$ . The post-hoc pairwise comparisons designated some within-group differences, as in Table 7, and between-group differences for both direct and indirect apologies, as in Table 8:

Table 7 Within-group Significant Differences for Each Group

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Control
*	*	*		*	*

Note: The asterisk in each cell indicates a significant within-group difference.

Table 8 Between-group Significant Differences for Direct and Indirect Apologies

	1x2	1x3	1x4	1x5	1xC	2x3	2x4	2x5	2xC	3x4	3x5	3xC	4x5	4xC	5xC
D	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*
I	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*

Note: The asterisk in each cell indicates a significant difference. D = Direct Apologies; I = Indirect Apologies; 1 = Group 1; 2 = Group 2; 3 = Group 3; 4 = Group 4; 5 = Group 5; C = the control group.

As shown in Table 7, only Group 4 showed no significant difference in the use of direct and indirect apologies, suggesting that seven-year-olds may be at an age when these two tendencies are balanced. Those children younger than seven tended to employ more direct apologies, while those older than seven were more likely to employ indirect apologies. On the other hand, the between-group comparisons as in Table 8 show that almost all of the decreasing percentages for direct apologies and increasing percentages for indirect apologies had a significant correlation with age. These results indicate that, with age, our children did gradually employ fewer direct apologies and more indirect apologies. These findings echo the pattern for the apology use of American elementary school girls in Sell & Rice (1988). It was found in their study that first-graders often only directly apologized, whereas the older children (fourth and seventh-graders) offered a variety of explanations, restitutions, and apologies.

The four-year-old children in the present study were inclined to employ direct rather than indirect apologies possibly because of their limited linguistic pool. When encountering an offense, they understood they had to offer some utterances which could abate the loss caused by the transgression. However, all they could utter most of the time was simply an IFID such as *duibuqi* 'sorry' because direct apologies, being formulaic and short, were naturally acquired first. However, the 5-year-olds used significantly fewer direct apologies, since they

were able to acknowledge their own responsibility and offer indirect apologies to maintain a kind of social equilibrium. In other words, our older children were more sophisticated in their ability to use various forms of indirect apologies.

Another way of examining the relative distribution of children's apology use is to observe different sub-strategies. A distribution of our subjects' apologizing sub-strategies is presented in Table 9:

Table 9 Distribution of the Subjects' Use of Strategies<sup>11</sup>

Type Group	Offer	Acknowledgement	Request	Total
Group 1	377 (99.5%)	2 (0.5%)	0 (0%)	379 (100%)
Group 2	427 (86.6%)	51 (10.3%)	15 (3.0%)	493 (100%)
Group 3	459 (88.8%)	51 (9.9%)	7 (1.4%)	517 (100%)
Group 4	462 (77.8%)	121 (20.4%)	11 (1.9%)	594 (100%)
Group 5	514 (77.3%)	142 (21.4%)	9 (1.4%)	665 (100%)
Control	517 (76.4%)	153 (22.6%)	7 (1.0%)	677 (100%)

As shown in Table 9, most of the apologies used by Group 1 were of the Offer type (99.5%). Groups 2 and 3 employed almost the same proportion of apology sub-strategies, more than eighty percent of them being Offers and around ten percent Acknowledgements. Group 4, Group 5, and the control group also showed a similar pattern. Three-fourths of their apologies were Offers and almost one-fourth of were Acknowledgements. Overall, the subjects employed Offers more than Acknowledgements, and the latter more than Requests. The overall distribution was statistically significant:  $2(10) = 157.383, p < .001$ .

This pattern of using sub-strategies also implies different stages of development. The first stage was at around age four, when almost all the children's apologies were Offers. The second stage was from age five to age six, when the children began to employ Acknowledgments. At the age of seven our children had already reached the final stage, in which Acknowledgements increased and

<sup>11</sup> Offer here is a combination of Types 1-1 (Offering an apology) and Types 2-2 (Offering further remarks); Request is a category combining Types 1-2 (Requesting forgiveness) and Types 2-3 (Requesting punishment or support).

comprised one-fifth of their apologies.

To further examine what specific apologies our subjects employed, we may take a look at the overall distribution of their apologizing strategies:

Table 10 Distribution of the Subjects' Use of Apologizing Strategies

Type Group	Type 1.1 (DO)	Type 1.2 (DR)	Type 2.1 (IA)	Type 2.2 (IO)	Type 2.3 (IR)	Total
Group 1	358 (94.5%)	0 (0%)	2 (0.5%)	19 (5.0%)	0 (0%)	379 (100%)
Group 2	355 (72.0%)	15 (3.0%)	51 (10.3%)	72 (14.6%)	0 (0%)	493 (100%)
Group 3	355 (68.7%)	7 (1.4%)	51 (9.9%)	104 (20.1%)	0 (0%)	517 (100%)
Group 4	305 (51.3%)	10 (1.7%)	121 (20.4%)	157 (26.4%)	1 (0.2%)	594 (100%)
Group 5	293 (44.1%)	8 (1.2%)	142 (21.4%)	221 (33.2%)	1 (0.2%)	665 (100%)
Control	238 (35.2%)	7 (1.0%)	153 (22.6%)	279 (41.2%)	0 (0%)	677 (100%)

Note: DO = direct apologies of Offer; DR = direct apologies of Request; IA = Indirect apologies of Acknowledgment; IO = Indirect apologies of Offer; IR = Indirect apologies of Request.

As shown in Table 10, the strategy employed most by Group 1 was that of direct apologies of Offer (94.5%). This group's members rarely used indirect apologies of Offer (5.0%) or indirect apologies of Acknowledgment (0.5%), and they never used direct or indirect apologies of Request. This pattern of use of apologizing strategies was similar to that of Group 2, although the latter's members employed fewer direct apologies of Offer (72.0%). They were also found to use direct apologies of Request (3.0%), and they increased their use of indirect apologies of Acknowledgment (10.3%) and indirect apologies of Offer (14.6%). Compared with the percentage for Group 2, the percentage of usage of Type 1.1 (DO) decreased (68.7%) for Group 3, and almost one-fifth of their apologies were indirect apologies of Offer (20.1%). On the other hand, only half of Group 4's apologies were direct apologies of Offer (51.3%). By contrast, this group increasingly employed IA (20.4%) and IO (26.4%). One-third of the apologies used by Group 5 were indirect apologies of Offer (33.2%), while less than half of their apologies were direct apologies of Offer (44.1%). The control group, unlike the experimental groups, employed more indirect (41.2%) than direct (35.2%) apologies of

Offer, although the frequency of their Type 2.1 usage (22.6%) was similar to that of the seven-year-olds (20.4%) and eight-year-olds (21.4%). Direct and indirect apologies of Request (Type 1.2 and Type 2.3) were rarely found in any of the groups, amounting to less than 3% of total apology use.

The overall distribution of the apologies used by different groups was statistically significant:  $2(20) = 513.059$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, according to the post-hoc pairwise comparison for the Chi-square test of homogeneity of proportions, not all of the apology strategies for each type were significant. In using Type 1.1 (DO), except for Group 2 x Group 3, Group 4 x Group 5, and Group 5 x Control, all pair-wise comparisons were significant. There was no between-group significant effect on the use of Type 1.2 (DR) and Type 2.3 (IR). As for the use of Type 2.1 (IA), only Group 1 performed significantly differently from other groups. It also showed a significant difference when compared with every other group except Group 2 in its use of Type 2.2 (IO). In addition, more pairs (i.e., Group 2 x Group 5, Group 2 x Control, and Group 3 x Control) were found to be statistically significant in their use of Type 2.2 (IO).

This closer observation of the use of direct and indirect apologies yielded a further trend in the development of apologizing strategies. Our four-year-olds relied heavily on direct apologies of Offer; however, older children gradually decreased the percentage of their use of direct apologies of Offer, and increased that of indirect apologies of Acknowledgement and Offer.

Not all of the subjects' answers fell nicely into our coding system; both the children and the adults sometimes employed other strategies. Some of their apologies were intensified by adverbs, such as *hen* 'very' or *feichang* 'very,' and thus they were categorized as apologies with internal modifiers. Sometimes the subjects did not think it was necessary to utter a word in response to the questions, or they did not know what to say. Sometimes the subjects teased the victims or gave them compliments. They sometimes might also deny responsibility as a way of opting out. These responses were categorized as "other strategies." A distribution of the subjects' use of other strategies is shown below:

Table 11 Distribution of the Subjects' Use of Other Strategies

Type Group	Coded Apologies	Apologies with Internal Modifiers <sup>12</sup>	Others	Total
Group 1	379 (94.0%)	0 (0%)	24 (6.0%)	403 (100%)
Group 2	493 (96.7%)	6 (1.2%)	11 (2.2%)	510 (100%)
Group 3	517 (97.7%)	3 (0.6%)	9 (1.7%)	529 (100%)
Group 4	594 (93.0%)	17 (2.7%)	28 (4.4%)	639 (100%)
Group 5	665 (94.5%)	9 (1.3%)	30 (4.3%)	704 (100%)
Control	677(84.2%)	26 (3.2%)	101 (12.6%)	804 (100%)

As shown in Table 11, the younger children seldom employed internal modification. One possible reason is that the modifiers *zende* “really” or *feichang* “very” are function words generally acquired at a later stage. Except for Group 1, all the groups gradually began to employ a number of apologies with internal modifiers; for example, the control group's members would say *feichang duibuqi* “very sorry” to express their guilt. Apparently, Group 1's members were too young to sense that an internal modifier could be used to ask for forgiveness when they felt really bad about their wrongdoings. All the experimental groups rarely employed strategies of other types.

In summary, some within- and between-group tendencies in the use of apologizing strategies can be suggested based on the previous observations. First, the children younger than seven years old employed more direct than indirect apologies. On the contrary, the older children and adults employed more indirect than direct apologies. Although apologies of Offer were employed by all the children and adults more than those of Acknowledgment, which were used more than those of Request, there was a three-stage development (4-year-olds: stage 1; 5- and 6-year-olds: stage 2; and 7- and 8-year-olds: stage 3). Furthermore, with age the percentage of direct apologies of Offer decreased but those of indirect apolo-

<sup>12</sup> As one of the reviewers pointed out, it might not be necessary to make “Apologies with Internal Modifiers” a separate category. The reason why we still presented this category in Table 11 was to show that our native controls tended to be more sophisticated in using these modifiers than the experimental groups when the situation was severe.

gies of Acknowledgement and Offer increased. The older children were also more proficient in combining strategies, and these children's most frequent formula was: direct apologies of Offer, followed by Acknowledgment or indirect apologies of Offer.

#### 4.3 Factors Affecting Children's Apologizing Strategy Use

In the previous section, we presented and explored the children's overall production of apologies or overall use of apologizing strategies. Now let us move on to discuss whether or not their use of apologies was affected by the devised variables. Figure 4 shows the percentages of apologizing strategies employed by the experimental groups when the offences were intended, in the context of the experimental groups' overall distribution:

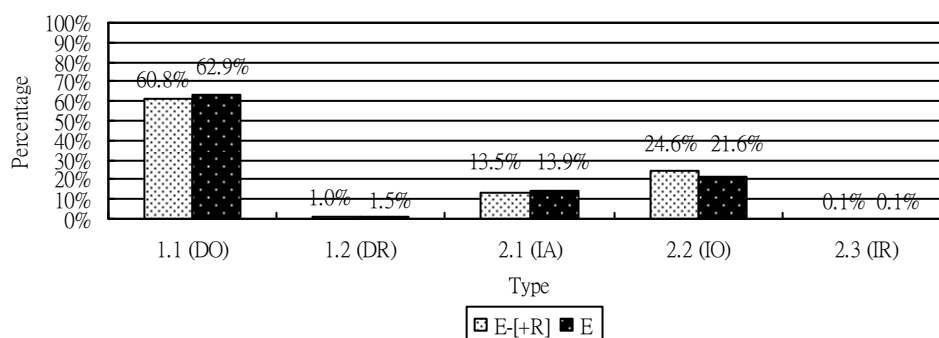


Figure 4 Percentages of the Children's Apologies under [+R]

Note: E-[+R] = the experimental groups' apologies employed under [+R]; E = the experimental groups' total employment of apologies in the present study.

As shown in Figure 4, in general when the responsibility level was high, the pattern of apologizing strategies employed by the experimental groups resembled that of their overall use of apologies. Types 1.2 (DR) and 2.3 (IR) were rarely employed by both groups (in total less than 2%). Over half (60.8%) of their apologies when the degree of responsibility was high were of Type 1.1 (DO). Showing a similar distribution, their overall use of direct apologies of Offer was 62.9%. Both groups also employed a nearly equal percentage of indirect apologies of Acknowledgement (13.5% for E-[+R] and 13.9% for E). A slight differ-



ence was found between the two groups with regard to the use of indirect apologies of Offer (24.6% for E-[+R] and 21.6% for E).

A similar trend in apology use shows that there might be no overt effect of degree of responsibility on the children's production of apologies. In order to further investigate whether responsibility was indeed a factor influencing our subjects' choices of apologizing strategies, let us compare the control group's apologies that were employed when the level of responsibility was high with their overall apologies in the present study, as shown in Figure 5:

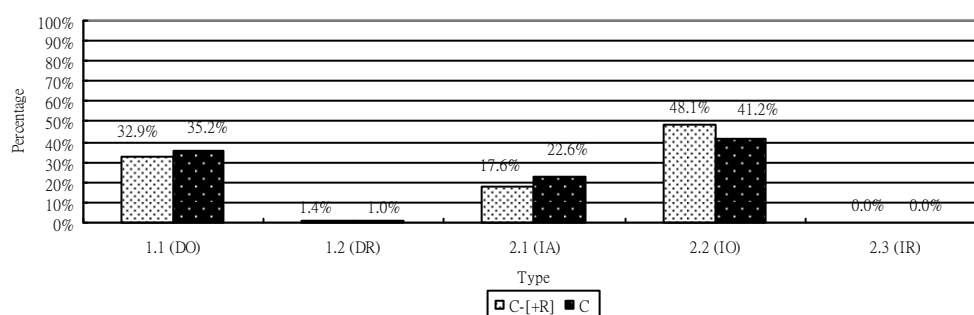


Figure 5 Percentages of the Control Group's Apologies under [+R]

Note: C-[+R] = the control group's apologies employed under [+R]; C = the control group's overall apologies in the present study

As can be seen in Figure 5, although the adults employed slightly more Type 2.2 (IO) and slightly fewer Type 2.1 (IA) apologies when degree of responsibility was high, the general patterns for both groups were almost the same, implying that the choices of different apology strategies did not mainly hinge upon whether the offence was intentional or not.

Since responsibility is more a subjective than an objective factor, it may not be directly associated with the apparent change of outcome in the vignettes used in this study. The other within-group variable in the present study, i.e., severity of the offence, is on the contrary more objective, so that the change of outcome may be more directly sensed. Figure 6 shows the comparison of the experimental groups' apologies when the severity of the offence was rated as high with their overall production of apologies:

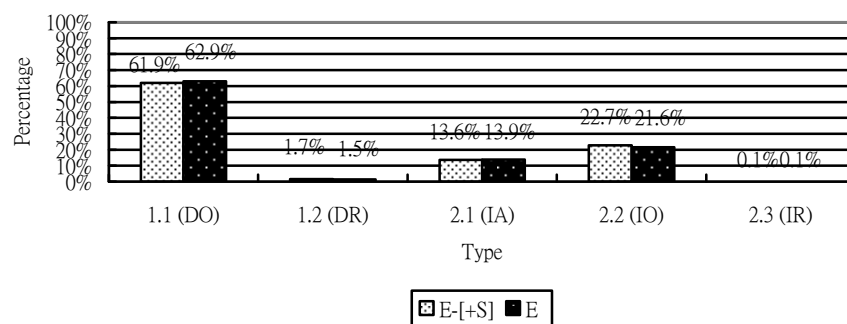


Figure 6 Percentages of the Children's Apologies under [+S]

Note: E-[+S] = the experimental groups' apologies employed under [+S]; E = the experimental groups' overall production of apologies in the present study.

As shown in Figure 6, the comparisons in each case were very close. Both groups employed almost the same percentage of direct apologies of Offer (61.9% for E-[+S] and 62.9% for E), indirect apologies of Acknowledgement (13.6% for E-[+S] and 13.9% for E), and Type 2.2 (22.7% for E-[+S] and 21.6% for E). Types 1.2 (DR) and 2.3 (IR), again, were rarely used by both groups, showing that almost no difference was found in the choosing of apologizing strategies when the severity of the offence was high.

Similarly, a comparison is made to see whether the severity of the offence influences the control group's apology choices in Figure 7:

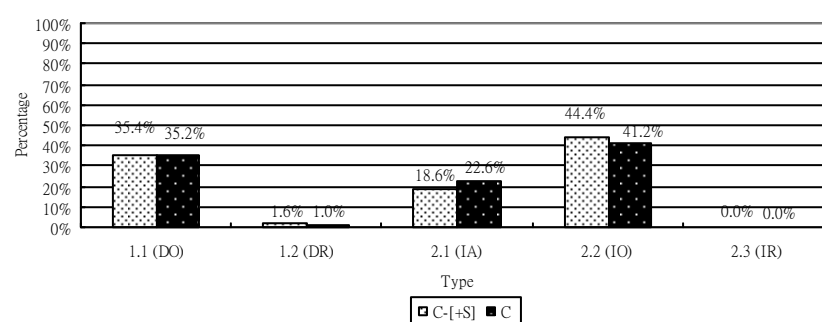


Figure 7 Percentages of the Control Group's Apologies under [+S]

Note: C-[+S] = the control group's apologies employed under [+S]; C = the control group's overall production of apologies in the present study

As shown in Figure 7, the control group's apologies when severity was high and their overall apologies showed a similar pattern. Both groups rarely employed Type 1.2 (DR) (1.6% and 1% for C and C-[+S], respectively) and Type 2.3 (IR) (0% for both groups). There was only a slight difference in the use of Type 1.1 (DO) (35.2% and 35.4% for C and C-[+S], respectively), Type 2.1 (IA) (22.6% and 18.6% for C and C-[+S], respectively), and Type 2.2 (IO) (41.2% and 44.4% for C and C-[+S], respectively).

The overall results show that neither high degree of severity nor high degree of responsibility were strongly correlated with the children's or the adults' apology choices. In other words, more indirect apologies were not elicited even when the offence was clearly intentional or severe. This surprising phenomenon may be due to the children's poor linguistic proficiency and the adults' concern about loss of face. It is likely that the children were not able to use more indirect apologies because of their limited repertoire, so that sometimes no difference could be detected when the level of responsibility or severity was higher. As for the adults, since it is assumed that they have attained a mature stage of linguistic development, the same or similar patterns might be due to their awareness of the victims' face needs. In other words, they might employ as many indirect apologies as possible as negative politeness strategies, even in the case of less severe offences or lower levels of responsibility, for fear of being impolite.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The present study explored Chinese children's patterns of development of apologizing strategies by investigating their perceptions of the offenders' degree of responsibility for the offence, the severity of the offense, and the consequent just punishment. Several issues have been addressed, including the correlation between the variables, in particular the degree of severity of the offence and level of responsibility for the offence and the perception of a "just" punishment on the one hand, and on the other hand the production of apologizing strategies.<sup>13</sup> A

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<sup>13</sup> In the literature, gender, severity, social power, social distance, and responsibility are all possible factors affecting apology use. In the present study we only examined responsibility and severity, which are also the two factors most commonly discussed.

key issue is that of the developmental trends in the use of apologies by children of different ages.

Pedagogically speaking, it is important to design scenarios to help Chinese children to differentiate severe from non-severe offences, and to know when the offender is responsible for his act. In this way they would be gradually learning the “adult grammar” concerning apology use. Likewise, our foreign students who are learning Chinese as their second language may need similar practice in learning to use Chinese apology terms correctly in context, as native speakers do.

However, the present study is limited in the following ways. First, we did not take prosodic features (such stress and tone) or paralinguistic information (such as facial expressions and body language) into consideration. These factors can be further examined in the future. Second, our scenarios contained only a single main offender, Little Bear, who clearly represents a child. Future research projects could adopt a role play task in which children and adults can play different roles, with a mixing of ages and genders, in order to see if the results are similar to the present findings.

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## 以中文為母語的兒童道歉語之習得

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### 摘要

本研究旨在探討以中文為母語之兒童使用道歉語的發展。本研究包含兩個控制變因，即責任與冒犯嚴重度。主要研究議題為兒童對於冒犯的認知與控制變因的關係，兒童使用道歉語的分類，及其道歉語是否受到控制變因和本身對冒犯認知之影響而有所不同。本研究採用兩種實驗題型：懲罰判斷測驗與看圖回答測驗。研究對象包含實驗組的一百二十位兒童，依平均年齡四至八歲分成五組，每組二十四人，以及對照組的二十四位成人。實驗結果顯示，中文為母語之兒童平均在四歲左右已能區分不同程度的責任與冒犯嚴重度。四歲與五歲兒童常因嚴重度高而給予較重的懲罰，較年長的兒童以及成人懲罰標準偏向責任，或是兩個變因混合考慮。口語語料顯示出，就主道歉策略而言，七歲以下兒童使用直接道歉策略多於間接道歉策略，七歲以上的兒童與成人剛好相反。就次道歉策略而言，所有兒童使用最多的是提供(Offer)，其次是承認(Acknowledgment)，要求(Request)最少。兒童使用次道歉策略也有階段性發展。最後，本研究發現可能的原因與兒童語言發展仍未至臻有關，因此較無法有效使用間接道歉策略。對成人而言，受到禮貌理論(Brown & Levinson 1987)的影響，成人仍會使用很多間接道歉策略，不因控制變因之不同或自我對於冒犯程度認知之不同而有顯著差異。

**關鍵詞：**道歉語，責任，嚴重度，冒犯，母語習得