Presidential Apology and Level of Acceptance:
The U.S. Beef Import Negotiation Upheaval in South Korea

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the apology strategies used by South Korean President Lee Myung-bak during the U.S. beef import negotiation upheaval in South Korea in 2008 and to investigate how these apologies were perceived by the South Korean public. The role of party identification as an audience-related variable in the perception of political apologies in the South Korean context was also examined. A content analysis of President Lee's speeches and related daily newspaper coverage was conducted to identify the main apology strategies employed by the president and conveyed to the public through the media during the crisis. Experimental work was then carried out to examine the level of acceptance of these strategies, with further research evaluating the effect of party identification on the overall results. According to the results of the experimental work, President Lee's apology strategies were generally ineffective, with the exception of the clear corrective action strategy. in addition the impact of party identification on the level of acceptance of the major apology strategies was confirmed.

Keywords: South Korean political apology, apology strategy, party identification, level of acceptance of apology

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Introduction

The government of South Korea banned imports of U.S. beef in 2003 after a case of mad cow disease (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) was discovered in the United States. Five years later, in April 2008, the administration of South Korean President Lee Myung-bak concluded negotiations with the United States on the resumption of beef imports. Shortly after, MBC, a major South Korean television network, aired a special report claiming there was a risk that beef imported under the new agreement could be infected with mad cow disease. Fear of the disease led many South Koreans to believe that the resumption of imports could cause public health problems, while others, already suspicious of the influence of Washington over the Lee administration, believed that the South Korean government did not consult the public sufficiently on the matter.

The resultant controversy led to a National Assembly hearing, anti-government demonstrations, and much-publicized candlelight protests in the capital, Seoul. During this period of political unrest, President Lee delivered public apologies on two occasions in order to control the issue. However, despite these interventions, public opinion on the matter remained sharply divided along partisan lines, and the government's approval rating plummeted to 29.2 percent in June from 52.5 percent in March of 2008.

In times of national crisis, political apologies are generally used to protect reputation, defend policy decision, and justify motives and intentions (Edwards 2005; Gold 1978). Under such conditions of crisis, political leaders can assure people of the rightness of their motives by admitting or denying faults, or by promising future corrective action (Gold 1978). As statements by political leaders can have a significant impact on the way they are perceived by the public, presidential rhetoric plays a vital role in the political process (Lim 2002). Consequently, the crisis communication strategies used to overcome political and national crises and the effectiveness of such strategies are important themes in the field of communications. In particular, the study of the perception and acceptance of political messages in times

of national crisis is of critical importance to overcoming crisis (Kasperson, Golding, and Tuler 1992).

Previous Western studies on the use of apology in crisis communication have mainly focused on the classification of apology strategies through rhetorical analysis (Benoit 2006; Benoit and Henson 2009; Bligh, Kohles, and Meindl 2004; Lee 2007). However, few studies have attempted to test this taxonomic work in order to formulate more substantial hypotheses (Sheldon and Sallot 2009).

With this in mind, this study attempts to investigate South Korean President Lee Myung-bak's apologies during the U.S. beef import negotiation crisis and to assess the effectiveness of different types of apologies within the South Korean context. It also looks at the effect of party identification as an audience-related variable in order to integrate the results with more pragmatic political concerns. The study is divided into two parts: the first part analyzes the apology strategies by President Lee in two major public speeches, which were covered widely in the media, while the second part investigates how the president's apology strategies were actually perceived by the public, and the extent to which party identification affected people's perception of those strategies.

Literature Review

Approaches to Crisis Communication

Benoit (2004) argues that audience perception of a crisis, including its perceived cause and degree of offensiveness, is more important than the crisis itself. The importance of subjectivity is also stressed by Millar and Beck (2004), who claim that social phenomena such as crises are constructed through communication. As such, one of the main purposes of communication in a crisis situation is to utilize this subjectivity in order to mitigate damage to one's image or reputation, and to encourage audiences to view one's behavior favorably (Benoit 2004). Although a crisis situation can negatively affect an individual's

effort to develop a mutual interest and beneficial relationship with an audience (Heath and Millar 2004), this problem can be overcome through the strategic use of public discourse.

As noted, prior studies of crisis communication have generally focused on identifying and classifying the content of crisis communication (Benoit 1995, 2006; Benoit and Henson 2009; Bligh, Kohles, and Meindl 2004; Hearit 2006; Karen 2009). A major representative work of this genre, Benoit (2004), outlines a comprehensive typology of image restoration strategies used in crisis communication. According to Benoit's schema, there are five general strategies that are commonly used in apologies: denial, excuse, justification, corrective action, and apology. Further subcategories include simple denial, blame shifting, defeasibility, good intentions, minimization, transcendence, and compensation. Hearit (2006) has also developed a five stance schema consisting of denial, counterattack, differentiation, apology, and legal stance. In addition to these representative classifications, a number of other apology strategies such as compassion without blame (Englehardt, Sallot, and Sprinston 2004), silence, hiding, and equivocation (Kim 2008; Park and Kim 2007), among others, are also noteworthy.

A number of other researchers have focused on assessing the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies, including Coombs and Holladay (2004), Scott and Lyman (1968), and Sheldon and Sallot (2009). Coombs and Holladay (2004) investigated the effects of crisis communication using Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Positioning crisis response strategies such as denial, excuse making, justification, corrective action, and apology on a "defensive-accommodative" continuum, they argue that more accommodative strategies better preserve organizational reputation in situations where greater attribution of crisis responsibility has been assigned. More recently, Coombs (2004a, 2004b, 2007) has focused on the role of crisis communication in the maintenance of favorable relationships with stakeholders, identifying the importance of "relationship history" to reputational threat. Sheldon and Sallot (2009) also conducted experimental work to investigate the effectiveness of crisis communication

strategies such as bolstering and corrective action strategies, based on Sheldon's earlier work (2006). Other studies have also shown that there is a correlation between the crisis communication strategy employed and the level of acceptance of that strategy (Allen and Caillouet 1994; Lyon and Cameron 2004).

In sum, crisis communication has generally been seen as a response to and defense from a crisis, and is usually accompanied by an apology. Rooted as it is in perception and discourse, it is also a process which aims to transform people's understanding and interpretation of a crisis. This study concurs with Millar and Beck's view that social reality is constructed through communication (Millar and Beck 2004), and attempts to integrate the classification-oriented approach of Benoit (2004) with the social science-oriented approach of Coombs and Holladay (2004).

The Apologies of Political Leaders

Given that crisis situations are ultimately rhetorical creations, political leaders use their own ethos and stylized rhetoric to construct them (Dow 1989). Apologia has been defined as a respons to crisis (Downey 1993; Edwards 2005; Hearit 2006). Existing studies also argue that political apologies can be defined as efforts to defend policy or to justify motives (Edwards 2005; Gold 1978). As with research on general crisis communication, studies specifically dealing with the apologies of political leaders have focused mainly on apology typology and the content of political rhetoric and discourse.

In the classification and typology tradition, Brummett (1981) analyzed the apology strategies of three U.S. presidential candidates—Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and John B. Anderson—in response to the perceived failure of national economic policy. He classified the apology strategies used by the three candidates as mortification, transcendence, and scapegoating, respectively. Brummett's work was important in highlighting the ways in which different rhetorical strategies can be used to interpret the same national crisis.

In the most recent decade, Benoit (2006) also examined the apol-

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ogy strategies of former U.S. President George W. Bush in response to public dissatisfaction with the Iraq War. He argued that President Bush built an impression of compassion, but denied error and refused to apologize for anything. Consequently, President Bush's discourse raised more questions about his decisions than it answered, and it thus did little to improve his image as president.

More recently, Benoit and Henson (2009) studied George W. Bush's apology strategies in relation to the Hurricane Katrina disaster of 2005. Using Benoit's earlier classification system, they showed that President Bush primarily employed the bolstering, defeasibility, and corrective action strategies. They argue that defeasibility, the strategy used most frequently by President Bush in relation to the crisis, was an inappropriate choice for a political leader because it conveyed a sense of incapability. Also, they believe that Bush did not use the corrective action strategy soon enough or indeed often enough, resulting in the strategy being viewed unfavorably.

Within the South Korean context, Kim (2004) studied the apology strategies of former South Korean President Kim Young-sam in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis. His work shows that the image restoration strategies that were used by President Kim, such as defeasibility and transcendence, were ineffective and were viewed unfavorably by South Koreans.

Another study by Lee (2007) analyzed the apology strategies of South Korean presidents Roh Tae-woo, Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung, and Roh Moo-hyun. Lee found that the apologies of the presidents mainly reflected a justification posture. These findings concur with other studies on crisis communication, which also suggest that the justification attitude is predominant in South Korea (Park and Kim 2007). In addition, the use of indirect discourse, which partly recognizes fault without offering a full apology, is also recognized as commonplace (Kim, Park, and Oh 2002). In contrast, sincere apology involving the recognition of responsibility and expression of deep regret is rarely used in South Korea (Kim 2004; Park and Kim 2007; Kim 2008).

A number of scholars have argued that the immutability of the

established social order within the Confucian tradition gives rise to a more *indirect* form of communication (Yum 1988; Kincaid 1987) as well as communication that seeks to preserve harmony and authority (Min 1996). Nevertheless, despite these features of Korean communication being widely recognized, little attention has been paid to verifying the real use of political apologies within South Korea and to assessing their effectiveness.

Moreover, studies of political apologies in general have understood such apologies as fulfilling the needs of one or another public relations goal, whether that be image restoration, crisis communication, or a subcategory of one such crisis apology. Given that the defense of crises by political leaders usually includes apologia, in this study the term "apology strategy" encompasses the wider efforts of political leaders to manage crises through public rhetoric.

Party Identification and Apology Accommodation

While prior studies of political apologies have focused mainly on the classification of apology strategies from rhetorical analysis perspectives, few studies have dealt with the public's reaction to specific apology strategies (Scott and Lyman 1968; Sturges 1994; Kim 2004). It is, therefore, unsurprising that little attention has been paid to audience-related variables, which may impact public perception of apology strategies, despite the widely-held assumption that political orientation and socioeconomic factors affect public perception of political messages (Kim 2008).

For instance, party identification has long been considered a major audience-related variable, which affects public opinion (Belknap and Campbell 1951; Campbell and Valen 1961; Owen 2000; Pillai, Doe, and Brodowsky 2004). Defined as the feelings of affinity people have with a certain political party and their degree of involvement with that party (Belknap and Campbell 1951), party identification is believed to be rooted in the individual's effort to maintain "cognitive balance" through a process of accepting the favorable and actively seeking to change the unfavorable (Sigel 1964).

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Within the Western context, many researchers have discussed the effect of party identification on public perception of and attitude towards political issues (Belknap and Campbell 1951; Owen 2000; Sigel 1964; Shamir 1994; Treier and Hillygus 2009). Within South Korea, similar studies have often expressed party identification in the post-war period as a preference for either the "ruling party" or "opposition party" (Kang 1998), with this preference seen as a substantial influence on public opinion (Kim and Yoo 1996).

Despite this, few scholars have incorporated these observations into investigations of the effectiveness of political messages, thorough investigations of what presumably involves the comparative analysis of the response of certain types of audiences to certain types of political messages. In the light of the theoretical and empirical advances in both message and audience discussed above, it would seem reasonable to begin investigating the interaction of these variables.

Research Questions

In order to investigate the nature and effectiveness of political apologies within the South Korean context, the following research questions were developed to focus the study further:

> RQ1. What apology strategies did President Lee Myung-bak use to deal with the U.S. beef import negotiation upheaval?
> RQ1-1. How did the media convey the apology strategies used by President Lee to the South Korean public?
>
> RQ2. How did South Koreans perceive the apology strategies used by President Lee and conveyed through the media, and what was the level of acceptance of those strategies?
>
> RQ3. Did the effectiveness of these apology strategies used by President Lee differ according to party identification?

In order to investigate RQ1, a content analysis of two presidential speeches delivered by President Lee as well as of major daily newspaper coverage of the two speeches was conducted. Given that public

Table 1. Apology Strategies and the Operational Definitions

Attitude	Apology strategy	Operational definition
Denial	Simple denial	To deny the incident/crisis
	Blame shifting	To shift the blame for the incident/crisis
Excuse making (evasion of responsibility)	Scapegoating	To scapegoat somebody for the incident/crisis
	Defeasibility	To claim the incident/crisis was outside one's control
	Accident	To describe the incident/crisis as a simple accident
	Good intentions	To emphasize good intentions
Justification (reducing offensiveness of event)	Bolstering	To bolster one's position with reference to past good deeds
	Minimization	To describe the incident/crisis as a trivial occurrence
	Differentiation	To differentiate the incident/crisis from similar occurrences
	Transcendence	To claim the incident/crisis took place for a just and worthy cause
	Fear mongering	**To threaten the audience with potential problems**
	Attacking the accuser	To attack and discredit the accuser
	Compensation	To offer compensation for the incident/crisis
Corrective action	**Ambiguous corrective action**	**To take corrective action without admitting responsibility**
	Clear corrective action	To take corrective action on the basis of acknowledged responsibility
Apology	Sincere apology	To apologize on the basis of acknowledged responsibility
Others	Simple silence	No response
	Hiding	To purposely avoid the matter
	Compassion without blame	To show compassion without admitting responsibility

Note: Bolded strategies have been added to the previous classifications by Benoit (1995) and Kim (2008). The apology attitudes are placed on a continuum from most defensive (denial) to most accommodative (apology), as proposed by Coombs and Holladay (2004).

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speeches are explicitly conveyed through media channels, media content analysis is essential in capturing messages as "they are delivered to the audience," regardless of the integrity of the transmission channels concerned. In order to investigate RQ2 and RQ3, experimental survey work was undertaken.

As a matter of definition, the term "apology" has been defined as "a broad term that means to respond to organizational criticism by offering a vigorous and compelling defense," including responses that "may be a defense that denies the validity of charges" (Hearit 2006, 4). Benoit and Hearit have further noted that apology connotes a crisis response to perceived error or wrongdoing, often involving either an actual apology or outright denial (Benoit 1995; Hearit 2006). This study inherits this disciplinary definition and regards the term as including broader categories of "attitudes," such as denial, excuse, and justification as well as specific "apology strategies" under each attitude, such as bolstering and defeasibility (see Table 1).

Content Analysis of President Lee's Apology Strategies

Content Selection

Two separate content analyses were conducted: one analyzing President Lee's speeches and the other analyzing related media coverage of the speeches in major South Korean daily newspapers. The latter study was carried out on the premise that the apologies were conveyed to the public by the media and, as such form, an integral part of the crises themselves (Coombs 2004; Sheldon and Sallot 2009). President Lee delivered his first speech on May 22, 2008, with another following nearly a month later on June 19. From these speeches, a total of 113 sentences containing apology strategies were identified and extracted.

Two major South Korean daily newspapers with contrasting political ideologies were selected as sources for the media content analysis, namely, *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh*. The mainstream conservative

newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* is recognized as generally taking a stance supportive of the conservative in government of President Lee, whereas the mainstream progressive newspaper *Hankyoreh* is recognized as generally taking a stance critical of the government.

The main intent of the two content analyses was to investigate whether the media's transmission of the apology strategies conformed to ideological expectations, and to compare the media representation of the apology strategies with the actual apology strategies given in the original speeches.

In order to select content from the media sources, this study used the official website of *Chosun Ilbo* (www.chosun.com) and South Korea's biggest Internet search portal Naver (www.naver.com), as *Hankyoreh*'s content is more readily accessible through Naver than through its own online search facility. Data dating from April 18, 2008, when the import negotiations were concluded, to July 18, 2008, a month after President Lee delivered his second public speech in response to the crisis, were collected.

Using search queries such as "Lee Myung-bak beef negotiation," a total of 113 articles were extracted from both newspapers: 45 from *Chosun Ilbo*, and 68 from *Hankyoreh*. From these articles, a total of 255 sentences containing presidential apology strategies were identified and collected, with 117 from *Chosun Ilbo* and 138 from *Hankyoreh*.

Operationalization and Procedure

In order to classify President Lee's apology strategies, Kim's apology strategy framework (Kim 2008), which is a reworking of earlier work by Benoit (1995), was employed. It was also assumed that all apology attitudes within the framework—denial, excuse making, justification, corrective action, and sincere apology—are positioned on a defensive-accommodative continuum as proposed by Coombs and Holladay (2004), enabling a more unified comparison of strategies. Within the context of this continuum, it is assumed that sincere apology is the most "accommodative" attitude, while denial is the most "defensive" attitude.

Two further apology strategies, fear mongering and ambiguous corrective action, were identified during the content analysis and added to the classification framework. Fear mongering is a strategy used to frighten the public with potential negative consequences that may or may not be relevant to the issue at hand, while ambiguous corrective action is a promise of corrective action pertaining to a matter irrelevant to the problem, thereby enabling the rhetor to avoid giving a clear admission of responsibility for the problem. It is believed that these strategies have not previously been incorporated into Benoit's model. Table 1 lists the full categorization of apology strategies used in the study.

Utilizing this classification, two graduate students majoring in Crisis Management at the School of Communication, Ewha Womans University, South Korea, selected the content following theoretical and practical training. From this content, each sentence containing an apology strategy was extracted as a separate thematic coding unit. If one sentence contained two kinds of apology strategies, it was treated as containing two separate apology strategies. A total of 368 sentences were used in the analysis: 113 from the speeches, 117 from *Chosun Ilbo*, and 138 from *Hankyoreh*. Using Holsti's (1969) method, the intercoder reliability of the two presidential speeches was 83.18 percent while that of media content was 87.05 percent.[1]

Results

A content analysis of President Lee's formal speeches was performed to identify the apology strategies that were employed. Among the 11 identified apology strategies, the most prevalent attitude was justification (45%), followed by corrective action (22%), excuse (21%), and apology (9%). The most prevalent apology strategy identified was fear

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1. Holsti's method: $IR = 2(M)/(N1 + N2)$ [IR = intercoder reliability, M = average agreement, N1, N2 = number of apology strategies from each coder]; intercoder reliability of two presidential speeches $= 28 \times 94 / (113 + 113) = 188/226 = 83.18$; intercoder reliability of media content $= 2 \times 222/255 + 255 = 444/510 = 87.05$.

mongering (22%), followed by ambiguous corrective action (19%), good intentions (14%), transcendence (11%), and sincere apology (9%).

Interestingly, fear mongering (22%), the strategy most used in the speeches, is a novel complement to Benoit's classification. As noted above, this strategy, which concurs with justification attitude, is an attempt to diminish the offensiveness of a crisis by appealing to a threat, which is often more alarming than the crisis at hand or even unrelated to it. For example, in the first speech, President Lee claimed that "competitor states have reached our level, and the gap between developed countries and our country has widened." This observation is not directly related to the beef negotiation crisis and appears to be an effort, through a general appeal, to heighten fear of an economic risk.

The second most frequently used strategy in the speeches, ambiguous corrective action (19%), is a remedy offered to the public that does not clearly acknowledge responsibility and suggests corrective action unrelated to the crisis itself. This strategy is also unique to the classification employed in this study. Thus, President Lee did not clearly acknowledge public concern arising from the beef negotiation, and neither did he suggest relevant corrective action to remedy it. A good example of this can be found in President Lee's first speech where he said, "[T]he government will create an environment conducive to investment from both domestic and foreign companies, which will create a number of quality jobs. I will humbly approach the people with trepidation." Even if the government were to argue that there was a general economic principle underlying both its position on the beef negotiations and the needs of the national economy, this strategy is still not directly related to the perceived cause of the crisis. Interestingly, fear mongering was used more in President Lee's first speech, while ambiguous corrective action was used more in his second speech, possibly indicating a change of tack, given the continued deterioration of public opinion.

The third most frequently used strategy in the speeches, good intentions (14%), was used to evade responsibility and make excuses

for a crisis by claiming that actions that led to the crisis were under-
taken for a good purpose. For example, in his second speech, Presi-
dent Lee stated, "I believed that I would not be able to succeed unless
I brought about changes and reforms within my first year in office."
Here, we can see a clear attempt to argue that the crisis was a result
of good intentions.

In addition, transcendence (11%) and sincere apology (9%) were
also identified in the speeches. The transcendence strategy is used to
frame a crisis as a necessary by-product of the pursuit of some greater
cause, while sincere apology refers to efforts to genuinely acknowl-
edge responsibility for a crisis and constitutes a full apology.

Following the analysis of the speeches, media reporting of the
president's apology strategies was then investigated. Given that the
media conveys political messages to the public, it would seem neces-
sary to analyze such messages as they appear in media reports in
order to better understand how they were perceived by the public.
Therefore, this was done to obtain a fuller understanding of the crisis
from the public's point of view. The most prevalent attitude identified
in the media coverage sampled was justification (30%), followed by
corrective action (24%), excuse (20%), and apology (17%), not too
dissimilar to the order of frequency found in the speeches. In total, 15
apology strategies were identified in the media reports, with the
strategies most frequently used in these reports being sincere apology
(17%), ambiguous corrective action (13%), clear corrective action
(11%), minimization (10%), fear mongering (8%), good intentions
(8%), and scapegoating (8%).

Note that clear corrective action, a strategy that only occurred
four times in the speeches (3%), was the third most frequently uti-
lized strategy identified in the media sampled. Clear corrective action
accompanies a genuine effort to identify the cause of the actual crisis
to enable corrective action to be taken to prevent such crises in the
future.

Interestingly, both media outlets stressed sincere apology far more
than the actual speeches did, with sincere apology comprising 17 per-
cent of apology strategies found in the media coverage, and only nine

percent apology strategies found in the actual speeches. In contrast, both media outlets downplayed fear mongering, with this strategy comprising eight percent of strategies found in the media coverage and 22 percent of apology strategies found in the actual speeches.

Table 2. Occurrences of Apology Strategies as Identified
in Select Media and Speeches

Attitude	Apology strategy	President Lee's speeches	Media report			Total
			Chosun Ilbo	*Han-kyoreh*	Media total	
Denial	**Simple denial**	–	**7 (6%)**	**8 (6%)**	**15 (6%)**	**15 (4%)**
Excuse (evasion of respon-sibility)	Scapegoating	–	12 (10%)	7 (5%)	19 (8%)	19 (5%)
	Defeasibility	8 (7%)	6 (5%)	5 (4%)	11 (4%)	19 (5%)
	Good intentions	**16 (14%)**	**9 (8%)**	**10 (7%)**	**19 (8%)**	**35 (7%)**
	Subtotal	24 (21%)	27 (23%)	22 (16%)	49 (20%)	73 (20%)
Justification (reducing offensiveness of event)	Bolstering	9 (8%)	1 (1%)	5 (4%)	6 (2%)	15 (4%)
	Minimization	2 (2%)	8 (7%)	18 (13%)	26 (10%)	28 (8%)
	Differentiation	–	–	1 (1%)	1 (0.5%)	1
	Transcendence	13 (11%)	3 (2%)	2 (1%)	5 (2%)	18 (5)
	Fear mongering	**25 (22%)**	**9 (8%)**	**12 (9%)**	**21 (8%)**	**46 (12%)**
	Attack accuser	–	2 (2%)	15 (11%)	17 (7%)	17 (5%)
	Compensation	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	–	1 (0.5%)	3 (1%)
	Subtotal	51 (45%)	24 (21%)	53 (39%)	77 (30%)	128 (35%)
Corrective action	**Ambiguous corrective action**	**22 (19%)**	**20 (17%)**	**14 (10%)**	**34 (13%)**	**56 (15%)**
	Clear corrective action	**3 (3%)**	**15 (13%)**	**13 (9%)**	**28 (11%)**	**31 (9%)**
	Subtotal	25 (22%)	35 (30%)	27 (19%)	62 (24%)	87 (24%)
Apology	**Sincere apology**	**10 (9%)**	**20 (17%)**	**24 (17%)**	**44 (17%)**	**54 (14%)**
Others	Compassion	3 (3%)	4 (3%)	4 (3%)	8 (3%)	11 (3%)
Total		113 (100%)	117 (100%)	138 (100%)	255 (100%)	368 (100%)

Note: President Lee's actual speeches did not include a simple denial strategy, but his statements were reported as such by the media; Bolded strategies were selected for use in the experimental work.

Combining the apologies found in both the speeches and the media coverage, the attitude which occurred most frequently was justification (35%), followed by corrective action (24%), excuse (20%), and apology (14%). Meanwhile, the apology strategy most frequently used was ambiguous corrective action (15%), followed by sincere apology (14%), fear mongering (12%), good intentions (10%), and clear corrective action (9%). This combined result gives an overall picture of the data that was presented to the public, thereby enabling the design of realistic apology scenarios for use in experimental work.

Experimental Work: Acceptance of the Apology Strategies

Method Outline

This experiment investigated the level of acceptance of the major strategies that were identified in the content analysis. Further work assessing the degree to which party identification affected this level of acceptance was then conducted.

   The major apology strategies identified in the content analysis were embedded in realistic scenarios that were presented to the subjects who were then asked to assess them in terms of their "level of acceptance." The most frequently occurring strategies from each attitude, including ambiguous corrective action (corrective action attitude), fear mongering (justification attitude), good intentions (excuse attitude), and clear corrective action (corrective action attitude) were selected for use in the experiment. A simple denial (denial attitude) was also added, enabling the testing of each attitude category found in Benoit's classification. Also, a sincere apology (apology attitude) strategy was added to all five apology strategy scenarios to provide the subjects with an "ideal apology" to use as a baseline setting. Both types of corrective action strategies, clear corrective action and ambiguous corrective action, were included for comparative purposes, particularly as the latter was new to the classification.

   These five apology strategies were then manipulated as scenarios

in the experiment and randomly assigned on a within-subject basis to avoid order effect. Subjects were asked to rate each strategy on a five-point Likert scale according to its "sincerity," "acceptability," and "effectiveness," yielding a total level of acceptance for each strategy, following Kim's (2006) reworking of Coombs and Holladay (2004). The five-point Likert scale ranged from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree" (see Table 3 for a list of the specific items used).

Table 3. Item List for the Level of Acceptance

Items	Used sentences
Sincerity	I think President Lee's apology is sincere
Acceptability	I can accept President Lee's apology
Effectiveness	I think President Lee's apology is effective to recover this crisis

An effort was then made to determine party identification along a conservative-liberal continuum, expressed specifically as an affinity with either the mainstream conservative Grand National Party or the mainstream liberal Democratic Party. Miscellaneous and no party options were also provided following the work of Campbell and Valen (1961).

A quota sampling method taking into account age and gender was used, and the data was based on the national population statistics of 2008.[2] The experiment involved 200 subjects, including 58 subjects in their 20s (30 male and 28 female), 70 subjects in their 30s (36 male and 34 female), and 72 subjects in their 40s (36 male and 36 female). The survey was conducted in Seoul, South Korea, in August 2009. The results were then analyzed using a paired t-test, one-way ANOVA and repeated measures ANOVA. The statistics package SPSS 12.0 was employed for this task.

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2. The statistics can be found at: rcps.egov.go.kr:egov.go.kr: 8081/jsp/stat/ppl-stat-if.jsp (accessed June 7, 2011).

Results

Prior to the analysis, the Cronbach's alpha of the dimensions of "sincerity," "acceptability," and "effectiveness" was 0.848, confirming the reliability of the questionnaire. The level of acceptance for each of these dimensions is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Acceptance Level of Apology Strategies

Scenario (apology strategy)		Sincerity	Accept-ability	Effecti-veness	Total
President Lee's apology strategies	Ambiguous corrective action (AC)	2.77	2.75	2.68	2.73
	Fear mongering (FM)	2.71	2.55	2.46	2.57
	Good intentions (GI)	2.68	2.61	2.41	2.57
	Clear corrective action (CC)	3.05	3.10	3.08	3.07
	Denial (DE)	2.50	2.38	2.19	2.36

Note: The result of the paired t-test on the total average score of the subjects' level of acceptance showed that there were statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between the following apology strategy pairs: AC-FM, AC-GI, AC-CC, AC-DE, FM-CC, FM-DE, GI-CC, GI-DE, CC-DE. There was no statistically significant difference between FM-GI in the paired t-test ($p = .942$). The five apology strategy scenarios identified in the speeches and newspapers as listed in descending order of usage frequency were AC, FM, GI, CC, and DE. In order to avoid order effect, the five apology strategy scenarios shown to the subjects were randomly assigned.

Overall, the acceptance score of President Lee's apology strategies did not, in general, exceed the scale midpoint (3.00), except for clear corrective action. This indicates that people did not respond positively on the whole to President Lee's apology strategies, although the clear corrective action strategy was viewed slightly more favorably. As the results of the experiment show, the most acceptable apology strategy was clear corrective action (3.07), followed by ambiguous corrective action (2.73), good intentions and fear mongering (both 2.57), and

denial (2.36).

Clear corrective action was rated as the most effective strategy, indicating a relatively greater acceptance of the decisive acknowledgement of a problem and clear actions to remedy it. Ambiguous corrective action was the next preferred apology strategy, indicating that South Koreans were relatively more accepting of this approach than a justification or excuse attitude, even if the corrective action was vague and/or irrelevant and did not involve acknowledgement of responsibility. Fear mongering aimed at justifying the crisis, and good intentions aimed at excusing it, had the same midpoint level of acceptance.

In identifying the differences in the level of acceptance of the apology strategies according to party identification, a one-way ANOVA of those who identified with the Grand National Party (n = 41), Democratic Party (n = 32), and no party (n = 119) was conducted. The fourth group, those who identified with Miscellaneous Party (n = 8), was excluded from the analysis due to insufficient sample size.

The perception of all five apology strategies differed according to party identification (see Table 5). Those who identified with the Grand National Party had the highest rate of acceptance of the five strategies, while those who identified with the Democratic Party had the lowest rate. Those who identified with the Grand National Party had above midpoint acceptance of the President's ambiguous corrective action (3.12) and good intentions (3.08) strategies, with the acceptance of fear mongering (2.95) and denial (2.86) being slightly below the midpoint. Meanwhile, those who identified with the Democratic Party had below midpoint acceptance of even clear corrective action (2.67), demonstrating a generally negative perception of President Lee's apologies.

As Table 5 shows, those who identified with the Grand National Party favored clear corrective action (3.46), followed by ambiguous corrective action (3.12), good intentions (3.08), fear mongering (2.95), and denial (2.86). Those who identified with the Democratic Party favored clear corrective action (2.67), followed by ambiguous corrective action (2.59), fear mongering (2.34), good intentions (2.27), and denial (1.87). Meanwhile, those who identified with no party had

Table 5. Difference in Acceptance of Apology Strategies according to
Party Identification

Scenario (apology strategy)	Party Identification	Average and SD	F*
Ambiguous corrective action (AC)	Grand National Party[a] Democratic party[b] No Party[b]	M = 3.12, SD = 0.99 M = 2.59, SD = 0.85 M = 2.68, SD = 0.88	4.293
Fear mongering (FM)	Grand National Party[a] Democratic Party[b] No party[b]	M = 2.95, SD = 1.02 M = 2.34, SD = 0.67 M = 2.52, SD = 0.78	5.728
Good intentions (GI)	Grand National Party[a] Democratic Party[b] No party[b]	M = 3.08, SD = 0.84 M = 2.27, SD = 0.74 M = 2.58, SD = 0.86	10.034
Clear corrective action (CC)	Grand National Party[a] Democratic Party[b] No party	M = 3.46, SD = 0.93 M = 2.67, SD = 0.94 M = 3.06, SD = 0.94	6.279
Denial (DE)	Grand National Party[a] Democratic Party[b] No party[c]	M = 2.86, SD = 0.88 M = 1.87, SD = 0.78 M = 2.34, SD = 0.82	13.088

Notes: (1) The result of Scheffe's post-hoc test showed that groups [a], [b], and [c] all have
statistically significant differences between groups * p < .05; (2) The five apolo-
gy strategy scenarios identified in the speeches and newspapers as listed in
descending order of usage frequency were AC, FM, GI, CC, and DE. In order to
avoid order effect, the five apology strategy scenarios shown to the subjects
were randomly assigned.

preferences similar to those who identified with the Grand National
Party, favoring clear corrective action (3.06), followed by ambiguous
corrective action (2.68), good intentions (2.58), fear mongering (2.52),
and denial (2.34).

The fact that those who identified with the Grand National Party
and no party favored good intentions (excuse attitude) over fear mon-
gering (justification attitude) could show that more defensive apolo-
gies are relatively more effective with certain groups. Also, the fact

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that those who identified with the Democratic Party favored fear mongering over good intentions could indicate that they are more likely to accept apology strategies that seek to justify an event rather than those seeking to excuse it, potentially showing that this group is more likely to accept less defensive apologies.

As each subject in the experimental survey was presented with the five different apology strategies repeatedly, it was possible to measure the interaction effects of party identification and apology strategy types using repeated measures ANOVA. A multivariate analysis of the level of acceptance of apology strategies shows that the results were statistically valid (Pillai's trace = .270, Wilks' lambda = .730, Hotelling's trace = .370, Roy's largest root = .370). However, the multivariate analysis of the interaction between apology strategies and party identification was not valid.

The results of Mauchly's Test of Sphericity failed to satisfy the sphericity assumption (p = .000). However, following a degree of freedom modification using the Greenhouse and Geisser or Huynh-Feldt type, in which the significance probabilities were p = .904 and p = .934, respectively, the sphericity assumption was satisfied.

The results of repeated measures ANOVA demonstrated that the apology strategies as within subjects effects had a significance probability of .000 and were thus statistically significant [Greenhouse-Geisser, $F(3.618, 683.796) = 20.638$, p = .000]. The main effect of party identification as between subjects effects was also statistically significant [$F(2.189) = 14.239$, p = .000].

Therefore, overall, the experimental survey work demonstrated that the level of acceptance of President Lee's apology strategies was affected by both the type of strategy used and party identification. Results of the experiment seem to support the notion that party identification has a distinct effect on the public's acceptance of apology strategies in the South Korean context.

Discussion and Implications

President Lee's Apology Strategies

This study drew upon Benoit's classification of apology strategies
(1995) and applied it to the South Korean context. Two additional
apology strategies were identified during the content analysis and
were added to the existing classification for use in experimental work.
The addition of fear mongering, the most frequently found strategy in
President Lee's speeches, accords with the results of work done by
Lee (2007), which found that justification attitudes were prevalent in
South Korean presidential speeches. Lee's findings attest to a wide-
spread use of the justification attitude, of which fear mongering is a
substrategy, while her finding that a sincere apology attitude is used
relatively less frequently is likely related to the authority-centered
communication features of South Korean Confucianism (Min 1996).
Meanwhile, the use of ambiguous corrective action, the second most
frequently occurring strategy in President Lee's speeches, accords
with the results of work indicating that indirect and unclear expres-
sion is prevalent in South Korea (Kim 2004, 2008; Park and Kim 2007;
Yum 1988; Kincaid 1987).

Aside from the additional apology strategies identified during the
content analysis, overall, Benoit's classification (1995) explained Pres-
ident Lee's apology strategies well. The two additional apology strate-
gies broadened Benoit's classification, better explaining the content
analyzed and warranting further testing beyond the South Korean
environment.

Effects of Apology Strategies

As a result of the experiment, the most accepted apology strategy,
clear corrective action (3.07), shows that there are differences between
strategies employed by political leaders and those actually preferred
by the (South Korean) public (Park and Kim 2007; Kim et al. 2004).
Given that in his speeches President Lee used less-accepted apology

strategies, such as fear mongering (2.57), relatively frequently (22%), while also using the most accepted apology strategy, such as clear corrective action (3.07), very infrequently (3%), it would seem that the overall effectiveness of the president's approach is open to question.

President Lee's use of the ambiguous corrective action strategy, the second most frequently occurring strategy identified in the speeches, was found to be the second most effective strategy overall (2.73). While the ambiguous corrective action approach was still below the midpoint acceptability level, it may be interpreted that South Koreans tend to favor more indirect expression to avoid conflict, as opposed to other strategies, such as justification and excuse (Kim 2008). Certainly, the results seem to indicate that president's apologies could have been of a lower level of acceptance, had this approach not been taken.

The level of acceptance of the fear mongering strategy (2.57), which was the most frequent strategy identified in the speeches, was similar to that of the good intentions strategy (2.57), and thus was not perceived to be very effective. Although previous studies have indicated that Koreans tend to prefer excuse making over justification (Kim 2004; Park and Kim 2007), this study shows that these two kinds of attitudes had a similar level of acceptance. Also, this study showed that the justification attitude is not effective in the South Korean context, while previous studies based on Western culture have reported it as being effective (Benoit 1995; Coombs 2004b; Sheldon and Sallot 2009).

The denial strategy (2.36) was the most ineffective of the five apology strategies tested. In contrast, a few studies have looked at the use of the denial strategy within the Western cultural context and have reported it to be relatively effective in certain situations (Bottom et al. 2002; Kim et al. 2004). The specific contexts in which denial may be an effective strategy warrant further investigation, but the findings of the present study seem to indicate that it is not a recommendable strategy in South Korea.

Differences in the Effectiveness of Apology Strategies according to Party Identification

Party identification was also found to impact the effectiveness of apology strategies in the South Korean context. Those who identified with the Grand National Party scored most of the strategies above or near midpoint, and were more accepting of defensive strategies than those who identified with the Democratic Party. The latter group had a far lower acceptance rate of all strategies including denial strategies (1.87). However, it is interesting to note that there were no major differences in the order of strategy preference despite party identification. Also, those who supported the Grand National Party and no party were significantly more accepting of the more defensive good intentions strategy (3.08 and 2.58, respectively) than they were of the more accommodative fear mongering strategy (2.95 and 2.52, respectively). This is consistent with the general expectation that an excuse attitude would be more effective than a justification attitude in South Korea (Kim 2004, 2006). Meanwhile, those who supported the Democratic Party were more accepting of the more accommodative fear mongering strategy (2.34) than they were of the more defensive good intentions strategy (2.27). This result may indicate that a more accommodative justification attitude is preferable to a more defensive excuse attitude when apologizing to a public which identifies with an opposing party.

Interestingly, those who supported no party shared similar perceptions with those who supported the Grand National Party, possibly indicating a "velcro effect" based on "not unfavorable relationship history" with President Lee (Coombs 2004b, 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2004). According to Coombs and Holladay (2004), unfavorable relationship histories lead to the attribution of greater responsibility than do favorable or neutral relationship histories.[3]

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3. See also Sheldon and Sallot (2009).

Conclusion and Limitations

This study verified the effect of party identification on the level of apology acceptance in South Korea, and showed that one element of a successful apology strategy is to consider the citizenry within the context of its political attachment. Concerning apology strategy typology, this study did not examine all possible combinations of strategies included in President Lee's apologies, and doing so would further test the robustness and general applicability of the results. It is recommended that a more diverse combination of apology strategies be analyzed in further research. In regard to the experimental work, it is possible that prior knowledge may have had an effect on the experiment as the subjects had presumably been exposed to President Lee's apologies to varying extents, though clear differences in the effectiveness of the strategies were observed. It is also possible that biases other than party identification, such as age and gender, affected the results. Finally, interesting differences between the actual speeches and media reporting of the speeches were observed, as were differences between media sources. These differences warrant further analysis and explication.

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