

Apology Translation in Diplomacy: Case Study of Prime Minister Abe's Apology Regarding "Comfort Women"

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(Translator)

This paper focuses on issues surrounding the interpretation from Japanese to English of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's apology statement concerning "comfort women" on April 27, 2007. At that time, U.S. House Resolution 121, which demands that the Japanese Government apologize for war crimes, was about to be adopted, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan was trying to prevent its passage. Prime Minister Abe, who had a considerable nationalist support base, used the phrase "moushi wake nai," which was interpreted as "to express apology." An experimental survey the author conducted with Japanese-English translators demonstrated that this translation amplified a tone of regret, and reactions on the part of the Japanese, U.S., Chinese and Korean media were clearly affected by it. Studying apology communication in multilateral diplomacy from the perspective of the translator is likely to contribute to successful diplomacy and it is the author's hope that this paper paves the way for more comprehensive studies regarding apology translations in diplomacy.

Introduction

Along with declining a request, expressing apology presents one of the most challenging aspects of intercultural communication, and it is natural that diplomatic apologies entail extreme difficulties for translators and interpreters alike (Torikai, 1998, p.189). This paper examines what occurred when a political apology statement was interpreted from Japanese to English, taking as a case study then-US President George W. Bush's and then-Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's joint press conference held on April 27, 2007.

At the joint conference, Prime Minister Abe mentioned Japan's war crimes, saying "申し訳ないといふ気持ちでいっぱいである *moushi wake nai to iu kimochi de ippai de aru*," which means "I am filled with the feeling of *moushi wake nai*." The interpretation of this phrase was "I apologize." Concerning this interpretation, A. Mizuno, a conference interpreter and Vice President & Secretary-General of the Japan Association for Interpretation Studies, stated: "*moushi wake nai* surely corresponds to 'express apologies,' but isn't it ordinarily translated as 'feel very sorry'?" [translation from Japanese by the author] (2007, n.p.)

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Some interpreters suggest that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) may have directed the interpreter to interpret “*moushi wake nai*” as “I apologize.” At around that time, the “comfort women” resolution was about to be adopted in the US House of Representatives and the MOFA did not want to anger US house members. At the same time, Prime Minister Abe, not wishing to lose support from his Japanese nationalist base, did not want to say “I apologize” in Japanese.

To clarify what happened and why, the author contacted the MOFA and the interpreter in question. Before discussing their response, this paper will review literature concerning differences in apology in Japan and the US, words and phrases used for expressing apology in Japanese and English, and past apology statements and translations regarding Japanese war crimes by Japanese politicians and officials. The author conducted an experiment as well concerning interpretation of apology phrases with Japanese and American interpreters to examine the degree of appropriateness of the interpretation in question. In addition, to reveal factors that might affect the interpreting, this paper investigates Abe’s political beliefs and positions as well as what actions the US Congress wanted Japan to take concerning war crimes. Furthermore, to reveal the effect of interpretation, this paper studies how the interpretation of Abe’s apology statement was perceived by members of Congress, as well as how the original speech in Japanese was perceived by the Japanese public and other Asian people.

1. Literature Review

Although there is not one academic article that studies the particular case of Abe’s apology statement and its interpretation, there are many previous research papers that compare Japanese apology communication styles with those prevalent in the US. Even though most of these papers compare apology communications within their respective cultures, these papers provide some clues for examining Japan-US intercultural communication norms of apology.

According to Sugimoto (1997), much of the previous research indicates that the Japanese tend to apologize elaborately and with less difficulty when compared to the Americans (p.104). Despite this apologetic national character, the Japanese war crimes issue remains controversial because Japan has not been able to apologize effectively, while other countries’ war crime issues have more or less been solved (Tanaka, et al, 2000, p.59). Two points can be made in positing the reasons for this seemingly odd phenomenon: a) Japanese politicians and officials have apologized for war crimes in ways which foreigners did not fully understand, or b) Japanese politicians and officials never actually intended to apologize for Japan’s war crimes toward foreign countries in the diplomatic arena.

It is probable that the intended effect of apology speeches by Japanese politicians and officials was not fully communicated because apology styles vary among cultures. There are two major differences in Japan-US intercultural communication concerning apology: perception of justifications and the language itself (English/Japanese). Many previous researches concerning differences between the U.S. and Japan in apology styles indicate that Japanese apologies tend not to be accompanied by justifications¹ of the speaker’s conduct. Suzuki (1999) indicates that Western culture has traditional *apologia*, which is rhetoric to recover ethos employing logos and pathos, while Japanese culture does not have this tradition. Rather,

it has a tradition of 切腹 *seppuku* ‘suicide,’ which in its modern form involves taking responsibility by acknowledging failure and resigning one’s post (p.153, 178). Japanese children are even taught that an apology accompanied by excuses is not really an apology (Sugimoto, 1995, p.151). In general then, it is common that when Japanese politicians and officials apologize in a Japanese way, Americans do not regard these as true apologies because their apologies do not include justification of their conduct. This point is examined in a later section of the paper.

The other factor that hinders mutual understanding of apology between the Japanese and the Americans resides in intrinsic differences between the Japanese and English languages. The word “apologize” in English means “defend, explain, or justify” and “confess, express remorse, or accept responsibility” (Wagatsuma & Rosset, 1986, 461-498), while the roots of “謝る *ayamaru*,” the Japanese word that is most commonly translated as “apologize,” is an expression of remorse, but not of accountability or a taking of responsibility (Sugimoto, 1995, p.147). According to Sugimoto (1995), *moushi wake nai*—the phrase used by Prime Minister Abe in the press conference in question—represents “another conventional fixed apology expression,” and implies “unconditional surrender and dislike of accounting” (p.151). Therefore, there is not a commonly used equivalent of “apologize” in Japanese, and the translation of apology intrinsically entails meaning shift.

The second point, that “Japanese politicians and officials have not really intended to apologize for the war crimes in the diplomatic arena,” may be true because people react differently in intercultural communication towards people not of their culture. Prime Minister Abe has been quoted as saying, “I think apology on behalf of a nation is different from personal communication.” (quoted by Yokota, 2007, p. 74). To examine the degree to which Japanese politicians and officials have apologized, their apology statements will be reviewed in Section 2.2 of this paper.

Research on the comparison of Japanese and American apology styles then suggests that the Japanese tend to apologize with less difficulty compared with Americans, and the reason that Japan has not succeeded in apologizing effectively for its war crimes may be that a) Japanese apologies are not understood, or b) Japanese are not apologetic in the diplomatic arena. The situating of Prime Minister Abe’s apology statement vis-à-vis these two viewpoints is discussed in Section 3.

2. Apology in Japanese and English

As introduced in the section above, Japanese apologies tend to lack justification elements because Japanese culture lacks the tradition of *apologia* (Suzuki, 1999, p.153 & 178). The Japanese language reflects this point; among Japanese words that are commonly used as translations of “apology,” there is really no equivalent for “apology,” which has a connotation of “defend” and “justify” (Sugimoto, 1995, p.147, 151). This section studies further the difference in connotations of apologetic words and phrases in Japanese and English, examines past apology statements by politicians and officials concerning Japan’s war crimes and their translations, and analyzes the appropriateness of translating *moushiwake nai* as “express apologies.”

2.1 Comparison and Analysis of Synonyms and Definitions of Apology in English and Japanese

Semantic fields covered by words from different languages usually have areas that do not overlap. As Jakobson (2000) states, “on the level of interlingual translation, there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units” (p.114). To examine the difference in connotations of apologetic words and phrases in Japanese and English, this paper will analyze the categorization of synonyms of apology in English and Japanese. Then, the definitions and translations of apologetic words and phrases in Japanese and English in dictionaries will be examined.

Categorization of the synonyms of apology in English and Japanese shows the difference in cultural background of apology between Japan and the US. The most significant difference in categorization by thesaurus in English (*Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus* and *thesaurus.com*) and in Japanese (Taishukan's *Nihongo Dai Thesaurus*) is that in Japanese, *shazai* ‘apology’ is divided broadly into two types, which are *ii wake* ‘excuse’ and *shazai suru* ‘apologize’— a classification that does not exist in English. *Shazai suru* ‘apologize’ is classified under the *mukuiru mukuwareru* ‘reciprocate and being reciprocated’ section, while *iwake* ‘excuse’ is classified under the *kangen, iiwake, nimai-jita* ‘cajolement, excuse, and duplicity’ section, which is a totally different section and has extremely negative connotations. There is no equivalent for defend/support, justify/legitimize, or palliate/cover up as synonyms of *shazai suru* ‘apologize’ in Japanese; instead, these words are categorized as *iwake* ‘excuse’ and are considered highly negative. This supports the aforementioned proposition that Japanese apologies lack a justification element and that there is no English equivalent for “apologize” in Japanese in the precise sense.

In addition to the study of synonyms above, the definitions and translations in dictionaries show the difference in cultural backgrounds of apology between Japan and the US. What is interesting to note is that, according to *Sanseido's Japanese Dictionary*, *moushi wake nai* means “there is no way to make an excuse” and “There is no room to make an excuse” (*mousiwake* means “excuse” and “justification” and *nai* is “no”), while the definition of “apologize” is, according to *Dictionary.com*, “1. To make excuse for or regretful acknowledgment of a fault or offense. 2. To make a formal defense or justification in speech or writing.” In this sense, *moushi wake nai* and “apologize” are opposite. Furthermore, according to the dictionaries’ (*Kojien* and *Sanseido's Japanese Dictionary*) definitions, *moushi wake nai*, *shazai suru*, *hansei*, *wabiru*, and *ikan*, which are words and phrases that have been used by Japanese politicians when apologizing for Japan’s war crimes (*q.v.* Section 2.2), all lack qualities of justification and have connotations of self-criticism and regret, while according to *Merriam Webster's Dictionary* and *Dictionary.com*, “apologize” in English has a connotation of justification and lacks self-criticism and regret elements. On the other hand, “be sorry” does lack justification and has connotation of sorrow and regret. Thus, it can be deduced that in general, the connotation of Japanese apology words and phrases is closer to “be sorry” than “apologize.” However, there remains the possibility that function-wise, the roles that *moushi wake nai*, *shazai suru*, *hansei*, *wabiru*, and *ikan* play in Japanese society might be closer to the roles “apologize” plays in American society than the role of “be sorry” plays.

In addition to synonyms and definitions of apology words and phrases in Japanese and English, the

translations of these words and phrases are examined, using Kenkyusya's *Reader's Dictionary* and *New Collegiate Dictionary*, Shogakukan's *Progressive Dictionary*, and Sanseido's *New Century Dictionary*. Japanese-English dictionaries show that *moushi wake nai* can be translated as either "be sorry" or "apologize," while *shazai suru* and *wabiru* are translated exclusively as "apologize." A study using English-Japanese dictionaries shows that, interestingly, *moushi wake nai* is not found at all as the translation of either "apologize" or "be sorry." However, "apologize" is translated as わびる *wabiru*, あやまる *ayamaru*, and 謝罪[陳謝]する *shazai [chinsha] suru*, which is included in the meaning of *moushi wake nai*, as Japanese dictionary reads "*moushi wake nai* is a phrase to utter when you *wabiru*" (*Kojien*, n.p.). As a similar word, "be sorry" is translated as *sumanai* 'feel bad.' *Sumanai* is not appropriate for official settings, and new hires who have just graduated from school are educated to say "*moushi wake nai*" when they would naturally say "*sumanai*." Therefore, it seems that "apologize" is better translated as *moushi wake nai* than "be sorry," considering register, but semantically, "be sorry" can be applicable.

The differences in connotations of apologetic words and phrases in English and Japanese shown above may bring about difficulty in interpreting apology and cause misunderstanding, and the translations in Japanese-English and English-Japanese dictionaries seem to reflect this. Concerning the translation of *moushi wake nai*, both "apologize" and "be sorry" are applicable.

2.2 Analysis of Translations Regarding Apologetic Words and Phrases Used in Past Apology Statements by Japanese Politicians and Officials for the War Crimes

It was shown in the previous section that there are differences in the cultural backgrounds of apology statements between Japan and the US. In order to examine the differences more specifically and find out what might happen when translating apology in a diplomatic setting, the author gathered past apology statements by politicians and officials concerning Japan's war crimes and their translations, using the website of MOFA and *World and Japan* database. A comparison of the various apology statements suggests that there are several levels in apology statements. Through analyzing the statements, the author focused on how far Abe went in apologizing and what is problematic when translating words and phrases at each level.

The first level in apology statements is to recognize Japan's "guilt," which is an important step because many Japanese nationalists have refused to recognize that "comfort women" were coerced. Prime Minister Abe was criticized for saying that there was no evidence that "comfort women" were coerced (Tsujimoto, 2007), but at the joint press conference, he seemed to take a positive step in recognizing that comfort women "were placed in extreme hardships."

The second level is to show reflection and remorse. Most of the past apology statements by politicians and officials concerning Japan's war crimes include the word 反省 *hansei*, which is difficult to translate. Torikai (1992) discusses translation of this word, employing the case of Foreign Minister Watanabe's remark on the attack on Pearl Harbor. A *New York Times* reporter claimed that *hansei* should be translated as "self-reflection," but Torikai is not supportive of this translation (p.36). She thinks that

“remorse” is excessive and “regret” would be safer (pp.36-37). In the translations for the above statements, *hansei* was translated as “reproach” in the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, and later translated as “remorse.” Prime Minister Abe did not use this word and any other words that stand for reproach or remorse.

Even though *hansei* might connote apology to some extent, the next level is to apologize. Most of the past apology statements by politicians and officials concerning Japan’s war crimes include the word お詫び *owabi*, and this word was translated as “apology” without exception. Prime Minister Abe did not use this word, but used *moushi wake nai* instead. One purpose of reviewing historical apology statements was to gather examples of translation for *moushi wake nai*, but only Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa used this word and there was no official translation for the statement. The translation of *moushi wake nai* will be examined further in Section 2.3 of this paper.

The fourth level would be to make a commitment and/or compensate for misdeeds. At the press conference, Prime Minister Abe showed willingness to contribute to making the 21st century a peaceful era in which there will be no human rights infringement cases.

Thus, there are differences in the cultural connotations behind apologetic words and phrases in Japanese and English, and there are some problematic words and phrases in translation, including *moushi wake nai*.

2.3 The Appropriateness of Translating *moushi wake nai* as “express apology”

a) Criticism against the Interpretation by Mizuno

The phrase *moushi wake nai* does not have an exact equivalent in English and requires interpreters to choose the most appropriate translation in accordance with context and situation, as does the word *hansei*. The interpretation for *moushi wake nai* depends on the speaker’s intention, but some expert interpreters believe that interpreting *moushi wake nai* as “express apology” is rather unusual. Mizuno (2007) mentions President Bush and Abe’s joint press conference and states that the interpretation for 申し訳ないという気持ちでいっぱい *moushi wake nai toiu kimochi de ippai* ‘I am filled with the feeling of *moushi wake nai*’ was simply “expressed my apologies,” drew his attention. He states “it is true that *moushi wake nai* could correspond to ‘express apologies,’ but I think, in most cases, the connotation of this word is like ‘feel very sorry’” (n. p.). A. Pym, professor at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona says, however, “Even though interpreters don’t translate *moushi wake nai* as ‘express apology,’ if ‘express apology’ functions in the same way as *moushi wake nai* in the US culture, this is an equivalent. Are there any cases in which *moushi wake nai* is used like ‘express apology?’” (personal communication, November 15, 2007). Upon Pym’s suggestion, the present paper will examine in the next section if there is a range of situations in which *moushi wake nai* can be (and indeed is) translated as “I apologize” by conducting an experiment of apology translations.

b) Experiment to Examine Whether Translating *moushi wake nai* as “I apologize” is Appropriate or Not

In order to examine the degree of appropriateness of translating *moushi wake nai* as “I apologize,” the

following experiment was conducted.

Seven short vignettes in both Japanese and English that include apologies were used. The apologies were arranged in a scale ranging from taking no responsibility at one end to taking complete responsibility and providing compensation at the other. Three Japanese translators translated the English version into Japanese, and three American translators translated the Japanese version into English. The present paper examines the translations to find out whether there is a range of situations in which *moushi wake nai* can be (and is) translated as “I apologize” (*id est, moushi wake nai* in Japanese culture has the same function as “express apologies” in the US).

The Japanese version (hereafter Version J1) is as follows:

1. 「30 分も遅れて申し訳ありません。乗るはずの電車が人身事故で来なくて、歩いて行けるもう一つの駅へと走っていたらハイヒールが排水溝の金具に刺さってかかどが取れてしまい、一度びっこをひきながら家に帰ったのです」「結果的に大変な目に遭わせてしまいました申し訳ない気持ちです *moushi wake nai kimochi desu*」
2. 「終電を逃しちゃったんですか？申し訳ございません *moushi wake gozai masen*、私がお引き止めしたせいで…」
3. 「今日は楽しかったです。すんなり帰れましたか？」「教えて頂いた帰り方だともう電車がなかったの、タクシーで帰りました。新宿経由だったら終電で帰れる時間だったみたいだったんですけど…」「うわ、申し訳ないです *moushi wake nai desu*…」
4. 「今回の事故は双方ともに不幸な偶然が重なって起こったこととは言え、ご迷惑をお掛け致しました皆様に慎んでお詫び致します *owabi itashi masu*。」
5. 「不倫の恋に狂って奥様に毒を盛ったなんて、私、どうかしていました。罪のないお子様にも心の傷を負わせてしまいましたことを深くお詫びさせて頂きたく存じます *fukaku owabi sasete itadakitaku zonji masu*。」
6. 「ブレーキとアクセルを踏み間違えてお庭に突っ込んでしまいました、犬小屋のワンちゃんに怪我をさせてしまいましたこと、心よりお詫び申し上げます *kokoro yori owabi moushi age masu*」
7. 「サラ金の利子がふくらんで苦しいなか、出来心で会社のお金に手をつけてしまいました。慙愧の念に堪えません。心より謝罪致します *kokoro yori shazai itashi masu*」

The English version (Translation of Version J1 by a MIIS professor. Hereafter Version E) is as follows:

1. “I’m so sorry that I’m 30 minutes late. The train I was supposed to take was delayed due to an accident involving an injury, then as I was running to another station within walking distance, my heel got caught in a sewer grate and came off, so I limped home to change into another pair of shoes before coming.”
“I’m sorry to have ended up putting you through so much trouble.”
2. “You missed the last train? I’m so sorry...if only I hadn’t detained you...”
3. “I had a good time today. Did you have any trouble getting home?”
“I had missed the last train according to your directions, so I took a cab home, although it seemed as if I would have been able to make the last train if I had gone via Shinjuku station.”
“Oh, I’m so sorry...”

4. “Although the recent accident was caused by unfortunate coincidences on both our parts, I sincerely apologize for the trouble I caused.”
5. “I must have been crazy to have poisoned your wife as a result of my illicit love for you. I apologize from the bottom of my heart for having caused such pain, not only to you but to your innocent children as well.”
6. “I apologize from the bottom of my heart for injuring your dog; I accidentally stepped on the gas instead of the brake, and ended up driving into your yard, hitting your doghouse in the process.”
7. “I truly regret having stolen company funds. I was in such dire straits due to growing interest payments for my consumer loans, and when faced with the opportunity, I couldn’t seem to stop myself. I apologize from the bottom of my heart.”

The speaker who apologizes in Vignette 1 has no personal responsibility; there was no way of knowing that his counterpart would encounter difficulties in keeping the appointment. The speaker who apologizes in Vignette 2 has slight responsibility, though basically it was his counterpart’s responsibility to keep track of the time on his own. The speaker who apologizes in Vignette 3 is responsible for the inconvenience that his counterpart had to go through due to the speaker’s misinforming him, but basically, it was his responsibility to grasp how to go back home. The speaker who apologizes in Vignette 4 shares responsibility for the accident to some extent, even if it was caused by an unavoidable coincidence. The speaker who apologizes in Vignette 5 is responsible for what she did because she did that intentionally (though the man who had an affair with her also has some responsibility). The speaker who apologizes in Vignette 6 is solely responsible for injuring the dog, though it was through a careless mistake. The speaker who apologizes in Vignette 7 intentionally violated the law, has complete responsibility, and is obligated to compensate the victim. As the speaker’s responsibility increases, the above expressions of apology change from *moushi wake nai* to “お詫ひ致します *owabi itashi masu*” or “謝罪致します *shazai itashi masu*.” However, as a native speaker of Japanese, the author feels that *moushi wake nai* is suitable even for Vignette 7, and decided to conduct another experiment wherein *moushi wake nai* is used in all the passages (hereafter Version J2) in order to see how native speakers of English translate them. Versions J1 and J2 are translated by three American translators (translators A, B, and C, and D, E, and F, respectively), and Version E was sent to three Japanese translators (translators G, H, and I) who are professors or students of the program.

In addition, the author asked American translators (A, B, C, D, E, and F) to translate a vignette that is similar to Abe’s speech (hereinafter referred to as J3), which is as follows:

私は、辛酸をなめられた元入所者の方々に、人間として、また施設長として心から同情するとともに、そうした極めて苦しい状況におかれたことについて申し訳ないという気持ちでいっぱいである、と述べました。

The results of this experiment are shown below:

Vignette	Source	A	B	C
1	<i>moushiwake ari masen</i>	I'm so sorry/ I apologize	I'm so sorry/ I'm really sorry	I'm so sorry/ Sorry
2	<i>moushiwake gozai masen</i>	I'm so sorry	I'm so sorry	I feel bad
3	<i>moushiwake nai desu</i>	I'm so sorry	sorry	I'm so sorry
4	<i>owabi itashi masu</i>	I sincerely apologize	gratitude	I sincerely regret
5	<i>fukaku owabi itashimasu</i>	I apologize from the bottom of my heart	I am so, so sorry for	I'm heartily sorry for
6	<i>kokoroyori owabi moushi age masu</i>	I apologize from the bottom of my heart for	Please accept my heartfelt apology	I want to offer my heartfelt apologies for
7	<i>kokoroyori owabi itashi masu</i>	I apologize	Please accept my sincerely apologies	offer my sincerest apologies

Table1: Translations of apologetic words and phrases in version J1

Vignette	Source	D	E	F
1	<i>moushiwake gozai masen</i>	I'm very sorry/I'm truly sorry	I'm sorry	I'm sorry/ I am sorry
2	<i>moushiwake gozai masen</i>	I'm sorry	I'm sorry	I'm sorry
3	<i>moushiwake nai desu</i>	I'm so sorry	I'm sorry	sorry
4	<i>moushiwake gozai masen</i>	I'm sorry	We are sorry	I am sorry
5	<i>moushiwake gozai masen</i>	I'm so sorry	I am truly sorry for	I feel deep sorrow
6	<i>moushiwake gozai masen</i>	I'm very sorry	I am really sorry	I am truly sorry
7	<i>moushiwake gozai masen</i>	I'm very sorry	sincerely apologize	I'm sorry

Table2: Translations of apologetic words and phrases in version J2

A	Deep remorse
B	regret
C	Sense of regret
D	Felt truly sorry for
E	Felt terribly sorry for
F	Sincere sorrow

Source: *Moushiwake nai to iu kimochi de ippai desu*

Table3: Translations of apologetic words and phrases in version J3

	Source	G	H	I
1	I'm sorry	<i>sumimasen/sumimasen deshita</i>	<i>Moushiwake arimasen/kawaisou data ne</i>	<i>Moushiwake arimasen/gomeiwaku wo okake shimashita</i>
2	I'm so sorry	<i>Warukatta ne</i>	<i>Moushiwake arimasen deshita</i>	<i>Sumimasen deshita</i>
3	I'm so sorry	<i>Shitsurei shimashita</i>	<i>Moushiwake arimasen deshita</i>	<i>Taihen deshita ne</i>
4	I sincerely apologize	<i>Moushiwake gozaimasen deshita</i>	<i>Owabi moushi age masu</i>	<i>Moushiwake naka zonji masu. Shazai itashi masu</i>
5	I apologize from the bottom of my heart	<i>Dou owabi shitemo shikareru monodeha arimasen</i>	<i>Moushiwake naku omotte imasu</i>	<i>Owabino shiyou mo arimasem</i>
6	I apologize from the bottom of my heart	<i>Moushiwake nai kimochi de ippai desu</i>	<i>Kokoroyori owabi itashi masu</i>	<i>Hontouni moushiwake naku omotte imasu</i>
7	I apologize from the bottom of my heart	<i>Fukaku owabivo moushi agemasu</i>	<i>Hontouni moushiwake arimasen deshita</i>	<i>Hukaku hansei shi shazai itashimasu</i>

Table4: Translations of apologetic words and phrases in version E

c) Analysis of the Results

Overall, the results show that *moushi wake nai*, which was used in Abe's speech, is commonly translated as "I am/feel sorry," rather than "express/extend apology," and *owabi itashi masu*, which was used by successive prime ministers, is commonly translated as "express/extend apology." It was deduced that "*moushi wake nai*" is usually translated as "I am/feel sorry" because in the translations of Vignettes 4, 5, 6, and 7 (wherein J1 uses *owabi shimasu*, while J2 uses *moushi wake nai*), "I am/feel sorry," was used 18 times in J2, while the phrase was used only 2 times in J1. Usually, it is *owabi shimasu* that corresponds to "express/extend apology" because the majority (8 times) of the translations of *owabi shimasu* in the Vignettes 4, 5, 6, and 7 in J1 was "express/extend apology." Furthermore, no one translated *moushi wake nai* in J3 as "apologize."

At the same time, however, the results show that *moushi wake nai* could be translated (*id est*, has the same function in the US culture) as "express/extend apology," depending on the situation. For example, two out of three participants translated *makotoni moushiwake nai kimochi desu* as "sincerely apologize"

regarding Vignette 7 of J2, and “apologize” was translated as *moushi wake nai* in five cases in the translation of E.

Therefore, though the results of this experiment suggest that Abe’s interpreter’s translation of *moushi wake nai* as “express apology” was not a widely used translation, it could be a proper translation if it reflected the speaker’s intention.

d) Experiment to Prove the Effects of Translation Concerning the Translation of *moushi wake nai*

In the previous section, it was suggested that *moushi wake nai* should have been translated as “be sorry,” while it was demonstrated that *moushi wake nai* could be translated in either as “express apology” or “feel/am sorry.” This section seeks to confirm whether the translation “express apology” and “feel/am sorry” give different impressions in the context of Abe’s statement.

To verify the differences in impression caused by the translations “express apology” and “feel/am sorry” in the context of Abe’s remark, a questionnaire was created. It presents the original translation of Abe’s remark retrieved from the website of Prime Minister’s office and the second version wherein “express apology” is replaced by “be sorry,” and asks respondents to note the difference in impression between the two texts. The participants were eight students and alumni of the Translation and Interpretation program in MIIS and a professor and a graduate student specialized in US-Japan relationships, all of whom were native speakers of English.

All of the participants recognized a difference in the impression created by “express apology” and “be sorry” within the given context. The list below is the précis of the answers given.

Version 1 (express apology)

Impressions of the word:

more official (apologizing on behalf of the country, perhaps)/more formal (2)
sincere/more sincere/ has a more explicit nuance of responsibility/more contrite
means I feel personally responsible for something bad that has happened
less direct

Backtranslation:

心からお詫び申し上げます *kokoro kara owabi moushi age masu*/お詫び申し上げました *owabi moushi age mashita*/お詫び申し上げます *owabi moushi age masu*
遺憾の意を表します *ikan no i wo hyoshi masu*/遺憾の意を表明する *ikan no I wo hyomei suru*
・・・については謝罪の言葉を述べました *...ni tsuite wa shazai no kotoba wo nobe mashita*

Version 2 (be sorry)

Impressions of the word:

casual (2)/colloquial/Inappropriate (considering the magnitude of the thing he is apologizing for)/sounds more like a personal apology from the Prime Minister, seems as if it’s his fault because he is the subject of the sentence/is used more commonly in reference to something which one did oneself in the recent past, could also mean that I feel bad something happened to that person, although I don’t necessarily feel

responsible./could be interpreted as more sympathetic than contrite, as in “I am sorry to hear that”

generic

more direct

Backtranslation:

申し訳ない *moushi wake nai*/申し訳ありません *moushiwake ari masen*/申し訳ございません

moushiwake gozai masen

ごめんなさい *gomen nasai*

どれほど残念なことであったか、というふうにお話しました *dorehodo zannen na koto de attaka, to iu*

fuuni ohanashi shimasita/大変残念でした *Taihen zannen deshita*

お詫び申し上げました *owabi moushiage mashita*

According to this data, first, “express apology” is more formal and appropriate for a prime minister’s utterance. Therefore, it is reasonable that the interpreter translated *moushiwake nai* as “express apology.” Nonetheless, “express apology” is more sincere and contrite than “be sorry,” and is a little too strong as a translation of *moushiwake nai* because *owabi* and *shazai*, which are stronger than *moushiwake nai*, are used in the backtranslations. The next section examines how this translation affected the public perception of Abe’s remarks, given the political situation under which Abe’s remarks were made.

3. Political Aspects and the Effect of the Translation of Prime Minister Abe’s Remarks

Why did Abe not repeat the phrase “I am feeling the same way as former Prime Minister Murayama” as most of the politicians did and why did he use the word *moushi wake nai*, instead of *owabi*? The answer to this question is investigated below.

3.1 Prime Minister Abe’s Intentions

While the speaker at the press conference was Prime Minister Abe alone, it could be MOFA officials that directed word choice to the interpreter. The speaker’s intention should be analyzed then taking into consideration both of these actors’ interests.

a) Prime Minister Abe’s Personal Intention

Abe’s standpoint in relation to the “comfort women” issue can be further classified into two categories: one that is based on his personal belief, and the other based on his need for securing votes.

His personal belief regarding interpretations of Japanese history seems to be quite firm; he used to be an executive director of the “Association of Young Statesmen Concerned with Japan’s Future and History Education” (Uozumi, 2007). This association supports the “Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform,” which claims that history textbooks should not mention the Nanking Massacre and “comfort women” because they might not be historical facts (Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, n.d.). The association is particularly opposed to acknowledging the Nanking Massacre and existence of “comfort women,” and even demands that Yohei Kono to retract the so-called “Kono

statement” (*JanJan*, 2005). In a book edited by the association (1997), Abe even declared, “I will make my best efforts to contribute to the association’s activities because I believe the task of history education should not be one that teaches children fabricated and distorted stories” (p.448-450) [translation by the present author]. It can thus be inferred that as a private individual, Abe is not willing to recognize the Japanese government’s responsibility regarding “comfort women” and the need to apologize.

It seems that Abe needed to be conservative and nationalistic for the sake of vote garnering as well. Nakakita (2007) found that Abe tried to build a more stable support base that could replace influence-peddling by emphasizing a conservative ideology, preaching a “breakaway from the postwar regime,” and mobilizing grass-roots conservatives in much the same way as President George W. Bush did in the United States (*Hokkaido Shimbun*, Nov. 16).

Therefore, for public and private reasons, Abe was unwilling to apologize for Japan on the “comfort women” issue and, at Diet sessions in 1997, stated that there was no evidence that such women were forcibly abducted (Abe, 2007). He likely made the statement at the joint press conference on April 27, 2007 for diplomatic reasons described below.

b) Prime Minister Abe’s Intention as a Representative of Japan

Before Prime Minister Abe visited the U.S., a resolution that demands an official apology from Japan for the “comfort women” issue was proposed to the U.S. House of Representatives on January 31, 2007 (*Congressman Mike Honda*, 2007). Prime Minister Abe’s remark on March 1, 2007, which “publicly backed away from his nation’s previous apologies to the comfort women” (Harden, 2007) by claiming there is no proof that the Japanese coerced Asian women into becoming “comfort women,” increased support for the resolution “as many American lawmakers expressed outrage over the statements” (Harden, 2007). Abe’s statement raised criticism even among conservatives. P. Brookes, a senior fellow at Heritage Foundation, which is known as a conservative think tank (Nakayama, 2000, p.118), stated “Abe apparently meant to boost his sagging popularity at home with this ill-conceived attempt at historical revisionism, but it’s roiling already testy regional waters, undermining vital American interests in Asia - and needlessly dishonoring Japan” (Brookes, 2007).

Amid this US-led criticism of Japan, Japanese Ambassador Ryozo Kato sent letters to leaders of the House of Representatives that said the resolution “will almost certainly have lasting and harmful effects on the deep friendship, close trust and wide-ranging cooperation our two nations now enjoy” (Harden, 2007). Trying to prevent the resolution from passing, he explained: “since 1993 Japan has repeatedly and officially apologized for its (“comfort women’s”) harsh treatment” (Harden, 2007). Therefore, as a representative of Japan, Abe needed to apologize in order to prevent the resolution from passing, while MOFA emphasized that the Japanese government had already apologized.

3.2 Intentions of the Representatives Who Demanded that Japan Apologize for War Crimes

Another significant political factor concerning Abe’s statement on April 27 was US representatives who demanded that Japan apologize for war crimes. This section focuses on what exactly they wanted.

The leader of the movement demanding that the Japanese government apologize for the victims of the “comfort women” issue was U.S. Congressman Mike Honda. In his address to the U.S. House of Representatives’ Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment in support of House Resolution 121 in February 15, 2007, he stated, “As someone who was put into an internment camp as an infant, I know firsthand that we must not be ignorant of the past, and that reconciliation through government actions to admit error are the only ones likely to be long lasting.” In an interview with Nishino, he stated that he had demanded that Japan apologize in order to bring peace of mind to the victims and to bring about historical reconciliation between Japan and other Asian countries (Nishino, 2007, p.78).

On the other hand, Nishimura (2007) indicated that Asian-Americans constituted a substantial portion of Congressman Honda’s constituency, and he led the movement because of pressure from Chinese and Korean organizations (p. 80). The Chinese Americans’ reason for the anti-Japan movement was, according to Tan (2007), to show a united front and show their presence in a multiethnic nation (p.88). For those who joined the movement for the sake of tightening the bonds among themselves, the reaction of Japan—including the wordings of apology statements—presumably did not really matter.

Concerning those who joined the movement to bring about peace of mind to the victims, their expectations were clearly written in Resolution 121, which calls for Japan to “acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility.” The author searched for the words that seem to be acceptable for the Congressmen from more than 500 synonyms, but “apologize” seemed to be most appropriate, and other words could be used only as supplements. Furthermore, the Japanese should be aware that the word “apology” entails justifications in U.S. culture, as was explained in the sections above.

Therefore, the word “apologize,” which is not usually used as a translation of *moushi wake nai* but was used in the translation of Abe’s speech, seems to be a crucial word for the representatives who were seeking for peace of mind for the victims.

3.3 How the Translation Was Perceived Domestically and Abroad

Those who had an intense interest in Prime Minister Abe’s statement regarding “comfort women” can be separated into three parties: Japanese nationalists who are Abe’s support base; the U.S. Representatives who were to vote for the resolution demanding that the Japanese government apologize for the “comfort women” issue and to the “comfort women”; and former “comfort women” (as well as the governments of the countries they are from). The perceptions of each party are reviewed below.

a) Japanese Nationalists’ Perception of the Statement

While Japanese nationalists were aware that Abe’s statement was translated as “I apologize,” they seemed to believe that Abe’s statement was not understood correctly by the U.S. and are still sympathetic to Abe. The reaction for Abe’s statement by the Japanese nationalists may be most appropriately reflected by articles of the *Sankei Shimbun* because this newspaper is quite often subscribed to by nationalists (Ueno, 2001). A reporter for the newspaper, Abiru (2007) wrote the following regarding Abe’s statement:

The Prime Minister's intention was clear; what was important was showing candid sympathy to the "comfort women"'s predicament because foreign media criticized that he lacked an awareness of human rights. This was despite the fact that he merely indicated that there was no "coercion in a narrow sense" that involves the abduction of "comfort women" by the authorities—recognizing that there was "coercion in a broad sense" that involves involuntary employment in statements at the Diet.

As for the reason for his sympathy for the "comfort women," he emphasized that there was "such a situation" in which the "comfort women" were placed, without mentioning the involvement of the Japanese government and constituted authorities. The intention of this statement was to emphasize that the wartime human rights infringement was not solely done by Japan and to have the audience focus on the future instead of on the past. In this way, he did not give up his basic belief that there was no "coercion in a narrow sense." [Translation by the present author]

Another reporter from the *Sankei Shimbun*, Komori (2007) reported that Prime Minister Abe miscalculated in handling the "comfort women" issue because his words 同情 *doujou* 'compassion' and *moushi wake nai* 'feel sorry' were translated as "express apology." Furthermore, the Japan Local Assembly Member League (2007, n.p.), which is a nationalistic organization under the banner of "Pride in Japan," stated that the U.S. side misinterpreted Prime Minister Abe's intention as apologetic.

Therefore, even though Japanese nationalists were aware of the fact that Prime Minister Abe "apologized" for the "comfort women" issue in the English translation, they believed that Abe did not intend to apologize, partly because he used the word "*moushi wake nai*" in the original Japanese.

b) U.S. Representatives' Perception of the Apology Statement

An article reported a comment by Representative Mike Honda, who is the principal sponsor of the resolution, as follows:

"I am heartened that Prime Minister Abe today expressed his apologies for the suffering of 'comfort women'. The logical extension of Mr. Abe's remarks is now for the Government of Japan to endorse the prime minister's personal sentiments in a formal, official and unambiguous fashion, recognizing that these women were coerced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army before and during World War II" (States News Service, 2007).

Aside from Mike Honda's comment, there seems to have been no newspaper coverage of comments on Abe's apology statement on April 27 by co-sponsors of the resolution, but several media outlets covered comments of some US representatives and officials. The Associated Press reported that "Representative Roy Blunt, R-Mo., said Abe 'expressed regret that his comments [This "comments" refers to Abe's statement in March in which he said that he did not recognize the "coercion in a narrow sense" of "comfort women"] were not as he intended for them to be and expressed great sympathy with people who had been placed in that kind of situation'" (Klug, 2007). Klug further reported that, "U.S. officials now say that Abe's recent public statements in support of the 1993 apology have been

convincing” (Klug, 2007). The BBC also mentioned Representative Blunt’s comment and emphasized that Abe had changed his attitude regarding the “comfort women” issue from that expressed in March (BBC, 2007).

That Representative Honda perceived that Abe apologized and that Abe would take actions required by the US representatives in the future, and at least some Western media took Abe’s apology statement on April 27 as indication that he had changed his attitude to one more apologetic on the “comfort women” issue.

c) Former “Comfort Women” and Their Countries’ Perception of the Apology Statement

The comments on Abe’s statement by Asian media are filled with anger, as they perceived that Abe had not changed his thought on the “comfort women” issue.

KCNA, a Korean news agency, covered the statement as “Abe’s window-dressing ‘apology’ for the ‘comfort women’ issue” (KCNA, 2007), and the *New Straits Times*, a Malaysian newspaper, did not interpret Abe’s statement as an apology, stating “Why does Japan not compensate the aged men and women who were its victims more than 60 years ago? It can and it should. Sympathy doesn’t cut it” (Ching, 2007). Yonhap, a Korean news agency, reported that American aides of the senators and Representatives were “extremely dissatisfied,” stating “what Abe said today was actually weaker than the Kono statement,” and “It wasn’t even clear to them what Abe was trying to say” (Yonhap, 2007). Those comments were made not with regards to the joint press conference on 27th, but with regards to Abe’s statement in a meeting with leaders of the U.S. House of Representatives on the 26th. However, the words used by Abe were almost the same on both days. Regarding Abe’s statement on the 27th, this news agency stated that “the prime minister never admitted that the women were forced,” that “He made new entries in the political lexicon by talking about a ‘sense of apology’ or a ‘sympathetic mind’ (Yonhap, 2007), and that “These statements do not construe an unequivocal apology to the estimated 200,000 women who were forced into sexual slavery. They amount to no more than words of sympathy and empathy. In fact, it is just gobbledygook as far as the former sex slaves are concerned” (Yonhap, 2007). Yonhap further stated as follows:

The expression *moushi wake nai* was the one that Abe had been using before, and he did not mention who took the women coercively this time either. This means that he did not recognize that the Japanese military coerced the women to do the job. Abe’s expression was conveyed as “sense of apology” in English. This was not the idiomatic phraseology. [Translation from Japanese to English by the author. Original: Korean] (Chosun Online, 2007, April 27)

Concerning the former “comfort women’s” perceptions of Abe’s statement on the 26th, Lee Young Su, who was a Korean visiting the U.S. and was preparing for a protest outside the White House, said “Prime Minister Abe’s apology is very evasive and cautiously worded, and in it he does not take direct responsibility on behalf of the Japanese government” (NPR, 2007).

Overall, victims of the “comfort women” case and their home countries do not perceive that Abe has apologized to them because Abe did not seem to basically change his convictions with regards to the issue. This is partly because Abe’s phrase *moushi wake nai kimochi* was translated as “sense of apology.”

d) Analysis of the Differences in the Perceptions

There are differences in interpretation of Abe’s statement among Japanese nationalists, the U.S., and countries of the “comfort women” victims. Concerning the interpretation of Abe’s true intention, Japanese nationalists and victim countries of the “comfort women” case did not believe that Abe had changed his stance regarding this issue and apologized, while the U.S. took him at his word and welcomed his “change.” The Japanese and the victim countries’ media mentioned the translation shift between *moushi wake nai* and “express apology,” and this is one reason for their thinking that Abe had still not unequivocally apologized. These differences in perception toward Abe’s comment among the three parties show that each party interpreted the statement in ways that were convenient for them, and the translation of Abe’s statement with regards to *moushi wake nai* amplified this tendency.

4. Why *moushi wake nai* was Interpreted as “I Apologize”

As examined in Section 2.3 of this paper, it is not usual to translate *moushi wake nai* as “express apology,” but this translation could be appropriate depending on the situation. Why did Abe’s interpreter translate *moushi wake nai* as “express apology”?

One of the best ways to identify what happened regarding the translation is, naturally, to ask people who were involved in this matter. There are two ways: to ask MOFA if they directed the interpreter to interpret *moushi wake nai* as “express apology,” and to ask the interpreter if he or she was directed to do so by MOFA.

The author called MOFA and interviewed an official. According to the person, the ministry is involved in assisting the prime minister’s diplomatic activities, and these activities always entail previous “study group sessions” involving the prime minister and MOFA staff (e.g. Director-General of the North American Affairs Bureau). Persons in charge of interpretation of the prime minister’s speeches are provided by MOFA, and the interpreters attend the sessions. Basically, the interpreters are chosen from the MOFA staff, but if no capable person for the assignment is available, they hire professional interpreters from outside of MOFA. The “study group sessions” are like briefings to the prime minister in which MOFA staff members explain the background information of the issues and sometimes advise what to say and/or what not to say.

The interpreter on the joint press conference stated that he was never directed by MOFA concerning interpretation of the conference. He continued: “All the preceding prime ministers used to say *hansei* until former Prime Minister Hashimoto. The word *hansei* does not mean apology, but interpreting the word as ‘reflect on oneself’ does not convey the implication of this word, so I used to interpret *hansei* as “remorse” or “contrition.” When former Prime Minister Abe said *moushi wake nai*, I may have decided at that instant that the word could be interpreted as apology.”

Thus, it was revealed that the interpreter translated *moushi wake nai* as “express apology” through his own instantaneous decision. The interpretation was delivered simultaneously, and this means that slight meaning shifts were unavoidable. He might have used another translation if he had had sufficient time to think. This point will be discussed further in the next Discussion and Conclusion section of this paper.

Discussion and Conclusion

Apology styles differ among cultures and one party might not understand an apology from the other party if it is interpreted word-for-word. In addition to the cultural difference, apologies in the diplomatic arena entail various obstacles. One example is that interpretation in the political field is generally required to be as literal as possible even if a different wording could function as well or better (Iida, 1989, p.12). Another example is a significant difference in cultural context vis-à-vis certain words, such as the literal translation of Prime Minister Sato’s word *zensho shimasu*. The literal translation of these words is “I will handle it properly,” but its implication is “I will not do anything.” The literal interpretation of these words caused miscommunication between President Nixon and Prime Minister Sato².

Furthermore, apologies in diplomacy involve various stakeholders and do not necessarily reflect the intentions of people who were really hurt and people who are trying to apologize. In the case of Prime Minister Abe’s speech, he needed support from his nationalist constituency, while MOFA—which administers Japan’s diplomacy—tried to emphasize Japan’s apologetic attitude, being conscious of prevalent views in the U.S. Congress. On the other hand, in addition to people who suffered from the “comfort women” case, there might be Asian-Americans who utilized the “comfort women” issue to solidify their group identity in the U.S.

Thus, apology communication in diplomacy is complicated, especially when multiple countries are involved. Translation might make this communication even more complicated because, as the case study shows, situations exist in which one phrase can be translated as two similar but different phrases and—even if both of them are correct translations—the difference can have a significant impact in the diplomatic and political world. How to communicate apologies smoothly in multilateral diplomacy varies on a case-by-case basis, but studying the cases from the perspective of the translator is likely to contribute to successful diplomacy. This paper, the author believes, paves the way for more comprehensive studies regarding apology translations in multilateral diplomacy.

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Notes

1. The closest word to Suzuki's "apologia" and Sugimoto's "account" seems to be "justification," and hereinafter this word is used.
2. At the summit meeting between Prime Minister Sato and President Nixon in 1970, President Nixon requested Japan to restrain its export of textiles to the U.S. and Prime Minister Sato answered "善処します *zensho shimasu*." The literal translation of *zensho shimasu* is "I will handle it properly" and this phrase can mean that literally, but politicians sometimes use this phrase to imply "I will not do anything" and Japanese people understand it in this way as well (Torikai, 1992, p.38). Prime Minister Sato's words are said to have been translated in the more literal manner as "I'll take care of it" (Kondo, 2004, p.289) and President Nixon subsequently felt deceived because Prime Minister Sato did not decrease exports, although President Nixon believed that Japan would take some concrete measures. This aggravated the Japan-US relationship significantly, causing economic and political damage to Japan (Kondo, 2004, p.290).

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