



**Artigo original**

## **Linguistic repair work in an English L1 community: could there be lessons to learn for the L2 classroom?**

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**ABSTRACT:** The study assessed repair work in an English native community in USA using both English native (NS) and English non-natives speakers (NNS) data. The main aims included assessment of the speakers' use of language in specific contexts of repair work; their deployment of social knowledge and expectations when doing repair work; differences and similarities between native and non-native speakers' behavior, and possible lessons that could be learned for the L2 classroom. The assumptions of the study were that accounts and apologies would tend to occur more with interlocutors in close and distant relationships, respectively. Overall, that is what the study found out. Corollary to that, the study found that realization of repair work is a function of perceived social distance, and that for most part the behavior displayed by NS and NNS during repair work is similar. Despite the general trend, NNS data showed that speakers may use different pragmalinguistic resources dependent on different sociopragmatic exigencies or expectations, where it concerns assignment of distance to relations, responsibility sharing, explicit acknowledgement of blame, among others. On the one hand, the findings bear some implications to the L2 classroom, especially where it concerns the need to deploy teaching approaches that are descriptive and reflexive; ones that help learners to trigger, deploy and explore their attentional processes in the classroom, and on the other hand, they pose some challenges to the current paradigm which privileges some NS forms, norms and rituals in the L2 classroom.

**Keywords:** repair work, social distance, attentional processes, pragmalinguistic switch

## **Os actos linguísticos de reparação numa comunidade falante nativa de Inglês: que ilações tirar para o ensino de língua segunda?**

**RESUMO:** O estudo avaliou actos de reparação linguística numa comunidade nativa de inglês nos EUA usando dados tanto de falantes nativos (FN) como de falantes não-nativos (FNN). Os principais objectivos do estudo eram avaliar o uso da língua em contextos específicos de realização da reparação linguística, verificar como se aplicam expectativas e conhecimentos sociais na realização desses actos, observar diferenças e semelhanças entre os FN e FNN e verificar as possíveis ilações para o ensino de L2. A priori, assumiu-se que as estratégias de explicação e de pedido de desculpas iriam ocorrer em relações próximas e distantes, respectivamente. No geral, foi o que se verificou. Como corolário disso, o estudo verificou que a reparação linguística faz-se em função da percepção da distância social que o falante assume ter com o interlocutor e que na maioria das vezes o comportamento dos FN e FNN durante a reparação linguística é idêntico. Contudo, apesar desta tendência geral, os dados mostraram que os FNN podem usar diferentes recursos pragmático-linguísticos de acordo com diferentes exigências ou expectativas sociopragmáticas, no que diz respeito à atribuição da distância social, partilha de responsabilidade, aceitação explícita de culpa, entre outros. Os resultados trazem implicações para o ensino de L2, por um lado, relativamente à necessidade de implementar perspectivas de ensino descritivas e reflexivas; que ajudem os aprendentes a activar, usar e explorar os seus processos de atenção e, por outro, desafiam o actual paradigma que, na sala de aulas de L2, somente privilegia algumas formas, normas e rituais de FN.

**Palavras-chave:** actos de reparação linguística, distância social, processos de atenção, alternância pragmática-linguística.

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## INTRODUCTION

In discussions of speech acts, social factors are seen as posing potential constraints to the said acts, given that in their deployment there are usually societal expectations to bear in mind (cf. LOCASTRO, 2003). Wierzbicka (2003), and Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1992) mention three important levels of acceptability of an act, namely social acceptability, linguistic acceptability and pragmatic acceptability.

In my experience as an L2 English language teacher, as well as an English language teacher trainer at the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM) in Mozambique, I have witnessed learners doing linguistic repair work in instances where and when the teacher would rather have them refrain from it. These are cases where instead of being polite, the learner may end up being labeled rude, inconsiderate or disturbing to the class. I have seen such cases as when learners come late, have to use the bathroom or when unintentionally push a seat or desk making noise, among others. I have also witnessed cases where unintentionally learners trip over others or bump into others, and never say “sorry”, but instead simply look at the other party and smile.

Maciel (2013), who assessed classroom practices by former teacher trainees at the Pedagogic University in Mozambique, and who are now teachers in secondary schools, found that they had difficulties in using descriptive and reflexive approaches in their language classes, which resulted in their inability to pay attention to situational restrictions or constraints of language use and to distinguish inherent registers and/or contexts. Observations such as Maciel’s and the ones that I mentioned above have motivated me to assess English linguistic repair work.

During my postgraduate studies in an English native community, the opportunity came when I attended a TESOL class,

which focused on cross-cultural aspects of language use, which among others discussed repair work. While on the one hand I observed repair acts from English native speakers (NS), which I realized to be different from some of the ones that I was used to back home, I also found that both the discussions that we had in the TESOL class and my own readings on the topic lacked aspects that I considered to be important, namely discussions over issues of social distance in repair work, as well as what I will call need for reciprocal face restoration in repair work. Thus, I set out to undertake this research mainly in order to assess how linguistic repair work took place in several contexts as well as with different interlocutors residing within the concerned English native community. I hoped that the work would contribute to inform my own classroom queries and practices, but also other L2 instructors on the type of language and societal behavior expected and adopted for repair work in English.

Broadly speaking, repair work refers to any linguistic attempts to restore people’s face, when an offence or face threat has occurred or is predicted to occur (MEIER, 1996). It is this concern with someone else’s face that makes repair work part of politeness strategies. Within this study, repair work is not only seen as restoration of the offending party’s face, but also of the offended party’s face, following socially accepted rituals and strategies within a given community. The rituals and strategies are deployed dependent on the social relations between the interlocutors.

Repair work is subdivided into two core strategies, namely apologies and accounts. According to Leech (1983, p.125) apologies indicate “regret for some offence committed by speaker to hearer”. On the other hand, accounts, which include excuses and justifications, do not show remorse. An excuse simply accepts wrongdoing, but it neither shows remorse nor accepts responsibility. The person

essentially says ‘sorry, I did it, but it was not my fault’ or ‘it was someone else’s fault’. On the other hand, justifications accept responsibility, even though they do not show remorse. They are an attempt to minimize the severity of face loss by implying that the offence was ‘not meant to be a big deal’.

Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that such issues as social distance and power relations impact how people address each other. Following mostly a model of politeness very much based on Western Anglo tradition, they also argue that the outputs of negative politeness, whereby the individual protects own face, territory or space and as a result, the individual wants to be free of imposition, are all forms that are in general useful for social distancing (BROWN and LEVINSON, 1987). Pan (2000), Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) and Arundale (2006) have gone further as to provide a view of such social relations. Their view is much more based on harmony, cooperation, in-group affiliation, etc., rather than simply one of conflicting relations, as it is mostly advocated in the theory of face threatening acts (FTAs). Moreover, they acknowledge that in addition to social relations being culture-specific, they are also emergent and/or situationally-bound. Considerations of societal expectations are important in any interaction in order to avoid miscommunication or further conflicts. This potential seems heightened during intercultural communication, because, as Janney and Arndt (1992) put it, people from different cultures differ not only in terms of ideas about linguistic code, but also in terms of what counts as imposition, options, friendliness, dominance, supportiveness, among others. These are very important issues to take into account in the L2 classroom because they can inform how classes involving cultural aspects should be handled, because whether we realize it or not, the L2 classroom is indeed a cross-cultural venue.

The native community in which the study is based accommodates non-native speakers

(NNS), as well. As a result, I decided to assess both NS and NNS data in order to find out the type of language and considerations over social relations that the speakers take into account so as to be pragmalinguistically and sociopragmatically correct in their use of language. I realize that the scope of NNS sample in the study is very limited. However, while it may not allow for generalizations, it may be informative of some NNS behavior in terms of repair work and of any adjustments that they make in their several day-to-day encounters.

For this work, I hypothesized that linguistic strategies of repair work were a function of the perceived distance in social relations between the offending and the offended parties. More specifically, I assumed that apologies would tend to occur more where unacquainted people and/or distant relations were concerned and the closer the people were or perceived to be in social relations, the more accounts would take place. The dynamic and emergent nature of social relations and roles in most of current modern communities was used to account for this hypothesis, whereby the situation and the goals of each participant are to be taken into account. Accordingly, Spencer-Oatey and Jiang (2003, p.1635) contend that “in different cultures, and in different speech contexts within the same culture, [...] different options or points on [a] continuum [of realization] could be favored [to the extent that] which point on the scale is ‘optimum’ depends partly on pragmatic contextual variables and partly on culturally-based socio-pragmatic preferences”.

### **Research Questions**

In order to pursue the objectives and hypotheses defined above, the study tried to answer the following questions:

- (i) what kind of repair work do the speakers (both English NS and NNS) living in the community favor the most?

- (ii) how do the speakers (both English NS and NNS) go about using language in specific contexts to do repair work (i.e., the pragmalinguistics of repair work)?
- (iii) how do the speakers (both English NS and NNS) go about deploying social knowledge and expectations when doing repair work (i.e., the sociopragmatics of repair work)? Still where it concerns social knowledge and expectations, how is the severity of the offence evaluated?
- (iv) are there any major differences or similarities between NS and NNS speech and behavior when it comes to (i) – (iii) above?;
- (v) given (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv), are there any lessons that could be learnt for the L2 classroom?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Data Collection**

In order to answer the questions, the study set out to collect both NS and NNS data. The data involved a sample of 114 instances of repair work, which came mostly from English native speakers. Others were from speakers of Akan (a language from Ghana), Portuguese and Thai. The said instances came from combinations involving English NS-English NS, English NS-English NNS (and vice-versa), English NNS-English NNS or from interactions involving NNS own first language (L1). In order to collect data in languages other than English, the study employed the help of some NNS, mostly post-graduate students and members of their families living in the target community in Illinois, USA. Even though NS data were the focus of the study, I felt that it would be important to incorporate NNS data in the study as well in order to see the extent to which features of their different native communities would surface and at which rate that would happen, as well as the

extent to which exposure to the NS community would have brought to NNS pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic repair work competence that is organized, realized and given meaning according to conflicting norms (GARCIA and OTHERGUY, 1989; KASANGA and LWANGA-LUMU, 2007) and rituals that are representative of emergent socio-cultural knowledge systems. The dynamic and emergent nature of knowledge systems is important for this study because if found in L2 data, it would show that apprehension of tacit cultural knowledge systems is possible by NNS under certain conditions (BLUM-KULKA and SHEFFER, 1993) worth exploring in L2 classroom.

The data were randomly collected from any person overheard<sup>i</sup> using repair work during the period of the study. Therefore, the data came from naturally and spontaneously occurring face-to-face exchanges, collected through ethnographic observation in public places, such as schools, parks, stores, sidewalks, among others. During data collection, available contextual information was recorded by filling in a form (see Appendix A), and this involved among others the situation of interaction, the topic of the interaction and/or the reason for the repair work, description of the interlocutors' likely age or age group and relationship.

The naturally occurring data allowed for observation and, where applicable, distinction of NS and NNS behavior. Following Janney and Arndt's (1992) idea that situational assumptions or frames are not permanent, but only binding within the actual context of interaction, it was important to assess these data because they showed some relevant constraints and/or possibilities for negotiation and emergent relations in repair work.

### **Data Systematization and Analysis**

Each instance of repair work was coded with a number, and the respective repair workers and the addressees were classed whether they were NS or NNS (for ethical reasons, no real names are used in the

examples drawn from the data). Social distance and power relations, which were subsumed from the relationships displayed by the speakers at the scene (see Appendix A) were taken as a single category, and they were subdivided into close, mid or distant relations. Close relations included interlocutors that were, for example, friends, couples, family members, roommates, or teammates, and distant relations involved interlocutors who appeared to be strangers. The mid relation was instituted because the respective data could either fall into close or distant relations. At first, the lack of a clear-cut division made this kind of data problematic to characterize. However, I followed both Janney and Arndt's (1992) situational assumptions and Meier's (1996) interpersonal uncertainty vs. less fixed distance in interactions, and included in this group classmates who appeared not to be friends, instructor-learner relations, co-workers not behaving as friends, salesman, clerk or waiter-customer relations, sorority or fraternity members, not behaving as friends, among others. The rationale for this classification was that those relations may at times involve strangers, but the roles played by the interlocutors at each given situation are evident, thus providing room for what Meier (1996) calls non-clear cut relations or more interpersonal uncertainty, which paves way for flexibility in language use and social role assignment.

Following literature, the repair work was categorized into two main groups; apologies and accounts. In addition, the latter were broken down into excuses and justifications. In order to subcategorize the data, I decided that all dyads of the interaction should be taken into account and not just the utterance, which accommodated the Illocutionary Force Identifying Device (IFID). So, I drew the relevant speech act based more on what I perceived to be the global or macro-structural intention of the repair worker's speech act, rather than on discrete local parts (i.e., individual propositions) of the interaction. That is, I used interpretative strategies on

the propositions to arrive at an account of a gist (VAN DIJK and KINTSCH, 1983), thus being concerned only with the essential point of the repair work. I opted for this approach because of the thin line that separates apologies and accounts, and the fact that these acts co-occur so often on a daily basis in such a way that they could be said to be in a continuum, rather than in opposition.

During data analysis, I looked at the frequency of the different types of repair work in order to find out the preferred type of repair strategies within the community and the type of language with which they are commonly associated, i.e. following questions (i) and (ii). Next, I assessed the relationship between the type of repair strategy and social relations holding between the interlocutors to see the extent to which social knowledge and expectations were deployed in repair work, as asked by question (iii). As will be seen below, the steps above also helped assess and/or interpret questions (iv) and (v).

## RESULTS

### Repair work: frequencies

In this part, I present results of frequencies relating to the different types of repair work and to the rates of acceptance of the repair acts. Overall, as can be seen in Table 1, the data provided 114 instances of repair acts. In terms of interlocutors, out of these instances, 100 (87.7%) were NS-initiated acts, and 14 (12.2%) were initiated by NNS. Out of the same total, 95 (83.3%) addressees were NS, and 19 (16.6%) were NNS.

In terms of interaction type, Table 2 shows figures accounting for 95 (83.3%) NS-NS interactions, 11 (9.6%) NNS-NNS exchanges, 5 (4.4%) NS-NNS and 3 (2.6%) NNS-NS.

These figures show that NS-NS exchanges far outnumber interactions involving NNS interlocutors. It should be noted that not all of NNS-NNS exchanges were in English, as others were in the native languages of the NNS participants.

When assessing the relationships binding between the interlocutors and the strategies employed during repair work, Table 3 shows 59 (51.7%) accounts and 55 (48.2%) apologies. Accounts subsequently split into 48 (41.9%) justifications, and 11 (9.6%) excuses.

As is summarized in Table 4, the data show that out of the 55 apologies, 39 (71%) were accepted and 16 (29%) were not. In 59 accounts, there were only 11 excuses, of which 8 (72.7%) were accepted and 3 (27.2%) were not. In terms of justifications, the results show that out of 48 instances, 41 (85.4%) were accepted and

only 7 (14.5%) were not. In global terms, the data show a slight difference in acceptability rates between accounts and apologies. When the different types of repair data are however taken separately, there were nonetheless more accepted repairs from accounts (83%), as averaged from 85.4% of justifications and 72.7% of excuses, than apologies, which fell into a rate of 71% of acceptance. Within accounts, one can see the differences in the rates of acceptability between excuses and justifications, where there are more of the latter than of the former.

**TABLE 1: Interlocutors**

	NSs #	NSs %	NNSs #	NNSs%	Total #	Total #
Repair workers	100	87.7%	14	12.2%	114	100%
Addressees	95	83.3%	19	16.6%		100%

**TABLE 2: Types of interaction**

NSs-NSs	NSs-NNSs	NNSs-NSs	NNSs-NNSs	Total
95	5	3	11	114
83.3%	4.4%	2.6%	9.6%	100%

**TABLE 3: Relationships vs. Repair Strategies**

Relation	Strategies						Total #	Total %
	Apol. #	Apol. %	Accounts		Justif. #	Justif. %		
			Exc. #	Exc.%				
Close	16	14%	7	6.1%	28	24.5%	51	44.6%
Mid	19	16.6%	3	2.6%	19	16.6%	41	35.8%
Distant	20	17.5%	1	0.8%	1	0.8%	22	19.1%
Total	55	48.2%	11	9.6%	48	41.9%	114	100%

**TABLE 4: Rate of Acceptability of Repair Strategy vs. Strategy**

	Apologies (55:100%)	Accounts (59:100%)	
		Excuses (11:100%)	Justifications (48:100%)
Accepted	39: 71%	8: 72.7%	41: 85.4%
Not Accepted	16: 29%	3: 27.2%	7: 14.5%
Total	55: 100%	11: 100%	48: 100%

**Table 5: Break down of Strategies into Patterns of Relationship**

#	Close (51)			Mid (41)			Distant (22)		
	apology	Accounts		apology	Accounts		apology	Accounts	
		Excuse	Justif.		Excuse	Justif.		Excuse	Justif.
16	7	28	19	3	19	20	1	1	
%	31%	13.7%	54.9%	46.3%	7.3%	46.3%	90.9%	4.5%	4.5%

These results seem to highlight one aspect, i.e. excuses are not a preferred kind of repair work within the community.

There were different ways in which addressees showed acceptance of the repair act. Some examples included 'ok', 'never mind', 'it happens', a smile, etc. As will be seen in more detail in the discussion, some NNS used IFIDs in English that relate very specifically to expectations from their native community. Some examples are 'forget the past', 'that's the past', etc. Non-acceptance was displayed by responses such as 'it is your fault', 'whatever', 'you should've known better', 'no. you are not (sorry)', or even a non-friendly face, among others. One example that comes from NNS data is one, which explicitly shows displeasure: 'I am very disappointed at you'.

### **Repair work and social relations**

The results summarized in Table 3 above show 51 (44.6%) repair acts in close relations, 41 (35.8%) in mid relations and 22 (19.1%) in distant relations. When conciliated with the types of repair work, the results show the following figures: 59 (51.7%) accounts, subdivided into 11 (9.6%) excuses, of which 7 (6.1%) were in close relations, 3 (0.8%) in mid relations and 1 (0.8%) in distant relations; and 55 apologies (48.1%), of which 20 (17.5%) were in distant relations, 19 (16.6%) in mid relations and 16 (14%) were in close relations.

Global figures (Table 5) show that out of the 51 instances of repair work in close relations, there were about 68.6% of accounts, and only 31% apologies. Within accounts, there is preference for justifications (28: 54.9%) over excuses (7: 13.7%) in the overall data. Within distant relationships, there were 20 (90.9%) apologies and only about 9% accounts; broken down into excuses and justifications with 1 (4.5%) frequency each.

As for language, most of the repair work involving distant relationships did not go beyond the level of the IFID. In terms of

locution, the majority of the instances were either 'sorry', 'I am sorry' or 'my bad'. These findings seem to replicate the trends presented by other studies. Davies, Merrison and Goddard (2007) studied repair work involving students and lecturers, whose interactions could be said to range from mid to close relations. They found out that the overall distribution showed that only 29% of their data had apology as the main function. They concluded that in the majority of cases concerning these relations, apologies were being used in the context of other head acts (DAVIES, MERRISON and GODDARD, 2007, p.53), i.e. speech acts that were not (macrostructurally) apologies, but were related to them (e.g. excuses and justifications).

Following questions (iii) and (iv), NNS data were isolated to see how they behave in terms of repair act type and social relations. The trend was not different from overall behavior: out of the repair instances observed within close relations, NNS used 70% justifications, 20% excuses and only 10% apologies, in mid relations, there were 66% of apologies and 33% justifications, and the only one distant relation act was an apology.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Frequency of Types and Language of Repair Work and Rates of Acceptance**

The results on the frequency of the three different types of repair acts, namely apologies, justifications and excuses show that English speakers do not favor the latter. While apologies and justifications occur more or less within similar rates, excuses are relegated to a very low position. For most part, this may be because of the fact that in excusing themselves, speakers do not accept responsibility, but rather deflect the responsibility to an alien cause or entity.

In terms of rates of acceptance of the repair acts, the results show that while apologies and excuses held similar frequencies, namely 71% and 72%, respectively, justifications

took the lead with 85.4%. It seems that the fact that justifications accept responsibility, on the one hand, and attempt to minimize the severity of face loss, on the other hand, may be seen as an aspect, which brings sincerity about the repair worker's intentions as well as trust that the offence will not take place again. Indeed, while at the level of the language used, most apologies stopped simply at bare IFIDs 'sorry', 'my bad' or 'sorry for X', and excuses went so far as only saying 'sorry + some remorseless statement', most justifications used 'sorry + explanations which if needed can be verified'. Here are some cases from the data to illustrate the case. In example 1, below:

1. Lindsey: I'm sorry for that.

Bill: It's ok.

there is an apology, and Lindsey; the repair worker, simply accepts responsibility and shows remorse for the wrongdoing through the use of the IFID 'sorry'. In example 2 below:

2. Joe: Sorry about your knee...

Brent: [B just eyes him up and down]

Joe: Hey, you're the one who bumped into me, bro, so don't give me that look.

Brent: Yeah, right!

There is an excuse. The repair worker (Joe) takes no responsibility for the 'wrongdoing'. Instead, he deflects the responsibility back to the addressee's own carelessness (e.g., 'you are the one who bumped into me ...'). Finally, in example 3:

3. Annah: I am sorry, but I can't cash your check at this moment. Funds are not available.

there is a justification, where Annah mainly explains why s/he cannot cash the addressee's check ('... funds are not available ...').

When looking at these examples, it can be

seen that the IFIDs were used to play or introduce different acts by being respectively focused on the (offensive) 'event per se', 'event-as-effect' and on the 'cause of the event or action'. More specifically, when the examples above are reconstructed, the following structures 4-6 are found, respectively:

4. Lindsey: Sorry + for 'that, which I did'.

5. Joe: Sorry about 'your leg, which hurts. The collision, which you caused, is to blame'.

6. Annah: Sorry + I can't cash your check at this moment 'because funds are not available'.

Unlike the others, by accepting responsibility, and explaining the situation by focusing on the cause of the event or action, structure 6 above seems to imply that the cause has been identified and it will be resolved so that it will not happen again. This may be why such repair strategy seems to be more likable in the community than the other types. Accordingly, I would sum up the findings in this section by arguing that the assumption that repair work follows socially accepted rituals and strategies within a given community has found evidence; acknowledging responsibility and identifying the cause to make sure or at least to try or imply that similar events will not happen again are part of the ritual that this community expects in repair acts. If the repair worker cannot do that, they should at least regret the offence that they have committed (LEECH, 1983).

Accordingly, I would like to insist on the role of acknowledging responsibility when it comes to repair work. In accounts, the overwhelming preference for justifications seems to underscore the idea that offended parties will hardly sympathize or empathize with other parties if these do not take responsibility for their actions. This would seem to accord with the finding that

most English native speakers value acknowledgement of responsibility for actions (MEIER, 1996, p.160). To the effect, when responsibility is not acknowledged, excuses are likely to be countered, as is shown in example 7:

7. Fabian: I am sorry, about that Sir, sometimes our cooks get a little backed up and slip up once in a while.

Bernard: The meat is just too tough, I couldn't eat it.

Fabian: We will have your order up in a minute. I will tell the chef to make it a priority.

Bernard: That's not very professional.

Here interlocutor Bernard counters the excuse made by Fabian that 'their cooks sometimes get very busy', by retorting that 'that is not professional'.

As suggested above, apologies seem not to be preferred acts in close relations. In addition to the explanation given earlier, it is possible that the fact that apologies are so to say 'cut and dry' leaves the addressee with the idea that if the repair worker valued their relationship enough, they would go on and explain why they proceeded the way they did. In many cases, where in close relations, further account was not given, the repair work was often seen as ineffective, and as a result likely to be countered, as example 8 below of an interaction between a couple illustrates:

8. Henry: I am sorry!

Sue: No, you're not.

Henry: What more can I say? I'm sorry!

Sue: [Silence]

Here Henry simply apologized. Having expected, but not seen further account, Sue perceives and complains that her interlocutor is 'not sorry [enough]', to which Henry

retorts asking what else he could say. This comment was met with what appears to be a stronger disapproval: silence. Behavior such as Sue's could be taken as evidence of the offended party's need for some closure through palpable reason for the misconduct perpetrated by Henry or, at least, he should have shown an interest in negotiating his way out. Indeed, by implying that the repair worker was not sorry enough, it would seem that the offended party takes the offence as having been intentional. It appears that countering repair work provides opportunity for negotiation between the interlocutors. Such a level of negotiation seems not to be called for in many distant relations, where, it seems, people just want to hear that the repair worker regrets the misconduct or offence whatever their reasons.

While justifications are clearly the preferred type of repair act, the data present figures that are worth exploring further in terms of the meaning of the respective acceptance rates. The fact is the different types of repair strategies all presented relatively high acceptance rates, namely apologies at 71%, excuses at 72% and justifications at 85%. A tentative explanation may be that even though the acts may not all be favored, speakers feel that there is need for harmony in social relations (PAN, 2000; BARGIELA-CHIAPPINI, 2003 and ARUNDALE, 2006), which as a result triggers the need for reciprocal face restoration in judgments of repair work.

### **Repair Work and Social Relations**

One aspect that the results on repair work and social relations reveal is that there are more repair acts in close relations than in any of the other relations. About half of all instances of repair work (44.6%) are found in this type of relation; next there is the mid relation with 35.8% and finally the distant relation with only 19%. This seems to indicate that close relations are keen to violate each other's face. I would speculate that while their closeness provides room

for a lot of physical accidents (e.g., tripping over or bumping into each other), these relations assume or take things for granted about each other much more frequently than mid and particularly distant relations. Example 9 below illustrates this case:

9. Amanda: Sorry, I thought you would not come home for lunch.

In example 9, Amanda is using repair work because she had assumed that her spouse would not come home for lunch, which was not accurate this time. While the data suggest that there is more ‘carelessness’ with one’s actions in close relations, actions with simple acquaintances and strangers seem to be taken more seriously and when violations happen, these are likely to be more of the kind of accidents than of any other type.

To further discuss the issue above, I assessed what triggered repair work within distant relations and compared their data with those from other relations. The data showed that most of the cases related to

physical offences. These included accidents such as collisions with or bumping into other people, dropping someone else’s possessions or stepping on someone else’s feet. Table 6 below synthesizes the data, and it shows that out of 20 repair acts that took place in distant relations, and which are included in Table 3 above, 16 (i.e. 80%) were physical accidents, and all of them were repaired by apologies.

The data presented thus far in this section seem to validate the hypothesis that linguistic strategies of repair work are a function of the perceived distance in social relations between the offending and the offended parties. For instance, when holding physical offences constant as the trigger of repair work across relationships, it was found that out of the 12 physical offences in close relations, 66.6% were repaired by justifications and only 4 (33.3%) were repaired by apologies. No excuses took place. In mid relations, apologies constituted the strategy used the most, 8 (72.7%) out of 11, whereas justifications came second with 2 occurrences (18.1%) and excuses last with a single occurrence (9%).

**Table 6: Repair strategies triggered by physical offence across relationships**

	Apologies	Accounts	
		Excuses	Justification
Close (12: 100%)	4: 33.3%		8: 66.6%
Mid (11: 100%)	8: 72.7%	1: 9%	2: 18.1%
Distant (16: 100%)	16: 100%		

Overall, the trend that comes from the data illustrates that in English the closer the interlocutors are, the more accounts will be used, and the further away that people are socially from each other, the more apologies will take place. In accounts, justifications are far more preferred than excuses, which fall out of favor in all types of relations. It looks as if that the preference for justifications in close relations is indicative of the need to explain and/or guarantee that the offence was not on purpose and that the repair worker is not taking advantage of their

relationship with the offended party and as such efforts will be made so that the action may not happen again. Preference for apologies in more distant relations seems to be on the basis of the need to simply show remorse or regret, and then each party will go about their own lives. Below, I explore this interpretation in some detail.

Repair work in close relations appeals more to addressees’ positive face than in mid or distant relations. For example, in 9 out of the 12 repair acts in close relations that were triggered by physical offence,

repair workers used expressions such as ‘man’, ‘bro’, ‘you’, ‘baby’, ‘honey’, ‘grandma’, ‘meu filho’ (i.e., ‘my son’, in Portuguese) and reference to addressee’s name. This can be seen in examples 10-12 below:

10. Honey, I am sorry ...
11. My bad, man ...
12. You are the one who bumped into me, bro.

In these examples, expressions ‘honey’, ‘man’ and ‘bro’ serve as ‘softeners’ to the situation.

The frequency of such ‘softeners’ represents 75% of acts in close relations, against only 18% in mid and 6% in distant relations. A look at the whole data shows that while ‘softening references’ are especially frequent in close relations, they are also pervasive in accounts. This could be an indication that in addition to everything else, they serve to claim in-group affiliation or identity (PAN, 2000; BARGIELA-CHIAPPINI, 2003 and ARUNDALE, 2006).

In cases categorized as mid or distant relations, where the interlocutors were strangers to each other, this would mean that the repair worker has used a softener because her/his assessment of the other has made him perceive that the distance between the two parties is short or that it can be shortened. If valid, this is an important aspect because it shows that during interactions, relations and distance can be negotiated on the spot, thus bringing into focus the flexible and/or emergent nature of social roles and relationships in human interactions.

Just like during the discussion of frequencies of repair work, this section isolates NNS data to look at them more in-depth and/or comparatively with NS data. Overall NNS data fell within the assumptions of the study, especially where it concerns the use of repair strategies vis-à-vis the type of relationships involved. However, some features, which seem to be specific to the respective cultures were also observed. For

example, some data seem to indicate that while acknowledgement of responsibility for an offence by the repair worker and acknowledgement of the apology by the addressee are important, it is equally important to explicitly forgive, thus letting bygones be bygones. Example 13 below from Akan illustrates this:

13. John: me pawo kyew faky e me, maany e no yiye (‘please forgive me, I know I am wrong’).

Jerry: eho, enhia, atswamu (‘it’s not necessary, that’s the past’).

John explicitly acknowledges responsibility (i.e. ‘I know I am wrong’) and explicitly begs for forgiveness. Jerry’s response is an explicit assurance that there will no longer be any grudges between the two parties, because whatever conflict there may have been was ‘buried in the past’.

Thai data also showed some features worth discussing. For example, speakers acknowledged the addressee’s right to be angry, as is shown in example 14 that follows:

14. Sasima: Pee thong goth phom mak lei tee phom mai auo hong toa jak pee leao. Phom Khor thot yang sung khrap pee (‘You have to get very angry with me. I am no longer taking over your room. I am very sorry’).

In example 14, the role of the explicit acknowledgement of the addressee’s or the offended party’s right to anger seems to be two-fold: on the one hand, it prepares the addressee for the worse in an attempt to soften the ‘blow’ of the news, and simultaneously seems to be a ritual to ask for forgiveness and reestablishment of trust in the interlocutors’ social relationships. Indeed, Sasima seems to be saying ‘you have every right to be angry with me, because I am not worth of your trust. I regret it (and so, I want to regain your

trust)'. This is evident from the exchange that follows between Sasima and Benji in example 15 below:

15. Benji: *tham mai?* ('why?').

Sasima: *Phom khor thot khrap pee. Phom plien jail leao khrap.* ('I am sorry. I changed my mind').

Benji: *khun tham hai pee pid wang mak* ('I am very disappointed at you')

Sasima: *Phom khor thot yang sung khrap pee* ('I am very sorry').

The dyads in example 15 show that when both Benji asks 'why?' and expresses her disappointment, Sasima keeps saying 'I am sorry', thus reinforcing her request for forgiveness.

The data just discussed may bring important aspects when it comes to NNS and L2 classrooms. For instance, two Akan speakers were overheard speaking in English, when they produced the following example:

16. Yassine: I am very sorry if I have offended you. I didn't intend to hurt you. Please forgive me.

Ben: Forget about the past.

Here forgiveness is not only begged for, and granted, but it is also realized explicitly by what seems to be a culture-specific IFID: 'forget the past'. This specific IFID is far more explicit than the usual and casual 'ok' or 'fine' pragmalinguistic strategies used by English NS when granting forgiveness. On the other hand, while it may be argued that NS also expect to be forgiven for their misdeeds, it seems though that this ritualized and explicit granting of it is a strategy, which is sociopragmatically specific to these Akan speakers' community. Interestingly, there were not found such IFIDs in cases where the said NNS interacted with NS. In

the data available, they mostly used 'ok', 'never mind' and 'no problem'.

This highlights the possibility that L2 speakers do not necessarily let the strategies of their L1 transfer into the L2, but that they may be using them selectively: when before an English NS, whom they perceive to be a distant relation (i.e. not from their community), they resort to the expected NS response, but when before a fellow NNS, who is from their own community, they may use the English language, but deploy pragmalinguistic resources that are appropriate to their respective sociopragmatic expectations and rituals. Therefore, such uses may not necessarily be L1 transfer into the L2 (ODLIN, 1989), but could well be a pragmalinguistic switch deployed because of specific contextual exigencies found in the communicative act.

Portuguese data provide less evident differences with English. For most part, the data seemed to enforce similar strategies. However, example 17 below is worth discussing:

17. 17. Alice: *Hei Sara, desculpe lá. Hoje não vai dar para irmos andar* ('Hey Sara, I am sorry. I can't go walking with you today').

Bela: [silence]

Alice: *Ontem, esquecí-me que hoje tinha consulta com os meus alunos* ('Yesterday, I'd forgotten that I'd have office hours today').

Bela: *Não faz mal. Não estou mesmo com disposição para isso* ('No problem. I am not in the mood for that anyway').

Alice: *Hah? Então, porque não me dizias?* ('Ah? Why then didn't you tell me?')

Bela: *É uma questao de consideração* [laughs] ('It is a matter of considerateness').

On Alice's first turn, Bela remained silent and did not even let Alice know that she was also considering not going for a walk. She did so only after Alice had explained why she would not go. In fact, Alice had interpreted Bela's silence as a question and/or request for more information. Only when in possession of the information, did she retort that she was not in the mood to go walking. Alice seemed stunned for a while, but Bela clarified that it was 'uma questão de consideração'.

An antecedent to the exchange is that the day before Alice had also cancelled the walk that the two friends usually took around the neighborhood, and because of that 'B' felt that she deserved a (considerate) explanation, despite her own conflicting agenda that day.

The example above parallels Covarrubias' (2002) claim that relational communication in Mexican Spanish reflects sociocultural patterns of both 'respeto' (respect) and 'confianza' (trust and closeness). That is, when claiming for an explanation, Bela believed that Alice had broken their trust and closeness by not being considerate. As a result, she would tell her part of the story only after Alice had been considerate to her. Elsewhere (i.e. example 8 above), English data showed speakers asking for similar (considerate) explanations, but not as explicitly as in this case, or as in the Spanish example (19) discussed further below. Here Bela seems to be saying quite literally 'I want you to be considerate and explain to me your reasons'.

While linguistic strategies used by the repair worker are a function of the perceived distance in social relations between the offending and the offended parties, the data show that the degree of severity of the offence is usually a function of the offended party's perception, rather than of the offender's or the offence per se. Assessment of negotiations between repair workers and addressees in all types of relations, whether in NS or NNS interactions was

used to reach this interpretation. Example 18 illustrates the case:

18. Andrew: Oops, sorry about that.

Chuck: you're fine. It happens.

Andrew: ah, let me help you.

Chuck: No. you're ok.

This one was an instance in which Andrew bumped into Chuck; a stranger, while running around a building. Chuck accepts the repair work without any complaints. In fact, he seemed understanding of the situation, because when Andrew offered to help pick up the books that had fallen down, he said 'no. you are fine'. He may have perceived it as an unintentional minor offence (i.e., "you are fine. [It happens]"). However, in examples (8), (15) and (17) above, as well as in example 19 below, there is a different case:

19. José: lo siento que no te he llamado ('I am sorry that I did not call you').

Ana: y porqué no me has llamado? ('and why didn't you call me?')

José: estaba muy ocupado. Quería llamarte por mucho pero...('I was very busy. I wanted to call you so much but ...')

Ana: ay si? ('oh yes?')

The repair workers in these examples seem to be engaging in an account (or not) depending on their addressee's perception of the offence. Note for instance the addressee in example 8, who says 'no, you are not', the addressee in 15, who asks 'ttham may?' ('why?'), the addressee's silence in example 17, or the addressee's 'y porqué no me has llamado?' in example 19. Contrast all these with the addressee's response in example 18, i.e. 'you're fine. [It happens ... No. you're ok]'. The addressee in example 18 takes the offence as a minor non-intentional offence.

When looking at how they retort to the repair work, the other addressees seem to perceive the offence with a higher degree of severity. For example, in example 19 there is an account, which is called for mostly because the offended party wants to make sure that the act of not calling had not been intentional, but that there had been a good reason why the offender had failed to call. Upon José's explanation, Ana's response 'ay si?' suggests that she is not convinced, yet. She may be considering that this is not a minor offence, and the likelihood is that the relationship between the two parties will be based on some mistrust, at least for some time.

A similar case comes from two NS pre-teens, as illustrated in example 20 below:

20. Joshua: I am sorry, it was an accident though.

Caroline: No, it wasn't. You pushed me because you wanted the ball.

Joshua: No! I ran into you and you fell.

Caroline: stop lying. You just don't want to get in trouble.

Here Caroline assumes that Joshua pushed her on purpose because he wanted the ball, and he was saying that he was sorry only because he did not want to get in trouble (with his mother who was sitting on a bench watching them play).

Given the way that the 'offended parties' in (19) and (20) responded to the repair work, it seems that they have taken such offences as intentional or at least as carelessness that could have very well been avoided, if the offender had tried enough. Thus, their perception of the degree of severity of the offence is higher than the assessment made by the addressees in examples 16 and 18.

How the offended party perceives or views the offence determines how s/he may respond to the repair work. For instance, in

some NS interactions, the 'offended parties' tended to 'share responsibility' with the 'offender' in what seemed to be one strategy used to restore the both interlocutor's faces. Example 21 shows this:

21. Mark: Oh, my bad. Didn't mean to scare you ...

Shirley: It's ok. I just wasn't expecting it.

In this example, Shirley acknowledges the apology, but also puts part of the responsibility on herself to mean something like 'had I been careful myself, this would not have happened'. It seems that going this further is not simply meant to give an explanation of why the incident happened. It is also a way of reaching out to the offender, so that together they come out of the ugly situation. The attempt here is to have both faces saved.

There is another NS case, which seems to validate this behavior. This one took place at a students' diner, where 'A', almost ran into 'B'. Trying to avoid the collision, 'B' swung her tray and almost spilt her milk. Example 22 shows the interaction that ensued:

22. Sandra: ah, I am so sorry.

Sarah: [silence]. But addressee looks at Sandra with a grave face and walks away.

Sandra: mm, what's her problem?

Will: never mind, she is just being a jerk!

Sandra's second turn shows that she is perplexed by Sarah's reaction, and mutters 'what's her problem?' in protest. Will, a passerby, in an attempt to restore her face, comforts her by suggesting that 'she was ok. The other was the jerk, by not accepting the apology'.

The need to accept the offender back into the human fold and/or to welcome them back as once again competent participants

in the social order (LAKOFF, 2003) is a ritual, which, when violated, is usually looked upon down by others. The example below is once again another case that illustrates this:

23. Mike: I am sorry, ma'am.

Mrs Culter: yeah, you should be.

Mike: give me a break. Don't patronize me! (Mike mutters almost to himself)

Like in the two earlier exchanges, in this one Mike feels that Mrs. Culter does not want to bring the relationship back to its default level, but instead that she wants to maintain a conflicting relationship. As a result, Mike's response is not positive to Mrs. Culter's attitude.

A final case that I want to make based on the available data is illustrated by the following example involving a NNS (Samson) and a NS (Prof. Brown):

24. Samson: Good evening. I am sorry, Professor. I came late because my bus today came late.

Prof. Brown: Ok, thanks.

However, at the end of the class, the Professor was overheard conferencing with Samson. What he said is presented below as example 25:

25. Prof. Brown: Next time, if you wanna say why you are late, you should see me after class.

That is, after coming late to a class, Samson felt compelled to give an immediate account of the behavior. He probably thought that he would be being considerate. Prof. Brown, however, did not assume that Samson had to, but rather that he had the option of giving the account (i.e. 'if you wanna tell me'), but even if he took the option, he had to mind the time (i.e., 'after class').

As indicated during the discussion of acceptance rates, this last case shows that in

the use of repair work, acceptance of the repair work does not necessarily mean that the act has been felicitous or vice-versa, even though that may be the case in most cases. Here, this NNS used appropriate pragmalinguistic resources, but seems to have failed at the sociopragmatic level (i.e. not understanding that he had an option and the appropriate timing of the act).

## CONCLUSIONS

This study assessed linguistic repair work in an English NS community, which also accommodates NNS in order to inform L2 classroom practices, where applicable. The study pursued the hypothesis that linguistic strategies of repair work were a function of the perceived distance in social relations between the offending and the offended parties, and more specifically that apologies would tend to occur more where unacquainted people and/or distant relations were involved, while accounts would take place in closer relations. After collecting ethnographically and analyzing 114 instances of repair work, the results of the study show just that. More specifically and when trying to answer the first question of the study (i.e., the kind of repair work preferred within the target community), the results show that apologies were the preferred repair strategy to address a more distant relation, while accounts were preferred to address a closer relation. Within accounts, justifications were by far more preferred than excuses. Excuses are the least preferred repair strategy across different social relations. Excuses seem to be the least preferred for not accepting responsibility and deflecting it to other entities. Justifications are the most preferred of all repair acts. In addition to accepting responsibility, they show that people care about the relationship and implicitly promise not to repeat the offence. Finally, apologies are preferred more in distant relations because people want to know that the offending party regrets committing the offense whatever their reasons.

The conclusions and interpretations above also find evidence when looking at results

concerning the second question (i.e. how speakers use language in specific contexts to do repair work). Most apologies barely go beyond the IFID; usually 'sorry', and focus mainly on the event (by regretting it); in excuses, in addition to the IFID, the language used focuses on the event-as-effect (on the offended party) without accepting responsibility and finally justifications include the IFID and accept responsibility by addressing the cause of the event. Another conclusion is that, more often than not, there is need for harmony in social relations. In turn, this triggers the need for reciprocal face restoration in repair work. This conclusion was reached after analyzing acceptance rates of repair acts, which showed that even if the type of the repair strategy is not the preferred one, the act will usually be acknowledged. This accords with Lakoff's (2003) claim that there is need to accept offenders back into the human fold and/or to welcome them back as once again competent participants in the social order.

When it comes to the third question (i.e., how speakers deploy social knowledge and expectations when doing repair work), the study concludes that once again the hypothesis that linguistic repair work is a function of the perceived distance in social relations between the offending and offended parties holds valid. On the one hand, the repair strategies for most part are stratified according to the type of relations, and on the other hand, the results show that where the relation is perceived to be closer, there are more appeals to the addressee's positive face possibly in order to claim in-group affiliation or identity. This need calls up for more negotiation turns in closer relations than where the relation is perceived to be more distant. The results show that closer relations cater for more repair work than more distant relations probably because people tend to take things for granted about others in those relations, in addition to possibilities of physical offenses; also, the results show that the degree of severity of the offence is

usually a function of the offended party's perception, rather than just of the offender's or the offence per se.

The results for the fourth question (i.e. if there are any major differences and similarities between NS and NNS behavior in repair work) allow for concluding that for most part, there are similar trends, especially where it concerns the type of strategies vis-à-vis relationships involved. However, there were observed a couple of pragmalinguistic strategies in NNS repair acts that were not found in NS repair acts. The strategies were found both in English as well as in the NNS native languages but only when the interactions involved same culture-based NNS-NNS combinations. The study speculated that this is a function of social distance, whereby NNS perceived the relationship with fellow NNS interlocutors as a closer relation, and so repair work and the corresponding pragmalinguistic material were triggered by culture-specific sociopragmatic expectations.

In interactions with NS, where different sociopragmatic expectations apply, NNS were found to use different resources. That is, following Tomacello (1999), NNS seem to deploy attentional processes, which enable them to notice and distinguish the different NS and NNS patterns. The different patterns are subsequently called up whenever needed in such a way that the speakers' speech is readjusted according to flexible and emergent relations found in their daily encounters. Accordingly, the study suggests that this behavior is more of a pragmalinguistic switch that is deployed because of socio-cultural contextual exigencies and/or expectations about the repair act.

Following the results and conclusions above, and as part of final remarks, question (v), i.e. whether there could be any lessons to learn for practices in the L2 classroom should now be considered. I think that one lesson that could be learnt has to do with Maciel's (2013) appeal that language teachers use descriptive and reflexive

approaches. For instance, the results have shown some instances of contextual restrictions (e.g., timing, place, option vs. obligation) and/or preferred types of repair work vs. social relations between the interlocutors. With that in hand, the L2 teacher should deploy an approach, which not only focuses on the linguistic code per se, but also on the sociopragmatic conditions, which constrain the use of the code. For that matter, the study found for example that L2 speakers were for most part competent repair workers in interactions with NS.

Following the finding that speakers can apprehend conflicting norms (GARCIA and OTHERGUY, 1989; KASANGA and LWANGA-LUMU, 2007), rituals of (emergent) socio-cultural knowledge systems, as well as tacit cultural knowledge systems, as may have been the case with the NNS in the target community, what L2 teachers in foreign language contexts should do is to find out which conditions they should cater for their classrooms that would expose the learners to the best models possible of language use. For instance, as far as repair work is concerned, teaching approaches and conditions should be geared towards instilling in the L2 learners the idea that English NS value interactions, in which there is reciprocal face saving (including the offending party's); that speakers usually strive to accept the offender back into the human fold and/or to welcome them back as competent participants in the social order (LAKOFF, 2003); that accepting responsibility and working towards avoiding the repetition of an offence represents a behavior the English NS value, among others. All of this should be presented and discussed in tandem with the uses of apologies, justifications and excuses.

On the other hand, the study found that L2 speakers can be competent in conflicting or rather different socio-cultural norms and rituals. When that happens and L2 users are able to use such norms and rituals appropriately and selectively, thus undertaking

pragmalinguistic switches and not necessarily L1 transfer.

The finding above may have a bearing on L2 teaching, especially where it concerns judgments over and/or feedback to learners' performance in different contexts. A descriptive and reflexive approach should allow the teacher to realize that L2 learners are dealing in bicultural waters and as such where it applies they should be let develop and use their bi-culturality by being able to respond appropriately to conflicting norms, rituals and expectations. For this, the results suggest that while harnessing their descriptive and reflexive approaches, L2 teachers should also deploy techniques which should develop learners' attentional processes. In the light of findings which suggest that learners may deploy pragmalinguistic resources other than those usually deployed by NS, teachers should, among others, strive to understand students' behavior and their reasons; to expose learners to appropriate target language and contexts; not banish learners' language, but rather understand it, its contexts and meanings.

In a context such as Mozambique, where English has the status of a foreign language, and as such where the classroom is oftentimes the only place where learners have exposure to the language, in addition to scarce resources, the classroom should enable integration of linguistic knowledge with sociocultural norms and rituals, which will in turn enable the learners to discover similar and different exigencies of the two languages. As far as repair work is concerned, if the assumption of pragmalinguistic switch is explored to the fullest, it could enable such integration.

Activities such as classroom discussions, comparison/contrast activities, use of metalinguistic resources, among others are likely to prove useful in bringing to the surface some important pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic exigencies of the target language. All of this should be in tandem with the so-called communicative activities such as role plays, dialogues, discussions,

among others. Where available, ICTs could be an asset, as well – movies, documentaries, among others could be brought into the classroom for shows and discussions in order to make learners attend to, notice, monitor and keep in perspective specific aspects related to the use of the target language. In the case of repair work, the teacher would be highlighting issues such as responsibility sharing; the need to accept the ‘offender’ into the natural fold and social order; the assumption that repair work should lead to harmony, cooperation and in-group affiliation, rather than conflicting relations, among others.

The results also show that there should be a challenge to the current L2 teaching paradigm, which insists only on some privileged NS forms and rituals. Therefore, the English used in traditionally-L2 communities, where the language is usually an official language, should also be present in L2 classrooms, so that learners are made aware of availability of different and contextualized pragmalinguistic resources.

There are limitations of the study, which should be acknowledged. To start with, NNS data were limited, and so they did not have the same kind of scope as NS data in terms of breadth of interactional contexts. Also, the fact that NNS data were not homogeneous in terms of linguistic background should make us take the results with some caution or as still preliminary ones. However, despite the limitations, both the NNS and NS brought about issues in the use of repair work, which may be discussed in teacher training so that teachers make better and informed decisions in their classes.

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**APPENDIX A**

Collection Form: Apologies

Exact wording of apology:

Response of addressee:

Second turn by repair worker:

Second turn by addressee:

Date collected:

Setting, situation:

Repair worker: NS/NNS (circle one), age, sex, relationship to addressee:

Addressee: NS/NNS (circle one), age, sex, relationship to repair worker:

Collected by: NS/NNS and Female/Male (circle one of each)

**NOTAS**

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<sup>i</sup> For ethical issues, the study was cleared by an IRB Protocol issued by the respective office at the ISU