

Dialogue: State of the Art

Studies in Memory of Sorin Stati

Sibilla Cantarini (ed.)



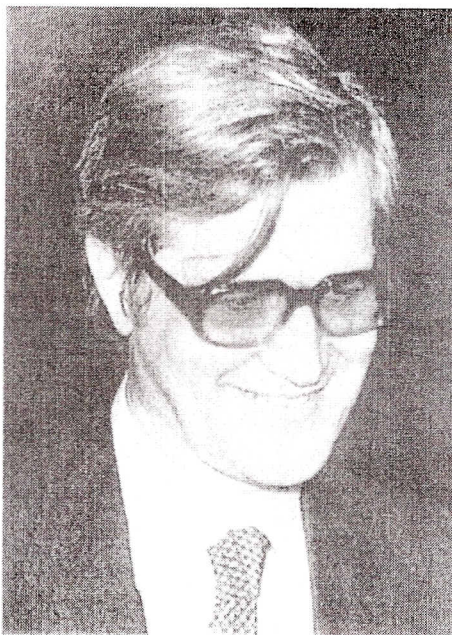
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- Sibilla Cantarini,
con il più sincero augurio
per la sua carriera internazionale,
S. Stati

SORIN STATI

2012
LINCOM EUROPA

Published by LINCOM GmbH 2012.

LINCOM GmbH
Gmunder Str. 35
D-81379 Muenchen

LINCOM.EUROPA@t-online.de
www.lincom.eu

webshop: www.lincom-shop.eu

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Printed in E.C.
Printed on chlorine-free paper

Die Deutsche Bibliothek - CIP Cataloguing-in-Publication-Data

A catalogue record for this publication is available from Die Deutsche Bibliothek (<http://www.ddb.de>)

Contributors

Franz Hundsnurscher, University of Münster

Gerd Fritz, University of Gießen

Anita Fetzer, University of Würzburg

Světlá Čmejrková & Jana Hoffmannová, Institute of the Czech Language of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague

Francesca Cabasino, *Sapienza* University of Rome

Adriana Bolívar, Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas

Liana Pop, *Babeş-Bolyai* University, Cluj-Napoca

Marcello Soffritti & Christine Heiss, University of Bologna

Sibilla Cantarini, University of Verona

Andrzej Zuczkowski & Ilaria Riccioni, University of Macerata

Valerij Dem'jankov, Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

Annelly Rothkegel, University of Technology, Chemnitz

Elda Weizman, *Bar-Ilan* University, Ramat Gan & **Lea Kozminsky**, Kaye Academic College of Education, Beer-Sheva

Adelino Cattani, University of Padua

Andrea Rocci & Gergana Zlatkova, Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano

Eddo Rigotti, Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano

Frans H. van Eemeren & Bart Garssen, University of Amsterdam

Marcelo Dascal, Tel Aviv University

*Political apologies by heads of state in diplomatic conflicts:
between sincerity and political cynicism*

Adriana Bolívar
Universidad Central de Venezuela

Abstract

In this paper, political apologies by heads of state in situations of diplomatic crisis in the Latin American context are studied. Pragmatics and critical discourse analysis are combined in order to analyze the types of apologies and reconciliation styles with attention to sincerity, credibility, and cynicism. The data consists of 250 texts from Venezuelan and international newspapers that covered the discursive struggle for apologies in three conflictive situations. It is shown that the sincerity condition did not apply in the two situations in which verbal offenses were the cause of the conflict (Peru/Venezuela, Spain/Venezuela), while it applied fully when the cause of the conflict was a military attack (Ecuador/Colombia). In all cases credibility was low, which leaves room for evaluations of cynicism. The effects on democratic dialogue and international relations are discussed.

1. Introduction

Apologies in general have been widely studied in various cultures as a fundamental politeness strategy particularly in conversational settings (Blum-Kulka & Olshtein 1984; Blum-Kulka *et al.* 1989; García 1989; Holmes 1995, 1998; Lakoff 2003; Marquez Reiter & Placencia 2005; Álvarez & Blondet 2008, and others). In spite of this, it is recognized that apologies are “hard to identify, define or categorize” because they perform a wide range of functions and the relation between form and function is consequently very complex (Lakoff 2003: 201). On the one hand, it has been shown that explanations based mainly on face work as in core politeness theories are insufficient to define apologies in the public space because, as Harris *et al.* (2006: 733) have pointed out, “such definitions do not take us very far in understanding the significance and issues raised by political apologies”. On the other hand, the analysis of apologies in wider contexts from various perspectives has led to the conclusion that, in the “age of apology” (Brooks 1999; Gibney *et al.* 2008; Harris *et al.* 2006; Meier 2004; Kampf 2008; Bolívar 2008a, 2009), it is very difficult to say what an effective apology is (Mills 2003; Kampf 2008). The major problem seems to be that in order for an apology to be accepted we have to rely on the judgments of those who validate the apology as effective and, therefore, on the role of evaluation and argumentation in specific cultural contexts (Watts 2003; Eelen 2001; Bolívar 2008a, 2008b).

In the last decade, a higher degree of verbal conflicts between heads of states has been reported by the media, particularly in the Latin American region. In these circumstances, apologies are often demanded and very rarely given verbally in the canonical form, and when they are finally accepted by the public and/or by the media, there is often the doubt whether they have been effective or not. This is the reason why, in this paper, I will focus on apologies in situations in which heads of state are involved and where the apologies are required to repair wrong actions in the present. These are quite different from apologies made by presidents or persons in positions of power in governments or the Church about past events related to war atrocities, mistreatment of aborigines, persecution, violation of rights, violence and killings, sexual abuse, and other abuses (see Dodds 2010). In apologies for past events, the apologizers are not directly responsible for the wrong-doings and others take up the responsibility for the harm done and for the reparation to the families of those who suffered or were affected (Howard-Hassmann 2010).

Apologies among heads of state are also different from those made by presidents to the people when they misbehave (as in the Clinton-Lewinsky affair) and make wrong decisions (as in Blair's case on the Iraq war). When one head of state has to apologize to another head of state, the question of power is very important because they both risk losing face and power, and also gaining or losing legitimacy as leaders. At the same time, those who judge the apology do it on the basis of their own experience and value systems. In this paper, we shall examine some of the options the public and the media have in order to assess apology events with reference to sincerity, credibility, and political cynicism. As is known, there are certain pragmatic conditions for apologies to be successful in English. They should follow certain sincerity conditions to be perceived as felicitous (Searle 1969), which often include the expression of regret and acceptance of responsibility in fixed formulas or variants of "I am sorry" and "It is my fault", as well as explanations or accounts, offers of reparation, and promises that the offensive behaviour will never happen again (Lakoff 2003; Harris *et al.* 2006). However, because public apologies form part of a dynamic social and political process in which the political mixes with other areas of experience, it is worth examining political apologies not only from the perspective of pragmatics and or discourse analysis, but also from the perspective of political discourse analysis and international relations, that is, within an analytical framework that includes the political actors, their adversaries, the political institutions, the media, and the citizens, as well as the micro and macro levels of descriptions and how they intersect (Charaudeau 2005; Chilton & Schäffner 2002; van Dijk 2002; Bolívar 2001, 2007, 2008a; Cohen 2004). Above all, we cannot forget that political discourse is about power: how to access it, how to maintain "the power to make decisions, to control resources, to control other people's behaviour and often to control their values" (Thomas & Wareing 1999: 32).

2. Between sincerity and political cynicism

Although it has been stressed that apologies cannot be described purely on linguistic basis because there is more to them than verbal language (Lakoff 2003; Harris *et al.* 2006; Bolívar 2008a, 2009), it has been acknowledged that canonical formulas studied in classical politeness theories (Brown & Levinson 1987) still continue to be an inspiration for the development of more complex studies. At least in the western world, most of the discursive struggle on whether an apology is needed or not, valid or not, touches the point of the “appropriateness” of the words used to express regret and responsibility for the harm done, and often conflicts last longer than expected for the lack of the “right” words the apologizer should pronounce as expected by the recipient(s) of the apology. In fact, we came across this phenomenon in the Latin American context when the diplomatic relations between Venezuela and México were suspended for almost two years, between 2005 and 2007, due to the fact that Mexico did not receive a formal explicit apology from the Venezuelan government after an exchange of insults between President Fox and President Chávez (Bolívar 2008a). At no point in the negotiations were the formulas “I am sorry” or “it is my fault” pronounced in an explicit manner by the presidents. These findings contradicted what Harris *et al.* (2006) found in the British culture where an *Ifid* is apparently obligatory in political apologies for the apology to be accepted as valid. As they put it: “In contrast to any apologies between individuals, which may take a wide variety of forms and often contain a high degree of implicitness, it seems to be crucial if political apologies are to be regarded as valid by those to whom they are addressed that they are not implicit or ambiguous, i.e. that they contain an explicit *Ifid* (‘sorry’ and/or ‘apologize’) and that there is an (explicit) acceptance of personal responsibility for a stated act which has been committed by the apologizer” (Harris *et al.* 2006: 734).

In addition, sincerity in political apologies does not seem to be the only requirement. In the public sphere, apparently the sincerity condition may be replaced by another condition which concerns the perception of the roles of the offenders. Kampf (2008), in his research on how apologies are accepted in the Israeli political arena, found that ordinary people and public figures “seek indicators of sincerity in apology statements”, but he points out that in the case of political apologies, the judgment of sincerity may be given a minor role and may be replaced for what he calls “the embarrassment condition” (Kampf 2008: 581). According to this condition, in order for an apology to be accepted what must be taken into account is to what extent the apology is perceived by the forgiver as threatening to the political image and symbolic power of the apologizer. The fact that political actors show awareness of the importance of their symbolic power in the political arena seems to lead to a greater willingness to accept the apology. This seems to indicate that the more embarrassed an offender looks or appears to the public eye, the greater the chances are for him or her to be forgiven, at least in the Israeli culture.

From my perspective, I claim that in political apologies among heads of state we need to go beyond sincerity and embarrassment and extend the analysis to conditions of credibility because while sincerity and embarrassment are attributed to the speaker, credibility is anchored in the social domain (Fetzer 2002). My assumption is that apologies that are

perceived as not valid or doubtful gain this evaluation because the people judge the apology according to what I have called “the cynicism condition”. This condition has to do with how credible and trustworthy a person, particularly a politician, is judged to be by the people in his or her own culture. In the Spanish speaking culture cynicism is associated with the attitude of “being cynical”. The dictionary of present Spanish defines the term *cynical* as related to lack of shame; A person who lies shamelessly or who acts shamelessly against the commonly agreed morals (“*Persona que miente con descaro, o que actúa con desvergüenza contra la moral comúnmente admitida*” (Seco, Andrés & Ramos 1999: 1049). In the English speaking world, cynicism is associated with being “selfish”. The *Collins Cobuild Dictionary* defines cynicism as “an attitude towards people in which you always expect them to act in a selfish way” and among the examples we find *The mood of political cynicism and despair deepened* (Collins Cobuild 1987: 352). If we bring together both definitions, we may come up with a concept of cynicism that integrates lack of shame and selfishness, together with an attitude of not taking into account what others think and not worrying about it. Political cynicism has been defined in various ways but “common to all definitions a disbelief in the goodness of political actors and a general disdain towards politics” are found (Schyns & Koop 2007: 5). In order to measure political cynicism and categorize types of cynicism, Schyns & Koop (2007: 6) defined it as “an individual attitude consisting of a conviction of the incompetence and immorality of political institutions and/or political systems as a whole”. From the perspective of political psychology, this attitude consists of beliefs and emotions, for example, holding the belief that all politicians are crooks or liars and showing feelings of anger, disgust and disappointment. Political cynicism is mainly associated with distrust and may have at least three political objects: the politicians, the institutions, and the political systems (Schyns & Koop 2007). We believe that heads of state are easy targets of political cynicism, so it is worth unveiling how dialogue works in different political contexts. By doing so, we shall be following the path initiated by Sorin Stati in whose honour I have written this paper, as a way to express my gratitude for inspiring many of us to do research into dialogue across cultures.

3. The analytical framework

In our perspective, it is important to combine pragmatics with critical discourse analysis. While other critical perspectives focus on socio-cognitive processes (van Dijk 2002) or socio-political dynamics (Fairclough 1994), I put particular emphasis on the responsibility of the participants involved in the conflicts in the course of events as they develop in social dynamics (Bolívar 2001, 2007, 2008a, 2009). The central category is dialogue because micro and macro exchanges are examined. This is the category that allows us to decide on the magnitude of the conflict. We assume that if the offense is not taken seriously, the interaction goes on. If it is taken more seriously, the interaction may be interrupted but still continue. However, when one of the parties involved judges that there has been a major offense, the dialogue breaks down, other parts take sides and get involved, the conflict intensifies and mediators are needed to reestablish the dialogue. The focus of the analysis is on the pragmatic

roles of the participants (demand or offer an apology, reject it, evaluate the apology process); the status of the political leaders (in a national and international hierarchy); the motivation for the offense and apology; the value systems involved; the linguistic and non-linguistic forms; the strategic aims of the apology; the degree of intensity of the conflict, and the reconciliation styles.

4. The data and procedures

The data were obtained from three conflictive events in which diplomatic relations were suspended. The first was between Alvaro García, president of Peru and Hugo Chávez, president of Venezuela where apologies for exchanging insults were required and apparently accepted, but there were no explicit indicators of illocutionary force. The apology event started on January 14th 2006 and ended on January 17th 2007. The second involved Juan Carlos de Borbón, the King of Spain, and President Hugo Chávez from Venezuela. Neither of them apologized according to canonical forms for their verbal transgressions and offenses, but the relations between Spain and Venezuela apparently improved. This conflict started on the 10th of November 2007 at the XVII Ibero-American Summit celebrated in Chile, and ended on the 26th of July 2008. Finally, the third situation was between Álvaro Uribe, president of Colombia, and Rafael Correa, President of Ecuador, on account of a border conflict related to the FARC¹. This conflict started on the 30th of January 2008 and lasted until the 7th of March 2008. It was the shortest but the most intense of the three events. Only in this case was the full canonical formula used. Correa formally accepted Uribe's public apologies, but the relations between the two countries remained tense and are still conflictive. We shall deal with each situation in more detail later. As these events were all reported by the media, we followed the news from the moment each conflict started until the moment when both parties agreed to restore their Ambassadors. In order to follow the exchanges we had to collect the texts in the chronological order in which they appeared. There was no preconceived idea of what genres we would take into account or how many as this depended on the dynamics of the interaction. The texts were organized in sequences that allowed us to read the discursive struggle around the apology. We followed the events in headlines and news reports as well as editorials and a total of 250 texts were examined in detail. We took them from Venezuelan newspapers supporting the government (*VEA, Ultimas Noticias, aporrea.org*) and more adversarial ones (*El Nacional, El Universal*). International papers were included (*El País, ABC, El Mundo, El Tiempo de Bogotá, El Universal de México, El Mercurio, BBC Mundo*, and other digital papers) to obtain a wider perspective of the impact of the conflicts.

¹ FARC means *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, which are conceived as terrorists by the Colombian government and its allies, but as "belligerent" legitimate forces by others, among whom we find the presidents of Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

5. Types of apologies and reconciliation styles

Situation 1: presidents García and Chávez reconcile after exchanging insults

The study of this situation gave us a pattern of interaction that had the following sequence: an offensive action + a demand of apology + rejection to offer an apology + reconciliation between the presidents + re-initiation of diplomatic relations + agreements of cooperation signed by the presidents. The offensive action came from Alan García when he was still a candidate for the presidency of Peru. Chávez had made public statements supporting Humala (the opposition candidate) and this was taken by Peruvians as interference in their electoral campaign and political affairs. As a strategic move to gain supporters García called president Chávez “sinvergüenza” (*scoundrel*) justifying this with the argument that Chávez had a double discourse since on the one hand he attacked capitalism and President Bush fiercely but, on the other hand, his country was one of the main exporters of oil to the United States. To this, Chávez replied that García was “ladrón” (a thief) and “corrupto” (corrupt). Underlying the difference of “opinions” was the fact that García had sided with the Venezuelan opposition in 2002 during what is known in Venezuela as the April events when there was an attempt to take Chávez out of power. Chávez demanded an apology for the “false accusations” about Venezuela’s interference with Peru’s sovereignty. García’s party (*Partido Aprista Peruano*) refused to apologize²:

- (1) “Al agresor no tenemos que pedirle perdón” (*we do not have to ask for forgiveness from our aggressor*) (...) si hay alguien quien tiene que pedir disculpas no solo a Perú sino a otros países, es justamente el Presidente Chávez, quien con cierta regularidad se despacha contra jefes de Estado y contra naciones enteras calificándolas y adjetivándolas” (*if there is someone who needs to apologize that is President Chávez who regularly attacks heads of state and entire nations with adjectives and epithets*) (*El Nacional*, 13/06/2006, p. A8).

A few days later, the general public joined this position and it was reported that 90% of “limeños” agreed that García should not apologize. García won the elections. As president elect, he refused to apologize once again on account of Chávez “inacceptable intromission” in Peruvian affairs:

- (2) “No me pidan que me disculpe de algo que tiene por origen injerencias y expresiones inaceptables en el derecho internacional” (*don’t ask me to apologize for something that has its origin in intromissions and expressions that are unacceptable in international rights*). (*El Nacional*, 14/06/2006, p. A22).

² All the translations into English were done by the author.

But then he gives the first step towards the reconciliation:

- (3) “Cuando era candidato podía responderle con los mismos adjetivos y la fuerza que él usa para referirse a mí. Sin embargo, ahora que soy presidente electo ya interviene el Estado que represento y por consiguiente la prudencia exige que bajemos todo lo que sea adjetivo o cruce de palabras para esperar la normalización de la relación de nuestros países. (*When I was a candidate I could reply with the same epithets and the intensity he uses to refer to me. However, now that I am president elect the State I represent intervenes and therefore caution is required to tone down the epithets and exchange of words towards the normalization of relations between our countries*). (*El Nacional*, 7/7/2006, p. A13).

Chávez agrees and states that he is willing to meet with president García:

- (4) “Creo que es un buen gesto del Presidente García que yo devuelvo con el mismo tono. Estoy dispuesto a que hagamos los esfuerzos para olvidarlas cosas que ocurrieron”. (*I think this is a good gesture from President García which I return in the same tone. I am willing for us to make efforts to forget the things that happened*) (*El Nacional*, 9/7/2006, p. A23).

The presidents meet in Cochabamba, Bolivia, at the II Summit of Southamerican Nations and exchange the following words as well as smiles and embraces appealing to the brotherhood and friendship among Latin Americans:

- (5) García: “Este espíritu nos permite fortalecer esa unión cerrando un capítulo de incomprensión y de enfrentamiento sin sentido, que hemos dado por terminado con mi amigo y compañero Hugo Chávez” Chavez: “Alan amigo mío desde hoy” (García: “*This spirit permits us to strengthen our unity and end a chapter of misunderstandings and nonsense confrontation, which we have ended now with my friend and partner Hugo Chávez*” Chavez: “Alan my friend from today on”) (*El Nacional*, 10/12/2006).

The reconciliation was in front of TV cameras and in the company of other presidents attending the Summit. The reconciliation ended with agreements for cooperation in two fields: oil and education. The presidents agreed that oil technicians from both countries would work together in “algún proyecto importante” (*in some important project*) and in education, in order to reinforce “una revolución educativa” (*an educational revolution*). The media reported the event with ironic headlines “Ahora son amigos” (*Now they are friends*) or with comments such as “aparentemente se reconciliaron” (*they apparently reconciled*). As seen in the

summary of the sequence above, no explicit words to express regret or acceptance of responsibility were used by the presidents, although we could accept that there was some degree of regret in García's statements. The sincerity of their apology therefore had to be interpreted mainly on the non verbal gestures of affection and good disposition to become friends. However, given that the public in Venezuela and Peru knew the historical facts behind their confrontation, their attitude was not taken as sincere or credible. The terms of the agreement were vague and later events showed that García did not side with Chávez' revolution, but with the countries that are critical of his attempts at following Cuba's steps. The judgments on the use of the term "friends" indicated that both the media and the public perceived this as a cynical attitude since they had never been friends before and there were slim chances that they would ever become friends from that moment on. Also, the style of reconciliation in this case gave prominence to the presidents as main actors in the public sphere. They were not perceived as sincere, they did not give signals of embarrassment, and their cynicism caused reactions of anger and disgust in Peru and Venezuela.

Situation 2: The King of Spain and Hugo Chávez after the King ordered Chávez "to shut up"

The phrase "Por qué no te callas" (*Why don't you shut up?*) addressed by Juan Carlos de Borbón to Hugo Chávez at the XVI Iberoamerican Summit went round the world. It made a global impact as it was the first time a King had lost his temper in a public event and given an order to a Latin American president. According to the news on the web in general (Possenti 2008), the King's expression was motivated by Chávez' repeated interruptions when the Spanish president, Rodríguez Zapatero, was taking his turn in the debate and was calling attention to the need that all presidents should show respect to each other and maintain a democratic dialogue. In fact, the micro study of the video distributed on YouTube showed that the dialogue was destabilized by Chávez (Bolívar 2008b, 2009). The day before, president Chávez had called Aznar a "fascist" (the ex-Spanish president) and again called him a "fascist" in his interruptions to Rodríguez Zapatero. The reconciliation between Venezuela and Spain took almost two years. The study of this situation gave us the following overall pattern of interaction: offensive actions + demand of apologies to the King + diplomatic negotiations + the offenders meet + commercial agreements. This event generated polarized reactions either in favour or against the King and Chávez in Spain, Venezuela, Chile and other countries. Neither the King nor Chávez offered explicit apologies to each other for their words. But Chávez demanded an apology from the King based on the arguments that the days of the Spanish domination were over, that they were both heads of state, that he deserved respect, and that he had been elected democratically. Chávez also criticized the King's emotional reaction.

- (6) "El que quedó muy mal ahí fue él que pierde el control, y entonces manda a callar pensando que somos sus súbditos todavía del siglo XVII, siglo XVIII. Nosotros somos indios

alzados, rebeldes, nadie nos va a callar, no nos vamos a callar” (...). El rey será rey pero no me puedè hacer callar. Reclamo respeto porque yo soy también un jefe de estado y electo democráticamente” (*El Universal*, 11/11/2007. http://eluniversal.com.mx/vi_460585.html) (*The one who lost face was he who lost control, and then he orders me to shut up thinking that we are still subjects as in the XVIIth, XVIIIth centuries. We are insurgent Indians, rebels, nobody is going to make us shut up, we are not going to shut up (...) The King may be a King but he cannot make me shut up. I demand respect because I am also a head of state, and democratically elected.*)

In the same way that the King received demonstrations of support in Spain and all over the world, Chávez received the appreciation of his friends, particularly Fidel Castro who defended him for the “demolishing criticism” he had aired during the Summit (*lanación.cl*, 11/11/2007). It can be said that, apart from all the jokes that circulated on the web, and the commercial interest for the sale of T-shirts and other items with the phrase on them, the event polarized the public at a global level. The Spanish and Venezuelan ambassadors were called for consultation. New offenses were exchanged with the participation of Aznar. Chávez threatened to “revise” Spain’s investments in Venezuela. After negotiations at a diplomatic level, the reconciliation was reached after the Spanish Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos visited Venezuela on the 18th of January 2008. As a result of this, Chávez visited Spain on the 25th of July 2008 and met the King and Rodríguez Zapatero. Chávez visited the King during his summer holidays at the Palace of Marivent in Palma de Mallorca. It had been agreed the encounter would take place at 10.30 a.m., but Chávez arrived at 11.25 a.m. The cameras were ready for the event. The heads of state shook hands, smiled and patted their shoulders. Chávez started with a joke

(7) ¿Por qué no nos vamos a la playa? (*Why don't we go to the beach?*)

to which the King replied with a gift, a T-shirt with the phrase “¿Por qué no te callas?” on it. Then Chávez made another joke:

(8) “Creo que usted me debe algo de dinerito” (*I think you owe me a little money*) (*El Universal*, 26/07/2008, p.14).

The media brought to the attention the negotiations and the agreements reached after the conversations as in (9) and the diplomatic “crisis” became an “incident” of the past.

(9) Juan Carlos y Chávez zanjaron en Mallorca la crisis diplomática. El rey le regaló una franela con el ¿por qué no te callas? El presidente venezolano ofreció a Rodríguez Zapatero 10.000 barriles diarios de petróleo a 100 dólares a cambio de

transferencia de tecnología (*El Nacional*, 26/07/2008, p.1). (*Juan Carlos and Chávez ended the diplomatic crisis in Mallorca. The King gave him a T-shirt, with "Why don't you shut up" on it, as a present. The Venezuelan president offered Rodríguez Zapatero 10.000 barrels of oil per day at the price of 100 dollars in exchange for the transfer of technology*)

- (10) "Quedó atrás ¿por qué no te callas?" ("Left behind Why don't you shut up?") VEA, 26/07/2007, p.1.
- (11) "Incidente del "por qué no te callas" quedó en el **pasado**" (*Incident of "Why don't you shut up" in the past* (*Últimas Noticias*, 26/07/2008, highlighted in the original).

The heads of state did not express, neither explicitly nor implicitly, their regret or responsibility for having offended each other's person or people. Instead, they used jokes to release tension. However, Chávez's joke "Why don't we go to the sea?" was interpreted as irrelevant in that it avoided the topic of the conversations and trivialized the meeting. The King's joke was a reminder of the situation and was judged by some as the indirect repetition of the order, and by others as a new insult to Chávez. The meeting in front of the cameras was very informal. The setting was a summer residence, with both heads of state standing outside the Palace. The body language was of affection and camaraderie. The King apparently forgot about how Chávez had insulted president Aznar and his behavior towards Zapatero at the Summit. There were no signs of embarrassment in neither of them. Some Venezuelans expressed their own personal embarrassment for Chávez's behavior in letters to the editors and messages on the Internet. The credibility level was very low. Chávez demanded respect while he himself had not shown respect for Spanish heads of state and for the King. He had asserted that he represented the "rebels" and would not submit to the "empire", but he ended up signing agreements to sell Spain cheaper oil in exchange for technological help. The public and the media took sides with the King and/or Chávez, but there were also voices from citizens in Spain and Venezuela that referred to the cynical attitude of the two heads of state who apparently ignored the fact that they attended the Summit representing their people and not as individuals. The act of reconciliation was evaluated as an act whose intention was to detach themselves from the responsibility of their transgressive verbal behavior. In fact, there were reactions of anger, disappointment, and demands of apologies from the King and Chávez (see Bolívar 2009).

Situation 3: President Uribe fully apologizes for "involuntary" violation of Ecuadorian territory

The conflict in this case was between Colombia and Ecuador because the Colombian army violated the territory in order to attack the FARC on the 30th of January 2008. In the attack, a guerrilla leader, Raúl Reyes, and twelve more guerrillas were killed as well as other persons who were in the area. President Uribe apologized to the government and the Ecuadorian

people for the “involuntary” action, but President Correa did not accept the apology because the explanation was not satisfactory. The conflict escalated with the participation of other heads of state who aligned either with Correa or with Uribe. The Venezuelan president ordered the movement of ten battalions to the Venezuelan border as a measure to prepare for a similar attack from Colombia and called the Venezuelan Ambassador to Caracas. Other presidents intervened as mediators. The intensity of the conflict was very high and bilateral diplomacy was not enough. The negotiations also included the participation of the United Nations and the Organization of American States as well as the intervention of other Latin American presidents. The reconciliation took place on the 7th of March 2008, after over a month, in the context of the XXth Summit of the *Grupo de Rio* celebrated in Dominican Republic where president Uribe fully apologized following the canonical form. The apology was accepted by president Correa and all the presidents attending the Summit. Correa acknowledged that the apology was valid with the following words:

- (12) “Con el compromiso de no agredir nunca más a un país hermano y el pedido de perdón, podemos dar por superado este gravísimo incidente” (*With the commitment to never attack a brother country again and a request for forgiveness, we can consider this very serious incident to be over*) (*ElTiempo.com/Política*, 7/03/2008)

Also, a Declaration was signed by all the presidents stating that there they were fully satisfied with the apology and reiterated their intentions to combat criminal and terrorist organizations as well as to keep respectful channels of communication. Some extracts are translated below:

- (13) 3. Tomamos nota, con satisfacción, de las plenas disculpas que el Presidente Álvaro Uribe ofreció al gobierno y al pueblo de Ecuador, por la violación del territorio y la soberanía de esta hermana nación, el primero de marzo de 2008, por parte de la fuerza pública de Colombia. (*We acknowledge with satisfaction the full apologies that President Uribe offered the Ecuadorian people for the violation, the 1st of March of 2008 by the Colombian public force, of the territory and sovereignty of this sister nation.*)
- (14) 4. Registramos también el compromiso del presidente Álvaro Uribe en nombre de su país de que estos hechos no se repetirán en el futuro bajo ninguna circunstancia, en cumplimiento de lo que imponen los artículos 19 y 21 de la carta de la OEA. (*We also take note of President Uribe’s promise in the name of his country that these events will not be repeated in the future under any circumstances, as required by articles 19 and 21 of the OAS regulations.*)
- (15) 10. Exhortamos a las partes involucradas a mantener abiertos canales respetuosos de comunicación y a buscar fórmulas de

distensión. (*We exhort the parties involved to maintain open respectful channels of communication and to look for formulas to avoid tension.*) <http://www.aporrea.org/imprime/n110419.html>
14/09/2008

President Uribe shook hands with all the presidents at the meeting. Uribe also shook hands with Correa, but the Ecuadorian president turned his back to him and did not make direct eye contact. His body language signalled that he was reluctantly accepting the apology. Uribe's action was apparently perceived as sincere; he deeply regretted his action and walked from one president to the other shaking hands. However, his apology was not judged as credible by the media which evaluated the whole event as a political spectacle:

(16) Después de intercambiar duras acusaciones que reflejaron la división política de América Latina, los presidentes de Colombia, Álvaro Uribe y de Ecuador, Rafael Correa, escenificaron ayer una reconciliación de dudosa credibilidad que, aparentemente, cierra una crisis que salpicó a todo el continente (...) Así sellaban la paz quienes minutos antes se habían lanzado gravísimas acusaciones" (*El País*, Edición Impresa Internacional, 31/07/2008) (*After exchanging very serious accusations that reflect the political division in Latin America, the presidents of Colombia, Álvaro Uribe and Ecuador, Rafael Correa, yesterday put up a reconciliation of dubious credibility which, apparently ended a crisis that had spread to the whole continent (...) Thus peace was sealed by those who a few minutes before had thrown extremely serious accusations at each other.*)

In spite of this, the full apology seemed to have a positive effect as tension was released at that moment. However, the tension between Ecuador and Colombia, and between Venezuela and Colombia has not decreased and lack of trust and disappointment with the regional leaders seems to grow.

6. Conclusions

In this paper we have explored some of the complexities of political apologies. I have examined the type of apologies that are demanded or given by heads of states in situations of diplomatic crisis in the present Latin American context. I have claimed that these apologies are different from those a president gives to the people for past or present events. As we have seen in the study presented here, in the two situations in which verbal offenses were the cause of the conflict (Peru-Venezuela / Spain-Venezuela), the heads of state tended to minimize the conflict ignoring the accusations and complaints they had made at the initiation of the conflict. The sincerity condition did not apply as there were no explicit expressions of regret

or acceptance of responsibility. The credibility was low as the reconciliation converted the "crisis" into an "incident" of no importance. And so, the heads of state's behavior was not seen as coherent. There was room for interpretations of cynicism as the public and the media showed distrust, anger, or disgust for their behavior as politicians. The situation that presented a full apology (Colombia- Ecuador) might have been taken as sincere, but it was not credible either as the apology was "too perfect". President Uribe actually used the explicit formulas "I am sorry" and "It was my fault", he also gave accounts, made promises, and asked for forgiveness. But his attitude was not credible because the accusations exchanged during the confrontations had been too serious and too much damage had been done to the international relations in the region. In fact, his behavior was evaluated as a dangerous "diplomacy of apologies" that only revealed a strategic use of apologies as symbolic weapons in international relations (Zapata 2008). The fact that politicians, particularly heads of state, participate in a game in which insults become "ritual insults", and take actions that do not match expectations, may have very unwanted effects on political dialogue. Political cynicism may grow and with it the lack of participation of citizens in political life and, consequently, in democratic dialogue. Therefore, we need more studies on the verbal and non verbal behavior of heads of state at Summits where fundamental issues that affect peace and dialogue are discussed. We shall learn more about how political apologies acquire their meaning in conflictive interactions and we shall understand better how political dialogues take their shape in the dynamics of international relations in the discursive struggle for power in a global world.

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This is the second volume dedicated to the memory of Sorin Stati, who passed away a few years ago, and constitutes a further homage to the great linguist by the association he founded, the International Association for Dialogue Analysis (I.A.D.A.), and his former colleagues. This collection provides an overview of the topical issues, new directions and latest findings in dialogue analysis, and shares with the reader the state of the art of the theoretical discussion and empirical research into dialogue. It also provides inspiration for new lines of research, as dialogue analysis is still today an expanding field. The articles in the collection are the fruits of different theoretical approaches to dialogue analysis and have implications in a range of fields of application. Some stem from traditional lines of dialogue analysis research, for example, theoretical approaches based on the speech act or argumentation theory, while others are clearly the product of new lines of research, in keeping with the desires of the founder of the I.A.D.A..

Sibilla Cantarini is Associate Professor of German Linguistics at the University of Verona. Her research interests include the syntax-semantics interface, comparative syntax and semantics, morphology, lexicology, lexicography, pragmatics, discourse analysis and argumentation theory.

LSPr 22
ISBN 978 3 86288 369 1



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