

Politeness strategies in Hanoi Vietnamese speech

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1. Cultural setting

Vietnamese belongs to the Austroasiatic Language Family. It is one of the ancient national languages in Southeast Asia which has about 80 million speakers in Vietnam (Asiaweek 2000:60) and more than a million speakers overseas. Vietnam is one of the Southeast Asian countries which has potential to be developed in various ways. There are many attractive factors for foreign investment, including the eager character of the Vietnamese people. Moreover, Vietnam has an interesting culture and a long colourful history which is reflected in Vietnamese characteristics. Although Vietnamese are Southeast Asian people like the other nine nations, Vietnamese have their own identity which can be difficult to analyse. One significant cause of this difficulty is their background of fighting in many wars, which have affected Vietnamese characteristics. However, Vietnamese have their own way to struggle for survival.

The new policy *Đổi mới* (economic reform) has been implemented for not too long a time. This policy has opened the country wider than before which affects the Vietnamese ways of life. There are both positive and negative points from this reform. In general, most of the Vietnamese people prefer this new innovation. They have more freedom to survive in the Communist regime than before. They can upgrade their life better than before the reform. However, negative points also occur such as people are more materialistic, and many government officers are corrupt in various ways. There are many social problems at the moment. These consequences also affect the daily life of the Vietnamese people to varying degrees.

Due to the fact that Vietnam has just been opened, there is only a small group of educated people who can speak English. Therefore, it is necessary for foreigners who want contact with the Vietnamese people to know the Vietnamese language and culture firstly because language is a significant key to the interesting sources. Any foreigner who can speak Vietnamese will receive a warm friendship from the Vietnamese people easier and quicker than the ones who know nothing. However, to study one aspect is not enough for foreigners to know any specific country. Therefore, the study should be multi-disciplinary. In this study, Vietnamese language and culture will be investigated in terms of politeness strategies.

Politeness embraces a strategy of making the addressee feel good, of being kind and friendly to minimize conflicts. Therefore, I would like to identify how the Vietnamese use their politeness strategies in their daily life which is based on the hypothesis that the Doi Moi policy (economic reform) and the openness of the country, in terms of economy, society, have affected politeness strategies of Vietnamese language in both linguistic and cultural aspects. From my viewpoint, the politeness strategies are like the media for foreigners to open the Vietnamese people's mind. If we know what their politeness strategies are, use them properly towards the Vietnamese people, it will not be hard for us to be accepted on one level. We should pursue the relationship sincerely, and collaborate with the Vietnamese people in order to ensure that any activities will be fulfilled. If we cannot be accepted, it will be hard to deal with them.

According to my literature survey, there is some work on Vietnamese politeness which is mainly written in Vietnamese. Most of the work studied only specific points such as requests and imposition or general description of Vietnamese politeness. There is no research which investigates the whole picture of politeness strategies of Vietnamese speech acts, i.e. greeting, leave-taking, introducing, thanking, requests, refusals, complaints, compliments, apologies and disagreement. Moreover, Thailand still lacks the knowledge of Vietnamese in various aspects, therefore, this study will contribute a part of Vietnamese language and culture knowledge to Thai society as well as to any foreigners who are interested in Vietnamese language and culture as well.

2. Theoretical framework

This study will use the theories of Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics and Ethnolinguistics for data collection and analysis by using questionnaires, observation, participation and interviews. The questionnaires will be designed to cover various speech acts mentioned above. The target respondents will be sampled from different ages (20-35 years, 36-50 years, and 51 up), gender (male, female) and occupation (government officials, state and private enterprises and students). The questions were designed for investigating how the respondents use politeness to the senior, equal and junior addressees. From the data, occupation is the significant factor which can distinguish the politeness clearer than age and gender. Different education does not affect linguistic politeness, therefore, it is not a significant factor and is not analysed in this work. Total respondents are expected to be approximately 105 people. The cultural aspect of politeness strategies is examined by observing, interviewing and reading materials.

The objective of the study is to investigate the Vietnamese politeness patterns of the speech acts including cultural aspects.

3. What is politeness?

Watts in the introduction to *“Politeness in language”* (1992:3) makes a distinction between first-order and second-order politeness. First-order politeness corresponds to “...the various ways in which polite behavior is perceived and talked about by members of socio-cultural groups. It encompasses, in other words, common sense notions of politeness. Second-order politeness, on the other hand, is a theoretical construct, a term within a theory of social behavior and language usage.”

As regards first-order politeness, there seems to exist in all cultures and languages words or notions which refer to proper social conduct and norms of appropriate social behavior in ordinary language use. In that sense, what counts as polite behavior is relative to a specific culture, a speech community or even a dominant social class within a society.

According to Kasper (1994: 3206), in English ‘polite’ dates back to the fifteen century (‘polished’). In the seventeenth century, a polite person was defined as having ‘refined courteous manners’ (*The Oxford Dictionary of Etymology*). Politeness is thus closely associated with the behavior of the upper classes and hence the expression ‘polite society’. In modern usage ‘polite’ is defined as “having refined manners, courteous; cultivated, cultured; well-bred; (of literature, etc.) refined, elegant” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*).

Lakoff (1973: 297-298) states that “Politeness usually supersedes: it is considered more important in a conversation to avoid offence than to achieve clarity. This makes sense, since in most informal conversations, actual communication of important ideas is secondary to merely reaffirming and strengthening relationship.” Lakoff formulates two rules of pragmatic competence as follows:

- (1) be clear
- (2) be polite

According to Leech (1983) on “Minimize the expression of impolite belief” is as follows:

Tact maxim: minimize cost to other. Maximize benefit to other.

Generosity maxim: minimize benefit to self. Maximize cost to self.

Approbation maxim: Minimize praise of self. Maximize dispraise of self.

Modesty maxim: minimize praise of self. Maximize praise of other.

Agreement maxim: minimize disagreement between self and other. Maximize agreement between self and other.

Sympathy maxim: minimize antipathy between self and other.

4. Linguistic aspect of Vietnamese politeness

The Vietnamese politeness strategies in speech acts involve greetings, introducing, leave-taking, thanking, requests, refusals, complaints, compliments, apologies and disagreements.

4.1 Greetings

There are 26 polite patterns. The three groups (Government, trader and student groups) use the same 4 patterns, as follows: 2 patterns speaking to senior addressee: 1) NP (kinship term) + *chào* “hello” + title/kinship term + polite particle 2) *Chào* + title/kinship term, 1 pattern to an equal addressee: 3) *Xin* “beg, please” + *chào* and 1 pattern to the junior addressee, as in: 4) (*Xin*) + (Kinship term) + *chào* + kinship term + (question).

The Government official and the student groups use the same 3 patterns to the equal addressee: 5) *Chào* + name. 6) The question *Đi đâu đấy?* “Where have you been?” + (Health question) 7) Exclamation *Ê!* + *Mày đấy à!* “That’s you?”

The government and the trader groups use the same 5 patterns: 4 patterns are used with the senior addressee: 8) *Xin* + *chào* + kinship term 9) Kinship term. 10) *Chào* + *động chí* “comrade” 11) *Chào* + NP *bạn* “friend”. One is used with the equal addressee 12) *Chào* + NP+ health question, activity.

The student group uses individually 3 patterns. One pattern is used with seniors: 13) The first pronoun (kinship term) + *chào* + title + polite particle + health question. One pattern is used with equal addressee: 14) (*Chào* + noun phrase)/name + questions: asking health, the weather or activity. One pattern is used with junior addressee: 15) Questions: health, activity

The government uses individually 9 patterns. 6 patterns are used with senior addressee: 16) *Xin* + *chào* 17) Title + polite particle *ạ* 18) *Kính chào* “Hello respectfully” + title 19) *Đạ* “yes”+ kin term + *chào* + title/kin term + polite particle *ạ*. 20) *Chào* + Kinship term + *đồng nghiệp* “colleague” 21) *Chào* + kin term + name (including smile or bow the head). 2 patterns are used with equal addressee: 22) Name 23) *Chào* + NP (name, noun) + particle and 1 pattern to junior addressee: 24) (greeting expression) + surprised statement.

The traders use individually 2 patterns. 1 pattern is used with senior addressee: 25) *Xin* + *chào* + health question. Another pattern is used with junior addressee: 26) Suggestion.

Examples:

- | | | | | |
|-----|-------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| (1) | Em | chào | thầy | ạ. |
| | (young sib. | greet | teacher (m.) | part) |
| | NP | V | NP | part |
- “I greet the teacher, sir.”

- (2) Chào thầy.
(greet teacher)
V NP
“Hello, teacher.”
- (3) Xin chào.
(beg greet)
V V
“Hello.”
- (4) (Đi) đâu đấy (Có khỏe không?)
(go where part Q strong Q)
V Q part Q V Q
“Where have you been? How are you?”

To smile and nod the head instead of saying the greeting words are also the way of greeting.

Age and sex, however, are not significant factors in politeness use. There are some interesting points which show some differences from different age-groups and sexes as follows:

20-36 years, both males and females use more polite particle *a* to the seniors than the two age-groups. When greeting friend, both males and females use the words “Hi!” or “Hello”. Females use more body language such as smiling or nodding the head instead of greeting by words more than males.

Females, 36-50 years old, use the polite particle *a* more than males when speaking to seniors. The style of males greeting is changeable from the above pattern such as using the word “hello” or asking about the health as the greeting pattern i.e. *Khỏe không?* “Are you fine?”. Females use more mild particles such as, *à, nhé* when speaking to friends or juniors while males do not use this pattern.

Females, 51+ years old, use more polite particle *a* than males when speaking to the seniors as well.

This agrees with the study of Huong, a Vietnamese linguist and with Sociolinguistics about Gender that females have a tendency to use polite words more than males.

4.2 Introducing

The situation is set up that the speaker has to introduce Hai to the teacher, friend and younger sibling, as follows:

There are 16 polite patterns. The three groups use the same 5 patterns, as follows: 3 patterns are used with senior addressee: 1) *Thưa* “dear” + NP +

Đây là “this is” + name + modifier 2) *Thưa* + title + kin term + *xin giới thiệu* “beg + introduce”+ *đây là* + name + modifier 3) (*Dạ*) + *Đây là* + name + modifier. 2 patterns are used with equal addressee, as follows: 4) (*Mình* = “I”) + (*xin*) *giới thiệu (với* “with”+ noun) + *đây là* + name + (modifier) 5) (*Đây là*) + name + (modifier). The 5th pattern is used with the junior addressee too.

The student and the trader groups use only 1 same pattern: 7) *Dạ* + *thưa* + title + *đây là* + name + (modified qualification of Hai) + (polite particle).

The student and the government official groups use the same 4 patterns; Two patterns are used with a senior addressee: 8) (Greeting expressions) + (title + *xin giới thiệu với* + title) + *Đây là* + name + (Modifier). 9) (*Xin*) *giới thiệu với* + title + *đây là* + name + modifier. Two patterns are used with an equal addressee: 10) (*Xin*) + *giới thiệu (với bạn)* + *Đây là* + name + (Modifier). 11) (Order to greet) + status of the introduced person + (order to greet).

The students use individually 2 patterns to senior addressee, as follows: 12) Greeting expressions + *thưa* + title + *đây là* + name + modifier. 13) (Greeting expressions) + (*xin*) + *giới thiệu (với bạn)* + *đây là* + name.

The government and the trader groups use the same 1 pattern to an equal addressee, as in: 14) Qualification of the introduced person.

The government group uses individually 2 patterns to equal addressee, as follows: 15) (greeting expression) + (vocative) + (*giới thiệu với em*) + *đây là* + name + (modifier). 16) Question + Status of the introduced person.

The trader group uses individually 1 pattern to senior addressee, as in: 17) qualification of that person + title + polite particle.

Examples:

(5)	Thưa	thầy,	em	xin	giới thiệu,	đây	là	Hải,
	(dear	teacher	young sib.	beg	introduce	this	be	Hai
	A	NP	NP	V	V	NP	V	NP

bạn em.
friend young sib.)
NP

“Dear teacher, May I introduce you, this is Hai, a friend of mine.”

(6)	Dạ	đây	là	Hải	bạn	em.
	(yes	this	be	Hai	friend	young sib.)
	AdvP	N	V	NP		

“Yes, this is Hai, my friend.”

- (7) Đây là Hai bạn thân của mình đây.
 (this be Hai friend close of I part)
 NP V NP
 “This is Hai, my close friend.”

- (8) Em chào cô. Em xin giới thiệu với cô.
 (young sib. greet teacher young sib. beg introduce with teacher)
 NP V NP NP V V PP

Đây là bạn Hai.
 This be friend Hai)
 NP V NP

“Hello teacher. I would like to introduce you, this is Hai, a friend of mine.”

- (9) Xin giới thiệu với cậu. Đây là bạn mình.
 (beg introduce with you this be friend I)
 V V PP NP V NP
 “(Let me) introduce with you. This is my friend.”

There are some points getting from the different age and sex, as follows:

Females, 20-35 years old, use the words *Thưa* “respectful”, *Dạ thưa* “Yes, sir/maam” starting the introduction sentences more than males. These show the respect to the seniors in terms of ages and status.

Males, 36-50 years old, use more the word *Thưa* “respectful” than females. This shows the respect to the status as well as age.

Female, 51+ years old, use the words *Thưa* “respectful”, *Dạ* “yes” more than males. This shows the respect to the status (if the speaker is senior than the boss) and/or to the age (if the boss is older than the speaker).

4.3 Leave-taking

The three groups say good-bye to the senior and equal people as follows:

There are 5 patterns. The three groups use the same 2 patterns to senior addressee: 1) Greeting expressions + (*em về* “I return” + polite particle). 2) (greeting expressions) + (kin term) + *xin phép* “let” + title + (first person pronoun + *vê*) + (polite particle).

The government group uses individually 2 patterns to senior addressee: 3) (*Thưa* + title)/(*Dạ*) + (first person pron.= *Em*) + *xin phép (đi về)* + (polite particle). 4) (*Kính chào* “Dear respectfully”) + blessing for the good health.

The trader group uses individually 1 pattern to equal addressee: 5) *Chào* + (noun) + (verb) + (clause)

Examples:

(10)	Chào	thầy	ạ.	Xin	phép	thầy,
	(greet	teacher	part	beg	permission	teacher
	V	NP	Part	V	NP	NP

em	về	ạ.
young sib.	return	part)
NP	V	part

“Hello, teacher. I’d like to ask permission to return, sir.”

(11)	Em	xin	phép.	Chào	thầy	ạ.
	(young sib.	beg	permission	greet	teacher	part)
	NP	V	NP	V	NP	part

“I’d like to ask permission to return, sir.”

(12)	Em	xin	phép	thầy	ạ.
	(young sib.	beg	permission	teacher	part)
	NP	V	NP	polite	part

“I’d like to ask permission sir.”

The hand shaking is used too.

Age and sex are not factors which affect the politeness patterns, only the manner which goes along with the speech is somehow different as follows:

Females and males, 20-35 years old, may or may not bend the head (with smile) when saying good-bye to the teacher. Females use the word *Dạ* “yes” at the beginning of the sentence for expressing the degree of politeness and respect to the teacher while males do not use.

Females and males, 36-50 years old, nod the head or shake hands with the senior owner of the house and/or say good-bye. It is noticeable that females use an exclamation word *Thôi* “that’s enough.” at the beginning of the sentence for ending up the conversation and say good-bye while males do not use.

When people 51 years old and over, say good-bye to the owner of the house, both male and female speakers can bend the head with saying good-bye, or either one. Women and men (either senior or junior than the owner) can shake hands with the owner as well.

4.4 Thanking

The three groups thank a senior person when s/he gave them fruit at their house, as in the following patterns:

There are 3 patterns. The three groups use the same 2 patterns to a senior addressee, as follows: 1) Use the sentimental expressions 2) (NP + *xin* + NP + Polite particle) + (*Cảm ơn* + NP + Polite particle). The government and the trader groups use the same 1 pattern: 3) (*Dạ*) + (Kin term) + *cảm ơn* + noun/noun phrase + (polite particle) + (modifier).

To equal addressee is used by the three groups as the pattern in 3, change only the noun phrase accordingly.

In general, the response for thanking is *Không có gì*. “It doesn’t matter” or *Không dám*. “Do not dare to accept (your thanking because my action is so tiny)”. This is rarely used in Hanoi.

Examples:

(13) *Dạ cháu cảm ơn thủ trưởng ạ.*
 (yes nephew thank boss part)
 AdvP NP V NP Polite part
 “I would like to thank you sir.”

(14) *Cảm ơn thủ trưởng. Thủ trưởng đến là em
 rất cảm ơn rồi.*
 (thank you boss boss arrive that young sib.
 V NP NP V COMP young sib.
 very thank you already)
 AdvP V AdvP
 “Thank you boss. Only you come, I already thanked you so much.”

(15) *Em xin cảm ơn ạ! Chị mua khéo quá ạ!*
 (young sib. beg thank part eld. sis buy skillful very part)
 NP V V Part NP V AdvP AdvP Part
 “I would like to thank you, sir. You buy skillfully.”

(16) *Quý hoá quá! Cảm ơn anh, cho em xin.*
 (very nice very thank you eld bro. let young sib. beg)
 AdvP AdvP V NP V NP V

“It’s very nice. Let me thank you.”

- (17) **Bác cho cháu nhiều thế.**
 (uncle give nephew many part)
 NP V NP AdvP Part
 “You give me too much!”

In terms of age and sex, there are some interesting points as follows:

Females, 20-35 years old, express the sentimental sentences more than males for thanking the seniors.

Females and males, 36-50 years old, express the sentiment with thanking sentence similarly. Females use the polite particle *a* to the seniors whereas males do not use it.

Male, 51 years old and over, use the word *Vâng* “yes” before thanking sentence. Males do not express much sentiment when thanking the seniors, not like females.

4.5 Requests

The three groups would like to borrow some money from seniors as in the following patterns:

There are 4 patterns. All groups use the same patterns. Three patterns are used with senior addressee as follows: 1) (Reason) + Question. 2) Reason + request/borrow money. 3) Borrow money. One pattern is used with an equal addressee: 4) Question

Examples:

- (18) **Công việc của con cần đầu tư thêm tiền.**
 (work of child want invest more money)
 NP V V V NP

Bố mẹ giúp con nhé.
 parents help child part)
 NP V NP Part

“My work needs more some investments, would you parents please help me.”

- (19) **Bố mẹ ơi con thiếu tiền mua nhà.**
 (parents voc. child lack money buy house)
 NP V NP V NP

Bố mẹ cho con vay một ít.
 parents give child borrow one small)
 NP V NP V NP

“Parents! I lack money to buy a house. Would you please lend me a little.”

- (20) *Cậu cho tôi mượn ít tiền được không?*
 (you give I borrow little money able Q)
 NP V NP V NP V Q
 “Can you loan me some money?”

In terms of age and sex, there are some interesting differences as follows:

Females, 20-35 years old, use question for the mild request more than males. Some females do not borrow from their parents but ask for money directly instead but males do not ask for it from parents.

Females, 36-50 years old, use the question as the mild request more than males.

Males and females, 51 years old and over, use the question in the same frequency. But males use the respectful word *Thưa* “respectful” at the beginning of the sentence whereas females do not.

4.6 Refusals

The three groups refuse to open the door to senior people as in the following patterns:

There are 8 patterns. The three groups use the same 3 patterns to a senior addressee, as follows: 1. (*Dạ*) + (Subject NP) + *xin lỗi* “excuse me” + Object NP + Reason (refuse). 2) (NP) + *thông cảm* “sympathize” + (particle) + reason 3) Refusal sentence.

The student and trader groups use the same 1 pattern to a senior addressee: 1) (*Thưa*) + NP subject + *thông cảm* “sympathize” + reason

The government and the trader groups use the same 1 pattern to a senior addressee: 2) Cause-reason or reason-cause.

The government and the student groups use the same 1 pattern to equal and junior addressee: 3) (subject) + *xin lỗi* “excuse me” + (NP) + refuse/reason.

The student group uses individually 2 patterns. One pattern is used with a senior addressee: 4) (NP subject) + *thưa* “dear” + NP + refusal/reason sentence. Another pattern is used with equal and junior addressee: 5) *làm ơn* “do a favour” + V + NP.

Examples:

(21) Em xin lỗi thầy. Em không thể giúp
 (young sib. excuse teacher young sib. not able help
 NP V NP NP AdvP AUX V

thầy mở được.
 teacher open able)
 NP V PostV

“I would like to pardon me. I can’t help you open the door.”

(22) Dạ xin lỗi hai tay em quá bận.
 (yes excuse two hand young sib. rather busy)
 AdvP V NP AdvP V

“Pardon me. My hands are busy, sir.”

(23) Thầy thông cảm cho em. Em đang
 (teacher sympathize to young sib. young sib. be in progress
 NP V PP NP AUX

bận quá.
 busy very)
 V AdvP

“The teacher sympathize with you. I am very busy.”

(24) Cậu thông cảm nhé. Tôi vội.
 (you sympathize part I hurry)
 NP V Part NP V

“You sympathize. I hurry.”

In terms of age and sex, there are some different points as follows:

Males, 20-35 years old, cannot help by themselves but propose the senior to request other person to help.

Males, 36-50 years old, refuse without any other proposal to help a senior open the door whereas females propose the idea to look for the others’ help.

Males and females, 51 years old and over, cannot help and do not propose other way for helping.

4.7 Complaints

The three groups complain about unbearable weather to a friend. The complaint can be done only to friends or colleagues, as follows:

There are 2 patterns. All use the same patterns to equal addressee: 1) (Complain) + Question or Question + complain. 2) Complain.

Examples:

(25) Hôm nay thời tiết khó chịu quá. Bạn có thấy thế không?
 (today weather unbearable very friend Q feel so Q)
 AdvP NP V AdvP NP Q V A Q
 “Today the weather is very unbearable. Do you feel so?”

(26) Cậu có thấy hôm nay rất khó chịu không?
 (you Q feel today very unbearable Q)
 NP Q V AdvP AdvP V Q
 “Do you feel that today is very unbearable?”

In Hanoi, to complain about the changeable weather is heard regularly. The complaints deal with the feelings of the speakers toward the weather such as *chán* “be bored”, *khó chịu* “unbearable”, *mệt mỏi* “tired”, *ghét* “hate”, *đau hết cả đầu* “headache”, *sợ* “afraid”, *chóng mặt* “dizzy”, as in the following examples:

(27) Mình rất ghét thời tiết này.
 (I very hate weather this)
 NP AdvP V NP
 “I hate this weather very much.”

(28) Mình cảm thấy đau đầu quá!
 (I feel headache very)
 NP V V AdvP
 “I feel very headachy.”

(29) Mình cảm thấy rất khó chịu.
 (I feel very unbearable)
 NP V AdvP V
 “I feel it’s very unbearable.”

(30) Người già rất sợ thời tiết thay đổi,
 (elder people very afraid weather change)
 NP AdvP V NP V

ẩm ướt dễ dịch bệnh.
 (humid easy epidemic disease)
 V V A NP

“The elder people are afraid of the changeable weather. The humidity easily causes the illness.”

The complaints also deal with the weather directly such as *oi* “hot and oppressive”, *khắc nghiệt* “harsh”, *thay đổi* “change”, *trở trời* “change from good to bad”, *khó chịu* “unbearable”, *không tốt* “not good”, *ngột ngạt* “stuffy”, etc., as in the following examples:

- (31) Thời tiết chán quá nhỉ cậu nhỉ.
 (weather bore very part you part)
 NP V AdvP Part NP Part
 “The weather is very boring.”

- (32) Thời tiết hôm nay không tốt cho sức khỏe.
 (weather today not good for health)
 NP AdvP Neg V PP
 “The weather today is not good for health.”

In terms of age and sex, there are some interesting points as follows:

Females, 20-35 years old, complain by using the questions *không?* “yes-no question”, *sao?* “how?”, whereas males use lesser. Males use the respectful word *Đạ* “yes” starting the complaint and ending with the polite particle *ạ* to the senior.

Females, 36-50 years old, use yes-no question *không?* in complaining while males do not use.

Both males and females, 51 years old and over, complain in a similar way.

4.8 Compliments

The three groups compliment the senior and junior people when they do well as in the following patterns:

There are 2 patterns. The three groups use the same 1 pattern to senior and junior addressee as in: 1) Compliments. The government and the trader groups use the same 1 pattern to senior and junior addressees as in: 2) Congratulations.

Examples:

- (33) Chúc mừng sự thành công của anh.
 (congratulate clf. success of you)
 V NP
 “Congratulations on your success!”

To praise directly is the most popular by using various praising patterns with the following words such as *tốt* “good”, *đáng khen* “be worthy to be praised”, *đáng khâm phục* “be worthy to be admired”, *khá* “getting better”, *có chất lượng* “qualify”, *xứng đáng* “deserve”, *niệt tình và cố gắng* “enthusiasm and try”, *tuyệt vời* “wonderful”, *tích cực* “active”, *xuất sắc* “outstanding”, *khen thưởng* “reward”, *siêu* “extraordinary” (This is a slang expression which is used with friends.), etc. The examples are as follows:

(34) **Bác làm rất tốt ạ.**
 (uncle do very good part)
 NP V AdvP V Part
 “You have done very well.”

(35) **Anh thật đáng khâm phục.**
 (eld bro. true be worthy admire)
 NP AdvP V V
 “You are worthy to be admired.”

(36) **Bạn xứng đáng với kết quả đó.**
 (friend deserve with result that)
 NP V PP
 “You deserve that good result.”

(37) **Bạn siêu thật.**
 (friend extraordinary true)
 NP V AdvP
 “You are truly extraordinary.”

In terms of age and sex, there are some interesting points as follows:

Both females and males, 20-35 years old, use similar patterns. It is noticeable that some young respondents do not know how to compliment a senior. They gave the response that “They do not say anything.”

Females, 36-50 years old, use the familiar (colloquial) word *sếp* (=chef) “boss”, the slang *siêu* “super” and the polite particle *ạ* to a superior, whereas males do not.

Males, 51 years old and over, use a little longer sentence when praising than females. Apart from compliments, females say that they want to learn from the senior’s experiences, whereas males do not.

4.9 Apologies

The three groups excuse a senior or an equal when they step on his/her feet, as follows:

There are 5 patterns. The three groups use the same 1 pattern to senior and equal addressee: 1) Excuse + Reason.

The government group uses individually 3 patterns to senior and equal addressee, as follows: 2) *Xin lỗi* “excuse” + NP object + (Reason) + (Question). 3) (NP) + *xin lỗi* “excuse” + NP + Reason. 4) Excuse + Reason + Expectation.

The student group uses individually 1 pattern to senior and equal addressee, as in: 5) NP + Reason + *xin lỗi* “excuse” + NP+(Particle).

Examples:

- (38) Xin lỗi anh. Tôi vô ý quá. Anh có sao không?
 (pardon eld bro. I thoughtless very eld bro. Q how Q)
 V NP NP V AdvP NP Q Q Q
 “Pardon me. I am very thoughtless. Are you o.k.?”

There are other words which express the unintention i.e. *không để ý* “not pay attention to”, *không cố ý* “not intend”, *sơ ý* “not intend”, *vô tình* “not intend”, as in the following examples:

- (39) Xin lỗi chú. Cháu không để ý.
 (excuse fa’s young bro. Niece not pay attention)
 V NP NP Neg V
 “Excuse me. I did not pay attention (to step on your feet).”

- (40) Xin lỗi, em không cố ý.
 (excuse young sib. not intend)
 V NP Neg V
 “Excuse me. I didn’t intend (to step on your feet).”

- (41) Em xin lỗi cô. Em thật là sơ ý.
 (young sib. excuse teacher young sib. true that not intend)
 NP V NP NP V Comp V
 “Excuse me. It’s true that I didn’t intend.”

- (42) Xin lỗi anh. Tôi thật là vô ý.
 (excuse eld bro. I true that thoughtless)
 V NP NP V Conj V

Mong anh thông cảm giúp.
 expect eld bro. sympathize help)
 V NP V V

“Excuse me. It’s true that I was thoughtless. Hope that you understand me.”

The following example is the excuse sentence followed by the reason.

- (43) Em xin lỗi thầy vì em vội quá.
 (young sib. excuse teacher because young sib. hurry very)
 NP V NP Conj NP V AdvP
 “Excuse me because I was very hurried.”

Apart from the word *xin lỗi* “excuse”, there are other words to express the forgiveness, i.e. *tha*, *thứ* “forgiveness”, *lỡ* “be so inadvertent as to” as follows:

- (44) Thủ trưởng tha lỗi, tôi vô ý quá!
 (boss forgive error I thoughtless very)
 NP V NP NP V AdvP
 “The boss forgives me. I am very thoughtless.”

- (45) Thủ trưởng thứ lỗi do tôi lỡ chân.
 (boss forgive error by I be so inadvertent feet)
 NP V NP P NP V NP
 “The boss forgives me for my unintentional stepping on your feet.”

In terms of age and sex, there are interesting points as follows:

Males, 20-35 years old, use the respectful word *Đạ* “Yes” preceding the excused sentence whereas female does not. Both males and females use the exclamation word *Ôi!* “Alas!”. Females ask the seniors how they are (from the stepping on feet) more than males.

Females, 36-50 years old, use more exclamation words i.e. *Ôi!* “Alas!”, *Ôi chết!* “Alas die!” *Thôi chết!* “Die!” which convey the stepping on the senior’s feet unintentionally, whereas male uses these words less.

Males, 51 years olds, make short excuse. Females use the familiar word *sếp* addressing the boss whereas males do not. Females, apart from excuse, ask how the superior is, whereas males do not. Females use the exclamation word *Ôi chết!* “Alas die” whereas males do not.

4.10 Disagreements

The three groups disagree with an idea senior people as in the following patterns:

There are 3 patterns. The three groups use the same 2 patterns to senior, equal and junior addressee, as in: 1) (*Xin lỗi*) “Excuse me” + Negative sentence 2) *Thưa* “dear” + NP + Proposed idea.

The government and the student groups use the same 1 pattern to senior, equal and junior addressee, as in: 3) Question.

Examples:

- (46) Thầy có ý kiến khác không?
 (teacher have opinion different Q)
 NP Q NP A Q
 “Does the teacher have another opinion?”

(47) Em nghĩ như thế này không biết có đúng không?
 (young sib. think like this not know Q correct Q)
 NP V NP Neg V Q V Q
 “I don’t know whether to think that this is correct.”

(48) Em **không** nghĩ như vậy.
 (young sib. not think like this)
 NP Neg V NP
 “I don’t think so.”

(49) Tôi **không** đồng ý với ý kiến của thủ trưởng đưa ra.
 (I not agree with opinion of superior put forward)
 NP Neg V PP NP PP V V
 “I don’t agree with your opinion.”

(50) Theo em, chúng ta làm theo cách này.
 (according to young sib. we do follow way this)
 A NP NP V V NP
 “According to me, we do it like this.”

In terms of age and sex, there are interesting points as follows:

Males, 20-25 years old, use the question for asking other idea from the seniors instead of disagreeing directly, whereas females disagree by using the negative sentence directly.

Females, 36-50 years old, use more polite expressions preceding the disagreements such as *Xin lỗi* “Excuse me”, *Thưa* “respectful”, *Em xin phép* “Let me” whereas males use them lesser. Males show disagreement directly. Females compliment first and then propose their idea later, whereas males do not compliment.

Males, 51 years old and over, use the respectful word *thưa* “respectful” whereas females use both *Xin lỗi* “Excuse me” and *Thưa* “sir”. Females compliment the idea of the boss firstly and show their disagreement later whereas males do not compliment.

The education of the respondents are grade 6 to Ph.D. but the ways of expressing politeness does not differ distinctively. Therefore, education is not a significant factor to distinguish the different patterns of politeness in Vietnamese as well as age and sex. These features are set up for widespread data collection.

5. Cultural aspects of Vietnamese politeness

Cultural politeness involves Vietnamese courtesies from family to society. The Vietnamese people have the concept of having the family as the main idea. The law allows women 18 years old and men 20 years old to get married. The wife belongs to husband's family after getting married. Women do not change the family name after marriage but the children use the paternal family name. Most Vietnamese families are tighter and warmer than families in many other countries. Women have to work harder than before for helping the husband earn more income.

The polite behaviors in greeting, leave-taking by asking the question, handshaking or hugging have been done. Other manners such as eye contact, tone of voices, polite consumption, telephone, teasing, visiting others, introducing others are quite similar to universal etiquette.

Summary

The above investigated politeness strategies of Vietnamese language use agree with Lakoff (1973) and Kasper (1994) in terms of being clear and being polite including Tact maxim, Approbation maxim, Modesty maxim, Agreement maxim and Sympathy maxim.

It is interesting to learn that in each speech act in Vietnamese there are various ways to speak to different addressees according to the involved sociolinguistic factors: age, occupation, social status, familiarity, formality and informality. This investigation provides the Vietnamese politeness speech acts patterns to both Vietnamese and foreigners. Anyone who can use these politeness patterns when speaking to Vietnamese people including cultural etiquette will be appreciated.

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