

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON ENCOURAGING IN VIETNAMESE AND AMERICAN ENGLISH

Field: Communication Studies

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INTRODUCTION

1. RATIONALE

In cross-cultural contacts between the Vietnamese and the American, which are increasingly widespread, there appears a need for participants to have certain understanding of not only the target language but also the target culture to behave in an appropriate way for successful communication. It has been proved in reality that, without a reasonable level of cultural competence, there exists a strong likelihood of culture shock, cultural conflicts, and communication breakdown. As a result, studies of similarities and differences between Vietnamese and American verbal communication are of great importance.

The speech act of encouraging is common in both Vietnamese and American cultures. Appropriate encouragement can help improve one's feeling, attitude, motivation as well as performance. However, cross-cultural studies of encouraging have not received much attention from Vietnamese researchers and linguists. This study is conducted in the hope of making positive contributions to the success in Vietnamese – American cross-cultural communication and in communicative English language teaching.

2. AIMS OF THE STUDY

The main aims of this study are:

to investigate how the Vietnamese native speakers (VNS) perform the act of encouraging as defined in relation to the social factors assigned in certain situations;

to investigate how the American native speakers (ANS) perform the act of encouraging as defined in relation to the social factors assigned in certain situations;

to find out if there are any prominent similarities and differences between the VNS' and the ANS' use of encouraging strategies in relation to the social factors assigned in the situations studied.

3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses only on the verbal aspects of the speech act of encouraging. Furthermore, it mainly concentrates on VNS' and ANS' use of encouraging strategies in six situations, in which P and D are systematically varied while R is controlled. Influences of other parameters of the informants are not analysed in this study. What is more, the data are collected only through survey questionnaire and the number of informants is limited. Besides, only Northern Vietnamese dialect is taken into consideration.

In the view of the above limitations, this can only be regarded as a preliminary study and all the conclusions are tentative.

DEVELOPMENT

Chapter 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. PRAGMATICS AND CROSS-CULTURAL PRAGMATICS

Pragmatics, since its appearance, has excited great attention from many leading linguists. Enormous efforts have gone into reaching a satisfactory definition of this linguistic phenomenon.

The notion of “pragmatics” is clarified by Richards, Platt, & Webber (1992: 284) as follows:

Pragmatics includes the study of:

How the interpretation and use of utterances depend on knowledge of the real world

How speakers use and understand speech acts

How the structure of sentences is influenced by the relationship between the speaker and the hearer.

Of the above issues, the study of speech acts is considered to be of high importance to pragmatics.

What is more, as “every culture has its own repertoire of characteristic speech acts” and “different cultures find expression in different system of speech acts and different speech acts become entrenched, and to some extent, codified in different languages” (Wierzbicka (1991: 25), the study of speech acts plays an even more important role in cross-cultural pragmatics, which is defined by Yule (1996: 87) as “the study of differences in expectations based on cultural schemata”.

1.2. SPEECH ACTS

1.2.1. Definition of speech acts

The concept of speech acts was first introduced by Austin (1962). Since then, it has been discussed extensively by a large number of philosophers and linguists such as Grice (1975), Hymes (1964), Searle (1969, 1975, 1979), Levinson (1983), Brown and Yule (1983), Mey (1993), Thomas (1995), and Yule (1996). All these speech act theorists share the confirmation of the close link between speech acts and language functions.

Generally, actions that are performed by the use of utterances to communicate are called speech acts (Yule, 1996: 47). In language use, speech acts are specifically labeled as apology, complaint, request, compliment, invitation, promise, etc.

Austin (1962) believes that a single speech act actually consists of three separate but interrelated acts:

A **locutionary act** is the act of saying something, performed with a sense and reference.

An **illocutionary act** is the function of the utterance, performed with a predetermination and/or intention.

A **perlocutionary act** is the recognition, and the effects that the hearer receives as following the illocutionary act.

Of the three acts, the illocutionary act is of the utmost importance as there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between syntactic forms and illocutionary forces. For example, the utterance “Your room is dirty.”

can bring about different forces. It may be understood as a remark, a criticism, or a request. It is the reason why Yule (1996: 52) observes that “the term *speech act* is generally interpreted quite narrowly to mean only the illocutionary force of an utterance” and Searle (1976: 1) regards the illocutionary act “the basic unit of human linguistic communication”.

1.2.2. Classifications of speech acts

1.2.2.1. Function-based approach

Searle (1976: 10-16) classified speech acts into five categories:

Assertives/ Representatives = speech acts that commit a speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition, e.g. reciting a Creed

Directives = speech acts that are to cause the hearer to take a particular action, e.g. requests, commands and advice

Commissives = speech acts that commit a speaker to some future action, e.g. promises and oaths

Expressives = speech acts that express the speaker's attitudes and emotions towards the proposition, e.g. congratulations, excuses and thanks

Declarations = speech acts that change the reality in accord with the proposition of the declaration, e.g. baptisms, pronouncing someone guilty or pronouncing someone husband and wife

Yule (1996: 55) makes a remarkable progress in summarizing the five general types of speech acts with their key functions as below:

Speech act type	Direction of fit	S = speaker, X = situation
Declarations	Words change the world	S causes X
Representatives	Makes words fit the world	S believes X
Expressives	Make words fit the world	S feels X
Directives	Make the world fits words	S wants X
Commissives	Make the world fits words	S intends X

Table 1.1: The five general functions of speech acts (following Searle, 1979)

1.2.2.2. Structure-function based approach

Based on the relationship between structures and functions of speech acts, some linguists classify speech acts in terms of directness and indirectness.

The issue is raised in Saville-Troike (1982) and supported by Yule (1996: 54), who suggests the criteria for classification: the relationship between the three structural forms (declarative, interrogative, and imperative) and the three general communication functions (statement, question, and command/request). According to Yule (1996: 54), we have a

direct speech act when a direct relationship between a structure and a function exists, and we have an indirect speech act when there is not a direct relationship.

In fact, each taxonomy has its own merits. In this study, the author follows the classification of Searle (1976) and the summary of the five types of speech acts with the five certain functions given by Yule (1996).

1.2.3. Encouraging as a speech act

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of English, **to encourage** is "to give somebody support, courage or hope".

In terms of syntax, there is no necessary correlation between structural forms and illocutionary forces in encouraging. In fact, encouragement can be expressed in declarative, interrogative, and imperative forms.

In the light of speech acts theory, encouraging can be classified as a representative (e.g. *You've clearly got talent!*), an expressive (e.g. *Great work!*), a directive (e.g. *Don't be worried, honey!*) or a commissive (e.g. *I'll stand by you.*).

1.3. POLITENESS IN CROSS-CULTURAL PRAGMATICS

1.3.1. Politeness defined

The working definition of politeness for this study is the one give by Nguyen (2006: 44): "Politeness is any communicative act (verbal and/or nonverbal) that is intentionally and appropriately meant to make another person/ other people feel better or less bad."

1.3.2. Conversational-maxim view on politeness

Lakoff (1983:142) specifies the politeness principle with three rules that speakers should follow in order to be polite, which are: *Don't impose*, *Offer options*, and *Encourage feelings of camaraderie*.

Leech's (1983: 16) politeness principles are constructed based on the notion of "cost" and "benefit". He introduces six following maxims: *Tact maxim*, *Generosity maxim*, *Approbation maxim*, *Modesty maxim*, *Agreement maxim*, and *Sympathy maxim*.

1.3.3. Face-management view on politeness

1.3.3.1. Face defined

Face is central to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, which is considered to be among the most influential ones. Brown and Levinson (1987: 66) see face as "the sense of a person's public self-image". Face consists of two aspects: positive and negative face.

In Brown and Levinson's (1987: 62) opinion, "positive face is the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others", whereas "negative face is the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others". Simply put, the former is the need to be concerned, and the latter, the need to be independent.

1.3.3.2. Strategies for FTAs

Politeness strategies are developed in order to formulate messages to save H's or S's face when FTAs (face-threatening acts) are inevitable. Politeness strategies can be understood as those which aim at (1) supporting

or enhancing H's positive face (positive politeness) and (2) avoiding transgression of H's freedom of action and freedom from imposition (negative politeness).

Brown and Levinson (1987: 69) posit a "form hierarchies" for speakers to implement politeness strategies, ranging from the worst to the best case: (1) *Do the act on record, baldly without any redressive action*, (2) *Do the act on record, using positive politeness*, (3) *Do the act on record, using negative politeness*, (4) *Do the act off record*, and (5) *Do not do the act*.

Although the above schema is highly appreciated by many researchers, there exists a limitation, which reduces its universality. The way Brown and Levinson (1987) number positive politeness and negative politeness indirectly shows that negative politeness strategies are considered to be "more polite" than positive ones. Nguyen (2006) does not share this opinion; therefore, he introduces another version as follows:

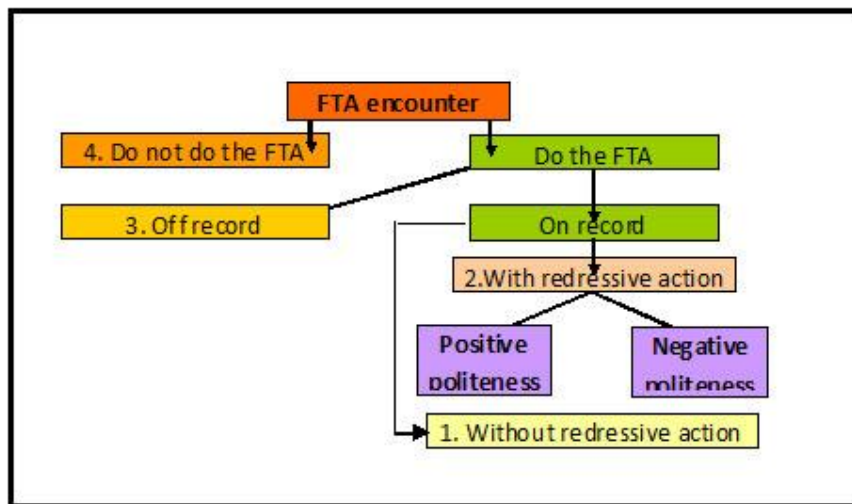


Figure 1.2. Possible strategies for doing FTAs (Nguyen, 2006: 47)

Nguyen (2006: 27-28) also introduces 17 positive and 11 negative politeness strategies.

1.3.4. Social variables affecting politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987: 74) propose three independent variables which have a systematic impact on the choice of appropriate politeness strategies in performing an FTA in a given context:

- The relative 'power' (P) of S and H (an asymmetric relation)
- The 'social distance' (D) of S and H (a symmetric relation)
- The absolute ranking (R) of imposition in the particular culture

These three sociological factors P, D and R are "crucial in determining the level of politeness" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 15) which a speaker (S) will use to a hearer (H).

Chapter 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do the Vietnamese native speakers perform the act of encouraging in relation to the social factors assigned in certain situations?

How do the American native speakers perform the act of encouraging in relation to the social factors assigned in certain situations?

How are the Vietnamese native speakers and the American native speakers similar to and different from each other in their use of encouraging strategies in relation to the social factors assigned in the situations studied?

2.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.2.1. Data collection instruments

The data collection instruments include two types of questionnaires:

the Metapragmatic Questionnaire (MPQ) was designed to test the validity and reliability of the situations used for data collection.

the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was designed to elicit encouraging utterances from the Vietnamese and American native speakers.

2.2.2. Variables manipulated in data collection instruments

The first type of questionnaire consists of 18 real-life situations, which are aimed at eliciting encouraging utterances from VNS and ANS. In these situations, various constellations of the three variables P, D, and R are reflected. The following are values of the variables.

The relative power (P) has three values:

+P: S has a higher rank, title or social status than H

=P: S and H are of equal rank, title or social status

-P: S has a lower rank, title or social status than H

The relative social distance (D) has two values:

=D: S and H are acquaintances. They are relatively familiar with each other. They do not know much about each other. They may be colleagues, school friends, etc.

-D: S and H are intimates. They are really close to each other. They may be family members, lovers, close friends, etc.

(+D (S and H are strangers) is not used in this study as strangers are less likely to encourage each other.)

The absolute ranking of imposition (R) is kept at a constantly high level.

Hence, there are six constellations:

+P, +D	=P, +D	-P, +D
+P, =D	=P, =D	-P, =D
+P, -D	=P, -D	-P, -D

Based on the above constellations, the six most valid and reliable situations were selected from the eighteen situations in the MPQ and then used in the DCT.

2.2.3. Contents of the questionnaires

The MPQ consists of eighteen situations, each of which is followed by three questions about the informants' judgements on the three variables P, D, and R. The informants rated each question according to their assessment of each variable on a 3-point scale. Besides, there are perception questions about the clarity of the situation and the likelihood of the situation happening in real life. In case the situation is not clear enough, they are asked to give suggestions to improve it.

The collected data from the MPQ were analysed so that the DCT with the six most valid and reliable situations was produced. A pilot study was then carried out with four Vietnamese and four American native speakers. Based on the data collected from the pilot DCT, one improvement was made to the final DCT: the space for the informants to write down their encouraging utterances was increased. Following is a sample item of the DCT:

Please read the situations and write down EXACTLY what you would say DIRECTLY in a normal conversation.

Your colleague has just been discovered to have cancer stage 1. He/she is severely depressed. You know that his/her disease can still be cured. You encourage him/her.

You say:

.....
.....
.....
.....

2.2.4. Informants

The questionnaires were delivered to two groups of informants either directly or via email. The first group consisted of 30 Vietnamese native speakers and the second group – 30 American people.

2.2.5. Data collection procedure

First, the MPQ was delivered to two groups of informants: the Vietnamese version to 30 Vietnamese native speakers and the English version to 30 American native speakers. The informants were asked to rate the social factors in each situation and answer the accompanying perception questions. The collected data were used to test the validity and reliability of the situations, which formed the basis for the selection of the six situations in the DCT.

The pilot DCT was administered to 4 Vietnamese and 4 American informants so that any necessary improvements can be made to the final DCT. The final DCT was then distributed to the 30 Vietnamese and 30 American speakers who had responded to the MPQ. One response, in fact, was sent back to an American speaker via email as this informant had forgotten to respond to one situation. Finally, 60 completed responses (30 in Vietnamese and 30 in English) were collected and analysed. Encouraging strategies were realized. The results of the statistical analysis were reported in chapter 3.

2.3. RESULTS OF THE MPQ

The six situations selected for the DCT can be seen in Appendix B.

- 1. +P, -D (higher power – familiar): Situation 1

2. +P, =D (higher power – fairly familiar):	Situation 2
3. =P, –D (equal power – familiar):	Situation 3
4. =P, =D (equal power – fairly familiar):	Situation 6
5. –P, –D (lower power – familiar):	Situation 4
6. –P, =D (lower power – fairly familiar):	Situation 5

2.4. REALISATION OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ENCOURAGING

This study is not intended to investigate whether the speech act of encouraging is more positive or negative politeness-oriented. Instead, nine encouraging strategies are realised to reflect the specificity of the data.

- Strategy 1: Alleviating H's hard feelings
- Strategy 2: Offering help or reward
- Strategy 3: Giving advice
- Strategy 4: Predicting bright prospect
- Strategy 5: Complimenting H
- Strategy 6: Showing understanding and sympathy
- Strategy 7: Reminding H's responsibility
- Strategy 8: Suggesting things to do
- Strategy 9: Stating facts

Chapter 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. OVERALL NUMBER OF STRATEGIES

The two groups used the same number of strategies for situation 6 (cancer stage 1). VNS used larger numbers of encouraging strategies in situation 1 (important exam), situation 4 (TV contest), and situation 5 (competition for promotion), whereas ANS used greater numbers of strategies for the rest situations.

On average, both VNS and ANS used at least two encouraging strategies in each situation. In reality, the number of strategies in each situation may vary. An encouragement may consist of only 1 strategy or several strategies. Results from the t-test analysis show that there was a significant difference between the numbers of strategies employed by VNS and ANS in the busy-spouse situation. More specifically, ANS used statistically significantly more strategies than VNS in situation 3.

3.2. OVERALL USE OF STRATEGIES

Interestingly enough, strategies 6, 7, and 8 were the least, second least, and third least frequently used strategies respectively in both groups VNS and ANS. What is more, strategies 3, 4, 9, 2, and 5 were utilised with decreasing frequency in both groups of informants. Nevertheless, there was a big gap between the frequency of strategy 1 in VNS group and that in its counterpart. While strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings), followed by strategy 3 (Giving advice), was the most common strategy utilised by VNS, ANS do not often use the strategy of alleviating H's hard feelings when giving verbal encouragement. Strategy 3 (Giving advice) and strategy 4 (Predicting bright prospect) were the most popular among ANS instead. Besides, VNS were inclined to use strategies 1 and 3 with approximately

equivalent frequency, whereas ANS employed strategies 3 and 4 evenly across all the six situations.

3.3. USE OF STRATEGIES BY SOCIAL VARIABLES

One notable similarity between the two groups is that strategy 5 (Complimenting H) was mainly employed by people of lower social status for those of higher social status rather than by people of equal/higher social status for their communicative partners, whereas strategy 8 (Suggesting things to do) appeared with a much higher frequency in high-status situations than in equal-status and low-status ones.

For VNS, strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings) and strategy 3 (Giving advice) were most frequently used in the high-status situations; strategy 1 was also most often employed in the equal-status situations; and strategy 3 (Giving advice) was the most popular in the low-status situations. On the other hand, ANS most favoured strategy 4 (Predicting bright prospect) and strategy 9 (Stating facts) in the high-status situations; strategy 3 (Giving advice) in the equal-status situations; and strategies 3 and 4 in the remaining situations.

Overall, both VNS and ANS utilized more strategies when encouraging acquaintances than when encouraging intimates. Both VNS and ANS used strategies 7, 8 and 9 more frequently for relatively familiar communicative partners than for familiar ones, whereas strategies 1, 2, 3, and 4 are employed more often in familiar situations than in relatively familiar ones for both VNS and ANS. There were differences in the use of the two remaining strategies. While ANS more favoured strategy 5 and strategy 6 in encouraging relatively familiar people, VNS employed these strategies more often for familiar ones.

In sum, social variables, including social status and social distance, have a profound effect on the choice of encouraging strategies for both VNS and ANS.

3.4. USE OF STRATEGIES BY SITUATIONS

On the whole, strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings) and strategy 3 (Giving advice) were the two most common ones, which had approximately equivalent frequencies. They were followed by strategy 4 (Predicting bright prospect). Each of these three strategies was available in all the situations. In contrast, five of the remaining strategies, which had lower frequencies, did not appear in some of the six situations studied.

The two most popular strategies used by ANS were strategies 3 and 4, which had the same frequency and were followed by strategies 9 (Stating facts) and 2 (Offering help or reward). Only these four strategies were distributed throughout all the situations for ANS.

The nine encouraging strategies were used with different frequencies across the six situations and there existed similarities and differences in the use of strategies between the two groups. In the following sections, an in-depth analysis of how VNS and ANS used the nine encouraging strategies in each situation will be presented.

3.4.1. Choice of encouraging strategies in high-power settings (+P)

3.4.1.1. Choice of encouraging strategies in Sit. 2 (+P, =D) (important package deal)

Strategy 8 (Suggesting things to do) was the most popular one for VNS while ANS most favoured strategy 4 (Predicting bright prospect) in this situation. Strategy 4 was also utilized by VNS with a high frequency, just after strategy 8. The t-test analysis shows that there were significant differences between VNS and ANS in the use of three strategies, which are strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings), strategy 7 (Reminding H's responsibility), and strategy 9 (Stating facts). While VNS tended to use strategy 1 more often than ANS, ANS appeared to employ strategies 7 and 9 with a considerably higher frequency than VNS.

3.4.1.2. Choice of encouraging strategies in Sit. 1 (+P, -D) (important exam)

In the important-exam situation, VNS and ANS were similar in that they did not use strategies 7 (Reminding H's responsibility) and 8 (Suggesting things to do) to encourage their sons. Strategies 6 (Showing understanding and sympathy), 5 (Complimenting H), and 2 (Offering help or reward) were rarely employed while other strategies appeared with much higher frequencies. Strategy 3 (Giving advice) was the most popular one for both groups of informants.

The t-test analysis indicates that strategy 9 (Stating facts) once again experienced a significant difference between VNS and ANS and it was also the only strategy in this situation.

In summary, in the important-package-deal and important-exam situations, many differences in the informants' choice and frequency of use of encouraging strategies were found. One important difference is that for their acquaintances of lower social status, VNS and ANS used strategy 8 and strategy 4 respectively most frequently, whereas the most popular one both groups of informants used for their intimates of lower social status was strategy 3. It seemed that the social distance more or less had influence on the use of different strategies in these two specific situations. Nevertheless, in both high-power settings, there was a significant difference in using strategy 9 (Stating facts) between the two groups: VNS and ANS.

3.4.2. Choice of encouraging strategies in equal-power settings (=P)

3.4.2.1. Choice of encouraging strategies in Sit. 6 (=P, =D) (cancer stage 1)

Strategy 5 (Complimenting H) was the only one which did not appear in this situation for both VNS and ANS. Strategies 7 (Reminding H's responsibility) and 8 (Suggesting things to do) were employed but with low frequencies by both groups of informants. Strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings) was most favoured by VNS while strategy 3 (Giving advice) was once again the most common one for ANS.

The t-test analysis shows that strategies 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings) and 2 (Offering help or reward) experienced significant differences between VNS and ANS in this situation. The frequency of use of strategy 1 by VNS was triple that by ANS. On the contrary, ANS seemed to use strategy 2 (Offering help or reward) much more often than VNS.

3.4.2.2. Choice of encouraging strategies in Sit. 3 (=P, -D) (busy spouse)

VNS did not utilise strategies 8 (Suggesting things to do) and 9 (Stating facts) in the busy-spouse situation while all the nine strategies were used by ANS. For VNS, the most and the second most popular strategies were strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings) and strategy 2 (Offering help or reward) respectively. For ANS, strategy 2 was the most popular one, which was followed by strategy 4 (Predicting bright prospect) and strategy 3 (Giving advice). In fact, these three strategies were utilized with approximately equal frequencies by ANS.

There existed significant differences between VNS and ANS in the use of four strategies: (1) Alleviating H' hard feelings, (3) Giving advice, (5) Complimenting H, and (9) Stating facts. The greatest difference was in the use of strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings) and this was also the only strategy of which the frequency of use by VNS outnumbered that by ANS. ANS used more of the other strategies than VNS. Of these three strategies, strategy 3 (Giving advice) experienced the most significant difference between VNS and ANS. ANS gave advice much more often than VNS.

In brief, there were some similarities between the informants' use of encouraging strategies in the cancer-stage-1 situation and the busy-spouse situation. Strategy 1 was used most frequently by VNS and strategy 3 was employed with a high frequency by ANS in the two situations. Besides, significant differences between VNS and ANS were found in the frequencies of strategy 1 in both equal-power settings. However, differences in the use and number of strategies still outnumbered similarities, which showed the noticeable effects of the social distance in these situations.

3.4.3. Choice of encouraging strategies in low-power settings (-P)

3.4.3.1. Choice of encouraging strategies in Sit. 5 (-P, =D) (competition for promotion)

All the nine strategies were used by ANS, whereas VNS did not employ strategies 6 and 8. The most frequently used strategies were strategy 3 (Giving advice) and strategy 5 (Complimenting H), which occupied the top rank for VNS and ANS respectively. In other words, strategy 3 was more common among VNS than ANS while strategy 5 was more popular among ANS.

The t-test analysis shows significant differences in the use of strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings) and strategy 7 (Reminding H's responsibility) between VNS and ANS. Both strategies were used with higher frequencies by VNS than by ANS.

3.4.3.2. Choice of encouraging strategies in Sit. 4 (-P, -D) (TV contest)

Surprisingly, there were so many similarities in the use of strategies between VNS and ANS in the TV-contest situation. First, three strategies 6 (Showing understanding and sympathy), 7 (Reminding H's responsibility), and 8 (Suggesting things to do) were not used at all by both VNS and ANS. Besides, for both groups, strategies 3 (Giving advice) and 4 (Predicting bright prospect) were utilised with the highest frequencies. What is more, there were no significant differences between the two groups' use of encouraging strategies in situation 4.

In sum, there were so many differences between the number and use of encouraging strategies in the competition-for-promotion and TV-contest situations. Strategies 6 and 8 were not employed only by VNS in situation 5 (competition for promotion), whereas all the three strategies 6, 7, and 8 were not utilized at all in the other situation. What is more, VNS used strategies 1 and 7 significantly more often than ANS in the relatively familiar situation while no significant difference between VNS and ANS in the frequency of strategies was found in the familiar situation. The influence of the social distance on the informants' verbal encouragement once again was demonstrated.

CONCLUSION

1. REVIEW OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

The findings of the study suggest that Vietnamese and American English have the same set of strategies used to perform the speech act of encouraging. However, they are culturally different in the preference for one strategy over the others in a particular communicative situation. Similarities and differences between the two informant groups VNS and ANS in their choice and frequency of use of strategies in the six investigated situations are found. Additionally, social factors including relative power and social distance produce considerable effects on both informant groups' verbal encouragement across all the situations.

1.1. Use of encouraging strategies

In general, both VNS and ANS use nine strategies: Alleviating H's hard feelings, Offering help or reward, Giving advice, Predicting bright prospect, Complimenting H, Showing understanding and sympathy, Reminding H's responsibility, Suggesting things to do, and Stating facts to perform the speech act of encouraging. VNS and ANS are similar in that on average they both employ at least two strategies and may utilize the same strategy more than once for a situation. The frequency of use of each strategy varies across situations with different relative power and social distance. Some encouraging strategies even are not used at all in certain situations. Another similarity between VNS and ANS is that both groups employ strategy 8 (Suggesting things to do), strategy 7 (Reminding H's responsibility), and strategy 6 (Showing understanding and sympathy) least frequently. What is more, they both utilize strategies 3 (Giving advice), 4 (Predicting bright prospect), 9 (Stating facts), 2 (Offering help or reward), and 5 (Complimenting H) with decreasing frequency. Besides, giving advice (strategy 3) is among the most common strategies for both VNS and ANS.

There are two major differences between VNS and ANS in their use of encouraging strategies. Firstly, the most common strategy for VNS is strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings), followed by strategy 3 (Giving advice), while ANS most favour strategy 3 (Giving advice) and strategy 4 (Predicting bright prospect). VNS also differ from ANS in that the number of strategies used by VNS is significantly lower than that by ANS in situation 3 (busy spouse).

1.2. Influence of social status

Social status has a considerable influence on the use of encouraging strategies by VNS and ANS. For each situation, different strategies are predominantly utilized. The data analysis reveals several important similarities between VNS and ANS in their use of strategies under the influence of social status. First, when giving verbal encouragement, both VNS and ANS mainly compliment their communicative partners (strategy 5) of higher social status rather than those of equal or lower rank. On the contrary, strategy 8 (Suggesting things to do) is employed mostly by people of higher position for their inferiors. Next, in low-power settings, strategy 3 (Giving advice) is employed with the highest frequency by both groups.

Differences between VNS and ANS are found in their preference of certain strategies over the others. First, in high-power settings, VNS most favour strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings), followed by strategy 3 (Giving advice), whereas ANS prefer strategy 4 (Predicting bright prospect) and strategy 9 (Stating facts). Second, in equal-power settings, the most common strategy for VNS is still strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings) while it is strategy 3 (Giving advice) for ANS.

1.3. Influence of social distance

Surprisingly, both VNS and ANS use more strategies for acquaintances than for intimates. What is more, both groups utilize strategy 7 (Reminding H's responsibility), strategy 8 (Suggesting things to do), and strategy 9 (Stating facts) for acquaintances more frequently than for intimates but they tend to use strategy 1 (Alleviating H's hard feelings), strategy 2 (Offering help or reward), strategy 3 (Giving advice), and strategy 4 (Predicting bright prospect) more often in familiar situations than in relatively familiar ones.

The two informant groups are different in their use of strategy 5 (Complimenting H) and strategy 6 (Showing understanding and sympathy). While VNS seem to use these two strategies more frequently for their intimates, ANS employ these more often for their acquaintances.

In conclusion, encouraging is regarded as a complex speech act, which is performed with various strategies. There exist similarities and differences between VNS and ANS in the ways they encourage their communicative partners. Besides, the choice and frequency of use of encouraging strategies are under the influence of social variables, namely social status and social distance.

It is also important to note that all the findings are context-dependent and the conclusions are, therefore, only tentative.

2. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study may serve as guidance for teaching English as a foreign language to Vietnamese native speakers. It is necessary for language teachers and learners to be fully aware that encouraging is a common but complex speech act which is realized by different strategies and performed differently by VNS and ANS. In order to help their learners to perform a speech act appropriately and effectively, teachers of English should teach language forms and functions contextually in specific situations with reference to social factors (relative power, social distance, gender, relationship, etc.) that may have influence on one's expressions.

Additionally, teachers and teaching materials should provide learners with not only linguistic input but also pragmatic input and socio-cultural information.

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