

# DIRECTNESS AND INDIRECTNESS IN MAKING REQUESTS IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

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**ABSTRACT:** Recently, it has been recognized that it is not possible to become proficient in a foreign language without being aware of its socio-cultural factors and comparing the language with the native language to avoid communication problems and culture shock. It has also been observed that many English students impose their culture when using this problem in real-life communication. Sometimes, non-native English speakers wonder why the expressions and sentences they use in certain situations offend British people. There are many research works on requests, but they belong only to intra-linguistics or mono-linguistics. In this article, I refer to ways of making requests that focus on some specific elements on the basis of politeness theory, which are directness and indirectness and similarities and differences in making a request between English and Vietnamese languages.

**Keywords:** how to make requests, intercultural communication, culture shock, directness and indirectness

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## TÍNH TRỰC TIẾP VÀ GIÁN TIẾP TRONG CÁCH ĐƯA RA LỜI YÊU CẦU TRONG TIẾNG VIỆT VÀ TIẾNG ANH

**TÓM TẮT:** Gần đây, người ta đã nhận ra rằng không thể thành thạo một ngoại ngữ nếu không nhận thức được yếu tố văn hóa xã hội của nó và so sánh ngôn ngữ đó với ngôn ngữ mẹ đẻ để tránh sự cố giao tiếp và sốc văn hóa. Người ta cũng quan sát thấy rằng nhiều sinh viên tiếng Anh áp đặt văn hóa của họ khi sử dụng vấn đề này trong giao tiếp thực tế. Đôi khi, những người nói tiếng Anh không phải là người bản ngữ tự hỏi tại sao các cách diễn đạt và câu họ sử dụng trong một số trường hợp cụ thể lại xúc phạm những người Anh. Có nhiều công trình nghiên cứu về cầu khiến nhưng chúng chỉ thuộc về nội ngôn ngữ học hoặc đơn ngữ học. Trong bài báo này, tôi đề cập đến các cách đưa ra lời yêu cầu tập trung vào một số yếu tố đặc trưng trên cơ sở lý thuyết về phép lịch sự, đó là tính trực tiếp, gián

tiếp; sự giống và khác nhau trong cách đưa ra lời yêu cầu giữa ngôn ngữ tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt.

**Từ khoá:** cách đưa ra lời yêu cầu, giao tiếp giữa các nền văn hóa, sức văn hóa, tính trực tiếp và gián tiếp.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the globalization tendency is a compulsory demand for all the countries in the world. A nation cannot exist if being separated from the others. Especially, Vietnam is a developing country in which the exchange of economic, scientific and cultural activities plays a crucial role in fostering its growth. At this time, English has become an effective international medium to help Vietnam take part in the integration process. It cannot be denied that mastering English is not an easy task. Sometimes, non-native speakers of English wonder why the expressions and sentences they use in some particular circumstances offend the feeling of Anglicist people. In spite of the fact that cross-culture communication is of great importance, it has long been a difficult field for learners of English in reaching their desirable goal of going native. There are many studies and researches on making requests but they belong to intra-linguistics or mono-linguistics only. In this paper, I will investigate into the directness and indirectness in making requests in Vietnamese and English cultures with the hope that not only learners but also teachers of English, with the modest research, will find clear description and classification of the request strategies in both Vietnamese and English for the better use of both the

languages. The study discusses the ways of making requests focusing on some typical factors in requests making on the background of the theory of politeness, namely directness and indirectness and the similarities and differences in request making between English and Vietnamese languages.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Directness - Indirectness - Politeness

Directness and Indirectness are two basic forms of expression in all languages. In many scholars' opinions, directness, indirectness and politeness are interrelated with each other and associated with different speech acts and events. As we know, a speech act can be performed directly or indirectly. So, as cultural categories, directness and indirectness always have a close link with language.

Culture and language scholars have also pointed out the correlation between directness, indirectness and politeness. They are closely interlinked and associated with different speech acts.

Blum Kulka (1987) believes "*Politeness is defined as the interactional balance achieved between two needs: the need to pragmatic clarity and the need to avoid coerciveness. This balance is achieved in the case of conventional*

*indirectness, which indeed received the highest ratings for politeness”.*

Wardhaugh (1991) maintains a certain Indirectness rather than Directness seems to be the norm in speech: “*We rarely attempt to make fully explicit what we have to say but rely on the intuition of others, their common sense, and a general idea about what we assume everybody knows and expects in order to get our points across. We tend to avoid the naked use of power or position and are generally reluctant to indulge in plain, blunt speaking in the form of either unequivocal commands or confrontational questions...*”

It might be the case that when giving a face-threatening act, indirectness degree is measured as an indicator of reducing or minimizing the threat, which is equal to politeness. Directness, in the favor of pragmatics clarity or non-coeriveness, can be considered as impolite because they indicate a lack of concern with face.

Request making is one of the most sensitive areas of daily communication in terms of politeness. It plays a crucial role in keeping people’s face. In reality, sometimes, there are cases in which you mean what you do not say or you say something but you mean something else. That is you have to express yourself indirectly to avoid directly imposing on the hearer or to give options to them. Then a indirect strategy is preferred to a direct one since it is seen as being more polite.

Leech (1983) suggests that it is possible “*to increase the degree of politeness by using a more and more indirect kind of illocution*” because indirect illocution is regarded as to be more polite by increasing the degree of optimality.

If a teacher says to her students:

*Could you say again your example, please?*

She uses her utterance in a polite and indirect way. By doing so, the teacher (1) respects her student and encourages the student to be self-confident enough to say the example again (2) does not use the power of teacher on the student, and (3) gives a soft and beautiful request but does not impose the reaction of the student by using words like “Could”, “Please”.

Despite such claims that politeness is linked to indirectness in general, the most indirect strategies are not considered as the most polite. In those cases, directness seems to be better. Let us consider the following example:

“*Khiếp, sao hôm nay trông đầu tóc rối bời thế?*” (indirect)

(Oh, you look like a terrible mess today)

And of course it is not as polite as:

“*Em nên chải tóc gọn gàng hơn*”

(You should comb your hair tidy)

## ***2.2. Politeness strategies used in making requests***

In general, politeness is any kind of behavior (either verbal or nonverbal or

both) that is intentionally and appropriately meant to make another person/other people feel better or less bad. Brown and Levinson (1987) provide a slightly different perspective on politeness phenomena. In their analysis, politeness is seen as “*trade in a commodity*” they call FACE. The notion of face is essential in the study of politeness. Face refers to the respect that an individual has for himself or herself, and maintaining that “self-esteem” in public or in private situations. Usually you try to avoid embarrassing the other person, or making them feel uncomfortable. When a person has the need to be independent, to have freedom of action and not to be imposed on by others, it is known as negative face. The face saving act oriented to a person’s negative face is relatively known as Negative politeness. Negative politeness is any kind of communicative act which is appropriately intended to show that the speaker does not want to impinge on the addressee’s privacy, thus, enhancing the sense of distance between them.

On the contrary, when a person has the need to be accepted by the others or to be treated as a member of the same group, this time the need is called positive face. The face saving act related to a person’s positive face named Positive politeness. Positive politeness is any kind of communicative act which is appropriately intended to show the speaker’s concern to the addressee, thus, enhancing the sense of solidarity between them.

Brown and Levinson (1987) assert: “*Negative politeness is specific and focused; it performs the function of minimizing the particular imposition that Face-threatening-acts (FTA) - those which are in some ways threatening to either the speaker’s or hearer’s face - unavoidably effects*”.

In the action of languages, Negative politeness is nominally conducted in request forms like:

“You won’t be so careless any more, will you?”

Brown and Levinson (1987) assume that “*Positive politeness is redress directed to the addressee’s positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the action acquisition/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable*”.

Some “getting to know you” talk can be easily recognized in Positive politeness expressions. Conversely, the Vietnamese culture seems more in favor of Positive politeness. According to Nguyen Quang (2005), “*Positive politeness is any communicative act which is intentionally and appropriately meant to show the speaker’s concern to the hearer/ addressee, thus, enhancing the sense of solidarity between them. Simply put, positive politeness is to show the speaker’s concern to others. In this case, positive politeness can be called warm or proximal, intimate politeness*”. He implicitly suggests that positive politeness strategies are appropriate between those who know each other well,

or those who wish to know each other well. As Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest: “*In Positive politeness the sphere of redress is widened to the appreciation of alters’ wants in general or to the expression of similarity between ego’s and alters’ wants*”

### 3. DIRECTNESS AND INDIRECTNESS IN MAKING REQUESTS IN VIETNAMESE

#### 3.1. Direct requests

##### 3.1.1. *Requesting people to do things*

It is clear that language and culture has such a close relation that we cannot master this one without the other. Language is created and finds its full expression in society. It is used “*to build bridge, to consolidate political regimes, to carry on arguments, to convey information*” (Schmidt and Richards, 1980). We may categorize the majority of all the requests as direct is that in the appropriate context of situation, they have only one meaning -direct people to do or not to do things; their literal meanings express the illocutionary force - that of requesting, and it can always be unambiguously inferred by the listener. The direct requests can be classified into three groups: requests in form of imperatives, requests with conventional markers, and requests in form of questions, with the first group forming the highest level of frequency and the last one, the lowest.

##### ***Requests in form of imperatives***

Requests in form of imperatives occur in any situation - formal, neutral or

informal. The three important elements which make the difference between a harsh command and a polite or friendly request are the modal words, the address term, and the tone of voice.

The modal words (từ tình thái - Ban, 2002) - *nào, thôi, đi, nhé, nha, nghe, nghen* - are the elements subordinate to the verb phrase in a sentence and convey various emotional meanings. They are usually added at the end of imperatives to soften the commanding effect, making the requests sound friendlier or less formal; and this is typical when we talk to a subordinate or an equal. For example, let us compare:

A: Xách giúp tôi cái túi đó

B: Xách giúp tôi cái túi đó *nhé*

C: Xách giúp tôi cái túi đó *nào*

D: Xách giúp tôi cái túi đó *nha*

E: Xách giúp tôi cái túi đó *nghe*

F: Xách giúp tôi cái túi đó *nghen*

We can see that A has a neutral meaning, whereas B, C, D, E, F sounds more friendly.

Then, an address term (if any) can make a request more or less tactful. In spite of this pattern, the numbers of requests with an address term and that without one are nearly equal. It is also widely accepted that an address term is usually required when we talk to a superior (as in (1) and (2)), and a vocative, at the beginning or the end of an utterance, is more frequent when we talk to a superordinate (as in (3) and (4)).

(1) Anh chờ em chút xíu nữa đi!  
Gần xong rồi! (Please wait for me for a few more minutes! I'm going to finish!)

(2) Ông sang ngay bên nhà dùng cơm nhé. (Go over for meal, please)

(3) Chào ông đi, Bé. (Greet him, Be)

(4) Hăng, vào đây đi! (Hang, come in)

In addition, various social variables must be taken into account as to which address term to choose in a specific situation. For example, a female second person can be addressed by *chị, anh, cháu, em, cô, dì, mày* ... depending on his/her age, sex, social role, familiarity, and so on. Each conveys some different emotional meaning on the part of the speaker. For instance, compare the two following requests made by teacher to a young boy:

A: “Em đưa cuốn sách trên bàn cho cô.”

B: “Em đưa cuốn sách trên bàn cho tôi.”

Finally, a rising tone is usually preferable - Ban (2002) observes that as far as requests are concerned, there are many levels of tone and each has different meaning. The most general feature is raising our voice at the end of the requests and making the word which conveys the main content longer than others.

To request somebody to do something and then something else, we use the pattern:

(S +) *Verb phrase 1 (đã), rồi (hãy)*  
*Verb phrase 2.* For example,

- Ở nhà ăn cơm *đã rồi* hãy đi. (Stay home to have dinner, then leave)

- Cơm trong bếp, còn nóng đấy. Ăn *rồi* ngủ đi. (Rice is still warm in the kitchen. Have it then go to bed)

### ***Requests with conventional Markers***

Utterances with the following words and/or expressions are conventionally counted as requests in Vietnamese:

Làm ơn: (literally: do a favor)

Nhờ: (lit. ask for help)

Xin: (lit. beg)

Lạy: (lit. bow to)

Giúp: (lit. help)

Giùm: (lit. for)

Hộ: (lit. for)

Thương: (lit. love)

Làm phúc: (lit. do blessing)

Trăm sự nhờ: (lit. hundreds of things depend on you)

Cắn rom cắn cỏ lạy: (lit. bite straw and grass to bow)

Whereas requests with *giúp, giùm, hộ* are quite common in every situation, the others are rather formal and usually used between people who are not very familiar or when a great service is demanded. Some of them are more often in written language. As how to use them in a sentence and in what context of situation varies for different words and expressions, we should take into consideration one by one.

*Nhờ* (lit. ask for help) is a neutral word. It is used in the pattern (S+) *nhờ* +

second person + do X, in which the subject can be omitted. For example,

*Thưa bác, cháu chỉ nhờ bác điện thoại vào khoa, nếu bác sĩ đồng ý, cháu sẽ chạy ù vào, chỉ cần gặp bác sĩ ba đến năm phút thôi bác ạ.* (Thúy Bắc - Mùa cốm đi qua)

(Sir, I just ask you to phone to the department, if the doctor agree, I'll run to meet him just a few minutes)

*Nhờ cô nói anh Minh xuống đây, tôi chỉ hỏi anh ấy một câu thôi.* (Could you possibly ask Minh to come down here? I just ask him a question)

### **Request in form of questions**

Questions are used to request information. A rising tone is typical and politeness depends on the address term or the vocative chosen (if any). For example:

*Tàu đã chạy chưa ông?* (Has the train left yet, sir?)

*Cháu ơi, cô Thanh có ở nhà không?* (Boy, is Miss Thanh in?)

*Thưa ông, đây là đâu vậy ông?* (Sir, where is it here?)

In many situations, we do not just ask a question: we get the person's attention and permission to ask first, by saying:

Tôi xin vô phép,

Ông bảo giùm cháu, (lit. you tell me)

Thưa cụ, thế này phải không, (lit. Sir, it is not good but...)

Cháu hỏi thăm cụ, (lit. I ask you)

Cho cháu hỏi thăm, (lit. let me ask you)

Ông làm ơn chỉ giúp tôi, (lit. do me a favor by telling me...)

Cho hỏi, (lit. let me ask)

Chẳng hay chị có biết, (lit. I wonder whether or not you know)

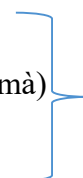
### **3.1.2. Requesting people not to do things**

In Vietnamese, to request people not to do something, we may say any of the followings,

Đừng (có, có mà)

(2<sup>nd</sup> person) + chớ (có, có mà)

Không được



For example:

*Các anh đừng đến gần đó nhé.* (You don't go near there.)

*Đừng* and *chớ* are neutral words, and *không (được)* sounds more friendly and is also common in formal situations.

Besides being used as subordinate elements in front of verb phrases, *đừng* and *không được* can function independently as a complete sentence to ask somebody not to do something mentioned earlier. They are typical to be spoken to an equal or a subordinate. A vocative is always required if we are talking to a superior. For example:

A: *Tôi phải đi ngay đây.* (I must leave now.)

B: *Đừng. Trời sắp mưa đấy.* (No, don't. It's going to rain.)

C: *Con đến nhà bạn Mai mẹ nhé.* (Mum, I'm going to go to Mai's house.)

D: Không được. Ở nhà học bài đi.  
(Don't do that. Stay home and learn your lesson)

Like the other types, when requesting people not to do something, an indication of power or authority, unfamiliarity, politeness, and/ or friendliness depends on the address term, the modal word (if any), and the tone of voice.

### 3.2. Indirect Requests

Besides the direct strategies, there are number of ways to make requests indirectly. It is a common belief that indirect requests are made when people find it hard to request directly. However, from the data obtained, it is noticed that some of the indirect requests occur in situations when being direct is unlikely to be difficult at all. The indirect requests can be classified into: Request people to do something and request people not to do something.

#### 3.2.1. Requesting people to do things

It can be generalized that requesting people to do something can be indirectly realized by:

1- Sentences informing the hearers of some state in the circumstances as the result of which some actions need to be performed.

For example:

Bu ơi, con đói. (Mum, I am hungry)

This is a request to feed.

Nhà bẩn quá Tí ơi. (Ti, the house is too dirty.)

It is a request to clean the house.

2- Sentences stating our wish that something could be done, and it is possible at the time of utterance. For example:

Giá em thay bộ quần áo khác thì hơn.  
Bộ này dầy đất dầy cát trông lòi thối lắm. (If only you put on another dress. This one looks very clumsy with too much soil and sand on it.)

It is a request to put on another dress.

Giá ai xách xô thùng nước lên gác nhỉ?  
(If only someone took this bucket of water upstairs!)

It is a request to take the water upstairs.

3- Sentences concern the reason why something is not done, and that is physically possible and should be done at the time of utterance. For example:

Anh không ra còn đứng đây làm gì?  
(Nam Cao, Xem bói). (Why don't you leave?)

It is a request to leave.

Sao mình không đi đôi dép anh mua cho độ nọ ấy mà?  
(Why don't you wear the slippers I bought the other day?)

This is a request to wear new slippers.

Sentences referring to the hearer's inability to do something that is obviously physically possible at the time of utterance. For example:

Không có miệng hả? (You haven't got a mouth?)

This is a request to say something.

Điếc à? (Are you deaf?)

This is a request to reply.

4- Questions whether or not something is going to be done, which should be performed at the time of utterance. For example:



Có câm miệng không? (Are you going to shut up?)

It is a request to shut up.

Có đi ngay không? (Are you going to leave at once?)

It is a request to leave immediately.

5- Any question whether or not the hearer has got something is to be interpreted as a request to have or to borrow it if the hearer believes the speaker does not have it and needs it at the time of utterance. For example:

*Nhà chú có thang không?* (Have you got a ladder?)

It is a request to borrow the ladder.

*Chị có phấn màu không?* (Have you got color chalk?)

It is a request for some color chalk.

### **3.2.2. Requesting people not to do things**

In Vietnamese, indirect requests to people not to do something or to stop doing something can be realized by:

#### ***Sentences concern the bad action or activity***

*Trời đất ơi, khổ quá! Khổ quá! Mày làm vỡ đầu nó ra bây giờ...* (Nam Cao, *Chuyện người hàng xóm*)

(Dear god! Poor me! Poor me! You are going to break his head...)

It is a request not to play the way she is doing with the little boy.

*Sương xuống rồi, anh Mười! Nằm đây cảm chết.* (Bích Ngân; *Đất không cu mưng*)

(Mist is falling, Muoi. Lying here, you may catch a cold.)

It requests a man not to lie outdoors.

#### ***Sentences concerning the impossibility of the action or activity***

Đã nhìn đến bằng tuổi này thì nhìn

hắn; ai lại đi lấy thằng Chí Phèo. (Nam Cao; *Chí Phèo*)

(Single at your age, keep staying single; No one like you would get married to Chi Pheo.)

It requests a girl not to get married to a gangster.

*Làm sao ngồi lên đó được, vỡ đấy.* (How can you sit there? It's going to break down)

It is a request not to sit there.

#### ***Sentences concern the reason of the action or activity.***

For example:

*Ai khiến nhà bác chõ mồm vào đây thế?* (Who urges to interfere?)

It is a request to someone not to interfere in the speaker's business.

*Việc gì mà mày khóc?* (Why are you crying?)

It is a request not to cry.

#### ***Sentences concern an action or activity which is going on but is proscribed at the time of utterance.***

For example:

*Những thằng này hỗn. Chỗ chúng mày ngồi đây à?* (Nam Cao; *Trẻ con không được ăn thịt chó*) (You naughty boys. Are these your seats?)

It is a request not to sit there.

*Các cậu định nói suốt đêm đây à? Có im lặng cho chị Ngũ chị ấy ngủ không?* (Nam Cao; *Bón cây số cách một căn cứ địch*). (*Are you going to talk all night long?*)

It is a request not to talk any more.

In Vietnamese, indirectness and politeness in requesting are not always corresponding as degrees of politeness. It depends on many factors.

#### 4. DIRECTNESS AND INDIRECTNESS IN MAKING REQUESTS IN ENGLISH

##### 4.1. Direct requests

##### 4.1.1. Requesting people to do things

The direct requests can be classified into two groups: The imperatives without a subject

and the imperative with a subject, with the second group forming the highest level of politeness and the first one is less formal in use.

##### *The imperatives without a subject*

We can get people to do things by making bald requests.

For instance,

*Be careful!*

*Come in!*

Requests in the form of commands are limited in use. They are generally avoided, especially between near equals. Direct and explicit commands are acceptable in a limited number of circumstances. They are usually made by people with authority: boss to employees, doctor to patient, and so on. As commands are fast and to the point, they are typical in emergencies (e.g. “*help me! Stop that thief!*” Or “*Someone! Quick! Get the doctor! He’s choking!*”)

##### *The imperative with a subject*

On the whole, requests and commands are really different, but to some extent, especially in imperative sentences, they are likely the same as

they both give orders and need the actions carried out afterwards.

We can specify the people who have to obey the command by putting a second or third person subject in front of the imperative verb, or else by using a vocative. For example:

*‘You take’ this tray, and ‘you take’ that one.*

##### *Ways of weakening the imperative force of commands.*

Leech (1983) discusses the ways to weaken the imperative force of a command. One way to tone down a command is to use a rising or a fall-rise tone instead of the usual falling tone.

*Be careful*

*Don’t forget your wallet.*

Another way is to add please or the tag question *won’t you*. For example:

*Please hurry up.*

*Look after the children, won’t you?*

Two other tags, *why don’t you* and *will you* (after negative command) also make a command less harsh:

*Have a drink, why don’t you?*

*Don’t be late, will you?*

##### 4.1.2. Requesting people not to do things

The common ways of requesting people not to do things in English are to add **don’t (or do not)** or never before imperatives. For instance:

*Don’t lean out the window.*

*Never speak to me like that again.*

Other ways are:

No  
 No more  
 Stop  
 Would you mind not  
 Please, will you stop...  
 Without  
 You shouldn't be  
 There will be trouble if you go on

+ V-ing...

For example:

*Would you mind not smoking here, please?*

*No more playing round, Tom!*

In addition, to stop somebody from doing something we can say: No, don't! Don't do that! Stop that!

To Tom, who is climbing a tree: *Stop that! That's silly.*

## 4.2. Indirect Requests

### 4.2.1. The linguistic Realizations

As bald requests are too direct, there are in English a range of requests which are more delicately phrased. The words we choose, the way we phrase them, and our tone of voice are important elements making the difference between a harsh command and a polite request. Remarks which are used to show the right expressions depend on:

- How difficult, unpleasant or urgent the task is
- Who you are and who you are talking to - the roles you are playing and your status.

They are arranged from informal to formal. Generally, the more delicately

phrased, the more formal a request is likely to be.

I want (a cup of coffee,...)

Will you do A?

Could you do A?

Would you mind doing A?

How about assisting me with...?

Could I impose on you to do A?

Will you do A, if you don't mind?

You couldn't do A, could you?

Do you think you could (possibly) do A?

I wonder if you could (possibly) do A?

If you could do A, I'd be very grateful.

I wonder if you'd mind doing A

I would be extremely grateful if you would do A

I hope it's not imposing on you, but could you...?

I hope you don't mind, but could you do X?

I have a favour to ask. Would you do A?

Would you be so kind as to do A?

I hope you don't mind my asking, but I wonder if you could possibly do A.

Sorry to trouble you, but I wonder if it might be at all possible for you to do A

Thus, a request can take any one of a wide variety of linguistic forms. We generally resist making bald requests and prefer to hedge what we say. Delicately phrased, these forms allows, as Wardhaugh (1991) points out, the

possibility that “the listener can comply with or refuse the request, but he can also deal with anyone of the other possibilities the form of the request opens to him”.

#### **4.2.2. The Communicative Realizations**

It is generally accepted that the avoidance of using requesting formula in terms of linguistic factors with the aim to minimizing the impose of speakers on the hearers for the face - giving acts / face - saving acts is also common in English culture (Nguyen Quang, 2005). For example,

Husband to a wife: “Honey, it’s time for tea.”

The implicature of this utterance is to request the wife to prepare the meal as quickly as possible, the husband may be hungry.

In some cases, English people can request by simply making comments, such as,

“*My glass is empty*” is a request other people to pour some more wine, etc.

“*You are standing in my way*” is a request other people to give way or not to put hearer’s nose in the speaker’s business, etc.

Because, if the speaker’s intention is clear, that is, the right combination of circumstances prevails, each of the above will be taken by the hearer as a request to do (or not to do) something. What is particularly important, of course, in understanding what is said as a request is

recognizing the right combination of circumstances. Those depend on the extra-linguistic factors. Therefore, the sentences can convey more than their literal meanings. For instance, the sentence *It’s cold in here* when spoken by a superior to a subordinate may convey the meaning of “close the window”.

Nguyen Quang (2005) also states that there are 2 types of indirectness: conventional and non-conventional indirectness.

Conventional indirectness realises the act by systematic reference to some precondition needed for its realization, and shares across languages the property of potential pragmatic ambiguity between pragmatic meaning and literal meaning. These are conventionalised acts in a particular language

Non-conventional indirectness on the other hand, is by definition open-ended both in terms of propositional content and linguistic form, as well as of pragmatic force. Thus, there are no formai limitations neither on the kinds of hints one might use, nor on the range of pragmatic forces that might be carried by any non-conventionally indirect utterance. For example, a non-conventional utterance like “You are not the best cook in the world” can imply the followings:

- *Next time, please do it better!*
- *Don’t be so worried. Forget it all as you are not the professional cook.*
- *Let me prepare the meal next time, etc*

Thus, question form can be analyzed grammatically as simple questions but interpreted as imperatives by means of conversational indirectness, such as: A speaker can convey a request by asking if the hearer intends to do the act, as in "Will you close the door?" However, it is clear that the conversational indirectness can convey requests by asserting hearer - based conditions as well as by questioning them, for example "You could be a little quieter you know".

## 5. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES CONCERNING THE REQUEST STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

### 5.1. Similarities

Direct and Indirect communication styles are present in all cultures, and the use of different styles varies depending on the context. In both languages, in direct communication style, both parties, the speaker and the listener, expect explicit verbal expression of intentions, wishes, hopes, etc. (e.g. "I am hungry", "I love you"). In indirect communication style the speaker expresses his/her thoughts implicitly, or using hints or modifiers (e.g. "perhaps", "maybe"). The listener is expected to monitor the nonverbal communication, to read contextual cues, to relate what has been stated to all information available about the speaker and the situation at hand in order to read the real meaning.

The general universal pattern of both Vietnamese and English in

communicating negative messages is that they tend to eliminate the negative effect by responding in a more unassertive and uninvolved way than usual in their verbal interaction. The communicative consequence of such effect is that people become more indirect, inexplicit, and unemphatic in their speech manner. Therefore, in the case of making requests, it is still the common belief that politeness is the most prominent motivation for the use of Indirectness.

However, in our observation, there is a large number of indirect requests which are far from polite. Many of them even sound rude. For example:

English:

- *Walk, you lazy hole.*
- *How dumb do I look?*
- *Are your legs broken?*

Vietnamese:

*Mày đi có phá xe tao à? (Will you break my motorbike?)*

*Trẻ con, biết gì mà mượn. (You are too young to drive.)*

*Mua lấy một cái (xe) mà đi. (Buy your own motorbike.)*

As regards to the responses, the most obvious similarity between English and Vietnamese is that we do not refuse point - blank but always give explanations why can not comply.

### 5.2. Differences

In the mainstream Anglicist culture, the ideal form of communication

includes being direct rather than indirect while Vietnamese culture does oppositely. Many Anglicists believe that “honesty is the best policy”, and their communication styles reflects this. Honesty and directness in communication are strongly related.

Most of indirect requests tend to be longer utterances and the Vietnamese indirect requests are often longer than English ones and express positive politeness. There are some typical utterances:

*Chú ơi chú, ban này chú bảo hôm nay cháu phải ở lại đây trực đến chiều rồi mà, chú quên rồi à? (You just told me to stay here on duty until afternoon, have you forgotten that?)*

*- Bác ơi bác thông cảm cho cháu. Chồng cháu dặn đi làm về ngay để chồng cháu lấy xe đi có việc. (You sympathize with me. My husband told me to come back home right after the office hour so that he could take the motorbike to go on business.)*

Nevertheless, the length of utterance does not always go directly proportional with the degree of politeness. The following utterances serve as examples:

*- Chị định làm luận án tiến sĩ hay sao ấy? Rắc rối quá! (Are you doing your Ph.D thesis? It's really complicated)*

*- Ôi giờ ơi, rách việc, để thời gian đấy mà xem phim. (Oh, God. You are taking unnecessary additional trouble. Better spend time watching films.)*

As far as the direct strategies are concerned, although both languages make use of the imperatives as requests, they are more limited in use and number in English than in Vietnamese. Whereas in English, bald requests are used in only a restricted number of situations, there are a range of ways to make direct requests in Vietnamese, which can be used in formal, neutral, as well as informal situations. Then, to weaken the imperative force of a command, the native speakers of English make use of a rising or fall - rise tone, and / or add the tags *please, won't you, why don't you, or will you*. Meanwhile, in Vietnamese, the tone, the address term, and the modal word chosen play a role in making the difference between a harsh command and a polite request.

To refuse a request, there seems to be more varied ways in Vietnamese than in English, for some of which there are no English equivalents (e.g. đừng có hòng) or the translations are not idiomatic (e.g. còn lâu, còn khuya) or are not conventional ways of refusing in English, (e.g. không bao giờ, không đời nào). Another difference lies in the use of apologies. Whereas in English, explanations why we cannot accept the requests are prefaced by apologies (e.g. *I'm afraid I can't, I'm sorry*). This is unlikely to be a norm in Vietnamese. Most of the refusals in the corpus indicate that the Vietnamese people seem less hesitant and reluctant when declining a request. As far as the compliances are concerned, they are

semantically similar in these two languages - to show our willingness to perform the task required, and/or indicate that it is not a problem for us to do it.

Anglicists tend to be more direct than Vietnamese because of saving time. There are several expressions in English that emphasize the importance of being direct: "Get to the point! Don't beat around the bush! Let's get down to business". However, Vietnamese people like to use fair communication styles for saving face. Therefore, they tend to be less direct in communication.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the strategies of making requests in English and Vietnamese from cross-cultural perspective. The paper recommends the politeness strategies that arise in interactions between English and Vietnamese. The contrastive study reveals some interesting differences and similarities between the two languages in this area. It can be summarized from the study that:

- The direct requests are more limited in number and use in English than in Vietnamese. Although both languages make use of the imperatives as requests, there are also in Vietnamese a range of ways to request directly, which are far from similar to the conventional ways in English.

- To weaken the imperative force of an imperative, the native speakers of English make use of tone, of the tags *will*

*you, won't you, why don't you*, whereas in Vietnamese, if we want to be friendly or polite, it is the tone, the address terms that count.

- Requests can also be performed indirectly in both languages.

- Generally, the native speakers of English make use of the negative politeness strategies. Meanwhile the native speakers of Vietnamese prefer the positive politeness strategies of making the listener feel good and feel that she is valued.

Hopefully, my paper may help English and Vietnamese speakers have a better understanding of one another's requesting behaviour. The choice of the different requesting strategies by members of these two groups is influenced by the major dimensions of cultural variability. It is undeniable that individuals may have their own personal communication styles, yet individual values are reflective of group values to a great extent. Consequently, the requesting patterns described here, though not all-inclusive, are expected to hold true in a general way. Of course, we are not in the position to set up the rules for the way people are supposed to behave. We just try to help remove the potential confusion which might occur in cross-cultural encounters, to the level of predictability. In truth, the successful communication largely depends on the interlocutors' fine sensitivity for cross-cultural differences and use of appropriate politeness principles.

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