

Replying to compliments in English and Vietnamese

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Abstract

The communicative act of replying to compliments has been studied in different languages but never in Vietnamese. The literature on cross-cultural pragmatics research has also been well documented with studies of compliment responses (CRs) in various pairs of languages but there exists no comparative study of CRs in English and Vietnamese. To supplement the literature, I compared and contrasted CRs in Australian English and Vietnamese. In this investigation, I applied my new methodology _ the Naturalized Role-play (Tran, 2004d, 2006a, 2006b) _ to the long-standing methodological problem in this field. Results of this study include new CR continua, differences between CRs in English and Vietnamese in terms of strategy use as well as strategy combination, and as yet unknown patterns of such differences.

Keywords: compliment response, English, Vietnamese, cross-cultural pragmatics, Naturalized Role-play, continua, communicative act

Introduction

The communicative act of replying to compliments has been studied in different languages but never in Vietnamese. The literature on cross-cultural pragmatics research has also been well documented with studies of compliment responses (CRs) in various pairs of languages but there exists no comparative study of CRs in English and Vietnamese. To supplement the literature, I compared and contrasted CRs in Australian English and Vietnamese. In this investigation, I applied my new methodology _ the Naturalized Role-play (Tran, 2004d, 2006a, 2006b) to the long-standing methodological problem in this field. Results of this study include new CR continua, differences between CRs in English and Vietnamese in terms of strategy use as well as strategy combination, and as yet unknown patterns of such differences.

Research aims and significance of aims

The aims of this study are to compare and contrast CRs in Australian English and Vietnamese, using the Naturalized Role-play (Tran, 2004d, 2006a, 2006b) to solve the hotly debated methodological issue in cross-cultural pragmatics research. The significance of these aims is justified in the following ways.

First, CRs constitute an interesting reflection of culture and a necessary social function in cross-cultural interaction. CRs are interesting to study because they reflect sociocultural norm(s) as stated by Herbert (1989):

CRs are an interesting object for study since there is relatively strong agreement within the speech community as to what form constitutes a "correct response" (p. 5).

Like other communicative acts (See Tran, 2004c for a definition of "communicative acts"), replying to compliments reveals "rules of language use in a speech community" and "critical elements of face maintenance devices". Therefore, studying CRs can "enhance our understanding of a

people's culture, social values, social organization, and the function and meaning of language use in a community" (Yuan, 2001, p. 273).

Responding to compliments is "of great interests to researchers" (Saito and Beecken, 1997, p. 364) also because CRs "differ from culture to culture" (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 144). Moreover, responding to compliments is a social function that non-native speakers (NNSs) often need to fulfil in cross-cultural interaction, particularly in Australia, because:

Complimenting behaviour among Australians is heard every day. Frequently, interaction with native speakers includes complimenting behaviour (Soenarso, 1988, pp 29-30).

Second, there has been no existing pragmatics (See Tran, 2003a for a definition of "pragmatics") and cross-cultural pragmatics study of native Vietnamese CRs in comparison with native Australian English ones. Cross-cultural pragmatics studies present a comparison of the norms of language use in two (or more) languages and cultures as exhibited by the data from native speakers (NSs) of each. In English, CRs have been studied by Pomerantz (1978) for American English, Herbert (1986) for American English, South African English and British English, Herbert and Straight (1989) for American English and South African English, Herbert (1991) for American English and Polish, Holmes (1986) for New Zealand English, Chen (1993) for American English and Chinese, Cordella et al. (1995) for Australian English and Spanish, etc. "However, studies based on non-Western languages are scarce" (Farghal and Al-Khatib, 2001, p. 1486). None of the existing CR studies so far has focused on Vietnamese CRs. As little is known about Vietnamese communicative act realization in general and CRs in particular, still less a comparison between Vietnamese and Australian English CRs, this study was intended to supplement cross-cultural pragmatics research with Vietnamese CRs in comparison with Australian English ones.

Finally, observable differences in Vietnamese and English CRs justified the selection of the communicative act of replying to compliments to study. In Vietnamese culture, people often respond to compliments negatively or reject the compliments to show modesty (Tran, 2004d). In English, a simple CR- "thank you"- is preferred as described in Johnson's etiquette book (1979). The preference for a simple 'thank you' in replying to compliments was demonstrated in American English (Barnlund and Araki, 1985; Herbert, 1986, 1989; Knapp et al., 1984; Saito and Beecken, 1997), British English (Herbert, 1986), New Zealand English (Holmes, 1986) and Australian English (Soenarso, 1988). Specifically, the percentages of acceptances out of the total number of CRs studied were 66% versus 88% for Americans and South Africans (Herbert, 1989), 61% for New Zealanders (Holmes, 1986) and 58% for Americans (Chen, 1993). Therefore, although there might be exceptions, Herbert's (1989) generalization about English CRs apparently holds true.

Virtually all speakers of English, when questioned on this matter in general (e.g. "What does one say after being complimented?") or particular (e.g. "What would you say if someone admired your shirt?") terms, agree that the correct response is thank you (Herbert, 1989, p. 5).

Previous studies of the communicative act of replying to compliments

CRs have been examined in a wide range of pragmatics studies (Baba, 1996, 1999; Chen, 1993; Farghal and Al-Khatib, 2001; Gajaseni, 1994; Golato, 2002, 2003; Herbert, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1991; Herbert and Straight, 1989; Holmes, 1986; Jeon, 1996; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001; Pomerantz, 1978, 1984; Saito and Beecken, 1997; Yu, 1999; Yuan, 1996, 2001; etc.). What is worth noticing is that previous studies of CRs (See Tran, 2002, 2004d for a review of previous studies of CRs) have presented different frameworks of CR categorization (See Tran, 2004d, 2006a, 2006b for a detailed review of previous frameworks of CR categorization), of which the most popular ones are listed below. It is, therefore, difficult to decide on the most appropriate one to adopt.

It can be said that the classic frameworks of CR categorization are those suggested by Pomerantz (1978) and Herbert (1989). The taxonomy of CR types by Pomerantz consists of Acceptances (Appreciation Token, Agreement), Rejections (Disagreement) and Self-praise Avoidance Mechanisms (Praise Downgrades, Referent Shifts). Herbert's CR types include Agreements (Appreciation Token, Comment Acceptance, Praise Upgrade, Comment History, Reassignment, Re-

turn), Nonagreements (Scale Down, Disagreement, Qualification, Question/ Question Response, No Acknowledgement) and Request Interpretation.

The frameworks of CR categorization by Pomerantz and Herbert have been widely used with or without adaptation. For example, in order to contrast CRs by British and Spanish university student, Lorenzo-Dus (2001) adopted Herbert's (1989) taxonomy but used only the following CR types: compliment acceptance, comment history, return, praise upgrade and reassignments.

In addition to the above classical frameworks, many others have been developed. Among these, an interesting framework of CR categorization was proposed by Saito and Beecken (1997) when they studied CRs by American learners of Japanese. They analyzed CRs in two ways: Initial Sentence Analysis (quantitative analysis) and Semantic Formula Analysis (qualitative analysis). In the Initial Sentence Analysis, they categorized a CR based on the first sentence rather than all sentences in the CR. The first sentence in the CR was classified as positive, negative or avoidance. In the Semantic Formula Analysis, they used they categorized CRs based on semantic formula e.g. gratitude, affirmative explanation, agreement, acceptance, joke, avoidance/topic change, mitigation, return and denial.

Saito and Beecken's framework is not the only one which was founded on more than one way of analysing CRs. Farghal and Al-Khatib (2001) also used two types of distinctions (i.e. binary distinctions) to categorize CRs by Jordanian college students. Their categories of CRs include simple responses versus complex responses, macro-functions versus micro-illocutions, and intrinsically-complex responses versus extrinsically-complex responses.

Although the frameworks of CR categorization cited are well-designed and well-grounded, they may not be able to account for all CR data in a certain study, for example this one. Therefore, it is at times necessary to develop another CR categorization framework which is more suitable for a specific study. Moreover, among existing pragmatics studies of CRs, none was particularly concerned with and presented a framework of CR categories in Australian English and Vietnamese. As regards Australian English, Cordella et al. (1995) studied the complimenting behavior in Australia but their study only tested and validated Wofson's Bulge Theory in Australian English without suggesting any framework of CR categorization. In Vietnamese, no study of CRs has been documented. Therefore, the framework of CR categorization suggested herein is the initial taxonomy of Australian English and Vietnamese CR types.

Research questions

The present study was intended to answer the following questions:

1. Are there differences between CRs in English and Vietnamese in terms of strategy selection/use?
2. Are there differences between CRs in English and Vietnamese in terms of strategy combination?
3. If CRs in English and Vietnamese differ, do differences fall into any patterns?

Methodology

Data collection

Participants

Participants in this study fell into two categories including role-play informants (abbreviated as I in examples) and role-play conductors (abbreviated as C in examples). All participants gave consent for their data to be used for research purposes by signing in the consent form prior to data collection.

Naturalized Role-play informants

The major source of data for this research project comes from the Naturalized Role-play. All role-play informants were university students, ranging in age from eighteen to thirty-one years. So they showed homogeneity in terms of age, education and profession. Following are details of the role-play informants.

- The English group (E group) included 20 NSs of Australian English in Melbourne, Australia. There were 10 male (abbreviated as M in examples) and 10 female (abbreviated as F in examples) informants in this group. These informants provided the baseline data on CRs in Australian English.
- The Vietnamese group (V group) consisted of 20 NSs of Vietnamese in Ho Chi Minh City and My Tho, Vietnam. 10 of them were men and the other 10 were women. They gave the baseline data on CRs in Vietnamese.

Role-play conductors

There were ten role-play conductors including six Australian English NSs (three men and three women) and four Vietnamese NSs (two men and two women). They role-played with informants of the same gender. Australian English speaking conductors role-played with Australian English NSs, which means each of them conducted role-plays with two to three E role-play informants. Vietnamese speaking role-play conductors role-played with Vietnamese NSs in Vietnam, which means each of them conducted role-plays with five V informants.

Instruments

Naturalized Role-play

In this study, the Naturalized Role-play is the main tool of data collection providing the major corpus of data for analysis (See Tran, 2006b for the description and validation of the Naturalized Role-play). The Naturalized Role-play (Tran, 2003b, 2003c, 2004a, 2004d, 2006a, 2006b) is a new methodology I created for my doctoral research from which this article stems. This methodology has proven to be an effective means of resolving the lasting controversy that the methodological issue in this field has engendered (See Tran, 2004b for a review of the controversial methodological issue in pragmatics research).

At the core of the Naturalized Role-play is the idea of eliciting spontaneous data in controlled settings. In the Naturalized Role-play, informants are not aware of the research focus during their role-play performance. They are conscious of being observed and studied in the whole procedure but not in the moments when they provide spontaneous data on a communicative act in focus.

The process of the Naturalized Role-play is demonstrated in the situational description and notes to participants in the appendix. The description of the Naturalized Role-play situations and the cards given to Vietnamese informants were translated into Vietnamese.

In the present study, each informant participating in the Naturalized Role-play produced four CRs to compliments on skill, possession, appearance and clothing. The total number of CRs collected was eighty CRs in English by Australian English NSs, eighty CRs in Vietnamese by Vietnamese NSs and eighty CRs in English by Vietnamese speakers of English.

Intercoder Reliability Test

The purpose of the Intercoder Reliability (See Tran, 2007a for the description of this test) is to verify the validity of the CR categorization framework proposed herein. The Intercoder Reliability sample consists of fifteen percent (i.e. 32 CRs) of the English CR data collected through the Naturalized role-play.

Procedure

At the beginning of the role-play procedure, the role-play and what the informants should do were explained to them. The cards describing the situation they were in and the tasks they would do in the role-play were also given to them. They were given as much time as they needed to familiar-

ize themselves with the situations and the role-play conductors, or to ask any question concerning the role-play. Then they role-played with the role-play conductors. All role-play informants performed the same Naturalized Role-play of two situations as described above and the role-play was audio-recorded. Each role-play (including description of two situations, explanation, preparation and enactment of two situations) took approximately fifteen minutes.

Following all role-plays performed by both English and Vietnamese informants were debriefing sessions in which informants were debriefed on details about the focus of the research. Role-play conductors were also encouraged to comment on the process and data collected.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. In the qualitative analysis, CR data was coded according to the strategies selected to reply to compliments. In the quantitative analysis, Fisher's test was applied to each CR strategy across groups in order to evaluate whether the differences in the use of each strategy between groups are (statistically) significant. Fisher's test can specify where the difference exists (e.g. between the V and VE groups or between the VE and E group) and indicate how significant the difference is.

Findings and discussion

Continua of CR strategies

The qualitative analysis of the semantic formulas and content of the CRs in this investigation resulted in a new framework of CR categories (Tran, 2006a, 2007a). This framework consists of two continua of CR strategies: a continuum of CR strategies from acceptance to denial strategies and a continuum of avoidance strategies. The new framework of CR categories was proposed because of two reasons.

First, previous studies about CRs have suggested various frameworks of CR categories (Baba, 1999; Chen, 1993; Farghal and Al-Khatib, 2001; Gajasen, 1994; Golato, 2002, 2003; Herbert, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1991; Herbert and Straight, 1989; Holmes, 1986; Jeon, 1996; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001; Pomerantz, 1978, 1984; Saito and Beecken, 1997; Yu, 1999; Yuan, 1996, 2001; etc.).

None of these frameworks individually accounted well for the data in this investigation. Moreover, there has not been any documented framework of CR categories in Australian English and Vietnamese. Therefore, a new framework had to be developed to categorize data here.

Second, unlike the frameworks in previous studies of CRs, mine indicates that CR strategies are not separate but connect with one another and form a continuum. According to Pomerantz (1978), the compliment receiver is in the dilemma of whether to agree with the complimenter to be polite or to disagree with the complimenter to avoid self-praise. Pomerantz also found that "most compliment responses lie somewhere in between (not at the polar extremes of) acceptances and agreements on the one hand and rejections and disagreements on the other" (p. 81). The best way to capture this "in between-ness" (Pomerantz, 1978, p. 81) is by means of continua. For example, CR strategies in my framework can be placed on the acceptance to denial continuum with compliment upgrade at one end and disagreement at the other. The strategies in between resolve the compliment receiver's dilemma. In addition, avoiding strategies form the avoidance continuum with the ones at the right end showing avoidance more clearly than those at the left end. The strategies along my two continua vary in terms of the degree to which they agree or disagree with the complimentary force, or the degree to which they avoid the praise.

The following are continua together with the definition and illustrative example(s) of each strategy. Examples are printed in *italics*. They are among the collected data. The underlined words in each example represent the CR strategy that the example illustrates. In the examples, A represents the complimenter and B the complementee. Moreover, on the acceptance to denial continuum, the strategy "Non-idiomatic Response" was placed in parentheses because it occurred only in NNSs' data, not in data provided by NSs.

The acceptance to denial continuum

Compliment Upgrade → Agreement (including Agreement Token) → Appreciation Token → Return → Explanation → Reassignment → (Non-idiomatic Response) → Compliment Downgrade → Disagreement (including Disagreement Token)

- **Compliment Upgrade:** The complimentee agrees with and increases the complimentary force/praise force/compliment assertion.

A: *Nice car!*

B: *Thanks. Brand new.*

- **Agreement:** The complimentee agrees with the complimentary force/praise force/compliment assertion probably by providing a response which is “semantically fitted to the compliment” (Herbert, 1989, p. 12).

A: *Hey you're looking really well today.*

B: *Yeah. I'm happy to say that that's correct. Heh heh heh.*

An agreement can be scaled down to mitigate or minimize the force of the compliment.

A: *I like your car. It's very good.*

B: *Oh. Yeah. Thanks. It's not bad.*

- **Agreement Token:** The complimentee may agree with the compliment assertion with a simple “Yes” or “Yeah”. An agreement token is classified as an agreement whether it occurs in a full agreement (e.g. “Yes, I think so, too”) or in isolation (e.g. “Yes” occurring by itself in a CR).

A: *It's really stylish.*

B: *Yeah.*

- **Appreciation Token:** The complimentee recognizes the status of the other speaker's previous utterance as a compliment and shows appreciation for it. The agreement token itself is not “semantically fitted to the specifics of that compliment” (Pomerantz, 1978, p. 83).

A: *What a lovely dress!*

B: *Oh. Thank you. Thank you.*

- **Return:** The complimentee reciprocates the act of complimenting by paying back the compliment to the complimenter.

A: *You're looking good.*

B: *Thanks. So are you.*

Or

A: *You're looking good today.*

B: *Thank you very much. Not too bad yourself.*

- **Explanation/Comment History:** The complimentee impersonalizes the complimentary force/ compliment assertion by giving further information, which may frequently be irrelevant, about the object of the compliment.

A: *I like your tie. It suits you well.*

B: *Thanks. Mom bought it for me. She likes to buy me nice ties now and again.*

- **Reassignment:** The complimentee redirects the praise offered by the complimenter to some third person or to something else (referent/credit shift)
A: By the way, I read your article that was published last week.
B: Alright?
A: Very very good.
B: (Laughter)
A: It is.
B: Oh, no. Actually my supervisor helped me a lot. So I couldn't do it by myself. (Laughter).
 Or
A: You look good today.
B: Oh, thanks. It must be the jacket.
- **Non-idiomatic Response:** The complimentee implies or would like to express that he/she does not agree with the compliment assertion. But this is done through the use of non-target-like responses.
A: I like your car. Cute looking car.
B: Uh. That's OK. (Intended meaning, which was specified in retrospective interviews: It's just OK. Nothing special)
 Or
A: I just read your article uhm published last week. I thought it was really good you know.
B: Oh. That's alright. (Intended meaning: It's just alright. Nothing special)
- **Compliment Downgrade:** The complimentee qualifies the praise force/compliment assertion, or downplays the object of the compliment.
A: It's a really nice car.
B: Oh no. It looks like that but actually it has a lot of problems.
 Or
A: It's a nice car. I really like it.
B: Oh well. It's just a normal and not very reliable car.
- **Disagreement:** The complimentee directly disagrees with the praise force/ compliment assertion. He/she asserts that the praise within the compliment is overdone or undue.
A: You're looking radiant.
B: Oh. No, I don't think so.
 Or
A: Hey, I like your tie. It suits you very well.
B: Really? I don't think so. Hah hah hah.
A: You're a hard man to flatter.
- **Disagreement Token:** The complimentee may disagree with the compliment assertion with a simple "No". A disagreement token is classified as a disagreement whether it oc-

curs in a full disagreement (e.g. “No, I don’t think so”) or in isolation (e.g. “No” occurring by itself in a CR).

A: *Oh you’re looking well.*

B: *Uhm. No.*

The avoidance continuum

Expressing Gladness → Follow-up Question → (Doubting) Question → Opting out.

- **Expressing Gladness:** The complimentee does not address the compliment assertion itself, which makes the response a type of avoidance, but expresses his/her gladness that the complimenter likes the object of the compliment.

A: By the way, I read your article that you published last week. It was very good.

B: Oh, that’s good. Thank you.

Or

A: I read that article you published last week. It was very good.

B: Well, great.

- **Follow-up Question:** The complimentee responds to the compliment with a question which elaborates the compliment assertion. It is equivocal whether this question is meant to fish for more compliments, or to gain specific information about the worthiness of the object being complimented. In the data for this research project, the latter seems to be the case.

A: *You know I just I just read your article that you published last week. I thought it was excellent.*

B: *Thanks a lot. What do you find interesting about it?*

- **(Doubting) Question:** The complimentee responds to the compliment with a question which corresponds to the request for repetition and/or expansion of the compliment assertion. The question is ambiguous in terms of whether the complimentee intends it to provide repetition/expansion of the original assertion or to question the sincerity/motives of the complimenter.

A: *(Referring to B’s article published last week) Fantastic actually.*

B: Really?

In the data for this investigation, questions of this type often occur with an agreement, disagreement, etc., especially in the VE corpus of data. This shows that the VE informants seem to have picked up this expression as a way to introduce the disagreement that follows.

A: *You’re looking very nice.*

B: Oh really? I don’t think so.

- **Opting out:**

Opting out with laughter: The complimentee responds to the compliment with mere laughter.

A: *Oh, that’s nice. How lovely! It’s my favorite color. I wanna buy a blue car one day.*

B: Heh heh.

- **Opting out with filler(s):** The complimentee just utters (some) filler(s) in response to the compliment.

A: *I was just reading your paper, that paper you submitted to the journal the other day. It was really good.*

B: Uhm.

- **Opting out without anything/No Acknowledgement:** The complimentee does not respond to the compliment at all verbally or nonverbally probably because he/she does not hear the other speaker's previous utterance or is occupied with something else.

A: *I read your article the other day, too. It was really good.*

B: *(Silence)*

- **Opting out with topic change:** The complimentee provides a response which cannot be understood as being linked to the compliment. He/she does not respond to the compliment itself but changes the topic to something else.

A: *I like your lovely dress.*

B: I heard that you (were) not well last time. So do you feel well now?

The validity of the proposed CR categorization framework was verified through the Inter-coder Reliability (See Tran, 2004d, 2007a). Inter-coders took part in a training session which introduced them to the above definitions and examples of CR strategies and presented them with various examples of pairs of compliments and CRs for them to gain hands-on experience of categorizing CR data. After the training session, they were asked to categorize a sample of CR data for this investigation in the Inter-coder Reliability.

The Inter-coder Reliability sample consists of fifteen percent (i.e. 32 CRs) of the English CR data collected through the Naturalized Role-play. The CR data in the test belongs to all the strategies above. Results of the Inter-coder Reliability (See Tran, 2004d, 2007a) showed that agreement between each inter-coder and me was high. At least 29/32 CRs were coded identically (90.63%). Moreover, when Cohen's kappa was used to measure inter-coder agreement among all coders, it yielded the kappa value of 0.927, which was very high. Therefore, results of the Inter-coder Reliability confirm the validity of the suggested CR strategy continua.

Differences in the frequency of CR strategy use between the VE and E groups

The statistical analysis and comparison of frequency of CR strategy use between the V and E groups resulted in Table 1. This table was based on the number of informants who did or did not use each CR strategy. The table also provides Fisher's P-values which indicate whether the differences in strategy use between the VE and E groups are statistically significant. (The significance level for Fisher's test is 0.05).

Table 1 Statistical comparison of frequency of CR strategy use between the V and E groups (based on the number of informants who used/did not use a specific CR strategy in each group).

Table 1

	V		E		Fisher's P-value (V-E)
	used	not used	used	not used	
Compliment Upgrade	0	20	9	11	0.001
Agreement	0	20	14	6	<0.001
Appreciation Token	4	16	18	2	<0.001
Return	3	17	9	11	0.082
Explanation	14	6	9	11	0.2
Reassignment	6	14	4	16	0.716
Non-idiomatic Response	0	20	0	20	1
Compliment Downgrade	15	5	2	18	<0.001
Disagreement	13	7	1	19	<0.001
Expressing Gladness	0	20	4	16	0.106
Follow-up Question	0	20	3	17	0.231
(Doubting) Question	4	16	3	17	1
Opting out	12	8	0	20	<0.001

Table 1 presents several statistically significant differences between the V and E groups with reference to CR strategy use. First, “Appreciation Token” was used very often in English but rarely in Vietnamese ($p < 0.005$). Only four out of twenty V informants used “Appreciation Token” whereas eighteen out of twenty E informants used this strategy. Second, the V informants used “Compliment Downgrade”, “Disagreement” and “Opting out” most frequently while the E informants used these strategies at a very low level of frequency ($p < 0.005$). “Compliment Downgrade” was used by fifteen out of twenty V informants but by only two out of twenty E informants ($p < 0.005$). Thirteen out of twenty V informants used “Disagreement” but only one E out of twenty informants did ($p < 0.005$). Twelve out of twenty V informants opted out but V informants did not use this strategy at all ($p < 0.005$). Third, the E informants often used “Compliment Upgrade” and “Agreement”, (i.e. nine out of twenty and fourteen out of twenty E informants did respectively), while the V informants never used these strategies ($p < 0.005$). Moreover, the strategy that was used the most frequently by the E group was “Appreciation Token” whereas the most common strategy used by the V group was “Compliment Downgrade”.

Table 1 is further illustrated by the diagrams in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 shows the variation in the frequency of each strategy on the acceptance to denial continuum among the V and E groups. Figure 2 illustrates the variation in the frequency of each strategy on the avoidance continuum also among these two groups.

Figure 1 Frequency of use of CR strategies on the acceptance to denial continuum by the V and E groups
 based on the number of informants who used a specific CR strategy in each group)

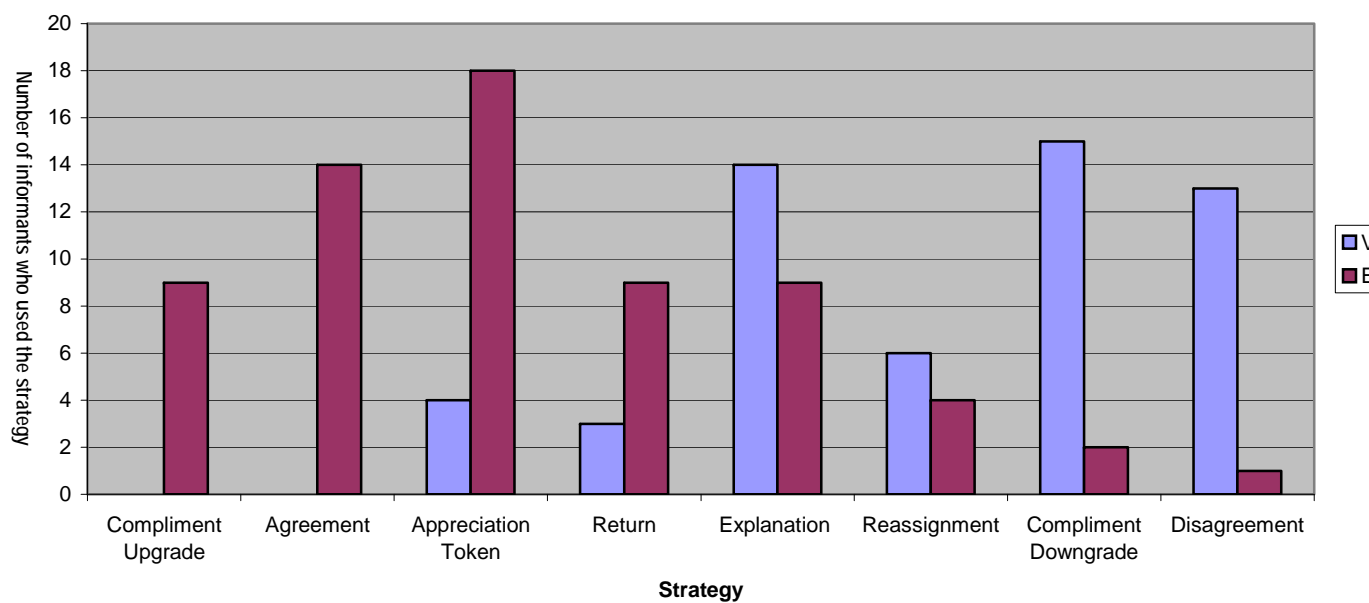


Figure 2 Frequency of use of CR strategies on the avoidance continuum by the V and E groups (based on the number of informants who used a specific CR strategy in each group)

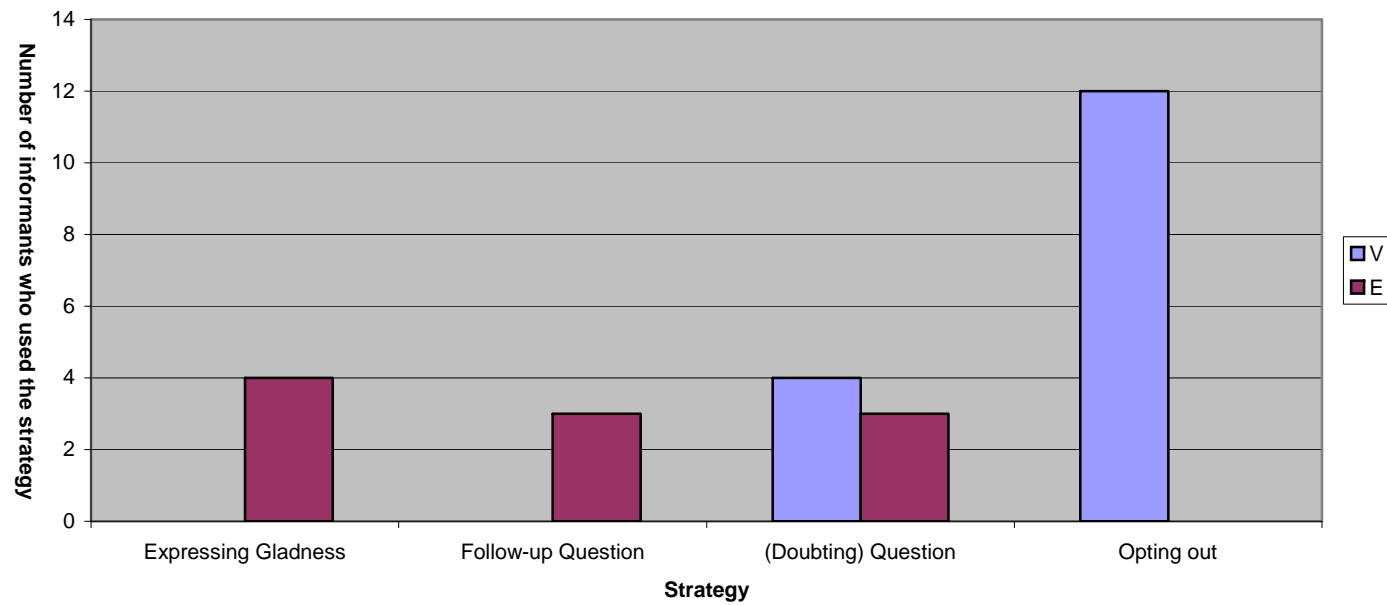


Figure 1 also showed that the V group did not use the two strategies at the left end of the acceptance to denial continuum, (i.e. “Compliment Upgrade” and “Agreement”). As regards other strategies on the left of the acceptance to denial continuum, the V group used them considerably less frequently than the E group. However, the V group used strategies on the right of the acceptance to denial continuum, especially the two strategies at the right end of this continuum (i.e. “Compliment Downgrade” and “Disagreement”), much more often than the E group. Figure 2 indicated that no V informant used strategies on the left half of the avoidance continuum, (i.e. “Expressing Gladness” and “Follow-up Question”), while E informants did. By contrast, more V informants used strategies on the right half of the avoidance continuum, (i.e. “Doubting Question” and “Opting Out”), than E informants. In fact, more than half of the V informants opted out but no E informant did.

Differences in the combination of CR strategies between the V and E groups

Detailed analysis of the content of Naturalized Role-play CR data from the V and E groups yielded some different patterns of strategy combination. The following are the differences in terms of CR strategy combination between the V and the E groups.

“Disagreement” and “Compliment Downgrade”

In the V group, “Disagreement” often occurred with “Compliment Downgrade” as in examples (1), (2) and (3). The frequency of occurrence of this type of strategy combination is relatively high in the V Naturalized Role-play data. Out of the total of twenty-seven “Disagreements” in the V data, ten “Disagreements” were used with “Compliment Downgrades”.

(1) VMC1: EÂ coù caùi àuò sô mi môùi phaûi khôâng? Trôøi ôi àuò naøy ñeïp gheâ nghe.

“Hey, got a new shirt? Gosh it looks good”.

VMI1: Coù ñâu anh ôi. Àuò naøy cuõ maëc luôn aáy maø.

“It’s not good. It’s just an old shirt”.

In (1), the “Disagreement” (“It’s not good”) co-occurred with a “Compliment Downgrade” (“It’s just an old shirt”) which downplayed the object of the compliment.

(2) VFC2: Chaăc chaăc. Caùi àuò cuõa baïn thieät laø heát saây.

“Wow. Your dress is really fancy”.

VFI9: Ñâu coù. Coi vaây chöù mình haøng doùm laém. Giaù cuõng reû reà haø.

“It’s not. It looks like that but the material is very bad. The price is also very cheap”.

The “Disagreement” (“It’s not”) in (2) co-occurred with two “Compliment Downgrades” (“It looks like that but the material is very bad. The price is also very cheap”).

(3) VMC1: UÛa maø xe anh ñoù haù? Trôøi ôi xe ñeïp quaù haù. Xe xòn gheâ ñoù nhe.

“Oh is it your motorbike? Gosh it’s cool. It’s very good”.

VMI4: Ôm cuõng chaúng xòn gì ñâu. Cuõng bình thöðøng thoài.

“Uhm it’s not good. It’s just normal”.

In (3), the “Disagreement” (“It’s not good”) preceded the “Compliment Downgrade” (“It’s just normal”) which qualified the praise force.

In English, however, no occurrence of the “Disagreement” and “Compliment Downgrade” combination was found. “Disagreement” or “Compliment Downgrade” also rarely occurred among the English data. When the strategy of “Compliment Downgrade” occurred as in example (4), it was used with “Appreciation Token”.

(4) EMC3: That's a nice suit you're wearing.

EMI8: Thank you. Not much I think.

"Appreciation Token" and other strategies

The combination of "Appreciation Token" and other strategies exhibited another pattern. In the V data, "Appreciation Token" occurred less than in the E data (i.e. four "Appreciation Tokens" in the V data versus forty-nine ones in the E data). When an "Appreciation Token" occurred in V CRs, it was often by itself (one occurrence), with a "Compliment Downgrade", "Disagreement" or "Doubting Question" (one occurrence per each type of combination). In E CRs, "Appreciation Token" was usually used with "Agreement", "Return" and "Explanation".

Therefore, it is noticeable that in V CRs, "Appreciation Token" either occurs by itself or is combined with strategies on the right of the acceptance to denial continuum, (i.e. "Compliment Downgrade" and "Disagreement"), or of the avoidance continuum, (i.e. "Doubting Question"). On the contrary, in E CRs, "Appreciation Token" is often combined with strategies on the left or in the middle of the acceptance to denial continuum. The following are some examples illustrating the differences in terms of the combination of "Appreciation Token" and other strategies in the V and E data.

Example of the use of "Appreciation Token" by itself in the V data:

(5) VFC1: A VFI5, hôm bõõa VFC1 còu nghe thầy nõi laø VFI5 còu caùi

baøi ñaêng trên tờ táp chí trong khoa ñoù, kéa VFC1 còu tìm

VFC1 ñõic. VFC1 thaáy baøi ñoù VFI5 vieát hay quau trõi. Thaáy neà quau!

"Ah, VFI5, I heard that you had a paper published in the departmental journal. I looked for it to read. I found it so well-written. It's admirable!"

VFI5: OÀ càm ôn VFC1 haù.

"Oh thank you".

(Note: In Vietnamese, the speaker sometimes addresses the other interlocutors as their names instead of the pronoun "you". The speaker may also refer to himself/herself as his/her name instead of the pronouns "I" and "me", and "of + his/her name" instead of "my". Codes were used instead of real names for confidentiality purposes).

Example of the use of "Appreciation Token" and "Disagreement" in the V data:

(6) VFC2: EÂ kyø tuần roài ñoù mình ñõic caùi baøi baùo. Trõi ôi mình thaáy

baøi cuõa VFI7 ñaêng. Baøi vieát hay deã deã sôi luôn.

"Hey last week I read a journal. Gosh I found your article.

It's very very good".

VFI7: Hoảng còu gì. Càm ôn baïn nhieàu.

"It's not. Thank you very much".

"Appreciation Token" and "Agreement" in the E data.

(7) EMC3: I like your car. It's very good.

EMI8: Oh yeah, thanks. It's not bad.

In example (7), the "Appreciation Token" ("Thanks") was used with the full "Agreement" consisting of the agreement token ("Yeah") and the scaled-down agreement ("It's not bad").

“Appreciation Token” and “Return” in the E data:

(8) EFC1: You're looking good.

EFI2: Thanks. So are you.

The combination of “Appreciation Token” and “Return” as in example (8) was found mostly in female E CR data.

“Appreciation Token” and “Explanation” in the E data:

(9) EMC2: I like your tie. It suits you well.

EMI4: Thanks. Mom bought it for me. She likes to buy me nice ties now and again.

In the above example, the “Appreciation Token” was followed by two “Explanations” (“Mom bought it for me. She likes to buy me nice ties now and again”).

“Return” by itself or preceded by “Appreciation Token”

Another difference in strategy combination in the V and the E data is the use of “Return” by itself or with an “Appreciation Token” before it. In the V data, there were only three “Returns” in total. “Return” occurred by itself twice and with “Compliment Downgrade” once. In the E data, however, there were ten “Returns” and only two of them occurred by themselves whereas eight of them followed “Appreciation Tokens”.

An English “Return”:

(10) EFC1: *You're looking good.*

EFI3: *Thanks. You, too.*

A Vietnamese “Return”:

(11) VFC1: *Trộm ôi hôm nay VF14 ãiẹp quàu ta.*

“Gosh you look beautiful today”.

VF14: *Trộm ôi ãâu ãiẹp bằng chò ãâu.*

“Gosh not as beautiful as you are”.

It should be explained that VF14 had no intention of making a joke by repeating VFC1's compliment. Her intention, as she explained later, was to return VFC1's compliment. It is common among the Vietnamese that they use a comparison favorable to the hearer in their “Return” in order to make a stronger compliment to the complimenter on the same subject of compliment.

It was observable that the way the “Return” was formed by the E informant differed from that by the V informant. While the E informant's “Return” was the paying back of the same compliment to the complimenter, the V informant's “Return” consisted of a comparison between the complimenter's object of compliment and that of the complimenter. Such a comparison was made in order to assert a stronger complimentary force in return to the complimenter.

Combination of CR strategies on the acceptance to denial continuum

The most important finding about the combination of strategies in the V and E data is that in English, strategies in the middle of the acceptance to denial continuum, (e.g. “Return”, “Explanation”, “Reassignment”), are often used with strategies at the acceptance end of the continuum, (e.g. “Compliment Upgrade”, “Agreement”, “Appreciation Token”) whereas in Vietnamese, strategies in the middle of this continuum are often combined with strategies at the denial end of the continuum, (e.g. “Compliment Downgrade”, “Disagreement”).

Specifically, in English, “Return” was used most often with “Appreciation Token”. Eight out of the total number of ten “Returns” in the E data co-occurred with “Appreciation Tokens”. When being in a combination in the English CRs, “Explanation” was used the most frequently with “Agreement”, “Appreciation Token” and sometimes with “Compliment Upgrade”. The use of the “Explanation” strategy occurred fifteen times in the E data and it was in combination with “Agreement” eight times, with “Appreciation Token” six times, and with “Compliment Upgrade” once. Moreover, there were four instances of use of “Reassignment” in the E data. One “Reassignment” was combined with “Agreement” and another with “Appreciation Token”.

In the V data, there were three “Returns”. “Return” occurred by itself twice and with “Compliment Downgrade” once. Out of twenty-four “Explanations” in the V data, fifteen were by themselves. When it occurred in combination with other strategies, “Explanation” was used the most frequently with “Disagreement” (four times) and less frequently with “Compliment Downgrade” (once). Moreover, among seven instances of use of “Reassignment” in the V data, “Reassignment” was combined the most often with “Disagreement”. “Reassignment” co-occurred with “Disagreement” four times and with “Compliment Downgrade” once.

The following are some examples showing the differences in the combination of CR strategies along the acceptance to denial continuum in the E and the V data.

An example of the combination of “Explanation” and “Compliment Upgrade” in English:

(12) EMC2: Hey you’ve got a nice car.

EMI5: Yeah. Uhm well I just bought this car a few months ago. And
 yeah I was fortunate to have a car like this.

In (12), the “Explanation” (“I just bought this car a few months ago”) was combined with a “Compliment Upgrade” (“I just bought this car a few months ago”) and an “Agreement” which was expressed through “Agreement Tokens” (“Yeah”, “Yeah”).

An example of the combination of “Reassignment”, “Explanation” and “Agreement” in English:

(13) EMC3: I like your suit as well.

EMI7: Yeah. Yeah. It’s actually not mine. It’s actually my dad’s. I haven’t had one.

The “Agreement”, which was expressed through “Agreement Tokens” (“Yeah. Yeah”), preceded the “Reassignment” (“It’s actually not mine. It’s actually my dad’s”), which reassigned the credit of the compliment to an absent third person, and a further “Explanation” (“I haven’t had one”).

An example of the combination of “Explanation” and “Compliment Downgrade” in Vietnamese:

(14) VMC2: Høi ôi ngöông mö anh VMI6 laém nhe. Høi böa ô ñoic caui

baøi vieát cuõa anh ñang treân baøu cuõa khoa ño. Trøi ôi caui baøi ño hay gheã vaãy ño.

“My goodness I really admire you. Uhm I read your article in the departmental journal the other day. Gosh that paper was really good”.

VMI6: Mình nghĩ cuõng thöông thoãi. Ôm caui yù ño laø xuaát phaùt töø caui hoær caũnh thöic teá, mình ghi lên baøu. Theá thoãi.

“I think it’s just normal. Uhm that idea came from reality and

I wrote about it in the article. That’s it”.

In this combination, the “Compliment Downgrade” (“I think it’s just normal”) preceded the “Explanation” (“That idea came from reality and I wrote about it in the article. That’s it”).

An example of the combination of “Explanation” and “Disagreement” in Vietnamese:

(15) VFC1: Trôphi ôi maëc àu ñààm ñeip quàu!

“Gosh what a beautiful dress you’re wearing!”

VFI6: Ñeip gì! (Cồôphi). Mòuì mua ñòu (Cồôphi).

“It’s not beautiful! (Smile). I just bought it (Smile)”.

The “Explanation” (“*I just bought it*”) in (15) followed the “Disagreement” (“*It’s not beautiful*”).

The combination of CR strategies in the middle of the acceptance to denial continuum with those at the left end of it in the E data contrasted with the combination of strategies in the middle of the continuum with those at the right end of it in the V data.

Patterns of differences between CRs in English and Vietnamese

Because frequency of CR strategy use based on the number of informants who used each strategy in each group has been thoroughly analyzed, a different portrait of CR strategy use based on the number of CRs containing each strategy in each group is presented here. The total number of times each strategy was used by each whole group was calculated, resulting in Table 2. Table 2 presents the frequency at which each CR strategy occurred in the whole E and V groups.

Table 2 The total number of times each CR strategy occurred in the E and V groups

Strategies along the continuum from acceptance to denial	E	V
Compliment Upgrade	9	0
Agreement	23	0
Appreciation Token	49	4
Return	10	3
Explanation	15	24
Reassignment	4	7
Non-idiomatic Response	0	0
Compliment Downgrade	3	29
Disagreement	1	27
Strategies along the avoidance continuum	E	V
Expressing Gladness	4	0
Follow-up Question	3	0
(Doubting) Question	3	4
Opting out	0	18

According to Table 2, the total number of times most CR strategies (“Compliment Upgrade”, “Agreement”, “Appreciation Token”, “Return”, “Explanation”, “Compliment Downgrade”, “Disagreement”, “Expressing Gladness”, “Follow-up Question” and “Opting out”) occurred in the whole V group differed from that in the whole E group. Being grounded on Table 2, Figures 3 and 4 indicate the variation in CR strategy use among the E and V groups. This variation is in



relation to total number of CRs containing a certain strategy in each group or the total number of times each strategy occurred in the CRs by each group. Figure 3 shows the variation in the use of CR strategies on the acceptance to denial continuum among the two groups and Figure 4 describes the two groups' use of CR strategies on the avoidance continuum.

**Figure 3 Variation in the use of CR strategies on the acceptance to denial continuum by the V and E groups
 (based on the number of CRs containing each strategy in each group)**

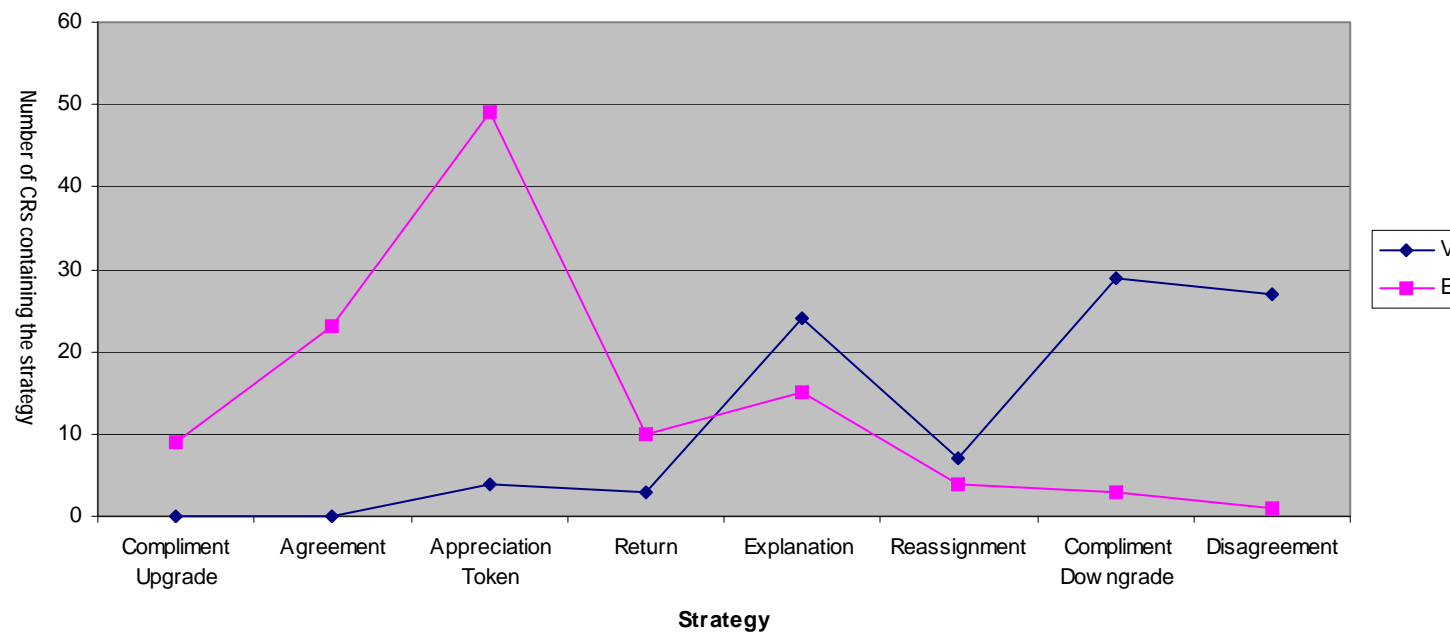
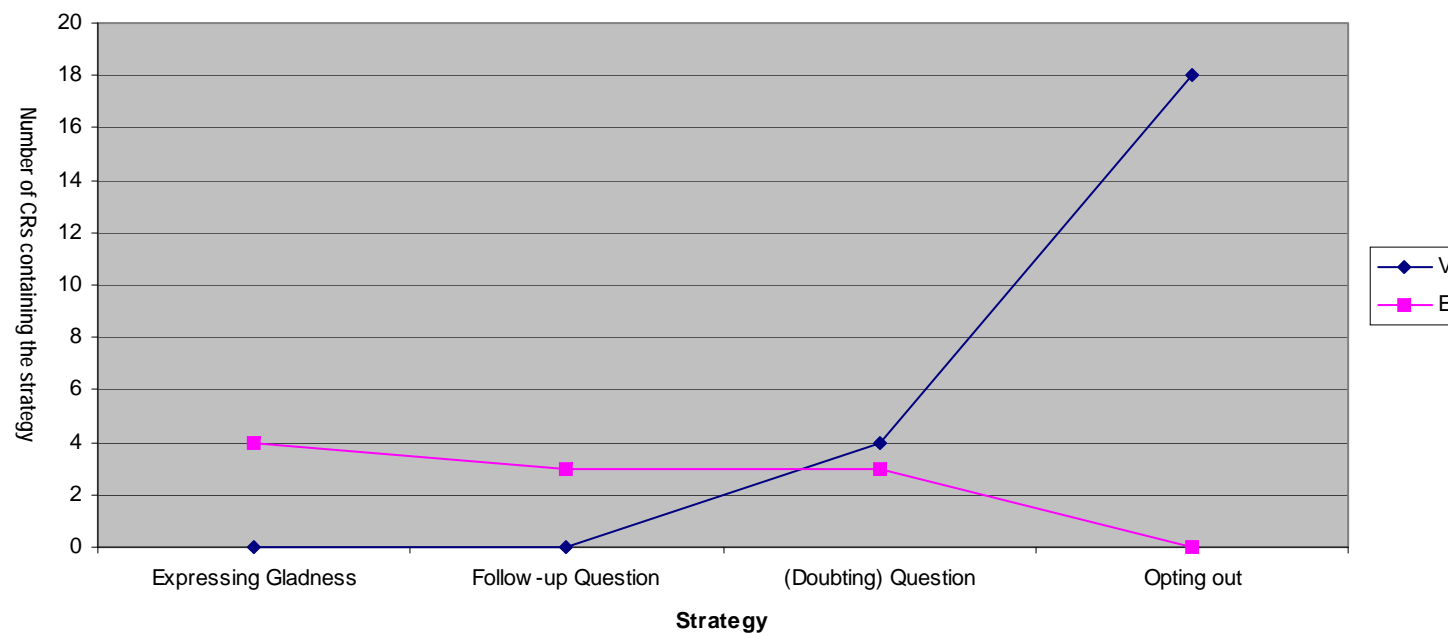


Figure 4 Variation in the use of CR strategies on the avoidance continuum by the V and E groups (based on the number of CRs containing each strategy in each group)



As can be seen in Figure 3, the lines representing the E and V groups' frequency of use of CR strategies on the acceptance to denial continuum are skewed towards opposite ends of the continuum. The line which depicts the E group's CR strategy use rises towards the acceptance end but falls towards the denial end of the continuum. By contrast, the line which illustrates the V group's use of CR strategies ascends towards the denial end but descends towards the acceptance end of the continuum.

Figure 4 portrays the E and V groups' frequency of use of CR strategies on the avoidance continuum as lines that rise and fall in opposite directions. The highest point of the line illustrating the E group's CR strategy use is at "Expressing Gladness" which is at the left end of the avoidance continuum. The lowest point of this line is at "Opting out" which is at the right end of the avoidance continuum. On the contrary, the highest point of the line depicting the V group's use of CR strategies is at "Opting out" and the lowest points of this line is at "Expressing Gladness" and "Follow-up Question".

Moreover, the way CR strategies are combined demonstrates another pattern of pragmatic and discourse transfer. CR strategies in the middle of the acceptance to denial continuum, (e.g. "Return", "Explanation", "Reassignment"), often occur with those at the acceptance end of the continuum, (e.g. "Compliment Upgrade", "Agreement", "Appreciation Token"), in (Australian) English whereas strategies in the middle of the continuum are often combined with those at the denial end of the continuum, (e.g. "Compliment Downgrade", "Disagreement"), in Vietnamese.

Despite the differences between English and Vietnamese CRs, there are some similarities in terms of strategy selection. In both English and Vietnamese, the number of "Appreciation Tokens" exceeds the number of "Agreements" and "Compliment Upgrades". There are also more "Explanations" than "Reassignments" and more "Compliment Downgrades" than "Disagreements" in both languages. Moreover, in Figure 3, elevated points (i.e. at "Appreciation Token", "Explanation" and "Compliment Downgrade") on the lines representing the E and V groups' frequency of use of CR strategies on the acceptance to denial continuum are the same. However, the differences between English and Vietnamese CRs far outweigh their similarities.

Conclusion

This study has shown similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese CRs in terms of strategy use and strategy combination. The study also revealed hitherto unknown patterns of such differences. Its originality rests upon not only the aforementioned results but also on the methodological design featuring the Naturalized Role-play, the new framework of data categorization consisting of two CR continua, and the underrepresented language being studied – Vietnamese.

The differences between English and Vietnamese CRs found herein can cause pragmatic and discourse transfer (See Tran, 2004c, 2004d, 2006a for a definition of "pragmatic and discourse transfer"). I have conducted further research into this matter. For research findings about pragmatic and discourse transfer by Vietnamese learners of English, see Tran (2004d, 2006a, 2007b, 2008).

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Appendix: Naturalized Role-play

SITUATION 1:

To the role-play informants:

The following situation describes you in a certain familiar role at school or in the society. Please listen to the description of the situation and identify yourself with the character “you” in it. If you have any question, please feel free to ask.

You are one of the best students in your class/office. Your articles have been published in popular journals in your field. There is a newcomer to your class/office. You two know each other's name and have said hello to each other sometimes but have not yet had a chance to talk much.

It is now around 5pm and you are leaving school for home. You are walking in the parking lot towards your new car/motorcycle. That new classmate/colleague approaches you and says some greetings.

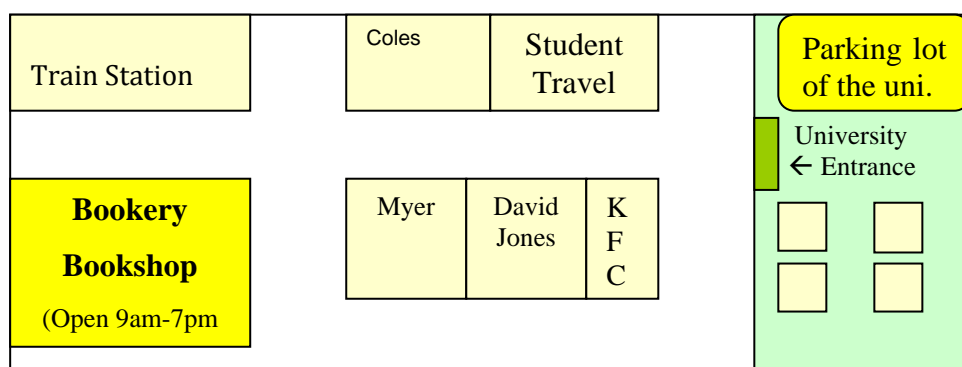
You two talk while walking together. The social talk should include but is not limited to the following points (See the card for role-play informants below).

In the card for the role-play informants:

- (When being asked) Please give him/her directions to get to the “Bookery” bookshop.
- (When being asked) Please tell him/her when the bookshop is closed today.
- Please offer him/her a ride to get there.

The directions and the hours can be found in the map below.

Please make the conversation as natural as possible. Speak as you would in real life.



To the role-play conductors:

It is your task to lead the conversation in a flexible and natural way. Please listen to the description of the situation and identify yourself with the character “you” in it. If you have any question, please feel free to ask.

You are a newcomer to a class/office. One of your new classmates/colleagues is a very good student with articles published in popular journals in your field. You two know each other’s name and have said hello to each other sometimes but have not yet had a chance to talk much.

It is now around 5pm and you are leaving school. You want to stop by a bookshop and have heard that there is one named “Bookery” not far from school but you do not know where it is. You are passing by or taking a short cut through the parking lot and see that new classmate/colleague. You approach him/her and say some greetings. You two talk while walking together. The talk should include but is not limited to the following points (See the card for role-play conductors below).

In the card for the role-play conductors:

- Please ask for directions to get to the “Bookery” bookshop.
- Please ask him/her what time the bookshop is closed today.
- Please accept the ride there that he/she offers.
- When it is most natural during the talk, compliment him/her on:
 - his/her article published last week
 - his/her car

Please make the conversation as natural as possible. Speak as you would in real life. It is very important that you compliment naturally and make your compliments a part of the normal social talk. Do not make it obvious that the compliments are among the tasks listed in the card for you.

SITUATION 2:

To the role-play informants:

About a week after that situation, you were invited to a dinner party of classmates/colleagues at that new classmate/colleague’s house. When he/she invited you to come over, he/she gave you a printed

map showing where to park your car/motorbike. Today is the day of the party. You dressed up for the event and drove your car/motorbike there. Now you are at his/her doorstep. You two will say some greetings and talk while he/she leads you to the living room. The social talk should include but is not limited to the following points (See the card for role-play informants below).

In the card for the role-play informants:

- (At the door and after some greetings) Please check with him/her whether you have parked your car in the right place.
- (After he/she has put your coat in the hall for you) Please ask if he/she is all right/ feeling better now (because you did not see him/her at the departmental seminar a few days ago and were told that he/she was not well).

Please make the conversation as natural as possible. Speak as you would in real life.

To the role-play conductors:

About a week after that situation, you invited this new classmate/colleague to a dinner party of classmates/colleagues at your house. Today is the day of the party. Now you are greeting him/her at the door. You two will talk while you lead him/her to the living room. The social talk should include but is not limited to the following points (See the card for role-play conductors below).

In the card for the role-play conductors:

- (When being asked) Please assure him/her that he/she has parked in the right place.
- Please respond to his/her question expressing concern about your health (which is asked because he/she did not see you at the departmental seminar a few days ago and they said you were not feeling well).
- When it is most natural during the talk, compliment him/her on:
 - his/her appearance that day
 - his/her clothing (e.g. her dress or his tie)

Please make the conversation as natural as possible. Speak as you would in real life. It is very important that you compliment naturally and make your compliments a part of the normal social talk. Do not make it obvious that the compliments are among the tasks listed in the card for you.