

## CHIẾN LƯỢC LỊCH SỰ VÀ CÁC YẾU TỐ VĂN HOÁ TRONG HÀNH VI XIN PHÉP VÀ HỒI ĐÁP TIẾNG VIỆT

### POLITENESS STRATEGIES AND CULTURAL FACTORS IN ASKING FOR AND GIVING PERMISSION IN VIETNAMESE

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**ABSTRACT:** *It can be said that politeness strategies and cultural factors are common extra linguistic factors that govern communication strategies in general as well as asking for and giving permission in Vietnamese in particular. The article focuses on studying Vietnamese asking for and giving permission in specific communication situations. With the use of linguistics factors such as the use of pronouns, the extended components, the modal particles with cultural characteristics of Vietnamese people expressed through asking for and giving permission.*

**Key words:** *Politeness strategies, culture, permission.*

**TÓM TẮT:** *Có thể nói chiến lược lịch sự và các yếu tố văn hóa là các nhân tố ngoại ngôn phổ biến chi phối các chiến lược giao tiếp nói chung cũng như các hành vi xin phép và hồi đáp trong tiếng Việt nói riêng. Sử dụng phương pháp thống kê phân loại và phân tích hệ thống hóa, bài viết tập trung nghiên cứu các hành vi xin phép và hồi đáp tiếng Việt trong những tình huống giao tiếp cụ thể. Với cách sử dụng các yếu tố ngôn ngữ như cách thức sử dụng các đại từ xưng hô, các yếu tố mở rộng, các tiểu từ tình thái cùng với nét đặc trưng văn hóa của người Việt Nam biểu lộ qua các hành vi xin phép và hồi đáp không chỉ để tôn vinh thể diện của người nghe mà còn khẳng định tính lịch sự của các hành vi xin phép và cho phép cũng như là tạo ra hiệu quả tích cực cho các hành vi giao tiếp này.*

**Từ khóa:** *Chiến lược lịch sự, văn hóa, cho phép.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

In Vietnam, speech acts have been receiving the attention of many linguists, especially Vietnamese linguists. Among them, we have to mention a number of research works by famous scientists such as Cao Xuan Hao (1991) in “*Tiếng Việt Sơ thảo ngữ pháp chức năng*” marking a turning point in the history of Vietnamese language research, “*Đại cương ngôn ngữ học*”, Pragmatics Volume 2 by Do Huu Chau & Bui Minh Toan introduced the concept of speech acts, distinguished between micro-speech expressions and micro-speech verbs, and presented a number of pragmatic signs marking the force of speech acts. Nguyen

Duc Dan (1998) with "Pragmatics" presented the basic theoretical foundations of pragmatics including speech acts.

The study of speech acts as a speech event in conversational interaction is also of interest to many linguists and there are many research works. Authors who have conducted in-depth research on speech acts in communication that affect politeness and cultural factors include Dao Nguyen Phuc (2007) “*Lịch sự trong đoạn thoại xin phép của tiếng Việt*” has deeply studied the characteristics of Vietnamese conversational language, especially the linguistic characteristics of “*Sự kiện lời nói xin phép*” through the description and classification of different forms of using permission speech

event and cultural factors that affect permission speech event in Vietnamese. The purpose of the research is to understand the nature of permission speech event in Vietnamese on the pragmatic level, clarifying the structural characteristics of permission dialogue in general. Le Thi Kim Dinh (2006) in "*Lịch sự trong hành động cầu khiến tiếng Việt*" pointed out factors affecting the assessment of politeness in speech such as communicative roles, politeness maxims, face and politeness, politeness strategies and the correlation between politeness and culture; Vu Thi Thanh Huong (1999) studied modern politeness of Vietnamese people through interview methods and language investigation with the article "*Gián tiếp và lịch sự trong lời cầu khiến tiếng Việt*".

### 1.2. Definition

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000) [6], the verb "ask for permission" is defined as the act of asking someone for permission to do something, especially from people with social power. Soehartono & Sianne (2003) found the dominant function in requesting behavior and concluded: "The function of requesting behavior is followed by the function of apology to show the lower social status of the requester in order to convince people with higher power." [13].

According to Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the act of asking for permission belongs to the type of requesting act in Directives. Austin believes that Directives are acts in which the speaker wishes to perform an action in the future. According to Austin's definition and theory, the act of asking for permission is an activity in which the speaker of the act of asking for permission (SP1) and the recipient of the act of asking for permission, responding to which is the

listener (SP2) have mutual influence through linguistic factors in certain ways to bring the act of asking for permission to reach the highest efficiency. Thus, the point of agreement between Austin and Searle in the concept of the group of Directives acts (including the act of asking for permission) is that the speaker wants the listener to allow them to perform an action in the future.

The act of asking for permission has a structure described as follows:

- The central predicate ask/ask permission has three elements: the first element is the speaker (S), the second element is the listener (H), the third element is the listener allowing the speaker to perform action X. From there, the third element of ask/ask for permission/leave has the semantic structure of a phrase with the central predicate allow/give/to with three elements: the first element is the listener (H), the second element is the speaker (S) and the third element is S performing X.

- In turn, the third element of the predicate allow/give/to has a structure revolving around the predicate expressing the action that the speaker wants to ask permission to do.

From the above analysis, the act of asking for permission is defined as a speech act in which, in certain contexts, the speaker makes an utterance to negotiate, to suggest that the listener agrees, to allow the speaker to perform a certain action in the future.

### 1.3. The concept of response

We already know that discourse is a product of speech acts. All speech acts require a response. The response dialogue is the response turn of SP2 after receiving the introductory turn from SP1 and this response dialogue (response turn) has a function in communication, which is the function in the

speech.

“*The function in the response is the function in the speech of the dialogues responding to the function in the introductory words*” [2, 330]. This response function belongs to the general response dialogues (including answering and indicating the level of satisfaction given by the dialogue in the introduction).

#### **1.4. Principles of politeness and face in conversation**

According to Hoang Phe's “Vietnamese Dictio *“có cách cư xử lịch thiệp và biết tuân theo lễ lối chuẩn mực xã hội trong giao tiếp”* and the way to follow social norms in communication” [10]. Do Huu Chau (2010) introduces the concept of “politeness” as *“phép lịch sự là hệ thống những phương thức mà người nói đưa vào hoạt động nhằm điều hòa và gia tăng giá trị của đối tác của mình”* [2, 280]. Nguyễn Đức Dân (1998) affirms “*Lịch sự là tôn trọng nhau. Nó là một biện pháp để giảm bớt trở ngại trong tương tác giao tiếp giữa các cá nhân*”. [4]

However, many foreign researchers also have different views on politeness and face, such as George Yule (1996) who viewed “politeness” in a conversational interaction as a means to affirm the perception of “face” of the communication participants and also a diplomatic ritual hidden within a culture. Brown, P. & Levinson, S., [1] proposed a theory of principles in communication to ensure politeness and face. According to this principle, he emphasized the importance and necessity of politeness and face to have successful communication, the close relationship between politeness and face, the higher the risk of face threat, the politer the speaker needs to choose the strategy. He believes that politeness must be based on the following rules:

- Social distance: Social distance is defined as the social level of balance of similarities and differences within the scope of the speaker and the listener.

- Relative Power: Relative power of the hearer over the speaker is an asymmetric social dimension. It is the degree to which a participant can impose his/her own plans and self- evaluation.

- Imposition Rank: Imposition rank refers to the ordering of impositions according to the degree to which they impinge upon an interactant's face wants in a particular culture and situation.

In this paper, we will analyze politeness and face strategies related to permission and response behavior according to Brown & Levinson's point of view. According to Brown & Levinson, in the course of conversation, speech acts potentially threaten the face of both the speaker and the listener, which is called Face Threatening Acts (FTA). We agree with Brown & Levinson's view of politeness because negative politeness has a compensatory or evasive nature. It is the avoidance of FTAs or mitigation by some measures such as:

1. Using polite forms of address (Mr., Mrs., Sir, Uncle, Chief, Director... only in the second person when talking directly).

2. Using extended elements such as calling elements, hedge elements.

3. Using modal particles.

Basing on the findings of the above researchers, we come to a conclusion about the relationship between politeness and the behavior of asking for permission and responding:

The behavior of asking for permission can be considered a behavior belonging to the group of negative face threats of the speaker. The more politeness in the conversation of

asking for permission and responding increases, the more the speaker must implement the maxim of maximizing loss to himself, and must find ways to save face or honor the face of the listener (the person opposite).

On the contrary, politeness will decrease; the success of the conversation will be threatened more when the speaker gives more benefits to himself such as honoring his own face, and pushes the damage to the other person such as threatening or losing the other person's face.

So, how to perform the behavior of asking for permission and responding with the maxim of honoring face or minimizing or compensating the face of the speaker (the person performing the behavior of asking for permission) and the listener (the person responding). The paper will use Brown & Levinson's theory of politeness principles to study and solve this problem.

Nguyen Duc Dan [4, 86] affirmed that "*Politeness is respecting each other. It is a measure to reduce obstacles in communication interactions between individuals*". He proposed three rules to follow when participating in communication related to politeness:

- a. Do not impose (in etiquette, diplomacy);
- b. Leave open for choice (in normal communication);
- c. Make the interlocutor feel comfortable (in intimate conversation)

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

- The samples were selected randomly focusing on distinct linguistic variables mainly age and gender of novels, short stories in Vietnamese. In addition, we collected the data from the 40 students of English in Quang Binh University. They answered the

questions of the questionnaire (DCT) with different social relationships such as fathers, mothers - children, teachers - students, leaders - workers.

- Linguistic statistical method: Using statistical methods to synthesize the behaviors of asking for permission and responding in Vietnamese using politeness strategies and cultural factors.

## 3. POLITENESS STRATEGIES AND CULTURAL FACTORS IN VIETNAMESE ASKING FOR PERMISSION AND RESPONSE

It can be said that cultural factors and communication roles are common extra linguistic factors that influence communication strategies in general as well as asking for permission and response in particular. Therefore, asking for permission and response depends a lot on social factors, the way of using pronouns, filler words, intonation of voice, and speech.

Due to cultural factors and customs of Vietnamese people, the higher the level of difference in social status between two people, the higher the level of politeness. Those social positions can be referred to as age, status, social relationships, positions, etc. Normally, in social interactions, people with lower social status often show a humble attitude towards people with higher social status. Depending on each context and communication environment, different social factors will be emphasized or reduced. For example, in the work environment, employees will have a humble and respectful attitude towards their directors and leaders [5] In the school environment, students must have a respectful and polite attitude towards their teachers in the teacher-student relationship [5]. In the family, the kinship relationship is expressed in the father-child,

mother-child relationship....

(1) *Bố mẹ ơi, sắp đến ngày sinh nhật con rồi. Bố mẹ có thể cho con tổ chức một bữa tiệc được không?*

*Ừ, con cứ tổ chức đi.*

(2) *Thưa sếp! Ngày mai nhà em có việc riêng, em xin phép sếp cho em xin nghỉ một ngày ạ?*

*Được, nhưng em nhớ phải bàn giao công việc đầy đủ nhé.*

### 3.1 Using pronouns

In Vietnamese, unlike in English, the terms to denote personal pronouns and titles are very rich and diverse. Pronouns clearly show the social relationship between the speaker and the listener. Each pronoun has different nuances of expression and context. From close and distant relationship in the family such as husband and wife, father and son, mother and son, aunt, uncle and nephew..., to the relationship between teachers and students, bosses and employees, directors and employees, all create an extremely rich picture of pronouns in Vietnamese. Therefore, if the participants in the communication use the correct pronouns when performing the acts of asking for permission and responding, the speaker will create an intimate and sincere relationship with the listener. Thanks to that, the politeness in the statements of asking for permission is further enhanced, and the listener's dignity is further honored.

(3) *Bấm mẹ, con xin phép mẹ cho con về.*

*Bá Tuần gặt đầu [16]*

(4) *Thưa cô, em đến muộn, xin phép cô cho em vào lớp.*

*Em vào đi. Nhớ lần sau đi học đúng giờ nhé. (DCT)*

It can be said that Vietnamese speakers often use direct ways to form statements of asking for permission. However, these ways

are very polite and save face for both the listener and the speaker, because they comply with the principles of communication.

First of all, it can be affirmed that Vietnamese people often use chants not only to honor the listener's face but also to affirm the politeness of the acts of asking for permission as well as creating a positive effect for these communication behaviors.

(5) *Bấm, chú cho phép cháu vào trong chào thím.*

*Thím không có ở đây đâu. [17]*

In the conversation (5) between the uncle and the nephew, there is a gap in the social status of the two people, the nephew raised the uncle's face, and showed great respect and humility. When performing the act of asking for permission, with the word “*bấm*” in Vietnamese and with the use of the verb “*permit*” in English. The uncle's response, on the contrary, was an indirect, somewhat cold negative response “*Thím không có ở đây đâu*”

(6) *Thưa bà, chúng tôi muốn gặp mặt bà để được hầu chuyện.*

*Không hề gì, mời ngài vào chơi. [17]*

Calling verbs such as “*say, report, confess, bow*”, “*thưa, báo cáo, bấm, lay*” in Vietnamese are often used at the beginning of the speech acts as in the example above to make the listener feel respected, their face is honored, and the speakers showed their politeness with the listeners when they speak, and then the listeners can accept the speaker's permission easier.

### 3.2. Use the extended components

Extended components of an utterance are elements that accompany expressions represent the core of the act of asking for permission, but do not express the content of the act of asking for permission. The extended component has the effect on

emphasizing the content of the act of asking for permission, while also increasing the speaker's politeness and respect the listener's face as well as making the act of asking for permission more gentle, winning the listener's sympathy. For this reason, when the speakers use the extended components, they can have positive responses from the listeners.

### **3.2.1. The extended component is the calling element**

The calling element in the statements of asking for permission that we collected is often at the beginning of these statements, increasing the listener's attention to the statements of asking for permission, and expressing intimate and close feelings between communication participants, more or less contributing to reducing the face threat to the listener caused by the statements of asking for permission.

(7) *Chị ơi, chị hãy cho phép em được hôn chị.*

*Đừng em. [18]*

(8) *Bu ơi, bu ở nhà, con đi đàng này một tí nhé.*

*Thôi con ạ, không thuốc thang gì nữa đâu. [15]*

Thanks to the calling elements as in the two above examples, it is possible to know the social relationships of the people participating in communication. In example (7), the relationship between speaker and listener is likely sis – sis sibling. But, actually this is the love between two friends who have known each other for a long time. In example (8), the relationship between interlocutors is the mother - child relationship.

### **3.2.2. The extension component is a welcome element**

Welcome factors are the reasons, the preemptive sentences that the speaker gives

before performing the acts of asking for permission to probe and grasp the listener's attitude in order to achieve the communication purpose of a response; that is the positive purpose from the listener to the acts of asking for permission of the speaker.

In daily communication, when performing the acts of asking for permission, Vietnamese people have many welcome ways to show their friendliness and achieve high efficiency in communication.

(9) *Đã nhiều năm tôi sống chết với các anh em trong cơ quan, xin phép đồng chí chủ nhiệm cho tôi được tham gia chuyến công tác đầy gian khó này.*

*Đồng chí đã nói như vậy, chúng tôi hoàn toàn ủng hộ. [11]*

In the utterances of asking for permission, the listener's face is always threatened, therefore, to avoid making the statements that do not receive a positive response from the listener, the speaker often uses the extended components such as giving an explanation, clearly stating the purpose and reason before making the statements of asking for permission to gain sympathy and agreements from the listener.

(10) *Nhà tôi độ này bạn quá, thành ra phải xin phép thầy cho cháu Dũng nghỉ ít bữa.*

*Tôi im lặng không nói gì. [17]*

This conversation occurred between a parent and a teacher. Because his father did not have any money to send his child to school, the child had to miss the school for a few days. However, when the teacher came to ask the father about his son's absence, he was very courteous and polite in asking for permission “*xin phép thầy cho cháu Dũng nghỉ ít bữa*”. To increase the credibility to convince the teacher, he also added the reason “*Nhà tôi độ này bạn quá*” with the

hope of getting a positive respond from the teacher to allow his child to miss school.

### 3.3. Social distance

According to Brown & Levinson (1978), social distance is one of the determining factors related to politeness in speech acts, including asking for permission. Social distance is a rather broad concept related to a person's age, gender, social position, occupation, and position in society. Social distance is a factor for the communicator to be aware of what he is saying and how to express the meaning of his words. Homes (1995) believes that if a person has a higher social status than the person participating in communication, he or she deserves to receive honor. That is why people with lower social status often avoid causing harm and often shows their respect for those with higher social status.

(11) A: *Quan lớn cho phép con được lui vào nhà trong ạ.*

B: *Vào đi chứ, đừng ăn vạ ở đây mãi à.* [14]

The social distance between those participating in the communication in this act of asking for permission is clearly shown. The farmer knew how to raise the social position of the person talking to him by using the phrase "*Bầm quan lớn*" and repeating the verb "xin phép" twice as an intention to raise the social position of the listener and show the speaker's own humanity to achieve his communication purpose at the same time.

### 3.4. Using modal particles

In Vietnamese, modal particles such as *thôi, này, nhé, ạ, cho, chứ, đã, cứ* are also one of the strategies that Vietnamese people use at the beginning or end of the statements of asking for permission. With different modal particles, the purpose and the effectiveness of the speaker will be different when making the

acts of asking for permission.

(12) *Anh cứ để tôi nói. Tôi nói rồi có chết cũng hả anh ạ.*

*Con...con... [16]*

The modal particle "*cứ*" in this case represents the speaker's request, he/she asks the listener to allow him or her to perform an action "*Anh cứ để tôi nói*" that the speaker wants to perform.

(13) *Bác cho cháu vào vườn hái nắm lá ngải cứu ạ.*

*Được thôi, cháu vào đi. [11]*

In this example, it can be shown that the communication position of the speaker is lower than that of the listener, so by using the modal particle "*ạ*", the speaker wants to show his respect and honor to the listener's face, while reducing the risk of threatening the speaker's face and creating positive responses from the listener.

(14) *Lạy ông tha cho con, con chỉ dám xin ông món tiền công ông chưa cho con mà thôi. [16]*

In this example, Pha humbly performed the act of asking for permission before the mandarin "*con chỉ dám xin ông món tiền công ông chưa cho con mà thôi*". By using the modal particle "*thôi*", he made his act of asking for permission smaller and gentler in the eyes of the mandarin. He lowered his social status that means he raised the mandarin's role a lot and he is able to get the mandarin's consent and positive response "*to get the salary from the mandarin*".

(15) *Bu ở nhà, con đi đằng này một tí nhé.*

*Thôi con ạ, không thuốc thang gì nữa đâu. [14]*

In example (15). The child wanted to ask the mother's permission to buy medicine for her mother. The child didn't use the structures with the verbs "*xin phép, xin... cho phép,*

*xin... được phép..., xin... cho*” as Vietnamese people often use. Here, only the modal particle “*nhé*” appears, but the word “*nhé*” helped the son form permission to her mother with the content “*Bu ở nhà, con đi đăng này một tí nhé*”.

The mother's response does not belong to the response structures as analyzed, however, it is easy to see that this is a negative response with the use of the modal particle “*thôi*” at the beginning of the utterance “*Thôi con ạ, không thuốc thang gì nữa đâu*”.

In terms of form, the utterances in the above examples are utterances that use modal particles at the end of the utterances, but the illocutionary force is asking for permission. By using modal particles at the beginning or at the end of the utterances, the speaker hopes that the utterances of asking for permission created by him will receive the consent and permission of the listener. Thanks to that, the listener also has the right to choose, And the imposition in the utterances of asking for permission is also reduced, the listener has the right to allow or refuse the utterances of asking for permission of the speaker. In general, the way we use the modal particles in

a sentence is always the optimal solution when the speaker wants to receive positive feedback from the listener because this way is more polite.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Regarding polite behavior related to the acts of asking for and giving permission in Vietnamese, we have gradually analyzed the relationship between the acts of asking for and giving permission in Vietnamese, the factors that help the acts of asking for and giving permission to be highly polite, Vietnamese people with a long - standing cultural tradition, politeness has become an indispensable spiritual food in the behavior of Vietnamese people. Vietnamese people often say “*Lời chào cao hơn mâm cỗ*”. That shows Vietnamese people often use subtle, humble words, with the way of using pronouns, the extended components, and modal particles when performing the acts of asking for permission to raise politeness, and honoring the face of the interlocutor at the same time. These factors are the means, the catalysts that help communication succeed easily and effectively.

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