

**THE UNIVERSITY OF DANANG
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**AN INVESTIGATION INTO LINGUISTIC
FEATURES OF ARGUMENTATIVE UTTERANCES
IN THE AMERICAN TV SERIES “THE LAST SHIP”**

**Major : ENGLISH LINGUISTICS
Code : 822.02.01**

**MASTER THESIS IN
LINGUISTICS AND CULTURAL STUDIES
OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES
(A SUMMARY)**

Da Nang, 2020

This thesis has been completed at
University of Foreign Language Studies, The University of Da Nang

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The thesis will be orally defended at the Examining Committee

Time: 3rd July, 2020

Venue: University of Foreign Language Studies – The University
of Da Nang

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

It is the fact that the increasing developments of the world today makes human become busier and live a hurried life. Therefore, English language learners have found many different ways to study in their free time like listening to music, watching movies and films... Among all, movies and films have long been a useful source for English language learners. Beside the comprehensive listening skills, English learners also learn how to persuade the other speakers through the arguments of the characters in those movies, especially the linguistic realizations used in the arguments. “The Last Ship” is an American action-drama television series, loosely based on the 1988 novel of the same name by Brinkley. All the characters in this TV series are highly-educated (captains, scientists, doctors...) and the premises used in their dialogues are diverse and accurate.

Consequently, the study is carried out in order to help learners of English language to identify the argument patterns so that they can interpret the implicatures of speakers and have the right choice of premises to support their conclusion.

1.2. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on the *argumentative* utterances by the light of the linguistic features related to syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features.

1.3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.3.1. Aims

This study is aimed to investigate the linguistic features of *argumentative* utterances in the American TV series “The Last Ship”

from season 1 to season 5, in order to help the learners of English as TV viewers have better insight into how the participants of *argument* perform their skills of critical thinking in problem solving and the linguistic features of their *argumentative* utterances as well as how to argue more effectively.

1.3.2. Objectives

- Analyze *argument* types used in the arguments in the American TV series “The Last Ship”.
- Identify the linguistic features of *argument* types used in the arguments in the American TV series “The Last Ship”.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the *argument* types used in the arguments in the American TV series “The Last Ship”?
- 2) What are the linguistic features in the arguments in the American TV series “The Last Ship”?

1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is expected to make contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the research findings are anticipated to provide additional reference for the researchers who want to conduct research into language of *arguments*. In terms of practical use, the results of this study are expected to be useful for both English language teachers and learners.

1.6. ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Implications

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Arguments have so far been a growing interest of many writers. A theoretical account of the problem of analyzing and evaluating argumentative discourse was described and analysed by several linguists. As a result, there are a number of great and useful books of critical thinking and language of *arguments*, and some of them have good reputation. Those books contain definitions and also illustrating examples that are aimed at providing readers with valuable and plentiful reference resources. Furthermore, there are many practical studies related to language features used in movies and films. All of these studies have revealed some aspects of language used in movies that offer readers an insight into language expressed in movies and films and give the supplementary knowledge of language used by the characters in some certain conversational contexts.

All of the foregoing, in short, can be the valuable reference resources, and the reason for conducting the study, named “*An Investigation into Linguistic Features of Argumentative Utterances in the American TV Series “The Last Ship”*”.

2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. Critical Thinking

According to Cambridge Dictionary, critical thinking is the process of thinking carefully about a subject or idea, without allowing feelings or opinions to affect you.

Stated by Lau (2011) critical thinking is thinking clearly and rationally. It involves thinking precisely and systematically, and following the rules of logic and scientific reasoning, among other things

2.2.2. Arguments

2.2.2.1. Concept of Argument

According to Armstrong and Fogelin (2009), in ordinary usage, an argument is often taken to be a somewhat heated dispute between people. But in logic and critical thinking, an argument is a list of statements, one of which is the conclusion and the others are the premise or assumption of the argument.

2.2.2.2. Entailment

Linguistic entailments occur when one may draw necessary conclusions from a particular use of a word, phrase or sentence. According to Beth (1955), entailment phrases are relations between propositions.

2.2.2.3. Types of Argument

- Valid arguments:

According to Lau (2011), a valid argument is the one where the conclusion follows logically from the premises.

- Invalid arguments:

Lau (2011) also states that an argument that is not valid is invalid. This happens as long as there is at least one logically possible situation where its premises are true and the conclusion is false.

2.2.3. Modality

2.2.3.1. Epistemic Modality

Epistemic modality which is concerned with certainty or doubt, possibility or impossibility, in other words the speaker's attitude to the truth of the proposition.

2.2.3.2. Volitional Modality

Palmer (1986) claims that volitional modality as a subcategory of deontic modality. Volitional function is not based on the speaker's knowledge of facts, but on the speaker's awareness of what is socially determined.

2.2.4. Pragmatic Markers

Stated in *Understanding Arguments: An Introduction to Informal Logic* by Armstrong and Fogelin (2009), pragmatic markers are linguistic expressions that are used to signal the relation of an utterance to the immediate context with the primary function of bringing to the listener's attention a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the immediate discourse context. Pragmatic markers are not part of the propositional content of the sentence. They are separate and distinct.

2.2.5. Speech Acts

Speech acts have been studied and defined by different theorists such as Austin (1955), Searle (1970) and others. Their common point of view is that speech act is a unit of communication. Each of these units performs a certain function such as: *complimenting, apologizing, offering*, etc.

According to Austin (1955), the term "speech act" is actually used exclusively to refer to the illocutionary act. He also suggests that different speech acts can be classified and compared basing on the classification of speech act verbs available in a language.

Searle (1970) further expands on Austin's work and basing on the felicity conditions for different speech acts, comes up with the taxonomy of speech act types: *representatives*, *directives*, *commissives*, *expressive*, and *declaratives*.

2.2.6. Definition of Politeness

There have been so far many Western researchers dealing with the notions of linguistic *Politeness*. Lakoff (1973, 1975, 1989) defines *Politeness* as those forms of behavior which have been "developed in society in order to reduce friction in interpersonal interaction". Leech (1983) defines *Politeness* as "strategic conflict avoidance" and the ability of participants to engage in interaction with an atmosphere of relative harmony. Brown and Levinson (1979) do not take *Politeness* to result from Pragmatic principles but rather form a more underlying need to minimize potential imposition on the addressee as a result of the verbal act.

2.2.7. Some Viewpoints on Linguistic Politeness

2.2.7.1. Grice's Conversational Principles

According to Grice's viewpoint which proposes the *Cooperative Principles* (CP), the speaking agent rational and his/her talk exchange is purposive so that the CP which consists of four main maxims of *quantity*, *quality*, *relation* and *manner* is normally observed.

2.2.7.2. Lakoff's Rules of Pragmatic Competence

From Grice's primitive ideas, Lakoff (1973) builds a theory of politeness in which politeness is assumed to be a means to avoid conflicts. The author formulates two rules of Pragmatic competence: 1) Be clear, and 2) Be polite. He takes these two rules to be in opposition to each other. Besides, Lakoff points out the following sub-rules: Rule 1: Don't impose (used when formal/ impersonal

politeness is required); Rule 2: Give options (used when informal politeness is required) and Rule 3: Make A feel good (used when intimate politeness is required)

2.2.7.3. Leech's Maxims of Politeness

Leech (1983) makes a distinction between the Speaker's illocutionary goals (what Speech Act the Speaker intends to convey through the utterance) and the Speaker's social goals (what position the Speaker is taking on being truthful, polite, ironic etc.). Leech (1983) argues that his *Cooperative Principle* and *Politeness Principle* often create a tension for the Speaker who must make a compromise between what message to convey and how to convey it.

2.2.7.4. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson (1987) mention the term "face" which is defined as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for him / herself". "Face" consists of *negative face* and *positive face*. In order to convey the intention to be polite in verbal interaction, Speakers should try to avoid or minimize the threat to face either of Speaker, or the Hearer or both. Moreover, the more indirect and elaborate a Speech Act utterance is, the more polite it becomes.

2.2.8. Arguments as a Face Threatening Act

Some speech acts, according to Brown and Levinson, may interfere with the addressee's freedom of action and are believed to threaten his/her negative face. They are considered potentially face-threatening and are called *Face-threatening acts* (FTAs). In an argument, many types of speech acts could be used including *requesting*, *apologizing*, *complaining*..., therefore, *arguing* is considered as a face threatening act.

2.2.9. Implicature

According to Grice (1975), implicature is a proposition implied by an utterance but it is not a part of the utterance. It does not follow as a necessary consequence of this utterance yet depends heavily upon the context of an utterance, including the participants

2.3. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has briefly reviewed the literature of studies of modality from different perspectives as well as presented the key concepts involved the analysis of *argument* such as the notion of argument types, *arguments* as a face threatening act speech acts under the influential accounts of famous writers. However, though the taxonomy of these semantic categories may cover a wide range of modality types, this thesis mainly focuses on the two main types: epistemic and volitional modality. In the view of pragmatics, speech act theory and politeness strategies have been taken into consideration when the semantic roles of modality markers modify the force of the illocutionary acts in the *arguments* by the interlocutors.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study is designed to answer the research questions mentioned in 1.4. It is based on both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative method is used to describe and analyze the data in terms of *argument* types and linguistic features of *arguments*. Additionally, the study utilized the quantitative approach to determine the frequency of the *argument* features.

3.2. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

- Collecting and classifying data from the transcript of the TV series “The Last Ship” to get the samples (200 samples).
- Analyzing the corpus to find out typical features of the research topic in terms of the argument types and linguistic features.
- Synthesizing the findings and giving the conclusions.
- Presenting the delimitations of the study.
- Suggesting some implications for teaching and learning English as well as for further research.

3.3. RESEARCH METHODS

Observational, descriptive and analytic methods were applied in order to achieve the research aims and objectives.

3.4. SAMPLING

The sampling is made with the searching for arguments between at least two interlocutors in a certain context. There are two types of sample: A complete *argument* sample and a shorten form of *argument*.

3.5. DATA COLLECTION

The data for the research are collected from the three reliable and helpful websites on the Internet that provide all the episodes in .mp4 format and also the transcript of the series: TopTVShows.me; ForeverDreaming.org and Springfield! Springfield!

3.6. DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analysed to meet the requirements of the qualitative and quantitative methods.

3.7. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

To guarantee the reliability and validity of the data, after carrying out the steps of 100 first pilot corpora analysis, I do the same steps with 200 more corpora collected in the same series but in different timeline to see whether the result remains the same through time or not and also to ensure to achieve what is intended to measure. It is a necessary step for the data analysis to avoid subjectivity in determining the results of data analysis and to ensure the data results reliability and validity.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. ARGUMENT TYPES USED IN THE ARGUMENTS IN TV SERIES “THE LAST SHIP”

Table 4.1: The Frequency of Argument Types in TV Series
“The Last Ship”

Argument types	Frequency				Total	
	Complete Form		Shortened Form			
Valid Arguments	19	19 %	63	63%	82	82%
Invalid Arguments	7	7%	11	11%	18	18%
Total	26	26%	74	74%	100	100%

4.1.1. Valid Arguments

4.1.2. Invalid Arguments

4.2. LINGUISTIC FEATURES EXPRESSED IN THE ARGUMENTS IN TV SERIES “THE LAST SHIP”

4.2.1. Pilot Results

The data discussed in this part of the thesis are the 100 pilot samples of *argumentative* utterances in TV series “The Last Ship”.

4.2.1.1. Syntactic Features Expressed in the Arguments in TV Series “The Last Ship”

Table 4.2: Syntactic Distribution of Argumentative Utterances in TV Series “The Last Ship”

	Declarative		Interrogative		Imperative		Total	
	N	F	N	F	N	F	N	F
Simple Sentence	30	30%	14	14%	9	9%	53	53%
Compound Sentence	20	20%	8	8%	6	6%	34	34%
Complex Sentence	8	8%	5	5%	0	0%	13	13%
Total	58	58%	27	27%	15	15%	100	100%

4.2.1.2. Semantic Features Expressed in the Arguments in TV Series “The Last Ship”

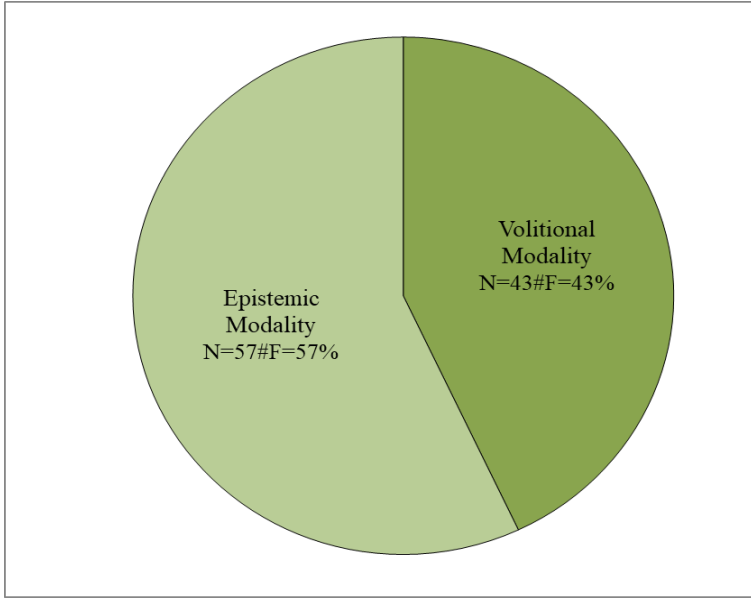
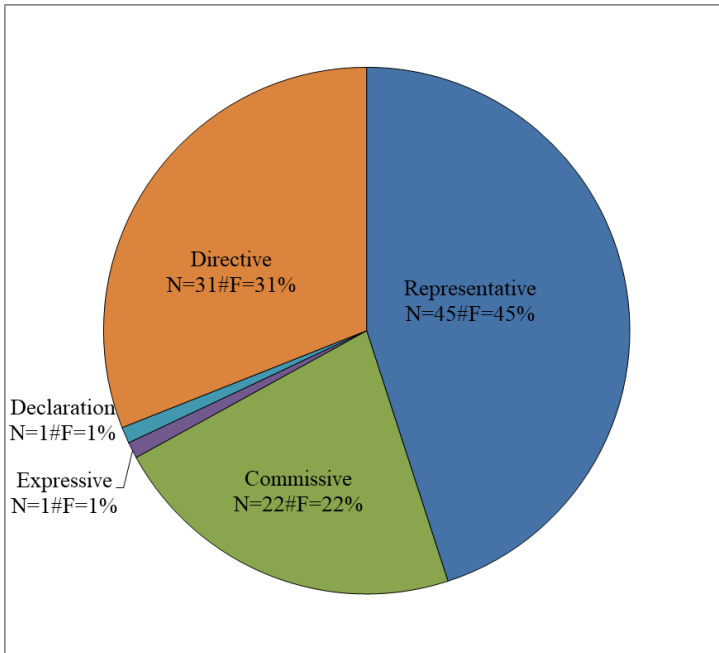


Chart 4.1 Semantic Distribution of Modality of Argumentative Utterances in TV Series "The Last Ship"

4.2.1.3. Pragmatic Features Expressed in the Arguments in TV Series "The Last Ship"



*Chart 4.2 Pragmatic Distribution of Argumentative Utterances
in TV series "The Last Ship"*

- a. Representative**
- b. Directive**
- c. Commissive**
- d. Expressive**
- e. Declaration**

4.2.2. Final Results

Table 4.3: The Frequency of Argument Types in TV Series
“The Last Ship” in 200 Later Samples

Argument types	Frequency				Total	
	Complete Form		Shortened Form			
Valid arguments	41	20.5%	127	63.5%	168	84.0%
Invalid arguments	16	8.0%	16	8.0%	32	16.0%
Total	57	28.5%	143	71.5%	200	100%

Table 4.4: Syntactic Distribution of Argumentative Utterances
in TV Series “The Last Ship” in 200 Later Samples

	Declarative		Interrogative		Imperative		Total	
	N	F	N	F	N	F	N	F
Simple Sentence	66	33%	23	11.5%	15	7.5%	104	52.0%
Compound Sentence	32	16%	18	9%	12	6%	62	31.0%
Complex Sentence	21	10.5%	13	6.5%	0	0%	34	17.0%
Total	119	59.5%	54	27.0%	27	13.5%	200	100%

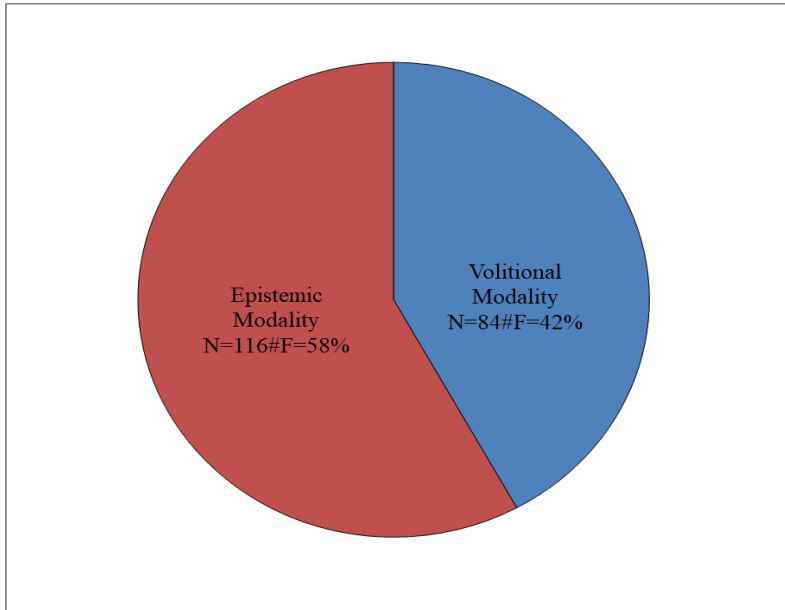


Chart 4.3: Semantic Distribution of Modality of Argumentative Utterances in TV Series "The Last Ship" in 200 Later Samples

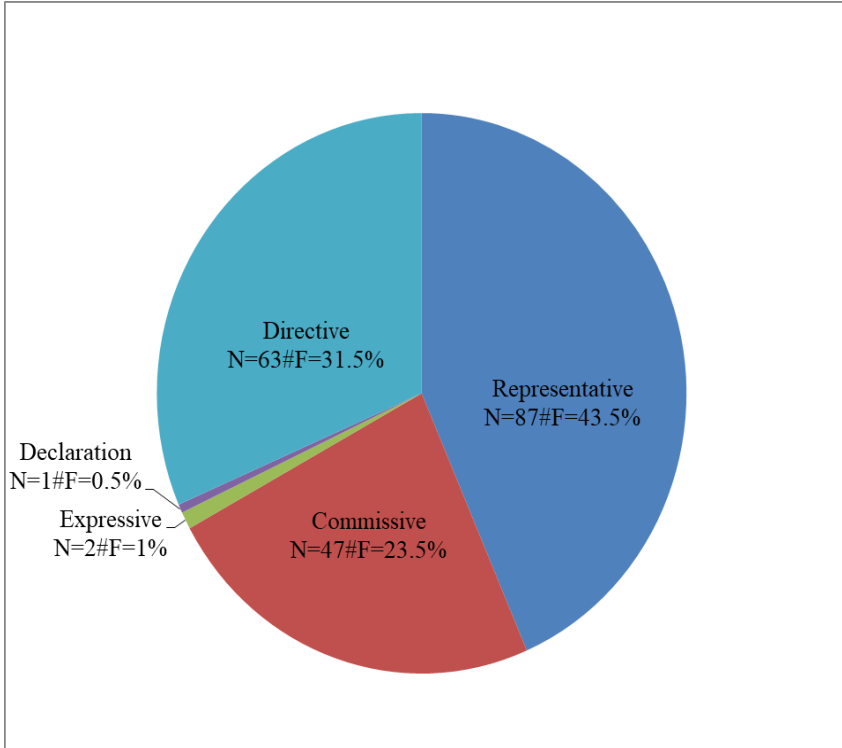


Chart 4.4: Pragmatic Distribution of Argumentative Utterances in TV Series "The Last Ship" in 200 Later Samples

4.3. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the linguistic features covering syntactic, semantic and pragmatic characteristics of *argumentative* utterances used by the characters in the American TV series “The Last Ship” such as the syntactic distribution, some semantic characteristics of two typical kinds of modality, including epistemic and volitional modality, the frequency use of 6 types of illocutionary acts are also discussed and analyzed in this chapter. Each sample is

analyzed under a certain situational context so that we could see the effect of the context on the use of *argument* language.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

After the data analysis in the thesis, the following conclusions could be withdrawn:

At syntactic level, *argumentative* utterances discussed in this thesis are classified into three labels: declarative, interrogative and imperative along with the three sentence structures: simple sentence, compound sentence and complex sentence. Due to the characteristic of the *argument* conversation, it could be understood that the highest frequency of occurrence of declarative and simple sentence could help the interlocutors strengthen their premises and have a higher chance of winning in arguments.

At semantic level, *argumentative* utterances can be categorized into two main groups: epistemic modality and volitional modality. As for epistemic modality which is more commonly used in *argumentative* conversation, they are to mark the Speaker's judgment and commitment to the proposition of the utterance and to the listeners. The scale of certainty depends on the reliability of evidences which are encoded as premises for strong or weak statements in the arguments. With *should*, its obligation meaning is not as binding as it is with *must*. With the different use of epistemic modality and volitional modality in *arguments*, the speaker could convey the different strength of his/her *argument* in different situations and different people that he/ she is arguing with. In terms of validity, the validity of argument is determined by the logical

connection between premises and conclusions. A true premise could entail a true conclusion. However, a false premise could lead to a true conclusion. More importantly, a true premise and a false conclusion could make up an invalid argument.

At pragmatic level, the *argumentative* utterances are expressed in all types of speech acts: *representatives*, *commissives*, *expressives*, *declarations*, and *directives*. Specifically, valid *arguments* are the most commonly expressed via the speech act of representative. Ranking the second and third in the expression of *argumentative* utterances are the speech acts of directives and commissives. The speech acts of expressives and declarations are not popularly used in *argumentative* conversations due to the need of avoiding imposition on the Hearer and of producing a convincing *argument*.

Besides the findings in terms of speech acts, there are also some conclusions involving politeness strategy choice in communication. Because the utterances analyzed in the thesis are produced by Native American whose culture is individualistic culture, we could see the choice of language used in arguments in relation to this cultural characteristic. Apart from the Social Distance between Speaker and Hearer, the Relative Power between Speaker and Hearer; the absolute Imposition Rank in a particular culture, the choice of which politeness strategy the interlocutors decide to use in *argumentative* conversations could be affected by the topic of the argument and the tension or the urgency of the argument that the interlocutors are in.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.2.1. Theoretical Contributions

The findings of this thesis could help intercultural communicators of English understand the choice of politeness strategy in communication and help these interlocutors avoid culture shock since the politeness strategy in arguments that the interlocutors choose to use not only depends on the social distance and the relative power between them but also the *argumentative* topic and the atmosphere, the tension or the urgency of the argument. As a result, the interlocutors could base on the above factors and especially the argument topic to decide the suitable politeness strategy. This could contribute to the framework of politeness theory suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987) and many other recent pragmatists as well as the governing factors related to the choice of politeness strategies in speech acts in general and in *arguments* in particular.

5.2.2. Practical Contributions

The qualitative results from the examination of the linguistic features of *argumentative* utterances used by the characters in TV series “The Last Ship” have laid the foundations for some implications to the English learning and teaching as follows:

5.2.2.1. For English Learners

Firstly for the English learners; they should know the dimensions of the validity of the *arguments* in order to produce a valid *argument* so that they could make their *arguments* convincing in an argument. In terms of syntactic, learners should know the differences between epistemic modality and volitional modality in

order to indicate the appropriate degree of certainty to the content of their premises and conclusions in an argument and especially in the appropriate atmosphere of formal or informal discourse. Moreover, the failure in analyzing the implicature of the utterance could make learners confused when making *argumentative* statements without awareness of the real intention of the interlocutors. Understanding the meaning of the *arguments* and how to use them correctly requires not only knowledge of syntactic, semantic, but also of pragmatic features. This suggests a need to provide the learners with pragmatic knowledge in general and knowledge in identifying the types of speech acts in particular. More importantly, learners should study the relation among all the linguistic features by various ways; for example, by watching and discussing the conversations in movies, so that they can have a better insight into *argumentative* utterances in daily conversations used by native speakers of English. Learning in this way can be said to be more meaningful than learning examples of *arguments* in isolation and out of context.

The Vietnamese learners of English sooner or later should be equipped with the knowledge of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features that are used in *arguments*. Thanks to this, they can make a good *argumentative* utterance in an argument in different situations as well as grasp the speaker's intention in a certain communicative circumstance. The study may help them identify speaker's implicature and realize *arguments* through the illocutionary acts which are used frequently in real life English arguments. Moreover, the findings in the *arguing* politeness strategy could give the learners of English more ways to produce polite

argumentative utterances in daily communication including arguments.

5.2.2.2. For English Teachers

Finally, some implications could be put forward to the teachers of English. Teachers should help learners know the rules of producing a valid *argument* in collaborating with suitable linguistic features of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic as well as give them the suitable materials and references for their self-study. This could be done by encouraging learners to read written materials as well as watch films and programs in foreign languages of a reliable source. Theory should go together with practice. Therefore, teachers should also offer more chances for learners to apply theoretical knowledge to exercises or practical activities related to *argument* and debate. A popular activity in English classes is presentation in public or public speaking. With the findings of this thesis, teachers of English should consider politeness aspect when teaching speaking and presenting skills for the students due to the fact that after presenting time, the discussion that goes after where they ask and answer questions about the presentation in fact is in form of an *argument* or a debate.

5.3. DELIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Within the scope of the study, just such linguistic features as syntactic, semantic and pragmatic ones are focused on; suprasegmental features like utterance stress, intonation of *argumentative* utterances have not been investigated. Additionally, due to the limited time, knowledge and references, the study has mainly examined some certain aspects of *argumentative* utterances like medical, political, military aspect. Therefore, it has not dealt

with other aspects such as social, environmental, educational. Moreover, contrastive studies of linguistic features of *argumentative* utterances in films in two certain different languages namely English and Vietnamese have so far not studied yet. Therefore, there still remain some other aspects for research. I strongly suggest further studies in the following areas:

- An investigation into intonation of *argumentative* utterances used in argumentative conversations in English.
- An investigation into *argumentative* utterances used in debates in social, environmental and educational issues.
- A contrastive analysis of linguistic features of *argumentative* utterances used in films in English and Vietnamese.