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**POLITENESS STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING
 ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE CONVERSATIONS**

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**M.A. THESIS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
 (A SUMMARY)**

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

To become an excellent conversationalist, besides being inborn, we should be able to understand and use politeness strategies, that will help us know how to open, maintain as well as close a conversation. Among them, politeness strategies for conversational maintenance is the most important thing because they are the key factors deciding the success of the whole conversational process.

For a successful conversation, the partners must achieve a workable balance of contributions. That is to say, we should be not only an active speaker but also an active listener, a conversation will go nowhere if it is just one-sided. Only when all of the conversationalists participate enthusiastically do they really contribute to the sustenance of any conversational making, either in English or Vietnamese.

Vietnamese learners have many difficulties and make errors when dealing with politeness strategies in maintaining English conversations, which results in communication failures or makes them unable to attain their communicative purposes.

Above are the main reasons that motivate me to engage in this research paper, "*Politeness Strategies for Maintaining English and Vietnamese Conversations*".

1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1. Aims

The study is expected to help learners to know deeply how English and Vietnamese conversations are politely maintained, the similarities and differences of the strategies used between the English speaking people and Vietnamese. In practice, the study aims to provide some pedagogical suggestions to enhance English language teaching and learning in Vietnam.

1.2.2. Objectives

- Identify and discuss the pragmatic, cultural, and sociolinguistic aspects of politeness strategies which native speakers of English and Vietnamese use to maintain their conversations.

- Clarify the similarities and differences in pragmatic, cultural, and sociolinguistic features of the politeness strategies for maintaining conversations in English and Vietnamese.

- Indicate the main causes that prevent many Vietnamese learners from being able to keep their conversations longer.

- Suggest some implications for teaching and learning English conversations.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the politeness strategies for sustaining a conversation in English and Vietnamese?

2. What are the pragmatic, cultural, and sociolinguistic features which affect or decide these strategies in English and Vietnamese conversational maintenance?

3. What are the similarities and differences of the politeness strategies used by English and Vietnamese speakers?

4. Which implications can be put forward to the Vietnamese in their teaching and learning of English conversations?

1.4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

On account of reference constraints, the ability and time, the study limits itself to the verbal language only for maintaining English and Vietnamese daily conversations. The non-verbal language with gestures, facial expressions, for example, are not the focus of this study. Noticeably, the presentation and analysis of the politeness strategies of conversational maintenance in pragmatic, cultural, and sociolinguistic factors are taken into consideration.

1.5. ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Methodology of research

Chapter 4: Findings and discussions

Chapter 5: Conclusion, implications, limitation,
recommendations.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1. Notion of Politeness

Many English and Vietnamese linguists such as Leech [41, p. 112], Cutting [23, p.73], Nguyen Duc Dan [3, p.142- 145] have stated the term “politeness” and its definitions.

Among them, Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory [19] is said to have weightiness in this field and has a great influence on our study. They understand politeness in term of conflict avoidance. The choices of such politeness strategies depend on the power and personal relationship between the speaker and the hearer, and the degree of negativity of the message.

2.1.2. Literature review of Conversational Maintenance

As for Conversational Maintenance, Wardhaugh [61, p.130-137] in the book “*How Conversation Works*”, Jones [38, p.24- 29] in “*Functions of English*” puts forward some skills and techniques to maintain a conversation.

Nguyen Quang [8] gives out some tactics to hold a conversation: repeating or rephrasing what is previously said, minimal encouragers, cajolers, or checking the other partner’s understanding.

Trinh Ngoc Xuan Thao [57, p.73- 75] in her thesis puts forward some polite ways of interruption when the listeners want to

get the speaker's clarification, repetition or explanation, to give some comments or feedback, even to add more information.

2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. Discourse, Discourse Analysis and features of Discourse

Although the term "*discourse*" has several definitions, we share the same view with Widdowson [64, p.100], i.e. "*Discourse is a communicative process by means of interaction. Its situational outcome is a change in a state of affairs: information is conveyed, intentions made clear, its linguistic product is text*".

Discourse analysis is sometimes defined as the analysis of language '*beyond the sentence*'. It studies the larger discourse context in order to understand how it affects the meaning of the sentence. Cook (1990) points out that discourse analysis is the examination of "*how stretches of language, considered in their full textual, social, and psychological context, became meaningful and unified for their users*".

There are 4 main features of discourses: transactional function, interactional function, topic, and coherence.

2.2.2. Conversation as a Discourse Type

2.2.2.1. The Notion of Conversation

Among many definitions, we choose the following definition of Finegan et al. [24, p. 316] as we find it suitable and useful to fulfill the goal of our thesis paper: "*Conversation can be viewed as a series of speech acts: greetings, requires, congratulations, comments, invitations, requests, etc. To accomplish the work of these speech*

acts, some organization is essential: we take turns to speak, answer questions, mark the beginning and the end of the conversation, and make corrections when they are needed".

2.2.2.2. Features of Conversation

Conversation bears certain features which are participants, common ground, action sequences, contributions.

2.2.2.3. Conversational Structure

2.2.2.3.1. Turn-taking

There are rules for speakers in every conversation and the matter of determining when one person's turn is over and the next person's turn begins is called *turn-taking*. Lakoff [40, p.167] refers to a turn at talk as "*an opportunity to hold the floor, not what is said while holding it*". A normal conversation can't proceed so smoothly without taking the turn-taking rules.

2.2.2.3.2. Adjacency Pairs

Adjacency pairs are described as automatic sequences consisting of a first part and a second part. These parts are produced by different speakers. There is a sequence of turn which intervenes between the first part and the second part of an adjacency pair called an insertion sequence.

2.2.2.3.3. Three-part Exchange

In Sinclair and Coulhard (1975)'s analysis, the most likely structure of a three-part exchange consists of a question, response and confirmation which is referred to as I (Initiation), R (Response), F (Follow-up). In non-classroom situations, the follow-up of the

first speaker on the response of the second speaker may save face or threaten face.

2.2.2.4. Conversational Principle

2.2.2.4.1. Co-operative Principle

The cooperative principle describes how people normally behave in a conversation. Grice divides the cooperative principle into four maxims, called Gricean maxims which are maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relation, maxim of manner.

2.2.2.4.2. Conversational Implicature

“*Conversational Implicature*” denotes either (i) the act of meaning, implying, or suggesting one thing by saying something else, or (ii) the object of that act. Implicatures can be part of sentence meaning or dependent on conversational context, and can be conventional (in different senses) or unconventional.

2.2.2.5. Politeness Theory

2.2.2.5.1. Face

“*Face*” which is defined as “*the public self-image that every member (of society) wants to claim for himself*”. Face consists of two related aspects: negative face and positive face.

2.2.2.5.2. Face Threatening Acts (FTAs)

A face-threatening act (FTA) is an act which challenges the face wants of an interlocutor. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), face-threatening acts may threaten either the speaker’s face or the hearer’s face, and they may threaten either positive face or negative face: (a) *Acts threatening to the hearer’s negative face*, (b) *Acts*

threatening to the hearer’s positive face, (c) *Acts threatening to speaker’s negative face*, (d) *Acts threatening to speaker’s positive face*.

2.2.2.5.3. Positive Politeness and Negative Politeness

Positive Politeness is concerned with other people’s need for inclusion and social approval. It is used for making the hearer feel good about himself/herself, his/her interests or possessions and are mostly used in situations where the audience knows each other fairly well.

Negative politeness is concerned with other people’s need not to be intruded or imposed upon.

2.2.2.5.4. Politeness Strategies

- . The *bald on-record* strategy does nothing to minimize threats to the hearer’s “face”.
- . The *positive politeness* strategy confirms that the relationship is friendly and expresses group reciprocity.
- . The *negative politeness* strategy assume that you may be imposing on the hearer, and intruding on their space.
- . *Off-record indirect* strategies take some of the pressure off of the hearer. By using this strategy, the speaker are removing himself/herself from any imposition whatsoever.

2.2.2.5.5. Factors influencing the choice of politeness strategies

The decision of choosing suitable strategies is based on three factors: the “*social distance*” (D) of S and H (a symmetric relation);

the relative “power” (P) of S and H (an asymmetric relation), and the absolute ranking (R) of imposition in the particular culture. The higher numbered strategies correspond to the acts that are more threatening. To assess the overall seriousness of risks of face- loss, it is necessary for the interlocutors to consider the three social values variables which provides them with the reasons to choose the suitable politeness strategies.

2.2.3. Conversation Maintenance

2.2.3.1. The notion of Conversation Maintenance

The study is based on the following viewpoints on conversational maintenance:

According to Geddes et al. [25, p.13] “ *To encourage conversation, it is important to be a good listener as well as a good speaker. When we are listening, we can show our interest non-verbally by nodding our heads, raising our eyebrows, laughing and so on. We can show our interest verbally such as making a comment, asking a short question, repeating a key word or phrase and so on*”

2.2.3.2. Functions of Conversation Maintenance

There exist several viewpoints about conversation maintenance which have contributed greatly to our study. However, one rather influential viewpoint is Olson’s [75], in “*Content for Conversation Partner*”, he emphasizes that strategies of conversational maintenance can improve learners’ communicative competence in conversation. The atmosphere in which many

participants of different voices enthusiastically converse will make students’ progress.

Chapter 3

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

3.1. Research Methods

Quantitative method in the form of survey questionnaires is supposed to be the main method for the study. Both close- ended questions or Metapragmatic Questions (MPQs) and open- ended questions or Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questions are also used. Besides, a bank of situations is established to support for survey questionnaires.

3.2. Data collection

250 daily conversations taken mostly from stories, novels, transcribed audio tapes, newspapers, magazines as well as the Internet for each language are selected to serve the purpose of the research. The source is obtained through survey questionnaires which is comprised of three section: personal information, MPQ questions and DCT questions.

3.3. Research Procedures

There are the steps involved in the study:

- Collecting data from various sources.
- Identifying the politeness strategies for conversational maintenance in English and Vietnamese.

- Analyzing the pragmatic, cultural, and sociolinguistic features of strategies discovered.
- Working out Vietnamese learners' problems in maintaining a conversation in English and suggesting some implications for the teaching and learning English conversations.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

4.1. Politeness Strategies for Active Speaking

4.1.1. Bald on- record

There are different kinds of bald on- record usage in different circumstances:

- Attention- getters: *Listen! I've got an idea, Hear me out!, Look, the point is this, Listen!/ Be attentive!, Give me your ears!, Have you heard, etc* in English or *Nghe nè! Tôi có ý này, Nghe tôi nè!, Coi nè, vấn đề ở đây là...,etc* in Vietnamese.

- First name or title: *Roger, Nguyệt, Thầy, etc*

4.1.2. Positive Politeness Strategies

4.1.2.1. Notice/ Attend to H (his wants, interests, needs)

In communication, caring for others' wants or needs, even paying compliments can create good impression on them which helps to start a conversation easily and keep it longer.

<8> Ken: *Oh, thank you very much. What a lovely house!*

<9> Wife : *Cảm ơn anh! Người thấy mùi sữa em mới sực nhớ là mình đang đói. Anh đúng là người chồng lý tưởng. Em rất là may mắn nên mới lấy được anh đó.*

4.1.2.2. Use In- group Identity Marker

They consist of generic names and terms of address such as *Mac, mate, buddy, pal, honey, dear, duckie, luv, babe, son, Mom, Blondie, brother, sister, cutie, sweetheart, darling, etc.*

<12> Bert : *Right, son. Any questions?*

<13> Thạch: *Anh à, ở Bãi Hạc có chuyện gì hay sao mà anh phải đi?*

4.1.2.3. Seek Agreement

By this strategy, S needs to find out topics that both interlocutors interested in talking about before jumping into the deeper conversation. Safe topics contributes very much to establish familiarity is about the weather.

<14> Sally : *I think a drought has set in. It hasn't rained a drop for months.*

Ethan: *I think so, too, but didn't it rain last month?*

4.1.2.4. Presuppose/ Raise/ Assert common ground

Presupposing, or raising, or asserting common ground is the way that S spends time and effort on being with H, as a remark of friendship or interest in him by using 3 following sub- strategies: *Small Talk, Syntactic Questions, Cajolers (You know, you see, as you know, as I said, as you may/ probably know, etc.)*

<22> Bob : *It's excellent. You know, Teresa, I just read an article about coffee last night. It was in that journal that Professor Clark recommended to us.*

<23> B: Em thấy đây! Nhà cửa bây giờ đã trở nên chật chội và anh cũng không muốn làm phiền ba má nhiều nữa. Rồi đây, chúng mình có con cái, lấy đâu chỗ cho con nó chơi?

4.1.2.5. Assert or Presuppose S's Knowledge of and concern for H's wants

S may indicate his/her knowledge of and sensitivity to H's wants, and thus potentially put pressure on H to cooperate with S, and assert or imply knowledge of H's wants and willingness to fit his/her own wants in with them.

<26> Chairman: Now we'd like to keep this session pretty informal, and I know Linda won't mind if members of the group want to ask questions as we go along. Let's start with an obvious one. What's Braille and where does it get its name from?

<27> A: Trả lời đi, biết anh muốn nói đến chuyên gì mà.

4.1.3. Negative Politeness Strategies

4.1.3.1. Minimize the Imposition

Another way of avoid coercing hearer when saying something is minimizing the seriousness of the imposition. In English, this is achieved by such expressions as *just, only, a tiny little bit, a sip, a taste, a drop, a smidgen, a little, a bit, etc* or “*chỉ, một tí, một tẹo, một chút, xin bổ sung thêm một chút/nữa, etc*” in Vietnamese.

4.2.3.2. Apologize

By apologizing for keeping the conversation longer, S can indicate his/her reluctance to impinge on H's negative face and thus partially redress that impingement.

* *Indicating impingement*

<34> Ellen: Scott, I know you are busy but the work you do in between sessions is just as important as you do when you are here in my office. If you are going to get the most out of counseling, you need to go through the workbook.

<35> A: Anh có phiền nếu chúng ta nói chuyện một lát?

* *Indicating reluctance*

<36> A: I don't want to bother you, but sometimes I stop here. Can I ask you about your child?

<37> A: Anh hỏi cái này hơi riêng tư, Đan đã yêu bao giờ chưa?

* *Giving overwhelming reasons*

<38> A: I have to do this research project for my sociology class, and I don't know how to begin.

* *Begging forgiveness*

<39> A: Excuse me, ma'am. Could I have a few minutes of your time?

<40> A: ...Tôi thích những người thành thật như ông. Xin ông thứ cho tính tò mò của tôi ông nhé. Ông từ nước nào về thăm nhà?

4.1.4. Off record

When S says utterances off record, the utterances cause conversational implicatures that make the addressee has to interpret

what is implied behind the utterances. Typical off record strategies found in the corpus is “Give hints”

<41> A: *Oh, my gosh, I'm gonna go crazy if I stay in this dorm any longer, How about going to the library?*

<42> Hoa : Em cũng có một châu y thế này.

4.2. Politeness Strategies for Active Listening

4.2.1. Bald on- record

With the bald on- record strategies, there is a direct possibility that the audience may be shocked or embarrassed by the strategy as it lacks any linguistic form which implicate politeness and speaker's intended meaning relatively clear. **4.2.2. Positive Politeness Strategies**

4.2.2.1. Give Sympathy to H

As listeners, we can show our sympathy with S by providing positive feedback to what S has just said.

<46> B : I see what you mean.

<47> B: Ừ, chi hiểu. Em không rung động.

4.2.2.2. Avoid Disagreement

In order not to be discord and offense, S has to employ “Avoid disagreement” strategy to mitigate the threat. Also, this strategy is used on purpose of pretending to agree or hiding disagreement.

Hedging opinions: is one way of giving one's opinion so as not to be seen disagreement.

<48> B: Perhaps, but don't you think we need to demonstrate to the management that we are prepared to consider alternative to increased overtime?

<49> Lê Mão : Thân trong là một đức tính cần thiết của một phóng viên, nhưng thận trọng quá, nhìn ai cũng ngờ họ tiêu cực khiến người tốt phát ngán thì ai dám chơi với mình. Dần dần mình hết bạn tốt đấy.

4.2.3. Negative Politeness Strategies

4.2.3.1. Being Conventionally Indirect

In listening, H sometimes have troubles catching or thoroughly understand S's words, therefore to avoid misunderstanding in a conversation, s/he can make indirect sentences by stating or questioning a felicity condition for explanation requests.

<50> Tutor : Can you give us an example of what you mean exactly?

<51> Student : Would you please explain the meaning of the phrase “many a” ?

<52> Policewoman: Tôi xin lỗi, tôi hiểu. Tôi xin phép nói chuyện với bác sĩ một chút được không?

4.2.3.2. Hedge

In conversational maintenance, hedge is used when H needs a clarification from S without coercing him/her.

* *Hedging Expressions:* “ I wonder”

<53> Kenvin: *Oh, and one last thing...I wonder if you'd mind telling me how you heard about us. We've just opened a new webpage and we're interested to see how effective it is.*

<54> Minh Cường : *Không thể phủ nhận là chìa khóa thành công của Tiến là ngoại hình của mình. Chính vì vậy mà không biết là một ngày em bỏ ra bao nhiêu tiếng để mà chăm sóc cho bề ngoài của mình trước khi ra khỏi nhà?*

* Adverbial clause "If":

<55> Eliot : *I wasn't sure if I'd done enough research before I started writing.*

4.2.3.3. Give Deference

S not only expresses his/her respect and humble attitude but also satisfy H's wants to be treated as superior, particularly in cases where H is of higher social status than S.

<56> B: *I'm afraid I'm not quite with you, madam*

<57> B: *Làm thế thì mất dáng áo, anh a. Trông cái áo sẽ cụt cụt, không đẹp.*

4.2.4. Off Record

Understate:

In listening, "Understate" can be used in the case of a criticism as S avoids the lower points of the scale, and in the case of a compliment, or admissions, S avoids the upper points. By understating, S wants to stress shared knowledge and shared values with H and can achieve action goals and enduring relationship

<60> B: *Yes, that is a bit late if you have to make 9 am lecture the next day!*

<61> Bình Minh: *Khánh hơi bi quan rồi đó tại vì cuộc sống hôn nhân muôn hình vạn trạng lắm...*

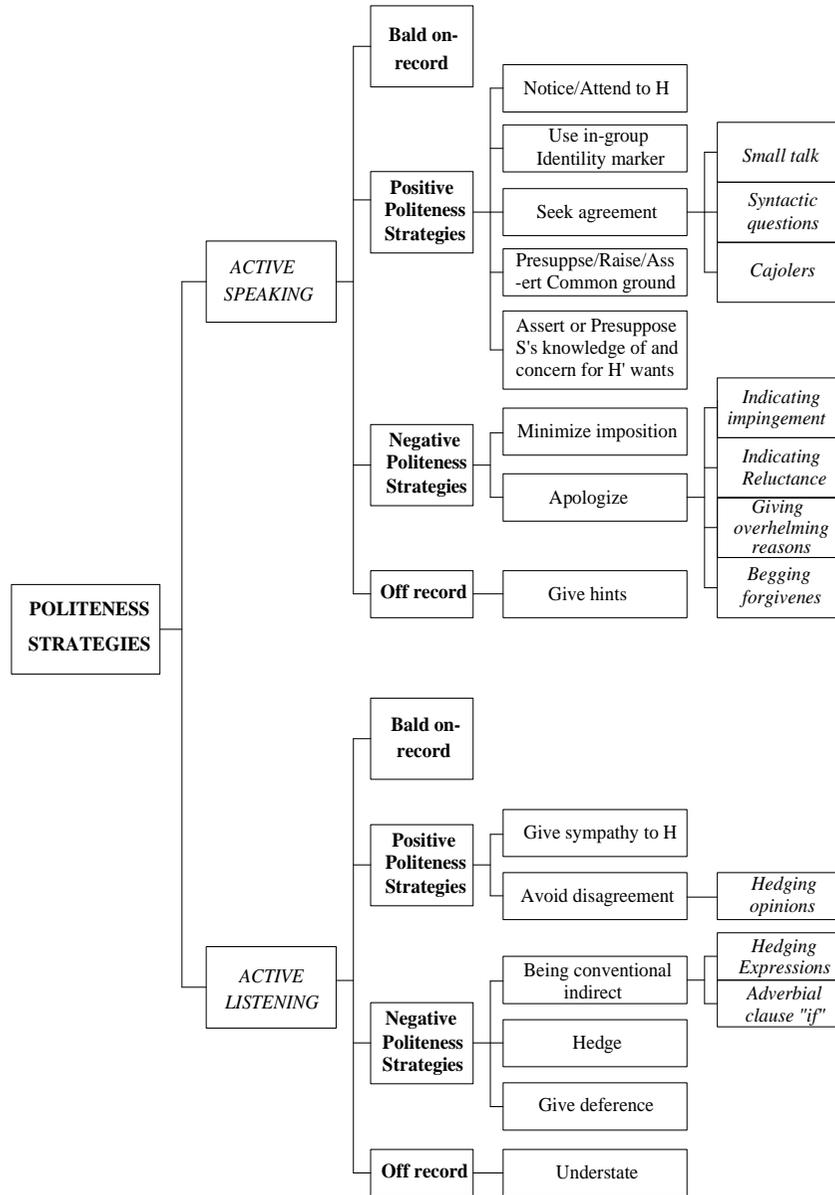


Figure 4.1. Summary of Politeness Strategies for Maintaining English and Vietnamese Conversations

4.3. Politeness Strategies For Maintaining English And Vietnamese Conversations Under The Influence Of Gender And Social Status

4.3.1. In terms of Overall Maintaining Responses:

Table 4.7. Overall maintaining responses (as an active speaker and listener): Native speakers of English and Native speakers of Vietnamese

Politeness Strategies	NSE		NSV	
	No	%	No	%
* Active speaker				
A. Bald- on record	47	23.98	42	24.14
B. Positive Politeness Strategies	136	69.39	110	63.22
C. Negative Politeness Strategies	13	6.63	22	12.64
D. Off Record	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	196	100	174	100
* Active listener				
A. Bald- on record	45	23.56	52	38.81
B. Positive Politeness Strategies	31	16.23	9	6.72
C. Negative Politeness Strategies	68	35.60	41	30.60
D. Off Record	47	24.61	32	23.88
Subtotal	191	100	134	100
Total	387		308	

As seen in table 4.7, 695 utterances are obtained from the two sets of questionnaires, of which 387 utterances are in English and 308 are in Vietnamese. This result shows that there is a significant

difference between English and Vietnamese frequency of politeness strategies for maintaining conversations. In general, more English speakers than Vietnamese ones use politeness strategies in maintaining their conversations, except in negative politeness strategies in active speaking. For the figures advanced above, it can be concluded that English speakers are more polite and tactful in conversational maintenance.

4.4. DISCUSSIONS

4.4.1. Similarities

There is also an incidental identity that both Vietnamese and English prefer using positive politeness strategies in speaking in which the most preferred strategies are “*Notice/ Attend to H*” and “*Presuppose/ Raise/ Assert common ground*”. Besides, they are inclined to “*Hedge*” strategy in negative politeness when listening to their counterparts.

All the politeness strategies for maintaining a conversation are largely affected by social factors such as sexes, status and available in both English and Vietnamese cultures.

Vietnamese and English males are likely to apply more bald on-record strategies than females.

4.4.2. Differences

a. Active speaking

The English like to use more in-group identity markers than the Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese exceed the English in the use of both “*Minimize the Imposition*” and “*Apologize*” strategies, especially between the lower status to the higher status.

b. Active listening

With respect to “*Give Sympathy*” strategy, while the Vietnamese rather stand on ceremony, the English constantly use sympathetic words and remark to share their understandings. Conversely, Vietnamese speakers take more “*Avoid Disagreement*” than English ones.

“*Being Conventionally Indirect*” and “*Give Deference*” are used by the English more than the Vietnamese. Besides, English and Vietnamese people also differ in the use of “*Hedge*”.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS- IMPLICATIONS- LIMITATIONS- SUGGESTIONS

5.1. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The description and analysis of politeness strategies for moving a conversation in the two languages are carried out mainly in the view of pragmatics. However, the choice of politeness strategies is also affected by cultural and social factors. The data illustrate some certain similarities and differences in English and Vietnamese. In terms of similarities, in contexts both groups prefer positive politeness strategies in speaking. In terms of differences, English and Vietnamese women tend to use more negative politeness strategies

than men in speaking, but men show more sympathy in listening than women. The result reflects the strong influence of the culture and social factors of each group on the way they employ politeness strategies.

The result is expected to help people in the two languages avoid embarrassment, misunderstanding and shock in communication. The study is also very useful for language learners as they can overcome some problems in maintaining a conversation, improve their conversational fluency, and raise their pragmatic, cultural and social awareness in learning a foreign language.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS

5.2.1. Vietnamese Students' Problems in Maintaining a Conversation in English

5.2.2. Implications for Teaching and Learning English Conversations

Four approaches to conversation teaching and learning are: a systematic conversation programme of micro- skills, politeness strategies in communication, language input and processes that lead to fluent conversations, conversation competence emerging from participating interactive activities such as discussions, role- plays, information gaps, and problem solving tasks, a combination of learner- centered learning, language exposure, interactional activities and teaching conversation as a spoken discourse, knowledge of cultural similarities and differences between the two languages to

keep shock, embarrassment, and misunderstanding away from communicating sides.

5.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The quality of politeness strategies found may not be overall and have been thoroughly discussed as it should be because other factors such as phonological features, facial expressions and body language to hold the conversation are not included.

5.4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

From the defect mentioned above, we find it necessary to make some suggestions for further researches as follows:

- Politeness strategies in conversation closing.
- How positive politeness strategies are used in business negotiation.
- Politeness strategies in the workplace.