

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
UNIVERSITY OF DANANG**

**TRAN TUYET LE**

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO  
LINGUISTIC DEVICES USED FOR  
AVOIDING CONFLICT IN  
CONVERSATION**

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

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. RATIONALE

With the increasing globalization of the world's economy, we are all becoming more interdependent with one another, and conflict is a product of diversity and interdependence [21, p.6]. Meanwhile, at present people who must work together to achieve the same goal have different purposes and interests. This is the reason why conflict gradually increases and is prevalent in all human relationships.

Conflict provokes strong emotions and may result in hurt feelings, disappointment, and discomfort. An unsuitable manner to handle conflict can cause irreparable rifts, resentments, and break-ups. By contrast, when resolved in an appropriate way, it increases our understanding of one another, builds trust, and strengthens our relationship bonds. Therefore, lessening and avoiding conflict can be a key for success in communication.

Let us have a look into the following sentences "*There's a lot in what you say, but I don't think it can be well done overnight*" [39, p.39] and "*Your plan is well-prepared, but it will not work I think*" [29, p.41]. With these sentences, at first, the speaker pretended to agree with the partner, then voiced a different opinion. Sometimes, the speaker also expresses uneasy or unwilling feeling to imply a reason for decline, as in "*I regret to say that I find myself unable to meet you because I have an important meeting*". These situations prove that there are lots of ways to express meaning, ideas, and purposes without hurting partner's feeling. A successful communicator is the person who knows for sure how to use different ways and various linguistic devices to give their own opinions which make their partner pleased.

There are many researchers who have studied conflict and how to resolve conflict in daily communication as we will mention in chapter 2, but finding the data in films seems to be a new way in research. In this thesis, I would like to investigate the communicational conflict in films and especially to find out the linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict.

### 1.2. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

For the restriction of time and thesis length, the study only focuses on the linguistic devices of these two languages and what are the similarities and differences used for avoiding conflict between English and Vietnamese.

The main data resource for this study is taken from English and Vietnamese films in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **1.3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

This research is aimed at investigating linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in conversation.

The objectives of the study are:

- To examine linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in English and Vietnamese films,
- To explore the frequency of linguistic devices for avoiding conflict in films scripts,
- To identify the similarities and differences in the use of language for avoiding conflict in English and Vietnamese,
- To find out cultural elements (if possible) that cause these differences.

Within these aims and objectives, the author of the research will with all of her efforts to answer the following questions.

### **1.4. RESEARCH QUESTION**

1. What are linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in English films?
2. What are linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in Vietnamese films?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the use of language for avoiding conflict in English and Vietnamese films?
4. How do cultural elements affect the different representation of conflict avoidance in English and Vietnamese?

### **1.5. MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

The fulfillment of the research on “An investigation into some linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in conversation” will bring the major contribution.

- To point out the most effective ways to help students in particular and language learners in general have a successful negotiation in future job and daily life.
- To provide a valuable source of reference to researchers who have the same interest in researches on avoiding conflict.

### **1.6. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

The thesis includes five chapters as follows: Introduction, Literature Review and Theoretical Background, Methodology, Finding and Discussion, and Conclusion

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. REVIEW OF PRIOR RESEARCH

### 2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### 2.2.1. Communication Strategies

2.2.1.1. *Theory of conversation*

2.2.1.2. *Politeness in communication*

#### 2.2.2. Positive politeness strategies

2.2.2.1. *Attend to the Hearer:*

2.2.2.2. *Exaggerate*

2.2.2.3. *Intensify interest to the Hs*

2.2.2.4. *Use in-group identity markers*

2.2.2.5. *Seek agreement*

2.2.2.6. *Avoid conflict*

2.2.2.7. *Presuppose/raise/assert common ground*

2.2.2.8. *Joke*

2.2.2.9. *Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants*

2.2.2.10. *Offer and promise*

2.2.2.11. *Be optimistic*

2.2.2.12. *Include both S and H in the activity*

2.2.2.13. *Ask for (or give) reasons*

2.2.2.14. *Assume or assert reciprocity*

2.2.2.15. *Give and share*

2.2.2.16. *Console and encourage*

2.2.2.17. *Ask about personal information*

#### 2.2.3. Strategies used for avoiding conflict

##### 2.2.3.1. *Conflict definition*

In this study, the researcher has chosen the definition of conflict withdrawn by Wilmot and Hocker [33, p.41] as follows:

*“Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.”*

##### 2.2.3.2. *Strategy for avoiding conflict*

The main categories of this strategy are specified as the following.

a. *Token agreement*

The desire to agree or appear to agree with H leads also to *mechanisms for pretending to agree*, instances of “token agreement”. Token agreement is used to avoid expressing a disagreement which may result in a psychological distance between S and H. Sacks [27] has collected numerous examples in English of the remarkable degree or to hide disagreement – to respond to a preceding utterance with “Yes, but...” in effect rather than an obvious “No” :

(2.17) A: What is she, small?

B: Yes, yes, she is small, smallish, um, not really small but certainly not very big.

[Excerpt from “Say it naturally”]

A similar example in Vietnamese is given as follow:

(2.20) Anh nói cũng có lý, nhưng theo tôi, ta vẫn không thể đốt cháy giai đoạn được.

[39, p.39]

Some markers used in token agreement [39, p.39-41] are pointed out in Table 2.2. These markers are grouped on the base of their structures. A short statement is a sentence including no more than four lexical items while a long statement includes over four lexical items.

Table 2.2: Some English and Vietnamese markers used in token agreement

Phrase of agreement, but/nhung		Short statement of agreement, but/nhung		Long statement of agreement, but/nhung	
English	Vietnamese	English	Vietnamese	English	Vietnamese
Yes, perhaps, but....	Ừ, nhưng mà...	Perhaps that’s true, but...	Tôi hiểu, nhưng mà...	I see what you mean, but...	Anh nói cũng có lý, nhưng mà...
Yes, maybe, but...	Vâng, nhưng mà...	Maybe that’s true, but...	Tôi hiểu (chứ), nhưng....	There’s a lot in what you say, but...	Anh nói cũng có cái đúng, nhưng
Agreed, but....	Cũng có thể, nhưng mà...	Perhaps I’m wrong, but...	Tôi hiểu ý anh, nhưng....	There’s a lot of truth in what you say, but...	Về nguyên tắc thì tôi đồng ý, nhưng...
Could be, but...		That may be, but...	Kể ra thì cũng đúng, nhưng....	There is some truth in what you say, but...	
Yes, but...		Perhaps that’s true, but...	Cũng có thể là như vậy, nhưng...	I couldn’t agree more, but...	
Ok, but...		I can see that, but...		That’s one way of looking at it, but...	

Mn, but...		That's all very well, but...		I agree with most of what you say, but..	
Granted, but...		I see your point, but...			
To a certain extent, yes, but...		I take your point, but...			
Yes, up to a point, but...					

### *b. Hedging*

The expressions which Lakoff [16] listed under “Some hedges and related Phenomena” contain those which weaken the S’s commitment to a proposal. Thus, hedges are elements by which S avoids specification in making a commitment to the illocutionary point of the utterance

In accordance with Lakoff’s main concern, the term *hedge* has later been defined by Brown/Levinson [6] as “a particular word or phrase that modifies the degree of the membership of a predicate or a noun phrase in a set It says of that membership that it is partial or true only in a certain respect, or that it is more true and complete than perhaps might be expected” (d-e)

Some English and Vietnamese markers used in hedging listed in [29] and [39] can be represented into five groups as follows:

- Modal auxiliary verbs: might, may, can, could,; có thể
- Modal lexical verbs: seem, think, doubt; nghĩ, dường như, nghi ngờ
- Adjective lexical phrases: sort of/kind of, like, some sort/kind of; kiểu, kiểu như là, kiểu như cũng, đại loại là, cái kiểu nó cũng, kiểu nó cũng, kiểu như nó cũng
- Adverbial modal phrase: maybe, perhaps, somehow, in a way, to a certain extent, up to a point ; có lẽ, có thể, ở một khía cạnh nào đó thì, ở một mức độ nào đó thì, thế nào ý
- Modal phrase with negative meaning (only in English): I’m not sure; I don’t think

### *c. White lies*

Everyone uses little white lies every now and then! Psychologists say harmless white lies can help you protect yourself and avoid conflict.

The important thing is to be clear about when to use them. Sometimes it is better to keep certain things to yourself. Even if we say that if you love someone

enough you should be able to tell them everything and vice versa, in truth little white lies don't always hurt. In some situations, they're better than telling the honest truth, which can sometimes lead to fireworks!

Nguyen Quang [39] argues that the essence of politeness in communication is to make the partner feel good. Thus, white lies, in many cases are received positively and even expected by Hs.

The markers often occurring listed in [39, p.43-45] are grouped into three categories on the base of their meaning and presented in Table 2.3.

*Table 2.3: Some English and Vietnamese markers used in white lies*

Statement of disagreement, because/vì		Expression of wish, but/nhưng		Expression of regret	
English	Vietnamese	English	Vietnamese	English	Vietnamese
I couldn't possibly..., because	Kể ra cũng khó nhĩ, vì tôi/tớ còn phải...	I wish I could, but.....	Thực lòng mà nói thì tôi/ tớ cũng rất muốn đấy, nhưng khổ nỗi.....	Unfortunatel y...	Hừ, chán quá nhĩ,....
I don't think I can... because		I would if I could, but...		Regretfully ...	Chán quá,...
I'm not sure (if) I can...,because...		I'd like to, but....	Sao anh/cậu không bảo tôi/ tớ trước,.....	Sorry, I can't possibly	Tiếc quá,...
I'm afraid I really have to say no, because...			Giá mà anh/ chị/ cậu nói trước thì tốt quá, nhưng (mà)....	I must be excused, but...	Mong anh/ chị/ cậu thông cảm,.....
I regret to say that I find myself unable to..., because...			Kể mà không phải..thì tôi/tớ....ngay, nhưng	Please accept my apologies, but...	Mong anh/ chị/ cậu hiểu cho...
I doubt if I can, because...					
I feel bad about saying no, but I really can't, because...					

### 2.3. Summary

To sum up, the issue of politeness has attracted the attention of researchers and there are various opinions about it. Through the summarization above, the researcher would like to confirm the agreement of all that the avoiding conflict strategy is one of the important strategies in politeness strategies. That is also the author's opinion to study, consider and explain for all problems mentioned in chapter 4.



## CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter starts with the research question followed by the description of research method and the variables. The data collection instruments and the participants were detailed before the procedure of the experiment. This chapter ends with the summary.

### 3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

To answer the research questions, the study is designed as follows

#### 3.1.1. Data collection

There are many various sources of data for analysis of linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict such as daily conversations, short stories and novels. Through consideration, we have chosen films as source of data for our thesis because films reflect the reality and the essence of daily life. Moreover, the strategy of avoiding conflict is carried out not only by some words or phrase as markers but the entire discourse of the speaker as well. In some cases it is difficult to identify whether the speaker has the intention of avoiding conflict or not. Therefore, films are chosen as to analyze because in films there are clear situations, and it is easy to recognize the Ss' intention through the image and context of discourse.

Aiming at bringing the thesis into practical application in modern age, we have chosen the films produced in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Besides, to increase the reliability of data source, we choose to collect American and English films in which Standard English is spoken. Conversations occur throughout the film.

Due to the research plan, we anticipated studying 20 film scripts in English and Vietnamese. However, the process of collecting film scripts is not smooth as the early plan. The data reference just focuses on 20 English and 15 Vietnamese films. There is at last a change in choosing the script of “Chuyện Làng Kinh” to add to the data analysis.

#### 3.1.2. Research method

The study is based on descriptive, contrastive, quantitative and qualitative methods.

The descriptive method will be used to describe features of linguistic devices for avoiding conflict in English and Vietnamese.

With the hope to provide some linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict effectively, the research highlights the similarities and differences between two

languages. Therefore, comparison is also used as a supporting method which make analysis more realizable.

The quantitative approach serves as the base for data analysis to find out the frequency of used linguistic devices. The result of data collected were grouped, put in Tables and charts and analyzed in terms of statistical frequency based on percentages to illustrate the findings. After being processed, statistics is analyzed and showed in Table and charts in English first and Vietnamese later.

Meanwhile, main method in the investigation of linguistic devices used for avoiding conflicts in films is qualitative method. In this study, the data were analyzed qualitatively to obtain reliability and validity.

### 3.1.3. Schedule of the study

Below is the schedule for my study:

Time	Work
Jan- March	Identifying the research topic, collect related materials
March-April	Establishing theoretical background
April-May	Writing research proposal (Identify rationale, scope, aims and objectives, research questions, significance and methods of the study)
May-June	Analyzing data and make statistics
June-July	Exploring and interpreting the findings
August- October	Writing the thesis chapters
October- November	Proof-reading the thesis

Actually, the process of studying is not as smooth as planned, especially in reading scripts and watching films to collect the data. Because some scripts can not be found, we have had to change and add the data, even at the stage of doing statistics and analysis in the procedure from April to August.

## 3.2. PROCEDURES

With an aim to investigate the linguistic devices used to avoid conflicts in English and Vietnamese films, all the conversations in the films were noted and analyzed. The researcher then would identify the markers of avoiding conflict appeared in the collected data. The utterances are categorized into the suiTable groups, each of which describes one linguistic device used for avoiding conflict in the

conversation. Finally, the data would be analyzed and reported. In sum, the collected data to be researched will be processed following these steps:

a. all linguistic devices used through conversations in the films which are satisfied the criteria of a device for avoiding conflict are chosen and listed. Then the data were classified into sub-groups in terms of according to their meaning and structures. The data were processed descriptively and qualitatively.

b. a quantitative study was applied to check the frequency of usage of all the linguistic devices in the films and find out which device was used most often.

c. a comparison of linguistic device usage was carried out between English and Vietnamese films to help answer the question about the differences and similarities in the use of language for avoiding conflict in Vietnamese and English

Last but not least, the result of data collected were grouped, put in Tables and charts and analyzed in terms of statistical frequency based on percentages to illustrate the findings. After being processed, statistics is analyzed and showed in Table and charts in English and Vietnamese. There are ... charts and Tables in total. At the end of each section, some comments concerning the section are made.

In carrying out the study, the researcher must face a lot of problems. The English film scripts are available on internet whereas the Vietnamese ones are rarely to find. Therefore, it costs a large amount of time to choose suitable films and to write out the conversations in Vietnamese word by word for analysis. After collecting the conversations in films, we have manually identified markers of avoiding conflict and classified them into groups within the strategies. There are some cases the markers exist but the discourse does not show the Ss' intention of avoiding conflict. Therefore, an overall analysis on the entire discourse with its context is necessary to specify whether the strategy of avoiding conflict is present or not. In cases the markers in theory do not exist but the whole discourse uses the strategy of avoiding conflict and are difficult to specify. Thus, we have to review the potential structure of linguistic devices within each sub-strategy and carefully watch all the situations of the conversation as well as the representation of the characters in films to discover if there is some sign of avoiding conflict.

### **3.4. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

Base on sources of information analyzed and categorized thematically, the study is hoped to achieve the satisfactory reliability and validity. After analyzing data in term of the frequencies with which the categories occurred, the researcher is able to check the reliability and validity of the method in accordance with the finding of the independent observer.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1. AN OVERVIEW ON THE RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

Based on the criteria to determine the linguistic devices used for reducing or avoiding conflict in communication, after collecting and analyzing the data, we have the results presented in Table 4.1 as follows:

*Table 4.1: Results of the survey on strategies to avoid conflict*

Strategy	Token agreement		Hedging		White lies		Total	
	Items	%	Items	%	Items	%	Items	%
English	452	45.6	412	41.5	128	12.9	992	100
Vietnamese	560	63.3	188	21.3	136	15.4	884	100

With the material of 20 English films and 15 Vietnamese films read and analyzed, we find out the frequency of strategies used in them as mentioned in Table 4.1. In 20 English films, there are 992 items of strategy used to avoid conflict in total whereas 884 items are used in Vietnamese ones. An inspection of Table 4.1 shows that token agreement is used most in both English and Vietnamese films, 63.3% and 45.6% respectively. With English films, token agreement and hedging are the two which are used frequently in order to avoid conflict in the conversation. This phenomenon is the same as that in Vietnamese films which have token agreement of 63.3% and hedging of 21.3% in comparison with only 15.4% of white lies. It can also be seen clearly from the Table 4.1 that white lies only make up 12.9% among the 20 English films. In Vietnamese films, white lies account for 15.4% whereas token agreement was used four times as many as white lies (63.3% compared with 15.4%).

Mentioning the frequent use of each strategy in both English and Vietnamese films, the table shows that there are more token agreements in Vietnamese films than in English films, 63.3% and 45.6% respectively. However, the use of hedging in both films revealed a typical difference. Hedging in Vietnamese films is nearly a half as much as that in English films.

The investigation shows that the structures set up in the theory are open systems with various realizations. The actual linguistic devices found in conversations are so abundant. They may not include any markers found in the theory such as the case of *Long statement of agreement, but...* in token agreement strategy in example 4.1-4.4.

(4.1) Bát: Ông nhầm to rồi. Nhất thời một số người nghe theo ông chỉ vì cái lợi nhỏ trước mắt thôi.

Khuêch: Nhỏ nhưng nó là cái ăn, cái mặc là sự sống.

Bát: *Miếng ăn quý thật đấy nhưng* quá khẫu thành tàn. Rồi ông xem, đến một lúc nào đó người dân sẽ hiểu cái nào mới là giá trị thật.

[Excerpt from “Chuyện Làng Kinh”]

(4.2) Nguyen’s mother: Dạ thưa anh chị. Bữa nay tôi qua đây xin thưa với anh chị về chuyện tụi nhỏ

Thuy’s father: *Hồng nói dẫu gì chị vì thương con nên tôi mới đồng ý với nó, nhưng* mà đứa nào cũng con nhỏ học hành chưa tới nơi tới chốn, sự nghiệp chưa có, tiền bạc không. Nếu bây giờ sinh con để cái biết lấy gì mà sống.

[Excerpt from “Những chiếc lá thời gian”]

(4.3) CAROLYN: Lester. I refuse to live like this. This is not a marriage.

LESTER: This hasn't been a marriage for years, but you were perfectly happy as long as I kept my mouth shut.

[Excerpt from “American beauty”]

(4.4) DON CORLEONE: Accept what's happened, Michael

MICHAEL: I could accept everything that's happened; I could accept it, but that I never had a choice. From the time I was born, you had laid this all out for me.

[Excerpt from “God father”]

Another example can be found in the case of structure *Short statement, but...* as in (4.5).

(4.5) LASZLO: Are you enough of a businessman to appreciate an offer of a hundred thousand francs?

RICK: *I appreciate it, but* I don't accept it.

[Excerpt from “Casablanca”]

The specific results and illustration will be presented in the following sections.

## 4.2. AN INVESTIGATION ON LINGUISTIC DEVICES USED IN TOKEN AGREEMENT STRATEGY FOR AVOIDING CONFLICT

### 4.2.1. An overview

#### 4.2.1.1. In English films

*Table 4.2: Results of the survey on English linguistic devices used in token agreement strategy to avoid conflict*

Token agreement	Phrase of agreement, but	Short statement of agreement, but	Long statement, but	Total
Item	56	12	384	452
%	12.4	2.7	84.9	100

As can be shown from Table 4.2, structure: “Long statement, but” places the first with 84.9% out of 452 in total. The structure: “Short statement of agreement, but” accounts for just 2.7% in the total of 20 films. When making comparison between the use of each kind in both Vietnamese and English films, we can easily see that for the structure of “Phrase of agreement, but/ *nhung*” shows a difference. There are 5.7% in Vietnamese films but 12.4% in English ones. English films received 84.9% of using structure: “Long statement, but” whereas 85.7% were noted in Vietnamese films.

One more interesting feature is that token agreement in Vietnamese film was used more than that in English films, 63.3% and 45.6% respectively.

#### 4.2.1.2. In Vietnamese films

*Table 4.3: Results of the survey on Vietnamese linguistic devices used in token agreement strategy to avoid conflict*

Token agreement	Phrase of agreement, <i>nhung</i>	Short statement of agreement, <i>nhung</i>	Long Statement, <i>nhung</i>	Total
Item	32	48	480	560
%	5.7	8.6	85.7	100

As can be seen from the Table 4.3, token agreement was classified into three categories in terms of: *Phrase of agreement, nhưng*; *Short statement of agreement, nhưng*; and *long statement, nhưng*. These three categories, of course, have clear differences. The structure: “Statement, nhưng” is the one which was used most often in 15 films (making up 85,7% out of 560 in total), following by the structure: “Short statement of agreement, nhưng”. This can be inferred that when using token agreement in the conversation, the structure: “Statement, nhưng” was employed the best. This is true if we study the Vietnamese culture. Vietnamese people tend to use a full sentence instead of using a word or phrase because a full sentence can express fully their deep meaning.

Below are the findings of the structure of the linguistic devices often used to avoid conflict.

#### **4.2.2. A specific investigation in English**

*4.2.2.1. Phrase of agreement, but...*

*4.2.2.2. Short statement of agreement, but...*

*4.2.2.3. Long statement of agreement, but ...*

#### **4.2.3. A specific investigation in Vietnamese**

*4.2.3.1. Phrase of agreement, nhưng...*

*4.2.3.2. Short statement of agreement, nhưng...*

*4.2.3.3. Long statement of agreement, nhưng...*

#### **4.2.4. Summary**

Through the investigation and the comparison with the findings suggested by Nguyen Quang [39], we can see that in the data, the structures such as *Yes, but...*; *Yeah, but...*; *Ok, but...*; *Vâng, nhưng..*; *Ừ/ Vâng, nhưng mà...*; *Cũng được, nhưng mà...*; *I know, but...*; *That's right, but*; *Tôi biết, nhưng ...*; *Ông nói đúng, nhưng...*” all appear. However, some structures like *To a certain extent, yes, but...*; *That's all very well, but...*; *That's one way of looking at it, but...*; *I agree with most of what you say, but...*; *There's a lot of truth in what you say, but...*; *Cũng có thể là như vậy, nhưng...*; *Về nguyên tắc thì tôi đồng ý, nhưng...* can not be found. There are also some structures not mentioned in the previous studied but appear in the data that are *I know that you are good, but...*; *I know that you think my dad's harmless, but...* *We could have a revolution here too, but...*; *Ý kiến hợp tác hay đấy, nhưng*; *Dượng đối với con thật tốt, nhưng...*; *Dượng biết con yêu cô Thủy, nhưng...*; *Tôi biết là em thương bạn, nhưng thương như thế thì không tốt...*

### 4.3. AN INVESTIGATION ON LINGUISTIC DEVICES USED IN HEDGING STRATEGY FOR AVOIDING CONFLICT

#### 4.3.1. An overview

*Table 4.4: Results of the survey on Vietnamese linguistic devices used in hedging strategy to avoid conflict*

Hedging	Modal verbs	Adverbial modal phrase	Total
Item	100	88	188
%	53.2	46.8	100

We can see from Table 4.4 that, there are two types of hedging used to avoid conflict in Vietnamese films: modal verbs and adverbial modal phrase. These two were used in films with a nearly equal frequency, 53.2% and 46.8% respectively.

*Table 4.5: Results of the survey on English linguistic devices used in hedging strategy to avoid conflict*

Hedging	Modal verbs	Adjective lexical phrases	Modal phrases with negative meaning	Adverbial modal phrase	Total
Item	144	48	52	168	412
%	34.9	11.7	12.6	40.8	100

Data from Table 4.5 shows a difference from that of Table 4.4. There are four main kinds of hedging used in English films to avoid conflicts. Among the total of 412 times using hedging, adverbial modal phrase was used the most, accounting for 40.8%. Adjective lexical phrases and Modal phrases with negative meaning made up nearly the same 11.7% and 12.6%.

#### 4.3.2. A detailed investigation in English

##### 4.3.2.1. Modal verbs

##### 4.3.2.2. Adjective lexical phrases

##### 4.3.2.3. Modal phrase with negative meaning

##### 4.3.2.4. Adverbial modal phrase



### 4.3.3. A detailed investigation in Vietnamese

#### 4.3.3.1. Modal verbs

#### 4.3.3.2. Adverbial modal phrase

### 4.3.4. Summary

Hence, compared with the linguistic devices used in hedging strategy found and introduced in the previous studies, in this section, we only find the devices such as *might, may, seem, think, sort of/kind of, like, maybe, perhaps; có thể, nghĩ, dường như, kiểu, kiểu như là, đại loại là, có lẽ, có thể*. The devices like *some sort/kind of, to a certain extent, up to a point, kiểu như cũng, kiểu như nó cũng, thế nào ý, ở một khía cạnh nào đó thì, ở một mức độ nào đó thì* are not discovered in the data. The difference in the rate and the usage of English and Vietnamese is also the problem to which we should also pay attention.

## 4.4. AN INVESTIGATION ON LINGUISTIC DEVICES USED IN WHITE LIE STRATEGY FOR AVOIDING CONFLICT

### 4.4.1. An overview

Table 4.6: Results of the survey on Vietnamese linguistic devices used in white lie strategy to avoid conflict

White lies	Expression of regret	Expression of wish	Statement of disagreement, vì/bởi vì	Total
Item	100	8	28	136
%	73.5	5.9	20.6	100

As can be understood from Table 4.6, using white lies as *expression of regret* is used the most in 15 films. Of all 136 times, this structure is used 73.5%. We can infer that *expression of regret* is the most popular structure to avoid conflict in Vietnamese language. The expression of wish is used only 5.9 % and *statement of disagreement, vì/ bởi vì...* is used 20.6%.

Table 4.7: Results of the survey on English linguistic devices used in white lie strategy to avoid conflict

White lies	Expression of regret	Expression of wish	Statement of disagreement, vì/bởi vì	Total
Item	96	8	24	128
%	75	6.2	18.8	100

Table 4.7 reveals that *Expression of regret* is used the most with 75% out of 128 times in total. It means that in daily conversation, “Sorry” is often used in the beginning of a sentence to avoid conflict.

#### 4.4.2. A detailed investigation in English

##### 4.4.2.1. *Expression of regret*

##### 4.4.2.2. *Expression of wish*

##### 4.4.2.3. *Statement of disagreement, because/because of*

#### 4.4.3. A detailed investigation in Vietnamese

##### 4.4.3.1 *Expression of regret*

##### 4.4.3.2. *Expression of wish*

#### 4.4.4. Summary

In sum, in comparison with the linguistic devices used in white lie strategy mentioned in the previous studies, in this section, the structures such as *I wish I could, but...; Sorry,...; Rất tiếc,...; Xin lỗi,...; Mong anh thông cảm,...; Mong anh hiểu cho*. The structures like *I regret to say that I find myself unable to..., because... ; I feel bad about saying no, but I really can't, because...; I'm afraid I really have to say no, because...; Thực lòng mà nói thì tôi/ tớ cũng rất muốn đấy, nhưng khổ nỗi...; Giá mà anh/ chị/ cậu nói trước thì tốt quá, nhưng (mà)...; Kể mà không phải..thì tôi/tớ....ngay, nhưng...* are not discovered in the data. Some structures, especially in the pattern *Statement of disagreement, because/vì...*, are not introduced in the early studies but appear in the data such as *Don't tell me I gotta stay cooped up in here and vege out, because none of this was my fault; Tôi không muốn trao đổi trước với anh vì biết thế nào anh cũng phản đối*.

## 4.5. INTERPRETATION OF LINGUISTIC DEVICES USED FOR AVOIDING CONFLICT IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

### 4.5.1. Discussion of linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in English and Vietnamese

Table 4.8: Summary of results of the surveys on linguistic devices used to avoid conflict in English and Vietnamese films

	Strategy	Linguistic devices		
	Token agreement	Phrase of agreement, but/nhưng	Short statement of agreement, but/nhưng	Long statement, but/nhưng

English (%)	<b>45.6</b>	12.4	2.7	84.9	
Vietnamese (%)	<b>63.3</b>	5.7	8.6	85.7	
	<b>Hedging</b>	<i>Modal verbs</i>	<i>Adjective lexical phrases</i>	<i>Modal phrases with negative meaning</i>	<i>Adverbial modal phrase</i>
English (%)	<b>41.5</b>	34.9	11.7	12.6	40.8
Vietnamese (%)	<b>21.3</b>	53.2	0	0	46.8
	<b>White lies</b>	<i>Expression of regret</i>	<i>Expression of wish</i>	<i>Statement of disagreement, because/ vì</i>	
English (%)	<b>12.9</b>	75	6.2	18.8	
Vietnamese (%)	<b>15.4</b>	73.5	5.9	20.6	

#### 4.5.1.1. Similarities

Among the 3 strategies, token agreement is prevail; the percentage is up to 45.6% in English and 63.3% in Vietnamese. Actually, the structure *Long statement, but/nhưng* occupies over 84% of the linguistic devices used in token agreement strategy. As a result, it is possible to come to a conclusion that this structure is the most favourite expression in both English and Vietnamese. The explanation can be found in the effect of this structure. It should be mentioned that the purpose here is to avoid a conflict, so we need to prove as clever and polite as possible, except for some cases of conversations with close relationship. However, from my experience, to close friends, politeness is also necessary, especially in situations of disagreement potentially cause hurt feelings. The structure *Long statement, but/nhưng* is the cleverest linguistic device to avoid or at least soften an arousing conflict. It begins with a statement focusing on a certain positive aspect of the matter which can brighten the hearers' mind or bring comfort to their heart. It can be considered as the lead-in for a contradiction attached with conjunction "but". This step is essential to prepare the hearers' psychology for an acceptance of a disagreement from the speakers. In reality, if we are ready or forecast something, we can easily stand and overcome. Moreover, with a good feeling we will have more energy to cope with bad news. Something bad coming so surprisingly has the potential to create strong hurt feelings. Due to these effects, the structure *Long statement, but/ nhưng...* is the most preferred.

In comparison with the expression *Long statement, but/nhung*, the structures *Phrase of agreement, but/nhung* and *Short statement of agreement, but/nhung...* only take up a very humble proportion. A possible explanation is that these structures are rather direct and ineffective in formal conversations. They only prove to be suitable in informal talks and in light disagreements.

The white lie strategy is the least used in E and V because it is quite direct. In this strategy the speakers often base on a reason to express their disagreement. Clearly, the reason here from the hearers' perspective is a fact which they do not expect but must accept. From speaker's view, the reason they give needs to be appropriate, so they must think carefully about it. Moreover, in white lie strategy, the speakers tend to expect sympathy from the hearer, and this appears to be not the preferred disposition in both the speakers and hearers in life. Within white lie strategy, the structure *expression of regret* with *sorry/xin lỗi* is the most used. It seems that people have the convention to prefer saying and hearing the regret or an excuse.

#### **4.5.1.2. Differences**

Especially in Vietnamese, the proportion of *Long statement, but/nhung* has risen up to 85.7% of 63.3% in comparison with 84.9 % of 45.6% in English. Vietnamese people tend to have the viewpoint appreciating others' emotions and maintaining of relationship, so they will pay more attention to the effective way to avoid causing collapses because of disagreements. Moreover, they have a convention of often saying directly about everything and preparing the hearers well to receive unexpected information. These cultural features result in their more preference in choosing the *statement, nhưng ...*

The great differences can be found in hedging strategy. The proportion of this strategy in English is nearly double that in Vietnam. It is due to the fact that the hedging devices are so abundant in English. For example, English has a large number of auxiliary modal verbs such as *may, might, can, could, would* with different aspects of meaning. Moreover, in this strategy, we can find linguistic devices of modal phrases with negative meaning in English such as *I don't think, I'm not sure*. Vietnamese people seem to be not familiar to this way of expression such as *tôi không nghĩ* or *tôi không chắc*. They often tend to use a positive meaning and negative expressions will be mentioned later.

In conclusion, linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in English and Vietnamese have both similarities and differences. The differences result from the specific effects of linguistic devices used and the distinctive features in each language and each culture.

#### 4.5.2. Common linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in English and Vietnamese

The words used for avoiding conflict are often hedges. Below are some common hedges found in the data:

Modal auxiliary verbs: *might, may; có thể*

Modal lexical verbs: *seem, think; nghĩ, dường như*

Adjective lexical phrases: *sort of/kind of, like*

Adverbial modal phrase: *maybe, perhaps; có lẽ, có thể*

Modal phrase with negative meaning: *I'm not sure; I don't think*

In addition to these words, the popular structures in the collected data are presented as follows:

Table 4.9: Patterns of the structure with “Phrase of agreement”

Phrase of agreement	Conjunction of contradiction	Expression of disagreement (Examples)
<i>Yes</i>	<i>but</i>	I want to hear you tell it. Starting with when you tried to grab the wheel -- where was this?
<i>Yeah</i>		I had enough reason to believe he did, and I told you. So you had to at least suspect him.
<i>Ok</i>		remember that they wear it because they have to. I wear it because I want to. That'll make me look different.
<i>Ừ/ Vâng</i>	<i>nhưng mà</i>	bác đừng xưng hô khách khí với tôi như vậy.
<i>Cũng được</i>		thua chè ở thái nguyên.

Table 4.10: Patterns of the structure with “Short statement of agreement”

Short statement of agreement	Conjunction of contradiction	Expression of disagreement (Examples)
<i>I know</i>	<i>but</i>	I won't tell you just yet.
<i>That's right</i>		we're not gonna talk about that.
<i>Tôi biết</i>	<i>nhưng mà</i>	tôi đã quá mệt mỏi.
<i>Ông/cô/chú/... nói đúng</i>		cái cách ông chọn như thế này không bao giờ có thể chấp nhận được.

Table 4.11: Patterns of the structure with “Statement of compliment”

Statement of compliment (Examples)	Conjunction of contradiction	Expression of disagreement (Examples)
I know that you are good	<i>but</i>	you have to try best in everything. I don't want you self-confident much.
Ý kiến hay, thật ra tôi có ý định làm riêng từ lâu	<i>nhưng mà</i>	mở công ty thì nhiều vốn lắm

Table 4.12: Patterns of the structure with “Statement expressing S' cognition”

Statement expressing S' cognition (Examples)	Conjunction of contradiction	Expression of disagreement (Examples)
I know that you think my dad's harmless	<i>but</i>	you're wrong
Dượng biết con yêu cô Thủy	<i>nhưng mà</i>	phải chấp nhận thì mới sống được con ạ.

Table 4.13: Patterns of the structure with “Expression of regret”

Expression of regret	Expression of disagreement (Examples)
<i>Sorry</i>	I had to leave... I didn't want to disturb you.
<i>Rất tiếc</i>	lệnh giám đốc không cho ai vào
<i>Anh/Chị/Bác...thông cảm</i>	tôi phải làm nhiệm vụ của tôi.

Table 4.14: Patterns of the structure with “Expression of wish”

Expression of wish (Examples)	Conjunction of contradiction	Reason (Examples)
<u>I wish</u> I hadn't overheard your conversation	<i>but</i>	I did and I just think, you know...
<u>I wish</u> I could		you know I am an Austrian. I have to be careful with the police. I'm afraid I can't help you, except with advice of course. Advice...
<u>Tôi rất muốn</u> nhường nhin cô	<i>nhưng</i>	cái cách cô đến đây thật khó chấp nhận.

Table 4.15: Patterns of the structure with “Statement of disagreement”

Statement of disagreement (Examples)	Conjunction of reason	Reason (Examples)
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don't tell me I gotta stay cooped up in here and vege out,	<i>because</i>	none of this was my fault!
tôi không muốn trao đổi trước với anh	<i>vì</i>	biết thế nào anh cũng phản đổi.

#### 4.6. SUMMARY

In shorts, in this chapter, we have carried out an investigation into the linguistic devices for avoiding conflict in 20 English films and 15 Vietnamese films. The specific linguistic devices in sub-strategy within the strategy of avoiding conflict are also specified. The investigation shows that the structures set up in the theory are open systems with various realizations. The actual linguistic devices found in conversations are so abundant, so they may not include any markers found in the theory. Through the investigation and the comparison with the early findings, we can see that in the data, most of structures introduced by the previous studies have been found. However, there are also some structures which do not appear in the collected data and structures which are not pointed out in the previous studies but found in the data.

The findings indicate that token agreement is used most in both English and Vietnamese films, 63.6% and 45.6% respectively. The structure *Long statement, but/nhung* is the most favourite expression in both English and Vietnamese. In comparison with the expression *Long statement, but/nhung*, the structures *Phrase of agreement, but/nhung* and *Short statement of agreement, but/nhung*...only take up a very humble rate. In Vietnamese, the proportion of *Long statement, but/nhung* has risen up to 85.7% of 63.3% in comparison with 84.9 % of 45.6% in English. The second rank belongs to hedging. However, the proportion of this strategy in English is nearly double that in Vietnam. It is due to the fact that the hedging devices are so abundant in English. Moreover, linguistic devices of modal phrases with negative meaning are only found in English. The strategy of white lies only makes up 12.9% in English and 15.4% in Vietnamese. Within white lie strategy, the structure *expression of regret with sorry/xin lỗi* is the most used. Thus, the linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in English and Vietnamese have both similarities and differences. The differences chiefly result from the distinctive features in each languages and each culture.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1. CONCLUSIONS

Conflict has gradually increased and is prevalent in all human relationships. When handled in an unsuitable manner, conflict can cause irreparable rifts, resentments, and break-ups. In contrast, an appropriate way of resolving will increase our understanding of one another, builds trust, and strengthens our relationship bonds. There are many studies on conflict and how to resolve conflict in daily communication, but films seem to be a new area of research. With the aim to investigate linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in conversation, the study is based on descriptive, contrastive, quantitative and qualitative methods. Forty films (20 English and 15 Vietnamese films) are collected and analyzed based on the theoretical background set up in Chapter 2. Below are some conclusions withdrawn from the research:

In 20 English films collected, there are 992 items of strategy used to avoid conflict in total whereas 884 items are used in Vietnamese ones. With English films, token agreement and hedging are the two which are used frequently in order to avoid conflict in the conversation. This phenomenon is the same as that in Vietnamese films which have token agreement of 63.3% and hedging of 18.8% in comparison with only 15.4% of white lies. Meanwhile, white lies only make up 12.9% among the 20 English films. In Vietnamese films, white lies account for 15.4% whereas token agreement was used four times as many as white lies.

The findings show that the structures set up in the theory are open systems with various realizations. The actual linguistic devices found in conversations are so abundant. They may not include any markers found in the theory but they appear in the discourses with the strategy of avoiding conflict.

With respect to the frequent use of each strategy in both English and Vietnamese films, there are more token agreements in Vietnamese films than in English films. However, the use of hedging in both films revealed a typical difference. Hedging in Vietnamese films is nearly a half as much as that in English films.

Token agreement was classified into three categories in terms of: *Phrase of agreement, but/nhung*; *Short statement of agreement, but/nhung*; and *Long statement, but/nhung*. These three categories, of course, have clear differences. The structure: “Long statement, but/nhung” is the one which was used the most in 20 films.



There are two types of hedging used to avoid conflict in Vietnamese films: modal verbs and adverbial modal phrase. These two were used in films with a nearly equal frequency. However, there are four main kinds of hedging used in English films to avoid conflicts. Among the total items using in hedging, adverbial modal phrase was used the most. The next rank belongs to *Adjective lexical phrases* and *Modal phrases with negative meaning* which made up nearly the same.

In white lie strategy, *expression of regret* is the most popular structure to avoid conflict in both English and Vietnamese language.

The linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in English and Vietnamese have both similar and different features. The differences depend on the specific linguistic device, the language and the culture.

In comparison with the early studies, the investigation into the linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in English and Vietnamese films reveals that most of structures introduced by the previous studies have been found. There are some which are not pointed out in the previous studies but found in the data. However, some structures have been mentioned previously but do not appear in the collected data. The lack of some structures, as we know, may result chiefly from the fact that the number of collected data is not sufficient enough.

## **5.2. IMPLICATIONS**

The analysis of the similarities and differences of the linguistic devices for avoiding conflict in English and Vietnamese may be of great significance and importance to native speakers of English and Vietnamese in terms of orientation in language study and practice.

Actually, conflict happens every day and potentially harms every relationship. It is necessary to master the strategies for avoiding disagreement to establish and maintain good social relation. The students need to be equipped with common strategies to avoid conflict such as *token agreement*, *hedging* and *white lies* to apply in daily life and work with Vietnamese and English people. The teachers should clearly explain the representation and use of linguistic devices in each strategy to the students. Moreover, it is necessary to point out the differences between the use of linguistic devices to avoid disagreement in English and Vietnamese. This can help students understand more about English and Vietnamese culture to gain success in social communication.

Vietnamese hedging devices are different from those in English, and English people have the tendency to use hedging strategy so frequently. As a result, when

teaching structures with hedging, the teachers should clearly point out the features of the devices such as modal auxiliary, modal lexical verbs, adjective modals, etc.

When using linguistic devices for avoiding conflict, we should consider the factors influencing the appropriate choice. For example, among friends or with close relationship we can use the expression *Phrase of agreement, but...*

Applying an appropriate strategy to certain situation may cause some trouble to students. As a result, teachers should give students opportunities to practice. Activities like role play, simulation and drama will be effective to get students involved in different roles and situations.

### **5.3. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

With the aim to investigate linguistic devices used for avoiding conflict in conversations, the study takes English and Vietnamese films as the main data resource. Moreover, for the restriction of time and thesis length, the study only focuses on the linguistic devices of two languages within the three strategies for avoiding conflict to find out the similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese. To overcome the shortcomings of this research, further studies may be made on another source of data, such as stories or real conversations. Besides, other studies may make a deep investigation into the linguistic devices in only one strategy, token agreement or white lie, to have a deeper insight.