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A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF INSULTS IN VIETNAMESE AND
AMERICAN ENGLISH

Field: THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
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M. A. THESIS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
(A SUMMARY)

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For the last few decades, English has been in great demand in our country. Since then, English language has become a means to strengthen the understanding and promote the communication between countries.

For effective communication, Vietnamese speakers of English need more to have not only a good command of grammatical rules, vocabulary and pronunciation but also cultural knowledge.

Therefore, to communicate effectively, English as a foreign language (EFL) users need not only linguistic knowledge but also interaction skills and cultural knowledge.

In order to promote the cultural knowledge between cultures and to avoid misinterpretations, mistakes or even insults among interlocutors (Rogers, 1997, cited in [27, p.4]), this study compared the insults in Vietnamese and American English.

1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Comparative Study of Insults in Vietnamese and American English aimed at providing Vietnamese users of English and American users of Vietnamese with some knowledge about social factors influencing Vietnamese and American perceptions of insults.

The specific objectives of the study included
- To identify the influences of social variables on the perceptions of insults.
- To find the similarities and differences between Vietnamese and American people in perceiving insults.
- To provide implications for effective crosscultural communication between Vietnamese and American people

1.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Considering the multidimensionality of insults [19], this study focused on the hearers' perceptions of possible insults and their extent of aggressiveness from the Vietnamese and American perspectives. In addition, the present study only focused on the verbal expressions of insults and not on the behaviours or other paralinguistic factors such as intonation and pitch.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the influences of social factors on Vietnamese and American perceptions of insults?
2. What are the similarities and differences between Vietnamese and American people in their perceptions of insults?
3. What are the implications of the study for effective cross-cultural communication?

1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to shed some light into the similarities and differences about the perceptions of insults in Vietnamese and American cultures. This insight might ultimately contribute to help the people in these cultures in cross-cultural communication to avoid possible miscommunication regarding the use of insults.

1.6. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Dictionary definitions of the term "insult" shares the feature of "offence" of a remark. For example, "an offensive remark or action" (The Cambridge Dictionary Online, The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language third edition, 1992), Only focusing on verbal insults, the present study considers insult as An offensive or contemptuous remark.
For example, 
“It is that you’re so selfish” [4, p.790]

1.7. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis consists of five chapters, specifically as follows.

Chapter 1 the rationale for choosing the topic, aims and objectives, scope of the study, the research questions, the definitions of terms and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the related literature

Chapter 3 the research design, methods and procedure of the study, data collection and analysis methods.

Chapter 4 shows the results and the findings.

Chapter 5 summarises the major findings, identifies the limitations of the study, suggests implications for the study and offers directions for further investigation.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1.1. Communicative Competence

Saville-Troike (1986, cited in [45, p.12]) further specifies the communicative competence as not only the linguistic knowledge, but also the interaction skills and cultural knowledge.

2.1.2. Speech Acts

Austin [3, p.94 – 101], argues that the action performed by producing an utterance will consist of three related acts such as locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act.

Yule [37, p.53-54], following Searle (1969) classifies speech acts into five classes of representatives/assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.
2.1.3. Face

*Face* is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction [5, p.61].

Negative face: a person's want that his actions be unimpeded by others

Positive face: a person's want that his actions be desirable to at least some others [5, p.62].

2.1.3.1 Face Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Based on the kinds of face threatened
- Positive face threatening acts
- Negative face threatening acts [5, p.65].

Based on the threats to H’s face versus threats to S’s,
- Acts that primarily threaten H’s face
- And those that threaten primarily S’s face [5, p.67].

2.1.3.2. Social Factors Affecting the Seriousness of an FTA

According to Brown and Levinson [5, p.74], the seriousness of an FTA is influenced by the following factors

i) the social distance (D) of speaker (S) and hearer (H).

ii) the relative power (P) of S and H.

iii) the absolute ranking (R) of impositions in the particular culture.

Social distance: *intimates, acquaintances* and *strangers* [13, p.1252].

The relative power of hearer and speaker is determined by various factors such as interactors’ social status, age, professions, etc. [38, p.17]
2.1.4. Politeness Theories

Politeness theories have concentrated on how we employ communicative strategies to maintain or promote social harmony (e.g. [5], [21]).

However, there are occasions when people attack rather than support their interlocutors, and sometimes those attacks are considered by others to be impolite and sometimes they are not [25, p.121].

Thus, the scope of a politeness theory might be extended to include antagonistic or confrontational communication [9, p.350].

2.1.4.1. Authentic Impoliteness

In distinguishing between authentic impoliteness and non-authentic impoliteness, Bernal [4] defines authentic impoliteness as:

“communicative activity that aims at damaging the face of others, according to social codes supposedly shared by speakers. It considers a damage to the interlocuter in every context. The effect of this activity is interpersonally negative, so it is deduced that an interpretation of such an activity as being impolite has been produced.” [4, p.788]

This definition covers the two features that the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking and the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally [4, p.788].

Bernal [4] believes that it also includes the shared knowledge that makes it possible for the hearer to interpret the meaning intended by the speaker.

2.1.4.2. Non-authentic Impoliteness

Culpeper [9]’s mock impoliteness or banter, a similar description to Bernal’s non-authentic impoliteness [4, p.792], is a form of impoliteness that remain on the surface so that there is no intention of offence [9, p.352].
Leech [21] attempts to capture this kind of phenomenon within his Banter Principle:

“In order to show solidarity with h, say something which is (i) obviously untrue, and (ii) obviously impolite to h” [and this will give rise to an interpretation such that] “what s says is impolite to h and is clearly untrue. Therefore what s really means is polite to h and true.” [21, p.144]

2.1.4.3. Judgements of Impoliteness

We should take into account the receiver’s reactions or interpretation when evaluating if an expression causes impoliteness or not [4], [19], [31].

Furthermore, socio-cultural context understood as part of a “context of the user” (Bravo 2003, [4, p.786]) is found important to the interpretation of an utterance as impolite or not [4], [9], [10].

2.1.5. Insults

As an offensive or contemptuous remark, insult is an FTA as this speech act shows that speaker has a negative evaluation of some aspect of hearer’s positive face [5, p.66].

However, insults may not always hurt people's feelings [4], as the same utterance may achieve different effects for different addressees [19, p.72]. One particular insult may be insulting for one particular addressee while it might not be insulting for another [26, p.6].

On the contrary, it is possible for unintentional insult to occur. An addressee may feel deeply offended by an utterance which is meant as a statement or an expression of surprise.

Basing on the speaker’s attitude, an insult may be seen as ludic or aggressive [19, p.74]
2.1.5.1 Aggressive Insults

It is clearly that aggressive insults [19], a similar description to Bernal’s insults which cause impoliteness effects [4, p.782], associate with authentic impoliteness. They can be seen as verbal provocations between hostile speakers [19, p.77] which may lead to verbal or even physical aggression [4, p.782], [19, p.75]. Evaluating if these expressions cause impoliteness effects bases on the receiver’s interpretation as insulting or the receiver’s reactions [4], [10], [19].

2.1.5.2. Ludic Insult

Ludic insults can be seen as the insults expressed in playful manner without causing impoliteness effects [19, p.90].

Banter (ref. 2.1.3.5) as a form of playful insults between intimates is a widespread form of ludic insults [19, p.75]. Leech [22, p.19] believes that banter or mock-impoliteness, a way of reinforcing in-group solidarity [4], [9], [10] may be characterised as verbal rudeness as a way of being polite.

2.1.5.3. Ludic Insults in relation to Aggressive Insults

With its aggressive nature [11], [20], a houmourous insult, to some extent, might be interpreted as an aggressive insult.

A factor which is important to the interpretation of humourous insults is the content of the utterance itself. Leech [21, p.144] believes that a humourous insult in the form of banter must be obviously untrue. Otherwise it can be perceived to be too close to reality and consequently regarded as a serious insult [19, p.89]

2.2 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Bernal [4] found that some expressions commonly used for insulting or mocking could, in certain contexts, produce an affiliative social effect, strenghthening feelings of solidarity within a group and of closeness between interlocutors.
Slugoski and Turnbull [31] found banters were found as more insulting than sarcasms.

With the data of insults filmed at an American recruit training base in 1980 Culpeper [9] found that impoliteness was deployed by the sergeants in a systematic way as part of what they perceived to be their job [9, p.359].

There has been no explicit study comparing insults between Vietnamese and American English. From the empirical findings, some focused only on the relative social status of the interlocutors [9], while others based on social distance [4], [31]. However, age might also be important to the interpretation of an utterance. Thus, the present study explores the influences of age, social status and social distance of interlocutors who know each other on the interpretation of insults in Vietnamese and American English.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

3.1. RESEARCH METHODS

This comparative study was mainly a quantitative research based on questionnaires with both Vietnamese and American respondents.

3.2. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

3.2.1 Research Instrument

A questionnaire with 16 situations was built to examine the influence of social factors, specifically age, social status and social distance on the perceptions of the insults.

The questionnaire was comprised of two parts:

- Personal parameters (Part I): respondents’ age and gender
Metapragmatic questionnaire (MPQ) questions (Part II): the MPQ, the respondents were asked to show their perceptions about the 16 situations of possible insults via determining the degree of their aggressiveness on a 5-point scale, ranging from ‘not insulted’ to ‘extremely insulted’ (Appendix). 16 situations can be seen as follows

**Table 3.1. List of Situations in relation to Age Factor**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Situations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>In a company picnic, everyone jumped into the sea and swam happily except you. Harry, your workmate, said, “Well, would you like me to teach you how to swim?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In a Japanese language class, after you had just answered the teacher's question incorrectly, Tom, a classmate sitting next to you, said, “You're admirable.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>You have just been promoted to a good position in your company. Suzie, your workmate, asked you, “You surely have a special relationship with the director, right?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>You were talking to your workmates about Jerry whom you thought was a very kind hearted lawyer in town. Cathy, a woman in the group, said, “Oh, you’re so naïve. Everyone knows that Jerry is a rogue.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>You refused to take part in a company strike. Alice, your workmate, said to you, “You're a rabbit.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>You are known for “preferring a quiet life” and for letting your husband/wife take care of your social life. Recently you have attended two dinners at your own home. At a dinner, Peter, your workmate, says to you, “You are having such an opulent social life these days.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>At a company party, Mario, a workmate, said to you, “Oh, you look sexy today!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Your workmate, Dominic, came to invite you to go out for breakfast. He knocked on your door and called out, “Hey, get out and join me for breakfast!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>In a group meeting, Lisa asked you to mention the main results of the group discussion last week. When you said that you could not remember them, Lisa asked another member to do it. She said, “Well, Mary, tell what we discussed last time to those who have poor memory”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ben compared you with a female workmate of yours, “Jane will be so far ahead of you that you can never catch up”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>After having excellently accomplished your work, you were asked to give a talk in your company and felt extremely nervous. Seeing this, John said, “You’re a chump for being afraid”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Arriving at a workmate’s birthday party, you heard Linda say, “Here comes the trouble!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>You have just got promoted in your company. Mary says to you, “Oh, You are a lucky dog!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>At a friend's wedding party, Bill said to you, “Oh, you look smart today. Where did you borrow your outfit?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Martin happily greeted you, “Hey, where are you going, you fatty?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>After a long absence, Daisy asked you with some concern, “Why do you seem so thin these days?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.2 Respondents

Two groups of people (50 Vietnamese and 50 Americans) were selected. The Vietnamese respondents worked in a company in Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam and the American respondents worked in a company in Washington D.C., USA. These people were from 30 to 40 years of age and of an equal share of gender.

3.2.3 Data Collection Procedure

After the delivery of the questionnaires, only 31 questionnaire responses from the US were returned 32 Vietnamese responses were received. All of 32 Vietnamese respondents aged from 30 to 40, with 17 of them being male and another 15 being female. All of the 31 American respondents also aged from 30 to 40, with one half (16) being male and the other half (15) being female.

3.3. DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

First, all the Vietnamese data and the American data were tabulated separately.

Second, the trends in each group of data for each social factor of age, as well as social status and distance were identified based on the degree of aggressiveness.

Third, comparison of the trends in the two groups of American and Vietnamese respondents were conducted.

Discussion of the results were discussed on the basis of the literature review findings and prominent findings were highlighted and reported.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

A total of 63/100 completed questionnaires were collected (31 from American respondents and 32 from Vietnamese respondents) for analysis.

In order for the writing to be obvious in determining the degree of aggressiveness of the situations investigated under the influence of the social factors above, the degrees of aggressiveness were grouped into three categories of “Very Insulted” (4 and 5 on the scale), "A little Insulted" (2 and 3 on the scale) and "No Insults" (1 on the 5 point scale).

While those comments perceived to be in the first group should be avoided, those in the third group might be considered safe for the comments to utter without any danger of insulting the interactant. Those in the second group, however, should be treated with great care as they might be causing discomfort to the hearer.

4.1.1. Age Factor

4.1.1.1. Vietnamese Data

The results of the data show that age may have salient influences on the interpretation of insults in Vietnamese culture. In all situations, vietnamese respondents felt more insulted when the comments were uttered by the younger than the other two and less insulted when they were uttered by the olders than by the other two.

With the topics of insults, degrading another by implicatively remarking that her/his success is not based on her/his own ability (sit. 3) may be considered as very insulting and therefore, it is necessary for
speakers to avoid saying so. However, they can feel safe in offering and inviting (sit.1 and 8) when they are older or as the same age as the hearers. Especially, they should treat the others (sit. 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7) with great care.

Situation 2 shows the high degree of aggressiveness of sarcasms or ironic insults. Especially, the comment was felt as very insulting with the same age speakers (40.6%).

With situation 7 (the hearer was commented as looking sexy at a company party), up to 65.6%, 68.8% and 59.4% of them felt a little insulted with the comment when it was uttered by the older, younger and same age speakers respectively.

It may be safe for the older speakers and the same age speakers to utter such utterances in situation 1 and situation 8. However, it is necessary to pay attention to the cases in which the speakers are younger.

4.1.1.2. American Data

- Age was not an important social factor for American respondents to take into consideration when producing an FTA. No clear influences of the age factor on the interpretation of insults can be found.

- With the topics of insults, degrading another by implicatively remarking that her/ his success is not based on her/his own ability (sit. 3), commenting another as sexy (a comment on the hearer’s appearance) (sit.7) may be considered as very insulting and therefore, it is necessary for speakers to avoid saying so. However, they can feel safe in situation 1, 2 and 8. Especially, they should treat the others (sit. 4, 5, and 6) with great care.
- Especially, in situation 2 (the hearer was sarcastically complimented as *admirable*), The utterance may be seen as a case of sarcasm is connected with banter phenomenon

4.1.1.3. Similarities and Differences between Vietnamese Data and American Data

- They had the same minds in perceiving the high degree of aggressiveness of comments on the hearer’s ability or intelligence (e.g. sit. 3) and the low degree of aggressiveness of comments which are for the hearer’s benefit (e.g. sit. 1).

- Situations need treating with great care in both cultures can be found in situations 4, 5, and 6 (the hearer was commented as *naïve*, as *rabbit* and as *having an opulent social life* after having two dinners at her/his own home).

- A clear difference can be found is that while age exerts its salient influences on the interpretation of insults in Vietnamese, it seems not to be an important social factor for Americans.

- While commenting another as *sexy* was considered as too insulting and therefore should be avoided in American culture, Vietnamese respondents felt a little insulted.

- From situation 2, it is interesting to see that sarcasm may be interpreted as more insulting in Vietnamese culture than in American culture.

- American respondents felt a little less insulting with comments on the hearer’s personality and behaviour (e.g. a rabbit).

4.1.2. Social Status Factor

4.1.2.1. Vietnamese Data

Such utterances that should be avoided can be seen in situations 9, and 13. (the hearer was commented as *having poor memory* or as a *lucky dog*)
The utterances in situation 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15 should be treated with great care in interactions as many Vietnamese respondents felt a little insulted with them.

In situation 11 (the hearer was commented as a chump when was asked to give a talk in the company), clearly it is a case of banter as being commented as a chump may have been perceived as untrue.

Similarly, the greeting in situation 15 (the hearer was happily greeted with “Hey, where are you going, you fatty?”) shows its low degree of aggressiveness in interactions in Vietnamese culture.

On the contrary, the utterances that may be considered safe to utter can be found in situations 16.

In general, social status did not show its clear influences on Vietnamese’ interpretation of insults. Ludic insults may occur more frequently with the classmates than with the superiors.

The data analysis also shows the possibility of the occurrence of ludic insults in Vietnamese interactions.

4.1.2.2. American Data

Utterances in situation 9, 10, 14, 15, and 16 should be avoided in interactions in American culture.

The utterances that need treating with great care in interactions can be found in situation 11, 12, 13. Interestingly, no situation can be found completely safe.

The situation that may have been interpreted as a banter can be found in situation 11 (the hearer was commented as a chump).

In general, social status did not show its clear influences on Americans’ interpretation of insults.

The comments seem less insulting when the speakers were the workmates.
4.1.2.3. Similarities and Differences between Vietnamese Data and American Data

In general, social status did not show its clear influences on the interpretation of insults in both cultures.

- They both had the same minds in perceiving the high degree of aggressiveness of comments on the hearer’s ability or intelligence (e.g. poor memory).

- American respondents felt less insulting with comments on the hearer’s personality or behaviour (e.g. a dog, the trouble).

- While comments on the hearer’s appearance may have been interpreted as ludic insults and shows of concern in Vietnamese culture, but interpreted as aggressive insults by American respondents.

Being commented as a chump in situation 11 may have been perceived as untrue as the hearer had had a success at work and was chosen to give a talk before the company, therefore it may have been interpreted as a banter to enforce solidarity and to encourage the hearer to give a talk.

4.1.3. Social Distance Factor

4.1.3.1. Vietnamese Data

The utterances which need to be avoided in friend talks (as they may be too insulting) can be seen in situation 9 and 13.

The utterances which need treating with great care in friend talks can be found in situation 10, 12 and 14.

They were perceived as much less insulting when uttered by the close friends than by the workmates.

Utterances considered as safe to utter in friend talks can be found in situations 11, 15, and 16.
Interestingly, in situation 15, commenting a close friend as *fatty* may have been interpreted by Vietnamese respondents as a ludic insult reinforcing solidarity with close friends.

In general, social distance has its great influences on the interpretation of insults in Vietnamese culture. Ludic insults may normally occur between close friends to reinforce their relationship without fear of causing offence.

### 4.1.3.2. American Data

Social distance is also a salient factor influencing the interpretation of insults in American culture. All of the utterances were perceived as less insulting when they were uttered by the respondents’ close friends than by their workmates.

Utterances which should be avoided in friend talks can be found in situations 10 and 15. Commenting the others on their appearance may be interpreted as an insult and should be avoided in American culture even when the speakers are close friends.

The utterances which need treating with great care in friend talks can be found in situations 9, 14, and 16.

Interestingly, in situation 16 (the hearer was asked with some concern about the reason why *s/he seemed so thin*), the utterance also needs treating with great care in interactions.

The utterances in situations 11, 12 and 13 (the hearer was commented as *the trouble* and *a lucky dog*) show their low degree of aggressiveness in American friend talks.

Commenting another as the trouble, a dog may be interpreted as a banter in friend talks, causing no impoliteness effect. This proves the possibility of the occurrence of ludic insults.
4.1.3.3. Similarities and Differences between Vietnamese Data and American Data

As the comment was clearly untrue (in sit. 11), both two groups of respondents may have the same mind in interpreting it as not insulting in friend talks. 68.7% and 64.5% respectively of Vietnamese and American respondents didn’t feel insulted.

Interestingly, while being commented as the trouble may have been interpreted as a little insulting in Vietnamese culture, it was also interpreted as a little insulting with workmate speakers, but a banter with friend speakers in American culture.

Great differences:

Being commented as a dog (sit. 13) has still been considered as too insulting in Vietnamese culture even in friend talks. However, in American friend talks, it might be used as a ludic insult.

On the contrary, while commenting on the hearers’ appearance (e.g. fatty, thin) may have been seen as very insulting, even in friend talks in American culture, it may have been used safely to tease or to show concern in Vietnamese culture.

Cultural shocks are greatly possible in situation 13, 15 and 16.

Social distance showed its salient influences on the interpretation of insults in both cultures. In some cases while a comment was perceived as insulting in workmate talks, it might be interpreted as a ludic insult in friend talks.

4.2. FINDINGS

Some empirical findings on the interpretation of insults in Vietnamese and American cultures.
4.2.1. The Influence of Social Factors on the Interpretation of Insults

- While age exerted its salient influences on the Vietnamese’ interpretation of insults, it seemed not to be an important social factor for Americans to take into consideration in doing so.

- Social status, in general, did not show its clear influences on the interpretation of insults in both cultures. However, in social contexts (e.g. at a party), ludic insults occurred more frequently with the workmates than with the superiors in both cultures.

- Social distance showed its salient influences on the interpretation of insults in both cultures. In some cases, negative comments might be interpreted as a ludic insult in friend talks.

- Insults in the ludic feature might normally occur in intimate talks in both Vietnamese and American cultures.

4.2.2. The Influence of Topics on the Interpretation of Insults

- Both Vietnamese and American respondents perceived the high degree of aggressiveness of negative comments on the hearer’s ability or intelligence.

- American respondents felt less insulted with comments on the hearer’s personality and behaviour (e.g. a rabbit, the problem) while they felt more insulted with comments considering them as inferior to others.

Especially, while being commented as a dog was perceived as a little insulting or even a banter in American culture, it was perceived as very insulting and should be avoided in interactions in Vietnamese culture.

- Especially, while comments on the hearer’s appearance (e.g. fatty, thin) may have been interpreted as ludic insults and expressions
of concern in Vietnamese culture, they may have been interpreted as aggressive insults by American respondents.

- Both Vietnamese respondents and American respondents didn’t feel insulted with comments that they may have perceived as balantly untrue though it was apparently impolite.

- Ludic insults in the form of sarcasm may be normally used in American culture, it may be potentially interpreted as an aggressive insult in Vietnamese culture.

**CHAPTER 5**

**CONCLUSIONS - IMPLICATIONS – LIMITATIONS - RECOMMENDATIONS**

**5.1. CONCLUSIONS**

- While age was not an important factor in the recipient’s interpretation of insults in American culture, it was found important in Vietnamese culture.

- Second, unlike age, social distance played a similar role in these two cultures.

- Third, in general, social status was not considered an important factor in the perceptions of insults in both cultures.

- Fourth, for the topics, the following findings were found:
  
  Both Vietnamese and American respondents had the same minds in perceiving the high degree of aggressiveness of negative comments on the hearer’s ability or intelligence

  American respondents felt less insulted with comments on the hearer’s personality and behaviour (e.g. *a rabit, the problem*), more insulted with comments considering them as inferior to others.
- Being commented as a *dog* was perceived as a little insulted or even a banter in American culture, but as very insulted and should be avoided in interactions in Vietnamese culture.

- On the contrary, comments on the hearer’s appearance (e.g. *fatty, thin*) may have been interpreted as ludic insults and expressions of concern in Vietnamese culture, but as aggressive insults by American respondents. It is also important to seen that commenting another as *sexy* should be avoided in both cultures.

Fifth, insults in the ludic feature might normally occur in intimate talks in both Vietnamese and American culture.

Both Vietnamese respondents and American respondents didn’t feel insulted with comments that may have perceived as balantly untrue though it was apparently impolite.

Sarcasm may be normally used in American culture as a strategy to create solidarity, but interpreted as an aggressive insult in Vietnamese culture.

### 5.2. IMPLICATIONS

The findings support Saville-Troike’s ideas that language users need not only linguistic knowledge but also and cultural knowledge (cited in [45, p.12]). For language teaching, in both the teaching of Vietnamese and English to American learners and Vietnamese learners, teachers should provide language learners with communicative competence, including what have been concluded through the result of the investigation, teachers have an opportunity to explore more topics or contexts in which some expressions normally for insulting may produce affiliative effects to support their language teaching.

Teachers should help learners distinguish between insults in aggressive and ludic manner to promote the appropriate use of the ludic
ones in interactions. Further more, teachers should help them be aware of and avoid situations where cultural shocks may potentially occur leading to the producing of unintentional insults.

For language learning and using, in order to effectively interact in inter-cultural interactions, language learners and users must have such communicative competence provided by language teachers, especially,

For Vietnamese users/learners of English, in interactions with native speakers of English, they should avoid:
- commenting or showing concern on their appearance (e.g. fatty, thin, sexy)
- comparing them as inferior to others
- treating the younger as inferior
and be aware of and understand
- the frequent occurrence of insults in ludic manner, especially, produced by workmates or friends
- the occasional occurrence of unintentional insults resulting from the speakers’ deficient communicative competence.

For American users/learners of Vietnamese, on the contrary, in interactions with Vietnamese, they should avoid or treat the followings with great care:
- Metaphorically commenting the interactants as an animal or a pet (e.g. rabbit, dog)
- Using directness in interactions with the older or offering to teach the older to do something
- Using sarcasm in ludic insults
and be aware of and understand
- the frequent occurrence of insults in ludic manner, especially, produced by workmates or friends
- the occasional occurrence of unintentional insults resulting from the speakers’ deficient communicative competence.

- In using ludic insults as a way of showing solidarity, language users must base on the background knowledge (e.g. the speakers and hearers’ typical teasing bahaviours), the communication context, and paralinguistic cues [1, p. 164-172], including:
  + it must be in intimate talks.
  + say something which is obviously untrue and obviously impolite to the hearers [21, p.144].

5.3. LIMITATIONS

- First, the findings came only from a small number of respondents (63 people in both cultures) and scenarios (16). Therefore, no generalisations could be made on the basis of these findings.

- Second, the perceptions of insults were based only on the questionnaire data; therefore, important factors involved in the delivery and reception of this speech acts such as paralinguistic factors (e.g. intonation, pitch, voice) and or nonverbal language were not considered. Thus, the findings could reflect only part of the insults and the perceptions.

- Third, factors such as the gender, the age, the education or family background of the respondents were not analysed to find out the influence of these factors on their perceptions of the insults.

5.4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- Since this research based only on the perceptions of the insults, it would be useful to find out the speaker's intent behind the insulting message. Thus, a study of insults in speaker’s perspective would help to illuminate how insulting messages are intended, and their impact on the relationship.
- Further studies should examine recorded spontaneous spoken data to provide an overall insight of this sensitive speech act.

- In addition, ludic insults have been assumed to be used to reinforce in-group solidarity, socialize and resolve conflicts among intimates [1], [4], [36]. Thus, a thorough comparative study of ludic insults in Vietnamese and English should be carried out.