



OFFERING IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to help speakers of English find out types of general English offering which are widely applied in everyday communications and how to use offering forms correctly according to social distance and relative power of English native speakers and Vietnamese speakers in particular situations. The study is carried out with the hope of contributing to a better English language teaching and learning status and it is also expected that Vietnamese learners of English would have a chance to get used to the natural way of making offers in English so as to be successful cross-cultural communicators.

Keywords: offering expressions; make offers; cross-cultural communicators.

1. Introduction

English is considered to be the international language of many fields such as politics, business, science, technology, sports etc. The number of people learning English for various purposes has been on the increase all over the world. To meet the demands of learners of English, there has also been a corresponding increase in the number of teachers and researchers of English, which has changed the status of English learning day by day.

In the process of learning a foreign language, Vietnamese learners of English, like those of any other language, have to get to know a new culture. They gradually realize the presence of cross-cultural differences between English and Vietnamese, which may be an impetus for them to study and explore the significance in the use of the language, but may also be an obstacle in their learning.

In cross-cultural communication, making offers is considered to be very important as an appropriate offer can make a good impression on the speaker and hearer and provide a powerful motivation for the conversation to go ahead. Therefore, awareness of what, when, and how to make offers is indispensable in communication. Making offers, as a matter fact, cannot be separated from the culture of the target language.

The aim of this study, with a limited scope of research on offering in English and Vietnamese, is to help speakers of English find out types of general English offering strategies which are widely applied in everyday communications. It also supplies the English learners with the choice of offering forms according to social distance and relative power of English native speakers and Vietnamese speakers in particular situations. Finally, a comparison between the Vietnamese speakers and the English speakers in the situations studied will be made concerning the use of offering expressions. The study is carried out

with the hope of contributing to a better English language teaching and learning status, and it is also expected that Vietnamese learners of English would have a chance to get used to the natural way of making offers in English so as to be successful cross-cultural communicators.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Cross-cultural awareness and communicative competence

It is a fact that there is no clear cut between cultures, which often causes difficulties for foreigners in communication with people from different cultures. Therefore, it is very necessary for cross-cultural communicators to be aware of what the pragmatics is and what the differences between their cultures are in order to avoid culture shock and to ensure successful communication.

According to Stephen C. Levinson (1983:21), “pragmatics is the study of the relationship between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding”. Pragmatics, on the whole, investigates the way in which language is appropriate to the context in which it occurs. Therefore, pragmatics goes beyond the meanings implied in individual words and word order.

For Yule (1986:87), “the study of differences in expectations based on cultural schemata is part of a broad area of investigation generally known as cross-cultural pragmatics”. In Vietnam, when a Vietnamese family are having lunch, for example, and a visitor arrives, the visitor is welcomed by *Have lunch with us, please. (mời bác vào xơi cơm với gia đình em.)*. Or when two Vietnamese neighbors meet on the road, they usually say *Where are you going? (Anh/chị đang đi đâu đấy?)* instead of *Hi/ Hello! (xin chào!)*. These are real greetings instead of an invitation or a real question. Close friends usually make the offer: *Have lunch? (Ăn trưa nhé?)*, but it is considered to be rude to talk to an old person. In Western countries, as I know, it is considered impolite to ask about someone’s age, marriage, or income for the first time, but it is the norm in Vietnam.

2.2. Speech Acts and offerings as Speech Act

2.2.1. Speech acts

In communication, people produce utterances functioning as making offer, request, complaint, invitation, promise or expressing sympathy, apology, etc. A speech act is part of a speech event, i.e. the circumstances, including other utterances, surrounding the utterances. The nature of a speech event is to determine the interpretation of an utterance as performing a particular speech act. Yule (1996:47) states that “Actions performed via utterances generally called **speech act**”.

The speech act is performed by producing an utterance and is made up of three different but interrelated acts. Yule (1996: 48) calls them: *locutionary act*- the basic act of utterance, or producing a meaningful linguistic expression, *illocutionary act* which is performed via communicative force of an utterance, and *perlocutionary act*, which creates an utterance with a function without intending it to have an effect.

Among the three kinds of acts above, the illocutionary act plays the most important

role because it is what the speaker wants to achieve through the action of uttering the sentence. Yule (1996: 51) claims that of these three types of speech acts, the most discussed is illocutionary force: "Indeed, the term speech act is generally interpreted quite narrowly to mean only the illocutionary force of an utterance". He also classifies speech acts into five kinds, which include: declarations, representatives, expressives, directives and commissives.

- Declarations: speech acts in which declarative statements are appropriately performed. For instance, *I resign/ War is hereby declared.*
- Representatives: these speech acts constitute assertions carrying true or false values. For example, *The earth is flat/It was a beautiful sunny day.*
- Expressives: these speech acts express an attitude or an inner state of the speaker which says nothing about the world. For example, *I am terribly sorry/ Oh, that's great.*
- Directives: means an effort on the part of the speaker to have the hearer do something (e.g. request, advice, orders, suggestions). For instance *Don't come to class late/ Could you tell me how to get there?/What about dinner tonight?*
- Commissives: speech acts of this kind create an obligation on the part of the speaker; that is, they commit the speaker to doing something (e.g. promises, threats, and refusals). *I'll never be late again/ I'll give you a lift* are examples.

We have seen what speech acts and their types are. In the next section, offering as a speech act is dealt with.

2.2.2. Offerings as Speech Act

In everyday conversation, people perform different types of speech acts and offering is one of those. Making offers is a very nice characteristic of every culture as it helps reveal people's consideration towards each other and therefore reinforces social relationship, relative power, rapport etc, and also makes life more interesting and meaningful. The way people extend and respond to offers is more or less guided by their beliefs, customs, personal characters etc. So the strategies that the Westerners choose in order to perform this speech act are often not the same as those chosen by the Easterners. That is why a systematic and scientific observation of the problem should be made.

According to Wierzbicka (1987: 191), the term "offer" covers the following meanings:

- *I think of X as something that could be good for you.*
- *I say: I will cause X to happen if you say you would want me to do it.*
- *I think that you want it to happen.*
- *I don't know if you want it to happen.*
- *I say this because I want to cause you to know that I would cause it to happen if you said that you wanted it to happen.*
- *I assume that you will say if you want it to happen.*

To offer to do something means to say that one is willing to do it and that one will do

it if the hearer (H) says that he wants the speaker to do it. The speaker (S) assumes that the proposed course of events could be good for H, but he does not take it for granted that H will want to, and he leaves H the freedom to decide whether or not the proposed action should take place. In this case "offer" can take a noun as a direct object. One can say not only *X offered to do something* but also *X offered somebody something*.

It seems quite clear that offering implies something like a benefit for H, but it is a bit unclear how the relevant component should be formulated. Wierzbicka (1987) argues that the formula "*I think of X as something that you may want*" may be more appropriate than the formula "*I think of X as something that would be good for you*".

Offers can be more or less tentative, but they always embody a degree of uncertainty "I don't know if you want me to do it". Consequently, they always call for an answer from the hearer. In this aspect, they are similar to questions and in fact they often take the form of questions *Would you like a cup of tea/ Can I help you?* and so on.

One might suggest that offers have a double illocution purpose: *to let H know of S's willingness to do something for him and cause H to say yes or no, to enable S to act accordingly*. The fact that responses to offers are frequently double *Yes, please/No, thank you* would support this.

Offers can be expressed in different forms. The choice depends on various factors including social variables and consideration of politeness. These will be discussed in the next section.

2.3. *Issues of politeness in offering*

According to Richards et al (1985:281), politeness is defined as follows: "how language expresses the social distance between speakers and their different role relationships". Leech (1983: 63) regards politeness as a set of linguistic behavior, while Brown & Levinson (1978: 58) see it as a form of behavior that allows communication to occur between potentially aggressive partners.

Central to the issue of politeness is the notion of face. **Face** means "the public self-image of a person. It refers to that emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize" (Yule, 1996: 48). According to Brown & Levinson (1987:61), "face" is "something that is emotionally invested and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction". Brown & Levinson (1987: 61) also divide face into two types: "positive face" and "negative face". **Positive face** is a person's need to be accepted, liked and treated as a member of the same group. **Negative face** is our wish to be independent, to have freedom of action and not to be imposed on by others. Sometimes, our face is put at risk. For example, if the speaker says something that presents a threat to another individual's expectations regarding self-image, a "face-threatening act" (FTAs) is created. Brown & Levinson (1987:64) find that there are three strategies that are chosen when a speaker does a "face – threatening act" to a listener. They are: do the act on- record, do the act off- record and don't do the act at all.

- Do the act on- record: means to offer explicitly with or without politeness strategy, for example *Have a cup of tea (please) / Lend me your pen (please)*.
- Do the act off -record: means not to offer explicitly but give a listener a hint so that he or she can infer that the speaker means an offer for instance, *Have you ever tasted Vietnamese tea? I've just given some/ Oh, I forgot my pen at home.*
- Don't do the act at all: means giving up making offering.

In everyday social interaction, people may mitigate the force of FTA by using a variety of politeness strategies such as positive politeness and negative politeness.

According to Brown & Levinson (1987: 70), **positive politeness** is oriented toward the positive face of H, the positive self-image that he claims for himself. For example instead of saying *don't do that*, you say *please don't do that, my friend*.

Negative politeness, on the other hand, is oriented mainly toward H's negative face, his basic want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination. For instance, *I know this is inconvenient, but please don't do that my friend*. Negative politeness, thus, is essentially avoidance-based, and realizations of negative-politeness strategies consist in assurances that S recognizes and respects H's negative -face wants and will not interfere with H's freedom of action.

Brown & Levinson (1987) argue that the essence of politeness has been defined as addressing both positive and negative face needs of the interlocutors. Politeness is calculated on the basis of the assessment.

In most western countries, especially English-speaking countries, people are usually more inclined to negative politeness. Conversely, Vietnamese people seem to be in favor of positive politeness. Here-in-after, we now turn to the social factors that have been put forward by Brown & Levinson.

2.4. Social factors affecting Politeness in offering

The choice of appropriate expressions in a given context depends on a number of factors which Brown & Levinson (1987:74) grouped into a formula consisting of three independent variables, namely the **social distance** (D) of the speaker and the Hearer (a symmetric relation), the **relative power** (P) of the speaker and the Hearer (an asymmetric relation) and the absolute **ranking** (R) of **imposition** in the particular culture. In their view, each of these variables has an independent effect on the choice of politeness strategies. They argue that the weightiness of an FTA is related to these variables. As they are not the only factors affecting speech act formulation, Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that they include all others such as authority, status, occupation, ethnic identity, situational factors, etc.

2.4.1. Social distance

According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 76-77), "the social distance variable is a symmetric dimension of similarity/ difference within which S and H stand for the purpose of this act". In many cases, it is based on an assessment of the frequency of interaction and

the kind of material or non-material goods (including face) exchanged between S and H. An important part of the assessment of D will usually be measures of social distance based on stable social attributes. The reflex of social closeness is, generally, the reciprocal giving and receiving of positive face. Situation 2 is an example. *You are the teacher. One of nephews comes to your house for your help with his study. You want to offer him some fruit.* The speaker has higher power than the hearer (+P), but it is familiar (-D) situation as S and H are in a very close relationship.

However, the dimension of “distance” or “social distance” has been defined differently by different authors. For instance, Brown and Gilman (1972) use *solidarity* to refer to the dimension, while Brown & Levinson (1987) use *distance* to refer to the same dimension. Different labels for scale extremities have been used such as “high-low” for discussion of social distance, “high/great-low/small” for discussion of distance, “familiar-unfamiliar” for familiarity etc. In this study, “familiar-unfamiliar” has been used for discussion of social distance (D).

2.4.2. Relative Power

The relative power (P) variable in Brown & Levinson (1987: 76-79) is an asymmetric social dimension of relative power: “P is the degree to which H can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of S’s plans and self-evaluation”. In general, there are two sources of P, either of which may be authorized or unauthorized-material control (over economic distribution and physical force) and metaphysical control (over the actions of others, by virtue of metaphysical forces subscribed to by those others).

Power can be seen in different ways. We could argue that individuals are assigned an absolute on this dimension that measures the power that each individuals has relative to all others. Thus a bank manager might be given a high rating and a low worker might be given a low one. But when the worker sits on a jury trying the manager, the power may be reversed. P can be equal in case of friendship situations. So in this paper high, low, and equal power settings are considered.

2.4.3. Ranking of imposition

Ranking of imposition (R) is another factor influencing Politeness. For Brown & Levinson (1987:77), “R is a culturally and situation ally defined ranking of imposition by the degree to which they are considered to interfere with an agent’s wants by self-determination or approval”. In general, there are probably two such scales or ranks that are identifiable for negative face FTAs: a ranking of imposition in proportion to the expenditure of service (including the provision of time) and of goods (including non-material goods like information as well as the expression of regard and other face payments). These intra-culturally defined costing of impositions on an individual’s preserve are in general constant only in their rank order from one situation to another.

2.5. Types of general English offering strategies mentioned in 10 communicative English books

There has been no particular research on offering in English as well as in Vietnamese so far. Therefore, before moving to the data analysis, it is necessary to point out and categorize the typical offering forms which are available in English practical textbooks. The authors chosen include Doff et al. (1983), Sampson, N. (1996), Hartley et al. (1981), Hollett, V. (1993), Hutchinson, T. (1999), Jones, L. (1987), O'Neill, R. (1972), Soars, J. & L. (1991), Soars, J. & L. (1996), and Swan, M. (1990). In these books, different linguistic forms of offers are grouped into three major categories, involving seven types of offer forms as follows.

Table 1. Seven types of offering strategies

Category	Types of offering strategies	Instances
1. Questions	1. Tentative	Would you like a cup of tea? Shall I post it for you?
	2. Permission	Can/Could I help you? May I send it for you?
	3. Elliptical	Tea?/ Cigarette?
	4. W- H questions	How/What about lunch at 12?
	5. Tag questions	I'll answer it, shall I?
2. Statements	6. Statements	I'll help you with your homework I'll open the door for you
3. Imperatives	7. Imperatives	Have some more wine, please. Help yourself with sugar, please.

Type 1: Offering in form of Tentative questions

The most familiar form in making offers in English is Tentative questions beginning with the auxiliary "Shall" or "Would". This fact can be easily recognized in most practical course books such as Function of English, Headway Intermediate, Getting Ahead, English In Focus B; Business Objectives, Meaning Into Words, Lifelines, The New Cambridge, Streamline English, Kernel Lessons Plus etc. 100% of the structures expressing offers suggested by the authors of those books are Tentative questions.

1. *Shall I carry it for you?* (Doff et al., 1983: 48)

2. *Would you like me to get it for you?* (Jones, L., 1987:37)

Those offers which begin with "Shall" or "Would" occur so frequently that they can be considered to be the most common offering. 100% of the authors of the course books mentioned above suggest these linguistic forms when making offers. Besides, offers may be expressed by using other auxiliaries such as *do*.

3. *Do you want me to get you a taxi?* (Jones et al., 1993: 196)

Type 2: Offering in form of Permission questions

The offers may be expressed by using the modal verbs such as *may/ can*. Five authors (50%) of the course books mentioned above suggest this linguistic form.

5. *Can I help you with that?* (Jones, L., 1987: 37)

6. *May I help you, Madam?* (O'neill, R., 1972: 113)

Type 3: Offering in form of Elliptical questions

Offers can be made in form of full questions as mentioned above or they can be made in form of Elliptical questions. The former way (full questions) can be used to make offers in polite and formal situations while the later (Elliptical questions) can be used in informal situations in which the interlocutors are in close relationship. Only 30% of the suggested offer forms by the authors mentioned above are Elliptical questions.

7. *Cigarette?* (Doff et al., 1983: 183)

8. *Tea?* (Hartley et al., 1981:3)

9. *Any point in my getting it for you?* (Jones, L., 1987: 37)

10. *I've got lots of money, if you are short.* (Doff et al., 1983: 48)

In these Elliptical questions, intonation plays a very important role. The rising tone is often used so that expressions could be interpreted as “to offer something to somebody”. Of course these forms are suggested to be used only in situations where S and H are close to each other or where S has more power than H.

Type 4: Offering on form of Wh- questions

The form of offers of this type usually begins with: “*how*”. Only 40% of the suggested offering forms are Wh- questions.

11. *How would you like the money?* (Harley et al., 1981: 21)

Offers with “*how*” certainly sound softer and more pleasant to hear. In fact, this way of making offers can help create more politeness and may be quite safe and effective when S and H are not in a close relationship. Sometimes, offers can be made with “*how*” in such a way as:

12. *How about a piece of cake?* (Sampson, N., 1996: 415)

13. *How about a drink before dinner?* (Hartley et al., 1981: 34)

These expressions seem more like suggestions. However the actions intended by S in these expressions are still offers. In the natural conversations, “*how about...?*” can be replaced by “*what about....?*” After these expressions, a noun or a gerund is often needed.

14. *What about some more wine?*

Type 5: Offering in form of Tag questions

Sometimes, tag questions are also used to make offers. The types of tag questions in making offers, however, are not varied (10%). In fact, only one form of tag question, the tag of which is “*shall I?*”, is suggested by Michael Swan (1990).

15. *I'll answer it, shall I?* (Swan, 1990:108).

Type 6: Offering in form of Statements

When offering H something or to do something, S can employ structures with *will/shall*+ V. The subject of the statement is always “I” so the offers of this kind are commissive. The action S has decided to perform at the time of utterance is obviously beneficial for H. The statement also implies that S is willing to take the action. 60% of the suggested structures are in the form of statements with *will/shall*.

16. *I'll open the door for you.* (Soars, 1994: 19)

17. *I'll help you with your homework* (Soars, 1994: 90)

The offers in form of statements do not usually call for an answer from H. The speaker often utters the speech act of offering and performs the action at the same time. For instance, a host may say *I'll open the door for you* to his guest and performs the action of opening the door at the same time. He does not wait for the answer from his guest as accepting the offer.

When S wants H to involve in the offer, he usually adds “*if you like*” at the end of the statement to make the offer more tentative as in the following:

18. *I'll deliver it if you like.* (Doff et al., 1983: 48)

19. *I could do the washing if you like* (Jones, 1987: 36)

Type 7: Offering in form of Imperatives

This type of offer is considered to be less formal and is widely accepted in daily life conversations (40%) where friendliness and intimacy exist. At a table dinner, a friend may say to his mates:

20. *Have some more wine please!* (Hartley et al., 1981: 34)

21. *Help yourself to vegetables please!* (Hartley et al., 1981: 34)

A friend may offer to stand in for his classmate who is on duty:

22. *I'll stand in for you if you like. Go off and have a good time* (Doff et al., 1983: 47)

These offers are usually uttered with a falling intonation. The speaker usually adds the word “please” at the end of the expressions to make the offers more appealing. These offers, however, are similar to the ones in form of Elliptical questions in terms of the contexts they can be used in. Four authors out of ten suggested this offer form, and 40% of the suggested structures are in form of Imperatives.

In formal situations, such as in a party among diplomats, offers in form of Imperatives with “*let*” are rarely applied. The statement which is used as an offer in the structure with “*let*” may be heard quite often in such situation as in the following examples:

23. *Let me get you an astray.* (Jones, 1987: 36)

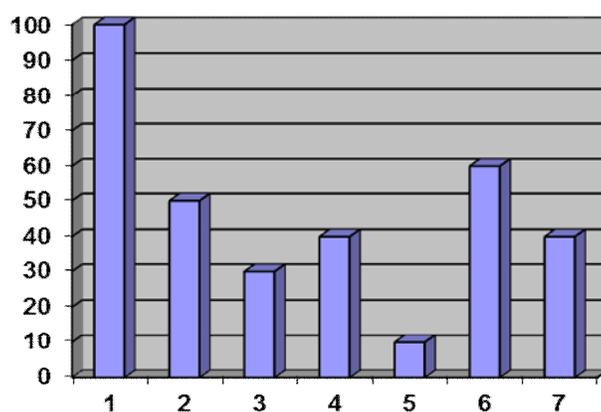
The case with “*let*” can be said to be a suggestion but at the same time it can be used to express an offer.

In table 2 below is the summary of the number of the authors who mentioned the offer forms in the practical course books mentioned above and the percentage of the linguistic forms mentioned by those authors.

Table 2. Statistics of authors who mentioned various types of offer forms and percentage linguistic forms

Offer form types	1.Tentative questions	2.Permission questions	3.Elliptical questions	4. Wh- questions	5.Tag questions	6.Statements	7.Imperatives
Number of authors	10/10	5/10	3/10	4/10	1/10	6/10	4/10
Percentage	100%	50%	30%	40%	10%	60%	40%

Chart 1. Statistics of authors who mentioned various types of offer forms and percentage linguistic forms



The statistics in chart 1, which is based on table 2, shows that the most popular offer form is offer in form of Tentative questions (100% authors mentioned this one). The second most common offer form is offer in form of Statement (60% authors mentioned this one). The offer form which is the least applied is in form of Tag questions (only one author out of ten: 10%).

In short, this section has shown us the classification of offering forms mentioned by authors of practical course books in general, and their frequency. In the next section, we are going to see how these offering forms are used in the situations according to Social distance and Relative power based on the data from the questionnaire.

3. Methodology and Data

3.1. Participants

Twenty native speakers of English and twenty Vietnamese speakers participated in the survey. The majority of English speaking participants come from Australia (16 people). However, two of them are from America and the rest from Britain. They belong to many socio-economic backgrounds. The Vietnamese participants, in contrast, come from Bac Ninh teacher training college in Vietnam, where I am working. They are state officials, or

lecturers of different subjects such as Maths, Literature, Geography, Informatics... etc. In order to ensure compatibility, the number of males and females in both groups were evenly distributed. The subjects' ages are between 25 and 50. All of the subjects in both groups have high levels of education.

3.2. Data collection

To find out types of general English offering strategies, methodologies of doing surveys, and collecting are exploited from the English communicative textbooks.

In order to see how the English and Vietnamese speakers express the offers in relation to the social factors assigned in the situations studied, the study uses a questionnaire in the form of a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) based on the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984:196-212) for data collection. In the present study, the DCT is designed in English for English native speakers and Vietnamese speaker learners of English.

The questionnaire consists of eleven situational offers that vary in terms of social distance (D) with two levels: unfamiliar (+D), familiar (- D), and social power (P) with three levels: high (+P), low (-P), and equal (= P). In this study, the size of imposition of the offer (R) on H is kept constantly low. The hearer usually feels pleased or very pleased to accept the offers in the situations studied. They have no feeling of being inferior to S when accepting the offers, i.e. S do not impose on H when making offers.

Based on the theory of Brown & Levinson mentioned in section 2.4, a bank of 11 situations was designed to elicit offers. The variables in the study are P, D, and R. As R was kept constantly low in this study, the description of the situations (Sit) in this study is as follows:

- The Speaker has higher power than the hearer; they are unfamiliar with each other (+P, +D) as in situation 1.
- The Speaker has higher power than the hearer; they are familiar with each other (+P, -D) as in situations 2, 3.
- The Speaker and the hearer are equal in power; they are unfamiliar with each other (=P, +D) as in situation 11.
- The Speaker and the hearer are equal in power; they are familiar with each other (=P, -D) as in situations 4, 5, 9.
- The Speaker has less power than the hearer; they are unfamiliar with each other (-P, +D) as in situations 7, 8, 1.
- The Speaker has less power than the hearer; they are familiar with each other (-P, -D) as in situations 6, 10.

The results of the questionnaire provided reliable data on how the subjects assessed the social factors of the contexts studied. This questionnaire is translated into Vietnamese for the Vietnamese subjects to assess.

4. Data Analysis and Results

As mentioned in 2.4, the two dimensions investigated in this study are relative power (P) and social distance (D). The imposition is kept low. So in this section, we investigate the choice of the offers in relation to the social dimensions of P and D in the situations:

- Where the Speaker has greater power than the Hearer (+P)
- Where the Speaker has equal power to the Hearer (=P)
- Where the Speaker has less power than the Hearer (-P)
- Where the Speaker and the Hearer are unfamiliar with each other (+D)
- Where the Speaker and the Hearer are familiar with each other (-D)

4.1. Choice of offering forms in high power settings

The English subjects and Vietnamese subjects differed in their choice of offer forms for the formulation of their offers in the setting where S have the greater power than H (+P). The data in table two below which was obtained from the questionnaire shows that most English speakers chose offers in the form of Tentative questions as “*Would you like a cup of tea?*” (Sit 1), or Permission questions such as “*Can I get you some tea?*” (Sit 1) when the speaker was of higher power than the hearer and they are unfamiliar to each other. Sixteen English subjects (80%) out of twenty chose offers in form of Tentative Questions and four (20%) chose Permission questions for Sit.1.

For Vietnamese subjects, the choice is a bit different with the same situation. The most common offer forms are Tentative and Imperative. Twelve Vietnamese subjects (60%) out of twenty chose offers in form of Imperative “*Mời anh/chị dùng trà*” (offer - you- drink -tea). Four Vietnamese used offers in form of Tentative (20%) “*anh/ chị có uống trà không?*” (you-drink-tea?). And four Vietnamese speakers (20%) used offer in form of Statement “*ĐỂ tôi lấy cho anh một tách trà.* (Let- me-bring -you- a- cup- of-tea). Neither of English or Vietnamese subjects chose Elliptical, W-h, or Tag questions in making offers.

Table 2. *The number of the English and Vietnamese subjects in the choice of offer forms with respect to (+P)*

(N⁰ is the number of subjects in the choice of offer forms)

Offer form - Type	Situation 1(+P; +D)				Situation 2(+P; -D)			
	English		Vietnamese		English		Vietnamese	
	N ⁰	%	N ⁰	%	N ⁰	%	N ⁰	%
1	16	80	4	20	13	65		
2	4	20			3	15		
3					1	5	2	10
4					1	5		
5								
6			4	20			2	10
7			12	60	2	10	16	80

The choice of offering where S has the greater power than H (+P) and they are familiar is also different between English and Vietnamese subjects. Thirteen English subjects (65%) chose offers in form of Tentative “*Would you like some fruit?*”. Three (15%) used offers in form of Permission “*Can I bring you some fruit?*”. Offers in form of Elliptical and Wh- question are used by only two people (10%) “*How about some fruit?*”, or “*some fruit please.*”. Offers in form of Tentative are commonly chosen by Vietnamese subjects, 16 subjects (80%) “*Ăn hoa quả đi em*” (*have- fruit- you*). Two Vietnamese (10%) chose offers in form of Statement “*ĐỂ tôi lấy hoa quả cho em*” (*Let-me-bring- you- fruit*). And other two (10%) used offers in form of Elliptical “*ít hoa quả nhé?*” (*some fruits?*).

The statistics in table 2 reveals that when the S has greater power than H (+P) and they are unfamiliar to each other, the concentration of English subjects is on offer in forms of Tentative and Permission whereas Vietnamese ones focus on offers in form of Tentative and Imperative in the same situation. These results show that the English subjects are more tentative when formulating offers in the unfamiliar higher situation, and the concentration of Vietnamese ones on Imperative shows that the Vietnamese subjects are more direct. The data also shows that the English subjects tend to use negative politeness strategies but the Vietnamese ones tend to use positive politeness strategies when expressing their offers in the unfamiliar high power situation.

When S and H are in the familiar high power situation, the common types of offer for English subjects are offers in form of Tentative and Permission, whereas for Vietnamese subjects they are Elliptical and Imperative. This fact seems to be related to culture differences between two groups of subjects when making offers. The English give more options to the H by using the Tentative frequently, whereas the Vietnamese subjects usually choose Imperative to show their friendliness in their offers in higher power situations. The English subjects seem to be more tentative when making offers, whereas Vietnamese ones are more direct when choosing Statements and Imperatives. This is because the Vietnamese subjects thought that the boss in his office is always superior to the applicant and the choice of Imperative “*Mời anh dùng trà*” (*offer-you-drink-tea*)/ “*ăn hoa quả đi em*” (*have- fruit- you*) shows that they want to express their friendliness in these situations. In contrast, the English subjects prefer the offers in form of Tentative, which are much more polite than the Vietnamese “*Would you like a cup of tea?*”/ “*Would you like some fruit?*”. This is completely in line with Brown & Levinson’s theory, (1987) on politeness: “The more tentative the act, the more politeness is communicated”.

4.2. Choice of offering forms in equal power settings

Looking at the results of situations 11 and 9 in table 3 below, we can see that the choice of offer forms of the English subjects and Vietnamese ones are different in the cases where S and H are equal in power.

Table 3. The number of the English and Vietnamese subjects in the choice of offer forms with respect to (=P)
(N⁰ is the number of subjects in the choice of offer forms)

Offer form - Type	Situation 11(=P; +D)				Situation 9 (=P; -D)			
	English		Vietnamese		English		Vietnamese	
	N ⁰	%	N ⁰	%	N ⁰	%	N ⁰	%
1	6	30			10	50		
2	1	5			7	35	1	5
3							4	20
4								
5								
6			8	40	3	15		
7	13	65	12	60			15	75

Most of the English subjects chose either offers in form of Imperative such as “*Please take my seat*” (Sit.11) or offers in form of Tentative question “*Shall I give you a lift?*” (Sit.9). The number of English subjects choosing Imperative form for Sit. 11, which is in unfamiliar equal power situation, is 13 (65%), and the people choosing Tentative question for Sit.9, which is in familiar equal power situation is 10 (50%). Only one person replied by Permission question (5%) for Sit.11 “*May I offer you my seat?*”. However, in familiar equal power situation, the types of Permission are more common than in unfamiliar equal power situation. Three out of twenty (10%) used Statement for Sit.9 “*Let me give you a lift home.*”, whereas no one used this type for Sit.11.

The choice by Vietnamese subjects in these two situations is different. Twelve Vietnamese speakers (60%) chose offer in form of Statement “*Chị hãy ngồi xuống ghế của tôi đây này*” (*you-sit-down-seat-my*) (Sit.11) and the rest chose offer in form of Imperative “*Hãy ngồi xuống ghế của tôi đi*” (*sit-down-seat-my*). When the S and H are in familiar equal power, Vietnamese subjects prefer offers in form of Imperative to Elliptical (75%) for Sit.9 “*lên xe anh đưa về*” (*get-on-car-I-take-home*). Four out of twenty used Elliptical offer for Sit.9 “*về không?*” (*back?*). Only one of twenty chose offer in form of Permission (5%) “*Tôi có thể đưa chị về được không?*” (*I-can-take-you-home?*).

The use of Imperative in Sit.6 used by most subjects of both groups shows that, in the unfamiliar equal situation, the subjects of both groups want their offers to be appreciated and approved of. They are adapting positive face by making their self-image being accepted (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In the familiar equal situation (Sit.9), the use of Tentative questions by most English subjects reveals that the English subjects are more tentative than the Vietnamese ones and they tend to use the negative politeness strategies often in this case. The wide use of Imperative by most Vietnamese subjects in Sit.9 shows that they are more direct than the English, and they tend to use the positive strategies more frequently in this case. The data in table 3 also reveals that when the interlocutors are of

equal power, the most common offer forms chosen by both groups include offers in form of Tentative questions, Statements, and Imperatives. Only one subject in each group used offer in form of Permission, and none of the subjects in either groups chose offers in form of “W-H question”, or “Tag question”

4.3. Choice of offering forms in low power settings

In the situations where S has less power than H, the English and Vietnamese subjects differ considerably regarding the choice of offer forms. In Sit.7, in which a waiter serves a group of customers, 50% of the English subjects chose the offer in form of Tentative such as: “*Would you like something for dessert now?*” and Permission “*Can I offer you some dessert?*”, whereas almost all Vietnamese subject used offer in form of Imperative (90%), such as “*mời quý vị dùng món tráng miệng của nhà hàng chúng tôi.*” (*offer- you-use-dessert-of-restaurant-our*). Two out of twenty Vietnamese subject chose offer in form of Permission (10%) “*Tôi có thể mang món tráng miệng cho quý vị được không?*” (*I-can-bring-desert-for-you?*). The greatest difference in Sit.7 is that while eighteen Vietnamese (90%) chose Imperative, none of the English subject chose this type. This fact shows that Vietnamese subjects are more direct when expressing their offers in unfamiliar low power situation.

Table 4. The number of the English and Vietnamese subjects in the choice of offer forms with respect to (-P)

(N⁰ is the number of subjects in the choice of offer forms)

Offer form - Type	Situation 7(-P; +D)				Situation 6 (-P; -D)			
	English		Vietnamese		English		Vietnamese	
	N ⁰	%	N ⁰	%	N ⁰	%	N ⁰	%
1	10	50			5	25	4	20
2	8	40	2	10	3	15	3	15
3								
4	1	5						
5								
6	1	5			12	60	13	75
7			18	90				

Table 4 also describes the choice of offer form in familiar low power situation (Sit.6), in which the son wants to post a letter for his father. Twelve English subjects out of twenty (60%) used the offers in form of statement “*I’ll post the letter for you, dad*”. Five of them (25%) chose the offers in form of Tentative “*Would you like me to post the letter?*”/ “*Do you want me to mail something, dad?*”. Only three of them (15%) applied the offers in form of Permission “*Can I post it for you?*”/ “*Can I post your letter?*”. Similarly, the number of Vietnamese subjects who used the offers in form of Statement is thirteen (75%), for example “*Con sắp đi tới bưu điện, bố để con gửi thư giúp bố*” (*I-going-to-post office, you-let-me-send-letter-for-you*). Four of twenty Vietnamese speakers (20%) made the

offers in form of Tentative “*Con sắp đi tới bưu điện, bố có muốn con gửi thư giúp bố không? (I-going-to-post office, you- want-me-send-letter-help-you?)*”. Only three people (15%) used the offers in form of Permission, exactly the same case as the English subjects “*Con có thể gửi thư giúp bố được không? Con sắp đi tới bưu điện*” (*I-can-post-letter-help-you? I-going-to-post office*).

This data suggests that in case of familiar low power, the choice of offering of English and Vietnamese subjects is almost similar. The most common form of offering is Statement, and the least popular one is Permission. No subjects used the offers in form of Wh- question, Elliptical, or Tag question. However, some differences between Vietnamese and English subjects were revealed. The Vietnamese subjects usually added the reason for making offer “*Con sắp đi tới bưu điện*” (*I-going-to-post office*). This may be due to the fact that in the Vietnamese families, parents, especially the father, plays a very important role in controlling and deciding almost everything in his family. He is considered the most powerful person in his family. The children therefore have to obey their father’s ideas. Even when offering to do something for their father, the son is also so cautious that he usually explains the reasons for making offers.

In short, the data in table 4 shows that Vietnamese subjects are more direct when expressing their offers in unfamiliar low power situation. In familiar low power situation, the choice of offering between the English and Vietnamese subjects is almost the same. The most common form of offering is Statement, the least popular one is Permission.

5. Conclusion

A survey was conducted to investigate types of general English offering forms, and the choice of English offering forms in relation to some social factors of English speakers and Vietnamese speakers as well. In the survey, seven types of English offering strategies are found and categorized. They are Tentative question, Permission question, Elliptical question, W-h question, Tag question, Statement, and Imperative question.

The data analysis of the two groups of subjects shows that the English subjects are more tentative, whereas the Vietnamese ones prefer Imperative in formulating offers in the unfamiliar higher power situation. The data also shows that the English subjects tend to use negative politeness strategies but the Vietnamese ones tend to use positive politeness strategies when expressing their offers in the unfamiliar high power situation. When S and H are in the familiar high power situation, the English subjects tend to choose offers in form of Tentative and Permission, whereas Vietnamese subjects choose Elliptical and Imperative.

In the unfamiliar equal situation, the use of Tentative questions by most English subjects shows that the English subjects are more tentative than the Vietnamese ones and they tend to use the negative politeness strategies often. The frequent use of Imperative by most Vietnamese subjects in Sit.9 shows that they are more direct than the English and they tend to use the positive strategies more frequently in this case.

The Vietnamese subjects are more direct when expressing their offers in the unfamiliar low power situations. In the familiar low power situations, the choice of offering between the English and Vietnamese subjects is almost the same. The most common form of offering is Statement, and the least common one is Permission.

Based on these results, we can conclude that the most popular offer strategy in English are Tentative questions, which coincides with the suggestions by the English native authors of the communicative text books mentioned in 2.5, whereas the most popular offer strategies in Vietnamese are Imperatives and Statements. The English subjects are more polite and indirect in making offers in comparison with the Vietnamese subjects since they are more tentative.

The Vietnamese subjects and the English subjects, to some extent, were found to be nearly similar in the choice of offer in unfamiliar low power situation in the study. This seems to be due to a coincidence of the formal structures of the two languages. In the other situations, the Vietnamese subjects also had the same choice of offer forms in comparison with the English subjects. This similarity may be explained as a result of the Vietnamese subjects being influenced by their working environment. They are working in offices and colleges, so they must have learnt at least one foreign language and they may be affected by the language they know. The above findings seem to suggest that more and more Vietnamese speakers will adapt the way of making offers that is common among English speakers since they are affected by their working environment.

More interestingly, the offer in form of Tag question, which is the least widely used (10%) in the ten books reviewed, did not occur in my study.

The findings of this study suggest that it is necessary for the Vietnamese teachers and learners of English to be aware that, when making an offer in English, the rule is that the speakers try to appear as tentative as possible. They should be aware that there are several ways to express offers in English but the most popular one is offers in form of Tentative questions beginning with *Shall/Would* as well. We should avoid using Tag questions and Elliptical questions to express offers in English since these forms sound strange when making offers in English. The findings of this study also suggest that it is necessary for the learners of Vietnamese to be aware that Imperative is the most frequently used in offer strategy in Vietnamese language. We should also avoid using expressions in Vietnamese such as Tag questions and Permission questions when making offers because these forms

do not exist in the Vietnamese language. Thus, learners of a foreign language have to be aware of these differences in order to reduce or avoid misunderstanding and inappropriateness in dealing with an essential part of everyday use, namely offer-making, which may lead to more successful cross-cultural communications.

However, a broader and deeper survey should be carried out to further establish the findings of the present study. The subjects of this study are English speakers and Vietnamese people working in offices and colleges, thus future research should include informants belonging to different social classes to see how they assess the social factors in the situations under study and how they express the offers in relation to these factors.

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LỜI MỜI TRONG TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT

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TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu này nhằm giúp những người nói tiếng Anh tìm ra các dạng lời mời tiếng Anh phổ biến, được áp dụng rộng rãi trong giao tiếp hàng ngày và cách sử dụng chúng một cách chính xác theo khoảng cách xã hội và mức độ các mối quan hệ của người bản ngữ nói tiếng Anh và người nói tiếng Việt trong các tình huống cụ thể. Bài nghiên cứu được thực hiện với hi vọng góp phần cải thiện tình trạng dạy và học tiếng Anh cũng như giúp người Việt học tiếng Anh có cơ hội làm quen với cách thức đưa ra lời mời bằng tiếng Anh một cách tự nhiên, để thành công trong văn hóa giao tiếp giữa hai ngôn ngữ.

Từ khóa: cấu trúc của lời mời, cách đưa ra lời mời, giao thoa văn hóa trong giao tiếp.