



The Association between Gender and Vietnamese Complaint Strategies

Thuy Ho Hoang Nguyen *

Lecturer, Hue University of Foreign Languages, Vietnam

Abstract

This study explores how gender is associated with the performance of Vietnamese complaint strategies. Seventy-two Vietnamese native speakers (36 males and 36 females) were involved in the study, and they were assigned the role of either a complainer or a complainee to role-play in nine situations of daily-life communication. Information about gender was provided in each of the nine situations. After each role-play, the participants explained and gave comments on their complaint performance. Both the participants' role-plays and their interpretations were audio-recorded. The collected data was then transcribed, coded, analysed and interpreted. The findings show that the inventory of eleven Vietnamese complaint strategies (Nguyen, 2016) is associated with the gender of the complainers and the complainees to varying extents. While the complainer's gender does not closely interact with the complaint performance, the complainee's gender shows an opposite result. Specifically, the Vietnamese are likely to make more complaints to people of the same sex than to people of the opposite sex. In addition, when complaining, both Vietnamese male and female complainers utilise more politeness strategies with female complainees than with male complainees.

Keywords: Vietnamese, complaint strategies, gender, face-threatening act, politeness

AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMPLAINT SPEECH ACT

A complaint is verbal, fully intentional and indicates "something bad happened" to the speaker (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 181). Other researchers such as Olshtain and Weinbach (1987, 1993), Kraft and Geluykens (2002), and Laforest (2002) also agree that a *complaint* is a communicatively demanding speech act, in which individual A expresses negative attitudes to individual B as a reaction to B's past or ongoing unsatisfactory behaviour, which affects A unfavourably. In this case, unsatisfactory behaviour refers to behaviour that violates social norms and fails to meet the expectations that A has for B (see Goffman, 1971). Complaining, therefore, is one way of reminding a person that these norms must not be transgressed (Laforest, 2002).

In addition, Trosborg (1995) defines a *complaint* as:

[...] an illocutionary act in which the speaker (the complainer) expresses his/her disapproval, negative feelings etc. towards the state of affairs described in the proposition (the complainable) and for which he/she holds the hearer (the complaine) responsible, either directly or indirectly (pp. 311-312).

This definition presents a full description of the essential factors contributing to the *complaint speech act*, including the participants, the propositional content and the interpersonal relation between the participants in the performance of the speech act. The definition of the *complaint speech act* evokes the notion that complaining is non-polite (Trosborg, 1995), thus posing a high degree of threat to the hearer's face (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993; Trosborg, 1995; Laforest, 2002; Kraft & Geluykens, 2002), and potentially creating subsequent opposition among the parties involved if they want to regain their social standing (Edmonson & House, 1981; Dersley & Wootton, 2001).

With *face* being defined as the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, a *complaint* may well be one of the most threatening of the face-threatening acts (FTAs), the acts that run against the face wants of either the speaker or the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). A *complaint* may therefore threaten the hearer's *positive face* and *negative face*, whereby *negative face* refers to the desire of a person to be "unimpeded" by others, while *positive face* denotes the right of a person to be respected by others (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62). Laforest (2002) only supports the notion that complaining threatens the hearer's positive face. He stresses that in complaining, the complainer's wishes do not correspond to the complaine's. Kraft and Geluykens (2002), on the other hand, support both notions. They specifically argue that if the *complaint* expresses a negative evaluation of the complaine's behaviour, it may threaten the complaine's *positive face* (e.g., "How careless you are!"); if the *complaint* implicitly or explicitly requires a rectification of the complaine's behaviour, it may then threaten the complaine's *negative face* (e.g., "Don't be late next time"). The complainer, therefore, should resort to different *politeness strategies* with a view to minimising the negative impact of his/her complaint on the complaine (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Trosborg, 1995; Kraft & Geluykens, 2002).

RELATED STUDIES ON THE COMPLAINT SPEECH ACT

The speech act of complaint has been investigated in a large body of research being divided into two types: interlanguage pragmatic research on complaints and research exploring complaints in one's own language. Many of these studies appeal to Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of face-saving as the theoretical framework. Typical interlanguage pragmatic studies on the complaint speech act were conducted by Olshtain and Weinbach (1987), Trenchs (1995), Trosborg (1995), Murphy and Neu (1996), Arent (1996), Tokano (1997), Kraft and Geluykens (2002), and Gershenson (2003). In addition to determining how non-native speakers comprehend and produce complaints in the target language, interlanguage pragmatic studies also place the focus on the discrepancy between native and non-native performances with regard to factors such as social distance, social/interpersonal status, and gender. In particular, the

studies by Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) and by Trosborg (1995) lay a foundation for other research in the field. With relation to the data collection methods, except for Trosborg (1995) who drew on role-plays to gather information, all of the other researchers made use of Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs).

While the interlanguage studies examined the complaint speech act by comparing the realization patterns of complaints between native language and non-native language, Dersley and Wootton (2000, 2001) and Laforest (2002) investigated complaints in their native language only. They also covered both complaints and complaint responses. One more critical feature in Dersley and Wootton's (2000, 2001) and Laforest's (2002) studies is that their data were taken from naturally occurring disputes.

Although many of the discussed studies have endeavoured to consider how the factors such as social distance, social status, and gender influence people's complaints, they described the influences of these variables, thus neglecting to adequately explain why there are such impacts. Moreover, these influences have not always been consistent across the studies. For example, social distance does not have any significant impact on the complainers' performance in Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987) study, whereas it heavily influences Trench's (1995), Trosborg's (1995), and Arent's (1996) findings. With regard to the gender factor, only Kraft and Geluykens (2002) have attempted to explore this feature and the research placed emphasis on the complainer's gender. How the complainees' gender affects the complainer's selection of strategies, therefore, has not yet been examined.

RESEARCH ON THE COMPLAINT SPEECH ACT IN VIETNAMESE

There has so far been one cross-linguistic study on Vietnamese complaining conducted by Nguyen (1998), with the data being obtained from DCTs. Nguyen's (1998) study explored complaints in Vietnamese and English, with a focus on the linguistic forms of complaints. According to Nguyen's findings, the common forms of Vietnamese complaints include a statement followed by a question, an exclamatory sentence or an imperative sentence with the modal particles such as *nhé*, *à*, *hở*. Nguyen's (1998) data reveal that Vietnamese complainers would expect the complainees to show sympathy or to make changes regarding the offensive situations. Nonetheless, Nguyen (1998) did not attempt to analyse the complaint speech act in terms of semantic formulae nor explored the pragmatic aspects of Vietnamese complaints.

In 2016, another researcher conducted a descriptive and interpretive study on Vietnamese complaint strategies (Nguyen, 2016). With the data being coded mainly based on Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987) and Trosborg's (1995) framework, a total of eleven complaint strategies were found in the Vietnamese data. Specifically, the complaint speech act was classified in terms of semantic formulae, which, as Cohen and Olshtain (1981) define, refer to words, phrases or sentences that meet particular semantic criteria. Moreover, in Nguyen's (2016) study, semantic formulae were employed to present the Vietnamese complaint speech act performance as a whole sequence. Within the inventory of eleven Vietnamese complaint strategies, some were

already presented by Olshtain and Weinbach (1987), Trosborg (1995) and some other previous researchers, while other formulae emerged from the analysis of the Vietnamese data, which are different in varying degrees from the available strategies enumerated in these sources. Nguyen's (2016) study investigated the complaint speech act in full speech sequences, that is, the complaint strategy consists not only of the complaint itself, but also other utterances and strategies which are developed to redress the offensive actions or to express increasing severity (Kraft & Geluykens, 2002). For example, request for repair, threat, and request for a change in complainee's future behaviour are treated as complaint strategies in Nguyen's (2016) study, although they are considered as directive acts in some other studies (e.g., Trosborg, 1995; Kraft & Geluykens, 2002).

Nguyen's (2016, pp. 243-245) inventory of eleven strategies was presented according to the increasing level of severity, that is, how they threaten the complainee's face. It is complicated to determine the face-threatening level within each complaint strategy; therefore, the ranking as shown in Table 1 below needs to be verified in more extensive research.

Table 1. The strategies used by Vietnamese to make complaints

Order	Strategies	Sub-strategies	Examples
1	Below level of reproach	Hints to show sympathy with the complainee	(1) <i>Đạo này anh sao vậy?</i> (What's the matter with you recently?) Complainee is usually late for work.
		Hints to attract the complainee's sympathy	(2) <i>Mẹ còn phải lo cho em út nữa.</i> (I am also busy looking after your younger brothers and sisters.) Complainee comes home quite late at night without asking for his mother's permission.
		Hints to show sympathy with the complainee and to attract the complainee's sympathy simultaneously	(3) <i>Tôi hiểu hoàn cảnh của anh nhưng quy chế công ty vẫn phải đảm bảo.</i> (I understand your situation but the regulations of the company must be followed.) Complainee is usually late for work.
2	Expression of annoyance or disapproval	Expression of annoyance	(4) <i>Cái máy sao mà trầy hết vậy?</i> (Why are there so many scratches on the mobile phone?) Complainee inadvertently damages his close friend's new and expensive mobile phone.
		Expression of ill consequences for the complainer	(5) <i>Tiền bạc không có nên em mệt mỏi quá.</i> (Being short of money makes me feel so tired.) Complainee has not returned the money to the complainer.
		Expression of ill consequences for the complainee	(6) <i>Đi kiểu đó nhớ có chuyện gì thì sao?</i> (What if you have any trouble when you come home that late?) Complainee comes home quite late at

			night without asking for his father's permission.
		Expression of ill consequences for both the complainer and the complainee	(7) <i>Tôi e là sự cộng tác của chúng ta khó mà thành công được.</i> (I am afraid that our cooperation is unlikely to be successful.) Complainee is the boss of a company and neither shows respect nor attempts to cooperate with the complainer, who is the representative of another company.
		Indirect accusation in which a third party related to the complainee is a potential agent of the offence	(8) <i>Có cho ai mượn xài không?</i> (Have you lent my mobile phone to someone else?) Complainee inadvertently damages his close friend's new and expensive mobile phone.
		Indirect accusation in which the complainee is a potential agent of the offence	(9) <i>Chuyện này tôi nhắc nhở anh nhiều lần rồi phải không?</i> (I have reminded you of this problem many times, haven't I?) Complainee is usually late for work.
3	Accusation	Direct accusation without evidence provided	(10) <i>Hôm nay cô lại trễ nữa.</i> (You are late again today.) Complainee is usually late for work.
		Direct accusation with evidence provided	(11) <i>Tôi gọi cá mà sao cô mang gà ra?</i> (I ordered fish, but why did you bring chicken?) Complainee brings the wrong dish for the customer (complainer).
4	Request for complainee's explanation for his/her behaviour		(12) <i>Cô giải thích cho tôi tại sao lại như vậy!</i> (Explain to me why it happened like that!) Complainee is usually late for work.
		Reluctant acceptance of complainee's explanation	(13) <i>Bây giờ thì anh em cũng phải thông cảm thôi.</i> (Anyway, I have to be tolerant with you because we are co-workers.) Complainee has not returned the money to the complainer.
5	Reaction to complainee's explanation for his/her behaviour	Indirect refusal of complainee's explanation	(14) <i>Lần nào cô cũng có lý do cả.</i> (You always have a reason for your being late.) Complainee is usually late for work.
		Direct refusal of complainee's explanation	(15) <i>Không thể được, không có chuyện thông cảm.</i> (No, I can't be tolerant with you at all.) Complainee is usually late for work.
6	Mockery		(16) <i>Cô xem đồng hồ giúp tôi bây giờ mấy giờ rồi?</i> (Could you tell me what time it is now?) Complainee is usually late for work.
		Modified blame	(17) <i>Máy mượn thì phải giữ gìn chứ.</i> (You should have taken more care of my mobile phone (because you borrowed it.) Complainee inadvertently damages his close friend's new and expensive mobile phone.
7	Blame	Explicit blame of the complainee's behaviour	(18) <i>Anh thấy chuyện trễ như vậy là không tốt.</i> (I think that being late in returning

			the money is not good.) Complainee has not returned the money to the complainer.
		Explicit blame of the complainee as a person	(19) <i>Tôi không nói với anh nữa, anh bất lịch sự lắm.</i> (I'm not talking to you any more, you're so impolite.) Complainee keeps pushing past the complainer and tries to get a ticket before the complainer.
8	Request for repair	Indirect request for repair	(20) <i>Thế thì bao giờ em có thể giúp anh?</i> (So when can you help me?) Complainee has not returned the money to the complainer.
		Direct request for repair	(21) <i>Dạ, có gì thầy giảm bớt cho bọn em chứ nhiều quá.</i> (Could you cut down the amount of the assignment for us because it is too much?) Complainer is given too many assignments to do during a short holiday.
9	Reaction to complainee's offer to repair	Indirect refusal of complainee's offer to repair	(22) <i>Bạn bè ai lại làm thế?</i> (How can I do that if you are my friend?) Complainee suggests paying for the damage she made to her friend's phone cover.
		Direct refusal of complainee's offer to repair	(23) <i>Đời nào tao để mày làm vậy, khó chịu quá!</i> (I can never accept your offer. It makes me feel so uncomfortable.) Complainee suggests paying for the damage she made to her friend's phone cover.
10	Threat	Threat with deferred consequences	(24) <i>Còn một lần nữa là tao đem hết quần áo ra đường nghe chưa.</i> (I will throw all your clothes out to the street if you come home late next time.) Complainee comes home quite late at night without asking for his mother's permission.
		Threat with immediate consequences	(25) <i>Anh mà không tôn trọng tôi chắc là tôi cũng xin về.</i> (If you don't respect me, perhaps I will leave now). Complainee is the boss of a company and neither shows respect nor attempts to cooperate with the complainer, who is the representative of another company.
11	Request for a change in complainee's future behaviour		(26) <i>Lần sau nhớ sửa chữa, không được tái phạm nữa.</i> (You should correct your mistake, and should not repeat the mistake.) Complainer wants the complainee to stop being late for work.

In addition to the inventory of Vietnamese complaint strategies above, Nguyen (2016) found that the Vietnamese have the greatest preference for the least face-threatening strategies (e.g., strategies 1, 2, 3); they also show greater preference for combining non-

open face-threatening strategies with open face-threatening in order to soften the complaints than combining two open face-threatening strategies in order to intensify the complaints. These findings are consistent in that Vietnamese complaining is a complex speech act with multifaceted face-threatening levels and that the Vietnamese, when complaining, tend to be more other-face-oriented than self-face-oriented, which reflects their strong desire to maintain a harmonious relationship with other people even in conflict situations.

Nguyen's (2016) inventory of eleven Vietnamese complaint strategies has been confirmed to be closely associated with the interpersonal/ social status of the complainers and complainees, as indicated by Nguyen (2017). Specifically, people with a higher position made a dramatically larger number of complaint strategies than those with an equal or lower position. Moreover, concerning the complaint strategies being classified in terms of face-threatening level, people with lower status utilised non-open face-threatening strategies much more frequently and employed open face-threatening strategies much less frequently than those with higher or equal status.

It is obvious that the available research on complaints focused on a few widely spoken languages such as English, French, and Russian; only a few studies examined less popular languages like Hebrew and Vietnamese. The literature also demonstrates that the complaint speech act has been the focus of a number of interlanguage pragmatic studies; there is a limitation on studies which concentrate on investigating complaints in one's own native language. Research on Vietnamese complaints has been conducted though with much less frequency; what is more, the emphasis on the pragmatic aspects has been on interpersonal/ social status, but gender. The current paper, therefore, aims to present how gender is associated with the Vietnamese complaint strategies already found by Nguyen (2016).

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

Seventy-two Vietnamese native speakers (36 males and 36 females) participated in the research. The participants worked in different professions, and ranged in age from 21 to 55. They were approached by the investigator and were recruited on a voluntary basis.

Data collection methods

Two data collection methods were employed, including open role-plays and verbal report interviews. A set of nine situations of daily-life communication was designed and translated into Vietnamese for participants to role-play according to their assigned role of a complainer or a complaine. To control the gender variable, each situation was played by eight pairs: two pairs of male-male, two of male-female, two of female-male, and two of female-female, where in each case the complainer is the first member of the pair. One participant would play two roles: being the complainer in one situation and the complaine in another situation. Right after each role-play, the participant who was the complainer would listen to the conversation and then comment on his/her

complaint strategies. Both the participants' role-plays and comments were audio-recorded. The 72 participants provided a total of 72 conversations with a corpus of 532 complaints and 72 samples of interpretation.

Data analysis methods

Descriptive and interpretive methods were employed in the analysis of the data of the present study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the distribution of Vietnamese complaint strategies (Nguyen, 2016) by gender. We employed this method by counting the total number of complaint strategies and the frequency of each strategy used by all the participants or by each group of participants. Interpretive methods were employed to analyse the contents of the complaints as well as the complainer's comments on their own complaints. Since there were in total eleven complaint strategies in Vietnamese, the data scattered, making several cells of the contingency table (e.g., Table 3 and Table 5) contain less than five cases. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000), this cannot place the confidence in the results if a Chi-square test is used. Therefore, we deliberately did not use Chi-square for two-way designs in this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The association between gender and Vietnamese complaint strategies

The association between gender and Vietnamese complaint strategies was considered in terms of both the complainer's gender and the complaine'e's gender. The results generally indicate that the Vietnamese complaint behaviour is more associated with the complaine'e's gender than with the complainer's gender.

Table 2. Distribution of Vietnamese complaint strategies by complainer's gender (1)

	Male complainers (N=36)	Female complainers (N=36)	Total
Number of complaints	280	252	532
Percentage	52.6	47.4	100

Table 2 reveals that the difference in the number of complaints used by Vietnamese males and Vietnamese females is not large. Male complainers utilised 280 complaint strategies (52.6%), whereas female complainers employed a slightly fewer number of complaints, 252 complaints, accounting for 47.4%. The data presented in Table 3 further clarify the slight differences in the complaint performance by Vietnamese males and females. The specific names for strategies 1 to 11 correspond to those in Table 1 and these strategies are also presented in an increasing level of severity.

Table 3. Distribution of Vietnamese complaint strategies by complainer's gender (2)

Strategy	Male complainers (N=36)		Female complainers (N=36)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Strategy 1	34	12.1	41	16.3
Strategy 2	50	17.9	44	17.5
Strategy 3	60	21.4	47	18.7

Strategy 4	12	4.3	18	7.1
Strategy 5	15	5.4	12	4.8
Strategy 6	17	6.1	14	5.6
Strategy 7	20	7.1	19	7.5
Strategy 8	41	14.6	31	12.3
Strategy 9	4	1.4	4	1.6
Strategy 10	17	6.1	14	5.6
Strategy 11	10	3.6	8	3.2
Total	280	100	252	100

Table 3 shows that both Vietnamese male and female complainers had the strongest preference for strategy 3 (accusation), but with somewhat different percentages (21.4% and 18.7%, respectively). Their second most preferred strategy is also the same: strategy 2 (expression of annoyance or disapproval: 17.9% and 17.5%, respectively).

Nonetheless, while male complainers preferred strategy 8 (request for repair) to strategy 1 (below level of reproach), female complainers showed an opposite preference. Specifically, the percentages that male complainers and female complainers had for strategy 1 were 12.1% and 16.3%, respectively, whereas those for strategy 8 were 14.6% and 12.3%, respectively. These findings indicate that females are somehow more tactful than males in their complaints (Holmes, 1995; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Additionally, the minor difference in Vietnamese male and female complainers' performance also occurs to the other seven strategies. For strategy 4 (request for complaine'e's explanation), strategy 7 (blame), and strategy 9 (reaction to complaine'e's offer to repair), male complainers utilised slightly fewer strategies than female complainers (4.3%, 7.1%, and 1.4% compared to 7.1%, 7.5%, and 1.6%, respectively). However, for strategy 5 (reaction to complaine'e's explanation), strategy 6 (mockery), strategy 10 (reaction to complaine'e's offer to repair), and strategy 11 (threat), male complainers had somewhat more complaint strategies than their female counterparts (5.4%, 6.1%, 6.1%, and 3.6% compared to 4.8%, 5.6%, 5.6%, and 3.2%, respectively).

In summary, the distribution of Vietnamese complaint strategies in terms of the complainer's gender does not offer very large differences. On the whole, Vietnamese males tend to complain slightly more than Vietnamese females, but their utilisation of the tactful strategy (strategy 1) is less frequent than with their female counterparts. Nonetheless, the discussion above has not always enabled us to explain these differences consistently with relation to degree of severity. This is also the dilemma reported by Kraft and Geluykens (2002) in their study of complaining in French L1 and L2.

Table 4. Distribution of Vietnamese complaint strategies by complaine'e's gender (1)

	Male Complainers (N=36)		Female Complainers (N=36)		Total
	Male Complainees (N= 18)	Female Complainees (N= 18)	Male Complainees (N= 18)	Female Complainees (N= 18)	
Number of complaints	144	136	124	128	532

Percentage	27.1	25.5	23.3	24.1	100
------------	------	------	------	------	-----

As stated above, each situation was played by eight pairs: two pairs of male-male, two of male-female, two of female-male, and two of female-female, where in each case the complainer is the first member of the pair. This assignment of roles to participants covers 27.1% of the complaints produced by male-male pairs, 25.5% by male-female pairs, 23.3% by female-male pairs, and 24.1% by female-female pairs. A first glance at this finding suggests that the Vietnamese tend to complain slightly more to people of the same sex than to people of the opposite sex. In other words, not only do females have more ground to make complaints with each other (Boxer, 1993), but males also seem to find it easier to complain to males.

A closer look at Table 5 yields much more important results in the Vietnamese complaint performance in relation to the complainees' gender. The specific names for strategies 1 to 11 in Table 5 correspond to those in Table 1 and these strategies are also presented in an increasing level of severity.

Table 5. Distribution of Vietnamese complaint strategies by complainees' gender (2)

	Male Complainers (N=36)				Female Complainers (N=36)			
	Male Complainees (N= 18)		Female Complainees (N= 18)		Male Complainees (N= 18)		Female Complainees (N= 18)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strategy 1	12	8.3	22	16.2	18	14.5	23	18.0
Strategy 2	16	11.1	34	25.0	13	10.5	31	24.2
Strategy 3	41	28.4	19	13.9	28	22.6	19	14.8
Strategy 4	4	2.8	8	5.9	10	8.1	8	6.3
Strategy 5	10	6.9	5	3.7	6	4.8	6	4.7
Strategy 6	7	4.9	10	7.4	7	5.7	7	5.5
Strategy 7	9	6.3	11	8.1	9	7.3	10	7.8
Strategy 8	29	20.1	12	8.8	21	16.9	10	7.8
Strategy 9	3	2.1	1	0.7	2	1.6	2	1.6
Strategy 10	7	4.9	10	7.4	7	5.6	7	5.4
Strategy 11	6	4.2	4	2.9	3	2.4	5	3.9
Total	144	100	136	100	124	100	128	100

When complaining to a male complainees, male complainers did not use non-open face-threatening strategies (strategy 1: below level of reproach, and strategy 2: expression of annoyance or disapproval) as frequently as when complaining to a female complainees (8.3% and 11.1% compared to 16.2% and 25.0%, respectively). On the contrary, they tend to employ open face-threatening strategies such as strategy 3 (accusation) and strategy 8 (request for repair) more regularly with a male counterpart than with a female counterpart (28.4% and 20.1% compared to 13.9% and 8.8%, respectively).

That male complainers showed more preference for severe strategies suggests that men aim to convey and obtain information by being direct and focusing on the content of the talk (Holmes, 1995). Moreover, as the male participants admitted, they found it easier to use these strategies in the male-male relationship because they understand that their male counterparts also pay more attention to what the information is than how the

information is transmitted. Additionally, according to the participants' explanation, male complainers were also aware that they should be polite to their female counterparts because being polite to a female is evaluated as being elegant and well-educated. Consequently, when the complainee is a female, male complainers tended to reduce the number of open-face threatening strategies (e.g., strategy 3: accusation, and strategy 8: request for repair) and to increase the number of the non-open face-threatening strategies (e.g., strategy 1: below level of reproach, and strategy 2: expression of annoyance or disapproval). For example, the following situation describes how a man complained about his new mobile phone being damaged. When he talked to a male counterpart, he utilised the *accusation* strategy and provided evidence to accuse the complainee right at the beginning (27). Nonetheless, when his interlocutor was a female, he expressed a hint and then showed his annoyance (28):

(27) Mà làm gì mà máy tao trầy hết vậy?

You do what but machine me scratch all interrogative-particle?

What did you do with my mobile phone? It has so many scratches now.

(28) Điện-thoại người-ta mới mua mà trầy hết rồi.

Phone I just buy but scratch all already.

I have just purchased this mobile phone, but it is scratched all over now.

Unlike Vietnamese males, Vietnamese females tended to utilise more politeness strategies with the same-sex complainees and fewer politeness strategies with the opposite-sex complainees. In other words, when complaining, both Vietnamese male and female complainers utilised more politeness strategies with female complainees than with male complainees. Specifically, female interlocutors inspired female complainers to use strategy 1 (below level of reproach) and strategy 2 (expression of annoyance or disapproval) more frequently than male interlocutors did (18.0% and 24.2% compared to 14.5% and 10.5%, respectively). In contrast, the female complainers' preference for strategy 3 (accusation) and strategy 8 (request for repair) was much lower when they complained to a female than when they complained to a male (14.8% and 7.8% compared to 22.6% and 16.9%, respectively).

The participants' interpretations also help to explain the phenomena in relation to female complaint behaviour. Even though Vietnamese females found it easier to complain to their female counterparts than to their male counterparts, they still made use of more tactful strategies (e.g., strategy 1 and strategy 2) when complaining to a female. The reason is that Vietnamese females are particularly attentive to self-face saving, thus they know that their female interlocutors also expect the same courtesy in return. As a result, more employment of strategies 1 and 2 is an effective way to reduce the face threat to the complainee, which then contributes to the establishment and negotiation of relationships among women (Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 1995). Moreover, according to female participants' reports, they were conscious that men pay more

attention to information in talks. Hence, females were likely to appeal to direct strategies (e.g., strategy 3 and strategy 8) when talking to men.

Additionally, female complainers sometimes tried some politeness strategies to downgrade the severity in the complaints made to men, since men are also attentive to their own social status (Holmes, 1995). For example, the female in the situation below complained to a colleague about his being late for returning the money to her. In her complaint sequence, she made use of the “accusation” strategy and “request for repair” strategy. To preserve the complainees’ face, the female complainer intentionally employed the hint (29) and reduced the face-threatening level in the accusation and the request by making use of indirect accusation (30) and indirect request for repair (31):

(29) Em thấy thời-gian trôi-qua lâu rồi,

I see time pass long already,

Time flies so quickly,

(30) mà chẳng nghe anh nói gì.

but not hear you (male) say what.

but you haven’t said anything.

(31) Anh nên cho em một cuộc-hẹn chắc-chắn đi.

You should give me one appointment sure particle.

You should give me a fixed appointment.

(i.e., You should let me know when you would return the money to me.)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while the complainer’s gender is not closely associated with Vietnamese complaint behaviour, the complainees’ gender reveals a much more obvious result. The Vietnamese have a tendency to complain more to people of the same sex than to people of the opposite sex. In other words, Vietnamese males and females produce more complaints when their interlocutors are males and females, respectively. Additionally, male complainers employ more open face-threatening strategies (e.g., Accusation and Request for repair) and fewer non-open face-threatening strategies (e.g., Below level of reproach and Expression of annoyance or disapproval) when complaining to a male than when complaining to a female, that is, male complainers tend to be more polite to their opposite-sex complainees than to their same-sex complainees. Female complainers, on the other hand, tend to be more polite to their same-sex complainees than to their opposite-sex complainees. In fact, female complainers make use of more non-open face-threatening strategies (e.g., Below level of reproach and Expression of annoyance or disapproval) and fewer open face-threatening strategies (e.g., Accusation and Request for repair) when complaining to a female than when complaining to a male.

These differences are due to how the Vietnamese perceive what males and females expect in conversations. People of both sexes perceive that men are more direct and pay more attention to the content of the information than to how the information is uttered, whereas women are much more attentive to the way the information is produced. The explanation for the association between of the complainees' gender and the Vietnamese complaint performance also indicates that both Vietnamese males and females are conscious of their interlocutor's desires in communication. Vietnamese complainers, despite their gender, tend to be more other-face-oriented even in conflict situations.

REFERENCES

- Arent, R. (1996). Sociopragmatic decisions regarding complaints by Chinese learners and NSs of American English. *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1, 125-147.
- Boxer, D. (1993). Complaining and commiserating: Exploring gender issues. *Text*, 13(3), 371-395.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In E. N. Goody (Ed.), *Questions and politeness* (pp. 56-289). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, A. D., & Olshtain, E. (1981). Developing a measure of sociocultural competence: The case of apology. *Language Learning*, 31, 113-134.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Dersley, I., & Wootton, A. (2000). Complaint sequences within antagonistic arguments. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 33(4), 375-406.
- Dersley, I., & Wootton, A. (2001). In the heat of the sequence: Interactional features preceding walkouts from argumentative talk. *Language in Society*, 30(4), 611-638.
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003). *Language and gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Edmonson, W. J., & House, J. (1981). *Let's talk and talk about it*. Munchen: Urban and Schwarzenberg.
- Gershenson, O. (2003). Misunderstanding between Israelis and Soviet immigrants: Linguistic and cultural factors. *Multilingua*, 22(3), 275-290.
- Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in public: Micro-studies of the public order*. New York.
- Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, men and politeness*. London: Longman.
- Kraft, B., & Geluykens, R. (2002). Complaining in French L1 and L2: A cross-linguistic investigation. *EUROSLA Yearbook*, 2, 227-242.
- Laforest, M. (2002). Scene of family life: Complaining in everyday conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34, 1595-1620.

- Murphy, B., & Neu, J. (1996). My grade's too low: The speech act set of complaining. In M. Gass & J. Neu (Eds.), *Speech acts across cultures: Challenges to communication in a second language* (pp. 191-215). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Nguyen, H. H. T. (2016). An investigation into Vietnamese complaint strategies. In *International Conference Proceedings on Action Research in Language Education* (pp. 240-252). Hue University of Foreign Languages.
- Nguyen, H. H. T. (2017). Interpersonal/ social status and Vietnamese complaint performance. In *National Conference Proceedings on Interdisciplinary Research on Language and Language Teaching*. Hue University of Foreign Languages.
- Nguyen, V. T. (1998). *Complaints in English and Vietnamese in terms of what has been done and what has not been done*. Vietnam National University, Hanoi.
- Olshtain, E., & Weinbach, L. (1987). Complaints: A study of speech act behaviour among native and nonnative speakers of Hebrew. In J. Verschueren & M. Bertuccelli-Papi (Eds.), *The pragmatic perspective* (pp. 195-205). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Olshtain, E., & Weinbach, L. (1993). Interlanguage features of the speech act of complaining. In G. Kasper & S. Blum-Kulka (Eds.), *Interlanguage pragmatics* (pp. 108-122). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tannen, D. (1990). *You just don't understand: Men and women in conversation*. New York: William Morrow & Company.
- Tokano, Y. (1997). How people complain: A comparison of the speech act of complaining among Japanese and American students. *Sophia Linguistica*, 41, 247-264.
- Trenchs, M. (1995). Pragmatic strategies in Catalan and English complaints: A comparative study of native and EFL speakers. *Language Quarterly*, 33(3-4), 160-182.
- Trosborg, A. (1995). *Interlanguage pragmatics: Requests, complaints and apologies*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1991). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantic of human interaction*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.