
Title Acquisition of request modifiers in Vietnamese as a second language
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Source *Journal of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society (JSEALS)*, 7, 31-51
Published by Asia-Pacific Linguistics

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ACQUISITION OF REQUEST MODIFIERS IN VIETNAMESE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This study examines the acquisition of request modifiers by learners of L2 Vietnamese, with a view to expanding the range of target languages under inquiry and contributing to the field of L2 pragmatics acquisition. Data were collected from nine Vietnamese native speakers and 18 learners from various language backgrounds, using open role-plays in six scenarios with differing social power and imposition levels. An analysis was made of the learners' use of request modifiers in relation to their proficiency levels in Vietnamese and their lengths of residency in the target language environment. Findings supported claims in the literature that learning pragmatics is particularly challenging for low-proficiency learners, and provided some evidence of pragmatic development in the case of high-proficiency learners who had stayed in the target language culture for an extended period.

Key words: request modifiers, second language acquisition, pragmatic competence

ISO 639-3 language codes: vie.

1. Introduction

The present study examines the effects of proficiency and length of residence in the target language (TL) environment on the acquisition of request modifiers by a group of learners of Vietnamese as a second language (L2) with different language learning profiles. The question that is addressed in the present study is important in at least three ways: (1) it analyses two variables that are of interest to the field of L2 pragmatic development (see Kasper and Rose, 2002; Schauer, 2009); (2) it focuses on an understudied L2; and (3) it investigates a diverse group of L2 learner population that are under-represented in the literature. First, as opposed to a bulk of studies examining L2 pragmatic performance, developmental issues have received comparatively little attention (see Bardovi-Harlig, 2010). Further, although there are quite a number of recent studies that have examined the impact of the study abroad context on the development of L2 pragmatic abilities, relatively few studies have actually addressed the effects of different lengths of stay (see Schauer, 2009 for a full review). Given its important implication for language teaching, this question is worth further investigations. The rationale for the present study also lies in the relative shortage of studies on requests in an Asian language as a L2 (e.g. Byon, 2004; Hassall, 2001; 2003; Ishihara & Tarone 2009; Nguyen & Basturkmen, 2013) as opposed to the substantial body of research on requests in an Asian language as a native language (e.g. Byon, 2006; Nguyen & Ho, 2013; Rue & Zhang, 2008; Upadhyay, 2003) and requests in an European language as a L2 (e.g. Hendriks, 2008; Otçu & Zeyrek, 2008; Shively, 2011; Woodfield, 2008). Particularly, request modifiers in Vietnamese as a L2 have not yet been reported in any previous studies. By looking at this under-researched language, we aim to expand the range of languages under inquiry and contribute to the existing interlanguage pragmatic literature. In addition, this study focuses on an understudied population of L2 learners in the field. Most research on L2 learners who spend time abroad focuses on university-age students who go abroad for one semester or one academic year to study (see Schauer, 2009 for a review). The current study includes not only students in a study abroad program, but also expatriates who need to learn the L2 for communication in the workplace. They constitute a learner sample with much more diverse backgrounds that has not been typically investigated in the literature.

Before we review the relevant literature on L2 pragmatic development, particularly in the study abroad context, it is helpful to define important terms and concepts. A request is a directive act performed to get the hearer to do something that is to the speaker's benefit and at the cost of the hearer (Searle 1969). Modifiers are defined as linguistic devices that are employed to reduce the offence of a face-threatening act (see Brown and Levinson, 1987). In this way modifiers are important for expressing "addressee-oriented meaning" and maintaining good social relationships (Coates, 1987: 120-121). Modifiers are often categorized into two broad groups according to their relative locations within the speech act. Internal modifiers occur within and make up an integral part of the head act while external modifiers occur in the immediate linguistic context of the head act as supportive moves. Internal modifiers can be of two types. Syntactic downgraders include conditional structures, negation, or use of past tenses with present time reference. Lexico-phasal downgraders include such linguistic means as politeness markers, hedges, and understaters (see Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, 1989).

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), since requests may pose a threat to the hearer's negative face, i.e. the freedom of action and freedom from imposition, the speaker has to mitigate the illocutionary force of his or her utterance to protect the hearer's autonomy. In European languages modifiers commonly used for this purpose may include syntactic modification such as negative or modal structures as distancing elements and hedging devices (see Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984). Nonetheless, Brown and Levinson's concept of negative face has not been supported by data from non-European languages and cultures that lack an individualistic orientation (e.g. Gu, 1990; Ide 1989; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto 1988; Nguyen & Ho, 2013; Vu, 1997, 1999; Wierzbicka, 1985). For instance, several researchers have argued that given the preference for involvement and sincerity over personal distance in Vietnamese culture, negative face seems to be of little importance and does not adequately account for verbal interaction by Vietnamese speakers. Face-saving may not also be the main driving factor that explains an individual's social behaviour in this culture where emphasis is placed more on marking social standing in relation to others in the community (Nguyen & Ho, 2013; N. Pham, 2008; Vu, 1997, 1999). In a recent study we found that request modifiers are used not so much to save negative face as to show conformity to social expectations (Nguyen & Ho, 2013). In particular, since Vietnamese culture underscores both hierarchical social structure and social harmony, address terms, honorifics and modal particles serve as important mitigating devices. On the other hand, distancing elements such as disarms and imposition minimizers were scarcely used. Indeed, Vu (1997, 1999) has argued that a politeness theory that may effectively account for verbal behaviour in Vietnamese must consider how language is used to both index social relationships (i.e. a normative view of politeness) and achieve the interlocutors' communicative goal in the specific speech event (i.e. a strategic view of politeness) (see Hill et al. 1986 for a similar discussion of discernment and volition in Japanese culture).

Previous studies have shown that the appropriate use of speech act modifiers in the L2 may be daunting to learners regardless of their proficiency levels and first language (L1) backgrounds. Compared to native speakers (NS), they tend to underuse internal modifiers (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Hassall, 2001; Hendriks, 2008; House & Kasper, 1987; Kasper, 1981; 1982; Nguyen, 2008; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Otçu & Zeyrek, 2006; Rintell, 1981; Trosborg, 1995; Woodfield, 2008). According to Hassall (2001), internal modifiers tend to contribute only minimal propositional meaning to the speech act; hence, they are less likely to be attended to by learners. Adding internal modifiers may also increase the structural complexity of the speech act, thus requiring more processing effort on the part of learners (Hassall, 2001; Nguyen, 2008). This may cause considerable difficulty to lower proficiency learners who do not develop a complete control over complex structures.

Several studies have also shown that high proficiency learners tend to overuse external modifiers, thus producing verbose speech acts (Blum-Kulka, 1991; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Cenoz & Valencia, 1996; Edmondson & House, 1991; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001; House, 1988; House & Kasper, 1987; Warga, 2004; Yu, 1999) while others found the contrary (Hill, 1997; Hutz, 2006; Nguyen, 2008; Otçu & Zeyrek, 2008; Trosborg, 1995). Interestingly, this verbosity is more evident in high-intermediate learners than in advanced learners (Ellis, 2008). Various explanations for this phenomenon have been attempted. House and Kasper (1987: 1283) consider this as a sign of learners reacting "sensitively to face-threatening situations" due to "being unsure of their linguistic and social competence" in English. Ellis (2008), on the other hand, assumes that verbosity may either reflect a desire on the part of learners to display their linguistic competence as now an adequate proficiency level makes it possible for them to do so, or their desire to mark a foreigner role in certain situations. Compared to internal modifiers, external modifiers carry more explicit propositional meaning and thus are more noticeable to learners. They also do not form an integral part of the

speech act but are planned in separate constituents to the speech act, thus causing less processing difficulty and are more available for use (Hassall, 2001).

Concerning pragmatic development, research has found that higher proficiency learners tend to mitigate their requests more frequently as compared to their lower proficiency peers thanks to a greater degree of control over the L2 (Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Hill, 1997; Otçu & Zeyrek, 2006; 2008; Rose, 2000; Trosborg, 1995; Warga, 2004). For example, Felix-Brasdefer (2007) found that advanced learners of Spanish displayed a more native-like use of conditional forms to internally modify their requests than their intermediate and beginner counterparts. Similar findings were reported in Otçu & Zeyrek (2006) who found that higher proficiency Turkish learners of English employed internal modifiers more frequently than the lower proficiency group. A steady increase in the use of external modifiers by higher proficiency Austrian learners of French as compared to the less proficient learners was also found in Warga (2004), mirroring the findings of Hill (1997) and Rose (2000).

As learners become more proficient in the L2, they also tend to improve their use of lexico-phrasal modifiers. Otçu and Zeyrek (2008) examined requests by Turkish lower intermediate and upper intermediate learners of English. They found a greater use of lexico-phrasal downgraders among the more proficient learners, similarly to the NSs. Syntactic modifiers, on the other hand, may be acquired later than lexico-phrasal modifiers. For example, Woodfield (2008) found that her German learners of English employed syntactic means considerably less frequently than lexical means when modifying their requests. The fact that lexicalized modifiers were abundant in the learners' data whereas grammaticalised modifiers were rare suggests that the latter might be more difficult to acquire. These findings are congruent with findings from studies on other speech acts such as disagreements (Salsbury, 2000; Salsbury & Bardovi-Harlig, 2000) and criticism (Nguyen, 2008). Overall, these studies support Meisel, Clahsen and Pienemann's (1981) Complexification Hypothesis, which holds that the order of acquisition of L2 forms is dependent on their structural complexity and the processing demands involved. Since syntactically complex structures are more cognitively demanding, they are usually acquired later than simpler structures, which require a minimum of processing capacity.

Other studies suggest that pragmatic development may not always be linear towards the native speaker norms. Otçu and Zeyrek (2008) found that their lower intermediate learners approximated NS use of external modifiers more closely than the upper intermediate group. These findings are supported by those of studies on other speech acts. For example, Nguyen (2008) found a higher frequency of use of external modifiers for criticism by intermediate learners, which brought them closer to the target group than their high beginning and advanced peers. Hassall (2006), observing his own use of leave-taking formulas in Indonesian, found that his use of the strategy *permisi* ("Excuse me!") and *dulu statement* changed non-linearly as his knowledge of Indonesian pragmatics was reconstructed. For instance, his initial avoidance of *dulu* was replaced by his infrequent use of this feature after two weeks in the TL environment, followed by subsequent avoidance in the following 4 weeks and finally by more increasing use.

Recently, a growing number of studies have focused on the impact of the sojourn in the TL community on learners' pragmatic ability (Barron, 2003; 2006; Bataller, 2010; Bella, 2012; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Felix-Brasdefer, 2004; Hassall, 2006; Schauer, 2004; 2007; 2008; 2009; Shively, 2011). Findings of these studies have shown that learners generally become more aware of native pragmatic norms over their course of sojourn. Barron (2003; 2006) reported an increased use of request modifiers for 33 Irish learners of German after studying for one year in Germany. Particularly, they employed a greater number of both syntactic and lexico-phrasal downgraders. Although some aspects of their use of mitigation still fell short of native-speaker competence, this study shows that the study abroad program had positive impacts on learners' pragmatic development. Cohen and Shively (2007) examined the effects of speech act strategy instruction on study-abroad students who spent one semester in a Spanish or French speaking community. It was found that although the instructed learners still lagged behind the NSs in their frequency of use of "query preparatory with verbal downgrading," they demonstrated an increased awareness of mitigating requests over time. Similar findings were reported in Schauer (2007; 2009) who found that study-abroad German learners of English developed a much broader repertoire of downgraders as compared to at-home learners.

One of the determinants of learners' pragmatic improvement is the length of residence in the TL environment (Barron, 2003; 2006; Felix-Brasdefer, 2004; Schauer, 2004; 2006). In Barron's studies (2003, 2006), some pragmatic elements were not acquired until very late in the learners' course of study abroad, suggesting that pragmatic awareness increased with time spent in the host country. Schauer (2004) was among the few studies that have directly measured the effects of length of stay. She observed the pragmatic

development of German learners of English over a course of one academic year at a British university. Comparing data collected shortly after the learners' arrival, in the middle of their stay and shortly before they returned home, Schauer found a link between the learners' acquisitional sequence of downgraders and their lengths of stay in the TL community. Felix-Brasdefer (2004) compared four groups of learners of Spanish with lengths of residence in the target context varying from one to 30 months. His study revealed that an approximation to NS pragmatic norms could only be achieved after a minimum of 9 months spent in the host community. These findings are supported by Schauer (2006) who found that after 9 months in Great Britain, her learners had achieved the same error recognition scores for pragmatic infelicities as the NSs.

A study by Bella (2012), however, raised the question of the relative effects of length of residence and intensity of interaction with the NS. Bella compared two groups of advanced learners of Greek: one with extended length of residence in the L2 environment but limited opportunities for interaction with NS and one with more frequent opportunities for interaction but limited length of residence. The results showed that the latter group exhibited a more native-like behavior with regards to external modification and some aspects of internal modification of requests. This study suggests that the relative effects of quantity and quality of exposure on pragmatic development remain a question for further investigation (also see Kasper & Rose, 2002 for similar discussion).

Overall, the few available studies to date have indicated that although learners' pragmatic competence may improve after a relatively short time in the study-abroad country (e.g. after 3 months of sojourn as reported in Hassall, 2006), a sojourn of at least 9 months is critical for achieving considerable improvement. Given the limited evidence, however, this question deserves future research attention.

Informed by the literature on the acquisition of L2 request modifiers above, this study addresses the three following research questions:

- In what way do the learners differ from the NSs in their use of request modifiers?
- What effect does proficiency have on the learners' use of request modifiers?
- What effect does length of stay have on the learners' use of request modifiers?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

Eighteen learners of L2 Vietnamese at low and high proficiency levels participated in this study. At the time of data collection, the learners were taking Vietnamese courses in language schools in Hanoi. They were randomly selected from a larger pool of learners who responded to the researchers' advertisement for recruitment of research participants. The low proficiency group (hereafter referred to as "Low Group") comprised eight learners who were learning Vietnamese at the pre-intermediate and intermediate levels. The high proficiency group (hereafter referred to as "High Group") included 10 learners who were enrolled in the upper-intermediate and advanced courses of Vietnamese. Since there were no standardized tests of Vietnamese as L2, the learners' proficiency levels were determined on the basis of the levels of the courses of Vietnamese they were undertaking and by their self-ratings. Eleven of the learners were female and seven were male, whose ages ranged from 19 to 44.

The learners came from various first language (L1) backgrounds, with five Polish NSs, three Russian NSs, one French NS, one Laotian NS, four NSs of different dialects of Chinese and four NSs of different varieties of English. The learners varied greatly in their lengths of study of Vietnamese. Two had been learning Vietnamese for less than one year, 11 had been learning the language between one and three years, and five had been learning it from three years onward. The learners' lengths of residence in Vietnam also varied greatly, since they came with different purposes. Eight of them were language exchange students who were in the country for a short stay, ranging between six and eight months, to enhance their language skills. On the other hand, three of them had been living in Vietnam for a relatively extended period, ranging between three and four years, for tertiary education. Seven came to work with their lengths of stay varying between two years and 11 years.

Table 1: Background information on the learner participants

Group		High proficiency	Low proficiency	Total
Gender	M	3	4	7
	F	7	4	11
Age	19-25	6	4	10
	26-30	1	2	3
	Over 30	3	2	5
Length of study	Between 6 months and 1 year	0	2	2
	Between 1 and 3 years	8	3	11
	Over 3 years	2	3	5
Length of stay	Short stay (under 1 year)	3	5	8
	Long stay (over 1 year)	7	3	10

The learners' bio-data revealed that although the learners were not living with Vietnamese families or friends, many of them had had substantial exposure to Vietnamese use outside the classroom, mostly via interaction with Vietnamese NS friends and mass media such as Vietnamese TV programs and newspapers. Informal communication with the learners revealed that many of them were not explicitly taught how Vietnamese NSs make requests in different scenarios. Table 1 presents general bio-data of the learners in aggregate while Table 2 (overleaf) presents details about individual learners' lengths of residence and proficiency levels. Eight learners who had been staying in the host country between six and twelve months were streamed into the 'Short-stay' group and 10 who had been staying from two years and above were placed into the 'Long-stay' group. It should be noted, however, that length of stay overlaps to some extent with proficiency. Therefore, the results reported with regard to these two variables in the subsequent sections should be treated with caution.

In addition to the learners, nine NSs of Vietnamese were conveniently sampled to provide baseline data. At the time of data collection, they were full time English language major students of a university in Hanoi. Eight of them were female and one was male. Their ages ranged between 21 and 22. They were originally from various parts in Northern Vietnam.

2.2. Data collection

Six role-play scenarios were designed to elicit requests and the informants' performance was audio-recorded. Some of the scenarios were adapted from Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Hassall (2003). The role-play was selected because it allows for impromptu speech production in conversational sequences, thus sharing a number of similarities with natural speech production (Kasper, 2008). The scenarios varied in the relative power between the speaker and the hearer but not in the social distance between them. They include: (1) borrowing a computer from an older friend, (2) borrowing lecture notes from a classmate, (3) asking a roommate to return a book to the library, (4) asking a teacher to write a letter of recommendation, (5) asking a teacher for a deadline extension, and (6) asking a supervisor to change the date of an upcoming meeting. Scenarios 1 through 3 described an equal power relationship (request directed at a friend), while the relationship described in Scenarios 4 through 6 is characteristic of an unequal power (request directed at a lecturer/ supervisor). The social distance, however, was kept constant: all the scenarios described a close relationship between the speaker and the hearer. The scenarios also varied in their degrees of imposition. However, due to space constraints, this contextual variable is not addressed in the present paper.

Table 2: Individual learners' length of stay and proficiency level

Participants	Actual length of stay (in month)	Group	Level of proficiency	Purpose of stay
P6	6	Short stay	Low	Language exchange
P7	6	Short stay	Low	Language exchange
P9	6	Short stay	Low	Language exchange
P1	8	Short stay	High	Language exchange
P10	8	Short stay	High	Language exchange
P14	8	Short stay	Low	Language exchange
P15	8	Short stay	Low	Language exchange
P5	12	Short stay	High	Language exchange
P16	24	Long stay	High	Working
P17	24	Long stay	Low	Working
P18	27	Long stay	High	Working
P3	36	Long stay	High	Attending university
P4	36	Long stay	High	Attending university
P8	36	Long stay	Low	Working
P11	36	Long stay	High	Working
P13	48	Long stay	High	Attending university
P2	60	Long stay	Low	Working
P12	132	Long stay	High	Working

Before being used for the present study, the role-plays were piloted with another group of native speakers of Vietnamese. Adjustments were then made to the instruction and scenario descriptions to enhance their comprehensibility. Also, because participants may find it difficult to perform in a role-play if the tasks are not realistic (see Bonikowska, 1988; Kasper, 2008), before the role-plays took place, the participants were asked to rate the extent to which they felt they were able to imagine themselves in each scenario, using a Likert 5-point scale. Results indicated that the informants scored quite high on all scenarios (means varying from 4.2 to 4.7), suggesting that they were familiar enough with the scenarios. Based on this result, all scenarios were kept for data collection. Each informant then role-played in Vietnamese for approximately one hour with one of the authors.

2.3. Data analysis

The role-play conversations were transcribed and data were then coded, using Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) taxonomy with slight adaptations to fit the data of this study. The revised taxonomy of request modifiers is presented in the Appendix with illustrative examples taken from the NS data of the current study. The two authors coded the data independently and then cross-checked their coding until a full agreement was achieved.

3. Results and discussion

To answer the research questions, comparisons were made between (1) the learners as a whole group and the NSs and (2) between the two proficiency groups of learners with reference to the NS baseline group to examine the extent to which each proficiency group approximated or deviated from the TL norms. The statistical procedures employed in the present study included the independent *t* test and one-way ANOVA. Where a significant difference was found among the three groups of participants, LSD *post hoc* ANOVA was also used to find in which comparison the difference lay.

3.1. Research Question 1: In what way do the learners differ from the NSs in their use of request modifiers?

Results of independent *t* tests show that the NS and NNS groups differed only in their use of internal modifiers but not external modifiers, with the NSs far exceeding the NNSs [$t(25) = 2.27, p=.032$]. When looking at individual external modifier types, it was found that the NSs produced considerably more steers (i.e. supportive moves for checking the hearer's availability) [$t(25) = 2.30, p=.047$] and committers (i.e. expression of compromise with the hearer's condition) [$t(25) = 2.50, p=.019$], whereas the NNSs used significantly more pre-sequences (i.e. announcement of intention) [$t(25) = 3.58, p=.001$] and disarms (i.e. acknowledgement of imposition on the hearer's) [$t(25) = 2.49, p=.020$]. Concerning internal modifiers, the

NSs outperformed the NNSs in their use of politeness markers (including address terms and honorifics) [$t(25) = 3.48, p = .002$] and appealors (such as alignment markers and tag questions) [$t(25) = 5.48, p < .001$]. The NNSs, on the other hand, made use of internal modifiers which were absent in the NS data, such as past tenses, progressive aspect, negation and conditional clauses. For example, one learner employed past tense and another used progressive aspect to modify the illocutionary force of her requests. Four other learners employed conditional clauses. Table 3 summarizes descriptive statistics for means of selected modifiers as used by the two groups.

The fact that the NSs used more steers while the learners used more pre-sequences showed that the NS requests were less abrupt as they had taken into consideration the hearer's availability before addressing the request to them. In comparison, the learners only made announcement that they wished to make a request.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for means of selected modifiers as used by the NSs and NNSs

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
External modifiers	NS	9	2.00	.36
	NNS	18	2.03	.52
Steers	NS	9	.38	.30
	NNS	18	.14	.11
Pre-sequences	NS	9	.02	.03
	NNS	18	.10	.08
Disarmers	NS	9	.04	.05
	NNS	18	.12	.11
Committers	NS	9	.20	.10
	NNS	18	.10	.09
Internal modifiers	NS	9	1.29	.27
	NNS	18	.88	.50
Politeness markers	NS	9	.61	.21
	NNS	18	.33	.19
Appealers	NS	9	.37	.14
	NNS	18	.09	.09
Total use	NS	9	3.29	.49
	NNS	18	2.90	.73

Since requests are at the cost of the hearer, they are considered dispreferred actions and are often delayed by means of hesitations or supportive moves (Al-Gahtani & Röver, 2012; Taleghani-Nikazm & Huth, 2010). The learners' infrequent use of steers, therefore, did not allow them to successfully lay the groundwork for projecting the upcoming request. For example, the learner below failed to perform check on the interlocutor's availability before producing a request, leading to a rejection from the latter (Scenario 1).

(1)

- L: *Chi* *oi,* *em* *có thé̂* *sử dụng* *máy tính* *chi*
 Elder sister vocative younger.sib can use computer elder sister
máy *tiếng* *không?*
 few hours no
 'Can I borrow your computer for a few hours?'

<i>Máy tính</i>	<i>em</i>	<i>bị</i>	<i>hỏng</i>
Computer	younger.sib	PASS	broke down
'Mine broke down.'			

I:	<i>Nhung mà</i>	<i>chị</i>	<i>đang</i>	<i>dùng</i>	<i>máy tính</i>
	But	elder sister	PROG	use	computer
	<i>em</i>	<i>không</i>	<i>thấy</i>	<i>à?</i>	
	younger.sib	not	see	YNQ	
'But I'm using it, don't you know?'					

The NSs greater use of committers showed that they were more willing to compromise with the hearer's condition, making it easier for the hearer to perform their request. On the other hand, the learners' preference for disarms showed their acknowledgement of the cost to the hearer. It should be noted, however, that disarms were almost absent in the NS data. This can be explained by the lack of concern for personal space in the Vietnamese culture (Nguyen, 2008; Nguyen & Ho, 2013). The Vietnamese culture is characterized by a collective orientation that emphasizes involvement, interference, interdependence and a strong sense of familial duties (see Tran, 1995; 2001). Therefore, in this culture the act of requesting may not necessarily always be seen as imposing on the hearer's autonomy (see the introduction section). The learners' preference for disarms suggests that they may not be fully aware of this Vietnamese pragmatic norm.

With respect to internal modifiers, the learners also lagged far behind the NSs. This finding echoed the findings of many earlier studies, showing that internal modifiers might cause learners considerable difficulty (e.g. Hendriks, 2008; Otçu & Zeyrek, 2006; Woodfield, 2008). As suggested in previous studies, this is because internal modifiers lack transparent pragmatic meanings and possibly add more structural complexity to the speech act (Hassall, 2001; Nguyen, 2008). The finding of the present study indicates that internal modifiers may be challenging not only for learners of inflected languages such as English and German (as reported in Hendriks, 2008; Otçu & Zeyrek, 2006; Woodfield, 2008), but also for learners of an isolating language like Vietnamese, in which the addition of internal modifiers does not result in morphological changes to the structure and increase its complexity. The difficulty in the latter case may stem from the fact that internal modifiers do not operate, both formally and functionally, in the same way in the learners' L1 and the TL (see Hassall, 2001, for further discussion).

Indeed, this was evident in the learners' inappropriate use of such modifier types that are characteristic of the Vietnamese language and culture. For example, the learners underused politeness markers (including address terms and honorifics) and appealors whereas many of them relied on verb tenses, negation and conditional clauses to internally modify their requests. This is because verb tenses (e.g. past tense with present time reference) typically function as internal modifiers in English (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). However, this is not the case for Vietnamese, in which verb tenses only indicate or emphasize the time factor. As Vũ (1997, 1999) pointed out, Vietnamese NS requests are more typically 'internally' modified by means of politeness markers such as address terms, verbs implying the speaker's modesty and humility such as *làm ơn* [do a favour], *xin* [beg], *cho* [give], *hỗ* [help], the honorific *à*. Another commonly used internal modifiers type includes appealors that are alignment markers (e.g., *nhé*, *với*, *cái*, *đi*). In comparison, the use of the above linguistic devices might not be the case for English requests. The learners' infrequent use of politeness markers in the present study is incongruent with findings of some previous studies that indicate an inclination for L2 learners to favour this modifier type over other types of internal modification (e.g. Faerch & Kasper, 1989). Presumably, this incongruence results from the fact that the politeness markers that are discussed in the above studies are limited to the single phrase *please* in English or its equivalents in other languages (such as *bitte* in German). In contrast, politeness markers in the present study refer to a wider variety of linguistic devices (see above), the use of which is governed by socio-cultural norms of the Vietnamese society. In particular, address terms indicate social roles and status in relation to other people, which is an important aspect of a collectivism-oriented society. Honorifics reflect the high value that the Vietnamese people place on modesty, humility and respect (T. Pham 1995). Modal particles that are alignment markers are an important means for solidarity building (Vu 1997, 1999).

In sum, as competent L1 users, the learners may enjoy a great deal of knowledge of pragmatic universals (Kasper, 1992) and thus may already be very well aware that a speech act should be modified.

However, the different operations of modifiers and the different form-function mappings in their L1 and the L2 might pose certain challenges to them.

3.2. Research Question 2: What effect does proficiency have on the learners' use of request modifiers?

Table 4 summarizes descriptive statistics for means of selected modifiers as used by the NSs, Low and High groups. First, results of a one-way ANOVA show a significant difference among the three groups in their total use of modifiers [$F(2, 26) = 4.78, p = .018$]. *Posthoc* with LSD analysis shows that this difference lay between the NS group with the Low group ($p = .011$) and between the two learner groups ($p = .013$) whereas there was no difference between the NS group and the High group ($p > .05$). Specifically, both the NS and High groups produced a greater number of modifiers than the Low group.

When looking at their use of two major categories of modifiers, namely external and internal, the three groups were found to differ only in their use of internal modifiers [$F(2, 26) = 6.70, p = .005$]. Particularly, the NSs and high proficiency learners employed a considerably greater number of internal modifiers as compared to the low proficiency learners [$p = .002; p = .014$, respectively]. There was no difference between the NSs and the high proficiency learners [$p > .05$] (Table 4).

With respect to the various types of external modifiers, the three groups differed significantly in their use of steers [$F(2, 26) = 4.89, p = .016$], pre-sequences [$F(2, 26) = 3.78, p = .038$], disarms [F(2, 26) = 5.63, $p = .010$] and understatements (i.e. expressions that emphasize the minimal cost of the act) [$F(2, 26) = 3.96, p = .033$]. *Posthoc* analyses show that the NSs used far more steers than both learner groups (NSs vs. High group: $p = .032$; NSs vs. Low group: $p = .006$) whereas there was no difference between the two learner groups ($p > .05$) (see Table 4).

However, the NSs produced fewer pre-sequences than both groups of learners (NSs vs. High group: $p = .021$; NSs vs. Low group: $p = .033$). Again, there was no difference between the two learner groups in their use of pre-sequences ($p > .05$). The Low group produced more disarms than both the NSs ($p = .004$) and their higher proficiency peers ($p = .018$) while there were no differences between the two latter groups ($p > .05$) (Table 4). Regarding understatements, the High group exceeded the Low group ($p = .010$) while there was no difference between them and the NSs ($p > .05$) as well as between the other two groups ($p > .05$).

Concerning the various types of internal modifiers, the three groups differed significantly in their use of politeness markers [$F(2, 26) = 9.4, p = .001$] and appealors [$F(2, 26) = 22.5, p < .001$]. *Posthoc* analyses show that both learner groups produced fewer politeness markers than the NSs (NS vs. High group: $p = .030$; NS vs. Low group: $p < .001$). The High group also made use of more politeness markers than their lower proficiency peers ($p = .037$). Both learner groups also produced fewer appealors than the NSs ($p < .001$ for both comparisons) while not differing from each other ($p > .05$) (see Table 4).

Overall, the above results indicate the effects of the learners' proficiency levels on their use of certain types of request modifiers. First, the High group's total use of modifiers far exceeded that of the Low group. The former group also internally modified their requests more often than the latter group. The fact that the High group outperformed their lower proficiency peers in these two aspects while not differing from the NS use suggests their closer approximation to the NS norms. When it came to individual modifier types, the High learners approximated the NS infrequent use of disarms and frequent use of understatements, also suggesting proficiency effects in these areas. As for the frequency of politeness markers and appealors, although the High learners produced far fewer than the NS, they produced more than the Low proficiency learners. Especially, a close examination of these two types seems to suggest a more native-like use by the more proficient learners. For instance, they correctly added address terms and honorifics in conformity to the speaker-hearer relationship. They also successfully employed politeness markers and appealors with similar mitigation function to the NSs.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for means of selected modifiers as used by the NS, High and Low groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
External modifiers	Low	8	1.89	.61
	High	10	2.14	.43
	NS	9	2.00	.36
Steers	Low	8	.10	.10
	High	10	.18	.11
	NS	9	.38	.30
Pre-sequences	Low	8	.09	.09
	High	10	.10	.07
	NS	9	.02	.03
Disarmers	Low	8	.18	.12
	High	10	.07	.09
	NS	9	.04	.05
Understatements	Low	8	.09	.07
	High	10	.29	.18
	NS	9	.22	.18
Internal modifiers	Low	8	.60	.29
	High	10	1.10	.54
	NS	9	1.29	.27
Politeness markers	Low	8	.22	.12
	High	10	.41	.19
	NS	9	.61	.21
Appealers	Low	8	.04	.05
	High	10	.12	.10
	NS	9	.37	.14
Total use	Low	8	2.49	.72
	High	10	3.24	.58
	NS	9	3.29	.49

In the following examples (Scenario 1), The High learners addressed higher status interlocutors respectfully (Example 2) while addressing equal status interlocutors properly (Example 3). ‘Respectfulness’ (*lẽ phép*) and ‘propriety’ (*dúng mực*) are two important concepts in modern Vietnamese politeness (Vu 1997; 1999). The former involves showing respect to people of higher power whereas the latter involves showing proper respect to people of equal and lower power and keeping distance vs. solidarity in conformity with the nature of the given speaker-hearer relationship. The High learners’ pragmatic choice, therefore, reflected the ways the NSs addressed their partners in corresponding relationships.

- (2) *Em mượn máy tính của chị một chút!*
 younger.sib borrow computer of elder sister a bit
 ‘Please let me borrow your computer for just a moment!’

- (3) *Bạn tôi cho tôi mượn máy ban cái!*
 Friend VOC give I(casual) borrow computer friend Alignment marker
 ‘My friend, please let me borrow your computer!’

In addition, the High learners were able to put more weight on solidarity and power factors to tailor the degree of their respectful politeness to different higher status people. For example, they used honorifics for their teacher (Example 4, Scenario 4), but not for an older friend (Example 2).

- (4) *Cô chỉ viết em sinh viên giỏi nhất*
 Teacher just write younger.sib student best
 ‘You only need to write that I’m the best student’
trong lớp thời cô a!
 in class just teacher honorifics
 ‘in the class!’

Generally speaking, honorifics would be desirable when a lower status person addresses a higher status person. However, in case the status difference is not too large (e.g. a younger friend to an older friend, a junior colleague to a senior colleague, etc.) and especially if the relationship is close, their use would be considered unnecessarily *khách sáo* (ceremonious) and *xa cách* (distant). The High learners, while showing sufficient respect to their older friend by using appropriate address terms, successfully saved themselves from going unnecessarily formal in a close relationship.

What is more, like the NSs, they were able to appeal for H’s cooperation and support by using appealers in the form of alignment markers such as *cái*, *đi*, *nhé*, and politeness markers such as *giúp*, *xin*, thus avoiding giving H the impression that they were imposing their will on H (examples 5 – Scenario 3 and 6 – Scenario 2).

- (5) *Chị giúp em đi!*
 Elder sister help younger.sib Alignment marker.
 ‘Sister, please help me!’
- (6) *Anh xin mượn nhé!*
 Elder brother beg borrow Alignment marker.
 ‘Please let me borrow it!’

As Vũ (1997) pointed out, address terms and appealers constitute a majority of Vietnamese politeness devices and are ranked higher by NSs on the politeness continuum as compared to other devices. The High learners’ employment of these modifier types, therefore, represented an NS approximation.

In contrast, evidence of pragmatic failure was abundant in the Low group’s data. In the following examples, they either misused or dropped address terms and honorifics when interacting with their teachers, thus failing to show status-appropriate politeness (examples 7, 8 – Scenario 4). When interacting in close and status equal relationships, they adopted an unnecessarily formal and distant speech style by making an inappropriate choice of address terms (example 9 – Scenario). Additionally, they failed to employ alignment markers to appeal for their friends’ cooperation, thus giving an unintended dogmatic tone (example 10 – Scenario 3).

- (7) *Em muốn cô giáo viết thư giới thiệu của em.*
 younger.sib want teacher write letter introduce of younger.sib
 ‘I want you to write me a letter of reference.’
- (8) L: *Xin lỗi tôi muốn chi giúp tôi có học bổng*
 Sorry I (formal) want elder sister help I (formal) have scholarship
 ‘Sorry I want you to help me to obtain a scholarship.’
Chi viết được thư giới thiệu?
 Elder sister write possible letter introduce?
 ‘Can you write me a letter of reference?’

- I: *Nhung mà khi nào em cần cái thư đây?*
 But when younger.sib need CLF letter that?
 ‘But when do you need the letter?’
- L: *Tuần sau thứ hai hết hạn.*
 Week after Monday due.
 ‘It’s due next Monday.’

- (9) *Tôi có quyền sách ngày mai*
 I (formal) have CLF book tomorrow
 ‘I have a book tomorrow’
- mà tôi không đi học*
 but I (formal) not go study
 ‘but I’m not going to school’
- em trả hộ quyền sách thư viện được không?*
 younger.sib return help CLF book library possible no?
 ‘Can you help to return a book to the library?’
- (10) *Em muốn chỉ trả quyền sách*
 Younger sibling want elder sister return CLF book
 ‘I want you to return a book’
- của em vào thư viện.*
 of younger.sib into library.
 ‘to the library for me.’

To sum up, the above findings offered evidence of pragmatic development for the High group and were consistent with findings of previous studies (e.g. Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Hill, 1997; Otçu & Zeyrek, 2006; 2008; Rose, 2000; Trosborg, 1995; Warga, 2004; Woodfield, 2008). They showed that although some areas still remained difficult, as the learners reached a higher level of proficiency, they also became more aware of the NS norms, thus were more able to successfully negotiate their requests by means of various modifiers.

3.3. Research Question 3: What effect does length of residence have on the learners’ use of request modifiers?

Table 5 summarizes descriptive statistics for means of selected modifiers as used by the NSs, Long-stay and Short-stay groups. Results of a one-way ANOVA show that the three groups significantly differed only in their use of internal modifiers [$F(2, 26) = 3.62, p = .042$]. Posthoc with LSD analysis shows that this difference lay between the NS group and the Short-stay group ($p = .013$), with the former producing far more internal modifiers. There was no difference between the two learner groups ($p > .05$) and between the NS group and the Long-stay group ($p > .05$).

Concerning different types of external modifiers, the three groups differed significantly in their use of steers [$F(2, 26) = 4.43, p = .023$] and pre-sequences [$F(2, 26) = 5.39, p = .012$]. Posthoc analyses show that the NSs used far more steers than both learner groups (NSs vs. Short-stay learners: $p = .014$; NSs vs. Long-stay learners: $p = .019$) whereas there was no difference between the two learner groups ($p > .05$). However, the NSs produced fewer pre-sequences than the Short-stay group ($p = .003$). There was no difference between the two learner groups ($p > .05$) and between the Long-stay group with the NS group in their use of pre-sequences ($p > .05$) (Table 5).

The three groups also significantly differed in their use of politeness markers [$F(2, 26) = 7.74, p = .003$] and appealors [$F(2, 26) = 25.2, p < .001$]. Posthoc analyses show that both learner groups produced fewer politeness markers than the NSs (NS vs. Short-stay learners: $p = .001$; NS vs. Long-stay learners: $p = .022$). There was no difference between the two learner groups ($p > .05$). Both learner groups also lagged behind the NSs in their use of appealors ($p < .001$ for both comparisons) but the Long-stay group far exceeded their Short-stay peers ($p = .048$) (see Table 5).

Overall, the above findings generally suggested some effects for the length of residence in the TL culture. Specifically, although the Long-stay learners did not produce a greater total of internal modifiers

than their Short-stay peers, their frequency of use approximated the NS use more closely. When it came to individual external modifier types, the Long-stay group was more similar to the NSs in their use of pre-sequences. Regarding individual internal modifier types, although they produced far fewer politeness markers and appealors than the NSs, they outperformed the Short-stay group in their use of the latter, suggesting a better awareness of this target pragmatic feature.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for means of selected modifiers as used by the NS, Long-stay and Short-stay groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
External modifiers	Short-stay	8	1.94	.47
	Long-stay	10	2.10	.56
	NS	9	2.00	.36
Steers	Short-stay	8	.13	.13
	Long-stay	10	.15	.09
	NS	9	.38	.30
Pre-sequences	Short-stay	8	.13	.08
	Long-stay	10	.07	.07
	NS	9	.02	.03
Internal modifiers	Short-stay	8	.73	.54
	Long-stay	10	1.01	.46
	NS	9	1.29	.27
Politeness markers	Short-stay	8	.25	.14
	Long-stay	10	.39	.20
	NS	9	.61	.21
Appealors	Short-stay	8	.03	.04
	Long-stay	10	.13	.09
	NS	9	.37	.14
Total use	Short-stay	8	2.66	.72
	Long-stay	10	3.10	.72
	NS	9	3.29	.49

These findings are not surprising since the study-abroad context has been documented to facilitate both the contextual familiarity and the acquisition of TL norms (see Kasper & Rose, 2002; Schauer, 2009). The reasons are obvious: in addition to formal language learning, learners in this context also benefit from numerous opportunities for using the language outside the classroom. Thus, if they take full advantage of the opportunities available to them, perhaps they can achieve a near-native level over time. In the present study, the Long stay group and the Short stay group appeared to differ not only in terms of their lengths of residence in the host country and thus probably the received amount of exposure to TL input but possibly also with respect to the intensity of their interaction with NSs (see Bella, 2012 for a similar discussion). The Long stay group comprised three learners who were undertaking their tertiary education in Vietnamese universities where Vietnamese language was the medium of instruction. The remaining learners in this group were expatriates working in the TL environment (see Table 2 in the previous section). Presumably, they may have had more abundant opportunities to interact with native speakers in the target language as compared to the Short stay group that consisted of language exchange students. As Barron (2006) pointed out, because of their individualized study programs, study-abroad students may have limited contact with the local people. In addition, since they are frequently placed in study programs with other study broad students, learners may interact more often with their fellow students than with native speakers. In the present study, although informal talks with learners from both groups of learners revealed their substantial exposure to the TL outside the classroom, due to their differentiated situations, their circumstances vis-à-vis input and

interaction may have differed greatly. Apparently, the above findings support those of previous studies regarding both the effects of both length of residence (e.g. Felix-Brasdefer, 2004; Schauer, 2004; 2006) and the intensity of interaction with NSs of the TL (e.g. Bella, 2012).

Despite some improvements in their pragmatic performance, however, the learners who had spent an extended period of time in the TL community still fell short of NS competence with regard to their use of various modifiers. This could be explained by a number of reasons. First, the effects of length of residence may have been confounded by proficiency effects because these two variables overlap to some extent. To put it more specifically, some low proficiency learners belonged to the Long-stay group and vice versa. Therefore, the results reported in this section should be treated with caution. Furthermore, their limited improvement may have also been caused by a lack of noticing of NS politeness strategies, which may not always be salient enough without being explicitly instructed. These findings indicate that it is necessary to train study-abroad students in the TL pragmatics before their departure in order to allow them to maximize the learning opportunities in the host country (see Cohen and Shiverly, 2007).

5. Conclusion

The present study allows us to draw several interesting conclusions about the impact of proficiency and length of residence in the TL environment on the acquisition of request modifiers by learners of L2 Vietnamese. The conclusions are necessarily preliminary, and limited by factors such as gender bias in the NS sample, different L1s among the learners of Vietnamese, and the as-yet unclear relationship between length of stay and the development of target language proficiency. Nevertheless, the data makes clear not only that there are differences in the ways learners of Vietnamese modify their requests as compared to native speakers, but also that the way learners modified their requests displayed greater native-like proficiency as time spent in the TL context increased. The study points towards fruitful avenues of further research that isolates issues such as the L1 of learners, or that focuses explicitly on the variable of time spent in the TL context.

Finally, the present study also offers important pedagogical implications. Previous research has documented that pragmatic knowledge is acquired slowly in naturalistic contexts (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993; Bouton, 1994). In other words, mere exposure is insufficient for L2 pragmatic development. Although study-abroad contexts offer plentiful opportunities for input and interaction with the NS, learners may not always make good use of these opportunities or notice TL pragmatic norms available to them. Therefore, pragmatic instruction is crucial in order to raise the learners' consciousness of form-function mappings and pertinent contextual variables they may otherwise overlook (Kasper and Schmidt, 1996). As a result, study-abroad programs should consider integrating training in cross-cultural pragmatic strategies to help learners make the most of their sojourns.

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APPENDIX: A taxonomy of request modifiers in Vietnamese

EXTERNAL MODIFIERS: Supportive moves that occur before or after the head act.

- a. Steers: Phrases that are used to prepare the hearer for the request. The speaker may do so by checking if the hearer is available to perform the request. Steers are used to avoid being abrupt and inconsiderate.

(1) Scenario 1

P1: *Linh oi mày đang chát với ai đây?*
 Name VOC you (casual) PROG chat with who that?
 ‘Linh, who are you chatting with?’

I: *À, tao đang chát với bạn trai tao.*
 Ah I (casual) PROG chat with boyfriend I (casual).
 ‘I’m chatting with my boyfriend.’

P1: *Thé à, quan trọng không?*
 So YNQ important no?
 ‘Are you? Is it important?’

- b. Pre-sequences: The speaker announces that they are going to make a request or checks if the hearer is willing to hear the request.

(2) Scenario 4

P4: *Cô oi có việc này em nhờ cô một tí*
 Teacher VOC have matter this
 ‘Teacher, I have something’
 younger.sib ask for help teacher one bit
 ‘that I need your help with.’

- c. Grounders: Excuses, reasons or explanations that the speaker uses to justify their request and thus to appear reasonable.

(3) Scenario 5

P2: *Cô oi*
 Teacher VOC
 ‘Teacher,’

hôm nay em có hẹn với cô
 today younger.sib have appointment with teacher
 ‘I have an appointment with you today’

nhưng mà tuần trước em không được khỏe lắm
 but week before younger.sib no PASS well very
 ‘but I wasn’t feeling very well last week’

nên em vẫn chưa viết xong cô a.
 so younger.sib still not yet write finish teacher honorific.
 ‘so I haven’t completed my chapter yet.’

- d. Disarmers: Utterances that the speaker uses to show their awareness of the pressure that the request may place on the hearer. The speaker might want to acknowledge the pressure and/ or apologize.

(4) Scenario 5

P3: Em *biết* *cô* *vẫn* *rất* *là* *bận.*
 younger.sib know teacher still very be busy.
 ‘I know you are very busy.’

Nhưng mà em chưa xong được.
 But younger.sib not yet finish possible.
 ‘But I haven’t finished my chapter yet.’

- e. Imposition minimizers: Utterances that the speaker uses to free the hearer from the imposition of the request.

(5) Scenario 4

P6: Thέ *lúc nào* *mà* *cô* *thấy* *không* *bát tiên* *quá*
 So when that teacher see not inconvenient very
 ‘So when it’s not too inconvenient to you’
thì cô nhớ giúp em *cô nhá?*
 then teacher remember help younger.sib teacher alignment marker?
 ‘please remember to help me!’

- f. Committers: The speaker may want to minimize the cost for the hearer by expressing their compromise with the hearer’s conditions or offering to make it easier for the hearer to perform the act.

(5) Scenario 5

P9: em *sẽ* *có gắng* *viết* *trong* *tuần* *này*
 younger.sib will try write in week this
 ‘I will try to write it this week’
và em nộp cho cô
 and younger.sib submit for teacher
 ‘to submit it to you’
tại vì tuần vừa rồi em bị óm quá
 because week last younger.sib PASS sick very
 ‘because I was really sick last week’
em chưa viết được
 younger.sib not yet write possible
 ‘I haven’t been able to do it’
trong tuần này em sẽ có gắng
 in week this younger.sib will try
 ‘I will try this week’
gửi cho cô để cô comment a.
 send for teacher for teacher comment honorific.
 ‘and send it to you for your comments.’

- g. Understatement: The speaker may want to underestimate the request so as to convince the hearer of the minimal cost of the act. Understatements normally occur when the hearer shows hesitation to help.

(6) Scenario 1

P2: Này *Huyền* *cho* *tao* *mượn* *máy tính* *cái.*
 Attention seeker name let I (casual) borrow computer IMP
 ‘Hey, Huyen, let me borrow your computer.’

I: *O* *nhưng* *bây giờ* *tao*
 Surprise marker but now I (casual)
 ‘But I’m’
đang *dùng mà.*
 PROG use stance marker
 ‘using it now’

P2: *Tao* *chi* *viết* *3* *trang* *thôi.*
 I (casual) just write 3 pages only.
 ‘I only need it to write just three pages.’
Sau *đấy* *mày* *dùng tiếp* *được* *không?*
 After that you (casual) use continue possible no
 ‘After that you can use it. Is that possible?’

- h. Offers of compensation: The speaker may also reduce the cost for the hearer by offering the hearer compensation or a reward.

(7) Scenario 1

P3: *Thôi thì* *chịu khó* *giúp tớ.*
 So bear difficulty help me (intimate).
 ‘So take trouble to help me.’
Có *gi* *tớ* *sẽ* *giúp* *câu* *sau.*
 Have what I (intimate) will help you (intimate) later.
 ‘I will help you later.’

- i. Sympathy seekers: The speaker may want to appeal for the hearer’s sympathy so as to increase the chance of success of the request. This category is absent in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) but has been added to fit data of this study.

(8) Scenario 3

P9: *B4* *thì* *chạy ra* *thư viện* *cũng nhanh* *mà.*
 B4 emphasis marker run to library also quick stance marker.
 ‘B4 is so close to the library.’
*H**ợ* *tớ* *tý.*
 Help me (intimate) bit
 ‘Help me’
*d**ể* *l**âu* *thư viện* *nó ... c**ô* *thư viện* *cô ý*
 keep long library it ... CLF librarian she
 ‘If I don’t return it, the librarian’
*l**ai* *t**ính* *t**ién* *t**h**êm*
 again count money more
 ‘will ask me to pay more fine’
*th**ì* *t**ớ* *ch**ết* *m**át*
 then I (intimate) die lose
 ‘I will sure die’
*t**ớ* *đ**ã* *d**ể* *l**âu* *r**ồi.*
 I (intimate) PST keep long already.
 ‘It’s already overdue.’

- j. Smoothers: The speaker may want to appeal for the hearer’s willingness to perform the act by offering the hearer a compliment/ appreciation or emphasising the hearer’s role.

(9) Scenario 1

P3: *Mày oi*
 You (casual) VOC
 ‘Hey’
Mày là ban tốt của tao mà,
 you (casual) be friend good of I (casual) stance marker,
 ‘You’re my good friend.’
Đồng ý đi, giúp tao đi.
 Agree IMP help me (casual) IMP.
 ‘Agree to help me, okay?’

- k. Thanking: The speaker may want to increase the benefit for the hearer by expressing their gratitude to the hearer for the act, e.g. “*Cảm ơn nhé!*” (Thanks!) or “*Em cảm ơn cô a*” (Thank you, teacher!).

INTERNAL MODIFIERS: Occur within and form part of the head act

- a. Politeness markers: including address terms and honorifics.

Address terms in the Vietnamese language include kinship terms, titles, personal pronouns, and proper names occurring in alerters, subjects or other places in the utterances (Vu 1997). Address terms are important in the Vietnamese language because a ‘no-naming’ style (i.e. “*nói trống không*”) violates social norms, particularly when communicating with superiors and in formal contexts. Interlocutors make choices of address terms depending on the relative power and social distance between themselves and the wrong choice of address terms may threaten H’s face. This means politeness is determined not only by the use or non-use of address terms, but also by the appropriate choice in conformity to social norms and speaker-hearer role relationships (Vu, ibid: 170). Note that Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) do not categorise address terms as request modifiers but since these linguistic features function as markers of politeness in Vietnamese, we classify them as a type of internal modifiers.

Honorifics: Particles, honorifics, and verbs that express respect to H, e.g. *vâng, dạ, a* [honorifics], *làm ơn* [do favour], *xin* [beg], *cho* [give], *hôp* [help], etc. This category is absent in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) but has been added to fit our data.

- b. Downgraders: Adverbial modifiers that help S to downgrade the act, e.g. *một chút, một tí* [one bit], etc.
- c. Downtoner: Verbs and sentence modifiers that S uses to reduce the pressure their request may place on H such as *có lẽ, có thể, chắc là* [perhaps, possibly, maybe/ may, probably], etc.
- d. Appealers: Particles or phrases S uses to call for H’s understanding and sympathy, e.g. *nhé, với, đi, cái* [alignment markers], *được không?* [possible no?]. This category is absent in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) but has been added to fit our data.