A Cross-Cultural Study of Modality in the Speech Act of Asking for Permission

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Abstract—**This paper is concerned with a cross-cultural study of modality expressions in asking for permission by Vietnamese and English speakers. The study involved 209 Canadian and Vietnamese informants with the use of a Discourse Completion Task questionnaire. A total of 3000 utterances were chosen for analysis to gain insights into the frequency and types of lexico-modal markers manifested in the two languages. It is found that hearer-oriented verbal style tends to be dominant in Vietnamese while the speaker-oriented strategy is more favored in English. Vietnamese speakers tend to employ direct strategies with a dominant use of appealers which sounds intimate to the hearer. English speakers, by contrast, incline to conventionally-indirect strategies such as *Can I, Could I*, etc. It is also evident that Vietnamese speakers frequently use politeness markers when they communicate with the older, but they hardly use them for their peers. English speakers, however, use politeness markers for all partners with a slight variation. Another noteworthy similarity is that both Canadian and Vietnamese women modalize their language than men.**

Index Terms—**modality, lexico-modal marker, politeness, asking for permission**

I. INTRODUCTION

From the logical perspective, the content of a proposition is composed of two parts: lexis or dictum, and modality. When interpreting certain sentences in natural language, one tends to talk about relations between different possibilities. For instance, if a person says: "*It may snow tomorrow*", he is not committing himself completely to the truth of the proposition, i.e., he is making a judgement or assessment of the truth of the situation, modifying his commitment to some degree by modalizing his utterance. In Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics view, modality serves the interpersonal function of language. It is generally referred to as the speaker's subjective opinions and attitudes towards the proposition that the sentence expresses or the situation that the proposition describes. It is the semantic category by which speakers express their attitude, judgement, or subjectivity towards the event contained in the proposition as probability, possibility, volition, obligation, necessity, doubt, wish, regret, desire, permission, etc. (Downing & Locke, 2006; Palmer, 1986). From sociolinguistic perspective, expressions of linguistic modality can encode power relationship between interlocutors since power can be manifested through language (Fairclough, 1995; 2001; Saville-Troike, 2003; Ekawati, 2019; Siti & Sulis, 2020). Power distance also differs across cultures (Hofstede, 1991; Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999; Kramsch, 2000), which results in different linguistic expressions. Therefore, cross-cultural research on linguistic modality can reveal universal and culturally specific features manifested in everyday social interaction. Among the speech acts classified by linguists (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Bach & Harnish, 1979), asking for permission (AFP) is a potentially face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987) that one needs to know how to perform it appropriately so as to avoid communication breakdowns, culture bumps, or even culture shocks. This study looks into how Vietnamese and English speakers use modality expressions in asking for permission. In addition to the theoretical values, the research results can have pedagogical implications that are useful for teachers and language learners.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A. Modality

In a pioneering work on modal logic, von Wright (1951) classified modes or modality into five types:
1) The alethic modes or modes of truth
2) The epistemic modes or modes of knowing
3) The deontic modes or modes of obligation
4) The existential modes or modes of existence
5) The dynamic modes concern with ability, volition and disposition.
These modalities are elaborated as follows:

Alethic	Epistemic	Deontic	Existential	Dynamic
Necessary	verified	obligatory	universal	------------------
Possible	-----------------	permitted	Existing	able
Contingent	undecided	indifferent	------------------	dispositional
impossible	falsified	forbidden	empty	volitional

(Palmer, 1986)

Palmer argues that epistemic and deontic modalities are the most important. The former is concerned with matters of knowledge, belief or opinion rather than fact, the latter is concerned with necessity or possibility of acts performed by morally responsible agents. He also relates his classification to Searle's five basic categories of illocutionary acts. He claims that *directives* correspond very largely to deontic modality. For example, *can* and *may* are common for permission requests and may be interpreted as expressing deontic possibility.

Can/May I photocopy some parts of your book ?

With the use of the interrogative form plus the possibility modals, the speaker not only expresses his or her own attitude or deontic modality but also asks the addressee about whether the action is deontically permissible. Hence, the sentence implies a request for permission and can be paraphrased as "*I ask you to give me permission to photocopy some parts of your book*". Following the speech act centered approach, Winter and Gardenfor (1995) contend that the epistemic use of modality is better understood by viewing this phenomenon as power. From the cognitive linguistic perspective, Radden and Dirven (2007) hold that deontic modality is concerned with the speaker's directive attitude towards an action to be carried out and it mainly consists of the notions of obligation and permission.

It is noted that modality can be expressed implicitly or explicitly, and in various ways. Downing and Locke (1992) divide the means of expressing modality into two main groups: verbal and non-verbal exponents. The former comprises:

- Lexical verbs such as *beg, allow, let, promise, warn*
- The lexical verbs *wonder* and *wish*, which express *doubt* and *wish*, respectively
- The lexico-modal auxiliaries: *able to, about to, bound to, due to, going to, liable to, likely to, certain to, sure to, suppose to, have to, had better , would rather, etc..*
- Modal auxiliaries: *can, could, may, might, will, would, must, shall, should, ought to,* and the semi-modals *need* and *dare*

The non-verbal exponents are composed of:

- Modal disjuncts: *probably, possibly, surely, hopefully, obviously*, and so forth.
- Modal adjectives*: possible, probable, likely*. These are used in impersonal constructions
- Modal nouns: *possibility, probability, chance, likelihood*.
- Certain uses of *If-clause* as in: *I wonder if I could use your computer*?
- The use of non-assertive items such as *any*
- Certain uses of intonation, hesitation in speech

However, Palmer et al. claim that modality is expressed mainly by modal verbs, mood, and lexico-modal markers. The modal verbs have some properties similar to the auxiliaries *be* and *have,* and some more distinctive features as:

- They do not co-occur
- They have no S-form for their third person singular
- They have no non-finite forms
- They have no imperatives, etc..

Mood is traditionally restricted to a category in verbal morphology and it is found in some, but not all, languages. The lexico-modal markers fall into nine categories which, according to Trosborg (1987), give rise to certain differences in politeness degree.

1. Downtoners (hereafter referred to as **dow**.) are used to express tentativeness or uncertainty, consisting of elements such as *just, simply, possibly, perhaps, maybe, probably, in a way,* etc., (có lẽ, có thể, có khả năng, phải chăng, ở mức độ nào đó, etc.)

Can I possibly photocopy this document ?

2. Hedges (hereafter referred to as **hed.)**: are elements by which S avoids specification in making a commitment to the illocutionary point of the utterance: *sort of, kind of, somehow, something like that* (kiểu như, đại loại là, đại thể là, etc.)

I'm sort of a lucky dog

3. Understaters (hereafter referred to as **und.**): are elements used to minimise the imposition, or reduce the degree of the propositions: *a bit, a little, a little bit, just a bit,* (một chút, một tí, tí chút, một chốc, tí tẹo, etc.).

Do you mind if I show up a little later for the meeting ? (Canadian) Cháu có thể đến trễ một chút được không a? (Vietnamese)

4. Subjectivisers (hereafter referred to as **subj.**): are elements which show the S's view or attitude towards the proposition*: I think, I hope, I mean, hopefully, in my view, to my mind* (tôi nghĩ rằng, tôi cho là, tôi e rằng, theo tôi thì, etc.)

I hope you don't mind but I will be late

5. **Intensifiers** (hereafter referred to as **int.**): are used to intensify the reality denoted in the proposition : *so, such, really, extremely, absolutely* (đến thế, hết sức, rất, cực kỳ, etc.)

Chị thấy phần này <u>rất</u> hay. Cho chị phô tô làm tư liệu được chứ?

I <u>really</u> enjoyed your book. I was wondering if I could photocopy some pages?

(Canadian)

6. **Commitment upgraders** hereafter referred to as **com.**): are used to express S's commitment to the proposition: *sure, certain, of course, surely, certainly,* (tất nhiên, chắc chắn, tin chắc, etc.)

Anh tin chắc là em sẽ thi đỗ (I'm sure you'll pass the exam)

7. **Cajolers** (hereafter referred to as **caj.**): justify what S is saying at the interpersonal level. They indicate understanding and harmony between the interactants: *You know, you see, as you know, as you may have learnt,* (Anh/chị biết đấy, như anh/chị đã biết, anh/chị biết không? etc.)

<u>Cậu biết đấy</u>, máy của tớ bị hỏng. Cho dùng nhờ tí nhé.

(You know, my computer is broken. Can I use yours for a little while?)

8. **Appealers** (hereafter referred to as **app.**): are elements employed to seek approval or response from hearer (H): *OK, right, would you, is it, will you ?* (đúng không nào, phải không nào, đấy nhỉ, chứ nhỉ, nhé, etc.)

Cho mình phô tô sách của cậu được <u>chứ</u>? (Vietnamese)

I'm using your computer for a sec, OK?   (Canadian)

9. **Politeness markers** (hereafter referred to as **pol**.): are elements such as honorifics *please, kindly* (dạ, thưa, vâng, ạ, v ậng, etc.)

Cho em phô tô phần này được không <u>ạ</u>? (Vietnamese)

May I <u>please</u> photocopy this section?   (Canadian)

In investigating the expression of modality in AFP, it is found that lexico-modal markers and modal verbs are employed abundantly and flexibly in both Canadian English and Vietnamese. For the purpose of the study and due to the time restriction, only lexico-modal markers are chosen for data analysis. In actual language use, particularly in Vietnamese, people sometimes use more than one type of lexico-modal markers in one utterance. The following part discusses the research findings in both languages.

B. The Speech Act of Asking for Permission (AFP)

The act of AFP exists in all societies and frequently occurs in daily communicative situations. It is a social etiquette affected by both situational and cultural factors. By asking somebody for permission to do something, speakers (S) may impinge on the hearer's (H) territory e.g. sitting beside someone in a bus, or acknowledge the superiority of H, e.g. asking an employer for some days off work. Hence, AFP has the potential to be intrusive and may be face-threatening to both S and H (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Culturally, the act of asking for permission is influenced by culture-specific elements such as values, beliefs, customs, etc.. In the Vietnamese culture, for instance, it is quite normal to start smoking during a meal with friends without having to ask for permission. In the Canadian culture, as the data show, such behaviour is considered intrusive to the counterpart and thus requires the act of AFP.

Pragmatically, AFP is a communicative illocutionary act which belongs to directives. In Searle (1969), Bach and Harnish's (1979) classifications, directives are again sub- categorized as commands, requests, orders, etc., among which the act of AFP belongs to requests, which have various ways of manifestation depending on the types of request goals: *requests for action, goods, information, and permission.* Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) claim that action requests are the most direct and permission requests the least direct.

Just as requests in general, AFP is a pre-event act which expresses the S's expectation of H with regards to prospective action, verbal or non-verbal. The clearest distinction between request for permission and other types of requests, according to Gordon and Ervin-Tripp, is that *"true permission requests imply that the addressee has control over the speaker, and that the speaker's wishes are subject to the hearer's approval. This is precisely the opposite of the status relations in a command "* (in Blum- Kulka et al, 1989, p.60). Therefore, utterances of permission requests are often oriented toward H's approval or agreement, employing the following strategies:

Conventionally indirect strategies are the most commonly employed, especially when S is in lower status than H.

Could I use your computer for a short while?

Direct strategies are normally used among friends, family members or in informal situations

I'm going to use your computer for a minute, OK?

Non-conventionally indirect strategies are not usually employed in asking for permission. No example of this type is found in my data.

In terms of perspectives, the choice presents an important source of variation in AFP. Hearer-oriented perspective emphasizes the role of H.

Anh có thể cho tôi phô tô một số trang sách được không? (Could you allow me to photocopy some pages of your book?)

Do you mind meeting a bit later?

Speaker – oriented perspective gives emphasis on S's role.

Can I use your computer?

Mình dùng máy tính của bạn một chút được không? (I use your computer for a minute, OK ?)
Speaker- and hearer- oriented strategy (inclusive strategy) are sometimes used, indicating positive politeness.
   Could we arrange to meet a little later?
Impersonal perspective is not frequently employed in AFP. Examples of this type are rarely found in my data.
Would it be a problem to meet a bit latter?
It is worth noting that the distribution of perspectives varies across cultures. The data show that in Vietnamese, Hearer-oriented strategy appears to be dominant while the reverse is true for Canadian English.
   May I please use your computer?
   Anh có thể cho phép em sử dụng máy tính được không? (Could you possibly allow me to use your computer?)
In conclusion, both cultural and situational factors influence the way people ask for permission. Despite its universal existence, there are culturally-specific features that determine the choice of strategies, and situation in which the act may occur also vary across cultures. The following section describes the methodology of the study, including research method, data collection instrument, and research procedures.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative method (Creswell, 2013), which focuses on objective measurements and statistical analysis of data collected through survey questionnaires. The informants of the study included 89 Canadians and 120 Vietnamese. For relative homogeneity of informants' parameters, 50 English and 50 Vietnamese speakers of Northern dialect were selected for analysis. The informants were asked to provide information about their nationality, age, gender, marital status, occupation, area where they spend most of their time, acquisition of languages other than their mother tongue.

The data collection instrument employed in the study was Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaires (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). A space is provided for the informants to respond to each situation with the description of the roles and relationships of the interlocutors. The DCT questionnaire comprised three situations, representing three different aspects of life: *material, spiritual* and *intellectual*:

1. How would you verbally ask the following person for permission if you want to use his/her computer?
2. How would you verbally ask the following person for permission if you want to be late for a meeting with him/her?
3. How would you verbally ask the following person for permission if you want to photocopy some parts from his/her book?

The respondents were required to ask the following persons for permission: boss (about 10 years older); boss (about 5 years younger); colleague (opposite sex, same age); colleague (same sex, same age); aunt/uncle; brother/sister; close friend; someone they dislike; acquaintance (about 10 years older); acquaintance (about 5 years younger). It should be noted, however, that some factors that may affect communication are not manifested in the questionnaires. For example, paralinguistic factors (pitch, rate, volume, prosodies, etc.); non-verbal factors (gestures, facial expressions, postures); communicative environment and object language (place, time, clothes, conversational distance etc.); mood of participants (happy, angry or confused). Therefore, these factors are the limitations of the study.

IV. FINDINGS

A. The Use of Lexico-modal Markers by English Informants

1. The Use of Lexico-modal Markers as Seen from Informants' Parameters.

Table 1 presents the use of lexico-modal markers as seen from Canadian informant's age. It is interesting to find that the age factor makes some differences in the use of lexico-modal markers in English data. The younger use more lexico-modal markers than the older (45.4% vs. 40.7%). People under 40 use *und.* and *app.* more than those above 40 (26.8% vs. 18.3%, and 7.3 % vs. 6.9%). *Subj.* is not seen in group above 40 but occasionally found in under-40 group (0.6%). In contrast, higher percentages of *pol., int*., and *dow.* are employed by informants above 40 (8% vs. 6.5%, 3.1% vs. 0.2%, and 4.4% vs. 4%, respectively).

TABLE 1
THE USE OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS AS SEEN FROM CANADIAN INFORMANT'S AGE

Markers / Age	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Above 40	4.4%	18.3%	0%	3.1%	6.9%	8%
Under 40	4%	26.8%	0.6%	0.2%	7.3%	6.5%

With regards to the gender parameter as indicated in Table 2, a prevailing rate of lexico-modal markers goes to women than to men, who do not use any *subj.* at all. The striking difference is that a much higher percentage of *pol.* is employed by women (11.1% vs. 1.8%), and women also use more than twice as many *dow.* as men do (5.8% vs. 2.1%). In addition, the rate of *int.* in men's utterances accounts for a minor proportion (0.2% vs 2.1% in women's). The aspects that men outnumber women are *app.* and *und.* While the men's dominance of *und.* over women's is not so distinct (24%

vs. 23.6%), the proportion of *app.* used by men almost doubles that by women (9.4% vs. 5.4%). The distribution of lexico-modal markers is summarized in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2
THE USE OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS AS SEEN FROM CANADIAN INFORMANT'S GENDER

gender \ markers	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Male	2.1%	24%	0%	0.2%	9.4%	1.8%
Female	5.8%	23.6%	0.6%	2.1%	5.4%	11.1%

As for area of living, it can be seen that Canadian people who spend most of their time in the country use lexico-modal markers with much higher frequency than those in the city. Except for *subj.* and *pol.*, being equal in rate (0.4% and 7%, respectively), the prevailing rates of *dow., int.,* and *app.* go to those in the rural area (6.3% vs. 3.8%; 4.6% vs. 0.5% and 8.3% vs. 6.9%). Most distinctively, the rural folks use *und.* much more frequently than the city dwellers (45% vs. 19.7%). The manifestation of modal markers is illustrated in Table 3:

TABLE 3
THE USE OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS AS SEEN FROM CANADIAN INFORMANT'S LIVING AREA

Area of living \ Markers	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Urban	3.8%	19.7%	0.4%	0.5%	6.9%	7%
Rural	6.3%	45%	0.4%	4.6%	8.3%	7%

In terms of marital status parameter presented in Table 4, the data show that the single group makes more use of modal markers than the married category. Excluding the marker *app.,* where the married people outnumber the single (8.9% vs. 5.9%), the general tendency is that bigger proportions of modal markers are found in the single category. Particularly, the rates of *pol.* and *dow.* by the single are higher than the rates of the married (10.3% vs. 2.4%, and 4.7% vs. 3.5%, respectively). *Subj.* and *int.* are occasionally recorded in both groups (0.6% vs. 0.2%, and 1.5% vs. 1%, respectively). Informants from both groups use *und.* at a maximum, but the rate of the single nearly doubles that of the married (29.8% vs. 15.4%). Therefore, we might come to a preliminary conclusion that in AFP Canadian informants usually use *und.* to soften or minimize the imposition on H.

TABLE 4
THE USE OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS AS SEEN FROM CANADIAN INFORMANT'S MARRITAL STATUS

Area of living \ Markers	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Married	3.5%	15.4%	0.2%	1%	8.9%	2.4%
Single	4.7%	29.8%	0.6%	1.5%	5.9%	10.3%

Regarding the occupation parameter, students tend to use lexico-modal markers at the highest rate (47.8%), in which *und.* occupies the biggest part (29.6%), followed by *pol*, (7.8%), *app.* (6.3%), and *dow.* (3.9%). No *subj.* is found in this group. While there are no *subj.* and *int.* in the service group who score the highest proportion of *app.* (16.2%). In comparison with other occupations, service workers score the lowest rate of *und.* (11.9%). *Dow.* is sometimes used, in that the service workers take the biggest proportion (9.5%), almost tripling that of students (3.9%) and well tripling the office workers' (3%), and the smallest percentage is *pol* (5.7%). Office workers employ most types of modal markers, in which the biggest percentage is *und.* (22.8%), much higher than *pol.* (6.4%), *app.* (5.2%), *dow.* (3%), and *int.* (2.4%). *Subj.* is found only in this group, which accounts for a modest proportion (0.8%). Table 5 summarizes the use of lexico-modal markers as seen from the informants' occupation.

TABLE 5
THE USE OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS AS SEEN FROM CANADIAN INFORMANT'S OCCUPATION

Occupation \ Markers	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Student	3.9%	29.6%	0%	0.2%	6.3%	7.8%
Office worker	3%	22.8%	0.8%	2.4%	5.2%	6.4%
Service worker	9.5%	11.9%	0%	0%	16.2%	5.7%

2. The Manipulation of Lexico-modal Markers as Seen from Canadian Communicating Partners' Parameters

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the choice of politeness strategies depends on three social factors known as DPR viz. Social distance, Power relations between interlocutors, the absolute Ranking of imposition of an act in a particular culture. As can be seen in Table 6, the communicating partners' parameters have significant influence on the manipulation of lexico-modal markers with *und.* being the most dominant (27.3%) when Canadian people speak to their older boss. This proves that *und.* is a commonly used mitigating device in AFP in Canadian English. Among the *und.*, "*a bit*" and "*a little*" are frequently seen as in

Would it be alright if I was a little late for the meeting?

Pol. occupies the second biggest portion (12.7%), highest among the communicating partners and they contribute to increasing the degree of politeness. *App., dow.* and *int.* are sometimes used at a low frequency (4.7%, 3.3% and 1.3%, respectively). The overall result shows that in addressing to the boss of higher age, Canadian speakers English employ lexico-modal markers at the highest rate of all.

TABLE 6
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO THE BOSS (10 YEARS OLDER)

Modal markers	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	3.3%	27.3%	0%	1.3%	4.7%	12.7%

Table 7 summarizes the frequency of lexico-modal markers addressed to the 5-year-younger boss. In this scenario, there are very few differences as compared to the older cases above. Most informants indicated *same as above*. Except for *pol.* which is lower in proportion than the order boss (9.3%), other modal markers are almost quantitatively equal. The fact that fewer people use *pol.* for the younger boss might imply that it is one of the common marker to show deference to the older besides other means such as mood or modal verbs. However, it should be noted that *pol.* in English is not as strong in indicating age distance as it is in Vietnamese.

TABLE 7
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO THE BOSS (5 YEARS YOUNGER)

Modal markers	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	4%	28%	0%	0.7%	4.7%	9.3%

When addressing to their colleagues of opposite sex and same age, Canadian people infrequently use modal markers. With this partner, *subj.* appears although the rate is insignificant (1.3%). As in the previous cases, *und.* is overwhelmingly used (25.3%). Ranked second is *app.* (7.3%), followed by *pol.* and *dow.* (6.7% and 3.3%, respectively). There is only one utterance with *int.* (0.7%) and the total number of lexico-modal markers is lower than the boss. The data are shown in Table 8 below.

TABLE 8
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO COLLEAGUES (OPPOSITE SEX, SAME AGE)

Modal markers	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	3.3%	25.3%	1.3%	0.7%	7.3%	6.7%

It is noticeable that the gender factor hardly makes any difference when Canadian colleagues communicate with one another in terms of modality. Table 9 indicates that with two exceptions of *dow.* and *app.*, which are lower in rate (2% and 5.3%, respectively), there is no difference in the way modality is manipulated as compared to the case of opposite sex. The following example is among the most commonly seen in the corpus.

I'll just be a couple of minutes late, OK?

TABLE 9
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO COLLEAGUES (SAME SEX, SAME AGE)

Modal markers	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	2%	25.3%	1.3%	0.7%	5.3%	6.7%

Table 10 shows that when addressing to their relatives, Canadian informants make fewer choices of *und.* (22.7%) and more choices of *app.* (10%) than to others. *Pol.* occupies 5.3%, higher than *dow.* (3.3%.) *Int.* and *subj.* are sparingly used, accounting for 1.3% and 0.7%, respectively. However, the distinction between the language addressed to aunt/uncle and that to other partners is not so clear in English as it is in Vietnamese. It might be tentatively concluded that the slight variation in language use by Canadian people partly reflects a loose family relationship of individualism. For instance:

Would I please be able to use your computer for a little while?

TABLE 10
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO AUNT/UNCLE

Modal markers	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	3.3%	22.7	0.7%	1.3%	10%	5.3%

When asking their brother or sister for permission, the striking feature is the very low rate of utterances with modal markers as indicated in Table 11 below. The total percentage is only 36.1% in comparison with the highest, 49.3%, (boss 10 years older). By contrast, *app.* is more frequently used (12%). The rates of *und.* and *pol.* are the lowest compared to the corresponding types for other partners (16.7% and 4%, respectively). The percentage of *dow.* is 2.7% and there is only one utterance with *int.* (0.7%). The most common *app.* is OK as in the following sentence.

I am going to use your computer, OK?

TABLE 11
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO BROTHER/SISTER

Modal markers	Dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	2.7%	16.7%	0%	0.7%	12%	4%

If compared to the case of brother/sister, there is not much difference in the manner Canadian people speak to their close friends as indicated in Table 12. Excluding *app.*, which is of a lower rate (10%) than the case above, other modal markers are a little more frequently chosen, among which *und.* ranks the top (19.3%), followed by *pol.* (4.7%) and *int.* (2%). For example:

Hey, I'm using your computer. Is that OK?

TABLE 12
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO CLOSE FRIENDS

Modal markers	Dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	4%	19.3%	0%	2%	10%	4.7%

In case of someone they dislike, the informants responded that *Und.* is the most usually employed (23.3%). The proportions of *pol., dow.* and *app.* are approximately equal (6%, 5.3% and 5.3 %, respectively). As in the previous case, *int.* is of a minor percentage (2%) and the typical *dow.* is '*just*'. Generally speaking, when addressing to the person they dislike, their language sounds more tentative as example below.

Could I just photocopy a few parts of your book?

TABLE 13
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO SOMEONE YOU DISLIKE

Modal markers	Dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	Pol.
Percentage	5.3%	23.3%	0%	2%	5.3%	6%

Regarding acquaintance, Table 14 indicates that when addressing to the older acquaintance, Canadian people use *pol.* with a slightly higher frequency than most of other partners (7.3%). *Und.* occupies the biggest proportion as in previous case (24%). However, *app.* accounts for only 4.7%, the lowest rate in comparison with other conversational interactants. *Dow.* and *int.* are occasionally chosen (3.3% and 1.3%, respectively). Roughly compared, there are considerable similarities when Canadian informants address to their colleague of the same sex and acquaintance as in the following instance:

May I have your permission to photocopy this, please?

TABLE 14
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO ACQUAINTANCE (10 YEARS OLDER)

Modal markers	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	3.3%	24%	0%	1.3%	4.7%	7.3%

When communicating with younger acquaintance, it is evident that Canadian informants make more use of modal markers than those ten years older (42% vs. 40.6% in total). Nevertheless, for this partner, fewer people choose *pol.* (6% vs. 7.3%). *Dow.* is used with the same rate (3.3%) but *und.* and *int.* are a little higher (24.7% and 2%, respectively). The most common types of *int.* are "*really*" and "*too*" as in the sentence below.

I really like your book. can I please copy some pages?

In addition, more utterances with *app.* are observed, occupying 6%. Based on the results, we can tentatively conclude that the age factor makers very little difference in AFP by Canadian people.

TABLE 15
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO ACQUAINTANCE (5 YEARS YOUNGER)

Modal markers	dow.	und.	subj.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	3.3%	24.7%	0%	2%	6%	6%

B. The Use of Lexico-modal Markers by Vietnamese Informants

1. The Use of Lexico-modal Markers as Seen from Informants' Parameters.

With regards to the age factor, it is found that Vietnamese under 40 use more lexico-modal markers than those above 40, excluding *int.* which the latter group greatly outnumbers the former (5.8% vs. 1%). Utterances with *app.* account for the majority with a prevailing rate for the younger (62.8% vs. 40.9%). The proportion of *und.* employed by the younger group also nearly doubles that by the older (23.2% vs.12.1%) and *dow.* is rarely used by both groups (2.2% vs.0.3%). It is additionally noticeable to see that people under 40 resort to *pol.* much more than those above 40 (9.1% vs. 2.1%) as shown in Table 16 below:

TABLE 16
THE USE OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS AS SEEN FROM INFORMANT'S AGE

Age	marker	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Above 40		0.3%	12.1%	5.8%	40.9%	2.1%
Under 40		2.2%	23.2%	1%	62.8%	9.1%

For the gender parameter, an overview of the data indicates that there are remarkable differences in the way males and females make choice of modal markers. The sharpest distinction is the use of *app.* which occupies 66.5% in the females' utterances compared to 51.3% in the male group. *Und.* comes second in the list with females' dominance (24.4% vs.18%), but *dow.* is used at a very low frequency (female: 2.1% vs. male: 1.5%). Additionally, females make more frequent use of *pol.* than males (11.4% vs. 4.6%). The only marker that males use more than females is *int.* (2.4% vs.1.7%). Therefore, it can be said that women show attitudinal markers in speech more than men as far as AFP is concerned.

TABLE 17
THE USE OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS AS SEEN FROM INFORMANT'S GENDER

Gender	Marker	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Male		1.5%	18%	2.4%	51.3%	4.6%
Female		2.1%	24.4%	1.7%	66.5%	11.4%

As seen from the area of living, Vietnamese rural dwellers use more lexico-modal markers than the urban counterparts. As in the previous cases, *app.* covers the majority (62.5% vs.54.7%, respectively). Also, people in the countryside use *und.* at a much higher rate than those in the city (27.9% vs.15.6%) and the former group resort to *pol.* more than the latter (8.3% vs.7.1%). *Dow.* is used almost equally in both groups (rural:1.7% vs. urban:1.8%). However, *int.* is in the reverse proportion, i.e., the townsmen make more choices of *int.* than the country folks. (2.3% vs.1.7%) as presented in Table 18.

TABLE 18
THE USE OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS AS SEEN FROM INFORMANT'S AREA OF LIVING

Living Area	marker	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Urban		1.8%	15.6%	2.3%	54.7%	7.1%
Rural		1.7%	27.9%	1.7%	62.5%	8.3%

For the marital status parameter, the findings show that the single and married groups have some differences in the use of lexico-modal markers. As can be seen in Table 19, the single generally make more modalized utterances than the married. The most frequently used marker in both groups is *app.*, which accounts for 62.3% in the former group and 45.6% in the latter. The proportions of *dow.* and *pol.* are also greater in utterances of the single (2.2% vs.0.5% and 8.6% vs.4.9%, respectively). Nevertheless, the married use *und.* and *int.* at little higher frequency than the single (21.8% vs.20.5%, and 3.3% vs.1.6%, respectively). These results are also similar to the Canadian findings.

TABLE 19
THE USE OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS AS SEEN FROM INFORMANT'S MARITAL STATUS

Marital status	marker	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Married		0.5%	21.8%	3.3%	45.6%	4.9%
Single		2.2%	20.5%	1.6%	62.3%	8.6%

Regarding occupation, it can be seen in Table 20 below that there are some distinct variations in the manipulation of modality as far as occupation is concerned. The service workers use *app.* more frequently than students and people in the office area (65.2% vs. 63.6% and 56.3%, respectively). However, the office workers use more *pol.* than the other two groups:17.3% in comparison with 11.4% by service workers and 9% by students. *Und.* is more frequently found in the utterances by the service group than the students and office counterparts (23.4% vs. 20% and 21%, respectively). While *dow.* is used minimally by students (1.1%) and office workers (1.2%), the people in the service sector use it more often (5.7%). Furthermore, although no *int.* is used by students, office and service workers occasionally employ it, with the dominance being the former (4% vs.1.4%). The general comparison shows the highest frequency in the use of modalized utterances by the people in the service sector.

TABLE 20
THE USE OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS AS SEEN FROM INFORMANT'S OCCUPATION

Occupation	marker	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Student		1.1%	20%	0%	63.6%	9%
Office worker		1.2%	21%	4%	56.3%	17.3%
Service worker		5.7%	23.4%	1.4%	65.2%	11.4%

2. The Manipulation of Lexico-modal Markers as Seen from Communicating Partners' Parameters

Vietnamese culture belongs to the large power distance model (Hofstede, 1991). Therefore, when addressing their boss, they tend to make more use of lexico-modal markers. As seen in Table 21, *App.* is employed at the highest rate (56%), and utterances with *und.* are frequently recorded at a similar rate (20%) as it is for the rest of interactants, i.e., there is little difference in the use of *und.* for all partners. *Int.* and *dow.* are sometimes utilized at an equal rate (1.3%) but there is a phenomenal increase in the number of utterances with *pol.* (26%). This indicates that in order to be linguistically polite to the superior Vietnamese people seem to resort to *pol.* The most common marker is *"ạ"* such as the example below:

Nếu không phiền, cháu có thể sử dụng máy của chú một chút được không ạ?
(If it doesn't cause any inconvenience, could I please use your computer for a minute?)

TABLE 21
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO THE BOSS (10 YEARS OLDER)

Modal markers	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	1.3%	20%	1.3%	56%	26%

As for the situation where the boss is younger, the data show a little fluctuation of lexico-modal markers distribution if compared with the previous situation except for *pol.,* which remarkably decreases in the occurrence frequency, covering only 9.3% of the total utterances. This is because *pol.* is normally used for the older by Vietnamese people. To show deference to the younger, people tend to resort to other markers such as *dow.* or *und.* rather than *pol.* Like "dạ", "thưa" because these markers sound humble or odd if they are addressed to the younger.

Tôi xin phép đến muộn một chút vì có việc riêng
(For personal reasons, may I have your permission to be a little late for the meeting)

TABLE 22
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO THE BOSS (5 YEARS YOUNGER)

Modal markers	Dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	2%	20%	0.7%	56%	9.3%

When addressing their workmates of the opposite sex, the Vietnamese informants dominantly use *app.* (60%). *Und.* comes second (20%), almost equal in rate for other interlocutors. *Dow.* is sometimes used (3.3%) but *Int.* and *pol.* are rarely employed (1.3% and 0.7%, respectively). It is evident that Vietnamese people make very little use of *pol.* for this conversational partner as summarized in the following table.

TABLE 23
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO COLLEAGUES (OPPOSITE SEX, SAME AGE)

Modal markers	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	3.3%	20%	1.3%	60%	0.7%

In comparison with the opposite sex colleagues, there is a slight increase in the rates of *und.* and *app.* (25.3% and 63.3%, respectively) and the proportion of *dow.* remains unchanged (3.3%). There are only three utterances with *int.* (2%) and no *pol.* is observed. Generally, there is not much difference in the way Vietnamese speakers address to their colleagues of both genders as indicated in Table 24. The following sentence is among the most commonly used in the corpus.

Cho mình photo tí tính ể? (Let me photocopy a few parts, will you?)

TABLE 24
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO COLLEAGUES (SAME SEX, SAME AGE)

Modal markers	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	3.3%	25.3%	2%	63.3%	0%

When addressing their aunt or uncle, Vietnamese informants utilise more *pol.* (14.7%). This concurs with the common practice in the Vietnamese culture that people usually employ *pol.* for their relatives of higher status to show respect. *App.* prevails as it is addressed to other interactants although it tends to decrease a little bit in rate (53%) and *und.* is also rather frequently recorded (20.7%). There is only one utterance with *dow.* (0.7%) and *Int.* covers a minor proportion (2.7%). The distribution of lexico-modal markers addressed to Aunt/Uncle is presented in Table 25 below.

TABLE 25
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO AUNT/UNCLE

Modal markers	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	0.7%	20.7%	2.7%	53.3%	14.7%

When addressing their sibling, it is evident from the table 26 that Vietnamese speakers use lexico-modal markers at the lowest rate. *App.* is of the approximately same proportion as it is for aunt/uncle (55.3%). *Und.* is employed at normal frequency (20%) but *pol.*, *int.* and *dow.* are used minimally (2%, 1.3% and 0.7%, respectively). It is possible

that the utterances with *pol.* are for the older brother or sister since the age factor considerably affects the choice of modal markers in Vietnamese.

TABLE 26
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO BROTHER/SISTER

Modal markers	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	0.7%	20%	1.3%	55.3%	2%

When asking their peers for permission, Vietnamese informants do not use *pol.* while *app.* is seen at a maximum rate (58.7%). There is hardly any noticeable change in the use of *und.,* which lies at 20% as it is for other situations. Utterances with *dow.* are sometimes observed, occupying only 2% and *Int.* is used at a little bit higher rate (2.7%). The statistics suggest that Vietnamese people are normally casual or informal in AFP if the addressee is their intimate. The most distinctive feature is the use of appealer "nhé"

Tớ sử dụng máy của <u>cậu</u> một lúc <u>nhé</u>(Mind if I use your computer for a while?)

TABLE 27
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO CLOSE FRIENDS

Modal markers	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	2%	20%	2.7%	58.7%	0%

For someone they dislike, the percentages of modalized utterances are greater than those for intimates and relatives. Quantitatively, utterances with *app.* account for 56%, and *und.* 21.3%. *Dow.* and *int.* are sparingly employed (1.3% and 2.7%, respectively). It is worth noting that while Canadian informants tend to resort to *pol.* as they address to someone they dislike more than to other interlocutors, Vietnamese counterparts show an opposite trend, that is to say, *pol.* is employed at a lower frequency (3.3%). However, they resort to other mitigating devices to soften the utterance as the sentence below

Xin lỗi, anh <u>có thể</u> cho tôi dùng máy <u>một chút</u> được không?
(Sorry! Could you possibly let me use your computer for a second ?)

TABLE 28
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO SOMEONE YOU DISLIKE

Modal markers	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	1.3%	21.3%	2.7%	56%	3.3%

In addressing their acquaintances who are ten years older, Vietnamese speakers make maximum use of *app.* (62%). *Und.* is also a commonly used marker, occupying 22.7%. Interestingly, *pol.* is used at a rather high rate (16.7%) only after the boss ten years older. This reflects the fact that hierarchy and seniority are strongly felt in the Vietnamese language and culture. *Dow* and *int.* are observed at a balanced rate (1.3%). The distribution of lexico-modal markers for older acquaintance is indicated in Table 29.

TABLE 29
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED ACQUAINTANCE (10 YEARS OLDER)

Modal markers	dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	1.3%	22.7%	1.3%	62%	16.7%

In case of younger acquaintance, the data indicate that Vietnamese informants use lexico-modal markers at similar rates as they do with their older interlocutors with an exception of *pol.*. Table 30 features the frequency of lexico-modal markers addressed to younger acquaintance with *app.* accounting for the biggest proportion (64%), followed by *und.* (22%). The fact that only one utterance containing *dow.* and no *pol.* is used implies an intimacy between the interlocutors. It is worth noting that the way *int.* is used is very similar in both languages and they are all seen in situation 3 (photocopy a book) and used to increase interest to H as in the following examples:

Chà! <u>Đoạn này đọc thú vị quá</u>. Cho anh mượn phô tô chút <u>nhé</u> (Vietnamese*)*
<u>I really enjoyed your book</u>. I was wondering if I could photocopy some pages. (Canadian)

TABLE 30
FREQUENCY OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKERS ADDRESSED TO ACQUAINTANCE (5 YEARS YOUNGER)

Modal markers	Dow.	und.	int.	app.	pol.
Percentage	0.7%	22%	2.7%	64%	0%

V. DISCUSSION

The analysis of 3000 utterances of AFP indicates that six out of nine types of lexico-modal markers are employed by the Canadian informants in comparison with five types used by Vietnamese counterparts. The sharpest difference is the use of appealers, which account for 58% of the total utterances in Vietnamese as compared to only 7.1% in English. Distribution of each category is represented in Table 31 below.

TABLE 31
OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF LEXICO-MODAL MARKER IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

Lexico-modal markers	English	Vietnamese
Understaters	23.7%	20.8%
Appealers	7.1%	58%
Politeness markers	7%	7.6 %
Downtoners	4.2%	1.8%
Intensifiers	1.3%	2%
Subjectivisers	0.4%	0%

Major Similarities and Differences

A. Major Similarities in Terms of Informants' Parameters

English and Vietnamese informants under 40 score higher percentages of *und.* and *app.* than those above 40 (English 26.8% vs.18.3%, and 7.3% vs. 6.9%; Vietnamese 23.2% vs. 12.1%, and 62.8% vs. 40.9%, respectively). Females from both groups make no use of *subj.* and use more *dow.* and *pol.* than males (English 5.8% vs. 2.1%, and 11.1% vs. 1.8%; Vietnamese 2.1% vs. 1.5%, and 11.4% vs. 4.6%, respectively). Both Canadian and Vietnamese rural dwellers employ lexico-modal markers at higher rate than their urban counterparts. The single informants from both groups score higher rates of *dow.* and *pol.* than the married (English 4.7% vs. 3.5%, and 10.3% vs. 2.4%; Vietnamese 2.2% vs. 0.5%, and 8.6% vs. 4.9%, respectively). Both Canadian and Vietnamese in the service sector make more choices of *dow.* and *app.* than students and office workers (English 9.5%, 3.9% and 3%; and 16.2%, 6.3% and 5.2%; Vietnamese 5.7%, 1.1% and 1.2%; and 65.2%, 63.6% and 56.3%, respectively).

B. Major Similarities in Terms of Communicating Partners' Parameters

The total numbers of modalized utterances addressed to brother/sister and close friend by Canadian and Vietnamese informants are the lowest of all. This proves that the language for intimates and family members is, to a certain extent, similar in both languages. *Und.* in both corpuses fluctuates around 20%, and *int.* is utilized at a minimal rate (from 0.7% to 2.7%). The striking similarity is the use of *int.*, which is exactly equal in rate in both groups when it is used for older and younger bosses, and older acquaintance (1.3%, 0.7% and 1.3%, respectively). Informants from both groups employ *und.* for older and younger acquaintance at approximately equivalent proportions (English 24% vs. 24.7%; Vietnamese 22.7% vs. 22%, respectively). The percentage of utterances with *int.* addressed to the close friend (English 2%, Vietnamese 2.7%) and the disliked person (English 2%, Vietnamese 2.7%) is equally distributed in both groups of informants.

C. Major Differences in Terms of Informants' Parameters

The investigation of 3,000 utterances uncovers that, except for *app.,* which Vietnamese informants overwhelmingly resort to, the proportions of lexico-modal markers slightly differ in both languages. Nevertheless, the distribution of modality regarding communicating partners' roles is more flexible in Vietnamese, i.e., the relationship between interlocutors significantly influences the manipulation of modality. This is due to the fact that Vietnamese culture belongs to what Hofstede (1991) labels as "Large Power Distance" society. It is further noted that *subj.* is sometimes seen in English but there is no such a single case in Vietnamese.

It is evident that English speakers above 40 use *pol.* at a higher rate than those under 40 (8% vs. 6.5%) while the Vietnamese data show the reverse results (2.1% vs. 9.1%, respectively). While both English age groups use *dow.* at almost the same rates (4.4% by the older and 4% by the younger), there is bigger difference in the Vietnamese data; the younger's rate is the higher (2.2% vs.0.3%). Canadian males use more *app.* than females (9.4% vs. 5.4%) but the Vietnamese females' rate dominates the males' (66.5% vs. 51.3%). While Canadian urban and rural people use *pol.* at the same rate (7%), the Vietnamese corpus shows that a higher percentage goes to the rural ones (8.3% vs. 7.1 %). In contrast, Vietnamese urban rate of *int.* is higher than the rural (2.3% vs. 1.7%) but the order is reverse in the English results (0.5% vs. 4.6%, respectively). Regarding marital status, although the difference in the use of *und.* by Vietnamese married and single people is inconsiderable (21.8% vs. 20.5%, respectively), the rate of the English latter group almost doubles the former's (29.8% vs. 15.4%). Vietnamese service workers use *und.* with a bigger proportion than the office workers and students (23.4%, 21% and 20%, respectively), whereas the English data show that the domination of *und.* goes to students, whose rate nearly triples the service workers' (29.6% vs. 11.9%). Also, Vietnamese office workers resort to *pol.* most often (office workers: 17.3%, service workers: 11.4%, students: 9%) while it is dominated by students in the English data (students: 7.8%, office workers: 6.4% and service workers: 5.7%). No *int.* is found in the English service group but it is sometimes used by Vietnamese respondents (1.4%).

D. Major Differences in Terms of Communicating Partners' Parameters

The prominent feature is the age factor that affects Vietnamese people's manner of communication. In addressing the older (boss, aunt/uncle, acquaintance) Vietnamese informants tend to overwhelmingly resort to *pol.* while such markers are not utilized in the language addressed to those of equal age. In English, the distinction is minor, i.e., *pol.* is used for all partners with a little distinction. It is evident that *pol.* is a very important device to convey politeness in Vietnamese. English informants employ *app.* most often for brother/sister, aunt/uncle and close friend (12%, 10% and 10%,

respectively) but Vietnamese counterparts use it most frequently for acquaintance (both older and younger) and colleague (same sex, same age: 62%, 64% and 63.3%, respectively). When speaking to someone they dislike, English speakers employ *pol.* at a higher rate (6%) than their Vietnamese counterparts (3.3%).

VI. CONCLUSION

This study investigates linguistic modality manifested in asking for permission by Vietnamese and Canadian speakers of English. There are certain similarities and differences in the two languages. While hearer-oriented verbal style tends to be dominant in Vietnamese through the use of "you", the speaker-oriented strategy with the dominant use of "I" is much more common in English. The cultural factor is also strongly felt in the use of direct and indirect speech acts. Vietnamese culture is categorized as Collectivism, which promotes interdependence and harmony (Hofstede, 1991). Hence, they tend to resort to direct strategies with a dominant use of appealers such as "nhé", which sounds intimate to H. English culture, by contrast, belongs to Individualism, which respects privacy and promotes independence. Conventionally indirect strategies such as *Can I, Could I*, etc. are therefore commonly employed by English speakers. Another noticeable feature is that Vietnamese speakers frequently use politeness markers when they communicate with the older, but they hardly use them for their peers. This is again an indication of Vietnamese collectivistic culture, where hierarchy is strongly felt in verbal interactions. English speakers, however, use politeness markers for all partners with a slight variation. Another noteworthy similarity is that both Canadian and Vietnamese women modalize their language than men. This may imply that women are generally more linguistically emotional than men as Holmes states*: "Men's reason for talking often focuses on the content of the talk or its outcomes, rather than how it affects the feelings of others. It is women who rather emphasize this aspect of talk"* (1995, p.2). These findings are, therefore, of theoretical significance and have pedagogical implications.

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