

# **A Vietnamese-American cross cultural study of giving comments on contestants' performance by judges in Vietnam Idol and American Idol / Trần Thị Hoàng Ngân**

## **PART A: INTRODUCTION**

### **I. RATIONALE**

With the development of society, the need of entertainment has been increasing more rapidly. People seek many ways to relax their mind such as go for holiday, go camping and so on. However, the simplest way of entertainment is music. Many music shows and games have been broadcasted on TV attracting the interest of most of people. Vietnam Idol and American Idol are very famous shows of music nowadays. Besides selecting an excellent contestant to become the idol of music, the audience also concern the manner the judges give comments on the performance of contestants. Thus, Vietnamese – American cross-cultural studies appear useful and vital in this way.

Commenting is common in many languages and cultures. It is realized by comforting, showing concern or expressing likes or dislike or reaction, etc. with the hearer. Cross-cultural study on judges' commenting on contestants' performance has not received much concern from linguistics and researchers. Then, how do Vietnamese and American judges give comments on contestants' performance? How are the two manners different? Which manner is a positive way? This leads the author to the decision to conduct a research into “**A Vietnamese-American cross-cultural study of giving comments on contestants' performance by judges in Vietnam and American Idol**” to find out the similarities and differences in the manner of giving comments of Vietnamese and American judges on contestants' performance. The findings from the study hopefully would be a source of assistance in understanding between the two cultures American and Vietnamese.

### **II. AIMS OF THE STUDY**

The aims of the study are:

- To convey ways which judges give verbal comments on contestants' performance in Vietnam Idol 2010 and American Idol 2011.
- To point out the similarities and differences in the manner American and Vietnamese judges commenting in their target language and culture.
- To answer the two research questions:
  - + Which politeness strategies are used by Vietnamese judges and which ones are chosen by American judges?

- + Who employs more politeness strategies in verbal communication: Vietnamese judges and American ones?
- To contribute to raise cross-cultural awareness in using verbal cues for foreign language teachers and learners as well as other potential interactants of international communication.

### **III. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The study is focused on the verbal aspect of the act of giving comments by judges on contestants' performance after live show in the two latest shows: Vietnam Idol 2010 and American Idol 2011 basing on the politeness theory by Brown and Levinson and other linguistics researchers. Because of some limitations, the author only focuses on the **final round: top 4 and top 3 perform**.

### **IV. METHODOLOGY**

This part is focused on a detailed depiction of the methodology applied in the research paper. More specially, the size and characteristics of the research subject altogether with research instruments, data collection procedure as well as data analysis procedure are put into description and justification.

#### **IV.1. Selection of subjects**

In order to conduct this study, the researcher has employed top 4 and top 3 performs of Vietnam Idol 2010 and also two ones of American Idol 2011. the research subjects in this study have been chosen under the procedure of information-oriented sampling, as opposed to random sampling. In these two performs of American Idol 2011, the researcher has obtained 51 utterances of commenting; meanwhile, she has got 36 commenting utterances of Vietnam version, which makes a total of 87 utterances. This size of the samples could somehow be considered eligible enough for the researcher to carry out a reliable study.

#### **IV.2. Research methods**

To conduct the study, the researcher has employed two methods namely quantitative and qualitative ones. The combination of these two methods has offered the researcher valid data for later analysis. Regarding the aim of the study, the researcher has found that quantitative is the most feasible method to deal with the research problems.

- To develop and employ mathematical models, theories
- To provide the fundamental connection between empirical observation and mathematical expression

Besides, qualitative research is a method of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, traditionally in the social sciences, but also in market research and further contexts.

- To gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior
- To investigate the **why** and **how** of decision-making

#### **IV.3. Data collection procedures**

The data collection procedure has been divided into two successive phases.

**Phase 1:**

This phase has concentrated mainly on collecting 4 shows of American Idol and another 4 shows of Vietnam Idol. To be more specific, the researcher has spent a lot of time finding then watching 12 Vietnamese episodes and 12 American ones then collected 4 episodes of each version.

**Phase 2:**

The researcher has watched then taken notes all the transcripts of the commenting parts of totally 8 American and Vietnamese shows. Afterwards, she has identified the strategies of politeness used in every commenting utterance transcribed. Simultaneously, prominent examples of each strategy have been noted down to exemplify the researcher's later analysis.

**IV.4. Data analysis procedures**

First, the verbal data have been interpreted into subtypes of politeness strategies. As observed, there are seven strategies that are most commonly used by both Vietnamese and American judges.

After that, the researcher has calculated the frequency of commentators' using the above politeness strategies. This step has been followed by her converting the frequency into the percentile forms for comparison.

Finally, the researcher has compared the frequencies of politeness strategies used by Vietnamese judges and American ones.

## **PART B: DEVELOPMENT**

### **CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL PRELIMINARIES**

#### **I.1. CULTURE**

##### **I.1.1. Definition of culture**

Culture is often thought of as shared behavior and beliefs, but in any society, all individuals never think and act exactly the same. Each author has different definitions of culture.

Culture is always the result of human intervention in the biological processes of nature. It is the product of socially and historically situated discourse communities, created and shaped by language. Culture is always changing because culture consists of learned patterns of behavior and belief. More clearly, language can not occur alone and is never separated from social activities and its culture.

##### **I.1.2. Language-culture interrelationship**

Language and culture always keep changing, consequently, people's behaviors and attitudes seem to vary due in time and space. Culture is the result of human intervention in the biological processes of nature. So culture is always changing as culture consists of learned patterns of behavior and belief. Meanwhile

language can not occur alone and is never separated from social activities and its culture. It is widely recognized that the correlation between language and culture is undeniable.

### **I.1.3 COMMUNICATION AND CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

#### **I.2 Speech acts**

##### **I.2.1 Theories of speech act**

Speech act is a term taken from the word of philosophers of language, John Searle and John Austin in particular who assumes that in saying something a speaker also does something.

John Austin (1962) defines speech acts as the actions performed in saying something. When people produce utterances, they often perform actions via those utterances. These actions are called speech acts; for example: complaint, compliment, invitation, comment or request. A speech act is part of a speech event. The speech act can be investigated under three different headings: (1) as meaningful speech, (2) as speech with a certain conventional force, and (3) as speech with a certain non-conventional effect. These three related acts are called locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act.

- Locutionary act is the basic act of producing a meaningful linguistic expression. The locutionary act is performed with some purposes or function in mind.
- Illocutionary act is an act performed via the communicative force of an utterance. In engaging in locutionary acts we also perform illocutionary acts such as informing, advising, offer, promise, commenting... In uttering a sentence by virtue of conversational force associated with it.
- Perlocutionary act is what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring perlocutionary acts are performed only on the assumption that the hearer will recognize the effect you intended.

##### **I.2.2 Classification of speech acts**

Austin (1962:151) divides the illocutionary acts into five major types of functions to utterances. They are: verdictives (e.g. assess, appraise...), exercitivities (e.g. command, direct...), commissives (e.g. promise, propose...), behabitives (e.g. apologise, thank...) and expositives (e.g. accept, agree...) Meanwhile, Searle (1976:10-16) pays attention to the way hearer responds to the utterance intentionally. He classifies speech act into five types:

1. **Declaration:** changing the state of affairs in the world by utterance, such as I bet, I resign...(a pronouncement at court)  
For example: *I hereby pronounce you husband and wife.*
2. **Representatives:** describing states or events in the world (e.g. an assertion or a report)  
For example: *It is a sunny day.*
3. **Commissives:** committing the speaker to doing something (e.g. a promise or a threat)  
For example: *I promise you that I will come back soon.*

4. **Expressives:** expressing feelings and attitudes about something. They may be statements of pleasure, pain, likes, joy or sorrow...

For example: *It was great!*

5. **Directives:** getting the listener to do something. They are commands, orders, requests and suggestions

For example: *You should go out with her.*

### **I.2.3 Commenting as a speech act**

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Encyclopedic, "*commenting is the act of expressing an opinion or reaction in speech or writing.*"

Giving comment to contestants' performance is, therefore, defined as the act of giving an opinion or reaction to the performance of contestants. Here, "give" literally means "offer" or "share" the understanding or experience of others. In brief, judges' giving comments to contestants' performance after their live show does not only mean the mere verbal words of commenting, but includes the way judges comment. The **What** and the **How** are both strongly emphasized in this act.

For example, American judges comment on contestants' performance:

*Very nicely done!*

*It was really beautiful.*

In the light of speech act, these utterances are regarded as ***the act of expressing surprise, and praise***. The speaker here would like to give the feeling of happiness and surprise to the success of the hearer's performance. This is an ***expressive act***.

Giving comments is also expressed in other acts.

For instance, Vietnamese judges give comments:

*I will vote this song.*

*If I have a prize, I will give to you for your effort to this song.*

When the speaker makes an utterance, he also has an intention in his speech. In term of commenting, the speaker uses variety acts of expressing his opinion or reaction. In this research, giving comments is analyzed in terms of verbal stimulus, with which the utterances are expressed in the two shows: Vietnam Idol and American Idol. Non-verbal communication, paralinguistic and extra linguistic factors of this act are not in the focus of the study. Another factor should be considered is that the response of this stimulus is beyond the scope of the study.

## **I.3 POLITENESS**

### **I.3.1 Theory of politeness**

Politeness, as defined by Blum-Kulka (1987:140), is "a function of redressive action with the latter having correlative relationship with indirectness."

Nguyen Quang (2005:18) gives different view of politeness, “*Politeness refers to any communicative act (verbal and/or nonverbal) which is appropriately intended to make others feel better or less bad.*”

When we give comments to somebody, we often show our politeness by expressing our awareness of another person’s face. In this sense, politeness can be accomplished in situations of social distance and closeness. Showing awareness for another’s face is often described in terms of friendliness, camaraderie or solidarity.

### 1.3.2 Politeness principles

Brown and Levinson (1978) do not give a rule of politeness principles but set a schema of four components of communicative choices:

- without redressive action, baldly
- positive politeness
- negative politeness
- off record

in which the way they number the choice decides the level of politeness: the greater FTA the more polite strategy employed, thus the higher number chosen in the following figure

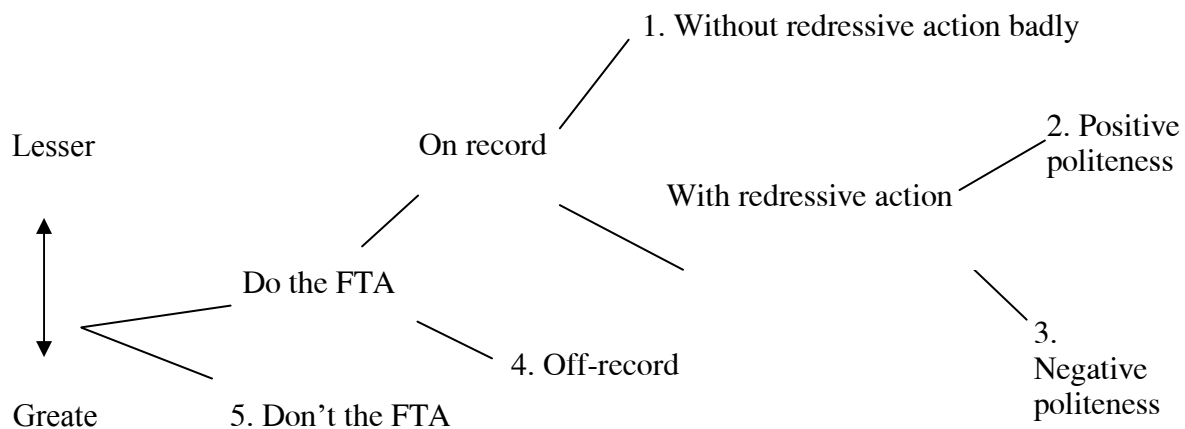
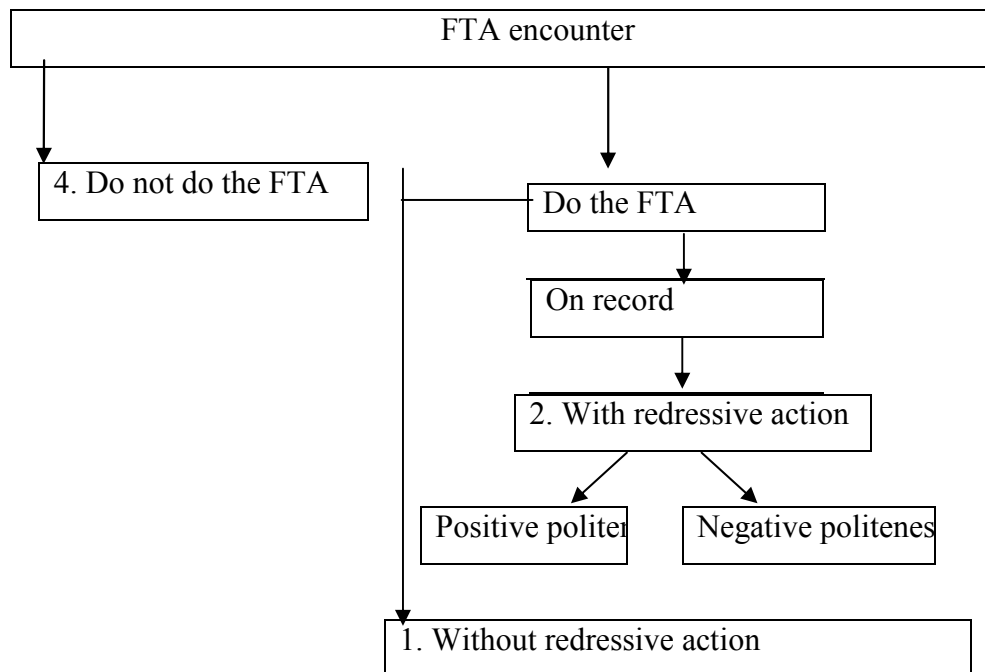


Figure 2: Strategies for doing the FTAs (Brown and Levinson, 1978:65)

According to Nguyen Quang (2005:25), the schemata should be changed in the following ways:

*Figure 3: Nguyen Quang's schemata of possible strategies for doing the FTAs*



### **I.3.3 POLITENESS STRATEGIES**

#### **I.3.3.1 Positive politeness strategies**

According to Nguyen Quang (2005: 27), “*Positive politeness is any communicative act (verbal and or nonverbal) which is appropriately intended to show the speaker’s concern to the addressee, thus, enhancing the sense of solidarity between them.*”

Positive politeness is realized in three main mechanisms:

- Claim common ground
- Display the sense of cooperation
- Satisfy hearer’s wants

#### **Mechanism 1: Claim common ground**

- **Strategy 1:** Notice/attend to H (interest, wants, needs...)

- **Strategy 2:** Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)
- **Strategy 3:** Intensify interest to the hearer in the speaker's contribution
- **Strategy 4:** Use in-group identity markers in speech
- **Strategy 5:** Seek agreement
- **Strategy 6:** Avoid disagreement
- **Strategy 7:** Presuppose, raise, and assert common ground.
- **Strategy 8:** Joke to put hearer at ease
- **Mechanism 2:** Display the sense of cooperation
  - **Strategy 9:** Assert or presuppose knowledge of and concern for hearer's wants
  - **Strategy 10:** Offer, promise.
  - **Strategy 11:** Be optimistic.
  - **Strategy 12:** Include both S and H in the activity.
  - **Strategy 13:** Give or ask for reasons.
  - **Strategy 14:** Assert reciprocal exchange.
  - **Strategy 15:** Give gifts to H (good, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)
  - **Strategy 16:** Console and encourage
  - **Strategy 17:** Ask personal questions

### I.3.3.2 Negative politeness strategies

According to Nguyen Quang (2005:30), negative politeness “is any communication act (verbal/or non verbal) which is appropriately intended to show that the speaker does not want to impinge on the addressee's privacy, thus enhancing the sense of distance between them.”

There are five main mechanisms in negative politeness, which consist 11 strategies;

- **Mechanism 1:** Be indirect
  - **Strategy 1:** Be conventionally indirect
  - **Strategy 2:** Question, hedge.
  - **Strategy 3:** Be pessimistic
  - **Strategy 4:** Minimizing the imposition
  - **Strategy 5:** Give deference.
  - **Strategy 6:** Apologise.
  - **Strategy 7:** Impersonalize S and H. Avoid the pronoun I and You
  - **Strategy 8:** State the FTA as instance of a general rule.
  - **Strategy 9:** Normalize to distance the actor and add formality.
  - **Strategy 10:** Go on record as incurring a debt or as not indebteding H
  - **Strategy 11:** Avoid asking personal questions



## CHAPTER II: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### II.1 Information of American Idol and Vietnam Idol

### II.2. REALISATION OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN GIVING COMMENTS ON CONTESTANTS' PERFORMANCE BY JUDGES IN AMERICAN IDOL AND VIETNAM IDOL

#### II.2.1 Giving comments with both positive and negative politeness strategies

- **Strategy 1: Exaggerate**

For examples:

*Very nicely done.*

*It was really beautiful.*

*A pretty, ethereal moment.*

*Tôi đánh giá cao về cách chọn bài hát của em vì nó mang tính cập nhật với giới trẻ hiện nay.*

*(I highly appreciate your choice of this song as this song is fashionable with the youth today).*

- **Strategy 2: Give advice**

Vietnamese:

*Phải mạnh bạo lên. Em cố gắng lên*

*(Be self-confident. Try your best!)*

- **Strategy 3: Joke**

*Haley, did you fall for me? It's not how many times you fall; it's how many times you get back up.*

*This girl is slaying it.*

*America's got their work cut out for them.*

*Tôi thấy em hát hay hơn bà của mình rất nhiều.*

*(I see that you sang much more beautifully than your grandmother).*

*Tôi phát hiện ra rằng đôi khi "sexy" không cần phải nhìn.*

*(I have found out that sometimes "sexy" cannot be seen, instead, "sexy" is expressed through your voice).*

- **Strategy 4: Assert concern for hearer's wants**

*You just keep getting better with your melody. Did I hear you get angry during the modulation when you went upstairs and kicked that song into the middle of next week?*

*Em có thấy hài lòng với chọn lựa này không?*

*Em có cảm thấy phong cách này gây khó với em không?*

*(Do you satisfy with this choice?*

*Do you find this style difficult to you?)*

- **Strategy 5: Be optimistic**

For examples:

*I'm in love with you. I can tell you know who you are.*

*That song showed me that you can. You hit it with feeling.*

*You did it well.*

*You crack me up. I think you did a good job with it.*

*Em sẽ thành công với bài hát này.*

*(You will succeed with this song)*

*Bài hát này có rất nhiều trải nghiệm và cảm xúc. Sẽ có rất nhiều người "vote" cho em bài hát này.*

- **Strategy 7: Express surprise**

For examples:

*Dude, you made Gaga's ya-ya go la-la. How could you do that? I love the humor, man.*

*I'm not sure if I believe it. You're evil; you're not evil. I just love you, you know that.*

*You gave me goosies from head to toe.*

*Tôi không nghĩ là các em hát thành công đến thế.*

*(I can't imagine how successfully you performed.)*

- **Strategy 8: Comfort and encourage**

For examples:

*are, and you are so at ease with your self.*

*It's a beautiful song; you've got a beautiful voice; and you nailed it again.*

*I never heard you deliver a chorus like that before. You were living that one.*

*Em có tiến bộ về cách phát âm.*

*(You made progress in articulating)*

*Em có một thể mạnh đó là phong cách trẻ trung. Em có thể trở thành ca sĩ giải trí rất tốt.*

### **II.3 Data analysis of strategies in giving comments on contestants' performance by judges in Vietnam Idol 2010 and American 2011**

#### **II.3.1 Data analysis**

##### **II.3.1.1 Top 4 Vietnam Idol and top 4 perform American Idol 2011**

**Round 1:**

	Str.1	Str.2	Str.3	Str.4	Str.5	Str.6	Str.7
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Strategy

Infor

	<i>(exaggerate)</i> (times)	<i>(give advice)</i> (times)	<i>(show concern)</i> (times)	<i>(joke)</i> (times)	<i>(be optimistic)</i> (times)	<i>(express surprise)</i> (times)	<i>(comfort/encourage)</i> (times)
V	0	3	0	0	2	1	3
A	2	0	1	0	4	0	3

**Round 2**

Strategy Informant	Str.1 <i>(exaggerate)</i> (times)	Str.2 <i>(give advice)</i> (times)	Str.3 <i>(show concern)</i> (times)	Str.4 <i>(joke)</i> (times)	Str.5 <i>(be optimistic)</i> (times)	Str.6 <i>(express surprise)</i> (times)	Str.7 <i>(comfort/encourage)</i> (times)
V	0	3	0	0	1	0	2
A	3	0	0	0	2	2	4

**II.3.1.2 Top 3-judges' choice- Vietnam Idol and top 3 perform American Idol 2011****Round 1:**

Strategy Informant	Str.1 <i>(exaggerate)</i> (times)	Str.2 <i>(give advice)</i> (times)	Str.3 <i>(show concern)</i> (times)	Str.4 <i>(joke)</i> (times)	Str.5 <i>(be optimistic)</i> (times)	Str.6 <i>(express surprise)</i> (times)	Str.7 <i>(comfort/encourage)</i> (times)
V	2	0	1	2	1	2	1
A	1	0	2	1	1	0	3

**Round 2**

Strategy Informant	Str.1 <i>(exaggerate)</i> (times)	Str.2 <i>(give advice)</i> (times)	Str.3 <i>(show concern)</i> (times)	Str.4 <i>(joke)</i> (times)	Str.5 <i>(be optimistic)</i> (times)	Str.6 <i>(express surprise)</i> (times)	Str.7 <i>(comfort/encourage)</i> (times)
V	2	0	1	1	2	0	1
A	2	0	1	0	0	1	2

### II.3.2. Major cross-cultural similarities and differences

#### a. Similarities

- Seven strategies employed by both the Vietnamese and American judges to give comment on the contestants' performance are: exaggerate, give advice, show concern, joke, be optimistic, express surprise, and comfort and encourage.
- Generally, both groups are in favor of *giving comfort and courage* to contestants and making contestants *optimistic*.
- Both groups use *express surprise* equally (3 times).
- It is noticeable that both groups of judges support *exaggerate* respectively.

#### b. Differences

- The Vietnamese judges use all the seven strategies whereas the American ones use six out of seven strategies: *exaggerate, joke, show concern, be optimistic, express surprise and comfort/encourage*.
- *Give advice* is not chosen by any of American judges, resulting from the fact that this strategy may disturb one's privacy. Contrasts to the American judges, the Vietnamese ones use this strategy frequently.
- While *show concern* is not favored by the American judges when giving comment on contestants' performance, it accounts for a relatively high rate (4 times) by the Vietnamese ones in the same case studied.

### II.3.3 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the choice that the judges employed politeness strategies when giving comments, more or less, is decided by the investigated parameters. Different groups use different strategies at different proportions.

More clearly, the Vietnamese judges employed more politeness strategies (seven strategies) than the American ones (six strategies).

The American judges do not choose the strategy *give advice* and rarely use the strategy *show concern*, may be American highly appreciate liberty and do not disturb one's privacy. This contrasts to the Vietnamese judges. They use these strategies more popular. It belongs to Vietnamese culture. They like to share their thinking and opinion with others. They always give their concern to other people as they think doing like that will create a closer and friendlier relationship with surrounding people.

There is a similar point between the Vietnamese judges and American ones. They both use the strategies *comfort/encourage* and *be optimistic* many times.

## PART C: CONCLUSION

### I. SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

In particular, of the seven suggested strategies, *comfort/encourage* and *be optimistic* are most preferred by all Vietnamese and American judges. *Exaggerate* is also in use many times by the Vietnamese and American judges. Meanwhile, *give advice* is not employed and *show concern* is rarely used by the American, though these are considerably popular in Vietnam.

These findings answer the two research questions put in *the aims of the study* that the *Vietnamese judges use more politeness strategies than the American*. These seven politeness strategies employed by Vietnamese judges are: *exaggerate, give advice, show concern, joke, be optimistic, express surprise, and comfort and encourage*. American judges *use six strategies*, excluding *give advice*.

It might be the case that the Vietnamese judges are more in favor of indirectness and conventionally while the American judges speak their mind and express things directly.

### II. IMPLICATIONS

To begin with, the research is believed to help raise people's awareness of commenting. As commenting belongs to the sensitive area of communication, each commentator should be more careful when making any statements.

Besides, the study sheds a light on the major similarities and differences in the ways American and Vietnamese panels employ popular commenting strategies. It, therefore, provides TV viewers of Vietnam Idol reality show with a clear understanding about the commenting format of the original version and a more critical view towards that of Vietnamese franchised version. Specifically, Vietnamese ways of commenting are inclined to criticizing/disparaging or even shouting at the contestants, but it is not often as it might cause hurt to contestants.

### III. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

#### ○ Limitation of the number of series

=> Some remarks, assumptions and comments are given

#### ○ Limited resources and capacity

=> Unable to access the matter: the adaptation of the Vietnamese version affects the employment of politeness strategies

#### ○ Limited time and the length of the study

=> Cannot expand the scope of the study into commenting strategies or indirectness and directness strategies

#### **IV. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

This research is only a partial investigation into the act of giving comment by Vietnamese and American native speakers. As mentioned in the scope of the study, only verbal aspect of the communicative act is under investigation. Many important factors are not discussed, therefore, it is hoped that studies on the communicative act of giving comment will be carried out in terms of:

- Formality-informality in giving comment
- Directness and Indirectness in giving comment
- Non-verbal cues in giving comment
- Paralinguistic factors in giving comment