

# Advisability of Invitation Declining Situations in the U.S and VN interaction - A Metapragmatic Model for Cross-cultural Assessment

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**Abstract:** *The article reveals the levels of the safety of invitation declining situations in the interaction made by the American (AM) and Vietnamese (VN) informants seen from Metapragmatic Perspectives. The procedure and the analysis of the data from of Metapragmatic Questionnaires (MPQ) used in the cross-cultural study was based on the theoretical frame of Kasper [9] and Nguyen Quang [15].*

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural Assessment, Metapragmatic Perspectives, advisability, declinability

## 1. Introduction

Inviting is considered as a speech act performed in every culture. Pragmatically, it is an illocutionary act, and it is classified differently together with other illocutionary acts. Culturally, inviting is influenced by many culture specific factors like: value, taboo, religion, belief, interactional style. To this speech act there are two possible responses: positive (accepting an invitation) and negative (declining an invitation). In fact, the topics used in these situations vary across cultures, which raises the necessity of research on the safety of topics in cross-cultural communication seen from Metapragmatic Perspectives. In our cross-cultural research [6] inviting and its negative response were chosen and the result of invitability was presented in our previous paper [7]. In order to uncover the whole picture of our empirical study in the speech act of Inviting and its negative responding, we continue to introduce the result of investigation into the advisability of invitation declining situations in the American and Vietnamese communication. The paper aims at not only introducing the results of the study but hopefully suggesting a model for cross-cultural assessment of the advisability and the compatibility of the investigated social situations as well.

## 2. Content

### 2.1. Theoretical background

#### 2.1.1 Negative Response to Inviting

Declining invitations (DI<sub>n</sub>) can be discussed as an independent speech act or as a negative responding to inviting. First, as an independent speech act, declining invitations is seen as one of 'reject' in the category of 'acknowledgement', i.e the act *shows the speaker's feelings towards the hearer* as Bach and Harnish [1] point out. According to them, the acts in the category of 'reject' are characterized as follows:

In uttering e, S rejects H's acknowledgment if S expresses:  
*-lack of appreciation of H's acknowledgment.*  
*-the intention that H believe that S fails to appreciate H's acknowledgment, and (perhaps also)*

*-the intention that his utterance violate the social expectation that one express appreciation of acknowledgment, and*  
*-the intention that H take S's utterance as violating this expression.[1:53]*

However, 'refuse' is considered to belong to 'commissives' in Searle's classification [17]. Thus, in Searle's classification, when refusing the speaker *commits himself/herself to doing something, and express him/her intention*. Therefore, the question posed here is which category of speech act of refusing, inclusive of declining invitations, belongs to. In fact, similar to the other acts in rejects, refusing expresses S's 'lack of appreciation of H's acknowledgment'. In the case when one declines the other's invitation, H's desire is opposite to S's will. At the same time, refusing also expresses S's intention: 'S doesn't want to do it' and 'S won't do it'. It is also understood as a kind of commissives: S commits himself/herself not doing something. Thus, refusing, in fact, are characterized by both rejecting H's acknowledgment and committing oneself not to do something specified in the propositional content. On the other side, distinctive from the others in commissives in Searle's classification which may occur with or without another act in the propositional content, refusing and other acts in rejects suggested by Bach and Harnish have a common feature: they are commonly used as a negative responding acts which always preceded by another act in the protentional content, called an initiating act. For this reason, I think that 'refusing', though considered as a commissive/acknowledge hybrid in the light of the combination of Bach and Harnish and Searle's classification, tends to be more 'acknowledgement'.

In social interaction, a communicative act may consist of two sub-acts: stimulus and response. Therefore, an invitation, called an initiating act, is always followed by a response – accepting or declining/refusing the invitation, called a responding act. Tsui [18] characterizes a response as '*an utterance which fulfils the interactional expectation set up by the preceding initiating act*'. Refusing, within the discourse frame work, can be seen as a challenging move that challenges the pragmatic presuppositions of the preceding utterance. For example, when making an invitation, the

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speaker expresses his desire: S has a desire that H do it', and he assumes that: 'H would want to do it'. In the case when H declines S's invitation, S's desire is opposite to H's will: 'H doesn't want to do it' and S's assumption that: 'H doesn't have to do it and H won't do it'. H has the need to express a negation of the invitation. Therefore, Verschueren in Wierzbicka [19] claims '*refusing is a negative response to directives.*' In the other words, if accepting invitations constitutes *FRA* (face-respecting act) rather than *FTA* (face-threatening act) because responders commonly express appreciation for invitations, declining invitations is really a face-threatening responding act, which requires a high consideration in choosing and using politeness strategies. This is also the main reason why declining, not accepting invitations, is chosen for investigation in our research.

### 2.1.2 DIn with Social Characteristics

Since speech acts are social, it is obvious that DIn as a communicative act has the social characteristics. In real life, there are various ways to extend and decline invitations, which depend on many factors such as the informants, purposes, settings, channels etc. Wolfson's research [19] and in Homes, J. [7] uncovers the sex difference that '*men's more specific invitations would be directed to subordinates and intimates, while women's invitations would include more negotiated invitations with a wider range of addressees,* and in a recent investigation, Duong, B.N [4] discovers that women tend to use white lies in DIn much more than men. Moreover, due to the differences between the communicative styles embedded in different cultures, these speech acts are different from culture to culture. For example, AM people tend to explain the reasons after invitations and to give general reasons for white lies when DIn. In contrast, the VN prefer to explain the reasons before invitations and to give specific reasons for white lies when declining invitations [5]. In Japanese and Chinese, refusing is more offensive than in AM, so off-record refusals are often with proverbs and impersonals [16]. In short, while DIn share some similar features with the others in the same group, they have their own characteristics of which recognition in actual conversations depends on various factors including syntactic forms, nonreferential and social aspects of context. Furthermore, as Labov and Fanshel [10] points out, '*most utterances can be seen as performing several speech acts simultaneously... Conversation is not a chain of utterances, but rather a matrix of utterances and actions bound together by web of understandings and reactions...*' in daily conversation, for some purposes DIn is often accompanied with apologizing, thanking, promising...

## 2.2 Method of study

### 2.2.1 Metapragmatic Questionnaires (MPQ)

Metapragmatics seen as 'an upper-level of pragmatics, since it takes the first order pragmatic references as an object' according to Lee Sungbom [13] and it 'highlights the conditions which make speaker's use of language possible and effective as Caffi states [3]. Therefore, it is necessary for questionnaires used in cross-cultural studies to be designed from this Metapragmatic perspective. As mentioned in our previous article [7], in order to explore American-Vietnamese cross-cultural characteristics of social contexts assessed by the speakers in the two cultures, the MPQ, which is based on Kasper's theory [9] and commonly used as one of

data collection instruments in scientific research to test validity and reliability of the situations under study, are explored in our study for the dual goal: to make a cross-cultural comparison in the assessment of the situations under study in MPQ made by the informants from the two different cultures, and to assure the compatibility of the situations under study in DCT. Only the situations evaluated to be applicable in both of the cultures under study are chosen for the candidates in DCT later. [4]

To do the survey on declinability in AM and VN, *multiple choice questions*, modified from Nguyen Quang's written questionnaire [15] are designed with four groups of activities, each of which consists of four situations. They are intended to examine the typical topics available in the two cultures:

- Friendship activities
- Family activities
- Social activities
- Professional activities

These questions offer five *column-tick* options based on the summated Likert rating scale [14]: *highly advisable, advisable, yes and no, unadvisable, and strongly advisable*. This is one of systematic scaling techniques widely used in attitude measurement, which enable the informants, when rating each situation, to have various responses to select.

**2.2.2 Subjects:** As discussed in section 2.1.2, with its social characteristics, DIn in the initial situations chosen for the questionnaires may be available to this to this culture but may not to the other. Therefore, the terms of *declinability* used in this section refer to the degrees of availability of the situations investigated according to the two populations' assessment. To do survey on invitation declinability in AM and VN, a MPQ with *multiple choice questions to five levels: highly advisable (HA), advisable(A), yes and no (Y/N), inadvisable (IA), and strongly advisable (SIA)*, modified from Nguyen Quang's written questionnaire [15], is manipulated with sixteen situations in four groups (S1->S16) as seen in *table 1*, which are compatible with the Inviting situation discussed in our previous article [7].

**Table 1:** DIn Situations investigated in MPQ

<p><b>B1: Friendship activities</b>                      S1: to have a drink.                      S2: to have a dinner at your home.                      S3: to go to the cinema.                      S4: to go to a dancing club.</p>
<p><b>B2: Family activities</b>                      S5: to attend your birthday party.                      S6: to go to the anniversary of your grandmother's death.                      S7: to go to your daughter's wedding ceremony.                      S8: to join the house-warming party of your new house.</p>
<p><b>B3: Social activities</b>                      S9: to attend a professional workshop.                      S10: to attend a business management seminar.                      S11: to co-operate in running a restaurant.                      S12: to be the Chairman of a public speaking contest for students.</p>
<p><b>B4: Professional activities</b>                      S13: to join a charitable artistic performance.                      S14: to go to a local meeting.                      S15: to support the local football team.                      S16: to welcome an important foreign guest.</p>

Based on this MPQ, the frequency and the informants' assessment of declining invitations in AM and VN is analyzed in order to discover the similarities and differences between the two cultures in assessing the advisability of these speech acts and to test the validity and reliability of the different situations which would be used in the next part of the questionnaire. The MPQ was conducted on sixty AM speakers including the native speakers, and sixty VN informants in Vietnam.

**(b) Statistical test:** With the aim at testing the statistical significance of relationship in contingency tables, all items with  $\chi^2 \leq \chi^2_{\alpha} = 3.84$  are considered not to be significant and those with  $\chi^2 > \chi^2_{\alpha} = 3.84$  are considered to be significant. Thus, henceforth the *significant items* (*sig+*) are considered to reflect the *difference* between the AM and VN assessment and the *insignificant ones* (*sig-*) to reflect their *relative similarity* with the probability of 0.05.

### 2.3 Assessment of topic-advisability under socio-cultural parameters in Din

#### (a) Friendship Activities (B1)

##### (1) Declining to have a drink (S1)

**•Similarities:** With the chi-square values below 3.84, the differences of the rates of informants choosing HA and SIA are not statistically significant in this situation. An interesting coincidence is found in the two groups' choice at the level of HA (6.7%), which is lower than the percentage of the subjects favoring SIA (AM: 8.3%, VN: 10%). Of notice here is that most of informants choosing SIA are men (AM: 4/5, VN 5/6). Thus, this is likely to be a widely common communicative form which men rarely avoid.

**•Differences:** The sig. in the chi-square indicates that the difference between the two groups of informants at the levels of A, Y/N and IA are of paramount importance. While the AM inclined to Y/N and A at the highest rates of 50% and 32.5% respectively far outnumber the VN at the same levels at 20% and 11.7% respectively, the proportion of the VN supporting IA is much higher than that of the AM (51.7% vs 3.3%). Moreover, 6 out of 7 VN informants choosing A are married women and 22 out of 31 VN subjects approval of IA are men, but there is no clear distinction between the AM men and women's assessment in this situation. Many VN girls and married women said that they are afraid of having a drink with the other people at the café, especially with the male acquaintances. This difference might be affected by strict conception deriving from the Eastern feudal culture. From both similarities and differences found, it is obviously seen that the two groups of informants display two different trends in assessing the situation. The AM, though assuming its applicability, seem to have neutral opinions of this situation. Unlike the counterpart, the VN tend to negative attitude towards to the declinability of the situation. One AM tourist in a hotel in Quinhon commented that the VN seemed to have too much free time to have drink at the café. This is one of possible explanations for the VN people's easy acceptance (i.e. rarely refuse) of this kind of invitation.

##### (2) Declining to have a dinner at the communicating partner's home (S2)

**•Similarities:** The differences between the AM and VN informants' assessment at all the levels except A in the contingency tables are not statistically significant. Both the groups of informants give the highest preference to Y/N (AM: 46.7%, VN: 43.4%) and the lowest one to HA (AM: 1.7%, VN: 3.3%). Thus, there seem to be much option in this situation.

**•Differences:** The both groups of informants great differ in their choice of A. Up to 28.3% of the AM but only 13.3% of the VN are in favor with this level. This distinction might be for some possible reasons. The AM, with the tendency of avoiding interference in the others' privacy, appear to be afraid of communication at home. By contrast, the VN often express their intimacy or respect to the communicating partners with cordial or grand meals so declining this kind of invitation may be coincident with hurting the inviter's feeling. However, the prominence of the rate of informants supporting Y/N as discussed above would be a clue for suggestion that for both the groups of informants the decision of whether or not to decline the invitations would be made in concrete situations.

##### (3) Declining to go to the cinema (S3)

**•Similarities:** Among the five levels of assessment under study, only two which are A and Y/N reflect relative similarities between the AM and VN informants' attitude toward this situation. Approximately 25% of informants think it is advisable to decline the acquaintances' invitation to the cinema. Nevertheless, the very high proportion of informants supporting Y/N provides suggestion that the fact this kind of refusal is made or not depends on some possible conditions such as the relationship between the inviter and invitee and their hobbies.

**•Differences:** The differences between the two groups of informant in assessing the situation at the levels of HA, IA and SIA are found to be statistically significant. Different from 25% of the VN informants who believe that it is advisable to decline invitations to the cinema, only 1.7% of the AM have the same opinion. Conversely, up to 28% of the latter but only 12% of the former are inclined to IA and SIA, respectively. This would be interpreted that the AM seem to have more positive attitude towards this situation than the VN do. It is likely that since going to the cinema is one common kind of entertainment in AM culture, the informants accept the invitation more easily than the VN. However, the dominant proportion of informants ticking Y/N echoes the decisive role of concrete conditions accompanied.

##### (4) Declining to go to a dancing club (S4)

**•Similarities:** Insignificant differences are reflected in the informants' assessment at the levels of A, IA and SIA. The fact that the number of informants in the two groups attaching much more weight to A than to IA and SIA suggests that for both the groups the situation of declining invitations to go to a dancing club is widely applicable. Noticeably, in both the sources of data, the higher number of subjects approving HA and A are women (AM: 13/21, VN: 27/43), which might be explained that women, probably tied to strictly social gender-

discrimination, seem to be much more afraid of accepting this kind of invitation than men.

•**Differences:** Striking differences between the two groups of informants are overtly revealed in their attitude towards the situation at HA and Y/N. While up to 36.7% of the VN are inclined to HA, only 6.7% of the counterparts mark the same level. These distinctive data suggest the possibility of interesting cross-cultural differences in their life-style conception. This interpretation seems to be more consolidated by the fact that many of ELI teachers and tourists coming to Vietnam state that they find so difficult to invite VN friends (both male and female) to go dancing, even in many cases they get shocked when their polite invitations are being refused. By contrast, the VN, inclusive of men and women, tend to consider dancing is exclusively for the smart set, for which they often avoid accepting this kind of invitation. However, 48.3% of the AM informants ticking Y/N throws more light on the complication of the situation. This might be interpreted that though more easily accept this kind of invitation, the AM have to deliberate who the communicating partners are and when or where the invitations are given.

#### (b) Family Activities (B2)

##### (1) Declining to attend the communicating partner's birthday party (S5)

•**Similarities:** The AM and VN informants display relative similarities in their choice of all the levels. It is noticeable that well over half of the informants in the two groups adhere to IA and SIA (AM: 53.3%, VN: 56.7%), far outweighing HA and A (AM: 18.3%, VN: 16.7%). This observation might be interpreted that the informants in the two cultures tend to avoid this situation. There appear to be widespread recognition that it is not polite to refuse to participate in the acquaintance's special occasion, except for overwhelming reasons.

##### (2) Declining to go to the anniversary of the communicating partner's grandmother's death (S6)

•**Similarities:** In spite of the unequal number of informants in the contingency tables,  $\chi^2 < 3.84$  reveals statistically insignificant difference between the informants of the two groups in assessing the situation at the levels of HA, A and SIA. However, in consideration with all the rates, the ones of these levels are much lower than Y/N and IA. Thus, in general the informants in the two groups avoid showing extreme assessment of this situation.

•**Differences:** It is worth considering that the AM and VN differ greatly in their choice of Y/N and IA. Up to 53.3% of the AM consider the situation to be optional while only 30% of the counterpart share the same opinion. Conversely, only 18.3% of the former but 43% of the latter support IA. Based on the results of data and interpretation of the invitations in the previous section, one possible explanation for the dominant proportion of AM Y/N is that for the AM, the inapplicability of inviting the familiar people to the anniversary of their grandmother make them hesitate in their choice. Unlike the counterpart, the VN are willing to share their feelings with the inviters in this traditional custom, which is reflected in the remarkable number of informants taking IA.

##### (3) Declining to go to the communicating partner's daughter's wedding ceremony (S7)

•**Similarities:** Only over 8% of informants in the two groups appreciate HA and A while around 75% pertain to IA and SIA. This result provides an evidence for interpretation that the majority of AM and VN informants avoid giving refusals in such an important occasion.

•**Differences:** Noticeably, that the AM opting Y/N far outnumbers the VN (30% vs 13.3%) is the only meaningful difference between these two groups of informants in assessing the situation. To seek the possible answer for this amazing result, we had an on-line chat with an AM engineer living in California and he said that for some overwhelming reasons the invitations would be declined but to avoid hurting the inviter a gift might be sent latter as a redress. Meanwhile, the VN, though sharing this conception with the counterpart, try their best not to be caught in this sticky situation and if they themselves could not participate, another in their family will do instead.

##### (4) Declining to join the communicating partner's house-warming party (S8)

•**Similarities:** The informants in the two groups expose their relative similarities in their attitude towards HA and A in this situation. Only approximately 15% of the informants in the two groups marking HA and A suggests their negative opinion of these levels.

•**Differences:** The chi-square below 3.84 at the levels of Y/N, IA and SIA indicate statistically significant differences between the two groups' assessment of this situation. With 48% of informants think it is optional the AM dominate the VN with only 20%. On the contrary, the latter far outnumbers the former in the ratio of 2 to 1 (68.4% vs 32.4%). Thus, the VN tend to avoid refusing happiness that the inviter would like to share with them. Meanwhile, for the AM the deliberation on the concrete conditions plays a decisive role.

#### (c) Professional activities (B3)

##### (1) Declining to attend a professional workshop (S9)

•**Similarities:** It is obviously seen that there is an interesting coincidence in the AM and VN informants' attitude to this situation at all the levels. Despite the applicability of the situation in both cultures, the proportion of the subjects choosing IA and SIA is rather higher than HA and A (one-fifths vs one-thirds). However, the option of refusals to this kind of invitation, in fact, much depends on many factors in concrete situations such as the necessity of the workshop or the time and point it takes place, which is reflected in the high distribution of Y/N chosen by the informants in the two groups.

##### (2) Declining to attend a business management seminar (S10)

•**Similarities:** The value of the chi-square below 3.84 reveals relative similarities between the AM and VN respondents' assessment of the situation. The possibility of the situation is assumed by one-fifths of informants ticking HA and A, yet of notice here is that the dominant proportion of subjects approving Y/N echoes the availability of the situation depending on many objective factors in real life.

**(3) Declining to co-operate in running a restaurant (S11)**

•**Similarities:** No statistically significant differences are found in the two groups of informants' attitude towards the situation. That 50% of informants favoring Y/N dominating those choosing HA+A (over 20%) and IA+SIA (approximately 15%) consolidates the fact that though it is possible to give a refusal to this kind of invitation, it is mainly decided after the careful deliberation on many subjective factors.

**(4) Declining to be the Chairman of a public speaking contest for students (S12)**

•**Similarities:** The AM informants share the relatively similar opinion with the VN in assessing the situation at all the levels. The possibility of the situation might be interpreted from 20% of the informants in the two group choosing HA and A. However, the dependence of giving refusals to this kind of situation on concrete conditions is illustrated by the proportion of 56.7% and 48.3% of the former and the latter opting Y/N, which is higher than the proportion of HA+IA and IA+SIA.

**(d) Social activities (B4)**

**(1) Declining to join a charitable artistic performance (S13)**

•**Similarities:** In spite of unequal number of informants at all the levels of assessment, no statistically significant difference between the two groups is reflected in this situation. It is noticeable that the informants inclined to Y/N far outnumber those favoring HA and A and IA and SIA, which provides more information about the high option in the situation. However, considered to be a wide-commonly social activity, the informants tend to be much more favor with IA and SIA than HA and A (AM:10% vs 40%, VN: 18.3% vs 48.3%).

**(2) Declining to go to a local meeting (S14)**

•**Similarities:** The AM and VN respondents expose the relatively similarities in their choice of HA, A and SIA. Of notice here is that the rates of informants choosing HA and SIA are much lower than the others, which might suggest that both groups seem to avoid express extreme attitude towards situation.

•**Differences:** It is worth considering that the two groups of informants show two different trends in assessing the situation at Y/N and IA. If up to 55% of the AM appreciate Y/N, only 31% of the VN have the same opinion. Conversely, 40% of the latter support IA but only 8.3% of the former are favor with this level. In our on-line chat, some AM informants reveal that local meetings are rarely held in their home country and they themselves hardly attend this kind of meeting. For this reason, the AM, though assuming the possibility of the situation, mostly think it is optional. Quite differently, the VN get used to community meetings which are often hold every month, even some of them said that the attendance in these activities is compulsory in their districts. This fact would be one possible explanation for the distinctive distribution between the AM and VN' subjects' choice at IA and A in the ratio of one to five.

**(3) Declining to support the local football team (S15)**

•**Similarities:** Both the two groups of informants show relatively similar attitude towards HA, Y/N and IA. The dominance of the rate of informants choosing Y/N to those

taking HA and A suggests that the informants, though partly assuming the possibility of the situation, are inclined to consider it as an optional matter, depending on concrete conditions.

•**Differences:** The chi-square value reveals that the two groups significantly differ in their assessment of the situation at A and SIA. While the AM support A at the rate of 40%, the VN tick the same level at 13.3%. Conversely, 1.7% and 18.3% of the former and the latter opt for SIA respectively. When observing local football matches in Vietnam, we discover that these activities are attractive to a big number of male audience, which is reflected in the majority of men under investigation choosing IA and SIA (VN: 11/16). Meanwhile, in the United States, as many native speakers reveal, football does not seem their favorite sport.

**(4) Declining to welcome an important foreign guest (S16)**

•**Similarities:** The difference between the two groups is not statistically significant at all levels except SIA. The most noticeable coincidence is that half of the informants inclined to Y/N far overweigh those choosing the other levels. This observation highlights the option of the situation which much depends on many objective factors.

•**Differences:** Amazingly, there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups in their attitude toward SIA. Despite that the Asian seem to be so reserved to communicate with the foreigners, 16.7 % of the VN are favorable with the topic at this level. Noticeably, 8 out of 11 informants in this group have knowledge of European languages and 4 out of 6 have social jobs. On the contrary only 1.7 % of the AM think that it is strongly inadvisable.

**2.2 Safety of the situations in AM-VN interaction in Declining invitation**

As well as the inevitability assessed by the AM and VN informants in our previous article [7], the levels of advisability of DIn are also found to be similar in most of the investigated situations. Some differences, however, are apparently unavoidable in the choice made by these two groups from different cultures. The informants' assessment, at different degrees, of declining invitations in the given topics is summarized in this section.

It is recognizable that the data provide further consistent support for the point that the two groups of informants from the US and VN share both coincidences and differences in assessing the advisability of the situations given. Based on the five-grade scale of HA-A-Y/N-IA-SIA developed by Nguyen Quang [15], the five levels of advisability are applied to measure what should and should not be declined in VN and AM cross-cultural communication.

**Table 2:** The five levels of advisability

1	2	3
Positive group	Neutral group	Negative group
-HA	-Y/N	-IA
-A		-SIA

Some noticeable points of levels of advisability evaluated by the VN informants can be drawn from the data collected and analyzed above as follows:

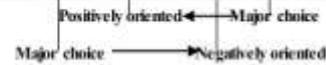
- Most of the situations (9 out of 16), at different degrees, belong to the neutral group; six situations belong to the negative group, and one to the positive.
- The nine situations at the neutral group are mainly distributed into the third and fourth groups of activities (Professional and Social activities), in which four at the former (S9, S10, S11, S12) and three at the latter (S13, S15, S16). Meanwhile, there are only two in the first set of activity (Friendship activities – S2, S3) and no situation in the second (Family activities). These neutral situations are equally divided into three groups of orientation: three with positive orientation (S3, S15, and S16), three with negative orientation (S2, S9, and S13), and the three left with no orientation (there are two levels take the same percentage in the second position: S10, S11, S12)
- Among the six situations found in the *negative group*, four belong to the second set of activities (S5, S6, S7, S8), one to the first set of activities (S1), and one to the last set of activities (S14). It is noticeable that all the six situations are at IA with three positively oriented (S1, S6, and S14) and three negatively oriented (S5, S7, and S8).
- The only one situation belonging to the *positive group* is at level A in the first set of activities and positively oriented (Friendship-S4).
- There are some crucial features summarized from the data of the AM informants' assessment collected above:
- Quite similar to the results data in the VN group, the number of situations belonging to the neutral group dominates the others: fourteen out of sixteen situations are found at this level. Two situations are in the negative group, and only one in the positive group.
- The number of the *neutral situations* in the AM data is much higher than the one in the VN data (14>9). The first, third and fourth sets of activities take the equal situations of four (A1: S1, S2, S3, S4 – A3: S9, S10, S11, S12 – A4: S13, S14, S15, S16). The two situations left belong to the second set of activities. Especially, ten among the fourteen situations in this neutral group are positively oriented.
- In the *negative group*, all the situation are in the second set of activities (S5, S7). One of them is with positive orientation, and the other with negative orientation. The number of situations in this group is three times as small as the one in the same group assessed by the VN informants (3/6).
- The only one situation of the positive group is S4 belonging to level A and positively oriented.
- It is worth noting that like the VN data, there is no choice of HA and SIA made by the informants in the AM results.

The similarities and differences in assessing the advisability of the situations given lead to the equivalent results in the safety of the topics of declining invitations in AM and VN cross-cultural communication. The degrees of the safety of situations vary from topic to topic and from culture to culture, which may result in breakdown in AM and VN interaction. In consideration of the importance of the realization of the culture-shock potentiality, the measurement based on the five-grade scale of HS-S-RS-US-HUS is

explored to discover the safety of DIn in the given situations in the two different culture communications.

**Table 3:** The scale of topic safety in the light of Nguyen Quang [15]

Nationality			HA		A		Y/N		IA		SIA	
			AM	VN	AM	VN	AM	VN	AM	VN	AM	VN
A1	S1	Count	25	24	19	32	10	3	4	1	2	0
		%	41.7	40.0	31.7	53.3	16.7	5.0	6.7	1.7	3.3	.0



As exhibited **table 2** and **3**, the safety of the given situations in DIn in AM and VN communication is discovered at different degrees:

**Grade 5- highly safe (HS):** There is no situation found in this grade.

**Grade 4- safe (S):** No situation is at this grade.

**Grade 3- relatively safe (RS):** The number of situations belonging to this grade far outweighs the ones in other grades. Among the ten situations at this grade three are distributed in the first set of activities (S1,S3,S4), four in the third set (S9.S10,S11,S12) and three in the fourth set (S13, S15, S16).

**Grade 2- unsafe (US):** The number of situations found at this grade takes the second position after the one at RS. Six situations with four of the second set of activities (S5, S6, S7, S8), one of the first set (S2) and one of the fourth (S14). Thus, the majority of the situations at US falls into the third of set of activities (Family activities).

**Grade 1- highly unsafe (HUS):** There is no situation found at this grade.

Based on this five-grade scale of measurement, the potentiality of AM and VN culture shock in declining invitations in the given situations is discovered as in **table 4**.

**Table 4:** Summary of situations and their levels of declinability assessed by American and Vietnamese informants and potentiality of culture shock

Level of advisability		I-INFORMANTS' ASSESSMENT OF ADVISABILITY OF SITUATIONS					II-SAFETY OF CULTURE SHOCK			
		HA	A	Y/N	IA	SIA	HS	S	RS	US
B1	S1			○						✓
	S2			● □						✓
	S3			○ □						✓
	S4			○ □						✓
B2	S5			● □						✓
	S6			● □						✓
	S7			● □						✓
	S8			● □						✓
B3	S9			● ●						✓
	S10			○ □						✓
	S11			○ □						✓
	S12			○ □						✓
B4	S13			● ●						✓
	S14			○ □						✓
	S15			○ □						✓
	S16			○ □						✓

Positive oriented: VN: ○ AE: □  
 Negative oriented: VN: ● AE: ■

The results aforementioned unveil some points which should be paid careful attention to in AM and VN interaction. First of all, the fact that no situation among the ones investigated is at HS and S provide a support for the suggestion that for both AM and VN informants declining invitations in all the situations, at different degrees, might threaten the inviters' face. For this reason, the majority of informants (10 out of 16) in the two groups show their major choice at the level of Y/N - the neutral group with the same orientation, which leads to the *relative* safety, not high safety, of the situations. Additionally, for the same reason the second choice made by the informants left (6 out of 16) is found at the level of IA. This seems to suggest that these situations are assessed differently by the informants from the two dissimilar cultures (e.g. S6, S14), or they are unsafe in both the cultures (e.g. S5, S6, S7, S8). It is worth considering that all the situations in the Family activities are discovered to be unsafe in AM and VN communication. Especially, S6 (*declining the invitation to go to the anniversary of your grandmother's death*) is at US because the equivalent situation in making invitations (S6: *inviting s.o. to go to the anniversary of your grandmother's death*), which is familiar with the VN informants, tend to be unpopular in AM culture. Furthermore, the result of no situations at HUS throws further light on the informants' assessment of the situations discussed. It appears that in the real-life communication declining invitations, though to some extent threatening the inviter's face, may happen due to some reluctant reasons, for which the refusals tend to be given with some redress to save the inviters' face. All in all, the outnumbering situations of declining invitations at RS lay a favorable background for the AM and VN in their cross-cultural interaction.

### 2.3 Concluding remarks

Based on the combination of statistical results analyzed in section 2.3 and the measurement of five-scale (HS-S-RS-US-HUS), the four typical candidates for DIn in DCT questionnaire taken from the four activities in the MPQ are as follows:

#### Declining invitation situations:

**B1:** Added to the degree of RS, S1 is the only one case in which the two groups of informants show the relative similarities in their choice at all the levels of assessment. Accordingly, S1 (*declining invitation to have a drink*), with the high applicability, is opted for DCT questionnaire.

**B2:** All the situations in this activity are given more preference at Y/N and IA, SIA and reach the level of HUS. However, S5 (*declining invitation to go to the communicating partner's birthday party*) is chosen due to some reasons. First, there is no statistically significant difference between the informants' choice at all levels. Second, the situation is considered to be applicable in the two cultures. Last but not least, it is necessary to accompany the initiating act selected in the set of invitation discussed in the previous section.

**B3:** Depending much on many objectives factors, the four situations, though their possibility is revealed, are considered to be optional at the remarkably high rates and reach the

degree of RS. Additionally, the proportions of HA+A and IA+SIA in all the situations are equivalent. However, S9 (*declining to attend a professional workshop*) is one of the situations chosen for DCT questionnaire as the accompaniment to the initiating act involving inviting.

**B4:** All the situations in this activity are highly assessed to be optional by the two groups of informants. However, S13 is the only case in which there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups in their choice at all the levels and is found to be at RS. For this reason, S13 (*declining to join a charitable artistic performance*) will be used in the DCT questionnaire latter./.

### 3. Conclusion

It is no doubt that research on cross-cultural communication plays a crucial importance in raising deep awareness of cross-cultural communication and minimizing potential culture shocks in daily international economic and cultural activities. With the findings on similarities and differences in assessing situations of declining invitations under the impact of both social context and social attributes in the American and Vietnamese interaction, from which safe topics could be chosen for the candidates in DTC in the long procedure of the research, our study hopefully contributes a model for cross-cultural assessment of the advisability, the safety and compatibility of the investigated social situations in cross-cultural studies.

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