Turn-taking strategies
in Vietnamese and English casual conversations

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Abstract. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson [1] stated that "the organization of taking turns to talk is fundamental to conversation, as well as to other speech-exchange systems." Since these scholars developed a systematic mechanism of turn-taking in English conversations in 1974, much research has been conducted on the field and turn-taking has become a central issue in pragmatics and conversation analysis. Under the scope of conversation analysis, this study was conducted to discuss the turn-taking mechanism in general and the turn-taking strategies in particular in casual Vietnamese conversations. Video ethnography and stimulated recall were applied to collect data for analysis, with which a system of turn-taking signals in Vietnamese conversations were developed. The system included both verbal and non-verbal signals, namely adjacency pairs, name nomination, appositionals, recompleters, overlaps, syntactic cues, prosodies, pause, gaze directions, head movement, kinesics, and postures. These strategies were, then, compared and contrasted to those applied by the English speakers to detect any patterns that stand out. On the whole, many strategies applied in the two languages are identical; whilst differences were spotted in the use of prosodies, pause between turns, lexicons, and overlap in the two languages. With such findings, implications for teaching English in Vietnam are discussed to wind up the study.

Keywords: Conversation analysis, turn-taking organization, turn-taking strategies, transition relevant places, turn constructional units.

1. In a recent study about turn-taking, Tanya Stivers, Steven Levinson, Makoto Hayashi [1] and other linguists stated that "informal conversation is where language is learned and where most of the business of social life is conducted. A fundamental part of the infrastructure for conversation is turn-taking, or the apportioning of who is to speak next and when." Actually, much research has been conducted to study the organization of turn-taking in English; however, little has been done about that in the Vietnamese language. Also, I have queried a lot whether there is a universal set of rules governing the turn-taking system across cultures or that set varies culture to culture. With that thinking in mind, I came up to carry out this research, which is about the turn-taking strategies in Vietnamese casual conversations and comparing those to turn-taking strategies applied in English conversations. More significantly, in the main course of doing the research, it became more practical when I looked at it from the standpoints of a language teacher, a sociologist, and a technocrat.

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2. Turn-taking actually plays important role in everyday communication. For the Vietnamese studying English and the people of other languages studying Vietnamese to achieve smooth conversations in practice, it is a prerequisite to know how the turn-taking mechanism varies across cultures. The research aims of this study, therefore, are to investigate:

- Turn-taking strategies used in Vietnamese casual conversations by native Vietnamese speakers.

- The similarities and differences of turn-taking strategies used in English and Vietnamese.

To achieve the above-stated objectives, the research questions should be designed so as that they cater for sufficient and relevant findings. With such, the following questions will be dealt with:

(1) What turn-taking strategies are used in Vietnamese casual conversations?

(2) What are the differences and similarities between turn-taking strategies used in casual Vietnamese conversations and those used in English ones?

This study shall be of interest to those who are concerned with or have worked on Conversation Analysis, to the teachers and learners of English and of Vietnamese, who desire to develop a systematic conversation rules supporting in improving learners' interactional skills in the target languages, and to those who are struggling to improve their communication skills so as that they get involved in smooth and successful face-to-face conversations. Specifically concerning Conversation Analysis, different researchers are recently paying much attention to turn-taking, under which two contradicted hypotheses are developed: (1) universal system hypothesis, which supports a universal set of rules governing the turn-taking mechanism across cultures, and (2) culture variability hypothesis, by which turn-taking is language and culture dependent. This study will be of moderately-

significant contribution in settling such controversy over turn-taking.

3. In order to study the turn-taking strategies used in Vietnamese, the researcher would go to the places where people naturally engage in actual conversations and record the conversations for further observation and analysis. The methodology used in this research is what might be called "video ethnography". Video ethnography combines classic ethnographic methods with digital video technology. There are a number of advantages when using video recording for data collection namely density of data (both contextual data and linguistic information) and permanence. Nevertheless, the amount of information, according to Crawford [2], contained in ethnographic footage, the unedited videotaped material of a particular event, is necessarily limited because it can capture only what is observable and videotaping only allows the event to be experienced vicariously.

Being aware of these limitations, the researcher hereof would use another method named stimulated recall. This method shall be applied to Vietnamese data collection process with an aim to minimize the limits of video ethnography method as mentioned above. Regarding this method, Benjamin Bloom [3]at the University of Chicago described a method that he named "stimulated recall" in 1953. Many researchers since then have used stimulated recall as their primary data source for information, as stated by Marland [4]. The stimulated recall procedure, in general, includes the following steps: videotaping, observations, stimulated recall, and field notes. During stimulated recall stage, the participants together with the researcher view the videotape. The videotape is stopped at points when the paraticipants recall thoughts or feelings that occurred during the conversations. Immediately following each contact with the participants, the researcher would complete field notes which are then used for analyzing data.

4. Ten Vietnamese conversations were finally selected out of twenty ones recorded.

The total recorded time is of about 250 minutes, out of which the total recorded time of the conversations selected for the analysis hereof is 95 minutes. After transcription, the total number of turns transcribed is 742 turns, which are distributed differently in those ten conversations. With the transcripts of the conversations and the results of stimulated recall sessions, different strategies were confirmed when the Vietnamese speakers take the floor, hold onto the floor, or relinquish the floor. Those strategies are grouped into two groups of verbal and non-verbal strategies. The verbal strategies are sub-grouped into adjacency pairs, name nomination, recompleters, appositionals, syntactic cues, and overlap. The non-verbal strategies include the paralanguage ones and the extralanguage ones. Below is the summary of the strategies applied:

Adjacency pairs

The application of the first part of an adjacency pair is perceived as a turn-yielding technique in Vietnamese. Almost all types of adjacency pairs are found to be in use in Vietnamese conversations. The following are adjacency pairs extracted from the studied conversations:

Question/answer:

G1: Khuê đi rồi thì cậu thấy Cát Bà thế nào

B1: Cát Bà à theo tôi nghĩ thì Cát Bà cũng đẹp thôi nhưng ở đấy thì ít chỗ vui chơi giải trí lắm

Offer/accept-reject:

G9: Đi Mai Châu không mọi người

B2: Trước tớ từng đi Mai Châu rồi

Name nomination

The current speaker may call out the name of another speaker to select him/her as the next speaker. The below extract is a typical example of name nomination in Vietnamese.

G3: Thế <u>Nga</u> thì chọn mua hay chọn may

G5: Chỉ đi mua thôi hầu như không may kiểu đi mua quần áo đã đủ mệt rồi hôm trước cái áo này tớ mới mua này hôm trước nữa đi lùng mua hai cái áo

Lexical devices

A large amount of words and phrases are often used at the end or beginning of Vietnamese utterances. Being aware of such words may help in both detecting the end of a turn and in acquiring a turn. These devices are appositionals (turn entry devices or pre-starts) and recompleters (turn-exit devices). The apppositionals often used in Vietnamese are *"không"*, *"đâu"*, *"nhưng"*, *"nhưng mà"*, *"thế"*, *"thì"*, *"thế thì"*, *"thế thì bây giờ"*, *"đúng rồi"*, *"ừ"*, *"à"*, *"chẳng qua"*, *"chẳng qua là"*, *"căn bản"*, *"căn bản là"*, *"cho nên"*, *"đấy"*, *"tức là"*, *"nói chung là"*, while the commonly used recompleters are *"đúng không"*, *"được không"*, *"à"*, *"ấ"*, *"hay là thế nào"*, *"nhớ"*, *"nhế"*, *"chứ gì"*, *"chứ"*, *"cơ mà"*, *"nhỉ"*, *"còn gì"*, *"còn gì nữa"*, *"chứ còn gì nữa"*, *", "ý"*, *"đâu"*.

Syntactic features

Possible completion points of phrases, clauses, or sentences are interpreted to be the completion points of turns, and thus are perceived as a turn-end signal. The male Vietnamese speakers seem to be more responsive to such completion points than the females.

Overlaps

Overlaps are used to acquire a turn by the Vietnamese speakers. Two types of overlaps observed are overlaps near transition relevant places (TRPs) and overlaps away from TRPs. Besides, the female Vietnamese speakers tend to overlap more often than the males, and overlaps between intimates are of higher frequency than those between strangers. The following are examples of overlaps near TRPs (1) and overlaps away from TRPs (2):

(1) B1 : Đi Hạ Long thì hay là…

G2: [Đi Hạ Long] thì nói chung thì kinh phí nó cũng vừa phải này…

B1: [Hạ Long thì] đi hai ngày ba đêm.

(2) G2: Năm ngoái, Phúc có tham gia đá không?

G3: Con trai thường có kinh nghiệm đá bóng hơn con gái, ấy có thể chia sẻ

G2: [Năm ngoái, có đá không?]

G3: kinh nghiệm với bọn tớ được không?

B1 : Năm ngoái mình không.

Prosodies

Vietnamese is a tone language with 6 lexical tones divided into two registers: high (NGANG, SAC, NGA) and low (HUYEN, NANG, HOI). The tones of a language in general and of Vietnamese in particular are generally realized within a well-defined F_0 range (fundamental frequency measured by Hertz); whilst the stress or accent in Vietnamese is often realized by duration measured by millisecond (ms) or intensity (the loudness of a sound) measured by decibel (dB). Therefore, a specialized audio program Nuendo 3.0 was applied to study how prosodic features function as turn signals in Vietnamese. Nuendo 3.0 is a computer application, which is often utilized by the musicians to compose and record songs. With this program, one utterance can be analyzed in four features: intensity, pitch, duration, and tempo as displayed on the figure below.
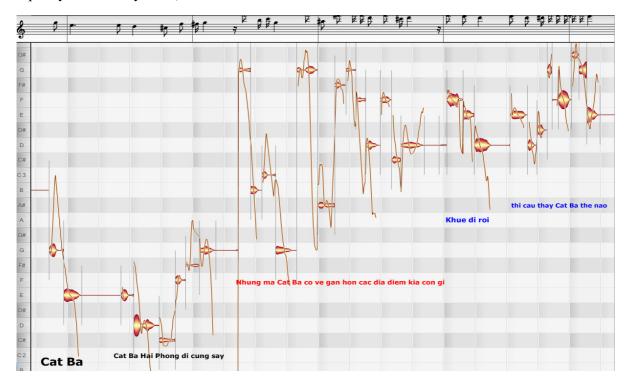

Figure 1. Measurements of intensity, duration, tempo, and pitch with Nuendo 3.0.

Four patterns of prosodies were found to be of close link to turn-taking: sound intensity, sound duration, tempo, and pitch, among which the Vietnamese rely more on the three former patterns than on the latter pattern. Concerning sound intensity, high intensity is interpreted to be of turn-holding and turn-acquiring functions, whereas relatively low sound is perceived as a way to pass a turn. As of sound duration, the longer sound produced may be seen as either turn-requesting or turn-ending techniques. High tempo in Vietnamese sometimes takes the functions of turn-passing. The last prosodic pattern studied is pitch. Pitch variation is of relatively less important turn-taking functions as compared to other techniques. Rising contour by the beginning of an utterance can be a turn-request signal, whereas falling contour by transition relevant place is interpreted a turn-passing strategy, for which patterns the following figure is a typical illustration.
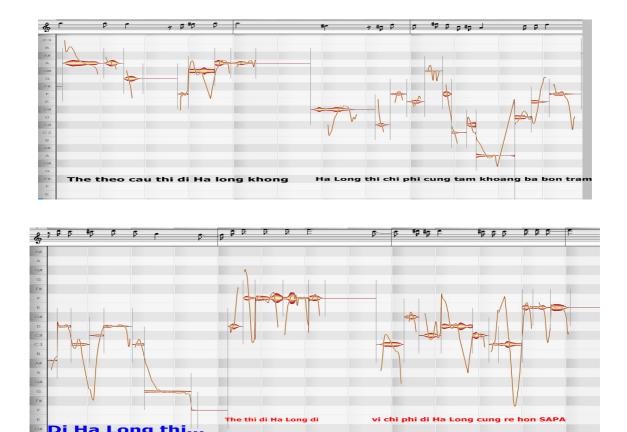
The theo cau thi di Ha long khong   Ha Long thi chi phi cung tam khoang ba bon tram

Di Ha Long thi...   The thi di Ha Long di   vi chi phi di Ha Long cung re hon SAPA

Figure 2. Rising contour as turn-beginning signal and falling contour as turn-end signal.

Silence

On the whole, the Vietnamese speakers tend to minimize pauses within a turn and gaps between turns. A rather long pause (of more than one second in length) is attributed to a turn-end signal, yet the Vietnamese seem to tolerate long silence between turns.

Gaze directions

Two patterns of gaze direction were noticed in the Vietnamese casual conversations: turn-yielding gaze and turn-avoiding gaze. The former is attributed to the current speaker, and the latter is of the other parties involved in the conversation.

Gestures

The Vietnamese people sometimes raise their hands to self-select them as the next speakers. Besides, gesturing in some particular cases is understood as a turn-yielding signal.

Head movements

Head nod is a turn-taking technique, while head shake takes the function of turn-avoiding.

Postures

Leaning backward is to surrender a turn, while leaning forward is considered as a way to request a turn.

Turn-taking, which used to be considered as being unstructured and spontaneous, is actually systematic and can be encoded. The above strategies, which were accrued from examining ten Vietnamese casual conversations within a rather small range of participants, may thereby be a practical illustration. Similar studies with a wider range of participants, if conducted, would

carter for a more valid set of strategies, which in so doing better represent the typical patterns of turn-taking in Vietnamese.

5. The above turn-taking strategies were then compared and contrasted to those applied in English conversations, which were complied by reviewing literatures, to detect any patterns that stand out. Briefly in English, in order to smoothly and successfully acquire a turn, a speaker should identify the signals ending the current turn and inform himself or herself of the techniques commonly applied to request a turn. The turn-end signals in English are name nomination, the application of the first part of an adjacency pairs, the use of lexical devices (recompleters), the gaze direction of the current speaker, the long pause, the falling intonation, gesturing, the decrease of voice volume, and the body movement. The turn-requesting techniques often applied by the English speakers are the use of lexical devices (appositionals), overlapping and interrupting the current speaker, the realization of completion points of utterances, hand raise, the increase in sound volume, and the changes of body posture.

On the whole, the strategies applied by the Vietnamese are identical to those applied by the English speakers, with which the findings of the research support the "universal system hypothesis" of universal set of rules governing turn-taking mechanism in different cultures (languages). Such identical strategies are the use of name nomination, lexicons, syntactic features, overlap, intonation, gaze direction and other body movements in turn-taking.

Nonetheless, with a close look at how such same set of rules works in practice, certain disparities were captured between the turn-taking strategies used in Vietnamese informal conversations and those used in English informal conversations. Such disparities to some extent are in line with the "cultural variability hypothesis", by which turn-taking is language and culture dependent. The differences between turn-taking strategies used in the two languages are related to the use of

lexicons as turn-end and turn-beginning signals, the level of overlaps in conversations, the application of prosodic features, and the silence between turns.

With regards to lexicons, the Vietnamese speakers rely on lexicons more often than the English speakers do to detect turn-end positions and to request a turn. Practically, the words and phrases which function as recompleters and appositionals in Vietnamese outnumber those in English. This may be resulted from the fact that the Vietnamese sentences are formed lexically rather than grammatically, with which the English sentences are formed.

In terms of overlaps, the Vietnamese tend to overlap in a higher frequency than the English do. According to Sack et al. [5], the English speakers tend to minimize gaps and overlaps between turns, interruptions which refer to simultaneous talk that does not occur at or near a TRP are even perceived to have negative connotation in English, whereas interruptions are common in Vietnamese and are rarely regarded as negative interlocutory acts.

The differences in acoustic patterns seem to emerge from the two languages per se. In the tone Vietnamese, sound intensity and duration seem to be applied more often than pitch, which is resorted to the most (among all prosodic features) in the non-tone language of English. In English, the variations of pitch may function in forming the types of sentences, and thus the listeners may integrally perceive a question or a request owing to the intonation contours applied by the speakers; whereas in Vietnamese pitch variations which are observed in every words uttered seem to function less in forming the types of sentences. The Vietnamese speakers, therefore, seem to neglect intonation when speaking, which is on the contrary to the habit of using intonation contours of the English speakers.

Another difference between English and Vietnamese in terms of turn-taking strategies is found in the pattern of silence or gap, lapse, and pause between turns. The English speakers just

tolerate a pause of less than one second, while about 71.6 per cent of inter-turn spaces observed in Vietnamese conversation is of longer than one second. The 'no gap, no overlap' structure of discourse is ingrained in Anglo-American culture, persons with a slower pace at turn-taking will regularly fail to get the floor to speak, conversely, the Vietnamese speakers though tend to minimize gaps between turns, do accept long pause between turns.

In a nutshell, it can be stated that the differences in the use of turn-taking signals between English speakers and Vietnamese speakers are shaped rooting from the two languages of English and Vietnamese per se; in which the former is non-tone and polysyllabic, whilst the latter is tone and monosyllabic.

6. To end with, as commented by Tarone and Yule [6] "There are few, if any, materials available at present which teach learners how to use communication strategies when problems are encountered in the process of transmitting information.", this situation is still attributive to the existing materials found in ELT environment in Vietnam. Besides, from my own experience of working in intercultural environment and of teaching English in Vietnam, the Vietnamese learners of English encounter problems when involving in intercultural conversations. Such problems partly relate to turn management and the use of intonation in turn management. It seems that the Vietnamese speakers tend to apply the Vietnamese conversation patterns when they speak English (for example, the hesitation fillers of "um" and "ah"), which makes them fail to get the floor and causes conversation breakdown. Besides, the Vietnamese tend to interrupt more often in some situations and pause in long duration in others. Moreover, the intonation patterns of the Vietnamese speaking English seem to be awkward and "Vietnamese like", causing misunderstandings among people involving in a conversation. To cope with those problems, the following are recommended basing on the findings above-mentioned:

(1) Turn-taking mechanism and rules should be presented in an integral part of EFL/ESL materials. For example, learners may need more exposure to various examples of English treatment of hesitation or postponement techniques while involving in conversations so as that they can minimize gaps when communicating in English. Thus, the materials designers, when designing ELT materials, incorporate a part namely Turn-taking or Turn Mechanism or even Conversation Skills, under which the most common English fillers are introduced in one lesson.

(2) ELT materials should be authentic, with which the natural turn-taking mechanism will automatically be included in any corpus of dialogues utilized in the materials. The authenticity in materials development has actually been the concerns of different researchers (Gilmore, Moore, Tomlinson, and others) and the recent materials developers have taken into consideration the authenticity when designing materials. The set of Market Leader course books is one typical example, yet turn-taking mechanism in general and turn-taking strategies in particular are not introduced in this series.

(3) EFL teachers, especially those who are focusing on teaching listening and speaking skills, should be responsive to the importance of turn-taking when designing syllabi. For example, regarding English intonation, a lesson in which intonation patterns functioning as turn-taking signals should be included in the syllabus, with which the learners will be aware of such functions of intonation in English, and thereby improve their own knowledge on the field.

(4) EFL teachers should be flexible in applying a practical set of teaching methods. McCarthy [7] suggested that the traditional "three Ps" Presentation-Practice-Production be replaced by "three Is" Illustration- Interaction-Induction. This means learners and teachers should involve in particular discourse patterns so as that the learners' English proficiency is improved practically. With reference to turn-taking, in L1 context, it is relatively easy and natural to know who is to speak, when, and for

how long. Nonetheless, this skill is not automatically transferred to L2 or FL context. To smoothly participate in intercultural communication, the English learners need to furnish themselves with sufficient knowledge of turn-taking mechanism, rules, and strategies present in the target language. Thus, when delivering lessons, the EFL teachers should introduce the learners with the English turn-taking system, and differences in turn-taking practice between English and Vietnamese speakers.

(5) Audio-visual aids should be equipped and applied in all EFL classrooms. The application of an audio-visual aids system in EFL classrooms has been studied and proved to be of efficiency by different researchers. The lessons introducing turn-taking strategies, especially the non-verbal cues will be more effective with the support of audio-visual aids.

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Chiến lược lượt lời trong hội thoại thông thường tiếng Việt và tiếng Anh

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Trong phạm vi phân tích hội thoại, nghiên cứu này được thực hiện để phân tích cơ chế lượt lời và cụ thể là chiến lược lượt lời trong đàm thoại Việt ngữ thông thường. Để thực hiện mục tiêu này, hai phương pháp thu thập dữ liệu được sử dụng là quay phim và khuyến khích hồi tưởng. Sau khi phân tích dữ liệu, một hệ thống chiến lược lượt lời tiếng Việt đã được xây dựng bao gồm cặp kế cận, tên người tham thoại, từ và cụm từ bắt đầu và kết thúc một lượt lời, sự gối lời, những dấu hiệu ngữ pháp, ngôn điệu, ánh mắt, cử chỉ, tư thế của người tham gia hội thoại, và sự ngừng lời. Những chiến lược lượt lời này sau đó được so sánh và đối chiếu với chiến lược lượt lời sử dụng trong hội thoại thông thường tiếng Anh để tìm ra những dấu hiệu khác biệt và tương đồng trong hai hệ thống ngôn ngữ. Từ những kết quả đạt được, một số ứng dụng trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh ở Việt nam được đề xuất, đặc biệt trong hoạt động phát triển tư liệu và thiết kế chương trình giảng dạy.

Từ khóa: phân tích hội thoại, cơ chế lượt lời, chiến lược lượt lời, điểm chuyển giao lượt lời, đơn vị cấu thành lượt lời.