

## Social Distance, Directness, and Cultural-Cognitive Orientations in Student Requests

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### Abstract

*This study aims to analyze the impact of social distance on the level of directness in the request acts of American and Vietnamese students, while simultaneously providing a preliminary examination of the role of cultural-cognitive orientations regarding social relationships and hierarchy. Methodologically, data from 94 students (45 American, 49 Vietnamese) were collected via 6 Discourse Completion Task (DCT) situations and Likert scales, and subsequently coded according to the CCSARP framework. The main results indicate that social distance had a strong negative effect on the level of directness ( $p < .001$ ). American students consistently employed conventionally indirect strategies, whereas Vietnamese students preferred direct utterances in close relationships and gradually shifted toward indirectness as social distance increased. The interaction of cultural-cognitive orientations did not demonstrate a statistically significant moderating role. The study concludes that social distance is the central contextual variable governing politeness strategies. Therefore, practical recommendations emphasize the need to focus on context-recognition competence in intercultural pragmatics pedagogy, while concurrently refining the measurement instruments for cognitive structures in subsequent research.*

## 1. Introduction

In the context of intercultural communication, the speech act of requesting is a highly face-threatening act. This stems from the fact that the speaker is not merely expressing a personal desire but is also directly intervening in the autonomy, obligations, and interactional status of the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Consequently, the decision to select a specific level of directness for a request is shaped not only by its propositional content but is also strongly governed by the social relationship existing between the interactants. Within the system of contextual variables influencing this behavior, social distance plays a pivotal role, as it reflects the degree of familiarity versus distance between individuals, thereby directly altering the speaker's tendency to employ direct or indirect forms of expression (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984).

Numerous studies in cross-cultural pragmatics have demonstrated that request acts can be analyzed through the lens of directness levels and politeness strategies. Notably, the

CCSARP analytical framework proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) classified this act into three levels: direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect. This model establishes a solid foundation for comparing the realization patterns of request acts across linguacultural communities. However, the majority of current comparative studies tend to emphasize only the surface-level differences in linguistic behavior among cultural groups, while the core cultural-cognitive mechanisms dictating the choice of directness within specific frameworks of social relationships remain a gap that needs to be elucidated. In other words, the study of culture demands a more comprehensive approach: culture must not be viewed merely as an identification label categorizing individuals by nationality or language, but rather as a system of cognitive orientations capable of influencing how each individual interprets social relationships, hierarchy, and communicative normativity (Shore, 1996; Bennardo & de Munck, 2020).

To contribute to addressing this gap, this paper analyzes the influence of social distance on the level of directness in the request acts of American and Vietnamese students, while simultaneously providing a preliminary examination of the role of cultural-cognitive orientations regarding social relationships and hierarchy. Theoretically, the research contributes to bridging cross-cultural pragmatics with the cognitive-cultural approach in speech act analysis. Practically, the findings can support the pedagogy of intercultural pragmatics, particularly in enhancing the competence to select appropriate levels of directness according to social relationships and communicative contexts.

This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. How does social distance influence the level of directness in the request acts of American and Vietnamese students?

RQ2. Do cultural-cognitive orientations regarding social relationships and hierarchy moderate the relationship between social distance and the level of directness in request acts?

## **2. Theoretical Background**

The act of requesting is a speech act in which the speaker attempts to influence the future action of the hearer. Because it involves personal autonomy, obligations, and interpersonal relations, the request act is generally considered an act with a high risk of face threat. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the selection of a politeness strategy is influenced by social variables such as relative power, social distance, and the rank of imposition. For this study, social distance is considered the central contextual variable as it reflects the degree of familiarity versus distance between the speaker and the hearer, thereby potentially influencing the choice of directness level in the request utterance.

In terms of pragmatic analysis, the study relies on the CCSARP framework developed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) in their work *Requests and Apologies: A Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns*. This work utilizes a cross-cultural comparative approach to analyze the realization patterns of request and apology acts across different linguacultural communities. Regarding the request act, the CCSARP framework allows for the coding of utterances according to levels of directness, including direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect strategies. This analytical framework is highly appropriate for the objective of this paper, as the central dependent variable of the study is the level of directness in the request acts of American and Vietnamese students.

Alongside the request coding framework, the study also references ongoing discussions regarding data elicitation instruments in cross-cultural pragmatics. Ogiermann (2018), in the work *Discourse Completion Tasks*, argues that the DCT is a useful instrument in speech act research because it allows for the rigorous control of contextual variables such as interactional roles, social relationships, and communicative situations. This approach aligns perfectly with the current study, in which the request situations are explicitly designed to elucidate the variation of directness levels according to the social distance between the interacting subjects.

However, speech act analytical frameworks such as the CCSARP primarily help describe which request form a speaker selects, while the question of why a speaker chooses a direct or indirect level within a specific social relationship needs further explanation from a cultural-cognitive perspective. According to the cultural-cognitive model approach, culture is not only understood as an aggregation of external behaviors, but also as a system of knowledge, schemas, and social expectations that are internalized by the individual during the interaction process. Shore (1996), in *Culture in Mind*, emphasizes the critical role of cultural structures in cognition and social behavior. Bennardo and de Munck (2020) further develop this perspective by conceptualizing cultural models as shared cognitive structures capable of orienting how individuals interpret situations and select appropriate behaviors.

The selection of American and Vietnamese students as survey participants stems from the objective of examining how cultural-cognitive factors participate in the interpretation of social relationships during request acts. In cross-cultural studies, the American context is often associated with a relatively high emphasis on individual autonomy, whereas the Vietnamese context is generally viewed as being more heavily influenced by interpersonal relations and social hierarchy. However, these differences are not considered fixed characteristics of every individual within the two communities, but merely serve as a theoretical basis to investigate the capacity of orientations regarding social relationships and hierarchy to modulate the level of directness in request acts (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Based on this premise, the paper approaches cultural-cognitive orientations as a hypothesized mechanism that may moderate the relationship between social distance and the level of directness in request acts. Specifically, orientations regarding social relationships and hierarchy are viewed as factors potentially influencing how speakers evaluate the degree of familiarity, roles, obligations, and appropriateness in interaction. A speaker with an orientation emphasizing social relationships or hierarchy may choose a different level of directness compared to a speaker less influenced by these orientations, even within the same type of request situation. This approach allows the study not only to describe differences in linguistic behavior between American and Vietnamese students but also to examine the cultural-cognitive mechanisms governing the choice of directness in specific social relationships.

Building on these arguments, the study proposes an analytical framework comprising three components: social distance as the independent variable; the level of directness in the request act as the dependent variable; and cultural-cognitive orientations regarding social relationships and hierarchy as the moderating variables. Accordingly, the first research question focuses on testing the influence of social distance on the level of directness in the request acts of American and Vietnamese students. The second research question seeks to clarify whether cultural-cognitive orientations regarding social relationships and hierarchy moderate the relationship between social distance and the level of directness. From this

framework, the study posits two hypotheses: first, social distance influences the level of directness in request acts; second, cultural-cognitive orientations regarding social relationships and hierarchy play a moderating role in the relationship between social distance and the level of directness in the request acts of American and Vietnamese students. These hypotheses are tested using the collected survey data.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

The study utilizes a quantitative research design combined with cross-cultural pragmatic analysis. This design allows for the coding of request utterances according to a pragmatic analytical framework, while simultaneously quantifying specific cultural-cognitive orientations at the individual level to examine the relationships between variables. This approach is appropriate for the objective of analyzing the variation in the level of directness across request situations characterized by differences in social distance.

#### **3.2. Participants, Scope, and Survey Data**

The scope of the study is limited to the request acts of American and Vietnamese students in communicative situations featuring variations in social distance. The survey participants consist of American national students studying at VinUni and Vietnamese students studying at Vietnam National University, Hanoi. The survey sample was selected based on criteria aligning with the study's cross-cultural comparative objectives, specifically ensuring that participants belonged to the two nationality/language groups corresponding to the two versions of the questionnaire.

Data was collected using printed paper questionnaires distributed directly to the students over a two-week period. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, comprising 100 English-language questionnaires for the American students and 100 Vietnamese-language questionnaires for the Vietnamese students. A total of 199 questionnaires were retrieved, including 99 English questionnaires and 100 Vietnamese questionnaires. After the screening process, the number of valid questionnaires utilized for analysis was 94, consisting of 45 English questionnaires and 49 Vietnamese questionnaires. Questionnaires excluded from the analysis included cases where respondents did not belong to the correct target demographic, lacked responses to the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) situations, had insufficient data to calculate scores for the cultural-cognitive orientation scales, or where the level of directness could not be coded according to the established criteria. This screening aimed to ensure that the final dataset met the requirements for both pragmatic and statistical analysis.

**Table 1. Survey Sample Information and Analytical Data**

<b>Survey Group</b>	<b>Questionnaires Distributed</b>	<b>Questionnaires Retrieved</b>	<b>Valid Questionnaires Included in Analysis</b>	<b>Proportion in Analytical Sample</b>
American Students	100	99	45	47.9%
Vietnamese Students	100	100	49	52.1%

Survey Group	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Retrieved	Valid Questionnaires Included in Analysis	Proportion in Analytical Sample
Total	200	199	94	100%

*Note: Questionnaires excluded from the analysis included cases where respondents did not belong to the correct target demographic, lacked responses to the DCT situations, had insufficient data to calculate scores for the cultural-cognitive orientation scales, or where the level of directness could not be coded according to the established criteria.*

### 3.3. Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments consisted of two versions of a survey questionnaire: an English version for the American students and a Vietnamese version for the Vietnamese students. The two versions were designed with corresponding content structures to serve the comparative objective. The questionnaire comprised three main sections: participants' background information, Likert-scale items measuring cultural-cognitive orientations, and discourse completion situations used to elicit request utterances.

The section measuring cultural-cognitive orientations utilized a 5-point Likert scale. Specifically, 5 items coded B1\_1 to B1\_5 measured the orientation toward social relationships; 5 items coded B2\_1 to B2\_5 measured the orientation toward hierarchy. These items were processed into corresponding mean scores for each participant.

The discourse completion task section consisted of 6 request situations, coded C1 through C6. These situations were designed to create controlled communicative contexts wherein participants wrote down a request utterance appropriate for each hypothetical situation. The content of the situations revolved around two main types of request tasks: borrowing a pen and asking for/sending files. In the DCT design, the study focused on operationalizing the social distance variable between the speaker and the hearer, while simultaneously restricting the variation of other contextual variables that could influence the level of directness. Specifically, the situations were set in a familiar academic environment, with request tasks possessing relatively similar ranks of imposition. The social power dynamics between characters in the situations were also controlled to avoid creating excessively large power disparities, aiming to prevent the level of directness from being primarily governed by power status rather than social distance. The use of DCT aligns with the research objectives because this instrument allows for the strict control of contextual variables such as social relationships, interactional roles, and request situations.

### 3.4. Research Variables and Measurements

In the research model, the independent variable is the social distance between the speaker and the hearer within the request situations. Social distance was operationalized into three levels: low/close, intermediate, and high/distant. These levels were embedded within the 6 DCT situations, where each level of social distance was associated with its corresponding request situations. Because the study focuses on the social distance variable, the other contextual variables in Brown and Levinson's politeness model, including relative power and the rank of imposition, were controlled at the situation design level. Specifically, the situations were limited to an academic environment, featuring familiar request tasks with imposition

ranks that were not significantly different, in order to minimize the possibility of these variables confounding the effect of social distance on the level of directness.

The dependent variable is the level of directness in the request act, determined based on the utterances produced by participants in each situation. The level of directness was coded into quantitative levels based on the CCSARP analytical framework.

The moderating variables comprised two cultural-cognitive orientations: the orientation toward social relationships and the orientation toward hierarchy. The orientation toward social relationships was measured by 5 items, coded B1\_1 to B1\_5, and aggregated into a mean score B1\_Mean\_Social\_Relationship. The orientation toward hierarchy was measured by 5 items, coded B2\_1 to B2\_5, and aggregated into a mean score B2\_Mean\_Hierarchy. These two variables were utilized to examine their potential capacity to moderate the relationship between social distance and the level of directness in the request acts.

**Table 2. Research Variables and Measurement Methods**

Variable Type	Variable Name	Operationalization/Measurement Method	Role in Analysis
Independent Variable	Social Distance	Operationalized across 6 DCT situations into three levels: low/close, intermediate, and high/distant	To test its effect on the level of directness in the request act
Dependent Variable	Level of Directness in Request Act	Coded from DCT responses based on the CCSARP framework into three levels: non-conventionally indirect, conventionally indirect, and direct	To reflect the pragmatic choices of the participants in each situation
Moderating Variable	Social Relationship Orientation	Measured by 5 Likert items, coded B1_1 to B1_5; aggregated into the mean score B1_Mean_Social_Relationship	To preliminarily examine its capacity to moderate the relationship between social distance and the level of directness
Moderating Variable	Hierarchy Orientation	Measured by 5 Likert items, coded B2_1 to B2_5; aggregated into the mean score B2_Mean_Hierarchy	To examine its capacity to moderate the relationship between social distance and the level of directness
Control/Design Variable	Request Task Type	Situations revolved around two main task types: borrowing a pen and asking for/sending files	To restrict excessive variations in the rank of imposition across situations
Control/Design Variable	Social Power and Rank of Imposition	Controlled at the situation design level within an academic context, avoiding the creation of large power disparities	To reduce the potential for statistical noise when analyzing the effect of social distance

### 3.5. Coding Procedure for Level of Directness

The coding of the level of directness of the request acts was conducted based on the CCSARP framework by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain. In this study, the DCT responses were coded into three levels: non-conventionally indirect, conventionally indirect, and direct.

Non-conventionally indirect utterances are instances where the speaker merely hints at the circumstances, needs, or problems without explicitly stating the action they desire the hearer to perform. Conventionally indirect utterances are instances where the speaker uses structures inquiring about ability, asking for permission, or requesting favors following familiar communicative formulas. Direct utterances are instances where the speaker clearly articulates the request through imperatives, truncated demands, or structures that straightforwardly state the action the hearer is required to execute. Converting natural language responses into analytical codes enables the DCT data to be processed quantitatively.

### 3.6. Data Processing and Analysis

Following collection, the data was screened prior to being included in the analysis. Valid questionnaires were those belonging to the correct target survey groups, containing sufficient information for English/Vietnamese categorization, including responses to the request situations, and providing the necessary data for coding the directness levels as well as calculating the scores for the cultural-cognitive orientation variables. Questionnaires failing to meet these criteria were not included in the final analytical dataset.

After screening, the data were entered, standardized, and reorganized to facilitate analysis. The responses across the 6 DCT situations were coded into quantitative data according to the level of directness. The Likert items were processed to calculate the mean scores for the two moderating variables: social relationship orientation and hierarchy orientation. The analytical data were also organized by sample group, situation, request task, and level of social distance.

Data analysis was conducted in two directions, corresponding to the two research questions. For the first research question, the study utilized descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, and comparisons of the directness levels across the three gradients of social distance, while concurrently comparing the two groups of American and Vietnamese students. For the second research question, the study examined the moderating role of the two cultural-cognitive orientation variables through an analysis of the relationships between social distance, the mean score of social relationship orientation, the mean score of hierarchy orientation, and the level of directness in the request acts.

## 4. Research Results

### 4.1. The Influence of Social Distance on the Level of Directness in Request Acts

The analytical data comprises 94 valid questionnaires, including 45 from the American student cohort and 49 from the Vietnamese student cohort. With 6 discourse completion situations, the total number of coded responses is 564. The level of directness was classified according to the CCSARP framework into three categories: non-conventionally indirect, conventionally indirect, and direct.

**Table 3. Distribution of Directness Levels by Social Distance and Student Cohort**

<b>Student Cohort</b>	<b>Social Distance</b>	<b>Non-Conventionally Indirect</b>	<b>Conventionally Indirect</b>	<b>Direct</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>
American Students	Low/Close	0	63	27	90
American Students	Intermediate	0	87	3	90
American Students	High/Distant	0	87	3	90
Vietnamese Students	Low/Close	3	7	88	98
Vietnamese Students	Intermediate	0	42	56	98
Vietnamese Students	High/Distant	0	53	45	98
Total		3	339	222	564

*Note: The data consists of 94 valid questionnaires, with 6 DCT situations, yielding 564 coded responses.*

The results demonstrate that social distance exerts a clear influence on the choice of directness level in request acts. In the American student cohort, conventionally indirect forms were dominant across all three distance levels. In low/close relationships, this group produced 63 conventionally indirect responses and 27 direct responses. When the social distance shifted to the intermediate level, the number of conventionally indirect responses increased to 87, while direct responses decreased to 3. At the high/distant level, this distribution was maintained with 87 conventionally indirect responses and 3 direct responses. Thus, American students tend to sharply reduce their use of direct utterances when the social relationship becomes more distant.

In the Vietnamese student cohort, the level of directness was more prominent, particularly in close relationships. At the low/close distance, there were 88 direct responses, 7 conventionally indirect responses, and 3 non-conventionally indirect responses. At the intermediate distance, the number of direct responses decreased to 56, while conventionally indirect responses increased to 42. At the high/distant level, direct responses further decreased to 45, and conventionally indirect responses increased to 53. These results indicate that Vietnamese students tend to use direct requests in close relationships, but gradually transition to conventionally indirect forms as social distance increases.

**Table 4. Percentage Distribution of Directness Levels by Social Distance and Student Cohort**

Student Cohort	Social Distance	Non-Conventionally Indirect	Conventionally Indirect	Direct
American Students	Low/Close	0.0%	70.0%	30.0%
American Students	Intermediate	0.0%	96.7%	3.3%
American Students	High/Distant	0.0%	96.7%	3.3%
Vietnamese Students	Low/Close	3.1%	7.1%	89.8%
Vietnamese Students	Intermediate	0.0%	42.9%	57.1%
Vietnamese Students	High/Distant	0.0%	54.1%	45.9%

*Note: Percentages were calculated from the frequency data presented in Table 3. For the American student cohort, each social-distance level included 90 coded responses. For the Vietnamese student cohort, each social-distance level included 98 coded responses.*

The percentage distribution provides a clearer view of the shift in directness across social-distance levels. Among American students, conventionally indirect strategies increased from 70.0% in low/close relationships to 96.7% in both intermediate and high/distant relationships, while direct strategies decreased from 30.0% to 3.3%. Among Vietnamese students, direct strategies accounted for 89.8% of responses in low/close relationships, but decreased to 57.1% at the intermediate level and 45.9% at the high/distant level. Conversely, conventionally indirect strategies increased from 7.1% to 42.9% and then to 54.1%. These patterns reinforce the finding that greater social distance is associated with a lower preference for direct request forms and a stronger tendency toward conventionally indirect strategies.

The results of the ordinal logistic regression reinforce this trend. In Model M1, social distance had a negative and statistically significant impact on the level of directness,  $\beta = -1.105$ ,  $p < .001$ . This indicates that as social distance increases, the probability of selecting a direct form decreases. The cohort variable was also significant,  $\beta = 2.866$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that the Vietnamese student group tends to use higher levels of directness than the American student group. Meanwhile, the task type variable was not statistically significant,  $p = .499$ .

#### 4.2. The Role of Cultural-Cognitive Orientations

To address the second research question, the study examined whether cultural-cognitive orientations could moderate the relationship between social distance and the level of directness in request acts. Two cultural-cognitive orientations were initially considered: social relationship orientation and hierarchy orientation. Before testing the moderating effects, the internal reliability of the two scales was examined to determine whether they were suitable for subsequent regression analysis.

The reliability test showed that the hierarchy orientation scale reached an acceptable level for exploratory analysis, with Cronbach's alpha = .732. By contrast, the social relationship orientation scale showed very low internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha = .185. This result indicates that the items measuring social relationship orientation did not demonstrate sufficient internal consistency in the current dataset. Therefore, to maintain methodological and statistical rigor, social relationship orientation was not included in the regression model for testing moderating effects. Consequently, no confirmatory conclusion can be drawn regarding the moderating role of social relationship orientation in this study. This variable should instead be treated as a measurement limitation that requires further refinement in future research.

**Table 5. Internal Reliability of the Cultural-Cognitive Orientation Scales**

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Social relationship orientation	5	.185	Low reliability; not retained for regression-based moderation testing
Hierarchy orientation	5	.732	Acceptable reliability for exploratory analysis and retained for moderation testing

After excluding the social relationship orientation variable, the moderation analysis was conducted only with hierarchy orientation. The regression result showed that the interaction between social distance and hierarchy orientation did not reach statistical significance,  $p = .116$ . In addition, model comparison indicated that adding the interaction term did not significantly improve model fit,  $p = .266$ . These results suggest that, within the scope of the current data, there is insufficient statistical evidence to confirm that hierarchy orientation moderates the relationship between social distance and the level of directness in request acts.

**Table 6. Results of Testing the Moderating Role of Hierarchy Orientation**

Tested Relationship	p	Statistical Result	Interpretation
Social distance × Hierarchy orientation	.116	Not statistically significant	Insufficient evidence to confirm the moderating role of hierarchy orientation
Model comparison after adding the interaction term	.266	No significant improvement in model fit	Adding the interaction term did not significantly increase the explanatory power of the model

Overall, the findings indicate that social distance remained the more prominent factor influencing the level of directness in request acts. The study did not find statistical evidence for the moderating role of hierarchy orientation. Meanwhile, the role of social relationship orientation could not be validly tested because the scale did not reach an acceptable level of internal reliability. This result does not necessarily reject the theoretical relevance of cultural-cognitive orientations; rather, it suggests that the measurement of such orientations requires further refinement. Future studies should revise the items measuring social relationship orientation, reassess their conceptual consistency, and validate the scale before using it in confirmatory regression models.

## 5. Discussion

The research results show that social distance is a factor that significantly influences the level of directness in the request acts of both American and Vietnamese student cohorts. As the relationship between the speaker and the hearer becomes more distant, participants tend to reduce the use of direct utterances and shift more toward conventionally indirect forms. This finding aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which posits that social distance is one of the variables that heightens the sensitivity to face in interactions, thereby prompting the speaker to select more cautious expression strategies to minimize the degree of imposition on the hearer.

The differences between the two groups suggest that the realization of request acts may be influenced by distinct pragmatic tendencies. The American student cohort maintained the predominance of the conventionally indirect form across all three levels of social distance, indicating a tendency to choose a relatively cautious and stable request strategy. Conversely, the Vietnamese student cohort used direct utterances more prominently in close relationships, and subsequently decreased the level of directness as social distance increased. This result suggests that in the communicative context of Vietnamese students, a close relationship may diminish the perceived risk of face threat, rendering direct requests more appropriate in certain interpersonal communicative situations.

Regarding the second research question, the analytical results did not find a statistically significant moderating role for hierarchy orientation concerning the relationship between social distance and the level of directness. When this interaction variable was included in the model, the influence of social distance remained the predominant factor governing pragmatic choices. This indicates that, within the scope of the current survey data, participants tend to adjust the level of directness primarily based on the familiar-distant characteristics of the communicative relationship presented in each situation, rather than their individual orientations toward hierarchy.

Crucially, regarding the orientation toward social relationships, the severe lack of internal reliability in its measurement scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .185$ ) precluded any valid assessment of its moderating role within the current dataset. Because this variable was excluded from the regression analysis to maintain statistical validity, empirical conclusions regarding its capacity to influence directness cannot be drawn. This methodological limitation strongly suggests that quantifying implicit cultural-cognitive schemas using explicit Likert scales requires highly robust instruments. Future studies must rigorously review items for conceptual compatibility and redesign the measurement tool for social relationship orientations to accurately capture the targeted constructs.

The research results suggest that the influence of cultural-cognitive orientations may not manifest directly or linearly in every request situation. Orientations regarding social relationships and hierarchy might participate in the speaker's process of interpreting the communicative context, but their impacts could be governed by specific contextual cues, among which social distance is the most salient factor in this study. Therefore, rather than viewing these results as a complete negation of the role of cultural-cognitive orientations, they highlight a critical need for refining measurement instruments and expanding testing in future studies.

Practically, the study's findings suggest that the teaching of cross-cultural pragmatics should emphasize training the competence to recognize and evaluate social distance within specific communicative contexts. Learners not only need to grasp general politeness formulas but also require guidance on how to adjust the level of directness according to the degree of familiarity, interactional status, and the appropriateness of the request act. This approach can contribute to enhancing pragmatic competence and mitigating the risk of communicative failure in cross-cultural environments.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study investigated the influence of social distance on the level of directness in the request acts of American and Vietnamese students, while examining the role of cultural-cognitive orientations regarding social relationships and hierarchy in this linkage. The results reveal that social distance is a prominent contextual variable: as social distance increases, participants tend to decrease their use of direct utterances and shift more toward conventionally indirect forms. Additionally, the divergence between the two groups indicates that American students maintain a more stable conventionally indirect tendency, whereas Vietnamese students utilize direct utterances more prominently in close relationships.

Regarding the cultural-cognitive orientations, the analytical results indicate that the influence of social distance still plays the predominant role. The interaction between social distance and hierarchy orientation did not demonstrate a statistically significant moderating role, while the social relationship orientation had to be excluded from the analysis due to severely low reliability. This suggests that the measurement of cultural-cognitive constructs requires further refinement. Based on these results, the paper emphasizes the importance of cultivating the ability to recognize social distance in cross-cultural pragmatics pedagogy, while proposing the expansion of the survey sample and the refinement of measurement tools in subsequent research.

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Nguyen Thi Hoa, MA, is a lecturer at the Faculty of English, University of Natural Resources and Environment, Vietnam, and is currently a PhD student in English Linguistics. After graduating with a Master's degree in English Linguistics, she has been teaching language skills courses at the university. She is interested in doing research on cross-cultural communication, an area with high applicability in language teaching and research.