

# So sánh chiến lược lịch sự trong các bài phát biểu của các nhà ngoại giao Hoa Kỳ đối với Trung Quốc và Việt Nam

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## TÓM TẮT

Bài báo tìm hiểu các chiến lược lịch sự trong những bài phát biểu của các nhà ngoại giao Hoa Kỳ với Trung Quốc và Việt Nam. Phương pháp nghiên cứu định lượng và định tính được áp dụng để xác định và phân tích các yếu tố ngôn ngữ thể hiện các chiến lược này. Kết quả nghiên cứu về các siêu chiến lược lịch sự thu thập được từ hai hệ thống dữ liệu cho thấy các dụng ý khác nhau của các nhà ngoại giao Hoa Kỳ đối với Trung Quốc và Việt Nam. Cụ thể là các chính khách Hoa Kỳ thể hiện thái độ thận trọng nhưng kiên quyết với Trung Quốc khi nói về vấn đề nhân quyền, an ninh, ổn định và phát triển của khu vực cũng như khẳng định về quan hệ song phương thông qua ngôn từ với ba siêu chiến lược: *lịch sự âm tính, nói bóng gió và nói thẳng không bù đắp*. Trong khi đó, họ lại thể hiện sự thoải mái, thân tình rõ nét với Việt Nam, biểu hiện qua việc sử dụng đa số các chiến lược *lịch sự dương tính* khi cùng đề cập đến những vấn đề này. Kết quả nghiên cứu cũng cho thấy giao tiếp ngoại giao chịu ảnh hưởng rất lớn của tình hình chính trị. Hi vọng rằng nghiên cứu này sẽ là nguồn tham khảo hữu ích cho những ai quan tâm đến ngôn ngữ lịch sự trong diễn ngôn chính trị hoặc những ai học tập và nghiên cứu về chuyên ngành chính trị và ngoại giao.

**Từ khóa:** Chính khách Hoa Kỳ, chiến lược lịch sự, bài phát biểu ngoại giao, Trung Quốc, Việt Nam.

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# A comparative study on politeness strategies in US diplomats' speeches towards China and Vietnam

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## ABSTRACT

The article investigates the politeness strategies employed in the speeches by US diplomats towards China and Vietnam. Quantitative and qualitative research approaches are applied to identify and analyze the linguistic devices that represent these strategies. The findings on politeness meta-strategies collected from two corpora denote different underlying intentions of US diplomats to China and Vietnam. Specifically, US diplomats are verbally cautious, implicit but bald in their speeches towards China on human rights, actions on regional security, stability, and development, and claims on bilateral relations, revealed by the more prevalence of the three politeness mega-strategies: *negative politeness*, *off-record*, and *bald on-record*. Meanwhile, they show warmth and friendliness towards Vietnam, which is a manifestation of *positive politeness* when they mention the same issues. The findings also show that diplomatic communication is greatly influenced by the political situation. It is hoped that the findings of the study will be a useful reference for those interested in linguistic politeness in political discourse or those studying and researching politics and diplomacy.

**Keywords:** US diplomats, politeness strategies, diplomatic speeches, China, Vietnam.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy, with the function of “*the principal means by which states communicate with each other, enabling them to have regular and complex relations*”, as defined in the Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Diplomacy,<sup>1</sup> has always served as one of the prime focuses of all democracies. Through diplomatic activities, leaders of nations aim at establishing political, economic, and cultural relationships with other nations, and even for ambitious governments with great economic and military strength, exerting their powerful impacts and superiority on world affairs.

To help governments achieve these intended diplomatic purposes, sharply worded

diplomatic conversations with highly polished styles of verbal ingredients may be used as an uppermost weapon. Hence, there have been numerous linguistic studies on the language of diplomacy, as by Chilton<sup>2</sup> or Orellana,<sup>3</sup> especially on the language of diplomats' speeches to see how they can use words to reach their diplomatic goals, as conducted by Phuc & Yen,<sup>4</sup> Azpíroz,<sup>5</sup> and Alavidze,<sup>6</sup> which inspired our research on diplomatic discourse.

This article examines the politeness strategies employed in US diplomats' speeches towards China and Vietnam. The rationale for this choice is as follows: First, as a discourse type of tact and delicacy, diplomatic speeches promise to be a productive land for politeness

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strategies to reveal their capacity of “*minimizing the negative effects of what one says on the feelings of the others and maximizing the positive effects*”.<sup>7</sup> Studying politeness strategies in this kind of discourse, therefore, may make further contributions to the general insights of communication strategies that help one to successfully achieve his communication goals. Second, the relationship between the US and China is strikingly different from that between the US and Vietnam. While the US government proclaims a state of tense and conflicting relationship between the US and China: “*We will counter Beijing’s aggressive and coercive actions, stand up to Beijing when PRC authorities are violating human rights and fundamental freedoms*”,<sup>8</sup> it claims the US-Vietnam partnership as a bilateral one, and Vietnam as a trusted partner: “*The United States and Vietnam are trusted partners with a friendship grounded in mutual respect*”.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it is hypothesized that due to these differences in the relationship conditions, the US has dealt with China and Vietnam with different politeness strategies in their interactions.

This article aims to investigate and compare politeness strategies in speeches made by native US diplomats towards China and towards Vietnam and to find out how political issues influence the diplomats’ use of linguistic politeness strategies in communication. Diplomatic speeches are selected as the database for this research because “*political discourse is full of conflicts and synergy, contestation and acquiescence, praise and dispraise as well as delicate criticism and unmitigated support*”,<sup>10</sup> and therefore, they are expected to contain typical politeness types to redress these possible FTAs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Previous studies on politeness strategies in political discourse

Political language has proved a fruitful source inspiring numerous research on politeness.

Alavidze<sup>6</sup> and Balogun & Munara<sup>11</sup> find that President Donald Trump shows lots of

negative politeness strategies to emphasize his strength and independence while Sari<sup>12</sup> shows that in his victory speech, Barack Obama gets audiences’ support by performing mainly positive politeness strategies.

Besides, there has been extensive research into the influence of cultures on using communicative strategies in political discourse. Phuc & Yen<sup>4</sup> investigate politeness strategies in the discourse of British and American politicians and find that American politicians appear to be more positive in expressing politeness strategies, whereas British politicians use more expressions of negative politeness strategies in their speech deliveries.

Furthermore, negative factors in political communication have also been looked at. Duszak et al.<sup>13</sup> examine the correlation between politeness strategies and conflicts, confrontations, and challenges in interactions to see how politicians orient to politeness norms, and how they strategically display threats, disapprovals, and fallacies to their rivals.

These early studies have contributed to the knowledge of the ways politicians achieve their political goals through linguistic politeness, the ways their cultures influence their choice of politeness strategies, and the ways they use politeness strategies to compensate for face-threatening acts in negative political contexts. However, the exploration of politeness strategies performed by diplomats of one certain country towards different partner countries under the influence of different relationship contexts has not been focused on. Therefore, this study orientates to the ways US diplomats employ politeness strategies to deal with different partners of different relationships by exploring and comparing politeness strategies used in US diplomats’ speeches towards China and Vietnam.

### 2.2. Brown and Levison’s approach to politeness

Despite different frameworks of important and influential views on politeness, linguists have shown great appreciation for Brown and

Levison's approach. Their face-saving view can be considered “*the best known of the recent approaches*”,<sup>14</sup> and their politeness theory “*one of the most influential theoretical frameworks relevant for studies on the pragmatic aspect of language*”.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, this study chooses Brown and Levison's face-saving view with their politeness strategies as the theoretical approach and background for the analysis and evaluation of the politeness strategies in US diplomats' speeches towards China and Vietnam.

Brown and Levison<sup>16</sup> use face theory as a foundation for explaining human interactions that revolve around being polite. In developing politeness theory, they begin with the statements that face is “*the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself*” and that we have two faces: positive face, which is the interactant's desire for acceptance and approval by others, and negative face, which is the interactant's expectation to protect the independence and freedom to proceed without being impeded upon by others. It is also argued in this theory that speech acts may have potential elements that threaten the speaker's negative or/and positive face, which means to engage in normal interactions is to risk losing face by “*face-threatening acts*” (FTAs).

### 2.3. Brown and Levison's classification of politeness strategies

From the notions of face and FTAs, Brown and Levinson postulate five super-strategies for doing FTAs with a set of sub-strategies for each. Agents of these strategies are defined as S (speaker) and H (hearer or addressee).

**Bald on record** technically describes S' doing an FTA in the most direct, clear, and concise way possible, without redressing the damage he may cause to the H's face. Brown and Levison divide bald on record into two cases: (1) *Cases of non-minimization of the face threat* which can be found in 3 main strategies: *Maximize*

*efficiency; Disregard H's face; Care about H's interest*, and (2) *Cases of FTA- oriented bald-on- record usage* which consist of *Welcomings; Farewells; Offers*.

**Positive politeness** can be interpreted as the strategies in which the speaker takes the hearer's wants into consideration, gets close to the hearer, and create friendliness or solidarity with the hearer. Brown and Levison classify their fifteen positive politeness strategies into three broad mechanisms, namely: (1) *Claim common ground*; (2) *Convey that the speaker and the hearer are cooperators*; (3) *Fulfill the hearer's wants*.

**Negative politeness** expresses S's recognition and respect for H's negative face wants and his commitment to not interfering with the hearer's territory and self-determination. Brown and Levison organize their ten negative politeness strategies satisfying five principles as follows: (1) *Be direct by being conventionally indirect*; (2) *Do not assume or presume*; (3) *Do not coerce H*; (4) *Communicate the speaker's want to not impinge on the hearer*; (5) *Redress other wants of H's*.

**Off-record** strategies are those not being addressed directly to the hearer. When using off-record statements, the speaker attempts to avoid committing FTAs by using hints or indirectness in his utterance to imply what he wants. Off-record politeness is accomplished in a couple of ways with several strategies for each: (1) *Invite conversational implicatures*; (2) *Be intentionally vague or ambiguous*.

Finally, the fifth strategic choice **Don't do the FTA** is simply that the speaker avoids offending the hearer at all with any particular FTA. According to Brown and Levison, 'Don't do the FTA' also means that the speaker fails to achieve his desired communication when using this strategy and therefore, it should be ignored in the exploration of FTAs.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Data sources and samples

The data were collected from US diplomats' speeches publicly released on three official websites of the US government:

(1) *U.S. Department of State*: <https://www.state.gov/>

(2) *U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China*: <https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/>

(3) *U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Vietnam*: <https://vn.usembassy.gov/>

To have the information updated, the data are the US diplomatic speeches towards China and Vietnam produced in five recent years from 2017 to 2021.

The speeches are produced by US diplomats of five ranks, namely: *President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Ambassador, and Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. They are all the representatives of the US government's attitudes and opinions towards other countries.

Although US diplomatic speeches towards China and Vietnam cover a diversity of subjects, this study is only concentrated on three categories of data. They are US diplomatic speeches that express the US government's attitudes and opinions on (1) *human rights in China and Vietnam*; (2) *China's and Vietnam's actions on regional security, stability, and development*; (3) *bilateral relations between the US and China/ Vietnam*.

The database for the study was divided into two corpora: *US diplomatic speeches towards China* (which was coded as UDSC) and *US diplomatic speeches towards Vietnam* (which was coded as UDSV). The speeches in the two corpora were coded from (1) *UDSC1* to *UDSC21* and (2) *UDSV1* to *UDSV21* according to the chronological order of the speech deliveries.

**Table 1.** Description of the Database of US diplomatic speeches towards China

Topics of speeches	No of speeches	Coded speeches	No of words	% of words
Human rights in China	7	UDSC1 - UDSC7	2,361	15.4
China's actions on regional security, stability, and development	7	UDSC8 - UDSC14	6,009	39.3
Claims on bilateral relations between the US and China	7	UDSC15 - UDSC21	6,924	45.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>		<b>15,294</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2.** Description of the Database of US diplomatic speeches towards Vietnam

Topics of speeches	No of speeches	Coded speeches	No of words	% of words
Human rights in Vietnam	7	UDSV1 - UDSV7	2,359	15.6
Vietnam's actions on regional security, stability, and development	7	UDSV8 - UDSV14	6,620	43.6
Claims on bilateral relations between the US and Vietnam	7	UDSV15 - UDSV21	6,184	40.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>		<b>15,163</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As shown in Table 1, the UDSC comprises a total of 21 speeches in the size of 15,294 words. It consists of 7 speeches on *human rights in China*; 7 speeches on *China's actions on regional security, stability, and development*; 7 speeches on *bilateral relations between the US and China*, at the word proportion of 15.4%, 39.3%, and 45.3% for each type of speeches respectively. Table 2 shows similar numbers to those in table 1, with a total of 21 speeches in the size of 15,163 words. The UDSV consists of 7 speeches on *human rights in Vietnam*; 7 speeches on *Vietnam's actions on regional security*,

*stability, and development; 7 speeches on bilateral relations between the US and Vietnam, at the word proportion of 15.6%, 43.6%, and 40.8% respectively.*

In general, the size, the subject, the synchronic range, and the political position of the US diplomats who deliver these speeches in the two corpora are approximately similar and equal. Therefore, the data for this study are expected to be relevant for making a comparison of the use of politeness strategies that the US diplomats perform in their speeches towards China and towards Vietnam.

### 3.2. Data analysis

US diplomats' speeches on three official websites of the US government were examined carefully to provide the collected texts with the required quality for the compilation of the two research corpora (the UDSC and the UDSV). Brown and Levison's theory of politeness was used to analyze politeness strategies in these speeches. When all the speeches had been analyzed and politeness strategies had been identified with appropriate codes, the frequency of each type and its subtypes of politeness strategies in the UDSC and the UDSV were calculated to highlight the similarities and differences in the US diplomats' choices of politeness strategies in their speeches towards China and Vietnam. Finally, the conclusion about the influence of diplomatic relationships on US diplomats' uses of linguistic politeness and the implications of the study were drawn.

### 3.3. Research methods

A combination of quantitative approach and qualitative approach was applied with the supporting manipulation of descriptive and comparative methods to explore elements of linguistic politeness. The qualitative approach was applied to identify politeness strategies used in the speeches while the quantitative approach with statistical analysis techniques was applied to put types of politeness strategies into statistics. Then the comparative method was used to

help the researcher to compare the choices of politeness types used in US diplomats' speeches towards China and the ones towards Vietnam. Finally, the descriptive method was employed to interpret the ways politeness strategies in the speeches function to convey the US diplomats' messages to both Chinese and Vietnamese counterparts.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Politeness strategies in UDSC and UDSV

**Table 3.** Frequency of politeness strategies in UDSC and UDSV

Politeness strategies	UDSC	UDSV
Bald-on-record	85 (20.9%)	31(6.1%)
Positive politeness	117(28.7%)	337 (66.3%)
Negative politeness	136(33.4%)	117 (23.0%)
Off-record	69 (17.0%)	23 (4.5%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>407(100%)</b>	<b>508(100%)</b>

Table 3 shows the profound differences in the uses of politeness strategies in US diplomats' speech deliveries towards China and Vietnam. Although the number of total words in each of the two corpora is nearly the same, the analysis reveals a much more abundant use of politeness strategies in US diplomats' speeches towards Vietnam than in their speeches towards China, with 508 instances in the UDSV and 407 instances in the UDSC. US diplomats show more uses of *bald-on-record*, *negative*, and *off-record strategies* in their speeches towards China, with 85 instances of *bald-on-record*, 136 instances of *negative politeness*, and 69 instances of *off-record*. The numbers of these strategies in speeches towards Vietnam are 31, 117, and 23 instances respectively. However, they show a much more marked preference for positive politeness strategies in their speeches towards Vietnam, with 337 cases, than towards China, with only 117 cases.

#### 4.1.1. Bald-on-record in UDSC and UDSV

The analysis shows that the gaps between the uses of bald-on-record in the speeches from

two corpora the UDSC and the UDSV are remarkably wide.

**Table 4.** Frequency of bald-on-record in UDSC and UDSV

Bald-on-record strategies	UDSC	UDSV
Maximize efficiency	0 (0%)	3 (9.7%)
Disregard H's face	83 (97.6%)	17 (54.8%)
Care about H's interest	2 (2.4%)	5 (16.1%)
Welcome	0 (0%)	5 (16.1%)
Farewell	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Offer	0 (0.0%)	1(3.2%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>85(100%)</b>	<b>31(100%)</b>

Table 4 provides a summary of the frequency of bald-on-record in the selected speeches. In the UDSC, diplomats emphasize the use of *disregard H's face* with an overwhelming number of 83 instances, accounting for up to 97.6% of the total numbers of instances of *bald-on-record* used in the corpus. Another bald-on-record strategy, *care about H's face*, occupies a very small frequency with only 2.4 %. There is not any instance of *maximize efficiency*, *welcome*, *farewell*, and *offer*. By contrast, in the UDSV, diplomats are more restrained with the use of *disregard's H's face* and pay more attention to other strategies of bald-on-record. *Disregard H's face* occupies 54.8%, followed by *care about H's interest* and *welcome* at 18.5% for each, and *maximize efficiency* at 9.7%. *Offer* occurs at the very least, 3.2%. There is not any instances of *farewell*. Cases of bald-on-record in the database are illustrated with examples as follows:

**a. Maximize efficiency:** This subtype is used where maximum efficiency is very important, and no face redress is necessary. For example, in (1), Secretary of State Pompeo asks the Vietnamese government to build for the present relationship, not to look back at the hostile past of the two countries.

(1) *But look where we are today.* (UDSV8)

**b. Disregard H's face:** This strategy is considered to pose the most threat to H's face when S wishes to impose his power on H and does not fear non-cooperation from H, as in (2).

(2) *The world needs answers from China on the virus. We must have transparency.* (UDSC10)

**c. Care about H's interest:** Sympathetic advice or warnings may be baldly on record. In (3), for instance, President Trump shows his care for Chinese companies' concerns when the two governments sign the Trade Agreement.

(3) *Just be strong, just be strong. Don't let it happen. But you don't have to do that.* (UDSC20)

**d. Welcome:** Here S insists that H may impose on his territory and independence. This is illustrated in (4), when Ambassador Kritenbrink welcomes participants to join him in a reception in Hanoi, Vietnam.

(4) *So I ask that you please join me in warmly welcoming the Secretary of State of the USA.* (UDSV8)

**e. Offer:** A baldly on record offer may be used to alleviate H's anxieties by S's inviting H to impinge on S's preserve. (5) is an example of this strategy when Secretary of State Pompeo invites the audience to move nearer to him.

(5) *Come on, the front pews are open. Come on.* (UDSV8)

**f. Farewell.** Not any farewell in the corpora is observed. This is, perhaps, because in the formality of the setting where the speeches are being made, it is reasonable for diplomats not to pay attention to H's leaving the speeches.

#### 4.1.2. Positive politeness in UDSC and UDSV

The analysis reveals a much higher density of *positive politeness strategies* in the UDSV than in the UDSC, which may prove the U.S diplomats' greater wish to express more solidarity and intimacy towards the Vietnamese people and government than when dealing with China.

**Table 5.** Frequency of positive politeness strategies in UDSC and UDSV

Positive politeness strategies	UDSC	UDSV
Notice, attend to H	7 (6.0%)	59 (17.5%)
Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)	15(12.8%)	25(7.4%)
Intensify interest to H	10(8.5%)	13(3.9%)
Use in - group identity markers	6(5.1%)	10(3.0%)
Seek agreement	1(0.9%)	15(4.5%)
Avoid disagreement	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Assert common ground	2(1.7%)	12(3.6%)
Joke	1(0.9%)	3(0.9%)
Assert S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants	3(2.6%)	9(2.7%)
Offer, promise	9(7.7%)	29(8.6%)
Be optimistic	10(8.5%)	29(8.6%)
Include both S and H in the activity	20(17.1%)	28(8.3%)
Give / ask for reason	3(2.6%)	10(3.0%)
Assume reciprocity	4(3.4%)	10(3.0%)
Give gifts to H	26(22.2%)	85(25.2%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>117(100%)</b>	<b>337(100%)</b>

As shown in Table 5, the UDSV uses nearly three times as many positive politeness strategies as the UDSC, accounting for 337 instances compared with 117 instances. The uses of *positive sub-strategies* are also remarkably different in the two corpora. All subtypes of *positive politeness* in the UDSV are used with more instances than in the UDSC, except for the absence of the strategy *avoid disagreement* in both the UDSV and the UDSC.

Positive politeness strategies found in the research corpora are classified into categories, each with examples illustrated as follows.

**a. Notice, attend to H:** This strategy, used in a large number in the UDSV, conveys the

message of S' care and attention to H's conditions. By saying (6), Ambassador Kritenbrink shows his notice and admiration for great values of the Vietnamese people.

(6) *This crisis has also given me the opportunity to see the generous, kind-hearted nature of the Vietnamese people.* (UDSV 12)

**b. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H).** This strategy implies that S really sincerely wants H's face to be enhanced. The exaggerative devices include the use of *hyperbole* or *intensifiers*, as in (7).

(7) *The industriousness of the Vietnamese people and sound leadership has made Vietnam an incredible success story today* (UDSV8).

**c. Intensify interest to H.** US diplomats attempt to increase the interest in the speeches by telling stories or using expressions and questions that draw H into the speeches. For instance, President Trump draws Chinese attendees by putting questions in (8).

(8) *You know, that they've worked so hard to develop and to come up with. Are you guys hearing that?* (UDSC20)

**d. Use in-group identity markers.** This strategy showing the common ground and the solidarity between S and H can be carried by markers of *address forms, dialects, jargon, and ellipsis*. In (9), for example, Assistant Secretary Stilwell uses Vietnamese to greet Vietnamese participants, or in (10), when President Trump omits the use of the head noun in his utterance, which implies the mutual comprehension between him and his Chinese counterparts.

(9) *Xin chào các bạn! Xin chào, Vietnam!* (UDSV17)

(10) *Phase one will also see China greatly expand imports of the – to the United States.* (UDSC20)

**e. Seek agreements.** In the two corpora, US diplomats seek agreement from H by giving examples to illustrate their points, or put H in a tie of agreement, as in (11).

(11) *It's why we believe – and you and I have talked about this – all countries have to play by the same rules of the road.* (UDSC21)

**f. Avoid disagreement.** Not any item of this strategy can be found in the data. It is, perhaps, because US diplomats see no need to pretend to agree or to hide disagreement, for political discourse is expected to be always clear and truthful.

**g. Presuppose/assert common ground.** By using this strategy, U.S diplomats imply that they share with H common concerns and attitudes. This is used in (12) to show the common knowledge of S and H on the effect of the antiretroviral drugs.

(12) *As we all know, antiretroviral drugs changed the course of the HIV/ AIDS epidemic* (UDSV10)

**h. Joke.** US diplomats use this strategy to put H at ease. In (13), for example, President Trump makes a joke pretending to hope that the Vice Premier of China is not hearing his criticism while this man is actually sitting in the room and listening to what he is saying.

(13) *Since China joined the WTO, we have racked up nearly \$5 trillion – the Vice Premier, I hope he's not listening to this – in trade deficits.* (UDSC20)

**i. Assert S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants.** This strategy is illustrated in (14) when Vice President Harris expresses the US government's knowledge of the Vietnamese government's wants and its commitment to supporting Vietnam in realizing this wish.

(14) *I understand that Vietnam recently requested a third former United States Coast Guard cutter, and our administration strongly supports this request, as we want to help Vietnam develop its maritime capabilities* (UDSV 21)

**j. Offer, promise.** As observed in the research corpora, the patterns “*The United States/ We will*” followed by an action verb, or “*The United States is/ We are committed to*” are found frequently used to give offers and promises, as in (15).

(15) *We want you to know that the United States will be right here with you as your partner and as your friend. We stand unwaveringly committed to supporting a strong, prosperous, and independent Vietnam.* (UDSV17)

**k. Be optimistic.** The analysis of the research corpora reveals such linguistic items that show S's optimism about H's cooperation for the mutual benefits as *We/ I believe/ hope..., I am hopeful/ optimistic/ confident/ certain/ sure that...* Being optimistic in (16) is to indicate Ambassador Branstdard's optimism in the participation of the Chinese government in the fight against Covid 19.

(16) *I am confident that our two countries will continue to find ways to jointly cooperate to combat this common enemy that threatens the lives of all of us.* (UDSC19)

**l. Include both S and H in the activity.** The patterns found most frequently used in the research corpora to convey the sense of solidarity involving both S and H in the cooperative activities are “*let's*”, “*let us*”, and inclusive “*we*” forms as illustrated below.

(17) *Let's all work together to end such intolerance and create an inclusive environment for our friends, families, and neighbors.* (UDSC15)

**m. Give / ask for reason.** Giving reasons as to why S wants what he wants leads H to see the reasonableness of S's FTA, and therefore may call for H's cooperation. As in (18), Secretary of State Pompeo explains the reason why he makes the attendees listen to his long talk.

(18) *I say all of that because it's important.* (UDSV8)

**n. Assume or assert reciprocity.** US diplomats emphasize the need for cooperation between their governments and their counterparts by giving evidence of reciprocity between them. One example is Ambassador Kritenbrink's affirmation of a win-win cooperation between the two governments in (19).

(19) *When you partner with us, we partner with you, and we all prosper.* (UDSV9)

**o. Give gifts to H.** This strategy gains the most preference of US diplomats with a proportion of 22.2% in the UDSC and 25.2% in the UDSV. They satisfy H's positive face by showing their affection, admiration, care, recognition, or understanding to H, as in (20).

(20) *I relayed my appreciation for Chinese efforts to assist our government in the export of needed medical supplies to the United States.* (UDSC19)

#### 4.1.3. Negative politeness in UDSC and UDSV

While the analysis reveals that U.S diplomats tend to express more solidarity and intimacy when aiming at Vietnam, it shows that they express more recognition and respect for their counterparts' independence and freedom of action when conversing with the Chinese government. Therefore, the items of *negative politeness* strategies in the UDSC outnumber the ones in the UDSV, with 136 instances in the UDSC and 117 instances in the UDSV, as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Frequency of negative politeness strategies in UDSC and UDSV

Negative politeness strategies	UDSC	UDSV
Be conventionally indirect	5(3.7%)	2(1.7%)
Hedge	35(25.7%)	21(17.9%)
Be pessimistic	0 (0%)	0(0.0%)
Minimize the imposition	4 (2.9%)	0(0.0%)
Give deference	16 (11.8%)	52(44.4%)
Apologize	0 (0%)	0(0.0%)
Impersonalize S and H	34 (25.0%)	8 (6.8%)
State the FTA as a general rule	6 (4.4%)	4(3.4%)
Nominalize	32 (23.5%)	5(4.3%)
Go on record as incurring a debt	4 (2.9%)	25(21.4%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>136(100%)</b>	<b>117(100%)</b>

The statistics of the study show that US diplomats tend to employ a higher rate of 6 negative politeness strategies in the UDSC than in the UDSV. They are *be conventionally indirect* (3.7%), *hedge* (25.7%), *minimize the imposition* (2.9%), *impersonalize S and H* (25.0%), *state the FTA as a general rule* (4.4%), and *nominalize* (23.5%). These statistics in UDSV are 1.7%, 17.9%, 0.0%, 6.8%, 3.4%, and 4.3% respectively. This result suggests that US diplomats deal with the Chinese government with more caution, avoiding addressing problems or imposing on them directly. By contrast, US diplomats seem to imply more deference and indebtedness to the Vietnamese government when using more strategies of *give deference* and *go on record as incurring a debt* in the UDSV than in the UDSC, with 44.4% and 21.4% in the UDSV, and 11.8% and 2.9% in the UDSC respectively.

The discussion on the uses of negative politeness strategies in the two corpora is carried out below, accompanied by examples chosen from the collected data.

**a. Be conventionally indirect.** This strategy allows H an 'out' to choose to be or not to be imposed by S' request. In the corpora, US diplomats are conventionally indirect by using conditional types 1 and 2, as in (21) when Ambassador Branstad indirectly addresses the issue of religious freedom in China by giving the reason why China should protect and promote religious freedom.

(21) *These experiences have helped me understand that protecting and promoting religious freedom **would** only enrich China's future.* (UDSC18)

**b. Hedge.** With the function of cautious notes that help what S says less direct, hedge is the most preferential strategy in UDSC and the third in UDSV. The hedges in the corpora exist as a word, a phrase, or a clause which addresses Grice maxims, minimizes, or intensifiers the illocutionary force, as in (22) when US diplomats inform China of the US policies of imposing visa restrictions on Chinese people.

(22) *These individuals will now be inadmissible into the United States, and their immediate family members **may be** subject to these visa restrictions as well* (UDSC9)

**c. Be pessimistic.** The analysis of the selected speeches reveals the absence of this strategy. It is, perhaps, because the nature of being pessimistic is S's assumption about an unhelpful and uncooperative response from H. A diplomatic speech with this strategy, therefore, would be a diplomatic failure, which leads to diplomats' avoidance of using it.

**d. Minimize the imposition.** As observed in the data, US diplomats use *softeners* and *modality markers* to minimize the threat of coercion on the hearers. In example (23), the Spokesperson eases the pressure of obligation when using the modal verb "should" instead of "must" or "have to". With "should" obligation, the diplomat's implication can be interpreted as a suggestion for the event to be performed rather than an order to the hearers.

(23) *The Council **should** hold governments and their representatives who violate human rights accountable for their actions if it values its legitimacy and credibility on the world stage.* (UDSC4)

**e. Give deference.** The observations of the research corpora show such patterns of giving deference as "Let me...", "I would...", "Thank you...", "It is my honor...", and *honorifics*. Besides, words that show respect to H are used, such as the word "graciously" in (24)

(24) *I would particularly like to thank all of our partners for so graciously hosting tonight's event and for inviting me to speak on this momentous occasion.* (UDSV20)

**f. Apologize.** The research shows no result of this strategy. This may be attributed to the fact that an apology is only made when someone does something wrong or causes a problem. Diplomatic discourse aims at achieving serious political purposes, which should not allow any use of admission of guilt or impingement.

**g. Impersonalize S and H.** This is the second preferable negative politeness strategy of US diplomats towards China. In the selected speeches, US diplomats use this strategy in some ways such as impersonal verbs, reference terms "you" and "I" avoidance, indirect speech, or passive voices as in (25) when Ambassador Nathan Sales avoids directly accusing the Chinese government of sending Uighurs into political indoctrination.

(25) *Up to 2 million more have been sent for political indoctrination in daytime facilities* (UDSC1)

**h. State the FTA as a general rule.** US diplomats show their tact and delicacy when implying that the addressee must follow a social rule, regulation, or obligation. For example, in (26) when Vice President Harris calls for the Vietnamese government's actions against domestic violence, she states a rule of social morality that women should be freed of violence.

(26) *Women need to live free of gender-based violence. Again, **this is the universal truth.** And we must all like to ensure that women live free of violence* (UDSV14)

**i. Nominalize.** This strategy occupies the third largest percentage in the UDSC for the benefit it brings to a formal conversation. The more nouny an expression, the more removed an actor from doing or feeling something. The degree of negative politeness, therefore, goes with nouniness. This is illustrated by (27) when the nouns create the intuition that the Chinese government is removed from cruel and inhumane actions.

(27) *The United States is concerned by reports of **China's interference** with oil and gas activities in the South China Sea.* (UDSC8)

**j. Go on record as incurring a debt.** This is one of the most preferable strategies in UDSV. The most frequently-used patterns of this strategy are "Thank you for having done something..." or "I am grateful...", which is illustrated by (28).

(28) *I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the hundreds of individuals and organizations who contributed to this generous donation.* (UDSV12)

#### 4.1.4. Off-record in UDSC and UDSV

The analysis result suggests more caution of the US government towards China than towards Vietnam, revealed by the higher number of off-record strategies in the UDSC than in the UDSV, as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Frequency of off-record politeness strategies in UDSC and UDSV

Off-record strategies	UDSC	UDSV
Give hints	25(36.2%)	10(43.5%)
Give association clues	5(7.2%)	0(0.0%)
Presuppose	10(14.5%)	1(4.3%)
Understate	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Overstate	2(2.9%)	0(0.0%)
Use tautologies	4(5.8%)	0(0.0%)
Use contradictions	3(4.3%)	0(0.0%)
Be ironic	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Use metaphors	9(13.0%)	8(34.8%)
Use rhetorical questions	8(11.6%)	2(8.7%)
Be ambiguous	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Be vague	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Over-generalize	3(4.3%)	2(8.7%)
Displace H	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Be incomplete, use ellipsis	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69(100%)</b>	<b>23(100%)</b>

Except for the zero number of some off-record strategies in both corpora, namely *understate*, *be ironic*, *be ambiguous*, *be vague*, *displace H*, *be incomplete*, all off-record strategies left in the UDSC outnumber the ones in the UDSV. *Give hints*; *Give association clues*; *Presuppose*; *Overstate*; *Use tautologies*; *Use contradictions*; *Use metaphors*; *Use rhetorical questions*; *Over-generalize* in the UDSC exist with the corresponding numbers of 25, 5, 10, 2,

4, 3, 9, 8, 3 instances while these numbers in the UDSV are only 10, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 8, 2, 2 instances.

Following is the detailed discussion of each single off-record strategy illustrated with examples taken from the corpora.

**a. Give hints.** This is the most frequently used off-record strategy in both the UDSC and the UDSV for its capacity of conveying implied messages, which helps S to avoid embarrassing H. As shown in (29), by stating the truth of history, Secretary Pompeo implies that the Chinese government must not violate the human rights of its people.

(29) *History has shown that nations are stronger when governments are responsive to their citizens, respect the rule of law, and uphold human rights and fundamental freedom.* (UDSC3)

**b. Give association clues.** This is a kind of implicature triggered by mentioning something associated with precedent in S – H's experience or by mutual knowledge between S and H, as used in (30) when both China and the US know that China employs North Korea as a tool to exchange for benefits from the United States.

(30) *China is helping us with North Korea. China is helping us with a lot of the things that they can be helping us with — which you don't see in a deal, but they have been very, very helpful with respect to Kim Jong Un, who has great respect for President Xi* (UDSC20)

**c. Presuppose.** Here S designs his off-record message on the basis of assumption about what H already knows, as in (31) where the word “*remains*” is used to force the Chinese government to search for the relevance of the presupposed prior event. Therefore, the US government here implicates a warning.

(31) *The United States **remains** committed to promoting accountability for those who commit human rights violations or abuses.* (UDSC4)

**d. Overstate.** S may convey implicatures by exaggerating the actual state of affairs. In (32), Vice President Haris uses the negative extreme of frequency “*never*” as a trigger for an appropriate implicature. Her utterance, with the use of this overstatement, conveys an off-record commitment between the two countries of the cooperation and care for each other’s benefits.

(32) *We never walk away wondering what the other man is thinking.* (UDSC21)

**e. Use tautologies.** Somewhere in the corpora, US diplomats use seem-to-be redundant words, which in fact imply deep messages, as illustrated in (33) when Ambassador Nathan Sales hints at the Chinese government’s manipulation.

(33) “*Colorful*” is not a word we would use to describe a gulag. (UDSC1)

**f. Use contradictions.** By stating two things that contradict each other, US diplomats encourage their counterparts to look for an implied interpretation. The extract (34), for example, is a sharp criticism of the Chinese government when using the contradiction between “*suffered grievously from their government*” and “*pursued a better future for their country*”.

(34) *The hundreds of thousands of protesters who gathered in Beijing and in other cities around China suffered grievously in pursuit of a better future for their country.* (UDSC3)

**g. Use metaphors.** This strategy is prevalently used in both the UDSC and the UDSV. Using literally false metaphors helps US diplomats avoid direct confrontations when dealing with issues of tension between the two countries. Secretary of State Pompeo uses the name *Frankenstein monster* in (35) to imply that China has become dangerous and destructive to the US despite favors that it has received from the US government.

(35) *President Nixon once said he feared he had created a “Frankenstein” by opening the world to the CCP, and here we are.* (UDSC11)

**h. Use rhetorical questions.** The selected speeches contain questions without the intention of obtaining an answer. These questions in fact are implied FTAs, as demonstrated in (36). By posing a rhetorical question, Secretary of State Pompeo evokes the tragic memories of the two peoples, a past of war so harsh and brutal that no one could imagine a day when the leaders of two countries that used to be enemies on the battlefield can let go of the past and join hands for a brighter future. The question is also an appreciation of the present dialogue and cooperation between the two countries.

(36) *Would someone in the ‘60s or ‘70s have had any hope or belief that the American secretary of state would have great conversations with Vietnam’s top political leaders, where we’ve shared a common vision of how we would move forward together?* (UDSV8)

**i. Over-generalize.** US diplomats show their tact and delicacy when giving a general rule and leave the object of FTA vaguely off-record. For example, in (37) Ambassador Kritenbrink gives the Vietnamese government an implied warning of infrastructure loans with opaque terms for projects of questionable economic justification.

(37) *Rule of thumb: If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is* (UDSV9)

**j. Absent off-record strategies:** The investigation of the corpora reveals the complete absence of 6 off-record strategies: *understate*, *be ironic*, *be ambiguous*, *be vague*, *displace H*, and *be incomplete*. This is perhaps explained by the fact that political discourse should avoid misunderstanding or delusional expectations between counterparts, and it is clear that these strategies may ruin serious diplomatic purposes that diplomats are trying to achieve.

#### 4.2. Similarities and differences in use of politeness strategies in UDSC and UDSV

The first similarity is that both of the two corpora indicate a rich source of politeness strategies, which denotes the formality, tact, and

delicacy of diplomatic discourse. The second one is the complete absence of some politeness sub-strategies in the two corpora. They are *farewell*, *avoid disagreement*, *be pessimistic*, and especially a variety of *off-record* strategies including *understate*, *be ironic*, *be ambiguous*, *be vague*, *displace H*, and *be incomplete*. The avoidance of these strategies is the evidence of the US diplomats' skillful manipulation of politeness strategies to achieve their diplomatic purposes, as previously explained.

On the other hand, the observation of the database shows remarkable differences in US diplomats' choices of politeness strategies between their speeches towards China and the ones towards Vietnam. Despite the same topics and the relatively same number of words in the two corpora, US diplomats employ more *bald-on-record*, *negative politeness*, and *off-record* strategies in their speeches towards China than in the ones towards Vietnam. The more abundant use of *bald-on-record* factors in the UDSC may emphasize the presence of more tense and conflicting reactions between the two countries when one wants to prove its power over the other, while the prevalence of *negative politeness* and *off-record* strategies are the evidence of US diplomats' being tentative, cautious and reserved towards the Chinese government. By contrast, with an overwhelming majority of *positive politeness* strategies in the UDSV, US diplomats hope to convey messages of solidarity and intimacy, of respect and satisfaction with Vietnam's policies and activities, of optimistic attitudes for good things to be realized, and of the desire to contribute to the prosperous development of Vietnam.

#### 4.3. Discussion

Despite the fact that the two corpora are produced by the same US diplomats, about the same topics, with the same ranking of imposition, in similar situations of geographical locations, traditional customs and rites, and cultural values between China and Vietnam, the research results

mainly show remarkable differences in the use of US diplomats' linguistic politeness towards China and towards Vietnam. Therefore, the only factor that decides the differences in politeness strategies in the UDSC and the UDSV may be only attributed to the relationship between the US and China and the US and Vietnam as hypothesized at the beginning of this study.

The comparative analysis of US diplomats' speeches towards China and Vietnam indicates US diplomats' extensive uses of politeness strategies to achieve their intended diplomatic purposes, to highlight the communicative and diplomatic status between the agent and the addressee countries, to convey their underlying messages of supports or confrontations, of peace or readiness for disputes over strengths and benefits. These create exemplary and successful political speeches.

This study is an extension of the one conducted by Phuc & Yen<sup>4</sup> when concluding that the diplomatic relationship between the interactants is another factor that influences the use of politeness strategies. Besides, it highlights the results found by Duszak et al.<sup>13</sup> that there is a certain correlation between politeness strategies and conflicts, confrontations, and challenges in interactions and that politicians orient to politeness norms when addressing their rivals. Finally, this study is hoped to broaden this fruitful area of research, contributing some practical insights into politeness in political resource.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

This paper reports part of our endeavor to investigate the use of politeness strategies in US diplomats' speeches towards China and Vietnam by examining linguistic politeness in 42 speeches of some of the most important political leaders of the US collected from three official websites of the US government. The results collected from the comparative analysis of the two corpora consist of both similarities and differences, which denote underlying intentions of US diplomats to China and Vietnam.

The findings of the study suggest that the relationship between the two interactants will profoundly influence their choices of politeness strategies in their communication.

One major limitation of this study lies in the genres of US diplomats' speeches. For confidential reasons, there is completely no or very little data of speeches on secret and sensitive diplomatic issues. Besides, this research chooses only written data and focuses on only verbal items of politeness strategies. Therefore, an investigation into many genres of diplomatic discourse would result in more detailed insight into the art of using linguistic politeness of politicians. Moreover, an examination of verbal politeness combined with the expressions of non-verbal forms would also be suggested to bring a more overall and exact picture of how a diplomat performs their politeness in their political speeches. Finally, future researchers can supplement and develop such a study with a greater database to draw a more reliable conclusion about diplomats' choices of politeness strategies in their dialogues with different countries.

Hopefully, the study is useful for those interested in linguistic politeness in general and linguistic politeness in political discourse in particular. Besides, this study is also a reference for researchers, teachers, and students in the field of politics and diplomacy.

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