

VIETNAMESE AND AUSTRALIAN RULES OF POLITENESS AND RESPECT

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ABSTRACT

This research paper argues that in interpersonal communication interlocutors' behaviours are governed by their systems of beliefs and values. Thus it examines the systems of beliefs, values, and behaviours of the Vietnamese and of Australian peoples. The two different systems of beliefs of the Vietnamese (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism) and the Australians (Judeo-Christianity) lead to two distinctive systems of values of \pm equality, \pm independence, \pm privacy, and \pm assertiveness. In their turn, these values govern opposite behaviours in cross-cultural communication, which may cause communication breakdown. Therefore, cultural awareness and sensitivity should be a basis for overcoming communication problems likely to face people from countries with contrastive cultural patterns.

TÓM TẮT

Các quy tắc lịch sự và kính trọng của người Việt và người Úc

Bài nghiên cứu này lập luận rằng trong giao tiếp liên nhân hệ đức tin và giá trị chi phối hành vi những người tham gia đối thoại. Vì vậy, bài viết tìm hiểu hệ đức tin, giá trị, và hành vi của người Việt và người Úc. Hai hệ đức tin khác nhau của người Việt (Phật, Nho và Lão) và người Úc (Do Thái – Cơ Đốc) dẫn đến hai hệ giá trị khác nhau là \pm bình đẳng, \pm độc lập, \pm riêng tư, và \pm quyết đoán. Đến lượt mình, những giá trị này chi phối hành vi đối lập nhau trong giao tiếp xuyên văn hóa. Điều này có thể dẫn đến thất bại trong giao tiếp. Vì vậy, những người đến từ các quốc gia có các mô hình văn hóa đối lập nhau nên lấy nhận thức và sự nhạy cảm về văn hóa làm cơ sở để vượt qua những vấn đề gặp phải trong giao tiếp.

1. Introduction

Interpersonal communication is full of potential ambiguity, which sometimes leads to misunderstanding and tension. In a cross-cultural communication context, the problems multiply. This is because of different interactional rules despite good intention on both sides. These rules might be carried over from one language into another, and in this study from Vietnamese

into Australian English, although Vietnamese learners of English may be able to speak English fluently and correctly at a morpho-syntactic level.

2. Examples of cross-cultural misunderstanding

Literature on Vietnamese and Australian or British or American cross-cultural communication in Vietnam and the world records many examples of misunderstanding of this sort. Three examples, one taken in Vietnam and the other two in Australia, suffice to illustrate

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the ambiguity due to different interactional rules of politeness and respect.

Western visitors in Vietnam are very surprised because Vietnamese people usually ask them questions, which they consider personal and private. They ask: Why do Vietnamese people often ask *personal* questions, such as questions about age and family?

Similarly, questions about digestion, destination and purpose are considered private by Australians, but are usually asked by Vietnamese people in Australia: “Have you eaten?”, “Where are you going?”, “Why?” [Bradley & Bradley, 1984, as cited in 4, p. 84].

The last example is about a Vietnamese immigrant in New South Wales, Australia. When the first Vietnamese people started to migrate to Australia in 1987, “many of them settled in Cabramatta, a south-western suburb of Sydney. At that time, the majority of the shops in Cabramatta were operated by Australians or by migrants who had lived in Australia for a considerable period and who had to a great extent acculturated, at least in regard to behaviour accepted in service encounters in shops. When a Vietnamese went into a shop, he would ask for what he wanted: “Give me a packet of cigarettes”, “I want a kilo of pork”. In Vietnamese, the direct translation of their words was totally appropriate. However, the Australian shopkeeper concluded from the lack of softeners (“Could I have ...”, “Have you got ...”), and from the lack of “please”

and “thank you”, that the Vietnamese was rude.

He therefore raised his voice slightly and spoke in a little more abruptly. The Vietnamese, observing this, concluded that, as he himself had behaved perfectly normally, the reason for this very obvious display of anger must be racism. He therefore used body language to convey his contempt for the shopkeeper... and so on. In the end, the majority of shopkeepers were convinced that Vietnamese were arrogant and impolite, while the majority of Vietnamese were equally convinced that the shopkeepers were arrogant, impolite and racist to boot.” [1, pp. 2-3]

Unlike the first two examples, which are related to matters regarded as “personal” and “private” in the ears of the Australians, the last one is about requests in Vietnamese and Australian English. The Vietnamese customer tries to be polite and turns out to be rude. Strange! “Why can’t I ask an Australian questions about his/her age, marital status, relative salary, and the like?” We, Vietnamese people, usually do so in Vietnamese. What is wrong with them? How can I request someone to do something for me in Australian English?

3. Research question

Because, after Grossman [1995, as cited in 10, p. 325], communication is rule-governed, these and similar questions, in essence, can be subsumed under only one umbrella question: “What are the rules of politeness and respect in

interpersonal communication in Vietnam and Australia?”

To answer to this question, an examination of the two systems of beliefs and values of the two countries is necessary because *we behave according to what we believe*. Or to put it another way, the rules (behaviours) offered in each culture reflect the values of that culture, and in their turn, values are a mirror of the system of beliefs in each culture

4. Beliefs, values, and behaviours

4.1. Beliefs

From the above assumption that communication in general and rules of politeness and respect in particular are influenced by the philosophical¹ foundations and value systems of the society in which they are found, this paper argues that there are remarkable differences in the rules of politeness and respect due to different ideologies of the two countries, which causes a lot of difficulties for a Vietnamese and an Australian in a cross-cultural communication context. When people communicate between cultures, where communicative rules as well as the substance of experience differ, the problems multiply. It is true that the more people differ the harder it is for them to understand each other. In other words, clear cross-cultural differences can and do produce conflicts or inhibit communication.

As explained, communicative rules of politeness and respect are governed by the value system, which reflects the core

ideology of a culture. Therefore, to find out what constitutes a behaviour considered polite and respectful in a culture, the starting point should be from its system of beliefs.

The three main religions in Vietnam are Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. There are some other religions, of course. Nevertheless, their influence on the Vietnamese life is not so great as these three. In regard to the impact of Christianity, Tran [11, p. 557] should be given credit for his argument:

“After four centuries of missionary work, up to now Christianity has had a firm position in Vietnam with more than 5 million Catholic believers and nearly half a million Protestant believers ... However, ... compared to the influence of Buddhism in Vietnam, the figure of more than 5 million is not great.”

This is because Christianity was introduced into Vietnam much later in the sixteenth century by Catholic missionaries from France, Spain, and Portugal

Many aspects of Vietnamese value system rest on the three religions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Therefore, it is now necessary to go into the details of how these religions shape the Vietnamese ideology with a view to identify what constitutes polite and respectful behaviours of Vietnamese people later. First, from Mahayana Buddhism comes an acceptance of silent suffering as an inevitable part of life; through extinction of desire and self-negation comes an eventual end to

suffering. Thus, a “non-assertive” tradition is found, requiring “politeness, humility, modesty” as some basic virtues. Second, in Taoism is to be found a spirit of harmony that requires a preference for a quiet, “non-assertive”, non-dynamic pursuit of balance, that can be interpreted by outsiders as compliance, passivity, and servility [see 4, p. 90].

And last but not least, the emphasis is put on the importance of recognising rank (age and relationship) within the family and within the society in Confucianism. Similarly, according to Hodge [4, p. 90], from Confucianism comes a “respect for age and an obedience to authority”. Similarly, Vietnam exhibits the strong emphasis on social relationships and devotion to the hierarchical family relations that are the essence of Confucian doctrines. Of four points identified by Hofstede [as cited in 12, p. 21], the two points below also convey what other researchers find out:

a. The stability of society is based on *unequal relations between people*.

b. *The family is the prototype of all social organisations*. (emphases added)

The system of beliefs in Australia can be traced back to Judeo-Christian heritage. For instance, Irwin [5, p. 49] writes:

“Australia, on the basis of its history over the past 200 years, is considered a Christian country ... it is clear that Christianity, as important from the UK and Europe, has been a major influence in Australia’s short history since European settlement; it has shaped

much concern with present-day ethics and moral behaviour, including behaviour affecting personal communication.”

Broadly speaking, Western culture seems to be largely influenced by the Judeo-Christian traditions. In Orton’s [7, pp. 2-3] article, the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and Jesus Christ of the Judeo-Christianity suffices to highlight a “substantial piece of core ideology”. Of absolute importance is the notion incorporated here of the “human being as individual”, processor of an individual will. Similarly, Christianity brings the notions of *equality* of all men in the eyes of God. In other words, in the West the individual “stands alone before his creator” [12, p. 21].

4.2. Values

In comparing and contrasting cultures, the following classification of 5 value orientations is normally cited: man-nature orientation, human-nature orientation, time orientation, activity orientation, and relational (or human relations) orientation. Based on these five orientations, Vietnamese philosophy can be summarised as follows: Vietnamese traditionally believe that human nature is basically good but corruptible; that human should strive for harmony with nature; they live oriented to the past, not the future; they are traditionally attached to one place, the ancestor’s land; they value the process of being and becoming, mutual dependence and linearity (or collectivity).

Based on what researchers write about Western orientations in general and American orientations in particular, I believe that Australian philosophy should be as follows:

Australian generally believe that human nature is evil but perfectible; that humans should have mastery over nature; they live oriented to future time; they are accustomed to movement, migration and mobility; they value accomplishment, individuality and self-reliance.

Of the five value orientations, in intercultural studies of the rules of politeness and respect in the two cultures, Vietnam and Australia, the last one, human relations, is of crucial importance. What are the relationships between two interlocutors in an interaction in Vietnam? And in Australia? Do participants take equal or unequal roles? If unequal, what factors should be taken into consideration and why? If equal, why?, etc. A look at the two value systems of the Vietnamese and Australian cultures in regard to human relations can shed light on these enquiries.

In Vietnam, some of the main teachings of the three main religions of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, which are very important to identify rules of politeness and respect in interpersonal communication, are (1) inequality, (2) dependence, (3) non-privacy, and (4) non-assertiveness. These concepts constitute the key values which help define whether a behaviour in interpersonal communication is polite

and respectful or not. In Australia, Judeo-Christianity conditions that the following values are significant in interpersonal communication: (1) equality, (2) independence, (3) privacy, and (4) assertiveness.

In regard to politeness and respect, it should be noted that in Vietnamese society the emphasis is more on respect. Respect is the corner stone of interpersonal relationship, whether in the family or in social circles, whether on the employment scene or between friends and lovers [4, p. 85]. Therefore, Vietnamese culture places more emphasis on “negative face”, or “deference politeness” [9, p. 38], four values of which are inequality, dependence, non-privacy, and non assertiveness as presented in the previous paragraph. In contrast, in Australia people put more emphasis on friendliness in interpersonal communication. Therefore, Australian culture puts more emphasis on “positive face”, or “solidarity politeness” [9, p. 38], four values of which are equality, independence, privacy and assertiveness in interpersonal communication.

First, inequality; the Confucian tradition teaches that “the stability of society is based on unequal relations between people” [12, p. 21]. In Vietnam the family is the most important unit of society. Family honour is of paramount concern. A by-product is that adults are always to be respected by children and youth and this intensifies with the age of the adult. Vietnam treats age as an honour and worthy of respect [1; 6, p. 3).

Inequality begins in the family, and then is extended into the society: “The family is the prototype of all social organisations” [12, p. 21]. Therefore, in addition to age, respect is also given to education and position of the speaker in society or person of higher status.

In Australia, there is equality in social relationships. By stressing the importance of the individual’s responsibilities to God, Western religion has downplayed the role of society or social relationships: equality of all men in the eyes of God. According to Price [8], Australians typically prefer to be treated as equals. Roles tend to be negotiated, not fixed by age and status. Australians downplay differences in status. They treat most people with friendliness and informality. They resent differences in status and people who draw attention to them. Age is of no significance in interpersonal relationships.

Second, dependence; in a society, where relations between people are unequal, one dependently relies upon the support, help, and opinions of others. In interpersonal relationships, Vietnamese people tend to be more interested in obtaining direction and feedback from others. They show little initiative or independence and rarely make decisions without others’ approval (based on 10, p. 353). “Others” here should be understood as people of older age, higher status, and higher education. Again, this concept is a consequence of the first concept of inequality – to show politeness and respect.

In Australia, there is independence in interpersonal relations. According to Price [8], Australians tend to place a lot of importance on showing initiative, self-expression, personal choice, and personal responsibility. After Orton [7, p. 3] the individual in the Australian society is of free will, able to choose good or bad, and hence responsible for his/her own actions: “You are to blame”, “Take responsibility for what you are doing”.

Third, non-privacy; the Vietnamese do not value privacy much. Cultures do not necessarily choose the same topic to talk about, and all cultures have some topics they would rather avoid. For the Vietnamese people such topics as financial details or relative salaries, one another’s children, one another’s marital status, age (which has already been discussed in the concept of inequality), intimate relationships, personal characteristics, digestion, destination, reason, and the like are not considered to be impolite and disrespectful. Triandis [12, p. 159] assumes that “such ‘intrusive’ questions are the means through which social behaviour is lubricated in collectivist cultures”. Clearly, their purpose is to reinforce human relationships as the basis of society.

Australians value privacy very much. The above topics are not accepted in an interpersonal communication. Australians tend to view intimate relationships, personal characteristics and money matters as private. They may be offended by comments about issues they

consider private [8]. Also, their digestion, destination, and reason are none of others' business.

Fourth, non-assertiveness; both Buddhism and Taoism encourage a non-assertive attitude toward life. Therefore, in Vietnam it is considered impolite and disrespectful to be assertive to someone older or of higher status or to disagree openly with them. These kinds of values need to be taken into consideration when interacting with Vietnamese speakers of English [6, p. 3]. Similarly, Hodge [4, p. 85] puts it that "in a society that is premised on the pursuit of harmony and the avoidance of conflict in human relations, it may be disrespectful to be assertive toward older people, or people of higher status".

In Australia, an assertive attitude is encouraged in interpersonal communication. This is rooted in the emphasis of Judeo-Christianity on the equality of all men before God. Respect is of no significance. Age and status are not appreciated. People involved in an interpersonal communication context are treated as equals. Therefore, Australians typically value people expressing their opinions and being assertive in conversations [8].

It is obvious from the presentation of the four key values above that central to the four concepts of inequality, dependence, non-privacy, and non-assertiveness is respect, which is a corner stone of interpersonal relationship in the Vietnamese society. Respect appears almost everywhere, and conditions

interpersonal relationships. Some markers that go with Vietnamese deference politeness are age, education, and status of the speaker in society under the influence of the three religions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Central to the four values of equality, independence, privacy, and assertiveness is friendliness in interpersonal relationships under the influence of the Judeo-Christian heritage, which highlights the equality of all men before God.

4.3. Behaviours

Governed by these two different systems of beliefs and values, it is expected to find fundamental and contrastive differences that exist between the Vietnamese and the Australian cultures in what is regarded as "polite and respectful" behaviour. In fact, a behaviour which is considered polite and respectful by a Vietnamese may turn out to be rude in the eyes and ears of an Australian, and vice versa a behaviour which is thought of as appropriate by an Australian may be interpreted as strange and impolite by a Vietnamese. Therefore, in a cross-cultural communication context between a Vietnamese and an Australian, "isomorphic attributions" should be the goal to be achieved, as Scollon and Scollon [9, p. 35] comment that:

"We speak to be understood. We make significant assumptions about what kind of a person the other person is and what kind of a person he or she would like us to think of him or her as being.

And what kind of person we intend them to think of us as”.

This part of the paper will help Vietnamese learners of English to achieve this cultural awareness and sensitivity. Behaviours, which are considered polite and respectful in each culture, will be examined in terms of the four key values of inequality / equality, dependence / independence, non-privacy/privacy, and non-assertiveness / assertiveness, as discussed in the second part.

First of all, inequality; because of the value that respect is given to age, education, and position or higher status, the following behaviours (or rules) are expected from a Vietnamese person to show his/her politeness and respect when addressing someone in an interaction:

a. *First names* are not used. Family relationships are more important; therefore, surname (or family name) is stated first in Vietnamese. The order is surname, middle name, and given name. People rarely address each other by their names. Instead, they employ a series of kinship terms or professional titles. These terms and titles always go before the given names, never the family names [6]. It is unusual to call someone in a meeting by their first name on its own in Vietnam [2, p. 2].

b. *Kinship terms* are used as address forms. This is because the basic principles underlying family relationships are extended to the relationships between members of wider social groups. The concept of society as an extension of the

family is evident in the transposition into social usage of a language originally intended for domestic life. Vietnamese people use more than a score of kinship terms as personal pronouns. The choice of the appropriate word depend on the relative age, social status, gender, degree of acquaintance, respect, and affection between speakers and hearers who are not related to each other by blood.

c. *Titles* should be used for older people to show respect for their age and position in society. The formal titles, for example Miss/Ms or Mr or teacher given to someone is a sign of respect given to them by the Vietnamese people. A person to address another without title can indicate to the Vietnamese a lack of respect for the person’s age and position in society [6].

d. In Vietnamese, special respect is conveyed by using *function-words* or *honorifics* for respect when addressing persons such as parents, old people, teachers, monks, and priests, and superiors. The verbal response begins with a function-word such as “*da*”, “*thua*”, “*da thua*”, “*kinh thua*”, or modal particles “*a*”, “*da*”, “*vang*” [13, p. 85].

e. “Other ways of showing politeness and respect are through adding *extra words* making enquiries, apologies and requests, especially to older people” [6, p. 3]. The words are, for example, “*xin loi*” (excuse), “*lam on*” (do favour) [13, pp. 83-84].

f. The speaker usually attempts to *elevate the status of the other, while reducing his or her own status* (Lebra, as

cited in 3, p. 53; 11, pp. 314-315; 13, p. 85). Examples of choosing terms of lower status to designate oneself and terms of higher status to designate the other party are: em-anh/chi (younger sister/brother-elder sister/ brother), chau-chu/co/bac (niece/ nephew-uncle/aunt), chau-ong/ba (grandson/ granddaughter-grandpa/grandma), etc. [13, p. 85].

Therefore, there is no equivalent in Vietnamese for the English "I". Different words are used (see above) to refer to the self. Similarly, "you" changes wording, depending on the social context [12, p. 69]. Or in other words, there are different words for "you" depending upon the level of politeness and upon the relationship. The forms of address in Vietnamese can also take the forms of the personal pronouns. There are 22 pronouns in Vietnamese and there are seven in English.

In Australia, status differences tend to be deemphasised and the notion of equality for all members of society is often manifested in communication on a first-name basis (Grossman, 1995, as cited in 10, p. 352), or as Irwin [5, p. 41] argues that Australia, a low-context culture, is more informal, allowing more equality in interaction by placing less emphasis on hierarchy. Therefore, in Australian society, no offence is taken when we ask someone their name, that is, unless we have been introduced previously and know that we should remember their name [4, p. 84]. According to Duong [2], calling someone in a meeting by their first name on its

own right may sound friendly in western culture. In addition, in the Australian English only one word is used to refer to the self. Similarly, one word is used to refer to the single listener. Therefore, the structure of Australians' local social relationships, and indeed the structure of the English language create problems of appropriate politeness and respect for Vietnamese people, whose first language contains pronouns, kinship terms, function-words or honorifics, extra words, and titles that indicate levels of respect, familiarity and coldness [4, p. 85].

In an interaction, the English speakers may feel uncomfortable with the formal address given to them by the Vietnamese. It can often be misunderstood as a mechanism for distancing oneself from the listener or a show of disrespect [6]. Failure to use the accepted and appropriate forms of greetings are a constant source of minor irritation; many Vietnamese people find the local use of first names in formal settings quite disconcerting, and try to conform to their own cultural models by responding to first name use with added honorifics (titles): "Mr Tony", "Madame Alison", "Mr Doctor John", and so on [4, p. 84].

Second, dependence; if Vietnamese society values relations in which people are unequal and one depends on another for support, help, and opinions, then behaviours in interpersonal communication which support these values should be accepted as polite and

respectful are as follows: People, younger in age or lower in status, are encouraged not to show initiative, self-expression, and personal choice, especially before older people, people of higher education, and people of higher status. One makes decisions only after consulting people. One does not make one's own decisions. Therefore, one does not take responsibility for them. However, collective support makes decisions less risky.

In Australia, there is independence in interpersonal relations. Therefore, those behaviours that are associated with these values are regarded as polite and respectful in interpersonal communication. An individual is expected to express his/her opinion. One addresses the issue directly. This is a way to show one's initiative. One makes one's own decisions and choices and takes responsibility for them [8, p. 7].

Third, non-privacy; collectivists hold that one's business is also the business of the group – friends should be concerned with each other's personal matters [12, p. 76]. Therefore, in Vietnam it is not impolite to disrespectful to ask personal questions about age, relative salary, marital status, children, destination², reason, and the like, such as “How old are you?”, “How much do you earn?”, “Why are you not married?”, “How unfortunate that you have no children” [4, p. 104], “Have you eaten?”, “Where are you going?”, “Why?” [Bradley & Bradley, 1984, as cited in 4,

p. 84), “How much money do you make per month?” [12, p. 5].

These questions are usually raised to an Australian by a Vietnamese in a cross-cultural communication context because, as explained in the previous paragraph, collectivists want to show concern for each other's personal matters in a mono-cultural interaction or they “cognitively convert situations into collectivist settings” in a cross-cultural interaction, as Triandis [12, p. 5] comments:

“People who have been raised in collectivist cultures tend to ‘cognitively convert’ situations into collectivist settings ... the trend in collectivist cultures is to perceive closeness between members of the group. Thus, for instance, after meeting with a stranger, and after establishing what might become an ingroup relationship, the collectivist may ask, “How much money do you make per month?”

In Australia, almost everything that is associated with an individual is valued. Privacy is considered to be of importance in interpersonal relationships. “Personal” means “private”. Therefore, the questions about independent self should be avoided. If they are asked by a recent acquaintance, they are regarded as “intrusive” [12, p. 159]. Intrusive means impolite and disrespectful in the ears of Australians. That is the reason why

Australians find it unacceptable in an Australian conversation between recent acquaintances to use such early conversational gambits as “How much do

you earn?", "Are you married?", "How old are you?", and the like. According to Hodge [4, p. 84], Australians may find rather impertinent some conversational questions like "Why don't you have any children?", or react badly to some of these questions ("Have you eaten?", "Where are you going?", "Why?"), thinking that their digestion, destination, and purpose are none of the other person's business.

Besides personal questions, modes of requesting should also be taken into account in regard to privacy, because the use of politeness markers (for example, please) and modes of indirectness ("Would you ...?", "Could you ...?", "Could I ...?", instead of an imperative construction) becomes a necessity if we think that such differences can result in *communicative breakdown*, as well as give rise to mistrust and prejudice among groups. It is true that for the Vietnamese society imperative constructions constitute appropriate requesting forms in considerably more contexts than in the Australian English society.

Australians may easily get offended and annoyed by the degree of "impoliteness" and "authoritarianism" in a request with imperative as illustrated in the story about a Vietnamese customer at the beginning of this paper. For the English (and Australians also) imperative is considered as imposition and consequently as intrusion to the hearer's privacy, something which is usually avoided.

Fourth, non-assertiveness; those behaviours thought of as a lack of assertiveness are in fact associated with respect in Vietnamese culture. A Lack of assertiveness is a mechanism in which young Vietnamese people demonstrate politeness and respect to older people [6]. Younger people should not question or argue with older people or people of higher education or status. A lack of assertiveness in interpersonal communication can also be expressed non-verbally, although the kinesics of Vietnamese has not been studied in depth: Bodily postures taught in the traditional society still subsist: one bows one's head when saying greetings to a superior and avoiding eye contact; children are taught to refrain from making hand gestures or even raising their voices; and a lack of eye contact in Vietnam may signify respect.

Australians, who tend to minimise status differences and formality, prefer interpersonal communication styles that are much more forthright and assertive [5, p. 40]. Similarly, Price [8, p. 10] writes that Australians typically value people expressing their opinions and being assertive in conversations. Assertiveness can also be expressed non-verbally: eye contact is needed. Australians may distrust people who do not "look them in the eyes" when talking. They may consider too little eye contact as a sign of inattention or lack of interest.

5. Conclusion

In a cross-cultural communication context between a Vietnamese and an

Australian, misunderstanding in behaviours in terms of politeness and respect are very likely to occur, which can lead to communication breakdown. One behaviour, which is considered polite and respectful in one culture, may turn out to be impolite and disrespectful in the other in terms of the four key concepts: inequality versus equality, dependence versus independence, non-privacy versus privacy, and non-assertiveness versus assertiveness. This is because interpersonal communication in Vietnam is much based on the concept of respect, while more emphasis is put on the concept of solidarity in Australian. The origin of these differences lies in the two different systems of values, which are in turn

influenced by the two systems of beliefs in Vietnam and Australia. Influenced by the main religions of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, interpersonal communication in Vietnam attaches much importance to maintain social relationships (or collectivism). Affected by Judeo-Christianity, Australian focuses more on individualism in interpersonal communication.

The implications of this research paper for Vietnamese and Australian cross-cultural communication is obvious, and it is equally obvious that cultural awareness and sensitivity will be a sound basis for overcoming communication problems likely to face people from countries with contrastive cultural patterns.

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¹ In this research paper, the three terms “philosophy” (or “religion-philosophy”), “belief”, and “ideology” (or “core ideology”) are used interchangeably.

² Actually, Vietnamese people regard questions about digestion and destination as a form of greeting, no more or less, which is similar to “Hi”, or “Hello”, or “Good morning/afternoon/ evening”, or “How are you?” in the Australian English culture.