LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL

JUDGES' CRITICISMS IN THE VOICE OF AMERICA TV SHOW FROM A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: This research aims to (1) identify the criticizing strategies employed by the judges in The Voice of America TV Show and (2) point out the impact of cultural traits on the choice of the criticizing strategies. This research used qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative approach was used to describe and analyze the data, and quantitative method was also employed in this research to obtain the frequency of the data occurrences in order to support the qualitative interpretation. The data were in the form of utterances containing criticism uttered by the judges in The Voice of America in the years of 2019 and 2020. The data were analyzed based on Nguyen (2005)'s framework of criticizing strategies and explained based on Hofstede (1980)'s and Hall (1990)'s theories on culture. The results of the research show that the judges in The Voice of America Show applied all the strategies namely direct, indirect and combined strategies when giving criticisms. However, due to cultural characteristics, the American judges tend to use the direct strategies more frequently than the indirect ones.

KEY WORDS: speech acts; culture; criticism; The Voice of America.

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1. Introduction

Criticism is one of the purposes of linguistic communication that any society or nation has. In daily communication, criticism is carried out for many purposes: disagreeing, advising, disapproving, evaluating and so on. However, this is a very necessary behavior which is important in communication because it is a negative behavior, the face-threatening behavior of both the speaker and the listener. Therefore, choosing appropriate criticizing strategies is considered an art of communication. Although quite a lot of studies on the speech act of criticizing have been carried out in different languages such as House and Kasper (1981), Tracy, Van Dusen, and Robison (1987), Tracy and Eisenberg (1990), Nguyen (2005, 2008), Vu (2009), Tran (2016) and others, the cultural problems posed for Vietnamese learners and users of English concerning criticisms have not yet been adequately dealt with despite the fact that several researches into criticisms have been conducted from pragmatic or syntactic perspective. This inspired us to conduct an investigation into criticisms by the judges or coaches in The Voice of America TV Shows from a cultural perspective with the two main objectives: (i) identifying the criticizing strategies employed by the judges in The Voice of America TV Show, and (ii) exploring the cultural impact on the choice of the criticizing strategies.

2. Literature review

2.1. Key features of American culture

America is a culturally diverse country made up of different community groups (ethnicity, religion, social classes, regions of residence). Compared to many countries with thousands of years of history such as China, India, Greece, etc., this is just a young country. In the process of formation and development, the US has built a stable political system, a developed economy, along with an extremely rich culture.

When it comes to the American personality and American culture, it is impossible not to mention individualism. Hofstede (1980) argues that there are four dimensions of national culture: low vs. high Power Distance; individualism vs. collectivism; masculinity vs. femininity; and uncertainty avoidance. In addition, "individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are

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loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family." (Hofstede, 1997). The concept of individualism plays a significant role in the lives of many Americans. US culture emphasizes individual initiative and personal achievement. Independence and self-reliance are highly valued and also extend to the workplace where business is frequently carried out autonomously. Consequently, one's position in US society is determined by one's own achievements as opposed to status or age.

Another characteristic feature of American culture is low-context culture. Edward Hall (1976) put forward his theory about high-context and low-context communication, which provides a new perspective to the relationship of cross-culture. Accordingly, American culture is regarded as a low context culture. Hall (1976) describes a low-context culture as one that communicates information in a way that relies heavily on words. Expressions in low-context cultures are often correct, with particular emphasis on words in a sentence. They do not rely on contextual factors (i.e. the speaker's voice or body language) to convey information. This is in contrast to a "high-context" culture, which relies heavily on implicit messages and contextual cues (the speaker's situation and intonation) to convey information. As Americans are task-centred, the primary purpose of communication is to exchange information, facts and opinions. In the US, conflict is dealt with directly and openly and for this reason, Americans will not hesitate to say 'no' or criticise others in public. This direct style of speech is often interpreted as rude by foreign visitors and may cause embarrassment to business people who are unaccustomed to such explicit communication.

2.2. The speech act of criticizing

2.2.1. Speech act theories

According to Yule G. (1996: 47), in attempting to express themselves, people do not only produce utterances containing grammatical structures and words, they perform actions via those utterances. These actions are referred to by Austin (1962) as speech acts - *'the acts of uttering a certain sentence in a given context for a determined purpose.'* A speech act consists of three components, namely a locutionary act, an illocutionary act, and a perlocutionary act.

Speech acts are diverse and not the same in every language. Therefore, the classification of speech acts will not be simple. Some authors have tried to categorize speech acts, but the most notable perhaps is Austin's classification.

Austin grouped illocutionary acts into five classes.

(i) Verdictives are typified by the giving of a verdict by a jury, umpire, arbitrator such as *acquit, grade, estimate, diagnose, rare, analyse, put it as, reckon, value, characterize, interpret as, measure*, etc.

(ii) Exercitives are the exercising of powers, rights or influence. An exercitive is the giving of a decision in favour of or against a certain course of action. It is a decision that something is to be so, as distinct from a judgement that it is so. Examples are: *appoint, dismiss, degrade, name, order, sentence, warn, declare open, advise, announce, nominate, veto*, etc.

*(iii) Commissive***s** are the speaker's commitments to a certain course of action. They may include declarations or announcements of intention, for instance *am determined to, propose to, intend, agree, bet, envisage, plan, pledge myself, declare my intention, vow, guarantee, shall, swear*, etc.

(iv) Behabitives include the notion of reaction to other people's behavior and fortunes and of attitudes and expressions of attitudes to someone else's past conduct or imminent conduct, such as: *apologize, thank, deplore, compliment, congratulate, condole, sympathize, complain, applaud, blame, welcome, defy, protest*, etc.

(v) Expositives clarify how utterances fit into ongoing discourse, or how they are being used, for example: *affirm, deny, describe, identify, mention, remark, inform, tell, answer, report, testify, illustrate, explain, begin by, turn to, conclude by, analyse, regard as, understand, refer*, etc.

With this classification, the act of criticizing can be seen as a form of behabitives which people use to react to others' action or speech.

2.2.2. The act of criticizing

Criticism has been defined as an utterance which is associated with bad habit or condition of the addressee. John L. Austin (1962) defines criticism as an act which functions to express the speaker's negative reaction of the addressee's bad habit.Nguyen (2005) states that criticism is an illocutionary act whose illocutionary point is to give negative evaluation on the hearer's choices, actions, words, and products for which he/she may be responsible.

In brief, criticism is a negative judgment or evaluation addressed towards someone or something. Therefore, in performing this act, people have to be aware of the context of speaking and then be able to determine which strategy is best applied in delivering their criticism.

There are different ways to classify criticizing strategies according to different authors. One of the most widely used classifications is proposed by Nguyen (2005).

***Table 1**. Nguyen's taxonomy of criticisms:*

Type	Characteristics	Examples
1. Direct criticism Explicitly pointing out the problem with hearer (H)'s choice/ actions/ work/ products, etc.		
Negative evaluation	Usually expressed via evaluative adjectives with negative meaning or evaluative adjective with positive meaning plus negation.	*I think it's not a good way to support to one's idea.* *Umm that's not really a good sentence.*
Disapproval	Describing speaker (S)'s attitude towards H's choice, etc.	*I don't like the way you write that.*
Expression of disagreement	Usually realized by means of negation word '*No'* or performatives *'I don't agree'* or *'I disagree'* (with or without modal) or via arguments against H.	*I don't quite agree with you with some points (.) about the conclusion.* *I don't really agree with you as strongly as you put it here.*
Statement of the problem	Stating errors or problems found with H's choice, etc.	*And there are some incorrect words, for example 'nowadays'.* *You had a few spelling mistakes.*
Statement of difficulty	Usually expressed by means of such structures as *'I find it difficult to understand…'* *'It's difficult to understand...'*	*I can't understand.* *I find it difficult to understand your idea.*
Consequences	Warning about negative consequences or negative effects of H's choice, etc. for H himself or herself or for the public.	*Someone who don't— doesn't agree with you would straight away read that and turn on".*
2. Indirect criticism: Implying the problems with H's choice/ actions/ work/ products, etc. by correcting H, indicating rules and standard, giving advice, suggesting or even requesting and demanding changes to H's work/ choice, and by means of different kinds of hints to raise H's awareness of the inappropriateness of H's choice.		

Correction	Including all utterances which have the purpose of fixing errors by asserting specific alternatives to H's choice, etc.	*'safer' not 'safe'* *And you put 'their' I think t-h-e-r-e.*
Indicating standard	Usually stated as a collective obligation rather than an obligation for H personally or as a rule which S thinks is commonly agreed upon and applied to all.	*You must pay attention to grammar.* *You have to talk about your opinion in your summary.*
Request for change	Usually expressed via such structures as *'will you…?', 'can you…?', 'would you…?'* or imperatives (with or without politeness markers), or want-statement.	*I still want you to consider some points.* *What I would have liked to have seen is like a definite theme from the start like you're just TALKING about it.*
Advice about change	Usually expressed via the performative "advise you…", or structures with "should" with or without modality.	*You should change it a little bit.*
Suggestion for change	Usually expressed via the performative '*I suggest that…' or such structures as 'you can', 'you could', 'it would be better if' or 'why don't you' etc.*	*I think if you make a full stop in here the ah (.) this sentence is clear is clear.* *It could have been better to put a comma (.) so ah ((laugh)).*
Expression of uncertainty	Utterances expressing S's uncertainty to raise H's awareness of the inappropriateness of H's choice, etc.	*Are there several paragraphs ah not sure about the paragraphs*.
Asking/ presupposing	Rhetorical questions to raise H's awareness of the inappropriateness of H's choice, etc.	*Did you read your writing again after you finish it?*
Other hints	Including other kinds of hints. May include sarcasm.	*I prefer a writing style which are not too personal.*

3. Research methodology

3.1. Source of data

In this study, the data were collected from the episodes in The Voice of America TV show, 2019 and 2020 seasons, with focus on the utterances made by the judges.

The Voice of America is a television singing competition organized under the copyright of the famous program The Voice of Holland, created and developed by John de Mol for the first time in 2010. The competition is organized to find out musical talents and create opportunities for singing enthusiasts to shine. In this show, the main factor is the vocals, not the appearance or other factors. There is not a single star who succeeds without talent and hard work. All contestants participating in the American Voice program will have to go through many challenges to be able to achieve the highest position.

The coaches in The Voice of America are all the famous singers, musicians or music producers in the country. After each performance of the contestants, the judges usually give their comments and feedbacks which include both compliments and criticisms. In this study, we focus on describing and analyzing the utterances containing the criticisms and the strategies that the judges use to make criticisms.

3.2. Research approach

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were applied. The qualitative approach was used to describe and analyze the different strategies that the judges used in the shows. Besides, the quantitative approach was applied to investigate the frequency of the strategies used in each language to support and prove the qualitative hypothesis.

The qualitative method was applied in this research as the purpose of this research was to describe as well as to understand the findings of the phenomena of criticizing strategies used by the judges in The Voice of America. Furthermore, this research was also supported by quantitative data in which we used numbers and frequency of the data occurrences in order to deepen the qualitative interpretation. Creswell (2009) pointed out that, using both qualitative and quantitative approach could broaden understanding of the research problems; therefore, the researcher could gain a better understanding of the findings of the research.

3.3. Method of the study

The main method used in this study is descriptive method. It is employed to describe, explain, and analyse the phenomenon which occurred behind the data. It was because the data to be investigated were the utterances containing criticisms employed by the judges or the coaches in The Voice of America TV show and the aim of the research was to describe the factual data supported by the theories which are proposed by several experts.

3.4. Data collection and data analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) state that the rough materials that researchers collected from the world they are studying are particulars that form the basic of analysis. The data source is the basic information to support the research. For this reason, the data of this research were the utterances containing criticisms employed by the judges or coaches in The Voice of America in the years of 2018 and 2019, and the contexts of the data were the dialogues among the judges and the contestants which contain criticisms after the contestants finish their performances.

The procedure or technique of data collection in the research is illustrated as follows:

First, the episodes of the contests were observed on YouTube channel; *Second*, the judges' comments were listened to repeatedly as required to determine utterances that would be taken to the data sheet; *Third*, notes of the utterances from singing contests containing criticisms were taken;

- Fourth, the collected data were refitted and recorded into the data sheet; *Finally*, the data were classified into data sheet based on the classification framework of the research.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Criticizing strategies employed by the judges in The Voice of America TV Show

4.1.1. Direct criticisms

Direct criticisms are the ones that explicitly point out the problem with the H's behavior, acts, choices, words, work, products and so on. Direct strategies of criticisms used by the judges in The Voice of America shows are related to candidates' voices, choices of songs, performing styles and can be realized as various sub-strategies.

The data related to direct criticisms are analyzed based on different factors including: 1/Content; 2/Linguistic realization accordingly

(i) Negative evaluation

Evaluation means the determination of the value, nature, character, or quality of something or someone. This involves both positive and negative evaluations. While positive evaluation means the act that explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some 'good' (possessions, characteristics, skills, etc) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer, negative evaluation focuses on expressing opinions about hearers' faults or bad qualities.

In The Voice of America TV Show, where the data were taken, after listening to the candidates' performances, the judges gave out a negative evaluation on candidates' voices, breath control

problems, choices of songs, performing styles by using some adjectives which are negative-evaluative like "bad", "pitchy", etc.

For example:

- *You have a good voice, but some of the notes were a bit under.* [Ayanna Joni, *Sorry Not Sorry*]
- *There were parts that were pitchy.* [Chrissy Joly, *Don't Let Me Down*, *2]
- *Your voice today is so normal, even bad.* [Jay Miah, *Never Enough*, *1]

Besides, the evaluation adjectives with positive meaning in English combined with a negation can also express negative evaluation on H's behaviors, acts, choices, words, work, products.

Before stating the evaluation, the judges here used some steers like *'I have comments about…*', *'There is something that I'd like to say…*', which helped to signalize that the judges were about to give their assessment and the contestants should be ready to listen to it.

In the examples below, the judges employ some positive adjectives such as *good, smart, energetic, experienced, controlled, charming* and negative words including *no, not*, which gives negative evaluation on the candidates' voice, choices of song and performing styles.

- *Your head-voice is not very good.* [*Jimmy Mowery, Attention*, *1]
- *There is something I would like to say, this song is not a smart choice. I think picking the right songs that highlight the best parts of your voice, that's the key.* [J Ryan, *Love Runs Out*, *1]
- *Your performance is not energetic enough*. [Steve Knill, *Up to the Mountain*, *1]
- *I have comments about your voice. Some places felt wild, just sounded like you are not experienced at all.* [Damali]
- *It just felt like it was a little bit wild. I felt like singing wasn't quite as controlled and charming as it could be, and it's the reason why I didn't hit my button.* [Monty Montanaro, *1]

(ii) Statement of the problem

Another sub-strategy used by the judges when giving direct criticisms found in the study is statement of the problem. Identification of the problem means that S points out the errors, limitations or problems with H's behaviors, acts, choices, words, work, products. Applying this sub-strategy, the judges in The Voice of America gave their criticisms on the performances of the contestants through stating the problems that the candidates commit.

- *I heard a little but if nerves, and that's what was getting a lot of us because there were moments when you felt a little bit unsure*. [JT Rodriguez, *Higher Love*, *1]
- *You pick a very challenging song to try to sing. Because it's so staccato ad it jumps around a lot, it hard for us to pin down exactly what your voice sounds like.* [Callie Lee, *1]
- *You spend too much time trying to get the crowd into it. You got to realize we're only hearing this, so maybe don't worry about 'Y'all, common'.* [CJ, *Tired of Being Alone*, *1]

In terms of linguistic representation, the study found that the problems could, in some cases, be indicated through such expressions with *problem, issue* like:

- *You have problems with breath control. It was almost like you were out of breath, and that was the only time that you would go off-key a little bit.* [Callie Lee, *1]
- *I thought that there were some issues with over-styling things*. [*House of the Rising Sun*, *1]

Besides, the judges in The Voice of America also applied negative structures including "not" in their way of mentioning the problems of the contestants:

- *The song was a little laid-back, but you didn't lend itself necessarily to the type of energy, for someone to really kind of have that favor to turn around and to hit.* [Andrew Sevener, *Honky Tonk Women,* *1]
- *So, it just didn't showcase what you can be as a vocalist.*

Additionally, results of the study revealed that the judges also used the grounders such as '*The (only) reason why I didn't turn was …', 'I think that prevented me from pushing'* when mentioning

the contestants' problem, in other words, the judges gave the reasons for their criticisms. This is illustrated in the following utterances:

- *The only reason why I didn't turn specifically was that I heard a few pitchy things.* [Maddi Fraser, *Get It While You Can*, *1]

- *And I have a hard time telling the difference if it's nerves or if it's just you didn't hear that you were pitchy*. [Maddi Fraser, *Get It While You Can*, *1]

What is more, through data analysis, we also found that when the judges in The Voice of America indicated the problems commited by the participants, they applied some sweeteners. In other words, they mentioned the good or strong points that the contestants had, then gave their criticisms. For example:

- *Your voice was like clear as a bell and sounded really great. My only question would be range and dynamic because it sounded like you were in a kind of one pocket the whole time*. [Karly Moreno, *Starving*, *1]

- *I think that you have some stylistic voices, it just seemed to me that some of the style was overdone, like some of the growls.* [Jon Rizzo, *Let Her Cry*]

-*You have this beautiful low, like, tone. Unfortunately, it's almost like you have to show us much at this audition*. [Wyatt Rivers, *River*, *1]

- *You have such a cool voice. And just sing something that you can get a little more attitude like you did..., but may be with a little more space.* [Lynnea Moorer, *Location*, *1]

Examining the examples, we can see that all the problems that the judges mentioned related to poor brathing and inappropriate breath support, poor tone quality, limited pitch range, lack of flexibility and lack of confidence, which were all about singing voice and performance style of their artists.

(iii) Statement of difficulty

The speakers use this strategy to express how difficult it is to understand what the hearers have done or said (Nguyen, 2005). This strategy is usually manifested by means of the adjective 'confused' or such structures as *'I find it difficult to understand...', 'It's difficult to understand...', 'It's hard for me/ us to ...'*.

The following examples show that the judges have difficulties getting the candidate's performance:

- *And I have a hard time telling the difference if it's nerves or if it's just you didn't hear that you were pitchy.* [Maddi Fraser, *Get It While You Can*, *1]

- *I heard a little but if nerves, and that's what was getting a lot of us because there were moments when you felt a little bit unsure, and we can't understand the meaning and the soul of the song.* [JT Rodriguez, *Higher Love*, *1]

- *The low notes scared us all a little bit, because you weren't exactly sure of yourself there, and it made us unsure.*[J Ryan, *Love Runs Out*, *1]

- *You pick a very challenging song to try to sing. Because it's so staccato ad it jumps around a lot, it's hard for us to pin down exactly what your voice sounds like.* [Callie Lee, *1]

4.1.2. Indirect criticisms

Apart from direct strategy, the judges in the The Voice of America also employed indirect strategy of giving criticisms.

As discussed earlier, indirect criticism deals with implying the problems with H's choice, actions, work, products, etc. by correcting H, indicating rules and standard, giving advice, suggesting or even requesting and demanding changes to H's work/ choice, and by means of different kinds of hints to raise H's awareness of the inappropriateness of H's choice.

Through the data collected, we realize that the judges in The Voice of America apply different proportions of sub-strategies.

(i) Demand for change

To demand something is to ask others to do something as a must. In the study, the demand for change was expressed via such structures as '*you have to', 'you must', 'it is obligatory that'* or *'you are required'* or *'you need', 'it is necessary',* etc.

- *I think you just have to refine a little bit, how to use your instrument a little bit more, and it'll sound much more natural. It'll sound like you're not putting on a style. It'll just sound like it's you.* [*House of the Rising Sun*, *1]

- *You need to have more experience. Performing live is not easy*. [Tommy Hood, *Make it Rain*]

- *It all needs to come together: who you are, the message you're trying to say, and the gift of the acrobatics and all that.* [CJ, *Tired of Being Alone*, *1]

(ii) Advice about change

Advice about change is a polite criticism in which S avoids the potential threat by giving advice on how to accomplish a task or to perform an action more skillfully. In this strategy, speakers usually inform the hearers what they should do to overcome a problem found in the hearers' behavior, words, etc. The advice for change is usually expressed via the imperatives or performative '*I advise you....',* or structures with *'should', 'had better....' , 'I think you should...'* with or without modality.

In The Voice of America Show investigated in the study, this sub-strategy is also employed by the coaches. The advice that the judges gave are all related to singing voice and performing skills which are expressed to help the contestants improve their ability. For example:

- *I think that if you can find a song that you can get up there a little bit more and spending some time beating us up with your voice and I think you should make this moment the thing that drives you to go.* [Crystal Rose, *Wicked Game*, *1]

- *You know, what we are hearing was a lot of potential that needed a little bit more polish. You should practice more and come back next season.* [Emily Bass, *Blank Space*, *1]

- *Lay down the most solid vocal that you can hand us because we don't know what's going on other than that.* [CJ, *Tired of Being Alone*, *1]

(iii) Suggestion for change

The next sub-strategy that the American judges used to give their criticisms indirectly found in The Voice of America is suggestion for change. According to Nguyen (2005), to suggest something is to put forward an idea for consideration. The suggestions were given after each performance in which the judges saw or found some problems or limitations including poor voice quality, poor song selection... Based on the problems that are commited by the participants, the judes gave the suggestions for change accordingly.

This strategy is usually expressed via the structures including imperative or conditionals with *'if', 'if only'*, which are illustrated in the following examples:

- *I think that if you can find a song that you can get up there a little bit more and spending some time beating us up with your voice and I think you should make this moment the thing that drives you to go*. [Crystal Rose, *Wicked Game*, *1]

- *If you could have shown a little bit more dynamics, I think that have made one of us turn around.* [Monty Montanaro, *1]

- *You should practice more and come back next season.* [Emily Bass, *Blank Space*, *1]

- *It wouldn't have been more of storyteller kind of scenario if you would have done something, like, acoustic, and maybe just something, like, sparsely happening.* [Cassidy Lee, *Gold Dust Woman,* *2]

(iv) Others

a. Wish: By expressing wish, the judges in the Voice of America TV Show implicitly criticize the contestants' choice of song, for example:

- *I wish it were a different song.* [Ruby G, *Hard Place*, *2]

b. Expectation and hope: With the data taken from The Voice of America TV Show, we found that there were two ways in which the judges criticized the contestants: by means of expressing expectation and hope.

First of all, the judges expressed their disappointment about the contestants' performance. This means that the performances did not meet the judges' expectation. This was conveyed via structures such as *'I/ We wanted to..., but...', 'We waited to...'*

- *I wanted some flair. I just wanted to feel something that was more transcendent. I didn't feel any flair, any excitement.* [Kanard Thomas, *Riding with the King*, *1]

- *I wanted it to feel a little dirtier, but you made it feel a little too sanitized.* [Andrew Sevener, *Honky Tonk Women*, *1]

- *I just wanted to hear a little bit more range.* [Ruby McAloon, *Back to You*, *1]

- *I was waiting for the big [whistles] note, but it never came*. [Ayanna Joni, *Sorry Not Sorry*]

Secondly, the judges in the Voice of America Show expected the contestants to be better in the next time joining the show.

- *I hope that you will improve your range better next time*. [Ruby G, *Hard Place*, *2]

4.1.3. Combined strategy

This is the combination of direct and direct criticizing strategies. In this type of criticism, the judges indicated the problems that contestants owned, then gave some request or suggestion for change. For instance:

- *There was a looseness to what you did that I thought kind of worked for you and against you at the times. Moving forward, pocket should be, like your number-one priority. .... I think that might have prevented me from pushing.* [Calista Garcia, *Wishing Well*, *1]

- *Jordan, it felt a little bit scattered 'cause you're singing background vocals, you're singing the lead. You need to have a little bit more discipline with how you plan out how to sing the song. It will help the listener focus a little more and let you tell the story of the song a little bit better.* [Jordan McCullough, *Let me love you*, *1]

- *Emily, sometimes we can tell you when someone sounds young just because the polish isn't there yet. It means that you have to spend a little more time honing your craft before you're ready.* [Emily Bass, *Love Yourself*, *2]

Apart from that, the judges also gave some suggestion first, then pointed out the limitation of the contestants as shown in the following examples:

- *If you come out here and you just did [buzzes lips], and then you sing it, it's all air. It takes less air to sing it bigger. That's the only reason why it gets pitchy.* [Jimmy Mowery, *Attention*, *1]

- *Lay down the most solid vocal that you can hand us because we don't know what's going on other than that.* [CJ, *Tired of Being Alone*, *1]

4.2. Impacts of culture on the choice of criticizing strategies

The first thing that can be seen from Table 2 is that the judges in The Voice of America employed all the criticizing strategies in the framework including direct strategy, indirect strategy and mixed strategy.

***Table 2**. Frequency of using criticizing strategies in The Voice of America*

Strategies	Number	Percentage
Direct	62	55.3
Indirect	39	34.7
Combined strategy	11	10
Total	112	100

In particular, direct strategy was applied the most frequently by the judges. Indirect strategy was used the second most frequently, and combined strategy was used the least. As indicated in the above table, direct strategy of criticism is the major choice of the American judges. Out of the 112 collected cases of criticism, 62 (55.3%) were identified to be the direct strategy of criticism. Meanwhile, direct strategy was the second most frequently applied (34.7% of the data with 38 criticisms out of 112), and combined strategy was the least frequently (10% with 11 cases out of the 112 occurrences).

From the statistical analysis of the strategies used to express criticisms by the judges in The Voice of America, we can see that direct and indirect strategies are used with high frequency. This is because of some reasons. First of all, The Voice is a TV show aiming to discover the good and talent singing voice as well as improve music ability of the contestants; therefore, they need to know what their strengths and weaknesses are, so that they can better themselves, and that is why the direct strategy is usually applied. In addition to realizing one's problems, it is necessary for the judges, the experts in the show, to give some solutions or ways to eliminate the problems and improve their voice. This is conveyed through the indirect strategy. Sometimes, the judges in The Voice of America used combined strategy, and this is believed to be an effective way of giving criticisms since it does not make the hearers feel depressed, lose their face in front of the public and can help them both indicate their weaknesses and know how to fix them.

However, it can be clearly observed from the table that, generally, the judges mostly produced direct criticisms. The main reason leading to this seems to lie on the cultural characteristics. As mentioned before, American culture is a low-context one, in which people translate a large part of the meaning into explicit code (Hall 1979). People explicitly say what they want to convey without beating around the bush. Their goal is to get and give information when communicating with other people. In The Voice of America show, more than half of the time, the judges directly criticize the candidates' problems or weaknesses.

Table 3. *The use of direct criticisms*

Sub-strategies	**Number**	**Percentage**
Negative evaluation	12	19.4
Identification of the problem	44	70.9
Statement of difficulty	6	9.7
Total	62	100

As can be clearly observed from the table that identification of the problem was the most frequently used sub-strategy to express criticisms by the judges in The Voice of America. Out of the 62 occurrences, 44 (70.9%) include statements of the problem. This could be attributed to the judges' roles in this singing contests. In the reality talent shows, the judges had the responsibilities to decide whether the participants could continue to participate in the subsequent competitions or not. Therefore, while giving commentaries, they were obliged to have their utterances unmistakably interpreted by their addressees. The sub-strategy of identification of the problem helped the contestants realize their limitation and the reason why they were not chosen by the judges.

The second most frequently used sub-strategy when giving direct criticisms by the American judges was negative evaluation with 12/62 cases (19.4%). The least used sub-strategy found in the study was statement of difficulty with 6/62 cases (9.7%).

Moreover, the low-context aspect of American culture is also reflected in the less common use of indirect strategies of criticizing compared to those direct ones (39/62). According to the data, the judges in The Voice of America applied indirect strategies with a variety of sub-strategies including

demand for change, request for change, advice about change, suggestion for change, wish and expectation. The table below illustrates the use of direct strategy of criticism found in the study.

***Table 4**. The use of indirect criticisms*

Sub-strategies	Number	Percentage
Advice about change	10	25.7
Demand for change	7	17.9
Suggestion for change	15	38.5
Wish	2	5.1
Expectation and hope	5	12.8
Total	39	100

In the American show, suggestion for change accounted for the highest percentage with 15/39 cases (38.5%). Advice about change ranked the second with 10/39 cases (25.7%), demand for change with 7/39 cases (17.9%) ranked the third. Showing (failed) expectation accounted for 12.8% with 5/39 cases and ranked the fourth. The lowest percentage belonged to wish with only 2/39 cases (5.1%).

5. Conclusion

The findings of the research reveal the fact that the judges in the Voice of America in the years of 2019 and 2020 adopted a variety of criticizing strategies in their comments on the contestants' performances, adding colour and spice to one of the most exciting singing contests on TV. The ultimate aim of the diverse strategies of criticizing was to help the contestants realize their limitation, and, as a result of this, enhance their performance. The considerably high frequency of direct criticisms used in the comments compared to the indirect or combined strategies once again depicts the low-context nature of American culture, and at the same time, further strengthens the belief of the influence of culture on the use of speech acts in general and on the act of criticizing in particular. In addition, the information regarding different strategies of criticizing from the study is certainly a useful tool to help Vietnamese learners of English gain a deeper understanding of the ways of giving criticisms in American culture, and avoid making mistakes and misunderstanding when criticizing others in English.

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APPENDIX: SOURCES OF DATA

[*1]The Voice America, Season 17, 2019, Blind Auditions: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLXklQwcMq7x-KwGC7Pkfb8nxlPTYl3e3T

[*2] The Voice America, Season 19, 2020, Blind Auditions: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLlYqpJ9JE-J_SDYNOhUrUVbeFKDOU6EGl

Lời phê bình của các giám khảo chương trình Tìm kiếm Giọng hát Mỹ nhìn từ góc độ văn hóa

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện nhằm (1) xác định các chiến lược phê bình mà các giám khảo sử dụng trong Chương trình truyền hình Tìm kiếm Giọng hát Mỹ và (2) chỉ ra tác động của các đặc điểm văn hóa đối với việc lựa chọn các chiến lược phê bình. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính và định lượng. Phương pháp định tính được sử dụng để mô tả và phân tích dữ liệu, và phương pháp định lượng được sử dụng để xác định tần suất xuất hiện của ngữ liệu. Ngữ liệu được sử dụng để phân tích là các phát ngôn bao gồm lời phê bình do ban giám khảo đưa ra trong chương trình Giọng hát Mỹ mùa 2019 và 2020. Dữ liệu được phân tích dựa trên khung chiến lược phê bình của Nguyễn (2005) và được giải thích dựa trên khung văn hóa của Hofstede (1980) và Hall (1990). Kết quả của nghiên cứu cho thấy các giám khảo trong Chương trình truyền hình Tìm kiếm Giọng hát Mỹ đã áp dụng tất cả các chiến lược gồm chiến lược trực tiếp, gián tiếp và chiến lược kết hợp khi đưa ra lời phê bình. Tuy nhiên, do đặc điểm văn hóa, các giám khảo người Mỹ có xu hướng sử dụng các chiến lược trực tiếp thường xuyên hơn các chiến lược gián tiếp.

Từ khóa: hành vi nói; văn hoá; lời phê bình; Giọng hát Mỹ.