

# Opening Sequences of Vietnamese Police-driver Traffic Enforcement Interactions

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**Abstract**—This paper examines the opening sequence of police-driver encounters at traffic stops when the police officers state the reasons for the stop, or request documents. Data include 30 video-recorded encounters between Vietnamese police officers and drivers, and are analysed using the methodology of Conversation Analysis. The findings have shown that police officers wield their judicial authority and institutional power right at the outset of the interactions by leading the interaction in a narrowly focused policing agenda, and taking different conversational paths. We argue that these differences in interactional orders may decrease driver co-operation and compliance with police officer directions, and be highly likely to increase recidivism. The present study may give police officers some new ideas about how to behave towards drivers during traffic stops, thus improving police-driver interactions in the Vietnamese policing context as well as in other cultural contexts in some respects.

**Index Terms**—Vietnamese, police-driver interaction, conversation analysis, opening sequences, policing interaction

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the opening sequence of police-driver encounters at traffic stops. Traffic stops are characterised by interactions between police officers and drivers which are typically initiated by the former (Engel, 2005). While travelling in their own vehicles, the latter are occasionally pulled over by the former for one reason or another. This ranges from obtaining a random breath test (the one to check an indication of the concentration of alcohol in a driver's breath) or checking the driver's documents. However, the most common reason is that the driver is deemed to commit a traffic offence such as drink driving, speeding, red light running, traffic sign disobedience, and seat belt use (Engel, 2005; Lundman & Kaufman, 2003; Skogan, 2005). As a traffic enforcer, the police officer is empowered to exert control, demand compliance, or impose sanctions, on drivers, if the latter are found to violate the law (Dixon, Schell, Giles, & Drogos, 2008). Overall, the police officer is authorized to make three decisions during the traffic stop encounters: (i) initiating a traffic stop, (ii) searching the driver, a vehicle, or passengers, and (iii) sanctioning the driver (Schafer, Carter, Katz-Bannister, & Wells, 2006).

Various Traffic Acts have been introduced to stipulate the characteristics of a police-driver encounter. For instance, according to the American Traffic Stop Statistics Act (1999), a traffic stop encounter should include the following: reason for the stop, driver's demographics, any types of search done plus its rationale, any items seized, and enforcement actions. Thompson and Jenkins (1993) developed a nine-step process of routine traffic stop encounters: (i) greeting, (ii) introducing the officer and their department, (iii) explaining the reasons for the stop, (iv) allowing drivers to offer justification, (v) requesting documents, (vi) clarifying details, (vii) deciding enforcement action, (viii) deciding to conduct a search, and (ix) explaining driver's options and closing encounter. Quite recently, Prabhakaran et al. (2018) unearthed six stages in police-driver interactions: (i) greeting, (ii) stating the reasons for the stop; (iii) requesting documents (e.g., driver license, registration, or insurance); (iv) seeking driver's demographic details (e.g., race, sex, and age); (v) issuing sanction (e.g., citation, fix-it ticket, or warning); and (vi) closing encounter.

Overall, the police-citizen encounters in our study also cover the above information and stages. However, the structural order in our corpus is not always the same as those above. More particularly, some of the police officers in this study skip the greeting stage, and some request to view documents (i.e., the third stage) prior to citing the reason for the stop (i.e., the second stage). In light of this, this study looks at the first three stages of the police-driver interactions in order to examine how the police officers strategically organise their interaction in the course of opening the encounters. Indeed, the openings are significant for the whole encounter (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) as they address the key organisational issues for the interaction being begun (Schegloff, 1986), and thus determining the trajectory of the encounters as well as impacting the driver's adherence to the sanctions.

## II. CONVERSATION ANALYSIS AND INSTITUTIONAL TALK

Police-driver interaction is characterised by talk about policing issues and is thus a form of institutional talk by nature. This form of talk is partly shaped by a power asymmetry between the interlocutors (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Van Dijk, 2002). Hence, in the specific type of institutional talk under scrutiny in this study, there is an imbalance in power between the police officer and the driver, plus this is augmented by the hierarchical society of Vietnam (Edwards & Phan, 2013; T. Q. N. Tran, 2013). In the current study, this talk is studied within the approach of Conversation Analysis (henceforth, 'CA'), which is an approach within the social sciences that "describe, analyse and understand talk as a basic and constitutive feature of human social life" (Sidnell, 2010, p. 1) by identifying the underlying rules orienting interactions in general (Edwards, 1995). Therefore, CA can highlight how interactants jointly construct their own reality through discursive strategies. Note also that, from a CA perspective, institutional asymmetries (or cultural factors) are enacted, managed, constructed, and negotiated through talk: they are not forces that exist outside of the interaction, but are brought to life in the interaction.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on police-driver encounters at traffic stops has fallen into two categories. The first has looked at how the demographic characteristics (e.g., race, gender, and age) of either the police officer or the driver can influence: (i) the police officer's decision to stop the driver (e.g., Alpert, MacDonald, & Dunham, 2005; Lundman & Kaufman, 2003; Schafer et al., 2006), (ii) the driver's satisfaction with the encounter (e.g., Skogan, 2005), or (iii) the manner in which the interaction itself unfolds (e.g., Dixon et al., 2008). The second category has been concerned with the driver's views of the police officer's communication behaviour during the traffic stop (e.g., Engel, 2005; Johnson, 2004; Sahin, 2014). Studies following the first trend have examined interactants' demographics (e.g., race, gender, and age) and have been conducted mostly in the United States of America (USA). In particular, Dixon et al. (2008) investigated the extent to which the interactant's race influenced their communication in routine traffic stops in Cincinnati, Ohio. Applying a quantitative coding method to 313 randomly-sampled audio and video recordings from police cars, and using content analysis, Dixon et al. found that (i) African-American civilians were more involved in the interaction than American civilians, (ii) the communication quality of African-American civilians on average was less positive than that of their American counterparts, and (iii) the officer's communication was more positive when they belonged to the same race as the civilian.

In addition, several studies examined how the civilian's demographics affected whether the police officer decided to impose a penalty or not. For example, Lundman and Kaufman (2003) used a nation-wide survey to examine how the civilian's race affected the officer's decision at the stop, the civilian's perceptions regarding the legitimacy of the police officer's reason for the stop, and the civilian's perceptions regarding the appropriateness of the officer's actions. The data were drawn from self-reports of 7,034 civilians who were stopped at least once, and submitted to a multivariate analysis. The findings indicated that male African-American civilians were especially likely to be stopped, and that, on the whole, African-American and Hispanic civilians did not find a legitimate reason for the officer's decision to stop them. Similarly, Alpert et al. (2005) investigated how situational variables (e.g., time, place, or descriptive information provided to an officer) and the interactant's race and demographics might affect the police officer's level of suspicion about the legality of the civilian's behaviour, and also their decision-making. Using quantitative and qualitative data from participant observation in Georgia, Alpert et al. found that police officers were more suspicious towards civilians belonging to minority groups than towards other civilians, but that their decision to stop a suspect was not affected by whether or not the suspect belonged to a minority group. In the same vein, Schafer et al. (2006) explored the decision-making patterns of police officers in traffic-stop encounters by analysing their self-reports. The findings revealed that the civilian's race mattered the most in determining whether or not the officer decided to stop them. In addition, situational considerations (e.g., the reasons for a traffic stop) and the civilian's gender and age also played an influential role. Overall, the demographics of both police officers and civilians were found to influence the officer's decision-making.

While the first trend in previous research looked at the perspective of both police officer and civilian, the second has focussed closely on the civilian's perspective. For instance, Sahin (2014) carried out a study to see whether civilians' views of officers would be affected when procedural justice principles were incorporated into how officers in the Turkish National Police handled traffic stops. In his study, 702 civilians did a survey, and the results were submitted to a multivariate analysis. Sahin found that (i) the way in which the officer interacted with the civilian influenced the latter's perceptions of the former related to the traffic-stop encounter, (ii) the civilian's perceptions of the police in procedurally just traffic encounters were more improved than their perceptions of the police in encounters in which there were only routine traffic enforcement procedures, (iii) higher levels of satisfaction with their treatment by police were reported by civilians who were in the experimental group than those in the control group, and (iv) the civilian's general views of the police were not greatly influenced by a single procedurally just encounter. In another study, Engel (2005) investigated whether or not civilians believed that they had been treated unjustly in traffic stops by police based on normative factors (i.e., perceptions of equity and fairness) and instrumental factors (i.e., the outcomes received). Using multinomial logistic regression, she analysed a national survey completed by 7,054 civilians in the USA, and found that citizens were concerned about the concept of fairness together with the actual decisions made by criminal-justice officials. Moreover, civilians' perceptions of distributive injustice (i.e., the unfairness of the outcome) and

procedural injustice (i.e., the unfairness of the procedures followed prior to the outcome) were also different by race. Another study by Johnson (2004) examined civilians' perceptions of the appropriateness of traffic-stop behaviour on the part of police. He recruited 245 college students in the USA for a survey. A multivariate regression analysis of the findings showed that the theory of procedural justice, and the use of verbal judo techniques (i.e., a set of interpersonal communication techniques taught to police officers in the USA) in police officer behavior, were consistently preferred by civilians during routine traffic stops. In brief, the research belonging to the second trend indicated that police behaviour during traffic-stop encounters improved if some interactional principles were incorporated into their communication. This increased civilians' satisfaction with the outcomes of these traffic stops.

From the literature review, it is notable that no study examined the openings of police-driver interactions, nor analysed the patterns of talk-in-interaction; rather, these studies only looked at police officers' communication behaviour and drivers' levels of satisfaction. Second, these studies only coded various features of the data, and analysed these properties quantitatively. Last but not least, research in the cultural context of Vietnam has so far garnered relatively little attention. Given that cultural differences have an impact on institutional talk (Drew & Heritage, 1992), it would be a mistake to assume that the findings obtained from Western studies will necessarily be representative of policing communication in general. The gap in literature creates a need for more research to be done in other cultural contexts, not least the Vietnamese one. Given the above shortcomings, this study looks at the openings of police-driver encounters at traffic stops in Vietnam. It aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the sequential organisations of the openings of police-driver encounters at traffic stops in Vietnam?
2. How do Vietnamese police exercise their judicial authority during the opening moments of the police-driver encounters?

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

Data are 30 video-recorded encounters conducted on the street sides, each includes one to five police officers interacting with one driver (and sometimes with one passenger). These data were recorded by the participants themselves (referred to as third-party data; Laurier, 2013) and were then uploaded to YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>). They are chosen for this study given their naturally-occurring interactions and non-research perspective. Although this study is concerned with the opening phases of the police-driver interactions, only the full recorded encounters are chosen as they enable an overview of the whole encounter as well as its trajectory. The recorded encounters took place throughout Vietnam, from the northern to the southern cities. Data are analysed using the methodology of CA, and following the techniques and symbols developed by Jefferson (2004).

#### V. FINDINGS

##### A. Sequential Organisations of Encounter Openings

According to Circular 01/2016/TT-BCA on the Law on Road Traffic issued by the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security, the traffic police are authorised to pull vehicles over when they: (i) detect traffic offences themselves or through specialised devices; (ii) are conducting a general check ordered by the head of the traffic police department, or by the chiefs of provincial bureaus of police; (iii) are performing the tasks of patrolling and inspecting road traffic planned by the head of traffic police divisions at the district level and above; (iv) are following the documents issued by the heads or deputy heads of investigation authorities, or those of competent authorities, in order to ensure security, order, and safety; and (v) are informed of traffic offences. The above circumstances all take place in our corpus, but the first (i.e., the traffic police or specialised devices detect traffic offences) is the most common one. More specifically, our traffic police participants pull the vehicles over in order to mostly deal with the driver's traffic violations, examine legitimate documents related to the vehicles as per law, and check alcohol in the driver's breath.

Even though the reasons for a traffic stop tend to fall into three categories above, the traffic police skilfully employ various interactional and sequential strategies in the course of opening the encounters. For instance, after his greeting, officer Hoa (P)<sup>1</sup> in (1) explicitly cites the reason for his pulling over Bac's (D) motorbike, that is Bac's speeding (line 3). Specifically, the speed limit for that area is 50 kilometres per hour but Bac exceeds 9 kilometres (not shown here). His speeding is recorded by a specialised camera which is located some kilometres away.

Ex. 1 (57)

- 1 P: chào anh *tnh*á:  
greet OB<sup>2</sup> PRT  
'Good afternoon!'
- 2 (0.6)
- 3 P: *thông+báo lỗi+vi phạm của anh anh chạy quá tốc+độ tnh*á  
announce offence of OB<sup>3</sup> OB ride excessive speeding PRT

<sup>1</sup> In the extracts, drivers are represented as D and police officers as P.

<sup>2</sup> The following abbreviations are used in the interlinear glosses: COP - copula; HON - honorific; INT - interrogative; OB - older brother; PRT - particle; YB - younger sibling.

**‘Just to let you know that you’re stopped for speeding’**

- 4 (0.8)  
 5 D: *a:nh cho em kiểm+tra:: (0.4) #tốc#+độ(.) em chạy CỐ::(.) ở+trong*  
 OB please YS check speed YS ride just in  
 6 *có năm+mươi ra tới ngo ãi này em chạy sáu+mươi:i,=*  
 just fifty ride to out here YS ride sixty  
**‘Can I please check your camera? I rode just- just fifty in town and sixty out of town’**  
 7 P: *=#chờ# t t:*  
 wait minute  
**‘Just a minute’**  
 ((171 lines deleted – Officer shows the video recording to driver and asks to see the driver’s paper))  
 178 D: *người+ta chạy chầm chín+chục #một#chăm anh hông bắt*  
 people drive eighty ninety one hundred OB not stop  
 179 *#th #thôi à:*  
 then just PRT  
**‘Why don’t you stop those driving at 80, 90, or 100?’**

Officer Hoa prefaces the reason-citation sequence with a pre-announcement TCU, *thông báo lỗi vi phạm của anh* (‘just to let you know that’, line 3). In this TCU, Hoa uses the words *lỗi vi phạm* (‘offence’ in gloss) explicitly to make relevant his subsequent announcement for the stop. Notably, Hoa ends his turn with the particle *nhá* in high pitch to indicate an emphasis on the accuracy of his information meanwhile obtaining Bac’s affiliation. In so doing, he aims to pre-empt any objection from Bac. Contrary to Hoa’s expectation, Bac neither admits nor denies his accusation overtly but inserts a post-first expansion sequence (Schegloff, 2007) to seek evidence for his speeding (lines 5-6). This expanded turn acts as a pre-rejection towards Hoa’s claim (Schegloff, 2007), and the second-pair part for Hoa’s announcement at line 3 is delayed until line 178. In other words, it is not until the video recording is shown plus other police officers offer an explanation about his speeding that Bac reluctantly admits his offence (not shown here). However, he tries to dodge the sanction by telling his experience (Pomerantz, 1984b) of witnessing those who far exceeded the speed limit without being stopped. Specifically, by formulating his question in lines 178-179, *người ta chạy chầm chín chục #một#chăm anh hông bắt #thi#thôi à:* (‘Why don’t you stop those driving at 80, 90, or 100?’), Bac acknowledges the police’s right decision to stop him, meanwhile treating his offence as much less legitimate than that of numerous drivers. That is, the police should not stop him given this minor violation, and thus should let him go without any sanction. Overall, this question formulation, together with his request to see the recording in lines 5-6 plus a delay in line 4, foreshows his dispreferred response to Hoa’s announcement.

In Extract (1), the sequential organisation of the encounter opening seems to consist of two initial stages: greeting and stating the reasons for the stop. Actually, due to driver Bac’s active resistance by a request for the camera evidence, the opening sequence does not close until near the conclusion of the encounter. Therefore, other stages are also involved, such as document request and detail clarification (not shown here). In other words, the driver response can largely frame the opening sequence.

While officer Hoa in Extract (1) states the reason for stopping the vehicle, officer Thanh (P) in Extract (2) requests to see the document instead. Notably, driver Vy’s (D) response treats Thanh’s request as the main reason for the visit, which means that the two stages of reason statement and document request are subsumed in one.

Ex. 2 (49)

- 1 P: *chào anh nha:;(0.3) giấy+tờ #mau lấy kiểm#+↓tra*  
 greet OB PRT paper quickly show check  
**‘Good afternoon! Show me your papers quickly!’**  
 2 (0.6)  
 3 D: *\$hừ:\$*  
 mm  
**‘Mm’**  
 4 (2.5)  
 5 D: *#dạ:# đây a:nh*  
 HON here OB  
**‘Here they are’**  
 6 (2.0)  
 7 D: *đây là bằng+lái °của em°(.) đây là bảo+hiểm*  
 this COP license of YS this COP insurance  
**‘Here is driver license, here is insurance’**

Thanh initiates the interaction with a greeting, then asking Vy to show his documents. However, Thanh’s interactional and linguistic organisation of this TCU, *giấy tờ #mau lấy kiểm# ↓tra* (‘show me your papers quickly’),

<sup>3</sup> The hierarchical organisation of Vietnamese society is reflected in the large number of kinship terms used for addressing and referring to others (H. T. L. Nguyen, 2018).

turns itself as somewhat imperious. Specifically, he formulates it as a directive act (Searle, 1979) without embedding any polite markers like ‘please’. Also, the adverb marker *mau* (‘quickly’) is employed to express his expectation of a prompt action. By asking Vy to show the papers without delay, Thanh puts himself in a state of impatience, or presumably he does not aim to spend much time on this case. Alternatively, from the video recording, there may be so many cases on that day that Thanh does not have ample time for his encounter with Vy. These linguistic resources communicate Thanh’s legitimacy of authorities over Vy particularly, and over the whole encounter generally. This reflects the fact that, as a form of institutional talk, police-driver interaction is also asymmetric by its nature in which the police typically lead the encounter (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Fisher & Todd, 1986; Van Dijk, 2002; West, 1984). More seriously, some police tend to be impolite and disrespectful to many drivers, especially those from lower social class (Sahin, 2014).

Interactionally, Thanh’s dominating voice partly shapes Vy’s response. Given that he is not treated with respect (Johnson, 2004; Skogan, 2005), Vy most likely registers his passive resistance with Thanh’s request (Stivers, 2006). In particular, Vy delays his response for 0.6 seconds (line 2) then replies with a response token, *\$hư:\$* (‘Mm’; Gardner, 2001), which acts as a receipt of Thanh’s request, in a laughing manner. In Vietnamese interaction, the most popular and appropriate response in this case should be a *dạ* (‘yes’) as drivers are culturally considered as passive recipients in the interaction with police officers (H. T. L. Nguyễn, 2018). Vy’s response token thus manifests the impact of Thanh’s voice on his interaction, although he also affiliates with his request at last (lines 5 and 7). Notably, Vy’s presenting the papers makes relevant Thanh’s request, and treats the main reason for the stop as absent. This embodies Vy’s understanding of Thanh’s document request as the main reason for the stop. In short, Extract (2) has indicated the sequential impact of turn design in the course of opening the encounter.

Extract (3) presents a different opening sequence in which there is an absence of greetings from police officer Tung (P) – the interaction initiator. Instead, he opens the encounter with the reason for the stop, then requests to see driver Phong’s (D) documents.

Ex. 3 (32)

- 1 P: *anh lại vi+phạm tốc+độ dô:i,(0.2) mời anh #xuống# xe*  
YB again violate speed PRT please OB get+off car
- 2 *xuất+ch ờnh giấy+tờ:(.) °t ấ° #kiểm#+cha:*  
show paper I check  
**‘You’ve violated the speed limit again. Please get off your car and show me your papers’**
- 3 D: *°chào anh°*  
greet OB  
**‘Hi!’**
- 4 (0.7)
- 5 P: *mời anh xuống xe ↑đi:*  
please OB get+off car PRT  
**‘Please get off your car’**
- 6 (4.5)
- 7 P: *anh xuất+ch ờnh giấy+tờ #ch úng#+t ấ kiểm+cha °n ầ o°*  
OB show paper we check PRT  
**‘Please show us your paper’**
- 8 (1.6)
- 9 D: *tốc+độ ầ? (0.4) đư:::a h ờnh+ảnh lại đây co:i,*  
speeding INT show record to here look  
**‘Speeding? Show me your record!’**  
((36 lines deleted – Driver insists on seeing video recording))
- 45 P: *<tu::i NHẢ::M xe ờnh,> xịn+lỗi a:nh (.) anh đi+chuyển đi,*  
I mistake car OB sorry OB OB move PRT  
**‘I’m sorry. I’ve mistaken your car for another car. Off you go, please’**

Police officer Tung’s opening turn consists of two TCUs: a reason and a document request, between which is a micropause as a transition-relevance place (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) for Phong’s turn. In his first TCU, *anh lại vi phạm tốc độ dô:i* (‘You’ve violated the speed limit again’), Tung’s use of a pair of temporal adverb, *lại...dô:i* (‘again’), communicates that this is not the first time Phong has violated the speeding, and that Phong’s previous speeding was also stopped by Tung himself. However, Phong does not show any uptake at this juncture. Tung thus treats Phong’s silence as an opportunity to initiate his command, that is, a request to see the document, *mời anh #xuống# xe xuất ch ờnh giấy tờ:(.) °t ấ° #kiểm#+cha:* (‘Please get off your car and show me your papers’). Through this second TCU, Tung displays an assumption that his reason for stop is legitimate and thus expecting Phong’s affiliation. However, Tung’s first-pair-part request does not trigger any relevant second-pair-part action except a greeting from Phong, which is treated by Tung as a failure (Stivers, 2012). Tung orients to Phong’s no-answer response in line 3 as a problem in hearing. Therefore, he repeats his request in two separate turns (lines 5 and 7) in order to seek Phong’s affiliation. Once again, Phong does not take an affiliative action, that is showing papers to Tung, but produces a partial

questioning repeat to initiate repair (line 9) and thus identify Tung's *vi phạm tốc độ* ('speeding'; line 1) as the trouble source (Robinson, 2013). This is further reinforced by his abrupt request to see the video recording for evidence, *đưa:::a hình ảnh lại đây coi*, ('Show me your record!'; line 9). In other words, Phong's repeat orients to Tung's previous assumption of Phong's hearing problem as incorrect, and his response on line 3 lays the ground for his disaffiliation with Tung's reason. The encounter concludes with an apology from Tung due to his mistake (line 45), which communicates that Phong's disaffiliation is reasonable.

While the above extracts feature some basic stages of the openings, Extract (4) has a different sequence. Neither greeting nor document request is present, and the reason is cited by police officer Hong (P) as an order, or a recommendation, for driver Thang (D) to act on, that is turning on signals when he turns right<sup>4</sup>. Right after Thang acknowledges his uptake of that order, Hong lets him go immediately without issuing any sanction to Thang at all (line 12).

Ex. 4 (55)

- 1 P: *xi+nha::n*,  
signal  
'Signal!'  
(3.3)
- 2
- 3 P: *lúc chạy bắt xi+nhạ \*lên\* gì ìm a:nh*,  
when ride turn signal on for OB  
'Please turn the signal on when riding your motorbike!'  
(0.4)
- 4
- 5 D: *#sao# a:nh?*  
what OB  
'What's wrong?'  
(1.0)
- 6
- 7 P: *mún (.) ge:o (.) phá:i (.) #câu# bắt xin+nhạ lên cho a:nh*  
want turn right uncle turn signal on for OB  
'You must turn the signal on if you want to turn right!'  
(0.3)
- 8
- 9 D: *ạ::*  
OK  
'OK'
- 10 P: *nghe câu nó chứ:a?*  
hear sentence that INT  
'Got it?'
- 11 D: *ô+kể: ô+<sup>o</sup>kể<sup>o</sup>*  
OK OK  
'OK OK'
- 12 P: *↓rô:i(.) đi lẹ đi:*  
OK go quickly PRT  
'OK. Go quickly'  
(0.2)
- 13
- 14 D: *ô:i (.) #cảm+mo# ↑nha:*  
OK thank PRT  
'OK. Thank you'
- 15 P: *à::*  
mmm  
'Mmm'

The video recording shows that while Thang is on his motorbike taking a right turn, Hong suddenly says *xi nha::n*, ('signal'; line 1) meanwhile signalling Thang to stop. This abrupt order makes it hard for Thang to grasp what is going on, which is reflected in his no response after a silence of 3.3 seconds, and his other-initiated repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977) to indicate his trouble in understanding it (line 5). Hong's modified repeat on line 7 makes relevant Thang's trouble. On receipt of Thang's confirmation of his understanding, Hong allows him to go.

Overall, the opening sequence of Vietnamese police-driver interactions features three stages of greeting, reason for stop, and document request. However, some encounters do not have such order, some do not contain greeting or document request, and some even do not have reason as it is subsumed in other stage. In spite of the absence of some stages, both interactants, especially drivers, can manipulate these different sequences skilfully toward a variety of socio political ends. This suggests that the ordering and functions of each stage closely connect with one another and are jointly understood by both drivers and police officers. Such ordering reflects the fact that policing opening is a socially

<sup>4</sup> In Vietnam, drivers drive on the right hand side of the street, and it is compulsory to use turn signals when the driver changes a lane, turns left, turns right, makes a U-turn, overtakes other vehicles, starts driving after stopping, or pulls over (Traffic Act 2008).

organised activity. Notably, driver responses to officer reasons can largely contribute to shaping the trajectory of the encounter. For instance, Bac's and Phong's requests for the camera evidence in Extract (1) and (3) respectively work to obtain a clear vindication for their cases, thus pre-empting any sanction from the officers.

### B. Police Open the Encounter - The Voice of Judicial Authority

The opening moment of an encounter is a chance for police officers to, not only establish and accomplish their interpersonal relationship with, but also exert their authority over, drivers (Modaff, 1995). Given their legitimate power, police officers are authorised to pull drivers over, then initiate the encounters at traffic stops. This statutory authority is embodied through officers' interactional practices. Particularly, they may deploy various interactional resources such as questioning behaviour, topic initiation, interruptions, or the use of address terms, in the course of opening the encounters. In the following, we will touch upon how officers raise their voice of judicial authority in citing the reasons for traffic stops.

In our corpus, police officers adopt different linguistic and interactional practices in order to exercise their institutional control over drivers and the whole encounters. However, most officers state the reasons in a polite manner, and indicate different politeness levels. To exemplify, police officer Nghia (P) in Extract (5) starts the encounter with an honorific term, *cho* ('please'; line 1), which is used in Vietnamese to ask for permission. Institutionally, there is no need for him to do so as a police officer since he is authorised to take the driver's breath test. Legally, driver Vuong (D) does nothing but have to comply with Nghia's request whatsoever. Nghia's polite manner is also grounded in his way of addressing: he self-refers as *em* ('younger sibling' in gloss) and addresses Vuong as *anh* ('older sibling' in gloss). In other words, Nghia's use of the term *cho* ('please'; line 1) communicates his respect for Vuong, who is senior in age, and this reflects the emphasis upon appropriateness in Vietnamese communication (Appel, 2013; T. Đ. Huỳnh, 1989; T. P. Lê 2011; T. Q. N. Trần, 2013). Even though Nghia tries to mitigate his request politely and respectfully, the request itself displays some form of power given the action it calls for. Specifically, the term *kiểm tra* ('test'; line 1) is, in fact, an executive order that Vuong has to obey rather than a request. However, Nghia's polite manner partly enables him to obtain Vuong's obedience without difficulty.

Ex. 5 (48)

- 1 P: *cho em kiểm+tra cồn thả ↑a:nh*  
 please YS test alcohol just OB  
 'Can I please test just your breath?'  
 2 (0.8)  
 3 D: *chào ↑anh*  
 greet OB  
 'Good evening!'  
 4 D: [*â::*] ]  
 uh  
 'Uh'  
 5 P: [*dạ cho::*] (0.3) *cho em kiểm+tra cồ:n cấ thả i:*  
 HON please please YS test alcohol PRT just  
 'Can I please- please test just your breath?'  
 6 (0.3)  
 7 P: *dạ: [mời anh °a°]*  
 HON please OB HON  
 'Please'  
 8 D: [*↓rồ::i*] (.) *ô+↑k ê*  
 alright OK  
 'All right. OK'

In Extract (6), police officer Trinh (P) employs a polite term, *mời* ('please'; line 6), to preface his order for driver Tuan (D). In spite of this, the order itself conveys some form of power that Tuan must follow strictly. This is foregrounded by an absence of his return to Tuan's greeting on line 1, which violates the rule of adjacency pairs (Schegloff, 2007). Moreover, an immediate delay of Trinh's turn on line 2 foreshows a dispreferred course of action (Pomerantz, 1984a). The cumulative effect of his action is to display his dissatisfaction with Tuan's traffic transgression meanwhile wielding his legislative power.

Ex. 6 (30)

- 1 D: *vẫ:ng hhh(.) chào đồng+↑chí:*  
 well greet comrade  
 'Well. Good afternoon!'  
 2 (1.5)  
 3 P: *bây+giờ là hiện+giờ là hỏi+nãy là (.) <CÓ: (0.2) t\_ñ+hiệu (.)*  
 now COP now COP just COP have signal  
 4 *dừng xe anh trên (.) v\_òng+xoay (0.2) sơn tị:nh>*  
 stop car OB at roundabout son tinh

**'Now- now- we've just signalled you to stop at Son Tinh roundabout'**

5 (0.4)

6 P: *bây giờ mời anh ơ::: (0.2) > cứ đứng đây đi; <=*  
now please OB uh keep stand here PRT

**'Now please stand here!'**

Unlike those in Extracts (5) and (6), officer Hoang (P) in Extract (7) does not utilise any specific mitigated device in his request (line 3). In addition, he starts the encounter with a request for driver Hai's (D) documents without mentioning his transgression (line 3). Given that in the orderly structure of a police-driver encounter, a document request should be logically based on a certain reason, Hoang's reverse order carries two implications. On the one hand, Hoang may suppose that Hai should grasp his transgression once his vehicle is pulled over. On the other, he may think that Hai's transgression (i.e., turning without a signal on) is not a serious one. These two suppositions may account for an absence of the reason explanation at the outset of the encounter. Regarding the request itself (line 3), Hoang projects it in a polite manner by using an address term, *anh* ('your'), instead of a zero-sign-address imperative (H. T. L. Nguyễn, 2018). Also, although it is formal and common to address others as *đồng chí*: ('comrade') and self-refer as *tôi* ('I') in Vietnamese policing interaction, Hoang uses *anh* ('your') instead. In so doing, he tends to count Hai as his relative or family member (T. N. Trần, 2006), thus creating a relaxed atmosphere for the encounter. Even so, the word *kiểm tra*: ('check' in the gloss) embodies his institutional authority in performing the action and that Hai must obey.

Ex. 7 (1)

1 D: *CHào a:nh*  
greet OB

**'Good morning!'**

2 (0.3)

((Police salutes driver))

3 P: *#rời# lấy #giấy#+tờ kiểm+tra:: đi ↑anh*  
OK show paper check please OB

**'OK. Please show me your paper!'**

4 (0.5)

5 D: *giờ tôi hỏi cho tôi HỎ::I #lê# tôi lỗi gì đây?*  
now I ask please I ask COP I violate what PRT

**'Now can I please ask what my offence is?'**

6 (0.5)

7 P: *quẹo #không# xin+nhan đèn*  
turn not signal PRT

**'Turning without a signal on'**

The police officers can also employ other linguistic markers in order to either decrease or increase the powerful level of their request. For instance, police officer Hong in Extract (4) uses the markers *giùm* ('for' in the gloss; line 3) and *cho* ('for' in the gloss; line 7), which seemingly treats driver Thang's adherence as a favour for Hong himself. However, the whole requests with a phrase-final rising intonation *lúc chạy bắt xin nhận \*lên\* giùm a:nh*, ('Please turn the signal on when riding your motorbike!'; line 3) or *mình (.) gẹ:o (.) phải: (.) #cậu# bắt xin nhận lên cho a:nh* ('You must turn the signal on if you want to turn right!'; line 7), display an authoritative tone of voice. In like manner, the marker *mau* ('quickly'; line 1) plus a zero-sign-address imperative in *giấy tờ #mau lấy kiểm# tra* ('Show me your papers quickly'; Extract (2)), seems to urge driver Vy to show his papers in a prompt manner, thus partly displaying officer Thanh's impatience and authority. Overall, via their deployment of linguistic and interactional strategies, police officers on the one hand display their politeness and respect but on the other exercise their legitimate authority as a law enforcement representative.

## VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the opening moments of police-driver interactions at traffic stops. It has showed various interactional trajectories that police officers took in the course of initiating the encounters, thus setting the legitimate scene for his pulling over driver vehicles. The analysis has also indicated that police officers strategically deployed linguistic and interactional resources to wield their judicial authority and institutional power right at the outset of the interactions.

As a representative for law enforcement agencies, a police officer is legally authorised to pull over any vehicles suspiciously committing a traffic violation. In these police-initiated encounters, police officers tend to lead the interaction in a narrowly focused policing agenda, and take different conversational paths in the opening moments of the encounter. For instance, some greet drivers, state reasons, then request documents, while others skip greetings and document request. More importantly, some do not explain the reason for the stop, or give it after orders or paper request have been taken. Given that the absence of reason at the outset of the encounter can result in aggravation in drivers (Giles et al., 2007) and impact their attitude and perceptions of the policing legitimacy (Prabhakaran et al., 2018), the differences in interactional orders in our data may decrease driver co-operation and compliance with police officer



directions, and be highly likely to increase recidivism (Bates, 2014).

Police-driver interaction is a form of institutional talk where there is evidently a power asymmetry between two interactants (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Giles et al., 2007). As an exchange of talk in which at least one interlocutor “represents a formal organisation of some kind” (Drew & Heritage, 1992, p. 3), police-driver encounter often involves one or more experts (i.e., police officers) having expertise in a policing field, and one or more laypeople (i.e., drivers) with little knowledge of the field. The direction of the interaction often lies in the hands of the police group rather than the drivers (Fisher & Todd, 1986). This kind of asymmetry is organised and institutionalised (Van Dijk, 2002), and reflected in the unequal contribution of interlocutors to the interaction, especially in the very moments of the policing encounters. Given this, the police officers in our data exerted their power authority right at the opening sequences through their orders and requests. While some tended to use imperative mode (i.e., *show me your papers quickly!*) that communicates their seniority and authority, most of the police officers employed request mitigating devices such as syntactic downgraders (e.g., *can I please...?*) or lexical downgraders (e.g., *please*). In so doing, they not only expressed their requests in a polite manner but also aimed to obtain drivers’ adherence. Whichever linguistic resources they used, their requests partly put imposition on the drivers in order to ensure their compliance with them as well as with traffic laws.

It is generally held that the driver’s perception of the police performance (e.g., disrespectful manner, aggressive behaviour, or unfair policing) considerably influences their trust in the police processes, and their inclination to engage in collaborative behaviours accordingly (Bates et al., 2015; Jonathan-Zamir, Mastroski, & Moyal, 2015; Johnson, 2004; Sahin, 2014; Skogan, 2005; Tyler, 2004). To obtain a compliant behaviour from drivers, some police officers in our study tried to mitigate their requests by using politeness markers. Even so, some of their drivers seemed doubtful about the police reasons, and thus seeking persuasive evidence for their traffic violations, like Bac, Phong, or Hai in Extract (1), (3), and (7) respectively. The fact that these drivers asked for clarification has two implications. On the one hand, they want the police officers to provide accurate information and be willing to explain what was going on. On the other, this action communicates their lack of trust in the policing processes as well as in the police officers themselves.

Given their responsibility for the traffic law enforcement, the police officers should, not only bring drivers under control, but also alter their traffic behaviour for road safety (Bates, 2014). To this end, they should demonstrate empathy, politeness, helpfulness, fairness, and courteousness, in a professional manner (Johnson, 2004; Skogan, 2005). In so doing, they increase the likelihood that drivers will show their adherence, respect, and cooperation during the encounter (Bates, 2014; Jonathan-Zamir et al., 2015).

By highlighting the police authority at the very moment of opening sequences of police-driver interaction, this study contributes to extending the work of previous researchers on policing interaction during traffic-stop encounters. In addition, it adds to empirical knowledge of police-driver interactions in developing countries like Vietnam specifically and, therefore, throughout the world more generally. Practically, the empirical findings of the present study may give police officers some new ideas about how to behave towards drivers during traffic stops, thus improving police-driver interactions in the Vietnamese policing context as well as in other cultural contexts in some respects. Nevertheless, given that policing interactions are institutionally and culturally shaped, further studies should focus on a comparison of police performance between Vietnamese encounters and Western encounters for a better understanding of police authority worldwide.

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