



**THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND**  
AUSTRALIA

**Vietnamese and Australian Interpretations of Silence: Similarities,  
Differences and Accommodation**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigated interpretations of silence used by Vietnamese and Australians and the cultural differences and similarities in perceived likelihood of silence and its interpretations. It also examined if and how Vietnamese adapt silence-related behavior in communication with Australians. This work was exploratory, inspired by the relative lack of detailed studies of silence in Vietnamese culture and in intercultural contexts with Australians, since existing research tends to rely on a stereotype of Vietnamese as more silent.

There were three research questions in this study: (1) How do Vietnamese and Australians interpret silence in everyday contexts?; (2) What are their beliefs about the use and appropriateness of silence?; (3) To what extent do Vietnamese adapt their interpretations and beliefs about silence when in regular communication with Australians? A mixed methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, was adopted. Specifically, the study used a questionnaire, followed by record sheets and interviews. The 275 participants in the initial questionnaire comprised three groups: Vietnamese in Vietnam (VV), Australians in Australia (AA), and Vietnamese in Australia who had regular contact with Australians (VA).

Participants completed a survey on the likelihood of responding with silence in each of 35 situations, also providing the possible meanings of silence. Participants' views, judgments and perceptions were also identified through the use of record sheets and interviews. In the record sheets, participants described their interactions involving silence with same-culture people, except for the VA group who reported silence involving interactions with Australians. The purpose of the record sheets was to see real incidents of silence which the participants considered noteworthy. The interviews probed these issues further and also asked the VA group if and how members adapted silence-related behavior in communication with Australians.

Based on the comparison of reported likelihood of silence and speaking, the study found that contrary to the stereotype, the VV were not more likely to be silent than the AA group, indeed Australians believed they would be silent in slightly more situations than the VV. Meanwhile the VA were the most likely to be silent in only one situation. The image of the Vietnamese as more silent was therefore not supported by this study in a straightforward way.

Focusing on the interpretations of silence, this study showed that silence is more than an absence of sound. Participants supplied a range of interpretations of silence including, in order of frequency, acquiescence, disregard, avoidance, processing, courtesy, apprehension, discourtesy, displeasure, dissent, discomfort, and regret.

The results showed significant similarities among all three groups in more than one third of the surveyed situations. In a number of cases, for example dealing with strangers and/or threats of conflict, participants across all groups were likely to be silent, and interpreted silence as a means of avoidance. This study found that in many of the other 21 surveyed situations where reported likelihood of silence differed across the three groups that the interpretations of silence were highly context dependent. Surprisingly there were situations where silence had both positive and negative connotations, for example, courtesy and discourtesy, acceptance and refusal.

The interviews showed that VA participants, who had regular contact with Australians while living and studying in Australia, perceived talking as characteristic of Australians' communication style and desirable. In some circumstances, VA exhibited accommodating behavior which took the form of speaking. The extent to which VA accommodated was greatly affected by (i) their perceived beliefs about Australians, (ii) their awareness of the importance of adaptation, for example their belief they would be negatively evaluated if they did not accommodate, and (iii) their experiences of L2 failure in communication with Australians. This study presented evidence that VA convergence was a conscious strategy and most noticeable in relation to their positive attitudes to talking. Concerning divergence, the current study highlights the unwilling choice of silence of the VA in communication with Australians. Unwilling divergence was due to VA lack of English proficiency and cultural differences in communication styles between Vietnamese and Australians. VA maintenance took place when speakers had strong beliefs in their identity and communication styles, and chose to perpetuate their existing culturally determined behavior, whether involving silence or speaking. The strong evidence of VA accommodation when communicating in English helps to support the hypothesis of pragmatic transfer when VA communicating with other Vietnamese.

This study contributes to research on communication, culture and silence by adding a more nuanced understanding of the likelihood, meanings and functions of silence, specifically among Vietnamese and Australians. This lays the basis for speakers to better overcome intra- and/or intercultural problems associated with silence. The study builds awareness of the importance of accommodation in intercultural encounters, thereby promoting better Australian-Vietnamese communication.

### **Declaration by author**

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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### **Publications during candidature**

No publications

### **Publications included in this thesis**

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### **Contributions by others to the thesis**

No contributions by others

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None

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### **Keywords**

Vietnamese, Australians, Vietnamese in Australia, silence, intercultural communication, Pragmatic Transfer, Accommodation Theory, Non-verbal communication, Pragmatics

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### **List of Abbreviations Used in the Thesis**

AA	Australians in Australia
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
CA	Conversational analysis
CAT	Communication Accommodation Theory
L1	First language
L2	Second language
QUAN	Quantitative
QUAL	Qualitative
RQ	Research question
Sitn	Situation
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
VV	Vietnamese in Vietnam
VA	Vietnamese in Australia



## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### ***1.1 Introduction***

One day, I met an Australian lecturer at university. I had not known him before but we soon broke the ice. In the conversation, I told him that I was Vietnamese and an English teacher. He then said: “so you teach silent students there”. I laughed not just because of his knowledge of Vietnamese classroom behavior but also because of the fact that silence has become representative of the Vietnamese image. This view, as we will show shortly (see Section 2.3), might originate from existing literature on Vietnamese beliefs and practices involving silence, the preference for silence and/or a smile, or the plethora of popular proverbs about the appropriateness of silence in Vietnamese culture. It is inevitable that there are cultures which use silence more extensively than others (Nakane, 2012, p. 167), but how can Vietnamese and Australians be characteristically silent or talkative when such characteristics are highly dependent on specific contexts? Saville-Troike (1985) emphasizes that silence is “more context-embedded than speech, that is, more dependent on context for its interpretation” (p. 11). One of the underlying purposes of this research is to question simple blanket generalizations of Vietnamese as being more silent, particularly in comparison with Australians. If we do not pose these questions, we find ourselves rehearsing stereotypes.

#### ***1.2 Rationale and context of the study***

Surveying the existing literature, we can see that by investigating the use of silence, scholars have in fact challenged the negative image of silence by recognizing it as a beneficial element of speech. Hall’s (1959) *The Silent Language* pays particular attention to nonverbal communication, including silence. Interestingly enough, he treated silence as a component of human communication co-occurring with speech. In the works by other scholars, the silence-related phenomena are seen as “a rich communicative resource [...] for analysis (Jarworski & Sachdev, 1998, p. 273), “a matter of saying nothing and meaning something” (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985, p. 97), “having significant communicative function” (Nwoye, 1985, p. 185) and as having “almost as many functions as speech” (Nakane, 2012, p. 162). In response to these positive views on silence, there is an increasing body of research into the phenomenon of silence. In particular, research has provided copious evidence that the interpretations of silence go beyond the meaninglessness of the ‘zero linguistic’ element of Haas’ (1957) study. The dominant interpretation is that silence in interactions is meaningful and can be interpreted in terms of a particular culture or community. That is why most previous work has focused on the use of silence, its forms and meanings in one specific culture e.g., Western Apache (Basso, 1970), Igbo of Nigeria (Nwoye, 1985), Finnish (Lehtonen &

Sajavaara, 1985), Old Order Amish (Enninger, 1987), Japanese (Lebra, 1987), Akan (Agyekum, 2002), U.S. (Bruneau, 2008), Native American (Covarrubias, 2007) and Indigenous Australian (Mushin & Gardner, 2009). Silence is also interpreted as a common ‘problem’ in intercultural classroom settings, predominantly that of Asian students in English-speaking cultures (Jones, 1999; Liu, 2002; Nakane, 2007). Some studies approach silence from a cross-cultural perspective, contrasting culturally based perceptions of silence e.g., in Japan and the United States (Hasegawa & Gudykunst, 1998), in various ethnic groups (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and African), in Vietnam and Australia (Yates & Nguyen, 2012) and within the United States (Franks, 2000). Overall, as has been attested by these studies, differences in the cultural interpretation of silence cannot be neglected.

Studies on silence as nonverbal communication suggest that not only is silence culturally determined, but it is also context-embedded and research in this area needs to: reveal the potential meanings and roles of silence in everyday contexts beyond the classroom (Jaworski, 1997; Nakane, 2007); investigate silent behavior in more than one culture to see cross-cultural differences in the meaning of silence (Basso, 1970; Samarin, 1965, Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985); analyze communicative strategies to adapt silence-related behavior when in communication with other cultures, and use an empirical multiple perspective to demonstrate the understandings of silence (Gudykunst, 2000; Nakane, 2012).

Although silence research has attracted much interest, no in-depth study beyond the educational context is available to refine the understanding of silence-related behavior of Vietnamese, particularly in comparison with Australians. A comprehensive investigation of the academic literature on silence in communication (see Section 2.3.2) reveals that there are only six authors who mention silence between Australian and Vietnamese culture. Furthermore, it should be noted that none of these texts is fully devoted to silence, apart from the context of the classroom. Three papers by Nguyễn (1994), Lê (1996) and Fahey (2000) discuss silence incidentally. Other authors, Byrne and FitzGerald (1996) talk about silence in a training course in which the Vietnamese practice of silent listening occupies only a small part. There is clearly a need for much more empirical research in this area. Therefore, the present research aims to break ground in investigating Vietnamese and Australians’ likelihood and interpretations of silence in everyday interaction. The study uses a mixed methods approach to provide systematic and critical descriptions and analyses of silence.

It is now important here to see what ‘silence’ is in this study. The first definition of silence given in the New Oxford Dictionary of English is “the absence of sound or noise” (Pearsal, 1998, p. 1733). This absence often signifies lack of, or negation of, information as well as failure to produce



speech. Nevertheless, Thompson (2004) paraphrases Jakobson (1939): “silence is a kind of nothingness, an absence of an overt linguistics element, but not the absence of meaning”. Thus, it appears that in many instances, silence is better defined as an avoidance of using talk as a way of communication. Accordingly, in the current study, the term ‘silence’ is seen as the absence of talk from at least one interlocutor in a conversation in a situation where talk might be expected (see Section 2.1). Defined in this way, silence can be recognized by the interlocutors, thus is seen as part of an interactional communicative structure.

### ***1.3 Aim and significance of the study***

The aim of the study is to understand the ways in which silence is interpreted by Vietnamese and Australians and the cultural differences and similarities in the meanings given to silence. It also aims to see if and how Vietnamese adapt silence-related behavior in communication with Australians.

The current study will provide an in-depth analysis and comparison of significant cultural similarities and differences in the interpretations and meanings given to silence by Vietnamese and Australians, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the use of silence. The study expands our understanding of silence usage and interpretations by adding a new context, Vietnam (in comparative relation with Australia), to silence research. Practically, the study will test the blanket generalizations about Vietnamese as being more silent. The project will therefore contribute to a better understanding of the meanings of silence in communication, specifically among Vietnamese and Australians. This lays the basis for speakers to better overcome intra- and/or intercultural problems associated with silence. The study is also useful not only for researchers interested in communication, culture and silence in general, but also for those who study and work and communicate in an intercultural environment.

### ***1.4 Research design characteristics***

This work is an explorative study of interpretations and reported use of silence as nonverbal communication by Vietnamese and Australians. The study also investigates the accommodation of the Vietnamese in Australia with respect to these matters.

#### ***1.4.1 Research questions***

Based on the purpose of the research, the study will answer the following research questions:

1. How do Vietnamese and Australians interpret silence in everyday contexts?
2. What beliefs do they have about the use and appropriateness of silence?

3. To what extent do Vietnamese adapt their interpretations and beliefs about silence when in regular communication with Australians?

The first question examines the meanings that Vietnamese and Australians attribute to silence in particular social interactions. The second question investigates how likely Vietnamese and Australians are to be silent in various situations, and the attitudes they express about silence in these contexts. The third question studies differences between the responses of Vietnamese in their home culture and Vietnamese living in Australia.

In Chapter 2 a detailed review of studies on functions and meanings of silence in relation to Vietnamese and Australian communication preferences provides the rationale for these research questions. The questions themselves suggest important characteristics of the research design. Firstly, they suggest that the investigation requires participants of contrasting cultural and geographical backgrounds. To be specific, the participants used in this study consisted of Vietnamese in Vietnam (VV), Australians in Australia (AA) and Vietnamese in Australia (VA). Secondly, the research questions (RQ) demand the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. For example, to answer RQ1, both quantitative and qualitative approaches should be used to see how Vietnamese and Australians interpret silence in specific situations. To see the participants' beliefs concerning the appropriateness of silence, and their actual behavior involving silence in their daily lives, the data should be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively (RQ2). Similarly, RQ3 will require both data as it requires the numerical data and data on participants' judgment, views and beliefs involving silence in the course of communication with Australians. A mixed methods approach is considered necessary for the current study.

#### *1.4.2 Participants*

In this study, both Vietnamese and Australian perspectives will be investigated to reveal the extent to which they are similar or differ in surveyed situations. The participants are divided into three groups i.e., Vietnamese in Vietnam (VV), Australians in Australia (AA), and Vietnamese in Australia who had regular contact with Australians (VA).

The three groups of participants are defined as follows: (1) Vietnamese are those who were born, live in and were educated in Vietnam, and use Vietnamese as their first and strongest language, (2) Australians are those living in Australia who identify primarily as Australian, speak English as their first and strongest language and were principally educated in Australia, and (3) Vietnamese in Australia are those who were born and were educated in Vietnam. They have been living or studying in Australia for at least two years.

### *1.4.3 Research design: mixed methods*

The study employs mixed methods to explore Vietnamese and Australian interpretations of silence and the cultural differences involving the phenomenon. Recent scholars discussing this methodology, including Creswell and Clark (2007), Greene (2007), Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), highlight that researchers need to collect, analyse data, and integrate the findings using both quantitative and qualitative methods in an attempt to bring about multi-level analysis of complex issues, and improve validity. In the present study, the three data collection instruments are questionnaire, record sheets and interviews. While the questionnaire was used to elicit the uses and meanings of silence by Vietnamese and Australians, the record sheets aimed to get their incident data in interactions when there was silence. The interviews were grounded in the aim of looking for participants' views and beliefs in using and responding to silence. Part of the VA interview data helped to see how the VA accommodate silence-related behavior when in communication with Australians. Further details about mixed methods and how it is adopted in this study are provided in Chapter Three.

### *1.5 Thesis organisation*

The thesis comprises seven chapters. **Chapter One** presents the background, the rationale, the aim, and the significance of the study, while **Chapter Two** reviews the relevant literature that underpins this research, including forms, and functions of silence in cross-cultural and intercultural communication studies in general and Vietnamese and Australian cultures with respect to silence and talk in particular. The research questions and methodology are established on the basis of the review of literature. **Chapter Three** deals with research design and methodology. The use of a mixed methods approach, specifically a questionnaire, record sheets and an in-depth interview designed to achieve an enhanced understanding of beliefs of silence among Vietnamese and Australians are clarified. Details about participants in this study, the instruments and the data collection procedures are presented in this chapter. In **Chapter Four**, the researcher reports on processes of ensuring that the data are reliable and valid before further statistical analyses. In discussing this, the analysis for inter-rater reliability will be provided. There is a particular focus on the method of data analysis i.e., grounded approach for analyzing qualitative survey data. **Chapter Five** is devoted to the analyses of the questionnaire survey asking for the likelihood and interpretations of silence. The Likert data and qualitative data are presented employing visual aids such as easy-to-understand graphs as part of a more extensive statistical analysis about how these two data sets intertwine. Upon finding the situations where the likelihood of silence was found to be similar or different among three groups, the chapter examines participants' perceptions of silence in comparison with silence likelihood and interpretations across groups. Three specific categories are

also analyzed to reflect how each of the group differs on the surveyed situations. The discussions of these categories highlight the emerging patterns of the closeness between Vietnamese Australians' and Australians' results and demonstrate that this topic requires further investigation. **Chapter Six** begins by showing how the findings in Chapter Five relate to pragmatic transfer. It then explores parallels between the pragmatic transfer hypothesized to explain the survey data and communication accommodation theory, which is used to explain relevant comments made in the record sheets and interviews. In the final chapter, **Chapter Seven**, responses to the research questions are provided, as well as the study's limitations and future directions.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the relevant literature that underpins this research. The first section explores existing definitions of silence and leads into the definition of silence used for the present study. The second section presents interpretations of silence in previous studies to provide a general understanding of silence, its functions and meanings in specific cultures. The third section narrows the focus to silence and talk between Vietnamese and Australians. This is discussed in relation to the appropriateness of silence in Vietnamese culture and to discussions of preferences for silence or talk between Vietnamese and Australians. Based on the findings of previous research and the need to generate more knowledge about silence between Vietnamese and Australians, the research questions and methodology are established.

#### *2.1 What is silence?*

Defining silence is a complicated and challenging matter because different researchers conceive of silence in a variety of ways. Within linguistics, silence is often seen as a linguistic zero without any meaning. It is only recognized for its boundary-marking function at the beginning and ending of utterances and is traditionally negatively defined as merely the absence of speech (Saville-Troike, 1985). In this way, silence is usually defined in relation to sound. For example, Bruneau (1973) identifies three major types of silence: 1) Psycholinguistic silence, 2) Interactive silence, and 3) Sociocultural silence. While the first type, including hesitations, stammering, and stuttering etc., is the shortest, the last two types are longer context-bound stops in conversation. They are pausal interruptions in dialogue, conversation, discussion, or debate and relate to “the characteristic manner in which entire social and cultural orders refrain from speech and manipulate both psycholinguistic and interactive silences” (p. 36). This is in line with a collection of papers by Tannen and Saville-Troike (1985) that also stresses that silence can include (from the smallest in length to the broadest most meaningful one): 1) unnoticed cessation of sound, 2) pausing (or hesitation, or at turn taking in conversation), 3) complete absence of sound from one interlocutor, and 4) marked and meaningful silence (p. xvii). However, when unnoticed cessation of sound and very short pauses are considered instances of silence, there may be no meaning at all, as brief moments which occur within and between turns are likely to be automatic before the next sequence of talk. Blimes (1994) and Jaworski and Sachdev (1998) also point out that silence in talk is relevant because conversation cannot consist entirely of talk. Nakane (2007) investigates silence in terms of eight levels, from micro units to macro units: 1) intra- and inter-turn pauses, 2) silent responses, 3) being silenced and silencing, 4) not participating in specific participant structures, 5)

not participating in interaction on specific topics, 6) not taking certain speaker roles, 7) not performing certain speech acts, 8) overall infrequency of participation (p. 198). The first two levels of this classification parallel Tannen and Saville-Troike's first three levels of silence. The last six levels relate more closely to situations in which talking is expected.

In conversation analysis, silence is also defined as gaps between turns. This is demonstrated in the model for the mechanism underlying changes of speaker in conversation proposed by Harvey Sack, Emanuel Schegoff and Gail Jefferson (1974). According to them, any silence in conversation may be seen as significant. Even when no one is speaking, the silence may be assigned to one or another of the interactants. They argue:

Talk can be continued or discontinued. It is continuous when, for a sequence of transition-relevance places, it continues (by another speaker or by the same continuing) across a transition-relevance place, with a minimization of gap and overlap. Discontinuities occur when at some transition-relevance place a current speaker has stopped, no speaker starts (or continues), and the ensuing space of non-talk constitutes itself as more than a gap – not a gap, but a lapse. (p. 714).

Working on American English and Dutch conversations, Jefferson (1989) defines silence by proposing a 'standard maximum' silence of approximately one second in conversation. However, when she times the silences in actual conversations, she finds that silences in conversations vary considerably compared to silences in non-conversational activity (e.g., silent reading or silence when writing down information) and that such silence may last up to four seconds. One of the causes of those variations is the pace of speaking: other studies have shown that the 'standard maximum' silence may be extended if the speaking speed is slower (Mushin & Gardner, 2009). These two authors assert that the length of silences in Australian Aboriginal talk-in-interaction is typically much greater than one second and long periods of silence are used as an ordinary part of speech. Clearly, by timing a silence to see its length, researchers wish to see how much silence is comfortable in interaction. The implication of studies by Sack et al., Jefferson and Mushin and Gardner is that silence, understood as the absence of speech, tends to vary in length depending on the culture.

Silence as described above is wide-ranging, and is often defined as the absence of sound, and described in terms of length in cessation of speech, or absence of speech. In this study, these varying definitions proposed by previous researchers are incorporated into a list of phenomena (Table 2.1), and it is asserted that **silence is generally understood as the absence of talk from at least one interlocutor in a conversation in a situation where talk might be expected or where talk is a possible response. This absence of talk can be recognized by the interlocutors.** This

project will adopt this as the definition of the study and will neither define silence as simply the absence of sound nor state the length of silence.

Table 2.1. *Phenomena of Silence in the Academic Literature*

What is silence?	Selected references
Silence includes omission of morphemes and words in syntactic structures.	Haas (1957),
Silence includes pausing, hesitation, stammering and stuttering in conversation.	Bruneau (1973), Saville-Troike (1985)
Silence is the gap between turns of about one second, in a conversation (the stops in the middle of talk).	Sacks et al. (1974)
Silence is "...a matter of saying nothing and meaning something" (p.97).	Tannen (1985)
Silence may last more than one second, up to four seconds.	Jefferson (1989)
Silence refers to gaps which occur in dialogues, conversations, and interactions between interlocutors.	O’Keeffe (1991)
Silence is the absence of talk.	Blimes (1994)
Silence refers to the avoidance of turn taking in conversation.	Dendrinis and Pedro (1997)
Silence is the moment when talk is expected and someone does not say anything.	Spencer-Oatey & Xing (2005)
Silence is not speaking/not answering/not responding.	Nakane (2007)
Silence is when one person intentionally does not say anything.	Kurzson (2007)
Silence includes utterances consisting only of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or words such as um, ah, uh, mmhm, okay, or yeah.	Walker, Drew, and Local (2011)

The advantage of defining silence as the absence of talk is that silence is interpreted as part of an interactional communicative structure. It serves the structuring discourse and does not “deny or terminate the interaction [...], and so cooperatively invites interpretations” (Saville-Troike, 1985, p. 9). Silence in this case differs from the simple absence of sound when perhaps no interaction and/or communication is going on e.g., the silence of a person in the middle of desert or the silence of a person alone in a room. It also excludes the omission of morphemes and words in syntactic structures (ellipsis) (Haas, 1957). Seen in this way, silence is not a kind of linguistic element without any meaning, but rather a meaningful element of interaction (Basso, 1970; Bruneau, 1973; Jensen, 1973; Johannesen, 1974). Defining silence as the absence of talk relates to an understanding of how silence is implicated in talk by Vietnamese and Australians in communication. Specifically, four types of silence that the research aim to examine are: 1) silence as a moment when talk is

expected and someone does not say anything (H. Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2005), 2) silence as not speaking/not answering/not responding (Nakane, 2007), 3) silence when one person intentionally does not say anything (Kurzon, 2007), and 4) silence as the avoidance of turn taking in conversation (Dendrinios & Pedro, 1997)

The definition adopted for this project does not rely primarily on the length of silence because this is context-dependant and varies culturally. Tannen (1985) shows that short silences (pauses) or longer silences can be distinguished only with reference to people's expectations. Therefore, one person's silence can be interpreted as a pause by another person and vice-versa.

## ***2.2 Interpretations of silence in previous studies***

There is a significant body of literature addressing silence in communication. The ethnographic work of Basso (1970) on the Western Apache people is pioneering in teasing out situations where people are silent. In this study, he reported six types of situations in which people in Apache society 'refrain from speech' i.e., when "meeting strangers", when "courting", when "children come home", when "getting cussed out", when "being with people who are sad" and when "being with someone for whom they sing". The study suggests that the absence of verbal communication is closely related to certain social situations. Such acts of silence in Basso's study are a "response to uncertainty and unpredictability in social relations" (p. 277). That is to say, in those circumstances when uncertainty and ambiguity are involved in the social relationships of focal participants, silence is the appropriate behavior and has greater value than speech. Agyekum's 2002 study explored how the Akan use and value silence. The Akan of Ghana use silence as an ideal tool in certain communicative situations "when the topic is particular delicate, a taboo, or when the situation is emotionally loaded" (Agyekum, 2002, p. 49). Agyekum states that silence "serves to organize and regulate the social relationships among members of the Akan speech community with regards to position, status, gender, and age" (p. 34). In Agyekum's study, there are five specific areas where silence is found more appropriate than speech. Such situations include death and bereavement, religion and rituals, initial courtship, borrowing and "silence at the palace". "Silence at the palace" is used to show respect to authorities. Similarly, in a study by Nwoye (1985) of the Igbo of Nigeria, the use of silence is demanded not only in ritual contexts but also in their hierarchical relationships. The implication of the studies by Basso, Agyekum and Nwoye is that silence has significant social communicative functions. The choices of silence as identified in their studies are valued as an appropriate behavior in communication.

Clearly, different cultures use silence in different ways. Many researchers argue that the meaning of silence varies and is dependent on context, including cultural context, for its



interpretations. There are many kinds of meanings of silence such as anxiety, ignorance, confusion, hesitation and more. Saville-Troike (2006) states: “The meanings they [silences] carry are generally affective in nature, and typically connotative rather than denotative” (p. 380). According to Bruneau (2008), Americans will often use silence to secure or gain information; to indicate their mistrust; to show deference, to show maintenance of social roles and to help facilitate conversations. There are instances when silence acts as a ‘natural way of being’. For example, Lebra (1987) investigated the cultural significance of silence in Japanese communication. She highlighted four meanings: truthfulness – silence for showing true inner expression; social discretion – silence for creating relational harmony; embarrassment; and defiance – while avoiding making a direct negative statement. Even if not all Japanese silences have these meanings, the virtue of silence is still an important value in Japanese society: “In the Japanese culture, silence is golden and is generally associated with wisdom and power[...] The rationale here is that what you don’t say cannot hurt anyone” (Franks, 2000, p. 6). In certain cultures, silence helps in “exhibiting a social model of personhood for which this is a valued, respected, and natural practice” (Carbaugh & Berry, 2006, p. 203). Carbaugh and Berry conducted an ethnographic study of Finnish communication codes. Cultural insiders interpreted silence as a “Natural way to be”, and “Being undisturbed in one’s thoughts”. In Finnish social life, the scholars found that people need to be quiet in certain circumstances to formulate thoughts, to focus and to reflect: “Knowing what is being said without words, and how to interpret this in a good way, is essential to understanding this natural way of being” (p. 215).

### 2.2.1 *Silence in cross-cultural studies*

Cross-cultural studies on silence can reveal variations in expectations and perceptions between specific cultures. Some authors have pointed out differences across cultures in the normative lengths of silence that can lead to stereotyping e.g., Lehtonen and Sajavaara (1985) on Finnish, Enninger (1987) on Old Order Amish, and Scollon and Wong-Scollon (1990) in relation to Athabaskan and English. For example, in research titled *The Silent Finn* by Lehtonen and Sajavaara, negative stereotypes of the Finns’ frequent use of silence are discussed. In Finns’ interpretations of silence in cross-cultural communication, silence can be ‘*active participation*’, ‘*silent participation*’ or ‘*entire withdrawal from the discussion*’. As Lehtonen and Sajavaara remark, “A Finnish listener’s silence or the absence of verbal signals for active listening may result in a foreign interactant’s inferring that the Finnish interlocutor is not paying attention, or that the Finn is indifferent, sullen, or even hostile” (p. 196). The study shows that the Finns’ rate of speech in the discourse is not very different from that of Swedes and English speakers. However, silence is

socially acceptable which is different to American culture where silence is not tolerated. The authors argue:

Communicatively meaningful silence may result from a speaker's intentional switch from the verbal to the nonverbal communication channel: silence can make up a silent speech act and thus becomes the message itself or part of it. In many cases, it can be the silence that contains the most important cues for the meaning of the message. Much can be said by keeping quiet. Silences of this type are often clearly culture-specific in their use and meaning (p. 199).

Scollon and Wong-Scollon found, that in relation to between-turn timings at transition relevant places i.e., points where speakers may change in conversation, Athabaskans face communication difficulties which result from even relatively small timing differences with English speakers.

However, these differences can still lead to negative stereotyping:

Generally speaking, Athabaskans allow a slightly longer-pause between sentences than do English speakers. The difference is probably not more than half a second in length, but it has an important effect on interethnic communication...The length of pause that the Athabaskan takes while expecting to continue is just about the length of pause the English speaker takes in exchanging turns. If an Athabaskan has in mind a series of sentences to say, it is most likely that at the end of the first one the English speaker will think that he has finished because of the length of the pause and will begin speaking (Scollon and Wong-Scollon, 1990, p. 273).

Scollon and Wong-Schollon posit that due to these different interaction styles, both the Athabaskan and the English speaker negatively evaluate each other. They emphasized that "Much of this misunderstanding is the result of something like a one half second difference in the timing of conversational pauses, but it can result in strong stereotypical responses to the opposite ethnic group" (p. 273).

Other studies emphasized that there can be different beliefs about the necessity for talk e.g., Hasegawa and Gudykunst (1998). Hasegawa and Gudykunst investigated the uses of and attitudes towards silence in Japan and the United States. Participants of the study were 375 students from a university in the western United States and 166 students from a university in Japan. The participants filled in a questionnaire asking them to respond to questions about their use of silence with same-sex, strangers and with close friends. The result shows that there are five emerging factors: (1) use of silence to avoid communicating; (2) negative view of silence; (3) strategic use of silence; (4) others' silence creates uncertainty; and (5) positive view of talking. The results indicated that the

Japanese used silence more than Americans do. Unlike the Americans, the Japanese reported a negative view of silence between strangers. However, in close friends' relationships, there is no difference between the Japanese and the American view. Hasegawa and Gudykunst conclude that "Japanese make clear and sharp distinctions between in-groups and outgroups, but Americans do not draw a sharp distinction between ingroups and outgroups except when ethnicity is involved" (p. 678).

This study does not support the stereotypes of speakers from Japan and United States. They show that attitudes to silence may vary.

### 2.2.2 *Silence of Asian students in English speaking countries*

Let us now move to the interpretations of silence in the institutional context of the classroom where silence has received considerable attention in the literature. The phenomenon of silence of Asian students in English-speaking classes is commonly noted (Jones, 1999; Liu, 2002; Nakane, 2007; Yates & Nguyen, 2012). As mentioned by Liu (2002), who conducted a multi-case ethnographic study of 20 Asian students in a large Midwestern university, Asian students' silence in American classrooms is closely related to multiple factors i.e., cognitive factors, pedagogical factors, affective factors, sociocultural factors, and linguistic factors. Jones (1999) explained the lack of active participation by many students from Asian cultures in academic group discussions. The reasons included poor language, lack of general confidence, and most importantly cultural background. 'Silent' students are not necessarily unable to orally interact with native speakers, rather they are "unaware of the culture-specific discourse conventions assumed by native speakers in academic discussion" (p. 257). To solve this problem, Jones suggests that more courses on participatory and interactive skills should be introduced to raise students' awareness of host culture, its interactive norms and patterns. In turn, host teachers need to understand non-native speakers' cultural background and "accustomed ways of learning and interacting" in order to encourage their participation.

Research by Nakane in intercultural classrooms (2005) showed that Asian students, i.e., Japanese in Australian classrooms, are often found to be 'silent' or 'reticent'. She mentions *individual nomination, open floor, and bidding* as ways of allocating students' turns, respectively the appointing of a participant in classroom e.g., through a teacher calling on a particular student; a student volunteering to respond to a question or other invitation to take the floor; and "self-selected turns without any explicit cues for participation" (p. 79). The most prevalent uses of silences were silent responses and a general lack of voluntary participation. Perhaps Nakane's most important argument is that cultural difference is not the only reason for silence; the immediate local conditions and the context in each classroom are decisive features of silence behavior which should be taken

into consideration more in the research of intercultural communication. Undoubtedly, silence in this study is partly the result of social distance, a mark of power imbalance between teachers and students. In a later paper in 2006, Nakane confirms that Japanese students' silence is commonly used to preserve their image, but is, however, negatively evaluated by Australian lecturers. The Japanese behavior tends to be quite different from that of Australian students who employ verbal strategies and more easily establish rapport with lecturers. She claims that among the Japanese students "avoidance of voluntary participation can be a way of maintaining positive face of the self, while avoidance of criticism and disagreement can be a classic 'Don't do the FTA's [Face Threatening Acts]' strategy to save the hearer's face" (p. 1831).

A study specifically focusing on Vietnamese university students in Australia also associated students' lack of participation with questions of language proficiency and culture (Yates & Nguyen, 2012). Yates and Nguyen conducted a qualitative investigation into the perspectives of Vietnamese on communication while studying in Australia. Ten postgraduate students from Vietnam studying at an Australian university were interviewed to gain an understanding of their difficulties, perceptions and beliefs regarding communication with Australian partners and the reasons for these. The findings showed that although Vietnamese students were aware that oral interaction was expected in their Australian university classes, their actual behaviour did not always conform to this model. According to Yates and Nguyen, English language factors and the differences between the cultures of learning prevented Vietnamese students from forming and exchanging their ideas in class. Yates and Nguyen explained,

It is not only what they [Vietnamese] can't do in English that holds them back from more active spoken participation, but also a range of cultural influences which discourage volubility, student initiations in class and public challenges to seniors, and which value spoken contributions as testaments of ability and achievement rather than as tools of learning (p. 30).

This rare study of Vietnamese students in Australian university classrooms, although it confirmed the image of Vietnamese as more reluctant speakers compared with their Australian counterparts, suggests that the issue of Vietnamese silence in the intercultural classrooms can only be fully solved with the active involvement of both students and teachers regarding language proficiency and patterns of explicit discussion.

A study by Liu (2002) highlighted the silence of Chinese students in American classrooms. Liu argues that Chinese students' silence is not the result of a lack of communicative competence but the result of cultural practice in Chinese communication norms. For example, in classroom settings, "students' silence is expected and encouraged as a sign of respect for their teachers and

classmates in Chinese culture” (p. 47). However, Americans can interpret Chinese students’ silence as a sign of passiveness; something negative.

The mismatch in the interpretations of silence of Asian students in English-speaking countries could cause misunderstandings in terms of classroom behavior. It is important to consider the cultural background of the one who uses silence in interpreting their silence to generate more positive attitudes that may lead to better communication styles.

Table 2.2 below summarizes some of the previous key studies on interpretation of silence in various cultures. Three main points emerge from previous studies: 1) silence goes beyond the individual level of interpretation. It is determined not only by the participants but also by the cultural and situational context, 2) cross-cultural studies on silence can reveal in detail differing expectations and perceptions of silence, and 3) no study explores Vietnamese and Australians’ use of and interpretations of conversational silence.

Table 2.2. *The Summary of Previous Studies of Silence*

Study	Issues examined	Culture	Method	Findings
Basso (1970)	Silence in the Western Apache	the Western Apache	Ethnography	- Six situations when Apache ‘refrain from speech’ i.e., when “meeting strangers”, when “courting”, when “children come home”, when “getting cussed out”, when “being with people who are sad” and when “being with someone for whom they sing”.
Lehtonen and Sajavaara (1985)	The negative stereotypes of the Finns’ frequent use of silence	Finnish	Discourse analysis	- Finns’ silence is interpreted variously as ‘active participation’, ‘silent participation’ or ‘entire withdrawal from the discussion’. - Silence is acceptable socially in Finnish culture.
Lebra (1987)	Silence in Japan	Japanese	Narrative	- Four functions of silence: truthfulness, social discretion, embarrassment; and defiance.
O’Keeffe (1991)	Functions and meanings of silence	American classroom culture	- videotaping the classrooms - observations - interview	- Silence is present actively in communication. - Instances and types of silence found in the classroom. - Achievement level (teachers and students) does not necessarily effect the successful interpretation of silence but a lack of shared rules among the participants does.
Scollon and	The normative lengths of between-turn	Native Americans and	Conversation Analysis	- Athabaskans face communication difficulties which result from even

Wong-Scollon (1990)	timings	English speakers in Canada		relatively small timing differences with respect to English speakers and these differences can lead to negative stereotyping.
Giles et al. (1992)	Beliefs about the necessity for talk	Chinese and American	Questionnaire study	- When talking with strangers, Chinese had a significantly higher 'tolerance for silence' than their American respondents did.
Hasegawa and Gudykunst (1998)	Uses of and attitudes towards silence	Japanese and American	Questionnaire survey	- Japanese use silence more than Americans do. - Japanese reported a negative view of silence between strangers. - In close friends' relationships, there is not much difference in views between Japanese and American.
Liu (2002)	Silence of Chinese students in American classrooms	Chinese and American	Case study	- Chinese students' silence is not the result of a lack of communicative competence but the result of Chinese communication norms. - Americans interpret Chinese students' silence as a sign of passiveness; something negative.
Agykum (2002)	Communicative functions of silence	Akan of Ghana	Discourse analysis	- Five areas where silence is found more appropriate than speech: death and bereavement, religion and rituals, initial courtship, borrowing and showing respect to authorities.
Nakane (2007)	The silence of Japanese students in Australian university classrooms	Japanese and Australians	Observation, Videotaping and Interview	- Japanese in Australian classrooms are often found to be 'silent' or 'reticent'. Their silence is commonly used to preserve their image, but is, however, negatively evaluated by Australian lecturers. - The most prevalent use of silences are silent responses and a general lack of voluntary participation.
Bruneau (2008)	How Americans use silence to communicate	Americans	Narrative	- Americans will often use silence to secure or gain information; to indicate their mistrust; to show deference, to show maintenance of social roles and to help facilitate conversations.
Yates and Nguyen (2012)	The silence of Vietnamese students in Australian university classrooms	Vietnamese and Australians	Interview	- Vietnamese silence in Australian classrooms due to language proficiency and different culture of learning. - Beliefs and perceptions of silence by Vietnamese were revealed.

In general, research has indicated that silence occurs in all cultures that have been studied, however, it was found to vary in interpretations and social roles.

### ***2.3 Silence and Vietnamese and Australian interaction styles***

This section explores beliefs about silence and talk in Vietnamese culture (both in classroom cultures and social interactions). It begins with a discussion of reasons for the Vietnamese preference for silence and/or a smile over verbal communication. Beliefs about Vietnamese and Australian interactional styles are then presented and questioned. The section argues that though silence is an important and valued part of communication between Vietnamese, it can be a barrier to their intercultural interaction with Australians.

#### ***2.3.1 The appropriateness of silence in Vietnamese culture***

For part of my life, I was educated in an Australian classroom culture that values speaking as a form of active participation. This is quite different from Vietnamese culture because most Vietnamese value classroom silence as an appropriate university classroom behavior. In class, students just take notes and listen attentively. In most cases, when students are given a chance to speak, they either keep silent using gestures such as nodding, a smile, or produce utterances such as “hmm”. Porter, Samovar and McDaniel (2007) trace this back to the Buddhist tradition, a prominent religion in Asian countries which values meditation and consequently led to the incorporation of quiet time into the school curriculum. As they argue, silence plays an important role in the Vietnamese university classroom because in the Buddhist tradition knowledge truth and wisdom come through silence, whereas this is arguably not so for an individualist country like America or Australia where the desirability of having students speak up in class is more strongly felt. Thus, silence in Western university classrooms such as Australian ones can be interpreted as frustrating and hostile when a student does not respond to teachers when expected to do so (Jaworksi, 1993).

Silence is seen as a virtue in Vietnamese culture and people are encouraged to act accordingly. “People with Vietnamese background do not express feelings of thankfulness or apology by verbal expressions such as ‘thank you’ or ‘I am sorry’, but by non-verbal [means] through silence or a smile” (Goldman 2009, p. 6). Furthermore, hiding feelings, preserving face and being afraid of losing face all prevent Vietnamese people from directness. Indirect verbal messages or silence are often used to promote respect for hierarchy, social/interpersonal harmony and face.

Confucianism has permeated Vietnamese culture for centuries and continues to have a strong impact on the social behavior of Asians (Cheng, 1990; Yum, 1988; Zhang, Lin, Nonaka, & Beon, 2005) including the Vietnamese (Florence & Jealous, 2003; D. L. Nguyen, 1980; Nhung, 2008). Confucianism emphasizes that people should be hesitant in their speech if they do not want to feel

ashamed when they cannot live up to what they say (Nhung, 2008). Jandt (2007) asserts that “In the Confucian context, silence, not talking, is a virtue” (p. 111). Furthermore, Confucianism is a doctrine of social hierarchies which defines the status quo among members of a social group. This means that people will feel uncomfortable if they do not know the status of the people they are talking with. Once the status is defined, *respect*, the corner-stone of interpersonal relationships, needs to be shown (Dung, 2010; Holmes, 2008). Respect can be conveyed by using appropriate terms of address. Yet, in Vietnamese culture, it is mostly expressed by non-verbal behavior. Hunt (2002) points out that to show respect, Vietnamese people often engage in prescribed behaviors such as avoiding direct eye contact and affective expression, remaining silent and showing attentive listening when speaking to someone older or an authoritative figure, avoiding interrupting, talking back or questioning because “asking questions or disagreeing with an authoritative speaker is like challenging the senior person’s social status” (Hunt, 2002, p. 115) which is seen to be rude in Vietnamese culture. Liem (1980) asserts that in the workplace context, “Vietnamese employees do not voice opinions to their bosses, but rather listen to orders” (p. 13). Again, silence to show respect towards the addressee is the appropriate behavior which is often formally applied in Vietnamese culture.

The Vietnamese value interpersonal harmony (Nguyễn, 1994; D. L. Nguyen, 1994). To maintain a harmonious relationship, Vietnamese will try to avoid conflict and direct confrontation. It is impolite and rude in Vietnamese culture to give a direct refusal or negative answer (Smith & Pham, 1996). That is why “questions can be left unanswered in a natural way. Likewise periods of silence in a conversation are not unusual” (D. L. Nguyen, 1980, p.12). Creating harmony, not discord, also lies in the concept of face.

Saving face, an individual public image, is very important to Vietnamese (Dung, 2002; Fahey, 2000; Khuc, 2006; McHugh, 1999; Nhung, 2007a, 2007b; Smith & Pham, 1996). The Vietnamese have an expression: “thà chết còn hơn bị mất mặt” [It is better to die than to lose face]. For this reason, it is all the more important to think carefully before saying something. What happens if one speaks imprudently? You might lose face or more seriously cause others to lose face, and thus damage relationships. Perhaps for this reason, a smile together with silence is a proper Vietnamese response in most situations in which verbal expression is not needed and not appropriate (Goldman, 2009; D. L. Nguyen, 1980, 1994). “Smiling can show agreement, embarrassment, disbelief, mild disagreement, appreciation or apology” (Goldman, 2009, p. 6). Besides, silence as a way of communicating in not answering a question, or not expressing criticism is a polite way to avoid confrontation and disagreement, thus saving face.



A logical conclusion that can be drawn is that Vietnamese or Asians use silences extensively which consequently leads to them making a greater effort to understand each other, leaving a gap in communication when in contact with Westerners. D. L. Nguyen (1980) stresses that

In Vietnam one thinks very carefully before speaking. The American style of 'speaking one's mind' is thus misunderstood, the Vietnamese listener looking for meanings not present – to be looked for and perhaps 'found' [...] and much emotional and mental effort must be put forth to understand a quiet individual. (p. 12)

Clearly, Vietnamese believe that meanings can be sensed even if not put into words. Their silence at a well-chosen moment can speak volumes to preserve harmony, save face or promote the respect of hierarchy.

Vietnamese communication is predominantly oral, as opposed to print, as the result of a rural based society (Fahey, 2000). One area of some concern is proverbs. Proverbs are used to transmit culture orally to the next generation, and many of these relate to the positive value of silence. As Zormeier and Samovar (2000) note, "discover the meaning of the proverb and you will understand something of what is important to its user" (p. 225).

The Vietnamese world view is mainly influenced by Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism (D. L. Nguyen, 1980). Although each religion teaches people how to live somewhat differently, all value silence as a source of wisdom which dictates behavior in general and communicative style in particular. Vietnamese Taoism is derived from the doctrine of Lao Tsu. In this doctrine, people should act according to the two elements Yin (negative) and Yang (positive). Lao Tsu directs the Vietnamese people to look for pleasure in nature, quietness and a peaceful unworried mind (D. L. Nguyen, 1980). In Taoism, there is an array of sayings such as "To be always talking is against nature", "One who speaks does not know" and so forth. It is thus a belief in Vietnamese culture that a talkative person cannot act appropriately or do what he/she says and is considered a 'show-off' or insincere.

Buddhism teaches the Vietnamese to seek happiness after life in Nirvana, free from the vicious circle of life and death. This is done essentially through meditation, when the individual is communicating with himself or herself in silence. A well-known saying is "im lặng là vàng" [Silence is golden]. Although this translation sounds the same as a very well known proverb in English, it represents the specific cultural practices of Vietnamese who treasure nonverbal expression.

In Vietnamese culture, many other proverbs like this advise listening rather than speaking. Consequently, talk in general appears to be regarded as less important than silence. Some examples include:

- "Há miệng mắc quai" [Disasters result from the mouth]/"More words, more mistakes].

- “Uốn lưỡi bảy lần trước khi nói” [Bend the tongue seven times before speaking out/Think twice before speaking].

- “Biết thì thưa thớt, không biết thì dựa cột mà nghe” [Speak only when asked to and answer only when beckoned to]

- “Ăn có nhai, nói có nghĩ” [Eating needs chewing, speaking needs deep thinking before opening the mouth].

- “Người khôn ăn nói nửa chừng. Để cho kẻ dại nửa mừng nửa lo” [The wise man talks less, speaking half of what he wants to say. This lets the fool be half happy half worried].

- “Người im lặng là người khôn” [A silent man is a wise one].

- “Chồng giận thì vợ bớt lời. Cơm sôi nhỏ lửa biết đời nào khê” [When the husband gets angry, it is better for the wife to keep silent. Boiling rice won't be burnt if we reduce the heat].

The value of silence in Vietnam derives from the belief that the wise and talented people are modest in action and speech. Therefore, Vietnamese seem comfortable with silence during communication.

This preference for silence is partly shown in a study by McHugh (1999). McHugh compared reported reactions by Americans, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, and Vietnamese to 57 proposed conversation topics. Participants were asked to rate those topics on a five-point scale (i.e., very good, good, neutral, bad, very bad) with respect to their appropriateness for conversation with a same-culture, same-sex, school friend. For those topics selected as either bad or very bad, subjects then selected one of the three possible reactions: *avoidance*, *false information*, or *silence*. The results show that for 17 “Skeletons in the Family Closet” conversation topics, Thai and Vietnamese favor *silence* more than Chinese and Japanese who often select *avoidance*. For the Americans, there are fewer topics they are unhappy talking about. The results imply that there could well be more silence in conversation with Asians than with Americans. Native English speakers could encounter a higher than expected frequency of avoidance and silent rejection strategies when communicating with the former. Embedded in McHugh's article is the idea that when Asians communicate in English with Americans or possibly Westerners in general, their avoidance or silent reaction could be perceived as resulting from a lack of fluency in the language of conversation rather than from an undesirable topic.

While many proverbs favor the appropriateness and value of silence in communication of Vietnamese, some work has been done to investigate silence in discourse of Vietnamese people (Nguyen, 1996, Pham, 2001). Nguyen conducted a study on silence and considered it as a speech act. Based on the corpus of Vietnamese literature, Nguyen identified the positions and forms of silence in sequences of conversation. Nguyen concluded that silence was a strategy in Vietnamese communication style and contexts played an important role in the use of silence.

As illustrated in this discussion, Vietnamese use silence frequently and their preference pertains to cultural and religious beliefs and interpersonal relationships.

### 2.3.2 *Silence and talk between Vietnamese and Australian*

In some cultures, and in some circumstances, silence often has greater value than words. In the West and in Australia, there are also many proverbs that express a positive appreciation of silence, such as the English “Silence is golden”, and “Talk is cheap”. Sontag (1969) suggests “one must acknowledge a surrounding environment of sound or language in order to recognize silence” (p. 11). Indeed, other cultures value silence, but perhaps not in the same way as many Asian cultures, particularly Vietnamese. Different cultural attitudes to silence are popularly seen to pose difficulties in intercultural communication, with, for example, silence being a topic in intercultural training courses.

In one of the video sequences in “Asian encounters” from the SBS series *What makes you say that? Cultural diversity at work* by Byrne and FitzGerald (1996), an example of Vietnamese silence is shown as evidence that cultural norms affect the way people communicate. Byrne and FitzGerald report on a genuine business meeting between Australian Telstra senior managers and their Vietnamese business partners. The most challenging aspect for the Australians is that the less senior Vietnamese colleague remains silent unless invited to speak. Even though he is proficient in English, he does not say anything in the whole of the 22 minutes. The authors remark:

Demonstrating attentive listening indicates respect for status and authority. It’s regarded as a sign of education and good breeding. By contrast, Western business people who come to Asia can often be too keen to come in with their next point. They may not give enough time and care to the act of listening (At 29’30 of the videotape).

What is clearly disconcerting for the Australian interlocutors is that attentive listening does not lead to verbal engagement in the conversation. The problem is that silence, for the Australians, is not seen as a sign of engagement and attention, but as a sign of disinterest. In other words, Vietnamese use of silence in the form of respectfully waiting to be invited to speak is not appreciated by the Australian partners and is a barrier to their communication.

Although Byrne and FitzGerald explain Vietnamese silence as a sign of respect, they assert that for Australians silence in a conversation is an indication that something is going wrong. In other words, for many Australian people, it might be regarded as problematic to go to a meeting and not say anything. A logical assumption here is that for successful intercultural communication, Australians doing business in Vietnam need to understand silence-related behavior and Vietnamese managers need to verbalize their expectations in spite of the Vietnamese value that is placed on not saying too much.

In contrast to the silent Vietnamese, Australians are sometimes considered aggressive by their Asian colleagues (Byrne and FitzGerald, 1996). In the videotape, Bernie Vanguardi, a Fijian businessman, tells how Japanese and Indonesians judge Australians who are working in a joint venture with them. He says:

You are Australians...when you talk, it's as if you always want to fight and you know that...I'm sure that it's very threatening to a Japanese colleague or an Indonesian colleague, so I guess generally speaking the Australians [...] are seen to be very aggressive or very dominating in their communication styles.

This is the impression given by Australians even though they do not intend to be aggressive.

There is less evidence about silence in Australian culture, except from studies about differences between rural Australian valuing minimal verbal communication, as opposed to a more expansive urban-based style of communication (Tridgell, 2006) and from those investigating the length of conversational silence among Aboriginal Australians. Studies show that Aboriginal Australians tolerate long periods of silences and treat them as ordinary (Mushin & Gardner, 2009) and that their silences in legal contexts, particularly in lawyer-client interviews and courtroom examination can disadvantage them (Eades, 2007). It is implicit in the studies of Mushin and Gardner, Eades, and Nakane that in Australian culture, it is expected that one not be silent in legal contexts and in classroom discussion.

Studies suggest that the preference for silence or talk of Vietnamese or Australians might cause trouble for them in intercultural interaction and thus create misunderstanding, tension or hostility. For example, Nguyễn (1994) states that Vietnamese often experience unsuccessful communication in intercultural meetings or job interviews with Australians where they tend to remain silent and do not express their views. A number of Australian host families reported to Nguyễn that they are very upset because “Vietnamese young people just leave without explanation, when the Australian practice would be to sit down together and discuss the matter with a view to eventually solving the conflict or misunderstanding to the satisfaction of both parties” (p. 67). Lê (1996) claims that in face-to face interaction between Vietnamese migrants and Australians in authority, Vietnamese non-verbal behavior is easily interpreted as timid. “Their gentle non-verbal signals showing respect and appreciation are misinterpreted as lack of confidence” (p. 144). These examples again suggest that silence is a real problem for Vietnamese when communicating with Australians since in many mainstream Australian contexts verbal messages are encouraged. In general, Vietnamese modes of communication and body language are different from those of Australians and thus cause cultural misunderstandings (Fahey, 2000). For example, indirectness as a subtle and sophisticated means of communicating can be frustrating for Australians, who often converse directly in comparison. Vietnamese reluctance to express opinions can cause Australian

supervisors to be frustrated as they do not know what has gone wrong. In speech, Vietnamese tend to speak softly and from a young age children are taught to be quiet. Although Fahey does not assemble an exhaustive list of communication barriers nor focus on silence in Vietnamese culture as a barrier to cultural misunderstanding, his paper shows that miscommunication is likely to happen between Australians and Vietnamese.

Throughout the literature, we can see Vietnamese norms of using silence and how these are perceived by Vietnamese and Australians. It is found that, to different degrees, Vietnamese use silence more frequently than Australians, and Australians are dominating in their speech. However, in fact, much variation is to be found. For example, Fahey (2000) states that “The Vietnamese are great story tellers and orators. Whenever Vietnamese meet, they talk about their neighbors and friends as a form of entertainment” (p. 2). This statement suggests that these people are not ‘silent’. This seems to explain why many Vietnamese attendees conduct private conversations during seminars or meetings, that some students even talk in exams, that coffee shops burst into loud noise with music and chatting and that the bus is often very noisy as people keep speaking to each other as well as talking on the phone. There is verbal noisiness in interaction of various kinds. For example, Milroy’s (2011) impression on his first visit to Vietnam was that the Vietnamese were very talkative. While the previous discussion shows that Vietnamese seem comfortable with silence during communication, Burns (1998) states that “the Vietnamese use silence to express feelings of being uncomfortable” (p. 239).

I will now turn to some more examples of Australian communication to complicate the stereotypes of Australians as more talkative. Australia has often been seen as a male-centered culture in which feelings of affection are not expressed verbally and Australians often experience considerable discomfort if others verbally express liking or positive regard for them (Hansford, 1992; Irwin, 1996; Tridgell, 2006). Reviewing works by Australian autobiographers e.g., Marshall (1955), Riemer (1992), Zwicky (1993), and Matthews (2001), Tridgell contends that the ideal of minimal verbal communication, of speaking no more than is necessary, is valued by Australians. For example, Australians adopt minimalist communication as a positive ideal when there is loss of a family member or when meeting a stranger. Tridgell asserts, “Speaking at length, speaking explicitly about feelings, or revealing feelings by facial expression or gesture are all at odds with what some observers have argued are traditional cultural ideals in Australia” (p. 294). Zwicky (cited in Tridgell) similarly argues that Australia is a country where people enjoy the atmosphere of sitting in silence. It is clear that talkativeness is seen in these case as a quality that Australians lack.

Ward (cited in Hansford, 1992), in writing about the distinctive Australian ethos, says that Australians are quiet rather than talkative. The generalization of loquacious Australians is therefore not always applicable. Australians may not value (total) silence as a positive contribution to

business meetings or classroom discussion, as has been shown above, but they do value silence in situations and/or places such as hotels, formal seminars, and official ceremonies. It can be said that it is considered a form of politeness and that in these places it is desirable not to disturb others and therefore to keep silent. Silence is thus a sign of respect. Tay and Smith (1990) note that Australian nightlife, for example, is relatively quiet compared to the bustle of life after dark in Asian cities.

A comprehensive investigation of academic literature on silence in communication reveals that there is no in-depth study on silence behavior beyond the education context with respect to Vietnamese and Australian cultures. The papers by Nguyễn, Lê and Fahey, though useful, mostly briefly mention silence between Australians and Vietnamese. They discuss silence incidentally: Nguyễn's and Lê's are conference presentations and Fahey's consists of notes for a lecture; Byrne and FitzGerald's text presents the Vietnamese practice of silent listening as part of a training course. There is only one study focusing on silence between Vietnamese and Australians in the intercultural classrooms. The preceding discussion also sheds doubt on the validity of the stereotype of Vietnamese as being more silent than Australians. There is clearly a need for more empirical research in this area.

While interpretations of silence are complex, nuanced and context-embedded, the literature on Vietnamese and Australians involving silence and talk consists only of reflections, without the reliability of a focused study. The current study is an attempt to add to our understanding of silence of Vietnamese and Australians to avoid any blanket generalizations and in order for communicators to become more culturally aware. It is of great benefit to explore the likelihood and interpretations of silence, beliefs and perceptions of the Vietnamese and Australians, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the use of silence, and is especially important in this era of globalization as Australia is hosting an increasing number of Vietnamese students and workers every year.

### *2.3.3 Research questions*

Based on the review of literature, this study was conducted to seek the answers to the following research questions:

- (1) How do Vietnamese and Australians interpret silence in everyday contexts?
- (2) What are their beliefs about the use and appropriateness of silence?
- (3) To what extent do Vietnamese adapt their interpretations and beliefs about silence when in regular communication with Australians?

## **2.4 Summary**

This chapter reviewed the earlier research on silence, usage, beliefs and interpretations. The discussion starts with various concepts of silence in order to frame the definition used in this study.

The chapter reveals that silence is a complex construct that invites interpretations, and that cultural and contextual differences produce variations in the interpretation of silence. These variations can result in misinterpretation. In the contexts of Vietnamese and Australian culture, silence is interpreted differently. There is some evidence of perceived problems when Vietnamese use silence in ways which are appropriate in their culture, in communication with Australians. However, there is no focused study on silence-related behavior in communication between Vietnamese and Australians, except only one dedicated study, which focuses on the classroom context. The extent to which Vietnamese adapt their behavior, while living in Australia and communicating with local people, is untouched in the scholarly literature. There is an obvious need for empirical research to generate more knowledge about interpretations of silence between Vietnamese and Australians and possible adaption of silence-related behavior in particular.

## Chapter 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes in detail how the researcher conducted a mixed methods research design. The chapter begins with the theoretical issues for the research design including reviews of data collection instruments used in previous studies on silence. It then moves on to justify the application of a mixed methods research approach. Details of participants, research instruments, and data collection procedures of the research were also presented in this chapter.

#### *3.1 Theoretical issues of research design*

Recently, scholars such as Jaworski (1997) and Nakane (2007) have claimed that silence is a multifaceted and ambiguous phenomenon, and that the investigation of silence is met with methodological difficulties. These difficulties are especially evident for studies using a single method, which might not be adequate. Basso (1970), for example, admitted that his ethnographic approach in his study on silence in Western Apache culture might be neither representative nor sufficiently comprehensive. He posited that “Although the form of silence is always the same, the function of a specific act of silence—that is, its interpretation by and effect upon other people—will vary” (p. 215). As discussed in Chapter 1, this can be a result of the fact that silence is not only culturally determined but also context-embedded, and investigators of silence therefore need to take these factors into account. A more difficult problem, however, lies in the internal ambiguous nature of silence. Despite employing multiple methods i.e., ethnographic interviews, discourse analysis of video and audio recordings and conversation analysis of follow-up interviews, Nakane recognized that the ambiguous nature of silence persisted and needed further exploration.

A considerable amount of research that investigates the nature and role of silence in communication has been carried out with a single method. Typical methods used include both quantitative approaches such as surveys, and qualitative approaches such as ethnography, interviews, and conversation analysis. This research adopts a mixed method approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to take advantage of several of these methods in combination. The most appropriate of these methods for this research are surveys and interviews. While methods such as ethnography and CA have proven useful in other studies, they were not suited to this research, as explained below.

**Surveys.** The quantitative method of a questionnaire survey using Likert-type rating scales has been employed in several attitude studies of silence. One notable project of this type is that of Giles et al. (1992), who examined beliefs about talk and silence cross-culturally. The survey contains short statements against which participants assess their own behavior and indicate how



they construe the act of talking. In this way, a repository of beliefs and attitudes is recognized, providing contextual factors inducing people to talk to or remain silent with strangers. The researchers state that “The questionnaire mode has the advantage of a tight focus and rigorous statistical treatment” (p. 228). In asking participants to assess their own behavior, Giles et al. also studied culturally stereotyped perceptions of socially appropriate behavior, which is possibly also found in the current research, where the researcher investigates the extent to which Vietnamese and Australians remain silent and their beliefs about the use and appropriateness of silence.

Questionnaire surveys were also used in studies by Jaworski and Sachdev (1998) and Hasegawa and Gudykunst (1998) to quickly gather a large amount of data involving beliefs and attitudes about silence. However, although questionnaire surveys appear ideal for supplying large amounts of data, they are not sufficient data collection tools on their own to make any generalizations in cross-cultural studies, particularly studies on silence. In the survey, people might report what they would do as an indication of their beliefs, but this may not give an entirely accurate representation of what people would actually do. A research project using a survey alone therefore faces the danger of “boiling down answers into numbers [which] strips away the context, losing much of the richness and complexity that make research realistic” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 2). Gudykunst (2000) suggests using multiple methods to fill the gap between actual behavior and reported behavior and to provide reliable and valid measures of the concepts being studied.

**Interviews.** Carbaugh and Berry (2006) Yates and Nguyen (2012) and Oduro-Frimpong (2007, 2011), among others, use interviews where investigators ask participants to recount experiences of specific situations involving silence. Some researchers point out the drawbacks of interviews, such as weakening internal validity and external validity in that they may not reveal what participants really think, or may not be generalizable to other subjects; other problems include the subjective perception and belief systems of researchers and participants, and data collection consisting of unstructured and unsystematic observation (Nunan, 1993). For studies on silence specifically, researchers prompt the participants to think about situations where silence has occurred and relies on their memory, hence not obtaining naturally occurring silence. However, as Bloom (1954) as cited in Gass and Mackey (2000) states, “a subject may be enabled to relive an original situation with great vividness and accuracy if he [sic] is presented with a large number of the cues or stimuli which occurred during the original situation” (p.17). Interviews have provided many insights into silence. For example, Oduro-Frimpong uses interviews to explore at a deeper level how marital couples use silence in conflict situations. Silence is evidently not the same in all communicative contexts. The results of Oduro-Frimpong’s study reveal, for instance, that there are certain conflict topics requiring the use of silence while others require talk. In short, interviews can

provide personal experiences and reconstruct events in which the researcher did not participate (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3), but are not practical for comparing reactions to a wide range of situations if used alone, as interviewees' experiences may not overlap. Again, the use of multiple methods can address this shortcoming to "reach a reliable interpretation and understanding [of the phenomenon of silence]" (Nakane, 2012, p. 162).

**Conversation Analysis (CA).** While CA has been the principal method applied by several researchers (Jefferson, 1989; Mushin & Gardner, 2009; Sacks et al., 1974; Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 1990) in research into silence, it has not been adopted in this study. Previous studies have measured the length of turns and/or silences in conversation to see whether people orient to silence and how much silence people are comfortable with in interaction. Studies on silence with CA can help to see how the participants themselves construe the silence in a particular context. Results of a study by Scollon and Wong-Scollon, for instance, showed that Athabaskans face communication difficulties which result from even relatively small timing differences with respect to English speakers. Researchers using CA were able to report naturally occurring silence, but have tended not to focus on thoughts and ideas that may accompany or provoke silence. As stated by Jaworski and Stephens (1998), CA provides an understanding of silence as a product of interlocutors' orient to the silence in face-to-face interaction. However, while CA reveals patterns of length and frequency of silence, it provides very little information about the interpretations of silence on the part of participants, the insiders.

**Ethnographic.** Many studies on silence (Agyekum, 2002; Basso, 1970; Covarrubbias, 2007; Jaksa & Stech, 1978) are ethnographic. Despite Basso's reservations (quoted above), ethnographies have provided rich and varied data (Boyle, 2000) and have helped previous researchers to see where people are more or less silent in communication. However, an ethnographic study does not enable the researcher to observe what people are thinking and why, and the usefulness of its data for cross-cultural studies is also limited due to problems of comparability and of note-taking that relies on the researcher's memory (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). With respect to the current project, ethnography is useful for natural data, but not feasible for the time allocated to this project. Data reported on silence by Agyekum and Covarrubbias, for example, were collected over three- to four-year periods. Furthermore, ethnography is normally employed to focus on the use of silence in one specific culture e.g., Western Apache (Basso), Akan (Agyekum), and Native American (Covarrubbias), and is little suited to studies which aim to investigate more than one culture. Ethnography is always carried out in natural settings, or the *field*; in this way the researcher studies the lives of members of the cultural group directly (Morse, 2007). Therefore, it is highly problematic to conduct ethnographic research with cultural groups of different geographically distant locations

e.g., in Hue (Vietnam) and in Brisbane (Australia), the primary locations of the current study. There are difficulties in collecting natural data because situations are not identical, and therefore difficult to compare.

**Mixed methods.** Given these methodological considerations, the researcher avoided using one single method as each one has its drawbacks, which would consequently fail to establish research validity. A mixed methods design that combines qualitative and quantitative research methods, on the other hand, can boost the strengths of the individual approaches and simultaneously overcome their weaknesses (Denzin, 1989; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Recent research highlights the strengths of a mixed methods methodology (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Nagy & Hesse-Biber, 2010), which potentially enables multi-level analysis of complex issues, improves validity, and reaches multiple audiences (Dörnyei, 2007). The mixed methods approach is also known for interrelating qualitative and quantitative data as a form of methodological triangulation, especially in the applied linguistics field. As an approach to inquiry, mixed methods research

combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing of both approaches in a study. Thus, it is more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research. (Creswell, 2009, p. 4)

On pointing out the outstanding features of applying mixed methods research, Morse and Richards (2002) argue that from their experience “many qualitative projects involve counting at some stage, and many questions are best answered by quantification”. Similarly, Robson (2002) states that rather than focusing on a single, specific research question, multi-methods may be used to address “different but complementary questions within a study” (p. 371); they can also be used to reinforce interpretability by complementing the strong features of each method.

There are further rationales for adopting a mixed methods design in the current research project, particularly the research questions. There are multiple, complementary research questions in the present study: some of these demand the use of quantitative (QUAN) methods and others qualitative (QUAL). RQ1 and RQ2 in this study require both QUAN and QUAL means of examining how Vietnamese and Australians rate their likelihood of being silent and how they interpret silence in specific situations in-depth, whereas RQ3 leads the researcher to explore new ideas of if and how Vietnamese adopt silence-related behavior in communication with Australians. Qualitative interviewing methods are then used to answer RQ3 about their actual behavior involving silence in their daily lives and to see how accommodation (with respect to that of the VA) comes about. All these together complete the picture within the scope addressed by the RQs and

lead to more robust conclusions. As such, these RQs and aims can be better achieved with the advantages of mixed methods research according to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009):

- (1) Mixed methods research can simultaneously address a range of confirmatory and exploratory questions with both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches.
- (2) Mixed methods research provides better (stronger) inferences.
- (3) Mixed methods research provides the opportunity for a greater assortment of divergent views. (p. 33)

The study also aims to represent “divergent views”. Interpretations of silence might be affected by culture; thus the present study requires multiple participants widely geographically distributed across Australia and Vietnam. The situated nature of the study means that any single method would be weak as it cannot effectively cover the three groups together, and their beliefs and interpretations of silence. In summary, given the kinds of data required to examine the reported uses and meanings of silence, a mixed methods approach, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, is more likely to generate a fuller understanding of the study’s research problem.

I now turn to further details about mixed methods in the present study, focusing on the choice of three data collection instruments: 1) an online questionnaire survey, 2) diary-type record sheets, and 3) an in-depth interview. To begin with, an online questionnaire survey is appropriate for data collection in this study for the following three reasons. First, it can gather a large amount of both qualitative and quantitative data in a relatively short time and across large distances. The study requires data collection from multiple participants residing across Australia and Vietnam. A survey responds well to these requirements, especially when it is delivered online. Several researchers have examined the value of online surveys and confirmed that they can obtain higher response rates than other survey formats and reduce data collection time and expense (Tuten, 2010; Sue, 2007; Evans and Mathur, 2005). Second, the Likert scale questions about the likelihood of silence allowed for ease of analysis of the data, as the results were able to be quantified. To respond to the 35 situations, each asking for likelihood of silence in the form of five-point Likert scale, the participants were required to choose one answer out of five choices. Such a questionnaire with closed questions helped the researcher to score the responses easily. Third, the free comment section of the survey, which then asked for the meaning of silence in particular situations, enabled gathering qualitative data from a large number of participants on the specified topics. Using the online questionnaire survey was therefore practical for the current study.

However, this online survey technique does not allow the researcher to gather incident data concerning participants’ interactions when there is silence, nor to gather descriptions of their

experiences in using and responding to silence. This weakness was somewhat remedied by adding the subsequent qualitative components of follow-up record sheets and interviews. This “sequential explanatory design” (Creswell et al., 2003) is a straightforward and beneficial model which enriches the final findings, and is easy to implement and analyze. Although record sheets have not been used in investigating silence in previous studies, they have been employed to collect sensitive incidents to explore politeness phenomena in interactions and have shown their effectiveness in exploring a particular issue in more depth (House, 2000; H Spencer-Oatey, 2002; H Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2003). Adapting this tool to explore incidents involving silence in real-life situations enables participants to share their experiences involving silence, explaining or adding more ideas. This in turn allows the researcher to collect data that helps to understand the circumstances where Vietnamese and Australians choose to be silent, and their ideas and feelings on this topic.

Interviews are also used in this study because they are a “flexible and adaptable way of finding things out” (Robson, 2002), often used in qualitative research and regularly applied in a variety of Applied Linguistics contexts and other social scientific fields for diverse purposes (Dornyei, 2007). Interviews are powerful data collection instruments because they have the advantage of one-to-one interaction between the researcher and interviewee, thus maximizing direct explanations and clarification. As such, the aim of the interviews in the current study was to further investigate the uses and meanings of silence and related behavior by Vietnamese and Australians. The researcher was able to ask participants when they use silence, how frequently they were silent or what meaning they attributed to a silence. They were then asked to explain their answers, give examples or describe their experiences. As suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2005), these kinds of matters that can be well explored through interviews.

There are many ways of integrating different components of qualitative and quantitative research into a single study. Creswell and Plano (2007) propose several typological principles which are widely accepted. These typological organizations are based on the sequence and the dominance of the constituent methods, as is shown in the following table.

Table 3.1. *Mixed Methods Design Types*

Design type	Timing and Notation	Mixing
Triangulation	Concurrent QUAN +QUAL at the same time	Merge the data during the interpretation or analysis
Embedded	Concurrent or sequential QUAN (qual) <sup>1</sup> or QUAL (quan)	Embed one type of data within a larger design using the other type

<sup>1</sup> The word QUAN or QUAL is capitalized to show that it is the predominant type of data being used, as opposed to quan or qual (used to indicate less major uses of these types of data).

		of data
Explanatory	Sequential: quan followed by qual QUAN → qual	Connect the data between the two phases
Exploratory	Sequential: qual followed by quan QUAL → quan	Connect the data between the two phases

(Adapted from Creswell and Plano, 2007, p. 85)

The present study does not fit neatly into one design type, but combines elements of the sequential embedded and explanatory models. In the table, the quantitative phase precedes the qualitative one in the sequential embedded model. Data between the two phases are connected to produce rich final findings. In the present study, the online survey asks for quantitative data about the uses and meanings of silence concurrently. The study continues with the qualitative phase of record sheets and interviews. Clearly, the quantitative phase is only employed in the first phase of data collection, while the embedded sequential model governs the whole data collection procedure and analysis, emphasizing the strengths of quantitative data in providing results to be investigated in more detail later. Moreover, the quantitative phase is embedded in the qualitative in order to find the interpretations of silence in situations provided. In the phase of record sheets and interviews, the qualitative findings are used to elaborate or refine the findings made in the initial phase. This phase also has the goal of finding more real-life situations of silence and participants' experience. The two phases are finally integrated to provide systematic and critical descriptions and analyses of the reported use of silence by Australians and Vietnamese.

In short, the current study employs triangulation of data through the initial use of a questionnaire survey, followed by record sheets and interviews to provide real life examples of silence as well as experience of silence usage and interpretation. The following section discusses the choice of participants and detailed data instruments and collection methods and procedure to best achieve the study's aims.

### ***3.2 Practical issues of research design***

#### *3.2.1 Participants and sampling*

There are three groups of participants: 1) Vietnamese in Vietnam (VV), 2) Australians in Australia (AA), and 3) Vietnamese in Australia (VA). In order to have groups comparable in age and education, the researcher recruited university students and other adult learners. The first two groups, the Vietnamese and the Australians, were in their home country at the time of the survey. These two groups were chosen in order to be able to undertake a cross-cultural comparison and to have a baseline to use for the study on reported accommodation. The third group was made up of Vietnamese able to speak English and studying in Australia, who therefore had regular contact with

Australians. The third group's eligibility is measured through two demographic questions in the online questionnaire asking for the extent the VA engages with Australians and the length of staying in Australia.

Participants in the AA group were recruited with the help of staff in the School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies, The University of Queensland (UQ), and the researcher's social network. The links to the survey were also published in UQUpdate, a magazine for UQ staff and students. The VA respondents were largely invited through an online social network on Facebook and also from Vnsclub (a popular email network for Vietnamese students). Special care was taken in passing the invitation with links to the potential respondents to ensure the comparability of samples. The English link was mostly sent to Australian target respondents by the researchers' supervisors and university lecturers, while the Vietnamese one was largely publicized by the researcher to Vietnamese students. As the survey required access to the Internet, it was not efficient to recruit the VV group in the same way as the other groups, as in Vietnam many students do not have a home computer or private Internet access. Therefore the researcher invited the students in this group to complete the survey online in a university laboratory. During the six weeks after the launch of the survey, three classes from Hue University of Sciences, Vietnam were invited to participate in the online survey. The reason for choosing science students is that these students have less extensive exposure to English language and Australian culture than, for example, foreign language students. They form a distinct group of Vietnamese who can be compared with Australians who have little or no extensive contact with Vietnamese language and culture.

In the case of students recruited through lecturers' contacts, the students were under no pressure from their teacher to take part, and were free to decide not to participate in the study or to withdraw from it during the survey. For the VV group who did the survey in a university laboratory, the researcher carefully explained the study to the students during their class. Those who wished to take part in the online survey went to the university computer laboratory. None of the students in any group were taught by the researcher.

### *3.2.2 Data collection instruments and procedure*

#### *3.2.2.1 Survey questionnaire*

A questionnaire was the initial instrument for collecting the data. It was divided into two parts. Part I contained demographic questions about the participants. Part II contained descriptions of 35 situations potentially involving silence. Each situation encouraged reflection on how people believed they would respond. Following the general question of "How likely are you to be silent if you were in this situation?" at the end of every situation, respondents were asked to rate their

responses on a five-point Likert-type scale: 1 (Very Unlikely), 2 (Unlikely), 3 (Not Sure), 4 (Likely) and 5 (Very Likely). Participants were also asked to indicate what silence would mean in the situation and were given another separate box so they could enter any further comments if they wished to do so (See Appendix 1).

The first page of the online survey provided all necessary information about the study, followed by the consent statement and the confirmation that the study met the requirements of the School Research Ethics Committee of The University of Queensland. The participants were assured that their participation in the study was voluntary, that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that the data collected from them would be treated confidentially. Most participants were fully anonymous. Students who were willing to participate further provided their email address or telephone number at the end of the survey.

The screen shot below shows how the instructions and the first situation and associated questions appeared on the online version of the survey. All situations were presented in a simple, consistent way. The participants only needed to click on the space of prompted options with their mouse to give an answer or type in a response to explain or make further comments.

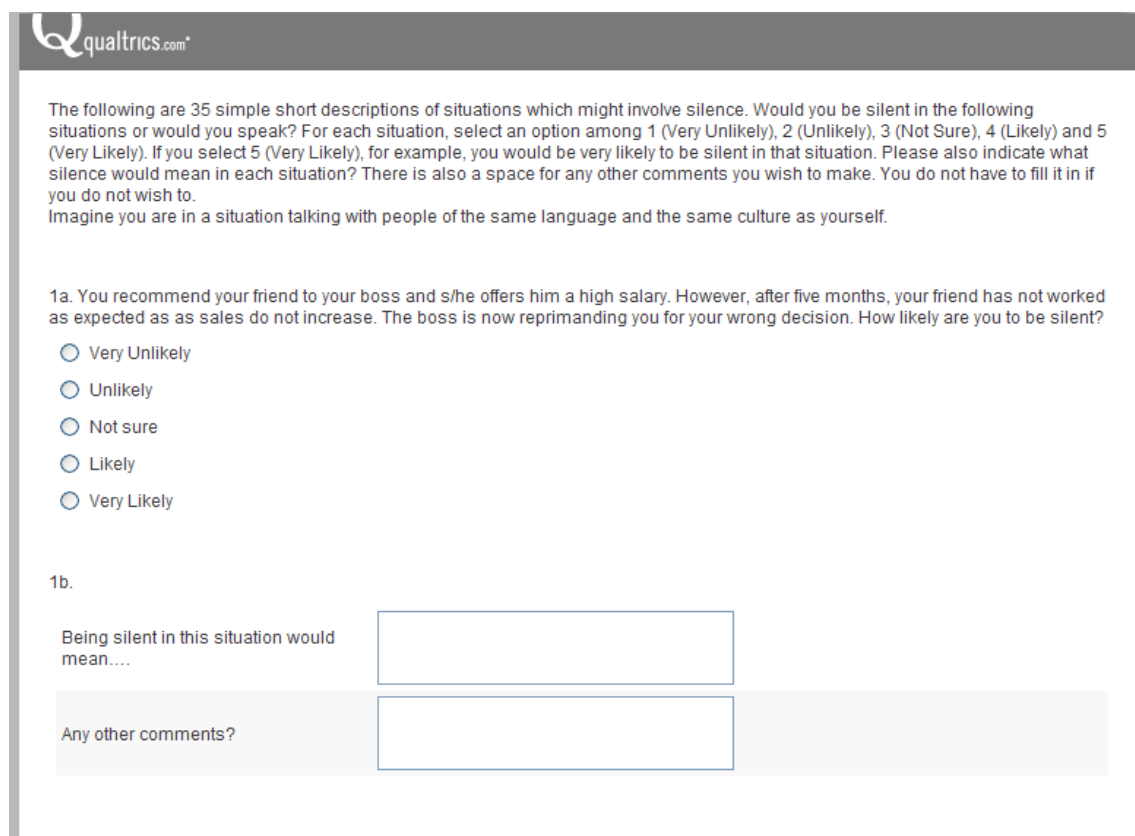


Figure 3.1. Example of survey interface.

The Likert scale was used: 1) because of the need for quantitative studies on silence, as discussed in section 3.1, 2) because it was used very successfully in other studies, and 3) to enable results to be easily compared with those of other researchers in the future. The application of a



Likert scale is used in studies on silence by Hasegawa and Gudyskunst (1998) on beliefs about the amount of silence used by Japanese and Americans when talking with close friends and strangers, and by Giles et al. (1992) on beliefs about talk between Chinese and Americans.

The present study differs from these in some respects. Firstly, the researcher did not use the items included in their study, but devised situations loosely based on information from four sources: 1) reported situations involving silence from conversations and from initial questions to Vietnamese and Australian acquaintances, 2) previous key studies on silence, 3) mass media i.e., Vietnamese and Australian talk shows and television programs and 4) the researcher's first-hand experience as a person living in the two cultures. Secondly, instead of just two distinct groups, one further group of participants was included, i.e., English-speaking Vietnamese in Australia. This made it possible to not only compare Vietnamese and Australian interpretations of silence in various situations, but also to explore possible changes in attitudes and behavior amongst Vietnamese who have regular contact with Australians.

To ensure the equivalence of the Vietnamese and English version of the questionnaire, Barnlund and Araki's (1985) method of translation was followed. First, the English version was translated into Vietnamese by the researcher, a native speaker of Vietnamese. Second, the Vietnamese version was assessed by two other people fluent in Vietnamese and English. Any discrepancies were resolved during discussions between the Vietnamese researcher and the other two bilingual speakers.

*Scenario development for the questionnaire.* In order to arrive at a set of specific situations potentially involving silence, the researcher first developed items found in academic literature on silence (e.g., Basso (1970); Jensen (1973); Johannesen (1974); Giles et al. (1992); Bruneau (1973); Saville-Troike (1985) and Nakane (2007)) into a series of scenarios. Secondly, in order to have more situations involving silence for the questionnaire, an initial general question asking "in which situations are you likely to be silent?" was sent to some Vietnamese and Australians. Situations were also drawn from mass media and personal experience.

In all, there were 44 situations in an initial draft questionnaire which covered many aspects of silence. These situations were then assessed for appropriateness. It was important that the situations provided were believable and natural for all groups involved, culturally and linguistically. Therefore, the researcher used her first-hand knowledge of the study and as a person studying and living in two cultures (Vietnam and Australia) as a filter to decide whether a particular situation was relevant. Discussion with the researcher's thesis supervisors also boosted the degree of appropriateness of the situations used. For example, some situations were too complicated for participants to imagine, or would have been too far from their everyday conversations, and

consequently not completely understandable; these were removed. The following scene was viewed and discussed by participants in a Vietnamese television programme:

*The foreman of your company told you to refuse an order. However, when you were eavesdropping by the office door, you heard her saying to the director that the company missed out on a big contract because you decided it was too difficult an order and that the customer was unlikely to become a regular customer. How likely are you to be silent?.*

In other words, the researcher talked through with her supervisors whether a situation was clear, understandable and likely to be encountered. For most situations, the supervisors and the researcher noted the possible meanings of silence according to their own Australian and Vietnamese cultural perceptions and compared the results. Situations where the most obvious Vietnamese and Australian interpretations coincided were removed. All in all, nine situations were removed, leaving 35 for the final questionnaire. The following table presents the summary of these situations.

Table 3.2. *Short Descriptions of Thirty-five Situations for the Survey*

<b>Situations</b>	<b>Contexts</b>
Sitn1	Boss reprimands you for wrong recommendation
Sitn2	Responding to a marriage proposal
Sitn3	Stepping on someone's foot
Sitn4	Talking to the teacher about a lesson which is difficult to understand
Sitn5	Going with boss to a meeting where partners negotiate orders
Sitn6	Breaking a friend's vase
Sitn7	On the bus being teased by strangers
Sitn8	Late to class and criticized by the teacher
Sitn9	Housemate in an ugly shirt
Sitn10	Disagreeing with a classmate in a discussion
Sitn11	Boss asks you to write a report in two days
Sitn12	Brother raises the topic of your broken contact with your father
Sitn13	Drunkard in the city
Sitn14	Disagreeing with the teacher in a class discussion
Sitn15	Being criticized in a staff meeting
Sitn16	Class discussion of topic you know little about
Sitn17	Dad asks to see your Maths report
Sitn18	Talking a lot with friends who do not respond
Sitn19	Teacher speaks too quickly to understand
Sitn20	Classmate ask for lecture notes before exam
Sitn21	Being pressed to eat
Sitn22	Invited to casino at the weekend but you don't want to go
Sitn23	Missed friend's birthday party and now you see him/her
Sitn24	Sitting with strangers at a wedding reception
Sitn25	Replying to a colleague who keeps asking why you look upset
Sitn26	No response to your toast at a party
Sitn27	You are reluctant to hire a new model but have no other suggestion

Sitn28	Talking to a friend and can't catch one point s/he is talking about
Sitn29	In the cinema when your phone rings
Sitn30	Your English teacher makes a mistake in class
Sitn31	Being ignored by your partner at party
Sitn32	Receiving comment on weight gain at a class reunion
Sitn33	Friend wants to live at your house for a month
Sitn34	The people behind you in the cinema talk between themselves
Sitn35	Your partner is reluctant to host friends visiting your town

*The online survey.* Piloting the study was an important step to test the clarity, usefulness and appropriateness of the questionnaire. Initial online surveys in English and in Vietnamese were activated and received feedback from 18 Vietnamese and Australians in total. The pilot not only allowed the researcher to see how the online survey on Qualtrics worked, but also enabled her to improve formatting and wording. Based on the comments and suggestions given at the end of the survey, the researcher made some modifications to clarify situations and minimize misunderstandings. The scenarios were made gender-neutral so that the respondents could find it easy to imagine themselves in the situations when they rated their responses. The box for nationality was set as a forced response as this information was essential to the study. "Any other comments" was added at the end of every situation to give space for respondents to give ideas if they wished to do so.

*Completion of the survey.* The final version of the online survey was activated in March 2012. The survey was active for 6 weeks. To ensure its validity and reliability, survey options were set to "Save & continue" (in case of power failure as frequently happens in Vietnam), and "Prevent Ballot Box Stuffing" (to avoid one person taking the survey several times).

### 3.2.2.2 *Diary-type record sheet*

After the questionnaire was collected, diary-type record sheets were sent to volunteer participants to explore incidents involving silence in real-life situations. The participants were invited to record noticeable moments involving silence in their social interactions. Each volunteer participant was invited to complete two record sheets.

The diary-type record sheet was chosen for three main reasons. First, previous research has shown that silence is context-dependent and the intended meaning of silence can be disclosed only by participants who use and experience it in the communicative interactions of their speech community (O'Keeffe, 1991). In this study, the researcher offered the participants an opportunity to keep records of their silence-related experiences and to interpret them from their own perspective. In this way, the participants reported naturally-occurring incidents where silence was involved, which, in turn, provided the researcher with better insights into when and why Australians and

Vietnamese were silent. Secondly, using both the questionnaire survey and the record sheets, the researcher could search for patterns in the differences and similarities in the perceptions of silence in interactions, as well as the possible connections between them. Thirdly, record sheets have been employed as the main source of data in previous studies and have shown their effectiveness in exploring a particular issue in more depth (House, 2000; H Spencer-Oatey, 2002; H Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2003).

The present study partly modifies the record sheet devised by Spencer-Oatey (2002), who used it as the main instrument to collect records of sensitive incidents to explore politeness phenomena in interactions between Chinese and Westerners in Great Britain. The design of the current record sheet took into consideration the importance of factors like age, gender, social status, culture, as well as perceived intimacy in influencing silent behavior, and the need to ensure confidentiality for participants.

The record sheet was sent to 10 participants to see the extent to which they understood the form and were able to complete it with incidents involving silence in everyday contexts. The results showed that the record sheet was clear and ready to use (see Appendix 2a, 2b).

At the end of the data collection process, 42 participants returned the completed record sheets, yielding a total of 57 incidents (23 incidents from VV, 12 incidents from AA and 22 incidents from VA). Of these, two record sheets in the AA group did not involve silence in direct interactions, but rather the participants' description of an event and her feelings about her friends' general behavior, and so they were discarded<sup>2</sup>. This left 55 incidents for analysis: 42 were negative incidents (where silence creates problems or makes the participants feel uncomfortable, annoyed or embarrassed), and 13 were positive incidents (where silence makes the participants feel happy and/or satisfied). It should be noted that the number of negative incidents reported is nearly four times as many as the positives. During the data collection process, the researcher offered participants the opportunity to describe an incident, whether of positive or negative silence, but many of the participants reported and described negative incidents. It might be logical to suggest that when there is noticeable silence, it is more likely to relate to negative incidents, or generally the participants found it harder to recall positive incidents than negative ones. In other words, negative incidents often made more lasting impressions. Further analysis of these incidents is presented in Chapter 6.

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<sup>2</sup> These two incidents were from AA73. The setting and the content of the event were not relevant for this study: one incident took place on the internet via a Facebook personal messages group chat regarding people complaining about the participant's hens night, and the other incident was via sms on a mobile phone about the participant's fiancé's cousin turning 21.

### 3.2.2.3 Recorded in-depth interview

In the present study, interviews were used to: 1) clarify and seek more details regarding the participants' answers, 2) examine participants' understanding and experiences of silence, and 3) triangulate the data on themes and interpretations.

The in-depth semi-structured individual interviews were scheduled after preliminary analysis of the results of the first two data collection exercises. Initial contact was made with all those who volunteered to be interviewed in the original online survey. A few days before the interview of each participant, the researcher contacted them to confirm the date, time, and meeting venue if it was a face-to-face interview. The researcher received 11 replies from the first contact with the VV volunteers, so it was not necessary to send the email again. For the VA and AA groups, the researcher worked down the list of volunteers and followed up (by sending a reminder, second or third email) until there were 11 participants in each group. In all, 33 interviews (11 in each group) were conducted. In following up, the researcher aimed to achieve a gender balance as shown in the following table:

Table 3.3. *Participants in the Interviews*

Participants	Male	Female	Face to face	Telephone	Language
from the VV ( $n = 11$ )	7	4	11	0	Vietnamese
from the AA ( $n = 11$ )	5	6	3	8	English
from the VA ( $n = 11$ )	6	5	7	4	Vietnamese

In the semi-structured interviews, the researcher followed a prepared interview guide flexibly (see Appendix 3). Very general open-ended questions such as “How do you notice the ways people in your country use silence or expression without words to express themselves in their daily life?”, “There is a proverb ‘Silence is golden’. What do you think?”, or “How often do you experience silence in communication?” were used as openers. In order to gather more specific data, detailed questions were posed to the participants such as “Do you ever consciously use/avoid silence when you talk? When and examples?”, “In which situations do you think it is more effective to use silence rather than words?” or “If the other person is silent, do you think it is a good idea to be silent too? Or to speak?”. In the course of the interview, the researcher adjusted the sequence of the questions to be asked and added questions based on the participants' responses. During the interviews, selected incidents from the questionnaire or record sheets were also mentioned in order to triangulate the stories with participants and trigger some more thoughts and/or stories. For example, one interesting situation in the survey is Situation 2: “*You are a young woman who has known and been in love with your boyfriend for at least a year. You are now sitting close together*

*on a bench when he proposes marriage to you*". The results showed that nearly 40% VV, 20 % VA but only 10% AA were likely to keep silent. The respondents in the interviews were asked what they thought about this.

The third group, VA, was also asked about how they adapted silence-related behavior in communication with Australians. To elicit accommodation strategies, the participants were asked if they had changed the ways they speak and use silence through their experiences of living and communicating with Australians, and how. In particular, they were prompted to talk about different aspects of their communications with Australians: the difference when they talked to Vietnamese compared with Australians, the difficulties they faced talking or communicating with Australians, the situations when they were often silent, how they felt and the ways they responded when an Australian was silent. The VA participants were also asked if they noticed or consciously changed the way they speak in Australia. The answers to these questions helped the researcher understand the VA participants' communication or speech styles with the AA, particularly the modifications they had made in their regular communication with the AA.

The interviews were recorded using a (Samsung Galaxy S II) mobile phone. This proved to be an effective tool for recording both face-to-face and telephone interviews. In the telephone interviews, the recording was made at maximum volume to achieve the highest quality of transmission. One problem with talking on the phone, however, was the lack of visual contact. Therefore, meanings needed to be explicitly explained. The researcher used some conversational gambits and requests for paraphrases, for example "did you say that...?", "did you mean that...?", and "Sorry, can you say that again...?" to verify comprehension. In the face-to-face interviews, the researcher could generate questions based on participants' verbal responses together with their nonverbal communication, such as gestures, and facial expressions. The audio recorder was visible in the face to face interviews and could therefore affect responses. However, the researcher and interviewees all appeared comfortable talking in this situation. The interview questions were piloted with some participants. For the Vietnamese participants, the researcher found out that it would be better to use Vietnamese forms of address (*em* [younger sister], *chi* [sister], and *anh* [brother] rather than the general word *you*. In this way, the researcher could establish rapport and encourage them to share more experiences.

In general, the participants were encouraged to share their attitudes, experiences and feelings. The interviews were selectively transcribed later for the data analysis.

### **3.3 Summary**

This chapter presented the theoretical and practical issues of the current research. The reviews of past methodology used in exploring silence behavior in communication showed the

drawbacks of single methods and at the same time pinpointed the need for a mixed methods design for the current study. The chapter therefore described how mixed methods research design was adopted. At the practical level, issues concerning participants, application of research instruments, and collection of data were specified. The next chapter presents the methods of data analysis.

## Chapter 4

### METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter reports on analytic techniques and the measures taken to ensure that the data were useful, reliable and valid before further statistical analyses. The chapter is divided into four parts. The first part focuses on the participants' eligibility relating to specific cultural background and demographic information. The second part deals with the methods of data analysis. The third part describes the coding of data, including second coding, and the analysis of interrater reliability in relation to the relevant literature on second coding and interrater reliability. The last part introduces grounded theory.

#### *4.1 Participants*

The survey was launched for six weeks. In order for a survey to be included in the data set, the participant needed to complete the demographic questions, fully answer at least one question in the next pages of 35 situations, and click the "submit" button. Surveys with no demographic information or no complete responses were eliminated. This yielded surveys from over 300 people (110 people for the English version and 190 for the Vietnamese one). To be eligible for the study, the participants also needed to be from the relevant cultural background, and this was established through the demographic questions in the survey. Vietnamese were either in Vietnam (VV group) or, in the case of the VA group, as defined in the introduction, were born and educated in Vietnam, but had been living or studying in Australia for at least one year as international students. Regarding the Australians (AA group), most of participants were identified Australian-born and educated in Australia (91.7%). Some 5.2% of AA participants originated from a cultural background other than Australian but had spent more than half or most of their life in Australia. The remaining 3.1% were participants with other cultural backgrounds but were born and live in Australia. After eliminating those who did not fit the eligibility criteria, 275 survey-takers remained: 96 Australians (AA), 89 Vietnamese with experience of Australian culture (VA) and 90 Vietnamese with limited or no contact with Australians (VV). Table 4.1 summarises the amount of data collected from the participants in each group together with different research instruments, and table 4.2 summarises further demographic information about the participants in the survey.



Table 4.1. *Summary of Participants Data*

Groups	VV	AA	VA
Participants in the survey ( $n = 275$ )	90	96	89
Participants in the record sheets ( $n = 42$ )	17 (Total: 23 record sheets)	9 (Total: 10 record sheets)	16 (Total: 22 record sheets)
Participants in the interviews ( $n = 33$ )	11	11	11

Table 4.2. *Survey Participants' Demographic Information*

Demographic variable	Groups	VV		AA		VA	
		$n$	%	$n$	%	$n$	%
Gender	Male	57	63.3	28	29.1	44	49.4
	Female	33	36.6	68	70.8	45	50.5
Age	20-25	90	100	70	72.9	21	23.5
	26-30	0	0	15	15.6	31	34.8
	31-40	0	2	5	5.2	34	38.2
	>40	0	0	4	4.1	3	3.3
	Not specified			2	2		

All participants were university students or other adult learners. The fact that the invitation to the online survey was very open meant that the researcher could not control the gender balance. While the number of female participants in the AA group was nearly double the number of males, the opposite was true for the VV group. Male and female participants were almost equal in number in the VA group. A small age range difference is apparent: most participants are in the 20-25 age range, except for the VA group who are mostly slightly older postgraduate students.

To protect participant anonymity, after the researcher finalised the survey responses for data analysis, each participant was assigned a unique identification code that indicated to which group s/he belonged (VV/AA/VA). Each participant's completed record sheet and interview section were then only referred to by the code assigned in the survey. More specifically, the codes for the survey were given according to the participants' groups and the participants' order in the data sets of that group. For example, a participant's code of AA80 meant that s/he was from the AA group and was

the 80<sup>th</sup> person in the order of the dataset. Prefix R (Record sheets) and Int (Interview) were added in front of the record sheets and interview data respectively to distinguish these two types of data from the data from the survey.

## **4.2 Questionnaire analysis**

### *4.2.1 Analysis of the quantitative questionnaire data*

Various methods to analyse the survey data were trialed, including statistical tests on the data using SPSS, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Tests included parametric statistical analyses (i.e. t-test, one way ANOVA, and Correlation). These statistical tools appeared inappropriate for the current project's data, particularly for understanding participants' reported likelihood of being silent. In particular, the assumptions of ANOVA regarding normal distribution and homogeneity of variances are violated by the current data. The reasons for this were, firstly, that in a number of cases, the Likert data gathered by the survey are not only not normally distributed, but also bimodal. The results of ANOVA in comparing the means in these situations are therefore not useful. For example, let us take the first situation:

*You recommend your friend to your boss and s/he offers him a high salary. However, after five months, your friend has not worked as expected as sales do not increase. The boss is now reprimanding you for your wrong decision. How likely are you to be silent?*

Here the Likert data from the VV group are bimodal with a polarization of two opposite ratings on the likelihood of being silent; thus a mean of three is meaningless. Secondly, the significant value in Levene's test (Homogeneity of Variances) of many situations is less than 0.05. This means that the groups do not have a similar spread in those situations, and therefore cannot be reliably compared using ANOVA.

Some useful information nonetheless emerged from the ANOVA calculations, namely that there is no clear trend over the whole data set. In response, the situations were grouped according to the relationship among interlocutors e.g., talking with people of higher status or equal status, talking to strangers. However, once again the results did not show a clear pattern. A possible reason for this is that the situations are complex and involve a number of factors; for example, some situations potentially involve both intimacy and hierarchy simultaneously, as in the father and son relationship. ANOVA is unable to show trends where a number of factors are involved in this way.

Another method using SPSS was factor analysis, a data reduction technique that reorganizes items and produces components or factors based on inter-item correlation. It can help to identify a smaller number of independent variables (factors) that can be used to represent relationships amongst a set of interrelated dependent variables. However, results obtained from factor analysis of the data were not highly interpretable or usable. The factors identified for one group of participants

were not intuitive and did not match the other groups. It might be hypothesized that the principal reason for these results is that there are no actual consistent properties for these constructs. Factor analysis will yield the most useful results when the survey object is constant, i.e. when the questions refer to the same construct, silence in this case. However, in the current project the situations in the survey are varied with the purpose of testing attitudes to silence in a range of rationally plausible situations found in the literature and in everyday encounters. In these different situations, silence may have a different meaning. In other words, silence is not a uniform construct throughout the survey; its meaning varies greatly across situations and participant groups. This brings about rich and complex results, but factor analysis is inappropriate for dealing with this complexity.

In short, strong claims cannot be made from using ANOVA and factor analysis. Therefore, alternative methods of data analysis that brought together quantitative analysis (tallying the Likert data) and qualitative analysis (coding meanings) were adopted. For the quantitative analysis, the researcher used Excel to provide simple graphs of Likert data of the three groups in each situation and then carried out a visual comparison. At the same time, coding of the qualitative survey data (the meanings attributed to silence) was undertaken as described below. Intersections or parallels between the quantitative and qualitative data were sought for each group and for each situation. In this way, the data were integrated and discussed together. This solution is plausible and effective because it leads to the identification of similarities and differences among three groups, which is the ultimate purpose of this research. The graphs show when and to what extent each group is likely to be silent or not. The coding enables the researcher to find out the meanings people attribute to their own silence. These reviews connect the results with the research questions about Vietnamese and Australian interpretations of silence.

#### *4.2.2 Analysis of the qualitative questionnaire data*

The survey contains questions on the meaning of silence, and the responses to these questions needed coding. Coding is the process of labelling pieces of data and allocating other pieces of data to them (and the label) (Saldaña, 2013). This section presents the coding process, the importance of having second coders and the process used to obtain the final codes for analysis.

A code in this study, as most often in qualitative inquiry, is a word that “symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2008, p. 3). Specifically, the study used key words to code the meanings attributed to silence by the survey participants. The current study used QQ as a code starter, as proposed by Sussex (2006). The rationale for starting notation tags with the sequence “QQ-,” is that this tag is a unique configuration and will not be confused or mistaken with any other

lexical items in the corpus. It is easy to use and to feed into a standard graphing package like Excel. It is also easy to use with coding filters.

Firstly, the researcher read through the whole data set. She then undertook pre-coding by highlighting participants' key words, and looking for emerging themes and descriptions of speech acts, e.g. "denial", "acceptance", and emotive words such as "embarrassed". With both the Vietnamese and English corpus, the researcher coded in English. Here is an example of a statement about the meaning of silence when being reprimanded by a boss: "*Allowing the boss to finish what they are saying rather than trying to start an argument*" (Sitn1, AA36). This was coded as QQallow. Note that while the code is taken directly from what the participant himself says, this is not always the case. For a statement like "*I am responsible for breaking the vase, and I regret it. I don't want to fight with the friend*" (Sitn6, AA04), QQsorry was assigned. This code reflects the meaning of silence given. The preliminary jottings generated many potential codes, some of which such as "awkward" and "embarrassed" overlapped and therefore were collapsed in to reduce the number of codes.

Some answers had two codes. For example, consider the following statement from a participant imagining facing a reprimand from the boss: "*admitting I am partially to blame, but also just holding my tongue to not exacerbate matters*" (Sitn1, AA06). Here the participant gave two meanings for silence: accepting guilt (QQguilt) and also calming the situation (QQcalm). Therefore, two codes need to be given to AA06's answer rather than one.

The final coding list included 43 codes and the most frequent of these were QQguilt [acceptance], QQagree [agreement], QQrefuse, and QQthinking. The same list of codes was available for all situations and for all three groups. The frequency of each code was calculated as a percentage of the total number of codes used by each group in each situation, and then the frequency of the codes across the three groups was compared. Sample coding of situation 1 for the AA group is presented in the screen shot below (Note that 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 refer to Likert responses).

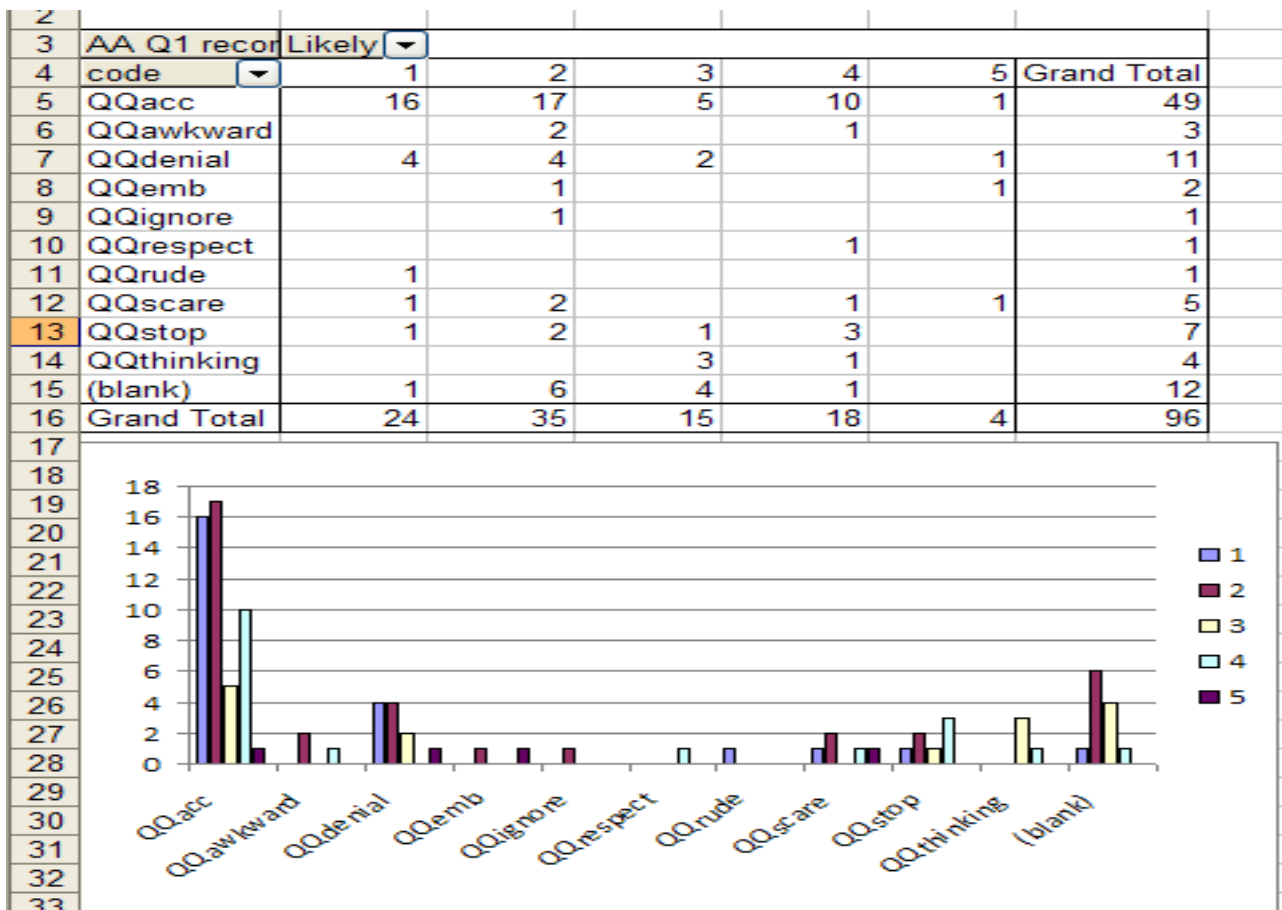


Figure 3.2. Sample coding with calculations.

The researcher continued to add to and refine the list during the coding process.

#### 4.2.2.1 Coding and second coding screening

To establish the reliability of the coding, second coding of a portion of the data was required. This is an essential step in the analysis of the data in order for the analysis to be considered valid (Eye & Mun, 2005; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Stemler, 2004). According to Slattery et al. (2011), what is necessary for interrater reliability is “two and more raters testing the same subjects with the same instrument and getting close to the same results” (p. 835). In the present study, two second coders were engaged, one Vietnamese and one Australian, one for each version of the survey (one in English and one in Vietnamese). The survey has 35 situations. Two second coders were needed for 10% of the coding, which is approximately three situations in each of the two languages. 10% of the coding can be considered “a minimum of comparable number of units to code” and appropriate in second language research (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 247). Situations 6, 7 and 8 were selected for the second coders, (and then interrater reliability was calculated on these three) as these situations had required the greatest variety of codes when originally coded. Situation 1 was used as a training situation for the second coders. Each coder received separate training in order to code in their language.

In the process of training, the researcher provided the list of codes and advised the second coders to look at the participant's responses where participants provided the meaning of silence. More specifically, the researcher and the second coder talked through the process and discussed the codes to resolve any problems or issues that were unclear. The researcher emphasized that there might be two codes in some cases and that the second coders could leave a blank where no meaning was provided by the participant. The second coders were advised to code according to their understanding of the meanings given. Then, half the responses completing the sentence "*Being silent in this situation would mean...*" were coded together and the other half were coded independently by the second coder. The researcher and the second coder then discussed the responses where their coding differed. The discussions resolved questions about why one code should be chosen instead of another or whether one more code was needed to fully convey the given responses. Where the second coder interpreted the data quite differently and his/her idea was valid, the researcher changed her coding accordingly. Importantly, through looking at the related codes, some useful distinctions were made that needed to be taken into consideration in the process of coding. Among them, the differences between QQguilt (accepting blame), QQagree (agreeing with what the other person says), and QQsubmissive (submitting to what the other person wants) were clarified. This entire process was then repeated with the Vietnamese second coder. In short, the researcher worked through the first situation with the second coders and the remaining three situations were sent to the second coders via email. The second coders coded these electronically and sent the completed coding back.

Upon receiving the completed coding, the researcher then reviewed the second coding and made some necessary adjustments. Specifically, the researcher removed the second coder's coding of the comments section (i.e. where the respondent had not responded to the question but had instead provided a comment) and some coding of situations where the respondent had said they would not be silent or they would continue to speak.

#### **4.2.2.2 Interrater reliability**

Interrater reliability refers to the degree of similarity between coding produced by different coders. The main purpose of interrater reliability is to validate the quality of one's own coding. As Mackey & Gass (2005) note, "If there is strong reliability, one can then assume with reasonable confidence that raters are judging the same set of data as representing the same phenomenon" (p. 129).

Although there are many ways of calculating interrater reliability, one of the most appropriate ways for the current data is through percentage agreement. This is the number of cases of agreement between codes divided by the total number of items coded by the two judges and

expressed as a percentage. The measure is easy to calculate and is most appropriate for nominal categorical data (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Stemler, 2004), that is data with words that can be sorted into categories, as in the current study. Although Cohen's kappa (1960) is a widely used method for assessing interrater reliability, it is not necessary for this study. Cohen's kappa is the average rate of agreement after correcting the percentage agreement figure for the amount of agreement expected by chance alone. In the current study, there are 43 codes, not merely a few codes that the coders can choose from; thus agreement due to chance can be expected to be low.

The test of interrater reliability in this study was based on the sample dataset of three situations. The number of agreements was counted, including both exact agreement and partial agreement in cases where two or more codes were assigned by one coder and only one of those codes was assigned by the other. As Stemler (2004) has noted, exact agreement is useful when data is ordinal in nature (e.g., a Likert scale). For nominal data, the researcher can also consider instances where both coders consistently identified the same dominant theme. They were said to have communicated with each other in a meaningful way and their coding should be counted as agreement. This is possible in qualitative coding as it is primarily interpretive (Morse & Richards, 2002). The following tables present the results of the test in assessing interrater reliability in the three situations.

Table 4.3. *Coding Agreement of the Vietnamese Qualitative Data in Situations 6, 7 and 8*

Situations	Total responses	Number of responses where coding differed	Number of responses with coder agreement	Percentage agreement
Sitn6	63	4	59	94%
Sitn7	66	11	55	83%
Sitn8	70	1	69	99%

Table 4.4. *Coding Agreement of the English Qualitative Data in Situations 6, 7 and 8*

	Total responses	Number of responses where coding differed	Number of responses with coder agreement	Percentage agreement
Sitn6	79	12	67	85%
Sitn7	84	16	68	81%
Sitn8	81	18	63	78%

Regarding the level of interrater reliability, for simple percentage agreement, a result of 70% to 75% or more is considered satisfactory, although over 90% is ideal (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Schreier, 2012; Stemler, 2004). As can be seen from the tables above, high interrater reliability of more than 80% agreement was maintained across all three situations for both the Vietnamese and English coding, except in situation 8 of the English questionnaire. The quality of interrater reliability between the Vietnamese coders was ideal in situations 6 and 8, where it reached 94% and 99% agreement respectively. The fact that both the researcher and the second coder are native Vietnamese and come from the same cultural background is the likely reason for the high coding agreement for the Vietnamese data.

The high interrater reliability of coding established by the test means that the researcher might then code the rest of the dataset independently and confidently. However, because “careful coding is a key component of good research” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 248), the researcher highlighted all differences between coders and examined any possible problems where coding differed. According to Schreier (2012), there are two main reasons for such disagreement: either because coders differ in their interpretation of that code, or because the coding definition is not sufficiently clear, often due to overlaps between codes. This could be seen in some situations where there was no useful distinctions between certain codes. To resolve the first problem, the researcher



reviewed the responses where codes differed, identified why they differed, adjusted her understanding and modified the definition of some codes to incorporate what the second coder had said. These distinctions were carefully noted in the list of codes and the researcher followed this understanding of the codes in the remaining coding. For the second problem, the researcher clarified definitions to reflect the discussions between the researcher and the second coder, and identified overlaps between codes.

Overlaps appeared to be the main issue underlying differences in coding in the interrater reliability test. A closer look at the data in English showed that half of the differences between the codes assigned by the researcher and the second coder in the three situations tested related to the two codes QQguilt and QQallow. For example, in situation 6, a number of responses showed that the possible usage of QQguilt and QQallow were not clearly differentiated, e.g., *“I would probably not say anything else as I have already try to reassure the friend it was an accident and she is more than likely venting her anger because she liked the vase”* (Sitn6, AA48). Likewise, in situation 7 about being teased by a group of people on the bus, there was no useful distinction between QQdon’t care *“Silence means I don’t care about what happened”* and QQignore *“Silence means I don’t pay attention to the other person”*. In the Vietnamese questionnaire, these two codes could be used interchangeably with responses *“mac ke nguoi ta noi”* (Sitn7, VV3, VV6, VV9) [so much the worse what s/he says], *“khong ban tam toi ho”* (Sitn7, VV20) [not interested in them/don’t care about them]; *“khong quan tam”* (Sitn7, VV24, VV34, 44, 52) [not interested in/don’t care], *“ai noi gi ke ho”* (Sitn7, VV55) [whatever they say, just ignore]. Perhaps because of this, seven out of eleven of the differences between the codes assigned to the Vietnamese responses concerned these two codes. These all suggest the modification the coding system to make it more appropriate to the data being coded. The solution to the overlap was not to remove a code, because although the two codes QQdont care and QQignore were difficult to distinguish in situation 7, the distinction between them was useful in other situations, e.g. situation 8 *“I didn’t care about what they said”* (AA80) versus *“I would let it slide, ignore the comments...”* (AA43). Clearly, overlaps are generally considered undesirable, and so the possibility of devising macro-codes was envisaged.

#### 4.2.2.3 Establishing macro-codes

Macro-codes (also referred to as “thematic code [s]” (Miles & Huberman, 1994), “codes” differentiated from sub-codes (Saldaña, 2009), “pattern codes” (Bazeley, 2013), “super-codes” (Gibson & Brown, 2009) or “theme codes” (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) are general codes that encompass the broad topic areas of two or more micro-codes. According to the literature, code grouping is widely used in coding practices. The macro-code is designed not simply to reduce data but to focus on and/or summarize the codes created through the initial, detailed coding process

(Bazeley, 2013; J. Harding, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). In discussing coding systems, Mackey and Gass (2005) state that “data can always be collapsed into a broader level of coding later if necessary” (p. 230). This is a point worth considering, as in coding researchers attempt to reduce complex, messy qualitative data to clearly see concepts, themes or ideas evolving. In this “second level of coding” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 232), the researchers sometimes need to combine a large number of specific codes .

Grouping related micro-codes has many important functions, but perhaps the most critical is that grouping enables the researcher “to identify categories that codes can be placed into and so save time in the analysis that follows” (J. Harding, 2013, p. 83). This technique can be seen as a kind of data reduction which “helps the researcher to see beyond the detail of the individual case and to identify themes” (Richards, 2009, p. 93). This closely links to Saldaña’s (2013) finding that when a researcher starts coding, they are likely to assign each unit of data a unique code. However, in larger and complete data sets, the researcher might group the coincidentally similar codes together. Similarly, Barbour (2008) highlights the dangers of using so many codes that data become unmanageable.

In this study, macro-codes were identified through a sorting process in which the researcher found possible connections between individual codes to generate a new code representing them. Following the works of Bazeley (2013); Bernard and Ryan (2010); Gibson and Brown (2009); J. Harding (2013); Mackey and Gass (2005); Saldaña (2013), the researcher established macro-codes by following these steps:

- (1) Review micro codes (QQ) with definitions
- (2) Group codes together
- (3) Name the macro-codes starting with QZ for each group of codes
- (4) Refine the preliminary list of macro-codes
- (5) Decide on the final macro-codes

As can be seen, macro-codes were identified through sorting micro-codes. In this process, trial and error were used to obtain the final list.

The first step was a close study of the codes to see which ones were related. A macro theme was then assigned to each network of codes. Examples 1-3 below show samples of networking selected codes, and the emergence of AVOIDANCE as a macro theme:

**Example 1:** QQavoid: Silence means I avoid confrontation. → Interpretation: avoiding conflict with people you are talking with → AVOIDANCE

**Example 2:** QQcalm: Silence means I try to calm the situation. → Interpretation: silence is an attempt to diminish conflict, to avoid exacerbating the situation → AVOIDANCE

**Example 3:** QQstop: Silence means I don't want to communicate anymore on this topic →

Interpretation: avoiding further communication → AVOIDANCE

In these examples, each code clearly relates to AVOIDANCE and was therefore placed in the same group. In the forthcoming discussions, macro-codes are prefixed with QZ to differentiate them from the micro-codes starting with QQ.

There are cases where the researcher can easily assign a macro-code as with QZavoidance above, where silence is seen as a way to avoid conflict; or with QZprocessing, including QQthinking, QQlearning and QQlistening, using silence to process information. The same process was performed on the other micro-codes, and mostly resulted in groups of three or four micro-codes. To arrive at QZacquiescence, seven micro-codes were found in common and were grouped together under the macro category labeled “QZacquiescence” (table 4.5).

Table 4.5. *Example of Macro-code QZacquiescence*

<b>QZacquiescence</b> = Silence as a sign of acceptance	QQguilt	Silence means I accept the blame/the responsibility for this.
	QQagree	Silence means I agree with what the other person says.
	QQallow	Silence means I let the other person say what they have to say whether it's appropriate or not.
	QQsubmissive	Silence means I submit to what the other person wants.
	QQunderstand	Silence means I understand the other person's position.
	QQpatient	Silence means I put up with the situation.
	QQpromise	Silence means I promise not to make the mistake again.

The researcher drew up a preliminary list of macro-codes. However, it is stated that “the researcher can only use their judgment to identify broad subject areas under which the data could be grouped [...] The initial list of categories will almost inevitably be modified in the course of the analysis” (J. Harding, 2013, p. 84). Therefore, the researcher continued to refine the grouping into macro-codes. For example, one new group was formed from grouping QZregret with QQsorry and QQsad. The four codes QQforgive, QQhappy, QQworse and QQstupid, which did not fit into any categories, were grouped together to form the twelfth group of “Other”.

The final 12 groups of macro-codes are shown in table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6. *The 12 Macro-codes Established for the Qualitative Survey*

<b>1. QZacquiescence</b> = Silence as a sign of acceptance	QQguilt	Silence means I accept the blame/the responsibility for this.
	QQagree	Silence means an agreement with what the other person says.
	QQallow	Silence means I let the other person say what they have to say whether it's appropriate or not.
	QQsubmissive	Silence means I submit to what the other person wants.
	QQunderstand	Silence means I understand the other person's position.
	QQpatient	Silence means I put up with the situation.
	QQpromise	Silence means I promise not to make the mistake again.
<b>2. QZdispleasure</b> = Silence as a sign of negative emotions	QQshock	Silence means I am shocked, e.g. I don't believe it.
	QQunfair	Silence means I feel it is unfair.
	QQangry	Silence means I feel angry.
	QQoffended	Silence means I feel offended.
	QQdislike	Silence means I don't like it.
<b>3. QZapprehension</b> = Silence as a sign of apprehension	QQdisappointed	Silence means I feel disappointed.
	QQshy	Silence means I am not confident/too shy to speak up.
	QQself-effacement	Silence means I don't want to draw attention to myself.
	QQscared	Silence means I am afraid of something, e.g. losing a job.
<b>4. QZprocessing</b> = Silence as a means of processing or gaining information	QQintimidated	Silence means I don't want to stand up to the other person.
	QQthinking	Silence means I am thinking/hesitating or unsure what to say.
	QQlearning	Silence means I am learning from what the other person is saying.
	QQlistening	Silence means I am listening to the reasoning of the other person.
<b>5. QZdisregard</b> = Silence as a sign of lack of engagement	QQignorant	Silence means I don't have enough information.
	QQdont care	Silence means I don't care about what happened/happens.
	QQignore	Silence means I don't pay attention to the other person.
	QQsmall	Silence means I think what has happened is minor and not worth worrying about.
<b>6. QZcourtesy</b> = Silence as a sign of good manners	QQpassive	Silence means I don't give any input/I show a lack of participation or interest.
	QQrespect	Silence shows respect.
	QQpolite	Silence shows politeness, e.g., in not interrupting the conversation.
	QQwellbred	Silence means I am well brought up.

	QQsmart	Silence means I am intelligent and/or better than the other person.
<b>7. QZavoidance</b> = Silence as a lack of participation	QQstop	Silence means I don't want to communicate any more on this topic.
	QQavoid	Silence means I avoid confrontation/avoid the topic.
	QQcalm	Silence means I try to calm the situation.
<b>8. QZdiscomfort</b> = Silence as a sign of awkwardness	QQawkward	Silence means the situation is awkward.
	QQemb	Silence means I feel embarrassed.
<b>9. QZdissent</b> = Silence as refusal	QQnot responsible	Silence means I am not responsible for the situation.
	QQrefuse	Silence means I don't accept what is said.
<b>10. QZregret</b> = Silence as a sign of regret	QQsorry	Silence means I am sorry/I apologise/I feel bad.
	QQsad	Silence means I feel sad about the situation.
<b>11. QZdiscourtesy</b> = Silence as a sign of poor behavior	QQrude	Silence is rude.
	QQdisrespect	Silence means I don't respect the other person's feelings/point of view.
<b>12. Others</b>	QQforgive	Silence means I forgive the other person.
	QQhappy	Silence means I feel happy.
	QQworse	Silence would make the situation worse.
	QQstupid	Silence means I am stupid.

To summarize, precise coding was necessary and was established on the basis of careful consideration of the data. Specifically:

1. The researcher was careful to code what informants said silence would mean, not how the informants were describing the situation in general.
2. If an informant gives two options i.e., silence could mean X or Y, the researcher coded both.
3. The researcher was careful with internal consistency in the coding.
4. The researcher was also careful not to over-interpret, that is not to add extra meaning to what the participants said.

#### **4.3 Record sheet and interview analysis**

The data set of record sheets comprised the participants' descriptions of their interactions involving silence with same-culture people, except the VA group, who reported silence involving interactions with Australians. As presented in their diary-type record sheet, authentic incidents from the participants were all real experiences. The total number of incidents collected was 55. The record sheet and interview data containing reports of real-life experiences are combined and discussed in Chapter 6.

The record sheets and interviews were analyzed in order to explain and develop our understanding of the patterns which emerged from the initial survey. This method is termed constant comparative analysis, and it was originally developed for the use in the grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1965). It consists of a continuous growth process in which any newly collected data is compared with previous data. Applying this method to the current study as patterns emerged from the questionnaire data, pieces of data i.e., interviews and record sheets, were compared to related pieces of survey data.

#### **4.4 Grounded theory**

Grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is one of the most widely used models for analysing qualitative data. The theory is central to an understanding of the research process being undertaken in the present project. In their original work, Glaser and Strauss suggest that a theory would work if it was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through a research project (pp. 2-3). From this point of view, inquiry is as much about discovering how to go about theorizing results as about having a theory grounded from the data (Berg & Lune, 2012; Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Jamie Harding, 2006; Morse & Richards, 2002; Schreier, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The main idea in grounded theory is to work inductively in order to “to create categories and subcategories in a data-driven way” (Schreier, 2012, p. 88). Therefore, the researcher does not begin the project with a preconceived theory in mind, but rather begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data. More precisely, in all phases of data treatment in this project i.e., the qualitative survey, record sheets and interviews, the researcher applied the steps of data analysis in grounded theory to generate inductive categories.

One of the essential steps in theory building is conceptualizing. As specified by Strauss and Corbin (1998), “In conceptualizing, we are abstracting. Data are broken down into discrete incidents, ideas, events, and acts, and then given a name that represents or stands for these” (p. 103). Once the concept formation is done, the researcher starts coding data and generating coding themes. These steps are especially “helpful for creating entire inductive coding frames, comprising both main categories and subcategories” (Schreier, 2012, p. 88). In the present research, codes in the qualitative survey are initially identified and defined, then assigned, refined and grouped to suggest relationships. Similarly, in the analysis of the record sheets and the interviews, the researcher explores participants’ thoughts, feelings and reasons for being silent. From here, the researcher sees where and why the VA are closer to the AA, which allows hypotheses to emerge from the data. The hypotheses include reasons for shifts in the likelihood of silence from the VA, and the desire for social integration that drives them to accommodate toward the AA and the culture of the AA they are living in and grappling with.

Underlying the concept of grounded theory is an emphasis on the detailed exploration of the subject matter and theoretical sensitivity in order to construct theory *grounded* in data (Morse & Richards, 2002). According to Morse and Richards, answering the questions “What’s going on here?”, “How is it different?” is essential to guide theorizing. The current study attempts to understand the intricate details of interpretations of silence across three different cultural groups who were asked to consider their likelihood of remaining silent in various situations and the meanings of being silent in each case. In analysing the responses to these questions, the researcher constantly worked with data to tease from them the patterns and the linkages that might generate theoretical insight. For example, with the survey data, firstly participants’ likelihood of being silent will be identified and compared. Patterns were thus found, along with their variations. Secondly, the frequency with which the various codes appeared was reviewed and compared with the data on the likelihood of being silent. By so doing, the circumstances where each of the group believes it would be silent and the meanings attributed to silence were found and an understanding of the circumstances was built into explanations of silence phenomena. In short, grounded theory derived from data was found to be most helpful for the analysis of the survey data.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has described the demographic information of the participants and the selection of participants’ data of the study. The chapter addresses different approaches to data analysis and the method finally used, emphasizing scale construct in the current data and the assumptions in the data set. Regarding data analysis issues, the ways codes in qualitative data analysis are identified and counted were presented. More specifically, the coding technique and the analysis of the qualitative data for this study were drawn from grounded theory. Relevant data in the latter two instruments, i.e., record sheets and interviews for explaining the beliefs and attitudes of the participants regarding accommodation into the new society, were analyzed from and triangulated with the patterns that emerged.

The analysis for interrater reliability shows that there is a high interrater reliability between the codes given by researchers and that of the second coders; this meant it was possible for the researcher to code the rest of the dataset independently and confidently. In preparation for efficient comparison and presentation of the qualitative questionnaire data and on the basis of careful consideration of similar and different micro-codes, macro-codes were applied.

The findings of the questionnaire data are discussed in Chapter 5, then the discussion of the findings and results from record sheets and interview are presented in the chapter that follows.

## Chapter 5

### DATA ANALYSIS FOR THE SURVEY: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As explained in the previous chapter, the investigation relies on various sources of data, i.e., questionnaire, record sheets and interview data, to offer an in-depth picture of silence. This chapter presents the results from the questionnaire. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the analysis of the Likert data, the second with the qualitative data on the meanings of silence. As shown in the first section, the analysis involved descriptive statistics to find out the patterns of similarity and differences in the reported likelihood of silence. The second section deals with the interpretations of silence by describing and comparing the relationship between Likert data and qualitative data employing visual aids such as easy-to-understand graphs as part of a more extensive statistical analysis about how these two data sets intertwine. The findings generated in this chapter involving the VA group will be further elucidated in the subsequent chapter with the relevant qualitative data in the record sheets and interviews.

#### *5.1 Overview*

In the questionnaire survey, each participant was invited to complete a 35-situation survey on the likelihood of responding with silence. Five responses were possible: 1 very unlikely, 2 unlikely, 3 not sure, 4 likely and 5 very likely. Survey takers were also asked to indicate the possible meanings of silence associated with each situation. Finally, further comments could be provided. Appendix 5 provides the Likert scale data and meaning charts for all 35 situations.

##### *5.1.1 The Likert data*

The Likert scale data were reported in charts and tables. For each situation, the researcher put the charts for the three groups side by side and carried out a visual comparison to identify similarities or differences between the three groups. Here is the example of the charts of the Likert data for Situation 1:

You recommend your friend to your boss and s/he offers him a high salary. However, after five months, your friend has not worked as expected as sales do not increase. The boss is now reprimanding you for your wrong decision. How likely are you to be silent? (1. Very unlikely, 2. Unlikely, 3. Not sure, 4. Likely, 5. Very Likely)



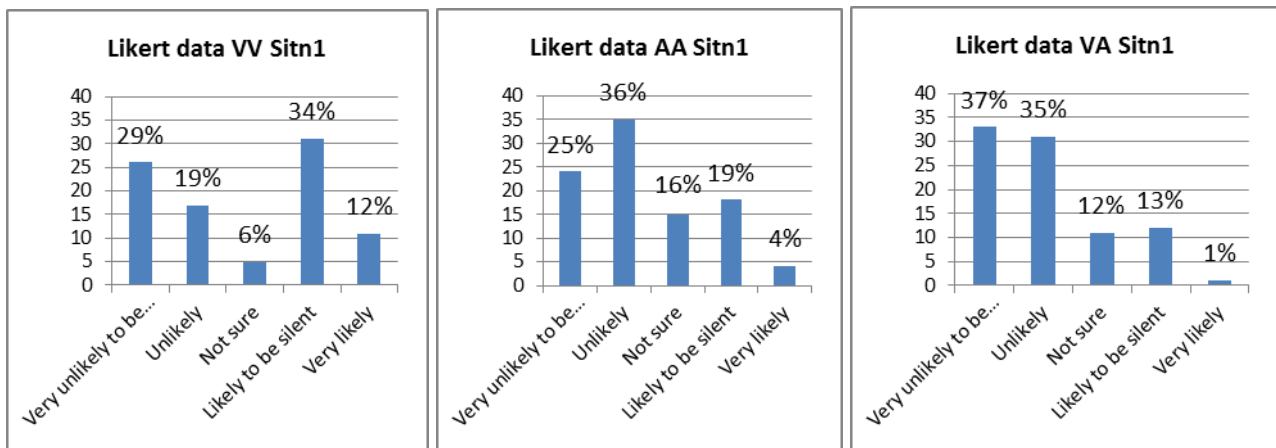


Figure 5.1. Reported likelihood of silence for Situation 1: Likert data.

The Likert data for each situation were then further analyzed. In grouping together the responses “very unlikely” and “unlikely” (Likert 1 and 2), the total likelihood of being silent in each of the three groups can be identified. Similarly, the responses “very likely” and “likely” (Likert 4 and 5) were added together to see the likelihood of speaking. As can be seen, in the situation above, the VV results are bimodal, having two opposing peaks, and this group has the greatest likelihood of being silent (adding Likert 4 and 5). VA are the most unlikely to be silent. This is quite surprising given the stereotypes of the Vietnamese in Australia. However, this is only one situation and it is necessary to examine the other 34 situations to see if this is a common pattern.

The researcher analyzed the Likert data for the 35 situations and noted obvious patterns of similarity and difference. The results are reported in Tables 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3.

#### 5.1.1.1 Patterns of similarity

As shown in Table 5.1, there are significant cultural similarities among the three groups in more than one third of the situations. In a number of cases, the responses of the VA group are similar to those of the AA group. In other cases, the VA are similar to their home culture. There are just three cases where the AA and VV group are similar. The VA have an interesting pattern in that sometimes they follow the VV group and sometimes they are similar to the AA group. We will discuss this further throughout chapters 5 and 6.

Table 5.1. *Patterns of Similarity across the 35 Situations: Likert data*

Grouping	Situations	Total (35)
All three groups similar	3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 34	14
VV different (VA and AA similar)	1, 2, 4, 12, 17, 21, 35	7
AA different (VA and VV similar)	5, 14, 15, 16, 19, 22, 33	7
VA different (AA and VV similar)	11, 27, 31, 32	4
All three groups different	9, 26, 30	3

**5.1.1.2 Likelihood of being silent**

After presenting broad patterns of similarity, it is possible to focus more specifically on the differences in the likelihood of being silent and likelihood of speaking. To see where each group is most likely to be silent, the responses “very likely” and “likely” (Likert 4 and 5) were added together figure 5.2).

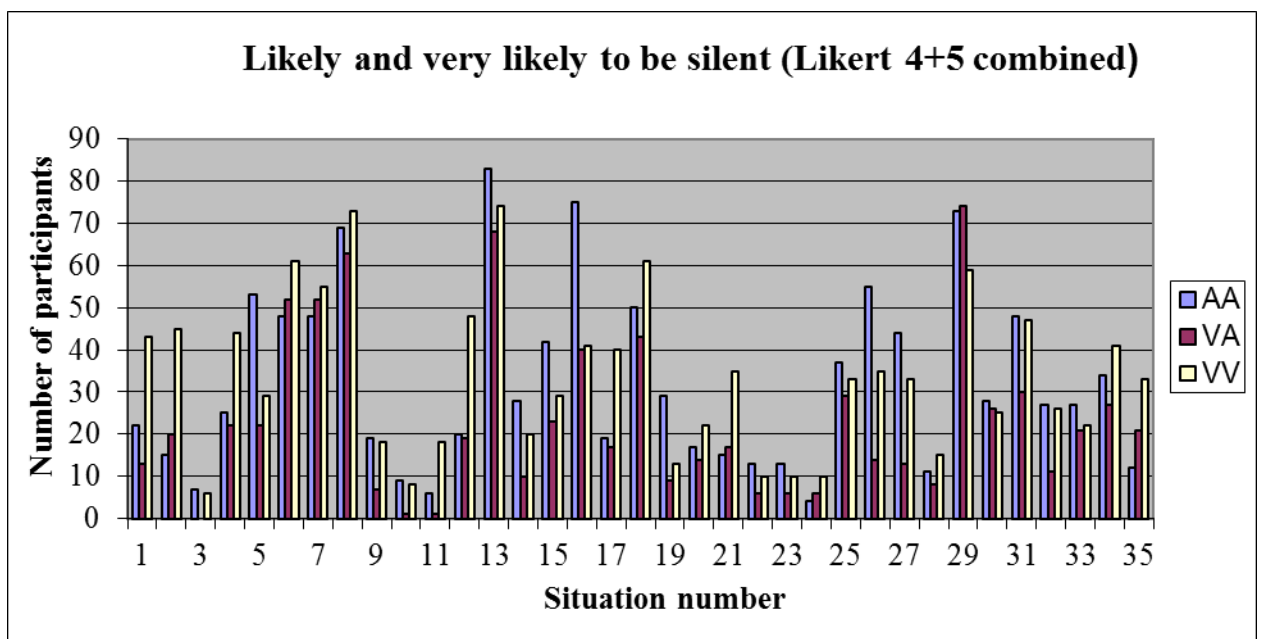


Figure 5.2. Likelihood of being silent among the three groups.

From figure 5.2, the group most likely to be silent in each situation was identified. This is shown in table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2. *Groups Most Likely to be Silent in each Situation*

Groups	Situations	Total
AA most likely to be silent	3, 5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 22, 23, 25,26,27, 30,31, 32, 33	18
VA most likely to be silent	29	1
VV most likely to be silent	1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 34, 35	16

The results show that although AA have the strongest belief that they would be silent in slightly more situations than VV, overall there was little difference between these two groups, as both VV and AA are the groups most likely to be silent in a similar number of situations (18 and 16 respectively). In other words, contrary to the stereotype, VV are not significantly more likely to be silent than the AA group. It should also be noted that VA are the most likely to be silent in only one situation.

### **5.1.1.3 Likelihood of speaking**

In the above section, participants' likelihood of silence was described. However, the likelihood of speaking needs to be identified and compared to see in which situations each group believes they are most likely to speak. The following figure shows the reported likelihood of speaking (or other means of not remaining silent) among the three groups.

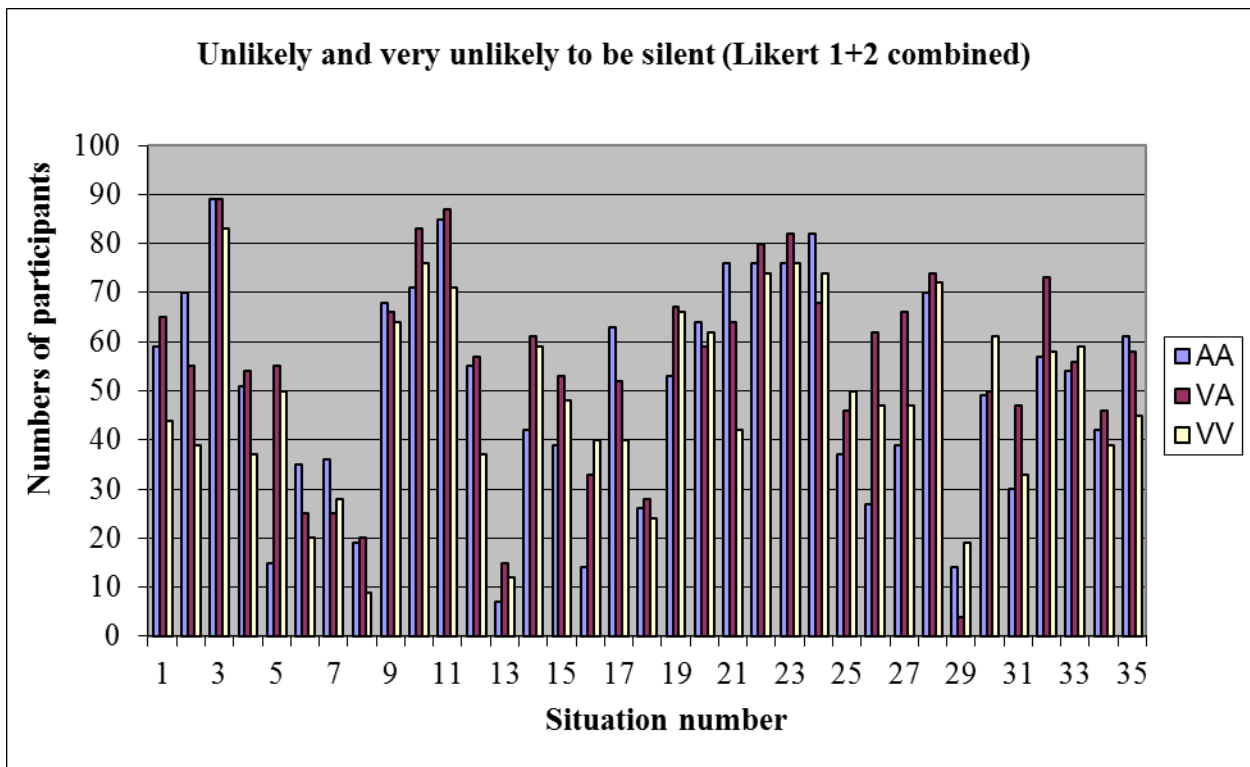


Figure 5.3. Likelihood of speaking among the three groups.

Table 5.3 below presents the situations where each group is most likely to speak.

Table 5.3. Likelihood of Speaking Across the 35 Situations

Groups	Situations	Total
AA least likely to be silent	2, 6, 7, 9, 17, 20, 21, 24, 35	9
VA least likely to be silent	1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32, 34	21
VV least likely to be silent	16, 25, 29, 30, 33	5

As is shown in Table 5.3, VA are the least likely to be silent in 21 situations out of 35. AA and VV are quite close to each other with nine and five situations respectively. Comparing this result with Table 4.6, it is interesting to note that the likelihood to speak is not simply the reverse of the likelihood of silence. For example, the AA group is both the most likely to be silent and the most likely to speak in Situation 9.

There are also situations where all three groups are quite similar in their responses. For example, all three groups are likely to speak in Situation 3 and Situation 11, but the VA are especially likely to speak.

#### *5.1.1.4 Summary*

This section has discussed the results of the Likert questions, which deal with Vietnamese and Australian beliefs about the likelihood of being silent and likelihood of speaking. The analysis above has shown that contrary to the stereotype, VV are not necessarily the most likely to be silent. AA believe the most strongly that they would be silent in slightly more situations than the other two groups. VA are the most likely to be silent in only one situation. We can therefore hypothesize that the image of the Vietnamese as being more silent than Australians (see Section 2.3.1) may well be an oversimplification.

#### *5.1.2 The qualitative data*

Utilizing the macro-codes described in Section 4.4, the researcher undertook coding of the qualitative questionnaire data (the meanings attributed to silence).

Eleven possible interpretations of silence were identified across the 35 situations even though some were perceived and used more often than the others. Participants supplied a range of interpretations of silence including: silence as a sign of acceptance (coded QZacquiescence), of negative emotions (coded QZdispleasure), of apprehension (coded QZapprehension), of processing (coded QZprocessing), of lacking engagement (coded QZdisregard), of good manners (coded QZcourtesy), of lack of participation (coded QZavoidance), of awkwardness (coded QZdiscomfort), of refusal (coded QZdissent), of regret (coded QZregret), and of poor behavior (coded QZdiscourtesy). Table 5.4 presents the frequencies of these codes. As can be seen, acquiescence, disregard and avoidance are the three most popular interpretations of silence, occupying 24.87%, 16.41% and 10.07% respectively. However, as we will see in the next sections the interpretations of silence are highly context dependent. QZregret is the least frequent choice for interpreting the silence, accounting for just 2.17%.

Table 5.4. *The Interpretations of Silence and the Their Frequencies Across All Three Groups and All 35 Situations*

Codes	VV	AA	VA	Total	Percentages
QZacquiescence	633	655	510	1798	24.87%
QZdisregard	292	553	341	1186	16.41%
QZavoidance	144	349	235	728	10.07%
QZprocessing	200	245	189	634	8.77%
QZcourtesy	183	242	184	609	8.42%
QZapprehension	153	253	189	595	8.23%
QZdiscourtesy	135	188	139	462	6.39%
QZdispleasure	94	196	101	391	5.41%
QZdissent	95	136	109	340	4.70%
QZdiscomfort	40	186	71	297	4.11%
QZregret	68	60	29	157	2.17%
Other	9	15	8	32	0
<b>Total by groups</b>	<b>2046</b>	<b>3078</b>	<b>2105</b>	<b>7229</b>	

Based on the frequency of occurrence of each code within the data, the researcher turned the coding into charts (henceforth called interpretation charts). As an example, frequencies of codes for Situation 2 for the AA group are presented in figure 5.4 below.

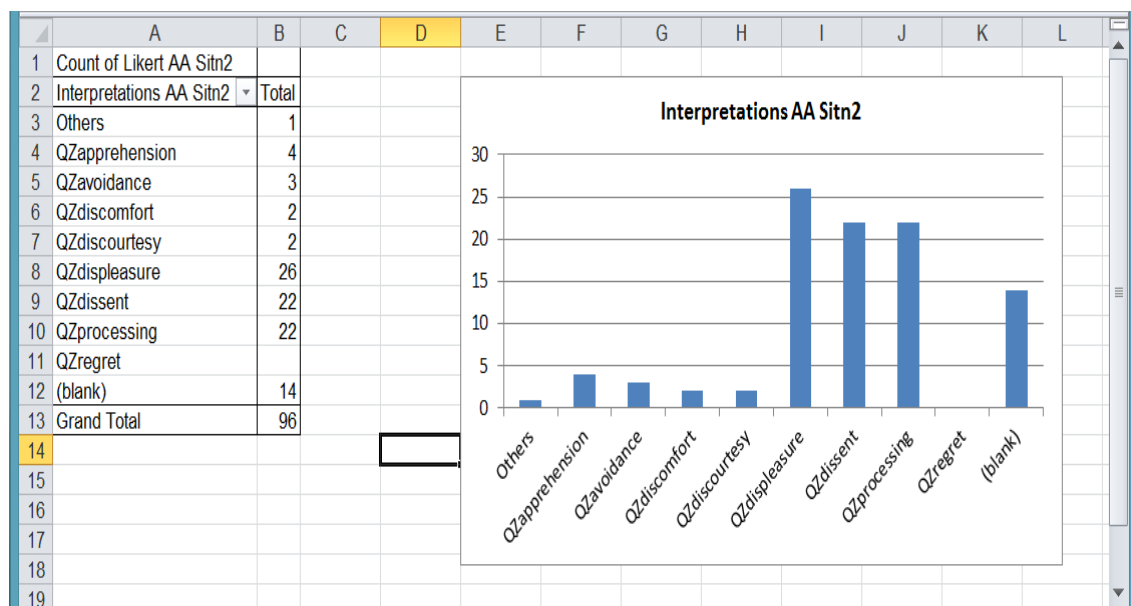


Figure 5.4. Frequency chart for coding of interpretations of silence for situation 2 by AA group.

Interpretation charts for the same situation across the three groups were then put together. An example of this is provided in figure 5.5.

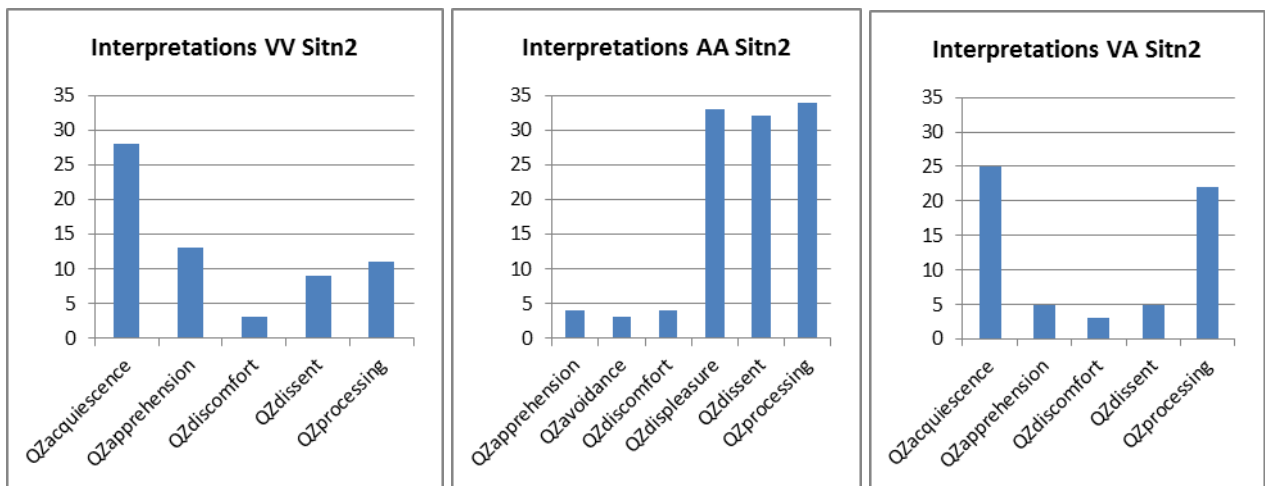


Figure 5.5. Interpretation charts for situation 2 across the three groups.

As can be seen from figure 5.5, coding meanings enables the researcher to gain an overview of what people believe silence would mean in a particular situation. Specifically, in Situation 2 [Responding to a marriage proposal], one can observe the different interpretations of silence across the three groups, the VV, AA and VA. Whereas the VV and VA groups interpret silence more as a sign of acceptance, nobody in the AA group would consider silence as acquiescence. In fact, AA informants would interpret silence in this situation as displeasure and dissent whereas these two codes in the other groups are minimal. *QZprocessing* in the AA and VA also appears high indicating silence as a sign of contemplation of the issue. The fact that a high number of responses from these two groups interpreted silence as processing, or thinking about the issue suggests that there would be less misunderstanding between these two groups regarding the silence-keeping behavior for processing information. However, it seems that misunderstanding could happen frequently between them and the VV due to low responses on *QZprocessing* from the VV.

In order to explore the relation between different interpretations of silence in the three groups and the likelihood of silence, the quantitative analysis (of the Likert data) and qualitative analysis (of the coded meanings) were put together. Specifically, the researcher assembled the six charts for each situation (three Likert scale charts and three interpretation charts, see Appendix 6) and looked for any intersections or parallels between the likelihood and the meanings of being silent among the three groups for each group and for each situation. Figure 5.6 presents the Likert data and participants' interpretations of silence for Situation 1 as an example of this method. Situation 1 was as follows:

You recommend your friend to your boss and s/he offers him a high salary. However, after five months, your friend has not worked as expected as sales do not increase. The boss is now reprimanding you for your wrong decision. How likely are you to be silent?

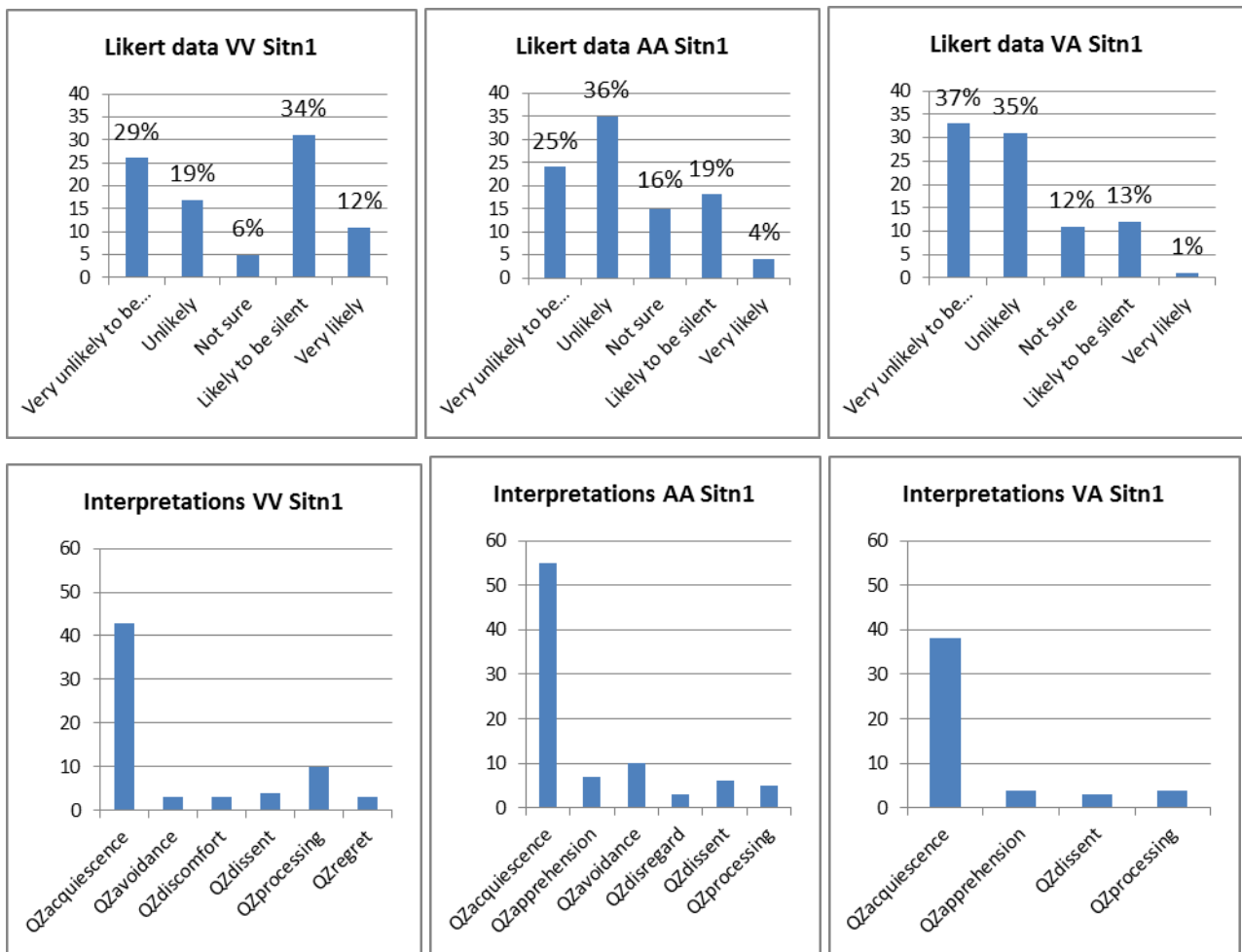


Figure 5.6. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for situation 1.

As can be seen, in the situation above, a large number of responses across the three groups indicated silence as a sign of acceptance (*QZacquiescence*) of the boss's accusation. It can be seen that all three groups agree on the interpretation of silence, but the likelihood of remaining silent is very different, with the VV group more likely to remain silent than the others. 49% of the VV group were likely to be silent (Likert scores 4 and 5), whereas only 23% of AA and 15% of VA would choose to be so. In other words, by examining the likelihood and interpretations of silence in the whole dataset, the researcher has the chance to see the similarities and differences in each of these variables across the three groups and the degree to which these two are related; all this helps answer the research questions as to the ways in which silence is understood and used by Vietnamese and Australians and the extent to which Vietnamese in Australia adapt their interpretations and beliefs about silence when in regular communication with Australians.

The researcher completed analysis of the likelihood of responding with silence in relation to the interpretations of silence for the 35 situations. Based on this initial analysis and on the fact that one of the aims of the current study is to identify whether and how Vietnamese and Australians differ in interpretations of silence, the 35 situations were classified into two groups. The first group comprised nine situations where there was little difference in likelihood and in interpretations



(Situations 3, 6, 7, 13, 18, 24, 29 and 34) across all three groups. These situations are discussed briefly below (Section 5.2.1). It was logical to infer that in these situations the participants from all three groups shared some norms with respect to the interpretations of silence and the behavior considered appropriate. The second group comprised five situations with similar likelihood but different interpretations (Section 5.2.2). The third group comprised 21 situations where informants across the three groups gave very different answers. These situations were further analysed to find out what exactly differed and to discover the intricacies of the use of silence (Section 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6).

## 5.2. Situations with few differences

### 5.2.1 Situations with similar likelihood and interpretations of silence

Most of the situations where there were similar likelihood and interpretations of silence were about dealing with strangers. These comprise Situations 3, 7, 13, 24, 29, and 34. The other situations in this group were Situations 6 and 8 and 18. It should be noted that all situations involving strangers in the dataset fall neatly into this group. The short descriptions of these situations are shown in Table 5.5 below<sup>3</sup>.

Table 5.5. *Situations with Similar Likelihood and Interpretations of Silence*

<b>Situations</b>	<b>Contexts</b>
<b>(Total: 9)</b>	
Sitn3	Stepping on someone's foot
Sitn6	Breaking a friend's vase
Sitn7	On the bus being teased by strangers
Sitn8	Late to class and criticized by the teacher
Sitn13	Drunkard in the city
Sitn 18	Talking a lot with friends who do not respond
Sitn24	Sitting with strangers at a wedding reception
Sitn29	In the cinema when your phone rings
Sitn34	The people behind you in the cinema talk among themselves

First of all, it is clear that both Vietnamese and Australian participants believed talking to be the most appropriate response after accidentally having inconvenienced someone (Situation 3), hence answered that they were unlikely to be silent, as can be seen from Figure 5.7. A study of the

<sup>3</sup> It is desirable from this point that readers consult Appendix 5 for full descriptions of situations and charts of the Likert scale data and interpretations.

interpretations of silence and likelihood together showed that there would be quite similar implications of silence, particularly when participants were very unlikely to be silent.

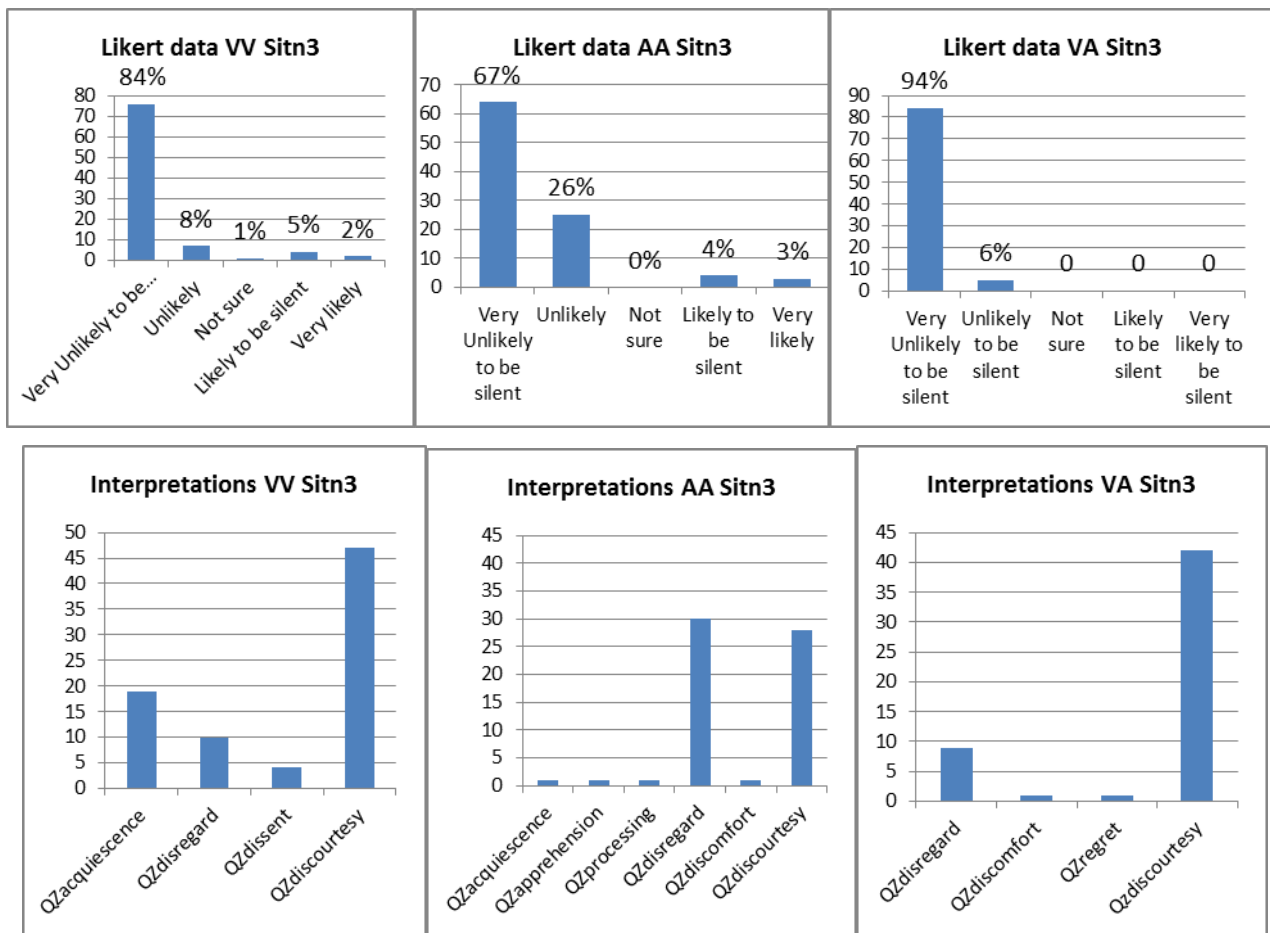


Figure 5.7. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence in the three groups for situation 3.

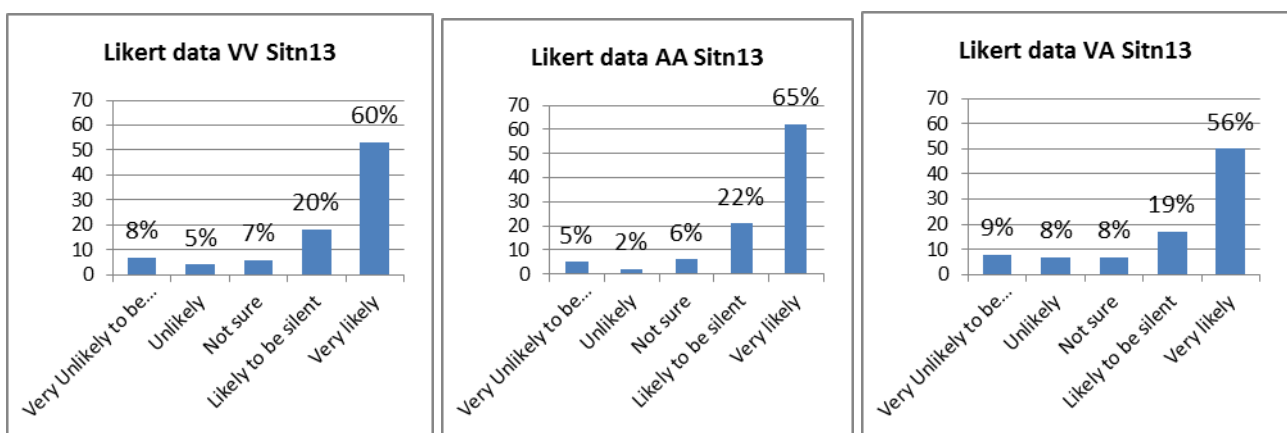
Figure 5.7 shows that *QZdiscourtesy* had the highest frequency among the coded interpretations and was also distributed similarly across the three groups. In the coding list, *QZdiscourtesy* was used to indicate that silence is considered rude and means that the other person's feelings and/or point of view are not respected. It can be understood as a form of poor behavior in not making an apology. Overall, the dominance of *QZdiscourtesy* (accounting for nearly half of the total interpretations in all three groups) and *QZdisregard* in the total number of code meanings shows the negative interpretations of silence in this situation and explains the unlikelihood of being silent across the three groups.

As can be seen from the data, it is important to say something when small violations of etiquette are committed, such as stepping on someone's foot. However, people can also deal with this mistake through the use of silence. Although only 7% of the VV think that they would be silent, the frequency of *QZacquiescence* in their interpretation indicates that silence is a way of showing guilt. For Situation 3, this is seen in the answers of *QQguilt* (Silence means I accept the blame/the

responsibility for this) of the VV group, which were later coded as *QZacquiescence*<sup>4</sup>. Examples of VV responses are “nhận lỗi của mình và không muốn nói ra lý do mình giẫm phải chân người khác” [accepting the mistake and not wanting to explain the reason for stepping on the person’s foot] (VV14), “thua nhận mình là người vô trách nhiệm” [accepting the blame for this as I was irresponsible] ((VV20), and “toi biết lỗi mà ko dám lên tiếng có nghĩa là toi đã sai” [I accept the mistake but in not speaking out I was wrong] (VV23). As the comment of VV23 shows, silence in this situation could be both acquiescence and discourteous: it indicates guilt, but also shows that this respondent at least thinks that just feeling guilty is not enough - there needs to be a verbal apology. It is logical to conclude that even if the participants were silent, they were not disregarding the situation but would feel apologetic as well. This would be particularly the case with the VV.

By and large the three groups indicated that if they were silent in this situation, it would be very rude and/or disrespectful to the other person. Regarding the interpretation of silence, however, nearly half of the VA and more than a quarter of the VV respondents gave no meaning of silence as they indicated that they would speak after all. It is worth mentioning that for reported likelihood the VA only chose options 4 and 5 on the Likert scale, thus showing their absolute determination to speak in this situation.

Although the choice of speaking was considered desirable in Situation 3 (for reasons of courtesy), it was not considered the best choice in Situations 7 [On the bus being teased by strangers] and 13 [Drunkard in the city]. This raises the hypothesis of a relationship between the possibility of provoking anger and the likelihood of remaining silent in these situations. Let us take Situation 13 as an example.



<sup>4</sup> Some nuances in the micro-coding were lost in the macro-coding. To resolve this, the researcher often tracked the original coding to see on which micro-code the macro-code was established.

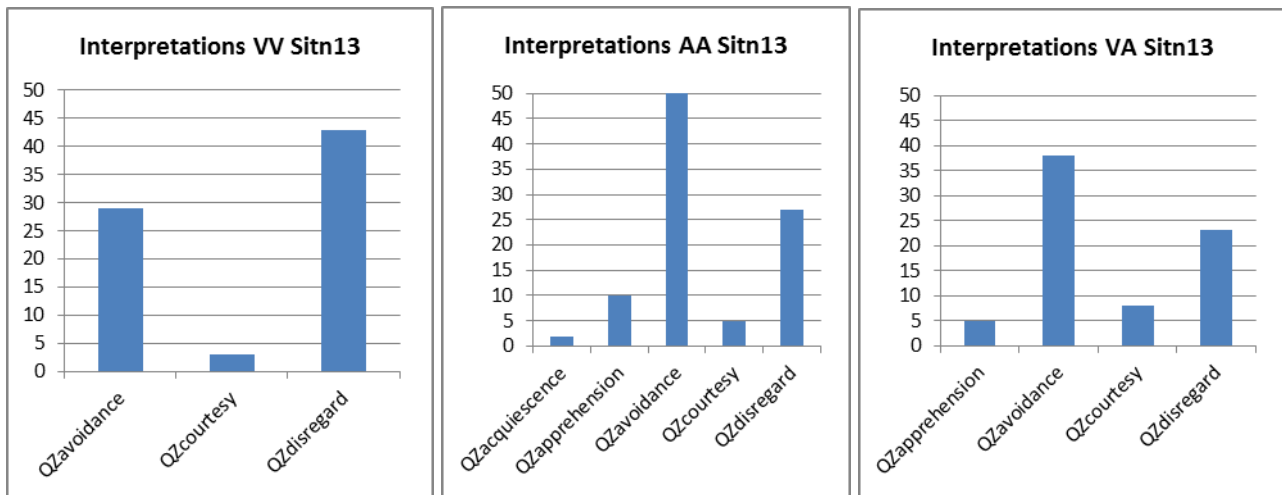


Figure 5.8. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence in the three groups for situation 13.

As figure 5.8 indicates, all three groups were quite similar in their responses with respect to the likelihood of being silent. *Likert 5 Very Likely to be silent* accounted for more than half of the total responses for all three groups. A low percentage of informants in each group indicated that they would be likely to speak (corresponding to *Likert score 1* and *Likert score 2*).

The interpretation charts for the three groups show that the participants would be silent mostly because they wanted to avoid conflict and at the same time disregard the drunkard.

Let us first examine avoidance of conflict. For the AA, *QZavoidance* represented more than half of the total number of coded meanings while this code for the VV and the VA was lower. Looking at the interpretations we see that “avoidance” is clearly about avoiding conflict. AA participants responded with phrases such as: “don’t want to engage” “don’t want to get involved” or “don’t want to provoke/antagonize”. The typical reasons given for these responses are that the participants are aware of the drunkard’s intoxicated state and thereby would stay silent to prevent the situation from escalating unnecessarily: “Trying not to provoke them or egg them on” (AA17), “you don’t want to cause trouble or to allow the situation to continue” (AA30), “Avoid dangerous conflict” (AA46), “You don’t want to antagonise an angry drunk because they are not themselves and it could create more trouble than it’s worth.” (AA48), “That you’re trying to not the let the situation escalate and see if it’ll resolve itself without further drama” (AA83), “You would not engage and aggravate him, and therefore risk being violently attacked” (AA92).

Turning to the VA, responses coded *QQavoid* are: “Muon tranh rac roi/phien phuc” [want to avoid trouble] (VA3), “không muốn có chuyện phiền phức” [don’t want to have troubles] (VA4), “toi tranh su rac roi va nguy hiem ko can thiet” [ I would avoid unnecessary troubles and dangers](VA10), “không muốn gây tranh cãi” [don’t want to cause an argument] (VA13), “tránh những phiền phức khi dừng lại và đáp trả nguoi say” [avoiding the troubles caused by staying and responding to the drunkard] (VA15), “Tranh day dua vao su rac roi ko can thiet” [avoiding getting

into unnecessary trouble] (VA26), “Ho dang khongkiem soat duoc hanh vi cua minh, tot nhat la im lang neu khong muon bi va lay” [They can’t control their behavior, thus it is better to be silent if one doesn’t want to get into trouble] (VA39), “Đổi với nhưng người say rượu, im lặng là cách tốt để giải quyết công việc” [With the drunkard, silence is the best way to solve the problem] (VA46), “không chấp vì cãi nhau với tên say sẽ chỉ làm tình huống xấu hơn” [don’t bother to reply because an argument with the drunkard will just make the situation worse] (VA71), etc. These responses refer to the desire to keep silent to avoid further troubles or conflict. Participants believe that responding to drunken strangers is not worth the time and would just inflame the situation further, hence would choose to be silent. Although the VV gave interpretations of avoidance slightly less often than the other two groups, their responses coded *QQavoid* express the same opinion as the AA and VA about coping with the drunkard; to say that they would be silent not for fear but for a desire to calm the situation. VV *QZavoidance* is slightly less frequent probably because a little more than half of the VV coded answers concern an interpretation of *QZdisregard*, more than double that of the other two groups.

We now move on to disregarding, the second most common interpretation of silence in this situation. For the VV *QZdisregard* provided nearly half the total coded meanings. A large number of the VV respondents spoke of the need to be silent as a way of ignoring the individual, which was later coded as *QQignore* under the umbrella code of *QZdisregard*: “không chấp voi nhưng người say” [refusing to acknowledge the drunk] (VV5, VV7), “mặc kệ nhưng lời của người say” [refusing to deal with the drunk and his words] (VV43), “mặc kệ họ vì họ đang say mà” [refusing to deal with them because they are drunk] (VV49), “không quan tâm đến tên say rượu” [not paying attention to the drunk] (VV78). VA *QQignore* – *QZdisregard* typically includes the phrase “không thèm chấp người say” [refusing to acknowledge the drunk] or “Phớt lờ, mặc kệ họ” [ignoring, refusing to deal with them]. The cases of the AA responses coded *QQignore* are: “Refusing to deal with the crazy guy” (AA2), “ignoring the man completely” (AA19), “Ignoring them, showing them they are not going to get the attention they want” (AA26), “ignoring the drunk [...]” (AA34), “that I am ignoring the individual” (AA35), “that I was not going to sink to their level, and I was just going to ignore it” (AA80), “walking away and pretending you didn’t see or hear him” (AA90). It can be said that the answers for avoidance and disregarding are about wise behavior towards the drunkard.

Confronting a drunken stranger seems an unwise thing to do. Thus participants imagining themselves in the situation tend think they would ignore and/or avoid the drunkard and walk away. Repeatedly in the answers of *QZavoidance* and *QZdisregard*, participants emphasized that in addition to being silent, something people would do was walk away. Participants’ responses were peppered with phrases like “To walk away without saying anything” (AA9), “[...] Best to walk away (AA10), “Walk away” (AA27, AA33), “[...] In most cases, walking away is better” (AA41),

“That you have enough strength to walk away” (AA56), “I think it would be best to walk away quickly and end the confrontation.” (AA80). As such what the respondents would do is very similar, whether or not their answers were coded as *QZavoidance* or *QZdisregard* – being silent and walk away. However, the comments in *QZavoidance* and *QZdisregard* show that how that behavior can be interpreted differently.

Also for Situation 13, a small number of respondents across the three groups responded that silence would mean courtesy. The interpretations that were subsumed under the macrocode *QZcourtesy* were originally coded as *QQsmart* (Silence means I am intelligent and/or better than the other person). Examples of AA responses are “the bigger person” (AA50), “that you have enough strength to walk away” (AA56), “being smart” (AA57), “you were smart because there is no reasoning with someone in an alcoholic state” (AA59) etc. “Courtesy” here indicates the belief of some informants that being silent would show the wisdom to know how to behave properly, to know what good manners are. Answers from Situations 7 [On the bus being teased by strangers] are similar to answers for Situation 13 in that participants would think silence would be the better choice to avoid danger/troubles. The two most common interpretations of silence across the three groups are avoidance and disregarding. For example, participants in the AA stated “Trying to ignore them, trying not to cause a scene” (AA2), “Ignoring their taunts, pretending not to care, feeling indifference and not responding verbally or emotionally (e.g. crying) to them” (AA10), “ignoring them (if I stayed near them); avoiding starting an a fight (if I moved away)” (AA14), “these people don’t know you and they are just being rude. It is better to avoid the situation and be silent” (AA16), “Ignoring these people and their comments” (AA43), “Avoid conflict” (AA46), “being a victim, not worsening the situation” (AA93), “Not giving them attention in order to not encourage them” (AA96).

In short, for Situations 7 and 13 involving the teasers on the bus and the drunkard in the city two, there is a strong possibility that people would be silent, ignore the crazy drunk and the teasers and moving away. This corresponds to the high frequency of interpretations of *QZavoidance* and *QZdisregard* in the data. The possible reason is that the bystanders would have a feeling of insecurity confronting the drunkard and/or a group of teasing strangers.

Turning to Situations 29 [In the cinema when your phone rings] and 34 [The people behind you in the cinema talk among themselves], it can be seen that most Vietnamese and Australians would be likely to be silent. The VV group was a little less certain and/or less emphatic in that they were more equally divided between likely and very likely. Relating this result to the interpretation charts, it is clear that *QZcourtesy* had some effect on the similar likelihood. Almost all coded answers from AA and VA groups related to an interpretation of courtesy in the situation, yielding more than half of the total coded meanings for each of those groups, double the occurrences for the

VV group. For situation 29, there was only a very small proportion of *QZdisregard*. In short, it can be seen that the AA and VA groups were close in both the likelihood of being silent and the interpretations of silence.

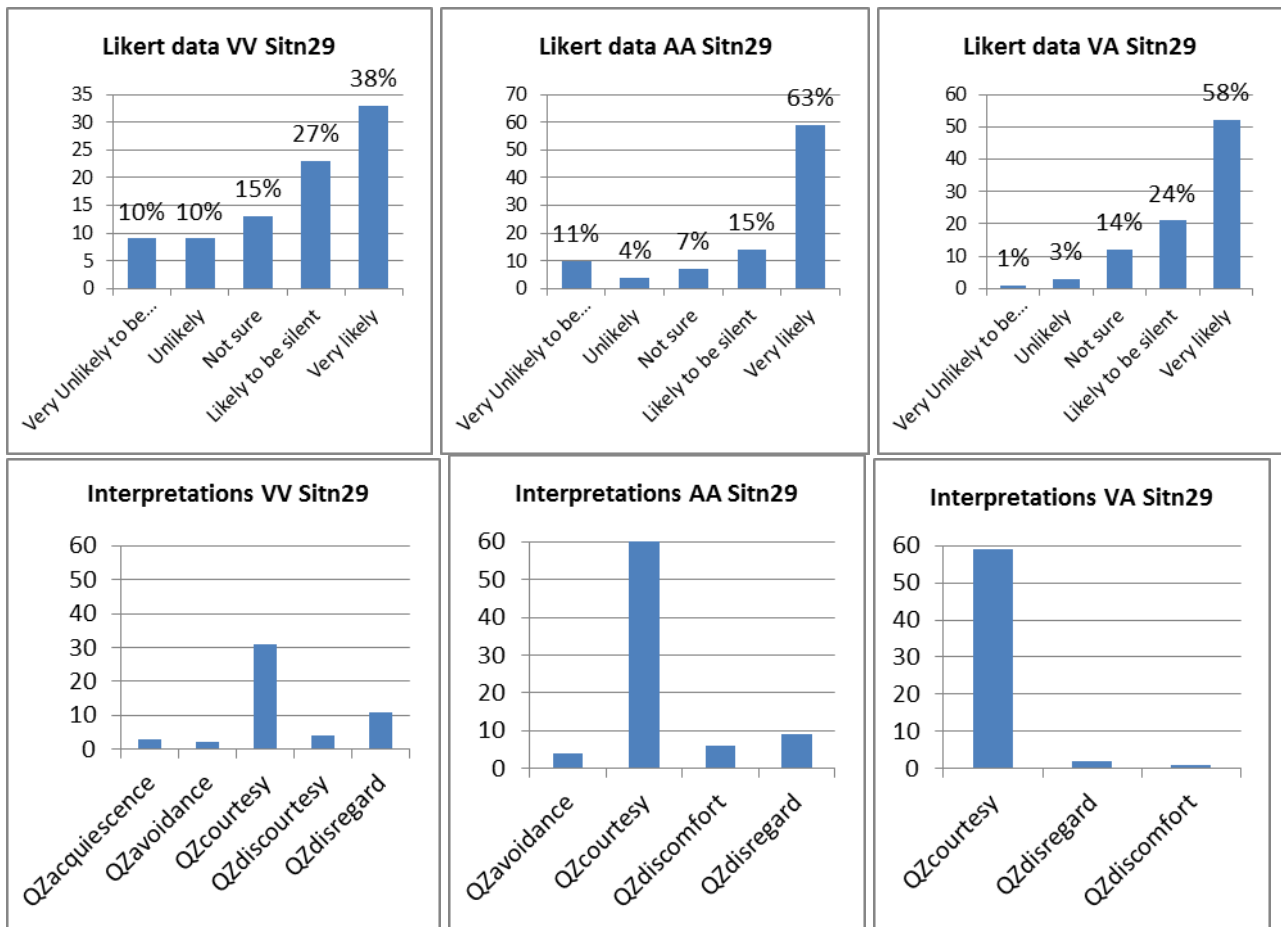


Figure 5.9. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence in the three groups for situation 29.

For Situation 34 [The people behind you in the cinema talk among themselves] (figure 5.10), respondents' choices are split between the likelihood and the unlikelihood of being silent, with slightly more opting for the latter response. This situation involves people (in the row behind) breaking the rule about silence. Therefore, the participants have to choose between obeying the rule of silence or breaking the rule of silence in order, presumably, to ask the people who are talking to be quiet. It is interesting to note, given this split in opinion, that there are also high scores for "Not sure". This can result from the fact that when being silent and not being silent seem equally acceptable, it is hard to know what to decide.

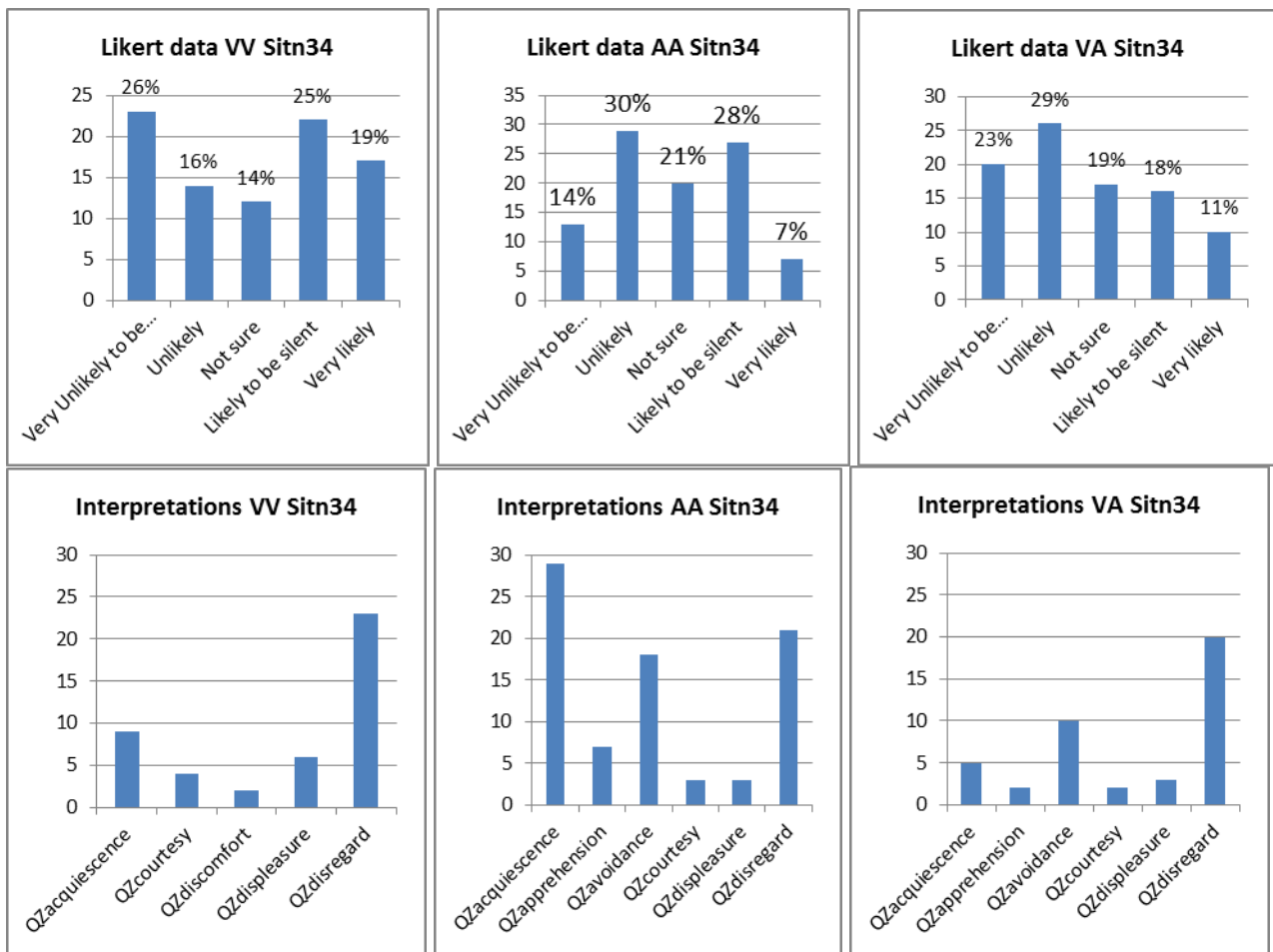


Figure 5.10. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence in the three groups for situation 34. Concerning the interpretations of silence, *QZdisregard* accounted for 35% of the total codes in each of the three groups' answers. However, as we will see, "disregard" does not work in quite the same way across the three groups. Avoidance made up more than a quarter of the interpretations given by the AA group which was a greater number than in the VA and VV groups, 17% and 7% respectively. For the AA, *QQignore* established *QZdisregard*, whereas *QZavoidance* was based on *QQavoid*. Examples of the AA responses coded *QQignore* are: "I am ignoring them" (AA6), "To continue watching and try to ignore the people behind you" (AA9), "ignoring/putting up with their rudeness" (AA14), "that you're trying to ignore them, or that you don't hear them" (AA34), "you are pretending not to hear them" (AA70). Apart from the social convention to keep silent in places like cinemas (thus requiring the movie watcher to ignore the people talking), there is also, logically, avoidance of confrontation. The AA responses coded as *QQavoid* are: "I don't want to cause a scene" (AA15), "Not wanting to cause trouble" (AA17), "not wanting to engage and cause a scene" (AA25), "You are not wanting to start any trouble" (AA56), "I wouldn't want to cause confrontation" (AA59), "not making a further disturbance" (AA74), "I'm avoiding unnecessary conflict" (AA86), etc. All these responses show that the participants would be silent to prevent a confrontation. For the VV *QZdisregard* was originally coded as *QQdon't care* (Silence means I



don't care about what happened/happens). Examples of VV responses are: “khong quan tam [don't care] (VV21, VV24), “mac cho ban noi chuyen” [don't care about them and their conversation] (VV22), “toi ko quan tam den nhung viec vat” [I don't care about trivial thing] (VV26), “mac ke moi chuyen xung quanh” [don't care about what is happening around me] (VV42).

Interestingly, for Situation 34, for the AA group *QZacquiescence* was the most common interpretation, accounting for more than half of the total coded meanings, but it only represented a small proportion in the other two groups. It could be seen that although participants across the three groups gave different interpretations for silence, they all indicated that they would disregard the situation. With the high frequency of *QZacquiescence*, the AA were more likely to put up with and/or accept the situation for the sake of others than the other two groups. Clearly, a cinema is a zone of silence, except for the sound from the movie.

It is significant that in Situation 29, respondents across the three groups not only agree on the likelihood of being silent but also agree on the principal meaning of silence (courtesy). However, in Situation 34, a greater proportion of respondents is likely to speak and the meanings of silence given are slightly different. Although there is a difference in likelihood, these two situations are similar in that the cinema is a place where silence should be respected. Thus whether the participants think they would be silent or not, the rule of silence is seen to be very important. In giving the meanings of silence, respondents in Situation 29 across the three groups have *QZcourtesy* as the dominant interpretation, indicating that silence is polite to respect others in the cinema, but in Situation 34, the responses often fall into the category *QZdisregard*, and suggest that silence is a way of ignoring the people talking, in order, presumably to respect other film-watchers. In other words, in both situations, participants have to choose between obeying the rule of silence or breaking it to get other people to comply. This was evidence of rules that Vietnamese and Australian cultures share about how to behave in such places like cinemas.

Among the situations with few differences, only Situation 6 [Breaking a friend's vase] and Situation 8 [Late to class and criticized by the teacher] do not involve strangers. Relating to the possibility of silence in the face of anger, these situations show little difference in the likelihood and in the interpretations across the three groups. Specifically, participants across the three groups are likely to be silent in response to the anger of the friend who is shouting. Further argument would apparently not help to solve conflict between the friend and the person who broke the vase and between the student and the angry teacher. The greatest proportion of interpretations of silence for the three groups falls into the category of *QZacquiescence*. For Situation 6, this code accounts for nearly half of the total number of coded meanings in each group. Also in Situation 6, *QZavoidance* comprises the second highest proportion in interpretations of silence across the three groups at just over 35%. It is logical to infer that participants across the three groups would accept that breaking

the vase was their fault and what the respondents would do is be silent to avoid conflict. Similarly, the student who was late to class might find it hard to confront the teacher. These can all be linked to Situation 13 [Drunkard in the city] where avoiding conflict made up nearly half of the total interpretations. Conflict avoidance is also present in Situation 34 in which many participants prefer to avoid turning around to the people talking in the cinema to confront them and thus choose to be quiet.

In short, the data showed that in situations involving strangers, especially those where there is a threat of conflict i.e., confronting the drunkard or a group of teasing strangers and in situations in public places like cinemas, both Vietnamese and Australians were likely to be silent, and understood silence to be a way of avoiding conflict and/or displaying disregard. These two meanings can sometimes be incompatible e.g., sometimes disregarding someone could lead to conflict. That is why people should not disregard someone whose foot they have stood on. The implication of the similarity in what people would do between the groups is that Vietnamese and Australians are not highly likely to misinterpret silence in intercultural communication when they are with strangers and/or in potentially conflicting situations in public places.

### 5.2.2 Situations with similar likelihood of silence but difference in interpretations<sup>5</sup>

This section explores how interpretations of silence may differ even if the likelihood of silence is similar, and considers possible reasons for the differences. There are five situations in this category (table 5.6). All of these situations relate to people of the same status e.g., friends or colleagues. Informants across the three groups indicated that they were likely to speak in these situations.

Table 5.6. *Situations with Similar Likelihood of Silence but Difference in Interpretations*

<b>Situations</b>	<b>Contexts</b>
<b>(Total: 5)</b>	
Sitn10	Disagreeing with a classmate in a discussion
Sitn20	Classmate asks for lecture notes before exam
Sitn23	Missed friend's birthday party and now you see him/her
Sitn25	Replying to a colleague who keeps asking why you look upset
Sitn28	Talking to a friend and can't catch one point s/he is talking about

The column graph for Situation 10 [Disagreeing with a classmate in a discussion] compares the interpretations of silence across the three groups (figure 5.11).

<sup>5</sup> Due to the similarities among groups in the likelihood to be silent, this section focuses on the interpretations of silence. It is desirable that readers consult Appendix 5 for full charts of the Likert scale data if required.

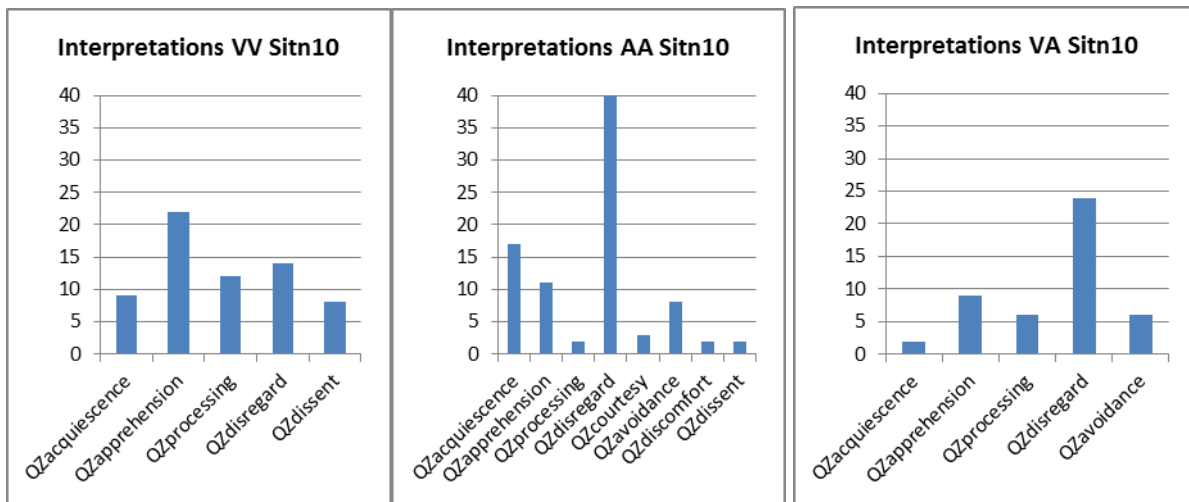


Figure 5.11. Interpretations of silence for situation 10 across the three groups.

Overall, in terms of numbers of codes the AA approach silence with the largest number of interpretations (8 codes), whereas the number of the VV interpretations equals that of the VA (5 codes). The difference in the number of codes given indicates that the AA provide a wider variety of interpretations in their responses compared with the other two groups. It could simply be because there are more responses from the AA. However, looking at the graph in greater detail, it can be seen that the dominant interpretation of silence for each group is different. *QZdisregard* accounts for almost half of the total coded meanings of the AA informants, indicating that silence means not expressing an opinion or not participating in the discussion. Some examples of AA responses are “Not sharing your opinion” (AA9), “not wanting to get involved in the discussion” (AA14), “not challenging yourself in class” (AA16), “Not contributing another viewpoint on the issue” (AA38), “Not expressing your opinions, not contributing to the debate” (AA41), “Not being bothered entering into a debate” (AA42), “didn’t care about the topic” (AA80) (AA89) etc. From these responses, it is clear that the AA largely perceive silence negatively as a sign of lack of engagement. This is consistent with academic literature regarding Australian beliefs and performance in mainstream classrooms (Nakane, 2006). In particular, for the AA, one should not be silent in classroom discussion where the desirability of speaking up is strong. *QZacquiescence* is next for the AA with a quarter of the total coded meanings, suggesting that silence would be a way of suggesting agreement in terms of allowing the classmate’s opinion to represent yours.

For the VV, the dominant interpretation of silence is *QZapprehension* which makes up just under one third of the total number of codes. The VV responses coded as *QZapprehension* were originally coded as *QQshy* or *QQintimidated*. Examples of VV answers coded as *QZapprehension* are “khong bao ve quan diem cua minh” [not defending your own point of view] (VV6), “khong tu tin y kien minh la dung” (VV7) (VV86) [not confident that your opinion is correct], “khong tu tin tham gia dong gop y kien” (VV15) [not confident to contribute to the discussion], “rut re” (VV24)

(VV54) [shy], “khong tu tin vao chinh minh” (VV28) [not be confident in oneself], (VV43), “khong dam phat bieu y kien cua minh” (VV60) [don’t dare to voice one’s opinion]. The VV thus see silence as indicating shyness or intimidation, which may explain why they would be more likely to speak up: perhaps because they do not want to be seen as incapable of defending their opinion. The VV interpretation appears to be consistent with the findings of Ellwood and Nakane (2009) regarding Asian student silences highlighting the privileging of verbal restraint in their cultures, but in fact their findings contrast sharply with the current situation in terms of VV likelihood data. The VV indicate their willingness to show disagreement in a discussion as they consider themselves the most unlikely to be silent amongst the three groups. In short, the VV responses interpret silence as the tendency to be too shy (or not confident enough) to enter into open disagreement, while the AA view silence as a problem associated with passivity in not giving one’s opinions. This raises a clash of perception and understandings of silence.

Like Situation 10 [Disagreeing with classmate in a discussion], Situation 28 [Talking to a friend and can’t catch one point s/he is talking about] shows similar likelihood and interpretations of silence. In both situations, the respondents would speak. If there was silence, the most dominant interpretation would be *QZdisregard*<sup>6</sup>. The contexts of both situations concern classmates requiring open discussion, hence bring about the similarity in the results. Therefore, to avoid repetition the researcher will not provide detailed analysis of Situation 28.

For Situation 20 [Classmate asks for lecture notes before exam], in terms of likelihood to be silent the respondents for all groups would speak, revealing the necessity to respond to the classmate’s request to lend him/her the notes. Regarding the interpretations, we can see that in the three groups the most frequent interpretations are acquiescence and dissent. In other words, silence in this situation could be interpreted both as agreeing to or refusing the request. Interestingly, there is an inversion in the proportion of responses of acquiescence and dissent for the VV and VA on the one hand and the AA on the other (figure 5.12).

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<sup>6</sup> For Situation 28, there is the presence of some discourtesy in the VV and acquiescence in the AA and VA though the numbers of these coded answers in these interpretation charts are not high.

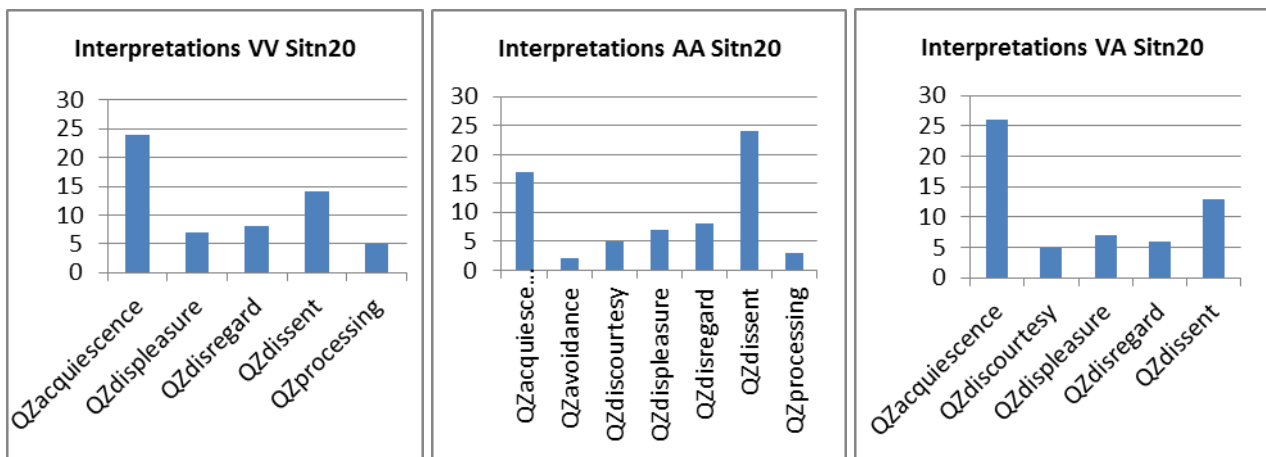


Figure 5.12. Interpretations of silence for Situation 20 across the three groups.

For the VV and VA, *QZacquiescence* is the most common interpretation. VV responses coded *QZacquiescence* are: “dong tinh voi ban” [submitting to the friend] (VV1), “hoc roi thi cho muon [...]” [already used, then can hand out to friend] (VV5), “vi ban ay chac co viec ban gi do” [because the friend might be busy] (VV17), “cho ban muon vo” [giving the notes to the friend] (VV25), “[cho ban muon] vi minh da vung kien thuc” [giving the notes to friend because I already mastered the knowledge] (VV30), “toi cho muon” [I will lend the notes] (VV32), “ban cua minh co the co li do gi do nen vang hoc” [my friend might have reasons for being absent from class] (VV40), “giup duoc gi cho ban thi giup” [helping the friend as I can] (VV48), “thong cam voi ban” [be sympathetic with the friend] (VV61), “chap nhan cho muon vo” [agree to lend the notes] (VV66) etc. VA responses coded *QZacquiescence* are the same kind of acceptance as the VV’s. Examples of the VA responses are: “không muốn làm mất lòng bạn của mình, cho qua lần này” [don’t want to hurt my friend’s feelings, will lend the notes this time] (VA4), “Thông cảm với bạn” [sympathetic with the friend] (VA14), “đồng ý cho mượn” [agree to lend the notes] (VA15), “chap nhan” [submit] (VA32), “Toi k thay co van de j khi cho ban muon vo. Do cung la cach de ban ay on bai, con diem thi la do kha nang cua ban ay” [I don’t see any problem lending the notes. It is also a way for her to do revision; as for the mark she might get, it is due to her capability] (VA48), “muốn giúp bạn thi tốt” [want to help the friend to do the exam well] (VA49), “chắc bạn có việc gì đó nên nghỉ, do đó cho mượn vở” [perhaps the friend is busy and is absent, therefore I will lend the notes] (VA52), “dong y cho muon, ko van de gi ca” [agree to lend the notes, no problem] (VA55), “Mỗi người đều có quyền tự chọn cho mình 1 cách học và tôi ko cảm thấy có vấn đề gì với chuyện cho mượn vở” [Each person has the right to study in their own way and I don’t see any problem in lending the notes] (VA73). The frequency of responses coded as acquiescence across the three groups shows that if the informants were silent, this means they intend to help the friend.

For the AA, the dominant interpretation is *QZdissent*. Thus silence would be more likely to mean that they will not lend the notes: “you don’t want to help” (AA3), “I do not want to share my

notes with them” (AA6), “not wanting to refuse outright, but still wanting to give them the message that I had no intention of giving them the notes” (AA14), “you don’t want to share your notes as you don’t think they deserve them” (AA19), “You don’t want to give them” (AA39), “That you don’t want them to have your notes but don’t want to tell them they can’t have them because they are your friend” (AA48), “disapproval” (AA57), “not agreeing to giving notes [...]” (AA79), “You don’t want to help them and hope they get the hint” (AA82), “Not wanting to give him the notes, slight anger” (AA83), “not giving them the lecture notes” (AA90). Here we can consider the Likert data again. The AA would be more likely to speak in this situation. In the commentaries accompanying the AA responses of *QQrefuse\_QZdissent*, we can find the following clues: “[...] I would tell them to take more responsibility and do their own work.” (AA4), “I’d be more likely to come up with a compromise, or tell them outright that I won’t give them the notes, than give them the silent treatment” (AA14), “I would reprimand them [...]” (AA23), “I would probably ask why they often missed class, or suggest that we study together and talk over the topics rather than just letting them copy my notes” (AA80), “My very unlikely in this case isn’t me wanting to give them the notes, it would be me explaining to them to download them off the university website as it’d inconvenience me otherwise” (AA83). These responses helped us to understand why and what the AA would refuse by being silent in this situation. Clearly, the person who was asked to lend the notes would feel negative about the request.

*QZacquiescence* ranked second in the AA responses indicating that silence could also mean the willingness to hand over the notes to help the friend. Examples of the AA responses in this respect are: “You will give them to her, even though it’s not the right thing to do, she’s still your friend and she may have a good reason for missing her classes” (AA21), “Assent” (AA23), “I want to help my friend” (AA37), “I would share my notes [...]” (AA49), “You are content with giving your friend your notes” (AA58), “That you don’t want to cause any kind of damage to the friendship and therefore just let them copy your notes” (AA85), “not losing friendship” (AA93).

In short, *QZacquiescence* and *QZdissent*, contradictory interpretations of silence, are frequently cited by each group. We can predict that silence will be ambiguous in this situation, and could therefore cause misunderstandings between people of different cultures. Specifically, if there was silence, the Vietnamese and Australian bystanders may well interpret it as meaning that the classmate either would or would not lend the notes, but they may not understand it in the same way.

Let us now move to Situation 23 [Missed friend’s birthday party and now you see him/her] to examine further contrasting interpretations of silence. For this situation, informants across the three groups indicated that they were likely to speak. In the interpretation graphs (figure 5.13), even though the frequencies of the codes are not very high, we still can see a great deal of difference across the three groups.

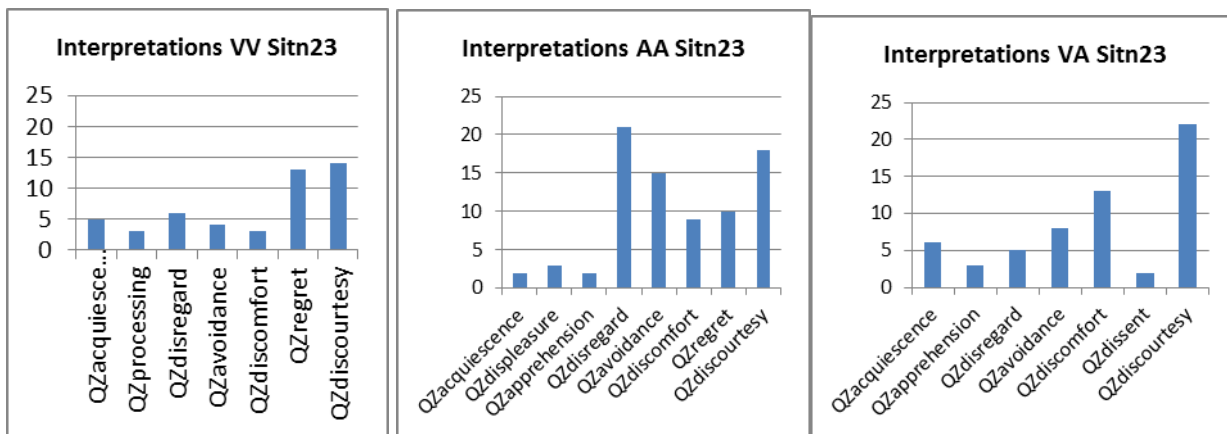


Figure 5.13. Interpretations of silence for Situation 23 across the three groups.

Let us first examine discourtesy as there are high scores for this code across the three groups. For most of the VA group, it is clear that a person who was silent in this situation would be considered rude. VA responses coded as *QZdiscourtesy* typically include the phrases “bat lich su” [rude] or “Không tôn trọng” [disrespect]; “thieu tu trong, bat lich su” [lack of self-respect, rude] (VA14), “khinh thuong ban minh” [looking down on the friend] (VA18), “khong lich su” [not polite] (VA25) (VA32) (VA38) (VA44), (VA82), (VA83), (VA88) “Không tôn trọng bạn bè” [not respecting the friend] (VA46). The examples given show that respondents would be aware of the rudeness if there was silence in the unexpected meeting at the supermarket after not attending the friend’s birthday as promised. In the AA responses it was clear that the respondents feel that the person owes the friend an explanation as to why they did not attend the party, thus appearing rude through keeping silent. A large number of AA mean that it is rude when one promised to go to the birthday’s party and then did not attend: “[...] insulting your friend” (AA2), “You are rude” (AA12), “disrespecting your friend. You owe him an explanation” (AA16), “You owe him an explanation as to why you didn’t attend his party” (AA21), “That you had forgotten his party and didn’t even acknowledge that you were invited and didn’t go - it would be kind of rude” (AA28), “I would be dishonouring my friend by not telling him why I couldn’t make it to his birthday party” (AA86), “Rudeness on my part (If he brought it up)” (AA92) etc. For the VV, the responses coded *QZdiscourtesy* look very much like what we see in the VA data, except for the fact that they are more concerned with the disrespectful behavior through keeping silence. Eleven out of 14 VV responses under *QZdiscourtesy* have the typical phrase “không tôn trọng bạn bè”, meaning not respecting the friend. In short, the respondents in the three groups indicated silence as discourtesy. There would be less misunderstanding across the three groups regarding this interpretation. However, other frequent interpretations appeared from each group: namely *QZdisregard* for the AA, *QZregret* for the VV and *QZdiscomfort* for the VA.

Disregarding is the highest interpretation for silence for the AA. AA responses coded as *QQignore* and *QQdon’t care* were finally grouped under the umbrella code of *QZdisregard*.

Examples where silence means ignoring (*QQignore*) are: “that I was snubbing my friend” (AA7), “I am ignoring him” (AA15), “Ignoring them as though they are in the wrong when you are” (AA26), “ignoring the situation (that you didn’t go)” (AA34) (AA74), “Ignoring the fact you may have let your friend down” (AA41), “I am ignoring the fact that I didn’t go” (AA64), “not address the fact you didn’t attend” (AA65) etc. For the AA, many responses show that by being silent the person shows a lack of concern about what happened: “Being silent shows that I don’t really care that I didn’t attend” (AA8), “that you don’t care about him” (AA18), “That you don’t care about them and couldn’t care less about the birthday party” (AA29), “that I didn’t care” (AA73), “I didn’t care that I missed the party” (AA80). These responses clearly fit the definition of *QQdon’t care*.

For many of the VV in Situation 23, silence is about feeling guilty for not attending the party. VV responses coded as *QZregret* related to the idea “*Silence means I am sorry/ I apologise/ I feel bad*”. Some examples of the VV responses coded as *QZregret* are “thay co loi” [feel quite guilty] (VV32), (VV40), “thay co loi va se xin loi anh ay” [feel guilty and will apologize to him] (VV57), “xin loi” [apologize] (VV88), or “ban sai” [you are wrong] (VV90). All these responses show feeling bad and/or guilt but the Likert data show that the respondents think there also needs to be a verbal apology or explanation. Indeed, looking at the Likert data gives a clear idea of what the respondents think they would do – they would speak up at least to express their guilt and apologize.

As for the VA, silence is about feeling discomfort in an unexpected meeting after not attending the friend’s birthday as promised. *QQemb (QZdiscomfort)* was coded from many of the VA responses: “xấu hổ, không biết giải thích sao” [embarrassed, don’t know how to explain] (VA2), “[...] mình cảm thấy xấu hổ vì mình đã hứa nhưng không đến được” [I feel embarrassed because I had promised and I didn’t come] (VA12, VA65), “ngại vì ko giữ lời hứa” [embarrassed at not keeping the promise] (VA30), “Ngại” [embarrassed] (VA51), “Xấu hổ, không muốn nhắc lại chuyện thất hứa của mình” [embarrassed, don’t want to mention again that I break the promise] (VA63), “bây giờ cảm thấy ngại nên không nói chuyện” [now I feel embarrassed, thus don’t want to talk] (VA86). From these responses, we could see that the VA were more concerned with their own feelings of embarrassment due to the action of not keeping the promise to attend the party. This is different from the AA who appeared disregarding and the VV who felt guilty. All this can create difficulties in intercultural contact. Specifically, a polite VV who might want to express guilt through silence would be seen as impolite by the VA and as uncaring by the AA, who interpret silence as disregarding; the AA who did not want to be seen as uncaring would try to talk and might just make things worse.

Situation 25 is another case where there are different responses across the three groups (figure 5.14). This is the situation in which the receptionist, upset by the resignation letter of a



friend, is asked by a colleague what the matter is. The receptionist does not say anything but the colleague still keeps asking why she is upset.

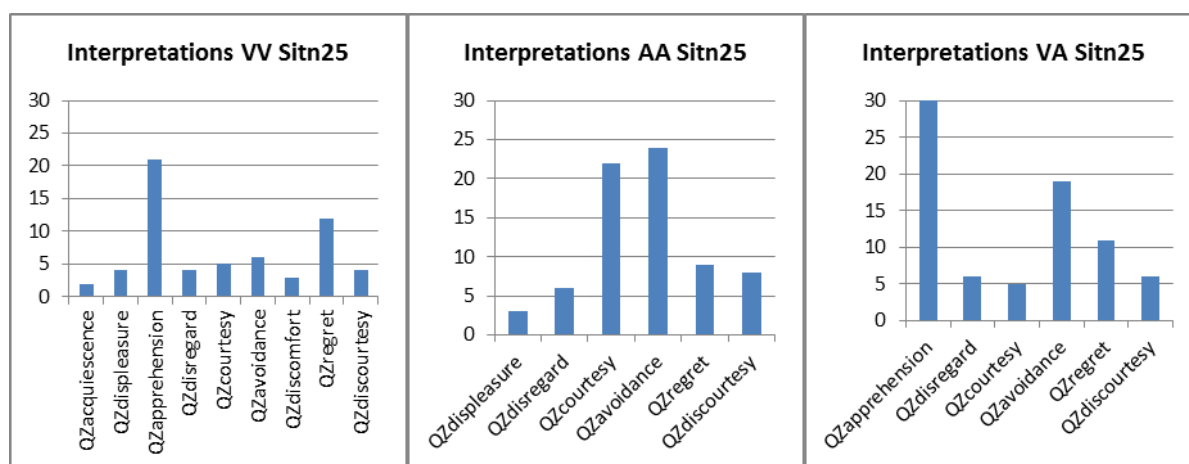


Figure 5.14. Interpretations of silence for Situation 25 across the three groups.

As can be seen from the graph, the VV indicate silence would be a sign of apprehension and regret while for the AA silence would suggest avoidance and courtesy. For the VA, silence would indicate apprehension and avoidance. The fact that nobody in the AA group considers silence as a sign of apprehension, whereas the majority of the VV and the VA do so, means that misinterpretation of silence could easily result in such an intercultural interaction of this kind. If we look at the interpretations that were coded *QZapprehension* for the VV and VA, we find that they were originally coded as *QQself-effacement* (Silence means I don't want to draw attention to myself). However, as we shall see *QQself-effacement* for the VV and VA implies a slight difference. Examples of the answers from the VV are “muon yen tinh mot minh” [want to be quiet alone] (VV7), “qua met moi va khong muon tra loi” [too tired and don't want to reply] (VV18), “khong muon nhac them mot loi nao nua” [don't want to think about the situation any more] (VV22), “toi muon im lang” [I want to be silent] (VV36), “minh thay buon that su, chan nan” [I feel really sad and completely bored] (VV40), “khong thich tam su voi nguoi khac” [don't want to have a heart to heart talk with anyone] (VV43). In giving very short answers directly about the need to have quiet time, the VV would probably get annoyed from the repeated asking.

Responses from the VA group are more concerned with a disinclination to share. Specifically, they do not want to share their feelings about being sad and to some extent do not want to reveal the other person's information. These fit the definition of *QQself-effacement* (*QZapprehension*) and *QQstop* (*QZavoidance*) respectively. Examples of the VA responses coded as *QQself-effacement* are “khong muon chia se” [don't want to share] (VA2) (VA4) (VA7) (VA14), “tôi không muốn chia sẻ chuyện riêng của mình” [I don't want to share my personal story] (VA12), “khong muon noi ra” [don't want to reveal] (VA15). Here are examples of VA *QQstop*: “im lang vi co nhung luc, bi mat hay chuyen cua nguoi khac khong nen chia se voi nguoi khac” [silence

because sometimes there is confidentiality or another person's story which should not be revealed to others] (VA19), "khong muon lo chuyen cua nguoi khac" [don't want to reveal the other person's private information] (VA32), "đó là chuyện riêng của bạn và người bạn thân kia" [it is private information between you and that friend] (VA33), etc. The VA is asked by a colleague what the matter is; through keeping silent the VA show that they do not want to tell the other colleague how they feel and to some degree do not want to reveal the other person's information. Clearly, the VV participants would interpret silence as a way to show sadness, thus needing quiet, whereas the VA participants would use silence for not wanting to share their feelings and to protect privacy.

Regarding the AA interpretations of silence, it can be seen that *QZavoidance* is the dominant interpretation, accounting for almost half of the total coded meanings. If we look at the interpretations that were coded *QZavoidance*, we can find that they were originally coded as *QQstop*. The definition of *QQstop* is "Silence means I don't want to communicate any more on this topic". It is explicit in the description of Situation 25 that the receptionist is unhappy about the friend leaving and that the friend's resignation is private. Therefore, we find responses of the AA such as "hiding something" or "hiding feelings" which were coded *QQstop*. Examples of the AA *QQstop* are: "You may not want to talk about the issue yet" (AA4), "I don't want to say anything. It must be serious" (AA15), "You don't want to answer the question" (AA26), "I was hiding something" (AA35), "that you are not willing to talk about it" (AA38), "You don't want to answer the question" (AA39), "Something is wrong and I don't want to talk about it" (AA46), "I do not need to spread the word about my friend's resignation" (AA63), "not addressing the situation" (AA65), "I did not want to answer their question" (AA80). Apparently, the AA here do not wish to talk to the asking colleague about the friend's resignation, which is different from the VV, who simply want quiet, and from the VAs' concern of not sharing personal thoughts. In other words, this *QQstop* for hiding feelings or to maintaining confidentiality can barely be seen in the VV data.

In conclusion, the codes for the three groups are different. The AA responses match the code of *QZavoidance*, indicating silence means they do not want to reveal the other person's information or divulge confidential information, whereas silence for the VV means not wanting to discuss the matter because they are too sad and want to be alone, which is coded as *QZapprehension*, as are the VA responses about not wanting to talk about a private matter with the inclusion of the desire to defend privacy.

The foregoing section has examined situations with similar likelihood of being silent but differences in interpretations. Table 5.7 shows the dominant interpretations of silence found in the five situations:

Table 5.7. *Interpretations of Silence across the Three Groups*

Situations	VV	AA	VA
Sitn10	QZapprehension	QZdisregard QZacquiescence	QZdisregard
Sitn20	QZacquiescence	QZdissent	QZacquiescence
Sitn23	QZcourtesy QZregret	QZdisregard QZdiscourtesy	QZdiscourtesy
Sitn25	QZapprehension	QZavoidance QZcourtesy	QZapprehension QZavoidance
Sitn28	QZdisregard	QZdisregard QZacquiescence	QZdisregard

Overall, the results showed that for situations requiring further thought before making a decision (i.e., what to say when disagreeing with friends, when being asked for lecture notes, when missed friend's birthday and now accidentally meeting him/her, what to say to a friend who keeps asking, how to say to a friend that you can't catch their point), participants interpret silence somewhat differently. The results indicate a mismatch of perceptions and understandings of silence based on cultural differences. The contradictory responses (agree/refuse, polite/rude) in the participants' answers imply opposing interpretations of silence, which can cause problems in communication.

The next sections (5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6) will examine situations with clear differences in the likelihood of being silent (as shown in the Likert responses of the participants) to find answers to the question of how the VV, the AA, and the VA approach silence differently in terms of both the likelihood and interpretations of silence. Specifically, the following four categories will be analysed: Category 1 (situations where VV Likert responses are different from the other two groups), Category 2 (situations where AA Likert responses differ), Category 3 (situations where VA Likert responses differ), and Category 4 (situations where the Likert responses of all three groups differ) by considering the relationship between the Likert data and the interpretations of silence for each category.

### ***5.3 Category 1: Situations where VV Likert responses are different from the other two groups***

The descriptions of the situations in this category are shown in Table 5.8 below.

Table 5.8. *Category 1: Situations where VV Likelihood of Silence are Different*

<b>Situations</b>	<b>Contexts</b>
<b>(Total: 7)</b>	
Sitn1	Boss reprimands you for wrong recommendation

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Sitn2	Responding to a marriage proposal
Sitn4	Teacher gets angry in a discussion about a difficult lesson
Sitn12	Brother raises the topic of your broken contact with your father
Sitn17	Dad asks to see your Maths report
Sitn21	Being pressed to eat
Sitn35	Your partner is reluctant to host friends visiting your town

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These are the situations where the VV respond differently from the other two groups (AA and VA). Specifically, as is shown in Section 5.1.1.2, for these situations, the VV have the greatest likelihood of being silent (adding Likert 4 and 5), whereas the AA and VA are more likely to speak. There are two interesting traits in the Likert data from this category: 1) the VV data are mostly bimodal with a polarization of two opposite ratings on the likelihood of being silent, and 2) the responses of the VA are similar to the responses of the AA, suggesting that the VA might have transferred their perception of Australian communicative behavior to their behavior when communicating with other Vietnamese. To avoid repetition and to see the focus of each trait, the discussion is organised as follows: Situations 1, 2, 12 and 35 are explained to show bimodality, Situations 4 and 12 are discussed in relation to the concept of pragmatic transfer, and Situations 17 and 21 are analysed to reveal the fact that VA movements towards AA does not necessarily lead to shared interpretations of silence between these two groups. This does not mean that the other traits in each of the situations were discounted; it merely avoids overlaps in the discussion and produces a clearer insight into the issues.

A bimodal distribution is defined as a probability distribution with two values that are significantly different. In the Likert graphs for the situations in category 1, a bimodal distribution is clearly shown in the VV Likert responses (but not in the AA or the VA responses) in all situations in this category. The VV Likert data appear as two distant peaks. In order to understand the bimodal distribution in the VV group in these situations, the interpretations of silence were analysed. For some situations, a systematic count of the relevant likelihood of being silent associated with different theme codes (e.g., *acquiescence*, *avoidance*, and *courtesy etc.*) was undertaken. Let us first examine Situation 1 [Boss reprimands you for wrong recommendation]. It can be seen from figure 5.15 that all three groups agree on the interpretation of silence, but the likelihood of remaining silent is very different, with the VV group more likely to remain silent than the others. 46% of the VV group were likely to be silent (Likert scores 4 and 5), whereas only 23% of AA and 14% of VA would choose to be so. However, it is particularly interesting that in the Likert data, the VV respondents' choices are split between the likelihood and the unlikelihood of being silent, whereas the AA and the VA responses are quite similar to each other. The fact that 48% of the VV reported

they would be unlikely to be silent (Likert scores 1 and 2) showed that a slightly more of the VV would be unlikely to be silent than likely. The data on the likelihood of being silent given by the AA and the VA indicated that these two groups might want to speak rather than being silent in this situation.

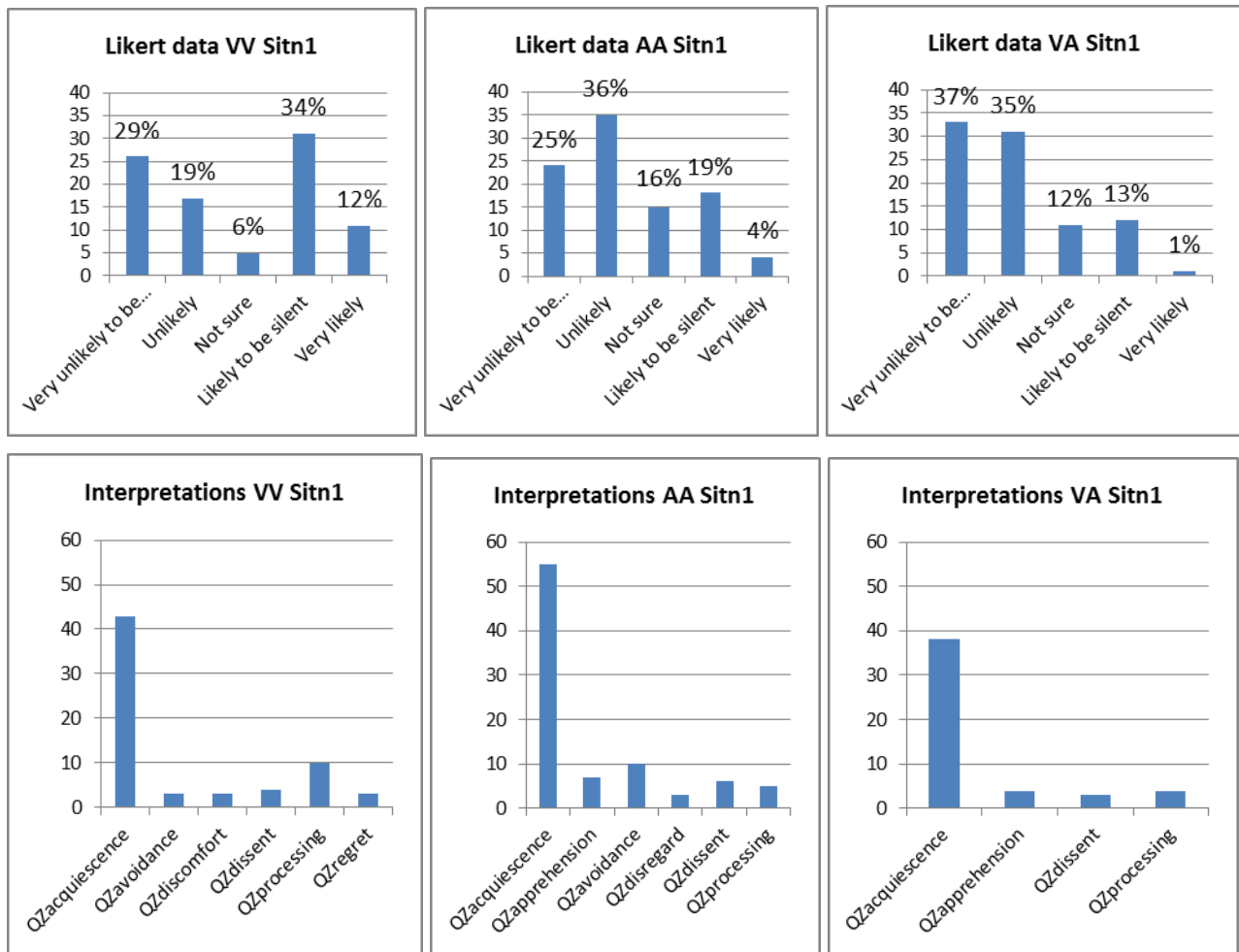


Figure 5.15. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 1.

Regarding the interpretations of silence, this is an interesting example where silence signifies agreement with the boss’s accusation. Specifically, a large number of responses across the three groups indicated silence as a sign of acceptance (*QZacquiescence*). Participants state: “You believe your friend’s actions are your responsibility” (AA1), “Accepting your boss’s reprimands and feeling shame” (AA2), “some sort of admission of guilt” (AA7), “accepting unconditionally that it is your fault that your friend does not work hard” (AA16), “I realise I made the wrong choice and I accept the criticism” (AA17), “admitting that you were wrong in suggesting your friend and that the only possible variable for no increase in sales is poor technique not extenuating circumstances in the market” (AA19), “accepting the fault” (AA30), “acceptance of being reprimanded” (AA34), “Silence could mean that you are accepting the responsibility” (AA47), “a compliance with what is said” (AA57), “That I’m accepting the responsibility of having referred the wrong person to the job” (AA63), “chap nhan vi minh da gioi thieu nham nguoi” (VV17) [accepting the reprimands

because I made the wrong recommendation], “thua nhan rang minh sai hoan toan va san sang chiu trach nhiem” (VV20) [accepting that I’m completely wrong and willing to accept the responsibility], “nguoì nay la do toi gioi thieu nen toi phai co trach nhiem” (VV41) [Accepting it was my responsibility because I recommended him to the boss], “nhan loi ve minh” (VV43) [acceptance of being wrong], “im lang vi minh cung co loi 1 phan trong tinh huong nay” (VV58) [silence because I am partly in the wrong in this situation], “minh da khong hieu dung nang luc cua ban” (VV75) [I haven’t correctly understood the friend’s abilities], “chấp nhận mình hoàn toàn sai lầm, không biện minh nổi” (VA2) [accepting that I am completely wrong, no excuse], “tôi nhận lỗi của mình đã giới thiệu người không đủ năng lực” (VA6) [I accept my fault when recommending the incompetent person], “dong y voi quo trach cua sep” (VA38) [Accepting your boss’s reprimands], “Tôi chấp nhận rằng mình đã làm sai: giới thiệu một người ko đủ năng lực nên chấp nhận lời quở trách của sếp” (VA73) [I accept that I was wrong: recommending an incompetent person, then accepting boss’s reprimands]. Across the three groups, the typical ideas are silence to accept blame or to accept the boss’s reprimands. All these responses were subsumed under the macrocode *QZacquiescence*. It is logical to understand that the participants therefore would interpret silence as agreement with the boss’s complaints.

Relating the two sets of data on the Likert responses and interpretation, we can say that for Situation 1 a difference in interpretation is not the reason for the different likelihood of silence. However, for the VV it is interesting that silence usually suggests agreement both when participants would speak and conversely when they would be silent (figure 5.16).

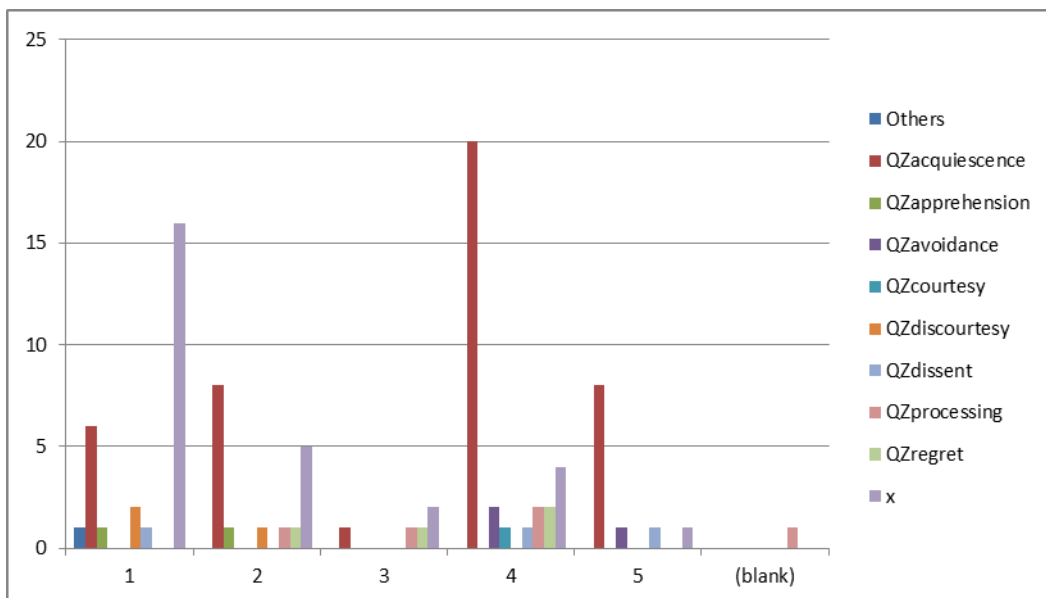


Figure 5.16. Likelihood and interpretations of silence in Situation 1 [Boss reprimands you for wrong recommendation] (VV group).

As can be seen from figure 5.16 including the information from both the Likert and interpretation charts for the VV group in Situation 1, *QZacquiescence* is the dominant response code. The higher

frequency of this code for the Likert options 4 and 5 indicates that the VV informants might be more opting for being silent than speaking up to show agreement. The high number of blank responses corresponding to the reported likelihood of options 1 and 2 could be understood in two ways: the first is that the participants would speak; therefore they felt there was no need to give a meaning for silence. The second is that when there is a high chance that agreement could be expressed either by silence or speaking like in this situation, leaving blanks for interpretations of silence could imply that the participants are aware of the ambiguity of being silent, and also feel it is better to talk to reduce the ambiguity. Indeed, speaking up is also quite a strong possibility for the VV as is shown in the data.

Let us now move to Situation 2 [Responding to a marriage proposal]. In the graphs of this situation, we see a great deal of similarity between the AA and the VA responses regarding the likelihood of being silent. The VV responses differ. Specifically, whereas nearly two thirds of the AA and the VA would choose to speak, almost half of the VV would speak while about half would be silent.

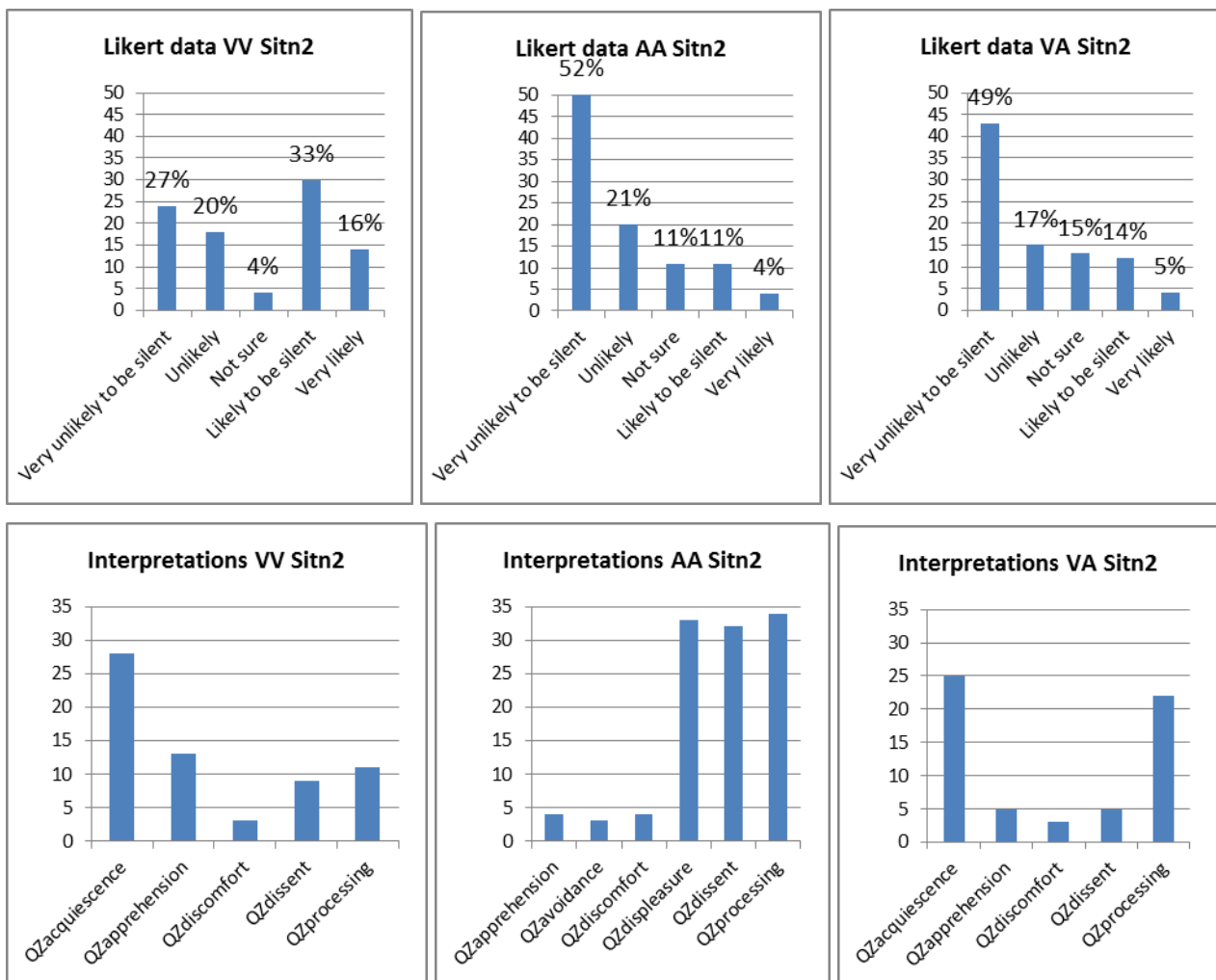


Figure 5.17. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 2.

Regarding the interpretations of silence for Situation 2 [Responding to a marriage proposal], we can see that whereas the VV and VA groups interpret silence more as a sign of acceptance, no AA respondents thought that silence meant acquiescence. In fact, AA informants would interpret silence in this situation as displeasure and dissent, whereas these two codes in the other groups are minimal. In particular, no VA or VV respondents would consider silence as displeasure. As such, misunderstanding could occur between the AA on the one hand and the VV and the VA on the other. In responding to a marriage proposal, the VV and the VA woman may keep silent to show her agreement, or at least to show her thinking for a proper answer. The Australian woman not speaking might well indicate her rejection of, or dislike and/or shock rather than agreement to a marriage proposal. The only common code amongst the three groups is *QZprocessing* indicating silence as a sign of contemplation of the issue. The fact that a higher number of responses from the AA and the VA interpreted silence as processing suggest that there would be less misunderstanding between these two groups regarding the silent-keeping behavior for processing information.

As for the interpretations of silence for the VV, figure 5.18 shows a clear difference in the interpretation distribution between those who responded 1 and 2 on the Likert scale, and those who responded 4 and 5 for Situation 2. In the answers appearing on the Likert scale of 1 and 2, the interpretations of silence are minimal. In contrast, in the answers of Likert 4 and 5, there is a high frequency of *QZacquiescence*, indicating that those who could remain silent showed a clear understanding of its meaning as acceptance. A difference in interpretation therefore appears to be linked to the likelihood of silence.

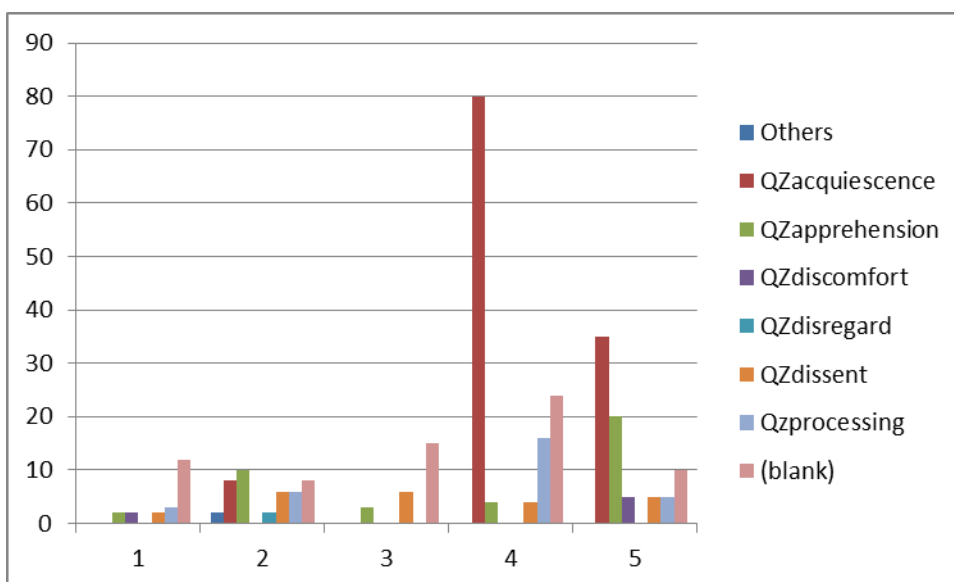


Figure 5.18. Likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 2 [Responding to a marriage proposal] (VV group).

Situation 12 [Brother raises the topic of your broken contact with your father] is another situation with a bimodal pattern of responses in the Likert data. Again if we look at the likelihood



graphs of the three groups, we can see that the Likert data of the AA and the VA are similar to each other and the VV data are bimodal. The AA and VA are more likely to speak in this situation whereas VV responses are polarized between silence and speaking. Regarding the interpretations of silence, it is interesting to see that although the Likert responses of the AA and VA are similar, their interpretations of silence are different. Specifically, AA respondents have *QZavoidance* as the dominant interpretation, accounting for one third of the total coded meanings, indicating that silence means not wanting to answer the question or not wanting conflict, but respondents in the VA group gave an interpretation of *QZacquiescence*, suggesting that silence is a way of admitting that the relationship with the father is not good. *QZacquiescence* for the VA group accounts for nearly a quarter of the total number of coded meanings. In this situation, a small number of participants in all groups interpret silence as an admission of guilt and shame for not contacting the father. Some AA responded that silence would mean disregard and discomfort. If we look at the interpretations that were coded *QZdisregard* and *QZdiscomfort*, we find that they were originally coded as *QQdon't care* and *QQawkward* respectively. Some examples of AA *QQdon't care* are “that you do not care about your father” (AA16, AA38), “That you don't care that your dad misses you” (AA18), “You have no wish to contact your father” (AA58), “That you show dis-interest in your father” (AA83). The AA *QQawkward* was used for responses “That you were unhappy with the question and you feel uncomfortable answering it” (AA4), “Uncomfortable/Indignance” (AA23), “It's awkward to talk about the situation” (AA82).

For the VV for Situation 12, *QZacquiescence* was the most common interpretation, appearing frequently in the coded answers of participants having indicated Likert 4 and Likert 5 (figure 5.19). It is interesting to see that for this situation the interpretations of the VV are similar to the VA, but totally different from the AA. In other words, if the Vietnamese were silent, it would be to acknowledge that what the brother said was correct, whereas if the Australians were silent it would be because they didn't want to talk about it.

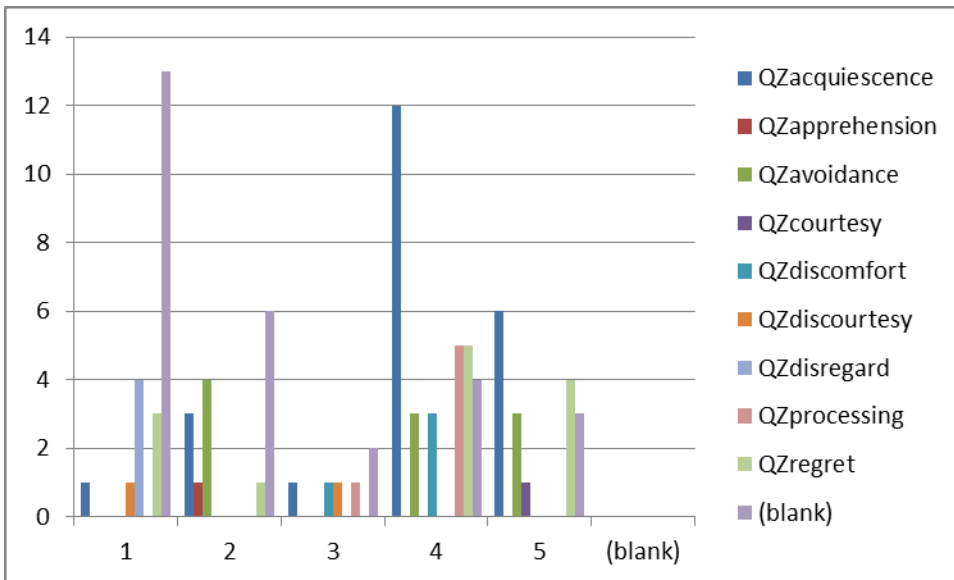
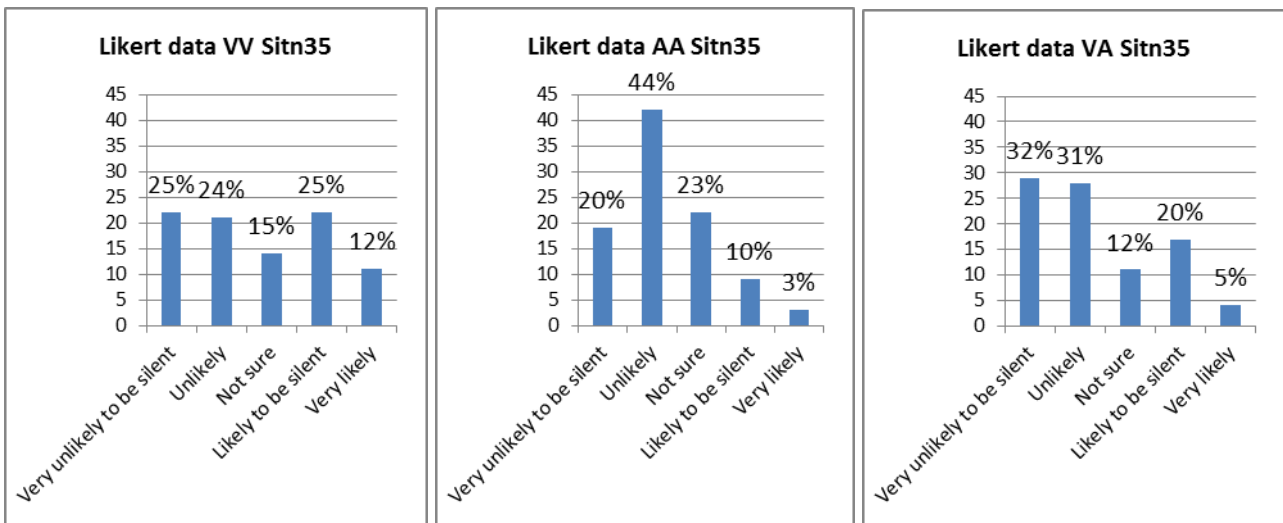


Figure 5.19. Likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 12 [Brother raises the topic of your broken contact with your father] (VV group).

Considering Situation 35 [Your partner is reluctant to host friends visiting your town] (figure 5.20), it can be seen that two thirds of the AA and VA stated they would be likely to speak whereas VV respondents were more likely to remain silent than the other groups, however they themselves were more equally divided between silence and speaking.



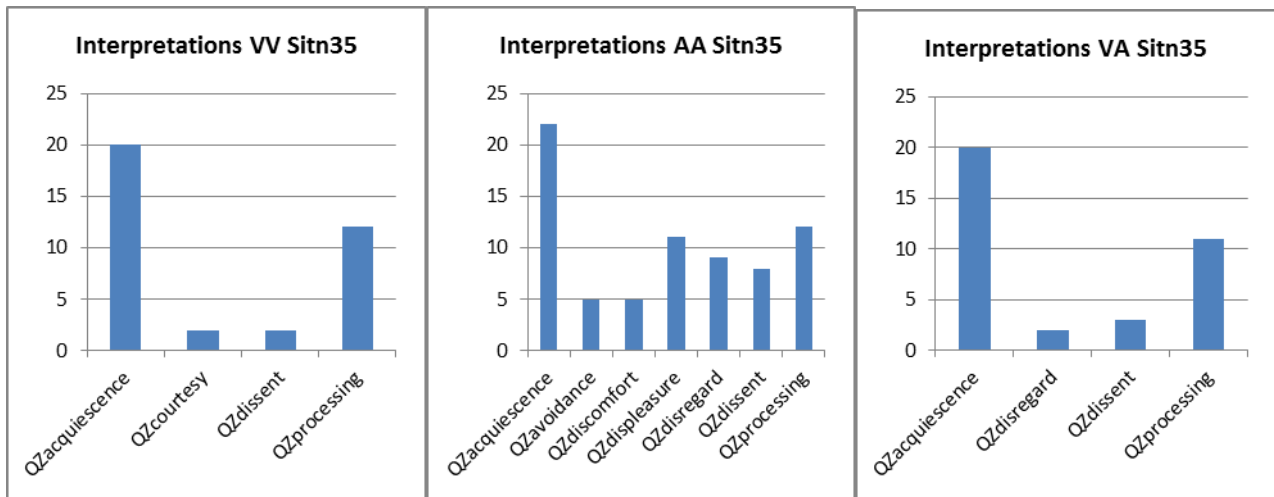


Figure 5.20. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 35.

This is the situation in which the person asks his/her partner to host a couple they know. The partner raises money matters as grounds for refusal and the person indicates their likelihood of remaining silent upon hearing this. The graphs of the interpretations of silence in this situation show that *QZacquiescence* is the dominant interpretations of silence in all three groups, followed by *QZprocessing*. However, the AA responses are somewhat different in that they also see silence as indicating displeasure and disregard.

The largest number of AA responses indicated silence as meaning acquiescence i.e., agreeing with the husband/wife not to host the couple. *QQagree* and *QQsubmissive* (under the umbrella of *QZacquiescence*) were the codes applied to the responses related to the idea “Silence means an agreement with what other people say” and “Silence means I submit to what the other person wants” respectively. Some examples of the AA responses coded as *QZacquiescence* are: “[...] you are being submissive” (AA1), “accepting that point” (AA7), “That you agree and would rather not host them due to financial difficulties [...]” (AA28), “you are submissive and don’t know about your own circumstances” (AA30), “I’d have to agree with my partner [...]” (AA63), “that I am accepting my partners opinion blindly into account” (AA64), “If you were to be silent it would mean that you agree with your husband/wife and that they should pay if they want to stay with you” (AA94), “I’ve acknowledged/accepted what my partner has said” (AA96). Examples of VA responses coded as *QZacquiescence* are: “thuận theo ý chồng” [submit to my husband’s decision] (VA4), “hiểu ý chồng ko muốn tiếp đãi vợ chồng bạn” [understand husband’s stance not to host the couple] (VA15), “im lang la dong y voi chong/vo của mình [...]” [silence means an agreement to the husband/wife] (VA19), “dong y voi y kien của chong va khong moi ban den nha tiếp đãi” [agree with the opinion of the husband and not invite the friend to come] (VA38), “đồng ý với chồng” [agree with the husband] (VA52), “Cảm thấy chồng/ vợ có lý và chấp nhận việc đó” [feeling that husband/wife is reasonable and submit to that] (VA63). As for the VV, responses coded as *QZacquiescence* include “chấp nhận” [submit] (VV1), “dong y voi y kien của chong

minh” [agree with the opinion of my husband] (VV7), “cung y kien voi chong” [having the same opinion as the husband] (VV22). In short, across the three groups, silence could be interpreted as acceptance of the partner’s view.

In all groups, *QZprocessing* is highly common after *QZacquiescence* in the respondents’ responses. Some VV responses read, “suy nghi” [thinking] (VV5, VV24), “toi se suy nghi va dua ra quyet dinh” [I will think and make a decision] (VV26), “tôi se suy nghi thêm và quyet dinh sau” [I’ll think it over and decide later] (VV36), “Không biet nên làm the nào” [don’t know what to do] (VV52), “suy nghi xem co du kha nang giúp khong?” [Considering if having enough financial well-being to help?] (VV66), “de xem co ta/anh ay noi gi roi se dua ra y kien” [let see what s/he’s saying, then will give opinion] (VV90). The AA responses concern the thinking process, but in some cases pairing with acquiescence, indicating the need to think about how to respond to their partner. AA responses coded as *QZprocessing* are: “[...] you don’t know how to respond” (AA4), “I am mulling it over” (AA6), “You’re unsure how to deal with the situation” (AA12), “I am thinking” (AA15), “Not knowing how to respond or what to do” (AA17), “Maybe agreeing with my partner and starting to think of how I was going to tell my friend” (AA42), “Need time to think” (AA46), “[...] just taking time to think of a solution to respond with” (AA83). Examples of VA responses coded as *QZprocessing* include “băn khoăn không biết xử lí thế nào” [wonder how to behave] (VA2), “can nhac loi noi cua chong/vo” [considering the words of husband/wife] (VA3), “toi can suy nghi ve dieu do” [I need to think about that] (VA10), “Tim kiem giai phap on thoa” [seeking an compromise solution] (VA26), “toi phai suy nghi ky truoac khi quyet dinh” [I have to think carefully before I can decide] (VA40), “suy nghi và tìm phương án giải quyết” [thinking and finding a solution] (VA56), “im lang va tìm cách khác giải quyet” [silence and find another way to solve the problem] (VA64), “suy nghi lại về tình hình gia đình và quyết định có tiếp đãi người bạn ở nhà hay không” [thinking over the family situation and make a decision regarding hosting the couple or not] (VA71).

Although the AA and the VA have similar Likert responses and some similarities in the interpretations for silence as acquiescence and processing, there are some differences between these two groups. In other interpretations of silence given by the AA, silence could mean displeasure, dissent and disregard. However, no VA respondents thought that silence meant displeasure; the two codes for disregard and dissent in the VA are minimal. Several micro codes were used for responses related to displeasure, of which *QQdislike* and *QQangry* are the most common. Examples of the former code are: “you are not happy with their response [...]” (AA1), “you don’t appreciate the comment” (AA29), “I don’t like what my partner just said” (AA37). Examples of the latter are: “You are grouchy” (AA3), “I’d be furious and humiliated” (AA10), “[...] I would feel annoyed” (AA48), “that you had not previously known you were short of money and were very angry at your

partner” (AA62), “I was annoyed by my partner’s refusal” (AA80). Other micro codes finally grouped into *QZdispleasure* include *QQshock* “Confusion, shock, surprise” (AA75) and *QQdisappointed* “That I’m disappointed [...]” (AA83). Some of the AA responses were coded as *QQpassive\_QZdisregard*. Examples of this are: “[...] that you don’t have anything to contribute back to the conversation” (AA28), “my voice wasn’t being heard” (AA49), “that you do not get the chance to work out the financial problems” (AA52), “not acknowledging their opinion” (AA70), “not discussing the options” (AA74), “Not suggesting other options” (AA77), “[...] not speaking up about not being able to afford to take them out; not requesting help with groceries” (AA87). These suggest an AA belief that everyone has a point of view, and if the person in Situation 35 just agrees with the husband/wife without contributing, s/he is as being passive.

In general, when the VV Likert results are bimodal, there is a tendency for the AA and the VA to have similar Likert responses but different interpretations of silence, as shown in Table 5.9 below. The interpretations of silence from the VA are close to those from the VV, their home culture. The codes for this set of bimodal situations demonstrated the high frequency of *QZacquiescence* for the VV group i.e., the most likely interpretation of silence in four out of six situations (Situation 1, 2, 12, and Situation 21). In each of these situations, *QZacquiescence* is the code appearing most frequently in the coded answers of informants having indicated *Likert 4* and *Likert 5*. In Situation 21, this code also has the highest percentage on every single Likert point, amounting to 65% of the total codes. The dominance of Vietnamese acquiescence related to *Likert 4* and *Likert 5* suggests that VV are likely to indicate acceptance by silence. The frequency of responses coded *QQguilt* under the umbrella code of *QZacquiescence* is worth noting here. The VV informants would see they were at least partly in the wrong e.g., giving a wrong recommendation (Sitn1), complaining about a lesson when nobody else did (Sitn4), refusing a small snack when actually you could try it to please the other person (Sitn21). Therefore, they “accept the blame/the responsibility for this” which is the definition of the code *QQguilt*. In other words, the data suggest a belief that in many of the situations silence would thus very often mean acceptance for the VV, a finding which is consistent with the Vietnamese saying “Im lang la dong y” [Silence is agreement]. VV informants might therefore not be silent because they do not agree with what is being said; they would speak up to express what they think. This leads to a half-half division in the Likert distribution of the VV producing a bimodal pattern. Comparing the VA interpretations with the VV and the AA, we can see that the VA are not at all moving closer to the AA interpretations. If anything, the VA has moved further away from the AA interpretations than the VV.

Table 5.9. *Analysis of Situations 1, 2, 4, 12, 17, 21 and 35 regarding the VA and AA Responses*

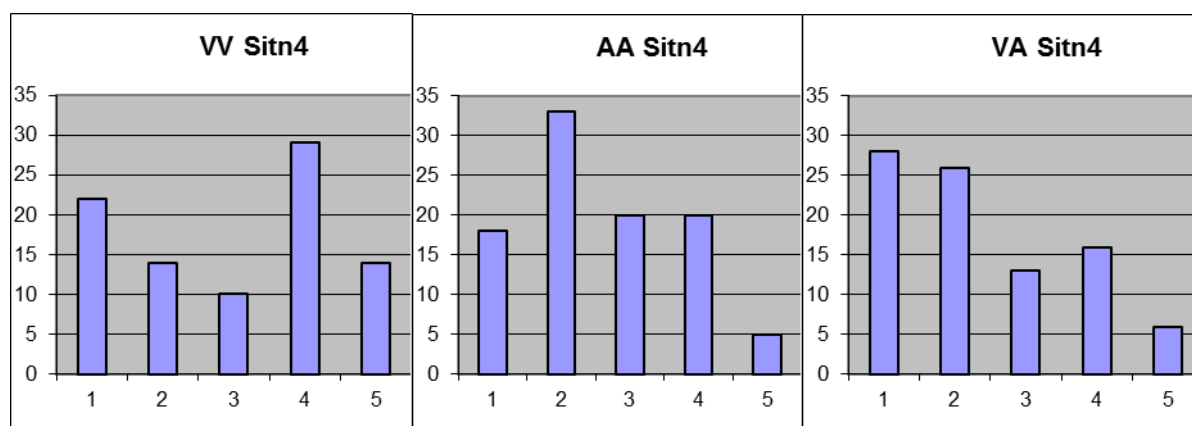
Situations	VV Bimodal	VA and AA	VA similar to AA in
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	in Likert	similar in Likert (likely to speak)	likelihood but not necessarily in interpretations
Sitn1	✓	✓*	
Sitn2	✓	✓	✓
Sitn4	✓	✓*	
Sitn12	✓	✓*	✓
Sitn17	✓	✓	✓
Sitn21	✓	✓	✓
Sitn35	✓	✓	✓

Note: ✓\* meaning that VA and AA are similar in Likert responses but the VA has a (perceived) greater likelihood of speaking

In contrast with the VV group, in Category 1, the VA and the AA are more likely to speak than being silent and their Likert responses approximate each other. This VA closeness to AA in terms of the likelihood of speaking can be analyzed through the lens of pragmatic transfer (Wolfson, 1989) and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Central to pragmatic transfer is the notion that L2 speakers might apply rules from the L1 culture to a second or a foreign language. Pragmatic transfer can be bidirectional between the L1 and the L2. In the current study, the comparison of the data from the three groups suggests that the VA have made some changes to their likelihood of speaking. Examples of this are provided in the analysis of Situation 4 and 12 below. The apparent phenomenon of VA and AA closeness or pragmatic transfer can be found in all the situations in Category 1 (table 5.9).

For Situation 4 [Teacher gets angry in a discussion about a difficult lesson], we can see that the VV Likert data are bimodal (almost half of the VV would be silent while about half would speak) while the VA appear to be influenced by Australian norms of behavior when they are communicating in Vietnamese represented by the AA Likert data (figure 5.21).



*Figure 5.21.* Likelihood of being silent in the three groups for Situation 4.

All three groups agree on the interpretation of silence as acquiescence, but the likelihood of remaining silent is very different, with the VV group more likely to remain silent than the other groups. Almost half of the VV group were likely to be silent (Likert scores 4 and 5), whereas just over a quarter of AA and VA would choose to be so. Also, we can see a great deal of similarity between the AA and the VA regarding the likelihood of speaking (Likert scores 1 and 2). This is where we hypothesize pragmatic transfer. Specifically, more than half of the VA and AA show their determination to speak in this situation. This was quite surprising in that people from a high context culture, the VA, would be expected to be more silent in front of authority, which is not the case in the responses. Perhaps instead of choosing silence when faced with an angry teacher, the VA would speak to explain and to calm the angry teacher. This likelihood of speaking makes the VA results closer to the AA. This can be understood in relation to findings from the study by D. T. Nguyen and Fussell (2012). They studied modifications between the high- and low- context cultures of Chinese and Americans respectively and found that expatriate Chinese tend to favor the direct low context style of Americans and have trouble readjusting to communicate with people in their home culture with its indirect high context style. They claim:

This variability in Chinese communication styles is consistent with other research showing that high context communicators (or those raised in that tradition) can adjust flexibly to match the styles of low context communicators, a process likely to occur when people are studying in the U.S. for an extended period of time (p. 124).

In short, what we could see from all the situations in Category 1 where the VA and the AA are close in likelihood and the VV have a bimodal distribution is that the VA are used to the possibility that people might either speak or be silent from their home culture. Therefore, in conforming to AA expectations, they are not abandoning VV habits, they are simply opting for behavior which is common both to their home culture and to their new culture. This leads to VA and AA closeness.

Indeed for Situations 1, 4 and 12, the VA results are not simply closer to those of the AA, but overtake them: their Likert scores 1 and 2 indicate that their determination to speak is higher than those of the AA. The VA Likert data in these situations are 5% to 10% higher than the AA in this regard. Let us take Situation 12 [Brother raises the topic of your broken contact with your father] as an example of these situations where the VA have a greater likelihood of speaking.

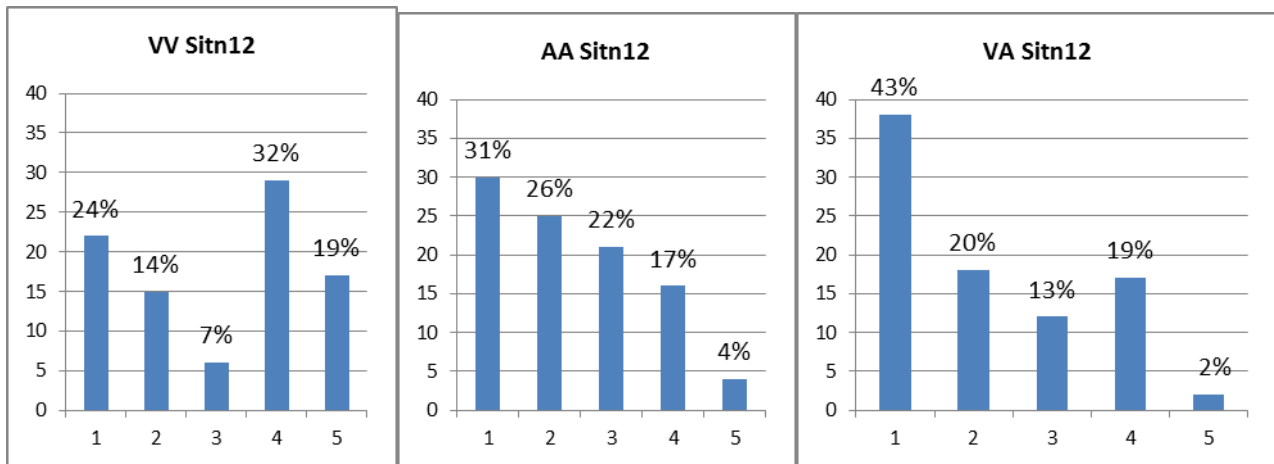


Figure 5.22. Likelihood of being silent in the three groups for Situation 12.

Figure 5.22 shows that VA Likert 1 is much higher than the VV (as the VV results are bimodal as discussed above), and also higher than the AA. This reported likelihood on the one hand might result from a VA belief that Australians are open and would thus talk more. The VA have been living or studying in Australia as international students. This might result in the belief for the VA that the Australians are more likely to speak and in their strong transfer to this behavior. In other words, the fact that the VA report a greater likelihood of speaking than the AA gives us the best clues about changes in the speech style of the VA. In relation to differences due to strong transfer, the situation happening with the VA is perhaps similar to the findings of Guillot (2011). In Guillot's study, English students of French notice interrupting behavior among the French, but do not notice the subtleties of when it is appropriate (appropriate in collaboration, not appropriate in conflict). This results in stereotyping the French as interrupters, and over-accommodating to this behavior. This means that students who have lived in France tend to interrupt more often than the French, in situations of conflict as well as collaboration.

One of the most interesting findings in Category 1 where the Likert responses for the VV group are different from those of the other two groups is that the VA move away to the AA by indicating a greater likelihood of speaking and the VA differ significantly in the ways they interpret silence. Examples of this can be seen in almost all situations in Category 1, particularly Situations 2, 12, 35 as previously analysed. Here we look at Situations 17 and 21, which fall into the same pattern (i.e., the VA similar to the AA in likelihood but not necessarily in interpretations). The charts for Situation 17 [Dad asks to see your Maths report] and for Situation 21 [Being pressed to eat] are as follows.



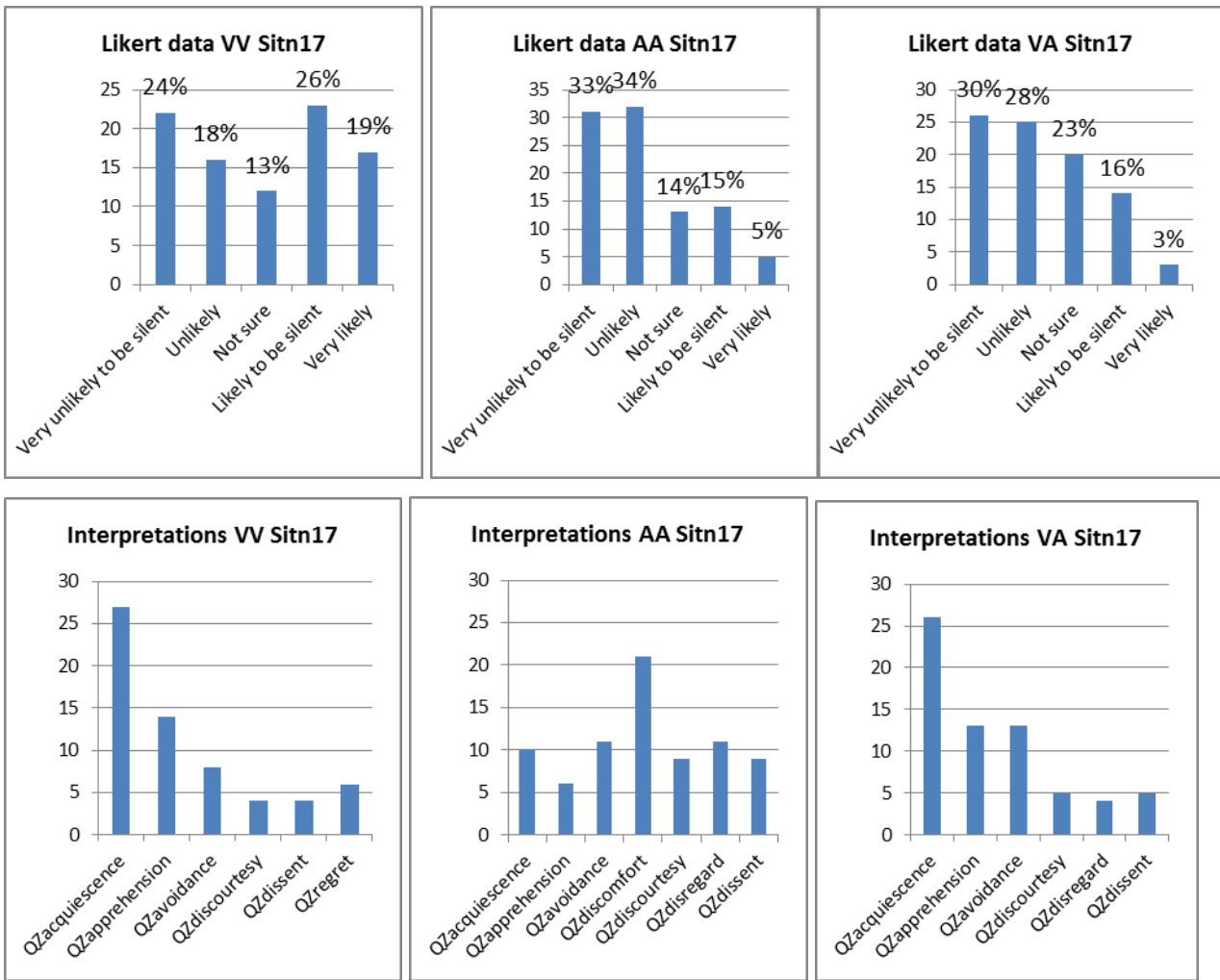
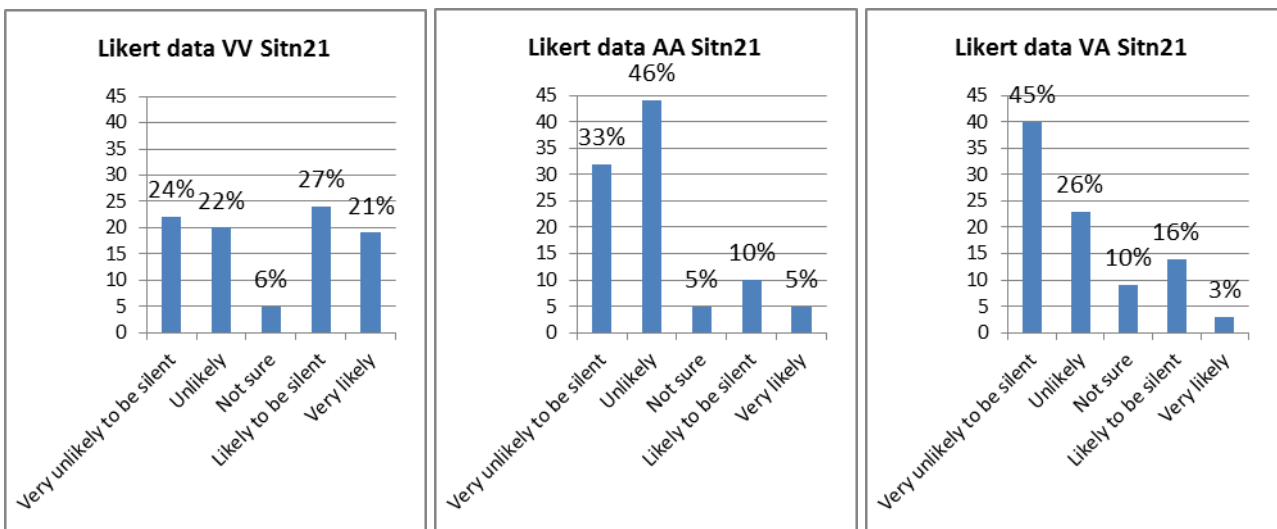


Figure 5.23. Likelihood of being silent in the three groups for Situation 17.



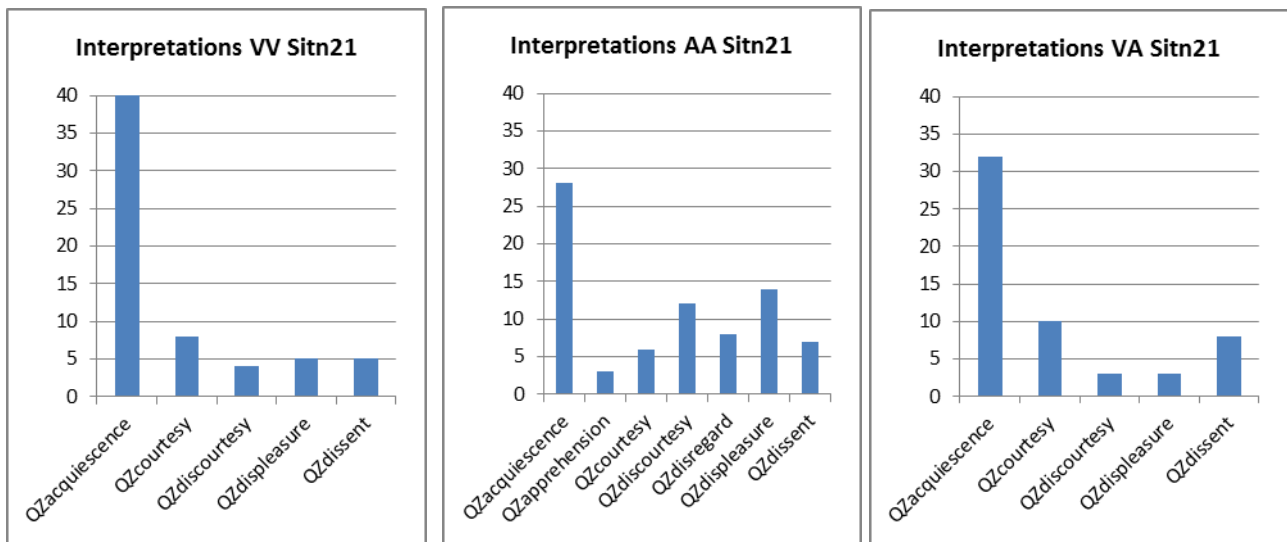


Figure 5.24. Likelihood of being silent in the three groups for Situation 21.

For these two situations the VV Likert data have a bimodal pattern as opposed to those of the other two groups who mostly chose unlikely to be silent. Concerning the interpretations of silence, for Situations 17 and 21 (as with Situations 2, 12, 35), the VA responses are similar to the VV interpretations, but not to the AA, despite being close the latter group in terms of the likelihood of being silent. For Situation 17, the VV and the VA mostly indicated silence as acquiescence, apprehension and to a lesser degree avoidance, whereas the AA interpreted silence as discomfort, avoidance and disregard. For Situation 21, the VA interpretations are close to the VV; they both interpret silence as acquiescence. The AA also indicate silence as acquiescence but in contrast to the other two groups they also see silence as discourtesy and displeasure. The interpretations of silence for Situations 17 and 21 were interesting as they show that even though the VA and the AA share the perception of likelihood of silence, possible communication difficulties could arise for them because they do not share the interpretations of silence. For example, for Situation 17, a member of the VV or the VA group would assume that if someone was silent it meant that the person agreed to give Dad the Maths report or admitted s/he was responsible for a bad performance at school. A VA or VV would thus feel scared to give Dad the report. These interpretations are not so strong among the AA, who would see silence as mainly discomfort and shame caused by a bad mark. Fear of showing the report is a smaller issue for the AA. In short, regarding the interpretations of silence, the VA seem not to have moved closer to the AA norms. On the contrary, they have remained close to the VV ones. What this means is that the VA speakers could more easily be understood by the VV than the AA. Miscommunication could occur between the VA and the AA when there was silence in the kind of situations that are in Category 1.

In conclusion, in all cases of Category 1 where the Likert responses for the VV group are different from those of the other two groups, the VV Likert results are bimodal, indicating a split between the likelihood and the unlikelihood of being silent. In most cases, the data on

interpretations of silence across the three groups display acquiescence as the dominant meaning for silence, although other meanings are sometimes present adding to the variety of possible meanings for silence.

The VA group displays an interesting pattern: while in terms of the likelihood of being silent they are similar to the AA group, they follow the VV group in their interpretations of silence. The fact that the VA Likert data are similar to the AA suggests the possibility that VA participants accommodate to the AA group in likelihood i.e., the culture they are living in and grappling with on an everyday basis. This accommodation reflected in Category 1 does not necessarily lead to shared interpretations of silence as there is less sign of similar interpretations between the two groups. In fact, the interpretations of silence by the VA remain closer to those of the VV group than the AA group. In other words, any accommodation is in terms of the likelihood of silent behavior rather than a change in the understanding of silence and the values associated with it.

#### **5.4 Category 2: Situations where AA Likert responses differ**

The descriptions of the situations in this category appear in Table 5.10 below.

Table 5.10. *Category 2: Situations Where AA Likert Responses Differ*

<b>Situations (Total: 7)</b>	<b>Contexts</b>
Sitn5	Going with boss to a meeting where partners negotiate orders
Sitn14	Disagreeing with the teacher in a class discussion
Sitn15	Being criticized in a staff meeting
Sitn16	Class discussion of topic you know little about
Sitn19	Teacher speaks too quickly to understand
Sitn22	Invited to casino at the weekend but you don't want to go
Sitn33	Friend has a financial problem and wants to live at your house for a month

The section will give a detailed analysis of the data, especially focusing on the difference between the interpretations of silence of the AA, and those of the VA and VV, which resemble each other. In some cases where the AA Likert responses are different from those of the other two groups, their interpretations also differ. In other words, a difference in interpretation appears to be the reason for the different likelihood of silence in these situations.

Situation 5 [Going with boss to a meeting where partners negotiate orders] (figure 5.25) is the first example of these situations where the responses of the AA differ from those of the VV and the VA.

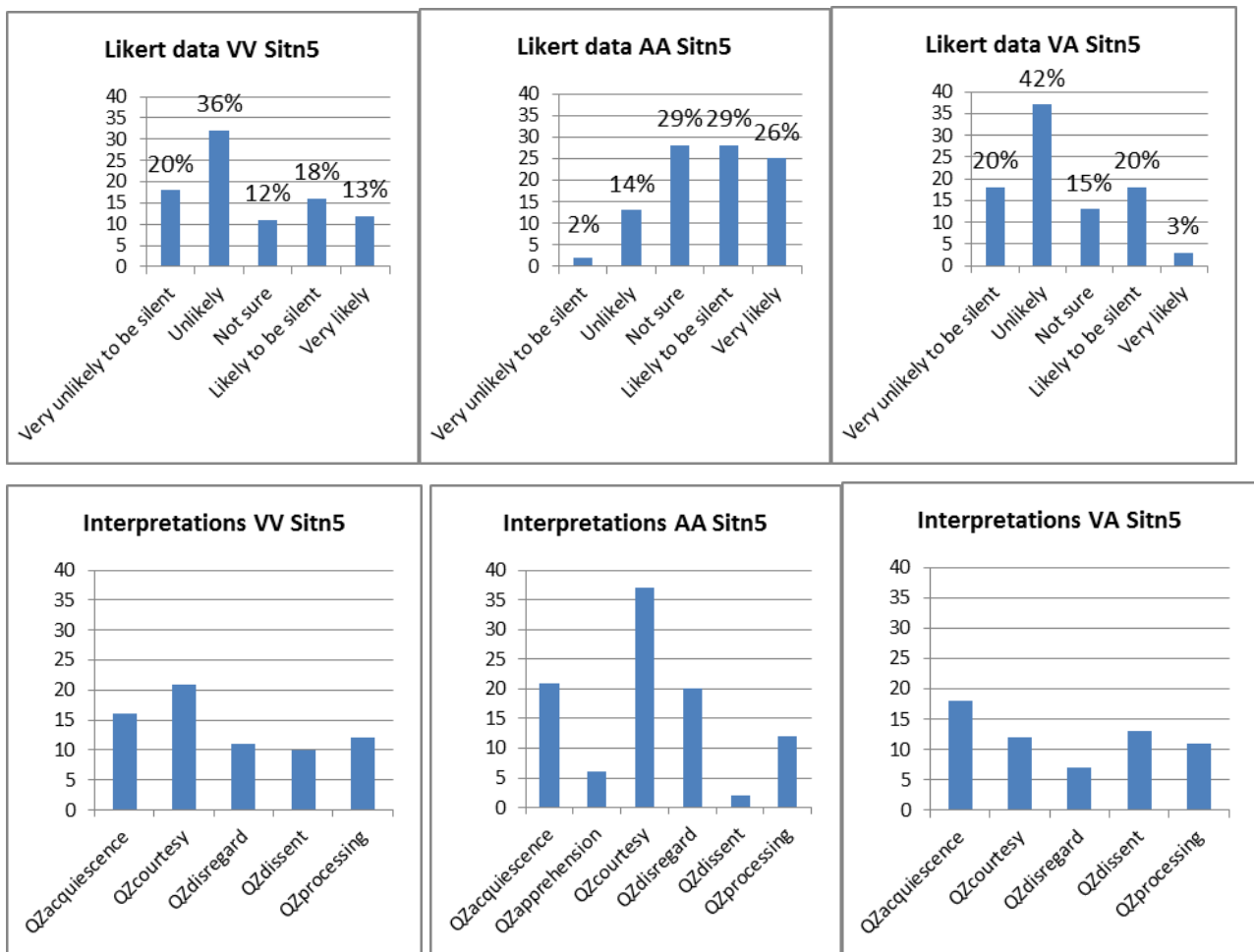


Figure 5.25. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 5.

Specifically, whereas more than half of the AA would choose to remain silent, only about one-fifth of the VV and the VA would choose to do so. Could the interpretations of silence have any effect on the likelihood that the Australians would remain silent? As can be seen, the AA interpretations differ in that the highest interpretation of silence is courtesy (double than that of the VV and VA) indicating silence as a way to show respect. A large number of the AA respondents spoke of the need to be silent as a sign of good manners, which was later coded as *QQrespect* under the umbrella code of *QZcourtesy*: “showing respect for your boss and their decisions” (AA1), “When bosses are talking, employees shouldn’t get involved unless asked as a sign of respect and to acknowledge that the boss knows what they are doing” (AA8), “respectfully not interrupting” (AA14), “That you respect your boss and understand that the negotiations are important and between your boss and someone else, talking/ butting in wouldn’t be appropriate” (AA28), “that I respect my boss’s higher standing in the company” (AA35), “respecting the authority of my boss and his/her position within the negotiation” (AA66), “You respected your boss’s authority and didn’t want to undermine them in front of the other boss” (AA89). Another difference in the AA interpretations of silence is that the AA indicate silence not only as a sign of allowing the boss to conduct the discussion like the other two groups (*QZacquiescence*), but also consider silence as a

sign of disregard in this situation. This was conveyed in many instances being coded as *QQpassive* (Silence means I don't give any input/I show a lack of participation or interest): "lack of participation or interest" (AA32), "Not giving any input" (AA42), "I have nothing to add" (AA44), "... that I am not being proactive in my role as a section manager" (AA64), "I'm not contributing to a decision that involves me" (AA86) etc. The AA participants' responses suggested a paradox in that participants were cognizant that silence could be respectful but could also show a passive attitude. Indeed several AA responses were double coded as *QQrespect* + *QQpassive*, for example "You are watching, trusting your boss and having nothing to add" (AA58) or

While I would let my boss lead the negotiation, I think it is important to contribute in some way so they know you are engaged in the conversation and supporting them in their role. Silence in this situation could mean that you are being respectful of their position, but it could also be interpreted as being disengaged or disinterested. (AA41)

This is an interesting example about conflicting interpretations of silence. The AA participants described silence as as indicative of respect in the meeting but as a behavior which also carried the risk of appearing incompetent to others.

For the VV and the VA, silence in Situation 5 could mean that the person is letting the boss lead the negotiation (this is shown in the dominant *QZacquiescence*), but it could also be interpreted as being courteous (*QZcourtesy*). The codes *QZacquiescence* and *QZcourtesy* were applied frequently to the responses of both the VV and the VA groups. The responses from the three groups that were coded as *QZacquiescence* related to the idea "Silence means I let the other person say what they have to say or do whether it's appropriate or not" (*QQallow*). Let us take VV *QQallow* (*QZacquiescence*) as an example: "de cho sep giai quyet van de" (VV14) [letting the boss go for the deal], "cu de sep noi" (VV15) [letting the boss negotiate], "vi minh la cap duoi nen khong duoc xen vao" (VV54) [accepting that I should not interfere as an inferior], "ban biet trach nhiem cua minh la di theo de ghi chep, k can phai thao luan, vi da co sep. Loi noi cua minh o day se khong co trong luong" (VV65) [you understand that your job in accompanying the boss is note-taking, there is no need to discuss. Your words won't be worthy here] (VV65), "de sep dam phan voi doi tac" [allowing the boss to negotiate with partner] (AA88).

As can be seen, the Vietnamese and the AA saw the appropriateness of silence differently. While the AA might want to show respect for the boss and their decision, hence choosing to be silent, the VV and the VA would tend not to be silent in the negotiation. To some extent, we can see that keeping silent in a meeting, whether intentionally or unintentionally, whether showing respect or accepting that the boss can do the best job, also has a negative effect, which is withholding information that might be useful to the meeting and/or organisation. Perhaps seeing this, the VV and the VA would rather speak. The responses given for this situation produce an image of more

silent Australians versus more talkative Vietnamese in a meeting. This contrasts clearly with what is reported elsewhere about differences in communication styles between Vietnamese and Australians in business meetings (Byrne & FitzGerald, 1996)<sup>7</sup>. One possible reason is that the AA in this study are quite young (they are undergraduate students, whereas the VA are mostly postgraduate as mentioned in Chapter 4). If they went to a meeting it would usually be as very junior staff. This could account for the data, and that those older, more senior employees, nearer in rank to the boss might be more willing to speak and might need to show their interest a little more.

Turning to Situation 14 [Disagreeing with the teacher in a class discussion] (figure 5.26), it can be seen that almost all Vietnamese stated they would be likely to be silent. The AA group were less certain about their responses (more than a quarter were unsure), but we can see that a greater proportion of respondents believed they would be likely to speak. Relating this result to the interpretation charts, it is clear that the interpretations given by the AA are somewhat different from those of the other two groups and might be linked to the likelihood of silence.

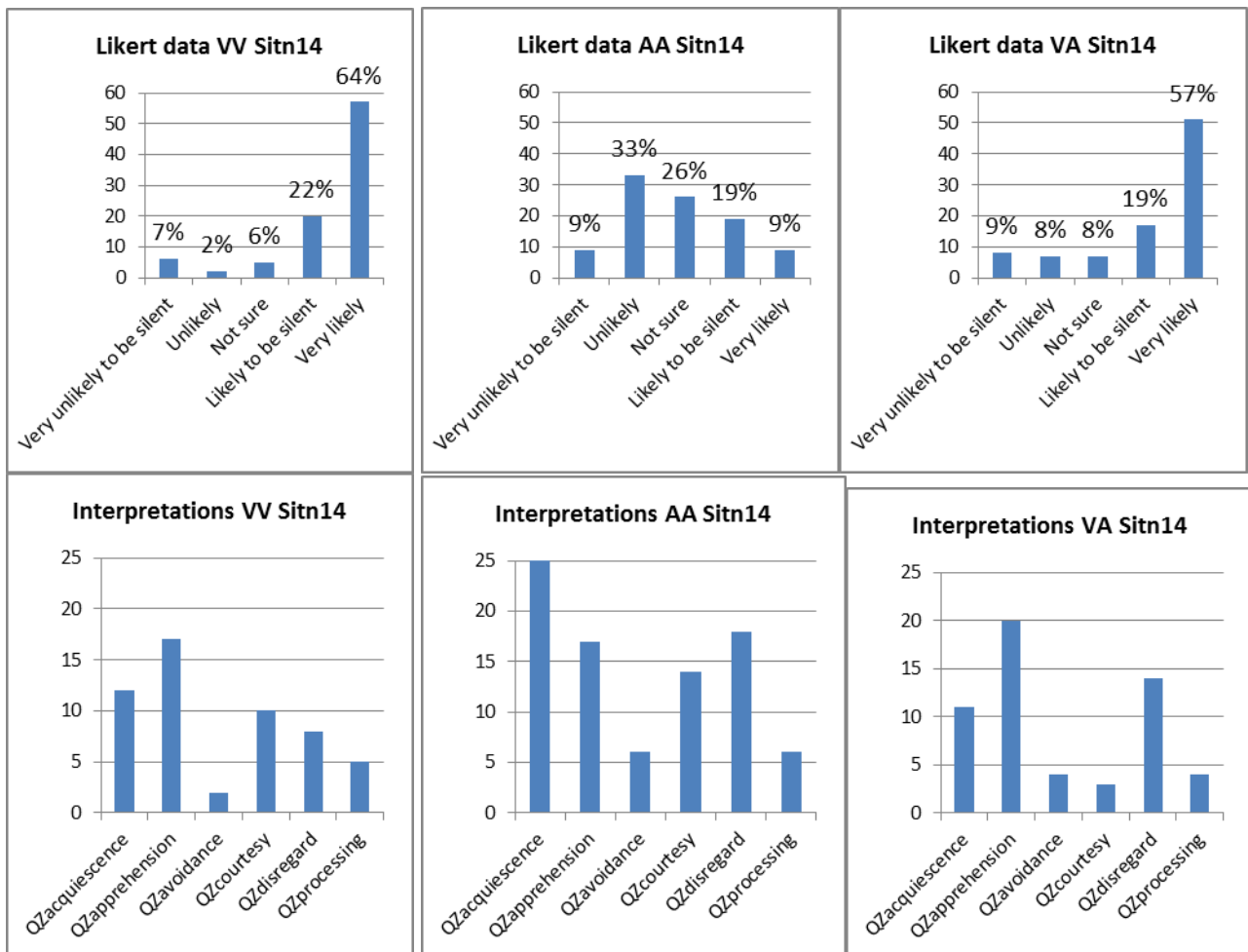


Figure 5.26. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 14.

<sup>7</sup> In their study, the Vietnamese are seen to use prolonged silence to indicate attentive listening and respect for status and authority, whereas the Australians are more vocal in their communication style.

Overall, respondents across the three groups cited a wide range of interpretations of silence, from concerns about showing acceptance of the teacher’s behavior, feeling intimidated by the teacher’s authority (Silence means I don’t want to stand up to the other person), showing courtesy, processing information or showing disregard. There is a large proportion of *QZacquiescence* in the AA data, representing nearly one third of the total number of coded meanings while this code is not the dominant interpretation given by the VV and the VA (which is *QZapprehension*). In the context of this situation, the AA gave an interpretation of acquiescence indicating compliance<sup>8</sup>. If we look at the interpretations that were coded *QZacquiescence*, we can find that they were originally coded as *QQagree*. Examples of AA responses are: “Not wanting to cause a fuss, maybe even accepting your teacher’s wrongness” (AA2), “That you agree, but you don’t.” (AA18), “you have less knowledge on the subject matter than your teacher” (AA30), “I feel the teacher may know more than I do” (AA37), “that you do not oppose the teacher” (AA52), “compliance” (AA57), “agree and not put forward your ideas” (AA65), “perhaps I have the wrong idea” (AA70), “it would appear that I agree with the teacher” (AA91), “If you were to be silent it would mean that you agree with the teacher” (AA94). What is common to a few of these interpretations (AA30, 37, and 70) is that the respondents do not want to contradict the teacher who is seen to have greater knowledge of the subject than the students. However, the implication from most AA responses coded as *QQagree* is that the students do not think the teacher has more knowledge; they think the teacher is wrong and that is why they would speak. It is evident in the AA Likert data that the AA would choose to speak as a better option, suggesting that communicating upwards to avoid further misunderstanding is important for the AA. In other words, keeping silent solely to feign agreement or to improve students’ relationships with their teacher will not help the students understand the lesson. The AA respondents understand that if they were silent, they might be perceived as being passive by the teacher. This is shown in the high interpretation of disregarding given by the AA. *QZdisregard* is the second dominant interpretation for this group and *QZapprehension* comes third.

For Situation 14, the VV and the VA were much more likely to be silent. The interpretation charts of the VV and the VA show that they would be silent mostly because they would not have the courage to challenge the teacher’s authority publicly. Looking at the interpretations that were coded *QZapprehension*, we can find that they were originally coded as *QQintimidated* (Silence means I don’t want to stand up to the other person) or *QQshy* (Silence means I am not confident/too shy to speak up). The VV and the VA responses coded in this way express the need to remain silent because the teacher is in a position of authority and the student is too shy to speak up. Examples of responses being coded as *QZapprehension* in the VA group are “khong tu tin vao ban than” (VA3)

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<sup>8</sup> “Silence is acquiescence” is a rephrasing of the old Latin rule of law: “qui tacet consentire videtur” (one who is silent is seen to have given consent).

(VA36) (VA57) [not confident in oneself], “chua manh dan” (VA7) [not strong enough], “khong du can dam, ly le de thuyet phuc” (VA11) [not having courage and reason enough to persuade the teacher], “ngai khong phat bieu y kien” (VA52) [too shy to speak up], “Không thực sự chắc chắn về ý kiến của mình nên tốt nhất là im lặng [...]” (VA63) [not really sure about my own ideas, better to keep silent [...]], “Bạn không dám nêu lên quan điểm của bản thân mình vì nhút nhát, sợ bạn bè trêu chọc hay thầy/cô giáo không quan tâm đến bạn nữa” (VA86) [you don’t dare to speak up about your point of view because you are shy, scared of being teased by friends and that your teachers won’t pay attention to you anymore] etc. Again, the Vietnamese students show a higher level of apprehension (e.g., scared of being wrong) than acquiescence. They tend not to make their objections publicly in a class discussion. The VV and the VA also expressed some acquiescence in their interpretations (second most frequent code after *QZapprehension*).

For Situation 15 [Being criticized in staff meeting], the VV and the VA report similar low likelihood of silence, while the AA report a higher likelihood of remaining silent. There is some variation across the three groups in the interpretations of silence (figure 5.27).

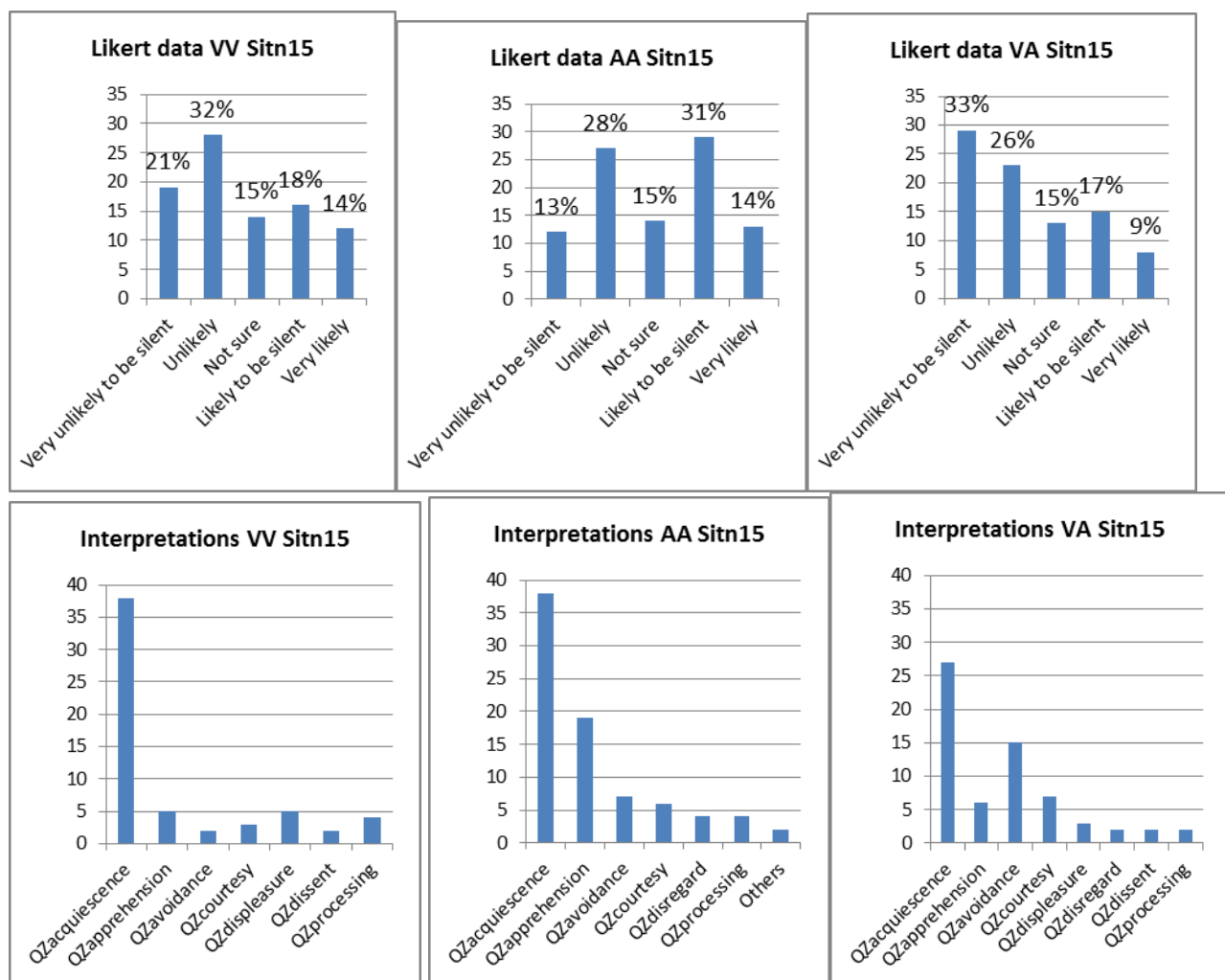


Figure 5.27. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 15.



Specifically, whereas more than half of the VV and the VA would choose to speak, less than half of the AA would speak while about half the AA would be silent. Clearly, the AA Likert data are bimodal with the responses divided between silence and speaking. With respect to the interpretation of silence, respondents across the three groups have *QZacquiescence* as the dominant interpretation, accounting for nearly half of the total coded meanings in the VV and the AA, and one third in the VA. In the interpretations of the AA that were coded *QZacquiescence*, we can find that they were originally coded as *QQagree* (Silence means an agreement with what other people say). Some examples of the AA *QQagree* are the ideas that the staff member agrees with the criticism of the Head of the department (AA1, AA2, AA6, AA14, AA15, AA16, AA39, and AA46). The respondents further expressed their thoughts: “To take the criticism from your superior without complaint” (AA9), “accepting the criticism as deserved” (AA14), “They may be right, but all you can do is try to be better. Talking will probably not help in this situation” (AA18), “you realise she is not singling any person out, just trying to improve” (AA19).

Turning to the interpretations of silence given by the VV and VA, the scores for *QZacquiescence* are high, indicating silence as a way to comply with the head of department. Specifically, for the VV, the original responses in this category were coded as *QQagree* and *QQguilt* (Silence means I accept the blame/the responsibility for this). Examples of the responses coded VV *QQguilt* are: “do la nguyen tac” (VV1) [it is a rule to be silent in this case], “nhan loi cua minh” (VV14) [accepting the mistake], “toi nghi phan viec minh lam van chua that su tot” (VV17) [I think the teaching task that I did was not very good], “tiiep thu nhung loi phe binh va sua sai” [acknowledge the blame/responsibility and correct the mistake] (VV22), “biet nhan loi, tiiep thu nhung y kien, nhung diem khong tot ma cap tren chi ra” (VV86) [accept the blame, listen to the ideas as well as the negative feedback from the head of the department]. Responses coded as *QZacquiescence* in the VA originated from *QQagree*: “đồng ý” [agree] (VA11), “chap nhan nhung gi nguoi khac noi ve minh la dung” [accepting what the other person talk about me is correct] (VA18), “chap nhan minh ko lam tot” [accepting that what I have done is not good enough] (VA25), “[...] chấp nhận lời phê bình” [accepting the criticism] (VA30), “Chấp nhận yếu kém thuộc về mình” [accepting that the weakness belongs to me] (VA36). In short, in Situation 15, respondents across the three groups gave an interpretation of acquiescence to the criticism, though there is a slight difference in the VV interpretations in that many respondents accept the blame/the responsibility, which falls under *QQguilt*, in addition to the *QQagree* of the AA and VA. The interpretation of silence as acceptance across the three groups can be linked to a finding from a study by Milliken and Morrison (2003) in which employees often keep silent as a way to accept criticism as they do not believe that their opinion is valued and speaking up does not seem likely to lead to a solution.

For Situation 15, *QZapprehension* is another common interpretation of silence given by the AA, which is not the case in the responses of the VV and the VA. The AA *QZapprehension* suggests that silence means not wanting to challenge the superior out of fear. Here are some concrete examples of the AA *QZapprehension*: “Not directly confronting the HOD [Head of Department] after/in the staff meeting” (AA10), “Not inciting any more ire from the Head – self-preservation” (AA26), “bowing to a superior” (AA35), “you are not in the correct place to confront your boss about the accusations” (AA44), “not annoy the head of university department” (AA42), “You don’t have confidence to stick up for yourself. Or you may want to be silent and keep your job” (AA56), “Intimidation in speaking out/shyness” (AA83), “You felt you could not challenge this person’s authority in an open arena” (AA89). In giving further comment, one respondent reflects: “I might be silent if I thought it was a one off reprimand to us ALL and had no repercussions” (AA10). These responses together with high frequent *QZacquiescence* in the AA data showed that respondents would try to avoid confrontation by silently taking the criticism regarding weakness in their teaching performance. However, they appeared to react in two ways: by choosing a silent response and accept criticism or by speaking out to ask for specific feedback or defend themselves against the criticism. Rather than giving meanings of silence as requested in the survey, a number of respondents stated in the comment space that “I’d ask for specific feedback” (AA12), “It’s important to either speak up then, or schedule a time later to discuss this” (AA39), “If my job is secure I would strongly, verbally disagree” (AA42), “I’d ask a lot of questions such as what is the basis for the criticism (e.g., student feedback)” (AA51), “ask for feedback” (AA65), “I would seek to justify my performance” (AA67). Such division in the AA responses makes the AA Likert results bimodal: half the participants indicate the need to give a silent response, whereas the other half convey the desire to justify or find out more about their performance by disagreeing or asking questions.

Let us now move to Situation 16 [Class discussion of topic you know little about]. If we look at the six graphs together (figure 5.28), we see that the AA Likert responses are different from those of the other two groups, and there is also a small difference in the interpretations given by this group. This is where we hypothesize that a difference in interpretation may be the reason for a different likelihood of silence. The VV and VA results, on the other hand, are similar both in the Likert responses and in the interpretations of silence.

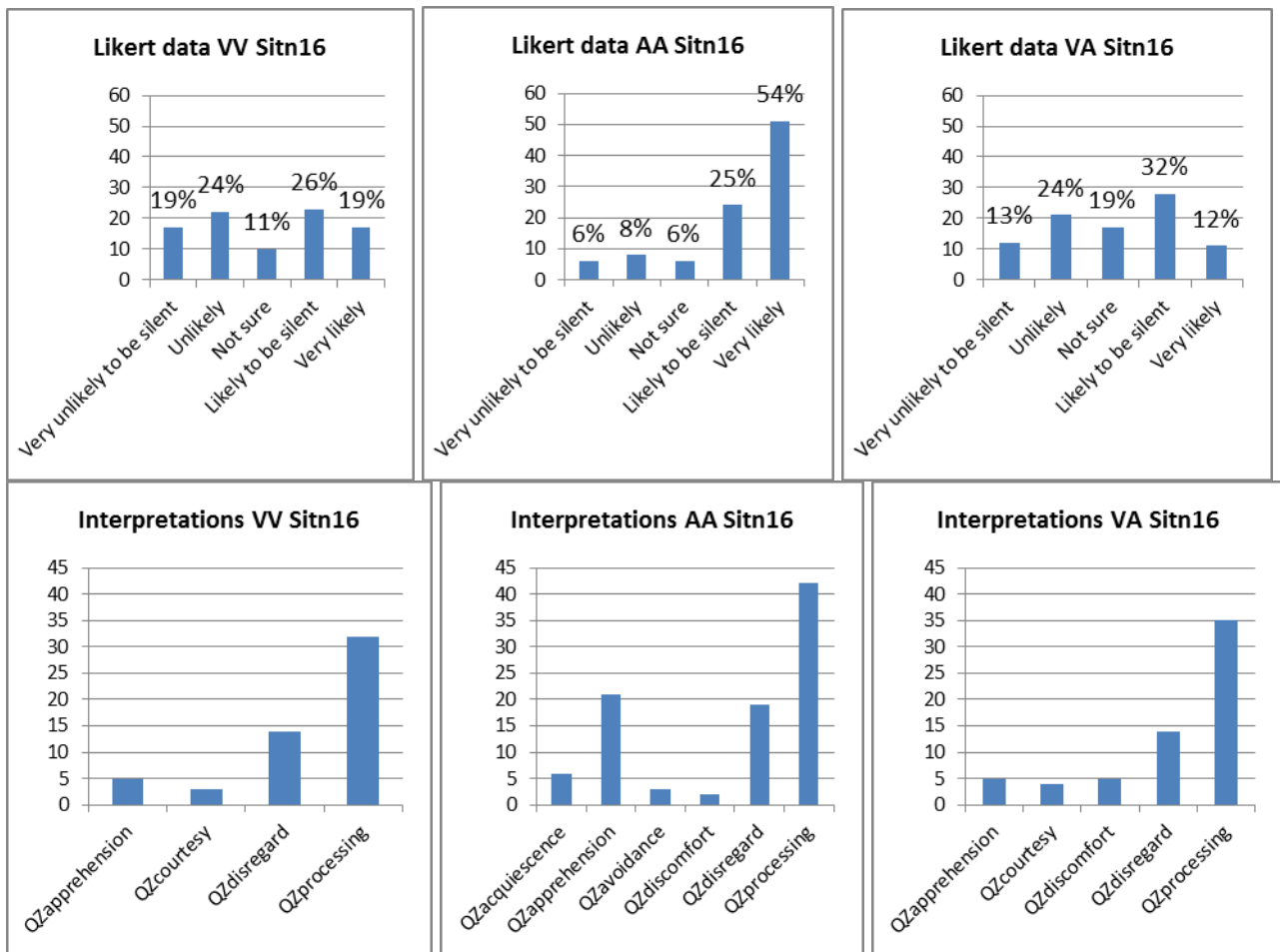


Figure 5.28. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 16.

For Situation 16, a far greater number of the AA would choose to be silent than the VV and the VA. The VV and the VA were a little less certain and/or less emphatic in that they were more equally divided between silence and speaking. Relating this result to the interpretation charts, we can see that the AA is similar to the VV and VA in *QZprocessing* and *QZdisregard* but there is a third category in the AA interpretations, which is *QZapprehension*. In other words, the two dominant interpretations of silence for all groups are *QZprocessing* and *QZdisregard*. Regarding *QZprocessing*, in the coded answers of the VV and the VA, respondents not only express the need to be silent because they do not know enough to participate in the discussion but also indicate silence as listening and learning. It is in the latter interpretation that VV and VA *QZprocessing* differ from the AA *QZprocessing*. Examples of VV *QZignorant* within *QZprocessing* are “khong biet gi” (VV1) [I don’t know anything], “minh chang biet gi ve cai do” (VV15) [I don’t know anything about that], “toi khong co y kien gi ve chuyen do” (VV19) [I don’t have any ideas about that], “chap nhan khong hieu van de do” [accepting ignorance about the topic], “do la cach tot nhat vi khong biet thi khong nen noi” (VV41) [it is the best way because one shouldn’t speak without knowing], “khong hieu ve chuyen dang thao luan” (VV45) [don’t understand the discussion topic], “so phoi bay su kem hieu biet cua minh voi nguoi khac” (VV76) [admitting that I really don’t know

this topic and this is obvious to others], “minh mu tich ve van de do” (VV78) [I know nothing about the discussion topic).

For the VV, *QQlistening* (Silence means I am listening to the reasoning of the other person) increased the frequency of *QZprocessing* and added to our understanding of how a person can deal with an unknown topic, especially in class discussion: s/he listens, instead of asking questions to gain more knowledge. Examples of VV *QQlistening* are “im lang de lang nghe” (VV10) [being silent to listen], “muon lang nghe cac y kien cua nguoi khac” [want to listen to the ideas of other people], “cham chu nghe va co gang hieu” (VV18) [attentive listening and trying to understand], “lang nghe, tiep thu roi co the neu y kien sau” (VV20) [listen, learn and then raise the ideas later], “muon tiep thu va tim hieu them ve chu de ma lop dang thao luan” (VV22) [being silent in wanting to learn and know more about the topic that the class is discussing], “im lang de tiep thu roi ve nha se tim doc them” (VV63) [being silent to learn, then will go home to search and read more about the topic], “minh dang co gang tiep thu, de co the tu cuoc thao luan do hieu them ve chu de do” (VV87) [I am trying to absorb the knowledge, listening to the discussion to understand more about that topic]. Similar responses are also found in the VA data. As can be seen, silence can be a way to learn for the Vietnamese. If they remained silent, it would be in order to allow more time for listening and learning, then they would research the topic after.

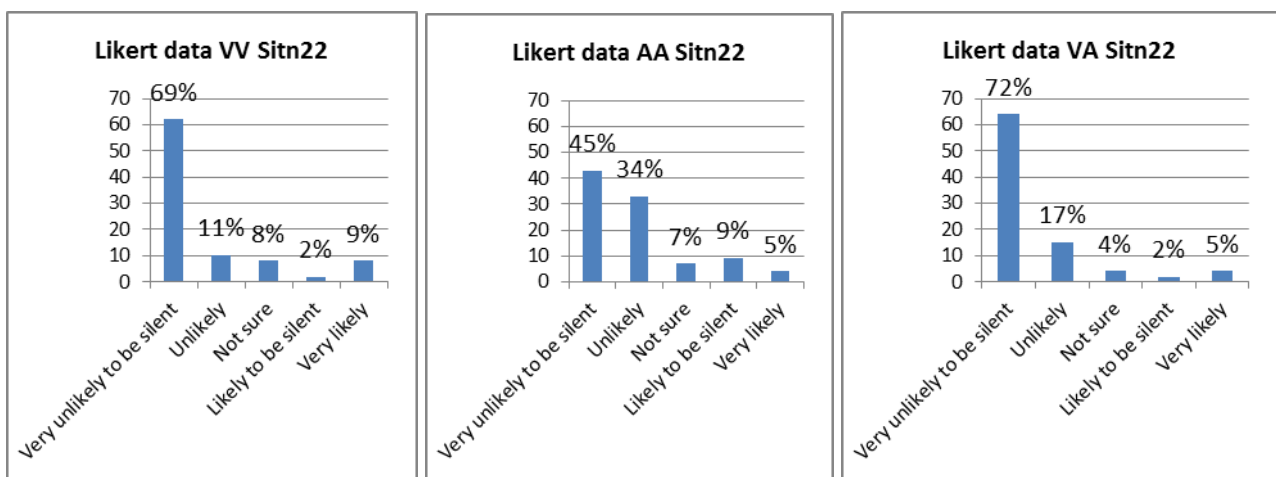
Regarding the interpretation of disregarding given by the VV and VA, for the two groups, the responses falling into the category *QZdisregard* suggest that being silent not only reveals passiveness in the class discussion but also shows a “don’t care” attitude. Here are some examples of *QQpassive* (Silence means I don’t give any input/I show a lack of participation or interest) and *QQdont care* in the VA data: “khong co y kien dong gop” (VA3) [you have nothing to add to the discussion], “khong tham gia tich cuc vao hoat dong tren lop” (VA14) [not actively participating in the activities in class], “khong hung thu voi chu de” (VA57) [no interest in the topic], “khong quan tam van de do” (VA23) (VA25) (VA36) (VA46) [I don’t care about that/the discussion topic], “tho o, khong quan tam” (VA89) [neglect, not interested in the topic], etc.

In short, the VV and VA consistently indicate silence as processing as well as disregarding the class discussion. Other people will realise they do not know what is being discussed. But at the same time, if they keep silent, the other people will not know how much they do not know; thus perhaps their ignorance will not be as noticeable. Also, when the Vietnamese are silent, they are cognizant that they may show a lack of participation or interest. Perhaps due to this variation in interpretations of silence, the Likert data for the VV and VA are bimodal with half the number of participants indicating that they were likely to remain silent, whereas the other half would be likely to speak.

For the AA *QZprocessing* accounted for nearly half of the total coded meanings, double *QZapprehension*. Looking at the AA responses in detail, there were a large number of responses about not knowing anything (*QQignorant\_QZprocessing*), but many of these were paired with the idea of not wanting to show one’s ignorance to other people and fear of appearing stupid (*QQself-effacement\_QZapprehension*). This explains why *QZprocessing* and *QZapprehension* are high for the AA. Overall, in a class discussion like the current scenario, if the Australians do not understand the topic, they do not seek clarification; they would rather keep silent in order not to reveal ignorance and not embarrass themselves by asking questions that could appear ‘stupid’. In other words, in this situation, the respondents use silence to avoid feeling socially inept. The combination of a fear of looking stupid if one speaks while trying to process unknown information led to a high likelihood of silence.

In short, for Situation 16, the AA are far more likely to be silent than the other two groups, and also attribute a further meaning to silence. If there was silence, all three groups would interpret it as thinking more about the topic, and at the same time as disregarding others. In addition to these two meanings, the AA see silence in this situation as a way of hiding one’s ignorance.

Situation 22 [Invited to casino at the weekend but you don’t want to go] is another example of a situation where the responses of the AA differ. Specifically, the respondents from the three groups believe they would speak in this situation, although the AA Likert responses are more equally divided between *Very unlikely* and *Unlikely* in comparison with the predominance of *Very unlikely* among the VV and VA. If we look at the interpretation charts, we see that the difference between the VV and the VA is minimal, but AA is dissimilar.



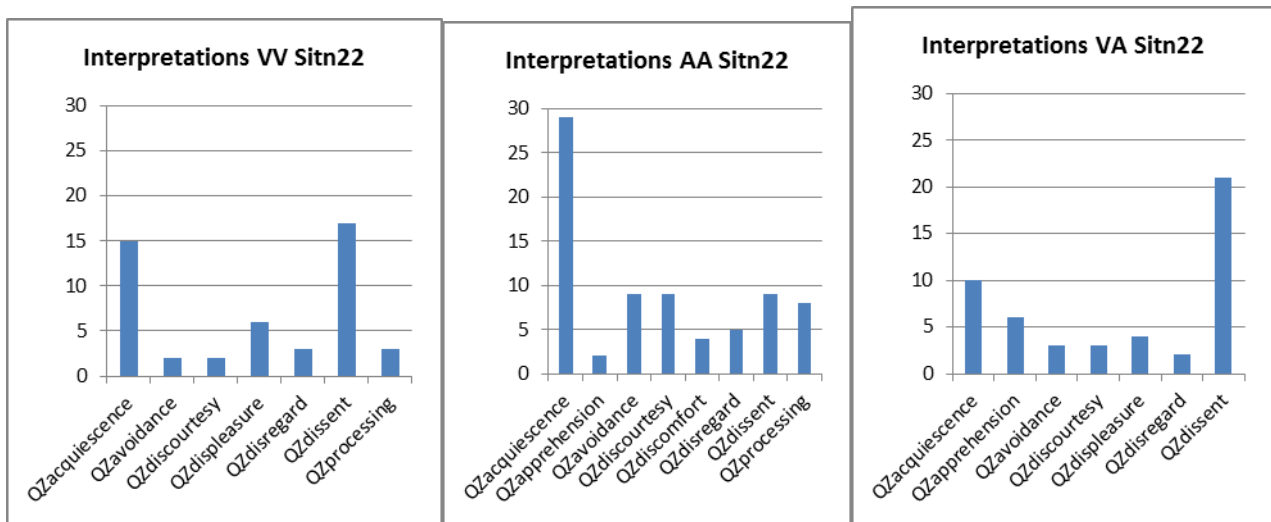


Figure 5.29. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 22.

As figure 5.29 indicates, the two dominant interpretations of being silent in this situation across the three groups are dissent and acquiescence. However, there is a far greater proportion of *QZacquiescence* in the AA data, representing nearly one third of the total number of coded meanings while the dominant interpretation given by the VV and the VA is *QZdissent*. Specifically, the AA *QZacquiescence* score is double that of the VV and VA. Looking at the interpretations that were coded *QZacquiescence*, we can find that they were originally coded as *QQagree* indicating that silence would mean agreement with the friend to go to the casino. The AA responses which have been coded as *QQagree* are: “you comply” (AA3), “You may be inadvertently agreeing to go with them [...]” (AA4), “To accompany your friend, without saying that you don’t want to go” (AA9), “Accepting the offer” (AA17), “That you don’t mind going” (AA18), “agreeing to go to the casino” (AA19), “Assent” (AA23), “I don’t have a problem with going to the casino” (AA46), “compliance” (AA57), “You would rather go with your friend, wherever that is” (AA58), “going to the casino, not losing friendship” (AA93). Here are VV responses which were coded with *QQagree*: “dong y” [agree] (VV7, VV8, VV49), “chap nhan” [submit] (VV12), “di cung” [going with the friend] (VV15), “ban dong y” [you agree] (VV32), “dong y di vao co bac” [agreeing to go and with gambling] (VV39), “nhan loi” [compliance] (VV88).

Examples of the VA responses coded as *QQagree* are: “dong y ngam” [imply that I agree to go] (VA14), “dong y” [agree] (VA25), “a dua” [yes to go with the friend] (VA33), “chap nhan loi de nghi do” [agree with that suggestion] (VA38), “dong y di theo ban của mình” [agree to go with the friend] (VA75), “Đồng ý đi chơi” [agree to go out] (VA79), “chấp nhận đến sòng bài chơi với bạn của bạn dù bạn không thích” [agree to go to the casino with the friend even though you don’t want to] (VA86), “cung muon di” [also want to go] (VA89). We can see from these examples that for both the Vietnamese and Australian participants, being silent can be an indirect means of accepting the invitation, which would be a way to respect the feelings of the friend or help to

maintain the friendship. However, in all three groups, other interpretations of silence occur, and in particular the opposite of agreement, which is refusal.

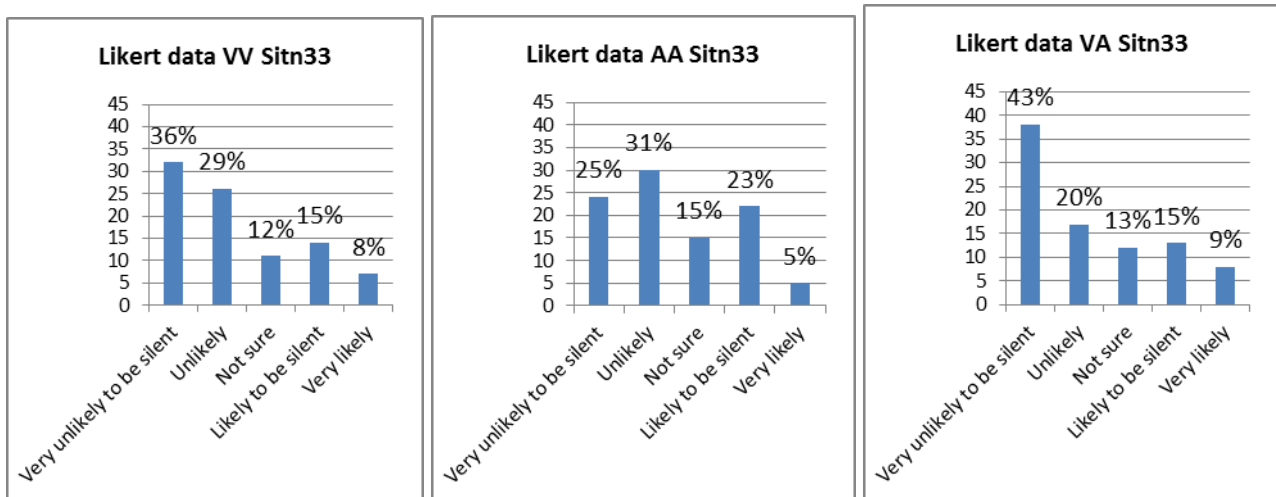
Indeed there are a great deal of responses coded *QQrefuse* (*QZdissent*). Some examples of AA responses coded as these are: “It is clear that I don’t want to go” (AA8), “I am not interested” (AA15), “[silence means] saying no” (AA26), “that you don’t really want to go” (AA34), “sometimes it’s hard telling your friends you don’t want to do something” (AA44), “I didn’t want to go but didn’t want to tell him” (AA59). Examples of VV answers coded as *QZdissent* are: “tu chôi” [refuse] (VV21, VV60), “toi muon o nha nghi ngoi” [I want to stay home to relax] (VV36), “khong muon di chôi” [don’t want to go out] (VV54), “minh khong muon di nhung khong dam noi len quan diem cua minh” [I don’t want to go but don’t dare to raise my viewpoint] (VV71), “khong muon di” [don’t want to go] (VV85). VA responses coded with *QZdissent* include “Không đồng tình” [not agree] (VA2), “(im lang nhung cuoi tru) thay cho loi tu chôi” [silence but with a smile to show refusal] (VA3), “không đi” [not to go] (VA15, VA32, VA83), “tu chôi” [refuse] (VA21, VA47), “minh khong di nhung khong muon noi cho ban biet dieu do” [I won’t go but don’t want to tell him so] (VA29), “tỏ ý không muốn” [showing that you don’t want to go] (VA71). The interpretation of silence as refusal across the three groups is certainly a sharp contrast to the agreement aspect discussed earlier. As such, the respondents for all groups provided an interesting contradiction in meanings. This may be a reason why they would be unlikely to be silent: the variety of possible meanings for silence could create ambiguity. Speaking definitely would help reduce ambiguity. In the comments’ columns, respondents across the three groups explain that they would speak in this situation either to give a definite answer or an excuse. Respondents surmised that the reasons for speaking were because: “I would say no thank you and explain why” (AA62), “I would either give an excuse, or say that I didn’t really like casinos, and suggest a different place to go with them” (AA82), “len tieng de tu chôi” [speak to give refusal] (VA59), “vi minh khong muon den nhung noi nhu vay” [because I don’t want to go to those places] (VV50), “de giai thich nhe nhang” [to explain in a subtle way] (VV56), “di chôi bai la khong tot” [going gambling is not good] (VV63), “len tieng de noi toi khong muon chôi nhung thu toi khong gioi” [speak up to say I don’t want to do something that I am not good at] (VV83).

I will now turn to some more examples from the AA responses to see the wider range of interpretations of silence besides the opposing meanings of acquiescence and dissent. Other AA interpretations of silence concerned discourtesy, processing information and avoidance. AA responses coded with *QZdiscourtesy* typically include the word ‘rude’, which indicates that silence in not giving the friend a definite answer to his offer is considered rude and means that the other person’s feelings and/or point of view are not respected. Let us now examine avoidance. In this situation, avoidance refers to avoiding giving a direct ‘no’ and in some cases avoiding the topic. For

the AA, some responses express an avoidance: “Not wanting to let your friend down” (AA42), “That you feel bad for not wanting to go with them and would rather not answer then let him down” (AA48), “That you don’t want to knock back your friend’s offer” (AA85), “avoidance of the topic, hoping they forget about it or it goes away” (AA96). These responses refer to the desire to keep silent to avoid the topic and/or disappointing the friend. Participants believe that responding to an offer with a verbal ‘no’ would turn the friend down too directly, and hence damage the relationship. All these responses were coded as *QZavoidance*. The other code accounting for the same proportion of responses as *QZdiscourtesy* and *QZavoidance* is *QZprocessing*. As logically expected, when one cannot think of what to say or cannot respond to an offer right away, one might fall into silence. For the AA, silence could show uncertainty or in some cases give time to consider the best way to approach a response at a later stage. There are examples of this in several AA responses such as “I am considering it” (AA13), “That you don’t know how to answer” (AA28), “You are not sure ” (AA39), “Not wanting to let your friend down, and being unsure how to tell him/her” (AA42), “thinking over the options” (AA74). The implication of these three codes together is that silence has a negative connotation, particularly that of rudeness. The greater number of codes for the AA responses not only suggests a wider range of interpretations of silence but also gives the impression that the meaning of silence is less clear for the AA. Again, it is a hypothesis that respondents would be aware of the ambiguity of silence, and therefore might choose to speak to reduce ambiguity.

In short, it can be clearly seen from the Likert data that in most cases, the participants would not be silent in replying to an unwelcome suggestion to go to the casino. The interpretation of silence is divided between dissent and acquiescence among the VV and VA, indicating contradictory interpretations of silence. The AA have a variety of ways of interpreting silence but acquiescence is by far the most frequent.

Situation 33 [Friend has a financial problem and wants to live at your house for a month] is the last situation where AA responses differs from those of the VA and VV in the Likert data.





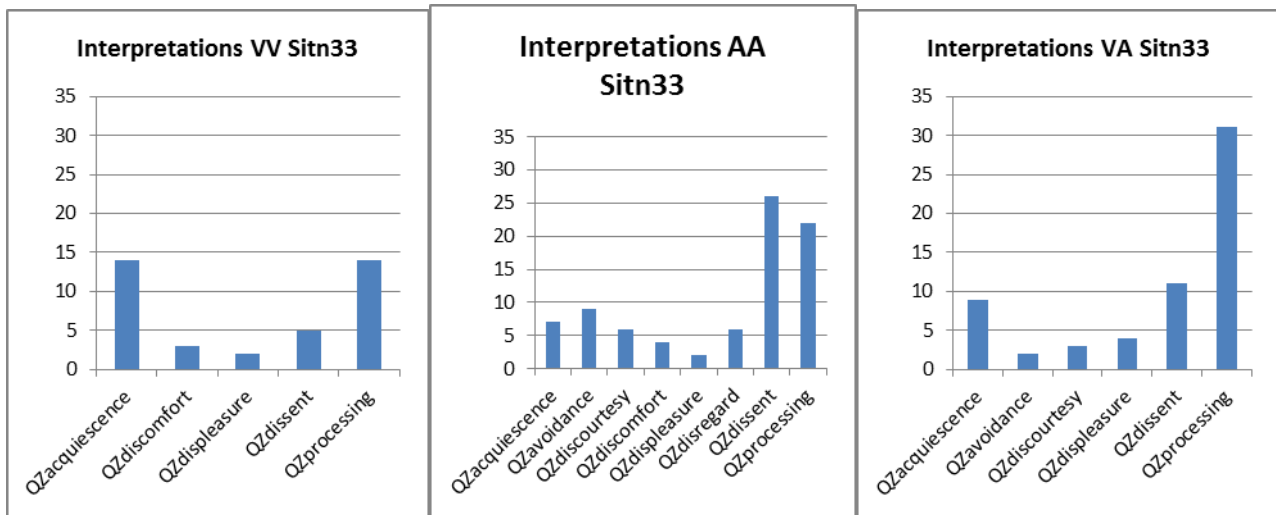


Figure 5.30. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 33.

In the Likert graphs for this situation (figure 5.30), the VV and VA responses show roughly equal proportions: both are unlikely to be silent, with more than two thirds of the total number of people providing answers of 1 or 2. For the AA, Likert score 1 and 2 are high but there is greater likelihood of being silent compared with that of the other two groups although the differences are small.

On the other hand, there is greater difference between the interpretations of silence amongst the groups. For the AA, *QZdissent* accounts for approximately one third of the total coded meanings, followed closely by *QZprocessing*. In contrast, for the VA, *QZprocessing* is the dominant interpretation of silence, with *QZdissent* far behind. The two dominant interpretations of silence for the VV are *QZprocessing* and *QZacquiescence*, with equal numbers of coded answers. In the responses coded *QZdissent*, we can see that through keeping silent, the AA and VA would mean a refusal to host the friend. Examples of AA responses are “You don’t want them to stay with you” (AA12, AA15, AA34, AA39), “you were unwilling to let them move in” (AA62), “If you were to be silent that you disagree with the idea of them moving in” (AA94). Furthermore, the pairing of *QQrefuse* (*QZdissent*) and *QQthinking* (*QZprocessing*) in the coding shows the connected ideas of the fact that the respondents wish to refuse and need to think in order to avoid saying no directly. This is shown in the responses such as: “you don’t want them to move in and you don’t know how to say no” (AA1), “that I don’t want my friend to move in but I am guilty about it and I’m trying to work out a way to say no that absolves me of any guilt” (AA91). Among the VA, *QZdissent* was used to code responses like these: “không đồng ý” [not agree] (VA2), “Từ chối” [refuse] (VA14, VA23, VA32, VA89), “không muốn cho ở” [don’t want to let them move in] (VA61), “từ chối yêu cầu của người bạn vì nó có thể ảnh hưởng đến sinh hoạt của gia đình” [refuse the request of the friend because it can influence the living habit of the family] (VA80). One noticeable reason in

VA80's response is that the hosting can influence the normal life of the family if the friend moves in.

Turning to *QZprocessing*, respondents in the three groups express the need to think over the situation, although the figure for the VV is slightly lower than that for the AA and VA, reaching only 15% of the total coded interpretations. For the AA, besides the examples of *QQthinking* (*QZprocessing*) in the pairing with *QQrefuse* (*QZdissent*) above, there are a number of examples that were coded "thinking": "you are thinking" (AA5), "you are comprehending their request and thinking through the options" (AA8), "Thinking about it and whether it would be viable" (AA17), "That you are thinking it over and maybe need more time to come to a decision/it has taken you by surprise" (AA28), "you are contemplating your answer" (AA30), "that I am thinking about the request" (AA38), "I'm processing the request and considering" (AA96). The VA responses which were coded *QZprocessing* are similar: "tôi đang lưỡng lự và cần thời gian để suy nghĩ thêm" [I am hesitating and need time to think over] (VA10), "để suy nghĩ trước khi trả lời" [to think through before giving the answer] (VA15), "suy nghĩ rồi nói với bạn sau" [thinking first and tell the friend later] (VA17), "Đang suy nghĩ nên tu chơi theo cách gì" [thinking how to refuse] (VA21), "Thường thì vấn đề xảy đến đột ngột tôi đều ko lên tiếng ngay mà cần một chút thời gian suy nghĩ" [when something comes suddenly, I don't normally speak; I spend some time to think] (VA73), "Đang suy nghĩ về những chuyện phức tạp khi bạn chuyển đến" [thinking about the troubles if the friend moves in] (VA83), "[...] bạn cần hỏi ý kiến của chồng và xem xét điều kiện của gia đình trước khi trả lời đồng ý hay không đồng ý" [you need to ask for your husband's opinion and consider the living condition of your family before answering with an agreement or not] (VA86). If we look at the VV data for this situation, we see that silence as a means of processing is dominant in their responses. Perhaps responding to a friend asking to stay when s/he is in financial difficulties is a difficult thing to do. VV respondents say something like: "để suy nghĩ" [to think] (VV5), "[...] sẽ suy nghĩ thật kỹ" [will think over carefully] (VV26, VV87), "suy tính" [considering] (VV43), "Không biết nên trả lời thế nào" [don't know how to answer] (VV52), "Suy nghĩ trước khi trả lời chính thức" [think before giving an official answer] (VV60), "chưa quyết định được" [can't decide yet] (VV64), "suy nghĩ xem giải quyết như thế nào" [think to see how to solve the problem] (VV82), "ngập ngừng, không quyết định ngay được" [hesitating, can't decide right away] (VV89). In general, the high percentage of *QZprocessing* in this situation amongst the three groups might reflect the fact that this is a situation involving finance, and therefore respondents need to think carefully.

From the responses of the three groups, it is possible to recognize that if the participants remained silent, it is more likely to mean a refusal of the friend's request for the AA, but an

acceptance to host the friend on the part of the VV, while for the VA it is equally likely to mean refusal or acceptance.

In conclusion, there is some variation in the interpretations of silence given by the three groups. In most cases where the AA are different in terms of likelihood, their interpretation of silence is also slightly different. Silence is more likely to mean refusal for AA and acceptance for VV. The likelihood and interpretations of silence by the VA remain closer to those of the VV group than the AA; therefore they are able to communicate well with each other in the foregoing situations.

### 5.5 Category 3: Situations where VA Likert responses differ

The descriptions of the situations in this category are shown in Table 5.11 below.

Table 5.11. *Category 3: Situations where VA Likert Responses Differ*

<b>Situations</b>	<b>Contexts</b>
<b>(Total: 4)</b>	
Sitn11	Boss asks you to write a report in two days
Sitn27	You are reluctant to hire a new model but have no other suggestion
Sitn31	Being ignored by your partner at party
Sitn32	Receiving comment on weight gain at a class reunion

In these situations, the VA group responds differently from the other two groups (VV and AA). Specifically, as is shown in the likelihood graphs of the three groups for the three situations, the VA have the greatest likelihood of speaking (the total scores of Likert 1 “very unlikely” and Likert 2 “unlikely”). A hypothesis raised in the earlier section 5.3 on situations where VV Likert responses are different from the other two groups is that the VA accommodate to AA when these two groups’ likelihood of silence are similar. Also, greater likelihood of speaking by the VA gives us the interpretation of over accommodation.

In Situation 11 [Boss asks you to write a report in two days], participants in all three groups indicate that they would speak. The VA responses show the highest percentage of participants who reported they were likely to speak at 97%, followed by the AA and VV at 89% and 78% respectively. On their Likert responses, the VA and VV participants mostly selected Likert 1, whereas the AA chose Likert 1 and Likert 2 to a similar extent.

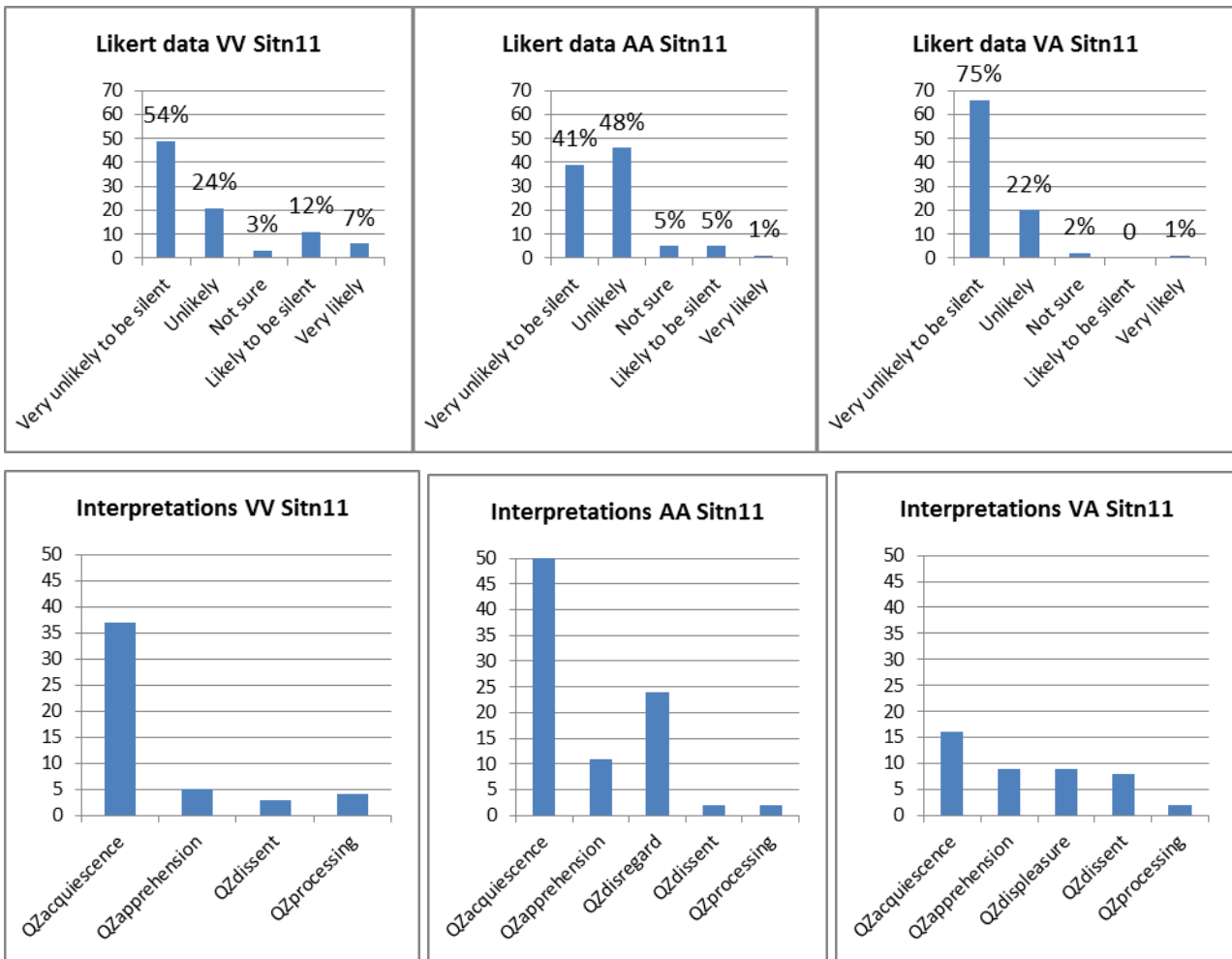


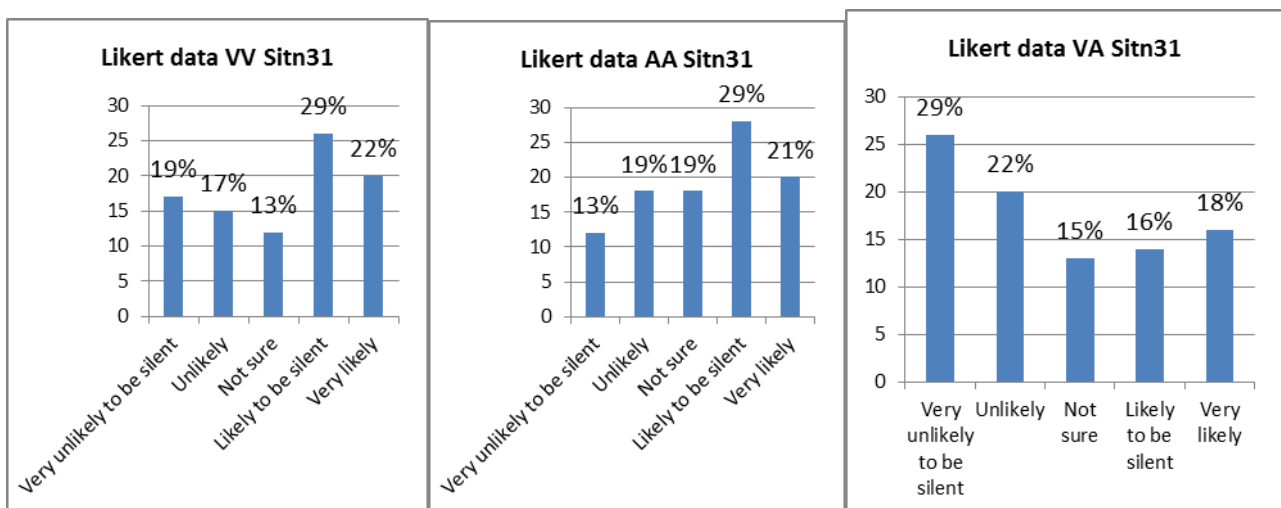
Figure 5.31. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 11.

Regarding the interpretation of silence in Situation 11, the dominant interpretations of being silent for the three groups would be acquiescence indicating an acceptance to write the report (figure 5.31). On the other hand, *QZdisregard* appeared frequently for the AA, whereas no VV or VA responded that silence would mean disregard. For the AA, there is a higher frequency of *QZacquiescence* and *QZdisregard* (*QZacquiescence* in the AA accounted for half of the total coded meanings). A large number of responses coded *QZacquiescence* and *QZdisregard* reflect the frequent pairing of *QQsubmissive* and *QQpassive* in the initial coding process. Examples of this coding for the AA are: “you are unable to complete your task properly” (AA30), “disaster, better to ask for information” (AA32), “That you feel you are unable to explain to your boss that the task is not possible without more data and that you would rather attempt to write the incorrect sales report than talk to your boss” (AA48), “That would mean that you would produce a not up to speed report and ultimately be selling your skills short” (AA52), “that you are giving your boss the impression all will be fine, when in fact you will be unable to produce the report” (AA60). Clearly, for these participants if they were silent, their silence would mean that they would submit to what the employer wanted, and did it passively, without asking any questions or attempting to get an extension trying to improve the situation or in any other way.

VV responses coded as *QZacquiescence* related to the idea “*Silence means I submit to what the other person wants*” (*QQsubmissive*) or “*Silence means an agreement with what other people say*” (*QQagree*). Answers coded as *QQagree* typically included the phrase ‘dong y’ [agreeing (to do the task)], whereas answers coded as *QQsubmissive* revealed unquestioning compliance such as “chap nhan nhiem vu sep ra” (VV6) [submit to complete the task], “do la cong viec phai co gang hoan thanh” (VV18) [it is the job, must try to complete], “chap nhan nhiem vu ma sep giao” (VV22) [compliance with the task that the boss gives], “no luc lam viec” (VV24) [try one’s best to complete].

Turning to the VA, corresponding to the given Likert data showing VA determination to speak, there is not much response on the interpretations of silence. A small number of the VA indicated silence as meaning acquiescence. Different from the interpretations of silence given by the AA, the VV and VA did not indicate silence as disregard, but as acquiescence only. The VA responses coded as acquiescence show that the staff member would have a sense of fear if speaking up: “Không dám trình bày van de, so sep quo trach” (VA3) [not dare to raise the issue, fear of being reprimanded], “[...]không dám phản đối sếp” (VA51) [not dare to oppose the boss], “sợ sếp [...] giận dữ” (VA53) [afraid that the boss will get angry]. From this, we can infer the motives for silence, that is about not raising the topic of difficulty of accomplishment out of fear. The AA are different. They interpret silence as meaning “agreeing to do the task” (AA2) and they also see that it is a passive thing to do which might end up with them losing the job for turning in a bad report. In general, although the VA Likert responses are different from those of the other two groups, their interpretations of silence resemble the VV, except that they gave fewer interpretations because they were so certain that they would not be silent.

Considering Situation 31 [Being ignored by your partner at party] (figure 5.32), it became clear that the responses of the VA differ from those of the VV, and AA with respect to both the likelihood and the interpretations of silence.



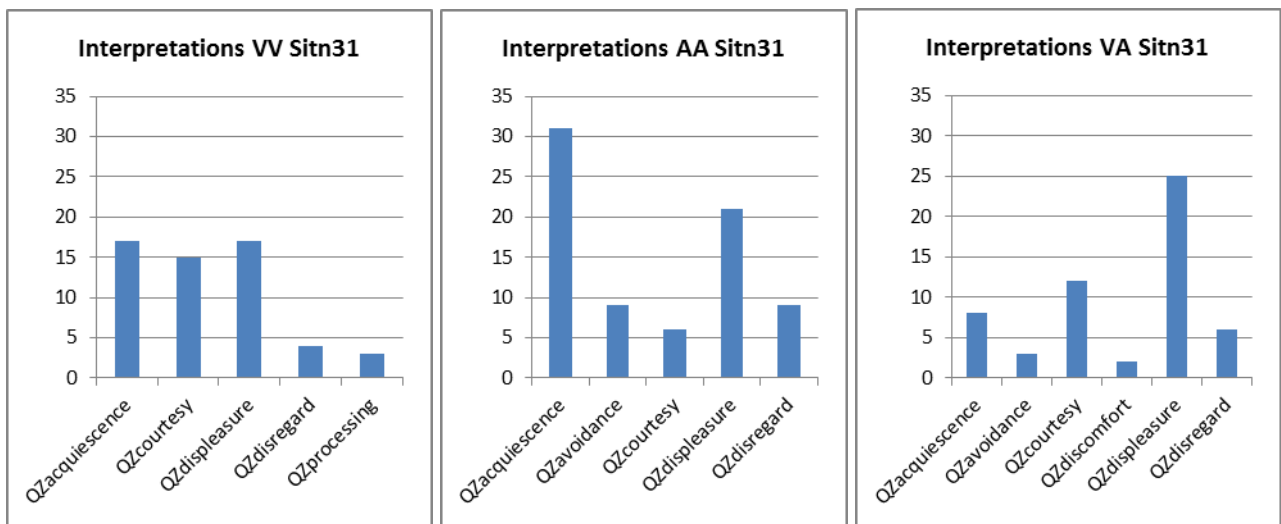


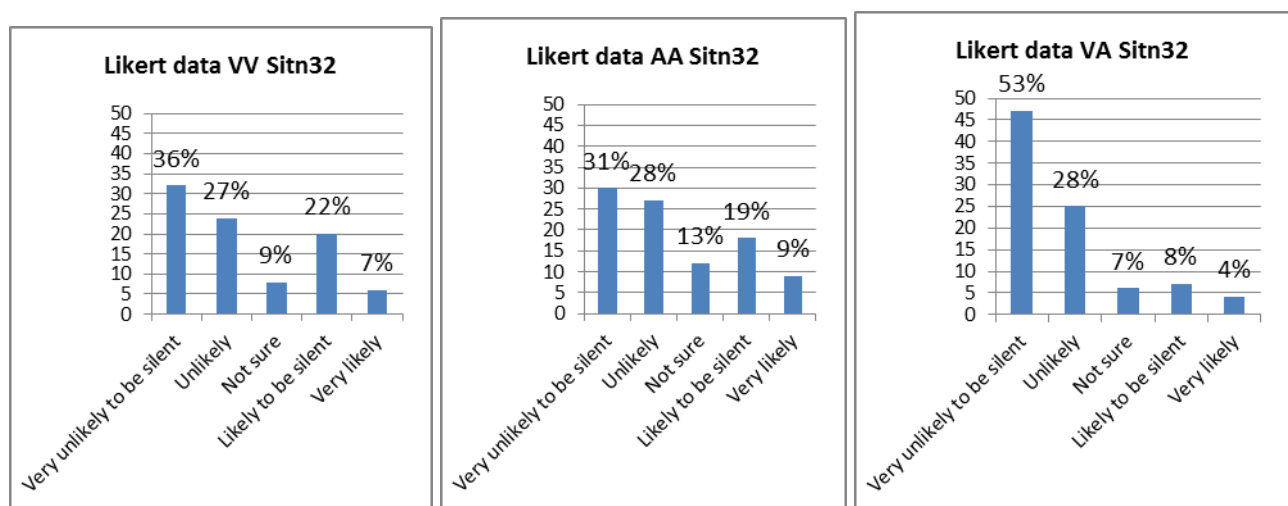
Figure 5.32. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 31.

As figure 5.32 indicates, there is an inversion in the likelihood of speaking and the likelihood of being silent among the VA in comparison with the VV and AA. Specifically, while 51% of the VA report being more likely to be silent, the same percentage of the other two groups would choose to speak. In addition, this is a situation where a considerable number of participants appeared uncertain about whether they would be silent or not, and would choose Likert 3 ‘not sure’. This indicates a difficulty in giving an absolute answer and/or can be seen as a high lack of self-disclosure (about communication between partners).

Turning to the interpretations of silence given by the three groups in figure 5.32, we can see that the AA cite *QZacquiescence* as the most frequent code, followed by *QZdispleasure*. For all groups, the score for *QZdispleasure* appeared frequently i.e., the highest for the VA (occupying one fourth of the total coded meanings) and the VV (occupying more than a quarter), and the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest for the AA (nearly approximate that of the VA), suggesting discomfort at seeing one’s partner engaging in a long conversation with someone else. Responses of the VA coded as *QZdispleasure* typically included the phrases “gian doi” [angry toward the partner] at being left alone; the VV responses coded as *QZdispleasure* show discontent. A smaller number of the VV and VA would elect to respond with silence as a way to show courtesy. This reflects people’s social needs to maintain good relationships and a congenial atmosphere at a social gathering. In their responses, the VV participants wrote “the hien su ton trong nguoi yeu truoc dam dong” (VV22) [showing respect to your partner in front of the crowd], “khong muon lam nguoi yeu mat the dien” (VV40, VV82) [don’t want to make the partner lose face], “ton trong nguoi yeu minh trong moi moi quan he” (VV45) [respecting your partner in all relationships], “ton trong nguoi khac” (VV46) [respecting others], “[...] ton trong cuoc noi chuyen cua ho” (VV61) [respecting their conversation], “giu the dien cho ca hai” (VV86) [to save both faces]. Likewise, in the VA responses coded as *QZcourtesy*, showing respect and saving face are revealed as an interpretation for silence.

The score for *QZacquiescence* for the AA is nearly four times that of the VA and nearly twice that of the VV, showing the greater potential for the Australians to see silence as indicative of accepting the situation. If we look at the interpretations that were coded *QZacquiescence* for the AA, we can find that they were originally coded as *QQallow* (Silence means I let the other person say what they have to say or do whether it's appropriate or not) and *QQpatient* (Silence means I put up with the situation). *QQallow* was applied to those responses where informants say they would allow their partner to socialise with whom s/he chooses or letting him/her to enjoy the party (AA12, 26, 30, 42, 63 etc.), whereas *QQpatient* was effectively used in cases where informants appeared to put up with the situation (AA19, 21, 32, 34, 70, 74). In fact, the AA do not merely accept the situation. The high presence of *QZdispleasure* shows that informants are not happy at seeing their partner with someone else (*QQdislike*). Examples of AA *QQdislike*\_ *QZdispleasure* are “Not saying anything to your partner, or trying to take them away from that other person” (AA9), “That you are not happy being with this other person” (AA18), “that I hate the other person and am annoyed at my partner for talking to them without including me” (AA36), “I’m angry and I hope my partner will notice” (AA38), “... that I did not like this person [...]” (AA64), “not saying that you don’t like the person to your partner” (AA90). The higher level of AA *QZacquiescence* compared with the VV’s might show that silence on the part of the AA is more likely to indicate tolerance of the partner’s actions than silence on the part of the VV.

For Situation 32 [Receiving comment on weight gain at a class reunion], while the VA report a low likelihood of silence, the VV and the AA report similar higher likelihood of silence but still all groups opt to speak. There is some variation across the three groups in the interpretations of silence (figure 5.33).



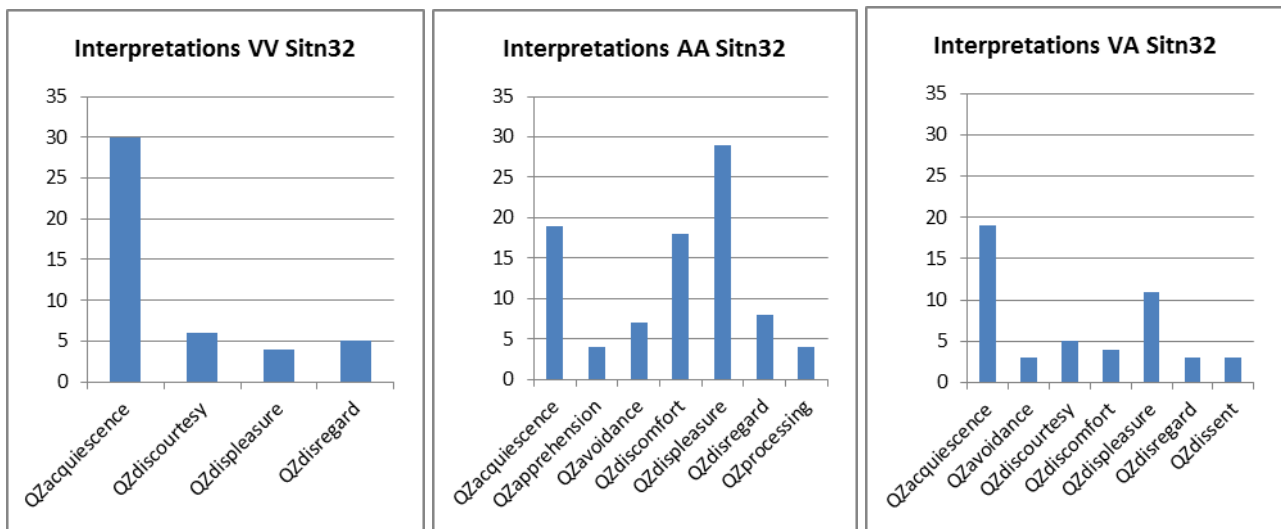


Figure 5.33. Reported likelihood and interpretations of silence for Situation 32.

In the likelihood graphs of the three groups, there is a greater likelihood of speaking for the VA. The Likert scores of the VV and AA approximate each other, accounting for more than half of the total Likert data. A study of the interpretations of silence and likelihood together showed that there would be quite different implications of silence, particularly when participants were unlikely to be silent.

Figure 5.33 presents the frequencies and distributions of codes for Situation 32. This figure shows that *QZacquiescence* had the highest frequency for the VV and the VA and was also distributed quite similarly across the three groups. A far greater number of AA gave an interpretation of displeasure compared with the other two groups. Apart from these, the AA respondents gave discomfort as a possible frequent interpretation. In the coding list, *QZacquiescence* indicates silence as a sign of acceptance. Participants in the AA say something like “agreement” (AA32, AA35), “Agreeing with them (laughing, feigning indifference)” (AA10) (AA67), “Accepting the criticism” (AA17), “to allow them to believe what they said was appropriate” (AA19). Respondents in the VA responded: “coi đó như một câu hỏi thăm bình thường” (VA15) [seeing the comments as a normal hello as usual], “cong nhan nhung gi ban minh no la dung” (VA18) [acknowledging what the friend said is true], “[...]xem do la cau dua vui” (VA19) [seeing this as a joke], “mot cach giao tien thong thuong” (VA21) [a usual way of communication], “dua thoi ma” (VA41) [it is only a joke]. For the VV, the typical interpretation under *QZacquiescence* is that the participants agree that they have put on weight (VV1, 5, 18, 52, 68, 83) and see the comments as a joke. A common reaction from the VV and the VA would be that they would smile with the friend upon hearing the statement and did not take this seriously, whereas the AA gave an interpretation of silence as high displeasure and as a sign of awkwardness or of feeling embarrassed/ashamed in front of other friends. Examples of AA responses are that silence would mean “absolute embarrassment” (AA38), “Embarrassed that you had put on weight [...]”



(AA48) (AA75), (AA93), (AA95), “i was embarrassed about putting on weight” (AA59) (AA79), “you were ashamed of putting on weight and unnecessarily insulted” (AA62), “... embarrassment among the people I was originally conversing with” (AA64). Although giving some acquiescence in their interpretations of silence, the AA do not think the statement is acceptable and therefore showed a preference for speaking up.

In conclusion, although the participants across the three groups offer the possible interpretations of silence, they indicate that spoken communication is necessary.

#### **5.6 Category 4: Situations where the Likert responses of all three groups differ**

The descriptions of the situations in this category are shown in Table 5.12 below.

Table 5.12. *Category 4: Situations where the Likert Responses of all Three Groups Differ*

<b>Situations</b>	<b>Contexts</b>
<b>(Total: 3)</b>	
Sitn9	Housemate in ugly shirt
Sitn26	No response to your toast at a party
Sitn30	Your English teacher makes a mistake in class

In this category, the responses for the three groups are different in several ways: in Situation 9, all three groups tend towards a greater likelihood of speaking but their interpretations of silence are somewhat different: in Situation 26, the AA are more likely to be silent, whereas the VA would speak and the VV Likert data are bimodal; and in Situation 30, the VA would speak, the VV are somewhat more likely to speak, and the AA Likert scores are bimodal. In these situations, we hypothesize the existence of different perceptions of silence in specific cultures i.e., Vietnamese, Australians and Vietnamese in Australia.

For Situation 9 [Housemate in an ugly shirt], participants in all three groups indicate that they would speak because it would be impolite to let the friend go out without a nice shirt. If we look at the interpretation charts, we see that there is an interesting contradiction in the interpretations of silence by the three groups (figure 5.34).

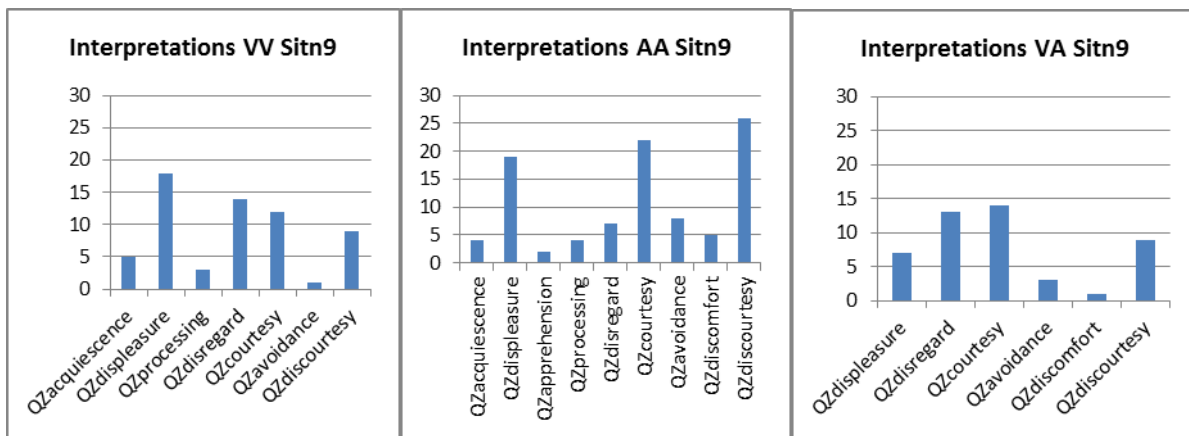


Figure 5.34. Interpretations of silence for Situation 9 across the three groups.

As figure 5.34 indicates, the four dominant interpretations of being silent in this situation would be courtesy, displeasure, disregard and discourtesy. It is surprising that for the AA, nearly one third of the score is about courtesy and more than a third of the score is about discourtesy. This is also the case for the VV and the VA in that courtesy and discourtesy are both present, though the frequency of these two codes is less than among the AA. The data collected for Situation 9 for all groups demonstrate a number of responses coded as *QQrespect* (grouped under the umbrella code of *QZcourtesy*) and *QQrude* and *QQdisrespect* (grouped under the umbrella code of *QZdiscourtesy*). It might be argued that by being silent, the person is being polite by not criticizing the shirt but at the same time this response is seen by others as offensive: by not giving an opinion or by allowing the friend to go out looking like that, the person is considered a bad friend. Examples of silence coded as *QQrespect* are “I do not like the shirt but don’t want to say so”, (AA15)<sup>9</sup>, “You don’t want to hurt your friend’s feelings” (AA69), “not offending mate” (AA32), “That you did not want to upset her” (AA89). On the other hand, examples of responses coded *QQrude*, *QQdisrespect* are: “Not giving an opinion, negative or positive” (AA9), “I don’t care how my friend looks” (AA37), “you were a bad friend for letting them leave in such an ugly shirt” (AA59), “You’re not giving them your honest opinion” (AA83), “I’m rude enough to allow my roommate to go out dressed inappropriately” (AA86). Perhaps due to such contradictions in interpretations of silence for all three groups, the Likert data for Situation 9 do not show any clear pattern, resulting in the three groups exhibiting different results for these data.

Although there were readings of courtesy and discourtesy for the VV, their dominant interpretations of silence for Situation 9 are *QZdispleasure* and *QZdisregard*. Looking at the interpretations that were coded *QZdispleasure*, we can find that they were originally coded as *QQdislike* (Silence means I don’t like it). Interpretations coded as *QQignore* (Silence means I don’t pay attention to the other person) were later coded *QZdisregard*. Examples of VV responses coded

<sup>9</sup> Although silence would mean not liking the shirt, there is also the desire to avoid upsetting the person and actually saying something about not liking the shirt. Therefore, responses like this are coded *QQrespect*.

*QQdislike* are: “vi no xau, toi khong thich” (VV12) [I don’t like it because it is ugly] , “muon noi cai ao khong duoc dep” (VV14) [want to imply that the shirt is not nice], “chi co ay dien vay xau” (VV15) [she is dressed in an ugly way], “toi khong thich nhung khong muon co ay buon ve trang phuc cua co ay” (VV19) [I don’t like it but don’t want to upset her about her clothes], “khong thich” (VV21, VV44) [I don’t like it], “minh da gian tiep che bo do do xau” (VV65) [I indirectly say that the shirt is ugly]. For the VV answers coded as *QQignore* typically included the phrase ‘khong quan tam’ [not paying attention]. We can interpret that in keeping silent, the VV would like to express their indifference and disapproval more discreetly than explicitly saying “I don’t like it” – because saying that might upset the friend.

For Situation 9, the VA also consider silence as a sign of disregard as *QZdisregard* appears frequently indicating silence as indifference. Some of the coded answers of *QQpassive*, *QQdont care* within *QZdisregard* for the VA are: “khong muon gop y” (VA18) [don’t want to give an opinion] “khong co quan diem gi” (VA23) [not having an opinion], “Nguoi do chua du than thiet voi minh de minh dua ra loi nhan xet, khuyen nhu” (VA38) [that person is not really close enough to me for me to give comments or advice], “Người bạn đó chưa thực sự thân thiết” (VA46) [that friend is not really close to care], “vì bạn đã quyết định nên không tham gia” (VA52) [you don’t give your opinion], “Mối quan hệ không thân thiết, không cần quan tâm đến người bạn cùng phòng” (VA63) [the relationship is not close, no need to show any concern for the roommate], “do la lua chon cua ban ay va toi khong quan tam nhieu den lua chon do” (VA67) [it is her choice and I don’t care about her choice very much] “mac ke ban muon mac gi” (VA82) [none of my business what she wears], “Người đó không quan trọng đối với bạn” (VA88) [that person is not important enough to you for you to care]. These are interesting answers in the way that the questionnaire clearly stated that it is a **friend** going out in the ugly shirt. And yet the only way the VA can apparently imagine staying silent is to say that the person is not really a friend after all, or not a close friend. Clearly, in the VA responses, silence means indifference towards the classmate, which is different from the VV, who would be silent to indicate an ugly shirt, thus thwarting the friend.

In short, we can see that silence is understood differently by the three groups in this situation. A large number of responses given by the AA have been coded *QZcourtesy* and *QZdiscourtesy* where it is clear that the person believes they would use silence to show politeness by not criticizing the shirt but at the same time would feel very rude to pretend that nothing was wrong with the shirt. However, for the VV, being silent means the silent person is leaning more towards disliking the shirt. For the VA, silence indicates indifference to the housemate, not the shirt. It is logical to interpret that in perceiving silence negatively, the three groups would rather speak, though the degree of speaking is highly different.

Considering Situation 26 [No response to your toast at a party], it is clear that the Likert responses of all three groups differ. The AA are more likely to be silent, whereas the VA would speak; the VV Likert data are bimodal with the responses divided between silence and speaking. Turning to the interpretations of silence given by the three groups in figure 5.35, we can see that the most common interpretation of silence proposed by both the VA and AA is that of discomfort when most people do not respond to the toast, whereas the VV cite a wide range of interpretations of silence with *QZprocessing* as the most frequent code.

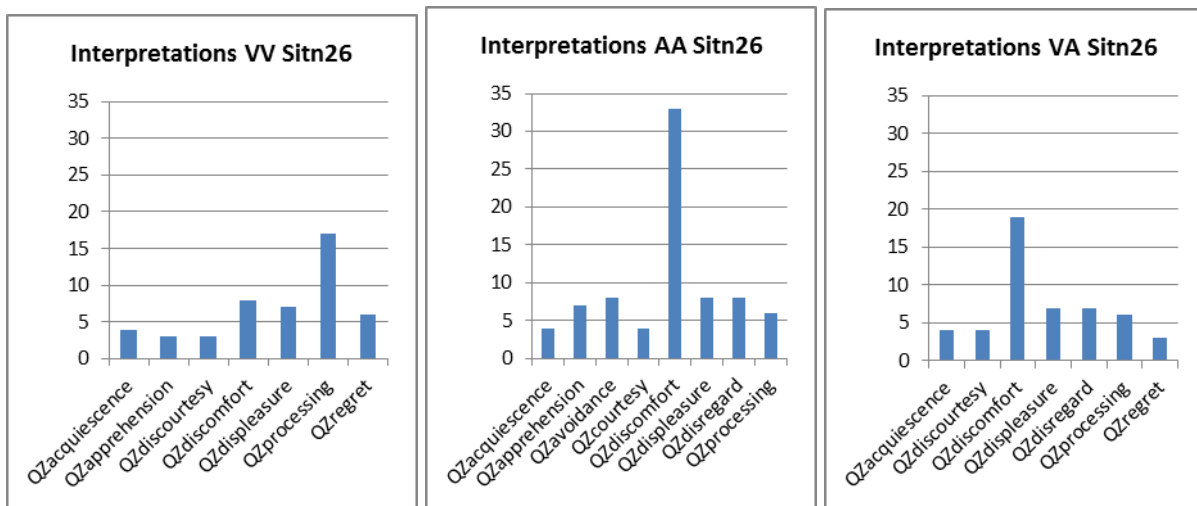


Figure 5.35. Interpretations of silence for Situation 26 across the three groups.

The score for *QZdiscomfort* for the AA is nearly double that of the VA, showing the greater potential for the Australians to see silence as indicative of an awkward situation. If we look at the interpretations that were coded *QZdiscomfort*, we can find that they were originally coded as *QQawkward* (Silence means the situation is awkward) and *QQemb* (Silence means I feel embarrassed). Examples of *QQawkward* are: “the situation was extremely awkward” (AA8), “awkward” (AA23), “confusion” (AA6, AA25), “Acknowledging the awkwardness” (AA26), “skipping over an awkward social moment that can be overcome” (AA51), “you are confused by the lack of the response” (AA74), “that I was confused or awkward that no one was joining in” (AA80), “it’s awkward” (AA84), “that I am confused [...] about people not responding positively to the reason for the party” (AA91). Here are some examples of *QQemb*: “embarrassment” (AA1, AA2, AA12, AA38, AA75, and AA93), “You are embarrassed” (AA13), “You were embarrassed that you weren’t received well” (AA4), “embarrassing...” (AA28), “Embarrassed that you publicly made a toast and not many people drank” (AA48), “you are embarrassed you didn’t get a good response” (AA56), “If you were to be silent it could mean that you are embarrassed about the response and perhaps that you are a little bit sensitive” (AA94). It is worth noting here that although the above two codes go under the code *QZdiscomfort*, they work well to show that the informants think they would be unable to communicate well due to the feeling of embarrassment and/or due to

recognizing of awkwardness. Hence, staying silence would be a better option. Perhaps seeing this, the AA group is the only one more likely to be silent. One participant from the AA explains:

You'd be silent here because it's just you against a wall of people who're obviously thinking the same thing. To demand an explanation or apology, or a change of response, from a crowd like that would be too embarrassing and you're likely to look idiotic. (AA10)

Looking at the coded responses of *QZdiscomfort* for the VA, we can see that the distinction between *QQawkward* and *QQemb* is useful. In this situation, there are more examples of *QQemb* than *QQawkward*. For example, participants are saying: “chữa ngưng” (VA33) [run away from embarrassment], “xau ho” (VA38) [I feel embarrassed], “toi la mot nguoi ngo ngan” (VA40) [I am a silly person], “the hien minh vo duyen” (VA44) [showing that I am not tactful], “Không muốn sự ngưng gao tiếp tục kéo dài” (VA51) [I don't want the embarrassment to last any longer], “Thấy ngưng, không muốn tiếp tục rơi vào tình huống thiếu sự đáp trả này nên tốt nhất là im lặng” (VA63) [I feel embarrassed, I don't want to keep seeing the others not toasting; therefore, it is best to be silent], “xấu hổ” (VA71) [embarrassment], “cảm giác ngưng ngưng vì không ai hưởng ứng theo mình” (VA80) [feeling embarrassed because no one responds to the toast], “bị xấu hổ trước mặt mọi người” (VA84) [I am embarrassed in front of people], and “Mất mặt” (VA88) [losing face]. If the VA interpret silence as embarrassment only (without any confusion or awkwardness), we can infer that they would partially understand the reasons why the guests are silent. This is different from the AA, who are both embarrassed and confused why people did not respond to the toast. Perhaps the VA's interpretation of silence as revealing embarrassment only makes this group answer differently from the other two in terms of likelihood of silence.

For the VV, it has to be admitted that the large number of blank answers makes it difficult to make an exact interpretation of silence<sup>10</sup>. However, we can base our interpretation on the most frequent code *QZprocessing* used for this group. If we look at the interpretations that were coded *QZprocessing*, we can find that they were originally coded as *QQthinking* (Silence means I am thinking/hesitating or unsure what to say). Examples of the VV responses are: “suy nghi” (VV8) [thinking], “khong biet noi gi het” (VV10) [don't know what to say], “chac la co chuyen gi do” (VV16) [there must be something wrong], “toi khong biet nen noi the nao voi nhung nguoi ban do” (VV19) [I don't know what to say with those friends], “minh da noi sai o dau do” (VV25) [wondering what I said wrong], “suy nghi co le minh da noi sai dieu gi do” (VV42) [thinking perhaps I said something wrong], “chac chan ban lam gi do sai sot” (VV53) [you must have made a *faux pas*], “can suy nghi vi sao lai co phan ung nhu vay?” (VV66) [being unsure as to why everyone

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<sup>10</sup> Again, it is worth mentioning that when someone believed they would speak, they felt there was no need to give meanings of silence. For reported likelihood nearly half of the VV chose options 1 on the Likert scale, thus showing their absolute determination to speak in this situation.

responded this way?], “vi phai co chuyen gi do ho moi yen lang” (VV73) [there must be something which makes them silent], “toi phan van khong biet noi gi “ (VV75) [I am wondering, not knowing what to say], “muon xem chuyen gi dang xay ra” (VV87) [want to see what will be happening], “[...] co chuyen gi xay ra” [thinking what is happening] (VV89), “doi 1 loi giai thich” (VV90) [waiting for an explanation]. The main idea in these interpretations is usage of contemplative silence. Respondents were cognizant that immediately asking to toast again could appear inappropriate. By being silent, the respondents could assume that everyone is listening; at the same time as they would think about how to handle the situation, i.e., what to do and what to say. In this way, the VV interpretation of silence is different from the other two groups.

Let us now move to Situation 30 (Your English teacher makes a mistake in class). If we look at the six graphs together, we see that the Likert responses for all three groups are different and there is some variation across the three groups in the interpretations of silence (figure 5.36).

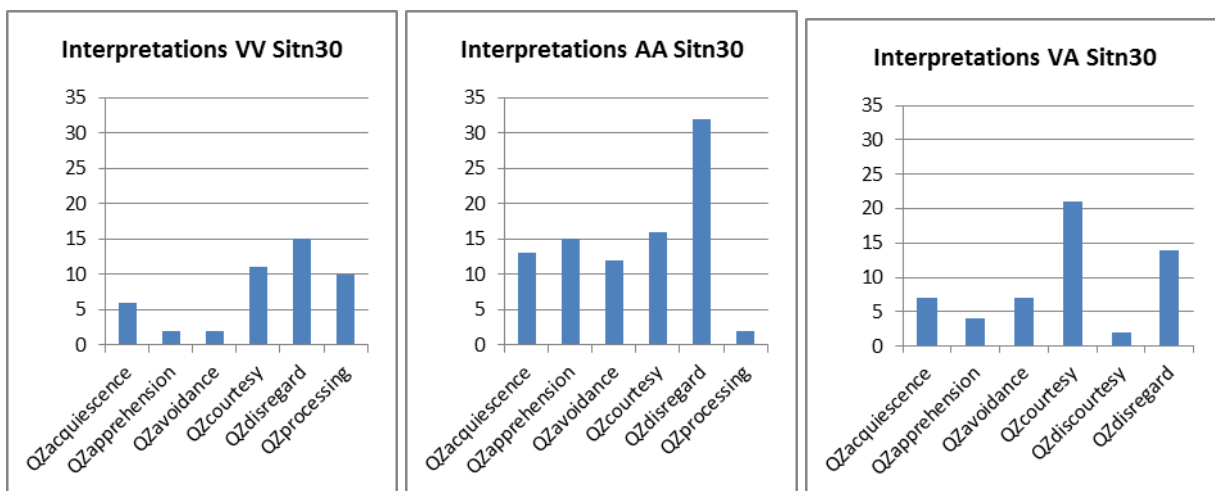


Figure 5.36. Interpretations of silence for Situation 30 across the three groups.

Respondents in Situation 30 across the three groups have *QZdisregard* and *QZcourtesy* as the dominant interpretations, indicating that silence is polite to respect the teacher (although at the same time showing a disregard of the classmates). Specifically, there is a large proportion of *QZdisregard* and *QZcourtesy* in the AA. Examples of *QZdisregard* are: “You’re allowing people to be misinformed” (AA12), “That everyone else in the class will get it wrong, even though you could have helped them” (AA18), “allowing the rest of the class to believe that she was right” (AA19), “Allowing other students to become confused” (AA26), “That everyone gets the wrong information, plus the teacher probably knows that they are wrong and just made a mistake anyway” (AA28), “you let everyone learn the wrong thing” (AA30), “the other students may continue to get it wrong” (AA38), “you don’t care if your peers learn the wrong information” (AA44), “You don’t care about correcting his/her grammar” (AA58), “not getting clarifying what is correct in my mind. I might have the wrong idea [...]” (AA91). All of these answers were originally coded as *QQdont care*. These responses show that by being silent the respondents would not care the teacher’s mistake,

even though they know everyone in the class will get the wrong information. To explain this, the AA *QZcourtesy* responses show that silence would be a way of avoiding offending the teacher out of kindness. Here, the student does not want to embarrass the teacher. Responses coded as *QQrespect* were finally grouped under the umbrella of *QZcourtesy*. Examples of this include: “[...] you didn’t want to embarrass the teacher” (AA4, AA40), “Respect for the teacher” (AA17), “respect to the teacher and not wanting to look like an idiot to everyone in the class” (AA29), “I am respecting my teacher” (AA37), “You dont want to disrespect your teacher” (AA56), “You don’t want to embarrass or offend the teacher” (AA69), “That you wouldn’t want to disrespect them by cutting in and mentioning their mistake” (AA85). At this point, we can see an interesting tension in the interpretations of silence by the AA: silence would show respect to the teacher but at the same time show an indifferent attitude towards the issue. Such division in the AA responses makes the AA Likert results bimodal: half the participants indicate the need to give a silent response, whereas the other half conveys the desire to point out the teacher’s mistake in class or after class. Clearly, by being silent, the informants were not communicating effectively with the teacher, and thus would not be fully aware of the lesson. The students’ silence in this context would be very different from the interpretations of students’ silence in the classroom due to lack of rapport seen elsewhere in academic literature.

In conclusion, this discussion, although brief, should have raised questions about the differences in the likelihood and/or interpretations of silence amongst the three groups.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter analysed the results of the questionnaire survey. The survey asked for two kinds of responses for the 35 situations, likelihood and interpretations of silence, thus enabling understanding of the ways in which silence is understood by Vietnamese and Australians and when it is considered appropriate. Based on the comparison of reported likelihood of silence and speaking across 35 situations and three groups, the study identified nine situations where there was little difference in likelihood and in interpretations, five situations with similar likelihood but different interpretations, and 21 situations where informants across the three groups gave very different answers. Analysis of the data provides a detailed account of similarities and differences in silence between the groups.

The results also show significant similarities among all three groups in more than one third of the situations. In a number of cases, for example dealing with strangers and/or threats of conflict, participants across all groups were likely to be silent, and interpreted silence as a means of avoidance.

Focusing on the interpretations of silence, this study shows that silence is more than simply an absence of sound. Participants supplied a range of interpretations of silence including: acquiescence, disregard, avoidance, processing, courtesy, apprehension, discourtesy, displeasure, dissent, discomfort, and regret. Acquiescence, disregard and avoidance were the three most common interpretations of silence, however, the analysis showed that in many instances the interpretations of silence were both culturally dependent and highly context-dependent.

In the analysis of the data set for interpretations of silence, surprisingly there were situations where silence can have both positive and negative connotations. For example, silence can both mean courtesy and discourtesy, or acquiescence and dissent. Sometimes there was a difference between groups, for example the Vietnamese interpreting silence as acceptance and the Australians interpreting silence as refusal. However in other situations, silence was ambiguous within the same cultural group, with responses divided between courtesy and discourtesy, or between agreement and refusal. The implication of each opposite pair together is that when there is silence, interlocutors may not interpret silence in the same way and that misinterpretations of silence are likely. Misunderstanding can be expected more frequently between the AA, the VV and the VA in situations involving these opposite pairs of interpretations.

As explained above, 21 situations with clear differences in the likelihood of silence were analysed. These were divided into three categories, as follows. It should be noted that across the three categories, the VA have an interesting pattern because sometimes they follow the VV group and sometimes they are similar to the AA group:

- (1) In circumstances where the VV Likert responses differ (Category 1 with seven situations), we can see the tendency that the VA likelihood of speaking is closer to the AA, however, their interpretations of silence remain similar to the VV. VA-AA closeness in likelihood could indicate that the VA are integrating into Australian culture. This movement does not necessarily lead to shared interpretations of silence as there is less sign of similar interpretations between the VA and the AA.
- (2) In circumstances where the AA Likert scores differ (Category 2 with seven situations), the likelihood and interpretations of silence by the VA remain closer to those of the VV group than the AA. It appears that there is very little shift in the VA likelihood of silence in these situations.
- (3) In another scenario, the VA likelihood differs from the both of the other two groups (Category 3 with four situations).

Reasons for the closeness and difference between the VA and AA will be explored in the next chapter where the researcher will draw parallels between the pragmatic transfer hypothesized to



explain the survey data and Communication Accommodation Theory in the record sheets and interviews in order to see whether any conclusions about intentionality can be drawn.

## Chapter 6

### VIETNAMESE IN AUSTRALIA: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

#### (Pragmatic Transfer and Intercultural Accommodation)

##### *6.1 Introduction*

In the discussion of the survey results for the three groups in Chapter 5, we saw that the likelihood and interpretations of silence by the VA and the VV are sometimes similar and sometimes different. When they differ in terms of likelihood of being silent, often the VA are closer to the AA than to the VV, suggesting a movement of Vietnamese Australians towards Australian societal norms. This is an interesting emerging pattern that requires further investigation. Specifically, this VA closeness to AA in the questionnaire results can be analyzed through the lens of pragmatic transfer (Wolfson, 1989). Pragmatic transfer refers primarily to the ways in which L2 speakers apply rules from the L1 culture to a second or a foreign language. However, it has been demonstrated in the literature that pragmatic transfer can be bidirectional between the L1 and the L2 (Bou-Franch, 2013; Kecskes & Papp, 2003; Pavlenko & Jarvis, 2002; Su, 2010). Unlike the VV, the VA group is made up of Vietnamese able to speak English and who are studying in Australia and are therefore in regular contact with Australians. The fact that the VA results of the questionnaire analyses regarding silence/speaking are closer to the AA than to the VV suggests the possibility that VA participants are influenced by Australian norms when communicating in Vietnamese (pragmatic transfer from L2 to L1). Hence, this chapter will elucidate the matter of VA-AA closeness in the likelihood of being silent/speaking in the questionnaire results based on the notion of pragmatic transfer.

In this study, record sheets and interviews for the VA were employed to see how the VA accommodated silence-related behavior when in communication with Australians. These data will be interpreted with reference to accommodation theory. Communication accommodation theory (CAT) proposes that in intergroup encounters, speakers indicate their attitude to other speakers by the extent to which they adapt their speech or nonverbal patterns to more closely approximate those of the interlocutor (Giles, 1973). It is worth considering what in particular the VA are accommodating, and their motives in their encounters with Australians. Therefore, this chapter examines data related to the VA group gathered through the second and third data collection instruments (i.e., record sheets and interviews) to analyze the extent to which silence-related behavior and beliefs are related to accommodation.

This chapter will thus examine the VA group in relation to the AA from two perspectives: Pragmatic transfer and CAT. It brings together on the one hand the circumstances where the VA

appear to be influenced by Australian norms of behavior in the initial survey when they are communicating in Vietnamese and, on the other, cases in the interviews and record sheets demonstrating VA beliefs and perceptions when communicating in English. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first introduces the theory, and the second describes how the results relating to the VA group in Chapter 5 can be related to pragmatic transfer. Relevant data from record sheets and interviews will be provided throughout and discussed in terms of intercultural accommodation theory. The last section presents a number of interplaying factors that might explain VA behavior of either moving towards or rejecting Australian cultural conventions.

## **6.2 Pragmatic Transfer and Communication Accommodation Theory**

Although pragmatic transfer is generally used to refer to the influence of L1 pragmatics when interacting in L2, it is not a simple concept in the larger domain of pragmatics. Wolfson (1989) posits: “the use of rules of speaking from one’s own native speech community when speaking or writing in a second language is known as sociolinguistic or pragmatic transfer” (p. 141). In this definition, the terms pragmatic transfer and sociolinguistic transfer are used interchangeably. Similar to Wolfson, Beebe et al. (1990) relate pragmatic transfer to sociocultural rules as a component of communicative competence. They define pragmatic transfer as the “transfer of L1 sociocultural communicative competence in performing L2 speech acts or any other aspects of L2 conversation, where the speaker is trying to achieve a particular function of language” (p. 56). Kasper (1992) similarly defines pragmatic transfer as “the influence exerted by learners’ pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production and learning of L2 pragmatic information” (p. 207). According to Kasper, there are two types of pragmatic transfer: pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer. The former refers to the influence of L1 with respect to certain linguistic forms on the comprehension and production of L2 whereas the latter occurs when “the social perceptions underlying language users’ interpretation and performance of linguistic action in L2 are influenced by their assessment of subjectively equivalent L1 contexts” (Kasper, 1992, p. 209). This study will focus on sociopragmatic transfer.

Whereas Kasper regards transfer as an interlanguage phenomenon, Cook (1992) takes a multicompetence view. In his pioneering work *Evidence on Multicompetence*, Cook argues that when people know two languages, both languages interact with each other. In other words, pragmatic transfer is bidirectional. In short, his conceptualization of pragmatic transfer is broader than the definition by Wolfson in terms of L1-L2 language influence.

Although most researchers have focused on pragmatic transfer as the influence of L1 on L2, there are a few studies of influence in the other direction. Examples of pragmatic transfer with an effect of L2 on L1 are found in Kecskes and Papp (2003), Matsumura (2007), Ribbert and Kuiken

(2010) and Moattarian (2013). Kecskes and Papp discuss dynamic change in transfer phenomena, emphasizing the effect of L2 on L1. They claim that multilingual speakers under the influence of the L2 demonstrate changes in conceptual fluency in terms of structure and vocabulary transfer, and cognitive functioning of the L1. However, these authors confess that it is difficult to find a direct effect of the L2 on the L1. Evidence of pragmatic transfer with the influence of L2 on L1 among Japanese learners of English was mentioned by Matsumura. In a longitudinal study, Matsumura examined changes over time in the pragmatic competence of 15 Japanese students after study abroad in a Canadian university. One of the findings that emerged from the study was that Japanese learners of English showed changes in strategy preference after their return to Japan. Matsumura indicated that pragmatic transfer was apparent in the perception alteration of the participants, that is, the participants were aware that they were influenced by the sociocultural norms of their second culture in their choice of strategy for giving advice. Changes in participants' L1 grammatical competence were explored by Ribbert and Kuiken (2010). The study found that Germans living in the Netherlands claimed to use infinitive clauses in German differently from those of Germans in their home country who did not have contact with the Dutch language. The analysis of the data suggested that pragmatic transfer in grammaticality judgments of Germans in the Netherlands was evident due to the influence of the L2 Dutch. More recently, Moattarian (2013) studied different kinds of crosslinguistic transfer among 70 Iranian students of English. Although there were more instances of L1-L2 transfer, the author nonetheless found a significant number of L2-L1 transfers.

In summary, recent literature on second language acquisition and language teaching is replete with descriptions of pragmatic transfer, particularly with the influence of L1 on L2. There are a few studies exploring the effect of L2 on L1 behavior. The extent to which L2 learners/users are affected by the norms of their second language/ culture in how they behave in their first language/ culture will be considered in the current study.

Parallels can be drawn between pragmatic transfer and CAT, in that both explain the influence of L2 on a speaker's behavior, but in different situations.

Communication accommodation theory, originally known as speech-accommodation theory (Giles, 1973) has been considered theoretically robust and important in explaining certain shifts in speech styles of speakers during social interactions. Giles' model developed out of the idea that in the dynamics of speech diversity in social settings, a speaker might modify his/her speech on the basis of the speech of the conversation partner. The shift may take the form of either 'convergence' or 'divergence', depending on the social motivational tendencies of the speaker. In his pioneering work on 'accent mobility', Giles showed the phenomenon of accent convergence of interviewees with the interviewer (who had a 'higher' status accent and consequently higher social prestige). In fact, the three basic ways in which a speaker can shift relative to his or her conversation partner are

‘convergence’, ‘divergence’ and ‘maintenance’ (Hornsey & Gallois, 1998). Convergence refers to speakers adjusting (or accommodating) their linguistic or paralinguistic behavior so as to be more similar to their conversation partner, whereas divergence indicates the opposite of this when speakers move away from their partners’ speech. Maintenance lies between the two strategies and refers to cases where speakers do not change their behavior at all. While it is not difficult for a researcher to identify convergent-divergent shifts, it is at times confusing to distinguish between features of each accommodating strategy, such as motives and listeners’ social evaluation. Giles, Coupland and Coupland (1991) thus established distinctions in characterizing convergence and divergence i.e., upward versus downward, full versus partial versus hyper-/crossover, large versus moderate, unimodal versus multimodal, symmetrical versus asymmetrical, and subjective versus objective. A comparison of these dimensions of speech accommodation shows the complexity but also progressive growth of the theory. Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, and Ota (1995) conclude that the practice of CAT continues to be a productive approach to intercultural communication research:

Overall, CAT is a multifunctional theory that conceptualizes communication in both subjective and objective terms. It focuses on both intergroup and interpersonal features and [...] can integrate dimensions of cultural variability. Moreover, in addition to individual factors of knowledge, motivation, and skill, CAT recognizes the importance of power and of macro contextual factors. Most important, perhaps, CAT is a theory of intercultural communication that actually attends to communication. (p. 127)

Since its initial formulation (Giles, 1973), CAT has been refined and extended in partnership with scholars from different disciplines. For example, Beebe and Giles (1984) overviewed the basic tenets of accommodation theory, particularly the propositions involving convergence, divergence, and maintenance and formulated various reasons for these behaviors. In more recent work, Gallois, Ogay, and Giles (2005) developed certain ideas of accommodation theory and laid out the parameters of a revised and consolidated version of CAT. Overall, these studies have elaborated the underlying motives of people attempting to converge or diverge, the magnitude of such convergence and divergence, and the ways in which such converging, diverging or maintaining acts are perceived or evaluated by interlocutors. Table 6.1 summarizes the major aspects of CAT.

Table 6.1. *Speech Accommodation Theory and its Basic Dimensions*

Phenomena	Motives	Listeners’ social evaluation
Convergence (Speakers’ attempts to shift	Gaining approval, liking and showing solidarity	positively evaluated <sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, according to Ball, Giles, Byrne, and Berechree (1984), speakers’ attempts at convergence will be negatively evaluated “when prevailing situational norms define the convergent act as a violation of them” (p. 126).

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positively toward their partners' speech)		
Divergence (Speakers' attempts to move away from their partners' speech)	Dissociating personally from another and showing a desire to keep identity	negatively evaluated
Maintenance (Speakers do not change their behavior)	Dissociating personally from another and showing a desire to keep identity	negatively evaluated

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The CAT theory proposed by Giles (1973) and Beebe and Giles (1984) is less complicated than its subsequent extensions and elaborations, and will therefore be used in this study for the analysis of the relevant data in the VA record sheets and interviews related to accommodation in the current research. At the heart of accommodation theory lies the basic distinction between production and reception. The former refers to moves by speakers to conform or not with what they believe their conversation partners' behavior to be in order to gain social approval, whereas the latter refers to the listeners' reactions (either favourable or unfavourable) to converging and diverging speakers. This study thus explores the production side of accommodation more than the reception side, since data were analyzed with respect to movements in VA behavior, specifically moves by the VA to conform to Australians. A remark by Gallois and Giles (1998) on this topic is noted:

CAT has become very complex, so that the theory as a whole probably cannot be tested at one time. This means that the researchers using CAT must develop mini-theories to suit the contexts in which they work, while at the same time keeping the whole of the theory in mind (p. 158)

The current study accepts these empirical challenges for conceptualizing relationships between the silence-related behavior of the VA and intercultural accommodation. We will investigate the extent to which VA participants, during social interaction, are motivated to adjust (or accommodate) their speech styles so as to be more similar to their conversation partner to gain approval, promote communication between interactants, and show solidarity (Beebe & Giles, 1984, p. 8).

Although there is no existing research investigating Vietnamese accommodation in relation to Australian English, research on accommodation of immigrants/sojourners, particularly those from the West Pacific rim (Chinese, Japanese) in the English-dominant context of Australia and other countries can serve as a background for the present research. The work by Gallois and Pittam

(1996)<sup>12</sup> and Gallois and Callan (1988) is relevant to some extent to the present investigation. Gallois and Callan make use of Turner's (1986) notion of prototypicality, which states that "The prototypicality of a person is the extent to which he or she is representative of some stereotypical attribute of the ingroup as a whole" (p. 273). Using this notion, they developed an accommodation index for measuring the ways in which Australians, including recent immigrants, accommodated in nonverbal ways that they believed to be prototypical Anglo-Australian communication. The results of Gallois and Callan's study showed that those who accommodated to the prototype were evaluated positively, and moreover those who had a socially desirable manner (i.e., smiled and made more eye contact) were valued even though smiling and eye contact do not always match the prototype. Although Gallois and Callan's 'nonverbal behaviors' are basically about body language and tone of voice, not 'silence', their study is related to the current research in that the interview and record sheet data in the current project provide insights into VA beliefs about Australian communication and silence, as well as their adaptation to perceived Australian-ness. Gallois and Callan's finding about positive evaluations of behavior suggests that VA who make attempts to shift towards Australian behavior with respect to silence will be seen more positively by Australians.

The preceding discussion documents pragmatic transfer and CAT. To capture the complexity of the VA who have been living in Australia, speaking fluently both Vietnamese and English, the current study draws a parallel between pragmatic transfer (influence of L2 English when VA communicate with Vietnamese) and CAT (when VA communicate with Australians). In the questionnaire results, the VA exhibit differences in their patterns of communication: sometimes the VA follow the VV group and sometimes they are similar to the AA group (See Section 5.1.1). As the major difference between the VA and the VV is that the VA have lived in Australia, it can be hypothesized that the VA were influenced by Australian norms when communicating in L1 (pragmatic transfer from L2 to L1). This is not to say that home culture communication traits regarding silence/speaking are not maintained when VA communicate in English (pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2). And as we shall see in examples found in record sheets and interviews, Vietnamese culture plays a role in the accommodating behavior of VA. Living in Australia, VA typically come in contact with Australians on a regular basis. They are able to adjust their communication such as to generate positive images in the minds of others. Hence, both theories will offer insights into the interpretation of the VA data: CAT when they are communicating in English and pragmatic transfer when in Vietnamese.

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<sup>12</sup> Gallois and Pittam (1996) made a general remark on intercultural accommodation between Vietnamese and Australians that "the level of accommodation between Anglo-Australians and this relatively new and small group [*Vietnamese*] is quite high" (p. 207).

### **6.3 VA results (*Pragmatic transfer and Intercultural accommodation*)**

CAT explains how people might adapt their communication behavior to that of their conversation partner(s). According to Gallois et al. (1988), accommodation towards another communicative form can be accomplished via changes in discourse, paralanguage and non-verbal behavior. The research problem addressed by the present study concerns silence, particularly the likelihood and interpretations of silence of three groups, the VV, the AA and the VA. The initial questionnaire data suggest that the VA, in their regular contact with the AA, are transferring elements of behavior appropriate to Australian interaction to their dealings in Vietnamese with Vietnamese people. To provide a more complete picture of the VA thoughts and behavior related to silence, the VA record sheets<sup>13</sup> and interviews<sup>14</sup> were examined. In the former instrument, the VA were asked to describe interactions where there was silence between them and Australians, whereas in the latter the VA were asked to share experiences about how they adopted silence-related behavior in communication with Australians, whether they had changed the ways they used silence, and if so, how. The VA beliefs, together with the authentic intercultural communication-incident data reported, provide insights into the communication style of the VA when they interact with Australians, particularly the modifications they have made in their regular communication with them.

This chapter then triangulates the VA questionnaire data with the data from record sheets and interviews. It should be noted that this chapter discusses pragmatic transfer with respect to the likelihood of silence, rather than its meaning. As argued in Chapter 5, the VA likelihood is close to that of the AA in all seven situations in Category 1 (see Section 5.3), for example, and even higher than that of the AA in three cases, but their interpretations of silence remained similar to those of the VV. In other words, any movement of the VA towards the AA was in terms of likelihood, not interpretations of silence. For Category 1, the VV likelihood of silence results are different from the other two groups, and the VA and AA results are similar. The closeness of the VA and AA will be discussed in section 6.3.1. In Category 3 (see Section 5.5), the VA likelihood of silence differs from that of AA and the VV. This difference of the VA from the population of Australians will be considered in section 6.3.2. For Category 2 (see Section 5.4) where AA likelihood differs, the VA and VV likelihood of silence is close, meaning that the VA did not change their behavior in their new cultural context. Their behavior is similar to that of their home culture, and therefore does not represent instances of transfer. Adopting the theoretical framework of pragmatic transfer, I will discuss these categories in turn, drawing parallels with CAT to explain related data from the record sheets and interviews involving the VA.

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<sup>13</sup> In total, 22 reports were collected from the VA.

<sup>14</sup> There were 11 interviews with the VA.



### 6.3.1 VA movements towards perceived Australian norms

#### 6.3.1.1 VA results in questionnaire data relating transferring

The situations in category 1 where the VV likelihood of silence differs from the other two groups present examples of pragmatic transfer from L2 to L1 because the VA responses are closer to those of the AA than the VV. Table 6.2 shows the shifts of alignment of the VA.

**Table 6.2. Situations where VV likelihood of silence differs from VA and AA**

Situations	VV (n = 90)		AA (n = 96)		VA (n = 89)	
	Likelihood of speaking <sup>15</sup> (%)	Likelihood of silence <sup>16</sup> (%)	Likelihood of speaking (%)	Likelihood of silence (%)	Likelihood of speaking (%)	Likelihood of silence (%)
Sitn1	48	46	61	23	71*	14
Sitn2	47	49	73	15	68	20
Sitn4	42	49	50	27	55*	25
Sitn12	42	50	55	21	60*	20
Sitn17	42	45	67	20	58	19
Sitn21	46	38	79	15	71	19
Sitn35	48	37	65	13	64	25

Note: an asterisk \* means that the VA are at least five percentage points more likely to speak than the AA.

The comparative data suggest that in these cases, the VA have moved away from VV norms: in all seven situations, this involves greater likelihood of talking than the VV group, in other words greater likelihood of talking than would be conventional in Vietnam. In all these cases, the VA likelihood of speaking is closer to the AA than the VV. The difference between the VA and VV scores suggests that the VA have transferred their perception of Australian communicative behavior to their behavior when communicating with other Vietnamese. In three situations (Situation 1, 4 and 12), VA indicate an even greater likelihood of speaking (strong transfer) than the AA. As the interview data discussed in the following section demonstrates, their perception is that Australians use less silence.

<sup>15</sup> Percentages for likelihood of speaking were calculated with the total of Likert 1 “Very Unlikely to be silent” and Likert 2 “Unlikely to be silent”.

<sup>16</sup> Percentages for likelihood of silence were calculated with the total of Likert 4 “Likely to be silent” and Likert 5 “Very likely to be silent”.

### 6.3.1.2 VA Attitudes towards perceived communication styles

Gallois and Callan (1988) made the point that “When one examines the reasons for accommodating by speakers, it is essential to know how much they have changed. For listeners, it is perceived behavior and their interpretation of the behavior that are important” (p. 281). A primary consideration in this chapter is therefore the VA’s perceptions and interpretations of Australians. The ability to speak English is always an issue for learners like the VA. Nakane (2006) found that L2 learners were often silent in the classroom and as a result were negatively evaluated by Australian lecturers. However, surprisingly, in response to the interview questions in the present study, ‘Is there any difference when you talk to Vietnamese and when you talk to Australians?’ and ‘Do you notice/ consciously change the way you speak in Australia?’, most interviewees mentioned their choice to speak rather than remain silent. Out of 11 VA interview participants, nine said that they had consciously changed the way they spoke in Australia, such that they spoke more.

Responses<sup>17</sup> included:

I found out that Vietnamese are often more silent than Australians. Australians are rarely silent; they use expressions with words more than Vietnamese [...]. When I talk to Australians, properly [“chinh xac la”] I have to talk more or I have to express more. (Int VA12)

As I said, Vietnamese culture values silence more whereas Australians don’t like silence. I want a way to integrate [“hoa nhap”] into the conversation, so I have to speak differently compared with the way I speak to Vietnamese. For example, if I speak to an Australian friend, a European friend, and a classmate in an Australian classroom context, I always promote communication including sentences like “Yes, I like it”. All these have to be verbally expressed, and even though they don’t carry much meaning I still want to say it out loud. For Asians, like Vietnamese, in situations like these, we can stand there and look at one another. Looking at each other’s facial expressions and body language, we can understand what others are saying and what they mean. Many times, I like something and I just look and smile, **our** fellow Asians will understand that I like it. (Int VA15, emphasis mine)

The foreigners [i.e., Australians] are straight forward. Sometimes if I speak in a shy way or am silent, they don’t understand what I want to express. For example, they don’t understand the way in our culture we say ‘yes’ or ‘no’. It is totally different from the foreigners’ way

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<sup>17</sup> The interviews took place in Vietnamese and were translated by the researcher.

[...] People say ‘in Rome act as the Romans do’, don’t they? You come to their straight forward culture where people expect you to be straight forward [“boc truc”]; you have to openly express your thinking. You can’t keep your tactful silence as you do in Asian culture generally and Vietnamese in particular because you can’t find interpersonal harmony in that way of communicating. (Int VA33)

These responses provide specific examples of how the VA see themselves and the AA. They indicate a belief on the part of the VA that having to speak and express verbally what one thinks is one element of Australians’ communication style. The VA choose to speak more because they believe that they will be negatively evaluated if they stay silent. This in turn shapes the VA participants’ motivation and intention to speak more in interaction with the AA. This finding is consistent with the findings of Beebe and Giles (1984), who stated that “...for positively valued affective and/or cognitive reasons, people will converge to where they *believe* their partners to be linguistically” (p. 9). Giles et al. (1991) noted that a speaker might feel less socially constrained by choosing to converge to some extent and then feel free to communicate in the speech patterns that they converge to (p. 22). This is evidenced, for example, in VA15’s strategy to speak to promote communication. She reported using short statements like “Yes, I like it”. She explains that in communication with her fellow Asians, if she likes something, she will often be silent, smile and use eye contact. This kind of communication is sufficient and her compatriots will understand what she means. She used the word *our* to indicate a common communication style among people from the same cultural background. She acknowledged that the Australians may be unable to understand this particular kind of communication if her ideas are not verbally expressed. A language learning strategy was also revealed as a motivation to speak more. VA82 said: “I speak more to Australians because only by speaking more can I know the mistakes I need to correct”. Clearly, when choosing between silence and speaking, all the participants quoted here describe the perceived need to use more verbal expressions to socialize in Australia or to learn the language. The comment from Int VA33 quoted above implies that the VA wish to gain approval and increase communicative efficiency. For the VA, living and learning in Australia is a process of negotiating meanings and adapting to the culture. They cannot stick to their own way of communicating if they want to be accepted. This can also be found in the interview with VA51. For VA51, Australians are sometimes more silent. VA51 had the feeling that Australians are helpful e.g., if she asks something, Australians will try to answer the question, but only to a certain extent. If she asks the same thing of Vietnamese people, on the other hand, they are more enthusiastic. This does not mean that this VA rejects the Australian way of communicating, in fact, she converges with the Australian way. She said:

For example, when I talk to Australians [“noi chuyen voi nguoi ta”], I say two or three sentences; if they don’t reply for example, I will interpret that they don’t like talking to me and I will keep silent. Or if I asked something a little bit personal, they don’t want to talk about it, and if they are silent, I will be silent too. (Int VA51).

VA51 seems to adapt according to how her interlocutors react. If they do not reply then she will stop talking. If they are silent she will be silent.

In short, repeated in the responses of the interviewees is the idea that moving towards the Australian communication style is a conscious process. Participants indicated a need to integrate into the new culture. Hence the VA convergence here can be seen as a conscious strategy. A significant point in relation to convergence was the fact that in the perceptions of VA participants, conformity often means speaking more. In other words, by taking a positive attitude towards speaking in Australia, in most cases the VA exhibited accommodating behavior towards the AA by speaking more. Again, in the seven Category 1 situations in the survey data, the VA have a high likelihood of speaking which is close to that of the AA, and in some cases the VA likelihood was even higher than that of the AA. The VA were adapting and changing. However, not being able to function fully and to integrate into the new context is often a problem for L2 interactants. As a result, there are times when the VA are unwillingly reduced to silence.

The VA convergence to Australians seen in the interview data in this study helps to explain the instances of pragmatic transfer identified in the survey results. Specifically, the VA in the survey seemed to opt for likelihood of speaking, higher than their peers in the Vietnamese group VV. This pattern is taken as an indication of pragmatic transfer, whereby the VA, having lived in Australia and being influenced by the perceived need to talk more with Australians, have transferred their perception of Australian communicative behavior to their behavior when communicating with other Vietnamese. As seen in the interviews, it was the VA’s perception and belief that having to speak more and express themselves verbally is an important element of Australian communication style to which they needed to accommodate. These two sources of data, one involving communication with other Vietnamese, the other involving communication with Australians, both showed patterns of VA moving towards conformity to Australian norms.

### *6.3.2 VA difference from Australians*

Above, we used the concept of pragmatic transfer to explain why the VA scores could shift towards the AA scores, and then found evidence of a desire to converge in the interview and record sheet data. This section discusses the cases where VA likelihood corresponds to neither the VV nor the AA groups. The data provide examples of situations where the VA reports of intended behavior

(likelihood of silence in the questionnaire) and actual behavior (incidents from the record sheets) differs from the reports of AA (and VV).

### *6.3.2.1 VA results in questionnaire data relating to difference between VA and AA*

In the questionnaire data, although in the four situations of Category 3<sup>18</sup> the VA were found to be likely to speak, their behavior patterns were not similar to those of the other two groups, especially the AA. In these situations, the VA are the least likely to be silent, and they are the most likely to talk (as shown in the total scores of Likert 1 “very unlikely” and Likert 2 “unlikely”). In Situation 11 [Boss asks you to write report in two days], for example, the VA likelihood responses show the highest percentage of participants who reported they were likely to speak, at 97%, nearly 10 percentage points higher than that of the AA. In this determination to speak, VA reported behavior is no longer close to AA, nor to VV. These appear similar to cases of over-accommodation as discussed by several studies (Edwards & Noller, 1993; Giles, 2008; Guillot, 2011). In their greater likelihood of speaking, the VA have transferred what they perceive to be an Australian inclination to speak to their communication with Vietnamese, to an extent that exceeds what the AA see as appropriate behavior.

In the situations in the questionnaire, the VA were asked to imagine they were talking with people from the same culture. Therefore, the VA likelihood of speaking in the questionnaire results is not related to a lack of linguistic competence. Unlike the instructions in the survey, in the interviews and records sheets the VA were asked to report experiences in communicating with Australians. In these real experiences, failure of L2 competence was a problem for VA. They were forced to be silent. This is seen as instances of unwilling divergence because VA do not have the language skills to talk.

### *6.3.2.2 Perceived problems of communication that lead to silence and divergence*

There is evidence of VA being influenced by the norms of Australian communicative style captured in the record sheets and interviews. These data indicate that VA behavior that appears as ‘divergence’ would in fact be better defined as ‘unwilling divergence’. I adopt this term in the following discussion because although the VA indicate that they desire to adapt to the perceived Australian ways of communicating (convergence), in their accounts of their production they cannot converge, leading to silence, and the VA assume that this silence will be negatively evaluated by Australian partners, meaning that their production and reception falls into the category of

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<sup>18</sup> Sitrn 11 [Boss asks you to write a report in two days], Sitrn 27 [You are reluctant to hire a new model but have no other suggestion], Sitrn 31 [Being ignored by your partner at party], and Sitrn 32 [Receiving comment on weight gain at a class reunion].

‘divergence’. This operationalization of the concept of ‘divergence’ is thus helpful to understand VA beliefs and interpretations of silence.

In the VA interviews and record sheet data, there are two reasons that can cause the VA to differ from AA by being more silent. One of these is the limited L2 linguistic repertoire of the VA and the other is the cultural differences between Vietnamese and Australians.

Firstly, there are instances of unwilling divergence in the record sheets where the VA are silent despite their desire to talk more. Among VA experiences of failure or lack of success in communication in English found in the record sheets<sup>19</sup>, VA failure to understand AA English and/or conversation or accent could be seen as the main cause of silence-related behavior on the part of VA. It triggered silent behavior in 14 out of a total of 22 encounters. Specifically, 14 participants noted that they fell silent because they failed to understand English. According to them, if they did not understand English, they would just be silent, nod their head or show some kind of facial response; they did not ask for repetition or clarification. These instances of silence are examples of failed attempts by the VA to converge with Australian norms of conversation. The following incident presents an example regarding difficulty in VA English proficiency.

Last Saturday, he came to my shop. After paying money for the things he bought, he talked to me about something. It seemed that he wanted to share with me something related to one of the vegetables he bought. He spoke too fast and his voice was so flat. I could not understand what he was saying. So, I just listened to him and kept quiet. I just nodded my head to show him that I was listening to him.

(R VA4 Sheet1)

The VA who reported this incident faced failure in communicating in English with an Australian. She only knew that the man said something and admitted in the record sheet that she could not understand him. In the following comments, this VA explains that her communication skills were not good. Rather than asking for clarification, she chose silence: “My listening was not good enough so I could not understand him. His voice was difficult to hear, too. As a result, I just kept quiet”. The difficulty discouraged her from converging. Incompetence in understanding Australian speech is also echoed in the record sheet by VA63. VA63 reported an incident in which an Australian friend made a joke to her. While knowing that the joke was made for fun, VA63 did not understand the meaning. She decided to be silent, and give a forced smile. In explaining her reactions and feelings, VA63 said the speech of that Australian friend was also difficult to understand; thus she had no hope of understanding even if she asked him to repeat himself.

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<sup>19</sup> VA experiences of failure or lack of success in communication in English included their failure to understand the AA’s questions, English, and accent; their feeling of being offended by the AA; their failure in answering the AA’s questions; and their failure in gaining expected behavior.

Below is another example of VA limited competence in English that prevents the VA from communicating with an Australian.

My supervisor, another staff member and I spoke together. My supervisor wanted to ask that staff member to lend me a recorder. While I was waiting to get the recorder, my supervisor and that staff member talked about something else. They spoke very quickly and laughed, I did not understand anything about their laughing. I just kept silent. I felt uncomfortable at that time because I do not have enough English and enough knowledge about their culture to understand.

(R VA50)

VA50 shared that “I felt uncomfortable and lonely among their joking. I know that at that time I could not integrate and it was difficult to integrate when my English was not really good”. It is clear that this VA withdrew and felt excluded from the conversation. The fact that VA4 and VA50 could not converse in English suggest that the VA cannot always function fully in response to the Australians, resulting in silence-related behavior. One of the VA ways of communicating when lacking English language, as is obvious from the above examples above, is to be silent. This is consistent with the findings of Lemak’s (2012) study. Lemak conducted a five-month descriptive qualitative study that explored perceptions of silence among Chinese, Korean, Russian, Colombian and Iranian ESL speakers, and Canadian native-speakers of English, and found that non-native speakers from Korea, China, Russia had significant problems in turn-taking in conversation and simply fell silent. That is, L2 speakers found themselves unable to speak because of their level of English language competence. Similarly, in the current project, in many cases the VA find themselves forced to be silent even though it is not actually what they think is appropriate, nor what they would like to do. This silence had hindered their integration and their participation in Australian social interactions. These particular motives, production and possible evaluation all relate to unwilling divergence on the part of the VA.

In the interview data, there were also examples of awareness that the VA wanted to adapt to their new society, to express themselves more, but their limited English prevented them from doing so. This was apparent in comments such as:

To the Australians, I am often silent. I have a feeling that they are the boss [“ho la chu”] in this country. I just play the role of a guest. My language is not very good. Sometimes, it takes me a very long time simply to understand a quick English speaker. During that time, I am silent. Then the person talks again; they thought I was hesitating about something and they keep the conversation going. Therefore, my ‘silences’ keep going longer. (Int VA1)

It is very difficult speaking to Australians. In fact, the biggest barrier is the language [...]. For example, in group discussion with native speaker students, my contribution to successful discussion is limited because I am more silent. Even though I have good English, it is still not enough to enter the discussion, to take turns. (Int VA2)

The first issue in communication with Australians is language. The language I am talking with them is definitely not my first language. It creates some difficulties in interactions. There are some obstacles concerning cultural differences. First, sometimes when I talk to them, I don't know if it is appropriate in their culture or not or if it will annoy them culturally [...]. Secondly, my language is not good enough ... I don't know how to express things; thus I have to remain silent. If I keep talking, they won't understand what I said. (Int VA7).

It should be noted that the participants here were implicitly assuming language competency as spoken competence. They talked about the ability to speak in English and to understand what the Australians said. As reflected in interviewees' words, feelings of insufficiency were important reasons that led to silence-related behavior. It appears that lowered self-confidence further contributed to a lowered likelihood of talking. Divergence turns out not to be a positive strategy but something into which people are forced by their feelings of insufficiency and they become stuck in a cycle of not talking.

Embedded in the responses of VA7 is the idea that cultural differences cause difficulties in expressing oneself and therefore in gaining social approval. This concurs with the findings of Hornsey and Gallois (1988), who posit that: "Failure to negotiate these cultural differences successfully may lead to social withdrawal, lack of acceptance, and feelings [of] anomie, alienation, and loneliness" (p. 324). Indeed, cultural differences were found to have specific influence on the VA's experience of using silence as reflected in their answers to the question "How about culture? Do you think culture influences the way people use silence?" Across the VA participants' interviews, each of the 11 participants made explicit statements about being modest in both speech and manner, in accordance with their cultural beliefs. These included both general remarks about beliefs about cultural differences between Easterners versus Westerners (VA2, VA3, VA59) and specific examples of how silence tends to be manifested in the VA's life and experiences as a result (VA1, VA3, VA7, VA12, VA15, etc.). VA2 stated:

[...] Particularly for Eastern people, for example Vietnamese, they don't have the culture of showing off, verbalizing frequently, they opt to for more reserved and solitary behavior. As a result, silence is more appreciated than by Westerners, who value outgoing behavior and individual ego.



VA2 expressed a belief in the discrepancy between his own culture and the target culture (Western) relating to introversion in communication. VA59 believed in a preference for quiet on the part of Vietnamese as he talked about the different degree of silence use between these two cultures. He asserted: “Westerners use less silence than our Asian people”. According to him Asians do not feel uncomfortable with the absence of noise or talk, and are not compelled to fill every pause when they have people around, and the opposite is true for Westerners. VA3 said: “I think Easterners are more shy and reserved than Westerners”. These cultural beliefs obviously have a considerable impact on the use and appropriateness of silence on the part of Vietnamese, which is different from the communication style of their non-Vietnamese conversation partners.

The degree to which silence manifests in the VA experience varies. VA1 described how he believes his culture rightly appreciates silence in workplace and family contexts. He shared that:

In the workplace, if I talk too much, people won't like me. They will think that I dominate the others. Furthermore, in my family culture, silence shows politeness, and respect to older people. Particularly when two elderly people are having a conversation and I am there, I have to play the role of a person who is mainly silent.

Two stand-out features identified in VA1's responses are that talking equates to a dominant communication style which is not appreciated in Vietnamese culture and the need for high considerateness and respect in avoiding involvement when elderly people are talking. Another example of beliefs about Vietnamese being more silent as identified by VA3 relates to the quietness of Vietnamese students in the classroom context. He said:

For example, students of some other countries have the habit of speaking their mind, or verbalizing right away what they want to know. In contrast, students from Vietnamese background don't have this habit, don't have enough confidence and courage to express their viewpoints, thus often keep more silent.

From these responses, it is possible to recognize that it is Vietnamese cultural beliefs and conventions relating to silence, which differ from those of their conversation partners that create difficulties for VA in perceiving Australian culture in general and in communicating with them in particular. Views such as these contribute to a Vietnamese stereotype of Australian talkativeness, which may be over-applied in some situations.

In short, the VA unwilling divergence resulted from participants' lack of English proficiency and their difficulties in understanding Australian culture (partly due to the discrepancy in the two cultures' views about silence). In the case of the VA questionnaire data, we can hypothesize that the divergence (the difference with respect to both the AA and VV results) is the result of unintentionally moving too far in adapting to the need for speech over silence that is perceived as the Australian norm.

### 6.3.3 VA maintenance of existing norms

We have seen in the analysis of Category 1 and Category 3 that the VA appeared to move closer towards perceived Australian norms in the former and away from them in the latter. As seen in chapter 5, in the situations in Category 2 the VA do not differ from the VV, but differ from the AA, suggesting that they have maintained their behavior despite the time spent in Australia. For example, in Situation 5 the VV and the VA would tend to speak, whereas the AA would be silent. There are seven situations of maintenance of Vietnamese communication norms by the VA<sup>20</sup>. If we look carefully at these situations, which are mostly more than two-party conversations, in some the VV and VA report a greater likelihood of being silent and in some they do not. Therefore, in some cases, maintaining home cultural values is about being quiet, in some cases it is about speaking up.

This contrasts with the explanations volunteered in the interview data which suggest that the participants see silence as an appropriate means of face saving or withdrawal from interaction in Vietnamese culture. A number of researchers note that in a Confucian heritage culture such as Vietnamese, face saving is important, particularly in communication with the presence of other people (Dung, 2002; Fahey, 2000; Khuc, 2006; McHugh, 1999; Nhung, 2007a, 2007b; Smith & Pham, 1996).

Looking at the interview data, maintenance may be the case in particular for those VA who have a strong belief in their Vietnamese identity and communication style. According to VA7, when she faced linguistic difficulties or cultural differences, she often remained silent. VA7 reported:

I am silent when they [Australians] speak and I can't understand, when what they said doesn't please me, and when what they said doesn't suit my culture. I know when they speak they don't think anything and their culture allows them to say so, but for my culture the thing they have just done will make me annoyed. I will be silent, saying nothing.

The conversation topic may also cause maintenance on the part of the VA. In the following circumstances, the VA were found to retain their own way of communication; most of the time, they were silent:

When they discuss something that I have little knowledge about, and the other people in the conversation have experience, I will remain silent. (Int VA1)

I don't understand what the Australians are talking about. I pretend to be listening but also show that I am not interested in the topic or the topic is not important to me. I want to save my 'face' with people around including the Vietnamese in that conversation. (Int VA3)

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<sup>20</sup> Sitn5 [Going with boss to a meeting where partners negotiate orders], Sitn14 [Disagreeing with the teacher in a class discussion], Sitn15 [Being criticized in a staff meeting], Sitn16 [Class discussion of topic you know little about], Sitn19 [Teacher speaks too quickly to understand], Sitn22 [Invited to casino on the weekend but you don't want to go], and Sitn33 [Friend has a financial problem and wants to live at your house for a month].

When the Australians start to discuss their own issue with another person, they indirectly exclude some people in the conversation. For politeness, I have to remain silent. (Int VA86)

As we can see, participants VA1, VA3, and VA86 did not know much about some of the topics that Australians are discussing, so they found themselves unable to join the conversation. In other words, they did not want to expose their weakness to others by speaking and displaying their ignorance. One of the reasons is that they fear losing face e.g., Int VA1, Int VA3. These participants kept their ignorance to themselves.

In the VA record sheets, there were cases where adhering to home cultural values meant being quiet, as is shown in the incidents R VA68 and R VA51 below.

We were walking in the university grounds when we saw a girl passing by. Her walk was quite unbalanced and she was wearing a short skirt. Upon seeing this, my Australian friend made fun of her for the group. The group talked about the girl and laughed cheerfully, except me who was silent. At that time I felt annoyed with the behavior of my friend.

(R VA68)

I visited my friend's house (I had known her for nearly 3 months. She was the closest Australian friend I had at university). We stayed at her house, looking out through the window to the front yard on a Saturday afternoon. I was asking her about the house, when it was built and how long it took to build, where she stayed when it was built etc. At first she told me about the time the house was built but then said "And it was a big joke" and didn't say anything else. I felt embarrassed and thought that I touched upon a sensitive issue that I shouldn't talk about. I was silent. After a while she changed the subject and we resumed our talking.

(R VA51)

The two examples above involve jokes and the participants remain silent: in the first case to show sympathy to the vulnerable girl, and in the second to respect the interlocutor's wish not to inquire further on the matter. It appeared that being silent in such circumstances was not forced or unwilling but rather very clearly thought-out. This was evidenced, for example, when VA68 described how the teasing was happening, negatively evaluated the joke by the friend, chose to be silent, and felt that he was right to do so. His choice of being silent was probably motivated by his cultural background. As such, it may be logical to infer that in Vietnamese culture a person should be silent rather than teasing people with disabilities, as occurred in the first example. Or in the case of VA51, it is that when one touches upon a sensitive issue that the interlocutor does not want to talk about, one should be silent, not asking more about the issue as it might become more awkward. The VA maintain these communication styles.

In short, the survey results relating to maintenance were a little more complicated than the other two phenomena (transfer and difference) in that in some surveyed situations the VV and VA report a greater likelihood of being silent, whereas in others they do not. So, in some cases, remaining close to home cultural values is about being quiet, and in some cases, it is about speaking up. The choice to be silent in surveyed situations and even in record sheets and interview data involving more than two-party conversations can be explained by a Confucian perspective of saving face and cultural beliefs on when to be silent.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

This chapter analyzed VA pragmatic transfer and accommodation behavior based on the evidence of their perceptions in the survey, interviews and authentic incidents related to silence. The investigation of VA perceptions from record sheets and interviews revealed three phenomenon of CAT, including convergence, divergence, and maintenance. Parallels were found between the pragmatic transfer hypothesized to explain the survey data and CAT in the record sheets and interviews. VA beliefs and attitudes to adaptation were clarified and supported with evidence from the interviews and record sheets.

- **Convergence.** It was revealed from detailed analysis of participants' stories that positive attitudes to talking were the most frequent motives of VA convergence. This facilitates the participants' communication with Australian conversation partners and improves their conversation efficiency. VA value convergence as a conscious strategy to integrate into Australian society. Another reason for convergence in speaking was that VA were aware they would be negatively evaluated if they stayed silent. It could be said that the findings relating to VA convergence in wishing to speak more provide direct evidence for VA pragmatic transfer in the survey data. In the survey, the VA showed higher levels of willingness to speak than the VV, while approximating the AA. It appears that VA, who had regular contact with Australians while living and studying in Australia, perceived talking as characteristic of Australians' communication style and desirable, and were influenced by this even in communication with other Vietnamese.
- **Divergence.** In the case of the VA, divergence tends to be behaviour in which people unwillingly engage.

As evidenced by the Likert data of situations in Category 3, the VA imagined they would be less silent than the VV and AA, perceiving a need for speech over silence. Although the VA appear to be influenced by AA norms when they attempt to speak more, their perceived higher likelihood of speaking is higher than that of the AA in some cases, producing difference. It can be hypothesized that the VA have strongly transferred what they perceive

to be Australian norms to their communication with Vietnamese. The willingness of the VA to speak more, as reflected in the survey data, is consistent with the unintentional divergence found in the interviews, where participants expressed frustration that they were not always able to participate in conversations as much as they wished. The analysis of perceived problems of communication that lead to silence even when the VA do not think that silence is appropriate suggests that the participants had to choose silence over the awkwardness of saying something without being understood. More precisely, lack of English proficiency was found to have a critical role in the social engagement of the VA and at times led the VA into an unfortunate performance against the desire to speak more: they were found to remain silent frequently in communication with Australians. Many participants were motivated to converge, but revealed in the interview data that they were not capable of doing so. This was also the case for those who overgeneralized talkativeness as characteristic of Australian culture. Both of these cases were here identified as unwilling divergence. It is logical to infer that if participants were better able to understand Australian conversation and culture, they might converge more.

- **Maintenance.** Maintenance is the case where speakers have strong beliefs in their identity and communication styles, and keep their own ways of communicating. Analysing the data on the VA participants' stories, we can see that depending on the English language proficiency of the participants or their knowledge in the topic of conversation, the VA deliberately choose to be silent or speak up according to home culture beliefs. This is consistent with the results of situations of maintenance in the questionnaire data where we have seen that in some cases maintaining home culture is about speaking up, and in others it is about being quiet.

All this draws a detailed picture of the VA perceptions and beliefs about silence when communicating with Australians. It should be noted that VA's insufficient English hinders the accommodation process for VA. This continues to be a challenging matter for those who attempt to integrate into Australian society. The next chapter focuses on integrating the findings from the analyses of data from the three research instruments to provide answers to the research questions of the study. It also outlines limitations of the study and its directions for future research.

## Chapter 7

### CONCLUSION

#### *7.1 Introduction*

Communication between people of the same culture is not always as smooth as it may appear. For people of different first language backgrounds, it is even harder, as in the case of Vietnamese and Australians. Silence as the choice of not verbalizing an idea at one point in the interaction is contextually contingent, and at the same time culturally dependent. The important thing is how much the interlocutors can interpret and match others' interpretations to achieve mutual understanding.

Although so far silence research has attracted much interest, no study examines silence-related behavior of Vietnamese in depth beyond the educational context, particularly in comparison with Australians. Thus, this study contributes to the body of work on silence in communication by surveying a range of Vietnamese and Australian participants to achieve insight into their interpretations of silence and to understand the cultural differences and similarities in meanings given to silence. Throughout, the study pursued answers to three research questions:

1. How do Vietnamese and Australians interpret silence in everyday contexts?
2. What are their beliefs about the use and appropriateness of silence?
3. To what extent do Vietnamese adapt their interpretations and beliefs about silence when in regular communication with Australians?

Data were collected using an online questionnaire, record sheets, and interviews. These instruments enabled the data to be triangulated so that a more accurate representation of participants' beliefs and interpretations of silence was obtained. There were three groups of participants in this study i.e., Vietnamese in Vietnam (VV), Australians in Australia (AA) and Vietnamese in Australia (who have regular contact with Australians) (VA). In the questionnaire, 275 participants across the three groups rated the likelihood of silence in 35 situations. Participants also provided meanings of silence in each of the situation. The choice of various methods with different complementary perspectives increased the validity of the study. For example, it was found that the VA reported the highest likelihood of speaking among the three groups. The findings in the latter instruments showed the VA were aware of speaking more in Australia and made attempts to talk more. Sometimes L2 difficulties cause them to be silent. Therefore, while the questionnaire reveals interesting insights about beliefs, it is the record sheets which show the full picture of what people would do.

Through the use of mixed methods research, important findings related to the research questions have been found. Overall, from the initial questionnaire the study found that the VV were not significantly more likely to be silent than the AA group, and the VA were the most likely to speak in many cases. The image of Vietnamese as being more silent than Australians is therefore not straightforwardly supported by this study. Far from the VA perception of the Australians as more talkative than Vietnamese (as captured in the interviews and record sheets), Australians believed they would be silent in slightly more situations than the VV.

It is interesting to see that in fact silence-related behavior is more complicated than the matter of who would be more silent. This view of silence also affords a greater opportunity to study the ways in which silence is interpreted as meaningful by Vietnamese and Australians. Participants interpreted silence, in order of frequency, to mean acquiescence, disregard, avoidance, processing, courtesy, apprehension, discourtesy, displeasure, dissent, discomfort, and regret.

Following analysis of the survey results of the three groups, the thesis explored the extent to which silence is used and how it is interpreted by the VA, the Vietnamese having regular contact with Australians. The reason for this is that in the initial questionnaire, in a number of cases the VA demonstrated higher willingness to speak than the other groups. This can be seen as evidence of L2-influenced changes in communication, even when the communication is with other Vietnamese. The relevant data from record sheets and interviews showed a pattern of VA moving towards conformity to Australian norms. In particular, a striking finding in the interview data is that VA participants believed very strongly that they change their communication style and attempt to talk more when in conversation with Australians. This phenomenon was seen as a result of socialization and contact with Australian culture and was explained under the rubrics of Communication accommodation theory (CAT), specifically those of Giles (1973). The following sections elaborate on these findings, discussing each research question in turn.

## ***7.2 Responses to the Research Questions***

### *7.2.1 How do Vietnamese and Australians interpret silence in everyday contexts?*

Interpretations of silence were examined in the initial questionnaire asking participants to provide the meanings of silence. The results enabled understanding of the ways in which silence is understood.

This study shows that silence is more than an absence of sound. This is consistent with the ideas of Tannen and Saville-Troike (1985). They state that “silence can be a matter of saying nothing and meaning something” (p. 97). It is in this spirit that this study found the value of silence involving a wide range of meanings. From the survey, the study located the interpretations of

silence within 11 themes: acquiescence, disregard, avoidance, processing, courtesy, apprehension, discourtesy, displeasure, dissent, discomfort, and regret. As coded from the responses of participants from the three groups, acquiescence, disregard and avoidance were the three most common interpretations of silence among the themes, whereas regret was the least frequent choice for interpreting the silence. However, the interpretations of silence are highly context and culture dependent.

The study found that in 17 situations, some form of agreement or acquiescence was the most common interpretation of silence among the VV group. However, among the AA, this was only the case in 12 situations. Refusal or disagreement was the most frequent interpretations by the VA group in nine situations, far more than the VV and AA groups. There were nine situations where interpretations of silence such as avoidance appear frequently. For example, the study found similar responses among the three groups when dealing with strangers and/or threats of conflict. In these situations, participants interpret silence to mean avoidance.

Surprisingly there were situations where silence could have both positive and negative connotations: in certain circumstances silence can both mean courtesy and discourtesy, or both acquiescence and dissent. Interlocutors might experience a great number of misinterpretations of silence in these cases. Implicit in these cautions against contrastive meaning is the ability to interpret silence on the core of context and cultural connotations of silence in communication. No single conclusion can be simply drawn about the contexts in which each of the group differs.

The importance of context has been recognized to play an important role in leading to patterns of cultural similarity/differences in the perception of silence in the surveyed situations.

### *7.2.2 What are Vietnamese and Australian beliefs about the use and appropriateness of silence?*

While the responses on the meanings of silence provide us with the interpretations of silence, the rating on the likelihood of silence help us to see whether, in a particular situation, the participants consider silence to be appropriate or not. In each of the 35 situations of the questionnaire, participants were required to state how likely they would be to remain silent.

From the analysis of the questionnaire data, we can see that there are more differences than similarities in terms of the likelihood of being silent among the three cultural groups. More precisely, the three groups were similar in their likelihood of being silent in approximately one third of the surveyed situations, whereas disparity was found in the other two thirds. This finding provides strong evidence for the different beliefs about the appropriateness of silence among the three groups.

The main findings regarding similarities about the appropriateness of silence among the three groups, as identified from their reported answers in the questionnaire survey, are related to: (i)



dealing with strangers; (ii) dealing with threats of conflicts; and (iii) norms of silence in places like the cinema. First, both Vietnamese and Australians in this study reported that in situations involving strangers, they were likely to be silent. Participants' verbal reticence with strangers in this study directly means avoidance. Second, this study was able to identify the threat of conflict e.g., when confronting a potential aggressor such as a drunkard, as a reason for silence on the part of participants. This was found in several situations, where the interpretations of silence as avoidance are clearly about avoiding conflict. Third, all participants in this study reported their likelihood of remaining silent in places where speaking could disturb others.

The implication of the similarity across the groups in what people would do is that there is less likelihood of misunderstanding between Vietnamese and Australians concerning silence when they are with strangers and/or in situations of potential conflict in public places. The results relating to the phenomenon of silence when dealing with strangers also imply that in same-culture communication of these situations, less misunderstanding will occur. This is consistent with the findings of Basso (1970) and Saunders (1985). Saunders asserts that "Silence, in sum, is a common strategy for the management of tense situations" (p. 181). As a result, people prefer to use silence, which can help prevent the situation from escalating unnecessarily.

The analysis of participants' responses with respect to the likelihood of being silent shows the importance of contextual concern. The study found that 21 situations with clear differences in the likelihood of silence fit three categories: (i) in circumstances where VV Likert differs (seven situations), we can see the tendency that the VA likelihood of speaking is closer to the AA, however, their interpretations of silence remain similar to the VV; (ii) in circumstances where AA Likert differs (seven situations), the likelihood and interpretations of silence by the VA remain closer to those of the VV group than the AA. It appears that the VA do not change behavior at all in these situations; (iii) in situations where VA likelihood differs from the other two groups (four situations), the VA were seen to move away from the AA.

### *7.2.3 To what extent do Vietnamese adapt their interpretations and beliefs about silence when in regular communication with Australians?*

The questionnaire data shows obvious differences between the VA and VV in 14 situations, providing evidence that the experience of living in Australia has resulted in changes in VA perceptions of silence. In other words, it can be hypothesized that the VA were influenced by Australian norms when communicating with other Vietnamese (pragmatic transfer from L2 to L1). In order better to understand this phenomenon, relevant data from the record sheets and interviews were examined.

Results indicated that VA participants, in their intercultural contact with the AA, exhibited accommodating behavior towards the AA by speaking. From an examination of the reasons and cases that helped to explain VA change, it can be seen that the extent to which VA accommodate is greatly affected by (i) their perceived beliefs about Australians, (ii) their awareness of the importance of adaptation, for example they will be negatively evaluated if they do not accommodate, and (iii) their experiences of L2 failure in communication with Australians. CAT proposes that in intergroup encounters, speakers indicate their attitude to other speakers by adapting their speech or nonverbal patterns to more closely approximate those of the interlocutor (Giles, 1973). The data in this study were related to three phenomena identified in CAT: convergence, divergence and maintenance. In the present study the term ‘unwilling divergence’ is introduced and operationalized to better explain the VA behavior, rather than the divergence in the CAT literature, which is defined as intentional.

Among the three aspects, VA attempts to converge in likelihood of silence were strongly felt in their communicative encounters. VA value convergence as a conscious strategy to integrate into Australian culture. This was reflected in their positive attitudes to talking. However, lack of English proficiency and cultural differences were found to have a critical role in the social engagement of the VA and led the VA to diverge from the perceived communication style of Australians, resulting in silence.

Divergence was found to be a behavior that people engaged in unwillingly, resulted in using silence. It was found to result from three factors. First, the VA questionnaire results showed that the VA were the most likely to talk and their perceived higher likelihood of speaking was higher than that of the AA in some cases, producing difference. This appears to result from the influence of their perception of Australian norms, over-applied in these cases, so that instead of VA behavior approaching that of the AA, there is instead unintentional divergence. Second, in the interview and record sheet data, VA were found to remain silent frequently despite their desire to talk more in communication with Australians as a result of their lack of English proficiency. This could be seen as the main cause of silence-related behavior on the part of the VA and had a negative impact on their communication. Third, there is evidence that unwilling divergence was also the case for those who did not understand Australian cultural factors affecting likelihood of silence. In all these three cases, VA participants diverged from the perceived communication style, and were silent.

The last aspect of CAT found in VA behavior is maintenance. Maintenance is the case where speakers have strong beliefs in their identity and communication style, and choose to perpetuate their existing culturally determined behavior, whether involving silence or speaking. The VA participants’ stories recounted in the interviews and record sheets show that depending on the VA English language proficiency or their knowledge of the topic of conversation, the VA deliberately

choose to be silent or speak up according to home culture beliefs. This is consistent with the results of situations of maintenance in the questionnaire data where we have seen that in some cases maintaining home culture is about speaking up, and in others it is about being quiet.

In short, the study has elucidated the matter of the high VA likelihood of speaking in the data. The strong evidence of VA accommodation when communicating in English helps to support the hypothesis of pragmatic transfer when communicating with other Vietnamese. Indeed, many VA participants' comments make it clear that accommodation is generally desired and that conformity often means speaking. From the VA interviews and record sheets, experiences of failure of L2 competence, for example, conflicted with the positive VA outlook to speak more, resulting in silence. In other words, VA silence is in fact more often due to lack of language fluency, rather than lack of desire to shift culturally. Thus, VA accommodation in this study represents complex and divergent views and perspectives. The perceived accommodative act on the part of VA would "depend upon the situation itself and the particular linguistic level upon which accommodation occurred" (Giles & Powesland, 1997, p. 233).

### ***7.3 Limitations and Future Directions***

This study has explored the ways in which silence was understood by Vietnamese and Australians in various aspects: likelihood of being silent, interpretations of silence, and VA's experiences of accommodation with respect to speaking and silence. It is clearly an exploratory study, and several limitations need to be taken into account in considering its findings. Some of these provide the impetus for further research.

First, the 275 survey-takers are a representative sample of university students from the cultural groups studied in the project. The findings of this research are then specific to students of this level of education. Future research that focuses on other adults would be useful to validate or extend the findings.

Second, the findings from the questionnaire are based on 35 situations asking the participants to rate their likelihood of being silent and their interpretations of silence. The results are therefore specific to this set of data. In reality, people face a variety of interactions in their day-to-day lives and these interactions are dependent on a range of factors such as gender, age, intimacy and settings. These interactions may be similar to those appearing in the survey situation but in practice may generate another result.

Third, due to the scope of the research project and the demographics of the volunteer participants, the effects of age and gender could not be fully explored. The participants were younger and predominantly female university students, resulting in a limited age range and a gender imbalance in the population sample. This creates the opportunity for further research and

discussion. Although factors like age and gender could contribute to the likelihood of silence, the study did not pursue this point in significant detail. Studies designed to investigate silence phenomena in relation to age or gender would extend this project and its questions in a useful way. For example, do female participants report higher likelihood of speaking, as gender stereotypes suggest? What cultural beliefs exist about the relation between silence, power and respect among older generations? Investigation into these could bring to light cultural differences in the relations between gender, age and views of silence-related behavior.

Fourth, the study found that the VA accommodate to the perceived communication styles of Australians while they are living in Australia and communicating with local people. This finding was based on an assessment of the VA attitudes and perceived need to move closer to what they believed an Australian communication style to be. However, it was not clear how Australians would react to the VA accommodated behavior. Recognition of this would be useful to see the full picture of accommodation with respect to Australians' social evaluations of Vietnamese speakers. Future study can investigate the reception of the VA accommodation behavior in ongoing interaction, in the light of the results of the present project.

#### ***7.4 Concluding Remarks***

Meeting the challenges posed by previous studies on silence requires that research on silence be clear about the complexity of silence phenomena and the ambiguous meanings involved when one is silent. This study contributes to understanding the intricacies that govern this silence-related behavior. Building on a comparison of the likelihood and interpretations of silence, the study identified circumstances in which cultural groups of participants are similar to or different from one another in their approach to silence. Beyond the cultural differences and similarities in the meanings given to silence, the study links the VA's high reported likelihood of speaking in certain situations to pragmatic transfer when they are communicating in Vietnamese and accommodation theory when in English. Through elucidating the nuances of silence in communication in general and between Vietnamese and Australian in particular, this study lays the foundation for promoting better Australian-Vietnamese communication, and furthermore for greater understanding of the uses, interpretations and effects of silence in intercultural encounters more generally.

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silent?					
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
3. You are a student and you are hurrying to hand in an assignment to your teacher's office when you accidentally step on someone's foot. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
4. In a conversation between you and your teacher, you mention that the last class was very difficult to understand. Your teacher gets angry. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
5. You go with your boss to a business meeting to negotiate an order for your company. In the meeting, your boss and the partner are negotiating the order. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
6. Your housemate arrives home and notices that her china vase is broken. You rush up to her and say, "Oh, I'm sorry! I had an awful accident. While I was cleaning the floor I bumped into the table and it fell and broke. I just feel terrible about it". Your friend becomes angry and shouts at you. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
7. On a bus, you are annoyed by a group of people who keep teasing about your appearance. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
8. You are a graduate student and you are late to class. You stop at the door and ask your teacher for permission to enter. The teacher asks, "Why are you late?". You say, "Oh, I am terribly sorry. I got stuck in a traffic jam". Then, you are allowed in. However, the teacher still criticizes you for not being on time. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
9. Your housemate has just finished her make-up and is about to leave for a party. She is wearing a flowery skirt that you do not like at all. Then she turns to you and asks if the skirt is Ok and if it suits her. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
10. In a class discussion, you disagree with your classmates. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
11. You are working in an office. The boss just gave you a difficult task that involves writing a sales report in two days. You have not got enough data to write it up. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					

12. You broke your relationship with your father a long time ago. One day, you meet your brother. In the conversation, your brother says that Dad misses you very much and asks if you still keep in touch with him. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
13. You are in the city with a friend. Suddenly, a drunk and angry individual approaches you and starts yelling insults. How likely are you to remain silent when being shouted at? (for example walk away without saying anything).	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
14. In the class discussion, you disagree with your teacher. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
15. The Rector of your university calls a meeting of each department to discuss how well the teaching staff have fulfilled its plan. The Rector criticizes each teacher's performance individually, even you. Responding to this, each teacher silently accepts the criticism and then promises to do better next time. This is your first semester and you feel particularly angry because you have taught every class you had been scheduled to teach, and a number of others besides, and you think you have done a good job. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
16. The class discussion deals with a topic that you do not have knowledge to talk about. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
17. Your father asks you to show him your study record for Maths in which you know you got a low mark. How likely are you to be silent?					
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
18. In a conversation with your friends, you notice that you are the one who keeps talking while they do not respond to you very much. How likely are you to become silent in response to their silences?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
19. In the class, your teacher speaks so quickly that you cannot understand. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
20. While you regularly attend classes and take really good notes, your classmate often misses class. The exam is coming and your classmate comes to see you and ask you for the lecture notes. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					

21. You are at a friend's house watching TV. The friend offers you a snack. You say that you have just had dinner. However, your friend presses you twice to eat. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
22. A friend suggests you go to the casino with him at the weekend. You do not want to go. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
23. A friend invited you to his birthday party and you promised to go but you were busy and did not attend. Now you meet him in the supermarket. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
24. You go to a wedding party in a restaurant and are seated at a table with strangers. They are all talking a lot and trying to draw you into the conversation. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
25. You are a receptionist. You are very sad because your colleague, a close friend of yours has just given you a resignation letter to pass to the director. You are at your desk when another colleague enters. You ignore him and do not say anything. However, the man keeps asking why you look upset. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
26. You hold a party in a restaurant. You stand up and explain the reason for the party. At the end of your speech, you enthusiastically invite everybody to drink, but oddly enough, most people do not respond to the toast. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
27. You are a deputy director in a fashion company. You are in a meeting with other three people: a manager, a staff member, and a designer. The discussion deals with the possibility of hiring a new model for the next fashion show. Three other people agree to have Mary. You show your reluctance to have her. Then the manager says, "If you don't like Mary, do you have a better suggestion?". How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
28. You are talking to a friend of yours. You cannot catch one point s/he is talking about. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
29. You are watching a film in a cinema when your phone rings. How likely are you to remain silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
30. You are in an English class. Your teacher makes a mistake when explaining a grammar point. You	1	2	3	4	5

know she is wrong. How likely are you to be silent?					
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
31. You go to a party with your partner. At this party, you note that your partner is engaged in a long conversation with someone else. They laugh and make jokes, leaving you there. You cannot stand this person. How likely are you to remain silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
32. You go to a class reunion. You enjoy the reunion, talking with old friends. When you are in the company of your friends, a girl comes and says, "Hey, I haven't seen you for ages! You look fat". How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
33. You are married. You and your partner have a mutual friend who has a financial problem. One day, the friend comes to see you and says, "I am wondering if I can move in with you for a month?" How likely are you to remain silent when you first hear the request?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
34. You are watching a film in a cinema. A man behind you has a private conversation. How likely are you to be silent?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					
35. A couple you know and like is coming to visit your hometown and would like you to host them. You ask your partner for his/her agreement. S/he says, "Accommodation is not a problem for us because we have a large house. However, we have run out of money for this month's expenses." How likely are you to be silent when you hear this?	1	2	3	4	5
Being silent in this situation would mean....					

Thank you for completing the survey. This study involves two further stages. Would you be willing to participate in:

a) keeping diary-type record sheets?      Yes       No

b) a further interview?      Yes       No

If yes, please provide contact details: Email:..... Tel:.....

Your preference for the interview:      Face-to-face interview       Telephone interview

***Thank you very much for your participation!***

*Appendix 2a. Sample record sheet for VV and AA*

RECORD SHEETS  
A NOTICEABLE EVENT INVOLVING SILENCE

Please describe a noticeable moment involving silence in your social interactions. It might be a silence which creates problems or makes you feel uncomfortable, annoyed or embarrassed. It might be a silence which seems appropriate or makes you feel happy and/or satisfied.

Name (optional):

Sex: M/F

Nationality:

Age: 20 - 25

26 - 30

31 - 40

> 40

Occupation(s):

Current place of residence: Vietnam

Australia

**Your description of the event:**

1) The setting (the place and time of the occurrence):

2) Other people involved in the event:

Gender		Age			Nationality	Relationship with you (e.g., “friend”, “colleague”, “boss”, “husband”, “partner”, “stranger” etc.)	Length of acquaintance <sup>2</sup> (years, months)
M	F	Older	Similar	Younger			

3) The event and 4) your immediate reactions and feelings or the other person’s reactions:

5) How could you explain these reactions and feelings?

Thank you very much for your participation!

*Appendix 2b. Sample record sheet for VA*

RECORD SHEETS  
A NOTICEABLE EVENT INVOLVING SILENCE

Please describe a noticeable moment involving silence in your social interactions with Australians. It might be a silence which creates problems or makes you feel uncomfortable, annoyed or embarrassed. It might be a silence which seems appropriate or makes you feel happy and/or satisfied.

Name (optional):

Sex: M/F

Nationality:

Age: 20 - 25

26 - 30

31 - 40

> 40

Occupation(s):

Current place of residence: Vietnam

Australia

**Your description of the event:**

1) The setting (the place and time of the occurrence):

2) Other people involved in the event:

Gender		Age			Nationality	Relationship with you (e.g., “friend”, “colleague”, “boss”, “husband”, “partner”, “stranger” etc.)	Length of acquaintance <sup>2</sup> (years, months)
M	F	Older	Similar	Younger			

3) The event and 4) your immediate reactions and feelings or the other person’s reactions:

5) How could you explain these reactions and feelings?

Thank you very much for your participation!



### ***Appendix 3. Interview***

The interview questions are not fixed in the sense that the interviewer can add or modify questions according to the responses of the participants in order to probe the participants' thinking and reactions.

#### **Opening**

- Self-introduction of interviewer.
- Asking for confirmation of project's understanding and consent i.e., 1) Did you read the information sheet? 2) Did you understand that it is confidential and that you can withdraw at any time?, and 3) Can I start to record our interview now?

#### **Content**

- How often do people in your country use silence or expression without words to express themselves in their daily life?
- There is a proverb "Silence is golden, speech is silver". How true is this in your country?
- Do you ever consciously use silence? When?
- Do you ever consciously avoid silence in your conversation? Example?
- How often do you experience silence in communication?
- Do you often express your feelings in words?
- Do you think silence is valued in places such as hotels, formal seminars, and official ceremonies? Why? Or Why not?
- Could you describe a situation you remember involving silence?
- In which situations do you think silence should be used? / In which situations do you think it is more effective to use silence rather than words?
- Many people claim to use silence to avoid communication. What do you think about this?
- How about culture? Do you think culture influences the way people use silence? If yes, how?
- If the other person is silent, do you think it is a good idea to be silent too? Or to speak?
- When you are interacting with your friend and he/she is silent, what are the different ways you might respond?
- What are your feelings when friend is silent?
- How do you think silence should be dealt with in a conversation?

#### ***Discussion of questionnaire or diary type data***

- Have you been silent in this situation:....?
- Talking about one situations reported by our respondent,....What do you think about this?

- Our study shows that,...Do you agree?
- In conversations with people in higher status, you should be modest in words. What do you think?

**Extra questions for Vietnamese in Australia group**

- Is there any difference between when you talk to Vietnamese and when you talk to Australians?
- Have you found any difficulties talking or communicating with Australians?
- Do you notice/ consciously change the way you speak in Australia?
- In communicating with Australians, when do you tend to use silence?
- How do you respond when the Australian is silent?
- How do you feel when he/she keeps silent?

**Closing**

- Is there anything else you want to bring up before we finish the interview?
- Can you please email me if you think of something you want to add?
- Thank you very much for your participation.

*Appendix 4. Coding List for the Qualitative Survey Data*

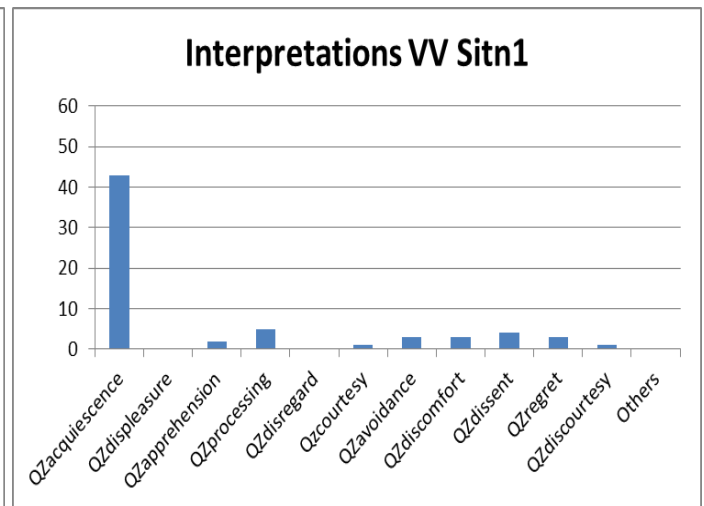
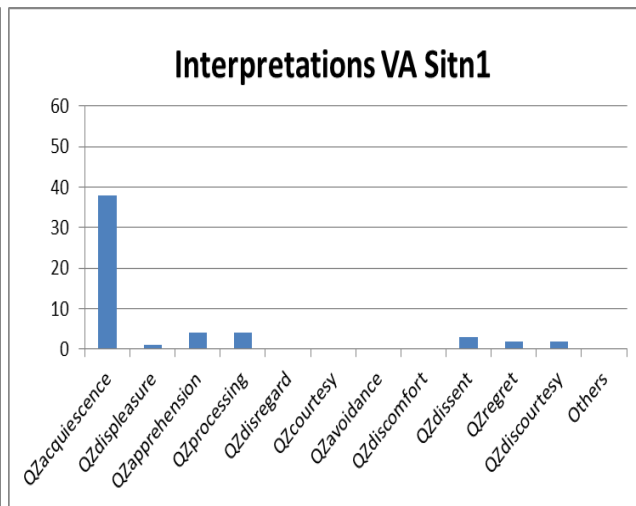
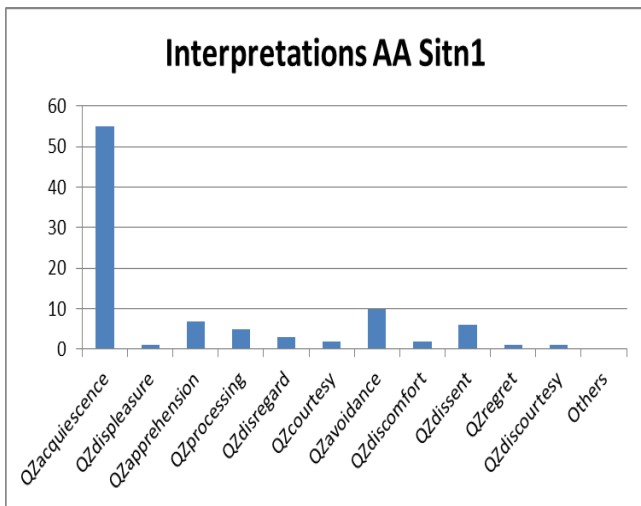
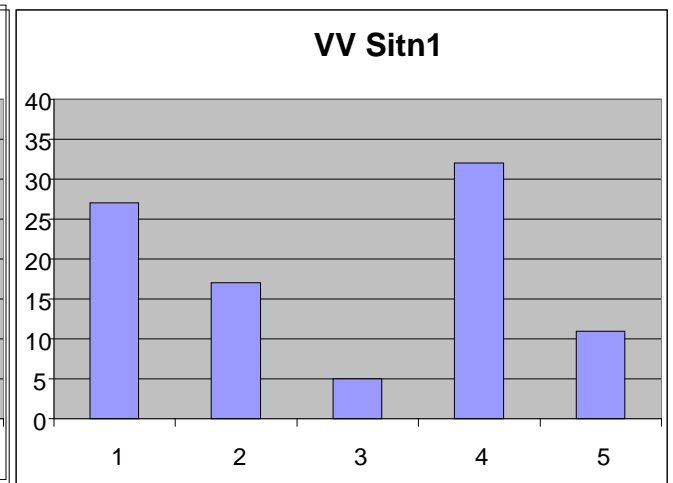
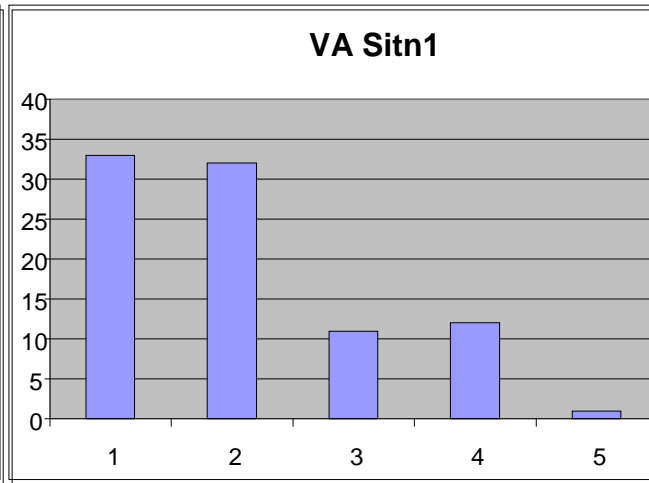
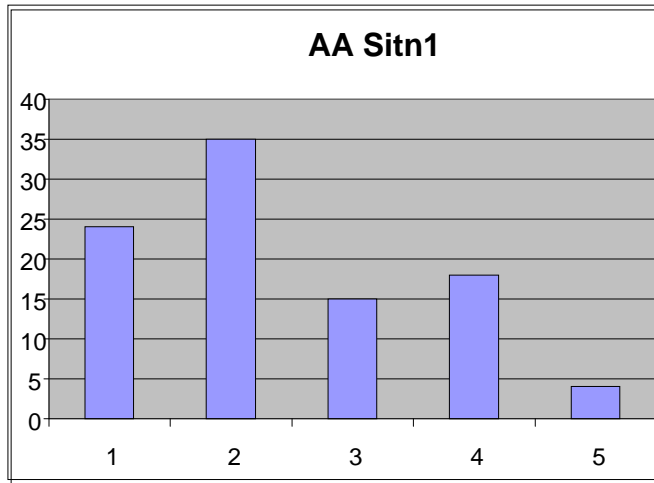
No.	Codes	Explanations
1	QQstop	Silence means I don't want to communicate any more on this topic.
2	QQguilt	Silence means I accept the blame/the responsibility for this.
3	QQagree	Silence means I agree with what other people say.
4	QQallow	Silence means I let the other person say what they have to say or do whether it's appropriate or not.
5	QQsubmissive	Silence means I submit to what the other person wants.
6	QQnot responsible	Silence means I am not responsible for the situation.
7	QQrefuse	Silence means I don't accept what is said.
8	QQthinking	Silence means I am thinking/hesitating or unsure what to say.
9	QQlearning	Silence means I am learning from what the other person is saying.
10	QQunderstand	Silence means I understand the other person's position.
11	QQlistening	Silence means I am listening to the reasoning of the other person.
12	QQdont care	Silence means I don't care about what happened/happens.
13	QQignore	Silence means I don't pay attention to the other person.
14	QQself-effacement	Silence means I don't want to draw attention to myself.
15	QQrespect	Silence shows respect.
16	QQpolite	Silence shows politeness, e.g., in not interrupting the conversation.
17	QQrude	Silence is rude.
18	QQdisrespect	Silence means I don't respect the other person's

		feelings/point of view.
19	QQforgive	Silence means I forgive the other person.
20	QQsorry	Silence means I am sorry/I apologise/I feel bad.
21	QQscared	Silence means I am afraid of something, e.g. losing a job.
22	QQavoid	Silence means I avoid confrontation/avoid the topic.
23	QQintimidated	Silence means I don't want to stand up to the other person.
24	QQsmall	Silence means I think what has happened is minor and not worth worrying about.
25	QQawkward	Silence means the situation is awkward.
26	QQemb	Silence means I feel embarrassed.
27	QQcalm	Silence means I try to calm the situation.
28	QQshy	Silence means I am not confident/too shy to speak up.
29	QQsad	Silence means I feel sad about the situation.
30	QQhappy	Silence means I feel happy.
31	QQshock	Silence means I am shocked, e.g. I don't believe it.
32	QQunfair	Silence means I feel it is unfair.
33	QQangry	Silence means I feel angry.
34	QQpassive	Silence means I don't give any input/I show a lack of participation or interest.
35	QQignorant	Silence means I don't have enough information.
36	QQoffended	Silence means I feel offended.
37	QQstupid	Silence means I am stupid.
38	QQdislike	Silence means I don't like it.
39	QQworse	Silence would make the situation worse.
40	QQdisappointed	Silence means I feel disappointed.
41	QQpatient	Silence means I put up with the situation.

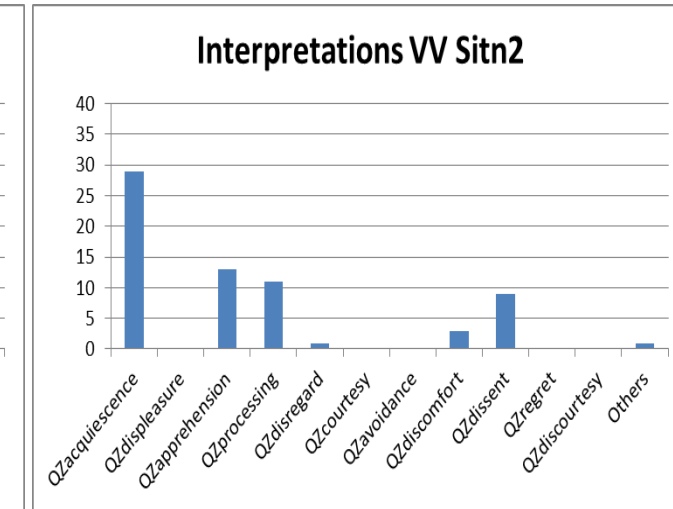
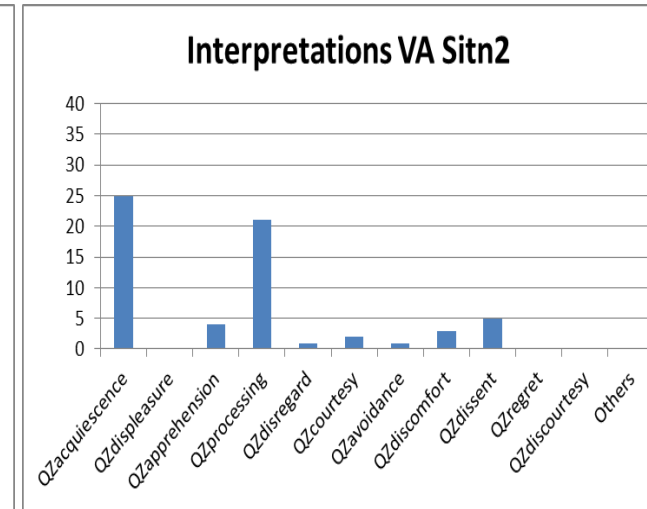
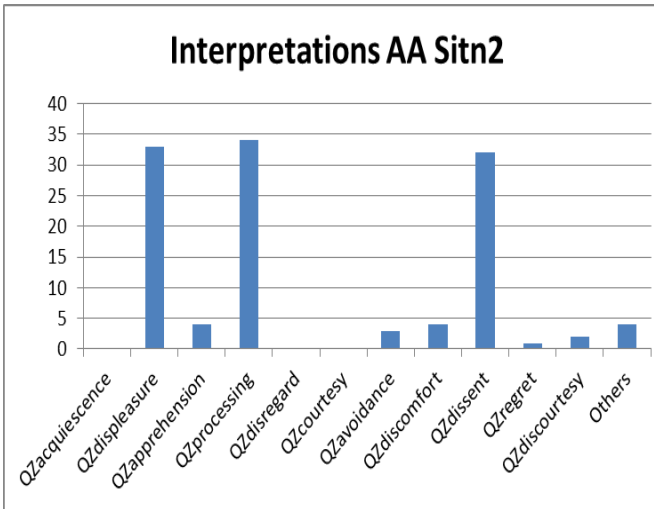
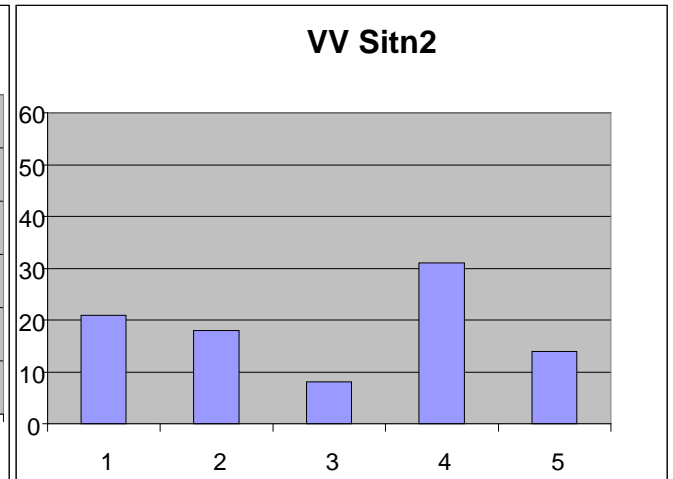
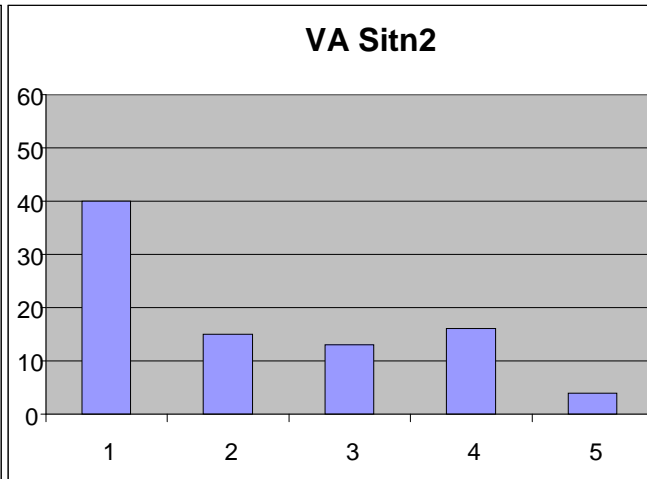
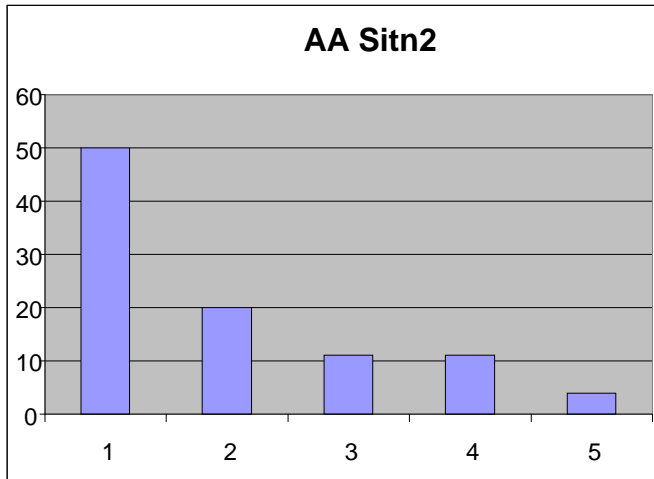
42	QQwellbred	Silence means I am well brought up.
43	QQpromise	Silence means I promise not to make the mistake again.
44	QQsmart	Silence means I am intelligent and/or better than the other person.

**Appendix 5. Likert Scale Data and Meaning Charts for all 35 Situations**

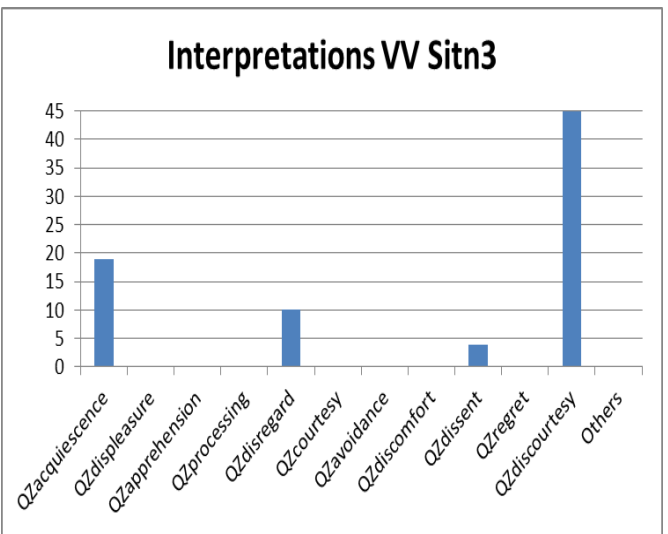
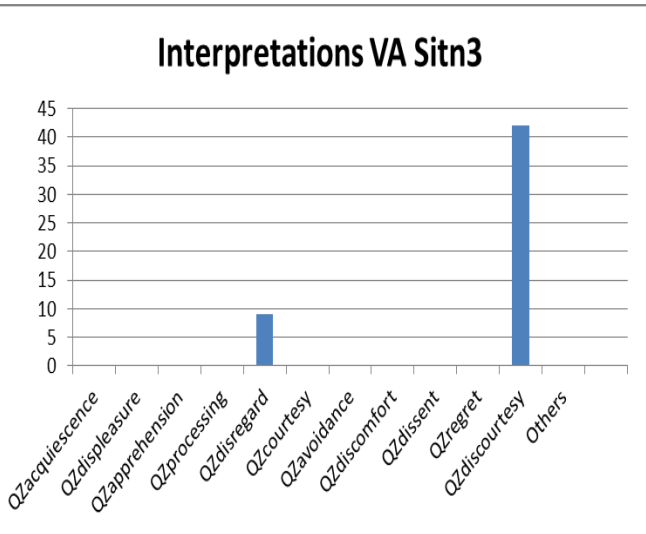
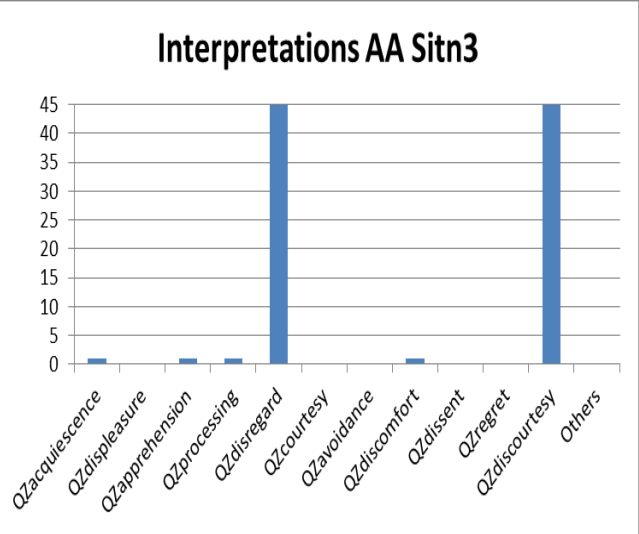
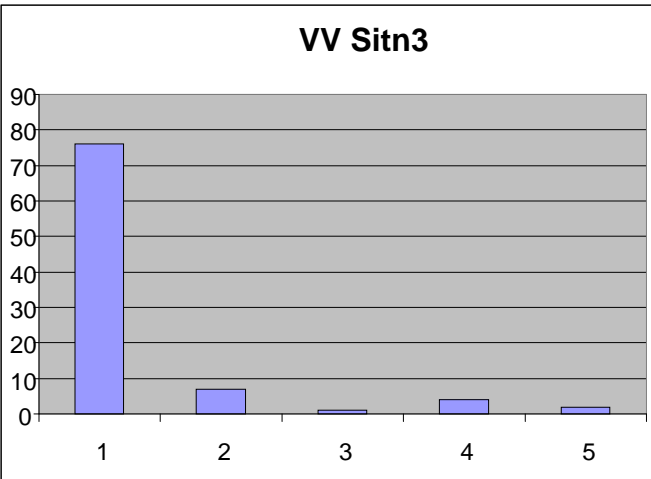
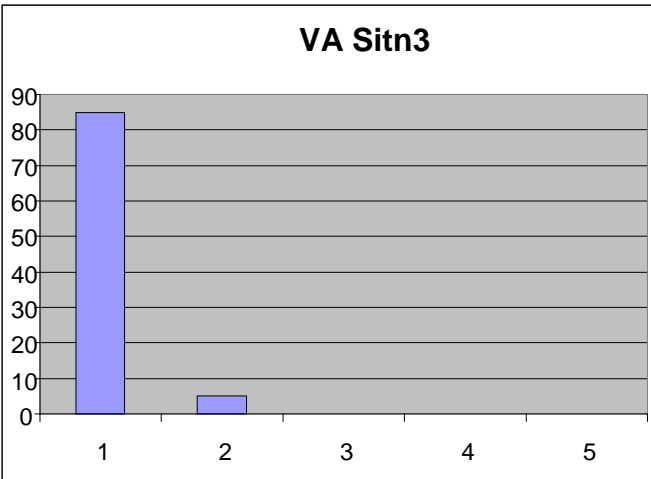
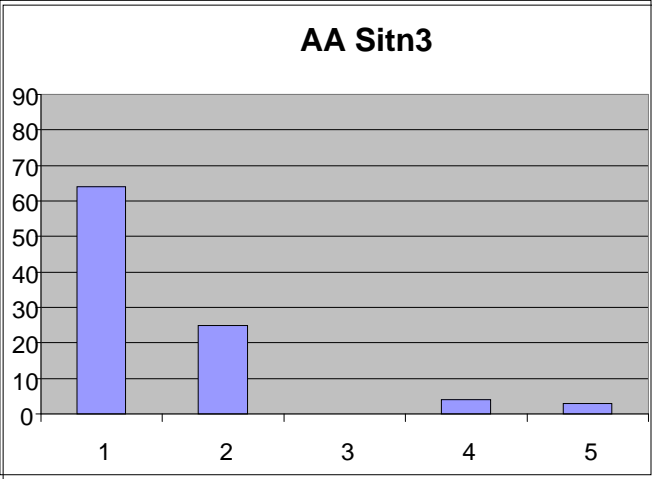
1a. You recommend your friend to your boss and s/he offers him a high salary. However, after five months, your friend has not worked as expected as sales do not increase. The boss is now reprimanding you for your wrong decision. How likely are you to be silent?



2a. You are a young woman who has known and been in love with your boyfriend for at least a year. You are now sitting close together on a bench when he proposes marriage to you. How likely are you to be silent?

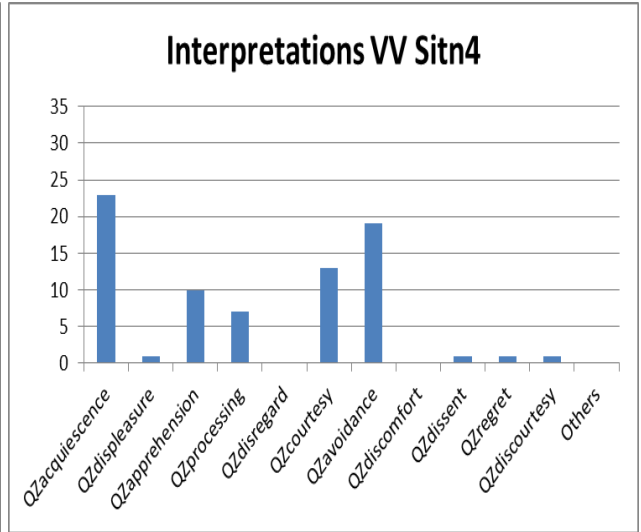
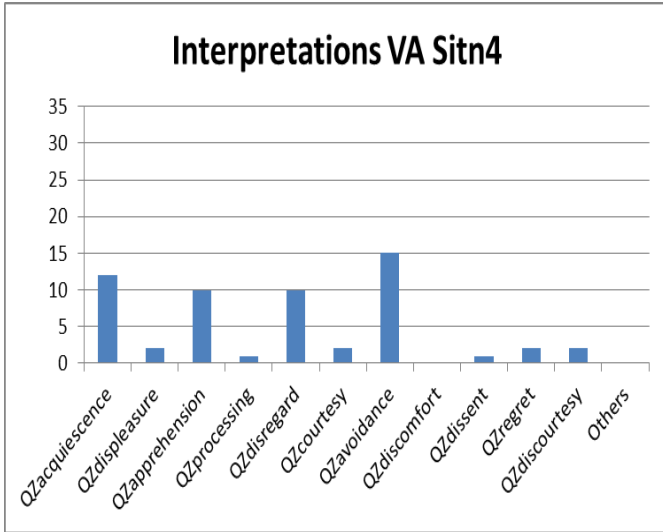
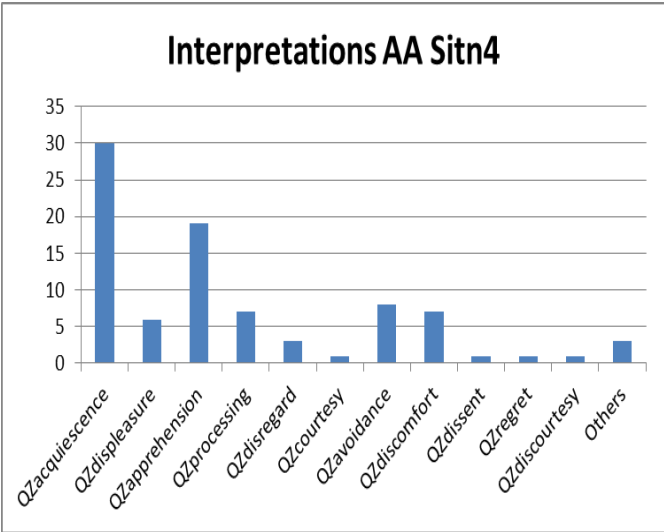
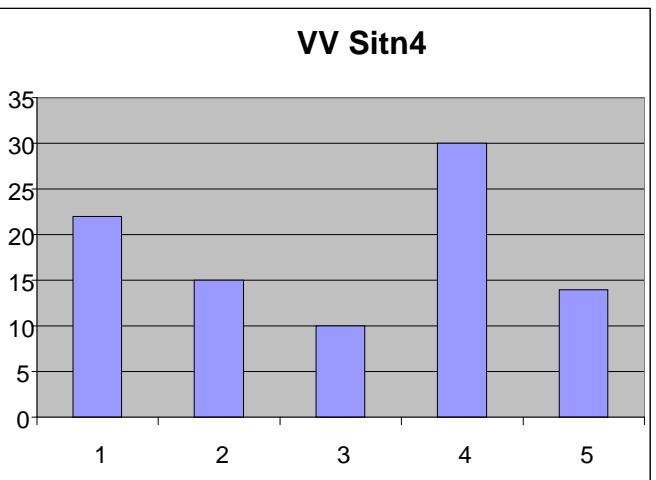
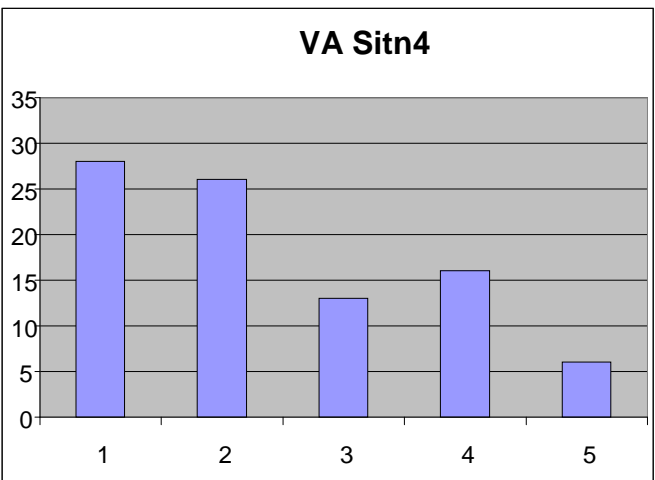
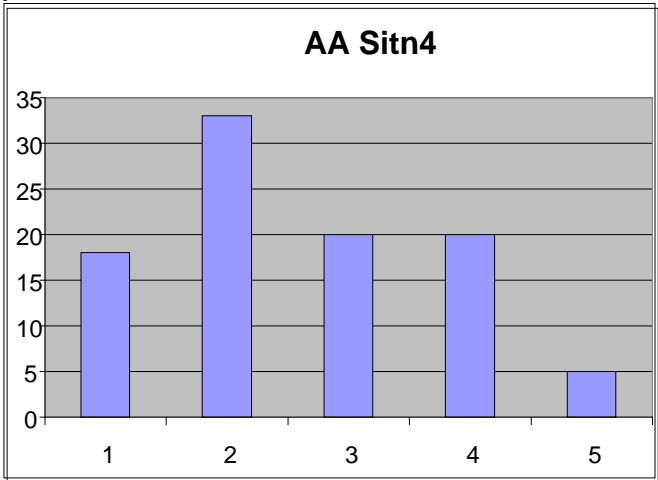


3a. You are a student and you are hurrying to hand in an assignment to your teacher's office when you accidentally step on someone's foot. How likely are you to be silent?

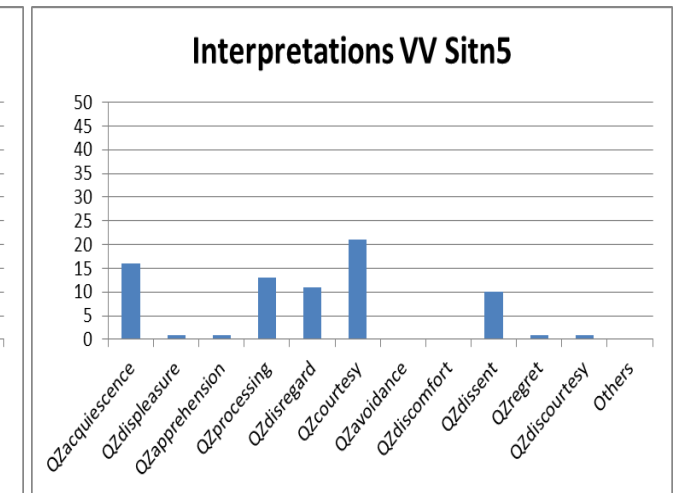
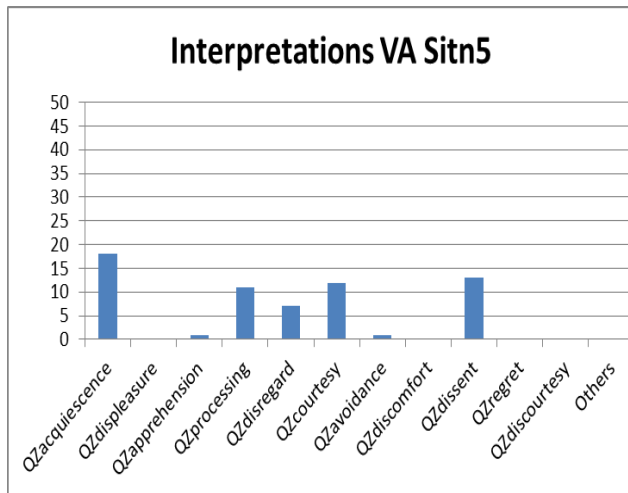
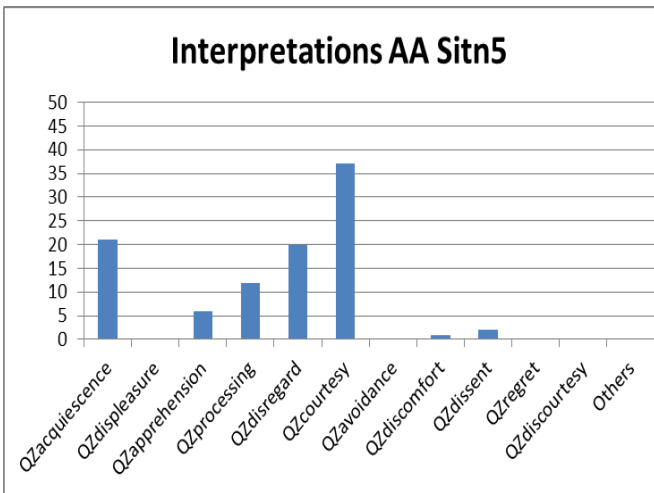
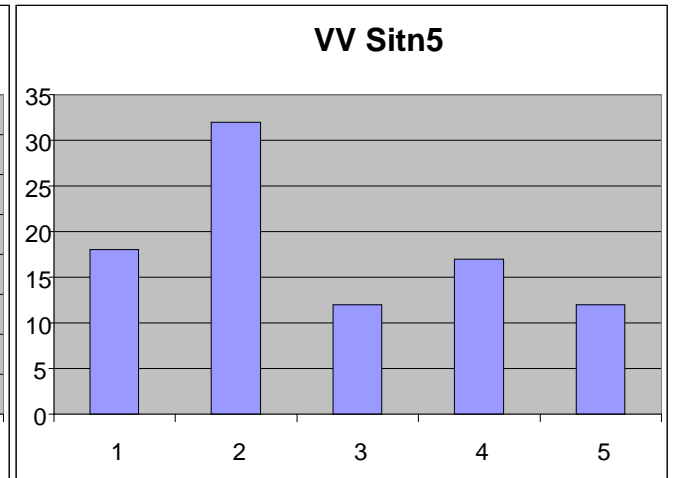
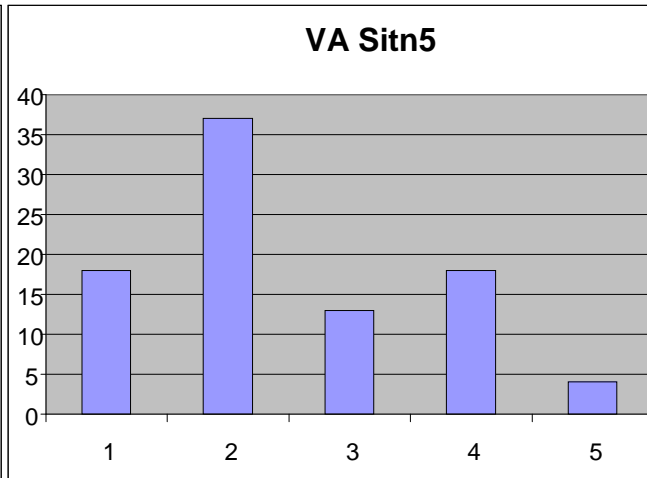
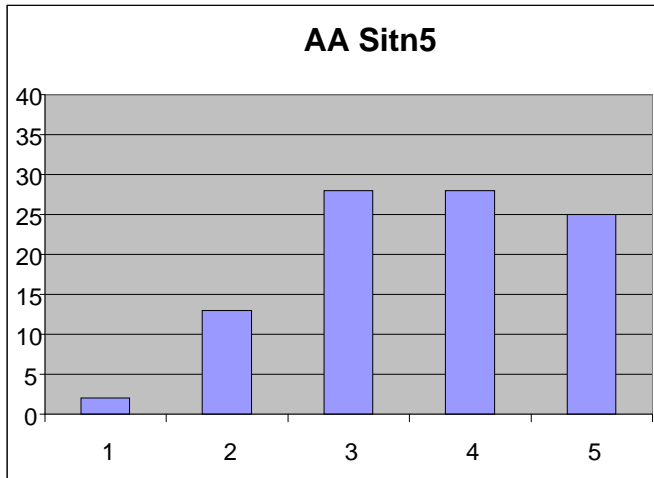




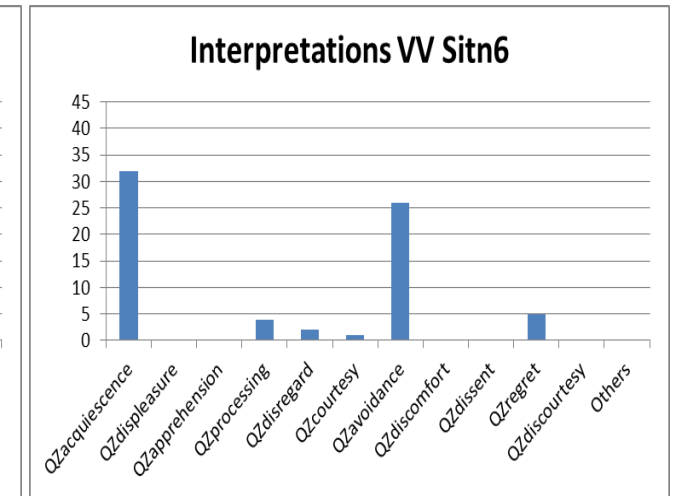
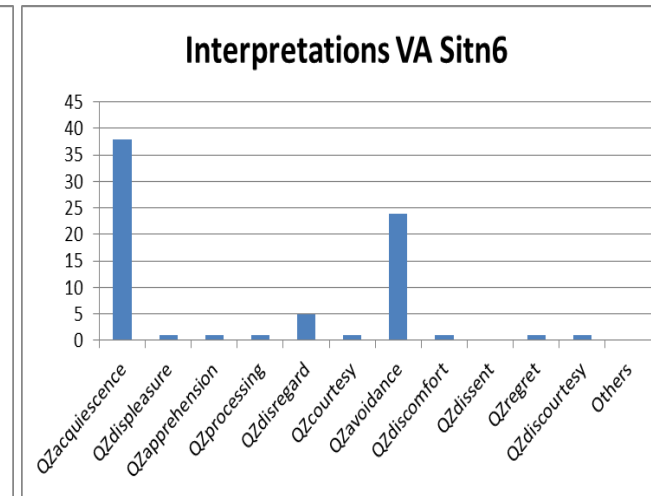
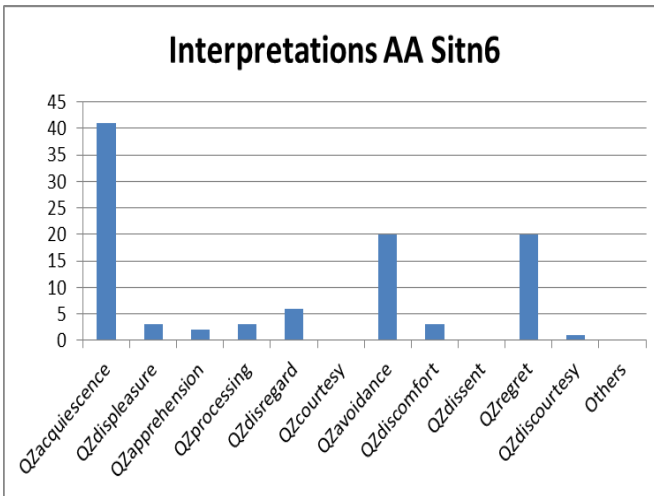
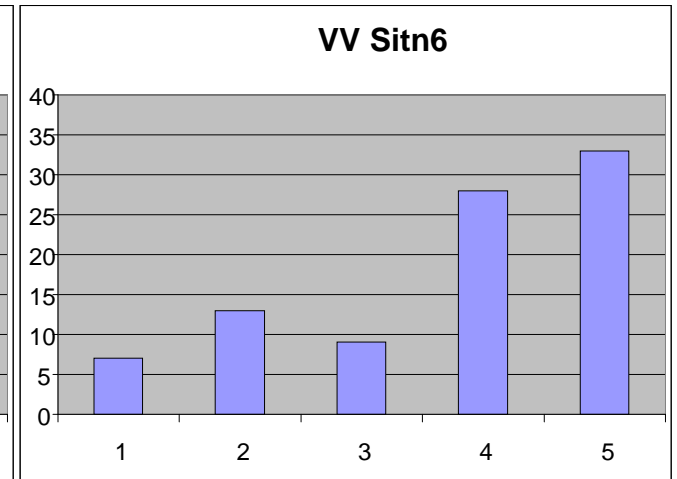
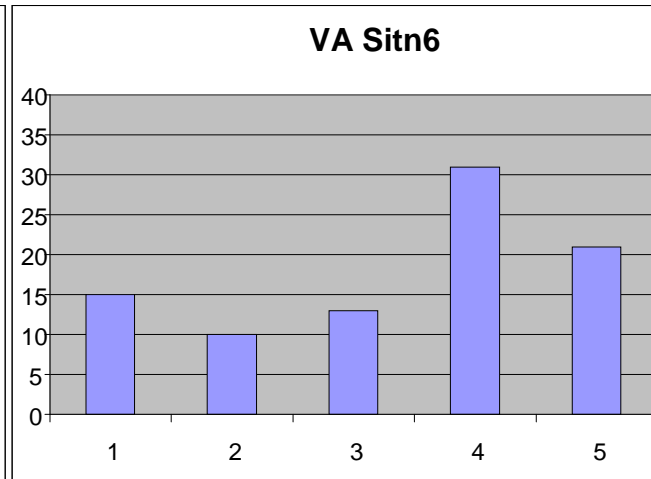
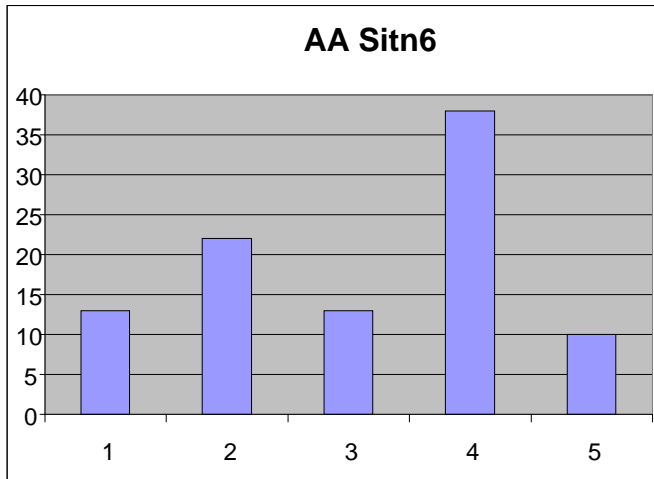
4a. In a conversation between you and your teacher, you mention that the last class was very difficult to understand. Your teacher gets angry. How likely are you to be silent?



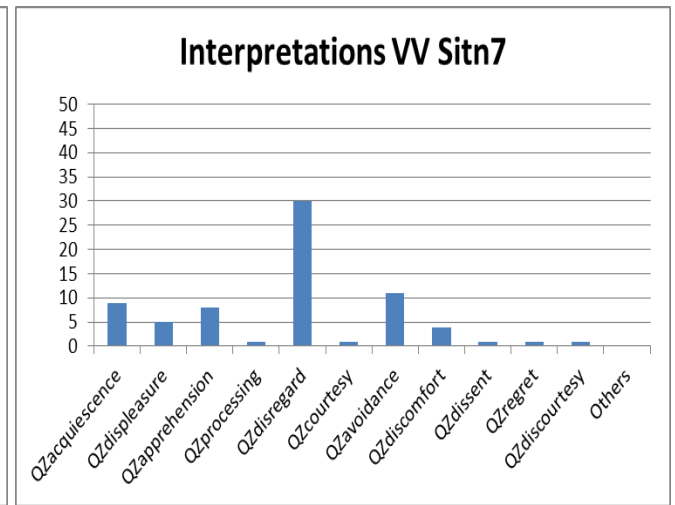
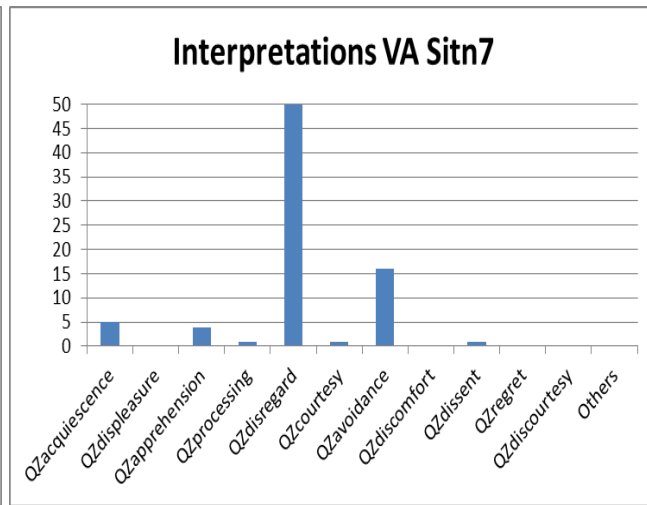
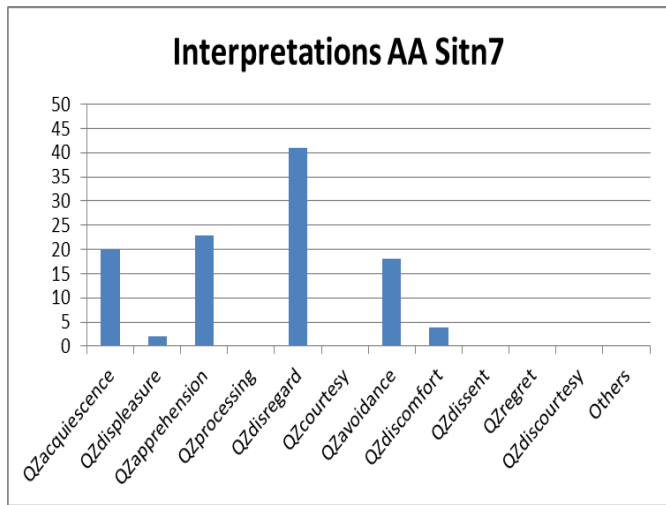
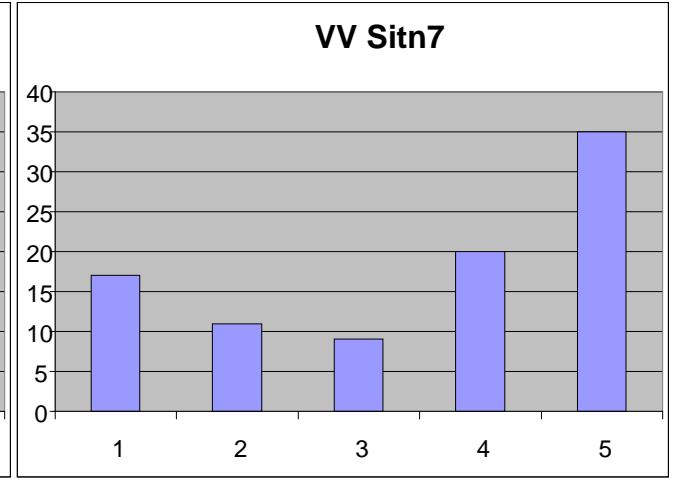
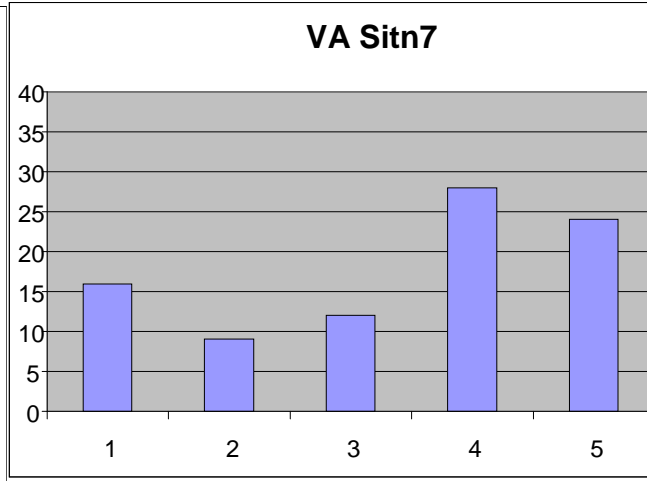
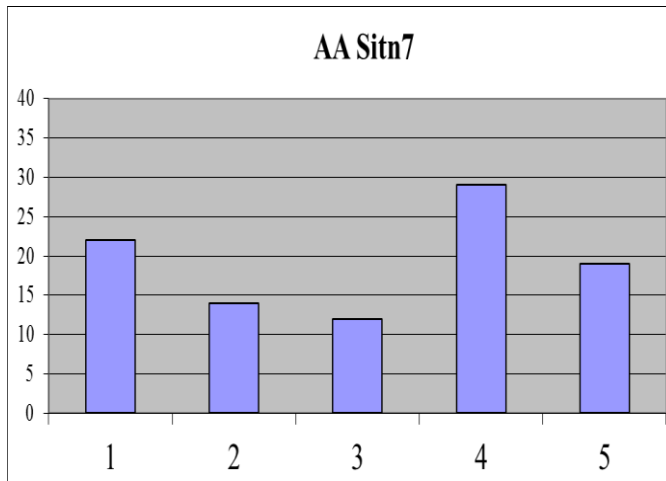
5a. You are a section manager. You go with your boss to a business meeting to negotiate an order for your company. In the meeting, your boss and the boss of the other company are negotiating the order. How likely are you to be silent?



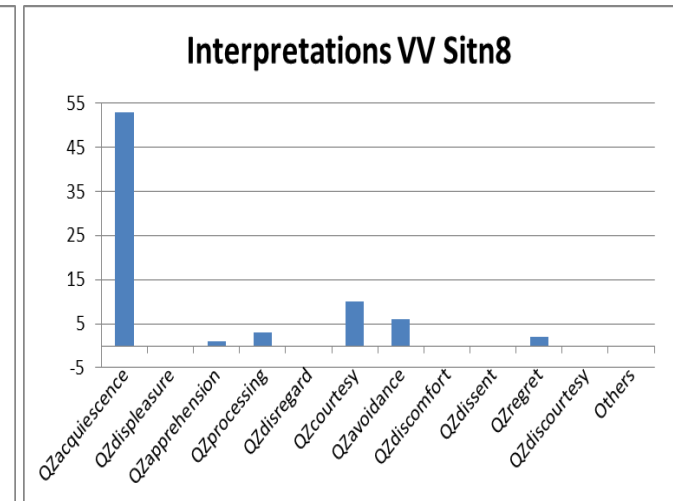
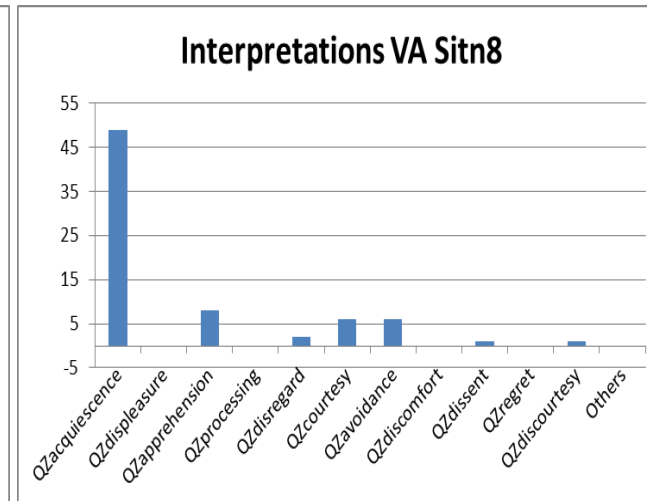
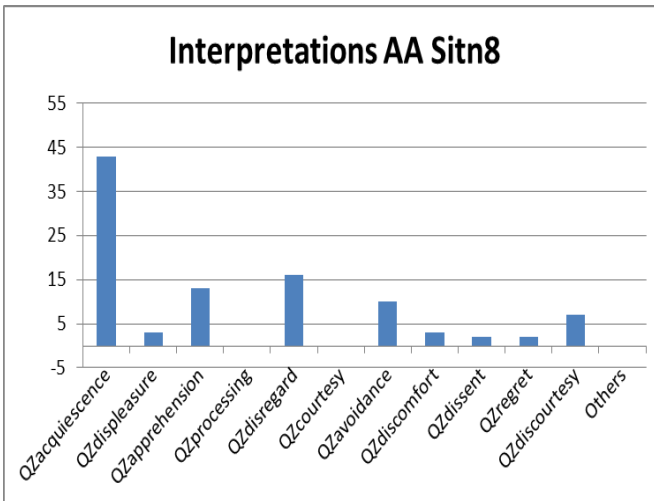
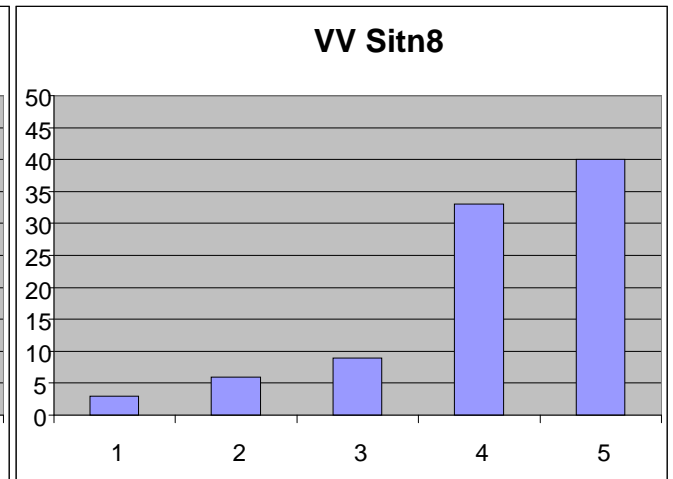
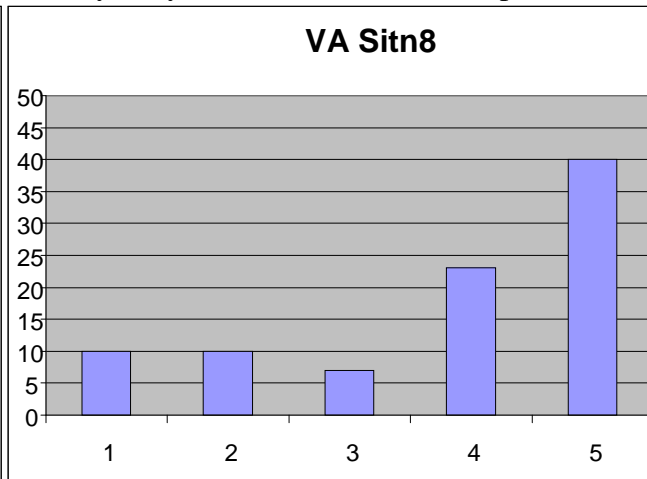
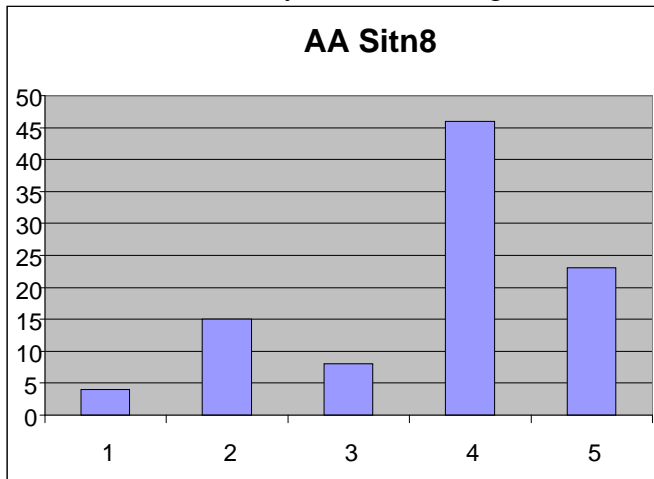
6a. You accidentally break your friend's vase. You apologise profusely but your friend becomes angry and shouts at you. How likely are you to be silent?



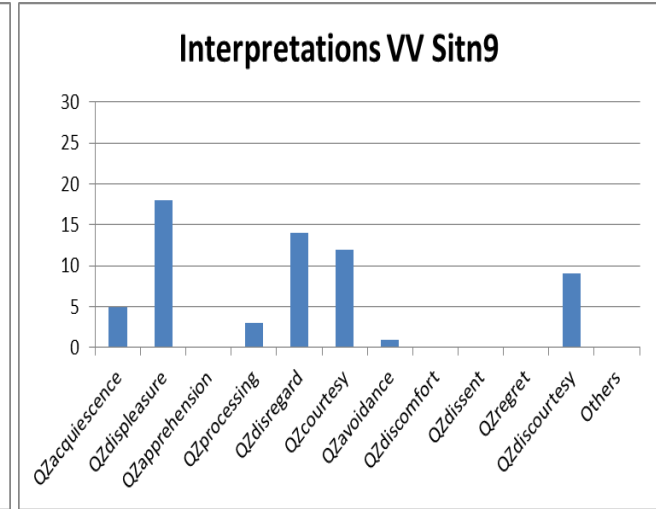
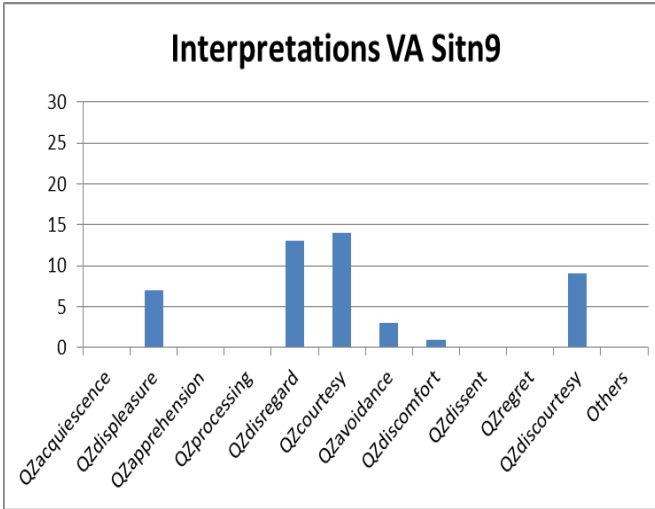
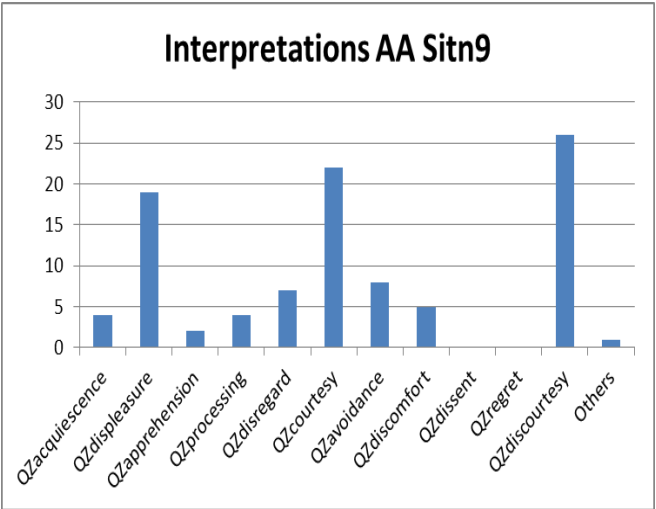
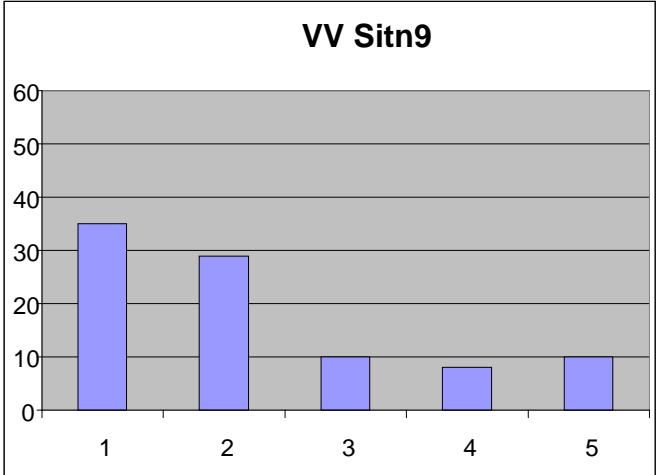
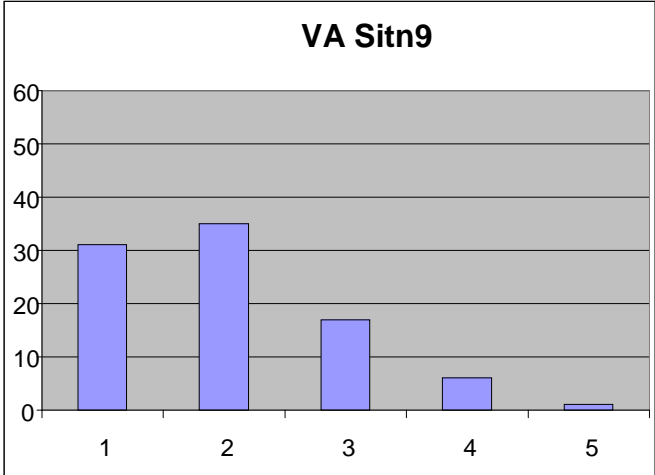
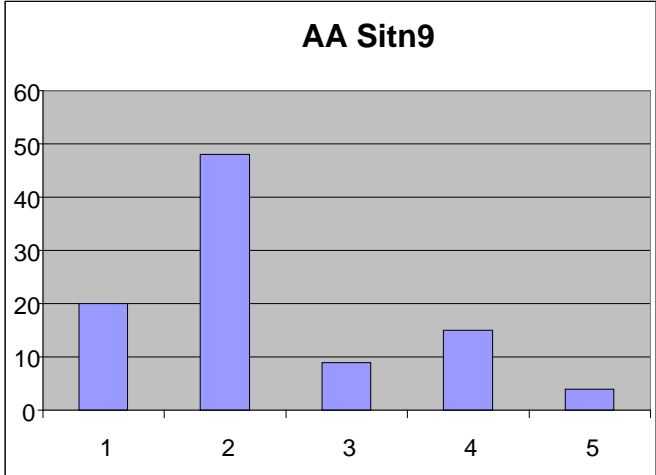
7a. On a bus, you are annoyed by a group of people who keep teasing you about your appearance. How likely are you to be silent?



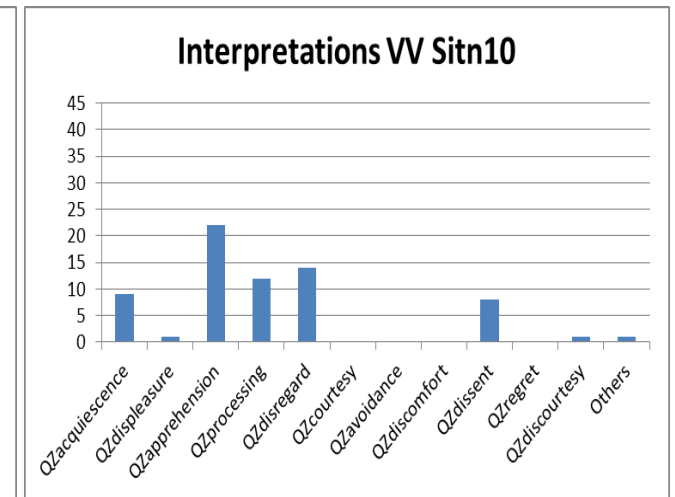
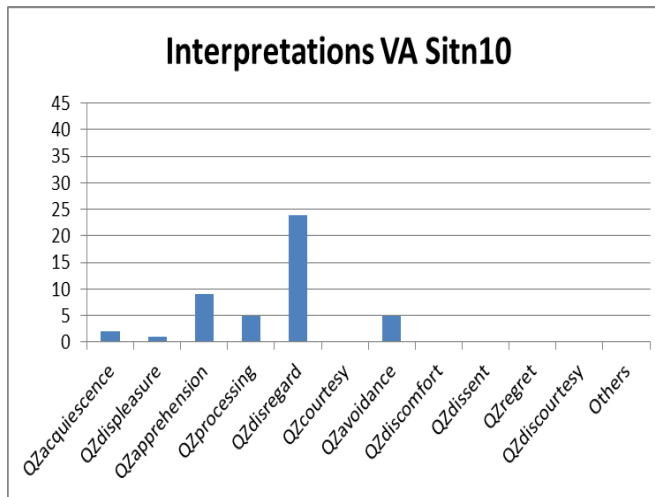
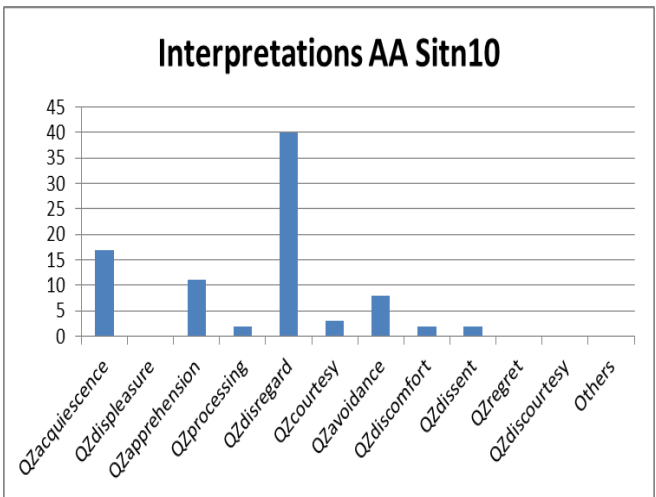
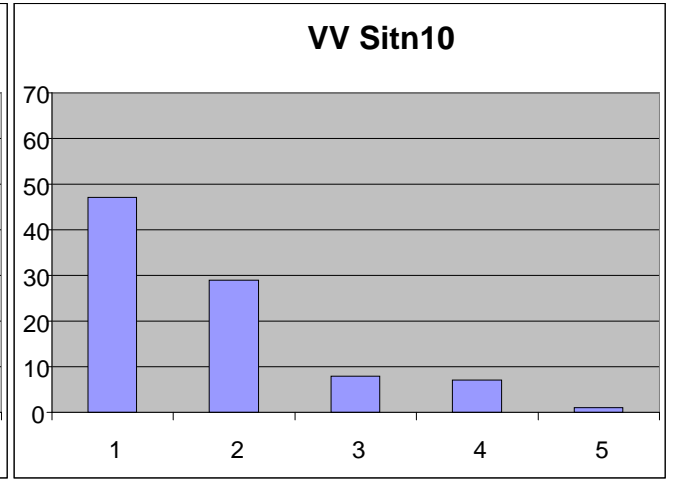
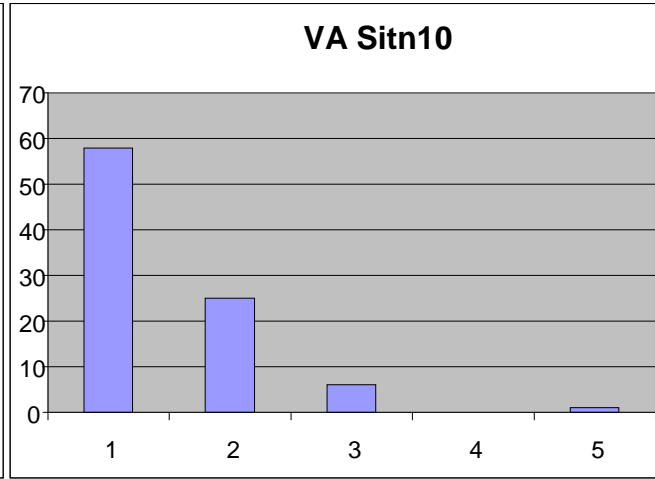
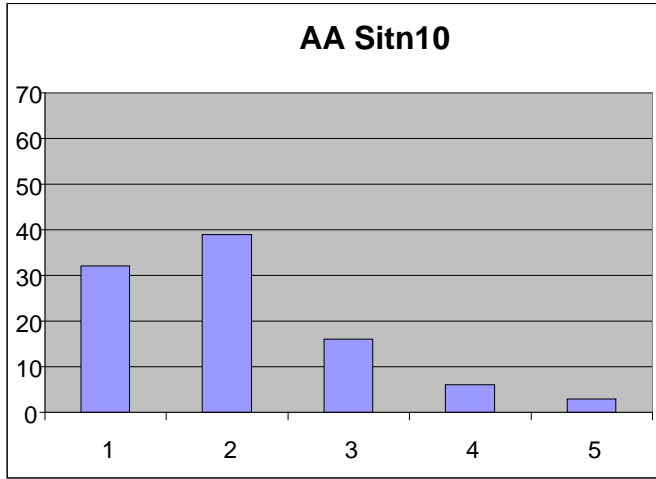
8a. You are a graduate student and you are late to class. You explain that you were stuck in a traffic jam and your teacher allows you in. However, the teacher still criticizes you for not being on time. How likely are you to remain silent in response?



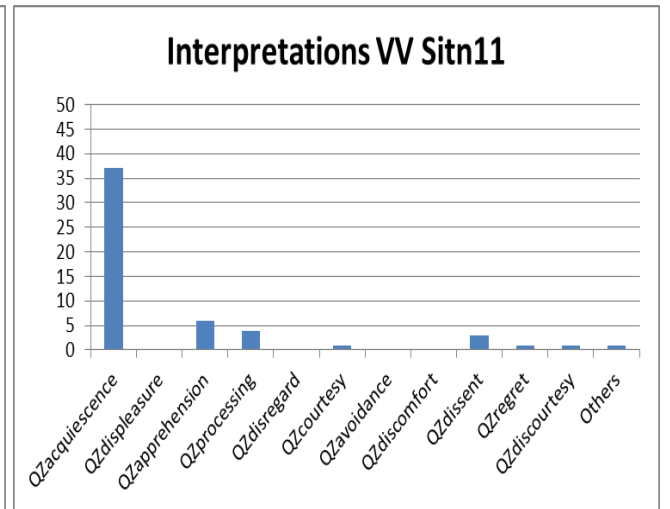
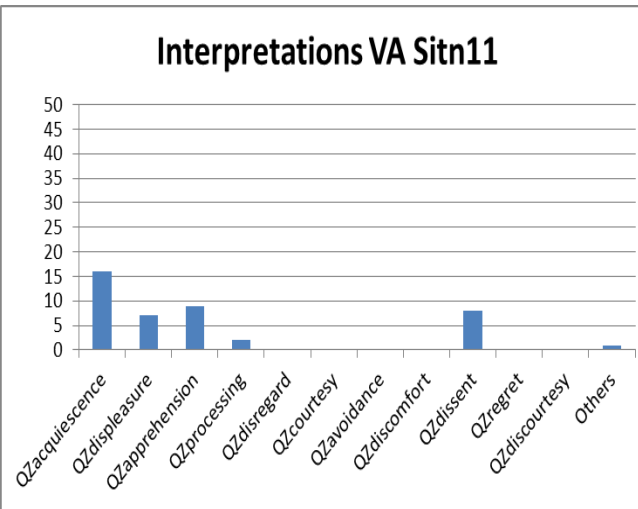
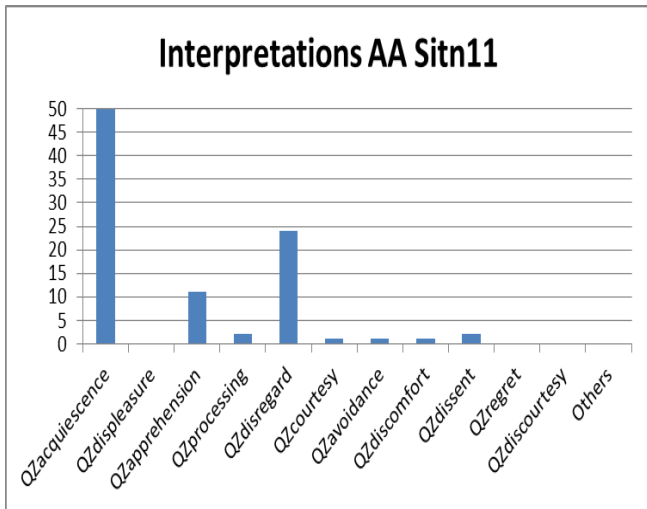
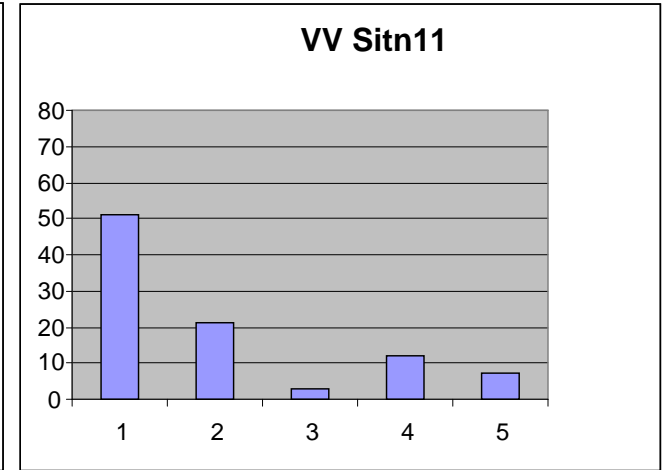
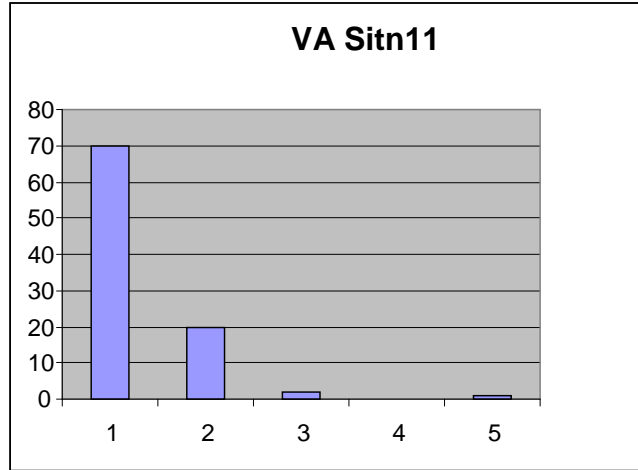
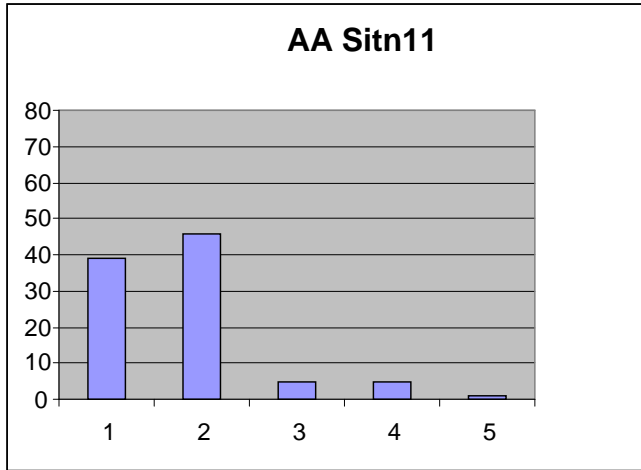
9a. Your housemate has just finished getting ready to go to a party and is wearing a shirt that you do not like at all. S/he asks if the shirt looks good. How likely are you to be silent?



10a. In a class discussion, you disagree with your classmates. How likely are you to be silent?

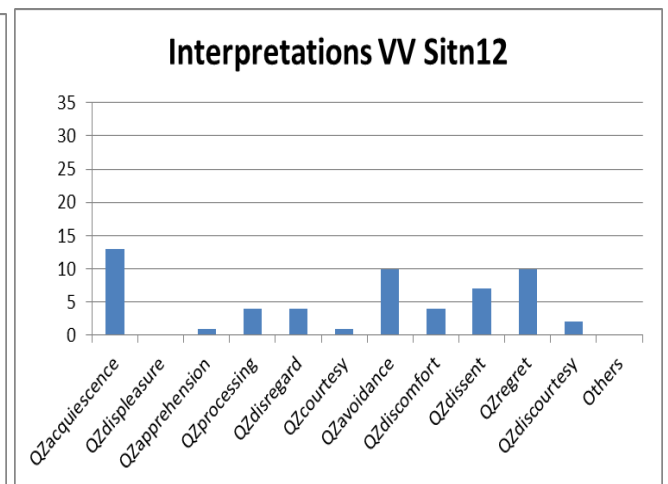
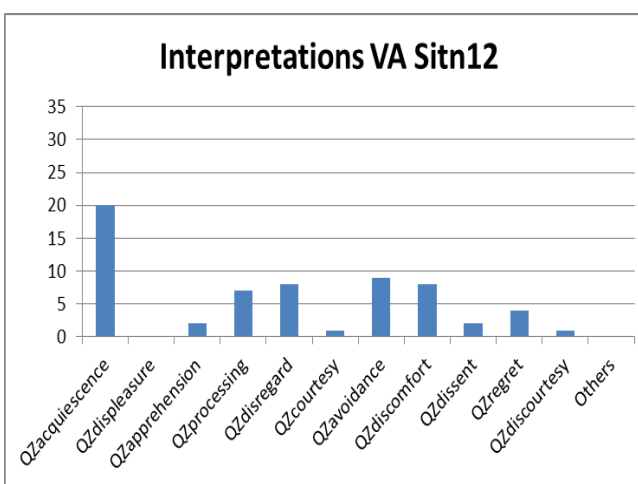
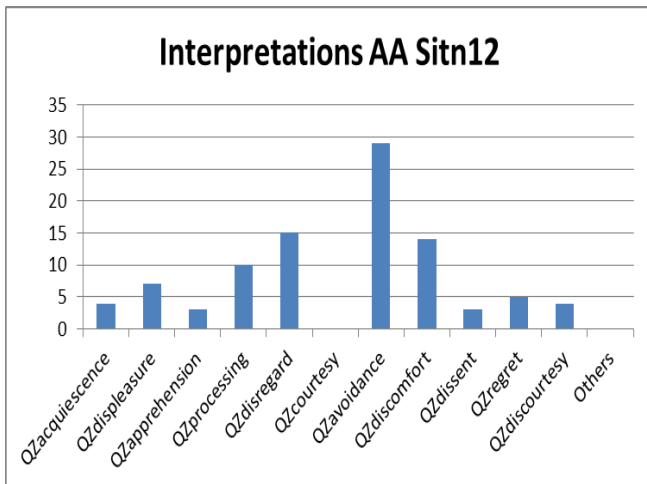
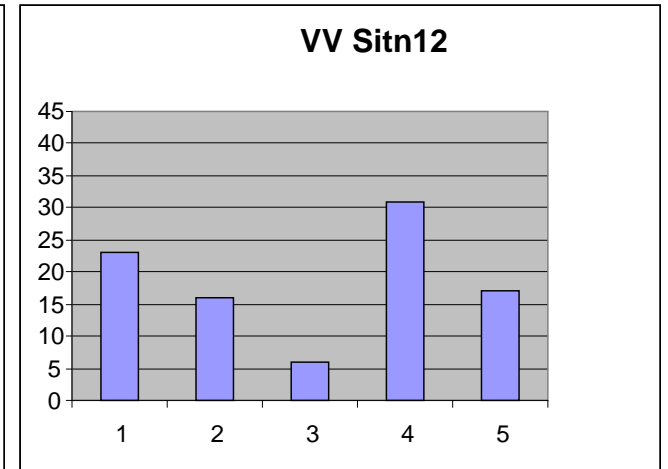
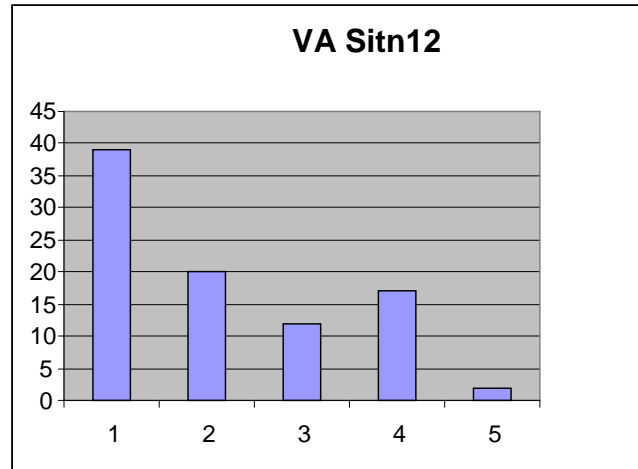
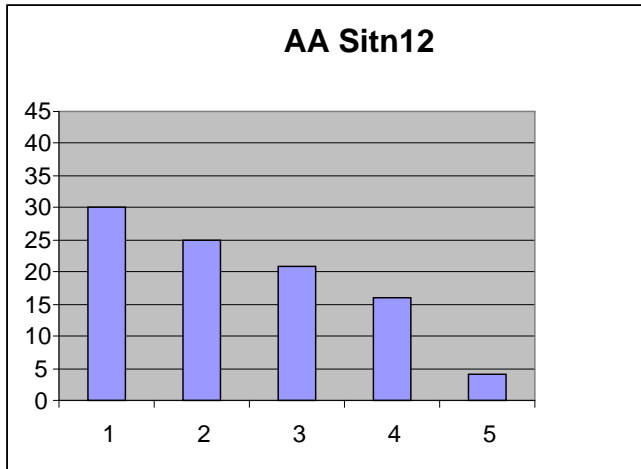


11a. You are working in an office. The boss just gave you a difficult task that involves writing a sales report in two days. You have not got enough data to write it up. How likely are you to be silent?

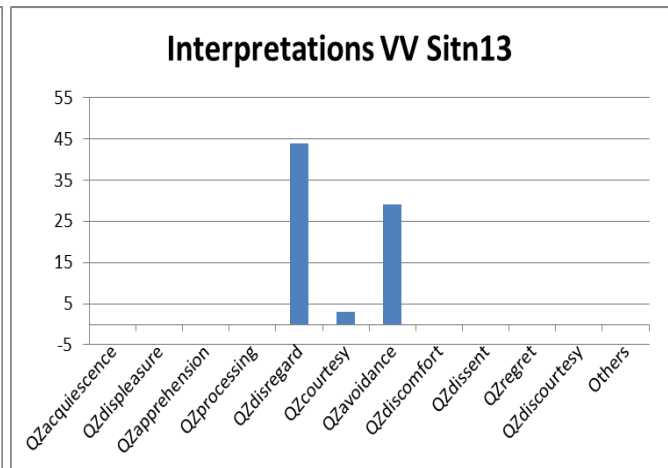
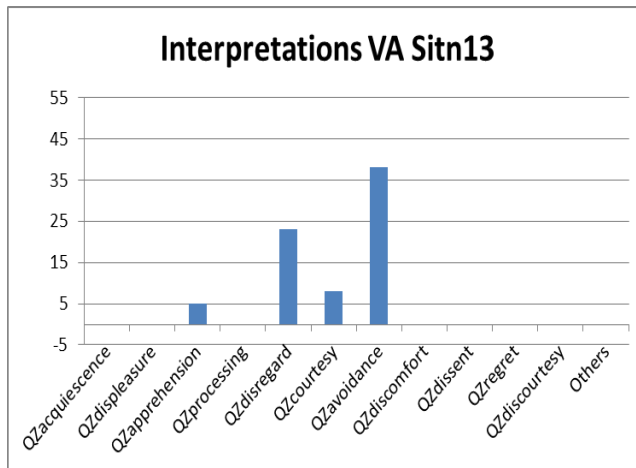
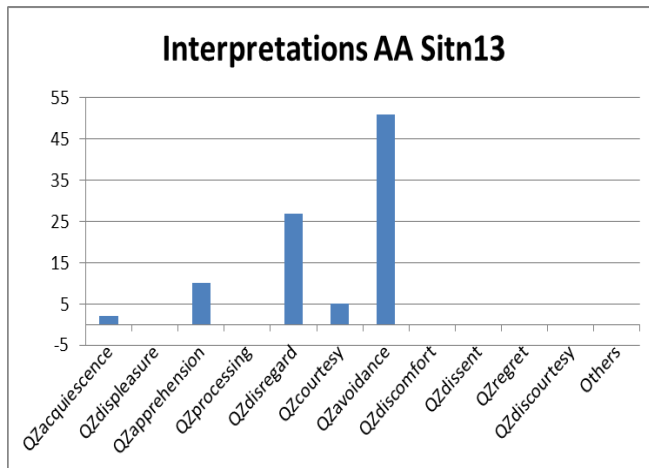
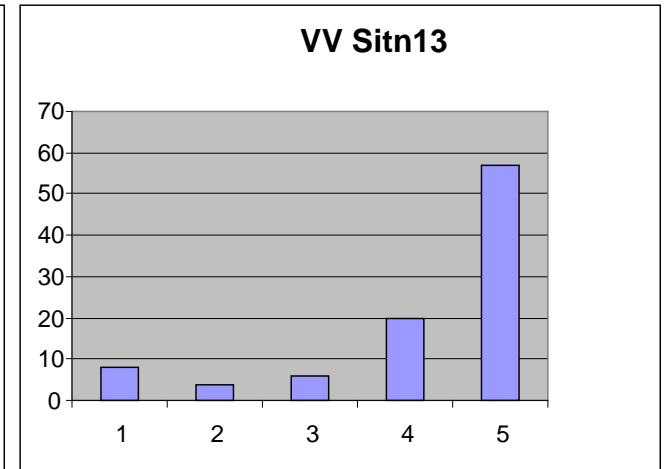
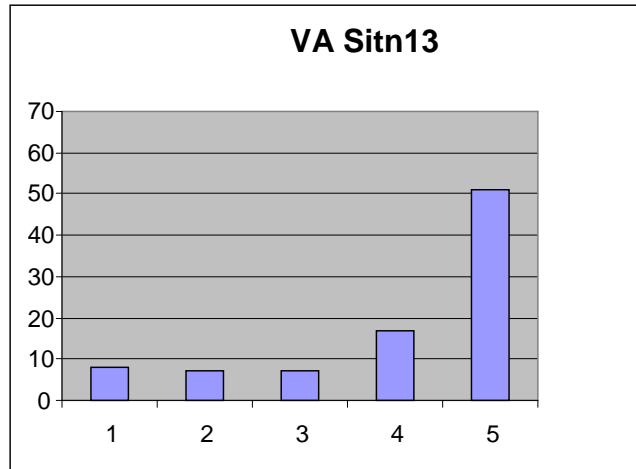
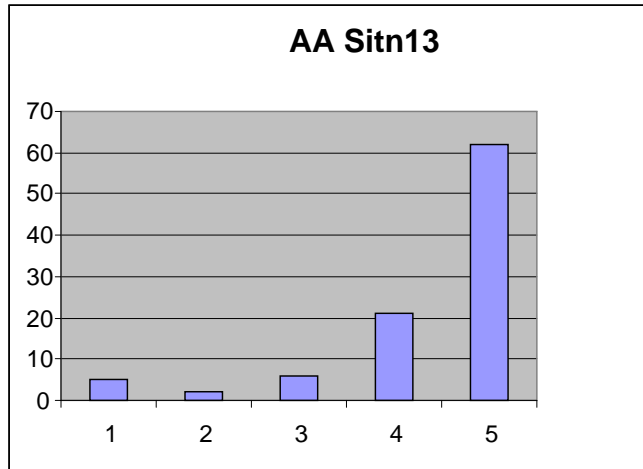




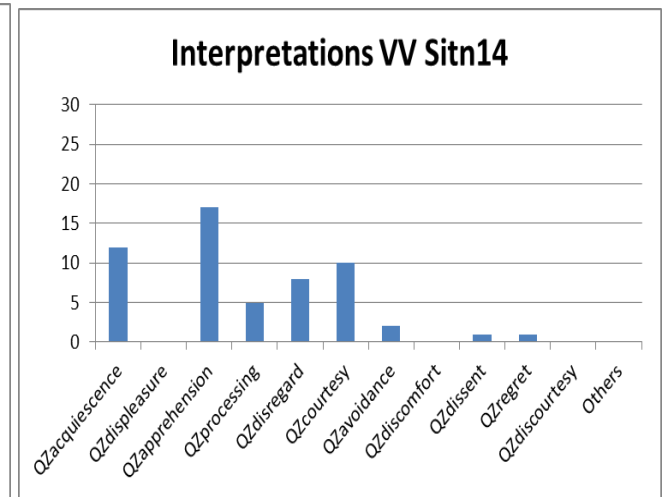
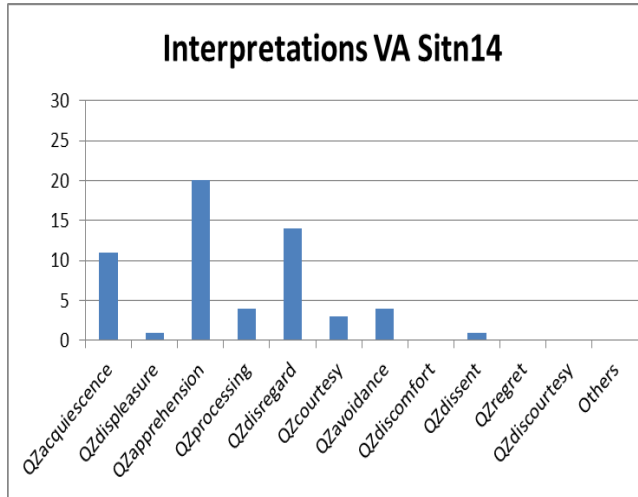
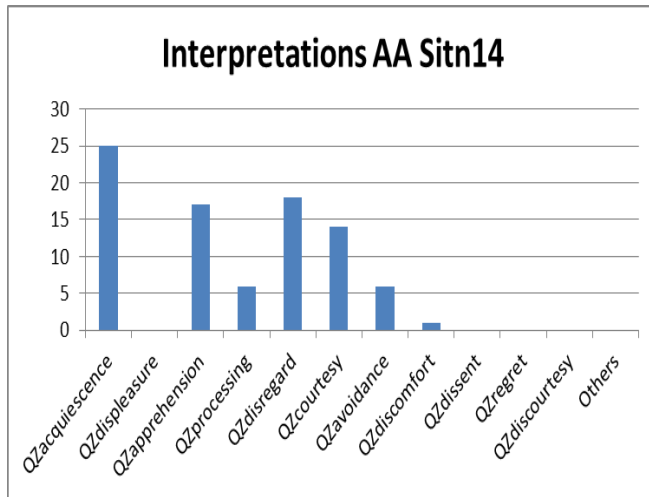
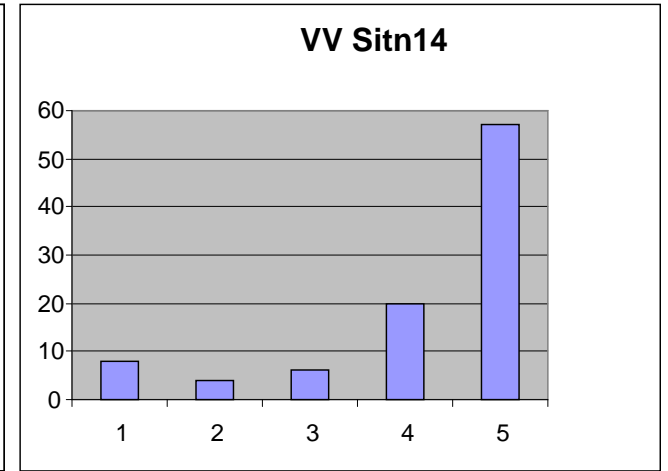
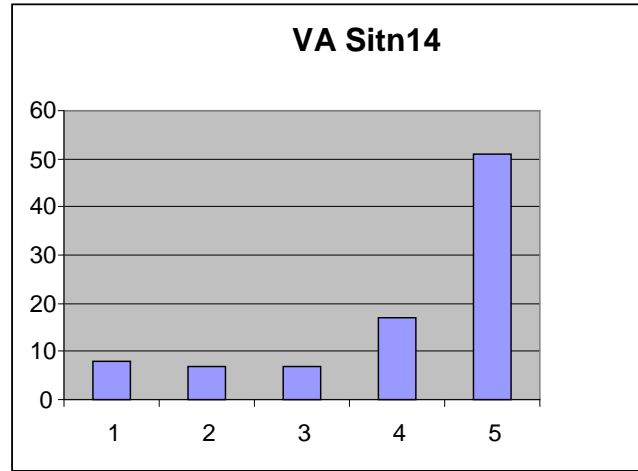
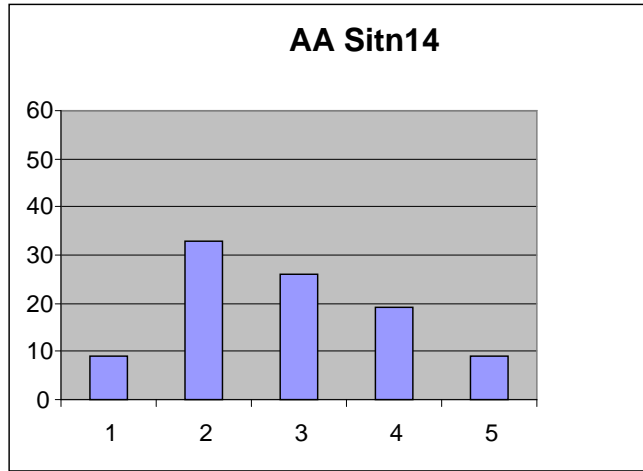
12a. You broke contact with your father a long time ago. One day, you meet your brother. In the conversation, your brother says that Dad misses you very much and asks if you still keep in touch with him. How likely are you to respond to your brother with silence?



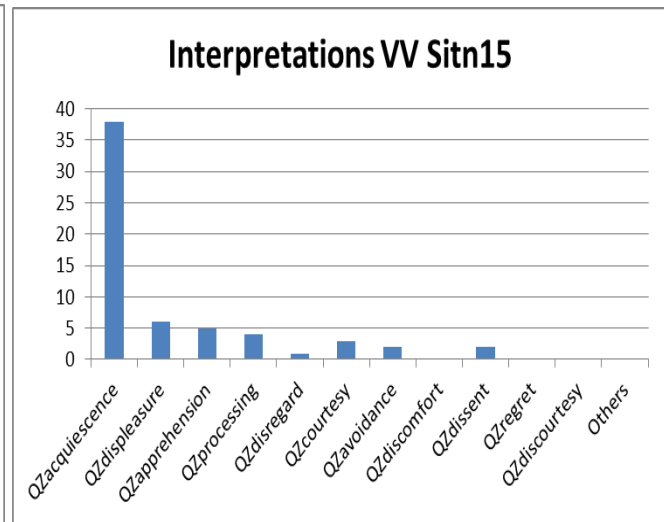
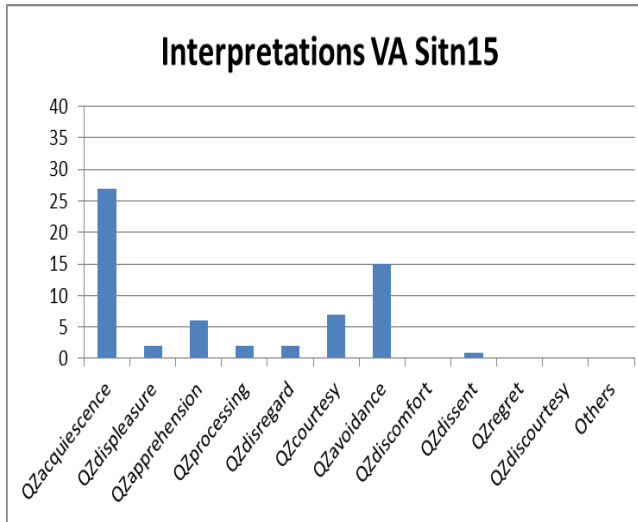
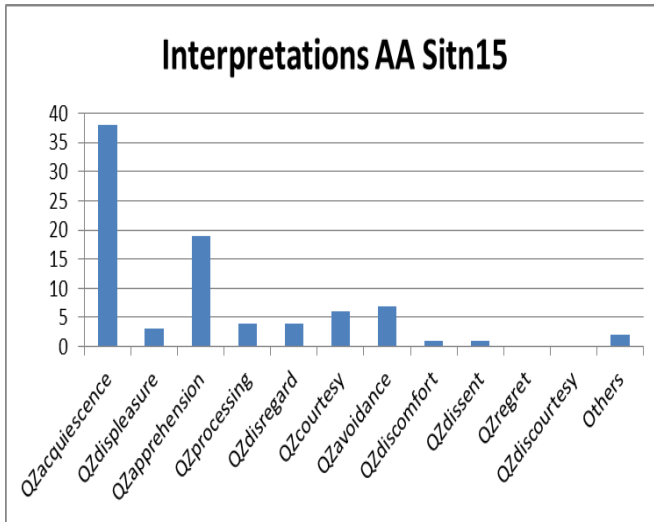
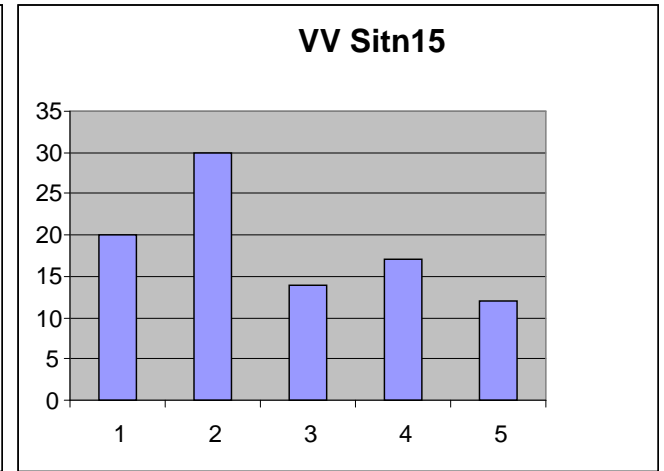
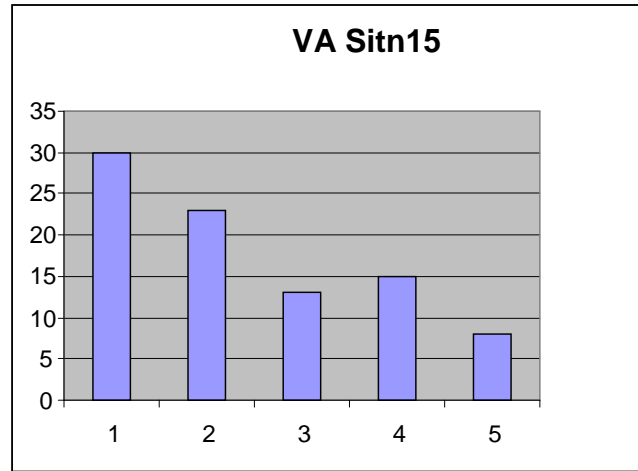
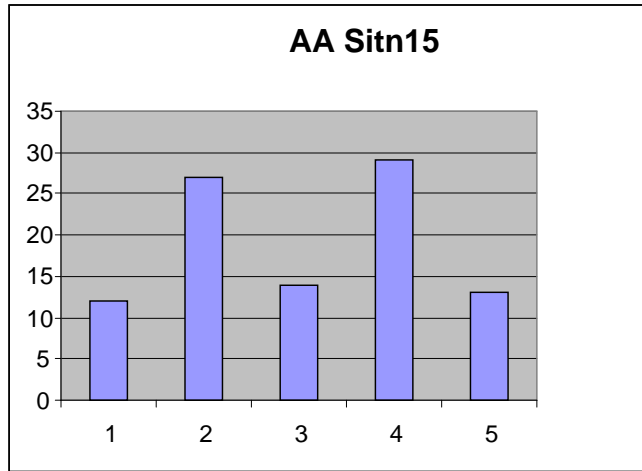
13a. You are in the city with a friend. Suddenly, a drunk and angry individual approaches you and starts yelling insults. How likely are you to remain silent when being shouted at? (for example walk away without saying anything).



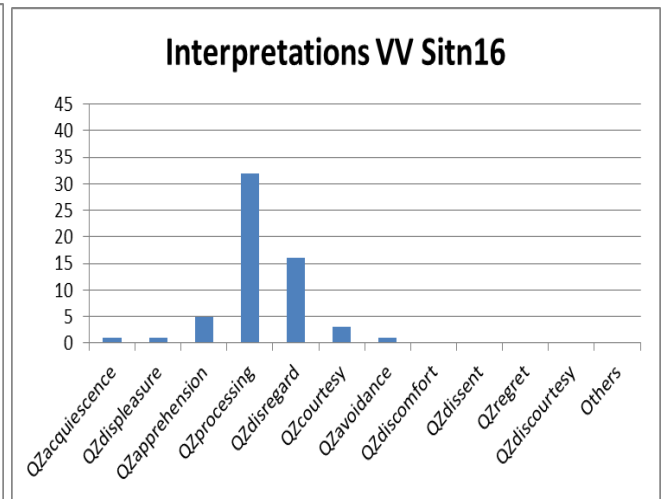
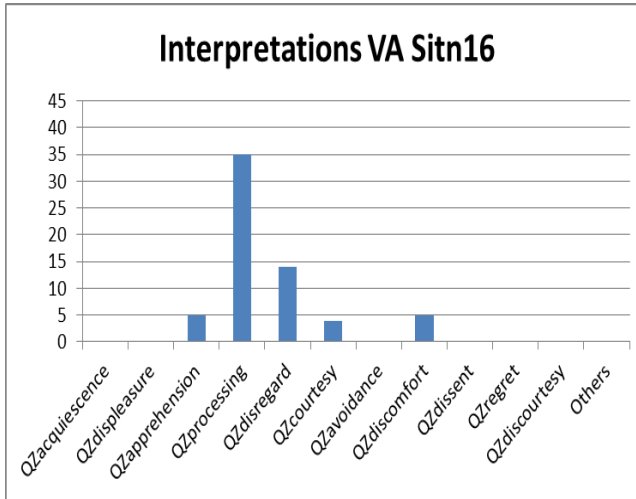
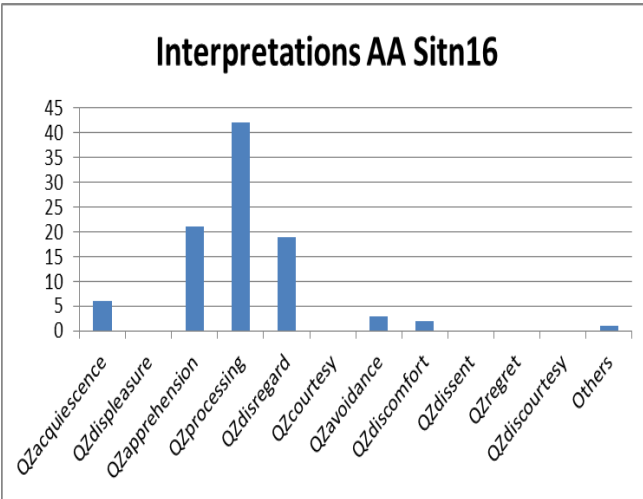
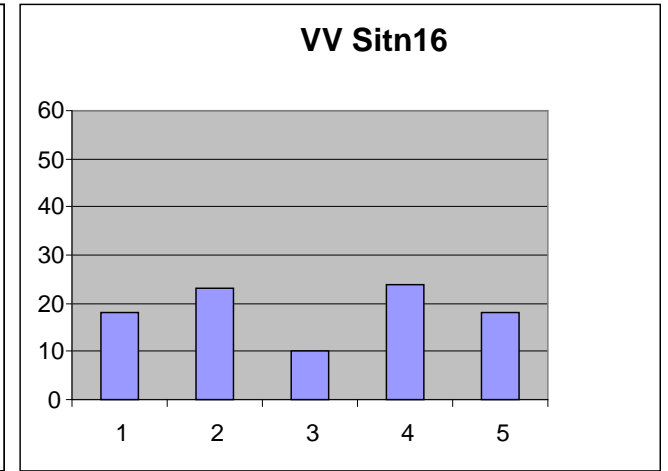
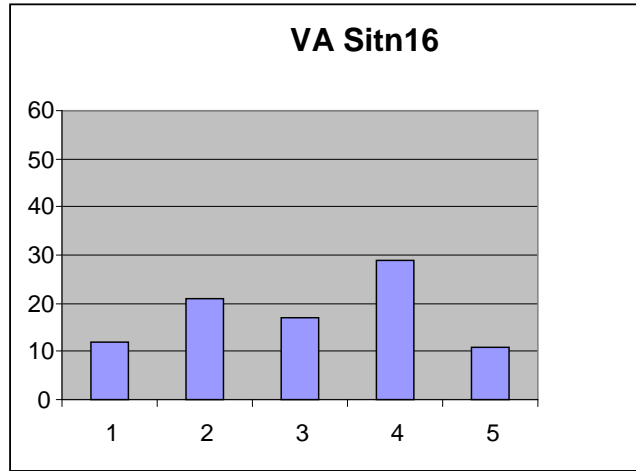
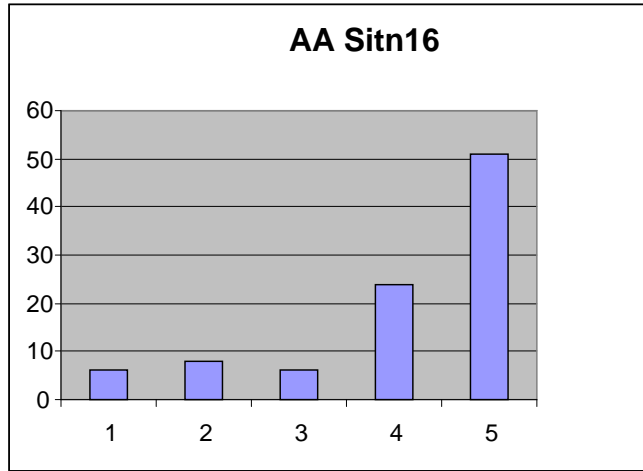
14a. In the class discussion, you disagree with your teacher. How likely are you to be silent?



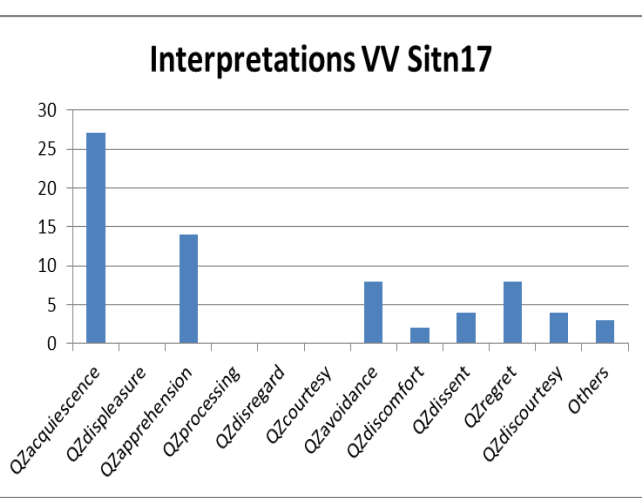
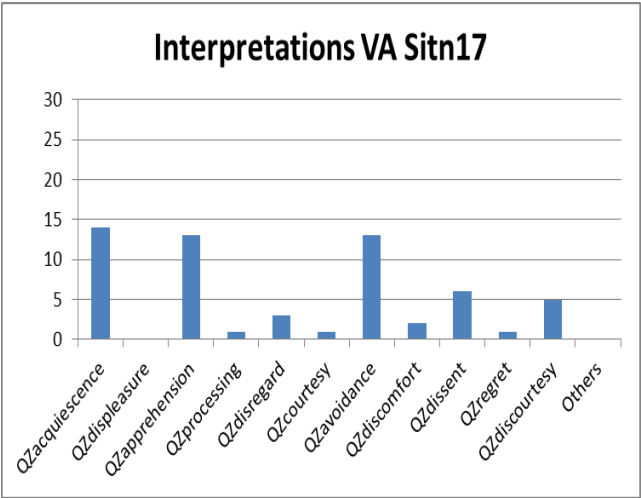
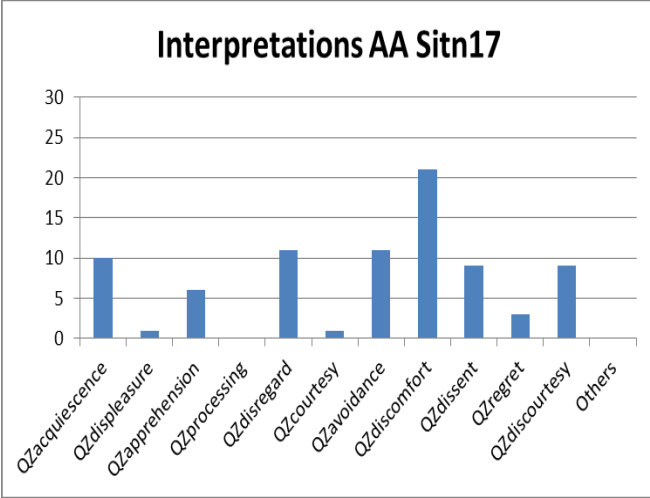
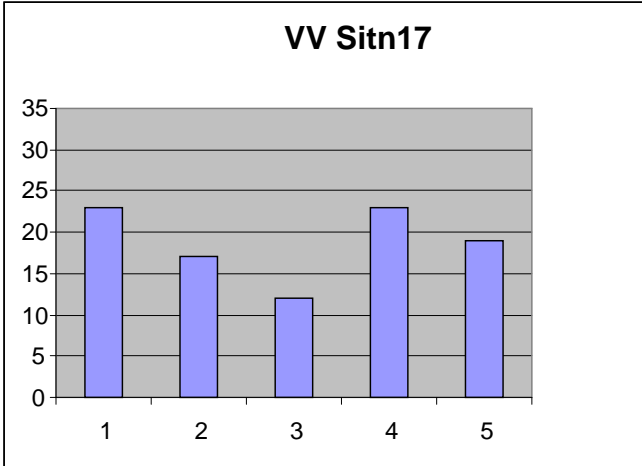
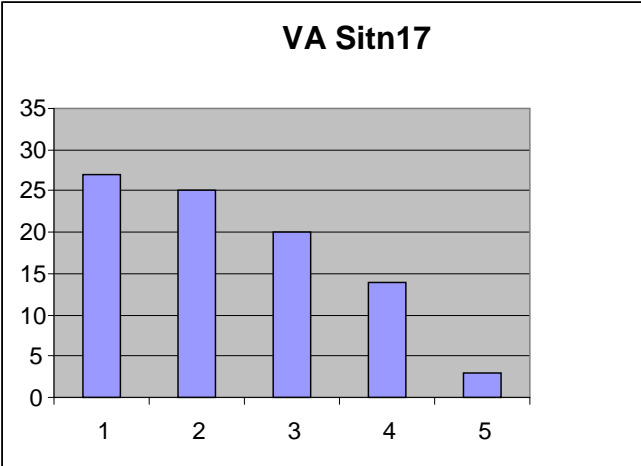
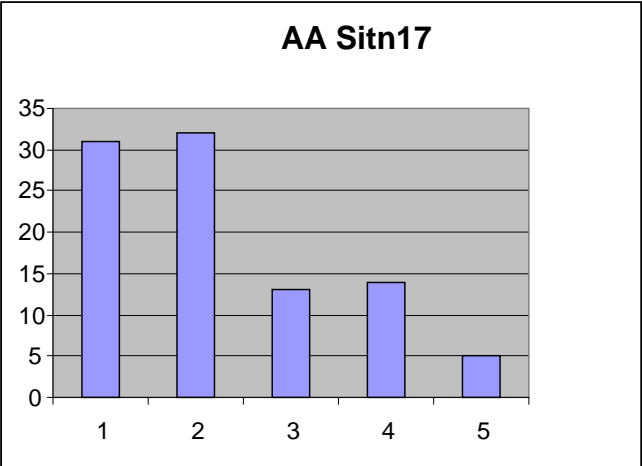
15a. The Head of the university department where you work calls a staff meeting. S/he criticizes each teacher's performance individually, even you. This is your first semester and you feel particularly angry because you have taught every class you had been scheduled to teach, and a number of others besides, and you think you have done a good job. How likely are you to be →



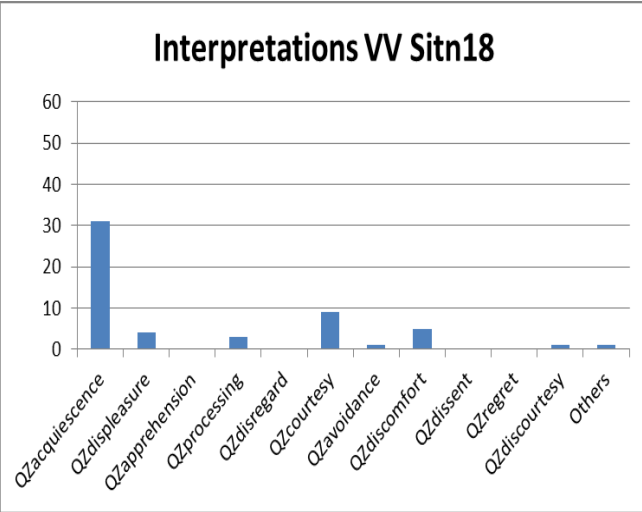
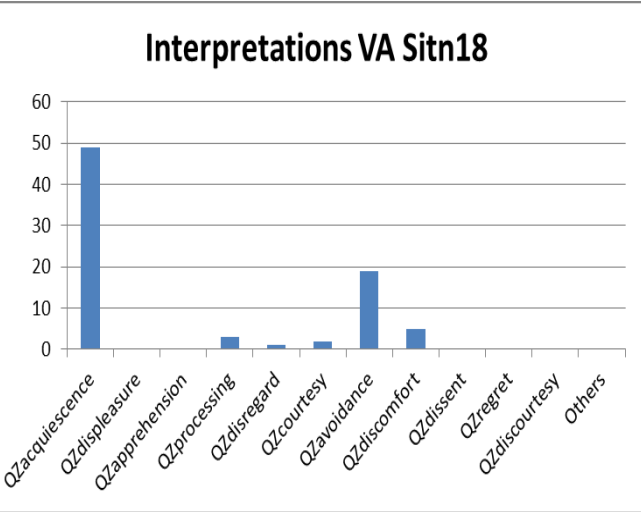
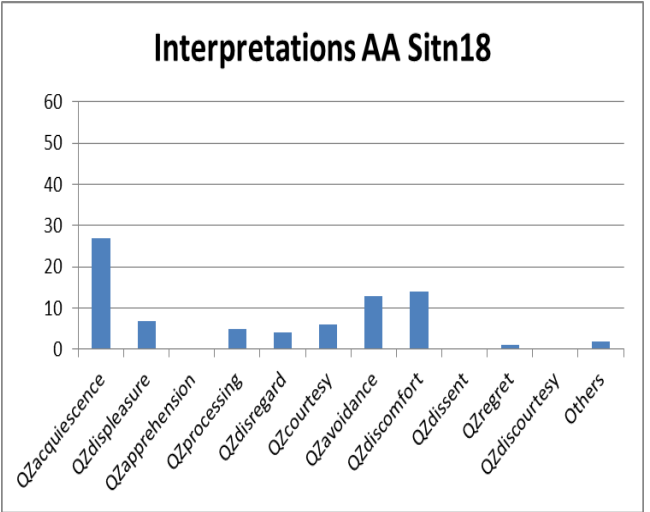
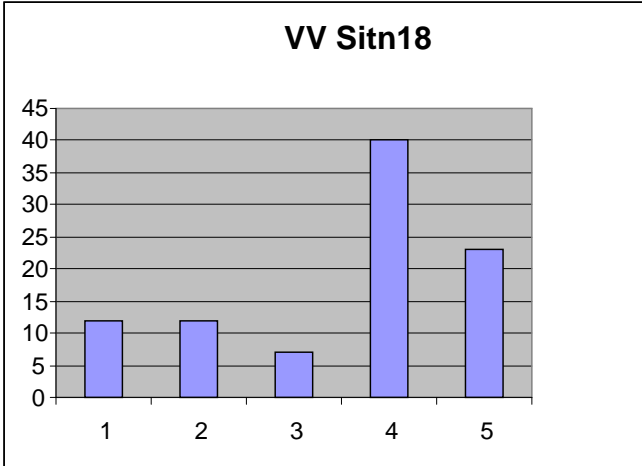
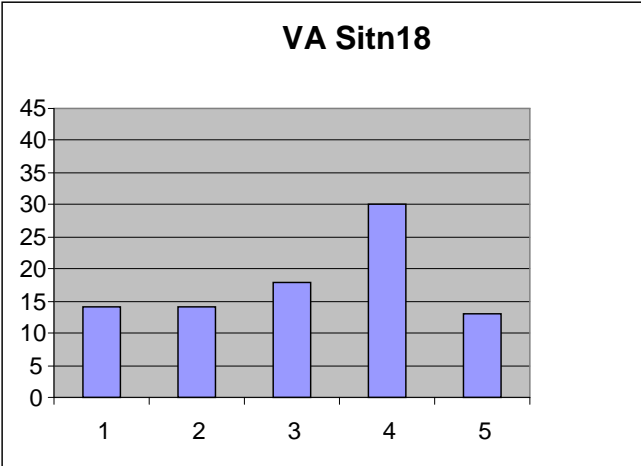
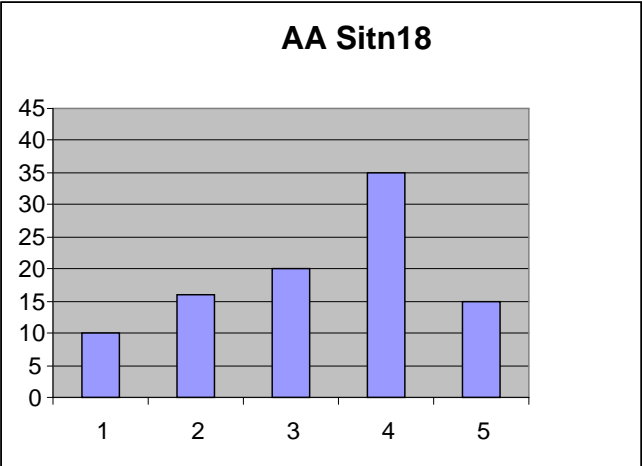
16a. The class discussion deals with a topic that you know little about. How likely are you to be silent?--> VA/ VV similar; AA likely to be silent.



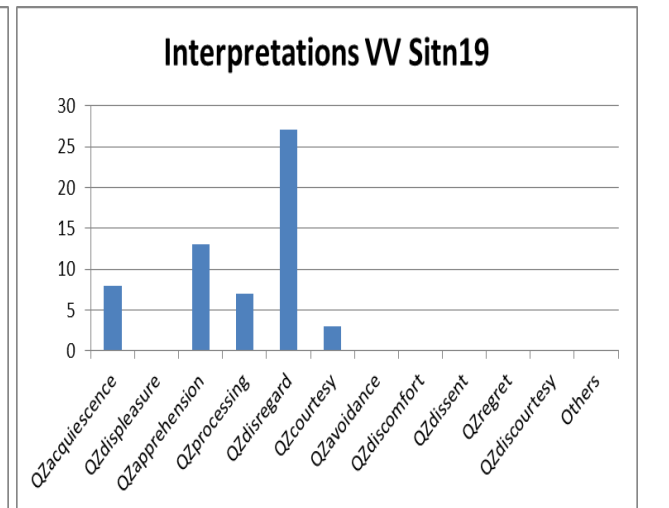
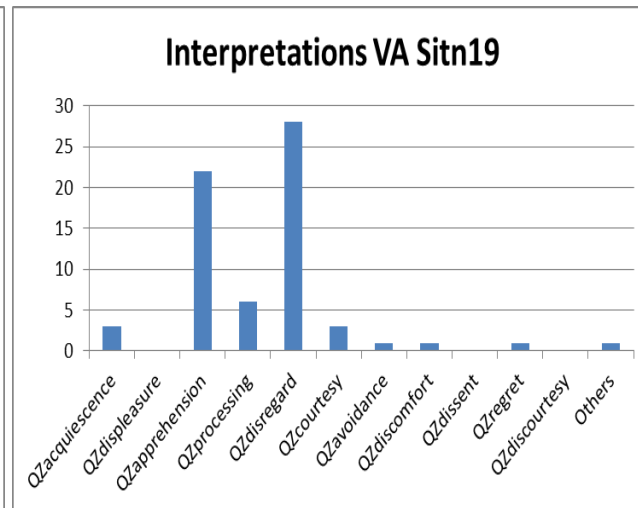
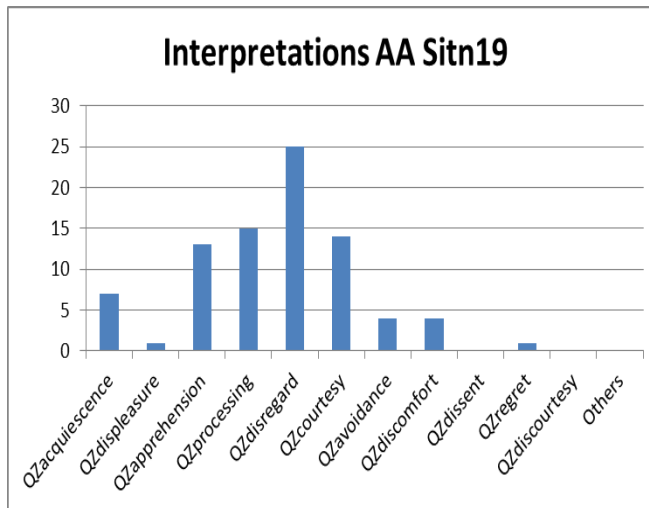
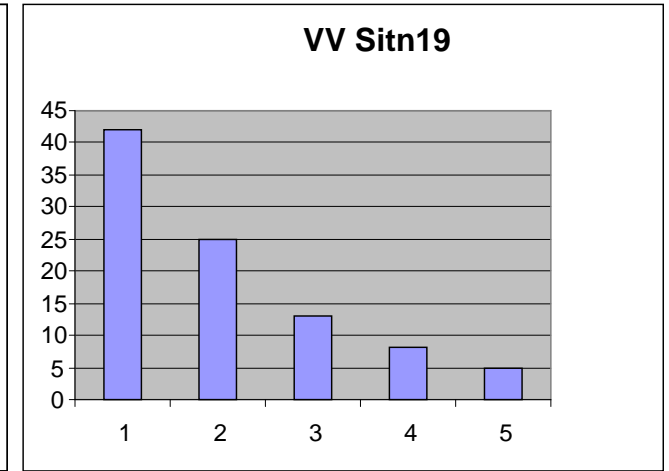
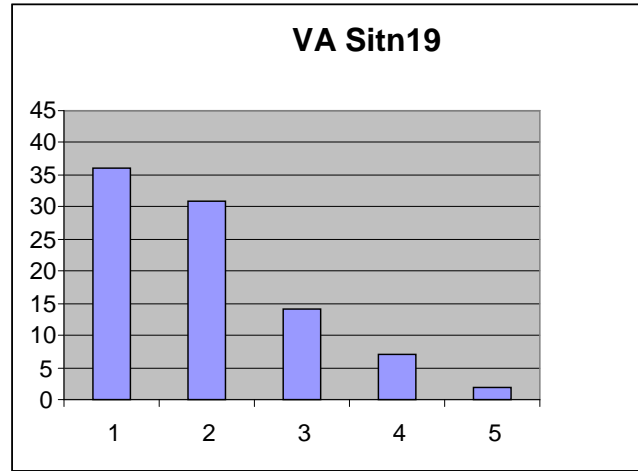
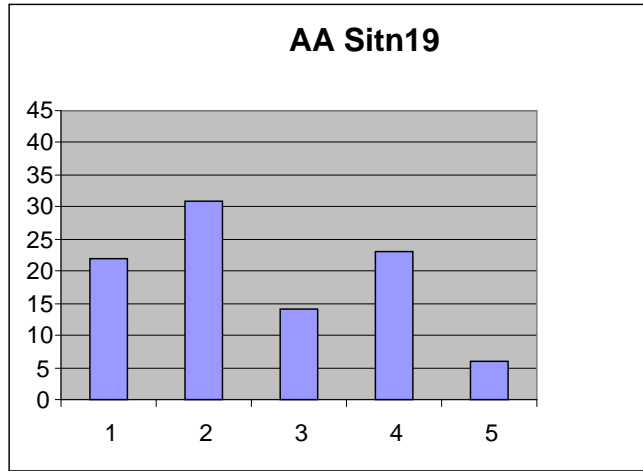
17a. Your father asks you to show him your study record for Maths in which you know you got a low mark. How likely are you to be silent rather than show him?



18a. In a conversation with your friends, you notice that you are the one who keeps talking while they do not respond to you very much. How likely are you to become silent in response to their silences?

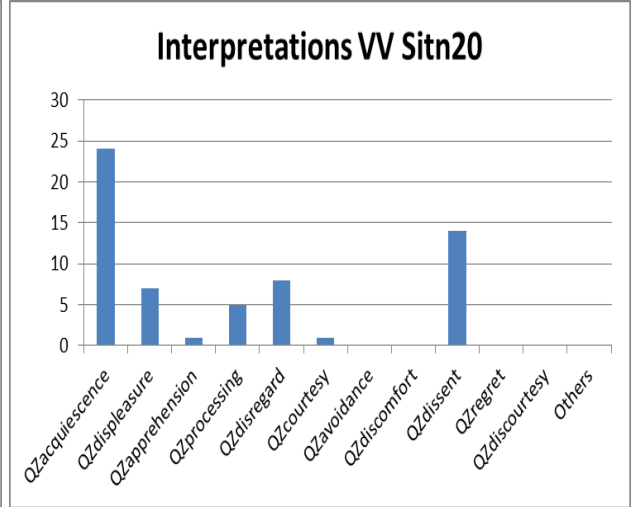
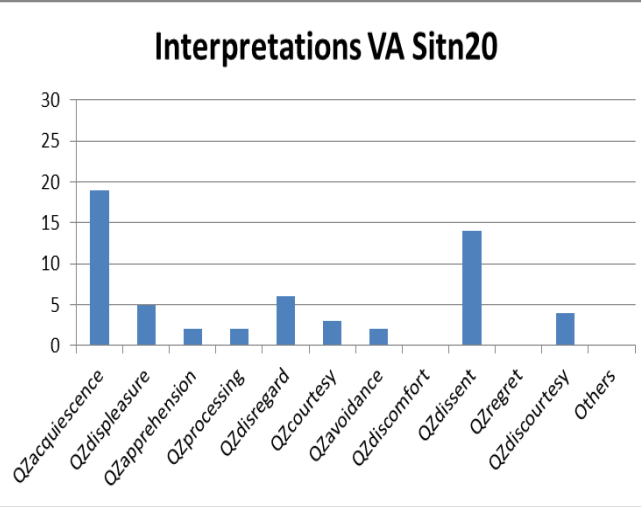
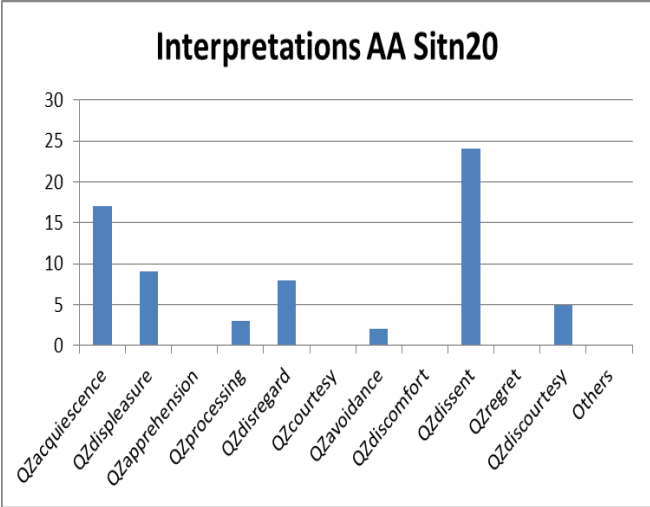
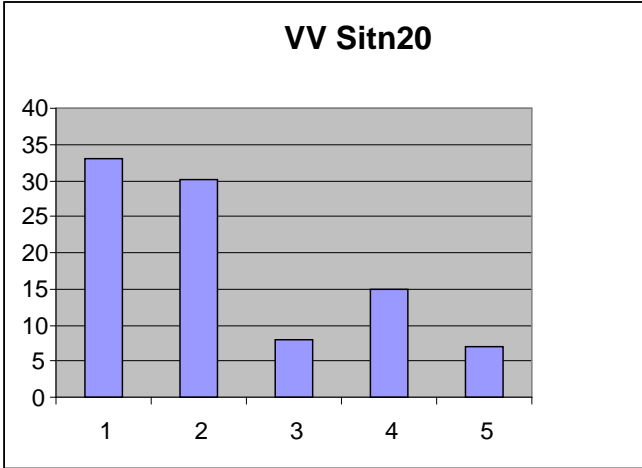
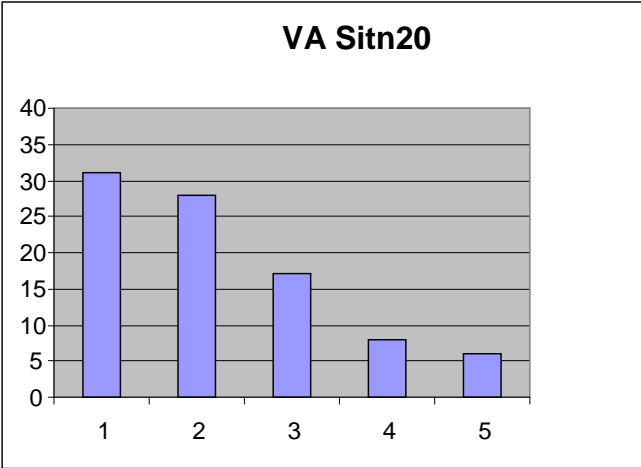
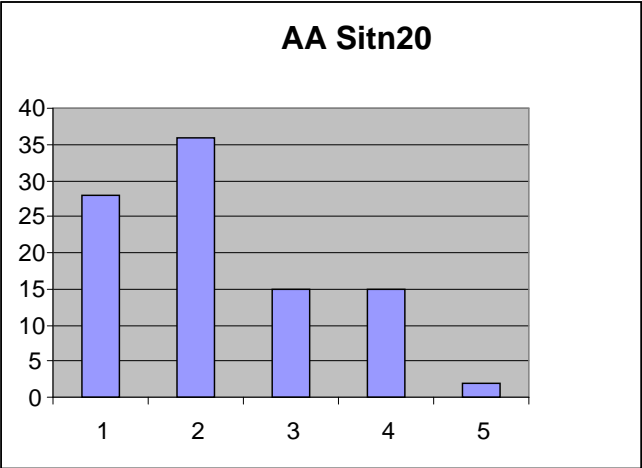


19a. In the class, your teacher speaks so quickly that you cannot understand. How likely are you to be silent?

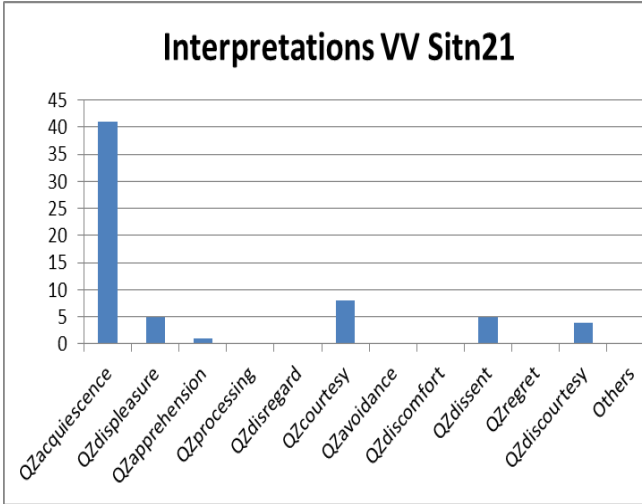
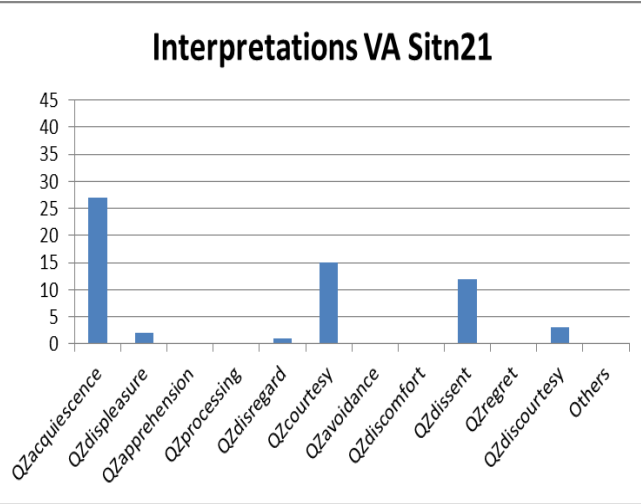
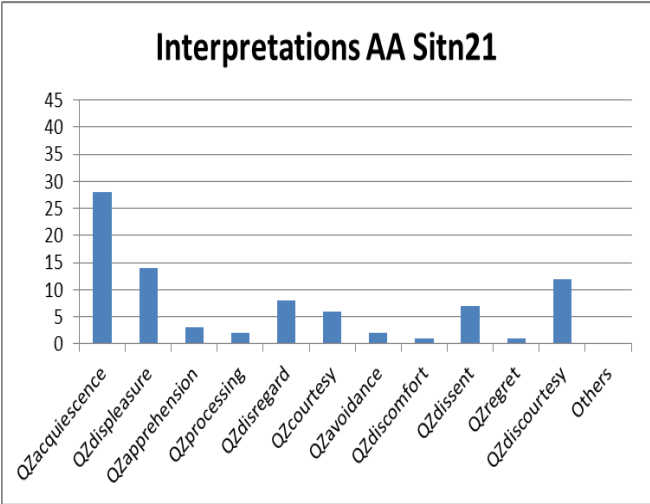
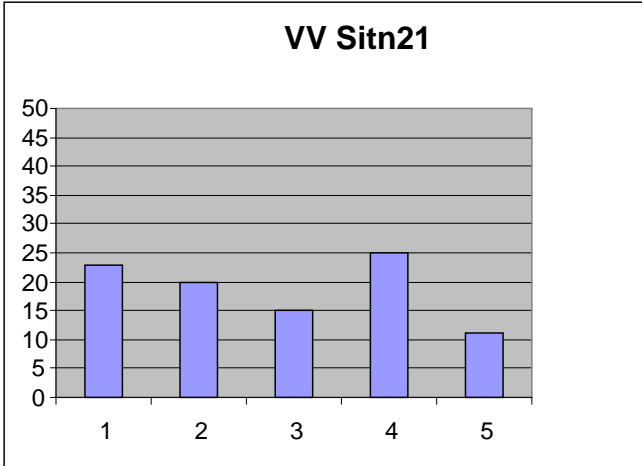
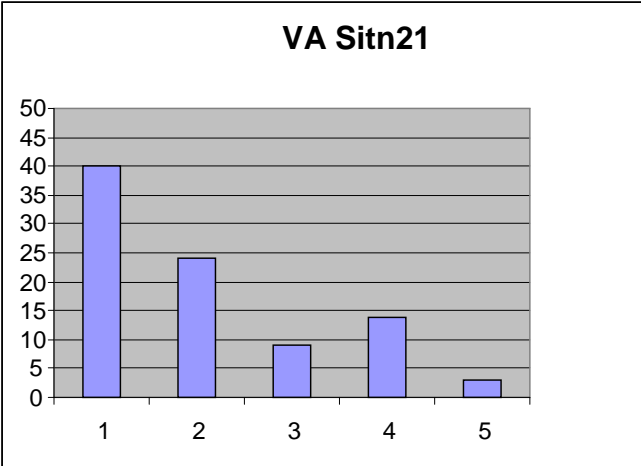
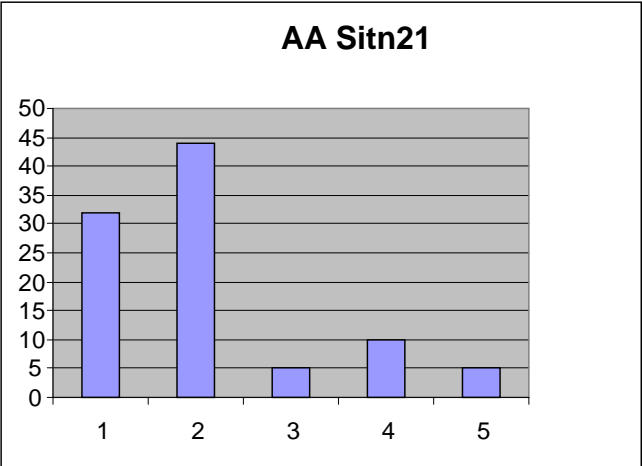




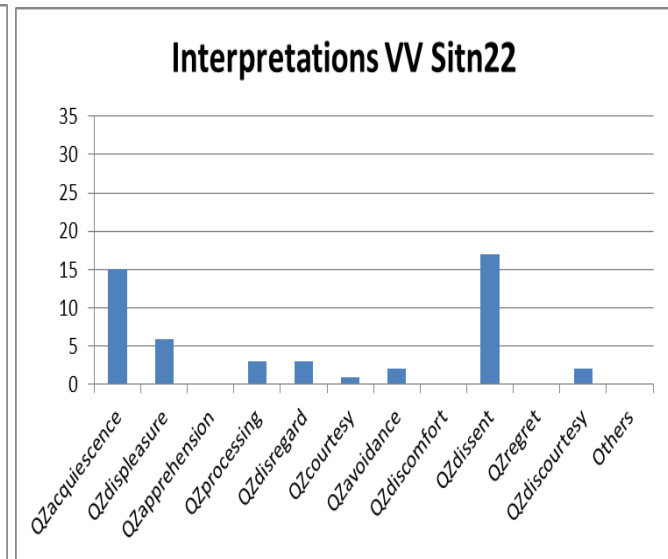
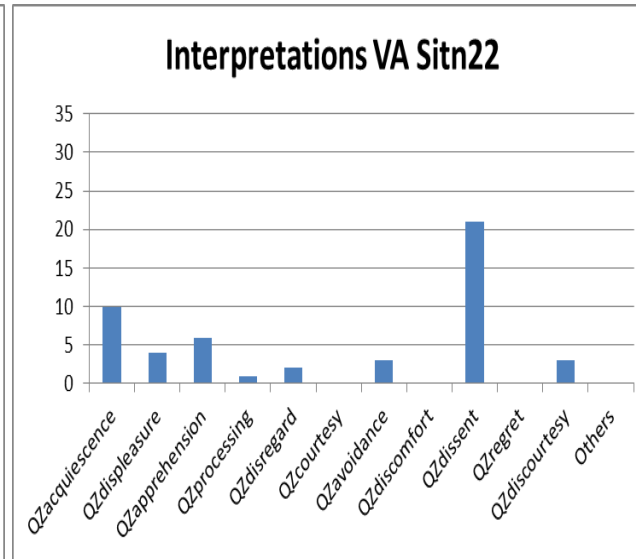
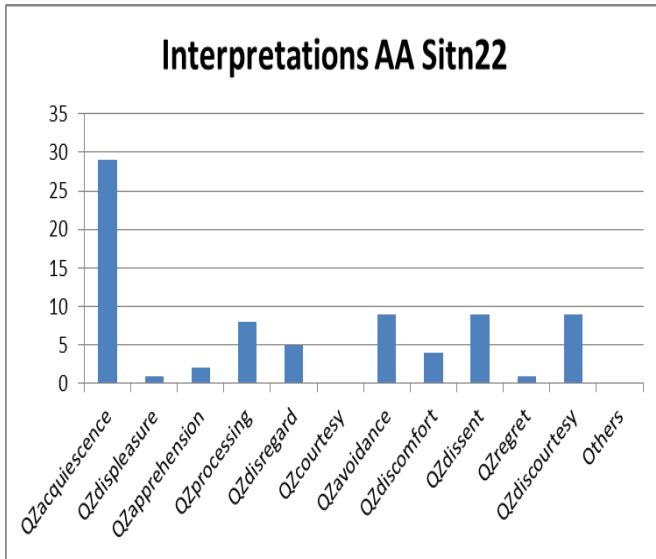
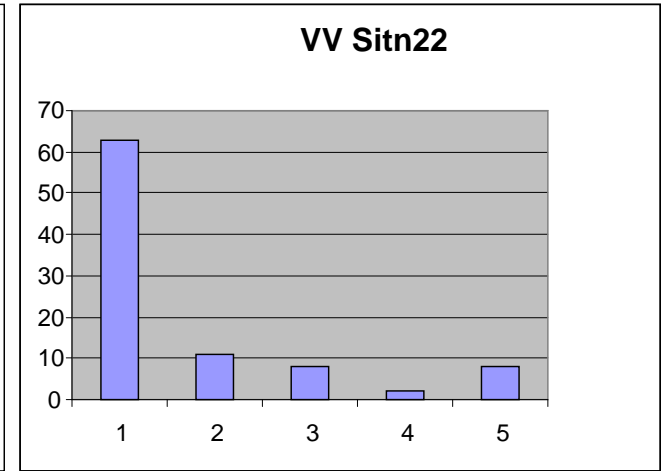
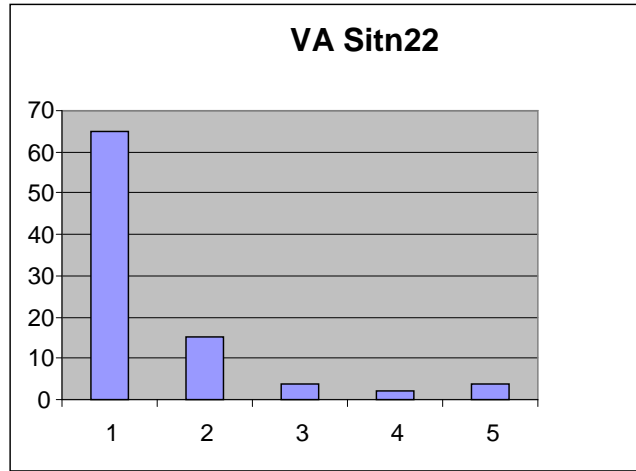
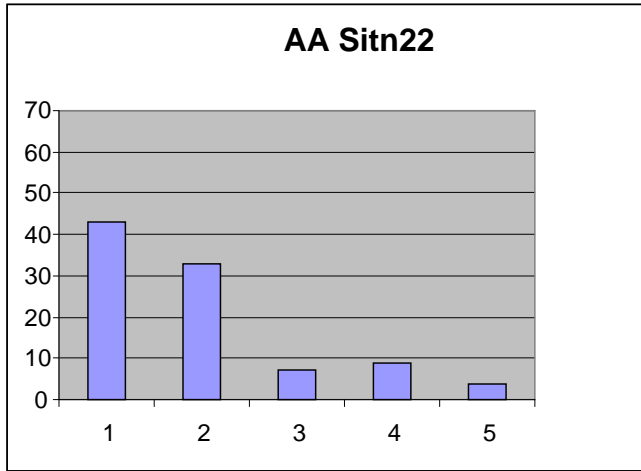
20a. While you regularly attend classes and take really good notes, your classmate often misses class. The exam is coming and your classmate comes to see you and ask you for the lecture notes. How likely are you to be silent?



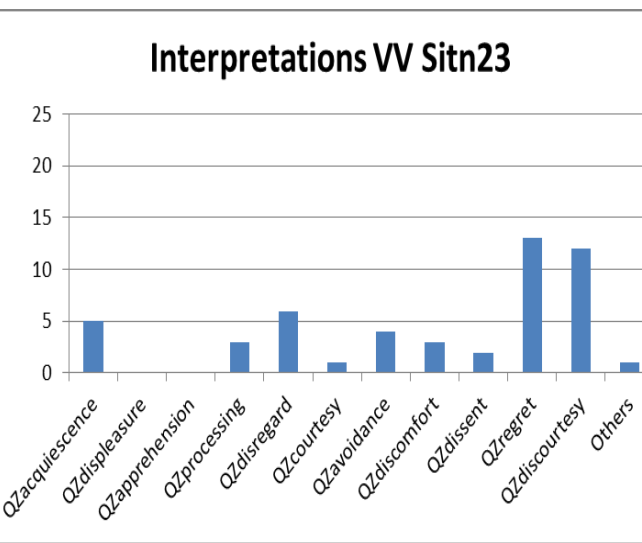
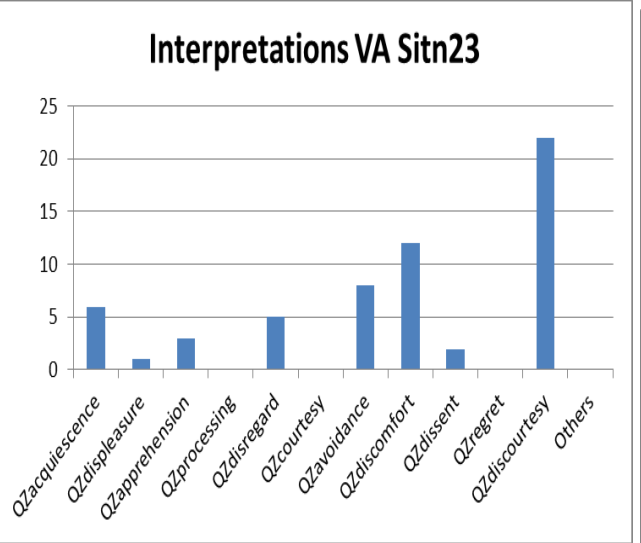
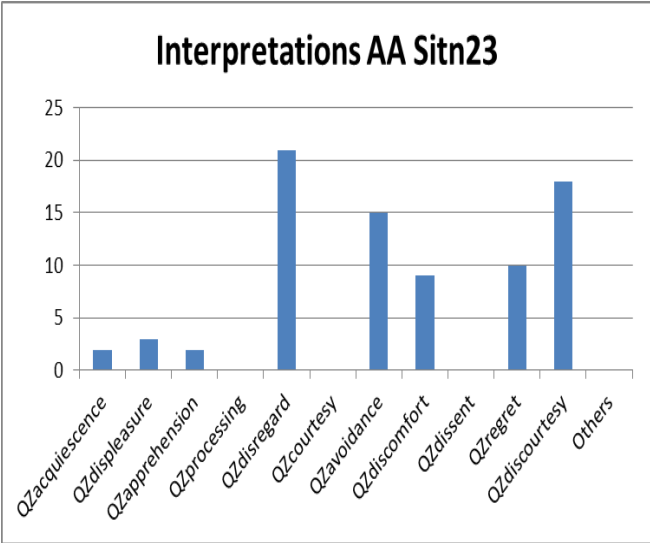
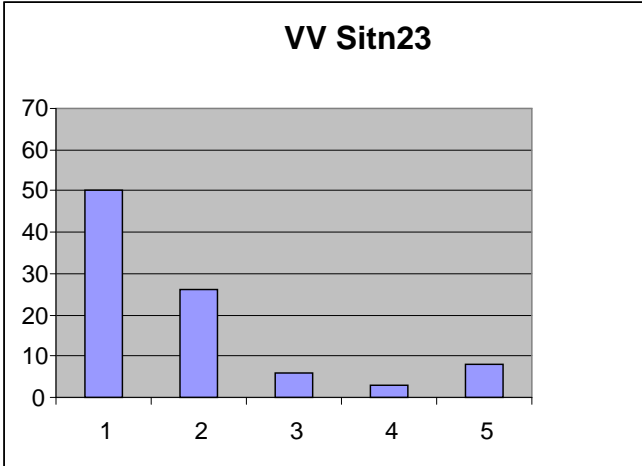
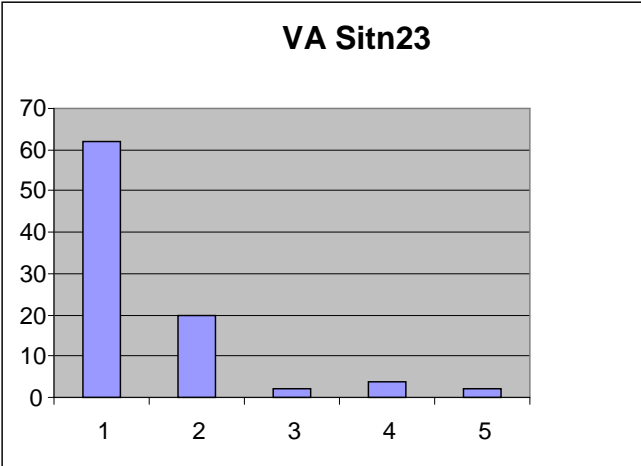
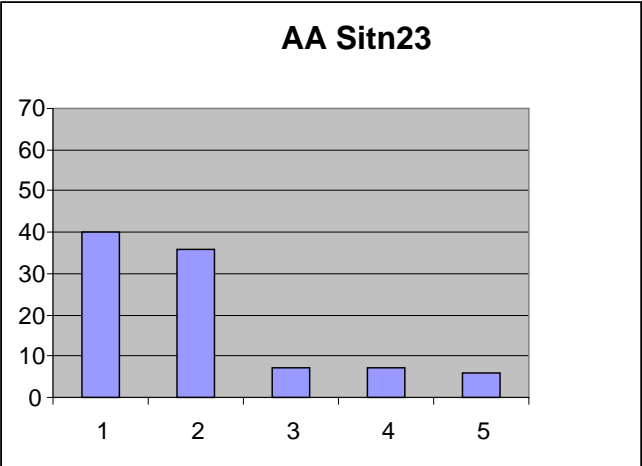
21a. You are at a friend's house watching TV. The friend offers you a snack. You say that you have just had dinner. However, your friend presses you twice to eat. How likely are you to be silent?



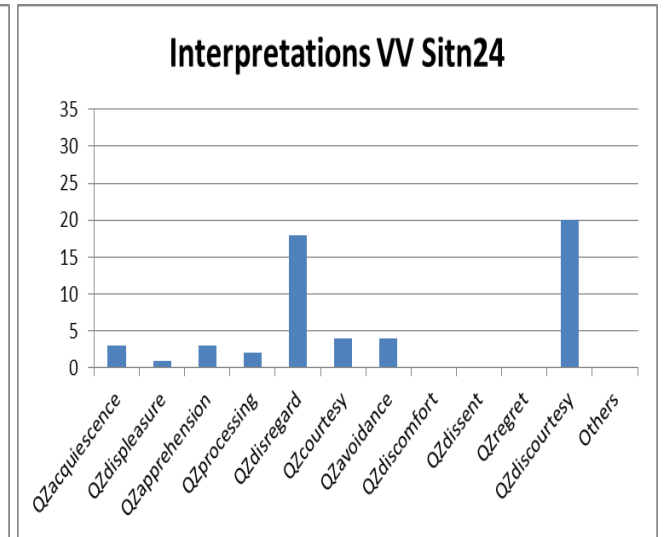
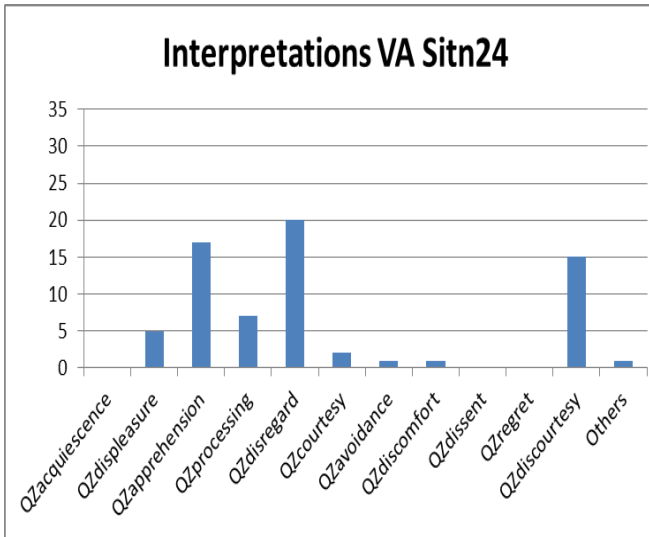
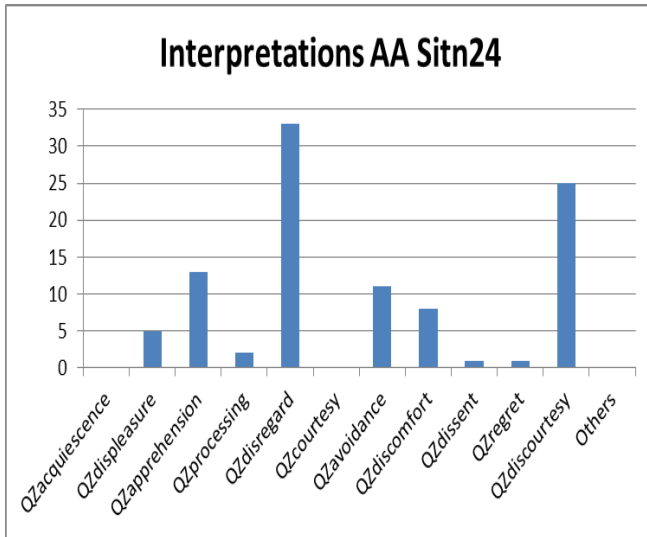
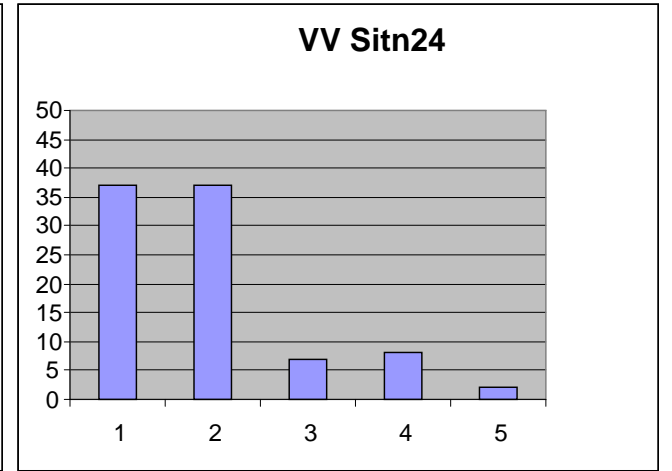
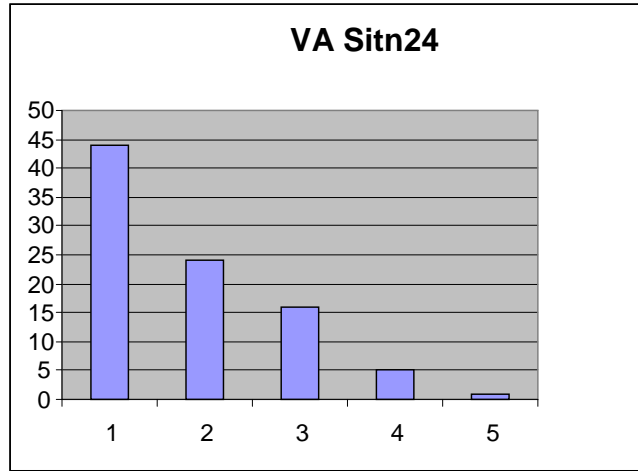
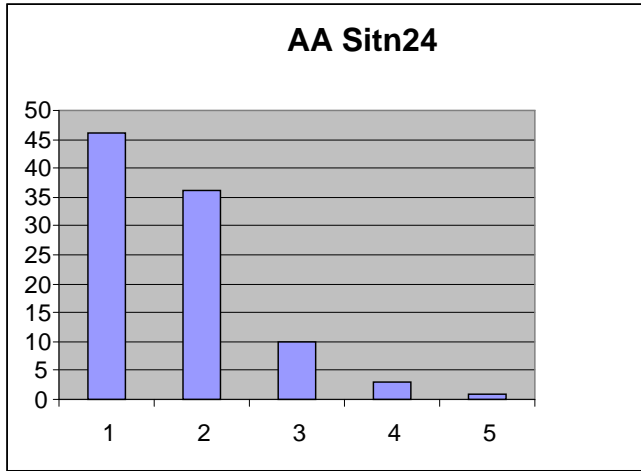
22a. A friend suggests you go to the casino with him at the weekend. You do not want to go. How likely are you to be silent?



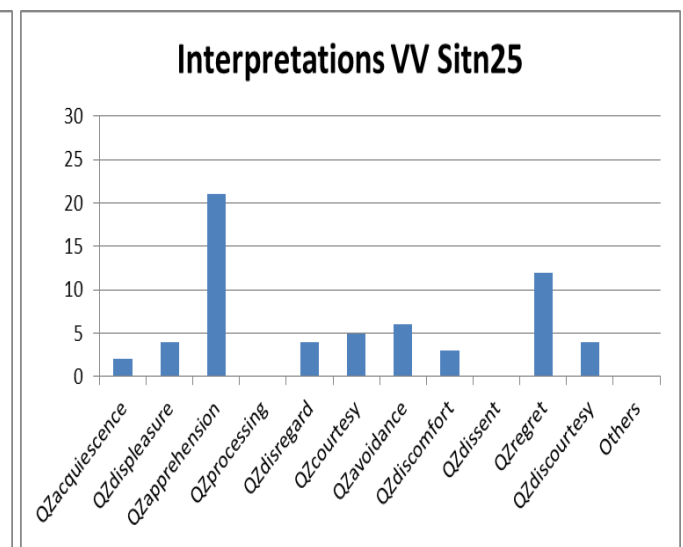
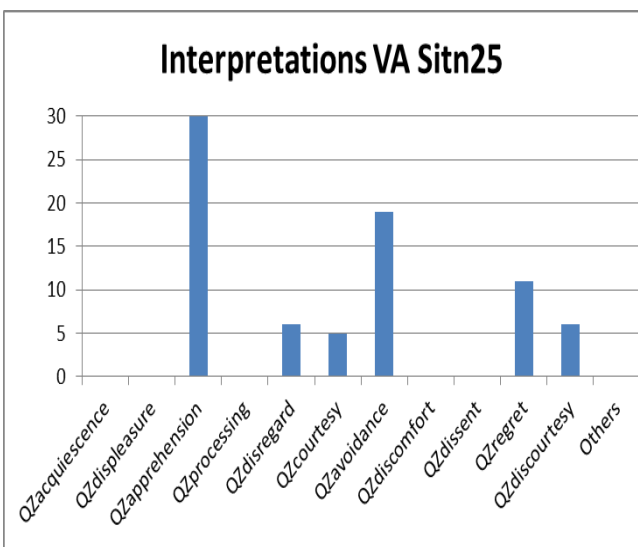
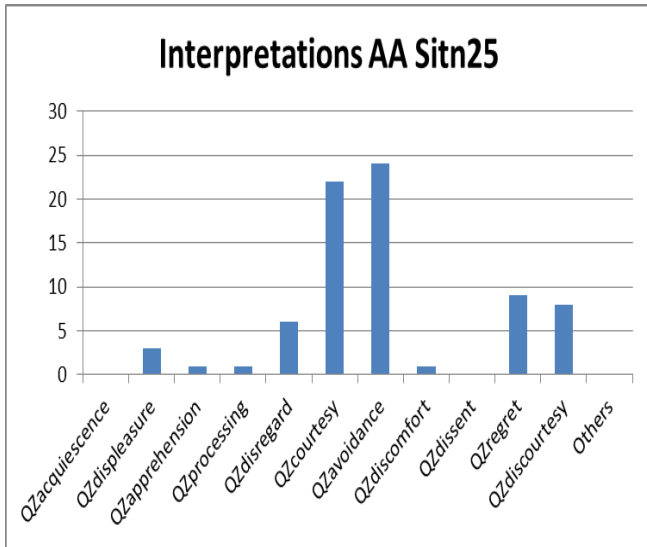
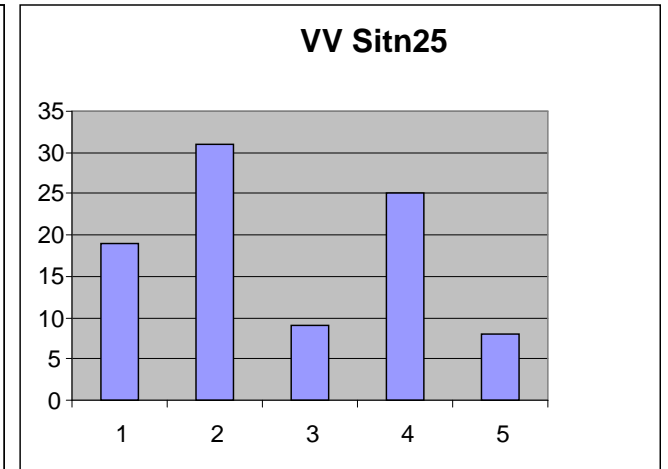
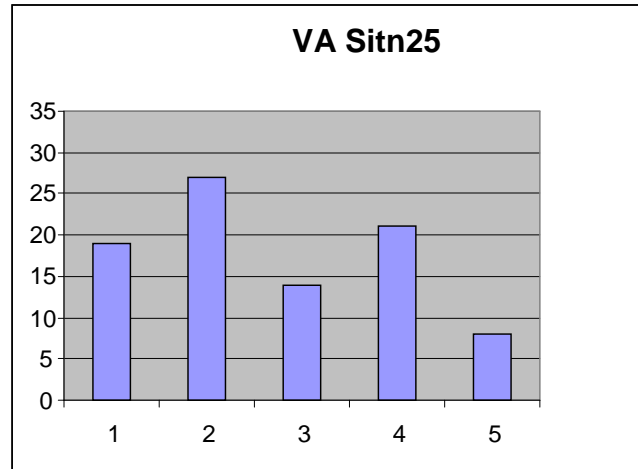
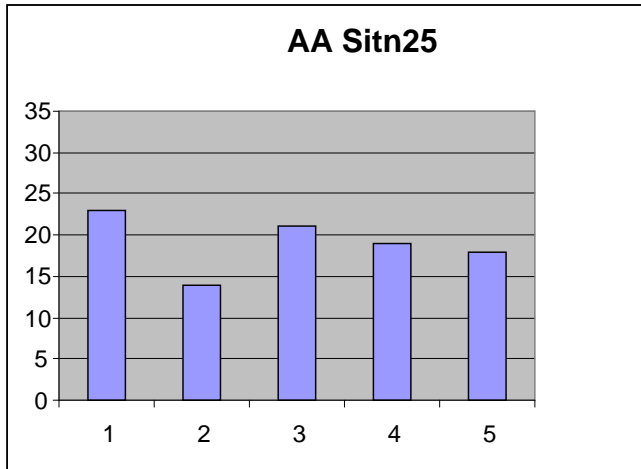
23a. A friend invited you to his birthday party and you promised to go but you were busy and did not attend. Now you meet him in the supermarket. How likely are you to be silent?



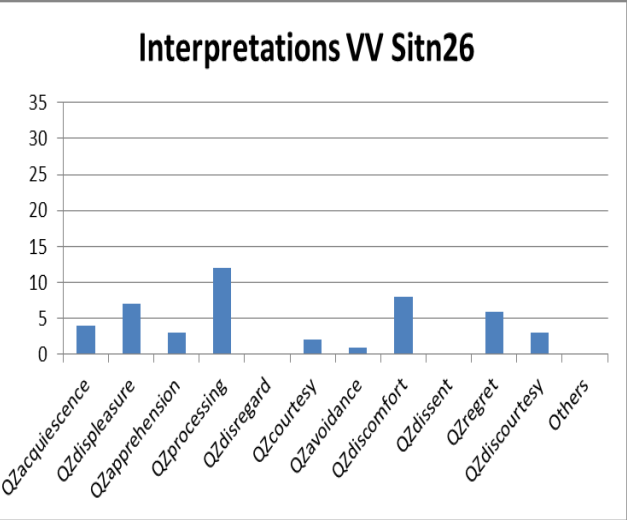
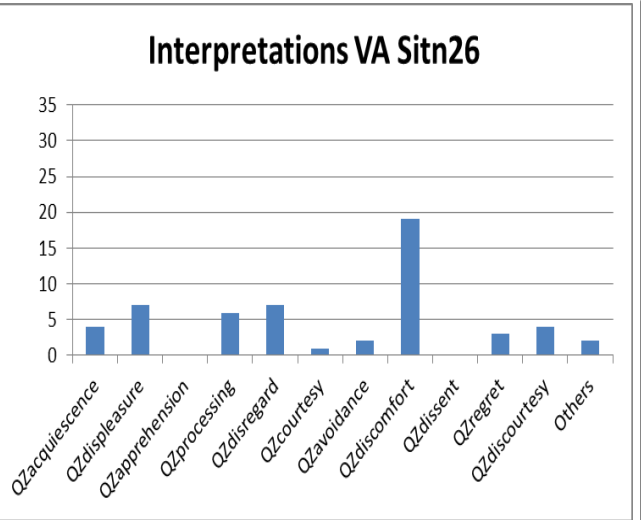
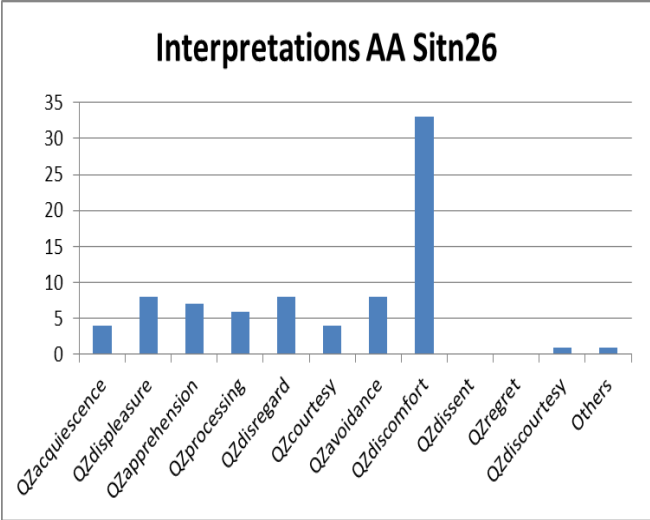
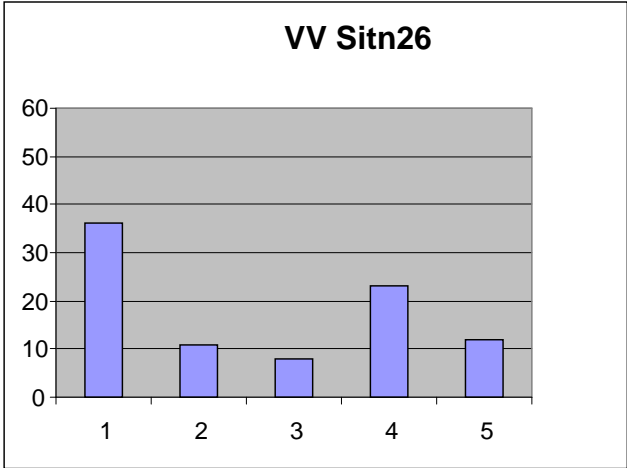
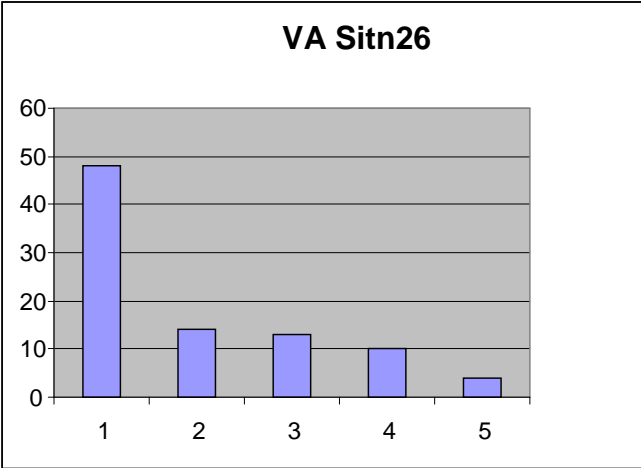
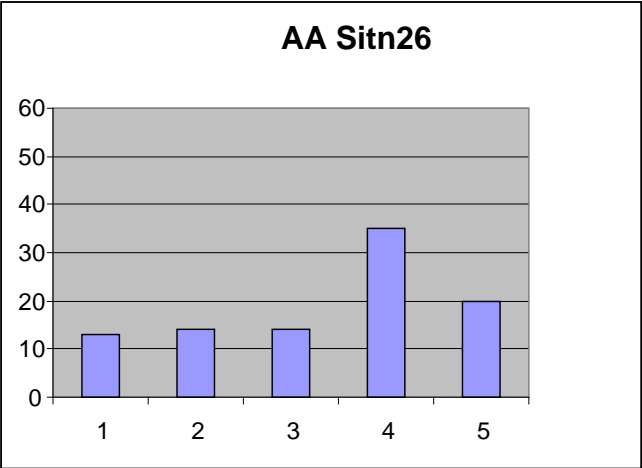
24a. You go to a wedding party in a restaurant and are seated at a table with strangers. They are all talking a lot and trying to draw you into the conversation. How likely are you to be silent?



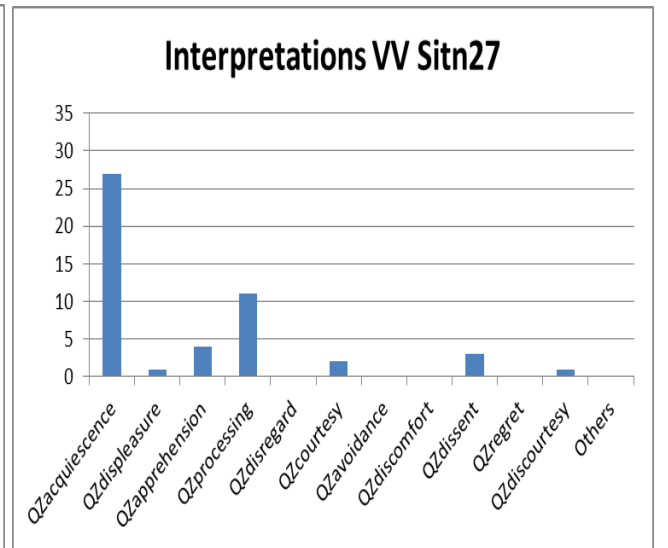
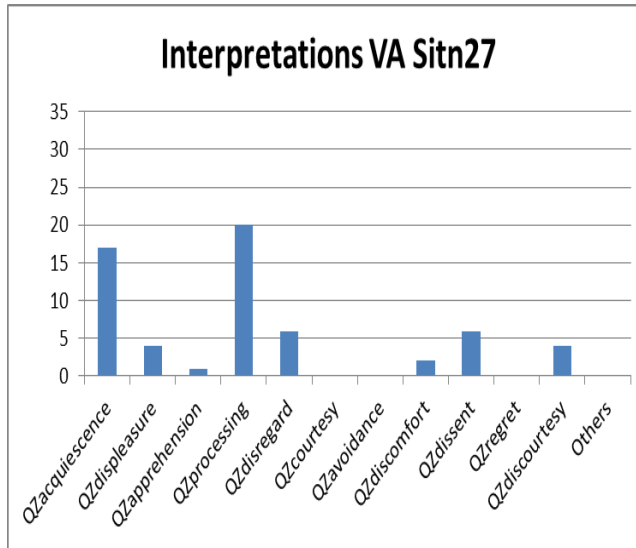
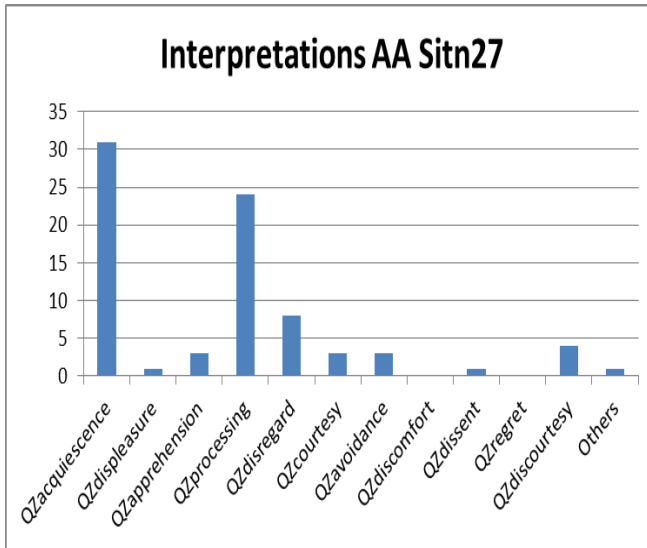
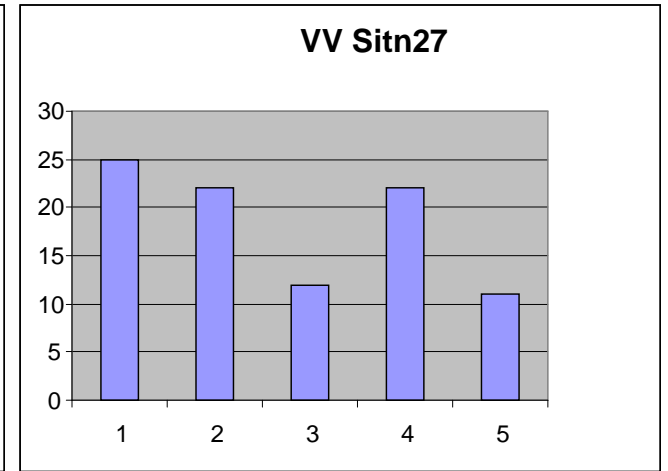
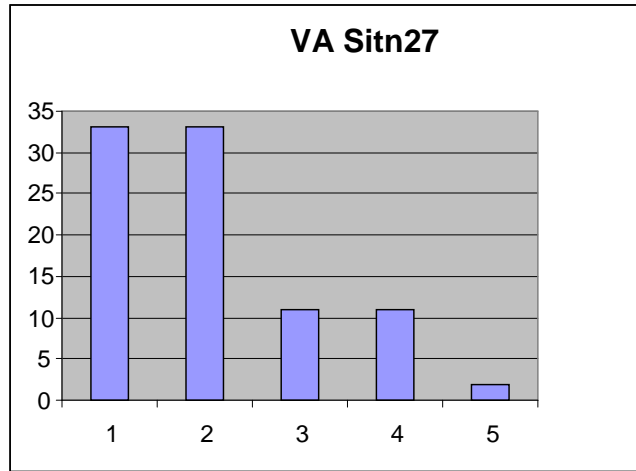
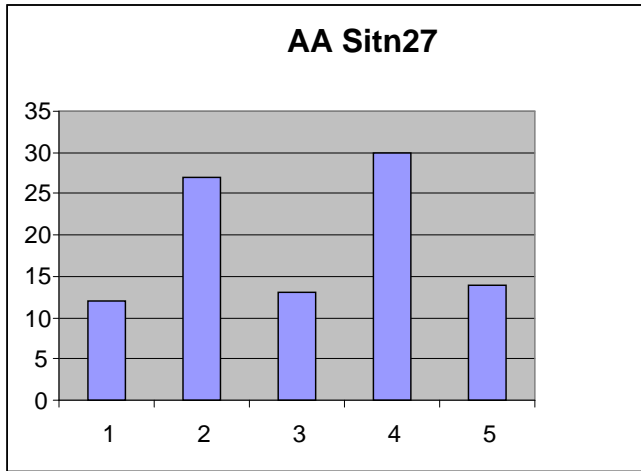
25a. You are a receptionist. You are very sad because your colleague, a close friend of yours has just given you a resignation letter to pass to the director. You are at your desk when another colleague enters. You do not say anything. However, your colleague keeps asking why you look upset. How likely are you to be silent instead of answering your colleague?



26a. You hold a party in a restaurant. You stand up and explain the reason for the party. At the end of your speech, you enthusiastically invite everybody to drink, but oddly enough, most people do not respond to the toast. How likely are you to be silent?

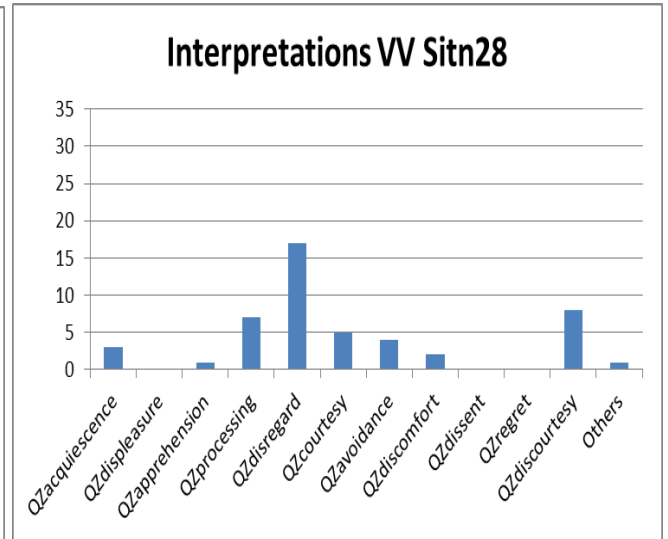
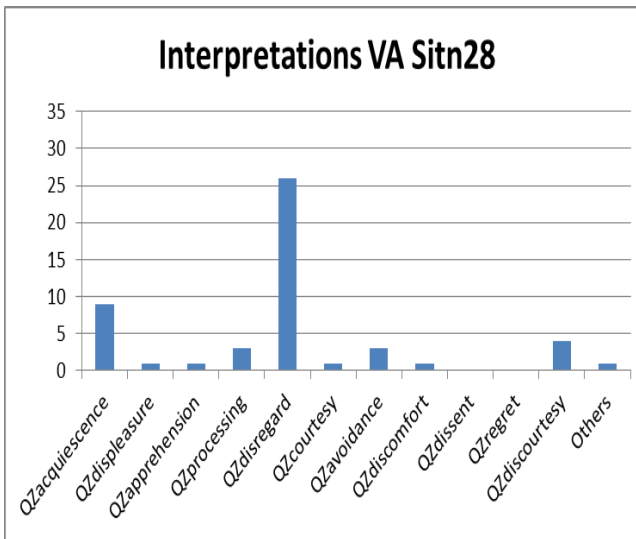
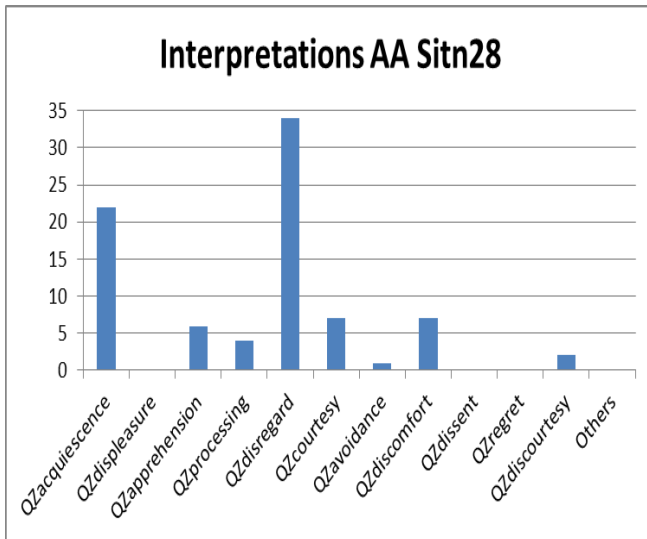
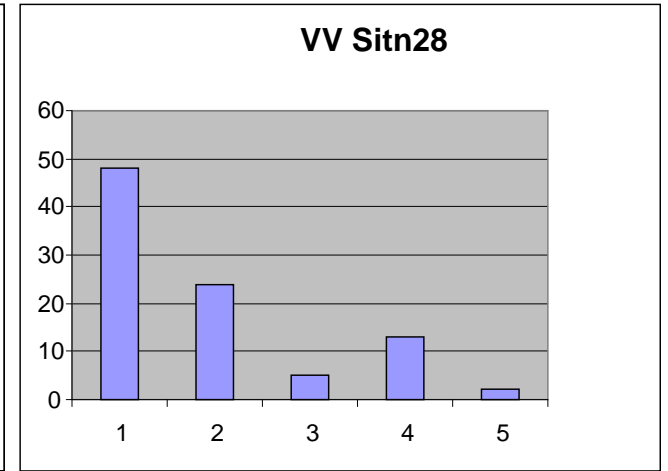
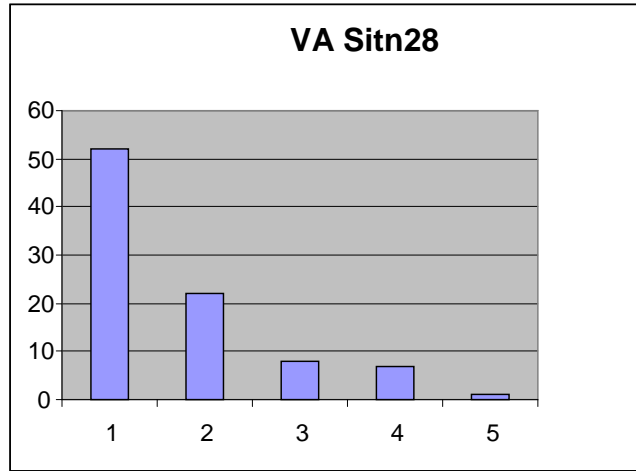
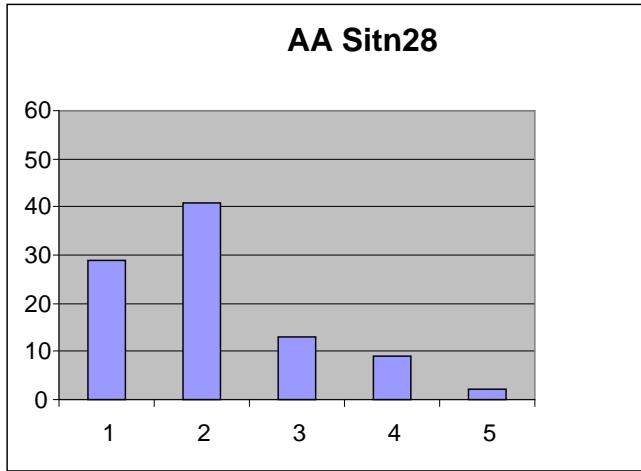


27a. You are a deputy director in a fashion company. You are in a meeting with the director and two others to discuss hiring a new model for the next fashion show. The other three people want to hire Miranda. You show your reluctance to have her. Then the director says, “If you don’t like Miranda, do you have a better suggestion?”. You actually do not have any. How likely are you to be silent?

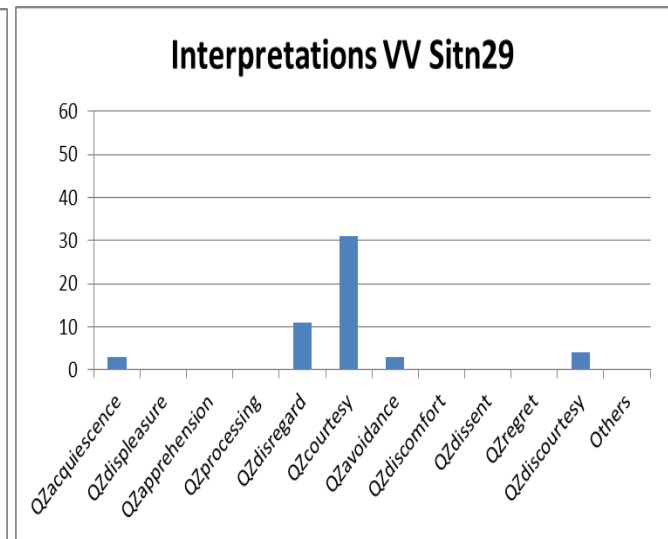
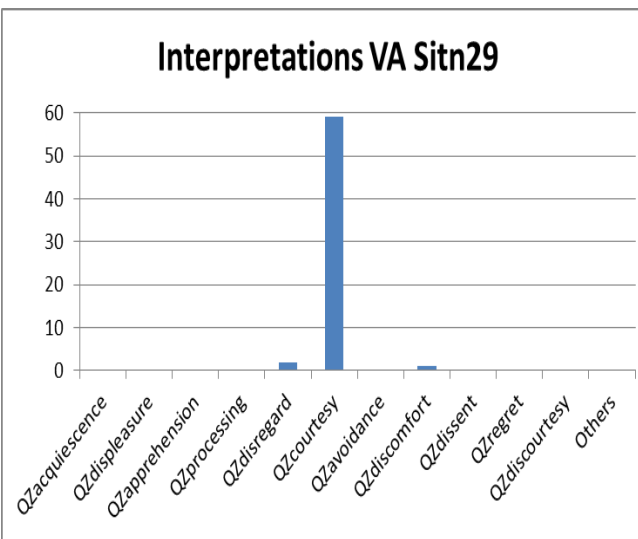
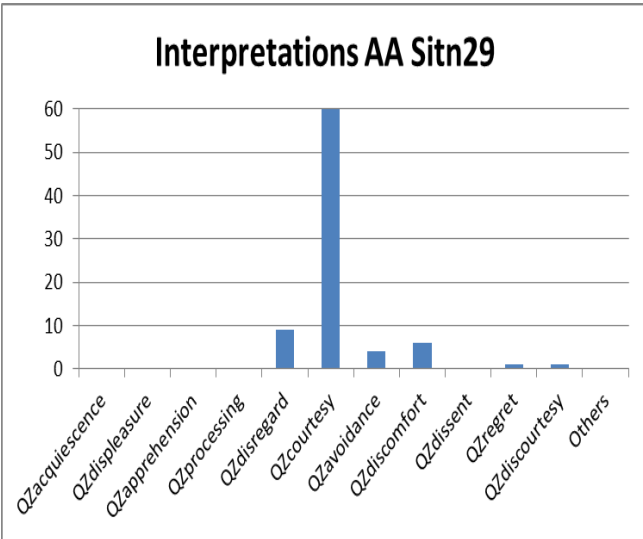
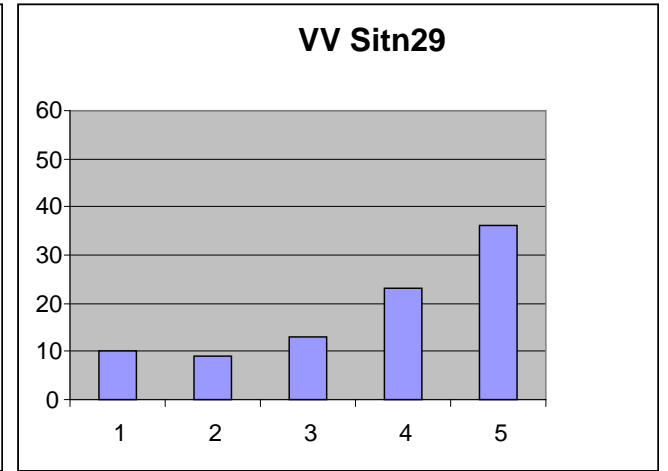
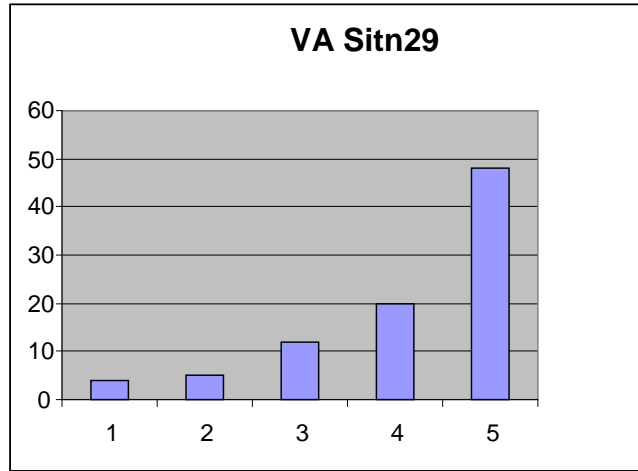
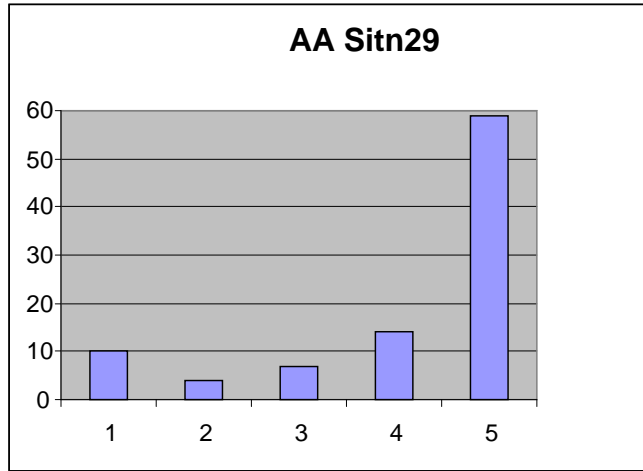




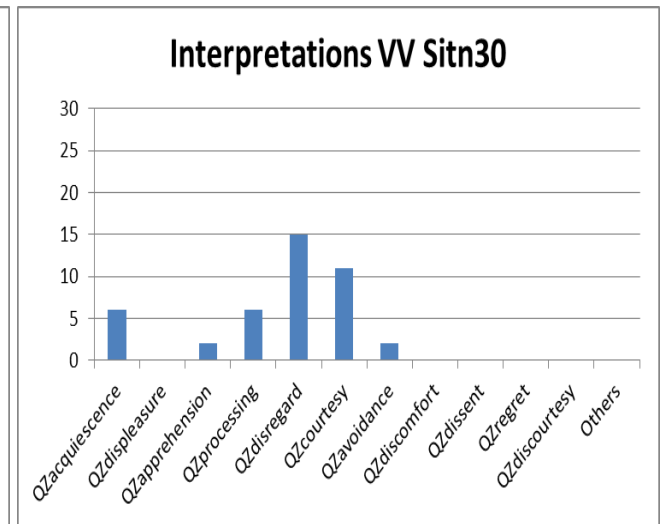
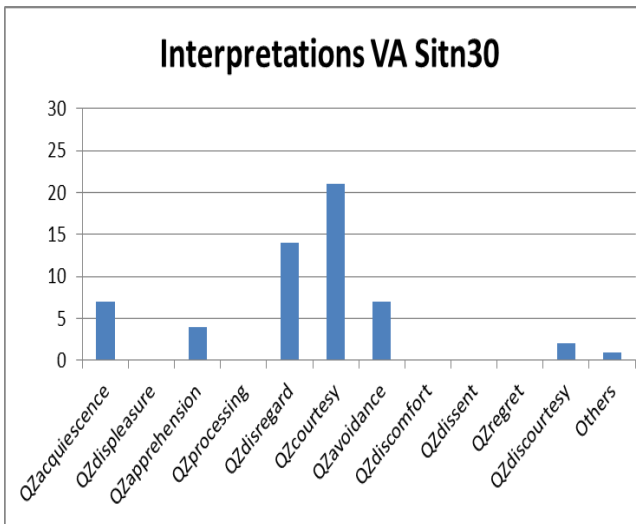
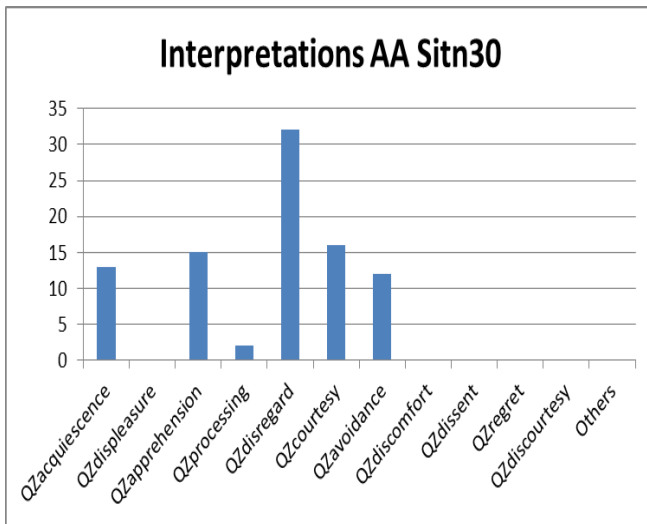
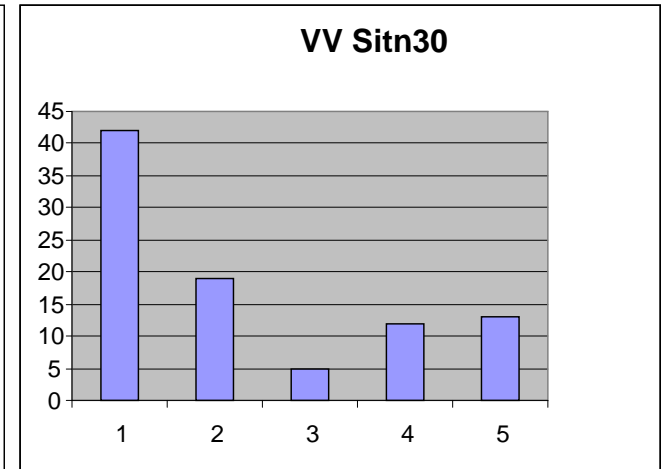
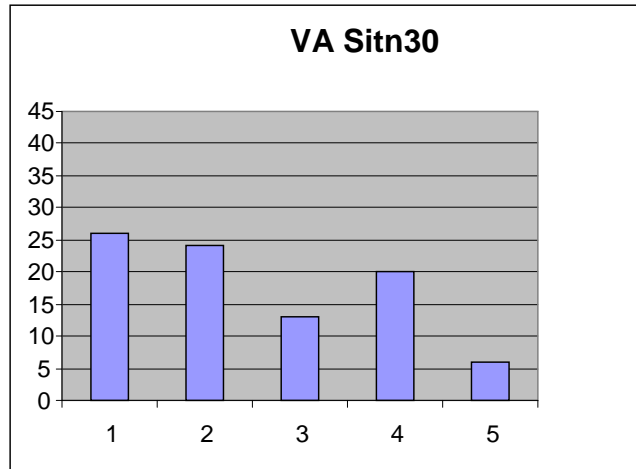
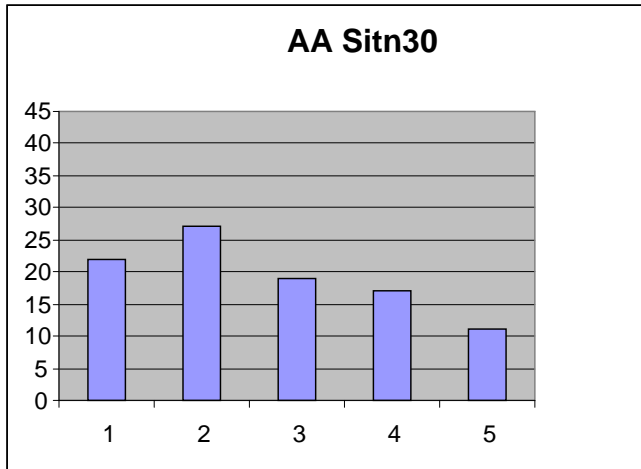
28a. You are talking to a friend of yours. You cannot catch one point s/he is talking about. How likely are you to be silent?



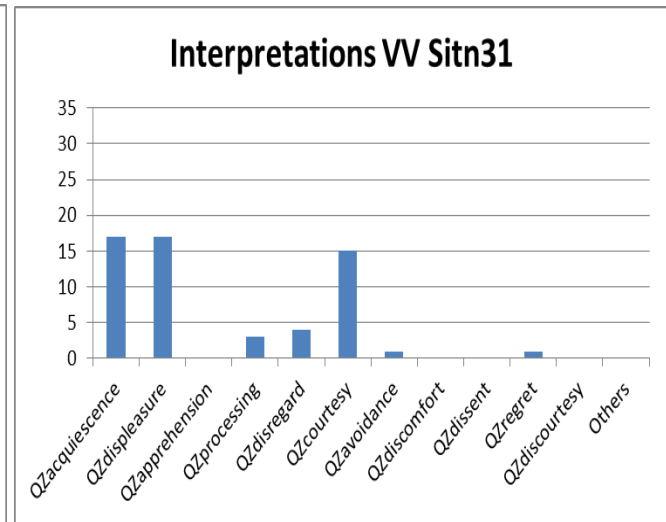
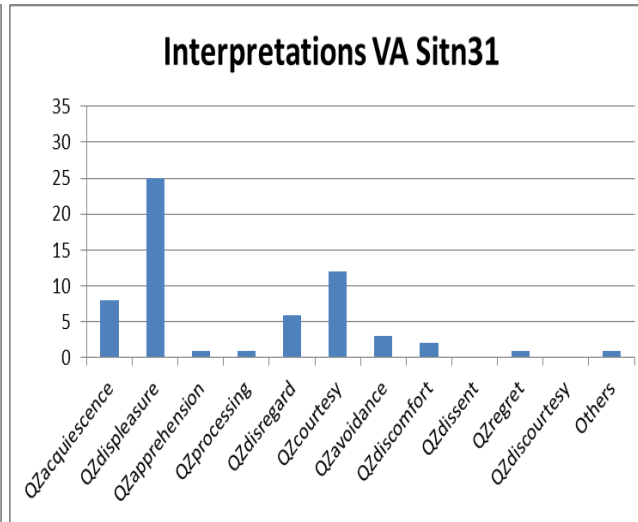
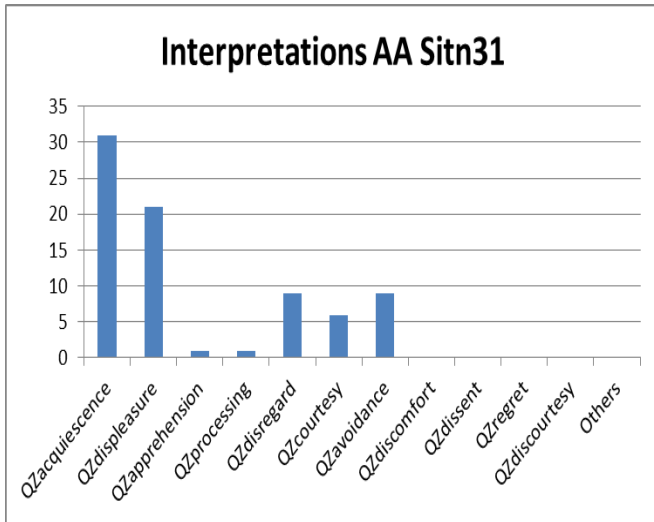
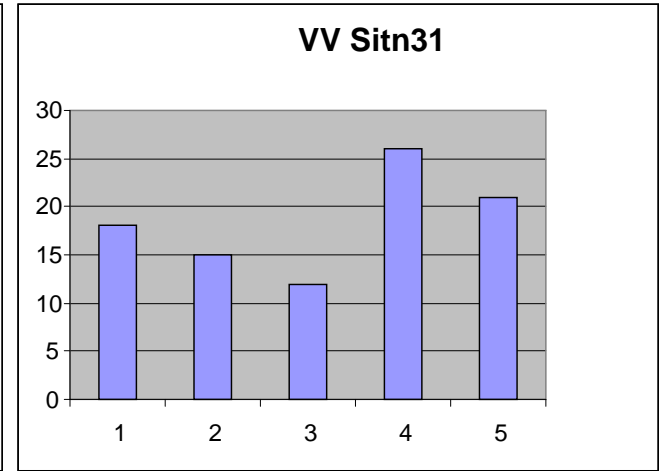
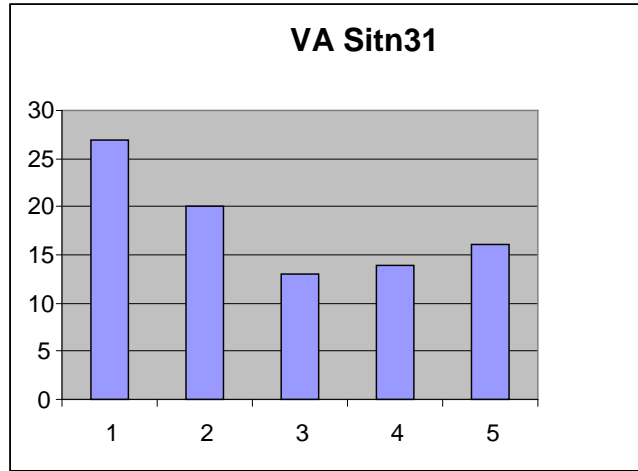
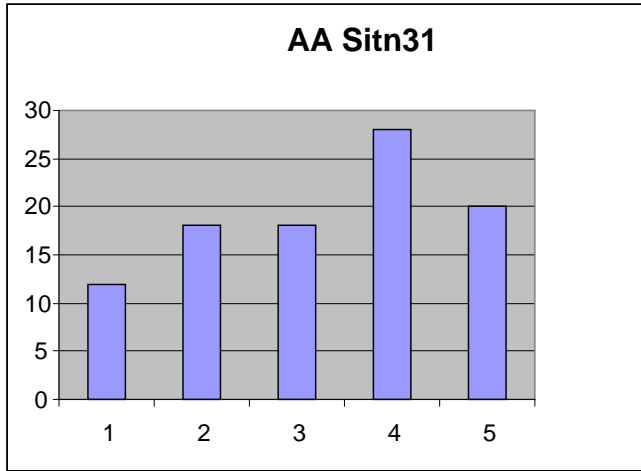
29a. You are watching a film in a cinema when your phone rings. How likely are you to remain silent instead of answering the phone?



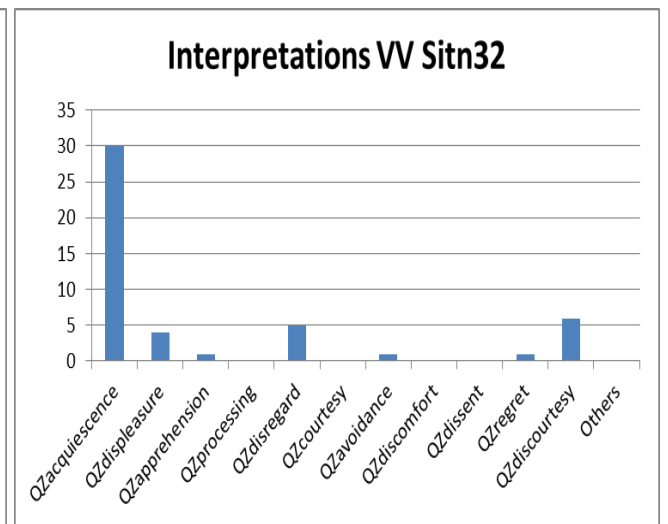
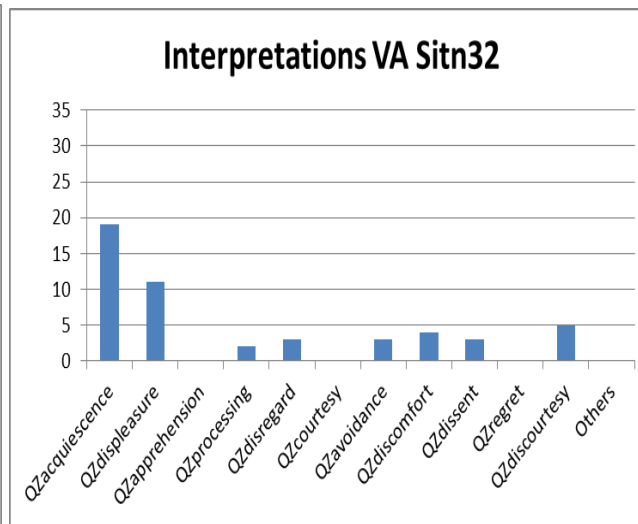
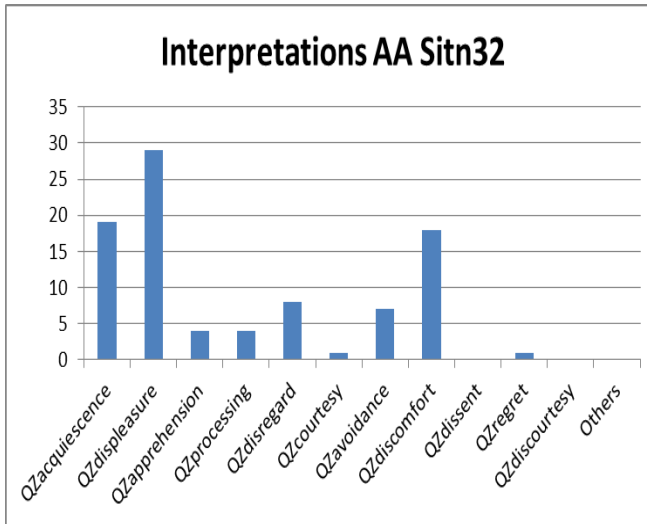
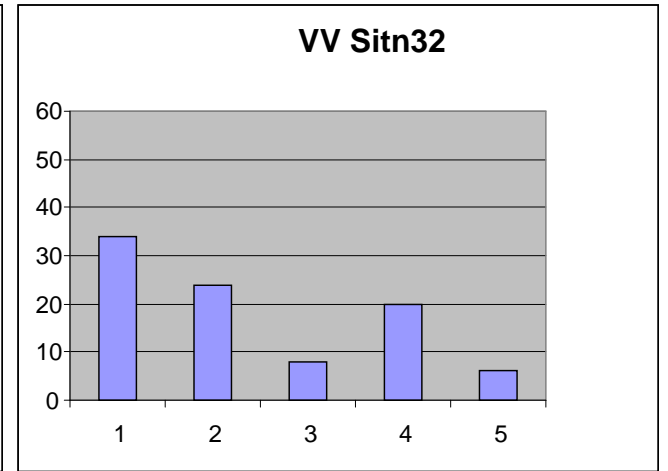
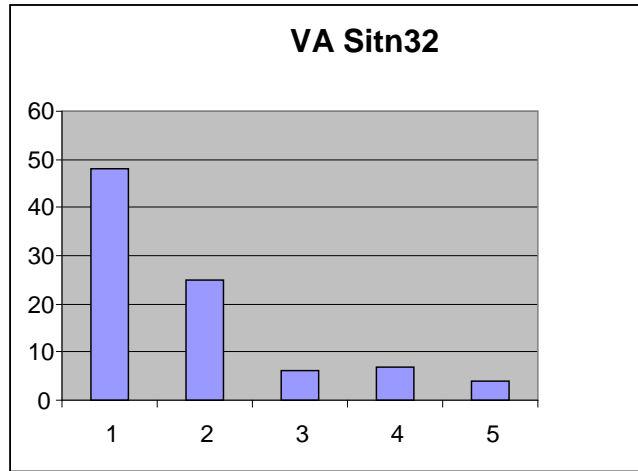
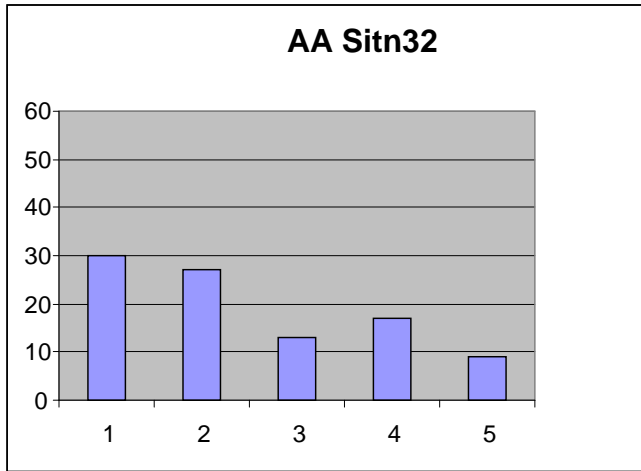
30a. You are in an English class. Your teacher makes a mistake when explaining a grammar point. You know s/he is wrong. How likely are you to be silent?



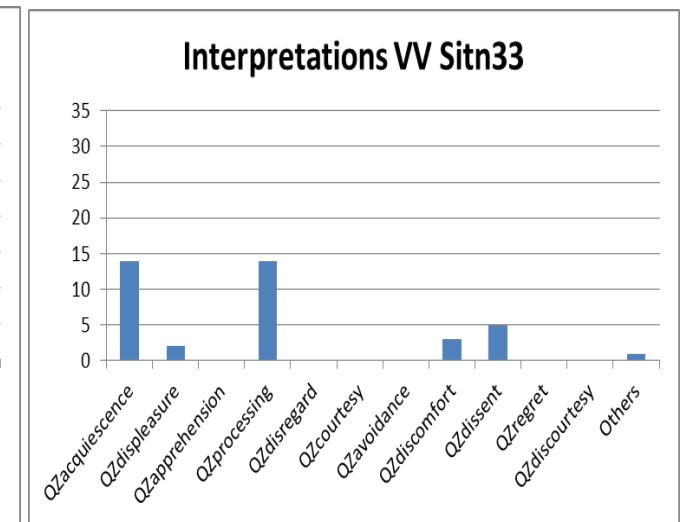
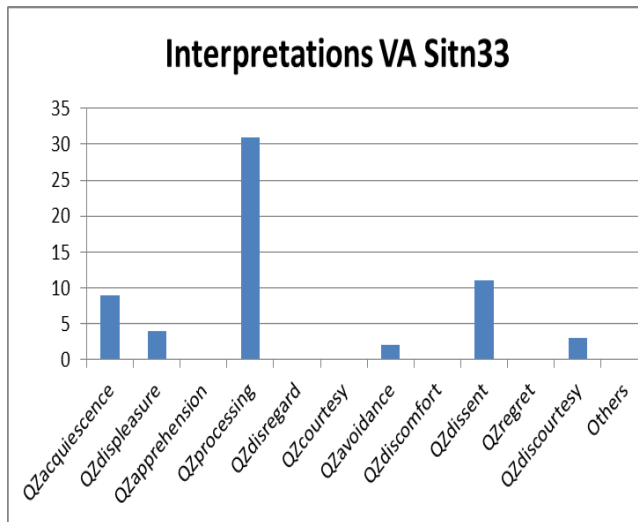
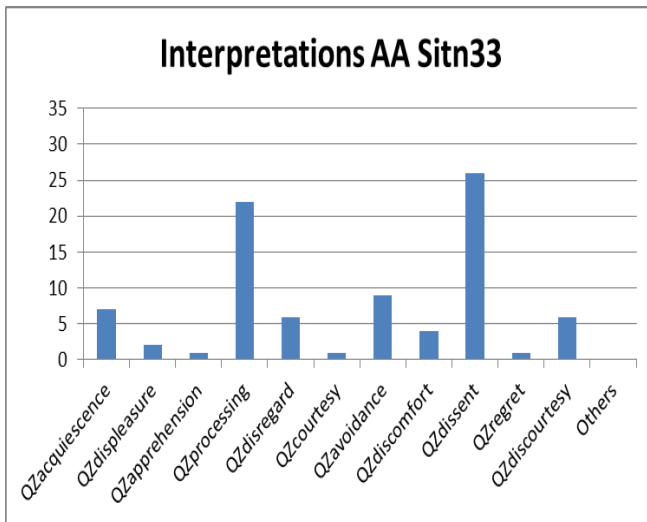
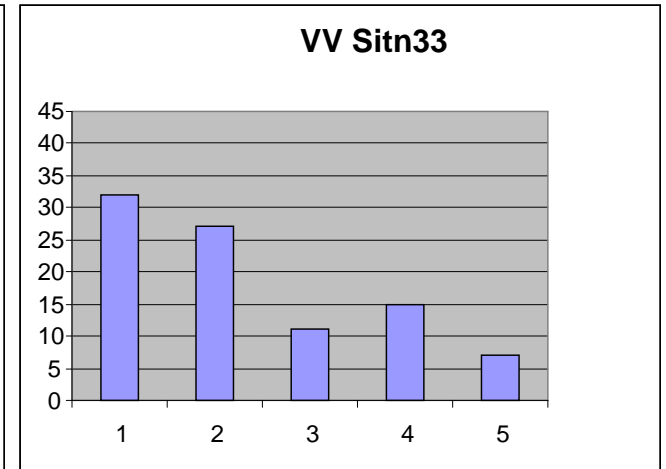
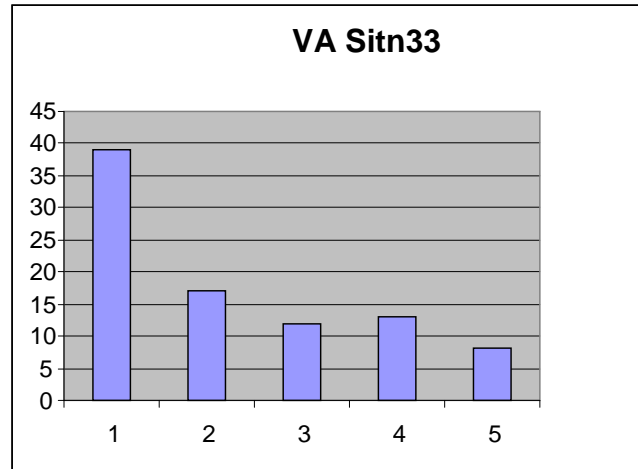
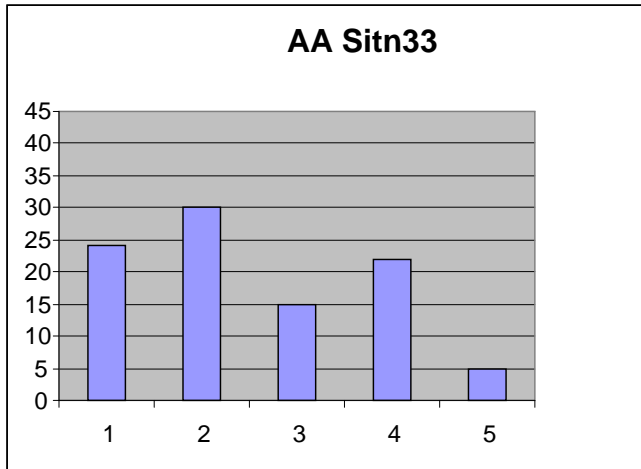
31a. You go to a party with your partner. At this party, you note that your partner is engaged in a long conversation with someone else. They laugh and make jokes, leaving you there. You cannot stand this person. How likely are you to remain silent?



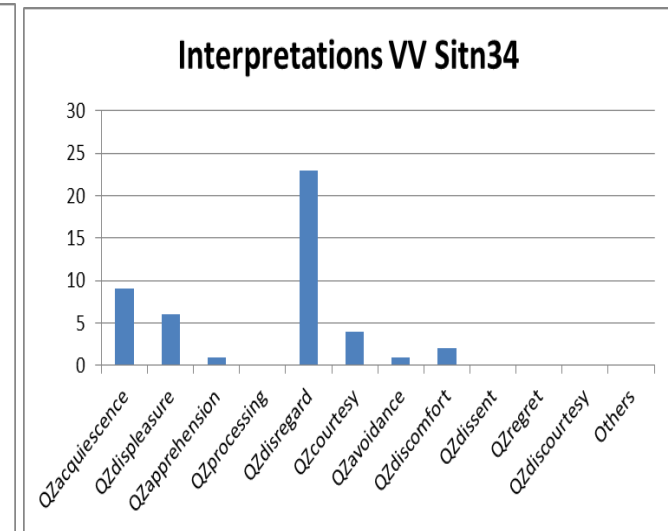
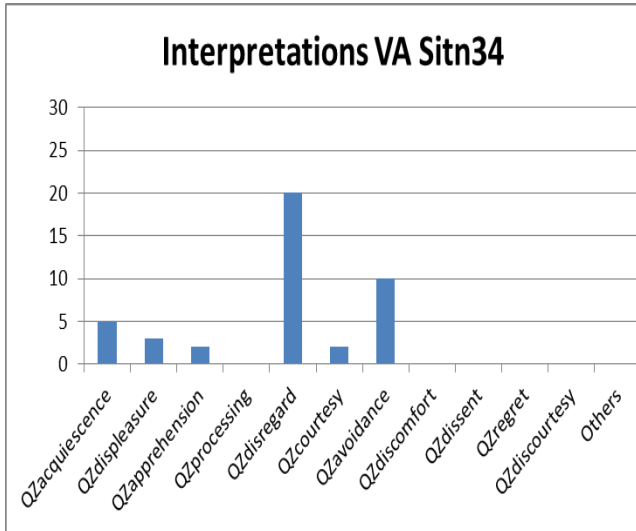
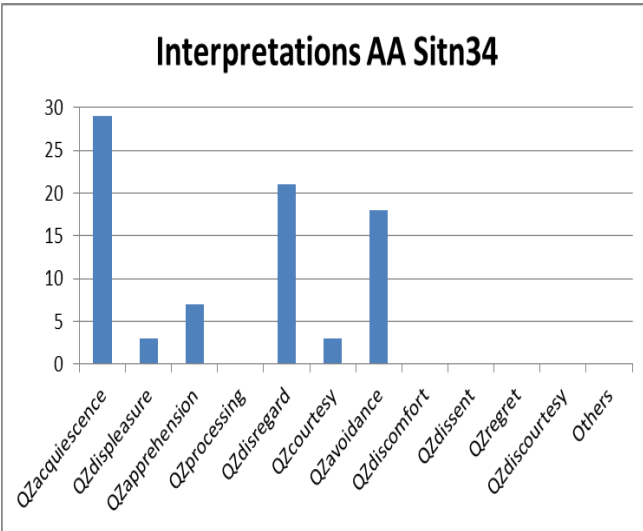
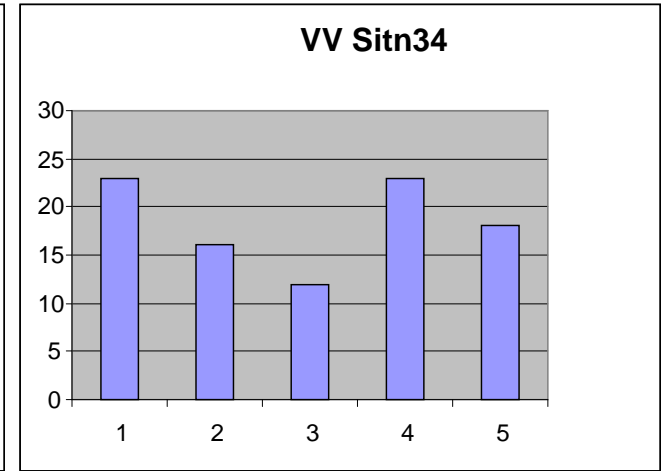
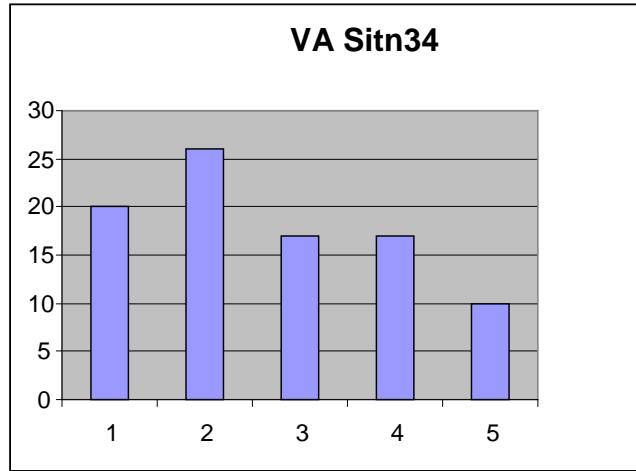
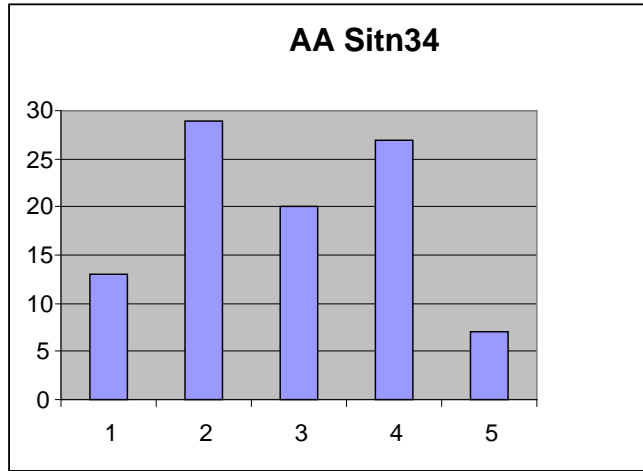
32a. You go to a class reunion. You enjoy the reunion, talking with old friends. When you are in the company of your friends, someone comes and says, “Hey, I haven’t seen you for ages! You’ve put on weight!”. How likely are you to be silent?



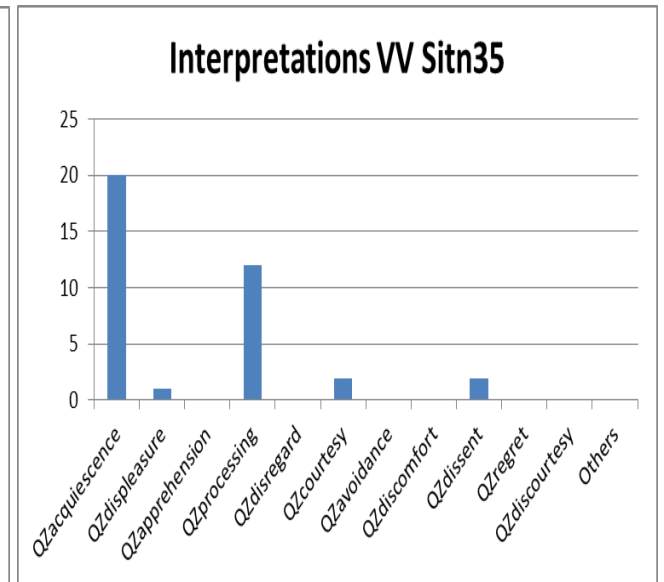
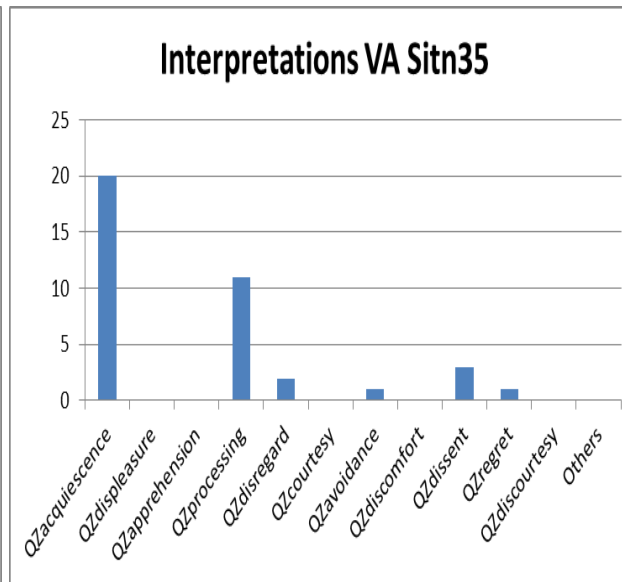
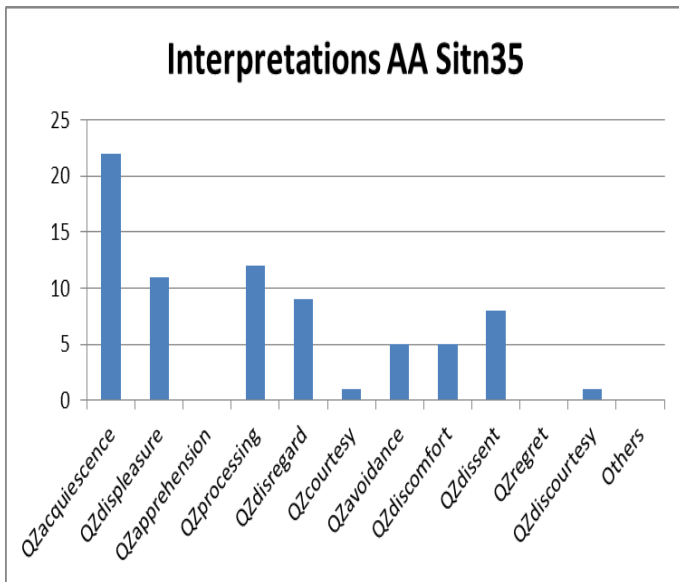
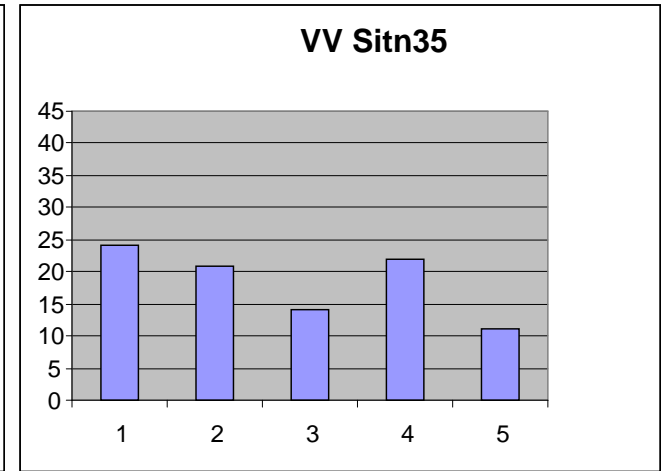
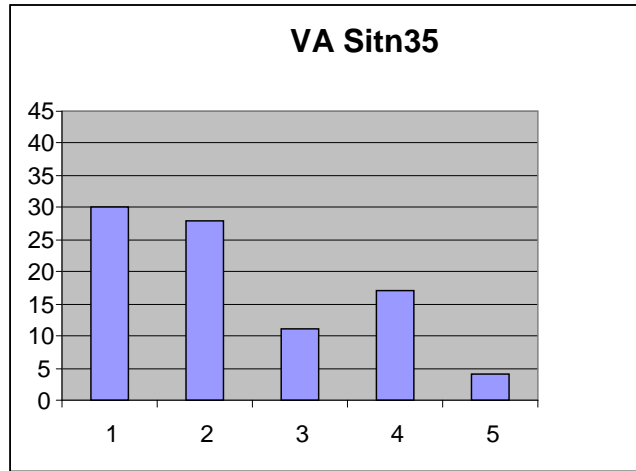
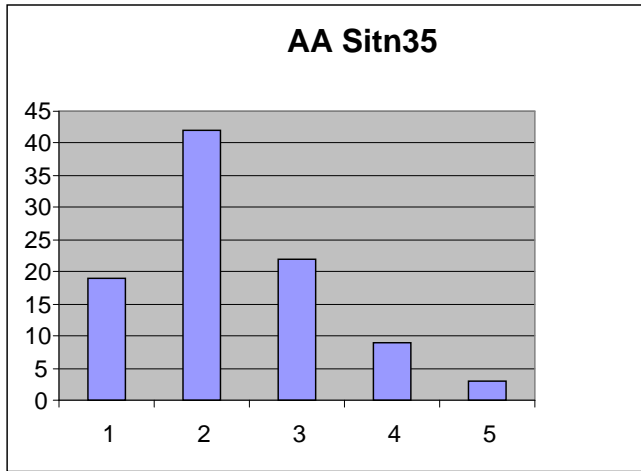
33a. You are married. You and your partner have a mutual friend who has a financial problem. One day, the friend comes to see you and says, “I am wondering if I can move in with you for a month?” How likely are you to remain silent when you first hear the request?



34a. You are watching a film in a cinema. A person behind you has a private conversation. How likely are you to be silent?



35a. A couple you know and like is coming to visit your hometown and would like you to host them. You ask your partner for his/her agreement. S/he says, “Accommodation is not a problem for us because we have a large house. However, we’re a bit short of money at the moment.” How likely are you to be silent when you hear this?





*Appendix 6. Summary of the Incidents from VA Record Sheets*

<b>Participants' code</b>	<b>Reported Incidents</b>
R VA4 Sheet1	The participant couldn't understand the flat Australian accent.
R VA4 Sheet2	The Australian shop assistant didn't say anything upon an attempt to bargain for a ring.
R VA16	Both the Vietnamese and the Australian man were ignored by the bus driver. They started to get to know each other. The Vietnamese said he was a student and shared the length he lived in Australia. The Australian said he had been to Vietnam and was a manager in an international school in Vietnam but later on the school was closed. As the Vietnamese was interested in education, he asked for the name of the school and for the reason why it was closed. The Australian went silent.
R VA17	Silence at a dinner when one can't take a turn in conversation
R VA 18 Sheet1	Silence when being accused wrongly by an Australian housemate.
R VA18 Sheet2	Silence in anger when a team member said he didn't complete his task for a group assignment, just before it was due.
R VA19	The Vietnamese worked part time in a nail shop where she served lots of local people. One day, she served a very elegant lady. As usual, the Vietnamese tried to get to know her. For about the first four questions, the lady just smiled (the Vietnamese thought there might be a problem with her pronunciation) but after the next three questions, the Vietnamese realized the lady didn't want to answer. The Vietnamese decided to stop asking and focus on the job to do her best when other friends around looked at her awkwardly. This was the first time the Vietnamese felt sad and disappointed in making conversation with local person. After 30 minutes doing the job, the Vietnamese interpreted that the lady was silent because she felt she was superior with her luxurious life and didn't want to talk to a person with a manual job. She felt inferior as an Asian too. When she paid the bill, the lady gave the Vietnamese \$20 tip with her handwriting on the back that she was very happy being served by her and that the Vietnamese informant was friendly and cheerful, but although she wanted to talk with her, she had just had a small operation in the throat and couldn't talk.
R VA25 Sheet1	The Vietnamese phoned the phone service provider and complained about a mistake in the phone bill. He was asked to explain how the bill was wrong. The Vietnamese explained that some phone calls were not made from his phone and asked the service provider to double check. The service agent insisted that those calls were made from his phone. After many attempts to explain, the Vietnamese got annoyed, was silent for a while and then hung up.
R VA25 Sheet2	The Australian supervisor fell silent when she found out that despite only earning \$200/month, her Vietnamese student still wanted to return home and contribute to the development of her country.
R VA33 Sheet1	The informant was not invited to come for dinner in an Australian home, whereas his Vietnamese friend was offered to come. The informant was not happy. Upon knowing this, the other friend has explained why the informant was not invited and the cultural differences in contexts like this. The informant went silent.
R VA33 Sheet2	An Australian lady came into a room where people were having lunch together. Perhaps she couldn't bear the Indian curry, so she left immediately. The participant fell silent upon recognizing that.

R VA46	An Australian teacher gave information about Australia and its geography in a very difficult to understand way. The teacher asked for several places on the map, but none in class knew. The Vietnamese did not dare to ask or comment, but went home, guessed and googled to find the answers to those questions.
R VA50	Keeping silent when not understanding what two Australians were talking about
R VA51 Sheet1	An Australian university administration officer: “She asked me if I had any knowledge of certain information. I admitted that I didn’t know anything about this. She kept silent and focused on the computer. I felt rather confused and anxious and wondered what I should say next. After about 1-2 minutes (probably used to find the relevant information) she printed out the information sheet and gave it to me.”
R VA51 Sheet2	The Vietnamese informant visited an Australian friend, who was the closest Australian friend she had at university. The informant was asking her about the house, when it was built and how long it took to build, where she stayed when it was built etc. At first the friend told me about the time the house was built but then said “And it was a big joke” and didn’t say anything else. The informant felt embarrassed.
R VA56	When the participant went past a restaurant, she was bitten by a couple’s dog. The couple said sorry as her leg was bleeding. The participant sat down and looked carefully at the bite mark. Some other people helped the participant including the restaurant owner but the couple just ignored them and kept eating. Until I stood up and left, they kept silent.
R VA57	The informant wanted to rent a place to live. She was silent when failing to negotiate with the land lord.
R VA63	An Australian friend made a joke. The Vietnamese understood that it was a joke but did not fully understand it. She asked the friend to repeat twice but she still couldn’t understand. After asking a third time, she went silent with a smile pretending that she understood the joke.
R VA66	The participant was silent in a group discussion for an assignment as he rarely spoke out even though he thought his ideas were slightly better than the others.
R VA68	Silence when her friend teased a handicapped girl to amuse the whole group.
R VA75 Sheet2	The participant fell silent as the Australian office co-worker unexpectedly said, “You are both two idiots.”
R VA75 Sheet1	The participant didn’t reply in a conversation with his academic supervisor when his supervisor seemed displeased and did not appear to believe in the results of the project he was undertaken.
R VA85	Silence when being accused wrongly by the landlord