

A Pragmatic Cultural Analysis of American English versus Vietnamese Use in Shop Signs

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ABSTRACT

Shop signs with English elements are becoming more and more frequent in Vietnam as a result of trade and globalization, requiring thorough investigations into various aspects of English and Vietnamese use in shop signs for further practice. Prior research mostly explores shop signs from the perspectives of linguistic landscape, linguistic transfer, and ADVERTISING discourse, in which the comparative culture and pragmatics are mentioned but remain insufficient to a large extent. This study tries to fill the gap by making a pragmatic cultural comparison of English and Vietnamese use in shop signs, applying the theoretical and analytical framework of cultural linguistics in relation to pragmatics by Sharifian (2017). More than 400 shop signs of each language have been randomly collected from many places in the US and Vietnam respectively for the contrastive analysis. The results show vast similarities in the knowledge of some situational contexts (pragmemes) underlying the same speech acts/events performed by the American English and Vietnamese shop signs associated with the pragmatic cultural schema of ADVERTISING. Many differences are highlighted in the pragmemes and practs (realizations of pragmemes) with the cultural conceptualizations relating to collective implications, signature objects, foreign elements, home-made origins, official origins, health commitment, establishment year, family references, and ethics. The study has finally made a positive contribution to the strategies of shop sign translation or creation with English (assumed from the American backgrounds) in monolingual, bilingual and hybrid contexts of Vietnam.

Key words: Shop Sign, Pragmatic Set, Cultural Conceptualization, ADVERTISING, Translation, American English, Vietnamese

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

As a result of transnational trade and globalization, more and more shop signs in Vietnam have been presented with English elements (in monolingual, bilingual or hybrid items) (Phan & Starks, 2019). According to Pham (2021), the trend is also found in other countries around the world and has brought into consideration three main culture-based approaches to the English translation or creation of signs in public places, that is, (i) focusing on the source culture and language to reserve and reflect the indigenous identity in global contexts (for example, English of Vietnamese people, or Vietnamese English); (ii) focusing on the target culture and language to make the translation or creation familiar to the English-speaking tourists and expatriates; or (iii) making a version of hybrid-culture to mix the distinctive norms encoded in both languages.

In order for the approaches to be effectively taken, it is necessary to make a cross-cultural analysis of English versus Vietnamese use in shop signs. However, the relationship between language and culture in such contexts is not only under-theorized but also insufficiently evident since prior

research mostly explores shop signs in terms of error analysis (linguistic transfer) (e.g. Al-Kharabsheh et al, 2008; Ko, 2010; Al-Athwary, 2014); language distribution, competition and characteristics (linguistic landscape) (e.g. Thongtong, 2016; ALHyari & Hamdan, 2019); or ADVERTISING discourse analysis (e.g. Baig, 2013; Bui, 2020). In other words, although the aspects of language (such as morphosyntax, semantic meaning, pragmatic meaning, and discourse) have been investigated in relation to cultural values, the focal point of the research is in the language nature or rules rather than in cultural cognition or cultural conceptualizations as a base for interpretation of meanings, especially those of pragmatics, which seem to be the primary concerns within public commercial environments. Moreover, researchers have not yet drawn comparisons between English and Vietnamese in contexts of shop signs, which also contributes to the motivation for this study to be done.

Purpose

Generally, shop signs refer to the written wordings outside a shop that are created with a view to describing or drawing attention to a product or service to promote sales. These purposes together

with all the relevant objects and the relationships among them are perceived, (re)conceptualized and enacted as human experiences shared among the members of a speech community and included in the so-called cultural schema of ADVERTISING.

“Cultural schema” is one of the key notions in the theoretical and analytic framework of cultural linguistics that has a close connection with pragmatics. As Sharifian (2017, p. 52) puts it:

The term [cultural schema] refers to those pools of knowledge that contain a significant portion of meanings encoded in human languages [and] the knowledge that underlies the enactment and uptake of speech acts is part of that knowledge; [...] the cultural schemas that provide a basis for pragmatic meanings (such as meaning of speech acts) are referred to as pragmatic schemas [or pragmatic cultural schemas], which often serve as one possible source of (assumed) shared knowledge – or common ground – that interlocutors draw upon during communication.

Thus, the cultural schema of ADVERTISING in a speech community is supposed to underpin various certain speech acts that its members tend to find familiar to. Capone (2016, p. xix) argues that the force of speech acts are often examined based on inferences from context with a combination of linguistic competence and abstract principles of communication/cognition, which are respectively involved in the two pragmatic devices, i.e. *practs* and *pragmemes*. *Practs* are the realizations of *pragmemes* which refer to “general situational prototypes of acts that are capable of being executed in a particular situation or cluster of situations” (Mey, 2010, p. 2884). In fact, *practs* are often in the form of linguistic expressions or behaviors that can be interpreted based on the underlying *pragmemes* associated with a pragmatic act (Mey, 2010) and simultaneously with a cultural schema that capture assumptions and expectations (Sharifian, 2017, pp. 51-52). The relationships among (pragmatic) cultural schemas, speech acts, *pragmemes* and *practs* are thus considered hierarchical in what is called “a pragmatic set” by Sharifian (2017, p. 54).

This study aims to examine and compare the use of English and Vietnamese that encode the cultural schema of ADVERTISING in shop signs, applying the framework of a pragmatic set as an analytic tool from the perspective of cultural linguistics by Sharifian (2017). Although the approach focuses on the culture-based analysis of pragmatic acts and meanings, other devices (such as morphosyntax, semantic meaning and discourse) are also covered in the framework as elements that reflect different identities through cultural conceptualizations entrenched in different languages of different speech communities. In short, by filling the gap between culture and language (or cultural schemas and pragmatic devices as well as other aspects of language), the chosen approach will help to produce significant results in the pragmatic cultural comparison of English and Vietnamese use in shop signs, which may finally allow useful contributions to the strategies of English translation in the local contexts.

Research Questions

As the approach taken in this study is quite culturally sensitive, the languages to be concerned should be investigated in

connection with their own speech communities, where certain cultural norms or values are embedded in the languages and are shared among the members from generations to generations across time and space (Sharifian, 2017). While Vietnamese is often studied without taking its varieties into account, the English language is variously used throughout the world and thus a certain variety of its own tends to be specifically addressed in research. This study desires to explore English shop signs that are found in the United States (US) on the assumption that they are created in American English, which is considered one of the most widely-used and influential international languages. The items are then analyzed in comparison with those found in Vietnam from the perspectives of cultural linguistics and pragmatics for practical translation or creation of English shop signs (assumed from the American backgrounds). The research questions include:

- (1) What are the typical pragmatic sets enacted from the cultural schema of ADVERTISING embedded in American English and Vietnamese shop signs? Are there any similarities or differences in the speech acts/events, *pragmemes* and *practs* between the two languages?
- (2) What are the cultural conceptualizations underlying the use of American English and Vietnamese in shop signs that reflect their identities?
- (3) What are the applications to the translation or creation of English shop signs in Vietnam (based on the American assumptions)?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Shop Signs in Cultural Linguistics Versus Other Approaches

Shop signs can be recognized in many different ways. From the perspective of physical nature, a shop sign is “all the linguistic material written to draw attention to a shop, be it on a typical sign, or on a shop window, or on a moving door that pertains to the same store or shop” (El-Yasin & Mahadin, 1996, p. 409). From the perspective of linguistic landscape, shop signs are a part of “the language use in its written form in public sphere” (Gorter, 2006, p. 2), indicating the linguistic characteristics of a certain speech community (i.e. informational function) and the significance of a language compared with others within a bilingual or multilingual setting (i.e. symbolic function) (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). From the perspective of functional grammar, shop signs are viewed as a genre that embraces “the whole range of culturally recognizable types of language activity” (Wallace, 1987, cited from Al-Kharabsheh et al, 2008, p. 717). From the perspective of consumerism, shop signs are considered as “a type of public discourse that [...] informs about a shop (services and goods), attracts people’s attention and persuades potential customers” (Ruzaitė, 2008, p. 213). From the perspective of cultural linguistics by Sharifian (2017), shop signs are supposed to substantiate stocks of knowledge shared among the members of a speech community, one of which includes beliefs, norms, rules, values and experiences pertaining to various aspects and components of ADVERTISING (i.e. cultural schema of ADVERTISING).

Unlike discourse approaches which focus on the text (mode) and its processes that govern its production and reception (field), reflecting the inner state of mind or power from the producers (e.g. advertisers) to the target audience (e.g. consumers) (tenor) (Halliday, 1985; Thompson, 1996; Baig, 2013, p. 127), the cultural linguistic approach views language (e.g. language of shop signs) as a “collective memory bank” (Wa Thiong’o, 1986) that covers all the aspects mentioned above (i.e. physical nature; linguistic characteristics; pragmatics; reflections of identity, culture, economic and social status) with cultural conceptualizations in the cultural cognition of the speech community. In other words, discourse analysis concerns the relationships among text, meaning and function, which together portrait and manifest the speaker or writer personas, while cultural linguistics depicts the shared knowledge as a “common ground” embedded in the language that a community normally use in daily communication; and while cultural aspects are just parts of the whole in the former, they are the focal points in the latter, which originate from the speech community’s cognition through social and linguistic interactions with each other and the world. Therefore, approaches of discourse analysis are often taken in research on register, genre or style, whereas cultural linguistics is favored in areas of cognition, language use in context, and ethnic identity formation.

Cultural Cognition and Cultural Conceptualizations

Sharifian’s theories of cultural linguistics are constructed from achievements of cognitive sciences and anthropology, as well as inherited and developed from prior scholars in the discipline (e.g. Langacker, 1994, 2014; Palmer, 1996). The core notion in the theoretical framework of cultural linguistics by Sharifian (2017, pp. 3-5) is “cultural cognition” with three main characteristics, i.e. (i) *enactive* (constructed from human social and linguistic interactions across space and time, not just something from human brain), (ii) *distributed* (not equally shared among the members of the speech community whose perception, comprehension and performance are influenced and determined to a varying degree), and (iii) *dynamic* (constantly updated through negotiations and contact across generations and speech communities).

Cultural conceptualizations are the processes of forming cultural concepts. Cultural conceptualizations are parts of cultural cognition and thus correctly reflect its characteristics. To examine cultural conceptualizations encoded in human language, Sharifian (2017) suggests the utilization of cultural schemas, cultural categories and cultural metaphors as useful assessment tools. A cultural schema includes knowledge, information or concepts relating to a certain domain, such as fact, person, self, role, context, procedure, strategy, emotion, image, proposition (Nishida, 1999; Sharifian, 2017) that help to provide a script/frame for the construction, practice and interpretation of meanings. A cultural category in a language of a speech community may contain instances that are different from those of others in both quality and quantity due to different cultural conceptualizations. And a cultural metaphor is a form of describing or understanding one domain (target) through the concepts expressed

in another domain (source) that is often derived from cultural traditions.

This study attempts to elaborate on the language use in shop signs with the utilization of cultural schemas (mostly ADVERTISING) in relation to pragmatic devices (i.e. speech acts, pragmemes, and practs). Cultural categorizations and cross-domain conceptualizations are also considered when it comes to explanation for lexical items or expressions that are formed as practs.

Cultural Conceptualizations Relating to ADVERTISING in Shop Signs

As different speech communities have different systems of cultural conceptualizations, the cultural schema of ADVERTISING contains different meanings (such as pragmatic meanings) that are differently encoded in their languages. For example, Han (2018, p. 362) finds that Chinese shop signs tend to favor the expression as “*Treat the customer as god*,” while this might not be appropriate in Western cultures where god is only for worship. Therefore, the English translation that Han thinks much closer to visitors or customers of Western cultures should be: “*The customer is our first priority*.” It can be explained that the pragmatic cultural schema of ADVERTISING in Chinese shop signs is closely related to the cultural schema of power (embedded in the god reference) while that in the Western culture counterparts is associated with the cultural schema of PRIORITY.

A similar example is also found in Qiannan’s study (2012, p. 171), presenting one Chinese company name printed in English as “*Shanghai Wanxiang Elephant Garment Co. Ltd.*,” which is thought to be inappropriate as “elephants in the eyes of Chinese people are loyal, simple and honest, cute things, but in Western eyes are reckless, stupid and violent things.” This is also agreed by Ma (2014, p. 2531), who explains that “elephant is treated as a symbol of trickery or deceitful favor in Western countries and stands for something which is expensive but useless,” as in “*elephant in the room*” (referring to a problem that everyone knows about but does not mention) or “*white elephant*” (referring to a thing, often costly one, that has no use and is no longer needed). The reason for this might be because the pragmatic cultural schema of ADVERTISING in Chinese shop signs is related to the cultural schemas of ethics and optimism encoded in the use of the “elephant” symbol, whereas the corresponding cases are absent or different in Western cultures; thus, the good English translation suggested by the scholars is the use of Chinese pinyin in the place of “elephant” and the like.

El-Yasin & Mahadin (1996) study shop signs in Jordan and advocate that “the main purpose of the material written on shop signs seems to be to persuade customers to go into these shops and do business there [...] although its illocutionary point is informing” (p. 414). Their conclusion can be explained in the form of a pragmatic set as follows:

Pragmatic cultural schema:	ADVERTISING
Speech act/event:	[persuading customers to do business with the shops]
Pragmeme:	[INFORMING]
Practs (literal translation):	<i>paints; we are open 24 hours a day; we offer the best always</i>

Logical as it is, the set seems too general and thus needs more in-depth analysis with sub-speech acts/events and sub-pragmemes together with their own practs. However, El-Yasin & Mahadin (1996, p. 414) only mention one more specific situation in which certain standards of quality can be shown thanks to the association with foreign elements, as shown from the following pragmatic set:

Pragmatic cultural schema:	ADVERTISING
Speech act/event:	[Showing quality standards]
Pragmeme:	[USING FOREIGN ELEMENTS]
Practs:	<i>Coca Cola</i> ; <i>software</i> ; <i>studyyoo</i> ('studio'); <i>saaloon</i> ('salon'); <i>tub snaak</i> ('top snack'); <i>baarti</i> ('party')

The use of foreign or hybrid terms as markers of quality is also confirmed by other scholars. For example, according to Whiting's study (2008) on business naming in Tomsk, Russia, the most famous products of some kinds are usually foreign, "so the use of foreign elements recalls those products and associates other non-foreign products with them" (p. 344); or as stated by Ruzaitė (2008) in a study on Lithuanian shop signs, "foreign associations can be expected to evoke associations with foreign quality" (p. 225). Therefore, it can be said that the cultural schema of QUALITY in these cases is associated with the cultural schema of FOREIGNNESS, and they are both parts of the pragmatic cultural schema of ADVERTISING underlying the speech act of referring to quality standards.

The above pragmatic sets seem to have become more specific with AlHyari & Hamdan's report (2019, pp. 947-952), which shows that shop signs in Salt, Jordan fulfill the purpose of introducing and promoting the brand, product quality and services in such typical ways as: using superiority reference (e.g. *The prince*); using famous/nearby place reference (e.g. *Paris for mobiles*); using social relationship reference (e.g. *The Mother's Exhibition*); using religious reference (e.g. *Basmalah Electricity for Cars*); using fauna and flora reference (e.g. *Butterfly Lingerie*); using ethical reference (e.g. *Honesty Supermarket*); etc. Whether created in Arabic, English, or bilingualism, these shop signs closely reflect the native culture and identity as the pragmatic cultural schema of ADVERTISING encoded in them is related to the cultural schemas of SUPERIORITY, PLACE, RELATIONSHIP, RELIGION, FAUNA, FLORA, ETHICS, etc. that are shared among the members of the Arabic communities.

In sum, the pragmatic cultural schema of ADVERTISING, as shown from prior studies, includes the knowledge base to understand the enactment and uptake of such speech acts as introducing, attracting, persuading, promoting, and showing standard quality, which are executed in the situations of naming, informing, using symbolic references, or using foreign elements substantiated in the shop signs. These findings, however, are not only limited in contexts, but also still inadequately explored with the framework of cultural linguistics. This study on the contrastive analysis of American English and Vietnamese use in shop signs with the underlying cultural conceptualizations relating to ADVERTISING is then necessary to expand the research scale and significance.

METHOD

This is a qualitative research on the language of shop signs observed in public places to describe its relationship with the cultural schema of ADVERTISING that is associated with some certain speech acts/events and underlying a number of pragmemes. The languages of the shop signs are limited to American English and Vietnamese. The steps of conducting the research can be summarized as follows.

Sampling

With the help of the "street view" tool on Google Maps, the pictures of American English and Vietnamese shop signs (more than 400 items for each language) are collected, randomly and respectively, from many places of the United States (such as Washington DC, San Francisco, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Virginia, North Carolina, Rhode Island) and Vietnam (mostly in Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Noi). Other samples are also received from the researcher's colleagues and friends around or taken from previous studies and shared pictures on the Internet (such as alamy.com).

Analyzing

The use of American English and Vietnamese in shop signs is described with the framework of a pragmatic set by Sharifian (2017) concerning the relationship between pragmatic cultural schemas (in this study, it is mainly ADVERTISING) with the pragmatic devices in Pragmatic Act Theory (Mey, 2001, 2010; Kecskes, 2010), i.e. speech acts/events (referred to as "situated speech acts" or "instantiated pragmatic acts"), pragmemes (generalized pragmatic acts) and practs (concrete pragmatic acts or substantiations of pragmemes) (see Figure 1). Some comments are also made on the formulation, the frequency and the context range of the practs as well as their underlying cultural conceptualizations.

Contrasting

The features of the two languages in shop signs are compared on the levels of a pragmatic set to detect some similarities

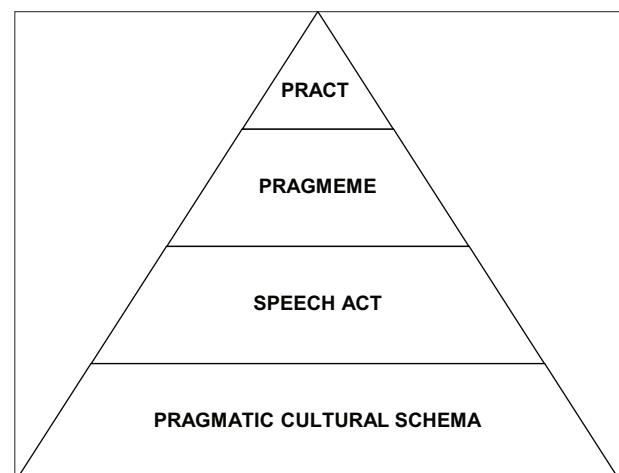


Figure 1. A pragmatic set (Sharifian, 2017, p. 54)

and differences, then the contrastive characteristics in each area are listed in the form of tables for further discussion on the divergence of cultural cognition. Finally, while the similarities are considered as assistance in intercultural communication, the differences are presumed to be difficult for cultural outsiders (Lado, 1957, p. 59) and thus are “what must be learned” and given focal attention (Gass & Selinker, 2008, pp. 96-97).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The pragmatic sets relating to ADVERTISING in American English versus Vietnamese shop signs

The typical speech acts of introducing, attracting, persuading, and promoting performed by the shop signs mentioned in the literature review for the purpose of ADVERTISING seem to overlap one another, which may cause some difficulties with the analysis. In fact, ADVERTISING “cannot simply be termed ‘informative’ or ‘persuasive’ as there are multiple factors functioning in variant combinations behind it” (Baig, 2013, p. 126). Based on the pragmatic cultural schema of ADVERTISING including knowledge, meanings, norms, values, behaviors, attitudes, etc. entrenched in the observed American English and Vietnamese shop signs, the speech acts can be segmented into quite distinctive sub-speech acts/events, namely emphasizing the focus of the business; emphasizing the access to the business; showing international quality/trend/identity; ensuring the reliability of quality standards; expressing credibility; showing outstanding qualities; and providing favorable treatment. Some similarities and (marked) differences in the general typical situations (pragmemes) of the speech acts/events and their realizations in words (practs) of American English and Vietnamese shop signs can be briefly presented and discussed as follows.

As can be seen from Table 1, there are many similarities in the situations where American English and Vietnamese shop signs perform the act of introducing the focus of the business. It can be the main products or services only to be mentioned (1a), or can be the products or services accom-

panied by items referring to themselves (1b), to their target customers (1c), or to their enormous variety and quantity (1d). The focus on the nature of the products or services (1b) are constructed with the utilization of their own intensions; for example, *yoga* can go with items like *core*, *power*, *energy*, *soul*; *opticians* may go with *light* or *eye*; *pizza* may go with *rotary* or *circle*; and *electrical appliances* often go with *lighting*. The customers on target (1c) are often mentioned in terms of age group, gender, or job (e.g. *senior*; *middle-aged*; *children*; *men*; *women*; *office staff*).

Although the products or services can also be brought into the center of interest with words of collective implications (1d) to highlight their diversity and abundance (such as *center* and *network*), the act can be differently expressed in shop signs of the two languages, that is, American English prefers such words as *whole*, *house*, and *shop* (e.g. *the whole donut*; *whole foods*; *donut house*; *brew house*; *farmhouse*; *mattress warehouse*; *coffee shop*; *donut shop*), whereas Vietnamese favors *siêu thị* ‘supermarket’ and *thế giới* ‘world’ (e.g. *siêu thị điện máy* ‘supermarket of machines’; *siêu thị tóc* ‘supermarket of hair’; *siêu thị mắt kính* ‘supermarket of eyeglasses’; *siêu thị đồ lót* ‘supermarket of underwear’; *siêu thị nội thất* ‘supermarket of furniture’; *thế giới đồ tập* ‘world of sportswear’; *thế giới đồ chơi* ‘world of toys’; *thế giới đồ gia dụng* ‘world of household appliances’; *thế giới di động* ‘world of mobile phones’; *thế giới kim cương* ‘world of diamonds’; *thế giới gạch* ‘world of bricks’; *thế giới laptop* ‘world of laptops’; *thế giới hoa quả* ‘world of fruit’).

Table 2 presents some similar situational prototypes in which American English and Vietnamese shop signs try to emphasize the access to the business. Those are the cases when the identity of the business owner (i.e. name; nickname; or brand name) (2a) or the nearby place (i.e. city; district; town; landmark; street name or address number) (2b) is mentioned along with the products or services so that customers may find it easier to remember and locate the shops quickly in mind. A significant difference may be the observation that Vietnamese shop signs often spotlight their business place by mentioning the products or services together with the easily identifiable object nearby (usually a plant)

Table 1. Analysis of speech act/event 1: emphasizing the focus of the business

Pragmemes	American English practs	Vietnamese practs
(1a) mentioning the products or services	<i>Futon and Bed</i> <i>Just a biscuit</i> <i>Alignments</i>	<i>Bánh-ướt</i> (‘wet cake’) <i>Chụp-hình-thẻ</i> (‘Shooting-photo-for cards’)
(1b) mentioning the products or services together with words relating to them	<i>Core power Yoga</i> <i>Rotary Pizza</i>	<i>Tiệm kính-Hồng-Quang</i> (‘Opticians-Red-Light’) <i>Tiệm điện-Ánh Sáng</i> (‘Electrical appliances store –Lighting’)
(1c) mentioning the products or services together with the target customers	<i>Senior living Arlington Place</i> <i>Karate Taewondo,</i> <i>Men-women-children</i>	<i>Thời trang-trung-niên</i> (‘Fashion-middle-aged’) <i>Cơm trưa-văn phòng</i> (‘Lunch-Office staff’)
(1d) mentioning the products or services together with words of collective implications	<i>Planet Fitness</i> <i>The whole donut</i> <i>Eye care center</i> <i>Mattress Warehouse</i>	<i>Thế giới-đồ tập</i> (‘World-sportswear’) <i>Siêu thị-tóc</i> (‘Supermarket-hair’)

(2c) or even make it sound unique with any object without much actual relations or meanings, whereas these situations are quite rare in American English shop signs.

Table 3 indicates many differences in the pragmatic meanings of foreign elements that are integrated in American English and Vietnamese shop signs. Specifically, Vietnamese shop signs tend to combine the business owner’s identity, the products or services with words of other languages (mostly English or languages of developed countries) to emphasize the international quality/trend which is perceived to be much better than the domestic standards, and thus may attract more attention from customers. In contrast, the use of foreign elements in American English shop signs is not arbitrary, but usually limited to words that have been borrowed and practiced for a long time so much so that they sound like native items (e.g. *boutique; bistro; café*) (3a); most of the other foreign words tend to appear along with American English equivalents as bilingual signs; the hybrid cases like *Rose déjà vu* are rare, or if any, just created by the ethnic minorities to reflect their own culture and language identity, such as Spanish, French, Chinese, and Korean (3b). Another difference is the countries’ identity to be mentioned in American English shop signs as a way to reveal the origins of the products or services, while in Vietnamese ones it is rather assumed to confirm the international trend with the best quality (3c).

Table 4 presents the cases of American English and Vietnamese shop signs having products or services mentioned together with home-made origin (4a) or famous brands/origins (4c) with a view to ensuring the reliability of quality

standards. For the first pragmeme (4a) to be discussed, the word referring to home-made origin in Vietnamese shop signs is usually *nhà-làm* ‘home-made’, and appears more often than the corresponding case in American English shop signs with words like *hometown* or *made in American/USA*. However, the shop signs of both languages share pragmeme (4c), where the famous brands or origins (i.e. state; district; city; town; etc.) are mentioned together with their products or services to serve the purpose. Table 4 also indicates some significant differences in this speech act/event. First, Vietnamese shop signs usually includes claims of official origin (4b) (e.g. *chính-chủ* ‘official-owner’; *chính-hãng* ‘official-producer’; *chính-hiệu* ‘official-brand’; *chính-gốc* ‘official-origin’), or some kind of health commitment (4d) (e.g. *đạt-chuẩn* ‘having-standards’; *không-hóa chất* ‘without-chemicals’) to the mentioned products or services so that their quality reliability can be increased, whereas such situations are quite rare in American English shop signs. Second, while Vietnamese shop signs do not often mention the establishment year of the business to ensure its quality reliability, the situation is quite common in American English counterparts with the formulation of “*since/EST/established + year*” (4e), that is, the longer the time refers back, the stronger the quality is confirmed.

As shown from Table 5, both American English and Vietnamese shop signs express credibility when the products or services are mentioned together with words of family reference such as *mẹ* ‘mother’, *chú/bác* ‘uncle’, *cô/dì* ‘auntie’ (5a) so that the customers may have a feeling of being cared like

Table 2. Analysis of speech act/event 2: emphasizing the access to the business

Pragmemes	American English practs	Vietnamese practs
(2a) mentioning the products or services together with the business owner’s identity	<i>Yvonne’s Hair Salon</i> <i>McReynold’s Liquors</i> <i>MODELL’S Sporting Goods</i>	<i>Vải-Ngọc Hương</i> (‘Cloth-Ngọc Hương’) <i>Quán cơm-Hải</i> (‘Rice restaurant-Hải’)
(2b) mentioning the products or services together with the nearby places	<i>Oldham Opticians</i> <i>Vineville Market</i> <i>Hartford Foodmart</i> <i>Sandy Spring Bank</i>	<i>Nha khoa-Phú Thọ</i> (‘Dentist’s-Phú Thọ’) <i>CLB-Bida-3/2</i> (‘Club-Billiards-3/2’)
(2c) mentioning the products or services together with the signature objects	.	<i>Quán nhậu-Cây Tre</i> (‘Drinking bistro-Bamboo Tree’) <i>Điểm tâm-Cây Me</i> (‘Breakfast-Tamarind Tree’)

Table 3. Analysis of speech act/event 3: showing international quality/trend/identity

Pragmemes	American English practs	Vietnamese practs
(3a) mentioning the business owner’s identity together with words of foreign languages	<i>Penelope’s Boutique</i> <i>Jackie’s Bistro</i> <i>Mason*Dixon Café</i>	<i>Cường mobile</i> <i>Honda Hùng</i> <i>Salon Hồng</i>
(3b) mentioning the products or services together with words of foreign languages	<i>Rose déjà vu</i>	<i>Túi xách-Phoenix</i> (‘Bags-Phoenix’) <i>Viện thẩm mỹ-Lavender</i> (‘Beauty salon-Lavender’)
(3c) mentioning the products or services together with other countries’ identity	<i>China Inn Restaurant</i> <i>Greek corner pizza</i> <i>Thai cuisine</i> <i>Korean Chicken wings</i>	<i>Thiết bị bếp-Châu Âu</i> (‘Kitchen utensils-European’) <i>Nhà hàng-Hàn Quốc</i> (‘Restaurant-Korean’)

home and trust the business more; however, this pragmeme is much more frequent in Vietnamese shop signs than in American English counterparts. Such affection can also be gained in the situation where the products or services are introduced with words of care reference such as *yêu thương* ‘loving’, *chia sẻ* ‘sharing’, *quan tâm* ‘caring’, *lắng nghe* ‘listening’, *thấu hiểu* ‘understanding’, and *trân trọng* ‘treasuring’ (5c). The difference might be that Vietnamese shop signs usually relate the products or services to ethical reference such as *tâm đức* ‘conscientiousness’, *tín nghĩa* ‘faithfulness’, *tận tâm* ‘dedication’ to manifest their trustworthiness, while this situation is almost absent in American English ones (5b).

Table 6 presents some situations in which the act of showing outstanding qualities is performed by American English and Vietnamese shop signs alike. The first one and also the most common one to be observed is when the products or services are mentioned together with their positive properties such as *tươi* ‘fresh’, *ngon* ‘delicious’, *công nghệ*

cao ‘high-tech’, *tuyệt vời* ‘spectacle’ (6a). The second one is when not only the products or services but also the positive effects exerted on customers are mentioned; for example, *dentist’s* may go with *pretty teeth* or *pretty smile*; *coffee* may go with *conscious* or *creative*; *milkshake* with *cool down*; and *gym* with *burn calories* (6b). Another situation that is also widely-favored is when the products or services are accompanied by words of superiority reference such as *vua* ‘king’, *số 1* ‘number one’, *lựa chọn hàng đầu* ‘first choice’, *độc nhất* ‘unique’, *tốt nhất* ‘best’, *chuyên gia* ‘expert’, *kiệt tác* ‘masterpiece’, *hoàn hảo* ‘perfect’, *quan trọng* ‘VIP’ (6c). The next way of demonstrating the marvelous points of the products or services is including the convenience reference such as *open 24/7*, *safe delivery*, *payless*, or *2 in 1* (6d). Last but not least, various symbols are often used in situations where the products or services imply something (6e); for example, *phoenix* or *sun* represents longevity and prosperity, and thus suggests that the business may last forever with the

Table 4. Analysis of speech act/event 4: ensuring the reliability of quality standards

Pragmemes	American English practs	Vietnamese practs
(4a) mentioning the products or services together with home-made origins	<i>Dynasty Jewelry</i> <i>your hometown jeweler</i> <i>Made in America Store</i>	<i>Trà-sữa-nhà-làm</i> (‘Tea-milk-home-made’) <i>Bánh-ngon-nhà-làm</i> (‘Cake-delicious-home-made’)
(4b) mentioning the products or services together with official origins	.	<i>Nhà-bán-chính-chủ</i> (‘House-sold-(by)-official-owner’) <i>Đặc sản-chính-gốc</i> (‘Specialties-official-origin’)
(4c) mentioning the products or services together with famous brands/ origins	<i>Kentucky fried chicken</i> <i>San Francisco sourdough bread</i> <i>Maryland crab cakes</i>	<i>Yến-sào-Nha Trang</i> (‘Bird-nest-Nha Trang’) <i>Bánh pía-Sóc Trăng</i> (‘Pía Cake - Sóc Trăng’)
(4d) mentioning the products or services together with health commitment	.	<i>Nhà thuốc-đạt-chuẩn GPP</i> (‘Drugstore-having-GPP standards’) <i>Thuốc nhuộm-không-hóa chất</i> (‘Dyes-without-chemicals’)
(4e) mentioning the products or services together with the year of business establishment	<i>Tommy Dinic’s roast PORK and BEEF, since 1954</i> <i>Town of Palm Beach Shores</i> <i>Best little town in Florida</i> <i>EST. 1951</i> <i>Kurt & Janna Carpenter, Established October 5, 2013</i>	.

Table 5. Analysis of speech act/event 5: expressing credibility

Pragmemes	American English practs	Vietnamese practs
(5a) mentioning the products or services together with words of family reference	<i>Uncle Zeke’s</i> <i>Dave Faigle & Son Jewelers</i> <i>Family dollar</i> <i>Auntie Anne’s</i>	<i>Mì-Chú-Tắc</i> (‘Noodles-Uncle-Tắc’) <i>Chè ngon-Mẹ-Nhím</i> (‘Sweet soup-Mother-Nhím’)
(5b) mentioning the products or services together with words of ethical reference	.	<i>Nhà thuốc-Tâm Đức</i> (‘Drugstore-Conscientiousness’) <i>Nước đá-Tín Nghĩa</i> (‘Ice-Faithfulness’)
(5c) mentioning the products or services together with words of care reference	<i>Loving Care Spa</i> <i>Loving care home services</i> <i>We’re sharing our resources with you</i> <i>Treasure shop</i>	<i>Hoa-yêu thương</i> (‘Flowers-loving’) <i>Luôn luôn-lắng nghe, luôn luôn-thấu hiểu</i> (‘Always-listening, always-understanding’)

Table 6. Analysis of speech act/event 6: showing outstanding qualities

Pragmemes	American English practs	Vietnamese practs
(6a) mentioning the products or services together with positive properties	<i>Fresh Squeezed Juice Bar</i> <i>Westborough Spectacle Shoppe</i>	<i>Bánh mì tươi</i> ('Fresh bread') <i>Camera công nghệ cao</i> (‘High-Tech Camera’)
(6b) mentioning the products or services together with positive effects	<i>DC conscious & Cafe'</i> <i>Cool down with our seasonal peach milkshake</i> <i>Burn calories, not cash</i>	<i>Nha khoa-Răng Xinh</i> (‘Dentist’s-Pretty Teeth’) <i>Bún bò-Huế-Ăn-là-nhớ</i> (‘Beef noodles-Huế-Eating-is –memorable’)
(6c) mentioning the products or services together with words of superiority reference	<i>Burger King</i> <i>First Choice Health Centers</i> <i>Unique stones and Jewelry</i> <i>America’s best</i>	<i>Vua-nệm</i> (‘King-mattress’) <i>Ví điện tử Momo, số 1 Việt Nam</i> (‘Digital wallet Momo, number 1 in Vietnam’)
(6d) mentioning the products or services together with the sake of convenience	<i>H&R Mart, Open 24/7</i> <i>Safeway home delivery</i> <i>1 hour delivery windows</i> <i>We deliver for you</i> <i>Payless SuperStore</i>	<i>Thẻ đa năng tiện ích 2 trong 1, Khám bệnh và Thanh toán như ATM</i> (‘Multi-function card 2 in 1, Medical check and payment like ATM’)
(6e) mentioning the products or services together with positive symbol reference	Phoenix Communications Inc. Hair heaven Sky nails Mohegan Sun Angel Massage & Spa	<i>Nhà hàng-Phượng Hoàng</i> (‘Restaurant-Phoenix’) <i>Thiên đường-ẩm thực</i> (‘Heaven-cuisine’) <i>Nhựa-Bình Minh</i> (‘Plastic-Sunrise’)

shining and wonderful status; *heaven* or *sky* may imply that the products or services will satisfy the customers’ expectations and make them feel like on cloud nine; *angel* may indicate salvation and means that the products or services may protect, help and console the customers.

As can be seen from Table 7, American English and Vietnamese shop signs share some knowledge base of the situations in which the act of promising favorable treatment during the transaction can be performed. Specifically, some special offers such as installments, free trials, low prices for early birds, accompanied presents or discounts are given to customers as encouragement and attraction (7a). The prices are also often exaggerated with words like *cực sốc* ‘super shocking’ or *đẹp như mơ* ‘beautiful like a dream’ in Vietnamese shop signs; or usually with *lowest* and *affordable* in American English ones (7b). To make the offers sound more relevant, urgent and appealing, some reasons such as selling-off (7c), closing-down (7d), or ceremony (7e) are usually mentioned along.

The cultural conceptualizations underlying the use of American English versus Vietnamese in shop signs

Both American and Vietnamese pragmatic cultural schema of ADVERTISING trigger the same speech acts/events executed in situational contexts associated with business focus, business access, international indication, quality assurance, quality appeal, credibility impression, and favorable treatment, which are entrenched in American English and Vietnamese shop signs (in the form of written language). The similarities that are shared between the two cultures include the situational contexts related to various cultural subschemas of ADVERTISING, such as PRODUCT, SERVICE,

CUSTOMER, NAME, PLACE, CARE, USEFULNESS, SUPERIORITY, CONVENIENCE, SYMBOL, TRANSACTION, OCCASION, and price. The differences exist in the following cultural sub-schemas of ADVERTISING with different cultural conceptualizations.

Collective implication

The use of collective implications (1d) may reflect differences in cultural cognition between the two mentioned cultures. For example, in American cultural cognition, *house* is where things are stored and is also perceived as a place to get affordable goods, as in *warehouse club/store* (a type of store that sells goods in large quantities at low prices), or *on the house* (provided free by the pub or restaurant), while the corresponding case in Vietnamese cultural cognition is *chợ* ‘market’, as in *đồ chợ* ‘market stuffs’ referring to quite cheap goods, or *đi chợ* ‘go to the market’ with the meaning of being allowed to get things easily from a menu or a place; the word *siêu thị* ‘supermarket’ is viewed as something very big and thus not only emphasizes the large quantity but also implies the enormous diversity. Generally, in Vietnamese shop signs, the variety and abundance of goods or services is often expressed in terms of gigantic scale (e.g. *siêu thị điện máy* ‘supermarket of machines’; *thế giới di động* ‘world of mobile phones’), whereas in American English counterparts, it is often expressed in terms of functional facility (e.g. *donut house*; *donut shop*).

Signature object

In Vietnamese cultural cognition, a shop’s identity is attached to its own signature object. Whether the shop owner likes it or not, the customers often tend to call the shop by the name of its accompanied object, which is often a plant

Table 7. Analysis of speech act/event 7: providing favorable treatment

Pragmemes	American English practs	Vietnamese practs
(7a) mentioning favorable selling terms of the products or services	<i>\$15 EARLY BIRD SPECIAL</i> <i>Try a free week</i> <i>Up to 50% off</i>	<i>Nokia-trả góp-0%</i> (‘Nokia-installment-0%’) <i>Nón-sơn, mua-1-tặng-1</i> (‘Hat-painted, buy-1-get-1’)
(7b) mentioning favorable prices of the products or services	<i>Highest Purity, Lowest Price</i> <i>Affordable home and Office delivery</i>	<i>Usp-giá-cực-sốc</i> (‘Usp-price-super-shocking’) <i>Giá-đẹp-như-mơ</i> (‘Price-beautiful-like-dream’)
(7c) announcing the selling-off together with favorable prices	<i>Entire store on sale</i> <i>Entire store 40-60%</i> <i>Inventory blowout sale</i> <i>All Sales Final</i>	<i>Xả hàng, bán giá vốn</i> (‘Selling-off, ground prices’) <i>Xả hết shop, 49k</i> (‘Selling-off entire shop, 49k’)
(7d) announcing the close-down together with special treatment	<i>Store closing sale (this location only), everything 40-60%, lowest ticketed price, nothing held back</i> <i>Closing down, Everything reduced, Everything must go! Huge savings!</i> <i>Going out of business, Huge stock clearance, Massive Reductions</i>	<i>Ngưng bán, trả mặt bằng, thanh lý toàn bộ, bán giá gốc</i> (‘Stop selling, (to) return property, entire store sale, ground prices’)
(7e) announcing the ceremony together with special treatment	<i>Memorial Day Sale, up to 50% everything</i> <i>Boxing Day Sale, special offer</i> <i>Winter Clearance, up to 70% off</i>	<i>Khai trương cửa hàng, giảm 20%</i> (‘Grand opening, discount 20%’) <i>Mừng quốc khánh, giảm tới 50%</i> (‘Independence Day, discount to 50%’)

grown in the front (e.g. *Quán nhậu-cây tre* ‘Drinking bistro-Bamboo Tree’), an accidental mark nearby (e.g. *Quán-Cây cột điện* ‘Bistro – Electrical Post’), or a theme color (e.g. *Café-Ngôi nhà-màu tím* ‘Café-House-purple’). Therefore, a lot of Vietnamese shop signs are created and have their identity acknowledged this way (2c). The case, however, is quite rare in American cultural cognition, maybe because such objects are not very likely to exist accidentally or intentionally in the US as they are in Vietnam.

Foreignness

The use of foreign elements in bilingual or hybrid shop signs are common in communities of both languages (3a-c). However, while American English shop signs take it as a systematic language phenomenon (e.g. *bistro; café; boutique*) or as a way to indicate the identity of the products or services (e.g. *China Inn Restaurant; Thai cuisine*), the Vietnamese counterparts mainly take it for the purpose of ensuring the best possible quality and showing international trend since foreignness (usually of developed countries) is believed to be better. The cultural conceptualization is typical of Vietnamese cultural cognition as reflected in the well-known Vietnamese proverb “*the domestic Buddha is not sacred*,” meaning that the things one is having will not work and that he should choose those beyond his possession (i.e. foreign to him) which are supposed to bring about more positive effects.

Home-made origin

In Vietnamese cognition, things of home-made origin are believed to be the best, as shown in the popular Vietnamese idiom “*delicious/true like mom’s cooking*” used to describe some

really tasty food or something so true and precise. Thus, when it comes to ADVERTISING, the quality of products (usually foods) is often marked with the formulation of “*PRODUCT + home-made*” (e.g. *Sữa chua-nhà làm* ‘yogurt-home-made’). A similar conceptualization also exists in American English communities (4a) but is based on a larger scale (i.e. *hometown + PRODUCT; PRODUCT + made in America/USA*) and not as frequent as it is in Vietnamese counterparts.

Official origin

As there may be quite a lot of fake products or services on the open market in Vietnam, claims of official origins included in a piece of ADVERTISING are perceived as assurances of reliability and trustworthiness, hence the utilization of the formulation of “*PRODUCT/SERVICE + official + owner/producer/brand/origin*” in many Vietnamese shop signs (4b). In contrast, the case is almost absent in American English ones since the US tends to be better at preventing imitations on the market to make the customers confident enough to approach the products or services without much concern about their authenticity.

Health commitment

Vietnamese people tend to have a sheer need for assurances about the quality of the products or services on the market before their decision to choose any. Various aspects of the stuffs are preferred to be claimed so that the need will be satisfied, one of which is health commitment. Although health standards are typical in ADVERTISING discourse, they are not often mentioned in American English shop signs as in Vietnamese ones (4d). The assumption is that health commitment associated with ADVERTISING is stronger in

Vietnamese cultural cognition, which encourages such statements as “*having health standards*,” “*no use of chemicals/preservatives/dyes*,” and “*no side effects*” to be made in a wide range of ADVERTISING contexts, including those found in shop signs.

Establishment year

Although it is common knowledge that the longer a business has survived, the more it is likely to be trusted and favored, the use of business establishment year in shop signs (e.g. *since/est. 1990*) to exert such effects on customers is more familiar in American English communities than in Vietnamese counterparts (4e). Some Vietnamese shop signs these days may have started to adapt or take advantage of the conceptualization as a result of the inter-cultural and inter-linguistic communication with English communities for a long time; nevertheless, the perception of the attached establishment year as a reliability assurance is currently not very typical of Vietnamese cultural cognition.

Family

Family reference is an integral part in Vietnamese shop signs, especially those of small businesses run by individuals who prefer their customers to address them as family members. The formulation of the shop signs is usually “*PRODUCT/SERVICE + mother/aunt/uncle/sister + NAME/ORDINAL POSITION AT BIRTH*” (e.g. *Chè ngon-Mẹ-Nhím* ‘Sweet soup-Mother-Nhím’; *Cơm tấm-Dì-Bà* ‘Broken rice-Auntie-The Third’). The use of family reference is associated with Vietnamese cultural schema of ADVERTISING as it underpins the business credibility (5a) in that mother, aunt, uncle and sister are perceived as the ones who are the most caring, thoughtful and dedicated to household stuffs, such as cooking, keeping clean, making and mending things. Family reference is also observed in American English shop signs (e.g. *Uncle/Auntie + NAME’S*) but with lower frequency and different underlying cultural conceptualizations, that is, the mentioned “uncle” or “auntie” refers to the business owner’s identity rather than the assumed social relationships with customers as it is in Vietnamese cultural cognition; and while the use may make the customers feel close and cared, the effects are not as strong in American English shop signs as in Vietnamese ones (mostly reflected in the use of ordinal position at birth as a form of address, usually beginning with “the second” for the first child and denoting a close-knit family/community bond).

Ethics

In Vietnamese communities, it is easy to catch a shop sign with a name connoting a moral ideology, such as *tâm đức* ‘conscientiousness’, *tín nghĩa* ‘faithfulness’, *tận tâm* ‘dedication’, *đức hạnh* ‘good virtue’ (5b). Such names are viewed as ethical commitments that the shop owners affirm to their businesses and customers, thus eventually enhance credibility, which is seriously concerned in Vietnamese cultural cognition as conveyed in the common Vietnamese proverb “*credibility that is lost once will be lost forever*.” In contrast,

members of American communities may prefer “*actions speak louder than words*,” so the similar conceptualization relating to ethical commitment is likely to be embedded in practical behaviors rather than in linguistic expressions, which might be the reason why words of ethic reference are rarely included in American English shop signs.

Applications to the translation or creation of English shop signs in Vietnam

The study results may make a positive contribution to the translation or creation of English shop signs in Vietnam, among the choices of focus to be put on the source or the target culture, or even some kind of combination. The concern about whether “nationalism” or “globalism,” “national” or “international” has been discussed in prior studies (such as Whiting, 2008; Ruzaitė, 2008) with the results of English elements in monolingual, bilingual and hybrid shop signs as a trend. Some applications in the local contexts can be suggested as follows:

First, the similarities in some parts of knowledge embedded in shop signs of the two languages can be employed to make a target-based monolingual creation, or a target-based translation along with the source one to form a bilingual item. However, while the formulations of the (American) English practs associated with each common pragmeme are taken into consideration, the differences in the comparison with Vietnamese ones should also be acknowledged to prevent some negative interferences they may cause during the translation. For example, Vietnamese shop signs usually use the word *siêu thị* ‘supermarket’ to imply a wide variety and quantity of products or services, but its English equivalent is not frequently used with the same pragmatic meanings as *house*, *shop* or *store* in (American) English shop signs; therefore, *siêu thị tóc* ‘supermarket of hair’ should be translated into *hair salon* or *barber shop*, and *siêu thị đồ chơi* ‘supermarket of toys’ can be translated into *toy house*, *toy shop* or *toy store*.

Second, with regard to the differences, a creation or translation that is completely based on the target (English) sometimes seems impossible as some pragmemes and practs are common in the source language (Vietnamese) but quite rare, different or even absent in the target one (assumed from American English). Then the solution might be hybridity, which refers to “a third space that gets the two parties to affect each other and the hybridization as well rather than embracing both in however explosive a mixture” (Fludernik, 1998, p. 13). For example, because the reference to the shop’s signature object is quite often in Vietnamese shop signs but appears quite rare in (American) English counterparts, the sign *Điểm tâm-Cây Me* ‘Breakfast-Tamarind Tree’ can be created/translated into *Tamarind Tree-Breakfast Bistro* or *Cây Me-Breakfast Bistro-since 1992*. The former translation is target-affected hybridity, where the signature object is added to the situation; while the latter translation is source-affected hybridity, where the products and services are shifted into English and also emphasized with the mentioned establishment year. Both of the translation versions within the “third place” may then grow so familiar that it be-

comes a shared cultural space where experience, knowledge as well as language meaning and use of the two parties will be constantly cross-understood and updated.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The knowledge base to understand and practice the above-analyzed speech acts/events as well as their pragmemes and practs is included in the pragmatic cultural schema of ADVERTISING, which is differently encoded in American English and Vietnamese shop signs, reflecting different cultural conceptualizations. Besides the similarities in the observed situated speech acts, many differences are highlighted in some pragmemes and practs whose underlying cultural conceptualizations relate to collective implications, signature objects, foreign elements, home-made origins, official origins, health commitment, establishment year, family references, and ethics. In reality, there may be more instantiated pragmatic acts that are simultaneously and differently executed, depending on (i) the physical nature of the shop signs (i.e. size, placement as well as ADVERTISING policies), (ii) the business owner's purposes, and especially (iii) the consciousness levels of the speech community members towards the shared knowledge (Wierzbicka, 1998, p. 245; Sharifian, 2017, pp. 60-61), that is, different customers may have different interpretations, feelings and behaviors towards the same shop sign; and one ADVERTISING strategy might be worked out from various pragmatic acts or situations within or beyond this analysis. While the first two aspects are mainly concerned in approaches of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, the cognitive frame of shop signs constructed from cultural conceptualizations is the significant contribution of this study, in which certain norms underpinning the use of American English and Vietnamese in shop signs are articulated and compared from pragmatic cultural perspectives for further practice of translation, business and intercultural communication within Vietnamese contexts. More research into the language use of shop signs should be done on a larger scale and within many other languages so that the approach can be confirmed and revised with more significant findings.

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