A contrastive analysis of performative verbs in English and Vietnamese / Trần Thị Thu Hiền

I hereby declare that I have conducted this Bachelor thesis independently, only using basic sources listed in the reference. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this work contains no material previously published or written by any other person.

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Last but not least, although all efforts have been made to fulfill the thesis, I am aware that this thesis is far from perfect. Therefore, comments or suggestions for the thesis would be highly appreciated.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is about the contrastive analysis of English directive performative verbs and their Vietnamese equivalents. In the first place, some concepts and terms related to this linguistic area have been dealt with. Then, the study is focused on exploring the structures and meanings of the two language systems. Based on the analysis of directive performative verbs in terms of syntactic and semantic features, some similarities and differences of verbs in the two languages are pointed out. With the aim of helping teachers and learners gain a clear understanding about directive performative verbs in English and Vietnamese, the author offers useful recommendations for the teaching and learning of English performative verbs as well as for the translation of written discourse from English text to Vietnamese one and vice versa.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A: Action

CA: Contrastive analysis

EPV: English Performative Verb

EPVs: English Performative Verbs

EPs: Explicit Performatives

H: Hearer

IF: Illocutionary Force

IFIDs: Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices

IPs: Implicit Performatives

PV: Performative Verb

S: Speaker

SA: Speech act

SAs: Speech acts

U: Utterance

Us: Utterances

VPV: Vietnamese Performative Verb

VPVs: Vietnamese Performative Verbs

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale of the study

Among speech act verbs, PVs are crucially importance to the way we interpret what other people are saying because PVs signal the performance of acts. However, there is a fact that leaners of English have not been well equipped with a all-sided knowledge of EPVs and the meanings of PVs have never been systematically investigated.

Recognizing the importance of PVs in communication and the problems learners may face in using PVs, I decide to carry out a contrastive analysis of English and Vietnamese directive PVs in terms of syntactic and semantic features.

1.2. Aims and objectives of the study

1.2.1. Aims

The study is aimed at:

- raising Vietnamese learner's awareness of how to realize the meanings of EPVs and use them appropriately in order to achieve communicative purposes.

- providing teachers of English with useful materials about the knowledge of PVs.

1.2.2. Objectives

To achieve these aims, the research tries to:

- present and describe the structures and the meanings of directive PVs in English and Vietnamese.

- point out the similarities and differences of directive EPVs and their Vietnamese equivalents in terms of syntax and semantics.

- suggest some implications for learning and teaching English directive PVs.

1.2.3. Research questions

The objectives are elaborated into the following research questions:

- What are the structures and meanings of directive PVs in English and Vietnamese ?

- What are the similarities and differences of directive PVs in English and Vietnamese?

- What are the possible recommendations for learning and teaching English directive PVs?

1.3. Scope of the study

Due to the limited time and the scale of the minor thesis, the study is focused on directive PVs which are most frequently used in written discourse in English and Vietnamese.

1.4. Methodology of the study

The main method in the study is the contrastive analysis (CA) of directive PVs in English and Vietnamese. The term CA is defined by James, C. (1980:3) as "*a linguistic enterprise aimed at producing inverted (i.e. contrastive, not comparative) two-valued typologies (a CA is always concerned with a pair of languages), and founded on the assumption that language can be compared.*"

The author uses the following principles in order to achieve the aims and objectives of the study:

+ Collecting data containing directive PVs.

+ Choosing data sources from ebook.

+ Choosing type of data: original texts in English and Vietnamese translation equivalents

+ Choosing instrumental languages: English is selected as the source language and Vietnamese as the target language.

Important techniques which are employed in the study include:

+ observing data on translation texts

+systematizing and categorizing data

1.5. Organization of the study

Chapter one: Introduction.

Chapter two: Theoretical Background

Chapter three: A contrastive analysis of directive PVs in English and in Vietnamese

Chapter four: Conclusion

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Speech Act Theory

2.1.1. Definition of speech acts

Yule, G. (1996, p.47) views that speech acts are actions that are performed via utterances to serve a function in communication. Speech acts are also defined as "*the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication*". (Searle, 1969, p.16).

2.1.2. Components of speech acts

In the book "*How to do things with words*" by Austin (1962), there are three related acts in the action of performing an utterance. Firstly, *locutionary act* can be viewed as a mere uttering of some words in certain language, while the *illocutionary* and *perlocutinary acts* convey a more complicated message for the hearer. Secondly, *illocutionary act* communicates the speaker's intentions behind the locution. Thirdly, *perlocutionary act* reveals the effect of the utterance on the listeners.

2.1.3. Speech Act Classification

On the basis of Searle's theory, a general classification system includes five types of functions performed by speech acts: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations.

2.1.4. Illocutionary force indicating device

The most obvious device for indicating the illocutionary force (the illocutionary force indicating device or IFID) is a piece of language that signals what kind of speech act is being performed.

2.1.5. Felicity conditions

2.1.6. The relationship between speech acts and speech act verbs

According to Searle (1979), illocutionary acts are "*natural conceptual kinds*". "*The illocutionary acts carried out by the speaker making utterances are the acts viewed in terms of the utterance's significance within a conventional system of social interaction.*" (James, 1983:244).

2.1.7. Property of speech act verbs

It is pointed out that many speech act verbs can be used "performatively", i.e that they can be used in the first person, present tense to indicate the nature (or the so-called "illocutionary force") of the utterance in which they occur.

2.2. Performatives

2.2.1. Performatives versus Constatives

2.2.2. Definition of Performatives

Austin defines a performative as an utterance which contains a special type of verb (a performative verb) by force of which it performs an action. Or "*a performative utterance is one that actually describes the act that it performs*". (James, 1983:235)

2.2.3. Types of performatives

Having defined performatives, Austin then distinguishes two general groups: explicit and implicit performatives.

2.2.3.1. Explicit performative

An explicit performative is one in which the utterance contains an expression that makes explicit what kind of act is being performed (Lyons, 1981:175)

2.2.3.2. Implicit performative

Implicit performatives do not make explicit the illocutionary act performed in making the utterance.

2.3. Performative verbs

2.3.1. Definition of performative verbs *which*

James R.Hurford (1983:237) defines that "*a performative verb is one, when used in a simple positive present tense sentence, with a 1st person singular subject, can make the utterance of that sentence performative.*"

2.3.2. The function of performative verbs

In speech act theory, utterances have two kinds of meaning including propositional meaning and illocutionary meaning.

2.3.3. Classification of performative verbs

Performative verbs appear in explicit performatives and do not exist in implict performatives. Based on the relations of utterances, Performative verbs can be classified into three types as follows:

2.3.3.1. Meta-linguistic performative verbs

2.3.3.2. Ritual performative verbs

2.3.3.3. Collaborate performative verbs

2.4. Summary

The chapter two has provided basic concepts and terms related to performative verbs in order to give better understanding of the rest of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH DIRECTIVE PERFORMATIVE VERBS AND THEIR VIETNAMESE EQUIVALENTS

3.1. Syntactic features of directive PVs

3.1.1. Directive PVs in English

Directive PVs in English include *ask, advise, beg, beseech, challenge, command, dare, defy, demand, dictate, direct, forgive, implore, insist, order, petition, propose, recommend, request, require, tell, suggest, urge, warn.*

They normally occur in the constructions below:

$$I + Vp + (you) + that\ X \quad or \quad I + Vp + (you) + to\ Y$$

In which:

- V_p: is a PV in directive clause

- that X: is that-clause which contains a subjunctive or a modal like "should". "*That*" is a conjunction and can be omitted.

- to Y: is an infinitive clause or to infinitive

3.1.2. Directive PVs in Vietnamese

The structures of directive PVs in Vietnamese are not as complicated as ones in English. Directive PVs in Vietnamese often occur in complex sentences.

The construction of a complex sentence that has a PV in the main predicate as follow:

$$S1 \quad - \quad V_{1(p)} \quad (conjunction)\ S2 \quad - \quad V$$
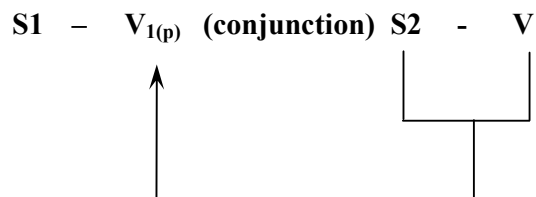
In which:

 - S1: is the subject of the main clause

 - V_1: is PV (the predicate of the main clause)

 - S_2: is the subject of the subordinate clause

 - V_2: is predicate of the subordinate clause

3.1.3. Similarities and differences of directive PVs in English and Vietnamese in terms of syntactic features

3.1.3.1. Similarities

3.1.3.2. Differences

The table shows the similarities and differences of PVs in English and Vietnamese in terms of syntactic feature.

	EPVs	VPVs
Similarity	I + Vp + (you) + (that) + you + V2 E.g: *I **suggest** that you see a psychiatrist as soon as possible.* (James, 1983:238)	S1 + Vp + (S2) + (rằng) + S2 + V2 E.g: *Tôi **đề nghị** anh đi gặp bác sỹ tâm thần càng sớm càng tốt.*
Differences	- I + Vp + for + Noun E.g: *I **beg** for favour.* *Might I **ask** for a photograph of Mr. John Straker?* - I + Vp + of / to + you E.g: *I hereby **request of** you that you close the door.* (Yule, 1996:55)	- S1 + Vp + Noun (without preposition) E.g: *Tôi **xin** một ân huệ.* *Liệu tôi có thể **xin** một bức ảnh của ông Straker được không?* - S1 + Vp + S2 E.g: *Tôi **yêu cầu** anh đóng cửa lại.*

3.2. Semantic features of directive PVs

3.2.1. Directive PVs in English

The classification of groups of directive PVs is based on the Dictionary of speech act verbs. (Wierzbicka, 1987)

➢ **The order group**

This group consists of PVs such as *order, claim, command, demand, direct, tell, instruct, charge, challenge, require, prescribe,* etc. There is a strong degree of imposition and the speaker's desire for the hearer to do the required acts.

➢ **The ask$_1$ group**

This group seems to be the most popular kind of directives including PVs such as *ask, beg, beseech, entreat, implore, entreat, insist, plead, appeal, solicit, supplicate*, etc. A person can ask for something for the sake of himself other than the addressee's benefit.

➢ **The ask₂ group**

- The verb "ask"

In the sense of 'asking a question' (e.g. "*ask who", "ask where", "ask when", "ask whether", "ask why", "ask whom*") to *ask* is to request the hearer to perform a future speech act that would give the original speaker a correct answer to his question. When the speaker asks questions, he does not expect a favour from the addressee.

➢ **The advise group**

PVs of this group may be *advise, suggest, recommend, warn, propose, remind*, etc. When the speaker gives advice, he thinks that he knows what the addressee should do and he says confidently that it will be a good thing if the addressee follows the proposed course of action.

3.2.2. Directive PVs in Vietnamese

➢ **The "order" group**

The "order" group in English has Vietnamese equivalents of verbs such as *ra lệnh, truyền, bảo, thách, yêu cầu, giao, phân công, chỉ thị, buộc, hạn*, etc.

➢ **The 'ask₁' group**

This group includes *đề nghị, bắt đền, mời, nhờ, năn nỉ, van, xin, thỉnh cầu, xin lỗi, xin phép*.

➢ **The ask₂ group**

In Vietnamese, PVs in this group are *hỏi, xin hỏi*.

➢ **The "advise" group**

This group has Vietnamese equivalents such as *khuyên, đề nghị, gợi ý, nhắc, báo trước, dặn, mách*, etc.

3.2.3. Similarities and differences of directive PVs in English and Vietnamese in terms of semantic features

3.2.3.1. Similarities

The following table summarizes the meanings of directive PVs:

PV groups	EPVs	VPVs
The "order" group	- command, direct, dictate, order - charge - challenge - demand, require - instruct - prescribe - convene, convoke	- ra lệnh, lệnh - giao, cử, phân công - đố, thách - yêu cầu, đòi hỏi - chỉ thị - quy định, buộc - triệu tập, đòi
The "ask$_1$" group	- ask, request - invite - beg, beseech, entreat, insist, invoke, appeal, implore, plead, petion, solicit, supplicate	- nhờ, yêu cầu, đề nghị - mời - van xin, năn nỉ, xin, van, cầu khẩn
The "ask$_2$" group	- ask, inquire, interrogate	- hỏi, xin hỏi
The "advise" group	- advise - propose, suggest, recommend - encourage - warn, caution, admonish - remind	- khuyên - đề nghị, kiến nghị, gợi ý, bày - khích lệ, động viên - dặn, cảnh báo, báo trước - nhắc, mách

3.2.3.2. Differences

There exists some differences established in this thesis between PVs in English and in Vietnamese.

Firstly, one difference is that the meanings of the verbs. In comparison with English verb "*advise*", the Vietnamese people use *khuyên, khuyên nhủ, khuyên răn, khuyên bảo*. In comparison with English verb "invite", Vietnamese people use *mời, mời mọc*. Look at the example: *Em mời anh xơi cơm* (nguyen thien giap: 58), only the verb "*mời*" is used in this

utterance. We do not use the verb "*mời mọc*' to say: *Em mời mọc bác ăn cơm* because "*mời mọc*" is used to describe the action of inviting.

To sum up, VPVs have more meaning than EPVs. This can be explained that people in different cultures use different languages.

Another diference is that some VPVs have no English equivalents such as hạn, bắt đền.

*Tôi **hạn** từ giờ đến tối phải thu cho đủ. Nếu không đủ sáng mai tôi phải trình quan.*

(41 – Tắt đèn, chapter 2)

*Chú Thanh, diều của cháu mà thua diều thằng Hùng dia à? Cháu **bắt đền** chú đấy.* (43-Chàng trai trên sân thượng)

Last but not least, the number and the range of modal verbs followed by PVs are not totally identical in the two languages. In English, the number of modal verbs outweights ones in Vietnamese. The English modal verbs may include *want to, would, wouldn't, would like, can, must, might, ought to* whereas in Vietnamese there are only some such as *muốn, xin, phải*

*Yes, Mrs. Reed, to you I owe some fearful pangs of mental suffering, but I **ought to forgive** you, for you knew not what you did: while rending my heart-strings, you thought you were only uprooting my bad propensities.* (27: chapter 3)

*Vâng, thưa bà Reed, chỉ vì bà mà thần kinh tôi khiếp đảm. Nhưng tôi **phải tha thứ** cho bà vì bà đâu có ý thức được việc mình làm. Khi làm tôi đau lòng, bà chỉ nghĩ làm vậy cốt để nhổ tận gốc rễ thói xấu của tôi thôi.* (28: chapter 3)

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

4.1. Recapitulation

The thesis is about the contrastive analysis of directive PVs in English and Vietnamese. The study is an attempt to describe and systematize directive PVs in terms of syntactic and semantic features. Besides, the author tries to provide readers with a thorough and brief overview of theory to find out the nature, type, function and conditions of using PVs. Through the observation and description of data, the study is investigated to analyze syntactic and semantic features of PVs employed in directives. The contrastive analysis of authentic examples paves the way for the comprehensive study of using PVs in both languages. In this perspective, all possible similarities and differences are revealed clearly. The findings show that there are more differences than similarities in terms of structure, meaning and using. The significant differences reflect the way people in different cultures conceive, think about, understand and feel the world dissimilarily.

4.2. Concluding remarks

4.2.1. Concluding remarks on objective 1

In general, all directive PVs have the formula "**I (hereby) Vp you**....". Directives are those kinds of speech acts that the speaker uses to get someone else to do something. Basing on the Dictionary "*Speech act verbs*" (Wierzbicka,1987), I describe the meanings of directive PVs in the "order" group, "ask$_1$" group, "ask$_2$" group, "advise" group in turn.

4.2.2. Concluding remarks on objective 2

Syntactically, the difference is that directive PVs in both languages appear in explicit performative utterances which contains the 1st person pronoun "I", followed by a certain type of verb in the present tense. However, there exist some differences of syntactic features. EPVs have more complicated forms than VPVs. EPVs can go with *that-clause* or *to infinitive* or to require a *preposition* to combine a noun functioning as a object whereas VPVs often occur in the complex sentences. Besides, EPVs always follow the first singular pronoun meanwhile the first pronoun of VPVs can be omitted. Also, in terms of semantics,

it is common that directive PVs in English and Vietnamese make the illocution of an utterance more explicit or clearer. In general, directive PVs in English and Vietnamese coincide in meanings but some VPVs which have no equivalents in meaning with EPVs such as *hạn, bắt đền,* etc.

4.2.3. Concluding remarks on objective 3

The analysis of the similarities and differences of PVs in English and Vietnamese may be significant and important to teaching and learning PVs. Through describing the structures and meanings of directive PVs which are used most frequently, Vietnamese teachers and learners will have a clear understanding of using PVs to avoid the confusion about meanings of directive PVs. It is necessary to learn PVs from examples in stories and novels so as to enhances the learner's ability of using the target language.

4.3. Limitation of the study

Although the thesis has been given much time and efforts, it is inevitable to avoid shortcomings for the limitations in the ability of the research as well as the inadequacy of materials. It is hoped that the thesis can receive a lot of contributions from all the teachers and opinions from readers so that it can become better and more effective.

4.4. Suggestions for further study

In briefly, this study has just touches a small aspect of performative verbs. The author is aware that there are some important matters remaining unanswered. An interesting point which needs further research is a contrastive analysis of PVs in English and Vietnamese employed in representatives, commissives, expressives, declarations.

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