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**HEDGED PERFORMATIVES  
IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE –  
A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS**

**Field : THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. RATIONALE

Everyday we use language to communicate both in conversation and in writing; they not only show the bare fact, the descriptive information but also include their attitude towards the States of Affairs by providing additional information. We, the communicators have to understand the interpersonal meaning besides the representational meaning about the content or event within its structure at the same time. In fact, Hedged performative is really useful in making us realize the interpersonal and attitudinal meaning in our communication. For instance, we may say *I regret to tell you that I don't have any money*. The utterance doesn't only mean the speaker has no money, but also implies that he can't lend the hearer any money at the moment of speaking.

Hedged performatives play a very important role in communicative success; however, learners of English are not confident enough to use hedged performatives in communication. They are often confused in choosing the appropriate hedged performatives to express their attitudes or emotions as well as in understanding them correctly. As a result, they sometimes fail in their communication concerning the use of hedged performatives. So it is essential to carry out a study of English and Vietnamese hedged performatives to help learners improve their knowledge of communication, overcome the difficulties in dealing with performatives and achieve their communicative purposes.

#### 1.2. JUSTIFICATION

A study with various linguistic devices on syntactic, semantic

and pragmatic features of Hedged performatives in English and Vietnamese may be a contribution to provide them with language materials in using hedges in appropriate interactional situations.

#### 1.3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To examine the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics of hedged performatives in English and Vietnamese.
- To provide the Vietnamese learners of English with the pragmatic knowledge of the hedged performatives so that they can be more successful in communication.

#### 1.4. OBJECTIVES

The study is planned to:

- Identify and describe a wide range of linguistic devices of hedged performatives (noun, adjective, verb, and adverb with their pragmatic functions as hedged performatives);
- Discover the similarities and differences between hedged performatives in English and Vietnamese in terms of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features;
- Suggest some implications in English language learning and teaching concerning the use of hedged performatives.

#### 1.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the language realizations as linguistic devices of hedged performatives in English and Vietnamese?
- 2) What are syntactic behaviours of the language components of hedged performatives and their syntactic functions in clausal structure in English and Vietnamese?
- 3) What are semantic and pragmatic features of hedged performatives in the light of Politeness Theory in English and Vietnamese?

4) What are the similarities and the differences of hedged performatives in English and Vietnamese in terms of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features?

### **1.6. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study deals with the issues of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of hedged performatives in English and Vietnamese in the light of Politeness Theory. Only the lexical devices will be examined. Such prosodic features as stress and intonation are beyond the scope of this study.

### **1.7. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Methodology of research

Chapter 4: Findings and discussions

Chapter 5: Conclusion, implications, limitation, recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 PREVIOUS STUDIES**

In English, Austin (1962), in “How to do things with words”, studied performatives in parallel with constatives.

Regarding hedges, Holmes (1984) related hedging to the more general communicative strategies for modifying the strength or force of speech acts, namely attenuating and boosting. Myers (1997) examining the interlacing of strengthening and weakening devices and conditions for subsidiary speech acts

The most frequently mentioned motivating factor is politeness as defined by Brown/Levinson (1987). Blum- Kulka and Kasper (1990), in “Pragmatics” by Yule, studied politeness and interaction. Fraser (1975) with hedged performatives, considered the effect that modals and semi-modals have on the illocutionary act denoted by a performative verb in performative sentences.

In Vietnamese, it can be noted by Cao Xuan Hao (1991), in “Tiếng Việt Sơ Khảo Ngữ pháp chức năng”, he studied performative verbs and their signals of illocutionary force. Regarding performatives, M.A.Thesis by Tran Ngoc My Chi (2002) studying “Performative Verbs in English versus Vietnamese”. Regarding hedges, the M.A. thesis by Nguyen Duong Nguyen Trinh (2001) examined a wide range of hedging devices in the representative speech act in English and Vietnamese. And the most recent study of the matters of hedged performatives is Nguyen Thi Hoai Phuong’s (2002) graduation paper for B.A. degree “Hedged performatives in English and Vietnamese”.

## 2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.2.1 Speech Acts: *Yule's theory*

In this part, I review some aspects related to speech act theory so that I will have a clearer understanding about the structure of performative as a speech act both in English [8], [9], [19], [28] and Vietnamese [1], [2], [4].

### 2.2.2. Performatives

The British philosopher Austin was considered the discoverer of performatives when he first mentioned this kind of linguistic device in "How to do things with words" (1962). In this book, he contrasted performatives with constatives. In Vietnamese [2], [3], [4] and in English [8], [9], [29].

### 2.2.3. Hedged performative

A hedged performative is an indirect illocution whose illocutionary force is expressed directly by a performative verb but is given an additional illocutionary force by some device, such as modalization or subordination..[10], [11], [12], [14], [16], [17], [20], [21]

### 2.2.4. Epistemic modality

Palmer [25], in his book on Mood and Modality (1986) viewed that evidentiality is part of the epistemic modal system. [12], [22], [25], [26].

### 2.2.5. Hedged performatives and Politeness theory

Discuss about Politeness theory of Brown and Levinson.[10]

### 2.2.6. Syntactic Representation of The Internal Structure of Hedged Performative

Discuss about the tree diagram and the aspects of the syntactic knowledge of sentence structure.

## CHAPTER 3 METHOD AND PROCEDURES

### 3.1. RESEARCH METHODS

A contrastive analysis of hedged performatives in different kinds of English and Vietnamese discourse was conducted so as to draw out some implications with particular reference to the teaching and learning of hedged performatives.

### 3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

Descriptive and qualitative approaches are to be adopted in this study. English is chosen as L2 and Vietnamese as L1.

### 3.3. DESCRIPTION OF POPULATION AND SAMPLES

A corpus of 500 English samples and 500 Vietnamese ones was randomly gathered from different sources such as novels, newspaper articles, essays, and interviews encrypted both in print and on the internet

### 3.4. PROCEDURES

### 3.5. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1. SYNTACTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF HEDGED PERFORMATIVES IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

The structures of adverbs, verbs, nouns and adjectives function as hedged performatives in both languages were predictable in the following positions:

**Initial position:** at the beginning of the sentence, before the subject

**Medial position:** immediately before auxiliary or before PV

**Final position:** after an intransitive verb, an object or a complement

#### 4.1.1. Adverbial structures of HPs in English and Vietnamese

Adverbials in English and Vietnamese were found to be realized in a wide range of syntactic forms: single adverbs, adverbial phrases, which have different positions with functions of hedged performatives.

In English, the adverbs as HPs in the initial position: *certainly, clearly, definitely, obviously, perhaps, possibly, bluntly, seriously, frankly, honestly, briefly, confidentially, generally, personally, simply, strictly, truthfully.*

In the medial position: *really, deeply, clearly, sincerely, definitely, highly, completely, happily, openly, officially, respectfully, successfully, always, only, still, actually...*

In Vietnamese, The adjectives functioning as adverbs found in the medial position in Vietnamese could be listed here as: *chân*

*thành, tha thiết, trân trọng, hoàn toàn, kiên quyết, thật sự, chính thức, chắc chắn, thành thật, sâu sắc, kịch liệt...*

In Vietnamese, the adjectives that function as advs in the final position used as PHs can be listed here as *thẳng thẳng, nhìn chung là, thật tình, thành thật, chân thành, sâu sắc, trân trọng, kiên quyết, thật lòng, hoàn toàn, kịch liệt, quả nhiên, tất nhiên là, quả thực là, thật vậy, vui vẻ, chính thức, rộng rãi...* These advs can be seen in the initial and the medial positions but they were found to be restricted to the final position.

*Table 4.1 Positions of Adv-structure in English and Vietnamese equivalents in clausal structure*

Positions of Adv-structure	Initial	Medial	Final
English	+	+	+
Vietnamese	+	+	-

#### 4.1.2. Adjective structures of HPs in English and Vietnamese

Generally, in both English and Vietnamese when speaker or writer uses the adj- structure as HP, they often show their attitude or their sense before giving out their speech act in order to emphasize or mitigate the illocutionary force

In English: “**I + be + adjective + to V<sub>P</sub>**” or “**It’s + adjective + to V<sub>P</sub>**”

In Vietnamese: “*Tôi rất vui/ tiếc/ hạnh phúc...để thông báo/ nói/ kể...*”

Table 4.2 Positions of adjective – structure in clausal structure in English and Vietnamese equivalents

Positions of adjective - structure	Initial	Medial	Final
English	-	+	-
Vietnamese	-	+	-

#### 4.1.3. Noun structures of hedged performatives in English and Vietnamese

English has at its disposal the adverbial disjuncts in form of noun phrases such as *in fact, with your permission, upon my honour, from the heart, as a president...* This structure is composed of a noun as the head and is preceded by a preposition. This kind of noun phrase can function as adverbials or disjuncts

Table 4.3 Positions of Noun-structure in English and Vietnamese equivalents in clausal structure

Positions of noun - structure	Initial	Medial	Final
English	+	+	+
Vietnamese	+	+	-

#### 4.1.4. Verb structures of hedged performatives in English and Vietnamese

The verb structures of PHs can stand in the initial and medial position.

Verb structures in the initial position:

**May I + PV...? Or Permit me/ Allow me + to PV + ...**

Verb structures in the medial position:

**I + regret + PV or I + Maux + PV + ...**

The observation showed that there's no final position in the Verb structures of hedged performatives in both languages

Table 4.4 Positions of Verb-structure in English and Vietnamese equivalents in clausal structure

Positions of verb - structures	Initial	Medial	Final
English	+	+	-
Vietnamese	+	+	-

#### 4.1.5 A remark from the contrastive analysis of HPs in English and Vietnamese in terms of the similarities and differences

In comparison of positions of HPs in English and those in Vietnamese, we can see HPs in both languages have the same positions such as initial, medial and final position in adjective and verb-structure. However, in noun and adverb-structures some significant differences should be mentioned here.

Table 4.5. Syntactic position of HPs in English and Vietnamese

Category	English				Vietnamese			
	I	M <sub>1</sub>	M <sub>2</sub>	F	I	M <sub>1</sub>	M <sub>2</sub>	F
Maux	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-
Mlex	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	-
Madv	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
Madj	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	-
Mn	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-

In English, the noun and adverb-structures as HPs were found to assume the final position but in Vietnamese they were found to be restricted in certain positions.



## 4.2. THE SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF HPS IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

### 4.2.1. HPs in English and Vietnamese in view of modality

By using linguistic devices of various forms from auxiliary verbs, adverbs, adjectives, to noun phrases, the speaker may wish to express his/her commitment to the truth of the proposition and especially to the speech modality, i.e. the validity of his/her act of utterance.

(66) I *must beg* you to forgive me for my folly. [54]

(71) *From the bottom of the heart* I congratulate you on magnificent victory... [59]

#### 4.2.1.1 The semantic features of modal auxiliaries and semi modal occurring with PVs in English and in Vietnamese

This section is concerned with the semantic features of *can, could, will, shall, would, must, dare, may, might, want to, would like to, going to* in English and *sẽ, có thể, phải, dám, muốn, định* in Vietnamese. These modal auxiliary verbs were found in performatives to express the speaker's attitude to an act of asserting a proposition and may contribute to the attitude towards the likelihood of the state of affairs. In the corpus, most of the modals were used deontically, epistemically.

Table 4.7 Summary of the Typical Semantic Meanings of Modal & Semi-modal verbs found in Hedged Performatives in English

Semantic category MAux	Obliga- tion	Permission	Intention	Ability	Tentati -veness
Will	-	-	+	-	-
Would	+	-	-	-	+
Can	+	-	-	+	-
Could	-	-	-	+	-
May	-	+	-	-	+
Might	-	+	-	-	+
Must	+	-	+/-	-	-
dare	-	-	+	+	-
Going to	-	+/-	+	-	+/-
Want to	-	-/+	+/-	-	+
Would like to	-	-/+	+/-	-	+

Unlike English, the Vietnamese modal auxiliaries occurring with performative verbs are limited. The following table will show this.

Table 4.8. Summary of the Typical Semantic Meanings of Modal & Semi-modal verbs found in Hedged Performatives in Vietnamese

Semantic category MAux	Obligation	Permission	Intention	Ability	Tentativeness
Sẽ	-	-	+	-	+
Có thể	-	-/+	-	+	-
Phải	+	-	-	-	-
dám	-	-	+	+	-
Muốn	-	-	+	-	+

#### 4.2.1.2 Indicating scale of reliability

Table 4.9 The degrees of reliability in English

Scale of reliability	Lower degree	High degree
May/might	+	-
Could	+	-
Can	-	+
Must	-	+
Dare	-	+
Will	-	+
Would	+	-

Table 4.10 The degrees of reliability in Vietnamese

Scale of reliability	High degree	Higher degree
sẽ	+	+
có thể	+	-
phải	+	+
dám	+	+

#### 4.2.1.3 The Modification Functions of HPs to the quality of Proposition

a. Hedging the illocutionary force with undesirable proposition

In this situation, the speaker may not want to speak out the truth; however, he/she fails to keep silence. I can establish the semantic and pragmatic components of these markers in as follow:

By saying I regret to tell/inform you P

I wish to convey that

[P is something negative/unpleasant that I wish to stay away from]

[I am well aware that P will have negative effects on you]

[By saying the P I imply that the news is also unpleasant to me]

[I don't want to speak out P]

[However I have to say it to you because of some reasons]

b. Hedging the illocutionary force with desirable proposition

The pragmatics of HPs of this type can be interpreted as follows:

By saying I am happy/ pleased to tell/inform you P

I wish to convey that

[P is something positive/pleasant that I wish to be closed to]

[I am well aware that P will have positive effects on you]

[By saying the P I imply that the news is also pleasant to me]

[I wish to speak out P]

[I have to say it to you because of some reasons]

#### 4.2.2. The Modification of Modal Adverbs in HPs in terms of Felicity Condition & Maxims of Conversation

Pragmatically, the use of these adverbs as the modification of the speech act or performative verbs signals that the speaker is conforming to the felicitous condition for a successful performance of his/her speech act.

Table 4.11. A representative set of English modal adverbs and their Vietnamese equivalent

Modal adverbs as modification		Pragmatic Ingredients	
English	Vietnamese	Felicitious condition	Maxim of conversation
certainly	hiển nhiên	Sincerity	Quality
clearly	rõ ràng	Sincerity	Quality
obviously	rõ ràng	Sincerity	Quality
perhaps	có lẽ	Sincerity	Quality
Bluntly	thẳng thẳng	Sincerity	Quality
seriously	thật sự	Sincerity	Quality
frankly	Trung thực	Sincerity	Quality
honestly	Thành thật	Sincerity	Quality
briefly	vắn tắt là	Sincerity	Quantity

<i>personally</i>	cá nhân	Sincerity	Quality
<i>strictly</i>	nói đúng ra	Sincerity	Quality/ Quantity
<i>loosely</i>	nói thoáng là	Sincerity	Quality/ Quantity
<i>truthfully</i>	chân thật	Sincerity	Quality
<i>really</i>	thực, thực sự	Sincerity	Quality
<i>sincerely</i>	chân thành	Sincerity	Quality
<i>happily</i>	vui vẻ	Sincerity	Quality
<i>officially</i>	trịnh trọng	Sincerity	Quality/ Quantity
<i>respectfully</i>	kính cẩn	Sincerity	Quality

#### 4.2.3. Modifying strategies of hedged performatives

##### 4.2.3.1. Accuracy-oriented hedges

In the utterances, the adj modal phrase “*not sure*”, *be hesitant*, and modal adverb *maybe* in English and *có lẽ, do dự* ...in Vietnamese indicate the speaker’s uncertainty. *Must, dare* in English and *dám, phải* in Vietnamese are considered as reliability hedges that express a conviction about the truth of a statement. The pragmatics of HPS in terms of content accuracy can be represented as follows:

The inner compelling force of evidence of P forces me to assert P

[I assume that P is true]

[I feel that I have to say P]

The inner compelling force of P allows me to lift the barrier of counter-evidence and assert P

[I assume that P is true and there is nothing to prevent that P is true]

[I feel that I can say P]

##### 4.2.3.2. Speaker-oriented hedges

###### a. Signaling the complete disagreement

When the addresser wants to imply a complete disagreement

in communication, he may choose to boost the illocutionary force of the speech act in order to save his positive face. In these situations, the strong members of HPs such as *completely, totally, hoàn toàn, kiên quyết, kịch liệt* were used to emphasize the speaker's view.

(158) “Tôi *kịch liệt phản đối* việc Thổ Nhĩ Kỳ gia nhập EU”, ông Sarkozy khẳng định trong một cuộc phỏng vấn trên truyền hình Pháp [102]

*b. Signaling a sincere apology and thankfulness*

The adverbs *really, sincerely, awfully, deeply* in English and *rất, chân thành, thành thật, thực sự* in Vietnamese were used as hedge to emphasize the sincerity of the apology and the thanking in the manifestation of the speaker's intention towards the hearer.

(160) I *deeply apologize* to those who were on alert for those stories. [39]

### 4.3. SOME REMARKS FROM THE CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF HPS IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE: THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

#### 4.3.1. Syntactic similarities

- HPs can exist at initial position, medial position and final position in the clausal structure of utterance.

- There's a wide range of syntactic categories: adverb structures, adjective structures, verb structures and noun structures.

- Exist HPs with the modal auxiliaries and semi-modal verbs in English and Vietnamese. In the structure “*I + can/must/dare ... + PV*” in English and equivalent Vietnamese structure “*Tôi + có thể/phải/dám... + PV*”

#### 4.3.2. Semantic and pragmatic similarities

- Concern the semantic notion of obligation, permissibility, intention, ability, and tentativeness by the function modification of Maux;

- Have different ways to express their thought and the speech act with high validity (different scale of reliability);

- Have effected to the illocutionary force of the PV of the utterance. (They mitigate or intensify the illocutionary force).

A significant similarity is the use of politeness strategies in the context where the speaker implies a sincere apology and thankfulness.

#### 4.3.3. Syntactic, semantic and pragmatic differences

My English corpus has yielded more structural as well as lexical variants of HPs than the Vietnamese corpus has done.

For example, the hedged performatives frankly, briefly, loosely...can be transformed to become a comment clause which have *a to-infinitive, an ing- clause or an ed-clause* such as *to be frank, frankly speaking, or stated frankly...*

- The English use more degrees than Vietnamese in the use of modal auxiliary verb. Vietnamese doesn't have the past form. English use *can, could, will, would, may, might, must, dare* to show the scale of reliability in communication whereas Vietnamese doesn't have the past form and use *có thể, phải, dám*.

- In Vietnamese, *an adjective* can be used with the function *of an adverb* to modify a PV; however, this isn't accepted in English.

- English performative verbs exist in two forms: *to infinitive* and *bare infinitive* whereas in Vietnamese, there are not the constructions with *to infinitive*.

### 4.5. SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have presented and discussed my findings about the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features and then do the contrastive analysis of HPs in English and Vietnamese, the result is that there were more similarities than differences from them.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 5.1 CONCLUSION

Syntactically, English and Vietnamese can make use of the same lexical devices as HPs in various structures and they can be found in various positions in the clausal structure or utterance. However, English has at its disposal a wide range of modal auxiliaries in form of present tense and past tense to combine with performative verbs whereas modal markers in Vietnamese cannot be used interchangeably between past and present form. Also, HPs in Vietnamese were rarely found in the final position of the utterance.

Semantically, HPs in both languages were used mainly as epistemic markers that function as to signal different shades of the speaker/writer's attitude towards the truth of the proposition. HPs in the two languages can be used to express the speaker's stance toward the psychological aspect of the content of utterance. Again, English offers more choices with modal auxiliaries in past and present form as compared with Vietnamese.

Pragmatically, HPs in both languages have a function to express the addressers' intention in boosting or mitigating the illocutionary force of the speech acts. The use of HPs in discourse can be governed by factors as principles of politeness and the Maxims of Conversation proposed by Grice. Speakers can specify their attitude towards the manner of delivering the pieces of news and simultaneously imply their stance towards the truth of the proposition.

#### 5.2. IMPLICATIONS ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING

First of all, I would like to address some transfer problems that Vietnamese learners of English may have to face in their performance of the target language and suggest some solutions for their learning.

The finding shows that the Vietnamese learners of English may not use HPs as much as English do in some grammatical categories and in some positions because they may not have enough knowledge and experience to make use of HPs in various structures. In the actual performance of modalized utterances, the Vietnamese learners of English may not have chance to practice the use of HPs. As a result, they limit themselves in some types of HPs and fail to modulate the their attitude in communication. The habit of using some HPs in Vietnamese at some fixed positions may cause the Vietnamese learners to apply this knowledge and habit in using HPs in English.

In order to over come this difficult point, Vietnamese learners of English may read materials in monolingual editions to master the use of HPs in English and then practice them in everyday conversations with their partners in their class and in the real life to acquire pragmatic knowledge about HPs as well as to build up their pragmatic competence and then, successfully use HPs with variety constructions.

Vietnamese learners of English as the language users should have access to the language resources in materials to acquire syntactic, semantic and pragmatic knowledge under the framework of epistemic modality, force and dynamics and politeness theory for a proper transfer. In this sense of language transfer, syntactic, semantic

and pragmatic translational equivalents between HPs in the two languages should be identified and brought into use.

HP is clearly a powerful strategy in communicative interactions so the learners of English should master this linguistic device to help them to become more skilful in interaction. They have to understand both linguistic competence and pragmatic competence so that they will no more feel confused when countering with this. When they are confident with knowledge in both languages, they will probably have ability to translate correctly not only the representational meaning but also interpersonal meaning in appreciate situations.

The Vietnamese learners' limitation in performing HPs may be due to the unawareness of the harmony and reinforcement of knowledge of different types of HPs and the shortage of practice this linguistic device.

From the problems presented above, I recommend the teachers should carry out his teaching with pragmatic knowledge about HPs both in English and Vietnamese for the students' acquisition of the syntactic features, the semantic ingredients of HPs as well as the pragmatic competence about the interpersonal dimensions of HPs. And then teachers may allow their classes to take part in the activities such as speaking matters of argument, everyday conversation, or responding to some undesirable state-of-affairs. Through these activities, the learners can be trained in a good environment where they can have chances to make use of HPs to express their point of view, protect their face as well as signal their attitude towards the desirable or undesirable aspects of the things presented in their utterances. With a competence of HPs as far as

their semantics and the corresponding structures are concerned of the two languages, the learners will probably express successfully their information as well as to convey their attitude to the proposition and to the other participants in dialogistic positioning.

### **5.3. LIMITATION AND FURTHER STUDY**

The study intends to explore more about the shaping of HPs in the light of Force-Dynamics Theory and how politeness strategies are employed by the interlocutors in interaction. However, this study just touched the fringe of the issues mentioned and thus the results are actually far from being expected to contribute a great deal to the present literature of the problem under investigation.

Therefore, I wish to further my study in the dimension of the issues presented above that is a further study of the semantics of HPs in terms of Force-Dynamics Theory and how politeness strategies are employed by the speakers in conversations.