

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

UNIVERSITY OF DANANG

**BÙI THỊ KHÁNH YÊN**

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE LINGUISTIC  
FEATURES OF PERFORMATIVES IN SPEECHES  
IN CULTURAL EVENTS IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE**

**Study Field : THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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**M.A. THESIS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**(A SUMMARY)**

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In linguistic communication, people do not merely exchange information; they actually do something through talking or writing in various circumstances. Actions performed via speaking are called speech acts.

It was Austin (1961) who created the term “speech act” which has aroused the widest interest in language study. We focus on one group, which Austin labels “performatives”. His idea is that by saying we often perform an act or do something, we can do things with speech. We can make speech, issue a warning, swear testimony, etc. It might be suggested that a special sort of convention is required for uses of the performative form to count as promises, apologies, requests, etc.

In Kissell (2005)’s article “Interesting Thing of the Day”, he assumed that using words to perform actions feels both elegant and powerful. Thus, we have good reasons to pay more attention to utterances containing performative verbs.

### 1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

#### 1.2.1. Aims

The thesis is conducted with the aim to discover the syntactic and pragmatic features of explicit performatives in cultural events to

help the Vietnamese users of English raise the awareness of performatives and illocutionary forces of each type to make performatives in communicating effectively in the right context.

### **1.2.2. Objectives**

To achieve the aims above, the study will focus on objectives as follows:

- To describe the linguistic features of English performatives and Vietnamese performatives used in cultural events.
- To identify the functions of English and Vietnamese performatives used in cultural events in particular contexts.
- To discover the similarities and differences in using performatives by English people and Vietnamese people used in cultural events.
- To suggest some implications for language teaching and learning in both English and Vietnamese.

### **1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the syntactic features of explicit performatives in cultural events in English and Vietnamese?
- 2) What are pragmatic features of English Performatives in cultural events and Vietnamese Performatives?
- 3) What are the similarities and differences of performatives in cultural events in English and Vietnamese?

#### **1.4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

Performatives are commonly used in communication in every field of life but we only do research on performatives in speeches in cultural events in English and Vietnamese. In this scope of the study, I just address the issues of syntactic realizations of performatives in cultural events and their functions in specific contexts of speeches in communicating in cultural events where the locutions as well as the illocutionary forces of the performatives in English are expected to yield both similarities and differences due to the distinctiveness of the culture of each speech community. Though the issues of speech acts are discussed, such related factors such as phonetic and prosodic features will not be dealt with and thus they are beyond the scope of this study.

#### **1.5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

With this thesis completed, we hope to help Vietnamese learners of English to get a better insight into the nature and the uses of performatives in the two languages in cultural events. Besides, the research will also help to raise the awareness of the special function of utterances of explicit performative sentences in the discourse and the importance of the dramatic effect created by performatives in language and then to expand our knowledge of English and Vietnamese.

#### **1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

##### ***Chapter 1. Introduction***

***Chapter 2. Literature Review and theoretical background***

***Chapter 3. Method and procedure***

***Chapter 4. Findings and Discussion***

***Chapter 5. Conclusion and Implications***

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Speech acts is one of levels or dimensions of discourse and the first author introducing the idea of speech acts is the linguist Austin with his posthumous book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), and was explored and expanded by other "ordinary language philosophers," including Searle (1970), Bach and Harnish (1979), and Butler (1997), etc.

In Vietnamese, speech acts and performatives have been the matter of a number of researches such as the MA thesis *Performative verbs in English versus Vietnamese* by Trần Ngọc Mỹ Chi (2002), *An investigation into Speech Act Verbs in English and Vietnamese TV News Transcripts* by Trần Thị Mỹ Tín (2010), *Hegded Performatives in English and Vietnamese- A Contrastive Analysis* by Vo Thi Thu Thao (2011).

All in all, however, the studies mentioned above have not addressed the issues of performatives in cultural events and thus,

such issues about the specific functions of explicit performatives and their syntactic realizations have not been touched. Also, in such cultural contexts where highly conventionalized, constitutionalized and formulaic, performatives are expected to reveal significant differences under the governing factors of social and linguistic events in both languages.

Therefore, it is definitely necessary to have further research on speech acts as well as explicit performatives in specific fields, namely cultural events to explore their features in particular contexts.

## **2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.2.1. Speech Acts**

#### ***2.2.1.1. Austin's Speech Acts***

#### ***2.2.1.2. Searle's Speech Acts***

### **2.2.2. Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts**

### **2.2.3. Grice's Communicative Intentions**

Grice (1957/1989) made an important distinction between signs and signals. Signs convey information, but such recognition of that information does not require a recognition of the speaker's intention to have that information recognized. Signals, on the other hand, convey nonnatural meaning and are communicative acts that achieve their ends by virtue of the hearer recognizing the speaker's intention to achieve those ends. In other words, the hearer's recognition of the speaker's intention fulfills the intention.

Communicative intentions are intentions of a peculiar and complex sort; they are reflexive intentions. He notes that communicative intentions have these characteristic properties:

- They always oriented towards some other agent – the addressee.
- They are overt, that is, they are intended to be recognized by the addressee.
- Their satisfaction consists precisely in being recognized by the addressee.

These properties are already pointed out in the first version of Grice's M-intentions as a reflexive intention:

*“A meant something by x” is equivalent to “A intended the utterance of x to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention”* [Grice (1957,1989), p.220]

## **2.2.4. Speech Act Verbs**

### **2.2.4.1. Reporting Verbs**

### **2.2.4.2. Performative Verbs**

## **2.2.5. Performatives**

### **2.2.5.1. The definition of Performatives**

Austin introduced the concept of the performative, contrasted in his writing with “constative”, i.e. descriptive utterances.



According to Austin's original formulation, a performative is a type of utterance characterized by two distinctive features:

- It is not true-evaluable (i.e. it is neither true nor false).
- Its uttering *performs* an action rather than simply describing one.

#### ***2.2.5.2. The form of Performatives***

One of Austin's most famous contributions to the philosophy of language was his discovery of that class of utterance which he called 'the explicit performative'. In English, the explicit performative has the normal form of

***I (hereby) Vp you (that) U***

#### ***2.2.5.3. The characteristics of Performatives***

A performative can be recognized with:

- The subject is the first singular or plural pronoun : I or We
- The PVs serve as main verbs in explicit performative formulas, and of course, they are in the present tense.
- The deictic adverb '*hereby*' is optionally inserted before PV. '*Hereby*' is a useful criterion that the utterance is a performative.
- The indirect object of this kind of verb is in the second person.
- A complement clause which expresses the propositional content of an utterance follows the indirect object

#### ***2.2.5.4. Conditions of Performatives***

With regard to Austin (1962), he claims that to perform an act:

- The uttering of certain words (and not others) is necessary.
- The circumstances must be appropriate.
- The speaker or some other person(s) should also perform other ‘physical’ or mental actions accompanying the utterance of the specific words which lead to the performance of the act.

#### **2.2.6. Felicity Conditions**

#### **2.2.7. Explicit Performatives and Implicit Performatives**

#### **2.2.8. Constatives and Performatives**

### **2.3. SUMMARY**

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHOD AND PROCEDURE**

#### **3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This descriptive study based on qualitative and quantitative approaches was conducted with a contrastive analysis where English was chosen as L2 and Vietnamese as L1.

The qualitative approach was used for data collection, analysis and interpretation to find out the distinctive features of English Performatives (EPs) and Vietnamese Performatives (VPs) in speeches in cultural events as well as similarities and differences between them in terms of syntax and pragmatics.

## **3.2. RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

1. Setting the criteria to identify and collect performatives in speeches from cultural events, culture forums, interviews after cultural events via World Wide Web

2. Using a descriptive framework adapting thoughts of Austin and Searle to analyse the syntactic and pragmatic features of performatives.

## **3.3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

### **3.3.1. Data Collection**

200 samples of English Performatives and 200 samples of Vietnamese Performatives were collected at random in speeches in cultural events.

### **3.3.2. Data analysis**

After collected from the websites, the samples were taken for steps of analysis as follows:

- Firstly, they were classified according to types of conventional illocutionary acts of Searle's framework (Representatives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives and Declaratives)
- Secondly, they were observed and analysed to find out the linguistic features of EPs and IPs in terms of syntax and pragmatics.

- Thirdly, relevant samples were embedded to illustrate for each case of performatives.
- Fourthly, a comparison of linguistic features of performatives in both languages was made to find out the similarities and differences between them.
- Finally, the calculation and statistics of the data were used to find out the frequency of occurrence of PVs in each particular situation.

### **3.4. THE CRITERIA OF IDENTIFYING PERFORMATIVE UTTERANCES (PUs) FOR ANALYSING**

Any performative utterance contains a PV, therefore it is necessarily to have criteria to identify PVs as well as identify PUs.

Besides, two criteria of PUs were focused to identify and analyse PUs:

- If S is a PU, S will be ‘happy’ or ‘unhappy’ rather than ‘true’ or ‘false’
- If S is a PU, S will perform an act rather than saying something.

A further criterion in order to recognise PUs and, especially, to distinguish them from constatives is the test “hereby” for EPs. If a sentence sounds okay with “hereby” added, the verb is being used performatively.

### **3.5. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

Reliability and validity are two most important criteria to guarantee the quality of the data collection procedures. The study is required to be verified if there are inaccuracies and inconsistencies. Therefore I would like to acknowledge that the data of the study were collected carefully from spoken and written speeches in cultural events on the active websites using the criteria for identifying PVs and performatives, thereby being completely reliable. Moreover, these speeches were issued by the authorities of the events so they are extremely valuable for the analysis. In addition, the languages used in the events were completely issued by the native speakers in particular contexts.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1. SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF EPS AND VPS**

##### **4.1.1 Declarative sentences**

This class comprises 3 types of illocutionary act, namely Representatives, Commissives, and Declaratives.

##### **4.1.1.1 Verb types**

###### **In English**

a) *Acknowledge, refuse, stress, criticize* are monotonitive verbs with many various complementiers such as *a noun phrase*, a *that-clause*, or a *non-finite clause* as the direct object.

(38) *Before I begin I would like to **acknowledge** the Noongar people, the traditional owners of the land on which we meet tonight.*

(41) *I **refuse** to accept despair as the final response to the ambiguities of history.*

b) **Submit, say, present** are ditransitive verbs which optionally get two objects, an indirect object always requiring a preposition “to” before it and a direct object consisting of a that-clause or a noun phrase.

44) *I **submit** to you this: that in the face of the great challenges we face as a human family, and the credentials that we bring to bear as the good people of the Commonwealth of Australia.*

f) **Tell** is also a ditransitive verb and always require an indirect object and a direct object.

(47) *I have to **tell** you that I completely agree.*

### **In Vietnamese**

a) **Chia sẻ, giới thiệu** require a noun phrase as its complement:

(52) *Sau đây Trang Nhung và Hứa Vỹ Văn xin được **giới thiệu** 3 đề cử Nữ Diễn Viên Phụ Được Yêu Thích Nhất.*

b) **Khẳng định, nhìn nhận** take the complement of the S-V structure:

(53) *Tôi **khẳng định**, cho đến thời điểm này, tôi và chị Hoàng Ngân vẫn chưa nhận được thông báo chính thức nào về việc thay đổi BGK.*

b) Transitive VPVs such as **thông báo** requires two complements.

#### 4.1.1.2. Clausal structures

In general, English performatives are independent and transitive clauses in all types of sentences. To give a clear representation of the syntactic makeup of each type of performatives, the tree diagram for each type will be shown. Performatives in this class have the following structures:

- The simple sentence:  $S + V_{monotrans} + To\text{-}infinitive P$
- The complex sentences:  $1, S + V_{ditrans} + Oi + Od$   
 $2, S + V_{trans} + Od (That\ Clause)$   
 $3, S + V_{ditrans} + Od (Noun\ Phrase) + Oi (for + noun/pro)$

In Vietnamese, the PV in this class has the structures below:

- The simple sentence:
  - 1)  $S + V_p + C$
  - 2)  $PreP + S_1 + V_p + C$  or  $PreP + S + V_1(p) + V_2$
- The complex sentences:
  - (1)  $S_1 + V_1(p) + conj + C$  or  $S_1 + V_1(p) + conj + S_2 + V_2$
  - (2)  $S_1 + V_1 + C$  or  $S_1 + V_1 + \{-conj\} + \{-S_2\} + V_2$

#### 4.1.2 Imperative sentences

In this section, we focus on one kind of syntactic realizations of directive performatives which contain such PVs as *encourage*, *urge*, *call upon/on*, *invite*, *request*, *remind*, *require*, *warn*, *ask*, etc. Instances of this kind of sentences can be treated as the syntactic

variants of the canonical imperative sentences due to the fact that they occur in the form of a declarative sentence but they function as an indirect directive.

#### **4.1.2.1 Verb types**

#### **4.1.2.2. Clausal structures**

### **4.1.3 Exclamative sentences**

In this section, performatives used to analyse are based on the type of expressive speech act. They comprise mainly PVs referring to emotive reactions such as: *thank, welcome, wish, regret, appreciate, value, congratulate, salute, dare, commend, etc.*

#### **4.1.3.1 Verb types**

#### **4.1.4.2. Clausal structures**

### **4.1.4 Formulaic cases**

In English, there are sentences treated as performatives though their structures are not in accordance with the performative form. Among the sentences I would like to present are *It-cleft* and *formulaic sentences*.

### **4.1.5 Some syntactic remarks from the contrastive analysis of performatives in English and Vietnamese**

## **4.2. PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF EPS**

### **4.2.1 Representatives**

Below are tables 4.1 and 4.2 where we show briefly the functions of EPs and VPs on the aspect of pragmatics. Notice that,



(1) is the illocutionary forces named by the representative EPVs; and then (2) is the intended perlocutionary forces caused after the illocutionary forces performed.

***Table 4.1 Pragmatic features of some representative EPs***

Pragmatic features Representative PVs	(1) Illocutionary forces	(2) Intended perlocutionary forces
Announce/ inform	Announcing	S convinces H to believe something is sure to happen.
Assure/ aver	Averring	S convinces H to believe something is true.
Predict/anticipate	Predicting	S supplies H with the actual evidence to help him believe something will happen.
Recognize	Recognizing	S convinces H to believe something is true.
Acknowledge	Acknowledging	S convinces H to agree with him/her to the state of affair.

Admit	Admitting	S persuades H to agree with him/her as well as the P.
Reaffirm	Affirming	S convinces H to believe that what is asserted is a matter of some important.
Argue	Arguing	S convinces H to support the his/her opinion or admit what S said is right and what H thought is wrong.
Object/reject	Disapproving	S embarrasses H in virtue of a bad state of affairs on the part of S but not on the part of H.

**Table 4.2 Pragmatic features of some representative VPs**

Pragmatic features Representative PVs	(1) Illocutionary forces	(2) Intended perlocutionary forces
Nói (răng)	Announcing	S persuades H to know and hear something.
Nói thẳng	Asserting	S annoys or makes H unhappy about what

		he/she asserted in the P.
Thưa	Responding	S convinces H to know the state of affairs
Truyền tải/ gửi thông điệp	Announcing	S convinces H to believe in the P.
Giới thiệu	Introducing	S appeals H to pay attention to something.
Khẳng định	Asserting	S convinces H to believe that the P is right.
Dự đoán	Predicting	S convinces H to believe in the future action.
Phủ nhận	Denying/rejecting	S convinces H not to believe in the P.
Thừa nhận	Admitting	S convinces H to believe the truth of something.
Chia sẻ	Congratulating	S enhances H for his/her good action.
Phát động	Announcing	S convinces H to participate in something with him/her voluntarily and enthusiastically.

### 4.2.2. Directives

**Table 4.3 Pragmatic features of some directive EPs**

Pragmatic features Representative PVs	(1) Illocutionary forces	(2) Intended perlocutionary forces
Invite	Inviting	S convinces H to do something for his/her honour as well as his/her benefit.
Require	requiring	S incites H to do the required action for the specific reason.
Request	requesting	S incites H to do a certain thing optionally.
Suggest	suggesting	S enlightens H to make a good decision of what to do in the difficult situation
Beg/beseech/ implore	(Humble) requesting	S embarrasses H to decide to do something for him/her.
Encourage	encouraging	S inspires H with courage while

		presupposing that the course of action advocated require courage.
Urge	urging	S incites H to do something for the course of action urged.

**Table 4.4 Pragmatic features of some directive VPs**

Pragmatic features representative PVs	(1) Illocutionary forces	(2) Intended perlocutionary forces
Đề nghị	Suggesting	S incites H to do something that is not beyond his ability.
Hỏi	Asking	S convince H to give his/her answer.
Kêu gọi/ mời gọi	Appealing	S incites H to take part in any action which is useful for both S and H in some certain contexts.
Xin	Requesting	S appeals H to do something.
Thỉnh cầu	Appealing/begging	S softens H who has authority over him/her.
Mời	Inviting	S convinces H to do something good for him.

### 4.2.3. Commissives

We do the same with the EPVs: *commit, bet, promise, guarantee, assure, propound*, and VPVs such as *đề xuất, hứa, thề, hẹn, nguyện and đảm bảo*.

### 4.2.4. Expressives

Expressive illocutionary verbs name forces whose point is to express mental states of the speaker such as *appreciation, gratitude, greeting, congratulations, approbation* which are important in our social forms of life. In this section, We do the analyse for English acts: *congratulating, commiserating, thanking, welcoming, saluting, applauding, etc*; and Vietnamese acts like *đánh giá cao, biểu dương, hoan nghênh, chào, chào mừng, chào tạm biệt, cảm ơn, chúc, xin lỗi, etc*.

### 4.2.5. Declaratives

Declaration performatives are utterances used to change the status of some entity. It consists of such English acts: *declaring, launching, confirming, granting, presenting, accepting, gathering, acknowledging, etc*; and Vietnamese acts: *tuyên bố, công bố, bỏ phiếu, tán thành, ủng hộ, tặng, etc*. They are analysed in this section of the paper.

## 4.3. SUMMARY

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 5.1. CONCLUSION

The paper is a contrastive analysis of English and Vietnamese performatives in cultural events to find similarities as well as differences from them. Within the scope of the investigation, the findings were restricted to only the syntactic and pragmatic aspects to get their inner structures, features and functions of explicit performatives in cultural events in the right contexts.

In the term of syntax, most of EPVs and VPVs are transitive verbs, in the structure of SV(O)O, with many various complementiers such as noun phrases, subjectless to-inf clauses, subjectless V-ing clauses or that-clauses as direct objects of the sentences. However, it can be seen that VPs get mostly the subordinate clauses of S-V structure as their direct objects rather than other. Moreover, some certain complex PVs can occur in EPs and VPs in some contexts instead of simple PVs, which is treated as distinguishing features of performatives in cultural events with those in other fields. Also, as regards types of sentences, complex performatives in English and Vietnamese make up the large number on the whole rather than simple ones. Differently, the voice of the VP is used rather free with the added word “*được*” as a polite marker rather than passive one; and the order of the S-V structure of VPs can be conversed optionally according to S’ attitude in any context.

In terms of pragmatics, performatives in both languages are found to have the same case of using the PV to name other illocutionary forces. Additionally, any normal performative in English and Vietnamese is uttered with the intention of the speaker of making an illocutionary force and its effects on the addressee. However, the Vietnamese, sometimes, use the positive PV to constitute the other illocutionary force on purpose mostly for the negative meaning while the English do not do so; for example, the PV “*ban tặng*” for the act of “*mia mai*”. The culture, on the one hand, influences the way the users of language produce the utterances in their own ways.

## **5.2 IMPLICATIONS ON ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The research is carried out in the hope that it can contribute to providing some indications to the users’ comprehending and using performatives in communication in general and in cultural events in particular. By using performatives in such social occasions, the speaker intends to show more commitment and responsibility to his/her statement or declaration. Also, the employment of performatives is to cause an effect in the addressee. In this sense, providing essential knowledge to the teachers and learners concerning the issue of performatives is of crucial point in the course of teaching and learning communicative functions of language units.



For English learning, the Vietnamese can use explicit performatives in order to raise the chance that the H recognizes the utterance meaning that is, the illocutionary force named by the speech act verb, and the perlocutionary effects. However, they should know that the meaning of the PVs is not purely performative but execution supporting. Getting aware of this may make it easy for them to produce expected utterances in English, and thus it is necessary for them to learn how to perform performatives successfully in the right context. They should be aware of the illocutionary forces that a certain speech act verb can bring to their utterances to name or signal their communicative intent. Also, mastering the use of performative verbs along with the modification of the verb may help them express their point of view together with the emotion effectively to win the addressee's acceptance. In public speaking, clarifying the purpose of speech act and attitude is of importance to clarify the speaker's position and his/her commitment to get close to the audience's heart.

For English teaching, the Vietnamese teachers of English should orient the learners to use performatives as much as possible by showing them how interesting they are and how the utterances are more than just acts of communication. In order to be cooperative and informative and to further course of conversation, instead of uttering implicit performatives, the teacher should let them know that resolving the ambiguity by uttering the explicit and direct PV is useful to get more successful in increasing the effective interaction

between the speaker and the audience. However, the teacher should provide practice knowledge of the constraints of performatives which may cause potential difficulties for the Vietnamese learners in employing these speech acts. In other words, for the speaker's utterance to be a successfully performed speech act, the hearer has to recognize the intended illocutionary force of the utterance. In addition, context is an important factor in the valid performance of an illocutionary act.

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

The study is conducted with the intention of exploring the syntactic features of EPs and VPs in four sentence types, namely declarative sentences, imperative sentences, exclamative sentences and question ones. But, the researcher has only reached the first three types of sentences due to the limit of the data collected from the websites and the length of the thesis. Moreover, pragmatic features of EPs and VPs were also discovered for communicative purposes just in the certain context.

Thus, I wish to have the further study conducted on the syntactic features of the performatives in interrogative sentences and their pragmatic features in a wide variety of contexts to explore their different communicative functions in discourse. /.