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LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF TEACHERS' QUESTIONS IN LECTURES FROM TOEFL iBT

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

It may be difficult for students to remember and grasp all in a short time in classroom with the very large and informative content of a lecture, especially in academic lectures. As we can see the process of posing and answering questions, whether by the teacher or by the students, is of critical importance in the language classroom. Asking question can help students summarize or outline the content when they are exposed to abundant chunks of knowledge. Questioning is one of the most common techniques used by teachers and serves as the principal way for teachers to control the classroom interaction. All students need to be made to feel comfortable asking questions, even if the answer has already been covered. The teacher must acknowledge the value of each question. The tendency for teachers to ask many questions has been observed in many investigations. In some classrooms over half of class time is taken up by question-and-answer exchanges. During the time in class, teachers make many questions and students should be given plenty of opportunity to ask questions, so that they do not need to be constantly interrupting the class to ask something.

Accordingly, this research is concerned with a title *linguistic features of teachers' questions in lectures from TOEFL iBT* with the hope of discovering that the linguistic features of the teachers' questions may encompass what can belong to with syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features to partly help lecturers give their lectures effectively and successfully.

1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1. Aims

This study aims at examining the teacher's questions in terms of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features to provide the Vietnamese teachers and students of English with a better insight into the structure, the use and interpretation of the meaning of teacher's questions in lectures in English.

1.2.2. Objectives

The study is intended:

1) To examine the linguistic features of teacher's questions in lectures in English in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics

1) To put forward some implications to the English teaching and learning concerning the use and interpretation of teacher's questions in lectures in English

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To fulfill the objectives mentioned above the research is to answer following questions

1) What are the linguistic features of teacher's questions in lectures in English in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics?

2) What are the implications to the English teaching and learning concerning the use of teacher's questions in lectures in English?

1.4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is mentioned such issues of syntax like clausal structures, syntactic functions of lexical items used in teacher's

questions, issues of semantics like reference and coherence, the attitudinal meaning of the modal markers used in teacher's questions, and issues of pragmatics like the interpersonal functions of the teacher's questions and the speech fillers used in this kind of speech act. Obviously, stress and intonation are two distinctive features of this kind of speech act in the conversational and interactive lectures; accordingly, such phonetic phenomena will be examined in the scope of this study.

1.5. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The thesis consists of 5 main chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedures

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Implications

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW
AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
2.1. PRIOR RESEARCHES RELATED TO THE STUDY

In a perspective of pragmatics of questions, Lynch (1991) characterizes a question as an utterance with a particular illocutionary force.

Regarding the function of questions, Quirk et al. (1970 and 1985) define a question as a semantic class used to seek information on a specific subject.

As far as the functions of question in classrooms are concerned, Long and Sato (1983) and Brock (1986) have investigated the role of questions in second language learning in the classroom environment. They have worked on the role of teacher's question types (especially display and referential questions) and their facilitating the learning.

The effects of the types of teacher questions asked on the production of the target language and the types of responses given by the students is investigate by Yang (2010). Different from the other studies that focused only on open/referential and closed/display questions, the effects of yes/no questions were also investigated.

In short, the present study involved the investigation of the questions asked in English lectures taught by teachers in terms of syntax like clausal structures, syntactic functions of lexical items used in teacher's questions, issues of semantics like reference and coherence, the attitudinal meaning of the modal markers used in

teacher's questions, and issues of pragmatics like the interpersonal functions of the teacher's questions and the speech fillers used in this kind of speech act.

2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. Notions of Lecture

Free online dictionary provides the following definition for a lecture: is an exposition of a given subject delivered before an audience or a class, as for the purpose of instruction.

2.2.2. Lecture styles

More complete classifications of lecture styles are those proposed by Goffman (1981), Dudley-Evans and Johns (1981) and Dudley-Evans (1994). This last study points out that: "the key to the understanding of lectures is an appreciation of lecturers' individual styles" Dudley-Evans (1994, p.148).

2.2.3. Notions of Question

The Longman Dictionary of English language (1992) provides the following definition for a question: *a command or interrogative expression used to elicit information or a response, or to test knowledge*.

2.2.4. Working definition of Teachers' Questions

2.2.5. The Taxonomy of Question forms

Table 2.1 The Taxonomy of Question Forms

Questions Forms	Examples
1. Wh-question	- **What** *is a census?* [B, p. 659] **- Who** *can tell the class how many lakes there are, and their names?* [B, p.669] **- What** *do you think travels in the stratosphere?* [B, p.677] **- What** *do you think travels in the stratosphere?* [B, p.677] - **"Where** *does that food come from?"* [B, p.669]
2. Yes/No question	- **Could you explain** *the differences between preindustrial, early industrial, and mature industrial populations again?* [C, p.694] - **Do you remember** *what the equator is?* [A, p.650]
3. Tag question	- *Pretty amazing,* **isn't it?** [B, p.654] - *Galileo's ideas make the Earth seem pretty insignificant in the grand scheme of things,* **doesn't it?** [C, p.707] - *It's quite a counterintuitive concept,* **isn't it?** [C, p.722] - *That's another example,* **isn't it?** [C, p.705]
4. Declarative/ Imperative + word tag	- *We don't expect doctors to speak in the same style as a group of musicians,* **right?** [B, p.666] - *I think you all know what a hypothesis is,* **right?** [B, p.670] - *The mass of a hydrogen atom is set at one.* **OK?**

	[C, p.703]
	- *OK, class, let's take a quick survey, **shall we?***
	[C, p.705]
5. Alternative question	- *Is it north-south or east-west?* [C, p.775]
	- *What other types of plants (or animals) prefer a hot, dry desert climate?* [B, p.656]
	- *Did you think of a lump inside a person's body? Or problems with the stomach or brain?* [B, p.681]
	- *Is the younger generation really so bad, or are the baby boomers looking through distorted glasses, comparing their children to their adult selves instead of themselves at the same age?* [C, p.712]
	- *Have any of you ever caught your baby brother or sister chewing on one of the plants in your house?* [C, p.718]
6. Incomplete question	- *Now, questions?* [A, p.653]
	- *This is especially true with a type of martial art called karate. Yes?* [A, p.653]
	- *Largest?* [B, p.669]

2.2.6. The Taxonomy of Question Functions

2.3. THE CONCEPT OF THEME AND TEXTUAL METAFUNCTION

2.4. THE NOTION OF MOOD

2.4.1.Speech Acts and Moods

2.4.2.Mood Elements

2.5. BLOOM'S TAXONOMY OF THE COGNITIVE DOMAIN

2.6. THE FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE

2.6.1. The ideational function and transitivity structure

2.6.2. The Interpersonal Function and Mood Structure

2.6.3. The Textual Function and Thematic Structure

2.7. SPEECH ACTS

2.7.1. Speech Acts Theory

2.7.2. Classification of Illocutionary Act

2.7.3. Felicity Conditions

2.8. SUMMARY

This chapter presented the key concepts involved in the view of Functional Grammar, Pragmatic Functions of Questions in view of Speech act theory, and the Semantics of Questions in view of Bloom's Taxonomy, types of lectures and questions. The literature review made a sketch of the previous related study which helps to make a setting of study with different perspectives on the study of lectures. This picture also helps me to set up a framework for examining the speech acts used in the lectures and also view the lectures as in mainly the interactional ones where lectures and students can take part in as interlocutors.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is carried out through a descriptive and qualitative approach. Questions are chosen from TOEFL iBT

3.1.1. Research Methods

To fulfill the tasks of the thesis, the study will be carried out through a descriptive and qualitative approach. The study is aimed to look for qualitative information about teacher's questions in lectures in terms of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features. Quantitative information about the frequency of kinds of questions, distinctive lexical items used and pragmatic functions of questions is also set up.

3.1.2. Procedures

3.2. DATA COLLECTION

This was done by collecting instances of teacher's questions in lecture discourse.

For the corpus, the instruments used for seeking data were survey and observe with the searched transcripts of the lectures used as the listening test of TOEFL iBT.

3.3. DESCRIPTION OF POPULATION AND SAMPLES

To get a reliable and objective result, I am going to collect data for the linguistic features of teacher's questions from the collection of instances of questions from lectures of various topics;

the number of a corpus of 400 English samples will be randomly from extracts of lectures from TOEFL iBT.

3.4. DATA ANALYSIS

Data of the corpus will be analyzed and classified into kinds of syntactic structures: clausal structures and lexical items used in questions. Then they will be employed to investigate the semantics and pragmatics of teacher's questions in the dimensions of epistemic modality, speech acts, theory of ellipsis, and theory of reference.

3.5. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

As presented above, the data collection is mainly based on extract lectures in English in TOEFL iBT by native speakers of English, and the collection of instances of questions from lectures of various topics ensures to include variants in each language which align to objective findings. However, due to the manual counting process and rather small corpus, the reliability of the research is, to some extent, not as expected.

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. THE SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF TEACHERS' QUESTION IN THE VIEW OF FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR

Knowledge of the interpersonal grammar of exchange makes it possible for teachers to introduce students explicitly and systematically to the grammar they can use to exchange meanings with other. The meaning we make when we interact that is when we are giving or demanding information or goods and services-are at the semantic level of the language map, while the patterns we use to realize these meanings at the level of lexicogrammar will not necessarily be aligned to these meanings. Students must initially learn to manage effectively the most straightforward grammatical realizations of the interpersonal meanings used in interactions. Besides, when students' texts find it difficult to follow and to pinpoint exactly what they are talking or writing about, the problem often originates in the choice of Themes and the expression of Rheme.

Learning to manage interpersonal Themes is important for those learning how to manage spoken interaction. What comes first in the Mood signals the types of clause chosen to exchange meanings. For this reason, learning to manage the relationship between Mood and Theme is central to effective participation in spoken interactions, whether the student is joining in the interaction or sustaining it. Teacher can use their knowledge of Mood and Theme to prepare skeleton exchange outlines for students to use in

guided practice activities and structure role play. Hence, in my corpus, clause as message and clause as exchange are used in analyzing the question in lectures. This analysis was based on the combination of a descriptive framework using a functional model and syntactic model where such functional components as Theme, Rheme, Mood and Residue were linguistically actualized by such syntactic elements as Subject, Finite Verb, Auxiliaries, Complement in Interrogative and Declarative mood.

4.1.1. Questions with Yes-No Interrogative in Clause as Exchange and Clause as Message

4.1.2. Questions with Wh-Interrogative in Clause as Exchange and Clause as Message

4.1.3. Tag questions in Clause as Exchange and Clause as Message

4.1.4. Declarative mood questions in Clause as Exchange and Clause as Message

QUESTIONS	Teachers' Questions as Clause as Exchange and Clause as Message				Function	
Yes-No Interrogative	Theme		Rheme		Goods & services	Demand confirming information
	Are	*you*	*convinced?*			
	finite	subject	predicator			
	Mood		Residue			

Wh-Interroga-tive	Theme		Rheme			Goods & services	Demand information
	which		*are*		*the most popular?*		
	Wh-subject		**Finite**		**complement**		
	Mood			Residue			

Tag Quest-ion	Theme			Rheme				Goods & services	Demand confirming information
	we	*'ve*	*come*	*a long way*	***Have -n't***	*we?*			
	sub-ject	Fini-te	Predic-tator	Compl-ement	finite	Sub ject			
	Mood		Residue		Mood tag				

Declara-tive Mood Question	Theme			Rheme		Goods & services	Demand confirming information
	I		*talked*		***about jetlag and time zones?***		
	Subject		finite	Predi-cator	adjunct		
	Mood			Residue			

4.2. THE SEMANTICS OF QUESTIONS IN VIEW OF BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

When developing learning tasks and activities around Bloom's taxonomy, it is important to include at least one activity from each of the six levels of the taxonomy. There are six levels in

the taxonomy, moving through the lowest order processes to the highest:

4.2.1. Knowledge

Knowledge exhibits memory of previously learned materials by recalling facts, terms, basic concepts and answers. Knowledge is defined as the remembering of previously learned material, the universals and abstractions in a field - principles and generalizations, theories and structures. This involves the recall of a wide range of material, from specific facts to complete theories, but all that is required is for students to bring to mind the appropriate information.

4.2.2. Comprehension

The ability grasps the meaning of material. This may be shown by translating material from one form to another (words to numbers), by interpreting material (explaining or summarizing), and by estimating future trends (predicting consequences or effects). These learning outcomes go one step beyond the simple remembering of material, and represent the lowest level of understanding.

4.2.3. Application

Application refers to the ability to use learned material in new and concrete situations. This may include the application of such things as rules, methods, concepts, principles, laws, and theories. Learning outcomes in this area require a higher level of understanding than those under comprehension.

4.2.4. Analysis

Analysis refers to the ability to break down material into its component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood. This may include the identification of the parts, analysis of the relationships between parts, and recognition of the organizational principles involved. Learning outcomes here represent a higher intellectual level than comprehension and application because they require an understanding of both the content and the structural form of the material.

4.2.5. Synthesis

Synthesis refers to the ability to put parts together to form a new whole. This may involve the production of a unique communication (theme or speech), a plan of operations (research proposal), or a set of abstract relations (scheme for classifying information). Learning outcomes in this area stress creative behaviors, with major emphasis on the formulation of new patterns of structures.

4.2.6. Evaluation

Evaluation is concerned with the ability to judge the value of material (statement, novel, poem, research report) for a given purpose. The judgments are to be based on definite criteria. These may be internal criteria (organization) or external criteria (relevance to the purpose), and the student may determine the criteria or be given them. Learning outcomes in this area are highest in the cognitive hierarchy because they contain elements of all of the other categories, plus conscious value judgments based on clearly defined criteria.

4.3. PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF QUESTIONS IN VIEW OF SPEECH ACT THEORY

Actions performed via utterances, in English, are comely given more specific labels, such as apology, complaint, invitation, promise, or request. Mostly we don't just produce well-formed utterances with no purpose. We form an utterance with some kind of function in mind and the teacher also makes questions for many different purposes. This is one of dimensions of speech act, the illocutionary act. The illocutionary act is performed via the communicative force of an utterance. Consider the following cases are presented below:

4.3.1. Arousing the Student/ Audience's curiosity

By arousing curiosity, rhetorical questions motivate people to pay closer attention to information relevant to the rhetorical question. The teacher used representative speech acts in interrogative form and especially 'rhetorical questions' which do not require an answer. In terms of the preparative condition and sincerity condition, this kind of sentence will not be treated as a genuine question because it violates or it does not satisfy the requirement that *the speaker doesn't know P*, and *he/she really wants to know P*.

4.3.2. Seeking Confirmation

In my corpus, I also found instances of questions in form of declarative sentences ended with a question marker like "*right?*" or "*O.K?*" with **Declarative** + **Right structure** and with the end of the utterance as a *tag* to mark the illocutionary force of utterance as question.

Let's consider the examples below.

(113)… *A few years ago, director Steven Spielberg made a movie called AI. It told the story of someone who looked and acted like a little boy, but wasn't a little boy. He was a robot, right?*   [C, p.711]

declarative mood	Demand confirming information	Theme	Rheme		Theme
		He	was	a robot	*right?*
		subject	finite	complement	tag
		Mood		Residue	Mood tag

The function of seeking confirmation and agreement is a commonly used way of asking a question in spoken conversation. "Right" is acting as a verbal cue. It lets the speaker's/ students' target (you perhaps?) know that he wants verification that whatever he just said is in fact true. In many cases the kinds of these questions could certainly be made clearer without the use of "right" but for teacher, this construction is simpler and implies that the teacher already expects students' answer to agree. Moreover, the teacher feels that he needs to draw his learners' attention the lecture will be sprinkled with "right?"

4.3.3. Inviting Agreement

'**Declarative + OK'** structure is used as a *tag* ending, expressed the request of agreement. It normally means something like 'I know you don't believe it. Here are instances of Polar

interrogatives (including yes/no question and tag question) were found as shown below.

It's important to understand the situation when deciding how to ask questions. According to the result of data analysis in corpus, teachers also used various kinds of questions with different purposes to arouse students' curiosity or catch their attention to the topics.

4.3.4. Introducing the Definitions of Terms/ Concepts/ Ideas

The most common form of interrogatives used as representatives is the structure "*What is/are + N*?" with the function of introducing a definition of a key term, defining the terms or giving examples of kinds of terms.

Often times, introducing new content or new concepts can be overwhelming for students and teachers alike. Through the use of discussions, students are able to preview the new content or concepts for things that they can relate to. They seek out information that looks familiar to them, things they don't quite understand, and things that look interesting to them, including new vocabulary. Discussions allow students to identify and develop topics important to their own thinking.

4.3.5. Introducing the Main Ideas of the Lecture

Basically, the direct illocution of a question requires a matching between the interrogative sentence structure and the typical illocutionary force of a question. The linguistic structure of a question can be realized as Wh-interrogative. As we can observe the

process of posing questions in the lectures in my data, questions in form of interrogatives were used with high frequency. Wh-questions (why, what, who, when, where, how) are used in most of the lectures and their answers are to provide information and elicit responses from students rather than yes or no. These questions are often related to main ideas and the topics of lectures being discussed. It is interesting to reveal that most of questions may not be answered and the answers are put in students' mind. The answers may be right or wrong.

4.3.6. Introducing the Topic of the Lecture

A variety of questions with different purposes in the following examples in representatives functioned as devices of asking, effective tools to catch students' attention to the topic, to introduce new knowledge, to confirm his or her credibility.

Not only were questions used to issue requests, they also expressed the procedure and content of the lectures such as introductions, transitions, conclusions, and so on.

4.3.7. Requesting Basic Knowledge or Basic Fact

Many questions are used in the lectures and especially question is a request for basic knowledge or basic fact. It is the commonest and most straightforward way to allow the student to show that they know and can express the answer in the target language. The purpose of this type of question is to discover the unknown information. Asking questions make the interaction motivated quickly and heatedly.

4.3.8. Getting Students' Attention in the Course of Lectures

Not only other questions but also the questions in form of Interrogatives beginning with an auxiliary were found to fulfill the function of reminding information that the students have learned. This kind of question is close-ended when what the speaker wants to know is the POLARITY 'yes or no'. A close question of the lectures is selected for this study. However, this kind of question can be a variant of request that falls within the directive types that have been mentioned above.

4.3.9. Lead-ins towards the Content of the Lecture

Besides the questions in form of canonical interrogatives mentioned above, my paper investigates instances of questions in form of embedded interrogatives used for leading into the content point of the lecture. This kind of interrogatives is constructed with an interrogative beginning with "*Do you know*", "*Does anyone know*", "*Can anyone recall*" plus the embedded clause requiring the information.

4.4. SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have presented the result of data analysis concerning the realization of the syntactic feature of teacher's question, the semantic and pragmatic function of questions in view of speech act theory used in English lectures. We have also given specific functions for each type of speech acts.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The investigation into linguistic features of teachers' questions in lectures, I investigated such issues of the realization of the syntactic feature of teacher's question, issues of semantics like the cognitive meaning of the speech acts conveyed in teacher's questions in view of Bloom cognitive taxonomy, and issues of pragmatic function of questions in view of speech act theory used in English lectures. The findings enable me to draw some conclusions and put forward some implications to the language teaching and learning related to lectures in English.

5.1. CONCLUSION

The linguistic features analysis of the teachers' questions in lectures from TOEFL iBT has yielded the following conclusions.

Questions are regarded as instances of a type of sentence, parallel to the directive and interrogative types. From the awareness of the significant role of questions in English teaching and learning, this study has investigated the use of questions in lectures with the hope to raise the awareness of language learners about the distinctive features of this sentence type and thus to help learners use questions effectively in communication.

Syntactically, regarding the taxonomy of questions used in lectures, the study has found out the syntactic forms of questions in English lectures according to the clause of exchange and the clause of message. By syntactic features of questions in the view of Functional

Grammar, questions in lectures were found to be realized into four types: *Questions with Yes-No Interrogative, Questions with Wh-Interrogative, Tag Questions and Declarative Mood Questions.* Teachers and writers manipulate the Subject-Finite relationship of Mood/ Residue structure to indicate whether they are giving or demanding information or exchange. Teachers also manage the relationship between Mood and Theme is central to effective participation in spoken interactions, whether the student is joining in the interaction or sustaining it.

Semantically, in terms of the semantics of Questions in the view of Bloom's Taxonomy, there are six levels Taxonomy recognized in structural forms of questions which functioned to help realize the taxonomy of question functions.

- Knowledge exhibits memory of previously learned materials by recalling facts, terms, basic concepts and answers.

- Comprehension demonstrates understanding of facts and ideas by organizing, comparing, translating, interpreting, giving descriptors and stating main ideas.

- Application solves problems in new situations by applying acquired knowledge, facts, techniques and rules in a different way, or in a new way.

- Analysis examines and breaks information into parts by identifying motives or causes or makes inferences and finds evidence to support generalizations.

- Synthesis compiles information together in a different way by combining elements in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions.

- Evaluation presents and defends opinions by making judgments about information, validity of ideas or quality of work based on a set of criteria.

Pragmatically, questions were found to be used to issue quite a lot of illocutionary acts in classroom context. Not only are questions uttered to make requests for information, but also demand information, give information and perform goods and services. In addition, the teacher can arouse the students' curiosity, seek confirmation, invite agreement, introduce a key terms or concepts or ideas, introduce the topic of the lectures, request basic knowledge or fact, get students' attention in the course of lectures and introduce lead-ins towards the content of the lecture as well. In fact, the corpus of the study was built from the extracts of the lectures instead of the video clips of the whole lectures.

To conclude, the results of this study indicate a need for English teachers and learners to get a better insight into their knowledge of English questions. Although there are inevitable limitations on the process of conducting this study, it is hoped to make a contribution to the effective use of questions for instructive, pedagogical and communicative purposes.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS

Based on the foregoing findings from the research on the linguistics features of the teachers' questions in the lectures, the

teachers' or lecturer's use of various types of questions, the syntactic realizations of these questions in the view of Functional Grammar, this thesis is also hoped to be useful for teachers and learners of English both theoretically and practically.

5.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to the restriction of materials, English lectures collected from transcripts of lectures chosen from TOEFL iBT listening instead of approaching real ones in classrooms. Additionally, because of the limited time, knowledge and references, the rather small size of the population of question samples, the study can only examine some certain aspects of English lectures such as the various types of questions, the syntactic features of teachers' questions as the Clause of Exchange and as the Clause of Message in the view of Functional grammar, the semantics of questions in the view of Bloom's Taxonomy and pragmatic Function of questions in view of the act theory, so it has not reached the expected depth as it should.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study only investigated the linguistic features of teachers' questions in the lectures from TOEFL iBT. However, within the limitation of time and materials, the study is by no means complete and there still remain some other aspects waiting research. An investigation into culture influences on questions in English and Vietnamese lectures is highly recommended for further study.