**THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES OF ASKING FOR AND GIVING PERMISSION IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE**

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***Abstract.*** *The act of asking for and giving permission is a widespread pair of speech act in Viet Nam as well as all over the world.* *The aim of the study is to find out some similarities and differences between the act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese in syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects. The research methods used are linguistic statistics, analytical method, comparative method. Besides, the paper focuses on exploring the relationship between politeness, culture with the act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese.*

***Keywords:*** *the act of asking for and giving permission, similarity, difference, English, Vietnamese*

**1. INTRODUCTON**

The act of asking for and giving permission is a widespread pair of speech act in Vietnamese as well as in other languages all over the world. According to Searle (1969) [13], the act of asking for and giving permission belongs to the directive, the aim of the speaker when he/she carries out the act of asking for permission is to get the positive reply of the hearer with his/ her utterances. However, Brown & Levison (1978) [11], thought that the speech act could be facing threaten of the speaker if the speaker gets the negative reply from the hearer, because the pragmatic transformation in the act of asking for and giving permission can lead to some unsuccessful communications in many different cultures in the world.

The study of the act of asking for and giving permission, the structures and the ways to express, the agents decide the effects of the act of asking for and giving permission, the specific characteristics of American people and Vietnamese people. The specific features of using the act of asking for and giving permission in communication of many social people is a necessary issue that can be examined in terms of similarities and differences in languages, politeness, cultural communications and the ways of thinking in both languages.

In general, the act of asking for and giving permission like as many speech acts has many uses and this depends on the aims and the contents of the speaker. However, this speech act in English and Vietnamese has some similarities and differences in semantics and pragmatics.

**1.1 Giving permission as a speech act**

*1.1.1 The concept of asking for permission*

According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s dictionary (2000), the verb *“asking for permission”* is defined *“the action of asking for permission of someone to carry out something, especialy, the people with the social power”.*

According to the definition and the theory of Austin (1962) [14], the act of asking for permission is an action in which the speaker 1 (SP1) and the speaker 2 (SP2) have a mutual effect based on the linguistic factors; so that the act of asking for permission can get the best effectiveness.

In short, basing on these concepts above, the act of asking for permission can be defined as follows: “The act of asking for permission is a speech act that in some certain situations, the speaker carries out an utterance to negotiate and to ask the hearer’s permission, so that the speaker can carry out this action in the future.

**1.2 Giving permission and politeness**

*1.2.1 The concept of giving permission*

There are two kinds of giving permission: positive giving permission and negative giving permission.

*1.2.2. Giving permission and politeness*

According to Brown & Levinson [1], politeness is established on the following rules:

- Social distance

- Relative Power

- Imposition Rank

In the conversation, the speech acts of the speaker and the hearer always have Face Threatening Acts - FTA, therefore, to avoid or mitigate FTA, Brown & Levinson advised the speakers to use some strategies.

Vietnamese people often use these ways when they have conversations:

1. Using the polite vocative words (ông, bà, ngài, chú, bác, thủ trưởng, giám đốc...)
2. Using the mitigating words
3. Using the modal verbs

English people often use indirect strategy with the modal verbs “*may, might, can, could”* and the interjection *“please”* to attain the aim of communication.

**1.3. Methodology**

The study is mainly researched according to the following main methods:

1. Linguistic statistics: This method is used to collect and summarize speech acts of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese.

2. Analytical method: The sample acts of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese are analysed to find out their typical characteristics.

3. Comparative method: Based on the analysed and described results, the author compares the similarities and differences of the act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese in the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects.

**1.4 Scope**

The study used the linguistic data as the main research objects from the following research sources:

- The Vietnamese novels, short stories in the mediaval and modern periods.

- The English, English - Vietnamese novels, short stories.

- Some Vietnamese and American films.

- The daily conversations based on DCT questionnaire.

To sum up, 970 utterances of asking for and giving permission in English and 1000 utterances of asking for and giving permission in Vietnamese are used as linguistic data.

**2. CONTENT**

**2.1. Some similarities**

*2.1.1 Comparing the content of the act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese*

The contentof the act of asking for and giving permission can be understood all the whole utterances of asking for permission that have the aim of the utterance. Although they are expressed with the different of modes and performative verbs, they have the same meaning *“asking somebody to do something”*

The first similarity we want to mention is the content in English and Vietnamese. In both languages, the act of asking for permission has the same purpose; the speaker wants to ask for permission the hearer to agree, to permit the speaker to carry out an action A in the future.

**Table 1:** Content and lexical meaning used to ask for and give permission   
in English and Vietnamese

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Content** | **Lexical/structural meaning used to ask for and give permission** | |
|  | **English** | **Vietnamese** |
| Speaker (S) asks for permission to carry out an action A | - Use performative verbs *“allow”,* *“permit”* and *“let”.*  - Use modal verbs*”can”, could”“may”, “might”*used in interrogative structures  *“Can I...?”, “Could I ...?”,*  *“Do you mind...?”, “Would you mind...?,”Do you allow...?”*  - Use Interjection *“please”.*  - Use *“Yes”* in positive giving permission.  - Use *“No”* in negative giving permission.  - Use *“No problem”, “Never mind”* or give some reasons to refuse somebody. | - Use performative verbs *“xin phép, “xin...được phép”, “xin...cho phép”, “cho”.*  - Use modal verbs *“có thể”.*  - Use the words*“ làm ơn”,“làm phúc”, “thưa” ,“bẩm”, “báo cáo”.*  - Usemodal particles *“thôi”, “nhé ạ”.*  - Use*“Có”,“Vâng”* in positive giving permission.  - Use *“Không”* in negative giving permission or give some reasons to refuse somebody. |

The acts of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese are carried out with high politeness. Usually, the speaker (the person who asks for permission) has lower social position, ages and social distance than the hearer (the person who gives permission); therefore, the speaker when carrying out any utterances, he/she has to be at a disadvantage compared with the hearer in the aspect of politeness and face. This is the next similarity found in the research

*(1) May I come to your house this afternoon, please? I want to see your new bike.*

*Certainly.* [10, 58]

It is very easy to see that in this example, the speaker is very clever and polite when using the interjection *“please”* to respect the face of the hearer and enhance the politeness of the act of asking for permission of the speaker. And then the hearer can accept the speaker’s request easily*“đến nhà vào chiều nay để xem chiếc xe đạp mới”.*

*(2) Thưa sếp, ngày mai nhà em có việc, sếp cho phép em nghỉ làm được không ạ?*

*Được thôi, nhà cậu có việc à?* [3, 99]

With the strategy of using the word *“thưa sếp”* in the example above, the speaker is very clever in carrying out the act of asking for permission to enhance the value of illocutionary act and the politeness and face with the hearer, so finally the speaker can get the positive reply from his boss*“Được thôi, nhà cậu có việc à?”.*

Although the ways of representation are different from the form, structure, the last aim of the act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese is not different, the speaker carries out an act of asking for permission and expect a positive reply from the hearer, permits the speaker to carry out his action.

*(3) Đã 2 giờ sáng rồi, xin phép bố mẹ con tranh thủ đi nằm một lát ạ.*

*Ừ.* [3, 99]

The direct act of asking for permission of the son in this example got the positive reply from his parents after he explained his action carefully *“đi nằm một lát ạ”* with the reason *“đã 2 giờ sáng rồi”*

*(4) Excuse me, can I get pass?*

*Sure, go ahead.* [3,100]

In example (4), the speaker used the indirect strategy with *“can”* to form an interrogative structure *“Can I get pass?”.* Moreover,it can not deny that the expression*“Excuse me”* makes the utterance more polite and respects the face of the hearer, and then expresses the modesty of the speaker as well. The reply *“Sure”* of the hearer is an affirmation to the act of asking for permission of the speaker.

*2.1.2 Comparing the semantics of the act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese*

- The act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese is categorized into two strategies: direct and indirect with the same structures such as; reported speeches, commands, passive statements of performative verbs “*cho phép”,* “*xin phép”, “xin…cho phép”, "xin"* in Vietnamese and “*permit, allow”, “let”* in English and interrogative statements in indirect strategy.

*(5) Hàng ngày, anh cho phép chúng em được gặp anh qua điện thoại.*

*Được, anh rất sẵn sàng, có gì khó khăn, chú cứ “phone” cho anh.* [6, 8]

*(6) Sáng mai, tôi xin phép được gặp anh.*

*Rất sẵn sàng, xin mời anh đến nhiệm sở của tôi và xin anh”phone” cho tôi trước.* [6, 8]

*(7) Good morning, sir. Could you please allow me to have a day off tomorrow?*

*Good morning. Oh, no, didn’t you see that tomorrow our office will be busy? [3,101]*

- The utterances of the act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese are often used with the personal pronouns *“I”, “We”* in English and *“tôi”, “chúng tôi”* in Vietnamese.

-The performative verbs are always used in the present tense, if these performative verbs are used in the past tense or any tenses, the utterances of the act of asking for and giving permission are not reported speeches to report the action of someone.

*(8) Tôi đã xin phép anh ấy cho tôi ở đây một vài ngày nữa.* [1,11]

The performative verb *“xin phép”* in this example is used in the past tense, therefore this verb *“xin phép”* is not a performative verb with the force of the performative verb, it is only a statement, reports the act of asking for permission of the hearer to the speaker with the action “*cho tôi ở đây một vài ngày nữa”.*

*(9) He asked the man to permit him to get four sardiness.* [12,2]

This example is a reported statement, which reports the boy’s asking for permission “*to get four sardines”* with the old man in *“The old man and the sea”* of Hermingway, and *“permit”* in this situation can be used in infinitive, not in the present tense.

*2.1.3 Comparing the pragmatics of the act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese*

- Use the mitigating devices:

The act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese both express the politeness and the face of the speaker and the hearer. In English and Vietnamese, the act of asking for and giving permission is used with the mitigating devices or the devices to mitigate the act of asking for permission, and mitigate the force of the speaker with the hearer when carrying out the act of asking for and giving permission. In Vietnamese, the mitigating devices are the beginning or ending words like *thôi, này, nhé, ạ, chớ, cứ chị ơi, bác ơi, làm ơn, làm phúc…*

*(10)* ***Lan ơi****, hôm nay xe đạp của mình bị hỏng mình chưa sửa được. Bạn có thể cho mình mượn xe đạp của bạn được không?*

*Ừ, bạn cứ lấy mà đi.* [3, 103]

*(11) Chị lát nữa có đi đâu không? Cho em nhờ xe chị sáng nay* ***nhé****.*

*À, chị sáng nay bận đến cơ quan. Em hỏi bố thử xem.* [8, 159]

*(12) Xin phép cho em được trình bày ý kiến của mình* ***ạ.***

*Được, em cứ trình bày đi.* [3, 103]

In English, the mitigating devices are the use of the interjection word *“please”*

and some structures “*Would you…*?”, *"Could you...?, "Do you mind...?"*. The interjection word *“please”* can express the high politeness of English people, it expresses the modesty and the goodwill of the speaker when carrying out the act of asking for permission to respect the hearer’s face, and the speaker can get the positive reply from the hearer in conversations.

*(13)* ***Please****, mum. May I use the computer?*

*No, dear, you can’t. It’s time to go to bed.* [16, 2]

- Use the gestures:

Body languageis one of the means of non- verbal communication, but gestures have some different rules for many different cultures. The normal body language that native people and Vietnamese often use are smiling, nodding in agreement, shaking his/ her head, pulling a wry face in disagreement of the hearer to a speaker’s asking for permission.

**3.1. Some differences**

*3.1.1 Comparing the semantics of the act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese*

Most of the acts of asking for in English are carried out in indirect strategy. Vietnamese people often use direct strategy with the performative verbs *“xin phép”, “cho phép”, “xin…cho phép”, “xin”* when they make the act of asking for permission. These performative verbs in Vietnamese contain the meanings *“asking for permission”*, so the hearer thinks that his/ her face is respected and he/she can accept the speaker’s action easily.

*(14) Tối nay bạn con tổ chức sinh nhật. Bố mẹ cho phép con về nhà muộn tí ạ.*

*Ừ, nhưng con nhớ không được về quá muộn.* [3, 105]

*(15) Xin phép bác cho cháu dựa xe vào chỗ này.*[8, 74]

*Cậu đi sang bên kia để tôi còn bán hàng, sáng ngày ra thật phiền phức quá.*

In English, people often use modal verbs “*Can”, “Could”, “May”* and some structures *“Would you mind …?”, “Do you mind…?”* in indirect strategy.

Modal verbs *“can, could, may, might”* in English that are used with different levels and different aims depend on the aims of the speaker, *“could”* is more polite than *“can”,* *“might”* is more polite than *“ may”.* In Vietnamese, all these modals verbs have one meaning *“có thể”* and they can be used in indirect strategy to enhance the politeness of the act of asking for permission.

*(16) Mom, there is a thing with my friend and it goes until 11. Can I please stay out past curfew this once?*

*OK. Just this once.* [3, 105]

*(17) Does it feel stuffy in here to anyone? May I open the window?*

*Sure, go ahead.* [3, 105]

*(18) Thưa sếp, mai nhà em có việc quan trọng, anh cho em nghỉ một hôm ạ.*

*Ừ được rồi, để tôi sắp xếp, em cứ lo việc gia đình đi nhé.* [3, 105]

In this example, the conversation happened between two persons, the boss and his employee, with the different distance and social position. The employee used the phrase “*Thưa sếp”* in the beginning of the utterance and the word *“nhé”* in the end of the utterance to carry out the action “*mai nhà em có việc quan trọng, anh cho em nghỉ một hôm ạ.”* to enhance his respect to his boss. Therefore, he got the boss’ permission to permit him to carry out his action easily “*Ừ được rồi, để tôi sắp xếp, em cứ lo việc gia đình đi nhé”.*

In aspect of semantics, the performative verb “*xin phép”* is generally used in English and Vietnamese with the meaning *“ask someone’s permission to do something”.* Besides, the performative verb “*xin phép”* in Vietnamese is used as a form of saying goodbye with the old people and they have higher social position.

*(19) Sáng mai con xin phép ông con đi sớm.*

*Cậu đi đâu, cậu có thể ở đây với tôi.* [4, 410]

3. CONCLUSION

In summary, the act of asking for and giving permission in English and Vietnamese has many similarities and differences of syntax and prgamatics. In both languages, people often use direct and indirect strategies with the same grammatical structures. English people often use indirect strategy with the modal verbs *“may, might, can, could”* and the interjection *“please”* to attain the aim of communication.

In contrast, the act of asking for and giving permission in Vietnamesedepends on many social features, the ways to use the modal verbs, especially the interest of the communicators; therefore they often use some strategies to increase the politeness and the face of the communicators as well. These features contribute to the total success of communications.

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**MỘT SỐ ĐIỂM TƯƠNG ĐỒNG VÀ KHÁC BIỆT CỦA HÀNH VI XIN PHÉP VÀ HỒI ĐÁP TRONG TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT**

***Tóm tắt.*** *Hành vi xin phép và hành vi hồi đáp là một trong những cặp hành vi lời nói phổ biến trong tiếng Việt cũng như ở trên thế giới. Hai loại hành vi này luôn đi cùng với nhau, cùng tồn tại và xuất hiện song hành trong các hội thoại hay phát ngôn lời nói. Bằng cách sử dụng các phương pháp nghiên cứu như thống kê ngôn ngữ, phân tích miêu tả, so sánh đối chiếu song song*, *bài viết đã đi sâu phân tích các hành vi xin phép và hồi đáp trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt để đối chiếu, so sánh, tìm ra những điểm tương đồng và khác biệt của hành vi xin phép và hồi đáp trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt xét trên bình diện ngữ pháp, ngữ nghĩa và ngữ dụng; từ đó thiết lập mối quan hệ giữa lịch sự, văn hóa với hành vi xin phép và hồi đáp trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt.*

***Từ khóa:*** *hành vi xin phép và hồi đáp, tương đồng, khác biệt, tiếng Anh, tiếng Việt*

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