

# A STUDY ON SYNTACTIC, SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF HYPERBOLIC EXPRESSIONS IN CEO NEWS ITEMS IN ENGLISH VERSUS VIETNAMESE

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**Abstract** - The article examines the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of hyperbolic expressions (HEs) in Chief Executive Officials (CEO) news items in English and Vietnamese. Its design is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods using the theory of hyperbole by Galperin (1981) and Đinh Trọng Lạc (1994) based on which HEs are extracted from various sources of daily up-dated CEO news on internet. The findings of the study show that HEs of English and Vietnamese CEO news have some differences and similarities in terms of semantics, syntax and pragmatics. The findings are expected to contribute a better insight into the explanation of the characteristics of HEs in English and Vietnamese language teaching, communication and Translation.

**Key words** - hyperbolic expressions (HEs); CEO news; syntactic; semantic; pragmatic features

## 1. Overview

Hyperbole is seen as one of stylistic devices having a great power of expressive meaning. People use it as a useful tool to make their words more impressive and attract the reader's attention. Hyperbole can be found popularly in literature and in oral communication, in poetry as well as in other discourse types; however, in the area of CEO news, hyperbolic expressions (HEs) remain as a mystery that needs to be further discovered. Let us look at the examples below of hyperbole employed in English and Vietnamese CEO news items:

(1) Universal's theme park business is hotter than a fire-breathing dragon.

Obviously, the bolded expression is an overstatement. The speaker used the hyperbolic expression (HE) "Universal's theme park business is hotter than a fire-breathing dragon" to emphasize that universal's theme on park business grows rapidly.

(2) ADSL xuất hiện với các quán cafe Internet mọc lên như nấm, giúp phổ biến Internet đến từng khu phố; giai đoạn Internet văn hóa xã lên lời về vùng nông thôn; và 3G xuất hiện.

To express the idea that many coffee shops have been built since ADSL appeared in the consuming market, the hyperbole expression (HE) "quán cafe mọc lên như nấm" is used to exaggerate the large number of coffee shops that have internet.

For the above-mentioned reasons, we have decided to conduct a study with the topic "A study on syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of hyperbolic expressions in CEO news items in English versus Vietnamese". Hopefully, this study can contribute a meaningful part to the learning and teaching of English and help Vietnamese learners comprehend and use hyperbole effectively in the areas of economics, communication and translation.

## 2. Focus of the study

In order to achieve the aim of the article I intend to fulfil the objectives (i) to examine the hyperbolic expressions in English and Vietnamese CEO news items in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics; (ii) to find out the similarities and differences in syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of hyperbolic expressions in English and Vietnamese CEO news items; (iii) to propose effective ways to comprehend and translate hyperbolic expressions effectively in English and Vietnamese CEO news.

## 3. Theoretical Background

### 3.1. Stylistics

According to Galperine, (1981) stylistics is a branch of general linguistics which deals mainly with the functional styles of language and the special media of language to secure the desirable effect of the utterance, and is called the stylistic devices and expressive means.

### 3.2. Stylistic Devices

#### 3.2.1. Definition of Stylistic Device

Galperin defines stylistic device as "a conscious and intentional literary use of some of the facts of the language (including expressive means) in which the most essential features (both structural and semantic) of the language forms are raised to a generalized level and thereby present a generative".

Đinh Trọng Lạc (1995) in "99 Phương tiện và Biện pháp Tu từ tiếng Việt" stated that stylistic device is one of the most decisive factors influencing the typical style of a writer or a lecturer. Besides, readers are able to discover particular styles of each writer or convey messages thanks to different types of stylistic devices used in his work.

#### 3.2.2. Function of Stylistic Devices

Stylistic devices are used in writing to make it more effective and persuasive. Without stylistic devices, writing would be plain and shallow. The more stylistic devices you know, the more unique your writing can be.

#### 3.2.3. Classification of Stylistic Devices

Galperin (1971) offered a classification of expressive means and stylistic devices based on the level-oriented approach: Phonetic expressive means and stylistic devices, Lexical expressive means and stylistic devices and Syntactical expressive means and stylistic devices.

### 3.3. Hyperbole

#### 3.3.1. Definitions and Functions of Hyperbole

According to Galperin (1977) hyperbole can be defined as "deliberate overstatement or exaggeration of a feature

essential (unlike periphrasis) to the object or phenomenon. Furthermore, Galperin (1977) stated that “hyperbole is a device which sharpens readers’ ability to make a logical assessment of the utterance. Hyperboles are perfect for fictional works, especially to add color and depth to a character or humor to the story.

### 3.4. Hyperbole and Metaphor

Hyperbole is often confused with metaphor because a metaphor does not use “like” or “as” to make a comparison, which is similar to hyperbole. However, the main difference is that hyperbole is an exaggeration to emphasize or make readers pay more attention to and understand more deeply the meaning of utterances.

### 3.5. Hyperbole and Simile

Simile and hyperbole are the terms for two different figures of speech. Simile is the use of words such as “like” to compare an object, concept, or person to something else. Simile and hyperbole can often be confused, because hyperbole sometimes fancifully compares its subject to something else.

### 3.6. Semantic Features

Semantics can be defined as the study of language meaning; that is the meaning of words, phrases, sentences and larger units of discourse (termed texts, or narratives). According to Richards et al (1987), “semantic features are “the smallest units of meaning in a word.”

Take a look at the following examples:

(3) ... GE’s exit from its vast finance arm ...

(4) ... những tên tuổi khổng lồ của thế giới dường như là một kỳ tích.

In examples (3) and (4), the HEs “vast finance arm”, “những tên tuổi khổng lồ của thế giới” are hyperboles of immensity and they are used to make strong impressions on readers.

### 3.7. Syntactic Features

Chomsky (1965) stated that syntax is the study of the principles and rules for constructing phrases and sentences in a language. Syntax focuses on the word order of a language and the relationships between words.

Let us look at the following syntactic feature in hyperbolic expressions in CEO news items in English versus in Vietnamese:

(5) Single –handly wiped out around 90,000 jobs. [N-4]

It is obvious that the syntactic features of hyperbolic expressions (3) are recognized in clause: **S+ V+O**

(6) “CEO Vietjet là người phụ nữ có bàn tay sắt bọc nhung”.

In example (6), the syntactic features of HE (3) are recognized in clause: **S+ V**

### 3.8. Pragmatic Features

Crystal (1997) defines pragmatics as the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context. In addition to using speech acts such as apologizing, complaining, complimenting, and requesting, communicative action includes also engaging in different kinds of discourse and participating in speech events of varying length and complexity.

The following examples are hyperboles expressing statement in terms of pragmatics in English and Vietnamese CEO news items.

(7) Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, seen here in this Jan. 28, 2016, file photo, says **technology is entering a golden era.**”

(8) Vinh nói” “Tỉnh làng xóm của người miền Tây Nam bộ **đã ăn sâu trong máu**, nhà nào có việc thì cả làng cùng đến”, Võ Văn Châu chia sẻ.”

## 4. Research Design and Methodology

The research design of this project is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods which are used to collect and analyze HEs in Vietnamese and English CEO news items.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

### 5.1. Syntactic Features Of Hyperbole Expressions In English And Vietnamese CEO News Items

*Table 1. Examples of Syntactic Feature of HEs in English and Vietnamese CEO News Items*

HEs	Examples
<b>NP = pre-modifier + N</b>	“tremendous growth”
<b>NP = pre-modifier + N + post-modifier</b>	“nguồn nhân lực vàng”
<b>NP = N+ post-modifier</b>	“mùi hương mê hoặc của cà phê Shin”
<b>VP = V+NP</b>	“has blown us away”
<b>VP = V intransitive</b>	“gây nghiện cho khách hàng”
<b>VP = V + post-modifier</b>	“chia sẻ chóng mặt, nổi như cồn”
<b>VP = pre-modifier + V + post-modifier</b>	“bị dội bom tin nhắn”
<b>AdjP = pre-modifier + Adj</b>	“crystal clear”
<b>PP = Pre-modifier + Prep + NP + Post-modifier</b>	“In a very short amount of time...”
<b>Adv = Adverb</b>	“...extremely well”
<b>S1 + V + Comp Adj + than + S</b>	“Universal’s theme park business is hotter than a fire-breathing dragon.”
<b>One of the + Superlative Adj + N + PrepP</b>	“One of the most powerful media titans in U.S. history.”
<b>S + Adv + V+ Superlative Adj + PrepP + that + clause</b>	“He really is best in class on all the criteria that we looked at.”
<b>NP + as/like + NP</b>	“Crazy like a fox.” “Con đường đầy chông gai như kinh doanh smartphone ở Việt Nam.”
<b>NP + that + V + look like + NP + VP</b>	“His energy level is so high that looks like his eyes might pop out of their rocket.”
<b>NP + Pre + as + NP</b>	“...nó như “tình yêu sét đánh”
<b>Conditionals (IF + present simple + simple future)</b>	“Nếu người sáng lập không phát triển nhanh được chắc chắn startup sẽ chết hoặc thoái thác, bị đối thủ mạnh hơn đè bẹp.”
<b>S + V</b>	“Với chiến lược “gây nghiện thị trường”
<b>S + V + O</b>	“It’s killing people’s minds.”
<b>S + V + C</b>	“Watson has become the silver thread tied into much of IBM’ success.”
<b>Existence Clause</b>	“There are enormous global pressures.”

## 5.2. Semantic Features of Hyperbolic Structures (HES) in English and Vietnamese CEO News Items

**Table 2.** Examples of Semantic Feature of Hyperbolic Expressions (HES) in English and Vietnamese CEO News Items

HES	Examples
<b>Immensity</b>	“những tên tuổi khổng lồ của thế giới”
<b>Strength</b>	“Whitman has single-handedly wiped out around 90,000 jobs at the firm” Người lèo lái con thuyền DHG vượt qua bão táp đến thành công
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	“his tireless work promoting low-cost investing” “đam mê nghiên cứu và sáng tạo đã dần ngấm vào máu của ông”
<b>Growth</b>	“Digitization is coming at us like a rocket.” “Thị trường bất động sản đang lên cơn sốt”
<b>Competition</b>	“Amazon.com was going to “kill” Best Buy...” “Săn lùng chất xám ...”
<b>CEO's Talent</b>	“He handles complexity extremely well.” “Người lèo lái con thuyền DHG vượt qua bão táp đến thành công.”

## 5.3. Pragmatic Feature of HES in English and Vietnamese CEO News Items

**Table 3.** Examples of Pragmatic Feature of HES in English and Vietnamese CEO News Items

HES	Examples
<b>Promise</b>	“We're bringing all of our energies to bear there,” he said. “Con gà Vietjet sẽ đề thật nhiều những quả trứng vàng hạnh phúc và thịnh vượng, cho hành khách, cho cộng đồng và cho chính mỗi chúng ta.”
<b>Warning</b>	“...waiting for consensus can kill you, because of speed matters, too.” “Khi khởi nghiệp, đa số các nhà sáng lập đều tin rằng, chỉ cần có ý tưởng điên rồ, khác biệt hoặc độc đáo là sẽ thành công nhưng đó lại là một trong những sai lầm chết người...”
<b>Assertion</b>	“General Motors has been a giant in the auto industry for more than one hundred years.” “CEO Vietjet là người phụ nữ có bàn tay sắt bọc nhung”
<b>Statement</b>	“Amazon founder Jeff Bezos says when it comes to technology, “We're on the edge of the golden era” “Tôi cho rằng xe điện là ngành hàng có ‘gen khủng long’, anh Long cho biết.”
<b>Prediction</b>	“Tech startups seem to be in boom times with the huge valuations we're seeing.” “10-15 năm nữa là thời điểm rất kim cương.”
<b>Asking</b>	“What does it feel like to be the CEO of a super-hot company ....?” “M&A có thực sự là “chiếc đu đưa thần” cho sự phát triển của doanh nghiệp?”

## 5.4. Quantitative results of hes in English and Vietnamese ceo news items.

### 5.4.1. Frequency of Syntactic Features of HES in English and Vietnamese CEO News

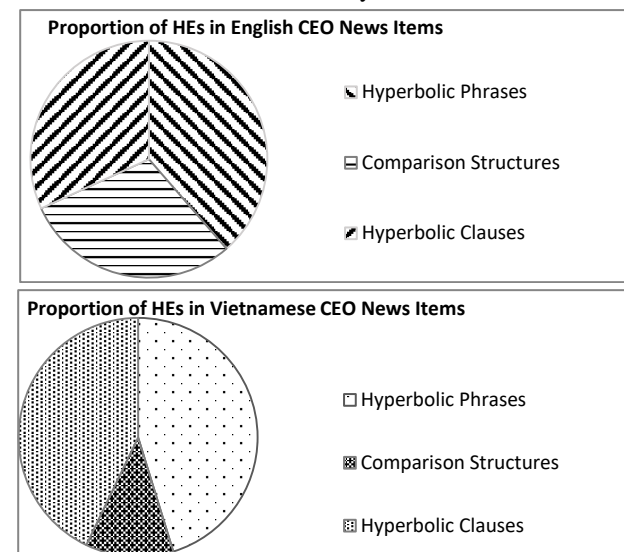
Both languages include HSs of two types: phrases and clauses. In terms of phrases, hyperbolic expressions are recognized in NPs, VPs, AdjPs, AdvPs, and PPs.

**Table 1.** Frequency of Syntactic Features of HES in English and Vietnamese CEO news

Types of Hes		English		Vietnamese	
		Oc	%	Oc	%
<b>HP</b>	NP	11	25	18	21.4
	VP	1	2.3	20	23.8
	AdjP	2	4.55	0	0
	PP	1	2.3	0	0
	AP	2	4.55	0	0
<b>ComS</b>		13	29.5	10	11.9
<b>HC</b>	Cond	0	0	1	1.2
	Others	14	31.8	35	41.7
<b>Total</b>		44	100%	84	100%

Noun phrases and verb phrases which have pre-modifiers and post-modifiers in English and Vietnamese syntactic features are found to be similar.

Vietnamese syntax has a number of distinctive features which are different from English syntax. First of all, there is a distinct difference in the order of nouns within noun phrase between two languages. There are also no cases of hyperbolic expressions in form of AdjPs, PrepPs and AdvPs compared to their English counterparts. Regarding conditionals, among the samples of HES in English CEO news items, there are no cases of HES in the form of conditionals. In terms of clauses, there are significant differences between the two languages. In English, clauses commonly used are structures S+V+O and S+V+C, while in Vietnamese, clauses commonly used are structures S+V.



**Figure 1.** Proportion of HES in English and Vietnamese CEO News Items in Terms of Syntax

### 5.4.2. Frequency of Semantic Features of HSs in English and Vietnamese CEO News

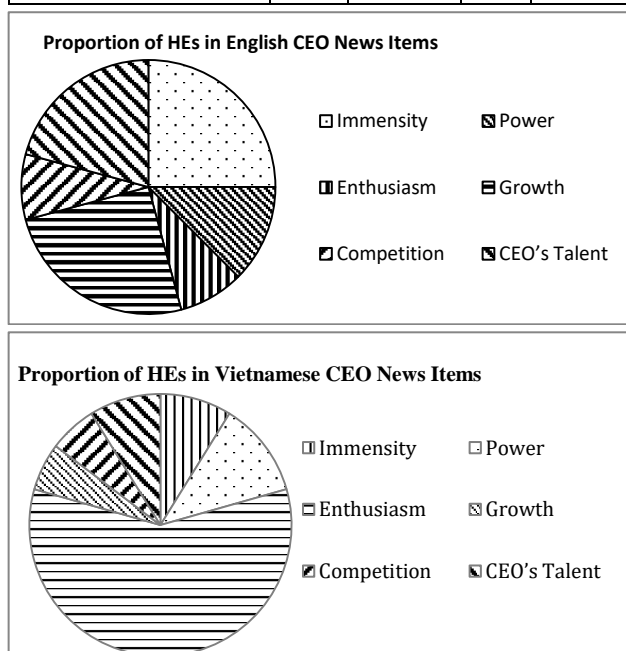
The hyperbolic structures such as hyperboles expressing immensity, hyperboles expressing strength, hyperboles expressing enthusiasm, hyperboles expressing growth, hyperboles expressing competition, hyperboles expressing CEO's talent are denoted in CEO news in English and in Vietnamese.

There are some differences between English and Vietnamese used in CEO news items. Vietnamese writers

consider “Enthusiasm of CEOs” and “strength” as interesting topics to hyperbolize; these aspects, on the other hand, are rarely paid attention to by the English ones. Another distinction worth mentioning is that English writers employ hyperboles expressing immensity and hyperboles expressing growth more commonly than Vietnamese ones do.

**Table 2.** Frequency of Semantic Features of HEs in English and Vietnamese CEO News

No.	Hyperbolic expressions	English		Vietnamese	
		Oc	%	Oc	%
1	Immensity	6	25	3	8.8
2	Strength	3	12.5	4	11.8
3	Enthusiasm	2	8.35	20	58.8
4	Growth	6	25	2	5.9
5	Competition	2	8.35	2	5.9
6	CEO's Talent	5	20.8	3	8.8
TOTAL		24	100%	34	100%



**Figure 2.** Proportion of HEs in English and Vietnamese CEO News Items in Terms of Semantics

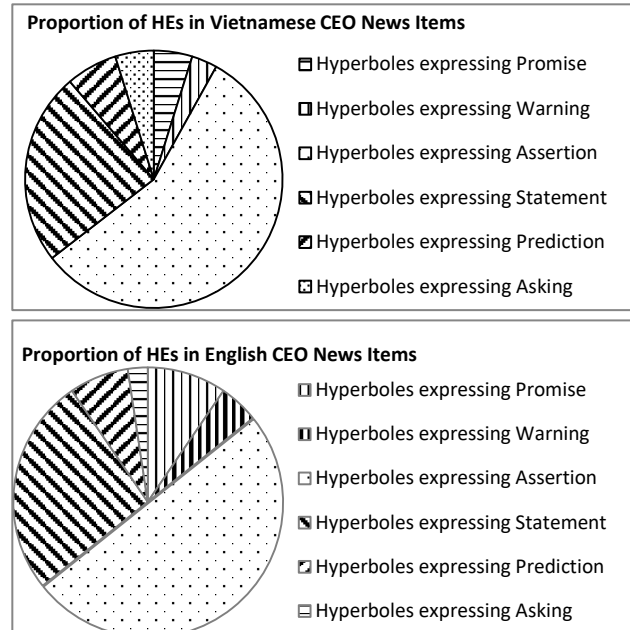
#### 5.4.3. Frequency of Pragmatic Features of HSs in English and Vietnamese CEO News

Hyperbolic structures in both languages are used with the same purposes of showing promise, warning, assertion, statement, prediction, and asking. It can be said that among all of hyperboles investigated, a large number of hyperboles expressing conclusion are used in Vietnamese while there are fewer hyperboles expressing conclusion found in English expressing this function.

**Table 3.** Frequency of Pragmatic Features of HEs in English and Vietnamese CEO News

No.	HEs	English		Vietnamese	
		Oc	%	Oc	%
1	Promise	4	9.6	3	4.9
2	Warning	2	4.8	2	3.3

3	Assertion	21	50	35	56.4
4	Statement	11	26	15	24.1
5	Prediction	3	7.2	4	6.5
6	Asking	1	2.4	3	4.8
TOTAL		42	100%	62	100%



**Figure 3.** Proportion of HEs in English and Vietnamese CEO News Items in Terms of Pragmatics

## 6. Conclusions

There are 6 groups of hyperbolic structures in both languages that emphasize and highlight a certain feature of the mentioned object such as hyperboles expressing immensity, hyperboles expressing strength, hyperboles expressing enthusiasm, hyperboles expressing growth, hyperboles expressing competition, and hyperboles expressing CEO's talent. Also hyperbolic structures in both languages are used with the same purposes of showing *promise*, *warning*, *assertion*, *statement*, *prediction*, and *asking*.

## 7. Implications

### 7.1. For CEOs

This study will provide CEOs with experience of how to resolve problems in business. Moreover, information in CEOs news items will help CEOs predict economic situation in the future and work out suitable strategies for their enterprises.

### 7.2. For language teachers and language learners

#### 7.2.1. For language teachers

Language teachers should ask students to do different kinds of hyperbolic exercises from different sources to help learners raise their awareness about the differences of HEs between English and Vietnamese in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. By doing this, they can help students apply what they understand about this language device into reality as well as to make their lessons more lively, which can contribute a meaningful part to the language learning process.

### 7.2.2. For language learners

Knowledge on HEs might help language learners pay special attention to hyperbolic syntactic structures to avoid errors made due to lack of knowledge about sentence elements in both languages.

### 7.2.3. For translators

In many cases we cannot find the complete equivalents in the two languages; therefore, knowledge on HEs might help translators and interpreters be aware of the grammatical construction as a single unit, compare the meanings of the sentences in the two languages, determine where the clauses begin and base on context to get the most suitable equivalents.

### 7.2.4. For learners of Economics

Thanks to the similarities and differences found out

between CEO news items in English and Vietnamese, learners of Economics might get a lot of information about English and Vietnamese CEO news from which they can appreciate a general view of CEOs in general and a global view of economic situations of other countries in particular.

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