LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF HIGH SCHOOL REGULATIONS
IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE
CÁC ĐẶC TRƯNG NGÔN NGỮ CỦA NỘI QUY TRƯỜNG TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG TẠI HOA KỲ VÀ VIỆT NAM

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Abstract - This study is aimed at investigating linguistic features of High School Regulations (HSRs) in English and Vietnamese. The data for analysis is collected from the official websites of well-known High Schools (HSs) in New York City (NYC) and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). The study focuses on analyzing HSRs in terms of their pragmatic features, syntactic features and lexical choices. With regard to the pragmatic aspect, the study attempts to investigate the functions of high school regulations. In terms of the syntactic aspect, the passive voice, imperative sentences, type 1 conditionals and relative clauses are the most striking structures in HSRs. In addition, descriptive adjectives, proper nouns and "forbid" verbs are prominent lexical choices to transmit certain messages to the readers effectively. It is hoped that the results of this study can be useful for those who are interested in analysis of texts, especially high school regulations.

Key words - linguistic features; high school regulations; pragmatic features; syntactic features; lexical choice.

Tóm tắt - Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là xác định đặc trưng ngôn ngữ của nội quy trường trung học bằng tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ các trang web chính thức của các trường trung học tại thành phố New York và thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Nghiên cứu này tập trung phân tích các nội quy của trường trung học về các đặc điểm ngữ dụng, cú pháp và lựa chọn từ vựng. Về mặt ngữ dụng, nghiên cứu này tìm hiểu các chức năng của nội quy trường học. Về mặt cú pháp, dạng bị động, câu mệnh lệnh, câu điều kiện loại 1 và mệnh đề quan hệ là các cấu trúc nổi bật nhất trong nội quy trường trung học. Ngoài ra, tính từ mô tả, danh từ riêng và các động từ thuộc phạm trù "cấm" là những lựa chọn từ vựng nổi bật nhằm truyền tải các thông điệp tới người đọc một cách hiệu quả. Hy vọng rằng kết quả nghiên cứu có thể giúp ích cho những ai quan tâm đến phân tích văn bản, đặc biệt là các nội quy trường trung học.

Từ khóa - đặc trưng ngôn ngữ; nội quy trường trung học; đặc điểm ngữ dụng; đặc trưng cú pháp; lựa chọn từ vựng.

1. Rationale

According to Allan David Bloom (1930 – 1992), an American philosopher, classicist, academician and teacher, *"Education is the movement from darkness to light"*. It is true that education plays the most important role in the development and progress of a country. Developing a child's personality requires the efforts of three main factors: the school, the family and the society. The school is an essential educational institution which exerts a great influence on a person's life. Schools in general and high schools in particular need regulations. If students are made to follow discipline, they will get a better environment to study and to live in harmony with others. School regulations are thus necessary because they are guidelines for students to what is acceptable and what is not. In conclusion, it is important to apply regulations to students' activities to keep school a secure and civilized place.

Viewed from the language angle, school regulations are texts with special language use. As a teacher, we are interested in the language of regulations as well as the features of their language use to compose effective high school regulations either in English or in Vietnamese.

It is hoped that the results of this study will probably provide some useful knowledge of linguistic features of regulations and facilitate the process of teaching and learning English, especially for Vietnamese teachers and students majoring in English as well as those who are interested in this field.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Text Types

Regulations as a whole belong to a certain text type. In the view of Reiss (1977), there are three main text types

with their characteristics being presented as follows:

An informative text is plain communication of facts: information, knowledge, opinions, etc. The language dimension used to transmit the information is logical or referential, the content or 'topic' is the main focus of the communication.

An expressive text is creative composition: the author uses the aesthetic dimension of language. The author or 'sender' is foregrounded, as well as the form of the message.

An operative text is inducing behavioral responses: the aim of the appellative function is to appeal to or persuade the reader or 'receiver' of the text to act in a certain way.

After Reiss' research (1977), some other researchers mentioned some other types of text including the vocative text. According to Buhler (1990), the three main functions of language are the expressive, the informative (representation) and the vocative (appeal) functions, which serve as bases for classifying texts. The vocative text type is a type of text where the function of language focuses on appealling readers to respond, or to persuade readers in an intended way. Examples of vocative text types are notices, publicity, propaganda, persuasive writings, advertisements and regulations. Therefore, regulations belong as a whole to the vocative text type because it show relevant characteristics of this text.

2.2. Pragmatic Features

In the book "The Study of Language", Yule (1997) claims that "communication clearly depends not only on recognizing the meaning of words in an utterance, but also on recognizing what speakers mean by their utterances. The study of what speakers mean, or 'speaker meaning', is called pragmatics".

The main pragmatic function in regulations is notification. After understanding these notifications, the intended readers

know what they should do or should not do. Moreover, regulations show the forms of discipline for students who do not follow the rules. In this study, pragmatic features of regulations center around the functions of the regulations.

2.3. Syntactic Features

Quirk et al. (1985) state that when looking at the syntactic features of a sentence, it is important to notice the roles that the elements of the sentence such as subject, object, complement, and condition play in the sentence. In addition, Trần Hữu Mạnh (2007) in *"Ngôn ngữ học đối chiếu cú pháp tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt"* explores English structures and makes a comparion with the Vietnamese equivalents with a strong focus on the syntactic features.

The regulation text platform pulls out the structure of regulations and preambles to present the text in an easily readable format. This format allows readers to quickly skim through and find the information that apply to readers. It is necessary to discover common syntactic features which are made up of words and governed by various linguistic rules. This research shows that the most remarkable structures employed in regulations are the passive voice, imperative sentences, conditional sentences and relative clauses.

2.4. Lexical Choice

In regulations, the lexical choice plays an important role in providing information and prominent characteristics of the regulations as well as transmitting messages adequately and effectively. In this study, descriptive adjectives, proper nouns and the "forbid" and "permit" verbs are identified as the most common lexical choices used in regulations.

2.5. Definition of Regulations

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary - 8th Edition, *"regulation"* is an official rule made by a government or some other authority.

In addition, *"regulation"* is an official rule or the act of controlling something, as defined in Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2008).

From the view mentioned above, regulations can be defined as sets of instructions which tell us the way things are to be done and act as a prescribed guide for actions and behavior.

2.6. Research Methods

The aim of the study is to investigate the linguistic features of English High School Regulations and English High School Regulations in terms of their pragmatic functions, syntactic structures and lexical choices. In order to achieve this aim, the descriptive method and the contrastive one are employed.

The descriptive method is used to depict pragmatic features, syntactic features and lexical choices pragmatic functions, syntactic structures and lexical choices High School Regulations in both languages.

The contrastive method is concerned with the way in which the linguistic features in both English High School Regulations (EHSR) and Vietnamese High School Regulations (VHSR) are compared to find out the similarities and differences between the two languages in terms of the above-mentioned aspects.

The research is carried out with samples taken from the official websites of HSs in New York City (NYC) and in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC).

In order to prepare for the research, the samples are collected based on three following criteria:

- Firstly, the samples must be written HSRs.

- Secondly, they are all taken from the official websites of HSs in NYC and HSs in HCMC in the school year 2016-2017.

- Thirdly, according to researcher's observation, EHSRs and VHSRs, cover five aspects: uniform, attendance, behaviour, responsibility and homework. They express the whole contents of the regulations. Therefore, the samples which cover all five aspects are selected.

For the sake of being valid and reliable, these HSRs are those last updated in the year 2017. With such criteria, we collected 114 samples in NYC and 92 in HCMC from the official websites of HSs in NYC and in HCMC for detailed investigation.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Pragmatic Features

3.1.1. Emphasizing student's responsibilities and behaviours

HSRs motivate students to become more active participants in the learning process, become independent learners and identify what is important to students' learning. Besides that, HSRs help students develop their personalities. Below are some examples:

In English:

(1) *Students have the responsibility:*

• ***Respect*** *the right of others to learn.*

•***Respect*** *their peers and teachers regardless of ethnicity, religion or gender.*

• ***Respect*** *the property and equipment of the school and others.*

(http://www.crnyhs.org/)

In Vietnamese:

(2) *Thái độ cư xử giao tiếp với Thầy, Cô, bạn bè:*

• ***Kính trọng*** *và* ***vâng lời*** *thầy cô, cha mẹ,* ***yêu mến*** *và* ***giúp đỡ*** *bạn,* ***có tinh thần kỉ luật*** *trong học tập và sinh hoạt.*

• ***Lễ phép, cúi chào*** *khi gặp Thầy, Cô giáo, cán bộ, công nhân viên, khách đến trường tham quan.*

(http://thpttranphu.hcm.edu.vn/Default.aspx)

a. Notifying students of the do's

All regulations of high schools in NYC and HCMC, which apply within the school premises at all times and during school functions outside the precinct of the school, allow students to build a good environment for learning and training as in the following examples.

In English:

(3) *Classroom Rules:*

• ***Arrive*** *on time with the correct equipment.*

• ***Work*** *hard and allow others to do the same.*

• ***Follow*** *instructions.*

(http://bhsec.bard.edu/manhattan/)

In Vietnamese:

(4) ***Tích cực, chủ động, sáng tạo*** *trong khi học tập.* ***Coi trọng*** *và* ***rèn luyện*** *phương pháp tự học.* ***Phải tập trung nghe giảng, chủ động tích cực xây dựng bài, ghi chép bài đầy đủ.***

(http://thptlythuongkiet.hcm.edu.vn/Default.aspx)

3.1.2. Notifying students of the don'ts

One of the purpose of high school regulations is to create a secure and effective learning environment for all students. HSRs impose a discipline system for all high schools in NYC and HCMC. Below are some examples:

In English:

(5) DRESS CODE

*1. Caps, hats or head coverings **are not to be worn** during the school day, or inside the school day, or inside the school building. **Do not bring caps or hats** on campus during school time.*

*2. Rollers, curlers, picks, rakes, forks, or combs in hair **are prohibited**.*

*3. Unnatural coloring of hair or cutting of symbols or designs in hair is **not permitted**.*

(School- https://www.aesshs.com/)

In Vietnamese:

(6) *Trật tự kỉ luật:*

*1. Học sinh **không được** có lời nói, hành động vô lễ với thầy cô, cán bộ công nhân viên nhà trường, người lớn tuổi, cha mẹ, khách đến liên hệ công việc tại trường.*

*2. Học sinh **không được** quay cóp, gian lận khi kiểm tra, thi cử.*

*3. **Không mang, không sử dụng**: Rượu, bia, thuốc lá, thuốc gây nghiện và các loại hung khí, chất nổ trong và ngoài nhà trường.*

(http://thptlythuongkiet.hcm.edu.vn/Default.aspx)

3.1.3. Protecting the high school environment

In order to create a healthy atmosphere at the school, all students need to protect the environment. HSRs require cleaning-up every day. A cleaning-up involves picking up litter on the playground, removing trash on the school campus, and picking up trash on nearby roads and sidewalks as in the following examples:

In English:

(7) ***Keep the school environment and the local community free from litter.***

(http://www.crnyhs.org/)

In Vietnamese:

(8) *Bảo vệ môi trường và tài sản chung:*

*- **Bỏ rác vào nơi quy định, không ném – xả rác bừa bãi, giữ gìn vệ sinh chung.***

*- **Không làm hư hỏng các trang thiết bị phòng học; giữ gìn các tài sản khác của nhà trường.***

(http://ngogiatu.quan8.edu.vn/)

3.1.4. Giving instructions in special cases

HSRs give advice to students or show the way to do or not to do when they are absent, when they use the laboratory or when they are ill. Below are some examples:

In English:

(9) *Any cell phone or electronic device that is confiscated will be returned according to the following schedule (For a first or second offense, parents can pick up the electronic device before the scheduled pick up day. However, please **call Ms. Loukissas ahead of time at***

71817-7791 so that she can have the device ready for you.

(https://www.bhsn.com/)

In Vietnamese:

(10) *HS nghỉ học phải có đơn xin phép của phụ huynh. Trong trường hợp cấp thiết thì cha mẹ phải **thông báo trực tiếp hoặc qua điện thoại với GVCN**, sau đó phải có đơn xin phép với lý do chính đáng mới được vào lớp.*

(http://thptnguyenhuuhuan.hcm.edu.vn/Default.aspx)

3.1.5. Warning students of punishment in case of violation

It is very important to help the students to easily understand the benefits of high school regulations. They are used to predict what will happen if the students do not adhere to regulations. Students will be appropriately disciplined or punished.

In English:

(11) *Any student who is granted a special permission transfer shall adhere to the following requirements, or may be subject to withdrawal from the school at the end of the school year.*

(http://www.legacyschool.org/Legacyschool/.html)

In Vietnamese:

(12) *Học sinh chấp hành đúng nội quy phòng thi, học sinh có các hành vi gian lận trong kiểm tra, thi cử sẽ bị hạ bậc hạnh kiểm.*

(http://www.trandainghia.edu.vn/Trang-Chu.aspx)

3.2. Syntactic Features

3.2.1. The Passive Voice

a. In English

In the collected samples of EHSRs, the passive voice is commonly used to emphasize not only the striking features of the regulations of schools but also the benefits the students can get when they obey those regulations. According to Quirk et al. (1985), "The passive voice is more commonly used in the informative than the imaginative writing and is notably frequent in the objective and impersonal style of article, contract and news reporting". This explains why the passive voice appears with a high frequency in EHSRs.

(13) *As usual, cell phones **are banned** in classrooms unless they are being used for instructional purposes at the teacher's discretion.*

(https://www.bsge.com/)

(14) *Mobile phones **will be permitted** in school.*

(http://www.newdesignhigh.com/)

b. In Vietnamese

Hoàng Trọng Phiến (2008) believes that the passiveness in Vietnamese is expressed with lexical and grammatical means in the syntactic structures: The Object in the active sentence becomes the Subject in the corresponding Passive sentence. The predicate is associated with "bị", "được" and the agent is optional. Most linguists agree that "bị" always has negative meaning and "được" in contrast, is often associated with positive meaning.

(15) *Ban Giám hiệu đề nghị các em học sinh chấp hành nội quy của nhà trường. Những học sinh vi phạm **sẽ bị xử lý kỷ luật** theo quy chế của nhà trường, Những học sinh thực hiện tốt **sẽ được tuyên dương khen thưởng.***

(http://www.thpt-lehongphong-tphcm.edu.vn/)

3.2.2. Imperative Sentences

a. In English

There are two main forms of the imperative found in HSRs: affirmative Imperative and negative Imperative. Below are examples:

(16) *Laboratory Rules:*

Always listen *carefully to instructions.*

Do not run *in the lab.*

(https://www.erhsnyc.org/index.jsp)

b. In Vietnamese

According to Diệp Quang Ban (2006), imperative sentences commonly used in Vietnamese are two main forms of the imperative: affirmative Imperative and negative Imperative.

(17) *Bảo quản tài sản chung*

*- **Giữ gìn và bảo quản** tài sản của nhà trường, của lớp.*

*- **Không di chuyển** bàn, ghế, ghế đá và các dụng cụ phục vụ trong trường.*

(http://www.thptlequydonhcm.edu.vn/home.aspx)

3.2.3. Type 1 Conditionals

a. English

The first type conditional sentences are very popular and can be found in EHSRs. Normally, there are two clauses in conditional sentences: the "if" clause and the "result" clause. Here are some examples:

(18) ***If a student uses a mobile phone inappropriately, or in contravention of the school's policy, he/she will be sanctioned accordingly***. *Mobile phones will not be confiscated except in circumstances where a member of staff considers the device to be a harmful or disruptive influence.*

(https://maanyc.com/)

The first type conditional help the students easily understand the benefits of regulations in school. They are used to predict what will happen if the students do not know or do not adhere to regulations.

b. In Vietnamese

In Vietnamese, such conjunctions as 'nếu', 'nếu mà', 'nếu như'... are commonly used:

(19) ***Nếu*** *học sinh nghỉ quá 45 buổi học trong năm học (nghỉ có phép hoặc không phép, nghỉ liên tục hoặc nghỉ nhiều lần cộng lại **thì** học sinh không được lên lớp.*

(http://mariecurie.edu.vn/)

3.2.4. Relative Clauses

In the whole collected data of the study, no case in Vietnamese is found similar to the English relative clause. In other words, relative clauses are prevalent only in EHSRs.

Huddleston and Pullum (2005) claim that "There is an anaphoric relation between the element in the relative clauses and the antecedent on which it depends". Relative clauses are often used to provide essential information for students in EHSRs. Here are some examples:

(20) *Sunglasses are not to be worn on school grounds unless prescribed for medical purposes and verified with a doctor's note, **which** must be presented to an administrator for approval.*

(https://mlkhsnyc.com/)

(21) *Students **whose** dress may cause distraction to the educational environment, or are deemed inappropriate for a work setting will be asked to change or go home.*

(https://www.marymountnyc.org/page)

In the above examples, the relative clauses is used to provide the essential information of dress code which the students can get as in the example (20) or to present the striking feature of dress code, as in the example (21).

3.3. Lexical Choices

3.3.1. Descriptive Adjectives

a. English

By using and combining various descriptive adjectives and their different forms flexibly, the writers of HSRs emphasize the quality and the benefits of the regulations. Consequently, the use of descriptive adjectives helps the writers succeed in persuading the students to remember the regulations and always follow them at school.

(22) *Self-discipline is learned in a **disciplined, safe, caring** environment. Respect for our rules will ensure that all students will benefit from the learning opportunities we provide.*

(http://gramercyhs.org/)

b. Vietnamese

Descriptive adjectives are also used in the creation of VHSRs. As the focus of information in VHSRs, adjectives are an effective and important device to make VHSRs more impressive to the students. The students of the school are to pay more attention to features about the school uniform, homework, behavior or attendance. That is one of the reasons why descriptive adjectives are mainly employed in VHSRs.

(23) *Học tập: Đến lớp phải chú ý nghe giảng, ghi chép **cẩn thận**, làm bài **đầy đủ**, tư thế **nghiêm chỉnh**, không nói chuyện, nói leo và làm việc riêng. Trong giờ thi, giờ kiểm tra phải tuyệt đối **nghiêm túc**, không quay cóp hoặc có những hành vi **thiếu trung thực.***

(http://www.trandainghia.edu.vn/Trang-Chu.aspx)

3.3.2. Proper Nouns

a. English

Proper nouns appear with a relatively high frequency in EHSRs. They are primarily used to refer to names of schools, offices in school as well as places and people relating to the training process. They contribute to making HSRs more impressive, which helps the students to remember the contents more easily.

(24) *To ensure the integrity of **New York State** assessments, **the State Education Department** prohibits all students from bringing cell phones and certain other electronic devices into a classroom or other location where a **New York State** assessment is being administered. Click here to view this policy.*

(https://www.sssm.org/)

b. Vietnamese

Like in English, proper nouns in Vietnamese are commonly used in HSRs. Especially, in VHSRs, they appear more frequently as names of the schools or a people.

(25) *Nếu vi phạm sẽ bị nhà trường sử lý kỉ luật theo thông tư 08 **Bộ Giáo dục** với các mức độ, phê bình trước lớp, khiển trách trước **Hội đồng Kỉ Luật** nhà trường, cảnh*

cáo trước toàn trường (có ghi học bạ), buộc nghỉ học có thời hạn, buộc thôi học và thông báo về địa phương.

(http://thptvothisau.hcm.edu.vn/Default.aspx)

(26) *Nắm vững tiểu sử danh nhân* **Nguyễn Huệ**, *phấn đấu học tập tấm gương yêu nước, phẩm chất cao đẹp, ý chí phấn đấu vì dân vì nước của ông.*

(http://thptnguyenhue.hcm.edu.vn/Web1/Default.aspx)

3.3.3. "Forbid" and "Permit" Verbs

a. English

According to Wierzbicka (1984), 'forbid' verbs include verbs such as *'prohibit', 'cancel', 'banned', 'refuse'*. In EHSRs, most of these verbs are used to make students follow the regulations, which is very useful in shaping their sense of discipline. Here is an example:

(27) *The school dress code is enforced at school dances. Students who violate the dress code may be* **prohibited** *from entering the dance venue. Inappropriate dancing and other suggestive movements are strictly* **prohibited** *at dances. Students may be expelled from the dance if they engage in inappropriate dancing.*

(http://www.mihsnyc.org/)

Besides that, the writers also use other verbs to express that students will be allowed or not allowed to do something by means of verbs like *'allow', 'accept', 'permit', 'obey'*.

(28) *Devices (Laptops / Notebooks / Tablets)*

• *Devices will be* **permitted** *in school.*

• *Students will not be* **permitted** *to use devices in the school grounds during Interval and Lunch.*

(https://harlemrenhs.org/)

Each of the above verbs is a means of expressing different implications, connotations and attitudes in a particular situation. Therefore, the act of proposing the right lexical choices to write successful EHSRs is really essential. It plays an integral role in getting the attention of students as well as persuading them to conform to the regulations.

b. Vietnamese

Like English, "forbid" verbs are commonly mentioned in VHSRs. Typically, 'nghiêm cấm', 'cấm' in Vietnamese are employed with the meaning similar to *'prohibit', 'banned'* in English. It is easy to find some examples in Vietnamese:

(29) *Những điều* **nghiêm cấm** *của học sinh:*

1. **Cấm** *đánh bạc dưới mọi hình thức.*

2. **Cấm** *việc hút thuốc lá, uống rượu bia.*

3. **Cấm** *mang các loại vũ khí, hung khí tới trường.*

(http://thpt-macdinhchi-tphcm.edu.vn/v3/)

4. Conclusion

This research has resulted in some findings as follows:

In terms of pragmatic features, HSRs play an important role in establishing and maintaining school discipline. Regarding to those functions, there are many similarities in English and Vietnamese with functions of the HSRs in EHSRs and VHSRs. With regard to syntactic features, imperative sentences appear in most HSRs; the passive voice is used to emphasize the prominent features of the

regulations. The first type conditional sentences are used to indicate what will happen if the students do not know or do not adhere to regulations. Nevertheless, the relative clause is also a significant grammatical structure but it is only found in EHSRs, not in VHSRs. Lastly, with regards to lexical choices, descriptive adjectives are employed to describe the features and benefits of regulations. They are often repeated intentionally to make the students easily memorize the contents of the regulations. Furthermore, in order to make HSRs more persuasive to the students, the writers usually resort to the "forbid" verbs.

It is hoped that the results of this research can be useful for those who are interested in analysing vocative texts, especially high school regulations.

Besides, the results may have some contributions not only to writing an effective EHSR and VHSR but also to the teaching and learning of English in Vietnam.

It is expected to raise students' awareness of how important it is to follow HSRs in general and to continue to emphasize the guidance and instruction from teachers in particular. The analysis of HSRs can thus bring certain benefits. The findings of this research will probably help to equip teachers with some basic linguistic knowledge about some common features of HSRs. As a result, by constructing practical exercises, as well as introducing different genres of English, teachers can help students develop their writing skill to produce effective pieces of writings. This research can also be beneficial to English learners, especially for students who major in the English language. They can also benefit from the knowledge of this genre in terms of linguistic features. Mastering these features, learners can improve their linguistic background and learn how to write a good text in general and HSRs in particular.

Above all, the findings of this research can be helpful for copywriters in completing the task of writing good HSRs regulations for high schools. Moreover, HSRs are a useful means to convey messages to the readers and arouse their interest in the operational mechanisms of schools.

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