A COMPARE-CONTRAST STUDY ON THE TYPES AND GRAMMATICAL AND MOVE STRUCTURES OF THE ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE QUESTIONS IN NATURAL AND CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION

Nguyen Thanh Binh
College of Foreign Languages, Hue University

Abstract. This research has been carried out to study the types and grammatical and move structures of English and Vietnamese questions in natural and classroom communication. Using comparative, contrastive, qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis, 1380 collected questions were analyzed. The research findings indicate that there are major differences between Vietnamese and English questions in terms of question types and question structures in natural and classroom communication. On the basis of the research findings, useful educational applications have been recommended for the effective use of questions in TESOL classes.

Keywords: Question, Move, Classroom Communication, Natural Communication, Type, Structure.

1. Introduction

The question is a speech act much used in communication and in education. In communication, questioning is an important speech act used to request for information. Questions are used in conversations, in interviews, in criminal investigations, in courts, in parliamentary debates, and in any fields of communication with the main purpose of seeking the needed information. In addition, questions are also used with many other purposes. According to William W. Wilen (1987), in the field of education, questioning has been a teaching technique much researched on and employed since Plato and Socrates up to the present time. According to a research (Wilen, 1987), teachers ask about 300-400 questions a day. Teachers use questions to teach, to pose problems, to seek solutions to problems, to challenge students to have critical thinking, to probe thought process, to check on learning, to review lessons, etc. According to Hilda Taba, the question has been used as the “single most influential teaching act” because of the power of the questions to influence student thinking and learning (cited in Wilen, 1987). In conclusion, the question is a popular speech act much used in social communication, in human cognition and in educational practices. With such significance, questions have been extensively researched on resulting in many important research findings and applications.
In Vietnam, currently, the English language has been taught and used extensively in many areas of life. Many foreigners come to Vietnam to work and to stay. They have the need to learn the Vietnamese language. Cross-cultural situations require people to speak English and Vietnamese in general and to know how to use English and Vietnamese questions in particular. Hence, the research on the similarities and differences between Vietnamese and English questions is of significance to facilitate communication and education.

This preliminary descriptive and contrastive research seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the types and grammatical and move structures of Vietnamese and English questions in natural communication and classroom communication?

2. What are the similarities and differences in types and structures between Vietnamese and English questions?

2. Literature review

The Terms Question and Interrogative Sentence

According to the communicative purposes, sentences can be classified into: 1-Declarative sentences, 2-Interrogative sentences, 3- Imperative sentences and 4-Exclamatory sentences. An interrogative sentence is a sentence with the form of a question. It is a sentence which asks a question, i.e. it is a request for information. In the Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar (Chalker and Weiner, 1996), the term interrogative is defined as follows: “Interrogative and question are often used interchangeably. Where a distinction is made between the form and function of a sentence, interrogative may be reserved for the syntactic form, in which typically there is inversion of subject and auxiliary.” The term question is defined in the same dictionary as follows: “A sentence seeking information, a sentence that interrogative in form. Some grammarians make a distinction between sentences that are questions in form and those that are questions in meaning, using interrogative for the syntactical classification and question as functional label. In practice, many grammarians used the word question with both meanings on different occasions. In general, sentences that are interrogative in form are also genuine questions in meaning” (Chalker and Weiner, 1996).

Ms. Anna-Brita Stenstrom in Questions and Responses (1984) defines the term question as follows: “Given that the speaker A and B co-operate, a question (Q) is any utterance by A that may elicit a response (R) from B; R is consequently an utterance elicited by Q.”

When a question is used in verbal communication, it realizes the speech act of questioning, one of the important speech acts. The speech act questioning is a directive
speech act. It requests a response. Questioning as a speech act requires the following felicity conditions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositional Content</th>
<th>Any proposition or proposition function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparatory</strong></td>
<td>a-S does not know the “answer ,” i.e. does not know the propositional function, does not know the information needed to complete the proposition truly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b-It is not obvious to both S and H that H will provide the information at that time without being asked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sincerity</strong></td>
<td>S wants this information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential</strong></td>
<td>Counts as an attempt to elicit this information from H.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Research Works on Questions

*Process-Product Research and Sociolinguistic Research*

According to William W. Wilen (1987), our interest in research on classroom questions is not new. One of the teaching methods using questions in the classroom dated back to Plato and Socrates in the year 335 B.C. Early in the 20th century, Stevens (1912), Bloom (1956), Sanders (1966), Gallaghers and Aschner (1963) continued researching on the use of questions in education. Their researches concentrated on question categories and question classification basing on different systems of classification. Process-product research works carried out in urbane classes in 1970s established a correlation between teacher question and students’ outcome in their studies. Recent sociolinguistic research works have focused on social contexts of the classroom language leading to new research prospects.

Research works on the use of questions in education were reviewed by Williams Carlsen (1991) in the article “Questioning in the classroom: A Sociolinguistic Perspective” published in *Review of Educational Research*. In this article, Williams Carlsen analyzed two research models: Process-product and Sociolinguistic models of research on questions in the classroom.

According to Ambrose A. Clegg Jr. (cited in Carlsen, 1991), in early 1970s, the Office of Education and National Institute of Education in the U.S.A began to embark on a series of long-term, carefully-designed evaluation studies of *Project Follow Through* on a national scale. These studies were designed on a model called “process-product” research that asked a basic question: Is there a relationship between certain teaching behaviour (process) and specific student achievement outcomes. The research focused around a sequence of the following three questions:
1. Can we observe and describe the teaching behaviour in some systematic way?
2. If so, is there a statistical correlation between the teaching behaviour and the student outcome that permits some meaningful interpretation of the relationship?

Can we demonstrate in a carefully designed classroom experiments, that the specific behaviour does indeed produce the desired outcome of increased student achievement?

Questions, Questioning Techniques and Effective Teaching

In the book Questions, Questioning Techniques and Effective Teaching, Williams W. Wilen (1987) summarizes the research findings of the studies on questions. The research findings answer the following questions:

1. Why are teachers’ questions and questioning practices so influential in the classroom?
2. What does the research say to the teachers about their use of questions?
3. How can questioning practices in the disciplines other education help inform teachers about their use of questions?
4. What are the cognitive and affective levels of teachers’ questions and how do they relate to student learning?
5. Why is the questioning technique of wait – time so influential in classroom interaction?
6. Which questioning techniques have been demonstrated to maximize student achievement?
7. What questioning strategies are effective in stimulating students’ thinking and involvement?
8. What role can students’ question have in the learning process and how can they be stimulated?
9. How can pre-service and in-service teachers improve their questions and questioning techniques?

Questions in Natural Communication

In her doctoral thesis on Questions and Responses in English Conversations, Anna Brita StenStröm (1984) presented her research findings on questions and responses in natural conversations very scientifically. In her thesis, question strategies and response strategies were described statistically by analyzing 25 conversations.
Among other things, her data confirmed that an utterance can function as a question regardless of intonation and syntactic structure. The determining factor for an utterance to be a question is the function of an utterance in a certain context.

Her model of analysis was based on Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) Model of Classroom Discourse. In this model and system of analysis, the question plays an important role in the Initiation Move. The structure of the initiation move is as follows:

(signal) (pre-head) head (post-head) (select)

In addition, there was Ruquaiya Hasan (1991)’s research work on Questions as Modes of Learning in Everyday Talk.

In Vietnam, there have been some research works on questions in natural communication. The research works on questions in the Vietnamese language include Nguyễn Thị Thìn (1994)’s, Lê Thị Lương (1996)’s, Lê Đồng (1996)’s doctoral dissertations.

Research on Questions in EFL/TESOL Classes

There have been many important researches on the use of question in education. In TESOL area, there have been 4 tendencies of research: 1-Forms and Functions of questions, 2-Questions used as teaching techniques, 3-Impact of questions on learning outcomes, and 4- The question in the three-part teaching exchange.


In the Department of English, Hue College of Foreign Languages, there were graduation theses written by Pham Thị Hồng Nhung (1997), Nguyễn Văn Thu (1998) and Pham Thị Diem Trang (2000).

3. Research methodology

Subjects of Study

This research is a preliminary research on English and Vietnamese Questions in natural and classroom communication. The collected data include 636 English questions and 744 Vietnamese questions from different sources with the total of 1380 questions.
Table 2. Distribution of the Questions in the data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English Questions</th>
<th>Vietnamese Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Communication</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Communication</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>1380</td>
<td>744</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

The data questions have been collected from different communication settings. The collected questions are direct and grammatically complete questions (A direct question is a question used in direct speech ending with a question mark (?), e.g. *Do you like football?*).

Data Analysis

The questions have been analyzed statistically, quantitatively and qualitatively and then compared and contrasted. The structures were semantico-grammatically analyzed. In terms of move structure analysis, the research made use of the Opening Move Structure from Sinclair and Couldhard (1975):

(Signal) (Pre-head) Head (Post-head) (Select)

4. Findings and discussion

Questions in English and Vietnamese can be classified into three types: 1-W/H questions, 2-Alternative questions and 3-Yes/No questions. The following part presents and compares the types and grammatical structures of English and Vietnamese questions.

Types and Grammatical Structures of Questions in English

W/H questions

There are two patterns for W/H questions

**Pattern 1:** W/H word (Subject)+V+O?

**Pattern 2:** W/H words (not Subject) + Operator + V+….?  

The W/H word occurs in initial position in English W/H questions. If the W/H word functions as the subject, the question follows pattern 1. If the W/H word is not the subject, we follow pattern 2. The W/H words can be *who, whom, what, which, whose, why, how, when…*

Alternative / Disjunctive Questions

**Pattern 3:** Operator +S+V+C+ or+C?
e.g.1. Would you like chocolate, vanilla or strawberry?
Yes / No question can be considered to be Alternative question. Compare:
e.g.2. Are you coming?
e.g.3. Are you coming or not?

**Pattern 4: W/H question? X, Y or Z?**
e.g.5. Which ice-cream would you like? Chocolate, vanilla or strawberry?

**Yes/No Questions**

**Inverted Yes / No Questions**

**Pattern 5: Operator + S + V+….?**
e.g.6. Have you seen him?
The operator can be an auxiliary (do, does, did, have, has, had, is, are, was, were) or a modal (can, may, must, should, would...).

**Tag Questions**
This is a type of question which is formed by a statement + a question tag (an auxiliary or a modal + a pronoun), a pseudo tag or a promter.

**Pattern 6: S+V+O, Auxiliary / modal + Pronoun?**
e.g.7. He likes his job, doesn’t he?

**Pattern 7: S+V+O, pseudo tag?**
e.g.8. You did it, right?

**Pattern 8: S+V+O, a promter?**
e.g.9. You read the book, ha?

In English Question tags, the intonation can be **Rise + Rise** or **Rise + Fall**. What speakers assume is expressed in the statement and how he expects the listener to response is expressed in the tag. Consider the following examples

**Table 3. Question tags and Intonation (Stenstrom, 1984)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rising Tone on Tag</th>
<th>Falling Tone on Tag</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POS+NEG I</td>
<td>He likes his job, doesn’t he?</td>
<td>He likes his job, doesn’t he?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEG+POS II</td>
<td>He doesn’t like his job, doesn’t he?</td>
<td>He doesn’t like his job, does he?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The correlation between question type and tone is as follows:

I  POS assumption + Neutral expectation
II  NEG assumption + Neutral expectation
III  POS assumption + POS expectation
IV  NEG assumption + NEG expectation

**Declarative Questions**

The structure of this type of question is the same as the structure of a declarative sentence.

**Pattern 9**: S + V + (O)?

e.g.10. *You realize what the risks are?*

**Questions in the Vietnamese Language**

**W / H Questions (Interrogative Questions)**

This type of question in the Vietnamese language contains an interrogative word equivalent to a W/H word in English. The structure of the question is the same as the structure of a statement. The position of an interrogative word in the sentence depends on the position for a sentence function of the interrogative word.

e.g.11. *Ai (Who) nói tiếng Anh?*  
(Who speaks English?)

e.g.12. *Anh hỏi ai (WHOM)?*  
*Who(m) do you want to see?*

However, there are interrogative words which can occur at the beginning or at the end of a sentence.

e.g.13. *Bao giờ (When) anh ấy đi?! (When will he leave?)*  
*Anh ấy đi khi nào (When)? (When did he left?)*

We should note that a W/H word in English can have more than one Vietnamese equivalent, e.g. the word *Why* can have the following equivalents: Vì sao, tài sao, vì lí do gì.

**Alternative Questions**

**Pattern 10**: S+ có / dã..V không / chưa?

e.g.14. *Em có nhớ anh không? (Do you miss me?)*

**Pattern 11**: S+V+C + hay / hoặc C?
e.g.15. Anh dùng bia hay dùng rượu? (Would you like beer or wine)

Yes / No Questions

Tag questions

Pattern 12: S+V+O..., phải không? (được không, có phải không, có được không, phải không a, đúng không…),

e.g.16. Bác mệt, phải không a? (You are tired, aren’t you?)

Questions with the Question Frames

The question frames can be formed by pairs of words with different shades of meaning: có…không, đã…chưa, còn…không, sắp….chưa…

Pattern 13 : Có X không? Đã X chưa?

e.g.17. Anh đã làm bài xong chưa? (Have you finished your homework yet?)

Questions with Modal Particles

The modal particles can be: à, ư,chăng, nhé, hà, …

Pattern 14: S+V+Modal Particle?

e.g.18. Anh lạnh à? (You are cold?)

à is a modal particle. It is used with two purposes: 1- to help form the question and 2- to show the speaker’s attitudes the the listener or to utterance content ( à indicate surprise or care).

Declarative Question (Question in the form of a declarative sentence)

A declarative question is a question in the form of a declarative sentence.

e.g.19. Chú nói vậy mà nghe được?

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of English and Vietnamese Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English Question</th>
<th>Vietnamese Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natural C.</td>
<td>Classroom C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-W/H</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>40 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Yes/No</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Alternative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarities and Differences between Vietnamese Questions and English Questions.
As presented above, there are three types of questions in both languages depending on the types of responses these questions elicit. However, there are many differences between questions in the Vietnamese language and questions in the English language.

The structure of the W/H questions in the Vietnamese language is the same as the structure of a declarative sentence in which the W/H words appear in the positions used for their functions in the sentence. In many cases the W/H words can occur either initially or finally in the sentence. An English W/H word can have more than one Vietnamese W/H equivalents. In English W/H questions, the W/H words appear in the initial position in the W in the W/H questions. When the W/H words are not the subject of the sentence, the operator appears before the subject. The Falling Intonation is used with English W/H questions.

English alternatives questions make use of the operator, the W/H words or and the Rise-Fall intonation to form the alternative question. The structure of the Vietnamese alternative question is the same as the structure of a declarative sentence. It makes use of the question frames có….không…(đã…chua, the words hay / hoặc là to form the Vietnamese alternative questions,

Yes / No Questions in English and Vietnamese are totally different. Yes / No questions in Vietnamese are more varied and are more like declaratives sentences with question tags (phải…không, có phải không…), modal particles (à, ạ, ế, ể, ể, ịa) (and the question frames (đã…chua., có …..không, còn…không…). Yes / No questions in the form of declarative sentences are like those in the English language. Yes / No questions in the English language make use of the operators and intonation in Inverted Yes / No questions and in tag questions. Pseudo tags and promters are used to form tag questions in the English language. The Rising Intonation is used with the English declarative questions. There exists this type of questions in both languages.

To form questions, the English language makes use of W/H words, operators and intonation. The Vietnamese language makes use of the lexical means to form questions. Most of the questions in the Vietnamese language have the pattern: Declarative sentence + (question word).

The Move Structures of Vietnamese and English Questions

In move structure analysis, the research made use of the Opening Move Structure from Sinclair and Couldhard (1975: 46).

(Signal) (Pre-head) Head (Post-head) (Select)

Following is the explanation of the terms used in the above structure:

Signal: Signals are realized by such words as well, ok, now, good, right, alright in English and by bây giờ, nào….in Vietnamese.
Pre-head: Pre-heads are realized by statements, questions or commands. Its functions are to provide information about or direct attention to or thought towards an area in order to make a correct response to the initiation more likely.

Head: Heads are realized by questions, statements or commands.

Post-head: Post-heads are realized by prompt or clue. Examples of prompt are go on, come on, hurry up, quickly, have a guess. Its function is to reinforce a directive or elicitation by suggesting that the teacher is no longer requesting a response but expecting or even demanding one. A clue is realized by statement, a question, or a command. It is subordinate to the head of the initiation and functions by providing additional information which helps the pupil to answer the elicitation or comply with the directive.

Select: Selects are realized by the name of the pupil, the pronoun you, anybody, yes... The function of nomination is to call on or give permission to a pupil to contribute to the discourse.

The frequency distribution of the move structures of Vietnamese questions

The following table summarizes the frequency distribution of the move structures of Vietnamese questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Natural C.</th>
<th>Classroom C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Head</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Prehead + Head</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Select + Head</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Signal + Head</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Head + Select</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Prehead+Head+Posthead</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Head + Posthead</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Prehead+Head+Select</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Other</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>620</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in table 5, more than 10 types of move structures were used in Vietnamese question data in two contexts. The table shows that Head and PreHead + Head patterns rank the first and the second in the data. However, the patterns Select +
Head, Signal + Head and Head + Select rank the third, fourth and fifth according to the frequency of occurrence in the natural communication data whereas the patterns Signal + Head, Head + Select and PreHead + Head + Select rank the third, the fourth and the fifth in the classroom data for Vietnamese questions. The frequency distribution figures in table 4 show the similarities and differences in Vietnamese questioning strategies in different contexts.

The frequency distribution of the move structures of English questions.

The following table summarizes the frequency distribution of the move structures of English questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Natural C.</th>
<th></th>
<th>Classroom C.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Head</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Prehead + Head</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Head + Select</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Head + Posthead</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Select + Head</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Prehead+Head+Posthead</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Other</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 shows the frequency distribution of the move structures of English questions in two contexts. The figures indicate that Head and PreHead+Head patterns still rank the first and the second in the data in both contexts. Whereas in natural communication, the patterns Head + Select, Head + PostHead and Select + Head rank the third, the fourth and the fifth in the data, the patterns Head + PostHead and Head + Select rank the third and the fourth in the English data for English classroom questions.

The data from both tables (5 and 6) have shown that Head and PreHead + Head have the highest frequency of occurrence. This shows the preferred tendencies in question move structures in communication and education. Other patterns are less common. The choice of a question move structure depends on such factors as culture, contexts and communicative and teaching strategies in education and communication.

5. Conclusion

This preliminary research studied the similarities and differences in the types
and grammatical and move structures between Vietnamese and English direct questions in natural communication and classroom communication. In general, there are three main types of questions in both languages: W/H questions, Yes/No questions and Alternative questions. However, there are differences in sub-categories and grammatical structures of the three main categories of questions in the two languages. The data show that there are similarities and differences in frequency distribution of the question sub-categories and move structures of English and Vietnamese questions in two different contexts.

The research offers the following recommendations:

- Learners of English and English learners of Vietnamese should know how to ask questions effectively in different communicative contexts. They should know the differences between Vietnamese and English questions and different strategies for question asking.

- Teachers of English should be well-trained in questioning techniques. They should be well-prepared for the lessons. The questions for each lesson should be carefully designed before teaching a lesson.

- There need to be training programmes and research in question techniques in education.

This research was a preliminary and small-scale research. Therefore, shortcomings are inevitable.

There should be further research on conversational questions, educational question, student questions and effective use of questions in education in Vietnam.

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