

# EDUCATIONAL MOTTOES OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN VIETNAM AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES: A STUDY OF SYNTACTIC FEATURES

Nguyen Thi Bich Phuong\*

University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi

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**Abstract:** It should be noted that at present educational sector has clearly shown its worth in accordance with the development of human society. The fact remains that numerous Vietnamese universities and colleges have penetrated into overseas educational sector, receiving thousands of foreign students annually and adopting various advertising campaigns using a wide range of English mottoes. It is inevitable that those universities and colleges may make some mistakes when creating fitting mottoes for their vision and mission. On the basis of the analyzed results, the study is expected to give an in-depth insight in one of the most integral aspects of linguistic characteristics of educational mottoes, syntax, which centers on investigating the way structural components are arranged. Furthermore, similarities and differences in the way of writing educational mottoes between Vietnam and English-speaking countries (ESCs) are also briefly summarized before proposing some useful hints for Vietnamese authorities in creating educational mottoes.

**Key words:** Syntactic features, educational mottoes, tertiary institutions, Vietnam, English-speaking countries

## 1. Introduction

According to statistics from the Ministry of Education and Training (Nick Clark, 2014), in 1987 Vietnam had just 87 higher education institutions, but this number had risen up to 235 universities (2017) and 219 colleges (2016). In the past few years, there has been growing awareness of the need to boost international student enrolments in some key universities and Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam (MOET). In his statement to the National Assembly, the former Vice-Minister of Education and Training, Bui Van Ga, has stated that “international student enrolment is one of the criteria to rank Vietnamese universities. Attracting foreign students is also a way for Vietnam to promote Vietnam’s education to the world” (as cited in Tran et al., 2014). In 2016, Vietnam hosted about 20,000 international students and most of them come from the Asia Pacific region, including China, Japan, Korea, Australia, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand (Tran et al., 2014) and has set an ambitious target of 15,000 international student enrolments in Vietnamese universities by 2020 (MOET, 2008).

When it comes to higher educational system in ESCs, without a doubt, The United Kingdom and The United States are seen as the most favorable destinations for any international student to dream of. The number of international students traveling to the United Kingdom for higher education was 431,905 by 2015 (British Council, 2013). The report from the British Council’s Education Intelligence Service also predicts that in the upcoming time, the United Kingdom will still retain its position as the world’s second most popular study destination after the US, attracting an extra 126,000 international students between 2011 and 2024.

It appears to be a must for each university and college to compete and persuade students to reconsider their offers and their attractors. One of these pivotal attractors which should be considered is the motto of the

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\* Email: phuongntb.unesco@gmail.com

university, the inspiring educational message of each institution. In reality, not all universities and colleges possess a motto, but numerous schools have done it. Educational motto can be seen as a key factor to make the very first strong impression on students or potential learners, which to a great extent, determines their final success of nurturing the talent for society. As is known to all, “the school motto is the soul of forming the school spirit and also keeps a core position in the campus culture” (Zhao, 2003). In plain word, similar to the function of slogans, vaunted and unique mottos enable brand identity and brand image of the schools to be persistently left in students’ minds, also leave them with unforgettable impression.

However, not every single motto can fulfill its duty successfully, which leads to a challenge in artistic tactics of utilizing just a handful of words to express an immense meaningfulness along with a profound insight in an abundance of linguistic aspects. Furthermore, while more and more cultural exchanges are conducted between Vietnam and foreign countries, a myriad of university mottos fail to convey the spirit and their own distinctive characteristics. Thus, a deep understanding of them can help to overcome language barriers, promoting the educational cooperation.

From the points mentioned above, the thorny problem that is often raised for any motto-writer is how to create a perfect motto. In order to compose a meaningful motto wrapping up the essence of the long-standing educational tradition, it is a must-have requirement to fully exploit all linguistic aspects from phonology, lexicology to semantics and pragmatics. Realizing the critical value of educational mottos to each university and college, this study is conducted to focally investigate the stylistic feature syntax of English mottos of some tertiary schools in Vietnam and ESCs, as well as their similarities and the differences to hopefully draw out some useful strategies for designing effective educational mottos.

With the view to achieving the aims and objectives of the study, these three following questions would be answered:

1. What are the syntactic features of the English educational mottos of universities and colleges in Vietnam and English-speaking countries?
2. What are the similarities and differences in terms of syntactic features of the English educational mottos of universities and colleges in Vietnam and English-speaking countries?

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Motto as a core value of tertiary education**

According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2018), motto is defined as “a short sentence or phrase that expresses the aims and beliefs of a person, a group, an institution, etc. and is used as a rule of behavior”. Being synthetic, a motto concentrates on key concepts and creates a spectrum of meanings. Some universities use mottos to increase the suggestion power for their potential students about their mission, in order to get more chances for building up their competitive advantage in a strategic analysis (Carpenter & Sanders, 2007; Dess et al., 2006).

*“In a global market for higher education, universities must compete for students re-thinking their offer, and their attractors. One of these attractors is the motto of the university, which suggests an inspiring message... A motto can be a useful attractor for the potential students, and thus many universities associate such mottos to their vision and mission statements.”*

(Management & Marketing, 2009)

### **2.2. Syntax**

### 2.2.1. Notion of syntax

Through the lens of Fromkin et al. (2000), syntax is described as a part of our linguistic knowledge that decides what constitutes a well-formed string of words and how to put words together to form phrases and sentences. Properly speaking, those principles staying in our subconscious mind may be acceptably employed in the language of one society but wrong in other ones. Similarly, Jim Miller (2002) points out that basically, “syntax is to do with how words are put together to build phrases, with how phrases are put together to build clauses or bigger phrases, and with how clauses are put together to build sentences” (p. 7). In a word, without syntax, human beings would be unable to construct complex messages conveying information about complex situations, proposals or ideas (Miller, 2002). Syntactic patterns display the close-knit relationships between words and larger units including phrases, clauses, and sentences. Nevertheless, owing to the scope of this study, the authors can only focus on two major aspects: phrases and sentences.

#### Phrases

Richards (1992) claims that a phrase is “a group of words which form a grammatical unit” and “does not contain a finite verb and does not have a subject-predicate structure.” (p. 153). Nonetheless, Miller (2002) shows his disagreement against the aforementioned perception by affirming that “phrase is a slot in which one or more words can occur, or indeed in which other phrases can occur” (p. 18). There are five main types of phrases in English encompassing noun phrase, verb phrase, adjective phrase, adverb phrase and prepositional phrase.

*A noun phrase* must consist of two major components, namely a noun head and other modifiers. The latter includes two other elements: a premodifier and a postmodifier (if any).

(1) Head: Get wisdom, get understanding (Eastern Kentucky University)

Premodifier(s) + Head: Create the difference (Staffordshire University)

Head + Postmodifier(s): Excellence in Diversity (Oxford Brookes University)

Premodifier(s) + Head + Postmodifier(s): The road to success (University of Economics and Business, VNU)

*A verb phrase* has a verb head and five formula possibilities (Delahunty & Garvey, 1994, p. 191).

(2) a. Head: Be Still and Know (University of Sussex)

b. Auxiliary(ies) + Head: Freely you have received, Freely give (Pepperdine University)

c. Head + Object(s)/ Complement: Winging your wishes (Sai Gon Technology University)

d. Head + Modifier(s): Educating for the Real World (University of Bridgeport)

e. Combination of the above: The truth shall make you free (California Institute of Technology)

*An adjective phrase* includes five formula possibilities (Delahunty & Garvey, 1994, p. 179).

(3) a. Head: A Creative Constellation (University of the Arts London)

b. Intensifier(s) + Head: The most valuable possession is knowledge (Cardiff Metropolitan University)

c. Head + Complement: Not unmindful of the future (Washington and Lee University)

d. Intensifier(s) + Head + Complement: You are extremely beautiful in this dress.

*An adverb phrase* combines a head and possibly an intensifier (Delahunty & Garvey, 1994, p. 180).

(4) a. Head: Educator for tomorrow (The University of Education)

b. Intensifier + Head: They may have life and have it more abundantly (York St John University)

*A prepositional phrase* is a combination of preposition and noun phrase:

(5) Synergy for excellence (Hue University)

### Sentences

A basic sentence is a complete thought or idea which composed of subject and predicate (Grammar Handbook, 2011). There exists a myriad of ways to categorize sentence depending on different criteria, and in this study, sentence is classified on the basis of discourse purposes.

*Statement* is sentence in which the subject is present and generally precedes verbs to “give information” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 803):

(6) We follow the light. (University of Exeter)

*Question* is employed in order to ask for information. This type of sentence is normally marked in one of two ways including yes-no interrogatives and wh-interrogatives. In the structure of interrogatives, the former possesses the operator positioned in front of the subject while the later has the interrogative wh-element placed initially (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 803). In view of structure, an interrogative sentence is typically marked by inversion of the subject and predicate which means the verb comes before the subject. It should be noted that this type of sentence ends with a question mark:

(7) Did you follow the class rules?

*Imperative* is utilized to not only give an order, advice or instruction but also indicate a request or a command to listeners. (John Eastwood, 2005, p. 9). Imperatives are sentences, which normally have no overt grammatical subject, and whose verb has the base form (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 803). An intriguing example to illustrate this type of sentence is the educational motto of International School, VNU:

(8) Study and Create with the World

*Exclamation* is sentence expressing a feeling, which has an initial phrase introduced by what and how, usually with subject-verb order (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 803). An example given:

(9) Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity! (University of the South)

### 3. Methods

Two hundred educational mottos chosen were collected from the official websites of 200 tertiary institutions in which 100 mottos are of Vietnamese universities and colleges, and the remainder are of ESCs. As for the mottos of universities and colleges in ESCs, 50 educational mottos were taken from British institutions and the rest were from American ones. The mottos of tertiary institutions in ESCs were taken from the official websites of the world-famous universities and colleges which are recorded in the world-famous ranking systems, The Times Higher Education - World Reputation Rankings 2017 and the University League Table 2017.

In the first place, a table with nine criteria namely noun phrase, verb phrase, adjective phrase, adverbial phrase, prepositional phrase and other sentence types such as statement, question, imperative, exclamation will be generated to place mottos into the most fitting one. In applying qualitative methods, each motto will be carefully analyzed by clarifying its sentence elements. After the careful investigation of syntactic features, the next step involves working out the proportion of mottos possessing each feature with the view to figuring out the prevailing trends in using syntactic features in educational mottos of the investigated universities and colleges. A general comparison between Vietnam and ESCs in using higher educational mottos will be clearly stated in the light of the data analyzed.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. The syntactic features of the English mottos of tertiary institutions in Vietnam

#### 4.1.1. Phrases

##### Verb phrases

**Table 1.** Verb phrase patterns used in mottos of Vietnamese tertiary institutions

Structure	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Head	6	15.38
Auxiliary(ies) + Head	1	2.56
Head + Object(s)/ Complement	28	71.79
Head + Modifier(s)	4	10.27
Combination of the above	0	0
Total	39	100.0

From the Table 1, we can infer that verb phrase tends to be employed much less, making up roughly 20 percent in a total of 100 collected mottos and varies in all four types. Despite the modest number of educational mottos using verb phrase with just 18.48 %, it is still worth taking this syntactic feature into account in some aspects. Head + Object(s)/ Complement appears to be the major type of verb phrase possessing hefty usage rate of over 70 percent, compared with merely 2.6% of Auxiliary(ies) + Head. It should be noted that these verb phrases exist predominantly in one crucial type, nonfinite verb phrase encompassing the infinitive and -ing participle.

(10) a. Invest in education – Change your life (Dong A University)

Head    Modifier

b. Creating opportunities together (University of Languages and International Studies)

Head    Object

##### Noun phrases

**Table 2.** Noun phrase patterns used in mottos of Vietnamese tertiary institutions

Structure	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Head	32	33.33
Premodifier + Head	40	41.67
Head + Postmodifier	13	13.54
Premodifier + Head + Postmodifier	11	11.46

Total	96	100
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Due to outstanding characteristics of educational mottos, namely short, easy to remember or unique, they mainly appear in the form of phrases with incomplete sentence. Based on the analysis of the mottos in Vietnamese tertiary institutes, the use of noun phrases is deemed the most remarkably employed (over 46%). The Premodifier + Head is used as the most common type in educational mottos of Vietnamese schools occupying more than 40%.

(11) a. Updated knowledge – Advanced methods (Hanoi College of Education)

Premodifier Head Premodifier Head

b. Open Education (Hanoi Open University)

Premodifier Head

c. Dynamism, aspiration, vision (Diplomatic Academic of Vietnam)

Head Head Head

The other kinds of noun phrases share the similar percentage of no more than 14%. This reflects a fact that Vietnamese authorities only show their little interest in adopting this use of noun phrase when writing mottos.

a. Synergy for excellence (Hue University)

Head Postmodifier

b. The road to success (VNU University of Economics and Business)

Premodifier Head Postmodifier

Noun phrase serves a variety of roles in sentence. It can be used as a complement in a prepositional phrase:

An object:

(13) a. Knowledge for justice (Ho Chi Minh University of Law)

A complement of a sentence:

b. Knowledge is power (Hanoi Community College)

Or merely noun phrases:

c. Creativity – Quality – Development - Effectiveness (Hanoi University of Industry)

### Adjective Phrases

**Table 3.** Adjective phrase patterns used in mottos of Vietnamese tertiary institutions

Structure	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Head	28	90.32
Intensifier(s) + Head	1	3.22
Head + Complement	2	6.46
Intensifier(s) + Head + Complement	0	0
Total	31	100.0

The adjective phrase is similar to verb phrase in the rate of occurrence with nearly 15%. Adjective phrases are principally found in the simple form of Head rather than Intensifier(s) + Head or Head + Complement (about 90%).

(14) a. Be international (Dong Do University)

Head

b. Active, Creative, Effective (University of Information & Communication Technology)

Head Head Head

c. Training highly qualified human resources (Thai Nguyen College of Economics & Finance)

Intensifier(s) Head

d. Creative and self-motivated spirit adaptable to the renovations (College of Food Industry)

Head Complement

## Adverb Phrases

**Table 4.** Adverb phrase patterns used in mottos of Vietnamese tertiary institutions

Structure	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Head	11	100.0
Intensifier(s) + Head	0.0	0.0
Total	11	100.0

Adverb phrase is hardly employed in creating an educational motto when the rate just falls in 11 times out of 100 sample mottos. Among all five categories of investigated phrases, this type is used least, comprising just about 5% and all of the adverb phrases used are in the Head form.

(15) Always innovative, forward-looking (Nha Trang University)

Head

## Prepositional Phrases

**Table 5.** Prepositional phrase patterns used in mottos of Vietnamese tertiary institutions

Structure	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Preposition + Noun, Pronoun, Gerund, or Clause	21	62.86
Preposition + Modifier(s) + Noun, Pronoun, Gerund, or Clause	13	37.14
Total	34	100.0

The prepositional phrases are applied with constitution of just over 16%. The major category of prepositional phrase employed is Preposition + Noun, Pronoun, Gerund, or Clause accounting for roughly 63 percent.

(16) a. Dream of Innovation (FPT University)

Preposition Noun

b. Across the national border to develop (Thai Nguyen University of Technology)

Preposition Modifier Noun

c. UET – Advanced Technology with Innovation (University of Engineering and Technology)

Preposition Noun

### 4.1.2. Sentences

#### Statement

With the aim of being memorable and recited, shortness and plainness appear to be a must of educational motto. To achieve this goal, authorities at tertiary institutions can write their mottos in many ways in which sentence is one of the effective choices. Nevertheless, the findings show that merely 23 out of 100 sample mottos employ this linguistic device in which statement exists in the tiny proportion of just over 30%:

(17) a. We bridge the world (School of Foreign Language – Thai Nguyen University)



b. Learning, the key to personal fulfillment and social well-being, is the only way to develop (Vo Truong Toan University)

### Imperative sentence

Imperative sentence tends to give advice, instructions or express a request to audience. This can be deemed a special type of sentence, which enables educational authorities to persuade the audience, both current students and potential learners, in an appealing way. This is the category of sentence used most commonly among educational mottos of Vietnamese higher education institutions with a hefty proportion of approximately 70%.

(18) a. Study and Create with the world (International School – VNU, Hanoi)

b. Come to HITECH to learn and plan for your future (Hanoi College of Technology)

Nevertheless, when it comes to two remaining sentential types, namely *Question* and *Exclamation*, their use does not occur in any educational mottos of Vietnamese schools.

## 4.2. The syntactic features of English educational mottos at universities and colleges in ESCs

### 4.2.1. Phrases

#### Verb phrases

**Table 6.** Verb phrase patterns used in mottos of English – speaking institutions

Structure	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Head	27	31.39
Auxiliary(ies) + Head	10	11.63
Head + Object(s)/ Complement	32	37.21
Head + Modifier(s)	8	9.3
Combination of the above	9	10.47
Total	86	100.0

Among the collected mottos, the majority belongs to the use of non-finite verbs (49 out of 100 universities and colleges) in all three forms mentioned above. However, infinitive form makes up the most (39 out of 49 mottos), followed by “-ing” (9 mottos) and “-ed” form (only 1 motto).

(19) a. Give invention light (University of Bradford)

V-infinitive

b. Making life better (Pennsylvania State University)

V-ing

c. Not more learned, but steeped in a higher learning (Haverford College)

V-ed V-ed

Furthermore, 37 out of 100 institutions use finite verbs for their mottos in only present form.

d. The wind of freedom blows (Stanford University)

Present tense

It should be noted that verb phrases possess five types of structures as listed in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, there are only two frequently used types are Head + Object(s)/Complement and Head with the percentage of around 37% and 31% respectively.

- (20) a. Laws without morals are useless (University of Pennsylvania)  
 Head    Complement
- b. Spark your imagination (Southampton Solent University)  
 Head    Object
- c. Learn and serve (Sheffield Hallam University)  
 Head    Head
- d. Enter to learn; go forth to serve (Brigham Young University)  
 Head    Modifier
- e. Through hard work, great heights are achieved (University of Birmingham)  
 Auxiliary    Head

### Noun phrases

**Table 7.** Noun phrase patterns used in mottos of English-speaking institutions

Structure	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Head	26	42.62
Premodifier(s) + Head	28	45.9
Head + Postmodifier(s)	3	4.92
Premodifier(s) + Head + Postmodifier(s)	4	6.56
Total	61	100.0

As can be seen from table 7, the structures “Premodifier(s) + Head” and “Head” dominate two other types with the percentage accounting for about 46% and 43% respectively in total of 61 noun phrases from 100 sampled school mottos. “Premodifier(s) + Head + Postmodifier(s)” structure ranks the third with about 7%, followed by “Head + Postmodifier(s)”.

- (21) a. Truth (Harvard University)  
 Head
- b. The truth shall make you free (California Institute of Technology)  
 Premodifier    Head
- c. Laws without morals are useless (University of Pennsylvania)  
 Head    Postmodifier
- d. To understand the causes of things (The London of School of Economics and Political Science)  
 Premodifier    Head    Postmodifier

### Adjective phrases

**Table 8.** Adjective phrase patterns used in mottos of English-speaking institutions

Structure	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Head	18	94.74
Intensifier(s) + Head	1	5.26
Head + Complement	0	0
Intensifier(s) + Head + Complement	0	0
Total	19	100.0

Adjective phrases are primarily found in the form of Head with the frequency of up to 95%.

(22) Useful and agreeable (Harper Adams University)

Head Head

### Adverb phrases

**Table 9.** Adverb phrase patterns used in educational mottos of English-speaking institutions

Structure	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Head	9	90
Intensifier(s) + Head	1	10
Total	10	100.0

According to the above table, adverb phrase is hardly used in creating an educational school motto when the use rate just falls in 10 times out of 100 sample mottos. What is more, “Head” appears to be a preponderance with the figure accounting for 90% while “Intensifier(s) + Head” only making up 10%.

(23) a. To Teach, To Heal, Together (Western University of Health Sciences)

Head

b. They may have life and have it more abundantly (York St John University)

Intensifier Head

### Prepositional phrases

**Table 10.** Prepositional phrase patterns used in mottos of English-speaking institutions

Structure	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Preposition + Noun, Pronoun, Gerund, or Clause	9	37.5
Preposition + Modifier(s) + Noun, Pronoun, Gerund, or Clause	15	62.5
Total	24	100.0

The prepositional phrases are applied at the rate of 24 times out of 100 educational school mottos and the principal category of prepositional phrase employed is “Preposition + Modifier(s) + Noun, Pronoun, Gerund, or Clause”, at roughly 62%.

(24) a. Knowledge is the adornment and safeguard of the Empire (Imperial College London)

Preposition Modifier Noun

b. The wind of freedom blows (Stanford University)

Preposition Noun

#### 4.2.2. Sentences

##### Statements

Statements are used to express the validity or truth of a basic assertion. Regarding educational mottos, a statement not only transmits the educational vision and mission of tertiary institutions but it also states the desire or the promise of the universities and colleges towards students. The findings show that nearly 54% of the sample mottos employ the statement structure, the most commonly used structure. Moreover, from 100 selected mottos, there is a predominance of SV, SVO sentence patterns together with a small number of SVC and SVOC patterns.

(25) a. The wind of freedom blows (Stanford University)

S            V

b. We follow the light (University of Exeter)

S    V    O

c. Laws without morals are useless (University of Pennsylvania)

S    V    C

d. The truth shall make you free (California Institute of Technology)

S    V    O    C

##### Questions

The purpose of using questions in school mottos is often to lay specific emphasis on students or in other words, to keep the institutes' image in students' mind. The number of questions used in educational mottos seems to be dominated by other types with the proportion accounting for nearly 2%.

(26) For so much, what shall we give back? (Queen's University Belfast)

##### Imperative sentences

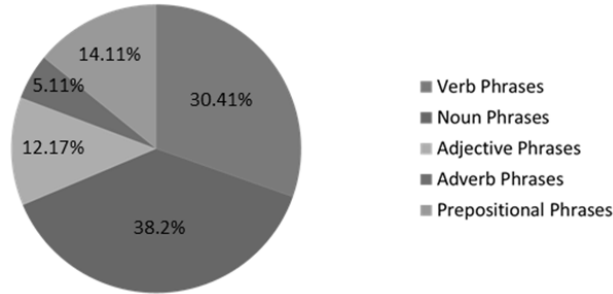
With the view to conveying a command, an advice or a request, motto writers tend to make use of imperative sentences. The figure for this kind of sentence makes up for about 45%.

(27) Know thyself (Hamilton College)

On the other hand, concerning the remaining sentential type which is *exclamation*, its use does not occur in any educational school mottos of English-speaking universities and colleges.

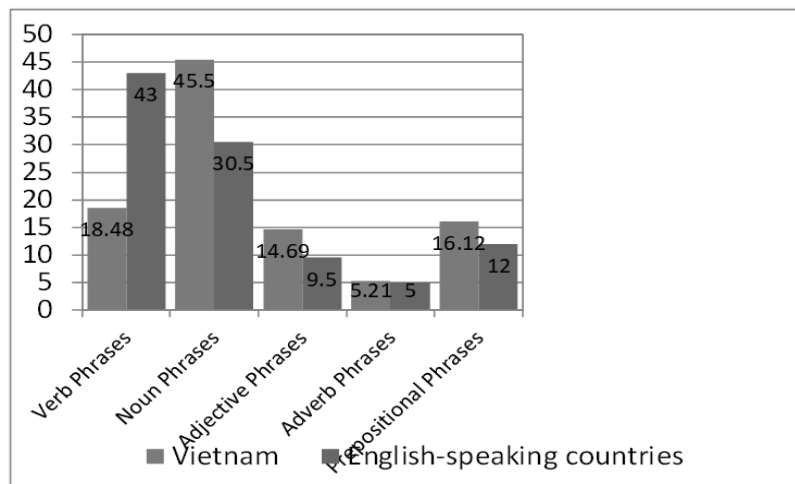
## 5. Discussion and implications

### 5.1. Phrases



**Figure 1.** The frequency of phrases in educational mottos of in both Vietnam and ESCs

The Figure 1 provides an overview of occurrence frequency of phrases in educational institution mottos in general. The total proportion of employed phrase category varies from type to type with the most ubiquitous type belonging to noun phrases (about 40%). The percentage of verb phrases also accounts a remarkable 30%, much more significant than that of adverb phrases (about 5%). The percentages of adjective phrases and prepositional phrases are roughly the same (12% and 14% respectively). Broadly speaking, noun phrase and verb phrase are evidently favored over other categories of phrases. Nevertheless, there exist some similarities and differences in the way of employing phrases in educational school mottos of tertiary institutes in Vietnam and English-speaking countries, which will be clearly stated below.



**Figure 2.** The frequency of phrases in educational mottos of in Vietnam and ESCs

The majority of phrases employed in mottos of Vietnamese universities and colleges are noun phrases which constitute nearly 46% compared with over 30% in mottos of ESCs. Unlike verb phrases, noun phrases are much more preferred by Vietnamese authorities. One of probable reasons for this noticeable difference can spring from the fact that most of mottos are usually used on the official websites of the universities and colleges and banners hung up in campuses. Due to limit of space, it virtually appears to have no room for longer and more complicated noun phrases or elaborated sentences. According to Bruthiaux (1996, p. 80-81), the fact that heavy modification of noun phrase springs from spatial and financial constraints which help to minimize the number of function words lead to the frequent use of heavy modification. In this study, it is particularly the form: Premodifier + Head. For the sake of attracting students' attention, mottos are found with the main use of adjectives and nouns to modify head nouns.

As shown in the chart above, universities and colleges of ESCs deem verb phrase a predominant type in writing educational institution mottos, accounting for 43%. Meanwhile, this usage is less observed in mottos of Vietnamese institutions with merely over 18%. In advertising, verbal groups are mostly of maximum simplicity, consisting of only one word (Leech, 1996). In addition, the marked frequency of using progressive forms in mottos of ESCs can probably result from the intention of advertisers to mimic spoken language (Biber et al., 2002, p. 158). This assists the authorities to add a conversational quality to advertisement which can make the audience easily feel warm and familiar. Another noticeable observation is the propensity of authorities to omit the subject and auxiliary in the progressive phrase to become non-finite, for instance “Shaping futures” (Nottingham Trent University). The reason is that students are supposed to form a virtual link between the implied subject of universities and colleges and mottos, which enables schools to remove it without misinterpretation. Also be concluded from the analysis of noun phrases, verb phrases are quite commonly used due to the limit on spatial and financial constraints.

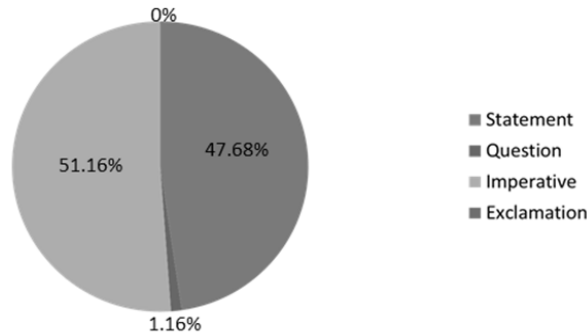
Other categories of phrases seem to be unremarkable and much less commonly used. Regarding adjective phrase, while its usage makes up only 9.5% in the mottos of ESCs, Vietnamese universities and colleges employ this linguistic feature more popularly, but with merely 15%. One reason for this fact may arise from the preference of using noun phrase with adjective modification. Hence, in sample mottos, adjectives just play a supplement role in noun phrase.

Concerning prepositional phrases, they account for over 16% and 12% in mottos of Vietnam and ESCs respectively. Prepositional phrases on educational institution mottos are aimed to inform the readers of the vision or the missions, so readers can be attracted if they are told what they will get from tertiary education. For example, the motto “The Road to Success” (University of Economics and Business) tells the readers that the school will assist students to obtain a successful career in the future. However, not many authorities think that prepositional phrases are strong enough to fascinate the target audience.

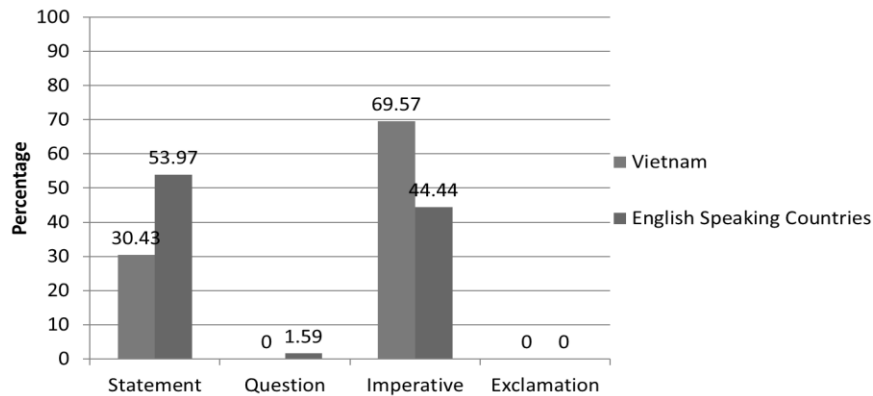
The least used phrases are adverb ones with roughly 5% in both Vietnam and ESCs. In general, adverbs are functioned as the modifiers in a sentence or to give further particulars about certain conditions. For instance, the word “freely” in “Freely you have received, Freely give” (Pepperdine University) will explain how you receive and give. However, it was found that adverb phrases do not always become the modifiers to the other lexical categories. In mottos, adverb phrases can stand alone as the main phrase to give further explanation about the universities and colleges.

In light of the abovementioned analysis, one can conclude that universities and colleges in Vietnam are strongly in favor of using noun phrases in creating motto, while those in ESCs pay much more attention to verb phrases. Nonetheless, they all somewhat share the same preference for adopting adjective phrases, adverb phrases and prepositional phrases when writing mottos. The use of nouns helps to save space and time in advertisements or other related activities. This is absolutely beneficial when the audience can be well informed and easily receive the imparted messages. Meanwhile, verb phrase assists school authorities to add a conversational quality to the educational motto which can create a friendly, warm atmosphere and a close relationship between the institutions and the audience. Plus, verb phrases are also used quite commonly due to spatial and financial constraints.

## **5.2. Sentences**



**Figure 3.** The frequency of sentences in mottos of in both Vietnam and ESCs



**Figure 4.** The frequency of sentences in mottos of in Vietnam and ESCs

As can be seen from Figure 3, the most frequently used type of sentence is imperative sentence with the proportion of over 50%. It is not surprising that the authorities would employ imperative sentences to create a motto since this is the most direct way to achieve the ideal effects. In particular, in Vietnamese institutions, imperative sentence appears to be predominance with around 70%. Leech (1966) argues that the reason for the ubiquitous utility of imperative sentence is deemed the audience's familiarity with the road signs, official forms and instructions. However, the tendency of applying this category in Vietnam is contrary to that in ESCs. It is evident that the figure for imperative sentence in ESCs nearly doubles that of Vietnamese institutions (28 versus 16 mottos). The reason for this may be the diverse use of other categories in Vietnam.

In terms of statement, which ranks second in the frequency of using in both Vietnamese and English-speaking universities and colleges with about 48%, the trend is different. To be more specific, the percentage in using statements of tertiary institutions in ESCS makes up roughly 54%, which is almost twice as much as that in Vietnam. Regarding statement, simple sentences are the most frequently used type because with well-composed simple sentences, the information imparted to readers will be succinct and coherent. Additionally, simple sentences are easy to remember, while one main aim of a motto is to be memorable and recited. Hence, statements, especially simple sentences are more reader-friendly and commonly applied in advertisements in general and in educational school mottos in particular.

Another category is question, making up only over 1% in both Vietnam and ESCs. Leech (1966) stated one of the functions of interrogative sentence in advertisements is to draw the audience's attention by raising questions, especially rhetorical questions. This approach may have merits as well as drawbacks; therefore, it might be considered one minor reason why questions are less used in educational school mottos.

Last but not least, it can be seen that exclamation is not used in any educational school mottos of universities and colleges in both Vietnam and ESCs. There is no doubt that exclamation is a sentence expressing a strong feeling; as a result, it is not suitable for serving educational institution mottos which transmit the educational vision and mission of the universities and colleges.

In a nutshell, on the one hand, both Vietnamese and English-speaking universities and colleges tend to make little use of question and exclamation. On the other hand, imperative sentence appears to be a major element employed in the mottos of tertiary institutions in Vietnam, whereas statement contributes the highest percentage in the frequency of using in ESCs. The notion to explain this result is that imperative sentence is applied to express the determination and commitment to achieve the set goals of the whole university. This type of short and concise sentence creates persuasion, serving for the purpose of boosting the learning spirit of students to try harder for their learning cause. In terms of the sentential type of statement, the main aim is to illustrate the visions and missions of schools, giving much more motivations for their students to pursue their study path. Furthermore, those facts can be also seen as reasons for them to enrol into universities and colleges.

This study aims at providing some critical insights in syntactic features of mottos, from which students can expand their understanding in the field of advertising mottos. Particularly for ones who work with advertising agency, this theory gives ways to understand structure of a motto and offers some techniques for them to write a successful motto in English to attract students' attention. As for teachers, they can take advantage of this study to understand not only the background information of advertising and mottos, but they also can gain a profound insight in syntactic aspects including phrases and sentences. Hence, they can apply knowledge as well as sample mottos as examples from this study to explain to students during the process of teaching. When it comes to Vietnamese tertiary institutes, this work creates an opportunity for these universities and colleges to have a deeper understanding in the structure of each kind of mottos. In particular, structure and the use of phrases and sentences are two major elements that can be attained through this study. In that way, tertiary institutions will easily make decisions on which kind of phrases or sentences is suitable and brings success to their reputation.

## **6. Conclusion**

It is worth noting that Vietnamese universities and colleges have tendency to use noun phrases in mottos whereas those in ESCs show their preference for adopting verb phrases. The use of nouns helps to save space and time in advertisements. This is absolutely beneficial when the audiences can be well informed and easily receive the delivered messages. Meanwhile, verb phrases assist school authorities to add a conversational quality to the educational mottos, which can create a friendly warm atmosphere and a close relationship between the tertiary institutions and the audience. What is more, verb phrases are also applied quite commonly due to the limit on spatial and financial constraints. Nonetheless, all universities and colleges in Vietnam and ESCs, to a certain extent, share the same preference for adopting adjective phrases, adverb phrases and prepositional phrases when creating mottos.

Regarding sentences, statements tend to hold up the majority in the frequency of occurrence in ESCs thanks to its being more reader-friendly and going straight to the audience' mind, while those in Vietnam give their preference to imperative sentences due to the audience's familiarity with the road signs, official forms and instructions. However, both Vietnamese and English-speaking universities and colleges tend to make little use of questions and exclamations.



Due to time constraint, this research has only investigated 200 educational institution mottos, which makes the results become less generalized. Hence, a larger population of samples is recommended to generate more precise results. Also, the scope of study on syntactic features can be implemented in other fields, not merely limited in tertiary education mottos.

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# KHẨU HIỆU GIÁO DỤC ĐẠI HỌC TẠI VIỆT NAM VÀ CÁC NƯỚC NÓI TIẾNG ANH: NGHIÊN CỨU DƯỚI GÓC NHÌN TỪ ĐẶC TRƯNG CÚ PHÁP

**Tóm tắt:** Hiện nay nền giáo dục đang ngày càng thể hiện rõ vị thế của mình trong quá trình phát triển của xã hội. Thực tế cho rằng rất nhiều trường đại học, cao đẳng của Việt Nam đang nỗ lực vươn mình ra tầm quốc tế, thu hút hàng nghìn sinh viên nước ngoài tới theo học mỗi năm, đồng thời áp dụng nhiều chiến dịch quảng bá hình ảnh, trong đó có sử dụng các khẩu hiệu giáo dục. Tuy nhiên, các trường đều thật khó tránh khỏi những sai sót trong quá trình định hình khẩu hiệu giáo dục phù hợp với tầm nhìn và sứ mệnh của mình. Dựa trên kết quả phân tích, bài nghiên cứu đưa ra một cái nhìn có chiều sâu về một trong những khía cạnh ngôn ngữ quan trọng nhất trong khẩu hiệu giáo dục, đó chính là cú pháp, tập trung nghiên cứu sự sắp xếp của các thành tố ngôn ngữ. Hơn nữa, đặc điểm giống và khác nhau về cách viết khẩu hiệu giáo dục của các trường đại học, cao đẳng ở Việt Nam và các nước nói tiếng Anh cũng được chỉ ra cùng với những gợi ý cho các trường khi viết khẩu hiệu giáo dục.

**Từ khóa:** Đặc điểm cú pháp, khẩu hiệu giáo dục, đại học và cao đẳng, Việt Nam, các nước nói tiếng Anh