

A STUDY ON THE USE OF ENGLISH IN STUDENTS' SOCIAL FORUMS ON FACEBOOK AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Young people including students have developed their language use in social networking sites like Facebook in their own ways, among which the insert of English in their posts has become part of their communication and a quite new interesting fact. However, it seems that there have been not so many research working on this phenomenon. This study aims at investigating how students use English in their social forums on Facebook at Thai Nguyen University of Education as well as their viewpoints on the use of English in those networks. Moreover, it analyzes the quality of students' English use and provides some further discussions which may give insights on the situation. Hence, the paper hopefully provokes a more systematic study on the use of English in Vietnamese social forums as a linguistic and social phenomenon.

Key words: *social forums on Facebook, students' use of English, Thai Nguyen University of Education*

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NGHIÊN CỨU VIỆC SỬ DỤNG TIẾNG ANH CỦA SINH VIÊN TRONG CÁC DIỄN ĐÀN XÃ HỘI TRÊN FACEBOOK CỦA TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC SƯ PHẠM – ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

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TÓM TẮT

Trong những năm gần đây, giới trẻ bao gồm cả sinh viên đã phát triển cách dùng ngôn ngữ trên các mạng xã hội như Facebook theo cách riêng của mình, trong đó, việc sử dụng tiếng Anh trong các đăng tải trên mạng xã hội đã trở thành một phần giao tiếp của họ và cũng là một thực tế mới khá thú vị. Tuy nhiên, chưa có nhiều nghiên cứu đề cập đến hiện tượng này. Bài báo này nghiên cứu việc sử dụng tiếng Anh của sinh viên trong các diễn đàn xã hội trên Facebook của trường Đại học Sư phạm – Đại học Thái Nguyên; đồng thời tìm hiểu quan điểm của sinh viên về việc tiếng Anh được sử dụng trên các mạng xã hội. Bên cạnh đó, nghiên cứu này cũng phân tích chất lượng sử dụng tiếng Anh của sinh viên và đưa ra những thảo luận có thể đem lại những cái nhìn sâu sắc hơn về hiện tượng này. Bài báo hi vọng sẽ khơi gợi cho những nghiên cứu có hệ thống hơn về việc sử dụng tiếng Anh trên các diễn đàn xã hội của Việt Nam như một hiện tượng ngôn ngữ và xã hội.

Từ khóa: *diễn đàn xã hội trên Facebook, việc sử dụng tiếng Anh của sinh viên, trường Đại học Sư phạm – Đại học Thái Nguyên*

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1. Introduction

English with its global spread has been integrating in every aspect of life in Vietnam, and this integration seems stronger than ever with the quick growth of technology and the Internet. One of the obvious consequences is that English has influenced the mother language use and somehow has become a crucial part in the communication of the Vietnamese, especially the youngsters [1].

Since its advent in 2004, Facebook has widely been recognized a leading social networking site used by university students [2], [3], [4] thanks to the huge benefits that it provides the users. Specifically, the function of public sharing and fast connection with other people despite their location allows its members to communicate more openly and socially than traditional communication tools. This service has miraculously transformed the way humans interact, including the way we use the language for communication [5]. There has appeared an interesting fact that young people, on social forums on Facebook, communicate their own language: their mother language is simplified and foreign languages, especially English is inserted in their communication. Students on social forums on Facebook at Thai Nguyen University of Education (TNUE) also join in this trend. It is seen from students' posts that English is widely and frequently used in their statuses and comments. This new interesting phenomenon has become part of the young's language and thus should require research to have a more insight of it.

2. Method

The research was primarily designed as a descriptive study and therefore adopts a quantitative approach with the use of the questionnaires and corpus as research instruments. Questionnaires are distributed to 426 students via Google forms to gather data

regarding student's experience in using English, students' opinions and interest in using English in social forums on Facebook. In addition, a collection of 37,592 students' statuses and comments on social forums on Facebook at TNUE is used for corpus analysis to discover how the participants use English in those social forums.

3. Findings

Results from the questionnaires have very much contributed to the answers of the questions: (i) How English is used in students' social forums on Facebook and (ii) What is the quality of the English use in those forums.

It can be seen from Table 1 that although there were a bigger number of students not using English in social forums on Facebook, about one third of the users have employed English at some level. In their posts, students used English words the most: 33.34% of the posts contained at least 1 English word; 0.43% of the posts contained English sentences, and only 0.03% of them employed English paragraphs.

The statuses and comments collected can be divided into three groups according to the purposes. Chart 1 shows that the first category was statuses for business: there were 585 statuses (45.5%) about job employment, selling utensils and advertisement. English words and quotes are often used in those posts. The second group was categorized based on their target to the audience in the community occupied 22 1.8%. In these statuses, students propagandized for blood donation and TNUE flashmob dancing competition. The last group as the biggest was statuses for personal purposes: there were 678 statuses (52.7%) in total. This result proved students used English a lot in their statuses, especially in the statuses for personal purposes.

Table 1. *How students use English in social forums on Facebook*

Not use English	Use English (33.8%)		
	Word level	Sentence level	Paragraph level
66.20%	33,34%	0.43%	0.03%

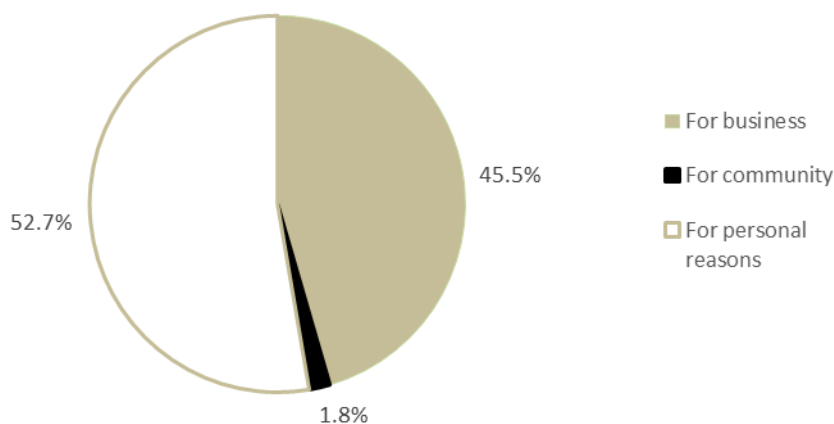


Chart 1. *Statuses categories*

Table 2. *Frequency and percentage distribution of students' opinions about reasons for using and not using English in social forums on Facebook*

Reasons		Frequency	Percentage
Use English	To be modern	83	19.5
	To show level of English	193	45.3
	To practice English in daily life	281	66
	To entertain	143	33.6
	Total	426	100
Not use English	Using English is annoying	123	28.9
	People make many mistake	53	12.5
	It is like people are imitating the others	144	33.8
	Not all the members of the forum know English	200	46.9
	There is no reason for not using English in social forums on Facebook	178	41.8
	Total	426	100

As displayed from Table 2, the advocates had their own reasons for using English in social forums on Facebook. Specifically, 66% of the respondents strongly believed that it is a good way to practice English in daily life. The students also acknowledged English use as a means of showing their foreign language proficiency (193 students, equivalent to 45.3% thought using English illustrates their high level of English). Moreover, 33.6% of the participants declared using English in social forums was entertaining and gave them a lot of fun. This result proved that students enjoy using English in social forums on Facebook for certain reasons.

Nevertheless, the participants did reveal some reasons for not using English in social forums

on Facebook. The fact that not all members can understand English has prevented 46.9% of the students from the use of English on social forums. Meanwhile, 33.8% of the correspondents found it would be like they were imitating the others if they had used English in their statuses/comments. 28.9% of the students regarded English use as some kind of annoyance and 12.5% thought that people should not insert English in their Facebook posts due to the constant mistakes that they make.

Furthermore, an analysis of the collected corpora allows a more insight of how students use English in TNUE social forums on Facebook.

Table 3. Ten most frequently used words

No.	Words/phrases used	Frequency (%)	Forum	Error category
1	innox/ib/inb (inbox)	38.7	TUE confession, TUE – Đại học Sư phạm Thái Nguyên	vocabulary
2	add/ad (admin)	22	TUE confession	vocabulary
3	cmt/comment (comment)	20.8	TUE confession, Anh k51 ĐHSPTN, TUE – Đại học Sư phạm Thái Nguyên, Sinh viên Ngoại ngữ	vocabulary
4	fulltime (full-time)	8.1	TUE – Đại học Sư phạm Thái Nguyên	vocabulary
5	partime (part-time)	7.5	TUE – Đại học Sư phạm Thái Nguyên	vocabulary
6	phan (fan)	6.6	TUE confession	vocabulary
7	okii/oke (okay)	4.8	TUE confession, Anh k51 ĐHSPTN, TUE – Đại học Sư phạm Thái Nguyên, Sinh viên Ngoại ngữ	cultural references
8	cfs (confession)	4.6	TUE confession	vocabulary
9	bream (?)	2.8	TUE – Đại học Sư phạm Thái Nguyên	vocabulary
10	sharre (share)	2.1	TUE confession, Anh k51 ĐHSPTN, TUE – Đại học Sư phạm Thái Nguyên, Sinh viên Ngoại ngữ	vocabulary

It can be seen in table 3 that all of the most frequent words in wrong use are short and common words. *ib/inb/inbox* is in the first rank with 38.7%. Nearly one quarter (22%) of the English words used in students' statuses and comments were *ad/add* which stand for *admin* or *administrator*. *Cmt/comment* referring to *comment* was wrongly used in 20.8% of the posts. Other words such as *full-time*, *part-time*, *ok*, *share*, etc. were employed less than 10% of the comments and statuses. Although these words also have Vietnamese equivalents, they still have been used widely instead of the words that have the same meaning in their mother tongue; consequently, their Vietnamese equivalents are somehow disregarded. This is partly due to the convenience in the condensed and user-friendly English codes, such as "*ad*". However, these words also partly indicate the

development and the trends of the youth's language nowadays.

The errors committed in vocabulary competence may occur due to students' carelessness while typing their comments or statuses (*ad-add*, *inbox-innox*, *comment-comment*, *fulltime-fulltime*); in addition, some words including *cmt*, *cfs*, *ib/inb*, etc. is not considered English words in correct use, as these words have not appeared in any English dictionary. In other words, it can be said that students created the abbreviations themselves. They used the word *ok* in many different forms, and some of them committed cultural references competence (*oki*, *oke*, *okii*).

In this study, the quality of students' English use is assessed in the light of Bachman's model [6]. Particularly, errors of English use in social forums are shown in the table below.

Table 4. *Quality of English use in TNUE social forums on Facebook*

Organizational competence – Grammatical competence			Pragmatic competence – Sociolinguistic competence
Vocabulary	Morphology	Syntax	Cultural references
Messenger, copy, wrong person (who is the wrong person in this story), beautiful, servey	before eat-before eating, 2 slot – 2 slots, some way – some ways, one – first	I do not know the dance, for me to sing, I am sorry before, they just asking, maybe the same caption with me, why friend no tag badminton, I am afraid pig or fat	dell, diss, sét– set, soppò rai – surprise, phan – fan, love – lớp, cook – Cúc, sòtuđàn ở gẽn- student again, where- que

It can be withdrawn from table 4 that the students’ mistakes in their English uses can be categorized in two broad groups: Grammatical competence and Pragmatic competence. In terms of grammatical competence, the errors that students have made belonged to 3 subgroups: vocabulary, morphology, and syntax. Most of the vocabulary errors were about spelling, for example *copy* (*copy*), *servey* (*survey*), etc. The morphology errors are often of plural/singular, for example, *2 slot* (*2 slots*). Syntax errors occurred because of the students’ lack of grammar, for example, *for me to sing* (*let me sing*), *they just asking* (*they were just asking*). In terms of Pragmatic competence, the errors were only related to cultural references, for example *love* (*lớp*), *cook* (*Cúc*), *dell*, *diss*, etc. Despite the wrong use, these words reflect quite an innovative way of using English among Vietnamese young people, which has become a noticeable trend in social forums, media as well as daily life.

Table 5. *Code-switching between English and Vietnamese*

No	Examples	Forums	Basis of inserting English
1	Em đã đi đượ muậ phần bar cuộc đời (<i>Em đã đi đượ một phần ba cuộc đời</i>)	TUE confession	Pronouncing references
2	mình thin đượ bóc họ cho high bạn (<i>mình xin đượ bóc họ cho hai bạn</i>)	TUE confession	Pronouncing references
3	đỉnh kout (<i>đỉnh cao</i>)	TUE confession	Pronouncing references
4	hưởng lương theo bream lương của công ty (<i>hưởng lương theo barem lương của công ty</i>)	TUE – Đại học Sư Phạm Thái Nguyên	Code - switching
5	eat cái này no fat và no pig too (<i>Ăn cái này không béo và cũng không ...</i>)	TUE confession	Code - switching
6	tán Cook thì sao (<i>tán Cúc thì sao</i>)	TUE confession	Pronouncing references
7	e thì cũng kute phô mai where (<i>em thì cũng rất đễ thương</i>)	TUE confession	Pronouncing references
8	Vào cf đi chứ (<i>vào xác nhận đi chứ</i>)	Anh K51 ĐHSPTN	Code - switching
9	ad cho xin cái list fan cứng đề of (<i>quản lý cho xin cái danh sách người hâm mộ nhiệt tình nhất để tổ chức buổi gặp mặt</i>)	TUE confession	Code - switching
10	năm nay nhân vật main có ai (<i>năm nay nhân vật chính có ai</i>)	TUE confession	Code - switching

As obviously shown in table 5, students inserted English in their posts frequently, and the words they used were not completely standardized English nor standardized Vietnamese. The ways of inserting English in those posts can be categorized in two groups. The first group is sentences containing English words that have the similar pronunciation with Vietnamese words. Some examples of this group are *Minh thin đượt bóc họ cho high bạn, E thì cũngkute phô mai where, etc.* (*thin – xin, high – hai, where – que*). The English words in these sentences are not used as English notional words but Vietnamese words so as to make the conversation become more interesting. However, they are still English originated; besides, clearly, these words require the knowledge of both languages from readers to be understood.

The second category is sentences containing English notional words. Sentences for example *Eat cái này no pig và no fat too, Ad cho xin cái list fan cứng để of, etc.* demonstrate code-switching phenomenon. The English words in these situations were just used to replace Vietnamese words in meaning in order to make the sentences become shorter and funnier. Despite having different basis of inserting English, the sentences in these two groups are all ambiguous in meaning, and hence, misunderstanding may occur.

4. Discussion

From the data recorded through corpora, it can be summarized that the English words that students used in social forums on Facebook can be categorized in two ways. The first group of English words used in social forums is to replace equivalent Vietnamese words. Students mostly employed English words to replace longer Vietnamese words such as *ad/admin for người quản lý, csf/confession for lời bộc bạch, fulltime for*

toàn thời gian, etc. These English words are shorter; therefore they are more convenient to use. Commenting on posts is similar with chatting in daily life, so people tend to use verbal expressions; as a result, people try to type as fast as they are thinking, so short words are necessary and thus are preferred. This phenomenon is called code-switching which to some extent is believed to help people in learning new words as well as practicing English use in daily life. It is a natural process where the two languages integrate and have mutual impacts. This somehow demonstrates that young people have acquired some certain English and have been accustomed to using the English in their communication, which can be a good signal for the teaching and learning of English in Vietnam after huge efforts of the government, schools, parents, teachers and students. However, in some cases, students use too many English words to replace Vietnamese words, which can make the conversation become hard for others to understand. Moreover, abusing code-switching too much might be the main reason leading to the use unstandardized Vietnamese language in daily communication.

The second way of using English words in social forums is to replace Vietnamese words that share similarities in pronunciation. Students prefer words such as *diss, dell* to replace the Vietnamese words which have similar pronunciation but impolite in meaning. This is a new way of euphemism in Vietnam. There are also Vietnamese words being replaced just for entertaining. Students used words such as *love trường (lớp trưởng), kim cook (Kim Cúc), high bạn (2 bạn)*, etc. to make the conversation become more interesting and funny. This way of euphemism is quite creative, and has just appeared among youngsters. Objectively speaking, this kind of language of the youngsters is like fashion trend but partly

shows the characteristics, psychological renewal of the young. Somehow it reflects the youngsters' language which has become quite common in their communication. In fact, this way of replacing words is a personal way of expression, but with the support of social forums on Facebook, it has been quickly spread, and become a new trend among young people. But like code-switching, this phenomenon can also make people misunderstand others' ideas, and partly contribute to the wider use of unstandardized Vietnamese. This practice of euphemism in the mother language is a noticeable phenomenon that may need study and recommendations from educators for better preservation of the native language.

Moreover, upon analyzing the corpora, it is realized the variety of English syntax in use is rather limited. The students only apply only two types of sentence structures: truncated simple sentences, for example *so sad, trust me*, etc. and simple sentences, for example *you're welcome, I want to kill him*. These kinds of sentences are easy to use and understand, and do not required complex grammar. This somehow can indicate TNUE students' low competence in English as well as their preference for straightforward and simple ideas. Quotes are also brought into students' posts, for example *In the end, we only regret the chances we didn't take* appears in posts for hiring employees. However, in fact this kind of posts can be merely copied from others' then pasted into the social forums as a new post. Obviously, students cannot use non-literal English, which requires a higher proficiency to be practiced effectively.

5. Conclusion

In summary, there have been a considerable number of students using of English in social

forums on Facebook at Thai Nguyen University of Education. However, their use of English is largely restricted to word level and demonstrates quite constant error systems. While the quality of students' English use in social forums is still limited and does not help much with their learning of English, the frequent switches between English and Vietnamese languages in communication may present some threats to the standard and purity of the mother language. This may require further study with recommendations from experts for better solutions to the study of English and the preservation of Vietnamese as the native language.

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