

Closing conversation :

# LEAVE-TAKING

IN AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

LÊ QUỐC HẠNH\*

**Lời giới thiệu:** Báo cáo khoa học “**Kết thúc đàm thoại trực diện trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt**” đã được trình bày tại Hội nghị khoa học quốc tế lần thứ 18 do Hội Ngôn ngữ học ứng dụng Australia tổ chức ở Adelaide tháng 9 năm 1993. Dựa vào nguồn cứ liệu phong phú do người Australia bản ngữ và người Việt đang học tập tại Australia cung cấp, tác giả phân tích, đối chiếu các dạng phát ngôn kết thúc đàm thoại trực diện trong tiếng Anh (của Australia) và tiếng Việt. Kết quả đối chiếu cho thấy cả hai ngôn ngữ đều có những dạng thức kết thúc đàm thoại/chào từ biệt riêng của mình và việc lựa chọn các phát ngôn đó bị các yếu tố như lứa tuổi, giới, vai trò hoặc địa vị xã hội của các bên đàm thoại chi phối. Kết quả cũng cho thấy, loại hình hoạt động lời nói này trong tiếng Việt dường như mang sắc thái trang trọng hơn trong tiếng Anh. Tác giả cũng đối chiếu cách chào từ biệt bằng tiếng Anh của người Việt và người Australia và thấy cách kết thúc đàm thoại/từ biệt bằng tiếng Anh của người Việt (trong môi trường tiếng Anh) còn bị ảnh hưởng nặng nề của tiếng mẹ đẻ, cách nói nhiều khi dài dòng, đơn điệu, trang trọng quá mức cần thiết, thiếu tự nhiên. Trên cơ sở đó tác giả nêu một vài gợi ý thiết thực đối với các đồng nghiệp dạy tiếng Anh về lĩnh vực này.

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\* ThS. Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ Hà Nội

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses leave-taking patterns made by Australian native speakers of English, comparing these with those made by Vietnamese informants, both in English and their mothertongue.

Analysing the data collected through discourse completion questionnaires, this paper aims at:

- Summing up main leave-taking strategies and patterns in Australian English and Vietnamese;
- Drawing some similarities and differences in the routine of leave-taking in Australian English and Vietnamese;
- Pointing out to what extent such factors as gender, age, social roles affect the choice of leave-taking patterns;
- Suggesting some practical implications for teaching English to speakers of the Vietnamese language.

## II. DATA

In order to obtain data for a contrastive analysis of leave-taking patterns in English and Vietnamese and to make some reliable conclusion as well as some suggestions for Vietnamese ELT teachers, a survey was carried out (see Appendix). Seven situations where two people are coming to the end of conversations were set up. Each situation is accompanied by a four-turn open dialogue. The respondents were asked to write down in the two missing turns in each conversation what they would say when they take their leave.

Situation 1 (S1): The respondent is talking to his/her friend. They are in a hurry. The place is not indicated.

Situation 2 (S2): The respondent is talking to his/her academic advisor at the latter's place.

Situation 3 (S3): The respondent acts as a professor and is talking to his/her student in the office.

Situation 4 (S4): The respondent acts as a teacher and is talking to his/her former student in a bookshop.

Situation 5 (S5): The respondent is talking to an old lady while waiting for the bus. His/her bus is coming.

Situation 6 (S6): The respondent is explaining to a schoolboy how to play a new game. Suddenly he/she remembers he/she has an important appointment soon.

Situation 7 (S7): The respondent has been at his/her friend's house for dinner and it's getting fairly late.

All the respondents are students of the University of Canberra and the Australian National University.

24 Australian students aged from 18 to 25 (12 females and 12 males) and 24 Vietnamese students aged 25-41 (12 females and 12 males) provided the total number of 1008 utterances. The latter were asked to write both in English and in Vietnamese with a two-week interval between the two versions of the same survey questionnaire.

504 leave-taking expressions were then analysed (168 by Australian native speakers of English, 168 by Vietnamese students, in Vietnamese and 168 by Vietnamese, in English).

### III. LEAVE-TAKING IN AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

**3.1.** *In total, Australian female respondents use 16 expressions which are listed below. The frequency of occurrence is given in brackets.*

- Good bye. (30)
- Bye/ bye bye. (22)
- See you (ya)/later/later on. (16)
- I'll see you in class next week. (4)
- I hope to see you again. (1)
- Hope to see you again. (1)
- I'll catch you around. (1)
- Have a nice day. (1)
- Drop in any time when you have problems. (1)
- Come and see me if you need more help. (1)
- Good day. (1)
- Good night. (1)
- It was fun. (1)
- I'll give you a call next week. (1)
- Next time we'll have it at my house. (1)
- Soon. (1)

Female respondents' expressions are grouped into several strategy types and their distribution among the seven situations may lead us to the following conclusions:

*a. Leave-taking made by Australian females is predominantly in the form of formulae (84%).*

*b. Good bye, Bye/Bye bye, See you* are the most frequent leave-taking patterns (82%),

*c. Good bye* is still used very often by females (36%), especially by people in higher positions. Out of 30 times when *Good bye* is used, 13 are made by a professor (S3) and a teacher (S4), 4 are made between friends (S1 và S7), 2 for addressing an academic advisor (S2), 6 times to address an old lady (S5) and 5 times for addressing a schoolboy (S6). It is clear that people who have higher social status are more formal than those in lower positions. The latter show less formality to their superiors, but more formality to older people.

*d. Bye* is informal and tends to be used more frequently among friends.

*e. See you* is neutral as it has rather equal distribution.

**3.2.** *Australian male respondents used 21 expressions altogether.*

- Bye. (29)
- See you. (15)
- Good bye. (14)
- I'll see you in class next week. (1)
- We'll have to get together again. (1)
- Thanks/Thank you. (5)
- Talk to you soon, no doubt. (1)
- OK. (1)
- I will. (1)
- Have a nice day. (2)

- |  |     |   |
|--|-----|---|
| - Do the work and see me if you have any problems. | (1) | <i>bye/See you</i> are used predominantly (58 times or 69%).<br>• Australian male respondents appear to be very informal. <i>Bye</i> is the most commonly used pattern, 29 times (35%) whereas <i>Good bye</i> -14 times, (16%). <i>Bye</i> and <i>See you</i> are used very often among friends.<br>• People in higher positions are more formal than those in lower positions. They prefer using formal and neutral formulae.<br>• Young males seem to be informal to both older and young people. It seems that age does not affect the choice of leave-taking patterns. For example, 6 times <i>Bye</i> is used for an old lady and 5 times it is used for a boy. |
| - We are here to help you.                         | (1) |   |
| - Let me know if I can be of any help.             | (1) |   |
| - And you too.                                     | (1) |   |
| - No problem/Not a problem.                        | (3) |   |
| - Keep practising.                                 | (1) |   |
| - I'll give you a call next week.                  | (1) |   |
| - Catch you later.                                 | (1) |   |
| - I look forward to your company then.             | (1) |   |
| - Good night.                                      | (1) |   |
| - That would be lovely.                            | (1) | <b>3.3.</b> Looking into the three main expressions ( <i>Bye / Good bye / See you</i> ) and some aspects of the data provided by both males and females, we can conclude that there are gender differences in using leave-taking patterns.  |
| - I bet we do.                                     | (1) |   |

Analysing the types and the distribution of the males' expressions, we see that:

- It is obvious that *Bye/Good*

	Females	Males
Variety of expressions	16	22
Variety of strategies	5	7
Frequency of using <i>Bye</i>	22 (26%)	29 (35%)
Frequency of using <i>Good bye</i>	30 (36%)	14 (17%)
Frequency of using <i>Good bye</i>	16 (19%)	15 (18%)
Other expressions	16 (19%)	26 (30%)

It is well-known that English is generally considered to have gender differences of the smaller, less obvious and more subconscious type. Therefore, it is too early to suggest that some expressions or patterns mentioned so far are gender-bound. Still, relying on the data, it is possible to suggest that the

idea that "*women's speech is more conservative than that of men*" (Wardough, 1986:92) is well-founded. "*Sociological studies have demonstrated that women in our society are, generally speaking, more stus-conscious than men. For this reason, they will be more sensitive to the social significance of*



*social - class - related linguistic variables... It seems that working-class speech, like certain other aspects of working class culture in our society, has connotations of or associations with masculinity, which may lead men to be more favourably disposed to non-standard linguistic forms than women*" (Wardaugh, 1986:87). The fact that women use less strategies and expressions may be a good example of Wardaugh's point.

From the comparison above it is also obvious that Australian males are more informal than females.

#### IV. LEAVE-TAKING IN VIETNAMESE

**4.1.1.** It is essential to point out that though both speakers of English and Vietnamese may use similar strategies and conversational routines, there are remarkable differences in the ways formality and politeness are expressed in the two languages.

**4.1.2.** The Vietnamese language has a very complicated system of pronouns which often clearly show social distance, age range, gender, interpersonal relationships, „*For the same pronoun I in English, the Vietnamese system has a number of alternatives such as: tôi, tao, anh, em, cháu, chú, bác, con, mình, bố, mẹ, chị, ông, bà, etc. By choosing one of these pronouns, the Vietnamese speaker, in addition to the choice of strategy, can indicate his/her relationship with the hearer, and increase or reduce the level of politeness. This is a great problem for the foreign learner of Vietnamese since the choice of inappropriate pronoun*

*may result in pragmatic failure although s/he uses the right strategy or even the most polite one*"(Nguyễn Xuân Vang, 1990: 7), for example, pattern 2 in 4.2, the most polite pattern in Vietnamese, does not imply any politeness but the opposite connotation, which is not acceptable by all means, if the pronoun *em* is replaced by *tao*.

Em chào thầy ạ : Polite/formal.

I farewell teacher + politeness marker. But "*Tao* chào thầy ạ" is extremely impolite.

I farewell you, bloke + *ạ* an irony marker rather than a polite one.

**4.1.3.** A polite pattern of addressing other people formally and politely in Vietnamese must carry, beside the compulsory formality/politeness-marking verb *chào* (greet/farewell) and appropriate intonation (smoothly falling tone), all or either of the following elements:

**a.** The sentence must be *complete*, i.e it must have the subject (the speaker), the verb (*chào*) and the object (the hearer).

e.g. Em chào thầy.

Subject + Verb + Object

(I farewell you, teacher)

**b.** The sentence must have the politeness marker *ạ* at the end.

e.g. Em chào thầy ạ.

**c.** The sentence must contain the politeness/formality-intensifying verb *xin* before the politeness/formality-marking verb *chào*.

e.g. Em *xin* chào thầy ạ.

The level of politeness/formality can be clearly seen as follows.

**a. Chào :** Subject and object are not indicated. Casual, used among friends and peers.

**b. Xin chào. :** Subject and object are not indicated. Less casual, used among friends and peers.

**c. Chào thầy. :** Object (thầy - teacher) is indicated but politeness marker is not. This can be used politely if accompanied by appropriate intonation and tone.

**d. Chào thầy ạ. :** Object is indicated, *ạ* is used. Polite.

**e. Em chào thầy ạ. :** Complete sentence with *ạ*. Very polite.

**f. Em xin chào thầy ạ. :** Intensified by *xin*. Most polite.

**4.2.1.** Vietnamese females use 14 different leave-taking patterns.

1. *Chào cậu (bạn/cháu/etc)* = (I) farewell you (mate/nephew/niece/etc.) + softener.

2. *Em chào thầy ạ.* = (I) farewell teacher/master + politeness marker.

*Cháu chào cụ ạ.* = I farewell grannie + politeness marker.

3. *Hẹn gặp lại/sau/vào dịp khác.* = Hope to see later/another occasion.

4. *Em về nhé.* = I go home + softener.

*Cô đi đây.* = I leave now.

5. *Em về nhé.* = You leave + softener. (In this case, *em* is not the speaker as in pattern 4, but refers to the hearer, the person who is leaving. It is understood from the context.)

6. *Tạm biệt.* = Good bye/farewell.

7. *Khi nào rỗi gọi điện cho tớ.* = When you're free, phone me.

8. *Rất mong gặp lại em/bạn/bà* = Wish to see you again.

9. *Xin phép thầy em về.* = I ask for your permission to go home.

*Xin phép bà cháu đi.* = I ask for your permission to go.

10. *Cháu rất thích nói chuyện với bà.* = I enjoy talking to you.

11. *Cháu chào cụ và chúc cụ mạnh khỏe.* = I farewell you and wish you good health.

12. *Cảm ơn.* = Thank you.

13. *Mình phải đi đây.* = I have to go now.

14. *Mình sẽ đến chỗ cậu* = I will come to see you.

**4.2.2.** Leave-taking expressions of the patterns, above can be grouped into the following strategy types.

Type 1: Formulae	Pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Type 2: Suggesting	Pattern 7
Type 3: Expressing hope	Pattern 8
Type 4: Asking for permission	Pattern 9
Type 5: Expressing satisfaction	Pattern 10
Type 6: Blessing someone	Pattern 11
Type 7: Thanking	Pattern 12
Type 8: Stating reason/excuse	Pattern 13
Type 9: Promising	Pattern 14

The frequency of occurrence and distribution of the patterns can be seen in Table 3, Appendix 2.

**4.2.3.** Considering that pattern 1 and pattern 3 are less formal than pattern 2, we can assume that:

**a.** Vietnamese females in higher positions or of older age are informal while addressing those who are in lower positions or who are younger. Out of 39 times when pattern 1 (*Chào* + object + softener) is used, 25 times (64%) are used by a teacher, a professor to address their students and by a student to address a schoolboy.

**b.** In similar situations, Australian females prefer using *Good bye* to *See you and Bye* (18/30 vs 12/28 or 60% vs 42%).

**c.** Pattern 2 with politeness marker *a* (polite, formal) is never used by people in higher positions to address those in lower positions or by older people to address younger people. It is not used among friends. This pattern is used by students while talking to their teachers, children to their parents or adults, employees to their bosses.

**4.2.4.** What is said in **a.** and **c.** shows that in Vietnamese society a greater degree of power accrues from age and occupation than it does in Australian society. This means that in Vietnamese conversational interaction, like Japanese and Thai, for the dyads older person / younger person, professor/student, or doctor/clerk, the first member of each pair holds a relatively greater degree of power than she or he would in many Western

societies. "*In Japanese and Thai, a formal style would be expected in encounters between such pairs, whereas in American society a less formal style could be used. American students, for example, sometimes call professors by their first names, a situation which would be unheard of in Japan or Thailand.*" (Richards, 1985:137). The same opinion would be suitable for the Australian -Vietnamese context being discussed here.

**4.3.1.** Vietnamese male respondents use 13 patterns similar to those used by females, except pattern 6 (*Tạm biệt*). Therefore, it is not necessary to list them and again group them into strategy types. These can be seen in **4.1**.

**4.3.2** Again, here we can see that, like Vietnamese females, Vietnamese males use formulae predominantly. However, there are some differences.

**a.** Vietnamese males prefer using a less formal way of leave-taking. In total, formulae are used 66 times in all situations. Out of this number, pattern I alone (*Chào* + Object + softener) is used 39 times or 59%. In the similar situations, Vietnamese females use this pattern 25 times or 37,8%. Obviously, Vietnamese males are more casual or informal than Vietnamese women while addressing other people.

**b.** This informal way of leave-taking is used widely not only among friends and peers but also by people with more social power while talking to people with less social power, but not vice versa in any way. A professor (*S3*) and a teacher (*S4*) address their students using

an informal style of speech. Adults talk to children, older people talk to younger people (see situation 6) in the same manner. Perhaps this is a way of showing sincerity by socially powerful people because casual speech style can usually help to reduce social distance. Saying this, we do not intend to deny a wide-spread idea that relative social power of the speaker and the hearer can be determined by their speech style. Considering cultural differences, we simply want to emphasise that *"a casual speech style is appropriate that stresses affiliation and solidarity"*. We are aware that *"If the participants are not of equal power, a more formal speech style is appropriate, one that marks the dominance of the speaker over the hearer. However, what might be a suitable context for formal style in one language may be a situation where casual style is thought to be appropriate in another"* (Richards, 1985: 137)

c. Once again, here, like Vietnamese females, Vietnamese students talk to their teachers (S2) and young males talk to old people (S5) using a very formal style (pattern 2 with politeness marker *a*).

d. Both females and males use the same strategies, the occurrence frequency of these strategies is almost identical. As mentioned above, males use formulae 66 times (78,5%) and only 18 times for other strategies (21,5%). Females use formulae 64 times (76,1%) and 20 times for other strategies (23,9%). The differences lie in the occurrence frequency of the formulae. An interesting fact is that males do not

use *Tạm biệt* at all, whereas females still use this very bookish, poetic expression.

4.4. Summing up what has been discussed so far in 4.2 and 4.3., we can assume that gender, age and social power play an important role in determining the choice of leave-taking patterns.

#### V. LEAVE-TAKING BY VIETNAMESE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH. SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR VIETNAMESE ELT TEACHERS

5.1. In total, Vietnamese respondents use 20 expressions. The data analysis shows that both Vietnamese females and males do not offer any significant difference in choosing leave-taking strategies, patterns or expressions. This is not surprising since they have the same culture, learn English under the same social conditions, use the same materials and other resources and are taught by Vietnamese English teachers. They are products of the same make, from the same mould. A good evidence of this is the use of the main types of leave-taking formulae shown below.

Frequency of using some main leave-taking expressions.

	Females	Males
Good bye	27 times (32%)	26 (31%)
Bye	19 (22,6%)	21 (25%)
See you	27 (32%)	26 (31%)

Total occurrence frequency		
of <i>Good bye, Bye, See you</i>	73	73
	(87%)	(87%)
Other expressions	11	11

**5.2.** Vietnamese speakers of English appear more formal in using leave-taking expressions, as *Good bye* is used very often, furthermore, in some situations they use it not quite appropriately. This can be seen in situation 7 where Vietnamese female respondents say *Good bye* to an old lady 5 times whereas this expression is used 6 times for a schoolboy.

**5.3.** Vietnamese speakers of English tend to use many wordy expressions whereas in the same situations Australians choose shorter ones. Here are some examples.

Vietnamese English	Australian English
- I'm looking forward to seeing you tomorrow.	See ya tomorrow.
- It's very nice to talk to you.	Nice talking to you.
- I'm sure we'll be able to talk to each other again.	Talk to you soon, no doubt.

**5.4.** It is obvious that Vietnamese speakers of English use less variety of expressions than Australians. Considering that 100% Vietnamese respondents are staying in Australia and learning English in an English speaking environment, and the fact that they are winners of very competitive tests (or, as a matter of fact, contests), we can assume that those who learn English in Vietnam would use much less variety of expressions. Lesson observation shows

that in many intermediate classes in Vietnam students do not use even *See you* at all. In these classes, *Good bye* is perhaps the only known leave-taking expression.

**5.5.** To help students to improve their speaking, teachers should use more and more a communicative approach to teaching. Experience shows that non-native English teachers usually spend too much time explaining rules or lexical items. Students should have more time to do pair work and other communicative activities during lessons. There must be more teaching and learning materials designed by native speakers of English. Video tapes with authentic English conversations should be used more in ELT. Language schools and colleges must have more native English-speaking teachers. Teachers of English should have more chance to perfect their language skills in English speaking countries, because learning a language is learning another culture, and learning it properly compels learners to attend to particular social dimensions.

What has been discussed in **5.2.**, **5.3.**, **5.4.** serves as a reminder of some tasks for Vietnamese ELT teachers. During lessons and in every day interaction with their learners they should use more conversational gambits. Providing students with variety of conversational routines and formulae together with thorough explanation of their appropriate uses in one way to enable students to avoid culture shock, conversational breakdowns when they communicate with native speakers of English. Language teachers should

remember that "language also does social acts, and systematically rely on social features to do so. The mapping rules between social acts and their verbal realization - how we do things with words - can show us how people code their social world" (Ervin-Tripp, 1988:395)

## VI. CONCLUSION

The data analysis shows that both Australian English and Vietnamese use certain types of conversational routines for leave-taking. Such factors as gender, age, social roles affect the choice of leave-taking patterns, especially in Vietnamese. The data analysis also reveals that the act of leave-taking in Vietnamese carries much more formality than Australian English. In Vietnamese, like many other Asian languages, there is a greater degree of social distance implied in the difference between the most informal and the most formal level than in the corresponding contrast implied in English. Again, in this contrastive analysis, we can see some effects of transfer of native-language conversational conventions into target-language conversational discourse. Therefore, in this paper it is hoped to propose some practical implications for teaching English conversational routines to speakers of the Vietnamese language.

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## APPENDIX

### Discourse analysis survey:

Closing conversation in English.

Please answer all the questions.

Gender: Male Female (circle one)

Age: (circle one)

18 - 25

36 - 45

26 - 35

46 and over

*Below are some situations where you are coming to the end of conversations. Please write what you would say in the spaces provided. One or several expressions may be used in each space.*

1. (You are talking to your friend. Both of you are in a hurry)

*Your friend:* My God, It's already 8.50

*You:*.....

...

Nice meeting you.

*Your friend:* You, too. See you later.

*You:* .....  
2. (You are a student and are now talking to your academic advisor in his/her office)

*You:* I really should leave for class now .....

*Your academic advisor:* You're welcome. Have a good semester. Don't hesitate to drop in when you have any questions.

*You:* .....  
.....  
.....

*Your academic advisor:* Good-bye.

3. (Suppose that you are a professor. You are talking to your student)

*Your student:* Yes, I understand it now, Professor.

*You:* Good

*Your student:* I will. Thank you very much. Good-bye.

*You:* .....

4. (Suppose that you are a teacher and now you're talking to David, your former student, in a bookstore)

*David:* It was nice seeing you again, Mr. Clark. I hope to see you again soon.

*You:* I hope so, too.

*David:* The same to you. Good bye.

*You:* .....  
...

5. (You're talking to a talkative old lady while waiting for the bus. You see your bus coming around the corner)

*You:* .....

....

*The lady:* It's been nice talking to you. See you later.

*You:* .....

...

6. (You're explaining to a schoolboy how to play a new game. Suddenly you remember you have an important appointment soon.)

*You:* .....

...

*The schoolboy:* Thank you very much. Good-bye.

*You:* .....

...

7. (You've been at your friend's house for dinner and it's getting fairly late)

*You:* .....

...

*Your friend:* You're welcome. I hope we can get together again.

*You:* .....

...

*Your friend:* Bye.

**Thank you for your co-operation.**

\*\*\*\*\*