

A contrastive analysis of semantic features of the verb “cut” in English collocations and their equivalents in Vietnamese

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ABSTRACT

As we know, verbs play an important role in using language. In this paper, the research focuses on the semantic features of the verb “cut” in English collocations and the verb “cắt” in Vietnamese collocations. Then, this study finds out the similarities and differences between these two verbs in terms of semantic features. The descriptive research method is employed to give an in-depth and detailed description of collocations of lexical verb “cut” in English and “cắt” in Vietnamese. The data are collected from different sources such as dictionaries, proverb books, stories, etc... Then, the data are analyzed systematically to generalize the uses of these collocations. These findings lead to the implications for teachers and students in teaching and learning “cut” collocations for translating collocations from English into Vietnamese and vice versa.

Key words: cut, semantic feature, contrastive analysis, collocation

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English has become one of the most important international languages in the world. The number of people who communicate and use it as the first language has been increasing day by day. Besides, there are more and more foreigners to come to Vietnam for jobs, travel, or marriage. They also have to study Vietnamese for communication. However, the learners cannot communicate fluently although they know a lot of words. The main reason for that is words are not used alone and separately but go with each other and depend on each other. Therefore, the possible combinations of words or collocations have to be taken into consideration. Words are combined into phrases. According to Nguyen Van An [1, p. 286], “Every sentence must have a verb as the verb is the heart of any sentence. Small changes in its form reflect many differences in meaning. One variable is number; a verb can be either singular or plural”. Besides, a verb can collocate with a noun, a preposition, an adjective, or even another verb. However, the knowledge of collocations

is vast so this study only focuses on “A contrastive analysis of semantic features of the verb “cut” in English collocations and their equivalents in Vietnamese”. This study is chosen because when the verb “cut” collocates with other words, both Vietnamese and foreign learners often feel confused, misunderstanding, especially about meaning of the verb “cut” collocations and the meaning of “cắt”.

The study is aimed at:

- Finding the semantic features of the “cut” collocations in English and those of the verb “cắt” collocations in Vietnamese.
- Finding the similarities and differences between the “cut” collocations in English and those of the verb “cắt” collocations in Vietnamese.

Research questions:

- What are the semantic features of the verb “cut” in English and the verb “cắt” in Vietnamese collocations?
- How are they similar and different in terms of these features?

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2. DEFINITIONS

The modern foreign language teaching tendency requires the teachers not only to teach their learners about the language but also how to use the language. To a certain extent, CA was established to meet that requirement.

Contrastive linguistics is a comparison of similarities and differences among two or more languages [2].

As cited in To Minh Thanh [3, p.12]: semantic features are “the smallest units of meaning in a word”. We identify the meaning of a word by its semantic features. For example, “father” may have the following semantic feature: +human, +male, +mature, +parental and +paternal. And “hen” may be described as a set of the following semantic features: +animate, +bird, +fowl, +fully grown, and +female.

The term “collocation” was first introduced by Firth [4], a British linguist. He was the first person to look at lexis at its syntagmatic, left-to-right unfolding of language. According to Firth [4], collocation is defined as a combination of words associated with each other, for example, *to take a photo, to do homework, to play football...* The term “collocation” has its origin in the Latin verb “collocate” which means “to set in order/to arrange”.

Nguyen Van An [1, p. 286] states: “A verb expresses action (jump, think) or state of being (is, become)”. The verb is the heart of a sentence – every sentence must have a verb. Recognizing the verb is often the most important step in understanding the meaning of a sentence. In the sentence “The dog bit the man”, “bit” is the verb and the word which shows the action of the sentence. In the sentence “The man is sitting on a chair”, “sitting” is the verb of the sentence. In the sentence “She is a smart girl”, there is no action but a state of being expressed by the verb “is”. The word “be” is different from other verbs in many ways but can still be thought of as a verb. According to Jack C. Richards et al [5, p. 398], in English, a word is a verb when it satisfied these following criteria:

- Occurs as part of the predicate of a sentence;
- Carries markers of grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, person, number, and mood.
- Refers to an action or state.

Almost verbs in English change in form in accordance with tense, mood, person. For example, “Baby is cutting his first tooth.”; “This knife cuts well.”; “He found his work cut out for him.”

There are many ways to classify verbs, however, in this paper, the classification of verbs into transitive and intransitive verbs shall be applied, which would be convenient to compare the two verbs “cut” in English and “cắt” in Vietnamese.

3. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

In English, one verb may have many different meanings, depending on the context that the verb has its own meaning, and this itself makes troubles to learners. Therefore, work by Truong Thi Hai [6] in Vinh University is interested in “meanings of the verb “to have” and its equivalents in Vietnamese”. She lists the meanings of the verb “to have” as an ordinary verb and “to have” in some constructions, and then compares to its equivalents in Vietnamese. In addition, Dang Thi Thuy Van [7] in University of Languages and International Studies in Ha Noi studies on the forms and meanings of the lexical verb “get” and Vietnamese equivalents. Besides, Do Thi Ngoc Lan [8] in the University of Languages and International Studies in Ha Noi studies on the collocations of the lexical verb “do” with Vietnamese equivalents. Moreover, Pham Thi Ngoc Minh [9] in the University of Languages and International Studies in Ha Noi is interested in “A contrastive analysis of semantic features of the verb “make” in English collocations and their equivalents in Vietnamese”. All of those theses study the meanings of the verbs and their equivalents in Vietnamese. They help the learners understand the meanings of the verbs in collocations, speak languages fluently, and translate well.

In this research, the author would like to contribute a very minor investigation focusing on the semantic features of the verb “cut” in English collocations and their equivalents in Vietnamese in order to facilitate students when learning vocabulary. The author chose this verb because it has many meanings in both English and Vietnamese.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study has been carried out basically through descriptive and qualitative methods. The descriptive method is employed to give an in-depth and detailed description of collocations of lexical verb “cut” in English. The work starts with a review of existing study results on collocations to provide a better understanding of the topic. Then different meanings of collocations of lexical verb “cut” are described, and then examples are provided to illustrate the description. The qualitative method is used in collecting data. Collocations with the lexical verb “cut” will be collected from different sources such as stories, books, magazines, etc... then analyzed systematically to generalize the uses of these collocations. In addition, a comparative and contrastive view is used to compare and contrast collocations of “cut” and their equivalents in Vietnamese.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Semantic features of the verbs “Cut” in English collocations

According to dictionary [10-11] when collocating with other words, the verb “cut” has the following basic meanings.

5.1.1. “Cut” conveys the meaning of “to wound/hole”

“Cut” can be understood as to make an opening or a wound in something, especially with a sharp tool such as a knife or scissors. Its Vietnamese equivalent expressions are: “đứt, cạo, vỡ (đầu), cưa, rẽ, xẻ”:

- She cut her finger on a piece of glass.

- He cut himself (= his face) shaving
- She had fallen and cut her head open.
- You need a powerful saw to cut through mental.

5.1.2. “Cut” conveys the meaning of “to remove with knife”

The next meaning is to remove something or a part of something, using a knife, ect. In Vietnamese, it means “xắt, chặt, khoét, đào”:

- He cut four thick slices from the loaf.
- I cut a piece of birthday cake for them all.
- The climbers cut steps in the ice.

5.1.3. “Cut” conveys the meaning of “to divide”

“Cut” also means “to divide something into two or more pieces with a knife. Its Vietnamese equivalents are “chia, cắt, chặt”.

- Don't cut the string, untie the knots.
- He cut the loaf into thick slices.
- Now cut the tomatoes in half.

5.1.4. “Cut” conveys the meaning of “to make something (hair, nails, grass) shorter by cutting.”

Its Vietnamese meanings are “cắt, hớt”.

- She cut her nails
- He's had his hair cut really short.

5.1.5. “Cut” conveys the meaning of “to release”

“Cut” also means to allow somebody to escape from somewhere by cutting the rope, object, ect. that is holding them.

- The injured driver had to be cut from the wreckage.
- Two survivors were **cut free** after being trapped for twenty minutes.

5.1.6. “Cut” conveys the meaning of to design and make a piece of clothing in a particular way.

The Vietnamese meanings are “cắt, may (quần áo)”

- The swimsuit was cut high in the leg.

5.1.7. “Cut” conveys the meaning “able to cut/be cut”

It means to be capable of cutting. Its Vietnamese equivalent are “cắt, gọt, chặt, thái”.

- This knife cuts well.

- This cheese cuts easily.

5.1.8. "Cut" conveys the meaning "reduce"

We can use the verb "cut" when we want to express the meaning of reducing something by removing a part of it. Its Vietnamese equivalent are "giảm, hạ, cắt bớt, rút ngắn".

- Buyers will bargain hard to **cut the cost of** the house they want.

- His salary has been cut by ten per cent.

- Could you cut your essay from 5000 to 3000 words.

5.1.9. "Cut" conveys the meaning of "to remove"

"Cut" also means to remove something from something.

- This scene was cut from the final version of the movie.

5.1.10. "Cut" conveys the meaning of "to delete/remove"

It means to delete part of a text on a computer screen in order to place it somewhere else. Its Vietnamese equivalents are "cắt, xóa".

- You can cut and paste between different programs.

5.1.11. "Cut" conveys the meaning of "to stop"

It is used to tell somebody to stop doing something. The Vietnamese meanings are "ngủ, dừng".

- Cut the chatter and get on with your work!

5.1.12. "Cut" conveys the meaning of "to end"

It means to completely end a relationship or all communication with somebody. Its Vietnamese equivalents are "cắt đứt, cắt rời, chia rẽ, tách ra, kết thúc".

- She has cut all ties with her family.

- He has refused to cut links with these companies.

5.1.13. "Cut" conveys the meaning of "to miss class"

Its meaning is to stay away from a class that you should go to. Its Vietnamese meanings are "bỏ học, trốn học".

- He's always cutting class.

5.1.14. "Cut" conveys the meaning of "to upset"

When we want to mean "to hurt somebody emotionally". Its Vietnamese equivalent is "làm đau lòng".

- His cruel remarks cut her deeply.

5.1.15. "Cut" conveys the meaning of "to cross another line"

Its Vietnamese meanings are "cắt nhau, gặp nhau, giao nhau".

- The line cuts the circle at two points.

- Two lines cut each other.

5.1.16. "Cut" conveys the meaning of "to have a new tooth beginning to appear through the gum."

The Vietnamese meaning is "mọc răng".

- When did she cut her first tooth?

- Baby is cutting his first tooth.

5.2. Semantic features of the verbs "cắt" in Vietnamese collocations

Generally, like other Vietnamese verbs, "cắt" refers to an action, an activity, progress, an impression and feeling, a change, a state, etc. "Cắt" is used by Vietnamese people in every day communicate in many contexts and usages. In this section, we will bring out the following senses of the verb "cắt" in Vietnamese language. These senses and semantic features have been collected on the basis of Từ Điển Chính Tả Tiếng Việt [12], Vietnamese-English Dictionary [13-14]. The data for the realization of the semantic features are illustrated with the examples cited verbatim from these dictionaries.

5.2.1. "Cắt" conveys the meaning of "to remove with sharp tools"

Like the verb "cut" in English, "cắt" in Vietnamese also denotes the act of removing something or a part of something, using a sharp tools such as knife, scissors. For example: cắt cỏ, cắt tóc, cắt quần áo, cắt móng tay.

5.2.2. "Cắt" conveys the meaning of "to make up a prescription of galenic medicine by"

cutting herbs and roots”.

- Đi cắt thang thuốc bổ.

5.2.3. “Cắt” conveys the meaning of “to break/cut off”

“Cắt” means to cut off all connexion with one's sweetheart.

- Cắt đứt với người yêu.

5.2.4. “Cắt” conveys the meaning of “to be cut in the heart”

We can use “cắt” to reflect the state of feeling a cutting pain in one's entrails.

- Ruột đau như cắt.

5.2.5. “Cắt” conveys the meaning of “cut through, cut off”

Đường xe lửa cắt ngang cánh đồng, cắt đường giao thông, cắt đứt quan hệ ngoại giao, cắt một huyện để nhập vào tỉnh trên.

5.2.6. “Cắt” conveys the meaning “to reduce/ cut down”

Cắt những khoản chi phí không cần thiết, cắt mấy tiết mục biểu diễn, bài viết bị cắt mất một đoạn.

5.2.7. “Cắt” conveys the meaning of “to delete/ remove part of a text on a computer screen in order to place it somewhere else.

Cắt đi một đoạn văn bản, cắt một cột trong văn bản.

5.2.8. Other meanings

In addition to the basic meanings of the verb “cắt” mentioned above, we discover some minor ones in the following examples:

- Cắt việc, cắt cử (cắt phiên đi tuần): to detail, assign, tell of

- Cắt bỏ (cắt bỏ khối u): remove

- Nơi chôn nhau cắt rốn: native place, birth-place

- Cắt cổ (using after a noun/ a verb: cho vay cắt cổ): exorbitant, usurious

- Cắt cụt (cắt cụt một chân): amputate

- Cắt lần: in turn

- Cắt nghĩa (cắt nghĩa từ khó): explain, interpret

- Cắt ruột (đau cắt ruột): a piercing pain

- Cắt tiết (cắt tiết lợn): stick

- Cắt xén (cắt xén tình tiết của vở kịch): truncate

At the first glance, people may believe that “cut” collocations in English are the same as “cắt” collocations in Vietnamese. However, a deep study on these two verbs' collocations has pointed out that they are similar but not exactly identical. Here are some similarities and differences between them in terms of semantics features which the authors have found out after studying the two verbs' collocation.

Similarities

In terms of parts of speech, both of them are verbs, accordingly, they all have one common semantic feature of verbs, that is, they both refer to an action or state.

Interestingly, they have a lot of general meanings in common. They refer to almost similar actions, activities, or progress.

More specifically, they both refer to:

+ make something shorter with a knife.

- For reasons of hygiene, we had to cut our fingernails really short.

(Vì giữ vệ sinh nên chúng ta cần phải cắt ngắn móng tay).

+ to divide something or separate something from its main part, using scissors, a knife, etc.

- Do you want me to cut the cake?

(Bạn muốn tôi cắt bánh không?).

+ to make an opening or a wound in something with a sharp tool.

- She cut her finger on a piece of glass.

(Mảnh thủy tinh cắt ngón tay của cô ấy).

+ to make something into a particular shape by cutting.

- Cut the carrots into thin strips.

(Cắt củ cà rốt thành từng miếng nhỏ).

+ to sever a relationship or all communication with somebody.

- To cut off all communication.

(Cắt đứt mọi phương tiện giao thông liên lạc).

- To cut off negotiation.

(Cắt đứt mọi cuộc thương lượng)

Differences

The verb “cut” collocations and the verb “cắt” collocations differ in some meanings. For example, in English, people say “She was cut off in her prime” and if we translate this sentence word by word into Vietnamese, we will have “Cô ấy bị cắt đứt đột ngột trong lúc còn thanh xuân”. This sentence sounds unnatural in Vietnamese and of course unsuitable. Obviously, when translating the sentence like this, the translators misunderstood the actual meaning of the verb “cut” here in its collocation. The translation should be “Cô ấy chết đột ngột trong lúc còn thanh xuân”.

Similarly, Vietnamese people may say “Máy bay cắt bom”, but in English, people say “The plane let down its bombs”.

Here are some meanings which the verb “cut” collocations have, but the verb “cắt” collocations do not:

- The blade cut deep into the wood (Lưỡi dao khoét sâu vào khúc gỗ).

- You need to cut the amount of fat and sugar in your diet.

(Bạn cần giảm lượng mỡ và đường trong bữa ăn kiêng).

- She had to be cut from the wreckage of her car (Cô ấy cần được giải thoát từ đống đổ nát của chiếc xe).

- He was in the vehicle for an hour before he was cut free.

(Anh ấy nằm trong xe một giờ trước khi được cứu thoát).

- A huge figure of a lion cut out in the rock.

(Hình một con sư tử khổng lồ được khắc ở tảng đá).

- He found his work cut out for him.

(Hắn thấy công việc của hắn đã được vạch ra từ trước).

- That argument cuts both ways (Lý lẽ độn xộn hai đầu).

- To cut through a wood (Đi tắt qua rừng).

- To cut up a writer (Chỉ trích gay gắt một nhà văn).

- To cut up a book (Phê bình gay gắt một cuốn sách).

- To be cut up by a piece of sad news (Đau đớn do nhận được tin buồn).

- To cut one's coat according to one's cloth (Liệu cơm gắp mắm).

- To cut and come again (Ăn ngon miệng).

- To cut the Gordian knot (Giải quyết nhanh một vấn đề hóc búa).

- To cut the ground from under somebody's feet (Nắm trước ý đồ của ai mà làm cho tang hẵng).

- To cut it fat (Lên mặt ta đây, làm bộ làm tịch).

- Cut it out! (Thôi đi!).

- To cut it fine (Dành một ít thời gian).

- To cut a loss (Tránh được sự thua lỗ).

- To cut no ice (hông ăn thua gì).

- To cut up savage (nổi cơn thịnh nộ, phát khùng).

On the contrary, we also discover a lot of meanings that “cắt” collocations in Vietnamese can have while “cut” collocations in English cannot. These differences are illustrated in the following examples:

- Nhanh như cắt (Swift as a doe).

- Cắt móng tay (Pare fingernails).

- Cắt bỏ khối u (Remove a tumour).

- Cho vay cắt cổ (To lend money at a usurious rate).

- Cắt cụt một chân (To amputate a leg).

- Cắt nghĩa từ khó (Explain a difficult word).

- Đau cắt ruột (A piercing pain).

- Rét cắt ruột (Biting cold).

- Cắt tiết gà (To stick a chicken).

Above, we have endeavored to bring about the contrastive analysis of the verbs “cut” and “cắt” in their collocations. By comparing “cut” in collocation and “cắt” in collocations and vice versa in terms of semantic features, we are able to state similarities and differences between the target verbs. In general, the differences between the two verbs are much greater than the similarities.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study focuses on semantic features of the verb “cut” in English collocations and their equivalents in Vietnamese.

The main concern is to find out the semantic features of the verb “cut” in English collocation and the verb “cắt” in Vietnamese collocations and then to show the similarities and differences between them. We also based on the theoretical background, the semantic features, the similarities and differences between the two verbs in collocations to carry out two surveys with the hope that this research can lead to effective ways to develop students' knowledge of collocations with “cut”, “cắt” in particular and other collocations in general. Some conclusions have been drawn as follows:

6.1. Objectives of the study

- Showing the semantic features of the “cut” collocations in English and “cắt” collocations in Vietnamese.
- Finding the similarities and differences between the “cut” collocations in English and “cắt” collocations in Vietnamese.
- Providing some recommendations for the teaching and learning as well as translation of “cut” collocations and “cắt” collocation into the target language. In fact, both Vietnamese and foreign learners will enlarge their vocabulary thanks to the knowledge of collocations. This will help them translate into English and Vietnamese beautifully. The teachers can create an environment in which students have a good chance of being exposed to learning and using collocations, especially in speaking and writing skills.

6.2. Implications for pedagogy

The final aim of language teaching is to develop learners' communicative competence as well as linguistic competence. Knowing a language is not only knowing the grammatical rules, but also knowing when and where it is appropriate to use, how to use, and to what people.

Teaching vocabulary also means providing learners with an increasing number of words and their equivalents in the target language which help them choose what to use with ease and

interpret accurately in different context.

For translation from English to Vietnamese and vice versa, the translators should master all semantics features of the two verbs “cut” and “cắt” in collocations that effects the uses of the two verbs and help the translators overcome possible difficulties when translating the context.

6.3. Contributions made by this study

The study is the first to conduct a contrastive analysis of semantic features of the verb “cut” in English collocations and their equivalents in Vietnamese. Knowing semantic features of the verb “cut” and the verb “cắt” in collocations as well as their similarities and differences can facilitate the learners' process of learning vocabulary. In addition, the implications can be applied as a general framework or model for teaching all collocations.

6.4. Limitations of the study

There are many aspects of the verb “cut” which can be investigated, the study however only focuses on semantic features of the verb “cut” in collocations. The next limitation is that the study has been unable to list all collocations of the verb “cut” and “cắt” to help teachers and learners of English have a thorough understanding of these two verbs in collocations.

6.5. Recommendation for further study

The research is only concerned with semantic features of the two verbs' collocations, so there are still many other aspects remaining to be investigated. Therefore, the further research is recommended to be done in the following areas:

First, research should be done on not only semantic features but also grammatical features of both verbs' collocations.

Second, research should be done to investigate synonyms and idioms with both the verb “cut” and “cắt” to help teachers and learners of English to have an overall picture of the similarities and differences between the two verbs.

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Phân tích đối chiếu các đặc điểm ngữ nghĩa của động từ "cut" trong các ngữ cố định tiếng Anh và các cụm từ tương đương trong tiếng Việt

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TÓM TẮT

Động từ đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ. Bài viết tập trung nghiên cứu nét nghĩa của động từ "cut" trong các ngữ cố định Tiếng Anh và động từ "cắt" trong các ngữ cố định Tiếng Việt. Nghiên cứu này tìm ra sự giống và khác nhau giữa hai động từ trong giới hạn nét nghĩa. Phương pháp miêu tả được sử dụng để mô tả chi tiết nét nghĩa cố định của động từ "cut" trong Tiếng Anh và động từ "cắt" trong Tiếng Việt. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ nhiều nguồn khác nhau như từ điển, sách tục ngữ, truyện... Khi đó, dữ liệu được phân tích một cách có hệ thống nhằm khái quát hóa cách sử dụng các ngữ cố định trên. Kết quả nghiên cứu giúp cho giáo viên và sinh viên trong việc dạy và học dịch các ngữ cố định của động từ "cut" từ Anh sang Việt và ngược lại.

Từ khóa: cắt, nét nghĩa, ngôn ngữ học đối chiếu, ngữ cố định

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