

Should We Change the Vietnamese Scout Motto from “Sấp-Sấn” to “Sấn-Sàng.”?

Hi all,

While I normally do not weigh in on the various discussions that occur in the Vietnamese scouting community, I feel compelled to share my thoughts on the issue of whether we should change the Vietnamese scout motto from “Sấp-Sấn” to “Sấn-Sàng.”

To be honest, initially I didn't think I would have a response—I have better things to think about than semantics, right? But it is not about a trivial issue of semantics—it is about words that have been a meaningful part of my life for the last 30 years. As a motto should, the words “Sấp-Sấn”, have come to represent to me the very core of what the scouting movement is all about.

The proposed change has been brought forth by scouters Long Tran and Huu Tran based on several reasons. I would like to address some of them below.

While I am not qualified academically to comment on the technicalities of which Vietnamese words more closely represent the translation of the scout motto “**Be Prepared**”, in common everyday usage the words “Sấn-Sàng” connotes more a sense of readiness than a process of preparation. Being ready and being prepared are two very different things. One can be **READY** and **WILLING**, but be totally **UNPREPARED**. In the very practical sense, what is it that we want to teach our youth? Is it readiness or is it preparation? I think there could be arguments made for each, but for myself I stress to my scouts (and my children) that preparation is a huge part of being successful. The process of preparation—learning, organizing, planning, etc can be directly correlated to chance of success. To me, the words “Sấn-Sàng” are not a closer translation of the words “Be Prepared.”

Beyond the technicalities, the issue was also brought up that the words “Sấp-Sấn” are not used anywhere else except for in Vietnamese scouting and that some parents of scouts question its meaning. There are many words in Vietnamese scouting that are not used anywhere else. Where else do you see or use any of these words: “**liên đoàn, kha sinh, tuyên húa**”? I think every organization has its own language and jargon that is used commonly by its members but may not be widely known or used by others. When you join an organization, its part of your integration into the group to learn its specific jargon. Anyone who has started a new job with a new company has experienced this...the words are no less meaningful just because they are specific to the organization.

The words “Sấp-Sấn” are a hyphenated word formed from two other words to form a more meaningful “new” word. Many may say this is just “making up” new words...but there is nothing wrong with that! **Language is a dynamic thing**, a few years ago no one knew what a “selfie” is, but it has become an accepted part of our lexicon now. While the words “Sấp-Sấn” are not new, it is also an accepted part of our scouting lexicon now—so why change? We should change if we could all point to the obvious improvement of the change. This is not the case. Change is only good if it is for the **BETTER**...change for its own sake is not good.

As a young Vietnamese girl growing up in the US in the 1980's, I struggled with trying to assimilate to this land while learning and honoring my Vietnamese roots and traditions. Joining the Vietnamese scouting movement was huge part of keeping my Vietnamese identity alive. I continue that with my own children today. As a Vietnamese American adult, I appreciate the weight of history and tradition that the words "Sấp-Sấn" carry with them. In my opinion, the proposed alternative has neither the tradition and history nor does it improve upon the meaning and usefulness of the motto. For this reason and the ones above, I would not be in favor of changing the words of the Vietnamese scout motto.

Yours in Scouting,
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