

## Vietnamese verbs

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This essay gives the grammatical characteristics of this important part of speech in Vietnamese and discusses the function of a verb within the predicate (or verb phrase) in its relation to preverbs (which may precede it to mark negation, aspect, tense, degree, frequency, etc.), to post-verbs (which may follow it to indicate repetition, direction, degree, result, etc.), and also to nouns, other verbs or embedded sentences which may trail behind.

Indeed, unlike the English verb, whose inflections serve to denote gender, person, number, tense, voice, etc., the verb in Vietnamese manifests syntactico-semantic categories by means of both kinds of lexemes (i.e. monemes): word order being an important syntactic device, either one "morpheme" (or more) or one "semanteme" (or more) may occur before or after the main verb.

### What is a Vietnamese Verb?

Let us begin by defining the verb class in Vietnamese. The verb is a syntactic word which denotes an action, a process, a state or a quality, and which can be either preceded by the negative lexeme *không* "not" or followed by the lexeme *rồi* "to complete,—already". Some verbs can also follow one of the imperative markers *hãy* "do ..., be sure to ...", *đừng* or *chớ* "don't ...". The latter markers distinguish a verb of action (or functive verb) from a verb of state or quality (or stative verb):

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| (1) Tôi không đi.    | "I'm not going; I didn't go; I won't go." |
| (2) Tôi chưa đi.     | "I haven't gone yet; I didn't go yet."    |
| (3) Tôi đi rồi.      | "I already went."                         |
| (4) Anh hãy đi đi.   | "Go (away)!"                              |
| (5) Anh đừng đi.     | "Don't go."                               |
| (6) Anh chớ (có) đi. | "Don't you go!"                           |

Stative verbs such as *cao* "to be tall", *lùn* "(of person) to be short", *dài* "to be long", *ngắn* "(of lesson, stick) to be short", *tốt* "to be good", *xấu* "to be bad", etc. are equivalent to adjectives in English, but do not require the copula *là* (often translated as "to be"). Typically such verbs of state or quality may be preceded by a degree marker (*rất* "very", *hơi*, *khí*, *khá* "rather, pretty"):

- |                        |                                    |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (7) Người-Dơi rất cao. | "Batman's very tall."              |
| (8) Nam khá cao.       | "Nam's pretty tall (for his age)." |
| (9) Ông hơi lùn.       | "Ông's a little (too) short."      |

(10) Bài này khá dài. "This lesson is a little too long."

A degree marker cannot precede a verb of action:

(11) \*Anh ấy rất đi. ?

The following sentence, where the imperative precedes a stative verb, is not grammatical:

(12) \*Anh hãy cao! "Be tall!"

### Tense, Number, Voice, etc.

Another distinctive feature of Vietnamese verbs is the absence of tense inflection, as shown in the translations of the above examples. "A sentence refers to the basic time of the context—that is the time which has been made clear in the context up to that point." (Thompson 1965:209) Furthermore, the form of the verb does not change according to the time when the action or process takes place:

(13) Năm ngoái tôi đã đi Hải-phòng rồi. "I already went to Haiphong last year."

(14) Tuần này tôi đi Hải-phòng. "I will go (= am going) to H. this week."

(15) Tháng sau tôi (sẽ) đi Hải-phòng. "I'll go to Haiphong next month."

The use of *đã* "already", *sẽ* "will, shall", etc. is possible but not obligatory. Nguyễn Kim Thân (1977:178-179) found that the frequency of these tense markers is lowest in writings in the natural sciences, slightly higher in the spoken language and in literary works (6.5% to 8%), rather high in writings in the social sciences (17% to 20%), and highest in news stories (30%).

Vietnamese verbs do not indicate person or number either, since these categories are made obvious by the context:

(16) Bố cháu đi Hải-phòng hôm qua rồi ạ. "My dad went to Haiphong yesterday."

(17) Ngày kia Bố đi Hải-phòng. (Father speaking) "I'm going to Haiphong the day after tomorrow."

(18) Hôm nay tôi đi xem chiếu bóng. "I'm going to the movies today."

(19) Mai mẹ đi (à-lạt) à? "So, Mom, you're going to Dalat tomorrow?" or "Is (our) mom going to Dalat tomorrow?"

(20) Các ông ấy đi rồi. "Those gentlemen have already left."

(21) Hôm nay chúng tôi đi. "We're leaving today."

(22) Sáng mai các anh đã đi rồi à? "Are you guys leaving tomorrow morning already?"

With regard to voice, only the context clarifies the direction of an action, the presence or absence of the feature (+pleasant) serving to trigger the use of a submissive verb—strictly a transitive verb—such as

được	"to get, obtain, receive, find, etc."
bị	"to suffer, sustain, undergo, contract."
phải	"to suffer, encounter, face, etc."
chịu	"to sustain, endure, stand, accept, admit."

Examples:

(23) X. được vàng.	"X found/hit gold."
(24) X. được (thầy giáo) thưởng.	"X was rewarded (by the teacher)."
(25) X. bị (bệnh) lao.	"X has TB."
(26) X. bị (cô giáo) phạt.	"X was punished (by the teacher)."
(27) X. phải gió (= trúng gió).	"X was caught in a draft."
(28) X. chịu thua.	"X conceded defeat."

In example (24), the object of *được* (+pleasant) is an embedded sentence (Thầy giáo thưởng X.) "The teacher (male) rewarded X", just as in example (26), *bị* (-pleasant) takes as object the embedded sentence (Cô giáo phạt X.) "The teacher (female) punished X." (Nguyễn Ính-Hoà 1972; Clark 1978). So strictly speaking Vietnamese uses only the active voice.

### Reduplications

To express repetition or extension, verbs (functive or stative) can be repeated, and reduplicative forms containing alliteration or rime help the language acquire more vividness since varied patterns of total or partial reduplication serve to emphasize reiteration, intensification, attenuation, or even irony:

(29) quen quen	"to know slightly, be slightly acquainted"
(30) cười cười	"lightly, seem to smile; to keep smiling"
(31) rung rung	"to quiver, move, stir lightly"
(32) rung rinh	"to bob, swing, sway" (< rung "to shake")
(33) làm lụng	"to work, toil" (< làm "to work")
(34) ngập ngừng	"to hesitate" (< ngừng "to stop")
(35) ao ước	"to wish" (< ước "to wish")
(36) lúng túng	"not to know what to do" (< túng "hard up")
(37) ki ca ki cốp	"to collect bit by bit, hoard" (< ki cốp < cốp "to gather")
(38) dủng dả dủng đỉnh	"to dilly-dally" (< dủng đỉnh "to dawdle, take one's time")
(39) vẽ vẽ	"to paint, draw (at all)" (< vẽ "to draw")
(40) học hiệc	"to study (at all)" (< học "to study")

Some reduplications cannot be analyzed as consisting of an obvious base followed or preceded by a derived form:

(41) ăn năn	"to repent, be sorry"
(42) cằn nhằn	"to grumble, gripe"
(43) phàn nàn	"to complain"

Indeed the form *ăn năn* in example 41 is actually a verb-object compound, in which *năn* denotes "a bitter grass which is chewed as an act of repentance": this meaning, recorded in 1651 (Nguyễn (ình-Hoà 1986), is no longer apparent since the two-syllable word is considered a riming reduplication.

A coordinate compound (see below) such as *nói cười* "to speak + to smile" can be reduplicated to yield a four-syllable expression *cười cười nói nói* "to smile and speak animatedly."

The coverbs *đi* "to go" and *lại* "to come" which serve primarily to indicate direction (see below) are used in the following expressions to mark reiteration:

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| (44) làm đi làm lại   | "to do over and over again"            |
| (45) viết đi viết lại | "to write over and over several times" |
| (46) dặn đi dặn lại   | "to keep repeating a message"          |

### Coverbs of Direction

The category of direction is expressed by means of postverbs or coverbs, that is to say, verbs which occur following the main verb and play a "secondary" role. They are reduced to the status of morphemes by the mere fact of appearing after full verbs: thus, *đi* (see above) will mean "off, away" when occurring after such a main verb of motion as *bay* "to fly" or *chạy* "to run."

- |              |                     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| (47) bay đi  | "to fly off / away" |
| (48) chạy đi | "to run away"       |

The pairs *đi* and *lại*, already encountered in examples 44-46, and similar pairs of verbs of motion such as *lên-xuống* "to go up" and "to go down", *ra-vào* "to go out" and "to go in", *tới-lùi* "to move forward" and "to move backward" add the idea of a to-and-fro movement:

- |                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| (49) bay đi bay lại    | "to fly back and forth" |
| (50) bay lên bay xuống | "to fly up and down"    |
| (51) chạy ra chạy vào  | "to run in and out"     |

Coverbs of direction, themselves full-fledged verbs of motion, play such an important part in verb phrases that they deserve some further comments.

The same verb *đi* discussed above can signal an injunction or urging (example 4), express the idea of destruction, erasure, severance, or just wear and tear:

- |         |                                  |
|---------|----------------------------------|
| bỏ đi   | "to abandon, leave out, discard" |
| cưa đi  | "to saw off, cut off, amputate"  |
| quên đi | "to forget"                      |
| mòn đi  | "to wear out"                    |

or a change for the worse:

già đi	"to age"
gầy đi	"to become thinner, skinny, emaciated, lose weight"
nghèo đi	"to become poor(er), impoverished"
or the idea of silence following a period of activity:	
im đi	"to keep quiet, shut up"
băng đi	"(of news) to stop coming"

The verb *ra*, which ordinarily indicates a movement "from the interior to the exterior, from one state to another, from a void to existence" (Trần Trọng Kim and others 1943:148), with the starting point comparatively less spacious and less well lit than the area of destination, also denotes growth, expansion, dismantling, separation or disentanglement:

cởi ra	"to untie, take off (clothes)"
tháo ra	"to untie, take apart, dismantle"
thả/thả ra	"to release, turn loose, set free",
hiện ra	"to appear"
or a spreading process:	
loang ra	"(of color, stain) to spread"
toé ra	"to splash"

or a movement from the seacoast to the ocean, from the shore to the water.

Furthermore, within the context of Vietnamese geography, "to go north" is *đi ra bắc* ("go + exit + north"). If a person starts at Nha-trang, a coastal town in Central Vietnam, and moves up to Huế, for instance, the phrase denoting his/her travel plan is *đi ra Huế*. On the other hand, *vào* "to enter" is used when one moves from a given location to another situated further south: *vào Huế* means "to go (south) to Huế—from Hanoi, for instance," and *vào Saigon* means "to go (south) to Saigon—from Huế, (à-nhã, Nha-trang, etc.)"

The postverb *lên* "to ascend" denotes an upward motion both literally and figuratively speaking. The movement may indeed be toward a higher altitude (e.g. *gửi lên Buôn Ma Thuột* "to send up to Banmethuot") or toward a higher-ranking agency or official (e.g. *trình lên Thủ-tướng* "to report to the Premier", *gửi lên Bộ* "to send up to the Ministry"). Administrative and military echelons and layers of office-holders even today are clearly defined in the highly status and hierarchy-minded Vietnamese society, so the appropriate use of *lên* and its opposite *xuống* "to descend" is almost automatic.

As shown under their respective head verbs, the directional postverbs or coverbs further help us identify a verb of action (or functive verb) as opposed to a verb of quality or state (or stative verb): one says *đem ra* "to bring out", *đem vào* "to bring in", *đem lên* "to bring up", *đem xuống* "to bring down", but with *đen* "to be black/dark", one cannot have *\*đen vào*, *\*đen lên* or *\*đen xuống*.

The sequence *đen ra* means something else in another context, where *ra* does not add a direction, but the nuance that the person described has acquired a good suntan: since before the sunbathing craze caught on, a dark complexion was not a desirable thing, especially among Vietnamese women, the coverb *đi* may be used instead, and the difference between *đen ra* and *đen đi* "to become/look darker" reflects an esthetic attitude toward health and appearance.

Let us also note the related category of orientation, which is present in such phrases as *cầm lấy* "to take hold of", *ôm lấy* "to embrace, hug" involving the verb *lấy* "to take" or such a sentence as (*ể tôi viết cho* "Let me write it for (you)," in which the word *anh* (or *cô, ông, bà, etc.*) denoting the beneficiary may be omitted, or *Sao lại để nó mắng cho?* "Why did you let him scold you like that?" (There is also an entirely different postverb *lấy* which means "(by) oneself, without someone's help").

### Coverbs of Result

In resultative constructions (52) like *nghe thấy*, the primary verb (meaning "to listen", "to look", "to sniff", "to touch" respectively) is helped by the coverb of result *thấy* "to perceive":

- |      |                         |                                  |
|------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (52) | <i>nghe thấy</i>        | "to hear"                        |
|      | <i>nhìn thấy</i>        | "to see"                         |
|      | <i>ngửi thấy</i>        | "to smell"                       |
|      | <i>sờ thấy</i>          | "to feel (by touching)"          |
| 53)  | <i>tìm thấy</i>         | "to find (after looking)"        |
|      | <i>kiếm thấy</i>        | "to find (after searching)"      |
| 54)  | <i>X tìm được vàng.</i> | "X found/struck gold." (= ex 19) |

Whereas the postverb *được* indicates an advantage, its opposite *phải*, whose core meaning is "to suffer, be hit," indicates a disadvantage. Compare:

- (55) *X lấy được cô vợ đẹp.* "X (fortunately) married a pretty girl."  
 (56) *X lấy phải cô vợ xấu.* "X (unluckily) married a homely girl."

The function of *mất* "to lose" as a coverb of result is clear from this example:

- (57) *X tiêu mất nửa tháng lương.* "X spent half of his monthly salary."

### Compounds

A syntactic word in Vietnamese most often consists of one syllable: *đi* "to go", *ăn* "to eat", *học* "to study", *nhà* "house, home", *chuối* "banana", etc. But a word can also be disyllabic: *cám ơn* "to thank", *tranh-đấu* "to struggle/struggle", *nhân-dân* "the people", *lớp học* "classroom", *châu-chấu* "grasshopper", *ba-bà* "river turtle", *mãng-cụt* (a borrowing from Malay) "mangosteen", *xà-phòng* (a loanword from French) "soap", etc.

There are numerous examples of such two-syllable verbs that can be traced to the so-called Sino-Vietnamese compounds: *đầu-phiếu* "to cast the ballot, vote", *phát-ngân* "to disburse", *phủ-quyết* "to veto", *truy-tố* "to prosecute", *tuyển-cử* "to elect", *xuất-cảng/xuất-khẩu* "to export", etc.

There are even words with three syllables: *lung-tung-beng* "pell-mell, in a medley", *quan-sát-viên* "observer", *ba-đờ-xuy* (< French pardessus) "overcoat", *bất-thình-lình* "all of a sudden", *vô-nhân-đạo* "inhuman", etc. In formal writings, particularly journalistic texts, some three-syllable compounds occur frequently to

convey notions of verbalization suggestive of English derivatives containing suffixes -fy or -ize: *bình-thường-hoá* "to normalize", *hợp-pháp-hoá* "to legalize", *tri-thức-hoá* "to intellectualize", *công-nghiệp-hoá* or *kỹ-nghệ-hoá* "to industrialize", *trung-lập-hoá* "to neutralize", *âu-hoá* "to europeanize", *Việt-hoá* "to vietnamize", etc.

The one-syllable lexeme—called *semanteme*, *moneme*, *morpheme* in Western languages, and *tiếng*, *tứ-tổ ngữ-vị* or *hình-vị* in Vietnamese—enters combinations called compounds, of which there are the following kinds, to limit our discussion to verb forms only:

A. Coordinate Compounds (V-V). Examples are *thương yêu* "to love and to cherish", *ăn uống* "to eat and drink", *mua bán* "to buy and to sell—to shop", *được thua* "to win and to lose, to succeed and to fail." This type of compound consisting of two synonyms or antonyms in juxtaposition is called a reversible compound if either order is possible: for example, *bồng bế* or *bế bồng* "to carry (a baby) in one's arms", *kính trọng* or *trọng kính* "to respect."

Some synonym compounds may not look as such, because one of the constituents is an archaic word, often unanalyzable to the native speaker, as in the following examples:

lo âu	"to worry" (âu = lo)
hỏi han	"to inquire, ask (in order to show concern)" (han = hỏi)
sum vầy	"to be united (as a family)" (vầy = sum)

Sometimes the members of a verb compound are not verbs themselves, but two nouns (N-N):

rượu chè	"alcohol + tea,-- to drink, get drunk"
trai gái	"boy + girl,-- to flirt, have amorous relations"
chăn chiếu	"blanket + sleeping mat,-- to live a marital life"

In the spoken language, and chiefly in the interrogative and the negative, rhetorical effects are achieved by inserting *với* (*chẳng/chả*) "and" between the two constituents of this type of compound:

*Buôn với bán gì cái bà ấy!* "How can she be a businesswoman?" (*buôn bán* "to buy wholesale + to sell,—to engage in trade" has been made discontinuous)

*Gạo đầu mà nấu với (chả) nướng!* "How can I do any cooking without rice?" (*nấu nướng* "to cook + to grill/roast,—to cook" is the compound that has been split)

The object (see below) of a coordinate compound is also likely to be a collective noun (such as *hàng họ* "goods, merchandise" from *hàng*, or *tiệc tùng* "dinners, banquets" from *tiệc*) or the indefinite pronoun *gì/chi* "anything":

Cô ấy chẳng biết buôn-bán hàng-họ gì cả.  
 "She doesn't know beans about buying and selling."

Mấy ngày nay tôi không nấu-nướng gì cả.  
 "I haven't done any cooking these past few days."

B. Verb-Noun Compounds (V-N). These compounds can be subdivided into two groups: those in which the noun is the object of the head verb, and those in which the noun serves as a complement to the verb nucleus. Examples of these verb-object (V-O) compounds are:

- |    |              |  |
|----|--------------|--|
| 1. | cảm / cảm ơn | "to feel + favor,-- to thank"                  |
|    | có tiếng     | "to have + reputation,-- to be famous"         |
|    | thiệt mạng   | "to lose + life,-- to die"                     |
|    | lâm-bệnh     | "to enter + illness,-- to become sick"         |
| 2. | ăn sáng      | "to eat + morning,-- to have breakfast"        |
|    | đi chân      | "to walk/go + foot,-- to walk"                 |
|    | ăn đũa       | "to eat + chopstick,-- to eat with chopsticks" |
|    | nằm đất      | "to lie + ground,-- to sleep on the floor"     |
|    | ngủ trưa     | "to sleep + noontime,-- to take a siesta"      |
|    | tắm sông     | "to bathe + river,-- to bathe in the river"    |

Many compounds are Chinese loanwords: *điểm-tâm* "to dot + heart,-- (to have a) snack, (have) breakfast" (cf. English *dim sum*), *xuất-cảng* "to exit + harbor,-- to export", *nhập-khẩu* "to enter + port,-- to import", etc.

Special notice is due certain "solid" compounds, whose idiomatic meaning cannot be gathered from the meanings of the parts: contrast *đánh tiếng* "to strike + noise (rumor, reputation),-- to put out a feeler" and *đánh máy* "to hit + machine,-- to type." The latter can be expanded into *đánh cái máy này* "to use this typewriter" whereas nothing can be inserted between the nuclear verb and its object in the former phrase: in other words, the integrity of the lexical compound *đánh tiếng* cannot be violated.

Such idiomatic collocations often comprise as head verb a "linking or classificatory verb" (see the section on Verb subclasses) such as *đâm/hoã/thành* "to become", *làm* "to act as, function as", *như* "to be like", or even *đánh* "to hit, strike" (comparable to the so-called "middle verbs" in English like become, resemble, cost, measure, etc.):

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| đi lính   | "to go + soldier,-- to serve in the army, enlist, join the army" |
| làm khách | "to act as + guest,-- to be polite, stand on ceremony"           |
| ở vú      | "to live + nursemaid,-- to work as a wet nurse"                  |
| đánh bạn  | "to strike + friend,-- to befriend"                              |
|           | (cf. English to strike up a friendship)                          |
| đánh đĩ   | "to strike + prostitute,-- to become/be a whore"                 |

Such word formations are discussed in detail in Hồ Lê (1976), Nguyễn Kim Thân (1977), and the most frequently occurring verb compounds, both native and Chinese-borrowed, are given in Nguyễn (inh-Hoà (1979).

Ideally, in a lexicographic corpus, such collocations should be clearly defined with a view to showing (a) how a free construction differs from a "frozen"

idiom (trả nợ "to pay a debt" is different from trả lời "to return + words,-- to answer, reply"), and (b) how language reflects culture: for example, the expression chống gậy containing the verb chống "to lean on" means literally "to use a walking stick", but in the context of a funeral procession requires such a gloss as "(of a man) to walk (backward) behind one's father's hearse, leaning upon a cane."

C. Verb-Complement Compounds (V-V' or V-A). This third type of compounds shows a main verb followed by its complement, which may be a "coverb" (V') or a stative verb (A):

trông thấy	"to look + to perceive,-- to see"
ăn no	"to eat + to be satiated,-- to eat one's fill"
nhìn lên	"to look + to ascend,-- to look up"
ăn sống	"to eat + to be raw,-- to eat raw"
mở rộng	"to open + to be wide,-- to open wide"
nhấn mạnh	"to press + to be strong,-- to emphasize"
(á) đảo	"to knock + to topple,-- Down with .....!"

Likewise, in other specialized idioms, the postverb adds the notion of intensity or completeness: *nghiền* "tight" is found only after *nhắm* "to close (one's eyes)", and *hốc* "wide open" occurs only following *há* "to open (one's mouth)." Here stylistics dictates the use of a specific postverb following a given verb: in *trói nghiền* "to tie up instantly" the intensifier *nghiến* is restricted to its companion verb *trói* "to tie up (a person)."

Whether the object noun occurs between the main verb and its coverb or following the combination V-V' makes a difference. Contrast, for instance, the sequences V N V' *đóng cửa lại* "to close the door" and V V' N *đóng lại cửa* "to close the door again (because it was not done right the first time)." Or compare *để sách lại*, the verb phrase V N V' which means "to leave the book(s) behind, not to take it/them" as opposed to the V V' N phrase *để lại sách* "to leave (or resell) books (to someone)."

D. Subordinate Compounds (M-V or M-N). These last ones merit a brief note, in as much as the Vietnamese lexicon contains a large number of Chinese loanwords that have retained the word order of the donor language. Most subordinate compounds, often hyphenated in formal texts, are made up of a modifier (M) preceding a verb (V) or a noun (N), both modifier and modified being Chinese-borrowed monemes: *bộ-hành* "step + to go,-- to walk; pedestrian", *điện-thoại* "electric + conversation,-- telephone; to telephone", etc.

On the model of such forms as *âu-hoá* "to europeanize", *Việt-hoá* or *Việt-nam-hoá* "to vietnamize", *thần-thánh-hoá* "to idolize", *quốc-hữu-hoá* "to nationalize", etc. several disciplines have even coined such new terms as *môi-hoá* "to labialize", *mũi-hoá* "to nasalize", *riêng-hoá* " (of common noun) to become a proper noun" (in linguistics), *ion-hoá* "to ionize" (in physics), *đá ong hoá* "to become laterite" (in geology), etc. (Nguyễn (inh-Hoà 1986)

## Verb subclasses

The identification of subclasses among Vietnamese verbs has been attempted by several modern descriptivists (Emeneau 1951, Thompson 1965, Nguyễn (ăng Liêm 1969, Trương Văn Chính 1970, Bửu Khải 1972, Nguyễn Kim Thán 1979, to name only a few). Although this essay is by no means a complete statement on the verb class in Vietnamese, a classificatory scheme will be attempted, merely to suggest that several subclasses can be usefully discriminated on the basis of both semantic features and co-occurrences with preverbs, postverbs and objects (direct, indirect or cognate).

(A) With regard to relations of transitivity, it is important first of all to note that the verb-object (V-O) relation in Vietnamese is very complex. Take the verb of action *ăn* "to eat." Its "object" can mean the goal (*ăn cơm* "to eat rice; to eat a meal") as well as the instrument (*ăn bát nhỏ* "to eat in small bowls"), the place (*ăn hiệu* "to eat in a restaurant", *ăn ngoài* "to eat out", *ăn (ại-La-Thiên* "to eat at Dai-La-Thien Restaurant—a famous eating place in Chợ-lớn, Saigon's Chinatown"), or the time (*ăn sáng* "to have breakfast, eat the morning meal", *ăn trưa* "to have lunch, eat the noontime meal").

(B) In the case of an "intransitive" verb such as *ngồi* "to sit" or *ngủ* "to sleep", it can take a cognate object, as in *ngồi một lúc* "to sit a moment, sit a while", *ngủ tám tiếng (đồng hồ)* "to sleep (for) eight hours", and of course a complement also, as in *ngồi xổm* "to squat", *ngủ ngồi* "to sleep in a sitting position."

(C) Verbs of existence, appearance and disappearance are best interpreted as "intransitive":

Gạo có không?	"Does some rice exist?--Is there any rice?"
Gạo còn không?	"Is there some rice left?"
Gạo hết rồi.	"The rice is all gone."

In the first example, "the subject has existence predicated of itself" (Emeneau 1951:65). This core meaning is even clearer when the verb precedes the noun in what has been called a "subjectless sentence":

Có gạo không?	"Is there any rice?"
Còn gạo không?	"Is there any rice left?"
Hết gạo rồi.	"There isn't any rice left."

With both subject and object present, i.e. in a full relation of transitivity, as in *Tôi có gạo* "I have some rice", "the subject has the existence of the object predicated with reference to itself" (Emeneau, loc. cit.). English equivalents then usually contain such glosses as "to have, own, possess" (for *có*), "to have ... left" (for *còn*, basically "to remain, be left, survive") or "to have no more, have exhausted the supply of" (for *hết*, basically "to be finished, be used up, be exhausted, be no more").

(D) Modal auxiliary verbs, for instance *có thể* "can, is able to, may", *muốn* "to want to, desire to", *cần* "to need to", *dám* "to dare (to)", *định* "to intend to", etc., are closely tied to the main verb. In a yes-or-no question of the type

V-or-not-V, the sequence aux + main verb as a whole can fit into the syntactic frame *có ..... không?* or *đã ..... chưa?*:

Anh có muốn đi không?	"Do you want to go?"
Anh đã muốn đi chưa?	"Do you want to go yet?"
Anh có thể đi (được) không?	"Can you go?" (có thể already means "to have the capability")

Thus the auxiliary verb has predicative value, unlike a tense marker (*đã* "completive", *sẽ* "future", *vừa, mới*, or *vừa mới* "recent past", etc.). It can even stand by itself, as in

Anh có cần không?	"Do you need it?"
Anh đã cần chưa?	"Do you need it yet?"

The affirmative answer to either of these two questions may be just *Cần*. "Yes, I do (need it)."

Furthermore, an auxiliary verb can take an adverb of degree like *rất* "very" because the ability, will, desire, intention, etc. that it denotes is measurable.

*Muốn, cần*, and *thèm* sometimes function as semi-active verbs and mean respectively "to desire", "to need", and "to crave for (something)."

(E) The copula *là* "to be so-and-so", which has been called an "identificational marker" (Thompson 1965:206ff), introduces a substantive predicate and can be preceded by *đã* "past, anterior", *sẽ* "will, shall", *còn* "still; also", *cũng* "likewise, also, too", *vẫn* (*còn*) "still", etc.

Tôi là người Việt-nam.	"I'm (a) Vietnamese."
Hôm nay (là) chủ nhật.	"Today is Sunday."
Mai (sẽ) là thứ hai.	"Tomorrow will be Monday."
Bà ấy cũng là người Hà-nội.	"She's also a native of Hanoi."

Negation involves the phrase *không phải* "it is not correct (that)": *Không phải tôi là người Pháp*. "It's not correct that I am a Frenchman," and when the subject is moved to the front, the sentence reads *Tôi không phải là người Pháp* "I am not French." (\**Tôi không là người Pháp* is ungrammatical.)

(F) Linking or classificatory verbs, which cannot occur without an attributive, are comparable to the English verbs *become* and *resemble* (Nguyễn ãnh-Hoà 1974:316-317):

Con cá hoá (ra con) rồng.	"The fish turned into a dragon."
Thái-tử thành Phật.	"The Prince became Buddha."
X trở thành bác-sĩ.	"X became a doctor."
X làm thợ sơn.	"X is a house painter."

(For idiomatic usage, see section on V-N Compounds above.)

The last sentence answers the question *X làm gì?* "What does X do (for a living)?" Here *là* can substitute for *làm*, resulting in *X là thợ sơn* "X is a house

painter", a likely response to something said erroneously about X's being a carpenter, for instance.

The attribute of *làm* can further be topicalized:

Thợ, anh có làm không? "Would you accept a blue-collar worker job?"  
 Gác gian, X cũng làm rồi. "X even worked as a janitor."

At any rate, sentences containing a verb of becoming but no attribute are ungrammatical:

- \*Con cá hoá
- \*X trở thành.
- \*Thái-tử thành.
- \*X làm.

(G) Beside taking a direct object, such quotative verbs (i. e. verbs of thinking, knowing and saying) as the equivalents of English to *remember, know, miss* (someone, something) often have a sentence (S) as object:

Tôi nghĩ rằng (S).	"I think that ....."
Tôi cho rằng (S).	"I feel/think that ....."
Tôi tưởng rằng (S).	"I mistakenly thought that ..."

(H) Some verbs can be followed by certain postverbs of direction, result, repetition, but others cannot. The environments \_\_\_\_ *ra*, \_\_\_\_ *vào*, \_\_\_\_ *lên*, \_\_\_\_ *xuống*, \_\_\_\_ *đi*, \_\_\_\_ *lại* serve to identify the vast majority of transitive verbs.

Certain of them are multi-directional verbs and yield sequences similar to English *run out, run in, run up, run down, run off, run back*. Others are mono-directional, just like English *stretch out, spit out; pile up; kneel down; break up* (a crowd), etc.

It is interesting that, whereas coordinate compounds (such as *ăn uống* "to eat and drink", *buôn bán* "to trade") and reduplications (such as *sửa sang* "to repair, fix", *trồng trọt* "to till, cultivate") cannot take coverbs of repetition, direction or intensity, Chinese-borrowed compounds denoting social and political activities such as *bãi-công* "to strike", *biểu-tình* "to demonstrate" (V-N compounds) or *đấu-tranh* "to struggle", *huấn-luyện* "to train" (V-V compounds) can be repeated with the pair \_\_\_\_ *đi* \_\_\_\_ *lại*, or the pair \_\_\_\_ *lên* \_\_\_\_ *xuống*.

(I) Of the three subclasses of ditransitive verbs, i.e. double-object verbs, we will only give some illustrative examples, in which IO, the indirect object or complement, and DO, the direct object, may switch positions just as in English (Nguyễn (inh-Hoà 1974:218-221; 343).

1. with a verb of **giving** (DO expressing the gift, and IO its recipient):  
 X tặng tôi (IO) món tiền (DO). "X gave me a sum of money."  
 =====> X tặng món tiền (DO) cho tôi (IO).

2. with a verb of **taking or receiving** (IO expressing the source or donor):  
 X vay bà ấy (IO) tiền (DO). "X borrowed money from her."  
 =====> X vay tiền (DO) của bà ấy (IO).

3. with a verb of **insertion** (a limited movement stopping at the goal):  
 X thọc tay (DO) vào túi (IO). "X thrust his hand into his pocket."  
 =====> X thọc vào túi (IO) cái bàn tay đen bẩn (DO). "X thrust his  
 dirty hand into his pocket." Cf. \*X thọc vào túi tay, an ill-formed sentence.

4. with a verb of **evaluation** (involving a judgment that equates DO with  
 the complement Compl):

Họ bầu Nam (DO) làm chủ-tịch (Compl).

"They elected Nam chairperson."

=====> Họ bầu làm chủ-tịch (Compl) một anh bất-lực. "They elected an  
 incompetent guy as chairperson." Cf. \*Họ bầu làm chủ-tịch Nam, an ill-formed  
 sentence.

(J) Causative verbs, equivalent to *make, permit, allow, invite, urge, or forbid, prohibit* in English, have been called "telescoping verbs" since in the construction V1 N V2, N is at the same time object of the main verb V1 and subject of the second verb V2.

NOTE: Unlike the sentence in English, the example X mời Y ăn cơm tối  
 "X invited Y to have dinner." can be shortened to either

X mời Y.

"X invited Y." or

X mời ăn cơm tối.

"X invited (someone) to have dinner."

The three verbs *bắt, buộc, or bắt buộc* "to force, compel, coerce" may  
 entail the preposing of *phải* "must, have to" (an auxiliary verb) before the second  
 verb: X bắt buộc họ (phải) đình-công "X forced them to go on strike." The  
 object noun (N) can be fronted, resulting in a "passive" sentence: Họ bắt buộc  
 phải đình-công "They were forced to go on strike."

(K) The object of each verb of bodily movement is a noun denoting a part  
 of the human or animal body: just as in English a man shrugs his shoulders but not  
 his knees, or a pig wags his tail but not his snout, both the verb and its object are  
 specific to a Vietnamese construction:

X há mồm/miệng ra.

"X opened his mouth",

which can be converted to

Mồm/miệng X há ra. "X's mouth opened"

Likewise *Con chó ngoe-nguẩy cái đuôi.* "The dog wagged his tail" would  
 give *Cái đuôi con chó ngoe-nguẩy.* "The dog's tail was wagging."

## A classification of verbs

Through a semantic analysis of transitivity relations and the use of criteria of  
 combinatory possibilities, it is possible to suggest a classificatory scheme for  
 Vietnamese verbs. This is a slightly revised version of an earlier list of verb

subclasses (Nguyễn (ình-Hoà 1971a), where adjectives are also included—as verbs of state and quality. Nguyễn Kim Thân's (1977) label "endomotivus" fits my subclasses 1, 5 and 6, and his label "exomotivus" certainly covers my subclasses 7 through 11. He calls the subclasses 2 and 3 below "neutral verbs", and treats the auxiliary verbs (my subclass 3) separately as "modal verbs", and to him the copula *là* (subclass 4) does not enjoy verb status.

### 1. Non-action verbs (intransitive ?).

These include some verbs of static position: *đứng* "to stand", *ngồi* "to sit", *nằm* "to lie down", *ngủ* "to sleep", *ngáy* "to snore", *ngã* "to fall" *thức* "to stay awake, stay up", etc.

### 2. Verbs of existence, appearance and disappearance.

Examples are *có* "to exist", *còn* "to remain, survive", *hết* "to be used up", *mọc, nẩy* "to erupt", *đâm, trổ* "to sprout, bud", etc.

### 3. Auxiliary verbs.

These helping verbs include such modals as: *có thể* "can, may", *phải* "must, have to", *cần* "need/have to", *muốn* "want to", *định* "plan to, intend to", *toan* "be about to", *dám* "dare to", etc.

4. Copula: *là* "to be so-and-so, equal; that is, namely; as; (think, know, ...) that"—an "identificational marker" (Thompson 1965:236-7), an equative verb which is like the "=" sign.

### 5. Linking or classificatory verbs.

Verbs of becoming: *đâm* "to become (something worse), turn (bad)", *hoá* "to change into", *thành* "to become", *như* "to be like", *giống* "to resemble", *làm* "to serve/work as", etc.

### 6. Quotative verbs.

This subclass include such verbs of thinking, knowing and saying: *báo* "to say, tell", *biết* "to know (that)", *hiểu* "to understand", *nhớ* "to remember (that)", *tin* "to believe (that)", *nghĩ* "to think (that)", *tưởng* "to think wrongly (that)", *tuyên-bố* "to state, announce", etc.

### 7. Action verbs (transitive ?)

a. Verbs of action: *ăn* "to eat", *uống* "to drink", *mở* "to open", *đóng* "to close", *viết* "to write", etc.

b. Verbs of motion: *ra* "to exit", *vào* "to enter", *lên* "to ascend", *xuống* "to descend", *sang/qua* "to cross over", *về* "to return", *lại* "to come", *đến/đi* "to reach, arrive", etc.

c. Semi-active verbs: *thích* "to like", *yêu* "to love", *thù* "to resent", *được* "to get, obtain, receive", *bị* "to suffer, sustain, undergo", *phải* "to contract, suffer from", *chịu* "to sustain, be resigned to", etc.

### 8. Ditransitive verbs I.

There is a large number of double-object verbs. This subgroup 1 includes such verbs of giving and taking/receiving as: *đưa* "to hand", *giao* "to deliver", *phát* "to distribute", *tặng* "to present", on the one hand, and *vay* "to borrow

(consumable thing, money)", *mượn* "to borrow (tool, car, money)", *nợ* "to owe", *nhận* "to receive", etc., on the other hand. The pattern is:

V + Direct O + cho + Recipient. or V + cho + Recipient + Direct O.  
V + Direct O + của + Patient. or V + của Patient + Direct O.

#### 9. Ditransitive verbs II.

This subgroup 2 comprises verbs of insertion such as: *án* "to push", *điền* "to fill out (blank)", *đút* "to stick (hand into pocket)", *nhồi* "to stuff", *nhét* "to cram", *thọc* "to thrust", *tra* "to sheathe, scabbard", etc. The pattern is:

V + Direct O + vào/vào + Goal.

#### 10. Ditransitive verbs III.

Verbs of evaluation and selection that comprise this subgroup 3 are *coi* "to consider, regard", *gọi* "to call, name", *bầu* "to elect", *cử* "to appoint", *chọn/lựa/tuyển* "to select", etc. The pattern is:

V + Direct Object + là/làm + Complement.

#### 11. Causative verbs.

These "telescoping" verbs make up a sizeable subclass: *cho* "to let, allow, permit", *để* "to let", *làm* "to make, render", *khuyến* "to make", *mời* "to invite", *rủ* "to invite (less formally—for a Dutch treat)", *xin* "to ask, request", *yêu-cầu* "to request", *đòi* (hỏi) "to demand", *giúp* "to help", *ép* "to compel", *khuyến* "to advise", *ngăn* "to prevent, stop", *bắt* / *buộc* / *bắt buộc* "to make, force, coerce", *cấm* "to forbid, prohibit", etc.

#### 12. Verbs of bodily movements.

*gật* "to nod", *lắc* "to shake (head)", *cúi* "to bend (head, neck)", *chúm* "to purse, round (lips)", *vươn* "to stretch (arm, shoulder, neck)", *nhún* "to shrug (shoulders)", *ngheń* "to crane (neck)", etc.

#### 13. Stative verbs (= Adjectives)

This subclass of verbs of state, condition or quality is comparable to the class of Adjectives in English, French, etc. Most authors do not include them in the word-class of verbs and treat them as a separate part of speech.



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