

Linguistics of Vietnamese



An International Survey

Edited by
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Preface

The present collection of chapters grew out of a workshop on “Linguistics of Vietnamese” at the University of Stuttgart in July 2009. The chapters that were accepted for inclusion in this volume have passed at least one internal and one external reviewing cycle, where “internal” refers to reviews written by authors who have themselves contributed to the volume. The external reviewing cycle fulfilled the standards of a double-blind peer review. The following external reviewers have agreed to be acknowledged for sharing their highly valued expertise with us: Walter Bisang, Katie Drager, Mary Erbaugh, Zhuo Jing-Schmidt, Yen-hui Audrey Li, Edgar Onea, Stavros Skopeteas, Thomas Stolz, Rolf Thieroff, Tue Trinh and Henk van Riemsdijk. In addition to these editorial measures, an anonymous reviewer for the whole volume appointed by the publishing house has instigated further changes.

We would like to express our gratitude to the persons and institutions which have had a share in rendering the 2009 workshop and this publication possible. Klaus von Heusinger has certainly been our most encouraging background supporter – thank you, Klaus! Moreover, we gratefully acknowledge Julia Jürgens’ help with the formatting of the contributions, as well as Waltraud Ott’s accounting assistance. Finally, we would like to thank the Fritz Thyssen Foundation for the Promotion of Science, which has supported the workshop with substantial funding. Without it, this volume could no have been realized, either.

The work of the editors is almost done. What remains to be done is to say that it has been a great pleasure for us to prepare this volume. We would like to thank the series editor Walter Bisang for his helpful supervision of the content aspects of the editing process. All authors, and no less Birgit Sievert, Julie Miess and Wolfgang Konwitschny from the publishing house, have had their share in establishing the highly collaborative spirit in which the enterprise “Linguistics of Vietnamese – an international survey” was carried out.

Berlin/Cologne, April 2013
Daniel Hole
Elisabeth Löbel

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Introduction

Linguistic lore has it that Vietnamese (Austro-Asiatic, Việt-Mường) constitutes the paradigm case of an isolating language with lexical tones. Moreover, Vietnamese with its roughly 80 million native speakers worldwide is one of the major languages of East and South East Asia. Nonetheless, detailed knowledge about Vietnamese is somewhat scarce among linguists, and those researchers or students who wish to enhance their knowledge about this language will often find that reliable information is scattered across the most varied publication sources, or is hard to come by for other reasons. To give just one example: One of the most detailed grammars of Vietnamese available in a western language (**Trương Văn Chình** 1970) was written in French and has never been translated into any other language; cf. Thompson 1965 for a comprehensive grammar in English). For this reason, it is generally ignored by the majority of linguists without literacy in French. Given these circumstances, the editors have taken special care to cater to the needs of a readership which should be as broad as possible. Each chapter in this volume is self-contained in the sense that no other chapter, let alone a grammar of Vietnamese, is necessary to make sense of it. Another guiding principle for the editing process has been to take an inclusive stance as far as the commitment to different frameworks and research methodologies is concerned. This decision implies that no attempt was made to level out differences in terminology.

The following survey of the contents of this volume is organized in the following way. We first single out four chapters and discuss them in some detail before the other contributions are briefly summarized. We have chosen this mode of presentation because some of the chapters are not just valuable additions to our knowledge of Vietnamese grammar, they may simultaneously serve to illustrate in a good way the wide array of methodological stances taken by individual contributions to this volume.

Brunelle and Jannedy's study is a contribution to the cutting-edge area of experimental sociophonetics. It demonstrates how the observer's paradox can be rendered fruitful in the domain of Vietnamese tones. The authors show among other things that dialectal traits in the speech of the experimenter influence hearers' perception of stimuli. The methodological position taken in the paper challenges simplistic views of the separation between competence and performance. It emphasizes the life-long (and frequency-dependent) plasticity of speakers' grammars instead. This position is put to work with the help of meticulous experimental design and refined statistical analysis. If we were to attempt a characterization of **Brunelle and Jannedy's** position in a slogan, "a

revision of the competence-performance divide with experimental back-up” would be the result.

The chapter by **Nguyễn** defends a different, highly reductionist and universalist position. In accordance with generative assumptions, **Nguyễn** develops an account of Vietnamese noun phrase, or DP, syntax which derives all possible word orders of noun phrases in all languages from a single universal cascade of functional categories inside the DP. The linearization found with Vietnamese noun phrases is analyzed as one pattern predicted by this universal cascade. The surface linearizations of Vietnamese noun phrases result from the application of movements which are constrained by general principles. It is worth pointing out that the reductionist methodology of **Nguyễn**’s contribution allows one to clearly state the conditions which would falsify the proposal – a highly desirable feature of the analysis. Given the cascade of categories and the movements assumed by the author, certain word orders are predicted not to exist in the languages of the world. If they turn out to be attested in the end, one will be able to discard the proposal. Not all linguistic frameworks have falsifiability conditions which are as clear – at least in theory. All in all, **Nguyễn** may be said to subscribe to “syntax-driven mainstream generativism”.

The authors **Paris** and **Lê** chose a classic topic of research into isolating languages, viz. the syntactic and semantic construal of conjunction and comitativity. Their chapter illustrates the usefulness of a modernized structuralist approach with a strong taxonomic underpinning. By relying mostly on clear distributional diagnostics, **Paris** and **Lê** carve out the detailed generalizations in this area of Vietnamese grammar for the first time. *Và* is established as a true ‘and’-type conjunction, whereas *với* is polysemous between a conjunctive use and a use in which it heads a comitative adjunct. Throughout the chapter, the situation found in Vietnamese is compared with that in Mandarin Chinese and French. “Advanced taxonomic structuralism informed by typology and semantics” could maybe describe the methodological position of the authors.

Hạ’s contribution, by contrast, illustrates a clearly functionalist and conversation-analytic standpoint. The author reports findings about the prosody of repair initiations in Vietnamese telephone calls. These findings are paired with an autosegmental analysis which accounts for different interaction patterns of lexical tones with repair-initializing high boundary tones. By tying the presence of high boundary tones to the function of the conversation-analytic category of repair initiation (as opposed to, say, the signaling of discourse incompleteness), **Hạ** subscribes to a research paradigm which prefers intuitively grounded basic notions over highly abstract principles for which language users lack intuitions: “autosegmentally-informed conversation analysis”, in a slogan.

	Author(s)	Title	Further specification of content
Phonology/ Phonetics	Marc Brunelle/ Stefanie Jannedy	The Cross-dialectal Perception of Vietnamese Tones: Indexicality and Convergence	Sociophonetics, Tonal Phonology
	Hạ Kiều Phương	Prosodic means in repair initiation as an activity in Northern Vietnamese conversation	Conversation Analysis, Autosegmental Phonology
Noun phrase syntax	Nguyễn Hùng Tưởng	The Vietnamese noun phrase	(Areal) Typology, Noun Phrase Structure, Classifiers
	Jennie Tran	Vietnamese classifier phrases from the perspective of how children acquire them	Acquisition, Noun Phrase Structure, Classifiers
Clausal and verb phrase syntax	Nigel Duffield	Head-First: On the head-initiality of Vietnamese clauses	(Areal) Typology, Functional Clause Structure
	Andrew Simpson/ Hồ Hảo Tâm	Vietnamese and the typology of passive constructions	(Areal) Typology, Voice, Causatives
	Theresa Hanske	Serial verbs and caused change of location constructions in Vietnamese	Aspectuality, Serial Verb Constructions
Pronouns and minor word classes	Tran Thuan/ Benjamin Bruening	Wh-phrases as indefinites: a Vietnamese perspective	Alternative Semantics, Indefinites
	Marie-Claude Paris/ Lê Thị Xuyên	On conjunction and comitativity in Vietnamese	(Areal) Typology, Conjunction, Comitativity
	Daniel Hole	Focus particles and related entities in Vietnamese	(Areal) Typology, Information Structure

Table 1: Contributions to this volume

If one assesses the qualitative vs. quantitative stance in methodology of the four chapters just mentioned, then qualitative approaches certainly prevail (qualitative: **Nguyễn, Paris/Lê, Hạ**; quantitative: **Brunelle/Jannedy**). This bias is representative of the whole volume. If formalist vs. functionalist explanatory patterns are taken as a dimension of classification, formalist thinking is found to characterize the majority of chapters (formalist: **Nguyễn, Paris/Lê**; functionalist: **Hạ, Brunelle/Jannedy**). Again, this is representative of the whole collection of chapters.

The classifier structures which are characteristic of many Vietnamese nominals are the primary object of study in **Tran's** acquisition study. It is the first such study on Vietnamese, and the author presents findings gained from both longitudinal and cross-sectional child data. The first structures produced by children are classifier+noun, classifier+demonstrative and classifier+*wh*-word beginning from around the age of 2. Moreover, the data reveals more omission errors than found in acquisition studies on other classifier languages.

Duffield's contribution focuses on clausal syntax. It makes a strong case for strictly left-headed structures in Vietnamese even in those domains that would seem to involve right-headed projections. Clause-final complementizers are **Duffield's** main concern. In the further course of the chapter, modals and demonstratives enter the picture, and parallels to Mandarin Chinese are drawn.

Simpson and **Hồ** direct their attention to passives and related constructions in Vietnamese, mainly in comparison with Mandarin Chinese. Apart from analyzing the neatly elaborated system of beneficiary and adversative passives found in Vietnamese, they deal with the important issue of whether the passive can be recognized as a clear-cut category in Vietnamese (and beyond) in the light of control structures and causative structures which make use of the same coding devices as translational equivalents of passives.

In **Hanske's** contribution, a detailed analysis of Vietnamese change-of-location constructions is developed which incorporates the insight that aspectual (or *aktionsart*) differences of the lexical items involved play an important role in the architecture of the resulting serial verb constructions. Most importantly, dynamic second verbs yield action readings while stative second verbs yield a perfect-of-result reading.

The chapter by **Tran** and **Bruening** on Vietnamese *wh*-indefinites, i.e. *wh*-words with (mostly indefinite) uses in non-question sentences, approaches its empirical domain from a (formal) syntax-and-semantics perspective. Non-veridical operators are identified as licensing non-interrogative uses of *wh*-words, and existential closure or choice functions lead to the *wh*-readings which may be characterized as indefinite.

Hole, finally, provides a first survey of Vietnamese lexical items and syntactic patterns which are used to convey focus-semantic meanings like 'also', 'even' or 'only'. The extraordinarily rich system found in Vietnamese outranks the partly similar system of Mandarin Chinese in complexity and calls for further research in this domain.

A strong undercurrent of the majority of chapters is the comparison of the Vietnamese facts with analogous phenomena in Mandarin Chinese, at least among other languages (**Duffield**, **Nguyễn**, **Tran**, **Simpson/Hồ**, **Hanske**, **Tran/Bruening**, **Paris/Lê**, **Hole**). It may seem objectionable to some readers to promote a more visible 'Linguistics of Vietnamese' with such a strong bias towards

comparison with Chinese. However, we would like to emphasize that, in contradistinction to Vietnamese, Chinese is a very well-studied language, and has been in close contact with Vietnamese for millennia. Moreover it is structurally similar to Vietnamese in some respect (classifiers, verb serialization, focus particles, to name just a few areas). Thus we submit that it is not a drawback if many chapters of this volume study Vietnamese against the background of the rich knowledge that we have about Mandarin Chinese.

References

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