

# WORD-GROUP DENOTING A DIRECTION OF MOTION IN CONTEMPORARY VIETNAMESE

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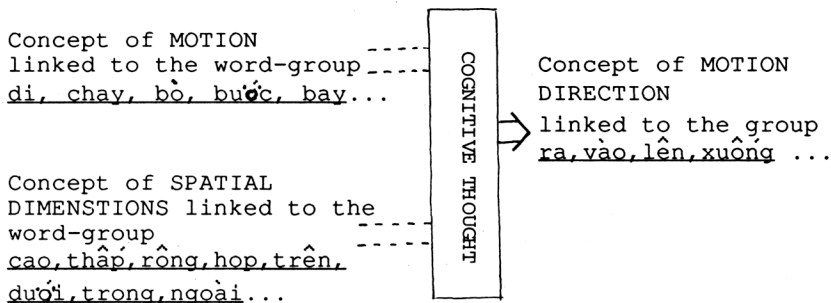
## Introduction

The word-group denoting a direction of motion in contemporary Vietnamese, as one of the objects of study, has been attracting the attention of many Vietnamese and foreign linguists. In this report we try to penetrate deeper into the process of determining and understanding the essence of this group concerning its formation and development.

1. The concept of **direction of motion** (relating to the word-group denoting the direction of motion<sup>1</sup>) is defined and explained in opposition to the **static direction** (also called "punctual direction"). Static direction in Vietnamese is closely linked to words like trên (on), duoi (under), trong (in), ngoài (out). Static direction is linked to the knowledge of the homology of spatial dimensions through a relative comparison by a **speaker not in motion**. The direction of motion, on the contrary, is formed in connection with the knowledge of the homology of spatial dimensions through the relative comparison of a **speaker in motion**. So, we may conclude that words denoting a motion appear as a result of a process of cognition of a form of motion in which the **aim in space the speaker is moving to is constantly in opposition** (in some form or other) to the point departure.

2. From the nominal angle and the principle of inductive transformation from "diachrony to synchrony", linked to the process of development of cognitive thought, following is the indispensable premise for the process of formation of this word-group : a) Knowledge of the dynamic activities linked to the motion operations expressed by the motion verb group like chạy (to run), bò (to crawl), buộc (to walk), bay (to fly); b) knowledge of relations concerning spatial dimensions (realised by the word-group denoting spatial dimensions

like cao (high), thấp (low), rộng (broad), hẹp (narrow), trên (on), dưới (under), trong (in), ngoài (outside). One should stress: the knowledge of motion direction (linked to the word-group denoting the motion direction) cannot be formed without the knowledge of the homology of spatial dimensions and relations in the actual space and inversely, even if knowledge of motion exists. The principle of this semantical induction can be expressed as below:



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Language is premise

Dynamics of  
thought, whose  
activity is  
oriented

Language is result  
(as well premise of  
the process of  
cognition

This principle of semantical induction helps us to grasp this difference : though on the synchronical axis, the word-group denoting motion direction (ra, vào, lên, xuống) and that denoting motion (di, chay, bò, bước, bay) as well as that denoting spatial dimensions exist on the same level, from the synchronical viewpoint the first group cannot appear before the two other ones.

3. On the other hand, we cannot speak of formation process of these word groups without connecting them to concrete typological characteristics. If we compare Vietnamese (as well as a number of languages of the same typology) with a number of languages of the Indo-European family, we see that in Vietnamese (as in Chinese, Khmer, Thai...) the concept of motion-direction on the terrain is linked to the sign of **a full word in its form** which may be used at the same time as an affixal element (like auf, ab, aus, ein... c, b, bz... in Indo-

European languages) and as a kernel in a combination denoting a motion in space. On the contrary in Indo-European languages this concept for the most part is expressed only by an affix, and these affixes cannot become independent kernels in the structure. Inversely, many concepts which may have the form of a full word and become kernels in the structure, cannot act as affixal elements in Vietnamese (for example : to come, comer, arriver...)

So, we may conclude : **the morphological identity between the stem and the affix, the fusion between the motion factor and the direction factor from the semantical viewpoint** are two inseparable aspects determining the most basic characteristic of word groups denoting the direction of motion Vietnamese.

4. When studying the possible morphological differences in the word group denoting the motion direction, we find that đi (to go) is the unique word, whose meaning shifts from that denoting motion to that denoting direction: Em bé tập đi (the baby learns how to walk (motion)). Nam đi H'a N'oi (Nam goes to H'a N'oi (direction)).

In our opinion, đi (verb of motion) stresses the physiological and physical aspect, and its proper meaning is more inclined to the action in itself than linked to a purposeful action. Thus it is not accidental that the syntactic structure model does not directly combine with the spatial aim : Em bé tập đi DI (the baby tries to walk). If we add an expression denoting a place in space **which is not a purpose**, đi does not change its character : Em bé tập đi TRONG PHÒNG (the baby learns to walk in the room). But if this place in space is a purpose (Em bé tập đi VÀO PHÒNG (the baby learns to go **into the room**)), its character begins to change : the shade of a motion with "two legs" in đi (Em bé tập đi vào phòng) is no longer the unique factor which attracts the attention of the listener. On the contrary, the hearer's attention **on the motion** is relegated to a role of secondary importance **by the information of an aim** in space (or by effect of **saturation**, the information concerning the change of place by making use of two legs loses its concrete character to merge into that of a **motion direction linked to an aim**). In this approach, we should pay particular attention to the factor of the hearer of the information who effectively contributes

to the determination of the final result of the information. By the pressure of **the aim in space** given in the context, the factor of a change of place "by making use of two legs" is wiped out and from semantical viewpoint there appears a "rapprochement" between di (denoting a change of place) and di (denoting a motion-direction)<sup>3</sup>.

From a more generalizing angle through these activities we explain the very close relationship between the categories : **motion-direction-aim**. A study of this relationship will show that these categories are for the most part not isolated, independent, but are closely connected with man's practical activities, especially purposeful motions in space in which direction becomes an indispensable spatial category. (Bước VAO nhà (to walk **into** the house). Chạy RA đường (to run out in the street). Trèo LÊN gác (to climb upstairs):

m o t i o n      d i r e c t i o n      a i m

bước (to walk)	VÀO (into)	nhà (house)
chạy (to run)	RA (out)	đường (street)
trèo (to climb)	LÊN (up)	gác (storey)

The logical relationship between the above-mentioned categories contributes to the explanation of the intermediary characteristic of the syntactical place bound to the sememes of words denoting motion direction and having the character of words denoting a relation.

5. Words denoting the motion direction in places as determined above, have the character of words denoting a relation (whose concrete appellation is **adverb with prepositional meaning** ("Adverb mit prapositionaler bedeutung") and contain two main sememes denoting **direction** and **motion**. The sememe denoting motion exists in an organic relation to that denoting direction, i.e. motion exists only in close relationship with the activity of motion in space. In particular, the sememe denoting direction here does not contain any concrete, definite manner regarding motion. Examples:

Rắn (snake)      BÒ (to crawl)      VÀO(into) hang(hole)

direction.....	-	.....	+
motion .....	+	.....	+
manner .....	+	.....	-

In close relationship with the distribution of main sememes, on lexical-grammatical meaning viewpoint, the word denoting motion direction (vào) defines the motion direction in space of the verb placed before it and plays a role **similar to that of a preposition** (which explains why the word denoting direction in this place of the structure is called **prepositional adverb word**).

On the other hand, by making use of transformation operations to the surface structure we can note the differences between **the prepositional adverb word** and **adverb**; **the prepositional adverb word** and the **common preposition** as follows : a) In the model of a definite motion in space (rắn bò vào hang) (the snake crawls into its hole) the suppression of the preposition will make the sentence ungrammatical (i.e. the expression Rắn bò (...) hang is impossible); b) It is used as a preposition but cannot change its place like an ordinary preposition (Rắn bò vào hang cannot become vào hang rắn bò); c) the object (the aim in space) after it can be omitted (Rắn bò vào hang can become Rắn bò vào ... ; d) A word denoting a static direction trong (in), ngoài (outside of), dưới (under) can be put immediately after : Rắn bò vào hang can become Rắn bò vào trong hang.

The explanation of the syntactical place in its relation to different levels of the word denoting motion direction helps us to set up a type of link words linked to the structure denoting a motion in space having fairly original shades and relatively firm in Vietnamese whose approach asks for a combination of descriptive viewpoint and the noumenal view-point : **adverb-prepositional word**.

6. Words denoting motion direction in space which have the character of linkwords (linked to the very mobile place in space) are formed owing to comparison and to the knowledge process of the correspondence in space (in general) . These characteristics are the premise of the process of their transformation and of their semantical development. These synchronic semantical shades can form three directions belonging to three categories with their internal relations : category of time, of space

and psychological category<sup>4</sup>. For example, we have three following concrete structures.

Ra<sub>1</sub> (X chay (to run) ra (out) duong (street))-X runs into the street - information denoting a change of place **from a narrow place to a large one** (spatial connotation)

R<sub>2</sub> (X tìm (finds) ra (out) đáp số (solution))-X finds out the solution, informs the hearer of a reality connected with **the end of a process of activity** (with temporal connotation)

Ra<sub>3</sub> (X dep (pretty) ra (out))-X becomes pretty, expresses the speaker's surprise when he indirectly notices a property of the object (with a shade of a **psychological emotion**).

Ra<sub>1</sub> contains a spatial meaning. But end with ra<sub>2</sub>, the spatial meaning changes into a different shade no longer corresponding to the original spatial meaning of ra<sub>1</sub>, which demonstrates that ra<sub>2</sub>, ra<sub>3</sub>, which are the newly created elements but not completely stable. But so far as their communicative function is concerned, they nevertheless contribute to supplying the general information as of the group Ra<sup>1</sup>.

When we base ourselves on the very flexible openness of the semantical mechanism (owing to the exchange between language and speech) as a premise, we must willy nilly base ourselves on sememes: that is, we should study the evolution in the smallest semantic unit according to laws governing spatial, temporal, psychological categories according to the possible forms of refraction like:

Ra<sub>1</sub> .....X tìm ra<sub>2</sub> đáp số (X finds out  
 the solution)

The spatial meaning in ra<sub>1</sub> (linked to its **potentiality of expressing the sememe denoting an approaching of the spatial axis**) is transformed by refraction into its capacity of expressing a result shade (corresponding to the ending point on the temporal axis) of ra<sub>2</sub>

Ra<sub>1</sub> .....X dep ra<sub>3</sub> (X becomes pretty)

If ra<sub>3</sub> in the structure (X dep ra) expresses a shade of surprise, the emotion of the speaker, this shade can be interpreted as an introspective state of the contrast and this contrast when it is not yet introspective (maintaining its original spatial character). It is the "narrow-broad" opposition of the motion process linked to the original lexical meaning of ra<sub>1</sub><sup>5</sup>.

7. In our approach on the study of the psychological reaction in its relations with objective and subjective categories, we find that in combinations which create the psychological direction, the word denoting direction a state. Here, its concrete spatial meaning changes and exists in the form of an instrument for indirectly and psychologically determining the opposition according to three directions (positive, neutral and negative). One should remark: a) the quality of the object reflected in the word denoting a state is **objective**, but the operation to bring these states to three axes (positive neutral, negative axis) by means of the word denoting a motion has more or less a **subjective character**; b) therefore, objectively speaking, a combination according to this manner (word indicating a state-word indicating the motion direction) is linked to the premise of giving the hearer active bases to think of an objective state. Cô ấy dep ra (She becomes pretty); dep (pretty) is an objective state. But dep RA (to become pretty) or dep LAI (to be pretty again) already contains the subjectivity of the speaker (following the direction of the expression of emotion, i.e. **not by means of a concept**); c) One may conclude that in this process, through words denoting a motion, the speaker willy nilly has added to the **static** state an **emotional shade** by the very subtle pressure of **words having a dynamic potential**; d) A problem arises why one can say dep RA, dep LAI and cannot say dep DI though di equally denotes the direction of a motion of **dynamic** character? In our opinion, di can only state that the essential feature of a state is positive (that is, not corresponding to the direction of a **minimum objective appreciation** of the speaker). The objective state of the appreciated object though having a certain passive degree, this degree does not go beyond the immanent property of a stable objective state of the object. In the end, it is the limit where an appreciation, though

subjective, does not go beyond the logic of the objective relation between an appreciation and the appreciated object in a concrete socio-psychological environment. That is why, we may say dep RA, dep LEN but we cannot say dep DI while we can say xấu DI (to become ugly), xấu LAI (to become ugly again) but cannot say xấu LEN, nghèo LEN.

This analysis shows that the relation creating the psychological direction (with words denoting motion direction) is a **semantical** relation between the word denoting a state and the word denoting a motion direction. Here, though the original semantical shade of the word denoting motion is not visible, the **dynamic** premise coming from the original lexical meaning (which is refracted to become an impression) nevertheless plays an extremely important role in the process of determining subtle semantical features, which are real but not easily grasped, and particularly, not easily explainable for the speaker.

9. In contemporary Vietnamese. all the words denoting motion direction are fairly frequently used in verbal function. Especially, in this position which is that of the structure kernel, their action is very dynamic. We regard this transformation process as a process in which the word denoting direction accept other functions in addition. In many sentences, oral or written, we meet reductions, like : Rắn bò vào<sub>1</sub> hang (The snake crawls into the hole) = Rắn vào<sub>2</sub> hang (the snakes enters the hole); = Tàu chạy xuống<sub>1</sub> Hai Phòng (the train runs towards Hai Phòng) = Tàu xuống<sub>2</sub> Hai Phòng. In this reduction, the result of the information is intact, that is the case vào<sub>2</sub> in the information has the same effect as bò vào, and we may say the same for xuống<sub>2</sub> and chạy xuống. Here the mode of changing of place in chạy (to run), bò (to crawl) passes to the word denoting the motion (when the verbs, chạy, bò are omitted) : Rắn bò vào<sub>1</sub> hang = Rắn (...) vào<sub>2</sub> hang.

From the operational viewpoint concerning the sememes, we call this transformation a substitution according to the principle of "representation" with the condition : the element which represents can keep the constituent **which does not exist in the represented**



element but it cannot be deprived of the element present in the element which is represented.

Rán bỏ vào<sub>1</sub> hang Rán(...) vào<sub>2</sub>hang

Constituent denoting direction	( - + )	-----	(+)
Constituent denoting changing of place	( + + )	-----	(+)
Constituent denoting the mode	( + - )	-----	(+)

An important fact : here the **lexical expansion** is the cause of the **syntactical expansion**, that is from the viewpoint of syntactical functions, vào<sub>2</sub> plays at the same time : 1) the function of a relation word (in the form of a prepositional adverb ; 2) the function of a verb as a predicate, like bỏ. This interpretation explains why when words indicating a motion act as a predicate, especially in structures of a spatial motion with an aim, they need no linkwords in any form whatsoever (Eg. Nó vào nhà (He goes into the house). Nó ra đồng (He goes to the field)....)

10. We do not divorce ourselves from the influence of the context when we explain the external conditions relating to the formation of sememes of the word denoting a motion, especially to their development. The context is an objective reality perceived by man according to a given logic and is transformed into the language. It is not a purely formal problem in the formation and development of the sememes of Vietnamese words denoting a movement. It is the problem of the reality of history, society, man, nature and so many other factors which have mingled to the information environment through the subjective knowledge of man in the concrete historical reality. For example, lên (to mount) in Vietnamese keeps the original connotation of **a motion from low to high**. In the usage, it acquires in addition the connotation : **from the sea to the mountain and from East to West**. The case of vào (to enter) is the same. By starting from the original semantical feature of a motion **from a narrow place to a broad place**, vào acquires in addition the semantical features : **from the outside to the inside, from North to South**. (In our opinion, in different languages, it is not necessary that words denoting motion direction with the same original sememe should have the same sememes in number

and in **quality** as products of the transformation). If National characteristics of language can be expressed in some way through the **real matter** which makes up the sememes, in this case, derived sememes of lên can be expressed in some way through the **real matter** which makes up the sememes, in this case, derived sememes of lên can be interpreted as reflecting the natural, fairly original topography of Viet Nam : the low attitude is linked to the sea and the East, the high altitude is linked to the mountain and the West. In other words, a relatively stable logic is formed in the conscience of *the Vietnamese and is expressed in the semantico-syntactical plan of the language on account of the context pressure which has given to lên the semantical feature of a motion from the sea to the mountain, from East to West.* At the same time, the relation between the narrowness and the breadth of the topography is transformed into a semantico-syntactical pressure and has given to vào the semantical feature of a motion **from northern Vietnam to southern Vietnam, from North to South**, relation which, in our opinion, has been reflected into the deep structure of the language as a manifestation of the combination between diachrony and synchrony.

*The capacity of expressing the correspondence from the topography viewpoint bound to the appearance of preceding sememes has created a number of words denoting direction in contemporary Vietnamese and at the same time has contributed to strengthening the peculiar features of this word-group.*

## Notes

1. According to our criteria, especially to the criterium "direction in space with limits" theo (to follow) khỏi (to evade), lui (to withdraw) are not included in the group. The word-group denoting motion-direction according to these criteria consists of the 11 following words : ra (to go out), vào (to enter), lên (to go up), xuống (to go down), đến (to come), đi (to arrive), sang (to go across), qua (to cross), lại (to come back), về (to return), đi (to go).

2 Our approach comes from Lenin : "Human concepts are not fixed but are eternally in movement, they pass into one another, the flow into one another, otherwise they do not reflect living life". Lenin - Collected Works Vol. 38 Moscou. Foreign Languages Publishing House. 1963. p. 253.

3 So, from the historical viewpoint, we can conceive the existence of the transformation of the verb denoting motion to the verb denoting direction, and that is the case of đi. For the case of words denoting the other motion directions in this group like ra, vào, lên xuống we do not find this phenomenon in semantical relations as well as in the form on the synchronical plan.

4 In the relations between the category of space and that of time, we follow this principle: Motion is the essence of space and time. Motion is the unity of the continuity of time and space.

5 In our opinion, this phenomenon cannot be called "substitution of meaning". For this phenomenon is

linked to two essential conditions: a) the conceptual sense when becoming emotional must be expressed in the form of an emotion; b) especially from conceptual it becomes non-conceptual and the process of external motion becomes an internal motion.

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