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 rôi "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 funtive verb) from a verb of state or quality (or static verb):

(1) Tôi không di.  "I'm not going; I didn't go; I won't go."
(2) Tôi chưa di.  "I haven't gone yet; I didn't go yet."
(3) Tôi đi rôi.  "I already went."
(4) Anh hãy di.   "Go (away)!"
(5) Anh đừng di.  "Don't go."
(6) Anh chớ (cô) di. "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, khá, khá "rather, pretty"):  

(7) Người-Doi 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."

MON-KHMER STUDIES 25:141-159
(10) Bằng 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 dâ "already", sê "will, shall", etc. is possible but not obligatory. Nguyễn Kim Thành (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 a. "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?

(20) Các ông ấy đi rồi.

(21) Hôm nay chúng tôi đi.

(22) Sáng mai các anh đã đi rồi à?

"So, Mom, you're going to Dalat tomorrow?" or "Is (our) mom going to Dalat tomorrow?"

"Those gentlemen have already left."

"We're leaving today."

"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 submissible verb—strictly a transitive verb—such as

duộc  "to get, obtain, receive, find, etc."
bì  "to suffer, sustain, undergo, contract."
phải  "to suffer, encounter, face, etc."
chỉu  "to sustain, endure, stand, accept, admit."

Examples:

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

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

Reduplications

To express repetition or extension, verbs (functive or static) 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  "lighty, 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 lâm  "to work, toil" (< làm "to work")
(34) ngaprès ngaprès  "to hesitate" (< presença "to stop")
(35) ao uóc  "to wish" (< uóc "to wish")
(36) lương tưng  "not to know what to do" (< tưng "hard up")
(37) ki ca ki coppia  "to collect bit by bit, hoard" (< coppia coppia "to gather")
(38) đúng đa đúng định  "to dilly-dally" (< định "to dawdle, take one's time")
(39) vẽ viếc  "to paint, draw (at all)" (< viếc "to dawdle")
(40) học hiếc  "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) canh nhận  "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 inh-Hoà 1986), is no longer apparent since the two-syllable word is considered a rimes 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) dẫn đi dẫn 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-luí "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:

bó 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"
ghếo đi  "to become poor(er), impoverished"
or the idea of silence following a period of activity:
im đi  "to keep quiet, shut up"
bằng 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",
hiên ra  "to appear"

or a spreading process:
loang ra  "(of color, stain) to spread"
tở 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 Sài Gòn means "to go (south) to Saigon—from Huế, (à-năng, 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 Bannmethuot") 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 dem ra "to bring out", dem vào "to bring in", dem lên "to bring up", dem xuống "to bring down", but with den "to be black/dark", one cannot have *den vào, *den lên or *den xuống.

The sequence den 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 dí may be used instead, and the difference between den ra and den dí "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 cắm láy "to take hold of", ôm láy "to embrace, hug" involving the verb láy "to take" or such a sentence as (để 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 dễ đỏ mạng cho? "Why did you let him scold you like that?" (There is also an entirely different postverb láy 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) nghe thấy                    "to hear"
    nhìn thấy                    "to see"
    ngũi thấy                    "to smell"
    sối thấy                    "to feel (by touching)"
(53) tìm thấy                    "to find (after looking)"
    kiếm thấy                    "to find (after searching)"
(54) X tìm được vàng.            "X found/struck gold." (= ex 19)

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

(55) X lấy được có vợ đẹp. "X (fortunately) married a pretty girl."
(56) X lấy phái có 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: cắm ơn "to thank", tranh-dấu "to struggle/struggle", nhân-dân "the people", lớp hộc "classroom", chậu-chậu "grasshopper", bờ-bờ "river turtle", măng-cút (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: dâu-phień "to cast the ballot, vote", phát-ngăn "to disburse", phù-quyệt "to veto", truy-tố "to prosecute", tuyo-en-cút "to elect", xuất-câng/xuất-khâu "to export", etc.

There are even words with three syllables: lung-tung-beng "pell-mell, in a medley", quán-sất-viên "observer", ba-dờ-xuy (< French pardessus) "overcoat", bật-thình-lình "all of a sudden", vô-nhan-dạo "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: **binh-thuong-hoa** "to normalize", **hoc-phap-hoa** "to legalize", **trinh-thuc-hoa** "to intellectualize", **cung-nhiep-hoa** or **ky-nghiep-hoa** "to industrialize", **trung-lap-hoa** "to neutralize", **au-hoa** "to europeanize", **Viet-hoa** "to vietnamize", etc.

The one-syllable lexeme—called semanteme, moneme, morpheme in Western languages, and **tien**, **tu-to ngui-vi** or **hin-vi** 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 **thuong yeu** "to love and to cherish", **dan uong** "to eat and drink", **mua ban** "to buy and to sell—to shop", **duoc thu** "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, **bong be or be bong** "to carry (a baby) in one's arms", **kinh tron** or **tron kinh** "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 au "to worry" (au = lo)
- hoi han "to inquire, ask (in order to show concern)" (han = hoi)
- sum vay "to be united (as a family)" (vay = sum)

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

- rucu che "alcohol + tea,— to drink, get drunk"
- trai gai "boy + girl,— to flirt, have amorous relations"
- chan chieu "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 **voi** (chango/chao) "and" between the two constituents of this type of compound:

**Buon voi ban gi cai ba ay!** "How can she be a businesswoman?" (buon ban "to buy wholesale + to sell,—to engage in trade" has been made discontinuous)

**Gao dau ma nau voi (cha) nung!** "How can I do any cooking without rice?" (nau nung "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 **hango** "goods, merchandise" from hang, or **tiec tung"diners, banquets" from tiec) or the indefinite pronoun **gi chi" anything":

Coi ay chang biết buon-ban hang-ho gi cac.
"She doesn't know beans about buying and selling."
Mây 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. **cám / cám ơn**  "to feel + favor, -- to thank"
có tiêng  "to have + reputation, -- to be famous"
thiệt mạng  "to lose + life, -- to die"
lắm-bệnh  "to enter + illness, -- to become sick"

2. **ăn sáng**  "to eat + morning, -- to have breakfast"
dĩ chăn  "to walk/go + foot, -- to walk"
ăn dúa  "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: **diêm-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 tiêng**  "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 tiêng** cannot be violated.

Such idiomatic collocations often comprise as head verb a "linking or classificatory verb" (see the section on Verb subclasses) such as **đãm/hoá/thành**  "to become", **lâm**  "to act as, function as", **nhiệt**  "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"
- **lắm khách**  "to act as + guest, -- to be polite, stand on ceremony"
- **đô vũ**  "to live + nursemaid, -- to work as a wet nurse"
- **đánh bạn**  "to strike + friend, -- to befriend"
  (cf. English to strike up a friendship)
- **đánh dĩ**  "to strike + prostitute, -- to become/be a whore"

Such word formations are discussed in detail in Hô Lê (1976), Nguyễn Kim Thân (1977), and the most frequently occurring verb compounds, both native and Chinese-borrowed, are given in Nguyễn Đình-Hòa (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 chòng gậy containing the verb chòng "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):

- trong thấycape + 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" 
- nhân mạnh "to press + to be strong,-- to emphasize" 
- (át dạo) "to knock + to topple,-- Down with .....!"

Likewise, in other specialized idioms, the postverb adds the notion of intensity or completeness: nghiệp "tight" is found only after nhắm "to close (one’s eyes)" and hộc "wide open" occurs only following hà "to open (one’s mouth)." Here stylistics dictates the use of a specific postverb following a given verb: in trời nghiệp "to tie up instantly" the intensifier nghiệp is restricted to its companion verb trời "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 dề 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 dề 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: bô-hành "step + to go,-- to walk; pedestrian", điện-thoại "electric + conversation,-- telephone; to telephone", etc.

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

The identification of subclasses among Vietnamese verbs has been attempted by several modern descriptivists (Emeneau 1951, Thompson 1965, Nguyễn (àng Liêm 1969, Trường Văn Chính 1970, Bưu Khải 1972, Nguyễn Kim Thành 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 (ai-La-Thiên "to eat at Dai-La-Thiên 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 ngủ "to sit" or ngủ "to sleep", it can take a cognate object, as in ngủ một lúc "to sit a moment, sit a while", ngủ tạm tiếng (đồng hồ) "to sleep (for) eight hours", and of course a complement also, as in ngủ xổm "to squat", ngủ ngủ "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 cò ...... không? or dã ...... chứa?:

- 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?" (cò thể already means "to have the capability")

Thus the auxiliary verb has predicative value, unlike a tense marker (dã "completive", sê "future", vúa, môi, or vúa môi "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 rât "very" because the ability, will, desire, intention, etc. that it denotes is measurable.

Muôn, cần, and thêm 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 dã "past, anterior", sê "will, shall", còn "still; also", cùng "likewise, also, too", và "(cô)" "still", etc.

- Tôi là người Việt-nam.  "I'm (a) Vietnamese."
- Hôm nay (lã) chủ nhật.  "Today is Sunday."
- Mai (sê) là thủ hài.  "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 (inh-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 thơ 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 thọ sơn "X is a house painter."
painter", a likely response to something said erroneously about X’s being a carpenter, for instance.

The attribute of làm can further be topicalized:
Thoát, 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:

Tớ nghi ràng (S). "I think that ...."  
Tớ cho rằng (S). "I feel/think that ...."  
Tớ 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, ___ xướng, ___ dĩ, ___ lai 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 monodirectional, 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 covers of repetition, direction or intensity, Chinese-borrowed compounds denoting social and political activities such as bái-cỏng "to strike", biểu-tình "to demonstrate" (V-N compounds) or dâu-tranh "to struggle", huấn-luyện "to train" (V-V compounds) can be repeated with the pair ___ dĩ ___ lai, or the pair ___ lên ___ xướng.

(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 bả áy (IO) tiền (DO). "X borrowed money from her."

====> X vay tiền (DO) của bả áy (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 den bàn (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-tích (Compl).
"They elected Nam chairperson."


(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 mỗi Y ăn cơm tôi "X invited Y to have dinner." can be shortened to either

X mọi Y. "X invited Y." or

X mọi ăn cơm tôi. "X invited (someone) to have dinner."

The three verbs bát, buốc, or bát buốc "to force, compel, coerce" may entail the preposing of phải "must, have to" (an auxiliary verb) before the second verb: X bát buốc họ (phải) dinh-công "X forced them to go on strike." The object noun (N) can be fronted, resulting in a "passive" sentence: Họ bát buốc phải dinh-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 Chúng ngое-nguống cài đuôi. "The dog wagged his tail" would give Cái đuôi chúng ngое-nguống. "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 (Nguyên (inh-Hoà 1971a), where adjectives are also included—as verbs of state and quality. Nguyên 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: dưng "to stand", ngủ "to sit", nằm "to lie down", ngủ "to sleep", ngày "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", mở, nở "to erupt", đâm, trò "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: dâm "to become (something worse), turn (bad)", hoả "to change into", thành "to become", như "to be like", giống "to resemble", làm "to serve/work as", etc.

6. Quotative verbs.
This subclass includes such verbs of thinking, knowing and saying: bao "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)", tiêu-bô "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/tới "to reach, arrive", etc.
   c. Semi-active verbs: thích "to like", yêu "to love", thụ "to resent", được "to get, obtain, receive", bị "to suffer, sustain, undergo", phải "to contract, suffer from", chỉu "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 + cưa + Patient. or V + cưa Patient + Direct O.

9. Ditransitive verbs II.
This subgroup 2 comprises verbs of insertion such as: ăn "to push", diện "to fill out (blank)", dứt "to stick (hand into pocket)", nhồi "to stuff", nhét "to cram", thọc "to thrust", trạ "to sheathe, scabbard", etc. The pattern is:
V + Direct O + vâo/vó + 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/tdát/tuyên "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", đẻ "to let", làm "to make, render", khién "to make", mời "to invite", rủ "to invite (less formally—for a Dutch treat)", xin "to ask, request", yêu-cầu "to request", dồi (hỏi) "to demand", giúp "to help", ép "to compel", khuyên "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)", chửm "to purse, round (lips)", vuông "to stretch (arm, shoulder, neck)", nhún "to shrug (shoulders)", nghiêng "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.
In this diagram the 12 verb subclasses listed above have been grouped into clusters together with 13, a large category of Stative Verbs (or Adjectives).

\[ \text{VERBS} \]

\[ (N \ [\text{không}] \quad N) \]

\[ (N \ [\text{không}] \quad \Delta) \]

\[ 4 \quad \text{Copula} \quad (N \quad \text{rồi}) \]

\[ 3 \quad \text{Aux} \quad \text{Quotative Causative} \]

\[ \text{Stative V.} \quad (\text{Adjectives}) \]

\[ \text{Functive V.} \]

\[ 13 \quad \text{cao*} \quad \text{Single-object V.} \quad \text{Double-object V.} \quad (\text{Ditransitive}) \]

\[ 1 \quad \text{Static} \quad \text{Existence/Appearance} \]

\[ 2 \quad \text{Linking} \quad \text{thành} \]

\[ 5 \quad \text{Active} \quad \text{Bodily Movement} \]

\[ 7 \quad \text{Giving/taking} \]

\[ 12 \quad \text{Inserting} \quad \text{Evaluation/Selection} \]

\[ 8 \quad \text{Static} \quad \text{Appearance} \]

\[ 9 \quad \text{Linking} \quad \text{thành} \]

\[ 10 \quad \text{Active} \quad \text{Bodily Movement} \]

\[ 12 \quad \text{Giving/taking} \]

\[ \Delta \text{ is a sentence. Verbs with an asterisk can be preceded by rát.} \]
REFERENCES


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