Semantic extension of the verb of giving in Vietnamese[*]

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Abstract

The objectives of this study are 1) to analyze the extended lexical and grammatical meanings of the verb of giving in Vietnamaese, i.e. *cho*, as found in the corresponding verbs in other languages and as found in Vietnamese only, and 2) to discuss the processes of semantic extension of this verb.

It is found that the extended meanings of *cho* that are also found in the corresponding verbs in other languages are grammatical ones, namely, 1) dative-marking, 2) benefactive- and malefactive-marking, 3) causative-marking and 4) purposive-marking, whereas those that are found in Vietnamese only are lexical ones, namely, 1) to supply or put something in a container and 2) to give an opinion.

The meanings of the word *cho* are interrelated. The basic meaning "to transfer the possession of a certain entity" is the central meaning from which five meanings/functions are extended from it, namely, to supply, to give an opinion, dative-marking, benefactive- and malefactive-marking, and causative-marking. The purposive-marking function is the only extended meaning which does not extend from the central meaning. Rather, it extends from the causative-marking function.

The semantic extension is primarily motivated by the cognitive process of metonymy in which a covert meaning contiguous with another meaning is elevated. There is only one meaning which is extended by the process of metaphor which involves the understanding of an entity in an abstract domain in terms of an entity in a concrete domain.

1. Introduction

The verb of giving has been extensively examined across languages as is evident in the large number of research works such as Huang and Ahrens

(1999), Bisang (1996), Iwasaki (1997), Newman (1993, 1996), Rangkupan (1997), Song (1997), Thepkanjana and Uehara (2008), Viberg (2002), Xu (1994), and Yap and Iwasaki (1998). The verb of giving in Vietnamese, namely, *cho*, is worth examining in depth because it has semantic properties which are not found in the verb of giving of other languages as documented in previous studies. This paper aims at investigating (1) the extended meanings of the verb of giving in Vietnamese and (2) the processes of semantic extension of this verb. Note that the syntactic category of the verb of giving across languages is a matter of controversy. Since this study is semantically oriented, the matter of syntactic categorization of this verb is outside the scope of the study.

This paper is divided into five sections. Section two introduces the typological characteristics of Vietnamese and examines the basic meaning of the verb *cho* in detail. Section three examines the extended meanings of *cho* as found in the verb of giving in other languages. Section four examines the extended meanings of *cho* as found in Vietnamese only. The processes of semantic extension are also investigated in sections three and four. Section five concludes the paper. The data used in this paper is collected from the written and spoken northern (Hanoi) dialect of Vietnamese. The written data is collected from the Vietnamese corpus of the Institute of Linguistics, Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences. The spoken data is elicited from three Vietnamese informants who speak the Hanoi dialect.

2.   Background

Vietnamese is a language of the Viet-Muang branch of the Mon-Khmer sub-family, which is in turn in the Austro-Asiatic family. It is the official language of the Republic of Vietnam and is spoken by about 86 million people all over the world according to the United Nations Population Division. It has three dialects: the northern dialect of which the Hanoi one is the representative, the central dialect of which the Hue one is the representative, and the Southern dialect of which the Saigon one is the representative. The writing system in use today is an adapted version of the Latin alphabet with additional diacritics for tones and certain letters (Edmondson 2006). Vietnamese is an isolating language with the SVO word order.

The basic meaning of *cho* in Vietnamese is to volitionally transfer the possession or control of a thing from an animate giver to an animate recipient. According to Newman (1997), although the verb of giving in its basic sense is easily understood, it has a complex structure of semantic components. The cognitively salient components of the basic sense of this verb are described below.

- There are three salient participants: the giver, the recipient and the "gift" or the thing given.
- The action named by the verb is the transfer of the possession or control of a thing.
- There is motion of the thing given.

- The transfer of possession or control must be volitional.
- There is a physical interaction between the giver, the thing given and the recipient
- The recipient is the goal of the transfer of possession or control.
- The recipient benefits in some way from the transfer of possession or control.

The verb *cho* occurring in its basic sense must appear in the following syntactic pattern.

(1) [Agent   *cho*   Recipient   Theme]

Example:

(2) *Tôi   cho   nó   hai   cuốn   sách*
    I   give   he   two   classifier   book
    'I gave him two books.' (elicited data)

The verb *cho* occurring in its basic sense must be followed by nouns expressing the recipient and the theme respectively as seen in (2). If the theme precedes the recipient, the sentence will be ungrammatical as in (3). It is noted that (3) is acceptable in the spoken but not written language.

(3) **Tôi   cho   hai   cuốn   sách   nó*
    I   give   two   classifier   book   he (written data)

The basic meaning of *cho* extends to a diversity of meanings. Some of the extended meanings are lexical and some others are grammatical. In order to show how the Vietnamese verb of giving is semantically interesting from a crosslinguistic perspective, we will discuss the extended meanings of *cho* in terms of two types of meanings, i.e. the meanings that are found in the verb of giving in other languages as documented in the linguistic literature on this verb and the ones that seem to be characteristic of the verb of giving in Vietnamese only.

3.   The extended meanings of *cho* as found in the verb of giving in other languages

The extended meanings of *cho* that are also found in the corresponding verbs in other languages are mostly grammatical meanings. Grammatical meanings are usually characterized as meanings which are semantically incomplete in themselves. They must be combined with other lexical meanings in order to express complete thoughts. They express the grammatical functions of words in sentences. According to Sapir (1921), grammatical meanings can be classified into two types: derivational concepts and relational concepts. Derivational concepts express additional concepts of the lexical meaning and are expressed by either bound morphemes or modifiers. Relational concepts indicate the relationship among words in sentences and are also expressed by bound morphemes or by function words in closed word

classes such as prepositions, conjunctions and discourse markers. The grammatical meanings which are expressed by *cho* are discussed below.

3.1 Dative-marking

The word *cho* can function as the dative marker indicating the recipient of a given thing. The dative-marking *cho* is usually categorized as a preposition and appears with two semantic types of verb, namely, the manually manipulative verb type and the communicative verb type. The former type of verb includes *gửi* 'to send', *trả* 'to return', *bán* 'to sell', *ném* 'to throw', *đưa* 'to hand in' and *giao* 'to deliver'. Sentence (4) illustrates the dative-marking *cho* occurring with the first type of verb.

> (4) *Hoa   gửi   thư   **cho**   Lan*
>   Hoa   send   letter give   Lan
>   'Hoa sent a letter to Lan.' (elicited data)

The latter type of verb includes such verb as *gọi điện thoại* 'to telephone', *đánh điện* 'to telegram' and *nhắn* 'to leave (a message)'. Sentence (5) illustrates the dative-marking *cho* occurring with this type of verb.

> (5) *Tớ   gọi điện thoại **cho** cậu   ngay,*
>   I   telephone   give   you   immediately
>
>   *nhưng máy   bận*
>   but   machine   busy
>   'I called her immediately but the line was busy.' (elicited data)

The dative-marking function extends from the basic meaning of *cho* by means of metonymy. Metonymy traditionally refers to a figure of speech used in rhetoric and literature. Metonymy is currently playing a crucial role in modern linguistics especially in cognitive linguistics. Metonymy as defined by cognitive linguists refers to a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same idealized cognitive model (Kövecses 2002). Metonymy is therefore an important cognitive process consisting of the transfer of meaning based on association between contiguous ideas in the same cognitive domain. Viewed from the cognitive perspective, metonymy can give rise to a new primary meaning for a word which used to be a covert element in the original meaning of the word. In the case under discussion, the recipient, which is one of the backgrounded concepts contiguous to the basic meaning of *cho*, is highlighted or promoted by the metonymic process as a new primary meaning of *cho*. This semantic extension is supported by the crosslinguistic grammaticalization path of GIVE postulated by Heine and Kuteva (2002), on which the dative-marking function of GIVE is grammaticalized from the basic action of possession transfer.

3.2 Benefactive-marking and malefactive-marking

Some actions can bring about either a good or bad result to the animate entity involved in the action. In the case under investigation, the action of transferring the possession of an entity typically brings about a good result to the recipient. This situation can be regarded a prototypical one of the action of giving. In this case, the fact that the animate entity benefits in some way from the act of giving, which is one of the backgrounded meanings in the basic sense of the verb of giving, is promoted as a new primary meaning of the word in the same way as the recipient is as discussed above. The new primary meaning in this case is generally known as the benefactive-marking function. Sentences (6) and (7) illustrate the benefactive-marking function of *cho*.

(6) *Hoa   lái   xe   **cho**   bố*
    Hoa   drive   car   give   father
    'Hoa drove the car for this father.' (elicited data)

(7) *Liên   xây   nhà   **cho**   Lan*
    Lien   build   house give   Lan
    'Lien built a house for Lan.' (elicited data)

The benefactive participant across languages is typically an animate entity especially a human being. This fact is understandable because the entity who benefits from an action is naturally an animate entity. However, the notion of the benefactive in Vietnamese can be extended to cover inanimate entities, which can be considered peripheral cases of the benefactive as shown in (8) and (9).

(8) *Bố   mua   lốp   mới   **cho**   chiếc   xe   cũ*
    father   buy   tyre   new   give   classifier vehicle old
    'Father bought a new tyre for the old car.' (elicited data)

(9) *Anh ấy   để dành   tiền   **cho**   tương lai*
    He   save   money   give   future
    'He saved money for the future.' (elicited data)

In (8) and (9), the noun phrases *xe cũ* 'old car' and *tương lai* 'future' are figuratively viewed as entities benefitting from the actions of buying a new tyre and saving money, respectively. In other words, they are personified as benefactors. This case constitutes the first peripheral case of the benefactive *cho*.

There are two other peripheral cases of the benefactive *cho*. The second peripheral case is the case in which *cho* appears in sentences with non-action verbs as described in (10) and shown in (11) and (12).

(10) [NP stative verb (NP2) *cho* NP3]

(11) *Quyển   sách   này   là   để   **cho**   trẻ em   từ*
      classifier book   this   be   for   give   child   from

bảy   đến   mười hai   tuổi
six   to   twelve   year
'This book is for children aged between 6-12 years old.'
(elicited data)

(12) *Vi tính   có   ích   **cho**   nhiều   người*
     Computer   have   benefit   give   plural   people
'Computers are useful for a large number of people.' (elicited data)

The last peripheral case of the benefactive *cho* is the one in which *cho* appears in isolated noun phrases, or in other words, non-sentences. The prototypical case of the benefactive *cho* is the one in which it appears with an action verb in a sentence. The case in which the benefactive *cho* co-occurs with an action verb is prototypical because the fact that a person gets benefit entails that the action has been carried out in such a way that it yields a positive result to that person. The peripheral case in which the benefactive *cho* appears in isolated noun phrases is described schematically in (13) and exemplified in (14).

(13) [NP1   *cho*   NP2]

(14) *Tiếng   Việt   **cho**   người   nước   ngoài*
    language   Vietnam   give   people   country   outside
'Vietnamese for foreigners.' (written data)

We might want to argue that the semantic role of the noun phrases marked by *cho* in the three peripheral cases is target rather than benefactive. Since the target and benefactive roles are semantically similar and are hard to distinguish, we have put them in the same semantic category with a remark about their prototypical and peripheral statuses as the benefactive entity.

The Vietnamese case is interesting because *cho* can mark the animate entity receiving not only a good result from an action but also a bad result. The former case is called the benefactive as discussed above whereas the latter case is called the malefactive. The malefactive *cho* typically co-occurs with verbs that inherently express "harming" actions, such as *thoi / đấm* 'to punch', *tát* 'to slap', *chửi* 'to attack verbally', *mắng* 'to scold', *đánh* 'to beat, hit' and *căn* 'to bite'. Sentences (15) and (16) exemplify the malefactive *cho*.

(15) *Đừng   chọc   con   chó. Nó   căn   **cho**   đấy*
     do not   bully   classifier   dog   it   bite   give   particle
'Do not bully the dog. It might bite you (and have a bad effect on you.) (written data)

(16) *Anh ấy thoi* **cho** *thằng Pháp một quả*
    he   punch give French person one   classifier
    'He threw a punch at a French person (and yielded a bad effect
    on him.)' (written data)

As in the case of the dative-marking *cho*, the benefactive-marking and malefactive-marking *cho*'s are derived by means of metonymy. The person or entity which receives the results of an action carried out by an agent, which is a backgrounded meaning in the basic sense of the act of giving, is mentally accessed by the metonymic process and subsequently promoted as a new primary meaning of *cho*. If the result is positive, *cho* will be benefactive-marking. If the result is undesirable, *cho* will be malefactive-marking.

3.3 Causative-marking

Cho can function as a causative verb marking indirect causation in the analytic causative construction. In indirect causation, the causer lets, or does not prevent, the causer from accomplishing the caused event; the causer does not bring about the caused event directly. Sentences (17) and (18) exemplify the causative-marking function of *cho*.

(17) *Chị* **cho** *tôi mượn cái kéo*
    you (f) give I   borrow   classifier scissors
    'You(f) let me borrow the scissors.' (written data)

(18) *Công nhân* **cho** *máy chạy*
    worker   give machine run, work
    'The worker let the machine work.' (written data)

The causative verb *cho* in Vietnamese constitutes an interesting case from the typological perspective because it can co-occur with the verbs *biết* 'to know', *thấy* 'to see' and *đến* or *tới* 'to arrive' in the causative construction to express concepts which are realized by single verbs in other languages such as Thai and English as discussed below.

The combination of the causative *cho* and the verb *biết* 'to know' in the causative construction literally expresses the indirect causative meaning of letting somebody know something as exemplified in (19) and (20). This meaning is realized as a single verb in other languages such as *bɔ̀ɔk* 'to tell' and *câɛ̀ŋ* 'to inform' in Thai. The causee is optional in the causative construction of *cho biết* 'let know'.

(19) *Tôi* **cho** *anh Nam biết ngày mai tôi cưới vợ*
    I   give brother Nam know tomorrow I   get married
    'I told Brother Nam (let Brother Nam know) that I will get married tomorrow.' (written data)

(20) *Anh ấy cho   biết   ngày mai không đi   học*
      he   give know tomorrow not   go   study
      'He told us (let us know) that he would not go to study
      tomorrow.' (elicited data)

The combination of the causative *cho* and *thấy* 'to see' in the
causative construction literally expresses the meaning of letting someone see
something as in (21). This meaning is realized by a single verb in other
languages such as *sədææŋ* 'to show'. It is common that the causee is not
present in the causative construction of *cho thấy* 'let see'.

(21) *Điều này   cho   thấy tiếng   Anh   rất   quan trọng*
      thing this give see   language English much important
      'This thing shows us (lets us see) that English is very
      important.' (written data)

The causative construction consisting of the causative verb *cho* and
đến or *tới* 'to arrive' literally means to let (time) proceed until a certain point of
time. The causing event is to let time proceed and the caused event is when
time has reached a certain point. This causative meaning is equivalent to the
preposition *conkràthâŋ* in Thai or *until* in English. Sentence (22) illustrates
this causative construction.

(22) *Khu   nhà   chúng tôi sống hết sức   êm đềm,*
      area house we   live extremely peaceful

      hầu như chưa   xảy ra sự cố   gì   cho   tới   hôm nay
      almost   not yet happen problem what give arrive day this
      'The surrounding area of the house where we live is very
      peaceful. There have never been any problems until now.'
      (written data)

The causative construction consisting of the causative verb *cho* and
another verb indicating the caused event as described above can, in principle,
allow the noun phrase expressing the causee to intervene between *cho* and the
verb naming the caused event. However, it has been found that the causee is
not present in most instances of causative sentences of this type. We should
therefore note that the constant absence of the causee paves the way for
causative constructions to be lexicalized and to express the single concepts of
telling, showing and until. We suspect that the causative constructions
consisting of *cho* and the verbs *biết* 'to know', *thấy* 'to see' and *đến* or *tới* 'to
arrive' are now on the way to become lexicalized phrases. The causative
constructions will cease to exhibit semantic transparency by the time they
become lexicalized.

The causative-marking function of *cho* is derived from the basic sense
of the act of giving by means of a metaphoric process. The transfer of
possession or control of an entity from the giver to the recipient, which is the
basic sense of the act of giving, metaphorically extends to the transfer of the
control of an action from the causer to the causee. The situation in which the

causer lets the causee perform an action is equivalent to the transfer of the control of an action from the causer to the cause, which is, in turn, metaphorically viewed as the transfer of possession or control of an entity.

3.4 Purposive-marking

   Cho can function as the connector indicating the purpose of carrying out an action. Newman (1996:180) claims that the purpose-marking GIVE connects two clauses with each other. The agent performs an action expressed by the first clause in order that a certain event expressed by the second clause takes place. However, the second event does not necessarily take place merely because it represents the purpose of the agent in the first clause in performing the action. The purposive-marking function of *cho* is exemplified in (23) and (24).

(23) *Thủ tướng ra lệnh **cho** quân đội sẵn sàng chiến đấu*
    Prime Minister order give army be ready fight
    'The Prime Minister ordered that the army be ready to fight.'
    (written data)

(24) *Em sẽ hát **cho** anh nghe*
    I will sing give you listen
    'I will sing for you to listen.' (elicited data)

   When the purposive-marking *cho* co-occurs with a stative verb, it expresses the manner of performing an action as shown in (25).

(25) *Dao cùn phải mài đi **cho** sắc*
    knife blunt must sharpen go give sharp
    'A blunt knife must be sharpened in such a way that it is sharp.' (written data)

   In (25), the verb *sắc* 'be sharp' represents the purpose of performing the action of sharpening the blunt knife. However, in order to accomplish this goal, the agent must sharpen the knife in such a way or manner that it becomes sharp. It is apparent that the manner meaning is closely associated with the purposive one. The semantic closeness between the two meanings allows the purposive *cho* to be interpreted as the manner-marking *cho* in some contexts as shown above.

   The purposive-marking function of *cho* extends from the causative-marking one by means of metonomy. The semantic component in the causative meaning which is mentally accessed by the metonymic process and promoted as the primary meaning of the purposive one is the volition of the causer in doing something to the causee so that the causee will perform another event.

4. The extended meanings of *cho* as found in Vietnamese only

   In this section we will discuss the extended meanings of *cho* that are not found in the linguistic literature of the verb of giving in other languages. The two extended meanings of *cho* to be examined in this section are,

incidentally, lexical meanings. Sapir (1921:102) defines lexical meanings as meanings which are complete in themselves. Words which express lexical meanings are content words such as nouns, verbs and adjectives.

4.1 To supply or to put something in a container

   Cho can function as a verb meaning to supply or to put something in a container as shown below.

(26)   *Mẹ   cho   than   vào   lò*
        mother   give   charcoal   into   stove
        'Mother put the charcoal in the stove.' (elicited data)

In sentence (26), the main verb *cho* is followed by two noun phrases indicating the entity in motion and the container respectively. In this case, the action of moving something and putting it in a container is derived metonymically from the basic action of giving, in that the backgrounded meaning of displacement of a given entity is mentally accessed and promoted as a primary meaning. The new primary meaning of *cho* thus focuses on the motion of the theme. The notion of the recipient in a giving action extends to that of the container in a moving action. The recipient and the container notions share the semantic property that they both function as the goal of the giving and the moving actions. It is noted that the verb *cho* in this sense must co-occur with the word *vào* 'enter'. However, the noun phrase indicating the container may be omitted if it can be recovered from context. In this case, the word *vào* 'enter' does not appear in the sentence as in (27).

(27)   *Khi   ăn   phở   tôi   thường   cho   hai   thìa   ớt*
        when   eat   noodles   I   usually give two   spoon   chili
        'When I eat noodles, I usually add two spoonfuls of chili (in the noodles.)' (elicited data)

4.2 To give an opinion

   The verb *cho* meaning to give an opinion occurs in combination with *rằng* or *là* which functions as a complementizer and is followed by a clause. These two complementizers are functionally equivalent to the complementizer *wâa* in Thai. The verb *cho* with this meaning is characterized by the facts that its subject must be human and that there must not be a direct object noun phrase following it as shown in (28).

(28)   *Tôi   cho   rằng   quyển   sách   này   sẽ   bán   rất chạy*
        I   give   COMP   classifier book   this will   sell much run
        'I suppose that this book will sell very well.' (elicited data)

The meaning of giving an opinion is derived metaphorically from the basic sense of GIVE. The transfer of possession or control of an entity is metaphorically mapped to the action of transferring an opinion from the speaker to the listener. The thing given is mapped to the opinion or message that the speaker wants to convey to the hearer.

5.   Conclusion

We have examined in this paper the extended meanings of *cho,* the verb of giving in Vietnamese. The extended meanings of *cho* that are also found in the verb of giving in other languages are grammatical ones, i.e. dative-marking, benefactive-marking and malefactive-marking, causative-marking and purposive-marking. However, the malefactive-marking function of the verb of giving is not crosslinguistically common. The benefactive-marking function of *cho* is interesting because it accommodates both the prototypical benefactive role and the target role, which is considered a peripheral case. Most of the extended grammatical meanings are derived from the basic sense of giving by means of metonymy. Only a few extended meanings are derived by means of metaphor. The extended meanings of *cho* which have been found so far in Vietnamese only are lexical ones, i.e. to put something in a container and to give an opinion. The extension of the basic sense of giving to other lexical meanings makes the Vietnamese verb of giving unique from a typological perspective. The findings in this paper reveal that Vietnamese employs the verb of giving in a linguistically creative way. The findings also shed some light on the investigation of a number of interrelated phenomena which are characteristic of isolating languages such as verb serialization, grammaticalization, the polyfunctionality of words and polysemy.

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