

The typology of motion verbs in Northern Vietnamese

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Abstract

Talmy's (1985) seminal work on motion verbs categorized languages as either verb-framed or satellite-framed depending on how the core schema 'motion' is mapped onto an expression. However, Vietnamese has motion verbs that appear to function both as verb-framed and as satellite-framed. Furthermore, there is a tendency for expressions involving motion in Vietnamese to involve serial verb constructions. This in particular results in ambiguous utterances for semantic typology, because it is difficult to interpret post-verbal components as verbs or satellites. Here, the cases for both verb-framed and satellite-framed analyses are presented, and diachronous change and coverbs are discussed as ways to ultimately argue that Vietnamese is a satellite-framed language.

Keywords: motion verbs, serial verb constructions, coverb

1 Introduction

Motion verbs, as described by Talmy (1985), can express motion in terms of Manner, or in terms of Path. In his prototypical example of this divide, he contrasts English and Spanish descriptions of a bottle floating into a cave:

English: The bottle floated *into* the cave.

Spanish:

- (1) *La botella entro a la cueva (flotando).*
the bottle moved-in to the cave (floating)
'the bottle moved into the cave (floating)'

This example is representative of the idea that English verbs depict Manner of Motion, while Spanish verbs depict Path of Motion. For an English utterance to indicate Path of Motion, a satellite (in this case, *into*) is used. Similarly, for a Spanish utterance to indicate Manner of Motion, a descriptor must be used (in this case, *flotando*).

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Talmy further proposes that languages are characteristically verb-framed or satellite-framed, depending on how the core schema ‘motion’ is mapped onto an expression. Thus, English is satellite-framed, because the motion “into” from the above example is achieved through a satellite to the verb “floated.” Spanish would be considered verb-framed, because it expresses the motion of moving into with the verb *entro*.

Thus, it would be expected that eliciting this utterance in Northern Vietnamese would indicate whether NV is verb-framed or satellite-framed. A native speaker of Northern Vietnamese, Trang, provided the data in this paper during a field methods course. It turns out that for Vietnamese, the verb-framed/satellite-framed categorization is not straightforward.

- (2) *Cái chai trôi vào trong động.*
 CL bottle to float to enter in cave
 ‘The bottle floated into the cave.’

The above elicitation, from Nagaya (2008), shows both a prototypical Manner of Motion verb, *trôi* “to float”, and a prototypical Path of Motion verb, *vào* “to enter.” Thus, it is not immediately obvious whether Northern Vietnamese is a verb-framed or satellite-framed language. This paper addresses Northern Vietnamese motion verbs in an effort to analyze NV with regard to Talmy’s prototypical examples.

2 Independence of Verbs

In example 2, two verbs occur in sequence. Both *trôi* “to float” and *vào* “to enter” can serve as the main verb of a sentence, but cannot independently express the meaning of the original sentence. Both of the following utterances are grammatically possible:

- (3) *Cái chai trôi trong động.*
 CL bottle to float in cave
 ‘The bottle floated in(side) the cave.’
- (4) *Cái chai vào trong động.*
 CL bottle to enter in cave
 ‘The bottle floated in(to) the cave.’

These sentences alone give equal support to either a Manner of Motion verb-based language or a Path of Motion verb-based language. Thus, it is still ambiguous as to which typological category best fits Vietnamese.

3 Dual and Single Functionality of Verb/Preposition Words

Further complications arise upon consideration of word classes in Vietnamese. In Northern Vietnamese, some verbs can function as prepositions (or vice versa). Table 1 is a list of some Northern Vietnamese words that can function as both prepositions and verbs.

As an example, Trang reports that *lên* can be used in the following sentence:

- (5) *Người đàn ông lên thang.*
 the man ascended ladder
 ‘The man went up the ladder.’

qua	through <i>or</i> to cross over
vê	back <i>or</i> to go back
vào	into <i>or</i> to enter
ra	out of <i>or</i> to exit
sang	across <i>or</i> to cross horizontally
dàng	across <i>or</i> to cross vertically
lên	up <i>or</i> to ascend
xuống	down <i>or</i> to descend
ở	at <i>or</i> to be
lại	at <i>or</i> to arrive
đến	to <i>or</i> to reach

Table 1: Dual-function Northern Vietnamese words

Here, a Path of Motion verb is used, and there is no satellite. Thus, Northern Vietnamese can indeed produce verb-framed expressions of motion (as evidenced in example (4)).

Just as not all Northern Vietnamese verbs can function as prepositions, not all Northern Vietnamese prepositions can function as verbs. Table 3 is a list of words that function as prepositions, and cannot function as any other part of speech. It cannot be said that there is a single word class consisting of both verb-like constituents and preposition-like constituents.

quanh	around
dưới long	under
trên	over
dọc theo	along

Table 2: Northern Vietnamese prepositions

When motion verbs are used with these prepositions, equally clear examples of satellite-framing are found. For instance the preposition *quanh* is found in example (6):

- (6) *Em bé bò quanh ô tô.*
 baby to crawl around car
 ‘The baby crawled around the car.’

Example (7) is ungrammatical:

- (7) **Em bé quanh ô tô.*
 baby around car
 ‘The baby circled the car.’

Here, the satellite *quanh* can only function as a preposition. Thus, Northern Vietnamese motion verbs can also occur as satellite-framed, as was seen in example (3).

Going back to the list of words that can function as both prepositions and verbs, it should be noted that *vào* does not exclusively function as a Path of Motion verb. We see that *vào* can be glossed as either a verb, in which case it means “to enter,” or a preposition, in which case it means “into.” Thus, it is also possible to gloss “The bottle floated into the cave” as:

- (8) *Cái chai trôi vào trong động.*
CL bottle to float into in cave
'The bottle floated into the cave.'

These types of constructions appear to occur often in Vietnamese. Other examples include:

- (9) *Con mèo nhảy qua cửa sổ.*
CL cat to jump to cross/through window
'The cat jumped through the window.'
- (10) *Tôi đi bộ đến công viên.*
I to go to walk to arrive/at park
'I walked to the park.'

This observation leads to two possibilities for how to correctly parse example (2). One possible interpretation of the example sentence is that *trôi vào* is functioning as a serial verb construction, with both Manner of Motion and Path of Motion verbs. In this case, the presence of the Path of Motion verb *vào* would indicate that Northern Vietnamese is a verb-framed language, similar to Spanish; but, the presence of *trôi* would equally indicate that Northern Vietnamese is a satellite-framed language, similar to English. The second possible interpretation is that *vào trong* is a series of prepositions. In this case, *vào* would be functioning as a satellite to accompany the Manner of Motion verb *trôi*, and would also indicate that Northern Vietnamese is a satellite-framed language (similar to English). It has been shown that both types of framing are possible in Northern Vietnamese in section 2. Therefore, a further look must be taken into complex sentences to determine whether NV motion verbs can be categorized as generally verb-framed, or generally satellite-framed, and whether serial prepositions can provide an easy answer to the problem.

4 Serial Verb Constructions

Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs) occur in Northern Vietnamese. Beecher (2004) describes three SVC types, and includes motion-path as one of these types. The following examples and categories are his:

Activity-goal:

- (11) *Tôi tìm thấy một bông hoa.*
I seek see one CL flower
'I find a flower.'

Resultative:

- (12) *Tôi đốt một cái nhà cháy.*
I ignite one CL house burn
'I burn down a house.'

Motion-path:

- (13) *Tôi rơi vào một cái lỗ.*
 I fall enter one CL hole
 ‘I fall into a hole.’

Beecher’s analysis of his motion-path verbs, however, assumes that *vào* is being used as a verb, instead of considering whether it is being used in a prepositional phrase. If it is true that this sentence must be viewed as containing a serial verb construction, Northern Vietnamese cannot be automatically cast as a satellite-framed language (as, in section 3, serial prepositions would allow).

Beecher’s analysis is based on the three semantic categories described above, but excludes mention of combinations of SVC categories. From Trang’s data, these categories are not so clear-cut. For instance, in Northern Vietnamese an activity-goal SVC can possibly be used in conjunction with another verb, simultaneously expressing both activity-goal and motion-path:

- (14) *Người đàn ông cố lê về nhà.*
 the man try limp back/to return home
 ‘The man tried to limp back home.’

Here, *cố* and *lê* represent the activity of trying, and the goal of limping. If *về* is interpreted as the verb “to return,” a motion verb, its use in conjunction with *cố* and *lê* shows an overlapping of Beecher’s SVC categories.

Neither *cố* or *lê* can function as prepositions, so there is clearly an SVC at work in this statement. What is not clear, however, is whether the SVC does consist of three verbs, or whether the two-verb SVC is functioning alongside a preposition. Yet again, the question is whether *về* indicates satellite-framing or verb-framing.

Beecher’s work may provide a clue to this question: not only does he not analyze any SVCs with more than two verbs, he suggests that such utterances are unlikely. He provides the following ill-formed example:

- (15) **Tôi đã đi về tìm thấy một cuốn sách của tôi.*
 I PAST go return seek see one CL book POSS I
 ‘I went back (to) find a book of mine.’

Beecher’s informants consistently found such combinations ill-formed and unacceptable without the use of a term like *để*, “in order to,” between *đi về* and *tìm thấy*. Trang confirms these judgments. If there is a dis-preference in Northern Vietnamese to use more than two verbs in a serial verb construction, it would indicate that *về* should be interpreted as a preposition.

Unfortunately, it is unclear whether Beecher’s dispreference stems from Northern Vietnamese SVCs only containing two verbs, or because it is unlikely for more than two verbs to relate to a single event. Trang’s example, describing a single event, may yet be an acceptable instance of an SVC with three verbs. Additionally, *cố* is a modal verb, and would therefore be particularly likely to exist in a three-word SVC, even if there is a dispreference for long SVCs in Vietnamese.

To continue this line of thought, a new utterance with up to three verbs in sequence is presented:

- (16) *Con chim bay ngang qua bầu trời.*
 CL bird to fly across/to cross over through/to cross over sky
 ‘The bird flew across the sky.’

In this example, *qua* is optional. In Trang’s earlier potential three-verb SVC, every verb and verb/preposition is necessary. *Qua*’s optionality shows that *bay ngang* is sufficient to express the motion idea. Unfortunately, since it is unknown whether *ngang* is also a satellite, further decisions still cannot be inferred from the loss of this satellite. Whether *qua* is optional because *bay ngang* is an SVC, or a verb and a preposition, is still up for debate.

Beecher shows that SVCs can occur with two intransitive verbs sharing a subject:

- (17) *Tôi ngồi xuống.*
 I sit descend
 ‘I sit down.’

However, for SVCs with objects, it is unclear whether objects need to occur with prepositions. In “the bird flew across the sky,” the similar glosses for *ngang* and *qua* (both roughly meaning “across” or “to cross”) may indicate that the words serve different functions. In other words, it may make more sense for “to cross” to occur with “across,” as opposed to having two “crossing” words or two “across” words. Thus, for sentences with both objects, and multiple verb/prepositions, it is possible that one verb/preposition functions as a preposition, while the other verb/prepositions function as verbs.

5 Location Within the Constructions

Thus far, these verb/prepositions have occurred in situations that specify a location. However, a location does not have to be explicit for these words to be used. For example:

- (18) *Một đám mây bay tới.*
 one group cloud to fly to arrive/at
 ‘The clouds floated into view.’

Here, the English notion of clouds floating “into view” is unnecessary in Vietnamese, and nothing like “view” is expressed. Considering *tới* to be a preposition in this instance would lead to an incomplete PP; thus, perhaps this is a situation where a strong argument for an SVC could be made.

Other location-less situations can involve verbs/prepositions, and they seem to typically involve an object of some sort. Some examples include:

- (19) *Cô ấy để tang cho mẹ mình.*
 she to grieve to give/for mother self
 ‘She grieved for her mother.’
- (20) *Em bé với tay ra.*
 baby to reach hand to exit/out
 ‘The baby reached out its hand.’
- (21) *Cái hạt mọc thành cây hoa.*
 CL seed to grow to become/turn into tree flower
 ‘The seed grew into a plant.’

Here, example (19) shows a verb/preposition occurring with a benefactive. Example (20) is similar to a directional situation, with the word *ra*, but the notion of direction appears to be more metaphorical. Also, (20) is syntactically different from (19) and (21), because one verb occurs after the object; we will see more of this in the next section. Finally, example (21) is reminiscent of one of Beecher’s goal-type SVCs.

6 Object Insertion

In the example that Beecher provides for resultative-type SVCs, an object takes a position between two components of the SVC.

- (22) *Tôi đốt một cái nhà cháy.*
I ignite one CL house burn
'I burn down a house.'

The object *cái nhà* is in the middle of the SVC *đốt cháy*. However, this may occur in non-resultative SVCs as well. A sentence taken from a monologue describing a tape-recording events may show an object in the midst of a directional SVC.

- (23) *cô ấy đút băng cát sét vào trong máy.*
she to insert tape cassette to enter/into in machine
'She put the cassette into the machine.'

Here, *băng cát sét* is the object of a VP, but it is unclear, due to previous SVC examples, whether that VP is simply *đút*, or whether it is *đút vào*.

It may also be possible to break up SVCs with adverbs. In the following sentence, the adverb *tròn* appears between *quay* and *vào*:

- (24) *Vũ công nhảy quay tròn vào trong phòng.*
dancer to jump to twirl round to enter/into in room
'The dancers waltzed into the room.'

An alternate interpretation to SVCs being broken up with adverbs, is that the presence of an adverb may indicate the conclusion of a verb sequence. If this is the case, the use of *tròn* would indicate that *vào* is functioning as a preposition.

7 Negation

In Vietnamese, negation is usually achieved by inserting the negator *không* directly before a main verb. For example:

- (25) **Người đàn ông không lê về nhà.*
the man not limp back/to return home
'The man didn't limp back home.'

To express the idea "the man limped not back home, but to the hospital," the negator could not be used in front of *về*; rather, it would still have to be used in front of the main verb *lê* (whether *về* is functioning as a verb or not). Thus, the following sentence is unacceptable:

- (26) **Người đàn ông lê không về nhà.*
the man limp not back/to return home
'The man limped not back home.'

It appears that Vietnamese will only allow a negator before a non-main verb in situations of ellipsis. For example, someone telling a story in Vietnamese could say:

- (27) *người đàn ông vào trong.*
 man enter/into building
 ‘The man went into the building.’

If their interlocutor is aware that the man actually went out of the building, Trang reports that that interlocutor can interject with *không vào trong!* (‘not into the building!’). However, it is still unclear whether this is truly a situation where a preposition is being negated, or whether this is a situation where *vào* is functioning as a verb.

8 Series of Prepositions

At this point, it is possible for multiple, sequential verb/prepositions to be functioning as SVCs, or to have one verb/preposition functioning as a preposition for an object. It still must be addressed, however, whether sequential verb/prepositions can act as series of prepositions. At this point, it becomes relevant to bring up prepositions in other languages.

While Vietnamese is not an Oceanic language, it may have an interesting feature in common with them. Many Oceanic languages have a word class referred to as “verbal-prepositions”, “directional adverb”, or “pseudo-preposition.” This alone is reminiscent of Northern Vietnamese. It is also interesting that the syntactic situation in which NV is ambiguous for verbs or prepositions (i.e., serial verb constructions) also played a role in Oceanic. Durie (1988) notes a “widespread typological diachronic drift...whereby verbs in serial verb constructions can develop into prepositions.” As seen in sentence (2), we have:

- (28) *Cái chai trôi vào trong động.*
 CL bottle to float to enter in cave
 ‘The bottle floated into the cave.’

If it is hypothesized that Northern Vietnamese underwent a process similar to Oceanic languages, serial verb constructions may be responsible for the fact that there are words with both verbal and prepositional meanings. If the comparison holds up, the notion of *vào trong* being a series of prepositions occurring after *trôi* seems more possible.

9 Evidence from Phrasing and Word Order

Northern Vietnamese employs strict SVO word order. However, Trang reports that sometimes in poetry, word order may be more flexible than it would be in normal speech. The following sentences were used to test for whether potential serial verb constructions/preposition series could be broken off and reordered. Trang provided judgments on all sentences.

- (29) **Quanh ô tô, em bé bò.*
 around car, baby crawled
 *‘Around the car, the baby crawled.’

This sentence, based off (6), was chosen for purposes of a baseline comparison. *Quanh ô tô*, unlike some ambiguous phrases, is clearly a prepositional phrase—*quanh* can only mean ‘around’, and cannot function as a verb. Thus, it appears that in Vietnamese, it is incorrect to place a verb phrase’s prepositional phrase in sentence-initial position (or, perhaps, it is incorrect to separate the prepositional phrase from the verb phrase at all).

- (30) **Trong động, cái chai trôi vào.*
 in cave CL bottle to float to enter/into
 *‘In the cave, the bottle floated into/entered.’

This example is also judged as inappropriate for Northern Vietnamese. Here, however, it is not clear whether it is inappropriate because a prepositional phrase, *trong động*, has been separated from an SVC, *trôi vào*, or because a prepositional phrase itself has been broken up (*vào trong động*). The following two unacceptable examples give similarly inconclusive evidence:

- (31) **Về nhà, người đàn ông cố lê.*
 to return/back home man to try to limp
 ‘Back home, the man tried to limp.’
- (32) **Qua bầu trời, con chim bay ngang.*
 through/to cross over sky CL bird to fly across/to cross over
 ‘Through the sky, the bird flew across.’

If these examples are re-ordered in different ways, however, some evidence for phrasing is obtained. As was mentioned previously, it is possible in poetic language to utilize a degree of word order flexibility. The poetic examples do not represent utterances that have only been idiomized by their popularity (as in a famous poem, for example); rather, they represent structuring that is grammatical, but unusual for normal production. For the following re-ordered sentence, one reordering is grammatical for poetry, and one is not:

Acceptable:

- (33) *Vào một cái lỗ, tôi rơi.*
 enter one CL hole I fall
 ‘Into/entering one hole, I fall.’

Unacceptable:

- (34) **Một cái lỗ, tôi rơi vào.*
 one CL hole I fall enter
 ‘One hole, I fall into/enter.’

In poetic speech, *vào một cái lỗ* is acceptable. If this were the prepositional phrase of a verb, earlier examples would lead to the prediction that it could not be moved to the beginning of a sentence. Thus, this type of poetic speech may indicate that *vào* is functioning like a verb, and not like a preposition. Furthermore, we see that it is optional to keep *rơi* and *vào* together when ellipsis is used. The following two examples are judged as equally grammatical:

- (35) *tôi rơi vào một cái lỗ, rồi rơi vào một cái lỗ khác.*
 I fall to enter/into one CL hole then fall to enter/into one CL hole different
 ‘I fall into a hole, then fall into another hole.’
- (36) *tôi rơi vào một cái lỗ, rồi vào một cái lỗ khác.*
 I fall to enter/into one CL hole then to enter/into one CL hole different
 ‘I fall into a hole, then into another hole.’

10 Clues from Discourse Data: a Frog Story

Trang was asked to participate in a frog story task, in hopes that story-telling would produce more naturalistic data than elicitation. Having Trang provide a story for the pictures in Mayer's (1969) *Frog, Where Are You?* yielded information regarding both scope and collocations in Vietnamese.

10.1 Scope and Ellipsis

Scope in the frog story supports some previously discussed ideas from section 9. A key example from the frog story is:

- (37) *Họ tìm ở trong hố sâu trên cây.*
they to search to be/at in hole deep on tree
'They search in the deep hole, on the tree.'

In this example, *tìm ở* has scope over both *trong hố sâu* and *trên cây*. As this suggests a separation between SVC and prepositional phrase, this example is interesting. Earlier evidence suggested that it was incorrect to distance a prepositional phrase from a verb phrase; however, ellipsis and scope in this example show that as long as the V still maintains scope over the PP, a PP can stand alone.

In an extension of the original elicitation sentence for this work, Trang provides another example of ellipsis:

- (38) *Cái chai trôi vào trong động, rồi (trôi) ra ngoài.*
CL bottle to float to enter/into in cave then (to float) to exit/out outside
'The bottle floated into the cave, then (floated) out.'

Trang indicates a preference for including *trôi*; but, she does not indicate that it is grammatically necessary. This optional ellipsis ties into another area of interest for the topic of verbs/prepositions, which will be discussed in the next section: collocations.

Trang provided another helpful ellipsis example relating to the original elicitation sentence:

- (39) *Cái chai trôi vào trong động, rồi cái can trôi vào trong động.*
CL bottle to float to enter/into in cave, then CL can to float to enter/into in cave
'The bottle floated into the cave, then the can floated into the cave.'

In the above example, the second clause has the entire VP repeated. However, it is not required to repeat the entire VP, as the next example shows:

- (40) *Cái chai trôi vào trong động, rồi cái can trôi vào.*
CL bottle to float to enter/into in cave, then CL can to float to enter/into
'The bottle floated into the cave, then the can.'

This example is of particular interest, because if *vào* were functioning as a preposition, leaving out *trong động* would render the PP incomplete.

10.2 Collocations

Many of the motions discussed in this paper could be considered common. Due to the potential of high frequency usage, it should be considered whether these potential serial verb constructions/preposition series have resulted in collocations for action-direction descriptions. The following example was taken from a frog story exercise:

- (41) *Chú chó nháy sang ra bên ngoài.*
 CL dog to jump to cross/across to exit/out CL outside
 ‘The dog jumps outside.’

This example is very similar to an earlier elicited example (9). However, *sang* was not actually said in the story; it was added later to the discourse transcription by Trang. Thus, in careful speech, *sang* should be included. This indicates that either *nháy sang* or *sang ra* may be collocational in careful speech.

In addition to this correction, there is evidence that some verbs or prepositions tend to go together in other phrases. When Trang was asked about changing examples she had given in the past, she would often say that changes were not wrong, but that it “just sounds better” the way she had given them originally. For example:

- (42) *Con chim bay ngang (qua) bầu trời.*
 CL bird to fly across/to cross over (through/to cross over) sky
 ‘The bird flew across the sky.’

While *qua* is optional in this sentence, it is preferred to include it. Although using this preposition does not appear to be necessary to the grammar of Vietnamese, it is the typical way to express this motion.

11 A Comparison to Another Language Family

The question of whether Northern Vietnamese motion verbs are best generally characterized as verb-framed or satellite-framed remains unsolved. Both Path of Motion verbs and Manner of Motion verbs can occur independently in NV. Analyzing complex motion events would have yielded a verdict regarding verb-framed v satellite-framed, if it weren’t for the fact that Northern Vietnamese has many lexical items that can function both as verbs and prepositions. Thus, it is difficult to discern whether these lexical items are functioning as verbs, which would suggest verb-framing, or functioning as prepositions, which would suggest satellite-framing. One hypothesis, influenced from trends in Oceanic, is that lexical items that were historically verbs are now functioning as prepositions in what would otherwise be serial verb constructions. Historical data from older forms of Vietnamese may help indicate whether this hypothesis can be verified.

12 One Possible Conclusion

If NV typically utilizes both a manner of motion verb and a path of motion verb in SVCs as a routine strategy for describing motion, this language would fail to fit satisfactorily into Talmy’s typology. If Northern Vietnamese, and other languages displaying similar ambiguity (whether in SVCs or other situations) were to be correctly described, a typological scale would have to be developed. Languages that lie in between verb-framed and satellite-framed would have to be accounted for.

13 Coverbs: A Separate Word Class

This paper so far has focused on a specific group of words, and discussed attempts to categorize these words as functioning as verbs or functioning as prepositions. These categorization attempts have failed to yield conclusive results regarding verb versus preposition class. The lack of conclusive

results may indicate a diachrony in which Vietnamese verbs develop into prepositions. Furthermore, this lack leads to the suggestion that Talmy's typology is insufficient, and should be adjusted to a scale whereby languages undergoing diachrony can be accommodated. However, there is a third possibility to consider. Path of Motion verbs in NV that can function as prepositions may be worthy of their own word class when they occur with Manner of Motion verbs: coverbs.

Srichampa (1998:63) proposes a coverb class consisting of words "which may function as verbs, prepositions, and directional verbs." Nguyễn (1975:75) describes such words as "[having] the functional meaning of Directional Adverb in English, such as 'up, down'..., etc." He chooses the term coverb over adverb, however, as these words "preserve [their] verbal nature because [they] can have Location-Direction tagmemes." This paper has many instances of verb/prepositions preceding "true" prepositions, and thus Nguyễn's terminology seems appropriate.

Srichampa proposes a division within the class of Vietnamese coverbs, as she sees that some coverbs are best described as either prepositional or directional. Therefore, examples like (18), (19), and (20) may be instances of prepositional coverbs, and they wouldn't be expected to involve a location. This provides a convenient distinction between examples like (17), which seem to utilize more metaphorical direction, and these examples that truly involve no location.

Thus, describing supplementary verbs/prepositions as coverbs may be the most apt term for Northern Vietnamese. This leads to the biggest step thus far in analyzing Vietnamese motion verbs as verb-framed or satellite-framed. If coverbs are taken to exist as their own word class, this separate class could be defined as one form of satellite, and thus lead NV to fit Talmy's typology as a satellite-framed language. It should be pointed out that words in the coverb class would not be exclusively coverbs—there is ample evidence that these words can also function independently. Rather, in this interpretation, all possible coverbs would function as coverbs when in a postverbal environment.

Coverbs can also fit neatly into a theory of diachrony for Vietnamese verbs. Just because Vietnamese verbs may be undergoing change does not necessarily mean that they just undergo change towards an existing word class (as Oceanic languages appear to do). They may simply be undergoing change towards a "new" word class. Thus, in terms of historical possibilities, and the difficulty in identifying an appropriate word class for this group, the coverb class resolves both the need for a syntactic explanation, and a diachronic explanation. Coverbs appear to be functioning as satellites to main verbs, and would thus allow Vietnamese to be fit typologically with satellite-framed languages.

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