Verbs of motion and their lexicalization patterns in English and Vietnamese - A perspective from cognitive semantics

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Abstract. This paper aims at providing a comparison of lexicalization patterns of motion verbs with typological and universal principles they embody across two languages: English and Vietnamese. Cognitive semantics classifies motion verbs based on the sort of semantic information which their verb roots characteristically encode, that is, manner, path or shape. Insights gained from our study reveals that English and Vietnamese motion verbs are typologically different in utilizing lexicalization patterns to conflate Path and Manner of Motion with Move elements. Given the conclusions, this paper indicates possible implications for language teaching and translation, hopefully providing an alternative method of analyzing an aspect of language from a different point of view.

Keywords: Motion, motion verbs, lexicalization patterns, motion event, manner, path, cause, figure, ground, satellite-framed, verb-framed.

1. Introduction

In the eighties, a new approach to the study of language began to develop: Cognitive Linguistics (CL). This school of linguistics was born as a reaction against formal approaches to language, such as Noam Chomsky's Generative Grammar (1957, 1965). According to Fauconier [1], CL emphasizes that the study of language is the study of language use because language is an integral part of cognition which reflects the interaction of social, cultural, psychological, communicative and functional cognitive development and mental processing. Cognitive Semantics consider linguistic meaning as a manifestation of conceptual structure, which emerges from bodily experience, that is, the

speaker's bodily experience that triggers the linguistic expressions that carry the meaning(s) to the hearer(s).

Talmy's [2] work distinguishes two different types of languages according to the way the different elements of a motion event are mapped onto linguistic elements: satellite-framed and verb-framed languages. Within the paradigm of cognitive semantics, we explored the conceptual structure of motion and the typological surface of both English and Vietnamese, inferring the implications to facilitate both language teaching and translation.

2. Motion verbs in English and Vietnamese

Motion verbs - "*the verbs that describe movement are first learned, most frequently used*

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and conceptually dominant" (Miller & Johnson-Laird [3]). The semantic function of a verb is to describe a motion, an act, occurrence, or mode of being. As analyzed in Mai Thu Han [4], both English and Vietnamese motion verbs can be transitive and intransitive, mostly in the patterns of SV and SVO. Also, Vietnamese motion verbs pattern with English equivalents in that many of them are manner-of-motion verbs which couple with another word to express the path of motion. For example:

(1)   I   *ran*   *across*   the road.

   Manner verb   path

Besides the common SV or SVO pattern, Vietnamese motion verbs tend to encode a complex motion event forming serial verb constructions (SVCs). Beecher [5] identifies three prominent variety of SVCs:

(i) Activity-Goal:

Tôi *đến tìm* em.   (seen as V + V)

(I came to look for you)

(ii) Resultative:

Gió *thổi bay* mái nhà.   (V + V)

(The wind blew off the roof of the house)

(iii) Motion-Path:

Tôi *rơi vào* một cái hố. (V + V)

(I fell into a hole)

These formations are hardly seen in English. The typical formation of motion verbs in English is Verb-particle/preposition constructions.

In addition, Vietnamese uses directional complement verbs (DC verbs) to encode the Path of Motion (Vmanner/cause + Directional Complement verbs) as in (2) whereas in English, the path of motion is incorporated in the particles (Vmanner/cause + particles or prepositions) as in (3). For example:

(2) Xe đã ***chạy***   ***qua***   cầu.

Motion + Manner   Direction

(Verb)   (Directional complement verb)

(3) The car   ***ran***   ***across***
the bridge.

Motion + Manner   Direction

(Verb)   (pre)

In English, the Latin-derived path-incorporating verbs such as *ascend, descend, enter, exit …* are only directional full verbs. The Vietnamese counterparts of these words are categorized as both full verbs encoding the Path of the motion, and 'directional complement verbs' which stand after motion verbs and convey prepositional meanings. These path verbs carry two semantic meanings and often require an Olocative: Motion and Direction of Motion. E.g.:

(4) Tôi   *rời*   ga tiễn,   *chui vào*   chiếc xe taxi...

V   Olocative   V + Vdirection

Regarding motion verbs, we present here a list of path verbs which may function as both full verbs and directional complement verbs conveying the meanings of prepositions in Vietnamese:

Table 1: Path verbs and directional complement verbs in Vietnamese

	Path verbs/ Directional complement verbs	Full verbs (in English)	Preposition meaning
1	qua/sang	to cross/get (over), pass	across
2	về/ lại	to come/go back	back
3	vào (trong)	to enter	in(to)
4	ra (khỏi)	to exit	out (of)
5	lên	to ascend	up
6	xuống	to descend	down
7	lại/ tới	to arrive	at
8	đến/tới	to reach	at
9	đi (khỏi)	to go	off/away

One more different thing lies in the semantic description of manner. In English manner verbs, manner category is encoded in the verbs themselves. Not to run parallel with this, Vietnamese tends to use more neutral motion verbs plus an adjunct adding manner information to the main motion verbs. For example, the English verbs *amble, backpack, meander, inch, limp, mince* … express different ways of walking, and they are translated into Vietnamese as *đi thong thả, đi lang thang, đi lần lần, đi khập khiễng, đi õng ẹo, … .*

In summary, English and Vietnamese motion verbs share the similarities and make the differences in both the syntactic and semantic features. Those are the things drawn out as the basis for further comparison.

3. Tamy's lexicalization patterns

Lexicalization is one of those terms which linguists do not use in the same way. In volume II of *Toward a Cognitive Semantics* (2000), Leonard Talmy delves into the exploration of the systematic relations in language between meaning and overt linguistic forms, in other words, into the process of **lexicalization** (Talmy [6]):

Lexicalization is involved where a particular meaning component is found to be in regular association with a particular morpheme.

In my understanding, new concepts that are given lexical form become part of the lexicon of a language and the process of establishing a new unit in any specific lexicon is commonly referred to as lexicalization. In other words, lexicalization is the process by which concepts are encoded in words.

Talmy's basic assumption is that we can isolate elements or components separately within the domain of meaning and within the domain of linguistic expression. As illustrated, an English motion verb (surface element) can encode distinct types of semantic information: Manner (e.g., *hop*), Cause (e.g., *kick*) and Path (e.g., *exit*, *enter*). On the other hand, the Path element may be encoded in English by verbs and by prepositions (e.g., *out*, *into*), that is, by two different linguistic elements. Talmy [6] claims that some characteristics of lexicalization is to associate a particular meaning component with a particular morpheme. Generally, there are three processes in a word's lexicalization: lexicalization, deletion (or zero), and interpretation.

Taking motion into consideration, Talmy [6] proposes what is called 'motion event'. Talmy considers a situation containing motion and the continuation of a stationary location alike as a *motion event*. Talmy [6] develops an analysis of basic motion events with four basic semantic components:

(i) **Figure**: the entity that is moving or located;

(ii) **Ground**: the entity which acts as a spatial reference point for the motion/location of the figure;

(iii) **Path**: the path of motion of the figure and

(iv) **Manner**: the manner of motion by which the figure moves along the path.

Talmy [6] compares the coding of the two semantic components of the motion event - manner and path - across languages and developed a three-way typology of how manner and path are expressed: manner-incorporating, path-incorporating and ground-incorporating. He also postulates a two-way typology of lexicalization of motion verbs which looks at the morphosyntactic constituents encoding the Path component of a motion event. In this regard, Talmy's work distinguishes two different types of languages, i.e., satellite-framed and verb-framed languages presented as follows:

Satellite-framed lexicalization:

V (Manner/Cause + Move) + Sat (Path)

Verb-framed lexicalization:

V (Path + Move) (+ adjunct - Manner/Cause)

4. The typology of motion verbs in English and Vietnamese

4.1. Lexicalization pattern 1

Motion + Co-event (Manner/Cause)

In one group of languages, the verb expresses both the fact of motion and its manner or its cause. In these languages, there are typically a set of frequently-used verbs that express motion "occurring in various manners or by various causes" (Talmy [6]).

Lexicalization pattern 1 (Motion + Co-event) is typical in English and it does exist in Vietnamese. Vietnamese exhibits characteristics that have been associated with satellite-framed language as English. Vietnamese patterns with English in that it uses a rich range of manner-of-motion verbs coupled with another word which expresses 'path'. Let's look at a sentence from 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallow' by J. K. Rowling [7] and the Vietnamese version by Lý Lan [8]:

He shoved me through the window.
Agent Move+Cause Figure Path Ground

Chú nó đẩy bác qua cửa sổ.
Agent Move+Cause Figure Path Ground

Besides this similarity, however, there are also some differences revealed.

(i) In English, the Path of Motion is encoded in the prepositions; while in Vietnamese, it is incorporated in a number of directional complement verbs including *ra, vào, lên, xuống, sang, qua, lại, về, đi, đến, tới* which convey the same prepositional meanings. For example:

Hermione **dragged** Goyle **onto** their broom…

Hermione **kéo** Goyle **lên** chổi của tụi nó…

(ii) One-verb construction is widely used in English whereas Vietnamese tends to encode a complex motion event into multiple verbal components forming serial verb constructions,

which denote more semantic components in one Event. Let's see another example taken from Rowling [7] and Ly Lan [8]:

Malfoy **fell** off the broom.
Figure Move+Path Path Ground

Malfoy **ngã lăn** khỏi cây chổi.
Figure Move+Path+Manner Path Ground

(iii) Manner information is often encoded in the motion verbs in English whereas it tends mainly mapped onto manner adjuncts in Vietnamese.

They **hurried** along the corridor.
Figure Move+Manner Path Ground

Hai bác cháu **vội vã** **chạy** dọc hành lang.
Figure Adjunct Move+Manner Path Ground

(iv) The English expression of Path in this lexicalization pattern tends to be more complex than that in Vietnamese. Different English prepositions and particles can be combined together after the main verbs to encode different directions of Motion: out into, down to, in through, up towards, back into …

Three of them stepped **back into** the corridor...
Figure Move+Figure Path Ground

Ba đứa nó leo **lên** hành lang …
Figure Move+Manner Path Ground

4.2. Lexicalization pattern 2: Motion + Path

In the second typological pattern for the expression of motion, the verb conflates both the fact of Motion and Path. Romance languages are of this type. In these languages, there are a series of surface verbs which express motion along various paths. The conflation pattern can be represented schematically as follows:

Motion + Path + (AdjunctManner/Cause expression + Ground)

According to Talmy [6], Spanish motion verbs are perfect examples of this type. For example:

La botella ***entró*** a la cueva (flotando)

The bottle MOVED-in to the cave (floating)

"The bottle floated into the cave"

Cái chai trôi vào trong hang.

The path is expressed in English by a category which Talmy [6] calls *satellite*, "which can be either a bound affix or a free word, is thus intended to encompass all of the following grammatical forms, which traditionally have been largely treated independently of each other: English verb particles, German separable and inseparable verb prefixes, Latin or Russian verb prefixes, Chinese verb complements, Caddo incorporated nouns and Atsugewi polysynthetic affixes around the verb root".

Path conceptualizations and their representations in English, Spanish and Vietnamese manifest certain similar and different typological characteristics. On the one hand, Vietnamese runs parallel with English in that path properties are realized in the satellites. However, the satellites are different. They are prepositions and particles in English, as *up* in 'The balloon floated *up* the sky', Directional complement verbs as *lên* in 'Quả bóng bay *lên* trời' or prepositions, positional nouns in Vietnamese. For this reason, Vietnamese can be categorized as a satellite-framed construction.

On the other hand, Vietnamese patterns with Spanish, that is, path properties may be realized in verbs. For example:

…Nhưng hắn không *vào* túp lều lúp xúp mà *ra* thẳng bờ sông. [9]

Figure Motion+Path Ground Motion+Path Ground

In contrast, English verb roots readily conflate the Co-event but not Path. This lexicalisation pattern is not characteristic, though English also has verbs that incorporate Path,

such as *arrive*, *approach*, *circle*, *cross*, *descend*, *enter*, *exit*, *follow*, *join*, *pass*, *rise*, *return*, *separate*, etc., but most of them are historic borrowings from Romance languages. Since Vietnamese maps Path onto the main verb and also conflates Path with Move, it can be categorized as a path-conflating or Verb-framed language.

4.3. Lexicalization pattern 3: Motion + Figure

In this third type of lexicalization, the verb expresses Motion together with Figure. This pattern is present in Navajo and in most northern Hokan languages. Atsugewi, a Hokan polysynthetic language of northern California, is the prototypical example of this type presented in Talmy [6]. It has a whole series of verbs that express various kinds of objects or materials moving. Its structure is as follows:

Motion + Figure + (Satellite + Ground)

Talmy [6] draws an analogy using English examples. It would be as if verbs like *rain* and *spit* were the common way of expressing movement. The non-agentive *rain* would refer to rain moving, and the agentive *spit* to causing spit to move, as in the following sentences:

It *rained* in through the bedroom window.

I *spat* into the cuspidor.

It is noted by Talmy [6] that this pattern of conflating the Figure with Motion extends to such Figural objects as body parts and garments. Some English motion verbs are of this type: *head* (He headed the ball into the goal), or *hand* (They hand the plate round). However, it is observed that the usual English construction for referring to body-part control involves expressing the body part as the direct-object nominal of a verb of maneuvering, as in *I laid my head on the pillow*. Vietnamese, a non-inflectional language with no affix, patterns with English in both cases. For example:

Hắn **bước** vào nhà. (Figure-conflating verb)

He stepped into/entered the house.

Nó **lắc** đầu liên tục. (Manner-conflating verb)

He shook his head continually.

While these three conflation systems for Motion verbs (**Motion + 1 semantic component**) are apparently the main ones found across languages, Talmy [6] notes other lexicalisation patterns which occur as well, in addition to some which do not. These minor patterns will be discussed in greater details in another paper

5. Split and parallel systems of conflation: the case of Vietnamese motion verbs?

A language often has a characteristic conflation type. However, a given language can characteristically (a) employ one conflation type with one type of Motion event, and a different conflation type for another type of Motion event; that is, a language may have a *split or complementary system of conflation*, or (b) use different conflation types with the same type of Motion event; that is, a language may have a *parallel system of conflation.*

To illustrate the parallel system of conflation, Talmy [6] states that English would exemplify a parallel-type system of its path verb-based constructions were as colloquial as its Co-event verb-based constructions. For example: *The bottle exited the cave floating* were as colloquial as *The bottle floated out of the cave*. But this is not the case so that English has been classed as being characteristic of the Co-event conflation type.

With regards to Vietnamese, as analyzed earlier, Vietnamese has a number of directional complement verbs, prepositions and even positional nouns that appear after the main verb and express the Path properties of Motion. In Talmy's work, these syntactic devices are viewed as satellites to the main verbs in Vietnamese motion expressions; and thus, Vietnamese is a ***satellite-framed*** or ***manner-conflating*** language.

However, this reflected situation is not the complete picture. In fact, in addition to the satellite lexicalization of Path, it is equally natural in Vietnamese to conflate Move with

Path and express them in the main verb of a motion sentence, as in Mẹ đã *về* nhà (Mum came-back home). *Về* is not a satellite but the main (only) verb of the sentence. This example suggests that the classification of Vietnamese as a satellite-framed or manner-conflating language isnot enough. *Vietnamese utilizes both satellite-framed and verb-framed lexicalization patterns* in encoding Path and other components of motion. Both patterns occur frequently in colloquial speech in Vietnamese. Typologically, this parallel system of conflation sets Vietnamese apart from languages such as English or Spanish which use only one type of conflation, as in Talmy's words, "in its most characteristic expression of motion".

From the similarities and differences concerning motion conceptualization and representation in the two languages, the study has come up with the conclusion that language is an experientially-based product of human mind, and a reflection of the fact that speakers of different languages structure their perception of reality in different ways. In terms of motion, languages are typologically different in utilizing lexicalization patterns to conflate Path and Manner of motion with Move elements. This supports the general notion of CLs; that is, language is conceptualized and embodied. More specifically, the ways we think about motion, the differences in our mental imagery trigger the linguistic expressions; and language used by us to express Motion is a description of human perception of Motion in reality.

6. Implications for language teaching and translation

6.1. The translation of motion verbs usually poses some difficulties to the Vietnamese translators especially students of translation subject on account of cross-linguistic differences. In Vietnamese-English translation, a lot of students may produce such versions as *He entered into the caves*; *she went on the stairs* or *The balloon went ascend on the sky …* To solve problems like this, Baker [10] points out that

In translation, grammar often has the effect of a straitjacket, forcing the translator along a certain course which may or may not follow that of the source text as closely as the translator would like to'.

6.2. The translation of motion verbs can serve as illustration: When translating Vietnamese sentences into English, Vietnamese translators need to add to verbs a particle or a prepositional phrase so as to express Manner whereas this element is included in the English verb. And when translating an English text into Vietnamese, it is required that the translator pay attention to the verb types (one-verb construction and SVCs), the omission of manner in the verbs, the expression of path especially path segmentation in order to avoid the loss of meaning in the target language. For example, in the sentence: 'She hurried into the room', the verb 'hurry' is quite difficult to translate into Vietnamese. Therefore, the Vietnamese translators base on the context to choose an appropriate Vietnamese verb among 'chạy', 'đi', 'vào'… However, these verbs can not encode all the semantic meanings of the original verb (Rate: fast). Very often, translators will add an adjunct of manner like 'vội vàng' to the main verb to account for the lost of manner. In this sense, the best produced sentence should be like: 'Nàng vội vàng chạy vào (trong) phòng'. For these reasons, during the translation process, translators need to consider the complex semantic nature of a vast number of English and Vietnamese motion verbs. Given this consideration, translators might either choose the most semantically equivalent verb if the context of the utterance allows its use, or they might render the motion verb by other linguistic means in order to be as faithful to the original as possible while still sounding natural in the target language.

6.3. As for language teachers, the semantic representations of motion verbs may have useful applications for teaching English as a second language, in particular, for teaching English to speakers of verb-framed languages. Vietnamese students of English find it very difficult to learn, master and put into use the vast amount of English manner-of- motion verbs. In reality, it was not surprising to see some students write interfered-by-mother-tongue sentences like '*My mother leads me come to school*', or '*I hurried run to the field*'. In general, we think that the discrepancies in learners' language acquisition usually arise from discrepancies in conceptualization, and the presentation of the conceptualization properties associated with language expressions develops learners' insight into a language, and thus facilitates learning. Therefore, if motion verbs are presented to students in categories and then explored in terms of the additional manner or path information they encode, it will be easier for them to understand their semantics.

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Động từ vận động và các mô hình từ vựng hóa của chúng trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt - xem xét từ góc độ ngữ nghĩa học tri nhận

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Bài viết so sánh các mô hình từ vựng hóa của các động từ vận động với các nguyên tắc loại hình và phổ quát trong hai ngôn ngữ tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt từ góc độ ngôn ngữ học tri nhận. Ngữ nghĩa học tri nhận phân loại động từ vận động dựa vào các yếu tố ngữ nghĩa tiêu biểu được mã hóa trong động từ gốc như: thể cách (manner), hướng (path) và dạng (shape). Kết quả thu được từ nghiên cứu của chúng tôi chỉ ra rằng động từ vận động trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt có sự khác nhau trong việc sử dụng các mô hình từ vựng hóa để mã hóa hướng và thể cách của vận động. Dựa trên những kết luận này, bài viết đưa ra những gợi ý cho việc dạy ngoại ngữ và dịch thuật, hy vọng sẽ mang đến một phương pháp phân tích các động từ vận động từ một góc nhìn khác.

Từ khoá: Vận động, động từ vận động, mô hình từ vựng hoá, sự tình vận động, thể cách, lối đi, nguyên nhân, hình, nền, khung vệ tinh, khung động từ.