

The grammatical nature of Sino-Vietnamese “verb-object compounds”

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Grammatical borrowing from Chinese to Vietnamese

Alves (2007: 343)

“...and many of grammatical characteristics typical of varieties of Chinese are not part of Vietnamese grammar...”

“Overall, the grammatical influence of Chinese is primarily lexical rather than structural...”

- The idea has been supported by other previous studies.

(Alves 2001, Washizawa 2019, among others)

The topic of this study

- **‘Verb-object (VO) compounds’** (or *líhécí* 離合詞)
 - have unique grammatical characteristics of typical of Chinese

Question:

Does **Sino-Vietnamese ‘VO compounds’** retain the same grammatical characteristics as the original forms in Chinese?

Answer:

Main characteristics of Chinese VO compounds have been lost in Vietnamese.

Verb-object compounds in Chinese

VO compounds (Li & Thompson 1981)

- consist of two constituents having syntactic relations of a verb and its direct object.

• Grammatical characteristics of VO compounds in Chinese

1. VO compounds include more than one bound morphemes.

e.g., *shàng* ***shì***

上 市

ascend city

‘come to market’

lǐ ***fà***

理 髮

arrange hair

‘have a haircut’

Verb-object compounds in Chinese

2. The majority of VO compounds allow their constituents to be separated and other morphemes or words can be inserted between them.

e.g., *shàng le shì*

上 了 市

ascend *perfective* city 'came to market'

Tā hái méi lǐ guo fà.

他 還 沒 理 過 髮。

he still not arrange EXP hair

'He still hasn't ever had a haircut'

Verb-object compounds in Chinese

3. The majority of VO compounds do not take a direct object.

e.g., *fēn lèi*

分 類

divide class

'classify'

fēn lèi* *dòngwù***

分 類

動物

divide class

animal

'classify animals'

Instead, a object-like noun appears at a prepositional phrase.

gěi dòngwù *fēn lèi*

給 動物 分 類

to animal

divid class

'classify animals'

Verb-object compounds in Chinese

- Previous studies of Chinese syntax have discussed the status of VO compounds: they are **word** or **phrase**?
(Lu 1957, Chao 1968, Lü 1979, among others)

Packard (2016: 76)

“Líhécí are best viewed as a kind of word with one or two bound constituents, but a word whose constituents are subject to syntactic analysis as free element in certain limited context.”

Dual status as words and phrases

Sino-Vietnamese ‘VO compounds’

- A number of VO compounds have been borrowed into Vietnamese.

Vietnamese:	<i>phân loại</i>	<i>kết hôn</i>	<i>phát điện</i>
Chinese pinyin:	<i>fēn lèi</i>	<i>jié hūn</i>	<i>fā diàn</i>
C characters:	分 類	結 婚	發 電
	divide-class	combine-mariage	produce-electrocity
	‘classify’	‘get married’	‘generate electrocity’

Question:

Does Sino-Vietnamese ‘VO compounds’ retain the same grammatical characteristics as their original forms in Chinese?

Methods of experiments

• Experiment I : Separation by grammatical words

	<i>ròi</i> ‘perfective’	
e.g., <i>phân loại</i>	<i>phân</i> ↓ <i>loại</i>	c.f. Chinese: <i>fēn le lèi</i>
	?	分了類
‘classify’	‘classified (perfective)??’	‘classified (perfective)’

• Experiment II : Insertion of object words

	<i>động vật</i> ‘animal’	
e.g., <i>phân loại</i>	<i>phân loại</i> ↓	c.f. Chinese: * <i>fēnlèi dòngwù</i>
	?	分類 動物
‘classify’	‘classify animals’	‘classify animals’

Selection of target words

1. Zhou (2011):

Dictionary of the Usage of Common Chinese Separable Words

漢語常用離合詞用法辭典

268 words

2. Kawamoto (2011):

Detailed Dictionary of Vietnamese-Japanese (55,500 words)

Từ Điển Tương Giải Việt Nhật

268 words → 90 words



Selection of target words

3. Familiarity assessment by a native speaker of Vietnamese (S1)

‘Familiar and commonly used words’

268 words → **90 words** → **47 words**

S1 - female, born in 1985.
- Hanoi → Japan (6 years) → Hanoi (2019-)

Experiment I : Separation by grammatical words

được : **fortunately, successfully, with a good result**

Ông ấy *mua* **được** *một ngôi nhà to.*

He buy successfully one CL house big

‘He purchased a large villa.’

lại : **repeating, doing over**

Lúc bạn tôi ra Hà Nội, tôi ở **lại** *Sài Gòn làm việc.*

when friend I go Hanoi I in (verb) again Saigon do thing

‘At the time my friend went to Hanoi, I remained in Saigon working.’

hết : **be completely finished**

Anh ấy *tiêu* **hết** *cả tiền* rồi.

He consume finish all money perfective

‘He’s spent all the money already’

Thompson (1965: 268, 345, 347)

Results of Experiment I

- All target words cannot be separated by the grammatical words **with one exception.**

phát điện  *phát **được** điện*
produce electricity produce successfully electricity
'generate electricity' 'be able to generate electricity'

e.g., *Cái máy này **phát được** điện.*
CL machine this produce successfully electricity
'This machine can generate electricity.'

Sino-Vietnamese VO compounds have a strong tendency to reject their separation.

Experiment II : Insertion of object words

- Question: Can each target word take an object?
- The results collected from S1 were relatively complicated and unstable.
- Partial assessment by the second native speaker of Vietnamese (S2)
 - **32 words** were selected as 'familiar and commonly used word'.
 - S2 assessed whether they can take an object.

S2 - female, born in 1993.

- Vung Tau → Ho Chi Minh City → Japan (2017-)

Results: Experiment II

α. Two speakers agreed that **7 words can take an object.**

<i>bảo mật</i>	keep + secret	'keep secret'	<i>bảo mật</i> thông tin 'to keep information'
<i>chiêu sinh</i>	invite + student	'recruit students'	<i>chiêu sinh</i> các lớp học 'to recruit students for each class'
<i>gia công</i>	add + working	'process (verb)'	<i>gia công</i> máy móc 'to process a machine'
<i>phát bệnh</i>	spread + disease	'become ill'	<i>phát bệnh</i> tim 'to get heart disease'
<i>phân công</i>	divide + work	'divide the work'	<i>phân công</i> công việc này 'to divide this task (to each worker)'
<i>phân loại</i>	divide + class	'classify'	<i>phân loại</i> động vật 'to classify animals'
<i>tốt nghiệp</i>	finish + job	'graduate'	<i>tốt nghiệp</i> đại học 'to graduate from university'

Results: Experiment II

β. S1 answered that 7 words can take an object, while S2 did not accept.

<i>báo danh</i>	report + name	'enroll'
<i>bế mạc</i>	close + curtain	'close (conference etc.)'
<i>điểm danh</i>	call + name	'call the roll'
<i>khai mạc</i>	open + curtain	'open (conference etc.)'
<i>nhập học</i>	enter + study	'enter a school'
<i>thi công</i>	carry out + work	'build'
<i>từ chức</i>	resign + job	'resign'

Results: Experiment II

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điểm danh, thi công & từ chức have examples with an object in dictionaries.

<i>điểm danh</i>	call + name	'call the roll'	<i>điểm danh học sinh</i> (PT) 'to call the students' names'
<i>thi công</i>	carry out + work	'build'	<i>thi công khu nhà ở cao tầng</i> (PT) 'to build a high-rise housing area'
<i>từ chức</i>	resign + job	'resign'	<i>từ chức hiệu trưởng</i> (TV) 'to resign as principal'

PT: Chu Bích Thu et. al. (2015) *Từ Điển Tiếng Việt Phổ Thông* (Tái bản có sửa chữa & bổ sung).
Nhà xuất Bản Phương Đông.

TV: Nguyễn Tôn Nhan & Phú Văn Hãn (2013) *Từ Điển Tiếng Việt*,
Nhà Xuất Bản Từ Điển Bách Khoa.

Results: Experiment II

γ. Two speakers agreed that **2 words can be followed by a verb phrase** rather than an object.

<i>phạm tội</i>	violate + crime	'commit a crime'	<i>phạm tội</i> <i>buôn bán ma túy</i> commit sell drugs 'to commit drug sales'
<i>tuyên thệ</i>	declare + notify	'declare'	<i>tuyên thệ</i> <i>sẽ làm gì đó</i> declare will do something 'to declare that I/you/he/she will do something'

Results: Experiment II

δ. Two speakers agreed that 5 words cannot take an object; instead, they can be followed by a prepositional phrase.

<i>an tâm</i>	be satisfied + heart	'be relieved'	<i>an tâm về tương lai</i> 'to be relieved about future'
<i>hành quân</i>	go + army	'(of troops) march'	<i>hành quân đến (tên địa điểm)</i> 'to march to (a place name)'
<i>kết hôn</i>	connect + marriage	'marry'	<i>kết hôn với anh ấy</i> 'to marry him'
<i>ly hôn</i>	leave + marriage	'divorce'	<i>ly hôn với Nam</i> 'to divorce Nam'
<i>nhập cảnh</i>	enter + border	'enter a country'	<i>Nhập cảnh vào Việt Nam</i> 'to enter into Vietnam'

Results: Experiment II

ε. Two speakers agreed that 11 words cannot take an object.

<i>bãi công</i>	cease + work	'go on a strike'	<i>sinh bệnh</i>	get + disease	'get ill'
<i>biến chất</i>	change + quality	'go bad'	<i>thất học</i>	lose + study	'be deprived of education'
<i>nhập viện</i>	enter + hospital	'be in hospital'	<i>thất nghiệp</i>	lose + job	'be unemployed'
<i>phá sản</i>	break + property	'go bankrupt'	<i>trực ban</i>	be on duty + duty	'be on duty'
<i>phạm pháp</i>	violate + law	'violate the law'	<i>xuất cảnh</i>	go out + border	'leave the country'
<i>phát điện</i>	produce + electricity	'generate electricity'			

Summary of results: Experiment II

α ✓ object	γ ✓ VP	δ ☹ object ✓ PP	ϵ ☹ object
7	2	5	11
Different from Chinese VO compounds 9		Common with Chinese VO compounds 16	

β . S1: ✓ object vs. S2: ☹ object 7 words

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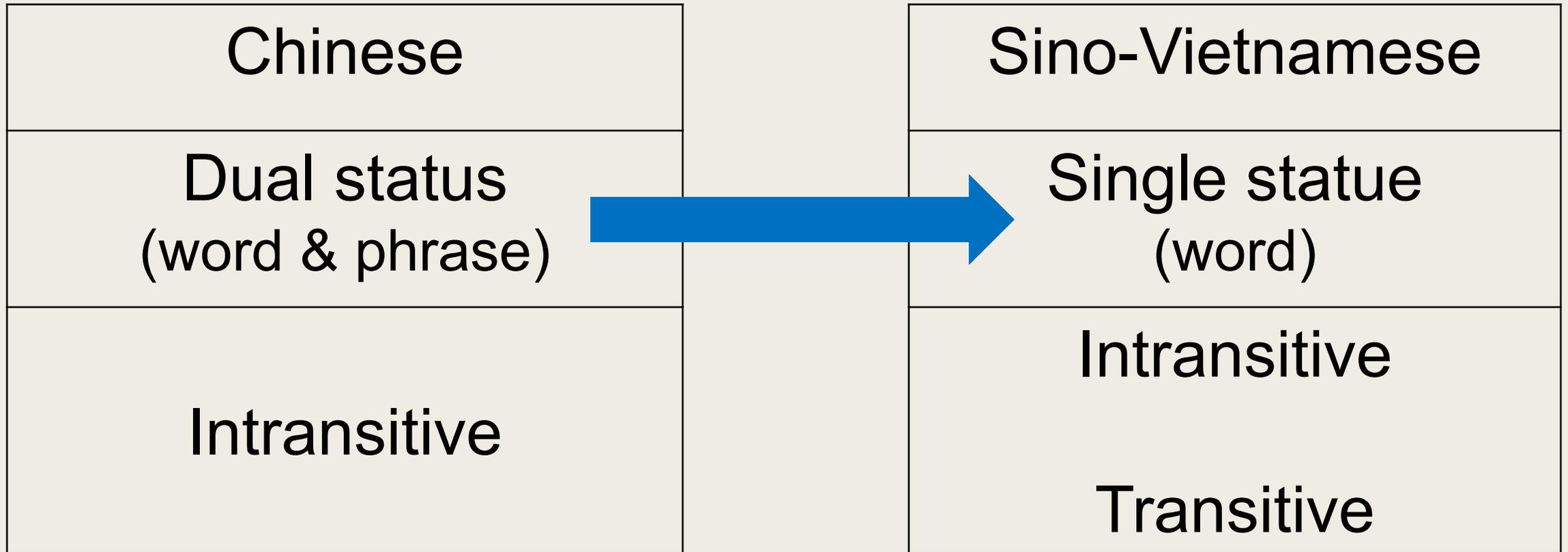
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Conclusion



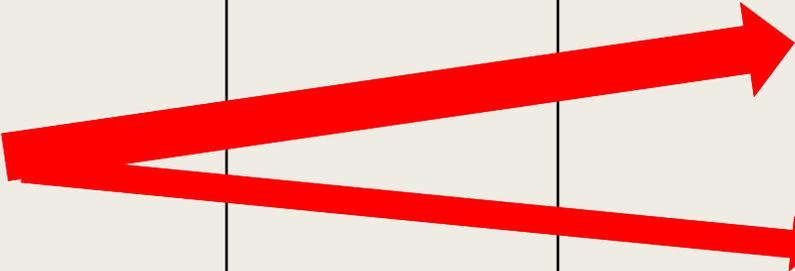
- The phrasal status was almost lost in Sino-Vietnamese VO compounds.

Alves (2007: 343)

“...and many of grammatical characteristics typical of varieties of Chinese are not part of Vietnamese grammar...”

Conclusion

Chinese	Sino-Vietnamese
Dual status (word & phrase)	Single statue (word)
Intransitive	Intransitive
	Transitive



- Some VO compounds has been reanalyzed as transitive verbs allowing to take an object word.
- What factors determine the transitivity of Sino-Vietnamese VO compounds?

Transitivity of VO compounds in Sino-Japanese

- The transitivity of borrowed VO compounds is in common between Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-Japanese.

α: ✓ **object**

 *fēn lèi* (分類) -  *phân loại* -  *bunrui* 'classify'

e.g., *dōbutsu-**o*** *bunrui-suru.* 'classify animals'
animal ACC classify do

ε: ☹️ **object**

 *pò chǎn* (破產) -  *phá sản* -  *hasan* 'go bankrupt'

e.g., *kono kaisha-**wa*** *hasan-shita.* 'This company went bankrupt'
this company TOPIC go bankrupt did

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