

The syntax of Tense and Aspect in Vietnamese

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This talk offers a unified semantic and syntactic analysis of aspectual morphemes in Vietnamese, in which the distribution and co-varying interpretation of these elements is shown to provide direct support for two aspectual domains in phrase-structure—Outer vs. Inner Aspect—a structural proposal originally advanced by Travis (2010) on the basis of evidence from Western Malayo-Polynesian languages.

We consider first the pre-verbal domain in Vietnamese, with particular focus on the ‘anterior’ morpheme *đã*, and its interaction with other pre-verbal elements, especially (future) tense (*sẽ*) and negation (*không*) morphemes. In previous work, this element has been treated as a temporal marker denoting past tense (Nguyễn, M. T. 1995; Nguyễn, Đ.H. 1997), and as a perfective or perfect aspect marker (Cao 2003, Trinh 2005). Through a careful exposition of the ways in which *đã* combines with different classes of predicate [1]—see Vendler (1957)—we argue first that *đã* is not perfective, though it *is* clearly aspectual: developing Klein’s (1994) relational analysis of Aspect, we propose instead that *đã* underlyingly is a perfect marker anchoring the initial—rather than final—subinterval of the Situation Time before the Topic Time (which is also the Utterance Time in the default case). Given this semantic characterization, the pre-verbal realization of the element, as well as its intermediate status—neither purely temporal nor conventionally aspectual—is claimed to be best explained through a syntactic analysis in which *đã* as an exponent of the functional category Outer Aspect, below TP and immediately outside the maximal vP. In conjunction with an independently motivated movement rule, this syntactic analysis is shown to explain two collocational restrictions: (i) the morphological incompatibility of aspectual *đã* with future *sẽ*, though *đã* may freely appear in future perfect contexts; (ii) the fact that *đã* only allows a preterite reading in negative contexts[3], though it is otherwise ambiguous between a perfect and preterite interpretation [2]; see Trinh (2005). Following Duffield (2011, 2013), both restrictions are argued to follow from head-movement conditions: in the absence of sentential negation, ‘*đã*’ is inserted under Asp and raises via Head Movement to T, resulting in ambiguity; however, when an intervening element (Neg) blocks this movement, *đã* must be merged directly under T (*cf.* Pollock 1989).

The second part of the talk is devoted to the analysis of *post*-verbal aspectual morphemes in Vietnamese, which have largely been ignored by previous studies: we argue that the syntactic alternations displayed by these elements are most consistent with an analysis in terms of Travis’ “Inner Aspect” projection, a functional projection within the VP shell (see Travis 2010, Ramchand 2008). Two kinds of aspectual morpheme support such an analysis: (i), alternations in the distribution of ‘completive’ predicates, as in [4]; (ii), the distribution and co-occurrence restrictions of ‘resultative’ morphemes [5], especially the multifunctional ‘modal’ predicate *được* (which just in this syntactic position has a purely aspectual (achievement) reading.)

In conclusion, both pre- and post-verbally, the radically isolating character of Vietnamese provides us with direct evidence for a split IP and an articulated VP structure. Employing a theoretical cartographic framework (Cinque 1999, 2001) enables us to elucidate the intricate behaviour of these aspectual markers in Vietnamese, in ways not available in other frameworks or from a purely descriptive perspective.

Examples:

- (1) a. Tôi đã khỏe rồi.
I *ant strong already*
‘I am already recovered’
b. Cuối cùng anh ấy đã thắng cuộc.

- Final prn dem ant win contest*
 ‘Finally, he won the contest’
- c. Hôm qua nó đã viết bài nhưng vẫn chưa xong.
Yesterday prn ant write paper but still neg finish
 ‘He wrote the paper yesterday but he has not finished it yet’.
- d. Tàu đã chạy rồi.
Train ant run already
 ‘The train has left’.
- (2) Nó đã làm bài
Prn ant do homework
 ‘He did the homework’.
 ‘He has done the homework.’
- (3) Nó đã không làm bài
Prn ant neg do homework
 ‘He did not do the homework.’
Not ‘He hasn’t done the homework.’
- (4) a. Nó đã lau bàn **xong**
Prn ant wipe table finish
 ‘He wiped out the table’ (He finished wiping the table).
- b. Nó đã lau **xong** (cái) bàn.
Prn ant wipe finish (cls) table
 ‘He wiped out the table’ (He finished wiping the table).
- (5) a. Chú bò tìm **ra** bạn.
Cls cow search out friend
 ‘The cow found his friend’.
- b. Cô ấy kiếm **được** việc chỉ trong 3 ngày.
Prn dem search can job only in three day
 ‘She found a job in only three days’.

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