

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SYNTACTIC FUNCTIONALITY OF VIETNAMESE ADJECTIVES AND ENGLISH ADJECTIVES

PHAM HONG HAI* - TRAN TIN NGHI**

ABSTRACT: This paper compares the syntactic functionality of Vietnamese adjectives with English adjectives to identify their similarities and differences in terms of: (i) Regarding the ability to act as predicates in sentences: Most Vietnamese adjectives can function independently as intransitive predicator, and can stand alone as predicates. English adjectives can be the main component of predicates but must be connected to the subject by linking verbs. (ii) Regarding the ability to function as transitive predicator: Vietnamese adjectives can function like transitive predicator. Most intransitive adjectives can be used transitively. English adjectives also express transitivity, but not as clearly as Vietnamese adjectives do. This study presents a deeper understanding of the nature of adjectives in general, and the functional role of adjectives in two typologically different languages. The paper also aims to help learners understand how to properly use sentences with adjectives as the nucleus of the predicate in English and Vietnamese, and how to effectively translate these sentence patterns between the two languages.

KEY WORDS: Adjective; predicator; predicate nucleus; intransitive adjective; transitive adjective.

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1. Introduction

The functional activity of Vietnamese adjectives and English adjectives on the syntactic plane has been discussed quite a lot by the authors in aspects such as: adjectives as determiners modifying nouns, adjectives as predicates in sentences, etc. In a typical inflected language like English, the function of adjectives has basically been determined. However, in a typical non-inflected language like Vietnamese, the function of adjective still has many issues that need to be discussed.

Semantically, adjectives often share broad conceptual domains across languages, such as property, quality, dimension, color, and state. However, their morphosyntactic behavior varies considerably from one language to another. In terms of form and syntactic function, adjectives may differ in how they are structured, how they combine with other sentence elements, and how they function within the predicate. These differences make the syntactic behavior of adjectives a complex issue that requires further analysis and discussion. The syntactic aspect of Vietnamese sentences and English sentences has many similarities, and comparing the functional ability of adjectives in the two languages on this aspect is expected to lead to valuable conclusions.

In English and inflected languages, the verb is traditionally understood as the word class that plays the central role in forming the predicate. In Vietnamese, a typical uninflected language, the syntactic functioning of word classes is very different. The common word classes that play the central role of the predicate are verbs and adjectives. In many cases, nouns and other word classes can also play the central role of the predicate. To establish a word class that can play the central role of the predicate in many languages, many functionalists have discussed a word class identified as *predicator*. We use the term *predicator* with the understanding that this is the word class that plays the central role of the

**University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU HCM, Vietnam*

***Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade, Vietnam (corresponding author,*

Email: nghitt@huit.edu.vn)

predicate in English sentences and in Vietnamese sentences. In English, a predicator can function like a verb. In Vietnamese sentences, the term predicator has a broader coverage in terms of word class.

This article extends previous work by focusing specifically on the contrast between predicate-nucleus function and adjectival transitivity in Vietnamese and English.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Typical research on adjectives worldwide

There have been many direct and indirect studies on the syntactical activities of adjectives in languages by many authors around the world. Among them, there are many works on the issue of objects of adjectives. Objects of adjectives are discussed and determined from many different angles, in typological linguistics.

Ikeya (1995) indirectly mentioned the object of adjectives, noting that in English there are some adjectives that must be combined with prepositional phrases, with *That* - clause, or with *To* verb Phrase, such as: *fond of (like)*, *worthy of (worthy of...)*, *desirous of (desirable)*,...

Börjars and Vincent (2010, p. 1), in “Complements of adjectives: a diachronic approach”, discussed the issue of object of adjectives (“Can an adjective have an object?”). These two authors argued that, “[h]owever, from the semantic point of view there is in fact good reason to expect that the range of complements available to adjectives is the same as for verbs, as evidenced by such near-synonymous pairs as *fear/be afraid of*, *love/be fond of*, *regret/be regretful of*. In practice grammarians have been happy to assign adjectives subcategorizations for COMP (certain that S), XCOMP (keen to VP), OBL (similar to NP). The question we ask in this paper therefore is whether an adjective can also take an OBJ”.

Dixon (2004, p.35) discussed the copula construction in English and its influence on the intransitive/transitive nature of adjectives in each language: “*Not all languages have a copula construction. One might expect a correlation: languages in which adjectives can be intransitive predicate might be thought likely to lack a copula construction, with languages for which adjectives cannot function as intransitive predicate being likely to have a copula construction. From examination of a range of languages, it appears that there is in fact no correlation. That is, whether or not a language has a copula construction is quite independent of whether or not adjectives can be intransitive predicates*”.

Park (2001) raised the issue of whether “Transitive Adjectives” really exist? The author has very remarkable explanation about the transitivity of adjectives and the direct object of adjectives.

In addition to these studies, related issues concerning adjectival complementation, predicative adjectives, and the boundary between adjectives and verbs have been examined from a range of theoretical and typological perspectives. For example, Bolinger (1967) and Ferris (1993) discuss the attributive and predicative functions of English adjectives; Backhouse (1984), Kuno (1973), Xu (1988), and Matasović (2000) address adjective-like categories in languages such as Japanese, Chinese, and Croatian; while Maling (1983) and Wetzer (1992) consider adjectival predication and transitivity from broader grammatical and typological viewpoints. These studies provide a useful background for examining whether adjectives may license complements comparable to verbal objects, although the present article focuses specifically on Vietnamese and English.

2.2. Typical research on adjectives in Vietnam

Vietnamese linguists have determined the functional activity of Vietnamese adjectives on the syntactic plane in many aspects. Diệp Quang Ban and Hoàng Văn Thung (1991), Nguyễn Tài Cẩn (1975), Đinh Văn Đức (1986), and Cao Xuân Hạo (1998) agreed that Vietnamese adjectives can stand alone as predicates, and when describing the arguments of adjectives as subsidiary members (before and after the adjective), these authors discussed more deeply the objective role of the subsidiary members following the adjective.

Nguyễn Tài Cẩn (1975, p.334) presented examples of the similarity of adjective phrases and verb phrases, in which subsidiary members behind the center refers to the object of the verb and adjective,

such as *gần quần chúng* (be close to the people), *xa bạn* (be far from friends), *khác người* (be different from people) (p.334). In his monograph "Ngữ pháp tiếng Việt" (Vietnamese Grammar), Đinh Văn Đức (1986) observed that: Due to the way of reflection of native speakers, a characteristic of the communication relationship can be visualized as a state; furthermore, Đinh Văn Đức (1986) suggests that some states denoted by Vietnamese adjectives may be construed as involving or affecting another entity. This provides a semantic basis for the emergence of post-adjectival complements, often described as "objects of adjectives" in Vietnamese.

Regarding the following subsidiary members as objects in adjective phrases, Diệp Quang Ban and Hoàng Văn Thung (1991) divided subsidiary members into several types: (i) The Objects of adjectives of quantity (e.g., *đông*/crowded, *đầy*/full, *vắng*/empty, *thưa*/sparse, *mau*/fast, *nhiều*/many, *ít*/few);

(ii) The Objects comprising nouns that are the subject of the semantic content stated in the adjective (e.g., *Cây này vàng lá* / *This tree - yellow- leaves*, meaning "*This tree has yellow leaves*").

(iii) The Objects indicate a spatial or temporal point in a positioning relationship with the element at the beginning of the sentence (e.g., *Nhà tôi xa trường* / *My house - far - from the school*, meaning "My house is far from school"; *Hôm nay gần Tết rồi* / *Today - near - Tet*, meaning "Tet is around the corner");

(iv) The Objects requires clarifying an aspect of the adjective's semantic content (e.g., *Tốt gỗ hơn tốt nước sơn* / *good - wood - better than - good - paint*, literally referring to the idea that it is better to have good wood than good paint (of the wood), meaning "Beauty is only skin deep") (Diệp Quang Ban & Hoàng Văn Thung, 1991, pp. 101–105).

Cao Xuân Hạo (1998) mainly relied on the criteria [+/- dynamic], [+/-controlled] to classify predicators into five basic types (action predicators, process predicators, posture predicators, stative predicators, and modal predicators). Among these five types of predicators, stative predicators contains the majority of the Vietnamese adjective set (conceptualized according to traditional grammar). More specifically, he continued to use the criteria [+permanent] (property) and [-permanent] (state) to classify the group of stative predicators into four subtypes:

(1) predicators of temperament: (e.g., *ác*/cruel, *bướng*/stubborn, *dại*/foolish, *gan* /brave, *hiền*/gentle, *liều* /reckless, *ngoan*/obedient, and *ưng*/obstinate).

(2) predicators of mentality: (e.g., *âu* /worried, *bận*/busy, *cáu*/angry, *chăm*/diligent, *dối*/sulky, *ganh*/envious, *hỗn*/rude, *khởi*/delighted, *thích*/interested, *thương*/love, and *yêu*/love).

(3) predicators of animate physical state: (e.g., *béo*/fat, *câm*/dumb, *còm*/emaciated, *đau*/painful, *đui*/blind, *khỏe*/healthy, *lả*/exhausted, *mập*/plump, *nghe*/choked, *ngọng*/stammering, *rèm*/sore, *sống*/alive, *thức*/awake, *vụng*/clumsy, and *xiu*/faint).

(4) predicators of inanimate physical state: (e.g., *ảo*/illusory, *bằng*/flat, *cao*/high, *chéo*/cross, *dẻo*/flexible, *dột*/leaky, *đặc*/dense, *đỏ*/red, *hôi*/smelly, *mẻ*/chipped/broken, *ngắn*/short, *nhạy*/sensitive, *rắn*/hard, *sắc*/sharp, *thật*/true, and *xấu*/bad).

Cao Xuân Hạo's statistics includes 1661 stative predicators. The data has a significant overlap with our statistical data of monosyllabic adjective (1612 monosyllabic adjectives) based on Hoàng Phê's dictionary (2006). Identifying the group of state predicators and dividing this group of predicators into subtypes based on criteria tested by Cao Xuân Hạo has created an important basis for discussing the ability of the Vietnamese adjective group to act as verbs.

Phạm Hồng Hải (2019) identified great similarities between the argument structure and syntactic structure of adjectives and verbs in Vietnamese. This further strengthens the assertion that "adjective" and "verb" in Vietnamese are two subtypes of one word class - predicators. For the first time, intransitive/transitive adjectives are clearly established in the following aspects:

(i) Intransitive adjectives

Intransitive adjectives are those that can stand alone as predicates (possibly combined with modals). They are also closely related to the subject both semantically and syntactically to form a complete sentence. Intransitive adjectives can be followed by an indirect object (with a preposition). Examples

include *vui* (happy), *buồn* (sad), *cao* (tall), *thấp* (short), *ngắn* (short), *dài* (long), *đen* (black), *trắng* (white), etc.

(1) a1. *Cô ấy buồn* (She – sad; She is **sad**)

a2. *Cô ấy buồn về chuyện gia đình* (She - sad – about – matters – family; She is **sad about** (her) family matters)

b1. *Quyển sách đã sòn* (Book - already - worn out; The book is **worn out**.)

b2. *Quyển sách đã sòn cả gáy* (Book - already - worn out – spine; The book is worn out, including the spine.) (Hoàng Phê, 2006)

In examples of 1a1 and 1b1, the adjectives *buồn* (sad) and *sòn* (worn out) can independently serve as predicates. In other words, these adjectives act as verbs in the argument structure of adjectives with an actant (obligatory argument) functioning as the subject. In examples of 1a2 and 1b2, *buồn* (sad) and *sòn* (worn out) are followed by an indirect object (*về chuyện gia đình/about family matters*, *cả gáy/including the spine*). The possibility of Vietnamese adjectives to independently function as predicates has been recognized in Vietnamese linguistics research.

(ii) *Transitive adjectives*

Adjectives that, in addition to having an actant serving as the subject in the syntactic plane, require a direct object actant (the direct object can be underlying) are considered transitive adjectives. Examples include *biệt/disappeared*, *ham/desirous of*, *giống/similar*, *xa/far*, *thiếu/short of*, *s xứng/justified or commendable*, etc.

(2) a. *Anh ấy xa nhà*. (He - far away – home; He is **far** away from his home)

b. *Nhà anh ấy xa*. (House - he – far; His house/home is **far away**.)

(Hoàng Phê, 2006)

In sentence 2a, *xa/far* is not a characteristic or state of the subject - *anh ấy/he*. In other words, *anh ấy/he* is not the subject experiencing the state (*far*), but rather *he* is described in relation to another object (*home*). Similarly, in sentence 2b, *nhà anh ấy/his home* is described in relation to an implicit object (*workplace*, etc.). In this case, *xa/far* is a typical transitive adjective because it requires the presence of another object besides the subject. The *nhà/home* in sentence 2a is an obligatory direct object. In sentence 2b, the direct object (*workplace*, etc.) is implicit. *Xa/far* is an adjective describing the subject in relation to another object and is considered a transitive adjective.

In Vietnamese, the phenomenon of adjectives with transitive nature is uncommon and relatively difficult to identify. We have compiled a list of 40 typical adjectives with transitive nature: *bằng, bề, biệt, bớt, chạnh, chéch, chệch, chung, chuyên, cóm, đặt, ế, gần, giáp, hại, hảo, hết, hoen, hơn, hợp, hụt, kém, khuất, lai, lảm, lỗi, quen, sành, sát, thân, thạo, thấu, thiếu, thừa, trội, vãn, vắng, xa, xứng, xuộm*.

In Vietnamese, there are many examples of adjectives that can function as transitive verbs: (Within the scope of this article, we have not translated the following Vietnamese examples into English because they are idioms, proverbs, and poems in Vietnamese. Translating each Vietnamese example into English with an equivalent sentence would not guarantee semantic equivalence).

+ “*Chạnh lòng thương kẻ xa xôi*.”; “*Ong qua bướm lại đã thừa xấu xa*.”; “*Nghề chơi cũng lảm công phu*.” (Nguyễn Du, 2022)

+ “...*Hắn rất hảo danh vọng, địa vị*” (Bọn Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm Trước Tòa Án Dư Luận, 1959)

+ “*Giấy mờ hoen vết mực*” (Thiên Niên Kỷ, 2022)

+ “*Tình hình khẩn trương mà ông ấy cứ bình chân như vại*.” (Nguyễn Khải, 1959)

(iii) *Adjectives with two usages*

Regarding the relationship between the argument structure and the semantic structure of Vietnamese adjectives, we have clarified from various perspectives: both the correspondence and the discrepancy between these two aspects. This also leads to the flexible usage of Vietnamese adjectives.

The adjectives are transitive but are used as intransitive adjectives (i.e., syntactically, they do not require a direct object or they are followed by an indirect object). For example:

- (3) a1. Họ rất **thân** (nhau). (They - very - close (to each other); They are very **close** (to each other).)
 a2. Họ rất **thân** với nhau. (They - very - close - to - each other; They are very **close** to each other.)

(Hoàng Phê, 2006)

In the native speaker's intuition, the adjective *thân/close* is always associated with an object (which can be implicit: *each other*), so essentially, *thân/close* is still a typical transitive adjective (3a1). In sentence 3a2, *thân/close* is followed by an indirect object (*với nhau* - *with each other*), and is a transitive adjective used as an intransitive adjective. This is a typical example of the discrepancy between syntactic structure and semantic structure.

Intransitive Adjectives used as Transitive Adjectives: These are adjectives that are inherently intransitive but can be used as transitive adjectives (i.e., followed by a direct object in the syntactic plane).

- (4) a1. Cô ấy **buồn**. (She – sad; She is sad.)
 a2. Chuyện tình của cô ấy rất **buồn**. (Love story - of - she - very sad; Her love story is very sad.)
 a3. Cô ấy **buồn** tình. (She - sad – love; She is **sad** about her love / She is lovesick.)

(Hoàng Phê, 2006)

In sentences 4a1 and 4a2, *buồn/sad* clearly shows its intransitive nature – even when the actant acting as the subject changes. In sentence 4a3, *buồn/sad* is used as a transitive adjective because it is followed by a direct object. However, semantically, for intransitive adjectives used as transitive, the actant acting as the object (*tình*) usually indicates a range, an aspect, or a characteristic of the subject that the adjective expresses. This semantic distinction is essential to supplement the syntactic distinction between intransitive and transitive adjectives.

In Vietnamese, the phenomenon of intransitive adjectives being used as transitive predicator is common. We have compiled a list of 300 intransitive adjectives used as transitive predicators: *ác, ảm, ảm, an, ắng, ấp, ẩu, bạc, bầm, bán, bản, bản, bần, bần, bảnh, bạo, bắt, bấy, bé, bệch, bền, bén, béo, bẹp, bí, biếng, bình, bõ, bố, bộn, bóng, bọt, bu, bự, bức, bụi, buom, buồn, buồn, buốt, cam, cân, cạn, căng, cao, cay, chắc, chai, chậm, chán, chật, chát, chặt, chèn, chênh, chết, choáng, chới, chòn, chóng, chột, chương, cọc, còi, còng, cực, cùng, cứng, cuồng, cụt, đặc, dai, dài, đại, dầm, đậm, dầm, dằm, dạn, đắng, danh, đất, dát, đau, dây, đầy, dễ, dối, đẹp, đều, điếc, điên, điếng, dịu, dơ, đồ, đồ, dở, độc, đom, dư, dữ, đứng, đuối, đượm, gai, giả, già, giàu, gở, hiếm, hiểu, hỏ, hời, hồng, hồng, hốt, hư, huê, húng, húp, hút, inh, ít, kẹt, khác, khái, khăn, khăn, khan, khánh, khê, khéo, kín, kinh, lạ, lảm, lằm, lặng, lạnh, lành, lạt, lép, lở, loạn, loi, lớn, long, lỏng, mẫn, mẫn, mẫn, mát, mẽ, mù, muộn, nặc, nặng, nao, nảo, nát, mầu, ngắn, ngát, ngói, nhẵn, nhát, nhạt, nhẹ, nhỏ, no, non, nông, nóng, nức, nức, núng, phải, rạc, rần, rạn, rạn, rãnh, ráo, rất, rầu, rẻ, rợn, rỗng, rộng, rực, sạch, sai, sái, sạm, sầm, sẵn, sáng, sâu, say, se, sẽ, sớm, sượng, suồng, sút, thẳng, thắm, thấp, tình, tình, to, tó, tốt, tốt, trái, trâm, trắng, trẻ, trơ, ướt, vắng, vui, xanh, xấu, xơ, xòm, xong, xốp, xót, xước, xuôi, yên, yếu,...*

The phenomenon of intransitive adjectives being used as transitive adjectives is common in Vietnamese. The central adjective is printed in bold in each of the following sentences:

- “Hương gây mùi nhớ trà **khan** giọng tình.”; “Càng treo giá ngọc càng **cao** phẩm người.”; “Mặt sao **dày** gió **dạn** sương”; “Đầu mày cuối mắt càng **nồng** tám yêu.”; “Thẻ hoa chưa **ráo** chén vàng.”; “**Thấp** cơ thua trí đàn bà.”; “Thông minh vốn **sẵn** tư trời.”; “Tiếng sen **sẽ** động giấc hòe.”; “Ông qua bướm lại đã **thừa** xấu xa.” (Nguyễn Du, 2022)

- “Trời nắng **chóng** trưa, trời mưa **chóng** tối.”; “Mưa tháng tư **hư** đất.”; “Áo ai **kín** bụng người ấy”; “Sáng ướt áo, trưa **ráo** thóc”; (Từ điển Thành ngữ và Tục ngữ Việt Nam, 2023)

- “Bấy giờ anh em đều **bầm** gan **tím** ruột, đau đớn trăm phần nhưng biết làm sao.” (Lê Văn Hiến, 2018)

- “**Mặn** tình trăng gió, **nhạt** tình lửa hương” (Bích Câu kì ngộ, 1964)

- “Ngày xưa gió **mát** đêm hè. Từ bàn tay mẹ êm say giấc nồng.” (Bùi Mỹ Hạnh, 2010)
- “Một tiếng chim kêu **sáng** cả rừng.” (Khuông Hữu Dụng, 1996)
- “Nắng từ má em **thấm** nửa sườn đồi” (Trần Lê Văn, 2010)
- “Chúng nó còn **trẻ** người **non** dạ, đã trông rõ lòng người đâu mà kén chọn cho sành.” (Hoàng Ngọc Phách, 2022)
- “...Ông **rợn** tóc gáy lên, gọi đốc thôi năm bảy tiếng nữa” (Kim Lân, 2022)

3. Methodology

In this study, a combination of analytical and descriptive methods was employed to examine the syntactic behavior of adjectives in both Vietnamese and English. The descriptive method was used to identify and outline the structural and functional properties of adjectives within each language, focusing particularly on their ability to function as predicates and their potential for transitivity. The analytical method enabled a more in-depth examination of how these adjectives interact with other sentence elements and what this reveals about the grammatical systems of the respective languages.

To enhance the comparative dimension of the research, the contrastive method was applied. This approach made it possible to systematically compare and contrast the syntactic structures involving adjectives in Vietnamese and English, thereby identifying key similarities and differences. These findings not only serve to clarify the unique syntactic features of Vietnamese adjectives but also provide insight into the broader typological distinctions between an inflectional language like English and an isolating language like Vietnamese.

English data were compiled from five reference works that explicitly discuss adjective predication, complement selection, or the question of adjectival transitivity: Ikeya (1995), Dixon (2004), Börjars and Vincent (2010), Park (2001), and Huddleston and Pullum (2002). From these sources, the study selected representative English adjectives illustrating the main complement types relevant to the analysis, namely prepositional phrases, infinitival clauses, finite clauses, and zero-complement predicative uses. An English item was retained in the core dataset only if (a) its pattern was explicitly described in the literature, (b) it illustrated one of the four diagnostics used in this article, or (c) it provided a stable comparison with a Vietnamese adjective pattern discussed in the analysis. The English side of the study is thus based on qualitative grammatical evidence and illustrative constructions, not on corpus frequency or statistical generalisation.

4. Results and Discussion

On the syntactic level, Vietnamese adjectives show similarities with Vietnamese verbs in terms of their role as the predicate nucleus and their ability to express intransitivity/transitivity.

4.1. Adjectives as the nucleus of the predicate

Vietnamese adjectives can independently act as predicates without needing copula or linking verbs. The predicate function is relevant for both verbs and adjectives in Vietnamese. In contrast, English adjectives can be an important part of the predicate, but cannot independently act as predicates. Instead, they must be connected to the subject by linking verbs. The predicate function is not a relevant function of English adjectives.

Vietnamese adjectives can independently act as predicates like intransitive verbs, whereas English adjectives cannot. In terms of syntax, the function of Vietnamese adjectives is also very different. In English, adjectives are considered part of the predicate but always require a linking verb. Consider the following typical examples:

- (5) a1. *She is sad.* (Cô ấy **buồn** / she - sad)
- a2. *She looks sad.* (Nhìn cô ấy **buồn** / Look – she - sad) (Cô ấy nhìn **buồn** / She – look - sad)
- a3. *She feels sad.* (Cô ấy cảm thấy **buồn** / She - feel - sad)
- a4. *She becomes sad.* (Cô ấy trở nên **buồn** / She - become - sad)
- a5. *She seems sad.* (Cô ấy có vẻ **buồn** / She - seem - sad)

In the example 5 above, the adjective *sad* functions as a predicative complement within the predicate headed by the linking verb, describing the subject *she*. Semantically, these sentences have subtle

differences but all describe the subject's sadness, collectively meaning "She is sad." Syntactically, these sentences belong to one of the basic English sentence structures (S + V + C). The verb in these sentences is a linking verb (is, looks, feels, becomes, seems), and the complement is an adjective (*sad*). These adjectives function as complements of the linking verbs. Here, the relationship between the subject and the adjective as the complement is direct in semantics but indirect in syntax.

In the Vietnamese version (in parentheses), syntactically, the adjectives can also follow verbs such as *nhìn/look*, *có vẻ/seem*, *trở nên/become*, and *cảm thấy/feel* to co-predicate. In the Vietnamese examples 5a1, the adjectives *buồn/sad* can serve as predicates independently, without any intermediary elements.

The following examples illustrate the similarity between adjectives and verbs in English in their function as predicates:

- (6) a. *This film is very boring.*
 a'. *Bộ phim này rất chán.*
 b. *I am bored.*
 b'. *Tôi chán quá.*
 c. *I am bored with this film.*
 c'. *Tôi chán bộ phim này.*
 d. *Teaching is very boring.*
 d'. *Dạy học (thì) rất chán.*
 e. *Teaching is learning.*
 e'. *Dạy (cũng) là học.* (Viện Ngôn ngữ học, 1993)

Each pair of examples consists of an English and a Vietnamese sentence with the same meaning. Comparing sentences 6.a and 6.b, there is a difference as follows: *boring* (active meaning) is expressed as a present participle, while *bored* (passive meaning) is expressed as a past participle, but the Vietnamese word *chán* does not have such a distinction. In sentence 6.c, the Vietnamese word "chán" is used as a verb and does not distinguish between active or passive meaning, while in English, the phrase *am bored with* is used to express a passive meaning (the film makes me bored). In sentences 6.d, *teaching* and *boring* have the same form (verb + ing), but *teaching* is considered a gerund in the subject role, and "boring" is considered a participle in the predicate role.

This notable characteristic shows the close relationship between verbs and adjectives in English, and the difficulties in distinguishing these two word classes. This characteristic is more evident in examples 6d and 6e, where the functional elements have the same form. The word *boring* in 6.d describes the subject's feature and thus is a present participle, while *learning* in 6e also describes the subject but remains a gerund because it denotes an activity like the subject (*teaching, learning*). This demonstrates that, despite being an inflectional language, when functioning, especially in the predicate function, English adjectives also show complexity and overlapping with other word classes on semantic scales.

In the syntactic structure containing adjectives in both English and Vietnamese sentences, there are similarities and differences:

- (7) a. *John is good (at tennis).* (John giỏi (về môn quần vợt).)
 S V C
 b. *John is blind (of one eye).* (John mù (một mắt).)
 S V C
 c. *This book is very easy (to read).* (Quyển sách này rất dễ (đọc).)
 S V C
 d. *To say it was difficult (for Mona).* (Nói điều đó thật khó (đối với Mona).)
 S V C
 (Ikeya, 1995, p.153).
 e. *I am tired (of sitting around the house).* (Tôi chán (ngồi không ở nhà).)
 S V C

We can see that the English sentences in the examples 7 above all share the same basic English sentence structure (SVC). In this case, the complement is an adjective describing the subject. The core of these sentences can stand independently, apart from the modifying elements (in parentheses). Ikeya (1995) had a basis for stating that the phrases *at tennis*, *of one eye*, *to read*, *for Mona*, and *of sitting around the house* are complements for the predicate or act as adverbs. They only clarify the predicate and are supplementary elements of the core sentence (SVC).

However, considering the corresponding Vietnamese sentences, we see that if we separate the phrases in parentheses, the adjectives can entirely act as predicates independently, making these sentences monovalent structures (one actant) of intransitive adjectives (*giỏi/good*, *mù/blind*, *dễ/easy*, *khó/difficult*, *chán/bored*). If we do not separate the phrases in parentheses, these sentences become bivalent structures (two-actant) of intransitive adjectives used as transitive ones. Vietnamese adjectives can directly combine with the subject and participate in more argument structures. English adjectives can only act as predicates when combined with linking verbs. When English adjectives combine with the following phrases (complements, adverbs), a marker (preposition, etc.) is required, whereas Vietnamese adjectives can directly combine with the following phrases as objects or adverbs.

Regarding the ability to act as the nuclear predicate in relative clauses and clauses, Vietnamese and English adjectives also show noteworthy similarities and differences:

In an inflectional language like English, adjectives show clear distinctions in morphology, semantics, and syntactic function compared to other word classes.. English adjectives and verbs do not have a clear resemblance compared to the relationship between Vietnamese adjectives and verbs. However, in many cases, there is no clear boundary between adjectives and verbs in English. For instance, morphologically, present participles or past participles show the close relationship between adjectives and verbs. Consider the example in the structure of relative clauses:

- (8) a. *"The Tale of Kiều", which was written by Nguyen Du, is a famous work.* (Truyện Kiều [mà] được viết bởi Nguyễn Du là một tác phẩm nổi tiếng)
 a'. *"The Tale of Kiều", written by Nguyen Du, is a famous work.*
 b. *The man who came here yesterday is my brother.* (Người đàn ông [mà] đến đây hôm qua là anh trai tôi)
 b'. *The man coming here yesterday is my brother.*
 c. *Ann is the woman who is responsible for preparing the budget.* (Ann là người có trách nhiệm chuẩn bị ngân sách)
 c'. *Ann is the woman responsible for preparing the budget.*

(Viện Ngôn ngữ học, 1993)

Sentences 8a and 8a' have the same meaning. The adjective clause *which was written by Nguyen Du* in 8a carries a passive meaning and is reduced to the past participle *written by Nguyen Du*. Sentence 8b and 8b' are similarly reduced, with the adjective clause *who came here yesterday* (active meaning) reduced to the present participle *coming here yesterday*. Semantically, *written* and *coming* emphasize the verb's quality. In terms of syntactic forms, they strongly show the adjective feature - modifying the subject (*Kieu story*, *the man*). Sentence 8c is a special case, where the adjective acts as the nuclear predicate of the relative clause after reduction.

The close relationship between verbs and adjectives in example 8 is limited to the framework of the adjective clause as a clause with a modifying function. To fully understand the nature of English adjectives and their similarity to English verbs, it is necessary to examine their function as predicates in sentences concerning arguments.

4.2. Transitivity/Intransitivity of Adjectives

Vietnamese adjectives have the ability to function as predicates, requiring a phrase as an object (either directly or indirectly) - a distinctive feature of Vietnamese adjectives compared to adjectives in other languages. In contrast, English adjectives function differently in the predicate role. However, to some extent, many cases show that English adjectives possess the characteristic of

transitivity/intransitivity. The following examples illustrate the role of English adjectives as predicates in syntax plane, specifically the ability to show transitivity/intransitivity and the ability to have objects. It shows that there is a certain compatibility of adjectives in Vietnamese and English.

Let us compare the following English and Vietnamese sentences:

- (9) a1. *Are you **afraid** of snakes?* (Cậu sợ rắn (không)?)
 a2. *Don't be **afraid**!* (Đừng sợ!)
 a3. *There's nothing to be **afraid** of.* (Chả có gì phải sợ.)
 a4. *Have we missed the train? I'm **afraid** so.* (Chúng ta lỡ tàu? Tôi sợ vậy.)
 b1. *Be **brave**!* (Hãy dũng cảm lên!)
 b2. *He was very **brave** about his operation.* (Anh ấy rất dũng cảm trong ca mổ.)
 b3. *She was **brave** to go into the burning building.* (Cô ấy dũng cảm xông vào tòa nhà đang cháy.)

(Viện Ngôn ngữ học, 1993)

In example 9a1, the noun phrase *snakes* is not a direct object of the adjective *afraid*, but the complement of the preposition *of* in the prepositional phrase *of snakes*. This prepositional phrase functions as a complement licensed by the adjective *afraid*, specifying the source or object of fear. In 9a2, *Don't be afraid!*, the adjective occurs without an overt complement; the source of fear is recoverable from the context rather than syntactically expressed. Similarly, in 9a3, *There's nothing to be afraid of*, the complement is realized through the pronoun *nothing*, while the preposition *of* is stranded. In 9a4, *I'm afraid so*, *afraid* is used in a fixed epistemic or discourse expression, in which it no longer denotes fear toward a concrete object but expresses the speaker's reluctant belief or expectation. These examples show that *afraid* can license different types of complements, especially of-prepositional phrases and clausal or propositional complements. Therefore, it should not be treated as a transitive adjective in the same sense as a transitive verb. Rather, *afraid* is an adjective with strong complement-taking potential, whose semantic relation to an object of fear is usually mediated by a preposition or recovered from context. In the corresponding Vietnamese sentences, the Vietnamese adjective *sợ* has similar syntactic characteristics to the English adjective *afraid*, except that it can function independently as a predicate. In 9b1, the adjective *brave* does not require an object, showing intransitivity. In sentences 9b2, 3, *brave* requires objects (*his operation*, *to go into the burning building*), indicating transitivity.

Ikeya (1995) also noted that in English, there are some adjectives that must combine with a prepositional phrase, with a clause starting with *that*, or with a verb phrase (to VP), such as *fond (of)/thích*, *worthy (of)/đáng để*, *desirous (of)/mong muốn*, etc.

Let us examine the following examples.

- (10) a. *He is **fond** of children.* (Anh ấy thích trẻ con.)
 b. *His behavior is **worthy** of reverence.* (Hành vi của anh ấy [thật] đáng kính trọng.)
 c. *The incident is **worthy** to be remembered.* (Sự việc đó [thật] đáng nhớ.)
 d. *We are **desirous** of such result.* (Chúng tôi mong muốn kết quả như thế.)
 e. *He is **desirous** that I should go there to help the needy.* (Anh ấy mong [rằng] tôi nên đến đó để giúp những người nghèo.)

(Ikeya, 1995, p.155)

The sentences in examples 10 show that the adjectives express characteristics of bivalent verb. *To be fond of* can be replaced by the transitive verb *like* - a typical bivalent verb. However, relying solely on this substitutability makes it difficult to determine whether the phrase following the adjective is an actant or circumstant. *Fond of*, *worthy of*, and *desirous of* can be considered equivalent to transitive verbs, but not all such structures (adjective + PP) can be replaced by corresponding transitive verbs. Therefore, the phrases following these adjectives (to PP, to VP, that clause) are still considered complements for the adjectives. Moreover, it is not always easy to distinguish the semantic roles of verb phrases (to VP) in *easy to read* and *worthy to be remembered*, so both verb phrases are viewed by Ikeya

as complements for the adjectives. He considers these adjectives as monovalent verb, not bivalent verb. In corresponding Vietnamese sentences, the nucleus predicate can be a verb (*thích/like, love; mong muốn/hope, want*) or an adjective (*đáng/worthy*), and the phrases following the verb or adjective can be direct objects in the form of a noun (*trẻ con/kids, children*), a verb (*kính trọng/respect; nhớ/miss, remember*), or a clause (*tôi nên đến đó để giúp những người nghèo / I should go there to help the poor*).

Börjars and Vincent (2010, p. 1) stated that “... from a semantic perspective, there is a reason to discuss a range of complements available to adjectives similar to those for verbs, as evidenced by near-synonymous pairs: *fear/be afraid of, love/be fond of, regret/be regretful of*”. Semantically, Vietnamese and English adjectives are quite similar in their ability to govern objective elements. The primary syntactic difference is that Vietnamese adjectives may or may not require a preposition before the object, whereas most English adjectives must have a preposition before the object (with rare exceptions like *near*: *The supermarket is near the station / Siêu thị (thì) gần nhà ga*).

5. Conclusions

Comparing the syntactic functioning of Vietnamese and English adjectives, the study has found that there exist both similarities and differences in several aspects. Regarding the ability to act as predicates in sentences, most Vietnamese adjectives can independently function as predicates like intransitive verbs. In contrast, English adjectives cannot do this. English adjectives can be the main component of predicates but must be connected to the subject by linking verbs. This is a fundamental difference in the syntactic form of adjectives in the two languages from typologically different languages. Regarding the ability to function as transitive verbs: Vietnamese adjectives can function like transitive verbs, and most intransitive adjectives can be used transitively. English adjectives also express transitivity, but not as clearly as Vietnamese adjectives do. In terms of similarities to verbs: Vietnamese adjectives have a high degree of similarity to Vietnamese verbs, which is an important basis for many Vietnamese linguists to classify these two groups into one word class (predicator). In contrast, English adjectives and verbs are very clearly independent, both morphologically and syntactically.

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**Một nghiên cứu đối chiếu chức năng cú pháp
của tính từ tiếng Việt và tính từ tiếng Anh**

Tóm tắt: Bài báo này so sánh chức năng cú pháp của tính từ tiếng Việt với tính từ tiếng Anh để xác định những điểm tương đồng và khác biệt giữa chúng về: (i) Về khả năng đóng vai trò vị ngữ trong câu: hầu hết các tính từ tiếng Việt có thể hoạt động độc lập làm vị ngữ giống như vị từ nội động. Tính từ tiếng Anh có thể là thành phần chính của vị ngữ nhưng phải được nối với chủ ngữ bằng động từ liên kết. (ii) Về khả năng hoạt động như vị từ ngoại động: Tính từ tiếng Việt có thể hoạt động như vị từ ngoại động một cách khá linh hoạt. Hầu hết các tính từ nội động đều có thể chuyển sang hoạt động như vị từ ngoại động; Tính từ tiếng Anh cũng thể hiện tính ngoại động, nhưng không rõ ràng như tính từ tiếng Việt. Nghiên cứu này mang đến sự hiểu biết sâu sắc hơn về bản chất của tính từ nói chung, và chức năng của tính từ trong hai ngôn ngữ có loại hình khác nhau. Bài báo cũng nhằm mục đích giúp người học hiểu cách sử dụng đúng câu có tính từ là hạt nhân của vị ngữ trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt, và cách chuyển dịch hiệu quả các mẫu câu này giữa hai ngôn ngữ.

Từ khóa: Tính từ; vị từ; vị ngữ hạt nhân; tính từ nội động; tính từ ngoại động.

Appendix**Sources of Illustrative Data**

The Vietnamese examples discussed in this article are drawn from the following literary, lexicographic, and other written sources:

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