

Verb Concatenation in Vietnamese

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1.0 Introduction.

In his book, The Grammar of Lahu, James A. Matisoff shows that Lahu, a Tibeto-Burman language of the Loloish group, is "remarkable for the apparent ease with which two or more verbs may be strung together or concatenated by simple juxtaposition to form complex verbal nuclei (1973:199). He calls these serial verb constructions "verb concatenations." In each concatenation there must be a head verb or V_h . Other verbs which occur either to the head's left, or to its right, or which flank the head on both sides, are called versatile verbs. Those which occur before the V_h are pre-head versatiles ($_vV$); those which come after the V_h are post-head versatiles (V_v). Versatile verbs stand in a subordinate relationship to the head, both syntactically and semantically.

This phenomenon is not restricted to Lahu alone. Barbara Abbott (1972) has shown that Vietnamese also has some kind of versatile verbs. Although she is on the right track in her approach, it is inevitable that there exist some misunderstandings in her analysis, as she herself modestly admits. It is the purpose of this paper to revise Abbott's survey. On syntactic grounds, her classification of versatile verbs is reshuffled.

And at various suitable points, comparisons are made between the Lahu and Vietnamese verb-concatenation systems. In spite of this ambitious intention, the present survey is by no means as comprehensive as I would wish. Although I am a native speaker of Vietnamese, I feel I should check my intuitions with many other speakers and assemble more data in order to buttress my analysis.

Before going on to the Vietnamese versatile verb system, it is worth restating the criteria for versatile verbhood as detailed by Matisoff. I have followed Matisoff's approach and outline in this paper. In order to qualify for versatile verbhood, a verb must meet the following requirements:

- (1) it must be a true verb -- either stative or non-stative -- capable of occurring alone as the only verb in its VP;
- (2) it must be characterized as having the property of "juxta-pository productivity;" that is, it must be capable of concatenating with a large number of other verbs in a subordinate relationship to them.

While the first requirement is purely syntactic, the second may be said to be syntactic-semantic.

Matisoff mentions that verb concatenation in Lahu provides the kind of information that other languages (like English) can only convey through "a formally disparate array of subordinating devices: complementary infinitives, -ing complements, modal auxiliaries, adverbs, prepositional phrases, even whole subordinate clauses" (1973:200 ff). This is also true of Vietnamese. However, unlike in Lahu, I have not been able to find in Vietnamese any kind of verb concatenation which conveys the same information as subordinate clauses do in English. Figure 1 shows the gamut¹ of English subordinating devices versus Vietnamese juxtaposition.

2.0 Non-versatile types of verbal constructions, multiverbal and otherwise.

Not every verbal syntagma in Vietnamese constitutes a true versatile concatenation. There are a number of other construc-

Figure 1. The gamut of English subordinating devices vs. Vietnamese juxtaposition.

<u>Complementary Infinitives:</u>	<u>-ing Complements:</u>	<u>Adverbs:</u>
khó đọc 'hard to read'	bận đọc 'busy reading'	đọc lại
bắt đầu đọc 'begin to read'	chán đọc 'bored reading'	'read again'
		vứt đi
<u>Modal Auxiliaries:</u>	<u>Prepositional Phrases:</u>	'throw away'
phải đọc 'must read'	đọc cho 'read for'	
nên đọc 'should read'	đọc nhầm 'read in error'	

tion types which resemble versatile concatenations on the surface. In general, these are easily distinguishable from true versatile concatenations. However, natural languages do not always operate according to strict, airtight rules. Thus there exist cases which are problematic. In 2.1-2.5 we present an account of these other non-versatile constructions, most of which (2.2-2.5) are multiverbal.

2.1 V + P_V and P_V + V sequences. Verb particles (P_V) are bound morphemes which occur either before or after verbs and "serve to elucidate the meaning of the verb in a variety of ways, conveying notions of aspect, directionality, subjective attitudes toward the verbal event, etc." (Matisoff, 1973:315). Although some of the verb particles are quite comparable to versatile verbs semantically, they do not meet the requirements for verbhood syntactically. Thus, sequences of V + P_V and P_V + V are not really "multiverbal" at all.

Verb particles are divided into pre-verb particles and post-verb particles. The former occur before their verb, the latter after. Some of the pre-verb particles are:

<u>rất</u> 'very'	<u>Cô ấy rất đẹp</u>	'She is very beautiful.'
	1 2 3	1 2 3
<u>hơi</u> 'slightly'	<u>Tôi hơi hiểu anh</u>	'I understand you slightly.'
	1 2 3 4	1 3 4 2
	<u>Cái này hơi nhỏ</u>	'This thing is rather small.'
	1 2 3 4	2 1 3 4

[Rất may occur only before stative verbs, while hơi can precede both stative and non-stative verbs.]

So far, I can find only two post-verb particles.² They are:

thay 'mildly exclamatory' Đau-đau thay phận đàn-bà!

1 2 3 4
'How painful is the lot of women!'

luôn 'directly, all at once' Bạn tôi bị đau đi luôn nhà thương

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
'My friend got sick and went
directly to the hospital.'

2.2 False concatenations.³

It is quite often observed that a series of verbs which appear in juxtaposition on the surface really belong to separate underlying VP's, or even to separate underlying sentences. Such verbs are said to be in "false concatenation."

2.21 False concatenations and và-deletion. This is the case involving conjoined VP's in a single sentence where the verbs represent a series of temporally consecutive actions. Consider the following examples:

- (1) quay lại⁴ 'turn around' and nhìn 'look':

Hồng quay lại nhìn con chó 'Hong turned around and looked
1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4
at the dog.'

- (2) bị đau 'get sick' and đi nhà thương 'go to the hospital':

Bạn tôi bị đau đi nhà thương rồi 'My friend got sick and
1 2 3 4 5 6 2 1 3
went to the hospital already.'

- (3) ngồi 'sit' and nhai 'chew':

Bà ta ngồi im-lặng nhai trầu 'She sat quietly and chewed
1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4
betel nut.'

- (4) ở 'live, be at' and đến 'come':

Anh ở đâu đến? 'Where did you come from?' (Where did you
1 2 3 4 3 1
live and come?)

- (5) đi 'go' and về 'return':

Anh đi đâu về? 'Where are you coming back from?' (You
₁ ₂ ₃ ₄ ₁
 are coming back after having gone where?')⁵
₄ ₂ ₃

In these cases it is always grammatical to insert the conjunction và 'and' between each pair of verbs in the series. Furthermore, this insertion does not alter the meaning of the sentence. We may thus posit the presence of và in the underlying structure of these sentences, with a và-deletion rule applying optionally. However, in the case of sentences (4) and (5) this rule must apply obligatorily.

In contrast with this, if và were to be introduced into a true versatile concatenation, the sentence would either be ungrammatical, or else would have a radically different meaning. Thus,

- (6) đễ 'easy' (_v) + thương 'love' (_h) > đễ thương 'lovely',
 but

- (7) *đễ và thương means 'be easy and love', which does not make sense at all.

In the following concatenation, và may be inserted between the _h and the _v, but at the cost of changing the meaning:

- (8) ngồi 'sit' (_h) and im-lặng 'be silent' >
ngồi im-lặng 'sit quietly',
 but

- (9) ngồi và im-lặng means 'sit and keep silent.'

Thus (9) is not a versatile concatenation. While a versatile concatenation forms a semantic unit, a false concatenation does not.

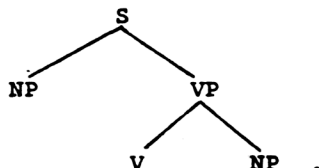
2.22 False concatenations arising from embedded structures.

Sometimes verbs come to stand in juxtaposition as the result of a process of deletion in an embedded sentence. In Vietnamese there is a small group of transitive verbs which sometimes require a sentential object. These verbs include: muốn 'want', bị 'undergo something unpleasant', được 'obtain', thích 'like', chịu 'endure', thấy 'see', xin 'ask for', thử 'try.' There may be a few more.

The normal underlying structure which takes these verbs is

(10) $VP \rightarrow V - NP$, and the sentence containing them has the tree:

(11)



Some examples:

(12) Tôi muốn một trái cam
 1 2 3 clf 4

'I want an orange.'
 1 2 3 4

(13) Cô ấy thích áo đẹp
 1 2 3 4

'She likes beautiful
 1 2 4
 dresses.'
 3

(14) Tôi thấy một chiếc xế hơi đỏ
 1 2 3 clf 4 5

'I saw a red car.'
 1 2 3 5 4

(15) Ông ấy bị bệnh
 1 2 3

'He has a disease.'
 1 2 3

(16) Anh chịu cái đồng-hồ này không?
 1 2 clf 3 4 qst

'Do you take (like) this
 1 2 4
 watch?.'
 3

(17) Sáng nay tôi được thơ nhà
 1 2 3 4 5 6

'I got letters from home
 3 4 5 6
 this morning.'
 2 1

(18) Ai xin thuốc lá?
 1 2 3

'Who asks for cigarettes?.'
 1 2 3

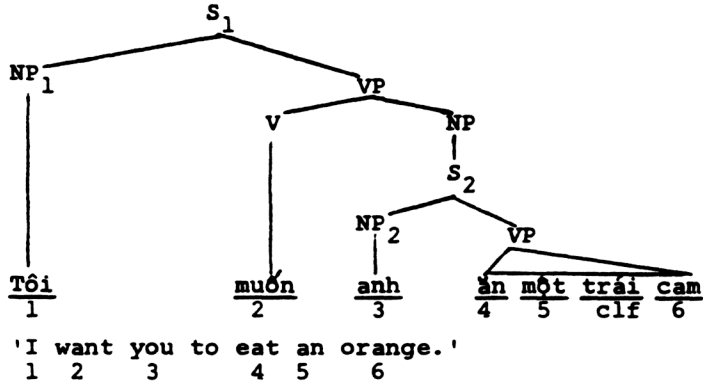
(19) Anh thử món này chưa?
 1 2 3 4 5

'Have you tried this dish
 1 2 4 3
 yet?.'
 5

The objects in (12)-(19) are all true, "natural" NP's. However, these verbs may also take sentential objects. Thus a sentence like (21) has an underlying structure as in (20) [next page].

If the subject NP of the embedded S_2 is identical with the subject NP of the matrix S_1 , the equi-NP deletion rule applies. As a result we get false concatenations, as in (22)-(24):

(20)



(21)

(22) Nó muốn đi Sài Gòn

'He wants to go to Saigon.'

(23) Tôi thấy lạnh

'I feel cold.'

(24) Ông ấy bị uống nhầm thuốc'He had the misfortune of taking
the wrong medicine.'

The equi-NP deletion rule is obligatory here. We cannot find on the surface sentences like (25)-(27):

(25) *Tôi được tôi đi Mỹ 'I have the (good) fortune of going to America.'(26) *Nó chịu nó làm việc 'He (painfully) agrees to work.'(27) *Sao anh không xin anh đổi đi? 'Why don't you ask to be transferred?'

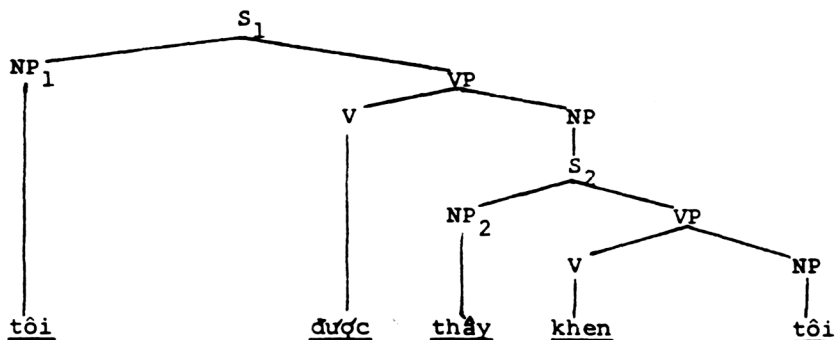
Instead we have (28)-(30):

(28) Tôi được đi Mỹ. (29) Nó chịu làm việc.(30) Sao anh không xin đổi đi?

The equi-NP deletion rule must also apply when the object NP of the embedded S₂ is identical with the subject NP₁ of the matrix S₁. Thus a sentence like (32) has an underlying structure as in (31) [next page].

Vietnamese also permits the deletion of the subject NP₂ of the embedded S₂ under certain conditions, even when NP₂ is not coreferential with NP₁, as in (33) and (34).

(31)



('I got teacher-praise-me.')

(32) Tôi được thầy khen 'I got praised by the teacher.'
 1 2 3 4 1 2 4 3

(33) Tôi được khen 'I got praised.'

(34) Ông Kennedy bị ám-sát 'Mr. Kennedy got assassinated.'

In (33) and (34), two different NP-deletion rules have applied, the equi-NP deletion (obligatory), and the deletion of the subject of the lower sentence (optional). The latter deletion is performed when the emphasis is on the action or event rather than on who creates or instigates it, and in these cases the best English translation often has a passive verb.

All these NP-deletion rules can leave us with verbs in false concatenation.

2.3 Resultative complements (C_r).

Like Lahu, Chinese, and Thai, Vietnamese has an important type of binomial verbal construction which consists of a main verb followed by a secondary verb of resultative meaning. This resultative verb serves to indicate the successful or non-successful completion of the action of the main verb. There are two types of resultative verbs: general and specific.

General resultative verbs are those which have a quite general meaning and can occur after large numbers of main verbs. These may be classified as a subtype of the post-head versatile verbs (section 4.1 below). The V_v được 'be able to V_h ' is typical: làm được 'able to do', nói được 'able to speak', khả được

'able to be better', ăn được 'able to eat.' The English translations may be a bit misleading here. In fact the V_v được means ' V_h so that the action is obtained.' Other V_v 's of this kind include hết ' V_h do that the action is completed', xong ' V_h so that the action is over', đổi ' V_h so that the action is perfected.' Also in this category of general resultative V_v 's are quantifying stative verbs (ít ' V_h to a small amount', nhều ' V_h to a large amount', vừa ' V_h to the right amount'), qualifying stative verbs (giỏi ' V_h to a skilful degree', đủ ' V_h to an unsatisfactory degree', hay ' V_h to a satisfactory degree'), and temporal stative verbs (sớm ' V_h early', trễ or muộn ' V_h late').

Specific resultative verbs are those which may occur only after a single verb, or a group of verbs which share certain common semantic features. Thus, thấy 'see' appears only after verbs of sense perception, like xem 'look at', ngửi 'smell', nghe 'hear', sờ 'touch', etc. Sạch 'be clean' appears only after verbs like rửa 'wash', gội 'wash the hair', giặt 'wash clothes', quét 'sweep', lau 'clean', chùi 'wipe', etc. Resultative verbs of this type are not "juxtapositorily productive" and may be excluded from versatile verbhood. Matisoff characterizes them as "resultative complements" (C_r) [1973:207-209].

At first glance, $V_h + C_r$ sequences look like a type of lexical compound. However, they have different syntactic behavior. In questions with the auxiliary có, có always occurs before the first element of a true compound, while it often intervenes between the V_h and a C_r . Under negation, the adverb không 'not' must always precede the first element of a true compound; with $V_h + C_r$ sequences, on the other hand, the negative morpheme may either precede the V_h or intervene between V_h and C_r . Thus:

- (35a) Anh có nghe được không? 'Can you hear?'
 (35b) Anh nghe có được không? 'id.'
 (36a) Anh có xem thấy không? 'Do you see (it)?'
 (36b) Anh xem có thấy không? 'id.'
 (37a) Nó giặt không sạch 'He did not wash (it) clean.'
 (37b) Nó không giặt sạch 'id.'

(38a) Tôi làm không xong 'I did not finish doing (it).'

(38b) Tôi không làm xong 'id.'

Occasionally a negative resultative construction is split into two VP's by the insertion of the conjunction mà 'but.' In this case the adverb không must follow mà and precede the C_r :

(39) Nó ăn mà không hết 'He ate (it) but did not finish (it).'

(40) Tôi lau mà không sạch 'I cleaned (it) but (it) did not get clean.'

We may also observe that with respect to negation, as well as in questions with the auxiliary có, versatile verb concatenations behave in much the same manner as lexical compounds (see next section). This is because versatile concatenations and lexical compounds both form integrated semantic units.

2.4 Lexical compounds.

Thompson distinguished two types of lexical compounds, "idiom compounds" and "syntactic compounds" (1965:126). Only syntactic compounds are relevant to our discussion here. Vietnamese syntactic compounds consist of two free verbs: học 'learn' + tập 'practice' > học-tập 'study and practice'; ăn 'eat' + ở 'live' > ăn-ở 'live, behave.' In general, these lexical compounds are different from versatile verb concatenations in that the former are sequences of two conjoined elements which yield single syntactic categories and which render new semantic units, while the latter are endocentric constructions in which the V_h is the head and the versatile verbs are attributives.

Syntactic lexical compounds in Vietnamese are of two types, generalizing compounds and reinforcing compounds.⁶ According to Thompson, generalizing compounds are composed of "bases denoting different items of reality; the forms have the general meaning 'these two items and other similar ones, making up a general class'" (1965:128). Thus, mua 'buy' + bán 'sell' > mua-bán 'do shopping'; chải 'comb, brush' + chुối 'polish' > chải-chuối 'take great pains with one's appearance.'

Reinforcing compounds contain "two components usually denoting identical or very similar items of reality. The resulting forms often have a more figurative or abstract reference than either of their bases." (Thompson, 1965:130). Some examples:

sợ 'be afraid' + hoảng 'be panic-stricken' > sợ-hoảng 'be terrified'; ghi 'record' + chép 'copy' > ghi-chép 'write down, transcribe'; tấn 'advance' + tới 'reach' > tấn-tới 'make progress.'

As shown in these examples, compounds are written with a hyphen between their components and "acquire the status of unitary lexical items" (Matisoff 1973:209). As in Lahu, lexical compounds in Vietnamese are exclusively binomial. However, unlike the vast majority of Lahu lexical compounds, Vietnamese compounds may fairly frequently have the order of their components reversed. This is the case more often with reinforcing compounds than with generalizing compounds. Thus, one may say sợ-hoảng or hoảng-sợ 'be terrified'; chọn-lựa or lựa-chọn 'select' (both chọn and lựa mean 'choose'). As we see, the permutation of the elements of a lexical compound does not change the combined meaning. In sharp contrast to this, when a versatile verb and the V_h exchange their positions, this carries with it a change of meaning. An obvious case is the concatenation of the V_h làm 'do, work' and the versatile verb lại 'again'. Thus, làm lại means 're-do', while lại làm means 'do again (in the sense that the action has been stopped and is now resumed).'

2.5 "Idiomatic" concatenations.⁷

The distinction between lexical compounds and versatile concatenations is not always crystal clear. Particularly hard to classify are concatenations with the V ăn 'eat; earn one's living by V_h 'ing.' On the one hand we have "idiomatic" sequences like ăn cắp 'steal, earn one's living by stealing', ăn cướp 'loot', ăn mày 'beg, live by begging', ăn bám 'live at someone else's expense', ăn hại 'feed on', etc. As the translations indicate, these sequences denote actions which are usually illegal, deplorable, or "low-class." However, in other series of verbs we can find another meaning of ăn which is much closer to its "literal" main-verb meaning, 'eat': ăn uống 'eat and drink', làm ăn 'earn one's livelihood', ăn chơi 'lead a life of pleasures' ("eat and play"), etc. It is clear that in one sense these are all true versatile concatenations. (Ăn is quite "juxtapositorily produc-

tive.") Yet many of these sequences are like compounds in that (a) specialization or "lexicalization" of meaning has occurred; or (b) they are so high-frequency that they are felt to form tight semantic units. Furthermore, the possible partners of ăn, though numerous, are restricted to a relatively narrow semantic range (verbs of eating, earning a living, etc.).⁸

Let us now proceed to a discussion of the inner workings of the three genuine types of versatile concatenations. Using Matisoff's terms, I will label them pre-head (${}_V C$), post-head (C_V), and fore-and-aft (${}_V C_V$) concatenations (Matisoff, 1973:211).

3.1 Pre-head concatenations.

A pre-head concatenation (${}_V C$) is one which contains one or more pre-head versatile verbs (but no post-head versatile). In this investigation, 23 pre-head versatile verbs (${}_V V$) were found. I suspect there are more, but for the moment let us content ourselves with this figure.⁹ These ${}_V V$'s may be roughly divided into seven groups, according to their syntactic and semantic behavior. Both types of criteria are necessary for a meaningful classification. The syntactic properties of these verb-classes will be discussed below in the section on "multi-versatile pre-head concatenations" (3.2).¹⁰

3.11 Group I consists of two verbs expressing the degree or intensity of V_h 'ing:

chỉ 'only V_h '

- (41) Tôi chỉ có hai đồng 'I have only two piastres.'
 1 2 3 4 5 1 3 2 4 5

thật 'really V_h '

- (42) Vấn-đề này thật khó 'This topic is really difficult.'
 1 2 3 4 2 1 3 4

- (43) Anh ấy thật muốn đi 'He really wants to go.'
 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

3.12 Group II has only one verb, which expresses the repetition of V_h 'ing:

lại ' V_h again'

- (44) Cô ấy lại khóc 'She weeps again.'
 1 2 3 1 3 2

3.13 Group III is made up of verbs which express the temporal aspect of V_h 'ing. There are seven verbs in this group:

sẵn-sàng 'be ready to V_h '

- (45) Anh sẵn-sàng đi chưa? 'Are you ready to go yet?'
 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

gần 'be about to V_h '

- (46) Cô ấy gần ra trường 'She is about to graduate.'
 1 2 3 1 2 3

mới and vừa 'have just V_h 'ed'

- (47) Tôi mới biết hôm qua 'I just knew (it) yesterday.'
 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

- (48) Ông Nixon vừa họp báo 'Mr. Nixon has just held a
 1 2 3 1 2 3
 press conference.'

[These two verbs are usually interchangeable when they function as V 's, though as main verbs mới means 'be new' and vừa 'be moderate.' To express the emphatic idea of recentness of V_h 'ing, combinations of these two verbs may be used. Thus,

- (49) Tôi vừa mới thấy nó 'I've just seen him.'
 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

- (50) Nó mới vừa chạy ra 'He's just run out.']
 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

hay 'usually V_h ; often V_h '

- (51) Tôi hay đi ngủ sớm 'I usually go to bed early.'
 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

- (52) Cô Lan hay khóc 'Miss Lan often weeps.'
 1 2 3 1 2 3

thường 'normally V_h ; often V_h '

- (53) Ông ấy thường ở nhà buổi chiều 'He normally stays home
 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4
 in the afternoons.'
 5

- (54) Tôi thường đi Sài Gòn 'I often go to Saigon.'
 1 2 3 1 2 3

[To express an emphatically frequent action, the combination thường hay is often used:

- (55) Anh Tâm thường hay đến nhà cô Hồng 'Tam often comes to
 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3
 Miss Hong's house.']
 5 6 4

cứ 'continue to V_h ; go ahead and V_h '

- (56) Anh cứ ở đây ' (You) continue to stay
 1 2 3 4
 here!'

- (57) Anh cứ làm việc đó ' (You) go ahead and do that job!'
 1 2 3 4 5
 1 2 3 5 4

3.14 Group IV consists of verbs expressing an attitude of commitment or obligation of the subject with respect to the action or state mentioned in the V_h :

dám 'dare to V_h '

- (58) Ai dám thách-thức Chính-phủ? 'Who dares to challenge the
 1 2 3 4
 government?'

đáng 'be worthy of V_h '

- (59) Anh đáng được học-bổng 'You deserve to get a scholarship.'
 1 2 3 4
 1 2 3 4

nên 'have an obligation to V_h '

- (60) Ông Nixon nên từ-chức 'Mr. Nixon should resign.'
 1 2 3 4
 1 2 3

phải 'must V_h ; have to V_h '

- (61) Phải biết người và biết ta ' (We) must know others and
 1 2 3 4 5 6
 know ourselves.'

3.15 Group V contains verbs which express the psychological or physical involvement of the subject with the action mentioned in the V_h :

chán 'be tired of, be sick of, be fed up with V_h 'ing'

- (62) Tôi chán học quá! 'I'm so tired of studying!'
 1 2 3 4
 1 4 2 3

bận 'be busy V_h 'ing'

- (63) Ông ấy bận tiếp khách 'He's busy entertaining guests.'
 1 2 3 4
 1 2 3 4

mắc 'be engaged in V_h 'ing' or 'have to V_h '

- (64) Chiều nay tôi mắc đi phố 'I have to (am engaged in)
 1 2 3 4 5 6
 go(ing) downtown this afternoon.'

3.16 Group VI consists of verbs which express manner or quantity of the action mentioned in the V_h :

đễ 'be easy to V_h '

(65) Ông ấy đễ nổi giận
1 2 3 4

'He's easy to get angry.'
1 2 3 4

khó 'be difficult to V_h '

(66) Bà ấy khó chịu lắm
1 2 3 4

'She's very hard to bear.'
1 4 2 3

ít ' V_h little; V_h seldom'

(67) Tôi ít ngủ
1 2 3

'I sleep little.'
1 3 2

(68) Tôi ít đi chơi
1 2 3

'I seldom go out.'
1 2 3

3.17 Group VII includes three important verbs of motion:

đi 'go and V_h '

(69) Anh đi thăm bác-sĩ chưa?
1 2 3 4 5

'Have you gone to see a
1 2 3
doctor yet?'
4 5

đến and tới 'come to V_h '

(70) Anh đến thăm em một chiều mưa
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

'I came to see you one
1 2 3 4 5
rainy afternoon.'
7 6

[As main verbs, đến means 'arrive' and tới 'reach.']

3.18 Binary pre-head concatenations.

Any of the V 's listed above may occur before V_h 's to form binary V 's. One important co-occurrence restriction is that V 's of Groups III, IV, V, and VII may not concatenate with stative V_h 's.

These simple binary V 's are generable by the following rule,¹¹ where " β " stands for the verbal nucleus of a VP:

$$(71) \beta \rightarrow ({}_V V) + V_h$$

This rule says that a verbal nucleus " β " consists of an obligatory V_h plus an optional V . Thus, for example, with the V_h ngó 'look at' we may have such strings as:

lại ngó 'look at again'; cứ ngó 'go on looking at'; bận ngó

'be busy looking at'; phải ngó 'must look at'; đến ngó 'easy to look at', etc.

The versatile verb is, as Matisoff states for Lahu (1973: 211), "in a subordinate, modifying relationship to the head on the right."

3.2 Multiversatile pre-head concatenations.

Several v 's may occur in the same sequence before a V_h . In this case we have a "multiversatile pre-head concatenation." Matisoff (1973:214) has the following optional rules which generate this kind of concatenation:

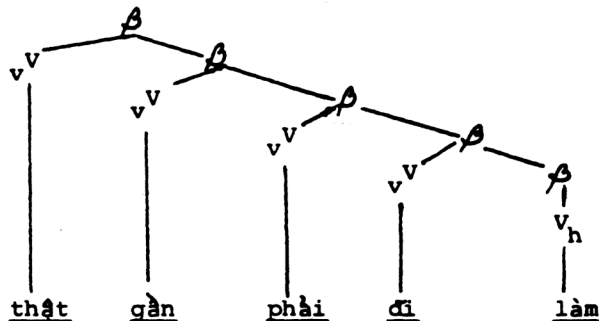
$$(72a) \quad \beta \xrightarrow{\text{opt}} v^V + \beta$$

$$(72b) \quad \beta \xrightarrow{\text{opt}} V_h$$

Figure 2 illustrates an expansion of rules (72a) and (72b):

Figure 2. A multiversatile v C.

<u>thật</u>	<u>gần</u>	<u>phải</u>	<u>đi</u>	<u>làm</u>
v	v	v	v	V_h
really	about	must	go	work



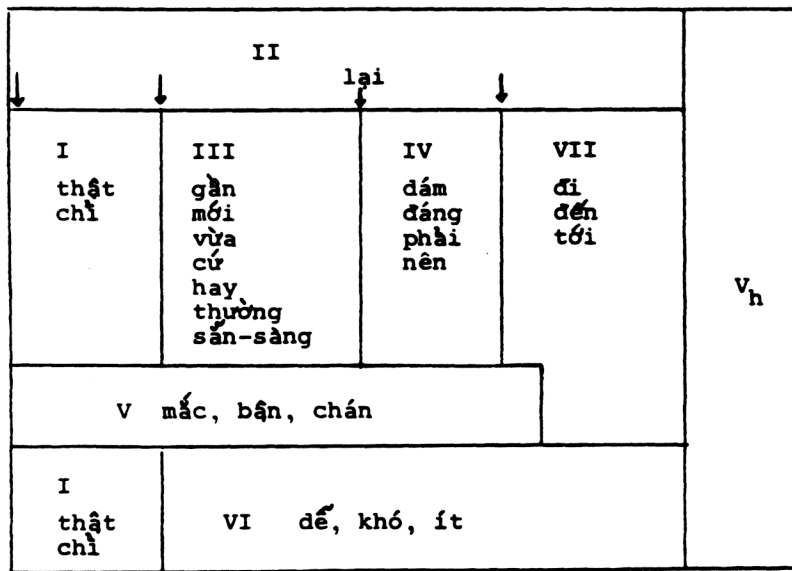
As in Lahu, each verb or verb-sequence to the right of a given verb is the latter's head. Thus, the v đi is attribute to its head làm: 'go to work.' đi làm as a unit is the head of phải: the "going to work" is "necessary." phải đi làm in turn is the head of gần: the "necessary going to work" is "about to" be performed. Finally, the sequence gần phải đi làm is the head of thật: it is "real" that the "necessary going to work" is

"about to" be performed. The ν^C as a whole means something like "[somebody] is really on the point of having to go to work."

3.3 Syntactic-semantic constraints on ν^C 's.

When more than one ν^V occurs in the same concatenation, they must be ordered in conformity with a rule which may be graphically summarized as in Figure 3:

Figure 3. Pre-head order rule.



Thus, for example, thật can only precede gần, and in turn gần must precede đám, and đi must follow đám. Similarly, chán must precede đến, and khó may be preceded only by chỉ or thật, etc. In general, only one ν^V from any given class may occur in the same concatenation. (Exceptions are mới/vừa and thường/hay which do sometimes co-occur [see (49), (50), (55)].)

At first glance this ordering seems quite arbitrary. However, as pointed out by Matisoff for Lahu (1973:216), there is actually a striking correlation between the syntactic and semantic properties of these verbs: namely, the more abstract ν^V 's occur to the left of those which have a more concrete meaning. The abstract modifies, and the concrete is modified.

Another principle particular to Vietnamese is that verbs denoting aspects of time precede others.

The verb lại is something of a special case. As Figure 3 shows, although lại is quite abstract in meaning, it may follow any of these \sqrt{V} 's except the most concrete ones (Groups V, VI, VII).¹² Yet the principle of "abstract preceding concrete" is really still operating here. Thus, lại may occur either before or after thật, either before or after mới, and either before or after phải. But it must always precede đi (Group VII). As for verbs of Groups V and VI, lại must always precede them.

According to the rule in Figure 3, one may form a concatenation of as many as five \sqrt{V} 's. Yet a study of a short story by a contemporary writer and of a recorded conversation between another Vietnamese student and myself shows that no five-verb \sqrt{V} 's spontaneously occur. Four-verb \sqrt{V} 's are also very rare. The most common types of \sqrt{V} 's are those with two or three verbs (including the V_h). This may be explained by the fact that certain pairs of \sqrt{V} 's are semantically incompatible -- some combinations are mutually exclusive and others have a low frequency. Thus, vừa and đang are mutually exclusive, and thường phải đi is excessively rare.

4.1 Post-head concatenations ($C_{\sqrt{V}}$).

It seems that the number of post-head versatiles is approximately the same as the number of pre-head versatiles in Vietnamese. However, this preliminary investigation shows that the $V_{\sqrt{V}}$'s can be more neatly grouped than the \sqrt{V} 's on the basis of distributional and semantic criteria. Like Barbara Abbott (1972:3), I divide the $V_{\sqrt{V}}$'s into five groups, though my groupings are quite different, and her $V_{\sqrt{V}}$'s include many verbs which I regard as resultative complements, or which fall into the category of "false concatenators."

4.1.1 Group I consists of directional verbs which Lê Văn Lý calls "directional verbal empty words" ("mots vides verbaux de direction", 1948:211ff), and which I previously labeled "direction and goal prepositions" (Trần Trọng Hải, 1971:11):¹³

đi 'V_h away, off'

(73) Sao anh xóa đi? 'Why did you erase (it) off?'
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

(74) Đừng vứt đi 'Don't throw (it) away!'
1 2 3 1 2 3

đến and tới 'V_h to a place'

(75) Chừng nào ông về tới California? 'When will you return
1 2 3 4 1 2 3
to (reach) California?'
4

lại 'V_h over to a place; V_h over
again; V_h back to the original place'

[It may be said that lại is the opposite of đi 'V_h away.' It expresses the idea of "rapprochement." Compare (76a) and (76b):]

(76a) Mang lại đây hai cái ghế 'Bring two chairs here.'
1 2 3 4 clf 5 1,2 4 5 3

(76b) Mang hai cái ghế này đi 'Take these two chairs away.'
1 2 clf 3 4 5 1 4 2 3 5

(77) Anh nói lại! '(You) say (it) again!'
1 2 3

(78) Làm ơn gấp lại 'Please (do a favor) fold (it)
1 2 3 4 1 2 3
back.'
4

về 'V_h back (home)'

(79) Khi nào anh đi về Việt-Nam? 'When will you go back to
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4
Vietnam?'

ra 'V_h out; V_h up to the north'

(80) Mở cửa ra 'Open the door.'
1 2 3 1,3 2

(81) Ông Thiệu bay ra Hà-nội 'Mr. Thieu flew (up) to Hanoi.'
1 2 3 1 2 3

vào or vô 'V_h into; V_h down to the south'

(82) Bỏ vào trong thùng rác 'Put (it) in the rubbish bin.'
1 2 3 4 5 1 2,3 5 4

(83) Tôi chạy vào Nam năm 1955 'I fled (ran) to the South
1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4
in 1955.'
5

lên 'V_h up'

(84) Vui lên! 'Cheer up!'
1 2

xuống 'V_h down'

- (85) Đừng vứt xuống đất! 'Don't throw (it) down on the
 1 2 3 4 ground!'
 4

sang and qua 'V_h across; V_h over to a place'

- (86) Ông Thiệu bay sang Mỹ 'Mr. Thieu flew (over) to America.'
 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

- (87) Anh đi qua sông bằng gì? 'How did you go across the river?'
 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4

theo 'V_h along'

- (88) Nhớ manh theo cơm với cá 'Remember to bring along rice
 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4
 and fish.'
 5 6

phải 'V_h right up to'

- (89) Tối qua tôi gặp phải một người say rượu
 1 2 3 4 5 6 clf 7

'I ran up to a drunkard last night.'
 3 4 5 6 7 2 1

[phải usually expresses an unexpected encounter with someone or something unpleasant.]

4.12 Group II consists of three verbs which express the effort exerted by the subject in V_h'ing:

thêm 'V_h more'

- (90) Ăn thêm một chén cơm 'Eat one more bowl of rice.'
 1 2 3 4 5 1 3 2 4 5

chung 'V_h together'

- (91) Chúng tôi ở chung một nhà 'We live together in one
 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4
 house.'
 5

lấy 'V_h by one's self'

- (92) Anh đọc lấy '(You) read (it) yourself!'
 1 2 3 1 2 3

4.13 Group III includes three verbs which indicate the dative or benefactive orientation of the main verb. From a case-grammar point of view, these verbs (as well as some of those in Group I above) could be regarded as case-markers.¹⁴

cho 'V_h to or for someone'

- (93) Đưa cho tôi 'Give (it) to me.'
 1 2 3 1 2 3
- (94) Mua cho tôi cuốn Văn-phạm Lahu 'Buy a copy of The
 1 2 3 4 5 1 4
Grammar of Lahu for me.'
 5 2 3

giùm and hộ 'V_h for, instead of someone'

- (95) Đừng để ai làm giùm anh 'Don't let anybody do (it) for
 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5
 you.'
 6
- (96) Ai viết hộ anh? 'Who wrote (it) for you?'
 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

4.14 Group IV contains verbs which express the light attitude of the subject toward the action mentioned in the main verb:

chơi 'V_h for fun, for pleasure (not as serious business)'

- (97) Anh ngồi chơi '(You) sit down (to relax)!'
 1 2 3 1 2 3

thử 'V_h as a try'

- (98) Để tôi ăn thử 'Let me eat (it) to have a taste.'
 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

xem 'V_h and see'

- (99) Cứ làm xem 'Go ahead and do (it) and see.'
 1 2 3 1 2 3

[Usually xem is used in a challenging way. Thus one finds it only in imperative sentences.]

4.15 Group V consists of verbs which may be called resultative V_v's:

bằng 'V_h by means of; be V_h'ed out of'

- (100) Anh đi bằng gì? 'How (by what means) did you go?'
 1 2 3 4 4 3 1 2
- (101) Cái áo này làm bằng da 'This shirt is made of leather.'
 clf 1 2 3 4 5 2 1 3 4 5

[This verb is not as resultative as it appears, but since its meaning is closest to other verbs of this group, and its syntactic behavior is the same (i.e. it may not follow or precede any other V_v's, I classify it with this Group V.)]

nên 'lead from V_h into'

- (102) Vụ Watergate đã gây nên một luồng sóng căm-phấn suốt
 1 2 3 4 5 clf 6 7 8
nước Mỹ 'The Watergate affair has caused (built up)
 9 10 1 2 3

into) a wave of anger throughout the US
 4 5 6 7 8
 (American nation).'
 10 9

thành 'V_h into'

(103) Dùng tài-liệu ấy mà viết thành một bài văn 'Use those
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 3
 materials and (in order to) write (up) an
 2 4 5 6 7
 article.'
 8

[Nên and thành may be used interchangeably.]

mất 'V_h out of sight'

(104) Nó chạy mất 'He ran out of sight.'

As the above examples demonstrate, these V_v's may be juxtaposed to V_h's to form binary post-head concatenations. Like V_vC's, C_v's are endocentric constructions with a head which is the V_h and an attributive which is a versatile verb. Binary post-head concatenations may be generated by the following rule (where ' ' is the verbal nucleus of the VP:

(105) $\beta \rightarrow V_h + (V_v)^{15}$

4.21 Multiversatile post-head concatenations.

Several V_v's may occur in a sequence after a V_h. In this case we have a "multiversatile C_v." We may devise two optional rules for the generation of this kind of concatenation (Matisoff 1973:239):

(106a) $\beta \xrightarrow{\text{opt}} \beta + V_v$

(106b) $\beta \xrightarrow{\text{opt}} V_h$

Applying these two rules we may produce verbal nuclei like the one shown in Figure 4 [next page].

The order of modification here is the mirror-image of what we found in pre-head concatenations. Each verb or sequence of verbs to the left of a given verb in a C_v is the latter's head. Thus, taking the example in Figure 4, the V_v xuống modifies its head đem: 'bring down.' Đem xuống as a unit is the head of chung: the 'bringing down' is performed 'together.' Đem xuống chung

Figure 4. A multiversatile C_v.

Thus, the more abstract a V_v is, the further to the right it is from the V_h . As we have seen, Group I contains verbs of direction and is closest to the V_h .¹⁶ Verbs of Group II are more abstract (effort is more abstract than directionality) than those of Group I, so they follow the latter and precede those of Group III. In some (hopefully non-circular) sense, verbs of Group IV are apparently considered by Vietnamese speakers to be the most abstract of all, and must occur at the end of their verb-string. Verbs of Group V do not tolerate the presence of any other V_v 's in the same C_v , and therefore seem to stand outside the abstractness/concreteness spectrum.

Verbs which belong to the same group are usually mutually exclusive. Thus, ra may not co-occur with lên or xuống in the same concatenation. However, a verb which may have alternative degrees of abstractness may co-occur with other verbs of its group. An example is the directional V_v lại ' V_h over to a place', which belongs to Group I. But in sentence (107),

- (107) Ai bảo anh viết ra lại? 'Who told you to write (it) out
 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5
 again?' ,
 6

it occurs after ra 'out'. This is possible because lại in this sentence has a more abstract (non-directional) meaning 'over again' than ra 'out' (directional).¹⁷

Among the verbs of Group III, giùm and hộ 'for someone' are mutually exclusive, but cho 'to someone' may co-occur with either of them. In such cases the benefactive aspect of the action is reinforced:

- (108) Anh mua giùm cho tôi một cuốn sách '(You) buy a book
 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 5 6
 for me!'
 3 4

Since cho means 'give' as a main verb, a pedestrian "deep-structure analysis" of this sentence might be "(you) buy a book and give it to me." But this is not necessarily what the sentence means -- the buyer of the book might never give it to you at all, but merely, e.g. send it on to a friend of yours as a gift on your behalf.

When a verb is used versatilely, it tends to acquire a more abstract meaning than when it is functioning as a V_h . It is a fundamental mistake to try to "reduce" its meaning as a versatile verb to its meaning as a V_h (though of course the two meanings are related in an obvious way).

As in the case of V 's, the possible length of a C_v is quite limited in actual speech. That is, one rarely finds a C_v with four V_v 's. The most common C_v 's are those which contain one V_v . Frequency goes down as the number of V_v 's in the sequence goes up.

5.0 Versatile verbs occurring in both V 's and C_v 's.

There are some versatile verbs which may function either as a V_v or a V_h . Their number is quite small, however. (This is partly because I have left out of consideration all the stative verbs which are possible candidates for the class of V_v 's, and have tentatively classified them as resultative complements. Although this is far from satisfactory, more time is needed for a thorough investigation in order to decide which stative verbs are in fact C_r 's and which are V_v 's.)

At present, I recognize six versatile verbs which fall into this class. They are listed in Figure 6:

Figure 6. Versatile verbs occurring in both V 's and C_v 's.

	<u>Meaning as V_h:</u>	<u>Meaning as V_v:</u>	<u>Meaning as V_v:</u>
<u>đi</u>	go	go and V_h	V_h away, off
<u>đến</u>	arrive	come to V_h	V_h to a place
<u>tới</u>	reach	come to V_h	V_h to a place
<u>lại</u>	come	V_h again	V_h over to a place; V_h back to origin; re- V_h
<u>nên</u>	be appropriate	have an obligation to V_h	lead from V_h into
<u>phải</u>	be right, correct	must V_h	V_h right up to

Except for nên and phải, these bi-functional verbs are all verbs of direction. Although they have a different meaning in each position, they may not occur twice in the same concatenation. That is, the same verb may not appear both as a ${}_V V$ and as a V_V modifying the same V_h at the same time. Another observation is that in general their meanings are more abstract in pre-head position than in post-head position. This fact is important in the interpretation of fore-and-aft concatenations [next section].

6.1 Fore-and-aft concatenations (${}_V C_V$).

We have a fore-and-aft concatenation when versatile verbs appear on both sides of the V_h in one sequence. These ${}_V C_V$'s are already generable by our rules (72a), (106a), and (106b):

$$\beta \rightarrow {}_V V + \beta$$

$$\beta \rightarrow \beta + V_V$$

$$\beta \rightarrow V_h .$$

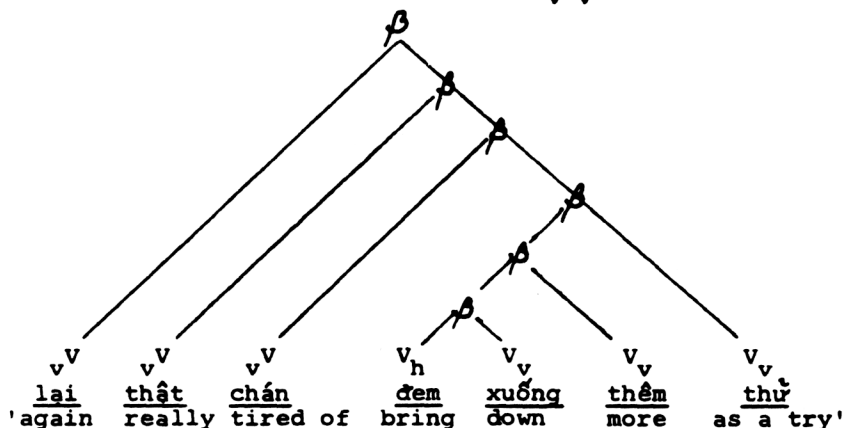
Unlike in Lahu (Matisoff 1973:248-258), I find that ${}_V C_V$'s in Vietnamese may not be susceptible of alternative interpretations. The principle that "the abstract modifies, and the concrete is modified" still works beautifully. It is noticed that, in general, ${}_V V$'s are more abstract than V_V 's. But it seems that in Vietnamese the overall features of the whole class can sometimes override the specific features of single items. Thus, Vietnamese has different numeral classifiers for objects of different shapes. The classifier for the class of round things is viên. It is used with kẹo 'candy', bi 'marble', etc. We must infer that kẹo originally referred to 'candy of a round shape.' Today we find candy coming in all shapes and sizes. Yet the classifier for kẹo still does not change according to the specific shape of any individual piece of candy. We still say viên kẹo dài 'the long candy' despite the fact that Vietnamese has another classifier for things of long shape.

Similarly, study of the semantic properties of concatena-

tions convinces us that, overall, the class of \sqrt{V} 's is more abstract than the class of V_V 's. Bearing this in mind, we may conclude that in a $\sqrt{C_V}$ the head is always the C_V on the right. Thus, such a hypothetical $\sqrt{C_V}$ as (109),

(109) Lại thật chán đem xuống thêm thử,
can surely be interpreted as in Figure 7:

Figure 7. Interpretation of a νC_v .



Starting from the V_h we go rightward till the rightmost V_v is covered, then we go leftward from the V_h . Thus, the V_v xuống modifies its head đem: 'bring down'. Đem xuống as a unit is the head of thêm: the 'bringing down' is performed 'more'. Đem xuống thêm is in turn the head of thử: the 'bringing down more' is performed 'as a try'. Then the whole C_v đem xuống thêm thử is now the head of the v_v chán: someone is 'tired of' the 'bringing down more as a try'. Now chán đem xuống thêm thử is the head of thật: the 'tiredness of bringing down more as a try' is 'real'. Finally, thật chán đem xuống thêm thử is the head of lại: 'really being tired of trying to bring down more' is 'again' experienced.

In real life, nobody has messages of such complexity to convey spontaneously, and we cannot find such a long $v_{\mathbf{C}_V}$. However, the interpretation of the direction of modification would always follow these principles. A few shorter examples will serve to illustrate this point:

- (110) Tôi thường phải đi làm giùm anh Tâm
 $\begin{matrix} & \text{v} & & \text{v} & & \text{v} & & \text{v}_h & & \text{v}_v \\ 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \end{matrix}$

'I often have to go to work for (instead of) (brother) Tam.'
 $\begin{matrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \end{matrix}$

- (111) Anh nên đóng cửa lại 'You should close the door (back to
 $\begin{matrix} & \text{v} & & \text{v}_h & & \text{v}_v \\ 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 \end{matrix}$ its original position).'
 $\begin{matrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 5 \end{matrix}$

- (112) Anh ấy bận đạy thêm giờ phu 'He's busy teaching more over-
 $\begin{matrix} & & \text{v} & \text{v}_h & \text{v}_v & & & & & \\ 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 5 \end{matrix}$ time.'
 $\begin{matrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 5 \end{matrix}$

6.2 Length of $\text{v}_\text{C}_\text{V}$'s.

Fore-and-aft concatenations have a quite narrow length range. The maximum number of versatile verbs in a given $\text{v}_\text{C}_\text{V}$ is usually four. However, I have observed that in a $\text{v}_\text{C}_\text{V}$, V_V 's usually outnumber v_V 's.¹⁸ Thus, $\text{v}_\text{C}_\text{V}$'s with one v_V and three V_V 's occur more frequently than $\text{v}_\text{C}_\text{V}$'s with three v_V 's and one V_V . This may be explained by the generalization that the class of v_V 's is more abstract, overall, than the class of V_V 's, and that our minds work faster with concrete items. Is this a problem of competence vs. performance, or the result of "the filtering or winnowing effect" of selectional constraint rules (Matisoff 1973:260)? It is difficult to say. For now we content ourselves with the observation that $\text{v}_\text{C}_\text{V}$'s with one v_V and one V_V , or with one v_V and two V_V 's, are the most common. As in other types of concatenation, frequencies of occurrence of $\text{v}_\text{C}_\text{V}$'s go down as the number of versatile verbs in them goes up.

7.0 Conclusion.

This is only a preliminary investigation, and many potentially fruitful avenues of research remain to be explored.¹⁹ The idea of versatile concatenations was first suggested by Matisoff for a Tibeto-Burman language, Lahu. As I hope this paper has shown, this idea is illuminating for Vietnamese too. I suspect that it also works for many other languages of Southeast Asia.

Notes

1. See Matisoff 1973, p. 201.
 2. Thompson (1965:268ff) recognizes them as "postverbs," and includes in this category lây 'by or for oneself' and lại 'repeating.' I exclude these two from the class of postverb particles because they meet the requirements for versatile verbhood.
 3. This is what Matisoff calls "fortuitous concatenations" (1973:203-207).
 4. Quay lại is itself a post-head concatenation, or C_v (below 3.2).
 5. This kind of construction also exists in Lahu and Thai (Matisoff 1973:203, 549).
 6. See Thompson 1965:126-138.
 7. Matisoff's term is used here (1973:210).
 8. Cf. the parallel behavior of the Lahu verb câ 'eat; V_h for a living' (Matisoff 1973:210-211).
 9. Abbott recognizes 32 of these in her paper. But some of these, as I have shown, turn out to form "false concatenations."
 10. If we were making a strictly semantic classification, some of these verbs could be assigned to other groups. Thus, it ' V_h little, V_h seldom' could be included in Group I (degree or intensity^h) instead of Group VI; lại ' V_h again' could be included in Group III (temporal aspect) instead of constituting a class all by itself; dám 'dare to V_h ', đễ 'be easy to V_h ', and khó 'be hard to V_h ' could all be included in Group V (psychological involvement^h), eliminating Group VI entirely; mắc 'have to V_h ' could be assigned to Group IV (commitment or obligation), etc.
 11. This rule and notation are Matisoff's (1973:211).
 12. This juxtapository flexibility enjoyed by lại is very similar to that of Matisoff's class of "post-head variable versatile", which may intervene at any of several different points in a C_v , but not before the members of the concrete class of "juxtacapital" V_v 's (1973:221, 240-242). **
 13. Several of these verbs (đi, đến, tới, lại) may also function as pre-head versatile, with different meanings. See 3.17 above and 5.0 below. For the analogy between Group I V_v 's in Vietnamese and Matisoff's "juxtacapital V_v 's" in Lahu, see note 16.
 14. In my paper "Case and verbs in Vietnamese," I posited cho as "dative case marker" and giùm and hộ as "benefactive case markers" (1971:11).
 15. Matisoff's rule (1973:222).
 16. These correspond closely to Matisoff's class of "juxtacapital V_v 's, which are directional in meaning and always occur right next to (juxta-) the verb-head (-capital). [1973:221-225]
- **In Vietnamese as in Lahu, the abstract/concrete continuum in C_v 's is the mirror-image of that in V_v 's, with the abstracter verbs occurring to the right of the concreter ones. See below 4.2-4.3.

17. It will be recalled that lại also means 'repetition' when it appears in pre-head position (above 3.12).
18. Sentence (110) is a counterexample to this generalization, since it contains three V's (thường, phải, and đi), but only one V_v (giùm).
19. E.g., under what conditions may nouns intervene within a verb concatenation (cf. của in [111])? What is the best compromise between the prepositional "case-analysis" of verbs like cho 'give; benefactive' (4.13) and their interpretation as serial verbs? Can "abstractness" be defined in a non-circular way, independent of the syntactic ordering properties of the verbs?

* * *

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