Vietnamese (vie), Austro-Asiatic
also known as Kinh, Gìn, Jing, Ching, Viet, Annamese
spoken in Vietnam (Asia)

1 Grammar Profile

1.1 Morpho-Syntax

1.1.1 Head position
Vietnamese is generally considered as head-initial.

Vietnamese has SVO as its canonical word order.

(1) Tân đánh nó
Tân Perf hit him
‘Tân hit him.’

(2) Minh nói rằng [Lan đỗ lái xe riêng của nó]
Minh say that [Lan Perf drive car own Poss Prn]
‘Minh said that Lan drove his own car.’

Except for some auxiliary/modal verb-like items, a verbal element cannot appear sentence-finally when there is a complement.

(3) Minh không thể giúp Lan được
Minh Neg ?? help Lan can
‘Minh cannot help Lan.’

(4) *Minh không thể Lan giúp
Minh Neg ?? Lan help

The subject is obligatorily in the clause initial position, whether it is a matrix or embedded clause, as can be seen in (5) and (6) below. Some notable exceptions are the presentational construction with có, as in (7) and embedded unaccusative verbs, as in (8).
Vietnamese has many preposition-like elements, such as ỏ, which always precede and never follow their complements.

Relative clauses, adjectives, demonstratives follow nouns, while numerals and classifiers precede them (Nguyen 2004, Simpson 2004)

1.1.2 Morphological type
isolating

1.1.3 Case system
No overt (morphological) case marking.

1.1.4 Verbal Agreement
No subject or object agreement.

1.1.5 Transitivity Patterns
There doesn’t seem to be any morpheme that serves purely to alter transitivity. However, they are lexical verbs that serve to function like passive and causative in other languages.

The subject of two verbs, bị ‘suffer’ and được ‘get or be granted’ are interpreted as affected favorably or adversely by an embedded event, respectively, and the theme or patient argument of the embedded event is interpreted to share its referent with the matrix subject. Thus, these verbs realize ‘object to subject promotion’ effect typical of passive.
(11) Dũng bị Minh đánh ec
Dũng, suffer Minh, hit ec
‘Dũng was hit by Minh. (≈ Dưng suffered Minh’s hitting him)’

(12) Minh, được Đùng giúp ec
Minh, get Đùng, help ec
‘Minh was helped by Đùng. (≈ Minh was granted Đùng’s helping him)’

lành cho, ‘make’, is used to express indirect causation, with the subject of the verb being the causer and the theme or patient argument of an embedded event being the causee. (Kwon 2004)

(13) Đủng làm cho Minh học tiếng Anh
Đủng, make give Minh study lang. English
‘Đủng made Minh study English.’

Since làm cho is limited to indirect causation, (13) can only mean that something that Đủng did influenced Minh and she voluntarily started studying English. In contrast, ép buộc ‘force’ is compatible with both direct and indirect causation. Thus, (14) below can be interpreted as Đủng directly or indirectly caused Minh to study English.

(14) Đủng ép buộc Minh học tiếng Anh
Đủng, force Minh, study lang. English
‘Đủng forced Minh to study English.’

Many prepositions-like elements function as applicatives.

(15) Ông ấy bán sách cho tôi
Prn, sell book to I
‘He sold the book to me.’

(16) Ông ấy mua sách giúp tôi
Prn, buy book for I
‘He bought the book for me.’

I am not aware of any instance of anti-passive in Vietnamese.

1.1.6 Null Arguments
Subject can be null depending on discourse conditions. Generally, objects cannot be null, even with a clear discourse context.

(17) Sẽ đi.
Imp go
‘I/he/she/μ/they etc. will go’

(18) Đủng che chó *(nó)
Đủng, protect Prn
‘Đứng protected him/her.’

However, with the passive-like constructions with bị ‘suffer’ and được ‘get or be granted’, the objects are preferred to be null.

1.1.7 Non-Finite Categories
Due to its isolating morphology, the verb forms are invariable irrespective of finiteness or different functions that a given verb serves in non-finite environments.

1.2 Matrix Clause
1.2.1 Basic word order
SVO
1.2.2 Alternate word orders

Topicalization can alter the basic SVO word order. (20) shows that the topicalized element can be overtly realized as a pronoun in situ.

(19) Thành phố này thì tôi không thích làm
city this Top I Neg like very
‘This city, I like very much’.

(20) Thành phố này thì tôi không thích nó làm
city this Top I Neg like Prn very
‘This city, I like it very much.’

Incidentally, topicalization is also possible within a finite-like complement introduced with ràng.

(21) Minh nói rằng [sách này thì cô ấy thích đọc]
Minh say that [book this Top she like read]
‘Minh says that this book, she likes to read.’

In Vietnamese, there are a number of elements which appear to serve different functions in different syntactic environments, and ai is one of them. For instance, it can be a wh-phrase in a wh-question, an NPI when there is negation.

(22) Ai biết cô ấy ở đâu
Ai know Prn be where
‘Who knows where she is?’

(23) Tôi không biết ai trong gia đình này cả
I Neg know AI in family this ??
‘I don’t know anyone in this family.’

When it is in subject position, ai is interpreted as universal quantifier together with cũng ‘also’.

(24) Ai cũng quen cô ấy
Ai also know Prn
‘Everyone knows her/him.’

However, ai cannot be preceded by cũng (and maintain the universal reading). Ai has to be at the front to avoid being governed by cũng (Duffeild 2004).

(25) *Cô ấy cũng quen ai
she also know ai
‘She knows everyone.’

(26) Ai, cô ấy cũng quen Æ_i
Q, she also know ec_i

This obligatory ai fronting may cross a clause boundary, as in (27). However, these two elements must maintain a local relation. Thus, ai fails to get licensed in (28), in which cũng is found in the embedded clause while ai is in the matrix.

(27) Ai, Lan cùng nghĩ rằng [nó quen Æ_i]
ai, Lan also think that [he know ec_i]
‘Lan thinks that he knows everyone.’

(28) ??Ai, Lan nghĩ rằng [nó cùng quen Æ_i]
ai, Lan think that [he also know ec_i]

1.2.3 Ordering of nominal and pronominal arguments

The same.
1.3 Embedded Clause

1.3.1 Basic word order
SVO (except for some unaccusative predicates under **làm** ‘make’. See 4.1).

1.3.2 Verbal agreement
N/A

1.3.3 Restrictions on tense, aspect, mood
Aspect/tense markers are generally optional, and often presence of a time adverbial suffices to establish the time of an event denoted.

Please describe any limitations on voice in the embedded clause.

Both of the two passive-like predicates, **bỉ** ‘suffer’ and **được** ‘get, gain, or be granted’ can be in an embedded clause.

1.3.4 Possible morphological categories of the embedded clause
There is no verbal morphology.

1.3.5 Non-control complements
Finite-like complements can optionally be introduced with items like **rằng** and **là**.

(29) Dùng nói **rằng/là** Minh dã trở về nhà
Dùng say that Minh Perf return home
‘Dùng said that Minh had gone home.’

**cho** can also be found preceding a complement, with verbs like **làm** ‘make’, **thích** ‘like’, and **muốn** ‘want’. However, a complement introduced by **cho** is incompatible with an aspect marker, unlike ones that are introduced by **rằng** and **là**.

(30) Dùng làm **cho** Minh (*dã) học tiếng Anh
Dùng make Minh (Perf) study lang. English
‘Dùng made Minh to study English.’

(31) Dùng thích **cho** chúng nó (*dã) đến
Dùng like they (Perf) come
‘Dùng (would) like them to come.’

(32) Dùng **muốn** **cho** chúng nó (*dã) đến
Dùng want they (Perf) come
‘Dùng wants them to come.’

There appear to be different types of compound/complex verbs in Vietnamese. One common type is a combination of two predicates of similar meaning (‘Reinforcing compounds’ in Thompson 1965).

- **cố** ‘try’
- **cố gắng** ‘try’ + ‘strive’ = try hard
- **đánh** ‘hit’
- **đánh đáp** ‘hit’ + ‘beat’ = beat

Some desiderative verbs, such as **muốn** ‘want’ and **thích** ‘like’, instantiate disjoint reference between an embedded subject and matrix arguments, which is the closest Vietnamese equivalent of ECM construction in other languages where case is visible. These verbs take a non-finite clausal complement, and the subjects of the clausal complements are not subject to selectional restrictions. The subject can be an inanimate object, as in (37), and it can also be non-referential, as in (38).
(33) Dùng muốn Lan (*đã) đến  
Dùng want Lan (*Perf) come  
‘Dùng wants/wanted Lan to come.’

(34) Dùng muốn hộp đồ đi San Diego  
Dùng want box that go San Diego  
‘Dùng wants that box to go to San Diego.’

Some aspectual verbs, such as ngiêng ‘stop’ and tiệp tục ‘continue’, as well as some modals, such as phải ‘must’, cần ‘need’, and nên ‘should’, allow a non-referential DPs to be their subject, suggesting that they are raising verbs.

(35) Trời phải /cần /nên mưa  
Sky must /need /should rain  
‘It must be raining/needs to rain/should rain.’

(36) Trời tiệp tục /ngiêng mưa  
Sky continue/stop rain  
‘It continues/stops raining.’

The same group of verbs (aspectual verbs) appear to be preserve the meaning of an idiomatic expression such as kiến bọ bưng ‘be/get really hungry’ (which means literally ‘ants craw in one’s stomach’).

(37) Kiến bắt đầu/tiệp tục bọ bưng  
ant begin/continue craw stomach  
‘I am beginning to get really hungry/I continued to be really hungry.’

2 Control Profile

2.1 forward subject control into a non-finite complement

2.1.1 Example structure

(38) Minh có (gắng) giúp Dùng.  
Minh try (strive) help Dùng  
‘Minh tries/tried to help Dùng.’

(39) Dùng muốn học tiếng Anh  
Dùng want study lang. English  
‘Dùng wants/wanted to study English.’

(40) Dùng thích học tiếng Anh  
Dùng like study lang. English  
‘Dùng likes/liked to study English.’

(41) Dùng định học tiếng Anh  
Dùng intend study lang. English  
‘Dùng intended to study English.’

2.1.2 Predicates participating in the construction  
verb, implicative, có ‘try’  
verb, desiderative, muốn, ‘want’, thích ‘like, would like’, quyết ‘decide’, định ‘intend’

2.1.3 Evidence in support bi-clausal structure  
First of all, evidence suggests that complements of the verbs listed above are clearly different from the finite-like complement introduced by either rạng or là. A rạng complement can have an overt subject
and it allows topicalization within itself, as has already been seen (see 5.2. and 6.4). The complements of the presumed control verbs are not compatible with an overt subject or topicalization.

(42) Dùng muốn che chở nó
Dùng want protect Prnj
‘Dùng wants to protect him/her.

(43) *Dùng muốn ông ấy che chở nó
Dùng want he want protect Prnj
‘Dùng wants he protect him/her.’ (intended)

(44) *Dùng muốn Kim thì (nói) che chở nó
Dùng want Kim Top (Prnj) protect ecj
‘Dùng wants Kim, he protects.’ (intended)

Moreover, Negative Polarity Items such as gì cả and ít nào ‘at all’ must be licensed by negation within in a ràng complement, as in (49) and (50), while an NPI in a complement of the presumed control verbs can be licensed by negation in the matrix, as in (51).

(45) Tôi nghĩ ràng [Minh không thích học tiếng Anh gì cả]
I think that [Minh Neg like study lang. English at all]
‘I think Minh doesn’t like to study English at all.’

(46) *Tôi không nghĩ ràng [Minh thích học tiếng Anh gì cả]
I neg think that [Minh like study lang. English at all]
‘I don’t think Minh likes to study English at all.’ (Intended)

There is also evidence that suggests the presumed control complements involve a structure that includes an embedded subject. The evidence is the distribution of a subject-oriented particle tự. A particle tự can be used as an emphatic/contrastive marker or part of reflexive together with a pronoun.

(47) Dùng không cờ (gảng) hút thuốc lá gì cả
Dùng Neg try strive inhale cigarette at all
‘Dùng didn’t try to smoke cigarette at all.’

Although the evidence presented so far may be taken to suggest monoclausal status of the control sentences, a closer look at the distribution of negation and licensing of NPIs suggests that the presumed control sentences are biclausal. First, negation can be found in a complement.

(48) Dùng cố (gảng) không hút thuốc lá
Dùng try striveNeg inhale cigarette
‘Dùng tried not to smoke.’

Also, at least for some speakers, the presumed control complements under some of the presumed control verbs are compatible with the imperfective aspect marker.

(49) Dùng muốn sé học tiếng Anh
Dùng want Imp study lang. English
‘Dùng wants/wanted to study English.’

There is also evidence that suggests the presumed control complements involve a structure that includes an embedded subject. The evidence is the distribution of a subject-oriented particle tự. A particle tự can be used as an emphatic/contrastive marker or part of reflexive together with a pronoun.

(50) Dùng tự che chở nó
Dùng, Self protect Prnj
‘Dùng, protected him/her, by himself.’

(51) Dùng tự nó che chở nó
Dùng, Self Prnj protect Prnj
‘Dùng protected himself.’

In a simple sentence, tự can appear either before or after a subject. But it cannot follow or precede an internal argument, as in (57) and (58).
(52) Tân tự làm đau nó
Tân Self make sick Prn
‘Tân hurt himself.’ or ‘Tân hurt him/her.’

(53) Tự Tân làm đau nó
Self Tân make sick Prn

(54) *Tân làm đau tự nó
Tân make sick Self Prn

(55) *Tân làm đau nó tự
Tân make sick Prn self

In the disjoint reference configuration, tự must appear before the entire complement.

(56) Minh muốn tự [Dừng (?*tự) che chở nó]
Minh want Self [Dừng (Self) protect Prn].
‘Minh, wants Dừng, himself, to protect him/j/k.’

(57) suggests that tự is located above the level of a complete clause including a subject (i.e. vP), as in (58):

(57) Minh muốn [tự [i.e. Dừng che chở nó]]
(58) Minh want [Self [i.e. Dừng protect Prn]]

However, tự must follow an aspectual marker and the negation when they are present, as in (59) and (60). This suggests that tự occupies the level that is lower than the levels where these functional elements appear.

(59) Cửa đó dã tự (*dã) đong
Door that Perf Self (*Perf) close
‘That door closed itself.’

(60) Dừng không tự (*không) di bộ được
Dừng Neg Self (*Neg) walk can
‘Dừng can not walk by himself.’

Going back to the presumed control verbs, with these verbs, tự must appear following the matrix control verb1.

(61) Minh (*tự) muốn tự che chở Dừng
Minh (*Self) want Self protect Dừng
‘Minh wants to protect Dừng himself.’

Recall that a control complement can have negation. As can be seen below, when tự and the negation co-occur in a presumed control complement, tự must follow the negation, as expected.

(62) Dừng, cõ (gảng) [không [XP tự [VP Δi hút thuốc lá]]]
Dừng, try strive[Neg [XP Self [VP Δi inhale cigarette]]]

Given the foregoing analysis, the presence of tự after the matrix control verb suggests that the presumed control complement has a subject position, as in (63).

(63) Minh, muốn tự [VP Δi che chở Dừng]
Minh, want self [VP Δi protect Dùng]

Thus, the presumed control sentences appear to be biclausal.

1 It is not clear why tự cannot appear preceding the matrix want.
2.1.4 Selectional restrictions
Non-referential DPs cannot be subjects of the presumed control verbs.

(64) Trời mura
Sky rain
‘It rains/rained.’

(65) Trời tiếp tục mura
Sky continue rain
‘It continues/continued to rain.’

(66) ??Trời muốn /có mura
Sky want /try rain
‘It wants/tries to rain.’

2.1.5 Control type: obligatory
Local, c-commanding, no split antecedent is required.

(67) Con cua Dưng muốn di Sàigòn
Son poss Dưng want go Saigon
‘Dưng’s son wants \(\Delta_{ij}\) to go to Saigon.’

(68) Kim nói rằng Lan muốn có hối nghị
Kim say that Lan want have meeting
‘Kim, said that Lan, want \(\Delta_{ij}\) to have a meeting.’

2.2 forward object control into non-finite complement

2.2.1 Example structure

(69) Dưng ép buộc Minh học tiếng Anh
Dưng force Minh study lang. English
‘Dưng forced Minh to study English.’

(70) Dưng làm cho Minh học tiếng Anh
Dưng make Minh study lang. English
‘Dưng (indirectly) made Minh study English.’

(71) Dưng yêu cầu Minh không nói tiếng Việt
Dưng order Minh Neg speak lang. Vietnamese
‘Dưng order Minh to not speak Vietnamese.’

(72) Lan thuyết phục Minh đi UCSD.
Lan convince Minh go UCSD
‘Lan convinced Minh to go to UCSD.’

2.2.2 Predicates participating in the construction
verb, manipulative, ép buộc ‘force’, làm cho ‘cause, make’, yêu cầu ‘require, order’, thuyết phục ‘convince’

2.2.3 Evidence in support bi-clausal structure
With these verbs, two conflicting time adverbials can modify the matrix and embedded verb, suggesting that there are two independent events involved.

(73) Hôm qua Dưng yêu cầu Minh hôm nay đi Sàigòn
Yesterday Dưng order Minh today go Saigon
‘Yesterday, Dưng order Minh to go to Saigon today.’
The distribution of *tự that has been discussed earlier makes a prediction with respect to the position of objects in the proposed object control verbs. If these verbs are indeed object control verbs, the second DPs in the object control sentences are arguments of the matrix verbs, i.e. objects. If these are matrix objects, *tự is predicted to never precede them, unlike the case of disjoint reference, in which the relevant DPs are embedded subjects (see 9.3.3.). The fact that *tự may only follow the DP suggests that the DP belongs to the matrix:

(74) Dùng ép bước (*tự) Minh tự nói tiếng Việt
Dùng force (*Self) Minh Self speak lang. Vietnamese
‘Dùng forced Minh herself to speak Vietnamese.’

(75) Dùng làm cho (*tự) Minh tự nói tiếng Việt
Dùng make (*Self) Minh Self speak lang Vietnamese
‘Dùng cause Minh herself to speak Vietnamese.’

2.2.4 Selectional restrictions
Unlike the case with the disjoint reference verbs, the second DPs in the proposed object control verbs are subject to selectional restriction.

(76) *Dùng ép bước trời mưa
Dùng force sky rain
‘Dùng forces it to rain.’

(77) ??Dùng làm cho trời mưa
Dùng make sky rain
‘Dùng makes it to rain.’

For some speakers, non-referential DP is acceptable with làm cho, presumably because it denotes indirect causation. For instance, (79) is felicitous when someone is making fun of someone else when it rained after s/he has done something out of his/her character.

2.2.5 Control type: obligatory
Split antecedent is impossible.

(78) *Dùng ép bước Minh giúp nhau
Dùng force Minh help each_other
‘Dùng, forced Minh to help each other,’ (intended)

(79) *Dùng làm cho Minh giúp nhau
Dùng make Minh help each_other
‘Dùng, make Minh to help each other,’ (intended)

The antecedent must c-command the covert subject.

(80) Dùng, ép bước con cái của Minh, *tự nói tiếng Việt
Dùng, force son Poss Minh, *tự speak lang. Vietnamese
‘Dùng forced Minh’s son to speak Vietnamese.’

(81) Dùng, làm cho con cái của Minh, *tự nói tiếng Việt
Dùng, make son Poss Minh, *tự speak lang Vietnamese
‘Dùng caused Minh’s son to speak Vietnamese.’
References

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