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# Spatial Conceptualization in Vietnamese: A Contrastive Analysis of 'Ra' and 'Vào' and Their English Equivalents

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## Abstract

This study explores the cognitive mechanisms underlying spatial conceptualization in Vietnamese, focusing on the directional markers *ra* ('out') and *vào* ('into') in contrast with their English equivalents. Using a cognitive linguistic framework and bilingual corpus analysis, the study reveals that, unlike English, which primarily employs goal-oriented prepositions, Vietnamese conceptualizes spatial relations through containment schemas and hierarchical reference frames. Vietnamese conceptualizes motion based on interior/exterior contrasts, narrow/wide spaces, and regional axes (e.g., *vào Nam* 'into the South,' *ra Bắc* 'out to the North'), while English focuses on endpoints with prepositions like *into* or *to*. The findings highlight key differences in spatial cognition, particularly in directional conceptualization and sociocultural influences. This study contributes to cognitive linguistics, cross-linguistic spatial representation, and translation studies, offering insights into how language-specific structures shape conceptualization and influence meaning construction across different linguistic systems.

## Keywords

conceptualization – encoding – spatial configuration – schema – ra – vào

## 1 Introduction

Spatial orientations and directions are fundamental to human cognition and are systematically expressed through language. However, different languages conceptualize and encode spatial motion in distinct ways, influenced by factors such as "viewpoint", "reference frames" (Levinson, 2003: 39–50), cognitive "salience", and "focus of attention" (Talmy, 2000: 76). This variation aligns with Langacker's (2008: 43–44) theory of "conceptual content" and "construal", where different languages impose different perspectives on the same spatial scene. Similarly, Aurnague et al. (2007: 6) highlight the "categorization of spatial relations", showing how languages differ in this regard, particularly in terms of containment and path-based motion.

Vietnamese provides a compelling case where the directional markers *ra* and *vào* encode both spatial containment and directional perspective, unlike English, which primarily relies on goal-oriented prepositions (Talmy, 2000). More significantly, Vietnamese spatial encoding reveals patterns that challenge existing theoretical frameworks in cognitive linguistics, necessitating new theoretical models to account for hierarchical spatial organization and culturally-embedded spatial schemas. Consider the following Vietnamese sentences:

(1) Cô ấy từ trong nhà lao *ra sân*.
She rushed out of the house and *into* the yard.

(2) Anh ấy từ ngoài ngõ *vào sân*.
He went *into* the yard from the alley.

Both sentences describe movement toward the same destination—the yard—but are encoded differently depending on the reference frame and perceived spatial configuration. *'Ra sân'* ('out to the yard') emphasizes motion away from an enclosed space (the house), while *'vào sân'* ('into the yard') highlights movement into a contained area from an open exterior (the alley). This contrast reveals that Vietnamese employs a hierarchical spatial organization where the same destination can be construed as either interior or exterior depending on the source of motion and cultural spatial schemas—a phenomenon that existing containment theories cannot adequately explain.

In contrast, English encodes both scenarios using the preposition *into*, reflecting a goal-oriented approach to spatial relationships (Talmy, 2000; Tyler & Evans, 2003). Jackendoff (1983) and Geeraerts (2010) further argue that *lexical semantics* plays a key role in shaping spatial interpretation. While English spatial prepositions categorize movement based on *goal-orientation*,

Vietnamese motion encoding suggests a system that foregrounds spatial "containment" and "reference frames" (Levinson, 2003: 39–50). The semantic contrast between *ra* and *vào* exemplifies this difference, reinforcing Aurnague et al.'s (2007) categorization of spatial motion as either containment-based or path-based. Whereas Vietnamese employs directionally specific containment schemas, English focuses on the endpoint of motion, often collapsing distinctions that other languages maintain (Talmy, 2000; Tyler & Evans, 2003).

This study aims to explore how Vietnamese and English speakers conceptualize and linguistically encode spatial relations, with particular attention to the semantics of the directional markers *ra* and *vào*. Building on prior work in cognitive semantics and cross-linguistic variation, the study has three primary objectives: (i) to analyze the semantic network of *ra* and *vào* in Vietnamese, comparing them with their English counterparts; (ii) to examine the cognitive processes that underlie spatial conceptualization in Vietnamese and English, focusing on reference frames, containment schemas, and directionality; and (iii) to investigate the linguistic, cultural, and social influences that shape the expression of spatial motion encoded by *ra* and *vào* and their English counterparts, with implications for translation and second language learning. Unlike studies that explore non-spatial meaning extensions of *ra* and *vào*, such as their use in abstract domains like knowing or support (Trần Văn Dương, 2021), this study focuses exclusively on their role in spatial conceptualization and encoding.

To address these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions: (i) How are the spatial meanings of *ra* and *vào* conceptualized and encoded by Vietnamese speakers, and how do these compare with English expressions of similar motion events? (ii) What cognitive differences exist between Vietnamese and English speakers in terms of spatial conceptualization, particularly regarding containment, path, and directionality? (iii) In what ways do cultural and linguistic norms shape the expression of spatial relations encoded by *ra* and *vào* in Vietnamese and their English counterparts, and how might these insights inform cross-linguistic research, translation practices, and pedagogical approaches in second language acquisition?

## 2 Theoretical Background

The interplay between spatial motion, its conceptualization, and its linguistic encoding offers a window into how human cognition interfaces with language. This study examines the Vietnamese directional markers *ra* and *vào* alongside their English counterparts, situating the analysis within the cognitive linguistic paradigm. Drawing on theories of spatial cognition,

conceptual construal, and cross-linguistic variation, it explores how these markers reflect both universal embodied experiences and language-specific cultural and historical influences (Talmy, 2000; Levinson, 2003). This section outlines the theoretical foundations guiding the study, including cognitive semantics, frames of reference, image schemas, and mental spaces, while establishing their relevance to a contrastive analysis of spatial encoding in Vietnamese and English. However, existing theories prove insufficient to account for the hierarchical and culturally-embedded patterns found in Vietnamese, necessitating theoretical innovation.

### 2.1 *Cognitive Semantics and Spatial Conceptualization*

Cognitive linguistics views language as an extension of embodied cognition, where spatial relations emerge from conceptual structures grounded in bodily experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Evans & Green, 2006). Langacker's (2008: 43–44) theory of conceptual construal provides a pivotal framework, positing that languages profile spatial scenes through distinct lexical and grammatical lenses. Central to this is the dynamic interplay of a *trajector* (the moving entity) and a *landmark* (the reference point), which together delineate a trajectory or path.

However, Langacker's framework, while valuable, operates primarily on binary trajector-landmark relationships and does not account for hierarchical spatial organization where multiple landmarks interact in culturally-determined ways. As illustrated in example (1), Vietnamese expressions like *ra sân* and *vào sân* reveal how *ra* and *vào* construe motion in terms of containment and directionality. English, by contrast, often foregrounds the goal via prepositions like *into*, highlighting a divergence in construal: Vietnamese emphasizes relational transitions, while English privileges endpoints.

Talmy's (2000: 9) typology of "motion events" further enriches this analysis. He distinguishes *verb-framed* languages, which encode path in the verb, from *satellite-framed* languages, where path is expressed through satellites like prepositions or particles. However, Vietnamese challenges this binary typology in three fundamental ways. First, *ra* and *vào* can function both as satellites and as main verbs within the same linguistic system. As satellites, they pattern like English: *Cô ấy chạy ra sân* ('She *ran out to* the yard'), where PATH is encoded in *ra* and MANNER in *chạy*. But they also function as motion verbs: *Cô ấy ra Hà Nội* ('She *went* to Hanoi'), where PATH is encoded in the main verb *ra* itself. Second, and most significantly, *ra* and *vào* encode cultural-spatial schemas rather than purely geometric PATH relationships. The same destination can be encoded differently depending on hierarchical containment: *ra sân* ('out to the yard') from inside the house versus *vào sân* ('into the yard') from the alley, demonstrating that cultural reference frames

override geometric relationships. This multifunctional behavior suggests the need for a third typological category: schema-based motion encoding, where cultural and spatial schemas determine encoding patterns rather than purely syntactic constraints.

### 2.2 *Frames of Reference in Spatial Cognition*

Levinson's (2003: 39–50) typology of spatial "reference frames"—*intrinsic*, *relative*, and *absolute*—provides a foundational framework for analyzing cross-linguistic variation in spatial orientation. However, Vietnamese spatial encoding reveals a fourth type that Levinson's framework cannot accommodate: *hierarchical-cultural frames*. In this model, intrinsic frames rely on object-internal features, relative frames depend on the speaker's viewpoint, and absolute frames draw on fixed external coordinates (Lý Toàn Thắng, 2005, 2012). Vietnamese makes use of all three systems, but the directional markers *ra* and *vào* frequently operate within a hierarchical-cultural frame that combines containment-based intrinsic features with socio-cultural and geographic conventions. For instance, expressions such as *vào Nam* ('into the South') and *ra Bắc* ('out to the North') exemplify this hybrid frame, where spatial encoding reflects historical and cultural conceptions of *containment* versus *openness* rather than mere cardinal directionality (Nguyễn Tài Cẩn, 1991). This challenges Levinson's tripartite system and suggests that spatial reference frames must account for cultural-historical embedding, not just geometric or deictic relationships.

English, conversely, leans toward relative and absolute frames, with prepositions like *to* or *into* emphasizing goal-directed motion without foregrounding containment contrasts. Levinson's framework helps explain an important difference: Vietnamese spatial cognition integrates hierarchical reference points such as the house, yard, or regional divisions, while English favors a linear, endpoint-oriented trajectory. This aligns with Hickmann's (2006) findings on motion relativity, suggesting that spatial encoding mirrors culturally salient distinctions—a lens this study applies to the socio-cultural dimensions of *ra* and *vào*. This challenges Levinson's tripartite system and suggests that spatial reference frames must account for cultural-historical embedding, not just geometric or deictic relationships.

### 2.3 *Image Schemas and Mental Spaces*

The role of image schemas, as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), provides a deeper cognitive basis for analyzing *ra* and *vào*. Image schemas are recurring, embodied patterns of experiences (e.g., containment, path, source-goal) that structure spatial language. In Vietnamese, the containment schema is central: *ra* encodes motion from an interior to an exterior space, while *vào* marks the reverse, reflecting a bodily experience of boundaries akin to

inhaling and exhaling (Johnson, 1987). This schema extends metaphorically, as in *ra tòa* ('out to court') or *vào tù* ('into prison'), where social and legal domains are conceptualized as spatial containers. English, however, often collapses these distinctions into a single schema of goal-orientation (*to court*, *to prison*), underscoring a divergence in metaphorical extension.

Fauconnier's (1994) theory of mental spaces and Fillmore's (2006) theory of frame semantics complement this analysis by framing spatial expressions as dynamic cognitive constructs. Mental spaces and frames are temporary conceptual domains activated during discourse, allowing speakers to shift perspectives. In Vietnamese, *ra* and *vào* activate distinct mental spaces based on whether motion traverses an open or enclosed trajectory, as seen in the contrast between *ra sân* and *vào sân*. English, by contrast, tends to unify these spaces under a single preposition (*into*), reflecting a less differentiated cognitive mapping. This interplay of schemas and mental spaces underscores the study's focus on how language-specific structures shape spatial conceptualization.

### 2.4 *Cross-Linguistic Variation and Cultural Influence*

Building on Aurnague et al. (2007), who argue that languages categorize spatial relations through containment or path-based systems, this study hypothesizes that Vietnamese prioritizes containment and hierarchical frames, while English emphasizes path and goal. This aligns with Jackendoff's (1983) and Geeraerts' (2010) emphasis on lexical semantics as a driver of spatial interpretation. Vietnamese *ra* and *vào* carry rich semantic networks, extending beyond physical motion to encode dispersion (*đổ tóe ra* 'spill out'), concentration (*xúm vào* 'huddle together'), and regional movement (*vào Nam*, *ra Bắc*). English equivalents, such as *out*, *into*, or *to*, lack this polysemy, reflecting a more uniform spatial lexicon.

Cultural and historical factors further shape these differences. Vietnam's linear geography and historical north-south division (Nguyễn Lai, 2001; Lý Toàn Thắng, 2005) imbue *ra* and *vào* with socio-spatial meanings absent in English. For instance, the *vào Nam–ra Bắc* schema reflects a containment metaphor rooted in 15th-century territorial perceptions, not merely a directional convention. English, lacking such a culturally specific spatial axis, relies on abstract or topographic markers (*north*, *south*), highlighting a contrast in how linguistic systems embed socio-cultural cognition.

## 3 Data and Methodology

This study employs a corpus-based cognitive approach to examine how *ra* and *vào* in Vietnamese, along with their English equivalents, are conceptualized

and encoded in spatial representation. The analysis is based on bilingual Vietnamese-English textual data, allowing for a contrastive examination of spatial cognition and encoding strategies across the two languages.

The dataset consists of 275 instances of *ra* and 355 instances of *vào*, along with their corresponding English translations. These instances were extracted from the bilingual corpus including Hồ Anh Thái's (2004) *Tình yêu sau chiến tranh: Tuyển tập truyện ngắn Việt Nam đương đại* and its English translation *Love after War: Contemporary Fiction from Viet Nam* (Karlin & Hồ Anh Thái, 2003). The Vietnamese collection features short stories by 45 Vietnamese authors, while the English version was translated by Wayne Karlin and a team of translators. Additional data were obtained from the Vietlex Corpus, developed by the Vietnam Lexicography Center, which provides extensive Vietnamese language data. Furthermore, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), a widely used reference for modern English usage, was utilized to validate the English equivalents of *ra* and *vào*. All numbered examples in this study (e.g., (1), (2)) are drawn from the bilingual corpus *Tình yêu sau chiến tranh: Tuyển tập truyện ngắn Việt Nam đương đại* and its English translation by a consistent team of translators. Since all examples come from the same bilingual corpus, individual source citations are not provided. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was used only to verify the typicality and frequency of English spatial expressions, particularly to confirm translated equivalents when needed. The data were selected to ensure linguistic representativeness, encompassing a range of spatial contexts where these markers occur.

The collected data were categorized using VietCorpus, a bilingual corpus analysis platform, to systematically classify instances of *ra* and *vào* based on: spatial configurations (e.g., containment, path, directionality); cognitive schemas (e.g., source-path-goal, trajector-landmark alignments); and linguistic and cultural contexts. The dataset was also analyzed to classify *ra* and *vào* as verbs, prepositions, adverbs/particles, or serial verb constructions, reflecting their varied syntactic behaviors across contexts. Each instance was analyzed within its context to identify its cognitive components and functional roles in different "proto-scenes" (Tyler & Evans, 2003: 50–53). The analysis focused on key cognitive components, including *source* (starting point of motion), *path* (trajectory of motion), *goal* (endpoint of motion), *trajector* (moving entity), and *landmark* (reference point).

To achieve the research objectives, the study employed a descriptive and interpretative analytical approach, integrating theories from cognitive semantics and spatial cognition. The framework was guided by: *image-schema theory* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), examining containment and motion schemas; *trajector-landmark alignment* (Langacker, 1987, 2008), analyzing spatial relationships in Vietnamese and English; *frames of reference in spatial*

*cognition* (Levinson, 2003), considering intrinsic, relative, and absolute reference systems; *cross-linguistic motion encoding typology* (Talmy, 2000), identifying differences between Vietnamese and English spatial representation strategies.

This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive contrastive analysis, highlighting the cognitive and cultural influences on spatial encoding in Vietnamese and English. The findings contribute to cognitive linguistic research, translation studies, and second language acquisition, particularly in understanding how Vietnamese and English speakers conceptualize and linguistically encode spatial motion.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

The data analysis reveals that the semantic network of the spatial directional markers *ra* and *vào* in Vietnamese is multifaceted. Beyond their core meaning related to the spatial configuration of containment, these markers also denote movements across various spatial dimensions, including movements between narrow and wide or closed and open areas. Additionally, they encode centrifugal and radial movements, as well as movements between regions along the country derived from the concepts *vào Nam* and *ra Bắc*, which reflects the linguistic and cultural particularities of Vietnamese spatial cognition.

### 4.1 *Ra—Vào Involving a Configuration of Containment*

The spatial configuration of containment, including an interior space, an exterior space, and a boundary, forms the fundamental distinction between the directions *vào* and *ra*. This conceptualization is likely rooted in human bodily experience, where the skin functions as a natural boundary separating the interior from the exterior (Tyler & Evans, 2003). Daily activities, such as inhaling and exhaling, serve as foundational experiences that inform the cognitive representation of *vào* and *ra* as motion inward and outward, respectively.

Containment configurations in Vietnamese are organized radially, with three-dimensional containers serving as the *prototype* at the center of this conceptual category (Tyler & Evans, 2003). For example, *nhà* ('house') represents a prototypical three-dimensional container, while *sân* ('yard') extends this schema as a less bounded, two-dimensional instance. Surrounding the prototype are less typical configurations, including two-dimensional entities such as *trong khu đất* ('in an area of land'), *trong vườn* ('in the garden'); weather phenomena such as *trong mưa* ('in the rain'), *trong bão* ('in the storm'), *trong sương* ('in the mist'), *trong gió* ('in the wind'); and liquids such as *trong nước*

('in the water'). These examples illustrate the diverse applications of containment as a spatial schema in Vietnamese.

### 4.1.1 Three-Dimensional Containers

The proto-scene of *ra* and *vào* can be visualized as a three-dimensional container, as illustrated in Figure 1. In this configuration, *ra* denotes the motion of a trajector from the interior to the exterior of the boundary (Figure 1A), while *vào* represents motion in the opposite direction, from the exterior to the interior (Figure 1B).

Analysis of corpus data indicates that motion from the interior space to the exterior, as illustrated in Figure 1A, is predominantly encoded by *ra*, either independently or with auxiliary specifiers such as *ra từ* (out from) or other analogous constructs. In contrast, English employs a broader array of linguistic expressions to encode such motion, including *out*, *out of*, *outside*, *from*, *out into*, and *off*. Consider the following examples:

(3) Anh *bước ra* với quả bầu đựng nước.
He *walked out* with wa dried pumpkin gourd filled with water.

(4) Vừa nói Biền vừa mở hòm *lấy ra* bộ quần áo của Mơ.
As he spoke, Bien opened a chest and *pulled out* one of Mo's old outfits.

(5) Cô gái *lấy ra từ trong* túi một phong bì dán kín, đưa cho Tân.
The girl *pulled* a sealed envelope *out of her bag* and handed it to Tan.

(6) Bỏ mặc vợ đứng như trời trồng, Đoàn *bước* vội *ra khỏi* nhà.
Leaving his wife standing motionless and alone, Đoàn *walked* briskly *out of* the house.

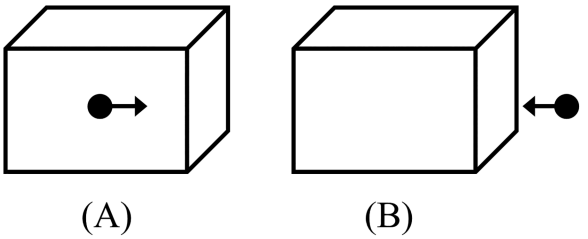


FIGURE 1 Spatial Construal of *Ra* and *Vào* in Vietnamese: Proto-Scene Involving a Three-Dimensional Container

In Vietnamese, two distinct patterns emerge in the use of *ra* to encode spatial motion. In the first pattern, the containing element is de-emphasized or relegated to the background, as seen in examples (3) and (4); this is typically expressed through the simple [verb + *ra*] construction. In the second pattern, the enclosing element is foregrounded, as illustrated in examples (5) and (6); this is commonly conveyed using more complex structures such as [verb + *ra* từ trong + x], [verb + từ trong + x + *ra*], or [verb + *ra khỏi* + x], where x denotes the container.

Statistical analysis of bilingual English texts shows that *out* and *out of* are the most frequent lexical items for encoding motion from an inner to an outer space, occurring at rates of 15.7% and 14.8%, respectively. Structurally, English mirrors Vietnamese through two main constructions: [verb + *out*], as seen in examples (3) and (4), and [verb + *out of* + x (container)], as observed in examples (5) and (6). These parallels reveal structural similarities in how the two languages encode spatial motion, despite their differences in lexical choices and grammatical frameworks.

The encoding of motion in Vietnamese with *ra* and *vào* reflects variations in attentional focus and the cognitive salience of spatial components, such as *source*, *path*, *goal*, *trajector*, and *landmark* (Lee, 2001; Tyler & Evans, 2003). For example, in *Xe đang ra* ('The car is coming out') and *Xe đang chạy vào* ('The car is coming in'), the goal is often backgrounded but recoverable from context or optionally expressed, as in *Xe đang ra* ***ngõ*** ('The car is coming out into the alley') and *Xe đang chạy vào* ***sân*** ('The car is coming into the yard'). These contrasts demonstrate how Vietnamese flexibly encodes motion based on the prominence of the goal. In *Xe đang ra*, the outward direction from a container is foregrounded, with the goal implied, whereas *Xe đang ra* ***ngõ*** explicitly specifies the alley as the endpoint. Similarly, *Xe đang chạy vào* emphasizes inward motion, while *Xe đang chạy vào* ***sân*** highlights the yard as the goal. Such syntactic variations demonstrate a shared containment schema, where the speaker's cognitive focus shapes whether the goal is linguistically articulated, reinforcing the role of conceptual structure in Vietnamese spatial cognition. The syntactic dimension of this issue will be discussed in detail in section 4.5.

English encodes spatial relations and motion not only through particles and prepositions but also via sentence components, particularly predicates. To represent the directional movement illustrated in Figure 1A, English employs constructions such as [verb + *outside*] and [verb + *from* + x], as shown in the following examples.

(7) Lần này thì mọi người *bước ra* ngoài, ngước nhìn theo hướng tay tôi chỉ.
This time, everyone *stepped outside*, turning to look in the direction I was pointing.

(8) Bà bắt tay thật nhiệt tình, hỏi tôi uống gì rồi mở xắc *lấy ra* một bức thư.
She shook my hand warmly and asked me what I'd like to drink. Then she *took* a letter *from* her bag and handed it to me.

In (7), *outside* functions as a locative adverb. When combined with the verb *stepped*, it encodes the direction of motion, emphasizing the destination—the space outside the house. In (8), *from* highlights the starting point of the movement, originating inside the container (the bag), and moving outward. Both examples demonstrate movement from an inner space to an outer space. However, in (7), the focus is on the destination, whereas in (8), the focus shifts to the starting point.

In the opposite direction, movement directed from the exterior of a boundary to its interior, as illustrated in Figure 1B, is typically encoded with the lexical item *vào*. Common constructions include [verb + *vào* + x] and [verb + sth + *vào* + x], as demonstrated in examples (9) and (10). Additionally, *vào* can function independently as a lexical verb encoding inward motion in the construction [*vào* + x] as in *vào nhà* ('go into the house'), without a preceding motion verb, as will be presented in detail in section 4.5.1. In these instances, the spatial configuration of containment emerges as the primary determinant in encoding the directionality of the motion. Similarly, in English parallel texts, the two constructions most used to encode these directions are [verb + *into* + x] and [verb + sth + *in* + x]. The former occurs in 131 out of 354 instances, accounting for 37.1% of the cases, while the latter appears in 39 out of 354 instances, corresponding to 11%. This distribution highlights a preference for the [verb + *into* + x] construction when expressing movement from the exterior to the interior of a boundary.

(9) Một cô gái nhỏ nhắn *ùa vào* nhà tôi như một cơn gió.
The little girl *rushed into* the house like a sudden gust of wind.

(10) Một tặng vật tôi giữ làm kỷ niệm. Ngày mai phải nhớ *cho nó vào* va ly.
It was a gift which I kept to remember the giver. Tomorrow I must remember to *put it in* my suitcase.

Interestingly, the Vietnamese data extracted from Vietlex corpus shows that in some contexts, the direction of movement from the exterior to the interior of a boundary is encoded using *ra*. Consider the following situations:

(11) Chị lập cập *đi ra* phòng ngoài.
She hurriedly *went to* the front room.

(12) Các hành khách đều *ra* phòng ăn.
The passengers all *went to* the dining room.

In these situations, the spatial configuration of a house appears to be the dominant factor influencing how motion is conceptualized and encoded. Although the direction of movement is toward the interior of a room's boundary, it is conceptualized within the broader spatial framework of a house, which consists of back rooms and front rooms. In the Vietnamese cognitive framework, movement from a back room to a front room within a house is conceptualized as movement from the inside to the outside. This suggests that the encoding of motion in Vietnamese is shaped not only by the notion of containment but also by the specific spatial configuration of a house. In contrast, native English speakers tend to conceptualize movement from one room to another within a house as motion between two distinct locations. As a result, the directional preposition commonly used in this context is 'to.'

As shown above, in Vietnamese, the direction of movement entering the interior of a boundary as diagrammed in Figure 1B, is commonly encoded with *vào,* as illustrated in (9); however, it is sometimes encoded by *ra*, as in (11) and (12), depending on the perspective with different dominant factors. In Vietnamese, there is also the phenomenon where the direction of movement from one container to another is encoded using the pair *ra—vào*. Consider the following situations:

(13) Cơm cho chó nào những thịt những miến những nấm, hâm lại *đổ ra bát* cẩn thận.
The dog's food consists of meat, noodles and mushrooms, re-warmed and *put into a bowl*.

(14) Anh ngồi xích gần tôi bảo *đổ* thêm nước từ quả bầu *vào ghè*.
He shifted closer to me and asked me *to pour* more water from the pumpkin shell *into the jar*.

In Vietnamese, the encoding of motion between containers reveals a subtle interplay of spatial conceptualization, as seen in examples (13) and (14). In (13), the motion is directed into the bounded space of a bowl, yet it is encoded as '*ra bát*' ('out a bowl') rather than '*vào bát*' ('into a bowl'). This occurs when the motion originates from a larger container and moves toward a smaller one. Here, the larger container serves as the primary spatial frame of reference, foregrounded in the conceptualization, while the smaller container—the bowl—is backgrounded within the trajectory. Conversely, in

(14), the movement of water from a pumpkin shell into a jar aligns with a containment schema and is encoded using *vào*, reflecting motion entering the interior of a bounded space, consistent with a more straightforward spatial orientation.

Analysis of Vietnamese textual data highlights that the relative size of containers significantly influences how motion is conceptualized and linguistically expressed in cases like (13) and (14). When movement occurs between containers, the larger one typically dominates as the reference point, shaping the choice of directional terms, while the smaller container plays a secondary role in the spatial narrative.

In contrast, English exhibits a different conceptualization. Regardless of whether motion occurs from a larger container to a smaller one, as in (13), or from a smaller to a larger one, as in (14), English consistently encodes it as entering a bounded space, using constructions like [verb + *into*/*in*]. The relative size of the containers does not affect the spatial framing; instead, English relies uniformly on a containment-based schema. This results in a stable linguistic pattern where the direction of motion—into a bounded area—remains the focal point, unaffected by container size disparities, highlighting a key difference from the Vietnamese system.

#### 4.1.2 Two-Dimensional Containers

In Vietnamese, when a container is conceptualized as a two-dimensional spatial entity, movement between its external and internal spaces is typically encoded using *ra* (outward) and *vào* (inward). This encoding reflects distinctive patterns of spatial conceptualization, particularly evident in the context of a traditional Vietnamese house's spatial configuration. For example, motion from the house to the yard, as in 'từ nhà *ra* sân' (from the house to the yard) in (15), or from the yard to the street, as in 'từ sân *ra* đường' (from the yard to the street) in (16), is consistently marked with ra.

Conversely, movement in the opposite direction, such as 'từ đường *vào* ngõ' (from the street to the alley) in (17) or 'từ ngõ *vào* sân' (from the alley to the yard) in (18), employs *vào*. These examples illustrate how Vietnamese encodes motion based on a hierarchical spatial framework rather than a strict notion of bounded containment.

(15) Cô vùng dậy *lao ra* sân, gào thét kêu cứu.
She jumped up and *ran into* the courtyard, crying for help.

(16) Trinh *lao* theo người đàn bà *ra* đường.
Trinh *bolted into* the street right behind the woman.

(17) Biên *dẫn* tôi ngoặt *vào* một ngõ vắng.
Bien *led* me *into* an empty alley.

(18) Một người đàn ông lao vút *vào* sân.
A man *drives* his motorcycle *into* the yard.

In these cases, the concept of bounded containment is less prominent than the spatial configuration of the house and its surrounding areas. The house serves as the innermost space, followed by the yard, then the alley, and finally the street or road. Movements outward through this hierarchy—such as from the house to the yard or from the yard to the street (motions 1 and 2 in Figure 2)—are systematically encoded with *ra*, even though the yard, street, and alley might otherwise be seen as two-dimensional containers. In contrast, English typically relies on a containment schema, encoding such motions with constructions like [verb + *into*/*in*], as seen in the translations of (15) and (16). Meanwhile, inward movements toward the house, such as from the street to the alley or from the alley to the yard (motion 3 in Figure 2), are marked with *vào,* aligning with the same hierarchical structure.

The encoding of motion events in Vietnamese, as seen in examples (15) and (18), exemplifies Langacker's (2008:43–44) theory of *conceptual construal*, where speakers impose different perspectives on the same spatial scene based on reference frames and spatial configurations. In *Cô vùng dậy lao **ra** sân* ('She jumped up and ran into the courtyard'), the yard is construed as an exterior space relative to the house, the innermost reference point in the hierarchical structure (house–yard–alley–street). The use of *ra* profiles the motion as outward, emphasizing the transition from an enclosed container (the house) to a less bounded area (the yard). Conversely, in *Một người đàn ông lao vút **vào** sân* ('A man drove his motorcycle into the yard'), the yard is construed as an interior space relative to the alley, an open exterior reference point. Here, *vào* profiles the motion as inward, highlighting entry into a contained area within the hierarchy. Despite both motions targeting the same destination (the yard), the contrasting use of *ra* and *vào* reflects distinct conceptual construals driven by the source of motion and the relational dynamics of the spatial configuration. This highlights how Vietnamese motion encoding prioritizes cognitive perspective over a uniform containment schema, unlike English, which consistently uses *into* for both scenarios.

In Vietnamese motion events, the encoding of *ra* and *vào* prioritizes *source-path-goal schemas* over deictic, speaker-centric reference frames, unlike static spatial relations where deixis may influence positioning (Talmy, 2000). For example, in static contexts, a speaker inside the house might describe a chicken's location as *con gà ở **ngoài** sân* ('the chicken is outside the yard'), while

a speaker on the street might say *con gà ở **trong** sân* ('the chicken is in the yard'), reflecting the speaker's perspective. In contrast, motion events such as *con gà chạy **vào** sân* ('the chicken ran into the yard') from the street or *con gà chạy **ra** sân* ('the chicken ran out into the yard') from the house are encoded based on the source of motion (street or house) and the spatial configuration of the yard within the hierarchical structure (house–yard–alley–street). This highlights that *ra* and *vào* in motion contexts are anchored to spatial schemas rather than the speaker's position.

The hierarchical structuring of space in Vietnamese can also lead to contextual distinctions in motion encoding, as seen in the contrast between *'ra sân'* and *'ra khỏi sân'*. Consider the following example:

(19) Thế rồi bất ngờ người đàn bà buông đứa trẻ ra, *đi* thật nhanh *ra khỏi* bãi cát xe tăng hỏng, đuổi theo lão đàn ông.
Suddenly the woman released him, *walked* swiftly *out of* the field of tanks and then ran after the man.

It is crucial to note the difference between *ra sân*, as in (15), and *ra khỏi sân*, as in (19). While *ra sân* encodes movement *toward* the interior of the yard's spatial boundary, *ra khỏi sân* encodes movement *away* from the interior, crossing the boundary into an exterior space. This distinction demonstrates the role of spatial configuration in Vietnamese motion encoding, where *ra* does not inherently indicate outward movement but instead aligns with hierarchical spatial structuring. Consequently, *ra sân* corresponds to *into the yard*, while *ra khỏi sân* corresponds to *out of the yard/field*.

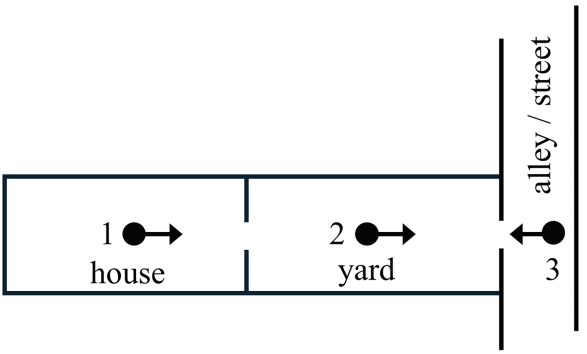


FIGURE 2 Hierarchical Direction of *Ra* and *Vào* in Vietnamese Based on the Spatial Configuration of a Traditional House

#### 4.1.3 Weather, Light, and Darkness as Spatial Containers

In Vietnamese, weather phenomena such as rain and sunshine, as well as light and darkness, are frequently conceptualized as spatial containers—bounded regions that entities can move into or out of. This conceptual framework influences the use of directional particles like ***ra*** and ***vào*** to encode motion, with the choice of particle determined by the spatial configuration of these phenomena. The following examples illustrate this pattern:

(20) Chiếc thuyền vó bè lại *hiện ra* trong làn sương sớm của một buổi mai.
The boat *appeared* again, moving *out of* the morning mist.

(21) Muôn ôm mặt *chạy ra* ngoài trời mưa.
Muon put her hands to her face and *ran out into* the rain.

The directional marker *ra* in (20) and (21) encodes distinct conceptualizations of motion. In (20), *ra* in *hiện ra trong làn sương* (appear from within the mist) marks the emergence of a trajector into the speaker's visual field. The phrase suggests movement away from a spatially bounded region covered by the mist, conceptualizing the mist as a container. Thus, *ra* encodes motion from an interior to an exterior space.

In contrast, in (21), *ra* in *chạy ra ngoài trời mưa* (run out into the rain) does not indicate movement away from the rain but rather movement *into* the rain. Here, the dominant reference frame is the house, which structures the conceptualization of motion. Although the movement ultimately enters a rain-covered space, it is primarily framed as exiting the house, reinforcing the hierarchical structuring of space in Vietnamese motion encoding. Consequently, *ra* is still used, emphasizing movement from an interior to an exterior space.

A comparison with English reveals notable differences in motion encoding. In (20), the English equivalent *moving out of the morning mist* mirrors the Vietnamese conceptualization, treating mist as a container. However, in (21), English employs a different strategy, using the construction *run out into the rain*. This structure encodes both the starting point (run out the house) and the endpoint (into the rain), mapping the entire trajectory within a single construction. In contrast, Vietnamese prioritizes the reference frame of the house, while English highlights the endpoint of motion (the rain).

Like weather and light, darkness is also conceptualized as a spatial container in Vietnamese. Darkness possesses the key characteristics of a bounded space, allowing motion into or out of it to be encoded using *vào* and *ra*, respectively. This conceptualization aligns with the containment schema, where darkness

is perceived as an enclosed space within which entities can move. The following examples illustrate this pattern:

(22) Cô *bước ra khỏi* bóng tối của ngôi nhà.
She *walked out of* the darkness of the house.

(23) Sau đó chúng tôi im lặng khi xe *đi vào* đêm tối.
After that, we were quiet as the car *drove into* the night.

The movements in (22) and (23) demonstrate how Vietnamese systematically applies the containment schema to non-physical entities that lack fixed, tangible boundaries but are still conceptualized as bounded spaces. This pattern extends beyond darkness to other intangible yet spatially conceptualized phenomena, such as smoke and fog. Motion into these spaces is encoded using *vào,* while motion out of them is expressed with *ra* or *ra khỏi*.

This pattern reflects the hierarchical structuring of space in Vietnamese, where movement between different spatial zones is encoded based on perceived containment rather than strictly defined physical boundaries. In this sense, the conceptualization and encoding of motion in these cases closely parallel the three-dimensional container schema discussed earlier, reinforcing the consistency of Vietnamese in encoding spatial directions.

The findings in this section challenge binary containment theories by demonstrating that Vietnamese employs *hierarchical spatial organization* where motion encoding depends on hierarchical positioning rather than simple boundary relationships. As demonstrated in examples (15) and (18), movement to the yard (*sân*) is encoded differently—*ra sân* ('out to the yard') when moving outward through the spatial hierarchy from house to yard, and *vào sân* ('into the yard') when moving inward through the hierarchy from alley to yard—reflecting the hierarchical spatial configuration of a traditional Vietnamese house. This supports the *hierarchical containment model*'s principle of source-dependent construal, where motion encoding depends on the trajector's position within the spatial hierarchy rather than absolute boundary relationships. This extends cognitive linguistics theory by showing that containment schemas are not fixed geometric relationships but flexible, hierarchically-organized cognitive structures that accommodate culturally-determined spatial configurations.

### 4.2 *RA—Vào Based on the Configuration of Narrow-Wide, Closed-Open Space*

Unlike Section 4.1's focus on boundary-based containment, this section examines *ra* and *vào* in *unboundaried* narrow-wide and closed-open spatial

transitions. In Vietnamese, movement from a narrow or enclosed space to a larger, more open space is consistently conceptualized and encoded using *ra*, as illustrated in (24), (25), and (26). Conversely, movement from a wide or open space to a more restricted or enclosed space is encoded using *vào*, as seen in (27). This distinction highlights a cognitive organization of space that prioritizes spatial containment and openness as defining factors in motion encoding.

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(24) Đến đêm, lão Hứa xua lệ ập đến, trói nghiến ông tôi kéo *ra đình*.
That night Hua sent the policemen, who tied my grandfather upside down and *dragged* him *to the meeting hall*.

(25) Con đường *từ* cổng nhà máy *ra đến quốc lộ* chỉ dài khoảng tám trăm mét.
The road *from* the factory gate *to the highway* was about 800 meters long.

(26) Sáng hôm sau, chúng tôi mang hai bao tải nặng *ra ga*, theo tàu ngược lên phố núi.
The next morning, we carried two heavy sacks *to the station* and caught the train going back up toward the mountain village.

In these examples, the movement away from enclosed or private spaces (e.g., a home, factory) into larger, more public spaces (e.g., a meeting hall, a highway, or a train station) is consistently encoded using *ra*. This pattern reflects a schematic organization in which *ra* signifies movement toward more open, socially shared spaces, particularly those associated with community activities (24), public infrastructure (25), and transportation hubs (26).

In contrast, English conceptualizes such movement as standard destination-based motion, where the emphasis is on the endpoint rather than the spatial transition. Consequently, English predominantly encodes these movements using the preposition *to*, as seen in (27).

(27) Ở lối rẽ *từ* đường cái *vào nhà máy* đã mọc lên một ngôi đền đồ sộ.
There, next to the road which ran *from* the highway *to the factory*, stood an enormous temple.

In (27), the movement from the highway (a broad public space) into the factory gate (a smaller, enclosed space) is encoded using *vào,* reinforcing the hierarchical spatial structuring in Vietnamese. Motion from a wider to a narrower or from an open to an enclosed space follows a consistent encoding pattern, further highlighting the systematic nature of Vietnamese spatial conceptualization.

Beyond physical spaces, the semantic scope of *ra* and *vào* extends into metaphorical domains, particularly in legal and institutional contexts. Vietnamese conceptualizes structured social spaces similarly to physical spaces, with *ra* signifying movement into judicial or public processes and *vào* encoding movement into spaces of restriction or confinement.

(28) Lôi nó *ra tòa* án tôn giáo.
Drag him *to* the religious court.

(29) Hắn *vào tù* thì tớ đưa cơm.
If he *went to prison*, I would bring him food every day.

In (28), *ra* is used in expressions like *ra tòa* (take someone to court) and *ra trước công lý* (bring someone to justice), reinforcing the conceptualization of the courtroom as an open, public forum where cases are presented and judgments issued. This aligns with the physical movement pattern of transitioning from an enclosed to an open space.

Conversely, in (29), *vào* is used in *vào tù* (into prison), illustrating how prisons are conceptualized as enclosed, restrictive spaces where individuals lose autonomy. This mirrors physical movement from an open space into a confined one.

In English, these opposing movements are typically conceptualized as movement *to* a location, with both directions being encoded using the preposition *to* (e.g., *to court* and *to prison*). Unlike Vietnamese, which emphasizes the spatial transition between spaces, English neutralizes the directional contrast, framing both movements as simple destination-based events.

These findings extend the hierarchical containment model to include cultural-spatial dimensions beyond physical boundaries. The systematic encoding of narrow-to-wide and closed-to-open movements demonstrates

that spatial hierarchies incorporate cultural concepts of openness, privacy, and social space. This challenges purely geometric approaches to spatial cognition and provides evidence for *cultural schema dominance*, where culturally-salient spatial distinctions override purely physical or geometric relationships in motion encoding.

### 4.3 *Ra—Vào Encoding Motion of Dispersion and Concentration*

In Vietnamese, the spatial particles *ra* and *vào* are commonly combined with verbs to indicate the motion of dispersion and concentration. Specifically, *ra* encodes motion away from a central point, representing distribution or centrifugal movement. Conversely, *vào* encodes motion toward a central point, representing concentration or centripetal movement. These opposing motion patterns can be further divided into two subtypes each: (1) *dispersion*: Entities move outward from a central location in a straight-line trajectory, encoded using *ra* (Figure 3A); and *centrifugal movement*: Entities move outward radially from a central point of origin, encoded using *ra* (Figure 3B); (2) *concentration*: Entities move inward toward a central point in a straight-line trajectory, encoded using *vào* (Figure 3A); and *centripetal movement*: Entities move inward radially toward a central focal point, encoded using *vào* (Figure 3B).

The proto-scene of dispersion movement, as shown in Figure 3A, consists of a trajector (the moving entity) departing from an origin along a linear path away from the starting point. In contrast, the centrifugal motion pattern, as illustrated in Figure 3B, consists of a trajector originating from the center of concentric circles, moving outward in a radial direction. In Vietnamese, these motion patterns are typically encoded using the [verb + *ra*] construction, as illustrated below:

(30) Đột nhiên, chân ông vướng phải một tấm gỗ. Nó rơi xuống hộp đinh và toàn bộ số đinh *đổ tóe ra* nền đất.
Suddenly, his foot caught against a board and knocked it over. It fell on a box of nails which *spilled out* on the ground.

(31) Cô trừng mắt nhìn y rồi ngồi *xích ra* có vẻ bất bình.
She glared at him and, indignant, *moved away*.

In (30), "*đinh đổ tóe ra nền đất*" (nails spilled out on the ground) represents a scattered motion of multiple entities, where the point of origin is the position where the box hits the ground. This follows the dispersion motion schema (Figure 3A). In (31), the phrase "*cô trừng mắt nhìn y rồi ngồi xích ra*" (She glared at him and moved away) describes motion between two individual entities,

where one moves away from the other, which remains stationary. This follows the centrifugal motion schema (Figure 3B). Both cases exemplify how *ra* encodes outward movement from a reference point, reinforcing its role in motion conceptualization in Vietnamese.

In English, dispersion and centrifugal movements are encoded using multiple lexical constructions rather than a single prepositional system like Vietnamese. In the translations above, the *RA-construction* in Vietnamese corresponds to different expressions in English, such as: '*spilled out*' (denoting dispersed motion), '*moved away*' (*denoting centrifugal motion*).

The findings from collected data suggests that *dispersion motion* in English is primarily encoded using the particles '*out*' or '*out from*', while *centrifugal motion* is often encoded using '*away*' or '*away from*', with additional lexical options such as '*apart*' and '*aside*', as seen in the following examples:

(32) Chợt một tiếng gà trong làng vọng đến. Cô giật mình *đẩy* Tuệ *ra*.
Suddenly the cock's crow echoed from the village. Startled, she *pushed* him *away*.

(33) Tôi choàng tỉnh, *xô* bắn nàng *ra*.
I released her and *pushed* her *away from* me violently.

(34) Thế là trận bom đã *xé* họ *ra*, bỏ lại Tân giữa một vùng hoang vắng.
The bombs *had torn* them *apart* and he was left alone in a deserted wasteland.

(35) *Xê ra*, hỏi lắm thế.
*Step aside*! Why do you ask so many questions?

In these cases, English employs different prepositions and adverbs: *away* and *away from* in (32) and (33) encode movement from a landmark in a straight trajectory; *apart* in (34) encodes separating movement in two distributed directions; *aside* in (35) encodes movement within a three-entity spatial configuration (speaker, listener, and passage space).

According to Talmy (2000: 196), English encodes dispersion motion through different lexical constructions, where *away from* represents motion in a straight-line path, while *out from* represents centrifugal motion originating from the center of a circle. The results from collected data supports this distinction: *out* or *out from* expresses centrifugal motion (Figure 3B); *away*, *away from*, *apart*, and *aside* express dispersion motion in a straight path (Figure 3A).

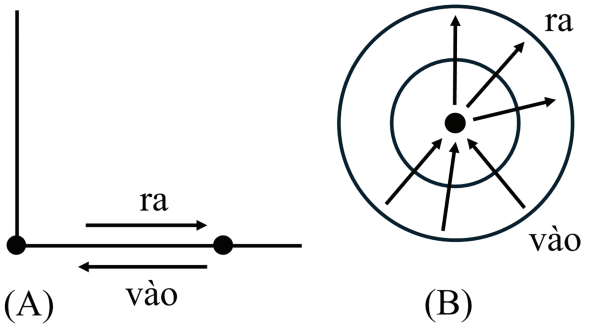


FIGURE 3 Cognitive Schemas of *Ra* and *Vào* in Vietnamese: Encoding Dispersion and Concentration

While *ra* signifies dispersion, *vào* indicates concentration and centripetal motion. Notably, *lại* often serves as an alternate to *vào* in these contexts. This interchangeability is evident in the Vietlex corpus, where constructions like *xúm vào* or *xúm lại* (huddle together), *gom vào* or *gom lại* (gather), and *tụ vào* or *tụ lại* (concentrate) frequently appear. For instance, *Cả đám xúm lại ngắm nghía, ai nấy đều cho là được* (The whole group huddled together to examine it, and everyone thought it was good) demonstrates the use of *lại*. Similarly, *Mọi người xúm vào mắng cho con mẹ một trận* (Everyone ganged up on the woman, scolding her severely) illustrates the use of *vào* in a comparable context, highlighting their functional equivalence.

The spatial particle *vào* not only encodes movement into physical spaces but also extends to scenarios involving forceful or intentional movement toward a target or a central reference point. This pattern is evident in interactions that involve combat, restraint, or intense physical engagement, as seen in the following examples:

(36) Hai con vật phóng *vào nhau* bằng tất cả niềm căm thù bấy lâu bị dồn ép.
The two beasts threw themselves *at each other* with all their long pent-up hatred.

(37) Dân quân xóm *trói* ông *vào một cái cọc*, phơi nắng nửa ngày rồi mới cho đi.
The village militia *tied* him *to a stake* and left him out in the sun for half a day before letting him go.

In (36) and (37), Vietnamese encodes inward concentration movement using *vào*, while English encodes it with collocational expressions like *at each other* and preposition *to*. This reflects a fundamental difference in spatial encoding between the two languages: Vietnamese employs spatial particles (*ra*, *vào*) in

verb constructions to express motion, while English relies more on lexical collocations and prepositional constructions.

### 4.4 *Vào Nam—Ra Bắc: A Cognitive Perspective on Motion Encoding*

Vietnamese conceptualizes motion along the North-South axis through a unique cognitive framework, diverging from a purely compass-based orientation. While both Vietnamese and English utilize an up-down schema related to Earth's poles (e.g., *lên phương Bắc* 'up to the North'—*xuống phương Nam* 'down to the South'), Vietnamese also employs a *ra–vào* schema, exemplified by *vào Nam* ('into the South') and *ra Bắc* ('out to the North'). This *ra–vào* schema is primarily applied to movement along the dominant north-south highway axis, reflecting the country's linear geographic configuration.

The *vào Nam–ra Bắc* schema might initially suggest a linguistic reflection of Vietnam's historical political divisions, particularly the 17th-century Trịnh–Nguyễn War, which split the country at the Gianh River into *Đàng Ngoài* ('Outer Region,' the North, ruled by the Trịnh Lords) and *Đàng Trong* ('Inner Region,' the South, governed by the Nguyễn Lords). However, historical evidence challenges this assumption. Nguyễn Tài Cẩn (1991) demonstrates that this spatial orientation predates the Trịnh–Nguyễn conflict by two centuries, tracing it back to the 15th century when Vietnam's territory consisted primarily of the expansive Northern Delta and a narrower stretch from Thanh Hóa to Thừa Thiên. At that time, movement between these regions was conceptualized as *vào nơi hẹp* ('into a narrow area') for travel southward and *ra nơi rộng* ('out to a wide area') for travel northward.

This early distinction between wide and narrow spaces gradually evolved into the modern *vào Nam–ra Bắc* schema, reinforced by historical and sociopolitical developments. This pattern reflects a containment-based metaphor rather than a strict reliance on compass directions, shaped by two cognitive factors identified by Nguyễn Tài Cẩn (1991): the salience of the North-South division in Vietnamese spatial perception and the dominance of this contrast over other geographic or topographic features. For instance:

(38) Giải phóng rồi, ông được *ra* miền Bắc với vợ con ông.
After liberation, you got to return *to* the North, to be with your wife and children.

(39) Cậu hãy bảo là sáng mai tôi mai bay *vào* miền Nam.
Tell them I'm taking a flight *to* the South tomorrow morning

The *vào–ra* schema primarily applies to movement between Vietnam's three main regions along the dominant North-South traffic axis. Specifically, *vào*

indicates movement from the North to the Central or Southern regions, or from the Central region to the South. Conversely, *ra* indicates movement from the South to the Central or Northern regions, or from the Central region to the North. Examples include:

(40) Anh ấy vừa mới *ra* Hà Nội họp.
He has just gone *to* Hanoi for a meeting

(41) Đấy là tàu Thống Nhất chạy suốt *vào* Sài Gòn.
This was the Unification Train on an express run *to* Saigon.

However, this schema is not applied rigidly. It often allows for alternative construals based on elevation or lateral movement, depending on the speaker's mental representation of topographic features. For instance, elevation-based contrasts may prompt the use of *lên* 'up', as in *từ Sài Gòn lên Đà Lạt* ('from Saigon up to Da Lat'), or *xuống* 'down', as in *từ Đà Lạt xuống Sài Gòn* ('from Da Lat down to Saigon'). Similarly, lateral movement may be expressed with *sang* 'over to' or *qua* 'through', as in *từ Nam Định sang Thái Bình* or *từ Nam Định qua Thái Bình* ('from Nam Dinh over to/through Thai Binh'). In other words, when other geographic contrasts—such as altitude (high vs. low), river crossings, or mountain ranges—become more salient, the *vào–ra* system gives way to alternative encodings like *lên* (up), *xuống* (down), *sang* (over to), and *qua* (through). For example:

(42) Nhiều chị em xung phong *lên* Sa Pa.
Many women volunteered to go *to* Sa Pa.

(43) Từ Đà Lạt *xuống* Nha Trang mất khoảng 4 tiếng.
It takes about 4 hours to go from Da Lat *to* Nha Trang.

(44) Anh ấy đi xe đạp từ Nam Định *qua* Thái Bình.
He rode his bicycle from Nam Dinh *to* Thai Binh.

(45) Đám thợ hồ từ Thái Bình *sang* Nam Định tìm việc.
The construction workers came from Thai Binh *to* Nam Dinh looking for work.

Within a single region, these alternative encodings often take precedence, as local topographic features outweigh the broader North-South schema. In contrast, English conceptualizes inter-regional movement as motion-to-goal,

emphasizing the destination. Vietnamese, however, highlights relational and containment aspects of motion, offering a distinct cognitive lens.

Ultimately, the *vào Nam–ra Bắc* schema reveals a uniquely Vietnamese approach to spatial cognition, where motion is framed not just as a journey across a landscape but as a dynamic interplay of containment and expanse rooted in historical and geographic realities. Unlike the English focus on directional endpoints, this *ra–vào* framework encodes the North and South as relational spaces—wide versus narrow, outer versus inner—shaped by centuries of territorial evolution and reinforced by the prominence of Vietnam's tripartite regional structure. While flexible enough to yield to local topographic cues like altitude or barriers, the schema's persistence highlights a cultural lens that prioritizes the experiential and socio-historical dimensions of space over abstract cardinal alignment. This distinct conceptualization underscores how language can reflect a people's collective perception of their world, blending physical geography with a narrative of identity and movement.

### 4.5 *Encoding Spatial Motion: Syntactic Functions of* Ra *and* Vào

To elucidate the linguistic versatility of *ra* and *vào*, this section examines their syntactic statuses and semantic roles in motion constructions, addressing the need for specificity in their multifunctional behavior (Talmy, 2000; Langacker, 2008). Based on an analysis of 275 instances of *ra* and 355 instances of *vào* collected from the corpus, these markers are classified into four functional categories: motion verbs, directional prepositions, directional particles, and components of serial verb constructions. The findings highlight their grammaticalization and syntactic flexibility, demonstrating how Vietnamese encodes motion events through a hybrid verb-satellite system in contrast to English's reliance on prepositions.

#### 4.5.1 *Ra* and *Vào* as Motion Verbs

As motion verbs, *ra* and *vào* independently encode movement toward or away from a landmark, functioning as predicates with clear directional semantics (Nguyễn Lai, 2001). From the collected data, 20 out of 275 instances of *ra* (7.3%) and 31 out of 355 instances of *vào* (8.7%) function as motion verbs. These cases typically appear in expressions such as *ra phòng ăn* as in (12), *vào tù* as in (29), *ra miền Bắc* as in (38), and *ra Hà Nội* as in (40). Consider the following examples:

(46) Bà ấy *ra* Hà Nội.
She went to Hanoi.

(47) Ông ấy *vào* Sài Gòn.
He went to Sai Gon.

In these examples, *ra* and *vào* encode both path and goal, with (46) and (47) aligning with the conceptual schema of *vào Nam—ra Bắc* discussed in section 4.4. These verbs contrast with English constructions, where similar meanings are expressed via motion verbs combined with prepositions like *to* (Talmy, 2000). Through the process of grammaticalization, however, *ra* and *vào* often undergo functional shifts, which are discussed in the sections that follow.

### 4.5.2 ***Ra*** and ***Vào*** as Directional Prepositions

When paired with a verb and followed by a noun, *ra* and *vào* can function as directional prepositions, forming prepositional phrases (Cao Xuân Hạo, 2005; Nguyễn Văn Phổ, 2018), as in:

(48) Ông ấy bước *ra* vườn.
He stepped into the garden.

(49) Bà ấy bước *vào* nhà.
She stepped into the house.

However, in certain contexts, the noun following *ra* or *vào*, such as *vườn* in (48) or *nhà* in (49), can be omitted without rendering the sentence ungrammatical:

(50) Chúng tôi vừa thảo luận xong thì ông ấy *bước ra*.

(51) Chúng tôi vừa thảo luận xong thì ông ấy *bước vào*.

In examples (50) and (51), *ra* and *vào* occur without a following noun phrase, thus they do not function as prepositions in these contexts. Some scholars argue that in such cases, *ra* and *vào* behave as directional particles, serving as secondary components in verb phrases such as *chạy ra*, *đi vào*, *bước ra*, and *bước vào* (Hoàng Phê, 2016; Đinh Văn Đức, 2015). This interpretation is further supported by the possibility of inserting locative elements between *ra*/*vào* and the noun, such as *trước*, *sau*, *trên*, *dưới*, *trong*, and *ngoài*:

(52) Ông ấy bước ra ***ngoài*** sân.

(53) Bà ấy bước vào ***giữa*** sân.

Here, the locative words *ngoài* in (52) and *giữa* in (53) establish spatial relations with the noun *sân*, resembling the function of prepositions. In such cases, *ra* and *vào* act as particles that accompany the verb, while the spatial relationship is primarily carried by the locative element.

The prepositional function of *ra* and *vào* is most evident when the verb takes a direct object, as in the following examples:

(54) Treo **cái áo** *vào* tủ.

(55) Cho **quần áo** *vào* va ly.

In (54) and (55), the presence of direct objects (*cái áo*, *quần áo*) followed by *vào* + *noun phrase* (*tủ*, *va ly*) confirms that *vào* functions as a true directional preposition. It introduces the goal of the motion and governs the following noun phrase, forming a canonical prepositional phrase.

### 4.5.3 *Ra* and *Vào* as Directional Particles

When *ra* and *vào* are used in verb constructions such as *cởi ra*, *mở ra*, *tháo ra*, or *buông ra* without any following noun phrase, they are best analysed as directional particles (Hoàng Phê, 2016; Đinh Văn Đức, 2015). Following these scholars, the current study adopts the term "directional particle" for consistency, although some linguistic frameworks might categorize them as adverbs.

According to the collected data, 116 out of 275 instances of *ra* (42.2%) and 24 out of 355 instances of *vào* (6.8%) function as directional particles. Typical examples include (3), (4), (5), (7), (8), (30)–(35). Consider the following case:

(56) Suốt ngày khúc khích *cởi ra mặc vào* tông hống giữa phố xá.
All day long they were *putting* things *on*, *taking* things *off*, standing half-naked in front of the shop.

In this construction, *ra* and *vào* act as directional particles within the verbal expressions *cởi ra* and *mặc vào*, serving as dependent elements of the verb. Even when a noun phrase intervenes between the verb and the directional element, the particle status remains unchanged, as seen in:

(32) Chợt một tiếng gà trong làng vọng đến. Cô giật mình *đẩy* Tuệ *ra*.
Suddenly the cock's crow echoed from the village. Startled, she *pushed* him *away*.

(33) Tôi choàng tỉnh, *xô* bắn nàng *ra*.
I released her and *pushed* her *away from* me violently.

In these examples, *ra* continues to function as a directional particle despite the object intervening between the main verb and the directional element. This reinforces the interpretation of *ra* and *vào* as post-verbal particles contributing to the motion semantics of the clause rather than serving as prepositions.

#### 4.5.4 *Ra* and *Vào* in Serial Verb Constructions

Although infrequent, *ra* and *vào* can co-occur in serial verb constructions (SVCs) in Vietnamese, functioning together as a single predicate to represent a unified motion event, in line with Talmy's (2000) typology of motion encoding. According to Aikhenvald (2006), a serial verb construction involves a sequence of verbs that form a single clause without coordination or subordination, collectively expressing one conceptual event. Following this definition, *ra* and *vào* may form a serial verb construction when they jointly denote a continuous, bidirectional motion path, such as "going out and in," rather than two separate events. Data from the present study provides two relevant examples:

(57) Từ hôm về, tôi đã thoáng thấy một gã điển trai thì thụt *ra vào* nhà chị.
Since my return, I noticed a guy going into and out of her house.

(58) Ông *ra vào*. Thững thờ. Bần thần.
He walked *in* and *out*. Aimlessly. Absent-mindedly.

In both cases, *ra* and *vào* form a compact verb sequence that expresses a *single macro-event* of repetitive, bidirectional movement involving the same agent and spatial reference. These verbs are not connected by coordinators such as *và* 'and' or *rồi* 'then,' which would indicate a temporal sequence of distinct actions and thus disqualify the structure as an SVC (Aikhenvald, 2006; Bisang, 2009). Instead, the *ra vào* constructions in (57) and (58) exhibit the core properties of SVCs: (i) They constitute a single predicate, (ii) represent one integrated conceptual event, (iii) occur within a monoclausal structure, and (iv) share the same subject and grammatical features.

It is important to distinguish these SVCs from coordinated verb sequences. For instance, if a coordinator were inserted (*ra rồi vào* or *ra và vào*), the two motion components would be interpreted as temporally separate actions, rather than one unified event. The prosodic and semantic cohesion of the *ra vào* sequence thus reinforces its analysis as a serial verb construction.

Therefore, while serial verb constructions with *ra* and *vào* are relatively rare in Vietnamese, the data supports their existence as *monoclausal, event-integrated expressions* of complex motion, aligning with cross-linguistic patterns of SVCs described in Aikhenvald (2006), Bisang (2009), and Sebba (2001).

### 4.5.5 Syntactic Distribution of *Ra* and *Vào*

To synthesise the findings from the previous subsections, Table 1 presents the overall syntactic distribution of *ra* and *vào* in the collected data.

The data reveal distinct distributional tendencies between *ra* and *vào*. *Vào* overwhelmingly functions as a directional preposition (84.5%), reflecting its semantic association with *containment*, *enclosure*, and *goal-oriented motion* (see section 4.1). In contrast, *ra* is more evenly distributed across functions, with substantial occurrences as both a directional preposition (50.5%) and a directional particle (42.2%), in line with its prototypical role in *outward and dispersive motion* (see section 4.3).

The rarity of serial verb constructions involving *ra* and *vào*—represented by only two instances in the corpus—highlights their *specialized but legitimate status* within Vietnamese syntax. These constructions demonstrate how Vietnamese can encode dynamic motion events *without resorting to coordination*, leveraging a compact verbal architecture that contrasts sharply with the preposition-heavy structure of English.

Furthermore, the multifunctionality of *ra* and *vào* highlights both the *grammatical complexity* and *cognitive load* associated with their acquisition in second language (L2) learning contexts. Learners of Vietnamese may struggle to distinguish when *vào* serves as a preposition, a verb, or a particle—differences that are not always marked morphologically. Likewise, serial structures like *ra vào* have no direct equivalents in English and may pose interpretive challenges in translation or pedagogical settings.

TABLE 1 Syntactic Distribution of *Ra* and *Vào*

| | RA | | VÀO | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Frequency** | **%** | **Frequency** | **%** |
| Directional particle | 116 | 42.2 | 24 | 6.8 |
| Directional preposition | 139 | 50.5 | 300 | 84.5 |
| Motion verb | 20 | 7.3 | 31 | 8.7 |
| TOTAL | 275 | 100% | 355 | 100% |

Taken together, these findings support a cognitive and functional account of Vietnamese motion expressions. The highly flexible yet semantically motivated behavior of *ra* and *vào* contributes to a complex system of *spatial conceptualization*, shaped by the interaction of lexical, syntactic, and event-structural constraints.

## 5 Conclusions

This study examined the spatial conceptualization and encoding of the Vietnamese directional markers *ra* and *vào*, comparing them with their English equivalents. The findings highlight key differences in spatial encoding between the two languages. Vietnamese systematically differentiates motion based on containment and directionality, employing *ra* for outward movement and *vào* for inward movement, while English relies primarily on goal-oriented prepositions (*into, out of*). The study also revealed that Vietnamese extends these markers beyond physical motion to metaphorical and cultural domains, as seen in expressions like *vào Nam* and *ra Bắc*, which reflect historical and geographic conceptualization. Additionally, motion encoding in Vietnamese is influenced by spatial hierarchy (narrow-to-wide vs. wide-to-narrow spaces) and specific cognitive schemas of dispersion and concentration.

The findings contribute to cognitive semantic research by demonstrating that spatial conceptualization varies significantly across languages, shaped by cultural and historical contexts. For translation studies, the contrast in spatial encoding between Vietnamese and English suggests potential challenges in translating directional expressions, as English does not always mark motion in the same way. In second language acquisition, understanding how Vietnamese speakers conceptualize space differently from English speakers can aid in designing instructional strategies that address negative transfer effects. Additionally, this research provides insights into cross-linguistic differences in spatial cognition, reinforcing the need to account for language-specific spatial schemas in comparative linguistics and linguistic relativity studies.

Future research can explore several areas to expand on these findings. First, a broader cross-linguistic analysis involving other typologically diverse languages may further illuminate how spatial motion is encoded across linguistic families. Second, psycholinguistic experiments, such as reaction -time studies or eye-tracking analyses, could provide empirical evidence of how native speakers of Vietnamese and English conceptualize spatial motion differently. Third, investigating the acquisition of *ra* and *vào* among

Vietnamese children or L2 learners of Vietnamese could reveal how these directional markers develop cognitively and how they are learned in contrast with English prepositions. Fourth, a comprehensive syntactic analysis of the grammaticalization processes and functional roles of *ra* and *vào* could be a valuable direction for future research, complementing the current study's focus on their cognitive and semantic conceptualization. Fifth, exploring the non-spatial meaning extensions of *ra* and *vào*, such as their use in abstract domains like knowing, appearance, or support (Trần Văn Dương, 2021), could further elucidate their semantic versatility beyond spatial conceptualization. Finally, a diachronic analysis of the evolution of *ra* and *vào* in historical Vietnamese texts may shed light on how spatial conceptualization has changed over time.

This study highlights the importance of cognitive linguistics in understanding language-specific spatial conceptualization. The distinct ways in which Vietnamese and English encode spatial motion reflect deeper cognitive structures shaped by cultural, historical, and linguistic factors. By investigating the conceptual schemas underlying directional markers, this research enhances our understanding of cross-linguistic variation and contributes to applied fields such as translation, language teaching, and cognitive semantics. Further interdisciplinary research integrating corpus linguistics, psycholinguistics, and cross-cultural cognition is essential to deepen our knowledge of how humans conceptualize and communicate spatial relationships across languages.

## Data Availability Statement

The dataset supporting the findings of this study, including 630 bilingual instances of the Vietnamese directional words "RA" (275 occurrences) and "VÀO" (355 occurrences) extracted from contemporary Vietnamese fiction, is openly available in Figshare at https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.29526191. The dataset includes raw examples with original Vietnamese sentences, their English translations, and author attributions, sourced from two anthologies: *Tình yêu sau chiến tranh: Tuyển tập truyện ngắn Việt Nam đương đại* (Hồ Anh Thái, 2004) and *Love after War: Contemporary Fiction from Viet Nam* (Karlin & Hồ Anh Thái, 2003). Detailed analyses, including frequency counts and grammatical categorizations, are conducted on the VietCorpus platform and described in the article. The dataset is licensed under Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0, allowing reuse with appropriate attribution.

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