

Serial verb constructions in Vietnamese

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A serial verb construction in Vietnamese is a sequence of verbs occurring together with a non-overt subject and/or a non-overt object in terms of Government and Binding Theory. The sentence with the non-overt subject is claimed to be an infinitival clause.

The non-overt NP is syntactically active but has no overt form. This non-overt subject of infinitivals will be represented as PRO whereas the non-overt object will be represented as *pro*, which is non-referential.

A sentence with one main verb will be illustrated first, a sentence with a serial verb presented second, and the underlying sentence presented third.

In the Vietnamese parts of speech, a basic state verb is a verb as well as being an adjective. Therefore the use of negation is one of the arguments to justify status as a verb as in (1) and (1a).

(1) Anh ấy nhANH lắm.
eld bro that fast very
“He is very fast.”

(1a) Anh ấy *khÔNG* nhANH lắm.
eld bro that not fast very
“He is not very fast.”

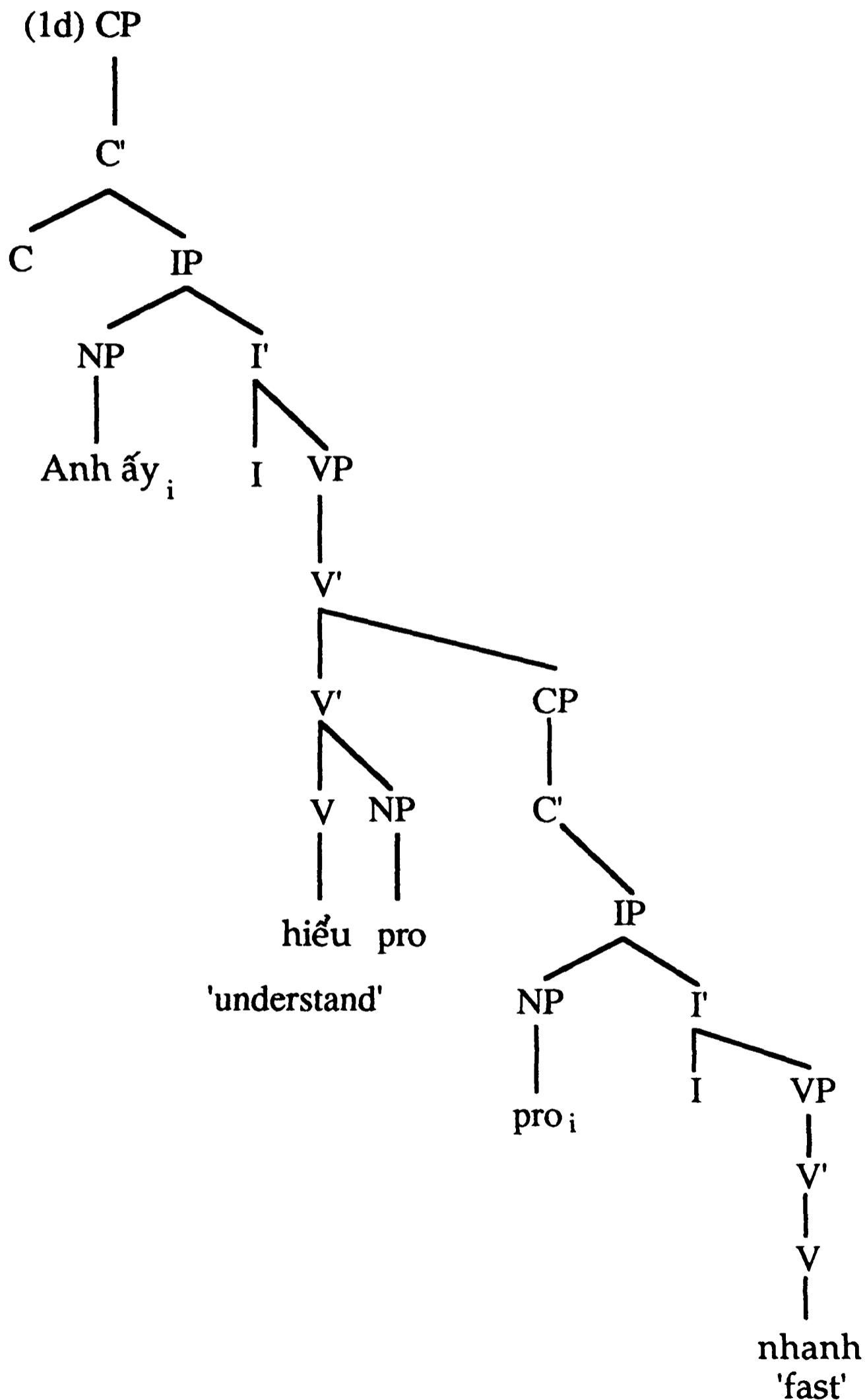
The following sentence (1b) has a serial verb construction .

(1b) Anh ấy hiỂU nhANH lắm.
eld bro that understand fast very
NP VP VP AdvP
“He understands very fast.”

Sentence (1b) is derived from the underlying sentence (1c).

(1c) Anh ấy_i hiểu *pro* [CP [IP PRO_i nhANH.]]
eld bro that understand fast
NP VP VP VP
Agt Pat Agt
“He understands very fast.”

In (1c) the verb *hiếu* 'to understand' is a transitive verb, and the non-overt object of this verb is *pro*, which is governed by the verb *hiếu*. In the infinitival clause the non-overt subject is PRO, which is controlled by the overt subject of the main clause. This non-overt subject PRO is not governed by I(nflection), which is empty in the infinitival clause in Vietnamese. The infinitival clause is an adjunct of the main clause. The structure of this sentence is shown in (1d).



The sentence in (2) has only one basic state verb in one clause.

- (2) Tôi ốm.
I sick
“I am sick.”

In (2a) there are two verbs occurring together.

- (2a) Tôi nghỉ ốm hai ngày.
I rest sick two day
NP VP VP NP
“I’ve rested (because I was) sick for two days.”

In (2a) the verb *nghỉ* ‘to rest’ is an intransitive verb. The non-overt subject of the infinitival clause is PRO, which is controlled by the overt NP subject of the main clause. This sentence is subject controlled. The infinitival clause is the adjunct of the main clause as in (2b).

- (2b) Tôi_i nghỉ_i [_{CP} [_{IP} PRO_i ốm hai ngày.]]
I rest sick two day
NP VP VP NP
“I’ve rested (because I was) sick for two days.”

- (3) Lan chăm chỉ.
Lan diligent
“Lan is diligent.”

In (3a) there are two verbs occurring together which have a derived preposition *về* ‘to return/ back’ which need to be observed.

- (3a) Lan chăm chỉ viết thư về nhà.
Lan diligent write letter return home
NP VP VP NP P NP
“Lan is diligent to write letters back home.”

(3a) has the same structure as (2a). *chăm chỉ* ‘diligent’ is an intransitive verb. The non-overt subject of the infinitival clause is PRO, which is controlled by the overt NP subject of the main clause. This sentence is subject controlled. In (3b) the infinitival clause is an adjunct of the main clause.

- (3b) Lan_i chăm chỉ_i [_{CP} [_{IP} PRO_i viết thư về nhà.]]
Lan diligent write letter return home
NP VP VP NP P NP
Agt Agt Pat Des
“Lan is diligent to write letters back home.”

về ‘to return, back’ is not claimed to be a verb because it cannot be preceded by a negative or an auxiliary to the verb as in (3c). Therefore it is claimed as a preposition which is the head of the PP: P *về* ‘back’ + NP *nhà*.

- (3c) Lan_i chăm chỉ [CP [IP PRO_i viết thư
 Lan diligent write letter
 NP VP VP NP
 Agt Agt Pat
 *không/*sẽ về nhà.]]
 not will return home
 NEG AUX P NP
 Des
 “Lan is diligent to write letters *not/*will back home.”

- (4) Lan là cô giáo.
 Lan be teacher
 NP VP NP
 “Lan is a teacher.”

- (4b) Lan là một giáo viên tiếng Anh có kinh nghiệm.
 Lan be one teacher language English has experience
 NP VP NP VP NP
 “Lan is a teacher of English (who) has experience.”

In (4b) there are two possible ways to justify status as a verb as in (4c) and (4d). In (4c) the non-overt subject of the infinitival clause is controlled by the overt-subject of the main clause.

- (4c) Lan_i là một giáo viên tiếng Anh
 Lan be one teacher language English
 NP VP NP NP VP NP
 [CP [IP PRO_i có kinh nghiệm.]]
 has experience
 VP NP
 “Lan is a teacher of English (who) has experience.”

Another possibility is that PRO is controlled by the overt object of the main clause which refers equally to the overt subject of the main clause. The infinitival clause is the adjunct of the main clause as in (4d).

- (4d) Lan_i là một giáo viên tiếng Anh_i
 Lan be one teacher language English
 NP VP NP NP VP NP
 [CP [IP PRO_i có kinh nghiệm.]]
 has experience
 VP NP
 “Lan is a teacher of English (who) has experience.”

Goral (1986: 292-293) calls this kind of verb an adjectival verb which is equivalent to the basic state verb in this study.

- (5) Ông trễ.
you late
“You are late.”
- (5a) Ông đến trễ.
you arrive late
“You arrived late.”
- (6) Tran đau tiếp tục.
clf battle continue
NP VP
“The battle is going on.”

In (6) the verb *tiếp tục* ‘continue’ is an intransitive verb.

- (6a) Tôi ngủ một lát lại tiếp tục làm.
I rest one moment again continue do
NP VP NP AdvP VP VP
“I rest a moment then continue to do it.”

In (6a) there are three verbs in the sentence which can be analysed as in (6b).

- (6b) Tôi_i ngủ một lát [CP [IP PRO_i lại tiếp tục]]
I rest one moment again continue
NP VP NP AdvP VP
Agt Agt
- [CP [IP PRO_i làm *pro*]].
VP
Agt Pat
“I rest a moment then continue to do it again.”

In (6b) there is one main clause and two infinitival clauses. The non-overt subjects of the infinitival clauses are PROs which are controlled by the overt subject of the main clause. The non-overt object of the verb *làm* ‘to do’ is *pro*, which is governed by the verb *làm*. The third clause is the complement of the second clause, whereas the second clause is an adjunct of the main clause.

- (7) Tôi đi chợ.
I go market
“I go to the market.”
- (7a) Chúng ta đưa con đi chơi công viên.
we bring child go play park
NP VP NP VP NP
“We take a child and go for a walk in the park.”

In (7a) there are two verbs in the sentence, as shown in (7b).

- (7b) Chúng ta đưa con [CP [IP PRO _i đi chơi công viên]].
 we bring child go play park
 NP VP NP VP NP
 Agt Pat Agt Loc
 “We take a child and go for a walk in the park.”

In (7b) the non-overt subject of the infinitival clause is controlled by the overt subject of the main clause. The second clause is the complement of the first clause.

- (8) Họ hét âm lên.
 they scream noise up
 NP VP NP P
 “They screamed very noisily.”

- (8a) Chị ấy gọi như hét vào tai.
 eld sis that call as scream into ear
 NP VP A VP P NP
 “She calls like (she is) screaming into one’s ear.”

In (8a) there are two verbs, as shown in (8b).

- (8b) [CP [IP Chị ấy gọi *pro* như
 eld sis that call as
 NP VP A
 Agt Pat
 [CP [IP PRO _i hét vào tai.]]
 scream into ear
 VP P NP
 Agt Des
 “She calls like (she is) screaming into one’s ear.”

In (8b) the verb ‘to call’ is a transitive verb which has as its complement the non-overt object *pro*. It is governed by the verb *gọi*, whereas the non-overt subject of the infinitival clause is PRO, which is controlled by the overt subject of the main clause. The second clause is the complement of the main clause. *vào* ‘enter, into’ is claimed to be a preposition, not a verb, because it cannot be negated or preceded by an adverb as a verb can be.

- (9) Nước mắt lan trên go ma.
 water eye roll on knoll cheek
 NP VP P NP
 “The tears rolled down her cheeks.”

- (9a) Bà nga lan ra đất.
 grandmo fall down roll out / exit ground
 NP VP VP P NP
 “Grandmother fell down and rolled on the ground.”

related reference within each sentence. Since verbs are considered a sequence because there are both non-overt subjects and non-overt objects in the main and infinitival clauses. The non-overt subject is referred to as PRO, the non-overt object is referred to as *pro*.

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