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## RESEARCH

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# THE CATEGORY OF VOICE IN VIETNAMESE: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL DESCRIPTION

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**Abstract:** This article is a functional description of the category of voice – arguably, one of the most slippery notions in the grammar of Vietnamese that seems to resist any satisfactory treatment. The theoretical framework employed for describing and interpreting the category is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Three questions which form the basis of this study are: (1) “Does the system of **VOICE** exist in Vietnamese?”; if so, (2) “What are the delicate options available in the environment of **VOICE** in Vietnamese?”; and (3) “How can these delicate options be distinguished from the SFL perspective?” The answers to these questions show that unlike formal grammatical descriptions, **VOICE** exists in Vietnamese as a system; the environment of **VOICE** opens up a number of delicate options; and these delicate options can be distinguished along the three metafunctions: experiential, interpersonal, and textual. The answers to these questions also show that SFL is a highly relevant framework for describing and interpreting the system of **VOICE** in Vietnamese: SFL helps us investigate the category from a number of dimensions, enabling us to have a more comprehensive view of it. The study contributes to the application of SFL to the description of Vietnamese grammar - a non-Indo-European language, opening up new potentials for a comprehensive approach to the description of a Systemic Functional Grammar of Vietnamese for research, application, and teaching purposes.

*Key words:* voice in Vietnamese, ergativity, transitivity, mood, theme

## 1. Introduction

The study of Vietnamese, since the introduction of traditional and formal Western-styles of linguistics, has been hampered by the perception that “In Vietnamese, there are no articles, nouns, pronouns, verbs; there are no genders and numbers either, only words; these words are all mono-syllabic and in general invariable; their meanings are changed by the positions of the words which precede or follow them, i.e. by their functions or positions in the sentence”<sup>1</sup> (Grammont & Le, 1911, pp. 201-2; as cited in Nguyen, 1977, p. 14). With regard to

voice, although the issue has been occasionally raised at seminars and conferences on Vietnamese linguistics and Vietnamese language teaching about whether or not this category exists in Vietnamese, it is under-researched. In reviewing the literature, it is evident that almost no systematic research on voice has ever been conducted. It is either mentioned in passing in some Vietnamese textbooks for foreigners (e.g. Bouchet, 1912; Nguyen, 1979) or briefly described in some grammar books, implicitly using some single aspect of formal grammars as the theoretical framework (e.g. Nguyen, 1977; Diep, 1987, 2013). One of the consequences is that their descriptions of voice in Vietnamese appear to be superficial and inadequate; and, to make matters worse, an exhaustive and coherent application of a particular linguistic model to the description of voice in Vietnamese has not been possible. This is the reason why in this article we will attempt a description and interpretation of the category of voice in Vietnamese, using SFL as the theoretical framework. Our study consists of five main sections. Section one introduces the topic.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 14. This passage, which I have translated here for presentation, appears in the Vietnamese original as follows:

Trong tiếng Việt không có mạo từ, danh từ, đại từ, động từ, cũng không có giống, số, mà chỉ có những từ không thôi; những từ này đều là đơn âm tiết, nói chung không biến đổi, ý nghĩa của chúng được thay đổi hay được xác định nhờ những từ đặt trước hay theo sau, nghĩa là, nhờ chức năng, vị trí của chúng trong câu.

Section two provides an overview of some formal conflicting views on voice in Vietnamese. Section three is concerned with data collection procedure and presentation of illustrative examples. Section four, drawing on insights from the studies by Halliday (1985, 1998, 2012, and elsewhere) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), describes and interprets in some detail the system of **VOICE** and its delicate options in Vietnamese. Finally, Section five summarises what has been explored and recommends the relevance of the SFL theory to description of Vietnamese grammar.

## 2. Voice in Vietnamese: Conflicting views

Formal grammarians of Vietnamese are not unanimous in looking at the category of voice in Vietnamese. To date, there have been three contradicting views about whether or not the category is applicable to the language. Some grammarians such as Truong (1867), Bui

(1a) [active]

<i>Giáp</i>	<i>đánh</i>	<i>con</i>	<i>ngựa</i>
Giap	beat	generic classifier	horse
NP1	V(main)		NP2

Giap beat(s) the horse.

(1b) [passive]

<i>Con</i>	<i>ngựa</i>	<i>bị</i>	<i>Giáp</i>	<i>đánh</i>
generic classifier	horse		Giap	beat
	NP2	V1(passive)	NP1	V2(main)

The horse is/was beaten by Giap.

However, there are some grammarians (e.g., Bouchet, 1912; Cordier, 1932; Tran et al., 1960; Emeneau, 1951; Le, 1980; Thompson, 1985) who, drawing mostly on the classical Western view, have expressed doubts about the existence of voice in Vietnamese. They argue against the need to recognise this category. To quote Emeneau (1951, pp. 63-4):

Of the Vietnamese verb in general, it may be said, as Yuen Ren Chao said for Chinese (*Mandarin Primer*, p. 35): “there is no distinction of voice in Chinese.” Besides what looks like syntactically expressed voice (“direction of action”) in the familiar Indo-European sense (“active” : “passive”, Vietnamese has the type of direction [...], with object but no subject, and the types of construction [...] in which a verb is followed by and object and that in which it is followed by another verb in series. None of these involve formal change in verb, and

(1952), Diep (1987, 2013) hold that the category of voice does exist in Vietnamese. They mention (in passing) that the distinction between what has been traditionally referred to as the active and passive voice rests on two conditions which generally coincide: (a) the difference in the structure corresponding to the active and passive voice in the clause and (b) the occurrence of the two traditionally called common passive verbs *bị* (suffer, sustain, undergo) and *được* (get, obtain, receive). Simplifying somewhat, the different structures corresponding to the active and passive voice in Vietnamese, using the terminology of formal grammar, can be represented respectively as follows (note: NP = noun phrase; V = verb):

NP1 + V (main) + NP2 [active]

NP2 + V1 (passive) + NP1 + V2 (main) [passive]

These contrasting constructions can be exemplified again in formal terms by the following clauses taken from Nguyen (1977, p. 132).

it must be said that the Vietnamese verb is without the category of voice.

Emeneau (ibid., p. 73) continues to state:

Tense, mode, and voice, [...] are not the categories of the Vietnamese verb; nor are aspect, number and person of the subject and object. The verb has its class meaning: it occurs and can occur as the nucleus of a predicate and cannot occur as the subject of a predicate or as object of a verb, except when the verb of the predicate is *là* (be).

In a similar vein, Thompson (1985, p. 217) claims:

An important way in which Vietnamese verbs differ from English verbs is that they do not in themselves imply a clear notion of “voice” in the grammatical sense. In English a (transitive) verb must be either active or passive. No such distinction is necessary in Vietnamese. As a matter of fact, the actor or the goal or object of

Vietnamese verbs are regularly not formally marked; these relationships are generally clear from the context, and if they are not there are ways in which they can be made clear; the point is that they need not be, and in the vast majority of Vietnamese sentences such classifying devices are not used. The device which indicates that a preceding focal complement is actually a goal or object of the action [...].

Thus, the rejection of the category of voice in Vietnamese is said to be justified by the fact that voice is the category of the verb, and that because Vietnamese is an isolating/analytic or

(2)

<i>Bác</i>	<i>Hai</i>	<i>bị</i>	<i>một</i>	<i>phát</i>	<i>súng lục</i>
uncle	Hai	suffer	one	generic classifier	pistol
	NP1	VP		NP2	

Uncle Hai got a gun shot.

(3)

<i>Quan</i>	<i>được</i>	<i>điểm</i>	<i>tốt</i>
Quan	get/receive	mark	good
NP1	VP		NP2

Quan got a good mark.

The fact that *bị* and *được* can and do function as fully notional verbs has resulted in the third position which holds that although Vietnamese does not employ functional or morphological means, it uses syntactic means

(4)

<i>Pha (...)</i>	<i>bưng</i>	<i>mâm</i>	<i>lên</i>
Pha (...)	bring	tray	up
NP1	VP	NP2	A
Subject	Predicate	Object	Adverbial modifier

Pha brought the food tray into the house.

(5)

<i>(...)</i>	<i>mâm</i>	<i>com</i>	<i>bưng</i>	<i>lên,</i>
	tray	rice	bring	up
	NP2		VP	A
	Object		Predicate	Adverbial modifier

(...) the food tray was brought into the house,

According to Nguyen (Ibid.), in clause (4) *Pha* is the actor, *bưng* (brought) is the verb expressing an action, and *mâm* (the food tray) is the object which is affected by the action expressed by the verb *bưng*. From the point of view of syntactic structure, this would be represented by the formal grammarian as Subject + Predicate + Object + Adverbial modifier of place. There is, however, an inversion of syntactic order in (5). In (4) *mâm* (the food tray), which is NP2, follows the verb *bưng* (brought) and functions as the Object; however, in (5) *mâm com* (the food tray) which is still said to be NP2 functions as the Subject

non-inflectional language, verbs in Vietnamese do not change in form to distinguish between the active and passive voices as those in many Indo-European languages. Further, it has been argued that the two most common forms *bị* and *được* (see examples (1a) and (1b) above), which have been referred to as the ‘passive particles’ (Emeneau, 1951; Thompson, 1985), are, to use the traditional terminology, ‘fully notional verbs’ (Nguyen, 1977, p. 196). In many respects, they can still be used as transitive verbs (Nguyen, 1979, p. xii) in the sentence. Examples (2) and (3) serve to illustrate the point (note: NP = noun phrase; VP = verb phrase; A = Adverb):

(structure) to express the passive meaning (Nguyen, 1977; Diep, 2013). Below I shall reproduce two more examples taken from Nguyen (1977, p. 207) to show how the voice contrast in Vietnamese is explained as seen from the point of view of the third position:

and precedes the verb *bưng*. Nguyen claims that the inversion of the order of the NP expressing the Object in clause (4) so that it acts as the Subject and precedes the verb in clause (5) indicates that the clause is passive. Nguyen (1977, p. 208) states:

In sentence 1 (= clause 4 here) the actor (of the action) and the subject (of the sentence) are conflated; this permits us to say that the verb *bưng* expresses the active meaning. In sentence 2 (= clause 5 here), however, the noun *mâm com*, which expresses the object (in clause 4), functions as the subject. So it would be justified to say that this sentence

is a passive one. The passive meaning, which is expressed by the whole syntactic structure as such, is not confined to the form of the verb but to the whole structure of the sentence.<sup>2</sup>

Nguyen's consideration of the active/passive distinction in terms of the different functions the subject plays in the sentence is crucial. It suggests that voice in Vietnamese is a feature of the clause, not of the verb, thus reflecting the specificity of Vietnamese as a non-inflectional language where verb form does not show whether a verb is active or passive. Further, what seems to be of theoretical importance is that his view represents a shift in focus from looking at the category of voice in Vietnamese totally from the point of view of the internal morphological structure of the verbal group (leading as a result to the claim that voice does not exist in Vietnamese) to viewing it from the point of view of the syntactic structure of the clause (leading as a result to the claim that voice exists in Vietnamese): in other words, the emphasis has shifted from (verb) morphology to (clause) syntax.

As can be seen from the above overview, scholars studying Vietnamese grammar have different views on the category of voice; some say that voice does exist in the language, while others hold that voice does not. What should be noted here is that those who recognize the existence of the voice base their interpretations only on one-faceted formal criterion. One of the consequences is that the picture of voice in Vietnamese appears to be inadequate. What is really needed is a comprehensive and coherent functional, social model of language that can help describe and interpret this important grammatical category in Vietnamese. This remark takes us to the next section where we will be concerned with the description and interpretation of voice in Vietnamese from the SFL perspective.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 208. This passage, which I have translated here for presentation, appears in the Vietnamese original as follows:

Trong câu 1, chủ thể của hoạt động và chủ ngữ của câu trùng với nhau, và điều đó cho phép ta khẳng định được rằng động từ *bung lên* có ý nghĩa chủ động. Còn ở câu 2, danh từ biểu thị đối tượng lại làm chủ ngữ của câu. Vì vậy có thể khẳng định rằng câu này có ý nghĩa bị động. Những ý nghĩa bị động biểu thị bằng cả một cấu trúc cú pháp như vậy không phải là dạng bị động của riêng động từ mà là ý nghĩa bị động của cả câu.

### 3. Data collection and descriptive strategies

#### 3.1. Data collection

Voice is a grammatical category construed at the rank of the clause. A clause, as always, is part of a text. It follows that the illustrating material in this study should be text-based, with examples taken from natural texts (both written and spoken). Ideally, every example should be the whole text; but in practice this ideal is unattainable. So in order to exemplify, I scour short extracts or passages from complete texts which are understandable even apart from their contexts; and from these extracts, I choose the target clauses as examples for illustration.

In this study, the majority of examples are authentic. They are taken from a variety of genres: folk poetry, poems, short stories, and grammar books of Vietnamese. I have decided not to base the study on a particular corpus, because a grammatical aspect of the clause is concerned not just with the actual or observed examples but with the possible examples as well (cf. Chomsky, 1965).

Some other examples are my own; they are provided based on my knowledge as a competent native speaker of Vietnamese. This was made necessary for two reasons. First, when a number of grammatical points need to be illustrated in one and the same example (clause), often it is difficult to find an instance in a given collection of texts. This does not mean that the imaginary example cannot occur, but simply because of 'the vast complexity of language' (cf. Palmer, 1980, p. 8), it would take a grammarian a lifetime to scour the texts for it while as a native speaker of the language he or she knows very well that the example in question is a 'good' clause in his or her language. And secondly, when I wish to compare an example with a possible variant, such agnate pair(s) is/are also unlikely to occur in the language, but it seems that to search for such a minimally contrasting pair would be taking the use of authentic examples to unnecessary extremes.

As the majority of examples are taken from natural texts, they sometimes contain elements which are irrelevant to the point under discussion. In some instances, in order to avoid overload of information not needed immediately, what we have done is (i) to 'tidy

up’ the original example by removing the irrelevant elements, and (ii) to expand the elements of an elliptical example, so as to remove ellipsis. It is hoped that these ‘editing’ steps, taken minimally, in no way invalidate the suitability of the examples, especially where the grammar of voice is concerned.

### 3.2. Presentation of illustrative examples

As this study is concerned only with a category of the clause of Vietnamese grammar, two notes of caution should be introduced before we could start. First, in the the SFL model (Halliday, 1967a, 1967b, 1968, 1970, 1978, 1985, 1998; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; and many others), the clause is recognized as a simultaneous representation of three different strands of meaning: experiential, interpersonal and textual, realized at once in the system of transitivity (experiential), mood (interpersonal), and theme (textual). This suggests that in starting to examine the category of voice from the transitivity system, we have to presuppose the existence of other two systems such as mood and theme<sup>3</sup> in Vietnamese. However, at some point when there is a need to bring out more clearly an issue concerning the category of voice some reference will be made to them and other aspects of the grammar of Vietnamese. Further, as mood and theme have not been extensively described in Vietnamese from the SFL perspective, while recognizing the shortcomings of taking these for granted, we have generally assumed that functions such as Subject, Predicator, Complement, Adjunct, Theme, Rheme, Given, and New at least at the primary level of delicacy resemble those in English. And secondly, because the description of the category of voice in Vietnamese presented in this study is written in English, it should be presented in a way so that not only Vietnamese but also English readers can understand it. To fulfil this goal, glosses and symbols used in the article are presented as follows: in the descriptive and explanatory text, the initial letter of the names of functions is capitalized; e.g., Actor, Goal, Beneficiary, etc. When they are introduced for the first time, they appear in bold type and are usually followed by abbreviations enclosed in round

<sup>3</sup> The Vietnamese transitivity system and its delicate subsystems such as material, behavioural, mental, verbal, relational, and existential have been described by Hoang (1997, 2012).

brackets (...): **Actor (Ac)**, **Agent (Ag)**, **Medium (Med)**, and so on. In contrast, names of systems are capitalised throughout: **TRANSITIVITY** for the system of **TRANSITIVITY**, **MOOD** for the system of **MOOD**, and so on.

The presentation of an illustrative example is organised as follows: each individual example is numbered in Arabic numeral which is enclosed in round brackets, followed by the source of data or the origin of the example which is enclosed in square brackets [...] (see Appendix); the first line, which is italicised, provides the Vietnamese wording; the second line gives English inter-glosses; the third line provides the configuration of functions of the elements in the clause and appear in bold type (where there is limited space, these functional labels are presented in abbreviated forms, but where there is enough space, they are presented in full); and the fourth represents an idiomatic translation into English. For non-Vietnamese speakers so far as the grammar is concerned, it is the inter-glosses that are more relevant and not the idiomatic translation, as the idiomatic translation is an attempt to convey the meaning and not the grammatical relations within the Vietnamese clause. Below is an instance of how an example is presented (note: [TĐ] = Tân Đà):

(0) [TĐ]

<i>Lá</i>	<i>thu</i>	<i>rơi rụng</i>	<i>đầu</i>	<i>ghènh</i>
leaf	autumn	fall	head	chute
<b>Actor/Medium</b>		<b>Process:</b> <b>material</b>	<b>Circumstance:</b> <b>location</b>	

Autumn leaves fell on top of the chute.

### 3. Voice in Vietnamese: A systemic functional description and interpretation

#### 3.1. The notions of transitivity and ergativity

We begin to explore the category of voice in Vietnamese with the examination of the notions of transitivity and ergativity because these notions have been the central topic of discussion of both formal and functional scholars (e.g. Svartvik, 1966; Fillmore, 1968; Lyons, 1979; Palmer, 1980; Kaplan, 1995; Collins Cobuild, 1996; Diep, 1987, 2013; Nguyen, 1977; Nguyen, 1979; Halliday, 1976, 1985, 1998; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Matthiessen, 1995; Davidse, 1992; Hoang, 1997, 2012, and many others). Of the two notions of transitivity and ergativity in Vietnamese, ergativity has not yet been explored in the SFL model. Therefore, as a basis for exploring ergativity, it would be useful to start with the notion of transitivity. Consider the following examples taken from Hoang (2012).

(6) [NM]

<i>Hắn</i>	<i>đến</i>
He	come
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>

He came.

(7) [NM]

<i>Hắn</i>	<i>đánh</i>	<i>Tuyết</i>
he	beat	Tuyet
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>	<b>Goal</b>

He beat Tuyet.

(8) [TDP]

<i>Ông</i>	<i>già</i>	<i>thở dài</i>
Mr	old	sigh
<b>Behaver</b>	<b>Process: behavioural</b>	

The old man sighed.

(9)

<i>Mẹ</i>	<i>nhìn</i>	<i>con</i>
mother	look	son
<b>Behaver</b>	<b>Process: behavioural</b>	<b>Phenomenon</b>

The mother looked at her son.

(10)

<i>Nga</i>	<i>nghĩ</i>	<i>miên man</i>
Nga	think	interminably
<b>Senser</b>	<b>Process: mental</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>

Nga thought interminably.

(11) [NM]

<i>Tuyết</i>	<i>yêu</i>	<i>tôi</i>
Tuyet	love	I
<b>Senser</b>	<b>Process: mental</b>	<b>Phenomenon</b>

Tuyet loved me.

(12)

<i>Họ</i>	<i>thắc mắc</i>	<i>về</i>	<i>chính sách</i>
they	complain	about	policy
<b>Sayer</b>	<b>Process: verbal</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>	

They complained about the policy.

(13) [NMC]

<i>Toà án</i>	<i>kết tội</i>	<i>kẻ giết người</i>
court	accuse	murderer
<b>Sayer</b>	<b>Process: verbal</b>	<b>Target</b>

The court accused the murderer.

(14) [TH]

<i>Con</i>	<i>chim</i>	<i>gáy</i>	(verbless) <sup>4</sup>	<i>hiền lành</i>
generic classifier	bird	crowing		gentle
<b>Carrier</b>				<b>Attribute</b>

The turtle-dove is gentle.

<sup>4</sup> Several features of verbs in Vietnamese are quite different from those of verbs in English. The class does include a great majority of words which may be translated by English verbs. A large number of forms which are most conveniently rendered by English adjectives following some form of the verb 'be': thus *Con chim gáy hiền lành* means (The turtle-dove is gentle), *Tôi vui* (I am happy), *Cô ấy buồn* (She was sad), and so forth. The meaning 'be' seems to represent an integral part of the semantic range of this sort of verb (for more detail, see Thompson, 1985).

(15) [NHT]

<i>Tôi</i>	<i>là</i>	<i>Nhâm</i>
I	be	Nham
<b>Identified/Token</b>	<b>Process: relational</b>	<b>Identifier/Value</b>

I'm Nham.

(16) [CD]

<i>Trên</i>	<i>giờ</i>	<i>có</i>	<i>đám mây</i>	<i>xanh</i>
on	sky	have	cloud	blue
<b>Circumstance</b>	<b>Process: existential</b>	<b>Existent</b>		

There is a blue cloud in the sky.

The above examples are intended to demonstrate two important points. First, they are the process types which have been recognized in the experiential grammar of Vietnamese (see Hoang, 1997, 2012), of which (6) and (7) are material processes; (8) and (9) behavioural processes; (10) and (11) mental processes, (12) and (13) verbal processes, (14) and (15) relational processes, and (16) is an existential process. Secondly, of these processes, (6), (8), (10), (12), (14), and (16) involve one participant referred to respectively as **Actor** in (6), **Behaver** in (8), **Senser** in (10), **Sayer** in (12), **Carrier** in (14) and **Existent** in (16); and (7), (9), (11), (13), and (15) involve two participants referred to respectively as **Actor** and **Goal** in (7), **Behaver** and **Phenomenon** in (9), **Senser** and **Phenomenon** in (11), **Sayer** and **Target** in (13), and **Identified/Token** and **Identifier/Value** in (15). The fact that a process may involve one or two participants has constituted a basis for the distinction which is traditionally captured in grammars by the terms 'intransitive' and 'transitive'. The traditional claim that an intransitive clause has one participant, and a transitive clause has two poses some problem, since the second half of the generalisation does not hold because of the parameter of **VOICE**. Consider the following set of material clauses:

(17a)

<i>Cửa</i>	<i>mở</i>
door	open
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>

The door opened.

(17b)

<i>Cường</i>	<i>mở</i>	<i>cửa</i>
Cuong	open	door
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>	<b>Goal</b>

Cuong opened the door.

(17c)

<i>Cửa</i>	<i>được</i>	<i>(Cường)</i>	<i>mở</i>
door	passive particle	(Cuong)	open
<b>Goal</b>		<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>

The door was opened (by Cuong).

(17a) is traditionally known as an intransitive clause; (17b) is a transitive and active clause; and (17c) is a transitive and passive clause. Thus, according to the analysis the transitive clause has two possible patterns: active and passive. However, it should be noted that the Actor, *Cường* in (17b) is still introduced as the Actor in (17c) though is now preceded by the form *được*, traditionally known in Vietnamese linguistic scholarship as ‘passive particle’. The active/passive contrast is applicable only if the clause is transitive, and while it is possible for the Actor to occur overtly in either case as (17b) and (17c) show, when the clause is passive, the participant that is obligatory is Goal, not Actor, a situation that is indicated in (17b) and (17c) by putting the Actor, *Cường*, in round brackets. Let us refer to the perspective presented above as the transitive analysis. Halliday (1967a, 1967b, 1968, 1976, 1998, 2012), Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), and Matthiessen (1995) have pointed out that there does exist an alternative perspective on clause organization. They refer to it as the ergative perspective. What is ergativity and what distinguishes it from transitivity?

“The root of the grammar of the nuclear **TRANSITIVITY** of processes and participants are two simultaneous systems, **PROCESS TYPE** and **AGENCY**” (Matthiessen, 1995, p. 206). The former is specifically related to the transitive model and the latter, to the ergative one. Halliday (1970, p. 157, 1998, p. 167) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 347) claim that these two alternative perspectives on clause organization are very widely distributed; possibly all languages display both, in different mixtures, with perhaps one or the other as the more dominant.

The transitive system realises a ‘**PROCESS AND EXTENSION** model’ (Davidse, 1992, p. 108; see also Halliday, 1977, 1998, 2012; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Hoang, 1997, 2012). Its point of departure (taking the material process as representative) is that the Actor is engaged in the process. If the action ends with the Actor as in *Cây rung* (The tree shook), then we have an intransitive clause realised by a structural configuration of **Actor^Process**, where Actor

can also be interpreted as the participant being ‘affected’ (Halliday, 1970, p. 157) by the action. However, the action does not have to stop at the Actor^Process combination. It can be extended to or directs itself on to a Goal as *cây* (tree) in *Gió rung cây* (The wind shook the tree). In such an instance, we have a transitive clause realised by a structural configuration of **Actor^Process^Goal**, where Goal now is that which is to be interpreted as the participant being affected by the process. Whether the structure is Actor^Process as *Cây rung* (The tree shook) or Actor^Process^Goal as *Gió rung cây* (The wind shook the tree), *cây* (the tree) still functions as something at which the action *rung* (shook) directs. Thus, if asked: *Cái gì thế?* (What happened?) or *Cái cây làm sao thế?* (What happened to the tree?), it would be reasonable to be told in response either that *Nó (cái cây) rung* (It [the tree] shook) or that *Gió rung nó* (The wind shook it [the tree]). In the first case, the action of shaking is represented as confined to the tree; in the second case, the action of shaking extends from the wind to the tree. Thus the transitivity model is based on ‘extension’. Its basic question is ‘whether the action extends beyond the actor or not’ (cf. Halliday, 1968, p. 185; Halliday, 1976, 1998; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

With the ergative system, the picture is quite different. The ergative system is said to be typically generalised and cuts across the various process types (Halliday, 1998, p. 164; Matthiessen, 1995, p. 206). To use Davidse’s (1992, p. 109) expression, the ergativity system realises an ‘**INSTIGATION OF PROCESS** model’. In this model, there is one participant that is the key figure in the process - the **Medium (Med)**, defined by Halliday (1998, p. 163) as ‘one through which the process is actualised, and without which there would be no process at all’. A clause is middle (mid) if the process is presented as ‘internally instigated’ (Davidse, 1992, p. 109) or ‘self-engendering’ (Halliday, 1998, p. 164; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 342): only the key participant and the process are expressed in it. Thus, *Cửa mở* (The door opened), *Cây đổ* (The tree fell), and *Cây rung* (The tree shook) are all middle clauses and have

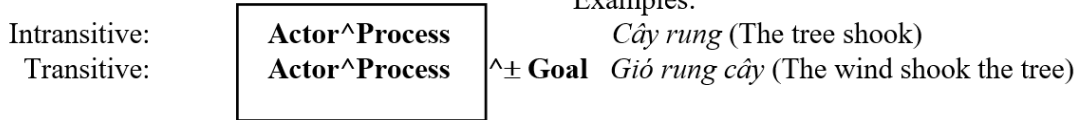
the same structural configuration of **Medium^Process**. In contrast, a clause is effective (eff) if the process is represented as ‘externally instigated’ (Davide, *ibid.*, p. 109); it is represented as if there were an external **Agent (Ag)**, or Instigator, causing the process to happen. Thus *Gió rung cây* (The wind shook the tree), *Cường mở cửa* (Cuong opened the door), and *Hấn đánh Tuyết* (He beat Tuyen) are all effective clauses and have

the same structural configuration of **Agent/Instigator^Process^Medium**. So unlike the transitive model, the ergative model is based on ‘causation’. Its basic question is ‘whether the cause/instigation is external to the action or not’ (Halliday 1968, 1970, 1998; see also Matthiessen, 1995; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Hoang, 1997, 2012). Below is a schema representing the two alternative models of transitivity and ergativity in Vietnamese.

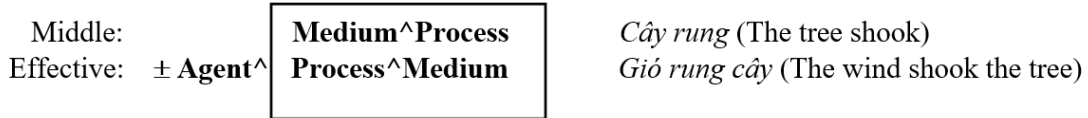
**Figure 1**

*Transitive and Ergative Patterning in Vietnamese*

**Transitive patterning**



**Ergative patterning**



As can be seen in Figure 1, each model has its own form of organisation. In the transitive model, the process is inherently accompanied by the obligatory Actor and the optional Goal which is indicated by the notation ±. In the ergative model, on the other hand, the obligatory participant that is centrally involved in the Process is the Medium and the optional one is the Agent. Halliday (1998, pp. 165-66) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, pp. 343-44) have shown, in relation to English which can also be applicable to Vietnamese, that the ergative function of Medium - ‘the nodal participant throughout the system’ (Halliday, 1998, p. 165; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 343) - turns up in all types of process. It is equivalent to:

Actor in middle material process; e.g.  
 (18)

<i>Thằng bé</i>	<i>ngã</i>
little boy	fall
<b>Medium/ Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>

The little boy fell.

Goal in effective material clause; e.g.  
 (19)

<i>Thằng bé</i>	<i>đá</i>	<i>quả bóng</i>
little boy	kick	ball
<b>Agent/ Actor</b>		<b>Medium/ Goal</b>

The boy kicked the ball.

Behaver in behavioural process; e.g.  
 (20) [TDP]

<i>Họ</i>	<i>uống</i>	<i>cả ngày</i>
they	drink	whole day
<b>Medium/ Behaver</b>	<b>Process: behavioural</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>

They drank the whole day.

Senser in mental process; e.g.  
 (21)

<i>Người</i>	<i>già</i>	<i>thích</i>	<i>thoải mái</i>
people	old	like	comfort
<b>Medium/ Senser</b>		<b>Process: mental</b>	<b>Phenomenon</b>

Old people like comfort.

Sayer in middle verbal process; e.g.  
 (22)

<i>Ông ấy</i>	<i>nói</i>	<i>về</i>	<i>lịch sử</i>
he	talk	about	history
<b>Medium/ Sayer</b>	<b>Process: verbal</b>		<b>Circumstance</b>

He talked about history.

Target in effective verbal process; e.g.  
 (23)

<i>Nhiều</i>	<i>người</i>	<i>ca ngợi</i>	<i>ông</i>
many	people	praise	he
<b>Agent/ Sayer</b>		<b>Process: verbal</b>	<b>Medium/Target</b>

Many people praised him.



Carrier in attributive relational process; e.g.  
(24)

<i>Hổ</i>	<i>dữ</i>
Tiger	fierce
<b>Medium/ Carrier</b>	<b>Attribute</b>

A tiger is fierce.

Identified in identifying relational process;  
e.g.

(25)

<i>Cô</i>	<i>Chi</i>	<i>là</i>	<i>giáo viên</i>
Ms	Chi	be	teacher
<b>Medium/ Identified</b>		<b>Process: relational</b>	<b>Identifier</b>

Ms Chi is the teacher.

Existent in existential process; e.g.

(26) [CD]

<i>Trên</i>	<i>giời</i>	<i>có</i>	<i>đám mây</i>	<i>xanh</i>
on	sky	have	cloud	blue
<b>Circumstance</b>		<b>Process: existential</b>	<b>Medium/ Existent</b>	

There is a blue cloud in the sky.

In contrast, Agent appears as a function only where the process is instigated by an external agency. It is equivalent to:

Actor in effective material process; e.g.

(27)

<i>Thằng</i>	<i>Trú</i>	<i>đốt</i>	<i>đền</i>
generic classifier	Tru	burn	temple
<b>Agent/ Actor</b>		<b>Process: material</b>	<b>Medium/Goal</b>

Tru burned the temple.

Attributor when the Carrier is present in attributive relational process; e.g.

(32)

<i>Trời</i>	<i>nóng</i>	<i>làm</i>	<i>hoa quả</i>	<i>chóng</i>	<i>chín</i>
sky	hot	make	fruit	quick	ripe
<b>Agent/ Attributor</b>			<b>Carrier</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>	<b>Attribute</b>

Hot weather made fruits ripe quickly.

Identifier/Token in identifying relational process; e.g.

(33) [NHT]

<i>Tôi</i>	<i>là</i>	<i>Nham</i>
I	be	Nham
<b>Agent/ Identified/ Token</b>	<b>Process: relational</b>	<b>Identifier/ Value</b>

I am Nham.

Assigner in identifying relational process; e.g.

(34)

<i>Họ</i>	<i>bầu</i>	<i>thầy</i>	<i>Nam</i>	<i>là</i>	<i>nhà giáo</i>	<i>ưu tú</i>
they	elect	teacher	Nam	be	teacher	meritorious
<b>Agent/ Assigner</b>		<b>Identified/ Token</b>	<b>Process: relational</b>		<b>Identifier/ Value</b>	

They elected Mr Nam meritorious teacher.

Two other additional participants recognised in the transitive model are also recognised in the ergative model and are given the same labels: **Range** and **Beneficiary**. Range, defined as “scope or domain of the process”

Initiator when the Actor is present in effective material process; e.g.

(28)

<i>Gió</i>	<i>làm</i>	<i>cây</i>	<i>rung</i>
wind	make	tree	shake
<b>Agent/ Initiator</b>		<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>

The wind made the tree shake.

Phenomenon in effective mental process of the encoded type (from Phenomenon to consciousness); e.g.

(29)

<i>Lời nói</i>	<i>của</i>	<i>cô ta</i>	<i>làm</i>	<i>hài lòng</i>	<i>cha</i>	<i>mẹ</i>
word	of	she	make	please	father	mother
<b>Agent/ Phenomenon</b>			<b>Process: mental</b>		<b>Medium/ Senser</b>	

Her words pleased her parents.

Sayer in effective verbal process; e.g.

(30) [NHT]

<i>Sư Thiệu</i>	<i>hỏi</i>	<i>Quyên</i>
Monk Thieu	ask	Quyên
<b>Agent/ Sayer</b>	<b>Process: verbal</b>	<b>Medium/ Receiver</b>

Monk Thieu asked Quyên.

Carrier in attributive relational process; e.g.

(31) [HT]

<i>Con</i>	<i>chim</i>	<i>gáy</i>	<i>hiền lành</i>
generic classifier	bird	crowing	gentle
<b>Agent/ Carrier</b>			<b>Medium/ Attribute</b>

The turtle-dove is gentle.

(Matthiessen et al., 2010, p. 170) or a restatement of the process itself (Halliday, 1967a, 1968, 1998), often enters into the clause as a nominal group. It can be assigned a different label in a different clause type. Thus, Range is equivalent to:

Range in middle material process; e.g.  
(35)

<i>Thầy</i>	<i>Năm</i>	<i>chơi</i>	<i>cờ</i>
father	Nam	play	chess
<b>Agent/Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>	<b>Range</b>	

Father Nam plays chess.

(36)

<i>Họ</i>	<i>nhảy</i>	<i>một</i>	<i>điều</i>	<i>rất</i>	<i>lạ</i>
they	dance	one	dance	very	strange
<b>Agent/Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>	<b>Range</b>			

They danced/performed a very strange dance.

Behaviour in behavioural process; e.g.

(37)

<i>Bọn trẻ</i>	<i>đang</i>	<i>nghe</i>	<i>nhạc</i>
children	aspectual marker	listen	music
<b>Agent/Behaver</b>	<b>Process: behavioural</b>	<b>Range/Behaviour</b>	

The children are listening to music.

Phenomenon of the ‘thích (like) type’ in mental process; e.g.

(38)

<i>Tuyết</i>	<i>thích</i>	<i>tôi</i>
Tuyet	like	I
<b>Agent/Senser</b>	<b>Process: mental</b>	<b>Range/Phenomenon</b>

Tuyet liked me.

Recipient in material process; e.g.

(42) [Recipient as direct participant]

<i>Tôi</i>	<i>gửi</i>	<i>mẹ</i>	<i>tôi</i>	<i>một</i>	<i>món</i>	<i>quà</i>
I	send	mother	I	one	generic classifier	present
<b>Agent/ Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>	<b>Recipient</b>	<b>Medium/Goal</b>			

I sent my mother a present.

(43) [Recipient as indirect participant]

<i>Tôi</i>	<i>gửi</i>	<i>một</i>	<i>món</i>	<i>quà</i>	<i>cho</i>	<i>mẹ</i>	<i>tôi</i>
I	send	one	generic classifier	present	to	mother	I
<b>Agent/ Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>	<b>Medium/Goal</b>			<b>Recipient</b>		

I sent a present to my mother.

Client in material process; e.g.

(44)

<i>Hắn</i>	<i>vẽ</i>	<i>bức</i>	<i>tranh</i>	<i>cho</i>	<i>mẹ</i>
he	paint	generic classifier	picture	for	mother
<b>Agent/ Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>	<b>Medium/ Goal</b>		<b>Client</b>	

He painted a picture for his mother.

Receiver in verbal process; e.g.

(45) [NHT]

<i>Sư</i>	<i>Thiếu</i>	<i>hỏi</i>	<i>Quyên</i>
monk	Thieu	ask	Quyen
<b>Agent/ Sayer</b>	<b>Process: verbal</b>	<b>Receiver</b>	

Monk Thieu asked Quyen.

Verbiage - “the content or kind of saying”  
(Halliday, 1998, p. 167) - in verbal process; e.g.

(39)

<i>Anh</i>	<i>gọi</i>	<i>hai</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>ruợu</i>
he	call	two	glass	wine
<b>Agent/Sayer</b>	<b>Process: verbal</b>	<b>Verbiage</b>		

He ordered two glasses of wine.

Attribute in attributive relational process; e.g.

(40)

<i>Cô</i>	<i>Chi</i>	<i>là</i>	<i>một</i>	<i>cô giáo</i>	<i>tốt</i>
Ms.	Chi	be	one	Ms teacher	good
<b>Agent/Carrier</b>	<b>Process: relational</b>	<b>Attribute</b>			

Ms. Chi is a good teacher.

Identifier/Value in identifying relational process; e.g.

(41)

<i>Cô</i>	<i>Chi</i>	<i>là</i>	<i>giáo viên</i>
Ms	Chi	be	teacher
<b>Identified/Token</b>	<b>Process: relational</b>	<b>Identifier/Value</b>	

Ms Chi is the teacher.

In contrast, Beneficiary, defined as “one that stands to gain” (Halliday, 1998, p. 167), may enter into the clause either directly as a nominal group or indirectly as a prepositional phrase. It can be equivalent to:

Beneficiary in relational attributive process; e.g.  
(46)

<i>Phần thưởng</i>	<i>này</i>	<i>là</i>	<i>dành</i>	<i>cho</i>	<i>anh</i>
reward	this	be	reserve	for	brother
<b>Medium/ Carrier</b>		<b>Process: relational</b>		<b>Beneficiary</b>	

This reward is for you.

**4.2. Voice in Vietnamese: A multifunctional interpretation**

The above discussion demonstrated that Vietnamese shows up in both the transitive and ergative systems, and each of these systems allows a more delicate systemic contrast. Figure 2 below shows the ergative and transitive as two concurrent systems with the system of process type for the Vietnamese clause: the **ERGATIVE** system is the entry condition for the options of middle v. effective, and the **TRANSITIVE** system is the entry condition for the options of intransitive v. transitive. The rationale for including both in the network is that they represent two complementary, not mutually exclusive, perspectives on clause organisation.

**Figure 2**

*Ergative and Transitive Systems: Primary Choices*

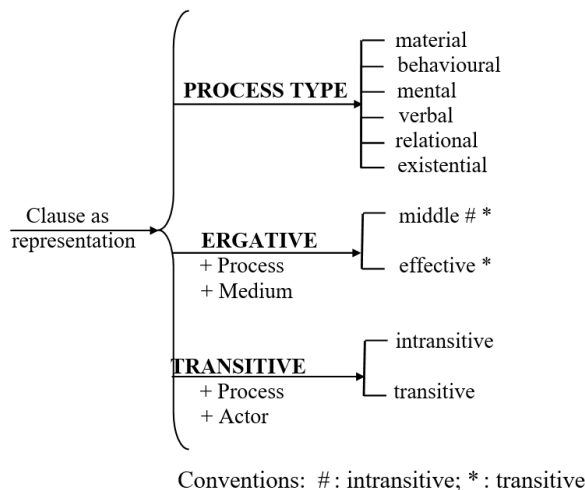


Figure 2 is intended to show three points. First, the system of **PROCESS TYPE** is the entry condition for the six clause options of material, behavioural, mental, verbal, relational, and existential; the **ERGATIVE** system is the entry condition for the options of middle v. effective; and the **TRANSITIVE** system is the entry condition for the options of intransitive v. transitive. Secondly, a middle clause can be either intransitive (indicated by the notation #) or transitive (indicated by the notation \*), while

an effective clause can be only transitive. And thirdly, voice can be interpreted either from the **TRANSITIVE** or the **ERGATIVE** system. Transitivity, a clause is intransitive when it has one participant (the Actor in a material process, for instance), and the voice is active as *Thầy Năm* in *Thầy Năm đi vào* (Father Nam came in). In contrast, a clause is transitive when it has two participants - an Actor and a Goal, and the voice may be active as *Cậu bé* and *quả bóng* in *Cậu bé đá quả bóng* (The boy kicked the ball) or passive as *Quả bóng* and *cậu bé* in *Quả bóng được cậu bé đá* (The ball was kicked by the boy). And ergatively, a clause is middle when it has no feature of agency; the clause is active; and it may have one participant - the Medium as *Cậu bé* in *Cậu bé ngã* (The little boy fell), or two participants - the Medium and an ‘additional entity’ which is not Goal because it “exists independently of the process and indicates the domain over which the process takes place” (Halliday, 1998, p. 146) referred to as Range as *đàn ghi ta* (guitar) in *Anh ta chơi đàn ghi ta* (He played the guitar). In contrast, a clause is effective when it has the feature of agency, and the clause can be either active (or operative) as in *Con chó đuổi con mèo* (The dog chased the cat) or passive (or receptive) as in *Con mèo bị con chó đuổi* (The cat was chased by the dog).

However, looked at from a wider environment, it can be seen that the choice of voice is not just a matter of the experiential metafunction; it is a matter of the interpersonal and textual metafunctions as well (cf. Halliday, 1998, p. 167; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In what follows, we will argue that the explanation of voice requires reference to all the three metafunctions.

The active v. passive choice is, in effect, a textual resource in the sense that it allows certain thematic possibilities, which in its absence would not be available. This remark concerns in particular the question of unmarked v. marked theme where unmarked theme refers to unusual or normal theme and marked theme implies unusual or abnormal theme. Taking the major material declarative clause as the starting

point, the constituent functioning as Subject will also have the function of unmarked Theme, (47a) [active voice]

<i>Anh ấy</i>	<i>sẽ</i>	<i>hoàn thành</i>	<i>luận án</i>	<i>năm</i>	<i>sau</i>
he	aspectual marker	complete	dissertation	year	after
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>		<b>Goal</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>	
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Predicator</b>		<b>Complement</b>	<b>Adjunct</b>	
<b>Theme (unmarked)</b>	<b>Rheme</b>				
<b>Given</b>	→ <b>New</b>				

He will complete his dissertation next year.

The conflated realisation of these three functions - Actor/Subject/unmarked Theme - by the same constituent construes a specific kind of point of departure. An unmarked Theme construes a point of departure which is not in contrast to any other, and typically does not (47b) [active voice]

<i>Luận án</i>	<i>anh ấy</i>	<i>sẽ</i>	<i>hoàn thành</i>	<i>năm</i>	<i>sau</i>
dissertation	he	aspectual marker	complete	year	after
<b>Goal</b>	<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>		<b>Circumstance</b>	
<b>Complement</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Predicator</b>		<b>Adjunct</b>	
<b>Theme (marked)</b>	<b>Rheme</b>				
<b>New</b>	← <b>Given</b>				

His dissertation he will complete next year.

(47c) [active voice]

<i>Năm</i>	<i>sau</i>	<i>anh ấy</i>	<i>sẽ</i>	<i>hoàn thành</i>	<i>luận án</i>
year	after	he	aspectual marker	complete	dissertation
<b>Circumstance</b>		<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>		<b>Goal</b>
<b>Adjunct</b>		<b>Subject</b>	<b>Predicator</b>		<b>Complement</b>
<b>Theme (marked)</b>		<b>Rheme</b>			
<b>Given</b>		→ <b>New</b>			

Next year he will complete his dissertation.

Note that the voice in all three clauses above is active. However, it is possible to choose as an unmarked Theme in a declarative clause something other than the constituent with the conflated function of Actor/Subject. In this case, however, the voice of the clause must be passive, for voice is a resource for re- (47d) [passive voice]

<i>Luận án</i>	<i>sẽ</i>	<i>được</i>	<i>(anh ấy)</i>	<i>hoàn thành</i>	<i>năm</i>	<i>sau</i>
dissertation	asp. marker	pass. marker	he	complete	year	after
<b>Goal</b>			<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>	
<b>Complement</b>			<b>Subject</b>	<b>Predicator</b>	<b>Adjunct</b>	
<b>Theme (unmarked)</b>	<b>Rheme</b>					
<b>Given</b>	→ <b>New</b>					

His dissertation will be completed next year.

At this point, a question raised for exploration here is: How can the active and passive voice be distinguished? To facilitate the

so long as it is the first constituent with an experiential and interpersonal function as in:

function as New information. The conflation of Theme in a declarative clause with any element other than Actor/Subject will make the Theme marked, in the sense that it will construe a point of departure that is in some sense contrastive and/or presents New information as for example in:

ordering of the experiential functions, with the result that with different voice choices, different experiential functions will conflate with different interpersonal ones. In particular, Subject in the passive clause will be conflated with Goal, and Actor may or may not be present as in:

discussion, let us produce below two examples and analyse them in terms of **TRANSITIVITY**, **MOOD**, and **THEME**:

(48a)

<i>Cường</i>	<i>nấu</i>	<i>cơm</i>	<i>này</i>	<i>ngon</i>
Cuong	cook	rice	this	delicious
<b>Actor/Agent</b>	<b>Process: material; effective</b>	<b>Goal/Medium</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>	
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Predicator</b>	<b>Complement</b>	<b>Adjunct</b>	
<b>Theme (unmarked)</b>	<b>Rheme</b>			

Cuong cooked this rice well.

(48b)

<i>Cơm</i>	<i>này</i>	<i>được</i>	<i>(Cường)</i>	<i>nấu</i>	<i>ngon</i>
rice	this	passive maker	Cuong	cook	delicious
<b>Goal/Medium</b>			<b>Actor/Agent</b>	<b>Process: material; effective</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>
<b>Subject</b>			<b>Adjunct</b>	<b>Predicator</b>	<b>Adjunct</b>
<b>Theme (unmarked)</b>		<b>Rheme</b>			

This rice was well cooked (by Cuong).

Clause (48a) is transitive and active, and clause (48b) is transitive and passive. If these clauses are compared, it will be noted that they differ from each other in a number of respects.

From the point of view of recognition, there is a re-ordering of the participants in the passive version. *Cường*, which is Actor/Agent and stands at the head of clause (48a), is still Actor/Agent but has moved to precede the Process in (48b); and *cơm này* (this rice), which is Goal/Medium and is preceded by the Process in clause (48a), is still

(48c)

<i>Cơm</i>	<i>này,</i>	<i>Cường</i>	<i>nấu</i>	<i>ngon</i>
rice	this	Cuong	cook	delicious
<b>Goal/Medium</b>	<b>Actor/Agent</b>	<b>Process: material; effective</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>	
<b>Complement</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Predicator</b>	<b>Adjunct</b>	
<b>Theme (marked)</b>	<b>Rheme</b>			

This rice, Cuong cooked well.

where Goal/Medium/Complement are brought to the head of the clause, and Theme is conflated with them: when Goal/Medium/Complement are conflated with Theme, Theme is no longer unmarked: it construes a point of departure which in some sense highlights it. The fact that there is a re-ordering of participants in the passive voice and this re-ordering opens up the different possibilities of conflation with Subject and Theme, leaving the thematic choices of the clause unmarked, is important: the definition criterion for the passive voice in Vietnamese is precisely the construal of Goal as the speaker's

(48d)

<i>Cơm</i>	<i>này</i>	<i>được</i>	<i>nấu</i>	<i>ngon</i>
rice	this	passive marker	cook	delicious
<b>Goal/Medium</b>			<b>Process: material; effective</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>
<b>Subject</b>			<b>Predicator</b>	<b>Adjunct</b>
<b>Theme</b>		<b>Rheme</b>		

This rice was well cooked.

The second distinction between a passive clause and an active one has to do with the

Goal/Medium but has moved to the head of (48b). This re-ordering of participants in the passive clause has opened up the different possibilities of conflation with lexicogrammatical functions that are realisationally related to the interpersonal and textual metafunctions. Thus, instead of Actor/Agent as Subject/Theme where Theme is unmarked in clause (48a), we have Goal/Medium as Subject/Theme so that Theme is still unmarked in (48b). This is in contrast to an agnate clause such as

point of departure without implying any highlighting for the information to which the element refers.

From the point of view of grammatical structure, (48b) can be distinguished from (48a) in two respects. First, like (48a), Actor/Agent *Cường* is present as a direct participant in (48b); however, unlike (48a), it is not conflated with Subject/Theme but is mapped on to Actor/Agent which is part of Rheme. Further, the presence of Actor/Agent in (48a) seems to be obligatory while the presence of Actor/Agent in (48b) may be optional. Thus, it is possible to say either as (48b) or as the following:

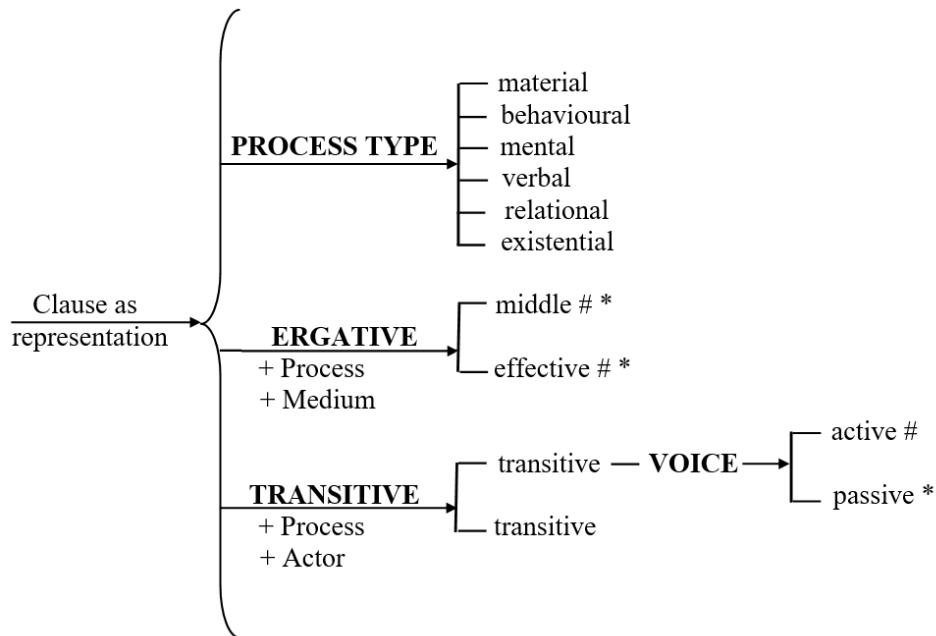
difference in the internal structure of the verbal group realising the Process in the passive

clause. In (48a) the Process is realised by the verb *nấu* (cooked); in (48b), however, the Process is realised by a verbal group which consists of the same verb form *nấu* (cooked) and the traditionally known ‘passive particle’, or ‘passive verb’ *được*.

The above discussion suggests that there are both semantic and lexicogrammatical grounds for distinguishing the active from the passive voice in Vietnamese. The active/passive distinction can be represented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*The System of VOICE in Vietnamese: Active and Passive*



Conventions: # = active; \* = passive

**4.3. *được* and *bị*: passive particles?**

In English, the construction of *be* + V-en constitutes the main choice of passive, which seems to be attitudinally neutral. Thus we can have *I am given; You are given, She is given, I was given, You were given, She was given*, which are all attitudinally neutral seen from the point of view of the speaker, and it seems no further distinction can be made. In Vietnamese, however, the choice of passive constitutes the entry condition for two more delicate systemic options having the feature of [+attitude: judgement] (Martin & White, 2005, p. 35), which can be referred to as ‘desirable’ v. ‘undesirable’. These options can be exemplified in (49) and (50):

(49)

<i>Com</i>	<i>được</i>	<i>Cường</i>	<i>nấu</i>	<i>ngon</i>
rice	benefit	Cuong	cook	deliciously

The rice was well cooked by Cuong.

(50)

<i>Tuyết</i>	<i>bị</i>	<i>hắn</i>	<i>đánh</i>
Tuyet	suffer	he	beat

Tuyet was beaten by him.

‘Desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ can be distinguished on both semantic and lexicogrammatical grounds. Semantically, desirable refers to the meaning of ‘benefiting’ which has the feature of [+pleasant]. In contrast, undesirable refers to the meaning of ‘suffering’ which has the feature of [-pleasant]. Lexicogrammatically, each of these options is realised by a different form: desirable is realised by the form *được* which means ‘benefit’, ‘gain’, ‘obtain’, or ‘receive’, and undesirable is realised by the form *bị* which means ‘suffer’, ‘sustain’, or ‘undergo’. The desirable/undesirable contrast can be represented in the following system network:

**Figure 4**

*The System of VOICE in Vietnamese: Desirable and Undesirable*

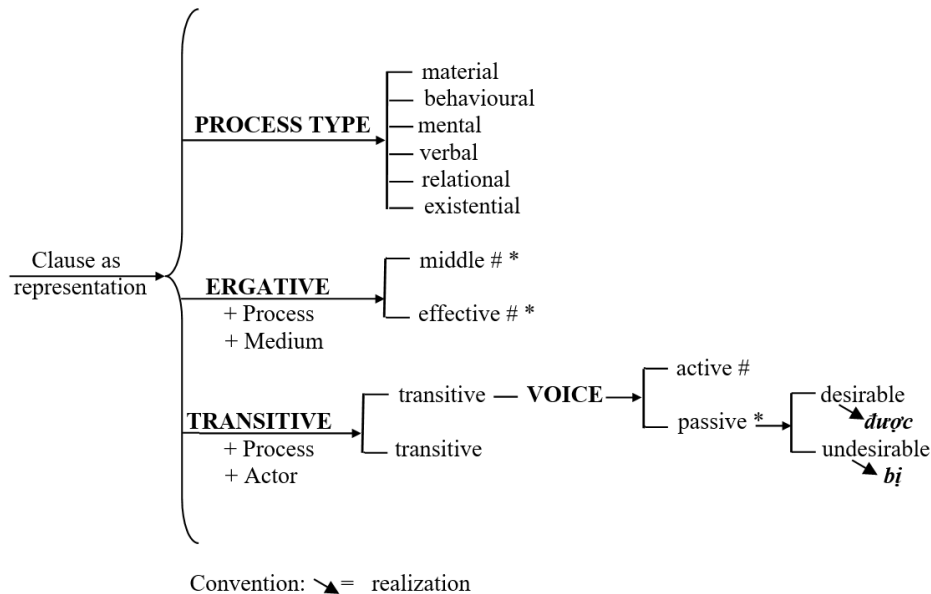


Figure 4 claims that in Vietnamese the choice between desirable v. undesirable (realised by *được* and *bị* respectively) is applicable if and only if the clause has feature [+passive]. This is obviously not true in the light of examples (2) and (3) above. There is however a difference between the use of *được*

and *bị* in an active clause as opposed to a passive. This can be clarified by a consideration of the following examples:

(51) intransitive/middle

<i>Thằng bé</i>	<i>bị</i>	<i>ngã</i>
little boy	suffer	fall

The little boy fell.

(52) transitive/middle/active

<i>Minh</i>	<i>được</i>	<i>ăn</i>	<i>một</i>	<i>bữa</i>	<i>sáng</i>	<i>ngon</i>
self/I	benefit	eat	one	generic classifier	morning	delicious

I had a delicious breakfast.

(53) transitive/effective/active

<i>Anh</i>	<i>bị</i>	<i>mất</i>	<i>một</i>	<i>chiếc</i>	<i>ô</i>	<i>trắng</i>
he	suffer	lose	one	generic classifier	umbrella	white

He lost a white umbrella.

Compare now (51) - (53) with the following:

(51a) intransitive/middle

<i>Thằng bé</i>	<i>ngã</i>
boy	fall

The boy fell.

(51a) transitive/middle/active

<i>Minh</i>	<i>ăn</i>	<i>một</i>	<i>bữa</i>	<i>sáng</i>	<i>ngon</i>
self/I	eat	one	generic classifier	morning	delicious

I had a delicious breakfast.

(51c) transitive/effective/active

<i>Anh</i>	<i>mất</i>	<i>một</i>	<i>chiếc</i>	<i>ô</i>	<i>trắng</i>
he	lose	one	generic classifier	umbrella	white

He lost a white umbrella.

It will appear clear that (51a), (52a) and (53a) are neutral while (51), (52), and (53) sound somewhat marked. This difference in marking can be attributed to the presence or

absence of *được* and *bị*: in the active clause the presence of *được* or *bị* has the effect of making it marked.

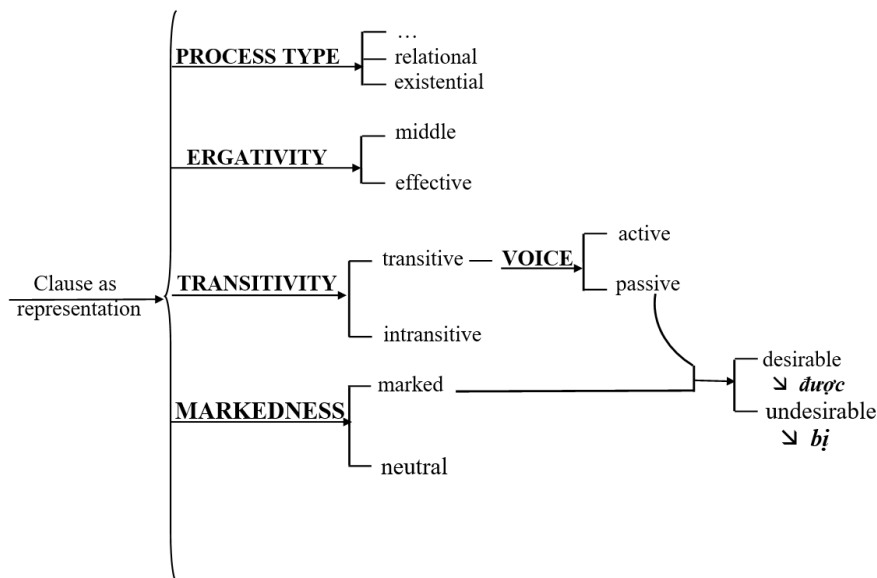
The fact that desirable/undesirable may be present in all types of clause and that, except in the case of passive, their presence in clauses with the [+active] feature makes them sound marked suggests two points: (i) *được* and *bị* are not passive particles *per se* but function in that capacity, and (ii) it may be possible to establish a separate system to account for the markedness of the presence of desirable/undesirable in clauses with the [+active] feature in Vietnamese. This system may be called **MARKEDNESS**, and the terms of the system are 'neutral' and 'marked'. The features 'marked' and 'passive' act as disjunctive entry conditions for the systemic choice between 'desirable' and 'undesirable': that is to say, the

choice between the last two systemic features is applicable either in the environment of ‘passive’ or in the environment of ‘marked’ (for detail about semantic system network in SFL, see

Hasan, 1996). The system of **MARKEDNESS** with its more delicate choices in concurrence with the systems of **PROCESS TYPE**, **ERGATIVITY**, and **TRANSITIVITY** is represented in Figure 5.

**Figure 5**

*The System of MARKEDNESS and its More Delicate Choices*



## 5. Concluding remarks

In this article, we have made an attempt to outline a description of one of the most important categories in the grammar of Vietnamese which does not seem to have received adequate attention from the Vietnamese linguistic scholarship: the category of voice. We began our discussion by presenting three formal contradicting views about whether or not voice is applicable to the language. Then drawing on insights from SFL, we have described and interpreted this category of voice in Vietnamese. We first examined voice in relation to the two alternative experiential perspectives: transitivity and ergativity. Then, using these perspectives as the basis, we took a step further, interpreting voice from a multifunctional approach, intertwining the experiential function with the interpersonal and the textual ones in the clause. In answering the first question “Does voice exist in Vietnamese?”, we share the idea of some formal grammarians (e.g. Truong, 1867; Bui, 1952; Nguyen, 1977; Nguyen, 1979; and Diep, 1987, 2013; and others) that voice does exist in Vietnamese, and that it is a feature of the

clause, rather than that of the verb. But, in answering the second and the third questions, “What are the delicate options available in the environment of **VOICE** in Vietnamese?”, and “How can these delicate options be distinguished from the SFL perspective?”, we differ markedly from formal grammarians. Offering a new approach to the description and interpretation of the Vietnamese voice – the SF approach, we have thus achieved new findings: first, **VOICE** in Vietnamese constitutes a system that runs across all types of ranking clause, and this system opens up a number of delicate choices: middle v. effective, if effective is chosen, it will allow two more delicate choices: active v. passive (voice), and if passive is chosen, it will further allow two more delicate choices: desirable v. undesirable. And secondly, these delicate choices can be distinguished along the three metafunctions of language: experiential (realized in transitivity and ergativity), interpersonal (realized in mood), and textual (realized in theme). It is clear from our research that to have a comprehensive picture of any grammatical category, we really need a multifunctional approach. And it is precisely this



multifunctional approach that has justified the relevance of SFL to our study: by describing and interpreting the system of **VOICE** in Vietnamese from the SFL perspective, we are able to understand many features which otherwise remain arbitrary or obscure.

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## Appendix

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# PHẠM TRÙ DẠNG TRONG TIẾNG VIỆT: MÔ TẢ THEO LÍ THUYẾT CHỨC NĂNG HỆ THỐNG

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**Tóm tắt:** Bài viết này mô tả phạm trù dạng - một trong những khái niệm ngữ pháp khó nắm bắt nhất trong ngữ pháp tiếng Việt dường như chống lại bất kì cách xử lí thoả đáng nào. Khung lí thuyết được sử dụng để mô tả và giải thích phạm trù này là Ngôn ngữ học chức năng hệ thống. Ba câu hỏi hình thành nên cơ sở của bài viết này là: (1) “Hệ thống **DẠNG** có tồn tại trong tiếng Việt không?”; nếu có thì (2) “Các sự lựa chọn tinh tế có sẵn trong môi trường của phạm trù **DẠNG** trong tiếng Việt là gì?”; và (3) “Các sự lựa chọn tinh tế này được phân biệt như thế nào nhìn từ quan điểm Ngôn ngữ học chức năng hệ thống?” Câu trả lời cho ba câu hỏi này cho thấy, khác với các mô tả của ngữ pháp hình thức, **DẠNG** tồn tại trong tiếng Việt như là một hệ thống; môi trường hệ thống **DẠNG** mở ra một số sự lựa chọn tinh tế; và những sự lựa chọn tinh tế này có thể được phân biệt theo ba siêu chức năng ngôn ngữ: siêu chức năng trải nghiệm, siêu chức năng liên nhân, và siêu chức năng văn bản. Nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra rằng Ngôn ngữ học chức năng hệ thống là khung lí thuyết rất phù hợp để mô tả và giải thích phạm trù **DẠNG** trong tiếng Việt: Lí thuyết chức năng hệ thống giúp chúng ta nghiên cứu phạm trù ngữ pháp từ nhiều chiều kích khác nhau, giúp chúng ta có một cái nhìn toàn diện hơn về phạm trù đó. Nghiên cứu này góp phần vào việc ứng dụng lí thuyết Ngôn ngữ học chức năng hệ thống vào mô tả ngữ pháp tiếng Việt - một ngôn ngữ phi Ấn-Âu, mở ra tiềm năng mới cho một cách tiếp cận toàn diện đối với việc mô tả ngữ pháp tiếng Việt theo lí thuyết Ngôn ngữ học chức năng hệ thống, phục vụ cho các mục đích nghiên cứu, ứng dụng và giảng dạy.

*Từ khoá:* hệ thống **DẠNG** trong tiếng Việt, khiến tác, chuyển tác, thức, đề ngữ