

**VERB RAISING, COVERT MODALS
AND FLIP-FLOP CONSTRUCTIONS IN VIETNAMESE:
A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE***

Trần Phan and Wei-Tien Dylan Tsai
National Tsing Hua University

ABSTRACT

This paper pursues the issues surrounding Vietnamese flip-flop sentences in terms of verb raising and covert modals from a comparative point of view. We show that verb movement in flip-flop constructions is found in both matrix and embedded environments where the presence of modality is attested. Evidence is presented to show the bi-clausal nature of the so-called “flip alternative” construction, as well as the rightward nature of V-to-M adjunction. We also draw cross-linguistic support from Thai data to substantiate our syntactic analyses on empirical grounds.

Keywords: verb raising, covert modals, flip-flop constructions, comparative syntax, Vietnamese

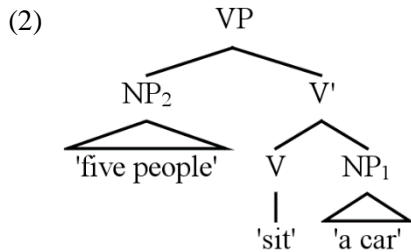
* The research leading to this article is funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan (“A Comparative Syntactic Study of Flip-flop Sentences,” MOST 109-2410-H-007-065-MY2). We thank the editors and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions. Special thanks go to Noppakao Sirintranon, Santhawat Thanyawong, Liang-Fan Chen, and Chunyi Wu for providing and discussing the Thai data. All errors are ours alone.

1. INTRODUCTION

The so-called flip-flop constructions in Mandarin Chinese are defined as constructions featuring a “bare” verb whose two arguments are both indefinite quantity noun phrases, as illustrated in (1). The two arguments can alternate between subject and object, a curious phenomenon motivating the moniker (Tsai 2001). We call (1a) the flip construction and (1b) the flop construction. Zhao and Tsai (2023) claim that the two constructions underlyingly exhibit the same argument structure as schematized in (2), and the difference in linear order only comes about when the need for labeling (Chomsky 2013) forces either of the two arguments to move out of its base-generated position. The movement of NP₁ derives the flip construction, while the raising of NP₂ yields the flop construction. Tsai and Phan (2022) (T&P henceforth) identify the landing site of these NPs as [Spec, MP (Modal Phrase)], and the head M is where the verb is subsequently raised to attach to. Note that the argument alternation as displayed when flip and flop constructions are compared is not free in reality, as the respective translations indicate. The semantic disparity observed is attributed to the presence of various covert modal elements permitted for each construction.

- (1) a. *Yi-bu che zuo wu-ge ren.* (flip construction)
one-CL car sit five-CL¹ person
'A car seats five people.'
- b. *Wu-ge ren zuo yi-bu che.* (flop construction)
five-CL person sit one-CL car
'Five people may/should/must sit in one car.'

¹ The abbreviations used in this paper are glossed as follows: CL: classifier; APPL: applicative marker; NEG: negation marker; PRT: particle; TOP: topic marker.



T&P show that a similar phenomenon is attested for Vietnamese. See (3) for an example.

- (3) a. *Một chiếc xe ngồi năm người.* (flip construction)
 one CL car sit five person
 'A car seats five people.'
- b. *Năm người ngồi một chiếc xe.* (flop construction)
 five person sit one CL car
 'Five people may/should/must sit in one car.'

In both languages, the surface position of the verb in flip sentences such as (1a, 2a) is derived via an obligatory verb-to-modal (V-to-M) raising, where the host is an implicit capacity modal ENO(ugh), as illustrated in (4a,b). The explicit counterpart of ENO in Vietnamese is *đủ* 'enough' in (5a), on par with Mandarin *gou* 'enough' in (5b), where they trigger the verb raising in question. The same pattern of movement emerges when either explicit or implicit priority modal auxiliaries substitute for the capacity modal, a point to be returned to.

- (4) a. *Một chiếc xe [ENO-ngồi] năm người <ngồi>*
 b. *Yi-bu che [ENO-zuo] wu-ge ren <zuo>* (T&P:190)

- (5) a. *Một chiếc xe đủ ngồi năm người <ngồi>.*
 one CL car enough sit five person sit
 'A car is enough to seat five people.'
- b. *Yi-bu che gou zuo wu-ge ren <zuo>.*
 one-CL car enough sit five-CL person sit
 'A car seats five people.'

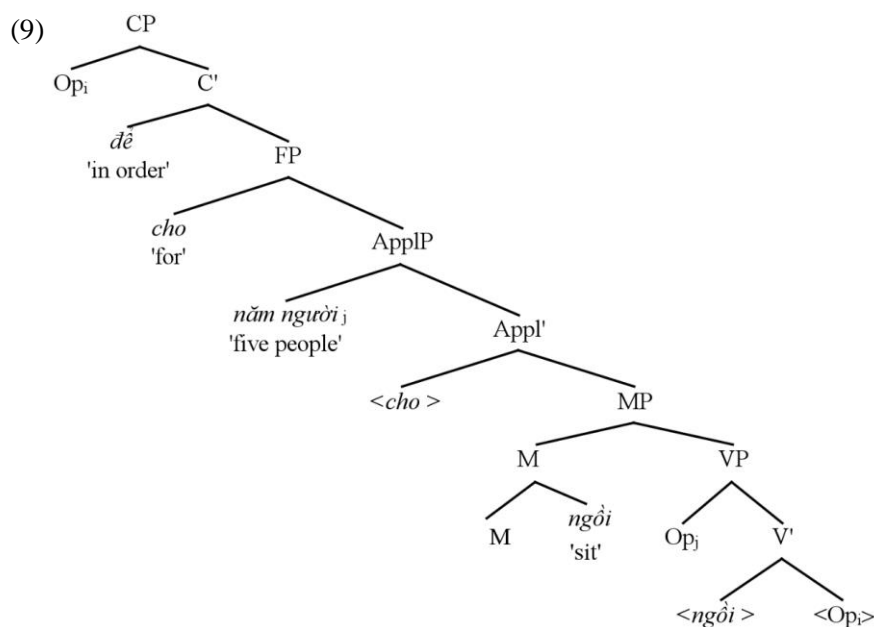
With regard to the flip construction, Mandarin also allows the main verb *zuo* ‘sit’ to stay *in situ* (“the flip alternative” henceforth), as in (6a). The same is observed with the overt presence of modal *gou* ‘enough’, see (6b). Despite that flip-flop constructions in the two languages strikingly mirror each other, Vietnamese however does not readily allow this free alternation. While (7a) and (6a) are equally degraded, (7b) is ungrammatical, unlike (6b). This leads T&P to argue that such a free alternation is but an illusion: when the verb appears not to raise, the structures at issue should be construed as bi-clausal instead. On the other hand, (6a) and (7a) induce a sense of incompleteness, although they are not technically ill-formed. To foreshadow, we will suggest in section 5 that these sentences are in fact derivationally unrelated to the flip construction, and can be improved when situated in an appropriate configuration.

- (6) a. %*Yi-bu che wu-ge ren zuo.*
one-CL car five-CL person sit
‘A car seats five people.’
b. *Yi-bu che gou wu-ge ren zuo.*
one-CL car enough five-CL person sit
‘A car is enough to seat five people.’
- (7) a. %*Một chiếc xe năm người ngồi.*
one CL car five person sit
‘A car seats five people.’
b. **Một chiếc xe đủ năm người ngồi.*
one CL car enough five person sit
Intended: ‘A car is enough to seat five people.’

One way to salvage (7b) is to have the purpose-like C-element *để* ‘for, in order’ inserted after *đủ* ‘enough’, see (8a). Alternatively, one can add *cho* ‘for’ in front of the second NP *năm người* ‘five people’ as in (8b). We assume in T&P that *cho* here does not have a verbal meaning such as ‘give’ or ‘allow’, but acts as an applicative head selecting the NP. Interestingly, *để* and *cho* can co-occur, see (8c). As long as at least one of the two elements is overtly present, the derivation will converge. Regardless of

how the subordinate clause following *đủ* is analyzed, it is safe to assume that the sentences in (8) are not mono-clausal, and *đủ* is better characterized as a lexical verb, not a modal auxiliary. V-to-M raising is still a possibility here, but this movement is locally constrained. The proposed structure for the embedded clause in (8) is illustrated in (9). Op_i is co-indexed with the matrix subject *một chiếc xe* ‘a car’, while Op_j refers to *năm người* ‘five people’, an argument introduced by the applicative head. For more discussions on this configuration, see T&P as well as section 3 below.

- (8) a. *Một chiếc xe đủ để năm người ngồi.*
one CL car enough for five person sit
‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’
- b. *Một chiếc xe đủ cho năm người ngồi.*
one CL car enough APPL five person sit
‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’
- c. *Một chiếc xe đủ để cho năm người ngồi.*
one CL car enough for APPL five person sit
‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’



(adapted from T&P:199)

Note that Mandarin in fact permits the overt realization of *gei* ‘for’ at the exact location Vietnamese *cho* is found, see (10). A multifunctional element itself (very much like *cho*), *gei* has been commonly associated with an applicative reading (see Tsai 2012, for example). These applicative heads are taken in this work to allow either an over or a covert realization.

- (10) *Yi-bu che gou (gei) wu-ge ren zuo.*
 one-CL car enough APPL five-CL person sit
 ‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’

This paper pursues the issues laid out by T&P, with special focus on Vietnamese flip-flop constructions and the manifestation of covert modals from the vantage point of comparative syntax. Section 2 and section 3 provide further evidence in support of the postulation of covert modals in

both main clauses and subordinate clauses. We presume that this remarkable ability to encode modality in the absence of lexical modal auxiliaries in Vietnamese (and Mandarin) is partially due to their mood-prominent nature (cf. Tsai 2019). Section 4 provides supplemental comparative evidence to support our view of the bi-clausal nature of flip sentences when the verb apparently stays *in situ*. In section 5, we tackle the issue of the directionality of head movement when V is raised to M. We argue that the pattern observed in Vietnamese is further attested for Thai, another robust analytic language genealogically related neither to Vietnamese nor to Mandarin. This lends credible support to our claim about the existence of a distinct bi-clausal configuration and the obligatoriness of V-to-M raising. Section 6 concludes the study.

2. COVERT MODALS IN MAIN CLAUSES

2.1 Covert capacity patterns

Imagine a context where a customer asks a car dealer about the seating capacity of the sedans available in his dealership. Such a question could take a form as simple as (11). The dealer may respond with (3a), repeated here as (12). This is a covertly modalized generic sentence with a dispositional reading, which features an indefinite singular NP *một chiếc xe* ‘a car’ as its subject. The modal is evaluated with regard to an ‘in virtue of’ modal base à la Lekakou 2005. Accordingly, (12) can be understood along the lines of ‘it is in virtue of some inherent properties of the cars in question that any of them is capable of seating five people.’ These properties are essentially determined by those responsible for the making of the cars.

- (11) *Một chiếc xe ngồi mấy người?*
one CL car sit how.many person
‘How many people does a car seat?’

- (12) *Một chiếc xe ngồi năm người.* (= (3a))
one CL car sit five person
'A car seats five people.'

Incidentally, (12) is semantically comparable to (13a), which employs the explicit modal *đủ* 'enough'. (12) can also be paraphrased as (13b), which features *có thể* 'can'. The two modal auxiliaries function to explicitly indicate the physical capacity of the referent of the subject NP. With or without an overt modal, (12) and (13) both communicate that the car's design allows it to seat (up to) five people.

- (13) a. *Một chiếc xe đủ ngồi năm người.*
one CL car enough sit five person
'A car is enough to seat five people.'
b. *Một chiếc xe có thể ngồi năm người.*
one CL car can sit five person
'A car is capable of seating five people.'

Such a pattern of inherent modality is attested cross-linguistically. We take (13) to pattern with English dispositional sentences like (14a) in their ability to communicate modality despite the lack of any lexical means. Chierchia and McConnell-Ginnet (2000) claim that one of the main functions of generic sentences like (14a) is to express capability (or possibility). This is again shown by the overtly modalized paraphrase in (14b). That (14a) is easily paraphrasable as (14b) via the insertion of *can* reveals the covert modal nature of the former. The same goes with (15).

- (14) a. *This program parses complicated sentences.*
b. *This program **can** parse complicated sentences.* (Chierchia and McConnell-Ginnet 2000:234)
- (15) a. *This car goes 200 kph.*
b. *The car **can** go 200 kph.* (Menéndez-Benito 2013:284)

Kratzer (1981) points out that this covert pattern of modality is equally available for German. To illustrate, the German sentence (16) has a

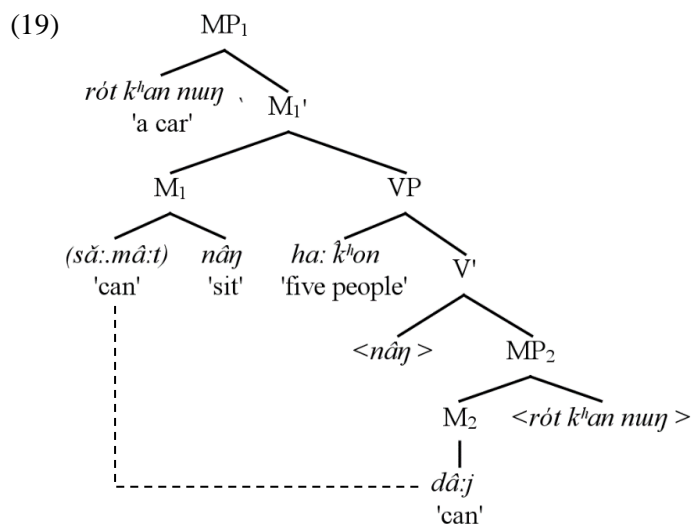
modalized reading of (16b) albeit its non-modal appearance as reflected by the literal translation in (16a). Menéndez-Benito (2013) proposes to treat the covert possibility modal in these dispositional sentences as expressing ‘inner dispositions’.

- (16) *Dieses Auto fährt zwanzig Meilen pro Stunde.*
 a. *This car goes twenty miles per hour.*
 b. *This car **can** go twenty miles per hour.* (Kratzer 1981:39)

Interestingly, Thai appears to mirror Vietnamese and Mandarin in allowing a modal reading for bare flip sentences. The bare sentence (17) could be semantically equivalent to either (18a) or (18b), which explicitly feature the capacity *pʰɔː* ‘enough’ and the dynamic *sǎː.mâːt... dâːj* construction respectively. Note that in (18b), both *sǎː.mâːt* and *dâːj* mean ‘can’. We assume, modeling after Cheng & Sybesma’s (2003, 2004) treatment of the Cantonese post-verbal modal *dak* and Phan’s (2023) analysis of the Vietnamese *được*, that *dâːj* as a cognate of both *dak* and *được* occupies the secondary modal position below VP, while the primary projection above VP is filled with *sǎː.mâːt*. The higher licenses the lower via an Agree relation. When V-to-M raising occurs, movement targets this higher projection. See (19) for a rough schematization of (18b).²

- (17) *Rót kʰan nùŋ nâŋ hâː kʰon.*
 car CL one sit five CL.person
 ‘A car seats five people.’
- (18) a. *Rót kʰan nùŋ pʰɔː nâŋ hâː kʰon.*
 car CL one enough sit five CL.person
 ‘A car is enough to seat five people.’
 b. *Rót kʰan nùŋ (sǎː.mâːt) nâŋ hâː kʰon dâːj.*
 car CL one can sit five CL.person can
 ‘A car is capable of seating five people.’

² An anonymous reviewer wonders if there is syntactic evidence for such an Agree relation in Thai. A detailed discussion on this matter unfortunately goes beyond the scope of this paper and thus must await future research.



2.2 Covert priority patterns

Besides a capacity modal reading (in response to (11)), (3a/12) may as well communicate a range of priority modal flavors *à la* Portner (2009). That is, (3a) may correspond to any of the sentences in (20), depending on the prompting context. This patterns well with Mandarin since the latter also permits the overt realization of various priority modal auxiliaries, as shown in (21).

- (20) a. *Một chiếc xe có thể ngồi năm người.* (permission)
 one CL car may sit five person
 'A car may seat five people.'
- b. *Một chiếc xe nên ngồi năm người.* (suggestion)
 one CL car should sit five person
 'A car should seat five people.'
- c. *Một chiếc xe phải ngồi năm người.* (obligation)
 one CL car must sit five person
 'A car must seat five people.'

- (21) *Yi-bu che keyi/yinggai/bixu zuo wu-ge ren.*
one-CL car may/ should/ must sit five-CL person
'A car may/should/must seat five people.'

A possible context for the 'permission' reading of (3a) is as followed. A group of ten tourists flags down two cabs. Since the local regulations dictate that a cab can only allow up to four passengers, the two drivers are at first reluctant to take them. After they offer to pay more, the drivers accept the deal and one of them utters (22). The relevant priority here is based on the personal wish of the drivers.

- (22) (*Được rồi.*) *Một chiếc xe ngồi năm người.*
okay PRT one CL car sit five person
'(Alright then.) A car may seat five people.'

Now consider another context. Towards the end of their trip, the same group of tourists plans to get back to the airport. Someone suggests they call three cabs so that three to four people can take one. Another raises the concern that the fare might be too high, then utters (23). A 'suggestion' reading for (3a) based on a (teleological) goal of saving money is felicitous in such a context. Alternatively, he may utter (24) knowing that the company sponsoring the trip will not reimburse the fare for the third cab since the plan is not as economical as possible. In this context, (3a) has an 'obligation' reading, with the priority based on certain rules or regulations.

- (23) (*Muốn tiết kiệm thì*) *một chiếc xe ngồi năm người.*
want save.money then one CL car sit five people
'(If we want to save money,) a car should seat five people.'

- (24) (*Công ty không duyệt đâu.*) *Một chiếc xe ngồi năm người.*
company NEG approve PRT. one CL car sit five people
'(The company won't approve this.) A car must seat five people.'

Thai data provides us with exactly the same picture. That is, a bare flip sentence like (25) could be semantically equivalent to any of the overtly modalized sentences in (26), as long as the context is clear about which

priority modal flavor and strength are at play. Similar to what suggested for Mandarin and Vietnamese, it is reasonable to assume (25) also involves an implicit priority modal auxiliary which allows for V to raise to M from its usual clause-final position. In 3.2 we will demonstrate that implicit priority modals are also attested in subordinate environments.

(25) *Rót kʰan nùŋ nâŋ hâ: kʰon.*
 car CL one sit five CL.person
 ‘A car seats five people.’

(26) a. *Rót kʰan nùŋ ?àat.cà/nâa.cà nâŋ hâ: kʰon.*
 car CL one may sit five CL.person
 ‘A car may seat five people.’

b. *Rót kʰan nùŋ kʰuan nâŋ hâ: kʰon.*
 car CL one should sit five CL.person
 ‘A car should seat five people.’

c. *Rót kʰan nùŋ tɔŋ nâŋ hâ: kʰon.*
 car CL one must sit five CL.person
 ‘A car must seat five people.’

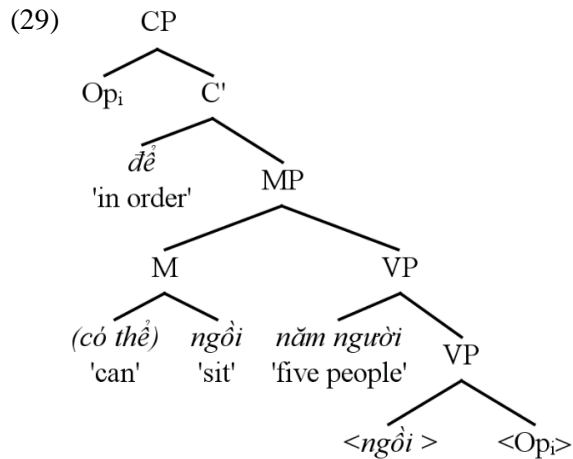
3. COVERT MODALS IN SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

3.1 Covert dynamic patterns in *để*-clauses

T&P argue that even when V is confined to a subordinate environment, V-to-M raising is still possible. It amounts to saying that a *để*-clause as in (8) contains a modal auxiliary, be it overt or covert. Such a position helps explain why (27) allows the displacement of *ngồi* ‘sit’ from its clause-final position. This line of thinking is backed by the overt realization of modal *có thể* ‘can’ between *để* and the raised verb in (28), with virtually no change in semantics compared to (27).

(27) *Một chiếc xe đủ để ngồi năm người.*
 one CL car enough for sit five person
 ‘A car is enough to seat five people.’

- (28) *Một chiếc xe đủ để có thể ngồi năm người.*
 one CL car enough for can sit five person
 ‘A car is enough to be able to seat five people.’



When V appears to stay *in situ* as in (30), such a raising still cannot be ruled out. That is, we could assume that *ngồi* ‘sit’ still raises to modal, and the NP in the subordinate clause is simply merged higher than MP. This proposal is supported by the possibility to have *có thể* ‘can’ inserted between the NP and the verb in (31). We assume further that the NP *năm người* ‘five people’ is introduced by the applicative head *cho* in (30-31), and not by V as in (27-28). In the former case, the external argument of V is a null operator co-indexed with this NP.

- (30) *Một chiếc xe đủ cho năm người ngồi.* (= (8b))
 one CL car enough APPL five person sit
 ‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’
- (31) *Một chiếc xe đủ cho năm người có thể ngồi.*
 one CL car enough APPL five person can sit
 ‘A car is enough for five people to be able to sit in.’

A similar situation is observed for Thai. In (32), the overt modal *sǎ:.mâ:t* precedes the verb but succeeds the NP introduced by *hâj* (as head of ApplP). Note that Thai native speakers might opt to omit *sǎ:.mâ:t*, but this is only because *dâ:j* is more commonly used in colloquial Thai, and the inclusion of *sǎ:.mâ:t* leads to wordiness. That being said, (32) are grammatical. In addition, even if *sǎ:.mâ:t* is omitted, the presence of post-verbal *dâ:j* is assumed to always guarantee the presence of a higher MP that licenses it.

- (32) *Rót kʰan nùŋ pʰɔ: hâj hâ: kʰon (sǎ:.mâ:t) nâŋ (dâ:j).*
 car CL one enough APPL five people can sit can
 ‘A car is enough for five people to (be able to) sit in.’

It is instructive to note that infinitival purpose clauses are in fact typically associated with modal interpretation cross-linguistically. As Bhatt (2006) points out, the *to*-clause in (33a) can be paraphrased with an explicitly modalized expression featuring *can*. The same is observed for Italian and Romania by Coniglio & Zegrean (2012), see (33b,c).

- (33) a. *Sue went to Torino to buy a violin.*
 (≈ ‘Sue went to Torino so that she could buy a violin.’)
 (English, Bhatt 2006:2)
- b. *Gianni è andato a Torino per/a comprare un violin.*
 Gianni is gone to Turin for/to to.buy a violin
 ‘Gianni went to Turin to buy a violin.’
 (Italian, Coniglio & Zegrean 2012:95)
 (≈ ‘Gianni went to Turin so that he could buy a violin.’)
- c. *Ion a sunat pentru a afla noutățile.*
 Ion has called for to find.out news-the
 ‘Ion called so that he could find out the news.’
 (Romania, Coniglio & Zegrean 2012:95)

Interestingly, Grosz (2011, 2014) also argues that German infinitival clauses like the *um*-clause in (34) contain a possibility modal operator. This is evidenced by the presence of modal particle *ruhig*, which as a modal modifier functions to increase the degree of possibility expressed

in a modalized utterance, and is thus a diagnosis of the existence of a modal operator.

- (34) Diese australische Kannenpflanze ist groß genug, **um** {**ruhig**
this Australian pitcher.plant is big enough for ruhig
auchmal/ auch mal **ruhig**} eine Ratte zu verschlingen.
also once also once ruhig a rat to devour
'This Australian pitcher plant is big enough in order to [ruhig] devour
a rat every now and then.' (Grosz 2014:277)

3.2. Covert priority patterns in subordinate clauses of mandative/directive verbs

Recall in 2.2 that we can express various priority modal meanings through a flip main clause in its bare form as long as the context is clear. Priority modal auxiliaries also appear to have a special affinity with a class of predicates expressing anything from order and request to prohibition and permission. This class goes by many names, including *directive verbs* (Comrie 1974), *desideratives* (Wurmbrand 2001; Landau 2013), and *mandatives* (Barrie and Pittman 2010). Burukina (2020) analyzes Russian mandative verbs like *velet* 'order' or *razrešit* 'allow' as the lexical realizations of a verb of communication embedding a silent deontic modal head. In Vietnamese, these verbs guarantee the presence of embedded (overt or covert) priority modals. For example, the modal is taken to be covert MUST in (35a) but is explicitly pronounced in (35b) by *phải* 'must'. In the same vein, the embedded clause in (36a) is assumed to contain an implicit SHOULD, whose explicit counterpart *nên* 'should' is attested in (36b).

- (35) a. *Tí yêu cầu (là) một chiếc xe ngồi năm người.*
Tí demand that one CL car sit five person
'Tí demands that one car seat five people.'
b. *Tí yêu cầu (là) một chiếc xe phải ngồi năm người.*
Tí demand that one CL car must sit five person
'Tí demands that one car must seat five people.'

- (36) a. *Tí gợi ý (là) một chiếc xe ngồi năm người.*
Tí suggest that one CL car sit five person
'Tí suggests that one car seat five people.'
- b. *Tí gợi ý (là) một chiếc xe nên ngồi năm người.*
Tí suggest that one CL car should sit five person
'Tí suggests that one car should seat five people.'

Again, the same pattern is attested for Thai, as exemplified in (37). That is, Thai priority modal *k^huan* 'should' and *t^hng* 'must' are optional in the clauses respectively selected by mandative verbs *ne[?].nam* 'suggest' and *k^hɔ:* 'demand'.

- (37) a. *Tí ne[?].nam wàa rôt k^han nùng (k^huan) nâg hâ: k^hon.*
Tí suggest that car CL one should sit five CL.person
'Tí suggests that one car (should) seat five people.'
- b. *Tí k^hɔ: wàa rôt k^han nùng (t^hng) nâg hâ: k^hon.*
Tí demand that one CL car must sit five person
'Tí demands that one car (must) seat five people.'

The phenomenon exemplified in (35-36) fits the description of Trinh's (2017) 'pleonastic modals' in Vietnamese, as shown in (38-39). Here it is claimed that the embedded modals are semantically transparent as sentences featuring them (e.g. (38a) and (39a)) are semantically equivalent to the ones without them (e.g. (38b) and (39b)).

- (38) a. *Mary bắt John phải đọc sách*
Mary require John must read books
'Mary required John to have the obligation to read books'/
'Mary required John to read books' (Trinh 2017:429)
- b. *Mary bắt John đọc sách*
Mary require John read books
'Mary required John to read books' (Trinh 2017:429)

- (39) a. *Mary cho phép John được đọc sách*
 Mary allow John may read books (Trinh 2017:431)
 b. *Mary cho phép John đọc sách*
 Mary allow John read books (Trinh 2017:431)

Taken together, sections 2 and 3 argue for the presence of modal auxiliaries, both covert and overt, in main and subordinate clauses in Vietnamese, and further show that a similar phenomenon is attested for Thai. We propose that it is these modal elements which induce the V-to-M raising in flip-flop constructions. The movement of V to M is taken to be both obligatory and local.

4. MONO/BI-CLAUSALITY AND THE FLIP ALTERNATIVE

We claim in section 1, following T&P, that when the main verb of a flip sentence appears to stay in its clause-final position instead of surfacing immediately after *đủ* ‘enough’, V-to-M raising does take place, although it is constrained to the local domain which is a purpose-like clause. This clause is introduced by either the left-peripheral element *để* ‘for, in order’ or its implicit equivalent. The postulation of such a bi-clausal configuration receives empirical support from Thai data. (40a) illustrates a Thai flip sentence with no overt modal marking. This sentence is semantically equivalent to (40b) which is explicitly modalized with *phủ*: ‘enough’. When the main verb *nằm* ‘sit’ surfaces clause-finally to form the flip alternative, the Thai pattern of grammaticality is the same as the Vietnamese one in (7), see (41).

- (40) a. *Rót k^han nù^hng nằ^hng hâ: k^hon.*
 car CL one sit five CL.person
 ‘A car seats five people.’
 b. *Rót k^han nù^hng phủ: nằ^hng hâ: k^hon.*
 car CL one enough sit five CL.person
 ‘A car is enough to seat five people.’

- (41) a. %*Rót k^han nùη hâ: k^hon nâη.*
 car CL one five CL.person sit
 ‘A car seats five people.’
- b. **Rót k^han nùη p^hɔ: hâ: k^hon nâη.*
 car CL one enough five CL.person sit
 Intended: ‘A car is enough to seat five people.’

More interestingly, (41) can be salvaged by the insertion of the purpose-like C-element *sămràp* ‘for, in order’ and/or an applicative *hâj* ‘for’ (which incidentally also means ‘give’ or ‘allow’ as a lexical verb, similar to the Vietnamese *cho*), see (42). This is also the pattern observed for Vietnamese in (8). Given the configurational similarity between the two languages in this respect, the syntactic analysis sketched out in (9) for Vietnamese bi-clausal construction is extended to the Thai data in (42).

- (42) a. *Rót k^han nùη p^hɔ: sâmràp hâ: k^hon nâη.*
 car CL one enough for five CL.person sit
 ‘A car is enough to seat five people.’
- b. *Rót k^han nùη p^hɔ: hâj hâ: k^hon nâη.*
 car CL one enough APPL five CL.person sit
 ‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’
- c. *Rót k^han nùη p^hɔ: sâmràp hâj hâ: k^hon nâη.*
 car CL one enough for APPL five CL.person sit
 ‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’

Note that in both Vietnamese and Thai, the order of the C-element and the applicative head is fixed, as the former must always precede the latter, see (8c) for Vietnamese and (42c) for Thai. When the applicative head surfaces higher than the C-element, ungrammaticality ensues, as shown in (43).

- (43) a. **Một chiếc xe đũ cho để năm người ngồi.*
 one CL car enough APPL for five person sit
 Intended: ‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’

- b. **Rót k^han nùη p^hɔ: hâj sǎmràp hâ: k^hon nâη.*
 car CL one enough APPL for five CL.person sit
 Intended: ‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’

Furthermore, if the main verb of the embedded clause appears between the applicative head and the second NP, the resulting sentence is also ill-formed, see (44). This ungrammaticality is straightforward if the second NP is indeed introduced by the applicatives *cho* in Vietnamese and *hâj* in Thai.

- (44) a. **Một chiếc xe đũ cho ngòì năm người.*
 one CL car enough APPL sit five person
 Intended: ‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’
 b. **Rót k^han nùη p^hɔ: hâj nâη hâ: k^hon*
 car CL one enough APPL sit five CL.person
 Intended: ‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’

Our proposal of a bi-clausal configuration for the flip alternative also has the advantage of explaining a number of syntactic facts otherwise obscure with a mono-clausal analysis. First, for the incompleteness of flip alternatives in (45), our position is as follows. While these flip alternatives are widely acknowledged to be able to contain an implicit capacity modal ENO as covert modal, it is unmotivated to assume that a proper lexical verb *đũ* ‘enough’ could somehow be implicit in the construction. It is therefore reasonable to take (45) as instances of mono-clausal construction featuring an implicit modal (not a bi-clausal sentence with a covert lexical verb). If it is the case, then the raising of the verb over the second NP is expected (as it must raise to attach to the modal, which is syntactically higher than this second NP). The clause-final position of the main verbs thus should logically lead to ungrammaticality. These sentences are however not straightforwardly out, as they appear to be salvageable once construed with a right configuration, thus the incompleteness effect.

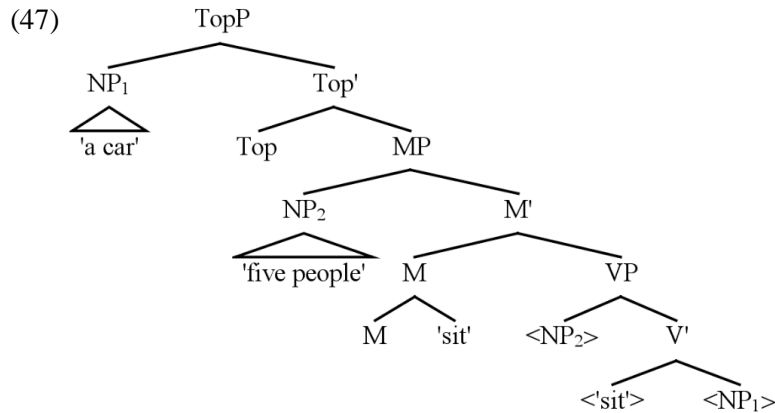
- (45) a. %*Một chiếc xe năm người ngòì.* (Vietnamese)
 one CL car five person sit
 ‘A car seats five people.’

- b. %*Yi-bu che wu-ge ren zuo.* (Mandarin)
 one-CL car five-CL person sit
 ‘A car seats five people.’
- c. %*Rót kʰan nùŋ hâ: kʰon nâŋ.* (Thai)
 car CL one five CL.person sit
 ‘A car seats five people.’

Specifically, the sentences in (45) become fully grammatical once NP₁ is marked for topicalization, see (46). Note that this topicalization needs to be overtly marked (with a topic marker, a pause, or both) for the feeling of incompleteness to disappear. We propose that (45) are derivationally unrelated to the flip construction, albeit their linear resemblance to one. The derivation yielding (45) goes as follows: the main verb first raises to MP, then NP₂ is moved to [Spec, MP]; NP₁ is subsequently raised to a higher functional projection, which we identify as TopP (Topic Phrase). Because the topic-comment configuration is not sufficiently marked in (45), in contrast to (46), it leads to a possible confusion with some variant of the flip sentence where the verb stays *in situ*. Now note how these former two movements in the aforementioned derivation, as claimed in T&P, essentially derive a flop construction. This amounts to saying that (46) are instances of flop sentences with a twist of topicalization. The derivation for (46) is illustrated in (47).³

- (46) a. *Một chiếc xe thì năm người ngồi.* (Vietnamese)
 one CL car TOP five person sit
 ‘A car, it seats five people.’
- b. *Yi-bu che a, wu-ge ren zuo.* (Mandarin)
 one-CL car TOP five-CL person sit
 ‘A car, it seats five people.’
- c. *Rót kʰan nùŋ, hâ: kʰon nâŋ.* (Thai)
 car CL one five CL.person sit
 ‘A car, it seats five people.’

³ We thank an anonymous reviewer for urging us to clarify how topicalization can eradicate the incompleteness effect in (45).



Second, in the presence of explicit priority modals, see (48), the clause-final position of the verb leads to ungrammaticality. Unlike the case of (8) where the existence of verbal *đủ* ‘enough’ guarantees the presence of a subordinate clause, there is no evidence for the bi-clausality of the sentences in (48). One way to salvage these sentences is to make them bi-clausal via the addition of, for example, the verbal *cho* ‘allow’. This way, the inability of the verb to move (to the main clause) is justified. Note that *cho* as a verb is distinct from *cho* as an applicative head: verbal *cho* can be replaced by *cho phép* ‘allow’, see (49). On the contrary, *cho phép* ‘allow’ cannot replace the applicative *cho* in (30-31) as evidenced in (50).

- (48) a. **Một chiếc xe có thể năm người ngồi.*
 one CL car may five person sit
 ‘A car may seat five people.’
- b. **Một chiếc xe nên năm người ngồi.*
 one CL car should five person sit
 ‘A car should seat five people.’
- c. **Một chiếc xe phải năm người ngồi.*
 one CL car must five person sit
 ‘A car must seat five people.’

- (49) a. *Một chiếc xe có thể cho/ cho phép năm người ngồi.*
 one CL car may allow five person sit
 ‘A car may allow five people to sit in.’
- b. *Một chiếc xe nên cho/ cho phép năm người ngồi.*
 one CL car should allow five person sit
 ‘A car should allow five people to sit in.’
- c. *Một chiếc xe phải cho/ cho phép năm người ngồi.*
 one CL car must allow five person sit
 ‘A car must allow five people to sit in.’
- (50) a. *Một chiếc xe đủ cho/ *cho phép năm người ngồi.*
 one CL car enough APPL allow five person sit
 ‘A car is enough for five people to sit in.’
- b. *Một chiếc xe đủ cho/ *cho phép năm người có thể ngồi.*
 one CL car enough APPL allow five person can sit
 ‘A car is enough for five people to be able to sit in.’

The same pattern is observed for Thai. The three sentences in (51) are ungrammatical as the verb appears to stay *in situ* instead of raising to attach to the modal auxiliaries. To salvage these sentences, we again could turn them into bi-clausal constructions. The addition of verbal *hâj* ‘allow’ (to be distinguished from applicative *hâj*) significantly improves the grammaticality of these sentences, as shown in (52).

- (51) a. **Rót k^han nùŋ k^huan hâ: k^hon nâŋ.*
 car CL one should five CL.person sit
 ‘A car should seat five people.’
- b. **Rót k^han nùŋ ?àat.cà/nâa.cà hâ: k^hon nâŋ.*
 car CL one may five CL.person sit
 ‘A car may seat five people.’
- c. **Rót k^han nùŋ t^hŋ hâ: k^hon nâŋ.*
 car CL one must five CL.person sit
 ‘A car must seat five people.’

- (52) a. *Rót kʰan nùŋ kʰuan hâj hâ: kʰon nâŋ.*
 car CL one should allow five CL.person sit
 ‘A car should allow five people to sit in.’
 b. *Rót kʰan nùŋ ʔàat.cà/nâa.cà hâj hâ: kʰon nâŋ.*
 car CL one may allow five CL.person sit
 ‘A car may allow five people to sit in.’
 c. *Rót kʰan nùŋ tŋ hâj hâ: kʰon nâŋ.*
 car CL one must allow five CL.person sit
 ‘A car must allow five people to sit in.’

5. DIRECTIONALITY OF HEAD MOVEMENT

It is established in T&P that head movement in Vietnamese and Mandarin flip-flop sentences results in V adjoining rightwards to M. This direction of adjunction is apparently problematic in view of Kayne’s (1994) Antisymmetry, which requires that the moving head adjoins to the left of the head hosting it. Adopting Chomsky (2001), Tsai (2020) suggests that the verb raising we are dealing with is a PF-movement, thus considerations normally applied to narrow syntax are not of concern. The notion of Late Insertion (Marantz 1997) is instead appealed to, by which the M-V order is established after syntax (during the process of Spell-Out) from a language-specific Vocabulary List.

For Mandarin, rightward adjunction is in fact the only option. To wit, only the M-V order (5b), and not the V-M order (53), is allowed. At first blush, a similar claim for Vietnamese and Thai seems to meet with obvious counterexamples, however. That is, the main verb appears to be found preceding *đủ* (54a) and *pʰɔ:* (54b) as well.

- (53) a. **Yi-bu che zuo gou wu-ge ren.*
 one-CL car sit enough five-CL person
 b. *Yi-bu che gou zuo wu-ge ren.* (= (5b))
 one-CL car enough sit five-CL person
 ‘A car seats five people.’

- (54) a. *Một chiếc xe ngồi đủ năm người.*
 a CL car sit enough five person
 ‘A car seats as many as (= up to) five people.’
 (= The greatest capacity a car reaches is five people.)
- b. *Rót k’han nùŋ nâŋ p’ɔː hâː k’ɔn.*
 car CL one sit enough five CL.person
 ‘A car seats as many as (= up to) five people.’
 (= The greatest capacity a car reaches is five people.)

Despite an apparent similarity in the capacity reading, we suggest that the sequence [*sit enough*] in (54) resembles a Resultative Verbal compound with a potential modal reading (cf. Wu 2004): Vietnamese *đủ* and Thai *p’ɔː* realize the Result component to be potentially achieved by the activity the Verb denotes. *Đủ* and *p’ɔː* in this context are therefore still non-modal, and we can maintain that no rightward adjunction of V to M occurs. Further evidence to dismiss a leftward adjunction of V to *đủ* comes from the potential presence of an element like the negative marker *không* ‘no(t)’ in (55) which scopes over *đủ*. In such a configuration, *không* legitimately intervenes between *đủ* and the preceding V *ngồi* ‘sit’, which shows that V does not attach to *đủ* in the manner of V-to-M raising. To compare, no intervening element is permitted between *đủ* and the verb to its right in the mono-clausal flip sentence (5a).

- (55) *Một chiếc xe ngồi không đủ năm người.*
 a CL car sit NEG enough five person
 ‘A car seats not as many as five people.’
 (= The greatest capacity a car reaches is less than five people.)

Note that V also never appears to the left of other modal verbs such as *có thể* ‘can’, *phải* ‘must’, and *nên* ‘should’, see (56). This is straightforward if all modal verbs behave alike when it comes to verb raising, and instances of *đủ* following the verb are indeed non-modal in nature.

- (56) **Một chiếc xe ngồi có thể/nên / phải năm người.*
a CL car sit can should must five person
Intended: ‘A car can/should/must seat five people.’

The last piece of evidence concerns the height of modal interpretation. That is, while *có thể* ‘can’ has both an epistemic and a capacity reading if V precedes *đủ* (57a), only the epistemic reading survives if V follows it (57b). The prohibition of a capacity reading in (57b) is straightforward if *đủ* in the pre-verbal position is already a root modal, and the preceding *có thể* is simply too high in the functional spine to be interpreted with a capacity reading. Conversely, *đủ* in the post-verbal position is lexical, which explains why *có thể* can be interpreted as low as a root modal.

- (57) a. *Một chiếc xe có thể ngồi đủ năm người.*
a CL car can sit enough five person
‘A car can seat as many as (= up to) five people.’
(*có thể*: epistemic/capacity)
- b. *Một chiếc xe có thể đủ ngồi năm người.*
a CL car can enough sit five person
‘A car can seat five people.’
(*có thể*: epistemic/*capacity)

All in all, we maintain that V-to-M raising in Vietnamese flip-flop sentences results in rightward adjunction only. In the presence of a modal auxiliary (both overt and covert), V invariably attaches to its right.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper draws the insights from T&P, and provides a fine-grained analysis based upon the interaction between verb movement and covert modals from the vantage point of comparative syntax. We offer a rationale for postulating covert modals to motivate the V-to-M analysis of Vietnamese flip-flop sentences. It is further argued that the mono/bi-clausal distinction between flip sentences is a necessity when apparent verb-raising is observed, and that rightward adjunction is the sole option

Trần Phan and Wei-Tien Dylan Tsai

for V-to-M raising. Finally, we explore the cross-linguistic aspect of this study, and present evidence from Thai to support our syntactic treatments of flip-flop constructions across languages.

REFERENCES

- Barrie, Michael and Christine Pittman. 2010. Mandatives: Lessons on raising/control diagnostics. *The Canadian Journal of Linguistics/La revue canadienne de linguistique* 55(1): 131-138.
- Bhatt, Rajesh. 2006. *Covert Modality in Non-finite Contexts*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Burukina, Irina. 2020. Mandative verbs and deontic modals in Russian: Between obligatory control and overt embedded subjects. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 5(1): 54. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.905>
- Cheng, Lisa L.-S. and Rint Sybesma. 2003. Forked modality. *Linguistics in the Netherlands* 20(1): 13-23.
- Cheng, Lisa L.-S. and Rint Sybesma. 2004. Postverbal 'can' in Cantonese (and Hakka) and Agree. *Lingua* 114(4): 419-445.
- Chierchia, Gennaro and Sally McConnell-Ginet. 2000. *Meaning and Grammar: An Introduction to Semantics* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2013. Problems of projection. *Lingua* 130: 33-49.
- Comrie, Bernard. 1974. The second dative: A transformational approach. In *Slavic transformational syntax*, eds. R. D. Brecht and C. V. Chvany, pp.123-150. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications.
- Coniglio, Marco and Iulia Zegrean. 2012. Notes on overt and covert modality in Italian and Romanian. In *Covert Patterns of Modality*, eds. Werner Abraham and Elisabeth Leiss, pp.79-105. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Grosz, Patrick. 2011. *German particles, modality, and the semantics of imperatives*. In *Proceedings of NELS 39*, Cambridge, pp.323-336.
- Grosz, Patrick. 2014. Modal particles in rationale clauses and related constructions. In *Modes of Modality: Modality, Typology, and Universal Grammar*, eds. Elisabeth Leiss and Werner Abraham, pp.263-290. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Kayne, Richard S. 1994. *The Antisymmetry of Syntax*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Kratzer, Angelika. 1981. The notional category of modality. In *Words, worlds, and contexts: New approaches in word semantics*, eds. Hans J. Eikmeyer and Hannes Rieser, pp.38-74. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Landau, Idan. 2013. *Control in generative grammar: A research companion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lekakou, Maria. 2005. *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated: The Semantics of Middles and Its Cross-linguistic Realization*. London: University College London.
- Menéndez-Benito, Paula. 2013. On dispositional sentences. In *Genericity*, eds. Alda Mari, Claire Beyssade and Fabio del Prete, pp.276-292. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Phan, Trần. 2023. Trinity in unity: asking *what*, *how* and *why* with *sao* in Vietnamese. *Taiwan Journal of Linguistics* 21(2): 129-175.
- Portner, Paul. 2009. *Modality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tsai, W.-T. Dylan. 2001. On Subject Specificity and Theory of Syntax-Semantics Interface. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 10(2): 129-168.

Trần Phan and Wei-Tien Dylan Tsai

- Tsai, W.-T. Dylan. 2012. High applicatives are not high enough: a cartographic solution. *Lingua Sinica* 4(2): 1-21.
- Tsai, W.-T. Dylan. 2019. Mood Prominence and Silent Modals of Chinese [漢語的語氣顯著性和隱性模態範疇]. *Linguistic Sciences* [語言科學] 18(1): 1-12.
- Tsai, W.-T. Dylan. 2020. Cartographic Approach, Head Movement and Flip-flop Sentences [製圖理論、中心語移位和乾坤挪移句]. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research* [外語教學與研究] 52(2): 176-85.
- Tsai, W.-T. Dylan and Trần Phan. 2022. On the optionality of verb raising: A view from flip-flop sentences in Chinese and Vietnamese. *Nanzan Linguistics* 17: 189-202.
- Trinh, Tue. 2017. When is not not not? *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 26: 411-438.
- Wu, C.-H. Teresa. 2004. On *de/bu* and the syntactic nature of resultative verbal compounding. *Language and Linguistics* 5(1): 271-329.
- Wurmbrand, Susi. 2001. *Infinitives: Restructuring and clause structure*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Zhao, Chen and W.-T. Dylan Tsai. 2023. A Labeling Approach to Chinese Flip-Flop Sentences [貼標理論視角下的漢語乾坤挪移句考察]. *Modern Foreign Languages* [現代外語] 46(2): 147-161.

[Received 16 June 2022; revised 21 Dec 2022; accepted 27 Feb 2023]

Trần Phan
Graduate Institute of Linguistics
National Tsing Hua University
101, Sec. 2, Guangfu Rd., East Dist., Hsinchu, Taiwan
tranphan@gapp.nthu.edu.tw

Wei-Tien Dylan Tsai
Graduate Institute of Linguistics
National Tsing Hua University
101, Sec. 2, Guangfu Rd., East Dist., Hsinchu, Taiwan
wttsai@mx.nthu.edu.tw

越南語中的動詞提升，隱性模態詞及乾坤挪移句—
一個比較句法的觀點

潘玉陳、蔡維天
國立清華大學

本文從比較句法的角度切入，來研究越南語中乾坤挪移句的動詞提升及隱性模態詞。我們發現動詞移位跟此類結構的模態性有密切的關連，主句、從句皆然。此外，證據顯示某些乾句的變體其實是由雙層句構組成，而動詞到模態詞的移位則屬右向加接。最後在實證層次上，我們也從泰語找到了平行現象來支持本文的句法分析。

關鍵字：動詞移位、隱性模態詞、乾坤挪移句、比較句法、越南語