

The connective word-tool *là* in the Vietnamese classical language

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Mini-Nôm Conference
April 11-12, 2008
Temple University

I Abstract

The following communication is drawn from the thesis entitled «Lexicological and Syntactic Approach of the Classical Vietnamese Language in Demotic Writing from Texts Translated from Classical Chinese (文言 *VĂN NGÔN*)». Our method is based on the structural likeness between the classical Vietnamese and Chinese, which allows us to deduce the syntactic rules of Vietnamese from those of Chinese based on translation which we called “minimal”. We call “minimal” a translation which brings minimal modifications to the Chinese text to transform a Chinese sentence into a correct Vietnamese sentence. We found this type of translations in two texts: 佛說大報父母恩重逕 *Phật thuyết đại báo phụ mẫu ân trọng kinh*, «Sûtra mattering on the big recognition owed to parents for their beneficial effects» and 新編傳奇漫錄 *Tân biên truyện kỳ mạn lục*, «Vast collection of marvellous stories».

1.

là; (N.; 羅) is an inter-molecular, complex word-tool, seldom returning in a definite manner a definite Chinese word-tool. It appears as a linking verb creating an equal connexion between two nominal or verbal molecules.

無不樹之國.

chẳng có nước nào **là** chẳng được gậy dựng.

Any country is a country which I could redress

When *là* links two verbal molecules, it can be structurally replaced by word-tool *mà*.

2.

là can, in this particular function, translate 為 for its value of linking verb and 是 for its late value of linking verb

何者名為五胞

chi óc **là** năm năm.

What is called the five organs?

即知是男子之身

chín hay **là** đũa con trai.

So, we know they are boys.

3.

The connecting function of *là* in a nominal clause extends, in a clause with verbal predicate, to a function of putting in apposition. This connecting function can be compared, *mutatis mutandis*, to the determiner/determinatum connective function of *chung* or of Japanese word-tool の, which assures in the modern Japanese language both functions of apposition and determiner/determinatum connective functions.

殺已降之子嬰

giết kẻ đã đầu là người Tử Anh.

You sent in death Tu Anh, the one who had already surrendered.

4.

là can occupy a similar position in that of *chung* by preceding the connected molecules:

南無已報親恩佛

kính lễ là Bụt đã trả áng nợ ơn.

Greeting to Buddha who has already paid his debt of recognition towards its parents.

In conclusion, we can say that *là* is a basic connecting word which establishes no hierarchy between the connected molecules. This word-tool appears connected with 之 / *chung* and 而 / *mà* which link while establishing a hierarchy.

là is in fact a linking word, in the most general sense, that assures a simple function of “séquençage”.

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