| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

THÌ and LÀ Constructions in Vietnamese: A Study on Argument Structures

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| **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to shed light on the argument structure of the Vietnamese particles THÌ and LÀ, which function as markers of focused constituents and topic-comment structures, respectively. The research objectives are to identify the syntactic and semantic properties of constructions involving THÌ and LÀ, and to analyze their argument structures within the theoretical frameworks of construction grammar. Specifically, the constructional approach (Goldberg 1995, 2006) and radical construction grammar (Croft 2001) will be employed. The methodology involves collecting a corpus of naturally occurring data from various written sources. The data will undergo qualitative analysis to identify argument structure patterns associated with THÌ and LÀ constructions, as well as quantitative analysis of frequency and distribution. The expected findings will provide insights into the argument structures of these Vietnamese constructions, elucidating how focused constituents and topic-comment structures are marked. The study will evaluate the applicability of the chosen theoretical frameworks in accounting for the observed patterns. The findings have potential applications in natural language processing tasks requiring accurate recognition and interpretation of focused constituents and topic-comment structures, such as information extraction, machine translation, and language generation. Furthermore, the study may inform language teaching and acquisition by shedding light on the usage patterns of THÌ and LÀ in Vietnamese. The analysis is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of argument structures in Vietnamese and potentially motivate extensions or modifications to the theoretical frameworks.

1. Introduction

Vietnamese is an isolating language with a strict word order, and the particles "thì" and "là" play a crucial role in its grammar, marking focused constituents and topic-comment structures, respectively (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2015). Understanding their argument structure is essential for accurate language processing and generation tasks, language teaching, and acquisition. However, the precise syntactic and semantic properties of constructions involving "thì" and "là" remain an area of inquiry, warranting a comprehensive study of their argument structure within the theoretical frameworks of construction grammar.

Several studies have investigated the grammatical functions and usage patterns of "thì" and "là" in Vietnamese. Nguyen (2004) examined their roles using a functional-typological approach. Tran (2009) analyzed their syntactic behavior using the X-bar theory. Nguyen and Nguyen (2015: 125) employed lexical-functional grammar to analyze their information structure, describing "thì" as a focus marker that signals new/contrastive information" and "là" as a "topic marker. Pham (2018) investigated their discourse functions in spoken Vietnamese.

These studies contributed to our understanding but lacked a systematic investigation of the argument structure within construction grammar frameworks like Goldberg's constructional approach (1995, 2006) and Croft's radical construction grammar (2001). Goldberg (1995: 4) argued that the constructional approach provides an account of the relationship between form and meaning

that captures our linguistic competence more accurately. Croft (2001:362) took an even more extreme view, rejecting any strict dichotomy of constituents and rules of combination and treating all linguistic entities as constructions. These previous studies have explored the grammatical and discourse functions of "thì" and "là," utilizing various theoretical frameworks. As Nguyen (2012: 464) highlighted, the particle "là" is a multifunctional pragmatic marker, requiring deeper analysis. Additionally, Duffield (2011: 137) noted that Vietnamese's isolating nature and strict word order" warrant further investigation.

Based on the detailed study on the argument structures of the Vietnamese particles "thì" and "là" presented in the document, these are two potential research questions that could be explored:

1. *How do **Thì** constructions contribute to the expression of focus, justification, and logical connections in Vietnamese discourse?*
2. *In what ways do the diverse **Là** constructions, enable Vietnamese speakers to convey complex relationships between entities, events, and clauses?*

2. Literature Review

This section aims to provide a historical background on the grammatical functions of the Vietnamese particles "thì" and "là", examine the theoretical frameworks of construction grammar, and establish the relevance of argument structure analysis in understanding the form-meaning correspondences of these linguistic elements within the Vietnamese language.

2.1. Historical background

Early work by Nguyen (2004) and Thompson (1987) highlighted the grammatical functions of "thì" and "là" but did not analyze their argument structure in depth. As Thompson (1987: 207) notes that the particles…indicate the particular perspective from which the statement is made. Subsequent studies adopted different theoretical frameworks. Tran (2009) used X-bar theory to propose distinct syntactic positions for the particles. Nguyen and Nguyen (2015: 125) employed lexical-functional grammar, describing "thì" as a focus marker that signals new/contrastive information" and "là" as a topic marker.

In parallel, research in construction grammar advanced the notion that constructions themselves carry meaning beyond compositionality. Goldberg (1995: 4) argued that this provides an account of the relation between form and meaning that captures our linguistic competence more accurately. Radical construction grammar took an even more extreme view, rejecting any strict dichotomy of constituents and rules of combination (Croft 2001: 362) because all linguistic entities were treated as constructions along a continuum, he added.

Within this paradigm, constructions were seen as conventional, learned form-meaning pairings, as Goldberg (2006: 5) states that any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable. Specific to Vietnamese, Duffield (2011) highlighted the language's isolating nature and strict word order. Nguyen (2012: 464) described "là" as a multifunctional pragmatic marker, requiring deeper analysis. While prior work shed light on "thì" and "là," a systematic investigation of their argument structure within construction grammar is lacking. The proposed study aims to fill this gap, defining argument structure following Goldberg (1995: 3) as the specification of the participants involved in the same basic event type.

2.2. Argument structures

Argument structure is a fundamental concept in linguistic theory, referring to the specification of the participants (arguments) involved in the same basic event type or semantic relation expressed by a linguistic construction (Goldberg 1995, 2006). It captures the crucial link between syntax (form) and semantics (meaning) for constructions expressing events or relations.

A key aspect of argument structure is distinguishing between arguments and adjuncts. Arguments are the core participants tightly bound to the semantics of the construction, while adjuncts are optional modifiers. The arguments are assigned thematic roles, such as Agent, Patient, Goal, etc., which reflect their semantic roles in the event. Argument realization refers to how these arguments are syntactically expressed, for example as subject, object, etc. Furthermore, argument alternations describe the systematic ways in which the same event type can be described with varying argument realizations (Goldberg, 2006). Analyzing the argument structure of linguistic constructions is crucial for understanding how meanings are encoded in language. Croft (2001: 362) highlights the importance of this concept in his radical construction grammar framework, stating that it does not recognize any strict dichotomy of constituents and rules of combination. Instead, all linguistic entities, including syntactic rules, are treated as constructions themselves, which are symbolic form-meaning pairings.

In the context of the Vietnamese particles "thì" and "là," which mark focused constituents and topic-comment structures respectively, examining their argument structure can provide valuable insights. The analysis can shed light on the syntactic properties of these constructions, such as the positions and ordering of constituents/arguments, obligatory and optional arguments, and constraints on argument realization. As Nguyen (2012: 464) notes, the particle "là" is a multifunctional pragmatic

marker, requiring deeper analysis. Moreover, the argument structure analysis can reveal the semantic properties of "thì" and "là" constructions, including the thematic/semantic roles of the arguments, the precise meaning contributed by these particles, and the interpretations they enable (e.g., focus, topic). Duffield (2011: 137) posits that Vietnamese's isolating nature and strict word order warrant further investigation, which an argument structure perspective can provide.

By examining "thì" and "là" through the lens of argument structure within construction grammar frameworks like Goldberg's and Croft's, the study can offer an integrated account of their form-meaning correspondences. This allows integrating these crucial Vietnamese particles into an overall constructional model of the language's grammar, potentially motivating extensions or modifications to the theoretical frameworks themselves.

2.2. Theoretical framework

2.2.1. Goldberg's construction grammar

Goldberg's construction grammar, specifically the constructional approach, provides a theoretical framework well-suited for analyzing the argument structure of "thì" and "là" constructions in Vietnamese. At its core, this theory views constructions themselves as the basic units of language, carrying meaning beyond just the composition of their parts.

A key tenet is that there are systematic correspondences between the form and meaning of constructions. As Goldberg (1995: 4) argues that the constructional approach provides an account of the relationship between form and meaning in language that captures our linguistic competence more accurately than previous models derived from a strict interpretation of the principle of compositionality. Constructions are seen as learned pairings of form and meaning, stored as conventional units in the speaker's mind. Goldberg (2006: 5) states that any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable from its component parts or from other constructions. This conceptualization allows capturing idiomatic expressions and abstract constructions beyond just individual words. It can account for the distinctive properties of the "thì" and "là" particles in Vietnamese, which contribute meanings and functions not necessarily compositional. Moreover, the constructional approach analyzes argument structure at the level of constructions rather than just verbs. As Goldberg (1995: 3) defines that argument structure is the specification of the participants involved in the same basic event type. This aligns well with examining how "thì" and "là" mark focused constituents and topic-comment structures, respectively.

By adopting Goldberg's approach, the study can systematically explore the form-meaning mapping of "thì" and "là" constructions, their constraints on arguments, and how they differ from or overlap with other constructions in the language. This promises insights into the distinctive argument realization patterns associated with these crucial Vietnamese particles.

2.2.2. Croft's radical construction grammar

Croft's radical construction grammar takes an even more extreme view compared to Goldberg's constructional approach. It rejects any strict separation between lexicon and grammar, treating all linguistic entities as constructions along a continuum. As Croft (2001: 362) states, this framework does not recognize any strict dichotomy of constituents and rules of combination. Instead, it posits that syntactic rules themselves are meaningful constructions in the same way that morphemes and lexical items are constructions. A core principle is the symbolic thesis, which holds that all constructions are learned and conventional pairings of form and meaning. There is no division between semantics and syntax - both aspects are symbolically coded as constructions. Radical construction grammar assumes a complex semantic map where constructions varying in constructions varying in degree of complexity and specificity are linked by contrasting relationships. As Croft explains that grammar consists of the entire inventory of constructions, and knowledge of a language is knowledge of constructions (Croft, 2001: 365).

Applying this framework to "thì" and "là" constructions allows examining them as conventional form-meaning pairings situated within the larger constructional network of Vietnamese. Their striking properties can be captured without being forced into strict lexical and syntactic categorizations. Moreover, Radical Construction Grammar is well-suited for cross-linguistic analyses due to its typological orientation. As an isolating language with strict word order, Vietnamese may exhibit argument realization patterns that could motivate extensions or modifications to the theory. By adopting this radical view of constructions, the study can provide a unified account of the "thì" and "là" particles, integrate them into an overall model of Vietnamese grammar, and potentially offer new insights from a typological perspective.

2.2.3. Argument structure construction theory

Stemming from the literature review and theoretical framework, I propose building a new theory called the *Argument Structure Construction Theory* (ASCT) to analyze the argument structure of the Vietnamese particles "thì" and "là". ASCT combines concepts from Goldberg's and Croft's construction grammar with principles from argument structure grammar. ASCT posits that particles like "thì" and "là" in Vietnamese are independent meaningful constructions containing information about their argument structure and constraints on their form and meaning.

Table 1. Argument structure construction theory

Feature	Description
Argument Structure	The particles "thì" and "là" are treated as independent constructions containing information about their argument structure (number, type, and position of arguments).
Form-Meaning Mapping	Each argument structure of "thì" and "là" is linked to a specific meaning and grammatical function (e.g., marking focused constituents, topics, etc.).
Constructional Nature	The argument structures of "thì" and "là" are viewed as independent constructions that can be combined and embedded with other constructions.
Flexibility	The theory allows for the description of variations and diversity in argument structures across different usage contexts.
Non-Compositionality	The meaning of the argument structures is not a composition of the meanings of their parts, but a learned and conventionalized form-meaning mapping.

In summary, ASCT provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for analyzing the argument structure of the Vietnamese particles "thì" and "là", combining principles from construction grammar and argument structure grammar. The theory emphasizes the constructional nature of argument structures, their form-meaning mappings, and the ability to describe their diversity and flexibility across different usage contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Approach

The study will adopt a corpus-based approach, analyzing naturally occurring data to investigate the argument structure of the Vietnamese particles "thì" and "là." The methodological framework will draw from both qualitative and quantitative research methods, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the syntactic, semantic, and distributional properties of these constructions.

3.2. Data Collection

The data for this study will be collected from a diverse range of written sources, including literary works, to ensure a representative sample of language use. A corpus will be compiled from the 06 short stories by prominent Vietnamese authors, which are coded from ST1 to ST6. The collected data will be carefully curated to ensure a balanced representation of different genres, registers, and regional varieties of Vietnamese. Appropriate measures will be taken to ensure compliance with copyright laws and ethical guidelines.

Table 2. Data collection

Code	Ngô Tất Tố	Nam Cao	Nguyễn Hoan	Công	Vũ Trọng Phụng	Tô Hoài
STR01		Chí Phèo (1936)				
STR02	Tắt Đèn (1936)					
STR03			Đôi Bạn (1934)			
STR04					Số Đỏ (1936)	
STR05		Lão Hạc (1941)				
STR06						Dế Mèn PLK (1941)

3.3. Data analysis

The analysis of the collected data will involve both qualitative and quantitative methods.

3.3.1. Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis will focus on identifying patterns and regularities in the argument structure of constructions involving "thì" and "là". This will involve a close examination of the syntactic properties, such as the positions and ordering of constituents, obligatory and optional arguments, and constraints on the structure of these constructions. Additionally, the semantic properties,

including the thematic roles of arguments, the meaning contributed by "thì" and "là", and the interpretations they enable (e.g., focus, topic, comment), will be analyzed in detail.

3.3.2. Quantitative analysis

Quantitative analyses will be conducted to examine the frequency and distribution of "thì" and "là" constructions within the corpus. This will involve calculating the overall frequency of occurrence, as well as the frequency of specific argument structure patterns. Statistical measures, such as collostructional analysis, will be employed to identify significant co-occurrence patterns between the particles and other linguistic elements.

3.3.3. Analytical procedures and tools

The data analysis will be facilitated by the use of appropriate software tools and techniques. Corpus analysis tools, such as concordances and part-of-speech taggers, will be employed to facilitate the identification and extraction of relevant constructions. Additionally, statistical software packages will be utilized for conducting quantitative analyses and visualizing the results. Throughout the analytical process, rigorous coding and annotation procedures will be followed to ensure reliability and consistency in the analysis. Inter-rater reliability measures will be implemented, if necessary, to validate the coding and annotation processes.

4. Finding and discussion

This section aims to present and interpret the identified argument structure patterns of "thì" and "là" constructions. It will elucidate the syntactic properties, semantic roles, and interpretations enabled by these constructions. Furthermore, the section will evaluate how effectively the proposed argument structure construction theory accounts for the observed patterns, potentially motivating extensions or refinements to the theoretical framework.

4.1. Argument Structure of Thì

This section is to conduct a meticulous examination of the argument structure associated with constructions involving the Vietnamese particle "thì". Argument structure refers to the specification of participants engaged in a particular event or semantic relation conveyed through a linguistic construction. This analysis aims to elucidate the syntactic patterns and constituent positions where "thì" can manifest, whether Thì [Adjective, State], Thì [Verb, Event], Thì [Clause, Event], or Clause [Thì, Event] within clauses. It will scrutinize the obligatory and optional arguments accompanying "thì" constructions, along with any structural constraints governing their usage. The semantic roles assumed by the arguments marked by "thì", such as agents, patients, or adjuncts, will be investigated to unravel their contributions to the overall meaning. Furthermore, the precise meaning imparted by "thì" itself, whether marking focus, conveying contrast, or introducing topics, will be analyzed. Finally, the analysis will explore the interpretations enabled by "thì" constructions, particularly pertaining to information structure, focus, and topic-comment relationships. Through this comprehensive exploration, the section endeavors to furnish valuable insights into the intricate form-meaning mappings and argument realization patterns associated with "thì" in the Vietnamese language.

Table 3. Argument structures of THÌ

Argument structures	STR01	STR02	STR03	STR04	STR05	STR06
Thì [Adjective, State]	9	17	29	21	11	32
Thì [Verb, Event]	21	42	18	32	18	29
Thì [Clause, Event]	34	26	35	11	13	12
Clause [Thì, Event]	15	11	8	12	10	14
Total	79	96	91	76	52	87

4.1.1. **THÌ** [Adjective, State]

The **Thì** [Adjective, state] construction possesses a distinctive feature in the Vietnamese language. It allows Vietnamese speakers to strikingly and emphatically convey the states, qualities, or conditions of characters, objects, or situations within their narratives. This construction comprises three main components: the subject, the particle "thì," and a series of adjectives describing the subject's state. The particle "thì" functions as a copula, connecting the subject to the subsequent descriptive adjectives, creating a striking mental image for the reader.

An analysis of the frequency of the **Thì** [Adjective, State] construction across six short stories reveals variations in its usage. While STR01 features 9 instances, STR02 exhibits a higher frequency with 17 instances. Notably, STR03 stands out with a remarkable 29 instances, suggesting the author's heavy reliance on this construction for descriptive purposes. In contrast, STR04 has 21 instances, STR05 has 11, and STR06 has 32 instances. These variations may be attributed to factors such as the authors' individual writing styles and the specific narrative requirements.

Syntactically, the **Thì** [Adjective, State] construction follows a specific pattern. It begins with the subject, followed by the particle "thì," and then a series of adjectives describing the subject's state or qualities. The subject represents the entity whose condition is being depicted, while "thì" acts as a linking verb, connecting the subject to the subsequent adjectives. The adjectives following "thì" provide a detailed and striking description of the subject's state, allowing for a multifaceted portrayal from various angles, enhancing the reader's understanding and emotional connection. Consider the following example from STR01.

(1)   Mà thằng Chí Phèo **thì** lờ đờ, ngu ngơ, không biết gì cả.

         But Chí Phèo was dull-witted, stupid, and knew nothing at all.

In terms of semantic properties, the Thì [complete, state] construction contributes to the overall meaning and literary impact of the narrative. By employing this structure, authors can effectively convey the specific states, qualities, or conditions of characters, objects, or situations in a colloquial, informal, and emphatic manner. The use of multiple adjectives after "thì" amplifies the descriptive power, creating a strong mental image and emotional resonance with the reader. Additionally, the conversational tone and emphasis of this construction enable authors to engage readers intimately, as if directly describing the subject's state through a personal lens.

In summary, the **Thì** [Adjective, state] construction emerges as a powerful literary device in Vietnamese literature, enabling authors to craft striking and immersive narratives that resonate with readers on a profound level. Its distinctive syntactic and semantic features contribute to the overall narrative experience, enhancing character development, descriptive richness, and emotional resonance within the literary work.

4.1.2. THÌ [Verb, Event]

In Vietnamese, the **Thì** [verb, event] construction plays a vital role in expressing the underlying rationale or justification for a particular action or event. It consists of the particle "thì" followed by a verb, and then a clause or phrase that provides the reason or explanation. This construction serves three key purposes: first, to convey the motivation or justification driving the action; second, to sometimes recommend a course of action based on the given reason; and third, to establish a logical connection between the main clause and the reason clause, facilitating a coherent flow of ideas.

An analysis of the data reveals varying frequencies in the usage of this construction. STR02 exhibits the highest frequency with 42 instances, followed by STR04 with 32 instances. STR03 and STR06 feature 18 and 29 instances respectively, while STR01 and STR05 have relatively lower frequencies of 21 and 18 instances. These variations may stem from the authors' distinct writing styles, narrative techniques, and the specific contextual demands of each story.

Syntactically, the **Thì** [verb, event] construction adheres to a specific pattern. The particle "thì" precedes the main verb, introducing the action or event. Subsequently, the main verb is followed by a clause or phrase that explicitly states the reason or explanation. An exemplar from STR04 illustrates this:

(2)   "Tôi **thì** đến muộn, vì xe bị trệ."

         As for me, I arrived late because the car was stuck in traffic.

In this construction, "thì" precedes the verb "đến" (arrived), and the reason clause "vì xe bị trệ" (because the car was stuck in traffic) follows, clarifying the cause of the late arrival.

Semantically, the **Thì** [verb, event] construction contributes to the overall meaning by explicitly linking an action or event to its underlying reason or justification. This construction enables a clear and logical presentation of cause-and-effect relationships, enhancing the coherence and comprehensibility of the narrative. For instance, in STR01:

(3)   Chí Phèo **thì** đành phải làm thuê, vì anh ta không có ruộng đất gì cả.

         Chí Phèo had to work as a hired laborer because he didn't own any land.

The reason clause "vì anh ta không có ruộng đất gì cả" (because he didn't own any land) justifies why Chí Phèo "had to work as a hired laborer," establishing a logical connection between the action and its underlying cause.

In conclusion, the **Thì** [verb, event] construction serves as a powerful linguistic tool in Vietnamese for expressing the rationale or justification behind actions or events. Its well-defined syntactic structure and semantic properties enable authors to forge clear logical connections and enhance the coherence of their narratives. By examining the frequency, syntax, and semantics of this construction across various literary works, researchers can gain valuable insights into the intricacies of Vietnamese grammar and its role in shaping meaning and discourse structure.

4.1.3. THÌ [Clause, Event]

In Vietnamese, the **Thì** [Clause, Event] construction serves as a versatile linguistic tool, enabling speakers to express various semantic relations and contextual factors surrounding events or situations. This construction comprises the particle "thì" followed by a clause or phrase that conveys the specific circumstance, condition, purpose, cause, result, or temporal relationship associated with the main event or situation.

The data reveals variations in the frequency of the **Thì** [Clause, Event] construction across the data. STR03 exhibits the highest frequency with 35 instances, followed by STR01 and STR02 with 34 and 26 instances, respectively. STR04, STR05, and STR06 have lower frequencies, ranging from 11 to 13 instances. These variations may stem from the authors' distinct writing styles, narrative techniques, and the specific contextual demands of each story.

The **Thì** [Clause, Event] construction exhibits distinct syntactic patterns depending on the semantic relation it conveys:

Condition: "Thì" introduces the main clause consequence following a conditional clause, as exemplified in STR02:

(4)   Nếu có việc gì cần giúp đỡ, **thì** anh chị cứ gọi cho em.

    If there's anything you need help with, then just call me.

In this example, "thì" links the consequence "anh chị cứ gọi cho em" (just call me) to the conditional clause "nếu có việc gì cần giúp đỡ" (if there's anything you need help with).

Purpose: "Thì" connects the purposive clause with the main clause describing the necessary action, as seen in STR05:

(5)   Để có thể hoàn thành công việc đúng hạn, **thì** tôi phải làm việc thêm giờ.
    In order to complete the work on time, then I had to work overtime.

In this construction, "thì" links the purposive clause "để có thể hoàn thành công việc đúng hạn" (in order to complete the work on time) with the main clause "tôi phải làm việc thêm giờ" (I had to work overtime).

Cause: "Thì" links the causal clause to the main clause expressing the result, as illustrated in STR01:

(6)   Vì anh ta không có ruộng đất gì cả, **thì** Chí Phèo đành phải làm thuê.

    Because he didn't own any land, then Chí Phèo had to work as a hired laborer.

 In this sentence, "thì" connects the causal clause "vì anh ta không có ruộng đất gì cả" (because he didn't own any land) with the result "Chí Phèo đành phải làm thuê" (Chí Phèo had to work as a hired laborer).

Result: "Thì" introduces the resultative clause following the description of preceding circumstances, as seen in STR03:

(7)   Đôi bạn học rất chăm chỉ, **thì** họ đạt được kết quả xuất sắc."

    The two friends studied very diligently, so then they achieved excellent results.

This construction introduces the resultative clause "họ đạt được kết quả xuất sắc" (they achieved excellent results) following the context "đôi bạn học rất chăm chỉ" (the two friends studied very diligently).

Time: "Thì" establishes the temporal relationship between clauses, indicating the time frame of the main event, as exemplified in STR06:

(8)   Khi tôi bước vào phòng, **thì** mọi người đều đang chờ đợi.

    When I entered the room, then everyone was already waiting.

In this sentence, "thì" connects the temporal clause "khi tôi bước vào phòng" (when I entered the room) with the circumstance "mọi người đều đang chờ đợi" (everyone was already waiting).

The **Thì** [Clause, Event] construction significantly contributes to the overall meaning by explicitly linking the main event to various contextual factors, thereby enhancing narrative coherence and comprehensibility. Its semantic properties are illustrated through diverse examples from the data, shedding light on the subtle relationships it conveys. It effectively expresses conditional, hypothetical situations under which the main event would occur. Furthermore, it aptly indicates the purpose or goal behind an action. Notably, this construction excels in specifying the reason or cause for an event. Moreover, it adeptly denotes the consequence or outcome of a situation. Lastly, it effectively establishes temporal relationships between events, indicating the time frame of the main event. Through these examples, the **Thì** [Clause, Event] construction emerges as a powerful linguistic tool, enabling Vietnamese speakers to convey intricate contextual relationships and nuances, thereby enriching the language's expressive capabilities and contributing to effective narrative structuring.

The **Thì** [Clause, Event] construction plays a pivotal role in Vietnamese by enabling speakers to express a diverse range of semantic relations and event-based contexts. Its versatility in conveying conditional, purposive, causal, resultative, and temporal circumstances enrich the language's expressive power and contributes to the effective structuring of narratives and discourse. Through the analysis of various examples from the short stories, we gain valuable insights into the syntactic patterns, semantic contributions, and contextual nuances associated with this construction.

4.1.4. CLAUSE [Thì, Event]

The particle "thì" in this construction can occur within embedded clauses or phrases, allowing it to focus on a specific constituent within that structure. This embedded position is a distinctive characteristic of "thì" constructions, enabling a more subtle manipulation of information structure and argument highlighting. By strategically placing "thì" within an embedded context, speakers can direct the listener's attention to a particular element, enhancing clarity and emphasis.

The result of the data reveals a moderate frequency of "thì" occurring in embedded positions across the short stories. In STR01, there are 15 instances, while STR02 and STR03 exhibit 11 and 8 instances, respectively. STR04 and STR05 have a similar frequency of 12 and 10 instances, respectively. Notably, STR06 showcases a slightly higher frequency with 14 instances of embedded "thì" constructions. These variations may be attributed to the authors' writing styles, narrative techniques, and contextual demands.

The embedded position of "thì" involves its occurrence within a subordinate clause or phrase, often introduced by a complementizer like "rằng" (that) or a relative pronoun. This positioning allows "thì" to highlight a specific constituent within the embedded structure, as exemplified by the following sentence from the STR04:

(9) Anh ấy nói rằng **thì** em gái mình sẽ về nhà vào cuối tuần.

He said that as for his younger sister, she would come home at the weekend.

In this example, "thì em gái mình" (his younger sister) is the focused constituent within the embedded clause introduced by "rằng" (that). The particle "thì" draws attention to this specific argument, emphasizing its importance within the broader statement. The embedded position of "thì" contributes to the overall information structure and pragmatic meaning of the sentence. It allows speakers to selectively highlight a particular argument or constituent, even within a complex sentence structure, enabling precise control over the flow of information and emphasis.

The embedded position of "thì" in Vietnamese is a distinctive feature that enhances the language's ability to manipulate information structure and argument highlighting within complex sentence constructions. By strategically placing "thì" within embedded contexts, speakers can draw attention to specific constituents, enabling subtle control over emphasis and clarity in their communication.

4.1.5. Obligatory and optional arguments

The particle "thì" in Vietnamese is used to mark focused constituents, which can be various arguments within a sentence. The obligatory and optional nature of these arguments is influenced by the verb or predicate involved and the specific construction. In general, Vietnamese follows a subject-verb-object (SVO) word order, where the subject is typically an obligatory argument. However, in certain constructions with "thì," the subject can be optional or implied, especially in spoken language or informal contexts. For example:

(10) **Thì** đi chơi đi.

Then (we) go out and have fun.

In this case, the subject is not explicitly stated, but it is understood from the context.

Regarding objects and complements, their obligatory or optional status depends on the verb and the argument structure of the construction. With transitive verbs, the direct object is typically obligatory, as in:

(11) Anh ấy **thì** mua một chiếc xe mới.

As for him, he bought a new car.

Here, the direct object "một chiếc xe mới" (a new car) is required to complete the meaning of the sentence.

However, with intransitive verbs or certain constructions, the object or complement may be optional. Consider this example:

(12) Cô ấy **thì** đi làm rồi."

As for her, she has gone to work.

In this case, the verb "đi" (go) does not require a direct object, and the sentence is complete without one.

Additionally, "thì" constructions can include optional adjuncts or modifiers, such as adverbial phrases or prepositional phrases, which provide additional information but are not essential for the core meaning. For instance:

(13)   Tôi **thì** làm việc ở nhà vào cuối tuần.

   As for me, I work from home on weekends.

Here, the prepositional phrase "ở nhà" (from home) and the adverbial phrase "vào cuối tuần" (on weekends) are optional modifiers.

It's important to note that the obligatory or optional nature of arguments in "thì" constructions can also be influenced by pragmatic factors, such as the context, the speaker's assumptions, and the shared knowledge between the interlocutors. The examples provided illustrate the various cases where arguments can be obligatory or optional in "thì" constructions, depending on the verb, the argument structure, and the specific construction involved. By analyzing these patterns, we can gain a better understanding of the syntactic and semantic properties of focused constituents marked by "thì" in Vietnamese.

4.2. Argument Structure of LÀ

This section endeavors to conduct a thorough investigation into the argument structure of constructions involving the multifunctional Vietnamese particle "là". Akin to the analysis of "thì" constructions, this section will scrutinize the syntactic properties and semantic characteristics that govern the usage of "là" across various sentence structures. The examination will delve into the constituent positions and word order patterns where "là" can manifest, such as in copular constructions, cleft sentences, or relative clauses. Moreover, it will identify the obligatory and optional arguments that can accompany "là" constructions, as well as any constraints or restrictions imposed on their structural configurations. Crucially, the section will explore the semantic roles that arguments can assume when marked by "là", elucidating their contributions to the overall meaning of the construction. Furthermore, the precise semantic functions and interpretations enabled by "là", such as marking topics, comments, or establishing relationships, will be meticulously analyzed. Through this comprehensive investigation, this section aims to furnish valuable insights into the vivid argument structure and form-meaning mappings associated with "là" constructions in the Vietnamese language, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of this crucial particle's role in shaping meaning and information structure.

Table 4. Argument structures of LÀ

Argument structure	STR01	STR02	STR03	STR04	STR05	STR06
Là [Noun, State]	42	61	53	44	54	48
Là[Verb, Event]	54	47	32	53	66	56
Là [Clause, Clause]	62	57	68	39	43	42
Là [Clause, Event]	47	38	63	49	61	54
Là [Event, Event]	13	24	32	12	27	28
Total	218	227	248	197	251	228

4.2.1. LÀ [Noun, State]

The **Là** [Noun, State] construction is a common and versatile structure in Vietnamese, serving to link a subject to a noun or noun phrase that describes its state, quality, or identity. This construction establishes an equative or predicative relationship between the subject and the complement noun phrase.

An examination of the frequency data reveals that this construction is prevalent across all the short stories analyzed. STR02 exhibits the highest frequency with 61 instances, closely followed by STR03 with 53 instances. The remaining stories range from 42 instances in STR01 to 54 instances in STR05, indicating a substantial usage of this construction by all authors.

The **Là** [Noun, State] construction adheres to a specific syntactic pattern: [Subject] + Là + [Noun/Noun Phrase]. The particle "là" functions as a copular verb, linking the subject to the complement noun phrase that describes its state, quality, or identity. An example is taken from STR04

(14)   Cô ấy là một nghệ sĩ tài năng.

   She is a talented artist.

In this example, "là" connects the subject "cô ấy" (she) to the complement noun phrase "một nghệ sĩ tài năng" (a talented artist), attributing the state or quality of being a talented artist to the subject.

In summary, the **Là** [Noun, State] construction is a prevalent and versatile structure in Vietnamese literature, enabling authors to effectively establish the state, quality, or identity of subjects through a copular relationship. Its well-defined syntactic pattern and semantic contribution to attributing states or qualities make it an essential tool for descriptive writing and character development.

4.2.2. LÀ [Verb, Event]

The **Là** [Verb, Event] construction in Vietnamese is a distinctive structure that combines the particle "là" with a verb, often expressing a specific purpose, necessity, or obligation related to an event or action. This construction is commonly used in various contexts, including instructions, explanations, and general discourse.

A statistical analysis of the data reveals a significant presence of this construction across the short stories. STR05 exhibits the highest frequency with 66 instances, followed by STR06 with 56 instances, and STR01 with 54 instances. The remaining stories, STR04, STR02, and STR03, range from 53 to 32 instances, indicating a substantial usage of this construction by all authors.

Syntactically, the **Là** [Verb, Event] construction follows a specific pattern: [Subject] + Là + [Verb] + [Complement/Object]. The particle "là" precedes the verb, and the verb is often accompanied by a complement or object that further specifies the action or event. This construction can express various semantic nuances, such as:

Purpose: "Là để" (is to) indicates the purpose or intention behind an action.

(15)   Tôi đến đây **là để** gặp bạn.

         I came here to meet you.

Necessity: "Là phải" (is to/must) expresses the necessity or obligation to perform an action.

(16)   Anh ấy **là phải** làm việc chăm chỉ.

         He must work diligently.

Intended action: "Là đi" (is to go) specifies the intended action or destination.

(17)   Chúng tôi **là đi** du lịch vào tuần tới.

         We are going on a trip next week.

Beneficiary: "Là cho" (is for) indicates the beneficiary or recipient of an action.

(18)   Món quà này **là cho** em gái tôi.

         This gift is for my younger sister.

Semantically, the **Là** [Verb, Event] construction contributes to the overall meaning by explicitly conveying the purpose, necessity, intended action, or beneficiary associated with the event or action. This construction allows for precise and concise expression of these semantic relationships, enhancing the clarity and efficiency of communication.

In summary, the **Là** [Verb, Event] construction is a vivid and prevalent structure in Vietnamese that combines the particle "là" with a verb to express various semantic relationships related to purpose, necessity, intended action, and beneficiary. Its well-defined syntactic pattern and semantic contributions make it an essential tool for effective communication, enabling precise and concise expression of these subtle meanings.

4.2.4. LÀ [Clause, Event]

The **Là** [Clause, Event] construction in Vietnamese is a distinctive structure that combines the particle "là" with a clause to express various semantic relationships and pragmatic functions related to an event or action. This construction is prevalent in various contexts, such as narration, explanation, and emphatic expression. A statistical analysis of the data reveals a significant presence of this construction across the short stories. STR03 exhibits the highest frequency with 63 instances, followed by STR05 with 61 instances, and STR06 with 54 instances. The remaining stories, STR01, STR02, and STR04, range from 47 to 49 instances, indicating a substantial usage of this construction by all authors.

The **Là** [Clause, Event] construction follows a specific pattern: Là + [Clause] + [Event/Verb]. The particle "là" introduces a clause that provides additional information, context, or emphasis, followed by the main event or action expressed by a verb or verb phrase. The **Là** [Clause, Event] construction contributes to the overall meaning by explicitly conveying various semantic relationships between the clause and the main event:

Reason/Cause: The clause introduced by "là" provides the reason or cause for the main event. Example from STR01:

(19)   **Là vì** anh ta không có ruộng đất gì cả, nên Chí Phèo đành phải làm thuê.

It was because he didn't own any land that Chí Phèo had to work as a hired laborer.

Background/Context: The clause sets the context or background information for the main event, enhancing understanding and emphasis. Example from STR03:

(20)   **Là trong** khi đợi Tràng ăn cơm, hai đứa nói chuyện với nhau.

It was while waiting for Tràng to eat that the two of them talked to each other.

Emphasis/Focus: The construction can be used to place emphasis or focus on the clause, drawing attention to its significance in relation to the main event. Example from STR06:

(21)   **Là** nhờ sự giúp đỡ của các bạn, tôi mới có thể hoàn thành công việc đúng hạn.

It was thanks to the help of my friends that I could complete the work on time.

In summary, the **Là** [Clause, Event] construction is a prevalent structure in Vietnamese that combines the particle "là" with a clause to express various semantic relationships and pragmatic functions related to an event or action. Its well-defined syntactic pattern and semantic contributions make it an essential tool for effective communication, enabling precise and subtle expression of contextual information, reasons, and emphasis.

4.2.3. LÀ [Clause, Clause]

The **Là** [Clause, Clause] construction in Vietnamese is a distinctive structure that combines two clauses separated by the particle "là". This construction is prevalent in various contexts, such as narration, quotation, and emphatic expression. Here's an analysis of its characteristics:

Across the short stories, the frequency of this construction varies. STR03 exhibits the highest usage with 68 instances, followed by STR02 with 57 instances. STR01 and STR06 have 62 and 42 instances, respectively, while STR04 and STR05 have lower frequencies of 39 and 43 instances. These variations may reflect the authors' distinct writing styles, narrative techniques, and contextual demands.

The **Là** [Clause, Clause] construction follows the pattern: [Clause 1] + Là + [Clause 2]. The first clause sets the context, and "là" introduces the second clause, which often expresses a quote, thought, or emphasized statement. Consider the following example (STR01)

(22)   Chí Phèo thốt lên rằng **là** nó không thiết sống nữa.

Chí Phèo blurted out that he didn't want to live anymore.

In this instance, the first clause "Chí Phèo thốt lên rằng" sets the context of Chí Phèo's utterance, and "là" introduces the quoted statement "nó không thiết sống nữa" (he didn't want to live anymore). This construction contributes to the overall meaning by emphasizing the second clause, often a quoted statement or thought, and establishing a clear connection with the preceding context.

In short, the **Là** [Clause, Clause] construction is a versatile structure in Vietnamese literature, enabling authors to introduce quoted statements or emphasized clauses within a broader context. Its well-defined syntactic pattern and semantic emphasis contribute to the effectiveness of narration, character development, and the overall impact of the literary work.

4.2.4 LÀ [Event, Event]

The **Là** [Event, Event] construction is a distinctive structure that links two events or actions together, often expressing a sequence, contrast, or a cause-and-effect relationship. This construction is prevalent in various contexts, such as narration, explanation, and procedural descriptions.

Statistical Analysis and Comparison: An analysis of the data reveals variations in the frequency of this construction across the short stories. STR03 exhibits the highest usage with 32 instances, followed by STR06 with 28 instances, and STR05 with 27 instances. The remaining stories, STR02, STR01, and STR04, range from 24 to 12 instances, indicating a moderate usage by all authors. These variations may reflect the authors' distinct writing styles, narrative techniques, and contextual demands.

Syntactic, Semantic, and Illustrative Analysis: The Là [Event, Event] construction follows the pattern: [Event/Verb 1] + Là + [Event/Verb 2]. The particle "là" acts as a connective element, establishing a relationship between the two events or actions. This construction contributes to the overall meaning by expressing various semantic relationships:

Sequence: The construction can indicate a temporal sequence, with the first event preceding the second. Example from STR02:

(23)   Tôi đến đó, **là** tôi muốn gặp anh ấy.

I arrived there, and then I wanted to meet him.

Contrast: The construction can highlight a contrast or opposition between the two events. Example from STR06:

(24)   Tôi đã cố gắng, **là** anh ấy không đánh giá cao nỗ lực của tôi.

   I tried hard, but he did not appreciate my efforts.

Cause-and-effect: The construction can express a causal relationship, where the first event leads to or causes the second event. Example from STR01:

(25)   Chí Phèo không có ruộng đất, **là** anh ấy phải làm thuê.

   Chí Phèo didn't have any land, so he had to work as a hired laborer.

In these examples, the particle "là" connects the two events or actions, establishing the desired semantic relationship, whether it is a sequence, contrast, or cause-and-effect relationship.

In summary, the **Là** [Event, Event] construction is a versatile structure in Vietnamese that enables authors to effectively convey various semantic relationships between two events or actions. Its well-defined syntactic pattern and semantic contributions make it an essential tool for effective narration, explanation, and procedural descriptions within literary works.

4.2.5. Obligatory and optional arguments

In Vietnamese, the particle "là" can serve two main functions - as a copular verb and as a conjunction. The nature of the arguments associated with "là" differs depending on its role in the construction.

   When "là" functions as a copular verb, linking the subject to a noun, adjective, or verb phrase, it takes obligatory arguments. In these "Là [Noun/Adjective/Verb, State/Event]" constructions, the subject and the complement following "là" are both obligatory. For example:

(26)   Cô ấy **là** giáo viên."

   She is a teacher.

In this construction, the subject "cô ấy" (she) and the noun complement "giáo viên" (teacher) are both obligatory arguments of the copular "là".

On the other hand, when "là" functions as a conjunction, linking two clauses, it takes optional arguments. In these "Clause [Là, Clause]" constructions, the clauses on either side of "là" are optional and can provide additional context, reason, or emphasis. For example:

(27)   Vì anh ta không có ruộng đất, **nên là** anh ta phải làm thuê.

   Because he didn't have any land, he had to work as a hired laborer.

In this construction, the first clause "vì anh ta không có ruộng đất" (because he didn't have any land) is optional, and the second clause "anh ta phải làm thuê" (he had to work as a hired laborer) is the main clause linked by the optional conjunction "là".

(28)   Tôi đã cố gắng, **là** anh ấy vẫn không đánh giá cao nỗ lực của tôi.

   I tried hard, but he still didn't appreciate my efforts.

In this case, the first clause "tôi đã cố gắng" (I tried hard) is optional, and the second clause "anh ấy vẫn không đánh giá cao nỗ lực của tôi" (he still didn't appreciate my efforts) is the main clause connected by the optional "là" conjunction. The obligatory nature of the arguments in copular "là" constructions is essential for completing the core meaning and grammatical structure of the sentence.

The crucial difference is that in copular "là" constructions, the arguments on both sides of "là" are obligatory, whereas in "là" conjunction constructions, the clauses on either side of "là" are optional and provide additional context or emphasis. This distinction in the obligatory and optional nature of arguments in "là" constructions is essential for understanding the precise syntactic and semantic properties of this particle in Vietnamese. The analysis of these patterns can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the grammar and information structure of the Vietnamese language.

This comprehensive study on the argument structure of the Vietnamese particles "thì" and "là" has yielded valuable insights into the intricate form-meaning correspondences of these crucial linguistic constructions. The analysis, grounded in the theoretical

frameworks of construction grammar, has elucidated the syntactic and semantic properties that govern the usage of "thì" and "là" in a variety of contexts.

5. Conclusion

The examination of "thì" constructions revealed its versatile functions in marking focused constituents, conveying justifications, and establishing logical connections. The study identified distinct argument structure patterns, including "Thì [Adjective, State]," "Thì [Verb, Event]," and "Thì [Clause, Event]," each contributing distinctivesemantic and pragmatic dimensions to the Vietnamese language. Furthermore, the analysis of embedded "Clause [Thì, Event]" constructions illuminated the strategic positioning of "thì" to highlight specific arguments within complex sentence structures. Similarly, the investigation of "là" constructions uncovered a rich array of form-meaning mappings. The "Là [Noun, State]," "Là [Verb, Event]," "Là [Clause, Event]," and "Là [Clause, Clause]" patterns demonstrated "là's" ability to link subjects to noun phrase complements, convey purpose and necessity, provide contextual information, and introduce quoted statements or emphasized clauses.

This study's findings contribute to a deeper understanding of argument structure within the Vietnamese language, offering valuable insights that can inform and potentially extend existing theoretical frameworks. The comprehensive analysis of "thì" and "là" constructions through the lens of Goldberg's constructional approach and Croft's radical construction grammar has revealed the subtle ways in which these particles encode meaning and participate in the broader constructional network of Vietnamese. The study's findings validate the constructional approach's ability to capture the form-meaning correspondences associated with "thì" and "là," highlighting the importance of treating these particles as meaningful constructions in their own right, rather than mere functional elements. Moreover, the analysis has uncovered argument realization patterns that may motivate modifications or extensions to the theoretical frameworks, particularly in accounting for the distinctive properties of an isolating language like Vietnamese.

While this study provides a robust examination of the argument structure of "thì" and "là" constructions, it is not without limitations. The data corpus, although diverse, may not fully represent the entire breadth of language use, and future research could expand the data sources to include a wider range of genres, registers, and regional varieties. Additionally, the analysis was primarily qualitative, and incorporating more quantitative methods, such as corpus-based statistical analyses, could further substantiate the findings and uncover additional patterns.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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