"ON"- ONE PREPOSITION, TWO NDERSTANDINGS (IN ENGLISH &VIETNAMESE)

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Abstract: *This paper meticulously examines the English preposition "ON" and its diverse semantic functions, encompassing spatial relations (surface contact, above), temporal markers (specific days, dates), and abstract connections (topic, state). Through a comparative analysis with Vietnamese, the study explores how these varied meanings are rendered, often requiring distinct prepositions and grammatical structures. We analyze core English usages of "ON" and map them against Vietnamese equivalents like* trên*,* ở*,* vào*, and locative particles. The findings highlight significant areas of semantic divergence and convergence, revealing instances where a single "ON" necessitates multiple Vietnamese translations depending on context. This underscores the crucial need to move beyond direct word-for-word translation and consider the nuanced semantic scope of "ON" for accurate cross-linguistic understanding and effective communication between English and Vietnamese speakers and translators. This analysis contributes to a deeper appreciation of prepositional semantics in cross-linguistic contexts.*
Keywords*: Differences, English, Indicating place, preposition "on", Similarities, Vietnamese.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Prepositions, though often small in form, play a crucial role in establishing relationships between elements within a sentence, conveying vital information about location, time, manner, and other abstract concepts. Among these seemingly simple yet semantically rich words, the English preposition "ON" stands out for its versatility and wide array of applications. From indicating physical contact ("the book is *on* the table") to specifying temporal points ("*on* Monday") and denoting topics of discussion ("a report *on* climate change"), "ON" demonstrates a remarkable semantic breadth. However, this apparent simplicity can pose significant challenges for learners and translators, particularly when dealing with languages that may employ multiple distinct lexical items or grammatical structures to express the various meanings encapsulated by a single English preposition.

This paper delves into the intricate world of the English preposition "ON" and seeks to unravel its diverse semantic functions. Recognizing that a single form can often mask a multitude of underlying concepts, we aim to explore the core meanings of "ON" in English and subsequently investigate how these meanings are rendered in Vietnamese. Unlike English, which frequently relies on a limited set of prepositions with broad semantic coverage, Vietnamese often utilizes a more granular system, employing a wider range of prepositions and locative particles to express spatial, temporal, and abstract relationships. By undertaking a comparative analysis between English and Vietnamese, focusing specifically on the translation and conceptualization of "ON", this study seeks to illuminate

the potential areas of semantic overlap and divergence between the two languages. Ultimately, this investigation aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of cross-linguistic equivalence and the complexities involved in mastering and translating seemingly straightforward grammatical elements like the preposition "ON".

2. THE SEMANTIC RANGE OF "ON" IN ENGLISH

The English preposition "ON" stands as a testament to the semantic versatility often found within seemingly simple linguistic units. Its core spatial meaning denotes contact with and support from a surface, exemplified by phrases like "the cup is *on* the saucer" or "the dust *on* the shelf." Extending from this primary sense, "ON" can also indicate a position along a linear feature or boundary, such as "the city lies *on* the coast" or "the address is *on* Elm Street," suggesting a non-volumetric containment or adjacency. Furthermore, it conveys a vertical relationship where one entity is situated above another and typically supported by it, as illustrated by "the painting hangs *on* the wall" or "the bird perched *on* the roof." This spatial dimension also encompasses being located on a specific floor ("the office is *on* the third floor") or being part of a larger surface or area ("the stain is *on* the carpet").

Beyond its spatial functions, "ON" plays a significant role in marking temporal relationships. It is the standard preposition for specifying particular days of the week ("*on* Tuesday"), specific dates ("*on* the twenty-first of June"), and designated holidays ("*on* Christmas Day"). It can also indicate a point in time when an event occurs or a state begins ("*on* arrival," "*on* hearing the news"). Moreover, "ON" can denote a continuous action or state occurring during a specific time period or condition ("*on* duty," "*on* vacation").

The abstract uses of "ON" further underscore its semantic richness. It serves to introduce the topic or subject of discussion, study, or writing ("a documentary *on* ancient civilizations," "a paper *on* quantum physics"). It can also indicate a state or condition that someone or something is in ("*on* strike," "*on* fire," "*on* sale"). Furthermore, "ON" specifies the means or mode of transportation ("*on* the bus," "*on* foot," "*on* the internet"). It can also express dependence or reliance ("living *on* a pension," "surviving *on* very little sleep"). Finally, "ON" can denote a basis or reason for something ("based *on* evidence," "acting *on* advice"). This intricate web of spatial, temporal, and abstract meanings associated with the single preposition "ON" highlights its fundamental importance in constructing and interpreting meaning within the English language, often requiring careful contextual analysis for accurate understanding.

3. THE CORRESPONDING EXPRESSIONS AND CONCEPTUALIZATIONS RANGE OF "ON" IN VIETNAMESE

In Vietnamese, the semantic territory covered by the single English preposition "ON" is typically dispersed across a range of prepositions and locative particles, reflecting a more granular system for expressing spatial, temporal, and abstract relationships. For the spatial sense of surface contact, Vietnamese often employs *trên* or *ở trên* (literally 'ON top of'), as in "*quyển sách ở trên bàn*" (the book is ON the table). However, the more general sense of being located at or along a surface or linear feature might be expressed by *ở* (at, in), such as "*thành phố ở bờ sông*" (the city is ON the riverbank). For vertical positioning without direct contact, *trên* can also be used, but sometimes combined with directional indicators like *cao* (high) or *mặt* (surface). The concept of being on a specific floor is usually conveyed by *ở tầng* (at floor).

When denoting temporal relationships, Vietnamese frequently uses *vào* for specific days and dates ("*vào thứ Hai*" - ON Monday, "*vào ngày mười lăm tháng tư*" - on the

fifteenth of April). For indicating a point in time when something occurs, *khi* (when) or *lúc* (at the time of) are common, as in "*khi đến*" (on arrival). The abstract meanings of "ON" necessitate an even wider array of Vietnamese expressions. For topics of discussion, *về* (about) is typically used ("*bài báo về biến đổi khí hậu*" - a report on climate change). States or conditions are often expressed through verbs or adverbs rather than direct prepositional equivalents; for example, "*đình công*" (strike - verb) translates "on strike." Means of transportation are usually indicated by *bằng* or *đi bằng* (by means of), such as "*đi bằng xe buýt*" (ON the bus). Finally, the sense of being based on something is often conveyed by *dựa trên* (based on). This diverse range of Vietnamese equivalents illustrates that the semantic load carried by "ON" in English is distributed among several distinct linguistic units in Vietnamese, highlighting differing conceptualizations of these relationships across the two languages.

4. THE AREAS OF DIVERGENCE AND CONVERGENCE BETWEEN THE USAGE OF "ON" AND ITS VIETNAMESE COUNTERPARTS

The comparison of the English preposition "ON" and its Vietnamese equivalents reveals a complex interplay of convergence and, more notably, divergence in how each language conceptualizes and expresses fundamental relationships. This means that while there are some instances where "ON" and a specific Vietnamese word align in meaning, the ways English and Vietnamese speakers think about and express these basic connections often differ significantly. The broad semantic scope of "ON," encompassing various spatial, temporal, and abstract ideas, often demands nuanced, context-sensitive rendering in Vietnamese. This is because Vietnamese may not have a single equivalent word that covers all the meanings of "ON." Instead, translators and speakers must carefully consider the specific situation and choose the Vietnamese word or grammatical structure that best captures the intended meaning. This necessity for careful selection highlights fundamental differences in their prepositional systems – how each language uses prepositions to build meaning – and the underlying cognitive frameworks, or the ways of thinking, that shape how speakers of each language perceive and articulate these relationships.

This divergence extends beyond simple word-for-word substitution, profoundly impacting how each language structures fundamental concepts of space, time, and abstract connections. It's not just about finding a different word for "ON"; rather, the grammatical and conceptual frameworks for expressing these relationships differ. For example, consider expressing the idea of something being *on* a specific date. English directly uses "on Monday." Vietnamese, however, employs "VÀO thứ Hai," where "VÀO" has a broader meaning closer to "IN" or "AT" within a temporal context. This isn't just a different word; it reflects a slightly different way of framing the temporal relationship. English uses a preposition directly linked to the day, while Vietnamese uses a more general temporal marker.

While some overlaps in meaning (convergence) might offer an initial, seemingly straightforward path for translation – like both using a concept similar to "ON top of" in basic spatial descriptions – the more common differences (prevalent divergence) highlight that English and Vietnamese speakers approach and express these basic relationships through distinct cognitive lenses. These underlying differences in how each language conceptualizes these fundamental ideas necessitate a deeper understanding beyond simple vocabulary matching for accurate and natural communication. When looking at how both English and Vietnamese describe objects on surfaces, subtle differences in how they express this reveal underlying conceptual distinctions. While both languages recognize the