

# Grammars of Vietnamese Feminist Poems

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## Abstract

This study aimed to investigate grammars of Vietnamese Feminist Poems. Most of selected poems were from the book of Vietnamese Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the present (Thơ Nữ Việt Nam Từ xưa đến nay). The collected data was 30-item Vietnamese poems. The finding revealed that oral folk poems (Ca dao) were composed in free rhythms, without metrical rule. Lục bát form is a couplet linking a six-syllable line with an eight-syllable line. Song Thất Lục bát links of seven syllable lines as well as a six-eight couplet. It also uses tone named Bằng and Trắc. The grammar of Vietnamese poems is complicated. There is the omission of subjects in the poems. Phrases as noun phrases convey descriptive a lot of information. Moreover, adjective phrases describe detail within the noun phrase. As verb phrases can affect the way we relate to poems.

**Keywords:** Grammar; Vietnamese Feminist; Poem

## Introduction

Women poets during 1960-1990 in general, however, we see the desire to communicate and make sense of things as a major concern of the women poetry. A dominant theme is the relationship between the internal self and society, culture and politic (external). The nature of identity in women's poetry becomes an area of exploration rather than explication. The process of women's poetry is giving the silent voice. The writing collectives encouraged women's poetry to share their experiences,

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resulting in poetry that spoke on theme such as anger, isolation, hurt, motherhood and women identity. The focus on their sexuality and the female body, the relationship between the female ‘self’ and literary and cultural traditions in which we found abundantly in Vietnamese women’s poetry.

During 1970s and 1980s, personal experience was used as a basis for work that world unites reader and poet in recognition of the female situation: work, friendships... It began to more women’s poetry in a new direction. In creative process, language and syntax resulted in problems of accessibility for the readers. Poems that used personal experience as the basis for their exploration of language and identity offered critiques of society, gender and culture.

The women poets in 1970s-1980s separated themselves from the poetic tradition ‘woman as object’ by emphasis on their power rather than passivity.

The heart of the poetry in this period is the find an appropriate way to communicate with their readers. The poets challenged readers received wisdom and viewpoints that they presented. They used language to construct different perspectives. Range of voices reveal woman’s experiences as mothers, wives, daughters, loves, sadness, representatives of a particular culture. As readers, we need to think how language tells us. The women’s poetry in this period is interested in the ordinary and everyday life’s experiences by women. The poems presented new ways of seeing the world. Sharing on experiences, observation and imaginations that the poet explores what it means to be a woman.

For the diversity, themes had been the focus on the issues about themselves. The image of motherhood by balancing images of the sacred, innocent and pure with real life experiences of the sense of female.

The outstanding of language, style and tone, the language is marked by its everyday life. The poets are using the ordinary words to claim the value of women’s experiences and liberate their inner selves.

## Research Objective

To investigate the grammars in Vietnamese Feminist Poems.

## Research Hypothesis

Grammars in Vietnamese feminist poems build up to understand Vietnamese women’s cognition through their poems.

## Research Method

The sample was comprised of 30 selected poems in the book of Vietnamese Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the present (Thơ Nữ Việt Nam Từ xưa đến nay).

The research method designed for this study was a qualitative. The instrument used for collecting the data was 30-item Vietnamese poems constructed by the researchers.

For data analysis, the researcher grouped the revealed grammars in each poem by linguistics way such as tones, syntax etc. In addition, the researcher investigated the grammar in the name of literary field such as prosody and figure of speeches in each poem.

## Research Results

Vietnamese poetry has its own unique forms as: Cadao were composed in free rhythms, without metrical rule appeared in the period of the Chinese domination, 111B.C.to939. Cadao generally known as “sing freely”, which refers to the act of composition in which verse lines can be added without limit. Composers can link rhythms, word tones and meter when they composed. The poems of Cadao are quite short. Normally, its lyrics can be completed in one couplet. For example:

Ai      đưa      em      đến      chốn      này,  
Who      guides I-sister      to      place      here

Bên      kia      thì      núi,      bên      này      thì      sông  
Side      far      mountain      side      near      river

“Who guides me to this place, on the far side there is mountain, on the near side there is a river.”

Lục bát is a couplet linking a six-syllable line with an eight-syllable line. Lục bát is probably the most basic form of lyric poetry.

The appearance of Lục bát was composed in the long poetry such as Hoa Tiên composed by Nguyễn Huy TỰ, Thúy Kiều composed by Nguyễn Du, Lục Vân Tiên composed by Nguyễn Đình Chiểu etc.

Normally, Lục bát was composed by Nôm ideographic script. For example:

Phong lưu	rất	mực	hồng	quần,
-6				
Refined-mannered	very	ink	red	trouser

Xuân xanh	xấp xỉ	tới tuần	cập kê.	
-8				
Youthful age	about	arrive	marriageable	

Êm đềm	trướng rủ màn che,			
-6				
Quiet and gentle	hanging curtain			

Tường đông ong bướm đi về mặc ai.				
-8				
Wall butterflies and bees	go back	leave who	alone	

3) Song Thất Lục bát or double seven couplet which can form continuous links of seven syllable lines or which can be linked in rhyme, meter and tone with a six-eight couplet. Tone used named Bằng and alternate with the tone named Trắc.

For example:

Chàng đi buổi	thu sơ	năm ấy,	-7
Lad	go	when beginning of autumn	year that

Thu	năm về,	nào thấy	chàng về.	-7
Autumn	year return	no see	lad return	

Chàng đi,	đi chẳng	trở về,	-6
Lad	go	go no	return

Thu	về,	thiếp những	tê mê dạ sầu.	-8
Autumn	return	visit	but	senseless feel sad

In the table below, each tone in Vietnamese language is generated in two basic opposite tone as follow: high-low and bằng-trắc.

Table 1: Bằng and Trắc Tone

	Bằng	Trắc	
Cao (High)	Ngang ◌	Nga ~	Sắc /
Thấp (Low)	Huyền ◌	Hỏi ?	Nặng .

The use of the tone Bằng and Trắc can create the more beautiful sound in Vietnamese poetry.

Table 2: All kinds of Vietnamese poetry

The period of Poetry and songs	Folk poetry	Classic poetry	Modern poetry
The kinds of poetry			
The no.of syllables			
Non rhythm			
4	Đồng Dao <i>Children's song</i>		
5	Hát Giặm <i>Folk song</i>	Ngũ Ngôn <i>Five-word verse</i>	Thơ 5 Chữ <i>Five-word poem</i>
6			Thơ 6 Chữ <i>Six-word poem</i>
7		Thất Ngôn Đường Luật Bát Cú <i>The eight heptasyllabic line genre</i>	Thơ 7 Chữ <i>Seven-word poem</i>
8			Thơ 8 Chữ <i>Eight-word poem</i>
Rhythm			
6-8	Ca Dao <i>Popular song</i>	Truyện <i>Tale</i>	Thơ Lục Bát <i>Six-word verse</i>

			<i>Followed by an eight-word line metre poem</i>
7-7-6-8		Ngâm <i>Recite</i>	Thơ Song Thất Lục Bát <i>Seven-seven-six-eight word metre poem</i>
other	Hát Nói <i>Tell song</i>		

In Vietnam, literary arts began with a woman. In 40 C.E, Trưng Trắc recited her ‘Oat at Hát River’ in front of her officers while before began against the Chinese in six-eight meter:

Một xin rửa sạch giặc thù -6  
First please wash clean rebel enemy

Hai xin dựng lại nghiệp xưa họ Hùng -8  
Second please rebuild again Karma ancient Hùng’s family

Ba kéo oan ức lòng chồng -6  
Third otherwise injustice bottom husband

Bốn xin toàn vẹn sở công lành này -8  
Fourth please whole service labour this

The grammar of poetry is complicated. The omission of grammatical function words may run the sentence associate with the genre. This feature makes readers work hard to understand the development of each poem. The example sentence is the omission of subject in Vietnamese poem:

Qua cầu ngã nón trông cầu,...  
cross bridge way hat look bridge

‘crossing the bridge, tilting hat,...’

Phrases in the sentences can help the reader to understand how poets create meanings.

A Noun Phrase in poetry convey descriptive a lot of information in form. The poet focuses reader’s attention on a sequence of images like cinematic effect by creating a sense of atmosphere rather than describe events.

Gió mưa                      một trận      khéo                      vô tình...

Wind and rain    one    fall    possibly                      feelingless

‘Harsh winds and relentless rains drown...’

An Adjective Phrase, poets can choose to describe detail within the Noun Phrase.

Êm      êm                                      trướng      rủ      màn      che...

Quiet and gentle                      hanging curtain

‘Brought up well behind the modest curtain...’

As Verb Phrases provides references to tense, time scale, and modality. The use of tenses can affect the way we relate to poem.

Chònh      chành      như      nón      không      quai...

Roll                                      like      hat      no                      strap

‘Like a hat without a strap...’

In addition, there are the use of other grammars in the poems as follows:

A Simile is a figure of speech that compares two different things in an interesting way by using the word “như” in the poems.

Example:

Có      thương      thì      thương      cho      chắc,

Bằng      trực      trặc      thì      trực      trặc      cho      luôn.

Đừng      làm      như      con      thỏ      nọ      đứng      đầu      truông,

Khi      vui      dớn      bóng,      khi      buồn      dớn      trăng.

*If you love, do be definite,*

*If you squabble, trouble will surely trouble beget.*

*Don’t be a rabbit caught dazed in a thicket,*

*Chasing shadows when happy, the moon when beset.*

In this poem, the poet compares a rabbit to the person who has the unclear love. The poet uses the word “như” in her passage.

A Metaphor is a figure of speech which makes an implicit comparison between two things that are unrelated but share some common characteristics.

Example:

Yêu nhau chẳng lọ bạc vàng,  
Tình thân nghĩa thiết, xin chàng chớ quên!  
*Love erases thoughts of silver, gold,*  
*Love means great care, please always be aware!*

For the poem, the poet uses metaphor concept by comparing love to precious things (silver and gold).

A Personification is about imagination of poets to use the words of nonhuman things to be like humans.

Example:

Những ngày không gặp nhau  
Biển bạc đầu thương nhớ  
Những ngày không gặp nhau  
Lòng thuyền đau-rạn vỡ  
*The days they didn't meet*  
*The white-capped sea filled with longing;*  
*The days they didn't meet*  
*The boat's heart ached-and cracked.*

This poem shows the poet's imagination by using the words of thuyền (boat) and biển (sea) to be like humans such as lòng (heart) and thương nhớ (love, missing). These words are humans' characteristics.

A Hyperbole is a figure of speech that uses extreme exaggeration to show emphasis.

Example:

Hương thơm ấy thấm sâu vào lồng ngực  
Anh lên đường hương sẽ theo đi khắp  
Họ chia tay vẫn chẳng nói điều gì  
Mà hương thấm thơm mãi bước người đi.  
*That perfume fills his lungs.*



*Wherever he goes, it follows.  
They parted without a word,  
But a hidden perfume fills his steps.*

The poet uses a figure of hyperbole to show emphasis of the closeness of a lover's heart. It shows us know how much she loves.

An Alliteration is a series of words begin with the same consonant sound. It uses to emphasize something important that a poet would like to express.

Example:

*Non non, nước nước, mây mây,  
Why lots of mountains, water, clouds?*

This poem shows series of words begin with “n” and “m” sounds in order to emphasize how plenty they are.

## Research Discussion

Grammars in Vietnamese feminist poems are various. Besides the use of many prosodies and tones in each period, the poets also use grammars as the omission of subjects, adjective phrases, noun phrases as well as verb phrases in their works. For the varieties of figure of speeches, the feminist poets in each period show their common characteristics. Similes, metaphors, personifications, hyperboles and alliterations are used in most of poems.

These grammars are the value of Vietnamese feminist poems. They are not only the use of language following linguistics way but the value of cognitive processes in composing. If we have more opportunities to study various poem, we may find out the oneness of universal grammar from the diversity of poets' cultures.

## Research Suggestions

1. Researchers increase the size of population and samples for the generalizability.
2. Researchers construct a more detailed instrument using various poems from many languages and comparing them.

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