

# A STUDY OF “ON” PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES IN ENGLISH WITH REFERENCE TO VIETNAMESE EQUIVALENTS

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**Summary:** Prepositional phrases are essential characteristics of linguistics. There was significant attention paid to dealing with “on” prepositional phrases in teaching and learning English. As the title of the article indicates: A study of “on” prepositional phrases in English with reference to Vietnamese equivalents, the purpose of this study is to investigate the syntactic and semantic features of “on” prepositional phrases in English and Vietnamese equivalents. The research finds that “on” prepositional phrases function as an adverb, adjective, noun. They also denote time, location, weather ... Besides, “on” prepositions in English correspond to “trên, vào, bên” in Vietnamese. To carry out this research, the author used such methods as descriptive and analytical. In the end, the paper pointed out the similarities and differences between “on” prepositional phrases in English and Vietnamese equivalents in terms of syntactic and semantic features.

**Keywords:** ON prepositional phrases, Vietnamese equivalents, syntactic functions, semantic functions.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English is considered a global language that is used to communicate with people all over the world. However, it is not easy to perform English effectively and accurately. When learning English grammar, learners generally focus on word classes and phrases, namely nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, because they are essential and shared knowledge. Hence, prepositions are of minor significance because they are limited in number and their meaning in a sentence. Furthermore, it considers that all the senses of the prepositions and prepositional phrases are highly arbitrary and are not related to another one. Both the

dictionary and grammar books show many unrelated meanings of the preposition, prepositional phrase. In terms of syntactic function, prepositions are used to link nouns, noun phrases with other phrases in a sentence. They exist both in English and Vietnamese, but their characteristics and usages are quite different. Therefore, the mastery of English prepositions and prepositional phrases are not a massive problem for Vietnamese people if they study hard.

In teaching and learning English, considerable attention should be given to “on” prepositional phrases. It is because of their syntactic and semantic properties, as well as stylistic characteristics.

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Therefore, a successful way to master prepositional “on” phrases can help learners overcome their difficulties with English acquisition.

This paper aims to investigate the semantic and syntactic features of “on” prepositional phrases in English and the Vietnamese equivalents and find out the similarities and differences between “on” prepositional phrases in English and Vietnamese equivalents in terms of syntactic and semantic features.

The author has divided this paper into four main parts: introduction, literature review, comparison of “on” prepositional phrases in English and Vietnamese and conclusion. The first part shows the rationale of the study. The second part indicates the researcher’s opinion and some quotes from famous authors about prepositions, and prepositional phrases. The third part compares the similarities and differences in the function of “on” prepositional phrases in English and Vietnamese equivalents. Finally, it is the summary of this paper.

## II. DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Preposition in English

A preposition traditionally defines the first word of a phrase that shows the relationship between a noun and other structures in a sentence. Prepositions are words used in sentences with nouns to provide information about time, location, and other interactions concerning items and acts. According to Kerl (1862:32) and Curme (1935:87), “a preposition is a word that indicates a relation between the noun or pronoun it governs and another word, which may be a verb, an adjective, or another noun or pronoun”.

E.g.: He was dependent on his family.

The preposition ON is said to relate *his family* to the adjective *dependent*.

While Quirk et al. 1 (1985:657) state that a preposition expresses a relation between two entities, represented by the prepositional complement, the other is another part of a sentence.

E.g.: Mary, with several of her friends, went to the library yesterday.

The preposition *with* in this example expresses the relation between the prepositional complement *several of her friends* and the noun *Mary*.

### 2. Prepositional phrase

To define the prepositional phrase, Cobbet (2015:168) affirms about the form of the preposition that it is “an item that typically precedes a noun or a noun phrase to form a single constituent of structure – a prepositional phrase or prepositional group”. This definition is similar to many others because it explains prepositions by relating them to other categories. It is possible to understand the preposition as a relation between the noun phrase and previous structures. The phrases containing a preposition and the object it controls are prepositional phrases. According to Biber (2003), “prepositional phrases mostly consist of a preposition followed by a noun phrase, known as the prepositional complement. The preposition can be thought of as a link relating the noun phrase to preceding structures”. Similarly, Quirk (1972:263) defines prepositional phrase by claiming that “a prepositional phrase consists of a preposition followed by a prepositional complement, which is characteristically either a noun phrase or a clause (wh-clause or V-ing clause) in nominal function”. From these points, we are easy to define “on” prepositional phrases. They

are phrases begin with “on” preposition followed by a noun, a noun phrases.

E.g., on the chair, on time.

### 3. Comparison of “on” prepositional phrases in English and Vietnamese

#### 3.1. “ON” prepositional phrases in English

Prepositional phrases are a group of words that include a preposition, a noun, or pronoun, or any modifier of the object. Like the others, prepositional phrases play an essential role in constituting a sentence and have their functions. There are many kinds of prepositional phrase functions in English but in this paper, the author mentions two kinds of functions of prepositional phrases with ON: syntactic and semantic functions.

##### *Syntactic functions of “on” prepositional phrases*

When used in a sentence, the “on” prepositional phrase can function as an adverb, an adjective, and a noun. The following sub-sections study each function.

##### *“ON” prepositional phrase functioning as an adverb .*

An “on” prepositional phrase is used as an adverb, it modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb; it gives more information about when, where, why, how, under what condition, to what extent.

E.g.: The newspaper is on the table.

The prepositional phrase *on the table* tells where *the newspaper*. It is functioning as an adverb as a modifier of *is*.

##### *“ON” prepositional phrase functioning as an adjective.*

When an “on” prepositional phrase functions as an adjective phrase, it describes a noun or pronoun in the sentence. That means it will answer the

questions: what kind, how much, or how many.

E.g.: The book *on the shelf* belongs to my mother.

The prepositional phrase *on the shelf* tells which *book*. It is used as an adjective as a modifier of noun *book*.

##### *“ON” prepositional phrase functioning as a noun.*

In general, prepositional phrase and “ON” prepositional phrase functioning as a noun are rare to appear in a sentence. The function as a noun will usually be the subject of a sentence, and less often as a predicate noun renaming the subject.

E.g.: On the bed is where my cat is.

The prepositional phrase *on the bed* is the noun of this sentence. It is used as a noun that tells the position of *my cat*.

##### *Semantic functions of “on” prepositional phrases*

Besides the syntactic functions, prepositional phrases with “on” also have semantic functions that signify time, location, weather, and affiliation.

##### *“ON” prepositional phrases denoting time*

Prepositional phrases with “on” are used to discuss certain days of the week or portions of days of the week, specific dates, and special days.

E.g.: On Saturday there’s going to be a disco.

The prepositional phrase *on Saturday* includes the preposition *on* and the day of week *Saturday*, which indicates time.

Sometimes “on” prepositional phrases also indicate the required time or the exact minute.

E.g.: He is punctual; he always arrives on time.

She came back home at ten o’clock on the dot.

Both *on time* and *on the dot* in these above sentences are used to describe the exact stated or expected time.

*“ON” prepositional phrases denoting location*

“ON” prepositional phrases indicate location higher than something and touching it, an outdoor location, specific inside surface locations, surface contact, or location in a part of an area (the side, left, right, surface.)

E.g.: The pen is on the desk.

They have a barbecue on the balcony.

There is a picture on the ceiling.

The child pasted the picture on the page.

The apple tree is on the side of the house.

*“ON” prepositional phrases denoting weather*

Sometimes, the prepositional phrase with “on” is used to talk about types of days, periods of the day (lovely days, sunny mornings, humid nights, rainy weekends).

E.g.: We play cards on rainy weekends.

*“ON” prepositional phrases denoting affiliation*

“ON” combines with the part of an exclusive group (board, committee, jury, panel, team, council, crew, faculty, honor roll, list, payroll, squad, staff) to make prepositional phrases that mean affiliation.

E.g.: They have approximately 100 employees on the payroll.

The “on” prepositional phrase *the payroll* in this sentence consists of *on* preposition and an exclusive group *the payroll* that phrase means employed by a particular company.

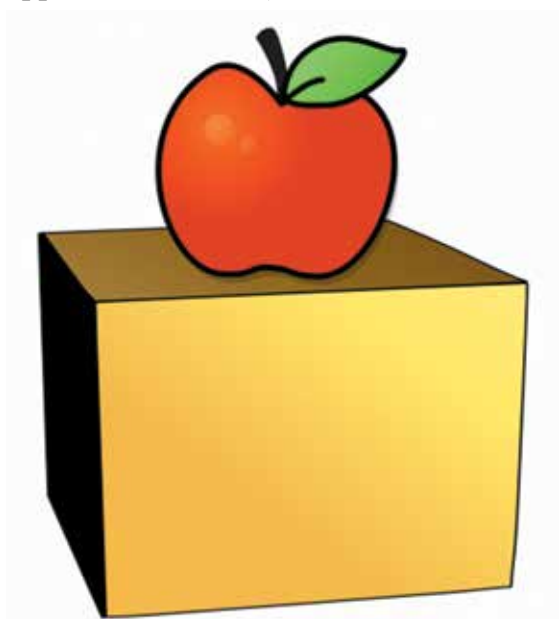
### 3.2. “ON” prepositional phrases in Vietnamese

Like English, Vietnamese also has a category of words analogous to prepositions. This category of Vietnamese words can be considered as prepositions in English. The Vietnamese preposition is considered a notional word that combines two words or two components that have the relationship of order. The following sub-classes will point out some meaning of the “on” preposition corresponding to Vietnamese.

*“ON” in English corresponds to “trên” in Vietnamese.*

In general, “ON” in English usually means “trên” in Vietnamese when it indicates the higher location in space comparing with a specific location or in a location in front of a particular location.

E.g.: Quả táo ở trên cái hộp. (The apple is on the box.)



*“ON” in English corresponds to “vào” in Vietnamese.*

In Vietnamese, “vào” also corresponds to “on” in English when in some roughly defined time or starting to become a

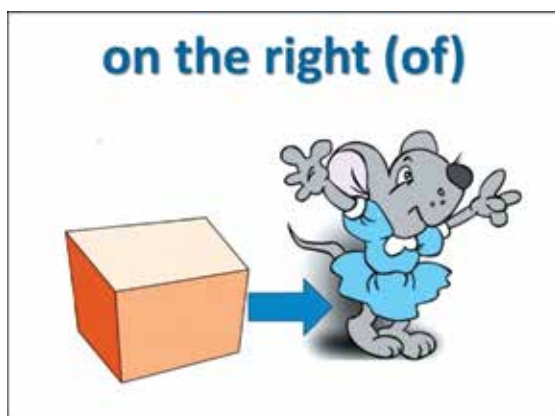
person of a certain organization.

E.g.: Chúng tôi sẽ gặp nhau vào ngày chủ nhật. (We will meet on Sunday)

“ON” in English corresponds to “bên” in Vietnamese

The “on” preposition in English resembles “bên” in Vietnamese when combined with the location in a part of an area or two opposite locations.

E.g.: Con chuột ở bên phải cái hộp. (The mouse is on the right of the box.)



### 3.3. Comparison

We can see some apparent similarities and differences with what was mentioned above about the function of “on” prepositional phrases in English and Vietnamese equivalents. The similarities and differences below will hopefully help English learners to avoid using prepositional phrases with ON incorrectly.

#### Similarities

Both “ON” prepositional phrases in English and Vietnamese have an adverb function in the sentence, which modifies the verb.

E.g.: Quả táo ở trên cái hộp. (The apple is on the box.)

The prepositional phrase *on the box* and the Vietnamese equivalents *trên cái hộp* are the adverbs which modify the verb *is* and *ở*.

Besides, they are also the prepositional phrases that denote the time and location in English and Vietnamese (“on my birthday” equivalents with “vào ngày sinh nhật của tôi”).

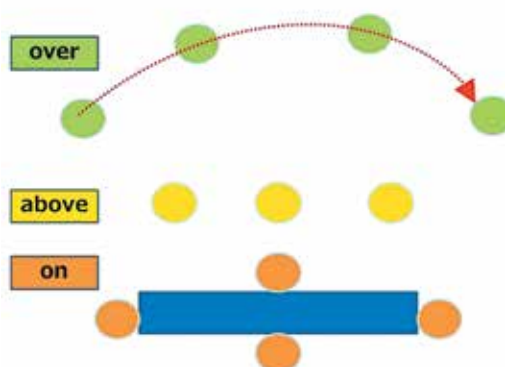
#### Differences

These are some of the differences between “on” prepositional phrases in English and Vietnamese equivalents.

Although the “on” prepositional phrases in English have the function as a noun in a sentence, in Vietnamese equivalents, they do not have this function.

E.g.: On the bed is where my cat is.

Besides, the structural meanings of “on” prepositional phrases have different features compared to the Vietnamese equivalents because of the structural variability of the positioning units in the language depending on the context. For example, in English, they distinguish among “on/over/above” while Vietnamese people use “trên”. When describing the “above” and “under” relation, Vietnamese people are not conscious of discriminate whether the trajectory is in the vertical reference of the landmark’s area. They just divide the space into two areas: *trên* (above)/ *dưới* (under).



### III. CONCLUSION

Prepositions and prepositional phrases are interesting categories of linguistics. However, many learners still feel confused and complicated about using them accurately, especially when there are some differences between prepositions in English and Vietnamese. In this paper, the researcher indicated that the syntactic functions of “on” prepositional phrases act as an adverb, adjective, noun. In terms of semantic features, they signify time, location, weather, affiliation. Besides, “on” prepositions in English

equate to “trên, vào, bên” in Vietnamese. In this way, we can see the similarities and differences in the function of “on” prepositional phrases in English and Vietnamese equivalents. Basing on what has been found in this study, the author hopes that it can partly help grasp the functions of “on” prepositional phrases in English and their characteristics with Vietnamese equivalents. From this point, they may find it interesting in grammar in general and in the prepositional phrase in particular and find effective methods to improve their English./.

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## NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ CỤM GIỚI TỪ “ON” TRONG TIẾNG ANH VỚI THAM CHIẾU TƯƠNG ĐƯƠNG TRONG TIẾNG VIỆT

Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Anh

**Tóm tắt:** Cụm giới từ phạm trù thiết yếu của ngôn ngữ học. Trong khi dạy và học tiếng Anh cụm giới từ “on” thường được nhắc tới nhiều. Đề tài: Nghiên cứu về các cụm giới từ “on” trong tiếng Anh tương đương trong tiếng Việt, nhằm chỉ ra các đặc điểm cú pháp và ngữ nghĩa của các cụm giới từ “on” trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt. Nghiên cứu nhận thấy rằng các cụm giới từ “on” có chức năng như một trạng từ, tính từ, danh từ. Chúng cũng biểu thị thời gian, địa điểm, thời tiết ... Ngoài ra, giới từ “on” trong tiếng Anh tương ứng với “trên, vào, bên” trong tiếng Việt. Để thực hiện nghiên cứu này, tác giả đã sử dụng các phương pháp như mô tả và phân tích. Cuối cùng, bài báo đã chỉ ra những điểm giống và khác nhau giữa các cụm giới từ “on” trong tiếng Anh và sự tương đương trong tiếng Việt về cả đặc điểm cú pháp và ngữ nghĩa.

**Từ khóa:** Cụm giới từ On, tương đương tiếng Việt, chức năng cú pháp, chức năng ngữ nghĩa.