

# “ON”- ONE PREPOSITION, TWO UNDERSTANDINGS ( 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.*

Nhận bài ngày 15.06.2025; gửi phản biện, chỉnh sửa, duyệt đăng ngày 28.8.2025

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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

basic idea of something being physically supported by a surface, English "ON" can also suggest that something is attached ("label on the bottle") or covering something else ("paint on the wall"). In these cases, Vietnamese might use the phrase *ở trên* (on top of) or even specific verbs that imply the action of attaching (*dán* - to stick). Similarly, when talking about locations along a line, like a coast ("city on the coast"), Vietnamese might use phrases like *ở ven* (AT the edge of) or *dọc theo* (along). Interestingly, when referring to specific floors ("ON the second floor" translates directly to *ở tầng hai*), the languages align. However, when "ON" is used more broadly for land or areas ("ON the island" becomes *ở đảo*), the sense of physical contact with a surface, which is often part of the meaning of "ON," is absent in Vietnamese. These variations demonstrate that even when there seems to be a direct translation, the underlying ideas associated with "ON" and its Vietnamese counterparts can differ.

The expression of time reveals a significant divergence between English and Vietnamese. While Vietnamese consistently employs *vào* to denote days and dates, the English preposition "ON" exhibits a broader temporal scope. For instance, when referring to a specific time linked to an event ("on hearing the alarm"), Vietnamese typically uses temporal conjunctions like *khi nghe thấy chuông báo thức* (when hearing the alarm), highlighting the temporal connection through a clause rather than a single preposition. Similarly, expressing a state during a period ("ON holiday") often requires descriptive phrases in Vietnamese, such as *trong kỳ nghỉ* (in the holiday). Furthermore, common English expressions using "ON" with time, like "ON time," frequently translate to adverbs in Vietnamese, such as *đúng giờ* (exactly on time). This contrast underscores the differing grammatical strategies each language employs to pinpoint moments or durations in time, with Vietnamese favoring more explicit conjunctions and descriptive phrases where English utilizes the versatile "ON."

The realm of abstract relationships highlights the most profound conceptual differences between English "ON" and its Vietnamese counterparts. The many meanings encompassed by "ON" in non-physical contexts often require entirely different linguistic tools in Vietnamese, moving beyond simple prepositional equivalents. For example, when "ON" indicates the topic of something ("a book ON philosophy"), Vietnamese uses *về* (*về triết học*), which specifically focuses on the subject matter. When "ON" describes a state ("on strike"), Vietnamese employs a verb (*đình công* - to strike), directly encoding the state as an action rather than a relationship denoted by a preposition. Similarly, to express the means by which something is done ("on the internet"), Vietnamese uses *TRÊN mạng internet*, where "TRÊN" functions more like "in the context of" a specific medium. For transportation ("ON the bus"), Vietnamese uses *bằng* or *đi bằng xe buýt* (by bus/go by bus), emphasizing the mode of transport. Finally, when indicating the foundation or basis of something ("based ON research"), Vietnamese uses *dựa trên* (*dựa trên nghiên cứu*), explicitly meaning "relying ON" These varied translations demonstrate that the abstract connections signaled by the single preposition "ON" in English often necessitate the use of different grammatical categories (like verbs) or more semantically specific prepositions in Vietnamese. This reflects fundamentally distinct ways in which each language conceptualizes and expresses these non-concrete relationships, highlighting a significant cognitive divergence rather than just a difference in vocabulary.

The idiomatic behavior of "ON" within English phrasal verbs further emphasizes the separation between the two languages. In English, "ON" often acts as a particle that combines with a verb to create a new meaning, as seen in "carry ON" (continue) and

"switch ON" (activate). However, Vietnamese typically expresses these same concepts using single verbs, such as *tiếp tục* for "carry ON" and *bật* for "switch ON." This preference for single, often compound, verbs in Vietnamese, rather than modifying a base verb with a prepositional particle, highlights a fundamental difference in how each language encodes semantic nuances within its verbal system. English relies on the flexibility of particles like "on" to extend the meaning of verbs, while Vietnamese tends to lexicalize these combined meanings into individual verb forms.

To summarize, despite some basic overlaps in how both languages describe physical contact in space (like "the book is ON the table" translating to "quyển sách ở TRÊN bàn"), the primary characteristic when comparing "ON" and its Vietnamese equivalents is divergence. English heavily utilizes the highly adaptable preposition "ON," which acquires its precise meaning based on the surrounding words and situation. In contrast, Vietnamese tends to use a wider variety of prepositions and grammatical constructions, each with a more narrowly defined meaning. For instance, while "ON" can mean "about" in "a book ON history" (*về lịch sử* in Vietnamese), it can also mean "AT" in "ON time" (*đúng giờ*), showcasing its versatility. Vietnamese, however, uses distinct words (*về* and the adverb *đúng*) to express these different shades of meaning. Comprehending these underlying conceptual and grammatical distinctions is therefore essential for effective and precise communication and translation between English and Vietnamese. It requires going beyond simply replacing "ON" with a single Vietnamese word and instead understanding the fundamental ways each language structures and expresses these relationships in thought and grammar.

## 5. SPECIFIC CASE ANALYSIS: SIMILARITIES IN THE USAGE OF “ON” AND “TRÊN” IN INDICATING PLACE

### *Contact with a Surface*

Both “ON” and “TRÊN” are fundamentally used to describe direct contact between an object and a surface. This usage is perhaps the most prototypical and universally recognized function of the preposition of place “on.” In such contexts, the object is usually perceived to be resting upon or attached to another object, and there is a sense of support or physical contact involved.

English	Vietnamese
The book is on the table.	Quyển sách trên bàn. (Book on table.)
The picture is on the wall.	Bức tranh trên tường. (Picture on wall.)
The ball is on the floor	Quả bóng trên sàn nhà. (Ball on floor)

In these examples, both languages emphasize the presence of tangibility and physical support, with the object located atop or attached to a surface. Vietnamese often omits the verb "là" (to be) in informal or written expressions, making the construction more compact. The phrase “trên + noun” functions structurally similar to “on + noun” in English.

### *Location along a linear surface*

Another key similarity lies in how both languages use “on” and “trên” to express positions along linear or elongated surfaces. In such cases, the reference point is not necessarily flat or horizontal, but it maintains the concept of a definable path or surface that the object is associated with.

English	Vietnamese
The town is on the river.	Thị trấn trên sông. (Town on river.)
There is a mark on the ruler.	Có một vết trên thước kẻ. (There is a mark on ruler.)
There are a lot of people on the road.	Có nhiều người trên đường. (There are a lot of people on road)

Here, both “ON” and “TRÊN” are used to denote something located along a visually or conceptually linear path (e.g., river, ruler, road). This supports the idea that both languages recognize the metaphorical extension of surface contact to non-flat surfaces or spatial paths.

#### *Specific points on a surface or area*

“ON” and “TRÊN” are also similarly employed to identify precise locations within larger surfaces or areas, such as points on a map or corners of streets. This use expands the spatial function of these prepositions from generalized surface contact to discrete points of reference.

English	Vietnamese
The town is on the river.	Thị trấn trên sông. (Town on river.)
There is a mark on the ruler.	Có một vết trên thước kẻ. (There is a mark on ruler.)
There are a lot of people on the road.	Có nhiều người trên đường. (There are a lot of people on road)

Although Vietnamese occasionally uses an additional locative verb such as “ở” to reinforce spatial reference (ở trên góc phố), the preposition of place “trên” still functions in a way that mirrors “ON” in English. This suggests a shared conceptual understanding of point-location “on” a defined area, such as a map or urban landscape.

The English preposition of place “ON” and the Vietnamese preposition of place “TRÊN” are both used to talk about where something is. But they are not the same, especially when they are used for vague ideas or in slang phrases. Vietnamese students can learn the right way to use “ON” in English by comparing the two.

## **6. SPECIFIC CASE ANALYSIS: DIFFERENCES IN THE USAGE OF “ON” AND “TRÊN” IN INDICATING PLACE**

Although the English preposition of place “ON” and the Vietnamese equivalent “TRÊN” share core semantic functions in expressing contact with or position on a surface, their applications diverge significantly due to differences in linguistic typology, spatial conceptualization, and syntactic constraints in the two languages. These divergences are particularly noticeable in contexts involving vertical surfaces, abstract locations, interactional surfaces, and metaphorical extensions.

#### *Vertical surfaces and the concept of “against”*

English uses “on” extensively for objects affixed to or resting upon vertical surfaces, such as posters or notices. In Vietnamese, however, the equivalent “trên” may sound unnatural or overly literal unless modified with verbs like “dán” (to stick). More commonly, Vietnamese utilizes the general preposition of place “ở” or combines it with action verbs to create more contextually accurate expressions.

English	Vietnamese
The poster is on the wall.	Tấm áp phích ở tường (Poster at wall) or Tấm áp phích dán trên tường (Poster stuck on wall)
The notice is on the door.	Thông báo ở cửa (Notice at door) or Thông báo dán trên cửa (Notice stuck on door)
He wrote his name on the blackboard.	Anh ấy viết tên lên bảng.

These examples show that Vietnamese prefers to imply attachment or presence through action rather than pure spatial location when dealing with vertical planes. This reflects a subtle conceptual shift: Vietnamese often externalizes spatial relationships through verbs, whereas English leans on prepositions alone.

*Interactive surfaces: sitting, standing, and resting*

English regularly uses “on” with furniture or ground-level surfaces that people interact with physically, such as chairs and floors. In contrast, Vietnamese often prefers “ở” for such contexts, as “trên” can sometimes imply non-contact or hovering above rather than actual interaction.

English	Vietnamese
The book is on the chair.	Quyển sách ở ghế. (Book at chair) – Trên ghế could suggest an unstable or awkward position.
He sat on the floor.	Anh ấy ngồi ở sàn nhà. (He sat at floor) – Ngồi trên sàn nhà may be grammatically correct but less natural in conversational usage.
There’s a cup on the desk.	Có một cái cốc ở bàn làm việc.

This distinction highlights that Vietnamese emphasizes the spatial orientation relative to the body and physical engagement, often defaulting to “ở” for familiar, interactive spaces.

*Abstract and conceptual usage of “ON”*

English frequently extends the usage of “on” into the abstract realm, including media, communication platforms, and intangible concepts (e.g., “on the internet,” “on the phone”). Vietnamese, while sometimes mirroring these structures with “trên,” often opts for other prepositions or alternative syntactic constructions to express such abstract notions.

English	Vietnamese
on the internet	trên mạng (literal and accepted)
on television	trên tivi (common usage)
on the phone	qua điện thoại (through the phone) or bằng điện thoại (by phone), “trên điện thoại” is rarely used.
on the news	trong tin tức (in the news) or trên bản tin (on the news broadcast)
on the radio	trên radio
on the way	trên đường

Here, the Vietnamese equivalents are often context-dependent. While some idiomatic translations are direct (e.g., *trên mạng*), others restructure the phrase entirely, replacing “*on*” with prepositions like “*qua*”, “*bằng*”, or “*trong*”. This reflects how prepositions use in Vietnamese is more fluid and influenced by meaning and collocation, rather than fixed patterns.

*Transportation and public vehicles*

English uses “*on*” for most forms of public or navigable transportation, especially where movement and space to walk are implied (e.g., buses, ships). Vietnamese, in this domain, aligns more closely with English by using “*trên*,” although the underlying conceptualization can differ slightly based on whether the speaker perceives the vehicle as an enclosed space or a moving platform.

English	Vietnamese
on the bus	trên xe buýt
on the train	trên tàu
on the plane	trên máy bay
on the ship	trên tàu thủy

This parallel use suggests greater convergence in this spatial domain, likely influenced by globalization and shared metaphors for movement and containment.

*Specific locations and urban addresses*

English uses “*on*” for addresses and street references (e.g., “on Main Street”). Vietnamese, however, tends to employ “*ở*” for general locative expressions and occasionally uses “*trên*” when emphasis is placed on a linear or directional aspect.

English	Vietnamese
He lives on Main Street.	Anh ấy sống ở phố Chính or Anh ấy sống trên đường Chính
The shop is on the corner of Pham Hung Street and Thang Long Avenue.	Cửa hàng ở góc đường Phạm Hùng và đại lộ Thăng Long or trên góc đường Phạm Hùng và đại lộ Thăng Long
There’s a pharmacy on the right side of the street.	Có một tiệm thuốc ở phía bên phải đường / <b>trên</b> phía bên phải con đường.

In Vietnamese, while “*trên*” is grammatically correct, “*ở*” is more commonly used and sounds more natural when referring to places where someone lives or where something is located. This shows a difference in how space is understood: English tends to focus on the surface or path (like a street), while Vietnamese focuses more on the fixed position or presence at a place.

In Vietnamese, while “*trên*” is grammatically correct, “*ở*” is more commonly used and sounds more natural when referring to places where someone lives or where something is located. This shows a difference in how space is understood: English tends to focus on the surface or path (like a street), while Vietnamese focuses more on the fixed position or presence at a place.

*Specific analysis with examples*

To better illustrate the nuanced similarities and differences in the usage of the preposition “*on*” in English and “*trên*” (or other equivalents) in Vietnamese, this section examines specific examples that highlight how spatial relationships are conceptualized and expressed across the two languages. These examples are chosen to reflect varying degrees of literal and metaphorical usage

Example 1: Literal Horizontal Surface

English	Vietnamese
The book is on the table.	Quyển sách trên bàn.

Analysis: This example demonstrates a direct correspondence between English “*on*” and Vietnamese “*trên*” both indicating physical contact with a horizontal surface. The spatial configuration involves the object (book) being in direct contact with and supported by another surface (table), with no intervening space. Here, “*trên*” fully aligns with the English “*on*” in terms of both syntactic role and semantic content. This reflects a shared cognitive model of spatial relationships rooted in contact and support.

Example 2: Vertical Attachment and Locative Expression

English	Vietnamese
The picture is on the wall.	Bức tranh ở tường. / Bức tranh dán trên tường.

Analysis: This example reveals a key divergence in prepositional use. English employs “*on*” to describe objects affixed to vertical surfaces without the need for additional clarification. However, in Vietnamese, using “*trên*” alone in this context (e.g., *bức tranh trên tường*) may sound unnatural or incomplete. Instead, Vietnamese tends to use: “*ở*” (a general preposition of place) when the attachment is implied or contextually understood, or “*dán trên*” (stuck on) when a specific physical action is involved.

This suggests that Vietnamese requires greater precision in such contexts, often incorporating verbs of attachment to express the relationship clearly. The underlying spatial schema in Vietnamese prioritizes the action or manner of contact, whereas English allows prepositions to encapsulate both location and attachment implicitly.

Example 3: Interactive Surface Involving Body Position

English	Vietnamese
He sat on the floor.	Anh ấy ngồi ở sàn nhà. (preferred) / Anh ấy ngồi trên sàn nhà. (acceptable but marked)

Analysis: Both Vietnamese options are grammatically correct; however, native intuition favors “*ở*” in this context. The choice of “*ở*” rather than “*trên*” reflects how Vietnamese conceptualizes bodily engagement with surfaces: the act of sitting implies presence at a location, rather than being positioned atop a surface. Using “*trên*” could imply a non-typical or elevated position, subtly altering the meaning. Thus, while English uses “*on*” uniformly for such actions, Vietnamese selects prepositions of place based on how the human body interacts with the space- a functional rather than strictly spatial distinction.

Example 4: Metaphorical/Abstract usage of "ON"

English	Vietnamese
The picture is on the wall.	Bức tranh ở tường. / Bức tranh dán trên tường.

Analysis: This case underscores the metaphorical and idiomatic flexibility of English “*on*.” In this usage, “*on*” suggests being connected to a communication channel, likely derived from the image of being “*on a line*” or “*on a call*.” Vietnamese, however, does not use “*trên điện thoại*” to convey this concept. Instead, it relies on:

“*qua*” (through) – focusing on the medium or conduit,

“*bằng*” (by means of) – emphasizing the instrumental role of the phone.

The examples above reveal that while English “*on*” and Vietnamese “*trên*” align in basic spatial contexts, notable differences emerge in vertical placement, bodily interaction, and metaphorical usage. Vietnamese often requires additional verbs or shifts to prepositions like “*ở*,”

“qua,” or “bằng” to convey nuances of action, function, or medium. These differences highlight the importance of context and cognitive framing in cross-linguistic prepositional use.

These variations highlight not only structural differences in prepositional usage but also deeper cognitive and cultural patterns in conceptualizing space and experience. For learners and translators, this reinforces the importance of context and conceptual framing, as seemingly equivalent prepositions may diverge significantly depending on the situation

## 7. RECOMMENDATION

Based on our contrastive study, we offer the following recommendations to aid language learners, educators, and translators dealing with the English preposition "on" and its Vietnamese equivalents. For language learners, it's vital to focus on the contextual use of "on" rather than simply equating it with "trên." Active engagement with idiomatic and abstract expressions containing "on" and learning their natural Vietnamese translations is key. Utilizing contrastive examples and translation exercises will help learners understand the diverse ways "on" maps to different Vietnamese prepositions or structures, improving comprehension and accuracy. Educators should incorporate contrastive grammar activities to highlight structural and conceptual differences in expressing spatial relationships between English and Vietnamese. Visual aids can effectively illustrate these differing conceptualizations. Emphasizing collocations and prepositional phrases with "on" will also benefit students. For translators and interpreters, direct translation of "on" as "trên," especially in abstract or idiomatic contexts, should be approached with caution. Prioritizing the intended meaning and context to select the most appropriate Vietnamese expression is crucial. Awareness of pragmatic and cultural nuances in expressing spatial relationships is also essential. Flexibility in phrasing can ensure clear and natural communication. Finally, further research is recommended to enhance understanding in this area. Future studies could analyze collocational patterns of "on" and its Vietnamese equivalents in corpora and explore regional variations in Vietnamese prepositional usage. Extending this contrastive analysis to other polysemous English prepositions would also provide a more comprehensive understanding of cross-linguistic spatial expression between English and Vietnamese.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This paper compared the English preposition "on" and its closest Vietnamese equivalent "trên" in spatial contexts. While both primarily indicate spatial relationships, especially surface contact, the study reveals significant differences in their usage, conceptual underpinnings, and syntactic behavior. Similarities were found mainly in literal spatial uses involving horizontal surfaces, linear features, and specific points on areas, where "on" and "trên" often function similarly, reflecting a shared basic understanding of space based on contact and orientation. However, substantial differences arise in more complex or abstract spatial domains. Vietnamese frequently uses alternative structures or prepositions like "ở," "bằng," "qua," and verbs like "dán" for spatial relations involving vertical surfaces, human interaction with space, and metaphorical expressions. These differences likely stem from the distinct linguistic structures of English, which favors prepositions, and Vietnamese, which often uses verb-centered or compound expressions for spatial nuance. Our analysis suggests that Vietnamese learners of English may face difficulties with these cross-linguistic variations, particularly in translating idioms, understanding metaphorical uses of "on," and applying it in specific contexts. A deeper understanding of these distinctions can significantly improve language learning for

Vietnamese speakers, enhance English teaching methods, and increase the accuracy of translations involving this common preposition.

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### GIỚI TỪ “ON” - HAI CÁCH HIỂU (TRONG TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT)

**Tóm tắt:** Bài báo này nghiên cứu tỉ mỉ giới từ tiếng Anh "ON" và các chức năng ngữ nghĩa đa dạng của nó, bao gồm các mối quan hệ không gian (tiếp xúc bề mặt, ở trên), các dấu hiệu thời gian (ngày cụ thể, ngày tháng) và các kết nối trừu tượng (chủ đề, trạng thái). Thông qua phân tích so sánh với tiếng Việt, nghiên cứu khám phá cách các ý nghĩa đa dạng này được diễn đạt, thường đòi hỏi các giới từ và cấu trúc ngữ pháp riêng biệt. Chúng tôi phân tích cách sử dụng cốt lõi của tiếng Anh đối với "ON" và so sánh chúng với các từ tương đương tiếng Việt như trên, ở, vào và các hạt định vị. Các phát hiện làm nổi bật các lĩnh vực phân kỳ và hội tụ ngữ nghĩa quan trọng, chỉ ra các trường hợp mà một "ON" duy nhất đòi hỏi nhiều bản dịch tiếng Việt tùy thuộc vào ngữ cảnh. Điều này nhấn mạnh nhu cầu quan trọng là phải vượt ra ngoài bản dịch trực tiếp từng từ và xem xét phạm vi ngữ nghĩa sắc thái của "ON" để hiểu chính xác giữa các ngôn ngữ và giao tiếp hiệu quả giữa người nói và người dịch tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt. Phân tích này góp phần đánh giá sâu sắc hơn về ngữ nghĩa giới từ trong các ngữ cảnh giữa các ngôn ngữ.

**Từ khóa:** Khác biệt, tiếng Anh, chỉ vị trí, giới từ “on”, tương đồng, tiếng Việt