

# Semantic taxonomy and nominal coordination in Vietnamese

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**Lee, Juwon. 2025. Semantic taxonomy and nominal coordination in Vietnamese.** *Linguistic Research* 42(2): 283-301. This paper investigates a previously underexplored type of nominal coordination – *Semantically Unlike Nominal Coordination* (SUNC) – originally identified in Korean, and examines its presence in Vietnamese. SUNC constructions involve conjuncts that are not semantically compatible with a shared verb, thereby challenging conventional assumptions about coordination. Drawing on experimental data, this study demonstrates that Vietnamese, like Korean, permits SUNC constructions. It extends a semantic taxonomy-based analysis, initially proposed for Korean, to the Vietnamese data, arguing that the apparent semantic mismatch between the verb and one conjunct can be resolved through mediation by an appropriate hypernym. These findings have significant implications for theories of coordination, as they challenge both syntactic and semantic constraints traditionally assumed to govern coordination. By incorporating data from two distinct languages, this study contributes to a more comprehensive theory of cross-linguistic variation in coordination structures. (Jeonju University)

**Keywords** nominal coordination, semantic taxonomy, hypernym, experiment, Vietnamese

## 1. Introduction

This paper investigates whether a particular type of nominal coordination attested in Korean – *Semantically Unlike Nominal Coordination* (SUNC) – also occurs in Vietnamese, and examines whether the semantic analysis developed for Korean data can be extended to Vietnamese. To provide a point of comparison, examples of typical nominal coordination in English and their Korean counterparts are presented in (1) and (2), respectively.

- (1) a. She bought [the rice and the bread].  
 b. [Teachers and students] smiled.
- (2) a. kunye-ka [pap-kwa kuliko ppang-ul] sa-ss-ta.  
 she-Nom rice-and and bread-Acc buy-Pst-Dec  
 ‘She bought the rice and the bread.’
- b. [sensayngnim-tul-kwa kuliko haksayng-tul-i]  
 teacher-Plu-and and student-Plu-Nom  
 wus-ess-ta.  
 smile-Pst-Dec  
 ‘Teachers and students smiled.’

In (1), the nominal coordinations function either as the subject or the object of the clause. In (2), both the affix *-kwa* ‘and’ and the lexical coordinator *kuliko* ‘and’ are used simultaneously; however, nominal coordination in Korean can occur with either coordinator independently. In both (1) and (2), a particular expression is shared between the two conjuncts. For instance, (2a) means that the subject bought the rice and bought the bread, while (2b) means that teachers smiled and students smiled. Nominal coordination can receive either a collective or distributive reading. Under the collective reading of (2a), the subject bought the rice and the bread simultaneously, as part of a single event; under the distributive reading, the subject bought the rice and the bread in separate, distinct events. This paper focuses on the distributive reading of nominal coordinations.

In contrast to the typical examples illustrated above, there are other types of nominal coordination in Korean in which the conjuncts do not share an expression. Two such examples are presented in (3), following Lee (2020, 2025).

- (3) a. ku-ka onul [sakwa han-ccok-kwa kuliko  
 he-Nom today apple one-piece-and and  
 khephi han can-ul] masi-ess-ta.  
 coffee one cup-Acc drink-Pst-Dec  
 (lit.) ‘Today he drank a cup of coffee and a piece of apple.’  
 = ‘Today he drank a cup of coffee and ate a piece of apple.’

- b. ku-ka      kakey-eyse    [moca-wa   kuliko   sinpal-ul]  
      he-Nom shop-at       hat-and       and       shoe-Acc  
      sin-e                po-ass-ta.  
      wear-Comp try-Pst-Dec  
      ‘He tried on the shoes and the hats at the shop.’

The sentences in (3) appear structurally similar to the typical nominal coordination example in (2a), as they share an almost identical syntactic configuration. However, a crucial difference lies in the semantic compatibility between the verb and the conjuncts. In (2a), the main verb *sa-ss-ta* ‘buy-Pst-Dec’ is semantically compatible with both conjuncts, meaning the verb is shared across them. In contrast, in (3), the main verb semantically aligns only with the final conjunct, demonstrating a lack of semantic sharing across the coordinated noun phrases. Despite this semantic mismatch, sentence (3a) is judged as acceptable, although it is generally perceived as less natural than typical nominal coordinations (see corpus and experimental evidence in Lee 2025). Such constructions are referred to as Semantically Unlike Nominal Coordination (SUNC) in Lee (2025). In (3b), the serial verb *sin-e po-ass-ta* ‘wear-Comp try-Pst-Dec’ (i.e., ‘tried on’) semantically aligns only with the final conjunct *sinpal-ul* ‘shoes-Acc’. A different verb, *ssu-* ‘wear’, is typically required for the preceding conjunct *moca-wa* ‘hat-and’. Assuming that Korean verbs like *sin-* ‘wear (on the feet)’ and *ssu-* ‘wear (on the head)’ lexically encode selectional restrictions for their patients, the serial verb *sin-e po-ass-ta* ‘tried on’ is incompatible with the non-final conjunct *moca-wa* ‘hat-and’. Nevertheless, sentence (3b) is also judged as acceptable, though less natural than sentences involving semantically compatible conjuncts. According to Lee (2025), Korean SUNC constructions received a mean z-score of 0.018 – slightly above zero – while typical nominal coordination constructions received a higher mean z-score of 0.850, indicating a clear preference for semantically uniform coordination.

A crucial question, then, is how to derive a verbal meaning that can be semantically associated with the non-final, or distant, conjuncts in such coordination constructions. This issue is theoretically significant, as it poses a substantial challenge to existing analyses of coordination in the literature (see detailed discussion in Section 3). To address this problem, Lee (2025) proposes that the semantic link between the verb and the distant conjunct is mediated by a direct hypernym of the verb. For example,

in (3a), *mek-* ‘eat’ serves as a direct hypernym of *masi-* ‘drink’, allowing *mek-* ‘eat’ to be semantically associated with the distant conjunct *sakwa han-ccok-kwa* ‘a piece of apple’. Similarly, in (3b), *chakyongha-* ‘wear (in general)’ is a direct hypernym of *sin-* ‘wear (on the feet)’, enabling the serial verb *chakyonghay po-ass-ta* ‘tried on’ to be interpreted as semantically compatible with the distant conjunct *moca-wa* ‘hat-and’.

This paper begins by presenting experimental evidence that Vietnamese, like Korean, permits SUNC. The inclusion of Vietnamese among the languages exhibiting this phenomenon further challenges major theoretical accounts of coordination in the literature. Building on this evidence, the paper extends a semantic taxonomy-based analysis originally developed for Korean SUNC to its Vietnamese counterpart. Taken together, the findings contribute to a broader cross-linguistic understanding of nominal coordination by expanding the empirical coverage and reinforcing the theoretical utility of semantic taxonomy in capturing the interface between coordination and predicate-argument compatibility.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents experimental evidence supporting the existence of SUNC in Vietnamese. Section 3 outlines the limitations of previous analyses of coordination, particularly their inability to adequately account for SUNCs. Section 4 discusses the implications of the proposed semantic taxonomy-based analysis. Section 5 concludes the paper by summarizing the findings and suggesting directions for future research.

## 2. An experiment

An experiment was conducted to examine whether SUNC is permissible in Vietnamese, a language with SVO word order. The results indicate that the first conjunct, which is closest to the verb, must be semantically compatible with it, while the second, more distant conjunct need not be. Crucially, the sentence is generally judged acceptable as long as a direct hypernym of the verb is semantically compatible with the second conjunct. This pattern parallels observations in Korean and supports the hypothesis that hypernymic mediation underlies the acceptability of semantically unlike nominal coordinations.

## 2.1 Design and material

A  $3 \times 3$  within-subjects factorial design was employed to investigate the acceptability of SUNC constructions in Vietnamese. The experiment manipulated two independent variables: FIRST CONJUNCT and SECOND CONJUNCT, each with three levels – *compatible*, *hypernymic*, and *beyond*. In the *compatible* condition, the verb was semantically compatible with the conjunct. In the *hypernymic* condition, a direct hypernym of the verb was compatible with the conjunct. In the *beyond* condition, the conjunct was incompatible with both the verb and its direct hypernym. Example test items are provided in (4). Note that, since Vietnamese is an SVO language, the first conjunct in a nominal coordination is the one that immediately follows the verb and is thus syntactically closest to it.

(4) a. **Condition 1: compatible | compatible**

[Nam smoked the cigarette in the morning and smoked the marijuana in the afternoon.]

Nam đã hút thuốc lá và cần sa.

Nam Pst smoke cigarette(s) and marijuana

‘Nam smoked the cigarette and the marijuana.’

b. **Condition 2: compatible | hypernymic**

[Nam smoked the cigarette in the morning and drank the coffee in the afternoon.]

Nam đã hút thuốc lá và cà phê.

Nam Pst smoke cigarette(s) and coffee

‘Nam smoked the cigarette and the coffee.’

c. **Condition 3: compatible | beyond**

[Nam smoked the cigarette in the morning and listened to the music in the afternoon.]

Nam đã hút thuốc lá và âm nhạc.

Nam Pst smoke cigarette(s) and music

‘Nam smoked the cigarette and the music.’

**d. Condition 4: hypernymic| compatible**

[Khoa drank the coffee in the morning and smoked the cigarette in the afternoon.]

Khoa đã hút cà phê và thuốc lá.

Khoa Pst smoke coffee and cigarette(s)

‘Khoa smoked the coffee and the cigarette.’

**e. Condition 5: hypernymic| hypernymic**

[Khoa drank the coffee in the morning and drank the juice in the afternoon.]

Khoa đã hút cà phê và nước ép.

Khoa Pst smoke coffee and juice

‘Khoa smoked the coffee and the juice.’

**f. Condition 6: hypernymic| beyond**

[Khoa drank the coffee in the morning and listened to the music in the afternoon.]

Khoa đã hút cà phê và âm nhạc.

Khoa Pst smoke coffee and music

‘Khoa smoked the coffee and the music.’

**g. Condition 7: beyond | compatible**

[Quân listened to the music in the morning and smoked the cigarette in the afternoon.]

Quân đã hút âm nhạc và thuốc lá.

Quân Pst smoke music and cigarette(s)

‘Quân smoked the music and the cigarette.’

**h. Condition 8: beyond | hypernymic**

[Quân listened to the music in the morning and drank the coffee in the afternoon.]

Quân đã hút âm nhạc và cà phê.

Quân Pst smoke music and coffee

‘Quân smoked the music and the coffee.’

i. **Condition 9: beyond | beyond**

[Quân listened to the music in the morning and kicked the lion in the afternoon.]

Quân đã hút âm nhạc và con sư tử.

Quân Pst smoke music and Clf lion

‘Quân smoked the music and the lion.’

In Condition 2 (the target condition), the first conjunct *thuốc lá* ‘cigarette(s)’ is semantically compatible with the verb *hút* ‘smoke’, whereas the second conjunct *cà phê* ‘coffee’ is not. However, the direct hypernym *dùng* ‘consume’ is semantically compatible with *cà phê* ‘coffee’. In contrast, in Condition 3, the second conjunct *âm nhạc* ‘music’ is incompatible with both the verb *hút* ‘smoke’ and its hypernym *dùng* ‘consume’, resulting in a full semantic mismatch between the verb and the conjunct.

The original stimulus list began with 3 instructional items, followed by a pseudo-randomized sequence of 18 test items – 2 sets of lexically distinct sentences  $\times$  3 levels of FIRST CONJUNCT  $\times$  3 levels of SECOND CONJUNCT – along with 16 filler items. To control for potential order effects, a reverse-ordered version of the list was also created. As a result, each participant was presented with a total of 37 items.

## 2.2 Participants and procedure

Twenty adult native speakers of Vietnamese participated in the experiment via the Prolific platform. Two participants were excluded from the analysis as outliers, resulting in a final sample of 18 participants. Participants were directed to the experiment through a Google Form link. Each version of the list was completed by 10 participants, with one outlier removed from each list. Participants were instructed to rate the appropriateness of each sentence in a given context using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *definitely unsuitable*, 7 = *definitely suitable*). Upon completion of the task, participants were compensated £1.50 (approximately \$1.90 USD) through the Prolific platform.

## 2.3 Results

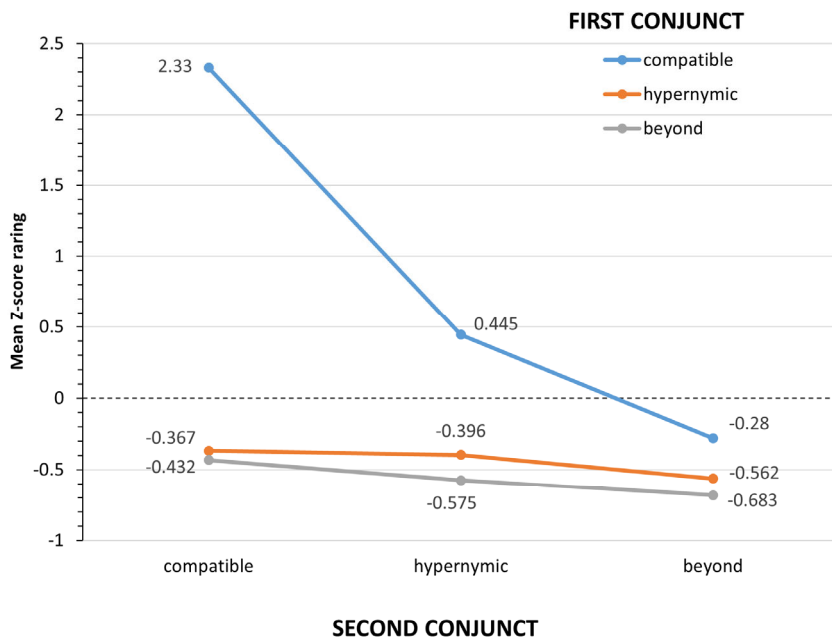
Participants’ ratings were z-transformed prior to analysis to normalize individual differences

in scale use. Descriptive statistics for each condition are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for condition ratings (z-transformed)

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Condition 1	36	2.33	0.883	2.03	2.63
Condition 2	36	0.445	1.20	0.0392	0.850
Condition 3	36	-0.280	0.624	-0.491	-0.0687
Condition 4	36	-0.367	0.514	-0.540	-0.193
Condition 5	36	-0.396	0.568	-0.588	-0.203
Condition 6	36	-0.562	0.411	-0.701	-0.423
Condition 7	36	-0.432	0.656	-0.653	-0.210
Condition 8	36	-0.575	0.423	-0.718	-0.432
Condition 9	36	-0.683	0.269	-0.774	-0.592

Notably, only Conditions 1 and 2 yielded mean ratings above zero, as shown in Table 1. The mean ratings for all nine experimental conditions are visualized in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Mean ratings of the nine conditions involving nominal coordinations in Vietnamese



A  $3 \times 3$  repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the effects of FIRST CONJUNCT and SECOND CONJUNCT on the acceptability of nominal coordination in Vietnamese. The analysis revealed statistically significant main effects for both FIRST CONJUNCT,  $F(2, 70) = 155.2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and SECOND CONJUNCT,  $F(2, 70) = 92.6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . In addition, there was a statistically significant interaction effect between FIRST CONJUNCT and SECOND CONJUNCT,  $F(4, 140) = 43.1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . As illustrated in Figure 1, semantic compatibility between the first conjunct and the verb is a necessary condition for the sentence to be judged acceptable, but not a sufficient one. When the first conjunct is compatible with the verb, the second conjunct must also be semantically compatible – either directly with the verb or via a direct hypernym – in order for the sentence to receive a mean acceptability rating above zero.

Post hoc Tukey comparisons were conducted to examine pairwise differences among the nine experimental conditions. The results revealed statistically significant differences between Condition 1 and all other conditions ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that Condition 1 ( $M = 2.33$ ) received substantially higher ratings than the others. Additionally, Condition 2 ( $M = 0.445$ ) was rated significantly higher than all remaining conditions ( $p < 0.05$ ), as summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Tukey post hoc test results

Comparisons		Mean difference	Standard error	Significance
Condition 2	- Condition 1	1.8830	0.2581	$p < 0.001$
Condition 2	- Condition 3	0.7243	0.1994	$p = 0.022$
Condition 2	- Condition 4	0.8112	0.1863	$p = 0.003$
Condition 2	- Condition 5	0.8400	0.2182	$p = 0.013$
Condition 2	- Condition 6	1.0062	0.2086	$p < 0.001$
Condition 2	- Condition 7	0.8762	0.1978	$p = 0.003$
Condition 2	- Condition 8	1.0199	0.2210	$p = 0.002$
Condition 2	- Condition 9	1.1274	0.2035	$p < 0.001$

The significant difference between Condition 1 ( $M = 2.33$ ) and Condition 2 ( $M = 0.445$ ) indicates that replacing a compatible conjunct with a hypernymic one notably reduces sentence acceptability, although the mean rating for Condition 2 remains above zero. Similarly, the significant difference between Condition 2 ( $M = 0.445$ ) and

Condition 3 ( $M = -0.23$ ) suggests that substituting an incompatible conjunct with a hypernymic one substantially improves acceptability, albeit not to the level observed in Condition 1.

## 2.4 Discussion

The experimental results, as illustrated in Figure 1, reveal a clear pattern: the first conjunct (i.e., the conjunct closest to the verb) must be semantically compatible with the verb for the sentence to be judged acceptable. Sentences that violated this requirement received significantly negative ratings. In contrast, the second conjunct (i.e., the more distant conjunct) exhibits greater semantic flexibility. Acceptability remained above zero when the second conjunct was semantically compatible with a direct hypernym of the verb. This pattern provides compelling evidence for the existence of SUNC in Vietnamese.

However, the data revealed a notable asymmetry: although Condition 2 (hypernymic compatibility) was generally judged acceptable, it received significantly lower ratings than Condition 1 (full compatibility). One possible explanation for this difference is that interpreting hypernymic relationships imposes a greater cognitive load. Specifically, understanding sentences in Condition 2 requires access to a more abstract semantic representation, involving an additional inferential step compared to the direct semantic match in Condition 1. This increased processing effort may account for the observed reduction in acceptability. Future research should aim to directly test this hypothesis, for example, through processing-based measures such as reading times or neurocognitive responses.

Finally, the scope of the present study was limited by the number of experimental items and participants. Future research should employ a more comprehensive experimental design – including a larger sample size and a broader range of lexical items – to validate these findings and to explore in greater depth the subtleties of hypernymic mediation in nominal coordination.

## 3. Previous studies

This section reviews major theories of coordination and shows that they cannot explain

SUNCs in Korean and Vietnamese. To address this issue in Korean, Lee (2020, 2025) proposes a semantic taxonomy-based analysis, which explains how verbs can be linked to semantically incompatible conjuncts through hypernyms. This analysis can also be applied to Vietnamese, suggesting a common explanation for SUNC in both languages.

### 3.1 Conjunction reduction

Chomsky (1957) proposed the Conjunction Reduction rule to account for coordination structures:

(5) Conjunction Reduction rule:

If S1 and S2 are grammatical sentences, and S1 differs from S2 only in that X appears in S1 where Y appears in S2 (i.e., S1 = ..X.. and S2 = ..Y..), and X and Y are constituents of the same type in S1 and S2, respectively, then S3 is a sentence, where S3 is the result of replacing X by X + and + Y in S1 (i.e., S3 = ..X.. + and + ..Y..). (Chomsky, 1957: 36)

This rule effectively accounts for standard English nominal coordinations, as illustrated in (6).

(6) S1: Manfred played the saxophone.

S2: Matthias played the saxophone.

→ S3: [Manfred and Matthias] played the saxophone.

In (6), both S1 and S2 are well-formed and have different subjects, *Manfred* and *Matthias*, which are constituents of the same type. Applying the Conjunction Reduction rule to these sentences yields the grammatical S3, where the shared structure is preserved and the differing subjects are conjoined. However, this rule encounters serious difficulties when applied to Korean nominal coordinations such as (3a), repeated in (7).

- (7) ku-ka      onul    [sakwa   han-ccok-kwa   kuliko  
          he-Nom   today   apple   one-piece-and   and  
          khephi   han   can-ul]   masi-ess-ta.  
          coffee   one   cup-Acc   drink-Pst-Dec  
          (lit.) ‘Today he drank a cup of coffee and a piece of apple.’  
          = ‘Today he drank a cup of coffee and ate a piece of apple.’

Although sentences like (7) are generally judged acceptable by native speakers – an observation supported by empirical data in Lee (2025) – a literal translation such as ‘drank a piece of apple’ remains semantically implausible. This discrepancy underscores the inadequacy of the Conjunction Reduction rule in accounting for SUNC constructions in Korean and Vietnamese. Moreover, as the following review will demonstrate, most existing approaches encounter similar difficulties in explaining SUNC in both languages.

### 3.2 Right node raising

Right Node Raising (RNR) has been proposed as a mechanism for deriving certain coordination constructions (Ross 1967; Dougherty 1970; Hankamer 1971; Maling 1972; Bresnan 1974; Postal 1974; Abbott 1976; Hudson 1976; Sabbagh 2007, among others). Consider the example in (8).

- (8) Jack may be-and Tony certainly is-a werewolf. (Hudson 1976: 549)

In (8), the noun phrase *a werewolf* is raised from its original position within each conjunct (*Jack may be a werewolf* and *Tony certainly is a werewolf*) to the sentence-final position, where it is shared by both conjuncts. However, applying RNR to generate sentence (7) presents a fundamental problem: the distant conjunct, *sakwa han-ccok-kwa* ‘a piece of apple-and’, is semantically incompatible with the verb *masi-ess-ta* ‘drink-Pst-Dec’. This incompatibility suggests that sentence (7) cannot be derived from full conjuncts in the way that RNR requires. Consequently, RNR fails to account for the semantic mismatch observed in SUNC constructions in Korean, as well as in comparable Vietnamese cases.

### 3.3 Deletion

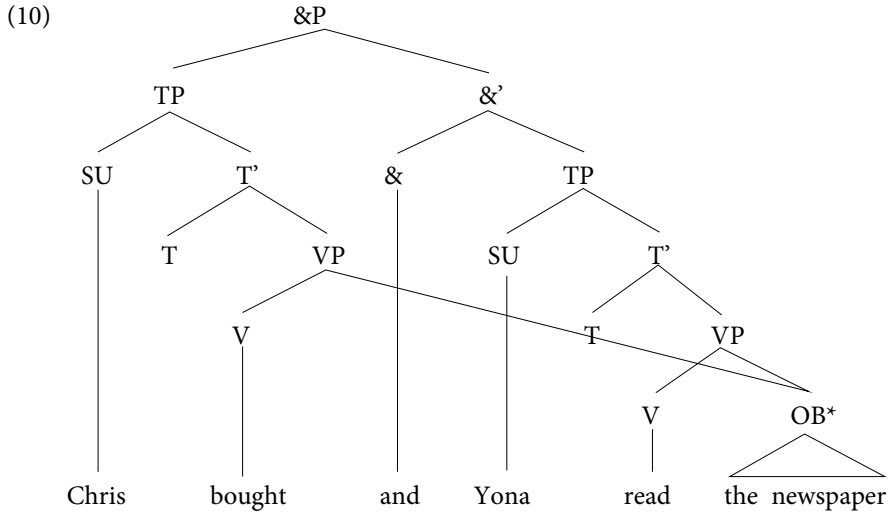
Deletion analyses (Wexler and Culicover 1980; Kayne 1994; Hartmann 2000; Merchant 2004, 2013, 2016) propose that identical elements in the first conjunct can be deleted when they reappear in the second. For example, in (9), the noun phrase *the magazine* can be omitted from the first conjunct because it is explicitly present in the second:

(9) He likes ~~the magazine~~ and she dislikes the magazine.

However, this approach proves inadequate when applied to Korean SUNC constructions. As discussed earlier, the putative underlying structure is semantically ill-formed, due to incompatibility between the verb and one of the conjuncts. Consequently, a deletion-based analysis cannot account for the derivation of sentence (7) and its Vietnamese counterpart.

### 3.4 Multiple dominance

Multiple dominance analyses of coordination (McCawley 1982; Goodall 1987; Muadz 1991; Moltmann 1992; Wilder 1997, 1999) propose syntactic structures in which a single constituent is dominated by multiple nodes within the coordination. For example, the sentence *Chris bought and Yona read the newspaper* can be analyzed like the following:



However, a multiple dominance analysis also proves inadequate when applied to SUNC constructions in Korean, where the verb cannot be straightforwardly associated with a non-adjacent conjunct. A similar limitation arises in the corresponding Vietnamese constructions. In sum, existing major approaches to coordination – including Conjunction Reduction, Right Node Raising, deletion, and multiple dominance – fail to account for the full range of empirical data observed in Korean and Vietnamese nominal coordinations. These shortcomings underscore the need for an alternative analysis that more accurately captures the structural and interpretive properties of such constructions.

### 3.5 Semantic taxonomy-based account

Lee (2020, 2025) proposes a semantic taxonomy-based account of SUNC in Korean, grounded in the following key constraints:

- (11) a. **The Closest Conjunct Constraint (CCC):** The closest conjunct of a nominal coordination must be syntactically and semantically compatible with the subcategorizing verb.

- b. **The Distant Conjunct Constraint (DCC):** If and only if a distant conjunct of a nominal coordination is semantically incompatible with the subcategorizing verb, a direct hypernym of the verb is semantically associated with the conjunct.

Due to the Closest Conjunct Constraint (CCC) (11a), the closest conjunct – *khephi han can-ul* ‘a cup of coffee’ – in example (7) is semantically compatible with the verb *masi-ess-ta* ‘drank’. Although the distant conjunct, *sakwa han-ccok-kwa* ‘a piece of apple’, is not directly compatible with the verb, it is compatible with the verb’s direct hypernym, *mek-ess-ta* ‘ate’, thereby satisfying the Distant Conjunct Constraint (DCC). As a result, the sentence is judged acceptable despite the apparent semantic mismatch.

This semantic taxonomy-based account of Korean SUNC can be extended to Vietnamese. In (4b), repeated in (12), the verb *đã hút* ‘smoked’ is semantically compatible with the first conjunct – the closest conjunct, *thuốc lá* ‘cigarette(s)’ – thus satisfying the Closest Conjunct Constraint (CCC). However, it is incompatible with the second conjunct – the distant conjunct, *cà phê* ‘coffee’:

(12) **Condition 2: compatible | hypernymic**

[Nam smoked the cigarette in the morning and drank the coffee in the afternoon.]

Nam    đã    hút        thuốc lá        và        cà phê.

Nam    Pst   smoke   cigarette(s)   and   coffee

‘Nam smoked the cigarette and the coffee.’

Despite the semantic mismatch between the verb *đã hút* ‘smoked’ and the distant conjunct *cà phê* ‘coffee’, the sentence in (12) is still judged acceptable. This is because the distant conjunct is semantically compatible with a direct hypernym of the verb – *dùng* ‘consume’ – thereby satisfying the Distant Conjunct Constraint (DCC).

Although Korean and Vietnamese differ in their basic word order – SOV and SVO, respectively – the constraints outlined in (11) successfully account for the acceptability of SUNC constructions in both languages. This supports the cross-linguistic applicability of the semantic taxonomy-based analysis.

#### 4. Implications

Unlike Korean and Vietnamese, English appears to disallow SUNC constructions (e.g., *#John drank the coffee and the cookie*). This contrast suggests the existence of a cross-linguistic typology in the acceptability of such constructions, as summarized in (13).

- (13) a. **Languages allowing SUNC:** Korean, Vietnamese  
 b. **Languages disallowing SUNC:** English

This typological distinction raises important questions: (i) Do other languages permit SUNC constructions?, and (ii) What syntactic or semantic factors determine whether a language allows such structures? A broader cross-linguistic investigation would not only serve to refine the proposed semantic taxonomy-based analysis, but also offer deeper insight into the interface between syntax and semantics in coordination structures more generally.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in verbal coordination, as illustrated by the Korean sentence (14) (see Lee 2024).

- (14) Miso-ka      umsik-ul [mek-ko    masi-ess-ta].  
 Miso-Nom   food-Acc eat-and    drink-Pst-Dec  
 (lit.) ‘Miso drank and ate foods.’

In (14), the closest conjunct in the verbal coordination – *mek-ko* ‘ate’ – is semantically compatible with the object *umsik-ul* ‘foods’. In contrast, the distant conjunct *masi-ess-ta* ‘drank’ is not directly compatible with *umsik-ul* ‘food-Acc’, but rather with a more specific category such as *umlyo* ‘beverage’, which is a direct hyponym of *umsik* ‘food’. Interestingly, a comparable construction appears to be acceptable in English as well – for example, *Mary drank and ate foods at the party*. This observation suggests the possibility of a typological classification based on whether languages permit *Semantically Unlike Verbal Coordination* (SUVC) – a coordination structure in which verbs differ in their selectional restrictions but remain interpretable through semantic taxonomy:



- (15) a. **Languages allowing SUVC:** Korean, English  
 b. **Languages disallowing SUVC:** None confirmed to date

While no language has yet been definitively shown to disallow SUVC construction, the contrasts observed in (13) and (15) underscore the central role of semantic taxonomies in determining the interpretation of diverse coordination constructions. These findings highlight the need for further cross-linguistic research to identify the factors that govern semantically unlike coordinations and to deepen our understanding of the syntax–semantics interface in such constructions.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has presented experimental evidence for the existence of Semantically Unlike Nominal Coordination (SUNC) in Vietnamese, a phenomenon previously identified in Korean. In SUNC constructions, conjuncts that are not semantically compatible with a shared verb may nonetheless yield acceptable and interpretable sentences, posing a challenge to traditional coordination analyses that assume semantic or syntactic parallelism. Building on the semantic taxonomy–based account originally proposed by Lee (2020, 2025), this study demonstrates that hypernymic relations within the verbal semantic hierarchy can mediate the interpretation of such mismatches in Vietnamese. The cross-linguistic presence of SUNC in both Korean and Vietnamese not only underscores the theoretical utility of semantic taxonomies, but also points to the need for a broader typological perspective in the study of coordination. Future research should continue to explore this phenomenon across a wider range of languages to identify the underlying factors that govern semantically unlike coordinations and to further refine our understanding of the syntax–semantics interface.

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