

# ENGLISH INVERSION WITH SPATIAL DEIXIS ADVERBIALS AND ITS VIETNAMESE EQUIVALENTS

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**ABSTRACT:** English inversion is really complicated for almost all Vietnamese learners of English because of differences between the two languages. Similarly, they find it very hard to produce appropriate sentences with inversion. For example, in “ YES/ NO” questions, English lexical verbs or auxiliary are placed before subjects. (Are you aware of how important it is to learn English inversion? or does she understand the English inversion?). By contrast, the word order in Vietnamese language is quite opposite. That is to say, the subject is used before the verb (Bạn có nhận thấy học đảo ngữ trong tiếng Anh quan trọng như thế nào không?” hoặc “Cô ấy có hiểu đảo ngữ trong tiếng Anh không?). Obviously, such a difference seems to cause problems for anyone who wants to acquire English as a foreign language.

Due to limitation of time and scale, the author would like to show an overview of English declaratives, spatial deixis, the definition of inversion, its distinguishing features and types which provides learners basic and relatively sufficient knowledge of this grammatical phenomenon used in English. Accordingly, a difference between English and Vietnamese inversion in declaratives with deictic adverbs is pointed out; then some implications in teaching English inversion are suggested. Hopefully, the paper will be useful for those who are interested in English teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** English inversion, inversion in declarative sentences, differences between Vietnamese and English inversion

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## ĐẢO NGỮ VỚI TRẠNG NGỮ CHỈ XUẤT KHÔNG GIAN TRONG TIẾNG ANH VÀ CÁCH DIỄN ĐẠT TƯƠNG ĐƯƠNG TRONG TIẾNG VIỆT

Đảo ngữ trong tiếng Anh thực sự khó đối với hầu hết người Việt học tiếng Anh bởi sự khác biệt giữa hai ngôn ngữ. Vì vậy, họ cảm thấy khó khi tạo ra những câu có đảo ngữ. Ví dụ, trong các câu hỏi trả lời bằng “ CÓ “ hoặc “ KHÔNG”, động từ chính

hoặc các trợ động từ được đặt lên trước chủ ngữ. (Are you aware of how important it is to learn English inversion?)” hoặc “Does she understand the English inversion?”. Ngược lại, trong tiếng Việt lại có trật tự khác “(Bạn có nhận thấy học đảo ngữ trong tiếng Anh quan trọng như thế nào không?” hoặc “Cô ấy có hiểu đảo ngữ trong tiếng Anh không?”. Rõ ràng, sự khác biệt này dường như đã gây không ít trở ngại cho những người muốn thụ đắc tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ.

Do giới hạn về mặt thời gian và phạm vi nghiên cứu, tác giả bài báo sẽ đưa ra cái nhìn khái quát về trạng từ chỉ xuất không gian, cấu trúc câu trần thuật trong tiếng Anh, định nghĩa về đảo ngữ, một số đặc điểm và các loại đảo ngữ, từ đó cung cấp cho người học kiến thức cơ bản và tương đối đầy đủ về hiện tượng ngữ pháp này được sử dụng ở tiếng Anh và Việt. Qua đó, tác giả chỉ ra sự khác biệt giữa đảo ngữ trong các trần thuật tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt với các trạng ngữ chỉ xuất không gian, tiếp đó tác giả cũng đưa ra một số gợi ý trong giảng dạy mệnh đề đảo ngữ. Hy vọng, bài viết sẽ có ích cho những ai giảng dạy và học tiếng Anh.

**Từ khoá:** Đảo ngữ trong tiếng Anh, đảo ngữ trong câu trần thuật tiếng Anh, sự khác biệt giữa đảo ngữ trong tiếng Việt và tiếng Anh.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is observed that acquiring English as foreign language is not easy at all for many Vietnamese learners due to a variety of differences in such a linguistic branch as grammar. Similarly, they find it hard to use some of grammatical structures in the right way.

“Inversion” is regarded as one of the most difficult barriers they may face. During the process of learning, they tend to be confused about using it in an appropriate way. Likewise, they are not usually accurate enough in terms of syntax when expressing themselves in the target language or vice versa. In order to help them to deal with this, I would like to have a minor study on the subject by making a contrast between English and Vietnamese

inversion. To be more specific, only inversion used in declaratives with spatial deixis will be discussed.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Declarative sentences

In English, sentences are seen from various viewpoints. First, according to communicative function, statement or declarative is one of the four types. It is a sentence that declares or states a fact with the presence of subject before the verb. Quirk, et al (1985) divide declaratives into seven types according to the presence of sentence elements (Subject, Verb, Object, Complement and Adverbial) such as SV, SVC, SVA, SVO, SVOO, SVOC and SVOA. These are made up of obligatory parts. The followings are examples:

[1] Difficulties in learning English inversion arises. (SV)

[2] Inversion is not easy. (SVC)

[3] Both English and Vietnamese inversions are in question. (SVA)

[4] We are discussing English inversion and Vietnamese equivalents. (SVO)

[5] I taught my students English inversion. (SVOO)

[6] They considered English inversion different from Vietnamese one. (SVOC)

[7] They translate these English statements with inversion into Vietnamese. (SVOA)

Obviously, the subject in all types must precede the verb phrase, which can be classified into various groups according to different criteria. Functionally, they are divided into two types such as lexical and auxiliary with two subdivisions like primary (be, do and have) and modals (can, may, might, need, will, ect). The former has lexical meaning while the latter provides grammatical meaning to the lexical verb and it functions as operator – the word which can help to form negative and interrogative forms.

In the traditional concept, the declarative contains two components called the subject and predicate, which is subdivided into the operator and the predication. Such a subdivision can be modelled as follows:

Subject + predicate

Subject + operator + predication

It is necessary that concrete analyses of the above-mentioned division should be made. Between [1] and [7], all noun phrases like “Difficulties in learning English inversion” or “both English and Vietnamese inversions” before the verbs (arises or are) function as subjects and all the rest are predicates. However, only [2], [3] and [4] contain the subjects (Inversion, Both English and Vietnamese inversions, We), the operators (are) and the predications (not easy, in questions, discussing English and Vietnamese equivalents)

## 2.2. Spatial Deixis

As for Yule (1996: 129-133), deixis is one of the five aspects in pragmatics. It is a method of using deitic words (this, that, here, there, ect) in one sentence or paragraph to replace those in the previous ones for shortening or emphasizing those (Hang, Bui Thi Thuy, 2018: 12-14).

Levinson (1983) states that there are five types of deixis such as personal, temporal, discourse, social and spatial, which is my focus in this paper. Spatial deixis is known as locative expression, showing the place between the speaker and other identities like people and things.” Here’ and “there” are examples of this. They are an opposite pair of meaning (proximal/ distal). The former designates a position towards the speaker whereas the

latter away from the speaker (Hoa, Nguyen Thi Quynh, 2004: 68). Structurally, they function as adverbials in these declaratives. That is to say, they may be found in the structure “SVA”, in which “A” is either obligatory or optional.

[8] Tom was here yesterday.

[9] The man went there.

(Thomson, 1985: 54)

### **2.3. English inversion**

#### **2.3.1. Definition**

Many researchers have advanced definitions of inversion in numerous ways. According to Mc Arthur, T (1992: 26), in rhetoric, speech in which is the normal word order of the statement is turned round, usually for emphasizing or marking priority is inversion. Also, Collin, W (1990: 429) seems to share the same viewpoint. He refers a inversion to fronting. Similarly, the verb (either auxiliary or lexical) is put before the subject in a declarative or question. Take the following as examples. The auxiliary verb “did” is placed before the subject “I” in the statement “Only yesterday did I realize that he was a liar” (Chỉ đến ngày hôm qua, tôi mới nhận thấy rằng hắn là kẻ lừa gạt). One more instance is that the lexical verb “is” is inverted in the declarative “Here is the news” (Tin tức đây rồi). To define this, both Hewing, M (1992) and Eagle (1983) claim that inversion is the rearrangement of the subject and the operator from their normal order in statements. It occurs in both declaratives and questions. They

add that inversion is used in those statements for the purpose of emphasis and interrogative questions. Quirk, R et al (1973, 412-413) seems to agree with what those have defined inversion. Likewise, he states that inversion is a phenomenon, which is associated with the thematic fronting of an element.

Through the above-mentioned definitions, inversion is shown with its own structures in various functions like questioning or emphasizing.

#### **2.3.2. English inversion features**

Like other grammatical structures in English, inversion has its own characteristics. To be more specific, it may change the shade and nuance of the sentences. For one, it does help to form an interrogative question, which can be three types such as “YES/ NO questions (General Y/N, Tag questions, exclamatory), Alternative and Wh-questions (Wh- element on Object, Complement, Adverbials or attribute) (Quirk et al, 1973)

[10] Has inversion been discussed so far?

[11] Is it easy or difficult for learners of English?

[12] Where have all the flowers gone?

It is clear that all general Y/N, alternative and Wh-question - [10], [11] [12] get the two operators (has- is- have) put before those subjects like “inversion - It and all the flowers”.

In addition, inversion is used in declaratives in order to give an emphasis on the element inverted before the subject, which is known as the initial element (Quirk, 1985) or the topic element (Leech, G, 1975). As for Ha (2017:46), the initial or topic elements are usually put into three groups. First, they are expressions of place or direction (here, there, across, down, ect). It is claimed that inversion is employed in such sentences for the purpose of emphasis since adverbials of place are marked. Second, they are expressions with negative meaning (never, nor, neither, hardly, no sooner, on no account, ect). In formal style, when these are put at the beginning of the sentence, the inversion of subject and predicate will occur

[13] Never in my life had I faced such an impossible mission.

[14] Under no circumstances must the door be left unlocked

(Ha, Pham Thi, 2017: 40)

One more feature is that inversion does not take place when the subject is expressed by a personal pronoun, (Quirk, et al, 1985: 1381). For example, “Away went they” is unacceptable, but it is appropriate to “Away went the men”. However, Quirk et al (1985; 1381) say that the subject can be a personal pronoun when there is a contrast between the two in clauses in a complex sentence as in the following instance

[15] There was she on the tennis court while I had to work

### 2.3.3. Classification

According to Swan (1980, 277), inversion is structurally divided into some groups. That is to say, it is put into two types based on the structure. In general, either lexical or auxiliary verb comes before the subject and all the rest come after.

[16] Have you got English books?

[17] Was inversion difficult?

[18] When did you learn English?

[19] Only yesterday did I realize that he was a liar.

As can be seen from those, lexical verbs in [16] and [17] are placed before the subjects “you” and “inversion” in general YES/ NO questions and auxiliary verbs in [18] and [19] are used in front of the subjects “you” and “I” in the Wh- question and declarative.

#### 2.3.3.1. Subject Lexical verbs inversion.

In this type, which is also called full inversion, the main verb is used before the subject in a declarative, question, indirect speech and formulae. Take the following as examples:

[20] On the steps stood an old man.

[21] Here is the news.

[22] Are you ready?

(Eagleson R.D, 1994: 57)

[23] Down came the train.

[24] “I love you”, whispered John.

[25] “Don’t go “, cried Daisy

(Leech, G and et al, 1975: 178)

[26] Long live Vietnam!

From the above-mentioned examples, intransitive verbs (go, come, stand) the intensive verb (be) and the introductory verbs (whisper, cry) in the reported speech can be inverted before the subject. In addition, this inversion is virtually limited to the verb in the simple present and simple past tense.

[27] From the corner comes the old beggar.

[28] Away went the car like a whirlwind.

### 2.3.3.2. *Subject auxiliary verbs inversion or subject operator inversion*

Unlike the first type, the subject-auxiliary verb or subject operator inversion known as partial inversion, has

auxiliary verbs in front. It can be only found in declaratives and questions but indirect speech:

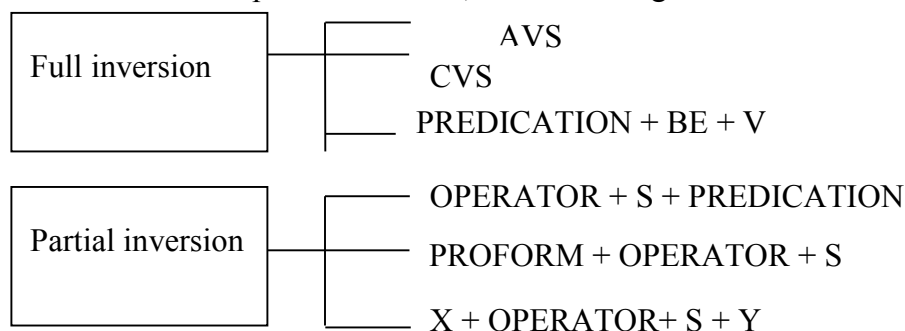
[29] I worked and so did the others.

[30] Under no circumstances must the switch be left on.

[31] Hardly had I left before the quarreling started.

(Quirk, R and et al, 1973: 414)

In sum, the division of the inversion in this article is based on the structural classification. In other words, it refers to the rearrangement of different elements in a sentence. As for Hoa, Nguyen Thi Quynh (2012: 3) both types can be generalized as follows:



(X: initial element & Y: all the rest)

## 3. ENGLISH INVERSION IN DECLARATIVES WITH SPATIAL DEIXIS ADVERBIALS AND ITS VIETNAMESE EQUIVALENTS

The notion of inversion is quite a difficult issue. It is believed that it would be complicated if English inversion were compared to Vietnamese ones in a large scale. Nevertheless, within this paper, only a contrastive analysis of English inversion in declaratives with spatial deictic

adverbials like “here” and “there” because it is observed that they are barriers for Vietnamese students when learning them due to the negative transfer or interference (Hoffman; 1991). As for him, “negative transfer occurs when the performance on the first language inhibits or detracts from performance in the second language”. In addition, the way the Vietnamese express such things in their language is mentioned so that structures in the two languages will be shown.

### 3.1. Inversions with “here”

The biggest difference between English and Vietnamese inversion is their usage with adverbials of place, clearly illustrated in declaratives with “here” at the beginning. Specifically, “here” is followed by the verb “to be” and the subject expressed by a noun phrase, which is a full inversion with the model “AVS”

[32a] Here is the waiter.

[32b] Bồi bàn đây rồi.

It is commonly used when the speaker would like to emphasize the presence of a certain identity like “the waiter” in [32a]. However, the Vietnamese language is quite opposite in terms of word order when they want to express the same thing as in [32b]. Here are the examples of inversion in declaratives with “here and their Vietnamese equivalents

English	Vietnamese
[(33a) Here is your cup of tea	[33b] Tách trà của anh đây
[34a] Here are your letters	[34b] Những bức thư của anh đây
[35a] Here is Tom	[35b] Tôm đây rồi
[36a] Here is an announcement for the passenger on flight TW 513 TO Miami	[36b] Thông báo dành cho hành khách trên chuyến bay TW 513 đến Maimi đây rồi
[37a] Here is the news	[37b] Tin tức đây rồi.

(Hoa, Nguyen Thi Quynh, 2010)

As can be seen from above examples in English and their Vietnamese equivalents, it is possible that the inversion of “be” and the subject after “here” is translated into “subject..... đây rồi”, which is clearly indicated as in the following:

English	Vietnamese
Here + V+ S	Subject + đây/ đây rồi

(Hanh, Tran Thi Hong, 2012: 23)

“Here” is also placed before verbs of motion like “come” and “go” in the declarative. It is said that “here” in this

situation carries more stress, which implies that “a taxi” has just come.

[38a] Here comes a taxi.

[38b] Tắc xi đến rồi.

Like “Here + subject – be” in the previous case, when spatial deixis adverbial “here” is stressed, which needs lexical verb - subject inversion as in [38a]. Clearly, the Vietnamese tend to do the opposite thing when expressing the same idea. Similarly, they do not employ inversion in it - [38b]. Undoubtedly, the full inversion in English is tantamount to “subject” and “verbs of motion” + đây rồi. It is shown in this figure

English	Vietnamese
Here + V <sub>motion</sub> + Subject	Subject + V <sub>motion</sub> + đây rồi

(Hanh, Tran Thi Hong, 2012: 24)

### 3.2. Inversions “there”

“There” is the second deixis discussed in the article. Grammatically, it does a similar job to “here” in a sentence. In other words, it functions as an initial adverbial in full inversion. Similarly, it is usually followed by the verb “be” or ordinary verbs of motion. To be more specific, “there” precedes the simple present tense of “to be” and a subject expressed by a noun phrase when the speaker wants to draw others’ attention to the presence of someone or something.

[39a] There is your brother.

[39b] Anh trai của bạn kia.

(Quirk, 1973: 228)

[40a] There is Anna.

[40b] Anna kia.

(Thompson, 1985: 54)

However, Quirk et al (1985: 1381) claim that the subject can be a personal pronoun when there is a contrast between the two in both clauses in a sentence. Take the following as an instance

[41] There was she, on the tennis court while I had to work.

It is believed that the subject and the verb “to be” inversion is quite opposite to the way the Vietnamese

would like to express the same thing. It is equivalent to “kia” or “kia kia”

English	Vietnamese
There + be + S	Subject + kia/ kia kia

(Hanh, Tran Thi Hong, 2012: 25)

More examples of those are found in these:

English	Vietnamese
[42a] There is John Smith	[42b] John Smith kia kia
[43a] There are our friends	[43b] Bạn của chúng mình kia

(Tan, Dao Thi Minh, 2003: 34)

As regards “there” in the above-mentioned structure, it is stressed and pronounced / ðeə/, which is different from unstressed / ðər/ in existential sentences. According to Quirk et al (1997: 14; 958), “there” in those behaves in most ways like the subject while “there” in the full inversion functions as adverbial and is used when the speaker indicates that he has just seen somebody or something and it is well established in formal English.

Apart from “to be”, “there” as adverbial may precedes verbs of motion and a subject realized by a noun in a declarative. Such a case is given by Alexandra (1988: 143)

[44a] There goes the last train.

[44b] Chuyển tàu cuối cùng đến kia.

Surprisingly, the Vietnamese use “kia” after the subject and the verb of motion, which can be modeled as in this



English	Vietnamese
There + V <sub>motion</sub> + Subject	Subject + V <sub>motion</sub> + kia

In summary, English inversion in declaratives with spatial dietic words like “here” and “there” is contrary to its Vietnamese equivalents. That is, the English tend to employ those adverbials before the verb and the subject while the Vietnamese do not change their positions when expressing the same idea.

#### 4. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

To my belief, such a difference in between English and Vietnamese inversion in declaratives with spatial dietic words mainly due to the structure and meaning has caused some problems for learners of English, especially beginners. In other words, it is inevitable for them to make mistakes when they want to express their ideas in the second language or vice versa.

Specifically, they seem to produce wrong sentences by remaining the position of the subject before the verb as in their native language. In addition, they may not distinguish the meaning in an ordinary declarative from that in the one with inverted subject and lexical verb.

Thus, it is implied that teachers be very accurate when providing them with knowledge of English inversion. For one, they should show their students that full inversion is often employed in

statements when “here” and “there” are the initial elements. Likewise, the structure “AVS” is in proportion to “Subject .... đây rồi or kia/ kia kia or “Subject + verbs of motion + đây rồi or kia. Obviously, the word order in the two languages is not the same. In addition, the meaning of the sentences with inversion should be made clear to the students. For example, in “Here is Tom”, the speaker means Tom has just come up or been found while “Tom is here” gives the sense that Tom is in this room or in a position towards the speaker. Or the indicative sentence “There + be + subject” ought to be discriminated from the existential one “there + be + singular or plural noun + adverbials of place”. Accordingly, “there”- / ðeər/ in the former is more stressed than in the latter - / ðər/ (Hanh, Nguyen Thi Hong, 2012: 22). To make it clearer, Quirk et al (1985, 14: 958) states that “there” in existential sentences behaves in most ways like the subject of the sentence. Thus, the first tends to be transferred into “Subject + kia/ kia kia” whereas the second means “có + singular/ plural noun + adverbials of place”

Most important, the students should make themselves understood in their learning environment by avoiding literal translation and the way the Vietnamese express so that they will be able to use the most appropriate one. In my opinion, that both teachers and students work with each other will have better outcomes

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the inversion is a hard category in English grammar which learners may cope with. Similarly, they are usually confused when transferring such things from Vietnamese into English or vice versa because there is a big difference between English and Vietnamese inversion structurally. Therefore, they often make mistakes when dealing with inversion in the first and second language. A contrastive analysis of inversion in relation to the spatial deitic adverbials in the article is useful for teachers and learners, especially the ones at the elementary level.

After having analyzing the structure of inversion in declaratives with deitic words, it can be clearly seen that when the subject is inverted before the verb after “here” and “there” in English while the order of words in Vietnamese is opposite.

I hope that this paper will be a piece of useful referent material for those who are interested in teaching and learning English language.

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