

Articles in Vietnamese Grammar Reflect a Purely Vietnamese Way of Thinking

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Vietnamese employs articles in ways that differ from languages such as German, French, Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese, where articles vary based on masculine, feminine, neuter, singular, or plural nouns (for example: “le”/“la”/“les”, “el”/“la”/“los”/“las”). While English distinguishes between definite and indefinite articles (“the” and “a”), Vietnamese uses articles primarily to signify “classification” and the “moving-static” nature of entities.

Vietnamese language reflects a mindset of “classification”. For example:

- NGƯỜI (PERSON/HUMAN BEING): người Mỹ (Americans), người ăn xin (beggars), người cộng sản (communists).
- CHIM (BIRD): chim bồ câu (pigeons), chim én (swallows), chim sẻ (sparrows).
- CÂY (TREE): cây sồi (oak tree), cây thông (pine tree), cây sung (fig tree).
- HOA (FLOWER): hoa hồng (roses), hoa thủy tiên (daffodils), hoa cúc (chrysanthemums).
- NHÀ (HOUSE): nhà ở (house), nhà máy (factory), nhà trẻ (kindergarten), nhà kho (warehouse).

Vietnamese speakers conceptualise entities based on their animate or static nature, using the articles CON and CÁI

Faced with an entity, Vietnamese people unconsciously perceive that this entity belong to the “moving” or “static” realm.

- Human beings, animals, and entities that move are classified within the “moving” realm, using the article CON. For example: con người (human being), con chó (dog), con sông (river), con vi trùng (bacteria).
- Conversely, objects and inanimate entities are classified into the “static” realm with the article CÁI. For example: cái bàn (table), cái nhà (house), cái cây (tree).
- Of course, there are exceptions (mainly using in poetry). For example: con đường (road).

The use of the articles CON and CÁI represents a purely Vietnamese worldview which is not observed in other languages.