

A Contrastive Study of Future-Time Conceptualization in Korean and Vietnamese – Focusing on Spatial and Motion Metaphors

Thi Thu Thuy Bui

Faculty of Korean Language and Culture, Dai Nam University, Vietnam

ABSTRACT: This study contrasts the conceptualization of future time in Korean and Vietnamese through spatial and motion metaphors. Building on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and previous research on the space–time relationship, the study examines representative constructions expressing future time as being ahead of the ego or subsequent to a temporal reference point, near or distant future, future events moving toward the experiencer, the experiencer moving toward the future, and the transition into a new stage. The data sources include 한국어기초사전 (the Korean Basic Dictionary) published by the National Institute of Korean Language, the Vietnamese Dictionary compiled by Hoàng Phê et al., as well as published works on temporal cognition in Korean, Vietnamese, and other languages. The study employs descriptive methods, cognitive semantic analysis, and qualitative contrastive analysis; examples serve solely to illustrate attested collocational patterns and are not used to infer frequency. The results show that both languages rely on spatial orientation, distance, and motion to structure the future, but differ on three main dimensions: the degree of lexicalization, the collocational range of the units, and the viewpoint organization. Korean is notable for its use of 앞으로 (ahead/from now on), 앞날 (the future/the days ahead), 다가오다 (approach/come closer), 닦쳐오다 (bear down upon), 나아가다 (advance/move toward), and 접어들다 (enter a phase); Vietnamese employs expressions such as phía trước (ahead), sau này (later), mai sau (in the future), sắp tới (coming), đến gần (approach), áp đến (bear down upon), tiến tới (move toward), and bước vào (enter). The coexistence of “future ahead” and “later/in the future” is explained by two different frames of reference: orientation from the experiencer’s position and the ordering of time points. The study thereby clarifies the structures of similarity and asymmetry in the system of future time expressions of Korean and Vietnamese.

KEYWORDS: future time; conceptualization; spatial metaphor; motion metaphor; Korean; Vietnamese

I. INTRODUCTION

Time is an abstract category, yet it permeates most human cognitive and communicative activities. Speakers typically do not express time as a completely independent entity; rather, they rely on more concrete experiences such as location, direction, distance, path, and movement. Consequently, in many languages, a point in time can be before or after, the future can be near or distant, a holiday can be approaching, and people can move toward a new year. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that such expressions are not merely isolated rhetorical devices, but reflect systematic correspondences between concrete experiential domains and abstract concepts.

Among temporal categories, the future has a distinct nature because it has not yet occurred and cannot be directly observed. The future is often associated with intentions, predictions, hopes, risks, or goals. For this reason, it is readily conceptualized as a space lying ahead of a person, a place not yet reached, an event drawing near, or a path to be traversed. Expressions such as 미래를 향해 나아가다 ‘advance toward the future’, 다가오는 미래 ‘the approaching future’, tương lai phía trước ‘the future ahead’, thời gian sắp tới ‘the coming time’, and bước vào thời đại mới ‘enter a new era’ all demonstrate the role of space and motion in how people talk about the future.

Studies on the cognition of time have shown that the relationship between space and time has an experiential basis, but is not entirely uniform across languages. Boroditsky (2000) found that spatial information can facilitate temporal reasoning. Gentner, Imai, and Boroditsky (2002) distinguish between two common modes of expression: time or events moving toward the observer, and the observer moving toward a point in time. Moore (2006, 2014) emphasizes the importance of viewpoint: an expression may take the present human being as its center, but it may also simply arrange events in a before–after order.

Korean and Vietnamese both have a rich system of expressions that use space and motion to talk about the future. In Korean, 앞으로 (ahead/from now on) can refer either to the forward direction or to the period of time from the present onward; 앞날 (the future/days ahead) refers to the coming days or the future; 가까운 미래 (near future) and 먼 미래 (distant future) place the future

A Contrastive Study of Future-Time Conceptualization in Korean and Vietnamese – Focusing on Spatial and Motion Metaphors

at a close or far distance; 다가오다 (approach/come closer) and 닦쳐오다 (bear down upon) describe an event drawing near; 나아가다 (advance/move forward) and 향하다 (head toward) describe people or society advancing toward a goal; 접어들다 (enter a phase) and 들어서다 (step into) describe entering a new stage. In Vietnamese, the corresponding functions are expressed through phía trước (ahead), sau này (later), mai sau (in the future), trong thời gian tới (in the time ahead), tương lai gần (near future), tương lai xa (distant future), đến gần (approach), áp đến (descend upon), hướng tới (head toward), tiến tới (advance toward), bước vào (enter), and bước sang (move into).

Despite these numerous similarities, the mapping between the two languages is not based on a straightforward form–function correspondence. 앞으로 (ahead/from now on) contains the element 앞 ‘front’, yet in its temporal function it typically corresponds to từ nay về sau (from now on) or trong thời gian tới (in the time ahead). Conversely, Vietnamese uses sau này (later), mai sau (in the future), and về sau (later on/afterward) to refer to the future; in these constructions, sau primarily denotes the position of a point in a sequence of events, rather than directly locating the future behind the body. Thus, a contrastive analysis must simultaneously consider lexical structure, reference point, and the relations among events.

Research on time in Korean has developed along multiple lines. Lim Ji-ryong (2002) presents the ways in which time is conceptualized in Korean, with space and movement occupying a prominent position. Lee Su-ryeon (2007) analyzes temporal deictic expressions from a cognitive perspective and emphasizes the role of the reference point. Jin Young-ha (2020) uses corpus data to contrast Korean and Chinese, showing that temporal expressions are organized through multiple experiential domains. Kim Hyun-hyo (2022) further systematizes conceptual metaphors in Korean temporal expressions. For Vietnamese, Sullivan and Bui (2016) provide notable evidence that in certain expressions and gestures, the future can be conceptualized as approaching from behind. Đinh Thị Minh Hiền and Lê Thị Khánh Lâm (2014) also acknowledge the role of space and motion in English–Vietnamese temporal metaphors.

Although there have been separate studies on Korean and Vietnamese, the number of works that place the two languages side by side for a specialized analysis of future time remains limited. The study addresses three questions: First, what spatial and motion source domains do Korean and Vietnamese use to structure the future? Second, in what respects are the representative groups of expressions similar and different? Third, how can the coexistence of expressions such as tương lai phía trước (the future ahead) and mai sau (in the future) be explained? Addressing these questions contributes to establishing a contrastive descriptive framework for the system of future time expressions in the two languages.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

A. Conceptual Metaphor and Future Time

Conceptual Metaphor Theory views metaphor as a way of organizing concepts. An abstract domain can be understood through a more familiar one. When people speak of the near future, the distant future, an exam day approaching, or moving toward the year 2030, they are using their experience of distance and motion to structure time. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) refer to these as systematic mappings: closeness in space corresponds to closeness in time; approaching corresponds to imminence; and a destination corresponds to a point in time or a state that the subject wishes to attain.

It should be noted that analyzing an expression in terms of its spatial origin does not mean that speakers always conjure a vivid mental image. Many expressions have become conventionalized and are used naturally as part of the lexicon. For instance, Koreans use 앞으로 (ahead/from now on) to mean ‘from now on’ without necessarily thinking of physical forward movement; Vietnamese speakers use sau này (later) to talk about the future without necessarily placing the future behind them. The task of cognitive analysis is to explain the historical and semantic connections between meanings, not to reduce every usage to a rigid mental scene.

For future time, two source domains play a particularly important role. The first is static space, in which the future is defined by position or distance: ahead, after the present, near, far, immediate. The second is motion, in which the future or future events move toward the person, or the person moves toward the future. These two domains are closely interrelated. When an event ‘approaches’, it is simultaneously located at an increasingly shorter distance; when a person ‘advances toward the future’, the future is viewed as a destination lying on the path ahead.

Evans (2004) argues that temporal language does not consist of a single metaphor but rather a network of perspectives. A single language may employ multiple ways of construing, depending on what the speaker wishes to emphasize. If a speaker wishes to convey the inevitability of an event, they may present the event as ‘coming’; if they wish to emphasize effort and goal-orientation, they tend to present the person as ‘moving forward’; if they wish to emphasize order, they use before and after; if they wish to talk about proximity, they use near and far. Therefore, the study does not seek to select a single conceptualization for each language, but rather examines the coexistence and functional distribution among different modes of expression.

B. Viewpoint and the Relation between “Front” and “After”

A crucial issue in the study of time is viewpoint. Moore (2006) distinguishes between ego-based temporal reference and sequence-based temporal ordering. In the first type, the speaker stands at the present and takes the orientation of the body as the

A Contrastive Study of Future-Time Conceptualization in Korean and Vietnamese – Focusing on Spatial and Motion Metaphors

basis. The front region is typically the part not yet experienced, because humans look and move forward. Expressions such as 앞날 (the future/days ahead), 앞길 (the path ahead/the future path), tương lai phía trước (the future ahead), or chặng đường phía trước (the road ahead) belong to this type of construal.

In the second type, points in time or events are arranged into a sequence. One event occurs before, another occurs after. Here, before and after are not necessarily directly related to the front or back of the speaker's body. When a Vietnamese speaker says sau này tôi sẽ học tiếp 'later I will continue studying' or mai sau con sẽ hiểu 'in the future you will understand', they place the events of continuing to study and understanding at a position after the present in the sequence. Likewise, 나중에 다시 만나다 'meet again later', 훗날 알게 되다 'come to know later on', and 이후에 변화가 나타나다 'a change appears afterward' all emphasize sequential relations.

This distinction explains why a language can simultaneously place the future ahead and the future after the present without creating a necessary contradiction. 'Ahead' answers the question of where the future is located relative to the experiencer; 'after' answers the question of where a future event stands relative to the present or another reference point. Núñez, Motz, and Teuscher (2006) show that in the comprehension of temporal expressions, the reference point significantly influences how readers select an interpretation.

However, one should not assume that all communities place the future ahead. Núñez and Sweetser (2006) demonstrate that in Aymara, the past may be placed ahead because it is known and has been seen, while the future lies behind because it cannot yet be seen. Sullivan and Bui (2016) identify a remarkable construal in Vietnamese, whereby the future can approach from behind the observer. These findings remind us that space-time relations are diverse, and a single language may maintain multiple perspectives simultaneously.

Empirical debates also suggest caution when moving from linguistic expressions to conclusions about thought. Boroditsky, Fuhrman, and McCormick (2011) found differences between English and Chinese speakers in certain temporal tasks, whereas Chen (2007) failed to replicate some of the earlier results. Therefore, the present study only draws conclusions about the conventionalized system of expression in Korean and Vietnamese, without claiming that all speakers of the two languages always conceptualize the future in a fixed direction.

C. Studies on Korean and Vietnamese

In Korean studies, Lim Ji-ryong (2002) is one of the authors who provides a relatively comprehensive systematization of how time is conceptualized. The author demonstrates that time can be understood as space, objects, motion, and resources. For the present study, the most important contribution is the confirmation that spatial expressions and motion verbs are not isolated phenomena, but form semantically related clusters.

Lee Su-ryeon (2007) approaches temporal terms from a deictic perspective. This study shows that the same lexical item may shift its interpretation depending on the reference point. For instance, 이후 'after that' requires a preceding anchor, whereas 앞으로 'from now on' typically takes the speaker's present as its reference point. This distinction is particularly useful when contrasting with Vietnamese, since sau này 'later', về sau 'later on', trong thời gian tới 'in the time ahead', and từ nay về sau 'from now on' are not entirely identical with respect to reference point and nuance.

Jin Young-ha (2020) contrasts the conceptualization of time in Korean and Chinese on the basis of corpus data. The work shows that languages may share broad source domains but differ in usage frequency, collocational patterns, and degree of lexicalization. Kim Hyun-hyo (2022) further synthesizes Korean temporal expressions within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, thereby highlighting the role of motion, location, and sequence. These studies provide a foundation for selecting the Korean units analyzed in this research.

For Vietnamese, Sullivan and Bui (2016) constitute the most direct source regarding the orientation of the future. By combining linguistic expressions and gestures, the authors argue that in certain cases, the future can be conceptualized as approaching from behind. This finding does not negate the existence of the future-ahead conceptualization in Vietnamese; on the contrary, it shows that the Vietnamese system may accommodate multiple perspectives: the future as the road ahead, the future as a point after the present, and the future as a timeline moving toward the observer.

Đinh Thị Minh Hiền and Lê Thị Khánh Lâm (2014) analyze time metaphors in English–Vietnamese romantic music and identify source domains such as space, motion, and objects. Since the data consist of song lyrics, the results cannot be taken as representative of Vietnamese as a whole; nevertheless, the study shows that image-laden temporal expressions are used flexibly in artistic discourse. The Vietnamese dictionary compiled by Hoàng et al. (2014) also serves as an important resource for verifying the meanings of units such as trước (before/front), sau (after/behind), tới (to/toward/coming), đến (to/arrive), bước (step), gần (near), and xa (far).

Overall, previous studies have established the theoretical foundation and provided many analyses for each language separately, but have not yet developed a contrastive description focused on future time in Korean and Vietnamese. On that basis, the study organizes its analysis around major semantic points, using representative expressions to clarify how the two languages establish the

A Contrastive Study of Future-Time Conceptualization in Korean and Vietnamese – Focusing on Spatial and Motion Metaphors

position, distance, direction of motion, and participant roles of the future. The focus of the study is to identify the relationships of similarity, partial correspondence, and asymmetry among groups of expressions.

D. Cross-Linguistic Evidence and Limits of Interpretation

Cross-linguistic studies help situate the Korean–Vietnamese contrast within a broader context. Boroditsky (2000) showed that participants can use spatial information when reasoning about time. This finding reinforces the assumption that words such as *before*, *after*, *near*, *far*, *come*, and *go* are not merely decorative linguistic flourishes, but may reflect conventionalized cognitive correspondences. However, this does not imply that every expression consistently triggers the same cognitive response in all speakers.

Gentner, Imai, and Boroditsky (2002) demonstrated that the Moving-Time and Moving-Ego metaphors can coexist. English speakers can say both "the deadline is approaching" and "we are approaching the deadline". Korean and Vietnamese exhibit a similar parallelism through 마감일이 다가오다 – thời hạn đang đến gần and 마감일을 향해 가다 – đang tiến tới thời hạn. The crucial point is not to identify a single correct way, but to clarify how shifting the moving entity changes the focus of the utterance.

Núñez and Sweetser (2006) show that the distribution of past and future in Aymara differs from the familiar pattern found in many European languages. This work has methodological value because it demonstrates that the orientation of time cannot be inferred from a universal assumption alone. When contrasting Korean and Vietnamese, one must start from the actual expressions of each language while acknowledging the possibility that a single system may encompass multiple orientations and multiple viewpoints.

Sullivan and Bui (2016) further extend this picture with respect to Vietnamese. The fact that the future can be conceptualized as approaching from behind in certain expressions and gestures indicates that the image of 'the future ahead' does not cover the entire system. However, this finding does not mean that Vietnamese always places the future behind. In ordinary language, there are still expressions such as tương lai phía trước (the future ahead), chặng đường phía trước (the road ahead), hướng tới tương lai (heading toward the future), and tiến về phía trước (advancing forward). A more plausible interpretation is that Vietnamese has multiple modes of conceptualization, each suited to a particular communicative context.

The debate between Boroditsky, Fuhrman, and McCormick (2011) and Chen (2007) regarding differences between English and Chinese speakers shows that experimental results can be influenced by task design, literacy experience, and cultural context. Therefore, the study does not generalize from linguistic expressions to the essential nature of thought in the two communities. The value of contrastive analysis lies in describing the conventionalized conceptual means, identifying the scope of correspondence and asymmetry between the two systems, and providing hypotheses for further empirical research.

III. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHOD

A. Scope and Data Sources

The object of the study is Korean and Vietnamese expressions that use spatial or motion elements to talk about future time and events. The study focuses on four dimensions: the future being placed ahead of or after a reference point; the future being identified as near or distant; time or future events moving toward the subject; and human or societal subjects moving toward or entering the future. Purely grammatical issues such as -겠- (a suffix indicating volition or prediction), -(으)ㄴ 것이다 (a structure indicating prediction or future plans), and sẽ, định, and sắp are not examined independently, as the goal of the study is not to contrast the means of expressing future tense or modality.

The primary Korean sources are the 한국어기초사전 (Basic Korean Dictionary) published by the National Institute of Korean Language, along with the works of Lim Ji-ryong (2002), Lee Su-ryeon (2007), Jin Young-ha (2020), and Kim Hyun-hyo (2022). The Vietnamese sources include Hoàng Phê et al.'s Từ điển tiếng Việt (Vietnamese Dictionary, 2014), the study by Sullivan and Bui (2016), the study by Đinh Thị Minh Hiền and Lê Thị Khánh Lâm (2014), together with familiar constructions verified through dictionary definitions.

The examples in the study are of two types. The first type consists of words and phrases directly attested in dictionaries or previous studies, such as 앞으로 (ahead/from now on), 앞날 (the future/days ahead), 다가오다 (approach/come closer), 접어들다 (enter a phase), sau này (later), mai sau (in the future), tương lai gần (near future), and bước vào giai đoạn mới (enter a new phase). The second type consists of illustrative sentences constructed by the author on the basis of established collocational patterns, intended to clearly demonstrate syntactic structure and semantic relations. These sentences are not treated as quoted corpus data and are not used to make inferences about frequency.

This delineation of data is appropriate for the goals of a foundational study: identifying the principal modes of expression and the correspondences between the two languages. However, it also poses clear limitations. The study does not conclude which expressions are used more frequently in actual communication, does not compare variation across genres, and does not generalize to the full range of non-linguistic cognitive activities of Korean and Vietnamese speakers.

B. Contrastive Criteria

The study conducts the contrastive analysis across three planes. The first is the conceptual plane, aimed at identifying the spatial or motion source domain and its relationship to future time. The second is the structural plane, focusing on the reference point, the role of the moving entity, and the type of spatial goal construed. The third is the lexical-semantic plane, examining the degree of lexicalization, collocational range, and nuance of the corresponding units in the two languages.

For example, 앞 (front) in 앞으로 (ahead/from now on) has the basic meaning ‘front’, but in the construction 앞으로 더 노력하겠습니다 (from now on, I will try harder), the entire unit establishes a period of time beginning from the present and extending into the future. In Vietnamese, this function is expressed by từ nay về sau (from now on) or trong thời gian tới (in the time ahead). Conversely, sau in sau này (later) originates from a positional relation, yet in its temporal function it identifies a point located after the present in a sequence. Therefore, the unit of contrast is not merely individual words but entire constructions and their referential mechanisms.

For motion metaphors, the central criterion is the role of the entity represented as moving. In constructions such as 다가오는 미래 (the approaching future) and thời hạn đang đến gần (the deadline is approaching), time or a future event takes the role of the moving entity, while the present serves as the point of approach. In constructions such as 미래를 향해 나아가다 (advance toward the future) and tiến tới tương lai (advance toward the future), a human or collective subject takes the role of the moving entity, while the future serves as the goal. This distinction allows for a contrastive analysis not only of lexical meaning but also of event structure and viewpoint.

The relations between units are classified into three degrees. Direct correspondence occurs when the two languages have constructions that are similar in both source image and function, as in 가까운 미래 – tương lai gần (near future). Partial correspondence occurs when the functions are similar but the source image or range of use differs, as in 앞으로 – từ nay về sau (from now on)/trong thời gian tới (in the time ahead). Asymmetry occurs when a unit in one language is differentiated into multiple choices in the other, as exemplified by 다가오다 (approach/come closer), 찾아오다 (come to/seek out), 닦쳐오다 (bear down upon) in Korean, as compared with đến gần (approach), đến với (come to), tìm đến (seek out), and áp đến (descend upon) in Vietnamese.

IV. SPATIAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF FUTURE TIME

A. The Future in Front of the Experiencer

The first argument is that both Korean and Vietnamese can place the future in the spatial domain ahead of the experiencer. This way of speaking is grounded in bodily experience: humans look forward, step forward, and tend to view the path not yet traveled as the life not yet lived. For this reason, the front readily becomes the image of what is about to happen, of goals, and of prospects.

In Korean, 앞날 (the future/days ahead) is the clearest case. The component 앞 (front) denotes the front, while 날 (day) denotes day; the entire word is used to refer to the days to come or the future. Combinations such as 앞날을 준비하다 ‘prepare for the future’ and 앞날이 밝다 ‘the future is bright’ show that the temporal meaning has become lexicalized. 앞길 (the road ahead/the future) can also extend beyond its literal meaning of a physical road to refer to one’s life path and prospects. When one says 젊은이들의 앞길을 열어 주다 (open the way for the future of young people), the natural interpretation is ‘open the future for young people’, not merely open a physical path ahead (National Institute of Korean Language, n.d.).

앞으로 (ahead/from now on) is a representative case of the connection between spatial and temporal meanings. In 앞으로 가세요 (please go forward), this unit indicates a direction of movement toward the front; in 앞으로 더 열심히 공부하겠습니다 (From now on, I will study harder), it establishes a period of time from the present onward. At the contrastive level, the second construction corresponds to ‘From now on, I will study harder’ or ‘In the time ahead, I will study harder’. The meaning ‘front’ remains the conceptual basis in Korean, whereas Vietnamese expresses the same function through sequential relations or the approaching of time.

Illustrative examples:

- (1) 앞으로 더 신중하게 결정하겠습니다. – From now on, I will make decisions more cautiously.
- (2) 우리의 앞날은 밝다. – Our future is bright.
- (3) 미래를 내다보고 인재를 양성해야 한다. – We need to train human resources with a vision for the future.

The examples above demonstrate three levels. 앞으로 (ahead/from now on) is a directional word that has developed a temporal function; 앞날 (the future/days ahead) is a noun that has become lexicalized to denote the future; 내다보다 (look ahead/foresee) originally meant look far out but is used to refer to the ability to foresee or predict the future. All three place the as-yet-unrealized domain within the space ahead of one's vision.

Vietnamese also makes extensive use of the front image. Expressions such as tương lai phía trước (the future ahead), con đường phía trước (the road ahead), chặng đường phía trước (the journey ahead), nhìn về tương lai (look toward the future), and hướng về

A Contrastive Study of Future-Time Conceptualization in Korean and Vietnamese – Focusing on Spatial and Motion Metaphors

phía trước (head toward the front) are all based on viewing the future as the spatial or journey domain not yet traversed. In educational, developmental, and political discourse, *chặng đường phía trước* (the journey ahead) often encompasses the tasks, challenges, and goals of the upcoming period. In everyday language, *trước mắt* (immediate/imminently) can refer to the very near future or an issue requiring immediate priority.

Illustrative examples:

(4) *Chặng đường phía trước còn nhiều khó khăn, nhưng chúng ta có cơ sở để tin tưởng.* – The road ahead still holds many difficulties, but we have grounds for confidence.

(5) *Trước mắt, nhóm nghiên cứu sẽ hoàn thiện phần thu thập dữ liệu.* – For the time being, the research team will complete the data collection phase.

(6) *Người trẻ cần chuẩn bị năng lực để bước đi vững vàng trong tương lai.* – Young people need to prepare their capacities to step firmly into the future.

Compared to Korean, Vietnamese does not have a single stable lexical unit corresponding to *앞날* (the future/days ahead) across all contexts. The phrase *ngày phía trước* (days ahead) may occur, but its range of use is narrower than *tương lai* (future) or *những ngày sắp tới* (the coming days). Conversely, *con đường phía trước* (the road ahead) and *chặng đường phía trước* (the journey ahead) are familiar constructions that highlight the journey aspect. Thus, the two languages share the same source domain but differ in the degree of lexical fixation of their units.

B. The Future as a Time after the Present

The second argument is that the future can be identified as a point in time that stands after the present in a sequence. This perspective does not derive directly from bodily orientation but from order: the present occurs first, the future occurs after. This is the basis for expressions such as *나중에* (later/in a while/afterward), *훗날* (in the future/someday), and *이후* (after that/after a stated reference point) in Korean, and *sau này* (later), *mai sau* (in the future), and *về sau* (later on/afterward) in Vietnamese.

나중에 (later/in a while/afterward) typically refers to a point in time after the present or after an activity already mentioned. The construction *나중에 다시 연락하겠습니다* (I will contact you later) can correspond to ‘*sau/lát nữa/sau này tôi sẽ liên lạc lại*’ (later/in a while/afterward, I will contact you), depending on the temporal distance of the reference point. *훗날* (in the future/someday) often carries a formal nuance and points to a relatively distant time, as in *훗날 이 일을 기억할 것이다* (one day I will remember this). *이후* (after that/after a stated reference point) and *이후에* (after that/after a stated reference point) require a clearer reference point, for example *졸업 이후에 한국에서 일하고 싶다* (After graduation, I want to work in Korea).

Illustrative examples:

(7) *나중에 다시 이야기합시다.* – Let’s talk again later.

(8) *훗날 그는 이 선택의 의미를 알게 되었다.* – Later on, he came to understand the meaning of this choice.

(9) *졸업 이후에는 대학원에 진학할 계획이다.* – After graduation, I plan to go to graduate school.

The three Korean units are all related to the relation of ‘after’, but they are not identical in terms of reference point and style. *나중에* (later/in a while/afterward) is flexible and commonly appears in conversation; *훗날* (in the future/someday) points to a distant future or is viewed from a narrative standpoint; *이후에* (after that/after a stated reference point) is tightly bound to a specified reference point. In Vietnamese, the corresponding functions are distributed among *sau* (after), *sau này* (later), *về sau* (later on), *sau đó* (after that), and *sau khi* (after (an event)). The correspondence is therefore established according to the temporal relation of the entire construction, not on the basis of a single word.

In Vietnamese, *sau này* (later) and *mai sau* (in the future) are the two clearest expressions for the future. *Sau này* (later) has a broad range of use and can refer to any period after the present. *Mai sau* (in the future) often carries a literary nuance or refers to a more distant future, particularly in statements about generations, life, and long-term outcomes. *Về sau* (later on) can refer to a time after a reference point in either the past or the future, so the reference point must be determined from context.

Illustrative examples:

(10) *Sau này tôi muốn trở thành giảng viên tiếng Hàn.* – Later on, I want to become a Korean language instructor.

(11) *Mai sau các em sẽ hiểu giá trị của những trải nghiệm hôm nay.* – In the future, you will understand the value of today’s experiences.

(12) *Sau khi hoàn thành khóa học, sinh viên có thể tiếp tục học ở trình độ cao hơn.* – After completing the course, students can continue studying at a higher level.

The important point is that *sau* (later) in the above examples expresses sequential order, and is not sufficient to conclude that the future is placed behind the speaker. A Vietnamese speaker can say *tương lai đang ở phía trước* (the future is ahead) and simultaneously say *sau này tôi sẽ làm việc ở Hàn Quốc* (later I will work in Korea). The two expressions answer two different questions: where the future is located relative to the direction of human movement, and when a future event occurs relative to the present.

A Contrastive Study of Future-Time Conceptualization in Korean and Vietnamese – Focusing on Spatial and Motion Metaphors

The contrastive analysis shows that the correspondence is primarily established at the functional level. 나중에 (later/in a while/afterward) corresponds to sau (after), lát nữa (in a while), or sau này (later); 훗날 (in the future/someday) corresponds to mai sau (in the future), về sau (later on), or một ngày nào đó (someday); 이후에 (after that/after a stated reference point) corresponds to sau đó (after that) or sau khi (after (an event)). Notably, 앞으로 (ahead/from now on) in some contexts also corresponds to sau này (later) or trong thời gian tới (in the time ahead), even though its source image is ‘front’. This confirms that 앞–trước and 뒤 (back)/후–sau do not form fixed contrastive pairs between the two languages.

C. Near and Distant Futures

The third argument is that spatial distance is used to express temporal distance. This is one of the clearest similarities between Korean and Vietnamese. 가까운 미래 or 가까운 장래 (near future/immediate future) corresponds quite directly to tương lai gần (near future); 먼 미래 (distant future) or 먼 훗날 (far-off future/distant days ahead) corresponds to tương lai xa (distant future) or mai sau xa xôi (far-off future). In both languages, ‘near’ not only refers to a short time but is also often associated with concreteness and the need for preparation; ‘far’ is often associated with uncertainty and a higher degree of abstraction.

Illustrative examples:

(13) 가까운 미래에 인공지능 교육이 더욱 확대될 것이다. – In the near future, artificial intelligence education will be further expanded.

(14) 먼 미래의 문제만이 아니라 지금 해결해야 할 과제이다. – This is not just a problem of the distant future but a task that needs to be addressed now.

(15) Trong một ngày không xa, công nghệ này có thể được ứng dụng rộng rãi. – In the not-too-distant future, this technology could be widely applied.

Beyond near and far, both languages also have expressions that reduce distance. Korean uses 머지않아 ‘before long/soon’ and 코앞에 닥치다 ‘imminent/right before one’s eyes’; Vietnamese uses không còn xa ‘not far off’, trước mắt ‘immediate’, cận kề ‘imminent’, and sắp tới ‘coming soon’. In these expressions, speakers do not need to measure exact distance; the purpose is to assess the degree of proximity of an event relative to the present.

However, near and far can carry psychological rather than merely temporal meaning. A plan scheduled for several years in the future may still be perceived as near if it is already clear and has direct implications; an event occurring soon may still be viewed as far off if conditions for its realization are lacking. This shows that the distance metaphor not only locates time but also expresses the speaker’s attitude and degree of certainty.

Visual expressions also often accompany distance. 앞날이 밝다 ‘the future is bright’, 미래가 불투명하다 ‘the future is unclear/opaque’, tương lai tươi sáng ‘a bright future’, and tương lai mờ mịt ‘a bleak/gloomy future’ all view the future as a domain that can be seen or obscured. Although vision is not the primary focus of this study, these expressions complement spatial positioning: the brighter and clearer the domain ahead, the more predictable it is; the darker or more obscure it is, the more uncertain it is.

D. The Future as a Visible, Open, or Obstructed Space

Beyond front–back and near–far, the future can also be presented as a domain that is visible, open, or obstructed. This mode of expression is still grounded in space but incorporates visual experience. When a path is bright and clear, people can see and move easily; when the front is dark, obscure, or blocked, prediction and forward movement become difficult. Thus, light and clarity are used to assess the degree of positivity and certainty of the future.

In Korean, 앞날이 밝다 (the future is bright) and 미래가 밝다 (the future is bright) express positive prospects. 밝다 (bright) originally denotes brightness, but in the context of the future it also implies opportunity, hope, and potential for development. Conversely, 앞날이 어둡다 (the future is dark/gloom), 미래가 불투명하다 (the future is unclear/opaque), and 미래가 보이지 않는다 (the future cannot be seen) express states of unpredictability or lack of prospects. 불투명하다 (unclear/opaque) literally means not transparent; when used with 미래 (the future), it presents the future as a domain that is covered and cannot be clearly seen.

Illustrative examples:

(31) 이 분야의 앞날 (tương lai/những ngày phía trước) 은 매우 밝다. – The future of this field is very bright.

(32) 경제 상황이 불안정해 미래가 불투명하다. – Unstable economic situation makes the future unclear.

(33) 장기적인 관점에서 미래를 내다볼 필요가 있다. – It is necessary to look ahead and foresee the future from a long-term perspective.

In the above examples, the future is placed before one’s vision. 밝다 (bright) makes the domain clear and positive; 불투명하다 (unclear/opaque) makes it difficult to see; 내다보다 (look ahead/foresee) places the observer in the present and directs the gaze forward. This is why visual expressions often accompany future orientation, planning, and forecasting.

A Contrastive Study of Future-Time Conceptualization in Korean and Vietnamese – Focusing on Spatial and Motion Metaphors

Vietnamese has very close equivalents such as *tương lai tươi sáng* (bright future), *tương lai mờ mịt* (bleak/gloomy future), *triển vọng rõ ràng* (clear prospects), *chưa nhìn thấy lối ra* (yet to see a way out), *mở ra một tương lai mới* (open up a new future), and *con đường phía trước còn nhiều trở ngại* (the road ahead still has many obstacles). *Tươi sáng* (bright) combines light with positive emotion; *mờ mịt* (bleak/gloomy) combines obscurity with uncertainty; *mở ra* (open up) views the future as a space or door that was previously inaccessible.

Illustrative examples:

(34) Thành công của dự án mở ra một tương lai mới cho ngành công nghệ này. – Success of the project opens up a new future for this technology sector.

(35) Nếu không có giải pháp phù hợp, triển vọng trong những năm tới vẫn còn mờ mịt. – Without appropriate solutions, the prospects for the coming years will remain bleak.

(36) Những thay đổi hiện nay cho phép chúng ta nhìn rõ hơn con đường phát triển phía trước. – Current changes allow us to see more clearly the path of development ahead.

The two languages exhibit a high degree of correspondence in constructions such as *밝은 미래* – *tương lai tươi sáng* (bright future), *불투명한 미래* – *tương lai không rõ ràng/mờ mịt* (unclear/opaque future), and *미래를 내다보다* – *nhìn xa tới tương lai* (look ahead to the future). However, collocational ranges are not entirely identical. *앞날이 창창하다* (the future is wide open/bright) in Korean expresses broad prospects, often associated with people at an early stage of life; Vietnamese expresses this content through *tương lai rộng mở* (an open future), *đường đời còn rộng* (life's path is still wide), or *có nhiều triển vọng* (has many prospects). The difference lies in the choice of supporting imagery and the degree of fixation of each construction.

The imagery of openness and closure is also related to the actions of the subject. *미래를 열다* 'open the future', *앞길을 열다* 'open the road ahead', and *mở đường cho tương lai* 'pave the way for the future' all express that humans can create conditions for a new phase. Conversely, *앞길을 가로막다* (block the future path) and *chặn đường tương lai* (block the future path) present difficulties as obstacles. This group of expressions connects spatial metaphor with the notion of agency: the future is not only a place to be reached but also a space that can be opened, built, or obstructed.

The examination of the visual and open-space group shows that future expressions simultaneously perform the functions of positioning and evaluation. The future approaching primarily expresses temporal relations; a bright future opening up also includes positive evaluation and degree of visibility. Therefore, a contrastive analysis must simultaneously consider spatial orientation, motion structure, and evaluative nuance integrated into each construction.

V. MOTION METAPHORS OF FUTURE TIME

A. Future Events Moving toward the Experiencer

The fourth argument is that time or future events can be presented as entities moving toward the person. In this mode of expression, the experiencer is viewed as relatively stationary in the present, while days, seasons, opportunities, deadlines, or risks draw near. As the distance decreases, the time of occurrence also becomes closer. Gentner, Imai, and Boroditsky (2002) refer to this as the Moving Time mode of expression.

Korean has a rather rich network of verbs for this perspective. *오다* 'come' is a general verb that can combine with *봄이 오다* 'spring comes', *기회가 오다* 'opportunity comes', and *새로운 시대가 오다* 'new era comes'. *다가오다* (approach/come closer) emphasizes the process of distance reduction, as in *시험 날이 다가오다* (the exam day is approaching) or *미래가 다가오다* (the future is approaching). *찾아오다* (come to/seek out) originally means come looking for, often creating the sense that an event is directed toward the person, as in *기회가 찾아오다* (opportunity comes). *닥쳐오다* (bear down upon) typically carries a strong nuance and often co-occurs with *위기* (crisis), *위험* (danger/risk), and *어려움* (difficulty) to express impending risks or difficulties (National Institute of Korean Language, n.d.).

Illustrative examples:

(16) 졸업식 날이 다가오고 있다. – Graduation day is approaching.

(17) 우리에게 새로운 기회가 찾아왔다. – A new opportunity has come to us.

(18) 예상하지 못한 위기가 닥쳐오고 있다. – An unforeseen crisis is bearing down upon us.

The three verbs in the examples above all denote events moving closer, but they differ in their nuance structure. *다가오다* (approach/come closer) is relatively neutral and emphasizes the narrowing of distance; *찾아오다* (come to/seek out) tends to increase the degree of personification and has a tendency to combine with favourable events; *닥쳐오다* (bear down upon) conveys pressure, suddenness, or unavoidability. In Vietnamese, the corresponding content is distributed among *đến gần* (approach), *đến với* (come to), *tìm đến* (seek out), *xuất hiện* (appear), *ập đến* (descend upon), and *đe dọa* (threaten). The contrastive relation is therefore network-like, not a one-to-one relationship.

A Contrastive Study of Future-Time Conceptualization in Korean and Vietnamese – Focusing on Spatial and Motion Metaphors

Vietnamese also has numerous ways to set time and events in motion. Ngày thi đến gần (the exam day is approaching), Tết đang đến (Tet is coming), cơ hội đã đến (opportunity has come), thời hạn sắp tới (the deadline is coming up), nguy cơ áp đến (risk descends), and một thời đại mới đang mở ra (a new era is opening up) all view what has not yet occurred as an entity approaching the present. Among these, đến and tới are neutral; đến gần and cận kề highlight distance; tìm đến often suggests choice or personification; áp đến carries a sudden, strong, and adverse nuance.

Illustrative examples:

(19) Thời hạn nộp bài đang đến gần. – The submission deadline is approaching.

(20) Một cơ hội hợp tác mới đã đến với nhà trường. – A new cooperation opportunity has come to the school.

(21) Nhiều khó khăn có thể áp đến nếu kế hoạch không được chuẩn bị kỹ. – Many difficulties may descend if the plan is not carefully prepared.

At a general level, both languages allow time and future events to assume the role of the moving entity. However, the semantic range of each verb does not entirely overlap: 다가오다 (approach/come closer) is close to đến gần (approach) or đang tới (is coming); 닥쳐오다 (bear down upon) is close to áp đến (descend upon), cận kề (imminent), or đe dọa (threaten); 찾아오다 (come to/seek out) corresponds to tìm đến (seek out), đến với (come to), or xuất hiện (appear) depending on the type of subject. The choice is governed by the event properties and the evaluative nuance of the entire sentence.

The Moving Time mode of expression tends to reduce the proactive role of humans. When one says 위기가 닥쳐온다 ‘crisis is bearing down’, the speaker emphasizes external pressure. When one says 기회가 찾아온다 ‘opportunity is coming’, the speaker emphasizes the emergence of favourable conditions. In both cases, humans are the recipients or responders, not the agents that generate temporal movement.

B. The Experiencer Moving toward the Future

The fifth argument is that human beings, organizations, or societies can be presented as moving toward the future. In this mode of expression, the present is the starting point, the future is the goal, and the process of living, learning, or developing is the path. This mode of expression tends to be more proactive and goal-oriented than the case where the future moves on its own.

In Korean, 향하다 (head toward) emphasizes direction, while 나아가다 (advance/move forward) emphasizes the process of progression and development. 미래를 향하다 (head toward the future) corresponds to hướng về tương lai; 미래를 향해 나아가다 (advance toward the future) corresponds to tiến về phía tương lai; 미래로 가다 (go to the future) uses a more general motion verb. The subjects are typically individuals, societies, nations, enterprises, or communities; thus, these constructions appear frequently in developmental, scientific, and policy-oriented discourse.

Illustrative examples:

(22) 우리는 더 나은 미래를 향해 나아가야 한다. – We must advance toward a better future.

(23) 이 정책은 지속 가능한 사회로 가는 길을 제시한다. – This policy points the way toward a sustainable society.

(24) 청년들이 미래를 스스로 개척할 수 있도록 도와야 한다. – We must help young people to pave their own way to the future.

In example (22), the future is the goal of motion; in (23), the social objective is structured as a destination at the end of the road; in (24), the future is a path that can be opened up. These expressions not only locate the future but also evaluate the subject as capable of action, choice, and overcoming difficulties.

Vietnamese has a similar system with hướng tới (head toward), tiến tới (advance toward), đi tới (go toward), tiến về (move toward), mở đường (pave the way), and vươn tới (reach toward). Hướng tới tương lai (heading toward the future) emphasizes orientation; tiến tới tương lai (advancing toward the future) emphasizes the process; đi tới một xã hội phát triển (going toward a developed society) emphasizes the outcome; mở đường cho thế hệ sau (paving the way for future generations) emphasizes creating conditions. In political and educational texts, these expressions often co-occur with words such as phát triển (development), bền vững (sustainable), hiện đại (modern), and tốt đẹp (good/noble).

Illustrative examples:

(25) Nhà trường đang hướng tới một mô hình giáo dục gắn với nhu cầu tương lai. – The school is heading toward an educational model aligned with future needs.

(26) Chúng ta cần tiến tới một xã hội học tập và sáng tạo. – We need to advance toward a learning and creative society.

(27) Những đổi mới hôm nay sẽ mở đường cho sự phát triển trong những năm tới. – Today’s innovations will pave the way for development in the years to come.

The degree of correspondence in this group is relatively high: 향하다 – hướng tới (head toward), 나아가다 – tiến tới (advance toward), 미래로 가다 – đi tới tương lai (go to the future), 길을 열다 – mở đường (pave the way). Nevertheless, the semantic focus of each verb still differs. 향하다 (head toward) establishes direction without necessarily entailing progression; 나아가다

A Contrastive Study of Future-Time Conceptualization in Korean and Vietnamese – Focusing on Spatial and Motion Metaphors

(advance/move forward) typically integrates the sense of development. Similarly, hướng tới (head toward) in Vietnamese is oriented toward the goal, while tiến tới (advance toward) emphasizes the process of approaching the goal.

The same event can be expressed from two viewpoints. A speaker may say 새로운 시대가 다가오고 있다 ‘a new era is approaching’, with the era as the moving entity; or 우리는 새로운 시대로 나아가고 있다 ‘we are advancing into a new era’, with humans as the moving entity. The temporal content is similar, but the responsibility and attitude differ: the first highlights the objectivity of change; the second highlights the subject’s participation.

C. Entering and Welcoming a New Period

Beyond viewing the future as a destination at the end of a road, both languages also treat a future phase as a bounded space that humans can enter. Korean uses 접어들다 (enter a phase), 들어서다 (step into), and 진입하다 (enter/advance into); Vietnamese uses bước vào (step into), đi vào (go into), bước sang (move into), and tiến vào (advance into). These verbs highlight the transitional moment between two phases.

새로운 시대로 접어들다 (enter a new era) corresponds to bước vào một thời đại mới. 접어들다 (enter a phase) originally denotes turning a corner or moving into a new stretch; when combined with time, this verb emphasizes the transitional threshold. 새로운 단계에 들어서다 ‘step into a new phase’ highlights the state of already being present in the new domain. 진입하다 (enter/advance into) has a formal nuance and often appears in specialized texts, such as 고령 사회에 진입하다 (enter an aging society).

Illustrative examples:

(28) 세계는 인공지능 중심의 새로운 시대로 접어들고 있다. – The world is entering a new era centered on artificial intelligence.

(29) 연구는 이제 새로운 단계에 들어섰다. – The research has now entered a new phase.

(30) Việt Nam đang bước vào giai đoạn chuyển đổi số sâu rộng. – Vietnam is entering a phase of extensive digital transformation.

Bước vào (step into) and bước sang (move into) in Vietnamese have a slight difference. Bước vào (step into) highlights entering a new domain; bước sang (move into) highlights the transition from one phase to another. Korean also distinguishes among 들어서다 (step into), 접어들다 (enter a phase), and 넘어가다 (move over to/turn into) depending on the perspective. Therefore, the correspondence is approximate and must be chosen according to the focus of the sentence.

Another group is 맞이하다 (welcome/receive) in Korean and đón (welcome), chào đón (greet/welcome), and đón nhận (receive/welcome) in Vietnamese. When one says 새해를 맞이하다 ‘welcome the new year’ or 미래를 맞이하다 ‘welcome the future’, the event is understood as arriving, but the subject also performs an act of reception. This mode of expression stands between the two viewpoints: the future advances toward humans, while humans also proactively prepare to meet the future.

Expressions of entering and welcoming the future are often associated with attitude. ‘Bước vào khủng hoảng’ (enter a crisis) evokes an unfavourable situation; ‘bước vào giai đoạn phát triển mới’ (enter a new phase of development) evokes opportunity; ‘chào đón tương lai’ (welcome the future) carries a positive nuance; ‘đối mặt với tương lai bất định’ (face an uncertain future) carries a tone of concern. Thus, motion not only organizes temporal sequence but also serves as a means of event evaluation.

VI. KOREAN-VIETNAMESE CONTRAST AND DISCUSSION

A. Major Similarities

From the foregoing arguments, it can be seen that the fundamental similarity between Korean and Vietnamese lies in the fact that both rely on spatial and motion experience to talk about the future. The future can be a spatial domain ahead, a point near or far, an event approaching, a goal toward which humans head, or a phase that can be entered. These similarities are consistent with the claims of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Boroditsky (2000), and Evans (2004) regarding the pervasive role of spatial experience in structuring time.

First, both languages associate the future with the front and with journey. 앞날 (the future/days ahead), 앞길 (the road ahead/the future), and 미래를 향해 나아가다 (advance toward the future) correspond in general meaning to tương lai phía trước (the future ahead), con đường phía trước (the road ahead), and tiến tới tương lai (advance toward the future). In both languages, this mode of expression typically appears when emphasizing goals, effort, and prospects.

Second, both languages use near-far distance. 가까운 미래 (near future) and 먼 미래 (distant future) have a direct correspondence with tương lai gần (near future) and tương lai xa (distant future). Distance-reducing expressions such as 다가오다 (approach/come closer), 머지않아 (before long), sắp tới (coming soon), đến gần (approach), and một ngày không xa (before long/not far off) also show that the closer time is to the present, the more it is expressed as an entity at a short distance.

Third, both languages allow the moving entity to vary. One can say that events come to people or that people advance toward events. 다가오는 미래 (the approaching future) and tương lai đang đến (the future is coming) place the future as the subject; 미래를

A Contrastive Study of Future-Time Conceptualization in Korean and Vietnamese – Focusing on Spatial and Motion Metaphors

향해 나아가다 (advance toward the future) and tiến tới tương lai (advance toward the future) place humans as the subject. This choice allows speakers to adjust the focus between the objectivity of change and the proactivity of action.

Fourth, both languages use expressions of entering a phase. 접어들다 (enter a phase), 들어서다 (step into), bước vào (step into), đi vào (go into), and bước sang (move into) treat a phase as a bounded domain. This similarity is particularly evident in discourse about social, technological, educational, and life changes.

B. Major Differences

Despite sharing these broad perspectives, Korean and Vietnamese differ in how they select and lexicalize expressions. The first difference lies in the 앞 group (front). Korean has 앞으로 (ahead/from now on), 앞날 (the future/days ahead), and 앞길 (the road ahead/the future), in which the future meaning is stable and widely used. Vietnamese has phía trước (ahead), con đường phía trước (the road ahead), and chặng đường phía trước (the journey ahead), but typically uses the noun tương lai (future) or những ngày sắp tới (the coming days) instead of a compound word directly equivalent to 앞날 (the future/days ahead).

앞으로 (ahead/from now on) clearly demonstrates the asymmetry between form and function. In its spatial sense, this unit corresponds to về phía trước (toward ahead); in its temporal sense, it corresponds to từ nay về sau (from now on), trong thời gian tới (in the time ahead), sắp tới (coming soon), or sau này (later). Thus, Korean maintains the image of ‘front’, while Vietnamese may use the sequential relation ‘after’ or the motion ‘toward’ to express the same temporal range. This difference shows that conceptual correspondence is not identical to formal correspondence.

The second difference lies in the group of expressions containing the element sau ‘after/back’. Vietnamese uses sau này (later), mai sau (in the future), and về sau (later on) very naturally to refer to the future. Korean has 나중에 (later/in a while/afterward), 훗날 (in the future/someday), and 이후에 (after that/after a stated reference point), but each unit is more clearly differentiated in terms of reference point and style. 나중에 (later/in a while/afterward) is flexible in conversation; 훗날 (in the future/someday) is typically more distant and has a written nuance; 이후에 (after that/after a stated reference point) depends on a preceding reference point. Thus, a single Vietnamese sau may correspond to multiple Korean units.

The third difference lies in the network of verbs denoting approaching events. Korean distinguishes 오다 (come), 다가오다 (approach/come closer), 찾아오다 (come to/seek out), 도착오다 (bear down upon), and 도래하다 (arrive/appear (formal)); Vietnamese has đến (come), tới (come/arrive), đến gần (approach), tìm đến (seek out),ập đến (descend upon), xuất hiện (appear), and mở ra (open up). The collocational ranges of these units do not entirely overlap. 기회가 찾아오다 (opportunity comes) corresponds to cơ hội đến (opportunity comes), cơ hội tìm đến (opportunity seeks (one) out), or cơ hội xuất hiện (opportunity appears); 위기가 도착오다 (crisis bears down) corresponds to khủng hoảngập đến (crisis descends), khủng hoảng cận kề (crisis is imminent), or nguy cơ khủng hoảng hiện hữu (the risk of crisis is present). The polysemous nature of the multiple correspondence patterns reflects the different segmentation of the semantic field in the two languages.

The fourth difference concerns verbs of future orientation. 향하다 (head toward) and 나아가다 (advance/move forward) both establish a relation with a future goal, but 향하다 (head toward) is oriented toward direction, while 나아가다 (advance/move forward) typically entails a process of progression and development. Vietnamese has hướng tới (head toward) and tiến tới (advance toward) with a similar distinction, yet their combinability is not entirely parallel. 미래를 향한 교육 (education oriented toward the future) corresponds to giáo dục hướng tới tương lai (education oriented toward the future), while 미래 사회로 나아가다 (advance toward a future society) corresponds to tiến tới xã hội tương lai (advance toward a future society). The level requiring contrast here is the semantic focus of the verb, not merely the general direction of motion.

The fifth difference lies in how the process of phase transition is expressed. 접어들다 (enter a phase), 들어서다 (step into), and 진입하다 (enter/advance into) all establish a new temporal domain but differ in focus: 접어들다 (enter a phase) emphasizes the transitional threshold; 들어서다 (step into) emphasizes the state of already being present in the new domain; 진입하다 (enter/advance into) is more terminological and formal. Vietnamese distributes the corresponding content among bước vào (step into), bước sang (move into), đi vào (go into), and tiến vào (advance into). The contrastive relation therefore depends on event structure and discourse style.

Another notable difference is the finding of Sullivan and Bui (2016) regarding the future approaching from behind in Vietnamese. The present study does not have equivalent data to confirm whether Korean has or lacks such a perspective in gestures and non-linguistic cognition. However, that finding shows that Vietnamese should not be described merely by the simple formula ‘the future is ahead’. Expressions of ahead, later, and time coming can coexist, each highlighting a different relation.

These differences primarily reflect the lexicalization processes and usage conventions of the two languages, and are not sufficient to conclude that Korean and Vietnamese speakers have entirely different conceptions of time. As Moore (2014) and Chen (2007) note, conclusions about cognition require further empirical data. Linguistic analysis first tells us what modes of expression are available to a community and in what contexts they are chosen.

C. Viewpoint and Event Structure in Contrast

The fundamental difference between the before/front and after groups of expressions does not lie in the two languages prescribing opposing future directions, but in their basis of reference. 앞으로 (ahead/from now on), 앞날 (the future/days ahead), tương lai phía trước (the future ahead), and chặng đường phía trước (the journey ahead) take the present position of the subject as the center, thereby locating the as-yet-unexperienced domain ahead. In contrast, 나중에 (later/in a while/afterward), 훗날 (in the future/someday), 이후 (after that/after a stated reference point), sau này (later), and mai sau (in the future) establish sequential relations between points in time. Thus, a linguistic system can simultaneously use both groups of expressions without creating structural contradiction.

The opposition between the Moving Time and Moving Ego models also changes event structure. In 다가오는 미래 (the approaching future) and tương lai đang đến (the future is coming), time or a future event takes the role of the moving entity, while the subject in the present is the point of approach. In 미래를 향해 나아가다 (advance toward the future) and tiến tới tương lai (advance toward the future), humans or communities take the role of the moving entity, while the future is the goal. The first model highlights the objectivity or pressure of change; the second emphasizes the orientation and agency of the subject.

Constructions such as 접어들다 (enter a phase), 들어서다 (step into), bước vào (step into), and bước sang (move into) add another type of organization: the future as a bounded domain. The salient point is no longer the distance between the subject and the goal but the crossing of the threshold between two phases. While 접어들다 (enter a phase) and bước vào (step into) tend toward the transitional process, 들어서다 (step into) and bước sang (move into) may highlight the new state or the shift in reference point. This differentiation shows that the same spatial source domain can still generate different event structures.

The evaluative level also participates in the differences between constructions. 다가오다 (approach/come closer) and đến gần (approach) are relatively neutral; 찾아오다 (come to/seek out) and tìm đến (seek out) increase the degree of personification; 닥쳐오다 (bear down upon) andập đến (descend upon) are associated with pressure or adversity. Similarly, 밝은 미래 – tương lai tươi sáng (bright future) and 불투명한 미래 – tương lai mờ昧 (unclear/opaque future) not only locate the future domain but also encode positive or uncertain evaluation. Therefore, semantic correspondence must be established on both positional content and evaluative nuance.

From a systemic perspective, Korean and Vietnamese draw on the same basic set of experiences consisting of direction, distance, motion, threshold, and vision. The differences lie primarily in how those experiences are distributed across specific lexical units. The finding of Sullivan and Bui (2016) regarding the possibility of the future approaching from behind in Vietnamese further shows that a language can maintain multiple space–time configurations simultaneously; however, the available data do not yet allow for establishing a direct experimental correspondence with Korean.

D. Correspondence and Asymmetry among Representative Expressions

The 앞으로 (ahead/from now on) group clearly shows the relation between functional correspondence and formal asymmetry. 앞으로 나아가다 (advance forward) maintains the spatial meaning ‘advance forward’, while 앞으로의 계획 (plans for the future/from now on) and 앞으로 조심하겠습니다 (I will be careful from now on) establish the temporal range from the present onward. In Vietnamese, these functions are expressed respectively by kế hoạch sắp tới/trong thời gian tới (plans for the coming period/in the time ahead) and từ nay sẽ thận trọng (will be careful from now on). Thus, a single Korean form links spatial and temporal meanings more tightly, while Vietnamese distributes them across multiple constructions.

The 앞날 (the future/days ahead) and 앞길 (the road ahead/the future) group reflects differences in the degree of lexicalization. 앞날 (the future/days ahead) is stable with the meaning ‘future, the coming days’, while 앞길 (the road ahead/the future) can oscillate between physical road, life path, and prospects. Vietnamese does not have a compound word fully corresponding to 앞날 (the future/days ahead), but uses tương lai (future), những ngày sắp tới (the coming days), con đường phía trước (the road ahead), chặng đường phía trước (the journey ahead), and đường đời (life path). The two systems share the image of the un-traversed path, but organize this image through units with different degrees of fixation.

The 나중에 (later/in a while/afterward), 훗날 (in the future/someday), and 이후 (after that/after a stated reference point) group shows detailed differentiation by reference point. 나중에 (later/in a while/afterward) has a flexible range from the near future to an unspecified point; 훗날 (in the future/someday) tends toward the distant future or a retrospective viewpoint; 이후 (after that/after a stated reference point) requires an explicitly stated reference point. In Vietnamese, sau (after), sau này (later), mai sau (in the future), về sau (later on), sau đó (after that), and sau khi (after (an event)) redistribute these functions in a different way. A single Vietnamese element sau may therefore encompass multiple types of relations that Korean distinguishes through multiple units.

The 다가오다 (approach/come closer), 찾아오다 (come to/seek out), and 닥쳐오다 (bear down upon) group shows differences in the nuance structure of approach motion. 다가오다 (approach/come closer) denotes distance reduction; 찾아오다 (come to/seek

A Contrastive Study of Future-Time Conceptualization in Korean and Vietnamese – Focusing on Spatial and Motion Metaphors

out) adds the sense of being directed toward the subject and often increases personification; *닥쳐오다* (bear down upon) denotes pressure or unavoidability. Vietnamese has the constructions *đến gần* ‘approach’, *đến với* ‘come to’, *tìm đến* ‘seek out’, and *ập đến* ‘descend upon’, but their collocational boundaries do not entirely overlap. The relation between the two systems is therefore one of cluster-based correspondence, not verb-by-verb reciprocity.

The *향하다* (head toward), *나아가다* (advance/move forward), *접어들다* (enter a phase), and *들어서다* (step into) group divides the future into direction, goal, and domain. *향하다* (head toward) establishes direction; *나아가다* (advance/move forward) emphasizes the process; *접어들다* (enter a phase) emphasizes the transitional threshold; *들어서다* (step into) emphasizes the state of entering the new domain. Vietnamese uses *hướng tới* (head toward), *tiến tới* (advance toward), *bước vào* (step into), and *bước sang* (move into) with a broadly corresponding distinction, but the coverage of each verb differs. Contrastive analysis in this group shows similarity in conceptual schema accompanied by asymmetry in lexical scope.

From the Vietnamese side, *sau này* (later), *trong thời gian tới* (in the time ahead), and *bước sang năm mới* (move into the new year) also do not have a single Korean unit covering their entire function. *Sau này* (later) may correspond to *나중에* (later/in a while/afterward) or *훗날* (in the future/someday) depending on distance and style; *trong thời gian tới* (in the time ahead) corresponds to *앞으로* (ahead/from now on), *향후* (in the future/from now on), or *가까운 시일 내에* (in the near future); *bước sang năm mới* (move into the new year) corresponds to *새해를 맞이하다* (welcome the new year) or *새해에 들어서다* (step into the new year) depending on whether the focus is on reception or phase transition. These cases confirm the bidirectionality of Korean–Vietnamese asymmetry.

Taken together, these groups show that the appropriate unit of contrast is the construction tied to reference point, motion role, and nuance, rather than the isolated word divorced from context. The two languages share basic conceptual schemas but divide the semantic field along different boundaries. Therefore, the results of the contrastive analysis should be presented as a many-to-many correspondence network, in which similarity in source domain does not guarantee identity in lexical structure and discourse function.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The study has contrasted the ways in which future time is conceptualized in Korean and Vietnamese, with a focus on space and motion. The results show that both languages can place the future ahead, identify the future in terms of near–far distance, present future events as approaching the person, present the person as moving toward the future, and treat a new phase as a domain that can be entered.

These similarities reflect a shared experiential basis concerning direction, distance, motion, and spatial thresholds. However, the two languages differ in their degree of lexicalization, collocational range, and the way they partition semantic fields. Korean is particularly notable for *앞으로* (ahead/from now on), *앞날* (the future/days ahead), *다가오다* (approach/come closer), *닥쳐오다* (bear down upon), *나아가다* (advance/move forward), and *접어들다* (enter a phase); Vietnamese employs *phía trước* (ahead), *sau này* (later), *mai sau* (in the future), *sắp tới* (coming soon), *đến gần* (approach), *ập đến* (descend upon), *hướng tới* (head toward), *tiến tới* (advance toward), and *bước vào* (enter). The contrastive relations are therefore established primarily between constructions and semantic networks, rather than between individual words with similar forms.

The coexistence of the future ahead and later/in the future is explained by two distinct bases of reference. ‘Ahead’ takes the subject’s current position as its center and views the future as the path not yet traversed; ‘later/after’ arranges the future event in a position subsequent to the present in the temporal sequence. In addition, Sullivan and Bui (2016) show that Vietnamese can also structure the future as an entity approaching from behind. This finding highlights the multi-configurational nature of the space–time system and shows that a language cannot be reduced to a single conceptual orientation.

The limitations of the study lie in its use of dictionary data and previously published expressions, rather than a balanced corpus, and the absence of direct experimentation with speakers. Further research should examine the frequency and collocational range of these expression groups in newspapers, conversation, and literature, while also contrasting the gestures and time-arrangement tasks of Korean and Vietnamese speakers. Despite these limitations, the study has established a contrastive framework centered on reference point, motion structure, degree of lexicalization, and evaluative nuance in the future time expressions of the two languages.

REFERENCES

- 1) Boroditsky, L. (2000). Metaphoric structuring: Understanding time through spatial metaphors. *Cognition*, 75(1), 1–28. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-0277\(99\)00073-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-0277(99)00073-6)
- 2) Boroditsky, L., Fuhrman, O., & McCormick, K. (2011). Do English and Mandarin speakers think about time differently? *Cognition*, 118(1), 123–129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2010.09.010>
- 3) Chen, J.-Y. (2007). Do Chinese and English speakers think about time differently? Failure of replicating Boroditsky (2001). *Cognition*, 104(2), 427–436. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2006.09.012>

- 4) Đinh Thị Minh Hiền, & Lê Thị Khánh Lâm. (2014). Nghiên cứu ẩn dụ ý niệm về thời gian trong nhạc trữ tình Anh–Việt [A Study of Conceptual Metaphors of Time in English and Vietnamese Romantic Songs]. *Tạp chí Khoa học và Công nghệ Đại học Đà Nẵng*, 8(81), 36–41.
- 5) Evans, V. (2004). The structure of time: Language, meaning and temporal cognition. John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/hcp.12>
- 6) Gentner, D., Imai, M., & Boroditsky, L. (2002). As time goes by: Evidence for two systems in processing space–time metaphors. *Language and Cognitive Processes*, 17(5), 537–565. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01690960143000317>
- 7) Hoàng Phê, Vũ Xuân Lương, Hoàng Thị Tuyền Linh, Phạm Thị Thủy, Đào Thị Minh Thu, & Đặng Thanh Hòa. (2014). *Từ điển tiếng Việt* [Vietnamese Dictionary]. Nhà xuất bản Đà Nẵng và Trung tâm Từ điển học.
- 8) 진영하 [Jin, Y.-H.]. (2020). 말뭉치 기반 한·중 시간 개념화 양상 대조 연구 [A Corpus-Based Contrastive Study of Patterns of Time Conceptualization in Korean and Chinese]. *한국언어문화학* [Korean Language and Culture], 17(2), 217–245.
- 9) 김현효 [Kim, H.-H.]. (2022). 시간표현의 개념적 은유 연구 [Study of Conceptual Metaphors in Temporal Expressions]. *언어연구* [Language Research], 37(4), 445–461. <https://doi.org/10.18627/jslg.37.4.202202.445>
- 10) Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
- 11) 이수련 [Lee, S.-R.]. (2007). 시간 지시사의 인지론적 해석 [A Cognitive Interpretation of Temporal Deictic Expressions]. *한글* [Hangeul], 277, 159–184.
- 12) 임지룡 [Lim, J.-R.]. (2002). ‘시간’의 개념화 양상 [Patterns of Time Conceptualization]. *어문학* [Language and Literature], 77, 201–222.
- 13) Moore, K. E. (2006). Space-to-time mappings and temporal concepts. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 17(2), 199–244. <https://doi.org/10.1515/COG.2006.005>
- 14) Moore, K. E. (2014). The spatial language of time: Metaphor, metonymy, and frames of reference. John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/hcp.42>
- 15) National Institute of Korean Language. (n.d.). *한국어기초사전* [Basic Korean Dictionary]. Retrieved July 2026 from <https://krdict.korean.go.kr>
- 16) Núñez, R. E., Motz, B. A., & Teuscher, U. (2006). Time after time: The psychological reality of the Ego- and Time-Reference-Point distinction in metaphorical construals of time. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 21(3), 133–146. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327868ms2103_1
- 17) Núñez, R. E., & Sweetser, E. (2006). With the future behind them: Convergent evidence from Aymara language and gesture in the crosslinguistic comparison of spatial construals of time. *Cognitive Science*, 30(3), 401–450. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog0000_62
- 18) Sullivan, K., & Bui, L. T. (2016). With the future coming up behind them: Evidence that time approaches from behind in Vietnamese. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 27(2), 205–233. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cog-2015-0066>



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non-Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.