

# A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE VIETNAMESE VERB “ĂN” AND ITS DEPRIVED EXPRESSIONS REFERRING TO FEASTS AND SOCIAL GATHERINGS

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## Abstract

This paper explores the semantic extension of the Vietnamese verb “ăn” (literally “to eat”), focusing on its usage in contexts related to attending social gatherings and ceremonial events. Drawing upon frameworks from cognitive linguistics and pragmatics, the study investigates how “ăn” transcends its basic denotation of consuming food to encompass a broader range of culturally significant activities such as weddings, birthdays, memorial ceremonies, festivals, and New Year celebrations. Through the mechanism of metonymy, “ăn” has evolved in Vietnamese to signify participation in communal and ritualistic events—where food is often central but not the sole focus. Expressions like “ăn cưới” (attend a wedding), “ăn giỗ” (attend a death anniversary), “ăn sinh nhật” (celebrate a birthday), and “ăn Tết” (celebrate Lunar New Year) illustrate how the verb has semantically expanded to reflect the cultural importance of feasting as a social and ceremonial practice. This semantic shift underscores the pivotal role of shared meals and banquets in Vietnamese society, where eating is deeply intertwined with social bonding, tradition, and etiquette. By analyzing authentic linguistic data and usage patterns, the paper maps out the semantic trajectory of “ăn” and identifies the cultural motivations behind its evolution. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of semantic construction in Vietnamese, offering valuable insights for comparative studies between Chinese and Vietnamese, as well as for cross-cultural communication and language teaching.

**Keywords:** Vietnamese language; ăn; semantic extension; metonymy; cultural linguistics

## INTRODUCTION

In the Vietnamese language, the verb “ăn”, which translates to “eat”, is one of the most elementary and frequently used words in daily communication. At its core, it denotes the act of consuming food, a basic biological necessity. A sentence like “Tôi ăn cơm” (“I eat rice”) is a straightforward expression of this fundamental human activity. However, as we delve deeper into the linguistic and cultural fabric of Vietnamese society, we uncover a remarkable phenomenon: “ăn” has evolved far beyond its literal meaning. It now functions as a culturally loaded verb that encapsulates complex social behaviors, ceremonial participation, and collective experiences.

One of the most striking examples of this semantic expansion is the phrase “Tôi ăn cưới”, which literally means “I eat wedding.” On the surface, it may appear to describe the act of eating at a wedding banquet. Yet in practice, it conveys the broader meaning of attending a wedding celebration. The verb “ăn” in this context does not merely refer to the physical act of eating. Instead, it serves as a metonymic representation of the entire event, including the rituals, social interactions, and communal feasting that define Vietnamese weddings. A more formal equivalent would be “Tôi tham dự một cái đám cưới” (“I attend a wedding”), but the colloquial use of “ăn cưới” is more natural, efficient, and culturally resonant.

This linguistic shortcut reflects a deeper cultural logic. In Vietnamese society, weddings are not just private ceremonies between two individuals. They are elaborate social events that involve extended families, neighbors, colleagues, and friends. Guests do more than witness the union of the bride and groom. They participate in a shared celebration, offer blessings and gifts, and engage in meaningful social exchange. The wedding banquet is a central component of this experience. It is a moment of hospitality, gratitude, and emotional connection, where the hosts express their appreciation through carefully prepared dishes and festive ambiance.

Over time, the prominence of the banquet in such events has led to a linguistic simplification. The entire process of attending a wedding and partaking in its feast is condensed into the symbolic expression “ăn cưới.” This is a classic example of metonymy, where a salient action within an event—eating—is used to represent the whole event. As Vietnamese linguist Hoang (2003) observes, this metonymic mechanism enables a salient action within a social event to stand for the entire experience, thereby enriching the semantic scope of the verb “ăn.”

This pattern is not limited to weddings. Vietnamese is rich with expressions that follow a similar structure.

*ăn giỗ* – attending a death anniversary  
*ăn sinh nhật* – celebrating a birthday  
*ăn liên hoan* – joining a party or gathering  
*ăn hỏi* – attending an engagement ceremony  
*ăn đám ma* – attending a funeral  
*ăn đầy tháng* – celebrating a baby's first month  
*ăn thôi nôi* – celebrating a baby's first birthday  
*ăn Tết* – celebrating Lunar New Year  
*ăn tân gia* – celebrating a housewarming

In each of these expressions, the verb “*ăn*” is paired with a culturally significant event that typically involves both ritual and feasting. As a result, “*ăn*” acquires a broader semantic role. It does not only mean to eat. It also implies participation, celebration, and social engagement. This is not a random linguistic coincidence. It is deeply rooted in Vietnamese collective culture, where shared meals are essential for maintaining relationships, expressing respect, and reinforcing community bonds.

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, this semantic expansion illustrates how human thought often moves from the concrete to the abstract and from part to whole. The verb “*ăn*” becomes a linguistic vessel for expressing broader social participation. It shows how language reflects cultural cognition and how specific words can carry layers of meaning shaped by lived experience.

Moreover, this usage reveals a distinctive feature of Vietnamese culture. Food and feasting are central to rituals, commemorations, and celebrations. The dining table is not just a place for nourishment. It is a space for connection, emotion, and cultural transmission. Using “*ăn*” to encapsulate these events is both a reflection of everyday life and a manifestation of cultural thinking. It also influences Vietnamese communication style, which often favors indirect, symbolic, and emotionally nuanced expressions of social relationships.

This phenomenon also offers valuable insights into the Vietnamese worldview. In Vietnamese society, important life events are rarely experienced in isolation. They are shared, celebrated, and ritualized through communal gatherings, where food plays a symbolic and practical role. The use of “*ăn*” in this context reflects a cultural emphasis on togetherness, gratitude, and emotional warmth. It is a linguistic embodiment of the Vietnamese values of hospitality, respect, and social harmony.

By examining this phenomenon, we gain a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed in Vietnamese and how language interacts with culture. Expressions like “*ăn cưới*” and “*ăn Tết*” are not just linguistic shortcuts. They are cultural signifiers that embody values of kinship, etiquette, and collective identity. They demonstrate how language serves as a repository of cultural meaning and offer learners a valuable lens through which to understand Vietnamese ways of thinking.

In the following sections, this paper will focus on the use of “*ăn*” in the context of attending feasts and events. It will analyze a wide range of examples and identify semantic patterns. Through this exploration, we aim to illuminate the cultural logic behind these expressions and provide meaningful insights for learners navigating Vietnamese-Chinese language comparison and cross-cultural communication.

## 2. Semantic Interpretation of “*Ăn*” in the Context of Attending Feasts and Social Events in Vietnamese

The Vietnamese verb “*ăn*”, which originally signifies the act of eating, has undergone a remarkable semantic transformation when used in conjunction with various social and ceremonial events. Expressions such as *ăn đám giỗ* (attending a death anniversary), *ăn sinh nhật* (celebrating a birthday), *ăn liên hoan* (joining a festive gathering), *ăn hỏi* (attending an engagement ceremony), *ăn đám ma* (attending a funeral), *ăn đầy tháng* (celebrating a baby's first month), *ăn thôi nôi* (celebrating a baby's first birthday), *ăn Tết* (celebrating Lunar New Year), and *ăn tân gia* (celebrating a housewarming) all follow a consistent linguistic pattern. This pattern can be summarized as the combination of the verb “*ăn*” with a noun that denotes a specific event or occasion.

The core meaning of these expressions is not limited to the literal act of eating. Instead, they reflect a broader cultural and cognitive process in which attending an event and sharing a meal are deeply intertwined. In Vietnamese society, communal dining is not merely a supplementary activity but a central and indispensable component of most social gatherings. As a result, the verb “*ăn*” becomes a symbolic representation of participation in the entire event. This transformation is rooted in a cognitive sequence that begins with attending a specific occasion, continues with the act of eating as a shared experience, and culminates in the completion of the social ritual. The verb “*ăn*” thus encapsulates this entire chain of actions and meanings.

To illustrate this phenomenon more clearly, consider the expression *ăn đầy tháng*, which refers to the celebration held when a newborn reaches one month of age. The term *đầy tháng* denotes a traditional Vietnamese ceremony that includes ancestral offerings, prayers for the child's health and future, and a gathering of family members and close friends. During this gathering, the host prepares a generous meal to honor the guests and mark the significance of the occasion. When someone says “*ăn đầy tháng*”, they are not simply referring to the act of eating food at the event. Rather, they are using the verb “*ăn*” to represent their participation in the entire ceremony, which includes both ritual and social components. This usage reflects a metonymic cognitive strategy in which a prominent and culturally salient action—eating—is used to stand for the whole event.

This metonymic extension of meaning is not arbitrary. It is deeply embedded in the cultural logic of Vietnamese society, where food and feasting play a central role in social life. The act of eating is not only a biological necessity but also a medium for expressing gratitude, reinforcing relationships, and celebrating shared values. In Vietnamese culture, important life events such as weddings, funerals, anniversaries, and festivals are almost always accompanied by communal meals. These meals serve as a space for emotional connection, cultural transmission, and social bonding. As a result, the verb “ăn” naturally acquires new layers of meaning that go beyond its original function.

From a linguistic perspective, the structure “ăn” + *event* represents a productive and culturally motivated pattern of semantic expansion. It demonstrates how language evolves to reflect the lived experiences and social practices of its speakers. The verb “ăn” becomes a linguistic vessel that carries both literal and symbolic meanings, allowing speakers to express complex social behaviors through familiar and culturally resonant vocabulary.

From a cognitive linguistic standpoint, this phenomenon exemplifies the principle of metonymy, in which a part of an event is used to represent the whole. In this case, the act of eating is selected as the most representative element of social gatherings, and is used to stand for the entire experience of attending and participating in the event. This reflects a universal cognitive tendency to move from the concrete to the abstract and from the specific to the general. The Vietnamese usage of “ăn” in this context provides a compelling example of how language mirrors thought and how cultural values shape linguistic expression.

From a cultural anthropological perspective, the prominence of “ăn” in expressions related to social events reveals the collective nature of Vietnamese society. Vietnamese culture places a strong emphasis on family, community, and interpersonal relationships. Social cohesion is maintained through shared rituals and communal experiences, many of which center around food. The dining table is not merely a place for nourishment but a symbolic space where respect is shown, emotions are expressed, and cultural identity is reinforced. The use of “ăn” to represent participation in these events reflects the deep integration of food into the social and cultural fabric of Vietnamese life.

In conclusion, the expression “ăn” + *event* is more than a linguistic construction. It is a cultural artifact that embodies the values, beliefs, and cognitive strategies of the Vietnamese people. It illustrates how a simple verb can evolve to carry complex meanings and how language serves as a bridge between individual experience and collective identity. This phenomenon offers valuable insights for comparative studies between Vietnamese and Chinese, for cross-cultural communication, and for language education. It highlights the importance of understanding the cultural context in which language is used and the ways in which linguistic forms reflect and reinforce social realities.

### 3. Semantic Illustration and Corpus-Based Analysis of “Ăn” in the Context of Attending Feasts and Social Events in Vietnamese

The use of the verb “ăn” to express participation in feasts and social events is a highly lexicalized and culturally embedded phenomenon in Vietnamese. This usage goes far beyond its literal meaning of eating and reflects a broader semantic and cognitive pattern. To analyze this phenomenon in greater detail, a corpus-based approach was employed using data from the Vietnamese S-Project Corpus. The results reveal a wide range of expressions in which “ăn” is used to denote attendance at culturally significant events. These expressions are not only frequent in usage but also deeply rooted in Vietnamese social practices.

The following table summarizes the frequency of selected expressions that follow the pattern “ăn” + *event*:

Expression	Meaning	Frequency in Corpus
Ăn Tết	Celebrating Lunar New Year	30,008
Ăn hỏi	Attending an engagement ceremony	2,913
Ăn cưới	Attending a wedding	1,862
Ăn liên hoan	Attending a festive gathering	355
Ăn sinh nhật	Celebrating a birthday	301

#### *Ăn Tết (Celebrating Lunar New Year)*

Among all expressions, “ăn Tết” is the most frequently used, appearing over thirty thousand times in the corpus. This phrase does not merely refer to eating during the New Year holiday. Instead, it encapsulates the entire experience of celebrating Tết, which is the most important and symbolic traditional festival in Vietnamese culture. From a cognitive perspective, “ăn Tết” reflects the central role of food in the rituals and social interactions that define the holiday.

In preparation for Tết, families clean their homes, purchase new clothes, and prepare abundant food offerings. During the holiday, people take extended time off work to rest, reunite with loved ones, and participate in various customs. A well-known Vietnamese saying, “Mùng Một Tết cha, mùng Hai Tết mẹ, mùng Ba Tết thầy” (On the first day of Tết, visit your father; on the second, your mother; on the third, your teacher), illustrates the importance of filial piety and gratitude during the celebration. Food is present throughout these rituals, from year-end feasts

to New Year banquets, making eating a symbolic representation of the entire festive experience, as shown in the following examples:

*Như thế là xuân này không có tiền ăn Tết.* (That means there is no money to celebrate Tết this year.)

*Mình chọn ăn Tết ở đây để vui chơi, đồng thời cũng để tìm hiểu lối sống và văn hoá của người Việt Nam qua lễ hội, phong tục.* (I chose to celebrate Tết here to enjoy the festivities and also to learn about Vietnamese lifestyle and culture through its traditions.)

*Ăn hỏi* (*Attending an Engagement Ceremony*)

The expression “*ăn hỏi*” appears nearly three thousand times in the corpus and refers to the traditional engagement ceremony that precedes a Vietnamese wedding. This ceremony involves the groom’s family bringing symbolic gifts to the bride’s family, including betel leaves, wine, fruits, sticky rice cakes, and other items. These offerings express respect and gratitude and mark the formal beginning of the marriage process.

After the ceremonial exchange, both families and guests gather for a celebratory meal. The verb “*ăn*” in this context does not simply denote eating. It represents the entire engagement ritual, including the procession, gift exchange, and communal dining. Through metonymy, the act of eating becomes the linguistic symbol for participating in the engagement ceremony, as shown below:

*Hai nhà không cách nhau quá xa nên Đăng Khôi đã đề xuất sử dụng xích lô để đi ăn hỏi thay vì đi xe sang.* (Since the two families are not far apart, Đăng Khôi suggested using a rickshaw for the engagement ceremony instead of a luxury car.)

*Lễ ăn hỏi, được tái hiện bằng 20 cô gái mặc áo dài đỏ bê khay, quả cùng nhà trai đi ăn hỏi.* (The engagement ceremony was reenacted with twenty girls in red áo dài carrying trays, accompanying the groom’s family.)

*Ăn cưới* (*Attending a Wedding*)

The phrase “*ăn cưới*” is another common expression, appearing over eighteen hundred times in the corpus. It refers to attending a wedding celebration, which typically includes multiple stages such as engagement, ancestral offerings, ring exchange, and a banquet. The banquet is often the most memorable and socially significant part of the event.

In this context, “*ăn*” is used to represent the entire wedding experience. It highlights the importance of food as a central element of Vietnamese weddings and reflects the cultural tendency to use the most prominent action - eating - as a stand-in for the whole event. This can be demonstrated by the following instances:

*Chán ngấy việc phải đi ăn cưới liên miên, một đôi vợ chồng ở Argentina đã đăng quảng cáo trên báo và cầu xin mọi người đừng mời họ dự đám cưới.* (Tired of constantly attending weddings, a couple in Argentina placed an ad in the newspaper begging people not to invite them anymore.)

*Họ mới vừa dự đám cưới mình thì không có lý do gì từ chối khi họ mời. Vì thế, sau đám cưới, vợ chồng tôi phải dành sẵn ít tiền để đi ăn cưới dần.* (They just attended our wedding, so we had no reason to refuse their invitation. After our wedding, my spouse and I had to set aside money to attend others.)

*Ăn liên hoan* (*Attending a Festive Gathering*)

Although less frequent than the previous expressions, “*ăn liên hoan*” still appears over three hundred times in the corpus. It refers to attending a celebratory gathering, often held to mark achievements in education, work, or community life. These events typically include shared meals, which serve as a medium for joy, recognition, and social bonding.

The verb “*ăn*” in this context symbolizes not only the act of eating but also the collective experience of celebration and emotional connection. It reflects the Vietnamese cultural emphasis on food as a means of reinforcing group identity and cohesion, as shown in the following examples:

*Từ sáng cả nhà gia đình đi chơi tại vườn thú rồi quay về siêu thị mua ít đồ ăn liên hoan đầu năm.* (The whole family went to the zoo in the morning and then returned to the supermarket to buy food for the New Year gathering.)

*Anh Hưng biết tôi thích ăn hai món đó nên lần nào đi ăn liên hoan cùng cả đội, anh đều cố tình đến những quán lẩu và hải sản hay sao ấy.* (Hưng knows I like those two dishes, so whenever we have a team gathering, he always seems to choose hotpot or seafood restaurants.)

*Ăn sinh nhật* (*Celebrating a Birthday*)

The expression “*ăn sinh nhật*” is commonly used to refer to attending or celebrating a birthday. It encompasses the entire event, including gift-giving, offering blessings, socializing, and sharing food. The verb “*ăn*” in this context functions as a metonymic representation of the celebration itself, as shown below:

*Ngày mai tôi đi ăn sinh nhật bạn tôi.* (Tomorrow I am going to my friend’s birthday party.)

*Hari Won cho biết, cô không thể nào quên được kỷ niệm lần đầu tiên ăn sinh nhật trên phim trường.* (Hari Won shared that she could never forget the memory of celebrating her birthday for the first time on a film set.)

#### 4. The Semantic Extension of “Ăn” as “Participating in Feasts and Events” and Its Cultural Mapping in Vietnam’s Food-Centered Society

In the Vietnamese language, the verb “*ăn*” is traditionally understood to denote the act of eating, a fundamental biological activity that sustains human life. However, its semantic trajectory reveals a remarkable evolution that transcends its original physiological function. In contemporary usage, “*ăn*” has developed into a culturally loaded



and socially symbolic verb that encapsulates participation in a wide array of communal and ceremonial events. This transformation is evident in expressions such as “*ăn cưới*” (attending a wedding), “*ăn Tết*” (celebrating Lunar New Year), “*ăn giỗ*” (attending ancestral memorials), “*ăn sinh nhật*” (celebrating a birthday), and “*ăn liên hoan*” (joining a festive gathering). In these constructions, the verb “*ăn*” no longer refers solely to the act of consuming food but functions metonymically to represent the entire event. This metonymic shift is achieved by foregrounding the most salient and culturally resonant component of the occasion—communal dining—and using it as a linguistic proxy for the broader social experience.

This phenomenon is deeply rooted in the cognitive and cultural frameworks of Vietnamese society. Within the Vietnamese worldview, food is not merely a biological necessity but a central medium through which social relationships are cultivated, maintained, and expressed. Communal meals are integral to rituals, celebrations, and everyday interactions, serving as platforms for emotional exchange, cultural transmission, and the reinforcement of social bonds. As Trần Quốc Vượng has observed, eating in Vietnamese culture functions as a cultural and social nucleus, intricately linked to customs, festivals, and community life. He emphasizes that food and family meals play a pivotal role in binding rural communities together and that many Vietnamese rituals and traditions are structured around the act of eating. This perspective is vividly reflected in traditional practices, where nearly every major life event—whether weddings, funerals, engagements, or seasonal celebrations—is organized around a communal feast. The dining table becomes a symbolic space where relationships are affirmed, values are transmitted, and collective identity is reinforced.

From the standpoint of cognitive linguistics, the semantic expansion of “*ăn*” illustrates a universal cognitive tendency: the abstraction from concrete experiences and the use of part-to-whole associations in conceptualization. In Vietnamese social events, the banquet is often the most visible and emotionally charged element. As such, it becomes the focal point through which the entire event is linguistically represented. Over time, this cognitive association becomes conventionalized, and “*ăn*” is reanalyzed as a symbolic marker of participation. This process results in the formation of a new semantic network in which “*ăn*” functions not only as a verb of consumption but also as a verb of social engagement. For example, when a speaker says “*Ngày mai tôi đi ăn cưới bạn tôi*” (“Tomorrow I will go eat my friend’s wedding”), the intended meaning is not limited to dining but encompasses the full experience of attending the wedding ceremony and celebration. Similarly, “*ăn Tết*” refers not only to eating traditional New Year foods but also to participating in a wide range of activities including shopping for holiday goods, performing ancestral rites, visiting relatives, and engaging in festive customs.

This semantic transformation also reveals important aspects of Vietnamese communicative style and cultural psychology. Vietnamese speakers often favor indirect, symbolic, and emotionally nuanced expressions over direct statements. The use of “*ăn*” to represent participation reflects this preference for subtlety and cultural resonance. It also aligns with the collectivist orientation of Vietnamese society, where group activities and shared experiences are prioritized over individual actions. The verb “*ăn*”, as one of the most frequent and familiar actions in daily life, is thus endowed with abstract significance and becomes a linguistic reflection of the food-centered cognition that characterizes Vietnamese culture. This transformation demonstrates the principle of linguistic economy, where the most salient and representative element of an event is used to express the whole, and the principle of cultural salience, where language mirrors the values and priorities of the community.

Furthermore, the semantic evolution of “*ăn*” offers a unique lens through which to examine the interplay between language and cultural identity. It illustrates how linguistic forms are not static but dynamically shaped by the social practices and cultural values of their speakers. In the case of Vietnamese, the centrality of food in social life has led to the lexicalization of “*ăn*” as a marker of communal participation. This lexicalization is not merely a linguistic convenience but a reflection of the deep emotional and symbolic significance that food holds in Vietnamese culture. The act of eating is imbued with meanings that extend beyond nourishment, encompassing notions of respect, gratitude, celebration, and belonging. As such, the verb “*ăn*” becomes a cultural artifact that encodes the collective experiences and relational ethos of the Vietnamese people.

In addition, this phenomenon has pedagogical implications for language learners and researchers engaged in cross-cultural communication. Understanding the expanded meanings of “*ăn*” provides insight into the Vietnamese way of thinking and interacting, revealing how everyday language can serve as a repository of cultural knowledge. It also highlights the importance of contextual and cultural competence in language education, where semantic nuances must be taught alongside grammatical structures. For comparative linguists, the case of “*ăn*” offers a rich example of how metonymy operates across languages and cultures, and how similar cognitive mechanisms can yield different linguistic outcomes depending on cultural context.

In sum, the transformation of “*ăn*” from a verb of consumption to a verb of participation is both a linguistic innovation and a cultural embodiment. It reflects the dynamic interplay between language, cognition, and culture, and illustrates how deeply food is embedded in the Vietnamese social fabric. Through metonymy, “*ăn*” becomes a symbol of unity, respect, and shared identity, transcending its material function to serve as a marker of cultural meaning. This phenomenon not only enriches our understanding of Vietnamese semantics but also affirms the inseparable bond between language and culture, offering a compelling example of how linguistic structures are shaped by collective experience and cultural worldview.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The semantic expansion of the Vietnamese verb “ăn” from its original meaning of “to eat” to a broader function denoting participation in social and ceremonial events represents a compelling intersection of language, cognition, and culture. Through a detailed analysis of expressions such as “ăn cưới” (attending a wedding), “ăn giỗ” (attending a memorial), “ăn sinh nhật” (celebrating a birthday), “ăn Tết” (celebrating Lunar New Year), “ăn hỏi” (attending an engagement ceremony), and “ăn liên hoan” (joining a festive gathering), it becomes evident that “ăn” has undergone a metonymic transformation. This transformation is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a reflection of the Vietnamese cultural worldview, in which food and communal dining occupy a central role in social life.

The mechanism underlying this semantic shift is rooted in cognitive linguistics, particularly in the principle of metonymy, where a salient and culturally significant action within an event, such as eating, is used to represent the entire event. This cognitive strategy reflects a broader pattern of human thought: the tendency to abstract from concrete experiences and to use part-to-whole associations in conceptualization. In Vietnamese, the act of eating is not only the most visible and memorable component of many social gatherings but also the most emotionally resonant. As such, it becomes the linguistic anchor through which participation in these events is expressed.

From a cultural perspective, the evolution of “ăn” into a symbol of social engagement reveals the deep integration of food into Vietnamese rituals, customs, and interpersonal relationships. The dining table is more than a place for nourishment; it is a space for emotional exchange, cultural transmission, and the reinforcement of social bonds. Vietnamese traditions consistently place communal meals at the heart of major life events, from weddings and funerals to festivals and family reunions. This cultural emphasis on shared dining is mirrored in the language, where “ăn” becomes a shorthand for collective experience and social participation.

Moreover, the semantic development of “ăn” illustrates the communicative style of the Vietnamese people, which favors indirectness, subtlety, and symbolic expression. Rather than stating explicitly that one is attending a ceremony or celebration, speakers often use expressions centered around “ăn”, thereby invoking the cultural significance of food and the social context it represents. This linguistic strategy aligns with the collectivist values of Vietnamese society, where harmony, respect, and relational depth are prioritized in communication.

The implications of this phenomenon extend beyond semantics. It offers valuable insights into the cognitive and cultural foundations of the Vietnamese language, highlighting how linguistic forms are shaped by lived experience and social values. It also provides a rich resource for comparative studies between Vietnamese and other languages, particularly in exploring how different cultures encode social participation and ritual through language. For language learners and cross-cultural communicators, understanding the expanded meanings of “ăn” opens a window into the Vietnamese way of thinking, revealing how everyday words can carry profound cultural significance.

In conclusion, the transformation of “ăn” from a verb of consumption to a verb of participation is both a linguistic innovation and a cultural embodiment. It demonstrates how language evolves in response to social practices and cultural priorities, and how cognitive mechanisms such as metonymy facilitate this evolution. The case of “ăn” in Vietnamese is a vivid example of how a single verb can encapsulate the values, relationships, and rituals of a people, turning the act of eating into a symbol of unity, celebration, and shared identity. This study not only enriches our understanding of Vietnamese semantics but also affirms the inseparable bond between language and culture.

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