

To cite this article: Nguyen Thi Thu Ha, Than Thi Hang, To Hanh Linh, Duong Linh Dan and Dang Chi Mai (2026). SUBSTITUTION IN READING TEXTS OF THE GRADE 5 VIETNAMESE TEXTBOOK (CANH DIEU SERIES), International Journal of Education and Social Science Research (IJESSR) 9 (2): 256-265 Article No. 1221, Sub Id 1881

SUBSTITUTION IN READING TEXTS OF THE GRADE 5 VIETNAMESE TEXTBOOK (CANH DIEU SERIES)

Nguyen Thi Thu Ha¹, Than Thi Hang², To Hanh Linh³, Duong Linh Dan⁴ and Dang Chi Mai⁵

¹Faculty of Primary Education, Thai Nguyen University of Education, Vietnam

²³⁴⁵K58 High-Quality Primary Education Program, Faculty of Primary Education, Thai Nguyen University of Education, Vietnam

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.37500/IJESSR.2026.9220>

ABSTRACT

This study investigates and analyzes the characteristics of substitution in reading texts from the Grade 5 Vietnamese textbook (Canh Dieu series). Drawing on the theoretical framework of textual cohesion, along with contributions from Vietnamese scholars such as Diep Quang Ban and Tran Ngoc Them, the study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to identify, classify, and to identify, classify, and analyze 250 instances of substitution in the corpus.

The findings reveal that pronominal substitution overwhelmingly predominates over synonymous substitution, with personal pronouns emerging as the most frequently employed forms. Although less frequent, synonymous substitution demonstrates notable expressive value and contributes to the enrichment of textual meaning.

The study provides further insights into cohesive mechanisms in instructional texts and offers pedagogical implications for the teaching of reading comprehension at the primary education level.

KEYWORDS: substitution, textual cohesion, primary Vietnamese, textbook, Canh Dieu

1. INTRODUCTION

In language-based communication, a text is not merely a collection of isolated sentences but a well-organized and cohesively structured whole through various linking mechanisms to ensure coherence. Among these, substitution constitutes an important cohesive device, contributing to the continuity of information flow and reducing lexical repetition in discourse.

In the context of current educational reforms, the investigation of cohesive devices in instructional texts - particularly in primary Vietnamese textbooks-holds practical significance for enhancing students' reading comprehension competence. However, existing studies on substitution have largely remained at the theoretical level or have focused on non-pedagogical texts, while research based on textbook corpora remains relatively limited.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to examine and analyze substitution in reading texts from the Grade 5 Vietnamese textbook (Canh Dieu series), with the purpose of clarifying its usage patterns and functional roles within instructional discourse.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the field of text linguistics, substitution is widely regarded as a key cohesive device that contributes to textual coherence. According to Diep Quang Ban, substitution involves replacing elements such as pronouns (e.g., *this*, *that*, *so*, *that way*) to stand in for previously mentioned constituents, including nouns, verbs, or clauses, thereby establishing cohesive relations between sentences in a text (Diep Quang Ban, 2007).

From a broader perspective, Tran Ngoc Them conceptualizes substitution as a semantic cohesive device encompassing both pronominal and synonymous substitution, which functions to maintain textual continuity while avoiding redundancy (Tran Ngoc Them, 1999).

These studies consistently emphasize the role of substitution in maintaining cohesion and facilitating text comprehension. Although primarily theoretical and often based on academic discourse, they provide a solid foundation for the present study.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, using the reading texts as its corpus in the Grade 5 Vietnamese textbook (Canh Dieu series). Grounded in the theoretical framework of text linguistics, the research involves the systematic collection, screening, and identification of instances of substitution within the texts.

Subsequently, these instances are quantitatively analyzed and categorized into different types, including pronominal substitution and synonymous substitution.

Representative cases are selected for qualitative analysis to elucidate the usage characteristics and cohesive functions of substitution in specific contexts. In addition, the findings are interpreted in relation to the requirements of teaching reading comprehension at the primary education level.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Survey Results

To establish a systematic basis for identifying the characteristics of substitution in reading texts from the Grade 5 Vietnamese textbook (Canh Dieu series), the study conducts a comprehensive survey and statistical analysis of all instances of substitution within the corpus. The results not only reflect the frequency of each type of substitution but also reveal tendencies in the selection of cohesive devices appropriate to the nature of primary-level texts. The aggregated data are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Frequency of Substitution Types

Type of Substitution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Pronominal substitution	205	82
Synonymous substitution	45	18
Total	250	100

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that substitution is widely employed in the reading texts of the Grade 5 Vietnamese textbook (Canh Dieu series), with a total of 250 recorded instances. Among these, pronominal substitution accounts for the majority, with 205 occurrences (82%), whereas synonymous substitution appears less frequently, with only 45 instances (18%).

This disparity reflects a clear tendency to prioritize cohesive devices that are direct, explicit, and easily recognizable in texts intended for primary school students. Notably, in narrative texts-which constitute a substantial proportion of the textbook-the continuous maintenance of referents such as characters and objects is essential. In this context, pronouns serve as an effective substitutive device, enabling the avoidance of lexical repetition while preserving textual cohesion.

4.2. Types of Substitution in Reading Texts

4.2.1. Pronominal Substitution

This is the most prevalent type of substitution, commonly occurring in narrative texts to maintain the continuity of referents, particularly characters.

Table 2. Frequency of Types of Pronominal Substitution

Type of Substitution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Interrogative pronoun substitution	4	2.0
Personal pronoun substitution	153	74.6
Demonstrative and substitutive pronoun substitution	48	23.4
Total	205	100

A closer examination of Table 2 reveals the diversity of pronominal substitution forms. Specifically, personal pronouns account for the highest proportion, with 153 instances (74.6%), followed by demonstrative and substitutive pronouns with 48 instances (23.4%). In contrast, interrogative pronouns appear with a very low frequency, representing only 2.0% of the total cases.

These findings indicate that, in reading texts, personal pronouns play a dominant role in maintaining textual cohesion, particularly in narrative discourse where characters are developed continuously

throughout the text. Beyond their substitutive function, personal pronouns also contribute to the expression of interpersonal relations, emotional nuances, and the social roles of characters within specific communicative contexts.

Below, each type of pronominal substitution is analyzed in detail through illustrative examples.

a) Interrogative Pronoun Substitution

According to the corpus analysis, interrogative pronoun substitution occurs only four times, all within a single text entitled “*The Story of the Watch*”.

Uncle suddenly took a pocket watch out of his pocket and asked:

- “*Can you see what this is?*”

Everyone replied in unison:

- “*A watch.*”

- “*What characters are there on the face of the watch?*”

- “*There are numbers.*”

- “*What are the short hand and the long hand used for?*”

- “*They are used to indicate hours and minutes.*”

- “*What is the mechanism inside used for?*”

- “*It is used to control the movement of the hands.*”

(The Story of the Watch, Vol. 1, pp. 77–78)

In this dialogue between Ho Chi Minh and the participants, interrogative pronouns such as *what*, *what characters*, and *what for* are used in the questions and are directly linked to corresponding answers such as *the watch*, *numbers*, *to indicate hours and minutes*, and *to control the movement of the hands*.

These elements establish a cohesive relationship between questions and responses, thereby maintaining the continuity of the discourse.

The use of this structure not only facilitates the logical development of information but also highlights the educational message of the text, particularly the emphasis on task allocation and the sense of responsibility of individuals within a collective.

b) Personal Pronoun Substitution

By flexibly replacing nouns denoting humans and objects with a diverse system of personal pronouns such as *the girl*, *they*, *he* and *it*, the texts effectively reduce lexical repetition while enhancing flexibility in expression. At the same time, this substitution contributes to a range of expressive nuances, creating a more fluent and engaging discourse for readers and listeners. These characteristics are illustrated through the following representative examples.

- Personal pronoun substitution referring to human entities

(5) *Bach Thai Buoi established a river transport company at a time when Chinese and French ships dominated the waterways of Northern Vietnam. He sent people to deliver speeches at the docks. On each ship, he posted the slogan “Vietnamese people should use Vietnamese ships” and placed a donation box so that those who supported him could contribute money to assist the ship owner. When the box was opened, there was a large amount of money-coins of all kinds in great quantity. The number of passengers using his ships steadily increased. Many Chinese and French ship owners had to sell their vessels to him. He then purchased a ship repair workshop and hired skilled engineers to manage it.*

(The King of River Transport - Bach Thai Buoi, Vol. 1, p. 56)

In this excerpt, the proper noun “*Bach Thai Buoi*” is replaced by the pronoun *he* in subsequent sentences, establishing cohesive ties across the discourse. This substitution not only avoids repetition but also maintains textual continuity.

Moreover, the use of the pronoun *he* conveys a respectful and formal tone toward the character, thereby contributing to the evaluative stance of the text. At the same time, it helps to foreground the image of the character as a talented entrepreneur associated with a strong sense of national identity.

Additional examples of personal pronoun substitution referring to human entities include:

(6) The princess’s voice grew softer and softer. She fell asleep.

(The Princess and the Moon, Vol. 1, pp. 17-18)

(7) People often praised him for being fortunate. On one occasion, An Tiêm modestly told them, “It is all thanks to diligence and hard work.”

(The Legend of Watermelon, Vol. 1, pp. 52-53)

(8) Perhaps Co-ret-ti did not intentionally bump into my elbow. I recalled visiting his house and seeing him studying while taking care of his sick mother. I looked at him and noticed that his shirt was torn, probably because he had been carrying firewood to help his mother.

In these cases, pronouns such as *she*, *they*, and *he-familiar* forms replacing previously mentioned referents, ensuring cohesion while simultaneously expressing interpersonal relations and social proximity among participants in the discourse.

- Personal pronoun substitution referring to animals and objects

In addition to replacing human referents, personal pronouns are also employed to substitute nouns denoting animals and objects. However, in the textbook corpus, this usage is relatively limited, with the pronoun *it* being the most common form.

(9) “The sky seemed to come close to the ground. In summer, *it* rises higher, and swallows fly across it.

(The Autumn Sky, Vol. 1, p. 47)

In this example, the pronoun *it* substitutes for *the sky*, thereby creating cohesion between the sentences. Beyond avoiding repetition, this usage also introduces a subtle personification effect, rendering the referent more vivid and accessible to young readers.

Further examples include:

(10) Boom! The seed sprouted. It sent its roots into the soft, moist soil and grew upward inside the glass jar.

(*Handicraft Activity*, Vol. 1, p. 40)

(11) The hard, black gac seed appeared. It had not yet sprouted.

(*Seed Germination*, Vol. 1, pp. 43-44)

From the above examples, it can be observed that personal pronoun substitution not only serves a cohesive function but also conveys expressive nuances and the writer's attitudinal stance. The flexible use of pronouns contributes to making the text more natural, vivid, and accessible, thereby aligning with the cognitive and receptive characteristics of primary school students.

c) Demonstrative and Substitutive Pronoun Substitution

In discourse, substitution through demonstrative pronouns constitutes a common cohesive device used to replace previously mentioned referents. This type of substitution not only helps avoid lexical repetition but also facilitates the clear identification of referents within the flow of discourse, thereby ensuring textual coherence and comprehensibility.

Particularly in informational texts designed for primary school students, demonstrative pronouns are frequently employed with explicit referential functions, enabling readers to easily recognize the content being referred to.

(12) On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9 earthquake struck the Tohoku region of Japan, triggering a tsunami over nine meters high that flooded up to five-story buildings. **This** was the largest earthquake ever recorded in Japan and the fourth largest in the world since 1900.

(*Overcoming Challenges*, Vol. 2, pp. 60-61)

In this example, the demonstrative pronoun *this* substitutes for the entire preceding event, namely the earthquake and tsunami. This substitution condenses the sentence structure while enhancing textual cohesion.

Moreover, the placement of the pronoun in the subject position serves to foreground the referent, thereby emphasizing the magnitude and significance of the event described.

Additional examples include:

(13) On days without sunshine or rain, it seemed as if no one thought about day or night; they were constantly busy harvesting, hauling stones, cutting rice, and dividing grain for the cooperative.

Everyone was the same-as soon as they put down their bowls, they went out immediately; as soon as they got up, they headed straight to the fields.

(*The Rural Landscape During Harvest Season*, Vol. 2, pp. 4-6)

(14) After only a few days, the prince had woven some very beautiful straw mats. The messenger then returned to the girl's house and showed her **those mats**.

(*The Prince Learns a Trade*, Vol. 1, p. 83)

These examples demonstrate that demonstrative and substitutive pronouns are used flexibly to establish cohesive links between different parts of the text. Beyond avoiding repetition, this type of substitution contributes to organizing information in a clear, logical, and reader-friendly manner.

However, it is noteworthy that this type of substitution occurs less frequently in poetic texts, where constraints of rhythm and musicality tend to limit the use of such referential devices.

4.2.2. *Synonymous Substitution*

This type of substitution typically occurs in descriptive and expressive texts.

Table 3. Frequency of Synonymous Substitution Types

Type of Substitution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Descriptive synonymous substitution	15	33.3
Context-dependent synonymous substitution	30	66.7
Total	45	100

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that, within the category of synonymous substitution, context-dependent synonymous substitution accounts for a higher proportion (66.7%) compared to descriptive synonymous substitution (33.3%).

This finding reflects a tendency toward the flexible use of linguistic resources in accordance with contextual conditions in reading texts. In such cases, synonymy is not fixed but is dynamically established based on specific communicative situations.

By contrast, although descriptive synonymous substitution occurs less frequently, it plays an important role in supplementing information and clarifying the characteristics of referents.

Overall, both types of synonymous substitution contribute to enriching expression, while simultaneously enhancing the cohesion and expressive quality of the text.

a) *Descriptive Synonymous Substitution*

In addition to pronominal substitution, descriptive synonymous substitution represents an important cohesive device in texts. This type of substitution employs lexical units with synonymous or near-synonymous relations to replace one another. As a result, it not only avoids repetition but also enriches the semantic nuances of the referent.

The use of descriptive synonymous substitution contributes to making discourse more vivid and imagery-rich, thereby aligning with the cognitive and receptive characteristics of primary school students.

(15) “Ly excitedly opened the package: the book *The Adventure of Little Tim Tim in the Land of Four O’ Clock Flowers* was still brand new and smelled of fresh ink. It was exactly **the book she had long wanted but had not yet dared to ask her mother to buy**.

(*The Blue Rubber Band, the Red Rubber Band*, Vol. 1, pp. 28–29)

In this example, the title of the book is subsequently replaced by the descriptive phrase the book Ly really liked but had not dared to ask her mother to buy.

This substitution not only prevents repetition but also adds evaluative and emotional information about the character, thereby enhancing the expressive value of the sentence.

Additional examples include:

(16) At the end of the Year of the Monkey (1284), the Yuan dynasty launched its second invasion of our country. With 500,000 troops advancing from the north and nearly 100,000 from the south, **the invaders** hoped to quickly conquer Dai Viet.

(*The Dien Hong Conference*, Vol. 1, pp. 89-90)

(17) In 1958, the Children’s Peace Monument, also known as the Sembazuru Tower (“Thousand Cranes”), was erected in the city’s Peace Park. At the top of the nine-meter-high **monument** stands a statue of a young girl-modeled after Sadako-raising her hands to hold a large crane with outstretched wings.

(*Paper Cranes*, Vol. 2, pp. 78-79)

In these cases, lexical items such as *invaders* and *memorial* are used to replace previously mentioned referents, forming synonymous or near-synonymous relations.

Such substitutions not only maintain cohesion but also contribute to clarifying and specifying the characteristics of the referents. At the same time, they allow the writer to express evaluative perspectives and shape the reader’s interpretation of the text.

b) *Context-dependent Synonymous Substitution*

Context-dependent synonymous substitution refers to cases in which lexical items that are not synonymous within the linguistic system can function as substitutes for one another in a specific context. This type of relationship is temporary and highly dependent on the communicative situation.

(18) From that day on, he began trading in *tomatoes*. Every day, he would get up before dawn to collect *produce* and then take it to a busy central market to sell.

(*Finding a Job*, Vol. 1, pp. 85-86)

In this example, tomatoes are later replace. While the two items are not absolute synonyms in a general sense, in this specific context, *produce* is used to denote the tomatoes being traded. As a result, this substitution contributes to textual cohesion by reducing lexical repetition and preserving the continuity of meaning.

This substitution establishes a context-bound semantic relation, thereby maintaining cohesion while enabling more flexible and economical expression.

Another example is as follows:

(19) Seeing people in the commune raising money to support disaster victims, Hai asked his parents for permission to break open his piggy bank and donate the money. However, when he broke open **the piggy bank**, he was surprised to find that, even after counting several times, there was still nearly three hundred thousand dong left.

(*The Boy and the Piggy Bank*, Vol. 2, pp. 36-37)

Here, the lexical item *pig* is used to refer to a *piggy bank*, demonstrating a shift in meaning that is interpretable only within the given context. This substitution relies on shared cultural and contextual knowledge, allowing readers to infer the intended referent despite the absence of formal synonymy.

Additional example:

(20) In this work of national reconstruction, **the country** places great expectations on you. Whether **Vietnam** becomes prosperous and beautiful, and whether **the Vietnamese nation** can rise to glory and stand alongside the great powers of the world, depends largely on your efforts in study.

(*Letter to Students*, Vol. 1, pp. 5-6)

In this case, expressions such as *the country*, *Vietnamese territory*, and *the Vietnamese nation* are not strictly synonymous but are contextually interchangeable within the same semantic field.

Such substitutions contribute to maintaining thematic continuity while simultaneously enriching the expressive and rhetorical quality of the discourse.

Overall, context-dependent synonymous substitution demonstrates a high degree of flexibility in language use. It reflects the dynamic nature of meaning construction in discourse, where semantic

relations are not fixed but are actively negotiated based on context. This type of substitution is particularly effective in enhancing textual cohesion while also supporting expressive richness, making it especially suitable for instructional texts aimed at primary school students.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that substitution constitutes an important cohesive device in the reading texts of the Grade 5 Vietnamese textbook (Canh Dieu series). Among the identified types, pronominal substitution plays a dominant role, contributing to the maintenance of textual coherence, clarity, and alignment with the cognitive characteristics of primary school students.

Although synonymous substitution occurs less frequently, it demonstrates considerable value in diversifying expression and enriching the informational content of the text.

These findings suggest that the identification and pedagogical exploitation of substitution in reading instruction are both necessary and valuable for enhancing students' language competence. Furthermore, the study offers a text-linguistic perspective that is closely connected to classroom practice, thereby aligning with the competency-based orientation of the 2018 General Education Curriculum in Vietnam.

REFERENCES

1. Diep, Q. B. (2007). *Text linguistics*. Hanoi National University of Education Publishing House.
2. Nguyen, M. T. (Ed.). (2024). *Vietnamese Language 5* (Vol. 1). Ho Chi Minh City University of Education Publishing House.
3. Nguyen, M. T. (Ed.). (2024). *Vietnamese Language 5* (Vol. 2). Ho Chi Minh City University of Education Publishing House.
4. Tran, N. T. (1999). *The system of cohesion in Vietnamese texts*. Education Publishing House.