

STANDARDISATION AND PURIFICATION: A LOOK AT LANGUAGE PLANNING IN VIETNAM

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0. Language planning has been defined as "the organized pursuit of solutions to language problems, typically at the national level" (Fishman 1975:55). In the second part of his book on *Language and Nationalism: Two Integrative Essays*, Fishman (1975:40-85) discusses the impact of nationalism on language and language planning by analysing the role of language as "the link with the glorious past", as "the link with authenticity" and as "part of the message of nationalism" (pp.44-5). The Vietnamese people have always been conscious of the real status and function of their language as symbol of the unity of the nation. Under colonial rule, although using French as the medium of instruction, school-children were encouraged to speak unadulterated Vietnamese and avoid the macaronic language consisting of a mixture of Vietnamese and French (Nguyễn Đình-Hoà 1975:44-5). French-trained teachers promoted the teaching of the Vietnamese script to illiterate adults through the Association for the Dissemination of Quốc-ngữ and the publication of numerous books and periodicals where nearly every technical subject could be discussed in the national language clothed in the Roman script (Nguyễn Khắc-Kham 1976:189-90).

Even prior to the August 1945 revolution, the Indochinese Communist Party in its Cultural Program (Đề-cương văn-hoá Việt-nam) issued in 1943 raised the question of making the task of "struggling about language" an urgent one, "which should aim at unifying and enriching the national language, determining grammatical rules and improving the quốc-ngữ script" (Vương Lộc 1975:21). Then after the August revolution, in the midst of this anti-French hostilities, Trường Chinh called upon everybody to "create a movement to Vietnamize both language and literature" and "to resolutely defend our mother tongue" (T. Tr. 1948).

During the partition of the country, linguistic scholars in both halves recognised that "to preserve the purity and clarity of the Vietnamese language and to make it richer, more beautiful and more precise every day is the task of every citizen of Vietnam, and especially of linguists, writers and newspapermen." (Luu Văn Lãng et al 1961:83).

This paper examines steps in the processes of language planning in the reunified Vietnam.

1. Language planning in Vietnam seems to have moved beyond the stage of "policy formation" (Jernudd 1973:15) or "norm selection" and well into the stages of "codification and elaboration" and "implementation"¹ (Haugen 1966; Fishman 1972:56-7).

1.1. It can be said that language policies were formulated officially only in 1966 when three meetings were organised between the end of January and the beginning of February by the Writers Association (Hội nhà văn Việt-nam) and the Institute of Literature (Viện văn-học) to discuss the problem of preserving the purity and clarity of the Vietnamese language. As reported in the organ of the latter institute, participants included poets, writers, newsmen, research workers in literature, linguistics and other sciences in the Institute of Social Sciences, as well as college teachers, representatives of the press, news agencies, radio stations and publishing houses. At these meetings led by Social Sciences Committee Chairman Nguyễn Khánh Toàn, Minister of Education Nguyễn Văn Huyền and Vice Minister of Education Lê Liêm, there was a lively exchange of ideas and opinions. Premier Phạm Văn Đồng attended all three meetings, and his remarks given at the last meeting were later published in *Tạp-chí Văn-học* 75 (March 1966:1-5, 93-5), then reproduced in the theoretical journal of the Lao-dộng (Workers) Party *Học-tập* 123 (April 1966:7-13).

The follow-up was reported in *Tạp-chí Văn-học* 80 (August 1966:106): nearly 60 linguistic workers held their own meeting on June 3, 1966 to discuss the preservation of the purity and clarity of Vietnamese. These scholars from the Institute of Social Sciences, the University of Hanoi, Hanoi Teachers College, Vinh Teachers College met under the chairmanship of Professor Đặng Thai Mai, President of the Institute of Literature, Professor Hoàng Xuân Nhị, Dean of Letters at the University of Hanoi, with other staff members of the Educational Sciences Institute, the School of Foreign Languages, etc.

1.2. More recently books and articles have been devoted to the same problem, which was set forth officially for the first time in 1966 with the participation of the Premier himself.

Speaking as a writer of great sensitivity, Premier Phạm Văn Đồng pointed out that the Vietnamese language being rich and beautiful, its speakers must be "deeply conscious of its richness and beauty and of its unlimited capabilities" (Phạm Văn Đồng 1966:3). He said (1966:4) that "language must reflect life and serve life, the daily life and the revolutionary struggle of the masses, our people's present anti-U.S. struggle for national salvation, political, cultural, literary, and artistic life, and scientific and technological life." The Premier first reviewed how since 1945 Vietnamese has been used in every field - political, economic, social, cultural, artistic, scientific and technical - mentioning the liquidation of illiteracy within a short time and the widespread use of Vietnamese as the medium of instruction, even at the college level, for science and technology. The Vietnamese leader said that Vietnamese had been made into an excellent tool in the cultural and ideological revolution. Then he cited three areas where Vietnamese must concentrate their initiative, display sensitivity and perseverance and work firmly with planning and organisation to sustain efforts at purism: (1) to preserve and develop the vocabulary; (2) to respect the grammar of (spoken and written) Vietnamese; and (3) to maintain the originality and essence of the national language in every genre of writing.

As far as vocabulary is concerned, he warned against a "communicable disease" which the late President Hồ Chí Minh used to criticise - the tendency or phenomenon that consists in using too many foreign loanwords, especially from Chinese:

xạ kích	instead of	bắn súng	'to shoot, fire'
cự-ly		khoảng cách	'distance'
tiến-hành		làm	'to do'
sử-dụng		dùng	'to use'
phát-biểu		nói	'to speak'

In his important speech, the Premier touched on the elaboration of scientific terminology. Technical terms have to be introduced systematically, he said, in all disciplines. However, who is going to be responsible for terminology work and how the new jargon can be worked out are important issues according to him.

It is significant that the Premier used the native words vốn chữ instead of từ-vựng for 'vocabulary, lexicon' and phép tắc instead of ngữ-pháp for 'grammar'.

Grammar is a very important subject, the Vietnamese leader explained, "because we teachers need it, our students need it, and foreigners who want to learn Vietnamese also need it." (1966:93). Here his major contribution was a warning against using the grammar of a foreign tongue to write a grammar of Vietnamese. He advised grammarians to start from "the realities of Vietnamese itself" just as "the natural conditions of our country and the revolutionary and social realities of our people" should help solve "such problems in our present life as growing rice, building a home, making a dress, cooking a meal, etc." (1966:93)

Thirdly, in making Vietnamese even richer and more beautiful and helping the language "keep up with the revolution and our people's rich life", people should try to use new expressions, new phraseology - for instance, nominalisation - yet at the same time ensuring that the language will be developed firmly on the foundation of the old lexicon and retain its style, its originality, its quintessence."

Language planning usually involves a "body of experts specifically delegated the task of preparing a plan" and who "ideally estimate existing resources and forecast." (Jernudd and Das Gupta 1971:196)

In his conclusion Premier Phạm Văn Đồng turned to his "body of experts" in the audience; he urged a division of labour, first with the Linguistics Section of the Institute of Literature - it has since grown into an Institute of Linguistics independent of, but working closely with, the latter institute - compiling a general dictionary and different glossaries of technical terms, in consultation with specialists in various branches of learning, then secondly the linguists also writing a grammar of Vietnamese, with the active participation of writers, and finally intensified efforts on the part of writers and journalists through the Writers' Association (Phạm Văn Đồng 1966:94).

1.3. The Premier noted the presence of educational leaders Nguyễn Văn Huyền and Lê Liêm at the 1966 sessions: since the school shoulders a heavy responsibility, he asserted that "the young generation must speak and write better than we do." (p.95)

The official language policy was thus clearly enunciated: "This is a long-range undertaking. We must be patient, look far ahead and have a broad view of the problem, proceed step by step with all our sense of responsibility, with a pride in our national language, with enthusiasm and confidence in our contribution to a task that is both important and extremely beautiful." (Phạm Văn Đồng 1966:95)

Dr Nguyễn Văn Huyền, then Minister of Education, analysed the weaknesses of the language arts program. First graders had not been taught