SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VIETNAMESE LEXICON: PRELIMINARY GLEANINGS FROM ALEXANDRE DE RHODES' WRITINGS

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1. Introduction
The phonological system of Middle (i.e. seventeenth-century) Vietnamese¹ has been treated in Gregerson (1969), Haurdicourt (1974), and others. This paper takes a look at the Vietnamese lexicon of the same period, as shown in the trilingual (Vietnamese–Portuguese–Latin) dictionary and in the Catechism authored by the Jesuit missionary Alexandre de Rhodes (1593-1660). Only 'full words' (thực-từ) or content words in their archaic forms will be discussed, leaving out function words, known by traditional Sino-Vietnamese grammarians as 'empty words' (hụ-từ).

The Dictionarium Annanamicum [sic] Lusitanum et Latinum² (Rhodes 1651a, hereafter Dict.) consists of 900 numbered columns, two to each page, listing Vietnamese entry words in alphabetical order according to the spelling of the time, each headword and illustrative example followed by its Portuguese equivalent, then by its Latin equivalent. Between the 'b' and 'c' sections, there is a section (cols. 65-74) devoted to words whose initial consonant is transcribed with the symbol ⟨p⟩; this lenis obstruent was described by de Rhodes (1651b: 3) as 'almost like Greek β as in ἐβαίνο “enter”, ἐβαίς cá “fin [of fish]”’. This feature is explained within a 31-page statement on Vietnamese grammar bound in the back of the dictionary, following an Appendix, which contains five unnumbered errata pages, and a 171-page index of Latin words: this Linguae Annamiticae seu Tunchinensis Brevis Declarato (hereafter BD) is composed of eight headings.

On the other hand, the Catechismus pro iis qui volunt suscipere Baptismum in octo dies divisus, Phêp giảng tâm ngày cho kẻ muốn chịu phép riesta tôi mà ḍèào đọt thành Đức Chúa Blòi (Rhodes 1651c; hereafter Cat.), constitutes 'the first work appearing in romanized Vietnamese' (tắc-phẩm quốc-ngữ đầu tiên), as the work is referred to in the title Giáo-sỉ Đức-lợ và tác-phẩm quốc-ngữ đầu tiên, (eds.) Nguyễn Khắc Xuyên and Phạm Đình Khiêm (1961), a book issued on the 300th anniversary of the death of the missionary – 'the evangelical apostle who codified the quốc-ngữ script,

1. Maspéro (1912) distinguished five periods in the history of the Vietnamese language: proto-annamite (before and during Chinese rule), préannamite (during independence), annamite ancien (fifteenth century), annamite moyen (seventeenth century), and annamite moderne.
2. For a general description of this trilingual dictionary, see Nguyễn Đình-Hoà 1985b.
and the reverend benefactor of the Vietnamese church and the Vietnamese nation.’

Since the compilation *Dict.* systematically listed the seventeenth-century lexicon, I have first tried to cull out archaic forms used in the *Catechismus*, then to check their listings in the trilingual dictionary. I also present other interesting items found in *Dict.*, but not in *Cat.* In this preliminary gleaning process, of necessity not exhaustive, I shall successively discuss nouns, classifiers, adjectives, adverbs, preverbs, verbs, and postverbs.

2. Nouns

The *Dict.* lists several ‘taboo words’ denoting sexual organs, e.g. *bên, đâu, độc, dồi, lòn, ke* (female), *bội,zac, dài, lồ* (male). The entry *dếch* is glossed as ‘semen humanum’: cf. ‘secretion from female genitalia’ and ‘female genitalia’ (Văn Tấn 1977, under *dạch*).

(*án)nân tổi (*Dict.* 7) ‘to eat the bitter grass [called năn (*Dict.* 504)] ‘to show remorse for one’s sin’. *Cat.* 177h.

*bái, con bái dĩ bái* (*Dict.* 19) ‘prostitute, lustful woman’.

*bôm, con bôm* (53)* ‘prostitute’, cf. modern VN dĩ *bôm*.

Both Lê Văn Đức (1970) and Văn Tấn (1977) have the compound *bôm bái* ‘deceitful person’ (cf. *bái, bình bái* (also *Dict.* 19, but separate entry) ‘deceitful person’).

*bàu* (30) ‘companion, partner’. *Cat.* 234. Lê Văn Đức et al. (1970) has both bàu ‘you [to wife or girl friend]’ and bàu-bàu ‘friends’ whereas Văn Tấn (1977) has only bàu bàu ‘same as bè bàu, friends’.

*cai* (79) ‘head, commander’ *Cat.* 71t, u, cf. modern VN ‘foreman’.

*cang la* (85), same as *giang la* (277) ‘wicker basket with handle’, cross-listed under *la* (389). This compound can be found in ‘Thập-giói cõ-hơn quốc-ngủ-văn’ (‘Ten commandments to lonely wickers’), in Thien-nam Du-ha Táp, a collection of poems by Emperor Lê Thánh-tông and his co-members in Tay-dân Circle (fifteenth century):

> Song viết liên tay; cang la, nớn ấnh.
> Hôm mai họp mặt: nội cõ, cười lau.

(Cao Hữu Lạng 1983: 12)

*cát nhân* (89) ‘incense’. *Cat.* 165b-c.

*cạt* (90) ‘back’. *Cat.* 185d. *Dict.* also gives sáp cất cùng ai and blái cất (cf. modern VN chung luồng dầu cất and trái cất).

*ché* (101) ‘pretty large earthenware vessel’. *Cat.* 181f-g.

*chằm cu* (95) ‘punctuation’. This expression is found in Poem 3, line 4, by Nguyễn Trãi (1380-1442): *Phien sâch ngày xuân ngồi chằm cu*, although the word cu (136) for ‘sentence’ is câu in modern VN.

*dinh liêu* (415, under liêu) ‘huge bamboo torch’.

*dòng tôi* (228) ‘chain, shackle’. *Cat.* 10f. Also spelled lời tôi, with tôi itself listed separately (822) ‘chain’.

*cöm* (130) *tlang* (804) ‘stock made of bamboo or wood to confine a

*Unless necessary for clarity, *Dict.* is dropped before page number to the entry (Ed.).
prisoner’s neck or ankles’. Cat. 10f. Cf. modern VN cùm and trồng, respectively, with the second member of the compound occurring in the expression่ง đốc trồng mang to denote the status of a prisoner restrained by a cangue (gông, Dict. 299) around the neck and by stocks around the ankles.

dãô (206), i.e. dông ‘spear’. Cat. 232q, u.

hé (318) ‘mourning rites lasting three years’. Cf. modern hội hé ‘festivals, merry-making occasions’.

khôô (374) ‘period, time’ < Chinese *k’uâ 考, which explains why the variant forms thôô (776) and thúô (784), nowadays spelled thứ/thuở, are transcribed in the nôm script by the character 考. Cat. 150i, 176d, 195h, 196s-t, 197b-c.

khu (376) ‘rear end, buttocks’.

lá dã (191 under dã and 390 under lá) ‘stone slab’ Cat. 280o,p,r. This archaic form is found for instance in Poem 21, line 1 by Nguyễn Trãi: Đầu ngời đì là dã mơn.

lâm (396) ‘mud’ Cat. 195n, 196x. Cf. chân lâm tay bin.


nê in tô nê ‘ancestors’ Cat. 81x. Cf. tô tôi (817) and both compounds appearing as subentries under tôi, i.e. tông (827).

phôo (598) ‘bamboo’: the second member of the synonym compound tre phôo retains this meaning in Mưòng.

rãc (632) ‘prison, jail’. Cat. tù rãc 10z, 10e. Dict. also gives the phrase rãc đa nguc ‘hell’.

tấp (725) ‘tempest, hurricane’, nowadays occurs only in such compounds as bão tấp.

tang (721) ‘mourning’ provides cultural meaning of the expression dê tang đê tôc [tôoc] (the bereaved man letting his hair grow on top and in front and the bereaved woman cutting part of her hair), which confirms that tang tôc is another synonym compound and not a reduplication.

thê (754) ‘world’. Cat. 5b, 6: thê nay ‘this world’.

thơi (774) ‘short moment’. Cat. 241m.

thôô (773) ‘brothel; prostitute’, with con thôô meaning ‘prostitute, harlot’ (cf. the adjective di thôô in modern VN).

tôi (822) ‘servant, slave’ with the compound tôi tá ‘servants’ Cat. 6t,x,y (cf. modern VN tôi tê).

3. Determiners, Classifiers and Demonstratives

Two items are used to denote ‘all, the whole’: cả and thay thay. The former occurs with và: cả và nhà ‘the whole house’, cả và thiên-hà ‘the whole universe’ (77), cho cả và loài người ta ‘for our whole mankind’ (Cat. 88f), cả và nước ‘the whole country’ (Cat. 21c). Dict. also lists cả họa as the equivalent of cã và under the entry họa (329). The latter word can be found in Poems 80, 90, 93 and 247 by Nguyễn Trãi, and it is tempting to posit the following development: họa/hwa/ > uá/wá/ > và/vá/. One can

3. Theurel (1877: 220) lists là dã ‘hail!’ and mea là dã ‘it is hailing’.

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also note *và hai* ‘both’ and the use of *và* as correlative conjunction in *và bánh và cá* ‘both bread and fish’ (*Cat.* 184n). The determiner *thay thay* is found with *hết* (734) although under *hết* (322) the spelling *hết thay thay* is presented.

In addition to pluralisers *các* (78), *chúng* (121-2), *những* (559), *Dict.* lists *một* (475), as in *môr tôi* (475), also discussed in *BD* 12, and *phô* (601), as in *phô ông phô bà* ‘ladies and gentlemen’, *phô thay* ‘masters’ and *những phô ông* ‘gentlemen’ (*BD* 12, 19). This last example is also listed under *những* that is glossed ‘only’, so *những phô ông* means ‘only gentlemen’ with *chặng những* meaning ‘not only’ whereas *những*, means ‘all’, and also ‘nothing but’ as in *những mong* ‘only hoping’, *đây những mùi* ‘full of mosquitoes’, *những mùi* là *mùi* ‘nothing but mosquitoes’ in modern VN.

Concerning *những*, the sense ‘as many as’ (e.g. *những tấm đa con* ‘as many as eight kids’) seems to have been non-existent in middle Vietnamese, and a dictionary published in the late nineteenth century, (Huỳnh-Tĩnh Cửa 1896: 143) does not list this sense, either, under the entry *những*.

On the other hand, for the second-person plural pronoun, the two arrogant expressions *môr bay* and *môr mãi* are noted together with *chúng mãi* (*chúng mayoría* and *bay* ‘you guys’ (*BD* 12).

The pluraliser *phô* (*Cat.* 197 and *passim*) had been used in the fifteenth century by Nguyễn Trãi, transcribed by the *nôm* character 𧃌 (Nguyễn Đình-Hoài 1985a: 471); it was still listed in Theurel (1877: ix, 363), and in Huỳnh-Tĩnh Cửa (1896: 200) with the character 𧃌.

Under the rubric ‘classifiers’, it is worth mentioning that *cái*, nowadays used for inanimate, non-living things, appears in the *Dict.* with such nouns as *cóc* ‘toad’, *dên* ‘spider’, *éch* ‘frog’, *kiến* ‘ant’ (128, 167, 249, 380, respectively), etc.

Beside the demonstratives *này, no, ãy, gia, gia*, the *Dict.* also has *te* as a synonym of *gia* ‘that... over there’: *

*nó* (507) is shown as occurring following the noun it modifies: *sao náo*, *thê náo*, *cách náo*, *đồng/nhơ poner náo* (*BD* 21) to denote ‘which...?’ and as occurring in such idiomatic expressions as *náo có ai biêt*? ‘who knows?’, *náo có tôi gi?* ‘which sin? which offence? which crime?’ with the connotation of negativity (508; *BD* 22). But there is also another usage, in which *náo* precedes a noun: *náo sách* ‘where’s the book?’, *náo thay*? ‘where’s the teacher?’ (508). This word order can be found in some of Nguyễn Trãi’s poems in the fifteenth century: *náo nở* ‘which place?’ (poem 47), *náo hoa* ‘which flower(s)?’ (poems 59 and 224), *náo cua* ‘which thing?’, *náo thuở* ‘which time?’ (poem 164).

4. Theurel (1877: 279) has the core meaning of *mô* as ‘10,000’ with its derived meaning as ‘parum, quoddam numerale’ to designate ‘a bunch’ [of vegetables *mô rau*] or ‘a handful’ [of rice *mô gao*]. Huỳnh-Tĩnh Cửa (1896: 41) gives the *nôm* character 𧃌 for *mô*, and provides two illustrations *mô tôi* and *mô qua* for ‘we, us (exclusive)’. 

5. According to Theurel (1877: pp. vii-viii) *rắn* ‘snake’, *kiên* ‘ant’, and *sâu* ‘insect, bug’ could take either *con* or *cái* as classifier.

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