

# THE VELAR ANIMAL PREFIX RELIC IN VIETNAM LANGUAGES

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## 0. Introduction

1. Animal terminology in Sedang
2. Animal terminology in Vietnam languages
3. Sedang animal names with non-final k

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Benedict (1972) and Matisoff (1973a.25 (footnote 37), 1973b)<sup>1</sup> have discussed a Tibeto-Burman bound velar animal prefix. It is the purpose of this paper to investigate the possibility that the animal prefix may have been a Southeast Asian areal phenomenon by examining linguistic data from Vietnam. There will be two aspects to this study. Section 1 is an in-depth study of one language, Sedang (a North Bahnaric language of the Mon-Khmer family), to see if a velar component is more frequent in animal names than in the general vocabulary of the language. Section 2 is a look at twenty-one animal terms in 26 different languages of Vietnam to see if there is any evidence for the prefix which such a comparative study might reveal. Section 3 lists all Sedang animal names in which there is a non-final k.

## 1. Animal terminology in Sedang

Many animal names begin with the velar k in Sedang. The possibility that this might be a relic of the hypothesized velar animal prefix is intriguing.<sup>2</sup>

A folk taxonomy of Sedang animals includes 212 different animal names; of these, 68 are modified by a following adjective to discriminate further 283 animals for a total listing of 427 different animals.<sup>3</sup> Among the 212 different animal names 66 (listed in Section 3 below) have a non-final velar k. Such a high proportion of animal names with non-final k, almost 1 in every 3, is what inspires this study from the outset. Only one in every 5 words in the general vocabulary has a non-final k. See Chart 1. This higher incidence of non-final k in animal names will be compared with the over-all Sedang vocabulary in five further ways to see if it is indeed unusual and thus indicative of a now dead k animal prefix. The author's Sedang-English manuscript dictionary is the basis of the general vocabulary counts included here (cf. Smith 1974a, 1974b).

### Comparison 1: Syllabicity

The maximum word in Sedang has two syllables: a main syllable and an optional preceding "presyllable". One would expect that the remains of an animal prefix might be evidenced in part by a higher proportion of bisyllabic animal names among all animal names than the proportion of bisyllabic words in the overall general Sedang vocabulary which has not typically been derived from affixes.<sup>4</sup> The following count shows that animal names do in fact have proportionately more bisyllabic words than does the overall vocabulary. Such bisyllabic words include those with a presyllable kô- (see Comparison 5 below), a medial k, as well as the non-velar consonants.

#### Percentage of words having two syllables:

##### General vocabulary

Presyllable <u>kô-</u>	455	
Presyllable plus medial <u>k</u>	103	
Presyllable plus medial non- <u>k</u>	<u>1356</u>	1914
Proportion:	1914/4768, 40o/o	

##### Animal names

Presyllable <u>kô-</u>	37	
Presyllable plus medial <u>k</u>	8	
Presyllable plus medial non- <u>k</u>	<u>51</u>	96
Proportion:	96/212, 45o/o	

	Animal names	General vocabulary
k-	15	261
kh-	1	64
kl-	5	101
kr-	8	101
kø-	37	455
Total	66	982
Proportion	$\frac{66}{212}$ , 31o/o	$\frac{982}{4768}$ , 21o/o

Chart 1. Incidence of non-final k

## Comparison 2: Initial consonant type

The initial consonant slot of the main syllable in Sedang may be either a single (simple) consonant or a consonant cluster. A relic affix and following consonant could coalesce into a consonant cluster. Thus one would expect that a former animal prefix might be evidenced in part by a higher proportion of consonant clusters in animal names than in the overall Sedang vocabulary. The following count confirms this; animal names have proportionately about 50o/o more consonant clusters than the overall vocabulary has. (Comparisons 2, 3, and 4 pertain only to monosyllabic words.)

Percentage of monosyllabic words having consonant cluster:

General vocabulary	946/2854, 33o/o
Animal names	44/89 , 49o/o

## Comparison 3: Initial single consonants

Among monosyllabic words beginning with single consonants, if the hypothesis were true, one might expect a higher proportion of initial k than other consonants—as the prefix may have suppressed other consonants during word contraction pressures. The following count confirms this; animal names have proportionately almost twice as many initial k's in monosyllabic words than the overall vocabulary has.

Percentage of monosyllabic single-consonant-initial words having initial k:

General vocabulary	158/1910, 8.3o/o
Animal names	7/45 , 15.5o/o

## Comparison 4: Initial consonant clusters

Among monosyllabic words with an initial consonant cluster, one would expect a higher proportion of clusters with cluster head k than other cluster heads (p, t, b, m, etc.) to evidence the animal prefix as consonants were retained during syllable reduction. The following count indicates that this is in fact true in Sedang. There are about 50o/o more k-type consonant clusters in Sedang animal names than throughout the entire Sedang vocabulary. <sup>5</sup>