

RUC AND OTHER MINOR VIETIC¹ LANGUAGES: LINGUISTIC STRANDS BETWEEN VIETNAMESE AND THE REST OF THE MON-KHMER LANGUAGE FAMILY

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0. ABSTRACT

This report examines the linguistic genetic connections between Vietnamese and the Mon-Khmer language family by looking at a little studied language, namely Ruc, that serves as an intermediate typological and historical link. Vietnamese has previously been considered a Mon-Khmer language based primarily on some shared basic vocabulary and a hypothesis for the genesis of tones in Vietnamese. This proposed genetic relationship, based on a relatively small amount of evidence, has been further blurred by the intense contact of Vietnamese with Chinese and the overall effect of the Southeast Asian linguistic areal phenomenon. This report is intended to build on previous work to help strengthen the contention that Vietnamese is a Mon-Khmer language, and while doing so, provide evidence of the earlier stages of Vietnamese when it was more like a typical modern Mon-Khmer language.

1. VIETNAMESE IN A RUC PERSPECTIVE

Concrete linguistic evidence linking Vietnamese to the Mon-Khmer language family lies in the more than one dozen minor Vietic languages spoken by small groups along the Vietnam-Laos border in the Cordilleran/Truong Son mountain range. The evidence for that link is seen in the phonology, morphology, lexicon, and syntax of these Vietic languages which share linguistic traits of both Vietnamese and other Mon-Khmer languages. These linguistic traits often appear as gradations between Vietnamese and other Mon-Khmer languages and most likely represent intermediate historical stages in the process Vietnamese underwent to arrive at its present state, that is, tonal, monosyllabic, and lacking affixes, in contrast with most typical Mon-Khmer languages which are non-tonal, polysyllabic (though generally having at most two syllables per word), and which have derivational prefixes and infixes.

This report outlines those important linguistic features in the minor Vietic language called Ruc, spoken by about 190 people² in the rather isolated highlands of North-Central Vietnam. The isolation of these people has helped to preserve ancient linguistic features in Ruc which can be explained neither as innovations nor borrowings.³ Though lexically and phonologically Ruc is most similar to Vietnamese, its syllable structure and morphology is more like typical Mon-Khmer languages. The Ruc four-way tone system is intermediate between the typical binary Mon-Khmer vocalic

register system and the Vietnamese six-tone system. The linguistic features of Ruc are important for providing solid evidence that Vietnamese is a Mon-Khmer language and how it is related to the rest of the Mon-Khmer language family. This report is divided into four sections: (1) this introduction, (2) previously explored evidence and issues, (3) the evidence in Ruc, and (4) a summary and conclusion. Section 3 provides the data that support the claim that Vietnamese is a Mon-Khmer language and highlights the data which show how Vietnamese has changed, with Ruc as a possible model.

2. PREVIOUSLY EXPLORED EVIDENCE AND ISSUES

Over the past 150 years, researchers have made different claims regarding the genetic affiliation of Vietnamese; that Vietnamese was variously a Chinese language and/or a Sino-Tibetan language, a Tai language, or a Mon-Khmer language. At the beginning of this century, the two strongest opposing arguments were for Mon-Khmer and Thai as the most likely candidates. Blagden (1913) and Pryluski (1924) considered Vietnamese to be part of Mon-Khmer, though J.R. Logan first proposed the Mon-Annam language family in 1852 (Gage 1985). Thai, according to Maspero (1912), was the most likely candidate based on the presence of tones in Vietnamese, in contrast with the lack of tones in Mon-Khmer and based on some shared vocabulary. Though some basic Mon-Khmer vocabulary was recognized in Vietnamese, Wilhelm Schmidt, who created the term 'Austroasiatic' in 1906 (Reid 1994), was uncertain about the position of Vietnamese since Vietnamese lacks Mon-Khmer morphology. Maspero argued that the presence of tones in Vietnamese meant that it could not be Mon-Khmer and that Tai was the most likely candidate based on the Tai vocabulary he saw in Vietnamese. Moreover, Vietnamese has a huge amount of Chinese vocabulary and shares typological features with both Tai and Chinese. In many ways, Vietnamese is a true typological border language, one which shares characteristics with all the language groups around it, including Mon-Khmer, Tai-Kadai, and Chinese, and which is connected to them in a way that makes determining its source difficult (Alves 1996).

It has been only over the last few decades that Vietnamese has been more convincingly proven to be a Mon-Khmer language. The most important step towards establishing Vietnamese as a Mon-Khmer language was Haudricourt's hypothesis of tonogenesis (1954). Haudricourt hypothesized that the reason final fricatives and stops in Mon-Khmer languages correspond to specific tones in Vietnamese (as was noted originally by Maspero (Ibid.)) was that those tones had developed from those finals through stages of conditioned phonemic changes which eventually led to phonemic tonal distinctions, followed by subsequent splitting of height by changes in the voicing of initials.

INITIAL \ FINAL	Open/ Sonorant	Stop	Fricative
Voiceless	1- mid-level	3-high-rising	5-mid-rising
Voiced	2- low-falling	4-low-level	6-broken-rising

Table 1: Correspondences between Mon-Khmer and Vietnamese

Table 1 shows the now widely recognized correspondences between the voicing of the initials, shown on the left side, and the quality of the finals, seen along the top. The type of final, whether open or sonorant, stop, or fricative gave rise to a contrast in contour. According to Haudricourt, a three-way tone system was split to six by the voicing of the initial, voiceless initials causing a higher pitch and in voiced ones a lower pitch. Table 2 contains supporting examples for the each tone categories from three Mon-Khmer languages.⁴

Gloss	Vietnamese	Pacoh	Stieng	Ruc
to fly	baj ¹	par	par	pər ¹
Betel	təu ²	--	mluu	plu ²
to die	cət ³	kucət	cət	kuɕit ³
One	mot ⁴	mɔːj	muaj	moɕ ⁴
firewood	kuj ⁵	ʔuːj ^h	--	kujh ¹
Nose	muj ⁶	mɔh	muh	mujh ²

Table 2: Examples of Haudricourt's hypothesis

With the development of lexicostatistics during the 1960s, the relationship between Vietnamese and Mon-Khmer became more well-established. In 1970, David Thomas and Robert Headley used lexicostatistics to propose linguistic subgroups within Mon-Khmer. Vietnamese showed nearly the same distance from other branches of Mon-Khmer as other recognized Mon-Khmer languages, basically in the 20% to 25% range.

Gregerson and Thomas in 1974, and more thoroughly Huffman (1977), linked the concepts, namely, the tonogenesis hypothesis and the lexicostatistics method. Huffman (Ibid.) used a combination of Swadesh-list type cognates (though ultimately representing core Mon-Khmer cognates) along with the regular correspondences between Vietnamese tones and the initials and finals of over a dozen Mon-Khmer languages for purposes of comparison. About 75% of the forms showed regular correspondences between the various Mon-Khmer phonemes and their expected Vietnamese tonal counterparts.

Evidence that could bolster the claim that Vietnamese is a Mon-Khmer language would be another language that indisputably shares typological and genetic features with both Vietnamese and the Mon-Khmer language family. The following sections show the evidence--including phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic evidence--seen in such a language, namely Ruc.

3. LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE FROM RUC

The evidence proving Vietnamese to be a Mon-Khmer language as seen through the linguistic features in Ruc includes four levels--lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic--which are all discussed in the following subsections.

3.1 Lexicon

The lexicon of Ruc gives clear witness to Ruc’s status as a Vietic language since its basic vocabulary is claimed to consist of 50% of basic vocabulary shared with Vietnamese (Nguyen V.L. 1993).

Branch	Language	Percent
Vietic (50%)	Vietnamese	53%
	Muong	50%
	Poong	52%
Chut (95%)	May	92%
	Sach	98%
Katuic (35%)	Pakoh	37.5%
	Taoih	33%
	Bru	37.5%

Table 3: Percentages of Ruc cognates in other Mon-Khmer languages

These items also have fairly regular sound correspondences. Table 3 (based on Samarina 1989 (Nguyen V.L. 1993)) shows the percentages of shared cognates between Ruc and several other languages, including three different branches.

Ruc has 35% shared vocabulary with the Katuic branch of Mon-Khmer and 50% with Vietnamese, thus placing Ruc in between those two groups. Figure 1 shows this relationship graphically.

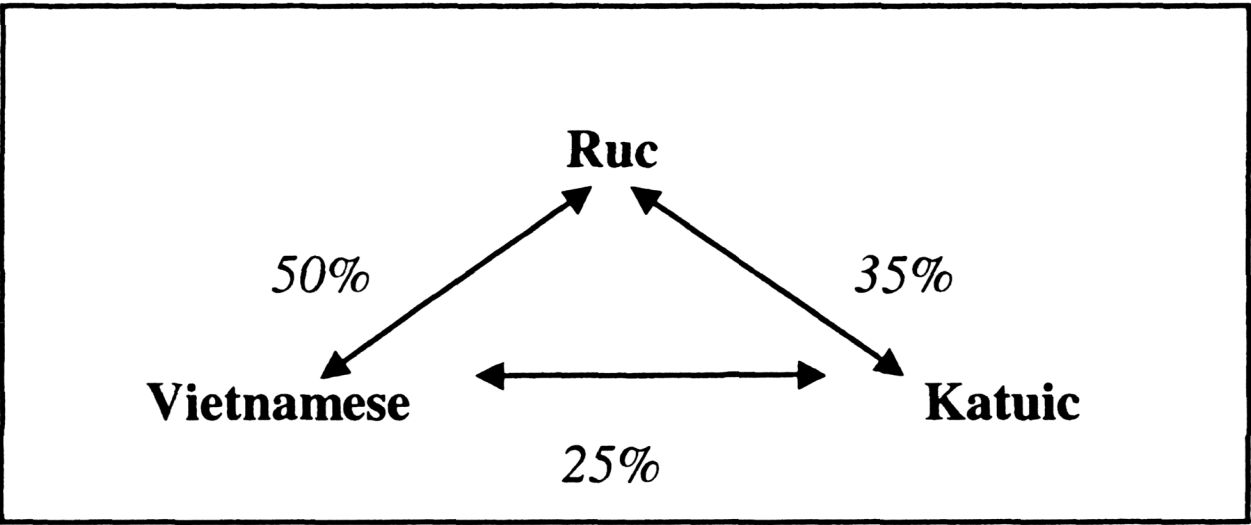


Figure 1: Ruc between Vietnamese and Katuic

A comparison of the numeral systems in Vietnamese and Ruc in Table 4 demonstrates that Ruc contains basic Vietic vocabulary and that Ruc preserves archaic phonological features of Vietic which have been changed in Vietnamese (e.g. loss of final /-l/ in 2, voicing in 3, 4, and 7, nasalization in 5, and consonant cluster reduction in 6).⁵

No.	Ruc	Vietnamese
1.	m ^h oc ⁴	mot ⁴
2.	hal ¹	haj ¹
3.	pa ¹	ba ¹
4.	pon ³	bon ³
5.	d ^h am ¹	nam ¹
6.	p ^h raw ³	şaw ³
7.	paj ²	baj ⁵
8.	t ^h am ³	tam ³
9.	cin ³	cin ³
10.	m ^h uəj ²	m ^h uəj ²

Table 4: Ruc and Vietnamese numerals

Even more convincing evidence of the relationship between Ruc and Vietnamese is seen in the comparison of their pronoun systems. Table 5 lists the Ruc pronouns, and those words with Vietnamese cognates are shaded.

No.	Sing.	Dual			Plur.		
		Excl.		Incl.	Excl.		Incl.
1	ho ¹	jal ¹		te ³	cu ⁴ pa ¹		ha ¹
2	mi ¹		ma ¹			pami ¹	
3	h ^h an ³		ri ^h am ⁴			hapa ¹	

Table 5: Ruc personal pronouns

What is interesting about the few true Vietnamese pronouns⁶ that remain (/maj²/ 2nd sing., /han³/ 3rd sing., possibly /tə³/ 1st) is that they have a very restricted usage within the complex system of terms of address in modern Vietnamese; these three pronouns in Vietnamese are intimate, derogatory, or rude. In contrast, in Ruc, they are not vulgar, but are simply part of the more typical, though elaborate Mon-Khmer pronoun system.

3.2 Sound System

The phoneme inventory of Ruc has many features that link Vietnamese to Mon-Khmer genetically and typologically. These features include (1) a large vowel system with a length distinction, (2) pharyngeal phonation features like those of the Mon-Khmer vocalic register phenomenon, (3) a four-way tone distinction that could represent earlier stages of Vietnamese tonal development, and (4) phonotactic constraints that are similar to a typical Mon-Khmer language. These typological features are listed in table 6, with a plus or minus for features in Vietnamese, Ruc, and Pacoh, a Mon-Khmer language. The combination -/+ in the table refers to the vestigial traces of these features in the Vietnamese phonological system. Phonation in Vietnamese is part of its tone system (i.e. tones hỏi, ngã, and nặng) in contrast with segmentally grounded phonation in the vocalic systems of many Mon-Khmer languages. The tonal system will be discussed further in section 3.2.1. The vowel length distinction seen in Mon-Khmer languages could be considered present in two sets of Vietnamese vowels.⁷

Typological Category	Vietnamese	Ruc	Pacoh
phonation features	-/+	+	+
tonal system	+	+	-
final fricatives	-	+	+
final liquids	-	+	+
retroflex initials	+	+	-
initial clusters	-	+	+
vowel length distinction	-/+	+	+
number of vowels	11	21	36

Table 6: Traits of Ruc compared with Vietnamese and Pacoh

Ruc phonotactic constraints are similar to those in Mon-Khmer languages by allowing complex initial consonant clusters and final fricatives and liquids. However, Ruc does have some initial retroflex consonants, a rare trait among Mon-Khmer languages, that occur as allophonic variations of initial clusters.

3.2.1 The Mon-Khmer Register System in Ruc

The term ‘register’, which here refers to the phonetic and phonological phenomenon in the vowel systems of Mon-Khmer languages, consists of a variety of pharyngeal related features. Gregerson (1976) and Huffman (1976, 1985) explored and described various features that register shows in numerous Mon-Khmer languages. The typical two-way register distinction includes features such as breathiness, pitch height variation, and in some cases, vocalic shifts such as diphthongization.

Within Vietic, there is a range of ways in which register and related pharyngeal features are manifested. At one end is Vietnamese which has a full-blown tonal system consisting of height, contour, and a variety of phonation-type features (Alves 1995). In the middle are the Minor Vietic languages. Descriptions of Ruc tones (Nguyen V.L. 1988 and 1993) show a language with the kinds of phonation features that are typical of Mon-Khmer languages. Simultaneously, Ruc has tonal contour, a criteria distinguishing it from simply a pitch distinction. Another minor Vietic language, Thavung, spoken in Laos, has a four-way vocalic register system that has two variables: high/low and clear/breathy (Hayes 1984). At least for Thavung speakers who are not also speakers of Laotian, register, not contour, is the crucially distinctive feature (Diffloth, p.c.), thus differentiating it from a true tonal system with contour. At the other extreme are most Mon-Khmer languages, which have only the more typical two-way distinction. Table 7 shows this range of two-, four-, and six-way distinctions; the use of pitch, or tone, and/or phonation; and some examples of languages within each category.

Register Type	Examples
2-way, pitch or phonation	Kuy, Bru
4-way, pitch and phonation	Thavung, Chong
4-way, tones and phonation	Ruc, Sach
6-way, tones and phonation	Vietnamese, Muong ¹

Table 7: Range of registers and tone type languages²

Thus, the Vietic languages (Ruc, Thavung, and Sach) shown in the table serve as links between the two extremes. Other Minor Vietic languages likely have similar features, though available descriptions of those other groups are still scarce.

3.2.2 Phonotactic Constraints

Phonotactic constraints in Ruc are similar to those of other Mon-Khmer languages. One noticeable aspect is that Ruc preserves final fricatives and liquids like other Mon-Khmer languages but which were lost in Vietnamese, as seen in the examples in table 8.

Gloss	Vietnamese	Ruc	Pacoh
Root	re ⁶	liɛrlh ¹	rjəj ^h
Nose	muj ⁶	murh ² /mujh ²	mɔ:h
Two	haj ¹	hal ¹	ba:r
firewood	kuj ⁵	kurh ¹ /kujh ²	ʔu:j ^h

Table 8: Mon-Khmer finals preserved in Ruc

One phonotactic constraint in Vietnamese is the matching of place of articulation between main vowels and finals, in particular, alveolars and palatals. The older Vietic forms would have been like Ruc as seen in table 9.

Gloss	Ruc	Vietnamese
One	mǒc ⁴	mot ⁴
intestines	roɔc ⁴	ruət ⁴
sweet	tuŋɔc ³	ŋɔt ⁴
to peel	kɔc ³	gɔt ⁴

Table 9: Ruc and Vietnamese phonotactics

A distinctly Mon-Khmer-like feature in Ruc is the presence of initial consonant clusters, clusters that consist of sequences of stop-liquid or stop-fricative. Table 10 shows Ruc compared with Khmu (Svantesson 1983) where the primary difference is that Khmu allows clusters with voiced initials while Ruc does not. Another difference is in the analysis. What Svantesson called clusters with /h/ were analyzed in Ruc as fricatives. Historically, the matter is clear when the aspirate could be separated from the initial by an infix, but synchronically, the matter is less clear.

Ruc Initial Clusters							Khmu Initials Clusters					
pl	tl	kl	ml	p ^h l	k ^h l	-	-	tl	-	kl	-	-
bl	-	-	-	-	-	-	bl	-	-	gl	hl	hm
pr	tr	kr	-	p ^h r	k ^h r	sr	pr	tr	cr	kr	hr	-
br	-	-	-	-	-	-	br	dr	jr	gr	-	hn
-	tw	kw	ŋw	-	k ^h w	hw	-	-	-	kw	hw	hy
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	gw	-	-
p ^h	t ^h	k ^h	-	-	-	-	ph	th	ch	kh	-	hɲ

Table 10: Ruc and Khmu Initial Consonant Cluster Combinations

Significant to the reconstruction of earlier Vietnamese initial clusters and prefixes are those stop-liquid clusters in Ruc which correspond to retroflex initials in Vietnamese. The reduction of Vietnamese clusters to retroflex sounds was possibly influenced in part by the massive influx of Chinese loanwords with retroflex sounds. Table 11 shows several such examples of the Vietnamese-Ruc correspondences.

Gloss	Vietnamese	Ruc1	Ruc2
six	ʂaw ³	p ^h răw ³ prăw ³	ʂaw ³ psaw ³
bridge of nose	ʂoŋ ³	kroŋ ³	ʂoŋ ³
strong	ʂuuk ³	k ^h ruuk ³	ʂuuk ³
eight	tam ³	t ^h am ³	təham ³
betel	tǎw ¹	klu ¹	tlu ¹
to cross	kwa ¹	kaβa ¹	kwa ¹
to spit	xac ³	kərhak ³	kahak ³

Table 11: Reduction and telescoping

In addition, the examples are those in which Ruc shows an allophonic variation between the original clusters to single phonemes. This alternation may be due to contact with the nearby Nguon people who speak a variety of Muong, though the alternation is expected areally and typologically.

Another difference in distribution is that of Ruc initial [p-] which corresponds to Vietnamese [f-]. The lack of an initial /p-/ is a trait unlike other Mon-Khmer languages. Late Middle Chinese experienced a change in the ‘feng’ category from /p-/ to /f-/ (Pulleyblank 1984), and it is possible that this phonological change entered and spread throughout Vietnamese while Ruc, which *did not receive those loan words, remained unaffected*.

Ruc has preserved final /l/, /r/, and /h/, none of which occur in modern Vietnamese, but all of which are well attested in other Mon-Khmer languages. Muong has preserved final /l/, something not even seen in Middle Vietnamese as attested in de Rhodes’ Vietnamese-Latin dictionary.

Gloss	Vietnamese	Ruc
dust, to	fuj ⁵	chapurh ¹
nose	muj ⁶	mujh ¹ , murh ¹
spit, to	no ⁵	ʝoh ¹
tongue	luəj ⁶	ləarh ² , ləajh ²

Table 12: Vietnamese tones and Ruc final fricatives

The final fricative is entirely absent from the Viet-Muong branch of Vietic, but is seen in Ruc and other minor Vietic languages. The most interesting aspect of the final fricatives in Ruc is that they regularly correspond with Vietnamese tones 5 and 6, hỏi and ngã. Table 12 has some examples.

This is strong evidence in favor of Haudricourt’s contention that the category arose from final fricatives as Ruc is clearly an immediate relative of Vietnamese. However, the data also modify Haudricourt’s claim about the order of Vietnamese tonogenesis since the data in Ruc suggest that the third category arose significantly later than the first two categories.

3.2.3 Syllable Structure

The syllable structure of Ruc is that of a typical Mon-Khmer language, with the canonical shape CVCCVC. Ruc initial clusters and presyllables in words cognate with those in Vietnamese clearly show the path of change from earlier stages of Vietic to that in modern Vietnamese. Table 13 lists five languages and gives a general description (many, few, or none) of the amount of sesquisyllabic words and words with initial consonant clusters

LANGUAGE	Sesquisyllabic	Consonant Clusters
Pacoh	many	many
Ruc	many	many
Cuoi	few	many
Muong	none	few
Viet	none	none

Table 13: Syllable types in Vietic languages (Nguyen V.T. 1978)

Table 13 shows that at one extreme, both sesquisyllabic words and words with consonant clusters are quite common in both Ruc (a Vietic language) and Pacoh (a Katuic language), with gradual reductions through Cuoi (a minor Vietic language) and Muong. Vietnamese is at the other extreme having neither sesquisyllabic roots nor initial consonant clusters. In fact, Vietnamese does have consonant clusters with medial [-w-], which is common among other Mon-Khmer languages. However, many of those combinations (e.g. /lw/, /sw/, or /tw/), particularly those not seen in other Mon-Khmer languages such as Khmu and Pacoh, are seen in Chinese loans, pointing out yet another Sinitic influence on Vietnamese phonology.

The maximum canonical syllable shape in Ruc is again similar to Mon-Khmer languages, though it is somewhat simpler than some, as seen in table 14.

Language	Monosyllabic	Bisyllabic
Vietnamese	CVC	none
Muong	CCVC	none
Ruc	CCVC	CVCVC
Khmu	CCVC	CVCCVC

Table 14: Maximum canonical syllable shapes

Again, there is a gradual change in the range of the maximal canonical shape, with Vietnamese at one end and a representative Mon-Khmer language, here Khmu, at the other. In discussing canonical syllable shape, again the issue of cluster reduction arises. Table 15 shows some concrete examples where that process of telescoping is evident.

GLOSS	Vietnamese	Ruc	Mon-Khmer lg.
1. buffalo	təw2	tlu2	tiriə? (Pacoh)
2. inside	tɔŋ1	klɔŋ1	kalluŋ (Pacoh)
3. deep	ʂəw1	ʂəru1	ʂruu (Stieng)

Table 15: Vietnamese retroflex, Ruc clusters, and Mon-Khmer syllables

It is also significant to consider that Ruc has preserved those liquids in clusters which were present in Middle Vietnamese.

3.3 Morphology

Ruc morphology clearly distinguishes it from Vietnamese, which is entirely without affixation. This morphology places Ruc solidly within the category of ‘Mon-Khmer language.’ Table 16 lists Ruc affix forms, functions, and examples of Ruc derivational morphemes. They are for the most part non-productive morphemes, occurring in lexicalized forms.

FORM	FUNCTION	EXAMPLE
pa-	causative	leŋ ¹ ‘to rise’ > paleŋ ¹ ‘to cause to rise’ βi ² ‘to return (intrans.)’ > avi ² ‘to return (trans.)’
-a-	“	kuɕit ³ ‘to die’ > kacit ³ ‘to kill’
CV-	generalize	kun ⁴ ‘afraid’ > kukun ⁴ ‘to be scared generally speaking’
-n-	nominalize	t ^h ut ‘stop up’ > tanut ³ ‘stopper’
-r-	“	səp ³ ‘to cover’ > sanəp ³ ‘a blanket’
mu-	quantify	hal ¹ ‘two’ > muhal ¹ ‘two in a measured expression’

kV-	animals	kuhal ³ ‘tiger’, kaplu ¹ ‘rabbit’, katam ¹ ‘crab’
k-	natural phenomena	kuməa ² ‘rain’, kajɔ ³ ‘wind’
tə-	stative verbs	təkal ³ ‘white’, tuŋɔk ³ ‘sweet’

Table 16: Ruc Derivational Morphemes

The most notable Mon-Khmer-like affixes in Ruc include (1) the /pa-/ prefix that derives transitive verbs that are semantically causative, (2) the /-n-/ nominalizing infix, and (3) the /mu-/ quantifying prefix. Table 17 shows types one and two and also a quantifying prefix which is actually a phonological contraction of ‘one.’

FORM	FUNCTION	Ruc	Khmu	Khmer	Pacoh
pa-	causative	+	+	+	+
-n-	nominalize	+	+	+	+
-r-	“	+	+	-	-
mu-	quantify	+	-	+	+

Table 17: Mon-Khmer Morphology⁸

Ferlus (1977) was able to show near doublets in Vietnamese in which one form is a verb with variable initial consonants while the related noun form consistently contained initial nasals, likely remnants of the /-n-/ nominalizing infix. Further study of Ruc and other minor Vietic languages would undoubtedly produce useful data that further develop reconstructions of morphology in Vietnamese.

The final aspect of word formation to mention is reduplication. Similar patterns of reduplication have been shown in Vietnamese and Katuic languages (Hoàng 1987 and 1993). Ruc likewise contains the kind of Mon-Khmer-style patterns of reduplication that again link it to both Vietnamese and Mon-Khmer. Table 18 illustrates four types of reduplication in Ruc in which parts of the base reduplicate and the other alternate.

TYPE	GLOSS	RUC
Full	Small	dɛ ³ dɛ ³
Rhyme	Wrist	lop ³ kop ³
CV	Throat	dɔ̌k ³ dɔl ¹
Segmental	to mince	căn ² căn ³

Table 18: Ruc Reduplication

3.4 Syntax

In terms of syntax, Ruc is typologically similar to other languages in the Southeast Asian linguistic area. Some of those typological features include the use of sentence final question and mood particles, post-verbal resultative and abilitative verbs, and what are often called serial verb constructions. According to the scant materials available on Ruc, its syntax would appear simply to be the same, word for word, as Vietnamese. However, there should be syntactic differences in cases where Ruc verbs with causative morphology are used. Those sorts of syntactic patterns cannot occur in Vietnamese, which has had to compensate for the loss of such morphology through the use of other verb combinations and prepositions. Clearly, further research on the syntax of Minor Vietic languages should turn up some syntactic patterns that are seen in other Mon-Khmer languages, unless of course they are wiped out by Vietnamese patterns through intensive language contact.

4. Conclusion

Through each linguistic level analyzed in this report, Minor Vietic languages have served as linguistic links that also show the path of change Vietnamese underwent. At each level, these languages have Mon-Khmer traits while still showing clear ties to Vietnamese, though obviously exhibiting more archaic traits. Lexically, Minor Vietic Languages have preserved more Mon-Khmer lexicon and have been less influenced by Chinese than Vietnamese. In terms of phonology, Minor Vietic languages have preserved consonant clusters, polysyllabic forms, and various final consonants. Ruc seems not to have seen the phonological effects from Chinese loan words that Vietnamese has. Though at least some of the Minor Vietic Languages have tones, the specific tone categories they have gives us a clearer picture of the path that Vietnamese followed during its stages of tonogenesis. In terms of morphology, Minor Vietic Languages are here most strongly linked to other Mon-Khmer languages and offer the chance for further reconstruction of previous Vietnamese morphology. Little syntactic work has been done in this area, though it could only produce fruitful results both about the typological and historical link discussed in this paper as well as deepen our understanding of syntax in the Southeast Asian region.

The urgent need for research on these languages cannot be understated. Unlike many neighboring Mon-Khmer groups with populations that number in the thousands, the Minor Vietic peoples only number in the hundreds or less. In addition, due to their ethnic closeness with the Vietnamese, they are even more likely to assimilate than Mon-Khmer groups that are not immediately related to Vietnamese. Only an immediate and more thorough study could prevent the loss of highly valuable information.

Notes

¹The term ‘Vietic,’ coined first by Hayes (1984), refers to the language group consisting of Vietnamese, Muong, and the perhaps two dozen other minor Vietic languages along the Vietnam/Laos border. These groups are minor in terms of population, generally numbering only in the hundreds per language/dialect. Among other terms previously used, including Annam-Muong, Vietnammuong, and most commonly Viet-Muong, none are truly appropriate for referring to the whole-group, at least in the face of evidence from the minor Vietic languages, as first stated by Hayes (1984) and explained in detail in Hayes (1991).

The term Viet-Muong has been used since the beginning of this century, beginning with French linguists in Indochina, and is still in popular usage. That term was used because, during the beginning of the twentieth century, Vietnamese and Muong were the only two languages recognized in that group. The other closely related languages, about which there had been very little research, were lumped together as Muong dialects. As more evidence became available, a few linguists (Hayes *Ibid.* and Thompson 1976) only recently recognized that the term Viet-Muong was inappropriate. Despite Hayes’ publications on Vietic, the term Viet-Muong has remained the dominant term.

Phonological evidence for different subgroupings was provided by Ferlus (1975) and later by Hayes (*Ibid.*). Based on Ferlus’ subgrouping, Ruc and other minor Vietic languages cannot be labeled as Muong dialects as they branch higher in a genetic tree. Thus, while Vietic may be used to refer to a more immediate branch of Mon-Khmer, Viet-Muong is only one sub-branch of that group.

²This number is based on data from Nguyen V.L. (1993). The group is truly endangered due to their precarious sociopolitical situation and even natural environment. They were almost wiped out by cholera in the late 1980s.

³The only borrowings evident at this time are from Vietnamese and, more specifically, Nguon, a variety of Muong spoken nearby. The largest number of loan words come from Nguon according to Ferlus (*p.c.*).

⁴This article contains IPA transcriptions of Vietnamese (as well as Ruc and Pacoh) rather than Vietnamese Quoc Ngu orthography for ease of comparison and for the benefit of those who do not speak Vietnamese. All other samples are taken as is from the original sources.

⁵See Nguyen T.C. (1995) for further statements on proto-Vietic.

⁶These pronouns are in contrast with the daily Vietnamese terms of address which are based on familial terms, being neither syntactically nor semantically pronouns since they can be followed by modifiers, demonstratives, and names.

⁷These vowels include the Vietnamese sounds represented by the Vietnamese Quoc Ngu orthography *ă/a* and *â/ơ*, though the distinctions are phonetic differences synchronically, [a/æ] and [ə/ʌ] respectively.

⁸Varieties of Muong and both Central and Southern Vietnamese have only five tones through the merging of tone categories. For those tones to have developed, six categories had to have existed originally.

⁹For Kuy and Bru, see Huffman (1976). For Chong, see Diffloth (1989). For Arem, see Tran (1990).

¹⁰The sources for Ruc, Khmu, and Pacoh are mentioned before. Information on Khmer morphology comes from Jenner and Pou (1982).

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