

Language Contact and Convergence Areas (The Case of Vietnam)

Bui Khanh The
Faculty of Oriental Studies
National University in Ho Chi Minh City

1. Vietnam is a nation of many peoples and languages. According to government statistic figures and the Ethnology Institute, Vietnam today has 54 distinct nationalities comprising hundreds of regional groups. The languages of these nationalities belong to different linguistic stocks of SE Asia (Matisoff 1993, as quoting from Benedict 1972; 1973).

On the other hand, Vietnam today is a single united country from the north to the south. This unity came about after many millenia of the intergration of the people as well as territories and after thousands of years of the struggle for the independence and the unification of the country and their safekeeping.

What was the state of linguistic communication of this multiethnic community in the past, and what is its present condition today? What are the different kinds of relations among these languages existing in Vietnam today? How have they in the past, and now, had an influence on each other? What are the internal (structural) and external (socio-cultural) factors which are playing roles in the process of interaction.

2. The specific feature of the foundation of Vietnam was that Vietnam established its identity through both interconnection with other cultures by intermarriage and through ethnic integration. Examples of intermarriage are given in history by the Lý

princesses with different Lords or tribal chieftains, Huyền Trân Princess with Champa King Chế Mân, Nguyễn Princess with Cambodia King Chay Chetta II ... Integration was a result of the small ethnic group concentration on the Việt nuclei. Those were the cases of different tribal or regional groups under the Đinh, Lê, Lý, and Trần Dynasties, and the cases of Mạc Cửu, Trần Thượng Xuyên, and Dương Ngạn Địch under the Nguyen Dynasty. Like in most parts of the world, people here had to struggle in order to enlarge their existing living ground. But it is necessary to say that after the conflicts between the local powers, almost all the simple and humble peoples have been living and working together in harmony. All of these above-mentioned situations required a corresponding linguistic communication.

3. According to a recent Vietnamese study, the earliest inhabitants of Van-Lang ... the name of the Vietnamese realm in the time when the founder of the state united all the tribes under his authority ... were Austroasiatic speaking people. Modern scholars tend to see the language of these nuclei people as belonging to the Proto-Viet Muong (Hà & Phạm 1978). From such a starting point, the Vietnamese linguistic life engaged in close contact with other languages, a situation which largely determined the responses of the enlarging former Van-Lang community into a multiethnic one: Âu-Lạc and An-Nam under Han domination, Dai Viet in the first independence period, then Vietnam in contemporary time.

Members from this multiethnic community "adapt their speech to circumstance and differentiate it from one interlocutor to another." The linguistic intercourse makes the cooperation become a pressing necessity, and "everyone will soon learn enough of the other man's language to establish communication" (A. Martinet). In the specific situations of Vietnam the co-existence and mutual understanding require interlocutors to imitate each other during their attempt to communicate. The earliest

inhabitants of Vietnam tried to imitate in their speech the languages of their interlocutory. Perhaps at the beginning it was neither common nor accurate. But step by step that kind of communication became more popular, and shaped previously unilingual groups into bilingual groups among each small community.

4. The purpose of this paragraph is to help clarify the questions which arose in section 1.

4.1. From the birth of the country, the Vietnamese language has always played a key role among the various languages in contact. During its history, Vietnam has experienced some language contact relations : Viet (or V-M) Thai-Kadai, Viet-Han, Viet-Mainland Austronesian languages, Viet-other Austroasiatic languages, and finally Viet-West languages. (Bui 1996). For all linguistic processes, the most important are interstructural. But in the case of Vietnam each kind of contact contributed its share in the widening of linguistic communication and also brought over some modifications and changes of original form.

4.2. As well known, evidence of this situation is the example of such Han-Viet (Sino-Vietnamese) words in Vietnamese today. It consisted not only of obvious loan-words borrowing from Chinese classical works, from the speech of Han officials, nobles, and literati who came to rule Vietnam, but also of colloquial words from humble and simple people who migrated from China to Vietnam and became a part of the Vietnamese population. Their speech was in contact with Vietnamese and was regulated by the mechanisms of interference.

The lexical elements enriched Vietnamese vocabulary in their status quo, and as constituent components for the derivation of new words. Also, we could say the same for Vietnamese lexical elements in other languages of minorities.

4.3. With respect to phonology, the languages of Vietnam today without exception have almost "the adjustments in words ... to these areal features are traces under the categories of (1) phonological word shape and (2) phoneme inventories" (Lee 1974). Many years ago these areal features were pointed out by E. W. Lee (1974) for Chamic languages; by D. Thomas, Mier, Wallace, Haupers, Thomas and Headley for Mon-Khmer languages; and by Chao, Haas, and Simmonds for Chinese and Tai languages. They contain the following facts:

- a. Shift to ultimate stress in poly/disyllabic words.
- b. Reduction to monosyllables.
- c. Developement of consonant clusters as consequence of monosyllabisation.
- d. Rearrangement of the phoneme inventories (increasing number of vowel qualities in main syllables, reduction of number of word final consonants, ect.).
- e. The prosodic feature and the development of voice register (or phonation type) can lead to gradually shaping of the linguistic phenomenon which some linguists call tones (for instance the case of Cham).

4.4. From the point of view of the potential area of interference we would like firstly to refer to the similarities in function and in structure of some grammar constructions in languages of Vietnam. Six languages in comparison are representatives of the main groups in Vietnam: Cham < Austronesian, Tay < Thai, Ksing Mul < Khmuic, Pacôh < Katuic, and Mnong < Bahnaric.

4.4.1. Orientational and directional constructions. There is in almost all the languages of Vietnam a group of moving action verbs which can occur as coverbs and which are direction/orientation of the main verbs in constructions (see Table 1). The coverbs or orientation (CO) and coverbs of direction (CD) often

Table 1

4.4.1. Oriental and directional constructions

Languages in comparison	Action verbs		Coverbs of orientation (CO)				Coverbs of direction (CD)	
			lên	xuống	ra	vào/vô		
Viet (V)	nhảy	mang					đi	lại
Cham (C)	plong	pa	takoq	trun	tapja	tamư	naw	may
Tay (T)	đít	thư	khư:n	lông	ʔok	khâu	pay	mưa
Ksing Mul (K)	poɽdeh	puơ	hư:n	lih	ngôh	ngom	daw/zu:	pleh
Pacôh (P)	Kanh chôl	pa/ta	sâr	sear	ngôh	moot	pók	liah/choo
Mnong (M)	rduh	njđôt	hao	yur	luh	láp	hân	sit
Meaning	jump	carry	go up (to)	go down (to)	go out (to)	go in /into	go away (from speaker)	coming (to speaker)

occur separately, but sometimes they can be used together with the same main verb in construction. Some examples:

- bek fừn ok (T) - to carry the wood out
- nhảy xuống (V) - to jump down
- chạy đi (C) - to run away

But: pà kajâu tapjaq naw (C) - to carry wood out going away.

4.4.2. Negative constructions use different negative words, but have nearly the same word order pattern (see Table 2).

Table 2
4.4.2. Negative constructions

Languages in Comparison	Unlimited Negative	Limited Negative	Prohibitives
Viet (V)	không (/chẳng, chả)	chưa	đừng/chớ
Cham (C)	ô/ôh; ôh ... ô	ka/ka ... ôh	côy/cờy ... cờy
Tay (T)	bấu	xằng/chằng	dá
Ksing Mul (K)	kô?/?ưk	kô? hej/?ưk hej	pe:
Pacôh (P)	lâiq	liâq yôh	akâp
Mnong (M)	mâu/mâu ... ôh	ê/ê ... ôh	lời/lời ... ôh
Meaning	no, not	not ... yet	don't

The typical negative patterns are:

- Nhăng lâiq pôk (P)
We don't go.
- Do khôiq vì kampâi, ma lâiq yôh bôn akai. (P)
He was married, but hasn't a child yet.

- Mãi akâp pôk (P)
(You) Don't go!

In some of these languages (Cham, Mnong ...) the negative words can be repeated at the end of a syntagm as emphasizing particles in the other one.

Comp: Tôi không đi đâu (V) - Tahlaq ôh naw ôh. (C)

I don't go.

Anh đừng nói thế chứ! (V) - Hư cờj dôm pẹq côj! (C)

Don't say that!

4.4.3. In almost all of the languages of Vietnam relator nouns are classified as a small class among the substantives.

- trên (V), angoq (C), nưa (T), hoda: (K), iniang (P), kalơ (M) - place on top, above, or high in or on.
- dưới (V), ala (C), tẩu (T), phưn (K), te idurp (P), dâng (M) - place at bottom or beneath.
- trong (V), talòm (C), chang, đầu (T), môk (K), tinga (P), tâm (M) - place inside, time within which, or total capacity.
- ngoài (V), lingiw (C), nook (T), nok (K), taltiah (P), dih (M) - place outside, quantity beyond.
- trước (V), anaq (C), nả/tó nả (T), thơ na: (K), mamăt (P), nấp (M) - place in front or time before.
- sau (V), likuq (C), lăng (T), kota:j (K), tatun/talooi (P), koir (M) - place behind or time after.
- giữa (V), krưk (C), chang/chính chang (T), kodô (K), tardi (P), ta n'gul (M) - place between.
- xung quanh/quanh (V), tom tər (C), quăng què (T), polwel (K), târ (P), rôpêt (M) - place surrounding.

Relator nouns occasionally appear as heads of restrictive phrases. The members of this small class appear superficially to resemble the prepositions of English or French. Two examples:

- Ala haluy kajăw (C)
Under the shade of the tree.
- Polwe:l dzieng re:p kuj peh kuj cruong (K)
Around the school there are the trees.

In spite of that, the understanding of basic nominal meanings, as shown by Vietnam grammar authors, helps to explain some of the puzzling aspect of their use (L. Thompson).

4.4.4. Causative constructions in the languages of Vietnam. They are expressed by the following model of grammatical relations.

S1 V1 (C) S2 V2

(S1 - Agent; V1 - Verb starting the causal action; S2 - Object of the causal action and the same time Agent of the action expressing by V2; V2 - action which S2 should do or the state of S2 under effect of V1; C - optional linking word.)

- Jih sông ur păng đã sai păng hăn mir (M)
After eating the wife suggested to her husband to go to the field.

At present this analytic causative construction is so commonly used that it is more widespread even in former affixational languages. An example is the causal morpheme, which is gradually being replaced in chamic languages by an analytic construction.

Jarai language : to live - hɔdip
 to resurrect - pɔ hɔdip (affix: pɔ)
 is being replaced by - ngã brei hɔdip
 gkai (to make alive again)

Rhade language : big - prong
 to make big - biprong (affix: bi)
 is being replaced by - ngã brei prong (to
 make big), which is becoming ngã
prong (to grow)

4.4.5. The Cham in the delta region, as well as the Austronesian and Austroasiatic languages in the high and borderland of Vietnam are now gradually losing their system of affixes. The affixation (to form new words) in these languages is being replaced by the compounding probably because of the influence of the analytical, isolating languages of Vietnam. Compound words - nominatives as well as predicatives - are more and more becoming a great part of their vocabularies. Along with the lexical interference and the current trends in reduction of primary disyllabic words to monosyllabic ones it makes them have nearly the same appearance.

5. Let us now turn back to where we started. All of the above-mentioned common trends and similarities reflect three types of relationships: genetic, areal and typological. If the genetic one is predestined (see 1), the areal relationship became visible during the process to spread Vietnamese which at the same time incorporated and expanded the linguistic components joined in the Vietnamese language. The typological relationship demands some explanation, especially for Chamic languages. Originally Chamic languages were genetically included in Austronesian agglutinative languages, even though "notable for a low degree of synthetism" (N. F. Alieva). But the transferring of

Cham from former linguistic type to analytic, isolating monosyllabic language in a relative short time is not possible to explain without the contact relation. In reality most of the Chams are Cham-Viet bilinguals (Bui 1979). We should say the same for other ethnic groups which are in contact with Vietnamese. Bilingualism/multilingualism is an appropriate type of language communication since the beginning of Vietnam history until the present-day and might remain likewise in the future for the Vietnam linguistic community.

At a glance at data in 4 - the structural similarities - one could consider the manifestation of the same tendencies in grammar as well as in enriching the lexicon. That is on one hand the inner structural development in the direction to higher degree of isolating monosyllabic languages. But on other hand that is also the result of the contact relation leading to the minimization and optimization of the grammar differences between contact languages as well as increasing of lexical interferences.

On the basis of these phenomena we should characterize the languages of present-day Vietnam as Vietnamese Languages Pack (VLP). Many years ago E. Gaspardone emphasized "an especially high level of concentration" of the languages in Indo-China (quoted in Coedes 1948). And N. F. Alieva (1984) explained this fact by the theory of language union.

For my part, I think it is preferable to use the expression "Convergence Areas of Vietnamese Language Pack." That would be explained by Weinreich's formula "the case of convergence development" and by Martinet's notable idea "Contact breeds imitation and imitation¹ breeds linguistic convergence."

¹In place of imitation should be used interference?

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