POONG LANGUAGE - THE FIRST CONTACT OF LANGUAGES BETWEEN VIET AND THAI

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After discovering and studying May, Ruc, Sach, Malieng, Coi, Arem ... in Central Vietnam, Vietnamese linguists agree upon the Mon-Khmer origin of Vietnamese. The above said languages are grouped into a common branch called Chut belonging to Viet-Muong group. Languages belonging to Chut branch are regarded as an image of ancient Viet-Muong before the Christian Era having mon-khmer elements and no Thai nor Han elements. While collecting materials on Muong, a number of languages like Cuoi, Danlai, Lyha have been described and they have been considered as most ancient Muong languages under the common name of Cuoi in which a separation from Mon-Khmer group, a contact with Thai have been detected but with no Han influences. Afterwards, a part of Muong on account of contact with Han gave rise to Vietnamese.

How this was realized the first contact of Ancient Viet Muong with Thai ? Without data from Poong it is diffi- cult to have an idea of the contact. The Poong (or Tay-Poong) are now living concentrated at Phong Hamlet, Tam Thai commune, Tuong Duong district, Nghe Tinh province. Data from Poong were first given by ethnographs in a very restricted number and therefore Poong has been differently classified, either it has been grouped in Cuoi branch and the Viet Muong group includes three branches : Chut, Cuoi, Muong-Viet, or it makes with Danlai, Lyha the Poong group and a binary opposition Chut-Poong > Muong-Viet has been born.

To compensate the shortness of data and clarify this problem we have directly visited Poong population and collected linguistic data of the language. This article does not aim at giving a detailed description of Poong but at presenting its basic features to find out its place among Viet Muong group.

Poong still retains a fairly numerous compound initials. Apart from common initial groups of other Viet

Muong languages like pì, bl, k'r, p'r, k'l, p'l, kl
there also exist ml and hl only popular in Poong.

As regards finals, Poong retains many classes.
Apart from m, n, ŋ, p, t, k, -i, -u there exist l, h, ʔ,
ɲ, c. Especially the old pair ɲ - c still exist in many
Poong words. The old pair h-ʔ though not so common as
the pair ɲ - c still exist in Poong as a mark of its
ancientness compared with a number of other languages.
We find them in following words:

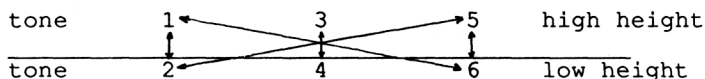|		
ə ɲŭʔ´	"tuoi"	"age"
pɛ dɛʔ´	"búng"	"to flip"
ɲŏʔ´	"noi"	"to loosen"
cŏʔ´	"chọc tiết"	"to stick"
lăm`pĕʔ´	"năm úp thìa"	"to lie on the belly"
p'lah	"tuói"	"to water"
lɛh	"dá"	"stone"
ɛh	"nhiều"	"many"
sə`nəh	"dệm"	"mattress"
kuh	"cúc áo"	"button"

On purely phonetic aspect Poong has 6 tones dif-
ferent from one another by their registers, contours and
glottalisation

But on phonemic aspect, there exists only 4 tones
differentiated by the register criterium and glottalisa-
tion. Before all, we find a phonemic opposition between
sound with high register and sound with low register.
They are tone 1 opposed to tone 2 / ` /, tone 3 / ´/,
opposed to tone 4 / ' /, tone 5 / ˇ/, opposed to tone 6
/ ^/: Examples:

pɛ˙	"b "	"raft"	)
			)tone 1 / tone 2
pɛ	"be"	"to break"	)
tit´	"dất"	"earth"	)
			)tone 3 / tone 4
tit'	"dít"	"bottom"	)

sa˅	"thậ"	"to set free")
		)
sa^	"rửa"	"to wash")
paˇ	"họ, người ta""they"	)
		)
pa^	"bổ củi"	"to split(firewood) tone 5/

tone 6

kaˇ	"gà"	"hen")
		)
ka^	"buôn"	"to sell")
maˇ	"ma"	"ghost")
		)
ma^	"ngựa"	"horse")
ka	"cá"	"fish")
		)
ka^	"bu ồn"	"to sell")
pe	"ngã"	"to fall")
		)
pe^	"thắng"	"to win")
noŋˋ	"gió nồm"	"southern wind")

) tone 2 / tone 5

noŋˇ	"ao"	"lake")

We may represent by the following schema:

tone	1	3	5	high height
tone	2	4	6	low height

Then we find the opposition between tones of the same height in which the differential feature is the presence or absence of glottalisation. They are tone 1 opposed to tone 5 /ˇ/, tone 2 /ˋ/ opposed to tone 6 /^/. Examples :

be	"biển"	"sea")
		)
beˇ	"sao"	"star")
		)
bɔ	"mỏ"	"mine")

bɔ̌	"bò"	"cow"	) tone 1/tone 5
			)
			)
sɔ	"x$\hat{a}$u(chi)"	"to thread"	)
			)
sɔ̌	"c$\hat{a}$i bút"	"pen"	)
k$\check{a}$iˋ	"rêu"	"wed"	)
			)
k$\check{a}$iˆ	"du (ngã)"		)
			) tone 2 /tone 6
kulˋ	"người"	"person"	)
			)
kulˆ	"lợn"	"pig"	)

We can represent by the following schema :

tone	1	3	5	high register
tone	2	4	6	low register

No opposition exists between tone 3 and tone 5, or between tone 4 and tone 6 which demonstrates the absence of opposition as regards contour. Tone 3 and tone 5 are therefore variants of the same tone, tone 4 and tone 5 are variants of the same tone. In short, Poong has only 4 tone phonemes differentiated by criteria of rîegister and glottalisation.

We have the following shcema :

absence of register glottalisation	glottalisation		
tone 1	tone 3	tone 5	high
tone 2	tone 4 ·	tone 6	low

Poong has syllables of CVCVC and CVC form. Old syllables
of CVCVC form are very numerous, about 10 % of the vocabulary

Examples :

ka` dɔŋ	"sao b$\tilde{a}$c d$\hat{a}$u"	"Pote star"
ka`  ma`	"mư'a"	"rain"

kɔˋ dɔ	"gió"	"wind"
taˋ kaŋˇ	"gang (tay)"	"span"
tɛˋ kɛl	"ghẻ'"	"scabies"
pɔˋ ɲɔˇ	"vò"	"to crush up"
bɘ saˇ	"tha"	"to set free"
paˋ ŋa	"(nằm) ngửa"	"to fall flat on one's back"

On lexical aspect, in contemporary Poong affixation does not exist. In the unique pair / dɔi/ "finger" and /kɔˋ dɔi/ "to show" one may suspect a vestige of prefixation. Thus, affixation in word formation has disappeared.

A fact worthy to be noticed : apart from words of austroasian origin, many words are of Thai origin whose form are more ancient than corresponding Thai ones. The most striking fact is that Poong words with /hl/ initial correspond to Thai words with /h/ initial. Examples:

Poong	Thai Thanh	Viet	
hlŭk'	hŭk	lau	"to wipe"
hliụ	hiụ	xách (nước)	"to bring (water)"
hlamˇ	hamˇ	khiêng	"carry with one's hand
hlu	hu^	biết	"to know"
hlăi̯ˋ	hăi̯ˋ	góp	"to add up"
hlăŋ^	hăŋ^	giàu	"rich"
hlɛ	hɛ	re	"cheap"
hlɔi̯^	hɔi̯^	trăm	"hundred"

There may exist a change process from /hl/ to /r/, then to /h/ or to /l/. Through Poong data we can determine a phonetic evolution of Thai languages /hl/ > /r/ > /h/ ~ /l/ in which in Thailand we have /r/, in Lao, Thai of Vietnam we have /h/ and in same dialects of Thailand the tendency of evolution from /r/ to /l/ has appeared. This fact shows that Poong had contacts with ancient Thai dialects. This contact was fairly intense : even the vocabulary for expressing natural phenomena and human body is full of words of Thai origin. Are these words borrowings when the Poong were in contact with the Thai coming from North West Vietnam ? This fact is certain and it is most clearly expressed in words for

denoting ricefield, ditches, plough, harrow, hoe... But
one cannot neglect the correspondence of /hl/ Poong to
/h/ Thai which denotes a very ancient origin of the con-
tact taking place then Thai still retained /hl/. A fair-
ly great number of Poong words retain a more ancient
form than Thai words. A comparison between Poong and
Thai Thanh, the ethnic group of Thai origin living
nearest to present Poong ethnic group is clear

Poong	Thai Thanh	Viet	
p'ruị`p'ruị˅	duị`	(muʼa) phùn	"drizzle"
kə`mɔk	mɔk	sʼuʼong	"dew"
p'lu	pu`	núi	"mountain"
pul˅	pun^	vôi	"lime"
p'lɛ	hɛ˅	sỏi	"gravel"
pɔt'pɔt	pɔt˅	bọt(nuʼớc)	"foam"
ki kɔ`hɔị˅	niẹŋ hɔị^lỗ hầu	"Adam's apple"	
klɔŋ	pɔŋ˅	cẳng (tay)	"forearm"
ka`ɲăm	kăm^	nắm (tay)	"fist"
kŭk k'lɛŋ	k'ɛn^	bap (tay)	"biceps"
ka`pa	k'a^	dùi	"thigh"
p'oẹc'	pɔt'	phổi	"lung"
muịc	muk´	mũi	"nose"

From the above characteristics we clearly see that
Poong cannot be included in languages of Cuoi branch for
it is much more ancient. In the syllable structure of
Poong the CVCVC form is fairly common while this form is
quite rare among languages of Cuoi branch and a series
of words denotes a change from CVCVC of Poong to CVC of
Cuoi. Example :

Poong	Cuoi Dep	Cuoi Cham	Danlai Lyha	Viet	
ka`ma	mɰə`	mɔ^	ma	muʼa	"rain"
kɔ`dɔ	duọ´	sɔ´	dɔ´	gió	"wind"
kə`cəp	cəp	cəp'	cəp'	chớp	"lightning"
kɛ`nɛŋ	săŋ`	nɛŋ	nɛŋ	răng	"tooth"
kiko	ko'	ko^	kɔ'	cổ	"neck"
ka`paŋ	pan´	taŋ˅	ban`	bàn(tay)	"hand"
kaɲăm	num´	năm`		nắm(tay)	"handful"
ka`săm^	mɔŋ´	săm	săm	móng(tay)	"rail"

tɛ̆kɛl	gɛˆ	k'ɛn	kɛn'	ghẻ	"scabies"
ka`tăk'	tăk'	tăk'	tăk'	tặc(luỡi)	"to click one's tongue"
tɔ`k̆ɔl	cɔi̭ˆ	k'ɔl	kŏk'	cốc	"to bump"
kə`cui̭	cui̭`	cui̭	cui̭	dùi	"to prick"
bəsăˇ	săˇ	sa	sa	thẵ	"to set free"
kɛ`ɲɛt'	ɲɛt'	ɲɛt'	ɲɛt'	nhét	"to stuff"
ta`kăp'	găp'	kɔp'	kăp'	gẵp	"to pick up"
pa`ŋa	ŋa ˆ	ŋa'	ŋa'	năm ngửa	"to lie flat on one's back"
tɛ`keŋ`	ŋi̭e ŋ	ŋi̭e ŋ	ŋi̭eŋ	nghiêng	"to lean"
ka`tep'	tɔ`	tɔp'	təp'	dập(đất)	"to strike"

One may base oneself on the fact that the initial system of Poong is simpley than that of languages Cuoi branch to affirm that it is not so ancient as the Cuoi branch. But if we paid attention on compound initials we should see that compound initials are more numerous than in Cuoi branch and it has compound initials like /ml/ and /hl/ not existing in Cuoi branch. Retroflex initials in Cuoi branch are a transitory step of the evolution from a compound initial to a simple one in Viet Muong group. Poong is an early form therefore compound initials are more numerous, more various and intermediary sounds are absent. We have a very regular correspondence between /hl/ of Poong and retroflex /ʈ/ or /ʐ/ in Cuoi branch and even in Vietnamese.

Examples :

Poong	Cuoi Dep	Cuoi Cham	Danlai Lyha	Viet	
hleŋ`hleŋˇ	ʈen`	rəl	reŋ	rîen	"to moan"
hlăn^	ʈăn^	răn'	răn`	rắn	"to contrac muscles"
hlɛk'	ʈɛk'	rɛk'	rɛk'	rách	"torn"
hlŭŋ	ʈŭŋ	rŭŋ	rŭŋ'	rụng	"to fall"
hlieu^	ʈieu^	rɯəṷ'	rɯəṷ'	ru̇'ọ'u	"alcohol"
hlɔi̭`	ʈɔi̭	rɔi̭	rɔi̭	ruỗi	"fly"
hlɛ	ʈɛ	rɛh	rɛh	rẻ	"cheap"
hlieŋ^	ʈieŋ`		ʈieŋ	riêng	"private"
hlɔ`		rɔ	rɔ	rùa	"tortoise"

Another very important reason, which prevents the inclusion of Poong in Cuoi branch : the tone system of

Poong has only 4 tones while it has 6 tones in Cuoi branch.

The final system of Poong though not having so many words with /h/ final as Cuoi Chçam but still retains an ancient vestigîe not present in Cuoi branch : it is the glottal sound /ʔ/. Moreover, /h/ final is not a current phenomenon among languages of Cuoi branch : it is absent in Cuoi Dep and is very sparse in Danlai Lyha. On the contrary the two ancient finals /c/ and /ɲ/ are much more frequent in Poong compared with Cuoi branch. If in Cuoi branch, /c/ and /ɲ/ are very scattered and appear only with some front vowels, in Poong they are combined with front and back vowels creating a series of vowels with glides.

Examples :

kuic'	"lủa"	"fire"
muic'	"mũi"	"nose"
buiɲˇ	"bếp"	"kitchen"
huiɲˇ	"hôn"	"to kiss"
moec'	"một"	"one"
p'oec	"phổi"	"lung"
rɔɛc'	"ruột"	"bowels"
klɔɛc'	"lọt"	"to leak"
bɔɛc^	"nhặt"	"to pick up"

This phenomenon is common in Poong.

All the above said phenomena allow us to separate Poong from Cuoi branch and they are present in Chut. But Poong has many words of Thai origin a fact not existing in Chut. It has 4 tones on phonemic aspect and 6 tones on phonetic aspect which demonstrates it is in the transitional stage of the tone evolution from 4 tones (a characteristic of Chut) to 6 tones (a characteristic of Muong-Viet).

We think that Poong is a direct evolution from Common Viet-Muong. Only Common Viet Muong can have these characteristics of Chut branch but a new contact process with ancient Thai had begun in which appeared the possibility of having a tone system on account of contact with Thai whose tone system is the most striking feature.

Thus, the special role of Poong is this language is nearest to Common Viet Muong, otherly speaking a direct evolution from Common Viet Muong. One may regard Poong as a member of Chut branch, the most modern one and at the same time a Muong-Viet language, the direct product of Common Viet Muong. If we base ourself on the data determination by Prof Ha Van Tan and Prof Pham Duc Duong, Poong might be born about a century BC and a century AC. Its palce in the whole context of Viet Muong group is as follows :

VIET MUONG GROUP

Muong-Viet branch

Chut branch

Malieng

Sách, May

Poong (Common V–M)

Cent. ± 1

Cuoi Danlai, Lyha (ancient Mg. dialects)

Muong Dialects

Modern Muong

Nguon (and Viet Dialect)

Viet Dialects

Modern Viet