

# AN OFFICIAL ORTHOGRAPHY FOR C'TU LANGUAGE

*Nguyen Dang Chau\**

From the general population investigation on the first, April 1979, General Department of Viet Nam statistics has used Cotu people. This name is called from researching consequence of Ethnic Institute — Social Science Committee ( National Center of social and humanities now ). In spite of that, the researchers of linguistics have still named Katu while Cotu people have never accepted it. C'tu or Cotu which is named by Cotu people themselves means living at upstream or along the rivers. From now on, we should call the unified name, Cotu people, Cotu language. On the similar situation, although there have been three writing systems suggested, Cotu writing has not become a part of Cotu people's life yet.

With the population of approximately 50.000 living in Viet Nam and over 10.000 in Laos, Cotu people live scatteredly, stretching from A Luoi, Nam Dong districts ( Thua Thien — Hue province ) toward Hien and Nam Giang districts ( Quang Nam province ) of eastern side of Truong Son chain mountain belonging to Viet Nam to Dac Chung and Ka Lum districts of Xe Kong province, Laos. Because residential regions are separated by high mountains and deep valley, local accents and dialect being complicated make disadvantages to be aware phonemics of Cotu language as well as to choose standard accent region for an official orthography of Cotu language. Therefore, things done by domestic and foreign researchers of linguistics are great, lost much time and very precious. Before showing some suggestions to a total solution of phonematics and of unified writing system, we can sketch Cotu phonetic in relation to the former solutions.

## **I- Outline of Cotu phonetics and the phonemic divided solution and agreed graphic signs of writing system.**

Up to now, researchers' acknowledgement to Cotu phonemic system has not unified yet. Besides, the symbols used for vowels and consonants have not been either. The foreign authors like Nancy.A.Costello, Judith Wallace chose some symbols being appropriate with English. For example, sound /d/ is distinguished with /ʔd/ by the letters [d] and [ḍ]. On the contrary, Conh Ta Lang and Conh Axoep want how to write Cotu language being close to Vietnamese with [ḍ] /ʔd/ and [dh] /d/. In fact, Cotu phonemes is a complicated system. It is necessary to have a seminar lead to determine the most reasonable and unified writing system. Chu Quoc Ngu contains many unreasonable things that we have known but the options of writing Cotu will not be able not to consider the advantages of usage bilingual Cotu- Vietnamese in this ethnic community in Viet Nam. A domestic author chose the letter [c] which is equivalent to [ch] in Vietnamese. This thing embarrasses to the Cotu pupils in the first grade having to writing two different letters for two similar sounds, otherwise for the only sound. For example, *cha* in Cotu language means to eat, is pronounced like *cha* meant father in Vietnamese; so, why do they have to write them differently? Using [c, k, q] for an only phoneme in Vietnamese is so surplus; we can delete some or distribute accurately for Cotu writing system but letter [c] should not represent the sound /ts/ like pasigraphy. Similarly, N. A. Costello has used the letter [d] represented the sound /d/ in Cotu language that is reasonable in English speaker's phonetic perception. But in Cotu native speaker's phonetic perception, there is a obvious distinction between the sound /ʔd/ like [ḍ] in Vietnamese and the sound /d/, lighter, softer, transferring apical sound, retracted to apical, retracted, gum, like [d] in English. So, do we agree with Costello's [d] or Conh Ta Lang's [dh]? The above facts are some typical examples, in fact, Cotu phonetic is more complicated with pre-nasal sound, glottocclusive sound /ʔ/ being alone or accompanying

---

\* Philology Department - Da Nang Education College

consonants / ʔb / , / ʔd /. In addition, because the phonetic reduction has taken place, some affixes exist as pre-syllables combined and becoming the clusters such as double consonant [ t'r ] ( t'rcha — to tab each other with knife ), [ mr ] ( mrhal — eager ), [ xr ] ( xrmil — mirror ); there are even tri-consonant like [ đrn ] ( đrnâc — mountain pass , đrnưc — hairpin ).

About vowels system, researchers' phonetic ears are different. After N. A. Costello and J. Wallace, there are 25 vowels consisting of 3 diphthongs, 11 pairs of short and long monophthongs. And after Quach Xân, there are too much of 39 vowels. Lately, Nguyen Huu Hoanh has recognized 27 vowels consisting of 3 diphthongs and 12 pair of short and long monophthongs. For reference, we extract three systems as they were remarked above:

a/ Quach Xan had just shown without description.

Vowels:

a ă á â    oo oỏ oó  
e ẻ é    ô ỗ ố  
ê ể ế    ơ ở ớ  
êê ểể ếế    ơơ ởở ớớ  
i ỉ í    uu u ử ú  
o ỏ ó    ưư ư ử ứ

Consonants:

b c d đ g h k l m n r s t v x j z y p q.

b/ Nancy A. Costello

Vowels: ( các nguyên âm ).

|           | Front | Central | Back |
|-----------|-------|---------|------|
| Glided    | iê    | ươ      | uô   |
| high      | i ii  | ư ưư    | u uu |
| mid       | ê êê  | ơ ơơ    | ô ôô |
| low close | e ee  | â ââ    | o oo |
| low high  |       | a aa    | ó óó |

Consonants: ( các phụ âm )

|               | Bilabial | Alveolar | Alveopalatal | Velar |
|---------------|----------|----------|--------------|-------|
| stops.v.unasp | p        | t        | ch           | k     |
| vl. asp       | ph       | th       | s            | kh    |
| vd            | b        | d        | j            | g     |
| glottal       | ʔ        | đ        | dy           | q     |
| liquids       | v        | l,r      | y            | h     |
| nasals        | m        | n        | nh           | ng    |

c/ Theo Nguyễn Hữu Hoàng:

Hệ thống các nguyên âm.

|         | Trước |                     | giữa  |        | sau   |       |
|---------|-------|---------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| Nhỏ     | i [i] | ị [i <sup>h</sup> ] | ư [ɤ] | ự [□□] | u [u] | ụ [□] |
| Nhỏ vừa | ê [e] | ệ [□]               | ơ [□] | ợ [□□] | ô [o] | ộ [□] |

|               |         |        |         |        |         |         |
|---------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| Lớn vừa       | e [ũ]   | ẹ [□□] | â [□]   | ạ [□□] | o [□]   | ọ [□ □] |
| Lớn           | E [ổ]   | ẹ [ổ□] | a [a]   | ạ [ã]  | A [i]   | ạ [i□]  |
| Nguyên âm đôi | iê [ie] |        | ươ [□□] |        | uô [uo] |         |

Hệ thống các phụ âm.

|                | Môi     | Đầu lưỡi<br>( lợi ) | Mặt lưỡi<br>( ngạc ) | Gốc lưỡi<br>( mặc ) | Họng  |
|----------------|---------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------|
| tắc - vô thanh | P [p]   | t [t]               | c [c]                | k [k]               | q [ʔ] |
| bật hơi        | ph [pʰ] | th [tʰ]             | s [h̃ʰ]              | kh [kʰ]             |       |
| hữu thanh      | b [b]   | d [d]               | J [j̃]               | g [g]               |       |
| bán hữu thanh  | ᵇ [ᵇ]   | ᵈ [ᵈ]               | ᵋ [ᵋ]                |                     |       |
| xát            | v [v]   | l/r [l/r]           | y [j]                |                     | h [h] |
| mũi            | m [m]   | n [n]               | nh [ɲ]               | ng [ŋ]              |       |

c/ Nguyễn Hữu Hoành:

Hệ thống các nguyên âm.

|               | Trước   |        | giữa    |        | sau     |         |
|---------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| Nhỏ           | i [i]   | ị [□]  | ư [□]   | ự [□□] | u [u]   | ụ [□]   |
| Nhỏ vừa       | ê [e]   | ệ [□]  | ơ [□]   | ợ [□□] | ô [o]   | ộ [□]   |
| Lớn vừa       | e [□]   | ẹ [□□] | â [□]   | ạ [□□] | o [□]   | ọ [□ □] |
| Lớn           | E [ổ]   | ẹ [ổ□] | a [a]   | ạ [ã]  | A [i]   | ạ [i□]  |
| Nguyên âm đôi | iê [ie] |        | ươ [□□] |        | uô [uo] |         |

Hệ thống các phụ âm.

|                | Môi     | Đầu lưỡi<br>( lợi ) | Mặt lưỡi<br>( ngạc ) | Gốc lưỡi<br>( mặc ) | Họng  |
|----------------|---------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------|
| tắc - vô thanh | P [p]   | t [t]               | c [c]                | k [k]               | q [ʔ] |
| bật hơi        | ph [pʰ] | th [tʰ]             | s [h̃ʰ]              | kh [kʰ]             |       |
| hữu thanh      | b [b]   | d [d]               | J [j̃]               | g [g]               |       |
| bán hữu thanh  | ᵇ [ᵇ]   | ᵈ [ᵈ]               | ᵋ [ᵋ]                |                     |       |
| xát            | v [v]   | l/r [l/r]           | y [j]                |                     | h [h] |
| mũi            | m [m]   | n [n]               | nh [ɲ]               | ng [ŋ]              |       |

To discuss a reasonable phonemic solution of Cotu, maybe it should be started from the description of the structure of Cotu syllable. They exist such the monosyllabic words as *moon* ( to say ), *lêi* ( to look ), *xââng* ( to hear ), *vộih* ( to go ), *cha* ( to eat boiled foots ), *đách* ( to eat meat, fishes ), *pá* ( to eat, then to let dregs out of mouth, example eating sugar cane ), *moóc* ( to eat baked foot )...or members of polysyllabic word ( consisting of disyllabic simple word and the

polysyllabic derivative word ). The polysyllabic derivative word consisting of a main syllable and one or many attached syllables. The main syllable often contains stress, has the same structure with the monosyllabic word [ c+\_cv or cv+\_c ]. Phonetic structure of the monosyllabic simple word is the typical structure of Cɔtu syllable formula. After the phonemic phonetic view, the monosyllabic simple word can be based to divide the phonemes, although, in addition to a main syllable, the double syllable word and the polysyllable word still contain attached syllables but they have not sufficient structure like above.

The Cɔtu syllable contains from one to three possible segmental phoneme ( ideal formula ) and can be arranged in two ways:

3 1 2  
 C+\_C V  
 C V+\_ C  
 3

- if factor (3) formed at the beginning of syllable, it will combine and become a initial cluster such as *cmoo* ( year ), *đnách* ( meat ), *crêê* ( right ), *prí* ( banana ), *t'ri* ( buffalo ),...
- if factor (3) formed at the end of syllable, it will link vowel becoming “ *vân* ” ( it makes the prosody in phonetic of a poem ...) such as *choom* ( to be able to ), *bêch* ( to sleep ), *xông đông* ( home mouse )...However, it seems hard to determine “ *vân* ” in some syllables with glottocclusive final sounds / ? /, / h / such as *óh* ( used at the end of the sentences to express a suggestion ), *báh* ( to carry baby on the back ), *căh* ( no )...

Especially, the Cɔtu syllables are still perceived clearly with prosodies consisting of the stress and the high or low accent. Within many words, these prosodies reveal phonemic difference. To justify the existence of tones and the Cɔtu tonetization process in condition that contacts with Vietnamese, we would like showing some cases which really contain phonemic contrariety. From phonetic intuit, we try describing the following phenomenon: there are available the words such as *bêê?* ( classifier of thing ), *dadá* ( điệu múa nữ ), *la* ( if ), *lah* ( to cleave )...in Cɔtu language. Throughout the contact, it has been had the access of words *bêê?* ( to put up ), *dada* ( mother in law ), *lá lang* ( leaves of sweet potataes )...The difference between each couple of words has a meaning difference, the phonemic valuation:

Eveness range: *bêê?*              *dada*              *la*  
 High range:    *bêê?*              *dadá*              *lá lang*

This phenomenon also has taken place in Cɔtu vocabulary itself:

Eveness range:    *zơ* ( wine jar )  
 High range:        *zớ* ( to postpone )      *cabhrế* ( đáng kiếp )  
 Medium range:                              *cabhrể* ( dài dằng )

**II- Being a researcher of teaching Vietnamese - Cɔtu bilingual pupils, we would like showing some suggestions:**

1/ Concerning phonological solution.

- The first thing is that phonem / t / as in the word *trotrô* ( meaning jealous, synonymous with *mamâu* ), *ơngtruah...ơngtruah* ( two actions occur at the same time ), *mơtruah* ( at the same time ) needs to be added to the system of consonant phonemes.

- The second thing is that each of the elements which change according to high and low registers like tone should be acknowleged since they specifically help to discriminate the meaning between words. For example:

+ *zơ* ---→ wine jar + *cabhrế*---→ to deserve well as a punishment + *dada*---→mother in law  
 + *zớ* ---→ postpone + *cabhrể*---→ prolonged + *dadá*---→female dance

An obvious truth is that the available systems can't be used to write distinctively the words above. According to us, Cotu presently has three tones, sharp rising tone, middle tone and level tone.

2/ Regarding graphic signs ( letters and tones ): The Cotu orthography needs to be developed with mutual agreement by all based upon considering the following elements:

- The first element is the customary usage of the system developed by Conh Ta Lang and Quach Xan by the older generation of Cotu.

- The second element is instead of using so many different letters for vowels three tones above should be used as elements which form the syllable.

- The third element concerns the conditions for bilingual communication and textbooks in Cotu and Vietnamese, wouldn't it be worthwhile to use the same symbol for similar phoneme in Vietnamese and Cotu?

The following sentences are in natural speaking:

+ *Cadiêl lêng Cadik paprá bhrớơ giơng.* ( Wife and husband talk about doing on the farm ):

- Cadik: *Tơngây ơng brơơng acu lướt bhrớơ giơng.*

( sớm ngày mai tôi đi phát rẫy )

( husband : early morning tomorrow I go to deforest for planting )

- Cadiêl: *Cơơnh câây cữơng choom.*

( như vậy cũng được )

( so that's OK )

- Cadik: *Ấy may lướt bhrớơ giơng ấy may bơn rơvếh cấh?*

( em đi làm rẫy em kiếm vật liệu để rào chưa? )

( you go doing paddy do you look for materials to hurdle yet? )

+ *Apêê cacoon mmoon caconh cacăn* ( Kids in holdhouse talk to their parents )

- *Amê lướt bơn chna, ama lướt tobơn đhnáh. Acu ất đhí đơng hơất apêê adhi, zếế đấc.*

( mẹ đi kiếm thức ăn, cha đi kiếm thịt rừng. Con ở nhà trông nom các em, nấu nước )

( mother go to find the foodstuff, father go looking for meat. You stay at home to keep eye on younger sisters and brothers, to cook water )

+ *Caconh cacăn prtoō cacoon* ( Parents leave words to kids )

- *?pêê aduấ aên ất cớh đơng ó tít amê lướt totêng ama lướt bơn cadhoơng.*

( các con yêu dấu ở nhà đừng theo mẹ đi làm cha đi kiếm cá )

( fond sons and daughters stay at home, don't follow mother gone for work, I [ daddy ] go to look for fishes )

- *Mê ma lúh ó đấh bớh, azi hơul cha.*

( mẹ cha đi ra ngoài nhớ đừng lâu, chúng con bị đói ăn.)

( parents go out, remember not be long time, we will be hungry )

- *Mê ma lướt totêng tớc đấl ơơi xấơng, aên Hươơng, aduấ Tâm Zzếế aví đơơng apêê adhi cha. Nấc cớh chnêêh amê đơc.*

( mẹ cha đi làm tới tối nghe chưa, con Hương, thằng Tâm nấu cơm cho các em ăn. Đó chỗ gạo mẹ để.)

( we go for work untill the evening, do you hear?, Hương, Tâm cook rice for younger sisters and brothers to eat )

+ *Pânjuih, pândil moon xấơ nhơ nhơó* ( boys and girls talk about the love ):

- *Acu hay adhi mơvaih prnoo liêm. Adhi hay anoo mơvaih crnoó bớc.*

( Tôi nhớ em thành ra chiêm bao đẹp. Em nhớ anh thành ra suy nghĩ nhiều )

( I miss you becoming nice dream. you miss me becoming a lot of thought )

- *Ôcê crouloom, anoo lăng adhi, dăp mơ kăh mơ choom havil adhi. Acu ăť căh clêch, cu bêch căh iêm.*

( Ui chao nát gan nát ruột, anh và em, mãi mãi mãi có thể quên em. Tôi ở không yên, tôi ngủ không ngon )

( Phew, how sorrowful we are, I and you, forever howlong to be able to forget you. )

## REFERENCES

- 1- AILA (review). Language teaching in the twenty first century. Manila 1992.
- 2- Hoàng Thị Châu. Le système de tons dans la language Cham au Vietnam. Etudes Vietnamienné, 1989.
- 3- Nancy A. Costello. Katu dictionary, Manila 1991.
- 4- Nancy A. Costello and Khamluan Sulavan. Katu folktales and society, Vientiane, 1993.
- 5- Nancy A. Costello. Affixes in Katu (Mon- Khmer studies 2, 1966, p 63-86)
- 6- Nancy A. Costello. The Katu nounphrase (Monkhmer studies 3, 1969, p 21-35)
- 7- Bùi Khánh Thế. Ngữ pháp tiếng Chăm. GD, 1996.
- 8- Phan Ngọc - Phạm Đức Dương. Tiếp xúc ngôn ngữ ở Đông Nam á, HN, 1983.
- 9- Nguyễn Hữu Hoàn. tiếng Katu cấu tạo từ, KHXX, HN, 1995.
- 10- Sở Giáo dục và Đào tạo QN - ĐN. Việc dạy chữ Katu ở QN - ĐN trong “ Giáo dục ngôn ngữ và sự phát triển văn hoá các dân tộc thiểu số phía Nam”, KHXX, 1993, tr 140- 147.
- 11- J. Wallace. Katu phonemes. Mon-Khmer N.3, 64-73, 1969.
- 12- Quách Xân. Boop Katu, lớp mui, Sở GDĐT, QN-ĐN, 1986.

# **MỘT VÀI NHẬN XÉT VỀ VỊ TRÍ KẾT HỢP CỦA LOẠI TỪ TRONG DANH NGỮ TIẾNG MÔNG**

*(TÓM TẮT)*

*Nguyen Van Hieu*

Trong bài viết này chúng tôi sẽ đưa ra một mô hình danh ngữ của tiếng Hmông ở dạng đầy đủ nhất. Đồng thời tiến hành phân loại danh từ ở vị trí trung tâm. Trên cơ sở đó sẽ lần lượt xem xét những vị trí kết hợp của loại từ với danh từ trung tâm trong danh ngữ tiếng Hmông (đặc điểm, vị trí và khả năng kết hợp của chúng trong danh ngữ ). Để từ đó cho chúng ta những cái nhìn đầy đủ về đơn vị được gọi là loại từ trong tiếng Hmông.