THE TAY-NUNG LANGUAGE IN CONTACT
WITH THE VIETNAMESE.

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Tay and Nung are two among 53 ethnic minorities in Vietnam. Because of the socio-historical reasons, they often live mixedly in the mountain areas of R.S of Vietnam. Nowadays, the ethnic mixture has become more and more prevailing in Vietnamese families, thus the linguistic life is here characterized by the growing bilingualism and multilingualism.

In accordance with the linguistic investigation made in North Vietnam, the Bo-y people frequently use the Tay language, while the Cao Lan and the Lu' are near to the Tay because they belong to the same linguistic family. The Giay language exists in the form of different dialects in contact with the Thai and the Tay.

Finally, the Tay and the Nung languages exist in the form of different dialects in contact with other languages. Both include a lot of dialects whose deter-
mination is not clear-cut. The mutual understanding between the different branches of Nung (Nung An, Nung Chao, Nung Loi, Nung Phan Slinh) is not always easy, especially if they live in the different regions. The Tay and the Nung peoples who live in the same place can easily understand each other. Therefore, some Vietnamese specialists think that there is a language common for Tay and Nung peoples. "Between the Tay and the Nung only exist the regional differences".\(^1\) "It is possible to have a common language for the Tay and the Nung".\(^2\) "The Tay and the Nung people share one language, that is the Tay-Nung language. Formerly, many linguists considered that this language belonged to the Tay-Thai branch, the Han-Thai line, the Han-Tang family. But a recent trend classifies it into the Austro-Asiatic family"\(^3\) but some authors still distinguish between the Tay and the Nung language.\(^4\) Nowadays the Tay-Nung language is used not only by the Tay and the Nung people but also by the other ethnic groups among them the viêt (Kinh) - who live alternately in the multilingual areas. This language has a vigorous vitality thanks partly to its homogeneity. In general, the contiguity leads more to uniform than to the separation.

The Nung people often have a voice lower than the Tay. However, these differences are not a major hindrance to the intercourse. We can identify the dialectal differences in the following symmetrical laws:

The differences in the initial consonants:
The dipthongs in opposition to the simple vowels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opposition</th>
<th>For example</th>
<th>Equivalents in English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/ ʊə - ʊ /</td>
<td>slu'ɑ - slu'</td>
<td>tiger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ uo - u /</td>
<td>lùa - lù</td>
<td>daughter-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ ie - i /</td>
<td>kʰiɛŋ-kʰiŋ</td>
<td>wooden chopping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The alternation of basic vowels in a syllable:
/ e / - / ɔ / : tên - tăm (short)

Some dialects are characterized by the half-way tone (*). If it is not the case, this tone will be
replaced by the low-breaked tone. Then, we have an homonymy, for example: na*(aunt) - ná (face).

The Tay-Nung language has a common vocabulary on the whole. But there are some lexical variants, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tay</th>
<th>Nung</th>
<th>Equiv. in English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pát</td>
<td>thúi</td>
<td>bowl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phát</td>
<td>chiu</td>
<td>chilli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phát</td>
<td>cún</td>
<td>boil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quang</td>
<td>phít</td>
<td>jar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tàng</td>
<td>lò</td>
<td>way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nowadays, the Tay-Nung language is used not only in family but also in society. Being the most effective means of communication, it is used more and more in education and in mass media. Previously, it was used only in the traditional folk literature and art as lu'Q'n, phong slu' of the Tay and sli of the Nung. Now it is used widely in local press and radio.

2. The Vietnamese language in the linguistic life of the Tay and the Nung people.

Side by side with their mother tongue, the Vietnamese language is frequently recognized as an official language. The romanized script was used to teach Vietnamese. The romanized script was first introduced in 17th century by European missionaries to propagate
catholicism, then it became an efficient means of communi-
cation all over Vietnam. Now it is used in all aspects
of life in Vietnam. It helps preserve and develop the
cultural and spiritual values of the Vietnamese nation,
and at the same time absorbs the quintessence of world
culture. Then, it is truly reasonable that the
Vietnamese has and will have an important role as
vehicle language for all minorities to come into contact
with the new achievements of natural and social sciences
of human society.

In these conditions, the Tay and the Nung authors
have created many valuable bilingual works: their
readers are not only those who know Tay-Nung language.
Some ethnic authors have produced in Vietnamese their
memoirs, stories, novels, fictions, scenarios, reviews,
theses, theoretical studies.

Thus, in the linguistic life of the Tay and the
Nung people, their vernacular and the Vietnamese are
equally used in all social functions. The Tay Nung –
Vietnamese bilingualism is appeared and developed in
those situations. Its easy contacts with the common
national language have helped to increase the number of
bilingual speakers and elevate the quality of the
bilingual level.

In the regions regrouped by the Tay and the Nung
people, the Tay Nung – Vietnamese bilingualism is
characterized by the vigorous change from the individual
bilingualism to the popular bilingualism, from the natu-
ral to the self-conscious, from the incomplete to the
complete bilingualism. This phenomenon dominates in
society, in the individual and common life, in communi-
cation between the Tay and the Nung and the other ethnic
groups who live in alternate habitats.

For their part, the Tay and the Nung peoples use
their mother tongue in daily life and use Vietnamese
language in social activities. In many families, the
parents can speak to their children in both languages
while the grandfathers and the grandmothers often speak
to their childrens by their mother tongue, but they can
understand Vietnamese. The bilingualism in family is
encouraged by the bilingual practice in social
activities as well as in administration and school. Even
in a dialogue, each speaker can use his own mother
tongue without any problems in communication.

In general, the individual bilingual level is con-
ditioned by the difference in age (old or young), in sex
(male or female), in literacy (illiterate or literate),
in profession (peasant, worker or intellect), in living
standard (both material and spiritual).

3. **Language interaction in the bilingual contact.**

In thus context, the interactions make each
language in contact richer in various aspects. As a
matter of fact, the Tay - Nung language is influenced by
the common national language, at the same it also
acquired new elements. A great number of new words are
borrowed from the Vietnamese especially to those which
denote the modern notions. The loan-words comprise some
particles as

\[
\begin{align*}
dâ & \quad \rightarrow \quad dâ \text{ (already)} \\
sê & \quad \rightarrow \quad xê \text{ (will, shall)},
\end{align*}
\]
many useful words as:

\[ \text{xã --- xã (village)} \]
\[ \text{nghĩ --- nghĩ (think)} \]

and scientific and technical terms.

In the borrowing process, the Vietnamese words can be assimilated. For example, in the Tay-Nung language, there is no the high-rising-breaked tonc (\( ~ \)), so the borrowed. Vietnamese words that have this tone were transformed into the low-falling-breaked tone as shown by the above examples.

The Tay-Nung language have no the consonnant \( /g/ \), so this sound is often changed into \( /ŋ/ ; /k/ \) or \( /k'/:\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ga</th>
<th>nga</th>
<th>(railway, station)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gác</td>
<td>các</td>
<td>(floor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gang</td>
<td>khoang</td>
<td>(ping - iron)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a multilingual nation, it is natural that the common national language influences the ethnic vernaculars. However there is a reversed impact: the Tay-Nung language also helps to enrich the common language.

In the phonetic aspect, the fact is that the Tay-Nung has helped to establish and confirm the initial \( /p-/ \) in Vietnamese for:
- the borrowing of the common nouns as: păpău (water chesnut), pi'noong (siblings), pi'mo (mountain witch doctor).

- the transcription of the proper names which comprise:

  + the place names: Pác Bọ, Pác Lằng, Pơ Lằng, Bần Pên, Khau Pen, Hang Pát,

  + the person's names: Păo, Păo, Pia, Păng etc...

In the lexical aspect, a great number Tay-Nung words are imported to the spoken Vietnamese language in the bilingual areas and also in the common national language in which the texts are written. Examples of the imported words in Vietnamese language are such common nouns as băn, kê mê, nhinh, sli, lụyơn, lồng tông, loồng, mạc cót, mạc kham, mạc mắt etc...

We can cited many examples such as some verses written by the famous poet TO HUU:

Mẹ kê nguồn con
Chuyển nhà chuyển cửa...
Nó tung dĩa bát
Nó dắp héc vải...
Ông kê lạc đầu
Một hai không biết.

(Bà mẹ Việt Bảc)
Mother told the story at home
He threw away bowls and plates
He broke the pan
The old man shook his head
That he didn't know anything.
(The Mother in the North of Vietnam)

In describing the peculiar way of speaking in the bilingual areas, the writers bring into full play the interjections as: dạ! uì! đỏ! lô! and the styles specific to the Tay-Nung language. For example:

- Chài bó dơi, te têo mà hãy

Anh bó dơi, nó lại về đây

(The military, he returns again here)

te = he : neuter style
nó = familiar and spoken style

Those language usages aim essentially at vividly describing the Tay-Nung people's speaking of Vietnamese language, but that is not yet the standardized common national language.

Conclusion.
The language contacts create the bilingualism and multilingualism in Vietnam, a multilingual nation. The interactions between the languages in contact find their expression in both directions at various levels.

In the Tay-Nung - Vietnamese region, the Tay-Nung language not only takes in many linguistic elements from the Vietnamese but also helps to enrich it so as to become the real common language for all ethnic peoples in Vietnam.

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Notes


Related literature by the same author (in Vietnamese):

2. Influence of the ethnic minorities, languages on the modern Vietnamese. in "The Vietnamese and the other languages in the South-East of Asia", Hanoi, Social Sciences Publ. 1988, pp. 219-223.