

# THE TAY-NUNG LANGUAGE IN CONTACT WITH THE VIETNAMESE.

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## 1. The Tay-Nung language in Vietnam.

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".<sup>1</sup> "It is possible to have a common language for the Tay and the Nung".<sup>2</sup> "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"<sup>3</sup> but some authors still distinguish between the Tay and the Nung language.<sup>4</sup> 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 viet (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:

Phonetic variants	For example	Equivalents in English
/ r - l - k /	ru <sup>h</sup> l <sup>h</sup> -lu <sup>h</sup> ò'n-slu <sup>h</sup> ò'n	house
/ + - t' - t /	sloong-thoong-toong	two
/ c - s - z /	ch <sup>h</sup> au - x <sup>h</sup> au - d <sup>h</sup> au	early
/ k - k' - g /	c <sup>h</sup> ăn-k <sup>h</sup> ăn-g <sup>h</sup> ăn	man
/ f - v - p' /	f <sup>h</sup> ạ - v <sup>h</sup> ạ - p <sup>h</sup> ạ	heaven
/ h - t' /	hua - thua	head
/ p - v /	p <sup>h</sup> ù - v <sup>h</sup> ù	mountain
/ t - t' /	t <sup>h</sup> àng - th <sup>h</sup> àng	way

The diphthongs in opposition to the simple vowels:

Opposition	For example	Equivalents in English
/ ʍʌ - ʍ /	slu'a - slu'	tiger
/ uo - u /	l <sup>h</sup> ua - l <sup>h</sup> ù	daughter-in-law
/ ie - i /	khi <sup>h</sup> êng-khi <sup>h</sup> ng	wooden chopping block

- The alternation of basic vowels in a syllable:  
/ e / - / ẽ / : t<sup>h</sup>ên - t<sup>h</sup>ăm (short)

- Some dialects are characterized by the half-way tone (\*). If it is not the case, this tone will be

replaced by the low-brokead tone. Then, we have an homonymy, for example: na\*(aunt) - nă (face).

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

Tay	Nung	Equiv. in English
pát	thủi	bowl
phất	chiu	chilli
phật	cún	boil
quang	phít	jar
tàng	lò	way

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 prequently 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 communication 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, essays, 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 natural 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 blingual level is conditioned 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<sub>n</sub> 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

dã	---	dạ (already)
sẽ	---	xẹ (will, shall),

many useful words as:

xã	---	xạ (village)
nghĩ	---	ngị (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-broke tone ( ~ ), so the borrowed Vietnamese words that have this tone were transformed into the low-falling-broke 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' /:

ga	nga	(railway, station)
gác	các	(floor)
gang	khang	(ping - iron)

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: páp (water chesnut), pí noong (siblings), pú mo (mountain witch doctor).

- the transcription of the proper names which comprise:

+ the place names: Pác Bó, Pác Lăng, Pò Làng, Bản Pén, Khau Pen, Hang Pát,

+ the person's names: Pảo, Páo, Pia, Pang 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 bản, ké mé, nhinh, sli, lượn, lồng tông, loỏng, mác cọt, mác kham, mác mật etc...

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

Mé kể <sup>?</sup> nguồn con  
 Chuyện nhà chuyện củ'a...  
 Nó tung đĩa bát  
 Nó đập héc vại...  
 Ông ké lặc dẫu  
 Một hai không biết.

(Bà mẹ Việt Bắc)



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: dà! úi! đồ! lố! and the styles specific to the Tay-Nung language. For example:

- Chàì bộ đội, te tẻo mà nấy

Anh bộ đội, 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**

1. LA VAN LO - HA VAN THU - Culture of Tay-Nung People.  
H.Culture Publication. 1985, p.59.
2. HOANG VAN MA - LUC VAN PAO - HOANG CHI - Grammar of  
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tion. 1971, p.7.
3. DOAN THIEN THUAT - Phonetic systems of the Tay-Nung  
language. Researches on the ethnic minorities  
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4. Ethnic minorities languages in VN and Language polocy  
H, Social Sciences Publication. 1986, pp.20, 25.

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1. Tay-Nung - Vietnamese bilingual region."Linguis-  
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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.
  3. Researches on the ethnic minorities' languages in Vietnam: achievements and essential direction. "Social Sciences Informations", No.2 1990, pp.32-38.
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