

JSEALS Special Publication No. 6

**STUDIES IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY
OF LANGUAGE IN MAINLAND
SOUTHEAST ASIA**



Edited by

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UNIVERSITY of
HAWAII
PRESS

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OPEN ACCESS – Semiannual with periodic special publications
E-ISSN: 1836-6821
<http://hdl.handle.net/10524/52466>



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Journal of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society

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INTRODUCTION FROM THE VOLUME EDITORS

To understand the nature of languages we need to understand the social histories and contexts of their speakers. This truism certainly holds in Mainland Southeast Asia, where some 600 languages belonging to five distinct language families differ considerably while also sharing broad structural similarities (e.g., analytic morphology, tone, elaborate systems of person reference, elaborate kin term systems, and more—see Enfield 2020). Together, the region’s combination of diversity and similarity points to a long history of contact and socio-linguistic convergence, which continues into the present.

The papers in this special issue were first written for a workshop held at the University of Sydney in August 2019, titled *The Anthropology of Language in Mainland Southeast Asia*. Of special interest in the workshop was the fact that only a tiny fraction of the area’s languages have national language status. These national languages are far better researched and understood than the vast majority of languages spoken in the area. New research on minority languages (mostly in descriptive and historical linguistics) is beginning to redress this imbalance, but much work remains if we are going to achieve a full picture of human language in mainland Southeast Asia.

We adopt the mindset of anthropology, in the broadest sense, as the study of humankind with two core questions: (1) In what ways are humans unique as a species? and (2) In what ways do human groups vary, within our species? We contend that these two questions cannot seriously be addressed without applying methods and theories of numerous disciplines, including linguistics, sociocultural anthropology, geography, demography, history, political science, and communications.

Contributions to this special issue are mostly from the broadly-defined discipline of linguistic anthropology, one of anthropology’s subfields (see Enfield, Kockelman, and Sidnell 2014). Linguistic anthropology looks at language in sociocultural context, and takes the view that language is not just a set of structures and practices, but also a social and political phenomenon. For example, social variation in the forms and structures of languages is always entangled with social norms, social categories such as those related to dialect or accent (including education, origin, and age), and the social actions that language fulfils in context. Usually working against this variation in linguistic forms and functions, and toward linguistic homogeneity, is the arm of the state. State policies affect language structure and use, for example through standardization and establishment of official statuses for selected languages, or through the accompanying suppression and marginalization—or co-option—of ethnic minority languages. Minority language groups are often defined in contrast to dominant ethnicities who hold state power, as is the case for the majority of non-official languages spoken in mainland Southeast Asia. The papers in this collection explore these and related issues.

We hope that this collection takes a step toward opening up two directions for further research on Mainland Southeast Asian languages: first, by examining the area’s languages through the lens of anthropologically-oriented disciplines, with special attention to minority languages, and second, by turning the core interdisciplinary questions of linguistic anthropology—a field whose attention has been mostly focussed on other areas of the world—through the lens of what’s unique about the mainland Southeast Asia language area. Much work on the anthropology of language in the area remains to be done, research that will include work illuminating language’s place in the history of the region and language’s relationship to the core issues of the contemporary world, including kinship, social interaction, music, media and technology, semiotic ideology, political power, patterns of thought, social structure, culture, and inter-group contact, among other topics.

We gratefully acknowledge financial support for the 2019 workshop and publication production costs from a Sydney Southeast Asia Centre Workshop Grant (2019) and an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant (nr. DP170104607). We thank Naomie Nguyen for her editorial and organizational assistance, and Editor-in-Chief of *JSEALS*, Mark Alves, for his support, expertise, and timely effort throughout. The papers in this collection benefited enormously from discussion and input from the invited participants, and especially from the six invited discussants, all of whom are prominent linguistic anthropologists and most of whom are not Southeast Asianists: Alessandro Duranti (UCLA), Judith Irvine (U Michigan), Hy Van Luong (U Toronto), Elinor Ochs (UCLA), Alan Rumsey (ANU) and James Slotta (UT Austin). We thank these scholars for their generous input and advice.

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Conference group photo taken by The Duong Nguyen

FROM THE JSEALS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

This volume is the sixth JSEALS Special Publication. The goal of JSEALS Special Publications is to share collections of linguistics articles, such as select papers from conferences or other special research agendas, as well as to offer a way for linguistic researchers in the greater Southeast Asian region to publish monograph-length works.

This volume contains ten papers from the workshop “The Anthropology of Language in Mainland Southeast Asia”, held by University of Sydney’s Sydney Southeast Asia Centre and Sydney Centre for Language Research on August 19 and 20, 2019. Multiple papers in this volume focus on Vietnam, but there were also papers centered in Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. Correspondingly, the Vietnamese language was the focus in several papers, but Burmese, Khmer, and a number of minority languages in both the Austroasiatic and Tai-Kadai language families are part of this range of languages in the Mainland Southeast Asian region.

The topics—all with an anthropological linguistic center—also range substantially, from two papers dealing with the complexity of the Vietnamese referential system in pragmatic contexts; analysis of spoken register in a Vietnamese ritual; language education among ethnic minorities in Vietnam; gender in political discourse in Myanmar; a regional cross-linguistic idiom centered in Laos; a review of reflective comments expressing anxiety about the status of Khmer; ethnolinguistic history in Laos; and sociolinguistic and historical linguistic notes on the La Chi language (of the Kra branch of Tai-Kadai) in northwest Vietnam.

Thus, this is a substantive contribution to anthropological linguistics in Mainland Southeast Asia. We are very pleased that JSEALS is able to contribute to the sharing of such valuable linguistic research.

Mark J. Alves

May 1st, 2020

Montgomery College

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FIRST-LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION BENEFITS ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN VIETNAM: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract

In Vietnam, formal education is conducted in Vietnamese, and this has deprived many ethnic minority (EM) students with limited Vietnamese proficiency of access to equal and quality education. In order to help these EM students to better understand lesson contents, the School Education Quality Assurance Programme (SEQAP) has used local teaching assistants (TA) in classrooms to facilitate teaching and learning in Vietnamese. Based on an analysis of reading scores of early primary grade students from six SEQAP provinces in Vietnam, this paper highlights that the use of EM students' mother tongue to facilitate classroom teaching and learning in Vietnamese (through the presence of local TAs) has some positive impact on the reading performance of EM students in early grades. However, the paper argues that in order to secure a successful extension of this use of EM students' languages in classrooms, the gap between scientific evidence, folk language ideology, and political discourse should be bridged.

Key words: first-language instruction, local teaching assistant, ethnic minority students, Vietnam
ISO 639-3 codes: vic

1 Introduction

Vietnam is an ethnically and linguistically diverse country. According to the 2019 Population and Housing survey, the Kinh, the majority ethnic group, consists of 85.3% of the country's population. The remaining 53 ethnic minority groups constitute only 14.7% of the country's population but account for 40% of the country's poor (World Bank 2011). Ethnic minority groups tend to live mainly in mountainous and remote areas along the Northern and Western borderlands: The cohabitation of four to five ethnic groups is common in many communes, while there are over ten in many districts and over 20 in many provinces (Ly & Nguyen 2002).

More than a hundred languages are spoken in Vietnam (Lewis et al. 2016), but they do not have the same social functions and uses. Only the Vietnamese language, the language of the Kinh majority, has the status of the language of common communication in the country and the official language used in laws, administration, education and diplomatic relations. Due to their different social functions and uses, languages in Vietnam do not have the same levels of development. Of them, nearly 30 languages have scripts: some have long histories, while some were recently created. Other languages do not yet have their own writing systems.

Recent research has shown that Vietnam's education system has achieved great successes in expanding access to basic education and improving quality (World Bank 2014; Rolleston & Krutikova 2014). Compared to other countries with similar incomes, the education system has greatly mitigated the effects of socio-economic inequalities (Asadullah & Perera 2015). Yet behind these achievements, there are concerns: substantial gaps in school attendance and educational achievement between Kinh majority and EM students have been reported (Le & Tran 2013; World Bank 2011; Glewwe et al. 2015, among others).

Several studies have examined potential reasons behind these access and attainment gaps. One recognized cause is the language barrier. The Education Law of Vietnam specifies that Vietnamese is the official language used in formal education. But many minority children start their first day of primary school unprepared for instruction in Vietnamese as they are accustomed to speaking their own ethnic languages at home (Vu 2014). Unfortunately, most teachers in the EM areas are Kinh, and few of them have the ability to communicate in local languages. Many EM students struggle to grapple with the unfamiliar language and many of them drop out early due to lack of success.

The government of Vietnam is well aware of these problems and has in recent years supported and invested in education initiatives for the poor and the vulnerable. One of these initiatives has been carried out

by the Ministry of Education and training (MoET) through the School Education Quality Assurance Programme (SEQAP). SEQAP is built to develop full-day schooling for the poor and EM students in poor areas with an aim to improve quality of learning and narrow education gaps. One component of SEQAP's activities is the use of ethnic teaching assistants in grade 1-2 classrooms with an aim to help EM students with limited Vietnamese proficiency better understand the lesson contents.

In this paper, I ask if the use of EM students' language to facilitate classroom teaching and learning in Vietnamese in grades 1-2 (through the use of local TAs) has a positive impact on EM students' performance, and if so, would it be possible to extend it to other non-SEQAP places with similar conditions in the country. To answer the first question, I will use the results of students' reading assessment (EGRA) in grades 1 and 2 in 2014 as a measurement of students' achievement. To answer the second question, I will look at people's attitudes towards the use of EM languages in education and Vietnam's language education policy to highlight some existing challenges.

2 The use of EM languages in education in multilingual contexts of Vietnam

The idea of using EM languages in primary schools in EM areas is not new in Vietnam. The first attempt dated from 1955 to 1960 when Thai and Hmong were used in primary schools in Northern mountainous areas: EM students learned in their mother tongues from grade 1 to grade 2 and then learned in Vietnamese from grade 3. These designs were not scientifically based and failed because students did not have enough Vietnamese proficiency to continue learning in grade 3. A second attempt to use EM languages in education involved Tay-Nung, Hmong and Thai in Northern mountainous areas from 1961 to 1980. During this time, EM students learned school content in their mother tongues (L1) while Vietnamese was taught as a subject in grade 1. Gradually, L1 was replaced by Vietnamese as the language of instruction at the higher grades of primary school and by grade 5 Vietnamese became the only language of instruction. A serious shortage of capable bilingual teachers at that time did not allow this model to continue (Mong 2001).

From 2000 to 2004, a transitional model of J'rai-Viet bilingual program was piloted in two primary schools in Gia Lai province (Bộ Giáo Dục và Đào Tạo 2006). According to this model, J'rai was used as a language of instruction in grades 1-2 while Vietnamese was taught as a subject. In grade 3, some subjects were taught in Vietnamese while others were taught in J'rai. In grades 4-5 all subjects were taught in Vietnamese. The program was claimed to be successful, but it stopped without explanation as soon as the piloted program completed.

With an aim to improve quality education for young ethnic minority children, from 2008 to 2014 UNICEF and MoET piloted an Action Research on Mother Tongue Based Bilingual Education in selected pre-primary and primary schools in three provinces of Lao Cai (Hmong language), Gia Lai (J'rai language) and Tra Vinh (Khmer language). These languages were chosen for the action research because they are developed languages with writing systems (Latin alphabets for Hmong and J'rai and Indic-based for Khmer). Within this project, both the children's L1 and the Vietnamese language (L2) are taught as subjects and used as mediums of instruction: Literacy skills are taught first in L1 (grades 1-2) and will be transferred to L2 when children's oral L2 competence is well developed (grades 3-4). The key determinant of the success of this project is the presence of bilingual teachers who are fluent in both the language of the children and the Vietnamese language. Despite its success (MOET & UNICEF 2014) and the desire to continue and extend this model of bilingual education from participating provinces, this use of L1-based bilingual education has not been scaled up yet.

If the L1-based bilingual education model piloted by MOET & UNICEF works for languages with writing systems, how can EM children whose mother tongues do not yet have scripts be helped? It was in this context that the project on "Promoting the fulfillment of EM children's rights to access to quality basic education" was designed by Save the Children and piloted in 4 schools in Dien Bien and Quang Ninh provinces in 2007-2010 (Vu 2010). Unlike the Action research, this project did not include written L1. The children's L1 is used as the language of instruction in the early grades (kindergarten and grades 1-3). At the same time, the children will learn Vietnamese, first orally and then in written form. To help children to develop their L1 orally as a bridge for learning spoken L2 and then written L2, the project uses bilingual community members as teaching assistants (TAs) to work closely with teachers to deliver lessons, allowing children to learn new concepts and skills in their home language while they acquire basic Vietnamese language skills. The main focus of the teaching assistants is to develop, in genuine partnership with teachers, active learning activities that will stimulate and improve children's mother tongue and Vietnamese language skills. The use of TAs had a positive impact on the learning of students, but the continuation of this program is difficult because most TAs have low

education background and it was too hard for them to understand the lesson contents, let alone teaching the children (Vu 2010).¹

The picture of EM languages' use in education in Vietnam could be better appreciated if put in comparison with some neighbouring countries such as Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, it is estimated that over 80 languages are spoken (Lewis et al. 2016). Lao is the official language recognized in the Constitution of 1991 and also the language in education stipulated by the Education Law of 2007. Only about half of the Lao population speaks Lao as their L1 but the government is reluctant to allow EM languages in education (Kosonen 2017). In Cambodia, Khmer is the dominant ethnic group comprising approximately 90 percent of the population. The remaining 10 percent of the population speak 27 other languages (Lewis et al. 2016). The Constitution of 1993 established Khmer as the official language and until the late 1990s, Khmer was exclusively the language of instruction at all levels. However, L1-based bilingual education programs in formal and nonformal education were introduced for 5 EM languages (Brao, Bunong, Kavet, Krung and Tampuan) and work is ongoing in three additional languages: J'rai, Kaco, and Kui (Kosonen 2013). In Thailand, about 72 languages are spoken (Lewis et al. 2016). Although the Thai Constitution has no references to the official language, the Standard Thai (based on the Thai dialect spoken in Bangkok) is the de facto official and national language and has been the language of instruction for many years. However, only about 50% of the Thai population speak Standard Thai as their L1 (Kosonen 2013). To deal with non-Standard Thai speaking children's comprehension problems at school, Thailand approved the first National Language Policy which calls for the use of learners' L1 as the basis for cognitive development. As a result, several EM languages are currently used in L1-based education pilot projects (Kosonen 2013 & 2017).

This brief comparison of recent language-in-education policies and practices in four countries clearly shows that, except for Laos where there is no evidence of policy support for or practices of using EM languages in education, Thailand and Cambodia have provided more support for the use of EM languages in education while Vietnam seems to provide a weakening policy support for EM languages. The roles of policy statements regarding the use of EM languages in education in Vietnam will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections.

3 Students' reading performance as a measurement of the impact of language use in primary classes

3.1 Teaching assistants in SEQAP schools

The objective of SEQAP is to improve learning outcomes and education completion for primary students through supporting the Government's full-day schooling reform in the 2009-2015 period. For the 2014-2015 school year, 36 provinces with 1,628 schools and 634,898 students participated in this program among which 668 schools (41%) are in "difficult or extremely difficult communes in EM or remote areas"² and 277,997 students (44%) are from EM background (Tran Dinh Thuan 2016).

To achieve the program's objective, SEQAP has combined different measures. With an aim to improve learning outcomes of EM students, who have limited proficiency in Vietnamese, SEQAP has hired EM men and women who can speak the local language and Vietnamese, who are interested in and committed to working with children and are endorsed by community leaders to work as teaching assistants (TA) in grades 1-2 where the majority of students are from one ethnic group. The main focus of the TAs is on working in partnership with class teachers to facilitate EM children in their learning by explaining or translating difficult words or contents as requested by class teachers and helping class teachers make suitable instructional aids. As such, the work of TAs in SEQAP's schools is not the same as the work of TAs in Save the Children's program.

3.2 Students' reading assessment

To assess the impact of SEQAP's interventions on students' learning outcomes, an assessment of grade 1, 2 and 3 students' reading proficiency (EGRA) was designed (Vu et al. 2016). In 2013, the first EGRA was implemented on 600 grade 1 and 600 grade 3 students in four provinces (Dien Bien, Nghe An, Gia Lai and

¹ Some Hmong teaching assistants had only finished grades 4-5.

² These communes are covered under the Socio-economic program for difficult and extremely difficult communes in mountainous and ethnic minority areas.

Vinh Long). In 2014 the second EGRA was administered on 1,079 grade 1 and 1,078 grade 2 students in six provinces (Lao Cai, Dien Bien, Nghe An, Quang Tri, Gia Lai and Vinh Long). The Vietnamese EGRA consists of eight reading components: Initial sound identification (P1), oral letter sound (P2), familiar word reading (P3), invented word reading (P4), oral passage reading fluency (P5), reading comprehension (P6), listening comprehension (P7) and dictation (P8).³ This paper will use the results of the second EGRA on grade 1 and grade 2 students to examine whether the use of students' mother tongue through the presence of a TA in the classroom would improve EM students' reading skills.

3.3 Sample and analysis

1,079 grade 1 and 1,078 grade 2 students were chosen from 72 primary schools in the six above-mentioned SEQAP provinces. The schools were chosen to secure representativeness from different socio-economic areas. The number of chosen schools from each province corresponds to the ratio of all primary schools in that province over the total number of primary schools in the six provinces. Among 72 chosen schools there are 28 SEQAP schools and 44 non-SEQAP schools. Of the 28 SEQAP schools 17 have TAs.

From each of the chosen schools, 15 grade 1 and 15 grade 2 students were randomly chosen. Among 1,079 grade 1 students, 591 (54.8%) are boys, and 488 (45.2%) are girls, 624 (57.8%) are Kinh and 455 (42.2%) are EM. Among 1,078 grade 2 students, 564 (52.3%) are boys, 514 (47.7%) are girls, 653 (60.6%) are Kinh, and 425 (39.4%) are EM.⁴ The EGRA was administered in a form of a face-to-face interview between a student and an assessor. Each student needs from 10 to 15 minutes to finish the EGRA tests and 5 to 10 minutes to answer a questionnaire. The questionnaire contains 24 questions gathering information about the students, their families, their living and schooling.

The analysis of students' reading achievement is based on the average number of correct answers for each part of the EGRA test after excluding 'early stop' cases, in which students gave no single correct answer for the first five questions of sub-skills requiring maximum 60 seconds to perform (P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5). These students scored zero on these subskills. The exclusion of these cases is meant to avoid the distortion of the whole sample's reading performance. Standard deviation and T-test are provided to measure the in-group and inter-group variance. If a student needs less than 60 seconds to perform the task, the score is calculated according to the following formula:⁵

$$\text{Correct answers per minute} = \text{number of correct answers} * 60 \text{ seconds} / \text{number of required seconds}$$

3.4 Reading scores of Kinh students vs. EM students

The results presented in Table 1 show that there is a significant gap in reading performance between Kinh and EM students: Kinh students in both grades systematically outperform EM students in all parts of the EGRA. The T-tests show that the differences are highly significant. The standard deviations indicate that variation among EM students is bigger than that among Kinh students in all EGRA parts. These EGRA results support previous findings about Kinh majority – Ethnic minority gaps in educational attainment (Le & Tran 2013; Glewwe et al. 2015; Iyer, Rolleston & Azubuikie 2017). The standard deviations are also small for some EGRA parts (like P1 and P2) and large for others (like P5, P6, P7). Large deviations reflect a large amount of variation from the mean scores and therefore indicate large degrees of differences among students in reading fluency (P5), reading comprehension (P6), and listening comprehension (P7): some students are doing well while many others are performing extremely poor. It is worth noting, however, that the gaps tend to reduce from grade 1 to grade 2, as evidenced in the deviance of mean scores in all subskills of the test.

³ The development of Vietnamese EGRA follows the concepts and principles of International EGRA (RTI 2009) while meeting the grade level standards specified by the national curriculum and reflecting the specific characteristics of the Vietnamese language. The EGRA test was approved by MOET before its implementation.

⁴ EM students are from the following groups: Tay, Hmong, Thai, Nung, Jrai, Bahnar, Khmer, Dao, Xa Pho, Khang, Ko Mu, and Muong. For analysis purpose here they are considered as a single group owing to small sample size of some groups.

⁵ RTI 2009.

Table 1: Means of correct answers by students' ethnic groups and grade levels

EGRA PARTS	Ethnicity	GRADE 1			GRADE 2		
		Means	St.Dev	T-test	Means	St.Dev	T-test
P1	Kinh	9.6	1.0	.000	9.4	1.2	.001
	Ethnic minority	9.0	1.7		9.1	1.7	
P2	Kinh	57.0	14.4	.000	48.6	15.4	.011
	Ethnic minority	50.1	15.4		47.7	21.5	
P3	Kinh	38.6	21.8	.000	53.9	21.5	.000
	Ethnic minority	30.6	21.9		49.2	25.6	
P4	Kinh	26.5	15.2	.004	37.6	17.3	.000
	Ethnic minority	23.5	18.5		34.0	21.2	
P5	Kinh	62.6	31.5	.000	100.3	35.2	.000
	Ethnic minority	48.6	31.7		80.6	38.6	
P6	Kinh	3.7	1.8	.000	3.1	2.0	.000
	Ethnic minority	2.3	2.2		2.0	1.9	
P7	Kinh	4.2	1.7	.000	4.6	1.5	.000
	Ethnic minority	2.2	2.2		3.3	2.2	
P8	Kinh	3.9	1.3	.000	6.1	1.3	.000
	Ethnic minority	3.0	1.8		4.9	2.0	

3.5 Reading scores of EM students by ethnic group

In Table 1 all EM students are considered as a single group. It should be remembered that this group is not homogeneous. The EGRA results broken down by EM groups will show whether or not the EM students differ among themselves in terms of education achievement. As the EM groups are not represented equally in the sample, Table 2 below only presents the EGRA results for the 3 biggest groups of EM students in the sample: Hmong (93 grade 1 students, 106 grade 2 students), Thai (222 grade 1 students, 226 grade 2 students) and J'rai (58 grade 1 students, 79 grade 2 students).

Table 2: The EGRA results of Hmong, Thai and J'rai students

EGRA	GRADE 1						GRADE 2					
	Hmong		Thai		J'rai		Hmong		Thai		J'rai	
	Means	St.dev	means	St.dev	Means	St.dev	Means	St.dev	Means	St.dev	Means	St.dev
P1	8.9	1.7	9.3	1.5	8.5	1.9	8.8	1.9	9.4	1.3	8.4	2.2
P2	51.1	20.9	54.3	16.3	41.3	15.0	49.5	27.4	48.5	15.2	43.5	13.3
P3	29.0	20.9	33.2	19.2	20.3	16.5	42.7	27.5	47.5	21.1	41.3	23.7
P4	21.9	15.1	25.8	15.1	14.9	10.3	34.7	24.3	34.0	17.8	29.7	17.8
P5	45.0	28.2	58.2	33.7	30.5	19.9	68.4	35.6	90.4	33.1	73.9	36.1
P6	1.9	1.3	3.4	1.1	0.8	1.3	1.7	1.6	2.5	1.8	1.4	1.2
P7	1.8	1.5	3.2	2.1	0.7	1.1	2.5	2.3	4.2	1.6	2.3	2.3
P8	2.9	1.9	3.6	1.5	1.8	1.3	4.1	2.3	5.4	1.6	4.3	1.9

The data presented in Table 2 show that for grade 1, Thai students outperform Hmong and J'rai students on all EGRA subskills. In turn, Hmong students also outperform J'rai students on all EGRA subskills. This pattern, however, does not hold for grade 2. Although Thai students still outperform J'rai students on all subskills, they underperform Hmong students on P2 and P4. J'rai students also outperform Hmong students on P5 and P8. The difference in mean scores of each ethnic group for each subskill is also smaller than that of grade 1. This pattern seems to suggest that the gaps in performance among ethnic students tend to get smaller as students move up.

3.6 Reading scores of EM students learning with a TA vs reading scores of students learning w/o a TA

It was indicated in the previous section that EM students do differ among themselves with Thai students outperforming Hmong and J'rai students, and Hmong students outperforming J'rai students, although the gaps

tend to diminish as students move from grade 1 to grade 2. It raises an important question about whether or not EM students who learn with a TA in their classrooms would outperform EM students who learn with only a Vietnamese teacher. As mentioned earlier, only 17 SEQAP schools have TAs, which means only 255 grade 1 EM students (of the total of 579 grade 1 EM students) and 255 grade 2 EM students (of the total of 594 grade 2 EM students) have a chance to learn with a TA in their classrooms. Table 3 presents the EGRA scores of EM students learning in classes with and without TAs.

As mentioned earlier, TAs are employed in classes where most students have poor Vietnamese language proficiency and they are from one ethnic group. The TA's task is to help the Vietnamese class teacher translate or explain in students' language the difficult words and contents as requested by the class teacher.

Table 3: *EGRA results of ethnic minority students in schools with and without TAs*

EGR A	Medium of instruction	GRADE 1			GRADE 2		
		Means	St.Dev	T-test	Means	St.Dev	T-test
P1	- Without TAs	8.8	1.8	.022	9.0	1.8	.350
	- With TAs	9.2	1.5		9.2	1.5	
P2	Without TAs	49.0	20.2	.034	44.5	15.5	.172
	With TAs	52.6	18.8		49.1	23.6	
P3	- Without TAs	29.6	21.5	.123	43.0	19.8	.669
	- With TAs	32.7	22.7		46.5	27.9	
P4	- Without TAs	22.2	15.4	.024	33.1	23.4	.876
	- With TAs	26.1	23.6		34.3	15.6	
P5	- Without TAs	45.3	29.5	.001	80.1	38.9	.643
	- With TAs	55.3	35.3		80.8	34.7	
P6	- Without TAs	2.1	2.2	.000	1.9	2.0	.653
	- With TAs	2.9	2.3		2.0	1.8	
P7	- Without TAs	2.1	2.2	.000	3.3	2.2	.812
	- With TAs	2.3	2.2		3.3	2.1	
P8	- Without TAs	2.9	1.8	.000	4.6	1.9	.007
	- With TAs	3.1	1.7		5.0	2.0	

The results presented in Table 3 show that in both grade 1 and grade 2, EM students learning in class with TAs generally outperform EM students learning in class without TAs. The differences are statistically significant for grade 1 EGRA results (except P3) but not significant for grade 2 EGRA results (except P8). These findings suggest that the use of Vietnamese together with children's L1 through the presence of a local TA in the classroom really benefits EM students with limited Vietnamese proficiency, but the positive impact is more obvious in grade 1 than in grade 2.

4 Attitudes towards the use of EM students' mother tongues through the presence of a TA in the classrooms

Following the EGRA tests, a small qualitative study was conducted in one Hmong primary school, one Thai primary school, and one J'rai primary school where grade 1 and 2 EM students had a local TA in their classrooms to assist a Vietnamese teacher. In each place, a focus group with students' parents, in-depth interviews with teachers, TAs, school heads, district and provincial education officials were conducted in order to understand their perceptions and attitudes towards the languages used as medium of instruction in early grades of EM schools. A total of 25 parents, 9 teachers and TAs, and 10 education officials participated in this study.

Analysis of the qualitative data reveals two conflicting attitudes towards the use of EM languages in the classroom. A majority of parents, teachers and education officials interviewed expressed a strong support for the use of EM L1 in the classroom to facilitate EM children's learning. These people were well aware that EM children faced enormous difficulties when they first entered school because they speak little Vietnamese. A Hmong parent recalled that when her child entered grade 1, she knew only a few Vietnamese words because at home they just spoke Hmong. This is what a teacher in a J'rai school in Gia Lai province said about her grade 1 J'rai students:

At the beginning of the school year they know nothing. They do not understand anything. During class, they turn back, turn forward, look very helpless, (are) unable to pay attention. (They) only understand when (we) explain things in J'rai. (We) had to explain everything meticulously.

Both parents and teachers noticed positive changes in students' behavior and learning since they had a TA in the classrooms. A Thai parent shared the following observations of her own children:

I have two kids. The old son is now in grade 4 and the younger one is in grade 1. The one in grade 1 now is learning in class with a TA. He is different from his older brother. He enjoys going to school, when he comes back home, he tells us different good things about school. He also speaks Vietnamese better than this older brother. I remember that my old son was very different when he was in grade 1. The younger boy learns better now.

A Hmong parent in a focus group discussion also expressed a very similar opinion about the impact of the local TA:

The kids said good words about their classes because they have a local TA in their class. Because they understand things, right? They wouldn't understand things if there is only a Vietnamese teacher.

The presence of a TA in the classroom and the use of the local language makes EM children who have limited Vietnamese proficiency feel at home and confident at school, and thus they like going to school. A district education official who frequently visited the school noticed the following positive changes.

We noticed very positive changes. Because there is a TA whom they know and who speaks their language, so they are not afraid of learning. We notice that at the beginning they were very shy, but now they enjoy school and learning. They are also more self-confident and smarter.

Despite the general supportive attitudes towards the use of a local language (through the presence of a TA) and Vietnamese as languages of instruction in early primary grades, some people voice their concerns. This is what a J'rai parent said in the discussion group:

Why should my children learn in our language at school? I want my children speak Vietnamese well, so they should learn in Vietnamese. We speak our language at home, in our village, and that's enough. We will never lose our language because we speak it at home. Our children also learn to speak our language at home. At school they should learn Vietnamese.

In the view of these parents, their mother tongue is needed for preserving their ethnic identity, but for that purpose, it is enough just to use it at home and in the village. They argue that their children need to learn Vietnamese well and in order to speed up their learning of Vietnamese, EM children should learn directly in Vietnamese. There is a popular belief that learning in an EM language would slow down the learning of Vietnamese, and EM children should be treated in the same way as Kinh children, which means they should learn in Vietnamese and should get to learn English. Such language ideologies are also found in the interviews with some teachers and officials. These people express a concern that that the use of local languages in the classrooms may jeopardize the children's achievement in Vietnamese, that "... learning in two languages would take away time for learning Vietnamese. It is not good to pay too much attention to developing their mother tongues, because only Vietnamese and English are linked to science and technology, right? What is the point of speaking the ethnic languages well?", said one district official. However, much research in bilingual education has shown that this is an erroneous belief. It has been shown that EM students first learning literacy in their language and then gradually shifting to learning in the language of majority would outperform EM students who learn only in the language of the majority (Cummins & Tamayo 1994). More importantly, longitudinal studies highlight that the length of time learning in mother tongue would correlate with students' long-term academic outcomes (Cummins 1991, Thomas & Collier 2002).

5 Vietnam's policy towards the use of EM languages in education

Vietnam used to have a very supportive policy towards the use of EM languages in education. The Constitutions of 1946 and the Primary Education Law of 1991 secured the rights of EM groups to use their own spoken and written languages in primary education. The important policy document, the Decision No

53/1980/QĐ-CP, provides specific guidelines for the use of EM languages together with Vietnamese as mediums of instruction in primary schools in EM areas. However, subsequent Constitutions (1960, 1980, 1992 and 2001) and Education Laws (1998, 2005) give very vague statements about the status of EM languages in education. The Education Law of 2005 states:

Vietnamese is the official language to be used in schools... The State shall enable EM people to learn their spoken and written languages in order to preserve and develop their cultural identity, to help students from EM groups easily absorb knowledge.

Decree No 82/2010 provides practical guidelines for the implementation of the Law in terms of EM languages in education. The Decree specifies that Vietnamese is the official language to be used in schools and EM languages are taught as a subject in general and continuing education institutions. It is worth noting here that until now, only eight EM languages are being taught as an optional subject in EM schools. While the government policy is weakening its support for the use of EM languages in education, the position of foreign languages is being strengthened: the Project on “Teaching and learning foreign languages in formal education systems from 2008 to 2020” specifies that foreign languages (mostly English) could be used together with Vietnamese as medium of instruction in schools. This change in the Laws and legal documents reflects a change in government’s ideologies towards the roles of languages in education. Vietnam’s policy towards the use of EM languages in education seems to go against the trend of increased status of EM languages in education in Cambodia and Thailand as highlighted above.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

The comparison of grade 1 and grade 2 students’ reading performance in 6 SEQAP provinces supports previous findings regarding the significant gaps in educational achievement between Kinh and EM students (Le & Tran 2013; Glewwe et al. 2015). The comparison also indicates gaps between EM students themselves with J’rai students lagging behind the Thai and Hmong students. However, the gap seems to be narrowed down as EM students move from grade 1 to grade 2, suggesting the effectiveness of school teaching programs and the important role of schools in addressing inter-ethnic inequalities.

Comparison of reading performance between EM students learning in classes with TAs and EM students learning in classes without TAs highlight a positive result: EM students in classes with TAs significantly outperform students without TAs, especially in grade 1. This finding seems to suggest that SEQAP’s use of local TAs to facilitate the teaching and learning in Vietnamese in EM schools where students have limited Vietnamese proficiency is justified. In the world, the emergence of the TAs can be traced back to the early 1960s in England and has become popular in many countries in the world, especially in England, Canada, USA, Australia, Japan. Over the years, the role of the TAs has changed considerably. Initially, the assistants functioned as classroom auxiliaries who relieved teachers of care and housekeeping-type duties, but recent initiatives in inclusion, curriculum development and workforce remodelling have resulted in them taking on an increasing variety of tasks, with many playing a significant part in the learning and teaching process (Anderson & Finney 2008). An example of the use of TAs could be found in the pilot bilingual classroom assistant activities implemented by ESCUP (Educational Support to Children of Underserved Populations) in selected schools in Kampong Cham, Cambodia in 2006-2007. Individuals in communities who speak a local language as well as Khmer are recruited to work as bilingual classroom assistants (BCA). Their role in the classroom is to act as a bridge between a Khmer teacher who does not speak the local language and very young minority children (grade 1) who do not yet understand Khmer. Although the BCAs are not supposed to teach, they are expected to help translate instructions and lesson content into the local language for these children (ESCUP 2006). The role of TAs in SEQAP schools is very much similar to the role of BCAs.

The presence of a TA in the classrooms to facilitate the teaching and learning in Vietnamese means that EM students can use both Vietnamese and their L1 as languages of instruction. However, this use of EM languages in education does not provide EM students with a more solid L1-based foundation to smoothly move to learning Vietnamese as seen in other bilingual programs such as UNICEF & MoET’s Action Research on Mother Tongue Based Bilingual Education or Save the Children’s project on Promoting the Fulfilment of EM Children’s Rights to Access to Quality Basic Education, mentioned above. This use of EM languages and Vietnamese seems to represent a weak form of bilingual education and has limited benefit: It could help EM students learn better when they first come to school, but it cannot help EM students bridge the gap between themselves and Kinh students. Nevertheless, it represents a practical solution to the language issues faced by

EM students while other more scientifically based and successful bilingual programs sponsored by international agencies are struggling with scaling up.

The expansion of the use of TAs in EM schools, however, is not without challenges. As highlighted in the above analysis of language attitudes and language-in-education policies, the folk misconception of the negative role of L1 in EM students' learning Vietnamese has been used as a pretext for excluding the use of EM languages as medium of instruction in EM schools both in policy and practice. In order for this use of EM languages or any other bilingual education models to be successfully implemented in practice, they need to be supported by the people and recognized by the law. Bridging the gap between scientific evidence, political positions and folk belief is an urgent task to secure equal rights to quality education to all children in the country.

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SHIFTING REFERENTIAL PERSPECTIVE IN VIETNAMESE SPEECH INTERACTION

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Abstract

In Vietnamese, speakers often refer to themselves and to their interlocutors using kin terms. Unlike pronouns, these are not marked for grammatical person and therefore not tied to the interactional roles of speaker and hearer. This fact allows for the speaker to shift the perspective from which reference is made, shifting, that is the indexical *origo* of the speech event and re-centering it in relation to another participant or a non-present party. We describe various permutations of this practice across a range of contexts and discuss some of the theoretical implications for an account of interlocutor reference.

Keywords: anthropology; kin terms; kinship; perspective;

ISO 639-3 codes: vie

1 Introduction

In Vietnamese, the preferred and most common form of address and self-reference (interlocutor reference) involves the use of kin terms, although proper names may also be used for address to and self-reference by junior interlocutors (Luong 1990:108, 117; cf. Fleming and Slotta 2018). Kinship terms are used across a wide range of contexts and with persons to whom the speaker is not genealogically related. Unlike person deictics such as English *I/me* and *you*, or Vietnamese *tôi* (1s), *tao* (1s) and *mày*, kin terms used in interlocutor reference do not specify grammatical person and thus are not indexically linked, in terms of grammatical and semantic structure, to the speech act participants. The absence of a specification for grammatical person makes possible shifts of referential perspective, which is the phenomenon we will focus on here.

To be more precise, in self reference, in making reference to a third party or in addressing another participant, speakers can, and in some situations are expected to, adopt a perspective other than their own. The default *origo* of any referential act is the speaker of the utterance – this is the anchor or “zero-point” in relation to which contextual values are calculated.¹ In the practices of perspective shift we describe here however, the *origo* is transposed from the speaker to some other person so as to effect an indexical recentering. Prototypically, a speaker adopts the perspective of another, more junior, participant in the speech encounter but as we will show, in some cases the perspective adopted is that of a person not present and even, on occasion, a person who does not exist.

Such shifts of referential perspective involve the selection of person-referring forms only. That is to say, a speaker uses forms of person reference appropriate to the person whose perspective is adopted but does not adjust to their perspective in any other way (e.g. does not adjust their use of demonstrative deixis for instance from *đó* ‘there’ to *đây* ‘here’). Perspective shift in this sense relates only to the social roles denoted by participant-referring kin terms and not to other features of the interaction context.

2 Referential perspective shift in interaction between adults and children and general rules of speech interaction

We begin with a baseline of prototypical cases in which a parent or other adult refers/addresses from the perspective of a co-present child. In the following example, Bê, a girl of about five years, is playing with her friend Zi (a boy about three years old) in Zi’s house. Earlier, Bê has told Thuý (Zi’s mother) that, while she

¹ Or, as Haviland (1996:272) puts it, “A privileged status is usually accorded to a given here and now’ as the context of utterance against which the denotata of indexical elements within utterances are understood.” See also Hanks 1990, Agha 2007.

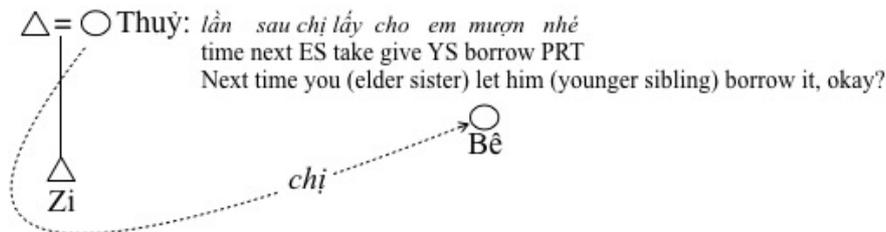
was coloring, Zi played with her pen box and also put his feet on her book. Thủy asks Zi, *con nói gì* ‘What do you say?’ thereby indicating to Zi that he should apologize to Bê. However, when Zi responds, he resists this implication, directing his talk not to Bê but rather to his mother and producing not an apology but rather a counter complaint, *chị Bê hư*, ‘Elder sister Bê is naughty.’ After some back and forth, Thủy eventually demands, *Con nói xin lỗi chị Bê đi*, ‘Say sorry to elder sister Bê’. Zi follows the instruction, producing in a sing-song voice, *Em xin lỗi chị Bê*, ‘I’m sorry elder sister Bê’, which is rather half-heartedly acknowledged by Bê. Then Thủy, now speaking to Bê, remarks:

(1) Thủy, Bê and Zi (from Nguyen 2015)

Thủy: *lần sau chị lấy cho em mượn nhé*
 Time next ES take give YS borrow PRT
 ‘Next time you (older sister) let him (younger sibling) borrow it, okay?’

Here Thủy adopts the perspectives of the co-present children both in reference to Zi (*em*) and in address to Bê (*chị*) as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Adult Thủy adopts the perspective of children Zi and Bê



Here then, adoption of another person’s referential perspective appears to serve as a means for socialization. Specifically, Thủy adopts the child’s perspective in order to highlight the terms of address and self-reference to be used by the involved children, as well as the reciprocal set of rights and duties in relation to which siblings and other same-generation peers are expected to organize their behavior.² Vietnamese kin terms are often extended to non-kin. Not only *anh, chị, em* (elder brother/senior male cousin, elder sister/senior female cousin, younger sibling/junior cousin), but many other terms like *bác, chú, cô* (respectively ‘senior uncle/aunt’, ‘junior paternal uncle’, ‘junior paternal aunt’) are used in reference to parents’ friends as fictive uncles and aunts and in fictive genealogical relations to specific egos. Such an extended usage to non-kin serves to structure the interaction between the referent and ego according to the rights and duties constitutive of a kinship relation.

In general, a Vietnamese kin term like *em* ‘younger sibling’ or *chị* ‘elder sister’ involves both the genealogical relation of the referent to a specific ego, and the rights and duties between the referent and this specific ego. Among the rights and duties are the following rules:

- (1) In kin term usages, a speaker adopts the referential perspective of a junior party, and not that of a person equal to or above him/her. For example, a parent adopts the perspective of a child, a senior cousin adopts the perspective of a junior cousin and so on, but not vice versa.
- (2) The general rule of politeness in Vietnamese culture requires that beyond spousal relations, the speaker elevates the status of an interlocutor but not of oneself.

3 Referential perspective shift in interaction among relatives

While such shifts of referential perspective likely do often serve as a means by which adults socialize children in practices of address and as way to highlight the child’s social responsibilities vis-a-vis others, there are cases that resist explanation in such terms. For instance, a speaker may shift perspective even when the person whose

² In particular, the referential perspective shift and the suggestion that Bê should allow Zi to borrow the toy next time invokes the relevance of the cultural injunction, *kính trên, nhường dưới* ‘respect those above, yield to those below.’

perspective is adopted already well knows the kinship terms, the address system and the institutionalized social roles to which particular terms are linked.

Thus, by the time they are two or three years of age, Vietnamese children consistently address extended family members, including grandparents, uncles, and aunts using the appropriate kin terms (see Luong 1986). However, the adoption of a child’s referential perspective continues unabated. For instance, in one household in the northern rural village of Hoài Thị (about 30 kilometers north of Hanoi), the parents refer to each other as *bố* ‘father’ and *mẹ* ‘mother’ even though their youngest child is already 6 years old and consistently addresses the parents correctly as *bố* and *mẹ*. Consider the following case:

(2) Quyển (father), Lan (mother), Giáp (six-year-old son) [Hoài Thị household #488]

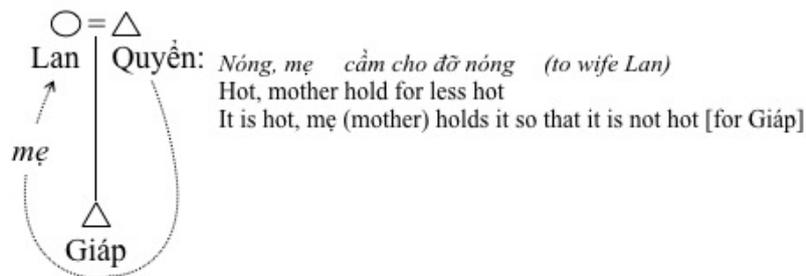
Quyển: *Ngồi hẳn hoi lên!* (to Giáp)
 Sit properly up
 ‘Sit up properly.’

Quyển: *Nóng, mẹ cầm cho đỡ nóng* (to wife Lan)
 Hot, mother hold for less hot
 ‘It is hot, mẹ (mother) holds it so that it is not hot [for Giáp].’

Lan: *Không, nguội rồi!*
 No, cool already
 ‘No, it is cool already.’

Quyển: *Mẹ bưng cho nó không vỡ kìa*
 Mother carry for him/her, no break so
 ‘Mẹ(mother) holds it for him. It may break [otherwise].’³

Figure 2: *Father Quyển adopts the perspective of son Giáp in reference to mother Lan*



Such shifting also occurs when the third-party whose perspective is adopted is not present, highlighting again that this practice is not simply a means of socialization. Illustrating this point and others, below are a few examples from another Hoài Thị household (#477), which included a 51-year-old father (Phong), a 49-year-old mother (Lịch), and four unmarried children (two daughters and two sons) aged 13 to 20.⁴ At the time, Phong and Lịch’s two older daughters had married into other Hoài Thị households and had one child each (aged five and one year old respectively). At a post-harvest feast [*lễ lên đồng*] in this household to which a few of Phong and Lịch’s senior relatives and the research team were invited, the host, Phong, and guests gathered in the main room of the house, the hostess Lịch moved back and forth between this room and the

³ Before having children, the husband Quyển and the wife Lan, like many other childless couples, normally addressed each other as *anh* ‘elder brother’, in reference to the husband, and *em* ‘younger sibling’ in reference to the wife (see Haas 1969). When they addressed each other as *bố* ‘father’ and *mẹ* ‘mother’, they adopted the perspective of their child. The use of *bố* and *mẹ* thus involved a shift in referential perspective.

⁴ This speech interaction was recorded in 1990.

kitchen, while Phong and Lịch's two sons-in-law, eldest daughter, and two unmarried daughters prepared food in the kitchen. Phong and Lịch's children and two grandchildren were not allowed in the living room, which was reserved for the guests. As only 18 people could be accommodated around the three trays of food (six people to each tray as customary), the hostess Lịch encouraged her two sons-in-law, who had been moving back and forth between the kitchen and the living room carrying trays of food, to sit down with the younger male guests at the tray on the floor.

(3) Lịch address sons-in-law Thỏa and Thuật [Hoài Thị household #477]

Lịch: *Thế* *bố* *Thỏa* *vào* *đây* *ngồi* *với* *các*
So, father Thỏa come-in here sit with PL

anh *ấy* *cũng* *được*.
EB 3 also alright.

'So, *bố* [father] Thỏa comes here to sit with these elder brothers [younger researchers].'

Sáu *anh* *em* *ngồi* *cho* *nó* *vui*
Six EB YS sit for it fun.

'Six brothers sit [here] for fun.'

.....

Lịch: *Thế* *cho* *bố* *Thuật* *ngồi* *đây* *vậy*
So, for father Thuật sit here so.

'So, *bố* [father] Thuật sits here.'

Thỏa (25 years old) and Thuật (27 years old) had, respectively, a one-year-old daughter and a five-year-old daughter, but neither child was present in the living room at the time. The hostess, Lịch, added their names to the kinterm *bố* 'father' to distinguish the two addressees. However, Phong, her husband, addressed Thuật as *anh* 'elder brother' Thuật, adopting his absent children's referential perspective instead of his absent granddaughter's. Phong also adopted his absent children's perspective in addressing his elder sister-in-law as *bác* 'parent's elder sibling' Phi. It was also a significant choice on the part of the hostess Lịch that she addressed her daughters in the kitchen by their first names, and, at one point, addressed one of them with the second-person singular pronoun *mày*. Her choices of first names and pronouns pragmatically implied greater informality and closeness in her interaction with her daughters, while the choices of kin terms (*mẹ* 'mother' or *dì* 'maternal aunt', from her granddaughter's perspective) would imply greater formality and less closeness.

Generally, a speaker adopts another's perspective only when referring to the addressee or to a non-addressed third party, but not in self-reference. The exception is in the interaction between spouses. For instance, in talking to his wife, a male speaker can adopt the perspective either of his child, self-referring as *bố* 'father' and addressing his wife as *mẹ* 'mother', or his grandchild, self-referring as *ông* 'grandfather' and addressing his wife as *bà* 'grandmother' (see also Nguyễn Thị Thanh Bình 2002:204).⁵ At the post-harvest feast discussed above, the host's elder sister-in-law Phi (62 years old) reported on her speech interaction with her husband, both of whom lived with their son, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren (a seven-year-old grand-daughter and a three-year-old grandson):

⁵ Spouses also often refer to one another using sibling terms with no perspective shift (see Haas 1969).

(4) Phi reports speaking to her husband Khiên

Phi: *Hôm qua, ông Khiên đi gieo mạ, tôi bảo:*
 Yesterday, GF Khiên go sow seedling, 1S said

“Khiếp ông mà gieo mạ hôm nay, có khi đêm nó
 Khip GF COMP sow seedling today, perhaps tonight 3

mưa nó trôi hết cả mạ.”
 rain 3 drift finish all seedling

‘Yesterday, grandfather/Mr. Khiên transplanted rice seedlings. I said: “Oh! If grandfather transplants seedlings today, maybe tonight, the rain will cause all of them to be washed away!”’

Phi: *ông thì đi gieo mạ, bà thì bảo có khi đêm*
 GF TOP go sow seedling, GM TOP say perhaps night

mưa trôi hết
 rain drift finish

‘Grandfather went transplanting rice seedlings, and I (=grandmother) said that they might be all washed away by the rain (laughs).’

It is not clear whether or not the reported speech interaction took place in the presence of the speaker’s and her husband’s grandchildren, but no grandchildren or children of the speaker were present in the reporting context. In a spousal relation, even in the absence of a child or grandchild whose perspective is adopted, a female speaker can use *mẹ* ‘mother’ or *bà* ‘grandmother’ for self-reference in conjunction with *bố* ‘father’ or *ông* ‘grandfather’ for her spouse (or vice versa in the case of a male speaker). However, at the post-harvest feast, although the host Phong addressed his elder sister-in-law Phi as *bác* ‘parent’s elder sibling’ from his absent children’s perspective, he referred to himself as *em* ‘younger sibling’, which is to say, from her perspective, and not as *bố* ‘father’, from his absent children’s perspective.

Northern Vietnamese children learn the art and the pragmatic presuppositions of referential perspective adoption from a young age. In the example below, Hiền, an eight-year-old Hoài Thị girl, adopted the perspective of her three-year-old first cousin Tuấn (mother’s younger brother’s son) in referring to her own four-year-old brother Nghiệp as *anh* ‘elder brother/senior male cousin’.⁶

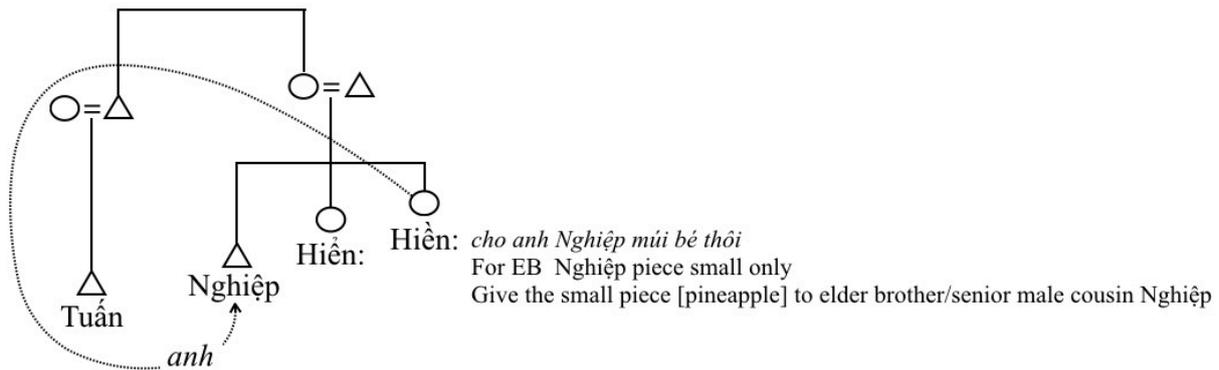
(5) Hiền (eight-year-old) addresses Tuấn (three-year-old), referring to Nghiệp (four-year-old)

Hiền: *cho anh Nghiệp múi bé thôi*
 For EB Nghiệp piece small only

‘Give the small piece [pineapple] to elder brother/senior male cousin Nghiệp’

⁶ In the Vietnamese kinship system, seniority among same-generation cousins is determined not by their relative age, but by the rank of their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents in the latter’s sibling relations. The three-year-old Tuấn is junior to the eight-year-old Hiền, six-year-old-Hiền, and four-year-old Nghiệp not because Tuấn is younger, but because Tuấn’s father is the younger sibling of the three former children’s mother. Even if Tuấn were older than his three cousins Hiền, Hiền, and Nghiệp, he would still be junior because Tuấn’s father was a younger sibling of the latter’s mother.

Figure 3: *Hiền adopts the perspective of Tuấn in referring to Nghiệp*



Similarly, in speaking to her four-year-old younger brother Nghiệp, Hiền also referred to her six-year-old younger sister Hiễn as *chị* ‘elder sister’, adopting her younger brother’s perspective.

(6) Hiền (eight-year-old) addresses Nghiệp (four-year-old) referring to Hiễn (six-year-old)

Hiền: *Nghiệp để phần chị Hiễn nữa!*
 Nghiệp, for part ES Hiễn too!
 ‘Nghiệp, give elder sister/senior female cousin Hiễn a piece too!’

As the examples so far discussed suggest, the adoption of a referential perspective itself pragmatically presupposes and implies a hierarchical relation, as a speaker can only adopt the referential perspective of an interlocutor junior to him/her and not of somebody senior or equal to him/her. A parent adopts the perspective of a child, an older sibling adopts the perspective of a younger sibling and so on, but not vice versa.

An older speaker who has *both* children and grandchildren often has to make a socioculturally embedded pragmatic decision regarding which referential perspective to adopt. At the previously described post-harvest feast, the host adopted the perspective of his children in addressing his son-in-law as *anh* ‘elder brother’, while the hostess adopted the perspective of a grandchild in referring to the same son-in-law as *bố* ‘father’. How are decisions made regarding whose referential perspective (child’s or grandchild’s) is to be adopted? Whose referential perspective to adopt is a pragmatic decision embedded in sociocultural rules and cultural premises. In addition to the previously discussed linkage between hierarchy and referential perspective adoption, we will discuss two other rules in connection with referential perspective shifts in the interaction among non-kin.

4 Referential perspective shift with non-kin

Referential perspective shift takes place not only in interaction among relatives, but also in the interaction among non-kin. Consider a case in which a female employee of a health insurance company reports how she invited her boss to a party celebrating her daughter’s admission to university.

Here the speaker, Hà, adopts the perspective of her own daughter, not present at the time, in speaking to her boss about the party. In this frame, the boss is *chú* ‘father’s younger brother’ and the daughter as *cháu* ‘niece/nephew’. In general, outside of a spousal relation, a speaker may adopt the perspective of an absent junior third party in address, but not in self reference. In this case then, the speaker continues to refer to herself as *chị* ‘elder sister’ (to her boss) even though in the reported speech the term *mẹ* ‘mother’ would be consistent with the referential perspective shift she has used in addressing her boss.

(7) VNR 20 (597-601) Hà reports inviting her boss to a party

Hà: *Thế nên bọn tao phải mời sếp để nó đi,*
 So so group 1S must invite boss to 3 go,
 ‘So we must invite the boss to go,

tao cũng đi, thế, thế mới ra chuyện.
 1S also go, like, like just go out story
 I am also going, that's how the story began

Mời sếp thì nó cứ hỏi lí do gì,
 Invite boss then 3 just ask reason what,
 So, I invited the boss and he asked, what's the party for,

thế mình bảo, cháu, cháu Mi thì mai
 so SF say, GC/N GC/N Mi, TOP tomorrow
 So I said, your niece, your niece Mi, tomorrow

cháu đi học rồi thế chú đến
 niece go study already so FYB come
 your niece will leave to go study, so you (father's younger brother) should come.

Chú chia vui với chị, chú làm lễ tẩy trần⁷
 FYB share joy with ES, FYB do ritual cleansing
 You can share the joy with me (elder sister), you can do the ritual cleansing

cho cháu, để ngày mai cháu lên đường cháu
 for GC/N, so that tomorrow GC/N up way GC/N
 for you niece, so that tomorrow your niece can make her way

đi học cho nó may mắn.
 go study give 3 good luck
 to go study with good luck.

Why can a speaker adopt their child's perspective in self-reference (say, as *mẹ* 'mother' or *bà* 'grandmother') only in addressing their own spouse as *bố* 'father' or *ông* 'grandfather', or vice versa for a male speaker? The general rule of politeness in Vietnamese culture requires that beyond spousal relations, the speaker elevate the status of an interlocutor but not of oneself. The female speaker chose *chị* 'elder sister' because the social status of an elder sister is less elevated than that of "mother" (and mother, less elevated than grandmother, *bà*, or great-grandmother, *cụ*). By the same cultural logic, the speaker can use *chú* 'junior uncle' because it is a term of greater elevation than *em* 'younger sibling'.

In general, the perspective shift in kin term usages with non-kin arguably represents the first step in the process of conventionalization, both in informal and formal speech interactions, that we will now turn to describe.

5 Conventionalization of Referential Perspective Shift in Informal Speech Interaction

A further development of referential perspective shift is seen in the common practice whereby a slightly older man, despite having not yet fathered a child, addresses a slightly younger, same-generation man, as *chú* 'father's younger brother'. Such usage may alternate with the more common pattern in which the older man refers to the younger as *em* 'younger sibling' and self refers with *anh* 'elder brother'.

This referential perspective shift is sometimes triggered by a situation in which the older man is doubting, teasing, or otherwise pushing back on something the younger one has said. In other cases, the perspective shift term is used throughout the interaction. As an example of the latter consider the following in which Thanh, who is the oldest of four participants, has been telling a story about how he posted a picture to Facebook of his wife holding a young child. He did this as a joke and in order to make people think he and his wife had had

⁷ *lễ*, 'ritual', *tẩy trần*, 'wash off the dust' - *lễ tẩy trần*, is a ritual performed when a person becomes a monk. So here the speaker is joking, using the analogy of joining a monastic order.

a child. In response, Hung, who is a slightly younger, close friend of Thanh's, suggests that only people who didn't know Thanh and his wife well would have fallen for the trick. Hung then goes on to suggest that he himself was not taken in. At this point, Thanh challenges Hung and in doing so addresses him as *chú* 'father's younger brother'.

(8) VNR_05_08_24_2012 - Thanh challenges Hung

Thanh: *Tin quá đi. Gớm. Chú mà không tin.*
 Believe too muchPRT. Incredible FYB COMP NEG believe!
 'You totally believed it! You believed it completely!'

Moments later, Thanh goes on to explain why he believes that Hung must have been taken in by his trick. Thus, according to Thanh, all Phuong (Hung's wife) had to do to get Hung to marry her was to tell him that she was pregnant.

(9) VNR_05_08_24_2012 - Thanh challenges Hung

Thanh: *Chú là ngày xưa chú tin quá đi*
 FYB COMP day old FYB believe too muchPRT
nên chú mới cưới con Phuong sớm thế
 so FYB just marry CL Phuong early PRT
 'You believe everything. That's why you married Phuong just like that so quickly!'

Thanh: *Con này nó nói, nó vừa nói phát là*
 CL this 3 say, 3 just say emit COMP
phải cưới ngay
 must marry immediate
 'This girl just said one thing, just said it and (you) married her immediately.'

In this case, there is not only no child present but no child in fact exists. Thanh, though married, does not yet have children.

Here then the use of *chú* is "conventionalized" in the sense that no actual perspective shift seems to be involved. Rather, the use of this term imports into Thanh and Hung's interaction the pragmatic presuppositions of behavioral patterns from another context (one in which Thanh adopts his child's perspective in addressing Hung). Specifically, this use *chú* presupposes the referent's (uncle's) responsibilities towards a junior person, his entitlement to respect, as well as greater formality and some distancing in the interaction between the speaker and the addressee in comparison to the use of *em* 'younger sibling'.

It is also significant that Thanh takes the initiative to refer to Hung either as *em* 'younger sibling' or as *chú* 'father's younger brother' as he sees fit. Hung, for his part, refers to Thanh as *anh* 'elder brother' and himself as *em*. There is then a second-order indexicality—a pragmatic presupposition not of the form itself but of the act of selection—involved in this practice of interlocutor reference. Specifically, by exercising his prerogative to refer to Hung as *chú* 'father's younger brother', Thanh invokes his own status as the older of the two.⁸

A parallel form of conventionalized perspective shift is seen in some uses of *cô* 'father's sister'. In (10), Kiêm (54) and Hồng Anh (47) have been telling Dung (48) that a visit to Bái Đính Pagoda is very tiring and involves a lot of walking in the heat of the midday sun. Dung, who is scheduled to make the trip the next day, has been doubting their claims and has suggested that it won't be too bad because, since it is not the busy

⁸ Another aspect of this conventionalization is seen in the fact that these terms are used in such contexts quite unselfconsciously, that is, without awareness that the "meaning" of the term involves shifting perspective.

season, it will not be crowded when she goes there. In response Kiêm, who otherwise refers to Dung with *chị* ‘elder sister’, addresses her as *cô* ‘father’s sister’ saying that she cannot imagine how tired she will be.⁹

(10) VNR 32, Kiêm addresses Dung as *cô*

Kiêm:	<i>Cô</i>	<i>ơ,</i>	<i>cô</i>	<i>không</i>	<i>hình dung</i>	<i>đâu,</i>	<i>léch théch</i>	<i>đi,</i>
	FS	VOC,	FS	NEG	imagine	NEG	slovenly	PRT,
	<i>mệt</i>	<i>đấy</i>	<i>rồi</i>	<i>đi</i>	<i>mai</i>	<i>mà</i>	<i>xem</i>	
	tired	there	already	PRT	tomorrow	COMP	see	

‘But Auntie! You (=father’s sister) cannot imagine, slovenly, tired, go tomorrow and you’ll see.’

A particularly well-known historical example of such conventionalized perspective shift is that which was practiced, in the years following the anti-colonial revolution against the French, with Hồ Chí Minh. As reported in Luong (1988), although the official Việt Minh newspaper, *Cứu Quốc*, referred to Hồ as *cụ* ‘great-grandfather’ or *Chủ tịch* ‘Chairman’, in more informal contexts, the pragmatic presuppositions of solidarity and brotherhood were preserved through the use of *bác* in reference to Hồ and Hồ’s use of *chú* to refer to his younger addressees. Here then, the use of *bác* in reference to Hồ implied that the speaker was adopting the perspective of his or her own child in relation to whom Hồ was figured as father’s elder brother. Meanwhile, Hồ’s use of *chú* to refer to his younger comrades involved him adopting the perspective of his own non-existent child in relation to whom the addressee was cast as father’s younger brother (see Luong 1988:248).

Such conventionalization has progressed even further in the use of *cậu* which, as a kin term, denotes a mother’s younger brother. Consider the following case from another exchange. Here Hoàn (30 years old) is wondering why Kiên (25 years old) does not have a lot of money despite the fact that he is earning a high wage. Using the second person singular pronoun *mày*, he asks Kiên whether he is saving money to get married or whether he is just giving it to a girl. After, Kiên explains that he is saving money to buy an expensive motorbike and that he will start saving for marriage after he purchases it, Hoàn accuses him of boasting, now referring to Kiên using *cậu*.

(11) VNR 12, Hoàn addresses Kiên as *cậu*

Hoàn:	<i>Cậu</i>	<i>toàn</i>	<i>nói</i>	<i>phét.</i>	<i>Ăn tặc</i>	<i>nói</i>	<i>phét.</i>
	MB/2S	total	say	boast.	Greedy	say	boast.

‘You are just boasting. Talking nonsense.’

<i>Bao</i>	<i>nhiều</i>	<i>năm</i>	<i>trời</i>	<i>vẫn</i>	<i>không</i>	<i>có</i>	<i>mảnh</i>	<i>tình</i>
How	many	year	god	still	NEG	have	piece	love

<i>vất</i>	<i>vai</i>	<i>mà</i>	<i>cứ</i>
press	shoulder	COMP	PRT

‘How many years you do not have any person to love?’

Kiên:	<i>Hôm</i>	<i>nọ</i>	<i>tôi</i>	<i>bắt</i>	<i>được</i>	<i>trên</i>	<i>Hồ</i>	<i>Hoàn Kiêm</i>	<i>rồi</i>	<i>nhé.</i>
	Day	that	1S	seize	get	on	lake	Hoàn Kiêm	already	PRT

‘The other day I grabbed something on Hoàn Kiêm lake.’

⁹ Kiêm refers to Dung as *chị* ‘elder sister’ despite the fact that she is younger than he is. This “polite fiction of address” is discussed in Sidnell and Shohet 2013.

Here the use of *cậu* seems very similar to the use of *chú* which we have already discussed: a switch in address from pronoun to a kin term implies formality and distancing, which is congruent with the speaker’s challenge to the addressee. At the same time, *cậu* is used to refer to an addressee who is male and who is younger than the speaker. In other words, in this case, the addressee is structurally related to the speaker such that they might be addressed as *cậu* ‘mother’s younger brother’ by the speaker’s own child.

However, the conventionalization of the perspective shift has progressed further in the case of *cậu*. As a kinship term *cậu* denotes a specific genealogical relation—a mother’s brother¹⁰—and can be used in practices involving referential perspective shift. In the absence of these prototypical elements, native speakers may believe that the common use of *cậu* among peers or between near-peers involves the use of a homophonous but distinct word meaning something like “boy”. As such, it is used more freely than *chú*. It is treated as a relatively neutral, second person pronoun for use between persons of roughly similar standing who, though familiar, are not sufficiently intimate so as to allow for the use of the pronoun *mày*. *Cậu*, although originally used only in reference and address to men, is nowadays used even among many urban young female speakers for addressing one another.¹¹ This use of *cậu* among young urban female speakers is roughly equivalent to the use of “guy”, a male term, among female speakers of English. It reflects young women’s adoption of a term used originally among men in a male-centered social universe.¹²

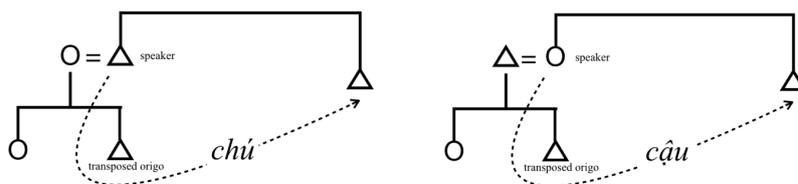
6 Conventionalization of Referential Perspective Shift in Formal Speech Interaction

In Hoài Thị village, in formal public fora such as the gatherings of older men in the communal house and of women at the village pagoda, elderly people address one another as *cụ* ‘great-grandparent’. For self-reference, the younger among them use *em* ‘younger sibling’, while the older ones use *tôi*. In address, elderly Hoài Thị women distinguish older ones from younger ones by addressing the former as *cụ anh* ‘great-grandparent elder brother’ and the latter as *cụ em* ‘great-grandparent-younger sibling’. They adopt this address pattern from the elderly men who gather twice a month on the same days at the communal house. The use of *anh* ‘elder brother’ instead of *chị* ‘elder sister’ in this case reflects the discursive and ideological acceptance of a male-centered universe, similar to the use of *cậu* for address among young urban female speakers. The elderly in Hoài Thị address each other as *cụ* ‘great grandparent’ in formal contexts, although most of the younger ones in their 50s have not had great grandchildren. The use of *cụ* to address people who do not yet have a great grandchild does not involve the adoption of a great grandchild’s perspective. It is a pragmatic choice on the basis of a cultural assumption and of behavioral presuppositions and implications linked to the position of a great grandparent. Hoài Thị elderly’s use of *cụ* reflects a widespread cultural assumption that it is fortunate to have children, more fortunate to have grandchildren, and even more fortunate to have great-grandchildren who address one as *cụ* ‘great-grandparent’. The more senior one’s status is in the kinship system, the more responsibilities such a person has in his/her kinship universe with more descendants and junior relatives and the more he/she is to be respected.

At the aforementioned post-harvest feast, the host’s choice of *bác* ‘parent’s elder sibling’ instead of *chị* ‘elder sister’ to address his elder sister-in-law involves not simply the adoption of his children’s referential

¹⁰ A male speaker can also use *cậu* to refer to his wife’s younger brother from his child’s perspective.

¹¹ The use of *cậu* but not *chú* by female speakers is perhaps partly predictable from the matrilineal kinship structure that the term presupposes (i.e. in its most basic use among kin it presupposes a female speaker when the origo is transposed to a child, i.e. the mother in the mother’s younger brother relation, though see note 7). This would explain its use by female speakers though not its use in reference to a female addressee.



¹² However, the use of *đì*, the counterpart term of *cậu*, or *cô* (father’s sister) among men is rare and restricted mainly to gay men (see Nguyễn Văn Dũng, Hoàng Nguyễn, and Đoàn Trang 2009:6-7, 10, 13, 19 -20, 34, 107, 110-111, 116-118, 127, 160), in the same way that “gal” as the counterpart of “guy” is seldom used for address by male English speakers.

perspective, but also an implication of greater respect and formality in their interaction. Even when no referential perspective of a child or junior person is adopted due to the absence of such a person, the use of Vietnamese kin terms involves pragmatic behavioral presuppositions and implications. We suggest that the use of *chú* in (7), or of *cụ* ‘great grandparent’ to address somebody without a great grandchild, needs to be understood in this context.

In general, the meanings of Vietnamese kin terms involve not only genealogical relations but also behavioral patterns, including whether and when to adopt the referential perspective of somebody else.

7 Conclusion

From a cross-cultural comparative perspective, in the presence of small children, parents in many cultures address each other with kinship terms for “father” and “mother” for the socialization of the former. However, Vietnamese speakers in northern Vietnam use kinship terms in a greater range of interactional contexts and beyond the purpose of socializing small children. Socializing small children or not, they use kinship terms to structure social interaction pragmatically. In comparison to speakers elsewhere, Vietnamese speakers in northern Vietnam also tend to emphasize polyadic relations more: in the aforementioned post-harvest feast, the host’s choice of *bác* ‘parent’s elder sibling’ instead of *chị* ‘elder sister’ to address his sister-in-law foregrounds not the dyadic relation between the host and his elder sister-in-law, but polyadic relations also involving junior relatives. The choice of *cụ* ‘great grandparent’ among Hoài Thị elderly constitutes a part of this emphasis on polyadic relations, which is also formalized much more in northern Vietnam with the formation of patrilineages and numerous voluntary associations, in comparison to the southern third of Vietnam (Luong 2016).

From a theoretical perspective, on one level, northern Vietnamese speakers’ use of the more senior kin terms such as *cụ* ‘great-grandparent’ as a high-level honorific term lends support to Fleming and Slotta’s argument that “in and by the semantic description of roles and qualities to participants in the interaction, the use of kin terms comes to count as a pragmatic act of honorification” (2018:390). However, it should be emphasized that *cụ* ‘great grandparent’ pragmatically presupposes and implies a great respect to the referent on the basis of not only the semantic meaning of the term, but also the strong cultural values on longevity and having numerous descendants. In a more youth-oriented culture like North America nowadays, such a term would unlikely function as an honorific.

On another level, Fleming and Slotta’s emphasis on semantic meanings as the basis for pragmatic inference would not be able to account for the relation between referential perspective adoption in Vietnamese kin term usages and the pragmatics of a hierarchical relation in Vietnam. Very young children do not have the cognitive ability to take the perspectives of other interactants (Piaget 1976 [1928]). Older children and adults, with this cognitive ability, adopt young children’s referential perspectives for the socialization of the latter in a context of hierarchical relations. It is in this context and not due to the semantic meanings of kin terms in and by themselves that the adoption of referential perspectives in kin term usages pragmatically presupposes and implies a hierarchical relation and the speaker’s higher position than the person whose perspective is adopted.

Transcript abbreviations

1S	first person singular
3	third person
CLF	classifier
COMP	complementizer
EB	elder brother
ES	elder sister
FYB	father’s younger brother
GC/N	grandchild or niece/nephew
GF	grandfather
GM	grandmother
NEG	negative
PL	plural
PRT	particle
TOP	topicalizer

VOC vocative
YS younger sibling

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RECONSTRUCTING LANGUAGE CONTACT AND SOCIAL CHANGE ON THE BOLOVEN PLATEAU, LAOS

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Abstract

In this paper, I compare and contrast the Austroasiatic languages Laven (also known as Jru') and Nyaheun, spoken on the Boloven Plateau in Southern Laos, based on my field work in the early 2000s. In their languages, hidden in plain sight in the lexicon, syntax, and phonology, we can find clues to their social histories and historical relations with the lowland Lao and even the earlier Angkorian Khmer. Out of these inferences one can model aspects of their social-linguistic history and a tentative schematic reconstruction of Laven and Nyaheun histories is presented at the conclusion of this paper. Broadly, it is suggested that while the Laven and Nyaheun have very different social status in contemporary Laos, with the Laven in a much stronger position than the Nyaheun, we see indications of a historical period of contact and linguistic convergence, followed by radical independent development. The latter phase is associated with heavy Lao influence on Laven while the Nyaheun were significantly marginalized.

Keywords: language contact, historical reconstruction, metatpy, convergence, areality
ISO 639-3 codes: lbo, nev, brb, kmh, sti, pll, ktv

1 Introduction

This paper's arguments and results are grounded in assumptions and practices of the *comparative method* of the *neogrammarians* and has evolved since the 19th century. Important to the comparative methods is the abstraction of patterns of corresponding structures revealed by the speech habits of individuals and communities removed from the contexts of immediate social interactions. This is largely in the expectation that independently repeated patterns in language reveal structures that have remained indexical within a speech community over time, albeit with possible changes in form and/or meaning.

Now refined by extensive application over some two centuries, the comparative method produces robust low-granularity descriptions of language states that can be localized in time and space with greater or lesser specificity on linguistic grounds, and potentially falsified by recourse to philological, archaeological and other historical methods. This ability to reconstruct language states gives us more than merely the capacity to expand diachronically our linguistic typology, but also; "... provides clues to past social interaction among groups—who was involved, what their relationship was like, and how the social and cultural practices of one or more participating groups were affected." (Epps 2014:579) Furthermore, historical linguistic methods are firmly biased epistemologically towards abstraction, objectivity and reproducibility.

This paper is about inferring social change, based on sequencing reconstructed linguistic changes, and correlations with historically documented events. A historical narrative of low granularity is offered in relation to the migrations and interactions between communities living on and about the Boloven Plateau region of Southern Laos. That narrative is a hypothesis based on reconciling multiple lines of evidence from different disciplines and independent data points. The theoretical bases of relating social and linguistic change have been thrashed out significantly over the past three decades or so, with plenty of scope for further progress in our understanding remaining to be explored. The fundamental work of Thomason and Kaufman (1988) has framed much of the discussion around contact driven language change in recent decades, in particular the competing models of language maintenance with change by the incorporation of borrowed features versus interference through shift conditioned by incomplete language acquisition in circumstances of a community acquiring a new language.

In this study it is largely assumed that synchronic differences and historically reconstructed changes in the relevant languages result from both direct borrowing and incomplete acquisition of native competence in

circumstances of contact. This includes contact effects between closely related languages in the process of diverging over time, and differential contact with unrelated/unintelligible language (in this case Lao). Borrowing has occurred at multiples levels of language structure, not merely lexical, but from segments to syntax, “extreme structural borrowing” within the Thomason and Kaufman terminology or “metatypy” in the more current usage (especially since Ross 1996). The present study assumes that metatypic change reflects acquisition of speaker competence that is more abstract and less consciously manipulated than straightforward lexical or similar *Wörter und Sachen* (“word and thing”) substitutions in speech, and thus is more objectively indexical of shared community knowledge and experience. In this way, focussing on higher level features, we can hypothesize correlations with social and other factors, offering historical explanatory power.

2 Demographic and linguistic background

Mainland Southeast Asia (MSEA) naturally presents many excellent opportunities for investigating social change, in particular linguistic change and its social correlates. This is due to the high linguistic diversity in a clearly delineated territory (the Indo-Chinese peninsular) dominated by a central mountain chain with cultivated lowlands on one side and narrow coastal plains on another. Within this territory it is possible to study interactions, from diachronic and synchronic perspectives, between communities combining linguistic description with textual, historical, and archaeological data to correlate conditions and patterns of social and linguistic change.

In recent decades it has been asserted that upland Asian communities value living beyond or on the periphery of the political and administrative control of nation states, especially in terms of the Zomia hypothesis (Scott 2009). Zomia conceptualizes the inhabited uplands as constituting a cultural area that extends across a vast region, including down the Anamite Range deep into the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. While elements of the Zomia idea may be applicable even in this region, it is clear that in southern Laos uplander communities want access to goods and opportunities that mainstream societies afford, and makes efforts with varying degrees of success to access and participate in the Lao economy and institutions (Faming 2019). Furthermore, the uplanders themselves are not above using their access to the wider world and differential success to play the status game amongst themselves, and upland groups are far from uniform or united, even when they intermix intimately (e.g. by intermarriage, sharing/exchanging farmland or forest access, mutual trade. etc.).

The Laven and Nyaheun are two recognized ethno-linguistic groups in Laos, among 49 officially recognized groups (and 160 sub-groups),¹ living in a geographically well-defined area that was poorly served in terms of access roads and other important infrastructure until the early 21st century. Since the time of my fieldwork in the region, paved roads and electricity have been widely rolled out and there has been much adaptation and resettlement (such as relocation of domiciles to towns and roadsides) to take advantage of the new infrastructure. We have historical descriptions of conditions on the Plateau, as far back to the 19th century, so there are things we can say with confidence about these these peoples before the current conditions which have disrupted earlier economic and social relations.

The Laven (ISO 693-3 lbo) are also known by their autonym Jru’ [ꨀꨆꨑ], and there are variants of this (such as Juk, Su’) used to self identify various Laven communities. The exonym Laven is from Siamese บลิวเว่น /bɔːriweːn/ ‘region’, from when the Boloven Plateau was part of the Kingdom of Champasak (1713–1904) (see Murdoch 1974 for a brief history in English of Champasak). The Ethnologue (2019) lists the Laven population at 56,400 and characterizes the language status as ‘vigorous’. The culture and language have been documented by various writers; sources include Harmond (2002 (1878-79)), Lavellée (1901), Dauplay (1929), Bondet De La Bernadie (1949), Fraise (1951), Jacq (2001). Harmond was the first Frenchman to describe the Laven, investigating the Boloven Plateau in the course of leading one of the Pavie Expeditions in Indochina. Arriving in Paksong (the trading town at the top of the plateau) in 1874, he found the Laven to be industrious cardamom plantation farmers who had taken on various cultural trait of the lowland Lao; there was a well established Buddhist temple in the town; he observed young Laven women wearing lipstick and hairdos acquired in Pakse (the lowland regional port on the Mekong). Jacq (2001) is a modern linguistic grammar of Laven and is the fullest description of the language available (and the only substantial source not written in French). I was involved in some of the data collection, assisting Jacq in the field and subsequently working with some of her Laven consultants. Laven are demographically dominant on the plateau, occupying all social levels from swiddeners and small holding coffee farmers to high levels in local government, in my experience they

¹ <https://minorityrights.org/country/laos>

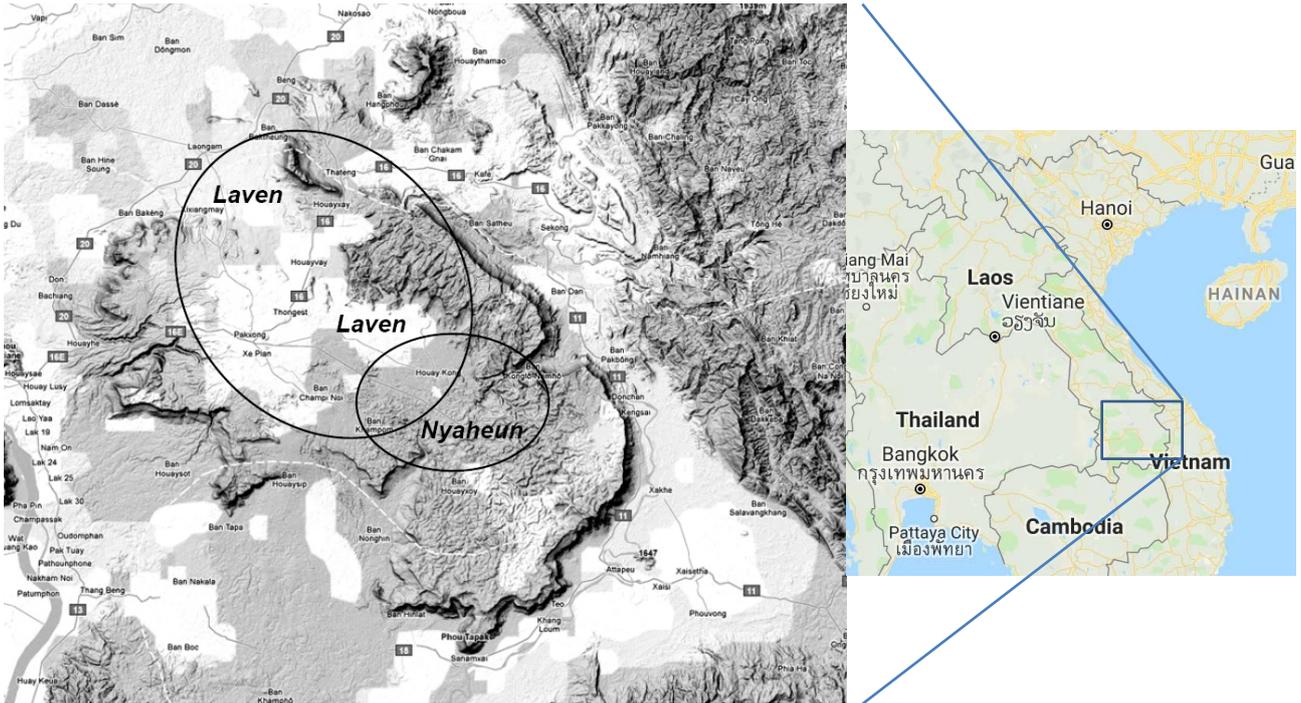
generally speak Lao well as a second language or as a second mother tongue, and it is common for visitors to be unaware that Laven people they are dealing with are not simply ethnic Lao.

The Nyaheun [ɲahΛːɲ] (ISO 693-3 ney) are given a population of 9,000 by the Ethnologue, although this is not historically representative; Chazée (1999) estimated 4000 in 1999, and my own attempts at a count in 2002 could find evidence for not more than about 2000 people shortly after a serious influenza epidemic afflicted the community subsequent to being relocated out of their traditional lands. The language is characterized as ‘vigorous’ by the Ethnologue, and I can confirm that this was the case a generation ago. Wall (1975) is an ethnographic account of Nyaheun culture (in French) based on her living for six months in a Nyaheun village, and also includes useful references to the scant published mentions of the Nyaheun in earlier sources. Wall’s account is especially important as it precedes the disruptions of Nyaheun life that followed the 1975 takeover of the country by the Pathet Lao and their subsequent administration. Wall describes a traditional hunting and swiddening culture of small riverside villages deep in the forest, many women and children were monolingual, and life was governed to a great extent by fear of spirits and by numerous ceremonies offering propitiations. Through the 1960s and early 1970s Nyaheun men were drafted into service with the Royal Lao Army and the community suffered significantly for this after 1975, and ultimately endured a complete roundup and relocation to purpose-built settlements north of the newly declared Sepian Conservation Area (corresponding roughly to their previous home range) around the turn of the millennium. Some families did return to the forest to resume more traditional lives (with off-and-on again disruption by authorities) while most achieved a kind of stable conventional rural village life in the resettlement areas (east of Paksong). The new villages were constructed in part on land confiscated from Laven, and it took some time for normal relations to be sorted out. Nowadays Nyaheun live in a manner that is comparable to the life of Laven living in the poorer hamlets. Coffee farming and vegetable farming are predominant occupations and the people have ready access to modern roads, electric power and mobile phone and internet.

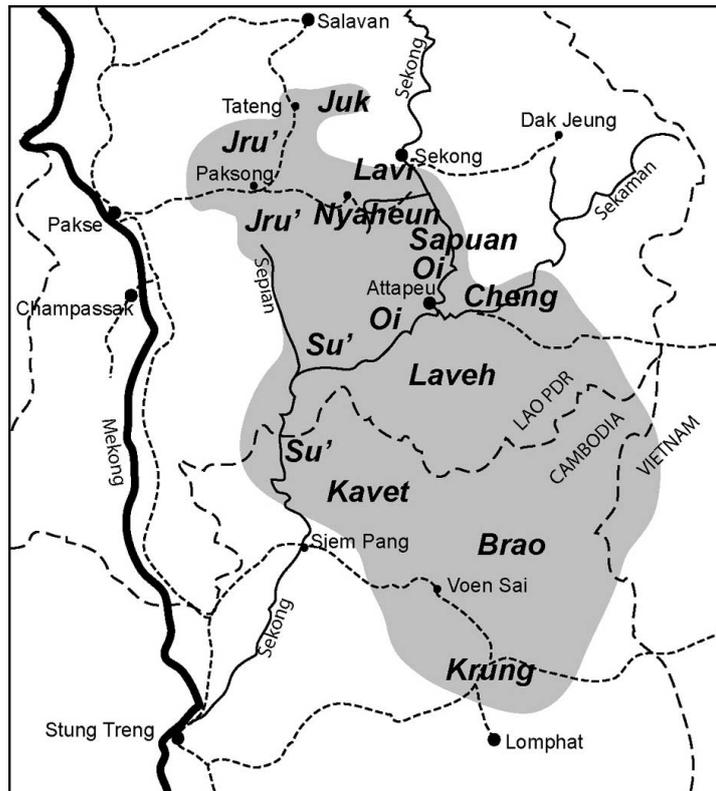
Linguistically Laven and Nyaheun fall into the West Bahnaric sub-group, and Sidwell & Jacq (2003) provide a detailed description and historical reconstruction of the language history. Within West Bahnaric these two languages do not have a special affinity but are markedly different in phonology, lexicon and grammar, although speakers do affect a useful degree of mutual intelligibility by exposure.

Sidwell & Jacq (2003) reconstruct Proto West Bahnaric, the common ancestor of Laven and Nyaheun. Their results suggest that the proto-language speaker community lived in the Sekong River valley, east of the plateau in the vicinity of present day Sekong City, during the Old Khmer period (i.e. prior to 1400 AD, and possibly much earlier) where they were in contact with Katuic and Old Khmer languages, evidenced by numerous lexical borrowings. The Laven evidently colonized the plateau from the north (note the distribution of Juk, Jru’ and Su’ indicated in Figure 2), probably forming a distinct community around modern day Tateng near Phu Set, and then spread southwards over the plateau and down the southern slopes as far as the current Su’ villages along the now defunct route 18 road (that used to connect Attapeu and Pakse but ceased to be maintained after 1975). The ancestors of the Nyaheun apparently moved up onto the plateau via the ‘Great Gorge’ on its eastern side, and into the Sepian river valley forests, settling in the area described by Wall (1975) and also spread westward enough to encounter and form relations with Laven (the distances are not great, one can walk from this area to Paksong in a day in good conditions). We can speculate that historically the Boloven plateau was a kind of refuge area around the time of the collapse of Angkor (early 1400s) until the establishment of the Lao Kingdom of Chamapsak (1713), as we lack any direct historical sources for the area before Lao times. Oral history and traditional stories as far as I was able to note are confused and contradictory, and do not seem to offer any useful insights to the earliest settlement of Laven and Nyaheun on the plateau.

Map 1: Indicative historical locations of Laven and Nyaheun



Map 2: Map of West Bahnaric languages



In the following sections, I compare and contrast Laven and Nyaheun in relation to phonology and syntax. In both respects there are strong similarities and one might easily come to the view that they are simply two closely related languages that have diverged in recognisable ways while also both being influenced by Lao and Khmer in various ways. However, a closer examination of the facts is strongly suggestive of specific social factors driving the nature and direction of language change.

3 Phonology

3.1 Vowels

The big languages of MSEA, such as Thai, Lao and Khmer, have a characteristic monophthong inventory with three degrees of height and backness and a robust short versus long contrast. This phonological pattern has arisen in part because lexical borrowing has been pervasive across the area, and the incorporation of loan words has brought in new segmental contrasts and/or reinforced existing marginal contrasts (see Thurgood 1999 for a detailed discussion of how such process transformed the phonology of Chamic languages from an Austronesian type to a Mainland type). In effect, when speakers of languages with dissimilar segmental inventories come into in strong contact they tend to fill out their inventories of available sounds to converge on a common maximal inventory. Additionally, we can expect that excessive crowding of the phonological space, would favour mergers to maintain symmetry, so while sound change, both internal and externally driven can be quite dynamic in individual languages, the segmental inventories in an area may appear to be relatively stable. In the context of this study, we note that Lao vowels conform neatly to the MSEA pattern (Enfield 2007:35):

Lao vowel segments

i i:	u u:	ɯ ɯ:	
e e:	ə ə:	o o:	
ɛ ɛ:	a a:	ɔ ɔ:	
ia	ua	ua	(+ au in Northern varieties)

+ 5 tones (1 level, 2 high-rising, 3 low-rising, 4 high-falling, 5 mid-falling)

The West Bahnaric languages are similarly typically SEAsian. Historically they are ‘unrestructured’ according to Huffman’s (1985) diachronic typology of MSEA vowel systems; that is they have not split into registers or developed tones, and can be regarded as relatively conservative. Those spoken off the plateau in the lowlands, such as Brao, have the following vowel inventory:

Brao vowel segments

i i:	i i:	u u:
e e:	ə ə:	o o:
ɛ ɛ:	a a:	ɔ ɔ:
ia	ia	ua

However, Laven and Nyaheun share some striking differences from the other West Bahnaric languages. They have innovated new contrasts, specifically a “new” vowel $\Lambda \sim \mathfrak{v}$ from earlier schwa, plus new diphthongs from older long monophthongs. Nyaheun in fact has two more diphthongs than Laven, but these are reconstructed as secondary innovations in which Nyaheun **ie**, **ue** < ***ia**, ***ua** before palatal codas. Allowing for this, we see that both languages have effectively innovated two vowel changes; these must have been shared areally after the languages had split from Proto West Bahnaric (Sidwell & Jacq 2003):

<i>Laven vowels:</i>			<i>Nyaheun vowels:</i>		
i i:	i i:	u u:	i i:	i i:	u u:
e e:	ə ə:	o o:	e e:	ə ə:	o o:
ɛ ɛ:	Λ Λ:	ɔ ɔ:	ɛ ɛ:	ɞ ɞ:	ɔ ɔ:
	a a:			a a:	
ie	iə	uo	ie	ie	iə
ia		ua	ue	ue	uo
			ia		ua

Note: Nyaheun **ie**, **ue** < ***ia**, ***ua** where the proto-final was +palatal.

3.2 Syllable/Word Structure

Like many MSEA languages, both Laven and Nyaheun have restructured sesquisyllables into monosyllables, although they have each done so quite differently. This is significant because the effect renders many cognate

words more or less unrecognizable as related unless one is aware of the principles of change involved. The changes are regular and discussed in detail by Sidwell and Jacq (2003), and in brief here.

Nyaheun speakers have restructured all morphemes and lexemes into monosyllables of the form C(C)V(C), with the only licit CC onsets being of two types: geminates and clusters with rising sonority (Cr, Cl, Cw, Cj, Ci). Laven restructuring has been less severe; many onset clusters and sesquisyllables have been reduced to monosyllables, while some are retained as hetero-organic clusters or pseudo-sesquisyllables. Specifically, Laven speakers have restructured:

- clusters with initial fricatives, palatals, and presyllables Cr-, into preaspirated stops or devoiced sonorants hC~Ç,
- prenasalized stops into preglottalized stops (with or without some phonetic nasalization), and
- vowel of monosyllables into very weak vocalic transitions where these have been retained.

Immediately below indicative Nyaheun forms are tabled in which onsets have become geminates, while cognate Laven forms have devoiced or historically voiceless onsets. For comparison Brao is included as a lowland West Bahnaric language, and other Austroasiatic cognates are given where available:

	Nyaheun	Laven	Brao	other
‘right (side)’	m:a:	ɱa:	cəma:	
‘finger’	p:uac	hp:uac	təɾpuac	
‘bean’	t:a:k	hta:k	hnta:k	Khmer <i>səntek</i>
‘turtle’	t:ɛ:k	ʔtʌ:k	ʔntə:k	Khmer <i>ʔandaək</i>
‘hoof’	c:ɔ:p	kʔo:p		Stieng <i>kəŋɔ:k</i>

The Nyaheun geminate onsets contrast structurally with rising sonority onsets exemplified below. The conditioning for these two onset types is discussed by Sidwell & Jacq (2003); note that the Laven cognates mostly reflect pseudo-sesquisyllables:

	Nyaheun	Laven	Brao	other
‘ghost/corpse’	gʔok	kʰsək	kəjak	
‘mortar’	dwaw	tʰpal	təwa:w	Khmer <i>tʰal</i>
‘to wash’	hra:	hta:	səda:	Palaung <i>kəta</i>
‘day’	nie, ŋje:	tʰŋaj	təŋaj	Khmer <i>tʰaj</i>
‘year’	ŋwɔ:, m:ɔ:	kʰmɔ:	kəma:	Katu <i>kama:</i>

Nyaheun’s gross reduction of onsets into just two strictly constrained types continues to an extreme a lenition process that occurred only partially in lowland West Bahnaric tongues. The latter include Brao, Oi, Cheng, Laveh and Sapuan; in these lects historical forms with oral stops in both presyllable and mainsyllable onsets saw lenition of the mainsyllable onsets, as in these examples:

	Laven	Nyaheun	Oi	Sapuan	Brao
‘alcohol’	tʰpɛ:	dwɛ:	təwɛ:	—	təwɛ:
‘mortar’	tʰpal	dwaw	təwaw	tva:w	təwa:w
‘earth’	pʰtɛh	bɾɛh	bədɛh	pədɛh	pədɛh
‘thick’	kʰbəl	gu:	kəwu:	—	kəwiw
‘charcoal’	kʰcah	gjah	—	—	kəjah

These data indicate that there was a historical split within West Bahnaric, with the lowland group sharing a restricted lenition of mainsyllable onsets, while Laven did not undergo this change. This places Nyaheun within the lowland group and is consistent with Nyaheun migrating up onto the plateau via the Great Gorge which divides the eastern slopes and provides access to the Sepian valley forests. The lenition rule evidently stalled in lowland West Bahnaric, while in Nyaheun it developed further eventually contributing to the complete monosyllabification of Nyaheun. The latter must have occurred after early Nyaheun became separated from Proto-West Bahnaric, presumably once they had established themselves on the plateau.

In an abstract sense one could say that both Laven and Nyaheun, living side by side on the plateau, have both moved towards monosyllabism, in contrast to lowland West Bahnaric languages, which robustly retain sesquisyllables. Yet the process has played out in very different ways in Laven and Nyaheun, with the effect

that we see dramatically different phonotactic outcomes in each language. Consequently, we must treat this tendency to monosyllables as independent in Laven and Nyaheun.

The evolution of Lao has also seen some phonological reduction in onsets, but this has been quite different to the West Bahnaric case. Lao onsets of the type *Cl and *Cr simplified to C and Ch respectively, so that only Cw arguably remains as a licit clustered onset. Yet Cl and Cr clusters remain licit in Laven and Nyaheun, except for cases where specific values of C are conditionally weakened. Additionally, thanks to substantial numbers of Khmer, Mon, and Pali loans, Lao has many sesquisyllabic words, e.g. *kata:jʰ* ‘rabbit’, *kata:l* ‘basket’ etc. and these forms are phonologically stable. Thus, it is clear that syllable restructuring that has occurred in Lao is quite different to what has happened in Laven and Nyaheun, and we can suggest that the Laven and Nyaheun changes discussed above occurred independently from any Lao influence, and quite probably before contact with Lao (or any Tai variety for that matter) ever occurred.

3.3 Interpretation of phonological history

The historical phonology suggests that Laven and Nyaheun began within different sub-groups of West Bahnaric, and the linguistic geography indicates that they migrated up onto the Boloven Plateau via different routes. And yet, these languages also share specific innovations in their vowel inventories that indicate a period of intimate contact in which the pronunciations of *i, *u, *ə, and *ɔ: changed in parallel manner in the same phonological contexts. While today and in the recent past the communities have had disparate social status, with the Nyaheun in an inferior position in relation to the Laven, it is reasonable to propose that they enjoyed little or no disparity when they first came into contact on the plateau. From the social-linguistic perspective, the shared changes in vocalism occurred after Laven and Nyaheun speakers came into close contact at an early phase of their life on the plateau, forming a local language area in which they shared some common linguistic changes, although not enough to erase their distinct linguistic identities. I suggest that subsequently, independent tendencies towards phonological reduction and monosyllabism played out in each speech community, leading to the striking phonotactic disparities found in the contemporary forms of the languages.

4 Syntax

4.1 Word Order

Below we see that Lao and Laven (as documented by Jacq 2001) show striking parallelism in the order of major clause constituents, and internal structures of NPs and VPs. The syntax of Nyaheun is not well documented and analysed, yet it is clear that Nyaheun is divergent in many respects, and this is discussed later below. Broadly speaking, word order in Lao and Laven is highly configurational; while pragmatic ordering is common, the basic pattern of structural slots in Lao kernel clauses is readily abstracted and illustrated as follows (Enfield 2007:171):

S/A	PRE-NEG	IRR	NEG	POST-NEG	ACHV	DIR	V(O)	POST-V	S-FINAL
	ASP-MOD			ASP-MOD				ASP-MOD	PARTICLES

Note: ACHV and DIR are the ‘achievement’ and ‘direction’ preverbs or co-verbs as commonly characterised in MSEA linguistics. We compare this to the structure of Laven clauses from Jacq (2001:420 expanded to compare more fully with Lao):

S/A	FUT	NEG	ASPECT	TENSE	MODAL	DIR	V(O)	ADV	S-FINAL
									PARTICLES

The structural characterisation of Laven clauses is expanded over the scheme offered by Jacq on the basis that she (p.216) discusses a ‘directional co-verb’ **rɛʔ**, semantically and syntactically equivalent to the Lao **paj3** DIR, while an equivalent to Lao ACHV is apparently missing in Laven. Within phrases the order of constituents in both Lao and Laven is strictly head-initial. This is normal for Austroasiatic languages under influence from Tai languages:

...Mon-Khmer languages exhibit head-initial characteristics, shared with Daic languages, and contrasting sharply with languages to the north and west (Dryer 2001:99)

Observing that that Lao and Laven have effectively the same ordering of constituents at clausal and phrasal levels we might characterise Laven as a relexified form of Lao.

By contrast, Nyaheun is apparently more flexible in word order than either Lao or Laven. In addition to finding many examples that follow Lao structurally, in my field notes I have found a strong tendency for intransitive subjects to occur after verbs, and this has also been noted as broad tendency among many other Austroasiatic languages (Jenny 2015). Speakers also often place the subject/agent immediately before the modal & main verb, so that negation and the aspectual marker precede the subject, or even for the negator to be relegated to the end of the clause. These patterns can be abstracted as follows, with the first line showing the dominant order in Lao and Laven and which is also common in Nyaheun, plus ordering patterns I have found attested in my corpus of Nyaheun texts:

S	Neg.	Asp.		Mod.	V(O)
	Neg.	Asp.	S	Mod.	V(O)
	Asp.	S	Mod.	V(O)	Neg.
S	Asp.		Mod.	V _{intrans}	
	Asp.		Mod.	V _{intrans}	S

At present, I cannot comment on how these variations in Nyaheun order may affect information structure. I can say that speakers appear to value a 2-4 beat (iambic rhythm), especially with rhyming/alliterating pairs in story telling, and will play with word order for stylistic reasons. This is often realised with reduplications and deletions as well as reordering elements within the constraints indicated above. The following examples show some of this variation in word order.

1) Nyaheun

ʔa:n bʌ:p hi: bʌ:m duok d̪ə:k ʔe:
 NEG father LOGOPH make boat REDUP that
 ‘His father wasn’t making a boat.’

2) Nyaheun

ʃia ŋuon rɛʔ ciʔ juan ʔa:n
 3DU want go return lead NEG
 ‘We don’t want to lead (you) (home)’ (must go alone).’

3) Nyaheun

kro: ... liaʔ lɔ:ŋ
 EXPR ... fall timber
 ‘Crash! The tree fell (down).’

4) Nyaheun

put to:c ke:t ɲak d̪u:
 quickly finish die demon manner
 ‘Quickly the demons died so’ (having taken poison).’

Interestingly, Thomas (1986), discussing South Bahnaric clause grammar, describes VS intransitive constructions in Mnong and Stieng, which he supposes “emphasise the verb” (although this notion is not further articulated). VS intransitives are evidently quite common in Bahnaric languages yet are not attested in Jacq’s corpus of Laven intransitives. While I cannot offer statistical confirmation, it is my impression that Nyaheun speakers make use of significantly more flexibility in word order than do Laven or Lao speakers; this certainly requires more empirical attention.

4.2 Grammatical Relations

4.2.1 Possessive

The Laven possessive marker **khə:ŋ** ‘of’ is a borrowing of Lao **khə:ŋ3** (lexically ‘things, stuff’). As in Lao, **khə:ŋ** is used as an optional/pragmatic indicator of possession, typically with tangible things, otherwise possessive constructions can be formed with simple parataxis of Possessed NP + Possessor NP.

5) Lao

mɛ:1 (khə:ŋ3) khə:j1 mi:t4 (khə:ŋ3) mə:3 nan4
 mother (of) 1SG knife (of) bloke that
 ‘your mother’ ‘that bloke’s knife’

6) Laven

han [ʔəh khə:ŋ ʔaj]
 3SG younger.sib of 1SG
 ‘He’s my younger brother.’

and as ‘thing’:

7) Laven

hməh ʔjuo saw ma ruat [khə:ŋ ca:]² hbiʔ ʔna:w
 name thing 2SG FUT buy thing eat evening new
 ‘What things will you buy for dinner tonight?’

Nyaheun presents a different strategy, having an optional possessive **man**³ post position, which follows the possessor. Otherwise, simple parataxis can be used. **khə:ŋ** is not used in Nyaheun.

8) Nyaheun

məp dɪk rə:ŋ ləh khian ʔa: man ʔɛ:
 EXCL get up look know food burning 1SG POSS EMPH
 ‘Suddenly, (he) got up to see if my food was burning.’

4.2.2 Logophoric pronoun

Nyaheun speakers employ a logophoric pronoun, **hi:**, which indexes subject (or topic? this requires more consideration) in discourse, and in reciprocal and possessive constructions. It was glossed as ‘my’ by Davis (1973) and ‘oneself’ by Ferlus (1998), and in the early 2000s in field work Jacq and I noticed that in longer discourse it **hi:** tracks the same subject over multiple mentions and clauses. E.g.:

47) Nyaheun

jɛ: hi: hʔə: ʔmɛ: ɓa:n hi:
 accidentally LOGOPH glimpse 3PL friend LOGOPH
 ‘(He) just caught a glimpse of his friend.’

In 2002, I heard **hi:** used as reciprocal in Lavi, which suggests that it is historically West Bahnaric. At the same time there is no equivalent noted for Laven.

² Patterns after Lao **khaw5 kin3** ‘food’ literally ‘rice-(to)eat’.

³ Cognate with Khmer /mien/ ‘have’.

4.2.3 *Aspect*

Laven uses **kamlaŋ**, from Lao **kamlaŋ2** (from a Khmer word meaning ‘strength/might’), to convey the progressive and inchoative aspects (‘about to start doing...’, ‘have just started doing...’). Lao grammars usually describe **kamlaŋ2** as marking progressive aspect, for example Enfield 2007 treats the following as synonymous:

9) Lao

<i>nam4 kamlaŋ2 fot2 ju:1</i>	<i>nam4 fot2 ju:1</i>
water PROG boil CONT	water boil CONT
‘The water is boiling (now).’	‘The water is boiling (now).’

Yet **kamlaŋ2** is often used as an inchoative in colloquial Lao; if one asks if something is happening yet, and the interlocutor intends to do so imminently, or has just done it a moment ago, he/she can reply with “*kamlaŋ2!*” emphasizing the immediacy of the new condition, already started or about to start. The same semantics apply in Laven, e.g.:

10) Laven

<i>pnam piəŋ da:k kamlaŋ ʔko:c</i>
village above water INCHO burn
‘The village upstream has just caught fire.’

11) Laven

<i>ʔa:p neʔ kamlaŋ tih</i>
rice this INCHO big
‘This rice (cooking in the pot) is now starting to swell up.’

Apparently **kamlaŋ** has not been observed used like this in Nyaheun, I have only noted the cognate form **klaŋ** being used with the lexical meaning ‘skillful/powerful’.

4.2.4 *Conjunctions*

Conservative Austroasiatic languages are relatively impoverished in coordinating conjunctions; speakers often merely employing pauses or using conjunctions borrowed from national languages. Subordinating or conditional conjunctions are common, often grammaticalised from verbs with meanings such as ‘to help’, ‘to arrive’ and such. Laven has borrowed various Lao conjunctions along with their semantics: **kap** ‘and/with’, **leʔ** ‘and’, **li:** ‘or’, **te:** ‘but’, **te:n** ‘instead of’, **ɲo:n** ‘because of’. The use of conjunctions is normal and pervasive in Laven, in contrast to Nyaheun.

12) Laven

<i>ʔaj ca: traw kap plaj ʔlo:ŋ</i>
I eat meat and fruit tree
‘I’m eating meat and fruit.’

In Laven **leʔ** ‘and’ can conjoin NPs, VPs, full clauses. It can also be used in place of **kap**, while the reverse does not apply. **leʔ** is also typically used when giving a list of things: ‘X and Y and Z...’, e.g.

13) Laven

<i>suan ʔaj kə:t hpoŋ leʔ cŋa:j leʔ makʔiʔ leʔ trəp</i>
garden I have cucumber and chili and pumpkin and eggplant
‘My garden has cucumber, chili, pumpkin and eggplant.’

Lao **li:3** ‘or’ and **te:1** ‘but’ optionally take a complementizer **wa:1**, although Laven does not follow this pattern as far as used has been documented.

In contrast, Nyaheun speech eschews conjunctions. Lao borrowings **li:** ‘or’, **tɛ:** (**wa:**) but, **ɲɔ:n** (**wa:**) ‘because’, **phat** ‘but’ (the latter not syntactically a conjunction in Lao) were occasionally noted, but simple parataxis, sometimes with prosodic pauses, is the dominant linking strategy; examples:

14) Nyaheun

brôô drök me kuan phat kiki seu
 EXPR leave EMPH child but small so
 ‘(Y)hey left (in a hurry), but the son was so small (he couldn’t...).’

15) Nyaheun

bi:-ʔuaj kap sa: ʔɛ: te:n nək ma:t ma:t nək
 parents.VOC bite you 3SG say struggle really struggle

the:.the: tɛ:.wa: məh ʔɛ: tiek klɑ:m
 really but sister 3PL EMPH brave
 ‘The (cannibal) parents (will) bite you, she said, really struggling, but those sisters were really brave.’

16) Nyaheun

sa:j ʔa: to:c ttu: to:c rɛʔ ɲɔ:n sa: nɛ:
 elder 1SG all flee all go because 2SG this
 ‘My older brothers all ran away because you (did) this.’

17) Nyaheun

mah mah si: kria ɗu: sək tɪŋ.hia ɗu:
 call/name REDUP name monster EMPH hair untidy EMPH
 ‘(They) called the monster Kreua (because of her) really untidy hair.’

18) Nyaheun

wɛ: drək kuo mi: wun bun wun khun wɛ:
 2PL go stay BEN have/get merit have/get benefit 2PL
 ‘(Whether) you go (or) stay may (you) have merit (and) good luck.’

19) Nyaheun

muʔ to:j bɔ:n ɲa:j ɗuk rɛʔ tə: mme: ʔkuat trəŋ
 elder.sib where place we know go see group lizard sp. lizard sp.
 ‘Older brother, where can we see the yellow tree monitor (or) edible wood lizard?’

In conditional clauses in Lao **khan2** is the regular ‘if/when’ conjunction, and Laven uses **khan** in the same manner:

20) Lao

khan2 *mɪŋ2 paj3, ku:3 ka paj3*
 if 2SG go 1SG LINK go
 ‘If you go, then I go.’

21) Laven

khan *ʔlɔ:ŋ ʔsoʔ ktɪəŋ kleh tɪəʔ htaw*
 if timber rotten bone fall down hole
 ‘When the timber is rotten the bones fall down the hole.’

22) Laven

khan kuan kɛ:t ʔmɛ: bi:m ri:t htəp
 if child die PERS do rite bury
 ‘If a child dies people perform a funeral.’

Nyaheun use a zero (pause) or **mɛn** as a conditional conjunction. The use of pauses in this function is areally common, but the absence of **khan** is notable:

23) Nyaheun

ʔɛ: ja:n naʔ ... mɛn ʔa:n ... ɲa:j ma ca:
 EMPH 2SG live ... if NEG ... 1PL FUT eat
 ‘You’re alive! If not .. we’d eat you.’ (Demon speaking).’

24) Nyaheun

the: kin ʔa:n naʔ ʔa: giet sa:
 true INT NEG PROG 1SG kill 2SG
 ‘Is it true? If not I will kill you.’

4.2.5 *Locatives*

Enfield lists various ‘denominal locative markers’ in Lao, one of these, **naj2** ‘inside’ has entered Laven as the regular term for ‘inside’. Note that in Lao it can be used with or without preceding locative verb **ju:1** ‘to be at’, while in Laven **naj** can be used with or without the locative preposition **hɛ:j**, mimicking the Lao pattern. By contrast **naj** has not been attested in Nyaheun. Examples follow:

25) Lao

phən1 naj1 (ju:1) naj2 hian2
 3SG sit (be.at) inside house
 ‘She is sitting inside the house.’

26) Laven

kə:t ʔjuo daj⁴ hɛ:j naj
 have thing some LOC inside
 ‘Is there anything inside (the container)?’

27) Laven

tu:j hnə:m ʔih ʔjuo naj
 each house NEG thing inside
 ‘Each house has nothing inside.’

4.2.6 *Post-Verbal Adverbs*

Laven speakers have apparently adopted Lao adverbs enthusiastically, a change I observed in progress. Lao **lɛ:j2**, glossed as NO.ADO (‘without ado’) by Enfield, and ‘further, too much’ by Kerr (1972) conveys the sense of going/doing further, e.g. you can tell a taxi driver ‘**paj3 lɛ:j2!**’ to go on and not stop yet. It is with the same sense that Jacq glosses Laven **lɛ:j** ‘keep on, continue’:

⁴ From Lao **daj3** ‘some; which’.

28) Laven

mo:ŋ ʔaj ʔih ke:t han dək lə:j
 clock 1SG NEG die 3SG go continue
 ‘My watch didn’t stop, it keeps going.’

29) Laven

ŋa:j ma rɛʔ lə:j haw bru:
 1PL FUT go continue climb mountain
 ‘We’ll go further up the mountain.’

Nyaheun speakers use the indigenous **naw** ‘new; more; again’, which has cognates throughout Bahnaric, and which seems to include the senses of ‘keep doing’ and ‘do it again’, as in these examples:

30) Nyaheun

klɔ: pah ra: mmɛ: blo: kuj naw
 man seven CLF person EXPR sleep more
 ‘Seven men, they are still sleeping.’

Lao **lɛ:w4** ‘already’ (‘post-verbal perfect’: Enfield) is also regularly used in Laven:

31) Lao

khacaw4 ma:2 lɛ:w4
 3PL come already
 ‘They have come.’

32) Laven

han rɛʔ lɛ:w
 3SG go already
 ‘They have arrived.’

The post-verbal **lɛ:w** competes with, or is used alongside of, the West Bahnaric preverbal **ba:c** perfective⁵ in Laven, while only **ba:c** is used by Nyaheun:

33) Laven

ʔaj ba:c taw ʔmɛ: klɔ: (lɛ:w)
 1SG PERF see person man (PERF)
 ‘I already saw the man.’

34) Nyaheun

maŋ bra:k ba:c bih mɛ:
 night peacock PERF arrive EMPH
 ‘(By) night the peacocks had arrived.’

Lao **kɔ:1 ciŋ3** ‘true enough’ (Kerr 1972, not discussed by Enfield) has become Laven **kcəŋ** ‘really, truly’ (incorrectly identified as an “indigenous adverb” by Jacq 2001):

⁵ In other Bahnaric languages, reflexes of this root have senses including ‘get, obtain, achieve’ and so resemble Lao **daj4** ‘acquire’ semantically.

35) Laven

ʔaj ma:t saw kcəŋ kcəŋ
 1SG love 2SG really really
 ‘I really really love you.’

Southern Lao **ma:t4** ‘much, a lot; very’ (not typically listed in dictionaries or grammars of Lao because it is considered too ‘Thai’ and not heard in Vientiane), often reduplicated, is a common intensifier in Laven. It also has the nuance of ‘authentic’. Note that the onset is preglottalized in Laven.

36) Laven

kjial ʔdeh ʔma:t ʔma:t
 1SG person very very
 ‘The wind is really cold!’

37) Laven

ʔaj pnus taʔ ʔo:j ... ʔih pnus jruʔ ʔma:t
 1SG person thing ... NEG person Jru’ very
 ‘I’m a Ta-Oy, not a real Jru’ person.’

Nyaheun speakers were occasionally heard to use **ma:t ma:t**, yet the lack of initial glottal may indicate that it is a recent Lao loan rather than an older nativized form.⁶ Nyaheun speakers have a huge repertoire of emphatics, including full and partial reduplicates, that are commonly used for such meanings. The use of ‘expressives’ is generally much more apparent in Nyaheun than Laven, the use of expressive vocabulary is characteristic of conservative Austroasiatic languages more generally (for an overview see Diffloth 1976, 1979, Sidwell 2013).

Lao **waj2** ‘fast, quickly’ has taken over from Laven **bɛŋ**; from 1999 I heard Laven speakers flipping between **bɛŋ** and **waj** in speech, and by 2005 I only heard **waj** used in Paksong:

38) Laven

han khien waj waj
 3SG write quickly quickly
 ‘He writes very quickly!’ (remarking on my taking notes).’

4.2.7 Calquing

Hearing Laven spoken, even in reasonably isolated villages like Ban Panuan (some 20kms into the forest where farmers still swidden and young children catch mice and lizards for breakfast if they are to get protein beyond what is doled out on ceremonial occasions), one hears a lot of transparently calqued Lao, especially greetings and interjections, as in these examples:

39) Laven

ha:j saw ma reʔ tam ha:j saw bih
 where 2SG FUT go from where 2SG come
 ‘Where are you going?’ ‘Where are you coming from?’

The above pattern semantically after a traditional Lao greeting:

⁶ There is are subtle mismatches in the length and voice onset timing of Lao oral and nasal stops vis-à-vis Laven and Nyaheun, and speakers of the latter are sensitive to this, especially among older speakers.

40) Lao

paj3 sa:3 ma:2 te:1 sa:3
 go where come from where
 ‘Where (are you) going?’ ‘Where (are you) coming from?’

Such greetings were common in Thailand but began to fall out of use in urban areas after the government decreed the new style **sawàt dii** (lit. ‘happy good’) in the 1930s,⁷ and Lao nationalists of the Issalat movement, not to be out done, popularised the analogous and now standard **saba:j3 di:3** (‘healthy/easy good’) (as I understand it from interviews with people who lived at the time).

Nyaheun speakers use greetings which are directly comparable to what I have heard from speakers of Bahnaric languages in Vietnam. These literally translate along the lines of “aren’t you ill?” or “aren’t you dead yet?”:

41) Nyaheun

ʔa:n jiʔ ʔa:n
 NEG ill/hurt Neg
 ‘Not ill?’ Response: ‘No!’

Another commonly heard calque is Laven speakers using **ʔih mɛ:n** ‘not true’ as an interjection or response, a calque of Lao **bəʔ mɛ:n1** ‘is not (so)’ (lit. ‘not be’).

4.2.8 *Verb concatenation and Resumptive Pronouns*

In both Laven and Lao one can concatenate verbs, reflecting complex events, pragmatically eliding arguments. For Lao, Enfield (2007:339) talks about, “long surface strings of up to six or more verbs”, of the following kind:

41) Lao

caw4 lɔ:ŋ2 ʔaw3 paj3 het1 kin3 bəŋ1 mɛ:4
 2SG try.out take go make eat look IMP
 ‘You go ahead and take (them) and try cooking (them) to eat!’

Similar strategies have been observed being used by Laven speakers:

42) Laven

ʔaj ma rɛʔ cak ʔam saw
 3SG FUT go get give 2SG
 ‘I will go get (some) and give (them) to you.’

43) Laven

ʔmɛ: bih cih kleh klah hmun hmun hmun
 3PL come discard fall explode destroy REDUP REDUP
 ‘They came, dropping (bombs), exploding, destroying destroying....’ (describing B52 raid)

Nyaheun speakers on the other hand don’t appear to like to do this, and instead prefer to give or repeat the relevant argument(s), especially as pronouns. Davis (1973) mentions this in cases where pairs of semantically similar verbs are used, as follows:

⁷ Between 1939 and 1942 the Thai government issued 12 cultural degrees for the purpose of creating a uniform national culture, in the context of the nation building efforts inspired by events in central European nations at the time. These appeared in The Royal Gazette, facsimiles can be retrieved online at <http://www.ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/>.

44) Nyaheun

mme: *ŋgən* *ʔa:* *drək* *ʔa:* *rɛʔ* *hɔʔ* *niŋ* *krim*
 3PL carry 1SG set off ISG go LOC above sky

‘They carried me as I went I went up into the sky.’

I have recorded the repetition of subject pronouns in wider contexts, and I speculate that it may have something to do with the preferred iambic speech rhythm, with the pronoun taking the unstressed beat:

45) Nyaheun

ʔa: *drək* *ʔa:* *rɛʔ* *ʔa:* *ruat* *ʔa:* *bih*
 1SG set off ISG go ISG buy ISG come

‘I’m off (to market) to buy (something) and return.’

Here is an example with aspect marker:

46) Nyaheun

ʔa: *bɔ:c* *ʔa:* *rɛʔ* *hmɛ:* *tɛ:n*
 1SG PERF ISG go so say

‘I’m going, he said’

Laven speakers are aware of this Nyaheun pattern but reject it as uncivilized or baby talk. I have not observed this use of presumptive pronouns in related languages of the area, but that might be an artifact of limited observation.

5 Conclusion

What can we make of these differences and similarities between Laven and Nyaheun? Several linguistic points are evident, 1) Laven and Nyaheun shared some innovations in their vowel systems, which are assumed to be a result of contact, since they fall into different West Bahnaric sub-groups, 2) the two languages diverged in reducing syllable complexity, and 3) Laven has converged syntactically on Lao, while Nyaheun has retained various archaic features and possibly innovated independently, although this requires further study.

As noted already above, we can reasonably assume that both communities had rather similar lifestyles and social status around the times that they settled on the Boloven Plateau and there eventually came into contact and appear to have shared some specific phonological innovations. However, with the coming of Lao rule, the Laven were acculturated to Lao, dramatically restructuring the language into a largely re-lexified version of Lao (although without the phonological tones of Lao). Many Laven became farmers trading with the lowland mainstream, and the status of Laven rose in relation to the neighboring Nyaheun, who were mostly living in the forests of the eastern plateau as subsistence swiddeners and gatherers, some even into current times. Nyaheun retains many linguistic archaisms and the evident borrowing from Lao appears to be on a much smaller scale than observed for Laven, indicative of prolonged isolation (whether internally or externally driven, this is not quite clear). There remains a strong sense of low social status among Nyaheun, who have been marginalized and even forcibly dispossessed, while the Laven enjoy relatively equal status and good relations with the local rural Lao.

Appended is my speculative *Schematic Reconstruction of Social-Linguistic History in the Boloven Region*. The attempt is to align known regional history and reconstructed linguistic history to model social-linguistic correlations, drawing heavily on the discussion in Sidwell & Jacq (2003). The main historical factors that I have tried to correlate with the linguistic history are the fall of Angkor and withdrawal of Khmer rule from the Champasak region, followed by several centuries of no apparent state control, followed by the assertion of Lao rule following the founding of Lao Champasak Kingdom in 1713, and more or less increasing Lao and Siamese influence in the region since then. The intermediate period of no externally imposed government is a candidate for the supposed period of similar social status between Laven and Nyaheun, in which common vowel innovations were shared. Subsequently, the Lao progressively exerted increasing influence over the Laven, but not the Nyaheun, who for whatever reasons preferred the isolation of their forest life (much as described by Wall 1975). During those several hundred years of now separate development Nyaheun did not assimilate metatypically to Lao, but instead continued down a path of radical phonological change further developing a trend that emerged only to stall in lowland West Bahnaric. A kind of partial

monosyllabification did occur in Laven, but it has no apparent regional correlates or parallels, so it is regarded as an independent Laven innovation.

This brief excursion into reconstructing social interaction and change, supported by linguistic data, advances a series of hypotheses that hold the potential to be investigated and further developed by integrating additional data on the bases of multiple disciplines. Specific hypotheses may be found to be valuable while others could be wrong-headed; the overarching synthesis offered here is satisfying as a coherent narrative but that does not make it more likely to be more faithful to historical reality, each component must hold up under scrutiny. Looking forward, more research on the micro-level of language interaction and change and correlates with social factors may also deliver more useful generalizations and ways of interpreting linguistic facts in historical contexts. My hope is that this paper stimulates thought in this regard while also contributing concretely to our understanding of the history of southern Laos and surrounds as an ethnically and culturally diverse region.

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Appendix: Schematic Reconstruction of Social-Linguistic History in the Boloven Region

Chronology	Local History/Social Circumstances		Consequences		
	Lowlands	Plateau	Laven	Nyaheun	Other West Bahnaric
pre-8thC > 9thC Chenla period	<p>Khmer dominance Khmers build Wat Phu complex at Champasak Locals caught up in a Śaivist (Hindu) cashless command economy</p>		<p>Proto West Bahnaric phase north of plateau language area with Katuic and Khmer</p> <p># Massive lexical borrowing Khmer</p> <p style="text-align: right;"> ↗Katuic ↘West Bahnaric </p> <p># phonological leveling</p>		
802-1431 Angkorian Period	<p>Late Angkor period marked by war with Champa, then Siam, and collapse of authority in the Champasak region</p>		<p>West Bahnaric differentiates into sub-groups, one expands southward down Sekong Valley, another to the north of the plateau</p> <p>#Geographical differentiation of Khmer loans into WB</p>		
1431-1713 No Khmer state No strong external political force in immediate region	<p>Lowland WB form widely scattered paddy farming villages connected by river.</p>	<p>Laven and Nyaheun independently colonise plateau Communities cooperate, intermarry No great status disparities</p>	<p>Plateau language area forms</p> <p># vowel height elaboration</p> <p># first phase of syllable restructuring : lenition of weak initial consonants Isolation? Drift?</p>	<p>Lawi in situ Oi, Brao etc spreading south</p>	
1713 > founding of Lao Champasak Kingdom. Late 18th to late 19thC vassal of Siam.	<p>Lao mandarins tax locals and control external trade</p>	<p>Trade route develops from Plateau westward to Champasak; Cardamom, pepper, forest goods. Alliance of local elite Lao & Laven control trade</p>	<p>Identify with Lao as source of relative status</p> <p># restructure syntactically > Lao</p>	<p>Subordinated to Laven, locked out of status opportunities</p> <p># Grammar stable, # Accelerated syllable restructuring</p>	<p>‘Normal’ lowland paddy farmers</p> <p># Linguistic stability, with creeping Lao contact</p>
20thC French period	<p>Integration into regular lowland rice farming economy</p>	<p>Coffee and beef become important cash earners on plateau</p>	<p>Relative equal status with Lao</p>	<p>Marginalized, loss of lands and assets</p>	<p>Assimilating with influx of Lao settlers</p>
Present time	<p>Rapid social change and modernization</p>		<p>Language shift to Lao among younger generation</p>		

IN NEED OF *DAUGHTERS OF GOOD LINEAGE*: PLACING GENDER IN MYANMAR'S BUDDHIST NATIONALIST DISCOURSE

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Abstract

On August 26, 2015, the Myanmar government passed *the Race and Religion Protection Laws* or *myosaun ubade* proposed by Wirathu, founder of The Patriotic Association of Myanmar (*Mabatha*). This paper analyzes the gender ideologies embedded in the choice of High and Low reference register in Burmese language for women in the Myanmar-Buddhist Women's Special Marriage Law as part of *myosaun ubade*. The choice of High register reference term *amyothamee* (daughter of lineage) in the rhetoric of *myosaun ubade* evokes a shared anxiety among the public and recruits other ethnic and religious minorities to join in the Burman Buddhist nationalistic agenda. By putting gender at the center of a linguistic analysis, I argue that Burman Buddhist nationalist discourses downplay ethnoreligious diversity and attempt to create a sense of alliance among the citizens of Myanmar.

Keywords: gender, religion, register, law, rhetoric
ISO 639-3 codes: mya

1 Introduction: A Lineage at Risk

On an early evening in May in 2012, the body of a Rakhine¹ Buddhist girl, Ma² Thida Htwe, was found on an embankment road near Kyauknimaw village in Yanbye township in Myanmar's northwest state of Rakhine, raped and stabbed to death. On June 5, 2012, the government-owned national newspaper *The New Light of Myanmar* published a story stating that local police had identified "three murderers" of Ma Thida Htwe; their names, their fathers' names, and the village they were from were announced alongside their ethnoreligious identities as "Bengali/Islam." According to the story, approximately 100 Rakhine nationals demanded that local police release the suspects to them. In order to avoid potential racial riots, the local police transferred the suspects to Kyaukphyu³ city jail. Conflicts between Myanmar's majority religious group, Buddhists, and others, especially those of Islamic faith, existed prior to the death of Ma Thida Htwe. However, the ethnoracial and religious identification of Ma Thida Htwe's three alleged murderers has backdropped the ongoing ethnic cleansing of the *Rohingya* population, a primarily Islamic ethnic minority residing in Rakhine state. The case has also played a fundamental role in Myanmar's 2015 implementation of the Interfaith Marriage law, prohibiting Buddhist women of Myanmar from marrying men of other faiths. The following question is necessary: What role do women, as the gender inferior, play in Burman Buddhist nationalist anti-Muslim discourse?

The nature of Ma Thida Htwe's crime sensationalized the public discourse around race, ethnicity, gender, and religion in Myanmar. One of the prominent voices was *Ashin*⁴ *Wirathu*, a Buddhist monk from Mandalay. Wirathu has been active in the anti-Muslim movement in the country, long before Ma Thida Htwe's death. He was born in 1968 in Kyaukse, a town 25 miles south of Mandalay, and at the age of 14, he left school and entered monkhood. Because of his involvement in the extreme Buddhist nationalist movement,⁵ he was

¹ Rakhine is the northwestern state of Myanmar bordering Bangladesh. It is recognized as one of the eight major ethnic groups in Myanmar.

² *Ma* is an honorific term as used here for young women in Burmese.

³ A major town in Rakhine state.

⁴ An honorific title for Buddhist monks in Burmese, similar to the English term *Venerable*.

⁵ The movement is known as the "969" movement. The numbers represent the virtues of the Buddha. The first denotes the nine attributes of the Buddha; the 6 signifies the six attributes of the *dhamma*; and the last 9 symbolizes the nine attributes of the *sangha* (monks).

imprisoned in 2003 (Hodal April 2013). In 2012, he was released under the presidential pardon for political prisoners. Since his release, he has continued to offer sermons and public speeches that promote anti-Muslim sentiments. His sociopolitical involvement as a Buddhist monk led him to be featured on the *Time Magazine* cover in 2013 as the “Buddhist Face of Terror.” The alleged rape crime of Ma Thida Htwe, a Rakhine Buddhist girl, by a group of Muslim Bengali men became a persuasive fact for Wirathu, which he used not only to support his anti-Muslim sermons and public speeches, but also to reinforce the sentiment through legal measures at a national level. Wirathu and his public discourses have done much to normalize anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The regulation of Buddhist female bodies has become part of this rhetoric, and Wirathu’s plans to police and legalize Buddhist women’s forms of intimacy are attempts to deal with anti-Muslim anxieties in Myanmar. In 2013, together with nationalist Buddhist monks across the country, Wirathu formed *The Patriotic Association of Myanmar*, later renamed the *Buddha Dhamma Charity Foundation*.⁶ In the same year, Wirathu drafted the Interfaith Marriage Law, known formally as the Myanmar Buddhist Women’s Special Marriage Law.⁷ He later drafted and added three laws on population control, religious conversion, and monogamy. Wirathu referred to the set of four laws as *myosaun ubade* (lit: The Keep the Lineage laws) or, more formally, as the Race and Religion Laws of Myanmar. On August 26, 2015, the Myanmar Parliament passed *myosaun ubade*. Since its passing, various non-profit organizations and scholars have denounced the content and intention of the laws as being in defiance of the United Nation’s Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Barrow 2015). Burman nationalist ethnoracial and gender ideologies however helped achieve the drafting and the passing of these laws. Much of the scholarship on anti-Muslim ethnic violence in contemporary Myanmar correctly argues that in the nation’s public discourse, ethnic diversity has been framed in terms of religion (see Turner 2014; Gravers 2015; Holt 2019). Here, I argue that while ethnic minorities may be spared violence if they are Buddhist, this process rests on a far less analyzed feature: its patriarchal foundations. By putting gender at the center of a linguistic analysis, I find that Burman Buddhist nationalist discourses are able to evoke a shared anxiety among the public and to recruit other ethnic and religious minorities of the nation.

2 Marking Difference

Myanmar’s nationwide anti-Muslim sentiments are disseminated and perpetuated through a variety of semiotic systems. We must first understand the process of marking ethnoracial and gender difference in Myanmar. The social categories such as ethnoraciality,⁸ religion, and gender are (re)produced through their representations in everyday life. Those representations are not merely extensions of their pre-existence, but they are also perpetuated in certain societal norms. The process of differentiation is performed either through language or metapragmatic discussion of language use of the targeted Other. Linguistic anthropologists have theorized this phenomenon as *language ideologies*, analyzing the mapping of people, events, or activities onto certain linguistic varieties and their characteristic linguistic features (Woolard & Schieffelin 1994; Irvine & Gal 2000). These ideologies are never purely about language, but deeply intertwined with moral and political interests (Irvine & Gal 2000).

Marking the *Rohingya* as ethno-racially different has been effective. In fueling a genocide, their linguistic differentiation is reinforced by other forms of social differentiation.⁹ As Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin (1994) argue, language ideologies are at times not concerned with the linguistic structure of the language itself but manifested in a variety of sociocultural semiotic devices associating with the language such

⁶ The headquarters of the association is in *Ma Soe Yein* (lit: ‘Do not worry’), a Buddhist monastery in Inn Sein township, Yangon. *Ma Soe Yein* is a branch of the monastery, originally from Mandalay that trains monks to enter sermonizing career and they are recognized as the best and the most restrictive and productive of sermonizing Buddhist monks in Myanmar. See Keeler (2017).

⁷ I refer to this as the “interfaith marriage law” throughout this paper.

⁸ I use the term *ethnoraciality* here to hint at ways in which the concept of ethnicity functions as race as understood in the west. That is, ethnicity in the Myanmar context does not just denote cultural distinctiveness but also biological or genetic difference among groups.

⁹ As of January of 2020, after the International Criminal Court at the Hague ruled that Myanmar must implement provisional measures to protect the Rohingya Muslims from violence and possible genocide. See https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/international-court-of-justice-orders-myanmar-to-prevent-genocide-against-the-rohingya/2020/01/23/ff383ff4-3d29-11ea-afe2-090eb37b60b1_story.html.

as aesthetics, morality, and epistemology. It is therefore useful to think Myanmar's anti-Rohingya crisis through Webb Keane's (2003:419) theorization of *semiotic ideologies*—“basic assumption about what signs are and how they function in the world.” The concept of semiotic ideologies broadens that of language ideology. Keane calls the interrelationship between multiple semiotic devices a *representational economy* where semiotic ideologies are ways in which those devices are rationalized or represented. The ethnoraciality of the *Rohingya* as the Other on the grounds of language semiotically interacts with other social categories such as religion and gender.

The status of the *Rohingya* as the ethnoracial Other is thus marked both by language and by religion. Buddhist nationalists like Wirathu use gender to address those differences. Legal discourses like the Interfaith Marriage Law are sites through which those semiotic variables marking an ethnoreligious Other come together. Ethnoracial difference is usually a driving force behind the legal rhetoric, but religion is cleverly chosen as an appropriate vehicle to highlight the difference between mainstream Buddhists and *Rohingya*. Meanwhile, gender is put forth as a means to strengthen the alliance among Buddhists.

3 Legalizing Intimacy

The 2015 passage of *myosaun ubade* coincided with the systematic targeting of the *Rohingya* population by the Myanmar government, but the ways in which the set of laws in *myosaun ubade* were drafted and implemented were not new in Myanmar legal discourse. The Myanmar Buddhist Women's Special Marriage law was a revamped version of the 1939 Buddhist Women's Special Marriage Succession Act, which was later updated in 1954 (Couch 2016). In 1938, the race riots broke out in colonial Burma and resulted in the death of over 200 people and 1,000 injured, most of them Muslims. The interfaith marriages between Buddhist women and men of other faiths were perceived as threats and a betrayal to anti-colonial nationalism at the time. As a result, the *Thathana Mamaka Young Sanghas Association* suggested the implementation of an interfaith marriage law to resolve racial tensions.

With this suggestion, the colonial authorities implemented the 1939 Buddhist Women's Special Marriage Succession Act into the *Myanmar dale thontan ubade*, or the Myanmar Customary Laws. The Act mandated the registration of these interfaith marriages and ruled to override laws of other faiths on the issues of property rights, guardianship, and divorce concerning such marriages.¹⁰ The anxieties and the rhetoric around the 1939 Interfaith Marriage Law bear a striking resemblance to the 2015 passage of *myosaun ubade*. The anti-Muslim sentiments foreground the emergence the 1939 and 2015 laws. These laws came about both as vehicles through which the nation articulates its anxieties towards ethnoreligious Others, especially Muslims, and as attempts to resolve these anxieties.

4 Forming a Lineage Alliance

The conceptualization of ethnoraciality and citizenship in the Myanmar context has always been “emergent.”¹¹ During the colonial period, the ethnoracial diversity allowed the British to instill a sense of differentiation among ethnic groups (see Ikeya 2011).¹² In the post-colonial era after 1948, the military regime attempted to revert that colonial discourse on ethnoraciality. The regime granted citizenship to those who claimed indigenous ties to the precolonial land.¹³ In 1989, the military regime changed its name from *Burma* to *Myanmar* on the grounds that the former name was tied to the colonial past.¹⁴ The state claims to include all citizens of different ethnic backgrounds with the name change, and not just of ethnic-majority, Burman, from which the old name appeared to have derived during the colonial time. The new name Myanmar literally means

¹⁰ See Couch (2016) for detail discussion on historical narrative of the emergence of the 1939 Special Marriage Succession Act.

¹¹ Here, I reference the theorization of identity as emergent in interaction and performance rather than fixed (cf., for example, Hymes 1975).

¹² See the memoir *Miss Burma* by novelist Charmaine Craig for the account on Karen-Burman ethnic tensions during the colonial times.

¹³ See the 1982 Burma Citizenship Law.

¹⁴ The final *r* is a phonological representation of long vowel in Burmese and not actually pronounced in speech. So, the actual pronunciation is *Myanma* or in *mjəŋma:* in International Phonetic Alphabet transcription. There have been popular rumors among the public that the military generals worked with a psychic medium in choosing the new name.

fast and strong (*myaṅ*: fast and *ma*: strong). The regime hoped for a fresh start in its post-colonial nation-building process with the change in all English proper names into modern literary Burmese pronunciation.

However, the new name has not always been well-received among the public. Each name for the country became socioculturally charged among the citizens by their experience of the regime that supported it. Some still resent the old name Burma due to its association with the country's colonial past. Some reject the new name Myanmar, as it was reinforced by the authoritative regime and a reminiscence of public fear and anxieties (see Skidmore 2004).¹⁵ The adjectival reference, Burmese, which is a polysemous term used to refer to both someone from Myanmar and of Burman descent, has also begun to be contested.¹⁶ As a result, the country is still referred to as both Burma and Myanmar. These terminologies are emblematic examples of the fusion of ethn racial and language ideologies in Myanmar sociopolitical discourse. Each citizen can choose either term according to their sociopolitical stance towards Myanmar. On the other hand, the state instills its own sociopolitical “imaginary” (Appadurai 1996) through the choice of the new term in formal settings as in legal documents and in selective languages (such as English and Burmese, but not ethnic minority languages of Myanmar or other Western languages).¹⁷

The country's name(s) were nowhere to be found in the 1939 and 1954 Interfaith Marriage Laws, which concerned the religious faith of its female citizens. However, in the 2015 law, the religious faith is further complicated by ethn raciality with the use of the term Myanmar. One could argue that the country's name was not used in either 1939 or 1954 laws because they were written prior to the formal declaration of the 1989 name change. While this argument is plausible, Couch (2016) calls Myanmar legal rhetoric the “Burmese Buddhist laws” due to their specific subjection onto the Buddhist citizens of Myanmar. The 1939 and 1954 Interfaith Marriage laws joined the rhetoric of the Burmese Buddhist laws and colonial era's focus on Burman Buddhist women of Myanmar. Women of other religions were not subjected to these laws but rather by the laws of their respective faiths. Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall's relationality principle through which identities are intersubjectively created or reinforced is illuminating here. Bucholtz and Hall (2005:598) discuss that people or entities like the Myanmar state construct identities by contrasting similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy. By using the term Myanmar both in its official name, *Myanmar Buddhist Women's Special Marriage law*, and throughout the content of the law, the state reconstructs ethn racial identities based on similarity, i.e., a shared religion, and lessens ethn racial difference. As a result, the 2015 law, together with other sets of *myosaun ubade*, “alter[s] Burmese Buddhist laws” (Couch 2016:86) and extends its applicability to non-Buddhist citizens of Myanmar.

The use of the new name Myanmar in *myosaun ubade* is indicative of the laws' mandating of not just Buddhist women but also women of other ethn racial identities of the Buddhist faith. Religion is presented as an umbrella identifier for the subjects of the law. Ethn racial difference within those who share the same religion is downplayed. Wirathu claims that *myosaun ubade* promises to “protect not just Myanmar women, but any women,” including Christian and Hindu women (2015). Despite this claim, he synonymizes *Myanmar* with mainstream Burman Buddhism. Wirathu attempts to include women of other ethn racialities indexed by religious faiths (Christianity and Hinduism) in his discourse. The rhetoric of ethn racial inclusion is a subtle but direct reference to the rape and murder of Ma Thida Htwe, who was Buddhist but not Burman. Usually, it is not the case to prioritize one's religious faith over her ethn racial identity. It is in fact the other way around.¹⁸ However, in the case of a legal document like *myosaun ubade*, ethn racial and religious differences among the citizens are downplayed, and differences between the indigenous citizens and those who considered as immigrants are heightened. The legal rhetoric prioritizes the shared grounds of religion to form a lineage

¹⁵ I observe these claims among my own community of Burman ethnic Burmese speakers, both in the diaspora and within the country.

¹⁶ I have written an op-ed article in Burmese on the potential adjectival terms in place of Burmese such as Myanmar, Myanmari, or Myanmarese in Los Angeles-based Burmese language newspaper *Myanmar Gazette* catering to the immigrants from Myanmar and publishing monthly in Burmese.

¹⁷ McCormick (2016) says, “the change from Burma to Myanmar affects only English, and no other languages (French, Thai, or the indigenous languages of Burma other than Burmese) have been forced to modify their usage.” Both the change in English and in Burmese are enough in appealing to national and global language ideology denoting the ethn raciality of the country.

¹⁸ I have demonstrated elsewhere that the question of one's ethn racial identity, even among the citizens, is always interrogated (Chu May Paing forthcoming).

alliance among its own diverse ethnoreligious citizens. Only by addressing the gendered features of this shifting rhetoric does it become clear that the burden to maintain a *pure* ethnoreligious population falls more heavily on female subjects.¹⁹ Indeed, it is only when considering this gendered framework that the nature of the violence against *Rohingya* is clear.

5 Keep the Lineage, but Whose Job Is It?

For the Myanmar state, a shared Buddhist identity highlights the collective or at least similar lineage among its ethnolinguistically diverse citizens. But when the risk of that lineage arises, the question of *responsibility* and *authority* to handle such risk follows. Gender is put forth as a solution. The focus on gender as a strategy in political domination can appear to advocate equality between men and women, but also as a point for political differentiation. For example, the appraisal for gender equality was used to differentiate Burman culture from its neighboring cultures.²⁰ Mi Mi Khaing (1984:13) claims,

while Mohammedan and Hindu women are shut up in harems and senanas, the Burmese women walk the streets with heads erect, puffing their huge cheroots without the slightest thought of being the ‘weaker vessel.’

Colonial missionaries, however, viewed this perceived gender equality among Burman people as a sign of backwardness and primitivism (see Trager 1966). They focused on recruiting ethnic minorities like Karen, whom they considered to bear a greater gender inequality, for religious conversion. Gender became “a site at which ‘civilization’/ethnicity/religious identity were encoded and contested” in colonial discourses (Tinzar Lwyn 1994:64). Scholars have, however, pointed out the limits of Burman gender equality, and argued that it was only ever observable among elites, not the general population (see Tharaphi Than 2011 and Ikeya 2011).

Colonial gender ideology has been repurposed among post-colonial mainstream Burman society. During the immediate post-colonial period, men were tasked with duties to reform the nation, whereas female bodies became a source of fuel for reclaiming Burman masculinity,²¹ both among laymen and even *sangha*. The colonial view on non-Burman ethnic men as belonging to “martial races,” who were then recruited into British militarization diminished the status of Burman men, consequentially challenging their sense of masculinity (Ikeya 2011). In one of his public speeches promoting *myosaun ubade*, Wirathu exclaims the lack of eligible bachelors because of their commitment to monkhood as a primary reason why Buddhist women entered interfaith marriages. Although Wirathu did not offer a solution to this reason, his anxiety around policing interfaith marriages seems to stem from the need to rescue Burman Buddhist masculinity, even threatening celibate monks. For Burman men, including *sangha*, women are safeguard through which they portray their manliness and virility. Women are therefore *responsible* for post-colonial Burman re-masculation. Their *authority* and *agency* are left to question.

Buddhist women’s agency is entangled in Burman nationalist discourse. The sentiments about women’s political role as responsible, but not dominant, bearers of lineage, influence the attitudes towards women’s sociocultural role as wives and mothers. Stoljar (2000) theorizes such understanding of covert feminine power as *substantive autonomy*, the agency to participate in traditional sociocultural gender roles, without necessarily having full consciousness of the agency inherent in that participation. Women in or seen as prone to interfaith marriages are painted as “honest, naive, dumb, friendly, gullible, affectionate, and ashamed” (Wirathu 2015).²² In their anti-Muslim agenda, nationalists like Wirathu discursively play with elevating women as *powerful queens* whose hands hold the future of Burman Buddhist lineage while reminding them of the legs that hold up such a throne, the men. Burman Buddhist nationalist discourses on female agency are narrated from the standpoints of substantive autonomy.

¹⁹ See Douglas’s (1966) seminal theorization of symbolic purity and pollution in *Purity and Danger*.

²⁰ Interestingly, I observed such gender ideologies even among Burmese Muslim women in the refugee community in Colorado attempting to differentiate themselves from their female *Rohingya* Muslim neighbors. The statements such as “her husband is more restrictive than mine because they are *Rohingya*” were expressed to me. I suspect that this is the mirroring of the discussion on ethnoracial difference among Myanmar citizens, but further ethnographic data is needed to make such a conclusion.

²¹ See Ikeya’s (2011) discussion on policing the fashion and style of *khit hsan thu* (modern women) in colonial nationalist discourses to reclaim Burman masculinity.

²² See Wirathu’s public speech at an unknown village in Myanmar promoting *myosaun ubade* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESiPocP5e7E>

The role and existence of a woman is always represented dyadically: woman-man, mother-child, wife-husband, daughter-parent, and so forth. Even *powerful queens* are deferential to *their kings*. I want to highlight two reference terms for *queen* in Burmese language here: *bayinma* (lit: female king) and *miphaya* (lit: female god). The former is used for a queen who rules a kingdom without a male spouse and the latter refers to a king's spouse. *Bayinma* therefore denotes the sole autonomous role of a ruling queen and *miphaya* is a relational and deferential role to the ruling king. Wirathu and nationalist discourses do not employ such terms, but the gender ideology embedded in them does emerge from ideas about *miphaya*, a woman at a position of power but still subservient and deferential to a man. This gender ideology is espoused in the language of the 2015 Interfaith Marriage law. For instance, even non-Burman Buddhist men still hold authority to *allow* (*kwinphyu*, lit: let an opportunity) or *disallow* the Buddhist women to practice Buddhist religion as seen in Chapter 3 of the law below:

[A man of other faiths] is to *allow* the Buddhist woman to donate according to religion, to worship, to recite to ward off evil (payeik), to tell (one's) beads, to listen to religious sermons, to practice religious meditations, to visit Pagodas and Monasteries, to fast, to read and study literature relating to Buddhism (Chapter 3, Part 24, Myanmar Women's Special Marriage law).²³

6 Women in the Words

Upon the 2015 passage of *myosaun ubade*, local activists and organizations working on gender issues were quick to point out the discriminatory undertone towards women in the laws. One salient example through which such gender ideologies are manifested is in the choice of reference terms towards women in the discourses *of* and *about* the Interfaith Marriage law. Burmese, a language reflective of its hierarchical social structure, is a two-register language: formal literary (High) and informal spoken (Low) (Bradley 2011). Most lexical terms therefore have alternative forms one might use in different social encounters. The High reference term for woman in Burmese is *amyothamee* (lit: daughter of lineage) and its male counterpart reference is *amyotha* (lit: son of lineage). The use of these register terms “socially enregister” the relationship by establishing or evoking certain stereotypes about the person addressed (Agha 2007). For instance, a person usually refers to a person whom they just met by the High term rather than Low term and this use denotes a sense of social distance between the two persons. The terms can also refer to a husband or wife.²⁴ In the case of Burmese, these register terms not only establish a social relationship between one another but also their gendered roles as citizens are “iconized” (Irvine & Gal 2000) in the eye of the nation-state. For instance, both High references denote citizens' relationship to their lineages. In addition, the High male reference term *amyotha* is the default for concepts of nationality and patriotism as in *amyotha nae* (son of lineage.day); *amyotha thachin* (son of lineage.anthem); *amyotha yeya* (son of lineage.affairs); and so on.

The Low register term for woman is *mainma* and for man is *youkkya*. They are also used to mean husband and wife, but in spoken and informal contexts. For instance, a boyfriend refers to his girlfriend as *kò mainma* (my wife or my woman) and vice versa to denote the nature of closer intimacy (perhaps sexual) between them although they are not legally married. The Low register term for ‘woman’ is also widely found in sexualized contexts such as *mainmasha* (gay or sissy, lit: woman's tongue); *mainmapyat* (prostitute, lit: damaged woman); *mainmashwin* (prostitute, lit: happy woman); *mainmako* (vagina, lit: woman body); *mainmapó* (morally loose woman, lit: light woman); and more. It is also found in derogatory descriptions of femininity or effeminacy such as *mainmalomainmaya* (narrow-minded or womanish, only used to describe effeminate men); *mainmanyman* (womanish artifice, lit: woman's knowledge).

The Low register term for man is, however, non-existent in those contexts. Some of the terms found with the Low register male reference are *youkkya batha* (strong man, used as an exclamatory cry in rallying sports); *minhka youkkya* (man in a royal entourage, lit: man who serves the King). In these ways, and like many honorific registers found cross-linguistically, these terms reference a person and the user's social stance towards the referenced person. Gender ideologies towards men and women are asymmetrical even in the same

²³ All English translation of the Interfaith Marriage law is an unofficial English translation published by the Congress and is available on the Online Burma Library.

²⁴ There has been a diachronic change in the use of the High register male reference term. In literature written in the 1940s, *amyotha* was used to refer to boyfriends and husbands, whereas nowadays, the term is only used exclusively to refer to husbands.

register. The Low register term for man does not indicate pejorative connotation and yet it is not the case for woman as seen in Burmese lexicon above. For instance, popular Burman song entitled “Minkha Youkkyā” (lit: the man who serves the King), by Shan male singer Sai Htee Saing and recorded in the 1970s, laments the lovesickness of a modern-day soldier in a battlefield far away from the city.²⁵ In contrast, another popular song entitled “Dathà lo Mainma” (a woman like dathà) by Burman female singer May Sweet, evokes the character *Ravana belu*²⁶ or widely known in Myanmar as *dathà*, a man-eating humanoid with ten heads, from the Myanmar’s epic *Yama Zatdaw*²⁷ to denote a wicked woman who attempts to destroy a love affair, nonetheless left heartbroken at the end.²⁸ Although registers are designated for formal vs. informal settings, the choice of the terms still rests in the tongue of the speakers and indexes a wide array of social positionalities towards the referenced person. As a result, gendered deference and respect towards the men is grammaticalized in those terms (see Irvine 1992). Therefore, it is noteworthy to pay attention to the choice of reference terms in and about the laws as it provides a stance taken by the lawmakers’ gender ideologies masked by seemingly equal reference terms for both men and women.

In the 1939, 1954, and 2015 Laws, both men and women were referenced in the Low register. The nature of social intimacy concerned in the Laws perhaps favored the Low register lexical terms. Wirathu regularly uses the High register term *amyothamee* in his public speeches and sermons promoting *myosaun ubade*. As a celibate Buddhist monk, he must remain distant from women, their dangerous and alluring bodies capable of decreasing his *hpoun* or “male superiority” as Spiro (1993) calls it. *Hpoun* can be translated as “glory” or “charisma” (Winterberger 2017:436) and is a personal essence only attainable by men. Buddhist monks are considered to possess even higher *hpoun* than men in Myanmar Buddhist society. One of the ways in which Buddhist monks and men can lose their *hpoun* is through women. For instance, a subconscious contact or passage underneath the cloth line with a woman’s *longyi* or skirt or the washing of his clothes with *longyi* can endanger a man’s *hpoun*.²⁹ The Myanmar Buddhist concept of “dangerous women” bears a resemblance to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s philosophical construction of women as sexed citizens of the state whose existence and reproductive capacity contributes to the mortality and civilization of men. “The woman has the special role of not only introducing men to forms of sociality but also teaching him how to renounce his attachment to her in order to give life to the political community” (Das 2007:43). For celibate Buddhist monks in the Myanmar context, their commitment to the sovereignty and their *hpoun* are achieved and elevated above laymen due to their ability or responsibility to detach from women, among other Theravada monastic codes to which they must adhere.³⁰ As responsible *amyotha* (a son of lineage or a nationalist), Wirathu feels obligated to continue to regulate female bodies and police bodily choices of women in order to keep ahold of their status as moral citizens.³¹

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Y9i1PLqPSI>

²⁶ *Ravana Belu* in the *Yama Zatdaw* is however a male commander of the *Rakhashasa* army, the enemy of the *Rama*, Hindu incarnation of the Buddha. In the story, he kidnapped the *Rama*’s wife, *Sita*, with an attempt to win the Battle of Lanka.

²⁷ *Yama Zatdaw* is a Myanmar version of the Sanskrit epic from India called *Ramayana*. The play was known to be introduced to and orally performed in the court of the Burman King Anawrahta (reigning from 1014 to 1077).

²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OcNapJFnHw>

²⁹ In early 2019, a Burmese artist Htein Lin launched a special exhibition on *longyi* and their relationship to *hpoun* in Yangon in which he uses various commonly used fabric of *longyi* as canvases. The pictures of this exhibition and his paintings can be seen at https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2284376314951574&id=166580710064489

³⁰ See The Buddhist Monastic Code at

<https://web.archive.org/web/20050411235902/http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/bmc1/index.html> *Sanghadiesa*, the 13 codes required for the initial meeting of the sangha, are mostly concerned with sexual, bodily, and linguistic interaction of the sangha with a woman. If broken, the sangha is to be put under probation until he is repented.

³¹ See the news report on nationalist Buddhist monks across Myanmar supporting Wirathu and his proposal for Interfaith Marriage law at <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/monk-conference-backs-bills-restrict-interfaith-marriage-Rohingya-voting.html>

Theravada monastic codes restrict *sangha* from contact with women. However, there is no explicit linguistic guidelines by which the monks should interact with women.³² Other Buddhist nationalist monks make no reference to women in said register terms in their sermons although they share anti-Muslim sentiments with Wirathu.³³ In addition to his use of High register reference, Wirathu at times refers to women as *tainyinthu*³⁴ (ethnic girl, lit: a female person who is indigenous to the land). The term *tainyinthu* in popular discourse is usually used to refer to non-Burman women of Myanmar. This term suggests Wirathu's belief that the problem of interfaith marriages rests not only in the hands of Buddhist women but also indigenous women "who have been seduced by those who pretend as a Buddhist and a Burman without being either" (Wirathu 2015). It is important here to remember that not all ethnoracial groups in Myanmar are of Buddhist faith; many "majority ethnic groups" like Karen, Chin, and Kachin are Christians. Wirathu's rhetorical stance however proposes that interfaith marriages of all ethnic women with men of non-Buddhist faith are to be restricted unless those marriages are between an ethnic woman and a Burman Buddhist man. Nationalist concerns about interfaith marriages come about from seeming lack of women as properties for Burman Buddhist men to perform their responsibility as moral citizens. By using the term like *tainyinthu*, Wirathu reminds all women of Myanmar of their responsibility to uphold the nation's lineage. This reminder extends beyond Burman Buddhist women. In the quest for the nationalists' rite of passage as masculine citizens of the state, women of both Burman Buddhist group and other ethnoreligious groups are called in to perform their duties as female citizens. Their duty as female citizens is equated to "a duty to [Burman Buddhist] husband" (Das 2007).

Wirathu's gender ideologies are deeply interlaced with issues of ethnoraciality and citizenship. His use of seemingly non-sexist reference terms for women in Myanmar are not to be taken for granted and his gender ideology towards women is to be questioned. The need for such questions becomes clear in one of his rally speeches protesting the United Nations' inquiry of potential human rights issues in Myanmar in 2015. In the video shared by the Democratic Voices of Burma (DVB) on YouTube,³⁵ Wirathu was seen delivering a vehement speech on a stage surrounded by nationalist men and Buddhist monks. In the speech, he referred to the U.N. special rapporteur on Myanmar, Ms. Yanghee Lee, as *kaunma* (bitch, lit: female animal) and *hpathema* (prostitute).³⁶ The audience was heard passionately agreeing with Wirathu's statement about Ms. Lee. In the same speech, he referred to those who reported about Ms. Lee *myosaun ubade* as *swakyalma* (loudmouthed women). For Wirathu, both Ms. Lee and the women who are against *myosaun ubade* are not *amyokaunthamee* (daughters of good lineage). He cried, Ms. Lee "may give her ass to *kala* (derogatory term referencing dark-skinned people of South Asian descent, especially *Rohingya* and Muslims in the country) but may not give away my country to *kala*." This inflammatory and sexist speech offers an insight into Wirathu's gender ideology in which women are only good when they uphold the nation's lineage and consequentially the lineage of Burman Buddhist men; if refused, they are spoiled, damaged, and only as good as *phathema* or prostitutes. Wirathu's rationality behind deciding between "a daughter of good lineage" or "a loudmouthed woman" rests not on the woman's ethnoraciality, but on her intimate choices and behaviors as female citizens.³⁷ In addition, gender ideology and social stance towards women are prevailing through the choices of reference terms in his nationalist discourse.

7 Conclusion: Women at Disposal

I opened this paper by asking what role women as the gender inferior in Burman society play in Buddhist nationalist discourse. To answer this question, I first explored historical representation and role of women in mainstream Burman Buddhist society. The issues of gender equality and gender discrimination during the colonial and post-colonial times were complex. During the colonial times, Burmans saw themselves as having

³² Monks in Myanmar usually refer to laypeople in conversational settings as *dayaka* (mas) or *dayakama* (fem) meaning "the donor" or "the person responsible for my wellbeing." See the relationship between the *sangha* and the laity in Myanmar in Keeler (2017).

³³ See anti-Muslim sentiments expressed by Myanmar's most revered Buddhist monk *Sitagu Sayadaw* at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/08/world/asia/buddhism-militant-rise.html>

³⁴ A masculine counterpart word for this is *tainyinthu* (lit: a male person who is indigenous to the land).

³⁵ <https://globalvoices.org/2015/01/22/myanmars-nationalist-monk-attacks-un-envoy-in-his-speech/>

³⁶ The word *hpathema* already refers to "female prostitute," but here, Wirathu adds suffix *ma* (female) to intensify the feminine nature of the prostitute.

³⁷ I am currently working on a paper on the discursive strategies such as repetition, negative interrogatives, phonemic wordplay, by which Wirathu transforms the acts of unthinkable to the thinkable and the rational.

gender equality, and colonial discourses treated this equality as symptomatic of backwardness. Scholars have challenged and dismantled the apparent gender equality during the post-colonial period as only pertaining to the elites. The class division was offered as an important factor in claiming gender equality across layers of society. However, gender remains a vehicle through which Burman society deals with the affairs of ethnoraciality, citizenship, religiosity, and modernity in democratic era.

In the chess game of Myanmar's post-colonial project, women are at nationalists' disposal to be employed either as pawns or queens. They are weak because of their emotional state as "affectionate, naïve, dumb, and gullible." They are powerful because of their physical function as wombs for the nation's next generation. Embedded in the rhetoric is the dilemma of where and how to task women in its nationalistic project. Nationalist men rely on women in order to perform their role as moral and political citizens. At the same time, it would diminish their role if women were to be put on the throne of power without any restrictions. As a Burman proverb goes, *maphyatma pyipyat* (only women or femininity can destroy the nation),³⁸ men find themselves at an impasse in their position against women. Considering the complexities of ethnoreligiosity in Myanmar, which they believed to be threatening to their project, nationalists do not have a choice but to recruit women to join alliance although they would rather maintain the overt narrative of women as the gender inferior.

Nationalists like Wirathu therefore place women in the nationalist project that polices and regulates their intimate and sexual choices. The laws like *myosaun ubade* are not new in Burman nationalist discourse. Regardless of its claim for perceived gender equality during colonial times, laws like the 1939, 1954, and 2015 Interfaith Marriage laws regulating women's marriages are rhetorical and legal efforts through which nationalists find escape for their anxieties about women as the powerful gender in the nation-state building project. At the same time, the lawmakers behind those laws carefully select certain discursive strategies to target women as primary subjects of the laws and consequentially making them the weak gender even compared to men of the othered ethnoreligious groups. In these ways, the Burman Buddhist nationalist discourses push and pull women as both "daughters of good lineage" and "loudmouthed women" responsible for and threatening to the nation's future. Why can we not be honest, affectionate, friendly, responsible, but also autonomous, powerful, and influential? That is the question left to ask.

Acknowledgements

This paper greatly benefited from the discussion at the Anthropology of Language on Mainland Southeast Asian Languages Workshop held at the University of Sydney in August of 2019. Comments and suggestions from Elinor Ochs, Nick Enfield, Jack Sidnell, Chip Zuckerman among other workshop participants undoubtedly improve my argument. I am also thankful to Carla Jones and Kira Hall for their feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. Lastly, I am grateful to Juan Garcia Oyervides for his sharp eyes in catching all my editorial mistakes. The writing of this paper is in part made possible by the funding from the NSF GRFP program. Any other errors in this paper remain mine alone.

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³⁸ A famous Buddhist monk *Ashin Nanda Mala Biwontha* however claims that this proverb does not denote women or femininity. He is able to make this argument because in Burmese, *ma* denotes both negative particle and femininity. Out of context, the meaning of this proverb can be ambiguous, as it can also mean that if violate the commands, the nation will be ruined. However, growing up, I only observed people use the proverb in the meaning I describe here. See the news article of *Ashin Nanda Mala Biwontha's* claim in Burmese here <https://realthadin.com/archives/20711>

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TALKING WITH THE ANCESTORS: REGISTER AND REPAIR IN THE VIETNAMESE SOUL-CALLING RITUAL (GỌI HỒN)

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Abstract

This article focuses on the phenomenon of conversational repair through the analysis of video data collected from a soul-calling ritual (*gọi hồn*) in Vietnam. Adopting a conversation analytic approach, I show that in this context repair occurs regularly in response to troubles of hearing and understanding. More specifically, in the soul-calling ritual, troubles emerge as a result of the way the medium, who hosts the spirit, talks with lowered volume and in a generally inarticulate way. These features of the talk are understood by participants as an iconic depiction of the ancestor's voice which speaks as if originating from another world. I argue that what the medium says during the course of the ritual is largely based on information gathered through sequences of repair from the other participants who are the relatives of the ancestor whose voice she channels. Thus, it seems that the soul-caller uses distinctive aspects of the delivery, which together form a register, in order to prompt the initiation of repair and thereby enlist the other (more knowledgeable) participants as the co-authors of her discourse.

Keywords: conversation analysis, repair, Vietnamese, soul-calling ritual, Đạo Mẫu
ISO 639-3 codes: vic

1 Introduction

In Vietnamese folk tradition, the soul-calling ritual (Vietnamese: *gọi hồn*) is considered a form of remembrance and a means by which living people can talk to the deceased. Many Vietnamese people believe that it is possible to communicate with the souls of dead people through a psychic or medium known in Vietnamese as *nhà ngoại cảm* 'telepath' or *cô hồn* 'soul-caller'. In what follows, I examine, the way participants manage their mutual understandings and attempt to overcome the various kinds of trouble of speaking, hearing and understanding that arise in this situation. I show that repair is used by the participants as the means to maintain the coherence of the talk and to make sense of one another's contributions when troubles arise. But a consideration of these repair sequences also reveals something else. Specifically, it appears that the quiet, inarticulate delivery of the soul caller gives rise to troubles of hearing and understanding and that, as a result, provides a basis for the initiation of repair. The repair sequences in turn allow the soul caller to enlist the support of the other participants in the production of the deceased person's message (Duranti 1986, Duranti & Goodwin 1992).

Adopting conversation analysis (CA) as the main methodology, this paper focuses on the phenomenon of conversational repair in a soul-calling ritual. The analysis is based on a video recording made during a particular instance by the author. It starts by introducing the soul-calling ritual in the context of contemporary Vietnamese society. I then turn to examine sequences of repair acts in a particular soul-calling ritual and to discuss what the analysis of this phenomenon can contribute to our understanding of soul-calling in Vietnam today.

2 Soul-calling ritual in Vietnamese culture

As noted by Cadière (1944), religion and ritual play an important role in the lives of many Kinh people.¹ Two key concepts of the traditional belief system are the notions of *hồn* and *phách*. Etymologically, both *hồn* and

1 Kinh is the name of the Vietnamese ethnic majority.

phách are Sino-Vietnamese words (see *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄), meaning ‘cloud-soul’ and ‘white-soul’ respectively, and these concepts derive from Daoism and Chinese traditional culture. Many Vietnamese people share a common belief that every living human has both a *hồn* – a spiritual, ethereal, *yang* soul which leaves the body after death—and also a *phách*—a corporeal, substantive, *yin* soul which remains with the corpse of the deceased. Phan Kế Bính (1915:123) wrote: “... we [Vietnamese] always claim that even the deceased have their own souls and senses like living people’. This belief is reflected in Vietnamese proverbs and idioms, such as *hồn xiêu phách lạc*, literally ‘*hồn* and *phách* moving away’ and used to mean ‘frightening’; *ba hồn bảy vía*, literally ‘three *hồn* and seven *vía*’ and used to indicate the structure of *hồn* and *vía* in every living human. The notions of *hồn* and *phách* are also mentioned in many literary works such as *Truyện Kiều* (The Tale of Kieu), *Ai Tư Văn* (Elegiacs), and *Chinh Phụ Ngâm* (Lament of the soldier’s wife).

The soul-calling ritual is premised on this set of beliefs and is associated with the indigenous pantheistic belief system, called Mother Goddess Religion (Đạo Mẫu).² In the practice of Đạo Mẫu, a spirit medium connects male and/or female divinities from the four ‘palaces’ (*phủ*) with mundane world, inviting them to incarnate and ‘mount’ in a prescribed order (Endres 2007, Endres 2008; Fjelstad & Nguyen Thi Hien 2011). Apart from such religious practices in Đạo Mẫu, *gọi hồn* also appears in the everyday life of Vietnamese families. Toan Ánh (2011 [1965]) states that soul-calling rituals are often organised by persons wishing to contact a recently deceased family member. In such a situation, persons want to communicate with the soul of the deceased in order so ask to about the experience in the world of the dead. He claims that, according to Kinh custom, a male or female soul is able to enter the body of a living person and can help that person realise their goals (2011 [1965]:171).

Soul-calling is undertaken by ‘*cô hồn*’ or ‘*đồng cốt*’ (soul-caller/medium). Such soul-callers act as a medium to connect between the deceased and living person. They are the ones who host the ritual and lead living persons to the world of the deceased. Generally, the ritual begins with the medium preparing themselves and producing incantations. Eventually, the body and speech behaviours of the medium are taken as a sign that a soul has entered his or her and the assembled family members begin a conversation with the soul of the deceased.³

Before turning to an analysis of repair sequences, two important linguistic features of the soul-calling ritual should be noted. First, when the soul enters the body of the soul-caller, the family members do not know whose soul it is. As a result, in the opening of conversations, the soul must introduce itself and be recognised by the other participants (Schegloff 1979). In many cases, the family members do not immediately recognise the soul that presents itself and the identity of the soul must be discovered through the ensuing talk. Secondly, when speaking as the hosted soul, the talk of the soul called is often difficult to understand: it is quiet, marked by unusual pronunciations and perturbations and is produced along with simultaneous expressions of sorrow such a crying and sobbing. Taken together, these features of the talk make the soul calling ritual particularly prone to interactional troubles that participants attempt to resolve by recourse to the practices of (other-initiated) repair. I will suggest that this is absolutely essential to the organization of the talk in this setting. Specifically, the distorted speech delivery, treated as an iconic sign of the soul’s voice or of interference in transmission, allows for the production of phonetically ambiguous utterances which the participants may then treat as approximations of a deceased family member’s name. These they offer up as candidate understandings that the soul caller can then accept and incorporate into her subsequent talk.

² Đạo Mẫu (or Practices related to the Viet beliefs in the Mother Goddesses of Three Realms) received UNESCO recognition as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2016.

³ According to Bùi Trọng Hiền (2012), those whom traditionally used to be called ‘*cô hồn*’ or ‘*đồng cốt*’, are now referred to with a new name ‘*nhà ngoại cảm*.’ In the Vietnamese language, there is a difference between those two synonyms. While ‘*cô hồn*’ is a superstitious term, referring to illegal practices, ‘*nhà ngoại cảm*’ can be equivalently translated as ‘psychic’, referring to a parapsychological activity, which is scientifically accepted. This name change in the current modern society of Vietnam indicates that the practices of soul-calling have been intentionally shifted from a superstitious/religious issue to a scientific one, regardless of the fact that its authenticity has still not been clarified so far. Under the title of psychics, ‘*nhà ngoại cảm*’ then can legally attend in a variety of superstitious activities in the society and even in official activities of searching martyrs’ graves (Schlecker & Endres 2011). Bùi Trọng Hiền (2012) also notes that Vietnamese people nowadays spend more time and efforts on spiritual world than ever. This apparently leads to a remarkable increase of ‘*nhà ngoại cảm*’ and soul-calling centres in Vietnam. Most of ‘*nhà ngoại cảm*’ now claim that they are able to ‘catch the signals’ of many different dead people, rather than just a particular deceased.

3 Repair in interaction

Conversation analysts suggest that ordinary interaction is an orderly and structurally organised phenomenon, or, as Sacks put it, is characterised by “order at all points” (Sacks 1995). This order is not, however, inherent or pre-existing in the interaction. Rather, it is locally produced in and through the participants’ interaction with one another. Participants in fact work to locate this order in the talk, and their behaviours, in turn, reflect that order. As one aspect of this orderliness, each turn-at-talk is designed in relation to previous turns and speakers’ display in their ‘next’ turns an understanding of what has previously been said and done. Thus, conversation is an environment where social order is established in, and demonstrated through, the contributions of participants. And yet, problems of speaking, hearing and understanding are inevitable. According to Sidnell (2010), troubles of speaking may arise when a speaker uses the wrong word or is not able to find the exact word they are looking for. Troubles of hearing arise when a participant cannot make out what a speaker has just said. Troubles of understanding arise when another participant does not recognise a particular word used, does not know who or what is being talked about, or cannot parse the grammatical structure of an utterance. Repair is a mechanism to deal with such problems of speaking, hearing or understanding in social interactions. Sequences of repair consist of, at least, two parts. First, repair is initiated, signalling a break in the progress of the talk underway. Second, the repair itself is produced thereby, potentially, resolving the trouble that the repair initiation had pointed to. These parts can be done the same or by different parties to the interaction.

4 The soul-calling ritual

The soul-calling ritual analysed in what follows was organised by members of my maternal family. For the purpose of this research, participants of this soul-calling ritual are codified as follows: Phong is my uncle (he is my mother’s younger brother), Thu is my uncle’s wife, Nam and Hoan are my uncle’s sons; the medium is the female ‘psychic’ or soul-caller who came to there with a man (a colleague of my uncle who introduced the medium to him). Before the ritual, the medium agreed and encouraged the participants to record the ritual. I did not participate in the interaction with the medium. As a researcher, I just observed and made the video recording.

The ritual started with a practice of praying, Buddhist chanting and some other ritualistic acts in front of the ancestor altar. After nearly an hour, the medium started moving her body around and around. The participants treated this as a sign that a foreign soul was taking control of her body. Before the ritual began, the medium explained that the soul of a deceased person would ‘come’ if and when there was a “fateful coincidence” (*duyên phận*) and thus, the souls would ‘come’ (*đến*) spontaneously when they caught the signals from the medium, rather than in an order expected by the family members. As a result, the soul, once it had mounted the medium, had to introduce itself and the participants had to collectively identify it. After a conversation lasting about fifteen minutes, the soul left the medium’s body. The departure of the soul by bodily behaviours of the medium – involuntary twitching and an apparent loss of balance.

After this, a new praying period started and, eventually, another soul entered the medium’s body. In this soul-calling ritual, there were five separate sessions during which distinct souls mounted and eventually dismounted the medium.

5 Talking with Phong’s mother

I focus on three of five times where the soul of the deceased was claimed by the medium to enter the medium’s body. The introductory sequence of the first session is shown in the following excerpt:

001 Medium °*Tôi* *chính* *là* *cụ* *Hu::* *ân* *đ:* *ây*°
 1S right be ancestor NAME here
 It’s me ancestor Hu::an
 (0.2)

002 Long *Ai* *đấy* *ạ.* *Cụ* [*nào* *ạ*
 who that POL ancestor which POL
 Who’s that? Which ancestor is that?

moaning. Despite possible ambiguity, Thu treated the talk as a confirmation of the candidate by greeting her mother-in-law in line 11.

After identifying the soul as Phong's mother, the family continued in their efforts to talk with it. The next topic was that the medium/soul immediately started asking the family to move to the ground floor to 'invite' (*mời*) the soul of an ancestor was unable to climb up the stairs to the room where they were gathered:

- 028 Medium *Ông cụ Nguyễn Đình Ng:ữ* [*đấy kh:án r::a*
 ancestor Name that pray out
 That Mister Nguyễn Đình Ngử, call him here
- 029 Thu [*Cụ cụ Nguyễn Đình* [*gì* *a*
 ancestor NAME what POL
 Mister who?
- 030 Medium [*Nguyễn Đình Du:ong*
- 031 Thu *Là Nguyễn Đình D:uong.*
 be NAME
 That is Nguyễn Đình Dương
- 032 Medium *.Ờ Ờ*
 ((sighing))
- 033 Thu *à* *thôi chết rồi* [*con kính lạy* *cụ Nguyễn Đình Dương a*
 oh so goodness child respect kowtow ancestor NAME POL
 Oh my god, good morning ancestor Nguyễn Đình Dương
- 034 Medium [*Chết r:ôi*]
 goodness
 Oh my god
- 035 Thu *Con kính mời* *cụ lên trên nhà a*
 child respect invite ancestor up on house POL
 I would like to invite you to go upstairs.

In line 28, the medium/soul mentioned a name *Nguyễn Đình Ngử* again with a somewhat distorted pronunciation. The recipient's treated this as another trouble source and Thu initiated repair with a question in line 29. In response, the medium/soul provided a repair by substituting another name for *Ngử*, *Nguyễn Đình Dương* with stress on the repair word '*Dương*.' After Thu repeated this name in line 31, the medium/soul confirmed with a sighing third position token of agreement, *Ờ*, in line 32. With the identity of the soul now established, Thu produced a "change of state token" *à* (see Heritage 1984) followed by a polite greeting of the ancestor. While the talk here suggests that Thu had realised whom she was speaking with, the other family members were apparently still not sure about the identity of this ancestor:

- 045 Medium *bảo là cụ Dương vào đây*
 say be ancestor NAME enter here
 Ask ancestor Dương to come here
 (0.2)
- 046 Thu *Cụ Dương hay* *cụ Chương* [*a*
 ancestor NAME or ancestor NAME POL
 Ancestor Dương or Chương?

047 Medium [Cu Du:ong
ancestor NAME
Ancestor Dương

048 Thu à cu Chương mời cu Chương
oh ancestor NAME invite ancestor NAME
Oh ancestor Chương, invite ancestor Chương

In this excerpt, the medium, speaking as/for Phong's mother, again mentioned the ancestor Dương. In the repair initiation at line 46 however, Thu offered two possible candidate hearings of the name (*Dương* or *Chương*). It is worth noting that after the soul/medium self-repaired in line 47, confirming clearly that the name was Dương, it was Thu who nevertheless selected the other alternative, interpreting the word as Chương (line 48). Chương is the name of a late ancestor in the family.

In the next excerpt, the soul of the mother of Phong wanted to talk to her grandson (Nam). The repair kept occurring when participants mentioned the name of the Nam:

051 Medium sao màý để thằng thằng cu kia đầu
why 2S let guy guy boy that where
Where is the boy?
(0.6)

052 Thu đầu thằng cu đầu ạ ((took Nam close to the medium))
here guy boy here POL
Here, the boy is here
(0.2)

053 Medium bảo í là con nhà nó í
say that be son house it that
I am saying your son

054 Thu à đầu ạ đầu cháu đầu ạ
oh here POL here grandson here POL
Oh here, your grandson is here
(1.9)

055 Medium Thế ch:ào [bà chưa
so greet grandma yet
So, have you greeted me?

056 Thu [con ra chào bà nội đi
son out greet grandma paternal PRT
Say hi to grandma

057 Long [Thằng cu này tên là gì thằng này tên là gì
guy boy this name be what guy this name be what
What is the name of this boy?
(0.2)

058 Phong Nam Nam Nam

059 Long *[thằng này tên là gì đây*
 guy this name be what here
 What is the boy's name?

060 Medium *Nam oi*
 NAME hey
 Hey Nam
 (0.2)

061 Thu *à Nam oi đây ạ*
 oh NAME hey here POL
 Yes, hey Nam, here

062 Phong *đây cháu Nam đây cháu Nam đây ạ*
 here grandson NAME here grandson NAME here POL
 Here Nam is here

In line 51, the soul/medium mentions *thằng cu* ‘the boy’ but, subsequently, in the third position, she self-repairs with *con nhà nó* ‘your son’. As such, the soul/medium clarified the person to whom she wanted to talk. In response, Thu pushed his son close to the soul/medium so that he could talk with his her. So far, the soul/medium had not used the son’s name. When the soul/medium starts to talk (55), Long asks for the name. After Long self-repairs his own talk (line 57), Phong provides an answer to the question, repeating the name of his son three times (line 58). The soul/medium, then, immediately calls the name of Nam to start the conversation with her ‘grandson’.

5 Talking with ‘great-great-grandfather’ and ‘great--grandmother’

After about fifteen minutes of talk, the soul of Phong’s mother left the body of the medium. The medium then began talking as herself. During this break time, Phong revealed to the medium that the family had no ancestor named ‘*Duong*’ but that they did have an ancestor named ‘*Chuong*’. In the next soul-calling ritual, the soul was identified as this ancestor *Chuong*.

069 Medium *Tôi đây. Chào cụ Chuong*
 1S here. Greet ancestor NAME
 I am here. Say hello to ancestor *Chuong*

070 Thu *cụ gì ạ*
 ancestor what POL
 Who ancestor is this?
 (0.6)

071 Medium *cụ Chu[ong]*
 ancestor NAME
 ancestor *Chuong*

072 Thu *[à con kính lạy cụ Chuong ạ*
 Oh child respect kowtow ancestor NAME POL
 Oh, I respectfully greet you, ancestor *Chuong*!

After entering the medium’s body, the soul/medium asked everyone to greet ancestor *Chuong* in line 69. However, troubles of hearing continued to afflict the talk, presumably as a result of the distorted and quiet quality of the soul/medium’s talk. The initiation of repair was produced by Thu (line 70) and was followed by

started asking about the name of the *soul*. As such, the identity of the soul was once again treated as a source of trouble. To overcome this, the soul/medium produced two repairs in line 134 and 137. Those two repairs from the medium were interspersed between two attempts by Thu and Long. Specifically, Thu and Long interpreted the repairs of the soul/medium as ‘*cụ bà*’ (woman ancestor) and ‘*cụ bà Ứng*’ (ancestor *Ứng*). However, after the self-repair of the soul/medium (line 137), Thu suggested ‘*bà cụ Yén*’ (ancestor *Yén*). This is the name of a late ancestor in the family (line 138). The soul/medium immediately confirmed this was as the identity of the soul in line 139. This confirmation led to the next turn in which terminated the identification sequence by greeting the soul as ‘*cụ Yén*’ (ancestor *Yén*) in line 140.

6. Discussion

These sequences represent a selection of the five cases in which the soul/medium declared that a ‘soul’ had entered her body. The mechanism and process of repair in the talk between the soul/medium and other participants is organised in very similar ways in these other cases. From the perspective of conversation analysis, the following points can be made:

Repair is a common and inevitable phenomenon during a soul-calling ritual. This phenomenon occurred regularly since this ritual is a potential scenario for the emergence of troubles relating to hearing and understanding. In this soul-calling ritual, trouble sources were derived from the soul/medium’s talk which was produced in a very low volume and in an inarticulate way. This mode of delivery in understood by the participants as an effect of the mixing of two voices: the deceased on the one hand and the living medium on the others. Here, there are two worlds that interact with each other: A world of living people and a world of ‘supernatural’ entities who communicate through the medium. This form of interaction – between entities living in two separate worlds – creates a rather special kind of context, which is different from everyday interactions. One of the contexts where repair occurred frequently at the beginning of each session when the soul introduced itself and the other participants had to figure out whom it was they were talking to.

A remarkable feature of the soul-calling is the degree to which participants other than trouble-source speaker (the soul/medium) actively managed the understanding of the talk through the repair process. In almost all cases, it was the recipients of the talk who initiated the repair although they did this in response to talk that was marked by numerous disfluencies, perturbations and that was produced in a sometimes very quiet voice (these features often pre-figure repair initiation, see, e.g. Sidnell 2009). At the same time, the recipients of the soul/medium’s talk also nominated names as candidate hearings and, in this way, actively steered the talk in a particular direction. For example, some names of the ancestors like ‘*cụ Dương*’ and ‘*cụ Ứng*’ produced by the soul/medium were step-by-step, through sequences of other-initiated repair, modified in such a way as correspond with the names of deceased family members.

In the fragments examined here, the soul/medium sometimes produces the repair once the sequence has been initiated by one of the other participants. However, it can be seen that those efforts at self-repair by the soul/medium quite often did not resolve the problem since the recipients were still unable to identify the soul with whom they were talking. As a result, in these cases there were repeated attempts made to confirm the identity of the soul. Remarkably, the soul/medium often repaired the problem identified and subsequently reconfirmed the repair after she received the confirmation from the recipients. In the case of the ancestor name ‘*Chuong – Dương*’, for example, it was the soul/medium who merged these two names into ‘*Chuong*’ after receiving confirmation from the family members about the identity of this ancestor. Similarly, after the family members confirmed the name ‘*cụ Yén*’ the soul/medium agreed to and accepted that as an accurate candidate hearing.

It this seems that the medium skilfully used repair techniques to overcome a basic asymmetry of knowledge between herself and the other participants who were the family members wishing to consult their deceased relatives. Specifically, she was able to quickly gather information in the family members’ talk to make appropriate adjustments to her own talk in subsequent turns based on that information. This fact has been pointed out by Toan Ánh (2011 [1965]:173) who suggests that ‘*cô hồn*’ are able to “hear very well and understand the psychology. So, when the soul-caller says something which the family members seem not to agree with, the soul-caller will immediately repair it.” In this soul-calling ritual considered here the soul would start the opening sequence by introducing itself in with talk that was difficult for the other participants to hear and to understand. This then prompted the initiation of repair and, eventually, the proffering of candidate hearings of the name the soul had used. The soul/medium would gradually adjust the trajectory of the conversation in order to match the information provided by the family members. In other words, in the repair

process, information provided by the family members was immediately incorporated into the soul/medium's talk so as to allow the interaction to proceed.

7 Conclusion

As the means to troubles occurring in interactive language and maintain the coherence of the conversation, repair occurs frequently in the context of soul calling ritual. Through the analysis of a particular soul-calling ritual in Vietnam, it can be seen that troubles emerge as a result of the way the medium, who hosts the soul, communicates with lowered volume and in a generally inarticulate way. These features of the talk are understood and accepted by participants as an iconic depiction of the ancestor's voice which speaks as if originating from another world. The sequential analysis of turn-at-talks clarifies the fact that what the medium said during the course of the ritual was largely based on information gathered through sequences of repair from the other participants who are the relatives of the ancestor. The medium used distinctive aspects of the delivery, which together formed a register, in order to prompt the initiation of repair and thereby enlist the other participants, who were more knowledgeable as the co-authors of her discourse (see Duranti 1986). Thanks to the active contributions of participants by correcting troubles made by the medium, the medium successfully took advantage of other-initiated other-repairs to complete her different roles and voices in the ritual. This conclusion is supported by the following claim of Toan Ánh (2011 [1965]): “the soul-caller will rely on the questions to answer, and rely on family members to assign himself as siblings, spouses or other members of the family.”

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Transcript abbreviations

- 1S first person singular
2S second person singular
PRT particle
POL politeness marker

ON THE DIVISION OF INTERSUBJECTIVE LABOR IN INTERACTION: A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF OTHER-INITIATED REPAIR IN VIETNAMESE CONVERSATION

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Abstract

A basic finding of research on interaction is that intersubjectivity—shared understanding—requires effort. In other words, conversational participants actively work to achieve and sustain understanding, it doesn't just happen spontaneously. Most of the time this work is invisible and only its products are displayed in the form of sequentially fitted and appropriate next turns at talk. However, in sequences of repair and especially in sequences of other-initiated repair that work rises to the surface. In these moments, we can see and thus describe what participants do to achieve and sustain what they take to be adequate understanding. A typically unarticulated assumption of much scholarship in this area is that the work required to sustain intersubjectivity is evenly distributed among the participants, each having essentially equivalent responsibility to ensure that they are understood and that they understand others. This fits with a pervasive egalitarian ideology that characterizes many of the settings in which talk takes place. However, there are social situations in which these assumptions of egalitarianism do not hold. In what follows we explore one such setting and suggest that in the organization of repair we see a clear division of intersubjective labor. In our data, which consist of casual conversations between Vietnamese same-generation peers, participants continuously display an orientation to relations of relative seniority. This pervasive orientation is also reflected in the practices of repair initiation. Specifically, seniors regularly initiate repair with so-called “open class” forms such as “huh?” “ha?” which display a minimal grasp of the talk targeted, require little effort to produce and, at the same time, push responsibility for resolving the problem onto the trouble source speaker (i.e. the junior member of the dyad). In contrast, juniors often initiate repair of a senior participant's talk by displaying a detailed understanding of what has been said, either in the form of a repeat or a reformulation, and inviting the senior to confirm. This asymmetry in the distribution of initiation practices seems to reflect a division of intersubjective labor. We conclude with some thoughts on the theoretical implications of our findings and relate them to earlier efforts by feminist sociolinguists to describe the way in which women seem to be burdened more than men with what Pamela Fishman (1977, 1978) called “interactional shitwork.”

Keywords: Social interaction; repair; seniority; intersubjectivity
ISO 639-3 codes: vic

1 Introduction

In her 1978 paper on differences in the contributions of men and women to everyday interaction, Fishman concluded:

It seems that, as with work in its usual sense, there is a division of labor in conversation. The people who do the routine maintenance work, the women, are not the same people who either control or benefit from the process. Women are the “shitworkers” of routine interaction, and the “goods” being made are not only interactions, but, through them, realities.

Fishman's findings were, however, largely impressionistic and the analysis was based on an, at the time, common assumption that the value and function of a practice in conversation is the same across different sequential contexts. For instance, Fishman quantified the number of questions asked by the male and female participants in seven hours of interaction in a domestic setting. She similarly compared “minimal responses”

and “statements” which “display an assumption on the part of the speaker” that they will be understood and of interest and will elicit response from their recipients. Subsequent attempts to replicate Fishman’s findings failed (see McMullen et al 1995). While the initial intuition of a division of interactional labor seems in many ways reasonable, particularly in the setting that Fishman studied, the analytic categories she employed were not, it seems, sufficiently well-defined to adequately capture it.

Research on the organization of interaction done since the 1970s allows for a refinement and rethinking of Fishman’s study (see, *inter alia*, Moerman and Sacks 1988, Heritage 1984, Sidnell 2014). Specifically, we know that the maintenance of shared understanding or intersubjectivity requires effort. Much of the time, the work that participants do to achieve such understanding is invisible to analysts, only its products in the form of appropriate fitted responsive utterances are available to us. However, when they encounter troubles of understanding conversationalists routinely employ practices of repair in their attempts to resolve them. This makes the work of maintaining intersubjectivity available for analytic inspection.

In what follows, we explore this work in a study of Vietnamese conversation. More specifically we examine various practices of repair initiation and track their distribution across senior and junior interlocutors. This is made possible by the fact that Vietnamese conversationalists are pervasively oriented to locally relevant relations of seniority. Their in-situ orientation to such relations is displayed, most prominently, in the terms they use for interlocutor reference, that is, reference to speaker and addressee.

Our analysis challenges a basic assumption of work in conversation analysis – that participants in a conversation bear essentially equivalent responsibilities for the work involved in maintaining shared understanding. That assumption may be warranted in many of the settings that conversation analysts have studied – such as interaction among English speaking peers in informal conversation – but does not accurately reflect the socio-cultural realities within which Vietnamese conversation takes place. In this latter setting, relations of seniority, and the different expectations in terms of interactional conduct to which they are indelibly linked, shape conversational organization in a range of significant ways.

The results of our study, and the intellectual motivation that animates it, resemble those of Elinor Ochs (1982, 1984) who, in research conducted in the early 1980s, compared what she called clarification strategies in White Middle Class American (WMC) and Samoan households. Ochs drew on work by Schegloff and other conversation analysts which seemed to show that 1) repair initiation practices exhibit a “natural ordering” based on their relative power to locate a repairable (Schegloff et al. 1977:369) and 2) “speakers show a preference for using the strongest form they can in initiating repair of another’s utterance” (Ochs 1984:331). Ochs found that in the Samoan context, practices of repair initiation (or what she calls clarification) are differentially employed depending on the relative rank of the participants:

In speaking to those of lower rank, higher ranking persons are not expected to do a great deal of perspective-taking to make sense out of their own utterances or to make sense of the utterance of a lower ranking interlocutor. Higher ranking persons, then, are not expected to clarify and simplify for lower ranking persons (...) And exactly the reverse is expected of lower ranking persons. Lower ranking persons take on more of the burden of clarifying their own utterances and the utterances of higher ranking interlocutors.

In the Samoan context, high-ranking conversationalists typically request clarification using a minimal grasp strategy (i.e., open class repair initiators) rather than an expressed guess, as the latter requires one to more obviously take alter’s perspective. In what follows we will show that, in Vietnamese conversation, we find a similar pattern in which seniors tend to initiate repair with open class initiators which 1) do not require that the speaker attempt to recover what the other has said, 2) suggest that responsibility for the encountered trouble lies with the trouble source speaker (i.e. the more junior interlocutor) and, 3), require little articulatory effort for their production (this itself serving as a sign of the senior participant’s low level of involvement in the junior participant’s talk). At the same time, we find that junior participants rarely employ such open class repair initiators. Juniors instead show a marked tendency to use a practice of repair initiation that involves repeating a more senior participant’s talk with an appended question particle. Even more striking, we find that junior interlocutors engage in an apparently distinctive sequence that involves asking a senior participant a question, receiving an answer and then requesting confirmation of that answer with a repeat appended by a question particle. This practice seems to illustrate the more general tendency of juniors to carefully and publicly reconstruct and check their understanding of a senior participant’s talk.

2 Data and methods

The data used in this study come from a larger investigation of other initiated repair and intersubjectivity in Vietnamese conversation. The corpus, collected in various coffee shops and restaurants in Hanoi in 2012, consists of approximately 35 hours of video recorded conversation among same-generation peers. For the present study we sampled five of these recordings. We summarize their basic features in table 1. All instances of other initiated repair were collected from a portion of each recording (VNR 05 and VNR 20 = +/-30 minutes, VNR 10, VNR 12 and VNR 32 = +/-10 minutes). The result was a collection of 77 instances. The authors of the current report relistened to all these cases and discussed them in some detail. As we did this, we also sorted the examples into subcollections according to the format used in the initiation of repair (see the next section for an overview). Once all the cases had been sorted, they were retranscribed and checked again, a process that resulted in several additional observations.

3 Overview of repair initiation practices

Episodes of repair are composed of parts. A repair initiation marks a disjunction with the immediately preceding talk while the repair itself constitutes an attempted solution to a problem. That problem, the particular segment of talk to which the repair is addressed, is called the trouble source.¹ Our discussion in what follows focuses on the alternative formats used in the other-initiation of repair and some of the sequential consequences that flow from the selection of one format or another. In their classic paper on the preference for self-correction, Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977:367-368) distinguished five common repair initiation formats in English conversation: 1) interjections and question words such as *huh*, and *what?*² 2) question words such as *who*, *where*, *when*, 3) partial repeats of the trouble-source turn, plus a question word, 4) partial repeats of the trouble-source turn, and, 5) *Y'mean* plus possible understandings of a prior turn. In an important recent study, Dingemanse et al. (2014:5) find that different languages make available “a wide but remarkably similar range of linguistic resources” for the other initiation of repair. According to these authors alternative formats can be differentiated along a number of dimensions including the extent to which they characterize the trouble, the way they manage responsibility for the trouble, and what they imply about the relative distribution of knowledge among the co-participants. Drawing on the distinctions introduced by Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) as well as some terminological and analytic refinements introduced by Dingemanse et al. and others (e.g. Drew 1997), we were able to sort the Vietnamese cases into five categories as shown in Table 2.

¹ The trouble source is to be distinguished from the source or basis of trouble, which can be anything from ambient noise, age-related hearing loss, or an esoteric word choice.

² In English, intonation distinguishes different types of repair initiation with a question word. Thus, *what?* produced with rising intonation typically serves as an open class repair initiation and treats an entire turn (or turn constructional unit) as the trouble source. In contrast *what.* produced with downward, final intonation serves as a closed class repair initiation by targeting some particular component noun phrase within the previous turn as the trouble source. We found a similar contrast in Vietnamese *cái gì* when used as a repair initiator (see also Kieu-Phuong & Grice 2017).

Table 1: Overview of data sources and cases used in the present study

	Number of participants ³	Age and sex of participants	# of cases of repair
VNR 05 	4	F27, F29, M30, M33	28
VNR 10 	5	F31, F31, F34, F34, F35	16
VNR 12 	3	M25, M30, M30	16
VNR 20 	4	F40, M41, F42, F45	12
VNR 32 	3	F47, F48, M54	5
Totals	19		77

Table 2: Distribution of formats used in the other-initiation of repair

	Open class	Closed class Q word	Repeat + Closed class Q word	Candidate understanding	Repeat (+ Q particle)	Total ⁴
N	13	4	8	25	18	68
%	19	6	12	37	26	100

³ This does not include restaurant servers or researchers.

⁴ We also collected nine cases of correction which brought the total to 77.

Open class and repeat formats will be examined in some detail in the discussion that follows. Here we give a few examples of the other formats for illustrative purposes.

In (1) the participants have been complaining about a rise in the cost of vegetables and about the dismissive attitude of those who sell them in the street markets. In line 679, *Phuong*, remarks that dill leaf has risen in price to ten thousand dong a bunch.⁵ *Thanh*, apparently unsure of what *Phuong* is referring to, initiates repair with *cái gì*, or ‘what,’ thereby targeting a noun phrase in *Phuong*’s previous utterance that refers to something other than a person or a place. *Phuong* provides a repair solution in the form of a repeat of the noun phrase (*thì là*).

(1) Closed Class Question Word (VNR05, 28:30)

679 P: *Thì là sắp lên mười nghìn rồi.*
Dill leaf about up ten thousand soon
Dill is about ten thousand

(...)

682 T: *Cái gì.*
CL Q
What

683 P: *Thì là*
Dill leaf
Dill

Below, (2) illustrates the use of a closed class question word appended to a partial repeat of prior talk. *Hoàn* and *Ba*, along with *Kiên*, jointly own and run a computer software and programming company. Where the extract begins, *Hoàn* is asking about one of several ongoing projects referring to this as, in line 007, *dự án ba* ‘project three’. *Ba* responds with an open class repair initiator which merely indicates a problem with the immediately preceding turn but does not specify a particular component or aspect of this as the trouble source. *Hoàn* continues in line 009 apparently assuming that the problem will resolve itself as the talk progresses, but *Ba* initiates repair again now using a combination of repeat (*dự án* ‘project’) and question word (*nào* ‘which’). *Hoàn* then provides a repair in line 011 saying, *Dự án đấy. Bank đấy* ‘That project. That bank.’

(2) Closed Class Question Word + Repeat (VNR12)

007 H: *Dự án ba thế nào, triển khai đi*
Project three what about, implement PRT
What about project three, implement it.

008 B: *Hử*
Huh
Huh?

009 H: *Rút anh em sang làm*
Withdraw people from work
Take the people from work.

⁵ Dong is the national currency of Vietnam. At the time of recording 10,000 dong was the equivalent of about 0.50 USD (50 cents).

010 B: *Dự án nào*
Project which?
Which project?

011 H: *Dự án đấy. Bank đấy*
Project that. Bank that
That project. That bank

012 B: *Triển khai đi, để làm nó chạy ổn định phát là ném lên app store*
Implement PRT, let's do 3 run stable transmit throw up app store
Let's implement it, let's implement it once it runs stably, put it up on the app store

Finally, in (3) we see the use of a candidate understanding to initiate repair. This is taken from the same recording as example (2). Here Hoàn, Ba and Kiên are discussing how much of the company money is being spent on their various projects. The extract begins with Kiên saying that Ba has recently withdrawn 100 million dong from a company account. Ba initiates repair in line 112 and Kiên repeats in part what he has just said. Ba then responds, suggesting that Kiên has misunderstood, and that he's talking about something else, leading Hoàn to initiate repair with a form which invites B to confirm a proposed candidate understanding of his talk. In the first of these candidates, Hoàn proposes *Khoản đấy bỏ ra à* 'You excluded that amount' and in the second, at line 117, he suggests *Nghĩa là bên kia nó nó đầu tư về à* 'Meaning the other part is what they invested?'

(3) Candidate Understanding (VNR12, 5:40)

111 K: *Vừa- Vừa rồi mới lấy một trăm triệu cơ mà.*
Ju- Just already take one hundred million PRT PRT
But you just got one hundred million!

112 B: *Hmm*
Hmm?

113 K: *Lấy về một [trăm triệu.*
Take about one hundred million
You took about one hundred million.

114 B: *[Không, không nói khoản đấy*
NEG, NEG say amount PRT
No, no, I'm not talking about that amount.

115 H: *Khoản đấy bỏ ra à*
Amount there excluded PRT
You excluded that amount?

116 B: *Mhm, khoản kia là khoản thiết bị máy móc*
Yes, amount that is amount equipment machinery
Yes, that's for their equipment.

117 H: *Nghĩa là bên kia nó nó đầu tư về à*
Meaning is side there 3 3 invest PRT
Meaning the other part is what they invested?

118 B: *Hả? Đâu, mình vay*
What? No, SF borrow
What? No, we borrowed that!

With respect to the initiation formats illustrated by examples (1), (2) and (3), there were no clear distributional differences according to the relative seniority of the participants.

4 Operationalizing “Seniority”

Our analysis focuses on the relation between the practices of other-initiated repair (and in particular on the use of alternative formats for initiation) and the relative seniority of the participants. Initial review of the recordings, along with native-speaker intuition, suggested that interjections (such as *huh?* and *ha?*) were used only when a senior participant initiates repair of a junior participant’s talk. In addition, a slightly more sustained examination of the recordings seemed to indicate that repeats were more often used, and used in a particular way, by junior participants to initiate repair of a senior participant’s talk.

In order to develop an analysis that might provide empirical grounding for such observations, we needed to operationalize a notion of “seniority.” This is an aspect of social organization towards which Vietnamese conversationalists are pervasively oriented since in almost any context a speaker must take such relations into account in designing a situationally appropriate utterance. This is seen most obviously in the terms used for interlocutor reference. As is well-established in the sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological literature, the default means for accomplishing interlocutor reference across a very wide range of contexts involves the use, not of pronouns, but rather of kin terms.⁶

In Vietnamese, there are no reciprocally used kin terms and, as such, interlocutor reference by such means results in a continuous display of relative seniority. For instance, a speaker may self-refer using a term such as *anh* ‘elder brother’ or *chị* ‘elder sister’ while referring to the addressee as *em* ‘younger sibling’. These relations of seniority cannot be read directly from the ages of participants for several reasons, some of which are important to the analysis of repair initiation that follows. First, if two persons are born in the same calendar year, they may consider themselves true peers and avoid the use of sibling terms that necessarily convey relative seniority. Second, in some contexts and in some social relations, relative seniority is exaggerated whereas in others it is understated. Specifically, a difference of five years may be treated as significant in one dyad but not in another.⁷ For these reasons, in order to operationalize seniority, we can’t simply correlate some particular aspect of the speech behavior with the relative ages of the participants. Rather, we have to look at the ways in which the participants themselves orient to such relations, for instance in their practices of interlocutor reference, and use those orientations as a guide to understanding other aspects of their conduct.⁸

5 Open class repair initiation

Our collection included 13 cases of open class repair initiation. In open class repair initiation, a speaker indicates that there is a problem with the prior turn but does not locate some particular item as the trouble source. Of these 13 cases, 11 involved the use of an interjection (e.g. *huh?*) while just two involved the use of

⁶ To clarify, in Vietnamese and several other languages of the region, kin terms and other noun phrases are used to refer to speaker and addressee and as direct arguments of the verb. They are thus used in syntactic positions otherwise occupied by pronouns in many languages especially those belonging to the Indo-European family. For this reason, some linguists suggest that kin terms are themselves pronouns (see Pham 2011 for discussion). An alternative approach describes the behavior of kin terms in these languages under the heading of “imposters” (see especially Kaufman 2014).

⁷ A third way in which relations of seniority do not map directly from relative age is not directly at issue in our study but should nevertheless be mentioned. In relations between family members, seniority in the ascending (or second ascending) generation is prioritized over seniority in ego’s generation such that, for example, the thirteen-year-old son of a younger brother addresses his eleven-year-old cousin as *anh* ‘elder brother/cousin’.

⁸ An unavoidable complication for our study resides in the fact that the use of particular format in the initiation of repair (e.g. an interjection) may itself be a communicative sign of relative seniority. This is to say that the selection of a repair initiation format is an only partially dependent variable.

a question word. Eight of the thirteen cases of open class repair initiation were addressed by a senior towards a junior co-participant. In two the relation was reversed and in three cases speaker and recipient treated one another as true peers by avoiding the use of kin terms.⁹ It is also worth noting that in two of the recordings sampled there were no instances of this repair initiation format.

Table 3: *Distribution of two formats for open class repair initiation*

	Senior → Junior	Junior → Senior	Not applicable
Interjection	7	1	3
Q-word	1	1	0
TOTAL	8	2	3

The example presented as (4) illustrates the use of an interjection to initiate repair. Here Thanh and Phuong have been talking about a time that they went together, along with Giang, to sing karaoke in Ho Chi Minh City. Thanh asks Phuong to guess how much it cost and, after some talk in which Phuong indicates that Thanh already told her how much it was, she produces the turn in line 604.

(4) Open Class - Interjection (VNR05, 25:07)

604 P: *Ở đây tám mươi nghìn một tiếng đúng không*
 LOC there eight ten thousand one hour correct NEG
 It is eighty thousand per hour there, right?

605 T: *Hả*
 Huh
 Huh?

606 P: *Tám mươi nghìn một tiếng đúng không*
 Eight ten thousand one hour, correct NEG
 Eighty thousand per hour there, right?

607 T: *Ừ*
 Yes
 Yes.

Here then the senior co-participant initiates repair of the junior co-participant's talk using an interjection which does not indicate what aspect or component of the immediately preceding turn is the trouble source. In attempting to resolve the problem, the speaker of the trouble source produces a near-exact repeat of her turn, one which preserves not only the informational content of the prior talk but also its status as a polar question.

The other open class repair initiation format involves the use of the question word *cái gì?*¹⁰ For instance, in the following case, Hà has been telling the others about an awkward exchange she had with their superior at work. This involved inviting the superior (Hiền) to a party to celebrate Hà's daughter's acceptance to a prestigious college. This was made awkward, in the first place, by the fact that Hiền also has a daughter of the same age, whom, the co-participants surmise, had not been similarly successful with her applications. But the awkwardness was exacerbated when Hiền asked Hà whether she expected the party-goers to pay money, which is to say give a gift of cash to Hà's daughter. Hà's talk about this matter has been directed primarily to Tiên while Mai and Lê have been occasionally talking about other matters. Here, however, Mai has, at line 606, asked Hà whether Hà told Hiền the reason for the party when she invited her.

⁹ Ba and Hoàn in VNR 12 are same age peers and do not use sibling or other kin terms to address one another or to self-refer.

¹⁰ Such uses of *cái gì* are distinguishable from closed class uses (illustrated by 1 above) by intonation, by response and, in many cases at least, by sequential position.

(5) Open Class – Question word (VNR20, 23:47)

606 M: *Nhưng chị hỏi em nha, lúc em mời chị Hiền em có nói lí do không*
But ES ask YS PRT, time YS invite ES Hien YS Q say reason Q
But I asked you, when you invited Hien, did you tell the reason for the party?

607 H: *Em không nói lí do, nhưng chắc chị hiểu ngay, chị lại bảo chứ,*
YS NEG say reason, but certainly ES understand immediately, ES PRT say PRT
I didn't tell her the reason, but I guess she understood right away, she said,

608 *thế nào[: ()*
How
How is it

608 M: *[Ngại thế nhở (nào)*
Awkward how
How awkward

609 H: *Ngại thế. Sao em lại thế nhở. Tiền nong như thế nào đây.*
Awkward how. Why YS PRT like that. Money insert like that here.
So awkward! Why did I do that? Just to talk about money like that!

610 *Có phải đóng tiền không.*
Q must pay money Q
“Should we pay money?”

611 M: *Ơ*
Oh
Oh

612 H: *Chị hỏi em câu đấy đấy*
ES ask YS CL that that
She asked me that question

613 M: *Cái gì*
CL Q
What?

614 H: *Chị hỏi em có phải đóng tiền không,*
ES ask YS Q have pay money Q,
She asked me, “Should we pay money?”

615 *em bảo sao dạo này chị kém cái độ lãng mạn đi thế.*
YS said why time this ES less CL degree romantic PRT PRT
I said, “why are you being so insensitive these days?”

614 M: *Thật á*
True PRT
Oh really?

Three observations about this case are the following. First, although the turn in line 613 clearly initiates repair, it does this not by means of an interjection but rather with a question word, *cái gì?* ‘what?’. Second, this is produced with a marked and exaggerated prosody and in this way not only initiates repair but also conveys Mai’s surprise. Third, the repair itself in line 614 involves not just repeating the reporting frame but also substituting the reported speech for the indexical expression used in line 612 (*câu đấy* → *có phải đúng tiền không*).

These open class repair initiation formats are equivalent in the sense that they do not locate a particular aspect or component of the prior talk as the source of trouble (see Ochs’ ‘minimal grasp’ description). Moreover, by not attempting to fix the problem, the one initiating repair in this way seems to push the responsibility for this on to trouble source speaker. Indeed, the default assumption appears to be that responsibility for the trouble lies with its speaker and these formats do nothing to defeat an inference based on such an assumption.¹¹

Beyond these basic similarities, the question-word format requires slightly more articulatory effort than does the interjection (see Dingemanse et al. 2013, Enfield et al. 2013). The interjection consists of a single syllable and is composed of a mid, central vowel and a consonant produced with minimal obstruction of the throat and mouth. Furthermore, the interjection has no stable, context-independent semantic meaning. In comparison, the question-word format is two-syllables and is composed of two lexical segments.

The semiotics of these two formats, then, are such that the question word suggests slightly more effort and by extension more (other-) attentiveness than the interjection. In this respect it is not surprising that when juniors initiate open class repair of a senior’s talk, they do so using a question word.

6 Initiating repair with a repeat

An open class repair initiation, whether formed with a question word or an interjection, does not identify a specific aspect or component of the prior turn as the trouble source. Rather, it merely signals a problem and leaves it to the speaker of the trouble source to determine what is required for its resolution. In striking contrast, a repeat formatted repair initiation identifies very precisely that part of the prior talk that is being treated as a source of trouble (see, *inter alia*, Jefferson 1972, Hayashi et al. 2013). Moreover, when a participant initiates repair in this way they take on almost all of the work to be done to achieve resolution. The speaker of the trouble source is merely asked to confirm or disconfirm.¹² For these reasons, repair initiation in this mode can appear solicitous, even obsequious. Consider the following case in which the participants, all of whom work at the same health insurance company, are talking about a time that Tiên hosted a gathering at his house which is some distance from Hanoi. Mai, the oldest person in the group, is explaining, in line 505, that she was busy that day and so couldn’t come. By gazing at Tiên while she says this, Mai indicates that she is addressing him specifically with her talk. However, although Tiên does appear to produce some response (barely audible on the recording), it is Lê who is most active in taking up Mai’s talk. Thus, in overlap with the last word of Mai’s turn, but at a point where it is surely projectable, Lê repeats *Chị không sang được* ‘You [elder sister] didn’t get to come’ (thereby addressing Mai as *Chị* ‘elder sister’). While produced with no appended particle, the repeat clearly invites confirmation from Mai by virtue of the epistemic asymmetry it indexes. Mai, who is still gazing at Tiên as she completes her turn in line 505, first acknowledges Tiên’s contribution with a slight head nod (line 508) and then, shifting her gaze to Lê, responds to the repeat repair initiation again with a brief head nod (line 509)

(6) Repeat (VNR20, 20:32)

504 T: *Chả muốn sửa*
NEG want fix
I don’t want to fix it

¹¹ Compare here apology-based formats for open-class repair initiation, discussed by Robinson 2006.

¹² Indeed, confirmation is commonly given using an interjection which, like that used to initiate repair, iconically represents the limited effort that went into its production. Taking this observation further, we note that confirmation is often so minimal as to be nearly inaudible and invisible, e.g. just a slight redirection of gaze in case (6) along with an extremely subtle head nod.

- 505 M: *Hôm sang nhà Tiến chị bận cái gì này, nên chị không sang* [được
Day come house Tiến ES busy CL Q PRT, so ES NEG come get
The day that you had people over, I was busy so didn't get to come
- 506 T: [()]
- 507 L: [*Chị không sang được*,
ES NEG come get,
You didn't get to come
- 508 (0.2) ((M head nod on L's *được* directed towards T, starts to shift gaze towards L, M & L momentary mutual gaze))
- 509 L: *Mhm* ((L affirmative head nod, composed of slight upwards movement then down towards table where gaze fixes on sunflower seeds, thus breaking mutual gaze with M. M also produces head nod as L says *Mhm*))
- 510 H: *Em mời lần nữa đi cho các chị sang*,
YS invite time again PRT give PL ES come,
Invite us sisters one more time so we can visit,
- 511 *khổ, chị Dung* [*cũng không được sang*
unfortunately, ES Dung also NEG get come
Dung also didn't get to come
- 512 T: [*Mời rồi chứ nhưng mà*
Invite already PRT but
But I already invited you

In a case like this, there's little sense of any actual problem of hearing or understanding. Rather, the repair initiation seems more "assistive". Mai is making an excuse and Lê, by initiating repair with a confirmation requesting repeat, appears to support this effort.

Consider also the case presented as (7). Here the student research assistant who filmed the interaction has been adjusting some of the equipment and, at line 057, announces that he will be sitting in the lower area of the restaurant while the video is recording, referring to himself as *anh* 'elder brother' in doing so. After a slight pause the assistant seems ready to continue speaking but Hiền initiates repair by repeating what he has said and appending a question particle (*à*). The assistant confirms with *Ừ*, an affirmative response particle or interjection that is considered appropriate with junior or same-age interlocutors.

(7) Repeat (VNR10, 2:12)

- 057 X: () *anh ngồi dưới tầng một* (1.0) ()
EB sit below floor one
I will sit downstairs
- 058 H: *Anh ngồi dưới tầng một à*
EB sit below floor one PRT
You will sit downstairs eh?

059 X: [Ū
Yes
Yes.

060 H: [*Bao giờ được anh lên chỉ gì*
When hour get EB up right
When it's done, you'll come back up right?

What we see in these cases then is that, coincident with a displayed orientation to asymmetrical status relations, participants in these conversations routinely use a repeat-formatted repair initiation not to deal with any obvious problem of hearing or understanding (after all they hear/understand well enough to be able to repeat the prior talk essentially verbatim) but rather to support or assist a senior interlocutor. What junior interlocutors do with these repair initiations, it seems, is to show a more senior person that they have been heard and understood. There is no sense, across the various cases collected, that the “sense” or “meaning” of the speaker’s repeated words is being questioned or challenged and so on (see Robinson and Kevoe-Feldman 2010, Robinson 2013, Sidnell 2010b). But neither are these repeated bits of talk being merely “registered” (see Persson 2015).¹³

In a discussion of repeat formatted initiations in Mandarin, Wu (2009:35) notes that those “repeats suffixed with *a* are commonly heard as confirmation questions, i.e. the use of this format makes a recipient’s confirmation or disconfirmation relevant in next position.”¹⁴ She illustrates with examples that bear some resemblance to those we have discussed here.¹⁵

We have observed, in the two cases shown, that the repair initiation seems intended to assist or support the speaker whose talk is being repeated. This appears to be a quite general and pervasive feature of the examples we collected and fits with the broader distributional pattern. In 13 of the 19 cases we collected (or 68%) it was the junior rather than the senior participant who used the repeat formatted initiation (we provide a brief discussion of the exceptional cases in the appendix to this paper). Even more remarkable, as we show in the next section, seven of these cases involved a specific sequence in which the junior participant asked a question, received an answer and then subsequently initiated repair using a repeat with an appended particle. In these cases, the junior participant treats the senior participant’s talk as something important and worthy of extra attention.¹⁶

7 A specialized type of sequence

Over half of the cases in which a junior recipient-initiated repair using a repeat involved a specific type of sequence which we will now describe. In this, the junior participant asks a question, receives an answer and then initiates repair of the answer-turn by repeating some portion of it and appending a question particle. Consider the following case in which Giang asks Phuong if she is planning to return to her natal village the following day. After the question is asked, there is some intervening talk between Phuong and Hung about another matter and, as such, Phuong’s answer to Giang is slightly displaced (and designed in a way sensitive to that displacement). Phuong’s eventual answer in line 365 affirms that she will return home. Giang then

¹³ We did collect several cases in which repeats are used to register and to acknowledge some prior talk. Often this is accompanied by a shift in gaze away from the speaker of the repeated talk (suggesting that no response is expected). Question particles are not appended to such registering repeats.

¹⁴ Wu (2009) investigates two different repeat formatted initiations one of which is appended with a question particle, one of which is produced with a rising, “question” intonation. She writes that, “When suffixed by the particle *a*, the repeat is intended and understood as a candidate hearing or understanding of the trouble source turn, ordinarily making a recipient confirmation relevant in next position. Without the *a*-suffixing and with question intonation, however, the repeat is commonly offered not as what the speaker proposes to have understood but as the speaker’s momentary breakdown in comprehension of the element being repeated in its current sequential context.”

¹⁵ See particularly Wu’s (2009) case (4) on page 36.

¹⁶ Although we did find three cases in which the roles of junior and senior were reversed, we show in appendix I that, in these cases, formal similarity masks a very significant difference in function.

initiates repair by repeating *mai* ‘tomorrow’ and appending the question particle *à*. As the two maintain mutual gaze, *Phuong* confirms with a subtle head nod.

(8) Repeat (VNR05, 14:40)

361 G: *Mai* *chị về quê* [*à*
Tomorrow ES return natal village PRT
Going home tomorrow?

362 H: [*Đi từ lúc bấy giờ mà lên Giảng Võ*
Go from at that time PRT up Giang Vo
If you were coming up Giảng Võ

363 *Làm gì mà lâu thế.*
Make Q PRT long PRT
Why did it take so long?

364 P: *Đi tắc đường.*
Go traffic jam
Traffic

365 P: *Mai* *chị về*
Tomorrow ES return
Going home tomorrow.

366 G: *Mai à*
Tomorrow
Tomorrow

367 (0.6) ((P and G mutual gaze, G nods slightly then P gives confirmation head nod))

368 *Hôm nào lên. Chủ nhật hay thứ hai*
Day which up. Sunday or Monday
When are you coming back? Sunday or Monday?

369 P: *Chủ nhật. À, chắc sáng thứ hai*
Sunday. Or, probably morning Monday
Sunday. Or probably Monday morning.

So here *Giang*, the junior participant, asks a question and, after it is answered, seeks confirmation of the answer with a repeat-formatted repair initiation. Formally, then, this is what has been called a post-expansion repair sequence (see Schegloff 2007, Sidnell 2010a). Now we might suppose that in this case the repair sequence is prompted by the intervening talk but many of the instances we collected cannot be explained in this way. For example, consider the following in which junior *Lệ* asks senior *Mai* what she is having to drink. After *Mai* answers, *Lệ* responds by requesting confirmation with a repair initiation that combines repetition with some lexical expansion and a question particle. (That is, *Mai*’s *thạch* ‘jelly’ is expanded to *sữa chua thạch* ‘yogurt with jelly’).

(9) Repeat (VNR20, 23:02)

584 L: *Thế cái này là cái gì chị*
So this is what ES
What is this?

585 M: *Thạch.*
Jelly
Jelly

586 L: *Cà phê thạch à- ah:: sữa chua thạch à*
Coffee jelly PRT- ah:: yogurt jelly PRT
Coffee jelly eh? Uh:: yogurt with jelly eh?

587 M: *Ừ*
Yes
Yes

Similarly, in (10), junior participant Liễu is asking senior participant Thanh where she (along with Hiền and Quý, also present) go swimming. Liễu's first attempt to pose the question in line 135 is produced in overlap with talk by Hiền and she reasks the question in line 136 now referring to the addressee and the others as *các chị* 'elder sisters'. After both Thanh and Hiền respond, Liễu requests confirmation with a repeat-formatted repair initiation in line 139. This is confirmed by Hiền in line 140 (and possibly by Thanh at the same time) and Liễu subsequently acknowledges the confirmation with *ah* in line 141.

(10) Repeat (VNR10, 5:00)

134 H: *Nhưng mà thằng [Nam nó nhớ, [nó bảo tuần sau đi bơi]*
But guy Nam 3 remember, 3 say week next go swim
But Nam remembers, he said we will go swimming next week

135 L: *[Bơi ở đâu. Bơi ở đâu. [(0.2) ((L gazing at T))]*
Swim where. Swim where.
Go swimming where? Go swimming where?

136 *Các chị bơi ở đâu*
PL ES swim where
Where do you (=elder sisters) go swimming?

137 T: *Bơi ở Định Công*
Swim at Định Công
[we] swim at Định Công

138 H: *Bơi ở Định công ấy*
Swim at Định công there
We go to Định Công

139 L: *Định Công á*
Định Công PRT
Định Công eh?

140 H: Ủ
Yes
Yeh

141 L: Ah.
Ah
Ah

A final case, (11), illustrates the different ways in which senior and junior participants manage these interrogative sequences. Here, junior An interrupts senior Dung’s talk to ask if she will go on a day-trip that has been planned by their employer for the following day. Orienting to Dung’s status as her senior, An asks, *Mai chị có đi không* ‘Are you (=elder sister) going tomorrow?’ Dung answers in the affirmative and An then requests confirmation with a repeat-formatted repair initiation in line 133.

(11) Repeat (VNR32, 02:46)

130 D: *Hôm vừa rồi làm thứ bảy là vì tưởng là vớt [vát được một tí.*
Day recent already work day seven because thought extra get one little
Recently I worked on a Saturday because I thought I could make some extra money

131 A: [Mai chị có đi không
Tomorrow ES Q go Q
Are you going tomorrow ?

132 D: Có
have
yes

133 A: *Mai đi à* ((A nodding throughout))
Mai go PRT ((Very slight head nod confirmation from D))
Tomorrow you’re going?

134 D: *Mai Hoàng Anh đi không*
Tomorrow Hoàng Anh go Q
Are you going tomorrow?

135 A: *Không. Em không đi.*
NEG. YS NEG go
No. I’m not going.

Notice then that at line 134 Dung asks the same question of An, that An asked of her – i.e. whether she is going tomorrow. After An answers, in line 135, Dung does not request confirmation of that answer. Rather, there is a slight lull in the talk and then An continues by explaining that she has other plans for the day.

In these sequences of talk then, by using a repeat formatted repair initiation to request confirmation of a just given answer, the junior participant treats the senior participant’s talk as something of particular importance, something that they, the junior participant, is concerned to get ‘right’. At the same time, all the repeat formatted repair initiations involve the participant initiating repair taking on more of the work than the participant who produced the trouble source. The senior participant, the trouble source speaker, is required only to confirm, typically with a minimal interjection or even just a subtle head nod, what the junior participant formulates. The relative effort involved here then diagrams their different entitlements and responsibilities – A junior participant is expected to make efforts to support, to anticipate and to do their best to figure out what

a senior participant means to say. A senior participant is required only to produce the most minimal kinds of confirming responses.

8 Some illustrative dyads

Our argument about the division of labor in this domain and specifically the expectation that junior participants shoulder more responsibility for the maintenance of intersubjectivity than their senior interlocutors can be further illustrated by a consideration of some exemplary dyads. For instance, in VNR 05, senior Thanh twice initiates repair of junior Hung's talk using an interjection, whereas Hung never initiates repair of Thanh's talk in this way. At the same time, Hung does initiate repair of Thanh's prior turn with a repeat-formatted initiation, while Thanh does not employ this format with Hung. This asymmetry correlates with a particular pattern of interlocutor reference in which Hung addresses Thanh as *anh* 'elder brother' and self-refers with *em* 'younger sibling' while Thanh addresses Hung as *chú* 'father's younger brother' and self-refers as *anh*. This use of *chú* involves a shift of the referential *origo* to Thanh's non-existent children and in this way highlights his own seniority vis-à-vis Hung (see Luong and Sidnell this volume for further discussion).

In VNR20 a similar kind of pattern can be observed in the conduct of senior Mai and junior Lê. Whereas Lê several times initiates repair of Mai's talk using the repeat-formatted repair initiation in ways that, as noted, seem other-attentive if not slightly obsequious (see examples 6 and 9 and discussion thereof), Mai initiates repair of Lê's talk with an open class interjection format. This is shown in (12) below:

(12) Open Class - Interjection (VNR20, 28:04)

729 L: *O chị Dung hôm nay được làm muộn một tí à.*
ES Dung today get do late one bit PRT
Dung is allowed to come back a bit later, isn't she?

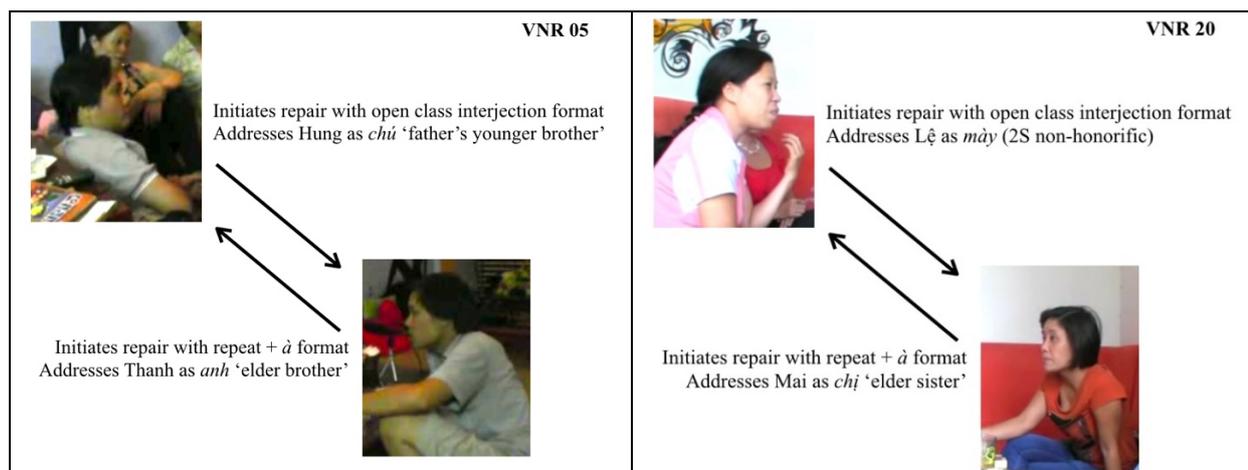
730 M: *Há* ((Mutual gaze M and L))
Huh?

731 L: *°một giờ hơn rồi.°*
one hour more PRT
One extra hour

Here then Lê remarks, somewhat out of the blue, that a co-worker named Dung has been given permission to return late from lunch. Mai initiates repair with an interjection, and Lê repairs the problem by specifying how much extra time Dung has been given.

What is particularly remarkable about this dyad is that while Lê addresses Mai as *chị* 'elder sister', Mai addresses Lê not with *em* 'younger sibling' but with the non-honorific second person singular pronoun, *mày*. While Mai is the oldest of the four co-participants, Lê is the only one that she addresses in this way.

Figure 1: Two illustrative dyads



These two dyads illustrate, at the interactional level, the pattern visible in the aggregate. Looking at these particular cases it is possible to see the way that these practices of repair initiation (and repair generally) constitute one part of a larger set of interactional norms based on the relative seniority of the participants.

9 Conclusion

Given the relatively small number of cases that we have so far collected, any conclusions we might draw about the significance of distributional patterns must, at this point, remain tentative. That said, even casual observation of same-generation peers in Vietnamese conversation suggests a robust division of intersubjective labor. Such observation is also supported by native-speaker testimony - “huh?” and other interjection-based repair initiations are described as appropriate only in talking with junior interlocutors. The use of a form such as this with a senior interlocutor (a parent or a teacher for instance) is widely considered to constitute a very significant breach of etiquette.¹⁷

Our study suggests then that, in Vietnamese conversation, participants are oriented to a normative division of labor which demands junior interlocutors expend more effort than senior ones in the maintenance of intersubjectivity. Specifically, whereas senior interlocutors regularly initiate repair with a form that pushes responsibility for the problem onto the other participant, junior interlocutors more often initiate repair in ways that display close attention to, and detailed understanding of, a senior interlocutor’s talk.

Transcript abbreviations

1S	first person singular
3	third person
CL	classifier
COMP	complementizer
EB	elder brother
ES	elder sister
FYB	father’s younger brother
GC/N	grandchild or niece/nephew
GF	grandfather
GM	grandmother
NEG	negative
PL	plural
PRT	particle
SF	quasi-pronoun meaning ‘self’

¹⁷ Such interjection-based repair initiations thus belong to a larger register which is considered appropriate only in speaking to (intimate) peers or junior interlocutors. This register includes also an interjection-based confirmation token (*ừ*) which alternates with a more formal alternative (*vâng*) as well as specific practice of interlocutor reference (see, e.g., Luong 1990).

TOP topicalizer
VOC vocative
YS younger sibling

Appendix I

This is an exceptional case in which a junior interlocutor is interrogated by a senior one. The senior interlocutor (H) questions the junior (L) about something construable as behaviour expected of a good or pious Vietnamese person/woman – prayer – and uses the repeat repair initiation format to do this, and specifically the Q-A-RI-C sequence we have described above. A difference here though is that H uses this practice to insist upon greater explicitness by L and to treat L's answers as insufficient.

(13) VNR_10_NTT_08_31_12_01A

327 H: *Nhà Liễu có cúng rằm không*
House Liễu Q pray mid-month NEG
In your house, do you pray on the full moon?

328 L: *Không.*
NEG
No

329 H: *Không cúng rằm à*
NEG pray mid-month PRT?
Don't pray on the full moon eh?

330 (0.2)

331 L: *Không cúng.*
NEG pray
Don't pray

332 H: *Có cúng không*
Q pray NEG
Do you pray at all?

333 L: ((shakes head, but does not look at H))

334 H: *Không à*
NEG PRT
No eh?

335 *Thế có ăn không, sinh nhật không (.) Rằm không*
Then Q eat Q, birthday Q Full moon Q
Do you eat? Birthdays? Full moon?

336 L: Hi (0.2) *Sinh nhật á. Sinh nhật ai.*
Birthday PRT Birthday who
Birthday? Whose birthday?

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HEAVY SOUND LIGHT SOUND: A NAM NOI METALINGUISTIC TROPE¹

Charles H. P. ZUCKERMAN and N. J. ENFIELD²

1 Introduction

The Nam Noi Watershed is an enclave nestled in upland Central Laos, about 300 km due east of Vientiane. It has only recently been connected to national and global infrastructural projects, and only partially so.³ Our research focuses on a situation of intense language contact and multilingualism in this area. It is something of a microcosm of the kind of ethnic pluralism that has arguably been the norm in mainland Southeast Asia over the last few thousand years (Enfield 2011, 2020).

In the Nam Noi Watershed, four languages are spoken in close proximity (within an hour's walk from each other):

- Kri (Vietic/Austroasiatic, spoken by approximately 600 people. Includes two varieties: Kri Mrka and Kri Phòongq, which is spoken both in the watershed in Laos and just over the border in Vietnam.)
- Saek (Northern Tai, spoken by at least a thousand people in the watershed.)
- Bru (Katuic/Austroasiatic, spoken by several thousand people in the watershed.)
- Lao (Southwestern Tai, the national language of Laos.)

Members of these communities show varying degrees of capacity to produce and comprehend each other's languages, along with Vietnamese. Most villagers can converse in multiple languages.

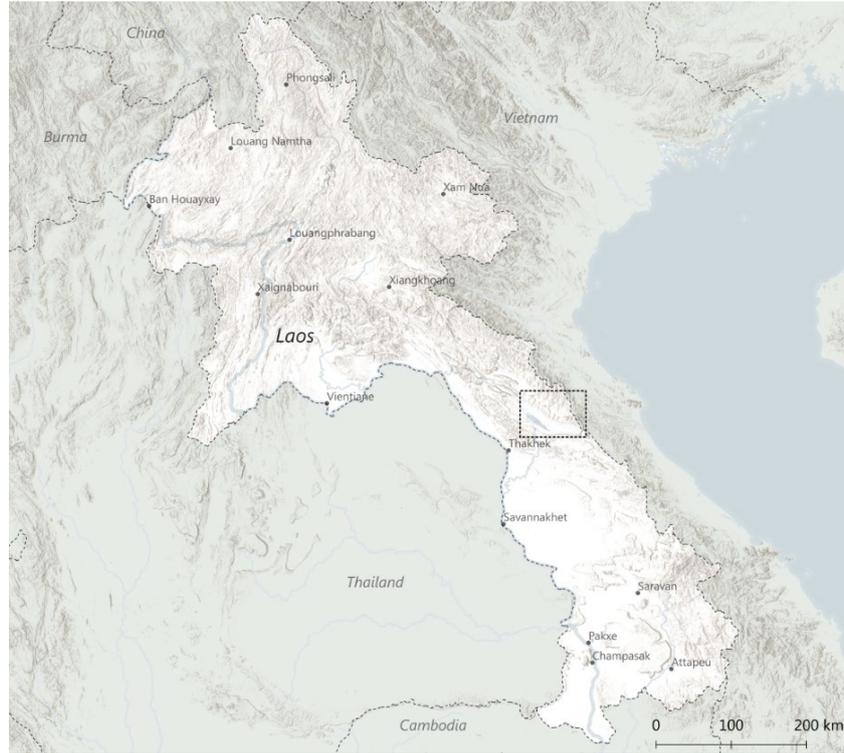
Our broader research questions have to do with language contact and the sociolinguistic conditions for linguistic convergence. Convergence can involve many different aspects of a language, from phonetics and phonology to morphology and syntax, and beyond. In this article we are concerned with a case of convergence in metalanguage. In this sense we are interested in language ideology, broadly conceived (Silverstein 1979, 1981; for recent treatment of the notion, see Gal and Irvine 2019).

¹ Acknowledgements: First, for their endless hospitality, patience, and advice, we thank our hosts, consultants, and teachers in the villages of the Nakai Nam Theun Watershed. For invaluable discussion, comments and insights on this study, we thank Marc Brunelle, Marlana Lutz-Hughes, Weijian Meng, Jack Sidnell, Vu Thi Thanh Huong, Hy Van Luong, and Angus Wheeler. Angus also provided the maps of the area, for which we are extremely grateful. For production advice and assistance, we thank Naomie Nguyen and Mark Alves. For incisive comments as discussed at the ALMSEA workshop, we thank Judith Irvine, along with all of the participants at the workshop. This research was funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant (DP170104607) and a Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (University of Sydney) Workshop Grant.

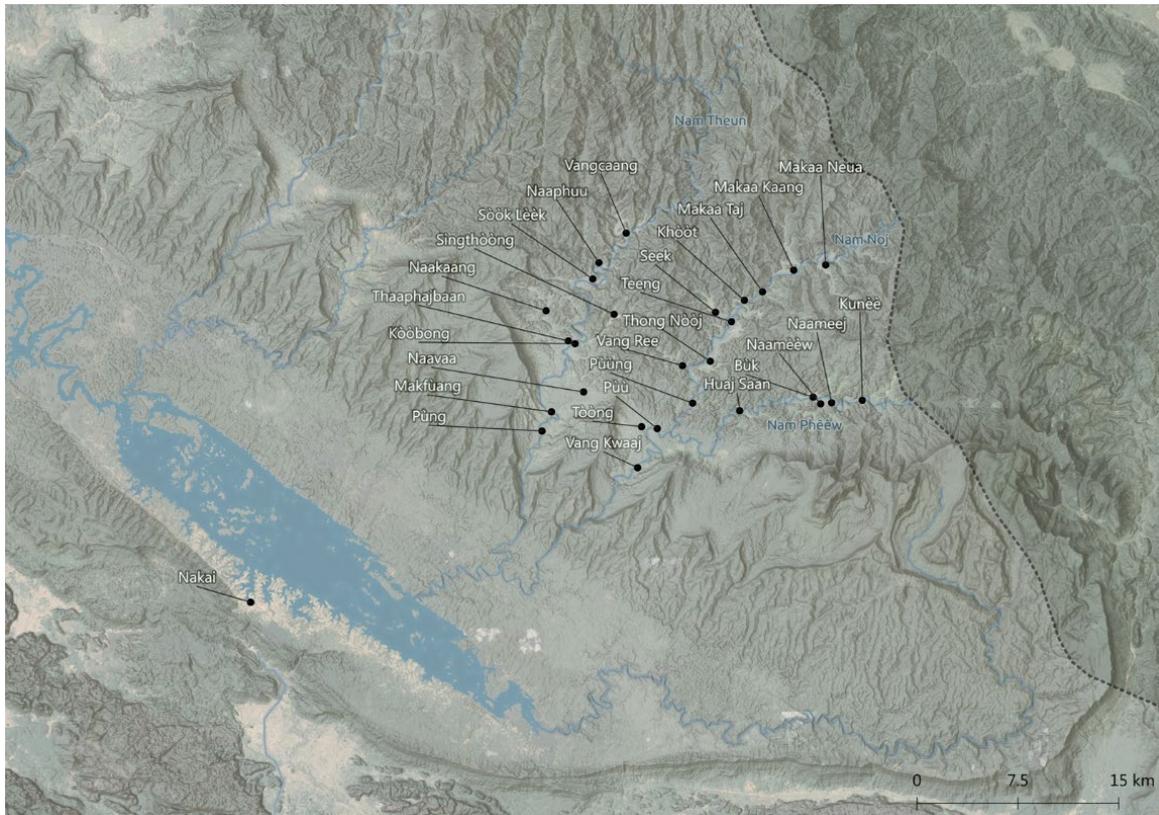
² Author contributions: NJE and CHPZ conducted the ethnographic description and analysis. CHPZ conducted the focused interviews and survey. NJE and CHPZ wrote the paper.

³ The area is in the catchment for the Nam Theun 2 hydroelectricity project (see Enfield 2018). The reservoir, created when the Nam Theun 2 Dam wall was completed and sealed in 2008, has flooded previous land access routes between the Nam Noi and lowland transportation in Laos. Where villagers could previously traverse a plateau along tracks and waterways, they must now travel by passenger boat. This increases the flow of certain kinds of traffic (e.g., merchants) and stems the flow of others (e.g., individuals without vehicles).

Map 1: A map of Laos; the watershed area is within the dotted-line box



Map 2: The watershed area⁴



⁴ The maps were created by Angus Wheeler, with data from the following sources: ARC1-STRM digital elevation data, obtained from <https://earthexplorer.usgs.gov/>; Esri. 2019. World Hillshade, obtained from https://services.arcgisonline.com/arcgis/rest/services/Elevation/World_Hillshade/MapServer, accessed 28/08/2019; and Map data ©2020 Google.

Our specific empirical focus in this article is an area-wide metalinguistic idiom, a phrase for denoting the idea of difference between speech sounds. The phrase literally means ‘heavy sound light sound’. Speakers of all the languages in the Nam Noi area use this expression—mirrored word-for-word in each language—to refer to various suprasegmental distinctions, including lexically-contrastive tone or phonation, and perceived differences of tone and timbre across distinct dialects.

- (1) Kri Mrka: *siàng nnangq siàng singeelq*
 Kri Phòòngq: *siàng qanangq siàng sangeelq*
 Bru: *siang ntâng siang ngkheel*
 Saek: *siang2 nak4 siang2 vaw1*
 Lao: *siang3 nak2 siang3 baw3*
 sound heavy sound light
 ‘Heavy sound light sound’

We can begin with an example from Kri Mrka, which will be our main focus in this article. In Kri Mrka, certain minimal pairs of words differ only in their phonation-type (see Enfield and Diffloth 2009). Compare the words for ‘elder sister’ and ‘head louse’:

- (2) *ciiq* [ci:ʔ] ‘elder sister’
 ciiq [c[◌]i:ʔ] ‘head louse’

Or ‘sand’ versus ‘sunshine’:

- (3) *karààng* [ka'r[◌]ã:ŋ] ‘sand’
 karaang [ka'ra:ŋ] ‘sunshine’

When modeling the correct sound in consultation sessions, Kri Mrka speakers would often characterize the difference between words using the ‘heavy sound light sound’ gloss:⁵

- (4) *siàng nnangq siàng singeelq*
 sound heavy sound light
 ‘Heavy sound light sound’

They would also offer the same gloss in Lao:

- (5) *siang3 nak2 siang3 baw3*
 sound heavy sound light
 ‘Heavy sound light sound’

Since beginning to work on the languages of the area, we have found that this phrase is one of the most frequently used metalinguistic tropes. It is used not only in conversation with us as field workers but in local conversations among villagers about matters of linguistic difference. These local conversations occur frequently; as people use and encounter different languages, they also enjoy talking about their varying properties.

In this study, we ask what variety of things the ‘heavy/light’ distinction refers to, and we consider whether there is a unified concept underlying the idiom. We then identify several issues that our findings raise for further research.

⁵ We assume that the Kri Mrka word *siàng* and the Bru word *siang* are borrowings from the Lao and/or Saek forms *siang3* / *siang2* ‘sound, voice’.

2 A technical linguistic use of the terms ‘heavy’ and ‘light’

In research on the languages of MSEA, the terms ‘heavy’ and ‘light’ have been widely used by linguists, in a technical phonological sense. Many Austroasiatic languages (e.g., Kri Mrka and Bru) have a two-way distinction in phonation-type register (see Enfield 2020). The two registers are sometimes described by linguists as heavy versus light, or an equivalent such as lax versus tense, high versus low, or breathy versus clear. The technical linguistic use of ‘heavy/light’ has a more specific and limited meaning than its vernacular use.

It is important to note here that phonation-type register systems, such as those that linguists have described as heavy/light, and pitch-based tone systems are idealized alternatives of what is essentially the same thing, namely: systems that use laryngeal distinctions for lexical contrast. Phonation distinctions are known to be present in the tones of multiple pitch-contour systems such as Hmong and Vietnamese. And pitch distinctions are known to be associated with the contrasting phonation-type registers of languages like Kri Mrka and Bru. Furthermore, the two kinds of phonetic distinction—pitch and phonation—are directly related in causal processes that underlie the historical development of phonological systems in mainland Southeast Asia.

Figure 1: *Kri Mrka syllable types (R=Register)*⁶

		R1	R2
Terminance	<i>checked</i>	R1-CHECKED	R2-CHECKED
	<i>voiced</i>	R1-VOICED	R2-VOICED
	<i>voiceless</i>	R1-VOICELESS	R2-VOICELESS

Figure 1 shows the Kri Mrka system of syllable types. Every stressed syllable in the language fits into one of these cells. All stressed syllables have a value on two independent parameters: either R1 or R2 in register, and either checked, voiced, or voiceless in terminance (i.e., in how the syllable terminates). For example, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: *Examples of Kri Mrka syllable types*

	R1	R2
Checked	tòòjq ‘bowl’	rooq ‘pig basket’
Voiced	tòòj ‘tail’	roo ‘turtle’
Voiceless	tòòjh ‘follow’	rooh ‘dry’

This array of six syllable types has the same underlying logic as a typical pitch-contour lexical tone system of mainland Southeast Asia, as found in Vietnamese, Hmong, or Lao, for instance. Figure 3 depicts the Vietnamese system using the same six-cell structure as in Figure 1.

Figure 3: *Vietnamese tones, distinguished by the syllable’s proto-initial as voiced or voiceless and the syllable’s proto-terminance as checked, voiced, or voiceless*

		<i>proto-voiced</i>	<i>proto-vless</i>
terminance	<i>checked</i>	nặng *bak > pək	sắc *pak > pək
	<i>voiced</i>	huyền *ba > pà	ngang *pa > pa
	<i>voiceless</i>	ngã *bas > pã	hỏi *pas > pã

The difference between Figure 1 and Figure 3 concerns the surface phonetic correlates of each cell. In Vietnamese, the phonetic correlates are related to pitch contour as well as phonation features such as

⁶ Enfield and Diffloth (2009) refer to the two registers as ‘heavy’ and ‘light’ in the technical linguistic sense.

glottalization (Brunelle 2009). In Kri Mrka, they are largely (but not exclusively) related to vowel phonation, initial-consonant voicing, and syllable-final glottalization.

While many linguists intuitively regard tone systems and phonation register systems to be different kinds of system altogether, the two systems can in fact be regarded as virtually the same thing. The popular understanding of tone “as the lexical phonemization of pitch distinctions” (Yip 2002; see also Benedict 1948:189) is “at best a misleading simplification, at worst a serious impediment to understanding” (Thurgood 2002:346; see also Brunelle and Kirby 2016:202). In reality, duration, intensity, and phonation, among other features, work in concert with pitch to distinguish one tone from another (see Henderson 1967). Thus, both tone and register systems distinguish syllable types in terms of laryngeal states and gestures, largely independent of segmental structure (though we note that there may be constraints on co-occurrence of certain segments with certain tones or registers; these constraints typically have historical explanations). A key finding of this study is that native speakers of Nam Noi languages categorize both tone and register systems using the same heavy/light distinction. That is, these native speakers recognize an underlying identity of these two types of system, at least in so far as they use a single metaphor to refer to lexically contrastive suprasegmental distinctions, regardless of whether pitch or phonation is the operative phonetic signal of a given contrast.

3 The referents of ‘heavy/light’

Nam Noi people use ‘heavy/light’ to refer both to system-internal contrasts and to contrasts across language varieties.

3.1 System-internal lexical contrast

A frequent function of the ‘heavy/light’ distinction used by Nam Noi villagers is to denote the difference between two words in a language that differ in terms of a suprasegmental feature such as phonation type or pitch contour. This is equivalent to, but less consistent than, the technical use of the contrast in the linguistic literature.

During sessions in which we elicited minimal pair lexical items in Kri, Saek, and Lao, Nam Noi villagers often described the difference between two words as ‘heavy’ versus ‘light’. Speakers were especially likely to do this if the forms in question only differed suprasegmentally, e.g., in pitch contour in Saek or Lao, or in phonation type in Kri Mrka (which also affects vowel quality). We also saw ‘heavy/light’ being used to refer to differences in terminance in Kri Mrka (for example, the presence versus absence of a glottal stop at the end of a word).

For example, the following two Kri Mrka words were described by multiple Kri Mrka speakers as showing the heavy/light contrast (where the checked syllable meaning ‘bowl’ was identified as the heavy one):

- (6) *tòj* ‘tail’
tòjq ‘bowl’

The two words differ only in terminance (‘tail’ is voiced, ‘bowl’ is checked). Saek speakers tend to use the ‘heavy/light’ contrast for forms that differ primarily in pitch. The minimal pair *phii4* ‘to fan’ (high level) and *phii5* ‘older sibling’ (high falling), for example, was described as showing a ‘heavy/light’ contrast, where *phii5* was said to be the heavier form.⁷

On several occasions, Nam Noi villagers related the ‘heavy/light’ distinction to the two most commonly used tone markers in Lao orthography, *maj4 qêêk5* and *maj4 thoo2* (markers of tones one and two in Proto-Tai). These tone markers are historical relics in Lao orthography and are not simple or consistent tone markers in the modern writing system.⁸ That said, in Lao, a word marked with *maj4 thoo2* will always be a falling tone

⁷ We mark Saek tones using Gedney’s dictionary (Hudak 2010). Thanks to Weijian Meng for discussion of Saek in the watershed.

⁸ The Thai writing system may have been “the first practical orthography to mark phonemic tonal contrasts in an explicit and systematic way, using dedicated tone-marking symbols invented specifically for the purpose” (Diller 1996; but see Diller 2017). That said, contemporary Lao and Thai orthography do not have a simple one-to-one system for indicating tones. To know the tone of a written Lao or Thai word one must look not only at the tone marker, but also

(either high-falling Tone 4 or low-falling Tone 5). All speakers who mentioned this agreed that *maj4 thoo2* (falling tone) is ‘heavy’ and *maj4 qêék5* is ‘light’. That speakers associate the ‘heavy/light’ distinction with Lao tone markers further suggests that the two terms are understood as capturing something analogous to suprasegmental features like tone.⁹

3.2 Inter-varietal contrast

A quite distinct use by Nam Noi villagers of the ‘heavy/light’ contrast is to refer to differences across linguistic varieties, that is, to compare dialects or languages. At times, Nam Noi villagers use the ‘heavy/light’ distinction to characterize the differences between linguistic varieties generically. For example, the difference between the two recognized varieties of Kri—Kri Phòòngq and Kri Mrka—was readily described as ‘heavy/light’ by people familiar with them.

At other times, speakers contrasted specific cognate forms in two varieties as heavy/light. (Some speakers were less willing to use heavy/light to contrast cognate forms in non-mutually-intelligible varieties—e.g., Bru and Saek, Kri Mrka and Lao, or Saek and Lao—as ‘heavy’ versus ‘light’.) In a multilingual competence survey, speakers were asked to translate the same phrase into the five most common languages in the watershed. They were asked to provide both the Kri Phòòngq and Kri Mrka form. This prompted some speakers to offer words or phrases whose pronunciation in the two dialects differed only, as they put it, in being ‘heavy’ in one variety versus ‘light’ in the other. An example is the word *tzrààh* ‘swidden’. Invariably, those native speakers that brought up the heavy/light distinction agreed that the ‘swidden’ sounded ‘heavy’ in Kri Mrka and ‘light’ in Kri Phòòngq. They modelled the difference as in (7).

- (7) Kri Mrka = [tʂɿaː^h] (falling pitch)
 Kri Phòòngq = [tʂ^hɿaː] (level pitch)

The ‘heavy’ Kri Mrka version has an unaspirated initial, devoiced terminance, and falling pitch, while the ‘light’ Kri Phòòngq version has an aspirated initial, modal terminance, and level pitch.

4 The meaning of ‘heavy/light’

There are two ways in which the meaning of the ‘heavy/light’ distinction is conveyed: one contentful, the other contrastive.

4.1 The contentful value of ‘heavy/light’

What does “heaviness” sound like? How can one hear “lightness”? Heavy and light may have positive semantic value. This value—the quality of a sound that makes it fit the description of ‘heavy’ or ‘light’—is fuzzy and difficult to specify, both for native speakers and for us as linguists. The terms are used for an array of seemingly unlike sound contrasts. Nevertheless, within the bounds of this flexibility, we can say a few things about the features that speakers tend to thematize with ‘heavy/light’.

Speakers are most likely to use the distinction to capture suprasegmental elements of speech, including the presence or absence of the following elements, which all indicate heaviness:

- breathiness (vs. clear phonation)
- a glottal stop in final position (vs. no stop)
- falling pitch contours (vs. other pitch contours)

Crucially, speakers did not accept that a ‘heavy/light’ distinction captured the differences between all minimal or near-minimal pairs. One Kri Mrka consultant, for example, was hesitant to label with a ‘heavy/light’ contrast pairs of words that contrasted only in their final segment. He said that Kri Mrka *booc* ‘mushroom’ (with a palatal final) and *book* ‘to scoop’ (velar final) were both ‘light’. He characterized *saaw* ‘ascend’ and *haar*

at the initial consonant (which may be one of three classes), the vowel length (long versus short), and the presence or absence of checked final consonants. The tone of a written word is only known from a combination of all these factors.

⁹ In a similar process of inter-language orthographic influence, Johnston (1976), working in Thailand, encountered speakers transposing suprasegmental orthographic markers from Thai to their own emerging orthography of Kuy (Katuic, Austroasiatic). In some contexts, these Kuy speakers would use *maj4 qêék5* to mark ‘low register vowels’ (Johnston 1976:270).

‘two’, forms that are quite different from one another segmentally (but in the same register suprasegmentally), as likewise, both ‘light’. A Saek consultant similarly considered the Saek words *phii4* ‘to fan’ and *plii1* ‘banana blossom’ as too ‘far (from each other)’ sonically, and thus not a ‘heavy/light’ pair. When prompted with the Saek homophones *maa2* ‘dog’ and *maa2* ‘come,’ he likewise said that the pair did not constitute a ‘heavy/light’ distinction because they did not present any form of contrast.

4.2 The contrastive value of ‘heavy/light’

One of our main consultants, Lung Dòò, a Saek native speaker and senior figure in the Nam Noi area, defined the heavy/light distinction as follows: “it means that things are similar, but they are not the same”. This is the essence of the concept of opposites, or “things alike in all significant respects but one” (Sahlins 1996:424). That is, opposites “typically differ along only one dimension of meaning: in respect to all other features they are identical, hence their semantic closeness; along the dimension of difference, they occupy opposing poles, hence the feeling of difference” (Cruse 1986:197; see also Hale 1971, Kennedy and McNally 2005:351).

This captures a fundamentally contrastive or negative value of the ‘heavy/light’ distinction. It also explains why people who invoke the heavy/light contrast are sometimes not willing or able to say which of the two forms is heavy and which is light. Often, all that matters is that the forms are different—not the same—in a specific way.

5 Discussion

The ‘heavy/light’ idiom that we have described here suggests that alongside the convergence of linguistic structure in Mainland Southeast Asia (see Enfield 2020), there can also be convergence of metalanguage. The case raises several questions for further research and discussion.

First, tone and phonation systems have developed in many instances in mainland Southeast Asia. These developments may have been induced, in part at least, by processes of language contact. How can tone spread from one language to another? One possibility is that when the *idea* of tone is transmitted, this can trigger its internal development within a language system (see Brunelle and Kirby 2015 for discussion of the idea that speakers’ sensitivity to tone contrasts in one language may lead them to be more sensitive to such contrasts in other languages). Could the suprasegmental awareness implied by the ‘heavy/light’ metalinguistic trope be a way in which an ‘idea of tone’ could be transmitted?

Second, what is the source of the ‘heavy/light’ metalinguistic trope in the Nam Noi? Has it travelled with Austroasiatic languages and speakers? Has it spread from one language to others? What is its usage among Vietnamese speakers living nearby,¹⁰ and how does their usage differ from that of Nam Noi villagers?

More generally, what do our findings—that a linguistic area can share a metalanguage of suprasegmental features—tell us about the ‘limits of awareness’ (Silverstein 1981) and the social dimensions of perceptual salience that guide speakers to ‘ideologize’ certain aspects of language and not others?

Finally, pitch contour or phonation type as lexically contrastive phonetic signals may be overly abstract concepts (as hue is an overly abstract idea of what ‘colour’ words refer to). The ‘heavy/light’ trope appears to directly pick out some unifying suprasegmental idea, without distinguishing between whether pitch contour, phonation type, or other tone-associated features of syllables such as final glottalization are primary within it. Does the ‘heavy/light’ trope reveal a broader understanding of suprasegmental contrast, arising from the natural intertwining of laryngeal features? Does this mean that the Nam Noi villagers’ native account of their phonological system goes closer to the truth than linguistics’ abstract categories of ‘tone’ and ‘phonation register’?

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¹⁰ We have been told by numerous commentators that a ‘heavy/light’ distinction is used by at least some Vietnamese speakers. It appears, though, that it is largely restricted to evaluation of dialect differences. Further research is needed.

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“KHMER HAS NO GRAMMAR RULES”: METAPRAGMATIC COMMENTARIES AND LINGUISTIC ANXIETY IN CAMBODIA

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Abstract

Despite being the official language of the Cambodia, some Cambodians believe that the Khmer language is dying or deteriorating. Some lament the corruption of the language, pointing to language mistakes they notice in both spoken and written form. Others surmise that, with the prevalence of international schools, Khmer will cease to exist as the younger generation prefers to speak English over Khmer. In light of Cambodia’s recent history of war and isolation to today’s globalization and open market economy, I argue that while such metapragmatic commentaries reflect local anxiety about language, they also reflect fears beyond language, fears about the changing cultural, economic, and political landscape in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime. These narratives simultaneously look to the past as well as into the future. Such discourses ignore the plight of indigenous and minority languages within Cambodia, which have vastly fewer speakers and less institutional power. I end my paper with a brief discussion comparing Khmer’s dominance over minority languages with Cambodian panic over similar foreign language encroachment onto Khmer.

Keywords: Khmer, Cambodia, complaint traditions, language complaints, metapragmatic commentaries, misspellings

ISO 639-3 codes: khm

1 Khmer Language Complaints

From 2014-2016, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Cambodia with the intention of studying the Khmer language’s honorifics in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime, splitting time between the capital of Phnom Penh and the town of Battambang. After introducing myself as a PhD student interested in the Khmer¹ language, I was surprised to encounter Cambodians complaining about the state of their language. Many of these complaints took the following forms.

1.1 Tribunal Translator

While interviewing a former tribunal translator, Mr. Phan, I asked about how he translated between Khmer and English. Mr. Phan, however, went off on a tangent and said that if I was interested in studying Khmer, I needed to understand how Khmer, unlike English, has not been updated since the publication of the Chuon Nath² dictionary in the 1960s. Having worked for several governmental ministries, he said the majority of the meetings were unnecessarily devoted to how to spell things. “Why? Because there are no rules³. In English, it is updated so people collectively follow it [the rules] and it [the language] progresses and develops. When it comes to Khmer, it worsens and deteriorates.”

¹ I use “Khmer” to describe the language of Cambodia. I use “Cambodia” to describe the people living in the country, which includes ethnic Khmer, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cham, and other indigenous groups. While Cambodians sometimes refer to their country as *Srok Khmer* (the country of Khmers), it is officially the Kingdom of Kampuchea. The French rendered “Kampuchea” as *Cambodge*, out of which the English “Cambodia” emerged.

² The Venerable Chuon Nath was a Buddhist monk who is still highly revered in Cambodia. He is the author the Cambodian national anthem. Although the dictionary was written by a committee, Chuon Nath is the one who is credited as the author. The Cambodian government and many schools and universities claim to follow the Chuon Nath dictionary’s spelling.

³ He used the English word “rule.”

1.2 The University Administrator

Before my friends and I were scheduled to give a panel presentation at a university in Cambodia, a university administrator wanted to screen our presentation topics to make sure they were not politically sensitive. When the administrator found out that my research was about the Khmer language, he went on a spiel about ungrammatical usages he observed in Cambodia— particularly, nouns being used as verbs. He claimed that he was part of an older generation that learned Khmer grammar, but that grammar is no longer taught in schools today. I grabbed a scrap piece of paper from my bookbag, a coffee shop receipt, and quickly scribbled his commentary. As he spoke, I jotted: “Khmer has no rules.”

1.3 Kolthida

My friend Kolthida lamented over dinner once that Khmer has no grammar rules and that there are no textbooks to teach the Khmer language. I had heard this before. Normally, I would nod and smile, and maybe jot it down in my notes, but this time I could no longer ignore it. Perhaps I felt close enough to Kolthida to voice disagreement. Perhaps I had reached my breaking point. This time I spoke up and told her she was wrong: Khmer *does* have grammar rules. To prove my point, I asked her how to say, “two glasses of iced water” in Khmer because, even though I knew the words individually (*pi* “two,” *kaeov* “glass,” *tikkok* “iced,” *tik* “water”), I could not remember the correct word order earlier in the day at another restaurant. Kolthida quickly told me it was *tik tikkok pi kaeov* (water iced two glasses). My goal was to show Kolthida that, even if Khmer grammar rules were not explicitly written down in textbooks, Khmer does have rules that lurk below the level of consciousness.

I remember how satisfied I was at proving my point to Kolthida that evening, but now I look back at my notes and cringe at my arrogance. My intention was to demonstrate to her and other Cambodians that Khmer is alive and thriving, but what I ended up doing was invalidating and dismissing their anxieties and concerns over the future of Khmer. I did not fully appreciate these metapragmatic commentaries (Silverstein 1993) as worthy of investigation during fieldwork. On the one hand, I did not care for such commentaries because I was primarily concerned with collecting data on Khmer honorific registers. On the other hand, I share the same bewilderment as Ovesen and Trankell when they say that it seems paradoxical that, as the dominant ethnic and linguistic group in Cambodia, Khmer-speakers continue to feel “both politically and culturally threatened” (2004:265). How can an official language, like Khmer, be recognized by its speakers as being endangered or in decline?

This article investigates Khmer language complaints (see Milroy & Milroy 2012 [1985] on “complaint traditions”) I collected ethnographically, through interactions and social media. I examine them in light of Cambodia’s tumultuous past in order to understand why there is so much anxiety surrounding language. I argue that Cambodian complaints and anxieties about language also reflect their complaints and anxieties about the country’s current political, economic, and social conditions. Furthermore, I trace how authority to decide how Khmer is to be standardized has shifted several times several times in the past century, leading to multiple spelling variations, but these shifts are recognized by locals as chaotic and confusing. The perceived messiness of the Khmer language reflects Cambodian society’s supposed disorderliness in other parts of society. Although these commentaries describe the present state of Khmer, I suggest that the language complaints are simultaneously backward-looking and forward-looking as Cambodians mourn the past and envision the future.

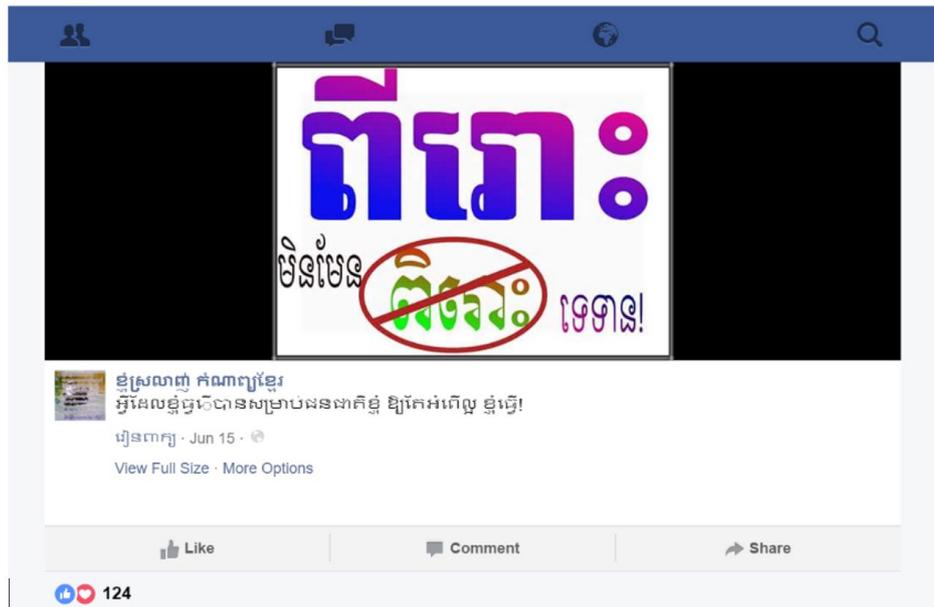
I conclude my article by putting these Khmer metapragmatic commentaries in conversation with the often-ignored minority and indigenous languages of Cambodia. If Khmer is truly in decline, as many Cambodians seem to believe, what about the fate of non-Khmer languages in the country? Those participating in Khmer language complaints urge the use and preservation of Khmer because it is their heritage language, but there is less commentary on the heritage languages of indigenous and minority communities in Cambodia. I thus conclude by speculating that fear of foreign languages eclipsing Khmer mimic the plight of minority languages within Cambodia that are being overshadowed by Khmer.

In order to situate Khmer language complaints, I will first provide a brief sketch of Khmer orthography and recent Cambodian history that frame the significance of these metapragmatic commentaries.

2 Khmer Orthography

Khmer script dates back to the 7th century and is Indic in origin, derived from the Brahmi script of South India (Thong 1985; Haiman 2011; Huffman, Lambert & Im 1970). The modern Khmer alphabet has 33 consonant characters (with accompanying subscript versions), 23 dependent vowel characters (which must attach themselves to a consonant), and 12 independent vowel characters that can stand on their own, as well as many diacritic marks. Some consonants and vowels are repeated; for example, there are two scripts for /n/ (ន and ណ) and two scripts for /l/ (ល and ឡ). The same syllables can be represented in different ways using the Khmer alphabet. For example, the aspirated /ɑ^h/ may be represented as អស់ (where ស, the /s/-consonant, is sometimes used to mark aspiration and the added diacritic mark ៉ shortens the preceding vowel អ /ɑ/) or it may be represented as អា: (which makes use of the dependent vowel េ្ា៖). Vowels also create difficulty because casual or colloquial pronunciations do not always match spelling. For example, a Facebook user who goes by the name ខ្ញុំស្រឡាញ់ កំណាព្យខ្មែរ (I Love Khmer Poetry) shares informational images to educate Cambodians on commonly misspelled words. In Figure 1, it says “ពីរោះ: not ពិរោះ: please.” According to “I Love Khmer Poetry,” the first vowel in ពីរោះ: /pi:ruəh/ has the elongated /i:/ vowel ី, but many Cambodians spell it with the short /i/ vowel ិ, which is how it is pronounced in casual conversations. Alluding to the Buddhist practice of earning merit, “I Love Khmer Poetry” says, “Whatever good deeds I can do for my people, I’ll do it.”

Figure 1: Facebook post



Facebook Image's text:

ពីរោះ	មិន	មែន	ពិរោះ	ទេ	ពាន!
melodious	not	really	melodious	NEG	polite marker

‘Melodious (ពីរោះ) not melodious (ពិរោះ) please!’

Caption below image: Name of Facebook user

ខ្ញុំ	ស្រឡាញ់	កំណាព្យ	ខ្មែរ
I	love	poetry	Khmer

‘I love Khmer Poetry’

Facebook user's caption underneath their name:

អ្វី	ដែល	ខ្ញុំ	ធ្វើ	បាន	សម្រាប់	ជន	ជាតិ	ខ្ញុំ
what	ever	I	do	can	for	people	race	my

ឱ្យ	តែ	អំពី	ល្អ	ខ្ញុំ	ធ្វើ!
give	only	about	good	I	do

‘Whatever I can do for my people, as long as it is good!’

One final note on the gap in spelling and pronunciation, Khmer contains Pali and Sanskrit borrowings that contain diacritic marks and unpronounced, but etymologically informative, consonants.

3 Cambodian History and Education

3.1 Cambodia’s Volatile History

Within the last century, Cambodia has undergone upheaval and radical change (Chandler 2008 [1983]; Kiernan 2004 [1985]; Edwards 2008; Ledgerwood 1998). Each era or political regime had different language ideologies which informed their policies and brought about different kinds of language change.

Before the 20th century, there was no institutionalized schooling system in Cambodia. Boys, but not girls, learned to read and write at local Buddhist pagodas from Buddhist monks. Spelling was not standardized so students learned to write based on their monk teacher’s way of writing. In the first half of the 20th century under French colonialism, the French began to implement a schooling system, but it was not wide-reaching. At the same time, there was a royal decree to compile the first Khmer language dictionary and to create a cultural committee to coin new Khmer words (Thong 1985). The first volume of the dictionary was published in 1939. Although it was created by a committee of intellectuals and learned monks, Cambodians associate the dictionary with the Venerable Chuon Nath, a highly revered monk and the late Supreme Patriarch of Cambodia. Today, it is often referred to as “the Chuon Nath dictionary.” The dictionary was not without its critics. Because Chuon Nath and the committee members were well-versed in Pali and Sanskrit, they preferred the etymological spelling of Pali and Sanskrit words. Keng Vannsak, a Khmer linguist, argued in contrast that spelling should reflect Khmer pronunciation (Harris 2005; Heder 2007; Thong 1985).

After independence from the French, King Norodom Sihanouk continued to expand the public schooling the French had started as a way to promote nation-building (Ayres 2000). This independence period, also known as Sankum Reastr Niyum (People’s Socialist Community) is often described as Cambodia’s golden era, where literature, art, and music flourished (Chandler 2008 [1983]). What this image obscures is that only Cambodians living in urban centers benefited from the flourishing of this period. Many rural Cambodians were resentful of the cities and their wealth. Because of this resentment, it was primarily these rural Cambodians who first joined the Khmer Rouge, led by leftist intellectuals who were inspired by Marxist beliefs (Chandler 2008 [1983]; Kiernan 2004 [1985]). The last edition of Chuon Nath’s dictionary was published in 1967, right before the coup and civil war in 1970. Due to the timing of its release and to the subsequent periods of upheaval, many Cambodians today covet the dictionary as a national treasure, the last remnant of this storied era. Today, when Cambodians debate about spelling, they often point to the Chuon Nath dictionary as the final word on how to spell things.

In 1970, the monarchy was overthrown by the Khmer Republic. For five years, there was a civil war between the new ruling government, the Khmer Republic, and the Khmer Rouge. During this period, Keng Vannsak’s spelling method was the preferred, prioritizing phonetic spelling (Sasagawa 2015). The next political regime, however, discouraged traditional education altogether. Under the Khmer Rouge from 1975-1979, scholastic education and other cultural institutions ceased to exist as Cambodians lived and worked communally to create a communist utopia. It was estimated that 75% of teachers, 96% of higher education students, and 67% of primary and secondary aged children died under the Khmer Rouge regime (Ayres 2000; Clayton 1998). Other intellectuals fled the country after the fall of the regime.

After the Vietnamese overthrew the Khmer Rouge in January 1979, Cambodia came under Vietnamese control in the 1980s. Vietnam installed Cambodians leaders who were pro-Vietnamese and many of them have remained in power to this day (Chandler 2008 [1983]). The country was renamed the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, then the State of Cambodia in 1989. Due to the lack of educational personnel, the Vietnamese attempted to rebuild Cambodia’s education system with the slogan, “Those who know more, teach those who know less. Those who know less, teach those who know nothing.”

Thus, teachers who had completed only up to third grade could teach students in grades 1-2, teachers who had completed junior high school could teach students in the upper grades of primary school, and those who had completed at least some high school grades could teach in the junior high schools (Nith et al. 2010:3).

Some Cambodians point to this period and the preceding Khmer Rouge as the catalyst for why the Khmer language is in disarray as unqualified people were recruited to teach. Researchers and non-profit organizations also emphasize the legacy of the Khmer Rouge when presenting statistics on teachers and their highest level of education. Nith et al. (2010:3) refer to a table that “shows the legacy of the earlier system, wherein over 75% of primary school teachers in 2003 had a lower secondary level or less of formal schooling.” Kim and Rouse similarly said, “This legacy continues even today, some 30 years later; as of 2008, over 70% of primary school teachers had only a lower secondary education or less” (Kim & Rouse 2011:420).

In the early 1990s, after Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia, the country was in a transitional period as the United Nations helped the country prepare for its first election for prime minister. After Cambodia had been isolated for almost 20 years, this period brought an influx of foreigners, such as non-governmental organization (NGO) workers, United Nations personnel, and journalists. English began to gain popularity as Cambodians who knew English were hired as translators for incoming foreigners (Wright 2010). Two prime ministers were chosen after the 1993 election, but in 1997, Hun Sen led a coup that ousted his co-prime minister, Prince Norodom Ranariddh. Hun Sen has remained prime minister in Cambodia ever since.

3.2 Education in Cambodia

In many societies, the education system is the primary way of upholding language standards through a shared curriculum. In Cambodia, however, schooling is not very robust. In a 2010 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, Cambodia was ranked 119 out of 129 countries in terms of quality of education (UNESCO & Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education 2015). School attendance is low and dropout rates are high. Although primary school enrollment rates hovered around 90-95% from 2003-2007, nearly half of the students drop out before they reach grade six (Kim & Rouse 2011). The primary reason for school dropout is poverty. Because schools are poorly funded, and public teachers are underpaid, it is not uncommon for public school teachers to ask for daily bribes from students, which average to \$0.25 per student per day (Besant 2014). Poor families are more likely to keep children out of schools because they may be unable to pay the bribes, lack the money to pay for school uniforms or other school supplies, lack transportation to schools, or find it more beneficial for children to work than to earn an income. Additionally, teachers may teach half of a course content during the day and ask students to return later in the afternoon for paid private tutoring in order to learn the other half of the course content (Bray 1999; Brehm 2017). This culture of “shadow education” (Brehm 2017) means that Cambodian families with modest means often pay for additional tutoring if they want to give their children any chance of passing exams. Families who can afford private schooling often put their children in so-called “international schools.” Most of these schools are not accredited internationally but are referred to this way because they teach foreign languages on top of a regular curriculum. Because of the practice of half-day schooling in the Cambodian public education system, many international schools offer half-day tuition so that families with lesser means can still send their children to private schools, if not full-time, then part-time. It became apparent how rampant cheating had been in previous years as only 26% of students passed that year (compared to 87% the prior year) and only 11 students out of 90,000 obtained the top A grade (The Asia Foundation 2014; Ponniah 2014).

3.3 Authority on Khmer Spelling

Aside from barriers to education, the government’s approval for Khmer orthography has changed several times in the last few decades. Under King Norodom Sihanouk and during the independence period, Chuon Nath’s dictionary was the approved spelling. During the civil war, it was Keng Vannsak’s model. After no schooling under the Khmer Rouge, the Vietnamese-controlled government in the 1980s followed Keng Vannsak’s model. My tutor, Samnang, said spelling was easy in the 1980s because Khmer words were spelled based on how it was pronounced. Some sources like Finlay and Yos (2009), however, claim that the Keng Vannsak system was taught in schools while the Chuon Nath system was used by the government, adding to confusion. In 2009, the Cambodian government reverted back to the Chuon Nath model as “Prime Minister Hun Sen declared that schools, newspapers, magazines, and official documents had to conform to Chuon Nath’s dictionary” (Sasagawa 2015:66).

Samnang, my tutor, said that after the governmental approval of Chuon Nath’s dictionary, people working in governmental or public institutions were afraid to spell incorrectly. He recalled a time when he worked at an NGO that wanted to print several hundred copies of a book, but the book’s title had the word *samrob samrul* “cooperation/compromise” that could be spelled serially (សំរួប សំរួល) r as a consonant cluster, also known as the step method because it calls for a subscript that often goes below, (ស្រួប ស្រួល). They were unsure which spelling was the approved, Chuon Nath version. They spent one hour discussing which version to write. “Nobody dared to write the word,” Samnang told me. They called a friend who worked for a government ministry for advice, hoping he knew the answer. He did not, but agreed to go back to his office to look at the dictionary to confirm the spelling. When I asked my tutor what the approved spelling was, he just shook his head and said, “I don’t remember. I just remember it was a waste of time.”

Table 1: Approved Spelling by Regime

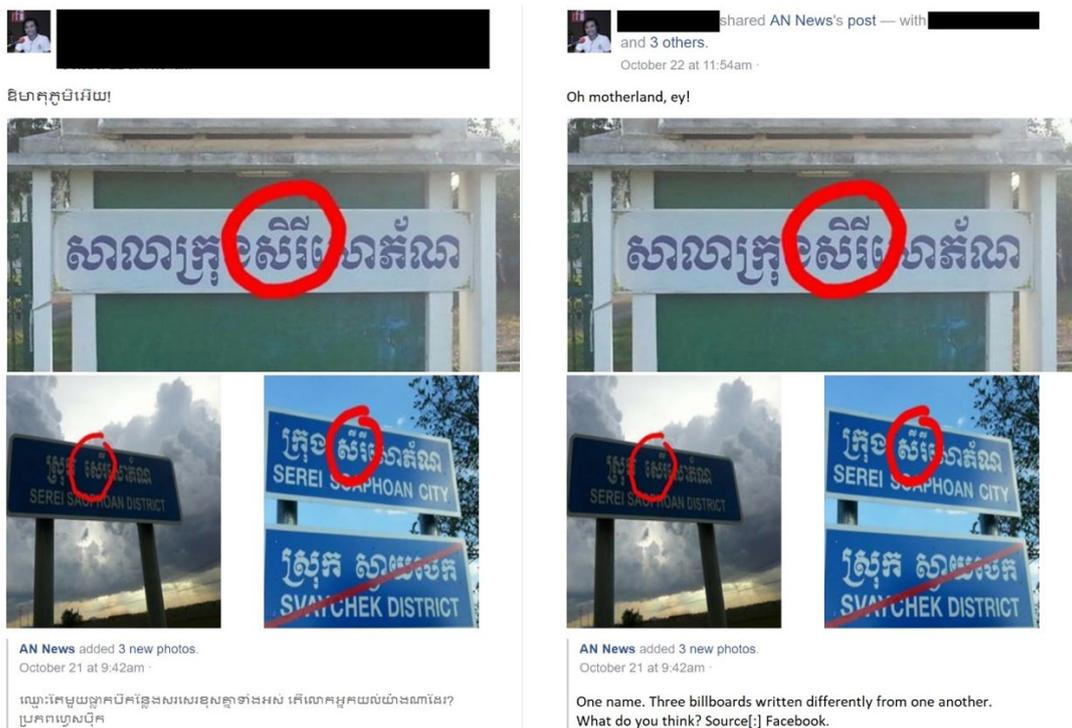
Years	Regime / Ruling Party	Approved Spelling Method
1939-1970	Independence Period	Chuon Nath
1970-1975	Khmer Republic	Keng Vannsak
1975-1979	Khmer Rouge	no education or literacy program
1979-2008	The People’s Republic of Kampuchea State of Cambodia (Cambodian’s People Party)	Keng Vannsak; some sources say Keng Vannsak taught in schools, while Chuon Nath used in government (Finlay & Yos 2009)
2009-present	Kingdom of Cambodia (Cambodian’s People Party)	Chuon Nath

With this background information laid out, I now return to Khmer language complaints in more detail.

4 Spelling Complaints

Most language complaints were about spelling—more specifically, misspellings in Khmer orthography. The large inventory of scripts, the gap between spelling and pronunciation, as well as the poor quality of education in Cambodia has contributed to spelling variation.

Figure 2: Facebook post



Caption above photos:

ឱ	មាតុ	ភូមិ	អើយ!
exclamative	mother	village	VOC-despair

‘Oh motherland, ey!’

Top photo:

សាលា	ក្រុង	សិរីសោភ័ណ
hall	city	Serei Saophoan

Bottom left photo:

ស្រុក	សិរីសោភ័ណ
district	Serei Saophoan

Bottom right photo:

ក្រុង	សិរីសោភ័ណ
city	Serei Saophoan

Caption below photos:

ឈ្មោះ	តែ	មួយ	ផ្លាក	បី	កន្លែង	សរសេរ	ខុស	គ្នា	ទាំង
name	only	one	sign/billboard	three	place	write	wrong	together	entirely

អស់	តើ	លោកអ្នក	យល់	យ៉ាង	ណា	ដែរ?
completely	question marker	you all	understand	type	what	also?

ប្រភព ហ្វេសប៊ុក
source Facebook

‘Only one name[,] three signs written differently from one another. What do you all think? Source: Facebook.’

This is an example of a common Khmer language complaint on Facebook. The original poster, AN News, shared photographs of three billboards that contain the words Serei Saophoan, the provincial capital of Banteay Meanchey Province. Each billboard used a different vowel in the first syllable of “Serei.”

Figure 3: Three Different Vowels

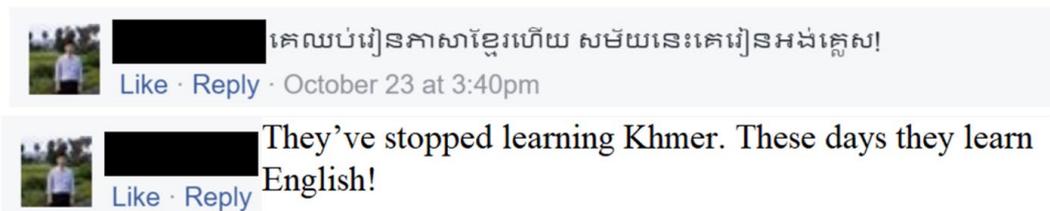


Many of the commenters on this particular Facebook post discussed reasons why there is variation in spelling. Some point to carelessness or laziness in society. Some blame the learning of foreign languages, which causes language-learners to forget or make mistakes in their own language.



ខ្មែរ	តែ	ចឹង	ធ្វើ	អី	មិន	ដែល	យក	ចិត្ត	ទុក	ទេ
Khmer	only	this	do	anything	NEG	ever	take	heart	keep	NEG
ឃើញ	ច្រើម	ហើយ								
see	many	already								

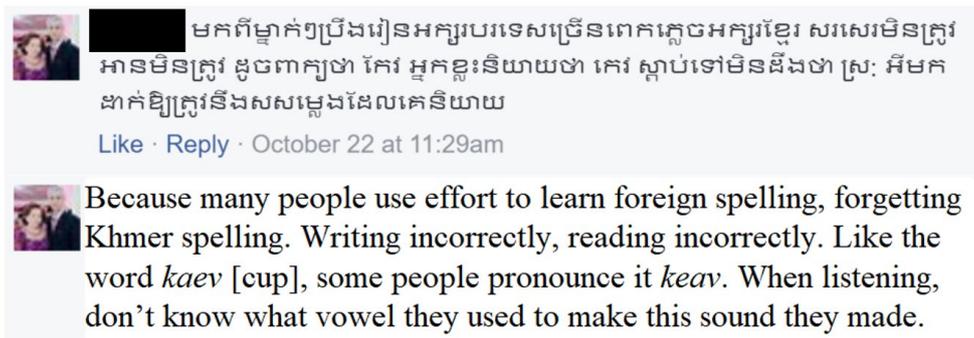
‘Khmer people are like this. Whatever they do, they don’t pay attention. Seen too many [mistakes].’



គេ	ឈប់	រៀន	ភាសា	ខ្មែរ	ហើយ	សម័យ	នេះ	គេ	រៀន
they	stop	learn	language	Khmer	already	period	this	they	learn
អង់គ្លេស!									
English!									

“They’ve stopped learning Khmer[.] These days they learn English!”

Others hint at the lack of education and literacy in Cambodia, on the part of the sign maker and/or municipal officials who approved the signs.



មក	ពី	ម្នាក់ៗ	ប្រឹង	រៀន	អក្សរ	បរទេស	ច្រើន	ពេក
come	from	each	try	learn	script	foreign	many	too much
ភ្លេច	អក្សរ	ខ្មែរ	សរសេរ	មិន	ត្រូវ	អាន	មិន	ត្រូវ
forget	script	Khmer	write	NEG	correct	read	NEG	correct

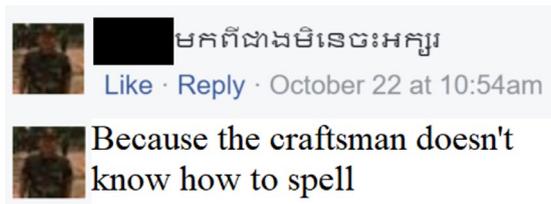
ដូច	ពាក្យ	ថា	កែវ		អ្នក	ខ្លះ	និយាយ	ថា	កែវ
like	word	say	cup (pronounced kaev)		person	some	speak	say	cup (pronounced keav)
ស្តាប់	ទៅ	មិន	ដឹង	ថា	ស្រៈ	អី	មក	ដាក់	
listen	to	NEG	know	say	vowel	what	come	put	
ឱ្យ	ត្រូវ	នឹង	ស	សម្លេង	ដែល	គេ	និយាយ		
give	correct	with	(typo)	sound	that	they	speak		

‘Because many people use effort to learn foreign spelling, forgetting Khmer spelling. Writing incorrectly, reading incorrectly. Like the word kaev [cup], some people pronounce it keav. When listening, don’t know what vowel they used to make this sound they made.’



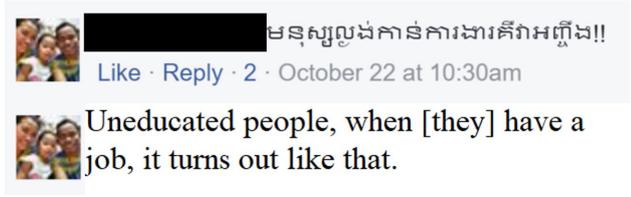
គ្មាន		យល់		យ៉ាង	ម៉េច	ព្រោះ	គាត់	សរសេរ	ទៅ	តាម
not to have		understand		type	why	because	he/she	write	to	according
តំបន់	ដូច	ជា	សាលា	ក្រុង	ស្រុក	ហើយ	និង	ក្រុង	ដោយសារ	តែ
region	like	as	hall	city	district	and	and	city	because	just
ថ្នាក់	ដឹក	នាំ	រៀន	មិន	បាន	ដល់	ថ្នាក់	ទី		ប្រាំ ផង
Rank	lead	lead	learn	NEG	can	reach	rank	<i>ordinal number marker</i>	five	also

‘Don’t [you] know?’ [It’s] because they write according to their regional [municipalities], like city hall, district, and city, since they [municipal officials] didn’t even reach the 5th grade.’



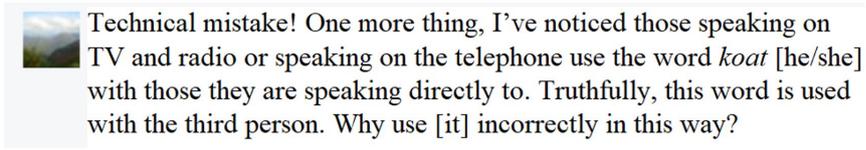
មក	ពី	ជាង		មិន*	ចេះ*	អក្សរ
come	from	craftsman		NEG	know	script

‘Because the craftsman doesn’t know how to spell.’
 (*typographical errors. Probably meant to type មិន and ចេះ, respectively.)



មនុស្ស ល្ងង់ កាន់ ការងារ គឺ វា អញ្ចឹង!!
 People uneducated hold job to be it this way
 ‘Uneducated people, when [they] have a job, it turns out like that.’

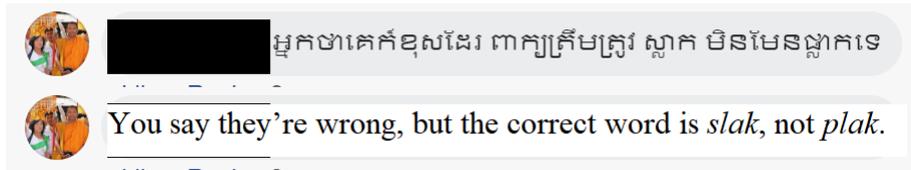
Complaints about spelling also trigger other linguistic complaints. One commenter criticized grammatical mistakes among media personalities; specifically, they object to the use of a third-person pronoun (គោត, or “he/she”) when speaking directly to an addressee. A few others correct the original poster by telling them that the correct word for “billboard” is *slak* (ស្លាក), not *plak* (ផ្លាក), which stems from the French *plaque*.



កំហុស បច្ចេកទេស! មួយ វិញ ទៀត ខ្ញុំ សង្កេត ឃើញ ថា
 mistake technical! one again also I observe see say
 អ្នក និយាយ តាម TV and Radio រឺ និយាយ តាម Telephone ប្រើ ពាក្យ
 person speak along TV and Radio or speak along Telephone use word
 ថា គាត់ ជា មួយ អ្នក ដែល ខ្លួន កំពុង សន្ទនា* ។
 say he/she with one person that self PROG conversation.
 តាម ពិត ពាក្យ នេះ គឺ ប្រើ សំរាប់ អ្នក ទី ៣ ។
 according truth word this to be used for person ordinal number marker 3.
 ហេតុអ្វី ប្រើ ខុស អី ខុស យ៉ាង នេះ ។
 why use wrong what wrong type this

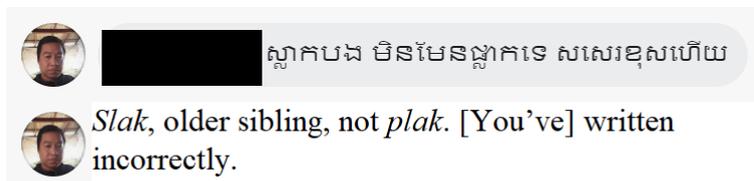
‘Technical mistake! One more thing, I’ve noticed those speaking on TV and radio or speaking on the telephone use the word *koat* [he/she] with those they are speaking to. Truthfully[,] this word is used with the third person. Why use [it] incorrectly in this way?’

*typographical error. Probably meant សន្ទនា.



អ្នក	ថា	គេ	ក៏	ខុស	ដែរ	ពាក្យ	ត្រឹម	ត្រូវ	ស្លាក
person	say	they	also	wrong	also	word	exact	correct	sign/billboard (ស្លាក)
មិន	មែន	ផ្លាក			ទេ				
NEG	really	sign/billboard (ផ្លាក)			NEG				

‘You say they’re wrong[,] but the correct word is slak (ស្លាក)[,] not plak (ផ្លាក).’



ស្លាក		បង	មិន	មែន	ផ្លាក	ទេ
sign/billboard (ស្លាក)		older sibling	NEG	really	sign/billboard (ផ្លាក)	NEG
សសេរ	ខុស	ហើយ				
write	wrong	already				

‘Slak (ស្លាក), older sibling, not plak (ផ្លាក)[.] [You’ve] written incorrectly.’

Through language complaints, these Cambodians are also expressing their discontent with other aspects of society: lack of attention and laziness among everyday citizens, political officials, and media personalities; the state of Cambodian education; and the popularity of foreign languages.

5 Lexical Complaints

Cambodians also complain about incorrect word usages they observe, what I refer to as “lexical complaints.” In the prior section, Facebook commenters argued that the word for “billboard” or “sign” in Khmer should be *slak* (ស្លាក) and not *plak* (ផ្លាក), as the original poster wrote in his posting. My tutor, Samnang, once explained to me that *plak* is wrong, but is commonly used in spoken Khmer. According to him, the government encourages Cambodians to use *slak* and has even urged television presenters to make this change.

Many lexical complaints concern foreign loanwords and English is often the target of these complaints. In an op-ed for the *Phnom Penh Post*, journalist Tong Soprach (2012) decries the use of the English words “yes” and “ok” among youths. In a Facebook community group named “តាមដានសំណេរភាសាខ្មែរ-Correct Khmer Spelling,” the group’s owner posts language related news and images, as well as language mistakes they find on the internet. In Figure 4, “Correct Khmer Spelling” nitpicks a Facebook post by a pineapple seller. They not only complained about misspellings, but also urged Cambodians to use Khmer words rather than French borrowings; the seller used កមង់ *kamang*, from the French “commander,” instead of the Khmer word បញ្ជាទិញ *banhceatinh* or “to order,” telling potential customers that they may “order” pineapples by calling their phone number.

Figure 4: Facebook post

 **តាមដានសំណេរភាសាខ្មែរ-Correct Khmer Spelling**
December 3, 2018 · 🌐

អ្នកខ្លះគិតថា ជាក់ហុសកូចកាច ប៉ុន្តែវាមិនកូចកាចទេ
ដូចជា ក្នុងករណីមន្ត្រីគុណការសរសេរខុសអក្ខរាវិរុទ្ធ ហើយត្រូវគេយកទៅចុះផ្សាយ
ពេញហ្វេសប៊ុក ជាដើម។

ក្នុងសារខាងក្រោម៖
#ប្រមូល មិនមែន ប្រមោល ទេ។
#ប៉ះពាល់ មិនមែន ប៉ាស់ប៉ាល់ ទេ។
គួរប្រើពាក្យខ្មែរ #បញ្ជាទិញ ជំនួស ពាក្យបរទេស។

**ម្ចាស់សរីរាង្គនៅស្រុកមោងឫស្សីចាប់ផ្តើមនឹងប្រមោលផល
ហើយ។ធានាថាគ្មានជាតិគីមីមិនប៉ាស់ប៉ាល់ដល់សុខភាពអាច
កម្រង់បានតាមលេខ [REDACTED]**



 **តាមដានសំណេរភាសាខ្មែរ-Correct Khmer Spelling**
December 3, 2018 · 🌐

Some people say it's only a small mistake, but it's not small at all
Like with court officials who write and spell incorrectly and then post it
all over Facebook.
In the message below:
#ប្រមូល not ប្រមោល
#ប៉ះពាល់ not ប៉ាស់ប៉ាល់
Must use Khmer words #បញ្ជាទិញ replace foreign words.

Organic pineapple in Moung Risey District[,] starting to harvest the crop.
We promise that there are no chemicals that affect the health[,] Can
order [កម្រង់, from French "commander"] through phone number -----



“តាមដានសំណេរភាសាខ្មែរ-Correct Khmer Spelling”

Their caption:

អ្នកខ្លះគិតថា ជាកំហុសតូចតាច ប៉ុន្តែវាមិនតូចតាចទេ ដូចជាក្នុងករណីមន្ត្រីតុលាការសរសេរខុសអក្ខរាវិរុទ្ធ ហើយត្រូវគេយកទៅចុះផ្សាយ ពេញហ្វេសប៊ុក ជាដើម។
 ក្នុងសារខាងក្រោម៖
 #ប្រមូល មិនមែន ប្រមោល ទេ។
 #ប៉ះពាល់ មិនមែន ប៉ាស់ប៉ាល់ ទេ។
 គួរប្រើពាក្យខ្មែរ #បញ្ជាទិញ ជំនួស ពាក្យបរទេស។

Caption of the image they were commenting on:

ម្ចាស់សរីរាង្គនៅស្រុកមោងឫស្សីចាប់ផ្តើមនឹងប្រមោលផល
 ហើយ។ធានាគ្មានជាតិគីមីមិនប៉ាស់ប៉ាល់ដល់សុខភាពអាច
 កម្រង់បានតាមលេខ -----

Translation of their caption:

Some people say it's only a small mistake, but it's not small at all
 Like with court officials who write and spell incorrectly and then post it all over Facebook.
 In the message below:
 #ប្រមូល not ប្រមោល
 #ប៉ះពាល់ not ប៉ាស់ប៉ាល់
 Must use Khmer words #បញ្ជាទិញ replace foreign words.

Translation of the caption of the image they were commenting on:

Organic pineapple in Moung Risey District[,] starting to harvest the crop. We promise that there are no chemicals that affect the health[.] Can order through phone number -----

Their caption:

អ្នក	ខ្លះ	គិត	ថា	ជា	កំហុស	តូច	តាច	ប៉ុន្តែ	វា	មិន
person	some	think	say	to be	mistake	small	small	but	it	NEG
តូច	តាច	ទេ	ដូច	ជា	ក្នុង	ករណី	មន្ត្រី		តុលាការ	
small	small	NEG	like	to be	in	case	ministry		court of law	
សរសេរ	ខុស	អក្ខរា	វិរុទ្ធ	ហើយ	ត្រូវ	គេ	យក	ទៅ		
write	mistake	writing	mistake	and	receive	they	take	to		
ចុះ	ផ្សាយ	ពេញ	ហ្វេសប៊ុក		ជាដើម។					
down	publish	full	Facebook		etcetera.					
ក្នុង	សារ	ខាង	ក្រោម៖							
in	message	side	below:							
#ប្រមូល		មិន	មែន	ប្រមោល		ទេ។				
#collect (ប្រមូល)	NEG	really	collect (ប្រមោល)	NEG.						
#ប៉ះពាល់		មិន	មែន	ប៉ាស់ប៉ាល់		ទេ។				
#affect (ប៉ះពាល់)	NEG	really	affect (ប៉ាស់ប៉ាល់)	NEG.						

គួរ	ប្រើ	ពាក្យ	ខ្មែរ	#បញ្ជាទិញ	ជំនួស	ពាក្យ	បរទេស។
must	use	word	Khmer	#order (បញ្ជាទិញ)	instead	word	foreign.

‘Some people say it’s only a small mistake, but it’s not small at all.’

Like with court officials who write and spell incorrectly and then post it all over Facebook.

In the message below:

#ប្រមូល not ប្រមោ
#ចុះពាល់ not ប៉ាស់ប៉ា

Must use Khmer words #បញ្ជាទិញ replace foreign words.’

Caption of the image they copied:

ម្នាស់	សរីរាង្គ	នៅ	ស្រុក	មោងឫស្សី	ចាប់
Pineapple	organic	at	district	Moung Risey	start
ផ្ដើម	នឹង	ប្រមោល	ផល	ហើយ។	
begin	to	collect	product	already.	
ធានា	គ្មាន	ជាតិ	គីមី	មិន	ប៉ាស់ប៉ាល់ ដល់
promise	not have	material	chemical	NEG	affect toward
សុខភាព	អាច	កម្រិត	បាន	តាម	លេខ -----
health	can	order	can	through	number -----

‘Organic pineapple in Moung Risey District[,] starting to harvest the crop. We promise that there are no chemicals that affect the health[.] Can order through phone number -----’

Cambodians complaints about the use of foreign words are supporters of linguistic purism, believing foreign words should not enter the Khmer language as language mixing is wrong. These beliefs are predicated on strong nationalistic convictions that value one’s heritage language. Linguistic purists worry that Khmer words may be devalued. They may even fear Khmer may slowly be overtaken by foreign languages. Many Cambodians point to more recent borrowings, yet Cambodians usually ignore Pali and Sanskrit loanwords into the Khmer language, some entering into Khmer during the Angkor period (Jacob 1993 [1986]), what many believe to be the height of Cambodian (and Khmer) civilization.

Not all lexical complaints are about foreign words. My friend Rithy complained that uneducated Cambodians were using Khmer words incorrectly. He used the verbs *peak* (ពាក់) and *sleak* (ស្លៀក) as examples. Both verbs mean “to wear” or “to put on” clothing, but according to Rithy, *peak* is used with shirts while *sleak* is used with pants. Today, some Cambodians use *peak* for both shirts and pants, which is wrong according to Rithy, because *peak* is for clothing that goes over your head. When someone uses *peak* with pants, he finds it funny because he imagines them putting their pants over their head.

6 Language Complaints as Critique of Contemporary Society

Cambodians do not just complain about language errors, they also attempt to understand the causes and sometimes propose solutions. Touch Kimsrieng, for example, is the president of the Khmer Literary and Cultural Association. He has been a consultant on Voice of America Cambodia and Radio FM 102 to answer language related questions from viewers. When asked why the Khmer language is in decline, Touch believes Cambodians do not know nor value the history of the Khmer language, i.e. its Pali and Sanskrit origins. He also admitted that the large inventory of Khmer script adds to the difficulty of spelling, which provide Cambodians many variations to represent the same sound. Further, he also cited individualism as another source of the problem, as Cambodians spell words based on their own individual preferences. While Touch appears to be sympathetic to the difficulties of the Khmer language, he is also adamant that Cambodians must persevere through the difficulties by memorizing correct usage and spelling (Voice of America Cambodia

2019). I have proposed simplifying Khmer script (eliminating repeated consonants and vowels, changing spelling to reflect pronunciation) to a few friends, as was the case in mainland China and Laos, but many were opposed to this. They said Khmer writing is their heritage and it should not be changed.

Khmer intellectuals often claim that Cambodians do not value or respect their own heritage language. They often complain that Cambodians are not only careless and lazy with Khmer, but that they also put more thought and care when it comes to foreign languages. According to Touch, Cambodians do not take the time to “write correctly, pronounce correctly, use correctly, create [new words] correctly, borrow [foreign words] correctly” (Voice of America Cambodia 2019). Hean Sokhom, the President of the National Council of Khmer Language, has noted inconsistencies in Khmer transliteration of foreign loanwords like “acid” and “gas.” This issue prompted the National Council of Khmer Language to hold a workshop on how to standardize Khmer spelling of foreign words (Chetra 2019). Journalist Tong Soprach, on the other hand, dislikes the use of English words. In fact, according to Tong, the Khmer language is in decline because of parents who encourage their children to learn foreign languages, de-valuing fluency in their own heritage language. He has observed parents bragging that their children earned an “A” grade in English, but Tong asks why nobody ever brags when their children earns an “A” in Khmer. Echoing discourses of carelessness, Tong says Cambodians put more care in writing English, consulting dictionaries if they are unsure of a word’s spelling; when it comes to Khmer, however, Cambodians do not bother to check (Tong 2013, 2012). Such attitudes are not unique to Cambodia. Referring to English complaints, Cameron argues that the ideology of language standardization is so strong that “even the most trivial spelling mistakes are to be deplored because they show that the writer is ‘careless’ and ‘sloppy’ - they are, in other words, outward signs of a deeper flaw in character” (2012 [1995]:68).

These language complaints, and the related metapragmatic commentaries, are an indirect critique of Cambodian society in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime because “complaints about language change are usually symbolic expressions of anxiety about larger social changes” (Cameron 2012 [1995]:238). When Cambodians complain about the use of English words or spelling mistakes on road signs, they are also pointing to other issues in Cambodia, from a historic accident that put certain leaders into power, to the way the education system was rebuilt in the 1980s, to the foreigners who entered Cambodia during the transitional period. These language complaints are ultimately asking: Why are corrupt or uneducated politicians in office? Why is public education so bad? Why are parents putting their children in private schools to learn English?

While these commentaries are about the present state of Cambodia and the Khmer language, there are hints of nostalgia for the pre-Khmer Rouge period. Simultaneously, Cambodians are worried about the future. What does that future look like? For some Cambodians like Chenda, who told me she was very concerned about Khmer because youths are learning English, Chinese, and Korean, the future is full of doom and gloom as Khmer slowly deteriorates. In a poem by Chap Pin, he wrote that Khmer literature must be protected because “if writing declines, the nation also dissolves.” Because language and nationalism are intimately intertwined (Haugen 1966), these Cambodians are preparing for the worst. Others, however, are fighting to prevent that from happening. With the creation of spaces and communities to correct and educate Cambodians on language-related issues, these Cambodians show signs of hope as they attempt to control the chaos. Alongside their complaints, we find a potential future that is much different from today: if only Cambodians learned Pali and Sanskrit etymology, if only Cambodians put more care and effort in studying Khmer instead of foreign languages, if only politicians were more educated, then Khmer would not be in decline and Cambodia would be a thriving country.

6 The Indigenous Ethnic Groups

I originally dismissed Khmer language complaints as trivial not only because I felt there were more pressing issues in the country besides their language, but because the Khmer language is the dominant and official language of the country. Despite the squabbles about spelling and word usage, Khmer is still a thriving language. It is one of three Mon-Khmer languages identified as least endangered (Bradley 2007). In contrast, the languages spoken by indigenous groups (sometimes referred to as “upland Khmers,” “highlanders,” “uplanders,” or “hilltribes”) are slowly disappearing as the younger generation is shifting to Khmer and assimilating to the majority Khmer-ethnic culture (Baird 2016, 2010, 2009; Keating 2016, 2013; Uk 20¹⁶; Ovesen & Trankell 2004).

Cambodia is often seen as a homogenous society and the Cambodian constitution describes its people as “Khmer citizens” and talks about “Khmer culture,” but the 2008 census shows 33 spoken languages in Cambodia (Frewer 2014). Some languages belong to recent immigrant groups such as the Chinese and

Vietnamese whose families migrated to Cambodia. About 1% of the Cambodian population can be described as indigenous non-Khmer ethnic groups (Keating 2013; Chhim 2005). Many of the languages spoken by these indigenous groups are labeled “threatened” or “nearly extinct.” They include the Saoch, Suoy, Poar, Jorai, Rhade, Brao, Kravet, Kreung, Kuy, Bunon, Pear, Samre, Samray, Stieng, and Tampuan. These groups differ from one another by language, kinship organization, and customs, but what they have in common is that they are opposed to ethnic Khmers in several ways. While the typical Khmer person speaks Khmer, practices Buddhism, lives in the lowlands, and participates in wet rice cultivation, cash cropping, and money exchange, indigenous groups have historically spoken their own languages that are distinct from Khmer, practiced beliefs that are often referred to as “animism,” lived in the uplands or highlands, and relied on swidden agriculture (Ruohomäki 2004). Stereotypically, indigenous groups are often depicted as “generally lacking in the social graces, language and modernist sensibilities of lowland [Khmer] civilization” (Keating 2013:310).

Based on historical records, the Cambodian government has attempted to integrate and assimilate indigenous groups into the wider Khmer society since the independence period. King Norodom Sihanouk, through his nation-building efforts, integrated all ethnic groups in Cambodia under the term “Khmer.” The various indigenous groups were categorized as Khmer Loeu (upland Khmers). The Cham Muslims were Khmer Islam. The Khmer living on the other side of the border in Vietnam were Khmer Kraom (lower Khmers). The Khmer majority were simply Khmer Kandal (central Khmers).⁴ Sihanouk implemented a policy of integration, believing Khmer Loeu needed Khmer culture, Khmer language, Khmer education, and Khmer progress, not unlike the French’s own *mission civilisatrice* on Cambodians under French colonialism (Uk 2016). Ethnic Khmer families were also relocated into predominantly indigenous regions with the aim of developing those areas (Uk 2016; Ovesen & Trankell 2004).

The Khmer Rouge, despite admiring the indigenous groups as being uncorrupted by the modern world, assimilated them into their own version of communist Khmer identity. They suppressed indigenous languages and banned religious practices (Baird 2011; Ruohomäki 2004; Uk 2016). After the Khmer Rouge, as Cambodia reintegrated into the global market, indigenous groups have encountered environmental changes that have affected their living conditions: the building of hydro-electric dams; land alienation; and forestry, tourism, mining issues (Ruohomäki 2004; Baird 2011; Frewer 2014). Not only have ethnic Khmers continued to move to areas that have been traditionally indigenous-only areas, but indigenous minorities have also relocated to the lowlands to work as well (Ruohomäki 2004).

If the quality of education in more populated areas of Cambodia is low, the quality of education in remote areas where indigenous minority groups live is even lower. Qualified teachers often are unwilling to move to such isolated areas and indigenous students may also be disenrolled from schools to work for their families (Asia Indigenous People’s Pact 2006). Within the last decade, a few NGOs have worked with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to create bilingual programs to help indigenous students learn to read and write in their own language (Benson & Wong 2019). The bilingual education programs have formed committees to use Khmer script to represent languages that did not traditionally have a writing system (Gregerson 2009; Middleborg 2005). While these bilingual programs have shown an increase in fluency in both local languages and in Khmer, and sometimes mathematics achievement (Lee, Watt & Frawley 2015), they are small in scale.

7 Conclusion

The very fears some Cambodians have about their language stem from the country’s tumultuous past and the influx of foreigners and foreign languages in the aftermath of war. As other scholars have noted, complaints about language are never really just about language; they often express anxieties about larger social issues (Cameron 2012 [1995]; Hill 1998, 2008; Milroy & Milroy 2012 [1985]). As some Cambodians find value in learning English, other Cambodians lament the changes they see, not just in the Khmer language, but also in Khmer society. They hold onto an idealized past with an idealized version of Khmer that was uniform and standard. This uniformity and standard that many Cambodians believed to have been present before the Khmer Rouge never existed, yet due to periods of war and devastation, some Cambodians cannot help but reimagine the pre-war years as the golden years.

⁴ There are also Surin Khmers, ethnic Khmers who live across the border in Thailand. Khmer Language Lecturer Frank Smith informed me that he suspects that the terms Khmer Loeu and Khmer Kraom may have been used by Surin Khmers long before the independence period, referring to themselves as Khmer Loeu, since they are located north of Cambodia, while Khmers in Cambodia are Khmer Kraom.

Critics who worry about the superiority and popularity of foreign languages often make a point to say that Khmer is the national or heritage language of Cambodia, arguing that Khmers must first learn to speak their own language properly before learning other languages—but what of non-Khmers within the borders of Cambodia? These commentaries often neglect to mention the various indigenous groups and indigenous languages within the country that have been overshadowed by Khmer language and culture. These communities have been erased (Irvine & Gal 2000) in order to create a homogenized vision of Cambodia as Khmer only. Further, in the same way some Cambodians see English as superior to Khmer, Khmer has been viewed as superior to indigenous languages by some indigenous communities. This hierarchical project was also reflected under French colonialism when the French represented their own language and culture as superior to their Khmer counterparts (Uk 2016). The same projection of difference, or fractal recursivity (Irvine & Gal 2000), of French as more civilized than Khmer, of Khmer as superior to indigenous languages, and of English as more popular than Khmer, has persisted to this day. Perhaps language complainers see the writing on the wall, that English might eclipse Khmer in the same way Khmer has overshadowed indigenous languages, and some are fighting their hardest to prevent that.

I cannot help but return to Ovesen and Trankell’s bewilderment, “Given the comparatively modest size of Cambodia’s minority population, it may seem a paradox that the dominant ethnic group continually feels both politically and culturally threatened” (2004:265). While I cannot predict how the Khmer language will develop nor can I tell Cambodians how to resolve their issues with it, I find it unlikely that Khmer is going to become extinct any time soon. Like all living languages, however, it will change. How it will change and in what direction remains to be seen.

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SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION IN ATTITUDES TO PRONOUN USE AMONG COUPLES IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM - A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Terms of address in Vietnamese are dominantly kinship terms. Among very few personal pronouns are three singular forms: *tao* (1st person), *mày* (2nd person), and *nó* (3rd person). These pronouns are genderless and hierarchical. Their usage expresses either solidarity or authority. Many studies have found that women tend to be more polite in their speech than men. This difference is assumed to be evident in a Confucian-based Vietnamese society, where inequality between the genders is so prevalent in the family structure that females are expected not to use personal pronouns towards or about their husbands in any situations. Vietnamese personal pronouns have never been studied in the context of politeness. In this study, we survey the endorsement of the three singular personal pronouns among couples in southern Vietnam. The study aims to investigate whether it is true that there are differences between genders in endorsing on these pronouns' usage. Results confirm the stereotype: participants consider personal pronoun usage significantly more acceptable when used by men talking about/to women than when used by women talking about/to men. Furthermore, the study also shows that the stereotype in the use of personal pronouns differs among social groups and subcultures.

Key words: gender and politeness, Vietnamese address terms, Vietnamese personal pronouns
ISO 639-3 codes: vie

1 Introduction

In the literature on politeness, “what is appropriate linguistic behavior is implicitly a key notion in all research on linguistic politeness, but it is one which is rarely described or analyzed adequately” (Mills 2003:9). This remark is true in the case of Vietnamese where studies on gender and language are still scarce. There are remarks and discussions on the Confucian-influenced expectations how women should talk, or stereotypes about the derogated language referring women (e.g., Pham 2002). These remarks and discussions often come from introspection and anecdotal observations rather than research with empirical evidence. Studies on politeness in the Vietnamese language are in general limited to examining politeness markers in speech acts where terms of address are dominantly kinship terms (e.g., Lê P. T. 2013, Lương 1984, Nguyễn and Hồ 2013, Pham A. H. 2002, Pham T. H. N. 2008, Sophana 2004, Vũ T. T. H. 1997). Not only does one need to use an appropriate term to address one another, but the absence of an address term in speech is considered to violate the norm of being polite, especially when talking to superiors (e.g., Nguyễn and Hồ 2013, Vũ T. T. H. 1997). Vietnamese kinship terms are used even when Vietnamese people speak in English (Truitt 2019).

Vietnamese personal pronouns have received little attention from researchers, especially in the field of gender and language, perhaps because there are very few personal pronouns in the Vietnamese language. They include *tao* (1st person, singular), *mày* (2nd person, singular), *nó* (3rd person, singular) and plural *bay* (3rd person). These pronouns are genderless and hierarchical. In the literature, discussions about these pronouns often do not go beyond the explanations of their pragmatic usage. The pronouns are described as markers for solidarity and intimacy among close friends or as derogatory terms for authority and/or disapproval and inferiority (e.g., Emeneau 1951, Thompson 1965, Sidnell and Shohet 2013). *Mày* (2nd person) and *tao* (1st person) are often used as a pair and even as an expression such as *Đừng mày-tao với em!* “Do not *mày-tao* with your (younger) siblings!” meaning don’t be brusque, rude to the siblings. These pronouns seem “to be little used today in most conversational situations” (Thompson 1965:149). Although the pronouns express solidarity and hierarchy, however, their use is not advised among couples.

Among Vietnamese couples, the common assumption is that in non-conflict situations, the husbands may be entitled to the use of *mày-tao* and *nó* when talking to or about their wives; however, it is unacceptable for

In southern Vietnam, the extract in (3) is taken from a short story by Trương V. K. (1909:14, cited in Bằng Giang 1992:342). A husband who is not an engraver, however, often boasts to his wife he has been making great wood products. One day the wife brought bad news home that the king's soldiers are looking for engravers to arrest for their bad works. The husband explains to his wife, using only *tao* for self-reference.

(3) Chạm rồng trở phụng là mấy anh thợ cái, chớ **tao** thì **tao**
 Engrave.dragon.engrave.peacocks is.those.CL.worker.main but.1st SG.then.1st SG
 cứ khiêng cây xeo gỗ cho họ làm mà thôi, **tao** có biết chạm trở ở đâu mà **tao**
 Go ahead.carry.tree.to.3rd PL.work.only 1st SG.AUX.know.engrave how.that.1st SG
 hòng lo?
 worried

‘Engraving dragons and peacocks is the job of the principle workers. My part was just to carry wood logs to them so they can do the job. I don’t know how to engrave, I have nothing to worry about.’

Another example in southern literature is shown in (4). The extract is taken from a 1928 novel by a southern writer (Hồ B. C. 1988:250-251). The husband wrote a break-up letter to his wife. He uses *tao-mày* in the entire letter (*mày* is southern spelling for *mày*). The letter opens with (4).

(4) **Tao** thương **mày**, mà **mày** trở lại **mày** hại **tao**.
 1st SG.love.2nd SG.yet.2nd SG.get back 2nd SG.hurt.1st SG
 ‘I love you, but you return me with harms.’

Although the situation in (4) is not an everyday one, however, the couple is not shown in direct quarrel, and the husband sent the message in a written style.

Cases where a similar use from wives towards husbands in non-conflict situations are not reported anywhere. Today the use of *tao-mày* by husbands is frowned upon, at least in urban areas. Given the characteristics of traditional Vietnamese culture and from Vietnamese folk linguistics, the common belief is that it is more acceptable for the husband to use *mày*, *tao*, and *nó* towards/about his wife, but not for the wife towards/about her husband (e.g., Pham A. H. 2002).

Given the genderless nature of the personal pronouns, for example, a mother can use the pronouns towards her children, and the Confucian characteristics of the traditional Vietnamese family, we would like to survey personal pronouns to see whether it is true that it is more acceptable for Vietnamese men/husbands to use personal pronouns towards/about their partners than vice versa. We also wanted to see if the stereotype in the use of personal pronouns varies across social groups, contexts, and communities. However, because our study uses a self-report design, at this point, we would be cautious in extrapolating these results directly to real-life settings.

This paper is the first statistical study to test the endorsement of three pronouns *tao*, *mày* and *nó* among couples in southern Vietnam. In Section Two we present the theoretical background of gender and language, and gender and politeness, our hypotheses, methodology and findings of the study. In Section Three we discuss some of the findings. The summary and conclusions are in Section Four.

2 Theoretical background, Hypotheses, Methodology and Findings

2.1. Theoretical background

Influential theories in gender and language and gender and politeness, although facing shortcomings, continue to contribute significantly to our understandings of gender differences in language (see, e.g., a review of politeness theories and their drawbacks in Al-Hindawi and Raheem Alkhazaali 2016). These approaches influence each other. Early theories, i.e., the deficit (pioneered by Lakoff 1973) and dominance models, characterize women’s speech as powerless, more polite than men. Women tend to use fewer vulgar words than men, strike for refined expressions and closer to standard English (see e.g., Brown 1998, Gomm 1981, Jespersen 1922). The dominance approach sees women as a group subordinated to men. In a patriarchal society, women are more linguistically hypercorrect than men in order to compensate for the unstable social

position and to gain prestige (e.g., Brown 1998; Holmes 1995; Spender 1980). The difference model sees gender as “doing” not “being”, as men and women form different subcultures and speech styles. In this view, the gender differences in behaviors are argued to come from what the society assigns to specific gender, rather than gender itself (Brown 1998, Holmes 1995, O’Barr and Atkins 1980, Tannen 1990, West and Zimmerman 1983). Researchers examine “the way in which gender is socially constructed in interaction, rather than existing as a fixed social category to which individuals are assigned at birth” (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999:180, Ridgeway and Correll 2004, Humm 1989). The interactions between men and women are often examined in unequal relationships which involve cultural beliefs and their effect in “social relational contexts” (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 2006). This effect creates experiences that confirm beliefs about gender differences and justify gender inequality.

In the dynamic or social constructionist model, the latest and most widely adopted approach, gender is socially constructed and should be treated as fluid and dynamic, not as a “static and dichotomized entity” (Mills 2003:215, West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender performance is based on contexts and individual’s choice within a particular culture (e.g. Aries 1996, Butler 1990, Coates 2004, Mills 2003). Aries 1996 suggests that instead of focusing on differences between genders or representing the facts with sociocultural assumptions pre-constructed by ourselves, we should reinterpret the research data to find “other truths”. In research evidence, typically less than 5% of the variance in social behavior is accounted for by gender (Aries 1996:7).

In the latest developments, gender is conceptualized as plural and the notion of “language” extends to “discourse”, which is not neutral: “whenever we speak we have to choose between different systems of meaning, different sets of values” (Coates 2004:216). Furthermore, the notion of “community of practice” sees gender has a local performance. Research in language and gender investigates “the social and linguistic practice of specific communities of practice” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995:469, Mills 2003). Because a community of practice is dynamic in nature, and constantly changes, what is considered to be the norm, or the notion of appropriateness in one community of practice is not always the same to members of the community.

Theories on gender and politeness show women in general are more polite than men (e.g., Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987; Holmes 1995). However, entities such as politeness and gender are viewed as “processes or acts of evaluation which people perform in conversation” (Mills 2003:1). The notion of politeness is dynamic and “reception-based” in that the addressee’s evaluation of the speaker’s behavior determines whether or not a speech act is polite. In this approach, politeness is determined by how individuals negotiate within their community of practice and with the wider society.

Although the dominance and difference approaches are useful in materializing folk-linguistic beliefs on gender and Vietnamese language, the dynamic model and the notion of Community of Practice seem to provide the best understandings for the complex use of Vietnamese personal pronouns among couples.

2.2. Hypotheses and methodology

The paper tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Respondents will, on average, rate usage of *tao-mày* ‘I-thou’ and *nó* ‘3rd., sing.’ by men when talking about/to wives as more acceptable than by women talking about/to husbands.

Hypothesis 1b: men consider the usage of *tao-mày* ‘I-thou’ and *nó* ‘3rd., sing.’ when they talk about/to their wives as more acceptable than women considering the usage of these pronouns when they talk about/to their husbands. In other words, men are more likely to consider these terms acceptable when they’re used by men about/towards women, and women are more likely to consider these terms acceptable when they’re used by women about/towards men.

Hypothesis 1c: The pronouns *tao-mày* ‘I-thou’ and *nó* ‘3rd., sing.’ are more acceptable during conflict situations than in non-conflict situations.

Hypothesis 2: older couples consider the use of *tao-mày* ‘I-thou’ and *nó* ‘3rd., sing.’ among couples to be less acceptable than do younger couples.

Hypothesis 3: People with advanced education consider the use of *tao-mày* ‘I-thou’ and *nó* ‘3rd., sing.’ among couples to be less acceptable than do couples without advanced education.

Hypothesis 4: People with ‘white collar’ jobs consider the use of *tao-mày* ‘I-thou’ and *nó* ‘3rd., sing.’ among couples to be less acceptable than do people with ‘blue collar’ jobs.

Hypothesis 5: Unmarried couples consider the use of *tao-mày* ‘I-thou’ and *nó* ‘3rd., sing.’ among couples to be less acceptable than do married couples.

The study used demographic questions and interviews in questionnaire, “the central instrument used in the systematic collection of dialect” (Francis 1983:52). Demographic variables included name, marital status, age, career, job title, level of education, birthplace, region, residence, and gender. There are 18 questions (see Appendix). The two linguistic dependent variables tested were the pair *tao-mày* (I-thou), and *nó* (he/she). Participants were 42 native speakers, ages 20 to 59, from various locations in the cities and rural villages in central and south Vietnam.

Questions were divided into 4 categories of acceptability of usage: by men when talking about women, by men when talking to women, by women talking about men, by women talking to men. Questions were designed to capture a breadth of contexts, including: (a) between the couple or about the spouse, (b) when speaking to one’s own parents, to the parents-in-law, and to friends, (c) whether the terms are used normally or during quarrels and (d) whether the couple is married or unmarried.

In dialects spoken in the north-central and central regions, *mày* is *mi* and *nó* is *hấn*. For participants from the north-central and central regions, the dialectal variations were presented in the questionnaires. The findings are reported in the following section.

2.3. Findings

The raw data were first compiled in Excel, then analyzed using the SPSS software package. In order to investigate our hypotheses, a series of uncorrected independent-samples t-tests and linear regressions were conducted with gender, age, education, career, and marital status as independent variables and perceived acceptability of *tao-mày* and the referent *nó* as dependent variables.

Dependent variable scores were first recoded such that higher scores reflect higher endorsement of its usage. A mean index of ‘acceptability of personal pronouns’ was created, comprising of all 18 questions. Other mean indices were created as needed (see each section for more detail). Scores range from 1 (least acceptable) to 7 (most acceptable). Findings from the 18 questions for both dependent variables are provided below, separated by each independent variable.

2.3.1 Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1a: it is perceived to be more acceptable for men to use *tao-mày* ‘I-thou’ and *nó* ‘3rd person, sing.’ when talking about/to women than it is for women to use such terms when talking about/to men. In other words, perceived acceptability scores from both genders would be higher for the questions referring to *tao-mày* and *nó* usage by men talking about/to women than for questions referring to such usage by women talking about/to men.

To investigate this hypothesis, a mean index of 9 questions under ‘men talking about/to women’ was created from the combination of 7 questions where men use *nó/hấn* to talk about women and the 2 questions where men use *tao-mày* when talking to women. A similar index was created, ‘women talking about/ to men’, from the combination of 5 questions where women use these terms when talking about men and 2 questions where women use these terms to talk to men.

Because participants provided responses to both indices under comparison, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare scores between the two newly-created index variables. As seen in Table 1, results suggest that participants consider personal pronoun usage significantly more acceptable when used by men ($M=3.13$) when talking about/to women than when used by women ($M=2.29$) when talking about/to men, $t=4.70, p<.001$.

Table 1: Descriptives and Paired-Samples T-test Statistics for Pronoun Target Comparisons

Pronoun Target	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
1: Men talking about/to women	42	3.13	1.62		
2: Women talking about/to men	42	2.29	1.33		
Pronoun target 1 vs. pronoun target 2				4.70	<.001

Note: The first two lines provide descriptive values for each of the variables used in the analysis. The last line provides the test statistics for the t-test.

Hypothesis 1b: men consider the usage of tao-mày when speaking about/to women as more acceptable than women considering the usage of tao-mày about/to men. If gender identity is salient, it is certainly possible that participants may end up biased in favor of their identified gender, which would result in different the patterns of responses between men and women.

In other words, if people are more biased in favor of their own genders, it would make some sense that men would find personal pronoun usage by men towards women more acceptable than women do. Conversely, women may find personal pronoun usage by women towards men more acceptable than men do.

To address this issue, a mixed-model analysis of variance was conducted with pronoun target (e.g., men talking about/to women vs. women talking about/to men) as the within-subjects factor and gender as the between-subjects factor.

Table 2: Descriptives for Pronoun Target Comparisons

Pronoun Target	Level	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men talking about/to women	Male	16	3.28	1.95
	Female	26	3.04	1.41
Women talking about/to men	Male	16	2.05	1.59
	Female	26	2.44	1.16

Note: The first two lines for each pronoun target provide descriptive values for each of the levels of the variable used in the analysis.

The mixed-model ANOVA revealed the interaction between gender and pronoun target did not meet the significance threshold of $\alpha=.05$, $F(1,40)=3.04$, $p=.089$, $\eta^2=0.071$, indicating insufficient evidence to conclude that the pattern of responses differ between men and women on pronoun acceptability. However, given that interactions typically require a larger sample size to test compared to main effects, and given a non-trivial effect size of .071, there exists sufficient reason to believe that the effect may exist, but that the study was simply too underpowered to detect this interaction. Thus, a breakdown of simple effects and their means may prove useful in an exploratory sense, and in laying the groundwork for a future, higher-powered study. When examining descriptive results from Table 2, we do seem to see results consistent with our prediction: it does seem to be the case that men consider personal pronoun usage slightly more acceptable ($M=3.28$) than women do ($M=3.04$) in cases where men are using these pronouns about/to women. Conversely, women ($M=2.44$) seem to consider personal pronoun usage as more acceptable than men do ($M=2.05$) in cases where women are using these pronouns about/to men. However, we emphasize that these comparisons are made in an exploratory sense and are part of an interaction that did not strictly reach an $\alpha=.05$ significance threshold.

- Hypothesis 1c: The personal pronouns are said to be more acceptable during conflict situations. A paired-samples t-test showed that people consider personal pronouns used among couples significantly more acceptable when used in conflict situations ($M=3.05$) than in non-conflict situations ($M=1.55$), $t(41)=-4.02$, $p<.001$.

2.3.2 Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2: older couples consider the use of *tao-mày* ‘I-thou’ and *nó* ‘3rd., sing.’ among couples to be less acceptable than do younger couples.

To investigate this hypothesis, a mean index of all 18 personal questions was created. A linear regression was conducted with age predicting score on this index, where higher score means higher acceptability of irreverent pronoun term usage. Results show this relationship between age ($n=42$, $M=33.9$) and irreverent pronoun acceptability ($M=2.74$) was not significant, $R^2=.017$, $F(1,40)=.708$, $p=.405$.

2.3.3 Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3: People without a college education consider personal pronoun usage among couples as significantly more acceptable than do speakers with a college education.

To investigate this hypothesis, an independent-samples t-test was conducted with education as the independent variable and irreverent pronoun acceptability as the dependent variable. The 4 levels of education, elementary ($n=2$), high school ($n=8$), bachelor ($n=25$), and post-graduate ($n=7$), were collapsed into 2 categories of ‘up to bachelor’s degree’ and ‘bachelor’s degree and above’ due to a) low cell counts for elementary and post-graduate levels; and b) we are primarily interested in a comparison between high and low levels of education, and because our education variable is not continuous, we would rather group these variables together to increase the power of our pairwise comparison and be able to make more statistically powerful claims at a more general level.

As expected, results show a statistically significant difference between those without a college education and those with a college education on the acceptability of personal pronoun acceptability: those without a college education ($n=10$, $M=3.47$, $SD=1.70$) consider irreverent pronoun usage as significantly more acceptable than do those with a college education ($n=32$, $M=2.49$, $SD=1.17$; $t(40)=2.08$, $p=.044$).

2.3.4 Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4: People with ‘white collar’ jobs consider the use of *tao-mày* and *nó* towards each other to be less acceptable than do people with ‘blue collar’ jobs.

To investigate this hypothesis, an independent-samples t-test was conducted with job type as the independent variable and irreverent pronoun acceptability as the dependent variable. Career levels were coded as ‘blue collar’ and ‘white collar’ job types prior to analyses.

As expected, results show that those working jobs coded as ‘blue collar’ ($n=9$, $M=3.62$, $SD=1.73$) considered personal pronoun usage to be significantly more acceptable than those with jobs coded as ‘white collar’ ($n=33$, $M=2.48$, $SD=1.15$; $t(40)=2.36$, $p=0.23$).

2.3.5 Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5: Unmarried couples consider the use of ‘*tao-mày*’ and ‘*nó*’ towards each other to be less acceptable than do married couples.

To investigate this hypothesis, an independent-samples t-test was conducted with marital status (married vs. unmarried) as the independent variable and personal pronoun acceptability as the dependent variable.

Results show no significant difference between married ($n=21$, $M=2.92$, $SD=1.51$) and unmarried ($n=21$, $M=2.53$, $SD=1.19$) participants on personal pronoun acceptability, $t(40)=-.913$, $p=.367$.

2.4 Summary

Our goal was to investigate the acceptability of personal pronoun usage across several variables and social categories, as well as investigate its acceptability of usage by men about/to women and by women about/to men.

Overall, it seems as though our entire sample, both men and women, consider it more acceptable for men to use personal pronouns towards women than it is for women to use these pronouns towards men. We had perhaps expected an influence of in-group bias along the lines of gender as evidenced by past research on group dynamics (e.g., Rudman & Goodwin, 2004), where one is expected to favor one's own group over out-group members (i.e., men should favor men's usage of these pronouns over women and women should favor women's usage of these pronouns over men), but we did not find sufficient evidence in our data to arrive at this conclusion.

Other results also show statistically significant differences for education and career where those with less than a college education and those working blue-collar jobs consider personal pronoun usage (by both men and women towards each other) as more acceptable than those with a college education and those working white-collar jobs.

3 Discussion

In this section we discuss some of the findings. First of all, Hypothesis 1a showed that both men and women consider these personal pronouns more acceptable when used by men towards women than when used by women towards men. We then looked at the interaction between gender and pronoun usage to see if men and women respond differently to Hypothesis 1a, and we did not find statistically significant evidence to conclude as such. However, because our result was marginally significant ($p=.089$) and we had a large effect size, it may be the case that we are looking at a real effect (i.e., men and women do respond differently to Hypothesis 1a), but lack the statistical power (e.g., sample size) to confirm it. As such, we think the results from Hypothesis 1b are still worth discussing in an exploratory sense.

Analyses from Hypothesis 1b showed that men consider it only slightly more acceptable ($M=3.28$) than women ($M=3.04$) for men to use *tao-mày* to wives. More interestingly, women ($M=2.44$) consider it more acceptable for women to use *tao-mày* towards husbands than men do ($M=2.05$). As viewed in the difference and dynamic models, it is important to be aware of how each gender interprets the use of these pronouns. In the reception-based approach, politeness is defined as an evaluation of the speakers' behavior by the addressee rather than the speaker's intention (e.g., Terkourafi 2001, Mills 2003). For example, some studies show that women and men perceive swearing differently. Women tend to rate swearing as more offensive than men do (Gauthier et al. 2015, Jay and Janschewitz 2008). Some swear words are found much more offensive to women than men (Bendixen and Gabriel 2013, James 1998). In the Vietnamese culture, women are supposed to show respect to their husbands to protect their social faces even at the expense of her own face (Vũ T. T. H. 1997:60). However, the principle of *lễ* (rites), a social norm of conduct, is not unidirectional. Husbands, like other superiors, also pay respects to subordinates (Ibid.). It is possible that between couples, Vietnamese women find the pair *tao-mày* 'I-thou' is more insulting than men do. However, we currently lack the statistical power to detect the interaction required to support this speculation. To further test this speculation in future work, we can recruit more participants to increase the statistical power of our current study or conduct a new study with a larger sample size. A replication would further reinforce confidence in the effect, and a larger sample size will provide us with the statistical power required to conduct more complex analyses.

Secondly, Mỹ Tho is mentioned as a place where personal pronouns can be used among couples in non-conflict situations: in this study, all three participants living in Mỹ Tho province report that it is acceptable among couples to use the pair *tao-mày* 'I-thou' in non-conflict situations. As pointed out in Mills 2003, "it is only participants in specific communities of practice who are competent to judge whether a language item or phrase is polite for them or not" (2003:2). The phenomenon seen in Mỹ Tho might be a remnant from the time the pronouns were freely used in all relationships (Phan Khôi 1955). In several languages in the southeast Asian region, the personal pronouns similar to the pair *mày-tao* have neutral attitude (Nguyễn V. C. 1988). It could be true that the Chinese influence in Vietnam, i.e., Confucian, is often exaggerated, and "many of the components of Vietnamese culture have roots indigenous to Southeast Asia" (Duiker 1995:166) where multiple ethnics co-live, especially in southern Vietnam (Li 1998, Taylor 2013). In central Vietnam, the dialectal variant of *mày* is *mi* (2nd person, sing.) and of *nó* is *hắn* (3rd person, sing.). *Mi* and *hắn* are used in Rục, another Vietic language with the same meanings (Alves 2017, Nguyễn V. L. 1993). The pronoun *tao* 'I' is Proto-Vietic, *mày* 'thou' and *nó* or *hắn* 'he, she' are Proto-Austroasiatic (Alves 2017).

Contextually, some young, married couples from the study shared that they sometimes use the pair *tao-mày* 'I-thou' with each other when they want to be playful or to relive the early dating period when they were still classmates. In fact, on tabloid newspapers these days, one can find topics such as "When the pair *mày-tao*

is allowed among couples?”. According to some specialists, the personal pronouns are allowed when the couple is relaxed and exchanges jokes, or in a private setting (Gia Hân 2015). It seems that in general, depending on the context, personal pronouns are acceptable between couples in modern Vietnamese society.

The phenomenon seen in Mỹ Tho or in certain contexts elsewhere can be hard to explain in a traditional view on early theories on gender differences in speech styles. The performative/dynamic model in gender and politeness or the Community of Practice model might provide explanations for the findings discussed above: a) during conflict times, when the socially expected behaviors are dropped, the pair *tao-mày* is significantly more acceptable than in non-conflict situations; b) speakers who consider *tao-mày* as acceptable in non-conflict situations (three Mỹ Tho speakers and some speakers in Quảng Nam), might not share much of the dominant beliefs with other communities about these personal pronouns; and finally c) the statistical significance of education and career illustrates that education, as a cultural aspect or context, can intervene with the gender bias.

4 Conclusions

Overall, both Vietnamese men and women consider it more acceptable for men to use personal pronouns *tao* and *mày* towards wives than it is for women to use these pronouns towards husbands. It is clear that gender bias is deeply rooted in the culture. The stereotype toward women through addressing remains, regardless of the improved social status of women in today society. Our general findings seem to indicate that Vietnamese men still hold a higher place in the relationship compared to women, at least when it comes to conversational indicators of respect. Education and career show statistically significant differences in endorsing the use of these personal pronouns.

However, our study about the use of personal pronouns shows a more interesting and complex picture than confirming the general assumption/claim about politeness in the speech style of Vietnamese women toward/about their husbands. Our results demonstrate intra-community variation in the strength of these stereotype beliefs. When we look at individuals and contexts, the biased differences are not always straightforward. It is important to recognize the dynamics of the situations and of the communities. This study shows that not sex but rather the contexts, education, and although more evidence is needed, the community are keys in whether the use of personal pronouns is acceptable among couples in southern Vietnam.

Northern Vietnam is the cradle of the Vietnamese culture and was under Chinese ruling for centuries before the migration of the Viet people to the current southern region. The Confucian influence, therefore, is assumed to be much heavier in northern than in southern Vietnam. We intend to collect data from couples in northern Vietnam and also expand the sample to cover mixed groups of friends with equal status in order to test more broadly the use of personal pronouns in Vietnamese.

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Appendix

Questionnaires

1. Normally husband and wife can use *mày-tao / mi-tao* to address one another.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. In a quarrel husband and wife can use *mày-tao / mi-tao* to address one another.
3. During a quarrelling time, when talking to his parents, the husband can refer to his wife as *nó/hắn*.
4. In a normal time, when talking to her parents, the wife can refer to her husband as *nó/hắn*.
5. During a quarrelling time, when talking to his in-laws the husband can refer to his wife as *nó/hắn*.

6. During a quarrel, the husband can use *mày-tao / mi-tao* to talk to his wife.
7. During a quarrelling time, when talking to his friends, the husband can use *nó/hắ* to refer to his wife.
8. During a quarrelling time, when talking to her in-laws, the wife can use *nó/hắ* to refer to her husband.
9. In a normal time, when talking to her friends, the wife can use *nó/hắ* to refer to her husband.
10. During a quarrelling time, when talking to his friends, the husband can use *nó/hắ* to refer to his wife.
11. In a normal time, when talking to friends, the husband can use *nó/hắ* to refer to his wife.
12. In a quarrelling time, when talking to her in-laws, the wife can use *nó/hắ* to refer to her husband.
13. During a normal time, when talking to his parents, the husband can use *nó/hắ* to refer to his wife.
14. In a quarrel, a girlfriend can use *mày-tao / mi-tao* when talking to her boyfriend.
15. In a normal time, when talking to her in-laws, the wife can use *nó/hắ* to refer to her husband.
16. During a quarrel, a boyfriend can use *mày-tao / mi-tao* when talking to his girlfriend.
17. In a normal time, when talking to his in-laws, the husband can use *nó/hắ* to refer to his wife.
18. During a quarrel, the wife can use *mày-tao / mi-tao* to talk to her husband.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE LA CHÍ PEOPLE IN BẢN DÍU COMMUNE, XÍN MẦN DISTRICT, HÀ GIANG PROVINCE, VIETNAM¹

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Abstract

The La Chí people reside in Hoàng Su Phì and Xín Mần districts of Hà Giang province in Vietnam and Mã Quan district of Yunnan province in China. There are seven La Chí groups among which four are in China and three in Vietnam. The La Chí language belongs to the Kra (Kadai) branch of the Tai-Kadai language family. This language is at high risk of extinction. In Mã Quan district, La Chí Hoa people (Luohua) still speak their mother tongue, but the other three La Chí groups have switched to Chinese or Choang. In Vietnam, La Chí in Bản Phùng commune, La Chí in Bản Máy commune also speak La Chí; but the La Chí in Bản Díu commune already switched to another language. This paper presents an analysis of the phonetic, lexical, and grammatical features of La Chí language in Bản Díu commune, in comparison with the language of La Chí in Bản Máy commune and La Chí in Bản Phùng commune. The paper concludes that, due to linguistic contact, the La Chí in Bản Díu have shifted from La Chí of the Kra branch to Central Tai of the Tai Kadai family. The analysis builds on a computerized database of word lists, grammars and sociolinguistic survey data with the help of WINCECIL, ASAP, PRAAT software.

Keywords: Kadai language, endangerous linguistics, social linguistics

ISO 639-3 codes: lbt

1 Introduction

The La Chí language belongs to the Kra (Kadai) branch of the Tai-Kadai language family, which is distributed in Ma Quan (Yunnan, China) and Hà Giang, Lào Cai (Vietnam). La Chí is highly endangered. The majority of La Chí people in Yunnan (China) have turned to speaking Chinese or Choang. The number of people who still use the language in Vietnam is also low, and the scope of use is limited. A number of La Chí people in Vietnam (La Chí Bản Díu) have shifted to using other languages.

The objective of this paper is to describe the current status, structure and function of the La Chí language in Bản Díu commune, Xín Mần district, Hà Giang province.

Linguistic field methods were the main means used to collect data on La Chí, including its phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar. Computer software such as PRAAT, SPEECH ANALYSIS, and WINCECIL were used for data analysis. In order to collect information on the social aspects of language use, sociolinguistic survey methods including questionnaires, in-depth interviews and group discussions were employed. Finally, the data from the sociolinguistic investigation was processed using SPSS software.

Historical comparative methods - lexical statistics, analysis of phonetic innovation processes - were used to determine the genetic relationship of La Chí Bản Díu to the other Tai-Kadai languages.

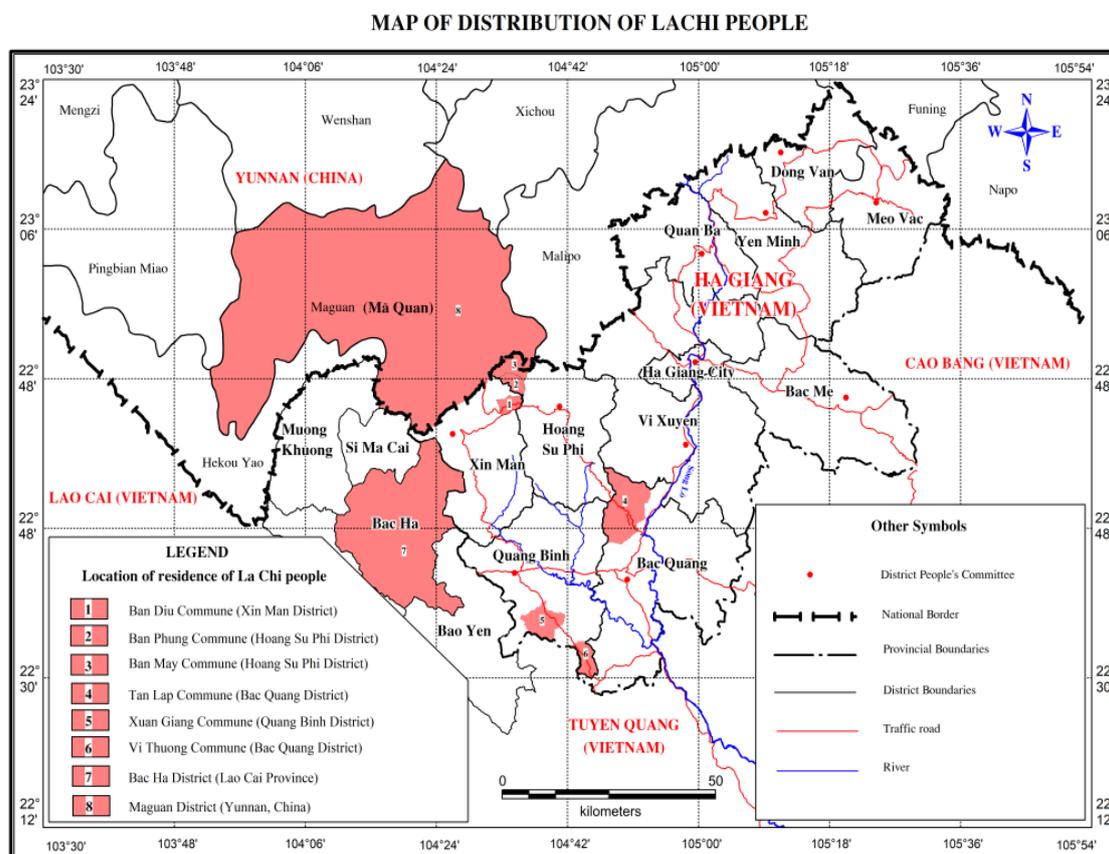
The materials collected during field trips include the following: (a) The materials of the La Chí language used in Bản Phùng commune, Hoàng Su Phì district, Hà Giang province collected in 1995 by Nguyễn Văn Lợi. These data were acquired in 2018 and 2019 by Dương Thu Hằng and Nguyễn Thu Quỳnh. (b) The materials of La Chí language in Bản Díu commune, Xín Mần district, Hà Giang province were collected in 2018 and 2019 by Dương Thu Hằng and Nguyễn Thu Quỳnh.

¹ This article is the product of a State-level science and technology project, Code: ĐTĐLXH - 01/18.

2 Results of the research

2.1 An overview of La Chí people and a literature review on the La Chí language

There are currently about 16,000 La Chí people living in Vietnam and China.



(Based on survey data of the research team in 2018, 2019. Map data from ©2020 Google.)

As of 1995 there were about 2,500 La Chí people living in Ma Quan district, Yunnan province, China. The La Chí people in China call themselves *li³⁵ pu⁴⁴ ljo⁴⁴*. “*Po/pu*” means “person” and it is often combined with another element to distinguish different local La Chí groups, for example: *li po ljo* (Flowery La Chí) in Jinchang area, *li po ke* (Red La Chí) in Xiaobari region, *li po tjo* (Han La Chí) in Renhe region, *li po te* (Bag La Chí) in the Nan Lao area.

As of 2017, the total population of the La Chí ethnic group was 14,497. La Chí people mainly live in Hà Giang with 13,333 people. The majority of those live in Bản Phùng, Bản Díu and Bản Máy communes of Xin Mản and Hoàng Su Phi districts while others live in districts such as Bắc Hà and Mường Khương of Lào Cai province. In Vietnam, the La Chí people call themselves *qu³² te⁴⁵³*. According to Edmondson, *qu³²* means “person”, not a cognate of *pu*, but a cognate of “*ka*,” *qa, *kra “person” in kadai, kradai. La Chí people in Vietnam often take place names (a village name, a commune name, for example) as their local group names: I Tỏ - La Chí in Bản Phùng, I Tỏ - La Chí in Bản Díu, I Pỏ or I Mja - La Chí in Bản Máy. In these names, element I is probably derived from [*i42*] meaning “water”. Thus, La Chí people currently reside in a relatively circumscribed area on the Vietnam-China border in the provinces of Hà Giang, Lào Cai (Vietnam) and Yunnan (China).

According to Lin Shao Min (1994), the La Chí people are organized into seven local groups (clans) which they call *li po*²². There are four clans in Ma Quan (China), and three clans in Hoàng Su Phì, Xin Mãn, Vietnam. Here are the names of the autonyms of La Chí groups (clans) in Vietnam and China:

- 1) *li po ljo* (Flowery La Chí) in Jinchang area
- 2) *li po ke* (Red La Chí) in Xiaobari region
- 3) *li po tjo* (Han La Chí) in Renhe region
- 4) *li po te* (Bag La Chí) in Nan Lao area
- 5) *li po pō* (White La Chí) in Bản Diu commune
- 6) *li po tjo* (Black La Chí) in Bản Páng and Bản Máy communes
- 7) *li po pi* (Long-haired La Chí) in Bản Phùng commune.

The Tai-Kadai language family is divided into three language branches: the Kam - Tai branch, the Hlai branch and the Kra branch. The Kam - Tai branch includes the Kam - Sui group, the Lakjia - Be group, and the Tai group. The Tai group includes the following subgroups: Northern subgroup (Bouyei, Northern Zhuang, Yai, Saek), Central subgroup (South Zhuang, Tay, Nung) and Southwestern subgroup (Thái (siam), Lao, Lự, Black Thai, White Thai). Kra branch includes the languages Gelao, La Chí, La Ha, Buyang, En, Qabiao (see Diller 2012). The original La Chí (La Chí Bản Phùng, Bản Máy) belongs to the Kra branch; the La Chí Bản Diu belongs to the Central Tai subgroup, the Tai group, the Kam-Tai branch, and the Tai-Kadai language family.

La Chí has been of much interest to linguists since the work of P. Benedict (1942) who first proposed that the Kadai group consisted of four languages (Pupeo, Le, La Chí, and Colao). In 1973, Haudricourt added two more languages to this group: Laha and Baha Buyang. Later, several Chinese authors, namely Lin Shao Mian (1994) and Liang Min (1990), published monographs on La Chí. These scholars provided detailed descriptions of the phonetic and lexical systems of La Chí in relation to other languages in the same group.

In Vietnam, the language of La Chí people was surveyed in the Vietnam-Russia cooperation program in 1994, and by Jerold Edmondson in cooperation with Vietnamese colleagues of the linguistics Institute (Edmondson and Nguyễn Văn Lợi 1997). The language of La Chí in China and Vietnam was studied in a Ph. D. dissertation on Proto-Kra (Weera 2000) and in a Ph. D. dissertation on the La Chí language (Kosaka 2000).

2.2 The situation of endangerment of the La Chí languages in China and Vietnam

2.2.1 General information

The language of La Chí people in Vietnam and China is highly endangered. In Jin Chang, Ma Quan, China, there are only about 250 Flowery La Chí people (most of whom are over 50 years old) who use the La Chí language. The majority of La Chí people in China have shifted to using Chinese, or Zhuang.

In Vietnam, according to the report entitled *Social – economic analysis of 53 ethnic minorities* (Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs, May 2017), 64.4% of 14,497 La Chí people still use the La Chí language. However, according to the results obtained from our field surveys, it is likely that the proportion of La Chí people who use the original La Chí language³ is lower than that. The vitality of La Chí, furthermore, is different in each local group, in terms of both the percentage of people who use it and the scope of their use of it.

² The division of La Chí branches into “white”, “red”, “black”, and “flower” is based on costume. La Chí Han is a group of La Chí people who have had a close relationship with the Han people and have shifted to speaking Chinese. Long-haired La Chí is the group in which people have long hair that they wear in a bun. Obviously, the elements with specific language functions that have a certain branch like *po*, *tjo*, *pi* express the relationship of La Chí branches in Vietnam and China.

³ The language used by the ancestors of the La Chí people (Proto La Chí).

2.2.2 *La Chí language use in Vietnam*

2.2.2.1 *La Chí language use in Bản Phùng commune (Hoàng Su Phì district)*

Bản Phùng commune is located in the west of Hoàng Su Phì district, 30 km from the district center. The commune has 501 households with 2,818 people belonging to six ethnic groups, of which La Chí people account for 92.44% (Report of Hoàng Su Phì district's population on January 25, 2019).⁴

La Chí people in Bản Phùng commune use the La Chí language with their families and in other situations of intra-ethnic communication. La Chí people also use Vietnamese - the national language, or Nùng language – as a language of inter-ethnic communication.

2.2.2.2 *La Chí language use in Bản Máy commune (Hoàng Su Phì district)*

Bản Máy commune has a total population of 2,308 people, belonging to 5 ethnic groups, of which La Chí people account for 48.40%.⁵ There are 4 villages in Bản Phùng commune (include Bản Páng, Lùng Cầu, Tà Trãi and Bản Máy).

The La Chí people living in Bản Máy regard themselves and are officially identified (according to their identity cards) as a part of the La Chí ethnic group. However, most of them use Nùng (they identify themselves as La Chí Nùng) or Tày (La Chí Tày) in everyday communication. Nùng is used in communication within families, in communication with other village residents, and in communication with other ethnic groups in neighboring communes and districts. Vietnamese is used in education, mass media, and administration. The original La Chí language is used only in ritual practices. However, even in this context, linguistic and cultural interference and borrowing still occur. For instance, two distinct forms of ritual practice are performed in ancestor worship, one using Nùng and applying Nùng ritual conventions, the other using La Chí and applying traditional La Chí ritual conventions.

Currently, the number of La Chí people who speak the original La Chí language in Bản Máy commune is very small. They are concentrated in 10 households with a total of 58 people living in the end of Bản Páng village with the highest geographical position. The original La Chí language is still used in family communication and with related ethnic minorities.

Thus, among the 13,333 La Chí people in Hà Giang, only 2,818 of those that live in Bản Phùng commune and 58 of those that live in Bản Máy commune (approximately 21% of all La Chí people in Hà Giang) are still using a variety of the original La Chí language.

2.2.2.3 *La Chí language use in Bản Díu commune (Xín Mần district)*

Bản Díu commune, Xín Mần district, has a population of 4,820 people, belonging to 5 ethnic groups, of which La Chí people account for approximately 65% (3,146 people). La Chí people of Bản Díu self-identify and are adamant about belonging to the La Chí ethnic group; they consider the language they use every day to be La Chí, namely, La Chí Bản Díu language. The following are some sociolinguistic characteristics of La Chí people in Bản Díu.

La Chí people in Bản Díu have settled permanently in the area. According to Abadia, the La Chí are indigenous to the area of Hoàng Su Phì and Xín Mần Hà Giang. The Nùng and Cờ Lao residents recounted that when they migrated from other places to Hoàng Su Phì, Xín Mần, they met La Chí people already living there. As a consequence, when building a new house or cultivating new fields, Nùng and Cờ Lao people often feel obligated to worship La Chí ancestors as the original residents of the area. The La Chí people believe that they are descended from a spirit figure Hoàng Dìn Thùng (Hoàng Văn Đông). However, residents of Nùng and Tày in Hoàng Su Phì and Xín Mần also consider Hoàng Dìn Thùng as their ancestors [Nguyễn Văn Huy. 1975]. The La Chí groups in Bản Phùng, Bản Máy, Bản Páng, Nán Xon, Nam Đan and Na Chí consider the La Chí Bản Díu to be their eldest brother. The temple of Hoàng Dìn Thùng is located in Bản Díu. Perhaps this is evidence that the La Chí people in Bản Díu were resident in the Hoàng Su Phì and Xín Mần areas earlier than other La Chí groups (Nguyễn Văn Huy 1975)).

⁴ Data provided by Mr. Tran Chi Nhan - Vice General of Culture Department of Hoàng Su Phì District.

⁵ Data provided by Mr. Luc Phat Chung, Bản Máy commune.

La Chí people in Bản Dúu reside with other ethnic minorities. The whole Bản Dúu commune has 970 families with 4,777 people, including 643 families and 3,172 La Chí people. The remaining families and individuals belong to the Tày (Tày Đăm), Nùng (Dín), Hmong, and Yao ethnic groups.

After the 80s, inter-ethnic marriage (exogamy) has become more common, increasing to 35%. Lachi people in Bản Dúu today suggested that marriage with members of other ethnic groups is a condition for social change, for promoting economic development, and for bringing success to their children. The trend towards exogamy, leading to an increase of mixed families, has meant that the language of children sometimes diverges widely from that of the mother or the father and the inheritance of the ethnic language is interrupted (Documents of the People's Committee of Bản Dúu commune).

Among La Chí residents in Bản Dúu, bilingualism and multilingualism are common. The proportion of La Chí people who can also speak Tày Đăm (Tày Đen) is 90%, Nùng 70%, Hmong, Yao, and other languages about 5 to 10%.

There are few institutions and practices currently in place to aid in the preservation and development of the traditional culture and language of the La Chí people. La Chí people in Bản Dúu who have shifted to speaking another language still identify themselves as La Chí. This sense of ethnic identity stems from the continued use of a common ethnonym (e.g. Cu Te, or I pò), memory of a common ancestor, and a more general recognition of shared customs, traditions, festivals, etc. with other La Chí groups. The majority of La Chí people want to maintain the traditional culture of the La Chí ethnic group. 94.5% of La Chí people stated that they did and will participate in local cultural festivals. However, this sense of identification as La Chí is fading in Bản Dúu and is less prominent among younger members of the community.

Currently, La Chí people in Bản Dúu have changed their language. They are aware that they no longer speak the original La Chí language, but rather a hybrid language that is mixed with Tày and Nùng. Today, the language itself is endangered. The number of people who speak it and the scope of their use of it (i.e. mainly in the family, not used in education or in mass media) are both decreasing. The language tends not to be transmitted to younger people in the community. There are also no specific and effective policies and measures to preserve and develop the language which the La Chí in Bản Dúu are using.

2.3 La Chí Bản Dúu in relation to of the original La Chí language and the Tai language group

2.3.1 Proto-La Chí and the original La Chí language and its phonetic characteristics

The original La Chí Language is a language that belongs to the Kra branch of Tai-kradai family. According to Ostapirat (2000), it is possible to divide La Chí into three groups: Northern La Chí (La Chí in China - Flowery La Chí), Central La Chí (La Chí in Bản Máy and Bản Pắng - White La Chí), and Southern La Chí (La Chí people in Bản Phùng – Long-haired La Chí, La Chí in Bản Dúu, and Black La Chí). Currently, there is very little information available about Central La Chí (Bản Máy and Bản Pắng); there are only a few words documented by Bonifacy (1906) and Lajongière (1906).

Table 1: Proto-Kra and Data in La Chí

Kra	Northern La Chí		Gloss	Central La Chí		Southern Bản Phùng	
*p	pje	A1	fire	pje	A1	pji	A1
*t	the	B1	ash			te	B1
*t̥	tã	A1	egg	tã	A1	tã	A1
*k	ko	D1S	foot	ko	D1S	qə	B1
	kho	D1S	monkey	ko	D1S	ko	D1S
	ku	C1	I	qu	C1	qu	A1
*ʔ	ʔi	C1	water			ʔi	C1
*b	ph̥u	B2	shoulder	pu	B2	ph̥u	B2
*d	th̥ja	D2S	bone			th̥o ^{452ʔ}	
*d̥	th̥je	D2	raw			th̥o ^{452ʔ}	
*dz	th̥jo	B2	chopsticks			th̥o	B2
*s	su	A1	two			fu	A1
*ʃ	so	D1	rope				
*ʃ̥	sə	B1	satisfied				
*ts	teĩ	A1	to buy			teĩ	A1
*ʒ	zho	B2	y.brother			jə	B2
	tja	A1	o.brother	tja	A1	zə	D2S
*dʒ	ja	D2S	to hear				
*j	zhu	C2	grandmother			zə	C2
*dz̥	tehi	A2	mountain			jə	A2
*m	m̥	A2	hand			m̥	A2
*(?n)	nhĩ	A2	six			nĩ	A2
*ŋ	nh̥jo	D2	bird	no ^{35ʔ}		noʔ	D2
*ŋ̥	nh̥jũ	A2	salt	ñũ	A2		
*ŋ	ŋ	A2	snake			ŋ	A2
*hm	ma	D1	flea			maʔ	D1
*hŋ	ŋ	A1	door	ŋ	A1	ŋ	A1
*hl	lje	C1	heart	leʔ	C1	leʔ	C1
*l	lhĩ	C2	to steal	n̥um	C2		
*l̥	lh̥ju	C2	near			lju	C2
*r	lfu	A2	ear			lu	A2
*v	v̥fu	C2	to go			v̥u	C2
*w	v̥hã	A2	sun			ŋwã	A2
*pl	pjo	D1L	blood			pju	D1L
*pwl	pə	D1	ten			ph̥jo	B1
*pr	ph̥jo	B1	silver				

Like Flowery La Chí in Jiangquang and Zhongzhai in Ma Quan, Yunnan, China (according to Liang Ming and Lin Shiaomian), the phonetic system of La Chí Bản Phùng uses an opposition between uvular (/q, q^h/) and non-uvular consonants. In contrast to the Flowery La Chí consonants in China, La Chí Bản Phùng also has implosive consonants /b, b̥j/ and pre-aspirated consonants (/hm, hn/). Among our informants, only Ms. Vang Thi Mia (Bản Phùng) was able to pronounce the uvular consonants. Those who were young, studying or working, and exposed to other languages, were no longer able to.

La Chí Bản Phùng has the following vowels: /i, e, ε, i, a, u, ɔ, o/. These vowels have a nasalisation/non-nasalisation opposition. Most of the phonetic syllables are open, some syllables end in nasal consonants /m, n, ŋ/ and there are no syllables with voiceless plosive consonants /p, t, k/ as finals. This is a distinct characteristic of this language in comparison with varieties of La Chí in Ma Quan, Yunnan, China.

La Chí Bản Phùng has 5 tones: tone 1: high, tone 2: high falling, tone 3: rising, tone 4: mid-level, tone 5: low falling. Among the older generation, in addition to features of pitch distinguishing these tones, some of

the tones also differ in voice quality. The third tone is expressed as the rising tone, ending with a glottal stop (as pronounced by Vàng Thị Mía). The fifth tone also ends with a glottal stop. The pronunciation tone 3 and tone 5 with glottal stop is not found in the age of under 40 years.

2.3.2 The La Chí Bản Dúi language

2.3.2.1 The position of La Chí Bản Dúi in relation to the original La Chí and languages of Tai group in terms of vocabulary

In order to determine the position of La Chí Bản Dúi in relation to the original La Chí (La Chí Bản Phùng) and the Tai group languages (Nùng Dín) in terms of vocabulary, we compared a table of 100 Swadesh words from La Chí Bản Dúi with a similar list from La Chí Bản Phùng and Nùng Dín (see the appendix below). We found cognates of La Chí Bản Dúi and other Tai-Kadai languages, as in these examples.

Gloss	La Chí Bản Dúi	La Chí Bản Phùng	Nùng Dín
liver	tăp ³⁵	ta ^{55?}	tăp ³⁵
dog	(ti ²¹)ma ³⁵	mã ⁴¹	(tu ²¹)ma ³⁵
bird	(ti ²¹)nək ⁴⁵	ʔa ³³ nɔ ^{55?}	(tu ²¹)nək ⁴⁵

We also found two words of La Chí Bản Dúi that are derived from the same origin as La Chí Bản Phùng.

Gloss	La Chí Bản Dúi	La Chí Bản Phùng	Nùng Dín
I	ku ⁴⁴	k ^h u ⁴⁴	k ^h ɔj ²¹
dry	k ^h u ²¹	qa ⁴⁴	ʂo ³²³

Thus, the majority of the basic vocabulary of La Chí Bản Dúi belongs to the Central Tai, the Tai group, the Kam-Tai branch, and the Tai-Kadai language family. Thus, out of this Swadesh list, the La Chí Bản Dúi variety retained only 2/100 words from the original La Chí.

2.3.2.2 The position of La Chí Bản Dúi in relation to languages in the Tai group in terms of phonetic innovation

The position of La Chí in Tai can be determined by the innovation of consonants, vowels, and tones, as shown in the following discussion and data.

a. Innovation of consonants

Following Li (1977), Diller (2012), and Pranee Kullavanijaya and Theraphan L-Thongkum (1998), we distinguish the Northern Tai subgroup, the Central Tai subgroup and the Southwestern Tai subgroup. To determine the place of La Chí among the three subgroups mentioned above, we rely on the following basis:

The development of Proto-Tai aspirated stops consonants

Northern Tai languages are characterized by the process of changing the Proto-Tai aspirated consonants into non-aspirated voiceless consonants: *p^h, *t^h, *k^h → /p, t, k/. In La Chí Bản Dúi, the aspirated consonants in Proto-Tai are preserved: *p^h, *t^h, *k^h → /p^h, t^h, k^h/. This is strong evidence that La Chí Bản Dúi does not belong to Northern Tai group.

	Proto-Tai	La Chí Bản Dúi
rain	*p ^h	p ^h ɔ̃n ³⁵
pond	*t ^h	t ^h om ³³
gold	*k ^h	k ^h ãm ³³

The development of Proto-Tai dental consonant clusters

Li Fang Kuei (1954) suggested that there is a distinction in the development of consonant clusters *tr, *thr as follows: *tr → /t/ in all Southwestern Tai dialects, *thr → /h/ in all Southwestern Tai dialects (except Ahom), where *thr → /r/, as follows.

Proto-Tai	Thai Siam	Black Tai	Nùng Dín	La Chí Bản Dú	Gloss
*tr	taai ³³	taai ³³	t ^h ai ³³	t ^h ai ³³	die
	taa ³³	taa ³³	(luk ³⁵) t ^h a ³²³	(luk ³⁵) t ^h a ³²³	eye
*thr	haaŋ ²⁴	haaŋ ²⁴	t ^h aŋ ³⁵	t ^h aŋ ³⁵	tail
	hin ²⁴	hin ³³	t ^h a ³²³	t ^h a ³²³	rock

Thus, the development of Proto-Tai dental consonant clusters in La Chí Bản Dú is typical for Central Tai languages (Nùng Dín) and is different from Southwestern Tai (Thai Siam, Black Tai).

b. Innovation of vowels

There is a difference in the development of Proto-Tai diphthongs in Central Tai subgroup and Southwestern Tai subgroup, as in the following table. Note the innovations in Tai Don and especially Nùng Dín.

Tai Daeng	*iə	*uə	*uə	*au	→	iə	uə	uə	ɤ
Tai Dam	*iə	*uə	*uə	*au	→	iə	uə	uə	au
Tai Cao Bằng	*iə	*uə	*uə	*au	→	iə	uə	uə	au
Tai Don	*iə	*uə	*uə	*au	→	e	ɤ	o	au
Nùng Dín	*iə	*uə	*uə	*au	→	e	ɤ	o	u

In La Chí Bản Dú, Proto-Tai diphthongs have become monophthongs. Thus, with regards to the process of development of Proto-Tai diphthongs, La Chí Bản Dú is close to the Nùng dialects (Nùng Dín), and different from the Tai Daeng, Tai Dam and Tai Cao Bằng languages.

	Tai Daeng	Tai Dam	Tai Cao Bằng	Nùng Dín	La Chí Bản Dú
salt	kuə ²³²	kuə ³³	kuɤ ³³	ku ³⁵	ku ³⁵
head	huə ²³²	huə ³³	huo ³³	t ^h u ³³	t ^h u ³³
heart	teɤ ²³²	teau ³³	teau ³³	cu ³³	cu ³³

c. Innovation of tones

Studying the development of tones from Proto-Tai to modern Tai languages is an effective way to classify Tai languages. In order to determine the position of the La Chí Bản Dú language in relation to Tai languages, the researchers studied the development of La Chí Bản Dú tones in comparison with some Tai languages with which La Chí people have had contact (Nùng Dín, Tày Dăm, Nùng Van Son, Van Nam).

The figure below describes the system of the La Chí Bản Dú tone system which has been analyzed and normalised by the WINCECIL program. The titles of the tones are based on the classification of Li Fang Kuei (1977) and William Gedney (Hudak 2008).

Figure 1: A, B, C tones of La Chí Bản Dú

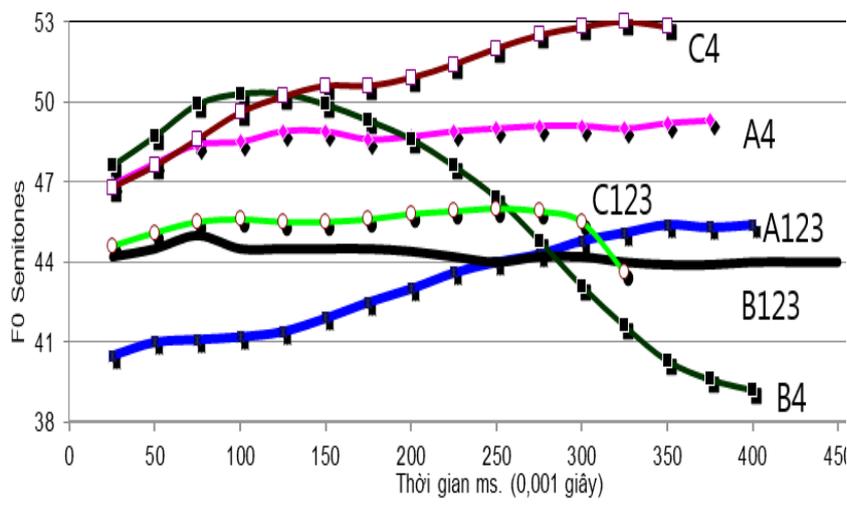
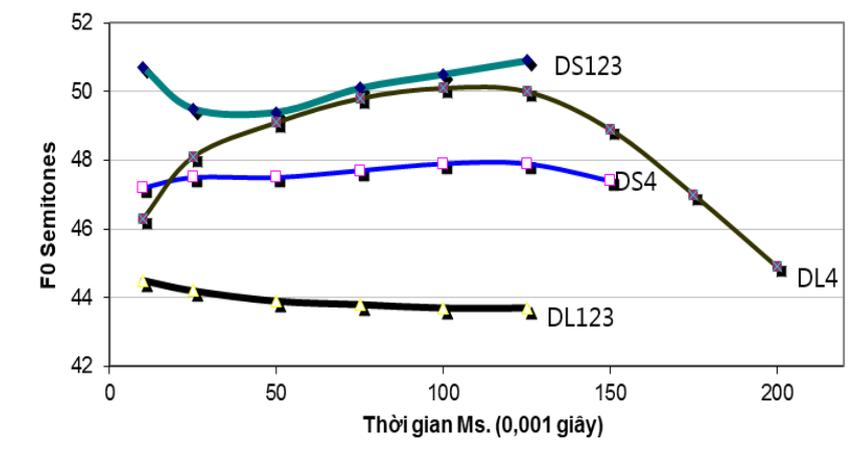


Figure 2: D tones of La Chí Bản Diu



In A to D below, the tone systems and the historical developments in the various Tai languages are briefly summarized.

A. The following table illustrates the development of tones from Proto-Tai to La Chí Ban Diu.

	A	B	C	DS	DL
1,2,3	23	<u>33</u>	33ʔ	44	11
4	44	<u>51</u>	45	<u>33</u>	<u>51</u>

The tones of La Chí Bản Diu were developed with the principle of tonal bipartition belonging to A, B, C, DS, DL, after a devoicing process of Proto-Tai voiced consonants.

- Tone A123 ≠ Tone A4
- Tone B123 ≠ Tone B4
- Tone C123 ≠ Tone C4
- Tone DS123 ≠ Tone DS4
- Tone DL123 ≠ Tone DL4

Tonal mergers in La Chí Ban Diu include the following.

- Tone A4 = Tone DS123 (44)
- Tone B123 = Tone DS4 (33)
- Tone B4 = Tone DL4 (51)

B. The following table illustrates the development of tones from Proto-Tai to Nùng Dín.

	A	B	C	DS	DL
1,2,3	212	<u>21</u>	323ʔ	44	<u>21</u>
4	43	<u>41</u>	35	33	<u>41</u>

The tones were developed with the principle of tonal bipartition belonging to A, B, C, DS, DL, after a devoicing process of Proto-Tai voiced consonants.

Tone A123 ≠ Tone A4
 Tone B123 ≠ Tone B4
 Tone C123 ≠ Tone C4
 Tone DS123 ≠ Tone DS4
 Tone DL 123 ≠ Tone DL4

Tonal mergers in Nùng Dín include the following.

Tone B123 = Tone DL123 (21)
 Tone B4 = Tone DL4 (41)

C. The following table illustrates the development of tones from Proto-Tai to Tày Đăm in Bắc Hà, Lào Cai.

	A	B	C	DL	DS
1,2,3	24	44	212	44	55
4	55	33	31	22	33

The tones were developed with the principle of tonal bipartition belonging to A, B, C, DS, DL, after a devoicing process of Proto-Tai voiced consonants.

Tone A123 ≠ Tone A4
 Tone B123 ≠ Tone B4
 Tone C123 ≠ Tone C4
 Tone DS123 ≠ Tone DS4
 Tone DL123 ≠ Tone DL4

Tonal mergers in Tày Đăm in Bắc Hà, Lào Cai include the following.

Tone A4 = Tone DS123 (55)
 Tone B123 = Tone DL123 (44)
 Tone B4 = Tone DS4 (33)

D. The table below illustrates the development of tones from Proto-Tai to Nùng Wenshan, Yunnan, China (Pranee Kullavanijaya and Theraphan L-Thongkum. 1998).

	*A	*B	*C	*DS	*DL
1, 2, 3	15	22	44	34	22
4	33		31	33	31

The tones were developed with the principle of tonal bipartition belonging to A, B, C, DS, DL, after the devoicing process of Proto-Tai voiced consonants.

Tone A123 ≠ Tone A4
 Tone B123 ≠ Tone B4
 Tone C123 ≠ Tone C4
 Tone DS123 ≠ Tone DS4
 Tone DL123 ≠ Tone DL4

Tonal mergers in Nùng Wenshan, Yunnan, China include the following.

- Tone A4 = Tone DS4 (33)
- Tone B123 = Tone DL123 (22)
- Tone B4 = Tone C4 = Tone DL4 (31)

2.4 The position of La Chí Bản Díu in relation to Central Tai languages

According to authors Pranee Kullavanijaya and Theraphan L-Thongkum (1998), the Central Tai languages have developed Proto-Tai A tones in two ways (Pranee Kullavanijaya and Theraphan L-Thongkum 1998).

Table 2: Proto-Tai

	Type 1			Type 2		
	*A	*B	*C	*A	*B	*C
* voiceless aspirated stops	1					
* voiceless dental clusters						
* voiceless sonorants	2	3	5	1	3	5
* unaspirated stops						
* glottalized stops						
All * voiced initials	1	4	6	2	4	6

- Type 1: A = A1 ≠ A2, A3 ≠ A4
- B = B1, B2, B3 ≠ B4
- C = C1, C2, C3 ≠ C4
- Type 2: A = A1, A2, A3 ≠ A4
- B = B1, B2, B3 ≠ B4
- C = C1, C2, C3 ≠ C4

As analyzed above, the tone system of La Chí Bản Díu, along with languages like Nùng Díu in Xín Mãn and Nùng in Wenshan and Tày Đăm (Tày Đen) in Bắc Hà Lào Cai, developed in parallel to this second type.

However, the development of Proto-Tai tones to La Chí Bản Díu is not completely identical with that of Nùng Díu, Nùng Wenshan and Tày Đăm (Tày Đen). Considering the merger of the tones B and D, the difference between La Chí Bản Díu and other Central Tai languages is follows:

La Chí Ban Díu:

- Tone A4 = Tone DS123 (44)
- Tone B123 = Tone DS4 (33)

Nùng Díu

- Tone B4 = Tone DL4 (51).
- Tone B123 = Tone DL123 (21)
- Tone B4 = Tone DL4 (41)

Tày Đăm (Tày Đen)

- Tone A4 = Tone DS123 (55)
- Tone B123 = Tone DL123 (44)
- Tone B4 = Tone DS4 (33)

Nùng Wenshan:

Tone A4 = Tone DS4 (33)

Tone B123 = Tone DL123 (22)

Tone B4 = Tone C4 = Tone DL4 (31)

3 Conclusion

The La Chí language in Bản Phùng, Bản Máy (Vietnam) and the La Chí language in Ma Quan (China) are variations of the original La Chí, belonging to the Kra branch of the Tai-Kadai language family. La Chí language of Bản Phùng, a part of La Chí Bản Máy, is critically endangered, according to UNESCO's criteria for assessing language endangerment (UNESCO 2003). Historically, La Chí Bản Dú people have been exposed to Tày and Nùng languages of Central Tai, and the La Chí language spoken in this area shows significant effects of this contact situation. Speakers of the La Chí Bản Dú language consider it to be an ethnic language. They use within the family, in the community, and in the village. La Chí Bản Dú language itself is endangered due to the decreasing scope of communication, the reduction in the number of users, the presence of higher-prestige languages such as Nùng (which is the language of regional communication) and Vietnamese, the language of state administration.

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Appendix: 100 words of La Chí Bản Phùng, La Chí Bản Dúu and Nùng Dín

No.	English	La Chí Bản Phùng	La Chí Bản Dúu	Nùng Dín	Vietnamese
1	sun	βa ³³	t ^h aŋ ³²³ vǎn ³³	t ^h aŋ ³²³ vǎn ³³	mặt trời
2	moon	m ³³ la ³³	ǎn ³³ haj ³²³	haj ³²³	mặt trăng
3	star	m ³³ t ^h i ⁴⁴ li ³³	ʔdǎw ³³ ʔdǐ ²¹	ʔdǎw ³³ ʔdǐ ²¹	sao
4	earth	ʔu ³³	nam ³³	nam ³¹	đất
5	cloud	m ³³ qe ⁴⁴ hu ¹¹	nǎm ³⁵ mɔ ²¹	p ^h a ⁴⁵	mây
6	rain	nǎ ³³	p ^h ǎn ³⁵ lǒŋ ³³	p ^h ǎn ³³	mưa
7	water	ʔi ³³	nǎm ⁴⁵	nǎm ⁴⁵	nước
8	mountain	kũŋ ⁵³ ɛo ³³	ǎn ³⁵ po ³⁵	po ³³ p ^h a ³²³	núi
9	rock	ni ^{11/33}	mǎk ²¹ pa ³⁵	mak ²¹ pa ³²³	đá
10	sand	nǎ ⁴⁴	saj ³³	saj ³³	cát
11	road/way	q ^h i ⁴⁴ /k ^h i ⁴⁴	k ^h a ³⁵ lo ³³	lo ³¹	đường (đi)
12	fire	pe ³³	fǎj ³³	fǎj ³³	lửa
13	smoke	kǎm ³³ pe ³³	zǎj ³³	zaj ³³ fǎj ³¹	khói
14	ash	te ³³	tǎw ³¹	tǎw ³¹	tro
15	night	ni ¹¹ βo ⁴⁴	c ^h aŋ ³⁵ huwŋ ³³	hǎm ³¹	đêm
16	tree	mja ¹¹ te ³³	mǎj ²³	mǎj ⁴⁵	cây
17	seed	pjo ⁴⁴	huj ²¹	huj ²¹	hạt
18	leaf	li ⁴⁴ /li ⁴⁴	ʔbɔŋ ⁴³ mǎj ³⁵	ʔbɔw ³²³	lá
19	root	ka ³³ ei ⁴⁴	lak ³⁵	lak ²¹	rễ
20	bark	ka ³³ tu ⁴⁴	nǎŋ ³⁵ mǎj ⁴⁴	nǎŋ ³⁵ mǎj ⁴⁴	vỏ (cây)
21	dog	mǎ ⁴¹	t ⁱ 21 ma ³⁵	ma ³²³	chó
22	bird	ʔa ³³ nɔ ^{55?}	t ⁱ 21 nɔk ⁴⁵	nɔk ³³	chim
23	fish	ʔa ⁴⁴ li ³³	t ⁱ 21 pa ³⁵	pa ³²³	cá
24	louse	te ⁴⁴	t ⁱ 323 mǎn ³³	t ^h ǎw ³³	chấy
25	claw	le ³³ m ⁵⁵	lep ⁴⁵	lep ⁴⁵	móng
26	horn	qe ⁴⁴	k ^h ǎw ³²³	k ^h ǎw ³²³	sừng
27	leather	mɛ ⁵⁵ me ^{55?}	k ^h ɔn ²¹ nɔk ³⁵	k ^h ɔn ²¹	lông
28	tail	ʔe ^{55?}	t ^h aŋ ³²³	t ^h aŋ ³²³	đuôi
29	egg	tǎ ^{55?}	ǎn ³³ saj ³¹	saj ³¹	trứng
30	head	nǎŋ ⁵³ k ^h a ⁵⁴⁵	pǎk ⁴¹ t ^h u ³³	t ^h u ³²³	đầu
31	hair	k ^h a ⁵⁴⁵ ɛo ^{55?}	k ^h ɔn ³²³ t ^h u ³²³	k ^h ɔn ³²³ t ^h u ³²³	tóc
32	eye	nǎm ⁵³ tju ³³	luk ³⁵ t ^h a ³²³	t ^h a ³²³	mắt
33	nose	na ^{55?}	ǎn ³³ ʔdǎŋ ³²³	ʔdǎŋ ³²³	mũi
34	mouth	m ³³ k ^h ɔ ³³	cum ⁴¹ pak ²¹	pak ²¹	mồm/miệng
35	tooth	ʔi ⁴⁴	mǎk ³⁵ fǎn ³³	mǎk ³⁵ fǎn ³³	răng
36	tongue	m ³³ ljo ³³	mǎk ²¹ lin ⁴⁵	lin ⁴⁵	lưỡi
37	ear	lu ³³	b ^v 33 siw ²¹	su ³²³	tai
38	neck	ka ⁴⁴ tu ³³ zu ^{55?}	ho ³³	kɔk ⁴⁵ ho ³³	cổ

39	hand	m̄ ⁵⁵	mũŋ ³³	mũŋ ³³	tay
40	chest	ta ²¹ p ^h u ⁵³	pāk ²¹² ʔāk ⁴⁵	ʔāk ⁴⁵	ngực
41	foot	le ⁵³	p ^h a ³³ k ^h a ⁴⁵	k ^h a ³²³	bàn chân
42	knee	kan ⁵⁵ t ^h jo ¹¹ t ^h ju ¹¹	k ^h a ³⁵ k ^h ɔw ²¹	t ^h u ³³ k ^h aw ²¹	đầu gối
43	stomach	ma ⁵³ nũ ¹¹ k ^h ɔ ³³	māk ¹¹ to.ŋ ⁴⁵	toŋ ⁴⁵	bụng
44	liver	ta ^{55?}	tăp ⁴⁵	tăp ⁴⁵	gan
45	heart	năm ⁵³ le ⁵³	māk ³²³ t ^h u ³³ cu ³³	mak ²¹ t ^h u ³³ cɔw ³³	tim
46	blood	pju ³³	lut ²¹²	lut ²¹²	máu
47	skin	ka ³³ tu ³³	năŋ ³⁵ nu ³³	năŋ ³²³	da
48	bone	kăn ⁵³ t ^h ɔ ^{55?}	ʔdũk ⁴⁵	ʔdũk ⁴⁵	xương
49	meat	ʔɔ ⁵³	nu ⁴⁵	nu ⁴⁵	thịt
50	fat	m̄ ³³ na ⁴⁴	ziw ³³	zu ³³	mỡ
51	human	qo ¹¹	tɪ ³²³ kɔn ³³	kɔn ³³	người
52	name	ka ⁵⁵ nĩ ³³	cu ³¹	cu ³¹	tên
53	man	nĩ ³³ mjă ¹¹	p ^h u ²¹ caj ³³	p ^h u ³¹ caj ³³	đàn ông
54	woman	nĩ ³³ mjă ¹¹	p ^h u ²¹ ŋiŋ ³³	p ^h u ³¹ ŋiŋ ³³	đàn bà
55	new	la ³³ m̄ ^{55?}	mu ²¹	mău ³¹	mới
56	good	ka ³³ la ⁴⁴	dăj ³²³	caj ³¹ / dăj ³²³	tốt
57	big/ huge	mi ⁵⁴⁵	tu ⁴⁵	tu ⁴⁵	to/lớn
58	small/ tiny	ten ²¹ tɛ ³⁵	ʔe ⁴⁵	ʔe ⁴⁵	nhỏ/bé
59	red	pu ⁵³ t ^h jo ⁵³	ʔdeŋ ³²³	ʔdeŋ ³²³	đỏ
60	black	năm ⁵⁴⁵ lja ⁵⁵	ʔdăm ³³	ʔdăm ³³	đen
61	white	ci ⁵⁴⁵ ʔi ³³	k ^h aw ³²³	k ^h aw ³²³	trắng
62	blue/ green	na ⁵⁴⁵ mi ⁵⁵	moŋ ³⁵	siw ³²³	xanh
63	yellow	ni ⁵⁴⁵ ni ⁵⁵	hen ²¹	hen ²¹	vàng
64	long	βe ⁵³ βɛ ^{55?}	li ³³	ri ³³	dài
65	many	ma ⁵⁴⁵	laj ³²³	laj ³²³	nhiều
66	round	t ^h iŋ ⁵⁴⁵ le ¹¹	măn ³³	măn ³³	tròn
67	hot	ʔăm ⁴⁴ lu ^{55?}	dat ²¹²	dat ²¹²	nóng
68	cold	săm ⁵³ se ⁵³	sit ⁴⁵	kɔŋ ³³	lạnh
69	full	m̄ ⁵³ ti ³³	tem ³⁵	tăm ³²³	đầy
70	dry	qa ⁴⁴	k ^h u ²¹	k ^h au ²¹	khô
71	go/move	βu ⁵³	păj ³²³	păj ³²³	đi
72	come	qo ³³	ma ³³	t ^h ăŋ ³²³	đến
73	burn	pe ³³ pje ⁵³	o ²¹	o ²¹	cháy
74	fly	ni ¹ pɔ ^{55?}	ʔbăn ³²³	ʔbăn ³²³	bay
75	stand	sɔ ³³	ʔin ³⁵	zin ³²³	đứng
76	swim	p ^h u ⁴⁴ ʔi ³³	săw ³²³ năŋ ⁴⁵	săw ³²³	bơi
77	kill	pi ⁵³	k ^h a ³³	k ^h a ³³	giết (gà)
78	sit	ka ⁵⁵ ki ¹¹	năŋ ³¹	năŋ ³¹	ngồi
79	hear	zɔ ^{55?}	pak ⁴⁵	pak ⁴⁵	nghe
80	talk	t ^h ɛ ^{55?}	ha ⁴⁵	ha ⁴⁵	nói
81	look at	le ⁵³	ŋaŋ ³¹	ŋaŋ ³¹	nhìn
82	lie	βũ ¹¹	năm ²¹	non ³³	nằm
83	sleep	βi ¹¹	nɔn ³³	non ³³	ngủ
84	know	eo ⁴⁴ / su ⁴⁴	lu ⁴⁵	ru ³³	biết
85	eat	pu ³³ mi ¹¹	cin ²³	cin ³²³	ăn
86	drink	ko ⁴⁴	cĩn ³²³	cĩn ³²³ cĩn ³²³	uống
87	bite	tja ³³	k ^h ăp ³⁵	k ^h ăp ³⁵	cắn
88	die	pɛ ⁵³	t ^h aj ³²³	t ^h aj ³²³	chết
89	give	ni ^{55?}	ha ³³ ʔu ³²³	hɔw ²¹ / hău ²¹	cho
90	one	căm ³³ / ca m̄	ʔdew ³³	ʔdew ³³	một
91	two	φu ⁴⁴	θɔ ³⁵	lɔŋ ³³	hai

92	all	to ³³ mjã ³³	tuŋ ³³ le ⁴³	tuŋ ³³ le ⁴³	tất cả
93	what	ke ⁴⁴ ʔa ⁴⁴	kǎŋ ²¹²	ka ³¹ rǎŋ ³³	gì, cái gì
94	who	ke ⁵⁵ nɔ ⁵³ ke ⁵⁵ ʔa ³³	kuŋ ³³	kɔŋ ³³ / rǎu ³³	ai
95	no	ljo ⁵⁵⁷	ʔbo ³¹	ʔbo ³¹	không
96	here	nɣ ⁵³	ne ⁴³	nǎj ³¹	này
97	that	kǎj ³²³	paj ³³	ũm ⁴⁵	kia
98	I	ʔa ³³ k ^h u ⁴⁴	ku ⁴⁴	k ^h ɔj ²¹	tao/tôi
99	you	ʔa ³³ be ³³	mu ³³	mǎu ³³	mày
100	we	ʔa ³³ te ³³	lǎw ³³	lǎw ³³	chúng ta

