



**ЯЗЫКОВОЙ КОНФЛИКТ**  
**LANGUAGE CONFLICT**

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**CONFLICTS OF WRITING SYSTEM AMONG ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES  
IN VIETNAM: A CASE OF HMONG, KATU, AND RAGLAI<sup>23</sup>**

**Nguyen Van Hiep**

School of Languages and Tourism, Hanoi University of Industry, Vietnam

Currently, the government of Vietnam acknowledge 54 ethnic groups, in which the Kinh people are the most populated along with 53 minor ethnic groups. Up until 2023, only 34 minor ethnic groups have their own writing scripts. The practical use of writing systems for ethnic minority languages in Vietnam reveals conflicts in writing systems when an ethnic minority group has multiple writing systems. This article describes cases of writing system conflicts among the Hmong, Katu, and Raglai languages. Hmong people have trouble selecting their writing script: the Hmong script acknowledged by the Vietnamese government is not popular, hard to learn, with an undeveloped ecosystem, while international Hmong script is popular among Hmong communities, from their origins among Protestants, and the number of Hmong people who speak international Hmong is four times the number of Hmong who use Hmong Vietnamese script, it also has a diverse ecosystem (powered by the internet, Google Translate, movies, and music with international Hmong subtitles). International Hmong script is also the only form of communication used among young Hmong in the digital age. The conflict between these scripts is also similar to the pair of Katu scripts used within the Katu community in Quang Nam and Thua Thien - Hue. This is due to Decision 53-CP (1980) by the Vietnamese government, giving local authorities the right to develop and acknowledge their own writing script and use it within their area. The conflict is even greater among Raglai (mainly living in Khanh Hoa and Ninh Thuan) with 5 different writing scripts. This study highlights the issues of script conflict as a linguistic reality in the context of Vietnam, a multi-ethnic and multilingual country. It also provides suggestions for resolving or mitigating such conflicts.

**Keywords:** language conflict, Hmong scripts, Katu scripts, Raglai scripts

**КОНФЛИКТЫ СИСТЕМЫ ПИСЬМЕННОСТИ СРЕДИ ЭТНИЧЕСКИХ  
МЕНЬШИНСТВ ВЬЕТНАМА ХМОНГ, КАТУ И РАГЛАЙ**

**Нгуен Ван Хьеп**

Школа языков и туризма Ханойского промышленного университета, Вьетнам

*В настоящее время правительство Вьетнама признает 54 этнические группы, самым многочисленным является народ кинь. По данным на 2023 г. 34 миноритарные этнические группы имеют письменность. Сегодня во Вьетнаме одновременно существуют несколько систем письма, отмечаются языковые конфликты, связанные с практическим использованием систем письма у некоторых этнических меньшинств. В статье анализируются конфликтные ситуации на примере языков хмонг, кату и раглай. Письменность хмонг, официально признана правительством Вьетнама, однако возникают определенные проблемы при ее использовании*

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хмонгами. Данная письменность непопулярна, сложна для изучения и имеет ограниченный функционал, в то время как международная система письма хмонг популярна среди общин хмонг; количество хмонгов, использующих международный хмонг, в четыре раза больше, чем хмонгов, использующих вьетнамский алфавит хмонг. Международная система письменности хмонг имеет широкий функционал, используется в системе интернет, Google Translate, большое количество аудио- и видеопроизведений с международными субтитрами хмонг. Международная письменность хмонг также является единственной формой общения в интернете, используемой молодыми хмонгами. Конфликт между этими системами письменности аналогичен ситуации сложившейся с языком кату, используемом в сообществе кату в Куангнаме и Тхуа Тхиен-Хюэ. Это связано с решением 53-СР (1980) правительства Вьетнама, которое дает местным властям право разрабатывать и признавать свою собственную письменность и использовать ее на своей территории. Сложнее ситуация складывается у этнического меньшинства раглай, проживающего в Кханьхоа и Ниньтхуан; раглай использует 5 различных систем письменности. В статье анализируются языковые конфликты, связанные с письменностью, предлагаются рекомендации по их решению.

**Ключевые слова:** языковой конфликт, письменность хмонг, письменность кату, письменность раглай

## 1. Overview of ethnic minorities writing systems in Vietnam

### Quantity of ethnic minorities writing systems in Vietnam

In Vietnam, there is diversity in the writing systems of different ethnic groups with various characteristics. Statistical research of Nguyen Huu Hoanh, Nguyen Van Loi, Ta Van Thong [2013] indicated 32 ethnic communities' writing systems within 53 ethnics. That means that in 2013, there were 60,37 % ethnic communities with their own writing systems (more than one script in some ethnic groups, such as the Thai whose writing system includes eight forms, the Hmong whose writing system includes two, the Co Tu whose writing system includes two...). In 2016, the Muong people in Hoa Binh started to use the Muong script, and by 2021, the Ha Nhi people in Lai Chau began to use the Ha Nhi script for the first time. The similarities between the two writing systems are: they both use Latin script and they are constructed by the Institute of Linguistics. Therefore, in 2023, 34 out of the 53 ethnic minorities (64,15 %) in Vietnam have their own scripts.

### Categorizations of ethnic minorities writing systems in Vietnam

#### *Categorizing by script forms of ethnic minorities writing systems in Vietnam*

There are four main script form categorizations in Vietnam:

Brahmic form: Cham Akha Thrah letters, Thai letters, Khmer letters, Lao letters and Lu letters. Cham Akha Thrah letters and Khmer letters originate from Brahmi letters of South Asia. Alphabets such as Thai, Lao and Lu all have their foundations from the Khmer writing system.

Arabic form: Cham Javi letters and Cham Ba Ni letters.



Ideographic form: Chinese letters (Han), Nom Tay letters, Nung, Dao, San Chay, Ngan and Lo Lo alphabets that originating from Di letters of China.

Latin form: including Tay – Nung Latin, Thai Latin, Cham Latin, Hmong, Gia Rai, E-de, Ba Na, Xo Dang, Hre, Co Ho, Raglai, Mnong, Stieng, Bru-Van Kieu, Co Tu, Lo Lo, Gie - Trieng, Ta Oi, Ma, Co, Cho Ro, Chu Ru and Muong letters.

### ***Categorizing by the history of ethnic minorities writing system in Vietnam***

Following the history of ethnic minorities' writing systems, they are divided into two types: old-established scripts known as traditional writing and modern writing.

Traditional writing was born in the 19th Century, including scripts such as San Diu, Ngai, San Chay, Dao, Lu, Lao, Lo Lo, Cham, Nung, Khmer and Tay.

Modern writing was not born until the late 19th Century to the 20th Century, including scripts such as Tay – Nung Latin, Thai Latin, Hmong, Gia Rai, E-de, Ba Na, Xo Dang, Hre, Co Ho, Raglai, Mnong, Stieng, Bru-Van Kieu, Co Tu, Lo Lo, Gie - Trieng, Ta Oi, Ma, Co, Cho Ro, Chu Ru, the latest are Muong script (in 2016) and Ha Nhi script (in 2021).

## **2. Clashes between minor ethnic writing scripts in Vietnam's modern day society**

This section will discuss various challenges among minor ethnic groups with more than one script; we call this clash/competition among scripts.

### **Hmong script. *Comparing two sets of Hmong characters***

Currently, there are two sets of Hmong script being used simultaneously: the Vietnamese Hmong script and the international Hmong script. There is great competition among these two sets of Hmong characters. Here is our comparison of these two Hmong scripts.

#### **A. Ease of use and learning.**

It can be confirmed that the international Hmong script is superior to the Vietnamese Hmong script in terms of adaptability. The Hmong people that we conducted in-depth interviews in Sin Suoi Ho village (Phong Tho, Lai Chau) and Nam Can village (Ky Son, Nghe An) all claimed that the international Hmong script doesn't need to be learned since activities such as reading the Bible, watching movie subtitles make the script much easier to be understood. The young Hmong people in Sa Pa, Bac Yen whom we had the opportunity to interview, also confirmed the same. They believed that up to 80 % of Hmong teenagers do not need to study the script; just watching movies and listening to Hmong songs with international Hmong subtitles for a period of time is enough to grasp of the international Hmong script.



In Ky Son, Nghe An, the chairman of commune Nam Can and his staff claimed that Hmong Vietnamese script is hard to learn, understand, and cannot be applied to record Hmong dialect in Ky Son. The chairman and his man claimed that their children, who are Hmong living in Ky Son, felt that learning Hmong Vietnamese script is extremely challenging and unrewarding.

In this aspect, we believe that phonetic traits and the vocabulary Hmong dialects affect the adaptation of Hmong script. For example, in certain mountainous regions, with phonetic systems similar to Hmong dialect in Sapa (Lao Cai), the opinion of the script is different. This is consistent with the data we acquired when we returned to the Hmong community in Mai Son district (Son La), where people interviewed believed that Hmong Vietnamese could be learnt and was welcomed by the community. While we were working with the staff of the Committee of Culture and Ethnic in Phong Tho district (Lai Chau), they thought Hmong Vietnamese had its drawbacks but was still a learnable script. However, it is possible that they did not want to go against the trend of teaching Hmong Vietnamese that has been going on for decades.

Technically, the research by Nguyen Kien Tho [2016] shows that the rationality of the phonological solution makes international Hmong script easier to learn than Hmong Vietnamese. Specifically,

- In terms of consonant and tone, both scripts have a similarity (both include 57 consonants and 8 tones)
- In terms of vowel: Hmong Vietnamese script has 29 vowels, while international Hmong script has 13 vowels. In reality, Hmong White and Hmong Lenh consist of only 13 vowels. Therefore, the vowel system implied by Hmong Vietnamese script is excessive, with 16 unused vowels (either rarely used or absent in most dialects of Hmong). Nguyen Kien Tho claimed: “The introduction of a large number of vowels that are not present in most of the Hmong dialect into the Vietnamese Hmong script will make it difficult for Hmong people to pronounce (impression of awkward pronunciation) and if pronounced according to the letter, the pronunciation will also not be standard according to the Hmong language that the Hmong people in many parts of Vietnam and around the world are using” [Nguyen Kien Tho, 2016].

#### **B. Hmong Vietnamese and International Hmong Script Ecology.**

When comparing these two writing systems, they are very different. While there are not a great number of documents and books in Hmong Vietnamese script, international Hmong script is very well represented in the media. The Bible is printed in international Hmong script in regions where Hmong practice Protestantism. Furthermore, many movies and music videos that people watch online have international Hmong script. Most importantly, international Hmong script is used on the Internet and thus attracts a large number of young Hmong, who mostly use smartphones with 3G/4G connectivity.



As of this date, international Hmong script remains their only tool to interact on the Internet. According to research from Nguyen Kien Tho [2014], Nguyen Kien Tho and Le Van Chinh [2016], most of Hmong college students living in the North area can read and write international Hmong script fluently. They can get access to information about Hmong people around the world and learn popular Hmong songs due to their exposure to the Internet. In addition, the authors claim that Hmong Vietnamese script, which was proposed and popularized, thanks to the Government's decision in 1961, is rarely used or used in an extremely limited area (for example, high schools and junior colleges in Northwest of Vietnam).

### C. Popularity

The above-mentioned comparisons can explain why using international Hmong script helped to promote its popularity. This is because it is more advantageous and suitable for the situation:

- Hmong people in local areas mostly use international Hmong script (according to priest Hang A Xa in Sin Suoi Ho village, Phong Tho, Lai Chau, 80 % of those who speak Hmong use the international version). On the other hand, through our in-depth interviews in Son La, Lai Chau, Ha Giang, after dozens of years being taught with Hmong Vietnamese, only 20 % use Hmong Vietnamese since most of them never use it and soon forget about the script.

- International Hmong script is easy to understand, read, and type on the computer, which is suitable for modern society.

Recently, in a quick survey using Google Form with 150 examples related to the usage level and demands of Hmong Vietnamese script and international Hmong script for Hmong college students at the University of Science and other members of the University of Thai Nguyen, Pham Thi Phuong Thai [2021] has received some results, in particularly:

- 68,5 % believe that international Hmong script is easy to study and use, 31,5 % believe that Hmong Vietnamese script is easy to study and use.

- Learning international Hmong script through: friends, relatives: 63,7 %, self- learn through internet/software: 17,1 %, online education (by teachers): 1,4 %, other methods: 17,8 %.

- Which Hmong script you choose to learn: 69,9 % chose

International Hmong script, 31,1 % picked Hmong Vietnamese script.

- The learners can do self-study and use existing documents that teach Hmong language on the Internet. Because international Hmong script is standardized through unicode, sending emails or getting updated on the internet is easy, allowing Hmong people in Vietnam to communicate with Hmong people worldwide. Google Translate, a famous auto-translation service, translates international Hmong script, further boosting its popularity. A propaganda officer that we interviewed in Yen Minh, Ha Giang province, said that he used Google Translate to translate the guidelines and



the policies of the Party and the Government written in Vietnamese into the international Hmong script, and then spread it to Hmong people.

### *Suggestions on the selection of the Hmong scripts*

The debate on which Hmong script is suitable to be used widely has been around for a while. We believe that we should not refuse to acknowledge international Hmong script as it has been widely used by non-Protestantism and Protestantism. Citing previous research (from authors : [Ho Ba Hua, 2014; Nguyen Kien Tho, 2014, Nguyen Kien Tho and Le Van Chinh, 2016; Vu Ba Thong, 2011; Committee for Ethnic Minority, 2013]) and our own study (through in-depth interviews during our field trip in Lai Chau, Son La, Nghe An, Thanh Hoa, where in places such as Son La, Lai Chau, we conducted two trips (focusing on in-depth interviews), we have these following suggestions.

Firstly, the government and educational organizations need further research on the situation and desire to use script from Hmong people living in Vietnam as well as the comparison of the social traits and linguistic traits of Hmong Vietnamese and international Hmong scripts to identify which script is suitable for the people, a requirement before standardizing the education of international Hmong. If we only acknowledge Hmong Vietnamese script, we have overlooked the objective existence of international Hmong script in Vietnam, used by many Hmong every day.

Secondly, we agree that there is a need to separate the original goal from the real value of the script. Supposedly, we see international Hmong script as a potential threat to political stability (seeing that it is used to spread Protestantism). In that case, we are overlooking how Protestantism uses international Hmong script to spread the Bible and this script is being widely used among the community (both Protestantism and non-Protestantism).

Thirdly, we need to take in early arguments from linguistic researchers when they objectively claim that: Hmong Vietnamese script was not well-built, it is complicated, hard to learn, and lacking in efficiency. In addition, the Vietnamese Hmong script is mainly based on a Hmong dialect that is not really typical. The government needs more people who can investigate, research, hold scientific discussions, and listen to the opinions of Hmong people and experts to officially acknowledge and use international Hmong script in educational programs and ensure its unity and ease of learning across the country.

Fourthly, there is a need to consider the advantages and drawbacks of acknowledging international Hmong script. As we all know, the idea of Marxism claims that language is not classified, but the way it is used and the purpose it is classified. Reality shows that if we keep on using Hmong Vietnamese script as the only script for Hmong people in Vietnam, the act of forcing to use and learn one script that, from many points of views, is hard to write, understand and rarely used



(according to the results of the in-depth interviews we conducted during the period from 2019 to 2021, only 20 % of Hmong knows Hmong Vietnamese, compared of 80 % for international Hmong script) would be inefficient, lacking in scientific research, unrealistic, and costly.

Hang A Xa, a priest in Lai Chau, in an interview, claimed that: Without acknowledging international Hmong script, we can “lose on our homecourt”. He cited: During political unrest in Muong Nhe district (Lai Chau), documents that used Vietnamese Hmong sent by the government were not understood, and, therefore, inefficient. Meanwhile, documents from outside forces with negative intentions written in International Hmong are widely understood and practiced. In an in-depth interview with an Hmong educator in Dien Bien, he claimed it is important to acknowledge International Hmong, as a tool to communicate between the government and its citizens.

Fifthly, we should not call international Hmong “American Hmong script” or use “Revolution Hmong” to indicate Hmong Vietnamese script. There is a need to agree and use “international Hmong script” (originated from foreign countries) and “Hmong Vietnamese script” (built by Vietnamese) to avoid political biases.

Sixthly, if we are still keen on using Hmong Vietnamese script, there need to be modifications to fix the weaknesses of Hmong Vietnamese script and further improve it to appeal to other Hmong communities. When there is a lack of documents in Hmong Vietnamese script, and most people have not known it and it is not widely used, these improvements are possible. In our in-depth interview with a local leader in Muong Te district (Lai Chau), the leader claims that Hmong Vietnamese script can be used but needs improvements in the mold of international Hmong script.

We agree with the argument of Nguyen Kien Tho in a research in 2016: “It is impossible to delay, we have to acknowledge and agree to use international Hmong script in the teaching of Hmong in Vietnam, for a goal to build, discover, and preserve the unique cultural values and rich history of Hmong community and build a modern Vietnam culture, with national traits” [Nguyen Kien Tho, 2016]

For the country’s growth in the era of multi ethnic and multi -languages, in which Hmong plays an important part, the Government needs to have an appropriate policy in selecting Hmong script, so that the community has a powerful tool to preserve and develop their language and culture in modern society. We hope this issue could receive suggestions and exchanges to provide scientific facts and opinions on the selection of Hmong script in business and education.

Suppose we let two Hmong scripts exist together over time. In that case, there is a possibility that Hmong will live with these scripts, similar to how Chinese has two characters set: simplified Chinese and traditional Chinese (personal opinion from Prof. Mark J. Alves, Montgomery University, United States).



### **On the two sets of Katu scripts in Vietnam**

Today, there are two Katu scripts being used mainly in Vietnam. One script is used in the area of Quang Nam (mainly Tay Giang, Nam Giang, Dong Giang, in which Tay Giang is the most populated area for Katu people), created by Bh'riu Liec, a local leader and educator. Another script created by the Institute of Linguistic is currently used in classrooms from 1st grade to 6th grade in Katu area around Thua Thien Hue, focusing in Nam Dong and A Luoi.

These two scripts both utilize Latin letters. Due to the debate between these two scripts, we want to demonstrate further the two Katu scripts used in Quang Nam and Thua Thien- Hue.

#### ***On the Katu script by Bh'riu Liec***

Bh'riu Liec, a government officer in Tay Giang, is always concerned about recovering the language of his people. After years of collecting, searching, systematically organizing vocabulary units and meanings, he wrote the book “Katu Common Language Dictionary – Kinh and Katu’s village culture” with the hope for Ka Tu people to learn the language to keep preserving and continue their traditions.

After the dictionary was put in use and approved by the community of Katu in Tay Giang, Bh'riu Liec kept improving his work. First and foremost, he wants to unify the way Katu is called because there are so many ways of writing, such as Katu, Co Tu, Ca Tu, Co-Tu... There is a need to unify the writing system to create identification documents for the Katu people. In a book on learning new Katu in 2018 (Pra Cotu: Cotu Language, Writers Publishing Group), he selects “Cotu ” as the correct way. Bh'riu Liec also made adjustments to some letter usages, wherein the Cơ Tu script differs from the Quoc ngu script (script of Vietnam) in 2 consonants (z, j), 3 final consonants (h, l, r) occurring after vowels (ah, ol, ur), 4 letter combinations representing double vowels (oo, oo, oo, êê), 5 long vowels (aa, ii, uu, urr, ôô), and 20 consonant cluster combinations (bh, bhl, đh, zr, dz...).

#### ***On the Katu script created by the Institute of Linguistic***

In 1998, two members of the Institute of Linguistics, Nguyen Huu Hoanh and Nguyen Van Loi announced the book “Katu Language” (Social Sciences Publisher), and afterwards, they were hired by the Institute of Science and Technology in Quang Nam to create a writing script for Katu in Quang Nam, while also working on the Vietnamese-Katu dictionary and a book on learning the language.

Based on the research on the Katu script used before 1975 and the script used by the Institute of Education in Quang Nam - Da Nang in textbooks in 1986, Nguyen Huu Hoanh [2009] had an important article “Opinions on a solution to change Katu script”.





The author has some positive notes while also points out drawbacks in the Katu script being used, which are:

It has all the flaws of the national script

There are many illogical instances: there is a lack of correlation between the phonetic system and writing system, since the people who created it did not have the skills to execute phonological analysis.

The author suggests creating a Katu script has these requirements:

Each phonemic is represented by a letter

The script must reflect the tight relationship between phonemics.

It must use the national script as a foundation

Other than Vietnamese, changing Katu must take in account the relationship with nearby minorities group, such as Pa Co - Ta Oi, Bru

Changing the Katu script must consider the current state of science technology, especially in printing and publishing. [Nguyen Huu Hoanh, 2009: 52–58]

Under these guidelines, since 2005, the Institute of Linguistics has been working with the Department of Science and Technology in Quang Nam to create a Katu script and use this script to write books such as: Katu Language, Katu Grammar, Vietnamese – Katu Dictionary, Katu – Vietnamese.

One obstacle is that the government of Quang Nam has not an official document acknowledging the Katu script created by the Institute of Linguistics, even though the proposal for this script has been approved. Not until 2016 did the government of Thua Thien Hue acknowledge this script and put it in use in textbooks on Katu from the 1st grade to 6th grade in certain areas, under the sponsorship of Faro Foundation (Norway).

### ***Suggestions on the selection of Katu script***

Research on the current state of using Katu and the views of Katu people indicate that the bilingual state (Katu- Vietnamese) of Katu people remains good, and the Katu language is safe from extinction. Most Katu people can use Vietnamese and their native language in everyday communication).

However, in the reality of two Katu script existing, we have these following suggestions:

First of all, we have to consider limiting “influential” factors in the selection of Katu scripts.

As we previously explained, there are two current Katu scripts being used at the same time by the people of Katu in Quang Nam (in Tay Giang, Nam Giang, Dong Giang district), one script created by Bh’riu Liec, a Katu educator, based on the script used during the war against America, and another script built by the Institute of Linguistics, based on the order of the Department of Science and Technology in Quang Nam.



In terms of science, the script created by the Institute of Linguistics is logical since it was created by people who were trained in linguistics and have experience in script creation. But why is this script not being used as the one and only Katu script?

We believe that there are power factors who influence this decision.

The script by the Institute of Linguistics only has one upside in its scientific and logical nature.

The script created by Bh'riu Liec has various forms of power:

Bh'riu Liec used to be a high-ranking government official in Tay Giang district, someone who was a part of the communist party, and a very educated Katu man who took pride in his heritage, with a desire to show Katu language and culture to the outside. Educated people always exert a strong influence on minor ethnic communities. Therefore, he has political influence and a close connection to the people of Katu, as he himself is one. When Bh'riu Liec promotes his script, the government of Quang Nam has trouble acknowledging and putting the script created by the Institute of Linguistics into use.

Not only he has political powers and a close connection to the Katu people, but his script is seen as the successor to the script that was used during the revolution and was part of propaganda documents utilized to fight America, therefore gaining the power of tradition, being associated to the “glory” past like Unseth [2005] has point out as a decisive factor in the selection of script.

Meanwhile, with real results and research, the government in Thua Thien-Hue has no trouble selecting the script created by the Institute of Linguistics as the official one.

Secondly, we have to unify the Katu script in education, creating dictionaries, and grammar books.

We believe that there is a need for a science conference for people who helped create these two scripts, as well as local leaders and people who influence the community to discuss and analyze to create a unified Katu script based on the foundation that the Institute of Linguistics laid with its script. During a conference in Tay Giang district, local leaders also asked us for advice on how to create a unified script, gain authorization from the government and put in the education program at school. Previously, at a year-end conference in 2021 in Quang Nam, regarding Katu education, there was an agreement to create a unified script for Katu people: Quang Nam has three districts: Dong Giang, Nam Giang, Tay Giang, Thua Thien - Hue has two districts: Nam Dong and A Luoi, they all wished to create an unified script that can be used in education, design curriculum, and write grammar books.

## **Raglai scripts**

### ***The existence of Raglai scripts***

From our understanding, based on researching documents and doing field work in Ninh Thuan in 2022, there are 5 acknowledged Raglai scripts, all using Latin letters.



A script created by SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) before 1975.

A script used during the war to liberate South Vietnam.

– A script created by a group of authors: Tran Vu and Mau Quoc Tien (in Khanh Son district of Khanh Hoa province) during the final years of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

– A script proposed by the Institute of Linguistics in 2001, authorized by government officials in Ninh Thuan according to Decision no. 287/2007/QĐ-UBND on 07/11/2007.

– A script created by Mau Thi Bich Phanh, a Raglai who lives in Bac Ai district, approved by the government of Ninh Thuan according to Decision 383/QB-UNBN 08/10/2019.

Currently, the competition among Raglai scripts is mainly between the script created by the Institute of Linguistics in 2001 and the script by Mau Thi Bich Phanh, both of which were approved by officials in Ninh Thuan during different time (the script by the Institute of Linguistics was accepted in 2007, the script by Mau Thi Bich Phanh (was approved in 2019). This is a situation that needs a clear and unified solution, especially in the near future when the Ministry of Education and Training wishes to bring Raglai into the high school curriculum as an optional subject (according to a private discussion with a high-ranking leader of the Department of Ethnic Education).

On the differences between these scripts, there are certain characteristics: The Raglai script created in 2019 by Mau Thi Bich Phanh consists of 26 Latin letters. The noticeable trait of this script is that it does not use tone marks, unlike the script created by the Institute of Linguistics, instead, it uses the consonant letter at the end of the syllable to distinguish the differences in length and nuance of vowels.

Even though Doan Van Phuc (2022) claimed that the script is “very strange”, the script was approved by the Ninh Thuan government and used widely. The script is accepted and used to educate government officials and military forces according to Decision no. 383/QĐ-UBND on 08/10/2019 by the government officials of Ninh Thuan and teach primary school students in the area according to Decision 1839/QB-UBND on 21/9/2021 by the government in Ninh Thuan, who also approved the program for Raglai 1 (SANAUT RADLAI 1), a textbook for students and guidebooks for teachers to practice in the area.

In discussing these two scripts, issues related to selecting which dialect to use as the foundation for the script remain controversial. Doan Van Phuc (2022) claims that “The Raglai script that was proposed by the Institute of Linguistics and Prof. Nguyen Van Loi (in collaborative research with the Department of Science and Technology in Ninh Thuan), is based on the Raglai script in Ninh Son, even though the Raglai in Ninh Son is not common in Ninh Thuan. In reality, people who speak



Raglai in this district are a lot fewer than Raglai in Bac Ai district. This is the same reason that Mau Thi Bich Phanh (an educated Raglai in Bac Ai) disagrees.

### *Suggestions on the selection of Raglai script in Vietnam*

Firstly, there is a need for a conference to compare and select the suitable Raglai script. This conference would not only compare the script by the Institute of Linguistics and the script by Mau Thi Bich Phanh, but also the script by Tran Vu and Mai Quoc Tien in Khanh Hoa. There is a need to unify the script and use it officially in the Raglai textbooks (optional subject) in the new Literature program (approved in 2018).

Secondly, after selecting the appropriate Raglai script, there would be adjustments to correct any irregularity in phonological analysis, which would require the participation of linguists.

Thirdly, after creating the unified script, we need to standardize documents that teach speaking and writing Raglai, ensuring its efficiency to improve the quality of teaching and learning Raglai in local areas.

### **3. Several opinions on the state of minor ethnic writing systems in Vietnam's modern day**

After analyzing the clashes between Hmong, Katu, and Raglai scripts, we have these suggestions:

Firstly, and also the most important suggestion, we believe that the language situation in Vietnam has greatly changed, and along with society (in combination with the development of finance and technology in the 4.0 era), there is a need for a decision that meets the demand of reality. It is time to hold a national conference to analyze the situation and deeply discuss issues regarding scripts for ethnic groups. There are two crucial problems: the first one being that it remains unclear whether the government's policy regarding language is sufficient; there is a need to build and approve greater plans, not only to judge but also to make important decisions, such as Decision 53-CP; secondly, this conference must listen to the voice of minority ethnic groups, but also not overlook the benefit of an entire country. Due to the political system in Vietnam, we demand the government to host this conference, which will lead to law documents that enforce the government's view towards minority ethnic languages, especially appropriate scripts, creating potential opportunities for the preservation of these languages, developing values and chances for minority ethnic groups to prove themselves in the age of technology.



Secondly, and very urgently, we need to research, develop and promulgate Language Laws, in which there are articles regarding language, and scripts for minor ethnic groups in Vietnam, to guarantee the language right for minor ethnic groups in a diverse country with multiple languages.

Thirdly, there is a need to establish a subcommittee for minor ethnic languages and scripts. The mission of this subcommittee is to provide counseling for local leaders and government offices, especially when rules regarding minority ethnic languages and scripts are enforced. The structure of this subcommittee must have a presence from leaders of several Institutes and local government officials who are directly involved in planning of minor ethnic language development. In this subcommittee, it is important that there are representatives from the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs of Vietnam, and the Institute of Linguistics.

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**Nguyen Van Hiep** – Professor, School of Languages and Tourism, Hanoi University of Industry  
Address: 298, Cau Dien Street, Hanoi, Vietnam  
E-mail: [nvhseoul@gmail.com](mailto:nvhseoul@gmail.com), [hiepnv@hau.edu.vn](mailto:hiepnv@hau.edu.vn)

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