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СИСТЕМЫ ПИСЬМЕННОСТИ ЯЗЫКОВ ЭТНИЧЕСКИХ МЕНЬШИНСТВ ВО ВЬЕТНАМЕ И ПРИМЕР ЯЗЫКА НУНГ

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В подлинно многоязычной стране Вьетнам существует более 33 систем письменности языков этнических меньшинств, некоторые из них являются традиционными системами письма, а другие были созданы в последние десятилетия. В данной статье представлен обзор систем письменности языков этнических меньшинств во Вьетнаме. В работе также рассматривается более детально то, каким образом во Вьетнаме реализуется языковая политика, и то, как она влияет на языковую компетенцию, использование языка и языковые установки жителей Вьетнама по отношению к своей системе письма. Несмотря на то, что значительное количество представителей этнических меньшинств во Вьетнаме имеют свои собственные системы письменности, а у некоторых из них несколько систем письменности, очень немногие представители этнических меньшинств могут использовать свои местные письменности, поскольку уровень грамотности довольно низок. В работе утверждается, что, хотя Вьетнам и добился заметных успехов в сохранении и развитии языков и письменности этнических меньшинств, предстоит еще много работы. Преимущества нынешней языковой политики Вьетнама в отношении языков и письменности этнических меньшинств весьма существенны. В то же время, в исследовании отмечаются и существующие недостатки, вызывающие трудности в сохранении и продвижении языков этнических меньшинств во Вьетнаме, в частности рассматривается язык нунг.

Ключевые слова: языковая политика, языковые установки, письменность, язык Нунг, Вьетнам.

WRITING SYSTEMS OF ETHNIC MINORITY LANGUAGES IN VIETNAM AND THE CASE OF NUNG

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There are over 33 writing systems of ethnic minority languages in a truly multilingual country of Vietnam, some of them are traditional writing systems, while others have been created in recent decades. This paper provides an overview of writing systems of ethnic minority languages in Vietnam. It also presents a closer look at the way the language policy is implemented in Vietnam and the effect it has over language competence, language use and language attitudes of Vietnamese people towards their writing systems. Despite the fact that a great number of minority ethnicities in Vietnam have their own writing systems and some of them have more than one writing system, very few ethnic minorities can use their local writing systems as the levels of literacy are quite low. The paper reveals that although Vietnam has gained remarkable achievements in preserving and promoting languages and writing systems of ethnic minorities, there is still a lot to be done. The advantages of the current language policy of Vietnam regarding the ethnic minority languages and writing systems are quite substantial. At the same time the study also notes the disadvantages that cause difficulties in preserving and promoting languages of ethnic minorities in Vietnam, including the case of Nung language.

Keywords: language policy, language attitude, writing system, Nung, Vietnam



I. Introduction

By and large, Vietnam is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country. According to the Decree No. 121-TCTK/PPCĐ issued by Vietnam General Bureau of Statistic on March 2nd, 1979, there are 53 minority ethnic groups in Vietnam which belong to Austroasiatic, Austronesian, Tai-Kai, Miao-Yao and Sino-Tibetan language families. The type of settling is of scattered nature, with some groups living close to each other.

Language policy of Vietnam promotes the status of the Vietnamese language as an inter-ethnic means of communication (in 2013 it was granted the status of a national language). The rights of ethnic minority people are guaranteed, i.e. the rights to use, preserve and promote their mother tongues, their own writing systems as it is stipulated in the Constitution of Vietnam, that was introduced in 1992. Decisions No. 153-CP, dated August 20th, 1969, regarding the creation, modification and use of the ethnic minorities' writing systems, basically regulate that all ethnicities in Vietnam need to study and use Vietnamese language. At the same time, existing writing systems could be improved or replaced if necessary. An ethnic minority's writing system will be created if that ethnic group meets the following conditions:

- substantial size of population;
- compact type of settling;
- desire of the language community to have their own writing system;
- the vocabulary of the language is reasonably developed.

The decisions No. 53-CP dated February 2nd, 1980, on the ethnic minorities' writing systems basically regulate that the Vietnamese language is a common language of an inter-ethnic communication; all Vietnam citizens have the right and duty to study and use the Vietnamese language. Languages and writing systems of each ethnic minority are precious for the whole nation, thus they must be preserved and promoted. All "scriptless" ethnic groups get support to develop Latin-based writing systems. The ethnicities, that already have a traditional writing system, will be helped to create Latin-based writing systems if necessary. All newly created writing systems of ethnic minorities need to be close to Vietnamese orthography for the convenience of Kinh people and ethnic minorities to study Vietnamese orthography and ethnic minorities' writing systems. Most notably, this kind of language policy authorizes provincial people's committees to adopt writing systems of any ethnic minorities that are the residents of the province. The Article 4 of Law on Primary Education issued in 1991 states that Primary Education is implemented in Vietnamese, but the ethnic minority groups are also entitled to use their own spoken and written languages in Primary Education. Decree No. 38/2004/CT-TTG, issued by the Prime Minister of Vietnam government, stated that governmental authorities, police and army forces that work in ethnic minority area are required to have a certain

level of command of local ethnic minority languages. Decree No. 82/NĐ-CP on teaching and learning languages and regulating the writing systems of minority ethnic groups in public schools and other education facilities, issued in 2010, outlined the conditions and procedures of teaching languages and work related to the creation of writing systems for minority ethnic groups. This Decree also authorizes the provincial committees to review the proposed or existing writing systems and prepare essential documentation so that they could be submitted to the Ministry of Education and Training for consideration in order to be able to study those languages in schools and develop the writing systems of minority ethnic groups within the province.

After decades of implementing the language policy, it is necessary to summarize its achievements as well as the issues that need to be resolved. This paper provides an overview of the writing systems of ethnic minority languages in Vietnam and a closer look at the language use, language competence and language attitude of Nung people and the effect the language policy of Vietnam had on them.

2. Data collection

In addition to data collected from the previous studies and available resources, we conducted 3 field trips from 2019 to 2021 to collect the data on language use and the attitudes of Nung people towards their writing system. A questionnaire included questions regarding to the personal information of the informants, their language competence, language use and language attitudes. The questionnaires were used to interview 600 informants, including 200 Nung Phan Sling people in Na Pat village, Chien Thang commune, Chi Lang district of Lang Son province, 200 Nung Xuong people in Bo Moi village, Dong Minh commune, Yen Minh district of Ha Giang province, and 200 Nung Ven people in Ca Tieng village, Noi Thon commune, Ha Quang district of Cao Bang province. Among them, 260/600 are from 18 to 35 years old; 265/600 are from 36 to 55 years old and 75/600 are above 55 years old. 65,17% are farmers, 19 retired, 8 workers and the rest are governmental officials. Regarding the informants' education, 46 are illiterate, 171 had primary school education, 193 had secondary school education, 176 had high school education and 14 graduated from colleges or universities.

3. Results

3.1. Writing systems of ethnic minorities in Vietnam

According to the statistics of The Department of Primary Education, Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam in 2019, 32 minority ethnics in Vietnam have their own writing systems, including Tay, Thai, Hoa, Khmer, Nung, Mong, Jrai, Ede, Bahnar, Cham, Sedang, Hre, Koho, Raglai, Mngong, Stieng, Bru, Cotu, Lo Lo, Jeh, Taoih, Ma, Cor, Choro, Chrau, Lao, Lu, Dao, San Chay, Ngai,

San Diu, Muong. In 2021, Hani was added into this list. Among them, Thai, Lao, Lu, Khmer and Cham's writing systems are Sanscrit based; Tay, Nung, Dao, San Chay, Ngai, San Diu, Hoa's writing systems are Sino-script based and Mong, Jrai, Ede, Bahnar, Cham, Sedang, Hre, Koho, Raglai, Mnong, Stieng, Bru, Cotu, Jeh, Taoih, Ma, Cor, Choro, Churu, Muong and Hani's writing systems are Latin based. Some of these ethnic groups have several writing systems as it is summarized in the following table:

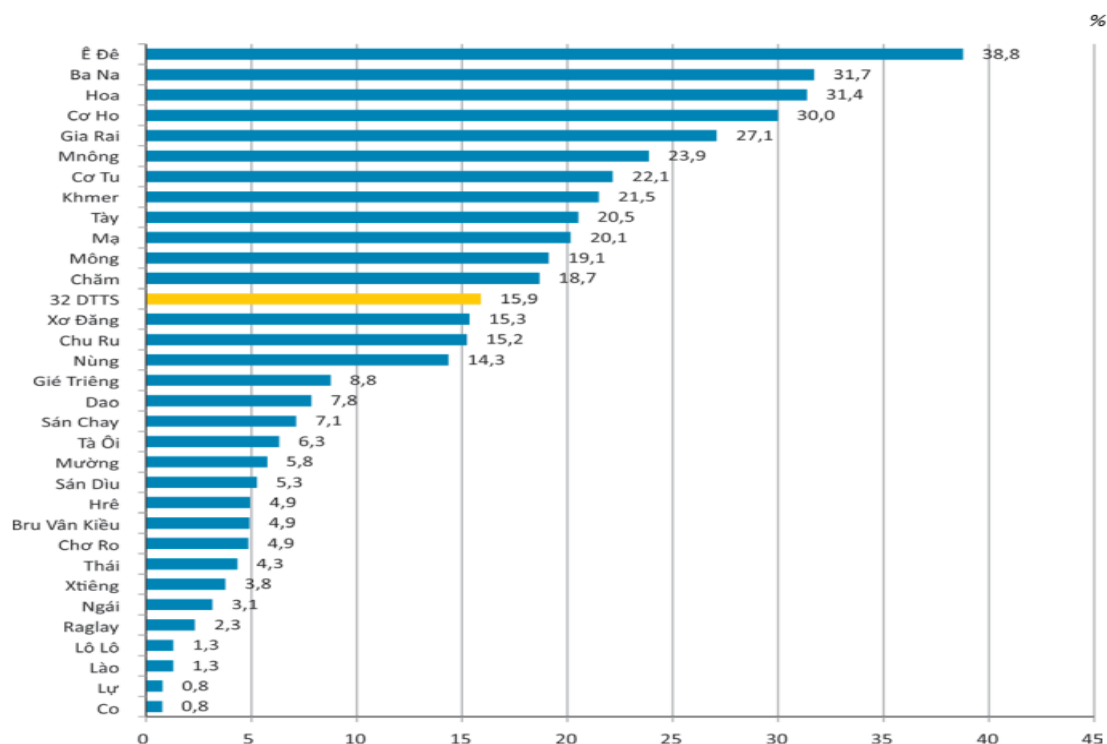
| No | Ethnic | Script based |
|----|--------|-----------------|
| 1 | Mong | Latin |
| 2 | Jrai | Latin |
| 3 | Ede | Latin |
| 4 | Bahnar | Latin |
| 5 | Sedang | Latin |
| 6 | Hre | Latin |
| 7 | Koho | Latin |
| 8 | Raglai | Latin |
| 9 | Mnong | Latin |
| 10 | Stieng | Latin |
| 11 | Bru | Latin |
| 12 | Cotu | Latin |
| 13 | Jeh | Latin |
| 14 | Taoih | Latin |
| 15 | Ma | Latin |
| 16 | Cor | Latin |
| 17 | Choro | Latin |
| 18 | Chrau | Latin |
| 19 | Mường | Latin |
| 20 | Hani | Latin |
| 21 | Khmer | Sanscrit |
| 22 | Lào | Sanscrit |
| 23 | Lự | Sanscrit |
| 24 | Thai | Sanscrit, Latin |
| 25 | Cham | Sanscrit, Latin |
| 26 | Hoa | Sino |

| | | |
|----|----------|-------------|
| 27 | Lo Lo | Sino |
| 28 | Dao | Sino |
| 29 | Sán Chay | Sino |
| 30 | Ngái | Sino |
| 31 | Sán Diu | Sino |
| 32 | Nung | Sino, Latin |
| 33 | Tay | Sino, Latin |

Except for Sino and Sanscrit-based cases that have traditional scripsis, Latin-based writing systems have been created from late 19th century by French researchers (before 1945), by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (from 1960s to 1970s) and the Vietnamese government later on up until now [Nguyen Huu Hoanh et al., 2013]. The earliest Latin-based writing systems of ethnic minorities in Vietnam were created for people in the Central Highland of Vietnam (Bahnar in 1861, Hmong in 1917, Jrai in 1918, Ede in 1923 etc.) by École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) starting from the end of 19th century [Ta Van Thong, Ta Quang Tung, 2017], [Phan Luong Hung, 2022]. Since 1960s up until now, many Latin-based writing systems have been created or modified by the Vietnamese government, including Hmong (1961), Tay-Nung (1961), Thai (1961), Coho (1983), Taoih (1986), Bru (1986), Raglai (2001), Mnong (2008), Cotu (2004), Bahnar (2006), Cham (2006), Hre (2006), Cadong (2008), Muong (2016), Hani (2021). In some cases, one ethnic group can have several writing systems with the same kind of script. For example, Thai people in Vietnam have at least 4 different Sanscrit-based writing systems. Bahnar, Raglai and Co Tu have two official Latin-based writing systems that are recognized by different provinces.

According to the statistics of The Department of Primary Education, Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam, in the period from 2011 to 2020, 6 ethnic minority languages and the respective writing systems were taught in primary school in 22 provinces, including Hmong, Ede, Jrau, Bahnar, Cham and Khmer with the total number of 756 schools, 5.267 classes and 174.562 pupils. Since 2022, Thai and Mnong have also been added to this list. From 2007 to 2017, 25 languages and writing systems were taught for state staffs, police and army forces who worked in an ethnic minority area; 858 classes and 36.691 learners were involved in learning ethnic minority languages and writing systems.

According to the statistics of General Statistics Office of Vietnam in 2019, the percentage of ethnic minority people who can use their local writing systems is still low (15,9 %). Among them, the highest percentage is reported in Ede group and the lowest percentage is reported in Cor and Lue (0,8 %) as showed in this chart:



Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam

3.2. The case of Nung writing systems

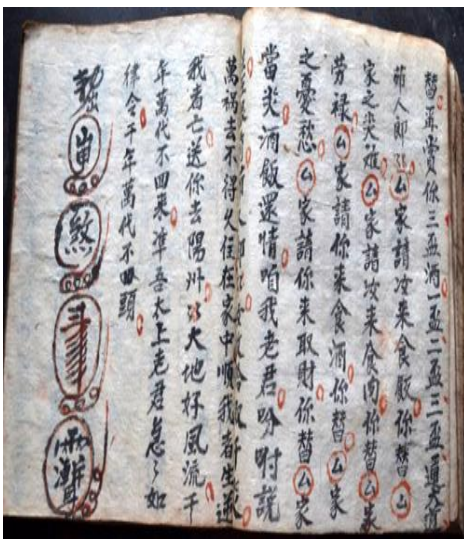
Nung is an official ethnic group of Vietnam with 1.083.298 people reported in 2019 by General Statistics Office of Vietnam; it is used mainly in Lang Son (335,316 people), Cao Bang (158,114 people), Bac Giang (95,805 people), Thai Nguyen (81,740 people), Ha Giang (81,478 people), Dak Lak (75,857 people), Lao Cai (31,150 people), Dak Nong (31,063 people), Bac Kan (28,709 people), Lam Dong (24,423 people), Binh Phuoc (23,917 people), Dong Nai (18,561 people), Tuyen Quang (16,902 people), Yen Bai (16,385 people), Bac Ninh (14,471 people) and Gia Lai (12,420 people). Nung people call themselves /nɔŋ/. Institute of Ethnology (1978, 1983) mentioned that Nung people in Vietnam previously had lived in the Southern area of the Yangtzu river, in China, and started to immigrate into Vietnam in 11th century. There are several subgroups of Nung people in Vietnam which are normally distinguished according to the type of national clothes they wear: Nung Khen Lai (sleeves have different colors), Nung Hu Lai (head scarfs have white spots), Nung Slu Tin (short shirts); and according to their previous place of residence in China: Nung An, Nung Inh, Nung Quy Rin, Nung Loi, Nung Phan Slinh, Nung Chao, Nung Loi or for unknown reasons: Nung Xuong, Nung Ven, Nung Din.

Nung language is genealogically classified as the Tai-Kadai language family, Kam-Tai branch, Be-Tai sub-branch, Tai group, Central – Tai subgroup [Edmondson, et al, 1997]. Nung language is very close to Tay language in Vietnam. Some Nung subdialects are even closer to Tay subdialects than

other Nung subdialects [Le Van Truong, 2004]. The dialects of Nung are confirmed to be close to each other, and are basically divided into five dialects:

- Nung spoken in the West of the North East of Vietnam: Bac Quang (Ha Giang), Na Hang, Chiem Hoa (Tuyen Quang), Cho Don (Bac Kan).
- Nung spoken in the South of the North East of Vietnam: Bac Son, Binh Gia, Cao Loc (Lang Son), Vo Nhai, Dai Tu (Thai Nguyen).
- Nung spoken in the Northeastern part of the North East of Vietnam: Hoa An, Nguyen Binh, Quang Uyen, Trung Khanh, Tra Linh, Ha Lang (Cao Bang).
- Nung spoken in the Central of the North East of Vietnam: Thach An (Cao Bang), Trang Dinh (Lang Son), Ngan Son, Na Ri, Cho Ra, Bach Thong (Bac Kan).
- Nung spoken in the Northwest part of the North East of Vietnam: Hoang Su Phi, Xin Man (Ha Giang), Yen Binh (Yen Bai) [Ta Van Thong, Ta Quang Tung, 2017].

Up until now, Nung people in Vietnam have had three different writing systems: the traditional script is Sino-based (Nom Nung), the Latin-based script which was created for Tay and Nung people by Vietnam Government in 1961 (thus called Latin-based Tay-Nung writing system) and the third writing system is also Latin-based created by Vy Thi Be and Janice Saul in 1974 while composing Nung Phan Slinh text book. Both Latin-based systems are close to Vietnamese with minor differences. For examples, Latin-based Nung script (1974) uses “-h-“ after vowels to represent shortness of vowel.



Sino-based Nung script Latin-based Tay -Nung textbook (1961)

| <u>Bai tại éht</u> | <u>Bài thứ nhất</u> | <u>Lesson One (1)</u> |
|---|--|--|
| 1. M̄hng kíhn ngai sahng? | Anh ăn com trưa chưa? | Have you eaten lunch yet? |
| 2. Cáu kíhn dả. Cáu hēhng kíhn s̄ng. | Tôi đã ăn rồi. Tôi mới ăn xong. | I have already eaten. I just finished eating. |
| 3. M̄hng kíhn môi s̄u ph̄hc ca-lahng? | Anh ăn com với rau gì? | What vegetables did you eat it with? |
| 4. Cáu kíhn môi s̄u pá. Cáu kíhn môi dái; bô mi ph̄hc ca-lahng. | Tôi ăn với cá. Tôi ăn com không thôi; không có rau gì. | I ate it with fish. I only had rice; there weren't any vegetables. |

Latin-based Nung script (1974)

Cung Van Luoc (1991) confirmed that Nom Tay-Nung was a result of language contact between Tay-Nung, Vietnamese and Chinese. Nom Tay-Nung is rather phonogram than ideogram. Tong Dai Hong (2013) suggested that Nom Tay-Nung had been created in 14th or 15th century. Meanwhile, Hoang Trieu An, Duong Nhat Thanh and Hoang Tuan Nam (2003) confirmed that Nom Tay – Nung had been created in 2th century BC and was only standardized in the 17th century.

Latin-based Tay-Nung writing system was created and approved by the Vietnam Government in 1961 and was taught in primary schools and used in literature, and in propaganda in the Northeast of Vietnam until 1976 [Luong Ben, 1993]. Hoang Van Ma (1993) reported that teaching and learning Tay-Nung language and writing system started in 1962-1963 school year with 78 first grade classes and 1800 pupils reported and reached highest scale with 1000 classes and 37.240 pupils in 1967-1968 school year. Luong Ben (1993) pointed out on the weakness of Latin-based Tay-Nung writing system that had been created and approved by Vietnam Government in 1961 and indicated that “The Tay-Nung script in 1961 was created with the idea of creating a common script for both Tay and Nung and for the whole Viet Bac region”. Therefore, Tay-Nung orthographic regulations created a gap between letters and sounds of certain dialects. Meanwhile, no Sino-based Nung script and Latin-based Nung script (1974) classes are officially reported.

Our data analysis shows that no single informant can read or write in their own writing systems. This result matches the report of The People Committee of Cao Bang in 2021 showing that there are hardly any Nung people who can read or write their own writing systems, except for several community shamans (fortune tellers) who can read Sino-based Nung script. Meanwhile, according to the statistical data of Luong Ben (1993), there are 15/108 Nung people who can read and write Latin-based Nung writing system created in 1961. This percentage corresponds to statistics of General Statistics Office of Vietnam in 2019 shown above. Regarding to the usage of Latin-based Tay-Nung writing system, data shows that Nung people do not use their own writing system in any situations.

Regarding to attitude of Nung people towards their own writing systems, 492/600 (82%) informants asserted that it was necessary to study the Nung writing system. Among them, 65% Nung



people wanted to learn Latin-based writing system and only 35% Nung people wanted to learn Sino-based writing system as it is easier to learn than the Latin-based one. This is a huge advance compared to Mong Ky Slay's (1993) statistical data showing that only 51,93% Nung people wanted their children to study Tay-Nung writing system.

Looking into the writing systems of Nung, we could find the following reasons for the current situation of Nung's language competence, language use and language attitudes towards their writing system:

Firstly, Nom Nung (traditional writing system of Nung people) is Sino-based which is completely different from Vietnamese writing system (Quoc Ngu). Thus, there are Nung people who can read and write the Latin-based writing system while hardly any Nung people can read and write Nom Nung.

Secondly, Latin-based Tay-Nung writing system was created in 1961 on the basis of Tay language in Bac Kan province. Meanwhile, differences between dialects of Tay and Nung are remarkable, especially in vowels and rhymes [Mong Ky Slay, 1993].

4. Conclusion

Language policy of Vietnam has been playing an important role in preserving and promoting languages and writing systems of ethnic minority groups. A great number of writing systems have been created. Education in the mother tongue has been implemented in many provinces throughout the country. However, there are facts that reveal the disadvantages regarding the language policy itself and the poor implementation that cause difficulties in preserving and promoting languages of ethnic minorities in Vietnam, including the case of Nung.

Firstly, Decisions No. 53 dated February 2nd, 1980 on the ethnic minorities' writing systems allow provincial authorities to adopt writing systems of ethnic minorities in the province. This makes it possible for different provinces to adopt different writing system for one ethnic group. And that also causes problems in the organization of education in the mother tongue on a national level.

Secondly, the quality of creating writing system is still limited. The case of Tay-Nung writing system reveals that it does not work well for both Tay and Nung people. Raglai and Cadong writing systems that were created recently are not used by the native speakers as they are not efficient enough. Thus, the system of creating writing system in Vietnam needs to be improved.

All in all, we suppose that the following tasks need to be done:

To begin with, the legal documents, related to the work of preserving and promoting ethnic minority languages and writing systems, should be revised. For example, Provincial People

Committees should not have the authority to approve ethnic minorities writing systems. This should be done at the Central level to avoid the situations when one ethnic group has several writing systems.

Another important consideration is that the language policy needs to be implemented systematically in order to be effective. All the language materials need to be well prepared, i.e., textbooks and supplementary materials such as dictionaries, grammar books, etc. And of particular importance are the propaganda work and human resources.

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