

On the Relationship Between the Austroasiatic and Austronesian Languages in Southeast Asia

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Abstract. Currently, in the taxonomy of Southeast Asian languages, there exist two different explanations for the relationship among Austroasiatic and Austronesian languages. As have been known, the Austroasiatic and Austronesian languages have phonetical and lexical correspondence. However, whether this is *borrowing or inheritance* relationship has long been an issue of controversy, because plausible evidence to these points of view is still unavailable. In this paper, equivalent data from basic vocabulary between the Việt Mường disyllabic/sesquisyllable languages (e.g. Arem, Ma Lieng, Sach, Ruc, Aheu of the Mon-Khmer in the Austroasiatic family) and the Chamic language are carefully investigated. Despite the shared basic vocabulary, this kind of equivalence lends further weight to the view that preference is given to the borrowing relationship. For that reason, these lexical resemblances are of a restricted range which supports the viewpoint of a *specially borrowed* relationship between the two language families.

1. In 1973, in his further elaborations of the concept Austro - Thai (AT) previously presented and in his analysis of its relationship with Austroasiatic (AA), P.K. Benedict posited that the relationship between Austronesian (AN) and Austroasiatic is merely the substratum (Benedict, 1976) [1]. His Austro-Thai concept included Miao-Yao, Tai-Kadai and Austronesian languages. Also in 1973, S.E. Jakhontov expressed his opinion about the relationship between these two language families. He recognized Vietnamese as a language belonging to AA (he called the Mon - Khmer) and Thai, both of which share the same origin with AN (he called Indonesia) rather than

Chinese, so for him, AA and AN merely have borrowing relationship (Jakhontov, 1973) [2].

One year later, A.G. Haudricourt made an analysis which shared the view of P.K. Benedict and S.E. Jakhontov (Haudricourt, 1974) [3]. Yet he insisted that the reciprocal borrowing between them is quite special because the shared words appear both in basic vocabulary and in different language groups. For example, in Malai "there are some words which do not appear in Cham such as: "crab" *ketam*, Bahnar *kotam*, Khmer *ktam*, Mon *gatam*, Samre *tham*, Khasi *tham*, Wa *tam*" (Haudricourt, 1974:33); and languages in Mon - Khmer (MK) as Maa, Mnong, Bahnar have loans from Chăm after millennia of domination by the Chăm people and "the loan words

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originated from Sanskrit ...; or Indonesien" (Haudricourt, 1974:33).

Nothing of the issue seems to require further discussion. But since then, we have encountered other approaches to the language classification in the region. For example, most recently, after proving the hereditary relationship between AN and Tai-Kadai, L. Sagart suggested that it may be possible to restore a *proto* form between Sino - Tibetan (ST) and AN (Sagart, 2004) [4]. This also means that, for Sagart, in Southeast Asia and southern China, Sino - Tibetan and Tai-Kadai could have belonged to a common language. It can be inferred from his view that in this area, there was a language family named AA besides Sino - Tibetan and AN language families.

Thus, in different analyses, the cited linguists show that the relationship between AA (more specifically the Mon-Khmer) and AN is not a genetic one; rather, it is purely borrowing or the result of their contact.

2. In an effort to develop a concept of "mixed language" by contact, Pham Duc Duong has maintained a hypothesis of "Southeast Asian language family" that he calls "Pre-Austroasiatic". In his view, this language family includes AA, AN and Dong Thai (corresponding to the concept of Tai-Kadai of many other linguists) (Pham Duc Duong, 2007:30) [5]. This also means, in his opinion, that the relationship between AA and AN is a genetic one and later this original language splits into three different parts of AA, AN, and Dong Thai as they are at present.

The view presented by Pham Duc Duong is merely a verbal expression of findings by other researchers. Most notably, linguistically speaking, in this mean time, it is just a hypothesis which cannot or has not been proven and the author has merely illustrated his hypothesis with an amount of "ethnolinguistically" biased data. This

precisely is the difference between him and the above authors. However, Pham Duc Duong's opinion clearly shows the very special relationship between AA and AN, as concluded by A.G. Haudricourt.

Therefore, to further clarify this relationship, we need to observe more data of different languages in the region.

3. When studying the languages in which several ancient traits of the Viet-Muong group (VM), one among the Mon-Khmer of AA, are still preserved (Tran Tri Doi, 2005) [6], we find a significant number of basic word correspondences between VM and some languages of AN. Analyzing the nature of lexical correspondences will contribute to clarifying the characteristics of the relationship between AN in the region and VM. Also, we will see more clearly the relationship between the northeastern VM and AN in the mainland of Southeast Asia.

The languages in VM which still maintain ancient characteristics are disyllabic/sesquisyllable such as Arem (Ar), Ma Lieng (ML), Sach (S), Ruc (R) or Aheu (Ah), Kha Phong (Kh), etc. The disyllabic characteristics prove that they still maintain features of Proto-Viet-Muong (PVM), and this is also the period which maintain the best MK characteristics. So, the lexical correspondences between VM and AN below, therefore, are very meaningful.

The location which disyllabic VM speakers lived is the mountainous area between Vietnam and Laos PDR's borders (Quang Binh, Ha Tinh and Nghe An provinces, see map). This is the high mountainous area with severe weather conditions and it is very difficult to move around here. Many linguists have found that those geographical features enable the languages to well preserve the phonetic forms of Proto-VM (Ferlus, 2001) [7].

data on Ruc, Arem, Sach, Ma Lieng, Kha Phong collected during our fieldtrips. For Chăm and Muong, we recorded from original documents and for the remaining languages, we used IPA.

3.2. Comments on the Data

Obviously, the two series of words cited above express several concepts and they belong to basic vocabulary of a language. According to the analyses of P.K. Benedict, S.E. Jakhontov, A.G. Haudricourt and L. Sargat, when such words and word classes do have correspondences, the correspondences may look genetic at first glance. However, this might not be the case in more detailed analysis. We can see the situation as follows:

3.2.1. First, among words signifying the concept of "earth, rock", the comparison of Ruc and Chăm languages reveal the correspondence in *núi đá* "rocky mountain", *đất* "earth". Meanwhile, with regards to the concept of "time", the correspondence between Chăm and VM seem more diverse. Specifically, there is a correspondence between Chăm and Vietnamese in the concept of "day" but there is a correspondence among Chăm and Vietnamese, Muong, Arem, Ma Lieng in the concept of "noon"; while there is a correspondence among Chăm and Vietnamese, Muong, Sach, Ruc in the concept of "moon" (synonymous with the concept of "month" in Cham); but there is a correspondence between Chăm and Arem in the concept of "year"; and to certain extent, it can be said that there is a correspondence among Cham and Sach, Ruc, Kha Phong in the concept of "early morning".

Obviously, the above correspondences occur in very basic words. It is not difficult to find a regular phonetic relationship among them (e.g. Cham *bilan*, Vietnamese *moon*, Muong *blăng/tlăng*, Sach and Ruc *palian*). Considering those correspondences alone, the proposal that there is a genetic relationship between Chăm and VM does have certain bases.

3.2.2. However, if analyzed in details, the situation is not entirely so simple. Observing the above correspondences between Chăm and VM, we find the common words in two basic series do not occur in regular patterns in VM.

This means some words in this language correspond to those in Chăm, but not in other languages of the same group. For example, the concept of "year" *t^hun* in Arem corresponds to *thun* in Cham, but in VM languages it is *năm* or *sanăm*; or another related concept of "moon" is in correspondence among Chăm, Vietnamese, Muong, Sach, Ruc but it is *l^mreah* in Arem. Likewise, the concept of "noon" sees a correspondence among the languages in question while Sach, Ruc show it in different forms; and the concepts of "rocky mountain" and possibly "earth" find correspondences among Ruc, Sach and Chăm, but not in VM languages.

The irregular correspondence in some concepts among languages within VM and Chăm may suggest that such correspondences can be single random coincidences only, which points towards a seemingly borrowing relationship between VM and Chăm. Thus, although basic words in VM and Chăm (as in 3.2.1) are found to be similar, the randomness of those correspondences likely result from borrowing relationship.

Nonetheless, it can also be explained that the random similarities within VM are due to the fact that some languages may have preserved the correspondences with Chăm but the other VM languages may not. Thus, the randomness within VM is an insufficient basis to deny a genetic relationship among the said basic word correspondences.

3.2.3. Detailed analysis of the correspondence among basic words denoting the concepts of "earth, rock and time" in Chăm and VM reveals a very interesting sign - that is the completeness of each series of the words in Chăm and VM compared above. This is probably the best evidence to prove the borrowing relationship between Chăm and VM.

In the first series of words denoting the concepts "earth, stone" of disyllabic VM, there

is a complete correspondence as in *rock, rocky mountain, earth, clay, sand* in Vietnamese and Muong. Although the words in Ruc denoting *rocky mountain* and *earth* are different, in the remaining languages, such correspondence is preserved, which demonstrates respect to the complete correspondence of the word series within the language group. Such is also the case with the second series denoting time concepts. The correspondence of *early, noon, night, month* and *year* is complete in VM, as the difference of *day* and *moon* does not break the systemic correspondence of “time” in VM.

So, in our view, it is the complete correspondence in the word series of VM that ascertains that the words of basic vocabulary, those which are similar to Cham and find their place in the system, are loan words. And because of this reason, they may be preserved in this VM language but not wholly or partially retained in others of the same group. In other words, it is true that there are similar basic words in Chăm of AN and VM languages of AA, but this similarity merely reflects the special borrowing relationship between them.

In view of this, we posit that there are five language families in Southeast Asia, including Austroasiatic, Austronesian, Tai-Kadai, Sino-Tibetan and Miao-Yao. The view we take coincides with that of some other authors and does not exclude the view regarding Southeast Asia as sharing certain linguistic and cultural similarity with the rest of the region. The difference lies in the fact that such similarity is not identical with the similarity of language origin.

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