

THE CHANGES OF THE HANOIAN LANGUAGE DURING RENEWAL PERIOD: the influence of European and North American languages from a vocabulary standpoint

NGUYỄN THỊ KIM LOAN^(*)

Over the past twenty years or so, the industrialization and modernization of the country, along with increased globalization, have fundamentally impacted our nation's culture and society. Linguistic changes are part of this impact. It is noteworthy that the usage of foreign vocabulary in Vietnamese used in major cities and elsewhere is remarkably common. Extracting information from the *Hà Nội mới* newspaper, which is reflective of the Hanoian people's opinions, this article offers a view on how Vietnamese spoken in Hanoi has been affected by European and North American languages. At the least, the press is an agent that converts everyday conversations and topics into writing. As such, it does quite a good job at depicting the way in which language is used within a community.

1. The influence of European and North American languages

The borrowing of words is a very common occurrence when two languages are exposed to each other. Vietnamese is no exception. However,

the pervasion of foreign words into the Vietnamese language has varied throughout the annals of history.

Since 1986, European and North American languages, especially English, have played an increasingly important role as a linking medium for Vietnam and the rest of the world. Hanoi is a point of entry for English, so to speak. English words can be found in all corners of our lexicon, but perhaps none more so than information technology and economics. Such words as *internet*, *website*, *file*, *Google*, *excel*, *blog*, *email*, *index*, and *market* have become all but too familiar. Without a doubt, Vietnamese, in particular the Hanoian language, has become heavily influenced by English, which is something that was foreseeable.

It has become common practice to throw some English words into everyday conversations, no matter the topic. For instance, in young people's conversations, many English words can

^(*) PhD., Institute of Linguistics.

be picked up on, such as: *bye, hello, goodbye, hot, makeup, file, cute...*

We could also observe foreign words in the *Hà Nội mới*. For example: "Sự *lãng-xê* một của phim Hàn Quốc ít ra cũng thu hút được một số người nào đó xem" (The *launching* of Korean styles basically attracted some of population) (*Hà Nội mới*, 1/1/2002); "Chúng được phối hợp với *phom* của giày dép..." (They were fit with *form* of shoes) (*Hà Nội mới*, 15/2/2002); "*Resort* chắc chắn sẽ rất hút khách" (*Resort* will definitely be attractive with travelers) (*Hà Nội*

become prevalent and sought after, especially in urban settings. The society we live in is such that word choice is one of the determining factors of a person's standing and value in a community.

To shed more light on the continually increasing prevalence of English, we note a number of instances where foreign words were used on some pages of the *Hà Nội mới* from the onset of the reform in 1987 to 2007, when Vietnam joined the WTO. These words are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Usage of European and North American vocabulary in the *Hà Nội mới* newspaper during the renewal

Years	No. of pages	Instances	Language		Percentage
1987-1992	720	95	English	56	59%
			French	32	33,7%
			Russian	07	7%
1992-1997	720	154	English	138	68%
			French	45	29%
			Russian	04	2,6%
1997-2002	720	264	English	215	81,4%
			French	45	17%
			Russian	04	1,5%
2002-2007	720	309	English	258	83,5%
			French	49	15,8%
			Russian	02	0,6%

mới, 15/6/2005); "*World Cup* năm nay có gì lạ?" (What is different for this year's *World Cup*?) (*Hà Nội mới*, 30/6/2006)... The mixed usage of English and Vietnamese words has

Upon analyzing the data in Table 1, it could be observed that: First, there is an increasingly large number of foreign words borrowed into Vietnamese. Second, English's dominance in comparison to that of other languages.

Evidently, the fundamental reason for this linguistic phenomenon is that comprehensive cooperation with the rest of the world has led to the adoption of many foreign terms for concepts and things. It can be observed that in times of reform, western languages, in particular English, tend to be widely utilized, so much so that some have been led to argue that

Vietnamese is gradually undergoing Anglicization. Many newspapers contain gratuitous use of English. Examples: "Các nhân viên trực cho chúng tôi 1 *account* và mật khẩu" (Staff who is on

shift provided us an *account* and password) (*Hà Nội mới*, 1/1/2000); "Hồ sơ nộp tại: Tháp Hà Nội, *shop* 7 và 8" (Documents are handed at 7th and 8th *shop* in Hanoi Tower) (*Hà Nội mới*, 15/6/2009); "Đồng Nai trận sau cũng chỉ có vé đá trận *play-off*" (Dong Nai team has only chance to play the *play – off* game) (*Hà Nội mới*, 15/6/2009); "Câu *slogan* nổi tiếng..." (The famous *slogan* is...) (*Hà Nội mới*, 30/5/2006)... These English words can easily be replaced by Vietnamese equivalents without affecting the meaning of the embodying text. What's more is that to the vast majority of Vietnamese, those words are may appear slightly unfamiliar if not completely unfamiliar.

This lingual abuse reflects, from a cultural standpoint, the tendency of Vietnamese people to glorify the west and many things associated with it. This attitude can be observed particularly among urban Vietnamese. The mixing of words from different languages is a new trend that is indicative of a society in which traditions are gradually being abandoned. This is linked to a linguistic theory called lingual attitude. "Lingual attitude may be construed as a community or individual's assessment of or tendency to use a certain language" (2. p. 74). The issue being considered here suggests that Vietnamese people are insecure about their mother tongue, which, according to researchers, arises when one ethnic group interacts with another having a different first language that is more prevalent and reputable than their own.

2. The entrance of European and North American vocabulary into Vietnamese and how it has evolved over time

Fundamental changes to society, which deal with culture and lifestyle, affect the way in which loanwords are employed. Below are some statistics on the usage of western words in three distinct periods marked by different cultural and societal characteristics (table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of two approaches to borrowing western words into Vietnamese

Period	No. of Pages	Approach		Percentage	
		ND	PC	ND	PC
1957-1975	360	68	165	28,93%	70,21%
1976-1985	360	16	134	10,19%	85,35%
1987-2007	360	213	99	51,82%	24,08%

(Legend: ND = original spelling; PC = transcription)

The data in table 2 illustrate the differences and inconsistencies in how the borrowing of words is dealt with. In principle, when we use foreign words, what we aim for are standardization, consistency, and simplicity, all of which facilitate interaction. Nonetheless, standards are arbitrary.

More specifically, there are two traditional approaches. Standards must be followed, but at the same time they are options that the individual may choose from. But whether standards are mandatory or optional must depend on the society's course of development. To

set forth regulations on the standardization of borrowed words, the first order of business is to determine the cultural and societal characteristics. Such regulations must be appropriate to cultural and societal development.

For example, in Vietnamese, some French words are altered so as to fit Vietnamese conventions (e.g., *săm, lớp, kem, phốt, kếp...*). These words are made consistent arbitrarily by listening to their sounds. According to Hoang Tue, transcription is done “through the ears of the native speaker, who often times is a laborer” (4, p.175). Another method would be to isolate each syllable for all foreign words: *tê-ta-xi-lin, gờ-li-xê-rin, cờ-lanh-ke...* In light of the general populace being poorly educated, this is widely viewed as a viable solution.

During the reform, this practice became no longer appropriate for the higher level of educational attainment reached by the average denizen of the capital. Perhaps for that very reason, after the reform, there were many more borrowed words that kept their original spelling instead of undergoing transcription. This signifies the desire to use standardized spelling for words borrowed into Vietnamese. It also suggests that the people of Vietnam, especially those residing in Hanoi, have become more sophisticated over time.

Still, aside from phonetics, there is still the issue of orthography when it comes to European and North American loanwords. Taking into consideration

issues of the Hà Nội mới, the prevailing practice now is to preserve the original spelling of borrowed words, which is mentioned by Hoàng Tuệ in his discussion on lingual standards (see: 4).

3. The diversity of borrowed European and North American words during the reform

Studies show that foreign vocabulary is used in conversations in numerous ways. Aside from words and phrases, smaller elements such as morphemes and phonemes are put to use as well. The scope of function of borrowed words has become increasingly broad. Words that are kept intact as well as those that have been localized are combined with native words to create new phases and terms that end up being frequently used. For example: *file chủ, chạy sô, hát sô, bầu sô, sô/show diễn, trang web, tuổi teen, phong cách xì-tin, xe container* (công te nơ), *mạng Internet, fan cuồng, tour du lịch, Oil Thái Bình, golf thủ, game thủ, Saigonbank...*

The rapid change in pace of life that occurs especially in dense urban areas like Hanoi has created a new supply of Vietnamese nomenclature. Compound words are created out of foreign words and native words. In Vietnamese, such words have long existed. Examples include: *xe tăng, phanh xe, bánh xà phòng, nhà băng...* or *trắng bạch, súng trường...* (1). Elements like *tăng, xà phòng, bang, bạch, and trường* are all French or Chinese in origin. But they have been localized to such an extent that native speakers no longer consider them to have any trace of foreignness.

What's more is that some of these terms were introduced along with the things that they signify. Hence it is all the more difficult to discern that they were foreign to begin with.

Newly coined compound words are predominantly formed by English terms. They are either kept intact or slightly localized, if at all. Of note is that they do not just refer to physical things, but also various concepts.

Today's native speakers are receptive to loanwords, which is indicative that the development of our society and enriching of our culture do impact our attitude toward language. To take an approach that involves combining native and foreign words to express ideas, the speaker must overcome many invisible obstacles imposed by society. Intense can be the opposition to the usage of nonnative, impure vocabulary.

In this day and age, society changes extremely rapidly. The world in which we live is one that is fast paced. The representation of an ever-changing reality through words is a major challenge to speakers. Hence, it is undeniably difficult to rely solely on one's mother tongue to transfer information that means such criteria as accuracy, succinctness, and truthfulness. On the other hand, using a combination of Vietnamese and other languages is a viable solution.

If one were to take a look language used in the *Thủ đô* (the precursor to *Hà Nội mới*), from 1957 to circa 1960, many compound words, most of which French, were used in the original, unaltered

form. Examples might include: *crêpe satin, tissus laine, crème de menthe...*; Culture: *guitare espagnol, guitare hawaïene, oeuvres de lenine...*; Science and Technology: *couches d'appêt, teinture d'iode, pomade au goudron, joint culasse, vernis isolant, vernis d'électrique, ét-xăng cơ-rép...* What is significant is that, for the most part, they appeared in the classifieds and advertisements section, and were in reference to imported merchandise.

In those times, Hanoi was regarded as a prodigal city (3). It was a place under heavy influence of the West, both in terms of lifestyle and language. The existence of French compound words and the fact that they referred to imported French merchandise that was in circulation implied the wasteful nature of this urban location.

Over time, society underwent change, and after a hiatus from being exposed to French culture and French people, the retro Hanoian ways slowly vanished, and so too did French words from the Vietnamese lexicon. This was nothing but a logical process.

The mid 1990's marked the true opening of Vietnam, which led to a more diverse influx of English words that were left intact. For example, in entertainment there were words like *Mrs. World, water park, sitcom, cinematheque, game show, talk show, game online, Amateur Open, megastar...*; in sports: *World cup, Tiger cup, Confederation cup, SEA games, fair play, play-off, dance sport...*; in tourism: *open tour*; in music: *video clip, live show, hip-hop, pop, rock, blue, jazz,*

acoustic...; in finance and economics: business class, fast business, debit card, fast accounting, fast financial...; in science and technology: video-cassette, megaweb, website, webmaster, networks, network... And especially there were words that referred to concepts in pop culture and society. For example: over night, night club, coffee the one, fast food, life resorts, hot girl, hot boy, clip sex, showroom, showbiz, weekend, the fashion, websex, single mom, catwalk, gay, les...

This was truly an interesting phenomenon of that period. From an economic and linguistic standpoint, there arose a need to utilize a standard, dependable language to treat matters pertaining to economics. Economic relations exist between many different peoples and English is considered a commonality. The fact that English is seen also as a tool that serves to expedite international integration is also reflective of tightening economic relations in a time of globalization.

An example would be contractors giving their construction projects meaningful English names in an attempt to draw attention. *The Manor, Hanoi Landmark Tower, Sunway, The Garden...* are just a few of such names. It is not necessary to use English names for business establishments however (e.g., supermarket, convenience store) for doing so might cause confusion or, worse yet, offend people. In certain cases however, the owner has no choice but to choose an English name. The Vietnamese counterparts for

supermarket, shopping mall simply do not do justice to the ideas they signify. English words, in contrast, do a far better job. The fact that Vietnam is striving to become on equal standing or surpass its foreign peers is the reason enterprises assume the same mentality; and corporate image and name are high on priority number one. Many enterprises are of the belief that a product's name is reflective of its quality. And so the importance of names is not to be scoffed at.

The post-reform era usage of foreign words differs from before in that words' subcomponents are useful as well. Phonemes like *pro* in *professional*, *teen* in *teenage*, *del* in *delete*, and *mem* in *member* have been put to use. Young people in the capital use these small units to deviate from the norm and grant themselves more freedom. This practice is innovative and drastically different from just merely localizing the pronunciation of foreign words, such as *crème/kem; envelope/ lóp...*

As can be observed, our nation has developed to such an extent that we no longer just borrow words and use them as they are. Rather, we "improve upon" them and customize them to suit our own needs.

Actually, this practice existed before the reform, but was indeed uncommon. For example, the word *ốp*, is an abbreviated and simplified localized version of the Russian word *obsezychie*. New approaches to using borrowed words can be taken only if society is sufficiently developed.

4. The diversification of European and North American words in various disciplines

Research has shown that loanwords in different disciplines have been fluctuating in percentage quite dramatically.

predominantly used in science and technology. But between 1987 and 2007, the situation changed quite markedly. Information Technology terms, mostly English, began to appear in large numbers. Colloquial words that can be used in everyday conversation rose in numbers too. Further, due to increased exposure to

Table 3. Use of European and North American terminology
by discipline and period

Years	Pages	Discipline	Instances	Percentage	Total
1957-1975	360	Mundane Words	55	23,4%	235
		Culture	10	4,25%	
		Economics	04	1,7%	
		Sociopolitics	04	1,7%	
		Military	02	0,85%	
		Technology	159	67,66%	
1976-1986	360	Mundane Words	16	10,32%	155
		Culture	14	9,0%	
		Economics	06	3,87%	
		Sociopolitics	04	2,6%	
		Military	0		
		Technology	115	74,19%	
1987-2007	360	Mundane Words	144	35,2%	409
		Culture	48	11,73%	
		Economics	56	13,7%	
		Sociopolitics	01	0,2%	
		Military	0		
		Technology	160	39,11%	

(**Acronyms:** ĐS: mundane words; VH: culture; KT: economics; CTXH: sociopolitics; QS = Military; KHKT: Technology)

As can be derived from table 3, prior to the reform, foreign words were

things: language, social demands, and

the rest of the globe, European and North American terms dealing with pop culture, sports, music, and entertainment began making their way into Vietnamese. Many new words were indicative of the rise in the standard of living in place like Hanoi, and such words could not have reasonably been borrowed prior to the reform. For example: *massage, over night, night club, fast food, life resorts, showroom, showbiz, weekend, websex, sextoys, single mom...* The

likes of these words reflect the link between three

social development. The more developed a society, the greater and more complex are the demands of its people. Hence, it can be asserted that people's capacity to take in a foreign language changes throughout the phases of history.

The evolution of language occurs in tandem with that of society. History, economics, politics, and culture all impact language. Case in point, the dialect spoken in Hanoi and how it as undergone change as a result of being exposed to foreign vocabulary. The capital is becoming increasingly international, and in an era of globalization, the prominence of European and North American languages has never been higher. Additionally, native speakers of Vietnamese exhibit both the willingness and capacity to take in foreign vocabulary and culture.

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