

## NOTES ON GRAMMATICAL VOCABULARY IN CENTRAL VIETNAMESE<sup>1</sup>

Mark J. ALVES

Montgomery College, USA

<[Mark.Alves@montgomerycollege.edu](mailto:Mark.Alves@montgomerycollege.edu)>

### Abstract

This study focuses on grammatical vocabulary in Central Vietnamese<sup>2</sup> (CV, hereafter) with the goal of exploring historical-linguistic developments in Vietnamese in general. One purpose of focusing on grammatical vocabulary is to provide a sample of how this type of vocabulary can innovate over time in different dialectal regions. For research on Central Vietnamese in particular, this focus also allows some identification of historical patterns of lexical preservations (e.g., forms shared with other Vietic languages), innovations or general variation, and the effects of language contact. While CV is quite obviously Vietnamese, there are a number of distinctive traits in its grammatical vocabulary which highlight some of the differentiation over time between CV and standard Vietnamese<sup>3</sup> (StV, hereafter). In a number of instances, data suggests reconstructability at the level of Proto-Việt-Mường or even Proto-Vietic forms. These historical points are dealt with throughout this paper and summarized in the conclusion.

**Keywords:** Vietnamese, Proto-Vietic, grammatical vocabulary

**ISO 639-3 language codes:** vie, mtq, scb

### 1. Central Vietnamese as a dialect

The historical-linguistic position taken in this paper follows that of Nguyễn Tài Căn (1979). Vietnamese belongs to the Vietic branch of Mon-Khmer, and within Vietic, there are the major sub-branches Pong-Chút (examples of languages include Rục, Thà Vựng, and Pọng) and Việt-Mường. Within Vietnamese, there are geographic regions where dialects can be distinguished. There are differences among them in pronunciation and lexical items which can be marked by isoglosses on a map of Vietnam.

Based on differences in both the lexicon and phonology, which can significantly impair the ability of Vietnamese from other regions from understanding CV speakers, CV must be considered a dialect, not merely a regional accent. This three-way regional distinction is well-known in Vietnam and has been documented in major linguistic works, such as that of Hoàng Thị Châu (1989: 90-103), as well as numerous shorter works (e.g., Friberg 1973, Vu 1982, etc.). Hoàng (Ibid.) even provided a list of lexical differences among several key grammatical types in the three regions of CV, Northern Vietnamese (NV, hereafter), and Southern Vietnamese (SoV, hereafter). Three areas—Bắc kỳ, Trung kỳ, and Nam Kỳ—and their lexical and phonological distinctions were recognized even in the cultural work of Phan K.B. at the beginning of the twentieth century (2011:422-435). Rather than discussing a distinction between NV, CV, and SoV, Thompson (1965:80-85) describes differences among Vietnamese dialects with major cities as the approximate dialect centers. In this view, Vĩnh and Huế, which are typically both considered to be CV dialects, are treated separately due to phonological distinctions.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a modified version of the article published in 2011 in *Hội Thảo Quốc Tế Đào Tạo và Nghiên Cứu Ngôn Ngữ Học ở Việt Nam: Những Vấn Đề Lí Luận và Thực Thiệm* (International Conference on Linguistics Training and Research in Vietnam: Theoretical and Practical Issues); *Trường Đại Học Khoa Học Xã Hội và Nhân Văn* (Hanoi. The University of Social Sciences and Humanities). ed. by Nguyễn Hồng Côn, et. al.

<sup>2</sup> The following is a complete list of the abbreviations: CV=Central Vietnamese, NV=Northern Vietnamese, NCV=North-Central Vietnamese, SV=Southern Vietnamese, StV=Standard Vietnamese.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'standard Vietnamese' is a translation of the Vietnamese term *tiếng chuẩn*, literally 'standard speech,' which refers to the generally accepted standard throughout Vietnam. It is generally similar to Northern Vietnamese. However, in some cases, even Northern Vietnamese has phonological and lexical traits which differ from the accepted standard.

While Thompson's approach circumvents deciding on major dialect regions, it also recognizes the fact that the matter is more complex, and that considering a three-way division may not be sufficient. It has also been noted that North-Central Vietnamese (NCV, hereafter), in the region around the city of Vinh, can possibly be considered a sub-region of CV due to some additional lexical and phonological distinctions. Hoàng (Ibid. 261) notes the special grammatical vocabulary in the NCV region and provides a list of key lexical items. Vietnamese spoken in the region of Nghệ Tĩnh and Bình Trị Thiên have been posited by Nguyễn Tài Cẩn in his 1995 historical-linguistic textbook on Vietnamese as being part of a special region of Vietnamese, one with characteristics of both NV and Mường (1995:275-278). The substantial dialectal variety even within small distances in that region, such those described in Alves 2007, suggests that this area is perhaps among the oldest of Vietnamese. It is also worth noting that NCV is a region where Mường and Việt-Chứt languages were spoken. However, more investigation would be needed to strengthen such a position.

## 2. Method of data collection and analysis

For this study, Đặng Thanh Hòa's entire 2005 Vietnamese dialect dictionary Từ Điển Phương Ngữ Tiếng Việt was studied, with grammatical vocabulary identified. The words and phrases were then entered into a spreadsheet with various categories noted, such as region, grammatical function, historical origins when identifiable, and other details. After that, other references were consulted, including Vương Lộc's 2002 dictionary of archaic Vietnamese, Nguyễn Tài Cẩn's 1995 comparative lists of Việt-Chứt language, Nguyễn Văn Lợi's 1995 description of the Rục language, Khang et.al.'s 2002 dictionary of the Mường language, and an unpublished manuscript by Michel Ferlus of reconstructions of Proto-Vietic, including complete lists of available vocabulary.

It is important to understand the method of selecting the vocabulary for this study. Determining which words and expressions are grammatical is not an absolute matter, and one may posit that there are degrees of grammaticality. In general, grammatical vocabulary tends to have more abstract meanings which function more to indicate syntactic relationships and even pragmatic functions, whereas content words, which are not included in this study, are the elements for which grammatical terms provide this semantico-syntactic context. For instance, the possessive marker *của* is clearly grammatical; *hôm nay* 'today' is slightly more semantically concrete but still expresses the grammatical function of time; while *sách* is a clearly content word.

Thus, words which express abstract relationships between nouns, such as locatives, conjunctions, and comparatives, are considered grammatical. Those expressing modality, negation, time, and degree to modify verbs and adjectivals are also treated as grammatical in this study. Quantity expressions and measure words, while not always as abstract as numbers and classifiers, are included in this study due to their generalized, open function and somewhat similar syntactic function to other clearly grammatical words. Pronouns and deictics are non-controversially considered grammatical, but also in this study, so are terms of address, which in Vietnamese have pronominal functions. The following non-exhaustive list is representative of the criteria used to select the vocabulary for this study.

- Pronominal reference (pronouns, deictics, and terms of address)
- Location (prepositions and locative nouns)
- Time and frequency
- Interrogative function
- Negation and modality
- Quantity and units of measurement
- Clause-connecting elements
- Comparison, degree, and intensification
- Pragmatic functions (sentence final particles, exclamations)
- Causation/causative verbs

In the database, over 140 items in CV were identified, of which over 100 are unique to CV and not generally shared with either SoV or NV. Of the 140, 35 are also seen in SoV, while only two are shared with NV. Overall, it can be said that there is a noticeably large number of CV grammatical vocabulary distinct from both NV or SoV, including at least a few crucial items. The significant overlap with SoV grammatical vocabulary, in addition to a number of phonological similarities, suggests a closer historical-linguistic relationship between those two regions than with NV despite the reduced mutual intelligibility between CV and either SoV and NV, a matter anecdotally attested among Vietnamese. More importantly, it must be assumed that the original approximate areas of where modern NV and CV are spoken had diverged a good deal before the migration of Vietnamese to Southern Vietnam. That migration occurred largely over the past

several centuries since the fall of the Champa Empire in the 1400s and resulted in expansion of Vietnamese settlements to modern day Southern Vietnam.

Based on the data collected, the types of CV grammatical vocabulary fall into the categories shown in Table 1. The first two categories are briefly explained in this section and then referred to in subsequent sections, while the third category, unique etyma, constitutes the bulk of rest of the paper. A brief note on archaic Vietnamese preserved in CV is provided in a subsection below.

**Table 1:** Categories of CV Grammatical Vocabulary Relative to StV

1.	Compounds with one cognate in common with StV and one non-cognate morph
2.	Cognates in common with StV but with alternate pronunciations
3.	Completely unique etyma (both archaic Vietnamese words and strictly CV forms)

Instances of mixed cognate morphemes show recurring patterns primarily among adverbial expressions. Among intensifying expressions with *hết* plus another morpheme, the second morpheme may differ in CV and StV, such as CV *hết cỡ* ‘extremely’ versus the synonymous StV item *hết mức*. In several compounds expressing time, CV uses *khi* in contrast with StV *lúc*, such as CV *khi đêm* ‘at night’ versus the StV equivalent *lúc đêm*. Among terms expressing time or quantity, several compounds in both CV and StV contain *một*, while the second morpheme alternates, such as CV *một tẹo* versus StV *một tí*. It is impossible to determine whether these are calques or simple alternates, but regardless, these word formation patterns are clearly part of the linguistic region.

**A. Patterns of phonological correspondence**

As historical phonological patterns between CV and StV are reasonably well described (Nguyễn Đình Hoa 1965, Friberg 1973, Vũ 1982, Hoàng 1989, Nguyễn Tài Căn 1995, etc.), it is generally easy to identify cognates among the dialects. Some of these alternations appear among high-frequency or significant CV grammatical words, as listed in Table 2, containing comparative samples of the phonemes shown with Vietnamese orthography. Cognates in the Vietic language Rục are included and highlight the conservative phonological aspects in CV. Some of the changes represent synchronic dialectal differences as well as diachronic changes, though that has been described elsewhere (c.f., Nguyễn Tài Căn 1995; Ferlus 1976 and 1981) and is beyond the scope of this paper.

**Table 2:** Common sound correspondences between CV and StV in grammatical vocabulary

CORRESPONDENCES	CV	StV	Vietic	GLOSS
ươ vs. a	đương	đang	NA	progressive marker
ây vs. ai	cây	cái	Rục <i>ke</i> <sup>4</sup>	general classifier
-ng vs. -nh	eng	anh	NA	term of address (male, older, respectful)
i vs. ay	mi ni	mày này	Rục <i>mi</i> <sup>1</sup>	you (informal) this
ch vs. gi	chi	gì	NA	what
tr vs. gi	trữa	giữa	Rục <i>troah</i> <sup>2</sup>	between
ui vs. ôi	tui	tôi	NA	I
r vs. nh	rau	nhau	NA	reciprocal marker

Of the 140 plus items in the database, only about 20 entries fall into this category, with about ten additional forms which cannot be considered with high certainty to be phonologically related cognates. Still, considering the high grammatical functionality of some of these words, those phonological differences, combined with the many other distinct etyma, certainly contribute to decreased mutual comprehensibility between CV and speakers in other regions. CV *mi* ‘you (informal)’ for StV *mày* and CV *ni* ‘this’ for StV *này* are quite similar to Mường and Việt-Chứt languages, such as Rục or Thà Vượng (Suwilai 1998). A few other highly functional words which are cognates with different pronunciations include SoV *chi* versus StV *gì* ‘what,’ CV *trữa* versus StV *giữa* ‘between/the middle,’ CV *tui* versus StV *tôi* ‘I,’ and the reciprocal in CV *rau* versus StV *nhau*. Many of these represent competing sound changes.

### B. Archaic words

Throughout this paper, CV words which are related to Mường or Pong-Chứt languages are noted, but in addition to these kinds of lexical preservations, there are various Vietnamese words which are not part of modern StV but which are listed in Vương Lộc's 2002 dictionary of archaic Vietnamese words. These words and phrases are shown in Table 3. How frequently these are still used in parts of Central Vietnam and where they are used in that region may vary and would require additional research to clarify. Nevertheless, this overall list highlights some of the more archaic parts of the CV lexicon (archaic in that they are no longer used, though few have cognates with other Vietic languages), even in the restricted domain of grammatical vocabulary. This is not to say that NV and SoV do not have vocabulary which is preserved from early stages of Vietnamese, but in addition to the other older Vietic vocabulary, this data is worth considering in exploring the history of Vietnamese.

**Table 3:** Archaic Grammatical Vocabulary in CV No Longer Used in StV

CV	StV	GLOSS
bao lăm	bao nhiêu	how much (implied negative)
bậu	(từ nam giới dùng để gọi vợ)	term used by husband to refer to wife lovingly
in	y	exactly as
lung	nhiều, quá mức	a lot
mụ	bà	grandmother
năng	hay, thường	often
nghi	nó, hă	he/she
nhủ	bảo	make/command
phải chi	giả như, giả mà	supposing that
phương chi	huống gì	much less/not to say
rày/rây	nay	at this time
rôi	xong	finished

### 3. Types of Central Vietnamese grammatical vocabulary

As noted in the previous section, the words were selected based on their grammatical functions. This casts a wide net but ultimately provides a more complete picture of the range of grammaticalized vocabulary in CV. The rest of this section covers nine types of grammatical vocabulary.

#### A. Interrogative words

Table 2 above shows phonological distinctions of CV, with cognates in the Vietic language Rục, in grammatical vocabulary. Beyond phonological distinctions, CV is well known for having several distinctive interrogative words, separating it from both StV and SoV. These include CV *mô* 'where' versus StV *đâu*, CV *răng*<sup>4</sup> 'how' versus StV *sao*, CV *chi* 'what' versus StV *gì*. The latter form *chi* is pronounced essentially the same as in Mường, an apparent older Vietic pronunciation, at least to proto-Việt-Mường. CV *mô* is notable as having cognates in several other Pong-Chứt languages. While not an interrogative word (though it is a causative verb having a relatively grammatical function), CV *măn* 'do' versus StV *làm* is combined with CV *răng* to express 'how'. *Măn* is also a Việt-Chứt cognate seen in Rục, suggesting a possible Proto-Vietic form.

**Table 4:** Interrogative words in various Vietic languages

StV	CV	Rục	Mường	Gloss
đâu	mô	tumô	no	where (or which)
gì	chi	chamo <sup>3</sup>	chi	what
làm	măn	mun <sup>2</sup>	là	make/do (used in interrogative compounds)

This sort of distinction between CV and StV is among the most persuasive data, showing that CV and StV, or NV to be precise, diverged as dialects. Moreover, in some cases, such differences also illustrate lexical and phonological preservations that highlight the closer relationship between CV and other Vietic

<sup>4</sup> It is also worth noting that, in this study, several CV grammatical words with deictic reference were found to have initial /r/. These include *răng* 'how', *ri/rúa* 'thusly', and *rày/rây* 'at this time'. This is not unlike patterns in basic demonstratives noted in StV by Thompson in which such words systematically have initial /d/, /n/, and /b/ (1965:142).

languages. One might even hypothesize that NV diverged from earlier Vietic, as more closely represented by CV.

### B. Negation and Modals

CV has a number of distinct negation and words expressing modality. In some cases, the difference is merely in pronunciation, as in items 3 and 4 in Table 5. Of the negation words, CV *nỏ* ‘not,’ which is more of a NCV form than CV in general, is an etymon worthy of attention. Whether it is a possible CV innovation is not clear. Cognates of the item have not been found in other Vietic languages. Other items on the list are interesting, though it is not clear based on the dictionary how common the other items are in CV.

**Table 5:** Negation words and modals

	CV	StV	GLOSS
1.	nỏ	không, chẳng	no, not
2.	dỏn	khỏi	no need
3.	làm chi	làm gì	nothing, not
4.	đờng	đang	(progressive marker)
5.	rỏi	xỏng	finished
6.	thầu	nỏi, hỏm ý phủ đĩnh	able
7.	lừa chi	thà rằng	had better

### C. Pronouns and Terms of Address

The number of differences, both phonological and etymological, among pronouns in CV clearly highlights the distinct dialect status of CV. Items 1 through 4 are cognates with StV forms, though they differ phonologically (c.f., section 3A). The pronoun pluralizer *bậy* may be related to StV *mậy*. A likely cognate is seen in Ruc, the pluralizer *bỏi*<sup>5</sup>. Items 9 through 13 are all entirely distinct from StV. At this point, they are of uncertain etymological origin, without immediately recognizable cognates among Mường or Việt-Chứt languages.

**Table 6:** Pronouns

	CV	StV	Gloss
1.	mi	mày	you (informal)
2.	ni	này	this
3.	tau	tao	first-person singular, informal
4.	tui	tôi	I
5.	bay/bậy	chúng mày	you, plural
6.	bậy	bỏn/tụi	plural marker
7.	bậy choa	bỏn/tụi tôi/tao	we
8.	bậy tui	bỏn/tụi tôi	we
9.	nghi	nỏ, hỏn	he/she
10.	choa	chúng ta	we, I
11.	ri	thế này	thusly
12.	rừa	thế	thusly
13.	nỏ	ấy	that

As for terms of address, often derived from familial terms, again, CV shows a number of significant differences. Worthy of note are the various forms which are not of Chinese origin, unlike in StV. CV *ả* ‘elder sister’ shows a contrast with the likely Old-Sino-Vietnamese *chỉ* (standard Sino-Vietnamese *tỷ* 姐 (Mandarin *jǐe*)), *mệ* and *mu*<sup>5</sup> ‘grandmother’ for the Chinese loanword *bà* 婆 (Mandarin *pó*), and CV *o* ‘sister of father’ in contrast with StV *cỏ*, also of Chinese origin 姑 (Mandarin *gũ*). Are these preservations of older Vietic, innovations in CV, or something else? The latter item CV *o* in particular has a cognate in Ruc, suggesting

<sup>5</sup> Admittedly, Chinese has phonologically similar 母 ‘mother,’ standard Sino-Vietnamese *mẫu*. However, having other forms meaning ‘mother’ (rather than ‘grandmother’), including StV *mẻ* and SV *mả*, altogether make clear identification of words with phonological differences, despite having initial /m/, problematic.

that this is possibly older in Vietic. Vương 2002 claims that CV *bậu* has a cognate in Mường *pấu*, which means ‘they/those people,’ though the semantic difference is significant and cannot be easily explained. It is a possible older Việt-Mường word, but the evidence must be considered tentative at this point. Vương also notes a possible Pọng-Chứt cognate for CV *tam*, namely, Thà vưng *saam*, which matches a tendency seen in Sino-Vietnamese /t/ for Middle Chinese /\*s/. Clearly, these items are worth investigating further as they could shed light on what might not be Chinese elements in Vietnamese and reflect a pre-Chinese influenced era.

**Table 7:** CV Terms of Address

CV	StV	GLOSS
ả	chị	sister, elder
bậu	(từ nam giới dùng để gọi vợ)	(term used by husband to refer to wife lovingly)
bọ	cha	father
eng	anh	(term of address for somewhat older man than the speaker)
mệ	bà	grandmother
mụ	bà	grandmother
o	cô	sister of father
tam	em	(term to address younger person)

#### D. Locative and Deictic Terms

CV has a few distinct etyma for locative words and deictics, in addition to those with phonologically related cognates, as shown in Table 8. These forms are fairly conservative and appear to be early Vietic words or have more archaic pronunciations. The initial /tr/ in CV *trữa* ‘between’ versus the palatalized StV *giữa* form shows a conservative tendency in sound (cf. the cognate in the Vietic language Rục *troah*<sup>2</sup>). Similarly, CV *ni* ‘this’ versus StV *nây* are essentially the pronunciation in Mường and Pọng-Chứt languages. Finally, the CV locative *côi* ‘top’ versus StV *trên*, the latter of which is spread throughout Vietic languages, is noteworthy for having a likely cognate in Mường, synonymous *côi* (though the tone is readily explainable), showing at least a potential proto-Việt-Mường form. There is also an interesting parallel in the tone change from *ngang* to *huyền* in the apparent non-cognates for the two distals indicating ‘over there’ and ‘over there, farther.’ This is an interesting tonal, morphological calque, though which form is the earlier cannot be determined at this point. Altogether, these grammatical words again highlight the distinctiveness CV has as a dialect.

**Table 8:** Locative and Deictic Terms

CV	StV	Gloss
trữa	giữa	between
côi	trên	top
tê	kia	over there
tề	kìa	over there, farther
đàng tê	đàng kia	over there
đàng tê tề	đàng kia kìa	over there, farther
đó tề	đó kia	over there
dựa	kề, cạnh	next to
ni	nây	this

#### E. Measure Words

Measure words are not as grammaticalized as what are considered true classifiers, yet they have the function of serving as complements of numerals and taking other nouns as complements, a relatively grammatical function. There are several distinctive CV measure words, as listed in Table 9. CV *âu* is also seen in Mường. CV has *rê*, while StV *bánh* is originally of Chinese origin (standard Sino-Vietnamese *bính*, Chinese 饼, Mandarin *bǐng*). Similarly, the CV measure word for bread *ố* parallels the function of the StV Old Chinese loanword *chiếc* (Sino-Vietnamese *chích*, 只, Mandarin *zhī*). These forms have clearly undergone semantic extension and grammaticalization. More research needs to be done to identify the etymological origins of these words and trace their historical relationships. Nevertheless, these examples highlight some differential patterns in this category.

**Table 9:** CV Measure Words

CV	StV	Gloss
âu	liễn	pot (terracotta) of liquid
vây	(lượng cỏ/rác...)	a quantity of grass, trass, etc.
ngoai	vòng, bận	a round of an activity
ô	chiếc	a loaf of bread, etc.
rê	bánh	a cake of tobacco

**F. Quantity and Intensifier Words and Expressions**

Basic numerals are the same in CV and StV, with the phonological exception of initial /l/ in NV *năm* ‘five’ in numeral compounds (e.g., ‘25’ *hai mươi lăm*). However, in expressing degree and generalized quantity, CV shows a number of differences from StV, as listed in Table 10. The etymological sources of these are not immediately identifiable. One interesting word is the CV word *lố* for ‘dozen,’ in contrast with the Sino-Vietnamese cognate in StV *tá*, Chinese 打 (Mandarin *dǎ*). It may be a cognate with the Hokkien word for dozen, 罗 *lô*, which has also been borrowed by Cambodian, Thai, and Laotian (Pou and Jenner, 77).

**Table 10:** Distinct CV intensifying words and expressions

CV	StV	GLOSS
băm	nhiều, lắm	very, much
bộn	nhiều	much
ét	đơn, chỉ có một	only one
lền	đầy, nhiều	fully, a lot
lố	tá	a dozen
loạn	lắm, nhiều	a lot
mê thiên	rất nhiều	very many
rền	đầy, nhiều	fully, a lot
ba hột	chút ít, không đáng kể	very little
sáp	bọn, tụi	a group of X

Some intensifying expressions are partial cognates, including those with *một*, *hết*, and *thầy* (with the additional element referring to one’s grandmother). These pattern in an almost prefix-like, calque-like way. Other words in the list are completely distinct etyma, though their specific origin is not yet clear.

**Table 11:** CV intensifying words and expressions with mixed etyma

CV	StV	GLOSS
hết cỡ	hết mức	excessively
một tẹo	một tí	a little
một thỉ	một tí	a little
thầy mụ nội	thầy bà	terribly
nhứt	nhất	most
dễ sợ	cực kì	extremely
đui	rất, khi	very
gắt	ở mức độ rất cao	extremely
lung	nhiều, quá mức	a lot
òm	quá, hết mức	extremely
bất	rất, quá	very

Some additional adverbs include those expressing approximation, as shown in Table 12. It is notable that the CV approximative *cỡ* is homophonous with the word meaning ‘size,’ which is parallel with StV approximative words *khoảng* and *độ*, both of which have homophonous meanings of a unit of time or place and height or period of time, respectively. This is suggestive of a pattern of grammaticalization in which a

unit of measurement becomes a generalizing expression (c.f., English approximative expression ‘in the *area* of X’).

**Table 12:** CV adverbs expressing approximation

CV	StV	GLOSS
cỡ	khoảng	about
cùng	khắp cả, hết tất cả	everywhere completely
lối	chừng, khoảng chừng	about, approximately
lối chừng	chừng, khoảng chừng	about, approximately

### G. Time Words and Expressions

In this category, many of the words are compounds, and of many of those compounds, there are many instances of shared cognates, as shown in Table 13. For example, CV *khi* parallels StV *lúc* and indicates time in many compounds. The other morphs in the compounds have the same meaning in many instances, such as CV *khi sớm* ‘while early’ versus StV *lúc sớm*.

**Table 13:** CV *Khi* versus StV *Lúc*

CV	StV	GLOSS
khi đầu	lúc đầu	at the beginning
khi đêm	lúc đêm	at night
khi hồi	lúc này	just now
khi ni	lúc này	at this time
khi đó	lúc ấy	at that time
khi sớm	lúc sớm	while early
khi tê	lúc trước	previously

One morph of historical note is StV *giờ*, which has been posited (Pulleyblank, 283) as an Old Sino-Vietnamese loanword (standard Vietnamese *thì*, Chinese 時, Mandarin *shí*) originally meaning ‘time’ and which has come to mean in Vietnamese ‘hour’ or more generally ‘at this time.’ CV has the clearly related cognate *giừ*, but also the likely cognate *chừ*. The two readings *giừ* and *chừ* appear to be phonological alternants in CV, but are still related to the StV form of the same etymon. The likely older form is *chừ* considering its non-palatalized initial, which, if accurate, would not be an insignificant fact in understanding Sino-Vietnamese historical linguistics.

**Table 14:** CV words meaning ‘now’

CV	StV	GLOSS
bây chừ	bây giờ	now
bây giừ	bây giờ	now
giừ	giờ	now

The large number of time words and expressions in CV which differ from those in StV clearly draws attention. Table 15 shows this substantial list, some of which involves a contrast between CV *bữa* and StV *hôm* in several compounds.



**Table 15:** Various CV time words and expressions

CV	StV	GLOSS
bữa điếp	hôm kia	day before yesterday
bữa ni	ngày hôm nay	today
bữa rày	bữa hôm ấy đến nay	from that day to today
bữa tê	hôm kia	day before yesterday
giác	độ, khoảng, lúc	around this time
hồi tê	hồi sau, lúc sau	at a previous time
mại lồi	ngày trước nói khái quát	a previous day, non-specific
mấy hồi	chẳng mấy lúc	not long
mấy nã	chẳng được mấy chốc	not even a moment
mốt	ngày kia	two days later
xém	súyt	nearly, about to
rày	nay	at this time

CV also shows a number of distinct time adverbs of frequency. Notable among these are some reduplicants, such as CV *hoài hụi* and *lần lần*, both of which parallel reduplication in StV. As noted in section 3B above, CV *nặng* is an archaic form of Vietnamese.

**Table 16:** Time adverbs of frequency

CV	StV	GLOSS
lút	tuốt, thẳng một mạch	continuously
thét	mãi	continuously
hoài hụi	mãi, luôn luôn	continuously, forever
lần	dần	gradually
lần lần	dần dần	gradually
nặng	hay, thường	often

### H. Conjunctions

Among connective words in CV are some phonological differences and some compounds with CV etyma, such as *rãng* and *rứa*, as noted above. As seen in other cases, these compounds appear almost like calques, though it is impossible to determine whether CV or NV first developed the terms and which variety calqued which originally. Regardless, the semantic patterns in these words are suggestive of a kind of linguistic area.

**Table 17:** CV Connective Words

CV	StV	GLOSS
dù rãng	dù sao	although
dưng	nhưng mà	but
bởi rứa	bởi thế	thus
giả thi như	ví dụ như	for example
hèn chi	hèn gì, hèn nào	that is why
nên chi	vì vậy, cho nên	thus
phải chi	giả như, giả mà	supposing that
phương chi	huống gì	much less

### I. Sentence Particles

The dialect dictionary contains at least ten CV sentence particles, though it is difficult to determine whether some of these are cognates with phonological variants or distinct etyma. It is tempting, for instance, to consider CV *nà*, an emphatic particle, to be related to StV *nào*, and the CV question particle *hì* appears phonologically similar to StV *hả*. However, neither of these forms fall under a common pattern of phonological correspondences between CV and StV. Sentence particles are semantically highly abstract and less readily perceived phonetically. It is thus, perhaps, not surprising that many of the dialectal forms, while

having similar functions, vary phonologically but only slightly. Consider the semantic and phonological similarities between CV particles *nghe* and *nha* with StV *nhé*, all of which express urging, though again without phonological patterns to clearly related them.

**Table 18:** CV sentence particles

CV	StV	GLOSS
háy	hả	emphatic question
hây	nhỉ	emphatic question
hĩ <sub>1</sub>	nhỉ	emphatic question
hĩ <sub>2</sub>	hả	question
hè	nào	urging
nà	nào	urging
nghe	nhé	urging
nha	nhé	urging
nì	này	urging
nờ	này, nào	urging

It is perhaps best to assume that there are various cognates among these words, but that due to their more peripheral nature in the lexicon, being nearly devoid of concrete meaning and most often occurring in sentence-final position, it is often the case that cognates cannot be claimed with certainty. It may be more realistic to posit a loose or even phonaestheme-like element for this category of words.

#### 4. Concluding Thoughts

Despite the focus on grammatical vocabulary, the data repeatedly demonstrate how CV is distinct from StV as a dialect, thereby suggesting how it is a distinct dialect region historically. It also shows in many instances—both phonologically and lexically—how close CV is to the older stages of Việt-Mường and Vietic in Vietnamese linguistic history. At the same time, the data are illustrative in various ways of a kind of linguistic area. In numerous instances, compounds with mixed cognates are suggestive of how CV and StV parallel each other in word-formation strategies. Indeed, in some cases, one may posit that these word-formation strategies are suggestive of derivational morphology, a counter-argument to the position that Vietnamese has strictly isolating morphology. This small study illustrates how grammatical vocabulary can serve to clarify the relationships among dialects.

#### References

- Alves, Mark J. 2007. A Look at North-Central Vietnamese. Electronic Publication E-4. SEALS XII Papers from the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society (2002), 1-8. ed. Ratreé Wayland, John Hartmann, and Paul Sidwell. Pacific Linguistics Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. The Australian National University.
- Alves, Mark and Nguyễn Duy Hương. 2007. Notes on Thanh-Chương Vietnamese in Nghệ-an Province. Electronic Publication E-2. SEALS VIII Papers from the 8th Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society (1998), 1-10. ed. Mark Alves, Paul Sidwell, and David Gil. Pacific Linguistics Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. The Australian National University.
- Đặng, Thanh Hòa. 2005. Từ Điển Phương Ngữ Tiếng Việt. Nhà Xuất Bản Đà Nẵng. Trung Tâm Từ Điển Học.
- Ferlus, Michel. 1976. Du nouveau sur la spirantisation ancienne en Vietnamien. Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris 71:305-312.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1981. Sự biến hóa của các âm tắc giữa (obstruents mediales) trong tiếng Việt (Changes of medial obstruents in Vietnamese). Ngôn Ngữ Học 1981.2:1-21.
- Friberg, Barbara. 1973. Generative phonology as applied to Vietnamese dialects: a study based on middle Vietnamese, comparing the three major dialects of modern Vietnamese. Saigon University MA thesis.
- Hoàng, Thị Châu. 1989. Tiếng Việt trên các Miền Đất Nước (Phương Ngữ Học). Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội – Hà Nội.
- Nguyễn, Đình Hoà. 1966. Vietnamese-English Dictionary. Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Co.

- Nguyễn, Tài Cẩn. 1995. Giáo trình lịch sử ngữ âm tiếng Việt (Textbook of Vietnamese historical phonology). Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục.
- Nguyễn, Văn Khang, Bùi Chí, and Hoàng Văn Hành. 2002. Từ Điển Tiếng Mường-Việt. Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hóa Dân Tộc – Hà Nội.
- Nguyễn, Văn Lợi. 1993. Tiếng Rục (The Ruc Language). Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội.
- Phan, Kế Bính. 2011 (reprint of the 1915 publication). Việt Nam Phong Tục. Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Học – Hà Nội.
- Pou, Saveros and Philip Jenner. 1973. *Journal of Oriental Studies* 6.1: 1-90. Hong Kong University Press.
- Pulleyblank, Edwin G. 1981. Some notes on Chinese historical phonology. *Bulletin de l'école Française d'Extreme-Orient* 277-288.
- Suwilai, Premrirat. 1998. So (Thavung)-English-Thai glossary Part I. *Mon-Khmer Studies* 28:189-218.
- Thompson, Laurence. 1965. *A Vietnamese grammar*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Vũ, Thanh Phương. 1982. Phonetic properties of Vietnamese tones across dialects. *Papers in Southeast Asian Linguistics*, No. 8:55-76, Tonation. *Pacific Linguistics A-62*. Ed. David Bradley. Canberra: Australian National University.
- Vương, Lộc. 2002. Từ Điển Từ Cổ (A Dictionary of Ancient Words, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed.). Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Đà Nẵng, Trung Tâm Từ Điển Học.