

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The origin of most tribal groups in the central highlands of Vietnam is generally believed to have come from two large groups: Austronesian speaking peoples and Austroasiatic speaking peoples (Keyes 1977:16, Cũu Long Giang and Toàn Ánh 1974:19). The Koho and Maa, like the Stieng, Mnong and some other ethnic groups in the highlands, are of Austroasiatic speaking people origin. The Maa group is said to have left the Cũu Long Delta to settle in more remote areas. Schliesinger (1998:31) hypothesizes that the Maa “may have originated among the peoples who once inhabited the upper reaches of the Mekong.”

Koho and Maa are in the Bahnaric branch of the Mon-Khmer family. Koho and Maa have several characteristics of Mon-Khmer languages such as SVO (subject-verb-object) clause structure and monosyllabic or sesquisyllabic word structure. Sesquisyllabic words have a weak and a strong syllable, with the weak (sometimes called the presyllable or minor syllable) being unstressed and the strong (or major) syllable being stressed. Tone has been considered as complimentary distribution with vowel length (Manley 1972) or tone development (Tạ Văn Thông 1988a).

There are divergent ideas concerning the linguistic relationship between Koho and Maa. Some scholars consider that these are two different languages (Hoàng Phê et al. 1984, and Yan Qixiang and Zhou Zhizhi 1995) while other scholars (Thomas 1979, Cũu Long Giang and Toàn Ánh 1974 and Tạ Văn Thông 1988) claim that Koho and Maa are varieties of a single language. This problem leads to the research question ‘what is the genetic relationship between Koho and Maa speech varieties?’ This thesis

is, therefore, an attempt to determine the genetic relationship between these speech varieties by employing lexicostatistics and phonological reconstruction, to propose a subgrouping for Koho and Maa, and to reconstruct the proto language of these varieties.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The current chapter provides an overview of the thesis approach and speech varieties under investigation. The second chapter reviews literature relevant to the topic and to the theoretical framework. A phonological overview of all seven speech varieties is given in chapter three. In chapter four the lexicostatistic method is used to compare the seven speech varieties. The results of this comparison are used to develop a tree diagram of the speech varieties. The phonological reconstruction for the proto language of Koho and Maa is provided in chapter five. A description of the proto language of Koho and Maa varieties as well as a discussion of the phonological relationships is given in chapter six. Chapter seven is the conclusion of the thesis which includes a summary of the findings and suggestions for further study. Work on this thesis required the reconstruction of several wordlists. A list of the reconstructed words is included in the appendices.

1.1 Koho and Maa Background

This section provides some general information about the Koho and Maa people, such as a summary of their legends, a brief history, updated demographic information, geographical locations, sociolinguistic information, and a discussion of the different speech varieties.

1.1.1 Mythological Background

The Maa, like many highland groups in Vietnam, believe that they were present at the beginning of the world. They existed at the start of time, with their bodies covered by

wild banana leaves. They believe that good spirits and the Great Spirit N'dul care for, watch over, and help people by providing knowledge about farming, hunting, building houses, and organizing society (Schrock et al. 1966).

The legends of the Koho tell how they originated from the eldest son of the only man who survived the great flood caused by a crab. The flood lasted seven days and wiped out all creatures on the earth except for two humans, a man and a woman, and a pair of every kind of animal who took refuge with them in a wooden chest. After the flood, the couple was on the verge of starvation, and an ant held in its mandibles two grains of rice as a gift from the spirits. The man, who was destined to become the grandfather of the Koho group, planted the two grains of rice, and the next day the plain was covered with a crop of rice. A few years later, the man got drunk drinking rice wine and fell asleep naked. The man's eldest son saw his father in this condition and started mocking him. The man's younger son reproached his brother and covered his father with a banana leaf. Learning what had taken place after awaking, the man took away the clothes of his eldest son and chased him into the forest. The eldest son founded the race of the Montagnards who are thought to be Koho who have no clothes (Schrock et al. 1966:392).

1.1.2 Historical Background

Clues to the origins of peoples in the south central highlands of Vietnam can be found by considering recorded history. According to Cũu Long Giang and Toàn Ánh (1974), Austronesian speaking peoples have lived in the territory of modern-day Vietnam from ancient times. These people were attacked by a group of Austroasiatic speaking peoples migrating from India. Later, however, a group of Austronesian speaking peoples from the southern coast invaded the land of the Austroasiatic speaking peoples on the central coast of Vietnam. Some of the groups who were beaten sought refuge in the relative safety provided by the forested and mountainous

areas. Keyes (1977:17) however is less certain of the origins of the people in the south central highlands and states that both the questions of the origins and migrations of the people speaking Austronesian and Austroasiatic languages still remains unanswered.

Specific information about the history of the Koho and Maa ethnic minorities is very limited. As a result, the question of whether the Koho and the Maa originated from a single ethnic minority or whether they came from two distinct ethnic minorities remains unanswered. A brief history is provided by Bourotte (1955), Schrock et al. (1966), and Cũu Long Giang and Toản Ánh (1974).

In the early centuries A.D., there were two powerful kingdoms: the Funan Kingdom, encountered by Indians in an area that is now in Cambodia, and the Champa. These two kingdoms fought for many centuries. According to Schrock et al. (1966:440), under the pressure of the invasion from the Cham, Chinese, Vietnamese and later the French, the Maa and Koho tribes moved westward from their fertile central Vietnamese coastal areas into the mountain terrain where they could remain in isolation. These are the areas which they presently inhabit. Cũu Long Giang and Toản Ánh (1974:86) suggest that probably after living under the rule of the Funan kingdom, the Maa tribe moved from the Cuu Long Delta and retreated to the mountainous and forested areas. Their settlements include the territory around La Nga River, the upper and central part of the Dong Nai area and the Di Linh Highlands (also known as the Maa Highlands).

According to Bourotte (1955:31-41), there was a loose temporary political and military coalition guided by a prince from the Che Maa (Koho) for a few centuries. Many tribesmen particularly Chrau, Koho and Stieng rebelled against their Cham rulers in 1328. However, when the Vietnamese became stronger in 1471, these minority groups aligned themselves with the Cham. Fighting between the Vietnamese

and Champa Kingdom ended in 1699. By the end of the 18th century the Che Maa Kingdom had numerous Vietnamese settlers.

In 1880, the Koho came under French colonial administration. The Maa, however, resisted French administration until 1937 (Schrock et al. 1966).

1.1.3 Demographic and Geographical Background

According to Vietnamese government statistics (2001) the population of the Koho is 128,723 and the population of the Maa is 33,338 in Vietnam. In addition, there are some Koho and Maa in the United States of America (Ethnologue 2000).

The Koho and Maa inhabit an extensive mountainous area which extends from Ho Chi Minh City in the south to Dalat City in the north. The Koho and Maa settlements are concentrated in Lam Dong Province in southern Vietnam (the map of Vietnam is provided in Figure 1). A few of these settlements are also in Dong Nai, Ninh Thuan, and some other Provinces. In the northern part of the Koho and Maa area are the Lang Biang Mountains which rise to about 6,000 feet (Schrock et al. 1966:390). There are also many other smaller mountains which make the province rich in forest products. This area also boasts grandiose waterfalls which attract tourists. The region also has rivers which make it a productive area for agriculture.

Geographically, to the north of the Maa are the Mnong, to the west of the Maa are the Stieng, to the east of the Maa are the Koho, and to the South of the Maa are the Chru, as shown in Figure 2. The Maa reside in the western part of Lam Dong Province in the following hamlets and districts: Loc Thang, Loc Bac, Loc Tan, Loc Lam, Loc Ngai, and Loc Chau Hamlets in Bao Loc district; Da Teh, Da M're, Da Huoai, and Ma Da Gui Hamlets in Da Huoai District; and two other hamlets, Da Don and Phu Son in Duc Trong District, and Dinh Trang Thuong Hamlet in the north of Di Linh District.

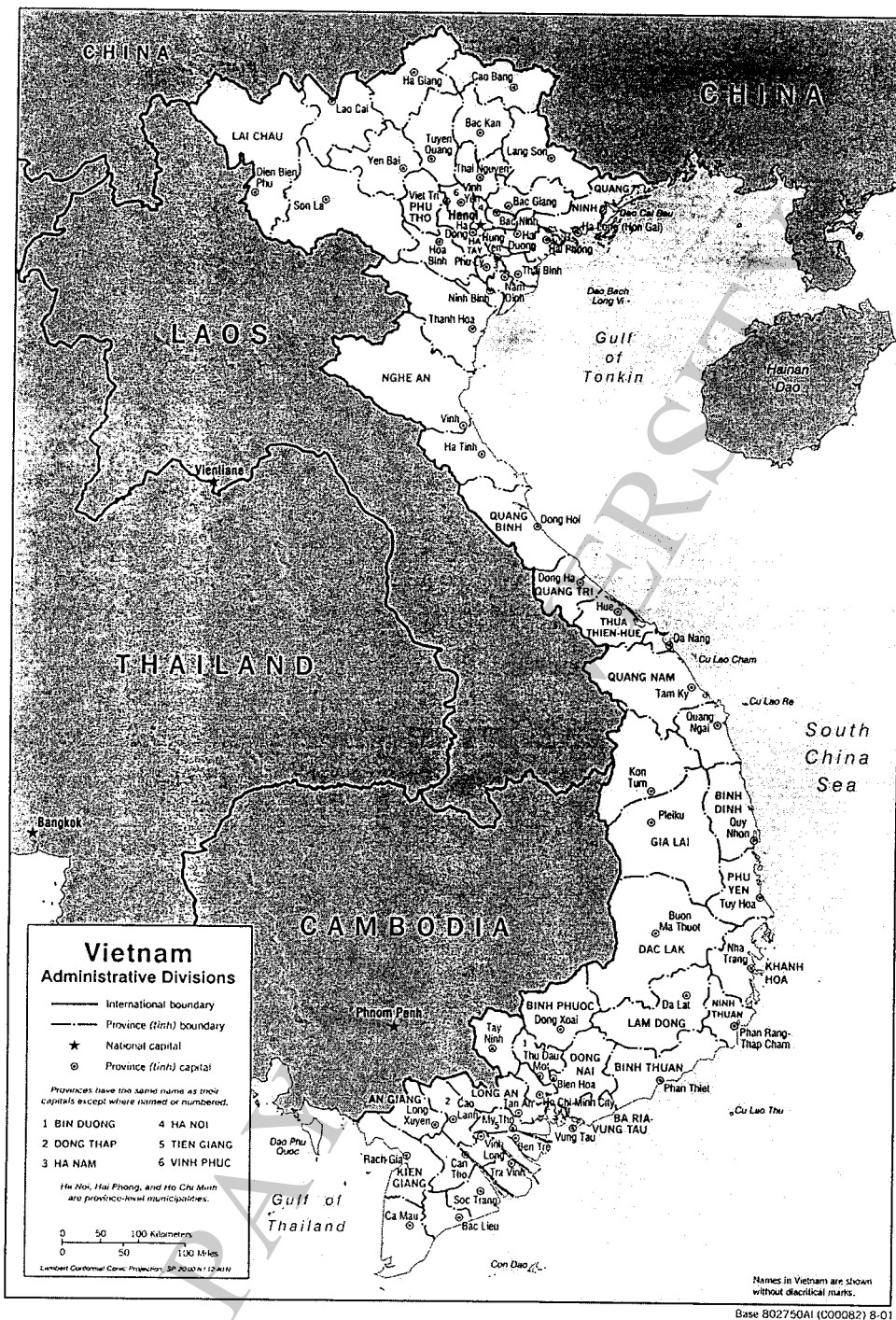


Figure 1. Map of Vietnam

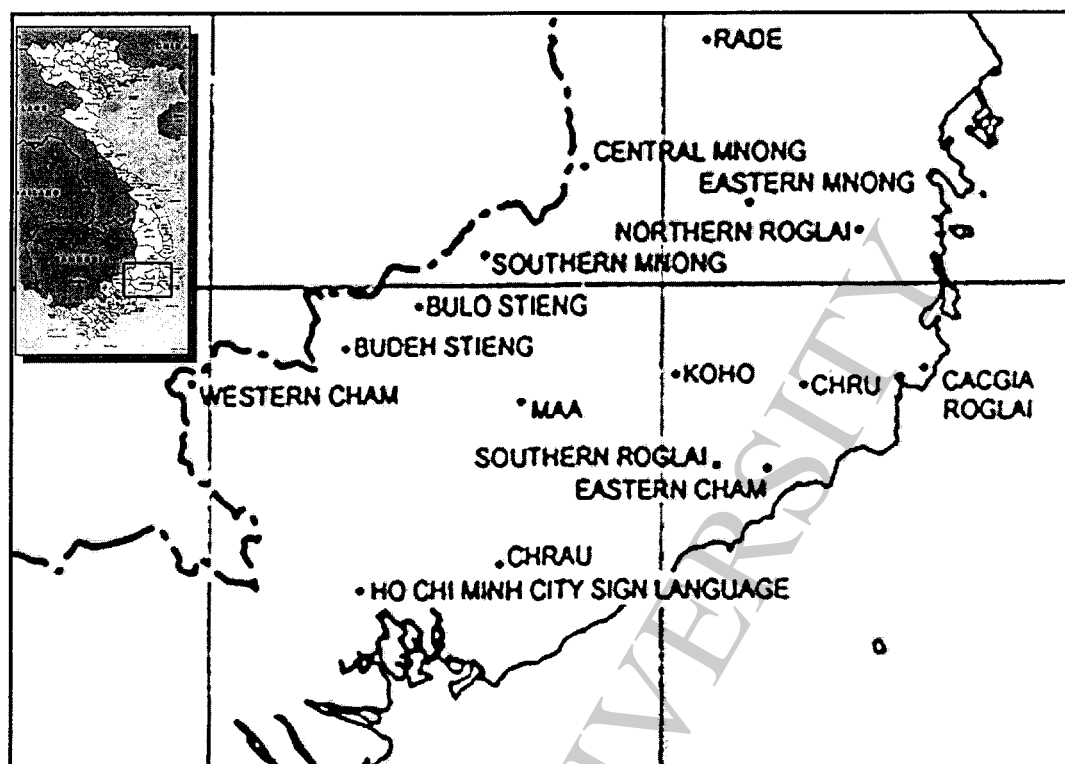


Figure 2. Map of Koho and Maa location

1.1.4 Sociolinguistic Background

This current sociolinguistic description is drawn from sociolinguistic questionnaires. From each village, four people were interviewed, some male and some female, in the following age groups: below 20; about 30; about 40; and about 50 years old.

The degree of bilingualism in Vietnamese depended on a variety of factors. Though Koho groups are matrilineal, the men are more bilingual than women because they have more contact with Vietnamese at work. The young people speak Vietnamese better than the old people inasmuch as they have more opportunity to study in Vietnamese at school. The people living in areas which are farther from Vietnamese

settlements cannot speak the national language as well as the ones living near Vietnamese settlements.

The language used in domains by the Maa and Koho can be divided into two categories. Vietnamese is usually used in public places (e.g. markets and government offices), or in social situations where Vietnamese are involved. This is due to the fact that Koho and Maa speech varieties are considered by the Vietnamese to be inferior to Vietnamese. The Koho and Maa speech varieties, on the other hand, are used by Koho and Maa people in public places when they have private conversations. The Koho and Maa varieties are almost exclusively used at home, in their villages, and in interactions with the village head. There are not clear-cut distinctions about language use at village meetings, with friends, or when someone comes to the village, because it depends on whom they talk with. For instance, if there is a non-native speaker in the meeting the Koho and Maa switch to Vietnamese.

The Koho and Maa have a very strong positive attitude about their language. They would like to preserve their varieties because this is their mother tongue and they want to maintain it. This is the reason they encourage their children to speak the mother tongue; as a result the children in their village use the varieties clearly. The Maa desperately want to have orthography for their language so that they can write down their folk tales, poems, songs, news and religious materials. The people want to have a way that they can preserve their traditions, customs and practices, and pass these on from one generation to the next.

Not all of the ethnic groups like to be grouped within Koho and Maa. Most scholars group Cil, Lach, Nop, and Sre together and call it Koho. The Cil and the Lach people say they are not Koho while the Sre and Nop consider themselves to be Koho. All of the groups within Koho would be offended if they were considered to be Maa. All the Maa identify themselves as Maa and are uncomfortable when they are referred to as Koho. Some of the young people in both groups, however, state that it doesn't matter

if they are called Koho or Maa since their mother tongues share some degree of intelligibility.

1.1.5 Dialect Background

The term Koho has been used to refer to many different ethnic groups in the south central highlands of Vietnam, such as Cil, Lach, Tring, Sre, Kalop, Tala, Sop, Rion, Nop, Laya, Langau, Kodon, Pru, and Maa (Cửu Long Giang and Toàn Ánh 1974, Thomas 1979, Hoàng Phê et al. 1984, and Lê Khắc Cường 2000). This thesis uses the terms Koho Cil, Koho Lach, Koho Nop and Koho Sre to refer to the Cil, the Lach, the Nop and the Sre, respectively.

The term Maa is used to refer to a group of speech varieties that distinguish themselves from neighboring groups. The name Maa is thought to have come from the word /mir/, which means “dry rice field,” because the Maa cultivate dry rice (Khong Dien 2002:46). The name and the number of dialects among the Maa is rather problematic. In 1957, Boulbet reported that the Maa are comprised of various subgroups: To, Ro, Sop, Borse, Tou, Da Dong, Wang, Daa Guy, and the Krung. LeBar et al. (1964) reduce the number of the subgroups to three: Maa To, Maa Ro, and Maa Sop. Bế Việt Đăng et al. (1984) state that the Maa community has four dialects, Maa Ngan, Maa Xop, Maa To, and Maa Krung. Some of the other names which are often heard such as Maa Dadong, Maa Dahuoai, and Maa Blao, etc. are administrative names which indicate a location, but do not identify cultural and linguistic differences. Maa Ngan is located in Loc Bac, Loc Trung, and Loc Lam Hamlets of Bao Loc District. Maa To settled in Blao Highland. Maa Krung is located in the southwest of Bao Loc Province. Maa Xop is located in Loc Bac, and part of Loc Trung of Bao Loc District.

In 2002 the author conducted research in different locations where the Maa reside. These places are Madagui Hamlet of Da Huoai District, Loc Thang Hamlet of Bao Loc District, and Dinh Trang Thuong Hamlet of Di Linh District. The local inhabitants reported that they are Maa Dagui, Maa Chop, and Maa Tadung, respectively. This thesis uses the terms Maa Dagui, Maa Chop, and Maa Tadung, as they call themselves, to refer to groups of Maa people in Madagui, Loc Thang, and Dinh Trang Thuong Hamlets, respectively.

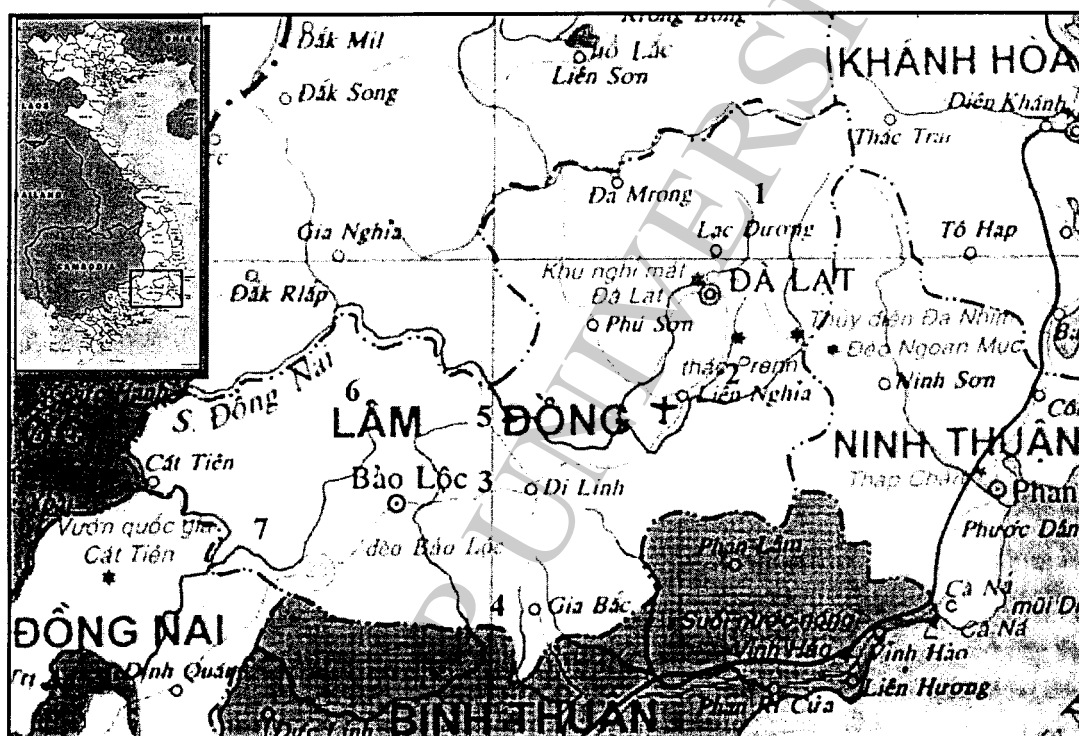


Figure 3. Locations of data collected

Figure 3 is the map of Lam Dong Province where the data for this thesis was collected. A summary of the names, locations, and codes of the speech varieties on the map is shown in Table 1.

Names of speech variety	Location (Hamlet, District, Province)	Speech variety	Map code
1. Lach	Lat, Lac Duong, Lam Dong	Koho	1
2. Cil	Phu Hoi, Duc Trong, Lam Dong	Koho	2
3. Sre	Lien Dam, Di Linh, Lam Dong	Koho	3
4. Nop	Son Dien, Di Linh, Lam Dong	Koho	4
5. Maa Tadung	Dinh Trang Thuong, Di Linh, Lam Dong	Maa	5
6. Maa Chop	Loc Thang, Bao Loc, Lam Dong	Maa	6
7. Maa Dagui	Madagui, Da Huoi, Lam Dong	Maa	7

Table 1. Speech varieties and locations

Besides the seven varieties of Koho and Maa considered here, there are other varieties such as Laya in Phan Thiet Province, Pru in the south of Djiring town, Rien in the south east of Dalat, Sop in the northeast of Djiring on the Dong Nai River and T'ring in Don Duong District in Lam Dong Province. These varieties are not included in this research because there was no data available.

1.2 Purpose of Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the relationship between the Koho and Maa varieties by using a lexicostatistic comparison of the varieties and a phonological reconstruction of the proto forms. The speech varieties used in this analysis are known as Koho Cil, Koho Lach, Koho Nop, Koho Sre, Maa Dagui, Maa Chop, and Maa Tadung. The lexicostatistic comparison is a preliminary investigation of the varieties used in phonological reconstruction. The reconstruction of the proto language and the rules used to derive the descendant languages help to construct a grouping of the Koho and Maa varieties.

1.3 Source of Linguistic Data

The data used in this thesis is a collection of wordlists taken from three Maa and four Koho speech varieties. The data collection was carried out in May 2002 and January 2003. The researcher attempted to visit villages where he was told the speech varieties originated. In each village, a wordlist was transcribed and digitally (mini-

disc) recorded. In addition to the wordlists, sociolinguistic data and information for a basic grammatical sketch was also collected. The wordlists later were edited in Sound Forge 4.5. Each word was then saved in a file for analysis in Speech Analyzer 24-35. Speech Analyzer was used as a tool to help confirm the initial transcriptions.

1.4 Methodology

In order to answer the research question ‘what is the relationship between Koho and Maa varieties?’ this thesis uses the tools of lexicostatistic comparison and phonological reconstruction. Lexicostatistic comparison provides a basic subgrouping of closely related speech varieties while phonological reconstruction provides a more thorough method of language classification. The analysis relies primarily on data from four speech varieties of Koho and three speech varieties of Maa. A lexicostatistic comparison of 100 core vocabulary items is used to determine a preliminary subgrouping of the speech varieties, as described in section 2.4.1. The phonological reconstruction will be based upon data from seven speech varieties, as described in section 2.4.2.