

Chinese Loanwords in Vietnamese Pronouns and Terms of Address and Reference

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Chinese loanwords have played a significant role in the Vietnamese system of pronouns and terms of address and reference. Semantic and pragmatic features of Chinese kinship terms and names have been transferred into the overall Vietnamese referential system. However, many of the Chinese loanwords in this semantic domain have undergone grammaticalization quite distinct from those in any variety of Chinese, thereby mitigating the notion of Chinese as being a primary source of the structure of in that system. This paper also considers how kinship terms, titles, and names came to have 1st and 2nd person reference potentially via language contact with Chinese, areal linguistic influence in Southeast Asia, or both. Many related questions will require future studies.

1. Background and Overview

Identifying the linguistic influence of Chinese on Vietnamese generally begins with Chinese loanwords, permeate various levels of the Vietnamese lexicon (cf. Lê 2002, Alves 2009). What has become increasingly clear is that a great deal of the lexical and phonological features of Vietnamese must be attributed to a period of substantive Sino-Vietnamese—or more properly Sinitic-Vietic—bilingualism and language contact. Phan (2013) has hypothesized the former existence of ‘Annamese Chinese,’ an earlier but now non-existent variety of Chinese that, he claims, emerged in northern Vietnam from the early to mid-first millennium CE and lasted presumably through the end of the Tang Dynasty, but ultimately merged via language shift with Viet-Muong at some point.

Historical records and archaeological data provide useful corroborating support to identify Early Sino-Vietnamese lexical items from the mid-1st millennium or earlier (cf. Alves 2016). Archaeological data in particular permits hypotheses not only about the possibility of borrowing terms for material culture but also sociocultural circumstances and timing as well. Regarding intangible aspects of culture, only inferences can be made. Thus, while the Chinese historical text the *Houhanshu* notes a broad administrative mandate for Chinese style marriages in modern-day northern Vietnam, it is reasonable to assume such intentional attempts at cultural change in northern Vietnamese contributed to the early borrowing of related words, such as ‘wife,’ ‘marriage,’ among other terms.

Nevertheless, what kind of sociocultural and sociolinguistic contact there was in the early period is still difficult to assess. We can infer from these records and speculate

from the large Chinese populations migrating south during turmoil in the early 300s of the East Jin Dynasty that intermarriage occurred. However, by adding lexical data, we have more support for these possibilities. Benedict (1947) first noted in print the significant impact of Chinese loanwords in Vietnamese kinship terms. The notable number of Chinese kinship terms in the Early Sino-Vietnamese layer suggests that there was indeed a significant amount of intermarriage and that some portion of the early Vietic population was drawn into Chinese marriage practices as well as a more Chinese-like family system.

What is less clear is how the Chinese style system of reference was used in Annamese Chinese. Despite the borrowing of over a dozen Chinese kinship terms, the Vietnamese pronoun system has at least kept its core etyma, but there have been changes in its pronoun system structure, as will be discussed. It is this overall system of address and reference (primarily pronouns, kinship terms, and names) that is of issue in this paper, with a focus on the lexical system but with reference to key syntactic and semantic aspects to provide more context to understand Chinese impact on the Vietnamese system.

The remainder of this paper summarizes (a) the Vietnamese referential system, (b) the historical periods of Sino-Vietnamese contact and borrowing of kinship terms and other related vocabulary, and finally (c) presentation of kinship terms, including grammatical aspects, and names.

2. The Vietnamese Referential System: Nouns, Pronouns, and Names

The anaphoric/referential system of Vietnamese includes not only pronouns but also a combination of nouns (including both kinship-derived terms and professions) and names, all allowing 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-person reference. Finally, pro-drop phenomena are also part of Vietnamese anaphora, though this naturally has no further relevance in this study focusing on lexical borrowing. Key studies on this aspect of Vietnamese grammar relevant to this study include Thompson (1985) on general semantico-syntactic properties, Cooke (1968) on semantico-pragmatic aspects, and Chew (2015) building on those previous studies and adding some diachronic developments.

The lexical items in this system must be analyzed along a range of parameters: (a) syntactic (e.g., clausal and phrasal distribution and syntactic relations), (b) semantic (e.g., features such as number, gender, age, etc.), and (c) pragmatic (e.g., interlocutor relations and status, politeness, etc.). These terms have developed recognizably grammatical anaphoric tendencies (cf. Alves 2005 and 2007). For example, the kinship term *cô* ‘father’s sister’, from Chinese 姑 *gū* of the same meaning, can also function as a referential term in 1st or 2nd person in any syntactic role in a sentence (e.g., subject, object, possessor). That word can cooccur with markers of plurality, such as pre-nominal *các* and *chúng*, and definiteness, mostly post-nominal *ta* and *ấy*, and the lexemes *chúng* and *ta* in particular mark it as having anaphoric status, as discussed in Section 4.2.4. In sociolinguistic terms, *cô* functions as a neutral, polite term used with women who are generally not children and not elderly, with the meaning comparable to ‘miss’ in English.

Vietnamese *cô* ‘miss’ is only one of a large number of possible pronoun-like noun elements in Vietnamese within a complex range of parameters. A sentence which translates as ‘I will help you’ in English can be rendered in a variety of ways depending on the two speakers’ gender, degree of intimacy, relative age and social roles, and sometimes other pragmatic communicative features, as seen in the sample of Table 1. In it, words of Chinese (Ch.) origin are noted, including a few kinship terms, names, and a noun (‘friend’). The only true pronouns (1st person *tao* and 2nd person *mày*) are extremely informal or intimate and are taboo in polite situations. Note that kinship-derived terms, nouns, and names can all function variously as 1st and 2nd person (e.g., *anh* and *cô* are shown in both positions), a kind of floating reference, something true pronouns generally cannot do.

Table 1: Translations of ‘I will help you’ in Vietnamese

1 st Person Referent	Verb	2 nd Person Referent
<i>Tôi</i> ‘I (neutral)’	<i>sẽ giúp</i>	<i>bạn</i> ‘friend’ (Ch. 伴 bàn)
<i>anh</i> (mister)		<i>cô</i> (miss)
<i>cô</i> (miss) (Ch. 姑 gū)		<i>anh</i> (mister)
<i>ông</i> (sir, much older) (Ch. 翁 wēng)		<i>con</i> (child/very young person)
<i>bác</i> (sir, older) (Ch. 伯 bó)		<i>em</i> (young person)
<i>chú</i> (sir, slightly older)		<i>em</i> (young person)
<i>thầy</i> (teacher)		<i>em</i> (young person)
<i>Minh</i> (name) (Ch. 明 míng)		<i>Châu</i> (name) (Ch. 珠 zhū)
<i>tao</i> ‘I (informal)’		<i>mày</i> ‘you (informal)’

The focus of this paper is, again, the nature of Chinese loanwords in this system, and each of these relevant aspects—syntax, semantics, and pragmatics—are large areas of inquiry. For this paper, they are dealt with as needed in individual sections with respect to lexical categories and specific lexemes since these factors clarify the nature of the borrowing from Chinese into Vietnamese as well as innovation in Vietnamese in ways unlike the donor language.

It is now necessary to provide a historical Sino-Vietnamese language contact scenario that specifically accounts for the types of lexical borrowing in order to understand the timing and impact of Chinese loanwords on those semantic domains.

3. Eras of Sino-Vietnamese Language Contact

ESV kinship items were noted first by Benedict (1947), calling them ‘vulgar’ (i.e., vernacular) terms, though he did not specify the timing of their adoption. Since then, increased understanding of the features to distinguish MC-era from EMC- and OC-era loanwords have been identified (e.g., Wang 1948, Haudricourt 1954, Tryon 1979, Nguyễn N. S. 2003). In the most recent advance in understanding of Sino-Vietnamese

language contact, Phan (2013) has presented a hypothesis of Sino-Vietnamese bilingualism. Thus, while the use of Chinese literature has significantly impacted the Vietnamese lexicon, as was the case in Japanese and Korean, Vietnamese also had a period of profound vernacular language contact with Chinese. Phan's posited Annamese Chinese following the Jin Dynasty is the best way to account for the borrowing of Chinese kinship terms into Vietnamese.

As for timing, at the very least, the periods of lexical borrowing from Chinese extend from Late Old Chinese (LOC) of the Han, Early Middle Chinese (EMC) of the Jin to pre-Tang dynasties, Middle Chinese (MC) proper of the Tang into the Song dynasties, and later periods of Chinese as well (cf. Alves 2016). Broadly speaking, there are both Sino-Vietnamese (SV) loanwords from the MC period and Early Sino-Vietnamese (ESV) loanwords, including both LOC and EMC era borrowings. While SV words may be either formal/written or colloquial (they are formally recognized as pronunciations of Chinese characters), ESV are generally only colloquial, highlighting the latter category's oral means of transmission. Table 2 shows an approximate range of the periods of SV and ESV in terms of Chinese dynasties and stages of Chinese historical phonological periods.

Table 2: Historical Periods of Sino-Vietnamese Contact

Types	Dynasties	Stages
ESV	Han	LOC
	Jin	EMC
	Pre/early-Tang	
SV	Tang	MC
	Song	

The two categories, SV and ESV, can be distinguished primarily by their tones but also by segmental features. Moreover, corroborating historical and archaeological evidence has further strengthened claims of timing of the borrowings and thus the sound changes (Alves 2016). The full range of phonological traits of ESV in contrast with SV vocabulary are too complex to completely summarize in this study. Primary references include Wang (1948), Tryon (1979) and Phan (2013). Identifying phonological characteristics of ESV items include the following:¹

- (a) the reverse of *shangsheng* 上聲 (from final glottal stop) and *qusheng* 去聲 (from final *-s) tone categories between ESV and SV items, which is the most robust criterion for identifying ESV items (e.g., ESV *kéo* 'scissors' with a *qusheng* tone versus SV *giảo* with *shangsheng* tone, Chinese 鉸 *jiǎo* 'shears', MC *kaewX*, OC **mə-[k]ʳ[a]wʔ*);
- (b) retention of velar initials (as in 'scissors' above), lenition, and changes in voicing (e.g., ESV *gan* 'liver' versus SV *can*, Chinese 肝 *gān* 'liver', MC *kan*, OC **s.kʰa[r]*);

¹ OC and MC reconstructions in this paper are those of Baxter and Sagart (2014).

(c) lowering or diphthongization of vowels (e.g., ESV *búa* ‘hammer’ versus SV *bủ*, Chinese ‘axe’, 斧 MC pjuX, OC *p(r)a?).

For all ESV items in this study, the corresponding SV items are listed, and when appropriate, the differences between the two words in these doublets are noted. However, for the most part, for this focused study, this is not necessary.

Finally, the lexical items in this study can be identified with their relative historical timing of borrowing, though the period of grammaticalization of kinship terms to pronoun-like terms is much less certain. The implication of the above data is that Chinese kinship terms were borrowed in Vietnamese over a continuous period of bilingualism stretching from the first to second half of the first millennium CE. However, regarding the semantico-syntactic and pragmatic features of the Vietnamese referential system, some parts may have started during the Chinese period, but it may have partly emerged in the second millennium in ways that parallel features in other Southeast Asian languages. The answer to that latter question will require future investigation.

4. Vietnamese Pronouns and Kinship Terms

This section describes Vietnamese lexical items in the categories of pronouns and kinship terms which have pronominal functions. It also presents relevant syntactic properties of noun phrases of pronominal kinship terms and the use of names. Finally, it identifies Chinese elements in these areas and shows how Chinese does—or does not—appear to have impacted these lexical items and related structures and semantico-pragmatic properties.

4.1 Pronouns: Common, Rare, and Pre-modern

Pronouns can be identified by several criteria, including anaphoric reference and their fit in systems of semantico-syntactic parameters, most often person and number. Vietnamese pronouns are listed in Table 3.² In terms of etymological sources, they consist of a mixture of Proto-Austroasiatic³ (PAA), Proto-Vietic (PVV), Chinese, and distinct etyma. Crucially, singular 1st, 2nd, and 3rd pronouns in Vietnamese are all native, either Austroasiatic or Vietic, thereby establishing a solid core of indigenous origins of Vietnamese. Vietnamese plural pronouns, in contrast, are varied in etymological origins. It is here that Chinese etyma can be identified, though these items function in Vietnamese in ways rather different from those in Chinese. These two categories, singular and plural, and discussed below with reference to potential Chinese lexical influence.

² These items’ regional usages and restrictions makes them much less of a cohesive system than in many languages, such as English and Chinese, in which pronoun systems are more systematic.

³ Proto-Austroasiatic reconstructions are those of Shorto et. al. (2006). The Proto-Vietic form is that of Michel Ferlus, available in the online *Mon-Khmer Etymological Dictionary*.

Table 3: Vietnamese Pronouns

No.	Singular	Plural
1 st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>tao</i> (informal) [PVV *so] • <i>tôi</i> (polite) [originally ‘servant’] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>chúng ta</i> (inclusive) [Ch. 众 zhong4 ‘group’] • <i>chúng tôi/tụi/tớ</i> (exclusive) • <i>ta</i> (specialized rhetorical usage)
2 nd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>mày</i> (informal) [PAA *mi[i]?, *miih; PVV *mi] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>bây/bay</i> [PAA *pi?] • <i>chúng mày</i>
3 rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>hắn</i> (informal) [PAA *[?]an?; PVV *han?] • <i>nó</i> (informal) [PAA *nɔ?] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>họ</i> [ESV vs SV <i>hộ</i>, Ch. 戶 hu4] • <i>chúng</i> [Ch. 众 zhong4 ‘group’] • <i>tụi nó</i> • <i>bọn</i> (‘group’) <i>họ/mình/chúng</i>

4.1.1 Core Singular Pronouns

The core 1st person *tao* and 2nd person *mày*, both of which are in the category of extremely informal and even rude terms, are both native terms. Regarding the commonly used polite first-person pronoun *tôi*, it has been noted (e.g., Cooke 1968) to stem from the original but now little used meaning ‘servant’. This is parallel to the use of such terms in premodern Chinese, such as 僕 *pú* ‘servant (male)’ and 婢 *bi* ‘servant (female)’, though not in cognate form. However, this semantic shift also occurs in Thai and Burmese (Cooke 1968), and thus it appears to be a regional grammaticalization cline, from ‘servant’ to deferential 1st person. Whether Chinese was the primary source of this development or might be part of a broader regional tendency would require more data.

The 3rd person pronoun *hắn* has been claimed to have been a Chinese loanword, from Chinese 漢 *hàn*, SV *hán*, in light of some data in a Tang Dynasty text showing it used with a derogatory function (Chew 2015:113). However, comparative data from various languages worldwide (*World Loanword Database*) shows that pronouns are most often retentions (with a borrowability rate of less than 0.1, which is comparable to basic vocabulary), not loanwords. Thus, it is logical to first assume that *hắn* is a retention of AA *[?]an? unless sufficient evidence shows otherwise. Moreover, the word’s informal status parallels that of *tao* and *mày*, both native etyma, in an overall paradigmatic manner. Moreover, the fact that this is reconstructable to PVV *han?, as it is not only in Vietnamese but also in highly conservative Vietic languages (e.g., Pong *han*, Tho *han*³, Ruc *han*³ (SEALANG Mon-Khmer Etymological Dictionary)), also suggests that is not a Chinese loanword. It is worth considering the possibility that Chinese speakers in the Tang Dynasty used the phonetically and semantically similar form in the MC period, but this hypothesis would require additional data, such as instances in Southern Chinese varieties to allow transmission via bilingualism, as is the case for *y* and *qua*, as discussed

below. For now, the notion that Vietnamese *hấn* is a retention, not a Chinese loanword, must be the primary working hypothesis.

4.1.2 Core Plural Pronouns

As for Vietnamese plural pronouns, two items of possible Chinese origin, pluralizing *chúng* and 3rd person singular *họ*, were likely borrowed from Chinese, though in different eras. *Chúng* is a SV reading (Ch. 众 *zhòng*), and thus from the later MC period, while *họ* is an ESV item, as suggested by the lowered vowel (i.e., ‘o’ /ɔ/ versus ‘ô’ /o/), and thus probably from the EMC period. *Chúng* is used (a) as a prenominal pluralizer and (b) as a stand-alone 3rd person plural pronoun. Chinese 众 *zhòng* functions with a more generalizing function (e.g., Ch. 眾人 *zhòng rén* ‘everyone’), but it does fit the syntactic template (i.e., prenominal) and carries comparable semantic import.

Thus, this Chinese lexical material appears not to have much, if anything, to do with developments in Chinese. Crucially, as can be seen among the dozens of varieties of Chinese in of almost all dialect groups from northern to southern China (Zhang 2013:169-190), plural marking very consistently follows pronouns: none mark plurality in the pre-pronoun position. Moreover, such markers are almost exclusively used with pronouns rather than nouns (with a few exceptions, e.g., Chinese 學生們 *xuéshēngmen*). Both Chinese pluralizing 各 *gè* and 每 *měi*, which date back to Classical Chinese, are in modern Vietnamese, allowing the possibility they could have been borrowed into Vietnamese via bilingual Chinese-Vietnamese communities. In contrast, 众 *zhòng* does not appear to have had a widespread pluralizing function in Chinese, and it is thus extremely unlikely that the prenominal pluralizing *chúng* is the result of borrowing from a variety of Chinese: it almost undoubtedly is an innovation after the language shift of Annamese Chinese to Vietnamese. Indeed, considering the similar pattern of marking plural pronouns with *bọn* and *tụi*, both of which mean ‘group,’ it appears to be a largely native innovation in Vietnamese.

The pronoun *họ* is of less certain status as an original Chinese word, though there is still both historical phonological and semantic support. The phonological form and tone for Chinese 戶 *hu4* (MC *huX*, OC **m-qʰaʔ*) are reasonable for an EMC item, and the connection of the Vietnamese sense ‘surname’ is reasonable. As for the semantic shift to ‘they’, assuming it is related to Chinese 戶 *hù* ‘household/family’ requires acceptance of a semantic shift for which there is no textual support, but the shift from family, and thus group reference, to 3rd person plural is not unreasonable. Moreover, there are no evident alternative native etymological sources. Pending additional evidence, this item can be considered a probable grammaticalized Chinese item.

4.1.3 Archaic and Peripheral Pronouns from Chinese

Other Chinese pronouns have been borrowed, but these have no significant impact on the overall modern Vietnamese system. *Trẫm* (Ch. 朕 *zhèn*) is an historical word that

was used, as in Chinese, only by kings in the 1st person, an example of the sociopolitical impact of Sino-Vietnamese contact. Vietnamese *trãm* is an SV item and thus a loanword borrowed at time of Chinese administrative rule, perhaps the late Tang, probably not after the beginning of Vietnamese independence from China in the mid-900s CE.

In modern Vietnamese, two items of note include the Vietnamese 3rd person pronoun *y* and 1st person *qua*, both listed by Thompson (1985:251) as having literary flavor. Neither have enough usage in modern Vietnamese to be added to lists of widely used pronouns in Vietnamese, but they merit attention here. The pronoun *y* is a verifiable standard SV reading of Chinese 伊 *yī*, also a 3rd person singular pronoun, though in Chinese, it is used primarily in Min and Wu, not Mandarin or Yue. However, despite having a MC-era reading, its adoption in spoken Vietnamese has been hypothesized to be a more recent loanword from Southern Min, in which that etymon is the standard 3rd person pronoun (Chew 2015:113). This is a somewhat problematic claim lacking precise corroborating evidence, though textual evidence for an earlier period of borrowing is also lacking. Similarly, first person *qua* is a possible Southern Min loanword, and this more clearly appears to be a more likely recent borrowing. *Qua* is used only in southern Vietnam among young men, and overall it has much less currency in Vietnamese.

It is worth noting the parallel of these two items with some varieties of Malay, such as Jakarta Indonesian, in which the 1st-person pronoun *gua* and 2nd person *lu* have been borrowed, probably from Southern Min *góa* (我) and *lí* or *lú* (你). This shows a shared sociolinguistic trend in two Southeast Asian languages and provides some incidental evidence in support of the claim that Vietnamese *qua* and *y* are possible Southern Min loanwords. However, while the level-tone *qua* is very unlike SV *ngã* (Ch. 我 *wǒ*) but phonologically similar to the Southern Min form, *y* is a SV reading and thus predates Southern Min presence in Vietnam. However, whether *y* was used prior to or only starting with the arrival of a Southern Min community is a matter requiring more substantial sociohistorical data.⁴

4.1.4 Overview of Chinese Impact on Vietnamese Pronouns

No core singular pronouns have been borrowed in Vietnamese, but rather only some peripheral items. In contrast, in the category of plural pronouns, Chinese words have been borrowed and played a role in that category's current structure. Overall, Chinese pronouns have not directly restructured the basic Vietnamese pronoun system, though there are some instances of grammatical embellishment and peripheral elements.

⁴ In 1924, in South Vietnam, several Chinese dialect groups were prevalent, with Cantonese (35%), Fujian (24%), and Chaozhou (22%), Kejia (15%), and Hainan (15%) varieties dominant, a total of some 200,000 persons (Trần 1993:31). With such a mixture, it seems odd that one of these groups, and not the numerically dominant one, became so influential. This is in contrast with, for example, Indonesia, where Southern Min speakers were dominant and Southern Min words were borrowed.

What is more significant is the reduced usage of original pronouns, such as informal 1st person *tao* and 2nd person *mày*, and increased used of kinship terms with pronominal functions, as discussed in the next section.

4.2 Vietnamese Kinship Terms

As noted in Section 4.1.1, comparative data shows kinship terms borrowed at significantly higher rates than pronouns. Chinese kinship terms in particular have been borrowed into several Southeast Asian languages, including Thai, Cambodian, and Tagalog (cf. Alves 2017). While Chinese has had little lexical impact on the Vietnamese pronoun system in more recent centuries, several Chinese kinship terms have been borrowed beginning from an early period of Sino-Vietnamese contact. However, like other Southeast Asian languages, some of these kinship loanwords in Vietnamese have become semantically bleached and now function with pronominal 1st and 2nd person reference.⁵

As for their referential functions, they fall into two classes. All Vietnamese kinship terms can be used with 1st and 2nd person functions within families. However, only a portion of the terms are used broadly in society outside the family, which highlights those items' grammatical status. These two categories are described below.

Table 4: Kinship terms without social pronominal functions

Meaning	Vietnamese	Etymological Source
great-great-grandparent	<i>sơ</i>	unknown
father	<i>cha, ba, bố</i> <i>thầy (dialectal)</i>	unknown unknown ⁶
mother	<i>mẹ, má</i>	(Comparable forms in both Austroasiatic and Tai-Kadai)
wife of father's younger brother	<i>thím</i>	ESV (SV <i>thâm</i> , 孀 <i>shěn</i>)
wife of mother's brother	<i>mợ</i>	ESV (SV <i>mỗ</i> , 姆 <i>mǔ</i>)
the husband of aunts	<i>dượng</i>	Unknown
mother's younger sister	<i>đì</i>	SV, 姨 <i>yí</i>

4.2.1 Kinship Terms without Social Pronominal Functions

Table 4 shows those kinship terms which have not developed generalized pronominal usage outside the family. A few of these belong to the ESV layer, what Benedict (1947) called the 'vulgar' (essentially, vernacular) terms, in contrast with

⁵ For discussion of the pronoun-like status of kinship terms, see Pham 2011.

⁶ This item has been posited to related to SV *sư*, Chinese 師 *shī*, MC *srij* (Nguyễn N.S. 2003:179). Vietnamese initial /t^h/ for MC *s is expected. However, the Vietnamese form has a low tone, unlike the expected high tone. It is not impossible to be an ESV item but not certain.

formal SV readings of Chinese characters. The words in this category include parents as well as some for aunts and uncles, the latter belonging to the earlier ESV Chinese loanwords.

Table 5: Vietnamese kinship term with pronoun functions

Referential Function	Term	Source
Male similar in age to an interlocutor's father (father's younger brother)	<i>chú</i>	ESV (SV <i>thúc</i> , 叔 <i>shū</i>) ⁷
Male similar in age to an interlocutor's mother (mother's brother)	<i>cậu</i>	ESV (SV <i>cũu</i> , 舅 <i>jiù</i>)
Male older than an interlocutor's parents (father's older brother)	<i>bác</i>	ESV 伯 <i>bó</i>
Adult female slightly older than interlocutor (elder sister)	<i>chị</i>	ESV (SV <i>tỉ</i> , 姊 <i>jiě</i>)
Middle-aged woman; a female one generation older than an interlocutor (grandmother)	<i>bà</i>	SV, 婆 <i>pó</i>
Middle-aged man; a male one generation older than the speaker (grandfather)	<i>ông</i>	SV, 翁 <i>wēng</i>
Young woman (father's sister)	<i>cô</i>	SV, 姑 <i>gū</i>
Very old person	<i>cụ/cố</i>	unknown
Adult male of a similar age as an interlocutor (elder brother)	<i>anh</i>	unknown
Person a generation younger than an interlocutor (younger sibling)	<i>em</i>	unknown
Child; someone one generation younger than an interlocutor (offspring)	<i>con</i>	Proto-AA
Child; someone one generation younger than an interlocutor (grandchild)	<i>cháu</i>	Proto-AA

4.2.2 Kinship Terms with Pronominal Functions

The other category of terms, namely, those which have generalized pronoun functions, is larger in number than those which do not. The terms in Table 5 are all derived from kinship terms, but have referential functions as noted with the respect to interlocutors. Quite a few are of Chinese origin. There are several Chinese loanwords in Table 4 and thirteen in Table 5, about half of the total items. Of these Chinese loanwords, about half are from the older ESV layer of the EMC or earlier, while the others are SV items from the MC era. However, both Chinese and non-Chinese kin terms are in this

⁷ The claim that this is an ESV item is weaker considering the loss of the final stop. However, the overall shape and tone of the word, in addition to the semantics, do correspond to the MC item.

category. Thus, there is no discernible pattern of etymological origin and use of the items as socially-conditioned pronouns, but statistically, kinship terms of Chinese origin are the most common and, in daily usage, probably the most common ones. The fact that these are Chinese in origin and their grammaticalization is probably not due to a causal relationship but rather a confluence of factors that led to their specialized functions. Nevertheless, semantic features, such as gender and relative age, are part of the features kept after the grammaticalization of these items occurred.

4.2.3 Grammatical Features of Kinship Terms with Pronominal Usage

It is now necessary to consider grammatical aspects of pronominal kinship terms in Vietnamese to consider the effect of Sino-Vietnamese language contact and borrowing. Two primary aspects are (a) the semantico-syntactic features and degrees of grammaticalization of these terms and (b) their syntactic roles in noun phrase structures.

4.2.3.1 Grammaticalized Kinship Terms

As mentioned in Section 4.2, only a subset of Vietnamese kinship terms have developed pronominal functions outside of family situations (cf. Table 5). The semantic shift typically involves (a) retention of the semantic features of gender and approximate age but (b) loss of the original sense of kinship. Moreover, there must have been a shift from a purely noun function with purely 3rd person function, as is the case for nouns in general, to a full range of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person pronominal functions.

What is unknown at this point is whether the pronominal function of kinship terms restricted to families existed prior to, following, or simultaneous to their application in broader social circumstances (i.e., with those outside interlocutors' kinship). That is, did kinship terms in Vietnamese develop pronoun functions within family situations before they did outside the home setting, or was there another sequence perhaps involving semantic domains other than kin terms?

Pre-modern Chinese employed complex systems of terms of address and reference with sociopragmatic functions of self-denigration and address-elevation (Kádár 2010), based on a variety of titles and other nouns.⁸ Such honorifics and even names had pronoun-like functions in context. It is thus likely that the pronominal use of honorific nouns was part of the Annamese Chinese spoken in Vietnamese. This is certainly a potential stimulus to allow for the pronominal usage of kinship terms in Vietnamese. One complication is that Vietnamese shares a significant amount of this socio-pragmatic system with other Southeast Asian languages, such as neighboring Laotian and Khmer.

⁸ While modern Chinese is a pronoun-dominant language, not generally using nouns as pronouns in common social situations, Chinese kinship terms can still be used in attention-getting vocative usages. For instance, speakers may use 阿姨 āyí 'auntie' to call a woman or 叔叔 shūshu 'uncle' to call to a man, something which can also be done with kinship terms Vietnamese. But this usage in modern Chinese does not involve 1st or 2nd person pronominal functions in thematic roles in sentences, as is the case in Vietnamese, as in Table 1.

Thus, this may be a more regional development that spread due in part to both contact with Chinese as well as other Southeast Asian languages.

A few Vietnamese pronominal kinship terms are particularly common and can be considered even more grammaticalized via frequent usage. Many but not all are Chinese in origin. These include *cô* (SV) ‘aunt’, *anh* (unknown) ‘elder brother’, *ông* (SV) ‘grandmother’, *bà* (SV) ‘grandmother’, *bác* (ESV) ‘father’s older brother’, *chú* (ESV) ‘father’s younger brother’, *cậu* (ESV) ‘father’s younger brother’, *em* (unknown) ‘younger sibling’, and *cháu* (PAA) ‘grandchild’. Corpus linguistic studies of frequency of this semantic domain of lexical items are not available, so how common each item is is an open question. Nevertheless, it is uncontroversial to say these words are widely used in general social situations in daily usage. Among these, *bác* is even more semantically bleached as it has become a respectful term for both older men and women (a function mostly specific to northern Vietnamese), very much in contrast with the original sense ‘father’s older brother’. In that usage, it has retained its age feature only.

4.2.3.2 Pronominal Kinship Terms in Noun Phrases

In this section, pronominal kinship terms in Vietnamese are described in terms of their place in noun phrases, including quantification, definiteness, and the interaction of these terms with Vietnamese names, most of which are of Chinese origin. However, the structures show a mix of Chinese-like and non-Chinese-like patterns.⁹

a. Quantification

Vietnamese noun phrase structure parallels that in Chinese in that numerals and classifiers precede nouns (e.g., ‘one book’ in Vietnamese *một cuốn sách* (one-unit-book) and Chinese 一本書 *yī běn shū* (one-unit-book)). However, in Vietnamese, human nouns are directly quantifiable without the use of intervening classifiers or other measure words (cf. Nguyễn Đ. H. 1957). Thus, Vietnamese kinship terms take directly preceding numbers (as in (1)), general quantifiers, and interrogative quantifiers.

- (1) *ba ông*
 three grandfather/older sir
 ‘we/you three sirs/grandfathers’

Common plural quantifiers in Vietnamese include *các* (SV from Chinese 各 *ge4*) and native *những*.¹⁰ These can be used to mark plurality on measure words or nouns, including kinship terms with pronominal functions, but not true pronouns. However,

⁹ The statements in this paper regarding Vietnamese noun phrase structure are generalized due to space restrictions. Thus, many details must be glossed over.

¹⁰ Nguyen H. T. (2004:36) posits that while *các* and *những* are both markers of plurality, they simultaneously mark definiteness. *Các* gives a definite reading, while *những* has an indefinite one.

there is another option. For pronouns, as noted in section 4.1, pre-nominal *chúng* (SV for Ch. 眾 *zhòng*) is a pluralizing element. It is also used with pronominal kinship terms (e.g., *chúng anh*, *chúng cháu*, *chúng con*, *chúng em*, *chúng ông*, etc.), though these are often listed in dictionaries as full entries or samples and thus appear more lexicalized.¹¹ While dictionaries are admittedly not absolute evidence, it does suggest that native-speakers perceive these more as compounds than syntactic units. Regardless, *chúng* appears associated with pronouns, and the pronominal status of certain kinship terms allows for combinations with this marker, distinguishing it from *các* and *những* with general nouns. This is an expanded usage of 眾 *zhòng* from its function in Chinese.

One final point to make is that, as noted above, Vietnamese kinship terms and human nouns in general take quantifiers directly preceding without classifiers (part of the class of what Thompson (1985:197) called ‘general categoricals’). This is surprising as Vietnamese is a classifier language with a large number of classifiers and measure words required of many categories of nouns.¹² It has been noted that many Vietnamese classifiers are Chinese in origin and that Chinese and Vietnamese share the pattern ‘numeral-measure/classifier-noun,’ leading to the hypothesis that the influence of Chinese has influenced this part of the Vietnamese noun phrase structure (Alves 2001).

However, regarding human nouns, direct quantification is an unexpected pattern since the requirement in modern Chinese that classifiers are required with human nouns is quite strongly applied, except in instances of poetry or classical expressions. That Vietnamese was in contact with Annamese Chinese during the period in which the Chinese classifier system was becoming fully formed in Chinese (e.g., by the end of the Tang Dynasty) (Peyraube 1996), means that either (a) Vietnamese, under influence of Chinese, had classifiers with human nouns and later lost them or (b) Vietnamese is preserving a feature of Archaic Chinese at the time before classifiers were required for quantification of all nouns.¹³ The latter possibility is the more likely of the two as there is no rationale for a supposed loss of required classifiers for human nouns specifically, while the second possibility does provide a viable language-contact scenario. The

¹¹ This is in contrast with the more evidently lexical status of both *các* and *những*, neither of which dictionaries list in compounds comparable to *chúng*. However, the distinction between compounds and phrases in the strongly isolating Vietnamese is ultimately difficult to verify.

¹² The situation regarding the requirement of classifiers in Vietnamese noun phrases is complicated: (a) some quantifiers make optionally precede nouns directly without classifiers (e.g., *nhieu* ‘many’, *tất cả* ‘all,’ etc.) (Nguyen T. H. 2004:53), (b) some noun classes do not take classifiers (e.g., bisyllabic Sino-Vietnamese compounds), and (c) classifiers may be dropped in certain registers (e.g., poetry, rapid speech, etc.) (Nguyen T. H. 2004:9). These factors do not prevent considering Vietnamese a classifier language.

¹³ One other possibility is that this is a preservation of earlier Vietic noun phrase structure. However, the more likely pattern of a conservative Austroasiatic language is seen in Khmer, in which numbers follow nouns and classifiers are optional and much less frequently used. Thus, the Vietnamese order numeral-noun still seems to be the probable result of contact with Chinese.

requirement for classifiers may have spread in various semantic domains, but perhaps due to sociopragmatic factors, the class of human nouns were excluded. Assessing this hypothesized situation will require additional investigation. But if shown viable, this would be evidence of Sino-Vietnamese language contact resulting not only in the borrowing of the words but also accompanying structure prior to full development of classifiers in Annamese Chinese.

b. Definiteness

Vietnamese pronominal kinship terms require no marking to indicate distinction of 1st versus 2nd person. With these terms, person is determined in speech context by the perspective of interlocutors. In contrast, 3rd person reference with kinship terms and titles usually require marking via determiners. Unlike Chinese, in Vietnamese, determiners and modifiers follow nouns, and this is also the case for kinship terms. For 3rd person reference with Vietnamese kin-derived terms, it is common to add *áy* (primarily in northern Vietnamese), *đó* (primarily in southern Vietnamese), and sometimes *ta*. While the first two lexemes can be used with any nouns, *ta* to mark 3rd person (not to be confused with *ta* or *chúng ta* ‘we (exclusive)’ in which *ta* marks 1st person) occurs only with kinship terms, such as *anh ta*, *cô ta*, *chị ta*, *ông ta*, *bà ta*, and others, which, like *chúng*, appear listed in dictionaries, thereby providing inferential evidence for their status as lexicalized compounds rather than syntactic constructions. This in contrast with *áy* or *đó*, neither of which are listed in dictionaries to make kinship terms, highlighting their status as free morphemes. Thus, the use of *áy* and *đó* after any class of nouns is unexceptional, while the specialized use of *ta* for distal reference only with certain terms is notable and again highlights the special status of kin-derived pronouns.

- (2) *ông* *áy*
 grandfather/older sir that
 ‘he (grandfather/older sir)’

Further evidence of the specialized status of kin-derived pronouns is the use of tones to mark 3rd person on pronominal kinship terms in southern Vietnamese. In Southern Vietnamese, instead of deictic markers, such words are marked by the dipping-rising *hỏi* tone (Henderson 1961). Thompson (1985:149) lists several such terms, such as *cô* ‘miss’ → *cỏi* ‘that miss’, *chị* ‘female (equal)’ → *chỉ* ‘that female (equal)’, *ông* ‘gentleman’ → *ỏing* ‘that gentleman’, among others. Locative and temporal terms are also marked in this way (e.g., *bên* ‘side’ → *bỏin* ‘that side,’ *hôm* ‘day’ → *hỏim* ‘that day’, etc.). However, a few of those in the data are not used outside family situations (e.g., *mẹ* ‘mother’ → *mỏi* ‘that mother’), but overall, this sort of morphological marking does largely occur on grammaticalized lexemes.

c. Names

Beyond pronouns and pronominal kinship terms, personal names also play a significant role in Vietnamese terms of address and reference as they too can have floating 1st/2nd/3rd person reference. In both Chinese and Vietnamese, names may be used with titles or alone. What distinguishes Chinese and Vietnamese in this area is that, while names in modern Chinese are generally used only with 3rd person reference or as 2nd person vocatives, names in Vietnamese can be used with a full range of pronominal 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person reference, as in (3). Use of names with 1st person reference by younger speakers with older speakers has been noted in pre-Modern Chinese (Kádár 2010).

- (3) *Châu* *biết*
 (given name) know
 ‘I/You/She (Chau) knows.’

Such usage is consistent with the fact that Vietnamese names are predominantly of Chinese origin. For example, common Chinese surnames are common as well in Vietnam (see Table 6). Even the most common Vietnamese surname *Nguyễn* is of Chinese origin, 阮 ruǎn. All of the surnames in the title are SV readings, except the Vietnamese surname *Lý*. That name has a *qusheng* tone for a *shangsheng* word, with an expected non-existent SV form of **lý*, suggesting this is an ESV form. This demonstrates historical depth of Chinese surnames in Vietnamese.

Table 6: Common Chinese Surnames also as Vietnamese surnames

Chinese	Vietnamese	Chinese	Vietnamese
Chén (陈)	<i>Trần</i>	Yáng (杨)	<i>Dương</i>
Huáng (黄)	<i>Huỳnh / Hoàng</i>	Zhào (赵)	<i>Triệu</i>
Wáng (王)	<i>Vương</i>	Wú (吴)	<i>Ngô</i>
Lǐ (李)	<i>Lý</i>	Zhōu (周)	<i>Châu</i>
Zhāng (张)	<i>Trương</i>		

Moreover, Vietnamese naming practices follow Chinese customs, including word order, gender, and other details. The order of elements of Vietnamese names follows Chinese word order, namely, family, middle, and given names, as in (4). The sample name in (4) can be found in both Vietnamese and Chinese communities, with the use of the middle name *mỹ*, Chinese 美 měi ‘beautiful,’ commonly used in names of females.

- (4) *Trần* *Mỹ* *Châu*
 陳 (chén) 美 (měi) 珠 (zhū)
 (family) (middle) (given)

There are, however, several notable differences in the distribution of names in noun phrases. In Vietnamese, given names follow titles, unlike in Chinese, in which surnames precede titles, as in (5a) and (5b). Thus, both the choice of the name (i.e., given name versus surname) and the word order (i.e., preceding or following titles) differ. Such titles also include professional titles, such as *thầy* ‘teacher,’ *bác sĩ* ‘doctor,’ and so on.

(5a)	<i>cô</i>	<i>châu</i>	(5b)	<i>chén</i>	<i>xiǎo jiě</i> (陳小姐)
	miss	(given name)		(family name)	miss
	‘Miss Chau’ (Vietnamese)			‘Miss Chen’ (Chinese)	

Thus, Vietnamese names are largely Chinese in origin, and the use of names with 1st and 2nd person reference of names in Vietnamese does match an earlier stage of Chinese. However, the structure of noun phrases with names and the types of names in them (i.e., surname versus given name) show substantially different patterns. Thus, Chinese names were borrowed possibly with some pragmatic parameters, but they appear to have been added to an indigenous syntactic template.

5. Summary and Open Questions

The result of language contact between the precursors of modern Chinese and Vietnamese has been profound, and many of the original semantic and pragmatic properties of lexical items in the domains of kinship terms and names have been preserved. However, they have undergone grammaticalization that is quite distinct from that in Chinese. Below is a summary.

- Vietnamese has borrowed over a dozen core kinship terms from Chinese from multiple periods of Chinese historical phonology. They have kept many of their original semantic features but have also developed anaphoric functions not seen in Chinese, with a distinction between kinship terms within families versus those used in society more generally.
- Chinese has likely contributed to the sociopragmatics of Vietnamese in pronoun reference with titles, names, kinship terms. However, understanding how the Southeast Asian linguistic area has also contributed to Vietnamese will require further investigation.
- While Vietnamese has retained core native pronouns, pluralization in that system does involve Chinese etyma, but in innovative ways not seen in Chinese. The quantification of kinship nouns without intervening classifiers suggests influence of Chinese, but in a period prior to the stabilization of the classifier system in Chinese.
- Definiteness of these terms is marked in post-nominal position (as in most Southeast Asian languages) without any apparent lexical or structural impact of Chinese.

- Names and the system of personal names in Vietnamese have been heavily impacted by Chinese, though with a number of structural differences that, again, appear to involve patterns of noun phrases seen in Southeast Asian.

Based on this data, further questions can be considered: What is the overall structural impact on the original Vietic systems of kinship and pronouns? How can language contact between Vietnamese and Chinese be considered with respect to other Southeast Asian languages, notably when they share certain sociopragmatic features? We leave these questions to future studies.

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