

Urbanization and Language Change in Vietnam: Evidence from a Rural Community in Hanoi

Trinh Cam Lan

Vietnam National University, Vietnam

Asian Linguistic Anthropology
2020, Vol. 1(3) 25-34
(c) JALA 2020
Article reuse guidelines
Jala.pub/permissions
DOI: 10.47298/jala.v1-i3-a4
Jala.pub



Abstract

Language change and contact in Vietnam has recently intensified among some demographic groups. As such, certain sociolinguistic patterns help to describe these changes in language and society. This study is aimed at observing and measuring dialect change in Vietnam influenced by urbanization, with evidence from a rural community in Hanoi, a speech community in Xuan Canh commune, Dong Anh district. The study investigates the ways in which dialect change in this region has developed according to specific social and cultural factors.

The Xuan Canh speech community evidences a narrowing usage of local variants. For its method, the study employs fieldwork, and subsequent quantitative methods to aid in the analysis. The data set includes 34 informants, randomly selected, which were categorized into certain social variables. The study also released 34 questionnaires, 11 recorded files of natural speech, from which emerged two sets of 34 recorded files of word lists and a text.

The results indicate a gradual reduction in the frequency of use of local variants, a decrease in the number of lexical forms with rural characteristics, and an increase in certain types of urban variants. This trend can be seen by observing changing social variables sensitive to urbanization, such as youths, officials, students, and hence people who have out-community communication scope. Here, the quantitative correlations prove statistically significant.

The state of dialect change in this community thus signifies a phenomenon common to Vietnamese

rural communities under the effect of the urbanization; that is, a tendency following language urbanization in Vietnam.

Keywords: *Tibeto-Burman, Himalayan linguistics, time, temporality, borrowing*

Introduction

Regarding social change, urbanization is a complex, multi-faceted process. The impact of urbanization on culture and language is clear. Language contact and consequently the rate and amount of language change in Vietnam is increasing due to recent demographic fluctuations. Certain social language models have well supported the description of these changes in language and society. The goal of the study is to observe and measure dialectic variation due to the impact of urbanization, with evidence from a rural community in Hanoi, Xuan Canh commune, Dong Anh district. This study investigates ways in which dialects are changing in this area, based on specific social and cultural factors.

Urbanization in rural areas in Vietnam in general and Hanoi in particular, since the late 20th and early 21st centuries has been intense, leading to many changes in Vietnamese. Through language change in the studied community, this article will attempt to respond to the questions of how and to what extent urbanization influences Vietnamese in the periphery of the capital.

Literature Review

Increasingly, linguists are becoming aware that the relationship between social and language processes is extremely complex (Miller 2007). It becomes even more complicated when those processes take place during the period of urbanization. The same social phenomenon, such as migration, can cause many different types of language change predicated on the historical and social issues of that migration (Werner 1970; Trudgill 1986; Amara 2005; Ann-Marie 2005; Miller 2007). That suggests that language change is predicated significantly on the social-historical environment where the change takes place. Migration and urbanization have encouraged linguists to face sizable problems of dialect and language contact (Kerswill 2003; Miller 2007). Studies show that both forms of language maintenance and language change are influenced by political, social and cultural factors related to urban development (Soylemez 2004).

The study of language change under the impact of urbanization has had a long history. Since the 1970s, sociolinguists have been well aware of the complex three-hand relationship, that is, urbanization, migration and language change. One such study – *The decline of German dialects* – mentioned the issue of dialect contact and of urbanized rural dialects (Werner 1970). At that time, it was discovered that the language change went in the direction of the loss of dialect features, instead of the more common features that people called ‘language urbanization.’

In North Africa, the first issue that sociolinguistic research focuses on is the changes in linguistic structure, especially among rural dialects when they come into contact (Amara 2005; Miller 2007). If internal change in linguistic systems is usually slow (e.g. hundreds or sometimes thousands of years), change due to external causes such as social, political and/or cultural factors will often be faster and more powerful. And, in the process of urbanization, language processes also operate and change more dynamically. Because languages and dialects are then in the situation of contact, they are in contact, and in those ways, language change is an inevitable result. The relationship between urbanization and language change in this case is an interactive, mutually changing relationship. Dialects cannot reveal all the changing tendencies without putting them in situations of contact (Miller 2007). When rural dialects are in contact with urban dialects, language change may occur in both directions, but rural dialects are often under pressure of stronger change. It is an expression of communicative accommodation, and this depends on many factors, in which the social network structure of the speakers plays the most important role (Amara 2005; Ann-Marie 2005; Miller 2007; Trinh 2007, 2010). Language change in urbanization makes the traditional dialect difference between rural and urban areas balanced. The inevitable tendency of language change is dialect leveling, and the main change involves rural dialects with the fading of marked features (Werner 1970; Trudgill 1986; Kerswill 2003; So Yylemez 2004; Ann-Marie 2005; Trinh 2007). Consequently, urban features, especially standard forms, appear more and more in the speech of young rural people and then spread throughout the community (Thomas 1997; Kerswill 2003; Tillery and Bailey 2003; Durian 2006).

About the Studied Region and the Linguistic Variables

a. Xuan Canh commune is in Dong Anh district, which is separated from Hanoi by two rivers – the Red River and Duong River, but still adjacent to Hanoi. Located in the confluence of the Red River and Duong River, the commune has many mudflats. Across the Red River is the inner city. Because of the separation from Hanoi by the Red River, traditionally, the Xuan Canh people mainly contacted the neighboring communes, but they did not have much contact with the inner city. The main occupation of the population is small-scale agricultural production and services. In the last years of the 20th and early 21st centuries, the rural appearance of Xuan Canh has been significantly updated, and the invested infrastructure has made the commune a new rural appearance. Compared to many other communes in the district, Xuan Canh does not have any newly developed industrial and urban areas. As a result, the residential area has few job opportunities and a smaller, less concentrated population. The population from other places to work and live is negligible. However, the commune has a small town called Dau Street. It used to be a market of the commune, but because of the increasingly busy trade, it became a street. This area represents development and urbanization to the local people, and it is the gateway to trade with outside regions.

b. The linguistic variables investigated in the locality are two consonants /l/ and /n/ and two vowels /ɔ/ and /ɛ/. These are units whose local variants are commonly used and strongly marked, both in terms of

the region and society.

Consonants /n/ and /l/

Like many rural communities in Hanoi and northern Vietnam, in this community, the phenomenon of confusion between /l/ and /n/ is quite common (e.g. standard *lâu* ‘long time’ pronounced as [nyw] and standard *nâu* ‘brown’ pronounced as [lyw]). In our notation, variant 0 is a mainstream pronunciation, while variant 1 is a local variant. Thus, [n]-0 is pronounced as [n] (the standard pronunciation) and [n]-1 is pronounced as [l] (the local variant). As for /l/, [l]-0 is pronounced as [l], while [l]-1 is pronounced as [n]. These local variants are not considered by many Vietnamese, especially those in urban areas, to be phonetically acceptable, and those with this phonetic variation are sometimes discriminated against by the mainstream Vietnamese-speaking community.

Vowels /ɔ/ and /ɛ/

In the Xuan Canh community, the two vowels /ɔ/ and /ɛ/ have two variants, both the standard and local types.

(1) Variants [ɔ]-0, [ɛ]-0: These are commonly pronounced as /ɔ/ and /ɛ/.

(2) Variants [ɔ]-1, [ɛ]-1: These are pronounced with an unstable timbre, from [u] to [ɔ] or from [u] to [ɔ] and then [ʌ] (with /ɔ/), or from [i] to [ɛ] (with /ɛ/), in other words, ranging from a narrow vowel to an open vowel. The range from narrow vowels to open vowels resembles diphthongs. However, in this combination, [ɔ] and [ɛ] are still the main vowels, [u] and [i] are only gliding vowels, which have an auxiliary role and can be denoted by [uɔ] / [uɔʌ] and [iɛ]. These are typical local variants, appearing regularly on all syllables with /ɔ/ and /ɛ/ as main vowels. It is possible to locate local variants of these two vowels as follows:

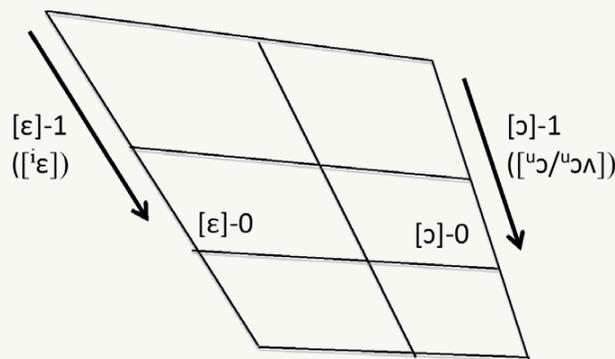


Figure 1: The change of /ɔ/ and /ɛ/ on vowel trapezoid

Materials and Methods

Materials

The study was carried out mainly on recorded data of 34 participants in 3 styles of speech: formal, careful and informal. Data in the formal style was collected through a word list or minimal pair of words, data in the careful style was collected through paragraphs (or text), and data in the informal style was collected through natural speech. In addition to recorded data, we also distributed 34 questionnaires to 34 participants for additional data to help find quantitative correlation models between linguistic change and socio-cultural factors influenced by urbanization.

Features		Frequency	Ratio %
<u>Age</u>	< 30	8	23.5
	30 - 50	15	44.1
	> 50	11	32.4
	Total	34	100.0
<u>Education</u>	School	26	76.5
	Colleges, University	8	23.5
	Total	34	100.0
<u>Occupation</u>	Farmer Trader	4	11.8
	Pupil, Student Officials	13	38.2
	Total	6	17.6
		11	32.6
	34	100.0	
<u>Communicative scope</u>	Open	14	41.2
	Close	20	58.8
	Total	34	100.0

Table 1: The social features of the sample

Method

After the data was gathered, phonetic features of variants were analyzed and described. The investigated material was then processed by quantitative analysis on SPSS statistical software using the Chi-square test.

Results and Discussion

The trend of significant language change reflected by the data is indication of dialect leveling. This is a common language process in modern times, reflecting a fast and strong social change in the era of urbanization in many countries. Dialect leveling is the reduction or elimination of marked variants which are uncommon or minority forms (Trudgill 1986). In this sense, dialect leveling can be seen as a result of convergence towards common usage, usually of standardized language (Trudgill 1986; Kerswill 2003).

The data which recorded the first and the most visible manifestation of the dialect leveling phenomenon was the reduction in the frequency of using local variants. In terms of style, the models of change of local variants is also proportional to attention to speech.

Variables	Variants (expressions)	Word list, text (%)	Natural speech (%)
/n/	[n] – 0 (n)	69.5	13.8
	[n] – 1 (l)	30.5	86.2
	Total	100.0	100.0
/l/	[l] – 0 (l)	100.0	86.0
	[l] – 1 (n)	0.0	14.0
	Total	100.0	100.0
/ɔ/	[ɔ] – 0 (ɔ)	44.5	7.4
	[ɔ] – 1 (ʰɔ/ʰɔʌ)	55.4	92.6
	Total	100.0	100.0
/ɛ/	[ɛ] – 0 (ɛ)	76.2	6.8
	[ɛ] – 1 (iɛ)	23.8	93.2
	Total	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Percentage using variants in styles1

In natural conversation, the rates of usage of local variants is very high. /n/, /ɔ/ and /ɛ/ have frequencies of 86.2%, 92.6% and 93.2% respectively. As for /l/, the ratio of occurrence of local variant [l]-1 is much lower - 14.0%. Thus, the confusion between /l/ and /n/ appears mainly in one direction. This is also the general situation of many rural areas in the North (Nguyen 2000; Vu 2004). In terms

of style, in natural speech, local variants are markedly reduced. The average rate of usage of local variants in careful styles is only 27.5%, while the rest are common variants that are prevalent in urban areas.

In terms of regional usage, urban variants tend to be used in cities, which have an urban lifestyle and a higher level of socio-economic development than purely agricultural areas. Socially, urban variants tend to spread noticeably in social groups representing high levels of intellectual development such as officials, students, groups of young people and groups of people with open access to other speech communities. This situation can be demonstrated through the following data.

Social features				% variants	Tổng số
	variant 0	variant 1		Cả hai loại	
<u>Age</u>	<30	55.0	12.5	32.5	100.0
	30-50	37.3	21.3	41.4	100.0
	>50	41.8	25.5	32.7	100.0
	0.036 < p³ < 0.423				
<u>Education</u>	School	30.8	7.5	24.6	100.0
	Colleges, University	82.5	7.5	10.0	100.0
	0.000 < p < 0.042				
<u>Occupation</u>	Farmer	7.5	32.5	60.0	100.0
	Trader	20.0	32.3	47.7	100.0
	Pupil, student	56.7	13.3	30.0	100.0
	Officials	72.8	9.1	18.1	100.0
	0.006 < p < 0.072				
<u>Communicative scope</u>	Open	60.4	14.6	25.0	100.0
	Close	32.5	27.4	40.1	100.0
	0.007 < p < 0.049				

Table 3: Variants with social characteristics of speakers²

The collected data shows the tendency to leave local variants in several social groups such as officials, students, young people and those who have many opportunities to communicate with communities outside their locality. Occupational characteristics, age and psychological characteristics, and opportunities to contact with urban communities make these groups sensitive to urbanization and

actively participate in local language change processes. Quantitative analysis models have found and shared significant correlations between these social groups and prestigious language variants in many communities due to migration and urbanization, not only in Vietnam (Nguyen 2000; Trinh 2007; Trinh 2010; Trinh and Dang 2012) but also in many communities around the world (Werner 1970; Wolfram and Fasold 1974; Trudgill 1986; Ann-Marie 2005 ...).

The second expression of dialect leveling is innovation in vocabulary by reducing the number of words with rural characteristics, appearing or increasing the number of words with urban characteristics, and the phenomenon of code-switching with English.

First, the usage of some rural-specific language words tends to decrease. In the past, these words were popularly used by peasantry and young children, but are now rare. Users may even encounter discrimination from the community. This creates a trend in which rural words are gradually replaced with urban ones. This trend occurs mainly in the following lexical categories.

- (1) Some address forms (self-address: I (impolite), your father, your grandfather, your grandgrandfather; referential terms: you (impolite), friend's name + his/her father's/mother's name...);
- (2) Some taboo words (shit, lick, fuck, patriarch, a woman's or man's genitals in folk sayings...);
- (3) Some ways of enclave popularized in the peasantry (connecting elements in sentences): as if, that is... in such examples as "I went to see it (as if) in 6 stores, but no where... "; "Today, grandfather has been hospitalized (that is) 17 days already!".

Groups (1) and (2) are most used among middle-aged men (usually in times of drunkenness or anger), some low-quality students or jobless young people. Group (3) tends to in some elderly people or female farmers. The remaining groups mostly use urban expressions.

Secondly, in natural speech, some types of linguistic lexical forms appear to be considered a characteristic of modern and integrated urban. This innovation focuses primarily on young people, for example: some address forms with friends showed group identity (e.g. calling friends by words for old men/women– addressing oneself as “I”, calling friends by the words for husbands/ wives- self-address by words for wives/husbands even with members of the same sex, etc.). Some teen idioms have appeared recently in urban areas due to the use of metaphony, harmonics in Vietnamese. These form, which are considered stylish by teenagers, have phonetic harmony but are generally meaningless, for example, [can5 ɲu1 kən1 zan5] (bored like cockroaches) and [buon2 ɲu1 kən1 cuon2 cuon2] (sad like dragonflies), [ak5 ɲu1 kən1 te1 zak5] (evil like rhinos).

Thirdly, code-switching with English in Vietnamese utterances of young people also appears to give rural speech urban characteristics.

- Mix English words: hello, bye, OK, thank you, hotboy, hotgirl, happy etc.;
- Pidginized forms: [hət5 ɣən1] (hotgirl), [he2 lo5] (hello), [he1 no1] (hello), [ɣut5 ap5 tɾ1 lun1] (good afternoon) etc.

The two phenomena above, however, may emerge from an increase in the number of people who can

use English in the community, where otherwise, the emanate from the psychology of interest in new things, such as style and wanting to act according to the trend of urban youth.

Conclusion

Language change in Hanoi rural communities in the process of urbanization has been experiencing rapid dialect leveling with a strong decrease in the use of local variants. In addition, the innovation in vocabulary, expressed in the disappearance of some rural characterized lexical forms and the increase in the use of some urban words, are also recorded. These changes appear first and foremost in urbanization-sensitive social groups such as officials, students, and groups with frequent language contact with other speech communities. They are also the social groups leading in linguistic processes (dialect leveling) and social processes (urbanization) of the region. Based on the expressions described above, we can see the areas with local dialectal diversity are beginning to be reduced due to the replacement of rural variants with urban variants. It can be said that the dialect change in this community is evidence of the relationship between urbanization and language change in Vietnam.

References

- Amara, M. (2005) Language, migration and urbanization: the case of Bethlehem. *Linguistics* 43, 5, 883-902.
- Ann-Marie, I. (2005) Town and Country: when Dialect meets standard in urban environment: the case of Finland Swedish. *Linguistics*, 43, 5, 1049-1071.
- Durian, D. (2006) Getting [S]tronger every day? More on urbanization and the socio- geographic diffusion of (str) in Columbus. *NWAV* 35, Columbus, OH.
- Hoang, T. C. (2004) Vietnamese dialectology. Hanoi National University Publishing House.
- Kerswill, P. (2003) Dialect levelling and geographical diffusion in British English. In *Social dialectology* (In honour of Peter Trudgill), edited by David Britain; Jenny Cheshire, 223-243. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Miller, C. (2007) Arabic Urban Vernaculars: Development and Change. In *Arabic in the City: Issues in Dialect contact and language variation*, edited by Miller et al, 1-30. Routledge.
- Nguyen, T. T. B. (2000) [n] or [l] in a Vietnamese village: An observation from a sociolinguistic perspective. In *Speech, gender and social groups from Vietnamese practice*, edited by Luong, V.H., 212-229. Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi.
- Soylemez, U. (2004) Urbanization and language shift in Turkey: the change processes at work in the transition from rural to urban settings. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. 165, 93-119.
- Thomas, E. R. (1997) A rural/metropolitan split in the speech of Texas Anglos. In *Language Variation and Change*, 9, 3, 309-332. October.
- Tillery, J. and Bailey, G. (2003) Urbanization and the evolution of Southern American English. In *English in the Southern United States*, edited by Steven J. Nagle and Sara L. Sanders, 159-172. Cambridge UP.
- Trinh, C.L. (2007) The language change of communities moving to the capital city (Case study on Nghe Tinh community in Hanoi). Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi.

- Trinh, C.L. (2010) The language change of Northern dialect community to Ho Chi Minh City after 1975 (On the way of using the sentence ending modal particles). Special scientific and technological research topic at Hanoi National University.
- Trinh, C. L. and Dang, T.L.A. (2012) Marked language variants and their use in Vietnamese dialects today. *Linguistics*, 1, 1-9.
- Trudgill, P. (1974) *Sociolinguistics - An introduction to language and Society*. New Edition. Penguin Books. England.
- Trudgill, P. (1986) Social identity and linguistic sex differentiation. In *Dialect and language variation*, edited by Michael Linn, 395-401. Academic Press-Inc-London.

Endnotes

1. Usually, variationists divide language style into three categories: formal style, careful style and informal style. Data for the formal style are collected by asking participants to read a word list or minimal pairs of words. Data for the careful style are collected by asking participants to read a paragraph. Data for the informal style are collected in natural speech.
- 2t. the average value of all 4 variables. 3P is a statistically significant difference in which the statistical difference is at 95%, i.e. $p = 0.05$. All values of $p > 0.05$ are considered not to reach statistically significant differences.