

INTRODUCTION FROM THE VOLUME EDITORS

The current issue is the result of a workshop held at the Harvard Yenching Institute in April of 2021, entitled *Vietnamese Linguistics, Typology and Language Universals*, and which featured nineteen linguists working on diverse aspects of the Vietnamese language, ranging from semantics to historical phonology. Our purpose in gathering was to take stock of the great leaps in Vietnamese linguistic research that have occurred over the past few decades, to bring together cutting-edge research from each subdiscipline, and to begin a new collaborative dialogue on Vietnamese linguistics, typology, and language universals. Most of all, it was our belief that the time had come to reconsider Vietnamese linguistics as a unified field of inquiry. As a result, a new academic organization was founded: the *International Society of Vietnamese Linguistics*.

In the past twenty years, research into the Vietnamese language has advanced exponentially, in tandem with developments in our understanding of syntax, semantics, phonetics, and phonology—both on the synchronic and diachronic levels. Specific work on the Vietnamese language now informs and even leads broader linguistic inquiry in a number of unprecedented ways. These new developments invite a concentration of state-the-field research into a single volume, one that will serve not only to summarize current issues in each subdiscipline of Vietnamese linguistics, but also to initiate a longer, more collaborative conversation about the Vietnamese language.

Our goals in this special issue are thus twofold: first, we seek to provide a snapshot of current research into Vietnamese syntax, semantics, phonology, and phonetics, from both the historical and synchronic points of view, that may serve as a resource for linguists interested in exploring our current understanding of the Vietnamese language. Second, we hope that this issue will also serve as an invitation to all linguists working on the Vietnamese language or related languages to contribute to a broader, more cosmopolitan discussion—one in which discoveries of one subdiscipline may serve to inform or enlighten another.

The overarching theme of the research contained within this special volume was to apply a comparative approach to the study of Vietnamese. In each of the subdisciplinary investigations here, the Vietnamese language was compared with other languages around the world, falling into three major categories: 1) languages to which it is genealogically related (i.e. Vietic, Viet-Muong, Austroasiatic, etc.); 2) languages that are genealogically unrelated but areally and/or typologically related (i.e. those languages spoken in the sprachbund linguistic region of East/Southeast Asia); and 3) languages that are neither genealogically nor areally and/or typologically related (i.e. Indo-European languages). This comparative approach highlights not only what is particular about the Vietnamese language, but also how universal principles are specifically instantiated in the Vietnamese language, as well as its direct and non-analogous relationships with other languages with which it is in contact.

The ten articles in this volume may be divided up into the following subdisciplines: Historical Linguistics, Phonetics & Phonology, Morphology & Syntax, and Semantics & Pragmatics. Shimizu Masaaki's work focuses on the intersection of philology and historical linguistics and focuses on the use of Chữ Nôm materials from the early modern and modern period to reconstruct phonological changes in the southern dialects of Vietnamese. Mark Alves presents a study of basic household Vietnamese etyma, informed by archaeohistorical data, in order to reconstruct details of prehistoric and quasi-historic Red River Vietic life on the eve of full Sinitic colonization. John Phan and Hilario de Sousa compare phonological characteristics of Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary with other contemporary southwestern Chinese languages to uncover new evidence suggesting the existence of a Southwestern Middle Chinese Dialect that was once native to the region of the Red River Plain, and spoken there up until the first few centuries of the second millennium. James Kirby and Mark Alves present a study on the statistical regularities and recognizability of Sino-Vietnamese loanword phonology in modern Vietnamese, and they have made their research data and tools available to researchers for future queries. Phạm Thị Thu Hà and Marc Brunelle examine two corpora of Southern Vietnamese to demonstrate that Vietnamese indeed demonstrates intonation, but that it is variable and does not seem grammaticalized (in contrast with the intonation systems of Western European language). Nigel Duffield uses data from a wide variety of languages, including Vata, Irish and Vietnamese, to shed light on universal aspects of

the underlying position of arguments and of the “functional sequence” in the pre-verbal domain, properties which are typically obscured in English. Trần Phan and Wei-Tien Dylan Tsai investigate a particular type of non-canonical *what*-questions in Vietnamese (often dubbed surprise-denial/disapproval questions) that displays properties not attested in languages with apparent similar construals—in particular, Mandarin and Taiwan Southern Min. Trang Phan and Michal Starke provide a comprehensive and systematic view of Vietnamese yes-no question particles and show how this description leads us to a deeper understanding of Vietnamese clause structure in general. Y.-L. Irene Liao, Trần Phan, and T.-H. Jonah Lin analyze the syntactic structure of post-nominal modifiers in Vietnamese, based on the antisymmetry approach (Kayne 1994) to phrase structure. Finally, Tue Trinh discusses the fact that in Vietnamese, speakers and hearers can refer to themselves by pronouns, proper names, or relational nouns, which differentiates Vietnamese from English and many other languages.

Though from diverse subdisciplines of linguistic inquiry, our contributors from North America, Europe and Asia all represent the cutting-edge of linguistic research on Vietnamese. By bringing their work together, we hope to invite truly thought-provoking discussion of what the study of Vietnamese can reveal about language universals and linguistic variations from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives. Finally, we hope that the body of linguistic research represented here will serve as an invitation to all scholars working on Vietnam, to learn about the Vietnamese language, its structure and its history, and to collaborate with linguists on larger questions that will deepen our understanding of Vietnamese history, culture, and society.

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John Phan is currently an Assistant Professor of Vietnamese Humanities in the Department of East Asian Languages & Cultures at Columbia University, as well as faculty member of the Columbia Linguistics Program. Phan obtained his Ph.D. from Cornell University in 2013, focusing on the phonological history of Vietnamese under Sinitic influence. From 2013-2014, he was a post-doctoral fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), based at the National Institute for Japanese Language & Linguistics (NINJAL), in Tokyo. From 2014-2017, he taught in the Department of Asian Languages & Cultures at Rutgers University, before joining the faculty at Columbia. Phan's research focuses both on the historical phonology of the Sinitic and Vietic languages, as well as on the literary and intellectual history of premodern Vietnam. His forthcoming book, to be published by Harvard Asia Center, is tentatively titled *Lost Tongues of the Red River: Annamese Middle Chinese and the Origins of the Vietnamese Language*.

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Mark Alves has been a professor at Montgomery College in the Department of ELAP, Linguistics, and Communication Studies since 2004. He received his Ph.D. at the University of Hawaii in 2000 in linguistics (Southeast Asian linguistics, Chinese linguistics, and Language Acquisition), with a dissertation of a description of the Pacoh language of central vietnam, later published as a book in 2006. He has been the Editor-in-Chief of JSEALS since 2015, and he has periodically served as editor of SEALS conferences proceedings. He has published widely on historical and comparative linguistics of Southeast Asia with a focus on Vietnamese and the Austroasiatic language family. His dozens of publications have explored regional language contact in greater Southeast Asia; typological linguistics, especially morphology in Austroasiatic; loanwords, especially Sino-Vietnamese and regional Chinese loanwords; ethnohistorical linguistics, including matters of metallurgy and metal implements, household objects and activities, domesticated birds, color terms, kinship terms, grammatical words, among other categories. His research agenda has increasingly incorporated an interdisciplinary approach involving linguistic, historical/textual, archaeological, and ethnographic data.

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