

Highland Hill Tribe Language System A Pilot Survey of Language Survive Circumstance

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Abstract: Highland is a typical area of Vietnam. It contains lots of unique things for people to study and discover. Among them are culture and language, these are two reciprocal elements to create a community that is called Hill tribe. Hill tribe has originally come to Highland for long time ago and they set up their life based on their root culture until now. When studying about Hill tribe, we realize that their culture is very interesting and worth tracing. Therefore, how to conserve and maintain Hill tribe's culture is what we need to take into consideration as soon as possible.

Keywords: Cultural conceptualisations; Cultural linguistics; Visual artifacts; Metacultural competence.

1. Introduction

Every country in the world has their own culture and tradition, throughout the change of time and events, they always try to maintain their culture as well as their language. Language is one among those we call tradition. Language is one of an effective way which can sign their community and their special characteristic when distinguishing with others. We still survive with our people if we lose our territory or even political system. However, if we lose our mother tongue, and then our community will completely disappear. We have a lot of language type like first language, second language and even ethnic language. In modern age with modern technology and development all over the world, we nearly lose our root language and are integrated by English and other international languages. Viet Nam is a country of 54 groups of ethnic minorities so we can have a lot of ethnic languages when we go to some places in Viet Nam like highlands or Mekong delta and even the North. Although they can speak Vietnamese when having conversations with Vietnamese but at home, they still speak their mother tongue to maintain it. Among them are biggest community of highland people which are called hill tribe. This paper attempts to discover about highland people; their language, culture and how they maintain and promote their languages. Therefore, it will be discovered about the policy to maintain and promote their language during modern society with the assimilation of international and modern language like English or other language.

2. Literature Review

Viet Nam is a country of 54 ethnic groups. Also, Viet Nam has three parts in geographical, they are North, Centrals and South. Highland is a Northwest part that belongs to the South and partially the Central with the combination of 4 main plateaus: Daklak, Pleiku, Kontum and Lam Vien with very changeable weather because it is very hot with terrible sun shining at day and cold with unpleasant way at night in the elevation of 500 – 900 meters. They are bounded by Lao and Cambodia on the left, The Central on the right even above and the South below. This is also a place of many ethnic groups which are called Hill tribes that means people who live on the highland as communities. Among them are some biggest hill tribes with large communities living together in some villages which are nearby city or even in the forest. They are Rahde, M'ngong, Jarai, Banah. The Rahde group live close to Buon Ma Thuot city, a central city of the whole highland where we can have an ethnical tour with some of its villages and tourist places to see how their life is moving and motioning. The M'ngong live about 45 km from Buon Ma Thuot city with their village and community, especially next to the "Lak" lake of Lak town. The Jarai live in Pleiku city which is 190 km from Buon Me Thuot city. They are the most ancient hill tribes who live here from long time ago. Their name was named for the province "Gia Rai". The Banah live close to KonTum province, this is the North point province of the Highland. The Banah is one of the real and still preserve the root languages and cultures among 4 hill tribe groups because they live near the forest and to be honest, Kontum is not developing province, and everything still remained old and natural. We know that everything will be changed and assimilated with the hand of human touching. It is very complicated to trace the Hill tribe origin because they had settled their life in Highland a long time ago, before the time of feudalism in Viet Nam. According to Gerald (1964), the Hill Tribe in highland originally came from some islands of Malay-sia and Indonesia which are called Java. They came through Cambodia and lived in Lao a long time ago for their purpose of better living. After a long time living there, they decided to come through the border to the Highland of Viet Nam to live because of some reasons: There are a lot of forest products that they can have better living there, one more reason is some of them married to Vietnamese so they come there to live

together. That's why we have a group of Hill Tribe call "M'Nong – Lao", a combination of M'Nong people and Lao people. Those people both live in Lao and Highland of Viet Nam now. It is logically believed that houses of Hill Tribe now they have a structure of the boat on their roof. That's a kind of commemorating their ancestry because they are original from Java islands, they travel and transport al-most by boat on the Sea. They always have their roof with curved shape of boat.

3. Methodology

The research design employ the methods of language description in order to describe types of ethnic minority language which are existed on Highland region.

Culture merely derives from geographical location, so what Hill tribe people have in their culture, their thinking about issue or problem depends mostly on where they live and whom they live with. The highlanders live most on the highland with the elevation of about 600 meters to 900 meters. Highland is hot in the afternoon and cold at night. They have forest, plateaus and various kinds of products. Therefore, it is a bit dangerous because of wild animals and due to the fact of various products, they will produce what they need and consume what they create. In brief, they have culture of highly quality in solidarity, very hard – working and honest. They live as community and stay in a village, due to many tribes live in a same forest so they have to live separately and try to protect their village with their solidarity. It creates community culture in Hill tribe. Due to strict weather, they are trained by tolerating weather and their background; they have to work a lot to earn money for their life. Also, they are honest because community rule are so strict, if they are found to steal something from somebody, they will be fined severely. There's a person called "headman" of a village who will be a judge in some prosecution and decide for punishment, moreover, he is a person who have interaction from outer village and handle affairs with local authority as well. Nevertheless, particularly in families of some groups like Ede, M'Nong, Bahnar, mother or women are leaders but not men that called "Matrilineal kinship system". They are mainly responsible for all family's affair like earning money and taking care of children. About their living, their village is often located near a river or a lake because they believe that water can give them life and revive their existence in this world. They also live in stilt houses due to avoid being attacked by wild animals. In their house, they set up a cage for "Montaigne pig" to live to make it easy for pigs to look for food from soil. When suitable time is coming, they are made to be food in some big ceremonies of a whole village. In their house, they always have fireplace since it will make their "home" warm in a "wild" weather of highland. For Ede group, they live in "Nha Dai" that is a long stilt house with three or four separate rooms for whole generation of their family. When their son or daughter get married, they will make it longer by building a new part connected to the house for their children to live with them. When they cannot make it longer, the couples will live next to them with a small stilt house and continuing when they have their children getting married. Especially for Bahnar group, they have a very big "Nha Rong" that is a community house where they have their all ceremony or even as a court for judging guilty. This house manifests their high focus on community culture. As Doanh (2007) stated, when hill tribes have such a big ceremony like "Bo-thy" funeral, they will make a big buffalo and lots of can wine to serve their whole village overnight. "Nha Rong" is also a house where they show their own achievement and exhibition of their community. Their achievement includes what they have after catching elephants or other products like Elephant tusk, Buffalo leather, a long chair called "K'ban" made by "Pomu", a kind of precious wood. About language, it has been found that "Mon-Khmer" and "Austronesian" are two main language system of Vietnam ethnic minority. "Mon-Khmer" was spoken by Bahnar, M'Nong and some other Hill tribe. It is a group of language system which is a combination of "Khmer", that is from Cambodia language and "Mon" that is from Burma language. Some of those groups they came to Vietnam a long time ago and settle down here to create such a language system. Here we can say that "Bahnar" and Cambodian they have a close relationship in language and society because they have same root. If we go to Cambodia, along our street we will see some houses made by wood with "stilt" style like houses of "Bahnar" people in Viet Nam highland. The second language system is "Austronesian", that is a kind of language group original from Java islands of ancient Indonesia and Malaysia. They immigrated here and create such a group and community in Viet Nam long time ago. This language is spoken by "Ede", "J'rai" and some other Hill tribe.

4. Results and discussion

To tell the truth, the current language and even culture of Hill tribes is really in danger now. Duc (n.d) stated that "Due to the differences in the standards of development of the nationalities, the social functions of the languages in Vietnam vary to a large extent. Aside from some languages now in development, some others are in danger of extinction". He was just partially correct because I have been to Highland plenty of times during my visit and I found that they have rapidly been changed from their real culture to modern culture for serving Tourists requirements. Particularly in Sapa, a mountainous town in the North, they had a very interesting culture and language point which is called "Love market", where Hill tribe people can come every Saturday to make

friends and look for girlfriends to go out with them and have a chat. Today, the way they do is different from the past. They just perform it unnaturally as a show for tourists to see and give them more money, and they even don't use their own language like they often used in the past but Vietnamese. We can see that culture and especially language of Hill tribe and Ethnic minority has increasingly assimilated by Vietnamese in modern society. Due to the fact that everything in our society nowadays has been developing rapidly, so what so called tradition is outdated a lot, they have to update their own with modern technology and information. Basically, what they all study has to be in Vietnamese. They have to use Vietnamese to acquire all information and then get them as their own. When they try to explain or impart it to their friends, there are some details or terms they have to use Vietnamese to express. That's also a reason why they have lost their language days by days. In addition, they increasingly lose their language by getting married with most of "Kinh" people and having a child. Their children have to go to school and learn Vietnamese and they seldom speak their mother tongue at home with their children. Thoughts of children are different from old age, they tend to obtain something new and modern but not traditional one so what they like to concern the most is how to be modern and sophisticated with their friends. That's the reason why they seldom care about keeping or maintaining their language or culture. What Duc (n.d) stated is partially correct especially for some prosperous groups like M'Nong, E'de, Cham (In the Central) and Kh'mer (Ancient Cambodian). They have their own community with big amount of population so they can have enough human resource to maintain their own culture and tradition. Furthermore, they have shown their chosen culture as unique culture to apply and approach to Vietnamese on some types of communication like TV, Radio.... For other groups, their culture and tradition or even language cannot be seen on TV or Radio because they have some old and rather haunted customs to make it popular. The last issue is their old custom restraint them a lot from integrating to Vietnamese and give us more information about their language and custom. They are afraid of being cheated by strangers who are not in same village with them.

5. Conclusion

For policies and efforts, Eric (2006) used to state "The increasing mobility of people, goods, and information has driven a powerful trend toward cultural uniformity and the extinction of local languages. But languages that have young people, business, and government on their side are alive and thriving". As a Vietnamese who also concern a lot in Ethnic issue, I wonder if it needs more bilingual schools for children of all Ethnic groups of Vietnam to go to study because they have to study and at least know how to read and write Vietnamese. Bilingual school can help them to recall what they have heard every day from their parents at home. They can both study Vietnamese and preserve their mother tongue. The obstacle is some mountainous province cannot have teachers of all Ethnic languages to teach pupils at local school. However, I personally think we can partially solve it due to the fact that we have a lot of language but we just have 7 basic language systems like "Mon-Khmer, Austronesian, Tay – Thai, Viet – Muong..." From this system, we can set up each type of language a group of teachers those who can speak those languages and fulfil at school. Next, trying to have more channels for Ethnic groups in Local Radio Station every day is as well, a good offer. Moreover, we can have a specific time on local channel with their language spoken so ethnic people can understand more about all issues of Viet Nam or even international issue expressed by their language. And the last thing we have to do is as Eric (2006) stated that we should bring it into business, which means make it more popular and gets profit from it. For example we can ask more authors to write books about Ethnic language and culture and publish it officially (approved by government) for 2 purposes. We can both get profit for Ethnic author and make it more popular to readers who are interested in this subject.

In conclusion, talking about Ethnic problem is complicated and there are lot of things to discuss. Their language and culture are needed to preserve in a strict and serious way. We are just people in our country and it needs the concern of a whole government and some relating chambers. We need more types of communication to fulfil the popularity of Hill tribe people and even to save their language. What we should do the most now is to make government recognize the influence and what benefit our country get from Ethnic groups with their culture and language, then they are going to do their best effort to save and develop everything related to Ethnic groups.

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