



General Picture Of The Culture And Language Of The Stiang People In Hon Quan District, Binh Phuoc Province, Viet Nam

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ABSTRACT

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country. Within the territory of the country, each ethnic minority community has its own characteristics of culture and language, which create the diversity of cultural identities and languages. This research gives an overview of the culture and language of the Stiang community in Hon Quan district, Binh Phuoc province, Vietnam and provides a foundation for further researches to contribute to the preservation and development of the language and culture of the Stiang people in general, of the Stiang community in Hon Quan district, Binh Phuoc province, Vietnam in particular in the current context.

Keywords: *ethnic minorities, Stiang language, Stiang culture*

1. Introduction

The Stiang are a group of people who moved from the north to the south of the Indochinese peninsula, along with large migrations in mainland Southeast Asia. The Stiang people have come and settled in the South Central Highlands, including Binh Phuoc province, since many centuries BC. The population of Stiang people in Vietnam is 100,752 people, are mainly living in Binh Phuoc province (over 81,708 people). Besides Binh Phuoc, the Stiang people reside in 2 provinces of Tay Ninh and Dong Nai. Hon Quan is a district in Binh Phuoc province, re-established on August 11, 2009 under Resolution No 35/NQ-CP of the Government. Hon Quan district has many ethnic groups living together, except for the Kinh people, the Stiang have the largest population among the ethnic minorities living here (18,849 people, accounting for about 19.01% of the district's population of the year 2015). In the process of adapting to the new land, the Stiang people have come into contact with and learned from neighboring ethnic groups in order to build for themselves a rather unique socio-cultural-economic appearance. The Stiang people are divided into two local groups: the highland Stiang (Bu Lo) and the lowland Stiang (Bu Deh). Most of the Stiang people living in Hon Quan are Stiang Bu Deh. This research introduces an overall picture of the culture and language of the Stiang people in Hon Quan district, serving as a foundation for further research to contribute to the conservation and development of the language and culture of the Stiang people in general, of the Stiang people in Hon Quan district in particular.

2. Some characteristics of the Stiang's culture

The characteristics of the socio-cultural and literary organization of the Stiang people have been being interested by researchers, approached from many different perspectives and levels such as the work: Social organization of the Stiang people, in the issue of people from ethnic groups in Song Be (Phan An, 1985), Ethnic social system of the Stiang people in Vietnam (from mid-19th century to 1975) (Phan An, 1992), Stiang ethnic society through custom (Ngo Van Ly, 1994), Scientific report: Cultural life of Stiang people in Binh Phuoc province (Tran Van Anh et al., 2010), Survey of Stiang folklore (Tu Thi Tho, 2013)... In this research, we focus on generalizing socio-cultural characteristics of the Stiang people in Hon Quan district, Binh Phuoc province.

The Stieng people living in Hon Quan particularly in Binh Phuoc in general always try to create a stable life. In the past, the Stieng people were very communal. They are industrious, hardworking, enduring, and tolerant in all economic activities such as shifting cultivation, hunting, blacksmithing, etc. The Stieng people who loved nature lived on nature, self-sufficient economy, hunting and gathering which were the main things. Together they searched, exploited new lands, then planted together, cared for and harvested together. Today, the Stieng people live by many different occupations such as farming industrial crops, making handicrafts, being small, medium and large traders, factory workers. In the past, the Stieng people lived mainly on upland fields, wet rice, today they switch to cultivating perennial industrial crops such as rubber, cashew, coffee, etc., which proves their ability to adapt to the constant changes of the land of residence.

The lifestyle and farming methods of the Stieng people have changed a lot in accordance with the continuous development of the locality, but they are always conscious of preserving the traditional values and traditional crafts of the Stieng people. Brocade weaving is a specific example. Brocade weaving is a profession imbued with the Stieng ethnic identity. From a young age, the Stieng girls have been taught by their grandmothers and mothers how to spin silk, weave cloth, knit loincloths, knit scarves, knit blankets, etc. Brocade products of the Stieng people have many similarities with other ethnic groups in the Central Highlands. Decorative patterns on the products are mainly in black, red, yellow and white colors. In addition, they also pay attention to the contours of the pattern around, creating the uniqueness and beauty of the fabric. In the past, textile materials were mainly from cotton picking in the fields, but now it is more flexible. To make a brocade product, the artisan has to perform many elaborate stages, requiring meticulousness and ingenuity. It can be said that brocade is a work of art, containing the traditional cultural values of the Stieng ethnic group and the relentless creativity of folk artisans.

The Stieng Bu Deh family in Hon Quan district follows the matrilineal system. Women hold an important position in family management. A woman has the right to marry and have children born with the mother's surname. In the past, the age of marriage of the Stieng people was about 15-17 years old, today the age is gradually raised due to the awareness of the value of marriage, as well as the expansion of knowledge about marriage and family law of the Stieng people. Normally, the Stieng people prefer to marry people of the same ethnic group and not equally accept of strangers, because they believe that disasters such as drought, crop failure, disease, etc. will happen if they marry people outside the ethnic group. However, due to their long-term coexistence on the same land, and the reciprocal contact with many ethnic groups, some Stieng families have different marriage compositions, such as families with Stieng wife - Kinh husband, Stieng husband - Kinh wife or Stieng wife - husband of other ethnic minorities in contrast to wife of other ethnic - husband of Stieng. Mixed marriage status between Stieng - Kinh or Stieng - other ethnic groups is not much. Currently, the Stieng people have the surnames Dieu, Thi and Dieu Thi mainly. Men have the first name Dieu. Women have the surname Thi or Dieu Thi.

According to village elder Dieu Thanh, Quarter 3, Tan Khai town, one thing to be proud of in the current life of his tribe is the community code of conduct. Each Stieng must behave politely in communication. Be polite to elders, grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters, to prestigious village elders and to the deceased. The fact that the field trips, through observing and participating in the voter meeting in Quarter 3, Tan Khai Town, which were attended by many Stieng people, we found that the Stieng people participating in this meeting were very polite, respecting the village elder Dieu Thanh.

In terms of cuisine, many traditional dishes are kept in the Stieng family, in festivals such as rice lam, soup, beef soup, salted meat, especially grilled meats with salt and chili are very popular. Thuc soup and lam rice are two of the most unique dishes of the Stieng people. According to Ms. Thi Ra, Quarter 3, Tan Khai Town, if you want to cook delicious jujube soup, it must be made from many types of vegetables, mainly forest vegetables such as banana buds, tweezers leaves, bunch buds of bags, bamboo shoots, etc. These vegetables are crumpled and put in a tube, adding a little salt, sometimes fish and meat. Lam rice is made from glutinous rice or plain rice, green beans or black beans. The rice is soaked for 3-4 hours and then put in the tube to cook. Delicious Lam rice has a combination of the taste of sticky rice, beans and the chalky smell of the tubers. In addition, the Stieng people have the custom of drinking Can wine on important days, festivals, and holidays.

The Stieng people have many festivals such as the Bau Bau festival, the buffalo stabbing festival, the new rice festival, the Gong festival, etc. Today, these festivals are not only attended by the Stieng people, but have become common festivals of the whole people in the region. This is an opportunity for people to interact and learn from each other, as well as an opportunity to remind children and grandchildren to keep their traditional festivals. Through our actual observations when directly participating in the rain prayer ceremony for the year of the Rat in the afternoon of February 9, 2020 at the community cultural house in Tan Khai town, the ceremony was organized neatly due to the influence of the COVID 19 pandemic. It is a testament to the high consciousness of the Stieng people in preserving their traditional festivals in particular and their national culture in general.

Stieng folklore has many genres and is quite abundant like Vietnamese folklore genres such as myths, epics, fairy tales, folk songs, etc. Myths reflect the Stieng's perception of the natural world, the universe, all things, and all species. The epic clearly reflects the cultural identity of the Stieng ethnic group. The epic of the Stieng re-enacts the traditional beliefs, customs and festivals of the ethnic group. Fairy tales of the Stieng people are

diverse in subtypes and themes. Folk songs describe the inner life of the Stieng people in a simple and pure language, including many topics, most notably the theme of couple's love.

3. Stieng's language

3.1. Features of Stieng

Stieng is of interest to researchers in many aspects. In terms of phonetics, an in-depth study on Stieng phonetics “The basis of Stieng's phonetics (compared with some languages in the Nam Bahnar group of Le Khac Cuong”, the author believes that there are two types of phonetic words used to create speech: monosyllable words and double-syllable words (Le Khac Cuong, 2000). In terms of grammar, Le Khac Cuong's research on Stieng nouns has clearly pointed out the characteristics of Stieng nouns in terms of semantics - syntax (Le Khac Cuong, 2011) In the article “Stieng Verb Phrases” (Phan Thanh Tam, 2018), Stieng verb phrases have in common with Vietnamese phrasal verbs in that they have sub-components before and in the middle part. In 2020, the author has published 3 works: “Adjectives in Stieng”, “Comparison of noun phrases in Stieng and Vietnamese” and the scientific research topic at the grassroots level: “Verb and verb phrase in Stieng” accepted in 2021. These three works have investigated more specifically about noun phrases and adjectives in Stieng. The thesis “Stieng sentences (in comparison with Vietnamese sentences)” by Phan Thanh Tam (2021) has identified, described and analyzed types of Stieng sentence in terms of syntax and semantics of each type of Stieng sentence such as: *simple sentence*, *compound sentence*, *complex sentence*, *declarative sentence*, *interrogative sentence*, *exclamation sentence*. At the same time, the author of the thesis compares Stieng sentence structure models with Vietnamese sentence structure models to clarify the similarities and differences between the two languages, etc. In general title, all of the above authors believe that Stieng language is a language belonging to the Austroasiatic family, Mon - Khmer genus, Nam Bahnar branch.

Previously, Stieng did not have a written script. From 1950 - 1960, researchers from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) of the United States began to survey the languages of ethnic minorities from the 17th latitude onward. This research program aims to compile language teaching books, tool books, and the Bibles in ethnic languages such as Ede, Cham, Mnong, Stieng, Ma, etc. After the process of living with the ethnic community, SIL researchers published works one after another such as David D. Thomas – Chrau, Ralph Haupers and Lorraine Haupers – Stieng, Kenneth D. Smith – Sedang, Richard L. Phillips – Hre, etc. (as cited in Le Khac Cuong, 2018). In 1975, the Vietnam country was unified, the US lost the war in the South, the SIL team officially stopped working. Therefore, the Latin alphabet that Ralph Haupers and Lorraine Haupers built for Stieng gradually became unfamiliar to the Stieng community. It seems that since then, the problem of Stieng writing has lacked the research investment of linguists. In 2003, Le Khac Cuong's research group published a research project titled: “Building a Stieng writing system and compiling a Vietnamese-Stieng dictionary and a Stieng-Vietnamese dictionary” by the Department of Science and Technology managed by Binh Duong province, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City chaired and presented the alphabet system to record consonants and vowels, the Stieng vocabulary system in contrastive comparison with Vietnamese. On June 30, 2017, the scientific conference: “Selection of the Stieng alphabet” was organized by the Department of Education and Training in collaboration with the Central Highlands University with the participation of many prestigious linguists. After the delegates discussed, exchanged and contributed ideas to come to a consensus on the Stieng alphabet plan proposed by the research team PUTRA PODAM, which consists of 33 letters, in which, vowel characters include 15 letters and consonant characters of 18 letters. In fact, through our surveys in Hon Quan district, specifically surveying 278 Stieng people, the vast majority of Stieng people do not know Stieng scripts (Doai Hoang Duc, 2020). Thus, the number of Stieng people in Hon Quan district who know Stieng scripts is small, especially the number of people who know it fluently is very small. Hopefully, the above researches, especially the above alphabet set, will soon be disseminated to the Stieng community in Hon Quan, in particular, in Binh Phuoc, the Stieng community currently living in Vietnam, in general. and apply it to the process of bilingual education for Stieng students. That contributes to the preservation of the ethnic language, writing and culture, because the language itself contains the ethnic cultural values.

The problem of zoning the dialect of Stieng is mentioned in works such as in the volume *Speak Stieng, Stieng Phrase Book, Stieng - Vietnamese - English* (1968) by two authors Ralph Haupers and Dieu Bi used to teach basic Stieng sentences. The two authors said that: “Stieng has two main dialects, namely, Bu Deh dialect (Binh Long Province) and Bu Lo dialect (Phuoc Long Province)” (According to Le Khac Cuong, 2015). According to Phan An, “The Stieng people in Song Be province can be divided into two local groups. This division has also been acknowledged by the Stieng themselves. These are the Stieng Bu Deh group, also known as the highland people, and the Stieng Bu Deh group, or the people.

3.2 Characteristics of language use of Stieng people in the current context

We survey by actual observations, in-depth interviews and questionnaires (all these questionnaires are processed on SPSS program). The research data includes 278 people, divided into four age groups: under 18 years old, from 19 to 30 years old, from 31 to 50 years old and from 51 years old; most of them are farmers, the

rest are workers, traders, pupils - students, teachers, working in hamlets - communes - districts - provinces, etc.

In communication, the Stieng people use pure Vietnamese, pure Stieng, alternately transcoding between Vietnamese and Stieng. In family communication, the Stieng people still use pure Vietnamese to communicate with each other. However, the rate of using pure Vietnamese by the Stieng people is relatively low and decreases with age. If communication with family members under 18 years old accounts for 10.07%, it is 6.12% with people aged 19 to 30 years old, with people between 31 and 50 years old 2.16% and from 51 years old age and older reduced to 1.08%. Communicating with neighbors of the same ethnicity, the rate of using pure Vietnamese of the Stieng people is low and gradually decreases with the increase of age from low to high. The rate of using pure Vietnamese of the Stieng people to communicate with their neighbors under the age of 18 accounts for the highest rate of 10.07% and the lowest rate of 2.52%. The scope of trade such as communication in the market, communication in the store, etc. Stieng people have the ability to recognize the ethnic composition of the target audience, so they use alternate and flexible language. Communicating with other ethnic groups, with Kinh people, the main language of communication is Vietnamese, and for people of the same ethnicity, Stieng people choose in two ways, either pure mother tongue or alternately Vietnamese (national language). For example, when communicating in markets, the rate of using Vietnamese when communicating with Kinh and other ethnic groups is high and almost absolute 98.56%. For the Stieng people, they give priority to using their native language 52.88%, but they still use pure Vietnamese, accounting for 12.23%.

The reality of language use of the Stieng community in Hon Quan district, Binh Phuoc province shows the fact that Stieng and Vietnamese are used flexibly in specific communication fields and contexts. Or in other words, the choice of language in communication of the Stieng people across different fields and communication contexts is completely different, due to the high division of linguistic function, Vietnamese, which is the national language, with the low division language, Stieng (Doai Hoang Duc, 2020). When communicating, the Stieng people take the initiative in choosing a language thanks to their good proficiency in Stieng and Vietnamese. For example, in the family, the Stieng people always have a sense of preserving their native language. Due to the advantage of a large population and relatively concentrated living, the Stieng language is well preserved, most of the Stieng people speak their mother tongue fluently. However, the situation of using language to communicate in the Stieng family is also very complicated. In fact, children can both talk to their parents in Vietnamese, with their grandparents in Stieng, with their Vietnamese peers as the first choice, this is a very common problem in families not of the same ethnic background. The remarkable feature is that the Stieng people do not use pure Stieng when communicating with their family members, but they still prefer to use their own language. That reflects the sense of preserving the native language of the ethnic community, and same time as well, the awareness of recognizing and respecting the Vietnamese language. In administrative communication, the Stieng people prefer to use Vietnamese. It can be affirmed that the language use of the Stieng people tends to integrate, both preserving the tradition and showing the community traits. In terms of language ability, in the current context, an emerging problem is that the native language ability of the Stieng people is very good in contrast to the majority of the Stieng people in Hon Quan district who do not know the Stieng script, the number of people who are proficient in all skills is less

3.3. Attitudes towards the use of language

In the Vietnamese dictionary of Hoang Phe (ed., 2003), attitude is "generally the totality of outward expressions (by facial expressions, gestures, words and actions) of thoughts and feelings towards someone or something". Linguistic attitudes can be understood as attitudes towards language. From the perspective of sociolinguistics, Nguyen Van Khang (2003) argues that linguistic attitudes are an assessment of the values and behavioral tendencies of a community or individual towards a language or a certain linguistic phenomenon. At present, there are many ways to divide language attitudes. In this article, we focus on understanding the attitudes of the Stieng people towards their mother tongue and towards Vietnamese in the use of language in family communication and outside in the society.

The Stieng people have their own cultural traditions and customs. Living in Hon Quan, they absorb the culture of the Kinh and other ethnic groups but still preserve the ethnic cultural identity. When communicating with Vietnamese or other ethnic groups, the Stieng use Vietnamese. When communicating in the Stieng community, the Stieng language is the most popular. They feel very proud to use their mother tongue to communicate with each other. Therefore, within the family line, they always consciously remind the younger generation to use their ethnic language. Statistics show that the Stieng people in Hon Quan district, Binh Phuoc province have 278/278 people, accounting for 100% of the people who self-identify Stieng as their mother tongue. It can be said that the Stieng people have a high sense of preserving the Stieng language, so the Stieng language is preserved very well, even the younger generation can use the Stieng language. The Stieng people have many advantages in preserving and promoting their native written language because:

- The Stieng have a tradition of their native language;
- The Stieng people in Hon Quan live concentratedly, so their traditional cultural values are very well preserved;
- In their mind, the Stieng people always have a sense of urge to use their native language, stemming from their passionate, intense love, respect and affection for their native language.

In addition, the Stieng people have an attitude that upholds the role of the Vietnamese language, actively learning to know and use Vietnamese. Vietnamese is the national language. 1992 Constitution (amended in 2013) Section 3 Article 5 stated: “The Vietnam national language is Vietnamese”, learning and understanding Vietnamese is the right and obligation of each citizen. Vietnamese is a means to help social harmony, to do business with the Kinh and other ethnic groups, to study higher. 278/278 Stieng people surveyed in Hon Quan (accounting for 100%) confirmed the great role of Vietnamese in their daily life. Therefore, the Stieng people have a sense of teaching their children the Stieng language in parallel with the Vietnamese language, in order to improve their children's competence and understanding of the Vietnamese language. The Stieng people's attitude of recognition and respect for Vietnamese is reflected in the scope of administrative communication and trade, specifically the ability to alternately use transcoding between their mother tongue and Vietnamese. Most of the Stieng people in Hon Quan district claim to know Vietnamese. Although in fact, some old Stieng people are illiterate in Quoc Ngu (Vietnam national script), but in daily communication can still use Vietnamese. It can be seen that the Stieng people acquire and learn Vietnamese from the reality of daily communication. When we asked the motivation for grasping and using Vietnamese, the Stieng here said: “We are Vietnamese, we must know Vietnamese, know Vietnamese to do business with Kinh and other ethnic groups, for higher study” (Words of a Stieng in Thanh An, Hon Quan, Binh Phuoc). Due to the division of language functions in communication, in the areas of social communication, Vietnamese always plays an important and great function in the communication of the Stieng people.

4. Conclusions

Hon Quan, Binh Phuoc province is a multi-ethnic and multilingual district. In daily life, the Stieng people still retain the beauty of their ethnic identity. The Stieng language belongs to the Austroasiatic family, Mon - Khmer genus, Nam Bahnar branch. Previously, Stieng did not have a written language script. Researchers have built a Latin script for Stieng. The Stieng in Hon Quan are the Stieng Bu Deh, Binh Long group. In daily life, the Stieng live close to the Kinh and speak Vietnamese fluently.

The choice of language in communication of the Stieng people depends on their language competence, language attitude and the reality of problems arising in daily communication such as context and objects of communication. The article surveyed 278 Stieng people in Hon Quan district, Binh Phuoc province. After analyzing, specific characteristics are: for language use characteristics in communication areas, Vietnamese and ethnic languages are used flexibly in specific fields and communication contexts, or in other words, the choice of language in communication of the Stieng across different fields and communication contexts is completely different, due to the division of high language function – Vietnamese, which is the national language, with low language – Stieng. In terms of language attitude, the Stieng people are conscious of learning their own language, in order to preserve their ethnic cultural traditions, as a tool to communicate with people of the same ethnicity and as a bridge to learn Vietnamese well. The attitude of the Stieng people to accept and use Vietnamese widely in society is the observance of the objective law of the division of language functions in a multilingual society. At the same time, the earnest attitude to preserve and promote the mother tongue in communication areas is a concrete expression of the desire to maintain the sacred identity of the native. The choice of language in communication of the Stieng people depends on a series of socio-linguistic factors such as age, gender, occupation, education, marriage, etc., especially, the situation of marriage in diverse Stieng families. Although they prioritize marrying with the same ethnic group, besides, the status of marriage with Vietnamese people and marriage with other ethnic people is happening. This raises the question that needs to be followed up with this research.

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