

Abstract for SEALS XX Conference (Zurich, Switzerland)

Due to historical contact, the Vietnamese language borrowed a significant amount of its lexical items from Chinese and French sources. The emergence of English due to British and American political hegemony and the status of English as the language of the technological age also encourage Vietnamese language users to expand its vocabulary to include English words. This study investigates the amount of English loan words currently used in selected Vietnamese newspapers, a topic that has not been studied before, in order to understand the difference in the way various newspapers employ English loan words in journalistic writing as well as the degree of influence English loan words exert on Vietnamese media in modern times.

This paper begins with some background information about the Vietnamese language, followed by a discussion and description of its history of borrowing from other languages such as Chinese, French, Russian, and English. In discussing the history of borrowing from Chinese, many references were made to Mark Alves' work on this issue. The study also descriptively observes the pattern of borrowing from French and the status of French loan words in modern Vietnamese usage. In addition, the paper also briefly discusses the coining of new terminology in Vietnam and the views, opinions, attitudes that the Vietnamese people might have towards loan words. Regarding English loan words, the question I am interested in is what kinds of words that are being borrowed into Vietnamese by online newspapers such as vnexpress.com, Tuoi Tre, Nhan Dan, ngoisao.net, Dan Tri, and 24h.com? What kinds of newspapers have a higher or lower tendency of borrowing? Based on these answers, some conclusions might be reached about the status of English borrowing in Vietnamese society.

I picked eight topics from which to select articles for loan word analysis: politics, economy/business, world news, education, technology, lifestyle, entertainment, and sports. The result suggests that ngoisao.net, a more popular, tabloid-like newspaper uses more loan words than other newspapers. Areas that are receiving many Anglo-Vietnamese words include Internet jargons, pop culture and geographical names. The paper also takes notes of the forms of spelling these loan words occur and their significance. Most loan items were spelled directly in English, without transliteration into Vietnamese, suggesting that they might not have yet to enter the spoken Vietnamese lexicon. While this paper surveys a broad overview of lexical borrowing, further research is needed to probe into this dynamic area, whereby not only the Vietnamese lexicon is affected by borrowing, but perhaps phonology and syntax also deserves academic attention.

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