

Convergence and divergence in Eastern Cham language contact

This paper examines language contact between Eastern Cham (Austronesian: Vietnam) and Vietnamese. Eastern Cham has converged with Vietnamese in terms of root structure: both languages now have predominantly monosyllabic roots. This change, however, has resulted in divergence in phonotactics and phoneme inventory: complex consonant clusters and geminate consonants, both of which Vietnamese lacks. The clusters also exhibit apparent free variation.

Eastern Cham has gone from having Austronesian-style disyllabic roots (e.g. 1a), to Mainland Southeast Asian-style sesquisyllabic roots (1b), to Vietnamese-style monosyllabic roots (1c). The standard analysis is that stress shifted to the final syllable, and initial syllables (“presyllables”) were reduced. Thurgood (1999) argues that this process is due to contact first with languages like Khmer, then with Vietnamese. Brunelle (2009) shows that the change from (b-c) is recent, and (b-c) mark different registers in contemporary speech. But not much is known about presyllable development in the colloquial register (cf. Brunelle & Văn Hãn 2015).

(1) a. Proto-Chamic **hala* ‘leaf’ b. Formal *hǎla* c. Colloquial *hla*

We provide a detailed sociolinguistic survey on presyllables in colloquial speech. 35 native speakers from the Cham villages of Ninh Thuận province, Vietnam performed word list, sentence elicitation, and free speech tasks. Two new results are presented. First, geminate consonants result from the coalescence of a presyllable onset with a sonorant onset in the second syllable (2). This results in a length contrast in initial sonorants (cf. *mi* ‘father’), something not found in Vietnamese.

(2) a. Proto-Chamic **tama* ‘enter’ b. Formal *tǎmi* c. Colloquial *m:i*

Second, variation results if the presyllable has a labial or liquid onset (i.e. /m/, /l/), especially if the onset of the following syllable is coronal (i.e. /t/, /th/). For example, all three of the pronunciations in (3c, 4c) are attested in the dataset (note **s* > *th*). The three variants in (c) appear to be in free variation. No grammatical factor seems to trigger any variant. There is significant intra-speaker variation: no consultant consistently used [m], [n], or [p] for the 12 words tested in this class. Many used multiple variants for the same lexical item during the same interview. As for inter-speaker variation, no correlation with age, gender, speaker village, education, or style was found.

(3) a. Proto-Chamic **mata* ‘eye’ b. Formal *mǎta* c. Colloquial *mta* ~ *nta* ~ *pta*

(4) a. Proto-Chamic **lisej* ‘cooked rice’ b. Formal *lǐsej* c. Colloq. *mthej* ~ *nthej* ~ *pthej*

This change also results in phonotactic divergence. Vietnamese has no consonant clusters at all. Eastern Cham has numerous novel clusters, many of which violate the sonority hierarchy. We hypothesize that the apparent free variation, along with the expanded consonant inventory and phonotactics are all fallout from the borrowing of a typological generalization, namely that all roots be monosyllabic. The tradeoff provides insight into language contact constraints and borrowing hierarchies (e.g. Thomason & Kaufman 1988). Additionally, as an endangered language, Eastern Cham provides evidence that language attrition is not purely simplifying: this contact-induced change creates significant complexity (cf. Romaine 2010).

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