

Editor-Translator's Preface

In: [A Grammar of May](#)

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It was with tremendous enthusiasm that I first received the invitation from Irina Samarina and Kirill Babaev to facilitate the publication in English (translated from Russian) of the 2018 grammar of May for the Brill series *Grammars and Sketches of the World's Languages (Mainland and Insular Southeast Asia)*. The significance of this project is difficult to over-emphasize: while there has generally been a dearth of detailed and thorough linguistic grammars of Austroasiatic languages, to date no full grammar of a minor Vietic language has been published in any language before Babaev and Samarina's (2018) 570-page monograph. This is all the more significant as May and other closely related Vietic languages are typologically quite unlike Vietnamese, while the latter has taken most of the spotlight in terms of linguistics attention given to Vietic. It is also important that this work introduces to an international readership the scholarship of Babaev and Samarina, both preeminent scholars in their sub-fields, yet have been better known to readers in Russia and Eastern Europe than wider international audiences.

The understanding of Vietic has historically been dominated by a focus on Vietnamese, which has long been known as typologically more similar to Chinese varieties such as Cantonese, and the Tai languages, with its highly developed tonality and preference for monosyllabic morphemes. Vietnamese is also famous for its high proportion of borrowed vocabulary, so much so that although Vietnamese has been recognized as Austroasiatic variously for more than a century, it is so utterly unrepresentative of Austroasiatic that it has often proven more informative for the historical study of Chinese and Tai than it has for its actual genealogical kin. By contrast, the hill-dwelling relatives of Vietnamese, such as the May, the Ruc, the Arem, and others, preserve vernaculars that attest a conservatism in phonology and lexicon that is pivotal to our reconstruction of Austroasiatic linguistic history. In terms of morpho-syntax the situation is rather different, and it is apparent that May and its closest relations have only traces of ancient affixation, and have assimilated some word-order patterns of Vietnamese. However, this is not something we cannot entirely blame on Vietnamese, as the whole of Mainland Southeast Asia has been drifting towards tonality, monosyllabism, verb-medial syntax, and in many ways Vietnamese is merely furthest along this path while its relatives sheltered in the hills have retained more linguistic independence.

Given this significance, the grammar of May provides an invaluable resource for linguistic analyses—historical and typological—as well as potentially informing linguistic and cultural preservation efforts in a region subject to rapid social change. The gap in the

literature that it fills is all the more remarkable given that Indo-China was under colonial rule for a century or so before decolonization in 1954, and good relations between local and international scholars continued and developed throughout those times and to the present day (especially links with Soviet/Russian and other European linguists). And while it is true that the smallest Vietic language such as Mạ were always in very remote areas, the same cannot be said for the various Muong dialects, the Nguon, or the Cuoi Cham, for example. Perhaps the pressing need for national language development in Vietnam has diverted attention and resources away from smaller languages.

A significant consequence of the historical situation is that linguists concerned with Vietic have largely been restricted to working with rather modest published lexicons, simple discussions of phonology, and fragments of data as have made their way into journal articles and other studies, in addition to what they could reasonably surmise on the bases of Vietnamese and its structural correspondences with other languages. This volume marks a substantial redress of this lack publication, and its appearance now in English significantly enhances its accessibility to a much wider audience.

The present work is not simply a direct translation of the Russian original, but is re-edited and revised in various aspects, although the data content remains the same. The original text is not just Russian in language but also very Russian in the style of the academic writing, the analyses, and discussion. I have personally taken pains to try to preserve some of the character of this style, while at the same time rewriting parts of the discussion to be more consistent with the ways that linguistic grammars are written in English, and to harmonize some aspects of the analyses with conventions of contemporary typological linguistics. This is always a challenge for translators, and I hope that I have achieved a reasonable balance.

In the first place I was provided with an electronic version of the original Russian text, plus a rough English translation that was done by Alexander Yefimov and pre-edited by Kirill Babaev. Yefimov's version was quite faithful, retaining characteristic structures such as frequent short declarative sentences and abundant repetition of words and statements that, although normal in Russian academic writing, can be jarring to English readers. Additionally, there were issues of translation of linguistic technical jargon, with the very literal Russian terminology having to be reformulated into terms consistent with current English usage. The merging of sentences and cutting of repetition has reduced the length of the text somewhat, without eliminating substantive content. The decision was also made to radically redact the selection of vernacular texts presented in the Appendix; only one text out of 12 was retained, while the full set is made available online (DOI 10.5281/zenodo.4308203).

Referencing also posed another problem for translation. In the original text there were both Russian and non-Russian references, and these were given in separate lists in the bibliography. For the translation, all Russian (Cyrillic) names have been romanized in the

in-text references. In the bibliography Russian language references are retained without translation or transliteration, but are preceded by Roman (transliterated) family names matching the in-text referencing. Readers with access to the original will also note that references in the bibliography have been reformatted and redacted to remove the duplication of names and dates used in the 2018 volume style.

The result of these efforts is hoped to be beginning of a series of grammars of small Indo-China languages that we expect will be published over coming years. These will not only redress gaps and distortions in the typological and descriptive literature, but hopefully provide reference models for dissertations and grammars not specifically written for the series but still focused on Indo-Chinese languages. The benefits include maximizing comparability between works, the lack of which has presented difficulties for the field over decades. There had been something of a boom in Indo-Chinese linguistics in the 1960s and 1970s, although much of the descriptive and analytical work done then was conducted in a variety of frameworks (Tagmemics, early Generative Grammar, and others) that do not always translate well into contemporary typological linguistics. Additionally, it was relatively rare for grammars of the time to adequately achieve the Boasian trilogy of a grammar with lexicon and text collection, with much work presented in relatively short theses/dissertations. Similar concerns around considerations of comparability applied to the *Unifying Typological Approach* taken with the 21 language sketches in *The Handbook of Austroasiatic Languages* (Jenny & Sidwell eds. 2014).

This May grammar approaches our ideal with its depth of well justified analyses, transparent glossing, extensive lexicon and accessible natural texts, and all the decisions made in the preparation of this translation were predicated on achieving this end. I congratulate the authors and extend my deepest thanks to them for their patience and understanding throughout.

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Canberra

December 2020

Preface

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The present monograph¹ is a result of the authors' work within the framework of the 2013 Russian-Vietnamese Linguistic Expedition dedicated to the study of languages spoken by ethnic minorities in Vietnam.² The Expedition managed to successfully document the May language, which has never been studied before. May belongs to the Chut subgroup of the Vietic branch of the Austroasiatic language family and numbers only several hundred speakers. The present work is based on authentic field data: over two thousand lexical units, about one thousand phrases, and about two dozen texts. Although the authors feel that it would be desirable to have more comprehensive data, we have decided to present it now along with a linguistic outline. The reason for it is the fact that no publications on May have been written so far. The situation with other Vietic languages with a small number of speakers is similar. Those tongues substantially differ typologically from Vietnamese, manifesting more archaic Austroasiatic characteristics than the national language.

The May language reflects historical structural transformation which has changed both its phonological and morphological appearance. The processes have resulted in the formation of monosyllabic structure in other Vietic languages (primarily in Vietnamese and Muong) and although active in May have not proceeded as far. May preserves a disyllabic (or, to be more precise, sesquisyllabic) phonological word structure by retaining an opposition major syllable and minor syllable (or presyllable). Traces of grammatical affixes are preserved in nouns and verbs, although these are now unproductive as analytic grammar has taken over all the relevant functions. Finally, there has been a drastic transformation of prosodic structure, with the emergence of a tone system that correlates with old pitch and phonation differences. Further study of May and other archaic languages of the Vietic branch will certainly shed light on such well-known linguistic problems as tonogenesis, grammaticalization, and structural transformation of languages.

The aim of the present work is to present a descriptive analysis of an endangered less studied Vietic language that presents various important peculiarities. The authors hope that the monograph will be a step forward—if only a small one—in the process of examining general phonology, typological peculiarities, and genetic links of the Austroasiatic languages.

The main part of the monograph is dedicated to the detailed—to the extent possible—outline of May phonology and morphosyntax. The outline is structured in accordance with contemporary descriptive linguistic analysis. In so doing, the work mainly focuses on the phonological system of May because this presents a number of poorly studied phenomena.

Chapter 1 gives general information on the Eastern Austroasiatic languages including the Vietic branch, and briefly describes the contemporary state of Vietic language studies. The chapter also includes information on six languages of the Chut subgroup in Vietnam and ethnic groups speaking these languages, their geographical distribution, reviews former studies, and sociolinguistic data. Major importance is attached to the May language and its speakers, with the ethnographic information on everyday life and culture of the May, history of research over recent decades as well as

the main typological peculiarities of May compared to the other languages of the Vietic branch and the Chut subgroup.

Chapter 2 describes the phonological system of May. The analysis defines the phonological word and syllable structure. Major syllables are described in terms of their components: initials, medials, nuclei, and codas, and examines prosodic characteristics of the major syllable (four basic prosodic types) followed by similar analysis applied to the minor syllable (presyllable) and its components.

Chapter 3 analyses May grammatical derivation and some peculiarities of its lexical system.

Chapter 4 describes May morphosyntax. The analysis encompasses the basic word classes—noun and verbal, their classification, grammatical categories, and meanings.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents the outline of May phrasal syntax, analyzes the clausal argument structure, examines basic types of simple and complex phrases as well as discourse elements.

The linguistic outline is followed by Appendices. Appendix 1 gives the Swadesh 100 word list for May along with lexical correspondences in other Chut languages. Appendices 2 and 3 comprise concise a May–English–Vietnamese glossary with two thousand title units and examples plus English–May index. Appendix 4 presents a glossed text in May language translated into Vietnamese and English, “The Man Married to Wasps”. That text is one of a collection of 12 published in the 2018 Russian language edition of this work, and all 12 with English translations are available online in the zenodo.org repository (DOI 10.5281/zenodo.4308203). The texts represent different stylistic discourse types: myths, fairy tales, ethnographic discourse, and everyday life.

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols are used to transcribe the field data in the present volume. Short vowels are indicated by breve symbol over them (v), whereas long vowels have no additional marking. Prosodic types and their variants are designated by high superscript digits from 0 through 4 located to the right of a syllable/sesquisyllable. All phrase examples both in Appendices and the core contain lines with glossing³ in English and Vietnamese.⁴ To indicate grammar meanings, the authors mainly followed the commonly used list of English abbreviations.⁵ Glossing in Vietnamese is mainly lexical in character, which is preconditioned by the typological specificity and proximity between May and Vietnamese.

While working on the present monograph, the authors also used the materials of the Russian-Vietnamese Linguistic Expeditions (1984, 1986, 2012, 2013, and 2015) which studied the closely related languages Ruc, Sach, Malieng, Arem, and Kri, some of which are still unpublished.

In the study, collection, and data processing for May, a crucial role was played by the participation of our Vietnamese colleagues. Dr. Ta Van Thong, researcher of the Vietnam Institute of Lexicography and Encyclopedia of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences who also actively promoted the publishing of the book. Ta Quang Tung, researcher of the Institute of Linguistics, and Dr. Le Van Truong took part in the field season of 2013. Prof. Nguyen Van Loi generously shared his multi-year experience in the sphere of studying and describing the languages of minorities living in Vietnam. We should also make a special mention of our colleagues who helped us in processing the audio records and text materials—Boris Kantorovich and Darya Ivanenko. Our special gratitude to the management of the Vietnam Institute of Lexicography and Encyclopedia of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences and, primarily, to its Director Dr. Lai Van Hung for all-round support of the authors in the process of our work for joint projects as well as assistance during the expeditions and preparation thereof.

We highly appreciate the consent to transfer the knowledge on May language by Mr. Ho Phoong and Mr. Ho Xoi, residents of Minh Hoa district, Quang Binh Province, Vietnam, as well as their readiness to help and patience in the process of joint work. Their beautiful native tongue sounds from every page of this book.

1

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2

The Expedition has been performed with financial support of the Russian Foundation for Humanities within the framework of Project No. 13-24-09551e(m) “Linguistic Expedition for Describing Archaic Vietic Languages of Sach, Mai, and Malieng in Quang Binh Province (Vietnam).”

3

Glossing is consistent with the Leipzig glossing system: <https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/Glossing-Rules.pdf>.

4

Glossing process was based on the *Vietnamese-English Dictionary* (TDVA 2010) and *Comprehensive Vietnamese-Dictionary* in two volumes (BVRS 2012).

5

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_glossing_abbreviations.

Abbreviations

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Abbreviations

Parts of Speech

adj[.] adjective

adv[.] adverb

anat. anatomical

bot. botanical

D direct [object]

dt. *danh từ* (noun)

đg. *động từ* (verbal)

đph. *địa phương* (dialectal)

func grammer marker

HP Hồ Phọng (May native speaker)

HX Hồ Xôi (May native speaker)

I indirect [object]

khg. *khẩu ngữ* (colloquial)

lt. *loại từ* (classifier)

MVP multi-verb predicates

n[.]	noun
NP	noun phrase
num	numeral
O	object
P	предикат
prep	preposition
pron	pronoun
pt.	<i>phụ từ</i> (auxiliary word)
rdpl.	reduplication
S	subject
tt.	<i>tính từ</i> (adjective)
v[.]	verb[al]
vi	intransitive verb
vt	transitive verb

Questionnaires

ATR	Attributive questionnaire
CLS	Clauses questionnaire
CLF	Classifiers questionnaire
CSN	Complex sentences questionnaire
LOC	Locative and temporal questionnaire
MOD	Modality questionnaire

PRM	Primary questionnaire
PTS	Parts of speech questionnaire
QUE	Interrogative questionnaire
Th	Thematic vocabulary
T	Texts Corpus

Glossing

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
A	animate
ABL	ablative marker
ADR	addressee/recipient
ALL	allative (limit) marker
ANPH	anaphoric pronoun
BEN	benefactive marker
CAUS	causative marker
CL	classifier
COM	comitative marker
COMP	complement marker
CONJ	conjunction
CONT	continuous marker

COP	copula
CPL	completive marker
DIST	distal determiner
DU	dual
DUR	durative marker
EMPH	emphasis
EXCL	exclusive
F	feminine marker
FOC	focus
FUT	future marker
HAB	habitualis marker
HORT	hortative marker
IMP	imperative marker
INCL	inclusive
INST	instrument marker
INT	interjection
LOC	locative marker
M	masculine marker
MED	medial determiner
N	non-animate

NEG	negation
NSIT	new situation marker
ORD	ordinal numeral marker
PASS	passive marker
PERF	perfective marker
PL	plural
POS	possibility marker
POSS	possessivity marker
PRF	perfect marker
PROG	progressive marker
PROH	prohibitive marker
PROX	proximity determiner
PRSP	prospective marker
PRT	particle
PST	past marker
PURP	purpose (target) marker
Q	question marker
QUOT	quotative marker
REC	reciprocal marker
REFL	reflexive marker

REL relative marker

RES result marker

SG singular

TEMP temporal

THM themes

TOP

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