Integration of French loanwords into Vietnamese.

A corpus-based analysis of tonal, syllabic and segmental aspects

Due to its long history of language contact with French, modern Vietnamese contains many loanwords of French origin, pertaining both to the basic lexicon and to more specialized lexical fields; an example is given in (1). The present study deals with the phonological aspects of such loans, considering tone, syllable structure and segmental structure. Studying the integration of relatively recent French loans into Vietnamese can shed light on the phonological system of the language, as it may be said that many of the generalizations to be drawn here are based on productive phonological rules of the language, which may be less visible when considering the entire diachronically stratified lexicon, which includes many loans from Chinese (Alves, 2009). Furthermore, in loanword integration it is possible to observe basic mechanisms of language contact, allowing insight into the processes that are active when speakers integrate words of a second language into their native language: In addition to constraints relating to the native grammar, it is phonetic and phonological perception, orthography as well as sociolinguistic factors (i.e., knowledge of and attitudes towards foreign languages) which also have a role to play (see Paradis & Lacharité, 2011; Vendelin & Peperkamp, 2006 for overview).

Previous studies of the integration of French loanwords into Vietnamese take a descriptive perspective (Barker, 1969; Huynh, 2010). A recent study by Pham (2012), based on Barker’s corpus, restricts its scope to tone assignment, which is modeled in the framework of Optimality Theory. Kang, Phạm, & Storme (2016) focus on the role of perceptual and phonological constraints in the integration of French vocalic segments into Vietnamese. The present study takes a more comprehensive approach, considering phonological and perceptual restrictions in (i) tone assignment, (ii) syllabic truncation, (iii) vowel epenthesis, (iv) reduction of consonant clusters and (v) consonantal substitutions. The major generalizations are accounted for in the framework of Optimality Theory, drawing on the interplay of Faithfulness constraints with Markedness constraints referring to syllable structure and tone assignment. The patterns of variation that are found in the corpus with respect to these five phonological dimensions are integrated into the model by means of stochastically ranked constraints (Boersma & Hayes, 2001). The occasional variation attested for individual lexemes is integrated into the model drawing on lexically indexed constraints (Pater, 2000).

The analysis is based on a corpus of roughly 500 Vietnamese nouns of French origin. For all nouns it has been checked whether they are still in use, drawing on native informants’ judgments as well as their frequency and use in the World Wide Web and in a Vietnamese dictionary (Nguyễn, Nguyễn, Vũ, & Phan, 1998). Phonetic transcriptions of Vietnamese were
generated automatically on the basis of the orthographic representation (Kirby, 2008) and were checked with reference to native informants’ pronunciation. Phonetic transcriptions of the French source words are based on the standard hexagonal pronunciation as may be found in common dictionaries (Rey-Debove & Rey, 2013).

As to tone assignment, in the unmarked case, the default level tone Ngang is assigned, see (2), confirming the results of previous studies (Barker, 1969; Pham, 2012). In syllables with obstructant codas, only the tones Năng or Sắc are licit; see (3). Of these, the tone Sắc appears to be the less marked and functions as the default tone in loan words ending in obstruents. The first syllable of disyllabic loans is often assigned the tone Huyễn, see (4), depending on syllable weight and vowel quality.

Consonant clusters are not allowed in Vietnamese syllable structure (except for Cw in onset position). Integration of loans with complex clusters recurs to resyllabification, (5), epenthesis, (6), and deletion, (7-8), the latter being the most common strategy. While resyllabification and epenthesis only occur in onset clusters, deletion is possible in both onset and coda clusters. When deletion occurs, it is mostly the second of two consonants that is deleted. Furthermore, we discuss processes of consonantal substitutions, largely confirming the findings of Huynh (2010), as well as the few occurrences of truncations which are found in the integration of polysyllabic loanwords, see (9). In the case of truncation, the target are mostly initial syllables, i.e., syllables which are stressless in the source language.

*Word count: 711*

**Examples**

Numbers in the transcription refer to the six tones of Vietnamese.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Viet. spelling</th>
<th>Viet. IPA</th>
<th>French spelling</th>
<th>French IPA</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) cà vạt</td>
<td>[ka2 vat6]</td>
<td>cravatte</td>
<td>[kʁavat]</td>
<td>‘tie’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Assignment of the default tone Ngang (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sô cõ la</td>
<td>[so1 ko1 la1]</td>
<td>chocolat</td>
<td>[ʃokola]</td>
<td>‘chocolate’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Assignment of the tone Sắc (a) or Năng (b) in obstruent-final syllables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. xúp</td>
<td>[sup5]</td>
<td>soupe</td>
<td>[sup]</td>
<td>‘soup’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. bột</td>
<td>[bot6]</td>
<td>poudre</td>
<td>[pudʁ(ə)]</td>
<td>‘powder, flour’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Assignment of the tone Huyễn to the first syllable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cà phê</td>
<td>[ka2 fe1]</td>
<td>café</td>
<td>[kafe]</td>
<td>‘coffee’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Resyllabification (only onset clusters)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>súp lơ</td>
<td>[sup5 lɔ1]</td>
<td>chou-fleur</td>
<td>[ʃuflœ̃]</td>
<td>‘cauliflower’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Epenthesis (only onset clusters)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
bố lu [bɔ̀ lu1] blouse [bluz] ‘blouse’

(7) Deletion in onset clusters (1st syllable of word)

bằng ca [băng ca1] brancard [brâ̄kaʁ] ‘stretcher’

(8) Deletion in coda clusters (2nd syllable of word)

công-tắc [kɔŋ-taʁk] contact [kɔtakt] ‘switch’

(9) Truncation in disyllabic words

lô [lɔ1] contrôleur [kɔtʁolœʁ] ‘inspector’

References


