ANCIENT VIETNAMESE WORDS IN SOUTHERN FOLK SONG COLLECTIONS PUBLISHED IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY

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Abstract

The article examines and explains the meanings of archaic Vietnamese words in southern folk song collections published in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. We have identified and selected typical Vietnamese words that are now rarely used or used differently. To explain these words’ meanings in folk songs, we use dictionaries, such as Vietnamese Dictionary, Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary, Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit) – the first Vietnamese dictionary, and Southern Dialect Dictionary. This research outlines a unique and exciting feature of the southern language that was popular in folk songs and people’s lives in the South.

Keywords: Archaic words; Early 20th century; Folk songs; Southern Vietnam.

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1. INTRODUCTION

To identify the time when people started writing down folk sayings, ethical poems, romantic songs, and oral stories of the Southern people, 1888 is perhaps a suitable milestone since collector Truong Vinh Ky in that year first published six verses in the first issue of *Lectures Instructives* (*Miscellaneés*) – the first private newspaper in Vietnam and the first literary academic journal in Vietnam using the Vietnamese alphabet. Within two consecutive years, 18 issues of *Lectures Instructives* were published. Many of the published works belong to different folklore genres, such as children’s songs, folk songs, proverbs, family ethical songs, narrative poems, legends, anecdotes about historical characters, jokes, and fairy tales. And other genres of folklore include rhymes, idioms, riddles, *câu thai* (which consist of four verses with alternating lines of six and eight syllables), quotations, descriptive poems, etc.

Besides Truong Vinh Ky’s first six verses in *Lectures Instructives*, other folk song collections were published in Saigon from the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century. Collectors, such as Huynh Tinh Paulus Cua, Dang Le Nhi, Khai Vo Nhi, Nguyen Cong Chan, Nguyen Ba Thoi, Ho Cong Minh, and Dang Trong Quon published collections of southern folk songs under different names, such as *Tục đìeu*, *Câu hát An Nam*, *Câu hát góp*, *Câu hát hương tình*, *Câu hát chèo ghe*, *Câu hóxay lúa*, *Hát hương điố đáp*, *Hát dố đố đáp*, *Hát và hó góp*, etc. These collections were published by the publishing houses of Dinh Thai Son, Le Van Thinh, Duc Luu Phuong, Nguyen Quoi Loan, and Xua Nay in Saigon in the first half of the 20th century. Some collections have never gone out of print.

We have gathered ten southern folk song collections published in Saigon before 1945 (1888 to 1939) and re-published after 1945 from national and local libraries and even from the bookcases of private individuals. The collections range from a few hundred to about a thousand verses recorded consecutively without numbering. The collection with the fewest verses is *Câu hát hương tình* of Dang Le Nhi with 360 verses, and for parallelism *Câu hát góp* of Huynh Tinh Paulus Cua with 1,010 verses.

After studying these collections, we found some common linguistic features of southern folk songs related to the formation and popularization of the Vietnamese alphabet in southern Vietnam in the period before 1945. These features are Vietnamese spellings, ancient Vietnamese words, Sino-Vietnamese words, words transliterated from French, and words from southern dialects. There are unlimited uses of historical and scholarly literary classics from Vietnamese and Chinese history and culture to express the meanings of southern folk songs in the early 20th century. This article will examine some typical ancient Vietnamese words in the collections listed below. After identifying these words and counting the number of times they appear in the ten collections, we used several dictionaries to look up their meanings: *Đại Nam quốc âm từ vĩ* (*Dictionnaire Annamit*) by Huynh Tinh Cua, *Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary* by Nguyen Ngoc San and Dinh Van Thien, *Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary* by Dao Duy Anh, *Southern Dialect Dictionary* by Huynh Cong Tin, and *Vietnamese Dictionary* by Hoang Phe.
For our survey and research, we used the collections of folk songs named below (in chronological order of publication).

1. Truong Vinh Ky (1888-1889). *Lectures Instructives/Miscellanées*. Impr. Commerciale Rey-Curiol. Issues 1 to 8 were published in 1888, issues 9 to 12 were published in 1889, and issues 1 to 6 were re-published in 1889. Each issue contains 16 pages. We found six verses in these 12 issues.


Since the folk verses in these collections meet the typical criteria of folk songs in Vietnamese folklore in terms of content and linguistic form, we use the term “folk songs” (*ca dao*) to refer to these verses in this article.

2. **INTERPRETATION OF ANCIENT VIETNAMESE WORDS IN SOUTHERN FOLK SONGS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY**

Among many concerns about the language used in southern folk songs in the early 20th century, in our opinion, spelling error is the one that can be solved most efficiently and thoroughly. On the other hand, the main challenge is identifying and explaining the ancient Vietnamese words commonly used in different contexts in folk songs of previous times but rarely used in folklore and written literature or daily communication nowadays.
To overcome this challenge, we need to understand ancient Vietnamese words from different researchers’ perspectives.

Đào (1975), in his work Chữ Nôm – Nguồn gốc câu tạo, diển biên, did not use the concept of “ancient words” but instead used the term “old words” and said that those words are no longer used or rarely used. In addition, he also considers monosyllabic Chinese words in ancient texts as a type of ancient word: Among the ancient words, there are also simple words borrowed from Chinese characters to express some concepts, which later on are only expressed in Vietnamese (Đào, 1975). According to Nguyên and Đình (2001, p. 187) in Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary, ancient words:

…are original Vietnamese words commonly used in everyday speech. Over time, they are no longer used and only exist in old works of literature or ancient folk songs and proverbs. “Ancient” can be understood under the circumstance in which modern Vietnamese people no longer understand the meaning of these words. The reason for this is their absence in the modern language, or that these words no longer retain their old meanings, which does not mean that these words appear the earliest.

Nguyễn (1984, as cited in Trần, 2010, p. 17), in her research Truyện Song Tinh – khảo định, phiên âm, chú thích, has presented ancient words in relation to dialects as:

…ancient words are generally understood as words with sounds and meanings. Using ancient words to make sentences is slightly or completely different from using common words nowadays. Ancient words or words still used in a certain region are called archaisms.

From the above perspectives, we show that ancient words in southern folk songs in the first half of the 20th century are related to the interpretations of the above researchers. They are old words that are no longer used or rarely used today; they only exist in old literature, folk songs, and proverbs or have different meanings from common words used nowadays, etc. These ancient words were used in everyday speech and are found in folk songs from the late 19th century and early 20th century. Later on, they are less used or combined with other words to generate different meanings. Therefore, it is not easy to find these words in Collections of recent folk songs. To look up the definitions of these ancient words, we use the dictionaries mentioned above and interpret the words in the context of folk songs.

Firstly, we want to mention a rare word only seen once in the collection Câu hát góp of Huỳnh Tinh Cua and not seen again in any other collection. It is the word tổ nễ:

Ngó lên tổ nễ chau may
Mảng lo sự khó quên ngày muối dưa

Translated:

The ancestors are in anger since
Decedents feel poor without worship and filial piety  
(Huỳnh, 1901)

According to the explanation in Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị (Dictionnaire Annamite), the word tổ nê refers to the ancestor, the great grandfathers, the ones who established the family business (Huỳnh, 2018b). The word tổ nê refers to the ancestors and appeared quite commonly in the vernacular used in the countryside of the Six Provinces of southern Vietnam. Also, in the folk song above, the word màng is an ancient Vietnamese word that is used with the different meaning. But in contrast to the word tổ nê, which appears only once, the word màng appears twenty-six times in the ten collections, often in phrases such as màng sầu căn dươn, màng sầu dươn nơ, màng sầu người nghĩa, màng sắm soi, màng thương, màng lo, màng coi, màng con trăng, màng con nước, etc.

_Cửa song loan đóng chặt còn nêm,_
_Mảng sầu dươn nơ lại thêm sầu mình_

Translated:

The gate closes tightly and wedges  
Minding sorrow that brings yourself sadness  
(Nguyễn, 1928)

_Dọn cơm chống dúa ngồi nhìn,_
_Mảng sầu người nghĩa thật tình quên ăn._

Translated:

Serving rice and sitting still just to stare  
Minding sorrow of the one being lovelorn  
(Nguyễn, 1928)

_Tiết bãi cỏng anh lao lung, lo vun bên cây tùng, bó em nô ơi!_  
_Mảng sắm soi trên ngọn, dưới gốc sung chẳng có hay_

Translated:

I worked hard and took care of the cedar tree, oh my dear!  
Just focusing on reaching the top yet abandoning its root  
( Kháu, 1933)

_Mằng thương anh nên ba má rầy la,_  
_Choàng tay qua có anh Ba khóc ròng._
Minding the love for you that worries parents
Wrapping arms around then starting to cry
(Nguyễn, 1967)

According to Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary, the word mảng means focusing on something (Nguyễn & Đinh, 2001). In Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), the word mảng is defined as working hard, minding one thing. Moreover, according to this dictionary, the folk song, Ngó lên tô nê chầu mà, mảng lo sữ khó quên ngày muối dưa, means worrying about poverty without worship and filial piety (Huỳnh, 2018b).

Another ancient word that we rarely see in folklore, including folk songs from the early 20th century, is mừa hè. This word appears only once in Dang Le Nghị’s Câu hát huế tình, published in 1928. Among the fourteen words in the six-eight-word couplet (lục bát), there is one ancient Vietnamese word, one word of the southern dialect, and two words transliterated from French.

Ô-ro-voa dầy giã bạn ra về
Căn dươn chưa bén, mưa hè phát-sê.

Translated:
Goodbye, my dear, as I am leaving now
Our fate is never shared, don’t be sad
(Dặng, 1928)

According to Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), the word mưa is no; mưa hè is do not (forbidden) (Huỳnh, 2018b). Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary also explains that mưa hè is do not (Nguyễn & Đinh, 2001). Furthermore, the word dườm is how people pronounce duyên, which is a common word in the South. The word căn dروع is căn duyên, meaning fate. In this folk song, there are two words transliterated from French, namely Ô-ro-voa and phát-sê. Ô-ro-voa is how Vietnamese people say au revoir, which means goodbye in French. It is probably as common as the English word goodbye used in everyday communication. Phát-sê means sad or angry, transliterated from the French word fâcher. The linguistic system transliterated from French is also an essential feature of folk language in these collections. We also discuss this issue in the article Đầu án văn hóa Pháp trong ca dao dân ca Nam Bộ đầu thế kỷ XX (La, 2021).

Another unusual word that we only come across twice in the collection Câu hát góp of Huỳnh Tinh Cua is the word âm can:

Giờ hiu hiu dầy chầu đứt đoạn
La Mai Thị Gia

Âm can trời nhớ bạn ta xưa
Bạn cũ ta xưa nay đã biệt lộ
Giả khách qua đẳng thương lộ hỏi thăm

Translated:

The wind is blowing and the string is untied
It is gloomy and I’m missing you
My old love is far away
Pretending to be a stranger, I ask about you
(Huỳnh, 1901)

Trời ôi ai đánh trời gầm,
Mây mưa đứt đoạn, tư bề âm can
cơ trời dâu bể đa đoan,
tơ duyên vắn vỏi thiệp chàng xa nhau.

Translated:

What makes the sky roar loudly?
Rain to rain then it is so gloomy
Heaven gives chance and quickly changes
Why love is short-lived to part you and me
(Huỳnh, 1901)

According to Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), the word âm can can be understood as less sunny. If the weather is âm can, the weather is not sunny. The phrase phơi âm can means drying something under the shade (Huỳnh, 2018a). The word âm can in the two folk songs above can be understood to mean that the weather is cloudy; the weather is not good; it is gloomy like the mood of couples who are apart because of a short-lived love (tơ duyên vắn với). The word vắn với is an old way of saying ngắn ngủi (short) (Nguyễn & Đinh, 2001). There is a method of drying medicinal herbs under the shade called phơi âm can. However, these words are rarely used today, both in literature and daily life.

We encounter the word khẳng twice in the following folk songs in Dang Le Nghi’s Câu hát huê tình performed by a call-and-response song between a male and a female.

- Male part:

Đó quyết cậy mai đây phân hoài chẳng khẳng,
Cha cha: có một tiếng ừ, vàng xìng mấy cân.
Translated:

Why does it take so long to accept?
It’s just a “yes,” gold is worth a few more

- Female part:

Một tiếng phải doan, ngàn vàng không đổi,
Huống việc vợ chồng biết nỗi mấy cân.

Translated:

Our fate crossed is worth a thousand gold
Now becoming husband and wife who knows its worth

(Dặng, 1928)

- Male part:

Miệng bậu đành ừ, qua chẳng tử lao khổ,
Đãu đăng sơn cắm hổ, dầu nhập hải tróc long
Trước sau giữ trọn một lòng,
Bớ em ơi, vào lớn ra cúi, anh đánh sòng theo em.

Translated:

If you say “yes,” there is nothing I cannot do
Whether hunting tigers in the mountains or going to the sea
I forever keep my heart for you and only
Oh, my dear, going through all these, I’m with you always

- Female part:

Em ừ bây chủ, cha mẹ tử chẳng khùng
Có phải hai anh, dau ngồi dau dựng,
Bớt anh lo ngược lo xuôi, trước sau lại không vui,
Bớ anh ơi, chỉ bằng anh cây mới nói hôm ban so.

Translated:

To say “yes” now will bring discomfort to parents
Will it worry you, whether sitting or standing?
Telling you to be so protective, no one is happy
Oh, my dear, if only you believe in the very first bonding  
(Dặng, 1928)

And this word also appears once in the collection, *Hát đối đáp* of Dang Trong Quon:

- Female part:

  Phải gặp ông Tơ em hỏi sơ cho biết  
  Phải gặp bà Nguyệt em hỏi thiệt cho rành  
  Vì đâu hoa nọ lìa nhành anh ơi  
  Nợ duyên sao sớm dứt cho đành dạ em  

Translated:

  When I meet the matchmaker, I will question him  
  When I see the matchmaker, I will ask the truth  
  Why did the flower leave the branch?  
  Why does our fate mean to end so soon?

- Male part:

  Trên mẹ cha chẳng chịu, dưới anh điệu làm con  
  Tại nơi em chẳng khũng chịu lòn, em ơi  
  Tuy là lúc giận chứ còn lúc thương  

Translated:

  Parents’ disagreement, I am a child not dare to disobey  
  Where you live shows no sign of concurrence  
  Even though a tough time, we still have love  

(Dảng, 1932)

*Khủng* is a rare word that is no longer used. This word means “accepted, endured” (Huỳnh, 2018a) or “accepted, resigned” (Nguyễn & Đinh, 2001). We notice this word in call-and-response songs about marriage preparations. It can be seen that this word formerly appeared in the context of weddings and proposals. *Khủng* is not the state of approving in general but has a meaning similar to the phrase “I do” in marriage. A girl accepted the proposal, accepted to become a wife, or the girl’s parents agreed to let the boy marry their daughter.

In the three pairs above, the word *lòn* appears twice in the two verses: *Tai nơi em chẳng khũng chịu lòn, em ơi* and *Bố em ơi, vào lòn ra cuí, anh đánh sông theo em*. This word also appears in a few other folk songs:
Sắt kia đá nọ còn mòn,
Lằm đau vô cúi ra lòn khổ thay.

Translated:
Iron and stone are still worn
Submissive as a daughter-in-law, she is so miserable
(Nguyễn, 1967)

Tháng ba cơm gói ra Hòn
Muốn ăn trứng nhạn phải lòn hang Mai
Hang Mai anh cũng muốn lòn
Sợ e trứng nhạn hãy còn vỏ không

Translated:
In March, rice is ready for trips to the island
Wanting swallow eggs to eat, Mai cave is where to go
Mai cave, I’m willing to go
Just being afraid to swallow eggs that still have shells
(Dặng, 1907)

According to Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), lòn is to lower down to go through and the phrase vào lòn ra cúi means being submissive (Huỳnh, 2018a). Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary explains that lòn is luốn, meaning wriggle (Nguyễn & Đinh, 2001). The term lòn is rarely used in today’s folk songs and only appears in literature that uses much dialect. It has been replaced by the word luốn.

The word lòn xòn in the following folk song is rare. It only appears once among the ten collections:

Đôi ta duyên nợ lòn xòn,
Bớ anh ơi, mặt tuy giáp mặt dạ còn uớc ao.

Translated:
We met in such a hurry
Oh, my dear, we met but it is never enough
(Dặng, 1928)

We have used many dictionaries such as Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary, Vietnamese Dictionary, Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị, Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary, etc. Still, this word does not belong to any category. When we used Huynh Cong Tin’s Southern
Dialect Dictionary, we found only one word, lòn sòn, meaning equal, almost equal, not much inferior to each other (Huỳnh, 2007). In terms of word structure, it can be said that the word lòn xòn in the above folk songs is another spelling of the word lòn sòn, but they do not have the same meaning. Therefore, in our opinion, the word lòn xòn in these folk songs is the other way of saying lon xon. Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit) claims that xon is an old word meaning “hurried, hasty” (Huỳnh, 2018a). The Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary also defines lon xon as “in a hurry” (Nguyễn & Đinh, 2001). From the context of the folk verse, Bố anh ơi, mất tuy mất đất cồn trước ao, it can be affirmed that the word lòn xòn is used in this sense, meaning that the couple met in a hurry, so they do not feel satisfied. It is not possible that the couple has the same amount of affection towards each other according to the meaning of the word lòn sòn in the sense of southern dialect.

In two collections, Câu hát đối theo bạn cây of Đặng Le Nghi and Câu hò xây lúa of Nguyen Cong Chanh, there is a word lượng khương, which is unusual in both old and modern folk songs.

Nước có khi chảy khi ương
Gấm tui với bậu lượng khương quá chừng.

Translated:

The water does not flow nor stop
You and I cannot be together nor apart
(Nguyễn, 1928)

- Female part:

Anh đừng có Qua lâu mà em sầu nhớ,
Thực địa anh sớm về xin chớ lượng khương.

Translated:

Do not go far so that it makes me sad
Come back to me soon; please do not hesitate

- Female part:

Lòng Hậu phát đây anh gìn khăn khắn,
Phận Hồng hoa bậu gấn giữ ràng,
Sa nhơn mến nghĩa, đôi hàng Châu sa.

Translated:

My heart for you, I treasure without fail
You’re a rose to me and should keep it in mind
Being apart, I miss you and cry

(Đặng, 1907)

The word lương khương is absent in Vietnamese Dictionary by Hoang Phe. And in Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), this word is defined as “troublesome, unlucky” (Huỳnh, 2018a). In Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary, the only word that is similar in terms of phonetics is the word lure khuron, with the meaning of “interact, live with” (Nguyễn & Đinh, 2001). In our opinion, lương khương and lure khuron are not the same. In the folk songs above, there is also the word ương in the verse, Nư ớc còn khi ương. The word ương is separated from the reduplicative word ương ương, meaning “not this nor that” (Nguyễn & Đinh, 2001). This meaning can be seen as a synonym of lương khương in the verse, Gấm tui với bầu lương khương quá ương, to indicate the dilemma of a couple. They cannot be together nor leave each other.

The word lương khương in the next folk verse is used in contrast to the word khăn khăn, which is the boy’s response to the girl’s doubt. When he heard her saying Thực địa anh về xin chờ lương khương, the young man replied Lòng Hậu phát anh đây gìn khăn khăn. According to Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), the word khăn khăn means “truehearted”; if you miss someone khăn khăn, it means you cannot stop missing them, you are always faithful and loyal (Huỳnh, 2018a). Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary also defines khăn khăn as always keeping something in mind (Nguyễn & Đinh, 2001). Thus, the boy uses the expression khăn khăn to affirm his feelings towards only one girl, and it is not lương khương like the girl’s worries. At the same time, the word lương khương capitalized in the folk verse is also the name of a traditional medicine. It can be seen that the couple has used herb names, such as Qua lâu, Thực Địa, Lương Khương, Hậu Phát, Hồng hoa, Sa Nhơn, and Châu Sa in talking to each other.

The reduplicative word khăn khăn appears one more time in the collection, Câu hát góp of Huỳnh Tinh Cua. It is also used with the meaning of faithful, loyal, or undoubting:

Thuyền dời, bèn cả không dời
Khắn khăn một lời quan từ新华网

Translated:

The boat left but the wharf is still
Loyal to what has been said and told

(Huỳnh, 1901)

In Câu hát Góp, there is another reduplicative word that is no longer used, which is nằng nằng:

Tiếc thay con thơ nằng nằng
Núp lùm chờ đợi bóng trăng bày cháy
Translated:

Pity, the rabbit is resolutely waiting
Hiding and waiting so long for the moon
(Huỳnh, 1901)

According to Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), the meaning of the word nặng nặng is unwavering (Huỳnh, 2018b). Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary defines this word as “resolutely doing it to the end” (Nguyễn & Đinh, 2001). Thus, we can see that the word khẩn khẩn in the previous folk song and nặng nặng in this one have the same meaning, indicating certainty, stability, and determination (mental or emotional state). And both of these words are now rarely used. Only two synonyms are phonetically equivalent to them, khăng khăng and nặng nặc. In the folk verse, Núp lùm chỗ đôi bổng trằng bày chảy, there is a word, bày chảy, meaning “for so long” (Huỳnh, 2018a). Compound words like this are rarely seen in today’s literature. If this word is separated into bày and chảy, it still retains the old meaning. And when combined with other words, we have phrases such as vô duyên bày – that is so charmless, and chỉ làm chảy – that is so much. The meaning of the word bày is “that so, that much” (Huỳnh, 2018a) and in phrases, không chóng thì chảy and năm canh chảy, the meaning of the word chảy is “slowly, late” (Huỳnh, 2018a).

In the same way that the reduplicative words nặng nặng and khẩn khẩn are composed, we also notice the ancient word trí trí with similar meaning.

- Male part:

Bầu có chồng sao bầu không tu bị,
Mỗi buổi chiều, bầu dạo thủy dạo sơn.

Translated:

You have a husband, why don’t you contemplate
Every time you go out to a different place?

- Female part:

Anh đừng có đem dạ nghi nan,
Em dạo chơi giải muộn, chữ lòng vàng trí trí.

Translated:

Do not be skeptical and doubtful
I go out for enjoyment, but I’m truehearted

(Đặng, 1928)
Sông xao mềm sóng với thoán,
Bớ anh ơi duyên nguyền xua em tác đa, lòng đá vàng tri tri.

Translated:
Waves are waves; boats are boats
Oh, my dear, no matter what, my heart is pure and still for you
(Dặng, 1907)

Nhứt ngôn trúng vạn ngôn dụng, nhứt ngôn bất trúng vạn sự bất thành
Em đừng có dạ nghi anh, bớ em ơi
Anh là quân tử lòng thành tri tri

Translated:
Keeping your word is everything; nothing works if you fail to keep it
Do not doubt my heart and intention, my dear
You have my word and sincere heart
(Dặng, 1932)

Rèn lòng vàng đá tri tri
Một ngày cũng gọi tương tri với chàng

Translated:
Keeping faithfulness like gold and stone
One day, I wish I shall be with you
(Huỳnh, 1901)

According to Đại Nam quyền âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), the word tri is knowing, mastering, knowledge, old acquaintance, confidant, prophet, or the word tri in the proverb Hoa hóa hoa bid nan hoa côi/Tri nhân tri diện bất tri tâm (Huỳnh, 2018b). This proverb means that when an artist paints a tiger, he can only paint its skin, not its bones; when we observe people, we can only know their appearance, not their truest intentions. However, in the context of the folk song above, the word tri tri is not used in this sense. The word tri in Đại Nam quyền âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit) is explained in the context of a Sino-Vietnamese word. The word tri tri in phrases such as vàng đá tri tri, lòng thành tri tri, lòng thành tri tri, or nạn nị tri tri, etc., is similar to the meanings of the two words, khẩn khẩn and nằng nằng, that we have analyzed. The word tri tri means the state of being truehearted, faithful, and confident. In folk songs, tri tri refers to the certainty of the characters in love. It is as solid as gold and stone. In addition, in the verse, Bậu có
chồng sao bầu không tu bì, there is an ancient word tu bì. The word tu bì, as explained in Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), means “correcting, improving” (Huỳnh, 2018b). In the situation where the husband suspected that his wife’s behavior is not proper for a married woman because she goes out often (đạo thủy đạo sơn), the girl used the phrase, lồng vàng tri tri (I’m truehearted), to affirm her faithfulness.

A phrase formed by combining dialect with an ancient word that we found in the collection, Câu hát góp, is lụy san san:

Lụy san san đưa nàng xuống vịnh
Anh trố lớn về nhướm bệnh tương tư

Translated:

My tears are pouring as you leave
I come home to my love sickness

(Huỳnh, 1901)

According to Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), the word san san means pouring out. The phrase lụy san san means tears pouring out, tears falling, crying profusely (Huỳnh, 2018b). Therefore, the phrase lụy san san was used to refer to crying instead of the phrase nước mắt chứa chan, as would be used nowadays. We encountered the word lụy, meaning tears, multiple times in southern folk songs of this period. This word occurs in phrases such as hai hàng lụy, rơi lụy, lụy nhớ, lụy ưa, lụy tuôn, lụy đầm, lụy thầm bầu, lụy rớt bầu, giờ lụy hồng, hớt lụy, lụy ngốc, cháu lụy, hot lụy cháu, etc.

Đại mộc lưu giang bất đắc hồi cố lý
Em xa bạn nhơn tình hột lụy chứa chan.

Translated:

Trees drifting in the river do not expect to return
Our separation brings so many tears to my eyes

(Đặng, 1928)

Đôi hàng lụy nhỏ lầm ly, em xiết chi rầu rĩ, anh ơi
Riêng trách ông trời già đày hủy hồng nhan

Translated:

Tears I cry profusely; I am in deep sorrow, my dear
Only the creator is to blame for destroying a beauty’s fate

(Đặng, 1932)
Suppose the word lụy (tears) in the above folk songs is not an ancient Vietnamese word but a word in the southern dialect – a different way of saying the word lệ. Surprisingly, it is not mentioned in *Southern Dialect Dictionary* by Huynh Cong Tin. In this dictionary, the word lụy is defined as falling down and no longer able to function (Huỳnh, 2007). It goes with an example of the word lụy in a folk song, *Nhẫn đầu cảnh sung anh giương cung bắn nhân, con nhạn lụy ròi anh làm bạn với ai* (The swallow was perching on a fig branch; he raised his bow to shoot it. The swallow fell off the branch, so he got no friend to be with). There are also cases that we have studied for which the meaning of the word lụy is falling down:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Anh hùng trường trải chín châu,} \\
\text{Tới đây lâm lụy phải lao nhà ngươi.}
\end{align*}
\]

Translated:

A hero conquered across nine continents
Till this point falling down because of your spear

(Huỳnh, 1901)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Chiều nay người nghĩa xa anh,} \\
\text{Chim sa cá lụy, kiếm đường xanh với tàn.}
\end{align*}
\]

Translated:

My loved one will go far this afternoon
Birds and fish are impaired as green plants quickly wither

(Nguyễn, 1928)

Looking up in the *Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary* of Dao Duy Anh, we found the explanation of the word lụy is “binding, involving” (Dao, 1992). We also found the word lụy with this meaning in these folk songs:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Đặng hoa thom em đom cái mái tóc, bớ anh ơi} \\
\text{Sợ lụy cái tay phạm nhỏ với thiên hương}
\end{align*}
\]
I use beautiful flowers to decorate my hair, my dear

Being afraid of binding with hands that touched the beauty

(Dặng, 1932)

Vì ai gây lụy cho mình
Mẹ cha hay đăng hành hình thân em

Translated:

Because of he who brought me tears
It will bring me trouble once my parents know

(Nguyễn, 1967)

Thus, the same phonetic form as the word lụy often appeared in southern folk songs in the early 20th century. The word lụy is both an ancient word and a regional colloquialism. When used in folk verses, it conveys three meanings, depending on the context of the folk song: hột lụy (tears), làm lụy (fallen), and liên lụy (involved).

Bować is another word appearing many times in southern folk songs and phrases, such as bować áo, hở bować, kết bować, nói bować, chia bować, and lụy thâm bovenant.

Nguyệt về rành rạnh tư bể
Đối ta nguyệt chứng lời thề kết bovenant.

Translated:

Moon is about to glow so brightly
The two of us testify to the oath of marriage

(Huỳnh, 1901)

Áo đài năm nút hở bovenant,
Bớ anh ơi, thung huyền em còn dò, em dám đầu tư tình

Translated:

Five-button tunic with opened collar
My dear, my parents are still here, I dare not deceive them

(Dặng, 1928)

Bớ anh ơi, như ai rứt xé ruột tâm
Mơ hình tương bóng lụy dám thâm bovenant
Transliterated:

Oh, my dear, like someone tearing the silkworm
Dreaming of my love is wetting my collar with tears

(Międzynarodowy Uniwersytet Języka i Literatury, 1933)

I gave the lapel of my shirt so I can write a few words
Parents are first, then you are my next concern

(Międzynarodowy Uniwersytet Języka i Literatury, 1928)

Lụy thâm bâu and kết bâu are phrases appearing many times in southern folk songs. In many dictionaries, the word bâu is both an ancient word and southern dialect. For example, according to Hoàng Phê’s Vietnamese Dictionary, the word bâu in the old sense is a collar, and in the dialect sense, it is a pocket (Hoàng, 2003). Southern Dialect Dictionary explains it as the excess sewn at the collar to fold down every time you wear it (Huỳnh, 2007). According to Ancient Vietnamese Vocabulary Dictionary, the word bâu is the collar or the lapel (Nguyễn & Đinh, 2001). Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit) also states that bâu is a collar and kết bâu means to tie the knot (Huỳnh, 2018a). Thus, it can be seen that the word bâu can be understood as different parts of the shirt, such as the collar, pocket, or lapel. Kết bâu means tying the two lapels of a man and a woman together, and the more profound meaning is to tie the knot. If it is combined with the word lụy, as in the phrase lụy iả thâm bâu, bâu is a collar, but if it is accompanied by the word áo, as in the folk verse Minh đưa bâu áo tôi viết tháo vài hàng, bâu is a lapel. If it is placed in verses Áo dài năm nút hở bâu or Ai từng bàn áo không bâu, the word bâu might mean collar. In addition, the word viết tháo in viết tháo is also an ancient word that needs to be explained. The word viết tháo is derived from viết tháo, which is the way of writing chữ Nôm (a logographic writing system formerly used to write the Vietnamese language) with “raw” style. In the Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary, the word tháo means crude, rudimentary. Tháo cảo means “a literature sketch” (Đào, 1992). Later on, the word viết tháo was written as viết thâu, meaning writing quickly, scribbling. In Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), viết thâu is writing like drawing, writing quickly or carelessly (Huỳnh, 2018b).

Trực tiếp or chức tiếp is also an ancient word found in the southern folk songs of this period:

Nhận còn nao nức hứng sương,
Đây tui còn trực tiếp nau nương chỗ mình
Translated:

The swallow is still excited about the dew
Here I am truehearted waiting for you
(Nguyễn, 1928)

Tà phi dòng tức đạo định công
Đêm nằm trực tiếp, phòng không chờ mình

Translated:

There is no one on my left side
Resting in faithfulness and waiting for you
(Nguyễn, 1928)

Cách bày thu tưởng dà ly biệt
Ai hay em còn chục tiếp với anh

Translated:

Many autumns passed without your loved one
Who thinks you are still so faithful?
(Huỳnh, 1901)

Giờ đưa đường nước xao đ don đ en
Giờ đưa mái may lòn đất độ
Đò đây duyên nơ sâm sờ, bò bầu ơi
Bầu còn trực tiếp đơ cho tròn ơi

Translated:

The wind makes the water turbulent
The wind makes the clouds flow
That's such an ultimate fate, my dear
For whom you are still waiting
(Đặng, 1932)

Dao Duy Anh explains in detail that trực tiếp or chục tiếp is a Sino-Vietnamese noun, literally referring to the node of a bamboo tree, and figuratively referring to a person’s integrity (Đào, 1999). However, when used in southern folk songs, trực tiếp (or chục tiếp) is used as a verb. Therefore, its meaning changes, which is explained in Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị (Dictionnaire Annamit) as “disciplining, refusing to reform or marry”
(Huỳnh, 2018a). In the context of the folk songs mentioned above, it can be seen that southern folk used **trực tiệt** or **chực tiệt** in this period to refer to the value of faithfulness in a couple. This word no longer appears in folk songs collected from the later period but is replaced with the phrase **giữ gìn tiệt hạnh**. In addition, in the folk verses, **Đó đây duyền nỡ sấm sờ, bọ bâu ơi/ Bầu cồn trực tiệt đợi chờ trong ai**, we also see the word, **sấm sờ**, which is rarely seen or mentioned in dictionaries. In our opinion, **săm sờ** might be a misreading of **sâm sờ**, which means “clearly exposed” (Huỳnh, 2018b) according to **Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị** (**Dictionnaire Annamit**). Based on the content of the folk song, we think that **săm sờ** and **sâm sờ** have a similar meaning: the couple’s predestined relationship is clear, as is why they are still hesitant.

Another word that appears ten times in the ten collections but is rarely used now is **xàu**, which refers to a wilting state of plants or a person’s dull mood.

*Cách xa nhau gan ruột héo xàu,*

*Anh phân tay, em lụy nhỏ tài nào không thương*

Translated:

The soul withers since being apart
To say goodbye, your tears, I treasure with my heart

(Nguyễn, 1967)

*Nghė anh than tặn ruột như bào,*

*Vì em mà anh đau đơn, ruột xàu héo hon.*

Translated:

Listening to you lament makes my heart ache
Because of me, you are in pain and sorrow

(Nguyễn, 1934)

*Huệ xàu vì bởi mất sương,*

*Em xanh xao vì bởi nhớ thương nghĩa vàng*

Translated:

The lily is faint due to the loss of dew
I'm pale because I'm missing you

(Nguyễn, 1967)

*Anh đoái cái bụi lan xàu*  
*Nhanh đào nâm, chim quấn cắm, bồn đế sầu,*  
*Phải chi Ngô - Hốn có câu,*
La Mai Thị Gia

*Khơi lo Ngưu - Nhữ buồn rầu đợi trông.*

Translated:

I think of the wilted orchid dust
The herb branch, the cuckoo, and the crickets
If only the Ngo and the Han dynasties had a bridge
Then no need for the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl to wait in sorrow

(Đặng, 1907)

In *Southern Dialect Dictionary*, xàu is defined as wilting, shrinking due to the lack of water, or drooping because of sadness (Huỳnh, 2007). According to Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (*Dictionnaire Annamit*), xàu is wilted, like in phrases such as héo xàu, bàu xàu, xàu mất (Huỳnh, 2018b). The word xàu in the above songs is used with two objects. The first one is the human body part, such as the liver or intestines, to indicate the sad and painful state of a man and a woman when they are apart. The second one is a flower, such as an orchid or lily, to show the withered form of the flower due to lack of water. The folk verse, Huế xàu vì bỏ mắtstrtotime, also appears in later folk songs collected in the southern provinces, but xàu has been changed into sầu. Furthermore, the word sầu can be used to personify the state of a plant to metaphorize human emotions, as in this verse: *Lan huệ sầu ai lan huệ héo* (Wilted orchid or lily is like my sorrow). But when this word is used in the verse, Huế sầu vì bỏ mắtstrtotime (The lily is faint due to the loss of dew), it is inappropriate and distinct from the word xàu used to refer to the wilting condition of plants due to lack of water.

Another word is hài. It always appears in compound words that are no longer used, such as duyên hài or dvoten hài:

Anh cũng không đảm chắc mê sắc hay mê tài,
Chẳng qua là tiền định duyên hài, bó em ơi!

Translated:

I'm not sure if I love beauty or talent
It's just a predestined fate, my dear!

(Nguyễn, 1934)

Bớ em ơi, tâm lòng ai có lợp phai,
Bớ chơn chưa luận ngãi, duyên hài lối thời,

Translated:

Oh, my dear, whose heart has faded

23
Since love is not much, our fate is not sure
(Nguyễn, 1934)

Hai đứa ta đã xứng đủơn hài
Em ham chi bóng sắt nó hành hài tấm thân

Translated:

The two of us have a predestined relationship
Do not love appearance which will ruin you
(Nguyễn, 1928)

According to Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), the word hài means harmony, clarity, completion. If something is not hài, it cannot be done smoothly (Huỳnh, 2018a). Thus, duyên hài can be understood as a beautiful and predestined relationship, the duality of a couple. Furthermore, in the folk songs in which the word duyên hài is used, we notice a combination of many classic references or Sino-Vietnamese sentences.

Anh hùng hữu nich sắc, Chí sĩ mặc tham tài.
Ngày sau đầu trọn duyên hài,
Bớ anh ơi, xin anh chớ học theo ngài Thái Ung

Translated:

No need for heroes to indulge in lust and scholars to be greedy
Till these days your fate remains
Oh, my dear, do not follow Thai Ung’s steps
(Dặng, 1928)

The folk song refers to an anecdote about the character, Thái Ung, a famous artist at the end of the Han Dynasty in Chinese history. This folk song includes a Sino-Vietnamese sentence, Anh hùng chó chim đấm sắc đức và kề sĩ chó tham lợi lộc, which means that heroes should not indulge in lust and scholars should not be greedy for fortune.

Nghinh hôn giá thú bất khả luận tài,
Trăm năm chẳng hiệp đủơn hài
Anh nằm lăn xuống bệ, anh lạy dài ông tơ

Translated:

Marriage should not be defined by social status
The hundred-year fate cannot be reconciled
I fall on the ground and beg the matchmaker

(Huỳnh, 1901)

This folk song means that marriage should not be defined by social status. Still, the couple has filled themselves with the idea of luận tài (considering social class), so the hundred-year fate cannot be reconciled. The character intends to blame the matchmaker for their broken relationship (chàng hiệp duơơn hài). The word duơơn hài is duyên hài in the proverb, Duyên hài can lê, which means “the duality of husband and wife” (Huỳnh, 2018a).

Another interesting word is trước in trước mai, which is also an ancient Vietnamese word. This word used to be quite common in folk songs.

Tai nghe cung oan co câu bởi chàng ơi
Phụng Hoàng, Phú Lộc chẳng sầu trước mai

Translated:

Listen to the sad melody, oh my dear
Phụng Hoàng, Phú Lộc tell the sad harmony

(Táng, 1932)

Thought it was union again
Cannot believe harmony is so far to reach

(Huỳnh, 1901)

Huệ tàn nên con bước chẳng vãng lại,
Tình xưa anh đã phụ, trước mai kể gì.

Translated:

The lily fades so the butterfly doesn’t stay
The love you have betrayed, harmony is nothing

(Đặng, 1928)

Thấy đó nói ra đây em đã hiểu ý,
Muốn cho đào lý hiệp với trước mai,
Quản chi biên rộng sông dài,
Bớ anh ơi, ôm duyên em đợi khách chương đài bấy lâu.

Translated:
Seeing that, I understand what you mean
Wanting to be in harmony
Do not worry about big oceans and long rivers
Oh, my dear, I have been waiting for you for so long

(Đặng, 1928)

According to Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), the word trước means bamboo (Huỳnh, 2018b), so trước mai is trúc mai. This expression is a symbol that often appears in folk songs to refer to a typical male and female couple. The term trúc, which is bamboo, indicates a gentleman, and the word mai, which is a yellow Mai flower, refers to a beautiful woman. In the folk verse, Muốn cho Dao lý hiệp với trước mai, there is another symbol of love, which is Dao and lý. Furthermore, in the following folk songs, besides the word trước, we also have the word sa dĩ. In Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), the term dĩ means “done” (Huỳnh, 2018b). Sạ is a misreading of the word sự, meaning a thing. So, the word sa dĩ can be understood as the thing is already done.

Khi nào thanh vắng một mình,
Tôi phân sa dĩ, dứt tình trước mai.

Translated:
When in solitude
The thing is done as well as our fate

(Đặng, 1928)

The word chích in chích mắc, chích bóng, and chích chiu is also an unusual word in both literature and daily life.

Bây giờ đợi ngã Sâm Thương,
Chiều đơn chích mắc thiệp chàng xa nhau

Translated:
The time when Sâm Thương are apart
How lonely am I when you and I are not together

(Huỳnh, 1901)

Liệu bỏ chích bóng có phòng,
Vào ra hiu quạnh tâm lòng thiết tha.
La Mai Thị Gia

Translated:

Willow tree friends with loneliness
In or out of solitude accompanies a sincere heart

(Nguyễn, 1934)

Đất Sài Gòn nam thanh nữ tú
Anh về rồi đừng say đắm hoa tươi
Để em chiu chích tương tư một mình

Translated:

The land of Sài Gòn is full of beauties
When you go there, don’t fall for a new taste
Let me immerse into my lonely feeling

(Nguyễn, 1933)

According to Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), the word chích means single, odd. Therefore, the word chích mắc means being alone, having no one by your side, which refers to the loneliness of a person in love with someone who has passed away. The word chích bóng means being alone without any companion. Chiu chít means moaning with sorrow (Huỳnh, 2018a). When the word chích combines with other single words to make compound words, such as chích mắc, chích bóng, and chích chiu, the word chích retains its meaning. All three compound words refer to the loneliness or lonely lament of a man or a woman in a separation situation. Today, the word chích bóng is still being used, but it has changed into chiế bóng.

The word đời in đời phân is also an ancient Vietnamese word that has now been replaced by another word:

Mặt em nào có phấn đời,
Có sao đẹp đẽ vô hồi thế kia.

Translated:

Your face is covered with no beauty powder
Why are you always so pretty?

(Nguyễn, 1967)

Thấy mặt em đời phân anh phải lòng,
Biết làm sao gái ngoài bã tông với em.
Translated:

I’m in love when you apply beauty powder
I do not know how to create an eternal bond with you

(Dặng, 1928)

In Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), đôi means bringing up, tossing up, or filling (Huỳnh, 2018a). With this meaning, the word đôi phân refers to the act of applying beauty powder to a woman’s face. Today, the word đôi is still widely used, whether as a single word or combined with other words. However, đôi phân is no longer used.

Similar to the word đôi in đôi phân, the word lậu in lậu tình is also rare in folk songs nowadays:

Anh có thương em anh phải làm ngơ,
Anh đừng sai trẻ đem thơ lậu tình.

Translated:

You love me, so you have to ignore
Asking children to bring letters will let others know

(Dặng, 1928)

Phượng hoàng tử Giả trường mây
Ra về thương nhớ, ở đây lậu tình.

Translated:

The phoenix said goodbye to Truong May
Somewhere, not here, to show love; it will be exposed by chance

(Nguyễn, 1928)

Tay cầm nhành que lại kẻ nhành tránh,
Thương tui để dạ đừng viếng thăm lậu tình

Translated:

Holding a rose next to a primrose
Love me, so please don’t visit since people will know

(Nguyễn, 1928)

In Đại Nam quốc âm từ vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), lậu tình is defined as accidentally letting others know (Huỳnh, 2018a). In the above songs, lậu tình can be understood in the context that your love for someone is accidentally exposed to people.
La Mai Thi Gia

Your feelings are revealed by chance rather than willingly by you. If the word lâu is used separately, this is still a commonly used word. But when combined with the word tình, the word lâu tình is rarely seen elsewhere.

The last word we want to mention in this article is hiềm hiềm, a rare word in folk songs nowadays and back then. It appears only once in the collection, Câu hát góp of Huỳnh Tịnh Cua.

\[ \text{Muốn chơi cháu cục tam hương} \]
\[ \text{Liễu huê hiềm hiềm dọc đường thiếu chỉ} \]

Translated:

To want is to want potted daisies
Willow flowers along the road are not so rare

(Huỳnh, 1901)

The word hiềm hiềm is both an ancient word and a particular word of the southern dialect. In Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị (Dictionnaire Annamit), it is defined as rare or messy. The word hiềm means a lot, abundant (Huỳnh, 2018a). In his article, Cách nói của người miền Tây Nam Bộ qua ca dao, Trần (2011) explained that “when people say hiềm hiềm, it means it is enough. Or when people say it is bốn bàng, it means they have more than enough.” In the above folk song, people used dialect to express deeper meanings and to implicitly compare potted daisies and willow flowers along the road. The word hiềm hiềm has increased the number and lowered the value of the subjects mentioned since we cannot call something with many duplicates rare! To say hiềm hiềm is to say it is not so rare.

3. CONCLUSION

The linguistic system of the southern people was formed in conjunction with the appearance of the national language script. The southern folk language has shown a unique characteristic of a new language through gradual improvements. It results from a convergence of features in folk languages from other regions of the country. Therefore, southern folk songs are a mixture of the national language and the unique language of the southern people in living and creating literature. From three elements: the formation of local history, the coexistence of many ethnic groups, and the fading of boundaries between localities in the same area, the southern people have created a vocabulary system of their own, which researchers continuously study, collect, and annotate into a unique regional dictionary known as the Southern Dialect Dictionary. It can be affirmed that the southern folk songs collected in the late 19th and early 20th centuries are repositories of ancient words and the unique dialect of locals in the South. These ancient words gradually disappeared and are no longer used in literature and everyday communication. If they are used, these words might be modified or combined with other words to express different meanings. Therefore, the research on ancient Vietnamese words in southern folk song collections
published in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century can contribute to sketching a unique and exciting picture of the southern language that was popular.

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