Hypercorrections in the Thổ dialect of Làng Lỡ (Nghệ An, Vietnam): an example of pitfalls for comparative linguistics

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Background knowledge about the Thổ dialect of Làng Lỡ

The language variety referred to here as the Thổ dialect of Làng Lỡ is named after the old name of the village currently called Lam Sơn. The language spoken in the villages of Làng Lỡ, Làng Rạch and Làng Đóng (Nghiã Đàn district, Nghệ An) is homogeneous; in total, it has about 1,500 speakers, who use the endonym 'Cuối'.

The Thổ dialect of Làng Lỡ, together with three other languages : (i) Cuối Chăm, spoken in Uý Lô (Ferlus 1994), (ii) Mọn, a.k.a. Thổ dialect of Quỳ Hợp, and (iii) Kẽo, a.k.a. Thổ dialect of Lâm Lá, constitutes subgroup **6-Thổ** of the Vietic group of the Mon-Khmer family (Austroasiatic). See map at end of handout.

The data used here were collected in December 2000 in the village of Lam Sơn (Nghiã Đàn district, Nghệ An), in collaboration with my colleague Trần Trí Dõi, a professor at the University of Hanoi. Our consultant was Mr. Phạm Đức Chương, who was 60 years old at the time of recording.

Motivation for the study

Henri Maspero (1912) used this dialect in his comparative work; he referred to it as "Làng Lỡ Mường" ("mường de Làng Lỡ"), and classified it as part of "Central Mường". Maspero used the term "Mường" to refer to all languages of the Vietic[2] group except "Annamese" (Vietnamese); present-day consensus is to restrict the term "Mường" to a smaller set of languages. "Việt-Mường" is a lower-level grouping containing Vietnamese and Mường dialects; a telltale set of irregular tonal correspondences distinguishes Việt-Mường ("Northern Vietic") from the rest of the Vietic group ("Southern Vietic") (Ferlus 1997/1999). The Thổ language shows a number of surface similarities (typological similarities) with Mường, but in view of the criterion of tonal correspondences, it clearly belongs to Southern Vietic.

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[1] Translated and expanded by Alexis Michaud in 2015, in consultation with the author. Original title of handout: "Les hypercorrections dans le thổ de Làng Lỡ (Nghệ An, Vietnam) ou les pièges du comparatisme". Available: https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00922722/

[2] The Vietic group was referred to as "Việt-Mường" by Thomas and Headley (1970), followed by Ferlus (1996; 1999; 2004). Nguyễn Tài Cẩn (1995) aptly proposed the term "Việt-Chứt", a compound of the names of the two most distant languages within the group; but the term "Vietic", proposed by Hayes (1982; 1992), has now become commonly accepted for the entire group, and we follow this usage.

My attention had long been drawn to this dialect by the fact that the word for 'cooked rice', Vietnamese *cơm* /kɤm^{A1}/, was *gươm* /ɣɯəm^{A1}/ in Làng Lỡ: a form that seemed aberrant and inexplicable. Serious fieldwork about the Thổ dialect of Làng Lỡ was in order, so as to solve this intriguing problem.

To preview the results of the analysis: Làng Lỡ Thổ is not an etymologically homogeneous language. It results from influence from Vietnamese, since several centuries, over a Vietic substratum, i.e. a language that is related to Vietnamese. In some cases, it is difficult to tell apart inherited vocabulary from acquired (borrowed) vocabulary, with the added complexity that some lexical items show hybridization: influence from Vietnamese, without complete replacement. That is to say, Vietnamese influence is reflected in loanwords (a classical phenomenon, attested in all known languages), but also in the borrowing of *segments* from Vietnamese words – a process that is less studied in the general literature on language contact. The latter constitute the central topic of the present talk.

Phonetic system of Làng Lỡ Thổ

Initial consonants

	tʰ			kʰ		
p	t	c	ʈ	k	ʔ	
ɓ	ɗ	ʔɟ				
f	s		ʂ		h	
β	ð		ɣ			
ʔð						
v		j				
l			ɽ			
m	n	ɲ		ŋ		

All of these units shows at least two correspondences with Vietnamese, including acquired correspondences in addition to inherited correspondences. Retroflex ʈ is found in Vietnamese loanwords with initial ʈ (orthographic *tr*). Spirants (weak fricatives) β ð ɣ ʔð (IPA: β ð ɣ ʔð) originate in the borrowing of segments from a variety of Vietnamese that existed several centuries ago.

Final consonants

p	t	c	k
m	n	ɲ	ŋ
w		j	

Palatal consonants c ɲ are found (i) in borrowings of Vietnamese words with final c ɲ (orthographic *ch* and *nh*), which originate in velars following high front vowels, and (ii) in a few inherited words, such as kăc^{24} (Viet. *cắt* [kăt^{D1}]) 'to cut' and siɲ^{24} (Viet. *rắn* [răn^{B1}]) 'snake'. The nasal final -n has three distinct origins: Proto-Vietic *-n, but also *-l and *-s.

Vowels

i	ɨ	u
e	ə	o
ɛ	ʌ	ɔ
	a ă	
iə	ɨə	uə
eə		oə

Tones

Etymological tone categories are indicated by odd numbers for the high series, and even numbers in the low series. Tones 1 to 6 are found on sonorant-final syllables (a.k.a. 'live' syllables): syllables ending in a vowel, semi-vowel or nasal. Tones 7 and 8 are found on obstruent-final syllables (a.k.a. 'stopped' syllables), ending in -p -t -c -k. Phonetic realizations are indicated in square brackets, using figures from [1] (lowest) to [5] (highest). The table brings out the merger of etymological categories 5 and 6.

1 [22]	3 [24]	5	7 [24]
2 [55]	4 [53]	6 [33ʔ]	8 [53]

The table below shows, for the sake of reference, the tone system of Vietnamese in the standard orthography. Confusions between tones 4 and 6 (ạ-ã) or 5 and 6 (ả-ã) are commonly encountered among Vietnamese dialects.

1 [a]	3 [á]	5 [ả]	7 [át]
2 [à]	4 [ạ]	6 [ã]	8 [ạt]

Spirants (weak fricatives) in Làng Lỡ Thổ

The terms *fricatives* and *spirants* are often considered as synonymous; but André Martinet (1981, 1981-82, 1985) suggests to distinguish consistently between these two series of sounds. Fricatives have a firm articulation; together with stops, they constitute the category of *obstruents*. Spirants (weak fricatives) have a lax articulation; together with semi-vowels, liquids and nasals, they constitute the category of *resonants*. Spirants are diachronically unstable and one therefore seldom has a chance to observe them.

The Thổ dialect of Làng Lỡ possesses a series of three spirants β δ ɣ plus a preglottalized spirant ʔδ. These are discussed in succession below.

• The most frequently occurring spirant is apical: δ. Its realizations range between [δ] and [δˀ]. In the articulation of this consonant, the organs are relaxed, unlike in the articulation of a stop such as t or d. The spirant gives an auditory impression of *lingering*. The lax articulation of the initial spirant is accompanied by a delay in the positioning of the organs (in particular the tongue) for the realization of the vowel. This lag is especially noticeable in the case of the most open vowels, for which the tongue must move from an apical position (tip of the tongue against the teeth) to a low position. During the transition between the spirant and the vowel, the

tongue goes through an intermediate (mid-range) position; this (voiced) interval gives the auditory impression of a schwa-like sound, of central articulation. In view of these observations, it is especially striking to note that transcriptions in the 1651 *Dictionarium* by Alexandre de Rhodes fluctuate between *d* et *dĕ*. I interpret this as a strong suggestion that (at least some of) the 17th-century Vietnamese dialects recorded in the *Dictionarium* had the same type of articulation as found in the Thổ dialect of Làng Lỡ.

Làng Lỡ		Vietnamese		
		modern	*17ᵗʰ c.*	
δa²²	δᵊa²²	*da*	*da/dĕa*	skin
δa⁵³	δᵊa⁵³	*dạ*	*dạ/dĕa*	stomach
δaw²²	δᵊaw²²	*dao*	*dao/dĕao*	knife
δa²²	δᵊa²²	(*đa*)	(*đa*)	banyan
δa²⁴	δᵊa²⁴	(*đá*)	(*đá*)	stone
(tan²⁴)		*dái*	*dái/dĕái*	scrotum

The element *ĕ* in the graph *dĕ* arguably reflects the impression of a transitional central sound, which I transcribe as a schwa in Làng Lỡ Thổ. This notation, only attested in the 17th century, clearly indicates that the articulation of this consonant in Vietnamese at the time was a spirant (as is currently the case in Làng Lỡ). Present-day Vietnamese only uses the graph *d*; its phonetic realization is [z] or [j] depending on the dialect, i.e. this phoneme is not articulated as a spirant anymore.

• The bilabial spirant β is little represented, at least in the speech of our consultant, but a variant βᵊ is found, with a schwa-like transition, as in the case of the apical. In the 1651 *Dictionarium* this consonant is written by means of a newly coined letter: ₵b, a modified form of the letter *b*, and its variant ₵bĕ. Both were later uniformly replaced by *v* (Haudricourt 1974). Here are the examples found in the data collected.

Làng Lỡ		Vietnamese		
		modern	*17ᵗʰ c.*	
βoj²²	βᵊoj²²	*vôi*	₵bôi/₵bĕôi	lime
βaj²²	βᵊaj²²	*vai*	₵bai	shoulder
βuok⁵³	-	(*buộc*)		to tie
βuon⁵⁵	-	(*buồn*)		sad

The bilabial spirant should be more broadly attested in Làng Lỡ Thổ. In many words where one would expect β, one finds v instead, indicating that its spirant pronunciation is in the process of changing to v, following the same evolution that took place in Vietnamese. In such a situation, it can be really difficult to tell apart instances of v that originate in the (ongoing) phonetic evolution of β, on the one hand, and on the other hand late borrowings from Vietnamese words that had an initial v. Be that as it may, the spirant pronunciation is well-preserved in Làng Lỡ Thổ in the few surviving examples listed above.

• The velar spirant ɣ is abundantly represented in Làng Lỡ Thổ. Its pronunciation is identical to Vietnamese ɣ (orthographic representation: *g/gh*). Unlike in the case of the bilabial and apical spirants, no variant with transitional schwa was observed in Làng Lỡ Thổ, any more than the *ĕ* element is attested in velar context in the *Dictionarium*.

Làng Lỡ	Vietnamese	
ɣaŋ²²	*gang*	pig iron
ɣua²³	*gạo*	husked rice
ɣʌn²²	(*cây*)	tree
ɣun⁵³	(*cúi*)	pork

• Preglottalized ˀδ is only attested in one single word, and does not correspond to any of the spirants of Middle Vietnamese. It reflects Proto-Vietic initial ʃ, also reflected by j and ɲ (in borrowings from Vietnamese). Here are examples:

Proto-Vietic	Làng Lỡ	Vietnamese	
ʃoh	ˀδo³³ˀ	*nhổ*	to pluck
ʃas	jăc²⁴	*nhảy*	to jump
ʃaw	ɲăw²²	*nhau*	placenta

• One would expect a palatal spirant corresponding to Middle Vietnamese ʒ (orthographic *gi*), but the reflex in Làng Lỡ is a semi-vowel, transcribed as j and whose pronunciation, [j ~ z ~ ʐ], is not spirant anymore.

Làng Lỡ	Vietnamese	
jɔt⁵³	*giọt*	drop
jɨəŋ⁵⁵	*giường*	bed
jʌj²⁴	*giấy*	paper
jɨa²⁴	(*dứa*)	pineapple
juoŋ²²	(*chồng*)	husband

To sum up, the β/v δ j ɣ phonemes occupy the same place in Làng Lỡ Thổ as the series written as *v* (17th century: ꞗ) *d gi g/gh* in the system of Vietnamese initials. However, this general pattern of correspondences is by no means exceptionless in detail; the exceptions precisely constitute the core of the argument presented here about the borrowing of individual segments, as will be argued further below.

Reminders about the formation of spirants in Vietnamese

In order to understand issues related to spirants in Làng Lỡ Thổ, it is indispensible to recall how the consonant system of Vietnamese developed, and in particular how spirants emerged.

In Proto-Vietic and in the earliest states of Vietnamese, the vocabulary contained monosyllabic words of the form CV(C) along with (quasi-)disyllabic words of the form CCV(C). By contrast, present-day Vietnamese is strictly monosyllabic (aside from cases of combinations of monosyllables into new lexical items). In the formation of the consonant system of this language, the same consonant followed different evolutionary paths depending on whether it was in initial position within a monosyllable or in medial position within a disyllable. The stops p t c k, which result from the merger of the voiceless and voiced series, retained their status as stops in initial position (with a change from voiceless to preglottalized for p and t); they are now represented in the orthography as *b đ ch c/k*, and realized as ɓ ɗ c k. In medial position, on the other hand, they underwent a process of spirantization (lenition) which resulted in the creation of a new series of consonants, with a lax articulation. These

consonants, reconstructed as in β δ ɟ ɣ, became phonologized as contrastive phonemes when disyllables eventually lost their presyllables. They are now written in Vietnamese as *v d gi g/gh* (Ferlus 1982). These evolutions are summarized in the table below. Patterns of confusion between *d* and *gi*, and present-day phonetic realizations, vary across dialects.

Proto-Vietic	in initial position (former monosyll.) C V (C)		in medial position (former disyllabes) C C V (C)	
before devoicing	*devoicing*	*Vietnamese*	*spirantization*	*Vietnamese*
p-b	p	ɓ *b*	p > β	v *v* (XVIIe ᵇb/ᵇbẻ)
t-d	t	ɗ *đ*	t > δ	z/j *d* (XVIIe *d/dẻ*)
c-ɟ	c	c *ch*	c > ɟ	z/j *gi*
k-g	k	k *c/k*	k > ɣ	y *g/gh*

Here are some examples illustrating this evolution, a hallmark of Vietnamese historical phonology.

Proto-Vietic				Vietnamese	
p	kpuːl[1]	p > β		*vôi*	lime
	kpaːs[1]			*vải*	cotton fabric
t	ktaːl[3]	t > δ		*dái*	scrotum
	ptɨŋ[3]			*dứng*	to stand upright
c	kcɔː[1]	c > ɟ		*giò*	foot
	kcoːŋ[3]			*giống*	seed
k	rkoː[3]	k > ɣ		*gạo*	husked rice
	ckəːŋ[2]			*gừng*	ginger

The introduction of spirants into the Thổ dialect of Làng Lỡ

The spirantization of medial stops is a telltale evolution specific to Vietnamese, the only language of the Vietic group where there is clear evidence for this development. Vietnamese is the language in which Vietic spirants originate: the presence of spirants in Central-Northern dialects of Vietnamese, and in the Thổ dialect of Làng Lỡ, appears to be due to a phenomenon of propagation of spirants by *irregular imitation*, not a propagation of the phonological change itself.

Correspondences between Làng Lỡ Thổ spirants and Vietnamese consonants fall into two categories:

Straightforward regular correspondences: spirants in Làng Lỡ (β/v δ j ɣ) corresponding to homologous spirants in Middle Vietnamese (orthographic *v d gi g/gh*).

	Làng Lỡ		Vietnamese		
			modern	*17th c.*	
β/v	βoj²²	βᵊoj²²	*vôi*	₫bôi/₫bĕôi	lime
	βaj²²	βᵊaj²²	*vai*	₫bai	shoulder
	vua⁵⁵		*vồ*	₫bồ	mallet
	vua³³ˀ		*vỗ*	₫bỗ	to strike
	voa³³ˀ		*vỏ*	₫bỏ	bark
	vuj²²		*vui*	₫bui	glad

Correspondences with initial v include many recent Vietnamese borrowings.

	Làng Lỡ		Vietnamese		
			modern	*17th c.*	
δ	δa²²	δᵊa²²	*da*	*da/dĕa*	skin
	δia²²		*dê*	*dê*	goat
	δia²⁴		*dế*		cricket
	δaw²²	δᵊaw²²	*dao*	*dao/dĕao*	knife
	δa⁵³	δᵊa⁵³	*dạ*	*dạ/dĕạ*	stomach
	δan²⁴	δᵊan²⁴	*dán*		to glue
	δiew⁵⁵		*diều*		gizzard
	δu²²		*dâu*		daughter-in-law
	δɨa²²		*dưa*		cucumber
	δăj⁵⁵	δᵊăj⁵⁵	*dày*		thick
	δăw²²	δᵊăw²²	*dâu*		ripe (fruit)
	δɨəj²²		*dơi*		bat
j	joa³³ˀ		*giỏ*		basket
	jɔt⁵³		*giọt*		drop
	jɨəŋ⁵⁵		*giường*		bed
	jăj²⁴		*giấy*		paper
	jiet²⁴		*giết*		to kill
	jup²⁴		*giúp*		to help
	jɨk⁵³		*giữ*		to watch
	jɛ³³ˀ		*giẻ*		rag
	joan⁵⁵		*giòn*		crisp
δ	δaŋ²²	δᵊaŋ²²	*giang*		(a sort of) bamboo
	δăj⁵⁵	δᵊăj⁵⁵	*giày*		shoe

ɣ	ɣaŋ²²	*gang*	pig iron
	ɣaj²²	*gai*	thorn
	ɣua²⁴	*gạo*	husked rice
	ɣaw²⁴	*gạo*	kapok
	ɣɨŋ⁵⁵	*gừng*	ginger
	ɣu⁵³	*gấu*	bear
	ɣa²²	*gà*	chicken
	ɣɨəŋ²²	*gương*	mirror
	ɣɨəm²²	*gươm*	sword
	ɣan²²	*gan*	liver
	ɣɨəj³³ʔ	*gởi*	to entrust
	ɣaŋ²²	*gang*	span
	ɣia²⁴	*ghế*	seat

The ɣ - ɣ correspondence may contain a large number of late borrowings from Vietnamese.

On the basis of these well-attested correspondences, one may conclude that spirantization is an innovation shared by the two languages; the lack of regularity of correspondence would then be explained as due to borrowings. There are several objections to this conclusion, however. Spirantization as it took place in Vietnamese is a well-identified change that required a highly specific sequence of events: while the lenition of medial stops is a commonly attested phonetic phenomenon, the phonologization of an entire series of spirants in Vietnamese was precipitated by the loss of pre-syllables. For the process of change to be transferred to another language would require close contact between the two languages while the change was under way; but Thổ is separated geographically from Vietnamese by the Mường subgroup, which did not undergo spirantization. Moreover, Làng Lỡ Thổ is the only language of the Thổ group to have spirants akin to those of Vietnamese. In case the change spread from Vietnamese to Làng Lỡ Thổ, one would be hard put to understand why it did not extend to the other languages of the Thổ group, which is lexically homogeneous and geographically tightly packed together.

Let us now examine other types of correspondences.

Non-trivial regular correspondences: Làng Lỡ Thổ spirants (β/v δ j ɣ) corresponding to homologous Vietnamese stops (*b đ ch c/k*).

	Làng Lỡ	Vietnamese	
β/v	βuok⁵³	*buộc*	to pluck
	βuon⁵⁵	*buồn*	sad
	vun⁵⁵	*bùn*	mud
	vuoŋ⁵⁵	*buồng*	bunch (of bananas)
	vuot⁵³	*bột*	flour
	vu⁵⁵	*bầu*	gourd
	voa⁵⁵	*bò*	zebu
	vea⁵⁵	*bè*	raft
	vɨa⁵⁵	*bừa*	harrow

δ	δa²⁴	δ°a²⁴	*đá*	stone
	δa²²	δ°a²²	*đa*	banyan
	δɛw⁵⁵	δ°ɛw⁵⁵	*đèo*	pass, col
	δia²⁴		*đái*	urine
	δean⁵⁵		*đèn*	lamp
	δʌm²²	δ°ʌm²²	*đâm*	to stab
	δuoŋ⁵⁵		*đồng*	copper
j	ji⁵⁵		*chì*	lead
	jɛ⁵⁵		*chè*	tea
	juon⁵⁵		*chồn*	weasel
	juoŋ⁵⁵		*chồng*	husband
	ji⁵³		*chị*	elder sister
	jɨa⁵³		*chợ*	market
	jɨ³³ʔ		*chữ*	character, letter
	juj⁵⁵		*chùi*	to erase
ɣ	ɣʌn⁵⁵		*cây*	tree
	ɣat²⁴		*cát*	sand
	ɣɨəm⁵⁵		*cơm*	cooked rice
	ɣam²⁴		*cám*	chaff
	ɣun⁵³		*cúi*	pig
	ɣʌj⁵⁵		*chồn*	civet-cat
	ɣean⁵³		*kiến*	ant
	ɣu⁵³		*cậu*	maternal uncle
	ɣim⁵⁵		*kim/ghim*	needle
	ɣun³³ʔ		*củi*	firewood
	ɣean⁵⁵		*kèn (mồm)*	Jew's harp
	ɣʌm⁵⁵		*cầm*	to hold

If spirantization were a regular phonetic change, like in Vietnamese, then one would have to suppose that the above words used to be disyllabic in Làng Lỡ Thổ. One would need to reconstruct, as the immediate ancestor of Làng Lỡ Thổ, a language with twice as many disyllables as Proto-Vietnamese. This is highly implausible: there are differences in the proportion of monosyllables and disyllables across Vietic languages, but not to such a considerable extent.

There are other arguments in favour of different hypotheses concerning the origin of spirants.

The four words below are old borrowings from Chinese which spread throughout the Vietic area (from Vietnamese to other Vietic languages). Their initial spirants in Làng Lỡ are puzzling.

jɛ⁵⁵	*chè*	tea
jɨa⁵³	*chợ*	market
jɨ³³ʔ	*chữ*	character, letter
ɣɨəm⁵⁵	*cơm*	cooked rice

More surprising still, two Sino-Vietnamese words, i.e. indisputably monosyllabic words, have spirant initials in Làng Lỡ. These spirants contradict headlong the hypothesis of a spread of the change.

ðuoŋ^{55}	*đồng*	copper	(*tóng* 銅)
ðien^{55}	*tiền*	money	(*qián* 錢)

I now turn to the task of proposing an explanation for the presence of spirants in Làng Lỡ Thổ.

Hypothesis: propagation by imitation and hypercorrection

To me, it is clear that the introduction of spirants into Làng Lỡ Thổ is due to a phenomenon of propagation. Here is the detailed explanation:

Vietnamese, after it developed a series of spirants, expanded southwards, and came into contact with a Thổ dialect. The relationship of prestige is clearly asymmetrical: Vietnamese is culturally and politically dominant; the local language is dominated. Despite their divergence since the Proto-Vietic stage, the two languages have preserved enough shared vocabulary to allow intercomprehension and a degree of awareness of phonetic correspondences.

Speakers of the Thổ dialect unconsciously perceive Vietnamese spirants – sounds that are absent from their language – as prestige elements that are characteristic of the dominating language. By a sort of affectation, speakers introduce these spirants into words of their own dialect, either by "expellor loans"[3] (a label coined by this author) whereby the Vietnamese word replaces the corresponding local word, or by borrowing only the spirantized segment from Vietnamese, which replaces the homologous segment in the cognate word in Thổ. The examples below illustrate the second type of borrowing: differences between the rhymes in Vietnamese and in Làng Lỡ Thổ are those that are expected on the basis of regular correspondences, clearly showing that only the initial is affected by the process of imitation.

voa^{33ʔ}	*vỏ*	bark
ɣu^{53}	*gấu*	bear
ɣua^{24}	*gạo*	husked rice

This is a process of *propagation by imitation* in cognate words. Vietnamese spirants, reconstructed as β ð ɟ ɣ (corresponding to *v d gi g/gh* in present-day spelling), replaced the stops of like point of articulation p t c k in the dominated dialect, yielding β/v ð ɟ ɣ. The propagation from Vietnamese to Làng Lỡ Thổ concerns the output of spirantization, not the process of spirantization itself.

A second stage consists in extending these spirants to other items of Thổ vocabulary, even in cases where the corresponding Vietnamese words have preserved initial stops. This implies that the words were already monosyllabic when spirants were introduced into the system. As above, differences in rhymes clearly demonstrate that only the initial stop is affected by the change.

voa^{55}	*bò*	zebu
βuok^{53}	*buộc*	to tie
ða^{24}	*đá*	stone

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[3] French neologism: *emprunt chassant.*

ða^{22}	*đa*	banyan
juoŋ^{55}	*chồng*	husband
jɨa^{53}	*chợ*	market
ɣɨəm^{55}	*cơm*	cooked rice
ɣun^{33ʔ}	*củi*	firewood

These substitutions in initials cannot be explained by a simple process of propagation by imitation. The Vietnamese form does not have a spirant, and provides no explanation for the spirant found in the Thổ dialect. This is an instance of *propagation by hypercorrection*. After they were introduced into the Thổ dialect, spirants replaced stops of like point of articulation, initial p t c k, in part of the language's lexicon.

Ces substitutions d'initiales ne peuvent s'expliquer par le simple processus de propagation par imitation. La forme sans spirante du viet ne peut justifier la forme avec spirante du dialecte. On est devant un processus de ***propagation par hypercorrection***. Les spirantes du dialecte (aujourd'hui β/v ð j ɣ) ont remplacé leurs homologues à l'initiale d'une partie du vocabulaire de ce même dialecte.

This astonishing phenomenon – call it *rampant spirantization* – even extends into contexts where it oughtn't:

ðien^{55}	*tiền*	money

The regular Làng Lở cognate for Viet. initial **t** is **s**.

si^{22}	*tay*	hand
saj^{22}	*tai*	ear
sat^{24}	*tát*	to scoop
som^{22}	*tôm*	shrimp

These borrowings of segments have the remarkable consequence that they result in *acquired correspondences*.

A brief note on the limits to the propagation of spirants

Vocabulary that remains unaffected by the propagation of spirants by imitation includes:

pok^{24}	*vốc*	handful
tan^{24}	*dái*	scrotum
coŋ^{24}	*giống*	seed
kăn^{24}	*gáy*	to sing (of rooster)
kʌ̆n^{24}	*gối*	knee
kua^{33ʔ}	*gỗ*	wood

Vocabulary that remains unaffected by the propagation of spirants by hypercorrection includes:

pʌ̆n^{22}	*bay*	to fly
pan^{33ʔ}	*bưởi*	grapefruit
tʌ̆t^{24}	*đất*	earth

taŋ⁵⁵	*đường*	path, road
cɔ²⁴	*chó*	dog
cim²²	*chim*	bird
kɔ³³ʔ	*cỏ*	grass
ka²⁴	*cá*	fish

.... (there are many other examples)

The above correspondences represent what is left of ***inherited correspondences***.

Vowel correspondences

to be added

Conclusions [to be expanded]

In the study of a phonetic change, the innovation is to be clearly distinguished from its propagation. The innovation generally takes place in a restricted area withia language's geographic domain. Propagation concerns either the change itself, or the results of the change (in which case the conditioning of the original change is not present); it can affect several languages.

The case of the propagation of Vietnamese spirants into the Thổ dialect of Làng Lỡ exemplifies the propagation of change in a highly specific situation of language contact where two languages that are genetically related, and present a degree of intercomprehension, come into contact on unequal terms where the one carries more prestige than the other.

The dominating language – in this case Vietnamese – has some sounds that are unfamiliar to the speakers of the influenced dialect (in this case: spirant consonants). The speakers of the dialect borrow these unusual sounds as *prestige phonemes*. This peculiar type of borrowing is unlike the classical case of loan words: a case of loan *phonemes*. The speakers of the influenced dialect (Làng Lỡ Thổ) borrow Vietnamese spirants, and introduce them into corresponding Thổ words, in replacement of the native phoneme.

This results in *acquired correspondences*, which, in the case of Làng Lỡ Thổ, are more numerous than inherited correspondences. This situation constitutes a pitfall for historical linguistics. A linguist applying the comparative method without teasing apart acquired and inherited correspondences would be led to reconstruct a surrealist proto-system. (Such mistakes are not unattested.)

Similar phenomenon have been hypothesized in the contact between Middle Chinese, as an influencing language, and Tibetan, as an influenced language (Ferlus 2000). As in Làng Lỡ Thổ, the borrowing concerns segments (Chinese rhymes of division II or III) that were noticeably alien to Tibetan ears.

This type of progagation has, to our knowledge, not been described clearly in the general linguistic literature; an understanding of such mechanisms would no doubt be highly beneficial to historical phonology, a field where researchers often need to grope around for models with which to buttress their hypotheses.

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Map: *Subgroups of Vietic* (after Ferlus 1996):

Southern area:
   1-Maleng: Maleng (proper), Malang, Pakatan, Mã Liềng, Maleng Brô, Kha Phong (a.k.a. Maleng Kari).
   2-Arem: Arem (a.k.a. Cmbrau).
   3-Chứt: Sách (a.k.a. Chứt, Salang), Rục.
   4-Aheu: Thavung, Sô (a.k.a. Sô Thavung), Phôn Soung.
   5-Hung: Pong (a.k.a. Phong), Toum, Liha, Đan Lai.
   6-Thổ: Thổ dialect of **Làng Lỡ** (a.k.a. Cuối), Cuối Chăm, Mọn, Kẽo.

Northern area:
   7-Mường: Mường (a.k.a. Mọl, ou Mọn); includes many dialects, among which M. Đằm, M. Khói and Tân Phong; Nguồn.
   8-Vietnamese: Standard Written Vietnamese and its dialects; Central-Northern dialects.