French and Tây Bôi in Vietnam:
A study of language policy, practice and perceptions

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Abstract

The field of this thesis is the policy and practice of French language use in Vietnam, with particular reference to Tây Bòi, a pidgin French spoken during the colonial era. The work will examine the varieties of French, the circumstances of their origins and development, how they are used and how they could contribute to the study of the meeting of different languages and cultures, especially with regard to the interaction of French with other languages. The example of Tây Bòi will illustrate some of the overlooked results of language planning policies and how practical usage differs from the ideals.

Research was conducted using material from various sources, including the limited number of linguistic studies on Tây Bòi, literature on colonial French policy and accounts of that era, and later works on Francophonie specifically on Vietnam and throughout the French-speaking world. Methodological approaches include aspects of sociolinguistic investigation, analysis of communicative necessity, the power, identity and prestige associated with language, and pidgin and creole theory. A study trip to Vietnam was necessary for researching archival records not available in Australia, as well as gathering linguistic data from French speakers and examining attitudes towards French across people of different generations and backgrounds.

Conclusions are drawn from this wide-ranging study on the continuing efforts of France to promote its language and culture overseas and the changes in emphasis and policy which have occurred since the colonial era. The study of contact between languages and cultures and of its results, including Tây Bòi, can prove valuable for understanding and developing an improved linguistic policy as well as international relations.
Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.
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Figure 1: Vietnam before 1860, showing the unification of the country under the Vietnamese emperors (DeFrancis 1977 p. 39).
Figure 2: Vietnam during the colonial era: French Indochina c. 1920s, showing population density, major cities, administrative divisions (small dashes) and the borders of French Indochina (large dashes) (Vidal de la Blache and Gallois 1929 p. 467).
Figure 3: Vietnam today (http://www.medteams.com/)