

## NOTES

### Nguồn: A Dialect of Vietnamese or a dialect of Mường? (Based on local data)\*

Nguyễn Văn Tài  
Linguistic Institute, Hanoi

Translated by  
Miriam A. BARKER  
Summer Institute of Linguistics

Is Nguồn a dialect of Vietnamese or a dialect of Mường? This is a question that linguists and ethnologists are discussing, but the opinions of the authors are quite different from each other. L. Cadière<sup>1</sup> showed indecision: on the one hand, he recognized that Nguồn<sup>2</sup> at least has the morphemes of ancient Vietnamese. On the other hand, he still saw a clear relationship between Nguồn, Sách and Mường of the Đà river region. M. Chéon<sup>3</sup> and J. Cuisinier<sup>4</sup> considered Nguồn a dialect of Mường. H. Maspéro<sup>5</sup> also viewed it that way, but classified it more specifically: he considered Nguồn a dialect, which, along with the dialects of Thạch Bi (Hoà Bình), Vân Mộng (Sơn Tây), Mỹ Đức (Hà Đông) and Nho Quan (Ninh Bình), creates the northern dialect of Mường. Phạm Đức Dương<sup>6</sup> considers Nguồn a local dialect of the north central plains dialect of Vietnamese, and so on...

---

\*Originally published in Vietnamese under the title *Tiếng Nguồn, một phương ngôn của tiếng Việt hay một phương, ngôn của tiếng Mường?* in *Ngôn Ngữ* 1975, 4 pp. 8-16.

<sup>1</sup> L. Cadière, *Les Hautes vallées du Song Gianh*. BEFEO vol. V, 1905, 3-4, p. 349.

<sup>2</sup> Nguồn is the spoken language of a group of people residing in Minh Hóa district, Quảng Bình province. (A rather secluded region in the Trường Sơn mountain range. Before the revolution it belonged to the Cơ Sa and Kim Linh cantons.)

<sup>3</sup> M. Chéon, "Note sur les dialects Nguồn, Sách et Mường" BEFEO Vol. VII, 1907, 1-2 p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> J. Cuisinier, *Les Mường* ("Travaux et mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie" 45) Paris, 1946.

<sup>5</sup> H. Maspéro, "Études sur la phonétique historique de la langue annamite. Les initiales" BEFEO, Vol XII, 1912, 1-2, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Phạm Đức Dương, *Về mối quan hệ thân thuộc giữa các ngôn ngữ thuộc nhóm Việt-Mường miền Tây tỉnh Quảng Bình*, [On the close relationship between the languages in the Việt-Mường group in western Quảng Bình province], a report at the Conference to firmly establish the list of ethnic minorities, Nov. 1973. (Translator's note: Later published in *Về vấn đề*

Determining the position of Nguồn in the Viet–Mường group, according to us, is necessary not only for the work of researching each language, but also for researching the Viet–Mường relationship. This article is written in order to supply some necessary data, and using the medium of that data, to contribute some small opinions toward a clear definition.

Is Nguồn an independent language like Mường and Vietnamese, or a dialect of one of these two languages? The problem is indeed not simple. What is a language? And what is a dialect? “It is nearly impossible to say clearly where the difference between a language and a dialect lies.”<sup>7</sup> Until now, we still do not have defining criteria that are really satisfactory. While we are waiting for further research on these criteria, we will temporarily recognize the following: defining a language, first and foremost, must rely on genuine linguistic criteria, such as the lexicon, phonetics and grammar. Also, one must pay close attention to the historical formation of the community of people who speak that language, and the relationship they have with their neighboring ethnic groups.

In addition, we cannot forget the ethnic self–consciousness of the people who speak the language that we are defining. We will look at each of these points in turn.

1. Our first observation when coming in contact with the Nguồn language is the closeness of Nguồn and Mường in aspects of the lexicon and also in phonetics.

1.1. First of all is the closeness in basic vocabulary. We have collected statistics of 500 words in these areas: nature, plants, objects, parts of the human body, numerals, time and location. The results of the statistical collection are as follows:

- 342 words are cognate with Mường, comprising 68.4%
- 228 words are cognate with the north central plains dialect of Vietnamese, comprising 45.6%<sup>8</sup>

- 83 words are cognate with Chữ<sup>9</sup>, comprising 16.6% (included are some words cognate with the dialects of Bru (Vân Kiều, Khùa, etc.) in the same residential area.<sup>10</sup>

The overlap between the 3 lexicons of Vietnamese, Mường and Nguồn is illustrated in the diagram below.

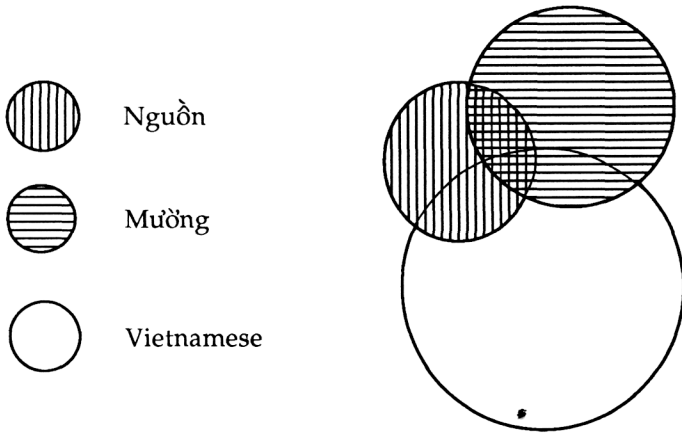
*xác định thành phần các dân tộc thiểu số ở miền Bắc Việt Nam*, [On the problem of defining the social position of the minority groups in northern Vietnam] 1975, p. 500-517, Viện Dân tộc Học (Ethnology Institute)

<sup>7</sup> F. de Saussure, *Giáo trình ngôn ngữ học đại cương* [cour de linguistique générale], Hanoi, 1973, p. 343.

<sup>8</sup> In a table of the words investigated (nearly 5000 words) the Nguồn words cognate with Vietnamese are mostly adjectives and some words we suspect Nguồn borrowed from Vietnamese. [Tr. The original said 15.6%, which is clearly an error in printing.]

<sup>9</sup> Chữ is the generic name of the group of people including Mày, Rục, Sách, A Rem, and Mã Liêng, in western Quảng Bình province.

<sup>10</sup> The total is more than 100% because the lexicons of Nguồn, Mường and Vietnamese have overlapping portions. (See the diagram below.)



The statistics show that the ratio of basic vocabulary cognates of Nguõn is higher with Muõng. We will defend this conclusion further with a table of 84 common words comparing Nguõn with the following languages: Muõng, Vietnamese (17th century<sup>11</sup>, north central plains dialect, and Hanoi dialect), Chũt and Vân Kiõu. See the following table (English glosses added by translator).

By the comparative table above we see that to consider Nguõn a variation of the north central plains dialect or of 17th century Vietnamese is not satisfactory. These words are not only foreign to the north central plains dialect, but also foreign to 17th century Vietnamese. So why then is there similarity between Nguõn and Muõng when their residential areas (in terms of Vietnamese territory) are quite far apart?<sup>12</sup> With these residential areas, we can exclude the possibility of Nguõn being under the influence of Muõng. In reality, the Nguõn lexicon reflects clearly the influence of Vietnamese, Chũt and the Mon–Khmer languages. However, Nguõn still retains its own aspects. Those aspects are very close to Muõng. Isn't it true that Nguõn and Muõng have a relationship here?

1.2. The closeness between Nguõn and Muõng in the area of the lexicon implies also a closeness in phonology. We can find lines of phonetic similarity in the table above. Below are some representative points of similarity.

<sup>11</sup> Taken from *Dictionnarium annamiticum, lusinatinum, latinum*, of A. de Rhodes (Rome, 1651).

<sup>12</sup> If you consider that some branches of Thổ (Thổ Mõn, Thổ Lâm La, Thổ Sông Con, etc) in western Nghệ An province are also Muõng, then the residential area of the Muõng people is more than 200 km from the residential area of the Nguõn people (as the crow flies, following the road it is about 400 km)

For the phonetic value of the symbols used in transcription see “Ngôn Ngữ”, 1975, 1, p. 70. For the sound /ɔ/ we use the symbol with the symbol (ɔ); (u: long, u short), except the two long vowels *a* and *ɔ*. About the long vowels, short vowels and diphthongs of Văn Kiều see, Nguyễn Văn Tài, *Giới thiệu*, in “Tìm hiểu ngôn ngữ *tiếng Văn Kiều*” (Seeking to understand the ethnic minority languages of Văn Kiều language), in “Tìm hiểu ngôn ngữ *tiếng Văn Kiều*” (Seeking to understand the ethnic minority languages of Văn Kiều language), vol 2 [This book was, in fact, never published, [Study the Bru Văn Kiều language], and the article was published instead in Sách học tiếng Bru Văn Kiều by Nguyễn Văn Tài, 1986 Bình Trị Thiên., . M.B.]

English	Nguồn	Việt Nam			Chữ	Văn Kiệu
		Mường Bi (Hòa Bình)		Hanoi		
		17th Century	North Central plains	5		
sky	1 tɔj <sup>1</sup> , tɔj <sup>1</sup>	2 tɔj <sup>1</sup>	3 bloi	4 trôi	6 ploj <sup>1</sup> , tɔm <sup>2</sup>	7 paɔɔj
earth	tâ <sup>3</sup>	tâ <sup>3</sup>	đét, đát	đất	atâk <sup>2</sup> , bon <sup>1</sup>	kule?
sun	dă <sup>3</sup>	dă <sup>3</sup>	nan	năng	karaj <sup>1</sup>	p'wak
rain	mư <sup>2</sup>	mư <sup>2</sup>	mưa	mưa	kamua <sup>1</sup>	mưa
stone	ta <sup>3</sup>	ta <sup>3</sup>	đá	đá	tata <sup>2</sup>	tamaw
water	đak <sup>3</sup>	đak <sup>3</sup>	nác, nước	nác	dak <sup>2</sup>	do?
stream	hon <sup>3</sup>	hon <sup>3</sup>	hỏi, Juáy	hỏi	tok <sup>2</sup>	taum
road, path	ta <sup>1</sup>	ta <sup>1</sup>	đàng	đàng	tjan <sup>1</sup>	karna
well	ciê <sup>3</sup>	ciê <sup>3</sup>	gyéng	giéng	ciê <sup>2</sup>	—
fire	la <sup>4</sup>	kuj <sup>4</sup>	lửa	lá	kul <sup>3</sup> to <sup>3</sup>	ôi
burn	căn <sup>3</sup>	căn <sup>3</sup>	cháy	cháy	kuco <sup>1</sup>	kat
drift	lô <sup>2</sup>	lô <sup>2</sup>	trôi	trôi	calô <sup>1</sup>	hori
float	dôn <sup>4</sup>	nô <sup>4</sup>	nổi	nổi	dôn <sup>1</sup>	dôi

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
person	ɲaj <sup>1</sup>	moj <sup>5</sup>	người	ngài	người	người	kwai
head	tɔk <sup>3</sup> , tɔk <sup>3</sup>	tɔk <sup>3</sup>	đầu	tróc	đầu	kuɔk <sup>2</sup>	plɔ
skin	ta <sup>2</sup>	ta <sup>2</sup>	dẽa, da	da	da	karɔt <sup>2</sup>	Ɂar
brain (mind)	uok <sup>3</sup>	ɲac <sup>3</sup>	óc	óc	óc	cuok <sup>2</sup>	abok
crown (top of the head)	u <sup>2</sup>	u <sup>2</sup>	—	thóp	thóp	kordɔ <sup>2</sup>	abok
hair	t'æk <sup>3</sup>	t'æk <sup>3</sup>	tảóc	tóc	tóc	usuk <sup>2</sup>	so:k
nape (of the neck)	ot <sup>3</sup>	kum <sup>5</sup> ku <sup>1</sup>	gáy	ót	gáy	kadok <sup>2</sup>	lo:koi
face	mat <sup>5</sup>	mat <sup>5</sup>	mặt	mặt	mặt	mat <sup>4</sup>	mat
nose	mun <sup>5</sup>	muj <sup>5</sup>	mũi	mũi	mũi	mul <sup>1</sup> , muh <sup>1</sup>	muh
mouth	mòm <sup>1</sup>	men <sup>5</sup>	miệng	mòm	miệng	kaɲ <sup>1</sup>	boh
tooth	t'aj <sup>2</sup>	t'aj <sup>2</sup>	răng	răng	răng	saj <sup>1</sup>	kaney
gum	tom <sup>5</sup>	toj <sup>5</sup>	lợi	lợi	lợi	lij <sup>1</sup>	taj
tongue	lan <sup>5</sup>	laj <sup>5</sup>	lưỡi	lại	lưỡi	lal <sup>4</sup> , liè <sup>1</sup>	lưai
ear	t'aj <sup>2</sup>	t'aj <sup>2</sup>	tai	tai	tai	saj <sup>4</sup>	kutur
shoulder	ban <sup>1</sup>	pak <sup>3</sup> vak <sup>3</sup>	ai, vai	vai	vai	kalan <sup>1</sup>	apal
liver	lom <sup>1</sup>	lom <sup>1</sup>	gan	gan	gan	lom <sup>1</sup>	lwam
breast	u <sup>3</sup>	u <sup>3</sup> , pu <sup>3</sup>	u	vũ, bú	vũ, bú	pupu <sup>2</sup>	to:h
navel	t'uj <sup>3</sup>	t'oj <sup>3</sup>	rún, rón	dún	đón (rón)	kudul <sup>2</sup>	talui
penis	tan <sup>3</sup>	taj <sup>3</sup>	dếái, dái	dái	dái	katal <sup>2</sup>	-
go	ti <sup>2</sup>	ti <sup>2</sup>	đi	đi	đi	ti <sup>1</sup>	pâ:l

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
stand	tuj <sup>3</sup>	coj <sup>5</sup>	đung	đung	đung	tuj <sup>2</sup>	tazuj
eat	an <sup>2</sup>	an <sup>2</sup>	ăn	ăn	ăn	an <sup>1</sup>	ca
speak	con <sup>3</sup>	po <sup>5</sup>	nói	nói	nói	coi <sup>2</sup>	tatorj
drink	oj <sup>3</sup>	oj <sup>3</sup>	uống	uống	uống	jo <sup>3</sup>	nwai
shoot	paj <sup>3</sup>	paj <sup>3</sup>	bán	bán	bán	paj <sup>2</sup>	popan
catch	pat <sup>3</sup>	pat <sup>3</sup>	bắt	bắt	bắt	num <sup>2</sup>	kopj
crush, press	pop <sup>3</sup>	pop <sup>3</sup>	bóp	bóp	bóp	kadac <sup>2</sup>	kupoit
bind, tie	puok <sup>5</sup>	puok <sup>5</sup>	buộc	buộc	buộc	dzak <sup>2</sup>	coj
rake	puo <sup>1</sup>	puo <sup>1</sup>	bừa	bừa	bừa	puo <sup>1</sup>	buoj
plow	kan <sup>1</sup>	kan <sup>1</sup>	cày	cày	cày	kai <sup>1</sup>	kai
step, walk	puok <sup>3</sup>	puok <sup>3</sup>	bước	bước	bước	tanjai <sup>2</sup>	tazaɹ
carry	paj <sup>1</sup>	ok <sup>-</sup>	caõ	cõng	cõng	pi <sup>2</sup>	peɹ
urinate	taj <sup>3</sup>	taj <sup>3</sup>	đái	đái	đái	ti <sup>2</sup>	kaklum
pound, stab	tam <sup>2</sup>	tam <sup>2</sup>	đâm	đâm	đâm	cjai <sup>2</sup>	cjat
be born	te <sup>4</sup>	te <sup>4</sup>	đẻ	đẻ	đẻ	kazjo <sup>2</sup>	sarun
hungry	ton <sup>3</sup>	ton <sup>3</sup>	đói	đói	đói	broj <sup>1</sup>	panjai
full	do <sup>2</sup>	do <sup>2</sup>	no	no	no	do <sup>1</sup>	pasai
OK	an <sup>3</sup>	an <sup>3</sup>	được	được	được	tok <sup>4</sup>	butn
good	t'oc <sup>3</sup>	t'oc <sup>3</sup>	tốt	tốt	tốt	t'oc <sup>2</sup>	oi
bad	saw <sup>3</sup>	saw <sup>3</sup>	xấu	xấu	xấu	nom <sup>1</sup>	tao:
fragrant	hom <sup>2</sup>	hom <sup>2</sup>	thơm	thơm	thơm	po <sup>m</sup> 1	p'uom

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
smelly	hó <sup>3</sup>	hó <sup>3</sup>	thối	thúi	thối	puok <sup>2</sup>	şo?
near	k'əp <sup>1</sup>	k'əp <sup>1</sup>	gần	gún, gần	gần	takj <sup>1</sup>	ce?
far	sa <sup>2</sup>	sa <sup>2</sup>	xa	ngái	xa	conaj <sup>2</sup>	zoj
red	to <sup>4</sup>	to <sup>4</sup>	đỏ	đỏ	đỏ	to <sup>3</sup>	kusai
black	ten <sup>2</sup>	zám <sup>2</sup>	đen	đen	đen	ten <sup>1</sup>	kurm
white	tləj <sup>3</sup> , tət <sup>3</sup>	tləj <sup>3</sup>	trắng	trắng	chăng	tokal <sup>1</sup>	klouk
older brother	əŋ <sup>2</sup>	əŋ <sup>2</sup> , tuo <sup>3</sup>	anh	anh	anh	muan <sup>4</sup>	ai
younger sibling	un <sup>3</sup>	un <sup>3</sup>	em	em	em	ciē <sup>2</sup>	sem
aunt	i <sup>3</sup>	i <sup>3</sup>	đì, mợ	đì, mự	đì, mợ	mu <sup>4</sup>	aŋta
bamboo	p'ew <sup>2</sup>	p'ew <sup>2</sup>	tre	tre	che	p'ew <sup>1</sup>	sarəŋ
neohouzeau	na <sup>3</sup>	law <sup>5</sup>	nứa	ná	nứa	patē <sup>2</sup>	ahə:
(a kind of bamboo)							
rice plants	lo <sup>3</sup>	lo <sup>5</sup>	lúa	ló	lúa	alo <sup>2</sup>	sarə:
husked rice	kəw <sup>3</sup>	kaw <sup>3</sup>	gạo	gấu	gạo	lôkô <sup>2</sup>	rakau
sticky rice	dép <sup>3</sup>	dép <sup>3</sup>	nếp	nếp	nếp	dép <sup>2</sup>	dirp
plain rice	lon <sup>1</sup>	cəm <sup>1</sup>	tẻ	lòn	tẻ	lwon <sup>1</sup>	-
bird	sin <sup>2</sup>	cim <sup>2</sup>	chim	chim	chim	cim <sup>1</sup>	căm
mouse (rat)	t'jén <sup>1</sup>	rê <sup>1</sup>	chuột	chuột	chuột	kunê <sup>1</sup>	kunai
chicken	ka <sup>1</sup>	ka <sup>1</sup>	gà	ga	gà	caka <sup>1</sup>	>>tuôi
tiger	k'an <sup>3</sup>	k'al <sup>3</sup>	khái	khái	hổ	kuhal <sup>1</sup>	kula
eel	luoŋ <sup>2</sup>	luoŋ <sup>2</sup>	lươn	lươn	lươn	blom <sup>1</sup>	nun

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
one	môc <sup>5</sup>	môc <sup>5</sup>	một	một	một	môc <sup>4</sup> , muc <sup>4</sup>	muôi
two	han <sup>2</sup>	hal <sup>2</sup>	hai	hai	hai	hal <sup>1</sup>	bar
three	pa <sup>2</sup>	pa <sup>2</sup>	ba	ba	ba	pa <sup>1</sup>	pai
four	pôn <sup>3</sup>	pôn <sup>3</sup>	bốn	bốn	bốn	pôn <sup>2</sup> , puôn <sup>1</sup>	pôn
five	dâm <sup>2</sup>	dâm <sup>2</sup>	năm	năm	năm	dâm <sup>1</sup>	son
six	şaw <sup>3</sup>	k'âw <sup>3</sup>	şau	sáu	xáu	p'law <sup>2</sup>	tapât
seven	paj <sup>4</sup>	paj <sup>4</sup>	bảy	bảy	bảy	paj <sup>3</sup> , pơ <sup>1</sup>	tapuul
eight	t'am <sup>3</sup>	t'am <sup>3</sup>	tám	tám	tám	t'am <sup>2</sup>	takuôi
nine	sin <sup>3</sup>	cin <sup>3</sup>	chín	chín	chín	cin <sup>2</sup>	takê:
ten	muôj <sup>1</sup>	muôj <sup>1</sup>	muôi	muôi	muôi	muôj	macuít



1.2.1. Although in Vietnamese the consonant /p/ disappeared more than 10 centuries ago (changed to /b/ under the voicing law of voiceless consonants,<sup>13</sup> in Nguồn, (as in Mường) this consonant still commonly exists.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the opposing pairs of voiceless-voiced consonants in Nguồn are very balanced: p/b, t/d, k/g.... That is a coinciding point of interest between Nguồn and Mường.<sup>15</sup>

As in Mường, Nguồn has not completed some processes of sound change that Vietnamese has gone through.

For example: The voiceless consonants have not become voiced: [English glossed added by translator.]

Mường	Vietnamese		Mường	Vietnamese	
[pät <sup>3</sup> ]	bắt	'catch'	[pəm <sup>3</sup> ]	bấm	'press, feel'
[pa <sup>2</sup> ]	ba	'three'	[ti <sup>2</sup> ]	đi	'go'
[ta <sup>3</sup> ]	đá	'stone'	[tət <sup>3</sup> ]	đất	'earth'
[kɛn <sup>2</sup> ]	ghen	'jealous'	[kɛt <sup>3</sup> ]	ghét	'hate'
[ka <sup>1</sup> ]	gà	'chicken'	[sɔ <sup>3</sup> ]	gió	'wind'
[siə <sup>4</sup> ]	giữa	'between'	[siəŋ <sup>2</sup> ]	tháng giêng	'January'

etc.

The aspirated stops have not become affricated:

Mường	Vietnamese		Mường	Vietnamese	
[p'ien <sup>1</sup> ]	phiền	'worry'	[p'ɔj <sup>4</sup> ]	phổi	'lung'
[p'ɔ <sup>4</sup> ]	vỡ	'break'	[k'ɛp <sup>3</sup> ]	ghép	'join'
[k'ap <sup>3</sup> ]	gặp	'meet'	[k'ə: <sup>4</sup> ]	gỡ	'unravel'
[t'uəŋ <sup>3</sup> ]	xuống	'descend'	[t'wa <sup>2</sup> ]	xoa	'rub'

etc.

<sup>13</sup> Maspéro. p. 19, 35 ff.

<sup>14</sup> The initial sound system of Nguồn is : /m, n, ɲ, p, ph, t, th, c, k, kh, b, d, s, h, β, z (j), l, tl, (t) s, z/ (t and d are two tongue blade stops).

<sup>15</sup> All Mường dialects have the consonant /p/. See:

Nguyễn Kim Thán, *Vài nét về hệ thống âm vị tiếng Mường và phương án phiên âm tiếng Mường* [Some characteristics of the Mường phoneme system, and the method of transcribing Mường phonetically], "Ngôn Ngữ," 1971, 1, p. 5.

Nguyễn Minh Đức, *Một vài nét về các thổ ngữ của tiếng Mường Hòa Bình* [A few characteristics of the local dialects of Hòa Bình Mường], "Tìm hiểu ngôn ngữ các dân tộc thiểu số ở Việt Nam" (An attempt to understand the ethnic minority languages of Vietnam). vol 1, 1972, p. 9.

Nguyễn Văn Tài, *Sơ sánh hệ thống ngữ âm tiếng Mường một số vùng quanh Hòa Bình* [Comparing the sound system of Mường in some areas around Hòa Bình], "Tìm hiểu ngôn ngữ các dân tộc thiểu số ở Việt Nam" (An attempt to understand the ethnic minority languages of Vietnam), vol 1, 1972, p. 28-29.

The consonant /d/ has not yet changed to /n/ (a very common law in Vietnamese that H. Maspéro has demonstrated):

Mường	Vietnamese		Mường	Vietnamese	
{[dak <sup>3</sup> ]	nước	'water'	[dãŋ <sup>3</sup> ]	nắng	'sunny'
[dɔ <sup>2</sup> ]	no	'full'	[dɛm <sup>3</sup> ]	nếm	'taste'
[dãm <sup>2</sup> ]	năm	'five'			

etc.

1.2.2. The system of syllable final sounds in Nguồn is the same as the syllable final sound system in the Mường Ông dialect of Mường.<sup>16</sup> Corresponding with some final /-j/ of Vietnamese are some final /-n/ of Nguồn:

Mường	Vietnamese		Mường	Vietnamese	
[kãŋ <sup>1</sup> ]	cày	'plow'	[kɔn <sup>3</sup> ]	cấy	'transplant'
{[lan <sup>5</sup> ]	lưỡi	'tongue'	[mən <sup>2</sup> ]	mây	'cloud'
[cãn <sup>4</sup> ]	chảy	'flow, run'			

etc.

If one were to consider that in Vietnamese the syllable final pair /ɲ-c/ are allophones of /ŋ-k/, in Nguồn, they are two phonemes independent of /ŋ-k/. Corresponding with this pair of final sounds /ɲ-c/ are the final pair /n-t/ in Vietnamese.

Mường	Vietnamese		Mường	Vietnamese	
{[zɛŋ <sup>5</sup> ]	rận	'louse'	[mec <sup>5</sup> ]	mật	'gall, nectar'
[tlɔŋ <sup>2</sup> ]	trơn	'smooth'	[pɔc <sup>3</sup> ]	bớt	'diminish'
[dac <sup>3</sup> ]	nát	'crushed'	[t'ɔŋ <sup>2</sup> ]	đan	'weave'
[lãc <sup>5</sup> ]	nhặt	'gather'	[tãŋ <sup>3</sup> ]	rắn	'snake'
[t'ɔŋ <sup>2</sup> ]	đun	'boil water'	[puc <sup>3</sup> ]	mút	'suck'
[hɔŋ <sup>2</sup> ]	hôn	'kiss'	[moc <sup>5</sup> ]	một	'one'
[mɔŋ <sup>3</sup> ]	muốn	'want'	[mɔc <sup>5</sup> ]	mọt	'weevil'

etc.

Conversely, if one were to consider /ɲ-c/ of Vietnamese as full phonemes, then /ɲ-c/ of Nguồn differs from Vietnamese /ɲ-c/ in that they can occur after all vowels, while the final pair /ɲ-c/ in Vietnamese can only link with /i, ê, e, (ʔ)/.

<sup>16</sup> See Nguyễn Văn Tài, p. 40

These characteristics of the syllable final sounds of Nguồn are very much in agreement with the characteristics of the Mường syllable final sounds that I have discussed.<sup>17</sup>

1.2.3. The tone system of Nguồn coincides with the tone system of Mường Vang and Thạch Thành Mường in both the shape and distribution in the kinds of syllable patterns.<sup>18</sup>

1.2.4. Only the vowel system of Nguồn doesn't have anything special compared with the vowel system of Mường and the vowel system of Vietnamese (north central plains dialect).

Note: The examples in brackets { } above are the forms for which no trace is found in the north central plains dialect of Vietnamese (the dialect in which some linguists want to include Nguồn). This proves that in Vietnamese these processes ended long ago (possibly long before a small group of Vietnamese migrated to the Nguồn area).

1.3. In the area of grammar, Nguồn, like Mường, is very close to Vietnamese. The only difference is: in Nguồn (Mường also) there are few formal variations on word order. The grammatical form is primarily ordered words. For example: In Vietnamese, to show the tense of a verb, usually there are two or more formal words alternating with each other. (To show future tense Vietnamese has *sẽ* 'will', *sắp* 'about to' and *sắp sửa* 'ready to', to show present tense, there is *đang* '-ing' and *còn* 'still' to show the past tense there is *đã* 'already' which occurs before the verb, and *rồi* 'already' which occurs after the verb.) But in Nguồn (and in Mường) each case usually has only one formal word and it occurs in a restricted way. For example; (English glosses added.)

un <sup>3</sup>	k'ap <sup>3</sup>	taj <sup>3</sup>					
em	sáp	ngủ					"Em sắp (sẽ, sắp sửa)ngủ."
child	about to	sleep					
	'(S)he is about to go to sleep.'						

un <sup>3</sup>	kɔn <sup>1</sup>	taj <sup>3</sup>	or	un <sup>3</sup>	taj <sup>3</sup>		
em	còn	ngủ		em	ngủ		"Em đang (còn...)ngủ."
child	still	sleep		child	sleep		
	'(S)he is sleeping.'						

un <sup>3</sup>	taj <sup>3</sup>	zoj'					
em	ngủ	rồi					"Em (đã) ngủ rồi."
child	sleep	already					
	'(S)he slept.'						

<sup>17</sup> See Nguyễn Văn Tài, p. 40

<sup>18</sup> See Nguyễn Kim Thân, p. 3, and Nguyễn Văn Tài, p. 48.

The above are some very sketchy purely linguistic features. But these features will help us to have a more objective attitude toward classifying Nguồn with Mường or with Vietnamese.

2. Now we will look at some non-linguistic features for further suggestions toward determining Nguồn's position.

2.1 First of all, let's look at the formation of the Nguồn people group and the Nguồn language. We do not have enough data on how this people group was formed to give strong opinions; here we will only discuss it from the standpoint of language.

It is very possible that some present Nguồn family lines are Vietnamese (Kinh) family lines originating from the lower Gianh river or Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh (according to some family records, and as was the opinion of Cadière), but is that enough to insist that all Nguồn people are Vietnamese or not?<sup>19</sup> We surmise that, before a few Vietnamese family lines (or, more precisely, a few families with Vietnamese last names) migrated to this area, there was already a group of people from a different ethnic group residing here. (Cadière suggests they were Sách people.) Those people spoke a different language than the plains Vietnamese. In order for convenient communication, those few Vietnamese had to learn the local language, and therefore, linguistically, they were assimilated.<sup>20</sup> Is not it possible that the original language here was Mường and not Sách? Because, according to family records, the Vietnamese migrated in around the late 17th or early 18th century, only just over two centuries ago. That period of time is not long enough for the Nguồn and Sách (Chữ) languages to have separated to this point. (Comparing the words in columns 1 [Nguồn] and 6 [Chữ] in the table above, we can see this clearly.) We suggest that in the process of migrating to the south, the Mường did not stop at Nghệ An, (to become the Thổ Mọn, Thổ Lâm La, and Thổ Sông Con people) but continued further south to Hà Tĩnh and Quảng Bình. Then why in Hà Tĩnh today are there no Mường people or any other minority group? Perhaps because Hà Tĩnh only has a very narrow strip of plain, the rest being forested mountains, so the Vietnamese then gradually moved into and developed up the mountainsides (including up into the Quảng Bình mountain forests, like the case of some families going to the Nguồn region, for example) nearly to the Vietnam-Laos border. The local residents here perhaps mixed in with these Vietnamese, or

---

<sup>19</sup> In discussing a similar problem, Trần Quốc Vượng and Nguyễn Dương Bình said very reasonably, "The family records of many Vietnamese family lines show clearly the Chinese origin of many Vietnamese. But we cannot thus vaguely conclude that the origin of Vietnamese people in general is the Chinese people of the Bắc thuộc period, and the Lạc Việt people are not then the ancestors of the modern Vietnamese." (See *Một vài nhận xét về mối quan hệ Mường-Việt và quá trình phân hoá giữa tộc Mường và tộc Việt* [A few observations on the Mường-Vietnamese relationship and the differentiating (splitting) process between the ethnic Mường and the ethnic Vietnamese], in "Thông báo khoa học (sử học) (Science communique [history]) vol 5, Hanoi University, 1971, p. 229-230.)

<sup>20</sup> Cadière also proposes this. This is very easy to understand. Because the number of Vietnamese who migrated to the Nguồn area before was so small, they were not enough to force the local language to be supplanted by their own language.

migrated across the top of the Trường Sơn mountains to the western side, went to the south, or returned to the north. Ngô Đức Thịnh tells us, "On the Laos-Vietnam border, in the provinces of Săm Nửa and Khăm Muộn (in Vietnam bordering with Thanh Hoá, Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh and Quảng Bình provinces in Laos,) are some people groups who speak Việt-Mường languages. These people groups migrated from Vietnam."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps among them are the Hà Tĩnh Mường people? Quảng Bình is the final migratory area of the Mường. Only one small group came down here. (It is also possible that they were the Hà Tĩnh Mường, migrating south.) Probably that small group of Mường came to the Quảng Bình area before some Vietnamese families migrated in. These two groups assimilated with each other to create the Nguồn people and the Nguồn language. Perhaps only a hypothesis such as this can explain why the Nguồn language is like Mường and not like the languages of the surrounding ethnic groups. Therefore we can picture the residential area of the Mường people stretching fairly uninterruptedly from Nghĩa Lộ down through Vĩnh Phú, Hà Tây, Hoà Bình, Ninh Bình, Thanh Hóa, Nghệ An and Khăm Muộn (Laos) to Quảng Bình.

2.2 On the relationship between the Nguồn people\* and the surrounding ethnic groups. The Nguồn people live fairly close together and are isolated from the plain. In that area there are also some ethnic people belonging to the Chứt group (primarily Mày, Rục and Sách) and the Bru group (Vân Kiều and Khùa). Before the October revolution, there was very little contact between the Nguồn people and the lowlanders because travel was inconvenient. So, if the Nguồn language has been under the influence of another language, then first and foremost it would have been influenced by Chứt, not by Vietnamese. (We consider Chứt an independent language equivalent with Mường and Vietnamese.)<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Nguồn still retains its own original character. This adds further evidence to our thinking.

2.3 The final point of consultation is the ethnic self-consciousness of the people. We have had contact with many Nguồn people from all age groups. Their general opinion is that it is very probable that they originated from the Vietnamese people, but their language is not Vietnamese. This is interesting. A few people also let us know that when they meet military personnel who are Mường from Hoà Bình or Thanh Hóa, both sides can communicate with each other entirely in their own mother tongue. One more thing (which we have tested): a Vietnamese (whether he is from Quảng Bình, Nghệ An or Hà Tĩnh), who is not familiar with the Mường language, cannot understand Nguồn.

Although still not complete, these things presented above lead us to think that there is a greater likelihood that Nguồn is a member of Mường rather than a part of

<sup>21</sup> Ngô Đức Thịnh, *Sơ lược giới thiệu quá trình hình thành sự phân bố cư dân và thành phần dân tộc ở Lào* [A sketchy introduction to the process of forming inhabited areas and ethnic social classes in Laos] "Thông báo dân tộc học" [Ethnology communique], 1972, 1, p. 132.

<sup>22</sup> Nguyễn Văn Tài, *Thử bàn về vị trí của tiếng Chứt, tiếng Cuối trong nhóm Việt-Mường* [An attempt to discuss the position of the Chứt and Cuối languages in the Việt-Mường group], Báo cáo khoa học". [Scientific report] (TNote: later published in "Tạp chí Dân Tộc Học [Ethnology journal], 1976, 2)

Vietnamese. As for classifying Nguồn as a dialect of Mường, or a regional variety of a Mường dialect, we must wait for some more detailed research projects to be done, more comprehensive in correlation with the dialects and local variations of Mường.<sup>23</sup>

Here we would like to express our gratitude to the Quảng Bình province Ethnic Commission, the Administration Committee of Minh Hóa district and the Nguồn people who enthusiastically helped us in this research.

9 January 1993

522 Oriole Blvd.  
Duncanville  
TX 75116  
USA

---

<sup>23</sup> We will discuss this problem on another occasion.