

## NOTES

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

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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...

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\*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, "Etudes 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 Chứt<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.

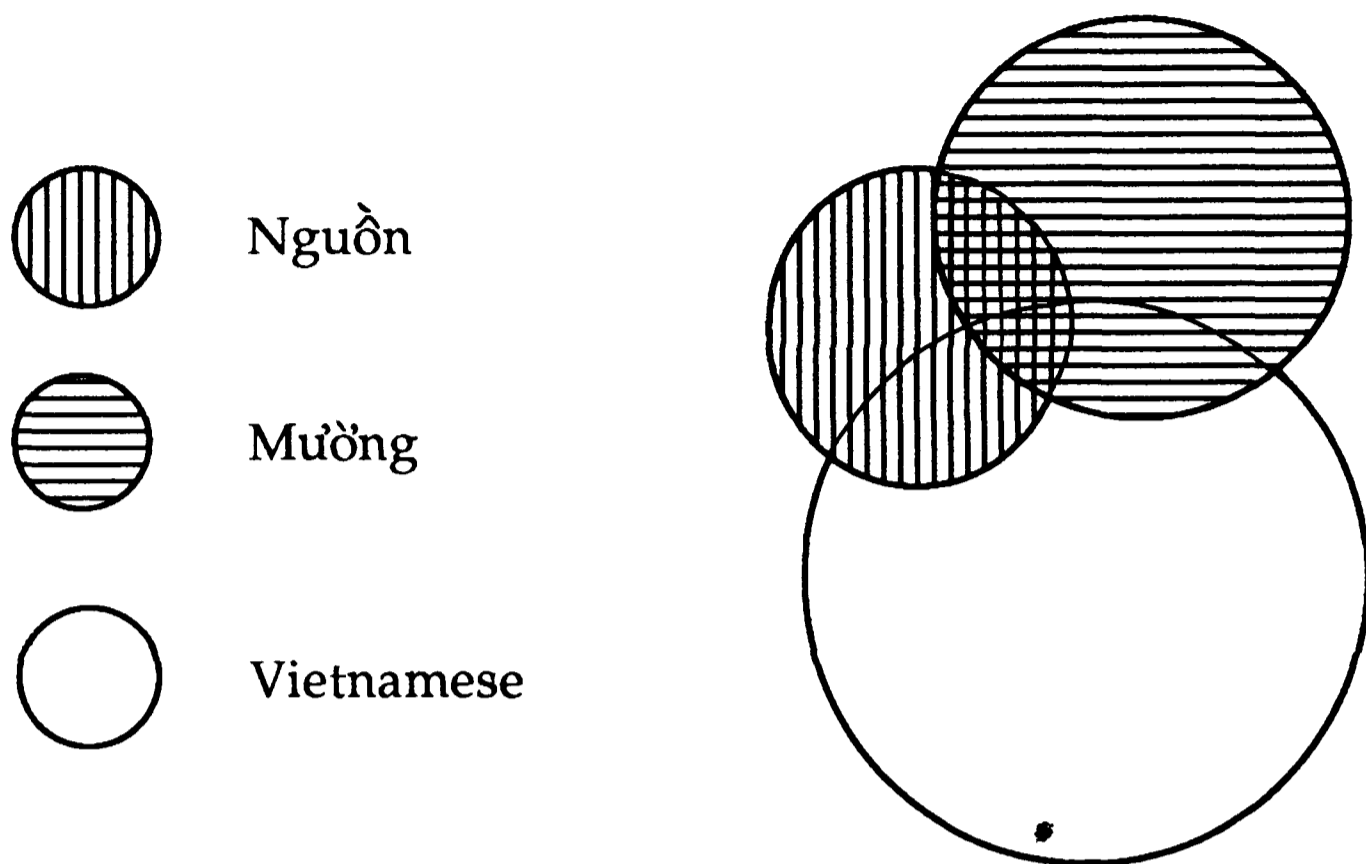
*xác định thành phần các dân tộc thiểu số ở miền Bắc Việt Nam*, [On the problem of defining the social position of the minority groups in northern Vietnam] 1975, p. 500-517, Viện Dân tộc Học (Ethnology Institute)

<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> Chứt 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 Nguồn is higher with Mường. We will defend this conclusion further with a table of 84 common words comparing Nguồn with the following languages: Mường, Vietnamese (17th century<sup>11</sup>, north central plains dialect, and Hanoi dialect), Chứt and Vân Kiều. See the following table (English glosses added by translator).

By the comparative table above we see that to consider Nguồn 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 Nguồn and Mường 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 Nguồn being under the influence of Mường. In reality, the Nguồn lexicon reflects clearly the influence of Vietnamese, Chứt and the Mon–Khmer languages. However, Nguồn still retains its own aspects. Those aspects are very close to Mường. Isn't it true that Nguồn and Mường have a relationship here?

1.2. The closeness between Nguồn and Mường 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 *Dictionarium annamiticum, lusinatinum, latinum*, of A. de Rhodes (Rome, 1651).

<sup>12</sup> If you consider that some branches of Thổ (Thổ Mọn, Thổ Lâm La, Thổ Sông Con, etc) in western Nghệ An province are also Mường, then the residential area of the Mường people is more than 200 km from the residential area of the Nguồn 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 (:), (u: long, u short), except the two long vowels *a* and *ɔ*. About the long vowels, short vowels and diphthongs of Vân Kiều see, Nguyễn Văn Tài, *Giới thiệu sô lược hệ thống ngữ âm tiếng Vân Kiều* ([A sketchy introduction to the sound system of the Vietnamese), vol 2 [This book was, in fact, never published, [Study the Bru Vân Kiều language], and the article was published instead in Sách học tiếng Bru Vân Kiều by Nguyễn Văn Tài, 1986 Bình Trị Thiên., . M.B.]

English	Nguồn	Vietnamese				Chữ	Vân Kiều
		Mường Bi (Hoà Bình)		North	Hanoi		
		17th Century	2	4	5		
sky	tloj <sup>1</sup> , [tɔj <sup>1</sup>	tloj <sup>1</sup>	3	trời	giời	ploj <sup>1</sup> , [tɔm <sup>2</sup>	palaj
earth	tât <sup>3</sup>	tât <sup>3</sup>	đất, đất	đất	đất	atāk <sup>2</sup> , bon <sup>1</sup>	kule?
sun	dănj <sup>3</sup>	dănj <sup>3</sup>	nang	nắng	nắng	karaj <sup>1</sup>	p'wak
rain	mưɔ <sup>2</sup>	mưɔ <sup>2</sup>	mưa	mưa	mưa	kamư <sup>1</sup>	mưa
stone	ta <sup>3</sup>	ta <sup>3</sup>	đá	đá	đá	tata <sup>2</sup>	tamaw
water	dak <sup>3</sup>	dak <sup>3</sup>	nác, nước	nác	nước	dak <sup>2</sup>	do?
stream	hon <sup>3</sup>	hon <sup>3</sup>	hói, Juáy	hói	xuôi (suối)	tok <sup>2</sup>	taum
road, path	taŋ <sup>1</sup>	taŋ <sup>1</sup>	đàng	đàng	đường đi	tjaŋ <sup>1</sup>	karna
well	ciêj <sup>3</sup>	ciêj <sup>3</sup>	gyéng	giếng	giếng	ciêj <sup>2</sup>	—
fire	la <sup>4</sup>	la <sup>4</sup>	lửa	lá	lửa	kul <sup>3</sup> to <sup>3</sup>	ô:i
burn	căn <sup>3</sup>	căn <sup>3</sup>	cháy	cháy	cháy	kuco <sup>1</sup>	kat
drift	lôj <sup>2</sup>	tloj <sup>2</sup>	tôi	trôi	chôi	calôj <sup>1</sup>	hoi
float	dôn <sup>4</sup>	nôj <sup>4</sup>	nổi	nổi	nổi	dôn <sup>1</sup>	dôi

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
person	ɲaj <sup>1</sup>	mol <sup>5</sup>	ngươi	ngài	ngươi	na <sup>1</sup>	kwai
head	tôk <sup>3</sup> , tîôk <sup>3</sup>	tîôk <sup>3</sup>	đầu	tróc	đầu	kulôk <sup>2</sup>	plo
skin	ta <sup>2</sup>	ta <sup>2</sup>	dẽa, da	da	da	karôt <sup>2</sup>	ka
brain (mind)	uôk <sup>3</sup>	ɲăc <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	kordo <sup>2</sup>	abok
hair	t'ăk <sup>3</sup>	t'ăk <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>	loikoi
face	măt <sup>5</sup>	măt <sup>5</sup>	măt	măt	măt	măt <sup>4</sup>	măt
nose	mun <sup>5</sup>	muj <sup>5</sup>	mũi	mũi	mũi	mul <sup>1</sup> , muh <sup>1</sup>	muh
mouth	môm <sup>1</sup>	meɲ <sup>5</sup>	miêng	mòm	miêng	kaɲ <sup>1</sup>	boh
tooth	t'aj <sup>2</sup>	t'aj <sup>2</sup>	răng	răng	dăng	saj <sup>1</sup>	kanɛɲ
gum	ton <sup>5</sup>	toɻ <sup>5</sup>	lợi	lợi	lợi	liɲ <sup>1</sup>	taj
tongue	lan <sup>5</sup>	laj <sup>5</sup>	lưỡi	lại	lưỡi	lal <sup>4</sup> , lie <sup>1</sup>	luai
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'ôn <sup>3</sup>	rún. rón	dún	dón (rón)	kudul <sup>2</sup>	talui
penis	tan <sup>3</sup>	tal <sup>3</sup>	dểái, dái	dái	dái	katal <sup>2</sup>	-
go	tí <sup>2</sup>	tí <sup>2</sup>	đi	đi	đi	tí <sup>1</sup>	pâɻ

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
stand	tư <sup>3</sup>	co <sup>5</sup>	đứng	đứng	đứng	tư <sup>2</sup>	tazư <sup>7</sup>
eat	ăn <sup>2</sup>	ăn <sup>2</sup>	ăn	ăn	ăn	ăn <sup>1</sup>	ca
speak	côn <sup>3</sup>	pô <sup>5</sup>	nói	nói	nói	cô <sup>2</sup>	tato <sup>7</sup>
drink	o <sup>3</sup>	o <sup>3</sup>	uống	uống	uống	o <sup>3</sup>	nwái
shoot	pạ <sup>3</sup>	pạ <sup>3</sup>	bắn	bắn	bắn	pi <sup>2</sup>	popăn
catch	pấ <sup>3</sup>	pấ <sup>3</sup>	bắt	bắt	bắt	nu <sup>2</sup>	ko <sup>7</sup>
crush, press	pop <sup>3</sup>	pop <sup>3</sup>	bóp	bóp	bóp	kada <sup>2</sup>	kupô <sup>7</sup>
bind, tie	puô <sup>5</sup>	puô <sup>5</sup>	buộc	buộc	buộc	dzak <sup>2</sup>	co <sup>7</sup>
rake	puơ <sup>1</sup>	puơ <sup>1</sup>	bừa	bừa	bừa	puơ <sup>1</sup>	bươ
plow	kăn <sup>1</sup>	kăl <sup>1</sup>	cày	cày	cày	kăl <sup>1</sup>	kài
step, walk	puơ <sup>3</sup>	puơ <sup>3</sup>	buớc	buớc	buớc	tanjan <sup>2</sup>	taza <sup>7</sup>
carry	pâ <sup>1</sup>	ok-	caõ	cõng	cõng	pi <sup>2</sup>	pe <sup>7</sup>
urinate	tâ <sup>3</sup>	taj <sup>3</sup>	đái	đái	đái	ti <sup>2</sup>	kaklum
pound, stab	tâm <sup>2</sup>	tâm <sup>2</sup>	đâm	đâm	đâm	cjât <sup>2</sup>	cjat
be born	te <sup>4</sup>	te <sup>4</sup>	đẻ	đẻ	đẻ	kazjo <sup>2</sup>	sarum
hungry	ton <sup>3</sup>	tol <sup>3</sup>	đói	đói	đói	broj <sup>1</sup>	panjái
full	do <sup>2</sup>	do <sup>2</sup>	no	no	no	do <sup>1</sup>	pasái
OK	an <sup>3</sup>	an <sup>3</sup>	được	được	được	tok <sup>4</sup>	bưn
good	t'ôc <sup>3</sup>	t'ôc <sup>3</sup>	tốt	tốt	tốt	t'ôc <sup>2</sup>	o:
bad	sâw <sup>3</sup>	sâw <sup>3</sup>	xấu	xấu	xấu	nom <sup>1</sup>	tao:
fragrant	hom <sup>2</sup>	hom <sup>2</sup>	thơm	thơm	thơm	p'ôm <sup>1</sup>	p'uôm

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
smelly	hōj <sup>3</sup>	hōj <sup>3</sup>	thōi	thúi	thối	puok <sup>2</sup>	soʔ
near	k'ən <sup>1</sup>	k'ên <sup>1</sup>	gân	gún, gin	gân	takj <sup>1</sup>	ceʔ
far	sa <sup>2</sup>	sa <sup>2</sup>	xa	ngái	xa	conaj <sup>2</sup>	zoŋ
red	to <sup>4</sup>	to <sup>4</sup>	đó	đó	đó	to <sup>3</sup>	kusai
black	ten <sup>2</sup>	zâm <sup>2</sup>	đen	đen	đen	ten <sup>1</sup>	kum
white	tlan <sup>3</sup> , taŋ <sup>3</sup>	tlan <sup>3</sup>	tláng	tráng	cháng	tokal <sup>1</sup>	klo:k
older brother	en <sup>2</sup>	en <sup>2</sup> , tươ <sup>3</sup>	anh	anh	anh	muan <sup>4</sup>	ai
younger sibling	un <sup>3</sup>	un <sup>3</sup>	em	em	em	ciê <sup>2</sup>	sem
aunt	i <sup>3</sup>	i <sup>3</sup>	dì, mợ	dì, mự	dì, mợ	mư <sup>4</sup>	aʔua
bamboo	p'ew <sup>2</sup>	p'ew <sup>2</sup>	tle	tre	che	p'ew <sup>1</sup>	sarəŋ
neohouzeau	na <sup>3</sup>	law <sup>5</sup>	núa	ná	núa	patê <sup>2</sup>	aho:
(a kind of bamboo)							
rice plants	lo <sup>3</sup>	lo <sup>5</sup>	lúa	ló	lúa	alo <sup>2</sup>	saro:
husked rice	kâw <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>	nép	nép	nép	dép <sup>2</sup>	dip
plain rice	lon <sup>1</sup>	câm <sup>1</sup>	tê	lòn	té	lwon <sup>1</sup>	-
bird	sin <sup>2</sup>	cim <sup>2</sup>	chim	chim	chim	cim <sup>1</sup>	câm
mouse (rat)	t'jên <sup>1</sup>	rê <sup>1</sup>	chuot	chuot	chuot	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	hồ	kuhal <sup>1</sup>	kula
eel	luoŋ <sup>2</sup>	luoŋ <sup>2</sup>	luon	luon	luon	blon <sup>1</sup>	nun

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
one	móc <sup>5</sup>	móc <sup>5</sup>	một	một	một	móc <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>	păi
four	pôn <sup>3</sup>	pôn <sup>3</sup>	bốn	bốn	bốn	pôn <sup>2</sup> , puôn <sup>1</sup>	pôn
five	dăm <sup>2</sup>	dăm <sup>2</sup>	năm	năm	năm	dăm <sup>1</sup>	som
six	şaw <sup>3</sup>	k'âw <sup>3</sup>	fau	sáu	xáu	p'lăw <sup>2</sup>	tapât
seven	păj <sup>4</sup>	păj <sup>4</sup>	bảy	bảy	bảy	păj <sup>3</sup> , pơ <sup>1</sup>	tapu:l
eight	t'am <sup>3</sup>	t'am <sup>3</sup>	tám	tám	tám	t'am <sup>2</sup>	takuôl
nine	sin <sup>3</sup>	cin <sup>3</sup>	chin	chin	chin	cin <sup>2</sup>	takê:
ten	mưoj <sup>1</sup>	mưoj <sup>1</sup>	mười	mười	mười	mưoj	macutt



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'iên <sup>1</sup> ]	phiền	‘worry’	[p'ɔj <sup>4</sup> ]	phối	‘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, ɳ, 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 Thản, *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, *So 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’	[dem <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 Ống 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’	[kən <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	
{ [zeŋ <sup>5</sup> ]	rận	‘louse’	[mec <sup>5</sup> ]	mật	‘gall, nectar’
[tləŋ <sup>2</sup> ]	trơn	‘smooth’	[pə:c <sup>3</sup> ]	bớt	‘diminish’
[dac <sup>3</sup> ]	nát	‘crushed’	[t'ãŋ <sup>2</sup> ]	đan	‘weave’
[lãc <sup>5</sup> ]	nhặt	‘gather’	[tãŋ <sup>3</sup> ]	rắn	‘snake’
[t'up <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, (?)/.

<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, ususally 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'ăp <sup>3</sup>	tăj <sup>3</sup>				“Em sắp (sẽ, sắp sửa)ngủ.”
em	sắp	ngủ				
child	about to	sleep				
	'(S)he is about to go to sleep.'					

un <sup>3</sup>	kòn <sup>1</sup>	tăj <sup>3</sup>	or	un <sup>3</sup>	tăj <sup>3</sup>	“Em đang (còn...)ngủ.”
em	còn	ngủ		em	ngủ	
child	still	sleep		child	sleep	
	'(S)he is sleeping.'					

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

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

<sup>18</sup> See Nguyễn Kim Thán, 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 (Chứt) languages to have separated to this point. (Comparing the words in columns 1 [Nguồn] and 6 [Chứt] 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

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<sup>19</sup> In discussing a similar problem, Trần Quốc Vương 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 Viet–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

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<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

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