

A Report on the Loanword Situation in Vietnamese

Mark Alves, Montgomery College and the University of Maryland, College Park

mark.alves@umd.edu

This presentation will summarize current research on the etymological layers of Vietnamese with particular emphasis on Chinese loanwords. By selecting categories of vocabulary (more commonly used daily language) rather than all words in a Vietnamese dictionary, a clearer picture of the quantity of Chinese vocabulary is provided. While 70% is a commonly cited number for the percentage of Chinese words in Vietnamese, the current study, based on a 1400-word wordlist, yields only 27%. However, such a low figure also creates a skewed impression of the impact Chinese has had on the Vietnamese lexicon. Grammatical vocabulary, names, loanblends, and calques must also be included in such an assessment to create a more realistic depiction of Sino-Vietnamese language contact. Tai loans are also considered in terms of the nature and timing of language contact between ancestors of Tai and Vietic peoples.