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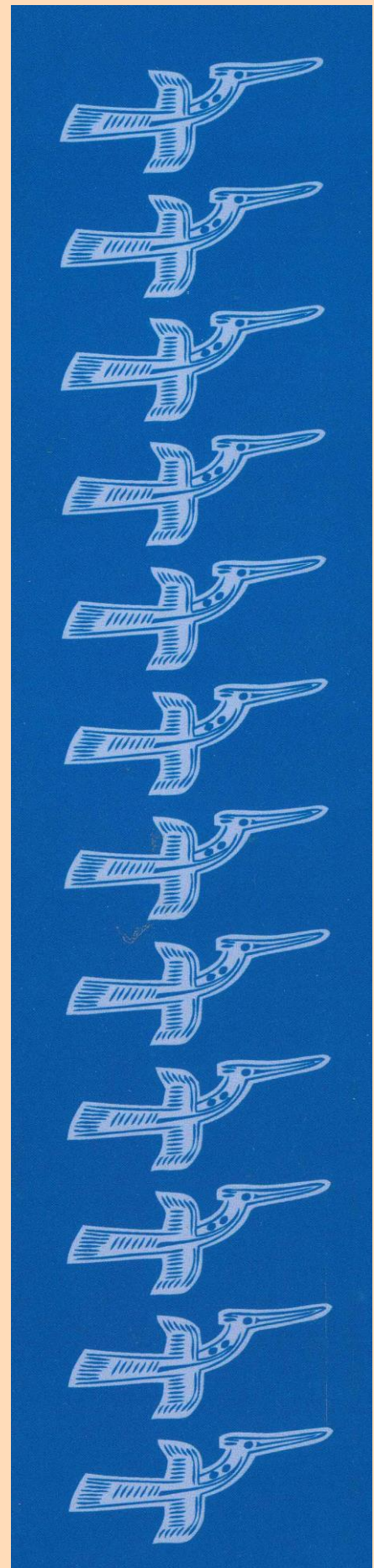
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Fifty Years of Mon-Khmer Studies

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It has been a great honour for me to have participated in the development of MKS Journal, and like all of my colleagues I am extremely proud to celebrate its first 50 years as a distinguished source of research on the South East Asian linguistic region.

MKS Journal was first published in 1964 under the joint sponsorship of SIL and the Linguistic Circle of Vietnam as an outlet for the work of young linguists working on various aspects of the languages of Vietnam (MKS I). Then MKS II – MKS XIV were produced by editorial staff in a variety of places including Vietnam, USA, Hawaii, and eventually in Thailand where the Research Institute of Languages and Cultures for Rural Development (now the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia), Mahidol University took over responsibility for the editing process, and University of Hawaii Press for the publishing of editions XV – XIX. SIL Dallas Academic Publications were responsible for publishing editions MKS XX to MKS 40. From MKS 41 on, the journal has been a fully online publication with each article becoming available to readers as soon as it is approved by the editorial board. Currently, MKS Journal is under the management of an active group of young MKS linguists led by Paul Sidwell, Brian Migliazza, Sophana Srichampa and others. The MKS Journal expects to expand its coverage of languages of the Austroasiatic Language Family, and apart from remaining an outlet for the documentation of MKS languages of Mainland SEA as well as South Asia and the languages of Southwest China, we also expect to publish more work on language documentation and revitalization by both the speakers themselves, and linguists who, increasingly, recognize the treasure of these languages.

Kenneth Gregerson
SIL International

In a Memoriam for David D. Thomas (MKS 36) I wrote:

“It may be difficult to appreciate now in the twenty first century just how little was known about this Southeast Asian family of languages when Dave [Thomas] and his wife Dorothy (Dot) arrived in Vietnam in the 1950’s to begin their research. Respected scholars were still, following Pater Wilhelm Schmidt, classifying Chamic languages as Mon-Khmer—an issue laid to rest by Richard Pittman in 1959. The sub-groupings of Mon-Khmer languages were vague and had little empirical basis. Thomas, acknowledging the great French scholarly tradition in Indochina and celebrating especially the ground-breaking work of Haudricourt, set about with his colleagues both to study in detail and to classify the many Montagnard groups in the region. Dave, along with Prof. Nguyen Dinh Hoa, formed the Linguistic Circle of Saigon, which in turn launched the journal Mon-Khmer Studies in 1964. This unique journal was a ‘labor of love’ which has over the years had several homes (now at Mahidol University in Bangkok), but would surely have died on the vine without Dave’s single-handed persistence.”

1. A Beginning: Volume 1 of Mon-Khmer Studies

Ken Smith who was “present at creation” in the early years of MKS, has taken in hand his copy of Volume 1, now worn and discolored by fifty years of Southeast Asian sunlight and monsoons. He summarizes the content of that first issue:

Publication No. 1 of the Linguistic Circle of Saigon

Published jointly by The Linguistic Circle of Saigon and The Summer Institute of Linguistics 1964

Foreword by Nguyen Dinh Hoa, Director of Cultural Affairs, Ministry of National Education

Introduction by David D. Thomas

Transformational Paradigms of Bahnar Clauses, John E. Banker

Word Classes in Brou, John D. Miller

The Substantive Phrase in Brou, Carolyn P. Miller

Personal Pronouns in Pacoh, Sandra K. Watson

Bahnar Affixation, Elizabeth M. Banker

Bahnar Reduplication, Elizabeth M. Banker

Pacoh Phonemes, Richard Watson

A Survey of Austroasiatic and Mon-Khmer Comparative Studies, David D. Thomas

Nguyen Dinh Hoa wrote in his Foreword:

The Linguistic Circle of Saigon is happy to introduce its first publication, *Mon-Khmer Studies I*, jointly sponsored by the LCS and the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

The Linguistic Circle of Saigon was launched very informally in 1959 with the help of faculty members of the University of Saigon and their American colleagues of the S.I.L. Vietnam Branch. Thanks to Dr. Nguyen-Quang-Trinh, then Rector of the University, the group was able to hold monthly meetings at the Rectorate, and under the chairmanship of Dr. Le-van-Ly papers were read in Vietnamese, English and French at the informal gatherings of linguists and language teachers in the area. Attendance has been growing steadily, and it is hoped that as linguistics is here to stay the tradition of holding periodic meetings and hearing research papers will be maintained as part of Saigon's scholarly activities.

The articles contained in this special volume speak for themselves; their authors, hard-working, promising linguistic scientists, can be rightly proud of their fine contributions to linguistics in general and Vietnamese linguistics in particular.

—January 1964

As David Thomas notes in his Introduction, this first issue of *MKS* represented no more than the output of a linguistic workshop he had conducted in Hue (Vietnam) in 1963, but now in historical perspective, we observe that it signaled the beginning of a renewed effort in the documentation and study of Mon-Khmer (and other Southeast Asian) languages. Indeed, the origins of the Journal carry the seeds of many of the aspects of *MKS* fifty years later.

2. A Cooperative Effort

From the get-go *MKS* was to be the property of any and all who would lend a hand in carving out a space for the study of this little-known language family. Our good friend and linguist, Professor Nguyen Dinh Hoa, and colleagues at the University of Saigon and Ministry of Education were steadfast in their commitment early on to SIL's fledgling early steps to study the minority languages.

In later years I remember Dave's extensive efforts to establish a partnership for *MKS* with the University of Hawaii, which continued for a several years. The home that *MKS* has enjoyed at Mahidol University and its Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development has been especially meaningful and stable. And the recent additional association with the Australian National University has further enhanced prospects for the future of the Journal.

3. An All-embracing Outlook

As reflected in Volume 1, MKS was never restricted just to Mon-Khmer. In his article (Vol 1: 149-163) Thomas provided a historical thumbnail sketch framing the MK comparative enterprise within a larger Austroasiatic scheme of things (touching even on Schmidt's Austric as well as speculations by Hevesy and Coedes of a Finno-Ugric connection for Munda). These large-scale questions continue to the present—though Finno-Ugric has not been brought up recently! As the MKS Journal website states:

Scope of the Journal: **MON-KHMER STUDIES** specializes in Austroasiatic (including Mon-Khmer and Munda) linguistics. For fifty years the MKSJ has provided a scholarly forum for high-quality articles relevant to the study of Southeast Asian languages and cultures. We welcome submissions that advance the study of any SEA language family; topics may include linguistic description, cultural description, comparison, bibliography, historical development, sociolinguistics, stylistics, orthography, and paleography.”

This breadth of inquiry was hinted at the first volume, in which papers included John Miller's Word Classes in Brou, a descriptive tour of the basic grammar of MK language cast in a Tagmemic framework. In this same issue John Banker writes on Transformational Paradigms of Bahnar Clauses, employing a then contemporary approach due to Henry Hiz, one Thomas's professors at the University of Pennsylvania.

This open market place of ideas and tools of explanation continues today with, for example, Edmondson, Gregerson and Sidwell applying to the North Bahnaric clade some uses of Bayesian probability that have shown promise in Proto-Indo-European linguistic classification (MKS Special Issue 3:33-37, 2011).

I am indebted to my colleague, Dick Watson, who wrote on Pacoh Phonemes in MKS 1, for pointing out that each ensuing volume likewise carried its own significance, e.g.:

MKS 2 was dedicated by Dick Pittman to two of our colleagues, Gaspar Makil and Elwood Jacobsen, who were killed during the war while going about their work. MKS 3 published on Atjehnese, a language outside of Vietnam, by Vaughn Collins. MKS 4 saw the journals sponsorship shift to Dr Hoa's Center for Vietnamese Studies at Carbondale, Illinois.

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And so it goes, each volume has stories to tell and they are not always linguistic ones.

4. A Circle of Friends

I remember the Linguistic Circle of Saigon in the 60's as an informal gathering of Vietnamese professors, students, and an eclectic assortment of the rest of us from wherever—a cordial and convivial gathering to talk about and hear of all things linguistic. Sometimes an SIL member would report on a discovery he/she had made in their village fieldwork. I remember interpreting for a Vietnamese speaker who had gone to a linguistic conference abroad which revealed the latest developments in Chomskian grammar—what is the word for 'generative' in Vietnamese?

While MKS represents the contributions of a “circle of (mostly) friends” , who occasionally differ on this or that linguistic point, for the most part we have been able, despite various entrenched positions, to maintain after a half a century a collegial easiness and camaraderie. And happily, like a pebble tossed in the water, the ripple effect has widened the circle to include colleagues around the world. I like the words of wisdom attributed to linguist, John R. “Haj” Ross, who having been through most of the generativist wars, said (approximately), “Let's try to imagine some way in which our opponent might just be right.”

On a final note, MKS Vol 1 lists the seven first contributors, three women and four men, not one of whom was a PhD! It started out as a kind of 'Mom and Pop' affair. They described what they observed with the linguistics they knew—an on-the-job training program. In a sense, they were a metaphor for the state of MK and Austroasiatic studies at that time. In the fifty years that have ensued, they have matured and so has the entire field, but it is my hope that we will never

grow out of the experience of getting our hands ‘dirty’ with data and having the ‘light bulbs go off in our heads’ as we see how each new piece of the puzzle falls wondrously into place.

Regrettably, space fails to acknowledge the many authors and supporters who have contributed so much to the success of our Journal. But here’s to the next 50 years of the Mon-Khmer Studies Journal and everyone for whom it remains a ‘labor of love.’