

A DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERACTIONS OF LINGUISTIC TONES IN VIETNAMESE FOLK MUSIC¹

Phan Gia Anh Thu²

Columbia University Teachers College & Temple University, agp2132@tc.columbia.edu

&

Ngô Thanh Nhàn³

New York University, Temple University & Folk Arts—Cultural Treasures Charter School

“Mobility, Technology and the Environment in Asia”

46th Annual Mid-Atlantic Region Association for Asian Studies Conference

October 6-8, 2017

Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA

Abstract

This paper attempts to describe the interactions between the lyric *thanh* “tones” in the melodies of popular Vietnamese folk songs. The investigation begins with a semi-automated *notated pitch-intensity-time contour* (nPIC) graph of a recorded folk song. On this nPIC graph, a music staff is overlaid and onsets of lyric syllables are identified, called a *syllamelis*. In order to exhaust the interactions of the linguistic tones in the melody, three concepts are advanced. A *toneume* (tone+neume) is a unit of tone within a syllamelis, established by tone pitch distinctive features. The *inter-toneume* as a pitch contour between two adjacent tone pitches. The complex *congruence* relationships, i.e. how well lyric tones are realized in the melody, reveal between (1) different dialect speech tones and the melodic toneumes, (2) two adjacent toneumes and their corresponding speech inter-tone behavior, (3) general speech tone pitches and singers idiolectal toneumes, and (4) performed *vibrato* and tones. The analysis is based on 412 syllamelic nPICs generated from 7 recordings of one singing and 6 readings of a southern Vietnamese folk song, *Ru Con mièn Nam* “Lullaby.” Thus, toneumes manifest distinctly in their *syllameles*, leaving space for inter-toneume variations and artist’s interpretation. The congruence of lyric vs toneume /syllamelis seems most favored, whereas incongruences serve to show creativity of the artists. The method proposed in this paper helps teachers to approach widely available music and songs online and prepare lessons quickly and accurately with challenging exercises. It also helps students everywhere to understand the inner structures of language and music.

Key words: notated pitch/intensity contour, key pitches in context, tone, congruence, inter-tone, syllamelis, toneume, *vibrato*, ...

1 The authors thank the *Mekong Traditional Vietnamese Instrumental Ensemble Troupe* (MTVIET) for the ideas coming from an MTVIET discussion on March 4, 2016.

2 *Music Education*, Teachers College - Columbia University, and *Fellow* of Temple University Center for Vietnamese Philosophy, Culture & Society. Email: agp2132@tc.columbia.edu.

3 New York University, *Linguistic String Project*, Temple University *Center for Vietnamese Philosophy, Culture & Society*, and Folk Arts—Cultural Treasures Charter School, *Dàn Tranh Ensemble*. Email nhan@cs.nyu.edu & nhan@temple.edu.