

LINGUISTICS AND VIETNAMESE LINGUISTICS

**NAMES OF COMMUNE-LEVEL UNITS
IN VIETNAM'S 2025
ADMINISTRATIVE RESTRUCTURING:
A MORPHOLOGICAL ONOMASTIC STUDY
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ABSTRACT: Vietnam's 2025 restructuring of its local governance model reduced the number of commune-level units from 10,035 to 3,321, constituting one of the most extensive renaming campaigns in the nation's modern history. This study applies a morphological onomastic approach to analyze structural and semantic patterns in 3,321 names using Python-assisted parsing and frequency analysis. Results reveal striking conservatism: 90.7% of names are bimorphemic, reaffirming Vietnamese norms of duality and rhythmic harmony. High-frequency morphemes such as *Tân* 'new', *An* 'peace', and *Phú* 'prosperous' dominate, encoding values of renewal, stability, and prosperity. Despite sweeping territorial reorganization, naming favored continuity over rupture, balancing bureaucratic rationalization with cultural symbolism. By foregrounding morphology as both linguistic form and cultural index, this study advances critical toponymy and Vietnamese onomastics, showing how structural regularities function as instruments of governance and identity.

KEY WORDS: morphology; onomastics; administrative restructuring; Vietnamese commune names; toponymy.

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1. Introduction

Place names are not merely administrative labels; they are cultural and political artefacts that encode identity, memory, and power (Rose-Redwood et al., 2009; Azaryahu, 2011; Alderman & Inwood, 2013). Within critical toponymy, place naming is understood as a sociolinguistic practice through which governance and heritage intersect, functioning as an "spatial inscription" that shapes spatial and symbolic landscapes (Rose-Redwood et al., 2009, p.453).

Vietnam's 2025 administrative restructuring, mandated by Resolution 202/2025/QH15 of the National Assembly on June 12, 2025, provides a rare opportunity to examine these dynamics at scale. The reform reduced provincial-level units from 63 to 34 by consolidating 52 units into 23 new ones while leaving 11 unchanged, resulting in 28 provinces and 6 centrally administered cities (National Assembly, 2025). A major institutional change replaced the traditional three-tier structure (province-district-commune/ward) with a two-tier system (province-commune/ward), eliminating approximately 696 district-level units effective July 1, 2025 (National Assembly 2025; Nguyễn Khánh Ly, 2025). At the commune level, units including wards, communes, and special zones were reduced from 10,035 to 3,321. Implemented through 34 resolutions of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, this large-scale reform required a nationwide renaming process that balanced administrative efficiency with the preservation of historical and cultural identity (Government News, 2025).

Though intended largely as a bureaucratic measure, the reform carries meaningful linguistic implications. Each newly established name embodies a negotiation between state authority and local identity, balancing administrative efficiency with symbolic continuity. This study approaches the phenomenon through a morphological-onomastic lens, focusing on the structural patterns of commune-level names created after the reform. While global scholarship has examined ideological ruptures in naming, few studies explore how large-scale reforms sustain morphological conservatism, a gap this paper addresses through the Vietnamese case.

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In Vietnamese linguistics, Nguyễn Thiện Giáp (2013, p.1) broadly concurs with Cao Xuân Hạo's (1998) view that the syllable often coincides with the morpheme, but further clarifies that not every syllable constitutes a word or a morpheme. To avoid engaging in broader theoretical debates, this study treats each administrative name as an onomastic composition of morphemes for analytical consistency. Morphology is particularly pertinent to Vietnamese naming traditions, which value semantic duality and rhythmic harmony. As such, morphemic composition functions not only as a linguistic structure but also as a reflection of cultural ideology, revealing how the linguistic form of place names encodes collective identity, memory, and the subtle interplay between language and governance.

Accordingly, this paper addresses two research questions: 1/ What morphological patterns characterize the names of commune-level units created or retained after Vietnam's 2025 administrative restructuring?; 2/ How do these patterns reflect linguistic conservatism and symbolic negotiation in the context of large-scale administrative change?

By applying Python-assisted morphological parsing and frequency analysis, this study contributes to onomastic theory and sociolinguistic research, demonstrating how language mediates between bureaucratic rationalization and cultural continuity in contemporary Vietnam.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Global Perspectives on Administrative Naming*

Place naming is far from neutral; it is a symbolic act that constructs and contests social, political, and cultural identities (Azaryahu, 2011; Alderman & Inwood, 2013). In state-led administrative reforms, toponyms serve both bureaucratic and ideological purposes, framing history, asserting authority, and rebranding territories (Light et al., 2002; Ndletyana, 2012; Gnatiuk, 2025). Comparative studies from post-socialist Eastern Europe, post-apartheid Africa, and conflict-affected Ukraine illustrate how renaming reflects power dynamics and memory politics. These cases confirm that naming performs identity work, reproducing collective memory while delineating symbolic ownership of space.

Recent methodological advances integrate computational and spatial approaches. Geographic name databases and reproducible spatial pipelines have enabled scholars to map renaming processes across large territories (Gritta et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2025). Such innovations underscore the value of mixed-method designs that combine quantitative pattern analysis with qualitative interpretation, an approach adopted in this study.

2.2. *Vietnamese Toponymic Scholarship*

Vietnamese scholarship offers a rich foundation for understanding the intersection of language, history, and governance. It complements these global insights by foregrounding morphology as a cultural constant. Lê Trung Hoa (2006, 2012) established systematic frameworks for Vietnamese place-name studies, defining principles and semantic categories while introducing the concept of *toponymic resilience* - the persistence of culturally resonant names across administrative changes. Nguyễn Văn Âu (2000) provides a comprehensive historical account of naming and boundary adjustments, situating modern reforms within a millennium of state-directed territorial organization. Recent works (Vũ Thị Sao Chi & Nguyễn Đức Tồn, 2023; Bùi Hoài Sơn, 2025) emphasize the cultural and symbolic stakes of renaming, warning that disregard for heritage can erode community identity. Phùng Thị Thanh Lâm (2016) analyze how street naming and renaming in Hà Nội reflects shifts in political ideology and national identity across regimes, while Kang (2015) examines Hồ Chí Minh City, showing how street naming codifies ideological narratives shifting from colonial geopolitics to commemorations of independence, culture, and economic achievement.

Despite this depth, existing studies have focused primarily on historical stratification or urban naming trends. Systematic morphological analysis of commune-level names under a national-scale reform remains absent. This gap is significant because morphemic structure in Vietnamese names reflects enduring cultural ideologies of harmony and duality (Cao Xuân Hạo, 1998), making morphology a critical lens for understanding continuity and change.

2.3. Morphological Structure of Vietnamese Toponyms

Vietnamese place names show a strong preference for bimorphemic forms, a pattern consistent with long-standing Vietnamese naming conventions (Lê Trung Hoa, 2006; Phạm Tất Thắng & Nguyễn Hoàng Phương Linh, 2024). This structural tendency reflects typological and cultural factors. Vietnamese, as an isolating language, typically aligns each syllable with a morpheme, though not always with an independent word (Nguyễn Thiện Giáp, 1998; Nguyễn Đức Tồn, 2011). Because the boundaries between syllable, morpheme, and word are often blurred, monosyllabic names can lack distinctiveness and are more susceptible to duplication. To ensure clarity and phonological ease, two-syllable combinations have historically served as the default format for place names. Scholars note that this structure provides balance, rhythmic harmony, and memorability, aligning with aesthetic principles in Vietnamese culture and facilitating euphony and articulation (Lê Trung Hoa, 2006). The prevalence of disyllabic Sino-Vietnamese compounds further reinforced this model, making it the dominant pattern in modern toponymy (Lã Minh Hằng, 2011). More broadly, two-syllable structures are common in Vietnamese proper names because they combine semantic clarity with expressive capacity to form a unified whole that is used as “an indivisible unit” in both speech and writing (Đỗ Việt Hùng, 2013, p.102).

2.4. Theoretical Lens

This dual perspective, structural and ideological, frames morphology not merely as a linguistic artifact but as a semiotic instrument of governance. Critical toponymy frames naming as a political act through which authority is asserted, contested, and symbolically inscribed in the landscape (Rose-Redwood et al., 2009). Place names are thus more than neutral geographic labels; they function as semiotic instruments that shape collective memory, legitimize political power, and delineate social boundaries. This perspective also highlights the agency of local communities. Names that endure despite political reforms reflect the resilience of local identity and memory, whereas newly imposed names may encounter resistance or selective adaptation (Azaryahu, 2011; Usmonova & Xujboyeva, 2025). Such dynamics illustrate that even state-led reforms, as exemplified by Vietnam’s 2025 administrative consolidation, require negotiation between central policy objectives and local cultural expectations, balancing efficiency with historical and symbolic legitimacy.

By integrating critical toponymy with morphological onomastics, this study examines how the structural composition of place names encodes both political authority and cultural ideology. It situates Vietnamese evidence within broader global debates on naming as a sociolinguistic and political practice.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative morphological onomastic approach, supported by computational tools for linguistic analysis. The design combines descriptive statistics with morphological parsing to identify structural patterns in commune-level names established after Vietnam’s 2025 administrative restructuring. This approach enables systematic classification of naming structures and frequency analysis of morphemic elements.

3.2. Data Source

The dataset comprises the official list of 3,321 commune-level administrative units (communes, wards, and townlets) promulgated after the restructuring, effective July 1, 2025. The data were extracted from National Assembly resolutions and consolidated into an Excel file, with each row representing one commune-level name. This dataset represents the entire population of post-reform commune-level units, ensuring comprehensive coverage.

3.3. Analytical Framework

The analysis was conducted in two stages. From a Vietnamese linguistic perspective, syllables, morphemes, and words can coincide (Cao Xuân Hạo, 1998; Nguyễn Thiện Giáp, 1998; 2013); however, place names, particularly administrative unit names, are not always standard Vietnamese

words (Trần Văn Dũng & Đặng Minh Tâm, 2021). To avoid unnecessary debate, this study treats proper names as combinations of morphemes.

First, each name was classified according to the number of morphemes it contains: one (monomorphemic), two (bimorphemic), three (trimorphemic), four, five, and more than five morphemes. This typology aligns with Vietnamese naming conventions, which traditionally favor disyllabic structures for semantic balance and rhythmic harmony.

Second, names comprising two or more morphemes were further categorized by compound type, including Direction + Nature (e.g., *Đông Sơn*), Virtue + Nature (e.g., *An Bình*), Numeric + Other (e.g., *Phường 1 Bảo Lộc*), Numeric only (e.g., *Phường 2*), and other polymorphemic constructions. This two-stage framework captures both the morphological structure and semantic composition of Vietnamese administrative names.

3.4. Computational Procedure

A Python script was developed to analyze the administrative names. Automated parsing ensured replicability and minimized human bias in morpheme segmentation. Each name was tokenized into morphemes using a Vietnamese-specific tokenizer, followed by morpheme counting and classification according to the established typology. Frequency distributions of individual morphemes were computed, and compound patterns were identified based on predefined semantic categories. Hyphenated names (e.g., *Đình Văn - Lâm Hà*) were treated as single merged units, with the hyphen removed. Ambiguous morphemes, such as *Trung* (which can denote both ‘central’ and ‘loyal’), were retained in frequency counts but interpreted contextually. Names not purely Vietnamese, mainly from the Tây Nguyên region, were processed according to morphemic principles, preserving the official orthography as documented in resolutions issued by the National Assembly.

3.5. Reliability and Limitations

The computational approach ensured consistency in tokenization and classification. However, semantic ambiguity and regional variations in morpheme interpretation were addressed qualitatively rather than algorithmically. The study focuses on surface morphology and does not attempt deep semantic parsing or historical etymology.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

This section presents the results of the morphological analysis, addressing the study’s research questions on structural patterns and naming dynamics in Vietnam’s 2025 commune-level system. The findings are organized into three parts: (1) morphological typology, (2) morphemic frequency, and (3) patterns of retention and innovation in new name formation. Together, these results illuminate how linguistic form reflects both continuity and change in the administrative naming process.

4.1.1. Morphological Typology

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of commune-level names by morpheme count across 3,321 names. The typology confirms the entrenched preference for two-morpheme structures, a hallmark of Vietnamese naming aesthetics.

Table 1. Morphological Typology

Morpheme Count	Number of Names	Percentage
1	20	0.6
2	3,012	90.7
3	277	8.3
4	11	0.33
5	1	0.03
>5	0	0

Interpretation: Nearly all names (90.7%) are bimorphemic, reflecting Vietnamese linguistic norms of duality and rhythmic harmony.

4.1.2. Morpheme Frequency

Table 2 presents the ten most frequently occurring morphemes in the dataset, illustrating the semantic preferences that shape Vietnamese administrative naming, particularly ideals of peace, prosperity, harmony, and renewal.

Table 2. The top-10 most frequent morphemes

No.	Morpheme	Frequency	Gloss	No.	Morpheme	Frequency	Gloss
1	Tân	194	new, renewal	6	Hoà	110	harmony
2	Sơn	180	mountain	7	Long	96	dragon
3	An	161	peace	8	Xuân	94	spring
4	Bình	155	peace, level	9	Đông	93	east
5	Phú	155	prosperous	10	Yên	91	peace, stillness

Interpretation: Semantic continuity dominates naming choices, privileging values of peace, prosperity, and nature. These lexical choices reveal a semantic economy that privileges cultural ideals over functional minimalism.

Table 3. The top-10 most frequent names

No.	Name	Frequency	No.	Name	Frequency
1	Tân An	10	6	Tân Hưng	6
2	Tân Thành	9	7	Tân Hoà	5
3	Tân Tiến	8	8	Bình Phú	5
4	Bình Minh	7	9	Thống Nhất	5
5	Tân Phú	6	10	Đông Thành	5

4.1.3. New name component

Figure 1 summarizes the compositional patterns of newly designated commune-level names, distinguishing between full retention, partial retention, and newly created forms.

The data show that most names maintain pre-merger structures, while a smaller proportion combine legacy morphemes or introduce entirely new symbolic elements. Numeric and hyphenated names appear only marginally, reflecting administrative pragmatism rather than linguistic innovation.

- Full retention: 78.1% of names preserved pre-merger forms (*Hoàn Kiếm, Hải Dương*), mostly bimorphemic names.

- Partial retention: 8.73% combined or modified legacy names (e.g., *Thành Bình Thọ, Hội Anh Đông*), combination of one or more morphemes from the former names.

- New names: 13.09% introduced symbolic elements of renewal (e.g., *Chợ Lớn, Ô Diên*), newly-created names usually stem from the collective memory.

- Numeric and Hyphenated Names

- Numeric elements: 37 names (e.g., *Phường 1 Bảo Lộc, Móng Cái 3*)

- Hyphenated names: 12 cases (e.g., *Đình Văn - Lâm Hà, Chân Mây - Lăng Cô*), signaling administrative mergers rather than lexical innovation.

These names are predominantly concentrated in Lâm Đồng Province. Nationwide, there are no remaining names composed solely of numbers.

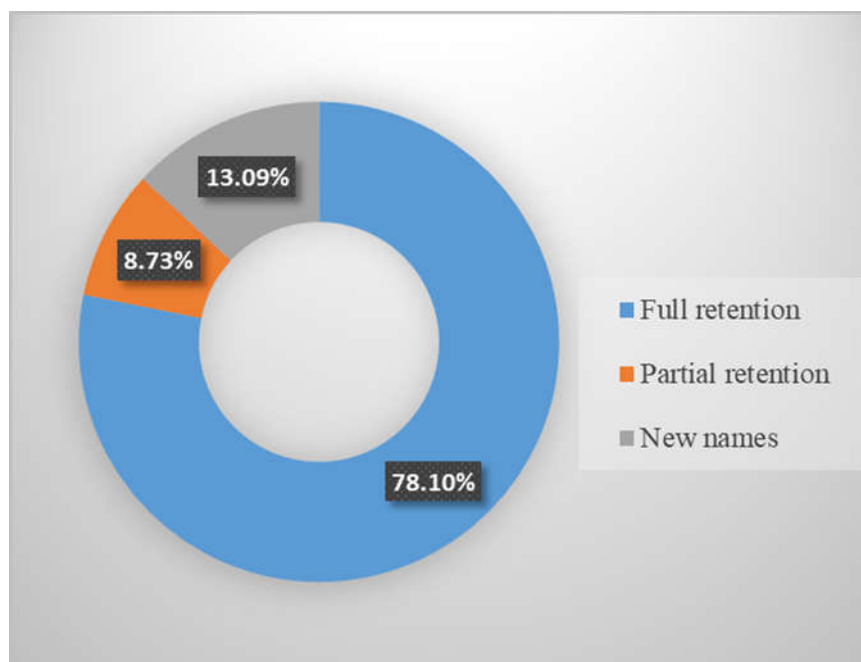


Figure 1. Composition patterns of newly designated commune-level names

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Morphological Typology: Structural Conservatism and Cultural Ideology

The dominance of bimorphemic names (90.7%) reaffirms Vietnamese linguistic norms rooted in rhythmic harmony and semantic duality (Cao Xuân Hạo, 1998; Nguyễn Thiện Giáp, 1998; Lê Trung Hoa, 2006). This structural conservatism reflects long-standing cultural aesthetics that conventionally prioritize semantic clarity, phonological balance, and mnemonic ease, qualities central to Vietnamese naming traditions. Historically, the prevalence of disyllabic Sino-Vietnamese compounds further entrenched this template, making two-morpheme structures the default format for administrative names (Lã Minh Hằng, 2011). The persistence of this pattern in the 2025 reform signals continuity rather than rupture, illustrating how linguistic form operates as a stabilizing force amid institutional change.

Monomorphemic names, by contrast, are exceedingly rare (0.6%) and persist only as legacy artifacts or in contexts where brevity is institutionally valued. Their scarcity confirms earlier observations that single-syllable forms lack distinctiveness and are prone to duplication, rendering them functionally and symbolically inadequate for administrative nomenclature (Nguyễn Thiện Giáp, 1998). At the opposite end of the spectrum, trimorphemic and polymorphemic names though limited to 8.3% and less than 1% respectively are analytically revealing. These expanded structures typically arise in administrative mergers, where local authorities seek to preserve multiple legacy identities within a single referent, or in commemorative contexts requiring additional lexical material to encode historical, geographic, or moral references. Such formations exemplify what Lê Trung Hoa (2006) terms the tension between linguistic economy and symbolic inclusivity: the need to balance structural simplicity with representational breadth.

The near absence of numeric names and the marginal presence of hyphenated forms further underscore systemic resistance to bureaucratic minimalism. Numeric identifiers, once common in urban wards (e.g., *Phường 1*), now appear only as residual traces, while hyphenated names function as merger markers rather than genuine morphological innovations. Both patterns highlight a cultural preference for meaningful compounds over purely functional labels, reinforcing Vietnamese toponymic aesthetics documented by Lê Trung Hoa (2006, 2012) and Bùi Hoài Sơn (2025).

Viewed through the lens of critical toponymy, these typological outcomes are not merely linguistic phenomena but socio-symbolic mechanisms. Morphology mediates between state rationalization and cultural continuity, stabilizing memory and legitimizing reform through structural conservatism rather than ideological rupture (Rose-Redwood et al., 2009; Azaryahu, 2011). In this sense, the Vietnamese case demonstrates how naming operates as a subtle instrument of governance, translating administrative change into culturally intelligible forms of spatial order.

4.2.2. Morpheme Frequency: Semantic Fields of Renewal, Peace, Prosperity, and Nature

The morphemic frequency distribution dominated by *Tân* ‘new, renewal’, *Sơn* ‘mountain’, *An* ‘peace’, *Bình* ‘peace, level’, *Phú* ‘prosperous’, *Hòa* ‘harmony’, *Long* ‘dragon’, *Xuân* ‘spring’, *Đông* ‘east’, and *Yên* ‘peace, stillness’ reveals a highly conservative and symbolically charged lexicon. These morphemes, recurrent across Vietnam’s commune-level nomenclature, account for a significant proportion of all tokens, indicating that naming creativity operates within a narrow but culturally potent repertoire. As Lê Trung Hoa (2006, 2012) observes, Vietnamese naming consistently orbits around a semantic triad of virtue (*đức*), prosperity (*phú*), and peace (*an*), anchoring linguistic innovation within long-standing moral and cosmological frameworks.

Two major semantic fields dominate the system. First, the virtue and social-order field embodied in *An*, *Bình*, *Hòa*, and *Yên* lexically encodes ideals of peace, harmony, and stability. These morphemes function as moral signifiers that legitimize acts of administrative restructuring by embedding them in a lexicon of virtue and reassurance. Following Alderman and Inwood (2013) and Azaryahu (2011), such naming can be understood as *symbolic maintenance*: it naturalizes political and spatial reorganization by evoking continuity and collective well-being. Second, the nature and locality field including *Sơn*, *Xuân*, and *Đông* reflects the enduring toponymic tendency to root communal identity in landscape and cosmology. These morphemes project a sense of embeddedness, reproducing what and Lê Trung Hoa (2012) describe as the environmental intelligibility of Vietnamese toponymy, where names double as micro-maps of the natural and directional order.

The prominence of *Tân* warrants special consideration. Although the overall system remains morphologically conservative, *Tân* operates as a calibrated lexical sign of renewal. Rather than signaling rupture, its recurrent use frames institutional change as restorative, a “newness within continuity”. Common collocations such as *Tân Thành*, *Tân An*, and *Tân Tiến* exemplify what Bùi Hoài Sơn (2025) terms *semantic modernization*, where linguistic innovation reinforces, rather than disrupts, inherited value systems. In this sense, *Tân* functions as a morpho-ideological bridge between bureaucratic rationalization and cultural tradition.

At the *compound (name) level*, frequency analysis reveals further regularities. The ten most common names: *Tân An*, *Tân Thành*, *Tân Tiến*, *Bình Minh*, *Tân Phú*, *Tân Hưng*, *Tân Hòa*, *Bình Phú*, *Thống Nhất*, and *Đông Thành* demonstrate an overwhelming reliance on recurrent dyadic templates:

- Renewal + Virtue/Success (e.g., *Tân Thành*, *Tân Tiến*, *Tân Hưng*)
- Renewal + Peace (e.g., *Tân An*, *Tân Hòa*)
- Peace + Prosperity (e.g., *Bình Phú*)
- Collective Unity (e.g., *Thống Nhất*, ‘unification’)

Each pairing fuses temporal and moral dimensions, translating the administrative logic of consolidation into linguistic expressions of progress and cohesion. The morphological productivity of *Tân* as a first element, and *Thành*, *An*, or *Phú* as second elements, confirms the semiotic resilience of these lexical pairings, which have persisted across centuries of Vietnamese toponymy.

The limited presence of *numeric and hyphenated names* (37 and 12 cases, respectively) further reinforces this morphological conservatism. Numeric identifiers (e.g., *Phường 1*, *Xã 2*) persist as residual bureaucratic markers rather than genuine naming innovations, while hyphenated forms (e.g., *Đình Văn - Lâm Hà*) encode merger provenance rather than new lexical formations. Both patterns underscore that administrative naming in Vietnam privileges *representational inclusion*, symbolic recognition of local identities, over minimalist or purely functional nomenclature.

Taken together, the morphemic and compound-level frequencies point to a linguistic system that is both structurally conservative and semantically coherent. Renewal, peace, prosperity, and natural harmony constitute the core symbolic axes through which Vietnam's 2025 commune names articulate belonging and governance. Morphology, in this context, is not merely descriptive but performative: it stabilizes social meaning within institutional change, reaffirming that linguistic form remains a primary medium through which Vietnamese administrative rationality is culturally domesticated.

4.2.3. Symbolic Negotiation: Full Retention, Partial Retention, and New Names

The morpho-semantic evidence from 3,321 commune-level names demonstrates a patterned negotiation between continuity and innovation, mediated through morphemes as semiotic resources. The three dominant naming trajectories: full retention (78.10%), partial retention (8.73%), and new names (13.09%), collectively illustrate how morphological structure encodes both administrative intent and cultural continuity.

Full retention represents the most pervasive strategy, preserving pre-merger morphemic configurations such as *Hoàn Kiếm* and *Hải Dương*. These bimorphemic forms exemplify what Lê Trung Hoa (2012) describes as *toponymic resilience*, in which linguistic continuity sustains social and mnemonic stability amid institutional change. Provinces such as Bắc Ninh, Sơn La, and Lai Châu, each exceeding 97% retention, demonstrate a pronounced preference for morphological conservation, reflecting governance that prioritizes symbolic familiarity over bureaucratic uniformity. In morpho-functional terms, such names preserve *phonological recognizability* and *semantic stability*, reducing administrative friction while maintaining community attachment to historically loaded lexemes (Rose-Redwood et al., 2009).

Partial retention (8.73%) reveals deliberate morphological blending as a mechanism of symbolic inclusion. Forms such as *Thành Bình Thọ* and *Hội Anh Đông* integrate legacy morphemes from multiple predecessor units, producing bimorphemic, trimorphemic, or even quadrimorphemic compounds. Such hybridization enables each constituent morpheme to contribute representational capital, aligning with Lê Trung Hoa's (2011) notion of *linguistic inclusivity*. These combined forms embody negotiated continuity: they neither erase prior identities nor simply concatenate labels, but semantically synthesize local histories, geography, and aspirations within a single morphological frame. This practice parallels international post-merger naming traditions where compound toponyms reconcile multiple identities within a single administrative referent (Azaryahu, 2011; Filipa & André, 2025).

New names though comprising only 13.09% of the corpus are morphologically and symbolically significant. Concentrated in urban provinces such as Hồ Chí Minh City (17.85%), they exemplify strategic lexical innovation through selective morpheme replacement. The transition from numeric or purely functional identifiers (*Phường 1*, *Phường 7*) to semantically rich forms such as *Chợ Lớn*, *Thiên Đức*, and *Xuân Hòa* signals a shift from administrative enumeration to cultural inscription. Morphemes such as *Tân* 'new/renewal', *Đức* 'virtue', and *Xuân* 'spring' perform a semiotic modernization of space reframing reform as rejuvenation rather than rupture (Bùi Hoài Sơn, 2025). In morpho-symbolic terms, these innovations reveal how new administrative identities are anchored in culturally resonant lexemes, fusing temporal modernity with linguistic tradition.

The numeric (37 cases) and hyphenated (12 cases) formations further illuminate morphotactic constraints and symbolic function. Numeric elements (largely concentrated in Lâm Đồng Province) represent residual traces of older enumerative naming practices (e.g., *Phường 1 Bảo Lộc*), now largely phased out due to perceived semantic impoverishment and lack of cultural salience. As contemporary practice rejects purely numerical morphemes, these cases highlight a systemic preference for *lexical meaning over indexical enumeration*. Hyphenated names (*Định Văn - Lâm Hà*, *Chân Mây - Lăng Cô*), while orthographically distinctive, are not genuine polymorphemic formations: the hyphen functions as a syntactic joiner denoting administrative merger rather than a morphemic unit (it is a mark of punctuation, not a unit of meaning). Their concentration (11 of 12

cases in Lâm Đồng) thus indexes institutional history rather than linguistic innovation. Morphologically, these represent concatenated retention rather than true compounding.

In sum, the morphemic profile of Vietnam's 2025 administrative restructuring reflects a deeply stratified system of symbolic negotiation. Full retention sustains lexical memory, partial retention mediates territorial reconciliation, and new names enact renewal within cultural bounds. Far from arbitrary, morphemic choices function as *semiotic instruments of governance*, translating administrative reform into culturally intelligible and linguistically coherent forms of place identity (Rose-Redwood et al., 2009; Alderman & Inwood, 2013; Gnatiuk, 2025).

4.2.4. Integrative Discussion: Morphology, Continuity, and Governance

The morphological regularities uncovered in this study underscore how linguistic form encodes sociopolitical meaning. The dominance of bimorphemic names and the recurrence of certain morphemes are not merely aesthetic phenomena; they reflect deep-seated conventions in Vietnamese linguistic culture that link symmetry, harmony, and semantic complementarity to ideals of social order. As Nguyễn Thiện Giáp (1998) and Lê Trung Hoa (2012) observed, the dual-morpheme structure serves not only prosodic elegance but also semantic reinforcement, allowing names to encapsulate both aspiration (*Tân, Phú*) and moral order (*An, Thịnh*).

At the same time, the distribution of naming strategies, which are full retention, partial retention, and new names, illustrates a calibrated approach to reform. Rather than pursuing wholesale renaming, local authorities favored continuity as a strategy of symbolic legitimacy (Bùi Hoài Sơn, 2025). This contrasts with cases in post-socialist Eastern Europe and postcolonial Africa, where renaming often functioned as a vehicle of ideological rupture (Alderman, 2008; Azaryahu, 2011). Vietnam's pattern instead reflects cultural pragmatism in administrative language, balancing modernization with the maintenance of historical and moral resonance.

Viewed through the lens of *critical toponymy* (Rose-Redwood et al., 2009; Vuolteenaho & Berg, 2009), morphological stability in Vietnam's commune-level names demonstrates how language operates as an instrument of continuity amid reform. The morphology of place and administrative names thus becomes a subtle yet powerful means through which the state negotiates between bureaucratic rationalization and collective identity, a negotiation expressed not in slogans, but in syllables.

4.2.5. Theoretical Contribution: Morphology as a Lens on Power, Memory, and Order

This study demonstrates that morphological analysis can serve not only as a linguistic tool but also as a critical framework for interpreting how power, memory, and ideology are embedded in administrative naming. The consistent preference for bimorphemic structures, typically encoding peace (*An, Bình*), prosperity (*Phú*), harmony (*Hòa*), and renewal (*Tân*), illustrates that morphological regularities are not simply aesthetic conventions but ideological expressions of order, stability, and moral legitimacy. In this sense, form operates as a linguistic manifestation of governance rationality, translating administrative restructuring into culturally intelligible expressions of continuity (Rose-Redwood et al., 2009; Alderman & Inwood, 2013).

Vietnamese linguistic scholarship has long recognized this interdependence between form, meaning, and worldview. Nguyễn Thiện Giáp (1998) emphasizes the semantic distinctiveness of multisyllabic compounds as essential for clarity and cultural resonance, while Lê Trung Hoa (2006, 2012) identifies the enduring equilibrium between linguistic economy and symbolic inclusivity as a defining trait of Vietnamese toponymy. The findings here reaffirm those insights: repetition of virtuous and natural morphemes operates as both a mnemonic and ideological device, preserving heritage even amid institutional transformation.

By reframing morphological typology as an index of socio-political meaning, this study extends critical toponymy beyond semantic and functional readings. Morphology emerges as an interpretive lens - a medium through which statecraft, cultural memory, and linguistic aesthetics converge to sustain Vietnam's evolving spatial and symbolic order.

5. Conclusion

Vietnam's 2025 administrative restructuring, while formally a governance reform, also constituted a nationwide linguistic event that reaffirmed the cultural resilience and adaptability of Vietnamese naming traditions. The morphological analysis of 3,321 commune-level names reveals two enduring dynamics: *structural conservatism and semantic continuity*. The overwhelming dominance of bimorphemic constructions (90.7%) underscores the Vietnamese preference for duality and rhythmic balance, a pattern rooted in the linguistic aesthetics identified by Nguyễn Thiện Giáp (1998) and Lê Trung Hoa (2006, 2012). Similarly, the recurrence of morphemes such as *Tân* 'new', *An* 'peace', and *Phú* 'prosperous' signals an enduring ideological orientation toward stability, renewal, and communal harmony.

Despite the magnitude of administrative change, naming practices favored continuity over rupture. Legacy names were predominantly retained or partially adapted, while new names were introduced through culturally resonant lexical materials rather than through structural or ideological breaks. This selective innovation contrasts with international patterns where renaming often accompanies political discontinuity or urban branding (Rose-Redwood et al., 2009; Alderman & Inwood, 2013). In Vietnam, morphology thus functions as a *symbolic buffer*, mediating between bureaucratic rationalization and collective identity.

By reframing morphology as a diagnostic lens, this study advances critical toponymy beyond semantic analysis, positioning linguistic form as a key mediator of governance and cultural resilience. For onomastic scholarship, these findings demonstrate that morphological analysis provides not only descriptive precision but also interpretive depth linking linguistic form with political order, collective memory, and aesthetic value. Future studies could extend this inquiry through *computational geoparsing, diachronic comparison of pre- and post-restructuring data, and cross-cultural analyses* involving other multilingual contexts. Such approaches would further clarify how morphological structures encode ideological continuities and illuminate how naming serves as a medium through which language, culture, and governance co-produce spatial meaning.

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Tên đơn vị cấp xã sau tái sắp xếp các đơn vị hành chính của Việt Nam năm 2025:

Nghiên cứu danh xưng từ góc độ hình thái học

Tóm tắt: Công cuộc tái cơ cấu mô hình chính quyền địa phương năm 2025 của Việt Nam đã giảm số đơn vị cấp xã từ 10.035 xuống còn 3.321, tạo nên một trong những chiến dịch đổi tên lớn nhất trong lịch sử hiện đại của đất nước. Nghiên cứu này áp dụng cách tiếp cận danh xưng học hình thái để phân tích các đặc điểm cấu trúc và ngữ nghĩa của 3.321 tên gọi, thông qua công cụ phân tích và thống kê tần suất có sự hỗ trợ của ngôn ngữ lập trình Python. Kết quả cho thấy xu hướng bảo thủ ngôn ngữ rất rõ nét: 90,7% tên gọi là song tiết, khẳng định quy luật truyền thống của tiếng Việt về tính song đôi và nhịp điệu hài hòa. Các hình vị có tần suất cao như *Tân* ‘mới’, *An* ‘bình yên’ và *Phú* ‘thịnh vượng’ chiếm ưu thế, phản ánh những giá trị về đổi mới, ổn định và phát triển. Mặc dù có sự thay đổi lớn về địa giới, quá trình đặt tên vẫn ưu tiên tính liên tục hơn là đứt gãy, dung hòa giữa hiệu quả hành chính và biểu tượng văn hóa. Bằng cách xem hình thái học vừa là hình thức ngôn ngữ vừa là chỉ số văn hóa, nghiên cứu này góp phần mở rộng lĩnh vực địa danh học phản biện và danh xưng học Việt Nam, cho thấy các quy luật cấu trúc ngôn ngữ có thể đóng vai trò như công cụ của quản trị và bản sắc.

Từ khóa: hình thái học; danh xưng học; tái cơ cấu hành chính; tên xã ở Việt Nam; địa danh học.