

Vietnamese language

Vietnamese (Vietnamese: *Tiếng Việt*)^[a] is an Austroasiatic language that originated in Vietnam, where it is the national and official language. It is by far the most spoken Austroasiatic language with over 70 million native speakers, at least seven times more than Khmer, the next most spoken Austroasiatic language.^[4] Its vocabulary has had significant influence from Chinese and French. It is the native language of the Vietnamese (Kinh) people, as well as a second language or first language for other ethnic groups in Vietnam. As a result of emigration, Vietnamese speakers are also found in other parts of Southeast Asia, East Asia, North America, Europe, and Australia. Vietnamese has also been officially recognized as a minority language in the Czech Republic.^[5]

Like many other languages in Southeast Asia and East Asia, Vietnamese is an analytic language with phonemic tone. It has head-initial directionality, with subject–verb–object order and modifiers following the words they modify. It also uses noun classifiers.

Vietnamese was historically written in a mixture of *Chữ Hán* (Chinese characters) for writing Sino-Vietnamese words and *Chữ Nôm*, a locally invented Chinese-based script for writing vernacular Vietnamese. French colonial rule of Vietnam led to the official adoption of the Vietnamese alphabet (*chữ Quốc ngữ*) which is based on Latin script. It uses digraphs and diacritics to mark tones and pronunciation. Whilst *Chữ Hán* and *Chữ Nôm* fell out of use in Vietnam by the early 20th century, they are still occasionally used by the Gin people in southeast China.^[6]

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Vietnamese	
<i>Tiếng Việt</i>	
Pronunciation	<div>[tʰiəŋ viəʔt]<div>(Northern)</div>[tʰiəŋ jiək]<div>(Southern)</div></div>
Native to	Vietnam and China (Dongxing , Guangxi)
Native speakers	76 million (2009) ^[1]
Language family	<div>Austroasiatic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Vietic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Viet–Muong<ul style="list-style-type: none">Vietnamese</div>
Early forms	<div>Viet–Muong<ul style="list-style-type: none">Old VietnameseMiddle Vietnamese</div>
Writing system	<div>Latin (Vietnamese alphabet)<div>Vietnamese Braille<div>Chữ Hán and Chữ Nôm (historic; current use by Gin people)</div></div></div>
Official status	
Official language in	<div> Vietnam</div> <div> ASEAN^[2]</div>
Recognised minority language in	<div> Czech Republic</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	<div>vi (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.ph)</div>

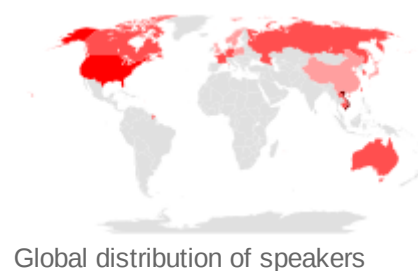
<u>Consonants</u>
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	<u>p?iso_639_1=vie</u> <u>i)</u>
<u>ISO 639-2</u>	<u>vie</u> (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/lang_codes_name.php?code_ID=479)
<u>ISO 639-3</u>	<u>vie</u>
<u>Glottolog</u>	<u>viet1252</u> (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/viet1252)
<u>Linguasphere</u>	<u>46-EBA</u>
 <p>Natively Vietnamese-speaking (non-minority) areas of Vietnam^[3]</p>	

Geographic distribution

As the national language, Vietnamese is the *lingua franca* in Vietnam. It is also spoken by the Gin traditionally residing on three islands (now joined to the mainland) off Dongxing in southern Guangxi Province, China.^[7] A large number of Vietnamese speakers also reside in neighboring countries of Cambodia and Laos.

In the United States, Vietnamese is the fifth most spoken language, with over 1.5 million speakers, who are concentrated in a handful of states. It is the third most spoken language in Texas and Washington; fourth in Georgia, Louisiana, and Virginia; and fifth in Arkansas and California.^[8] Vietnamese is the seventh most spoken language in Australia.^[9] In France, it is the most spoken Asian language and the eighth most spoken immigrant language at home.^[10]



Official status

Vietnamese is the sole official and national language of Vietnam. It is the first language of the majority of the Vietnamese population, as well as a first or second language for the country's ethnic minority groups.^[11]

In the Czech Republic, Vietnamese has been recognized as one of 14 minority languages, on the basis of communities that have resided in the country either traditionally or on a long-term basis. This status grants the Vietnamese community in the country a representative on the Government Council for Nationalities, an advisory body of the Czech Government for matters of policy towards national minorities and their members. It also grants the community the right to use Vietnamese with public authorities and in courts anywhere in the country.^{[12][13]}

As a foreign language

Vietnamese is increasingly being taught in schools and institutions outside of Vietnam, a large part which is contributed by its large diaspora. In countries with strongly established Vietnamese-speaking communities such as the United States, France, Australia, Canada, Germany, and the Czech Republic, Vietnamese language education largely serves as a cultural role to link descendants of Vietnamese immigrants to their ancestral culture. Meanwhile, in countries near Vietnam such as Cambodia, Laos, China, Taiwan, and Thailand, the increased role of Vietnamese in foreign language education is largely due to the recent recovery of the Vietnamese economy.^{[14][15]}

Since the 1980s, Vietnamese language schools (*trường Việt ngữ*) have been established for youth in many Vietnamese-speaking communities around the world, notably in the United States.^{[16][17]}

Similarly, since the late 1980s, the Vietnamese-German community has enlisted the support of city governments to bring Vietnamese into high school curriculum for the purpose of teaching and reminding Vietnamese German students of their mother-tongue. Furthermore, there has also been a number of Germans studying Vietnamese due to increased economic investments and business.^{[18][19]}

Historic and stronger trade and diplomatic relations with Vietnam and a growing interest among the French Vietnamese population (one of France's most established non-European ethnic groups) of their ancestral culture have also led to an increasing number of institutions in France, including universities, to offer formal courses in the language.^[20]

Linguistic classification

Early linguistic work some 150 years ago^[21] classified Vietnamese as belonging to the Mon–Khmer branch of the Austroasiatic language family (which also includes the Khmer language spoken in Cambodia, as well as various smaller and/or regional languages, such as the Munda and Khasi languages spoken in eastern India, and others in Laos, southern China and parts of Thailand). Later, Muong was found to be more closely related to Vietnamese than other Mon–Khmer languages, and a Viet–Muong subgrouping was established, also including Thavung, Chut, Cuoi, etc.^[22] The term "Vietic" was proposed by Hayes (1992),^[23] who proposed to redefine Viet–Muong as referring to a subbranch of Vietic containing only Vietnamese and Muong. The term "Vietic" is used, among others, by Gérard Diffloth, with a slightly different proposal on subclassification, within which the term "Viet–Muong" refers to a lower subgrouping (within an eastern Vietic branch) consisting of Vietnamese dialects, Muong dialects, and Nguồn (of Quảng Bình Province).^[24]

Lexicon and borrowings

The result of language contact with Chinese heavily influenced the Vietnamese language overall, causing it to diverge from Viet-Muong and other South East Asian languages into Vietnamese. For example, the Vietnamese word quản lý, meaning management (noun) or manage (verb) is likely descended from the same word as guǎnlǐ (管理) in Chinese, kanri (管理 (かんり)) in Japanese, and gwalli (관리 (管理)) in Korean.

Modern linguists describe modern Vietnamese having lost many Proto-Austroasiatic phonological and morphological features that original Vietnamese had.^[25] The Chinese influence on Vietnamese corresponds to various periods when Vietnam was under Chinese rule, and subsequent influence after Vietnam became independent. Early linguists thought that this meant Vietnamese lexicon then received only two layers of Chinese words, one stemming from the period under actual Chinese rule and a second layer from afterwards. These words are grouped together as Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary.

However, according to linguist John Phan, “Annamese Middle Chinese” was already used and spoken in the Red River Valley by the 1st century CE, and its vocabulary significantly fused with the co-existing Proto-Viet-Muong language, the immediate ancestor of Vietnamese. He lists three major classes of Sino-Vietnamese borrowings:^{[26][27][28]} Early Sino-Vietnamese (Han Dynasty (ca. 1st century CE) and Jin Dynasty (ca. 4th century CE)), Late Sino-Vietnamese (Tang Dynasty), Recent Sino-Vietnamese (Ming Dynasty and afterwards)

Additionally, the French presence in Vietnam from 1777 to the Geneva Accords of 1954 resulted in influence from French into eastern Indochina. For Vietnamese, 'cà phê', derived from the French word *café* (coffee). Yogurt in vernacular Vietnamese is "sữa chua", but also calqued from French (*yaourt*) into Vietnamese (*da ua* - /j/a ua). Nowadays, many new words are being added to the language's lexicon especially from English. Some are incorporated into Vietnamese as loan words— e.g., "TV" has been borrowed as "tivi". The musical note is translated into Vietnamese as "*nhạc nốt* (*musical notes*)". The Cambodian name for Cambodia, "Kampuchea" becomes "Campuchia". Some other borrowings are calques, translated into Viet, for example, 'software' is translated into '*phần mềm*' (literally meaning "soft part"). Some other scientific terms such as "biological cell" may be from Hán-Nôm or Han character texts, (细胞 - tế bào), whilst other scientific names such as "acetylcholine" are kept as they are. Some other scientific terms like "peptide", may be Vietnamized to make it easier to pronounce amongst Vietnamese words e.g. *peptide* may also be seen as *peptit* in Vietnamese texts. Other words, like *muôn thuở* meaning *forever* are seen to be purely Vietnamese invention, being derived from Vietnamese Nôm characters. Hán and Nôm words are also transliterated into the Vietnamese alphabet.

Phonology (linguistics)

Vowels

Vietnamese has a large number of vowels. Below is a vowel diagram of Vietnamese from Hanoi (including centering diphthongs):

	Front	Central	Back
<u>Centering</u>	ia/iê [iə]	ua/uơ [iə]	ua/uô [uə]
<u>Close</u>	i/y [i]	ư [ɨ]	u [u]
<u>Close-mid/</u> <u>Mid</u>	ê [e]	ơ [əː] â [ə]	ô [o]
<u>Open-mid/</u> <u>Open</u>	e [ɛ]	a [aː] ă [a]	o [ɔ]

Front and central vowels (i, ê, e, ư, â, ơ, ă, a) are unrounded, whereas the back vowels (u, ô, o) are rounded. The vowels â [ə] and ă [a] are pronounced very short, much shorter than the other vowels. Thus, ơ and â are basically pronounced the same except that ơ [əː] is of normal length while â [ə] is short – the same applies to

the vowels long a [aː] and short ă [a].^[29]

The centering diphthongs are formed with only the three high vowels (i, ɯ, u). They are generally spelled as ia, ɯa, ua when they end a word and are spelled iê, ɯɔ, uô, respectively, when they are followed by a consonant.

In addition to single vowels (or monophthongs) and centering diphthongs, Vietnamese has closing diphthongs^[30] and triphthongs. The closing diphthongs and triphthongs consist of a main vowel component followed by a shorter semivowel offglide /j/ or /w/.^[31] There are restrictions on the high offglides: /j/ cannot occur after a front vowel (i, ê, e) nucleus and /w/ cannot occur after a back vowel (u, ô, o) nucleus.^[32]

	/w/ offglide		/j/ offglide	
	Front	Central	Back	
Centering	iêu [iəw]	ɯɔu [ɯəw]	ɯɔi [ɯəj]	uôi [uəj]
Close	iu [iw]	ɯu [ɯw]	ui [ij]	ui [uj]
Close-mid/ Mid	êu [ew]	– âu [əw]	ɔi [əːj] ây [əj]	ôi [oj]
Open-mid/ Open	eo [ɛw]	ao [aːw] au [aw]	ai [aːj] ay [aj]	oi [ɔj]

The correspondence between the orthography and pronunciation is complicated. For example, the offglide /j/ is usually written as i; however, it may also be represented with y. In addition, in the diphthongs [āj] and [āːj] the letters y and i also indicate the pronunciation of the main vowel: ay = ă + /j/, ai = a + /j/. Thus, "tay" "hand" is [tāj] while "tai" "ear" is [tāːj]. Similarly, u and o indicate different pronunciations of the main vowel: au = ă + /w/, ao = a + /w/. Thus, thau "brass" is [tʰāw] while thao "raw silk" is [tʰāːw].

Consonants

The consonants that occur in Vietnamese are listed below in the Vietnamese orthography with the phonetic pronunciation to the right.

		Labial	Dental/ Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Nasal		m [m]	n [n]		nh [ɲ]	ng/ngh [ŋ]	
Stop	tenuis	p [p]	t [t]	tr [ʈ]	ch [c]	c/k/q [k]	
	aspirated		th [tʰ]				
	glottalized	b [ɓ]	đ [ɗ]				
Fricative	voiceless	ph [f]	x [s]	s [ʂ~s]		kh [x~kʰ]	h [h]
	voiced	v [v]	d/gi [z~j]			g/gh [ɣ]	
Approximant			l [l]		y/i [j]	u/o [w]	
Rhotic				r [r]			

Some consonant sounds are written with only one letter (like "p"), other consonant sounds are written with a digraph (like "ph"), and others are written with more than one letter or digraph (the velar stop is written variously as "c", "k", or "q").

Not all dialects of Vietnamese have the same consonant in a given word (although all dialects use the same spelling in the written language). See the [language variation section](#) for further elaboration.

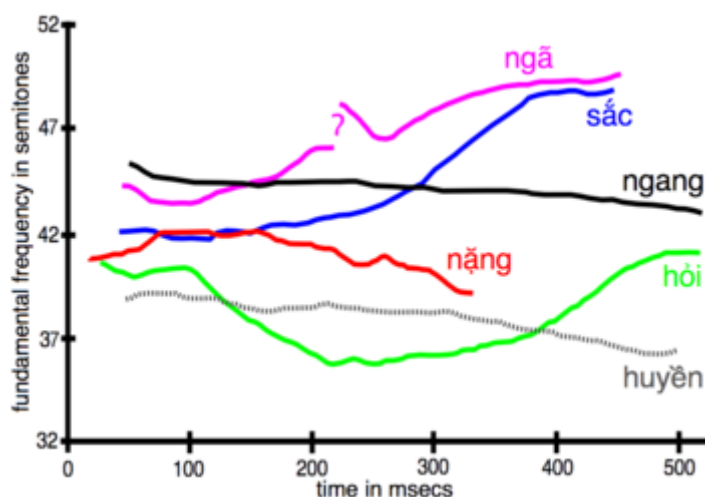
The analysis of syllable-final orthographic *ch* and *nh* in Vietnamese has had different analyses. One analysis has final *ch*, *nh* as being phonemes /c/, /ɲ/ contrasting with syllable-final *t*, *c* /t/, /k/ and *n*, *ng* /n/, /ŋ/ and identifies final *ch* with the syllable-initial *ch* /c/. The other analysis has final *ch* and *nh* as predictable allophonic variants of the velar phonemes /k/ and /ŋ/ that occur after the upper front vowels *i* /i/ and *ê* /e/; although they also occur after *a*, but in such cases are believed to have resulted from an earlier *e* /ɛ/ which diphthongized to *ai* (cf. *ach* from *aic*, *anh* from *aing*). (See [Vietnamese phonology: Analysis of final *ch*, *nh*](#) for further details.)

Tones

Each Vietnamese syllable is pronounced with an inherent tone,^[33] centered on the main vowel or group of vowels. Tonal language in Vietnamese translates to "ngôn ngữ âm sắc". Tones differ in:

- length (duration)
- pitch contour (i.e. pitch melody)
- pitch height
- phonation

Tone is indicated by diacritics written above or below the vowel (most of the tone diacritics appear above the vowel; however, the *nặng* tone dot diacritic goes below the vowel).^[34] The six tones in the northern varieties (including Hanoi), with their self-referential Vietnamese names, are:



Pitch contours and duration of the six Northern Vietnamese tones as spoken by a male speaker (not from Hanoi). Fundamental frequency is plotted over time. From Nguyễn & Edmondson (1998).

Name	Description	Contour	Diacritic	Example	Sample vowel
ngang 'level'	mid level	├	(no mark)	<i>ma</i> 'ghost'	a
huyền 'deep'	low falling (often breathy)	┘	◌ (grave accent)	<i>mà</i> 'but'	à
sắc 'sharp'	high rising	└	◌ (acute accent)	<i>má</i> 'cheek, mother (southern)'	á
hỏi 'questioning'	mid dipping-rising	┘└	◌ (hook above)	<i>mả</i> 'tomb, grave'	ả
ngã 'tumbling'	creaky high breaking-rising	└ʔ└	◌ (tilde)	<i>mã</i> 'horse (Sino-Vietnamese), code'	ã
nặng 'heavy'	creaky low falling constricted (short length)	┘ʔ	◌ (dot below)	<i>mạ</i> 'rice seedling'	ạ

Other dialects of Vietnamese may have fewer tones (typically only five).

In Vietnamese poetry, tones are classed into two groups: (tone pattern)

Tone group	Tones within tone group
<i>bằng</i> "level, flat"	<i>ngang</i> and <i>huyền</i>
<i>trắc</i> "oblique, sharp"	<i>sắc</i> , <i>hỏi</i> , <i>ngã</i> , and <i>nặng</i>

Words with tones belonging to a particular tone group must occur in certain positions within the poetic verse.

Vietnamese Catholics practice a distinctive style of prayer recitation called *đọc kinh*, in which each tone is assigned a specific note or sequence of notes.

Language variation

The Vietnamese language has several mutually intelligible regional varieties:^[35]

Dialect region	Localities	Previous Names
Northern	<u>Hà Nội</u> , <u>Hải Phòng</u> , <u>Red River Delta</u> , <u>Northwest</u> and <u>Northeast</u>	<u>Tonkinese</u>
North-central (Area IV)	<u>Thanh Hoá</u> (people's voice in here sound like in the northern but their pronunciation and vocabulary are of the north-central), <u>Vinh</u> , <u>Hà Tĩnh</u>	<u>Annamese</u>
Mid-Central	<u>Quảng Bình</u> , <u>Quảng Trị</u> , <u>Huế</u> , <u>Thừa Thiên</u>	Annamese
South-Central (Area V)	<u>Đà Nẵng</u> , <u>Quảng Nam</u> , <u>Quảng Ngãi</u> , <u>Bình Định</u> , <u>Phú Yên</u> , <u>Nha Trang</u>	Annamese
Southern	<u>Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu</u> , <u>Hồ Chí Minh</u> , <u>Lâm Đồng</u> , <u>Mê Kông</u>	<u>Cochin-China</u>

Vietnamese has traditionally been divided into three dialect regions: North, Central, and South. Michel Ferlus and Nguyễn Tài Cẩn also proved that there was a separate North-Central dialect for Vietnamese as well. The term *Haut-Annam* refers to dialects spoken from northern Nghệ An Province to southern (former) Thừa Thiên Province that preserve archaic features (like consonant clusters and undiphthongized vowels) that have been lost in other modern dialects.

These dialect regions differ mostly in their sound systems (see below), but also in vocabulary (including basic vocabulary, non-basic vocabulary, and grammatical words) and grammar.^[36] The North-central and Central regional varieties, which have a significant number of vocabulary differences, are generally less mutually intelligible to Northern and Southern speakers. There is less internal variation within the Southern region than the other regions due to its relatively late settlement by Vietnamese speakers (around the end of the 15th century). The North-central region is particularly conservative; its pronunciation has diverged less from Vietnamese orthography than the other varieties, which tend to merge certain sounds. Along the coastal areas, regional variation has been neutralized to a certain extent, while more mountainous regions preserve more variation. As for sociolinguistic attitudes, the North-central varieties are often felt to be "peculiar" or "difficult to understand" by speakers of other dialects, despite the fact that their pronunciation fits the written language the most closely; this is typically because of various words in their vocabulary which are unfamiliar to other speakers (see the example vocabulary table below).

The large movements of people between North and South beginning in the mid-20th century and continuing to this day have resulted in a sizable number of Southern residents speaking in the Northern accent/dialect and, to a greater extent, Northern residents speaking in the Southern accent/dialect. Following the Geneva Accords of 1954 that called for the temporary division of the country, about a million northerners (mainly from Hanoi,

Haiphong and the surrounding Red River Delta areas) moved south (mainly to Saigon and heavily to Biên Hòa and Vũng Tàu, and the surrounding areas) as part of Operation Passage to Freedom. About 3% (~30,000) of that number of people made the move in the reverse direction (*Tập kết ra Bắc*, literally "go to the North".)

Following the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, Northern and North-Central speakers from the densely populated Red River Delta and the traditionally poorer provinces of Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh, and Quảng Bình have continued to move South to look for better economic opportunities, beginning with the new government's "New Economic Zones program" which lasted from 1975 to 1985.^[37] The first half of the program (1975–80), resulted in 1.3 million people sent to the New Economic Zones (NEZs), majority of which were relocated to the southern half of the country in previously uninhabited areas, of which 550,000 were Northerners.^[37] The second half (1981–85) saw almost 1 million Northerners relocated to the NEZs.^[37] Government and military personnel from Northern and North-central Vietnam are also posted to various locations throughout the country, often away from their home regions. More recently, the growth of the free market system has resulted in increased interregional movement and relations between distant parts of Vietnam through business and travel. These movements have also resulted in some blending of dialects, but more significantly, have made the Northern dialect more easily understood in the South and vice versa. Most Southerners, when singing modern/old popular Vietnamese songs or addressing the public, do so in the standardized accent if possible (which is Northern pronunciation). This is true in Vietnam as well as in overseas Vietnamese communities.

Modern Standard Vietnamese is based on the Hanoi dialect. Nevertheless, the major dialects are still predominant in their respective areas and have also evolved over time with influences from other areas. Historically, accents have been distinguished by how each region pronounces the letters *d* ([zuh] in the Northern dialect and [yuh] in the Central and Southern dialect) and *r* ([zuh] in the Northern dialect, [ruh] in the Central and Southern dialects). Thus, the Central and Southern dialects can be said to have retained a pronunciation closer to Vietnamese orthography and resemble how Middle Vietnamese sounded in contrast to the modern Northern (Hanoi) dialect which underwent shifts.

Vocabulary

Regional variation in vocabulary^[38]

Northern	Central	Southern	English gloss
<i>này</i>	<i>ni, nì</i>	<i>nè</i>	"this"
<i>thế này</i>	<i>như ri</i>	<i>như vậy</i>	"thus, this way"
<i>đấy</i>	<i>nớ, tê</i>	<i>đó</i>	"that"
<i>thế, thế ấy</i>	<i>rúa, rúa tê</i>	<i>vậy, vậy đó</i>	"thus, so, that way"
<i>kìa, kì</i>	<i>tê, tề</i>	<i>đó</i>	"that yonder"
<i>đâu</i>	<i>mô</i>	<i>đâu</i>	"where"
<i>nào</i>	<i>mổ</i>	<i>nào</i>	"which"
<i>tại sao</i>	<i>rằng</i>	<i>tại sao</i>	"why"
<i>thế nào, như nào</i>	<i>rằng, làm rằng</i>	<i>làm sao</i>	"how"
<i>tui, tôi</i>	<i>tui</i>	<i>tui</i>	"I, me (polite)"
<i>tao</i>	<i>tau</i>	<i>tao</i>	"I, me (arrogant, familiar)"
<i>chúng tao</i>	<i>choa, bọn choa</i>	<i>tụi tao, tụi tui, bọn tui</i>	"we, us (but not you, colloquial, familiar)"
<i>mày</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>mày</i>	"you (arrogant, familiar)"
<i>chúng mày</i>	<i>bây, bọn bây</i>	<i>tụi mầy, tụi bây, bọn mày</i>	"you guys (arrogant, familiar)"
<i>nó</i>	<i>hắn</i>	<i>nó</i>	"he/she/it (arrogant, familiar)"
<i>chúng nó</i>	<i>bọn nớ</i>	<i>tụi nó</i>	"they/them (arrogant, familiar)"
<i>ông ấy</i>	<i>ông nớ</i>	<i>ổng</i>	"he/him, that gentleman, sir"
<i>bà ấy</i>	<i>bà nớ</i>	<i>bả</i>	"she/her, that lady, madam"
<i>anh ấy</i>	<i>anh nớ</i>	<i>ảnh</i>	"he/him, that young man (of equal status)"
<i>ruộng</i>	<i>nương</i>	<i>ruộng, rẫy</i>	"field"
<i>bát</i>	<i>đọi</i>	<i>chén</i>	"rice bowl"
<i>bẩn</i>	<i>nhóp</i>	<i>dơ</i>	"dirty"
<i>muôi</i>	<i>môi</i>	<i>vá</i>	"ladle"
<i>đầu</i>	<i>trốc</i>	<i>đầu</i>	"head"
<i>lười</i>	<i>nhác</i>	<i>làm biếng, lười</i>	"lazy"
<i>ô tô</i>	<i>ô tô</i>	<i>xe hơi (ô tô)</i>	"car"
<i>thìa</i>	<i>thìa</i>	<i>muỗng</i>	"spoon"
<i>xấu</i>	<i>tệ</i>	<i>dở</i>	"bad"

Although regional variations developed over time, most of these words can be used interchangeably and be understood well, albeit, with more or less frequency than others or with slightly different but often discernible pronunciations.

Consonants

The syllable-initial *ch* and *tr* digraphs are pronounced distinctly in North-Central, Central, and Southern varieties, but are merged in Northern varieties (i.e. they are both pronounced the same way). The North-Central varieties preserve three distinct pronunciations for *d*, *gi*, and *r* whereas the North has a three-way

merger and the Central and South have a merger of *d* and *gi* while keeping *r* distinct. At the end of syllables, palatals *ch* and *nh* have merged with alveolars *t* and *n*, which, in turn, have also partially merged with velars *c* and *ng* in Central and Southern varieties.

Regional consonant correspondences

Syllable position	Orthography	Northern	North-central	Central	Southern
syllable-initial	<i>x</i>	[s]	[s]		
	<i>s</i>		[ɬ]		[s, ɬ] ^[39]
	<i>ch</i>	[t͡ɕ]	[c]		
	<i>tr</i>		[t]		[c, t] ^[39]
	<i>r</i>	[z]	[r]		
	<i>d</i>		[ɟ]	[j]	
	<i>gi</i>		[z]		
	<i>v</i>	[v]			[v, j] ^[40]
syllable-final	<i>t</i>	[t]		[k]	
	<i>c</i>	[k]			
	<i>t</i> after <i>i, ê</i>	[t]		[t]	
	<i>ch</i>	[k͡]			
	<i>t</i> after <i>u, ô</i>	[t]		[kp]	
	<i>c</i> after <i>u, ô, o</i>	[kp]			
	<i>n</i>	[n]		[ŋ]	
	<i>ng</i>	[ŋ]			
	<i>n</i> after <i>i, ê</i>	[n]		[n]	
	<i>nh</i>	[n̥]			
	<i>n</i> after <i>u, ô</i>	[n]		[ŋm]	
	<i>ng</i> after <i>u, ô, o</i>	[ŋm]			

In addition to the regional variation described above, there is a merger of *l* and *n* in certain rural varieties in the North:^[41]

l, n variation

Orthography	"Mainstream" varieties	Rural varieties
<i>n</i>	[n]	[l]
<i>l</i>	[l]	

Variation between *l* and *n* can be found even in mainstream Vietnamese in certain words. For example, the numeral "five" appears as *năm* by itself and in compound numerals like *năm mươi* "fifty" but appears as *lăm* in *mười lăm* "fifteen" (see [Vietnamese grammar#Cardinal](#)). In some northern varieties, this numeral appears with an initial *nh* instead of *l*: *hai mươi nhăm* "twenty-five", instead of mainstream *hai mươi lăm*.^[42]

There is also a merger of *r* and *g* in certain rural varieties in the South:

r, g variation		
Orthography	"Mainstream" varieties	Rural varieties
<i>r</i>	[r]	[ʁ]
<i>g</i>	[ʁ]	

The consonant clusters that were originally present in Middle Vietnamese (of the 17th century) have been lost in almost all modern Vietnamese varieties (but retained in other closely related Vietic languages). However, some speech communities have preserved some of these archaic clusters: "sky" is *blời* with a cluster in Hảo Nho (Yên Mô, Ninh Bình Province) but *trời* in Southern Vietnamese and *giời* in Hanoi Vietnamese (initial single consonants /t̪/, /z/, respectively).

Tones

Although there are six tones in Vietnamese, some tones may slightly "merge", but are still highly distinguishable due to the context of the speech. The *hỏi* and *ngã* tones are distinct in North and some North-central varieties (although often with different pitch contours) but have somewhat merged in Central, Southern, and some North-Central varieties (also with different pitch contours). Some North-Central varieties (such as Hà Tĩnh Vietnamese) have a slight merger of the *ngã* and *nặng* tones while keeping the *hỏi* tone distinct. Still, other North-Central varieties have a three-way merger of *hỏi*, *ngã*, and *nặng* resulting in a four-tone system. In addition, there are several phonetic differences (mostly in pitch contour and phonation type) in the tones among dialects.

Regional tone correspondences						
Tone	Northern	North-central			Central	Southern
		Vinh	Thanh Chương	Hà Tĩnh		
ngang	↑ 33	↑ 35	↑ 35	↑ 35, ↑ 353	↑ 35	↑ 33
huyền	↓ 21	↑ 33	↑ 33	↑ 33	↑ 33	↓ 21
sắc	↑ 35	↓ 11	↓ 11, ↓ 13	↓ 13	↓ 13	↑ 35
hỏi	↘ 313	↓ 31	↓ 31	↘? 31?	↘ 312	↓ 214
ngã	↑? 1 3?5	↓ 13		↓ 22		
nặng	↘? 21?	↑ 22	↓ 22		↓ 22	↓ 212

The table above shows the pitch contour of each tone using Chao tone number notation (where 1 represents the lowest pitch, and 5 the highest); glottalization (creaky, stiff, harsh) is indicated with the ⟨ ͡ ⟩ symbol; murmured voice with ⟨ ̤ ⟩; glottal stop with ⟨ ʔ ⟩; sub-dialectal variants are separated with commas. (See also the tone section below.)

Grammar

Vietnamese, like Chinese and many languages in Southeast Asia, is an analytic language. Vietnamese does not use morphological marking of case, gender, number or tense (and, as a result, has no finite/nonfinite distinction).^[43] Also like other languages in the region, Vietnamese syntax conforms to subject–verb–object word order, is head-initial (displaying modified-modifier ordering), and has a noun classifier system. Additionally, it is pro-drop, wh-in-situ, and allows verb serialization.

Some Vietnamese sentences with English word glosses and translations are provided below.

<i>Minh</i>	<i>là</i>	<i>giáo viên</i>
Minh	BE	teacher.
"Min is a teacher."		

<i>Trí</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>tuổi</i>
Trí	13	age
"Trí is 13 years old,"		

<i>Mai</i>	<i>có vẻ</i>	<i>là</i>
Mai	seem	BE
<i>sinh viên</i>	<i>hoặc</i>	<i>học sinh.</i>
student (college)	or	student (under-college)
"Mai seems to be a college or high school student."		

<i>Tài</i>	<i>đang</i>	<i>nói.</i>
Tài	PRES.CONT	talk
"Tài is talking."		

<i>Giáp</i>	<i>rất</i>	<i>cao.</i>
Giáp	INT	tall
"Giáp is very tall."		

<i>Người</i>	<i>đó</i>	<i>là</i>
person	that.DET	BE
<i>anh</i>	<i>của</i>	<i>nó.</i>
older brother	POSS	3.PRO
"That person is his/her brother."		

<i>Con</i>	<i>chó</i>	<i>này</i>
CL	dog	DET
<i>chẳng</i>	<i>bao giờ</i>	<i>sủa</i>
NEG	ever	bark
<i>cả.</i>		
all		
"This dog never barks at all."		

<i>Nó</i>	<i>chỉ</i>	<i>ăn</i>
3.PRO	just	eat
<i>cơm</i>	<i>Việt Nam</i>	<i>thôi.</i>
rice.FAM	Vietnam	only
"He/she/it only eats Vietnamese rice (or food, especially spoken by the elderly)."		

<i>Tôi</i>	<i>thích</i>	<i>con</i>
1.PRO	like	CL
<i>ngựa</i>	<i>đen.</i>	
horse	black	
"I like the black horse."		

<i>Tôi</i>	<i>thích</i>	<i>cái</i>
1.PRO	like	FOC
<i>con</i>	<i>ngựa</i>	<i>đen</i>
CL	horse	black
<i>đó.</i>		
DET		

"I like that black horse."

<i>Hãy</i>	<i>ở lại</i>	<i>đây</i>
HORT	stay	here
<i>ít</i>	<i>phút</i>	<i>cho tới</i>
few	minute	until
<i>khi</i>	<i>tôi</i>	<i>quay</i>
when	1.PRO	turn
<i>lại.</i>		
come		

"Please stay here for a few minutes until I come back."

Dates and numbers writing formats

Vietnamese speak date in the format "[day] [month] [year]". Each month's name is just the ordinal of that month appended after the word *tháng*, which means "month". Traditional Vietnamese however assigns other names to some months; these names are mostly used in the lunar calendar and in poetry.

English month name	Vietnamese month name	
	Normal	Traditional
January	Tháng Một	Tháng Giêng
February	Tháng Hai	
March	Tháng Ba	
April	Tháng Tư	
May	Tháng Năm	
June	Tháng Sáu	
July	Tháng Bảy	
August	Tháng Tám	
September	Tháng Chín	
October	Tháng Mười	
November	Tháng Mười Một	
December	Tháng Mười Hai	Tháng Chạp

When written in the short form, "DD/MM/YYYY" is preferred.

Example:

- **English:** 28 March 2018
- **Vietnamese long form:** Ngày 28 tháng 3 năm 2018

■ Vietnamese short form: 28/3/2018

The Vietnamese prefer writing numbers with a comma as the decimal separator in lieu of dots, and either spaces or dots to group the digits. An example is 1 629,15 (one thousand six hundred twenty-nine point fifteen). Because a comma is used as the decimal separator, a semicolon is used to separate two numbers instead.

Writing systems

Up to the late 19th century, a writing system that was a mix of two types of scripts was used in Vietnam: chữ Hán (Chinese characters) and chữ Nôm (lit. 'Southern characters').^[44] All formal writing, including government business, scholarship and formal literature, was done in Classical Chinese (called as "văn ngôn" - 文言 or "Hán văn" - 漢文 in Vietnamese) with chữ Hán.

Folk literature in Vietnamese was recorded using the chữ Nôm script, which is based on borrowed Chinese characters and mostly modified and invented to represent native Vietnamese words. This was because chữ Hán could only be used for Sino-Vietnamese words, and was not enough to write native Vietnamese words. For example, the Vietnamese numerals for 1-2-3 are read in "một-hai-ba" in Vietnamese or "nhất-nhị-tam" by Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation. Although the "nhất-nhị-tam" represented by 一 二 三 in chữ Hán was used in official contexts, Vietnamese speakers modified its chữ Nôm equivalent to 𠬞 𠬟 𠬟 in order to represent "một-hai-ba", which is the colloquial native equivalent.

Created in the 13th century or earlier, the Nôm writing reached its zenith in the 18th century when many Vietnamese writers and poets composed their works in Nôm, most notably Nguyễn Du and Hồ Xuân Hương (dubbed "the Queen of Nôm poetry"). However, it was only used for official purposes during the brief Hồ and Tây Sơn dynasties.

A Vietnamese Catholic, Nguyễn Trường Tộ, sent petitions to the Court which suggested a Chinese character-based syllabary which would be used for Vietnamese sounds; however, his petition failed.

The French colonial administration sought to eliminate the Chinese writing system, Confucianism, and other Chinese influences from Vietnam by getting rid of Nôm.^[45]

A romanization of Vietnamese was codified in the 17th century by the Avignonese Jesuit missionary Alexandre de Rhodes (1591–1660), based on works of earlier Portuguese missionaries, particularly Francisco de Pina, Gaspar do Amaral and Antonio Barbosa.^{[46][47]} Still, chữ Nôm was the dominant script in Vietnamese Catholic literature for more than 200 years.^[48] Starting from the late 19th century, the Vietnamese alphabet (chữ Quốc ngữ or "national language script") was gradually expanded from its initial usage in Christian writing to become more popular among the general public.

The Vietnamese alphabet contains 29 letters, including one digraph (đ) and nine with diacritics, five of which are used to designate tone (i.e. à, á, â, ã, and ạ) and the other four used for separate letters of the Vietnamese alphabet (ă, â/ê/ô, ơ, ư).^[49]

Tôi nói tiếng Việt Nam
碎 呐 啗 越 南

"I speak Vietnamese" (*Tôi nói tiếng Việt Nam* - 碎呐啗越南) is written in Latin (Vietnamese alphabet) or written in mixed scripts of chữ Hán (Chinese characters) and chữ Nôm (underline).



In the bilingual dictionary *Nhật dụng thường đàm* (1851), Chinese characters (chữ Nho) are explained in chữ Nôm.

This Romanized script became predominant over the course of the early 20th century, when education became widespread and a simpler writing system was found to be more expedient for teaching and communication with the general population. Under French colonial rule, French superseded Chinese in administration. Vietnamese written with the alphabet became required for all public documents in 1910 by issue of a decree by the French Résident Supérieur of the protectorate of Tonkin. In turn, Vietnamese reformists and nationalists themselves encouraged and popularized the use of *chữ quốc ngữ*. By the middle of the 20th century, most writing was done in *chữ quốc ngữ*, which became the official script on independence.

Nevertheless, *Chữ Hán* was still in use during the French colonial period and as late as World War II was still featured on banknotes,^{[50][51]} but fell out of official and mainstream use shortly thereafter. The education reform by North Vietnam in 1950 eliminated the use of *chữ Hán* and *chữ Nôm*.^[52] Today, only a few scholars and some extremely elderly people are able to read *chữ Nôm* or use it in Vietnamese calligraphy. In contrast, members of the Gin minority in China still write in *chữ Nôm*.

Chữ quốc ngữ reflects a "Middle Vietnamese" dialect that combines vowels and final consonants most similar to northern dialects with initial consonants most similar to southern dialects. This Middle Vietnamese is presumably close to the Hanoi variety as spoken sometime after 1600 but before the present. (This is not unlike how English orthography is based on the Chancery Standard of Late Middle English, with many spellings retained even after the Great Vowel Shift.)

Computer support

The Unicode character set contains all Vietnamese characters and the Vietnamese currency symbol. On systems that do not support Unicode, many 8-bit Vietnamese code pages are available such as Vietnamese Standard Code for Information Interchange (VSCII) or Windows-1258. Where ASCII must be used, Vietnamese letters are often typed using the VIQR convention, though this is largely unnecessary with the increasing ubiquity of Unicode. There are many software tools that help type Roman-script Vietnamese on English keyboards, such as WinVNKey (<http://winvnkey.sf.net>) and Unikey (<https://www.unikey.org/>) on Windows, or MacVNKey (<http://macvnkey.sf.net>) on Macintosh, with popular methods of encoding (<https://tipsmake.com/encoding-of-vietnamese-typing-methods-telex-vni-and-viqr-on-unikey>) Vietnamese using Telex, VNI or VIQR input methods. Telex input method is often set as the default for many devices.

History

In the distant past, Vietnamese shared more characteristics common to other languages in South East Asia and with the Austroasiatic family, such as an inflectional morphology and a richer set of consonant clusters, which have subsequently disappeared from the language since Chinese influence. Vietnamese is heavily influenced by its location in the Mainland Southeast Asia linguistic area, with the result that it has acquired or converged toward characteristics such as isolating morphology and phonemically distinctive tones, through processes of

[illegible]

Jean-Louis Taberd's dictionary *Dictionarium anamitico-latinum* (1838) represents Vietnamese (then Annamese) words in the Latin alphabet and *chữ Nôm*.



A sign at the Hỏa Lò Prison museum in Hanoi lists rules for visitors in both Vietnamese and English.

tonogenesis. These characteristics have become part of many of the genetically unrelated languages of Southeast Asia; for example, Tsat (a member of the Malayo-Polynesian group within Austronesian), and Vietnamese each developed tones as a phonemic feature. The ancestor of the Vietnamese language is usually believed to have been originally based in the area of the Red River Delta in what is now northern Vietnam.^{[53][54][55]}

Distinctive tonal variations emerged during the subsequent expansion of the Vietnamese language and people into what is now central and southern Vietnam through conquest of the ancient nation of Champa and the Khmer people of the Mekong Delta in the vicinity of present-day Ho Chi Minh City, also known as Saigon.

Vietnamese was primarily influenced by Chinese, which came to predominate politically in the 2nd century BC. After Vietnam achieved independence in the 10th century, the ruling class adopted Classical Chinese as the formal medium of government, scholarship and literature. With the dominance of Chinese came radical importation of Chinese vocabulary and grammatical influence. A portion of the Vietnamese lexicon in all realms consists of Sino-Vietnamese words (They are about a third of the Vietnamese lexicon, and may account for as much as 60% of the vocabulary used in formal texts.^[56])

When France invaded Vietnam in the late 19th century, French gradually replaced Chinese as the official language in education and government. Vietnamese adopted many French terms, such as *đầm* (dame, from *madame*), *ga* (train station, from *gare*), *sơ mi* (shirt, from *chemise*), and *búp bê* (doll, from *poupée*). In addition, many Sino-Vietnamese terms were devised for Western ideas imported through the French.

Henri Maspero described six periods of the Vietnamese language:^{[57][58]}

1. **Proto-Viet–Muong**, also known as *Pre-Vietnamese* or *Proto-Vietnamuong*, the ancestor of Vietnamese and the related Muong language (before 7th century AD).
2. **Proto-Vietnamese**, the oldest reconstructable version of Vietnamese, dated to just before the entry of massive amounts of Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary into the language, c. 7th to 9th century AD. At this state, the language had three tones.
3. **Archaic Vietnamese**, the state of the language upon adoption of the Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary and the beginning of creation of the Vietnamese characters during the Ngô Dynasty, c. 10th century AD.
4. **Ancient Vietnamese**, the language represented by Chữ Nôm (c. 15th century), widely used during the Lê and the Chinese–Vietnamese, and the Ming glossary "Annanguo Yiyu" 安南國譯語 (c. 15th century) by the Bureau of Interpreters 会同館 (from the series *Huáyí Yiyǔ* (Chinese: 华夷译语). By this point, a tone split had happened in the language, leading to six tones but a loss of contrastive voicing among consonants.
5. **Middle Vietnamese**, the language of the *Dictionarium Annamiticum Lusitanum et Latinum* of the Jesuit missionary Alexandre de Rhodes (c. 17th century); the dictionary was published in Rome in 1651. Another famous dictionary of this period was written by P. J. Pigneau de Behaine in 1773 and published by Jean-Louis Taberd in 1838.
6. **Modern Vietnamese**, from the 19th century.

Proto-Viet–Muong

The following diagram shows the phonology of Proto-Viet–Muong (the nearest ancestor of Vietnamese and the closely related Muong language), along with the outcomes in the modern language:^{[59][60][61][62]}

		<u>Labial</u>	<u>Dental/Alveolar</u>		<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
Stop	tenuis	*p > b	*t > ɗ		*c > ch	*k > k/c/q	*ʔ > #
	voiced	*b > b	*d > ɗ		*ɟ > ch	*g > k/c/q	
	aspirated	*p ^h > ph	*t ^h > th			*k ^h > kh	
	voiced glottalized	*ḃ > m	*ḏ > n		*ɟ̚ > nh ¹		
Nasal		*m > m	*n > n		*ɲ > nh	*ŋ > ng/ngh	
Affricate					*tʃ > x ¹		
Fricative	voiceless			*s > t			*h > h
	voiced ²	*(β) > v ³	*(ð) > d	*(r) > r ⁴	*(j) > gi	*(ɣ) > g/gh	
Approximant		*w > v	*l > l	*r > r	*j > d		

^1 According to Ferlus, */tʃ/ and */ɟ̚/ are not accepted by all researchers. Ferlus 1992^[59] also had additional phonemes */dʒ/ and */ʑ/.

^2 The fricatives indicated above in parentheses developed as allophones of stop consonants occurring between vowels (i.e. when a minor syllable occurred). These fricatives were not present in Proto-Viet–Muong, as indicated by their absence in Muong, but were evidently present in the later Proto-Vietnamese stage. Subsequent loss of the minor-syllable prefixes phonemicized the fricatives. Ferlus 1992^[59] proposes that originally there were both voiced and voiceless fricatives, corresponding to original voiced or voiceless stops, but Ferlus 2009^[60] appears to have abandoned that hypothesis, suggesting that stops were softened and voiced at approximately the same time, according to the following pattern:

- *p, *b > /β/
- *t, *d > /ð/
- *s > /ɹ/
- *c, *ɟ, *tʃ > /j/
- *k, *g > /ɣ/

^3 In Middle Vietnamese, the outcome of these sounds was written with a hooked *b* (*ḃ*), representing a /β/ that was still distinct from *v* (then pronounced /w/). See below.

^4 It is unclear what this sound was. According to Ferlus 1992,^[59] in the Archaic Vietnamese period (c. 10th century AD, when Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary was borrowed) it was *ɹ̥, distinct at that time from *r.

The following initial clusters occurred, with outcomes indicated:

- *pr, *br, *tr, *dr, *kr, *gr > /k^hr/ > /kʃ/ > s
- *pl, *bl > MV *bl* > Northern *gi*, Southern *tr*
- *kl, *gl > MV *tl* > *tr*
- *ml > MV *ml* > *mnh* > *nh*
- *kj > *gi*

A large number of words were borrowed from Middle Chinese, forming part of the Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary. These caused the original introduction of the retroflex sounds /ʂ/ and /ʈ/ (modern *s*, *tr*) into the language.

Origin of the tones

Proto-Viet–Muong had no tones to speak of. The tones later developed in some of the daughter languages from distinctions in the initial and final consonants. Vietnamese tones developed as follows:

Register	Initial consonant	Smooth ending	Glottal ending	Fricative ending
High (first) register	Voiceless	A1 <i>ngang</i> "level"	B1 <i>sắc</i> "sharp"	C1 <i>hỏi</i> "asking"
Low (second) register	Voiced	A2 <i>huyền</i> "deep"	B2 <i>nặng</i> "heavy"	C2 <i>ngã</i> "tumbling"

Glottal-ending syllables ended with a glottal stop /ʔ/, while fricative-ending syllables ended with /s/ or /h/. Both types of syllables could co-occur with a resonant (e.g. /m/ or /n/).

At some point, a tone split occurred, as in many other Southeast Asian languages. Essentially, an allophonic distinction developed in the tones, whereby the tones in syllables with voiced initials were pronounced differently from those with voiceless initials. (Approximately speaking, the voiced allotones were pronounced with additional breathy voice or creaky voice and with lowered pitch. The quality difference predominates in today's northern varieties, e.g. in Hanoi, while in the southern varieties the pitch difference predominates, as in Ho Chi Minh City.) Subsequent to this, the plain-voiced stops became voiceless and the allotones became new phonemic tones. Note that the implosive stops were unaffected, and in fact developed tonally as if they were unvoiced. (This behavior is common to all East Asian languages with implosive stops.)

As noted above, Proto-Viet–Muong had sesquisyllabic words with an initial minor syllable (in addition to, and independent of, initial clusters in the main syllable). When a minor syllable occurred, the main syllable's initial consonant was intervocalic and as a result suffered lenition, becoming a voiced fricative. The minor syllables were eventually lost, but not until the tone split had occurred. As a result, words in modern Vietnamese with voiced fricatives occur in all six tones, and the tonal register reflects the voicing of the minor-syllable prefix and not the voicing of the main-syllable stop in Proto-Viet–Muong that produced the fricative. For similar reasons, words beginning with /l/ and /ŋ/ occur in both registers. (Thompson 1976^[62] reconstructed voiceless resonants to account for outcomes where resonants occur with a first-register tone, but this is no longer considered necessary, at least by Ferlus.)

Old Vietnamese

Examples of Old Vietnamese (Gong 2019)

Meaning	Old Vietnamese	> Middle Vietnamese	> Modern Vietnamese
Heaven	*plòì ^[63]	blòì ^[64]	trời ^[63]
snake	*p-sǎn ^[65]	rǎn ^[66]	răn ^[65]
shoulder	*t-mai ^[67]	ɸai ^[68]	vai ^[67]
remember	*k-nó ^[67]	dó/nhó ^[68]	nhớ ^[67]
happy, merry	*s-pui ^[67]	ɸui ^[69]	vui ^[67]
edge, riverbank	*t-pen ^[70]	uen ^[71]	ven ^[70]
far	*k-ǵa ^[72]	xa ^[73]	xã ^[72]
kiln, oven	*ʔ-lò ^[74]	lò ^[75]	lò ^[76]

Old Vietnamese was a Vietic language which was separated from Viet–Muong around 9th century, and evolved to Middle Vietnamese by 15th century. The sources for the reconstruction of Old Vietnamese are 12th-century text *Phật thuyết Đại báo phụ mẫu ân trọng kinh* ("Sūtra explained by the Buddha on the Great Repayment of the Heavy Debt to Parents")^[65] and late 13th-century (possibly 1293) *Annan Jishi* (<https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=224481&remap=gb>) by Chinese diplomat Chen Fu (c. 1259 – 1309).^[77] Old Vietnamese used Chinese characters phonetically where each word, monosyllabic in Modern Vietnamese, is written with two Chinese characters or in a composite character made of two different characters.^[78]


Middle Vietnamese

The writing system used for Vietnamese is based closely on the system developed by Alexandre de Rhodes for his 1651 *Dictionarium Annamiticum Lusitanum et Latinum*. It reflects the pronunciation of the Vietnamese of Hanoi at that time, a stage commonly termed *Middle Vietnamese* (*tiếng Việt trung đại*). The pronunciation of the "rime" of the syllable, i.e. all parts other than the initial consonant (optional /w/ glide, vowel nucleus, tone and final consonant), appears nearly identical between Middle Vietnamese and modern Hanoi pronunciation. On the other hand, the Middle Vietnamese pronunciation of the initial consonant differs greatly from all modern dialects, and in fact is significantly closer to the modern Saigon dialect than the modern Hanoi dialect.

The following diagram shows the orthography and pronunciation of Middle Vietnamese:

		<u>Labial</u>	<u>Dental/ Alveolar</u>	<u>Retroflex</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Nasal</u>		<i>m</i> [m]	<i>n</i> [n]		<i>nh</i> [ɲ]	<i>ng/ngh</i> [ŋ]	
<u>Stop</u>	tenuis	<i>p</i> [p] ¹	<i>t</i> [t]	<i>tr</i> [ʈ]	<i>ch</i> [c]	<i>c/k</i> [k]	
	aspirated	<i>ph</i> [pʰ]	<i>th</i> [tʰ]			<i>kh</i> [kʰ]	
	voiced glottalized	<i>b</i> [ɓ]	<i>đ</i> [ɗ]				
<u>Fricative</u>	voiceless			<i>s/l</i> [ɬ]	<i>x</i> [ɕ]		<i>h</i> [h]
	voiced	<i>ϕ</i> [β] ²	<i>d</i> [ð]		<i>gi</i> [j]	<i>g/gh</i> [ɣ]	
<u>Approximant</u>		<i>v/u/o</i> [w]	<i>l</i> [l]		<i>y/i/ě</i> [j] ³		
<u>Rhotic</u>			<i>r</i> [r]				

^1 [p] occurs only at the end of a syllable.

^2 This symbol, "Latin small letter *B* with flourish", looks like: . It has a rounded hook that starts halfway up the left side (where the top of the curved part of the b meets the vertical, straight part) and curves about 180 degrees counterclockwise, ending below the bottom-left corner.

^3 [j] does not occur at the beginning of a syllable, but can occur at the end of a syllable, where it is notated *i* or *y* (with the difference between the two often indicating differences in the quality or length of the preceding vowel), and after /ð/ and /β/, where it is notated *ě*. This *ě*, and the /j/ it notated, have disappeared from the modern language.

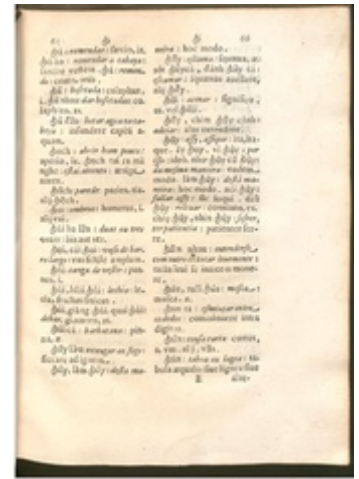
Note that *b* [ɓ] and *p* [p] never contrast in any position, suggesting that they are allophones.

The language also has three clusters at the beginning of syllables, which have since disappeared:

- *tl* /tʰl/ > modern *tr*
- *bl* /bʰl/ > modern *gi* (Northern), *tr* (Southern)
- *ml* /mʰl/ > *mnh* /mʰɲ/ > modern *nh*

Most of the unusual correspondences between spelling and modern pronunciation are explained by Middle Vietnamese. Note in particular:

- de Rhodes' system has two different b letters, a regular b and a "hooked" b in which the upper section of the curved part of the b extends leftward past the vertical bar and curls down again in a semicircle. This apparently represented a voiced bilabial fricative /β/. Within a century or so, both /β/ and /w/ had merged as /v/, spelled as v.
- de Rhodes' system has a second medial glide /j/ that is written ě and appears in some words with initial *d* and hooked *b*. These later disappear.
- *đ* /d/ was (and still is) alveolar, whereas *d* /ð/ was dental. The choice of symbols was based on the dental rather than alveolar nature of /d/ and its allophone [ð] in Spanish and other Romance languages. The inconsistency with the symbols assigned to /b/ vs. /β/ was based on the lack of any such place distinction between the two, with the result that the stop consonant /b/ appeared more "normal" than the fricative /β/. In both cases, the implosive nature of the stops does not appear to have had any role in the choice of symbol.
- x was the alveolo-palatal fricative /ç/ rather than the dental /s/ of the modern language. In 17th-century Portuguese, the common language of the Jesuits, s was the apico-alveolar sibilant /ʃ/ (as still in much of Spain and some parts of Portugal), while x was a palatoalveolar /ʃ/. The similarity of apicoalveolar /ʃ/ to the Vietnamese retroflex /ʂ/ led to the assignment of s and x as above.



The first page of the phi section in Alexandre de Rhodes's Dictionarium Annamiticum Lusitanum et Latinum (Vietnamese–Portuguese–Latin dictionary)

De Rhodes's orthography also made use of an apex diacritic to indicate a final labial-velar nasal /ŋm/, an allophone of /ŋ/ that is peculiar to the Hanoi dialect to the present day. This diacritic is often mistaken for a tilde in modern reproductions of early Vietnamese writing.

đẽoũ, vide doũ :
đẽoũ, cá đẽoũ : certo pei-
ne : piscis quidam đẽoũ di-
ctus, vel doũ.

de Rhodes's entry for đẽoũ shows distinct breves, acutes and apices.

Word play

A language game known as nói lái is used by Vietnamese speakers.^[79] Nói lái involves switching the tones in a pair of words and also the order of the two words or the first consonant and rime of each word; the resulting nói lái pair preserves the original sequence of tones. Some examples:

Original phrase		Phrase after <u>nói lái</u> transformation	Structural change
đái dấm "(child) pee"	→	dấm đài (literal translation "vinegar stage")	word order and tone switch
chửa hoang "pregnancy out of wedlock"	→	hoảng chửa "scared yet?"	word order and tone switch
bầy tôi "all the king's subjects"	→	bồi tây "west waiter "	initial consonant, rime, and tone switch
bí mật "secrets"	→	bật mí "revealing secrets"	initial consonant and rime switch

The resulting transformed phrase often has a different meaning but sometimes may just be a nonsensical word pair. *Nói lái* can be used to obscure the original meaning and thus soften the discussion of a socially sensitive issue, as with *dấm dãi* and *hoàng chưa* (above) or, when implied (and not overtly spoken), to deliver a hidden subtextual message, as with *bồi tây*.^[80] Naturally, *nói lái* can be used for a humorous effect.^[81]

Another word game somewhat reminiscent of pig latin is played by children. Here a nonsense syllable (chosen by the child) is prefixed onto a target word's syllables, then their initial consonants and rimes are switched with the tone of the original word remaining on the new switched rime.

Nonsense syllable	Target word		Intermediate form with prefixed syllable		Resulting "secret" word
<i>la</i>	<i>phở</i> "beef or chicken noodle soup"	→	<i>la phở</i>	→	<i>lơ phả</i>
<i>la</i>	<i>ăn</i> "to eat"	→	<i>la ăn</i>	→	<i>lăn a</i>
<i>la</i>	<i>hoàn cảnh</i> "situation"	→	<i>la hoàn la cảnh</i>	→	<i>loan hà lanh cã</i>
<i>chim</i>	<i>hoàn cảnh</i> "situation"	→	<i>chim hoàn chim cảnh</i>	→	<i>choan him chanh kìm</i>

This language game is often used as a "secret" or "coded" language useful for obscuring messages from adult comprehension.

Slang

Vietnamese slang (tiếng lóng) changed from time to time. Vietnamese slang consists of pure Vietnamese words or words borrowed from other languages such as Mandarin or Indo-European languages.^[82] It is estimated that Vietnamese slang that originated from Mandarin accounts for a tiny proportion of all Vietnamese slang (4.6% of surveyed data in newspapers).^[82] On the contrary, slang that originated from Indo-European languages accounts for a more significant proportion (12%) and is much more common in today's uses.^[82] Slang borrowed from these languages can be either transliteration or vernacular.^[82] Some examples:

Word	IPA	Description
Ex		a word borrowed from English used to describe ex-lover, usually pronounced similarly to <i>ếch</i> ("frog"). This is an example of vernacular slang. ^[82]
Sô	ʂo	a word derived from the English's word "show" which has the same meaning, usually pair with the word <i>chạy</i> ("to run") to make the phrase <i>chạy sô</i> , which translates in English to "running shows", but its everyday use has the same connotation as "having to do a lot of tasks within a short amount of time". This is an example of transliteration slang. ^[82]

With the rise of the Internet, new slang is generated and popularized through social media. This more modern slang is commonly used among the younger generation in Vietnam. This more recent slang is mostly pure Vietnamese, and almost all the words are homonyms or some form of wordplay. Some examples:

Word	IPA	Description
Vãi	vă̌ʔj	One of the most popular slang in Vietnamese. Vãi can be a noun, or a verb depends on the context. It refers to a female pagoda-goer in its noun form and refers to spilling something over in its verb form. Nowadays, it's commonly used to emphasize an adjective or a verb. For example, <i>ngon vãi</i> ("so delicious"), <i>sợ vãi</i> ("so scary"). ^[83] Similar uses to expletive, <i>bloody</i> .
Trẻ trâu	tʂɛ tʂəw	A noun whose literal translation is "young buffalo". It is usually used to describe younger children or people who behave like a child, like putting on airs, and act foolishly to attract other people's attention (with negative actions, words, and thoughts). ^[84]
Gấu	ɣǎw	A noun meaning "bear". It is also commonly used to refer to someone's lover. ^[85]
Gà	ɣà	A noun meaning "chicken". It is also commonly used to refer to someone's lack of ability to complete or compete in a task. ^[84]
Cá sấu	ka səw	A noun meaning "crocodile". It is also commonly used to refer to someone's lack of beauty. The word <i>sấu</i> can be pronounced similar to <i>xấu</i> (ugly). ^[85]
Thả thính	tʰaː tʰiŋ	A verb used to describe the action of dropping roasted <i>bran</i> as bait for fish. Nowadays, it is also used to describe the act of dropping hints to another person that one is attracted to. ^[85]
Nha (and other variants)	[naː-]	Similar to other particles: <i>nhé</i> , <i>nghe</i> , <i>nhỉ</i> , <i>nhá</i> . It can be used to end sentences. " <i>Rửa chén, nhỉ</i> " can mean "Wash the dishes... yeah?" ^[86]
Dzô	[zo-], [jow-]	Eye dialect of the word <i>vô</i> , meaning "in". The letter "z" which is not usually present in the Vietnamese alphabet, can be used for emphasis or for slang terms. ^[87]

There are debates on the prevalence of uses of slang among young people in Vietnam, as certain teen speak conversations become difficult to understand for older generations. Many critics believed that incorporating teenspeak or internet slang into daily conversation among teenagers would affect the formality and cadence of speech.^[88] Others argue that it is not the slang that is the problem but rather the lack of communication techniques for the instant internet messaging era. They believe slang should not be dismissed, but instead, youth should be informed enough to know when to use them and when it is appropriate.^[89]

Examples

The Tale of Kieu is an epic narrative poem by the celebrated poet Nguyễn Du, (阮攸), which is often considered the most significant work of Vietnamese literature. It was originally written in Chữ Nôm (titled *Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh* 斷腸新聲) and is widely taught in Vietnam in chữ quốc ngữ.

See also

- Vietnamese Wikipedia
- Vietnamese calligraphy
- Vietnamese pronouns
- Vietnamese studies

Notes

a. Written as 省越 in Chữ Nôm

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3. From *Ethnologue* (2009, 2013)
4. Driem, George van (2001). *Languages of the Himalayas, Volume One* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=fiavPYCz4dYC&pg=PA264>). BRILL. p. 264. ISBN 90-04-12062-9. "Of the approximately 90 millions speakers of Austroasiatic languages, over 70 million speak Vietnamese, nearly ten million speak Khmer and roughly five million speak Santali."
5. Citizens belonging to minorities, which traditionally and on long-term basis live within the territory of the Czech Republic, enjoy the right to use their language in communication with authorities and in front of the courts of law (for the list of recognized minorities see National Minorities Policy of the Government of the Czech Republic (<http://www.vlada.cz/en/pracovni-a-poradni-organy-vlady/rnm/historie-a-soucasnost-rady-en-16666/>), Belorussian and Vietnamese since 4 July 2013, see *Česko má nové oficiální národnostní menšiny. Vietnamce a Bělorusy* (http://zpravy.idnes.cz/vietnamci-oficialni-narodnostni-mensinou-fiq-/domaci.aspx?c=A130703_133019_domaci_jj)). The article 25 of the Czech Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms ensures right of the national and ethnic minorities for education and communication with authorities in their own language. Act No. 500/2004 Coll. (*The Administrative Rule*) in its paragraph 16 (4) (*Procedural Language*) ensures, that a citizen of the Czech Republic, who belongs to a national or an ethnic minority, which traditionally and on long-term basis lives within the territory of the Czech Republic, have right to address an administrative agency and proceed before it in the language of the minority. In the case that the administrative agency doesn't have an employee with knowledge of the language, the agency is bound to obtain a translator at the agency's own expense. According to Act No. 273/2001 (*About The Rights of Members of Minorities*) paragraph 9 (*The right to use language of a national minority in dealing with authorities and in front of the courts of law*) the same applies for the members of national minorities also in front of the courts of law.
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29. There are different descriptions of Hanoi vowels. Another common description is that of Thompson (1965):

	<u>Front</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Back</u>	
			<u>unrounded</u>	<u>rounded</u>
<u>Centering</u>	ia~iê [iə]		ua~uơ [uə]	ua~uô [uɔ]
<u>Close</u>	i [i]		ư [ɯ]	u [u]
<u>Close-mid</u>	ê [e]		ơ [ɤ]	ô [o]
<u>Open-mid</u>	e [ɛ]	ă [ɐ]	â [ʌ]	o [ɔ]
<u>Open</u>		a [a]		

This description distinguishes four degrees of vowel height and a rounding contrast (rounded vs. unrounded) between back vowels. The relative shortness of ă and â would then be a secondary feature. Thompson describes the vowel ă [ɐ] as being slightly higher (upper low) than a [a].

30. In Vietnamese, diphthongs are *âm đôi*.

31. The closing diphthongs and triphthongs as described by Thompson can be compared with the description above:

	<u>/w/ offglide</u>		<u>/j/ offglide</u>	
<u>Centering</u>	iêu [iəw]	ươu [uəw]	ươí [uəj]	uôi [uɔj]
<u>Close</u>	iu [iɯ]	ưư [ɯɯ]	ưí [ɯj]	ui [uj]
<u>Close-mid</u>	êu [ɛw]	– âu [ʌw]	ơí [ɤj]	ôi [oj]
<u>Open-mid</u>	eo [ɛɯ]		ây [ʌj]	oi [ɔj]
<u>Open</u>		ao [aw] au [ɛw]	ai [aj] ay [ɛj]	

32. The lack of diphthong consisting of a σ + back offglide (i.e., [ə:w]) is an apparent gap.

33. Called *thanh điệu* or *thanh* in Vietnamese

34. Note that the name of each tone has the corresponding tonal diacritic on the vowel.

35. Sources on Vietnamese variation include: Alves (forthcoming), Alves & Nguyễn (2007), Emeneau (1947), Hoàng (1989), Honda (2006), Nguyễn, Đ.-H. (1995), Pham (2005), Thompson (1991[1965]), Vũ (1982), Vương (1981).

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38. Table data from Hoàng (1989).

39. In southern dialects, *ch* and *tr* are increasingly being merged as [c]. Similarly, *x* and *s* are increasingly being merged as [s].

40. In southern dialects, *v* is increasingly being pronounced [v] among educated speakers. Less educated speakers have [j] more consistently throughout their speech.

41. Kirby (2011), p. 382.

42. Gregerson (1981) notes that this variation was present in de Rhodes's time in some initial consonant clusters: *mlẽ ~ mnhẽ* "reason" (cf. modern Vietnamese *lẽ* "reason").
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79. Nguyễn Đ.-H. (1997)
80. Nguyễn Đ.-H. (1997: 29) gives the following context: "... a collaborator under the French administration was presented with a congratulatory panel featuring the two Chinese characters *quần thần*. This Sino-Vietnamese expression could be defined as *bầy tôi* meaning 'all the king's subjects'. But those two syllables, when undergoing commutation of rhyme and tone, would generate *bồi tây* meaning 'servant in a French household'."
81. See www.users.bigpond.com/doanviettrung/noilai.html (<http://www.users.bigpond.com/doanviettrung/noilai.html>) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20080222075952/http://www.users.bigpond.com/doanviettrung/noilai.html>) 2008-02-22 at the Wayback Machine, <http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/language-log/archives/001788.html> (<http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/language-log/archives/001788.html>), and tphcm.blogspot.com/2005/01/ni-li.html (<http://tphcm.blogspot.com/2005/01/ni-li.html>) for more examples.
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External links

Online lessons

- Online Vietnamese lessons (<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/vietnamese/VNLanguage/SupportNS/ableofcontent.htm>) from Northern Illinois University

Vocabulary

- Vietnamese Vocabulary List (<http://wold.clld.org/vocabulary/24>) (from the World Loanword Database)
- Swadesh list of Vietnamese basic vocabulary words (https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Vietnamese_Swadesh_list) (from Wiktionary's [Swadesh-list appendix](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Swadesh_lists) (https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Swadesh_lists))

Language tools

- The Vietnamese keyboard (<http://just.nicepeople.free.fr/kbd/>) its layout is compared with US, UK, Canada, France, and Germany's keyboards.
- The Free Vietnamese Dictionary Project (<https://web.archive.org/web/20181013093753/http://www.informatik.uni-leipzig.de/~duc/Dict/index.html>)

Research projects and data resources

- [rwaai | Projects](http://projekt.ht.lu.se/rwaaai) (<http://projekt.ht.lu.se/rwaaai>) RWAAI (Repository and Workspace for Austroasiatic Intangible Heritage)
- <http://hdl.handle.net/10050/00-0000-0000-0003-93ED-5@view> Vietnamese in RWAAI Digital Archive

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