

Vietnamese



Vietnam formed part of French Indo-China from the late 1800s until WWII. The country was officially split in two in 1954 and the United States undertook to support the government in the south when the French pulled out in 1956, while the north was supported by China. Fearing a communist take-over of Indo-China, US troops moved into Vietnam in 1961 and war raged until US troops withdrew in 1973. The government of the south collapsed and Vietnam was united under a communist regime.

Vietnamese is spoken by about 65 million people in Vietnam and another million speak it in Cambodia, some in Laos and Thailand. It has also spread to western countries following refugee movements since the war. The language is monosyllabic and non-inflecting (words don't change to show tense or plurals, etc). It has six tones, so one word said differently can mean six different things that are no way related. For example; *bá* (high rising) means embrace, *ba* (high level) means three, *bà* (low falling) is grandmother, *bã* (fall rising) means poison, *bá* (high creaky) means residue, and *ba* (low creaky) means random. Vietnamese is so different from English that many Vietnamese speakers may find English very difficult to learn.

The earliest writing of Vietnamese was either Chinese characters or other ideograms developed from these, but when Christian missionaries went to Vietnam in the 17th century they developed a romanised script called *quoc-ngu*, which remains today. Punctuation has always been a bit loose and even today in Vietnam they cannot agree on correct

Vietnamese punctuation. Sometimes French punctuation is adopted. Direct speech is normally indicated by a dash or when quotation marks are used they're the French kind («...»).

The Vietnamese alphabet consists of 12 vowels, 17 consonants and 11 compound consonants. Because it is a tonal language it is difficult for Vietnamese speakers to express word stress that is required in English because stress effects the tone.

The letters *w*, *f*, and *z* do not exist in Vietnamese and amongst their consonant clusters they do not have the *sh* sound. There is a *th* sound but it is not expressed exactly the same as the English equivalents. The *j* sound as in *jet*, the *zha* sound in *measure* and the *ch* in *chair* are also hard for Vietnamese speakers to pronounce.

Vietnamese speakers will often be troubled by *s* in the middle of a word and may leave it out. So *abstract* would be said *abtrak*. They also have a tendency to leave off the ends of words so *nice*, *nine*, *night*, *nights* and *nile* can all sound like *ni*.

Responses to questions may be misunderstood, especially negative ones. If asked, *Don't you want to go?* they may say *yes* which could mean they agree or it could mean they are being respectful.

Traditionally humble, if someone is praised a response would be *I dare not accept your praise* or *You praise me too much*.

When greeting people they may say *Where are you going?* and this isn't considered nosy. When



meeting someone at meal times, in addition to normal greetings, they may say *Have you eaten yet?* To say to someone *Wow, you have put on weight*, is considered a compliment.

It is considered rude to look people steadily in the eyes, especially a person of respect. Vietnamese will bow their heads in front of a superior or older person.



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NOW YOU'RE TALKING
COMMUNITY LANGUAGE CARDS

GENERAL

ENGLISH	VIETNAMESE	PRONUNCIATION
Hi/Hello.....	Chào.....	Chow
Bye/Goodbye.....	Chào tạm biệt.....	Chow tahm biet
How are you?.....	Ông khoẻ không?.....	Ohng koair cohng?
Fine/Well, and you?.....	Tôi khoẻ, còn (...) khoẻ không?.....	Tohi koair, kon (...) koair kohng?
Not so good.....	Không khỏe lắm.....	Kohng koair lahm
What's your name?.....	Tên (...) là gì?.....	Ten (...) lah zee?
My name is.....	Tên tôi là.....	Ten tohi lah.....
Pardon?.....	(...) nói gì?.....	(...) noi zee?
Yes.....	Vâng.....	Vang
No.....	Không.....	Kohng
I don't know.....	Tôi không biết.....	Toi kohng biet
Please.....	Xin vui lòng.....	Seen vooi long
Thank you.....	Cảm ơn.....	Kahm ern

DURING THE LESSON

Good!.....	Tốt.....	Toht
Do you understand?.....	(...) hiểu không?.....	(...) hua kohng?
Try again.....	Làm lại.....	Lahm lai
Do you want some help?.....	(...) Có cần tôi giúp không?.....	(...) ko kun tohi zoop kohng?
Don't worry, learning takes time.....	Đừng lo, học phải mất thời gian.....	Derng lo, hok fai mut theri zan
Shall we take a break now?.....	Bây giờ chúng ta nghỉ mệt nhé?.....	Bay zer choong tah ngi met nha?
Let's finish (the lesson) now.....	Chúng ta ngừng ở đây.....	Choong tah ngerng er day
You're doing well.....	(...) tiến bộ lắm.....	(...) tien boh lam
Can you say it now?.....	(...) lặp lại đi.....	(...) lup lai di
Can you answer (the question)?.....	(...) trả lời đi.....	(...) trah leri di
Now you ask me.....	Bây giờ (...) hỏi tôi đi.....	Bay zer (...) hoi tohi di
See you next week.....	Gặp (...) tuần tới.....	Gup (...) tooan teri