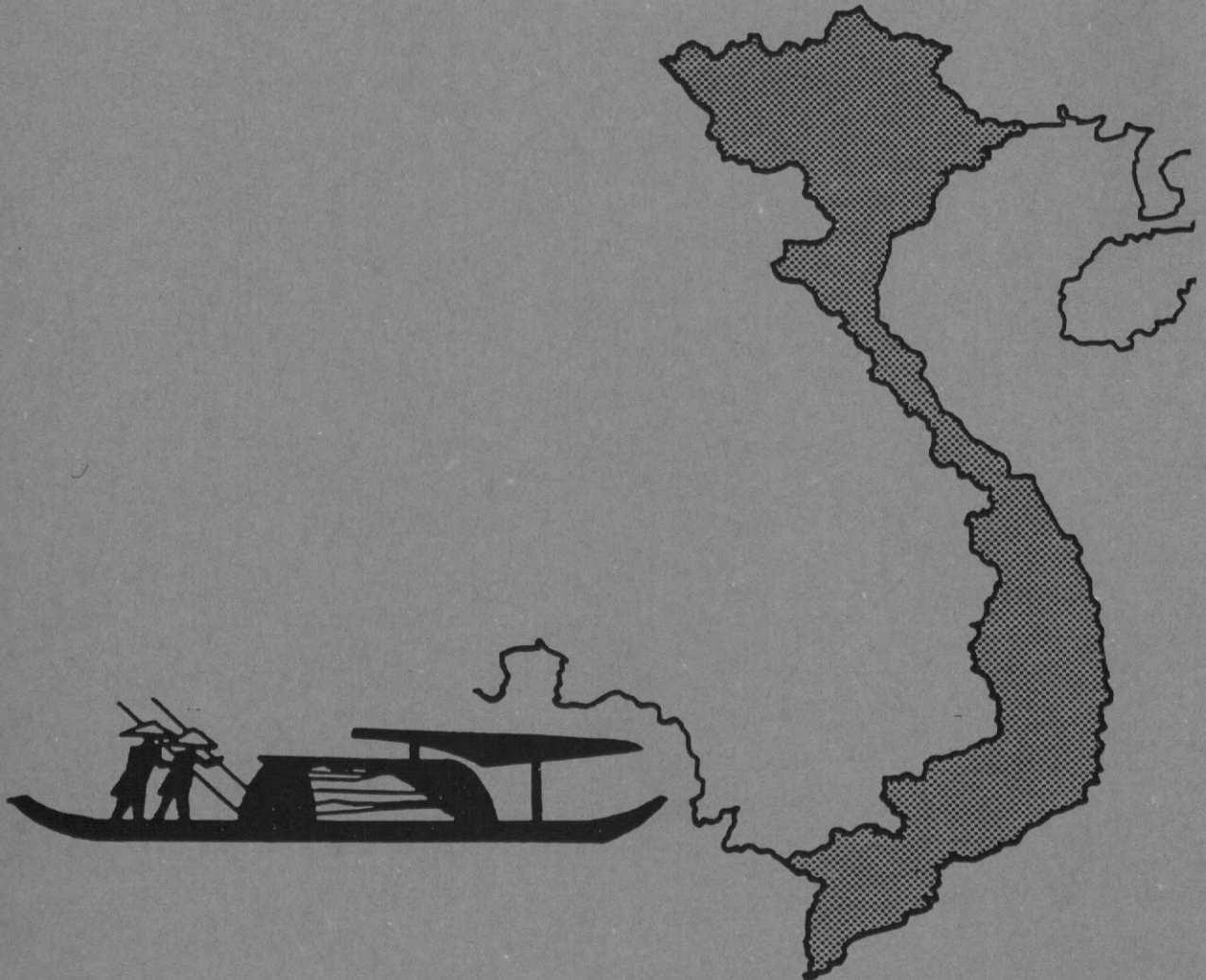


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VIETNAMESE



INTRODUCTION TO THE STANDARD WRITING SYSTEM

DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE, FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

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V I E T N A M E S E

INTRODUCTION TO THE STANDARD WRITING SYSTEM

August 1966

DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE (parts of the letter)
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

VIETNAMESE WRITING SYSTEM

I. Introduction

The standard Vietnamese writing system is that of alphabetic writing. Quốc-ngữ or written Vietnamese was invented late in the sixteenth century by Western missionaries. It did not reach a definitive form until the publication of the monumental Annamese-Portuguese-Latin dictionary (*Dictionarium annamiticum, lusitanum et latinum*) in 1651 in Rome. It was the first important printed work in which the Vietnamese words were transcribed into Roman Characters.

Since about 1920 it has become the national or Vietnamese language. It is also called Việt-ngữ.

II. General Characteristics

- A. Vietnamese uses Latin alphabet a, b, c, and so on.
- B. Monosyllabic feature: Every syllable expresses a distinct idea and thus is a word in itself.
- C. Direction: Vietnamese like English is written from left to right.
- D. The following diacritical marks (parts of the letter) are used:

1. ^ (circumflex or hat)

e.g. â, ô, ê

2. ˘ (breve or saucer) over "a" only

e.g. â

3. ˆ (barb) on "o" and "u"

e.g. ô, û

Note: These diacritical marks are parts of the letter and they indicate a modification of the pronunciation of the basic vowels.

E. đ (or barred d) is the only consonant modified by a diacritical mark. The unbarred d is also used in Vietnamese.

F. The single letter q does not exist in Vietnamese, therefore, qu, a compound consonant is used.

G. p is final only; as initial it is always followed by h, hence ph coming into use.

H. There are no f, j, w or z.

I. â and ã do not occur finally.

J. In Vietnamese writing, g equals gh, ng equals ngh, c equals k in pronunciation, when occurring initially in the syllable.

Spelling notes: 1) gh, ngh and k are written

before i, y, ê or e.

e.g. ghê 'chair', nghe 'to

listen', ký 'to sign'

(Exception: before i, gi is written g)

2) g, ng and c are written before all other vowels.

e.g. ga 'railroad station',

ngủ 'to sleep',

của 'of; to belong to'

III. Vowels (12)

A convenient way for remembering these vowels would be the following:

a	â	ã
e	ê	
	i	
o	ô	ơ
u	û	
	y	

Notes on vowels:

1. Vietnamese vowels may be complete words in themselves.

e.g. Á(châu) 'Asia'

ô 'umbrella'

y 'him'

2. Two kinds of vowels:

a. Simple vowels or those similar (in writing only) to English vowels:

a e i y o u

3. Vowels with diacritical marks:

â â ă ô ơ ư

A. Combination of vowels

1. Diphthongs:

ai	ao	au	ay
âu	ây		
eo			
êu			
ia		iu	
oa		oe	oi
ôi			
ơi	ơu		
ua		ue	
uê	ui	ưô	uy
ưâ	ưi	ưư	

2. Triphthongs (formed by placing i, o, u, d or y before certain diphthongs):

iêu

oai	oao	oay	o eo
uây	uêu	uôi	uya uyê uyu
ưôi	ưôu		
yêu			

B. Vowels and Combination of Vowels with Final Consonants

Vowels

Combination

Examples

1.	a		A! 'exclamation of joy'
		ac	các 'all'
		ach	sách 'book'
		ai	hai 'two'
		am	tám 'eight'
		an	bàn 'table'
		ang	sáng 'morning'
		anh	cánh 'wing'
		ao	cao 'tall; high'
		ap	Pháp 'France'
		at	mát 'to be cool'
		au	sáu 'six'
		ay	tay 'hand'
2.	ă	ăc	mặc 'to put on'
		ăm	năm 'five'
		ăn	ăn 'to eat'
		ăng	nắng 'to be sunny'
		áp	bắp 'corn'
		ăt	mặt 'face'
3.	â	âc	giấc 'nap'
		âm	mâm 'tray'
		ân	vân 'alphabet'

4. e

âng	vâng 'yes'
ập	tập 'to drill'
ât	mật 'honey'
âu	nâu 'to cook'
ây	ây 'that'
	e ngại 'to be afraid'
ec	éc-éc 'grunt of a pig'
em	tem 'stamp'
en	đen 'black'
eng	reng 'tinkle of a bell'
eo	theo 'to follow'
ep	đẹp 'beautiful'
et	quét 'to sweep'
	ê-chê 'shameful'
êch	êch 'frog'
êt	chết 'to die'
êm	đêm 'night'
ên	lên 'to go up'
ênh	lệnh 'order'
êp	xếp 'to fold'
êu	nêu 'to raise'
	ỉ 'motionless'
ia	bia 'beer'
ích	ích 'useful'
iêc	tiệc 'party'

5. ê

6. i

7. o

iêm	diêm 'match'
iên	tiên 'fairy'
iêng	miệng 'mouth'
iêp	tiếp 'to receive'
iêt	viết 'to write'
iêu	tiêu 'to spend'
im	tìm 'to look for'
in	chín 'nine'
inh	lính 'soldier'
ip	kịp 'on time'
it	ít 'few'
iu	chịu 'to be impossible'
	o 'to seduce'
oa	hoa 'flower'
oac	hoác 'wide open'
oach	kê-hoạch 'strategy'
oai	khoai 'potato'
oam	ngoạm 'to snap'
oan	ngoan 'to be good'
oang	thỉnh thoảng 'from time to time'
oanh	oanh 'orifice'
oao	ngoao 'meow of a cat'
oat	sinh-hoạt 'to live'
oay	xoay 'to find the way to do something'

oãc	hoãc 'or'
oãm	oái-oãm 'odd and cruel'
oãn	xoãn-xít 'to be attached to'
oăng	ngoăng 'to wind itself'
oăt	nhỏ choắt 'very small'
oc	đọc 'to read'
oe	khoe 'to boast'
oen	khoen 'link'
oec	ngẻo 'to die'
oet	tàu hoét 'the train whistle'
oi	nói 'to say'
om	nhóm 'group'
on	con 'small'
ong	trong 'in'
op	cọp 'tiger'
ot	ngọt 'sweet'
	ô 'umbrella'
ôc	gốc 'foot of a tree'
ôi	tôi 'I'
ôm	ôm 'sick'
ôn	bốn 'four'
ông	ông 'Mr.'
ôp	hộp 'can, box'
ôt	một 'one'

8. ô

9.	ơ		ơ-hồ 'indifferent'
		ơi	xe hơi 'automobile'
		ơm	cơm 'cooked rice'
		ơn	ơn 'favor'
		ơp	lớp 'class'
		ơt	hớt 'to trim'
10.	u		u 'mother'
		ua	mua 'to buy'
		uân	quân 'troop'
		uâng	bâng-khuâng 'melancholic'
		uât	xuât 'to go out'
		uây	khuây 'to relieve'
		uc	múc 'to haul'
		uê	ô-uê 'filthy'
		uêch	khuêch 'to develop'
		uênh	huênh-hoang 'bombastic'
		ui	bụi 'dust'
		uit	quít 'tangerine'
		ung	bụng 'abdomen'
		uộc	thuộc 'to belong'
		uôm	nhuộm 'to dye'
		uôn	luôn 'always'
		uông	uông 'to drink'
		uôt	chuột 'rat'
		ư	thuờ 'time'

ue	que 'stick'
um	um-tùm 'thick'
un	đun 'to heat'
up	xúp 'soup'
ut	lụt 'flood'
uy	tuy 'although'
uya	khuya 'late at night'
uych	huych 'sound of the fall of a heavy body'
uyên	chuyện 'story'
uyêt	tuyêt 'snow'
uynh	huynh 'elder brother'
uyu	khủyu 'elbow'
uyt	huýt 'to whistle'
11. u	thê u 'it's like that'
ua	chua 'not yet'
uc	mặc 'ink'
ui	gửi 'to send'
un	chún 'foot'
ung	-đừng 'don't'
uo	được 'to be able'
uoi	mười 'ten'
uom	lượm 'to gather'
uon	mượn 'to borrow'
uong	lương 'salary'

uop	uóp 'to flavor'
uot	uốt 'wet'
uou	hươu 'roe buck'
ut	nhút 'first'
uu	cứu 'to save'
12. y	y 'him'
yem	yêm 'bra'
yen	yên 'peaceful'
yêt	yêt 'to visit a superior'
yeu	yêu 'to love'

IV. Consonants (26 in all)

A. Single Consonants (15)

b c d đ g h k l m n p r s t x

B. Compound Consonants (11)

ch, gh, kh, ng, ngh, nh, ph, th, tr, gi, qu

C. Classification of Consonants

1. Initial only (19)

b, d, đ, g, gh, gi, h, k, kh, l, ngh, ph, qu,
r, s, th, tr, v, x

2. Either initial or final (7)

c, ch, m, n, ng, nh, t

3. Final only: p (e.g. Pháp)

VOWELS

a	ã	â
i (y)	e	ê
o	ô	ó
	u	ú

VOWEL PRONUNCIATION EXERCISE

Part I.

1.	a	ã	â
2.	i	e	ê
3.	o	ô	ó
4.	a	u	ú

Part II. Vowels followed by n

1.	an	ãn	ân
2.	in	en	ên
3.	on	ôn	on
4.	an	un	ún

Part III. Vowels with tones followed by n

1.	an	-	an	án	ãn	àn	ân	ạn
2.	ãn	-	ãn	ãn	ãn	ãn	ãn	ạn
3.	ân	-	ân	ân	ãn	ãn	ãn	ạn
4.	in	-	in	ín	ĩn	in	in	ỉn
5.	on	-	on	ón	õn	òn	ôn	on
6.	en	-	en	én	ẽn	èn	ên	en
7.	ên	-	ên	ên	ẽn	ẽn	ên	en
8.	on	-	on	ón	õn	òn	ôn	on
9.	un	-	un	ún	ũn	ùn	ún	un
10.	un	-	un	ún	ũn	ùn	ún	un
11.	ôn	-	ôn	ôn	õn	òn	ôn	on

CONSONANTS

c	gh	k	nh
ch	gi	kh	qu
d	h	ng	r

s	tr
t	v
th	x

CONSONANT PRONUNCIATION EXERCISE

(Take a consonant above, then combine with the vowels a i u i)

C	ca	ki	ku	ki
CH	cha	chi	chu	chi
D	da	di	du	di
G	ga	ghi	gu	ghi
GI	gia	gi	giu	gi
H	hua	huy	huu	huy
K	ka	ki	ku	ki
KH	kha	khi	khu	khi
NG	nga	nghi	ngu	nghi
NH	nha	nhi	nhu	nhi
QU	qua	qui	quu	qui
R	ra	ri	ru	ri
S	sa	si	su	si
T	ta	ti	tu	ti
TH	tha	thi	thu	thi
TR	tra	tri	tru	tri
V	va	vi	vu	vi
X	xa	xi	xu	xi

V. Tone Marks (6)







Name	Symbol	Description	Graph	Frequency
1. sắc high rising	· (á)	Rapid rise to high then staying high		24 0/0
2. ngã high broken	- (ã)	Acute, interrupted by a glottal stop		5 0/0
3. không dấu mid-level	(none) (a)	No change of pitch		25 0/0
4. nặng low broken	· (ạ)	Grave, interrupted by a glottal stop		8 0/0
5. hỏi low rising	· (â)	Gradual rise from low to high		9 0/0
6. huyền low falling	· (à)	Rapid fall to low then staying low		29 0/0

Illustration:

	<u>Tones</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
1.	lá	leaf
2.	lã	plain (nước lã: plain water)
3.	la	to shout
4.	lạ	to be strange
5.	lả	to be exhausted
6.	là	to be

VIETNAMESE TONE MARKS

DẤU SẮC



DẤU NGÃ



DẤU NẶNG



DẤU HỎI



DẤU HUYỀN



TONE PRONUNCIATION EXERCISE

Part I.

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|---|----|----|---|----|----|---|----|----|---|----|----|
| 1. | ma | má | - | ma | mã | - | ma | mà | - | ma | mả | - | ma | mạ |
| 2. | mi | mí | - | mi | mĩ | - | mi | mì | - | mi | mị | - | mi | mị |
| 3. | mô | mồ | - | mô | mỗ | - | mô | mở | - | mô | mở | - | mô | mộ |

Part II.

1. ban - ban bán - ban bán - ban bán - ban bán - ban bán
2. ghé - ghé ghé - ghé ghé - ghé ghé - ghé ghé - ghé ghé
3. cửa - cửa cửa - cửa cửa - cửa cửa - cửa cửa - cửa cửa

Part III.

- | | | | | | | | | |
|----|-----|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. | ma | - | ma | má | mã | mà | mả | mạ |
| 2. | mi | - | mi | mí | mĩ | mì | mị | mị |
| 3. | mô | - | mô | mồ | mỗ | mở | mở | mộ |
| 4. | ban | - | ban | bán | bã | bản | bản | bạn |
| 5. | ghé | - | ghé | ghề | ghễ | ghế | ghề | ghệ |
| 6. | cửa | - | cửa | cửa | cửa | cửa | cửa | cửa |

Notes on Tone Marks:

A. The pronunciation of a word is affected by the tones; so is the meaning. It is necessary to place the right tone marks over the right vowels.

e.g. của
lúa

B. All tone marks, except (.) or low-broken tone, are to be placed over the ă, â, ê, ô, ơ, and ư if a word has one of those vowels:

e.g. đất, mât, quê, lớn

If a word has two of those vowels the tone mark should be placed over the second one:

e.g. xưởng 'factory'; thường 'ordinary'

Or beneath it if it is (.) or low-broken tone:

e.g. được 'to be possible'; rượu 'alcohol'

C. If a word has a diphthong formed by combination of a, e, i, y, o, u, such as ao, oa, au, ai, ia, ua, and so on, the tone mark should be placed over the first vowel (if such a tone mark is being used).

e.g. cái, mùa, áo, nào

D. If a word carries a diphthong formed with ă, â, ê, ơ and ư, the tone mark should be placed over or beneath the vowel with diacritical mark.

e.g. đũa, lựa, lớn, lộn

E. A word never has two different tone marks.

F. Some words have no tone marks.

VIETNAMESE TONES

HIGH	LOW
MID-LEVEL	LOW-FALLING
PLAIN	

HIGH-RISING	LOW-RISING
MELODIOUS	

HIGH-BROKEN	LOW-BROKEN
GLOTTAL	

VI. Symbols of Vietnamese Writing
(Complete Vietnamese Alphabet)

VĂN QUỐC-NGŨ

À	Ả	Ã	Â	Ê	Đ	Đ	Ê
a	ă	â	à	e	d	đ	ê
Ê	Ë	Ê	Ï	Ê	L	M	N
ê	ë	è	ï	ê	l	m	n
Ô	Ô	Ô	Ô	Q	R	S	Ê
o	ô	õ	ö	q	r	s	ê

U	U	V	X	Y
u	ü	v	x	y

VII. Numbers:

0	(số không)	5	(năm)
1	(một)	6	(sáu)
2	(hai)	7	(bảy)
3	(ba)	8	(tám)
4	(bốn)	9	(chín)

VIII. Punctuation:

- (.) chấm
- (,) phết (phẩy)
- (;) chấm phết
- (:) hai chấm
- (?) chấm hỏi
- (!) chấm nhều (chấm than)
- (--) dấu ngoặc đơn
- (" --- ") dấu ngoặc kép
- (—) và (— ... —) gạch dài
- (...) ba chấm

PRONUNCIATION DRILL I (With 12 basic vowels)

<u>a</u>	<u>ã</u>	<u>â</u>	<u>e</u>	<u>ê</u>	<u>o</u>	<u>ô</u>	<u>ơ</u>	<u>u</u>	<u>ư</u>	<u>i</u>	<u>y</u>
an	ãm	ân	em	êm	lo	lô	ơn	bu	ưa	im	ky
am	nãm	âm	đem	đêm	to	tô	cơn	đu	của	in	my
nam	vãn	nâm	đen	bên	ho	hồ	ơm	đun	mũa	đi	tuy
van	bãn	vâm	me	lên	no	nô	cóm	đua	ưu	vi	ay
đan	bãng	đâm	xe	quên	lon	côn	hơn	mua	mũa	ai	may
san	vãng	mâm	xem	nên	non	nôn	bơ	cua	ưng	mai	bay
can	đãng	âu	tem	phên	hom	hôm	bơn	nui	búng	tai	ây
qua	mãng	lâu	kem	tên	ong	ông	mơ	vui	lúng	oi	mây
quan	sãng	đâu	nem	sên	đong	đông	mơn	mui	lương	voi	bây
qual	ãn	nâu	lem	đen	song	sông	sơn	sui	cường	toi	cây

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PRONUNCIATION DRILL II (With Tone Marks)

<u>Ma</u>	<u>Má</u>	<u>Mà</u>	<u>Mả</u>	<u>Mã</u>	<u>Mạ</u>
ta	lá (leaf)	chào (to greet)	nhỏ (small)	ngã (to fall)	đẹp (pretty)
ra (out)	khá (quite)	nào (which)	phải (must)	cũ (old)	mặt (face)
ông (sir)	sắc (sharp)	vào (to enter)	cửa (door)	mũ (hat)	mặt (tired)
không (not)	sắt (iron)	này (this, that)	cả (all)	nữa (also)	lọ (pot)
bông (flower)	bắt (to catch)	nhà (house)	mở (to open)	mũi (nose)	lạ (strange)
sông (river)	mắt (eye)	là (to be)	sở (office)	mỗi (each)	lợn (pig)
tôi (I)	bút (pen)	tờ (piece)	hỏi (ask)	đã (already)	sợ (scared)
thôi (no)	phút (minute)	bà (Mrs.)	khỏi (to recover)	chữ (word)	vợ (wife)
đi (to go)	chút (little)	rồi (already)	thế (could)	sữa (milk)	chợ (market)
thi (contest)	cút (button)	ngồi (to sit)	bể (sea)	Mỹ (America)	được (can)
khi (when)	khó (difficult)	tôi (cheap)	đề (to put)	nghĩ (think)	gọi (to call)

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