

Learner profile: Vietnamese

This guide presents common challenges faced by Vietnamese learners of English and typical features of language production. Please note, these guidelines are intended to advise teachers on areas where students may experience problems. However, native speakers may not all find the following points challenging.



Facts

- **Language family:** Austroasiatic language family.
- **Native speakers:** Approximately 76 million.
- **Second language speakers:** Around 16 million.
- **Location:** Vietnam and southern China. Vietnamese is also recognised as a minority language in the Czech Republic.
- **Writing system:** Latin script with diacritics to show tones.
- **Alphabet:** The Vietnamese alphabet has the following letters which aren't in the English alphabet: ã, â, đ, ê, ô, ơ, ư. The Vietnamese alphabet doesn't have these letters which are in the English alphabet: f, j, w, z.

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Pronunciation

- Vietnamese does not allow consonant clusters and so native speakers may struggle with English consonant clusters, especially the cluster 'tr', which may be pronounced as /tʃ/, the first sound in 'church'. The 'r' sound is difficult; the 'r' in the Saigon dialect of Vietnamese is rolled.
- In Vietnamese, there is no voicing distinction and so pairs of sounds which differ in voicing (such as 'bat' and 'pat') may be confusing for native speakers.
- The majority of Vietnamese words are short and monomorphemic, which means the middle or final consonant of longer English words might be omitted. Vietnamese speakers may also struggle with English stress patterns.
- Neither the 'th', /ð/ and /θ/, or 'sh', /ʃ/, sounds are in the Vietnamese phonemic inventory. The 'th' in 'then', /ð/, may be pronounced as a 'z' or 'd' and the 'th' of 'think', /θ/, may be pronounced as 's' or 't'. The 'sh', /ʃ/, in words such as 'fish' may be pronounced as 's'.

Grammar

- Vietnamese is a language where adjectives can be used as verbs so the verb 'to be' might be omitted in English, as in 'he tall'.
- Vietnamese puts the adjective after the noun and so speakers may confuse adjective and word orders in English.
- Native speakers of Vietnamese may struggle with any tense in English other than the present tense because Vietnamese does not have a past or future tense.
- Vietnamese native speakers may have uncertainties over which article to use in English.
- Vietnamese does not mark possession on the noun and so the difference between plural 's' and possession 's' might be difficult for native speakers.
- Forming questions in English can be confusing for native Vietnamese speakers.

Writing

- Native Vietnamese speakers may have difficulties spelling long English words because Vietnamese words are often shorter.
- Silent letters can be confusing for native speakers of Vietnamese, which is a more phonetic language.

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Recommended FlashAcademy® lessons

Some lessons which might help based on the above differences:

Beginner > A few basics > Personal pronouns

Beginner > Phonics 1 > Tricky words I

Beginner > Phonics 1 > Additional sounds

Beginner > Phonics 2 > Initial 'R' clusters

Beginner > Phonics 2 > Initial 'L' clusters

Beginner > Phonics 2 > More initial consonant clusters

Beginner > Phonics 2 > 3-letter clusters

Beginner > Food & drink > Articles

Beginner > English Language > Spelling

Beginner > High Frequency Words 1 > Your vs. You're

Beginner > High Frequency Words 3 > It's vs. Its