

# Hệ Thống Ngữ Âm Tiếng Việt – The Vietnamese Sound System

## A. Bảng Mẫu Tự – The Alphabet

The modern Vietnamese alphabet, *bảng mẫu tự*, of the Vietnamese sound system, *hệ thống ngữ âm tiếng Việt*, has 29 letters:

a A	ă Ă	â Â	b B	c C	d D	đ Đ	e E
ê Ê	g G	h H	i I	k K	l L	m M	n N
o O	ô Ô	ơ Ơ	p P	q Q	r R	s S	t T
u U	ư Ư	v V	x X	y Y			

The need to deal with loanwords, mainly from European languages, adds these four letters – ff [ɛfə], j [dʒi], w [vedub], and z [zét] to transliterate words like *fi-lê* for ‘fillet’, *jun* for ‘jouiille’, *wát* or *oát* for ‘watt’, *zê-rô* for ‘zero’, etc.

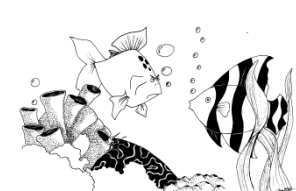
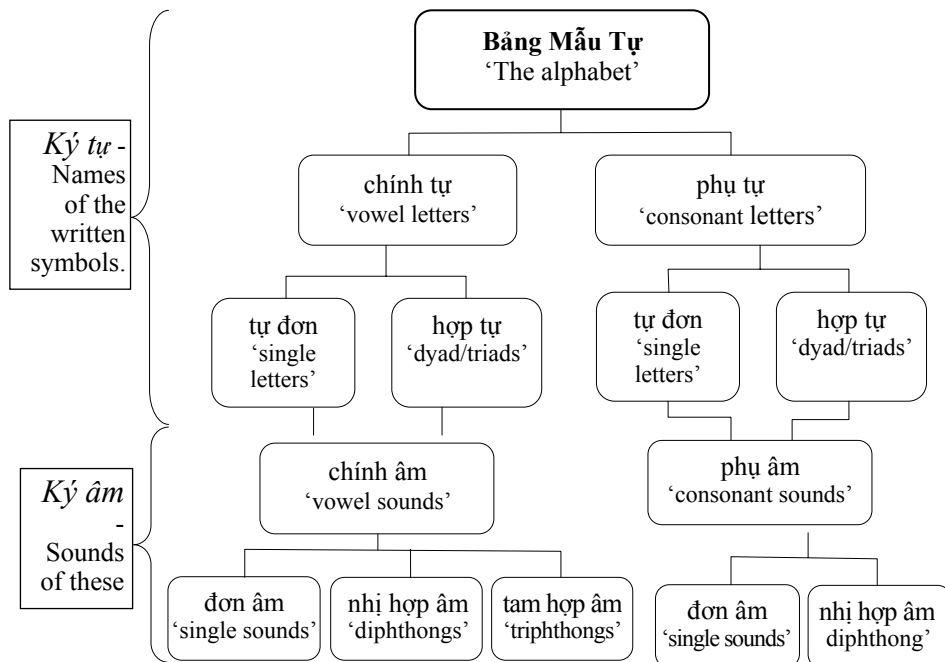
Since each regional dialect has a certain “defect” in pronouncing the words and such a standardized format would be helpful for foreign beginners, this publication is devoted to the so-called “simple standard Vietnamese,” which is intelligible all over Vietnam.

### 1. Chính Tự và Chính Âm – Vowels and Consonants

The 29 letters of the alphabet are made up of two groups: *chính tự* ‘vowel letters’ and *phụ tự* ‘consonant letters’. The vowel letters and consonant letters represent *chính âm* ‘vowel sounds’ and *phụ âm* ‘consonant sounds’.

The names of the vowel letters are identical to the sounds they present, except for the last letter – y, which has two names: *y-kret* or *i dài*: a ă â e ê i o ô ơ u ư y.

The 17 consonant letters – b c d đ g h k l m n p q r s t v x – together with 11 compounds – **ch gh gi kh ng ngh nh ph qu th tr** – produce 23 sounds altogether. Vietnamese has eight finals producing eight single sounds and 2 compounds: -c -ch -ng -nh -m -n -p -t. Of all the 23 sounds, two are unfamiliar to beginners: **nh** [ɲ] and **tr** [ʈ]. The rest are very familiar to most speakers of syllabic languages. However, the **ng-** [ŋ] is familiar but its initial position turns out to be a ‘reall problem’ to a number of speakers. In order to master this sound, say *doing*, then prolong the last sound [ŋ] for a while. Add an easy vowel [a] by lowering the jaw to release the nasalized vibration to end with *nga* [ŋa]. Continue with other vowels.



*Ký tự* -  
Names  
of the  
written  
symbols.

*Ký âm* -  
Sounds  
of these

✿ Ký tự – names of the written symbols (transcribed in IPA – International Phonetic Alphabet): The 29 letters in the alphabet have their own names: **a** [ɑ] **ă** [ʌ] **â** [ɤ] **b** [be] **c** [se] **d** [je,ze] **đ** [de] **e** [ɛ] **g** [ʒe] **h** [hat] **i** [i] **k** [ka] **l** [ɛlə] **m** [ɛmə] **n** [ɛnə] **o** [ɔ] **ô** [o] **ơ** [ə] **p** [pe] **q** [ku] **r** [ɛrə] **s** [ɛt] **t** [te] **u** [u] **ư** [u] **v** [ve] **x** [it] **y** [igɾɛt] or [ijai].

Transcription in Vietnamese: [a ă â bê xê dê/zê ê e ê gê hát i ca el-ờ em-ờ en-ờ o, ô ơ pê cu er-ờ ét tê u ư vê ít i-dài or i-cờ-rết.]

✿ Ký âm – sounds of these symbols: **a** [ɑ] **ă** [ʌ] **â** [ɤ] **b** [b] **c** [k] **d** [j,z] **đ** [d] **e** [ɛ] **ê** [e] **g** [g] **h** [h] **i** [i] **k** [k] **l** [l] **m** [m] **n** [n] **o** [ɔ] **ô** [o] **ơ** [ə] **p** [p] **q** [kw] **r** [z, r, ʒ, g] **s** [ʃ, s] **t** [t] **u** [u] **ư** [w] **v** [v,j] **x** [x] **y** [i].

### a. Chính tự - Vowel letters

Vietnamese has a large number of single and compound vowel sounds, *chính âm*, derived from the twelve vowel letters, *chính tự*: **a ă â e ê i o ô ơ u ư** and **y**.

Manner \ Place	Front	Central	Back
	High	<b>i,y</b> [i]	<b>ư</b> [w]
Higher mid	<b>ê</b> [e]		<b>ô</b> [o]
Lower mid	<b>e</b> [ɛ]	<b>â</b> [ɤ] <b>ơ</b> [ə]	<b>o</b> [ɔ]
Low	<b>a</b> [ɑ]	<b>ă</b> [ʌ]	

Table 1: Bảng chính tự/chính âm Việt – the vowel sound chart

These 12 vowel letters comprise a total of 51 “-thongs” including 11 *chính tự* ‘monads’, 29 *nhị hợp tự* ‘dyads’, and 12 *tam hợp tự* ‘triads’. The **y** is a pseudo-semivowel; it becomes [i] in initial position and [i:<sup>y</sup>] at final when preceded by low front **a** [ɑ], and [i:<sup>y</sup>] by back vowel **u** [u]. See more details in the Dyads/Diphthongs Section.

### b. Đơn tự & đơn âm – Monads and their sounds

The monothong, *đơn tự/đơn âm*, are perfectly phonemic: their names and their sounds are basically identical:

[i] **i, y** [e] **ê** [ɛ] **e** [ɑ] **a** [ʌ] **ă** [ɤ] **â** [ə] **ơ** [w] **ư** [u] **u** [o] **ô** [ɔ] **o**

Vietnamese has three unfamiliar vowels: [ʌ] **ă**, [ɤ] **â**, and [w] **ư**. The [ʌ] **ă** sounds somehow like the ‘u’ in *but*. The [ɤ] **â** assimilates with an accented schwa “a” as in *ago*. And the [w] **ư** is a “grinning ‘oo’ [u] in *oo*”. Say [u] then unround your lips as if you are making a “mirthless grin.”

### c. Nhị hợp tự và nhị hợp âm – Dyads/diphthongs

A dyad, *nhị hợp tự*, is comprised of two vowel letters, one of which is primary, representing a primary vowel sound, *nguyên âm*, and the other a secondary or semi-sound, *bán âm*. In certain cases a *bán âm* may become a consonant sound.

When a tonal mark is needed, it is placed either above or under the primary vowel of the dyads. Vietnamese has 29 dyads:

ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iê iu oa oă oe oi  
oo ôi oï ua uâ ui uô ươ uy ưa ươ ưi ươ ưư



Nhị Hợp Tự – Dyads												
	-a	-ă	-â	-e	-ê	-i	-o	-ô	-ơ	-u	-ư	-y
a-						ai	ao			au		ay
ă-												
â-										âu		ây
e-							eo					
ê-										êu		
i-	ia				iê					iu		
o-	oa	oă		oe		oi	oo					
ô-						ôi						
ơ-						ơi						
u-	ua		uâ		uê	ui		uô	ươ			uy
ư-	ưa					ưi			ươ	ưư		

Table 2: Tóm tắt về nhị hợp tự – A summary of the dyads

For the purpose of pronunciation, these dyads are made into three groups.

**Group 1** – This group comprises most of the dyads (18 of 29), which **never** take a final consonant.

**ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu iu ia oi ôi oï ua ui ưa ưi ưư**

These dyads consist of a primary, which is the one that comes first, and the secondary that follows. If a tonal mark is needed, it is always above or under the primary. See **Table 3** for offglide vowels. It is recommended that users set their Vietnamese keyboarding in linguistic mode *oà uy* instead of *òà uy* (aesthetic mode).

These dyads consist of a primary vowel that is preceded by a semivowel offglide to either a high front position [i], a central [ə] or a high back [ɯ]. Although **i** and **y** are phonologically identical in most cases, the two dyads **ai** and **ay** are distinctly different. In the **ai**, the primary **a** is lengthened: [a:i] and in the **ay**, the **y** causes the **a** to be shortened [ai:].

Here are some examples showing the placing of tonal marks. Diacritics will be introduced in the latter section.

**ái ào ảu áy âu ấy èo ếu ịu ìa òi ối ỡi ủa ùi ừa ửi ứu ưư**

Lõi 'Nucleus'	Mở-khép trước 'Front offglide'	Mở-khép giữa 'Central offglide'	Mở-khép sau 'Back offglide'
i, y [i]	<b>ia</b> [i: <sup>a</sup> ]		<b>iu, yu</b> [i: <sup>u</sup> ]
ê [e]			<b>êu</b> [e: <sup>u</sup> ]
e [ɛ]			<b>eo</b> [ɛ: <sup>ɔ</sup> ]
a [ɑ]	<b>ai</b> [ɑ: <sup>i</sup> ] <b>ay</b> [ɑi: <sup>y</sup> ]		<b>au</b> [ɑ: <sup>u</sup> ] <b>ao</b> [ɑ: <sup>w</sup> ]
â [ɤ]	<b>ây</b> [ɤi: <sup>y</sup> ]		<b>âu</b> [ɤ: <sup>w</sup> ]
ơ [ə]	<b>oi</b> [ə: <sup>i</sup> ]		
ư [u]	<b>uri</b> [u: <sup>i</sup> ]	<b>ura</b> [u: <sup>a</sup> ]	<b>uru</b> [u: <sup>w</sup> ]
u [u]	<b>ui</b> [u: <sup>i</sup> ] <b>ua</b> [u: <sup>a</sup> ]		
ô [o]	<b>ôi</b> [o: <sup>i</sup> ]		
ơ [ɔ]	<b>oi</b> [ɔ: <sup>i</sup> ]		

**Table 3:** Bảng chính âm nhóm 1 – Vowel nucleus offglide distribution.

In this chart learners also find the new dyad **yu**, which is added because it is phonologically identical to the dyad **iu**, and will be in the triads combination (Table 5).

**Group 2** – This group is of dyads that **optionally** need a final consonant: **oa oe uê ươ uy**

For example: **oà oẻ uế ưở uỷ**

The vowels **o** and **u** in group 2 and 3 dyads become [w] when pronounced. Therefore the second vowels in these groups are **primary**.

Lõi 'Nucleus'	Khép-mở trước 'Front onglide'	Khép-mở giữa 'Central onglide'	Khép-mở sau 'Back onglide'
i [i]	<b>iê, yê</b> [i: <sup>e</sup> ]		
ư [u]		<b>ươ</b> [u: <sup>ə</sup> ]	
u [u]	<b>uy</b> [u: <sup>i</sup> ] <b>uê</b> [u: <sup>e</sup> ]	<b>uâ</b> [u: <sup>ɤ</sup> ] <b>ươ</b> [u: <sup>ə</sup> ]	<b>uô</b> [u: <sup>o</sup> ]
ơ [ɔ]	<b>oe</b> [ɔ: <sup>ɛ</sup> ] <b>oa</b> [ɔ: <sup>a</sup> ]	<b>oã</b> [ɔ: <sup>Λ</sup> ]	<b>oo</b> [ɔ: <sup>ɔ</sup> ]

**Table 4:** Bảng âm chính nhóm 2&3– Vowel nucleus in onglide distribution.

The **y** in the dyad **uy** prolongs itself and becomes a primary vowel.

**Group 3** – This group comprises dyads that **always** need a final consonant. Therefore, tonal marks will be placed above or under the second vowel of a dyad, which the primary. The dyads **iê** becomes **yê** when proceeds by a [w] as in *qu- iê- n > quỳên*.

                   
                   
*biếc* *oảng* *gòong* *uất* *thuộc* *thưởng*  
*chiếc* *hoảng* *khuất*



**d. Tam hợp tự và tam hợp âm – Triads and triphthongs**

A triad, *tam hợp tự*, has three vowel letters; two of which are secondary (s) and one primary (p). Except

for the one in frame – **ssp**, the formula for the rest of other triphthongs are in the form of **sps**. The **ssp** triphthong is the sole one that takes a final consonant: *uyên, tuyệt*, etc.

Vietnamese has 12 triphthongs:

**iêu oai oao oay oeo uây uôi uya uyê uyu ươi ươu**

*Oai* is a free triphthong; the rest are bound .

Tam Hợp Tự/Âm – Triad/Triphthongs							
Finals	iê-	oa-	oe-	uâ-	uô-	uy	ươ-
-a						uya <sup>[w:i:a]</sup>	
-ê						uyê <sup>[wi:e]</sup>	
-i		oai <sup>[w:a:i]</sup>			uôi <sup>[w:o:i]</sup>		ươi <sup>[wə:i]</sup>
-o		oao <sup>[w:a:w]</sup>	oeo <sup>[wɛ:u]</sup>				
-u	iêu <sup>[iê:w]</sup>					uyu <sup>[wi:u]</sup>	ươu <sup>[wə:u]</sup>
-y		oay <sup>[w:a:i]</sup>		uây <sup>[w:a:i]</sup>			

**Table 5:** Bảng tam hợp âm – Vietnamese triphthongs distribution

**Note:** The **uao, uau, uâu** in *quau, quâu* are not triphthongs but only dyads: *qu* [kw]+*ao*, *qu+au*, *qu+âu*. There used to be another triad **uêu** in the sole word *nguồn*. Now it is *êu*: *ngheêu* ‘decepitly (tall)’

## 2. Phụ Tự Và Phụ Âm – Consonant Letters and Sounds

There are 17 single consonant letters, *phụ tự*, and 11 compounds that represent 23 consonant sounds and two allophones. These vowel sounds and consonant sounds possibly cover all regional dialects.

Vị Trí 'Place' Vị thế 'Manner'	Âm môi 'Labial'	Môi- răng 'Labio- dental'	Âm nướu 'Alve- olar'	Âm nướu -cúa 'Alveolar- palatal'	Âm cúa 'Retro- flex'	Âm của cứng 'Palatal'	Âm của mềm 'Velar'	Âm hầu 'Glottal'
Bật hơi 'Aspirated'	[p]			[t <sup>h</sup> ]			[k <sup>h</sup> ]	
Không bật hơi 'Unaspirated'	[b]		[t] [d]		[ʈ]	[ç]	[k]	
Âm mũi 'Nasal'	[m]		[n]			[ɲ]	[ŋ]	
Rung lưỡi 'Trill'			[r]					
Thoát hơi 'Fricative'	[ɸ]	[f] [v]	[s] [z]	[ʃ] [ʒ]			[g]	[h]
Án lưỡi 'Approximant'	[w]					[j]		
Bật lưỡi 'Lateral'			[l]					

**Table 6:** Bảng phụ âm – The consonant sound chart.

As stated above, there are 17 single consonants and 11 compounds. They comprise 23 sounds occurring in initial position:

<b>b</b>	<b>c,k</b>	<b>d,gi</b>	<b>đ</b>	<b>g,gh</b>	<b>h</b>	<b>l</b>	<b>m</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>q,qu</b>	<b>r</b>
[b]	[k]	[j/z]	[d]	[g]	[h]	[l]	[m]	[n]	[p]	[kw]	[r/z]
<b>s</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>v</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>ch</b>	<b>kh</b>	<b>ng,ngh</b>	<b>nh</b>	<b>ph</b>	<b>th</b>	<b>tr</b>	
[ʃ/s]	[t]	[v/j]	[s]	[c]	[x]	[ŋ]	[ɲ]	[f,ϕ]	[tʰ]	[t]	

**a. Phụ tự và phụ âm cuối – The final consonants**

Of the 17 single letters and 11 compounds, only eight letters are finals: **-c -ch -ng -nh -m -n -p -t**, which produce eight single sounds and two compounds:

<b>-c</b>	<b>-ch</b>	<b>-ng</b>	<b>-nh</b>	<b>-m</b>	<b>-n</b>	<b>-p</b>	<b>-t</b>
[kʰ cʰ kpʰ]	[cʰ]	[ŋʰ ŋm n]	[ɲ]	[m]	[n]	[bʰ]	[tʰ]

The sign [ʰ] means that final sounds in Vietnamese are unaspirated. In fact, they are pronounced implosively.

**b. Âm môi hoá – Bilabialization**

Most Vietnamese words beginning with [u] (u) or dyads containing (u) are bilabialized, strongly or slightly: *cau* [kaw] ‘areca nut’ *đâu* [dɔw] ‘where’ *thiu* [tʰi:w] ‘stale’ *huru* [huw] ‘pension, retire’

The three back vowels – **o, ô** and **u** – strongly affect their surroundings progressively and regressively.

Progressively, final **c** [k] and **ng** [ŋ] preceded by these back vowels are always bilabialized: *học* [hɔkp̚] ‘study’ *lốc* [lɔkp̚] ‘tornado’ *thúc* [tʰukp̚] ‘urge’; *cong* [kʰoŋm̚] ‘curled, curly’, *công* [kʰoŋm̚] ‘labor’ *Dung* [juŋm̚] (name of a person) *không* [kʰoŋm̚] ‘no, not, null’.

Regressively, unvoiced *ph* is bilabialized when followed by back vowels [u, o] or [ɔ] **u, ô** or **o** as in *phục* ‘admire’, *phông* ‘background’, *phòng* ‘room’.

	Levels	Symbols	Transliteration	Examples	Meanings
Initial	<b>strong</b>	[b, m, u]	<i>b</i> +most vowels <i>m</i> +most vowels <i>uy</i>	<i>bu</i> <i>mi</i> <i>uy</i>	to cling to eyelash prestige
	slight	[ϕ] [kw]	<i>ph</i> + <i>o, ô</i> or <i>u</i> <i>qu</i> +some vowels	<i>phó</i> <i>quỳ</i>	assistant to kneel down
Final	<b>strong</b>	[ŋm̚]	<i>o, ô</i> or <i>u</i> + <i>ng</i>	<i>cong</i> <i>không</i> <i>chung</i>	curved no, not, null together
	slight	[kp̚]	<i>o, ô</i> or <i>u</i> + <i>c</i>	<i>khóc</i> <i>dốc</i> <i>cúc</i>	to cry slope ‘mums’

**Table 7:** Tóm tắt về âm môi hoá – A summary of bilabialization

**B. Thanh Giọng – The Tones**

Vietnamese vowels are implosive. It has six tones, five of which have marks, called diacritical marks or tonal marks. The tones differ in pitch, length, and melody. Beginners should listen to a native speaker.

When needed, the mark is simply added above or under the vowel letter in the word, or the primary vowel of a diphthong or a triphthong. The standard dictionary alphabetical sequence is as follows:

Unmarked tone, *không dấu*, or level tone, has no mark, as in *ba* ‘three’

High rising, *dấu sắc*, or acute accent, [ ´ ], as in *bá* ‘cling to, hundred’

Low falling, *dấu huyền*, or grave accent, [ ` ], as in *bà* ‘mrs., grandma’

Low rising, *dấu hỏi*, or dipping rising, [ ʔ ], as in *bả*, ‘she is’

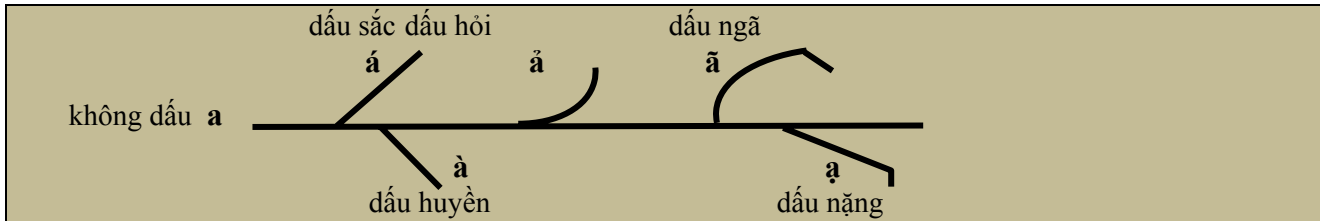
High broken, *dấu ngã*, or breaking rising, [ ˜ ], as in *bã*, ‘waste’

Low broken, *dấu nặng*, or constricted, [ ˙ ], as in *bạ* ‘record’.



These tones are classified into two groups: even and slant tone. Even tone includes *không dấu* and *dấu huyền*; slant tone *sắc*, *hỏi*, *ngã* and *nặng*.

Orthographically, all twelve vowel letters can receive the tonal marks. All vowels except for the two bound vowels *ă* and *â* can stand alone and form a word. The two bound vowels never stand as finals.



a	á	à	ã	â	ạ	ă	ắ	ằ	ẳ	ẫ	ậ	â	ắ	ằ	ẳ	ẫ	ậ						
e	é	è	ê	ê	ẹ	ê	é	è	ê	ê	ẹ	i	í	ì	ỉ	ĩ	ị						
o	ó	ò	ô	ô	ọ	ô	ó	ò	ô	ô	ọ	ơ	ớ	ờ	ở	ỡ	ợ						
u	ú	ù	ủ	ủ	ụ	ư	ứ	ừ	ử	ữ	ự	y	ý	ỳ	ỷ	ỹ	ỵ						

### 1. Độ Dài Của Chính Âm – Length of Vowels

Depending on the consonant that follows it, a vowel can be shortened or prolonged. In general, if a vowel is followed by one of the four final consonants: **-c -ch -p** and **-t**, it is shortened; and if followed by one of the other four: **-ng -nh -m** and **-n**, it is prolonged. Those in the first group are stop sounds; therefore, they only take either high rising ( ˆ ) or low broken ( ˙ ) marks. See **Table 8**.

Very long: Any vowel or vowel cluster can be prolonged to express the great quality or degree of anything the speaker wants to emphasize.

If someone wishes to express “something very, very beautiful,” he/she simply prolongs the adjective *đẹp* ‘beautiful’ in such a way that the word *đẹp* would be like this: *đề ..e...ê...ê...p*. This can be applied to most form of emphasis. For instance, if someone wants to say “He has everything: car, house, money in the bank, and so on,” he/she simple says: *Nó có nhằằ, xee, tiiềềềề trong ngân hàng này.*” (*Này* is a **particle** – an emphatic marker attaching to whichever part of speech used to emphasize.)

Phonologically, there are some “strange” points in the spelling and pronunciation, as the *ă* sound exactly like *á*, and *â* like *ớ*.

Vowels	Either with ( ˆ ) or ( ˙ ) tone only				Possible with all six tones			
	-c	-ch	-p	-t	-m	-n	-ng	-nh
<b>a</b>	ac	ach	ap	at	am	an	ang	anh
<b>ă</b>	ăc		ăp	ăt	ăm	ăn	ang	
<b>â</b>	âc		âp	ât	âm	ân	ang	
<b>e</b>	ec		ep	et	em	en	eng	
<b>ê</b>		êch	êp	êt	êm	ên		ênh
<b>i</b>		ich	ip	it	im	in		inh
<b>o</b>	oc		op	ot	om	on	ong	
<b>ô</b>	oc		ôp	ôt	ôm	ôn	ông	
<b>ơ</b>			ơp	ơt	ơm	ơn		
<b>u</b>	uc		up	ut	um	un	ung	
<b>ư</b>	ưc		ưt	ưt	ưm	ưn	ưng	

**Table 8:** Dấu trên vẫn có đơn tự và phụ tự cuối – Tonal marks on single vowels and final consonants.

## C. Quy Tắc Chính Tả – Phonotactic Rules

Now that we have covered most parts of Vietnamese phonology. It's time to examine word formation in term of pronouncing practice. Vietnamese syllables are comprised in five basic patterns: vowel (V), vowel-consonant (VC) consonant-vowel (CV), and consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC).

### 1. Vần Chính Tụ – Syllabic Vowel Pattern

Vietnamese has quite a few words comprised of vowel syllable. Such a word can be a single-vowel, a dyad or a triad. Except the bound vowels – **ã** and **â**, the rest can become a simple-syllable word:

#### a. Vần đơn tự – Single vowel syllable

á è é ó ố ở ị ụ ù y

**Á!** *Đau quá!* 'Ah! It hurt.'

**É** *khách.* 'Business is low.'

**Cái áo bị ố** *màu.* 'The coat's color faded.'

**Con chó ị** *trước sân.* 'The dog pooped in the front yard.'

**Ụ đất** *giữa đường.* 'A pile of dirt in the middle of the road.'

**Ừ,** *đúng rồi.* 'Uh, that's correct.'

**È** *cổ ra trả.* 'Pay through the nose.'

**Con ó** *đầu bạc.* 'The bald eagle.'

**Anh ở** *đâu?* 'Where do you live?'

**Y** *là người Mỹ.* 'He's American.'



#### b. Vần nhị hợp tự – Syllables with dyads

Of the 29 dyads, excluding **êu**, **iu** and **ui** in group I and **uơ** in group II, the remaining dyads in both groups can form independent syllables or words themselves:

**ai ao au ay âu ây eo ia oi ôi oĩ ua ui ura uru oa oe uê uy**

*ai* 'who, sad' *ái* 'love' *ải* 'a passage on border' *ãi* 'decomposed'

*ao* 'pond' *áo* 'top garment'

*ào* 'torrential' *ảo* 'illusioned'

*au* 'bright' in *đỏ au* 'bright red'

*áy* 'rattle' *áy náy* 'reckless, disturbed'.

*âu* 'chum' *ấu* 'baby' *ẩu* 'careless'

*áy* 'that, alike' *áy* 'push'

*eo* 'waist' *éo* 'faintly' *èo* 'weak'

*ĩa* 'defecate'

*oi* 'muggy' *ói* 'vomit' *oĩ* 'noisy'

*ôi* 'stale' *oĩ* 'guava'

*ơ ới* 'hullabaloo'

*úa* 'withering' *ùa* 'swarm (in)'

*ui* 'iron' *ui* 'run into' (a thing)

*ua* 'favorite' *úa* 'to secrete, shed'

*uru* 'super'

*oà* 'burst out (crying)'

*oé* 'squeaking' *oẹ* 'nauseous'

*uế* 'dirty' *uế* 'fatigue'

*ủy ban* 'committee'



#### c. Vần tam hợp tự – Syllables with triads

Of the 12 triads, two can form a word themselves: *oai* 'noble-looking'; *yêu* 'love', *yếu* 'weak'. The rest are bound.

### 2. Vần Chính Tụ-Phụ Tụ – Vowel-Consonant Pattern

This pattern is comprised of a single vowel or dyad and a single or compound consonant. As a rule, this formation occurs with some dyads of groups II **oa oe uê uơ uy** and III **iê oã oo oo uâ uô uơ**, and one single triphthong **uyê\_**.

#### a. Chính tự đơn + phụ tự cuối – Single vowel+final consonant

Table 8 reflects all possible combinations of single vowel + final consonant in Vietnamese, including the addition of tonal marks:

\* *ác* 'cruel' *ách* 'yoke' *áp* 'to apply' *át* 'to deafen' *ạch* 'flop (fall)' *am* 'small temple' *an* 'safe' *ang* 'bushel' *anh* 'brother, husband';

\* *ấp* 'overly full' *ất* 'perhaps' *ẵm* 'to carry in arms (baby)' *ăn* 'to eat' *ẳng ẳng* 'howling with pain (dog)';

- ✿ *áp* ‘hamlet’ *át* ‘lamp light (the second symbol of the celestial body)’ *ám* ‘warm’ *án* ‘press’;
- ✿ *éc* ‘oink’ *ép* ‘to press (for juice), force’ *em* ‘sister, wife’ *én* ‘swallow’ *eng éc* ‘squeaking sound’;
- ✿ *éch* ‘frog’ *ép* ‘hey’ *êm* ‘soft (of cushion), smooth’ *ênh* ‘awkward look’;
- ✿ *ích* ‘useful’ *ít* ‘few, little’ *im* ‘silent’ *in* ‘to print’ *inh* ‘noisily’ *ình* ‘(a variant of *ênh*)’;
- ✿ *óc* ‘brain’ *óp* ‘soft, fleshless (of crab)’ *ót* ‘nape of the neck’ *òm* ‘awful’ *ôn én* ‘childish behavior’ *ông* ‘bulgy (belly)’;
- ✿ *ốc* ‘snail’ *óp* ‘to inlay’ *ôt ột* ‘stomach rumbling’ *óm* ‘sick {N}, thin {S}’ *òn* ‘noisy’ *ông* ‘mister’ *ổng* ‘he, him’;
- ✿ *ót* ‘red pepper, chili’ *ợt* ‘very (degree), fading (color)’ *õm ò* ‘coaxing’ ‘half in jest half in earnest’ *ón* ‘be fed up’
- ✿ *Úc* ‘Australia’ *úp* ‘to turn upside down’ *út* ‘youngest (child, little finger)’ *um* ‘exuberant’ *ung* ‘cancer’ *úng* ‘soaked in stagnant water’ *úng* ‘high boots’
- ✿ *úc* ‘chest’ *ung* ‘to fall in love with s.o.’ *ung* ‘hawk’ *úng* ‘pay in advance part of the sum’ *ửng* ‘become rosy’

**b. Nhị hợp tự + phụ tự cuối – Dyad + final consonant**

Combinations of this type are fairly limited. Only some in the group II and III dyads are possible:

- ✿ *oác* ‘crackle (of hen)’ *oan* ‘falsely accused’ *oàm oạp* ‘splashing’ *oang oang* ‘resounding’ *oanh* ‘oriole’ *oáp* ‘tree frog’;
- ✿ *uênh oạng* ‘horned frog’
- ✿ *uych* ‘falling or punching sound’ *uỳnh uyịch* ‘sounds of heavy steps’;
- ✿ *oằn* ‘to give (under a heavy weight)’ *oǎng oǎng* ‘howl of pain’ *oắt* ‘urchin’;
- ✿ *uẩn* ‘mysterious’ *uất* ‘choke with rage’;
- ✿ *uôm* ‘to roar’ *uốn* ‘to bend’ *uống* ‘to drink’ *uột* ‘too weak’;
- ✿ *ước* ‘to wish’ *uôm* ‘to unwind silk’ *uôn* ‘gamy’ *uông* ‘half ripe’ *uóp* ‘to season, embalm’ *uột* ‘wet’;



Chính tự-phụ tự phối hợp ‘Vowel-Consonant Pattern’									
	Vowels	-c	-ch	-m	-n	-ng	-nh	-p	-t
Group II dyads	oa	<b>oac</b>	<b>oach</b>	<b>oam</b>	<b>oan</b>	<b>oang</b>	<b>oanh</b>	<b>oap</b>	-
	oe								
	uê		<b>uêch</b>						
	uơ								
	uy		<b>uych</b>				<b>uynh</b>		
Group III dyads	iê								
	oã			<b>oãm</b>	<b>oãn</b>	<b>oãng</b>			<b>oắt</b>
	oo								
	uâ				<b>uân</b>				<b>uât</b>
	uô			<b>uôm</b>	<b>uôn</b>	<b>uông</b>			<b>uột</b>
	uơ	<b>uơc</b>		<b>uơm</b>	<b>uơn</b>	<b>uơng</b>		<b>uơp</b>	<b>uột</b>
triads-	uyê				<b>uyên</b>				

**Table 9:** Chính tự + phụ tự phối hợp – Vowel-consonant combination

**c. Tam hợp tự + phụ tự cuối – Triads + final consonant**

There is only one triphthong that needs final consonant: **uyê\_**

✿ *uyên* ‘profound, immense’ *uyên bác* ‘scholastic’ *uyển* ‘flexible’.

### 3. Vần Phụ Tự + Chính Tự – Consonant-Vowel Pattern

This pattern is comprised of three categories: C-V; C-dyad; C-triad.

#### a. Phụ tự + chính tự đơn – Consonant + single vowel

In the following pages, learners will familiarize themselves with this pattern. Those with **ã** and **â** can be found at the end of the example marked by this symbol ||.

✿ The bilabial **b-** [b] sound the same as English **b**, and it goes with all vowels except **y**.

Except for **bã** and **bâ**, all others are meaningful words and can receive tonal marks to derive meanings:

**bá** - - **bè** **bẻ** **bì** **bõ** **bổ** **bờ** **bù** **bự** -

*bá* ‘cling to’ *bà* ‘Mrs., grandma’ *bè* ‘raft’ *bẻ* ‘broken’ *bì* ‘cover’ *bõ* ‘nursing woman’ *bổ* ‘nutritious’ *bờ* ‘bank, shore’ *bù* ‘compensate’ *bự* ‘big’ || *bắn* ‘to shoot’ *bận* ‘busy’

✿ The velar **c-** and **k-** are pronounced [k] but their spelling combinations are different. Except for **cã**, **câ**, and **ka**, all others are meaningful words and can all receive tonal marks. For example:

**cá** - - - - - **cò** **cổ** **cỡ** **củ** **cự** -

**ka** - - **kẻ** **kề** **kí** - - - - - **kỹ**

*cá* ‘fish’ *cò* ‘crane’ *cổ* ‘neck’ *cỡ* ‘size’ *củ* ‘root’ *cự* ‘to displease’

*Ka-* is used mainly for loanword transliteration: *ka-ki* ‘khaki’; *kẻ* ‘someone’ *kề* ‘near’ ‘close to’ *kí* ‘kilogram’ *kỹ* ‘careful’ || *cắn* ‘to bite’ *cầm* ‘to hold’

✿ The alveolar **d-** and palatal **gi-** are pronounced [j] by majority of the Vietnamese (in Central and in the South), and [z] by speakers in Hà Nội and regions around it. They go with most vowels. Currently some linguists are attempting to compromise these two consonants by suggesting [j] for **d** and [z] for **gi** or vice versa.

**Dã**, **dâ**, **giã**, **giâ**, **giê** are non-phonotactic if they stand alone with or without tonal marks. **Gi** has two pronunciations: a) if unmarked, **gi** itself is [zi], denoting the name of a bird, and b) if marked, it sounds either [ji:] or [zi:] + low falling mark: *gi* ‘what’, *giữ gìn* [jũ jìn] [zũ zìn] ‘to conserve’. In the early stage, this “word” used to be **giì**, which is lexically more logical. Now the second ‘i’ was omitted.

**dạ** - - **dè** **dě** **dì** **dò** **đỏ** **dở** **dụ** **dữ** -

**giã** - - **giẻ** **giê** **gì** **giỏ** **giỗ** **giờ** **giữ** **giữ** -

*dạ* ‘yes’ (a polite marker) *dè* ‘cautious’ *dě* ‘easy’ *dì* ‘maternal aunt’ *dò* ‘scrutinize’ *đỏ* ‘catfish’ *dở* ‘tasteless, uninteresting’ *dụ* ‘solicit, lure’ *dữ* ‘cruel’ || *dặn* ‘remind’ *dẫn* ‘to guide, lead’;

*giã* ‘fake’ *giẻ* ‘rag’ *giê* ‘removal’ *gì* ‘what’ *giỏ* ‘wind’ *giỗ* ‘to commemorate the dead’ *giờ* ‘hour’ *giữ* ‘shake s.t. off’ *giữ* ‘to keep’ || *giặt* ‘wash (clothes)’ *giận* ‘angry’

✿ The alveolar **đ-** is pronounced like the English **d** [d] as in *day*, *do*, *don’t*, and it can go with most vowels:

**đá** - - **dè** **dě** **đì** **dò** **đỏ** **đở** **đu** **đừ** -

*đá* ‘to kick’ *dè* ‘press down’ *dě* ‘to place’ *đì* ‘to rank s.o.’ *dò* ‘passenger boat, ferry’ *đỏ* ‘pull in’ *đở* ‘support’ *đu* ‘enough’ *đừ* ‘exhausted’ || *đặc* ‘dense, condense’ *đậm* ‘dark (of colors)’

✿ The velar **g-** and **gh-** are pronounced [g] like English **g-** as in *get*, *go*, *guy*, but their combinations with vowels are strictly different.

They can take most tonal marks depending on their meanings:

**gà** - - - - - **gò** **gỗ** **gờ** **gù** **gừ**

- - **ghé** **ghé** **ghì** - - - - -

*gà* ‘chicken’ *gò* ‘mound’ *gỗ* ‘wood’ *gờ* ‘edge’ *gù* ‘hump, kyphosis’ *gừ* ‘gnarl’ *ghé* ‘stop by’ *ghé* ‘chair’ *ghì* ‘hold down’ || *gặp* ‘to meet’ *gấp* ‘in a hurry’

✿ The glottal **h-** [h] is similar to English **h-** as in *hi*, *home*, *how*, .... And it goes with all vowels.

**hả** - - **hè** **hề** **hí** **họ** **hồ** **hở** **hũ** **hứ** **hỷ**  
*hả* ‘open (mouth)’ *hè* ‘summer, veranda’ *hề* ‘clown, funny’ *hí* ‘neigh (horse)’ *họ* ‘they, family name’ *hồ*  
‘tiger’ *hở* ‘opening’ *hũ* ‘urn’ *hứ* ‘huh (an expression particle)’ *hỷ* ‘happy’ || *hắn* ‘he, him’ *hận* ‘resent’

✱ The alveolar consonants **l-** and **n-** are universally pronounced the same as in many European languages, and they go with all vowels. In some areas in the North these two sounds are interchangeable. They take most tonal marks:

**lá** - - **lè** **lễ** **lì** **lò** **lố** **lỡ** **lũ** **lự** **lý**  
**ná** - - **né** **nễ** **nỉ** **nỏ** **nỗ** **nợ** **nụ** **nữ** **nỷ**  
*lá* ‘leaf’ *lè* ‘thrust (tongue)’ *lễ* ‘holiday, festive’ *lì* ‘stubborn’ *lò* ‘stove’ *lố* ‘hole’ *lỡ* ‘to miss (something)’ *lũ* ‘flood’  
*lự* ‘thinking’ *lý* ‘reason’ || *lắm* ‘very’ *lần* ‘time(s)’  
*ná* ‘slingshot’ *né* ‘dodge’ *nễ* ‘you’ *nỉ* ‘felt’ *nỏ* ‘crossbow’ *nỗ* ‘effort’ *nợ* ‘debt’ *nụ* ‘bud’ *nữ* ‘female’ *nỷ* ‘felt’  
|| *nằm* ‘to lie (down)’ *nấm* ‘mushroom’

✱ The bilabial **m-** [m] is another universal sound. Except for **mã**, **mã**, others can take most tonal marks. **Mu** itself does not exist:

**mà** - - **mè** **mề** **mí** **mò** **mỏ** **mợ** **mũ** - **mỹ**  
*mà* ‘but, hypnotise’ *mè* ‘sesame’ *mề* ‘chick gizzard’ *mí* ‘eyelid’ *mò* ‘to feel’ *mỏ* ‘operate on’ *mợ* ‘wife of an  
uncle’ *mũ* ‘hat’ *mỹ* ‘beautiful’ || *mặn* ‘salted’ *mất* ‘to lose, miss’

✱ The bilabial stop **p-** [p] occurs mostly in loan words – scientific and mathematical terms and names of some locations in the mountain areas where the minor ethnic peoples dwell: *Pleiku*, *Pác-bó*, *Tchepone* (*xê-pôn*). It frequently goes with **-h** to represent two allphones:

a) [f] labio-dental with most vowels as English [f] in *fan*, *father*, *fee*: *pha*, *phả*, *phâ*, *phe*, *phê*, *phi*, *phe*, *phê*, *phơ*, *phư*

b) [ɸ] bilabial fricative with back vowels **o**, **ô** and **u**: *pho*, *phô*, *phu* (→).

**pan** **pi** **pin** **Pleiku** **Pác-bó**  
**pha** - - **phe** **phê** **phi** - - **phơ** - - - -  
→ - - - **pho** **phô** - - **phu** - -

*pan* ‘engine failure’ *pi* ‘π’ *pin* ‘battery’ *Pleiku* ‘name of a city in the highland of Central Vietnam’ *Pác-bó*  
‘name of a village in northernmost part of North Vietnam’ || *păng păng* ‘bang, bang’

*pha* ‘mix’ *phê* ‘leisure’ *phê* ‘criticize’ *phí* ‘fee, to waste’ *phở* ‘a Viet-nameese dish’ *phò* ‘serve’ *phố*  
‘town street, downtown’ *phư* ‘laborer’ || *phẳng* ‘flat’ *phần* ‘part’ *phức* ‘complex’

✱ **Q-** always goes with **-u** to comprise the cluster [kw], and it goes with most vowels, except with **u** or **ư**. **Quả**, **quâ**, and **quô** need finals:

**quà** - - **què** **quế** **quí** **quô** - **quó** - - **quỹ**  
*quà* ‘gift’ *què* ‘lame’ *quế* ‘cinamon’ *quí* ‘precious’ *quó* ‘nervous’ *quỹ* ‘fund’ || *quăng* ‘throw’  
*quần* ‘pants’ *quốc* ‘nation’

In the South and southernmost part of Vietnam, this [kw] is merged with [w]: *quà* [kwà] > [wà] ‘gift’ *què*  
> [kwè] > [wè] ‘lame’ *quế* [kwé] > [wé] ‘cinamon’ *quí* [kwí] > [wí] ‘precious’ *quốc* [kwók] > [wók] ‘nation’  
*quó* [kwɔ] > [wɔ] ‘nervous’ *quỹ* [kwĩ] > [wĩ] ‘fund’

✱ The alveolar **r** has four pronunciations [r, ʒ, z, g] depending on regional dialect. Speakers in the North merge it with **d-** and **gi-** = [z]. Speakers in the Central say [ʒ], Saigonese and speakers in provinces around Saigon make it [r], whereas speakers in the southernmost parts of South Vietnam pronounce it [g]. **Rã**, **rã**, and **ru** need final consonant to produce valid syllables.

**rạ** - - **rẻ** **rễ** **rỉ** **rỏ** **rổ** **rờ** **rủ** **ru** -  
*rạ* ‘straw (of rice)’ *rẻ* ‘cheap’ *rễ* ‘root’ *rỉ* ‘rust’ *rỏ* ‘clear’ *rổ* ‘basket’ *rờ* ‘touch’ *rủ* ‘to scoop down’ ||  
*rắn* ‘snake, hard’ *rất* ‘very’ *rứt* ‘pluck off’

✿ The alveolar **s-** [ʃ] is pronounced like **sh-** in English as in *she, sheet, show, ...* This letter is distinctly pronounced by speakers in the Central, but it is merged with the **x-** [s] by many speakers in the North and the South:

**sả - - sễ sẻ sỉ sọ sỏ sợ sụ sú sỹ**  
*sả* ‘lemon grass’ *sễ* ‘will’ *sẻ* ‘baggy’ *sỉ* ‘wholesale’ *sọ* ‘skull’ *sỏ* ‘notebook’ *sợ* ‘fear, afraid’ *sụ* ‘exuberant’  
*sứ* ‘china’ *sĩ/sỹ* ‘scholar’ || *săn* ‘to hunt’ *sản* ‘coarse’

✿ The unaspirated alveolar **t-** [tʰ] in Vietnamese is like the English unarticulated ‘t’ in the cluster **st-** as in *stay, steal, stamp*.

**tá - - té tệ tí tỏ tổ tờ tử từ tỹ**  
*tá* ‘dozen’ *té* ‘fall’ *tệ* ‘bad’ *tí* ‘tiny’ *tỏ* ‘apparent’ *tổ* ‘nest’ *tờ* ‘sheet’ *tử* ‘wardrobe’ *từ* ‘from’ *tỹ*  
‘billion’ || *tắt* ‘turn off’ *tắc* ‘decimeter’

✿ The fricative labio-dental **v-** [v] is very much like English **v-** [v] in *van, vice, vine, ...* It is merged in [j] or [bj] by speakers in the Saigon area and its vicinity. **Vă\_**, **vâ\_** and **vr\_** need final consonants:

**và - - vé về vì vỏ vỗ vỡ vụ - vy**  
*và* ‘and’ *vé* ‘ticket’ *về* ‘go home’ *vì* ‘because’ *vỏ* ‘bark (of tree)’ *vỗ* ‘clap’ *vỡ* ‘broken’ *vụ* ‘incident’ *vỹ*  
‘great’ || *văn* ‘literature’ *vẫn* ‘still’ *vững* ‘stable’

✿ The alveolar **x-** [s] is pronounced like the English **s-** [s] in *sing, son, soon, sung, ...*

**xa - - xé xế xì xỏ xỗ xơ xu xú xy**  
*xa* ‘far’ *xé* ‘to tear’ *xế* ‘past noon’ *xì* ‘leak’ *xỏ* ‘pierce’ *xỏ* ‘to relieve constipation’ *xơ* ‘fiber’ *xu* ‘cent’ *xú*  
‘country’ *xy-* (prefix) *xy-lanh* ‘cylinder’ || *xắt* ‘to slice’ *xấn* ‘push forward, cut down’

✿ The palatal **ch-** [c] is much softer than the English **ch-** since it is more gingival and implosive.

**chà - - chẻ ché chị chó chõ chờ chủ chử -**  
*chà* ‘to rub’ *chẻ* ‘to split’ *ché* ‘produce’ *chị* ‘older sister’ *chó* ‘dog’ *chõ* ‘location, site’ *chờ* ‘to wait’ *chủ*  
‘master, owner’ *chử* ‘word’ || *chẵn* ‘even (number)’ *chặn* ‘stop someone/something’ *Chy* does not exist.

This sound [c] merges with [f] **tr-** that can be found in Northerners’ speech: *chà* [cà] ‘to rub’ > *trà* ‘tea’  
*chẻ* ‘to split’ > *trẻ* [cẻ] > ‘young’ *ché* ‘produce’ > *tré* [cé] ‘Ø’ *chị* [cị] ‘older sister’ > *trị* ‘punish, rule’ *chó*  
‘dog’ > *tró* [cố] ‘basket’ *chõ* [cõ] ‘location, site’ > *trõ* ‘Ø’ *chờ* [cờ] ‘to wait’ > *trờ* ‘pull forward’ *chủ* ‘master,  
owner’ *chử* ‘word’ || *chẵn* ‘even (number)’ *chặn* ‘stop someone/ something’

✿ The velar **kh-** [x] is like English [k<sup>h</sup>] as in *key, can, cut, keen, ...*

**khá - - khẽ khế khí kho khô khờ khu khú -**  
*khá* ‘not bad’ *khẽ* ‘softly’ *khế* ‘starfruit’ *khí* ‘air’ *kho* ‘simmer’ *khỏ* ‘miserable’ *khờ* ‘silly’ *khu* ‘area’ *khú*  
‘to go’ || *khăn* ‘towel’ *khấn* ‘silent prayer’

✿ The velar **ng-** and **ng-** share the same pronunciation [ŋ] and their phonotactic constraints are similar to those of **g-** and **gh-**

**ngà - - - - - ngò ngô ngơ ngu ngư -**  
- - - **nghe nghe nghĩ** - - - - -  
*ngà* ‘ivory’ *ngò* ‘cilantro’ *ngô* (*bắp*) ‘corn’ *ngớ* ‘bewildered’ *ngu* ‘stupid’ *ngủ* ‘to sleep’ *ngư* ‘fish’ ||  
*ngắn* ‘short’ *ngân* ‘money, resound’ *nghe* ‘hear’ *nghe* ‘occupation’ *ngĩ* ‘to think’

✿ The palatal **nh-** [ɲ] is similar to English **-ny-** [ɲ] as in *canyon, Kenya*.

**nhà - - nhẹ nhẽ nhì nhỏ nhô nhớ nhu nhừ -**  
*nhà* ‘house, home’ *nhẹ* ‘light, soft’ *nhẽ* ‘excessive’ *nhì* ‘second’ *nhỏ* ‘small, little’ *nhô* ‘emerge’ *nhớ* ‘miss,  
remember’ *nhú* ‘to bud’ *nhừ* ‘well-stewed’ || *nhắm* ‘to aim’ *nhầm* ‘mistake’.

In the Central this sound [ɲ] turns into [j], especially in words with **a** [a] and **e** [ɛ]: *nhà* > [jà], *nhè nhẹ* [jè jẹ] softly and tenderly

✿ The alveolar-palatal **th-** [tʰ] is like the aspirated **t-** [tʰ] in English *time, two, tin, ...*

**tha - - thể thể thì thỏ thố thờ thú thử thy**

*thả* ‘release’ *thể* ‘pass’ *thề* ‘bethroth, vow’ *thì* ‘then’ *thỏ* ‘rabbit’ *thố* ‘urn’ *thờ* ‘worship’ *thú* ‘animal’ *thử* ‘try on’ *thy* ‘a proper name’ || *thắt* ‘tie’ *thân* ‘close to’ *thận* ‘kidney’

✿ The retroflex **tr-** [ʈ] is quite unfamiliar to non-Vietnamese speakers. Learners should spend time practicing this sound correctly.

**trà - - trẻ trẻ trĩ trở trở trở trú trữ -**

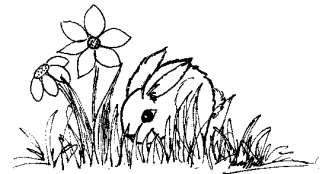
*trà* ‘tea’ *trẻ* ‘young’ *trễ* ‘late’ *trĩ* ‘hemorrhoid’ *trỏ* ‘point’ *trố* ‘stare (at)’ *trở* ‘turn’ *trú* ‘reside’ *trữ* ‘store’ || *trắng* ‘white’ *trận* ‘a game, battle’

✿ **Y-** can stand initially with the vowel **-ê-** in combination with final **m, n, t** or **u**.

**yêu yếu yếm yên yên tay tây tuy**

**yểu yễm yết táy táy tuý thấy thấy thủy**

*yêu* ‘love’ *yếu* ‘weak’ *yếm* ‘halter dress’ *yên* ‘saddle’ *yến* ‘oriole’ *tay* ‘hand, arm’ *tây* ‘west’ *tuy* ‘however’ *yểu* ‘premature’ *yễm* ‘support’ *yết* ‘post’ *táy* ‘meddle’ *táy* ‘severely’ *tuý* ‘essence’ *thấy* ‘toss’ *thấy* ‘toss’ *thấy* ‘see’ *thủy* ‘aqua’



Consonant-Vowel Pattern												
C \ V	a	ă	â	e	ê	i	o	ô	ơ	u	ư	y
<b>b</b>	ba	bă	bâ	bè	bê	bì	bồ	bộ	bờ	bù	bự	
<b>c</b>	ca	că	câ				cò	cô	cờ	cù	cự	
<b>k</b>	ka			kê	kề	kí						kỹ
<b>d</b>	da	dă	dâ	dè	dê	dì	dồ	đò	dờ	đu	đự	
<b>gi</b>	gia	giă	giâ	giê	giề	gì	gió	giồ	giờ	giũ	giữ	
<b>đ</b>	đa	đă	đâ	đè	đê	đì	đồ	đò	đờ	đu	đự	
<b>g</b>	ga	gă	gâ				gò	gô	gờ	gù	gự	
<b>gh</b>				ghê	ghề	ghi						
<b>h</b>	ha	hă	hâ	hè	hê	hí	họ	hồ	hờ	hũ	hự	hỹ
<b>l</b>	la	lă		lè	lề	lì	lò	lô	lờ	lũ	lự	lý
<b>n</b>	na	nă	nâ	né	nề	nì	nò	nô	nờ	nũ	nự	nỹ
<b>m</b>	ma	mă	mâ	mè	mề	mì	mò	mô	mờ	mũ		mỹ
<b>p</b>	pan		plă			pi						
<b>ph</b>	pha	phă	phâ	phe	phê	phi	pho	phô	phơ	phu		
<b>qu</b>	qua	quă	quâ	què	quề	quí	quô		quớ			quỹ
<b>r</b>	ra	ră	râ	rè	rề	rì	rồ	rô	rờ	rũ	rự	
<b>s</b>	sa	să	sâ	sè	sề	sì	sồ	sô	sờ	sũ	sự	sỹ
<b>t</b>	ta	tă	tâ	té	tề	tì	tồ	tô	tờ	tũ	tự	tỹ
<b>v</b>	va	vă	vâ	vè	về	vì	vồ	vô	vờ	vũ		vy
<b>x</b>	xa	xă	xâ	xé	xề	xì	xồ	xô	xờ	xu	xự	xy
<b>ch</b>	cha	chă	châ	chè	chề	chị	chó	chồ	chờ	chủ	chữ	
<b>kh</b>	kha	khă	khâ	khê	khề	khí	kho	khô	khờ	khủ	khử	
<b>ng</b>	nga	ngă	ngâ				ngò	ngô	ngờ	ngu	ngự	
<b>ng</b>				nghe	ngề	ngi						
<b>nh</b>	nha	nhă	nhâ	nhè	nhề	nhì	nhồ	nhô	nhờ	nhủ	nhự	
<b>th</b>	tha	thă	thâ	thè	thề	thì	thỏ	thố	thờ	thủ	thử	thy
<b>tr</b>	tra	tră	trâ	trè	trề	trĩ	trỏ	trố	trờ	trú	trữ	

Table 10: Vần phụ tự + chính tự có dấu – Consonant-single vowel and tonal marks combination

**b. Phụ tự + nhị hợp tự nhóm I – Consonants + group I dyads**

Vietnamese has 29 dyads, eleven of which need finals. But only five of the eleven are optionally final. These dyads always need finals: **iê, oã, oo, uâ, uô** and **ươ**. And these do not always need finals: **oa, oe, uê, ươ** and **uy**.

In this section there are 18 dyads that never need finals: **ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ư** and **ưi ưu**, and the five optional ones.

In brief, most initial consonants – alphabetically from **b** to **x** – can be combined with most of these dyads. The same rules, however, applied in the section of Consonant–vowel pattern work perfectly with dyads whose primary vowels meet the phonotactic constraints. Those marked with a dash ( - ) are non-phonotactic.

**b+** ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ư - ư

*bài* ‘lesson’ *bãi* ‘lot’ *bão* ‘storm’ *báu* ‘precious’ *bày* ‘show’ *bầu* ‘vote’ *bầy* ‘herd’ *béo* ‘fat, fatty’ *bệu* ‘corpulent’ *bia* ‘beer’ *bịu* ‘busy’ *bói* ‘fortune telling’ *bồi* ‘waiter’ *bơi* ‘to swim’ *búa* ‘hammer’ *bụi* ‘bush’ *bữa* ‘meal’ *buu* ‘postal’

**c+** ai ao au ay âu ây - - - - oi ôi ơi ua ui ư - ư

*cãi* ‘talk back’ *cào* ‘scratch’ *cáu* ‘annoyed’ *cay* ‘hot and spicy’ *cầu* ‘bridge’ *cây* ‘tree’ *coi* ‘see’ *cối* ‘take off’ *cởi* ‘take off’ *coi* ‘watch’ *cúi* ‘bend down’ *cứu* ‘rescue’

**ch+** ai ao au ay âu ây eo - ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ư - ư

*chải* ‘comb’ *chào* ‘greet, salute’ *cháu* ‘grandchild, nephew, niece’ *cháy* ‘burn’ *chậu* ‘tub’ *chảy* ‘to flow’ *chèo* ‘to row’ *chia* ‘to divide’ *chịu* ‘agree’ *chọi* ‘throw at’ *chối* ‘deny’ *chơi* ‘to play’ *chua* ‘sour’ *chùi* ‘clean’ *chứa* ‘contain’ *chửi* ‘to berate’ *chữu* ‘a proper name’

**d+** ai ao au ay âu ây eo - ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ư - -

*dài* ‘long’ *dáo* ‘spear’ *dàu* ‘withering’ *dạy* ‘teach’ *dầu* ‘oil’ *dây* ‘string’ *dẻo* ‘elastic’ *đĩa* ‘disk’ *dịu* ‘mild’ *đọi* ‘weight’ *đối* ‘false’ *dời* ‘move’ *đũa* ‘to pile up’ *dùi* ‘to bore (a hole)’ *dừa* ‘coconut’

**đ+** ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ư - -

*đãi* ‘treat s.o.’ *đào* ‘to dig’ *đau* ‘hurt’ *đáy* ‘bottom’ *đâu* ‘where’ *đeo* ‘to wear’ *đều* ‘all, altogether’ *đĩa* ‘dish’ *điều* ‘leafless tree’ *đói* ‘hungry’ *đồi* ‘hill’ *đời* ‘life’ *đua* ‘to race’ *đui* ‘blind’ *đứa* ‘a child’

**g+** ai ao au ay âu ây - - - - oi ôi ơi - ui - - -

*gãi* ‘to scratch’ *gào* ‘to moan’ *gàu* ‘bucket’ *gãy* ‘broken’ *gấu* ‘bear’ *gầy* ‘thin’ {N} *gọi* ‘to call’ *gối* ‘pillow’ *gởi* ‘to send’ *gùi* ‘backbasket (backpack)’

**gi+** ai ao au ay âu ây - - - - oi ôi ơi ua ui ư - -

*giải* ‘to resolve’ *giáo* ‘to teach’ *giàu* ‘rich’ *giày* ‘shoe’ *giấu* ‘to hide’ *gieo* ‘to sow’ *giễu* ‘to tease’ *giỏi* ‘well’ *giới* ‘to make a will’ *giới* ‘class’ *giữa* ‘file (as in nail file)’ *giúi* ‘thrust into’ *giữa* ‘between, in the middle’

**gh+** - - - - eo - - - - - - - - -

*ghẹo* ‘to tease’

**h+** ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ư - ư

*hai* ‘two’ *hào* ‘oyster’ *hãy* ‘let’s’ *hầu* ‘servant’ *hây* ‘reddish’ *heo* ‘pig’ *hếu* ‘morning light’ *hia* ‘boot’ *hiu* ‘haughty’ *hói* ‘bald’ *hôi* ‘stingy’ *hời* ‘cheap’ *hùa* ‘take sides’ *húi* ‘to cut’ *hứa* ‘to promise’ *huru* ‘retire’

**k+** a - - - - eo êu ia iu - - - - -

*ka-li* ‘kalinite’ *kẹo* ‘candy’ *kêu* ‘to call’ *kia* ‘there, that’ *kêu* ‘creaking (onomatopoeia)’

**kh+** ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ư - ư

*khai* ‘open’ *khao* ‘to treat’ *kháu* ‘cute’ *khay* ‘tray’ *khâu* ‘to sew’ *khẩy* ‘mocking’ *khéo* ‘skillful’ *khêu* ‘pry up’ *khía* ‘notch’ *khieu* ‘slim’ *khói* ‘smoke’ *khối* ‘cube’ *khởi* ‘to gnaw’ *khua* ‘rattle’ *khui* ‘uncork’ *khứa* ‘guest’ *khứu* ‘nose’

**l+** ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ư - ư

*lái* ‘drive’ *lão* ‘old’ *lạy* ‘kowitz’ *lầu* ‘story (of building)’ *lấy* ‘to take’ *lèo* ‘leading line (of sail)’ *lều* ‘tent’ *li*

‘separate’ *liu* ‘twittering’ *lôi* ‘core’ *lỗi* ‘mistake’ *lời* ‘word’ *lúa* ‘rice’ *lui* ‘retreat’ *lửa* ‘fire’ *lựu* ‘pomegranate’

**m+ ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ưạ - ưư**

*mài* ‘to grind’ *mão* ‘hat’ *máy* ‘machine’ *mẫu* ‘sample’ *mấy* ‘how many’ *méo* ‘unrounded’ *mếu* ‘about to cry’  
*mía* ‘sugar cane’ *mỉu* ‘cat’ *mỏi* ‘tired’ *mỗi* ‘each’ *mời* ‘to invite’ *múa* ‘dance’ *múi* ‘clove’ *mưa* ‘rain’ *mur*  
‘scheme’

**n+ ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ưạ - ưư**

*nài* ‘to plead to’ *não* ‘brain’ *này* ‘this’ *nâu* ‘brown’ *nầy* ‘this’ *nẻo* ‘way’ *nếu* ‘if’ *nĩa* ‘fork’ *níu* ‘to cleave’  
*nói* ‘to speak’ *nồi* ‘pot’ *nơi* ‘location’ *nua* ‘very old’ *núi* ‘mountain’ *nữa* ‘more’ *nữu* ‘new (as in New York)’

**ng+ ai ao au ay âu ây - - - - oi ôi ơi ua ui ưạ - ưư**

*ngài* ‘sir’ *ngạo* ‘haughty’ *ngàu* ‘muddy’ *ngày* ‘day’ *ngấy* ‘fed up’ *ngói* ‘tile (roofing)’ *ngồi* ‘to sit’ *ngời*  
‘glossy’ *ngựa* ‘to drown in’ *ngúi* ‘rather short’ *ngựa* ‘horse’ *ngư* ‘ox’

**ngh+ - - - - eo êu ia iu - - - - - - - -**

*nghèo* ‘poor’ *nghệu* ‘lofty’ *ngía* ‘gazing’ *ngịu* ‘blushing’

**nh+ ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ưạ - -**

*nhai* ‘to chew’ *nhào* ‘topple’ *nhau* ‘each other, one another’ *nhạy* ‘sensitive’ *nhậu* ‘to booze’ *nhầy* ‘viscous’ *nhéo* ‘to  
pinch’ *nhễu* ‘dripping’ *nhĩa* ‘gaze’ *nhíu* ‘frown’ *nhối* ‘painful’ *nhôi* ‘stuff’ *nhoi* ‘lazy (of eating)’ *nhúa* ‘dirty’ *nhụi* ‘clean’  
*nhựa* ‘plastic’

**ph+ ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi - ui ưạ - -**

*phải* ‘right, correct’ *phao* ‘buoy’ *phay* ‘cut’ *phẫu* ‘dissect’ *phẩy* ‘comma’ *phèo* ‘intestine’ *phễu*  
‘funnel’ *phía* ‘side’ *phiu* ‘flat’ *phối* ‘lung’ *phơi* ‘dry in the sun’ *phui* ‘disclose’ *phạ* ‘overly ...’

**qu+ ai ao - ay âu ây eo êu - iu - - ơi - - - - -**

*quai* ‘strap’ *quào* ‘scratch’ *quày* ‘counter’ *quậu* ‘upset’ *quấy* ‘disturb, wrong’ *quẹo* ‘to turn’ *quều* ‘to pull  
with a hook’ *quúu* ‘overwhelmed with fear’ *quớu* ‘precious’ (a variant of *quý*)

**r+ ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ưạ - -**

*rãi* ‘to sow’ *rảo* ‘to hasten’ *rau* ‘vegetable’ *rảy* ‘jar off’ *râu* ‘beard’ *réo* ‘to yield’ *rêu* ‘moss’ *rìu* ‘adz’ *rià*  
‘edge’ *roi* ‘rod’ *rôi* ‘already, then’ *rời* ‘to leave’ *rùa* ‘turtle’ *rủi* ‘unfortunate’ *rửa* ‘to wash’

**s+ ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ưạ - ưư**

*sái* ‘sprain’ *sáo* ‘flute’ *sáu* ‘six’ *say* ‘drunk’ *sâu* ‘caterpillar’ *sấy* ‘air dry’ *sẹo* ‘scar’ *sếu* ‘stork’ *sĩa* ‘lose  
balance’ *siu* ‘stale’ *sói* ‘bald, wolf’ *sôi* ‘boiling’ *sởi* ‘measles’ *sũa* ‘to bark’ *sui* ‘in-law’ *sữa* ‘jelly fish’ *suru* ‘head  
tax’

**t+ ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ưạ - ưư**

*tài* ‘talent’ *táo* ‘apple’ *tàu* ‘ship, train’ *tay* ‘arm’ *tậu* ‘to purchase’ *tẩy* ‘to bleach’ *teo* ‘atrophy’ *tếu* ‘funny’ *tĩa*  
‘to trim’ *tíu* ‘high-legged table’ *tôi* ‘garlic’ *tôi* ‘I, me’ *tới* ‘to come’ *tua* ‘tassel’ *túi* ‘pocket’ *tựa* ‘preface’ *từu*  
‘wine’

**th+ ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ưạ - ưư**

*thải* ‘to waste, discard’ *tháo* ‘disassemble’ *thau* ‘basin’ *thảy* ‘to toss’ *thầu* ‘work on contract’ *thấy* ‘to see’  
*theo* ‘to follow’ *thêu* ‘to embroider’ *thìa* ‘spoon’ *thiu* ‘stale’ *thỏi* ‘stick’ *thổi* ‘to blow’ *thời* ‘period’ *thua* ‘to  
lose’ *thúi* ‘stingy’ *thừa* ‘extra’ *thứu* ‘a legendary bird’

**tr+ ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ưạ - ưư**

*trái* ‘left, wrong’ *trào* ‘overflow’ *trấu trẩu* ‘bee eater’ *tráy* ‘a kind of bamboo’ *trâu* ‘water buffalo’ *trây* ‘to stain  
with dirt, litter’ *treo* ‘to hang’ *trêu* ‘to tease’ *trĩa* ‘to sow (seeds)’ *trĩu* ‘to give under weight’ *trói* ‘to tie’ *trỗi* ‘emerge’  
*trời* ‘sky, heaven, it (of weather)’ *trụa* ‘scratched, cut, worn’ *trụi* ‘leafless’ *trưa* ‘noon’ *trừu* ‘sheep’

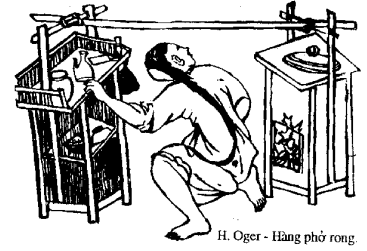
**v+ ai ao - ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ưạ - ưư**

*vài* ‘some’ *vào* ‘to enter’ *váy* ‘skirt’ *vấu* ‘knot’ *vẫy* ‘to wave’ *vẹo* ‘awry’ *vều* ‘inflammatory’ *vĩa* ‘side’ *víu*  
‘to hold’ *vòi* ‘tusk’ *vôi* ‘limestone’ *với* ‘to reach’ *vua* ‘king’ *vui* ‘merry, joyous’ *vừa* ‘to fit, enough, just’ *vừu*  
‘pretty’

**x+ ai ao au ay âu ây eo êu ia iu oi ôi ơi ua ui ưạ - ưư**

*xài* ‘to spend’ *xáo* ‘mess up’ *xàu* ‘to fade’ *xay* ‘to grind’ *xấu* ‘bad’ *xây* ‘to build’ *xéo* ‘slanting’ *xêu* ‘scoop’  
*xĩa* ‘to pick (teeth)’ *xìu* ‘flatten’ *xói* ‘to poke (the ground)’ *xối* ‘to pour water onto’ *xới* ‘to turn over’ *xua* ‘to drive  
away’ *xui* ‘unlucky’ *xua* ‘in the old days’ *xíu* ‘to seize’

Consonant-Vowel Pattern (cont'd)														
gh+							eo							
k+							eo	êu	ia	iu				
ng+							eo	êu	ia	iu				
qu+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	-	iu			oi	
g+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây					oi	ôi	ơ	-
gi+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây					oi	ôi	ơ	ua
ng+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây					oi	ôi	ơ	ua
c+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây					oi	ôi	ơ	ua
ph+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	-
d+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	-	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
đ+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
nh+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
r+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
v+	ai	ao	-	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
ch+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	-	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
b+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
h+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
kh+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
l+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
m+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
n+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
s+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
t+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
th+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
tr+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua
x+	ai	ao	au	ay	âu	ây	eo	êu	ia	iu	oi	ôi	ơ	ua



H. Oger - Hàng phố rong

Table 11: Phụ tự +nhị hợp tự nhóm I phối hợp – Consonant-dyads of group I combinations

**c. Phụ tự + nhị hợp tự nhóm II – Consonant + group II dyads**

Group II can take finals optionally. They are: **oa oe uê uơ uy**, and in combination with limited initials.

**b+** oa - - - -

*boa* ‘gratuity, tip’ (from French *pourboire*)

**ch+** oa oe uê - uy

*choá* ‘dazzled’ *choe choé* ‘to shriek’ *chúé* ‘excrescence’ *chuy* ‘bludgeon’

**d+** oa - uê - uy

*doạ* ‘to menace, threaten’ *duê* ‘offspring’ *duy* ‘but, except’

**đ+** oa - - - -

*đoá* ‘classifier for flower’ *đoạ* ‘to fall down’

**g+** oa - - - -

*goá* ‘widowed’

**h+** oa oe uê uơ uy

*hoa* ‘flower’ *hoe* ‘colorful, bright’ *huê* ‘lily’ *huơ* ‘sweep off’ (variant of *quơ*) *huy* ‘alias’

In the South, this **h-** disappears as if the syllable were made of one single dyad. For example: *hoa* [hwa] > [wa].

**kh+** oa oe uê - uy

*khoá* ‘nude’ *khoe* ‘show off’ *khuê* ‘noble woman’ *khuy* ‘flop down’

**l+** oa oe - - uy

*loa* ‘speaker’ *loá* ‘blind’ *loê* ‘to bluff s.o.’ *luy* ‘hedge, wall, lui’

**m+** oa - - - -



*moa* ‘from French *moi*’ *moá* (a variant of *moa*)

**ng+** **oa** **oe** - - **uy**

*ngoa* ‘peevish’ *ngoa* ‘to sit down’ *ngoé* ‘green frog’ *nguy* ‘hazardous’

**nh+** **oa** **oe** **uê** - **uy**

*nhoà* ‘blurred’ *nhoè* ‘to mackle’ *nhuê* ‘strong’ *nhuy* ‘stamen’

**ph+** - - - - **uy**

*phuy* ‘container’

**s+** - - **uê** - **uy**

*suê* ‘luxuriant – a variant of *sê*’ *suy* ‘to decline, recess’

**t+** **oa** **oe** **uê** **uơ** **uy**

*toà* ‘court’ *toè* ‘flatten out (of pen)’ *tuê* ‘root of intellect’ *tuơ* ‘become loose’ *tuy* ‘depending’

**th+** **oa** - **uê** **uơ** **uy**

*thoa* ‘to rub’ *thuê* ‘tax’ *thuở* ‘period -hood’ *thuy* ‘aqua’

**tr+** - - - - **uy**

*truy* ‘go after, smoke s.o/s.t. out’

**x+** **oa** **oe** **uê** - **uy**

*xoá* ‘to erase’ *xoè* ‘to open out’ *xuê* ‘fine’ *xuy xoá* ‘to do away with’



Consonant-Vowel Pattern (cont'd)										
<b>b+</b>	oa					<b>ng+</b>	oa	oe		uy
<b>ch+</b>	oa	oe	uê		uy	<b>nh+</b>	oa	oe	uê	uy
<b>d+</b>	oa		uê		uy	<b>ph+</b>				uy
<b>đ+</b>	oa					<b>s+</b>			uê	uy
<b>g+</b>	oa					<b>t+</b>	oa	oe	uê	uơ
<b>h+</b>	oa	oe	uê	uơ	uy	<b>th+</b>	oa		uê	uơ
<b>kh+</b>	oa	oe	uê		uy	<b>tr+</b>				uy
<b>l+</b>	oa	oe			uy	<b>x+</b>	oa	oe	uê	uy
<b>m+</b>	oa									

Table 12: Phụ tự + nhị hợp tự nhóm 2 phối hợp – Consonant-dyads of group II combinations

**d. Phụ tự + nhị hợp tự nhóm 3 – Consonants + group III dyads**

Group III dyads always need finals: **iê** **oã** **oo** **uâ** **uô** **uơ**, and they never stand initially. See details in section 4-a (Table 14).

**đ. Phụ tự + tam hợp tự – Consonants + triads**

This pattern is part of the C-V pattern. Of 12 triphthongs in Vietnamese, there is only one that needs a final: *uyê\_*. The rest comply perfectly with this pattern: **iêu** **oai** **oao** **oay** **o eo** **uây** **uôi** **uya** **uyu** **uơ** **uơu**. However, their combinations with initial consonants are limited.

**b+** **iêu** - - - - **uôi** - - - -

*biểu* ‘to give (gift)’ *buổi* ‘part of a day’

**ch+** **iêu** **oai** - - - - **uôi** - - - -

*chiều* ‘afternoon’ *choai* ‘preadolescent’ *chuôi* ‘pommel’

**d+** **iêu** - - - - **uôi** - - **uơ** - -

*diều* ‘kite’ *đuôi* ‘extend (arm/leg)’ *dưới* ‘under’

**đ+** **iêu** **oai** - - - - **uôi** - - **uơ** - -

*điều* ‘article (law)’ *đoài* ‘west’ *đuôi* ‘tail’ *đười ươi* ‘ape’

**h+** **iêu** **oai** - **oay** - - - - **uơu**

*hiểu* ‘to understand’ *hoài* ‘all the time’ *hoáy* ‘busy doing’ *hươu* ‘deer’

**kh+ iêu oai - - - uây - uya uy uoi uou**  
*khiêu* ‘to excite’ *khoái* ‘enjoyable’ *khuấy* ‘stir’ *khuya* ‘midnight’ *khuyu* ‘to collapse’ *khroi* ‘bring up, stir up’ *khrou* ‘jay (bird)’

**l+ iêu oai - oay - - - - uoi -**  
*liêu* ‘take risk’ *loài* ‘kind, species’ *loay hoay* ‘busy doing s.t.’ *lười* ‘lazy’

**m+ iêu - - - - uôi - - uoi uou**  
*miếu* ‘temple’ *muỗi* ‘mosquito’ *mười* ‘ten’ *muối* ‘a Viet verse intro’

**n+ iêu - - - - - - - - -**  
*niêu* ‘clay pot’ *nuôi* ‘nurture’

**ng+ - oai oao oay oeo uây uôi - - uoi -**  
*ngoài* ‘outside’ *ngoáo* ‘bugaboo’ *ngoáy* ‘look over the shoulder’ *ngoè* ‘winding’ *nguồn* ‘to wag (tail)’  
*ngội* ‘cool down’ *người* ‘people’

**nh+ iêu - - - - - - - - -**  
*nhieu* ‘many’ *nhòi* ‘to dive for’

**ph+ iêu - - - - - - - - -**  
*phiêu* ‘adventurous’

**th+ iêu - - - - - - - - -**  
*thieu* ‘to incinerate’

**tr+ iêu - - - - - uôi - - - -**  
*triều* ‘dynasty, tide’ *truôi* ‘locative name (in Huế-Central Vietnam)’

**x+ iêu oai - oay - - uôi - - - -**  
*xiêu* ‘to incline’ *xoài* ‘mango’ *xoay* ‘to turn’ *xuôi* ‘downward’

Consonant-Vowel Pattern (cont'd)												
IC	iêu	oai	oao	oay	oeo	uây	uêu	uôi	uya	uyu	uoi	uou
<b>b+</b>	iêu							uôi				
<b>ch+</b>	iêu	oai						uôi				
<b>d+</b>	iêu							uôi			uoi	
<b>đ+</b>	iêu	oai						uôi			uoi	
<b>h+</b>	iêu	oai		oay								uou
<b>kh+</b>	iêu	oai		oay	oeo	uây			uya	uyu	uoi	uou
<b>l+</b>	iêu	oai						uôi			uoi	
<b>m+</b>	iêu							uôi			uoi	uou
<b>n+</b>	iêu							uôi			uoi	uou
<b>ng+</b>		oai	oao	oay	oeo	uây	uêu	uôi			uoi	
<b>nh+</b>	iêu											
<b>ph+</b>	iêu	oai										
<b>th+</b>	iêu	oai										
<b>tr+</b>	iêu							uôi				
<b>x+</b>	iêu	oai		oay				uôi				

Table 13: Phụ tự đầu + tam hợp tự – Initial Consonants (IC)-Triphthongs

#### 4. Vần Phụ + Chính + Phụ Tự – Consonant-Vowel-Consonant Pattern

The third syllabic composition is C-V-C. This pattern includes most of the initials in addition to the eleven dyads in groups II and III covering a great part of the Vietnamese vocabulary. Review tables 5, 6 and 8.

**a. Phụ tự + âm chính đơn + phụ tự – Consonant-single vowel-consonant**

\* *bác* ‘paternal uncle, father’s older brother’ *cát* ‘sand’ *chính* ‘principal’ *dành* ‘to save’ *giành* ‘fight over s.t.’ *đất* ‘earth, dirt’ *gút* ‘knot’ *học* ‘to study, learn’ *không* ‘no, not, null’ *lưng* ‘back’ *mong* ‘look forward to’ *nín* ‘stop crying’ *ngó* ‘to look’ *ngịch* ‘playful’ *nhích* ‘to inch’ *phông* ‘background (picture)’ *quýnh* ‘overwhelmed’ *rung* ‘to ring’ *swong* ‘dew’ *túng* ‘be broke’ *thích* ‘to like’ *tránh* ‘avoid’ *vững* ‘stable’ *xong* ‘finish, complete’

**b. Phụ + nhị hợp tự nhóm II và III + phụ tự cuối – Consonant + dyad of group 2 and 3 + final**

\* C-V (group II)-C: The onglide dyads are *oa eo uê uơ uy*. These can take finals optionally. Initial consonants compatible with dyads (See Table 8) will be expanded and modified with addition of the eight final consonants: **-c -ch -ng -nh -m -n -p** and **-t**. Combinations with initial consonants, finals and tonal marks are fairly limited:

*buýt* ‘bus (from French autobus)’;

*choác* ‘play drug (slang)’ *choán* ‘occupied’ *choẹt* ‘too young’ *chuyệt choạc* ‘out of order’;

*doãn* ‘to consent’ *doành* ‘current of water’ *doạng* ‘astride (variant of *giạng*)’ *doanh* ‘quarters (lodging)’ *duềnh* ‘cliff’;

*đoác* ‘palm tree’ *đoàn* ‘group, team’ *đoảng* ‘unskilled’ *đoành* ‘bang (gunshot)’ *đoạt* ‘seize upon’ *đuểng* *đoảng* ‘insipid’;

*hoác* ‘widely’ *hoạch* ‘stroke, bar, line’ *hoàn* ‘pill, round thing’ *hoảng* ‘terrified’ *hoành* ‘crosswide’ *hoạt* ‘active, lively’ *hoen* ‘stained’ *hoét* ‘glaringly’ *huyếch* ‘too large’ *huênh hoang* ‘showy (person)’ *huôn* ‘free (time)’ *huych* ‘thug (falling)’ *huỳnh huych* ‘clumpsily (of walking)’ *huyt* ‘whistle’;

*khoác* ‘put on (overcoat)’ *khoản* ‘part of something’ *khoảng* ‘mineral’ *khoảnh* ‘plot (of land)’ *khoát* ‘scoop up (water)’ *khuynh* ‘to subvert’ *khuyt* ‘close in’;

*loác choạc* ‘incoherent’ *loạn* ‘chaos’ *loãng* ‘dilute, watery (soup)’ *loanh quanh* ‘move around’ *loạt* ‘series’ *loen loét* ‘to gape open (of wound)’ *luych* ‘luxury; luxe (French)’ *luyt quýnh* ‘to show perturbation’;

*ngoác* ‘(open) widely’ *ngoạch* ‘to scribble off’ *ngoạm* ‘to snap up’ *ngoan ngoãn* ‘obedient (of child)’ *ngoảnh* ‘look away’ *ngóáp* ‘to bubble, gape (variant of *ngáp*)’ *ngoém* ‘to wolf down’ *ngoễn ngoễn* ‘shameless’ *ngoét* ‘awfully’ *nguech ngoac* ‘carelessly (of handwriting)’ *nguồn* ‘origin, beginning, primary (variant of *nguyên*)’ *nguyt* ‘to look askance at s.o.’;

*nhoàm* ‘piglike manner (of eating)’ *nhoảng* ‘like lightning’ *nhoẻn* ‘about to grin’ *nhoét* ‘not in shape’;

*soạn* ‘prepare’ *soát* ‘to check, inspect’ *suýt* ‘at a close shave (a variant of *xuýt*)’;

*toác* ‘to crack, split’ *toàn* ‘all, entire’ *toang* ‘widely’ (*mới*) *toanh* ‘brand (new)’ *toát* ‘to secrete’ *tuếch* ‘completely’ *tuýt* ‘rock-n-roll’;

*thoan* ‘to lay hold of’ *thoang thoảng* ‘wafted s.t.’ *thoát* ‘escape’;

*xoác* ‘astride’ *xoàm* ‘disheveled’ *xoành xoạch* ‘continuously, endlessly’ *xoàn* ‘diamond’ *xoạt xoạt* ‘tearing sound (onomatopoeia)’ *xoen xoét* ‘to jabber’ *xoẹt* ‘flash’ *xuếch xoạc* ‘shabby’ *xuềnh xoàng* ‘plain dress’ *xuyt* ‘to hush s.o. to silence’

Consonant-Vowel-Consonant Pattern										
IC	oa	FC	oe	FC	uê	FC	uơ	FC	uy	FC
b+	oa								uy	t
ch+	oa	c,n	oe	t	uê	ch,nh			uy	
d+	oa	n,ng,nh			uê	nh			uy	
đ+	oa	c,n,ng,nh,t			uê	nh				
h+	oa	c, ch, ng, nh,t	oe	n,t	uê	ch,nh	uơ	n	uy	ch,nh,t
kh+	oa	c, ch, n, ng, nh,t	oe	n,t	uê	ch			uy	nh,p
l+	oa	c, n, ng, nh,t	oe	n,t					uy	ch,nh
ng+	oa	c, ch, m, n, nh, p	oe	m, n, t	uê	ch	uơ	n	uy	t
nh+	oa	m, ng	oe	n, t	uê		uơ		uy	
s+	oa	n, t			uê				uy	t
t+	oa	c, n, ng, nh, t	oe	n, t	uê	ch	uơ		uy	t
th+	oa	n, ng, t			uê		uơ		uy	
x+	oa	c, ch, m, n, ng, nh, t	oe	n, t	uê	ch, nh			uy	t

**Table 14:** Dạng phụ-chính-phụ + nhị hợp tự nhóm II – C-V-C pattern with group ii dyads. **ic** ‘initial consonant’; **fc** ‘final consonant’

✱ **C-V (Group III)-C:** Group III dyads are **iê oã oo uâ uô uơ**. Like those in group II, they can combine with most initials and a limited number of finals, phonologically and semantically.

*biếc* ‘pure (of blue color)’ *biếm* ‘sarcasm’ *biển* ‘sea’ *lười biếng* ‘lazy’ *boong tàu* ‘ship deck’ *buộc* ‘to tie’ *buồm* ‘sail’ *buồn* ‘sad’ *buồng* ‘room’ *buột* ‘impulsively’ *bước* ‘to step’ *bướm* ‘butterfly’ *buồn* ‘in a hurry’ *buồng* ‘stubborn’

*coọc* ‘a kind of fruit’ *coong* ‘jing-a-ling (onomatopoeia)’ *cuộc* ‘course of’ *cuỗm* ‘to steal (slang)’ *cuốn* ‘to roll’ *cuồng* ‘mad’ *cước* ‘fee’ *cườm* ‘glass bead’ *cường* ‘energetic, strong’ *cướp* ‘to rob’

*chiếc* ‘an item’ *chiếm* ‘to occupy’ *chiên* ‘to fry’ *chiêng* ‘gong’ *chiết* ‘extract’ *chuẩn* ‘standard’ *chước* ‘buy back, redeem’ *chươm* ‘small pond’ *chuồn chuồn* ‘dragon fly’ *chượng* ‘favor’ *chuột* ‘rat, mouse’ *chước* ‘trick’ *chườm* ‘apply (treatment)’ *chường* ‘hard-to-please’ *chượp* ‘fish resource (to make fish source)’

*diệc* ‘heron’ *diễm* ‘beautiful’ *diện* ‘dandy’ *diệp* ‘leaf’ *đuần* ‘bamboo shoot’ *duật* ‘cloud of three colors’ *đuóm* ‘be infected (variant of *nhuộm*)’ *duỡng* ‘handle with care’ *dượt* ‘practice’

*điếc* ‘deaf’ *điểm* ‘point’ *điện* ‘electricity’ *điêng* ‘stunningly’ *diệp* ‘halibut’ *đuốc* ‘torch’ *đuồm uồm* ‘to roar’ *đuôn đuôn* ‘without ramification’ *đuông* ‘palm-worm’ *đường* ‘road, sugar’ *đuột* ‘straight’ *được* ‘favorably’ *đượm* ‘well burning’ *đườn* ‘at full length’ *đường* ‘sugar, road’

*giêng* ‘first month of the lunar year’ *giếng* ‘well (water)’ *goòng* ‘car (of train, coach)’ *guốc* ‘wooden shoes’ *guộn* ‘to roll up (a variant of *cuộn*)’ *guồng* ‘system’ *guột* ‘a tree’ *guôm* ‘sword’ *guơng* ‘glass, mirror’

*góm* *ghiếc* ‘distastefully’ *ghiền* ‘be addicted (a variant of *nghiện*)’

*hiếm* ‘rare’ *hiền* ‘meek’ *hiêng* ‘squint’ *hiệp* ‘to combine’ *hiệt* ‘straight neck’ *hoặc* ‘or, untrue’ *hoảm* ‘very (of depth)’ *hoàng* ‘large, great’ *hoắt* ‘sharp’ *huấn* ‘teaching’ *huống* ‘situational’ *huốt* ‘in one breath’ *hước* ‘humorous’ *hườm* ‘rosy ripe’ *hườn* ‘pill, roundish shape (a variant of *hoàn*)’ *hương* ‘fragrance’

*kiểm* ‘to check’ *kiên* ‘persistent’ *kiếng* ‘glass’ *kiếp* ‘karmic life’ *kiệt* ‘stingy’

*liếc* ‘to glance’ *liếm* ‘to lick’ *liên* ‘contiguous’ *liêng* ‘to throw’ *liếp* ‘bamboo wattle’ *liệt* ‘paralysed’ *loét* ‘to gape open’ *loãn xoãn* ‘to fuss around’ *loàng ngoàng* ‘zigzags’ *loắt choắt* ‘tiny’ *loong toong* ‘pager (from French *pluton*)’ *luận* ‘composition, essay’ *luật* ‘law’ *lược* ‘to boil’ *lụa* *thuộm* ‘neglectful’ *luôn luôn* ‘always’ *luống* ‘bed (of vegetables)’ *lượt* ‘slip off’ *lược* ‘briefly, comb’ *lượm* ‘pick up’ *lườn* ‘flank’ *lương* ‘salary’ *lượt* ‘time(s)’

*miền* ‘region’ *miệng* ‘mouth’ *miết* ‘to rub gently’ *moóc-chê* ‘mortar’ *muỗm* ‘sour mango’ *muộn* ‘late, retard’ *muống* ‘morning glory (veggie)’ *muốt* ‘nicely’ *mược* ‘leave s.o. alone, variant of *mặc*’ *mượn* ‘to borrow’ *mương*

'ditch' *mướp* 'gourd'

*niên* 'year' *niễng* 'water-zizania' *niết* 'papyrus' *nuộc* 'turn (rope, chain)' *nuốm* 'knob, handle' *nuông* 'to coddle' *nuốt* 'to swallow' *nước* 'water' *nuòm nuọp* 'a great number' *nuong* 'to lean on'

*ngoắc* 'to wave to s.o.' *ngoằn ngoèo* 'winding (road)' *ngoằng* 'lengthy' *nguồn* 'source' *ngước* 'look up' *ngưỡng* 'admire'

*nghiêm* 'serious' *nghiên* 'ink stand' *nghiêng* 'inclined' *nghiệp* 'karma';

*nhiếc* 'reprimand' *nhiễm* 'infected' *nhiên* 'to kindle' *nhiếp* 'to collect' *nhiệt* 'heat' *nhuần* 'saturated' *nhuốc* 'shame' *nhuộm* 'to dye' *nhược* 'weak' *nhưón* 'to crane (neck) also *nhướng*', raise' *nhường* 'to cede'

*phiếm* 'idle (talking)' *phiến* 'plate, sheet' *phiệt* 'peppery' *phước* 'from French *fourche*' *phước* 'be blessed' *phướn* 'pennant' *phường* 'ward'

*riềm* 'border' *riển* 'perfectly (fit)' *riêng* 'own, private' *riết* 'firmly' *ruốc* 'shrimp sauce' *ruộm* 'to dye (variant of *nhuộm*)' *ruôn ruốt* 'hastily' *ruộng* 'rice paddy' *ruột* 'intestine' *rước* 'to greet' *rướm* 'bleeding' *rướn* 'stretch out' *rương* 'trunk' *rượt* 'to chase'

*siếc* 'to make a complaint' *siểm* 'to flatter' *siêng* 'assiduous' *siết* 'to clasp' *soóc* 'shorts' *soong* 'casserole' *suất* 'part, portion' *suôn* 'shrimp soup' *suông* 'empty (of words)' *suốt* 'during, whole' *suòn* 'rib' *suống* 'pleasant' *suốt* 'to graze (one's skin)'

*tiếc* 'to regret' *tiệm* 'store' *tiện* 'convenient' *tiếng* 'word, language' *tiếp* 'to continue' *tiết* 'time, period' (*ba toong* 'baton' *tuần* 'week' *tuất* allowance' *tuộc* 'octopus: *bạch tuộc*' *tuôn* 'flow, dash off' *tuông* 'overrun' *tuột* 'slip, take off' *tước* 'rank' *tươm* 'to ooze (of blood)' *tươn* 'to advance (variant of *tiến*)' *tường* 'wall' *tướt* 'diarrhea (pedia)')

*thiếc* 'tin' *thiêm* 'to add' *thiên* 'chapter' *thiêng* 'miraculous' *thiếp* 'card' *thiết* 'close, intimate' *thoăn* (*thoắt*) 'quick and clever' *thoảng* 'a blue streak' *thoắt* 'in a flash' *thuận* 'to agree' *thuật* 'way, method' *thuốc* 'drug, tobacco' (*luộm*) *thuộm* 'clumsy' *thuôn* 'tapering' *thuổng* 'digging shovel' *thước* 'ruler' *thườn* *thợt* 'trailing long' *thưởng* 'reward' *thướt tha* 'graceful'

*triện* 'seal' *triêng* 'brim, edge' *triết* 'philosophy' *truân* 'toilsome' *truat* 'to dismiss' *truông* 'dense woods' *trước* 'before' *trườn* 'to creep' *trường* 'school' *trượt* 'slip'

*việc* 'job' *viêm* 'inflammatory' *viện* 'institute' *viếng* 'to visit' *việt* 'super' *vuông* 'square' *vuốt* 'jaws' *vược* 'sea perch' *vươn* 'to rise' *vướng* 'to be caught' *vượt* 'overcome'

*xiếc* 'circus' *xiên* 'slant' *xiềng* 'shackle' *xiết* 'swiftly' *xoắn* 'twisted' *xoắt* 'promptly' *xoong* 'casserole (variant of *soong*)' *xuân* 'spring' *xuất* 'exit' *xuốc* 'to sweep (variant of *quét*)' *xước* 'to graze one's skin' *xướng* 'announce'.



Consonant-Vowel-Consonant Pattern												
	iê	FC	oã	FC	oo	FC	uâ	FC	uô	FC	tr	FC
<b>b</b>	iê	c,m,n,ng	-	-	oo	ng	-	-	uô	c,m,ng,t	tr	c,m,ng
<b>c</b>	-	-	-	-	oo	c,ng	-	-	uô	c,m,n,ng	tr	c,m,ng,p
<b>ch</b>	iê	c,m,n,ng,t	-	-	-	-	uâ	n	uô	c,m,n,ng,t	tr	c,m,n,ng,p
<b>d</b>	iê	c,m,n,p	-	-	-	-	uâ	n,t	uô	m,ng	tr	c,n,ng,t
<b>đ</b>	iê	c,m,n,ng,p	-	-	-	-	-	-	uô	c,m,n,ng,t	tr	c,m,n,ng
<b>g</b>	-	-	-	-	oo	ng	-	-	uô	c,n,ng,t	tr	m,ng
<b>gh</b>	iê	c,n	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>h</b>	iê	m,n,ng,nh,p,t	oã	c,m,ng,t	-	-	uâ	n	uô	ng,t	tr	c,m,n,ng
<b>k</b>	iê	m,n,ng,p,t	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>l</b>	iê	c,m,n,ng,p,t	oã	n,ng,t	oo	ng	uâ	n,t	uô	c,m,n,ng,t	tr	c,m,n,ng,t
<b>m</b>	iê	n,ng,t	-	-	oo	c	-	-	uô	m,n,ng,t	tr	c,n,ng,p,t
<b>n</b>	iê	n,ng,t	-	-	-	-	-	-	uô	c,m,ng,t	tr	c,m,ng,p
<b>ng</b>	-	-	oã	c,n,ng	-	-	-	-	uô	n	tr	c,ng
<b>ngh</b>	iê	mn,ng,p,t	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>nh</b>	iê	c,m,n,p,t	-	-	-	-	uâ	n	uô	c,m	tr	c,n,ng
<b>ph</b>	iê	m,n,t	-	-	-	-	-	-	uô	c	tr	c,n,ng
<b>r</b>	iê	m,n,ng,t	-	-	-	-	-	-	uô	c,m,n,ng,t	tr	c,m,n,ng,t
<b>s</b>	iê	c,m,ng,t	-	-	oo	c,ng	uâ	t	uô	n,ng,t	tr	n,ng,t
<b>t</b>	iê	c,m,n,ng,p,t	-	-	oo	ng	uâ	n,t	uô	c,n,ng,t	tr	c,m,n,ng,p,t
<b>th</b>	iê	c,m,n,ng,p,t	oã	n,ng,t	-	-	uâ	n,t	uô	c,m,n,ng	tr	c,n,ng,t
<b>tr</b>	iê	n,ng,t	-	-	-	-	uâ	n,t	uô	ng	tr	c,n,ng,t
<b>v</b>	iê	c,m,n,ng,t	-	-	-	-	-	-	uô	ng,t	tr	c,n,ng,t
<b>x</b>	iê	c,m,n,ng,t	oã	n,t	oo	ng	uâ	n,t	uô	m,ng	tr	ng,t

Table 15: Phụ-chính-phụ + nhị hợp tự nhóm III – C-V-C and group III

**c. Phụ tự + tam hợp tự + phụ tự cuối – Consonant-triad-final consonant**

Vietnamese has one triphthong that needs finals. That is **uyê**. Here are some examples:

*chuyên* ‘transfer’ *chuyện* ‘told story’ *duyên* ‘chance to meet’ *huyền* ‘black’ *huyền* ‘unreal’ *huyệt* ‘grave’  
*khuyên* ‘to advise’ *luyện* ‘train’ *Nguyễn* ‘most common family name’ *nguyện* ‘to will’ *nguyệt* ‘moon’ *nhuyễn*  
‘fine’ *thuyền* ‘boat’ *tuyển* ‘select’ *truyện* ‘printed story’ *xuyên* ‘pierce through’

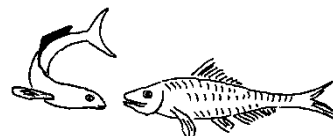
Consonant-Vowel-Consonant										
	ch-	d-	h-	l-	ng-	nh-	s-	th-	t-	tr-
_ u y ê _										
<b>-n</b>	chuyên	duyên	huyền	luyện	nguyên	nhuyễn	suyễn	thuyền	tuyễn	truyện
<b>-t</b>	-	duyệt	huyệt	-	nguyệt	-	-	thuyết	tuyết	-

Table 16: Phụ-chính-phụ + tam hợp tự – C-V-C Pattern with triphthong **uyê**.

**D. -Y hay -I? – Phonotactic Constraints -Y or -I?**

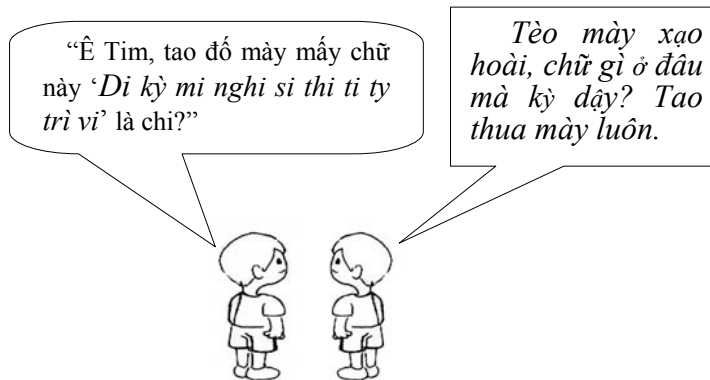
Presently, a new constraint tends to “merge” all terms ending with the **-y** making it an **-i**. For instance: *mỹ* > *mĩ*; *kỹ* > *kĩ*, etc. This is not a wise idea. Vietnamese has nearly 70 percent of Sino-originals co-existing with Nôm. Retaining **-y** in certain terms at least shows some distinction among words containing **-y** or **-i**.

In addition, **y** can stand alone and be a word: *y khoa* ‘medicine’ *y phục* ‘clothes’ *y lại* ‘subservience’ *y kiến* ‘idea’ *âm y* ‘boisterous’, ...



The most important, however, is its semantic feature, which is as important as those with words of *dấu hỏi* ‘low rising’ or *dấu ngã* ‘high broken’, or those with ending *-c* or *-t*, *-n* or *-ng*. Let’s compare:

*Hỉ mũi vào cái khăn giấy này.* ‘Blow your nose in this tissue.’  
*Con người sống phải biết hỷ xả.* ‘One should lead a forgivable life.’  
*Chỗ này là ba kí.* ‘This thing weighs three kilograms.’  
*Xin chị ký vào chỗ này.* ‘Sign your name here.’  
*Nó nói lí nhí trong miệng.* ‘He murmured something inaudible.’  
*Nó nói có lý lắm.* ‘He spoke very logically.’  
*Vua Lý Thái Tổ* ‘King Lý Thái Tổ.’  
*Chị Hai là người tỉ mỉ.* ‘Ms Hai is a meticulous person.’  
*Mỹ thuật thì không đo lường được.* ‘Art is unmeasurable.’  
*Mai quì xuống trước bàn thờ.* ‘Mai knelt down in front of the altar.’  
*Người ấy thật tâm cái tà quy chính.* ‘That person honestly wants to be a good man.’  
*Món quà quý giá của tôi.* ‘My precious gift.’  
*Thưa quý vị và các bạn.* ‘Ladies, gentlemen and friends.’  
*Con vật nhỏ li ti cũng là một mạng sống.* ‘Even tiny, a small living being is a life.’  
*Hồi trước ty thuộc cấp tỉnh.* Formerly, *ty* is an office at provincial level.’  
*Một tí nữa là xong.* ‘Just a little more and the job will be done.’  
*Năm ấy là năm Tý.* ‘That was the Year of the Mouse.’  
*Nó tì tay trên bàn.* ‘He leaned his hands against the table.’  
*Cái đàn tỳ bà này rất cổ.* ‘This four-string lute is very old.’  
*Đóa tường vi vừa chớm nở.* ‘The dog roses are just in bloom.’  
*Tên nàng là Tường Vy.* ‘Her name is Tường Vy.’  
*Lửa cháy âm ỉ suốt đêm.* ‘The fire is smoldering all night.’  
*Nó là con người thường ỷ lại.* ‘He is always depending on others.’



**Giải:** di 移 ‘dời’ kỳ 幟 ‘cờ’ mì 你 ‘mày’ nghi 疑 ‘ngờ’ si 癡 ‘say’ thi 詩 ‘thơ’ ti 絲 ‘tơ’ ty 司 ‘chủ quản’ trì 杵 ‘chày’ vì 鱗 ‘vây (cá)’

Cần phân biệt rõ cách viết để ít nhất cũng cho thấy có sự khác nghĩa.

## II. Địa Phương Ngữ – Regional Dialectal Constraints

### A. Khác Biệt Về Ngữ Âm – Phonological Mergence and Variation

Educated native speakers often make fun of one another about how “correctly” they speak. Speakers from the North complain that speakers in the South make no distinction between final *c/t* and *n/ng* and *dấu huyền* the ‘low rising’ and *dấu ngã* ‘low broken’. On the contrary, speakers from the South laugh at the way Northerners merge many initial sounds into one. They mean *ch- tr-* sound the same [c]; *d, gi* and *r* share the [z].

Of the four typical regional dialects, the North-Central is considered most “standard” in terms of intelligibility and consistency.

As a matter of fact, Vietnamese has hundreds of different regional dialects. People speak differently from village to village, not to mention a larger region. Table 17 indicates mergences of sounds in the five different major regions: North, North-Central, Central, South, and Southernmost. As the simple and non-dialectal basis, the chart functions as a guide to help non-native Vietnamese beginners learn how to pronounce the sounds distinctively and correctly in order to cope with all possible dialects they may adopt afterwards.

In brief, Northern dialect merges more initial sounds than the others. Similarly, the Southern dialect does more with the finals. The sign > means “sounds like.” Here are some examples of consonantal mergences:

*Chiến tranh chính trị* > *chiến chanh chính chị* ‘political war’;

*Bà kể chuyện cho cháu nghe* > *Bà kể truyện cổ cho cháu nghe*. ‘Grandma tells her grandchildren folk tales.’

It should be reminded that *chuyện* is told orally and *truyện* is printed in book form. Correctly, one should always say: *kể chuyện* ‘story telling’, *câu chuyện* ‘a told story’; *đọc truyện* ‘read a story’ *viết truyện* ‘write a story’.

*Dì Dung dùng giàng giận dữ bỏ đi ra.* > *Zì Zung zùng zàng zận zữ bỏ đi ra.* ‘Aunt Dung angrily walked out, waving her body.’ (Auntie Dung walked away with an upset manner.)

*Bảo nó làm nó không làm, nó cứ đứng nói.* > *Bảo nó làm nó không làm, nó cứ đứng lói.* ‘Don’t worry, the government will take care of it.’

*Xác suất trong sản xuất* > *Xác xuất trong sản xuất*. ‘Probability in production.’

*xác* ‘accuracy’ *suất* ‘ratio, scale’ > *xác suất* ‘ratio of accuracy, probability’

In the Central as well as the South speakers merge the ending *-n* with *-ng* and *-t* with *-c*:

*Người Việt làm việc rất siêng năng.* > *Người Việc làm việc rác siêng năng.* ‘The Vietnamese work assiduously.’

and *dấu hỏi* with *dấu ngã*.

*Máy bình sữa để gần cửa ra vào.* > *Máy bình sữa để gần cửa ra vào.* ‘The milk bottles were placed near the entrance.’

Particularly in Huế, *nh* merges with *d* in words with low front *a*:

*nhà* > *dà* as in *về nhà* > *về dà* ‘coming home’

Southern and Southernmost dialects merge:

- *t* > *c* as in example (2): *cát* > *các*; *vát* > *vác*; *bát đĩa* > *bác đĩa* ‘bowls and plates’; *tháo vát* > *tháo vác* ‘handy-andy’
- *t* > *ch* [t] > [c] in words with front vowel *i* [i]: *thịt* > *thịch* ‘meat’ *chằng chịt* > *chằng chịch* ‘labyrinthine’; *mù mịt* > *mù mịch* ‘ambiguous and confusing’ (1)
- Depending on the preceding vowel *n* > *nh* [ɲ] when preceded by *i* [i]: *chín* > *chính* ‘nine’ *nhịn* > *nhịn* ‘to fast’ *nín* > *nính* ‘to keep silent, to reserve’, and *nh* > *n* when preceded by *ê* [e]: *lênh đênh* > *lên đên* ‘to be at sea’ (2)

- Words ending with *-n* > *-ng*: *Con thằn lằn ăn con gián.* > *Con thằn lằn ăng con gián.* ‘The wall lizard ate a roach.’ (3)

Major Regional Dialects 1							
Spelling	“Simple” symbols	Northern (Hà Nội)	N-Central (Thanh Hoá)	Central (Huế)	Southern (Sàigòn)	Southernmost (Cần Thơ)	
Initial Consonants	ch	[c]	[c]	[c]	[c]	[c, t]	[c]
	tr	[t]		[t]	[t]		
	d	[z]	[z]	[j]	[j]	[j]	[bj]
	gi	[j]		[z]	[j]	[j]	[j]
	r	[r]		[r]	[ʒ]	[rr]	[r, g]
	l	[l]	[n]	[l]	[l]	[l]	[l]
	n	[n]	[l]	[n]	[n]	[n]	[n]
	v	[v]	[v]	[v]	[v]	[j]	[bj]
	nh	[ɲ]	[ɲ]	[ɲ]	[j]	[ɲ]	[ɲ]
	s	[ʃ]	[s]	[ʃ]	[ʃ]	[s]	[s]
x	[s]	[s]		[s]			
Final Consonants	c	[k <sup>1</sup> ]	[k <sup>1</sup> ]	[k <sup>1</sup> ]	[k <sup>1</sup> ] <sup>(1)</sup> [c] <sup>(2)</sup>		
	t	[t <sup>1</sup> ]	[t <sup>1</sup> ]	[t <sup>1</sup> ]			
	ch	[c]	[c]	[c]			
	nh	[ɲ]	[ɲ]	[ɲ]	[n,ɲ] <sup>(3)</sup> [ŋ] <sup>(4)</sup>		
	n	[n]	[n]	[n]			
	ng	[ŋ]	[ŋ]	[ŋ]			
	dấu hỏi	[ <sup>h</sup> ]	[ <sup>h</sup> ]	[ <sup>h</sup> ]	[ <sup>h</sup> ]	[ <sup>h</sup> ]	[ <sup>h</sup> ]
dấu ngã	[ <sup>~</sup> ]	[ <sup>~</sup> ]	[ <sup>~</sup> ]	[ <sup>~</sup> ]	[ <sup>~</sup> ]	[ <sup>~</sup> ]	

**Table 17:** Tóm tắt về địa phương ngữ – A summary of regional dialect varieties. <sup>i</sup>, <sup>ii</sup>, <sup>iii</sup>, <sup>iv</sup> see notes on next page.

In addition to consonantal mergences, vowels are no exception. Triads *iêu* > *iu*; *uyê* > *iê*; *uô* > *u*; *uou* > *u*; *uyu* > *uy*; *uoi* > *ui* in some finals:

- *iê* > *i* when preceding *u*, *m*, *p*:
- *kỳ diệu* > *kỳ diệu* ‘miraculous’; *chiều* > *chìu* ‘afternoon’
- *tiêm* > *tim* ‘inject’; *thiệp mời* > *thịp mời* ‘invitation card’
- *uô* > *u* when preceding *i*: *mấy tuổi* > *mấy tui* ‘how old’ *buổi tối* > *bui tối* ‘evening’; *com nguội* > *com ngui* ‘left-over rice’
- *uyê* > *iê* when preceding *n* and *t*: *duyên nợ* > *diên nợ* ‘pre-destined’; *chuyên môn* > *chiên môn* ‘professional’; *giả thuyết* > *giả thiét* ‘suppose’
- *ươ* > *ur* when preceding *u*: *con hươu* > *con huru* ‘deer’; *tươi cười* > *turi cười* ‘all smiles’; *người ta* > *người ta* ‘people’
- *khủy tay* > *khuy tay* ‘the elbow’ *khúc khủy* > *khúc khuy* ‘sharp n’ winding’



Vowel Mergences					
Di-/triphthong	North	North-Central	Central	South	Southernmost
iê	iê	iê	i	i	i
oã	oã	oã	oã	wã	wã
uê	uê	uê	uê	wê	wê
uy	uy	uy	uy	wi	wi
iêu,yêu	iêu	iêu	iu	iu	iu
oai	oai	oai	oai	wai	wai
uyê	uyê	uyê	iê	iê	iê
uôi	uôi	uôi	ui	ui	ui
ươu	iêu	ươu	ươu	uu	uu

**Table 18:** Chính âm biến cách theo địa phương – Vowel varieties in regional dialects.

## B. Khác Biệt Về Từ Vựng – Lexical Variation

People in different localities often use different terms for things, actions, situations, feelings, and so on. This phenomenon exists in all languages in general, and in Vietnamese in particular. This publication introduces some examples of typical lexical variations. It is suggested that learners find a good Vietnamese-English dictionary for more vocabulary of this type. See Appendix 1 for more examples.

Lexical Differences			
Term	South	Central	North
alley	<i>hẻm</i>	<i>kiệt</i>	<i>ngõ</i>
pineapple	<i>dứa</i>	<i>thơm</i>	<i>khóm</i>
pig	<i>heo</i>	<i>heo</i>	<i>lợn</i>
peanut	<i>đậu phụng</i>	<i>đậu phụng</i>	<i>lạc</i>
sesame	<i>mè</i>	<i>mè</i>	<i>vừng</i>
sick	<i>đau</i>	<i>bệnh</i>	<i>ốm</i>
thin	<i>ốm</i>	<i>ốm</i>	<i>gầy</i>

**Table 19:** Từ vựng theo địa phương – Lexical regional variation

## III. Ngữ Điều – Intonation

Vietnamese shares the same characteristics of all languages of the world. Orthographically, the Vietnamese language was romanized the earliest of all languages in the area. And the syllabic formation has proved very convenient and easy to learn. Intonation plays an important role in expressing an idea. Good pronunciation of Vietnamese must include four factors: sounds, tones, intonation and rhythm.

### A. Âm – Sounds

In order to master Vietnamese sounds, beginners should practice the eleven vowel sounds as much as possible. Once this is done, learners have accomplished one-third of the process. The consonants are somehow similar to most English ones, except for the two initial sounds [ŋ] of **ng-**, and [ɲ] of **nh-**, which takes less efforts of learners than do the vowels.

### B. Thanh giọng – The Tones

As we have learned in previous sections, Vietnamese sounds are mainly tonal. In other words, a change of the tone over a word means shifting from one meaning to another. Vietnamese basically has six tones: one unmarked tone and five marked ones: high rising, low falling, low rising, high broken and low broken. The unmarked tone is plain and neutral. Practice this sound in words to found a base for other tones. Let's

compare:

<b>Words with low rising</b>		<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Words with high broken</b>		<b>Meaning</b>
<i>bả</i>		she, her	<i>bã</i>		waste
<i>đả</i>		to beat, to attack	<i>đã</i>		already
<i>gả</i>		to marry s.o. to s.o.	<i>gã</i>		guy
<i>mả</i>		grave, burial ground	<i>mã</i>		appearance, horse
<i>ngả</i>		incline, way, unstable	<i>ngã</i>		self, topple, fall
<i>nhả</i>		spit out of one's mouth	<i>nhã</i>		elegant
<i>quảng</i>		broad	<i>quãng</i>		distance
<i>rửa</i>		wash, clean	<i>rữa</i>		decay, rotten
<i>sửa</i>		repair, fix, mend	<i>sữa</i>		milk
<i>tả</i>		describe, tattered, left	<i>tã</i>		diaper, bad condition
<i>vỉ</i>		layer, gridiron	<i>vĩ</i>		great, tail, parallel
<i>xả</i>		drain, litter, forgive	<i>xã</i>		village, a spouse

### C. Thở Điều – Pitch

This is the way you can add your attitude to what you say. There are several ways to express one's attitude, but here are two main ways, universally:

#### 1. Bình Thường – Normal

<i>Tôi đi học.</i>	'I go to school.'
<i>Tôi đi học một tuần hai ngày.</i>	'I go to school two days a week.'
<i>Hôm nay chúng tôi ở nhà.</i>	'Today we stay home.'

#### 2. Nhấn Mạnh – Emphatic

When you want to emphasize on something, you change your intonation.

<i>Tôi đi học chứ không phải đi làm.</i>	'I go to school, not to work.'
<i>Người đó chính là tôi.</i>	'That person was I.'

#### a. Câu hỏi phải/không – Yes/No questions

**Yes** or **No** questions, in general, require a rise of the voice at the end of the question. This type of question ends with *tiểu từ diễn cảm* 'expressive particles': **không, chứ, hả, phải không**, and so on See Chapter 15 **Particles** for more details.

<i>Bà khỏe không?</i>	<i>Hôm nay anh đi làm không?</i>
'How are your ma'am?'	'Do you go to work today?'
<i>Anh đi với tôi chứ?</i>	<i>Chị biết ông ấy chứ?</i>
'You go with me, don't you?'	'You know that man, don't you?'

Bà chưa thức dậy hả?  
1 2 3

'Grandma has not woken up yet?'

Ông không ăn sáng hả?  
1 2 3

'Don't you eat breakfast?'

Anh là Nam phải không?  
1 2 3

'You are Nam, aren't you?'

Chị là người Việt phải không?  
1 2 3

'You are Vietnamese, aren't you?'

### b. Câu hỏi chất vấn – Wh-questions

Most **Wh-** questions, in general, end with dropping of the voice.

Xin hỏi, chị tên gì?  
2 3 1

Miss? Excuse me, what do you do?

Xin lỗi, anh làm nghề gì?  
3 2 1

'May I ask what your name is

Hiện nay anh chị ở đâu?  
2 3 1

'Where are you currently living?'

Anh chị làm việc tại đâu?  
2 3 1

'Where are you two working now?'

Tên bà đánh vần ra sao?  
2 3 1

'How do spell your name, ma'am?'

Cái này họ làm ra sao?  
2 3 1

'How do they do this?'

Khi nào anh về?  
2 3 1

'When do you go home?'

Hôm nào bạn đi học lại?  
2 3 1

'When do you go back to school?'

Xin hỏi, bà là ai?  
2 3 1

'May I ask who you are, ma'am?'

Xin hỏi bà muốn hỏi ai?  
2 3 1

'May I ask who you want to see?'

Chị muốn chọn cái nào?  
2 3 1

'Which one do you select?'

Anh rảnh vào ngày nào?  
2 3 1

'Which is your free day?'

### D. Âm Diệu – Rhythm

Vietnamese rhythm sounds staccato to English speakers: the utterance seems shortened and detached.

*Ai đó?* 'Who's there?'

*Ai ngoài đó?* 'Who's out there?'

*Ai đang ở ngoài đó?* 'Who's (being) out there?'

*Ai đang ở ngoài đó vậy?* 'Who's being out there anyway?'

*Ai đang ở ngoài đó lên tiếng đi.* 'Who's being out there speak up.'

*Ai đang ở ngoài đó lên tiếng* 'Who's being out there speak up

*cho tôi biết đi.* so I can know.'

### Đ. Nhóm Ý – Thought Group Division

Thought group division plays an important role in the meaning of an utterance. Pausing incorrectly

within a sentence spoils the gist of the sentence and most of the time connotes an awkward idea. Here are some significant examples:

*Rắn là một loài bò sát // không chân.* ‘Snake is a limbless reptile.’ (More accurate: Snake is a reptile // legless.)

**Not:** *Rắn là một loài bò // sát không chân.* ‘Snake is a cow that crawls without legs.’

*Quân ta tiến vào đồn // địch bị tiêu diệt hoàn toàn.* ‘Our force attacked the enemies’ stronghold, and the enemies were completely destroyed.’ (More accurate: Our troops advanced into fort // enemies were destroyed completely.)

**Not:** *Quân ta tiến vào đồn địch // bị tiêu diệt hoàn toàn.* ‘Our force attacked the enemies’ stronghold and was completely destroyed.’ (Lit.: Our troops advanced into fort enemies // were destroyed completely.)

*Chó đuổi kẻ trộm // sủa om sòm.* ‘The dog chased the burglar and barked noisily.’ (Lit.: Dog chased burglar // barked noisily.)

**Not:** *Chó đuổi // kẻ trộm sủa om sòm.* ‘The dog chased (the burglar), and the burglar barked noisily.’

### E. Trường Độ – Lengthening Feature

In order to express or describe something special or extraordinary, a Vietnamese speaker will lengthen the descriptive word – usually an adjective – of a statement.

**Normal:** *Cái áo ấy đẹp.* ‘That dress is pretty.’

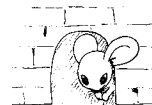
**Lengthening:** *Cái áo ấy đẹp:::p.* ‘That dress is very pretty.’

**Normal:** *Ông ấy khó chịu lắm.* ‘He’s very mean.’

**Lengthening:** *Ông ấy khó::: chịu lắm.* ‘He’s very, very, very mean.’

**Normal:** *Tôi thấy con chuột to cỡ này nè.* ‘I saw a mouse this big.’

**Lengthening:** *Tôi thấy con chuột to::: cỡ này nè.* ‘I saw a mouse that is very big like this.’



## IV. Từ Điển Âm/Vận – Derivatives

Derivatives, *tiếng điệp âm*, are a characteristic of the Vietnamese language. They signify the exact way of expressing the sentimentalism of the Vietnamese. The nuances found in these derivatives are usually subtle.

### A. Từ Điển Âm – Duplicate Derivatives

Duplicate derivatives (or **duplicative**, *điệp âm đôi*, for short) are used in a statement to reduce the quality or quantity of something. There are two primary methods of duplication: simple duplication and tone alternation.

#### 1. Điệp Âm Đơn – Simple Duplicate Derivatives

✿ Simple duplication; simply double the word to make an identical pair: *đỏ* ‘red’ > *đỏ đỏ* ‘reddish’ *ngắn* ‘short’ > *ngắn ngắn* ‘rather short’ *khá* ‘fairly good’ > *khá khá* ‘barely adequate’ *đau* ‘hurt’ > *đau đau* ‘slightly hurt’ *thường* ‘normal’ *thường thường* ‘usually’

✿ Tone alternation; simply convert the word with a tone to unmarked and make it a “prefix”: *đỏ* > *đo* *đỏ* ‘reddish’ *ngắn* > *ngăn ngắn* ‘fairly short’ *khá* > *kha khá* ‘barely mediocre’ *cứng* ‘hard’ > *cung cứng* ‘fairly hard’ *tím* ‘purple’ *tim tím* ‘purplish’ *ửng* ‘rosy’ *ung ửng* ‘a little rosy’

If the word has a low broken tone, the “prefix” will carry a low falling tone: *mặn* ‘salted’ *mản mặn* ‘lightly salted’ *nặng* ‘heavy’ > *nằng nặng* ‘rather heavy’ *nhẹ* ‘light’ > *nhè nhẹ* ‘somewhat light’

#### 2. Điệp Âm Ba – Tonal Emphatic Derivative

Tonal emphatic derivative or *điệp vận ba*: To describe something very unusual, this formula is applied: *any tone* + *low falling* + *low broken*, which generally denotes the degree of abnormality:

✿ **Tiền tố** ‘prefix’ is not closely related:

*côn* ‘tiny’ > *côn còn con* ‘very tiny’

*khít* ‘tight’ > *khít khìn khịt* ‘excessively tight’;

*sạch* ‘clean’ > *sạch sành sanh* ‘perfectly clean’

*sát* ‘close’ > *sát sàp sát* ‘excessively close’

*tuốt* ‘thorough’ > *tuốt tuồn tuột* ‘perfectly thorough’

*trần* ‘topless’ > *trần trùng trọc* ‘topless showing one’s skin’



Let’s read this typical anonymous folk poem:

*Tai nghe gà gáy tẻ-tẻ-te,* ‘Cockcrows resound cock-a-doodle-do;  
*Bóng ác vừa lên hé-hè-hè.* As the sun has just risen peeping out.  
*Non một chồng cao von-vót-vót,* The mountain is so gigantic-tall;  
*Hoa năm sắc nở loẻ-loẻ-loe.* Flowers of five colors are in full bloom.  
*Chim tình bầu bạn kia-kìa kia,* Shh, the birds are caressing each other;  
*Ong nghĩa vua tôi nhẹ-nhè-nhè.* The bees share the birds’ privacy.  
*Danh lợi mặc người ti-tí-tỉ,* Regardless people fight for bits of bite;  
*Ngủ trưa chưa dậy khoẻ-khoẻ-khoe.* I sleep till the sun rises to its height.’

Tonal Emphatic Alternations			
Root tones	Tonal deriv. 1	Tonal deriv. 2	Tonal deriv. 3
high rising ( ´ )	high rising ( ´ )	low falling ( ` )	low broken ( . )
low falling ( ` )	low falling ( ` )	low falling ( ` )	low broken ( . )
low rising ( ˆ )	low rising ( ˆ )	low falling ( ` )	unmarked
low broken ( . )	low broken ( . )	low falling ( ` )	unmarked
unmarked	unmarked	high rising ( ´ )	high rising ( ´ )
low broken ( . )	low broken ( . )	high rising ( ´ )	low falling ( ` )
unmarked	unmarked	high rising ( ´ )	high rising ( ´ )
high rising ( ´ )	high rising ( ´ )	low falling ( ` )	unmarked

**Table 20:** Biến cách của điệp vần theo thanh giọng – Chameleon alternations in tonal emphatic derivatives.

✿ **Tiền tố** ‘the prefix’ or **hậu tố** ‘suffix’ is somewhat unrelated to the terms it compounds:

*ba* ‘three’, *lãng nhãng* ‘confusing’ > *ba lãng nhãng* ‘trifling’ *Mấy chuyện ba lãng nhãng ấy không nên để ý.* ‘Those trifling things shouldn’t bother your attention.’

*lộn* ‘mistake’, *tùng phèo* ‘topsy-turvy’ > *lộn tùng phèo* ‘messy’ *Chị làm lộn tùng phèo của em rồi.* ‘You made all these things of mine messy.’

*lung tung* ‘undefined’ *beng* ‘entangled’ > *lung tung beng* ‘very messy’

*tơ* ‘silk’, *lơ mơ* ‘vague, hazy’ > *tơ lơ mơ* ‘unreliable’ *Anh ta lơ mơ quá.* ‘He is so unreliable.’

## 2. **Điệp Vần** – Tonal Rhymic Derivatives

To describe someone’s habit of doing things repeatedly or something that occurs repeatedly, the duplicatives are doubled.

### 1. **Điệp Vần Cặp** – Paired Derivatives

Most of these derivatives denote emotions. They multiply the actions by repeating them to denote some habit that is “hard to break.”

*cười nói* ‘talk and laugh’ > *cười cười nói nói* ‘talking and laughing manner’; *ăn uống* ‘eat and drink’ > *ăn ăn uống uống* ‘be fond of snacking’; *nạt nộ* ‘yell and shout’ > *nạt nạt nộ nộ* ‘be always yelling and shouting’; *mếu máo* ‘say crying and grimacing’ > *mếu mếu máo máo* ‘say weeping bitterly’

*Cô Ba thì lúc nào cũng cười cười nói nói luôn miệng.* ‘Ms Ba is always talking and laughing incessantly.’

This type of derivative deals with duplicatives rhyming the core with the same tones in the change of vowels. Basically there are four types of tonal rhymic derivatives: suffixal, infixal, prefixal-infixal, and prefixal. Most of these derivatives are pictorial or onomatopoeic:

✿ suffixal duplicatives, *điệp vần đuôi* – an addition of components to the target phrase as suffixes: *linh tinh* ‘irrelevant’ *linh tinh lang tang* ‘quite irrelevant’ *tầm bậy* ‘ugly wrong’ > *tầm bậy tầm bạ* ‘very ugly wrong’; *trụi lủi* ‘completely bare’ > *trụi lủi trụi lơ* ‘completely denuded’; *tùm lum* ‘messy’ > *tùm lum tà la* ‘very messy’; *xa lắc* ‘far’ *xa lắc xa lơ* ‘extremely far’.

*Ông ấy ở gì cái chỗ xa lắc xa lơ.* ‘What a very far place he is living in.’

✿ infixal duplicatives, *điệp vần giữa* – an addition of components that weave in the target phrase as an infix: *chập chững* ‘toddling’ > *chập chà chập chững* ‘unsteadily toddling’; *ký cốp* > ‘to collect bit by bit’ > *ký ca ký cốp* ‘to toil to collect’; *vất vưởng* ‘hopeless and aimless’ > *vất va vất vưởng* ‘desperately hopeless and aimless’; *cà tàng* ‘junky’ > *cà rịch cà tàng* ‘lame and junky’; *nhí nhảnh* ‘sprightly’ > *nhí nha nhí nhảnh* ‘cute and lively’

*Con gái lớn rồi mà lúc nào cũng nhí nha nhí nhảnh.* That girl is an adult but she still acts like a teenager who looks so lively and cute!

✿ prefixal-infixal duplicatives, *điệp vần đầu và giữa* – an addition of components that precede and weave in the target phrase as prefixes and infixes: *láo lếu* ‘mischievous’ *bố láo bố lếu* ‘detestably mischievous’; *mò mẫm* ‘to grope’ > *tò mò tẩn mẫm* ‘to grope for a long time’; *quỳnh quáng* ‘be disoriented’ > *lỉnh quỳnh lảng quáng* ‘be extremely disoriented’; *trầy trật* ‘clumsily’ > *trảm trầy trảm trật* ‘very clumsily’.

*Tay đó vụng về lắm. Y làm gì cũng trảm trật trảm trật.* ‘That guy is not handy. Whatever he does, he does it very clumsily.’

✿ prefixal duplicatives, *điệp vần đầu* – an addition of components to the target phrase as prefixes: *bồi hồi* ‘agitated’ > *bồi hồi bồi hồi* ‘plagued with perplexity’ *lếch thếch* ‘shabby’ > *lôi thôi lếch thếch* ‘untidy and shabby’; *tỉ mỉ* ‘meticulous’ > *tẩn mẩn tỉ mỉ* ‘to grope meticulously’ (be painstaking);

## 2. Điệp Vần Cảm Tính – Emotional Tonal Rhymic Derivative

This is one the many ways to express one’s feeling toward something or something being introduced. The derivatives themselves reflect the speaker’s attitude, which normally is to oppose the idea being introduced to the listener. Most of them mean the same “not such and such said thing.” Simply insert *bà* and change the initial letter of the terms being introduced with *l-* and *x-* to be suffixes of the derivatives:

✿ **Danh từ** – Adjective:

<i>anh</i> ‘brother’	> <i>anh bà lanh xanh</i>	‘not my brother at all’
<i>chị</i> ‘sister’	> <i>chị bà lị xỉ</i>	‘not my sister at all’
<i>lo</i> ‘worried’	> <i>lo bà lo xo</i>	‘not worried at all’
<i>ông</i> ‘gentleman’	> <i>ông bà lông xông</i>	‘not a gentleman at all’
<i>thầy</i> ‘teacher’	> <i>thầy bà lầy xây</i>	‘not a teacher at all’

This format can be applied to other parts of speech as well:

✿ **Tính từ** – Adjective:

<i>dại</i> ‘credulous’	> <i>dại bà lại xại</i>	‘not credulous at all’
<i>khôn</i> ‘wise’	> <i>khôn bà lôn xôn</i>	‘not wise at all’
<i>lanh</i> ‘clever’	> <i>lanh bà lanh xanh</i>	‘not clever at all’



Chị bà lị xỉ!

tốt ‘good’ > *tốt bà lột tốt* ‘not good at all’

✿ **Động từ** – Verb:

ăn ‘eat’ > *ăn bà lãn ăn* ‘not eating at all’

không ‘no’ > *không bà lông xông* ‘not none at all’

làm ‘work’ > *làm bà làm xàm* ‘not working at all’

thương ‘love’ > *thương ba lương xương* ‘not loving at all’



## V. Sự Biến Thể của Từ – Lexical Alternation

Although Vietnamese is non-inflectional, lexical alternation is possible. However, in most cases this alternation does not affect grammatical function.

### A. Biến Thể của Lõi – Alternation of The Core

The most common type of alternation is that of the core. Similar to the umlaut and ablaut of European languages, alternation of the core in a Vietnamese word reflects a high degree of assimilation.

#### 1. Chuyển Dấu – Shifting of Tonal Marks

In a number of cases, words with tonal marks may appear without the original marks or shift from one mark to another. This is alternation in the internal phonological structure of a word element in combination with other words, creating nuances in meaning.

##### a. Dấu nặng > dấu sắc – Low broken > high rising

*dạng* > *dáng* ‘glimpse’ in combination with *nhân dạng/dáng* ‘human figure’ or *hình dáng/dạng* ‘form, shape’: *hình dáng đẹp đẽ* ‘good-looking appearance’ *Làm quan có dạng, làm dáng có hình.* ‘It is not the cowl that makes the monk.’

*mạ* > *má* ‘mother, cheek’; regional dialect differences; *mạ* is widely used in Central and *má* in the South): *Chờ mạ má sung.* ‘While the grass grows the horses starve.’

*một* > *mốt* ‘one’; all number “one” coming with the “-ties” (21, 31, 41, ... 91) display this alternation: *hai mươi mốt* ‘twenty-one’ *ba mươi mốt* ‘thirty-one’, *bốn mươi mốt* ‘forty-one’, ... *chín mươi mốt* ‘91’ **not** *hai mươi một*, ... *chín mươi một*

*mượn* > *mướn* ‘hire someone to do something’: *Nếu không tự làm được thì phải mướn người.* ‘If you can’t do it yourself, you have to hire someone to do it.’ *Anh ta lúc nào cũng mượn tiền tôi.* ‘He always borrows my money.’

*xộc xệch* > *xóc xếch* ‘shabby’: *bàn ghế xộc xệch* ‘rundown furniture’ *áo quần xóc xếch* ‘shabby clothes’

##### b. Dấu huyền > không dấu – Low falling > unmarked

*mười* > *mươi* ‘ten’ all number “tens” coming with the “-ties” (20, 30, 40, ... 90) display this alternation: *hai mươi* ‘twenty’ *ba mươi mốt* ‘thirty’, *bốn mươi mốt* ‘forty’, ... *chín mươi* ‘90’ **not** *hai mươi*, ... or *chín mươi*

*ngươi* > *ngươi* ‘person, you’: *Các người không nên nói vậy.* ‘You guys shouldn’t say that.’ *Các người nên nhớ rằng ....* ‘You people should remember that ....’

*nhiều* > *niều* ‘many, much’ *Còn được nhiều ít? – Chỉ chừng nhiều thôi.* ‘How many left? – This many.’

##### c. Không dấu > có dấu – Unmarked > marked (with tones)

*chưa* > *chửa* ‘no, without’ *Muróp chửa ra hoa, cà chửa nụ.* ‘The guord has no sign of flowering; eggplants not budding.’

*nôm* > *nòm* ‘South’: *chữ Nôm* ‘Southern script’ *gió nôm* ‘South wind’

#### 2. Thay Đổi Chính Tự – Alternation of Vowel Letter

Most of this type see alternation of the vowel, and the tone remains.

*bản* > *bốn* ‘copy’ (noun) *Cho tôi xin ba bản/bốn.* ‘Please give me three copies.’  
*chính* > *chánh* ‘principal, main’ *Đây là bản/bổn chính/chánh.* ‘This is the original.’  
*cởi* > *cởi* ‘take off (clothes, shoes)’ *Cởi/cởi giày ra.* ‘Take off your shoes.’ *Thương nhau cởi áo cho nhau.* ‘When in love one takes off each other’s outfit.’

*dầu* > *dù* > *dẫu* ‘although, though, despite’ *Dầu trời lớn mưa tôi cũng về.* ‘Although it rains hard, I go home.’ *Dẫu cho muôn trùng tôi vẫn còn thương.* ‘Despite being far apart, I am always in love with you.’

*đàng* > *đường* ‘road, way’ *Hỡi anh đi đàng cái quan.* ‘Hello to the young man traveling on the main road.’ [Note: *đàng cái quan* ‘the main road, national route’ in contrast with *huong lộ* ‘country road’. Also there is one combination of *đàng/đường* that denotes two significant ideas: *hoang đường* ‘illusionary, incredible’ vs. *hoang đàng* ‘indulging in sensual pleasure’.]

*hôn* > *hun* ‘to kiss’ *Mẹ hôn lên má em.* ‘Mother kissed me on the cheek.’

*mạ* > *mẹ* ‘mother’ *Mẹ ơi, con nhớ mẹ lắm!* ‘Oh mom, I miss you so much!’

*minh* > *miễn* ‘I, me (friendly term)’ *Miễn đâu có biết chuyện ấy.* ‘I never know about that.’

*mông* > *mùng* ‘first ten days of the month’: *mùng một Tết* ‘first day of Tết’, *mùng hai tháng ba* ‘second day of the third month (lunar year)’ *mùng mười tháng ba giỗ tổ Hùng Vương* ‘the tenth of the third month of the lunar year – Kings of Hùng Vương Commemoration’

*thi* > *thơ* ‘poetry’ *nền thi ca Việt Nam* ‘Vietnamese poetry’

*thọ* > *thụ* ‘absorb’ *hấp thụ nền văn minh Tây phương* ‘absorb the Western civilization’

*thực* > *thật* ‘real, true’ In most cases, these two have the same meaning and can be used interchangeably: *Sự thật/thực, anh ấy là người tốt.* ‘In fact, he is a good man.’ However, they can be different when applied to *cảnh thực* ‘a real view’ not in a dream and *cảnh thật* ‘natural view’ not ‘an artificial view’ and *trung thực*, but never *trung thật*.

### 3. Thay đổi phần đầu – Alternation of the First Part

Alternation of the initial consonant or consonant cluster.

*an* > *yên* ‘secured, safe’ *Thượng lộ bình an.* ‘God speed to you.’

*bíu* > *víu* ‘to cling to’ *đưa tay víu lấy cành cây* ‘extend one’s hand to cling to a branch of a tree’

*dạt dào* > *rạt rào* ‘brimful’ *Dạt dào niềm vui* ‘overwhelmed with joy’

*dần* > *lần* ‘gradual’ *Dần dần anh ấy sẽ hiểu chúng ta.* ‘Gradually he will understand us.’

*giai* > *trai* ‘boy, son’ *Bà ấy sanh con trai.* ‘She gave birth to a son.’

*giời* > *trời* ‘heaven, sky, god’ *Ông trời có mắt.* ‘God has eyes.’

*sẫm* > *thẫm* ‘dark (of color)’, sometimes *sậm, đậm* *Bầu trời đã đổi sang màu tím thẫm.* ‘The sky has turned into a dark purple.’

*chuyền* > *truyền* ‘transfer, spread’ *Chuyền nhau quyển sách để đọc.* ‘Handing the book over to another to read.’ *Bệnh ấy truyền từ người này sang người khác.* ‘The disease spread from one person to another.’

### 4. Thay Đổi Lõi + Phần Cuối – Alternation of the Core + Final Part

Alternation of vowel and final consonant.

*kính* > *kiếng* ‘eyeglasses’ *Chị ấy phải mang kiếng mới đọc được.* ‘She has to wear glasses to read.’

*khênh* > *khiêng* ‘to carry by hand’ *Khênh người bệnh vào phòng cấp cứu.* ‘Carry the patient into the emergency room.’

*môm* > *miệng* ‘mouth’; like *đàng* vs. *đường*, *môm* is more contextually negative: *to môm* ‘big mouth’, *miệng* (not *môm*) *cười dễ thương* ‘the mouth with a sweet smile’

*ngộp* > *ngạt* > *nghet* ‘suffocated’ *Nạn nhân chết bị bị nghẹt thở.* ‘The victim of suffocation.’

*tợ* > *tựa* ‘similar, like’ *Hình đó trông tựa hình này.* ‘That picture looks similar to this one.’

More lexical alternations can be found in a good dictionary.

### 3. Sự Đồng Hoá – Assimilation

Assimilation in Vietnamese contributes to the process of lexical alternation. The two most common

categories of assimilation are progressive and regressive.

### 1. Đồng Hoá Thuận – Progressive Assimilation

The initial consonant of the second word assimilates to the initial consonant of the first word. There are two types: with and without tonal alternation.

#### a. Đồng hoá thuận không đổi dấu – Progressive assimilation without tonal alternation.

*dì giương > dì dương* ‘aunt and her husband’ *Dì dương tôi là người tốt bụng.* ‘My aunt and her husband are kind-hearted people.’

*gió bắc > gió bắc* ‘north wind’ *Mùa đông gió bắc thổi.* ‘In winter, the north wind blows in.’

*ngươi hoai > ngươi ngoai* ‘alleviate’ *sau một thời gian nỗi buồn cũng ngươi ngoai* ‘after a while the sorrow is alleviated’

*phanh khui > phanh phui* ‘expose (a secret, truth)’ *phanh phui vụ tham nhũng* ‘to expose a corruption scandal’

*phong thanh > phong phanh* ‘hearsay, rumor’ *nghe phong phanh về vụ tai tiếng ấy* ‘hearsay about that scandal’

*yếu ớt > yếu ớt* ‘feeble’ *Mới lành bệnh nên ông đi rất yếu ớt.* Just recovered from his illness, he is too feeble to talk.’

#### b. Đồng hoá thuận đổi dấu – Progressive assimilation with tonal alternation.

*dại dốt > đại dột* ‘silly’ *Đừng có đại dột nghe lời nó.* ‘Don’t be so silly as to listen to him.’

*giỏi giản > giỏi giang* ‘skillful’ *Cô ấy là người giỏi giang.* ‘She is a skillful person.’

*nhỏ nhẹ > nhỏ nhẹ* ‘soft tongue’ *Cô ta ăn nói nhỏ nhẹ.* ‘She has a soft tongue.’

*nịnh hót > nịnh nọt* ‘flatter’ *Anh ta cứ nịnh nọt ông ấy để lấy lòng.* ‘She keeps flattering him to win his favor.’

### 2. Đồng Hoá Nghịch – Regressive Assimilation

The first word in a pair assimilates with the second. There are two types: with tonal alternation and without tonal alternation.

*chóc mào > chào mào* ‘robin’ *Con chim chào mào đậu trên bờ rào.* ‘A robin is perching on the hedge.’

*đã > đã* ‘already’ *Khách đã lên ngựa, người còn trông theo.* ‘The visitor has mounted his horse, yet the hostess kept watching.’

*lôm chôm > chôm chôm* ‘rambutan’ *Trong vườn toàn là chôm chôm.* ‘In the garden rambutan trees are everywhere.’

*lòm nhòm > nhòm nhòm* ‘eating like a pig’ *Nó ăn uống nhòm nhòm.* ‘He eats like a pig.’

*nền nếp > nề nếp* ‘discipline, rule of conduct’ *con nhà nề nếp* ‘children from a good family’

### 4. Sự Dị Hoá – Dissimilation

A speech sound becomes different from its original neighboring sounds:

*ách ách > anh ách* ‘bloaty’ *thấy anh ách trong bụng* ‘bloated belly’ *Nó ăn nhiều quá nên bụng nó anh ách.* ‘Overeating bloated his belly.’

*dặc đặc > dằng dặc* ‘never-ending’ *những năm chờ đợi dài dằng dặc* ‘the never-ending years of waiting’

*khe khẽ > nhẹ nhẹ* ‘gentle, softly’ *Nàng khe khẽ hát.* ‘She sang softly.’

*khét khét > khen khét* ‘slight smell of burning’ *Có gì cháy không mà thấy khen khét.* ‘Is there something burning, it smells like that.’

*khinh khích > khúc khích* ‘giggle’ *Hai cô đang cười khúc khích với nhau.* ‘The two girls are giggling with each other.’

*lỗ mỗ > lỗ mãng* ‘rude’ *nói năng lỗ mãng* ‘talking with a rude manner’

*lông kính > lộng kiếng* ‘frame and glass (something)’ *Anh ta lộng kiếng cái bằng và treo lên tường.* ‘He framed and glassed his diploma and hung it on the wall.’

*nhức nhức* > *nhưng nhức* ‘slightly painful’ *Cái răng hơi nhưng nhức*. ‘It is slightly painful in the tooth.’

*phiêu phiêu* > *phiêu diêu* ‘be tossed about by the wind’ *Tâm hồn bay bổng phiêu diêu như cánh diều*. ‘His feeling floated up in the air and was tossed about by the wind like a kite.’

## 5. Nói Luyện – Gemination

Gemination is fairly common in conversations with speakers of rapid speech. In most cases, the strong form of a word becomes weak and nasalized.

### 1. Lối Kết Từ – Blending

A word made by blending two words, as *smog*, made from *smoke* and *fog*, *lox*, from *liquid* and *oxygen*

#### a. Lối kết từ về người – Coinage for personal terms

*anh ấy* > *ảnh* ‘that man’      *bà ấy* > *bả* ‘that woman’  
*chị ấy* > *chỉ* ‘that lady’      *dì ấy* > *dỉ* ‘that aunt, that woman’  
*cha ấy* > *chả* ‘that guy’      *cô ấy* > *cỏ* ‘that aunt, that woman’  
*ông ấy* > *ổng* ‘that man’      *bọn mày* > *bay* ‘you guys’

*Bả là người rất xuê xoa vui tánh*. ‘She is a happy-go-lucky woman.’

*Thưa chị, ảnh có nhà không chị?* ‘Ma’am, is he home?’ (her husband)

*Tao ghét thằng chả thậm tệ*. ‘I hate that guy bitterly.’

#### b. Lối kết từ về thời & không gian – Coinage for time & space

*bằng này* > *bấy* > *bây* ‘that, such’    *bấy nhiều* ‘that many/much’  
*bằng nào* > *bao* ‘that many’    *bằng ấy lâu* > *bấy lâu* ‘that long’  
*bên ấy* > *bển* ‘that side, there’    *chưa có* > *chửa* ‘not yet’  
*chừng ấy* > *chùng* ‘only that’    *dai như chèo rách* > *dai nhách* ‘rubbery’  
*đằng ấy* > *đẵng* ‘there’      *đằng nào* > *đâu* ‘where’  
*đằng nọ* > *đó* ‘there’      *hồi nãy giờ* > *hồi giờ* ‘very recently’  
*ngoài ấy* > *ngoài* ‘out there’    *trong ấy* > *trỏng* ‘in there’  
*hôm ấy đến hôm nay* > *hôm rày* ‘all these days, of late, lately’  
*Vật ấy lớn cỡ nào?* ‘How big is that thing?’ – *Cỡ bấy lớn*. ‘About this big.’

➤ **Note:** *đằng ấy* can be used in two ways:

a) referring to “you”: *Đằng ấy có rảnh không?* ‘Ya have a minute?’

b) to place: *Muốn biết lại đằng ấy hỏi*. ‘Wanna know? Go there and ask.’

When using *đẵng*, the coined word applies to (b) only:

*Muốn biết lại đẵng hỏi*. ‘Wanna know? Gat tere n ask.’ (Go there and ask.)

*vậy đó* > *vây* ‘thus, such’

*Biết đằng nào mà tìm*. > *Biết đâu mà tìm*. ‘Where can it be found?’

### 2. Nói Luyện Kết – Gemination

*ba* > *băm/bâm* ‘thirties’ applies to all numbers from 31 to 39

*ba mươi mốt* > *băm/bâm mốt* ‘thirty-one’ ... *băm/bâmlăm* ‘35’ ... *chín* ‘39’

*hai mươi* > *hăm/hâm* ‘twenties’ applies to all numbers from 21 to 29

*hăm mươi mốt* > *hăm/hâm mốt* ‘21’ ... *hăm/hâm lăm* ‘25’ .... *chín* ‘29’

*Hăm lăm năm sau gặp lại hai đứa ngỡ ngàng*. ‘After 25 years the two met each other in bewilderment.’

*bốn mươi mốt* > *bốn mốt* applies to all numbers from 41 to 49

*bốn mươi mốt* > *bốn mốt* ‘41’ ... *bốn chín* ‘49’

*năm mươi mốt* > *năm mốt* ‘51’ .... *năm lăm* ‘55’ ... *năm chín* ‘59’

➤ Similarly, the *mười* in the ‘-ties’ can be dropped and all the numbers can be simplified as seen in item 1

about coinage.

*Năm nay ông bảy mốt.* ‘He is 71 (this year).’

*Năm bảy lăm tôi ở Sài Gòn.* ‘In 1975 I was in Saigon.’

*cảm ơn > cảm ơn* ‘thank you’

➤ In rapid speech, gemination is widely applied as in English:

going to > gonna; don’t want to > dawanna

did you eat yet? > jer=et chet?

give me > gimme            let me go > lemme go

what you may call them > watchamacallem

*Cảm ơn anh nhiều.* ‘Thanks very much.’

*cho mượn một đồng > chum mượn n đồng* ‘lemme borrow one đồng<sup>1</sup>

*có một đồng > cón n đồng thôi* ‘(I) have only one đồng.’

*đi đâu đó > i đâu ó?* ‘where (ya) going?’

*gia đình tôi > gian n tôi* ‘my family’

*Gia đình tôi có năm người. > Gian n tôi cón năm người.* ‘My family has five people.’

*đang làm gì vậy? > n làm gì vậy?* ‘what (are you) doing?’

*không biết > hum biết* ‘(I) don’t know.’

*Nó n làm gì vậy? – Hum biết.* ‘What’s he doing? – ‘Don’t know.’

*Các nhà khoa học > các nhà khwa ọc* ‘the scientists’



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<sup>1</sup> *đồng*: current monetary unit in Vietnam; a classifier for any monetary unit: *đồng Mỹ kim* ‘U.S. dollar’, *đồng yen Nhật* ‘Japanese yen’ *đồng Phạt lãng* ‘French franc’