

The Phonological Adaptation of French Loanwords in Vietnamese

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Due to the influence of France while Vietnam was a French colony, many French words have been adopted by the Vietnamese. Some of these words are in everyday use, while others are restricted to learned usage. The purpose of this paper is to state the regularities of sound shifts, or phonological adaptations, which French words undergo when they are taken into the Vietnamese language.

The phonemic system of French, according to Hall,¹ has twelve vowels, three semivowels, and eighteen consonants. These are represented in the following charts

Vowels & Semi-Vowels

	Front	Front	Back
	Unrounded	Rounded	Rounded
Semi-Vowels	j	y	w
High	i	y	u
High-Mid	e	ø	o
Vowels			
Low-Mid	ɛ	œ	ɔ
Low	a	ɶ	ɑ

Nasalization occurs with four of the above vowels /ɛ, œ, ɔ, a/, giving nasalized vowels /ɛ̃, œ̃, ɔ̃, ɑ̃/. Two of the vowels show allophonic variation: /ɛ/: [æ] when nasalized, [ɛ] otherwise. /ɔ/: [ɔ̃] before /r/ and when nasalized. [ɑ̃] otherwise.

Consonants

	Labial and		Palatal, Velar
	Labio-dental	Dental	and Faucal
Stops			
fortis	p	t	k
lenis	b	d	g
Fricatives			
fortis	f	s	ʃ
Sibilants			
lenis	v	z	ʒ
Nasals	m	n	ɲ
Lateral		l	
Trill & Constrictive		r	

The phonemic system of Vietnamese, following Lý's analysis,² has fourteen vowels, twenty-two consonants, six tones, and labialization. These are represented on the following charts:

	Vowels		
	Front	Central	Back
glided	iə	ɯə	uə
High	i	ɯ	u
Mid	e	ə (ă)	o
Low	ɛ	a (ã)	ɔ

Two of the vowels show allophonic variation :/o/ : [ə^u] preceding a velar consonant [o] otherwise. /ɔ/ : [a^u] preceding a velar consonant, [ɔ] otherwise. The symbols in parentheses in the above chart represent short vowels at the same position as the ones they follow. Vowel length is not phonemic for other vowels.

Consonants

		Labial	Dental	Palatal	Retroflex	Velar	Glottal
Stops	voiceless		t	č	t	k	
	voiced	b	d				
Fricatives	voiceless	f	s	ʃ		x	h
	voiced	v	z	ʒ		g	
Nasals		m	n	ɲ		ŋ	
Liquids			l		r		
Aspirate			t ^h				

The six tones of Vietnamese are as follows:

bằng (unmarked) level

sắc (/) high rising

hỏi (?) low rising

huyền (\) low falling

ngã (~) high rising broken

nặng (.) low constricted.

In words with a final stop (b, t, ĉ, k, this six-way contrast is neutralized to a twoway contrast, the two which occur being phonetically high rising (ˀ) and low constricted (ˁ).

With the exception of some loanwords and compounds, Vietnamese is a monosyllabic language. The syllable (or word) pattern can be represented by the following formula: (C₁) (v) VT * (C₂). This formula is to be read as follows: The vowel with its tone is the only obligatory element of the syllable. The optional element, C₁, may be any consonant. The optional element, v, is labialization, which can occur with any consonant except /b, v, f, m, n, r/, or it can occur without any initial consonant. The optional final consonant, C₂, may be /b, t, ĉ, k, m, n, p, ɲ, v, l/.

The following allophonic variation of consonants occurs /b/: [b] word initial, [p] word final. /v/: [v] word initial, [w] as labialization or word final. /l/: [l] word initial, [y] word final. /ɲ/: [mɲ] after back, unglided vowels, [ɲ] otherwise. /k/: [pk] after back, unglided vowels, [k] otherwise.

By comparing the two phonemic systems, it is easy to see that some changes will have to be made when French words are taken into Vietnamese. Vietnamese is a monosyllabic, tonal language with no consonant clusters and severe restrictions on which consonants can occur in final position. French is a polysyllabic, non-tonal language with nasalized vowels which allows clusters of up to four consonants [dɛksɔʁ] *dextre* «dexter». When French words are used by Vietnamese speakers, they are usually changed if necessary to fit the phonemic system of Vietnamese. There are two situations, however, in which the phonemic system of Vietnamese may be disrupted to accommodate the French loanwords.

The lack of an initial /p-/ in Vietnamese constitutes a «hole in the pattern» which I have discussed elsewhere.³ This hole in the pattern leaves a place for Vietnamese to retain the pronunciation of initial [p-] in French loanwords, which is done in some cases. However, I believe it is only educated people who follow this pattern; others are more likely to make the normal substitution of [b-] for [p-] in initial position. [pupe] > [búp-be], [pip] > [píp].

The Vietnamese phonemic system is also sometimes disrupted by words ending in [ʒ] in French, which become [ɲ] in Vietnamese. According to the allophonic variation noted above, I would expect these to be pronounced [aɯɲ]. Some words

* VT = Vowel-tone

follow the expected pattern, while others retain the [ɔŋ] pronunciation (Vietnamese spelling: -ong). [pɔ̃]>[bɔŋ], [bɔ̃]>[baʊmŋ].

The following generalizations can be made about the sound changes which French words undergo when they are borrowed by Vietnamese:

1. Words with a nasalized vowel in French take a final nasal consonant in Vietnamese.

1a. If the nasalized vowel is syllable final, the Vietnamese nasal consonant used is /-ŋ/. [ãtɛ̃n]>[ãŋtɛ̃n].

1b. If the nasalized vowel is followed by a stop in the same syllable, the Vietnamese nasal consonant used is the one produced at the same point of articulation as the French stop. [bɔ̃b]>[bɔm].

2. Some polysyllabic words are reduced to monosyllables. Other retain all syllables. [pɔ̃rɪəfœj]>[bɔ̃p], [kaʎɪrɪ]>[ka-lo-ri].

3. Consonant clusters are reduced to single consonants or separated by an epenthetic vowel. [krɛ̃m]>[kɛ̃m] or [kà-rɛ̃m].

4. Non-allowed final consonants may be dropped, changed to an allowed consonant, or the preceding vowel may be changed to a glide. [bœr]>[bə], [vɛ̃rni]>[vɛ̃, ni], [tur]>[tuə].

5. Vowel qualities are changed [aky] [ãk-kvi].

6. Most borrowed words take the level tone in Vietnamese.

6a. If the borrowed word ends with a stop, or if it develops a stop because of the above generalizations, it takes the high rising tone [kup]>[kúp] [dubl]>[dúp]

6b. The first syllable of two-syllable borrowed words often takes the low falling tone. [kate]>[kà-fe].

Following is a list of some common French loanwords in Vietnamese, given in the following order: Vietnamese spelling, phonemic representation of Vietnamese word, French spelling, phonemic representation of French word, English gloss. Those words which do not completely conform to the Vietnamese phonemic system are marked with an asterisk.

ăc-quy	ăk-kvi	accu	aky	battery
ăng-kết	ăŋ-két	enquête	ăkét	inquest
ăng-lê	ăŋ-le	anglais	ăŋlɛ	English
ăng-ten	ăŋ-tɛn	antenne	ătɛn	antenna
ba	ba	papa	papa	dad
* ba-toong	ba-tɔŋ	bâton	batɔ	stick
ba-tui	ba-tui	patrouille	patruj	patrol
ban	ban	balle	bal	ball
băng	băŋ	banque	băk	bank
* bê-toong	be-tɔŋ	béton	betɔ	concrete
bi	bi	bille	bij	marble
bia	biə	bière	bjɛr	beer
bít-tết	bít-tét	bifteck	biftɛk	beefsteak
bom	bɔm	bombe	bɔb	bomb
* boong	bɔŋ	pont	pɔ	deck of ship
bóp	bɔb	portefeuille	pɔrtəfœj	wallet
bốc	bók	boxe	bɔks	boxing
bông	bɔŋ	bon	bɔ	coupon
bơ	bə	beurre	bœr	butter
bom	bəm	pompe	pɔp	pump
* bù-loong	bù-lɔŋ	boulon	bulɔ	bolt
búp-bê	búb-be	poupée	pupe	doll
ca	ka	cas	ka	case
ca-lô	ka-lo	calot	kalo	forage-cap
ca-lô-ri	ka-lo-ri	calorie	kalɔri	calorie
ca-nô	ka-no	canot	kano	speed-boat
ca-vát	ka-vát	cravate	kravat	necktie
cà-phê	kà-fe	café	kafe	coffee
các	kák	carte	kart	visiting card

cao-su	kav-Su	caoutchouc	kautSu	rubber
căng	kǎŋ	camp	kā	camp
cổ-vé	kǝ-ve	corvée	kǝrve	fatigue duty
cóp	kúb	copier	kǝpje	to copy, cheat
ăn-côn	ăn-kou	alcool	alkǝl	alcohol
côn	kôn	col	kǝl	collar
còn	kôn	colle	kǝl	paste
cu-li	ku-li	coolie	kuli	coolie
cú	kú	coup	ku	blow
cúp	kúb	couper	kupe	to cut
cúp	kúb	coupe	kup	trophy
đăng-ten	dǎŋ-tɛn	dentelle	dǎtɛl	lace
đăm	dǎm	dame	dam	French lady
đít-cua	dít-kuǝ	discours	diskur	speech
đoan	dvan	douane	dwan	customs
đốc-tơ	dók-tǝ	docteur	dǝktǝr	doctor
đúp	dúb	double	dubl	duplicate
ét	ét	aide-chauffeur	ɛd Sofǝr	driver's assistant
ét-xăng	ét-sǎŋ	essence	ɛsǎs	gasoline
ga	ga	gas	ga	accelerator
ga	ga	gare	gar	railroad station
gác	gák	garde	gard	guard
gam	gam	gramme	gram	gram
gà-ram	gà-ram	"	"	"
găng	gǎŋ	gant	gǎ	glove
ghi	gi	aiguille	ɛgyij	railroad switch
gôn	gon	goal	gol	goalkeeper
ke	kɛ	quai	kɛ	quay
ke	kɛ	équerre	ekɛr	square
kem	kɛm	crème	krɛm	ice-cream

cà-rem	kà-rĕm	crème	krem	ice-cream
két	kĕt	caisse	kĕs	safe
ki-lô	ki-lo	kilogram	kiłogram	kilogram
ki-lô-mét	ki-lo-mĕt	kilomètre	kiłomĕtr	kilometer
kí	kí	kilogram	kiłogram	kilogram
len	lĕn	laine	lĕn	wool
lê-dương	le-Zəŋ	légion	lezjɔ̃	French Foreign Legion
líp	lib	libre	libr	free
lít	lít	litre	litr	litre
lò-xo	lɔ̃-sɔ	ressort	rəsɔr	spring
lon	lon	galon	galɔ̃	chevron
lô	lo	lot	lo	lot, series
lơ	lə	bleu	blô	blucing
ma-dút	ma-Zút	mazout	mazut	fuel oil
mác	mák	marque	mark	brand, make
măng-đa	măŋ-đa	mandat	măda	money order
măng-sông	măŋ-sɔŋ	manchon	măSɔ̃	gasmantle
mét	mĕt	mètre	mĕtr	meter
mề-day	mề-dal	médaille	medaj	medal
min	min	mine	min	mine (military)
mô-tô	mo-to	motocyclette	mɔ̃tosiklĕt	motorcycle
mốt	mót	mode	mɔd	fashion
nốt	nót	note	nɔt	grade, mark
nơ	nə	noeud	nô	bowtie
om	ɔm	ohm	om	ohm
ô-ten	o-tĕn	hôtel	otɛl	hotel
ô-tô	o-to	automobile	otomɔbil	automobile
* pi-gia-ma	pi-za-ma	pyjama	piZama	pajamas
* pin	pin	pile	pil	battery
* pip	píp	pipe	píp	smoking pipe

* pô-ke	po-kɛ	poker	pɔkɛr	poker (the game)
pha	fa	phase	faz	phase
pha	fa	phare	far	headlight
phanh	fañ	frein	frɛ̃	drake
phắc-tơ	fắktə	facteur	faktœr	mailman
phắc-tuya	fắk-tviə	facture	faktyr	invoice
phích	fič	filtre	filtr	thermos bottle
phim	fim	film	film	movie
phia	fin	fil	fil	thread
phó-mát	fó-mát	fromage	frɔmaʒ	cheese
phông	foŋ	fond	fɔ̃	background
phốt	fót	faute	fot	mistake
phớt	fát	feutre	fôtr	felt
ra-di-ô	ra-di-o	radio	radjo	radio
ram	ram	rame	ram	quire (of paper)
rày	rắl	rail	raj	rail
reo	rɛv	grève	grɛv	strike
rô	ro	carreau	karo	diamond (cards)
sà-lan	Sà-lan	chalande	Salãd	barge
săm	Săm	chambre	Sãbr	rented room
son	Sɔn	solde	Sɔld	discount sale
sốp-phơ	Sốp-fə	chauffeur	Sɔfœr	driver
xơ	sə	sœur	sœr	Catholic sister
xúp	súb	soupe	sup	soup
tách	táč	tasse	tas	cup
tắc-xi	tắk-si	taxi	taksi	taxicab
tăng	tăŋ	tank	tăk	tank
tem	tɛm	timbre	tɛbr	postage stamp
tua	tuə	tour	tur	turn

tuyn	tvin	tulle	tyl	tulle
va-li	va-li	valise	valiz	suitcase
va-ni	va-ni	vanille	vanij	vanilla
van	van	valve	valv	valve
vang	van	vin	vē	European wine
vát	vát	watt	wat	watt
ve	vē	revers	rəvɛr	lapel
vẹt-ni	vẹt-ni	vernis	vɛrni	varnish
vít	vít	vis	vis	screw
xà-bông	sà-bon	savon	savɔ̃	soap
xà-lách	sà-láç	salade	salad	salad
xà-lông	sà-lon	salon	salɔ̃	living room
xà-lúp	sà-lúb	chaluupe	Salup	launch
xích-lô	síç-lo	cyclo	siklo	pedicab
xi	si	cire	sir	wax
xi-măng	si-măŋ	ciment	simã	cement
xiếc	síək	cirque	sirk	circus
* xoong	sɔŋ	casserole	kasrɔ̃l	saucepan
xốt	sót	sauce	sos	sauce
xu	su	řou	su	penny

Footnotes

¹Hall, Robert A., Jr. *Structural Sketch 1: French* (Language Monograph 24) 1948. 56 pp.

²Lê Văn Lý. *Le Parler Vietnamien*. Paris: Imprimerie-Edition Hông-Anh, 1948.

³Barker, Milton E. 'Proto-Vietnamuong Initial Labial Consonants' *Văn-Hóa Nguyệt-San* 12: 491-500. (1963).