9. Vietnamese and English speech development

Many Vietnamese-Australian children are good at speaking both Vietnamese and English.

The VietSpeech team have shown that

- Children who learned Vietnamese and English can
    - Produce speech intelligibly most of the time, even to strangers by the time they are 4- to 5- years-old
    - Pronounce most Vietnamese and English vowels correctly at a young age
    - Pronounce most Vietnamese tones correctly at a young age, although tones 3 (creaky, thanh ngã) and 4 (dipping-rising, thanh hỏi) are difficult for some children
    - Pronounce some Vietnamese and English consonants more easily than others
- Easy Vietnamese consonants are the ones that are shared with English (the symbols are from the International Phonetic Alphabet chart. There is a table comparing Vietnamese and English letters and consonants earlier in this book)
    - Plosives: /b, t̪ʰ, d, c/ = b, th, đ, ch
    - Nasals: /m, n, ɲ/ = m, n, nh
    - Fricatives: /f, s, h/ = ph, x, h
    - Lateral approximant: /l/ = l
    - Semivowels: /w, j/ = w, u, o
- Difficult Vietnamese consonants for Vietnamese-Australian children are
    - Plosives: /k, ʈ, ʔ/ = c, k, q, tr
    - Nasals: /ŋ/ = ng
    - Fricatives: /ɣ, z, ʂ, ʐ/ = gh, gi, d, s, r
- Easy English consonants for Vietnamese-Australian children are
    - Plosives: /b, p, t, d, k, ɡ/ = b, p, t, d, k, g
    - Nasals: /n, m, ŋ/ = m, n, ng
    - Fricatives: / f, v, ʃ, h/ = f, v, sh, h
    - Affricates: /ʧ/ = ch
    - Approximants: /w, j/ = w, y
    - Lateral: /l/ = l
- Difficult English consonants for Vietnamese-Australian children are similar to the consonants that are difficult for children who are only learning English.
    - Fricatives: /θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ/ = th, th, s, z, sh, zh
    - Affricates: /ʤ/ = j
    - Approximant: /ɹ/ = r
- Difficult features of English. There are a number of things that Vietnamese-speaking people find difficult about learning to speak English. These are mostly features that are in English but are NOT in Vietnamese. The main ones are:
    - Sounds that aren't shared between the two languages (consonants and vowels)
    - Consonant clusters: where two or more consonant sounds are together such as 'sp' in spoon
    - Grammatical features that change word endings such as '–ed' for past tense in walked or "s" for plurals in cows

- Long words with many syllables
- Stress patterns: Using different stress on syllables where the emphasis in a word can change its meaning
- Irregular pronunciations that are different from the way a word is spelled
- Linking: linking the final consonant of the previous word with the initial vowel of the following word

Northern Vietnamese children's speech development

Dr Ben Phạm and colleagues studied young children's speech in Northern Vietnam (e.g., Hanoi) and found that by 5 years of age Northern Vietnamese-speaking children can

- Produce speech intelligibly most of the time, even to strangers
- Produce all initial-syllable consonants correctly, except the initial-syllable consonants: /ɲ/ (nh), /s/ (x), /z/ (d/gi/r), and /x/ (kh)
- Produce all final-syllable consonants correctly
- Produce all semivowels correctly, except the semivowel /w/ (u/o) that occurs in the middle of the syllable
- Produce all vowels and diphthongs correctly
- Produce all tones correctly, except tones 3 (creaky, *thanh ngã*) and 4 (dipping-rising, *thanh hỏi*)

Southern Vietnamese children's speech development

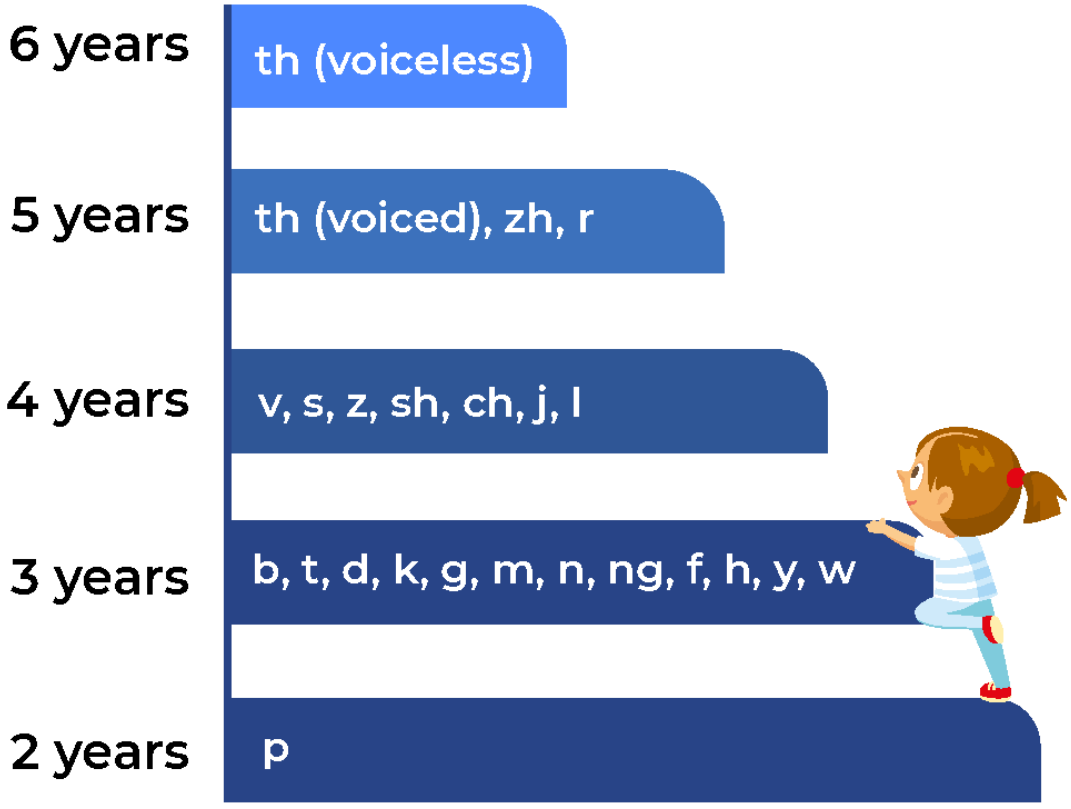
Le Xuan Thi Thanh and colleagues studied young children's speech in Southern Vietnam (e.g., Ho Chi Minh City) and found that by 4 years of age Southern Vietnamese-speaking children can

- Produce speech intelligibly most of the time, even to strangers
- Produce more than 90% of tones, vowels and diphthongs, word-initial and word-final consonants correctly

More information

- Multilingual Children's Speech website: https://www.csu.edu.au/research/multilingual-speech/speech-acquisition (FREE posters)
- Le, X. T. T., McLeod, S., & Phạm, B. (2021). Consonant accuracy and intelligibility of Southern Vietnamese children. *Speech, Language and Hearing*. https://doi.org/10.1080/2050571X.2021.1888195
- McLeod, S. (2020). Intelligibility in Context Scale: Cross-linguistic use, validity, and reliability. *Speech, Language and Hearing, 23*(1), 9–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/2050571X.2020.1718837
- McLeod, S., & Crowe, K. (2018). Children's consonant acquisition in 27 languages: A cross-linguistic review. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 27*, 1546–1571. https://doi.org/10.1044/2018_AJSLP-17-0100 (FREE journal article)
- Phạm, B., & McLeod, S. (2019). Vietnamese-speaking children's acquisition of consonants, semivowels, vowels, and tones in Northern Viet Nam. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 62*(8), 2645-2670. https://doi.org/10.1044/2019_JSLHR-S-17-0405
- Phạm, B., McLeod, S., & Harrison, L. J. (2017). Validation and norming of the Intelligibility in Context Scale in Northern Vietnam. *Clinical Linguistics and Phonetics, 31*(7-9), 665-681. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699206.2017.1306110

Learning English Consonants (Across the World)



Average age of acquisition of English consonants across the world (90–100% criteria)

The review was based on 15 studies of 7,369 children speaking English in Australia, Republic of Ireland, Malaysia, South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States (McLeod & Crowe, 2018).

This information should be used alongside other information about children's speech acquisition; for example, typically developing 4- to 5-year-old children are usually intelligible, even to strangers (McLeod, Crowe, & Shahaeian, 2015).

McLeod, S., & Crowe, K. (2018). Children's consonant acquisition in 27 languages: A cross-linguistic review. *American Journal of Speech–Language Pathology, 27*, 1546–1571. doi:10.1044/2018_AJSLP-17-0100

McLeod, S., Crowe, K., & Shahaeian, A. (2015). Intelligibility in Context Scale: Normative and validation data for English-speaking preschoolers. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 46*(3), 266–276. doi:10.1044/2015_LSHSS-14-0120