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THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH ON THE VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE IN THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the influence of English on Vietnamese in the context of globalisation, with particular attention to lexical borrowing, code-switching, digital discourse, and language attitudes. Grounded in contact linguistics, sociolinguistic theory, and language ideology studies, the paper uses a qualitative design that combines naturalistic observation of public and digital language practices with a systematic review of recent scholarship on English-Vietnamese contact. The analysis shows that English influence is most visible in the lexical domain, especially in technology, education, business, and popular culture. English-Vietnamese code-switching is also widespread in youth-oriented and digitally mediated communication, where it serves pragmatic functions such as emphasis, brevity, and topic framing, as well as social functions such as identity performance and in-group solidarity. Syntactic and phonological influences appear more limited and register-specific, although English-influenced discourse markers, passive constructions, and loanword pronunciation patterns are increasingly noticeable among proficient bilingual users. The study further indicates that attitudes toward English influence remain ambivalent: younger speakers often treat bilingual hybridity as a sign of modernity and global identity, while purist concerns persist in public and institutional discourse. The paper concludes with implications for Vietnamese language policy and English education.

KEYWORDS: English influence, Vietnamese language, language contact, code-switching, digital communication

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1. INTRODUCTION

English has become the dominant global lingua franca in education, commerce, science, technology, and popular culture. Its worldwide expansion has intensified contact between English and local languages, producing changes that are not limited to vocabulary but also affect discourse practices, communicative norms, identity construction, and language attitudes. In many multilingual societies, English is simultaneously valued as a resource for mobility and viewed with concern as a possible threat to local linguistic traditions.

Vietnam provides a particularly relevant context for examining this process. Since the Đổi Mới reforms, the country has become increasingly connected to regional and global markets, and English has moved from a peripheral foreign language to a central component of educational and professional development. English proficiency is now widely associated with academic success, employability, access to digital knowledge, and participation in international communication. As a result, English has entered Vietnamese not only through formal education but also through technology, advertising, entertainment, social media, and everyday youth communication.

Vietnamese has a long history of language contact, including contact with Chinese and French. However, contemporary contact with English differs in speed, scale, and social reach. English is now encountered across social media platforms, university classrooms, workplaces, commercial spaces, and transnational cultural flows. This creates conditions in which English elements can circulate rapidly and become normalised in everyday Vietnamese discourse. Such contact raises important questions about the extent to which English reshapes Vietnamese vocabulary, discourse organisation, pronunciation practices, and speakers' perceptions of linguistic authenticity.

This study therefore investigates the influence of English on Vietnamese through a qualitative and interpretive lens. Rather than treating English influence only as a set of isolated linguistic borrowings, the paper approaches it as a socially embedded phenomenon shaped by speakers' communicative needs, identities, ideologies, and participation in globalised networks. The study addresses four guiding questions: (1) What forms of English influence are visible in contemporary Vietnamese? (2) In which domains are English loanwords and code-switching most prominent? (3) How do English-influenced forms function in digital and public discourse? and (4) What ideological tensions emerge around English influence on Vietnamese language and identity?

The paper contributes to research on language contact by offering a focused synthesis of English-Vietnamese contact across lexical, pragmatic, structural, and attitudinal dimensions. It also has practical relevance for language policy and English education in Vietnam, where educators and planners must balance the benefits of English-mediated global participation with the need to sustain Vietnamese linguistic vitality.

A further rationale for the study is the practical visibility of English in present-day Vietnamese life. Many English elements are now so common that speakers may no longer notice them as foreign, while other forms remain socially marked and invite criticism. Examining both normalised and contested forms allows the paper to distinguish between ordinary lexical integration, stylistic code-mixing, and ideologically sensitive language change. This distinction is important for avoiding simplistic claims that English influence is either wholly beneficial or wholly harmful. It also helps clarify which forms require educational attention and which simply reflect normal language contact.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on language contact has long shown that linguistic influence is shaped by both structural and social factors. Weinreich [1] established that languages in contact may influence each other through borrowing, interference, and bilingual practices, while Thomason and Kaufman [2] demonstrated that lexical borrowing commonly occurs before deeper structural influence. Thomason [3] further emphasises that social conditions such as intensity of contact, prestige relations, and speaker attitudes are crucial in determining the direction and extent of contact-induced change.

In the Vietnamese context, lexical borrowing is the most visible form of English influence. Studies have documented the growing presence of English loanwords in technology, business, education, media, and youth culture [4], [5]. English terms such as app, online, deadline, feedback, sale, brand, and livestream often coexist with Vietnamese equivalents. Their use is not always motivated by lexical necessity; in many cases, English terms carry social meanings associated with modernity, expertise, international orientation, or youth identity. This coexistence suggests that borrowing expands stylistic and ideological choices rather than simply filling vocabulary gaps.

Code-switching and code-mixing have also received considerable attention. Poplack's [7] distinction between tag-switching, inter-sentential switching, and intra-sentential switching remains useful for describing bilingual patterns, while Myers-Scotton's [6] Markedness Model explains how code choices index social meanings. Auer's [8] conversation-analytic approach further highlights the sequential and interactional functions of switching. In Vietnamese-English contexts, Tuc [9], [10] shows that bilingual speakers switch codes to achieve precision, emphasis, clarification, and identity expression. Nhat et al. [11] similarly demonstrate that English-Vietnamese mixing in media discourse can signal topic shift, stylistic appeal, and cosmopolitan positioning.

Digital communication has intensified these practices. Social media platforms provide informal, fast-moving, and multimodal spaces where users combine Vietnamese, English, emojis, acronyms, hashtags, and visual signs. Tagg [12] argues that computer-mediated communication encourages creative, economical, and socially marked language use. Tri [13] illustrates this point in the Vietnamese context by showing how Facebook users localise English expressions to express local cultural meanings. Such practices indicate that English influence is not merely imported passively; it is creatively adapted to Vietnamese communicative norms.

Studies on structural influence are more limited. It has been noted that English may influence Vietnamese syntax in formal and academic registers, particularly through passive constructions, English-influenced discourse markers, and patterns of written argumentation. Phonological influence is even more subtle, appearing mainly in the pronunciation of loanwords by younger or highly proficient bilingual users. These findings support contact linguistics theory: structural change usually requires stronger and more sustained bilingual contact than lexical borrowing.

Language attitudes form another important strand of research. Silverstein [14] and Woolard [15] show that language ideologies shape how speakers evaluate linguistic forms and how institutions regulate language use. In Vietnam, Van [16] observes that English is widely valued for education and socioeconomic mobility, but concerns remain about linguistic purity and national identity. Pham's [17] work on linguistic landscapes likewise shows that English in public signage indexes modernity, prestige, and global orientation, while also raising questions about cultural authenticity. Overall, the literature suggests a need for an integrated analysis that connects linguistic forms, domains of use, digital practices, and ideological responses.

3. Theoretical Framework

The analysis is informed by three complementary theoretical perspectives: contact linguistics, sociolinguistic approaches to bilingualism, and language ideology theory. Contact linguistics provides concepts for describing the linguistic outcomes of English-Vietnamese interaction, including lexical borrowing, calquing, phonological adaptation, and potential structural influence. In this tradition, borrowing is not treated as accidental contamination but as a normal consequence of sustained contact between speech communities.

Weinreich's [1] early account of languages in contact is useful because it shows that linguistic transfer is mediated by bilingual speakers and by the social conditions in which they use both languages. Thomason and Kaufman [2] further argue that the intensity of contact and the social relationship between languages strongly affect the depth of borrowing. In the Vietnamese case, English has high prestige in education, technology, and the labour market, but Vietnamese remains the dominant language of national identity and everyday interaction. This imbalance helps explain why lexical borrowing is widespread while deeper structural influence remains more limited.

Van Coetsem's [18] distinction between recipient-language and source-language agentivity is also relevant. Most English influence on Vietnamese appears to involve recipient-language agentivity: Vietnamese speakers select English items that are useful, fashionable, or symbolically powerful, and then integrate them into Vietnamese discourse. This framework helps avoid portraying Vietnamese speakers as passive recipients of English. They are active agents who evaluate, adapt, and sometimes resist English elements.

Sociolinguistic theories of code-switching explain the pragmatic and identity-related functions of bilingual discourse. Poplack's [7] typology provides descriptive categories for different switching patterns, while Myers-Scotton's [6] Markedness Model helps interpret why speakers choose a marked or unmarked code in particular social contexts. Auer's [8] approach adds an interactional dimension by showing that switching can frame topic changes, manage alignment, and signal shifts in stance. These perspectives are especially useful for interpreting English-Vietnamese mixing in digital communication.

Language ideology theory provides the final lens. Silverstein [14] and Woolard [15] show that attitudes toward language are connected to broader social values, including nationalism, modernity, authority, education, and authenticity. In Vietnam, debates over English influence are not only linguistic debates; they are also debates about what it means to be Vietnamese in a globalised world. The framework therefore treats language attitudes as part of the phenomenon under study rather than as secondary reactions to linguistic change.

4. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative, interpretive design. The aim is not to measure the statistical frequency of English elements in Vietnamese, but to identify major patterns of influence and interpret their social meanings. The design combines naturalistic observation of digital and public language use with a systematic review of relevant academic and documentary sources. This combination allows the study to examine English influence both as it appears in actual discourse and as it has been analysed in previous scholarship.

The observational component focused on publicly available language data from Vietnamese digital and public contexts. Digital data included social media posts and comments, online forums, news comment sections, YouTube comments, and public pages on platforms commonly used by Vietnamese speakers. Public-language data included shop signs, advertisements, university-related notices, product packaging, and commercial displays in urban settings. The observation targeted domains where English-Vietnamese contact is especially visible: technology, education, commerce, popular culture, lifestyle communication, and youth-oriented digital interaction.

The documentary component included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, dissertations, and policy-related texts on English in Vietnam, Vietnamese sociolinguistics, language contact, code-switching, language ideology, and digital communication. Searches were conducted through academic databases and citation chaining, with priority given to recent studies from 2015 to 2025 while retaining foundational works in contact linguistics and sociolinguistics. The review provided theoretical grounding and helped contextualise patterns observed in contemporary discourse.

Data analysis followed an iterative process. First, observed texts and documents were read repeatedly to identify recurring English elements, contexts of use, and metalinguistic comments. Second, initial codes were developed for phenomena such as lexical borrowing, code-switching, discourse markers, English-influenced orthography, digital abbreviations, symbolic English use, and expressions of language ideology. Third, these codes were grouped into broader themes corresponding to the study's research questions. Finally, representative examples were interpreted in relation to contact linguistics, code-switching theory, and language ideology studies. Braun and Clarke's [19] model of thematic analysis informed the process of coding, theme refinement, and analytic reporting.

Critical discourse analysis was also used to interpret how English elements construct social meanings in digital and public texts. Attention was paid to the relationship between linguistic choices and identity

positioning, especially were English indexed modernity, professionalism, youthfulness, creativity, or cosmopolitan orientation. Comparative analysis across domains helped identify variation between digital discourse, educational contexts, commercial signage, and more formal public language.

Ethical care was taken because the study relied on observational data. Only publicly accessible texts were considered, and the analysis focused on patterns rather than identifiable individuals. Examples were anonymised or modified where necessary to avoid identifying users. As a Vietnamese-English bilingual researcher, the author also engaged in reflexive memo-writing to reduce the risk of overinterpreting familiar language practices. The main limitation is that observational data cannot directly access speakers' personal motivations; therefore, interpretations are supported through triangulation with prior empirical research and documented language-attitude studies.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation across data types and analytic perspectives. Patterns identified in social media and public signage were compared with findings in peer-reviewed studies, and claims were made only when similar tendencies appeared across more than one source. Thick description was used to connect linguistic examples with their social domains, such as education, technology, commerce, or youth culture, so that readers can judge the transferability of the interpretations.

The study is best understood as an interpretive synthesis rather than a corpus-based frequency study. It does not claim to represent all Vietnamese speakers or all regions of Vietnam. Instead, it identifies salient forms and meanings of English influence in contexts where English-Vietnamese contact is highly visible. Future studies can build on this work by collecting larger spoken and written corpora and by comparing urban and rural communities more systematically.

Table 1. Research Procedure and Data Sources

Stage	Data/source	Analytical focus
Observation	Public digital posts, comments, signage, advertisements	English loanwords, switching patterns, symbolic English use
Review	Scholarly articles, books, dissertations, policy-related texts	Theoretical concepts, prior findings, documented attitudes
Synthesis	Observed data and literature	Themes across lexical, pragmatic, structural, and ideological dimensions

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Lexical borrowing across domains

Lexical borrowing is the most prominent form of English influence found in the data and literature. English words are especially common in domains where new concepts, technologies, and global cultural products are introduced through English. In technology and digital communication, terms such as app, laptop, smartphone, software, online, wifi, update, download, livestream, and share are frequently embedded in Vietnamese sentences. These terms often function as ordinary vocabulary rather than as marked foreign insertions.

Education and academic discourse also show extensive borrowing. Words such as presentation, assignment, deadline, feedback, workshop, seminar, project, and major are commonly used by students and educators. Their popularity reflects the strong association between English and higher education, internationalisation, and professional competence. In many cases, Vietnamese equivalents exist but are perceived as longer, less precise, or less natural in youth and university contexts.

In business, marketing, and lifestyle discourse, English terms index modernity and symbolic prestige. Words such as brand, sale, trend, style, fashion, check-in, selfie, and relax circulate widely in advertising and social media. These borrowings do more than name imported concepts. They also help speakers project identities associated with urbanity, consumer sophistication, and global cultural participation. This supports Myers-Scotton's [6] view that language choice can carry social meaning beyond referential content.

Borrowed items vary in their degree of adaptation. Older and more established borrowings may be pronounced according to Vietnamese phonological patterns, while newer digital and professional terms are often kept closer to English pronunciation, particularly among younger and more proficient English users. This variation demonstrates that borrowing is not a uniform process. It is shaped by age, proficiency, medium, domain, and the symbolic value attached to English.

Table 2. Common Domains of English Influence in Vietnamese

Domain	Examples	Main function	Typical context
Technology	app, online, update, wifi	Naming new tools and practices	Digital platforms, forums, workplaces
Education	deadline, feedback, presentation	Academic/professional precision	Universities, student discourse
Business and marketing	brand, sale, trend, content	Prestige and market orientation	Advertising, commerce, social media
Lifestyle and youth culture	style, selfie, check-in, relax	Identity performance and playfulness	Instagram, Facebook, TikTok

5.2 Code-switching and code-mixing as communicative practice

Code-switching and code-mixing are especially visible in informal digital communication and among urban, educated speakers. Examples such as Hôm nay mình có presentation, Deadline là tối nay, or Project này khá challenging illustrate how English lexical items and phrases are inserted into Vietnamese grammatical frames. These forms correspond mainly to intra-sentential switching, although tag-switching and inter-sentential switching also occur.

The observed functions of code-switching are both pragmatic and social. Pragmatically, English is used for brevity, technical precision, emphasis, humour, topic framing, and emotional expression. Expressions such as okay, anyway, really, so cute, or Oh my God often function as discourse markers or affective intensifiers. In professional and academic contexts, English terms can signal precision or familiarity with specialised knowledge. In social media, English may add playfulness and stylistic appeal.

Socially, code-switching helps speakers perform identity. For many younger Vietnamese users, mixing English and Vietnamese signals education, digital fluency, cosmopolitan taste, and membership in peer communities that share similar linguistic resources. It can also create in-group solidarity because the mixed code is most meaningful to those who understand both languages and the cultural references attached to them. This supports Bucholtz and Hall's [20] view of identity as produced through interactional practice rather than simply possessed by individuals.

However, code-switching is not evaluated uniformly. In some contexts it is admired as modern and creative; in others it is criticised as pretentious, unnecessary, or harmful to Vietnamese. The social acceptability of switching depends on audience, setting, age, and perceived communicative purpose. Speakers therefore need sociolinguistic competence, not merely bilingual competence, to decide when English-Vietnamese mixing is appropriate.

5.3 Digital communication and relocalisation

Digital communication is the most dynamic site of English-Vietnamese hybridity. Social media and messaging platforms encourage short, expressive, and multimodal language. Users combine Vietnamese with English words, abbreviations, emojis, hashtags, and stylised spelling to create meanings that are difficult to separate into two autonomous language systems. Acronyms such as LOL, OMG, and ASAP appear beside Vietnamese words, while English hashtags often accompany Vietnamese captions.

Different platforms encourage different practices. Instagram and TikTok are associated with stronger visual self-presentation and therefore show frequent English captions, hashtags, and lifestyle vocabulary. Facebook and Zalo display more varied mixing because users address overlapping networks of friends, family, classmates, and colleagues. YouTube comments often mix English and Vietnamese when users respond to global media content or refer to international celebrities, songs, games, and trends.

A striking feature of digital discourse is relocalisation: English elements are adapted to express Vietnamese meanings, humour, and cultural relationships. Tri's [13] analysis of Vietnamese Facebook language demonstrates that English expressions can be recontextualised rather than simply copied. In this process, English becomes a resource for local creativity. It is bent, abbreviated, punningly translated, or combined with Vietnamese to produce hybrid forms that are intelligible within Vietnamese online communities.

This finding challenges the view that English influence is necessarily a one-way process of linguistic domination. Although English has high global prestige, Vietnamese users actively reshape English elements to fit local communicative styles. Digital hybridity therefore reveals speaker agency: users borrow English, but they also domesticate it, play with it, and use it to produce distinctively Vietnamese digital voices.

5.4 Syntactic and phonological influence

Compared with lexical borrowing and code-switching, syntactic influence is more limited and less stable. Some English-influenced patterns are visible in formal and semi-formal written Vietnamese, especially in academic, business, and translated texts. These include increased use of passive-like constructions, impersonal structures, and discourse connectives modelled on English rhetorical organisation. Phrases corresponding to however, therefore, in addition, and on the other hand are increasingly common in academic Vietnamese, partly because English academic writing serves as a prestige model.

Such influence is register-specific. It is more likely to appear in texts written by highly educated bilingual users, translators, university students, and professionals who regularly work with English. It is less apparent in informal everyday Vietnamese, where Vietnamese grammatical patterns remain robust. This supports Thomason and Kaufman [2] claim that structural borrowing generally requires more intense contact than lexical borrowing.

Phonological influence is also subtle. The clearest evidence appears in the pronunciation of loanwords. Younger speakers who encounter English through schooling, films, music, and digital media may preserve English-like pronunciation for words such as internet, computer, marketing, or smartphone. Older speakers and less proficient English users are more likely to adapt such words to Vietnamese syllable structure and sound patterns. The coexistence of adapted and English-like pronunciations reflects social differences in proficiency, age, and identity orientation.

At present, these syntactic and phonological influences should be interpreted cautiously. They indicate tendencies rather than completed change. Vietnamese remains structurally resilient, and overtly English-like grammar can still be resisted in formal writing and language education. Nevertheless, these subtle patterns deserve further longitudinal research because they may become more salient as younger bilingual speakers gain institutional and professional influence.

5.5 Language attitudes, ideology, and identity

Attitudes toward English influence are ambivalent. On the one hand, English is strongly associated with educational achievement, employability, international mobility, and access to global knowledge. This instrumental value is recognised across age groups and social contexts. On the other hand, English influence is sometimes linked to fears of linguistic impurity, cultural loss, and weakening attachment to Vietnamese. These concerns are particularly visible in purist or institutional discourse.

A generational contrast is evident. Younger speakers often treat English-Vietnamese mixing as natural, efficient, and identity-affirming. For them, bilingual hybridity does not necessarily mean abandoning Vietnamese identity; rather, it can express a contemporary Vietnamese identity that is both local and global. Older speakers and language guardians may be more likely to associate heavy English mixing with loss of linguistic discipline or erosion of cultural heritage.

This tension reflects competing language ideologies. Purist ideologies construct Vietnamese as a bounded national language that should be protected from foreign intrusion. Cosmopolitan ideologies treat multilingualism and hybrid language use as resources for mobility, creativity, and global belonging. In practice, many speakers navigate both ideologies at once. They may use English freely in digital or professional contexts while still believing that Vietnamese should be preserved in formal, educational, or national-cultural domains.

The relationship between language and identity is therefore not a simple opposition between English and Vietnamese. English influence may threaten certain purist ideals, but it can also expand the expressive repertoire of Vietnamese speakers. The key policy challenge is to support strong Vietnamese language development while recognising that bilingual practices are now part of the lived reality of many Vietnamese speakers.

5.6 Limitations and future research directions

The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the study focuses primarily on visible public and digital discourse. These contexts are important because they reveal how English circulates in contemporary Vietnamese society, but they cannot fully represent private family interaction, rural communication, or the language practices of speakers with limited internet access. English influence is likely to vary considerably across region, class, education, occupation, and age.

Second, the study is qualitative and interpretive rather than quantitative. It identifies salient patterns and social meanings, but it does not calculate the frequency of English borrowings across a representative corpus. Future research could combine the interpretive approach used here with corpus linguistics to examine how often particular loanwords, discourse markers, or switching patterns occur across different genres. Such research would be useful for distinguishing temporary fashionable usage from more durable language change.

Third, because many of the examples come from written digital communication, the study offers only limited insight into pronunciation and spoken interaction. Future work should include recorded natural

conversations, interviews, and classroom or workplace discourse to examine phonological adaptation, interactional code-switching, and speakers' explicit reflections on their own language choices. Longitudinal research would also be valuable for tracking whether younger speakers' current bilingual practices become stable features of Vietnamese usage over time.

5.7 Implications for language policy and education

The findings suggest that attempts to eliminate English influence from Vietnamese are unlikely to succeed. English enters Vietnamese through powerful channels: schooling, employment, technology, entertainment, and global digital platforms. A more realistic approach is to promote additive bilingualism, in which English proficiency is developed without weakening Vietnamese literacy, stylistic range, and cultural knowledge.

In education, learners should be taught not only English skills but also metalinguistic awareness. They need to understand when borrowing and code-switching are effective, when they may be inappropriate, and how language choices affect audience perception. Vietnamese language education can also be strengthened by developing contemporary Vietnamese terminology for academic, technological, and professional domains so that speakers have meaningful choices rather than relying automatically on English.

For language planning, the findings support a balanced orientation. Vietnamese should be actively developed and valued, but policy should also acknowledge the inevitability of contact-induced change. Instead of framing bilingual practices as linguistic contamination, educators and planners can help speakers use both languages critically, creatively, and responsibly.

6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study has examined the influence of English on Vietnamese in the era of globalisation through a qualitative analysis of observed discourse and existing scholarship. The findings show that English influence is most visible in lexical borrowing, especially in technology, education, business, and popular culture. Code-switching and code-mixing are also widespread in digital and youth-oriented communication, where they serve pragmatic functions and help construct social identities.

Syntactic and phonological influences are less extensive but still observable in specific registers and among proficient bilingual users. English-influenced discourse markers, passive-like constructions, and loanword pronunciation patterns indicate emerging forms of contact influence, although Vietnamese grammatical structure remains strong. Digital communication is particularly important because it accelerates linguistic experimentation and allows English to be creatively relocalised in Vietnamese cultural contexts.

The study also shows that attitudes toward English influence are ideologically complex. English is widely valued for its instrumental benefits, but concerns about linguistic purity and cultural identity persist. Younger speakers often understand bilingual hybridity as part of a modern Vietnamese identity, while older or more purist voices may view it as a threat to linguistic authenticity.

The paper suggests that future research should include longitudinal studies, larger corpora of naturalistic speech and writing, and comparative work across rural and urban communities. For policy and education, the most productive direction is not to reject English influence but to strengthen Vietnamese linguistic resources while promoting critical, context-sensitive bilingual competence. Such an approach can help Vietnam engage with global English while preserving the vitality and expressive richness of Vietnamese.

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