VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE PRIMER FOR THE STUDENT

I have attempted to compile some of my notes on trying to learn Vietnamese. They are only a PHONETIC representation of what the phrase or word SOUNDS LIKE TO ME and I cannot guarantee that it sounds the same to everyone. The actual written Vietnamese word, with the special characters, is way beyond me at this point. Even at that, what I include here might be pronounced differently by different readers. So Beware.

WARNING: Vietnamese is a highly tonal, inflected language. With just the right (or wrong) rising or lowering of the vocal tone and emphasis, a word can drastically alter it’s meaning. And with such alteration, the entire context of a statement can shift from a polite greeting to a crude statement about someone’s genitals! This is not an exaggeration. Therefore, be forewarned that things are not always as easy as they appear.

And, don’t forget – I DO NOT know how to speak Vietnamese... Otherwise I wouldn’t have needed to write these notes for myself. I give them to you only as some quick sort of reference aid for the totally lost student who needs to know how to interpret some Vietnamese phrases and names.

I apologize for any embarrassment or insult I might cause to those who “really know” the language. Like I say, this is just the way I HEAR IT. I suspect I’ll hear promptly from anyone who I cause a problem with.

With this introduction, let me share with you some of the useful words and phrases that I’ve run into.

VIETNAMESE PRIMER

Before I get started into the actual vocabulary part, people have cautioned me over time that I should spend time up-front with the concept of addressing others. That’s exactly correct, but is ALMOST a separate topic unto its own.

Here are a few pointers:

• You choose the form of addressing someone based manly on age:
• You need to be pretty accurate in your estimates of age.
• Failure to get this correct can be a cause of embarrassment for both you and the party you are talking to.

Here are a few simplified rules for general guidance (again, these are phonetic pronunciations):

• The term “em” is used for anyone of either sex who is significantly younger than you;
• If you addressed a woman as old as or older than you as “em’ it would really be offensive.
• A woman of teenage age should be addressed as “chi” (chee) and an older or a married woman as “ba”.
• “ang” should only be used for men of teenage years or younger.
“Owng” is a better way to address older men. Using “anh” would be like saying “hey you” to your grandfather.

I
We
You
Hello (generic)
Goodbye
I'll see you again
Thank you
Thank you very much
Don't mention it (You're welcome)
Excuse me
Please
Yes
No
What is your name
What is your name
My name is ______
How are you?
How are you?
Thank you. I am fine.
I am happy
I am happy to see you (male/female/etc)
I am happy to meet you (male/female/etc)
What time is it
What time do we leave
When do we arrive
Where do we go now
Where are we
I don’t understand
I don’t know the Vietnamese language
I have to piss
I am hungry
I am thirsty
Stop! (harsh command=halt!)
I need a doctor
I am sick
I feel tired
Oh! Dear me!
I want
I need
I would like
I must
What is this?
What is that?
I want to take a picture.

toy
chung-ta
Dependent on age=em,ang,chee,ba,owng.
Sin chow
Tom bee it
hen gawp lie
Caam uhrn
Caam uhrn neow
Kong kawchi
Sin loi
sin
Caw/or/Za
Kung
Em ten zee (to female)
Ang ten zee (to males)
Toy ten ______
Em coh quay kong (to females)
Ang coh quay kong (to males)
Caam urhn. Toy quay.
toy zet voo-ey
toy zet voo-ey gawp lie (ang/em/etc)
toy zet voo-ey gawp (ang/em/etc)
Myza
Myza chung ta dee
Myza chung ta den
Beza chung ta de dow
Chung ta uuh-oh
Toy kung hey-oh
Toy kung bee-it tieng viet
Toy dee die
Toy doy
Toy caht
Zung Lie
Toy khan baak’ see
Toy kung quay
Toy med
Choy oy
toy moo-un
toy kaan
toy tick
toy fie
Die zee day
Die zee kee-ah
Toy chop eye'ng
How much does this cost?
I want to buy this
I need to change money
This one
Go to buy goods
Go to buy something
Go away quickly
I don't like this
Go home!
Go to school
It is raining
It is sunny
Waiter. My bill. (if younger)
With ice (if younger)
Without sugar
A little bit
Bread
Water
Water (spring water-drinking water)
Egg
Bird
Eat
This food is very delicious
Please bring me ______
Very cold
Hot
Friend
Sir
Madam
I am crazy
I work at the office
Walk (go by walking)
Today

One
Two
Three
Four
Five
Six
Seven
Eight
Nine
Ten

Moee-oy

Bow neew tee-en
Toy nooun moo-ah guy nie
Toy khan doy tee-en
guy nie
dee moo-ah wah
dee moo-ah doe
Sin my dee dee
Toy kung tick
Dee doy
dee hop
Choy mur
Choy nang
Em oy. Tin tee-en
coa dah
kung dung
mote chute
buyg-mee
nook
nook su-way
trung
chim
aahn
come zut nawn
sin doo-ah tou ______
opp liegh
nong
Baan
Ong (if older)
Ba (if older)
Toy din-din kung-kung
Toy lam vick a van fahng
dee bow
hom nie

mote
high
baa
bone
nam
sal
by
tom
chin