

Growing Up Bilingual in Australia

A ViệtSpeak Podcast - Episode 1

Title: Trọng's Motivation for Learning Vietnamese

[THEME MUSIC]

Intro Chi: Hi, welcome to our podcast. Here, we speak with bilingual children and their parents about growing up multilingual in Australia. I'm Chi Vu, a writer and educator, and with me is Hoang Tran, a member of the language advocacy group ViệtSpeak.

Throughout the podcast, there will be code switching between different languages, so if there are languages you don't understand, don't worry too much – I think you'll still grasp what's going on from the context. And even if you don't, I want to give you permission to not understand every single word on this podcast. Instead, let yourself hear the 'music' of the various languages spoken by these multilinguals.

On today's first episode, we meet Trọng, and his mother, Vinh. We're in their living room in Melbourne's western suburb of St Albans. It's a Sunday morning, and there's a birthday sign and balloons still up from a lockdown birthday party.

Chi: Tên con là gì

Trọng: Tên con là Trọng [My name is Trọng]

Chi: Rồi Trọng nam nay mấy tuổi

Trọng: Nam nay Trọng chín tuổi [This year I am nine years old]

Chi: Là học lớp mấy giậy

Trọng: Lớp bốn [Grade 4]

Chi: Do you know what your name means in English?

Trọng: My name i'm pretty sure Anthony means Antion which was the son of Hercules. That was what I found up found out on the web

Chi: Oh okay what about Trọng?

Trọng: Trọng means, my mom said that it was like VIP or something was special. I don't know That was just what she said.

Chi: Yeah yeah, that's a good um way of translating. Um I think it's like someone worthy of respect.

Trọng: Oh. My mom also said that it mean like they're not worthy of respect but like respectful to others.

Chi: When you were four, you said.

Trọng: Four to five

Chi: Four or five, you said that you decided you wanted to learn Vietnamese.

Trọng: Yeah, so I could talk to my grandparents

Chi: Aha was there an incident where you felt oh I can't talk to my grandparents?

Trọng: Well like usually when I go to my grandparents I like to play games. And then my mom kept on yelling at me to like stop or something

Chi: Right. All right so you're at your grandparents and you're just playing video games but you [00:47] can't talk to them because your vietnamese is not strong enough right?

Trọng: Yeah, because I had to try and think um remember some words but I couldn't process that process them correctly so I just, I just talked English

Chi: What was the feeling you had when you tried to talk but you couldn't um?

Trọng: I just felt like an ice block just standing there melting.

Chi: Oh, okay and so you've been doing Vietnamese on Saturday since what age?

Trọng: Since um like four or five

Chi: And so you do you feel pretty confident

Trọng: Well I feel confident since that my parents don't I don't let my parents help tutor me or something

Chi: Oh right yes yes, because they offered to tutor you in Vietnamese

Trọng: Yeah but like, like they just said offered me to help with my vietnamese stuff

Chi: And you said no

Trọng: yeah

Chi: Why was that, are they terrible teachers?

Trọng: They're not terrible teachers, I just wanted to try and be independent on that one.

Chi: Um, ok. Why is it better to kind of be independent on on that one?

Trọng: Well i just wanted to be independent because most of the stuff my mom helped me with, sometimes she would help me with homework but now I do it myself. She, my dad used to write in the diary my reading diary for me but now I do it myself. I just want to be a bit more independent for like later, later on in life.

Chi: Yeah, what happens later on in life?

Trọng: Well like later on in life my parents won't be there anymore so I just wanted to try and learn to be by myself and independent

Chi: Oh yeah yeah, that's true isn't it so you know because parents get older and

Trọng: They pass away

Chi" yeah and and so one day you will be an adult and you won't have your parents or your grandparents around and you have to you know make decisions right you have to be able

Trọng: Yeah, to try and go there like just live life myself yeah after that

Chi: Uh, are there any advantages to knowing two languages?

Trọng: It's an advantage um because I can say other words that other people won't know when they're like bullying me or something, so it gives me a bigger advantage

Hoang: Do you think it's helping you talk with your grandparents?

Trọng: Uh I don't really know since like, I've when I, I usually stammer a lot and then it's hard for me to talk

Chi: Ah, would you stammer in, because you're not stammering now is it the stammering um sometimes only in Vietnamese or both?

Trọng: It's usually in English and Vietnamese

Chi: Oh okay, so um learning Vietnamese has you given you more confidence?

Trọng: Yeah, it gives me a bit more confidence than usual.

Chi: When you are speaking um in Vietnamese do you feel that you are different? Does it feel different to when you are speaking English?

Trọng: It doesn't really feel different when I write it since like I already know the letters and then. But like the only different thing to writing is like the, um the things, the dấu sách, um the, I forgot what it's called.

Chi: Yeah the, mấy cây dấu, like diacritics right, dấu sách, dấu huyền, yeah. So what about speaking, do you notice?

Trọng: I don't, I notice like um how I talk is different than how I usually talk in English

Chi: Yeah can you tell me more?

Trọng: Like when I talk it sounds like different when I say, well some things sound similar like con kỳ sounds like monkey but it also sounds like donkey.
[LAUGHTER]

Hoang: So do you ever talk Vietnamese with your friends at school?

Trọng: Well I would, well used-to sometimes, but like only the ones who understand. But in my school, there's like only a few people of Vietnamese.

Chi: When would you speak to them in Vietnamese?

Trọng: Well um, speak to them in Vietnamese when sometimes, if I want to say secret stuff to them, in private.

[THEME MUSIC]

Chi: Tên chị là gì?

Vinh: Em tên là Vinh. Hi my name is Vinh, I'm 14 years old. I came here when I was 14 years old but I didn't live in Vietnam consistently, total of 8 years. I left Vietnam when I was 5 years old and stayed at a refugee camp in Hong Kong for 6 years before I returned to Vietnam. After that I was sponsored to Australia when I was 14. Yes I have two kids. The older one, the oldest is 9 years old and the youngest is 3 years old, so there are 6-years gap. Bé lớn là được chín tuổi, bé nhỏ là được ba tuổi. Hai bé cách nhau đúng sáu năm.

Chi: What surprised you about um your kids learning Vietnamese, what has been surprising or unexpected

Vinh: Yeah um, I'm very very surprised one day um the the older ones say "Mommy I want to go to Vietnamese school," and then I said "Why?" He said "It's because I want to learn Vietnamese to speak with my grandparents" he said. Wow, that's amazing because, you know that's, which means he have, he love his grandparents.

Thường thì em hay tâm sự với con on-the-go. Majority of time I talk to them on-the-go, on the road. Before with Anthony he was knew all the traffic signals when he was little boy. I said to him red light you have to stop green light you go yellow light you have to prepare to stop so he knows everyone turn left right and so on. I teach him on-the-go because the truth is I don't have much time at home to play and because of that I take the time to take him to all the events, people will see me show up at the majority of events everywhere.

Chi: Trọng was telling us that you and your husband sometimes sing karaoke

Vinh: Yeah yeah. I try now I try to sing the song now he hates it, I sing so much "Thương ca tiếng Việt." Because like the little one one day I said to him you know during the lock down and he said he wants something for his birthday. Of course I will buy something for his birthday, but I said if you can remember this song, you don't have to remember the whole thing, just can follow the word so I try to let him, um learn how to read Vietnamese faster

We sing karaoke together and I try teach him like listen to Vietnamese and he repeat the song and he start learning the different word and how to pronounce them

Hoang: So he learns the words through singing?

Vinh: Yeah, a lot of the word through singing, and if he doesn't understand he ask me and I explain to him

[Audio of Vinh and Trọng singing karaoke together approx. 40 seconds]

Chi: Is there anything you would like to say to all the kids and maybe even grown-ups who are learning another language like any words of encouragement

Vinh: I came to Australia I was 14 I know nothing English from zero until now. So I'm happy with how I can be more confident today even sometime I got accent, but who care, just try your best. Now my my son when this when my sons when they speak Vietnamese I can't expect them to speak with me like me but they can't expect me to speak English like them, because I'm not born in Australia. I come here when I'm old and they born in Australia they can't expect to speak Vietnamese so doesn't matter if you speak something when you say something wrong and people laugh at you. Forget about them, just move on and you'll be proud of yourself one day

Chi: As we're leaving, Trong's grandmother starts a game of hide and seek with Trong and his younger brother Bryan

Hoang: Chắc Trọng đang trốn kìa, Trọng trốn song chưa?

[Audio of Trọng and Grandma playing hide and seek]

Grandma Toan: Trọng tiến bộ lắm. Đầu tiên học thì không muốn học tiếng Việt, vậy Bà phải đi học tiếng Anh để nói chuyện với cháu.

V/O: At the start he didn't want to learn Vietnamese so I had to learn English to speak with him. I said to him: I want to go learn but I first have to find money to support the family. Now I have a pension, I don't go to classes anymore [laughter] I don't understand anything at English classes... I go to English classes to speak with Trọng, but I said to him "You should go to Vietnamese classes to talk with me. I will try to go classes but if I can't you can teach me, you show me." So he taught me some English words hundreds of times but I cannot learn them [laughter] I'm old now so nothing sticks anymore so you try your best to learn Vietnamese so you can talk to me

Toan: Một, hai, ba. Xong chưa? [LAUGHTER]

[Audio of Grandma playing hide and seek with Trọng and Bryan]

[THEME MUSIC]

Chi: You've been listening to Growing Up Bilingual in Australia, the podcast where we speak with bilingual children and their parents about language, culture and what it feels like to be multilingual in Australia. For bonus materials from this episode head to vietbilingual.org/podcast

Trong: Growing Up Bilingual in Australia is hosted by Chi Vu, and produced by Hoang Tran Nguyen. Script development is by André Dao and Chi Vu. Music is by Quang Dinh.