

# **Hmong Language and Cultural Maintenance in Merced, California**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to ascertain whether the Hmong language and culture were shifting or were being maintained within a generational cross-section of 12 Hmong participants in Merced, California. Data was collected in the form of interviews, questionnaires, Internet research, and library research. The results of the study showed that though there were Hmong language and cultural resources available in Merced, the participants nonetheless seemed to be undergoing a generational shift in their heritage language in terms of both ability and use, as well as their attitudes about and participation in their heritage culture.

## **Introduction: The Hmong Journey to Merced, California**

The Hmong people in Merced, California, are mainly from the Southeast Asian country of Laos (Vang & Lewis, 1984; Yang, 1995). While the United States fought against the communist regime in Vietnam, a “Secret War” was also occurring in Laos against the communist Prathet Lao Party. The American government’s Central Intelligence Agency enlisted the Hmong people to help fight communism in these two Southeast Asian countries. When the United States’ allies lost the conflict in Vietnam by 1975, a quarter to a half million Hmong people had no choice but to try to escape to refugee camps in Thailand (Willcox, 1986). Overcoming intense hardships along the way, those who did make it to the refugee camps were sent to France, Germany, Canada, Australia, and the United States (Fadiman, 1997; Willcox).

Merced, California, located in the San Joaquin Valley, was chosen by many Hmong families as a place to relocate because it is a largely agricultural area. According to the U.S. Census of 2000, the Hmong community in Merced made up 6,148 of the countywide population of 210,554 (California Census Data Center, 2001).

The researcher, though non-Hmong, was born and raised in Merced and grew up with friends who belonged to the Hmong community there. It is the researcher's desire to find out if the Hmong language and culture within a generational cross-section of Hmong participants in Merced are being maintained or are shifting.

### **Hmong Culture and Language**

For the Hmong who live in the United States, there are differing ideas of what defines their present Hmong culture. Important aspects that have been identified by some include the following: having a common history of immigration from their ancestral home of China, being without a home country, having patriarchal and age-related social systems within the family unit and the community, living in close vicinity to other Hmong people, practicing ancestral worship and animism, having Hmong physical features, practicing traditional Hmong birthing practices, being affiliated with a Hmong clan or family, having a Hmong last name, caring for and respecting others, and being able to speak the Hmong language (Donnelly, 1994; Lee, 1995; Pfeifer, 2001; Saykao, 2002; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990).

The Hmong language is relevant to the Sino-Tibetan language family and has two main dialects: White Hmong and Blue Hmong or Green Hmong (Vang & Lewis, 1984). It is comprised of about twice as many consonants and vowels as English and has eight tones. The Hmong people may have had a written form of their language in centuries past, when they lived in China, where the written form may not have been allowed by the Chinese and may consequently have been lost (Brittan, 1997). Though several alphabets have been invented for the Hmong language since that time, two of the most popular in the United States include an alphabet created in the 1950s by American and French missionary linguists based on the Roman Popular Alphabet and the Pahawh Hmong alphabet created in 1959 by Shong LueYang, a previously illiterate Hmong farmer who credited God for revealing the Pahawh alphabet to him (Ager, 2004).

### **Language and Cultural Shift and Maintenance**

Language shift is a change in the use of a person's heritage language that results in a loss of that person's ability to use his or her heritage language. Likewise, cultural shift is a change in participating in one's heritage culture that results in a loss of understanding and adherence to one's cultural heritage. Fishman (1991) maintains that both language and cultural shift result in losing sight of one's true self, the security that self brings, the cultural heritage it fosters, and the value it has for one's life as well as the lives of others.

Factors affecting such a shift in language and culture include the following: the prestige of the dominant language and the comparatively lesser status of the heritage language, the lack of societal support for the ethnic group and its heritage language, the perception of the heritage language as unnecessary by subsequent generations, a decrease of group identification through the heritage language, a low level of acquisition of the heritage language at the time of decreased use of that language, an increased amount of contact with the dominant culture, an increased use of the dominant language instead of the heritage language with children, and attitudes against keeping the heritage language (Schmid, 2002). Other prominent factors include the use of the primary language of the dominant culture exclusively in at least some areas, a change in the environment in which the heritage language is used, and an infiltration of words or phrases from the dominant language into the minority language (Fishman, 1966; Haugen, 1969, 1972).

Recent studies conducted on language shift and maintenance have overwhelmingly shown a shift in heritage language use among the younger generations (Lee, 1999; Mills, 2001; Nguyen, Shin, & Krashen, 2001; Slavik, 2001). Because heritage language maintenance has been such a salient issue in the lives of refugees and immigrants, much research has also been done on how to best maintain a heritage language and culture, including but not limited to research on incorporating the heritage language and culture into the home, the school, and the community in general (Cho & Krashen, 2000; Lin, 2000; Luo & Wiseman, 2000; Sakamoto, 2001; Sun, 2000; Torrico, 2000). To the best knowledge of this researcher, however, there is a gap in the literature on language and cultural shift or maintenance within a generational cross-section of a Hmong community. This research will attempt to fill that gap.

## **Methodology**

The research questions that framed this study were threefold: (a) Is the Hmong language being maintained in a cross-section of the Hmong population in Merced? (b) Is the Hmong culture being maintained in a cross-section of the Hmong population in Merced? and (c) What support is available for Hmong language and cultural maintenance in Merced? To answer these questions, data were collected from individuals of varying ages within the Hmong community in Merced and from information resources there.

A total of 12 participants were chosen for the study on the basis of their Hmong ethnic heritage, residence in Merced, age or leadership position in the Hmong community, and gender, as shown in Table 1. The 10–17 age category was created for the youngest participants who (a) could be included in the research and (b) could be considered “children.” The 50 and older age category was created to include the oldest generation of participants in the study. The intermediate age categories each began a year after the end of the preceding

category and spanned to the middle (or, in the case of the 35- to 49-year-olds, the end) of the following decade. The researcher also chose participants based on their last names. The biographical categories and clan affiliations were chosen so that the study would be representative of the larger Hmong population in Merced, with the exception of the generation under 10, which was too young to participate in the research. The findings of the study, however, will focus on only the 12 participants from whom data were collected.

Participants were initially contacted to participate in this research via a relative of the researcher (who contacted her Hmong coworkers) and through a Hmong friend of the researcher (who contacted her relatives, friends, and friends of relatives). The researcher then called each potential participant, and/or parent of participant, to explain the reason for the research and the procedures that would be used for data collection. A date, time, and place to meet for the collection of data were then set during this phone contact. Interviews were conducted one-on-one with the researcher and each participant, sometimes with the addition of a translator who was made available for those needing translation services.

Participants were interviewed using 12 questions directed toward language and cultural maintenance (see Appendix A). Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The transcripts were mailed to the participants with a letter requesting a response if changes needed to be made.

Each participant was also given a questionnaire, which the researcher filled out with the participant at the time of the interview (see Appendix B). The questionnaire, adapted from a questionnaire created by Boshier (1992), asked each participant to provide biographical information (see Table 1), agree

Table 1  
*Participants' Biographical Data*

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age group</b>	<b>Sex</b>
<b>Community members</b>	Yer	10–17	Female
	Ger	10–17	Male
	Gao	18–24	Female
	Nou	18–24	Male
	Mai	25–34	Female
	Tou	25–34	Male
	Ai	35–49	Female
	Cha	35–49	Male
	Sa	50 or older	Female
	Thai	50 or older	Male
<b>Community leaders</b>	Chang	50 or older	Male
	Neng	50 or older	Male

*Note.* Pseudonyms were given to participants.

or disagree with statements regarding culture or language (see Table 2), give a self-rating of his or her own language abilities in terms of various language-based tasks (see Table 3), and tell how often he or she engaged in certain activities related to culture or language (see Tables 4 & 5). The findings from the interviews and questionnaires were summarized in terms of whether or not the generational cross-section of Hmong participants in the study were maintaining their Hmong language and culture.

Beyond gathering data from the Hmong subjects themselves, the researcher also obtained data about Merced in general, including its Hmong resources and organizations, to find out what support is available for Hmong language and cultural maintenance in Merced. Research was conducted via the Internet, library research, visits to various organizations in Merced, and personal interviews, as will be discussed in the following section.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **The Hmong Support System in Merced**

In researching what support is available for Hmong people in Merced, the researcher visited the Merced Lao Family Community Inc., the main Hmong organization in Merced that provides services to Hmong people. Through personal interviews with employees at the Merced Lao Family Community Inc. and through literature provided in the organization's office, the researcher found that this nonprofit organization has been serving the Southeast Asian community in general and the Hmong people in particular since 1983 by providing life-skills education, employment searches, translation services, and Hmong cultural celebrations (Merced Lao Family Community Inc., n.d.).

The researcher also visited libraries and schools and conducted Internet research to find out what other materials and resources for and about the Hmong people are available in Merced. It was found that the two public libraries in Merced, the Merced County Library and the Merced College Library, have a selection of books in both Hmong and English about the Hmong language, history, and culture. Merced College's library contains 22 books within the subject heading "Hmong," while the Merced County Library contains 42 books within the same subject heading (Merced County, 2004).

The researcher conducted research via the Internet about Hmong classes offered in Merced as well. Merced's two high schools, as well as its community college, all have Hmong language and culture classes at the beginning and intermediate levels. In Merced's school districts, bilingual Hmong teachers and Hmong paraprofessionals also serve the Hmong students.

Additionally, the participants in the study noted that cable TV Channel 11 broadcasts programs in Merced twice a week. Programs are directed

toward informing the Southeast Asian community about such topics as education, medicine, law, local organizations and agencies, and cultural events and celebrations (Merced Lao Family Community Inc., n.d.).

The participants in the study also stated that the Hmong language and culture are supported by a radio station broadcasting from Fresno, California, KBIF 900 AM, that reaches the Hmong population in Merced. The radio station boasts, "Hmong radio programmers estimate as many as 95% of the Hmong community listen some of the time" (KBIF Radio, 2001). According to the station's Web site, it also hosts what it calls a "Generation X Radio Show," which plays top Hmong hits geared to the younger Hmong generations.

### Group Profile

Over half of the 12 participants had been living in the United States for over 20 years, while the rest had lived there between 11 and 20 years. In the case of the youngest generation, this latter time frame spanned their entire lives. (All participants in this study have been given pseudonyms.)

In general, the younger generations arrived in the United States at younger ages, while the older generations arrived when they were older. The participants in the two youngest age categories were born in the United States and had lived there since that time. In the middle age category (25–34), Mai fell into the subcategory of arriving in the United States when she was between 1 day and 4 years old, while Tou arrived at an age between 5 and 13 years. Ai, from the 35–49 age category, also arrived when she was between 5 and 13 years old, while Cha, her male counterpart in the 35–49 age category, arrived when he was between 18 and 29 years old. Sa and Thai, from the 50 or older age category, arrived in the United States when they were 30–49 years old. Chang, one community leader, arrived when he was between 18 and 29, while Neng, another of the community leaders, arrived when he was 30–49 years old. All of the participants have lived in the United States since the time of their arrival.

All of the participants noted that they interacted with other Hmong people often, though some to a greater extent than others. Six of the participants lived in the same neighborhood as one or two other Hmong families. Six also lived within a mile of a relative other than those in their own household, while four lived only 1 to 5 miles from a relative. Ten of the participants saw a relative at least once a week. In addition, all of the participants had at least three siblings, while eight had six or more siblings. Seven of the participants, six of whom were 25 or older, felt that most of their friends were Hmong. Both of the 10- to 17-year-olds, on the other hand, felt that only some of their friends were Hmong, and only Nou, in the 18- to 24-year-old category, felt that almost none of his friends were Hmong.

In order to ascertain how often participants in this study engaged in activities with those who were not Hmong, the researcher also asked about participants' relationships with "American" people. For the purpose of this

study, *American* was defined as “non-Hmong.” The reasoning behind this line of questioning is that if participants are spending more time with American people than they are with other Hmong people, they may be more likely to experience a shift in their Hmong language and culture. Half of the participants, representing all age groups, noted that some of their close friends were American, while Nou, Gao, and Chang said that almost all of their close friends were American. Only three participants (Sa and Neng, who could not speak English to a communicative degree, and Mai) noted that almost none of their close friends were American. This discrepancy between Chang, who is 50 or older, having almost all American friends and Sa and Neng, also 50 or older, having almost all Hmong friends may be due to Chang’s younger age upon arrival in the United States. It is not clear why Mai, who is from the third-youngest generation, did not have close American friends.

### Language Ability and Use: Generational Shift

All of the participants’ parents were able to speak Hmong fluently, with Hmong being the native language of all of the participants’ fathers and the native language of 10 of the 12 participants’ mothers. Two of the participants’ mothers spoke Lao as their native language but were also able to speak Hmong with ease. All of the participants themselves were able to understand spoken directions in Hmong (see Table 3). Though Ger and Mai found it difficult to speak in Hmong to a Hmong store owner about a product in the store, all of the other participants found this task to be easy in Hmong.

A generational shift was shown with regard to the importance participants placed on English or Hmong language skills (see Table 2). While Nou, from the 18–24 category, disagreed that it was important for a Hmong person to speak Hmong, Ger and Yer from the youngest generation only somewhat agreed, and all of the participants over 24 felt strongly that it was important for a Hmong person to speak Hmong. While all of the participants under 35 somewhat agreed that it was important for a Hmong person to speak English very well, three of those 35 or older strongly agreed, and two disagreed. All but one of the participants 25 or older strongly agreed that it was important for a Hmong person to read and write in Hmong, whereas the 18- to 24-year-olds disagreed, and the 10- to 17-year-olds somewhat agreed. All participants 34 or younger, with the exception of Yer, somewhat agreed that it was important for a Hmong person to read and write in English very well, while three of those 35 or older strongly agreed, and two disagreed.

A generational shift was shown with regard to not only opinions about language ability, but also actual self-rated language ability (see Table 3). Of the participants under 35, half found two or more listening or speaking tasks in Hmong to be difficult. On the other hand, all of the participants 35 or older, with the exception of Ai, felt that all listening and speaking tasks in Hmong were easy to perform. The majority of the participants found the reading and

Table 2

*Participant Opinions Regarding Language and Culture*

Participants from youngest to oldest	Opinions regarding culture							Opinions regarding language				
	I am proud to be Hmong.	I am (or would be) proud to be an American citizen.	It is important for me to keep my Hmong culture.	It is important to me that I marry another Hmong person.	It is important for me to respect my elders by obeying them.	It is important for me to take care of my elderly family members by having them live with me.	It is important for me to maintain close family ties with my relatives.	It is important for a Hmong person to speak Hmong.	It is important for a Hmong person to read and write in Hmong.	It is important for a Hmong person to speak English very well.	It is important for a Hmong person to read and write in English very well.	
Yer	1	1	1	3	1	2	1	2	2	2	3	
Ger	2	2	2	3	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	
Gao	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	1	3	2	2	
Nou	2	2	3	3	1	1	1	3	3	2	2	
Mai	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	
Tou	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	
Ai	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	
Cha	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	
Sa	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	
Thai	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Chang	1	1	1	2	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	
Neng	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	

Note. 1 = strongly agree; 2 = somewhat agree; 3 = disagree.

writing tasks in Hmong to be difficult, though Ai and Cha (in the 35- to 49-year-old category) and Chang (50 or older) felt that the Hmong reading and writing tasks were easy.

Results for English-language ability showed a contrast with the results regarding ability in Hmong (see Table 3). Although all of the participants who were 50 or older felt that debating about an important topic in English would be difficult, and although Sa and Neng, also 50 or older, felt that any task other than understanding spoken directions in English would be difficult, all of the other participants noted that all of the English-language tasks were easy for them. Sa and Neng were preliterate in both Hmong and English.

The findings showed that language choice was affected not only by the generation of the person speaking but also by the generation of the person being addressed (see Table 4). For example, 11 of the 12 participants used



Table 3

*Participant Self-Ratings of Language Ability*

	Participants from youngest to oldest	Understand spoken directions	Understand the news on TV	Speak to a store owner about a product in the store	<sup>a</sup> Debate about an important topic	<sup>a</sup> Read a flyer from an elementary school	Read a folktale in Hmong or read a research paper on Laos in English	<sup>a</sup> Write an invitation to a party in Hmong or fill out a job application in English	Write a folktale in Hmong or write an essay about your life in the U.S. in English
<b>Hmong language ability</b>	Yer	E	E	E	E	D	D	E	D
	Ger	E	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
	Gao	E	E	E	E	D	D	D	D
	Nou	E	D	E	D	D	D	D	D
	Mai	E	E	D	D	D	D	D	D
	Tou	E	E	E	E	D	E	D	D
	Ai	E	D	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Cha	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Sa	E	E	E	E	D	D	D	D
	Thai	E	E	E	E	D	D	D	D
	Chang	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Neng	E	E	E	E	D	D	D	D
<b>English language ability</b>	Yer	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Ger	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Gao	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Nou	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Mai	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Tou	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Ai	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Cha	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Sa	E	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
	Thai	E	E	E	D	E	E	E	E
	Chang	E	E	E	D	E	E	E	E
	Neng	E	D	D	D	D	D	D	D

Note. E = easy; D = difficult.

<sup>a</sup> The 10–17 age group was given an age-appropriate equivalent to the language ability statements presented to participants 18 or over. (See Appendix B.)

Table 4

*Frequency of Hmong and English-Language Use With Others*

Participants from youngest to oldest	Frequency of use of Hmong by others to participants									Frequency of use of Hmong by participants to others								
	Grandparents	Father	Mother	Siblings	Spouse	Children	Hmong friends	Coworkers	Teachers	Grandparents	Father	Mother	Siblings	Spouse	Children	Hmong friends	Coworkers	Teachers
Yer	2	2	2	1	NA	NA	1	0	0	2	2	2	1	NA	NA	1	0	0
Ger	2	1	1	1	NA	NA	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	NA	NA	1	1	0
Gao	2	2	2	1	NA	NA	1	1	0	2	2	2	1	NA	NA	1	1	0
Nou	2	1	1	1	1	NA	1	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
Mai	NA	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	NA	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	0
Tou	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	0
Ai	2	2	2	2	NA	1	1	1	0	2	2	2	2	NA	1	1	1	0
Cha	NA	2	2	2	1	1	2	0	0	NA	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	0
Sa	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	NA	NA	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	NA	NA
Thai	NA	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	NA	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	0
Chang	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	0	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	0
Neng	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	NA	NA	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	NA	NA

*Note.* 2 = always; 1 = sometimes; 0 = never; NA = not applicable.

Hmong with grandparents, whereas Ger, from the youngest age category, sometimes used English while speaking with his grandparents.

Language use with parents showed more differentiation among generations (see Table 4). In terms of Hmong-language use, 10 of the 12 participants noted that they “always” spoke Hmong to their parents, while 2, Ger and Nou, from the two youngest age categories, stated that they only “sometimes” did so. Yer, however, interpreted “always” on the questionnaire to mean “most of the time,” as she noted that she also “sometimes” spoke English with her parents. Ger and Nou also noted that their parents only sometimes spoke Hmong to them, whereas the other 10 participants noted that their parents always did so. However, Mai, who noted that she and her parents always used Hmong when communicating, added in her interview that when her parents spoke Hmong, “it’s really hard for me to pick up what they’re trying to say.” Of the youngest generation, Yer and Ger’s parents sometimes spoke English to them, while Ger sometime spoke Hmong to his parents. Yer, again, interpreted “always” as “most of the time,” as she noted

Table 4, cont.,

Participants from youngest to oldest	Frequency of use of English by others to participants									Frequency of use of English by participants to others								
	Grandparents	Father	Mother	Siblings	Spouse	Children	Hmong friends	Coworkers	Teachers	Grandparents	Father	Mother	Siblings	Spouse	Children	Hmong friends	Coworkers	Teachers
Yer	0	1	1	1	NA	NA	1	2	2	0	1	1	1	NA	NA	1	2	2
Ger	0	1	1	1	NA	NA	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	NA	NA	1	1	2
Gao	0	0	1	1	NA	NA	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	NA	NA	1	1	2
Nou	0	1	1	1	1	NA	1	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Mai	NA	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	NA	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2
Tou	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2
Ai	0	0	0	0	NA	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	NA	1	1	1	2
Cha	NA	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	NA	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	2
Sa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	NA	NA	0	0	0	0	0	0	NA	NA	NA
Thai	NA	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	NA	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2
Chang	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2
Neng	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	NA	NA	0	0	0	0	0	0	NA	NA	NA

Note. 2 = always; 1 = sometimes; 0 = never; NA = not applicable.

that her parents “always” spoke Hmong to her as well. The other participants, all 25 or older, stated that their parents never used English with them and that they never used English with their parents.

Of the participants who had spouses, those younger than 50 sometimes used Hmong with each other, while only Cha “always” used Hmong when speaking to his wife (see Table 4). However, like Yer, Cha seemed to interpret “always” on the questionnaire as “most of the time,” as he also noted that he “sometimes” spoke English to his wife. All of the spouses of the participants who were under 50 sometimes spoke English with the participants, including Cha’s wife. Participants who were 50 or older noted that they and their spouses always spoke Hmong with each other, though Chang also noted that he and his wife sometimes spoke English together, and Thai noted that he sometimes spoke English to his wife. Chang and Thai, like Yer, also interpreted “always” on this section of the questionnaire as meaning “most of the time.”

With relation to language use with children, only Sa and Neng, Hmong-only speakers, stated that they and their children always communicated in

Hmong and never used English. The other participants with offspring spoke both Hmong and English to their children; their children, if old enough to speak, did the same.

Findings regarding language use with siblings showed that Hmong was “always” spoken to siblings of those who were 35 or older, though the data also showed that Cha, Thai, and Chang interpreted this to mean “almost always,” as they sometimes used English when speaking with their siblings as well (see Table 4). On the other hand, all of those who were under 35 spoke Hmong to their siblings only sometimes. Likewise, the three participants who noted that they never spoke English to their siblings and the four who stated that their siblings never used English with them were all 35 or older, while the majority of those who stated that they sometimes used English with their siblings were under the age of 35.

Within the category of language use with Hmong friends, of the participants who were able to speak English, all used both English and Hmong (see Table 4). Only two participants, Sa and Neng, always spoke Hmong with their Hmong friends and never used English. In the domains of work and school, the majority of the participants and their coworkers used English at least some of the time, while they always used English with their teachers.

As a whole, the findings on self-rated language ability and use showed that the older generations used Hmong with greater ease and frequency than the younger generations and that the younger generations were more proficient in English and used English more often than the older generations.

### Participation in Hmong or American Cultures: Generational Shift

A generational shift was also apparent in terms of participants living Hmong or American lifestyles. According to their interviews, most of the participants under 50 felt that they lived either an equally Hmong and American lifestyle or a mostly American lifestyle, whereas the majority of those 50 or older stated that they lived a more Hmong lifestyle. Though all of the participants noted on the questionnaires that they were proud to be both Hmong and American, the interviews showed that those who were over 35 considered themselves to be Hmong at all times and rarely, if ever, felt American, while the majority of those 34 or younger said that they felt both Hmong and American at the same time. Likewise, 9 of the 12 participants strongly agreed that it was important to maintain their Hmong culture, while the 2 who somewhat agreed and the 1 who disagreed were under 25. The majority of participants under 35 also disagreed that it was important for them to marry another Hmong person. Not all of the findings showed a cultural shift in lifestyle, however, as the majority of the participants, representing all age groups, felt that it was important to respect their elders by obeying them, to take care of their elderly family members by having them live with them, and to maintain close ties with their relatives.

Findings regarding participation in Hmong or American cultures also showed a generational shift in some areas (see Table 5). Participation in American cultural events such as shows, concerts, parades, or exhibits and Hmong cultural events such as house cleansing ceremonies or healing ceremonies seemed to have equal participation from across the generations. However, although most of the participants participated in Hmong New Year events, two of the four who only sometimes participated in the Hmong New Year traditions were Yer and Ger, from the youngest age group, and the one who noted that he never participated in such events was Nou, from the second-youngest generation. Likewise, most of the participants took part in the American tradition of Thanksgiving, while of the three who did not always participate, two were 50 years old or older.

Table 5

*Frequency of Participation in American or Hmong Cultural Activities*

<b>Participants from youngest to oldest</b>	Eat Southeast Asian food such as steamed rice, tam som, or tapioca drink	Eat non-Southeast Asian food such as sandwiches, hamburgers, hot dogs, or baked potatoes	Listen to music with Hmong lyrics	Listen to music with English lyrics	Watch movies in Hmong	Watch movies in English	Participate in American cultural events such as shows, concerts, parades, or exhibits	Participate in Hmong cultural events such as house cleansing ceremonies or healing ceremonies	Participate in Hmong holidays such as Hmong New Year celebrations	Participate in American holidays such as Thanksgiving
Yer	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	3
Ger	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	3
Gao	3	2	1	3	2	3	2	3	3	2
Nou	3	2	1	3	1	3	2	2	1	3
Mai	2	3	1	3	1	3	2	3	3	3
Tou	3	3	1	3	1	3	2	2	3	3
Ai	3	2	3	3	1	3	3	1	3	3
Cha	3	1	3	2	3	1	2	3	2	3
Sa	3	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1
Thai	3	2	3	2	3	3	2	2	3	3
Chang	3	1	3	2	1	3	1	2	3	3
Neng	3	1	3	1	2	1	2	3	3	2

*Note.* 3 = almost always (7 or more times out of 10); 2 = sometimes (2 to 6 times out of 10); 1 = hardly ever (0 times to 1 time out of 10).

In terms of food preferences, most of the participants almost always ate Southeast Asian food such as steamed rice, tam som, or tapioca drink, with the exception of two participants who were under 35, who only sometimes ate Southeast Asian food (see Table 5). Of the participants under 35, the majority sometimes ate non-Southeast Asian food such as sandwiches, hamburgers, hot dogs, or baked potatoes, while the majority of those over 34 hardly ever ate non-Southeast Asian food.

Findings on entertainment choices showed that the majority of those who listened to music with English lyrics were of the younger generations, while the majority of those who listened to music with Hmong lyrics were of the older generations (see Table 5). Four participants in the younger generations hardly ever listened to music with Hmong lyrics, whereas only Sa and Neng, both 50 or older, hardly ever listened to music with English lyrics. Likewise, most of the participants almost always watched movies in English, while only two, Cha and Thai, who were both 35 or older, almost always watched movies in Hmong. Thai, however, also noted that he almost always watched movies in English as well.

The above findings, then, showed that participation in Hmong cultural activities and adherence to Hmong cultural traditions seemed to be shifting in some areas in the younger generations of participants. At the same time, the findings pointed to a higher connectivity with the American culture, traditions, and lifestyle in some areas among the younger generations of participants. Rather than indicating a complete shift toward American culture in its totality, this may be pointing to a shift toward a new Hmong identity formed in the United States that is not necessarily Hmong culture from Laos and not exactly American culture.

### Participant Predictions About Future of Hmong Language and Culture in Merced

Though most of the participants pointed to Hmong religious practices, cultural traditions, and language as identifying factors of being Hmong, many felt that these Hmong traits would not exist in the future. With regard to culture and religion, many of the participants felt that the Hmong traditions would change or be completely lost in the near future. Tou, for example, stated of the Hmong traditions, "We're lucky if they're gonna be recorded on paper and ... someday our kids can just read in the paper." He concluded, "If we can get that much, then I think we'll be lucky." Gao also stated of the Hmong culture, "I feel like it's already dying out a lot." Thai felt that the Hmong heritage would be lost as the Hmong youth married Americans, though Yer opposed this point of view, saying that such marriages would not cause the shift of the Hmong culture. Some participants felt that though there would be changes in the Hmong traditions, those changes would be of little consequence

to the culture as a whole. Ger explained of the Hmong cultural practices, “It won’t be the same ... but at least, but at least it’ll be, like, still there, you know?”

With regard to the future of the Hmong language, many participants also felt that generations to come would not be able to speak Hmong with the fluency that Hmong is now being spoken among the older generations. Yer stated of her generation that “we hardly know any Hmong. . . . We don’t even know the meanings, so how can we tell our own kids, like, the meaning of what we’re speaking and stuff?” Gao also explained, “To be honest, I’m starting to feel like it’s dying out already.” Neng, on the other hand, predicted that though the Hmong language may change, it will always be spoken by Hmong people.

### Participant Feelings About Hmong Language and Cultural Shift in Merced

Some participants seemed to have mixed emotions about the Hmong traditions, religion, or language being lost in subsequent generations. Yer, for example, stated, “To me, it doesn’t matter about, um, if you practice going to church or if you practice, um, doing the shaman.” She then asserted, however, “I really think it’s screwed up to, you know, believe in Caucasian belief or whatever.” She explained of Hmong people who go to church, “Now they’re losing the whole tradition because they’re going to church and stuff ... and, and it teaches them God, but how about the spirits, you know, like what Hmong people believe, you know?” Similarly, Cha stated, “I feel bad” about the younger generation’s loss of ability to carry on the Hmong traditions, and asserted that the elders should “explain [to the younger generation that] we have to keep our culture like this.”

A few participants expressed indifference about the continuance of the Hmong culture in the future. Sa stated through a translator, “If they don’t know it, that’s fine. I mean, we came to America, so if they’re gonna lose it, then that’s okay. I mean, if they want to become Christian or whatnot, then that’s fine.” Similarly, in speaking about future generations of Hmong people performing the Hmong religious ceremonies, Neng stated through a translator, “If they don’t like it and they don’t want to do it, they could go to church. . . . It’s not gonna be a problem for him [Neng].”

Participants also had varying feelings about the Hmong language shifting. Regarding the loss of the Hmong language in the younger generations, Thai asserted, “If they stop to speak Hmong, they is not a Hmong!” Sa stated through a translator that if Hmong people cannot speak Hmong, “It doesn’t seem that’s right,” but “she [Sa] doesn’t look down upon them or anything. She [Sa] just wishes they would learn.” When asked how he would feel if his infant daughter were not able to speak Hmong when she grew up, Nou responded, “I would like her to be able to conversate in Hmong with a Hmong

person . . . who doesn't speak English . . . but I wouldn't feel really . . . really, really bad if she doesn't want to. . . . So, but I would really love it if she did." He concluded, "I'm kind of tossed in between, you know?"

### Participant Perceptions of Hmong Language and Cultural Support in Merced

The participants had varying opinions as to whether their culture and language were being supported in Merced. Most of those who felt that the Hmong culture was indeed being supported pointed to the Hmong New Year celebration that is held at the Merced Fairgrounds every year. Gao explained, "It's trying to tell us that we are still Hmong, come to this New Year, you know? Wear Hmong costume. Come to this New Year. So, I guess they're still helping out to keep that alive." Nou also felt that Merced's support was "pretty evident" due to "the different organizations" in Merced that help the Hmong community.

Mai, however, would only go so far as to say that in the Merced community "there is a sufficient level of toleration" for Hmong people and Hmong cultural practices, but that the Hmong community was not "supported" per se. Tou also stated, "Of the community as a whole, I think we're still very divided and separated." He explained, "I think there's, there's still a lot of ignorance out there and there's still, uh, a lot of intolerance for different practices."

Most of those who felt that the Hmong culture was not supported stated that there was a cultural barrier with regard to animal sacrifices not being allowed at residences. The Hmong traditional practices of healing, for example, generally involve the sacrifice of a chicken or pig in exchange for the returned health of the sick individual. According to Sa, shamans, healers in the Hmong culture, have the ability to exchange the soul of an animal for the lost part of a person's soul (the part of the body that is causing the illness), but not all shamans have the special ability to then transport the lost soul over a distance back to its original home. It is no wonder, then, that, as Yer stated, "Like, the whole killing pig at your house, they don't let you do that, like, but Hmong people still do it anyways." Mai felt that in terms of traditional Hmong healing practices, non-Hmong people in Merced "don't get to know a certain group of people" and "they just, you know, judge you." She explained that non-Hmong people "may not understand what we [are] doing . . . and to them, it's probably, like . . . you can't do that. . . . It's, it's against animal right[s] or whatever. . . . But, to the Hmong people, that's something that they have to do. So, to me, it's not really, um, supporting. . . . I think it's a culture conflict."



## Participant Perceptions of Why Hmong Language and Culture May Be Shifting in Merced

Participants felt that a generational shift in Hmong language and culture might be occurring for various reasons. With regard to a shift in language, many of the participants stated that the older generations knew the “deeper” Hmong words and “more sophisticated” grammar, whereas the younger generations did not. Chang gave an example, stating, “Hmong never have the word *gas*. But over there [in Laos] we just, uh, have the wood and the wood, uh, we have the Hmong word, but the gas, we do not have the Hmong word or the Lao word, and they, so they, so they don’t know.” Neng also explained through an interpreter that he knew many different words for an object, whereas his children knew only one word for each object. Tou explained how this affects the communication between generations, saying, “A lot of young people are not able to communicate with their parents because they haven’t picked up the Hmong language. . . . They, uh, communicate in English much better.” Yer and Ger stated that their generation did not always understand their parents’ generation when they spoke Hmong because, as Ger expressed, “Their Hmong is real Hmong, it’s Laos Hmong. . . . And then our Hmong is American slash Hmong.”

Many participants also pointed to the infiltration of the English language into the Hmong language as a reason why the Hmong language seems to be shifting in the younger generations in Merced. For example, Chang explained that Hmong did not have an equivalent for “I don’t care,” so Hmong youth combined the Hmong for “I don’t” (“*kuv tsis*”) with “care” in English. Participants from the younger generations noted that they have difficulty speaking Hmong without using English. Gao also felt that the Hmong families were contributing to more English-language use, saying that Hmong families are “making their kids speak more English now than Hmong. So, it’s already dying out a lot from that.” Low motivation to speak Hmong may also be a factor as to why a shift in the Hmong language may be occurring among the younger generations, as Ger asserted, “I can’t really speak Hmong. Wait. . . . Yeah, I can, but I don’t want to.”

In terms of why Hmong culture may be shifting, participants felt that the younger generations were not being taught the culture and the reasons behind the traditions, but also that they were not interested in learning about the culture either. Cha stated, “I think it be just, that, nobody teach them because I see that they don’t teach.” Yer supported this statement when she explained of her generation, “We don’t even know what shaman is. . . . Like, we practice it but we don’t, like, you know, we don’t know why it’s done, the causes and stuff like that.” Mai stated that the shift was also due to personal choice, stating, “I think, I think that they [the younger generations] choose not to learn the Hmong culture or to learn the Hmong language.”

## Characteristics of the Hmong Community

There are several characteristics of the Hmong community that may enable the community to maintain its heritage language and culture despite the results from this study that seem to show a shift occurring in the use of the Hmong language and practice of the Hmong culture among the younger generations of Hmong participants. Schmid (2002) identifies one such characteristic as the “ethnic vitality” factor, defined as group solidarity, community, and promotion of the heritage language and culture. Not only are there Hmong classes, resources, and celebrations in Merced, but there is also a community of over 6,000 Hmong people living there, creating an extensive network for the promotion of Hmong language and culture.

Many of the participants in this study noted that they value the Hmong community in Merced and the bond that Hmong people have with each other. Participants noted in their interviews that the Hmong communities maintain a well-defined organizational structure and time-proven method of handing down their cultural practices from community leaders and elders to others in the community. Some of the participants in this study felt that the elders and the Hmong community as a whole in Merced would be able to provide the necessary cultural training and language education for the younger generations that could not carry out the Hmong cultural traditions or speak the Hmong language well at the time of this study.

## Conclusion

This study has shown that the Hmong language does seem to be shifting in the generational cross-section of participants in the Hmong community in Merced, and that aspects of the Hmong culture also seem to be undergoing a generational shift within those same participants. The implications of this apparent shift in the Hmong language and culture of the younger generations are twofold: (a) If the younger generations of participants do not learn the Hmong language by the time they need to teach their children Hmong, then future generations of the participants will experience a loss in their ability to maintain their language, and (b) If the younger generations of participants are not able to impart their Hmong cultural traditions to their children, then future generations of the participants will experience a loss in their ability to maintain their culture. The findings also showed, however, that there are Hmong language and cultural resources for the Hmong in Merced through which to maintain their language and culture.

Though this study showed that the participants seemed to be undergoing a generational shift in terms of their Hmong language and culture, it does not show conclusive evidence as to whether or not this difference in language and culture will continue as the younger generations of participants become

more advanced in years. If the younger generations can form a new Hmong identity in which salient features of the Hmong community's identity are incorporated—that is, if the older Hmong generations can in fact impart their knowledge of the Hmong culture and language to the younger Hmong generations in the future, which appears possible in light of this study's findings regarding their community characteristics—then the chances of the participants' Hmong language and culture being maintained are heightened.

## Suggestions

### *Suggestions of participants*

Many of the participants in this study stated that if the Hmong culture and language were to be maintained, the motivation and means would need to come from within the Hmong community itself. Some participants pointed to the Hmong family unit as the main promoter of Hmong culture and language, where others pointed to the individual or to the others in the Hmong community. Gao asserted, "I think the family's the main thing, you know, like, if they want that Hmong language to continue, it continues in the family." Yer felt, however, "If you're Hmong and you're proud of who you are, then you should keep your own language. You shouldn't depend on other people, like, keeping your own language and helping you, you know, get your language and stuff." Neng stated through a translator, "It's not up to the individual. It's the community that the individual lives in."

It was also noted, however, that people outside of the Hmong community could serve as catalysts for such change in terms of providing funding, giving political support, promoting the maintenance of the Hmong language and culture in Merced's schools, and advocating Hmong language and cultural maintenance in Merced in general. Tou, for example, stated that as a minority, he feels that Hmong culture is "less significant" and "less important" than American culture, but that "if you actually incorporate the [Hmong] history, the culture, the language into the mainstream culture" then "it makes the kids realize, 'Hey, we're actually a part of America.'" Hmong classes at the high school level have, for example, had an effect on Yer's understanding of her Hmong language and culture as well as her desire to maintain her heritage for future generations. She explained that she took Hmong classes because "I want to find out, like, how, why we're Hmong and how we all just got to America and stuff like that. And so I'm proud of who I am. . . . And if I can have children, I plan to really teach them Hmong and English at the same time. . . . I don't want my, part of my culture to be left out from us, you know, I want part of it still to be in them, too."

Some of the participants also noted that a Hmong cultural center would be helpful in maintaining the Hmong culture and language, especially in promoting the culture and language to the younger Hmong generations. Chang explained that such a place is important for the survival of the Hmong culture,

saying, "I believe that we should have the resource or the one thing, Miss, because we are not too rich and nobody can offer the place for us, you know, offer the place [where] we can meet or to teach. That is the problem for us. . . . To learn the Hmong culture, some you cannot learn inside the home, too, you need to learn outside the home. . . . Some culture . . . they don't allow you to learn inside."

### *Suggestions of the researcher*

The researcher would suggest that the Hmong people pursue language planning to promote the maintenance of the Hmong language and culture in Merced (Warner, 1999). The following two ideas serve to expand upon this suggestion:

1. Young Hmong individuals should be taught to conduct research on Hmong language and cultural maintenance in Merced in order that they might serve as change agents in terms of issues that they identify as necessary and important.
2. Hmong individuals in Merced should be taught how to conduct a language-planning campaign so that they might be catalysts for reversing the apparent shift of the Hmong language and promoting its maintenance. Such teaching might include discussions with other linguistic communities who have used such campaigns with positive results.

The researcher would also suggest the following for the education of Hmong students in Merced:

1. The schools in Merced should bolster their efforts in the maintenance and promotion of the Hmong language and culture. The "World Languages enrichment classes" offered at Phalen Lake Elementary School, part of Saint Paul Public Schools in Minnesota, might be a helpful model (Phalen Lake Elementary School, n.d.).
2. Merced should create a charter school for the integration of Hmong language and culture into the daily school curriculum, as is the case at the Hmong Academy Charter School in Minneapolis, which opened in the fall of 2004 (Hmong Academy, n.d.).

### *Need for Further Study*

Though this study suggested that the younger Hmong generations in Merced were not able to use the Hmong language as well as the older generations and did not maintain the Hmong culture to the extent that the older generations did, it is not conclusive whether or not this trend will continue as those in the younger generations grow older. It is also uncertain how the relocation of 15,000 Hmong refugees from Thailand to Hmong communities in the United States in the summer of 2004 will affect the maintenance of Hmong language and culture in Merced (Magagnini, 2004).

The researcher, then, would suggest the following options for further study:

1. A longitudinal study of Hmong participants other than those in this research and/or a study of the same younger generation participants in the future should be conducted to ascertain whether they had indeed kept their Hmong language and culture as they grew older.
2. A larger pool of participants should respond to a questionnaire designed to identify whether the Hmong language and culture are shifting as well as to determine the variables affecting such a shift.
3. A longitudinal study of the same younger generation participants and participants from the new group of Hmong refugees in Merced should be undertaken to identify how, if at all, the new Hmong refugees are affecting Hmong language and cultural maintenance in Merced.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

#### Language Maintenance

1. Do you think that the Hmong that you speak is different from the Hmong that your (parents, children, grandchildren, grandparents, etc.) speak? If it is, how is it different, and why do you think it is different? If it is not different, why do you think it has been able to stay the same?
2. What do you think would happen if a Hmong person did not learn how to speak Hmong? What effect would that have on his/her life, as well as the lives of others in the Hmong community?
3. What do you do to make sure that you (and your children) do not forget how to speak Hmong?
4. What places in Merced can you see Hmong in print? What places in Merced can you hear the Hmong language? What places in Merced can you see Hmong people?
5. What do you think the Merced community can do to help the Hmong community keep the Hmong language alive and strong?

#### Cultural Maintenance

1. What makes you Hmong?
2. In what situations or occasions do you identify yourself as Hmong? As American? Why?
3. What Hmong values do you value the most? American values? Why?
4. How would you identify the way that you live in terms of being mostly Hmong or mostly American or equally Hmong and American? Why?
5. In your life, do you feel like you keep your Hmong culture? If you do, what do you do to make sure that you (and your children) keep your Hmong culture? If you do not, why do you think you are not keeping your Hmong culture?
6. Do you think that the people of Merced support the Hmong community by celebrating your culture? Why? Why not?
7. What do you think the Merced community can do to help the Hmong community keep the Hmong culture alive and strong?



## Appendix B

### Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?

male

female

2. How old were you when you entered the United States?

- |                                    |                        |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| ˘ I was born in the United States. | ˘ 18 years to 29 years |
| ˘ 1 day to 4 years                 | ˘ 30 years to 49 years |
| ˘ 5 years to 13 years              | ˘ 50 or over           |
| ˘ 14 years to 17 years             |                        |

3. How old are you now?

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| ˘ 10 years to 17 years | ˘ 35 years to 49 years |
| ˘ 18 years to 24 years | ˘ 50 or over           |
| ˘ 25 years to 34 years |                        |

4. How many years have you lived in the United States?

- |             |                 |
|-------------|-----------------|
| ˘ 0–1 year  | ˘ 8–10 years    |
| ˘ 2–3 years | ˘ 11–20 years   |
| ˘ 4–5 years | ˘ over 20 years |
| ˘ 6–7 years |                 |

5. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

- |     |             |
|-----|-------------|
| ˘ 0 | ˘ 4         |
| ˘ 1 | ˘ 5         |
| ˘ 2 | ˘ 6 or more |
| ˘ 3 |             |

6. What is your birth order?

- |                          |                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| ˘ I am the first child.  | ˘ I am the fifth child. |
| ˘ I am the second child. | ˘ I am the sixth child. |
| ˘ I am the third child.  | ˘ I am _____.           |
| ˘ I am the fourth child. |                         |

If your parents were not educated in their native countries, go to #9.

7. What is the highest level of education that your father has completed in his native country?
- ˘ No education
  - ˘ Between one and two years of schooling
  - ˘ Between three and five years of schooling
  - ˘ Secondary school
  - ˘ College
  - ˘ Post-college work
  - ˘ I don't know.
8. What is the highest level of education that your mother has completed in her native country?
- ˘ No education
  - ˘ Between one and two years of schooling
  - ˘ Between three and five years of schooling
  - ˘ Secondary school
  - ˘ College
  - ˘ Post-college work
  - ˘ I don't know.

If your parents were not educated in the U.S., go to #11.

9. What is the highest level of education that your father has completed in the United States?
- ˘ No education
  - ˘ Elementary school
  - ˘ Secondary school (high school or GED)
  - ˘ College
  - ˘ Post-college
  - ˘ I don't know.
10. What is the highest level of education that your mother has completed in the United States?
- ˘ No education
  - ˘ Elementary school
  - ˘ Secondary school (high school or GED)
  - ˘ College
  - ˘ Post-college
  - ˘ I don't know.

11. At what level did you enter into the United States school system?

- ˘ I did not attend school in the United States.
- ˘ Preschool or Kindergarten
- ˘ Grade 1–Grade 5
- ˘ Grade 6–Grade 9
- ˘ Grade 10–Grade 12
- ˘ College
- ˘ Post-college

12. What is the native language (first language) of your mother?

- ˘ Hmong
- ˘ Lao
- ˘ Thai
- ˘ Chinese
- ˘ English
- ˘ Other

13. What is the native language (first language) of your father?

- ˘ Hmong
- ˘ Lao
- ˘ Thai
- ˘ Chinese
- ˘ English
- ˘ Other

14. Please mark an “X” in the box that best describes how often each of the people on the left *speaks Hmong to you*.

	Always	Sometimes	Never	Not Applicable
Grandparents				
Father				
Mother				
Siblings				
Husband/Wife				
Children				
Hmong friends				
Colleagues (at work)				
Teachers (at school)				

15. Please mark an “X” in the box that best describes how often *you speak Hmong* to the people on the left.

	Always	Sometimes	Never	Not Applicable
Grandparents				
Father				
Mother				
Siblings				
Husband/Wife				
Children				
Hmong friends				
Colleagues (at work)				
Teachers (at school)				

16. Please mark an “X” in the box that best describes how often each of the people on the left *speaks English to you*.

	Always	Sometimes	Never	Not Applicable
Grandparents				
Father				
Mother				
Siblings				
Husband/Wife				
Children				
Hmong friends				
Colleagues (at work)				
Teachers (at school)				

17. Please mark an “X” in the box that best describes how often *you speak English* to the people on the left.

	Always	Sometimes	Never	Not Applicable
Grandparents				
Father				
Mother				
Siblings				
Husband/Wife				
Children				
Hmong friends				
Colleagues (at work)				
Teachers (at school)				

18. How many of your close friends are Hmong?

- ˘ Almost all of them
- ˘ Almost none of them
- ˘ Some of them

19. How many of your close friends are American? (“American,” in this case, means a person who was born in the United States and is not Hmong.)

- ˘ Almost all of them
- ˘ Almost none of them
- ˘ Some of them

20. How many Hmong families live near you? (in your neighborhood)

- ˘ None
- ˘ 4–5 families
- ˘ 1 family
- ˘ 6–7 families
- ˘ 2 families
- ˘ 8 or more families
- ˘ 3 families

21. How far away are you from a relative other than those with whom you live?

- ˘ Within a mile
- ˘ Between 16 and 30 miles
- ˘ Between 1 and 5 miles
- ˘ Between 31 and 60 miles
- ˘ Between 6 and 15 miles
- ˘ Over 60 miles

22. How often do you see at least one other relative other than those with whom you live?

- Once a week
- Once a month
- Once a year

In the following two questions, “American” means a person who was born in the United States who, in this case, is not Hmong.

23. Think of your favorite song. Who is the singer? Is he/she...

- Hmong
- American
- Other

24. Think of your favorite actor/actress. Who is he/she? Is he/she...

- Hmong
- American
- Other

The following questions have “almost always,” “sometimes,” and “hardly ever” as possible responses. “Almost always” can be defined as 7 or more times out of 10. “Sometimes” can be defined as 2–6 times out of 10. “Hardly ever” can be defined as 0 times to 1 time out of 10.

25. How often do you eat Southeast Asian food? (steamed rice, tam som, tapioca drink)

- Almost always
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever

26. How often do you eat non–Southeast Asian food? (sandwiches, hamburgers, hot dogs, baked potatoes)

- Almost always
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever

27. When you listen to music, how often do you listen to music with Hmong lyrics?

- Almost always
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever

28. When you listen to music, how often do you listen to music with English lyrics?

- Almost always
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever

29. When you watch movies, how often do you watch them in Hmong?

- ˘ Almost always                      ˘ Hardly ever
- ˘ Sometimes

30. When you watch movies, how often do you watch them in English?

- ˘ Almost always                      ˘ Hardly ever
- ˘ Sometimes

31. When you participate in social and/or recreational activities, how often do you do so with other Hmong people?

- ˘ Almost always                      ˘ Hardly ever
- ˘ Sometimes

In the following questions, “American” indicates a person/tradition that, in this case, is not Hmong.

32. When you participate in social and/or recreational activities, how often do you do so with American people?

- ˘ Almost always                      ˘ Hardly ever
- ˘ Sometimes

33. How often do you participate in American cultural events? (shows, concerts, parades, exhibits)

- ˘ Almost always                      ˘ Hardly ever
- ˘ Sometimes

34. How often do you participate in Hmong cultural events? (house cleansing ceremonies, healing ceremonies)

- ˘ Almost always                      ˘ Hardly ever
- ˘ Sometimes

35. How often do you participate in Hmong holidays such as Hmong New Year celebrations?

- ˘ Almost always                      ˘ Hardly ever
- ˘ Sometimes

36. How often do you participate in American holidays such as Halloween?

- ˘ Almost always                      ˘ Hardly ever
- ˘ Sometimes

37. How often do you participate in American holidays such as Thanksgiving?  
` Almost always                      ` Hardly ever  
` Sometimes

For the following questions, please identify the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Circle the number that matches how you feel. Use this key:

1 = strongly agree      2 = somewhat agree      3 = disagree

38. I am proud to be Hmong.

1                      2                      3

39. I am proud to be an American citizen. (Or, I would be proud to be an American citizen.)

1                      2                      3

40. It is necessary for a Hmong person to speak the Hmong language.

1                      2                      3

41. It is necessary for a Hmong person to read and write in Hmong.

1                      2                      3

42. It is necessary for a Hmong person to speak the English language very well.

1                      2                      3

43. It is necessary for a Hmong person to read and write in English very well.

1                      2                      3

44. I enjoy dressing up in traditional Hmong clothing to celebrate Hmong New Year events and/or to celebrate other Hmong events.

1                      2                      3

45. It is important to me that I marry another Hmong person.

1                      2                      3

46. It is *not* necessary for a Hmong person to marry another Hmong person.

1                      2                      3



47. It is important for me to maintain my Hmong culture.  
1            2            3
48. It is important for me to take part in American cultural activities.  
1            2            3
49. It is important for me to respect my elders by obeying them.  
1            2            3
50. It is *not* necessary for a Hmong person to ask permission from his or her  
elders before making an important decision such as marriage.  
1            2            3
51. It is necessary for me to take care of my own family's needs before I take  
care of the needs of others.  
1            2            3
52. It is important for me to take care of my elderly family members by having  
them live with me.  
1            2            3
53. It is important for me to maintain close family ties with my relatives.  
1            2            3
54. I like to spend my weekends mostly outside of my home.  
1            2            3
55. It is important for me to greet each person when I walk into a house.  
1            2            3
56. It is important for me to make a lot of money and have a lot of nice things.  
1            2            3
57. It is important for me to stick up for myself.  
1            2            3
58. It is important to me that I make my own decisions.  
1            2            3

59. For the following questions, please rate how easy or difficult each task is (or would be) *in Hmong and without the use of a dictionary* by placing an “X” in the appropriate box.

<b>In Hmong</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Difficult</b>
Understand directions in Hmong.		
Understand the news on tv in Hmong.		
Understand traditional Hmong chanting during cultural events (marriages, New Year events).		
Speak Hmong to a store owner who speaks Hmong.		
<sup>a</sup> Debate in Hmong about an important topic (divorce, bilingual education).		
Tell a story in Hmong about your life in the United States.		
<sup>a</sup> Read a flyer in Hmong from an elementary school.		
Read a one page letter (note) in Hmong from a friend.		
Read a Hmong folktale written in Hmong.		
<sup>a</sup> Write an invitation to a party in Hmong.		
<sup>a</sup> Write a one page letter in Hmong to a friend.		
Write a folktale in Hmong that you have heard from a relative.		
<sup>a</sup> Write a research paper in Hmong.		

<sup>a</sup> These items were replaced with age-appropriate questions for participants under age 18.

60. For the following questions, please rate how easy or difficult each task is (or would be) *in English and without the use of a dictionary* by placing an “X” in the appropriate box.

<b>In English</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Difficult</b>
Understand directions in English.		
Understand the news on tv in English.		
Understand a phone conversation with a stranger who speaks English.		
Speak to a store owner who understands English.		
<sup>a</sup> Debate in English about an important topic (divorce, bilingual education).		
Tell a story in English about your life in the United States.		
<sup>a</sup> Read a flyer in English from an elementary school.		
Read a letter (note) in English from a friend.		
<sup>a</sup> Read a research paper in English on the history of Laos.		
<sup>a</sup> Fill out a job application in English.		
<sup>a</sup> Write a formal business letter in English.		
<sup>a</sup> Write an essay in English about your life in the United States.		

<sup>a</sup> These items were replaced with age-appropriate questions for participants under age 18.

This section of the questionnaire is designed specifically for those between the ages of 10 and 17.

59. For the following questions, please rate how easy or difficult each task is (or would be) *in Hmong and without the use of a dictionary* by placing an “X” in the appropriate box.

<b>In Hmong</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Difficult</b>
Understand directions in Hmong.		
Understand the news on tv in Hmong.		
Understand traditional Hmong chanting during cultural events (marriages, New Year events).		
Speak Hmong to a store owner who speaks Hmong.		
<sup>a</sup> Introduce yourself and talk to the elders in your clan using appropriate Hmong.		
Tell a story in Hmong about your life in the United States.		
<sup>a</sup> Read a flyer in Hmong from your school.		
Read a one page letter (note) in Hmong from a friend.		
Read a Hmong folktale (story) written in Hmong.		
<sup>a</sup> Write a sentence in Hmong to remind your relative to do something for you. (For example, to pick you up from school.)		
<sup>a</sup> Write a short letter in Hmong to a friend.		
Write a folktale (story) in Hmong that you have heard from a relative.		
<sup>a</sup> Write a research paper in Hmong on the history of Laos.		

<sup>a</sup> These items were substituted for certain questions posed to participants 18 and older.

60. For the following questions, please rate how easy or difficult each task is (or would be) *in English and without the use of a dictionary* by placing an “X” in the appropriate box.

<b>In English</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Difficult</b>
Understand directions in English.		
Understand the news on tv in English.		
Understand a phone conversation with a stranger who speaks English.		
Speak to a store owner who understands English.		
<sup>a</sup> Introduce yourself and talk to the principal of your school using appropriate English.		
Tell a story in English about your life in the United States.		
<sup>a</sup> Read a flyer in English from your school.		
Read a letter (note) in English from a friend.		
<sup>a</sup> Read an article in English in the Merced Sun-Star.		
<sup>a</sup> Write a sentence in English to remind your friend to do something for you. (For example, to wait for you after class.)		
<sup>a</sup> Write a short letter in English to a friend.		
<sup>a</sup> Write a story in English about your life in the United States.		
<sup>a</sup> Write a research paper in English on the history of Laos.		

<sup>a</sup> These items were substituted for certain questions posed to participants 18 and older.

