

Second-generation Hmong Americans' Self-confidence and Self-perceived Competency
Communicating in English in a Variety of Settings

Mary Vang

Senior Honor Thesis

Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Oklahoma State University

Valerie Freeman, PhD, Thesis Director

Sara Loss, PhD, Committee Reader

April 18, 2023

Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge and give my deepest appreciation to the McNair Scholars program for providing me with the resources to start my research career.

I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Valerie Freeman and Dr. Sara Loss, the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorder at Oklahoma State University, and my honors advisor, Amanda Booth, who encouraged me through this research project.

In addition, I would also like to thank the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's Academic and Research Mentoring Network for funding this research through the Students Preparing for Academic-Research Careers Award.

Abstract

After resettling to the United States in the late 1970s, Hmong refugees have integrated into American society by learning a second language, English. In recent years, many researchers have focused their studies on the declination of the Hmong language and the impact this decline has on the Hmong American community language (Thao 2020; Xiong-Lor, 2015; Yang Xiong, 2019). On the other hand, there has been less research on the acquisition of English among Hmong Americans and its broader impact on the Hmong community. This research project seeks to explore the experiences of second-generation Hmong Americans after learning English and whether being English language learners has affected their self-confidence and self-perceived competency in communicating in English. Data was collected using a mixed-method that consisted of a language background questionnaire and a 20-minute semi-structured Zoom interview. Questions for the interview portion included a mix of questions from the Bilingual Language Profile, the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q), and the Quantifying Bilingual EXperience (Q-BEx) questionnaire. Data collected from 15 participants found that higher self-confidence and self-perceived competency reflected participants' willingness to communicate in different settings. Participants reported higher self-competency and confidence in English compared to lower self-competency and confidence in Hmong, and higher willingness to communicate in English in formal and informal settings compared to lower willingness to communicate in Hmong in formal and informal settings. Thematic analysis for the interviews also found that second-generation Hmong Americans have a positive outlook as the Hmong community shifts from being a Hmong-dominated speaking community to becoming a bilingual Hmong and English-dominated speaking community.

Introduction

The Hmong people are refugees from Laos who fled to America between 1975 and the early 2000s due to their involvement with the Central Intelligence Agency's Secret War during the Vietnam War. Over the past five decades, many second-generation Hmong American refugees

eventually became second-language speakers, often learning English upon entering the school system or along with their native language, Hmong. The attendance of second-generation Hmong Americans in the American school and work system has overall increased the English proficiency rate among the Hmong community. Meanwhile, the usage of the Hmong language is gradually declining over the years. Although many researchers have raised concerns about the decline of the usage of the Hmong language (Thao, 2020; Xiong-Lor, 2015; Yang Xiong, 2019), there has not been much research focused on the English acquisition of second language learners among Hmong Americans. Often, learning a second language has long-lasting effects on an individual's self-confidence in speaking the second language and their view of their language competency (Aoyama and Takahashi, 2020; Clément, 1986). This research aims to fill in the gap between the decline of the Hmong language and English acquisition by exploring how Hmong American ESL speakers' experiences communicating in English have impacted their self-confidence in a variety of settings and how they perceive their English competency among other Hmong Americans and monolingual English speakers. This study used a mixed-method approach utilizing a self-reported language background history questionnaire and a modified oral survey among second-generation Hmong Americans ages 18 to 27. The oral surveys were conducted through a semi-structured interview using the Bilingual Language Profile, the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q), and the Quantifying Bilingual Experience (Q-BEx) questionnaire.

Review of the Literature

History of the Hmong People

The Hmong people were believed to have originated from the Miao clan in China over 5,000 years ago (Vang, 2008). They lived a simple life within small clans and were self-sufficient in agriculture and hunting. Over the years, the Hmong people immigrated across the mountains of China, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and Burma. In the 1960s during the Vietnam War, the American Central Intelligence Agency recruited the Hmong people to fight in a Secret War as allies in Laos. However, after the end of the war in 1975, 150,000 Hmong people fled to Thailand to avoid persecution from the Pathet Lao government (Faderman and Xiong, 1998). Hmong refugees were then resettled in third countries, with the majority choosing to resettle to the United States. The first wave of Hmong resettlement to the U.S. occurred in 1975-1978 right after the end of the Vietnam War. The second wave took place between 1979-1982, and the last wave in the 1980s-1990s after the Refugee Act of 1980 was passed (Johnson, 2000). While many Hmong families resettled to America, many others resettled to other countries such as France, Australia, and Canada.

Assimilation in the United States

According to self-reports from the Pew Research Center, as of 2019, there are 327,000 Hmong Americans who reside in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2021). Of this population, the

overall reported English proficiency rate for Hmong Americans is 68%. This population can be broken into two groups: U.S.-born Hmong Americans and foreign-born Hmong Americans. Compared to the overall English proficiency rate, U.S.-born Hmong Americans reported an overall higher English proficiency rate of 83%, while foreign-born Hmong Americans reported an overall lower English proficiency rate of 43% (Pew Research Center, 2021). On the other hand, the Hmong proficiency rates are even lower. Since the Hmong language was primarily an oral language until the development of the Hmong writing system in 1953, only a handful of Hmong individuals can fluently read and write in Hmong (Duffy, 2007). Thus, having the ability to read and write is highly valued. With their newfound freedom in America, education was even more highly valued in the Hmong community. This value for education can be observed in Thao's dissertation on the Hmong people's acculturation struggles in the U.S. In his study, Thao interviewed 6 Hmong American young adults and 6 parents. Through Thao's interview, all 12 participants shared the same vision of obtaining education and passing the same value along the generation (Thao, 2020).

Consequently, by attending schooling in America, U.S. born Hmong Americans often have a higher English proficiency rate. Naturally, many Hmong children learned how to read and write in English. However, the Hmong language is only acquired by the few who naturally learn the language in a Hmong-dominant home. Thus, there has been a gradual decline in the Hmong language use and an increase in the dominance of the English language. This eventually led to a cultural and linguistic shift in the Hmong community. One researcher, Yang Xiong, accounts for this shift due to the failure of the American school system to provide academic resources in other languages such as Hmong (2020). As Xiong-Lor (2015) noted in her study, she found that there is an increased awareness of this shift and many Hmong Americans have voiced their concerns about maintaining their language and culture.

Present Study

With the gradual loss of the Hmong language among the second generation, the English language has gradually become more dominant. There has been an abundant amount of research focusing on the loss of the Hmong language and the effects it has on the Hmong community. However, the effects of the dominance of English in the Hmong community are less researched. One study done by Yang Xiong (2019) focused on the effects English and acculturation have on the relationship between Hmong parents and children. One of Yang Xiong's research purposes was to look at the experiences of students attending American schools and the impact the experiences had on their identities, self-esteem, and academic journeys. Yang Xiong's study found that attending the American school system overall had a negative impact on all of the other aspects. This was often due to the language barrier between parents, students, and teachers, along with incidents of bullying (Yang Xiong, 2019).

This negative experience was also noted in Kwan's study on microaggressions that occur to Hmong American students when entering the American school system and learning English. Kwan noted how these experiences lead Hmong American students to quickly adapt to their environment by learning English although it came with the loss of their native language (Kwan, 2015). Another study conducted by Ito (2020) interviewed a Hmong American girl who describes her experience speaking English. The young Hmong girl, May, stated that "Hmong people will tease you about the English you use" (Ito, 2020, p. 349). With her higher English competency, May often felt judged by her family as they felt she was becoming too "Americanized". Additionally, Ito's research team also interviewed a young Hmong boy, Chris, who discussed his usage of Hmonglish. Hmonglish is a code-switching term for using English and Hmong within an utterance. While other code-switching terms such as Spanglish (Spanish and English) are often used with a negative connotation, Ito pointed out how Chris's view of Hmonglish was in a positive light because of his pride in being able to speak both languages, contrary to his Hmong friends who were only able to speak English. As Hmonglish is becoming more prominent among Hmong Americans, this research also seeks to explore and gather second-generation Hmong Americans opinion on the prevalence of using Hmonglish with friends and family.

Self-Confidence and Self-Competency

In addition, there have been studies that focused on the relationship between self-confidence and willingness to communicate in English as a second language among other minority groups in America. One study was conducted to research international Japanese students and their willingness to communicate. In Aoyama and Takahashi's study (2020), they found that international Japanese students' self-confidence in English correlated with how willing they were to communicate. Using Aoyama and Takahashi's study as inspiration for this research study design, the present study gathered qualitative data focusing on self-confidence and self-perceived competency using English in different settings. With the lack of research on the effects of the language shift to English in the Hmong community, this study focused on gathering qualitative data that focuses on self-confidence and self-perceived competency using English in different settings.

This study looks at the following overarching questions, 1) how do second-generation Hmong Americans' self-confidence in speaking English differ in different settings? 2) how do second-generation Hmong Americans perceive their level of English competency in different settings? And 3) how do second-generation Hmong Americans feel about the language shift to becoming more English dominant and the terms associated with this shift, such as Hmonglish?

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 15 second-generation Hmong Americans (children of Hmong refugee(s)) between the ages of 18 to 27 (3 male, 12 female). All 15 participants were raised and are currently residing in the Oklahoma and Arkansas region. Participants were compensated with a \$10 Amazon electronic gift card. After IRB approval, participants were recruited through flyers posted on social media, such as Instagram and Facebook, and by word of mouth.

Research Design

This research consisted of two parts: an online self-reported questionnaire and a semi-structured oral interview. The self-reported questionnaire consisted of the language history questionnaire (LHQ) (Li et al., 2020) that surveyed participants' language backgrounds. The oral interview included a mix of questions from the following questionnaires 1) Bilingual Language Profile (Birdsong, 2012), 2) Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q) (Marian et al., 2007), 3) Quantifying Bilingual EXperience (Q-Bex) (De Cat et al., 2022). Participants first filled out an informed consent form that outlines the purpose of this research and what the survey and interview entail. After receiving the consent form, an email of the language history questionnaire (LHQ) was sent to the participants to complete. Once finished with the LHQ, participants signed up for an interview slot. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured method to allow participants to elaborate more on topics of discussion. The nature of the oral interview is to allow participants, who are often second-language speakers, to express their answers orally rather than through a written questionnaire. The interviews were conducted orally in English to be consistent across interviews with speakers of varying Hmong language proficiency and confidence. Interviews were recorded utilizing the online meeting platform Zoom. During the interview, the participants chose their pseudonyms. All interviews were recorded for transcriptional purposes and thematic analysis.

It is also important to note that the author is also a second-generation Hmong American. This current research ties in closely to the researcher's personal experience and cultural upbringing, classifying the researcher as a "cultural insider". In Manohar et al. (2017) research on the positionality of researchers in studies that are cross-cultural and sensitive, the positionality of the research may impact the research process and outcomes. With the cross-cultural and sensitive nature of this study, being a cultural insider adds as a benefit as it may allow for the participants to feel more comfortable to build trust and connect with the researcher during the research process.

Data Analysis

Data from the language history questionnaire was analyzed for language proficiency, dominance, and immersion level. Data gathered during the interview from the Bilingual Language Profile, Language Experience and Proficiency questionnaire, and Quantifying Bilingual EXperience was analyzed for language attitude and quantifying language experience. All recorded interviews

were further transcribed and analyzed for common and recurring themes using Microsoft Word and Excel.

Results

Language History Questionnaire

Using results from the language history questionnaire, participants were grouped in two different ways to help analyze results from the questionnaire and used to compare answers in the interview later on. First, participants were grouped based on the age of English acquisition: pre-school or post-school age in English acquisition. Seven participants indicated their age of English acquisition began pre-attendance to public school (ages 0-3). Eight participants indicated their age of English acquisition began post-attendance to public school (ages 4-5).

The first group, pre-attendance to public school, was further broken down into two groups based on their native language or L1. Of the seven participants in the pre-attendance group, three indicated English as their L1 and Hmong as their L2, while four indicated Hmong as their L1 and English as their L2. In the second group, post-attendance, all eight participants indicated Hmong as their L1 and English as their L2. The separation of these two groupings is further explored in the thematic analysis when looking at language learning and self-perceived language competency. Demographics of all 15 participants and the age at which English and Hmong were introduced to both groups is reflected in the table and two graphs below.

| Pseudonym | Gender & Age | Education | L1, L2 | Age of English Acquisition | |
|------------------|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Winnie | Female, 21 | Bachelor | English, Hmong | 1 | P1: English acquisition pre-attendance to public school |
| Gamma | Male, 24 | Bachelor | English, Hmong | 1 | |
| MT | Female, 21 | High School | English, Hmong | 1 | |
| Charlie Brown | Female, 21 | Bachelor | Hmong, English | 0 | |
| Water | Female, 21 | Bachelor | Hmong, English | 0 | |
| Green | Female, 18 | High School | Hmong, English | 1 | |
| Elephant | Female, 22 | Bachelor | Hmong, English | 2 | |
| Angel | Female, 21 | High School | Hmong, English | 4 | P2: English acquisition post- |
| Wang | Male, 25 | Doctorate | Hmong, English | 4 | |

| | | | | | |
|---------|------------|-----------|----------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Cherry | Female, 22 | Bachelor | Hmong, English | 4 | attendance to public school |
| TV | Female, 27 | Bachelor | Hmong, English | 4 | |
| ML | Male, 22 | Bachelor | Hmong, English | 4 | |
| TY | Female, 23 | Bachelor | Hmong, English | 4 | |
| Jessica | Female, 27 | Doctorate | Hmong, English | 4 | |
| ZPL | Female, 27 | Bachelor | Hmong, English | 5 | |

Table 1: Demographics and language background of all 15 participants.

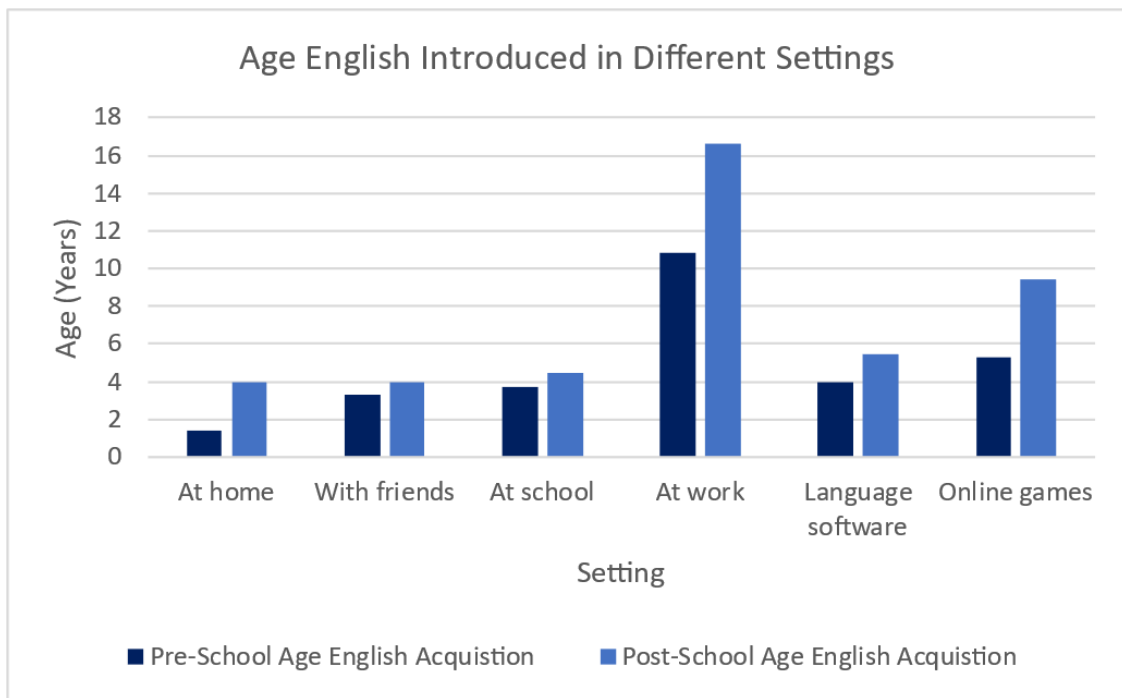


Figure 1: Average age in which English was introduced in different settings between pre-school and post-school age in English acquisition.

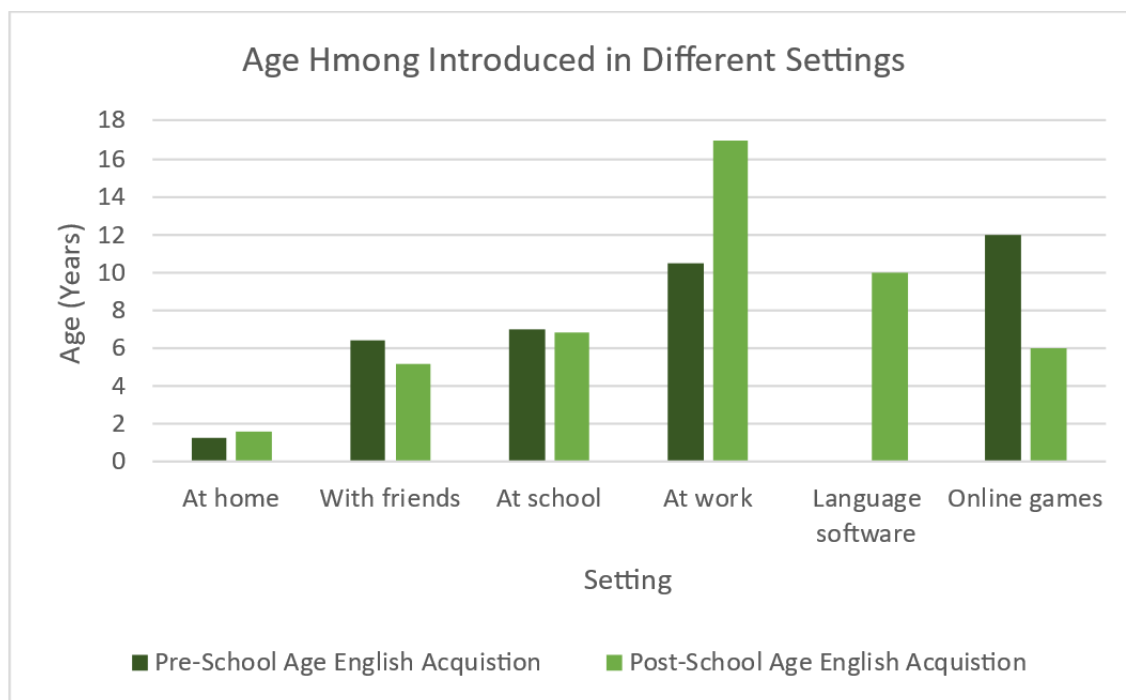


Figure 2: Average age in which Hmong was introduced in different settings between pre-school and post-school age in English acquisition.

Other groupings that were considered for data and thematic analysis that were not further pursued included the age of participants and parental usage of Hmong versus English. After the completion of data collection, the age of participants did not have a significant impact on participant answers. Additionally, parental usage of Hmong versus English was not clearly defined in the language background history questionnaire, making it inexact to group participants based on parental usage of Hmong versus English.

Recurring Themes in Interviews

The thematic analysis used to analyze the interviews followed Glade's (2018) separation of raw data to theme methodology using the grounded theory approach in her research interviewing auditory rehabilitation for adults using cochlear implants. The themes are categorized into five groups and further broken down into specific settings and ideas. The five big themes include 1) experience speaking and learning English and Hmong in various settings, 2) cultural identity, 3) language preferences in various settings, 4) self-confidence and willingness to communicate in English and Hmong in various settings, and 5) the term "Hmonglish". Each theme is analyzed as a whole based on all 15 participants and further analyzed for differences and similarities based on the two groups.

1) Experience with Language Learning and Usage

Early childhood language development has been closely tied to parental usage of language. In immigrant homes, the bilingual aspect of the child's home and native language differs from their school and social environment. Second-generation Hmong Americans often face this situation. Either English was simultaneously acquired with Hmong during early the participant's childhood life, or consecutively learned through the American school system. Of the 15 participants in this study, 7 of the participants simultaneously learned English at home through their older siblings or parents, along with learning Hmong, while 8 of the participants consecutively learned English after acquiring Hmong upon entering preschool or kindergarten. This theme seeks to explore the experience of how each participant learned and use English and Hmong at home with parents and siblings, versus their experience and language usage at school with classmates, friends, and teachers.

At home, the primary language used during early childhood years and the primary language used currently to communicate with family members has changed. During early childhood years, 8 of the participants' parents used Hmong as their primary mode of communication with the participants growing up, while 7 used a mix of Hmong and English. Over the years, as English became the participants' dominant language, English became the dominant language used at home to communicate with family. This language dominance shift depended on the age in which English was formally introduced to participants, either pre-school or post-school age acquisition, and how early English was used in other settings such as work and media usage. Those in the pre-school age in English acquisition had an earlier start with the language shift compared to the post-school age in English acquisition. The results of how this affected self-confidence and self-perceived competency are later discussed in the "Self-confidence and Willingness using English and Hmong in Various Settings" theme.

Exploring the experience of the language shift, participant by the pseudonym of Water explains:

"Hmong was my native language. But like I use English way more. So, it's almost as if English is my native language."

Participant by the pseudonym of ML also reflected on this language shift in his early school experience:

"I will say that before school or going to school I was primarily a native [Hmong] speaker. And then I think whenever I got to school, so I was like in kindergarten like we came [to Oklahoma], that's where I started learning English, and I started making it my primary language."

This language shift that is being seen with the participants is considered subtractive bilingualism. Subtractive bilingualism is when learning the dominant language leads to the loss or subtracted usage of the native or home language (Cummins, 1976). This language shift can further be explored through the language learning experience in usage in the school setting.

In the school setting, the primary language used to communicate with classmates, friends, and teachers has always been and still is English. Due to English being the language commonly used in mainstream schools, the participants had little to no exposure to their native language or other languages. The only time Hmong was used in the school setting was with Hmong classmates or friends. As participant Gamma stated:

“I didn't really speak Hmong unless it was to other Hmong kids in my class.”

Thus, with little to no exposure to their native language in the school setting, English naturally became the language the participants became comfortable using. As participant by the pseudonym of TV explained:

“Well, you don't use that [Hmong], you lose it. And then, when you go to a school where they mainly just teach you English – like I haven't been to a school or a class that just teaches Hmong, so you just study that language more so you become more comfortable with that language.”

Overall, due to the nature of English being the language taught and used at school, English became the language second-generation Hmong Americans primarily used in all settings. Although Hmong is sometimes used in language mixing at home and with Hmong friends, the preferred language used to communicate is still English. With the subtractive bilingual experience among second-generation Hmong Americans, it is no surprise to see the rise of English usage and the decline of Hmong usage in future generations.

2) Effects of Language Usage on Cultural Identity

Language is often closely tied to cultural identity (Bakhtin, 1981). In immigrant homes, the introduction of two languages introduces two cultures. In this case, the Hmong language and Hmong culture are introduced through parents and caregivers while the English language and American culture are acquired through classroom settings and social interactions at school.

During the interview, the participants were asked which culture they identify with. Of the 15 participants, 9 participants identify more closely to the American and English-speaking cultures, while 1 participant identified more closely to the Hmong culture, and 5 identify as a mix of both cultures. The 9 participants that identify with the American and English-speaking culture explained their choice due to three primary factors: 1) their lack of confidence in speaking the Hmong language, 2) the feeling of being “Americanized” due to English being their dominant language, and 3) the lack of usage of Hmong in everyday life. As participant Ellie explained:

“Because since coming to college you're not really around Hmong people a lot. So therefore, I just surround myself a lot with individuals who speak English more, and my Hmong is kind of dying.”

On the other hand, the 5 participants that identified as a mix of both cultures explain that even though English is their dominant language, they still are proud of being able to speak Hmong. Participant Cherry explains how her bilingual identity tied into her cultural identification:

“I am proud of my roots too; I speak my own native language. However, because I mostly speak English at home, I can't really say if I'm... part of like English or Hmong. But I am really proud ... to be like bilingual.”

3) Language Preferences in Various Settings

Language preferences between conversational partners differed in everyday settings among bilingual users. Most notably, the language preference of parents compared to friends and professional colleagues greatly differed.

At home, parental language preferences differed among the pre-school English acquisition and post-school English acquisition groups. In general, the parents of the pre-school English acquisition group tended to be more willing to communicate in English. Parents of the post-school English acquisition group tended to prefer to communicate in Hmong but were also comfortable if English was mixed into the conversation. As Green explains:

“I'm pretty sure my parents prefer us talking in Hmong, even though they can understand English really well, too, so I think there's not a preference, but there is like a good boundary. I would say a good maybe 50-50.”

When participants communicate with their parents, they noted that the language they use includes a mix of English and Hmong. However, the ratio of English to Hmong fluctuated between the pre-school English acquisition group and the post-school English acquisition group. The pre-school English acquisition group used a higher ratio of English to Hmong, while the post-school English acquisition group either used a 50:50 ratio or a higher Hmong to English ratio.

At school, the primary language that was preferred by classmates and teachers was English. The usage of Hmong occasionally occurred among friends and classmates who spoke Hmong but was not used as the preferred language to communicate amongst each other.

When it came to personal language preferences, all 15 participants identified using English as their preferred language to communicate, only using Hmong in conversational settings with specific individuals such as family members and close friends.

4) Self-confidence and Willingness to use English and Hmong in Various Settings

In Aoyama and Takahashi's (2020) study with international Japanese students, they found that international Japanese students were more willing to use English if their self-perceived

competency and confidence in using English were higher. Using Aoyama and Takahashi's study as design inspiration, during the interview, participants were asked to rate their self-confidence and willingness to use English and Hmong in formal settings such as conferences, meetings, and work, and in informal settings such as with family and friends.

When it came to assessing self-confidence using English in formal settings, 7 participants answered, "mildly confident", while 8 participants answered "confident". This also reflected their willingness to use English in those settings as 7 participants answered "mostly willing", while 8 participants answered "willing". Similarly, when it came to assessing self-confidence using English in informal settings, 5 participants answered, "moderately confident" while 10 answered "confident". This also reflected their willingness to use English in those settings as the 5 participants answered "willing", while the 10 participants answered "very willing".

On the other hand, when it came to assessing self-confidence using Hmong in formal settings, 10 participants answered, "not confident" while 5 answered "comfortable, but not confident." This also reflected their willingness to use Hmong in formal settings as 7 of the participants answered "maybe" while 8 answered "somewhat willing." The answers varied even more when it came to the recipients in the formal settings. When it came to assessing self-confidence using Hmong in informal settings, 3 participants answered "somewhat confident" and 12 answered "confident." This also reflected their willingness to use Hmong in informal settings as the participants answered 3 "willing" to 12 answered "very willing."

When comparing the results from the pre-school and post-school age in English acquisition, there were no significant differences in how the P1 and P2 groups rated their self-confidence and willingness for English. However, there were slight differences in the self-confidence and willingness to use Hmong in formal settings among the P1 and P2 groups. The 8 participants who learned English post-school age tended to rate higher self-confidence and willingness to use Hmong in formal settings compared to seven who learned English pre-school. However, it also important to note that two of the eight post-school age participants have a history of undergoing speech therapy and had lower self-ratings of competency communicating in English.

In summary, all 15 participants rated higher self-confidence and willingness to communicate in English in both formal and informal settings, while all 15 participants rated low to mid self-confidence and willingness to communicate in Hmong in both formal and informal settings. This difference in self-confidence and willingness to communicate in English compared to Hmong can be explained through Winnie's experience:

"I would be a lot more comfortable speaking in English compared to Hmong... they've taught it [English] in school, and you know, like they help prepare us professionally to speak better in English, like even just thinking about writing essays, they make us speak more eloquently. But in Hmong, I would say that I wasn't necessarily taught in different ways to speak in different environments."

5) *Hmonglish*

Hmonglish is the coined term for using the Hmong and English language together in a sentence. Often, Hmonglish is debated amongst the Hmong community whether or not Hmonglish is a “good” or “bad” thing. As mentioned in Ito’s (2020) research, one of the participants mentioned their pride in being able to speak both Hmong and English through the usage of Hmonglish. Similarly, all 15 participants from this study also had a positive perspective on the usage of Hmonglish. All participants reported high usage of Hmonglish in everyday life with friends and family. When using Hmonglish with parents, participants viewed it as an effort to meet the middle ground with parents who preferred communicating in Hmong. Additionally, Hmonglish was often noted as necessary for communication as some words and emotions cannot be translated between both languages. As participant TY explains:

“I think it's [Hmonglish] natural, because you know sometimes there are words in Hmong, or vice versa, that you know aren't translated well, or there's just no words for them, so you have to use either or.”

Some participants even view Hmonglish as an effort to preserve their native language. As participant by the pseudonym of Gamma expressed:

“I would say that it's [Hmonglish] definitely going to be the future of how the Hmong language survives because a lot of generations that are sprouting up... I found that a lot of kids nowadays, or Hmong kids don't really understand Hmong. They understand like maybe their basics, *like mom, dad, grandma, grandpa*, but they don't exactly understand the language itself... so I find that Hmonglish is probably what's gonna have to happen to our language for it to survive at this point.”

Rather than viewing Hmonglish as a lack of competency in Hmong and English, Gamma along with 2 other participants expressed that Hmonglish is a way of preserving their native language, Hmong. Participant by the pseudonym of TV also further explains the effort of using Hmonglish as a way to preserve Hmong through her interview:

“When you grow up in an environment where they only teach you English at school and stuff, and you spend most of your time at school. And when you come home, of course, you still speak to your parents and all that, and your family, but it's not like you're learning it... like at school. So it's hard for you try to express your thoughts and stuff in just one language because one language you're learning, and the other language, it's kind of like you're trying to preserve the other language too.”

Overall, a more positive outlook of language mixing is being seen among the 15 participants, similar to how participant Chris in Ito's study (2020) positively viewed Hmonglish. Rather than viewing language mixing as a lack of competency in speaking both languages fluently, language mixing between Hmong and English is seen among second-generation Hmong Americans as a way to communicate with the older generation, an expressive communication tool, and an effort to preserve their native language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the data answered the three research questions from this study.

First, all the 15 participants' self-confidence in speaking English did not differ in different settings. With English as the predominant language used at school and consistent usage at home with parents and siblings, all the participants naturally acquired fluent English. All the participants rated mid to high levels of self-confidence when communicating in English in both formal and informal settings. They also indicated higher levels of willingness to communicate in English in formal and informal settings. However, on the Hmong speaking side, second-generation Hmong Americans' self-confidence in speaking Hmong does differ in different settings, with lower self-confidence to communication in Hmong in formal settings versus informal settings. With the language dominance shift from Hmong to English, it is not surprising to see how self-confidence is rated much higher in both formal and informal settings compared to Hmong in both formal and informal settings.

Secondly, all 15 participants perceived equal level of English competency in both formal and informal settings. Through the interviews, we saw that all participants had mid to high levels of self-perceived competency when communicating in English. However, on the Hmong speaking side, self-perceived confidence in communicating in Hmong was low for informal settings, and even lower in formal settings. It was not surprising to see that self-perceived competency in both formal and informal settings were equally high among second-generation Hmong Americans as language and literacy has been noted to be an important asset in the Hmong community (Duffy, 2011). However, it is important to point out that the P1 participants rated lower self-confidence and competency communicating in English than the P2 group, and vice versa for self-confidence and competency communicating in Hmong. Being exposed to English earlier on, as we noted from the result, does affect the participants experience with speaking English later on in life.

Lastly, all 15 participants had a positive outlook about the language shift to becoming more English-dominant and the terms associated with this shift such as Hmonglish. Overall, the participants acknowledged the shift and embraced the shift while also embracing their native culture. All the participants stated that learning English is essential to them, but also learning basic levels of conversational Hmong to communicate with parents and elders was also important. Similar to the second-generation Hmong American, Chris, in Ito's study (2020), all of the participants in this study have a generally positive outlook on the term "Hmonglish". As all

the participants have a positive outlook and sense of pride in being able to speak both languages, this language dominance shift did not seem to raise a concern for language loss but reflects the view of language preservation.

Study Limitations

This study had limitations that should be noted. This study had a small participant size that consisted of only second-generation Hmong Americans from the Oklahoma and Arkansas region. Despite recruiting participants through social media, recruitment by word of mouth was the most effective participant recruitment. This inadvertently led to all 15 participants coming from the Oklahoma and Arkansas region, where there is a smaller Hmong population of roughly 6,700. Compared to the more Hmong-populated states such as Wisconsin, the Hmong community is much bigger with a Hmong population size of 54,000 (Name Census, 2023). Thus, the data and language experience of these 15 participants may differ from the experience of second-generation Hmong Americans from more Hmong-populated regions. Although the researcher was considered a cultural insider, which build trust between the participants and researcher, it is also important to note that such closeness between the researcher and the participants may also negatively impact the research through preconceived biases. Thus, efforts to reduce potential biases were done by verifying data through previous studies such as Aoyama and Takahashi's study (2020) and Ito's qualitative study (2020).

Future Steps

With the current results from this study, future steps that can be taken to expand this research is to expand into other Hmong populations in the different regions of the United States to include experiences in different Hmong communities. Additional research can be conducted on the intergenerational language shift and how that affects generational attitudes towards language shift.

References

- Aoyama, T., & Takahashi, T. (2020). International students' willingness to communicate in English as a second language. *Journal of International Students*, 10(3), 703–723. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i3.730>
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). Discourse in the Novel (M. Holquist, & C. Emerson, Trans.). In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination* (pp. 259-422). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Birdsong, D., Gertken, L.M., & Amengual, M. *Bilingual Language Profile: An Easy-to-Use Instrument to Assess Bilingualism*. COERLL, University of Texas at Austin. Web. 20 Jan. 2012. <<https://sites.la.utexas.edu/bilingual/>>.
- Budiman, A. (2022, May 24). *Hmong in the U.S. Fact Sheet*. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. Retrieved 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/asian-americans-hmong-in-the-u-s/>
- Clément, R. (1986). Second Language Proficiency and Acculturation: An Investigation of the Effects of Language Status and Individual Characteristics. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*. 5. 271-290. 10.1177/0261927X8600500403.
- Cummins, J. (1976). The Influence of Bilingualism on Cognitive Growth: A Synthesis of Research Findings and Explanatory Hypotheses. Working Papers on Bilingualism, No. 9.
- De Cat, C., Kaščelan, D., Prévost, P., Serratrice, L., Tuller, L., & Unsworth, S. (2022). *Quantifying Bilingual EXperience (Q-BEx): questionnaire manual and documentation*. <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/V7EC8>
- Duffy, J. M. (2011). *Writing from these roots: Literacy in a Hmong-American community*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Faderman, L., & Xiong, G. (2005). *I begin my life all over: The Hmong and the American immigrant experience*. Beacon Press.
- Ito, R. (2020). Not a white girl and speaking English with slang: Negotiating Hmong American identities in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. *Multilingual*, 40(3), 339–366. <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2019-0082>
- Johnson, F. L. (2002). *Speaking culturally: Language diversity in the United States*. Sage.
- Kwan, Y. Y. (2015). Microaggressions and Hmong American students. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 38(1), 23–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2015.1017026>
- Li, P., Zhang, F., Yu, A., & Zhao, X. (2020). Language History Questionnaire (LHQ3): An enhanced tool for assessing multilingual experience. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 23(5), 938-944. doi:10.1017/S1366728918001153
- Manohar, N., Liamputtong, P., Bhole, S., & Arora, A. (2017). Researcher positionality in cross-cultural and sensitive research. *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2779-6_35-1

- Marian, V., Blumenfeld, H.K., & Kaushanskaya, M. (2007). The Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q): Assessing language profiles in bilinguals and multilinguals. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research, 50*, 940-967.
- Number of Hmong People in the United States. (n.d.). NameCensus.com. Retrieved on April 5, 2023, from <https://namecensus.com/ancestry/hmong/>.
- Thao, C. (2020). Acculturation Struggles Hmong Families Encounter in America. Masters thesis, California State University, Stanislaus. *ProQuest*.
- Vang, T. S. (2013). *A history of the Hmong: From Ancient Times to the modern diaspora*. Lulu Press.
- Xiong-Lor, V. (2015). Current Hmong Perceptions of Their Speaking, Reading, and Writing Ability and Cultural Values as Related to Language and Cultural Maintenance. Doctoral dissertation, California State University, Fresno. *ProQuest*.
- Yang Xiong, K. (2019). The Disappearing Hmong Language: The Effects of English on Hmong Children's Heritage Language and Their Relationship with Their Parents. Doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado, Denver. *ProQuest*.

Appendix

Questionnaires

Language history questionnaire (Li et al., 2020)

[PDF of language history questionnaire](#)

Bilingual Language Profile (Birdsong, 2012)

Language History

1. At what age did you start to feel comfortable using English/Hmong?

Language Use

1. When you talk to yourself, how often do you talk to yourself in English/Hmong?
2. When you count, how often do you count in English/Hmong?

Language Attitudes

1. I feel like myself when I speak English/Hmong.
2. I identify with an English/Hmong -speaking culture.
3. It is important to me to use (or eventually use) English/Hmong like a native speaker.
4. I want others to think I am a native speaker of English/Hmong.

Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q) (Marian et al., 2007)

1. In your perception, how much of a foreign accent do you have in English/Hmong
2. Please rate how frequently others identify you as a non-native speaker based on your accent in English/Hmong

Quantifying Bilingual EXperience (Q-Bex) (De Cat et al., 2022)

Attitudes on language mixing

- 1) Generally, what do people in your home including yourself think of mixing languages in the same conversation?
- 2) Generally, what do teachers/carers and other people working in your school think of mixing languages in the same conversation?

- 3) Generally, what do other people in your local community (outside school) think of mixing languages in the same conversation?
- 4) Generally, do people in your home including yourself have a preference for which language you use together?
- 5) Generally, do teachers and other people working in your school have a preference for which language they use?
- 6) Generally, do other people in your local community (outside school) have a preference for which language they use?

Satisfaction with speaking and understanding

- 1) Are you satisfied with your ability to speak in English/Hmong? “Satisfied” means happy.
- 2) Are you satisfied with your ability to understand English/Hmong? “Satisfied” means happy.

Pressure (on caregivers) and (child’s) willingness to speak

- 1) Do your caregivers ever feel pressure to speak in English/Hmong? For example, by colleagues, friends or anyone else in their everyday environment.
- 2) Are you ever willing to speak in English/Hmong?

Language Mixing

- 1) At home, how often do you speak to people in English/Hmong, how often do you switch to the other language(s)?
- 2) At home, when people speak to you in English/Hmong, how often do they switch to the other language(s)?
- 3) At home, how often do you do any of the following?
 - a. Use a word from one language when speaking in another language?
 - b. Say one sentence in one language and then the next sentence in another language?
 - c. Use a word two or three words from one language when speaking in another language?
- 4) At home, when people speak to you, how often do they do any of the following?

- a. Use a word from one language when speaking in another language?
- b. Say one sentence in one language and then the next sentence in another language?