

12-2011

# Suspended Between Languages: Stories from the Biliterate Lives of Hmong Generation 1.5 University Women

Kimberli A. Huster  
*Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Huster, Kimberli A., "Suspended Between Languages: Stories from the Biliterate Lives of Hmong Generation 1.5 University Women" (2011). *Theses and Dissertations (All)*. 1047.  
<http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/1047>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact [cclouser@iup.edu](mailto:cclouser@iup.edu), [sara.parme@iup.edu](mailto:sara.parme@iup.edu).

SUSPENDED BETWEEN LANGUAGES:  
STORIES FROM THE BILITERATE LIVES  
OF HMONG GENERATION 1.5 UNIVERSITY WOMEN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Kimberli A. Huster

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2011

The figure on page 52 is taken from *The continua of biliteracy: An ecological framework for educational policy, research, and practice in multilingual settings*, N.H. Hornberger, p. 39. Copyright [2003] by Multilingual Matters. Reprinted with permission of Multilingual Matters.

© 2011 Kimberli A. Huster. All Rights Reserved.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
The School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Kimberli A. Huster

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 30, 2011

Signature on File  
Dan J. Tannacito, Ph.D.  
Professor of English, Advisor

September 30, 2011

Signature on File  
Sharon K. Deckert, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English

September 30, 2011

Signature on File  
Lisya Seloni, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of English  
Illinois State University

ACCEPTED

Signature on File  
Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.  
Dean  
The School of Graduate Studies and Research

---

Title: Suspended Between Languages: Stories from the Biliterate Lives of Hmong Generation 1.5 University Women.

Author: Kimberli A. Huster

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Dan J. Tannacito

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Sharon Deckert

Dr. Lisy Seloni

U.S. higher education institutions are enrolling increasing numbers of long-term immigrant students, who belong to Generation 1.5. Essentially beginning college while still in the process of learning English, these students often struggle in higher education, and they present new challenges to college writing instructors. This study explored the literacy and language development experiences of thirteen Generation 1.5 Hmong women in a California university.

Because of the complexity and multi-faceted nature of literacy and language, a qualitative research methodology, which combined aspects of narrative inquiry and feminist ethnography, was implemented for this investigation. Data was gathered through journal writing, group discussions, and one-on-one interviews. The participants were encouraged to take an active role in determining the focus and direction of the research, and their descriptions of their experiences were enhanced by their interactions with each other. The product of the data collection process was a compilation of short narratives, in the women's own words, which described the educational and literacy journeys of each of the participants individually and provided a broader perspective on their collective experience as a minority population.

These stories were organized and analyzed using a framework developed by Nancy Hornberger (2003) and revealed that the literacy development of Hmong women often occupied the less powerful ends of Hornberger's continua of biliteracy. Their stories demonstrated that their language use was heavily influenced by the literacy and language use in their homes, as well as their families' values concerning education and the role of women in their culture. In addition, their opportunities to use English were often limited to classroom situations in which their literacy development was hampered by marginalizing experiences with teachers and classmates. Despite their long history in this country, these Hmong college women remained suspended between two cultures and languages.

In the final chapter, the author proposes three ways that educators might address the critical issues revealed by these stories: by educating, supporting, and establishing teachers to be agents for social change; by promoting the appropriate attitudes toward multiculturalism in U.S. schools; and by legitimizing the minority experience within the U.S. educational system.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As it should be, completing this degree has been the most intellectually challenging experience of my life. I would like to first thank those academic visionaries who had the foresight to develop the summer residency option for the Composition and TESOL Ph.D. program at IUP. Without that option, I would never have been able to embark on this journey.

From the first day of class in the summer of 2005, I had the great fortune to find myself in the midst of a wonderful cohort which quickly became known as SKoP (Some Kind of People). I learned so much from all of you, not only about Composition and TESOL, but about kindness and friendship. Thanks for all of the dinners, cookouts, late night trips to the Meadows, and discussions about classes, teaching, and life in general. Without you, this endeavor would have been all work and no play.

Thanks to all of the amazing scholar-professors in the Comp and TESOL program, who encouraged me to pursue scholarship and excellence in my profession. I hope that I can make you proud. A special thanks to Dan Tannacito who kept me focused on the task, challenged my thinking, returned my e-mails quickly when I needed help, and guided me through the often overwhelming process of completing this dissertation. Thanks also to my committee members, Sharon Deckert and Lisya Seloni, whose thoughtful input helped me to sharpen the focus of my research.

Thanks to all of my family, friends, and colleagues who supported and encouraged me along the way. I'm sure they are all tired of hearing me say, "Sorry. I have to work on my dissertation. Maybe next time." Now we can go back to having fun! Special thanks to my Mom, who made a valiant effort to read through my dissertation

when she came to visit and who has always made me feel like I can accomplish anything I try. Thanks also to Shiao-huei, my senior daughter, who has been a great friend and supporter and sacrificed her time to watch over our house when we vacated every summer to go to Pennsylvania.

I couldn't have done this without the help of my husband of nearly 27 years and my best friend, Michael. He supported me in every way imaginable. He was my chauffeur back and forth across the country from California to Pennsylvania every summer. He was my tech support and proofreader. He was my personal shopper, cook, housekeeper, and launderer for much of the last 6 years. He was my encourager and my constant cheerleader. I can't imagine what my life would be like without you! Thanks for all your support!

Finally, and most importantly, I want to give thanks to God, my Father, who has given me all of the good things in my life and carried me through all of the hard times. I pray that I will use my education in ways that are pleasing and glorifying to Him.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
DEDICATION.....	xii
PREFACE.....	xiii
1	THE PROBLEM.....1
	Overview of the Problem and the Research Question .....1
	Generation 1.5.....5
	Definition of the Term .....5
	Ethnic labels.....11
	Linguistic labels.....12
	Academic labels.....15
	Generation 1.5 and the College Classroom: The Scope of the Problem....16
	The Hmong: The Target Generation 1.5 Population .....24
	Rationale for the Target Population.....24
	The Hmong People in the United States .....26
	The Distinctive Role of Women within the Hmong Culture .....31
	The Interface between the Hmong and Higher Education.....33
	The Hmong at California Christian University.....37
	The U.S. Hmong as Writers.....41
	Return to the Research Question.....43
2	REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .....48
	Biliteracy and Bilingualism .....49
	The Second Language Acquisition Process .....55
	SLA Theories and Immigrant Populations .....57
	Factors Associated with the SLA of Immigrants.....60
	Language background and literacy history .....63
	Family and cultural influences.....66
	Educational practices and preparation for college .....70
	Race and social issues .....75
	Conflicting desires and identities.....78
	Academic Language Challenges for Generation 1.5 College Students .....81
	Academic Language Proficiency of Generation 1.5 Students .....82
	Explanations for Generation 1.5 Language Features .....86
	Attempted Solutions for the College Classroom .....89
	Overview of Related Studies .....92

3	PROCEDURES.....99	99
	Qualitative Research Methods in Literacy and Language Development...99	99
	Theory and Philosophy of the Research Method.....102	102
	Narrative as a Tool for Collecting and Presenting Data .....107	107
	Memories as a Source of Data .....110	110
	Responsibilities of the Researcher as the Collector of Memories .....113	113
	Emphasizing Success .....118	118
	Overview of the Research Process.....119	119
	Maintaining the Integrity of the Research Process .....122	122
	Ethical Treatment of Participants.....124	124
	Gathering the Participants.....126	126
	The Data Collection Process.....130	130
	Transcribing and Coding the Data .....135	135
	Constructing the Stories .....140	140
	The Research Journal.....141	141
4	DATA AND ANALYSIS .....146	146
	Introduction.....146	146
	Representing the Stories .....151	151
	General Description of the Participant Group .....154	154
	Examining Biliteracy .....156	156
	The Media of Biliteracy .....158	158
	The simultaneous-successive exposure continuum .....158	158
	The similar-dissimilar language structures continuum.....160	160
	The convergent-divergent scripts continuum.....162	162
	The Context of Biliteracy.....163	163
	The micro-macro continuum.....163	163
	Grammar examples .....165	165
	Vocabulary examples.....167	167
	The oral-literate continuum.....182	182
	The bilingual-monolingual continuum .....186	186
	The Development of Biliteracy.....203	203
	The oral-written continuum .....203	203
	The reception-production continuum.....208	208
	The Content of Biliteracy.....226	226
	The contextualized-decontextualized continuum .....227	227
	The vernacular-literary continuum .....234	234
	The minority-majority continuum.....235	235
	Responsibilities outside of school.....237	237
	Parental involvement in extracurricular activities .....243	243
	Attending college away from home.....249	249
	Gender differences in the attitude toward education .....257	257
	The place of women in the Hmong culture.....262	262

5	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .....	283
	Introduction.....	283
	The Hmong Experience in the U.S. Educational System .....	286
	General Observations from the Stories .....	289
	Drawing on Multiliteracies .....	296
	Positive Ways to Transform Classrooms.....	300
	Establishing the Teacher as an Agent for Social Change .....	302
	Promoting Critical Multiculturalism in the Classroom .....	310
	Legitimizing and Giving Voice to the Minority Experience .....	316
	Conclusion .....	320
	REFERENCES .....	324
	APPENDICES .....	338
	Appendix A Informed Consent Form .....	338
	Appendix B Orientation Handout .....	340
	Appendix C Background Questionnaire .....	348
	Appendix D Round 1 Journal Questions .....	349
	Appendix E Round 2 Journal Questions .....	350
	Appendix F Round 3 Journal Questions .....	351
	Appendix G Final Questionnaire .....	353
	Appendix H Sample Story with Raw Data .....	354
	Appendix I Correspondence Regarding Copyrighted Material .....	357

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Power relations in the continua model.....	52

## DEDICATION

I would be remiss if I did not dedicate this dissertation to my thirteen wonderful Hmong muses, who co-labored in this research project with me and sacrificed their valuable time to reflect on, write about, and share their experiences. This project truly could not have happened without you. I was motivated by your stories, awed by your courage, inspired by your determination, and humbled by your generosity with your time. You have been a big part of a major milestone in my life. Thank you for letting me into your lives. Know that you will always be in my heart.

## PREFACE

### Beginnings and Endings

As I recently reached the half-century mark in my life, it has been fascinating to reflect on the cycles of life and the way that events and incidents from the past connect to current experiences. In 1980, at the beginning of the final year of my undergraduate education at the University of Pennsylvania, where I was studying to be a physical therapist, I first encountered the Hmong people when I became involved in a benevolent ministry at Chestnut Street Baptist Church in west Philadelphia. Following the conflicts in Vietnam and Cambodia, churches in the United States sponsored large numbers of Southeast Asian refugees. Because of its commitment to sponsoring refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, the church provided an abundance of opportunities to assist these refugees in their adjustment to life in America. Through this ministry, I had the opportunity to become a part of the struggles of the Hmong as they worked to make a new life in a big city in a foreign country with a strange language and unfamiliar cultural practices. I was involved in teaching English to families in their homes, I helped adults study for their driver's licenses and complete applications for jobs, and I led a Girl Scout Troop of mostly Hmong girls. As thanks for my help, I was invited to Hmong homes frequently to enjoy their wonderful hospitality and food. I also was often an honored (as well as a humbled and embarrassed) guest at their community parties and celebrations.

When I moved to San Diego in the mid-eighties, I became involved in a small Protestant denomination called the Christian and Missionary Alliance. As it happens, this denomination was heavily involved in missionary work in Southeast Asia prior to the political conflicts and had experienced high levels of response and conversion among the

Hmong people. During my time in San Diego, I went to Thailand twice on mission trips. On one trip, I visited a Bible school for Hmong students in the countryside in northern Thailand where I once again observed the independence and self-sufficiency of the Hmong people. The seminary's dormitories were set up to accommodate families. Since the Hmong people traditionally tend to marry young, most of the students had young children. Either one or both of the parents were taking classes in the school. The dormitory, which was built of bamboo and had a thatched roof, consisted of a long hallway down the middle; each family had a room for sleeping on one side of the hallway and an individual kitchen on the other side of the hallway. Outside the dorm, they had expansive gardens where they grew their own vegetables and rice. Chickens, wandering freely around the grounds, were raised for food. In addition, the students had excavated a large pond in which they bred and stocked fish to supplement their diets. On another visit to Thailand, I attended a Hmong church service in a small village in the jungle. After church, the Hmong prepared a meal of stir-fried meat and vegetables, rice, and noodles, cooked on open outdoor fires in huge stir-fry pans, more than two feet in diameter.

Although I had minimal personal contact with Hmong people during my time in San Diego, my involvement in this denomination eventually led to the position I held at the time of this research as a faculty member at a Christian liberal arts college in northern California. My husband and I were the faculty sponsors for the Asian Fellowship on the campus for five years. Because of the denominational ties of the Hmong with the university and because of the high concentration of Hmong living in California, the vast majority of the Asian students on the campus are Hmong, and we spent a significant

amount of time with these students on a weekly basis. The Asian Fellowship conducts weekly meetings on campus, and we also met regularly with the student leaders of the group for planning these weekly meetings as well as bigger events, like the annual culture show and weekend retreats. In addition to this non-academic relationship, I often had Hmong students in my composition, TESOL, and linguistics classes.

Beginnings and endings. In my intermittent involvement with them over the years, I have found the Hmong to be a friendly, gracious, and engaging group of people which has welcomed me into their homes and lives. I was involved in the beginning of the educational and adjustment experiences of the Hmong when they first began coming to the United States; now I am involved in their educational and literacy experiences as this people group may be likely nearing the end of their assimilation process. Thirty years ago, the Hmong were part of my beginning experiences in teaching English; my involvement with them and other Southeast Asians refugees sparked my interest in teaching ESL and in living among and learning about cultures vastly different from my own. Now they are part of the culmination of my formal education as I earn my Ph.D. in TESOL.

This project is a loving tribute to the impact of the Hmong people who have been a part of my life, especially the thirteen women who have been a part of this study. I hope that I can present their struggles and triumphs effectively and shed light on the language acquisition and literacy journeys of long-term immigrants in a way that might benefit their younger brothers and sisters and future populations like them.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM

#### **Overview of the Problem and the Research Question**

The current U.S. immigrant population lives in a post-industrial society which essentially necessitates that its residents pursue a college education in order to accomplish upward economic mobility (Roberge, 2002). In the present economy, a college degree is becoming the minimal educational expectation for many non-labor occupations. As a result, colleges and universities are confronting the challenges associated with a student body which becomes more diverse every year; this growing diversity can be attributed in part to an influx of students who have been labeled as “Generation 1.5.”

The designation Generation 1.5 has been used in a variety of ways. Initially, the term was used to describe immigrant youth who were born outside of the United States (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). However, Roberge (2002) argues that, because the American-born children of immigrants share many traits with young people who physically emigrate from other countries, the definition of the term should be expanded to include the U.S.-born children of immigrants who are raised in enclave communities where English is not the primary language of the home and community. Despite graduating from U.S. high schools and having received all or most of their education in English, Generation 1.5 students are likely to enter college while they are still in the process of acquiring the English language (Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999). Although, in fact, all language users are constantly adding to and evolving in their use of language, for most, this process primarily occurs below the level of conscious effort through an unconscious

assimilation of linguistic understanding. However, this ongoing developmental process is different for Generation 1.5 college students. The impetus for this study arose from comments of students with whom I have had personal contact who have expressed an acute awareness that their ongoing language development requires conscious effort and explicit attention.

Researchers and educators in the fields of applied linguistics, literacy development, composition, and second language acquisition (SLA) are investigating ways to provide an appropriate and beneficial educational experience for this growing population, including the reasons behind and the possible solutions for the challenges that these students face. However, the manner in which many of these issues are examined has failed to provide satisfying outcomes. Much of the research follows the empirical tradition, which relies heavily on the observations and conclusions of the researcher and tends to present only the etic perspective of the issue. In addition, quantitative research projects, which are inclined to view subjects as members of homogenous groups rather than as unique individuals, often ignore ethnic and gender differences, resulting in the loss of valuable distinguishing information about cultures and language groups. To emphasize this point, here are a few examples of the many labels by which members of the Generation 1.5 have been identified in different educational and research contexts: U.S.-born second generation immigrants (Goen, Porter, Swanson, & Vandommelen, 2002a), ESL writers (Holten & Mikesell, 2007), U.S. resident writers (Reid, 1998), non-English-language background students or NELBs (Reeves, 2004), and immigrant ESL students (Roberge, 2001).

Qualitatively-oriented researchers embrace the concept that the subjects of a research study are themselves the most reliable source of lived experience. Unfortunately, as is often the case with minority populations, those who have lived certain experiences either do not perceive themselves as possessing valuable information or perhaps they do not have the outlets or the network of tools or influence needed to share these experiences. As noted by Norton (in Nunan and Choi, 2010), people often consider their own experiences and personal histories to be insignificant, especially people who “have few material resources and a history of inequity” (p. xi). Thus, the study proposed here seeks to facilitate a narrowly-defined group of second language users—Hmong Generation 1.5 female college students at a small Christian liberal arts college in northern California—in analyzing and sharing their own bilingual and biliterate life experiences. My goal as a researcher was to provide the women in the study with a safe environment and with the tools that they needed to recall and evaluate their language and literacy experiences individually through self-reflection, journaling, and one-on-one interviews and collectively through interaction and group discussions. Ultimately, I hoped that the outcome of this research would be part of a process for legitimizing and affirming their experiences by capturing, presenting, comparing, and reinforcing the educational, social, familial, cultural, political, and personal experiences of the women in this group with respect to their literacy and language development.

Through narrative inquiry, this study seeks to address the following questions with respect to the Hmong Generation 1.5 women who participated in this research process:

- What experiences in their homes, schools, and communities do they remember as significant and either facilitative or inhibitive in their language and literacy histories?
- How do their cultural and language backgrounds influence their educational experiences and their literacy development in a second language?
- How significant are critical issues in the literacy and language development of these members of a minority language population?
- How can U.S. educators at all levels respond to the experiences of minority populations within their institutions in order to facilitate and expand their literacy and language development?

Chapter 1 will provide background information for this study by explaining and defining the term Generation 1.5 and detailing its unique characteristics, as well as outlining the challenges that these students and the colleges they attend face as more and more members of Generation 1.5 pursue postsecondary educations. Next, concrete evidence will be produced to establish that, in fact, Generation 1.5 students are flocking to colleges and universities in record numbers. Then, the distinctive history and traits of the Hmong people will be presented, along with a rationale for their unique suitability as participants in this study. An additional section will highlight the importance of studying Hmong men and women separately because of the tremendous difference in their cultural roles and family expectations. It will also be important to include demographic and educational information about the Hmong as an immigrant group in the United States and, especially, in California. Following this, there will be a brief discussion on research which demonstrates that the Hmong in the U.S. are poised to use writing as a way of

sharing their viewpoints and explaining their culture. Concluding the section on the Hmong will be a brief explanation of the reasons that such a high percentage of Hmong attend the particular university in which this study was conducted. Finally, the chapter will end by returning to a discussion of the research question.

## **Generation 1.5**

### **Definition of the Term**

Assigning a label to any group of people carries inherent risk. Designating a person as a member of particular group introduces the possibility of mislabeling or misrepresenting individuals within that group and of overlooking the individual differences between the members of that group. However, in regard to the Generation 1.5 population, Holten (2002) astutely notes that although applying a label to a group of people is problematic because of the potential for stereotyping or homogenizing a population, in the case of Generation 1.5 students, this risk is warranted if the end result is an increased awareness of and response to the unique experiences and needs of this group of English language learners. The subset of immigrants who have come to be known as the Generation 1.5 in second language writing and acquisition circles has existed for many years, largely unrecognized and unacknowledged. Rodriguez (2006) views Generation 1.5 students as “the least understood and most overlooked students” (p. 1) in the U.S. education system, including elementary and secondary schools as well as higher education institutions. Their potential for invisibility is evident in the terms that researchers have used to portray these learners and their stories. Borrowing a term from Ilona Leki, Nye (2006) refers to the stories of these students as “hidden transcripts” in his dissertation which involved Generation 1.5 students in a California state university.

Another term used to describe this group is “the forgotten generation” (Rodriguez, 2006). This kind of figurative vocabulary poignantly communicates the unintentional anonymity associated with this group. In coming generations of an immigrant-receiving country like the United States, the composition of Generation 1.5 will vary as immigration patterns change and older immigrant populations become assimilated; however, if attention is not directed toward the current Generation 1.5, it, as well as future generations, will likely remain an invisible presence in America’s educational systems.

A discussion of the various definitions of the term Generation 1.5 will provide a fuller meaning of the term, as well as a more informed understanding of the potential breadth of individual experience of those who might fall under the umbrella of this designation. Rumbaut and Ima (1988) are credited with first coining the moniker “Generation 1.5” in their in-depth comparative case study of the adaptation of immigrant youth from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in San Diego. Their investigation was sponsored by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, a division within the United States Department of Health and Human Services. In the aftermath of the Vietnam and Cambodia conflicts in Southeast Asia, the United States experienced an influx of refugees who were different from the refugees who had previously immigrated to the United States. In light of the uniqueness and the sheer numbers of these populations, these two researchers were tasked with comparing groups of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao refugees with respect to the level of success that they achieved in their educations and occupations. Here is Rumbaut and Ima’s (1988) description of their target population from the first pages of their seminal manuscript addressing the Generation 1.5:

These respondents are members of what we will call the “1.5” generation: that is, they are neither part of the “first” generation of their parents, the responsible adults who were formed in the homeland, who made the fateful decision to leave it and to flee as refugees to an uncertain exile in the United States [...] nor are the youths part of the “second” generation of children who are born in the U.S., and for whom the “homeland” exists as a representation consisting of parental memories and memorabilia, even though their ethnicity may remain well-defined. Rather, the refugee youths in our study constitute a distinctive cohort: they are those young people who were born in their countries of origin but formed in the U.S.; [...] they were not the main protagonists of the decision to leave and hence are less beholden to their parents’ attitudes [...]; and they are in many ways marginal to both the new and old worlds, for while they straddle both worlds they are in some sense fully part of neither of them. [...] Though they differ greatly from each other in cultural and social class origins, [...] they generally share a common psychohistorical location in terms of their age and migration status/role, and in terms of developing bicultural strategies of response and adjustment to that unique position which they occupy as “1.5’ers” in the interstices, as it were, of two societies and cultures, between the first and second generation, between being “refugees” and being “ethnics” (or “hyphenated Americans”). (pp. 1-2)

In these initial observations of the Generation 1.5 population, Rumbaut and Ima (1988) identified the key distinguishing characteristic of this group, namely the fact that they are unable to identify fully with either their immigrant parents’ generation or their own contemporaries in American communities and schools. They occupy a nebulous

space between two different cultures. Although the meaning of the term has evolved and expanded in the two decades since it was coined, the keen insight of these pioneer investigators must be recognized and lauded. They may be surprised themselves that the term is still being used, but they might be even more astonished to see that twenty years later members of these same ethnic populations continue to “straddle both worlds” (p. 1). Rumbaut and Ima’s (1988) imagery of a generation straddling two worlds provides a provocative metaphor, calling to mind a deep chasm, straddled by a hesitant sojourner, one foot on one side of the divide and one foot on the other, suspended between two languages and two cultures, powerless to choose and jump, unable to claim belonging on either side, her identity often elusive—even to herself.

In recent years, researchers have continued to use terminology that expands and reinforces the unstable and uncertain identity of members of this group. Inherent in the term Generation 1.5 is reference to the group’s “in-between status” (Goen, Porter, Swanson, & Vandommelen, 2002b). Oudenhoven (2006) described the Generation 1.5 Latino students that she studied as being “caught in the middle.” The members of the Generation 1.5 can be viewed as straddling multiple chasms—gaps between nations, between languages, between cultures, between educational labels, and between effective teaching methodologies.

Initially the term “Generation 1.5” was used to describe youth who were not born in the United States. However, since Rumbaut and Ima’s (1988) initial use of the label, educators and researchers have used the name in varying ways. Frodesen (2002) acknowledges that the term Generation 1.5 refers to a wide range of individuals who cannot be viewed as a homogenous group. Some people continue to restrict the term to

describing only foreign-born young people (Oudenhoven, 2006), despite Roberge's (2002) argument that the term Generation 1.5 should be expanded beyond the actual physical immigrant population to include U.S.-born children of immigrants who are raised in environments where English is not the primary language of the home and community. At one end of the spectrum are those, like many of today's Hmong college students, who were either born in the United States or arrived when they were very young and have received all of their education in U.S. institutions. At the other end of the scale are students who arrived as adolescents and completed all or some of their junior and senior high school education in the States. At both ends of this spectrum, regardless of how long they have been in the states, these students commonly share continued challenges with the English language; they also share the distinction of being bicultural, as well as bilingual.

Researchers and educators who use the term Generation 1.5 have increasingly emphasized the unifying characteristics of these individuals rather than their places of birth or their length of time in the adopted country. Roberge's (2002) definition provided above will be adopted for use in this study. In the case of the Hmong, many students attending U.S. colleges and universities today were born in the United States, but they have been raised in homes and communities where a dialect of the Hmong language is the sole language for everyday communication. Many of their parents speak little or no English. When these students begin their schooling, they know only the tongue of their parents and communities, and they do not have a working knowledge of the language of the majority population.

Both educators and Generation 1.5 students themselves often have difficulty describing and categorizing their language identities. Although Rodby (1999), from the California State University in Chico, acknowledges that Generation 1.5 students often resemble native English speakers in their proficiency for everyday interactions, he describes the Generation 1.5 students in the university as “still learning English,” “struggling with writing and reading,” and “having deficiencies in language” (p. 45). A Generation 1.5 student described himself in the following way:

I don't really know if I'm bilingual because I don't really bond with—I don't really connect with the English culture. American culture. I'm kind of in between, I guess. I don't really speak [Chinese] that well, therefore, I'm non-native Chinese. [. . .] But I think more English because I don't use Chinese on a regular basis. [. . .] I don't feel emotionally attached to it, but sometimes I feel guilty when I don't. [. . .] But I feel I should be Chinese. I, like I said, when I, I think in English, it's so easy. When I think in Chinese, I have to think for a while. It's hard. [. . .] I feel like . . . a bamboo. Like um, yellow on the outside and white on the inside. (Chiang & Schmida, 1999, p. 86)

If Generation 1.5 students themselves are confused, the labels applied to them by educators and researchers are no less bewildering. In their introduction to a theme section on Generation 1.5 in *The CATESOL Journal*, Goen et al. (2002a) emphasize that Generation 1.5 students are associated with various conventional labels and categories that neither adequately describe them nor embody the uniqueness of their situations. Two important factors must be considered when exploring information on the Generation 1.5. As mentioned above, the term itself is used in very different ways. Additionally,

information on the Generation 1.5 population can be found subsumed under vastly different labels. When the latter is the case, the information is difficult to extract for application directly to the Generation 1.5 population. Roberge (2002) points out that part of the reason that these students are difficult to categorize is that, as already discussed, in so many areas of their lives, they straddle the classifications of commonly-used ethnic, linguistic, and academic labels.

**Ethnic labels.** In the case of the Hmong, the group which was the focus of this study, a variety of ethnic labels have been applied; most of these labels over-generalize and thus mask valuable distinctive characteristics of the Hmong people. In research studies, the Hmong are often subsumed under various typified categories, such as *Asian immigrants*, *Asian-Americans* (Walker-Moffat, 1995), or *Southeast Asian Americans* (Tarone, Downing, Cohen, Gillette, Murie, & Dailey, 1993). Roberge (2002) makes the point that both fourth generation Japanese Americans and recently arrived Southeast Asian refugees are labeled Asian-Americans, yet their experiences, backgrounds, and language abilities are quite different. Even within the narrower label of *Southeast Asian refugees*, Rumbaut and Ima's study (1988) found notable differences in the educational levels of these refugee groups. Hmong refugees were by far the least educated. Ethnic Vietnamese parents averaged more than nine years of education, Vietnamese-Chinese parents averaged seven years, Khmer and Lao parents averaged five years, and Hmong parents averaged only one year of education (p. xii). About 90% of the Hmong were from rural backgrounds, whereas 95% of the Vietnamese were from urban backgrounds (p. xii). Both of these factors—parents' level of education and living in a rural versus an

urban environment—have been identified as bearing significance when predicting the potential educational success of second language learners.

Even a more specific hyphenated label, such as *Hmong-American*, is not without its ambiguities. Julie Choi (2010) discusses her challenging identity as a Korean-American in her chapter “Living on the Hyphen” in a book which she co-edited with David Nunan, entitled *Language and Culture: Reflective Narratives and the Emergence of Identity*. She shares that the hyphenated label identifies her as not quite Korean but also not quite American. She also notes that the label carries both limitations and possibilities, and she describes ways in which she has used the designation to her advantage to position herself as an outsider or an insider depending on her needs in a specific encounter. Her stories highlight the fact that the use of hyphenated ethnic labels as descriptors for a person or a group is complicated by the ability of individuals to slide along the hyphen toward one end or the other depending on the needs or circumstances of a particular situation.

**Linguistic labels.** In terms of linguistic labels, Generation 1.5 students also straddle several gaps, such as native versus non-native, first language versus second language, and ESL versus non-ESL to name a few. A very awkward and problematic linguistic distinction in education and second language acquisition circles is that of native versus non-native English speaker. First of all, there are so many different varieties and dialects of English, even within the United States, that it is impossible to identify exactly what a native speaker sounds like. Secondly, the distinction of native versus non-native carries the connotation that native is somehow better than non-native when, in fact, the current consensus promoted by those in the field of sociolinguistics is that the use of a

non-standard dialect of a language is merely different, not deficient (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007).

Generation 1.5 students themselves often have difficulty identifying what their first or primary language is; they are aware that they are not competent in their home languages, as they are constantly reminded by parents, grandparents, and sometimes their own peers, but many of them are also conscious that they do not possess academic proficiency in English either, which they are made painfully aware of in the college writing classroom. In practical terms, they may use English more proficiently than their home language, yet they are not quite proficient enough to perform the academic tasks required for comfortably negotiating through a college education.

Rodriguez (2006) notes that traditional ESL students and Generation 1.5 students have very different characteristics. Unfortunately, the California State Department of Education, along with many colleges and universities, does not differentiate between these two categories of learners and conflates them under the labels of either *English Language Learners* (ELLs) or *limited English proficient* (LEP) students (California Department of Education). Generation 1.5 students are not like traditional ESL students because often all of their education has been in English and many consider English to be their primary language. Because they are proficient at listening and speaking, Generation 1.5 college students have different needs than those of traditional ESL students. Another linguistic label which has been associated with these students is that of *language minority* (Chiang and Schmida, 1999). Labels such as these not only fail to offer accurate descriptions of these students, but they also embody somewhat derogatory connotations.

Harklau, Seigal, and Losey (1999) identify this type of student in a more positive, less pejorative, light by using the term *linguistically diverse* (p. 3), which they describe as inclusive of bilingual students who enter U.S. colleges after progressing through elementary and secondary schools in the United States. However, they are concerned that these students must be differentiated from the more traditional international ESL students who enter U.S. higher education after completing their primary and secondary education outside the United States. Whatever label is assigned to them, in the college classroom, these linguistically diverse students straddle yet another gap; they do not fit into the traditional college ESL classroom because they have extensive exposure to U.S. culture and to the English language, yet they often struggle in the mainstream composition classroom because their language use in the academic setting is not “native.”

Frodesen and Starna (1999, p. 63) make an additional linguistic distinction between *incipient* and *functional* bilingual writers. These authors describe incipient bilinguals as having frequent errors in sentence structure and word choice; their writing is described as containing multiple errors and various kinds of grammatical mistakes. Functional bilingual writers also make errors in grammar, but the errors are of a more systematic nature and tend to fall into predictable categories often associated with fossilization, such as errors in subject verb-agreement, inappropriate verb-tenses and endings, incorrect word forms, and improper treatment of mass nouns. Most Generation 1.5 writers fall into the category of functional bilinguals. Frodesen and Starna (1999) believe that these two types of bilinguals will benefit from different types of interventions and recommend that functional bilinguals be placed in mainstream writing classrooms; whereas, incipient bilinguals might benefit more from specialized ESL classes.

**Academic labels.** In terms of academic labels, Generation 1.5 students have been assigned to various categories, such as *remedial* or *basic* writers or *academically underprepared* college students (Goen et al, 2002a). Reid (1998) refers to them as *U.S. resident writers*, and Roberge (2001) refers to them as *immigrant ESL students*. Schwartz (2006) used a slightly more specific term, *cross-over students*, to identify Generation 1.5 students who are enrolled in mainstream classes. However, the language characteristics of these students are distinct from first language basic or remedial writers, students who are often considered academically underprepared for the rigors of college-level work. In addition, despite the fact that these students often display language characteristics that identify them as second language writers, they differ markedly from true ESL students—those students whose first language was firmly established prior to beginning the acquisition of a second language. One major difference is that traditional ESL students, who learned English in the classroom setting and received much of their education in another country, are often more proficient in grammar but have greater difficulty pronouncing, speaking, and understanding English. On the other hand, Generation 1.5 students have learned English largely informally through exposure to the language around them, and their speech is often indistinguishable from native English speakers. Even though they have different needs from both native speakers and ESL students, they are often placed in remedial or ESL writing classes in high school or college. Such classes do not meet their unique needs.

Rose (1989) uses a slightly different term which has no reference to immigration status or ethnicity yet includes many students who belong to the Hmong Generation 1.5. His focus is on the *educationally underprepared*, those students who find themselves in

America's colleges and universities, but have not been adequately provided with the academic skills necessary to be successful. These students may or may not be immigrants, but they often have in common that they are raised in depressed communities and come from families in the lower socioeconomic levels. Rose believes that in order for these students to be successful, they need encouraging and supportive assistance at many points in their educational journeys. Unfortunately, in many cases, their secondary school education has failed to provide them with the needed support, so they arrive in the college classroom as strangers to academic writing conventions and critical thinking processes.

Although educators may not be able to agree on an appropriate title for Generation 1.5 students, they definitely recognize these students. Goen et al. (2002a) report that when they conduct workshops on Generation 1.5 writers, they often hear the following comment from instructors: "I recognize these students! They are the ones in my English class who are struggling the most and whom I feel the least able to help" (p. 104). Whatever ethnic, linguistic, or academic labels are applied to these students, studies have shown that, despite the fact that many Generation 1.5 immigrant students develop competence in everyday usage of the language, they seem to have difficulty attaining the level of competence required for success in postsecondary academic endeavors (Bosher, 1997; Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999; Nye, 2006; Roberge, 2001 & 2002; Rose, 1999; and Tarone, Downing, Cohen, Gillette, Murie, & Dailey, 1993).

### **Generation 1.5 and the College Classroom: The Scope of the Problem**

Most of the Hmong students currently enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities would be classified as Generation 1.5 because they were either born in the United States

or were born in refugee camps and came to the States when they were infants or toddlers. Many of them spoke only Hmong until they entered the U.S. public education system. Many of their parents have never become fluent English speakers, so the young people continue to speak Hmong almost exclusively in their homes and communities. Despite the fact that these students are educated entirely in English, when they enter college, their academic writing ability is described by their instructors as retaining residual non-native traces which seem to be directly related to the fact that English is not their first language.

Whatever labels are used to describe Generation 1.5 students, evidence exists that colleges and universities are now seeing a flood of these students, who, despite graduating from U.S. high schools and receiving the majority of their education in English, enter college while they are still in the process of acquiring the English language (Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999). These students have very different writing and language needs and vastly different life and educational experiences from previous generations of college students (Harklau 2001; Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999).

As mentioned briefly in the introduction to this chapter, several reasons have been offered for their increasing presence in the college classroom. Roberge (2002) notes that the immigrant population in the latter part of the twentieth century differs markedly from that of previous generations and suggests that the post-industrial society in which current immigrant populations find themselves requires that they pursue a college education in order to survive economically. Due to technological advances and globalization, higher and higher percentages of people who would have previously chosen middle-class occupations in industrial or service fields are being forced to opt for a college education out of necessity (Harklau, 2001; Roberge, 2002). Historically, during times of recession,

people who are unable to find jobs decide to go to college. Given the current state of the U.S. economy, the percentage of students making this decision is likely to increase. In addition, many students who chose not to go to college directly from high school are deciding to go to college after a few years in the work force. Each of these categories of students is likely to include an increased representation of Generation 1.5 students.

Irrespective of the reasons, educational systems in many parts of the country have experienced, or are now experiencing, dilemmas in trying to meet the needs of increasing numbers of Generation 1.5 immigrant students. Certain parts of the country have been more noticeably affected—states like California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, and Illinois (Roberge, 2002). According to Roberge (2002), one third of all U.S. immigrants choose to settle in California, and one quarter of the population of the state of California is comprised of immigrants. During the Southeast Asian refugee diaspora that began with the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Saigon in 1975, the U.S. government made an attempt to settle this influx of refugees all over the country in order to avoid overburdening local communities and state and county budgets. However, because of the strong family and ethnic connections in the Hmong community, the Hmong people quickly began migrating within the United States to live in better climates in more rural settings and to settle in places where there were growing Hmong refugee populations (Koltyk, 1998). During the time that I worked with the Hmong in the early eighties in Philadelphia, I clearly remember a time when several families (probably between one hundred and two hundred people) migrated en masse out of the city to live in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where there was abundant countryside and farmland, which they strongly preferred to the inner city. This strong propensity of the Hmong to establish

tight-knit ethnic communities is likely part of the explanation for their unusual ability to successfully maintain significant aspects of their culture.

Despite government efforts to diffuse the burden of this influx of immigrants, when Rumbaut and Ima (1988) conducted their research in 1986-87, 40% of all Southeast Asian refugees had settled in California (p. 6), placing a significant burden on certain school systems. They also noted that the percentage of Southeast Asian refugee students in the San Diego school system had rapidly doubled from 8.5% in 1982 to 17.4% in 1986. A small community in Wisconsin had only a few Hmong families in 1976; however, the Hmong population rose to over 3,000 by 1990 and over 4,400 by 1995, a number that represented about 10% of the city's population (Duffy, 2004). Walker-Moffat (1995) describes an extreme case of an elementary school in California being suddenly inundated with Hmong students—with no advance warning. She starts her story as follows:

At 7:00 A.M. on the first morning after Christmas vacation in January 1981, a principal arrived at her elementary school...to find a long line of people, many of them women wearing black embroidered turbans, waiting outside to register their children (p. 54).

She then relates that four school administrators spent the entire day, from 7:15 A.M. until 5:30 P.M. registering these students. They did not know who the Hmong were and had no Hmong-English bilingual staff to assist in the registration or teaching process.

The mass migration of Hmong into Merced County, California, resulted in a tremendous crisis for the local school system. Fadiman (1997) describes the situation in this way:

In order to relieve overcrowding and to desegregate schools that would otherwise be almost entirely Asian, Merced has had to bus nearly 2,000 of its elementary and middle-school students; build three new elementary schools, a new middle school, and a new high school; teach classes in more than seventy trailers and, while waiting for them to arrive, in cafeterias, on auditorium stages, and in the exhibition hall of the County Fairgrounds; and switch seven schools to a staggered all-year calendar. (p. 238)

Perhaps the experiences of these school districts provided a foreshadowing of the influx of Generation 1.5 students who are emerging in today's colleges and universities.

The above stories are by no means isolated cases. In their chapter contribution in *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition*, Hartman and Tarone (1999, p. 99) provide the following quote from a Minneapolis newspaper: “the number of students [in the state] who speak little or no English has more than tripled in the past 10 years [since 1987] to about 27,000—roughly the size of one of the state's largest school districts (Smith, Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, May 24, 1997, p.1).” Today, about half of the students in California public schools begin learning English only when they enter the school system; in fact, in many high schools, students who could be classified as Generation 1.5 comprise a majority of the school population (Ching, 2007).

According to the California Department of Education enrollment figures, in the 1981-82 school year, white (non-Hispanic) students accounted for roughly 56% of the student population; in 2001-02, white enrollment percentages were only 35%. In demographic statistics by ethnicity, the Hmong are integrated into the “Asian” category; however, in the language category, their language is broken out. Despite the fact that the

Hmong are a relatively small immigrant group within the United States, in California, they are quite noticeable; over the past 25 years, students designated as Hmong speakers are in the top five language groups in terms of numbers, although Spanish far outweighs all others.

As already noted, much of the data on the California Department of Education website lists Hmong under the general category of “Asian.” However, there are a few categories in which the students are grouped by language rather than ethnicity, and these provide some interesting information about the Hmong. In the 1995-96 academic year, out of 37,500 Hmong students in grades K-12, only 5,600 were rated as Fluent-English-Proficient (FEP); the rest were designated as English Language Learners (ELLs). Thus, only 15% were scored as FEP. In the 2001-02 academic year, out of nearly 34,000 Hmong students, 7,000 were rated as FEP, which is only about 20%. The picture had improved somewhat by 2007-08, when, out of nearly 30,000 Hmong students, around 10,000 were designated as FEP, about 33%.

In the public school system in California, students whose home language is not English are required to take the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) annually until they achieve a score which indicates proficiency in English (Innovative Education Management). Kindergarten and Grade 1 students are tested based on their listening and speaking skills, and Grades 2 through 12 are tested based on listening, speaking, reading and writing. The California Department of Education website reveals that in 2002, 37% of Hmong students who took the exam in Grade 12 scored only at an intermediate language proficiency level; 41% scored at the early advanced level, and only 11% scored at the advanced level. These scores had not

significantly changed by 2008 (29% at the intermediate level, 41% at the early advanced level, and only 12% at the advanced level). In other words, according to the CELDT, many students are entering college with an English language skill level designated as lower than advanced. Another interesting observation regarding the CELDT is that, in the 2007-2008 academic year, 50% of Hmong kindergarten students in the state of California were still rated as beginning English learners, even though it is likely that their families have been in the United States for many years.

California community colleges and universities have been serving increasing numbers of ESL students since the 1980s, but until recently, the majority of these students had been in the United States for less than seven years and still required extensive instruction and support in their use of the English language. However, in the three years between 1998 and 2001, UCLA, for example, experienced a tripling of the number of first-year immigrant ESL students who were born in the United States or had attended American schools since elementary school (Holten, 2002). These students are not “linguistic or cultural newcomers” (Goen et al., 2002b); rather, they are bilingual, long-term U.S. residents. Goen et al. (2002b) relate similar changes that have occurred in the student population of the ESL program at San Francisco State. They state that until recently the student population in their ESL program was one-third immigrant and two-thirds international, now the distribution has reversed, and many of the two-thirds who now comprise the immigrant side of the equation have been in the country for more than ten years.

This rapidly increasing population of Generation 1.5 students in America’s colleges and universities provides a basic justification or need for a study such as this

one. Both students and teachers in higher education institutions are challenged by the current classifications and the teaching philosophies and techniques employed in attempting to meet the needs of students who demonstrate limited academic proficiency in the English language. The influx of students in an in-between stage in their literacy development process presents a number of dilemmas for composition instructors at colleges and universities regarding placement (mainstream versus ESL) and assessment (Frodesen & Starna, 1999). Different educational options which have been implemented will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

On a personal level, this study was prompted by my own observations in my college composition classrooms, my long history of association with the Hmong people, and my continued involvement with them on the college campus. My education and experience in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) did not prepare me for the college writing classroom. My TESL experience had focused primarily on teaching recent immigrants, and most of the ESL classes that I taught were comprised of very low level beginners, whose goals were to be able to function in the community and get a job. Through an unusual set of circumstances, I found myself as an adjunct instructor teaching college writing in a small Christian liberal arts college in northern California to predominantly mainstream native-English-speaking college freshman. For a variety of reasons, the university at which I work has a high percentage of Hmong students. This is partially a reflection of the geographical area in which we are located since a rather high percentage of Hmong live in California's Central Valley. As will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter, it is also a reflection of the long history of involvement of our Christian denomination with the Hmong people, which extends historically to their

homelands of China, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. When I started to teach college writing a few years ago, I was stunned and intrigued by the difficulties that these Hmong students exhibited in the college writing classroom. I was under the obviously erroneous assumption that since they were born and educated in the United States, they would use English in the same way as other native English speakers.

### **The Hmong: The Target Generation 1.5 Population**

The next section of this chapter will focus specifically on the characteristics of the Hmong population in the United States and on their suitability as a population for a study of this scope.

### **Rationale for the Target Population**

From my personal experience with the Hmong, I believe that this population can offer valuable insights into the complex issues surrounding the development of literacy in a second language, including very important educational and social factors. Countless studies have been conducted on second language users in the academic environment; however, as mentioned earlier, within many of these studies, the Hmong are subsumed under broader typified categories. In educational circles, such categories may include labels such as L2 writers, immigrant writers, ESL students, or English language learners (ELLs). Significant variation exists between the various experiences and people groups which are represented within these broader terms. This variation may result in masking valuable information and thus make these broader groupings inadequate foci for detailed study. These groupings may include English learners who have been in the United States most of their lives under the same general label as those who have completed their entire secondary education in another country and have newly arrived in the United States to

pursue their college educations. As also noted previously, the above types of classifications typically also combine participants from a variety of ethnic, language, and cultural backgrounds.

Aside from my familiarity and access to Hmong college students, I chose to study them because they are a relatively recent immigrant group which has fought hard (and with relative success) to maintain their culture and language in the midst of a dominant U.S. culture which could easily overwhelm and consume them. The distinctive characteristics of the Hmong Generation 1.5 have been lost in studies that focus on more general categories, like *Southeast Asian immigrants* or *second generation* or *academically underprepared*. The word *Hmong* itself means *free* (Chan, 1994), and true to their name, the Hmong people have resisted assimilation to such a degree that I believe they can have the potential to offer some valuable insights on literacy development issues that may be more subtle and thus more difficult to identify and investigate in populations that have welcomed greater cultural assimilation. At the same time, the English language ability of Hmong college students has developed to a level that should allow them to be able to provide information in an academically meaningful way; such information may benefit their own culture as well as future immigrant populations like them.

In addition to their uniqueness from other Asian immigrants in their strong commitment to retaining their home culture, the Hmong are also distinctive in their persistent belief and adherence to strictly defined gender roles—despite the length of time that they have been in the United States. These traditionally-prescribed gender patterns have the potential for minimizing the relevance of education for young women since, within their culture, their primary value and social functions lie in the home. Because of

these strictly defined gender roles, the literacy experiences and the significance of postsecondary education are likely to be quite different for male and female Hmong young people. Furthermore, because of this potential for diverse experiences and family support between male and female Hmong young people, I am planning to focus my research efforts specifically on Hmong women. A brief history and description of the Hmong people will be helpful in providing a backdrop for this study.

### **The Hmong People in the United States**

The Hmong have a long history of adapting, without assimilating. For thousands of years, the Hmong people have been immigrating and relocating, yet they have managed to maintain many of their traditional customs and beliefs. People believe that the Hmong originated in Mesopotamia, Siberia, or Mongolia (Faderman & Xiong, 1998). Although there is no actual evidence for where they first appeared, there is strong historical evidence that the Hmong settled in China more than five thousand years ago (Faderman & Xiong, 1998). Beginning in the seventeenth century, the Hmong began to migrate in waves to the Southeast Asian countries of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand (Quincy, 1995). It is from these countries that the majority of Hmong have entered the United States.

In the immigration history of the United States, rarely has a people group been less prepared than the Hmong for the surprises that awaited them. Fadiman (1997) describes some of the experiences of this hill tribe whose people were essentially nomadic farmers and maintained minimal contact with the dominant cultures of the countries in which they lived. She provides the following description of these displaced peoples after they arrived in the United States:

Some newcomers wore pajamas as street clothes; poured water on electric stoves to extinguish them; lit charcoal fires in their living rooms; stored blankets in their refrigerators; washed rice in their toilets; washed their clothes in swimming pools; washed their hair with Lestoil; cooked with motor oil and furniture polish; drank Clorox; ate cat food; planted crops in public parks; shot and ate skunks, porcupines, woodpeckers, robins, egrets, sparrows, and a bald eagle; and hunted pigeons with crossbows in the streets of Philadelphia. (p. 188)

The goal of the Hmong who came to the United States was not to assimilate. Fadiman (1997) proposes that, in fact, many of the Hmong desired to come to the United States to avoid the assimilation which was inevitable in their home countries following the wars in Southeast Asia. The Hmong hoped to preserve their ethnicity by emigrating from Southeast Asia. Indeed, thus far, the Hmong culture has successfully managed to survive much of the influence from the American culture which surrounds it. Fadiman (1997) observes that the success of the Hmong is remarkable, in that their culture has been so minimally eroded by integration into the dominant culture:

Virtually all Hmong still marry other Hmong, marry young, obey the taboo against marrying within their own clans, pay brideprices, and have large families. Clan and lineage structures remain intact, as is the ethic of group solidarity or mutual assistance. (p. 208)

Fadiman wrote the above description in 1997; however, in my own experience many of her observations remain true. Most of the Hmong people with whom I have had contact still marry other Hmong (outside their own clans), practice the custom of paying dowries, and have large families. The larger Hmong community remains generally

intact. I, personally, have had more than one Hmong student tell me about breaking down on a highway somewhere in California. In such an emergency, they will look up the name of someone who shares their clan name and call that phone number and ask for help. They are often helped, fed, and given a place to stay for the night. I have often wondered if this is a modern urban folktale, but because I have heard the story consistently enough, I am inclined to believe that it is likely an ordinary practice among the Hmong.

Because of their uniqueness, the Hmong have been studied from many socio-cultural perspectives aside from language and literacy development, such as immigration patterns, cultural distinctiveness, resistance to change, educational challenges, and a variety of family and social issues. Although the Hmong are a small percentage of the mix of immigrants present in the U.S, they are conspicuous because they tend to migrate within the country in large groups and congregate in certain areas of the country—mostly rural, farming areas. Because of this inclination toward mass migration, their impact on the educational system in some geographical areas has been overwhelming, as noted above. Extensive educational research has been conducted on the Hmong in places like California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, resulting in the recognition that many public school systems have failed to respond to the needs of the Hmong. As the Hmong have increasingly begun to enroll in colleges and universities, some of struggles that began at lower levels of education have become more salient. Vang (2001) reports that, although 95% of Hmong secondary students graduate from high school on schedule, only 10% to 15% of these students are equipped with the academic skills necessary for success at the university level.

In their 1988 study, Rumbaut and Ima noted that, due to limited English language ability, Hmong students in kindergarten through eighth grade were not faring well in school even though many of them had spent all or most of their lives in the United States. One of the outcomes of their study was that unless specific intervention programs were instituted in the lower elementary grades, the majority of Hmong-American students would be unlikely to succeed at the post-secondary level. Vang (2004-05) conducted a study of Hmong-American students in high school settings and concluded that their success or failure seemed to be closely related to their economic situations. However, Lee (2001) believed the problem to be much more complex than lower socioeconomic status and identified several potential contributing factors, including level of motivation, first language ability, resistance to acculturation, and limited family support for educational pursuits.

It is intriguing that twenty years after Rumbaut and Ima (1988) first coined the phrase Generation 1.5, Hmong students continue to straddle the gap between the old and new cultures described by these researchers. Lee (2005) has identified resistance to assimilation as a possible hindrance to education within the Hmong community. She makes a distinction between *traditional* and *Americanized* Hmong (p. 50) and labels them respectively as 1.5 generation or second generation. Interestingly, her division between these two titles is not based on the students' place of birth or length of time in the country, but rather on the extent to which they hold to traditional Hmong values and the degree to which they identify with the English language. Lee's observations link academic success with being more Americanized. O'Reilly (1998) identified additional common factors present in the lives of Hmong students who experience academic

success. Her study showed that Hmong who achieve success in higher education possess certain characteristics: a relationship with their parents which involves mutual respect and open discussion, a specific plan and goals for their education immediately following high school, access to technology, counseling and extra school services, effective skills for coping with academic and economic problems, and high self-esteem. The relative significance of some of these factors will emerge in the results of this study.

It is interesting to juxtapose these older findings with information from the most recent available U.S. Census information. The 2000 U.S. Census Bureau compiled a report entitled *We the People: Asians in the U.S.* This report summarized the results of the census as specifically related to various Asian populations. The Hmong were identified as a unique population within this report as one of the eleven largest Asian groups in the United States. In comparison charts of these various ethnic groups, the Hmong show several outstanding trends and traits. In general, Asians had a slightly lower median age (33 years old) than the general population (35 years old); however, the Hmong, by far, reported the lowest median age among Asian populations, with a median age of only 16 years old. The next lowest groups were Cambodians and Laotians, with median ages of 24 and 26, respectively. This number is likely due to the fact that the Hmong have continued to favor large families. The Hmong had the highest percent of married couple households of all Asian groups with 78%; they also had the highest average household size (6.14 people per household). Once again, Cambodian and Laotian households followed with 4.41 and 4.23 people per household respectively. Roughly 44% of the Hmong are native born citizens; this percentage was second only to the Japanese, a group who has been in this country for several generations. Again, this

high percentage is likely due to the high birth rate and family size among the Hmong. Only 4% of Hmong families speak only English at home, the smallest percentage of any Asian population; 58.6% of families surveyed indicated that the English spoken in the home was spoken less than *very well*. Nearly 60% of the Hmong over age 25 did not have a high school diploma. Again in this category, the Hmong were closely followed by the Cambodians (53.3%) and Laotians (49.6%). The Hmong also exhibited the lowest percentage of bachelor's degrees within their population with 7.5%. For full-time, year-round workers age 16 and above, the Hmong had the lowest median earnings of all Asian groups: \$25,187 for men and \$20,237 for women. They also had the lowest median family income, which was \$32,384, closely rivaled only by Cambodians (\$35,621). The poverty rate within the Hmong population was by far the highest of any Asian population at nearly 38%. Hmong also reported the lowest percentage of home ownership among Asian groups.

### **The Distinctive Role of Women within the Hmong Culture**

The Hmong culture has traditionally adhered to strictly-defined gender roles, resulting in women having limited status within the authority structure of their clans and families. Walker-Moffat (1995) cites that "motherhood is the Hmong woman's only basis for power in the traditional Hmong culture" (p. 121). Therefore, many women marry at a young age and begin producing large families because their value and identity revolve around being wives and mothers. A woman's achievements as a wife and mother determine her status within a community, not the level of education that she has been able to achieve. Walker-Moffat (1995) also contends that independence and self-sufficiency

are not highly valued within the Hmong culture, and the women are not encouraged to develop their personal identities apart from their traditional familial roles.

The Hmong woman's identity is closely linked to the family structure, and when she marries, her identity is transferred from one family to another. Since the expectation is that a Hmong woman will marry and leave her birth family to become part of her husband's family, the birth family is often not willing to invest in her education. Ngo (2002) takes the identity development of the young women a step further and notes that girls who drop out of school for marital or maternal reasons are often lauded by their communities, and conversely, women who insist on pursuing higher education are considered undesirable marriage partners in some communities because they tend to become too assertive and independent.

Despite the fact that Hmong have been in the United States for two or three decades, teen marriage remains prevalent within the Hmong culture. Walker-Moffat (1995) reports that Hmong girls are considered to be women as soon as they marry, which can occur as early as thirteen to fifteen years of age. Marrying at such a young age significantly impacts educational options and motivation for Hmong teenagers who become wives and mothers. Even those who plan to continue their educations after marriage often find it very difficult to do so. Lee (1997) suggests that Hmong parents continue to encourage their daughters to marry at a young age because they see marriage as a way of keeping the young women from becoming absorbed into the dominant culture which they feel threatens their existence as a people. Because of this traditional practice, many Hmong women are afraid that if they wait until after college to get married, Hmong men will consider them unattractive potential partners. Hmong men generally have a

preference for younger women because they perceive them to be easier to control. Even Hmong men who have graduated from college often choose to marry much younger girls (Lee, 1997).

Ngo (2002) believes that the practice of early marriage is more than just an effort on the part of the older generations to maintain their traditional practices. He contends that many Hmong girls do not marry because they want to follow their cultural traditions, but because they want to escape the control of their parents. Early marriage offers them a way to establish their identities and self-esteem and to achieve some sense of power within their cultural framework (Ngo, 2002). Ngo offers a second reason that many Hmong women marry early: as an act of resistance against the struggles and marginalizing experiences they face in their homes and in educational settings. As they progress through their secondary education, they realize that even if they complete their educations, they will still have to contend with gender, racial, and cultural inequities in order to meet their professional and economic goals. In the face of the marginalization they experience in their educational settings and within the dominant culture, many opt for the simpler solution they believe may be found in the traditional female roles (Ngo, 2002).

### **The Interface between the Hmong and Higher Education**

According to Walker-Moffat (1995), many first generation Hmong immigrants view higher education with ambivalence and are faced with a difficult choice. If they resist American education and acculturation, they run the risk of remaining a small, poor minority group within the United States. Conversely, if they begin to place a high value on literacy and formal education, they may contribute to the breakdown of their

traditional cultural identity and practices. As noted in the previous section, this concern for preserving culture becomes heightened where Hmong women are concerned. The uniqueness of the role of women within the Hmong culture in general has generated a significant amount of interest and research, as have the potentially negative effects that adherence to these traditional gender roles can have on the education of Hmong women.

In their seminal study on the Generation 1.5, while studying Southeast Asian immigrant groups in the San Diego area, Rumbaut and Ima (1988) compared young people who belonged to the Vietnamese, Khmer, and Hmong ethnic groups. At the time of their study, the Hmong exhibited the highest levels of unemployment, poverty, and welfare dependency among those three populations. These researchers noted several other general trends in their studies. One was that females in these groups tended to have higher grade point averages (GPAs) than their male counterparts—except among the Hmong (p. xiv). The researchers attributed this to the fact that females were seriously devalued in the Hmong culture. Another notable statistic was that while the Hmong were least likely to drop out of school before graduation, they were also the least likely to pursue post-secondary schooling (p. xiv). Rumbaut and Ima (1998) attribute this to the early marriage and childbearing practices among the Hmong. They also noted the following barriers to educational and occupational progress within the Hmong community: limited proficiency in the English language, lack of role models and limited access to information about careers and continuing education, counter-productive survival strategies, and difficulty juxtaposing their two cultures (p. xvi). On the positive side, Rumbaut and Ima (1988) noted that, in general, the Hmong appeared to be good students. They had higher GPAs than most other ethnic groups, including majority white

students, and they had good attendance, low dropout rates, and low juvenile delinquency rates. Rumbaut and Ima attribute this success to the ongoing intact nature of the Hmong social structures; however, they note that this supposed source of strength also proved to be a limiting factor in the education of Hmong women, for the reasons already noted above (p. xix).

In the context of education and gender roles, Hmong women have much bigger hurdles to overcome than their male counterparts since they are faced with conflicting values about higher education from within their own culture and families. According to Lee (1997), many young women have been warned by their older sisters and mothers that the traditional Hmong way of life is a very difficult way for women to live, and they are very motivated to go to college because they are aware that college can provide them with a higher degree of freedom of choice in their marriages and careers. However, when young Hmong women look within their own culture for role models, they see very few educated women (Walker-Moffat, 1995).

Educational opportunities for Hmong women can be limited because of the strict cultural norms that are violated when young women are not living under the watchful eyes of their male relatives. Hmong families place a high priority on maintaining the reputations of their young women and the reputations of their families. Ngo (2002) reports that even Hmong women who do go to college are often forced to stay close to home and continue to live with their parents, limiting their choices of colleges and majors. The role of women within the Hmong culture is changing, but very slowly and not without tremendous struggle and inner turmoil on the part of the young women. When all of these conflicting factors are considered, the Hmong women who ultimately

make their way into the college classroom have had to overcome a long history of male domination within their culture and have had the strength to challenge the traditional roles ascribed to them by their culture and families.

Many Hmong women are aware that they now have choices in what they do with their lives. Although it may be difficult to resist the demands of their cultural roles and other family pressures, many are choosing to pursue higher education. In Duffy's (2007) book, *Writing from These Roots*, one young woman shared the following after attending a Hmong women's conference:

Hmong women, right now, we have more leadership and more education. It's very amazing. [. . .] In October, I went to a conference, and I saw many Hmong women who are very successful and very good English speakers. They are good role models compared to what I saw ten years ago or eight years ago. In the past, I never saw this. So we have become very successful. We still have a long way to go, but we're improving now (p. 169).

In a case study of a young Hmong woman in a college composition class in a state university in California, Rodby (1990) makes the important point that many Hmong women do not view their college endeavor as one with an individual goal and purpose; instead, they view their success or failure as having an impact on their own children, their culture, and their people. This point made by Rodby prompted me to recall the story of a young Hmong woman, whom I had the opportunity to observe over a period of eight years at the university as she struggled to complete her Bachelor's degree in liberal studies and then her Master's degree in education. In one class, I heard her describe her elementary school education experience. She did not speak English when she went to

public school and spent the first year of school sitting next to the teacher crying. By her description, she learned nothing, completed no assignments, and did not interact with English-speaking students at all. She perceives that her teachers felt sorry for her, and she was passed through the first couple grades of elementary school without doing much schoolwork at all. She feels that she never really recovered or caught up from those initial unproductive years in elementary school. In college, she took longer than usual to complete her degrees, she took fewer classes at a time, and she consistently sought instructor assistance and support in satisfactorily completing assignments. She is now a teacher trainer for English teachers in Korea. Over many conversations with her, it became clear that she persisted in her education because she viewed herself as fulfilling the position of a role model. In her family, she was the first to complete a college degree. In her culture she wanted to represent herself as a Hmong woman who took the time necessary to complete an advanced degree and, furthermore, declined to pursue marriage immediately after finishing that degree, but rather chose to spend several years in another country, where her chances of meeting someone to marry were very slim.

### **The Hmong at California Christian University**

The women who participated in this study were current students or recent graduates of a Christian university in California. This section will provide some significant background information regarding the Hmong who choose to attend California Christian University. (Note that this university name is a pseudonym.) One significant point that should be made about the Hmong who attend this university is that one of the primary reasons that they attend is because of the particular Christian denominational affiliation of the university. Thus, they are all evangelical Christians, at least nominally.

This is significant in that they may differ in some fundamental ways from the general population of Hmong in the United States. The following story is valuable for explaining the high percentage of Hmong people within the denomination and the university and for increasing the reader's understanding of the collective nature of the Hmong culture and some of the traditional beliefs that the Hmong held prior to converting to Christianity.

The denomination has a long history of association with the Hmong people, which began prior to their immigration to the United States. The website of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) currently features a short three-part video series, entitled "The Hmong People Movement," celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hmong Alliance church in America. Part one of the video series, which is subtitled "Chosen," is narrated by Dr. Timothy Vang, the Superintendent of the Hmong U.S. churches within the Christian and Missionary Alliance and tells the story of the Christian evangelization of the Hmong people while they were still in Thailand and Laos. He states that traditionally the Hmong people believed strongly in the spirit world and trusted in the spirits of their deceased ancestors and other talismans to protect them. They relied heavily on the leadership of their tribal shamans to guide their daily existence and practices. He also relates that, aside from the Hmong who have converted to Christianity, no Hmong have dared to destroy their altars and fetishes for fear of death. In fact, many Hmong have witnessed the mysterious deaths and illnesses of anyone who disregarded the desires of the spirits.

Vang (Christian and Missionary Alliance video, Part 1, 2005) goes on to describe the history of Christian evangelization among the Hmong people. In 1949, the first missionary to the Hmong arrived in Southeast Asia. Prior to the arrival of the

missionaries, many of the shamans were experiencing premonitions that something was going to happen among them: one had a premonition that someone would soon be arriving to tell them about the *real God* and several others were noticing that evil spirits who had plagued them for a long time were fleeing from the area. He shares a story of how a missionary and a Bible school student came to a village where one family had been converted when they observed evidence before their very eyes that the God of Christianity was more powerful than the evil spirits within their midst. The missionaries left the village and returned six months later to find that two thousand people within the village had converted to Christianity in their absence. The message quickly spread to nearby villages, and within a couple years, several thousand people had accepted Christ.

In Part 2 of the video series, which is subtitled “Self-Conversion,” the story continues with an account of how two men from a Hmong village met a white man on a trail who spoke to them in the Laotian language and gave them literature which explained Christianity. They brought this literature back to the village, where the shamans examined it and were immediately convinced that this was the good news that had been prophesied. Whole families converted to Christianity and turned away from their shamanistic practices with confidence in the power of the God of the Bible. The Hmong people actually largely converted themselves through reading the portions of the Bible and evangelistic tracts received through this chance encounter with a missionary on a trail. In one city, thirty to forty families converted to Christianity without ever meeting a foreign missionary or evangelist. Within Christian circles, this type of conversion pattern is known as a *people movement* and is not limited only to the Hmong experience.

Part 3 of the video series, "Full Circle," presents the involvement of the Hmong in the Vietnam War. Hmong soldiers in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were recruited by the CIA to wage a secret war in the highlands and border areas of Southeast Asia. They stymied North Vietnamese forces on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and rescued downed American pilots. Because of the Hmong support of the American effort, many of their villages were invaded, and entire villages of Hmong became refugees within their own country. In 1975, when American troops began to withdraw from Southeast Asia, the Hmong knew that they would be a target for persecution because of the role they had played in the war. Estimates are that 100,000 Hmong fled to Thailand, and nearly 30,000 died on the way. In the refugee camps in Thailand, despite the poor living conditions and despite being surrounded by disease and death, Hmong continued to convert to Christianity in large numbers. Many Christian and Missionary Alliance missionaries were in the refugee camps caring for the needs of the people; consequently, those who were converted considered themselves part of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Once they immigrated to the United States, the Hmong established their own indigenous churches under the auspices of the C&MA. Currently, the Hmong branch of the C&MA estimates a membership of roughly 29,000 people across the United States.

Since the United States only conducts a nationwide census every ten years and because it takes several years for the Census Bureau to process and present accurate and detailed results to the public, the information presented here is slightly dated. For example, detailed information on the Hmong in the U.S. from the data gathered in the 2000 U.S. Census was not published until 2004. That being said, the 2000 census reports estimated the U.S. Hmong population to be about 184,000. This would mean that

roughly 16% of the Hmong in the United States are associated with the C&MA. It is important to note, however, that the Hmong community itself is largely convinced that its numbers are significantly undercounted in the census and that perhaps its population is closer to twice this number. The Hmong themselves cite several possible reasons for this underrepresentation in the census: registration under country of origin rather than ethnicity, suspicion and misunderstandings regarding the census, and language and cultural barriers to completing the forms (Hmong National Development, Inc.).

### **The U.S. Hmong as Writers**

John Duffy, a professor at the University of Notre Dame and a long-time scholar on literacy issues related to the Hmong people, offers support for the fact that the Hmong are likely to be fitting participants in a study such as this one. Duffy (2007) provides evidence that the Hmong people in the United States have begun to use writing to stake their claims in the public spheres of their schools and communities and believes that the Hmong are poised to contribute significantly to educational research through writing. He also suggests that the Hmong have a unique literacy history, not so much in the events themselves, but in the fact that the events were compressed into such a short period of time. Literacy development, learning to read and write, is personal, cultural, institutional, transnational, historical, and, finally, rhetorical (Duffy, 2007). It is personal in the sense that each individual directs her learning for her own purposes, in response to her own personal desires and goals. However, literacy extends from the personal to the cultural because even though people pursue literacy for their own reasons, they do so within the context of the culture in which they live. Even though literacy is ultimately pursued for personal reasons, literacy development is also influenced by the institutions in which an

individual must function; these might include educational or governmental institutions. Understanding of literacy expands beyond the learner's current situation into past experiences in their home countries and the historical origins of their people. When investigating literacy development, one must take all of these aspects into account.

Duffy (2004) defines rhetoric as “the use of symbols by institutions or individuals to structure thought and shape conceptions of the world” (p. 226), and he outlines various “rhetorics” that have contributed to the development of Hmong literacy in the United States: the rhetoric of Christian sponsorship, the rhetoric of public schooling, and the rhetoric of workplace writing (p. 126). He also makes the point that these rhetorics were not entirely new to the Hmong, but rather built on their prior historical experiences, beginning with centuries-old myths about lost books, progressing through the war in Vietnam and Laos, and continuing into their migration and adaptation to life after immigrating to the United States. Duffy (2007) also proposes that “literacy [can] serve as a shaping instrument, a means for inviting readers and writers to understand themselves, whether as citizens, Christians, soldiers, refugees, or members of some other group” (p. 152). Duffy (2007) theorizes that writing facilitates individuals to “reconceive and ‘rewrite’ the identities they have been offered” (p. 152). Duffy (2007) devotes the last chapter of his book to demonstrating that their relatively newly-developed literacy and writing abilities can empower the Hmong by allowing them to speak for themselves, resisting stereotypes, rather than relying on the interpretations of researchers in sociology, education, and anthropology to represent them.

Duffy (2007) provides examples of ways in which the Hmong have rewritten accounts of their personal histories to present themselves as a competent and creative

people who have overcome difficult circumstances to emerge victorious and strong. Hmong women have the opportunity to use their writing abilities to challenge and re-create gender roles within their culture. In a separate publication, Duffy (2004) demonstrates the way in which the Hmong in the community of Wausau, Wisconsin, were able to defend themselves by responding creatively and intelligently to anti-immigrant editorials directed at them in the local newspaper. The locals described the Hmong as defiantly having large families in order to milk the welfare system, as stealthily abducting neighborhood pets to eat, and as stubbornly refusing to learn English. One long-time resident of Wausau was recorded as lamenting “What has happened to our fair city?” (p. 224). The Hmong countered these criticisms and used their written responses as opportunities to explain their ethnic background to the dominant culture inhabitants of the community.

The information which has been presented in the preceding sections of this chapter serve to provide background information on Hmong immigrants in general, as well as more specific information on the Hmong students who attend California Christian University. Background explanations such as this provide part of the “thick description” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993) which qualitative researchers identify as an important component of reliable qualitative studies.

### **Return to the Research Question**

In summary, increasing numbers of Generation 1.5 college students are struggling with meeting the language standards in our colleges and universities every day; likewise, teachers and administrators in many institutes of higher education are searching for ways to best serve this population and advance them successfully through their college careers.

However, the issues leading to the challenges faced by these students do not lend themselves to easy observation. Research has been conducted in a number of ways, but the answers often turn out to be incomplete and fragmented.

Both literacy development and language learning are complicated processes to study and document because of the multiple intersecting and contributing factors involved; logically, therefore, in the study of the development of *biliteracy* and *bilingualism*, the challenges are multiplied. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, because of the intricacy and complexity of these processes, researchers and educators in the fields of literacy development, second language acquisition, and applied linguistics often find attempts to analyze these processes dissatisfying because they are able to address so few of the many variables involved. Traditional research practices attempt to control some aspects of the process in an attempt to study one particular variable in the overall equation. Relying heavily on the observations and conclusions of the observer-researcher, empirical research presents only the etic perspective of a particular phenomenon. In other words, many studies explain the experience of the research subjects from the viewpoint of the researchers, who are outsiders. Furthermore, in many studies, individual differences are lost when research subjects are categorized into homogenous groups with arbitrarily-defined labels.

To reiterate the research goals, this study attempted to facilitate members of the Generation 1.5 themselves in exploring and evaluating their own experiences with biliterate language development and to present these stories in such a way as to elucidate the nuances in their literacy and language development processes. The data will be presented in such a way as to shed light on a few questions surrounding the complex

issues encountered by minority populations in their literacy and language development experiences by highlighting the events that this particular group cites as having been helpful or hindering, by exploring how cultural and language backgrounds of these women have influenced their biliterate language development, and by considering the effects of critical language and social encounters on the educational experiences of this particular group of Generation 1.5 women.

Several data gathering techniques were adopted to assist the participants in recalling and critically evaluating their own experiences: background questionnaires, journal responses, group discussions, and one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The goal was to uncover experiences and stories from the lives of these women which demonstrate the challenges they have faced as a result of the intersecting educational, familial, and social structures present in their lives. Perhaps some of this information will be helpful to primary and secondary school teachers who are involved in the initial process of aiding present and future generations of U.S. immigrants in their biliterate development and to colleges and universities who are likely to see higher and higher percentages of these students in the postsecondary classroom. In addition to the possible implications of the outcome of such a study for Hmong immigrants and long-term immigrants in general, the participants themselves and perhaps their immediate families should also benefit from the research process as problems areas, as well as positive experiences, in the language and literacy development process are remembered and explored in group discussions.

The Hmong people have been studied in a variety of different ways by researchers in different academic disciplines. While previous studies in educational research and

applied linguistics have included Generation 1.5 Hmong women among their subjects, any unique characteristics they possess are often masked by alternate groupings and labels. Due to the very nature of qualitative research, specific outcomes are difficult to predict in advance. Mark Pfeifer, director of the Hmong Resource Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, and editor of the *Hmong Studies Journal*, cites a need for further research on cultural adaptation and educational outcomes as they relate to language use among Hmong who have been born and raised in the United States. He notes that “the definitive work(s) pertaining to Hmong-American interactions with the primary, secondary or higher educational systems have yet to be written” (2005, p. 3).

As the literature review in the next chapter will show, language and literacy development in a biliterate environment is impacted by multiple social, educational, and individual factors. Chapter 3 will outline the justification for the type of research conducted in this study: a feminist ethnographic methodology, using narratives as the primary tool for collecting and presenting the data. Chapter 4 will present the data through the use of small stories organized within a framework of Nancy Hornberger’s (2003) continua of biliteracy and will demonstrate that even though the women have received their entire educations in English, they have not been full participants in the educational and social experiences of the society surrounding them due to the limitations placed on them by themselves, their families, their Hmong culture, or members of the dominant U.S. culture. Finally, in Chapter 5, the author will propose three ways that educators might address the critical issues revealed by these stories: by educating, supporting, and establishing teachers to be agents for social change; by promoting the

appropriate attitudes toward multiculturalism in U.S. schools; and by legitimizing the minority experience within the U.S. educational system.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter 1 introduced the definition of the term Generation 1.5, the scope and nature of the research problem, the purpose for conducting this study, and an overview of the population under investigation. This chapter will focus on features of biliteracy and second language development as they relate to the Generation 1.5 population.

Bilingualism and biliteracy inhabit a place at the intersection of many second language acquisition theories, assorted educational theories and practices, and various aspects of sociolinguistics. Because these developmental processes are extremely complex and encompass a plethora of diverse theories, it would be impossible to address this topic exhaustively in any single work, much less one of this limited scope. However, different aspects of these theories and various facets of the literacy development process will necessarily be part of this investigation. For this reason, Chapter 2 will begin with a discussion on the definitions of biliteracy and bilingualism and an explanation of Nancy Hornberger's continua of biliteracy, followed by a brief overview of a few selected second language acquisition theories which relate directly to long-term U.S. immigrants and a description of several of the factors which are believed to contribute to biliterate language development and acquisition. This literature review will also include a description of the language characteristics noted in college writing samples of Generation 1.5 students. Next, various explanations which have been offered as reasons for these distinct writing characteristics and their relationships to the language development process will be presented. The chapter will end with a discussion of previous studies and the shortfalls in their descriptions or explanations for the observations made regarding

Generation 1.5 students. Many of the discussions in this chapter will pertain to Generation 1.5 students in general. When specific information is available regarding Hmong students, this information will also be included.

### **Biliteracy and Bilingualism**

To the general population, the term literacy refers simply to the ability to read and write, and the term bilingual refers to a person's ability to speak two languages. However, to professionals in the educational and linguistics fields, the meaning of these terms is much more complicated. Literacy is more than simply the skill of using the written word (Street & Lefstein, 2007). Street and Lefstein (2007) assert that the study of literacy is important because it is viewed as vital to the continuance of society, it is a high priority in political and societal discourses, and it encompasses a broad range of social, political, and ideological concerns. One might add that this is especially true in a country like the United States which welcomes people from many different countries and cultures. Street (1984) asserts that beliefs in the strength and importance of literacy are in themselves socially constructed and learned; thus, immigrant populations are often at a disadvantage in the traditional U.S. educational system which strongly reflects the U.S. culture.

Societies in which written language does not play a significant part are often described as being illiterate or pre-literate—terms which carry a connotation of deficit to those from societies that value the written word. Until very recently, the Hmong people would have fit into this category. In recent years, however, multiple alternate definitions of literacy have been proposed. Many modern researchers and theorists claim that an understanding of language and literacy must go beyond the limitations of finite language

skills or the spoken and written word and must include social relationships and the community practices associated with language use (Norton & Vanderheyden, 2004). Street uses the term literacy as a “shorthand for the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (1984, p. 1) and emphasizes that literacy practices are never neutral because they always reflect the social contexts in which they are situated. Therefore, the study of literacy must include discussions of many other social, political, and cultural issues.

Hornberger (2003) brings together the two very complex fields of literacy and bilingualism, both of which are intimately connected with language development. She cites many prior definitions of biliteracy, such as “an advanced state of bilingualism where the person cannot only speak two languages fluently, but also read and write these two languages” (p. xiii, quoted from Niyekawa) or “the mastery of reading in particular, and also of writing, in two (or more) languages” (p. xiii, quoted from Fishman). Hornberger chooses to define biliteracy as “any and all instances in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in or around writing” (2003, p. xiii). This definition serves as more inclusive and embraces those people who are most likely to experience conflict and struggle related to language use. She also emphasizes that the development of biliteracy involves more than what is learned through formal education; biliteracy is also developed in social structures such as families, homes, and communities.

Hornberger (2003) has developed a framework to show the relationship between literacy and the development of a second language in her continua of biliteracy. She describes biliteracy as the conjunction between literacy and bilingualism, and she

recognizes that when “one seeks to attend to both [literacy and bilingualism], already complex issues seem to become further muddled” (p. 4). Hornberger developed her continua of biliteracy in an attempt to make sense of the chaos associated with biliterate usage and development. Her framework provides a useful heuristic for discussing the multitude of issues associated with biliteracy. Hornberger views her continua as “interrelated dimensions of one highly complex whole; and that in fact it is in the dynamic, rapidly changing, and sometimes contested spaces along and across the intersecting continua that most biliteracy use and learning occur” (2003, p. xiv). She further asserts that the more extensively a learning and social context allows language users to access all of the continua, the more successful those learners are likely to be in their biliterate development. Her stated goal was to reduce these many complex issues into concrete images and categories and, thereby, provide a productive framework in which teachers, researchers, and language planners could investigate, understand, and discuss biliteracy. Her framework utilizes the notion of continuum rather than dichotomy to represent the variable intersecting dimensions of literacy and language.

Hornberger (2003) initially divided her continua into three categories: the contexts of biliteracy, the development of biliteracy, and the media of biliteracy. Later, in conjunction with Skilton-Sylvester (2003), she added three continua under the category of the content of biliteracy. The contexts of biliteracy include the continua of micro-macro, oral-literate, and monolingual-bilingual. The development of biliteracy includes the reception-production, the oral language-written language, and the L1-L2 transfer continua. The media of biliteracy continua encompass simultaneous-successive exposure, similar-dissimilar structures, and convergent-divergent scripts (Hornberger,



by no means exhaustive in terms of explaining biliterate language development, as will be obvious from the continuing discussion in this chapter.

Hornberger's (2003) explanation of the contexts of biliteracy begins with a discussion of the micro-macro continuum; the micro end of the continua may reference minute features of the language, such as the pronunciation of particular phonemes, while the macro end may address wider societal aspects, such as the functions of a certain language or dialect within a specific segment of society. In other words, this continuum addresses whether the use of language is being analyzed by looking at small structures of the language or at the broader contextualized usage of language. The oral-literate continuum refers to the idea that different contexts and cultures utilize and value oral and literate skills in differing ways. The monolingual-bilingual continuum refers to the differences between monolingual and bilingual individuals in terms of using differing language styles in different contexts. An example might be in the way that monolinguals and bilinguals view code-switching between languages and language varieties.

Hornberger (2003) continues with a discussion of the continua related to the development of biliteracy. The reception-production continuum is based on the idea that receptive skills (reading and listening) are developed before productive skills (writing and speaking). Likewise, the oral language-written language continuum arises out of the understanding that oral skills precede written skills. L1-L2 transfer refers to the extent to which one language transfers or interferes with the development of the other. This aspect has been extensively researched in language acquisition and education circles.

Thirdly, Hornberger (2003) describes the continua within the category of the media of biliteracy. The simultaneous-successive exposure continuum explores the

impact of whether two languages are acquired at the same time or consecutively. The similar-dissimilar language structures continuum considers whether the fact that languages share common features or not has an impact on the learning process. The same concept, except with specific reference to the writing systems of the two languages, applies to the convergent-divergent scripts continuum. However, these continua which address the structures of the language are by no means addressing a simple relationship because researchers have been unable to provide clear evidence for whether similarity or difference will inhibit or facilitate the learning process.

With the addition of the fourth layer, the content of biliteracy, three further continua are outlined (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2003). These continua are very closely tied to critical and social perspectives associated with language and biliteracy. The minority-majority continuum refers to a consideration of whether written texts include exploration of topics relevant to and/or produced by writers at the minority end of the continuum and whether minority experiences are presented and valued in the classroom as a whole. The second continuum is the vernacular-literary which examines whether vernacular forms of writing are valued or even present in the school discourse. The third and final continuum is the decontextualized-contextualized continuum which references the fact that language is often taught as decontextualized parts rather than as a contextualized whole, which can hinder some students from developing the skills needed for the abstract processing skills that are required in college. Often, when the texts that students produce are returned to them with the teachers' comments, emphasis is placed on the parts rather than the whole. This can influence how students view their own writing.

Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester (2003) argue that among educators within specific geographical and ideological contexts, one end of the continua is generally considered more valuable and more powerful than the other end, as demonstrated by Figure 1 above on page 48. Street and Lefstein (2007) assert that the development of literacy within an individual is never a neutral process, but that literacy is “part of a power relationship and how people ‘take hold’ of it is contingent on social and cultural practices and not just on pedagogic and cognitive factors” (p. 42). From the very beginning, literacy development is largely a social act, and, as such, is fraught with power relations between the participants. In the foreword to Hornberger’s book, Cummins lauds her continua of biliteracy as an excellent framework for making sense of the complex inter-relationships and issues surrounding the experience of the bilingual person. He also strongly states his belief, which he develops and supports in much more extensive texts, that the biliterate development of children in the U.S. is continually under attack with the result of “undermin[ing] the rich linguistic and intellectual resources of individual children, communities, and the nation itself” (p. viii).

### **The Second Language Acquisition Process**

A brief discussion of second language acquisition theory itself is also appropriate at this point since there are additional factors associated with the development of bilingualism that are not addressed even in the extensive framework of the continua of biliteracy and are likely to surface during the field research into this topic. In their brief history of research trends in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), McKay and Wong (1996) make a point that for many years, SLA research focused on the product of language learning, the code of the language itself (the syntax and morphology, for

example), and the assumption that a learner needed to acquire the rules for using a language. Keeping in line with the philosophies and theories of SLA, historically, the research focus in the field was skewed toward the etic perspective of the researcher and toward the view of language acquisition as primarily a cognitive process (Firth and Wagner, 1997). Firth and Wagner (1997) argue that this view is “individualistic and mechanistic, and that it fails to account in a satisfactory way for interactional and sociolinguistic dimensions of language” (p. 285). Along with Block (2003), these researchers advocate that, while the psycholinguistic aspect of second language acquisition should not be ignored, it must be balanced with the social and cultural dimensions of language acquisition.

During the 1980s, the field of SLA refocused its research lens onto the process of language acquisition, rather than the product. More recently as evidenced from the continua described above, researchers and educators have become attuned to the concept that social context, including pertinent power and discourse relationships, is a vital component of the second language acquisition process. Norton (2000) states: “Language is not just a neutral form of communication, but a practice that is socially constructed in the hegemonic events, activities, and processes that constitute daily life—the practices that are considered normal by the dominant society” (p. 130).

Any attempt to list all of the factors associated with second language acquisition would prove futile. However, for this chapter, I have endeavored to selectively highlight the factors that I anticipate will be most pertinent to the discussion of long-term immigrant language learners. The next section will be devoted to a brief discussion of the SLA theoretical bases that may have particular application to immigrant populations.

This brief discussion on SLA theory is not intended to be exhaustive or comprehensive by any means but will contain a presentation of some of the categorizations and descriptions of possible contributing factors involved in the SLA process, again focusing on those that I anticipated would be most pertinent to the experiences of the Generation 1.5 and the particular population under consideration in this study.

### **SLA Theories and Immigrant Populations**

Block (2003) notes that, in the past few years in the field of applied linguistics and second language acquisition and teaching studies, increased attention has been focused on aspects of critical and social theory. He identifies a major division between theorists who continue to view SLA as mainly psycholinguistic and those who view the SLA process as a combination of cognitive and social factors. I anticipated that issues would arise in the memories of the Hmong participants which were related to individual and cultural identity formation and preservation of the Hmong culture within the dominant U.S. culture. Therefore, I thought it would be constructive to discuss just a couple pertinent SLA theories that address sociocultural issues. Schumann's Acculturation Model and Norton's emphasis on critical theory poignantly suggest that even though individuals from immigrant populations might be eager and willing to interact with the dominant culture, the dominant culture may not welcome them or provide them with opportunities for meaningful interaction.

Although Schumann proposed his second language acquisition theory, called the Acculturation Model, in the 1970s, his main premise remains a viable consideration today. By acculturation, he was referring to the integration of an immigrant population into the target language group, and he anticipated the learner's likelihood of success in

acquiring a second language based on the social distance between the home culture group and the target language group (Schumann, 1978). Schumann's (1978) list of factors included social dominance patterns, integration strategies (i.e. assimilation, preservation, or adaptation), enclosure, cohesiveness, size, cultural congruence, attitude, and intended length of stay in the target language country. Schumann essentially predicted that the more socially equal the two groups were, the more willing each group would be to accept the other, and the more the groups shared common community spaces, the more likely an immigrant population would be to acquire the target language successfully.

The social factors identified by Schumann have the potential to be especially relevant to Hmong immigrants. Based on the previous discussion of the Hmong people in Chapter 1, if Schumann's predictions are accurate, conditions would not be favorable for the Hmong to easily acquire the English language. The U.S. culture would definitely be considered dominant to the Hmong culture in this country, and neither the Hmong nor the U.S. culture would likely be considered eager for assimilation or, in many cases, even as having positive attitudes toward one another. In terms of enclosure, as noted previously, the Hmong tend to congregate in certain communities and are therefore often able to maintain their own churches and social groups, although they do share educational facilities with the dominant culture. In addition, the Hmong culture is very different from the U.S. culture, and the Hmong tend to be a very cohesive group.

Norton (2000) argues that learning a second language is not a skill that can be accomplished by sheer determination and hard work on the part of the learner. Rather, it is a complex social process in which the learner must withstand conflicts in her own sense of identity to find ways to gain access to interactions with native speakers of the

language. Speaking for proponents of sociocultural theories, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) propose the concept of a participation metaphor as an addition to the acquisition metaphor more traditionally utilized in discussing language acquisition. They describe the acquisition metaphor as viewing the learner's mind as a storehouse for language rules or codes; conversely, the participation metaphor encourages theorists to think of language learning as a participatory process in which the learner becomes a member of the target language community and shifts the focus from language structures to language use in context. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000, p. 155) describe second language learning "not as the acquisition of a new set of grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms but as a struggle of concrete socially constituted and always socially situated beings to participate in the socially mediated lifeworld of another culture."

In the early 1990s, Norton (2000) conducted an in-depth qualitative study involving five women in Canada who emigrated from several different countries. She spent extensive time with these women over a period of many months. Her goal was to create a friendly and supportive environment which would encourage the women to share (in writing and in group discussions) their very personal joys, fears, struggles and desires as related to their language acculturation experiences. She worked hard to balance her roles as friend, teacher, and researcher. As a result of this study, Norton became convinced that language learning by immigrants is often hampered by limited opportunities for meaningful involvement with native speakers. Second language speakers are often denied the opportunity for communication due to attitudes and actions of the native speakers with whom they come in contact. Norton (2000) adopted a critical perspective of language learning and notes that "the tendency in the field of SLA to avoid

questions of power [and] the refusal to name and address power relations limits our ability to do justice to the complex experiences of language learners across historical time and social space” (p. 131).

Once again, this brief discussion of SLA theory is obviously not comprehensive or exhaustive; I simply wanted to mention these specific sites of struggle between diverse cultures and between individuals with unequal power distributions because I anticipated that they might be salient in the stories of the Hmong women who participated in this study.

### **Factors Associated with the SLA of Immigrants**

Even to the casual observer, it is obvious that second language learners achieve variable success in their quest to acquire proficiency in a target language. The second language acquisition process of immigrant populations is complicated and is influenced by many factors. The previous section looked at theories that addressed the intersection of culture and social relationships with second language acquisition. However, to focus primarily on social or cultural theories would negate the influence of the many other factors that are believed to have an impact on second language acquisition (SLA). SLA researchers and theorists have named a multitude of factors as possible contributors to the successful acquisition of a second language. Like the discussion on theory, it would be impossible to address all of the factors involved in this very complicated process; however, it is important to make mention of some of them since many of them will surface in various ways throughout the course of this study.

Some of these pertinent factors reside within the individual, and some are related to the environment; in other words, some are internal, and some are external. SLA

scholars and researchers have attempted to enumerate and categorize this complicated web of issues in various ways. Brown (2000) and Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) provide similar lists which attempt to explain the factors that relate to second language acquisition in general. Scarcella (1990) attempted to construct a more specific list related particularly to language minority students in the U.S., and Roberge (2002) assembled a listing associated particularly with the Generation 1.5 population. Each of these lists is valuable in the sense that they offer slightly different perspectives on the process. In reality, the experience is a complex combination of all of these factors.

The following list is condensed from *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003): age of acquisition, learning styles (including field sensitivity, right/left brain dominance, ambiguity tolerance, reflectivity/impulsivity), learning strategies, educational background (first language literacy, type/intensity of second language training), motivational aspects (integrative/instrumental, intrinsic/extrinsic), basic language aptitude, personality/affective factors (including self-esteem, inhibition, risk-taking, anxiety, introversion/extroversion), and sociocultural factors. Brown (2000) categorizes the factors related to second language acquisition into the following groupings: cross-linguistic influences, which are related to the interaction of the first and second language; sociocultural factors, which include the familial, educational, national, and political cultures of the individual or group; and individual personality or affective factors, which would consist of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, level of self-esteem, intensity of inhibition, amount of anxiety, and the balance of extroversion and introversion.

Scarcella (1990) perhaps offers the most comprehensive list of reasons for differing levels of success among language minority students: first language backgrounds; patterns of acculturation; resident status; political and historical backgrounds; teacher prejudice and/or lowered level of expectations; discontinuities between home and school; learning style discontinuities between the competitive, individualistic dominant U.S learning style and the more cooperative, collaborative style of many immigrant populations; language attitudes and linguistic prejudice; socioeconomic status; inadequate and unfair assessment and pedagogy practices; low level of involvement of language minority parents in their children's schooling; the stress of being caught between two cultures; and the self-perception of language minority students within the power relations of educational environments.

Roberge (2002) relates his list specifically to the Generation 1.5 and provides a more simplified categorization which encompasses many of Scarcella's issues, as well. He proposes that long-term immigrant ESL students face the following types of challenges: psychosocial difficulties associated with immigration and minority status, acculturation and identity formation, challenging and complicated educational experiences and classifications, and, finally, language practices within their homes, schools, and communities.

Standardized delineations within and between these categories do not exist. For example, Brown (2000) places the characteristic of "risk-taking" under the broader heading of aptitude rather than listing it as a personality attribute. Sparks and Ganschow (1991) consider motivation to be a sub-point under the heading of personality and affective factors. Regardless of the variances in taxonomy and characterization of these

factors, SLA professionals agree that there are a multitude of factors that contribute to the success or failure of a second language learner. Although I suspected that individual differences, like language aptitude, personality factors, and learning styles, would surface in the experiences of the participants, for the purposes of this study, I decided to forego a more detailed discussion of the individual differences and, instead, chose to focus on the external factors related to broader issues of literacy development among Generation 1.5 students and long-term immigrants.

Acknowledging that many other researchers have created alternate lists, I have chosen to use the four mentioned above as background for further investigation and have used their commonalities to construct a list to guide my own literature review in this area. The following external factors will be addressed in more detail in this section: the learner's language background and literacy history, family and cultural influences, educational practices and preparation, social issues and socioeconomic status, and conflicting desires and identity formation. It is also important to note that even though I will attempt to discuss these issues in separate categories, many of these factors do not operate in isolation and, in fact, as already demonstrated in the discussion of the continua of biliteracy, intricately interface with each other. For instance, socioeconomic status is closely related to family and culture and can influence what types of school a child is able to attend, and family and cultural influences have a significant impact on educational practices and identity formation.

**Language background and literacy history.** Studies have shown that components of the first language of a learner can transfer, either positively or negatively, in the acquisition of a second language. Language transfer involves all of the linguistic

levels of language (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics), and cross-linguistic influence or interference can occur in either production or comprehension or both (Odlin, 2003). One might assume that the more similar two languages are, the more facilitative the language transfer will be; however, studies have yielded conflicting data regarding whether language learning is facilitated or hindered when languages are more similar. Brown (2000) cites several studies that demonstrate that subtle differences can often cause more problems than greater distinctions between two languages.

From a brief literature comparison, I found minimal similarities between the Hmong dialects and English. The primary common characteristic is the word order of sentences. Hmong and English share a preferred word order of subject-verb-object (Center for Applied Linguistics). In opposition to English, the vast majority of Hmong words consist of one syllable, beginning with a consonant or consonant blend and followed by a vowel sound or diphthong. Polysyllabic words and words that end in consonants may be difficult for native-Hmong-speakers to pronounce because Hmong words usually consist of only one syllable and seldom end in consonants (Center for Applied Linguistics). Each Hmong word also includes one of seven tones (Center for Applied Linguistics). Since most Hmong words consist of a single morpheme with no affixes, the language would be classified as an analytic or isolating language; this is quite different from English, which is an inflectional language and contains multiple verb tenses and numerous prefixes and suffixes. These differences between the languages might account for some of the non-native features that will be discussed later in this chapter, such as the problems that Generation 1.5 students tend to have with appropriate verb endings and subject-verb agreement.

These differences between the languages not only create difficulties in learning a new language, they can also result in misunderstandings during translation of meaning since some of the distinctions made in English do not have equivalent translations in the Hmong language. In her moving ethnography of the experiences of an epileptic Hmong child and her family's interactions with the medical profession, Fadiman (1997) shares an episode when the father essentially kidnaps his daughter from the hospital because he thinks that he is being asked to sign a form stating that his daughter would die within two hours. An enlightened educator, commenting on the incident, made the following observations: "I'm not surprised. All those verb tenses! Lia will die, Lia might die, Lia has a ninety-five percent chance of dying. Those nuances would be confusing through an interpreter" (p. 178).

The level of education and literacy in a student's family can significantly impact the student. It is unlikely that Hmong parents are reading bedtime stories to their children in Hmong because, even assuming that the parents can read, there is paucity of children's reading in the Hmong language. In fact, Duffy (2007) relates an example of a Hmong woman who immigrated to the United States in 1989 but has never learned to read or write and has never held a pencil. Not all Hmong arrive in the United States unable to read in their native language, however. In the twenty or so years just prior to their sudden departure from Laos, many began to be educated as a result of the war, either because they were converting to Christianity and wanted to read the Bible, were serving in the military, or were attending one of the Laotian village schools that sprang up during the war (Duffy, 2007).

The Hmong have often been described as a preliterate culture, a term which generally implies that a people group has no knowledge of writing or print (Duffy, 2007). In fact, the Hmong were very aware of the writing systems of the people around them, both in China and in Laos. Documentation exists that over the last hundred years several attempts were made to devise a writing system for their language, by the Hmong themselves and by various missionary and government agencies with a desire to educate the Hmong, but most of these systems failed to become extensively utilized (Duffy, 2007). The writing system that is most widely used today was first developed in the 1950s; known as the RPA (Romanized Popular Alphabet), this system was developed by two Christian and Missionary Alliance missionaries, William Smalley and Linwood Barney, in cooperation with a Catholic missionary named Father Bertrais. This alphabetic writing system was represented by letters of the Roman alphabet and could be easily typed and printed. Because Hmong is a tonal language, certain consonants were designated as tone markers and were attached to the ends of words to indicate the tone of each monosyllabic word. In addition to the publication of religious material for which RPA was originally created, the writing system is widely used to write letters, academic literature, and internet materials and to record and preserve novels and poetry (Duffy, 2007). Thus, a writing system did exist, but many people, especially women, never learned to access and use this system. In addition, reading and writing were not a significant part of their lives prior to coming to the United States.

**Family and cultural influences.** Roberge (2002) provides an excellent summary of the familial conflicts that Generation 1.5 students may face as they enter college:

Many are “first in the family” to go to college. Many have to deal with cultural and racial prejudices in college. Many are struggling economically, often working full time to support their families because their non-English speaking parents have limited earning potential. Their families, while supportive of education, might have little understanding of what American college experiences are all about and some families may pressure students to take unreasonable course loads in order to finish in record time. In addition, recent anti-remediation mandates in many state college systems have put additional pressures on immigrant students to complete their ESL coursework in record time or face disenrollment or loss of financial aid. (p. 119)

Every day, Generation 1.5 Hmong students must travel between two very different worlds—the world at home, where primarily Hmong is spoken and the values and practices are based on hundreds of years of history, and the world at school, where they must negotiate only in English and the social interactions are based on an entirely different set of expectations. In school, they are students, whose only responsibility is to study. However, Generation 1.5 students are often burdened by family responsibilities, like caring for younger siblings while parents work long hours, serving as translators or language brokers, and being pressured to get jobs and begin contributing to the family income at an early age (Roberge, 2002). This pressure to work often interferes with the time that a student can spend on his or her education, even in high school. Often, before students are old enough to work outside the home, they are expected to help on family farms or spend their weekends at Farmer’s Markets selling vegetables. These responsibilities prohibit students from participating in extracurricular sports activities and

from focusing fully on their academic pursuits. They are also instilled with the value, whether positively or negatively, that family responsibilities have higher priority than studies.

I have spoken to several Hmong students over the past couple years about their practice of traveling home every weekend, rather than spending time in the library or socializing with their college friends. One young woman said that since she was the oldest child, her family needed her to help with business and paperwork on the weekends. She ended up leaving school after only one semester. Another young man travels seventy miles home from college every day to work at a Radio Shack and to help his father in his landscaping business. I have also heard stories of girls in elementary school who are expected to cook for their older brothers because their mother is working outside the home. An interesting point is that most of these young people do not seem to resent these expectations. They accept them as reasonable responsibilities and submit gladly to the needs of their families. However, not all young people are as accepting and compliant as those described above. Some children experience value and expectation conflicts with their parents and elders in their clans, resulting in dissolution of relationships, gang involvement, and marriage at a very young age (Lee, 2005).

Educational institutions remain unfamiliar territory for many Hmong adults. They have minimal prior educational experience themselves and are often suspicious of the values that are being taught to their children. They fear that education will pull their children away from the Hmong culture, so they may view education as a necessary, but threatening, evil (Walker-Moffat, 1995). Roberge (2002) believes that because American schools operate under a system that is consistent with the values and norms of middle-

class Anglo families, they are foreign places for many immigrant adults. By American standards, parents are expected to maintain some level of involvement in their children's schooling, which is often difficult for immigrants to do, given their high number of work hours, language barriers, and previous unpleasant interactions with school officials and teachers. I know from my own experiences of teaching ESL to immigrant parents in an elementary school that parents often are embarrassed in front of their children by their lack of education and limited English abilities. They are extremely frustrated that they are unable to help their children with their school work and that they must rely on their children to perform adult tasks.

Americans believe that parents are ultimately responsible for their children's education, but many immigrant populations view the schools as having the sole authority and responsibility for the education of their children. A teacher in Merced, California, described her many experiences of parent-teacher conferences with Hmong parents, which were often translated through the students themselves. Although they were very grateful to the teachers for teaching their children, the parents rarely asked about the child's academic performance and inquired mostly about the child's behavior, whether they were working hard or whether they were showing the appropriate amount of respect (Fadiman, 1997).

Before I move on to discuss education, it is important to note some family and cultural issues identified by Reid (1998) which intersect with educational issues and can affect the ultimate success of second language learners in their quest to achieve academic success. One cultural issue may be that some cultures, like the Hmong, value cooperation over the competitive underpinning of American education. This can result in

frustration and difficulty in adjusting to educational norms. Another issue is the general attitude that immigrant parents may have toward education. For example, in the case of the Hmong culture, education may be viewed as unnecessary for girls since their roles within the culture are not oriented toward careers outside the home.

Roberge (2002) notes that because of their family economic situations, many immigrant children are forced to live in low-income areas with other immigrant and/or minority groups who speak non-standard dialects of English. Because their primary mode of learning English is through interaction with their peers, their speech patterns may develop non-standard forms. In addition, because of where they live, they are more likely to attend schools which are under-funded and under-staffed.

**Educational practices and preparation for college.** Although in recent years the language challenges associated with Generation 1.5 students, especially as related to their writing skills, have become more prominent as their presence in the college classroom has increased, the mismatch is unlikely to have begun in college. Generation 1.5 students have often weathered a confusing maze of inconsistent experiences and educational disruptions before they ever arrive in the college writing class. Their educational experiences are often interrupted as families move around before settling on a final place to live, and assessment practices vary between states and even school systems within the same state. Students have often encountered discriminatory or marginalizing events, not only at the hands of other students but also at the hands of their teachers, even well-meaning teachers, who operate within the values of the dominant American culture. They have been forced to adapt through significant changes in academic policies and regulations and variable government educational funding which may have significantly

altered the course of their educations. They may also have been confronted with educational systems that were unprepared or unwilling to meet the special needs of large numbers of immigrant students. Several of these issues will be addressed below in more detail.

Many school systems are not prepared to offer specialized instruction to English language learners (ELLs), especially long-term immigrants like those who belong to Generation 1.5. Instructional and support staff are not adequately trained to meet the needs of this diverse group of students, economic and funding realities limit the availability of specialized instruction, and placement options are confusing and differentially available (Roberge, 2002). Roberge (2002) postulates that perhaps the language issues of the Generation 1.5 reach a crisis point in college because primary and secondary education are seen as an entitlement so that school systems do whatever is necessary to see that each student succeeds; conversely, a college education must be earned, and colleges must be concerned with maintaining a certain level of academic standards and rigor.

Classroom teaching emphases change with trends in pedagogy and in acquisition theory. In addition, in some cases, theories are incompletely understood and incorrectly applied. For example, with the popularity of the theories of Stephen Krashen, many English language teachers seemed to assume that explicitly teaching grammar was unnecessary; however, according to Ching (2007), Krashen himself admitted that instruction in some areas of grammar and punctuation might be useful for the development of writing skills. In this case, an incomplete application of Krashen's theory is occurring. In fact, on examination, grammar instruction seems to be quite consistent

with Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis, in which the Monitor acts as an editor in situations where there is time for editing—like when writing essays (Krashen, 1992). One student who was placed in an ESL class in college reported that he was given good grades on his high school writing assignments because his high school teachers graded on the quality of the ideas in the papers, but paid no attention to the grammar (Frodesen & Starna, 1999).

Foin & Lange (2007) note that one of the challenges of Generation 1.5 students is that they have difficulty writing with a high degree of grammatical exactness when producing academic style essays. The students in their ESL classes informed them that in high school the grading of their writing assignments was based entirely on content and their grammar was ignored; therefore, they were largely unaware that they were even making grammatical errors. In addition, they had not been explicitly taught grammar, so they do not know how to notice or edit their errors. Reid (1998) offers an additional consideration for the type of instruction provided in the typical primary or secondary classroom; she suggests that language development is not fostered in traditional-style classrooms where students are not encouraged to be orally involved or when teachers focus on rote-memorization of words and facts.

Roberge (2002) notes that even when school staff members have been trained in ESL teaching techniques, services often remain inadequate to meet the needs of immigrant students; immigrants who are long-term U.S. residents do not fit into traditional categories, like ESL, remedial, or bilingual. In some cases, students may place out of ESL programs, only to find themselves redesignated as English language learners at higher levels of education. Sometimes, students are placed out of ESL programs prematurely due to their oral language proficiency; other times they are kept in ESL

programs longer than appropriate. Since California voters passed Proposition 227 in 1998, bilingual education and services have become even less consistent and more confusing. Proposition 227 changed the way that ELLs were taught by requiring that instruction be provided primarily in English, through sheltered immersion programs. Students were expected to transfer out of these programs into mainstream English-language classrooms after only one year (American Institutes for Research). The success or failure of the instruction provided under Proposition 227 has yet to be conclusively determined; however, Rodriguez (2006) cites several studies that indicate that true bilingual education, in which students are encouraged and facilitated to develop their home language literacy alongside their second language literacy, often results in improved second language development. Despite this research, states like California and Arizona, which have large immigrant populations have passed guidelines restricting or prohibiting bilingual education.

Part of the premise behind Proposition 227 is the belief that every student should be treated equally. Reeves (2004) asserts that, in practice, this belief often results in “difference blindness” (p. 43). When differences in student populations are ignored, however, English language learners (ELLs) suffer in a couple different ways. Often they are subjected to inconsistent grading and assessment. In addition, at least initially in the language learning process, their access to course content is greatly restricted. Reeves cites the 1974 court case of *Lau v. Nichols* in which Chinese American students in San Francisco claimed that they were not obtaining the language assistance to which they were entitled. According to Reeves (2004, p. 44), the decision in the case read as follows: “There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same

facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum, for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education.” In other words, equal treatment should not mean that students are provided with identical services. Equal treatment means that they are provided with what they need in order to have equal access to learning. Reeves (2004) claims that appropriate teaching approaches should seek neither the assimilation nor separation of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

In the case of the Hmong, teachers may either underestimate their abilities and not challenge the students or overestimate their abilities based on the model minority stereotype associated with Asian populations who are historically more educated. McKay and Wong (1996) describe the model minority discourse, which viewed Asian-Americans as quite successful in the school systems and as a group to be emulated by other minority groups, like Latinos and African Americans. The model minority discourse also entails the idea that Asian students are quiet, hard-working, passive, compliant and cooperative. Other authors have pointed out that this model minority myth, which was initiated by teachers’ interactions with the more highly educated Chinese and Japanese immigrants, has in many ways been detrimental to the Hmong (Lee, 2001; Walker-Moffat, 1995). These previous immigrants achieved success without special intervention, and educators expected the Hmong to do the same. Additional services were not provided in many cases, and when the Hmong were unable to meet expectations, they were seen as lazy and unmotivated. In other instances, the Hmong were not viewed as members of the model minority; rather, they were perceived as not having the potential to do well in school and were channeled into classes which did not prepare them for higher education academic pursuits. Harklau (2000) refers to this type

of practice as the “hidden curriculum of schooling” (p. 38), which implies that schooling prepares immigrants to take on certain roles or positions in the dominant social structure.

McKay and Wong (1996) assert that educational professionals, including ESL educators, have a tendency to view the language learning experience as code-based, and even in cases where the educators are cognizant that language learning is a process, their understanding of the application of ideas such as social identity or power relations remain limited. In their study, McKay and Wong (1996) conclude that language learners are complicated social participants who may have contradictory desires which manifest themselves in the context of multiple educational and social discourses. This leads to the next topic of discussion.

**Race and social issues.** Race and culture are often significant contributing social factors in the education of immigrants. As opposed to previous generations of white European immigrants, much of the current U.S. immigrant population is comprised of visible minorities, who are more vulnerable to racial discrimination, which may result in slower assimilation processes (Roberge, 2002). Whereas previous generations of immigrants were anxious to assimilate into the American culture, more recent groups of immigrants desire to maintain their home culture identities—to acculturate without assimilating (Roberge, 2002)—even though the young people have no real memory of their “home” countries, just information conveyed to them by their parents and older relatives. Conflicting information exists regarding the relationship between cultural assimilation and academic success. Although often the inability to assimilate to a culture has been cited as a reason for difficulties in the classroom, Roberge (2002) cites research

which indicates that a strong sense of home cultural identity is sometimes positively linked with academic success.

With the many experiences that she learned about from the women in her research study, Norton (2000) makes a convincing case for the fact that being of a minority race or being perceived as belonging to an immigrant group can have an adverse effect on a person's ability to penetrate the barriers set up by the dominant culture and language group. Immigrant language learners are often unable to establish a sense of belonging or to develop opportunities for meaningful interaction which would significantly increase the learners' chances to practice the target language with native speakers and enhance the potential for developing advanced proficiency in the target language.

McKay and Wong (1996) demonstrate that racialized discourses are present even in the ESL classroom, where one might expect a higher level of empathy and understanding toward the immigrant population. An ESL teacher in McKay and Wong's study (1996), a teacher who would be expected to be informed and tolerant of ethnic differences, made the following statement about Spanish-speaking students: "They don't go anywhere, they're lazy, and they don't want to study" (p. 584). At the other end of the spectrum, the impact of race and color may be essentially ignored. Kubota (2004) asserts that even in bilingual and ESL programs, instructors often support multilingualism and cultural diversity with lip service only. Kubota (2004) describes the concept of multiculturalism as "a token social protocol that everyone has to endorse whether or not they agree" (p. 32). Such philosophies tend to focus more on sameness than on difference. Kubota (2004) points out that U.S. educational institutions operate with a strong sense of meritocracy in which all individuals have the potential to succeed, with

enough hard work, and that all students should be treated equally. She also contends that such views ignore the inherent advantages attached to being white. According to Kubota, these ideas go even further and result in conflating all language groups and insisting that all must be treated the same, when there are clear rationales for varying treatment of different language groups. In addition, even within particular ethnic backgrounds, groups of students are expected to act in a certain way, based on stereotypes, and when they do not act in these ways, educators are surprised and stymied (Kubota, 2004). Often individuals fail, not because they have not worked hard enough, but simply because they are members of a particular group or are perceived to fall into a typified category.

Kubota (2004) warns against the dangers of “cultural tourism” (p. 35) in which the surface aspects of cultural difference, like historical practices and traditional dress and foods, are highlighted while ignoring the everyday realities of racism and prejudice. She cites annual multicultural celebrations as examples of cultural tourism, in which cultures are represented by cultural artifacts and exotic beliefs and customs, which often hold no place in the modern existence of these cultures. Highlighting these historical differences represents culture as a static, perhaps even primitive, construct, rather than one that is dynamic and constantly responding to changes in the discourses surrounding it. Kubota (2004) advocates consideration of “critical multicultural education” (p. 37) which increases students’ own awareness of power inequities and challenges them to become forces for social change. Of course, critical education cannot occur unless educators understand and promote it. Kubota’s suggestions will be more extensively incorporated into the discussion in Chapter 5.

**Conflicting desires and identities.** Second language learners often experience conflicts when conceptualizing and understanding their ethnic and social identities, as well as their language identities. Harklau (2000) and Norton (2000) created new meanings for the words *representation* and *investment* respectively to explain the way that identities are formed and evolve over time in response to different social situations and environments. Harklau (2000) defines representation as the temporary stereotypical ideals that serve to “stabilize and homogenize images of identity” (p. 37). The conceptualization and representation of various identities provide both students and teachers with ways of interpreting or understanding the relationship of the student to the changing educational and social situations in which she finds herself. Norton’s (2000) concept of investment refers more specifically to the relationship of the learner to the target language. Norton notes that because of varying power structures in the learner’s relationships with other people, the learner may have ambivalent attitudes toward learning a second language. This idea of investment combines the socially-established position of the learner with the learner’s desired identity (McKay & Wong, 1996). Norton is careful to make a distinction between investment and instrumental motivation:

The notion of investment...conceives of the language learner as having a complex social history and multiple desires. The notion presupposes that when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space (p. 10-11).

This is one of the reasons that this research project was designed to facilitate the participants in reconstructing their perceptions of themselves over a long period of time. I believed that it would be informative for the purposes of the study if they were able to remember and recreate their identities at various points in their lives, as well as the various representations which were used to categorize them.

Lee (2005) explores the manner in which Hmong American youth construct their identities in the context of their school experiences. Generation 1.5 students must negotiate between multiple ethnic or pan-ethnic identities; for the Hmong, such identities might be Asian-American, Hmong-American, or simply Hmong or American. Lee (2005) asserts that for Hmong-American youth, race is the key issue which defines their identity because they must negotiate in an environment where white middle class people are at the top of the racial hierarchy, both within the educational system and in the community at large. Lee performed her study at a school that had an excellent reputation for the quality of its academics; however, she observed that many Hmong students did not achieve high levels of success. She attributes this academic failure to the inability of these students to satisfactorily resolve their ethnic and educational identities.

Several researchers have attributed the difficulties experienced by Generation 1.5 students to issues related to language identity. Students themselves seem to have confusion in identifying their first and second languages. Identification with one language or the other may have less to do with ability than with cultural affiliation. A study by Chiang and Schmida (1999) involving Asian students in the College Writing Program at UC Berkeley, revealed the following statistic: 40% of the Asian American students identified themselves as native English speakers, but only 28% reported English

as their first language (p. 84). In this study, students seemed to conflate the terms bilingual and bicultural; because they felt a cultural tie to their home culture, they often claimed to be bilingual even though many were not fluent in their heritage languages and voiced frustration with not being able to communicate with parents and grandparents.

Bosher (1997) was interested in exploring the relationship between self-esteem, academic success, acculturation, ethnic identity, and second language acquisition among the Hmong post-secondary students that she studied. On a scale provided by Bosher, 50% of the students self-identified themselves as *Hmong American* and 41% as simply *Hmong*. However, in terms of lifestyle, 62% identified themselves as bicultural (16% as *mostly Hmong*), and in terms of values, 55% believed they were bicultural (27% *mostly Hmong*). In terms of marriage, 46% of these students indicated that it was *extremely important* and an additional 23% indicated that it was *very important* to marry a Hmong. Another interesting discovery that Bosher made was that an orientation to Hmong culture resulted in more proficient use of the Hmong language and an orientation to American culture contributed to both Hmong and English proficiency. Bosher (1997) also noted that the increased freedom which accompanies attendance in college did not result in a dismissal of the students' "Hmongness." Instead, students reaffirmed their desires to be Hmong by cultivating a stronger identification with their cultural traditions and closer involvements with other Hmong students. Many of the students interviewed indicated that they used both Hmong and English on a daily basis.

This section of the chapter briefly addressed second language acquisition theory and the development of biliteracy as it relates to the social structures involving immigrant populations in general and the Hmong population in particular. Then, a few of the

numerous contributing factors to second language acquisition were discussed, including the learner's literacy and first language background, family and cultural influences, educational preparation, racial factors, and issues of identity formation. Next, consideration will be given to the actual ways in which Generation 1.5 students have been observed to differ from the general student population in their academic writing endeavors.

### **Academic Language Challenges for Generation 1.5 College Students**

The challenges of academic language for Generation 1.5 students seem to become most apparent in the college writing classroom. Researchers and educators have identified several of the more common ways that their writing differs from their instructors' expectations. This section of the chapter will address some of the variances that have been noted in the academic language skills of Generation 1.5 college students and some possible explanations for these patterns. The purpose of this section is to establish the importance, range, and complexity of the issues surrounding the use of academic language for Generation 1.5 college students.

Before I enter into the following discussion, I would like to comment on some of my language choices in this section of the literature review, as well as in other parts of this document. There will be frequent mention of the "errors" made by Generation 1.5 students. I am aware that the term *error* in this context is a source of controversy within the field of sociolinguistics; in other words, there are questions regarding whether the non-standard language structures noted are truly errors or actually dialectical differences. Despite these concerns from some language scholars, the term *error* continues to be commonly used in research and discussions about language use. The same is true of

terms such as *native speaker*, *language proficiency* or *Standard American English*. These terms carry certain undesirable connotations, yet their use persists. In my usage of these terms, I am not trying to reinforce or support their validity; rather, I am using them because they were used by the authors that I am citing or because alternate terms would require extensive explanation and discussion which are outside of the immediate purview of this study.

### **Academic Language Proficiency of Generation 1.5 Students**

Generation 1.5 students often exhibit oral fluency and proficiency in their second language; in fact, their ability to communicate orally in informal situations is often essentially indistinguishable from their native-English-speaking peers. Unfortunately, their aptitude in oral communication often camouflages the difficulties that may be present in their academic literacy skills. Cummins (1980) has described this skill distinction as the difference between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP).

CALP entails the features of a language that are related to literacy skills in both the learner's first and second language. CALP is associated with a conscious awareness of grammar and syntax; whereas, BICS is more closely related to oral communication and sociolinguistic competence and is associated with the unconscious language awareness that all L1 speakers of a language possess. Cummins (1980), who first developed this language distinction, submits that these two types of competencies are quite different. He asserts that investigations have shown a direct correlation between the potential for developing CALP in the L2 based on the language learner's proficiency of CALP in the L1 at the time that she begins intensive exposure to the target language.

Academic functions mastered in the L1 appear to be strong predictors of the ability to attain the same level of proficiency in the L2. Cummins (1980) postulates that older L2 learners, whose cognitive/academic language skills are better developed in the L1, will more easily acquire CALP in the L2. Collier (1987) backs up this theory by demonstrating that learners can require five to seven years to acquire academic language proficiency. Interestingly, Generation 1.5 students who are born in the United States usually begin their L2 instruction prior to the development of any cognitive/academic skills in the L1. Thus, they may have a more difficult time than English language learners who begin their language acquisition process at later ages. Given these observations, one might extrapolate that if students are placed in ESL classes which do not require academic level processing and comprehension skills, it seems likely that it would be difficult to determine at what point they actually begin the process at all. It is conceivable that if teachers have lowered expectations of them or they are held in remedial studies throughout their secondary education, they may not have even started the process of developing CALP by the time they reach college.

From casual observation of the language use of the Hmong students that I know, in terms of everyday oral communication, they have few aberrations from Standard American English. However, one common verbal distinction that I frequently hear is the use of *mines* as a possessive pronoun, as in “That book is mines.” To me, it seems possible that this word form derives from the overgeneralization of an underlying grammatical rule. In other words, all of the other possessive pronouns end in *s*, like *hers*, *his*, *ours*, *yours*, and *theirs*; therefore, to the unconscious linguistic mind, it seems reasonable that *mine* should also end in *s*. Interestingly, this distinction is one that I have

often heard native-English-speaking students correcting in the speech of their Hmong friends, even though the meaning in the context is obvious. In general, Hmong college students seem to have little or no specific language problems in everyday interactions with their non-Hmong peers. They are quite competent in their BICS ability but face greater challenges in their ability to interact on paper and in the classroom.

Researchers have noticed several common types of deviations from Standard American English in the written work of Generation 1.5 students. Frodesen and Starna (1999) note lack of agreement between subjects and verbs, inappropriate verb-tenses and endings, incorrect word forms, and improper treatment of mass nouns. Goen et al. (2002a) observed that Generation 1.5 student writers often exhibit simplicity in sentence structure and problems with logical connectors. Holten and Mikesell (2007) performed a study which focused on the lexicogrammatical errors which are representative of the types of errors that Generation 1.5 students seem to exhibit. They noted that many of the sentence structure errors made by Generation 1.5 students demonstrate that they have a fairly rich vocabulary but have not mastered the use of that vocabulary. These students also tend to have difficulty with the use of metacognitive verbs which are frequently used in academic-style writing to paraphrase and summarize and to introduce quotes (Holten & Mikesell, 2007). These types of verbs are complex because the writer not only has to choose the verb that expresses the appropriate nuanced meaning, but he or she must also understand the semantic and grammar compatibility constraints of each verb. Another area of difficulty is faulty predication which has to do with the grammatical and semantic compatibility of the subject and verb in a sentence. Generation 1.5 writers also often

make errors in the use of multiword lexical units, like collocations and idioms or sentence frames, like “according to...” or “based on...” used at the beginning of sentences.

Reid (1998) notes the following divergences from standard academic usage, which are similar to those listed above: inflections, subject-verb agreement, agreement between demonstrative pronouns and their associated nouns, vocabulary mistakes, incorrect use of idiomatic expressions, and arbitrary capitalization. She identifies these traits as characteristic of aural language learners and proposes that their origins may be related to the fact that aural learners do not attend to grammatical features that are non-salient in verbal speech, like morphological endings (past tense or -s endings), and therefore these features never become part of their understanding of the language. In addition, these learners are often not familiar with metalinguistic and grammar terminology.

Mikesell (2007) chose to study the use of past participles by Generation 1.5 students because native speakers are very unlikely to make mistakes with this structure. This study had two important outcomes: it showed how Generation 1.5 students differ from traditional ESL students, and it also uncovered the specific problems that Generation 1.5 students have with past participles. The outcome of the study was that Generation 1.5 students and ESL students demonstrated about the same percentage of correct and incorrect usage of the past participle; however, the types of errors made were quite different. The Generation 1.5 population made significantly more form errors than context errors, and the ESL population made many more context than form errors. Mikesell purports that when placing students in writing classes and determining the type of instruction that students receive in those classes, it is important to analyze the types of

mistakes that are made rather than simply the number of mistakes. She reinforces the contention that Generation 1.5 students are unique and are likely to benefit from specialized resources which address their language learning experience styles and preferences, as well as their specific language errors. She is careful to point out that the type of form-based instruction that Generation 1.5 students need is the very type of instruction that is counter to the way they have learned their second language and is, therefore, not a comfortable or familiar way for them to address language. Proposed

### **Explanations for Generation 1.5 Language Features**

A distinguishing characteristic of members of the Generation 1.5 is that they learn most of their English through informal methods (Goen et al., 2002b). One of the most frequently advanced explanations used to account for the particular types of errors noted in the writing of Generation 1.5 students is that of Reid (1998). Reid describes the difference between formal and informal learning as arising respectively from “eye” or “ear” learning. She proposes that U.S. resident writers (her preferred term for Generation 1.5 learners) learn English primarily through their ears, from what they hear in the world around them. Their problems with academic tasks are related to a lack of literacy development and/or reading experience. This limits their ability to discern nuances of language structures which are not aurally salient. Reid (1998) represents these learners as occupying the opposite end of the continuum from international students who are usually very literacy-fluent in their first languages and have learned English primarily through their “eyes” through classroom learning of grammar rules and vocabulary.

Generation 1.5 students are often orally-proficient in their first language, but not as literacy-proficient in that language. They have essentially learned their second

language by immersion. They graduate from U.S. high schools with well-developed listening and speaking skills, and they are quite familiar with the U.S. social and educational culture (Reid, 1998). Reid makes the point that writing needs differ greatly between international students and U.S. resident L2 writers. She suggests that this is the case because these two groups of students have acquired their second languages in very different ways. She notes that the atypical writing structures of U.S. resident L2 writers is often a cause of bewilderment for their writing instructors.

Reid (1998) makes a distinction between two types of errors: developmental and fossilized. She describes developmental errors as those that can be changed with practice and fossilized errors as being deeply ingrained and requiring a tremendous effort to unlearn and replace with the correct form. She believes that fossilized errors primarily derive from the aural integration of the language rather than from first-language transfer. Many of the errors made by Generation 1.5 students are related to the fact that the associated correct structures are not aurally salient. She gives an example of a student who thought “why” and “while” were the same word with different meanings because the *l* sound at the end of “while” is not very noticeable. She also gave the example of the following sentence: The students are taken their time. “Taken” is used instead of “taking” very likely because the *g* sound at the end of the word is often dropped or de-emphasized in verbal interactions.

As a slightly different explanation, Holten and Mikesell (2007) offer some interesting dichotomies as possible explanations for the inaccuracies in the use of higher level vocabulary among Generation 1.5 students, namely, the difference between receptive versus productive learning and incidental versus intentional learning. Laufer

(1997) provides a list of the generally-accepted criteria for considering that a person has learned a new word. In order to know a word, a learner must know the form of the word, including its pronunciation and spelling; the root structure of the word and its common derivations and inflections; the phrasal and sentential syntactic pattern of a word; the referential, affective, and pragmatic meanings of the word; the lexical relations of the word with its synonyms, hyponyms, and antonyms; and the common collocations of a word. The receptive versus productive dichotomy refers to the fact that students may be able to passively process a word receptively, but it is only when they are required to use the word productively that they really begin to consider all of the pertinent aspects of actually knowing the word. Incidental learning is the type of learning that occurs when language structures and vocabulary are picked up aurally; intentional learning refers to explicitly learning the vocabulary, forms, and structures of a particular word. Holten and Mikesell (2007) hypothesize that Generation 1.5 students have familiarity with words through reading or hearing them for school work, but they do not have a full understanding of the connotation of these words or of the grammatical patterns with which the words are used. They are seldom forced to use these words until they begin writing college level essays. When they begin to use these words, their incomplete understanding becomes evident.

Foin & Lange (2007) explored the relative success of different options for marking errors in the academic essays of Generation 1.5 students. The results of this study were that Generation 1.5 students have difficulty correcting grammatical errors even when they are underlined and coded by the instructor. In order for coding to be effective, some type of grammar instruction must accompany the use of the coding in

order to provide the appropriate metalinguistic understanding needed to respond to the errors coded. They recommend focusing on structures pertinent to academic language, like the past tense of modals, the hypothetical conditional, and verb tenses with aspect. To remedy this, the authors encourage students to do drafts early and work on errors with teachers, tutors, and classmates, making needed corrections in content and grammar before even handing in a first draft to the composition instructor.

### **Attempted Solutions for the College Classroom**

As noted several times, college writing seems to be site where the language insufficiencies of Generation 1.5 students become most noticeable. This area has become increasingly represented in SLA and composition research. Because Generation 1.5 learners exhibit language traits of both ESL students and native English speakers, they are often shuffled back and forth between mainstream, developmental, and ESL programs throughout their educations. This shuffling can and does persist into their college experiences when students are often required to take placement and proficiency exams and are found lacking in their college-level writing ability. Suggestions for meeting the needs of these students arise in two different areas: the use of suitable assessment and placement instruments and the availability of the necessary classes to meet their unique needs.

In terms of the use of effective assessment and placement instruments, more and more educators and institutions are becoming aware that for Generation 1.5 students, a single placement exam may not be adequate to determine the appropriate classroom situation. Other factors may need to be taken into account beyond what languages they speak and how old they were when they arrived in the United States. Of course, gaining

additional information is much more time-consuming because it requires assessors to make subjective judgment determinations. Frodesen and Starna (1999) recommend asking questions about the way that students use their first and second (and perhaps additional) languages, both written and spoken, in and out of the classroom; their literacy experiences, including the English education they have received in their home countries and/or in the United States and their reactions to those experiences; the way they view themselves as L2 users; and their academic and career goals.

Harklau (2000) makes a very convincing case for the importance of context in assessing students' academic performance; context may include teachers' perceptions of the students' abilities and the learners' perceptions of their identities as students. She performed a very interesting and informative case study of three students during the second semester of their senior year in high school through their first semester of ESOL English classes at a community college. She shows that the same students who were considered to be perceptive, determined, and inspirational by their high school teachers were found by their college instructors to be resistant, lazy, and bored. Harklau attributes these differing perceptions, at least partially, to the possibility that in college these long-term immigrant students were "out-newcomered and out-othered" (p. 56) by foreign international students who were the majority of their classmates.

Several colleges and universities are seeking to develop solutions for meeting the needs of Generation 1.5 students. Rodby (1999) described the situation at Chico State in California. Chico State developed a program in response to students' insistence that they did not want to be placed in remedial or ESL classes to learn how to do the task of academic writing; rather, they wanted to be allowed to do the task in mainstream classes

and be given the support that they might need. Chico State set up a system wherein students who were considered to be at-risk enrolled in mainstream freshman composition classes, but in addition they enrolled in an adjunct workshop designed to support the freshman composition classes. In the four years after instituting this change, the program saw an 89% pass rate among NNES students. Those teaching in the program believed that success was most closely linked to persistence in multiple revisions, which they extrapolated to be most closely tied to motivation. They further postulated that the level of motivation was dependent on the classroom context and that perhaps students were more motivated by being allowed to enroll in mainstream classes rather than remedial or ESL classes. They showed further evidence that motivation also came from other influences, such as whether or not the student had friends in the class, whether or not they had older siblings who had attended college, whether or not their family was depending on them finishing their college education, and whether or not their family, church, and social organizations had positive attitudes toward education.

At UCLA, Holten (2002) realized that Generation 1.5 students were not being well-served in the mainstream composition classroom and were demeaned and discouraged by being placed in an ESL writing class, which also did not meet their needs since these classes focused on international students. Holten designed and taught a substitute class especially for Generation 1.5 students which, if passed, would fulfill the standard freshman writing requirement. This class involved additional credit hours, but provided focused training on self-correction of the grammar tasks that are most problematic for Generation 1.5 writers: labeling sentence constituents, achieving subject-verb agreement, avoiding verb-tense shifts, and properly utilizing correlative

conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, and subordinating conjunctions. At the time that the article was written, the class was experiencing successful outcomes.

At San Francisco State University, Goen, et al. (2002b) brought together mainstream composition instructors and ESL instructors and designed an alternate pedagogical model that they hoped would better meet the needs of Generation 1.5 students. They purposed to take into account learners' backgrounds and their own self-identification as ESL or native-English speakers. In addition, they wanted to capitalize on the learners' abilities of fluent oral communication, and they wanted to specifically address any gaps that these learners had regarding academic writing. Their goals were to help the students understand the relationship between their speaking and writing and to determine their patterns of error and develop effective self-editing strategies.

Destandau and Wald (2002), from San Francisco State University and University of California Berkeley respectively, acknowledging the diversity within the Generation 1.5 population, assert that learning centers and/or individual tutors which support students in mainstream classes provide an effective alternative solution for these students. These educators maintain that part of implementing an effective tutoring program is to provide a multilingual, multicultural tutoring staff which Generation 1.5 students can feel comfortable with and view as role models. They then propose that these tutors be trained to assess the needs of the students and teach the students to become autonomous in self-correcting and self-editing.

### **Overview of Related Studies**

As seen from the preceding information, the Generation 1.5 population has been a prominent research topic for college second language specialists in the past few years.

However, there are significant gaps, misrepresentations, and overgeneralizations evident in much of the research. A few examples of previous recent research will be discussed in this section; then the chapter will end by describing how this study will seek to avoid reproducing the same limitations.

Despite the fact that Generation 1.5 students come from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, many studies view this population as a homogenous group, thereby obscuring differences due to culture or language. Much of the recent research on Generation 1.5 students has tended to focus primarily on the students' performance in the college composition classroom, which seems to be a primary site for their second language challenges to become evident. Other studies, rather than acknowledging the complexity of the individual learner, look at specific issues in the language learning process or focus on how to improve the delivery of education to this population. Thus, these studies reduce the representation of the students to the specific types of grammatical errors that they make or on the level of success of various educational programs or methods with which they are involved. Still other inquiries tend to look at brief snapshots in time and, consequently, lose the sense of the development of biliteracy as an ongoing process. The following paragraphs present some examples of studies which demonstrate these characteristics.

Aside from asserting that broadly-defined categorizations do not to justice to individuals and groups, Walker-Moffat (1995) contends that such studies may, in fact, be detrimental to the development of appropriate language education in the public school systems. As briefly mentioned earlier, she challenges the validity of the label *Asian American* and contends that the "Asian American academic success myth" (p. 5) has been

perpetuated by educational and political bureaucrats who cite it as evidence that academic success is attainable for minorities and non-native speakers without the need for costly educational reforms and programs. Throughout her book, Walker-Moffat (1995) reinforces the point that all Asian immigrants are not alike. Some arrive in the U.S from well-educated, middle class populations; others originate from uneducated, lower class backgrounds. A study by Tarone, Downing, Cohen, Gillette, Murie, & Dailey (1993), which will be discussed more thoroughly below, identified a category labeled “Southeast Asian-Americans.” However, even this narrower label proves insufficient, as it includes native speakers of Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese. Addressing these students as a homogenous group causes the research results to become muddled because in reality the literacy background and social structures of immigrants from various Southeast Asian backgrounds are quite diverse. When only two of these groups are compared, the Hmong and the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese tend to be from more highly educated, higher socioeconomic, urban backgrounds, while the Hmong are from a pre-literate, rural, nomadic society, which did not even possess a written language until the 1950s. Many studies can be cited that demonstrate that these diverse factors in a person’s literacy and educational background have a significant impact on the development of a second language.

The 1993 study conducted in Minnesota (Tarone, Downing, Cohen, Gillette, Murie, & Dailey) provides a further example of the failure to distinguish between language and cultural backgrounds. The researchers looked at the writing ability of Southeast Asian American students in both secondary and postsecondary schools. The native languages of the students in the secondary school portion of their study were

Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao, and Hmong. At the college level, they looked at three different groups of students: Southeast Asian students (11 Vietnamese and 1 Lao), international students (Japanese, Korean, French, Arabic, Spanish, and Indonesian), and native English speakers. This highly quantitative study focused on the effects of students' levels of literacy in their first language and their age of arrival in the United States. They concluded that providing students with instruction in literacy skills in their native language should be a priority, as well as more instruction and support for the development of writing skills in the second language. The students who participated in this study came from a variety of different language backgrounds and no attempt is made to make a distinction between these backgrounds, even though there is a reasonable expectation that the language and cultural background, as well as other social factors, could significantly impact the learning of the second language. Aside from conflating the people groups, this study also focused on the educational process rather than the acquisition or social integration processes.

Bosher's 1997 study, which has already been referenced earlier in this chapter, presents an example of what I view as the snapshot approach to research. She limited her focus to Hmong students at the post-secondary level and aimed her study at investigating the affective factors associated with second language acquisition, as well as the students' identities with respect to language. She conducted a quantitative analysis of 100 students using a survey instrument. She then interviewed fifteen of the students to obtain more individualized data about the students' adaptation to a new language and culture. She discovered that many of these Hmong college students placed a high value on their home cultures; however, her study was largely quantitative and statistical and lacked the depth

and richness that are possible with more qualitatively-oriented studies. Although she did narrow her study to a particular language and ethnic group, she looked at the subjects at only one point in time; she measured the students' current perceptions of their culture and language but did not address the process aspect of language and literacy development.

Since California is home to one of the highest concentrations of immigrants in the United States, it is no surprise that a recent issue of *The CATESOL Journal* included a cluster of articles on Generation 1.5. Those articles are discussed here. Mikesell (2007) provides yet another example of the blurring of cultural distinctions and a focus on the educational process; she concentrates her study on the use of the past participle in academic essays and concludes that language instruction for Generation 1.5 students should continue alongside writing instruction. She includes students from several different language backgrounds in her study (Chinese, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Korean, Hmong, English, Khmer, Spanish, and Farsi) but does not identify any differences in their abilities or needs. Another article in the same volume (Holten & Mikesell, 2007) focused on the lexicogrammatical errors in the academic writing of Generation 1.5 college students and proposed possible discourse-based strategies for students to recognize and correct their own errors; this article does not even address identifying characteristics of the participants. They are identified only as belonging to Generation 1.5. A third article in the 2007 CATESOL journal (Foin & Lange, 2007) explored the relative success of different options for marking errors in the academic essays of Generation 1.5 students. Their study population of 58 students was comprised mostly of students from "Asian language backgrounds" (p. 149), with the exception of three Spanish speakers. In these three studies, the distinction between people groups is

collapsed, the focus is on the educational process rather than on sociolinguistic or cultural factors or the complex language acquisition process, and the study of individuals is reduced to the types of errors that they make.

Goen et al. (2002b) underscore the tendency of colleges and universities to ignore such unique populations as the Generation 1.5 due to budgetary and organizational constraints or due to the belief that the presence of this group is a passing phenomenon. Therefore, these researchers charge those of us who encounter these students in our classrooms, whether they be mainstream, basic, or ESL writing classes, to increase the visibility of these students and gather and circulate what we learn about them and how we can best help them.

The study which will be described in detail in the next chapter attempted to do just that, by overcoming some of the drawbacks of previous studies. First of all, it focused on a very specific group of learners—Generation 1.5 Hmong female college students. To some, this might be considered a limitation of the study rather than a strength. However, I believe much can be gained by focusing on a particular group of like learners. The generalizability of such a study may be questioned, but I believe that in the long run more can be gained from examining a group of narrowly-defined learners than from conflating many different types of learners and attempting to draw conclusions based on a diverse group of subjects. In addition, this study endeavored to look at the lifelong process of second language literacy and language development rather than focusing on any one particular aspect or time period. Furthermore, the choice of which aspects would be most significant to discuss was jointly determined by the researcher and

the participants, giving the language learners themselves significant voice and determination in the research process.

## CHAPTER 3

### PROCEDURES

#### **Qualitative Research Methods in Literacy and Language Development**

As is evident from the previous chapter, including the description of Hornberger's continua of biliteracy, the development of biliteracy is a very intricate and complicated process which combines a multitude of factors for the individual learners—personally and collectively, internally and externally, educationally and culturally, linguistically, and socially. As such, any attempts to examine and explain this process are equally complex. This type of phenomenon requires a research process that will take into account its multifaceted nature. However, since the inception of educational and language research, inquiries into literacy and language development have been dominated by what Markee (1994) calls a nomothetic epistemology, which focuses on the discovery of general scientific laws and has a positivist base associated mainly with quantitative, experimental methodologies. Thus, it assumes a “single, discoverable reality that causally obeys the laws of nature” (Markee, 1994, p. 90). For many years, this belief was forcefully advanced by prominent researchers in the field of second language acquisition, like Michael Long and Diane Larsen-Freeman; voices to the contrary were considered “voices crying in the applied linguistic wilderness” (Markee, 1994, p. 91). In her attempt to establish that both empirical and ethnographic research have value within the field as ways of creating new knowledge, Markee (1994) argues that, even though quantitative research is often touted as providing objective information, its statistical nature can obscure the subjective decisions and judgments incidentally made by the researchers in establishing their research questions and methodologies.

Gan, Humphries, & Hamp-Lyons (2004) confirm Markee's assertion that quantitative studies have contributed the bulk of research on literacy and language development. Unfortunately, quantitative studies have failed to provide acceptable explanations for or descriptions of the intricate interactions between the multiple factors that contribute to the development of biliteracy. Watson-Gegeo (2004) asserts that, in the past, the relationship between cognitive development and social practice and the impact of social practice on the development of language skills were not given the attention that they merit. More recently, researchers have noted that the field of second language acquisition theory itself, which has been dominated for many years by divisive squabbles between cognitive and socio-cultural theorists, is experiencing a paradigm shift (Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Firth and Wagner, 1997, Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Block, 2003). The same shift is likely occurring in the fields of education and pedagogy, resulting in an increased acceptance of less-traditional qualitative research methods within all of these fields (Watson-Gegeo, 2004).

An outstanding example of the rich information that can be gleaned from a well-designed qualitative research study is presented in Bonny Norton's *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity, and Educational Change* (2000). Norton (2000) states that her study was influenced by three different theoretical frameworks: feminist research, cultural studies, and critical ethnography. She states that critical ethnography arose in response to social research which hid the identities of real people, hiding their voices within broad constructs like class, race, and gender—not that these constructs are unimportant, but it is also important to be able to hear the voices of individuals. As briefly mentioned above, Norton centers her widely-referenced study on the concept of

*investment*. In her study of five immigrant women, Norton's definition of investment refers to the notion that individual language learners exist within an intricate network of social and historical relationships which activate a continuous reorganization of their identities; the concept of investment entails the hope that acquisition of the target language will "increase their symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" (p. 10). She asserts that this complex interplay of factors can result in varying emotions and motivations for learning and practicing a language. She spent a significant amount of time with the women she studied over a period of many months and was rewarded with an abundance of information which has considerably added to the field of applied linguistics as well as prompted ideas for further investigation.

Anne Fadiman (1997) demonstrates the valuable results that an ethnographic, qualitative study can yield in her widely acclaimed book, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. She spent nine years negotiating between a Hmong family and the medical community in Merced, California, while she documented and studied the interactions and the culture clashes which endangered the life of a young epileptic girl. The profoundly valuable details that she gathered cannot be obtained through a quantitative study, in which interactions are often artificial and controlled. She wrote the following in her preface: "I have always felt that the action most worth watching is not at the center of things, but where edges meet. I like shorelines, weather fronts, international borders. There are interesting frictions and incongruities in these places, and often, if you stand at the point of tangency, you can see both sides better than if you were in the middle of

either one” (p. viii). The most powerful information is often not the most obvious or the most visible.

Reducing the literacy and language journeys of the Hmong Generation 1.5 women to graphs and statistics would not do justice to their stories. The development of biliteracy is such a complex and multifaceted process that one can easily argue that it is best studied using qualitative research methods. The biliteracy development process incorporates the personality traits and abilities of the individual learner as well as her social environment, her home culture and language, and her educational experiences. Given the complexity of the process to be studied and the need for a qualitative research format, the challenge for the researcher becomes finding the best way to discover the valuable information that each participant possesses.

### **Theory and Philosophy of the Research Method**

The inconsistent and evolving nomenclature and categorization of various research techniques and methodologies can make definitive categorization of a study difficult. Different researchers do not always agree on what constitutes a particular type of study. In addition, research techniques themselves, such as interviews, group discussions, and journal writing employed in this study, can be used as tools in many different types of research. That being said, the study described here is a collective case study with narrative inquiry as the primary mode of collecting the data. Reinharz’ description of feminist ethnography (1992) also contributed to the design of the study and provided guiding principles for the researcher.

Yin (2003) asserts that collective case studies are well-suited for studying complex phenomena. In this study, I endeavored to implement qualitative research

methods and provided a *thick description* (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993) of the interrelatedness of the issues and experiences of Hmong women in their pursuit of success as proficient second language users throughout their educational histories. In this study, each individual language learner could be considered a case. Stake (2003) makes a distinction between instrumental case studies and intrinsic case studies. Intrinsic case studies are pursued out of a desire to understand a particular case; instrumental case studies are performed with the goal of gaining better understanding of a larger issue. Thus, this study would be considered a collective, instrumental case study since I planned to look at several cases with the objective of expanding the knowledge in the field of biliterate development. The actual methodology of this study is unique in that the cases, or the individual learners, will be interacting and collaborating as they reconstruct their personal language and literacy development experiences. The collective component of the research provides the benefit of inviting consideration as to whether aspects of the language development experience are specific to the individual or whether commonalities are present in students from the same background language and culture.

Narrative inquiry offers a highly effective technique for this type of investigation. Creswell (2007) identified narrative inquiry as a mode of research that “begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (p. 54). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that “lived experience” (p. xxii) is the logical starting point for all social science inquiry. Since “[e]xperience happens narratively” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19), it can logically follow that researchers should study it narratively. These authors criticize traditional forms of inquiry that often reduce the individual to an example of a particular idea or theory or social category; alternatively, they assert that

people should be viewed as “embodiments of lived stories” (p. 43). One of the outcomes of this research project will be that the participants will produce a collection of *lived stories*. Cresswell (2007) also notes that a key aspect of narrative research involves a “relationship between the researcher and the researched in which both parties will learn and change in the encounter” (p. 57). An additional benefit of this reciprocal relationship is that the interaction of the researcher and the participants in discussing the meaning and the details of the stories adds a validation check to the data collection process (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

When investigating a process as multifaceted as the development of biliteracy, the researcher should consider the participants’ own words to be a more valuable source of information than the researcher’s perceptions and observations. Johnstone (2000) notes that a person’s understanding of her experiences constitutes her reality and that a research subject should be allowed to speak for herself and to pose questions that should be answered by the research. In his doctoral dissertation, Jamey Nye (2006) adopts the term “hidden transcripts” (p. 2) which he borrowed from Ilona Leki, who used it to describe the unique literacy stories of second language students as well as the students’ perceptions of how and why these stories unfolded as they did. Nye performed a longitudinal study of four students from four different ethnic and/or literacy backgrounds as they progressed through their community college literacy-development experiences; two of the students were classified as ESL and two as Generation 1.5. In addition to providing an insightful perspective of the students’ own perceptions of their literacy experiences in their journey to acquire academic proficiency, Nye’s research demonstrates the richness and depth of the information that can be garnered from using

the students' own words as a primary source of data. The use of narrative as a source of data will be discussed in much more detail in the next section of the chapter.

While this study would not be considered an ethnographic study in the traditional sense, it embodies many of the principles of contemporary, feminist ethnography as described by Reinharz (1992) and utilizes many of the techniques used by traditional ethnographers. The use of the term *ethnography* has traditionally been reserved for the type of social and cultural research which was the trademark of early twentieth century anthropologists who immersed themselves into the cultures that they were studying (Creswell, 2007; Watson-Gegeo, 1988; Johnstone, 2000). Modern-day ethnographers of this sort continue to exist as evidenced by Shirley Brice Heath's landmark comparative ethnographic study of children's language development in two neighboring working class communities in the southern United States—one white and one black. In her prologue, she states, "In the years between 1969 and 1978, I lived, worked, and played with the children and their families and friends in Roadville and Trackton" (Heath, 1983, p. 5). The type of information which she was able to gather as a participant-observer in these communities would never have been possible through the use of other research strategies.

However, Johnstone observes that modern-day ethnographers tend to conduct less comprehensive studies which focus on more narrowly-defined subjects or theories. Reinharz (1992) also distinguishes contemporary ethnography as multimethod research, which may include observation, participation, archive analysis and interviewing. "Ethnography is an important feminist method of [*sic*] it makes women's *lives* visible, just as interviewing is an important feminist method if it makes women's *voices* audible (Reinharz, 1992, p. 48). Reinharz (1992) further purports that feminist ethnography has

three primary goals: chronicling the events in the lives of women, seeking to present an emic perspective of the experiences of women, and viewing the actions of women as a part of the social contexts in which they live. She further states that “in feminist ethnography, the researchers are women, the field sites are sometimes women’s settings, and the key informants are typically women” (1992, p. 55). Toohey (1995) notes that in critical ethnography studies, which often focus on adults, interviews are often the primary method of collecting data. Toohey also asserts that research which seeks to liberate oppressed groups has the potential to change education in general and language education in particular. She adds that such research must not overlook “the histories, the ongoing dynamics and effects of differential privilege and social conflict” (Toohey, 1995, p. 578).

In studies such as this one in which a marginalized population is being explored, perhaps the perspective of the researcher as an ethnographer is more important than the actual technique or methodology that she uses. Street (1993), through his concept of New Literacy Studies, explains the value of taking an “ethnographic perspective on literacy” (p. 1). Watson-Gegeo (1988) explains the ethnographic perspective regarding language development in this way:

The ethnographic perspective on language learning is one of language socialization rather than one of language acquisition. The substitution of *socialization* for *acquisition* places language learning within the more comprehensive domain of socialization, the lifelong process through which individuals are initiated into cultural meanings and learn to perform the skills, tasks, roles, and identities expected by whatever society or societies they may live in. The language socialization perspective implies that language is learned

through social interaction. It also implies that language is a primary vehicle of socialization: When we learn a second language, we are learning more than a structure for communication; we are also learning (for example) social and cultural norms, procedures for interpretation, and forms of reasoning. (Watson-Gegeo, 1988, p. 582)

Although this study is fundamentally a narrative inquiry project, as the researcher, I have endeavored to maintain an ethnographic philosophy and awareness that the acquisition of language and literacy development cannot be isolated from the social environment of which an individual is a part. Rather than the primary researcher being a participant-observer, the participants themselves assume the participant-observer role, with the researcher as a catalyst for the memories recalled, a scribe for the experiences shared, and a collator and analyst of the information generated. Even though the data was not collected over a long period of time, the participants' stories and memories span their entire lifetimes and provide a longitudinal picture of their experiences. As mentioned above, the data for this study will be collected in a narrative fashion. The use of narrative inquiry will be more fully explored in the next section. Support for the use of memories as data sources will also be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

### **Narrative as a Tool for Collecting and Presenting Data**

Narrative was used in two different ways in the course of this study. Data was gathered through the participants, or co-researchers, sharing narratives about their own experiences. As the reader will see in Chapter 4, narrative also served as a way of organizing and sharing the information gleaned from the research. As will be described later in this chapter, the data sources for this study were the memories of the participants

surrounding their language and literacy development experiences. This section will discuss the value of the writing and discussion of stories as tools in qualitative research and, furthermore, as a way of ensuring that individuals are fairly and accurately represented in the research.

There is precedent for using various writing techniques to explore the literacy journeys of language learners. Chiang and Schmida (1999) used this method to ask Generation 1.5 students to respond to writing prompts regarding their experiences with writing and speaking in English. In writing, the students were able to recall and share their confusion and frustration regarding their language identities. Norton (2000) used a diary study for her participants to reflect on their ongoing language learning experiences. They could write as often and as much as they liked, but they agreed that they should write only in English. The participants were then encouraged to share excerpts from their diaries in the weekly meetings of the group. Norton's study differs from the one conducted here in that she was asking her participants to reflect on current events rather than consider their language and literacy experiences in retrospect.

Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) argue that, despite the concerns of empirical researchers, first-person narratives provide a much more meaningful source of data than third-person observations. They also assert that refusing to recognize the importance of first-person accounts of bilinguals regarding their language learning experiences, in effect, subverts the experiences of an already marginalized population. Furthermore, of relevance to this study, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) provide support for legitimizing "retroactive" first-person narratives" (p. 158) as a valuable source of research data. They agree that, although narrative inquiry and experimental models each have strengths and

value, for studying social processes, experimental research often eliminates the social context of an activity and provides more potential for the researcher to manipulate or control the results.

Consistent with the goals of feminist research philosophy, writing not only has value for gathering information as a research tool, but those who participate in writing as research derive personal benefits as well. Drawing on the research of Clark and Ivancic's *The Politics of Writing*, published in 1997, Norton (2000) outlines the multiple identities that writers bring to the act of writing:

The autobiographical self is the one that has been shaped by a writer's life-history up to the moment of writing, the discursive self addresses the on-going construction of identity implicated in each act of writing, and the self as author addresses the question of ownership and voice in the writing process. These three writer identities, in turn, are understood in the context of a larger more abstract notion of writer identity which addresses the subject positions that are available to writers within particular communities, at particular points in time. (p. 148)

Norton (2000) theorizes that the diary writing that her participants undertook allowed them to explore the identities outlined above in ways that they had previously considered inaccessible to them as immigrant language learners.

Haug (1987) contends that the act of writing can turn the subject of the research into a researcher herself and be a source of empowerment for the writer—especially a writer who is part of a subjugated population:

Writing is a transgression of boundaries, an exploration of new territory. It involves making public the events of our lives, wriggling free of the constraints of

purely private and individual experiences. From a state of modest insignificance we enter a space in which we can take ourselves seriously. As an alternative to accepting everyday events mindlessly, we recalled them in writing, in an attempt to identify points in the past where we succeeded in defending ourselves against the encroachment of others. (p. 36)

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Duffy (2007) has demonstrated that the Hmong people in the United States have already begun to use writing for sharing their stories and analyzing their cultural uniqueness and choices; this was an encouraging sign in predicting potentially successful outcomes for this project. As noted in Chapter 2, writing seems to be the medium in which the language difficulties of Generation 1.5 students become most apparent. Writing might then be viewed as one of the primary sites of conflict or struggle for these language users. If this is the case, perhaps the use of writing in this study will extend beyond the immediate goal of gathering data and will accomplish a higher objective of encouraging the participants to turn a possible site of weakness into a source of strength.

### **Memories as a Source of Data**

Given the complexity of the development of biliteracy and its situatedness within a complicated social environment, I searched for data collection methods that seemed best suited to explore the many facets of this topic, that would utilize the strengths of the target population to its full potential, and that might ultimately result in benefiting the participants as individuals and as a people group. I came across a brief mention of the method known as memory-work in Reinharz' (1992) chapter on feminist research methods. I was immediately intrigued by the process and the possibilities of this method.

The growing use of this method helps to establish the value of memories as a source of data. In addition, from my previous knowledge of Hmong women, I felt that certain aspects of the method had the potential to capitalize on their strong values of community and collectivism.

Interestingly, the technique has primarily been used by investigators involved in doctoral work, and the participants in the studies have also often been women who are pursuing advanced academic degrees and are themselves experienced researchers (Onyx & Small, 2001). However, I became convinced that some of the principles associated with this method would prove fruitful for implementation in gathering the stories from the participants in this study. In addition, the success of the previous use of memory-work legitimizes the value of memories as a source of data in researching issues which are part of complex social interactions. Judging from many of the sources cited in this section, memory-work has become established in Germany and other parts of Europe, as well as in Australia and New Zealand. Since memory-work is an emerging method, especially in the United States, an explanation of a few of its most salient characteristics would be useful. This section will explain the history and philosophy behind the method, describe the prescribed roles and responsibilities of the participants and the researcher, and discuss the value of memories as an important source of data.

Memory-work as a research method was initially developed in Germany by Frigga Haug to investigate female socialization and sexualization (Reinharz, 1992; Onyx & Small, 2001; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). This investigative method derives from feminist, critical, and social constructionist views of the world (Ingleton, 2007). Cadman et al. (2007) identify the key principles of this research technique as follows:

to use collectivity as a means of deriving common meaning, to collapse the dualism of subject and object within a specific research design, to understand the reproduction of social formation, and to reflect on memories as a means of agency and change (p.2).

Memory-work is uniquely designed to study a process since the goal is to reconstruct occurrences from the past which contributed to the participants' integration into the social practices around them. The use of memories seemed especially suitable for my purposes because I wanted to investigate a process, namely biliterate development, which occurs over many years; unfortunately, I did not have the luxury of conducting a longitudinal study and waiting years to obtain the results. Also, I felt that the process of reflection and discussion would be viewed positively by the Hmong women who would be the target population of my study.

From Haug's (1987) perspective and experience, memory-work is well-suited for studying social processes that involve a critical perspective, processes that involve suffering and subordination. She views the research process as a potential act of liberation. Traditionally, memory-work involves three phases: the writing down of memories, the group examination and discussion of those memories, and the theorizing of the writing and discussion (Onyx & Small, 2001). The writing and discussion inherent in the process allow the participants to confront patterns of thought that have become part of their sense of reality. Haug (1987) believes that the memory-work process can reveal faulty ways of thinking that have blindly been accepted as fact and allow the participants to develop resistance to such thoughts. The foundation of this method is the conviction that the events that people remember are significant simply because they remember them.

Haug (1987) states her belief this way: “Our basic premise was that anything and everything remembered constitutes a relevant trace—precisely because it is remembered—for the formation of identity” (p. 50). Others contend that experiences are likely remembered because they are problematic and in need of further thought and analysis (Thomson & Holland, 2005).

Cadman et al. (2007) assert that in feminist theory, written memories are viewed as valid data and that memory-work allows those who might otherwise be silent to share their experiences. The action of writing down memories is expected to result in the activation of further memories (Onyx & Small, 2001); in addition, reducing one’s experiences to writing imbues those experiences with a greater sense of value and significance (Haug, 1987). Haug (1987) further advocates that the process of writing and analyzing each other’s stories is a way of developing increased self-confidence. As mentioned above, in many of the studies conducted using the memory-work method, all of the participants are themselves experienced researchers and, as such, are prepared and able to theorize their stories. In the case of this study, the theorizing of the writing and discussion was largely completed by me, as the primary researcher, although as the reader will see from a few of the stories shared in the next chapter that some theoretical discussion did occur among the participants during the group sessions.

### **Responsibilities of the Researcher as the Collector of Memories**

Even though I am not implementing the memory-work method as a whole, many of its principles of working with memories and its suggestion for the role of the researcher remain relevant for me to apply to my own study. I felt a great responsibility as the collector and handler of the shared experiences of the women who volunteered for

this study. The most outstanding responsibility was to respect and care for the stories of others and to represent their stories as accurately as I could. As stated previously, one of the goals of memory-work is to break down the barriers between the researcher and the researched. With this goal in mind, the role of the researcher in memory-work can be very delicate. This is especially true when, as in the case of my study, I, the researcher, was obviously not on equal footing with the rest of the participants. I am, in fact, not part of the group at all; we are separated by age, ethnicity, and academic status. In addition, the Hmong culture is very hierarchical, and great respect is given to spiritual leaders and elder people. I have had to fight hard to break down these cultural barriers even within my very informal role of faculty sponsor for the Asian Fellowship on campus. Even those who have not been my students tend to view me in an authoritative role, and despite the fact that my personal teaching philosophy leans strongly toward creating a cooperative rather than hegemonic atmosphere in the classroom, some Hmong who have been my students interact with me in a very formal way. Fortunately, this is less true of the women than the men, which bodes well for the design of this study.

While perhaps it is not possible to be viewed as a peer, researchers can convey that their primary purpose is not to study the participants, but rather to learn from and be taught by them (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). In other words, the researcher can view the participants as teachers rather than as subjects. Norton (2000) noted that despite the fact that her role in the group remained teacher/researcher, she did not feel that this hampered the willingness of her participants to share freely. She says, “whatever authority I may have had did not appear to silence them” (Norton, 2000, p. 147). She attributes the eagerness of the women to share their lives to the fact that she was able to

make them feel comfortable in her presence; in addition, she took the time to understand her participants in terms of their current situations and their immigration and language histories. They felt valued by Norton, and their experiences were validated. My goal was to create this same type of atmosphere with the women in my study.

One of the goals of feminist research in general, and memory-work in particular, is to effect change in the individuals involved in the research, in others like them, and, hopefully, in society at large. With this goal in mind, Cadman et al. (2007) suggest that “we, as researchers, should use the data ‘lovingly’ and carefully with an eye to the potential consequences of representation” (p. 6). They further imply that the primary researcher need not be emotionally distant from the project or the participants. They assert, rather, that if the primary researcher is emotionally committed to the project and the participants, the integrity of the project will be maintained and the participants will enjoy and benefit from the experience:

Emotion states include decision-making and a disposition to act, and as such, emotion contains elements of reason and action as well as of feeling. Emotion can no longer be regarded as a synonym for irrationality. Rather, our analysis suggested that emotionality is an acceptable, necessary and vital aspect of the embodiment of experience and therefore of the research process. Incorporating our feelings and emotions to understand, direct, analyze and interpret our stories in the memory-work process disrupts the rational/irrational binary that, within positivist traditions, has served to silence embodied feminist knowledges.

(Cadman et al., 2007, p. 7)

Thus, I did not attempt to make my involvement entirely objective and detached. I cried with the women when they cried and laughed with them when they laughed. When they mourned over lost opportunities, I mourned with them.

I wanted to be very careful to minimize my position as an authority figure within the university and within the Asian Fellowship. I was concerned that the participants understood that I did not have expectations of what the results *should* be. I was aware that they may be uncomfortable correcting my interpretations of their words when I was analyzing and representing them. Throughout the research process, I wanted to communicate that my highest priority and my greatest desire was to characterize them accurately and to tell their stories fairly. Therefore, I tried to continually encourage and facilitate the participants to act as co-researchers in the research process.

Although I involved the women in the study in deciding which topics to talk about, as the researcher, it was my responsibility to craft a suitable trigger to which the participants could respond. An inadequate prompt will cause the respondents to produce ineffective replies (Onyx & Small, 2001). For example, a superficial, conventional prompt is likely to result in a conventional, rote response; Onyx and Small (2001) advise other researchers that “[t]he trick is to produce the more jagged stuff of personal lived experience” (p. 776). In addition, the researcher must remember that the particular stories that participants choose to write about speak as loudly as the stories themselves. Brodkey (1987) shares the following advice:

One studies stories not because they are true or even because they are false, but for the same reason that people listen and tell them, in order to learn about the terms on which others make sense of their lives: what they take in account and

what they do not; what they consider worth contemplating and what they do not; what they are and are not willing to raise and discuss as problematic and unresolved in life. (p. 47)

Norton (2000) discusses the qualitative researcher's relationship with the researched by elaborating on three prepositions: *on*, *for*, and *with*. She advocates that the researcher must always remember that she is doing research *on* real people and that these people should not be harmed by the research. She is investigating *for* her subjects in the sense that research should be aimed at benefitting those who are being studied. Finally, the researcher should seek to empower the participants by, as much as possible, doing the research *with* them. Participants should have significant input on the topics that receive the focus in the study.

Liamputtong & Ezzy (2005) describe some of the advantages of using memories as raw data—memories are fairly easy to obtain; memories can link theory with lived experience; and memories have the potential for empowering and liberating marginalized people. These authors give the following admonition regarding research which focuses on the use of memories:

Memory-work works well when the group is a real group: The members have shared values and interests, they enjoy each other's company and they are willing to work together for a long period of time. Most important of all is the trust between them. Without this trust, the memory-work may not succeed. (p. 156)

This counsel was encouraging to me because I knew that my group (excluding myself) generally meets these requirements of being a "real group." Since our university is rather small and the Hmong students tend to congregate frequently, most of my participants

already knew each other, some of them for many years through the larger Hmong community. Throughout the research process, I endeavored to follow the counsel given above and fulfill my responsibilities as the researcher in such a way as to enhance the experience for all of us.

### **Emphasizing Success**

Literacy and language development research literature often addresses the conundrum of why some learners are successful while others in the same or similar situations fail to achieve their desired literacy goals. As I have already noted in this report, second language learning theorists offer a variety of reasons for the inability of many second language learners to develop high levels of proficiency for negotiating in a second language. In addition, second language research often focuses on the deficits and problems of second language learners, but few studies examine and highlight the successes. This is also often true of studies in literacy development. This is not because the students themselves are failures; more likely, it is because the nature of people and social systems are often most apparent during times of struggle (Leki, 1997). Indeed, throughout the process of writing this manuscript, I struggled with the words I should use to describe these issues; I wanted to find words that did not carry connotations of judgment or deficit. As the idea for the project was forming, I was at a conference and engaged in a conversation with Mark Roberge, an ESL composition instructor at San Francisco State University and a published researcher on Generation 1.5. In the course of that conversation, Dr. Roberge encouraged me to view my exploration into the literacy and language identities of Hmong Generation 1.5 college students as a celebration of the students' resilience and academic success (personal communication, April 12, 2008). In

a very real sense, any Hmong woman who has accepted the challenge of a university-level education cannot be seen as a failure; indeed, she must be viewed as a success. In fact, the participants in my study should be admired because they have managed to progress, within one generation since immigration, from a group of people who farmed the jungles of southeast Asia to successful college students in the United States.

Maintaining this perspective can be a formidable challenge in an educational and social milieu which tends to focus on the deficits rather than the benefits associated with minority populations. Individual students will have different struggles, but, rather than seeing them on a continuum between success and failure, I want to consistently communicate that I view each one of these Hmong women enrolled in the university as examples of success, and I want to seek to encourage each one to view herself in this same way. An additional role of the researcher is to remind the participants that even though the process may seem to be spotlighting failures, as is often the case with investigations into the lives of students and teachers, the ultimate goal of the research is to seek opportunities for the betterment of the situation of current and future Generation 1.5 students. One of the keys to sustaining a positive atmosphere during the project will be to emphasize the success of the individual while maintaining a critical view of the possibly flawed or disabling educational and social processes and institutions involved in the development of biliteracy. Studies like this should seek to empower and support the minority student rather than discourage her.

### **Overview of the Research Process**

Harklau (2000) makes the point that identities are not stable; rather, they are constantly renegotiated through social relationships. That is why I endeavored to

encourage and record students' best memories and recollections of their literacy and language learning experiences and then used their memories to reveal their own perceptions of their language and literacy development experiences—the factors they perceive as facilitative to their biliterate development and the factors they remember as hampering or discouraging their development.

This study was designed to provide a retrospective, longitudinal picture of the language and literacy development process for a very specific group of individuals, namely biliterate Hmong college women, using the actual words of the individuals themselves. Although such a study may not produce results which can be generalized to other populations, I believe that by focusing on such a narrowly-defined target population, I may be able to obtain results that potentially offer new insight into the interrelatedness of various factors associated with the biliterate development process. Much can be gained by targeting a specific language group in depth; viable results can later be compared with those of other groups studied by different researchers within the broader fields of applied linguistics and SLA.

By synthesizing the work of several educational researchers involved in cultural studies, feminist research and critical ethnography, Norton (2000) identified six common foundational beliefs or principles: (a) social structures cannot be studied apart from looking at the lives of the real people within them, (b) researchers cannot ignore the unequal balance of power based on race, class, ethnicity, and gender, (c) researchers must take into consideration individuals' own interpretations of their experiences, (d) research must be viewed within a pertinent historical background, (e) researchers must be willing to acknowledge that they cannot be completely objective and unbiased, and

finally, (f) feminist, critical, educational researchers believe that the goal of research is to effect social change.

Norton advocates that the application of these ideas should prove useful for any research involving identity and language learning, and I have endeavored to use these principles as a guiding framework for my own research project. In the earlier chapters, I have provided relevant background information about the history of the Hmong, described their immigration and acculturation experiences, and presented information about their culture and language. I have chosen a research method which is designed to give actual voice to the participants themselves by providing the opportunity to address social structures, including power inequities, and has social change as its goal. I have attempted to be as objective as possible by avoiding the formation of preconceived ideas about what the outcomes should be and by faithfully representing and communicating the experiences of my participants.

Hmong women are poised for a study such as this which requires them to write and analyze their past literacy and language learning experiences. As a social group which is relatively new to literacy practices, the Hmong have already begun to use the media of writing to share their experiences and challenge existing social structures and prejudices (Duffy, 2007). Hmong women are less represented in such writing practices than Hmong men; however, the women are also beginning to use their literacy skills to critique gender roles within their communities and offer alternatives to traditional ways of thinking about women (Moua, 2002). Hmong women in the United States are using their literacy skills not only to benefit their own families economically, but to confront Hmong cultural patterns, including those of gender (Duffy, 2007). One Hmong woman

shared the following view of literacy: “[I wanted to learn] because I saw someone read, and I saw someone write. And it was just like, my gosh, that’s powerful. I want to do that too.” (Duffy, 2007, p. 163)

The design of this study maximizes my position as a female researcher. Because I am a woman, the potential exists for me to be able to create a supportive and empowering atmosphere for the women in my study, thereby greatly enhancing the richness of the information gleaned through the research process. Atkinson (1998) suggests that more life stories of women need to be recorded in order to give the feminine voice a chance to be heard and to bring a sense of equilibrium to databases which are often dominated by the male perspective. In addition, Reinharz (1992) strongly makes a case for her assertion that women are especially suited for interviewing and studying other women. “A woman listening with care and concern enables another woman to develop ideas, construct meaning, and use words that say what she means” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 24).

### **Maintaining the Integrity of the Research Process**

This section of the chapter will describe the research process which was followed in conducting the study. However, before actually describing the procedural sequence of the project, I will present a few general themes or principles to which I tried to adhere throughout the process. I was always mindful of maintaining the integrity and, thus, the future validity of the study. Creswell and Miller (2000) provide a list of nine possible validity procedures for use in qualitative research studies: triangulation, disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity, member checking, prolonged engagement in the field, collaboration, the audit trail, thick description, and peer debriefing. Several of these were intrinsically incorporated into the research design of this particular study. First of all,

because this project was completed as part of the requirements for completing my doctoral dissertation, there is a built-in peer response process; the dissertation advisor and readers periodically challenged my assumptions and asked questions about my methods and interpretations. In addition, I often discussed my ideas with colleagues in my Ph.D. program. Researcher reflexivity and the collaborative flavor which I endeavored to instill in this project have already been extensively discussed in the above description of memory-work. However, to briefly reiterate, throughout the entire process, I attempted to minimize my role as an authority figure and professor and to position myself to the extent possible as a co-researcher. I frequently repeated my genuine commitment to representing the participants accurately and reinforced the value of their personal experiences to the success of this project.

Member checking is defined by Erlandson et al. (1993) as allowing participants to indicate whether the representations of the researcher are true and accurate. Member checking was built into the study at several points. First of all, although much of the data originated from the journal writing, when the subjects shared their journals in the group discussions, they often added explanatory or clarification information as they read. These comments became part of the recorded conversation and eventually part of the transcripts of the discussions. During the group discussions, their comments were open to questions and reactions from the rest of the group. In addition, after each group discussion session, I transcribed the conversation, and then during the individual interviews, I went over each participant's responses and asked questions, clarified her previous stories and statements, and encouraged her to add details to some of her stories. Thus, during the individual interviews, the women were again able to clarify or adjust information as needed. Any

analysis or theorizing that I conducted between discussion sessions, I also brought to the collective for opinions and suggestions. After my initial draft of Chapters 4 and 5 was written, it was e-mailed to the participants for them to read and comment on before the final version of this paper was completed.

Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that a qualitative researcher should keep an extensive research log and journal, including a careful data collection chronology which describes and records data analysis procedures plainly, including the coding process. If these procedures are meticulously maintained, it will be possible for an outside auditor to examine the documentation and confirm the credibility of the process. Thus, my final validation measure was to produce a careful audit trail. In order to do this, I kept documentation of all research decisions and activities as outlined above. All group meetings were recorded and transcribed, and all memory writing and revisions were collected. All e-mails that I sent out to the participants were saved and documented. I regularly wrote journal entries describing my actions and thoughts throughout the process. I also carefully chronicled my coding and analysis process. Some of my thoughts during the process will be shared at the end of this chapter.

### **Ethical Treatment of Participants**

Of utmost importance in any research project involving human beings is the admonition that the subjects should not be harmed by the process, treated unfairly, or taken advantage of in any way. This was especially important to me since most of the women involved in my study were well known to me, some for several years. I was concerned about taking their time during a busy school semester, and I was very concerned about the potential for misunderstanding and misrepresenting them. In the

previous sections of this chapter, several important points have already been made concerning the ethical treatment of the participants in this study; however, this topic is important enough to reiterate these points.

Participation in this study was completely voluntary, and all of the participants were of legal age. Informed consent was received from all subjects, and each subject was aware that she could withdraw from the study at any time. The participants volunteered based on their interest in the study and their willingness to devote the necessary reflection, writing, and meeting time. The participants' privacy was maintained by the use of pseudonyms in the written report based on this study. Participants were also assured that during the study, all information would be kept confidential within the research group.

There was minimal expectation of participants being injured by the research performed in this study. Nonetheless, when working with memories, which are an intimate piece of a person's past, the researcher must ensure that the participants are not harmed by the experience of contributing to the study. Farrar (2007) cautions that remembering some experiences may be very sensitive and can threaten the individual's emotional, spiritual, and/or psychological strength; thus, the recollection of memories can be destabilizing for the individuals involved (Haug, 1987). In the case of this study, at times the women became aware of unfair or detrimental treatment that they received in educational or social situations during their literacy development process. Recalling this information had the potential to produce anger, resentment, or discouragement. Two specific topics generated a significant amount of emotion: the level of parental involvement in school and extra curricular activities and the participants' own differing

abilities in the use of the Hmong language. In these cases, which will be briefly addressed at the end of the chapter in the section about my research journal, the participants were encouraged in their personal achievements and were heartened by the prospect of the potential for future change as a result of studies like this. However, even though negative memories and situations may be dredged up during the research process, there is reasonable evidence that the writing done by the participants is more likely to be beneficial than harmful (Norton, 2000; Duffy, 2007; Duffy, 2004). Haug (1987) believes that the writing of memories can actually free the writer and develop in the writer a greater sense of significance and confidence.

Part of my role as the researcher included providing a nurturing environment for the group interactions and also intellectually preparing the members of the group for discussing their past experiences by thoroughly explaining the research method and the theories behind the topic of the research (Cadman et al., 2007). This step was completed prior to the participants signing the consent for participation in the study. The researcher must also assume responsibility for balancing the needs of the participants against the requirements of the research process, and the well-being of the participants must always have top priority. Because the students attended a university at which I was a teacher, I made every effort to separate my role as researcher from that of instructor. Participants were assured that their decision to participate or not participate in this study would never negatively impact their grades or roles in future classroom situations.

### **Gathering the Participants**

At the beginning of the spring semester in 2010, I was present at a gathering of the Asian students from my campus. I asked for an opportunity to speak to all of the

Hmong women present. I presented my plans for the research project and a brief description of the time commitment that would be required on their parts if they chose to be participants in this study. Many of the women were not surprised by my request since I had previously talked with many of them as I was considering this topic. All of the women present indicated interest in participating in the project. I also asked for names and contact information for other Hmong women on campus who were not present at this particular meeting. An e-mail was sent to each of the women who signed up and to the other potential contacts that were provided by these women. The e-mail included an invitation to participate in the project, a written description of the program, the projected time commitment expected from the participants, and two optional dates for a more detailed orientation meeting which would provide an opportunity for them to ask questions. Initially, e-mails were sent to twenty women, which I believe included all of the Hmong women on campus. Out of this original list, only five of the women declined to participate without further discussion; most based their decisions on concern about the time commitment conflicting with their studies and job commitments. Fifteen women attended one of the two orientation meetings, after which two more women declined to participate. Again, their concern was that too much time would be taken away from their studies. Thus, the remaining thirteen participants were self-selected from the available pool of twenty, based on their interest in the project and their ability to commit to the time involved.

During the orientation meetings, I provided each prospective participant with copies of the informed consent, a background questionnaire, and a handout with general information about the project. Each section of the handout was read out loud and

discussed. The handout explained that the general purpose of the study was to obtain their personal perspectives surrounding their literacy and language development experiences. The handout also included a nuanced definition of the term “Generation 1.5” as well as a summary of the factors identified in previous research as contributing to the development of biliteracy. The importance of their personal narratives or stories in shedding light on this very complicated issue was also emphasized. In addition, the handout contained an explanation of what would be expected of them as participants, including the time commitment involved and their responsibilities for writing and attending group discussions and individual interviews. Finally, I invited them to be co-researchers in this project. They were very quick to identify with the designation of Generation 1.5 and adopt it for themselves. They seemed to welcome this label as they felt that it accurately described their personal situations. In addition, I shared my belief that they would benefit individually from writing about and discussing their language and literacy experiences and voiced my hope that, together, we might uncover valuable insights which might benefit their own families and culture as well as future generations of U.S. immigrants. The final page of the handout presented some potential questions for writing or discussion during the study, and the women were invited to voice their opinions on the relevance of these possible topics. The abbreviated list of topics included experiences of marginalization in social and educational settings, positive or negative experiences with ESL classes, and cultural, familial and gender conflicts surrounding their educational experiences. Appendix A contains a copy of informed consent form, and Appendix B contains the handout for this orientation meeting.

I was very careful to stress the time commitment involved and that they should each evaluate their personal situations and decide whether or not it would be feasible for them to participate. I made it as easy as possible for them to drop out and stressed that whether or not they participated in the study would not change my opinions or feelings about them either in our friendship relationships or our present or future student-teacher relationships. As mentioned above, thirteen women ultimately voiced willingness to participate in the research. I had a decision to make at that point. I was not initially intending to use so many participants, and I never expected that so many would be interested in participating, so I did not have a plan for choosing among those who were willing, nor had I informed them that such a decision might have to be made. Therefore, I decided to continue with all of those who were willing. I made this choice for several additional reasons. First of all, in such a small community, I did not want to offend or disappoint any of the women by eliminating them. Secondly, I was afraid of losing valuable diversity of experiences, and thirdly, I was concerned about the potential for attrition as the semester progressed. As it turned out, none of the participants dropped out after committing to the study.

Once the participant group was finalized, most of the communication regarding topics for journal questions and scheduling of meetings was conducted by e-mail, which worked very effectively with this group. The thirteen women were invited to fill out the informed consent and an initial background questionnaire. The initial questionnaire included questions about contact information, geographic and family data, and self-perceptions of their proficiency in Hmong and English. The questions from the initial questionnaire are included in Appendix C.

## **The Data Collection Process**

The data was collected through four means: questionnaires at the beginning and end of the project, journal writing in response to prompts, group discussions after each round of journaling, and finally, individual interviews to clarify and check previous information provided by each participant.

Richards (2003) proposes that during the process of good qualitative inquiry, people should realize things about themselves of which they were previously unaware. From my perspective, in addition to allowing subjects to become active participants in the research process, giving subjects the opportunity to write allowed them time to recall and reflect on their own memories and experiences and resulted in a more fruitful and meaningful exchange of ideas in a group setting than a spontaneous focus group discussion would afford. As significant topics emerged through the writing and discussion, we reflexively used the journals and transcripts of the group discussions to identify issues for interaction and for future journal topic emphasis. Onyx and Small (2001) state that the purpose of the collective discussion phase is to discover the common social patterns and meanings of each remembered event and to imagine potentially new meanings.

Since the group was so large, the participants were split into two groups for each round of group discussion. One group meeting was held on the weekends to accommodate those who felt that their time was too occupied during the week with work and school, and the other was held during the week for those who went home or participated in ministry opportunities on the weekends. The meetings were generally held within a couple days of each other. The women could choose which group to attend, and I tried to keep the numbers as balanced as possible to encourage maximum

participation. For the most part the make-up of the each group remained fairly stable, except when scheduling conflicts arose which required someone to switch groups for one round. There were only three occasions when one of the women completely missed one of the rounds of group discussions.

During the initial orientation meeting, I provided the women with a list of examples of potential triggers for future journaling and discussions. I elicited their responses to these prompts and their judgments on whether or not they felt these questions might capture important aspects of their personal literacy development experiences and asked for their input on what they would like to use as a topic for their initial journal responses. These potential topics included questions regarding the possible facilitating or inhibiting factors in their literacy and language development, the value that the Hmong culture places on language and literacy, and the manner in which literacy acquisition is promoted in Hmong homes. Some of the questions were adapted from suggestions provided by Duffy (2007) in the appendix of his book for addressing issues pertinent to the U.S. Hmong population. Many of his questions were too straightforward to provide a good basis for memory writing, so I complicated them somewhat in order to create the potential for evoking thoughts of a more provocative nature. These questions can be found in the Orientation Handout in Appendix B. The women felt that all of the topics offered were pertinent, and each of them generated discussion during the orientation meetings. Based on the input of the participants and on their interest in these topics, I selected a few questions to begin the first round of journaling. An additional issue, which I had never considered, was also raised independently in each of the two meetings: many of the women had the perception that Hmong men were not as motivated

to enter or complete college as Hmong women. This was determined to be a significant topic for a future discussion.

Questions or topics for journaling were provided to the women ten to fourteen days in advance of the scheduled group discussions. The journal prompts for each round of journaling and discussion can be found in Appendices D, E, and F. Participants were asked to generate their journals digitally and were encouraged to spend time thinking, reflecting, and writing over a period of several days; however, as is often the case with college students, much of the writing was done at the last minute. Most of the time, participants e-mailed their responses prior to the meeting as requested; sometimes, they brought them with them at the time of the meeting; and occasionally a couple of them were working on the questions during the group discussion and then provided them to me later. Since it was impossible to discuss all of the prompts in the two hours allotted for the group discussions, I allowed the participants to choose the topics that they were most interested in discussing after they had written about them. Each person was given an opportunity to read or summarize her response to the chosen triggers, and then comments and questions were invited from the rest of the group. In addition to the discussions during the initial orientation meetings which were held on January 30 and February 1 (and which I eventually decided to include in the data minus the input from the two women who declined to participate), there were three rounds of journaling and group discussions. The first round was conducted on February 20 and 22, the second round on March 14 and 15, and the third round on April 11 and 12.

Following the journal writing and group discussions, I met individually with the participants for the purpose of clarifying details of their written stories and comments

made in the group discussions. These individual interviews also gave those who were quieter or may have been reluctant to speak freely in the group an opportunity to add to their stories and make comments. Two individual interviews were conducted with each participant—one after the second round of group discussions (which included clarification and conversation about all of the previous group meetings and journals) and one after final group discussion. The first round of individual interviews was mostly conducted between March 16 and March 26, and the second round was completed between April 19 and May 6. Except for the final round of group discussions, I was able to keep up with producing the transcripts of the group discussions immediately after they were conducted and prior to the individual interviews. Therefore, in preparation for each individual interview, I was able to review the individual's comments from these discussions, carefully read her journal responses, and write a list of questions that I wanted to discuss with her. In the case of the final group discussion sessions, since I did not have time to complete the transcripts, I listened to the audio-recording of the group discussion rather than transcribing and made notes about questions to discuss with each participant. For the final round of individual interviews, I also reviewed either the transcripts or the audio of the previous individual interview for the particular woman with whom I was meeting.

The group discussions were held in a small, cozy conference room located in the suite where my faculty office was located. The meetings were held on weekends and evenings when there was rarely anyone in the offices. I tried to make the atmosphere as comfortable as possible for the participants. Even though we met on campus, I brought home-baked cookies and offered hot chocolate and other drinks during the group

discussions. I shared my cookie recipes with them and offered to help with any writing that they had to do for their classes during the semester. Only one person actually took me up on this offer of help. The length of the group discussions hovered around two hours which was the time frame expected by the participants. One of the discussions lasted two hours and forty-five minutes by consensus of the participants involved.

Individual interviews were held in the most convenient place for each participant. Since the majority of the women lived on campus and did not have personal transportation, most of the individual interviews were held in my office on campus. A few were held in my home, and one was held in the participant's apartment. The length of time for individual interviews varied from thirty eight minutes to one hundred and twenty eight minutes, depending on each participant's time constraints and interest in talking. In both the group discussions and the individual interviews, I tried very hard not to limit or focus the conversations too strictly and to leave questions open-ended enough to allow for a variety of answers because I wanted the women to have the freedom to introduce their own concerns and topics.

At the end of the semester, I had the women fill out a final questionnaire with some additional background questions that I had not thought about asking before but felt might be pertinent to analyzing the data. These questions can be found in Appendix G. As a celebration for completion of the study and a special thank you for the women, I invited them to my home for dinner. They loved the idea and decided that they wanted to make it a formal event. Everyone dressed up, and I set a formal table, complete with a long-stemmed rose in a vase for each woman to take with her. I served a wonderful shrimp scampi and steak dinner which my husband and a friend helped to cook and serve.

We had a chocolate fountain with strawberries and cream puffs for dessert. We took lots of pictures and had a great time of celebrating the end of the semester and the end of the research. As a final thank you, I later bought each woman a copy of the book *Bamboo among the Oaks* to give them some examples of the types of writing that Hmong young people are doing and hopefully to encourage them to produce some writing of their own.

### **Transcribing and Coding the Data**

All of the group discussions and individual interviews were audio-recorded using the Olympus digital voice recorder WS-500M with an additional Olympus ME51S condenser stereo microphone. The quality of recordings from this device was more than adequate, and the audio files were extremely easy to transfer to the computer for storage and transcribing. In addition, the device was so small, that it was barely noticeable; in other words, even though the women obviously knew that they were being recorded, the recorder was not a conspicuous presence in the room. For the transcribing process, I used a free, downloadable program called ExpressScribe which allowed me to set many different parameters to accommodate my own speed and style of transcribing.

Transcription is a vital step in the process of analyzing spoken discourse. Deborah Cameron (2001) describes the transcript of an oral interaction as lasting evidence which allows the researcher to be able to document and explore the spoken word. However, the depth of detail in a transcription and the particular symbols and conventions used can vary greatly (Johnstone, 2002). Johnstone (2002) cautions that a researcher must be aware that decisions about how to transcribe have underlying theoretical and practical consequences. Cameron (2001) also emphasizes that the researcher/transcriber must be aware that she makes important choices about the kinds of

details that she includes in the transcription. These choices can have an impact on the data which can be gleaned from a transcription. She cautions that using punctuation in the traditional ways that it is used in written prose—to produce a series of sentences—prevents the transcript from being an accurate representation of the spoken word.

Cameron (2001) further asserts that when a researcher imposes the structure of written language upon spoken intercourse, she runs the risk of misrepresenting the actual meaning and intent of a speaker. For this reason, she points out the dangers of using professional transcribers who have not experienced the context in which a given interaction took place. For this reason, I did all of my own transcribing, even though it was tempting to hire someone in order to speed up the process. In addition, I tried to produce the transcriptions as soon as possible after the conversations took place in order that my recollection of the speaker's affect and intent would be as fresh as possible to help with any words or meanings that were difficult to decipher.

Cameron (2001) also notes that what is important to include in a transcript depends on how the transcript will be used. There were some common transcription characteristics that I chose not to spend time documenting in my own transcripts. Since I was most interested in the stories of the individuals and not the mechanics of their interactions, like pauses, pronunciation, or overlaps, I did not include these details in the transcription records. I also did not attempt to document intonation or the length of pauses, since I felt that the words and the content of the stories were what was most important for my research goals. I made these choices because I believed that this level of detail was adequate for my purpose of constructing stories; however, I was aware that

if, in the future, I wanted to use these transcripts for studying more minute aspects of language, I would likely need to go back and transcribe them again.

Although language accuracy was not a specific focus of this study, I felt that the ways in which the language use of these Hmong women differed from what might be considered standard use of the language might be significant in the context of this study. Therefore, I did not leave out any words or correct any grammar in the transcription process. I included characteristics such as grammatical errors and filler words, though I removed some of the fillers and false starts in my formatting of the stories for Chapter 4. In terms of practicality, I found that transcribing every word was actually faster and more efficient than deciding whether to leave words out as I was typing. I did not include punctuation in the original transcriptions, but when I later formatted the stories for inclusion in the results, I generally used standard punctuation according to my understanding of the stories as told by the individuals. I made my transcription decisions based on Johnstone's assertion that the most valuable transcripts are those that represent what they claim to represent and those which include the information that the researcher needs, without incorporating distracting and extraneous detail.

As mentioned earlier, I was able to keep up with much of the transcription of the group discussions as the data collection was progressing. I then spent the summer of 2010, completing the transcriptions of the final individual interviews and trying to make sense of the vast amount of text that I had collected. I relied only on the recordings for information from the meetings; the only notes I took during the discussions or interviews were notes to myself on items to follow-up on immediately during the discussion. I

essentially transcribed all of the recordings completely, with the exception of a few side discussions of a personal or social nature.

Once all of the transcriptions were complete, I then had information from essentially four different sources: the initial and final questionnaires, the written journal responses from each participant, the group discussion transcripts, and the individual interview transcripts. I ended up with approximately fifty hours of recordings, resulting in roughly 1000 pages of raw data to sort through and analyze. This often seemed like an overwhelming task, and I experienced many false starts and stops due to frustrations and time constraints. However, over the next year, I repeatedly read over the data and attempted to pick out recurrent themes. I also looked at the information from each participant and identified the most prevalent stories that each one told.

Using the information from the background questionnaire and the final questionnaire, I made a spread sheet so that I could get an overall picture of the characteristics of the group. The spread sheet included information such as date and place of birth, educational status, size of family and ages of siblings, hometown, self-ratings of Hmong and English language ability, high school and college grade point averages and SAT scores, grades in college writing courses, and parents' and siblings' levels of education and English ability. A summary of the information from this spread sheet will be provided in the next chapter.

Initially, as I read through the data, I made notes on the themes that I noticed and determined a few viable coding categories. In my initial coding, I used abbreviations for the following categories: Hmong language conflict, literacy in the home, gender, language use, othering, ESL, family background, writing, and higher education. I began

coding using these classifications by marking the transcripts using Microsoft Word's *insert comment* function. As I worked through the transcripts, I kept coming upon information that I felt was important but did not quite fit into one of the categories. I kept adding categories until I had too many to reasonably keep track of. Additional categories included conflicts with Hmong culture, educational experiences prior to college, experiences in college classrooms, experiences related to gender and culture, experiences related to gender and education, family responsibilities, feelings about English ability, feelings about Hmong ability, language conflict in the church, language and literacy practices in the home, feelings about reading, and struggles with vocabulary.

In order for me to compare and evaluate the information, it quickly became clear that I needed to put the information on a particular topic in the same file, in addition to marking the transcripts. I then began managing the material by creating separate Word files and copying information from the transcripts into the Word files, noting the origination file and page number of the information. After I finished coding by category, I felt that I also needed to code by participant in order to be able to discern which issues were most prevalent in the stories of each individual participant. I performed this coding in the same way by copying and pasting information into Word files, including the date of the transcript from which it came, as well as the page number so I could go back and look at the information in context if the need arose. Once I had a file folder on the computer for each individual, it was much easier to put the individuals' stories together by inserting and combining material from the other sources of individual information, including the journal responses, the discussion groups, and the individual interviews.

## **Constructing the Stories**

After I had the information from an individual on particular topic isolated, I started with the most complete version of the individual's story and added additional information as available from other sources. For example, if a participant told the most complete story of a particular incident or situation in her journal, then I used that source of information as the starting point for writing the narrative. I then added in further information provided by that participant through other data files, such as group discussions or individual interviews. The process of crafting the stories will be described in more detail in the next chapter. After I produced the stories and decided to present them within the context of Hornberger's continua of biliteracy, I went through once again and re-coded the stories according to their potential and appropriateness for representing one of the continua.

The data collected through this research has not been used to construct lengthy narratives about individual participants. Rather, it will be presented as shorter stories related to specific topics; these stories originated from the participant's journal writing or through conversations with the researcher or within the group discussions. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) advocate for the effectiveness of the use of *small stories* as a means of exploring identity. They examine the concept of small stories in juxtaposition with larger narratives, which are the more traditional products of narrative research. They assert that *big stories* focus on putting information together into a sequence of events, often sacrificing the context of the telling of the story, while small stories are used in actual interactions to construct the identity of the storyteller. Through the use of small

stories, a person is using language to construct her identity and her sense of self (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

### **The Research Journal**

As suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000), I kept a research journal as I progressed through the data collection and coding process as a way of validating the timeline of the research and the decisions and observations made along the way. I would like to end this chapter with some of the topics that I included in this journal as a way of giving my reader insight into a few of my thoughts and choices during the research process. The journal largely contained observations that seemed important to me as we advanced through the research process, changes that I made in my planned research process, and principles that I wanted to keep uppermost in my mind as I interacted with the women.

One observation that I made in my journal pertained to the different volume of writing and conversation provided by each participant. These differences were not especially surprising in themselves, given the individual variation that one might expect with any group of people. I did observe, however, that the older women—those who were almost ready to graduate or had already graduated—were generally more prolific writers. They produced more pages in their journals, and their comments were generally of a more reflective and analytical nature. I speculated that perhaps this difference was a result of the practice and confidence that they had gained in critical thinking through their years of college experience. I also recorded in the journal that I was a little discouraged by the fact that many of them did not seem to be spending much time on the journals. It became evident that in some cases they were doing them the night before or even the day

of the discussion groups. I felt that this did not give them much time for introspection. However, I realized that perhaps I had been somewhat unrealistic in my expectations of the level of involvement that I was hoping for since many of them did not have positive attitudes toward writing in general. In addition, I had to remind myself that they might not have a lot of time to devote to this study when many of them were struggling just to get through their classes. After writing in response to the initial journal prompts, one of the women said something to the effect that I did probably did not realize how much time it took them to write these responses and try to make them sound good. I assured them that it was not necessary to devote excessive amounts of time to checking grammar and punctuation and that I was primarily interested in the content of their responses.

At the beginning of the study, I spent time explaining why I was conducting the study, and I provided the participants with a digital copy of the first three chapters of this manuscript in case they wanted to read more about the underpinnings of the project. I suspect that few, if any of them, took advantage of this opportunity. I was initially a little disappointed that they were not interested in reading this background, but I realized when they later talked about their feelings toward reading that, for many of them, reading this material would have been a dreaded task. I also concluded at a later point that perhaps it was better if their comments and thoughts were not biased by reading the previous research and information on the topic.

I also wrote in my journal about my desire to allow the participants to guide the conversations. I actively involved them in determining the topics which would be most interesting and pertinent to write about and discuss and I tried to make the questions as open-ended as possible in order to elicit from the women aspects of their experiences that

they thought were significant. I also always tried to leave the option open for them to say that they really did not think a question or topic was significant by writing or asking, “Do you even think this is an issue?” In addition, in each group discussion, the group was encouraged to decide which of the topics that they had written about was the most exciting to them and which they were most looking forward to talking about during the session. On several occasions, I was encouraged when one of women mentioned to me that she was benefitting from being able to reflect on and discuss issues that, as a group, they seldom addressed informally. More than once, they commented that the discussion times were like therapy and made them feel better about themselves.

Another issue that I addressed in my journal was that I felt at times as though the women were avoiding certain stories for a variety of reasons. When discussing experiences that happened to them in college, they seemed to be very aware of their positions as students, and they also seemed very cognizant of the fact that they were talking about my colleagues and friends when discussing their experiences with professors. Their reluctance to talk about their professors was likely undergirded by the fact that we were on a small campus where it was often easy to identify the person under discussion and that they were not sure exactly who might see this information.

I commented in my journal that one of the most emotional group discussions was one in which the women were describing the limited nature of their parents’ involvement in their school activities. They seemed surprised themselves at the intensity of the emotions that emerged. For some of them, this seemed to be a source of deep hurt, though they infrequently thought about or admitted this fact. In my journal, I proposed the possibility that much of the reason for ignoring this fact over the years is that they

have a fierce loyalty and love for their parents and they are very aware of the difficult lives that their parents have led both before and since coming to the United States.

Although in many ways the women in the study exhibited similar perceptions about their experiences and life situations, one of the most fractious and tense topics seemed to be their varying competence in the Hmong language. Some were very proud of their Hmong language ability and in many ways looked down on those who were less competent. Those who were less competent felt sometimes persecuted by the more competent Hmong speakers. They seemed to avoid discussing this topic openly during the group discussions, but women on both sides of the issue mentioned it in the individual interviews.

The women also seemed a little reluctant to theorize about certain issues. One area in which this was most apparent was when we discussed the differences between Hmong men and women in higher education. I surmised that either they felt they lacked the expertise to theorize or they were insecure in their own interpretations surrounding this issue. Another possibility for their reticence may have been that they were afraid of how their hypotheses would be received by their peers or were concerned that their ideas might get back to the men.

I made frequent notes to myself in the journal that I must be careful to hold my own opinions and beliefs lightly, and I often made notes about the fact that I was trying very hard not to steer conversations too strongly in the direction of my own theoretical biases. I also noted that throughout the process, many of the women were concerned about my success in this project and frequently asked whether I was getting the information that I needed. I tried to reassure them that I was not looking for specific

information; I just wanted to hear their language and literacy development experiences and their reactions to those experiences.

Throughout the research process I have tried to keep in mind Leki's (1999) admonition about qualitative research; she advises researchers to "be aware of the arrogance of the enterprise and of the impossibility of 'telling the truth.' You can only tell a story, not the truth. All experience with reality is interpreted" (p. 17). The next chapter will present my humble attempt to interpret the data I collected through this research process.

CHAPTER 4  
DATA AND ANALYSIS

**Introduction**

The stories that follow are the product of journal entries, group discussions, and individual interviews with the thirteen Hmong women who participated in this research project. My primary objective as stated previously was to discover the educational, familial, cultural, and social paths trod by these women in their biliterate life journeys to the college classroom and to explore the possible reasons for the difficulties that they meet as they pursue higher education. These stories will paint a picture of the challenging experiences that Hmong women face in various areas of their lives as members of a U.S. minority language group and will demonstrate the language and cultural conflicts that they frequently encounter in their homes, schools, and communities. These narratives will also demonstrate that even though these women progress from preschool through college using the English language, they are not full and equal participants in the educational and social experiences of the society surrounding them due to the limitations placed on them by their families or members of the dominant culture or by their own decisions as they attempt to negotiate through the complex network of conflicting values bombarding them from various sources.

A large amount of data was collected during this research process; indeed, in examining a process as complex as the development of biliteracy, a large amount of data is required to represent the whole picture and to justify the formation of any reasonable conclusions. This chapter presents only a small portion of the data that was collected as I conducted the field research for this project. In order to address the intricacy of the

issues and conclusions outlined in the previous paragraph, Hornberger's continua of biliteracy will be used as a backdrop for organizing and presenting this data, so this chapter will effectually contain the results of the research interwoven with analysis through the use of the continua of biliteracy. The use of Hornberger's continua of biliteracy framework to describe the language usage of these Hmong Generation 1.5 university women will demonstrate that in many instances, their strengths and language usage patterns fall at the less powerful ends of the continua. (See Figure 1 on page 52.) The final chapter will provide a practically-oriented response to this data and analysis.

At this point, I must reiterate my awareness of the delicacy of my role as the researcher in a project such as this. The researcher wields a significant amount of influence on the research process. She ultimately guides the focus of the discussions by choosing the topics, triggers, and prompts for the writing phase of the project. Every piece of information that is discovered through the research process cannot be included in the final report. Therefore, the researcher must attempt to faithfully represent the spirit and tone of the participants. In her final written presentation of the project, she decides what information to include and what information to leave out. Ingleton (2007) describes the ultimate representation of memories in this way:

Each memory-work project begins with a dynamic process in which individuals become a group generating unique and unexpected outcomes. Memories are stirred, experiences shared, insights gained and perceptions changed, long after the last meeting has been held. But when the project develops into a product for publication, some of these vital signs are lost. (p. 6)

Ingleton (2007) further cautions the researcher to be aware that some of her judgments will be made outside of her conscious awareness; thus, the analysis of the data should maintain the integrity of the language used by the participants themselves. If the participants are willing and available, they should be shown the final product before publication in order to provide input on the content and representation. In the pages that follow, I have carefully attempted to implement these recommendations. The research process developed for this study allowed participants to check and correct any inaccurate information at several stages during the process and prior to publication of the finished product.

After I gathered and transcribed the data for this project, I was faced with the daunting task of making sense of the hundreds of pages of journals and transcripts that I gathered. I asked myself, “What is the story that I heard?” In considering this question as I remembered and re-read the data, recurring themes emerged. In the broadest terms, these young women are conflicted in many areas of their lives; they continue to live in an in-between state, much as they did when Rumbaut and Ima (1988) first coined the term Generation 1.5. They feel distanced in many ways from both their Hmong communities and from the mainstream American middle-class culture in which they live. Their worldview is significantly different from that of their parents, yet they feel a strong pull toward traditional Hmong values. They also struggle with their roles as women within their families and culture. Language is a constant source of struggle and conflict—both English and Hmong. They often feel that their English ability is insufficient for the demands of college, and they face many frustrating, alienating, and confusing situations. Their “deficiencies” in the college classroom have been discussed at length in the

literature, as outlined in an earlier chapter. Here, these variations from the standard will be presented from the perspective of the Generation 1.5 women themselves.

As I trudged again and again through the journals and the fifty hours of taped conversation which translated into more than one thousand pages of text, re-reading, reorganizing, and re-categorizing the data, dominant themes emerged. One over-riding impression was that language is a topic that is often part of the conscious awareness of these bicultural, biliterate Generation 1.5 college students. I was constantly struck by the fact that language—both Hmong and English—and its accompanying social ramifications seem to be a source of conflict and frustration in many areas of their lives. The following description of this conflict provided by Martha Ani Boudakian is poignant, eloquent, and apropos to the experiences of the Hmong and will serve as a starting point for this discussion:

I am an Armenian woman, born and raised in the United States; an American-Armenian woman. I live a hyphenated existence—two poles coexisting. Where does one end and the other begin? I function in two worlds, and I am on the margin in both of them. Within me exists the interface of those two worlds, yet they are very separate. Within me exists a place that is both of those worlds, merged and discrete, and a place that is neither of them. It is a place called home. It is a radical place called the other side (Budakian, 1994, p. 34).

The use of language is frequently a contested practice for Generation 1.5 Hmong women. They feel that their English is not good enough, and many of them also feel that their Hmong is not good enough. The elders within their home culture are dissatisfied with their use of Hmong; their teachers, especially at the college level, are often

unimpressed with their use of English. Throughout their lives they are asked not to use Hmong in many circumstances—like educational situations—and they are often expected not to use English in many situations in their homes and communities. Their ability to use Hmong is rarely valued outside the Hmong community, and although their ability to use English is valued within the Hmong community in a utilitarian way, it is certainly not valued at the expense of Hmong. The reader will see from the following experiences shared by Hmong Generation 1.5 women that they are often forced to occupy the margins of participation in many educational and social situations; they are, in many ways, suspended between their two languages.

In any discussion involving the characteristics of a group of people, there is a danger of generalizing and stereotyping. In the stories and analysis which follow, I will attempt to present a representative, collective view of the experiences of the thirteen women who participated in this study. Where varying or dissenting views existed, I have tried to acknowledge and include those points, following the advice of Watson-Gegeo (1988), who asserts that ethnographic studies must use comprehensive data treatment:

One of the greatest weaknesses in many published studies is their reliance on a few anecdotes used to support the researcher's theoretical point of view or conclusions, but chosen by criteria usually not clarified for the reader. When illustrative examples are presented in an ethnographic report, they should be the result of a systematic selection of *representative* examples, in which both variation and central tendency or typicality in the data are reflected (p. 585).

The following story is a compilation of some of the many stories I heard as I interacted individually and collectively with the Hmong women who participated in this

study. This account includes the individual stories that they were prompted to share from their own lives as well as a collective story that emerged as their life experiences were compiled. I set out to gather these stories for several reasons. The Hmong have always intrigued me from when I first became associated with them around 1980. This study was prompted by my curiosity about the educational and literacy paths that Hmong women take that bring them to the place where, despite being born in the United States and despite obtaining their education entirely in English, they, by their own admission, continue to struggle with the English language in their roles as college students.

My goal was to put their stories together in such a way as to show the similarities and differences in their experiences. I also wanted to represent their stories in a way that might perhaps be difficult for them to do. Some of the women were very expressive in relating stories from their lives. Others struggled in sharing the details of their stories but were able to flesh out the stories with encouragement and coaxing from others in the group as well as questions from me as the researcher.

### **Representing the Stories**

Each of the narratives generated from this research was not necessarily gathered in its entirety at one sitting or from one data source. The data collection process was organized in such a way as to encourage the women to build upon and add to their stories through additional questions from the researcher or through group discussions with each other. Thus, in my retelling of these stories, I have taken the liberty of inserting additional information provided by the storyteller herself into the appropriate place in her most complete account of the story. I have used the participant's own vocabulary, even when the words were not used quite correctly or there were word form or tense errors. I

have occasionally inserted transitional words, like *but* or *so*, to minimize disruptions in the flow of the story which may have been created by this slightly fragmented manner of piecing the stories together. These transitions and relationships between words were obvious in conversation, but not so obvious in the words alone, and were required to make the story more understandable to the reader outside of its original context. When I have added clarifying information or changed the wording to remove identifying information, I have enclosed the words in square brackets.

Many of the women demonstrated to some degree their generation's dialectical language distinctions—the extensive use of the word *like*, for example. I have taken the liberty of removing some of these oral insertions and filler phrases from stories in which they were excessive in order for the reader to be able to focus more fully on the content of the story without the distractions of this repetition. I also made the decision not to indicate where these have been removed because my goal is for the reader to pay attention to the content and emotion of the stories and to be as free as possible from visual distractions related to discourse conventions. As I mentioned above, I have not removed grammatical and word choice distinctions that might be considered inaccurate use of the language by some. This will allow the readers of this manuscript to be able to see for themselves the relative language proficiency of each of the participants.

I realize that even these minor changes and alterations I have made in the participants' own words may raise a concern for some; however, I have worked hard to maintain the integrity and intent of the women as I understood their stories at the time of their telling. I also inserted my own sentence punctuation and conversational quotation marks based on my understanding as I listened to or read each story. In case the reader is

curious or dubious about how accurately I have represented the participants' words, Appendix H contains one of the stories along with the raw data from which that story was derived in order to show the nominal nature of the types of changes that I made.

The stories were extracted from the transcripts and journals in different ways. Many of the stories originally sprouted from the participant's written journal responses to questions. For the written part of the data collection, given the many competing time demands these women had, not the least of which was their required school work, they were encouraged to share their thoughts as accurately and completely as they could, but not spend their time on correct grammar and punctuation since they would be adding to their stories as we progressed through the research process. Details were added and the stories were expanded through the women's responses to questions from the other participants when they shared their stories in a group format and through the individual conversations of the participants during individual interviews with the researcher. I have taken the liberty of inserting the participants' additions into the stories without indicating exactly where specific pieces of information were added or obtained. After each story, I include a reference that gives all of the data sources for each story. I have, of course, left out the repetition of parts of the stories that were re-told in the different data collection venues. I would be the first to admit that the entire story, related in the individual's own words, created by the individual herself, would provide the most reliable representation, but since these participants were neither prepared to nor inclined to tell these stories on their own at this point in their lives, I have endeavored to re-construct these stories for them, retaining as much as possible their original words, intent, and tone.

## **General Description of the Participant Group**

In this section, a general description of the characteristics of this particular group will be provided. I have refrained from describing each participant individually in detail for reasons of confidentiality. Although such descriptions would have been a valuable addition to the project, I felt that the university community in which the research was conducted was too small to allow this to be done while still retaining the anonymity of each woman. In addition, the Christian Hmong community in the United States is quite intimate; they hold national youth and young adult conferences every year, and many of women in this study have friends and family all over the country. Pieces of individual information about each participant will be added throughout the presentation of the results of the study when those specific pieces are immediately applicable to the data under discussion.

Demographic information on each participant was mostly obtained through an initial survey and then confirmed and clarified in subsequent interviews. Of the 13 participants in this study, only two were born outside of the United States. One was born in Laos, went to a refugee camp in Thailand when she was one year old, and then immigrated to the United States when she was three. The other was born in Thailand after her family escaped from Laos, and she came to the United States as an infant. Nine of the women essentially grew up in California, and the other four came from four different states. The women ranged in age from nineteen to twenty-six. In terms of their years in higher education, they represented a varied distribution: three were first-year college students, three were second-year, one was in her third year, three were graduating

at the end of the semester in which the research was conducted, two had graduated in the past year, and one was attending seminary.

As mentioned earlier in this manuscript, the Hmong generally tend to have large families and are often classified as being in the lower socioeconomic class. Among the group of participants for this project, two came from relatively small families by Hmong standards; one came from a family with a total of four children, and another was one of five siblings. All of the others came from families whose size ranged from eight to thirteen children. Only one participant was the youngest child, and none was the eldest in her family. Without any specific parameters regarding class, only two of the participants defined their families as being middle class. Two others had difficulty deciding whether their families were middle or lower class, and the rest described their families as living on subsistence farming, surviving on very low incomes, requiring some type of government financial assistance, and/or relying on the income of elder siblings. This is largely consistent with results from the most recent U.S. census information available which were cited in an earlier chapter.

In terms of academic pursuits, the group represented several undergraduate majors: five were in education majors, three in Christian ministry majors, three were in business, and two in pre-nursing. By their own reports, all but one of the participants graduated from high school with grade point averages higher than 3.0, and seven of them had averages higher than 3.7. Again, through their own reporting, all but three of them reported college GPAs between 2.5 and 3.0, generally exhibiting a significant drop from their high school experiences in terms of scholastic achievement as measured by grades. Only five of the participants had any older siblings who had completed a four-year

college degree. Seven of them had older siblings with failed attempts at finishing college.

The participants described the language and literacy skills of their parents in both English and Hmong in varying ways. This information is difficult to summarize, so what follows is a very brief generalization. Communication between family members was largely oral. Use of the written word was almost non-existent in most of their homes, with the exception of those who used the Hmong Bible and/or hymnals in their homes. Reading was not a common practice or an encouraged past-time. Few of the women in this study read widely as children, although a few did later develop a love for reading as late as their college years.

### **Examining Biliteracy**

Discussing biliteracy is always a challenge because of the multiplicity of factors that are involved; this complexity is what prompted Hornberger to develop her explanatory framework, the continua of biliteracy (Figure 1 on page 52). Even as I am attempting to use Hornberger's continua here, problems still arise because in each story or experience, it is nearly impossible to single out a specific continuum. Many of the stories could have been categorized under more than one of the continua; however, I have attempted to choose the data available to me which was most closely related to the continuum under discussion. This is further evidence for the intricate nature of biliteracy and for Hornberger's contention that the continua are inextricably linked to each other. Some of the continua will be discussed in more detail than others, based on their observable applicability to the data. However, I would like to use Hornberger's own

words to emphasize the difficulties inherent in trying to extricate the continua from each other for the purposes of discussion:

Somewhat ironically, the framework outlined here suggests that the hope for understanding biliteracy, as well as literacy and bilingualism seems to lie in the complexity of biliteracy. Once it is recognized that every instance of biliteracy shares in being situated on the same series of continua, it no longer seems to matter which particular configuration is under consideration. The important point becomes recognizing and understanding what the continua are and how they are related to each other (2003, pp. 26-27).

Chapter Two outlined the four categories of Hornberger's continua: the context of biliteracy, the development of biliteracy, the content of biliteracy, and the media of biliteracy. An important corollary concept to the continua of biliteracy is the observation that in considering the continua, it becomes obvious that one end of each continuum is generally considered more desirable or more powerful within a society and its educational system (Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester, 2003). The ramifications of this will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

From the following experiences of the Hmong, it will become apparent that their language usage patterns and their biliterate development often lie at the less powerful ends of the continua. However, the discussion will also demonstrate that in some cases their experiences do not place them precisely at one end or the other and may address both ends of a particular continuum as well as fall on points in between. Hornberger's categorizations provide a heuristic for talking about the very complex issues associated with the intersection of literacy and bilingualism. She makes the point that there are not

finite points on each continuum, and any point is linked not only to other points on its own continuum, but to all of the other continua as well (Hornberger, 2003).

### **The Media of Biliteracy**

I am going to first briefly address the continua contained in the category of the media of biliteracy: the simultaneous-successive exposure continuum, the similar-dissimilar language structures continuum, and the convergent-divergent scripts continuum. I will use a couple stories in this first section; however, later stories will also demonstrate and reinforce the concepts discussed here.

**The simultaneous-successive exposure continuum.** By the strictest definition of simultaneous and successive bilingualism, Hmong children are successive bilinguals since English development does not really begin until after age three. However, in reality, Hmong children in the United States cannot be described as having a clear pattern of either successive or simultaneous development of their two languages. Initially, Hmong and English are largely acquired in a successive fashion, although the children certainly have some exposure to English before they enter the educational system. However, for almost all of these women, minimal English was learned prior to schooling; thus, they began their educations in a foreign environment, immediately immersed in an unfamiliar language. They had to “sink or swim.” Even though they are immersed in the language in the classroom, they continue to develop friendships mainly only with other Hmong students. Once they begin learning English, some feel that their Hmong abilities diminish. However, for many, Hmong and English both continue to progress, with Hmong ability likely benefitting from the knowledge that the child is gaining about language in general as she is learning English. As with most immigrant populations, in

some households, there is a more intentional effort to keep the home language alive, while in others, the emphasis is for the children to focus on their school language in order to excel in their educations and elevate the status and financial stability of the family.

Hli Chia, the eighth of eleven children, was in her final semester at the time of this research. Her major is cross-cultural studies and she plans to become a missionary overseas. Hli Chia seemed to have an especially vivid memory of her early years in school, so she was able to give a somewhat detailed account of her initial experiences with the English language. Hli Chia's story below will show how oral English and Hmong were acquired successively. In addition, this story describes the alienation and fear that she felt as a young minority student.

When I was five years old, I remember asking my [older] brothers and sisters what they were saying in English. Whenever they did not want me to know what they are talking about, they would speak in English. It was frustrating for me but I wanted to learn and catch up with them so bad. I did not even know how to operate the TV correctly. I remember pleading with one of my sisters, who was rushing out the door, to turn the TV channel to PBS for me before she left for school. She generously taught me quickly how to use the remote control and told me to just press the big button to turn on the TV. Anyhow, as I kept listening to my siblings speak in English, I started to understand some words and phrases.

On my first day of school, I was ready to meet my kindergarten teacher. I have rehearsed with one of my sisters how to greet my teacher when I saw him. However, as my dad dropped me off in my class, I chickened out. I didn't realize how tall my teacher would be, since I was so small, and I lost every English word from my mouth. I thought my dad was going to stay with me, but it turned out that I would be in class without him. He promised me that he needed to go to the store and he'll be right back. I think I even cried and held on to him because I was afraid of being left with strangers. However, if it wasn't for my trust in my father's promise, I would not have agreed to stay in that class. I kept looking at the open door the whole entire class time because my dad would be back soon. I kept waiting and waiting, and eventually he came back, of course, to pick me up at the end of the school day.

I have lots of memories in my kindergarten class. It was with my teacher that I first spoke English. Before asking him if I could go to the rest room, I would form the question in my mind and hold the thought. It was hard for me to form

questions. I also remembered making friends with most of the Hmong students because all the other kids were loud, aggressive and rude, I thought. I remember learning how to read, to do math, and to how to write my letters. One thing that motivated me to learn my English in kindergarten was so that I could be as good as my Hmong friends, who's English was far better than mine.

Part of the reason why most of my friends were Hmong was because they were as alone as I was. I assume that we all felt like we were with strangers so we stuck together for support. We also did not understand and speak English well. So if we wanted to have friends then the only ones we could talk to were other Hmong students. Some of my friends were even shier than I in front of my teacher so I automatically was given the title of bravery for speaking to him. I guess I preferred speaking in Hmong more. We didn't need to learn English right away because we were shy and our teacher was graceful. I would eventually pick up more in my English but I preferred speaking and hanging out with the Hmong students. Perhaps it was the discrimination I faced that drove me to not hang out with the white kids. They would always make fun of us because our English weren't good. We also got bullied a lot by Anglo and Hispanic boys. The best thing we could even say to them was, "Stop it, man!" Now that I think about it, I never got in a fight or learned how to say any cruel thing because I abided by the rules (journal, February, 20, 2010).

Later stories will show that as some Hmong children master the conventions of written English, if they are motivated to learn written Hmong, they are later able to apply this understanding of spelling and writing in English to their first language and are able to use this ability to learn written Hmong. Successive exposure to a second language is generally considered to be at the more powerful end of the continuum, but the experience of most Hmong children is a complex mixture of simultaneous and successive exposure on their journeys toward mastering their two languages.

**The similar-dissimilar language structures continuum.** My understanding of the Hmong language is primarily gained from listening to presentations and reading student projects regarding the Hmong language for an assignment in one my linguistics classes. Without doing extensive study on the language, I have been able to discern that Hmong is a tonal language and can be classified as an analytic or isolating language

because it is devoid of inflectional endings and variable word forms and has relatively simple grammatical rules when compared to English. In addition, Hmong words are generally monosyllabic. The impact of differences between a learner's first and second language is debatable, as some researchers believe that similarity is facilitative in learning a second language and others demonstrate that similarity can hinder the acquisition of the second language. Although the English language has a loose system of formal and informal language usage, according to the women that I interviewed, Hmong has a formal form which is used only when talking to God. Therefore, while these women generally feel that they are adept at both languages on an interpersonal level, they struggle in more formal instances in the use of Hmong, as well as in more professional and academic uses of the English language.

Kaying, a college freshman, who considers herself a very competent Hmong speaker and loves to use Hmong, voiced some frustration with an inability to pray, or communicate with God, in Hmong because she is not fluent with the proper vocabulary or in the appropriate speech register to address and communicate with God.

When I listen to my parents pray in Hmong, they use these words that we don't normally use. I'll tell you this one situation. It was just this semester and my uncle Jason, he told me to pray in Hmong and not in English and I thought I could do it and then when I closed my eyes and I started praying, it was like "What are those words, I can't think of any." I tried to go to my room and pray in Hmong and then it just turns out in English. Cause it's a different vocabulary you use every day. There are words for "Most High" or "humble" (group discussion, February 22, 2010).

A couple other participants reinforced Kaying's experience by voicing difficulties of their own with the vocabulary for prayer. Chu Ka, who also described herself as a proficient Hmong speaker, added to this conversation with the following comments:

It's like humbling yourself and saying "I" to God. It's just different vocabulary you say when you're speaking to God. Just to God, when you pray. Like you don't have to, you can just use basic, but then you will sound really basic (group discussion, February 22, 2010).

**The convergent-divergent scripts continuum.** The same type of disagreement in theory mentioned regarding similar and dissimilar language structures applies to convergent and divergent scripts. Some researchers have shown that the more similar the scripts of the languages are, the easier it is to learn to write in a second language. Others maintain that more dissimilar structures offer less interference. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the Hmong written language system was only developed in the 1950s and uses the Roman alphabet. The letter-to-sound symbol system in Hmong is similar in concept to that of the English language. A significant difference which does seem to present difficulties when students are trying to learn to write in Hmong is the representation of the tones. For example, if the letter *j* is placed at the end of a word, it indicates that the word has a high falling tone ("The Hmong: An Introduction," 2004). Several of the women voiced problems with trying to discern the correct letter ending for a word when writing in Hmong. However, it is very likely that the development of literacy in Hmong is aided and reinforced by literacy in English.

Paj Chia was the sixth child in a family of 12; her next youngest sibling, Chu Ka, mentioned briefly above, was also a participant in this study. They belonged to a family with exceptionally strong ties to the Hmong culture. They talked about watching Hmong movies together as a family for hours, and they were very proud of their Hmong language ability and were very committed to maintaining proficiency in the Hmong language. Chu Ka was also very interested in Hmong cultural dress and dancing. Paj Chia had the following to say about learning to write in Hmong, which demonstrates that she had

difficulty mastering the part of the writing system that diverged from English. Other women voiced this same difficulty with learning to write in Hmong.

My only frustration with the Hmong language is that I do not know how to perfect the writing. I can write it but never could get the ending down. The Hmong language is all about tone and so that was always difficult for me to write (journal, February 20, 2010).

Convergent script is considered the more powerful end of the divergent-convergent scripts continuum; thus, in this case, if the Hmong had previously developed their ability to read and write in their native language, they might have been able to use that understanding to facilitate learning to write in English. However, since those who do know how to write in Hmong developed that ability subsequent to mastering the writing system of English, their understanding of the English orthographic system likely aided in acquiring the Hmong writing system.

### **The Context of Biliteracy**

Biliterate context refers to the linguistic and social context in which a given interaction takes place. The context of biliteracy is the next set of continua which will be addressed, and it is described through the following three continua: the micro-macro continuum, the oral-literate continuum, and the bilingual-monolingual continuum.

**The micro-macro continuum.** At the micro level, distinct linguistic patterns are discernable in the way that the Hmong women involved in this study use the English language. This observation intersects with the bilingual-monolingual continuum in the sense that, as Hornberger (2003) notes, bilingual speakers tend to demonstrate distinctive linguistic structures from monolinguals. When compared with Standard English, the English used by the women in this study demonstrates difficulties with irregular forms of nouns and verbs, inconsistencies surrounding the use of non-count nouns, and subject-

verb agreement errors, along with a few other miscellaneous divergences from standard use. These deviations from Standard English are discernable in both the writing and speech of these women. As would be expected, the frequency of these patterns varies from person to person, though the language of none of these participants was free of these distinctions. Whether these differences arise out of interference from the Hmong language or whether they are simply perpetuated as a community dialect is beyond the purview of this study. As the examples below will demonstrate, these somewhat salient language structures are likely bothersome to college-level instructors despite the fact that they often do not significantly impair the meaning of written or spoken communication.

The Generation 1.5 Hmong students with whom I have had contact do not have a distinctive pronunciation or accent as part of their shared vernacular English dialect. Most of the language differences that might be identified as dialectical are related to morphology and syntax and exhibit distinctive patterns. The dialect that they use works fine for social situations; any problems that they have in comprehension seem to be related to difficulty with vocabulary words (by their own admission and by observations made during the study.) At times, they had trouble answering my questions because they did not really understand a word in the question.

The participants in this study viewed themselves as still struggling at the micro end of this continuum with some specific language skills, namely grammar and academic vocabulary, which they felt limited their ability to communicate as well as they would like in their college classes. Their struggles in these areas and their acute awareness of these struggles provides evidence that, as Harklau, Siegal, and Losey (1999) observed, Generation 1.5 students often enter the college classroom while they are still in the

process of learning English. I was fascinated with the fact that identification of these problem areas was almost universal among the participants. At first, I suspected that perhaps these flaws were criticisms that they had heard many times about themselves, but as I pressed them to give me examples and tell me what evidence they had that limitations in these areas existed, several of them were able to identify specific situations through which they had become aware of these perceived weaknesses for themselves. Most of the women who participated in this study voiced dissatisfaction with their English language ability—especially for the purposes of writing and participation in college. Since they were only doing journal writing for this study, I did not have the opportunity to directly observe their skills in the academic writing context. However, in the writing and speaking that they did for this study, I was able to identify specific surface error issues which seemed to be common across many of the different users. The women exhibited these deviations from Standard American English to greater and lesser degrees. In addition to those surface errors which had little impact on meaning or communication, the women themselves often voiced frustration with the limitations of their vocabulary, as well as their critical thinking skills, which they feel affects their ability to perform well in college classes. From my perspective, their spoken and written language forms were similar in these areas.

*Grammar examples.* As might be expected, many of the women revealed that they knew they had grammar problems because of all the red marks they got back on their writing assignments. With casual observation, one can easily identify occasional surface errors in the writing and speech of many of the women in this study. There did seem to be a pattern in the types of errors they made. The following are a few examples

of the types of non-standard language use patterns that were noted in the writing and speech of the women involved in this study. I have attempted to include examples from different participants in order to show that these language forms were not limited to one or two of them.

Here are some examples in which the women tended to regularize noun pluralizations and verb tenses which have irregular forms. The regularized forms have been italicized for ease of identification.

- I think he started to believe in that lie, and it *hurted*. (Emma, individual interview, April 11, 2010)
- We still *seeked* for a higher education. (Paj Chia, group discussion, April 11, 2010)
- I think the pastors, they see it and they appreciate the contribution the *womens* make (Hli Chia, group discussion, April 12, 2010)
- Cause we have 12 kids in our family, so me and Paj Chia were the middle *childs* (Chu Ka, group discussion, February 1, 2010)

There were also several kinds of errors associated with the use of non-count nouns, such as pluralizing the nouns and using the incorrect quantifiers and determiners.

- ...a lot of my professors are...telling us that they are going to be correcting our *grammars*, and everything. (Hli Chia, group discussion, January, 30, 2010)
- They don't want to take that position because they see *so many* drama that they don't want to be in charge of it. (Pajka, group discussion, April 12, 2010)
- And my oldest sister will call me, too, and just ask me for *advices*. (Pajka, individual interview, March 1, 2010)
- They were illiterate so they couldn't help us in our *schoolworks* (Hli Chia, group discussion, February 20, 2010)
- I have them proofread my *writings* (Bao Bai, individual interview, March 23, 2010)
- When I had used to put down Hmong as my first language, the school *staffs* would always ask what I'm mixed with (Meh, journal, February 22, 2010)
- You can have *as much* PhDs as you want and stuff and you can come back to your Hmong community or your tribe or your clan and they still don't value your voice cause you're a woman. (Nkauj Choua Shoua, group discussion, January 30, 2010)
- We're supposed to have *as much* kids as they have right now (Paj Chia, individual interview, May 4, 2010).

- This meant that they really didn't want to do homework unless they had to because they were able to do all *those* other stuff (Youa, group discussion, April 11, 2010).

Subject-verb agreement errors were also very common.

- My dad and my mom *was* just like, "Oh." (Emma, individual interview, March 15, 2010)
- Why *does* your parents want to be missionaries? (Emma, individual interview, March 15, 2010)
- Where I went to elementary school, there *wasn't* any Hmong girls except for one. (Kaying, group discussion, February 22, 2010)
- I am so glad that I'm bilingual because I love to help those Hmong families that *doesn't* speak English. It makes me happy knowing that I can be a middle man for those that *needs* translating (Chu Ka, journal, February 22, 2010)
- My mom and dad *does* not read or write English (Paj Chia, group discussion, February 20, 2010)
- There *are* a lot of jargon in the teaching field that you need to know and you need to be able to say it correctly (Youa, individual interview, March 21, 2010)
- When my parents realized how my sisters and I strive for higher education, my parents *wants* to support us more (Pajka, journal, April 12, 2010).

Lastly, a couple other language structure differences which are very prevalent but do not fall into one of the above categories are the use of *mines* as a possessive pronoun and the non-standard use of *too* and *both*, instead of *either*. Here are some examples of these structures:

- I can read *mines* (Hli Chia, group discussion, March 14, 2010)
- I think of putting someone's needs before *mines*. (Nkauj Choua Shoua, journal, March 14, 2010)
- I still feel insecure about my English and Hmong. I don't feel confident in *both* (Mai Mee, group discussion, February 22, 2010).
- They're not the best brothers, *too* (Nkauj Ntxawm, group discussion, April 11, 2010).
- My parents were not involved much in my educational process because of their lack of education. They supported me in my education but they weren't able to help me with schoolworks or the financial aid application... No one from my family went to the only musical plays that I have been in, *too* (Hli Chia, group discussion, March 14, 2010).

**Vocabulary examples.** Holten and Mikesell (2007) made the point in their study that although Generation 1.5 students have been exposed to academic vocabulary, they

have not mastered the use of that vocabulary. As mentioned in Chapter 2, in order to truly know a word, a person must know many related characteristics associated with that word, including the pronunciation and spelling of the word, the root form of the word as well as its possible variations, the sentence patterns that the word requires, and common collocations for the word (Laufer, 1997).

Many of the participants voiced a concern that their vocabulary was a significant limiting factor in their ability to use English effectively. It was a comment that I heard so many times that I began to feel as if it had acquired the status of a fable within their culture, so I tried probing them for specific reasons for their feelings of inadequacy or examples of words that they did not understand. The answers they gave revealed that they are keenly aware that their limited vocabulary has a significant impact on their writing and their confidence in being able to participate in class. Here are a few of the instances that I identified in which words were used in ways which varied slightly from the standard way of using them:

- They were very *objected*. (talking about her parent's reaction to her going away to college.) (Meh, group discussion, March 15, 2010)
- In high school, it felt like my writing skills went on a *recession* (Hli Chia, final questionnaire, May 2010)
- Well first I would research on what I was supposed to say, and so that I can like write down exactly what I was thinking about and go back to do the intro and then I switch things around to like have them *compartmentalize* with each other (Hli Chia, individual interview, May 5, 2010).
- I remember my mom would always *say* stories like when she was like 5 years old, she would be carrying a baby on her back (Pajka, group discussion, February 1, 2010).
- And he did not enroll into college because he said that he wanted to work to save money from McDonalds in order to get a car for when he does go to college. I was like, "No, that's just a *saying*." (Chu Ka, group discussion, February 1, 2010)
- I *frustrate* often at finding the right word (Chu Ka, individual interview, March 24, 2010)
- I'm glad I have this decision I can make instead of, you know, getting married young and then having kids already like a lot of my friends and they can't even go

to school if they want to, so I'm glad that I have this decision. Instead of being *indulgent* to my culture, and listening to my parents, getting married young, by now I would have like three kids already, so I'm happy at the point that I'm here (Paj Chia, individual interview, May 4, 2010).

- The Hmong language contain words that is difficult to find meaning in the English language and vice versa, so it becomes *contemplative* when one knows two languages because of the knowledge of both languages (Chu Ka, group discussion, Feb 22, 2010)
- Whatever she said was not *worthy* of anybody (Youa, group discussion, January 30, 2010)
- We still pursue our education and aim for higher goals, but we are still *engraved* to our families and the needs of them (Chu Ka, group discussion, April 12, 2010).

Here are several stories told by the women describing some of their vocabulary difficulties as evidence that they fall short in terms of their understanding of advanced vocabulary. Phoua, a second-year transfer student, shared about some specific words that she has had difficulty with recently.

People kept on talking about, "Stop procrastinating." And I was like, "What's procrastinating?" They're like, "That's when you do your homework the last minute." I was like, "Oh, OK. That's a new word I just added to my vocab." Then like I guess like perception and what's the other word...perception and what's, oh my gosh, I don't remember the other word, but... I can't remember that word, it was like similar to it, but it's...oh, perspective. I always have those two mixed up, but when I like read it in a sentence, I was like, "Oh, OK, it's not perspective, it's perception," so I have those two mixed up (individual interview, March 25, 2010).

Bao Bai, a first year college student, shared her experiences with vocabulary:

For English, I get embarrassed when I write any kind of paper for assignments, or even letters for my scholarships because my vocabulary is so little. Ever since I started Junior High when I had to start writing papers, my siblings were always telling me that my vocabulary was terrible. Everybody in my family reads except for me, and so they always tell me, "Bao Bai, you need better vocabulary" because I have them proofread my writings and like even when I speak, they wonder why I use such small words, and then they use big words, and I'm like, "What's that mean?" My whole life I've been afraid to ask them what words mean, but my senior year I was like, "You know what? I have a right to ask them," so just in the past year, when they use a word and I don't know what that means, I've been constantly asking them, and they're like, "Bao Bai, you need to read a dictionary." And I'm like, "I can't even read a book, so how do you expect me to read a dictionary?" I don't know how to improve because my favorite book

is still *Matilda* [a children's book by Roald Dahl] (group discussion, February 20, 2010; individual interview, March 23, 2010).

Nkauj Choua Shoua, who is studying to be a teacher, was graduating at the end of the semester in which this data was collected. She is quite outspoken and is a little older than the traditional college student. She is fairly satisfied with her vocabulary, but she did talk about how she and one of her Hmong roommates intentionally worked on increasing their vocabulary.

When I was in AP English, one of my professors--he was a professor, he taught at college level until he came to our school--always made a big deal about spelling tests. I didn't understand the importance of vocabulary until I was in his classroom. He always like made it such an important deal that we learn different words and actually learn the definitions to them, so I think that my vocabulary is OK, it could be better, but I think it has do a lot with your teachers and what they value when they teach you and if they place values on learning new words. Everyday [my previous roommate] has a dictionary word and she learns that word. I didn't know she does that until I lived with her. I was like, "What are you doing?" She was like "Want to hear my new word?" She uses an online dictionary, and it will pronounce [the word] for her, so it helps her learn. I think it is something we can do ourselves. I guess I was reading a dictionary for fun. I was like "Hey there's a lot of words here I don't know." Or a lot of different ways to say something. I tried over the summer too, so I learned some more like vocabs. I feel that my vocabulary will never compare to a native English speaker, but I think I am at college level (background questionnaire, January 2010; group discussion, February 20, 2010).

Mai Mee is also planning on pursuing her teaching credential. She is one of thirteen children, and her older sister, Pajka is also participating in this project. As Mai Mee talks about her limitations in vocabulary, she also describes her perceptions about flaws in her critical thinking ability.

I don't feel like I have a big enough vocabulary cause I guess just hearing other people talk with you, they use a lot of big words. Sometimes when people speak out in classes, like other students or my peers, there's some times I don't know what they mean because I've never heard [the words] before. Or like I've heard of it, but I don't remember the definition or what it actually means. For the critical thought, I just realize [my weakness] sitting in class and listening to how other students catch on like with just reading a book or something and just critical

thinking about it and disagreeing or agreeing with it, and why they disagree with it or why they agree with it. They understand what the author's trying to say. I can't grasp that as fast as they can. After they say what their thoughts are, then I would understand it, you know. I know when I read by myself, I understand what the author is trying to say but I don't really go to the point of what he or she is really saying. Sometimes I feel like maybe it's just how we were brought up like in a different culture where we weren't supposed to think critically on our own because a lot of us, our parents would say, "You know we're always right, and you have to listen," and we always listened to them. So when we're in class, we always just listen and we think that the answers are always correct because they know more than we do (individual interview, March 24, 2010).

Youa, a recent graduate who is also pursuing a career in education, is a little older than many of the other participants in this study, and we had many long discussions. She presents herself as a very professional and competent young woman, yet she voiced significant feelings of inadequacy with her vocabulary and communication abilities. Because she is quite articulate and self-analytical, I tried to push her to give me concrete reasons for why she believed that her vocabulary is not as good as others. She shows astute perception regarding the difficulties that she has in the use of certain vocabulary words and perhaps why she is hesitant to use some words or is unable to pull them out of her mental lexicon.

I know I don't have enough vocabulary because I don't have big words; I don't use big words. I'm very limited to just the everyday, the easiest way to say things, the easiest way to put down in words. I'm not articulate. I wish I can use bigger words in my everyday speaking and writing. When I'm just with friends and with people I'm comfortable with, I don't really care, but once you're in an interview, you start feeling like you don't have the right...you don't seem as smart or as higher upper class or whatever. If I'm not sure about something, I try not to write it. I change it to something more simple that I know is correct. That's my technique to making sure I don't try too hard and just make a fool out of myself too. Then in speaking sometimes, as I say in meetings, I try. If I want to use a word, and I think maybe that is the right word, I still won't use it because I'm not sure if it's correct because I feel not using it is better than using it incorrectly. You hear other people speak and you see the way they write, and I'm usually really good about understanding what they say. It's just that I don't have [the word] in my dictionary. I don't have it memorized or have it in my own personal dictionary to where I can just use it whenever I want. Now if I do see it,

I can use it, or if I have it in the back of my head at that very moment...you see, I think my vocabulary, the book in my mind...it's not big enough, where I'm not able to store the words that I would like to store so I don't remember them when I want to use them. And I think that maybe the words that I want to know, maybe the reason they're not in my dictionary is because I don't know all rules for using them, so then I feel insecure using them. Sometimes it gets frustrating when I know that I can't use the words. I can't use big words, or I can't use these words I want to use because I don't have it, and then that frustrates me. In [education] classes, we talk about how you want to teach your students the academic language, and I sometimes I feel like, "How am I going to be a teacher if I don't even know, if I don't use academic language as much as I should." I think I have to do a lot more reading because I feel like if you don't practice it...and with me being afraid of using words because I may not know them...I don't practice it, but I think if you read it enough in books or, then that, in a way, that's practicing and so when the time does come for you to use it... And I think that's the problem because I'm so afraid of using words, I don't use them anymore and when you don't practice them, you start forgetting, or you start losing them. I don't know. I just need to do more. I need to practice more academic language.

I honestly believe, I'm convinced, that if I was to take someone who's more native, their English is their first language, and if I was to be able to take out their dictionary from their heads and take mine out. I know for sure that I won't have as much as them. We [second language users] don't use the language as often. I mean, because you're [native English speakers] always speaking English, so yes, you're not using academic language, but yet you're still using proper English that makes you use certain words that for us, we would never really use because we never have to. Because at home, we don't need to and with our friends, we're already speaking street language anyway. And so I feel like, yes you don't have to purposely use academic language to really practice certain rules. For us, we don't practice it at all except for school, and at school, you don't speak that much either to your teachers. I mean, mainly you listen to what they say, or what they write (individual interview, March 21, 2010).

Many of the women involved in this study voiced frustrations with what they perceived to be inadequacies in their command of the English language, including Emma, who is a recent graduate of the university and is now in graduate school. She was one of the most outspoken about her dissatisfaction with her English ability, which was very surprising to me because I have known Emma for several years and have always perceived her to be especially articulate and analytical. Her written and verbal contributions pertaining to this study did nothing to change my opinion of her, yet she

often voiced disappointment and embarrassment surrounding her English ability. However, she shared at one point that one of her college professors had tried to recruit her to help other students to edit their papers to make them clearer and easier to understand. Although she did not feel like she had the time to take on that extra responsibility, she still views the fact that she was asked as a victory with her English language. Emma did not feel limited by her English ability prior to entering college, but when she became enrolled in college classes, she began to feel inadequate. She shares that she found a good friend with whom she could practice and discuss her questions about vocabulary or complicated concepts.

At first it was definitely different because the majority of the students were white, unlike the public schools that I went to. This made it a struggle because I was really intimidated and felt strange being the only Hmong student (or minority) in the class—I'm not sure where it came from but I didn't feel adequate as a college student because it seemed like everyone had an understanding of the concepts and I felt so far behind. It was mostly because everybody always had something to say. They always were raising their hands, giving input, and I was like, "Really? I've never even heard about this until now," or like I wouldn't just raise my hand and tell something that was fake because I don't know the experience, especially with a lot of Bible stuff. In some other classes also I just kind of sat there. Like, "I don't have a clue what they're talking about." It was hard to relate, and I think just because everyone else had something to say, or when we did get into groups, everyone had input, or they would know the answers and then when they said it, it was right, and I was like, "Oh my gosh, that would never even have crossed my mind." And so that's what I mean when I say that. [My good friend] helped me to overcome this fear a bit. She would let me use words that I was learning and help to correct me if I wasn't using them in the right context or form. She also helped me to see that if I didn't understand, it was likely that someone else probably didn't either so I wouldn't only be helping myself but someone else as well. [My friend] helped me to see the good in what I saw as an unfortunate disability. I eventually have found it a little less intimidating to ask for help when something doesn't make sense to me, even if it seems to make sense to everyone else. This is a bit harder to do in class but when I'm having smaller conversations with people, this makes it easier. In hindsight, I see how far I've come, and despite feeling like I was not capable of doing the work for my classes, I received good grades and passed my classes (journal, February 2010; journal, March, 2010; individual interview, March 24, 2010).

Chu Ka, a sophomore who plans to be a teacher, shared specific examples of how her limited vocabulary slows down her study and deters her from participating fully in class.

When I was in grade school, I thought I was doing OK with my English. I thought I was pretty good. I think once I started hitting middle and high school, I'd be getting only C's on my essays. I was like, "I don't know what's wrong. Is it my vocabulary?" I started doubting my writing and then like I've always gotten like C's or B's on my writings, so that made me think that maybe I should work on my vocabulary because when I read other students' work, I go, "Oh, OK, that's why they get A's because it has like a good vocabulary in there." Yeah, so we're given assignments like by you or by other professors, and we have to do like a journal on it, and I want to understand it. I'm not understanding any of it because of the big words, then I would have a dictionary on the side and just type it up and then, "Oh, that's what it means." Next word in my reading. Look up another word. That's how I would understand. Like recently, like yesterday, I just learned what impoverished means. Yeah, cause I looked it up. I was like, "What does destitute mean?" I looked it up, and I was like, "OK, what does impoverished mean?" I just looked it up. I just had to read it for an article. But then they would all go away. Like there are so many words that I don't know. Maybe because like there was no one to talk to, to expand your knowledge, like upon learning new ways to write and new vocabulary, you know. But I felt like even if I took those and used it, there were still some things that you had to do outside of class. Of course, like reading. I don't like reading. Like I don't read for pleasure; I read for class. So like, yeah, I think I just didn't know what to do. I'm passive [in class]. Probably I feel like someone probably has a smarter answer anyways, so I will just let them say it, which eventually they do. Like especially in like the conversational classes, like the interacting classes, such as like our Bible classes, like sometimes you want to say something, but like, you know, our vocabulary only goes so far as to what we know and then like another person raises her hand and be like, "Oh, da da da da da." That's just like, "Oh, OK, see, that's why I don't raise my hand." I mean if people really point me out and just ask me, then I'll say what I know, but I don't sound as smart because they use big words (group discussion, February 22, 2010; individual interview, March 24, 2010).

Chu Ka's sister, Paj Chia, graduated in the semester just prior to when this research was performed. She is currently employed in a job in which formal usage of the English language is important, and her use of language is, in fact, noticed and evaluated by her co-workers and supervisors. Even though she is no longer in school, she continues

to feel like her English language ability limits and defines her. After she voiced some dissatisfaction with her vocabulary, I probed her for specific information on why she feels that her vocabulary is inadequate.

Like after the Bachelor's degree and then now working where I work now, working with writing papers and actually editing the lawyer. I feel like I should have better [English]. I feel like I haven't been trained enough or haven't been educated enough or even here sometimes the teachers are so lenient and they don't...They go "work on your grammar," and that's it. You know and it's like, "Okay, um, how?" It doesn't really affect your grades so you're like "Well, I can fly with this." But now it's my job and people view you as, "OK she speaks another language." And now it really matters. I think it's a big deal.

People use words that I don't know. I guess like when I write, I write more simple. I should write it in a more complex way or use a broader vocabulary, but then I don't. It doesn't come naturally. I have to try to use bigger words, or I feel like, for example, at work, when my co-workers write sentences, I can totally tell the difference of when I write it and if they write it. They use words that I wouldn't think of, but I know they're there. I just don't use it. It sounds better or more professional, but it doesn't come to me right away and I want it to just come to me naturally like that. Like, today, my computer crashed, and [my co-worker] just took over and wrote in a way that used words that I knew were there but I just didn't use. Like *compel*, or you know, just words like that. Even at work right now when I do stuff. I do dictations and everything for the lawyer and I give it back to [my supervisor] to review or something and she'll just say, "Hmmm," and she'll just find something wrong with it, you know. And I'm like, for once, why couldn't it just be perfect, you know. There's like one word in there that's like missing, or I don't know, not the right tense.

I always have trouble with the tenses. And then of course, I always want a broader vocabulary but I think as much as you study, I don't know how broad it could be. Ever. In high school, when I would take AP English, every week we would have huge words or bigger words so that we will know what they mean. I remember my teacher always made us use vocabulary in a sentence, and she'll give us points if we use it in class. It's like you did it because you have to, but then the words go away. Now, if I come across a word I didn't understand, I would probably look it up (group discussion, January 30, 2010; individual interview, March 24, 2010).

Highlighting the in-between status of the Generation 1.5 women, Chu Ka also shares that she experiences similar problems in the Hmong language, even though she

considers herself quite fluent in Hmong and others in the group have the same opinion of her.

Even I, myself, struggle at certain points in my speeches to find the right word, or just to find a word for the meaning. I'm proud of myself for being able to speak Hmong fluently and knowing the basics. One thing that affected me most was that my parents spoke only in Hmong, so to be able to communicate, I had to speak Hmong and that helped develop my Hmong. For all my speeches, either in Hmong or English, I always perform or do better when it's written down. Most of the time, I think it's smart if I use big words, but I don't know any big words. Same goes for the Hmong language, I know the basics and everything, but to find the big words is difficult (group discussion, Feb 22, 2010).

Several other participants also voiced that not only do they believe that their English vocabulary is lacking, but their ability to communicate in Hmong is also limited by their Hmong vocabulary. For example, there is sense that deep communication between children and their parents is hampered by the participants' level of ability in communicating in Hmong. This story also demonstrates the fact that these women feel that they are continuously in a process of learning both of their languages. Nkauj Choua Shoua is unique in that she describes her father as being very anxious for their family to assimilate into the mainstream culture; therefore, they do not speak a lot of Hmong in their home except with their mother, who does not speak English well.

When me and mom get into a fight and I want to make sure she knows what I'm trying to say, I'll speak in Hmong. Cause she doesn't get the same feeling when I speak to her in English. I switch over to Hmong and make sure that she gets what I'm trying to say, cause when you speak English to [your parents], it doesn't have the same feelings, cause there's some Hmong words that if you say them, it just hurts. But you have to have a good enough vocabulary to say what you need to say. I learned some new Hmong words this semester. I'm like, "Wow, man, I didn't know that!" cause my vocabulary in Hmong is not really that big. I have like elementary level vocabulary, and [my friend] was teaching me some new words. I'm like, "What, I never heard of that word before. What does that mean?" And she'll tell me, like there's so many different ways to express like heartache in Hmong, and man when you say it, you can just feel it. Like if our parents really speak Hmong to us, like how their native tongue is, they express a

lot more things, more elaborately than we could ever do. (group discussion, January 30, 2010)

I was surprised to find out that even some of the journal prompts that I provided offered some challenging vocabulary. I began one of my prompts with the following:

“Many first generation Hmong immigrants view higher education with ambivalence...”

In response to this prompt, in a group discussion, Emma made the following statement: “I had to look [it] up in the dictionary. Ambivalence? I never used that!” (group discussion, April 11, 2010) On the final questionnaire, I asked, “Were your parents more disposed to allow you to go away to school at Simpson because of its Christian-based status?” The following response comes from Kaying, who is a freshman pre-nursing major. She is the sixth of eight children and has two older sisters who have graduated from college.

To be honest with you, I tried to look up what the word *disposed* means and I don't really know what it means still, it's either agreed to let me come to Northern California Christian because of the Christian-based status or disagreed because of something else. But if it is agree, then yes, I think so because since [it] is so expensive, my parents don't want me to go into debt when I get out of college. They were about to not let me come [here] but because my dad's faith was really strong in God [they let me come] (final questionnaire, April 25, 2010).

At the macro side of the micro-macro continuum, it is interesting to note how the Hmong women use their two languages. For many of them, English is used primarily for school or jobs, and Hmong is used for home, church, and socializing with each other. However, their Hmong usage with each other is not always without frustration and contention. Later stories will demonstrate that those who do not speak Hmong well are often looked down upon. Since Hmong is the primary language spoken in most of their homes, few of the women spoke English when they started their educations in kindergarten or preschool. The Hmong people within the United States tend to migrate to certain geographical areas within the country and live in tightly knit social groups within

those communities; therefore, most of these women attended schools with a significant population of Hmong students. Thus, they formed friendships with other Hmong and used Hmong or “Hmonglish” when they socialized outside the classroom. Nkauj Ntxawm was one notable exception to this pattern since she attended a school where there was only one other Hmong family, and she was primarily raised by her two older sisters who graduated from college in the United States and are quite fluent in English. Church, which is a major social structure in the lives of Christian Hmong, is also largely conducted in the Hmong language, although several of the women shared that conflicts are arising in the church as the younger generation is beginning to favor the use of English, which is being resisted by the elders of the communities. (For the Hmong, the term “elder” is not a religious designation; instead, it refers simply to anyone who is older than oneself.)

Another interesting aspect of friendship socialization was demonstrated in cases where young girls were drawn into friendships with non-Hmong classmates; they were strongly discouraged from these friendships by the Hmong community, with the resulting outcome, as noted above, of further limitation of their use of English to only classroom situations. The first story is told by Kaying.

Where I went to elementary school, there wasn't any Hmong girls except for one other one, but then at that time, I didn't really like hanging out with her. There was a Mexican girl and black girl, and we were best friends. We were so small and we didn't care about each other's race. I remember they talked about Spice Girls and I had no idea who they were and just went along with it. I was just going along with whatever they were saying, even though I didn't know what they were saying. But I do remember us three...we were really mean to this other Mexican girl cause we were like kind of bullying her. I don't know why, but we were really mean. We were friends for like two years—first and second grade. My sister—she was like 2 years older than me and she still went to the same elementary as I did—so her and her friends kept telling me, “Why are you hanging out with other people and they're not even Hmong,” and so they were

pressuring me to not hang out with them. So I kind of stayed away from them after that; then them two went to their race too. I guess that we were small and we didn't care about race and then we grew up and we just split into our own race (group conversation, February 22, 2010; individual interview, March 23, 2010).

The next story is told by Hli Chia. Hli Chia is a graduating senior and is planning to become a Christian missionary in another country. An interesting aspect of this story is that she is now challenging the pressure from her Hmong friends that she acquiesced to when she was younger.

I remember one of my first friendships with a non-Hmong girl. She's Caucasian. We really got along together, even though like her English was so much better than mine. But I remember this one time I was saving her a spot in line and my Hmong friends behind me just said, "Don't save a spot for her; she's American; don't save a spot for her." And I don't know why, but I listened to them. I felt so convicted that I'm hanging out with other people, and so when she came back, I told her, "I'm sorry, I didn't save you a spot," and so she got mad at me and she left and she wasn't my friend until like a year later. We started talking again. That was like one of my first [non-Hmong] friends. It's the tension between the Hmong people looking down on you and your English not being good enough to fit in the other side. But this last semester, I've been hanging out away from the Hmong students, and I'm learning more. Like in a different conversation; it's different and I'm exposed to different subjects that the Hmong students would never talk about. So I think it's actually helping me socially. I had a lot of classes with [three male Hmong friends]. But I kept away from them, like when [the teacher] says, "OK. Get in a group of four," I think they might have expected us to come together, but I just hung out with girls, so they would feel like "She wants to be with the girls," but I try to stay away from that and I don't know if I made them feel like I've neglected them, but oh well, I want to learn from a different group of people (individual interview, May 5, 2010).

In the classroom, the use of English was further limited by the fact that the Hmong women seldom participated in classrooms discussions, so their opportunities to practice the language that they were learning and to get feedback on their usage was limited. A couple of the women even shared that for a time in their secondary educations, they almost did not speak at all. Kaying and Meh both attribute some of their perceived difficulties with language to periods of silence during their educational

experiences. Each attributed her silence to different social reasons; however, each one also refers to a belief that her silence contributed to her lack of confidence in her English vocabulary.

Kaying shared that when she was in elementary school, she was outgoing and confident and did not have the sense that she was limited by her English ability. She shares that her sense of inadequacy, in terms of language, came in secondary school. From her description, it is clear that she believes that her vocabulary limitations either stemmed from or caused her to be silenced in classroom situations. From my perspective as a language teacher, periods of silence as Kaying describes, limit a student's involvement with the language and therefore limit the development of confidence and proficiency.

I was really loud in elementary, but ever since I hit middle school, I became really quiet because in my middle school I was the only Hmong girl in there so there wasn't any other Hmong girls. So I was really quiet, but I guess that's when I lost my speaking ability to speak to people loud and confidently. It's like you have the saying like if you don't use it then you kinda lose your vocab. Throughout high school whenever I go to class, I never spoke unless they spoke to me, so I think that's how I lost my vocabulary. Because that's what I do every day. Go to school, like from 8-3, then just sit and don't say anything. The teacher will ask the question, and you will know the answer to it, but then you won't answer because you might think that it will be wrong or something. I don't know how I got that way. When you give the wrong answer, you feel like everyone's looking at you and they're saying, "Oh my god, that girl got the wrong answer," so that's how I felt like. Maybe, I think like I'm not as smart to answer the questions or like when we're in class, I can't, for example, raise my hand to read, even though I really want to, because maybe I might pronounce something wrong, you know, or like say something that is so weird, cause I do have some times where I stumble on words that are really easy and so I don't like that. And then, whenever I talk, I always have to repeat it a lot of times because I don't have like a really loud voice. I think I do, but then people say I don't talk loud so I guess that's why [I don't want to talk]. And then when I talk to my friends, I would just speak how we speak, like joke with each other. And they're like the same as me too, so I guess it's like, we're just rubbing off each other; we're not learning different vocabs or anything, so I guess that's how I lose my vocabs. (group discussion, Feb 22, 2010; individual interview, March 23, 2010)

Meh, who was also in her first year of college at the time of this research, shared a story about silence as well. She gives several reasons for her silence which are unrelated to language itself, such as losing friendships, working many hours at a job, and becoming more serious about her studies. However, she also believes that her period of silence contributed to her perception that she has English vocabulary limitations. It seems reasonable that her limited participation in these two vital years prior to entering college may be a viable contributing factor in her claimed difficulties with vocabulary in college.

[I stopped talking] towards the end of my junior all the way through my senior year. I mean for me in school I'm always the one that like talks a lot and I'm a person that likes to talk to teachers, but ever since I stopped talking, I just didn't talk anymore. I didn't find a reason to talk anymore. My normal friends were not there anymore. They all graduated. I would lose those friends that I was close to, so in high school when I got to my junior year, I became very unsocial because my senior or my junior friends were not there anymore, and I started working. So I became very unsocial and that's when I just start speaking to myself inside my head. I didn't talk at home anymore. I didn't talk at all. Except for when I worked, but then at work, I worked at Taco Bell. Like, "Salad, no salad? Beef? Cheese? What you like?" And like cause they're all Spanish speakers they don't really understand me and like I'm always the one who like has to answer the phone calls, but it's not like I really talked to customers a lot. I'm just like, "Oh, what do you want? A chalupa? A soft taco?" That's all I ever said, and you know there is no syntax in that. I don't even see grammar anymore and like in high school because I didn't talk a lot, my writing is the only thing that kept me going, even though it sucked. All I know is that I'm not the same. But like now that I'm starting to communicate more, like I realize I'm losing my past and present tense verbs. I mean, my roommates know because I'm always using the wrong words because now that I'm starting to talk again, it's just different. I don't know how to explain it, but if you were me and you didn't speak for like 3 whole years. I mean you did speak but you barely spoke for two years. And then like I forget how to say some words and cause now that I'm starting to speak again like I'm starting to talk more again, I don't feel like I'm able to talk anymore. Lately I've been catching myself saying the wrong word or misusing the wrong word. (group discussion, February 22, 2010; individual interview, March 22, 2010)

Meh's story is also interesting because she shows an astute awareness of the metalanguage associated with linguistic understanding and an ability to analyze her own use of syntax, grammar, and tenses.

The vocabulary and grammar discussion provided in this section demonstrates that the language concerns of these Hmong women themselves often appear to address the micro end of the continuum. Mostly like, these are the types of language structures by which they are judged by their peers and teachers, thus causing their increased awareness of this end of the continuum. However, although these are the issues that they raised about specific language structure problems, other discussions will establish that they also experience difficulties at the macro end of the continuum, including their social interactions with co-workers, classmates and teachers.

**The oral-literate continuum.** Research has shown that use of the written word in one language reinforces its use in a second language. Despite the fact that some Hmong parents are able to read and write in Hmong; there is little use of written language in their homes and communities. Four of the women described their mothers as being unable to read or write in Hmong; fathers generally were described as having higher written and oral skills in both English and Hmong, although a couple of the women felt that their mothers may have better English skills than their fathers due to arrival in the States at an earlier age or higher exposure to the English language through their job situations. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the Hmong language essentially had no written form until the 1950s. Among the Christians, the use of the Bible and written hymns are the primary uses of the written language. The singing of hymns and worship songs is often the first exposure that some of the younger people have to the written

Hmong language. The women in this study seemed unaware of any other use of written Hmong within their households and stated that they had rarely seen any written literature in Hmong, aside from the church sources. The use of reading and writing was essentially non-existent in most of their homes and families except for schoolwork done in English. Conversely, much of their exposure to English is based on written work. Much listening takes place but not much speaking and interaction in the educational context. In the usage patterns of these Hmong women, Hmong and English seem to occupy nearly opposite ends of the oral-literate continuum.

Some of the participants had parents who were young enough to have attended secondary school in the United States after arriving from Southeast Asia. However, even those parents were described as having strong accents and still preferred to communicate in Hmong. Essentially none of the parents had adopted English as a primary means of communication. Prior to entering school, most of the women expressed that they had minimal exposure to the written word. Here are several brief descriptions provided by some of the women as they recollected the literacy practices in their home related to written language.

Meh talks about trying to learn to read and write in Hmong.

About Hmong, I only learned slowly through the songbooks written in Hmong we had to sing for church. My dad attempted to teach me and my siblings how to read and write in Hmong but he worked then, mostly nightshifts, and was always tired. My mom only knew how to read in Hmong but she didn't really know how to write, mostly because of the endings to our words (i.e. pab (help) different in tone with paj (rose)). (journal, February 20, 2010)

Bao Bai talks about the influence that the Christian forms of written language had on her ability to learn to read and write in Hmong.

We all spent about 1-2 hours every night singing songs and reading the Bible. Of course, we were young and my parents didn't go to much school, so we started off singing the Hmong songs that my parents learned/memorized in their youth. That's how I kept up with my Hmong. My mom was the talker of my parents so she always reminded us that we needed to know how to speak both languages! I think she said that exact phrase each night. But I am very thankful for the night Bible studies with my whole family because when I got older, 6, we had the Hmong song books, and the Hmong Bibles which we read from. This is where I learned to read and write (journal, February 20, 2010).

Hli Chia describes the strong oral tradition in her home that supplanted the use of written language.

The way my parents imposed their values on us was through telling us stories. They told us many Hmong legendary/myths stories. They also told us stories of their lives in Laos and the journey of their grandparents who came from China. It was through these stories that rooted me deeply in my understanding and interest in Hmong values. I am glad that my mom is open to sharing with us her knowledge of the Hmong culture. She would answer every curious question my siblings and I have about are genealogy and Hmong history. I loved hearing stories especially from older Hmong adults. I remember sitting at my mom's feet while all my aunts and uncles held family meetings and recalled stories of crossing from Laos to America (journal, February 20, 2010).

Pajka also relates that her family has a very strong bent toward oral rather than written use of language.

As I look back into my home environment as I was growing up I don't remember anything related to reading or writing. My parents usually did not encourage reading or writing because they always preferred speaking in Hmong. When I was in elementary my parents did not have the ability to help me as a student to write or read. They had always asked me to finish my homework but never asked me to go pick up a book to read. When I was 5 years old I remember my mother teaching me how to make chili pepper sauce and the way to teach was by your oral demonstration. For there on I learned a lot of my cooking skills from oral demonstration. It was never put on a written paper, but always orally (journal, March 1, 2010).

Although Nkauj Choua Shoua shares in the following story that she did not read much when she was younger, at a later point in our discussions, it was obvious that since coming to college, she has become an avid reader and loves to collect and read novels.

Reading wise, I never read much growing up. The only thing I remember reading was Reader's Digest and the comic section of the newspaper. My older sisters didn't read to me either because there wasn't a huge age gap between us. We all were around the same age so we couldn't really help each other (journal, February 20, 2010).

Nkauj Ntxawm describes a very different experience from many of the other women in the study.

Thinking back on the kinds of activities related to reading and writing, I remember during the summers of my elementary days, my dad would make me practice my writing. He wanted me to have good penmanship, so he would give me a book to simply copy out what was written in the books onto paper. I would write what I read in the book during the day and then showed it to my dad when he got home from work. With my siblings, I remember [my oldest sister], would always read to me in bed before I went to sleep. We always bought a lot of books and checked out a lot through the library. I would always bring it home and she would read to me and I also learned to read to her. With both situations, I used English books, my dad made me use English books to practice my writing and my sister Pang often read to me only English worded books (journal, February 20, 2010).

Finally, Youa talks about the factors in her development of a love for reading, which she saw modeled in her home by her sister-in-law. In addition, she was encouraged by the librarian when she worked as an aide in the school library.

Thinking back to my home environment as I was growing up, I do not remember being encouraged to read or write much. No one read to me. My mom teaches us what she felt was important by lecturing us whenever she had a chance to. Her lectures ranged from short quick statements to long tearful dreams for our futures. Because she was not educated, that was all she could do for us. She cooked for us, and lectured us. I never minded it. I believe that it is because of her lectures that I am where I am today. I do remember during the summers, my sister-in-law would take my brothers and I to the public library. She enrolled us into the summer reading program to encourage us to read. I remember that I enjoyed the program a great deal. I liked to read. It was when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade that I started becoming interested in really reading for myself. I remember seeing my sister-in-

law always reading romance novels. She would talk to me about what her current novel is about. I saw from our conversations how much she enjoyed her books. This observation made me also want to be excited about reading. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade I was put in the library as an aide. I decided that if I was going to discover what reading was about, this was my time to start. I asked the librarian to suggest a book for me. She grabbed a book and handed it to me saying that I should start with that one. Because there was a stain from a water spill on most of the pages, she said she was going to throw it out, but now, she'd rather give it to me. This book changed me. It was by Lurlene McDaniel called "Angels Watching Over Me." I remember that I took it home but did not pick it up right away. It took about two or three weeks before I finally decided to see what it was about. One Saturday afternoon, I hesitantly opened the book up and surprisingly, did not close it until it was done. With tears in my eyes, I was really happy. The book was so refreshing and I was so proud of myself for spending my afternoon reading and enjoyed it greatly. After this day, for the next few years, I would read whenever I had free time. I also remember me feeling sad because I did not have a quiet place to read. I had a big family, all living under one 3 bedroom home. When I wanted quiet time, I would lock myself in the restroom. The restroom became my library for those few years of my life. (journal, February 20, 2010).

These stories establish the limited use of literacy in Hmong homes and the preference for oral communication, which place the biliterate context of language usage of the Hmong once again at the traditionally less powerful oral end of the oral-literate continuum.

**The bilingual-monolingual continuum.** The language situation for the Hmong is difficult to describe on this continuum. In many ways, the Hmong move back and forth between two monolingual worlds, although there is significant variation in the amount of Hmong that they choose to use when given an option. The educational community and the community outside their homes are primarily English-speaking. Within their homes, both Hmong and English are used, but English is generally used sparingly. When the young people are communicating with each other, they often code-mix the languages and use the words that most vividly express their intended meaning. The monolingual end of this continuum is considered the more powerful end by Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester

(2003); however the Hmong in the United States fall much closer to the bilingual end.

The first part of this section contains a couple stories about situations in which bilingual ability is used to its advantage in hiding information from non-Hmong speaking people.

These stories are followed by several descriptions of situations pertaining to Hmong people are not able to use Hmong very fluently.

Youa shared a very amusing anecdote about her young nieces' perceptions of the use of the Hmong language. Several other of the women agreed that they often use Hmong as a way of communicating about the non-Hmong people around them.

There is a situation that I can say I only use Hmong. It may sound bad, but when I am at the store with my husband or with a friend or family member that I trust, I use the Hmong language when we need to say something about someone and we do not want anyone to hear or understand. I feel bad saying this but it is the absolute truth. I remember one time when I was at the store with my little nieces. There was a lady who happened to do something (I forget what), and one of my nieces said out loud, "Aunty, did you see that lady do (whatever it is that she did)?" I felt so embarrassed. My other nieces laughed and shushed her in Hmong saying, "Don't say that in English. This is why we know Hmong, to use it when you want to say something mean like that." This is true. I find it nice to be able to speak Hmong to not hurt other people's feelings (journal, February 20, 2010).

Meh gives another example of using Hmong to hide information from the English-speaking world around her.

It's funny too. I think once in a while when I guess you just need to like say it at the moment if somebody is like being rude or somebody smells, you just have to let it out. I mean, and it's not really bad. It just comes naturally sometimes, but I'm like, like me and Mai Mee, if we were like walking, and somebody was to smell, we'll say in Hmong "Dang, that person smells" but then we don't want to be rude, so it's something to lighten the mood at the moment. Like sometimes, my sister and I were like trying out clothes at the store or something, and I'll be like, "You're showing too much cleavage." I'll say that in English, and she'll be so mad. So she's like all "Why couldn't you say that in Hmong, so it won't be so embarrassing?" (individual interview, March 22, 2010).

Bao Bai was the most vocally passionate about her love for the Hmong language.

I personally, love my Hmong. I wouldn't mind if I only knew Hmong, but English has been handy. I like to speak Hmong to my parents or anyone that seems to be older than me. This age range starts at 25. I guess you could say that my parents also taught me to respect my elders, and so speaking in Hmong to my considered Hmong elders is important to me (even on the phone). I almost prefer Hmong at school over English. If I didn't want to fail, I would even speak Hmong to my teachers. I remember one of my friends telling me how funny I was because no matter how much English they were speaking, I kept answering in Hmong.

When I go to a Hmong church, I like to keep my language to Hmong if at all possible, when there are Hmong guests in the house, or when I have to speak in front of a lot of Hmong people. Sometimes, for youth gatherings, I like to speak in Hmong so my youth members also hear it too. Honestly, I would never prefer English, but it is necessary to live in America. If my Hmong friends don't tell me that they don't like when I speak in Hmong, I would limit my English instantly. But coming here to Simpson, I have learned that there are people who can't speak Hmong. Of course I don't judge them, but I want to help them gradually pick it back up, if they also want to and try to. So, being here with Hmong friends who don't really speak Hmong is a challenge to balance an equal amount of English and Hmong.

I am very proud to use Hmong when I am with a lot of Hmong elders and when I meet relatives because usually my relatives prefer Hmong. But I am very proud that I know English also because I would not be able to get anywhere if I didn't know English! The most important time that I used English was when I was traveling alone for the first time here to California. I needed to be able to comprehend what the airline workers were saying, to understand what I was reading, making sure that I was getting on the right plane, and able to ask questions when I needed help.

I do get embarrassed when I can't use proper Hmong or don't know all of the Hmong words when I speak to the elders. I also get embarrassed when I can't spell every word also. For English, I get embarrassed when I write any kind of paper for assignments, or even letters for my scholarships because my vocabulary is so little. Other than that, I don't have any difficulty with my languages.

My languages are very valuable to me. Even though, it is embarrassing when I don't know everything about these two languages, knowing what I already do works well for me. I like to keep my Hmong identity by speaking as much Hmong as I can and when I can. At school, I try to keep my English as sophisticated as I can. For my church at home, I like to keep it as Hmong as possible because even though my youth members can speak English, I know they don't speak enough [Hmong]. Usually the jobs that I have been working at are all American owned,

so I have to keep up with my communicating skills and to be able to expand my vocabulary a little for the people around me (journal, February 20, 2010).

It is no surprise that language is a source of struggle and conflict for this population. They experience conflict with language in many areas of their lives. They experience conflict in their Hmong world as well as in their English-speaking world. They do not speak Hmong well enough to meet the expectations of their elders; likewise, they feel that they do not use English at a high enough level to meet their educational goals. If they are not good at speaking Hmong, they are derided by their Hmong friends and family. If they are not good at English, they struggle in their educational endeavors. Many seem to indicate that no matter how hard they try, they cannot achieve the proficiency that they would like to achieve in either language.

Some of the women expressed a sense of loss over not being able to speak Hmong well themselves or their observations that many of the younger generation are not showing an interest in maintaining their ability to speak Hmong. Nkauj Ntxawm was the youngest of five children and describes that she was essentially raised by her older sisters (who are sixteen and nineteen years older than she), both of whom have college degrees and careers. Her sisters primarily spoke to her in English. In addition, she lived in a community in which hers was one of only two Hmong families in the school district. Her primary contact with Hmong people was through her church, but in her church, the young people spoke mostly English. However, she states that she has been told that she was able to speak Hmong when she was a young child. During one of my individual interviews with Nkauj Ntxawm, she tearfully shared an experience she had on campus during which she felt made fun of by other Hmong students because of her limited Hmong language ability. Nkauj Ntxawm has experienced some painful adjustments

moving from a situation in which she had limited contact with Hmong people in her daily life to the situation at California Christian University where there is a large Hmong population.

There has been a lot of comments from people saying that I don't speak a lot of Hmong and so it kind of pushes me down. It is hard to try to talk in Hmong, and then sometimes they'll make little comments like, "What were you trying to say?" or "That didn't sound right." So there was this incident last semester. We were at dinner and then there was a bunch of Hmong guys, and they kept talking to me in Hmong. I was like, "Why aren't you guys asking [Nkauj Choua Shoua]? And then they're like, "Well, we want to talk to you." I'm like, "Are you trying to make fun of me? And then they were like, "No, we're not, we're just trying to communicate with you in Hmong." And just the way they said it, I knew that they were insulting the way that I couldn't understand them and it was frustrating because they'd done that before. So I just left and I called my sister and I told her and she just said "It's OK, they're just from different families and they were raised differently." I think we're all OK, but I think they know not to try to talk to me in Hmong, so some days I just try to not have a long conversation with them, so I don't get stuck. But there has been some times with the girls here, too. It's kind of hard because like I like to try to at least talk in Hmong and sometimes the girls are like, "Oh, you have to talk in English around her," and that kind of makes me mad too because it's like, well, they can talk in Hmong, but they need to at least understand that I will understand a little bit of it, but I won't understand all of it. But they don't have to change their conversation just to make me understand or like to make me feel like I'm dumb for some things I don't understand. I'm not ashamed of being Hmong and then somebody said, "I think she knows how to talk Hmong; she's just ashamed or embarrassed of it." Those kind of comments are not very helpful. It's like if they really cared about it, they would be considerate, but a lot of times it's very disrespectful the way they've acted towards me. (individual interview, March 19)

The following short comment related by Meh about another friend in the university is an additional example of how those who can speak Hmong view those who are not so fluent.

Like, their family, they don't speak a lot of Hmong because they went to school all their life with just American kids and never really with Hmong kids. The only Hmong people they hang out with is the church kids, the Hmong church that we go to. But even there, we speak English still and yeah, she has a very strong accent when she speaks Hmong. She sounds like a little kid, not to be like offensive or anything. It's just really funny when I hear her speak in Hmong, like I laugh, too (individual interview, March 22, 2010).

Bao Bai, once again passionate about the Hmong language, also voiced sorrow over Hmong people who do not speak Hmong well.

When I see Hmong people who don't speak Hmong very well, I'm very sad. I'm sad right now because my Hmong is slowly deteriorating. When I went home for Christmas, it was so hard to speak Hmong. But when I came here, I found out that some people get offended, when I speak Hmong to them. I'm afraid to speak it, just to certain people, like [Josh], I know he speaks it. [Melissa] likes to speak Hmong. [Leslie] likes Hmong, too, but like [Jen], her Hmong's not that good, so I'm really afraid to speak Hmong [to her]. I was told they get offended when I try to be all Hmong. Some people get offended when you enforce Hmong culture onto them, but you just do it naturally, because you think she's Hmong. I would like to speak [Hmong] with them because that's the only way that you'll learn it because they say they don't speak it because they don't know how. I'm just kind of afraid of those people. I don't say I shouldn't speak Hmong, but I'll speak and then I'll be like, "Oh, I know that she doesn't like that," but I don't look down on anybody (individual interview, March 23, 2010).

Another topic of discussion which demonstrates that the Hmong fall toward the bilingual end of the continuum is their experiences with ESL programs, into which they are placed largely as a factor of having a first language other than English. ESL intervention often results in further distancing of the minority group from the general school population. When students are taken out of mainstream classrooms and put into an ESL class for a period of time during the school day, several things happen. First, they often once again become isolated with their friends with whom they are more likely to speak Hmong. Secondly, by their own descriptions, as will be evident from the stories below, they are being taught information they already know. Thirdly, they are missing valuable content and vocabulary in their mainstream classroom.

The women varied in their exposure to specialized ESL instruction. Some had little or none, and others had extensive experience with ESL classes. Of those who did have ESL intervention, most did not see much value in it. Those who did value the experience valued it more for the interactions with teachers and other students rather than

anything that they learned. Many saw it as an impediment to their educations and something to be avoided as much as possible. It had a very strong negative stigma attached to it. From my perspective as a language educator, these students were often pulled out of class for instruction that was not of significant benefit to them, and they missed out on instruction that might have helped further their involvement with English academic language and conversation. In one case, ESL students were actually subjected to physical harm. One of the women also talked about the fact that some students in her school viewed their ESL classes as a break from the more rigorous requirements of other English classes and took advantage of them. In addition, students who were pulled out for ESL classes were further stigmatized and othered in the eyes of the other students in their classes. Of note, three of the women, Nkauj Ntxawm, Emma, and Bao Bai did not recall receiving any ESL intervention.

Meh shared the following stories which highlight examples of programs that were not providing the appropriate level of instruction and perhaps were even providing services to a student who did not have a need for ESL intervention at all.

I know I was in ESL in kindergarten. Then for first grade I moved to another state and was in ESL for the first couple months. I didn't really know what ESL was, but some time during the week, you go and they teach you how to read. I thought I was special because I was going to this program. I was chosen out of the many who were left behind in class. I received cassettes that went with short story books. I always went home and read out loud with the cassette playing. My grandma thought I was so good. I really loved to read and I already knew how to read, but for some reason, the first time I went there, the lady told me to read slowly. So even though I could read faster, I read slowly. I'll give you an example. This is how they wanted me to read: The-e-e b-a-a-at i-i-i-s bla-a-a-ack. The-e-e-e ba-a-a-a-t fle-e-e-e-w-w-w. I remember thinking, "I already know how to say this word. Why do you want me to say it slowly?" I would go home and tell my mom, "Mom, they always tell me to read slow. What's wrong with me reading fast?" I was starting to get annoyed by this sort of method, and I always wanted to ask if I could read faster, but then my parents always told me to be a good student and listen to the teachers. I was in this program for two months

and I was reading like that. I got so mad every time I had to go. I didn't feel special anymore after like a month, and so one day, I had a new tutor. I got tired, and I think my tutor got tired, too. She said, "Can't you read any faster?" I said, "Yeah, I can read faster!" and I read so fast and she was like "You don't have any problems." She was so shocked. I can remember her tone and voice, "Wow Meh. Here, how about you read this book to me." The book had more paragraphs, but I had no trouble reading it. And then after that, they just took me out [of ESL] (group discussion, February 1, 2010; journal, February 22, 2010).

We moved back to California when I was in fourth grade. For some reason, the staff had put me in a lower division class. It seems like the staff who are part of placing people judge the person standing in front of them with their eyes and ears. Does this person look white? Does this person speak with an accent? Do the parents speak English well? In my elementary school when we first moved here to California, they had lower division classes. I don't think they labeled it that way, but we felt it. And I wasn't sure what was going on because I was a little kid and I didn't talk much because I was shy and I didn't know anybody. I just knew that I didn't have to go at such a slow pace; I didn't have to do so many worksheets. In the class that I was put in, we had to like pronounce, like re-pronounce, words like 'bat' or 'hat' and 'cake' and just simpler words like that, and I thought "I'm already in fourth grade. I know how to say these words. It's not hard for me at all." The only person I knew at the school was in a different class, and I asked her what her class did and I remember saying, "You guys do things that are good for your mind...better than pronouncing 'bat' with the whole class." My brother, who was in third grade, was experiencing the same thing. He's really good in math, and his class was just doing addition. I was already doing multiplication in third grade when I was in [another state], so when I came there and they were still doing addition and subtraction, I knew this was wrong (personal interview, March 22, 2010; journal, April 20, 2010).

So my brother and I told my mom that something was wrong, and then my mom went to the school. She had a talk with my brother's teacher and found out that this class is for students who are trying to learn English; it's not really ESL, but a class for students who didn't speak English very well. My mom argued for the school to switch me and my brother out of the lower division classes into classes where there would be more English speaking students, because she felt that we wouldn't learn much with the same race in the class and because she felt we wouldn't be challenged if we were always put in lower division classes. My brother's teacher supported us, and we were switched after about two months in those classes. After that, my mom always made sure me and my siblings were placed in the right classes. We would either complain about how easy school is, or she would ask us who is in our classes. If there were more than ten Hmong kids in the class or if there was any suspicion about us being placed into easy classes, my mom would have a parent conference with the teachers or go to Back to School nights. I don't even know if Hmong was really my first language. I just remember learning in English, but I used both languages, so I didn't really know

whether to put down English or Hmong as my first language. I spoke more in English and spoke better in English. Because of my fear of being put in ESL classes again after moving from school to school, I would always tell my dad to put down English as my first language (journal, March 22, 2010; journal, April 20, 2010).

Meh was fortunate to have a mother who attended high school in the United States and had the ability to intervene on her behalf. Hli Chia, on the other hand, was able to get out of ESL fairly quickly by working hard to pass the placement exam. Here is her story.

I remember taking ESL classes in elementary school, but I never knew it was called ESL. The classes were fun, especially because I was pulled out of class. We got to do fun activities with numbers, shapes, and books that we don't do in the regular class. I sort of thought it was where the cool kids got to hang out until I noticed that the smart Hmong students were never in ESL with me. That's when I realized that ESL was for students who weren't competent in their grade level. At first, I enjoyed ESL in elementary but I hit a point where I thought, "Why am I in here?" I already know this stuff, so I fought my way to not be in there. They would make all the ethnic students take a quiz, so I would try to do really well on that so I wouldn't have to go to ESL. Everyone that didn't pass that would have to go.

I was never in ESL after elementary school. In middle school, my English teacher would offer time after school to help students with their work if they needed the help. Because I was not confident in where I stood in my learning level, I raised my hand when my teacher took names of students who were going to be present after school. However, he was surprised that I raised my hand because I was one of the top students in the class. That was when I realized that I was doing better in school than I thought.

Even though I never had to go to ESL after elementary school, I was very aware of the students who did. In high school, the teachers would announce the names of minority students that needed to meet in a particular class to take a test. I hated the fact that my teachers called out the names of students on that list, and none of them were Anglo students. It felt like we, the minority groups, were being singled out, and we pretended not to be embarrassed. It made me feel like I needed to work harder in my English and in school so that I would not be included in that category of students. I recall one year when my teacher called out students' names; I was hoping that mine would not be on the list. Fortunately, I was not, and for some reason it made me feel like I had improved in my English. Part of the reason why I did not want to be sucked in to ESL was because I heard from my friends that they make the students do unnecessary activities and work that's under their learning level. The students just end up fooling around in the class and not taking it seriously. If I was pulled in to ESL, it would have been annoying for

me to have to stick with those students because it irritates me when students slack off and try to take the easy classes to pass in school. In English I signed up for all the honor English courses, so that I could learn from the Anglos or other students who are smarter (journal, March 14, 2010; group discussion, February 20, 2010).

Chu Ka shares how she was never in ESL classes until middle school. It appears that in changing schools from elementary school to middle school, it was determined that she required ESL assistance.

In elementary school, I never received ESL services, although I saw my friends of various races receiving them. I always wondered what it was and why did the people have to leave class sometimes. Then, for some reason, when I was in the sixth grade and entered Junior High School for the first time, I noticed I was put in a class with all the multi-racial people. I noticed that there were a lot of Russians and Mexicans. Otherwise, it looked like a regular classroom, right next to a normal class. I was wondering, “Why am I stuck with all these foreign people?” Then I realized that I, myself, look foreign, too. Until I was put into that class, I didn’t think of myself that way. The class was really different to me; you could just tell that their way of teaching was much slower and the students in there learned at a different rate. I kept wondering why the learning process was so slow and why I was there. At the end of the semester, I got the award for the highest grade. After excelling in that class for the first semester, they moved me into another classroom that contained all my friends that I knew from elementary school. When I moved to the other class, I realized that that was where all my friends from fifth grade were. And I said “Oh, so you were all here all along.” I was so glad; I felt normal again, and not isolated (journal, February 22, 2010; group discussion, February 1, 2010; personal interview, April 19, 2010).

Kaying described a situation in which she was moved in and out of ESL. In her case, though, she felt that she benefitted from being in the ESL program and had a very positive experience.

At first, I wasn’t in ESL in elementary school. I remember that I wanted to go to ESL because all the other Hmong kids were going to ESL, so I felt left out. I asked my teacher if I could go into ESL, so I went in either second or third grade, and I went until fifth grade. In sixth grade, I passed to test to get out of ESL. In seventh grade, I began to feel that my English wasn’t really good; I’m pretty sure it was because my seventh grade teacher was really into English, but when we wrote essays, I didn’t really understand what she wanted us to write about. I realized in eighth grade that I should have been put into ESL in sixth and seventh grade. I felt really dumb when I got put back into ESL. We didn’t have a lot of Hmong people, and everyone looked up to me because I wasn’t in ESL and I was

considered the most fluent one. So when I went back into ESL, I was kind of embarrassed.

But then I actually learned something, so it was really good. Soon, I really felt that ESL was the best choice that any counselor has ever made for me. I had the most wonderful teacher. She was the teacher who taught me how to write my papers. She not only helped me understand English a little bit better, but she was really into everyone's culture and heritage, including our Hmong culture. Most of the ESL students spoke Hmong or Spanish. Our teacher put on a culture show, and she organized all the Hmong girls to do our traditional dance and made us feel like we were a "somebody" in school. Not only was the ESL class helpful for my English, but the classes helped me to understand different cultures and nationalities and languages (journal, March 15, 2010; personal interview, March 23, 2010).

Mai Mee was never in ESL classes until middle school, and for her, being in ESL classes was a very disheartening experience. In addition to feeling discouraged and alienated, she now feels like even though she was taking the ESL class as well as another English class, she still did not learn as much about English as she feels that she should have.

I don't know if my elementary school had ESL, but I never had to take an ESL class until middle school. The first time I ever sat in an ESL classroom was in sixth grade, and I continued through eighth grade. Maybe it was because of my test scores. When I was put into ESL classes, I felt really insecure, and I thought that I was stupid because I wasn't good in English. I thought, "I guess I'm not that smart and that's why I was put into ESL classes." I know there were a lot of students where I live who spoke a lot of Spanish; they rarely spoke English and they weren't that fluent. But I know that I spoke a lot of English, and I didn't understand why I needed to be in that class. I didn't know I had an English problem, but I kind of felt stupid, and I wanted to be in a higher English class. I remember taking ESL and another English class, too. I felt like I was kind of lost.

I was confused and I was thinking, "I don't know like if I really need this." The classes consisted of reading in class, writing, and workbook exercises. The workbooks had stories for us to read and then answer questions. I remember reading "The Chronicles of Narnia" out loud in a group. It was really simple. I thought, "These things are so easy." I don't remember really learning anything in there. Last semester when I was taking the grammar class, I was thinking about how they taught us English from elementary to high school, and there were certain things that we didn't learn. I never did diagramming sentences before. And we weren't even taught grammar. We were just taught to write, and they

would just correct our grammar. I think that's just one of the reasons we were put in ESL, because they didn't really teach us those things, and we didn't know that we needed those things and how important they were. That's why I didn't understand how to use a semicolon or a comma. All I knew was that a comma was used when you listed things. And then now you have to learn about clauses. We didn't even learn about clauses until like maybe high school. I always feel insecure about my English because my future is based on knowing English. I still do feel insecure about my writing in English, and sometimes speaking because there's so much grammar and syntax that you have to be aware of (group discussion, February 1, 2010; group discussion and journal, February 22, 2010; journal, March 15, 2010; personal interview, March 23, 2010).

Youa felt that in many ways, her ESL instruction was unnecessary because she was presented with information that she already knew. In her case, going to ESL was even more unpleasant because she was aware that some of the girls were being sexually abused when they were with the ESL teacher. This is a very sad case of a man taking advantage of young minority girls and getting away with it for a long time because they did not feel that they had the power to speak out.

I don't think I was ever in an actual ESL class; my actual class was with other students, but I vaguely remember in fourth grade, during class sometimes, I would be pulled out of class to go over a few things that I thought were kind of ridiculous. I remember looking at pictures and being asked what they were pictures of. "What is this picture of?" "A chair." For example, he showed me a picture of a table. He would point to the legs of the table and ask me what they were called. I remember it being really simple things, and so I never liked going. I felt I was missing out on some fun things my class was doing while I was gone. So, sometimes, you're not at a level where you feel like you need to be in ESL because they're teaching you "A is for apple" and you know that already. And others do think that ESL means you're stupid, when really it's not supposed to mean you're stupid; it's just supposed to mean that it's teaching you English. It's just more like they want to make sure they know where you're at in your English level. They pull you out for those things, but then if you're at proficiency, then that's OK; they let you out. They don't pull you out anymore. Thinking back, I believe I was in ESL until the end of fourth or fifth grade.

Honestly, the only other thing that comes to mind is that no one in my class liked being pulled out. We all sat at a table. All the Hmong girls, because my fourth grade class had a lot of Hmong students in the class. I don't know why, but I think it's because this teacher loved the Hmong students, so she wanted them. But I had all these friends, and we were all sitting together. The ESL teacher

would come in and all of the Hmong girls would look at each other and silently say, “Oh wow, he’s here. Hopefully it’s not me today.” I remember that very clearly. I can even kind of see how we were sitting, and I can see him walking in and when it’s not you, you say, “Sorry,” to the girl who has to go, but inside you’re saying “Yes! (with a hand pump gesture)” When he did not call us, we would give each other high fives. Or when it’s your turn, you’re like “Darn!” But we also had a bad experience with him, on a personal level. He molested some of the girls, and so we really didn’t like him, not because it was ESL, but also because he wasn’t a very good man. So, I think that was the reason; because I remember talking to some of the girls about the experiences, but we wouldn’t say anything. We didn’t talk about it to anyone else, just among ourselves. I remember being at recess and asking, “Did something happen? Because you went, did anything happen?” And we would talk about it. It wasn’t until I was in eighth grade that he got fired. So that’s already four years later and it made me feel bad because it could have been stopped a long time ago, but the main reason I think we didn’t want to go was because of the bad experience with him, not necessarily that we were learning stupid things, so with my experience, it might not be really about ESL.

I also remember that same year, I got pulled out for ESL for fifteen or twenty minutes of the day, but my teacher thought I was good enough to go to Gate. I don’t know exactly how that happened, but she was one of my favorite teachers. For the first time I felt that I was good in my schoolwork and I was getting things fast, but I didn’t have it confirmed until she said “Hey, why don’t you go into Gate? Because I think you would do well in that. You need that. I think it would be good for you.” And I asked, “What is it?” She said, “Well it’s an extra class for you to go and learn new things that we’re not learning here.” We had to go early for the Gate class before school actually started, but I was really happy to go (group discussion, February 20, 2010; journal, March 14, 2010; personal interview, March 21, 2010).

In Paj Chia’s experience with ESL classes, she was not really even aware that she was receiving ESL. From her description, her ESL class was comprised almost entirely of Hmong students, with whom she was already interacting on a regular basis. By being pulled out of her history class to take ESL, she was being deprived of a learning experience which may have been more likely to enhance her understanding and use of English. She also shared an experience which related to the stigmatization associated with the term ESL.

I do not think I received any ESL services growing up. I do remember in fourth grade, there was a Hmong woman that got hired to work with the Hmong kids. All the Hmong kids got divided into small groups and she was the leader of the group. It felt like more of a get-together with the other Hmong kids. We weren't talkative in class, so I think they wanted us to be more interactive. I think that's what it was, but I'm not really sure. I remember a few things that we did, like work on vocab and math, but it was weird because it was during school and I always wondered why they were taking us to another room while they were doing history in our regular classroom. We read and did summaries, and then we also played games. I remember I loved the games part, so it didn't really feel as if it was ESL. If it was, I didn't know. We always talk about that history class that we missed sometimes and remember all the fun times we had because we were going to our own room to mostly just play and joke around. Now I wonder, "Why did we have those small groups of Hmong students?" But it was only that one year, I didn't have it in lower grades and I didn't have it fifth and sixth grade (journal, February 20, 2010; personal interview, May 4, 2010).

One of my hardest times in high school related to ESL was just a comment made by a student teacher in AP English. Now that I think about it, it was really stupid and I should have yelled at her or something, but I didn't. She just called me up...it was like private, but she said something like, "I look at your papers and I understand you speak a different language, but you write like my ESL students." I don't recall exactly what she said to me, but I remember it was really offensive. I was thinking, "Well I'm not in ESL, and if I made a mistake, I would like to know about it instead of being referred to as an ESL kid." I know I had some grammar problems, but I was not ESL. I felt that was a mistreatment, and she could have approached me better. I don't think she approached it in the right way, so even though I was young, I got really offended. At first, I didn't say anything to her, and I went and sat down, but it really bothered me and so I went back and told her. She said she was sorry, and that she didn't mean it that way and then that was it. I took AP English all through high school and I worked really hard. Sometimes I feel as if some teachers do not sympathize enough with students that are learning English as a second language (group discussion, February 20, 2010; personal interview, May 4, 2010).

Phoua had a similar experience to Paj Chia in that she also struggled with writing papers in later grades and was told that she may need ESL intervention. She also makes a very astute observation that she was doing better in school than some of the white students, but they were never required to take any kind of English proficiency examination.

I received ESL services when I was in elementary school. I don't remember when I first went to ESL, but I remember that I would attend ESL class during recess time, so I wasn't taken out of my class. In third grade when I went to ESL, we didn't really do much. I remember playing a lot of games and reading books like "Frog and Toad" and "The Stinky Cheese Man." What I remember in ESL was we played a lot of games, a lot hand games and a lot of picture games, like "What is this?" My remembrance of ESL is not very vivid now, but I remember the ESL instructors. One was Spanish and it was very hard for me to understand what she was talking about because she had a very thick accent. The other ESL instructor was Hmong, and she spoke a lot of Hmong to us and so I understood her. During elementary school, I only had Hmong friends. We spoke a lot of Hmong with each other, and during that time, I was still in ESL. Then when I went to private school, from fifth through seventh grade, I didn't have ESL anymore.

When I went middle school and high school, my oldest brother fought for us not to go to ESL anymore. We feel like we're born in America, and we don't need to go to ESL. It shows that maybe you're stupid or something, but I felt that it was very discriminatory. I felt like they're always picking on the people who had a second language. My language wasn't that much different than the people around me, but I was picked out, just because I had a second language, not based on my ability. They would make us take an English test every year, and I couldn't understand why I got better grades than some of the white students, but they didn't have to take the test. Why can't they take the test, too? So I feel like we were treated differently. My younger siblings are still being placed in ESL classes, and I want to say, "Why are you guys holding them back from their education?"

Sometimes you do struggle when you write your papers, but in a way, it hurts when your teacher comments to you saying, "I think you need to go to ESL because of this and that." Instead of helping you, they tell you, "Go straight to ESL, and they'll help you with this." But you don't need that. I was in honors English, and she wrote on my paper, "I think you need to work on it and go to ESL class for help." And I thought, "Why can't you just tell me to go to a writing center or somewhere else instead of ESL? Did you see that I had a language barrier? Why did you have to say ESL, when you could have been a good teacher and just talked with me about it yourself, because you are my English teacher?" A lot of people back home now are taking advantage of ESL classes because they see that it's easy and they can get A's. I feel that they don't try to get out of ESL; they don't want to go a step further. I was in honors classes because I liked the challenge, so I always felt like, "How come you guys don't strive for a better education than this." I don't feel that ESL gives you the best opportunity or the best education. I take honors classes and I get a C, and I feel like if I was in ESL, I would have A's, too. But when we're applying to go to college, they will look at those ESL grades compared to mine, and they don't see the classes I'm taking are actually a challenge for me. My GPA wasn't good enough, so I couldn't fill

out the scholarship applications, so I didn't get the scholarships that I needed for college, and the people who took ESL classes got scholarships. I don't see it, because I took harder courses. I'm still happy with where I am because I took the challenge to take higher courses instead of taking just regular or ESL classes (group discussion, February 20, 2010; journal, March 15, 2010; personal interview, March 25, 2010; personal interview, May 6, 2010).

Pajka seems to have mixed impressions about her ESL experiences. She describes a situation in which she was bounced in and out of the ESL program in her school system. She tried hard to stay out of ESL, yet looking back now, she thinks that she might have benefitted from even more ESL assistance than she received. She gives some credit to a different program, AVID, for providing her with the boost she needed to be able to get to college.

In elementary school, there would be a Hmong assistant, and he would go over the concepts with us, but I would always be like, "OK, I already understand this." I understand what the teacher is saying; it just takes me a longer time to process. At the same time, I could write it right away, you know, and usually they would pull me out of ESL, like during third grade, and they were like, "OK, she's regular." I remember in 5<sup>th</sup> grade they tried pulling me out again, but I started to learn faster and then my teacher was like, "OK, she's regular," and that's when I started to spend after-school programs with my teacher, and just going over like divisions with him, like math, and everything. The more it was more one-on-one time, then the more I understood, cause I guess in a big classroom our culture just kind of really makes us we can't really talk in front of the class. So, I received ESL services until I was about 10 years old and stopped when the teacher realized I was able to read and write in English. Then when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade they put me back to ESL. We started to have the accelerated reading program. And with that, they kind of put all of the Hmong kids into ESL again, and we had to go through the correctional reading. I did a summer of it, just to prove that I could do it, and then in my seventh and eighth grade they pulled me out of ESL again. Then, when I was a freshmen in high school my counselor put me in another ESL class, thinking that I needed extra help with my English, but after my freshmen year, my ESL teacher requested for me to move to regular English. After all this battle of switching to ESL and regular English class I was enrolled in the AVID program. I was in this program for about 3 years and this program helped prepared me for college. I feel like ESL helped me understand more, because I feel like English was something that I never learned as a kid. It was just spoken to me, and I never knew the structure, and I guess ESL helped me to understand why things are in a certain way in English. Even now, I would say ESL would help me more; it

would help me to understand English writing more (personal interview, March 1, 2010; journal, March 15, 2010).

AVID stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination and was a program that several of the women were involved with in different schools. They described it as a college preparatory program which seemed to provide scaffolding to help students succeed in their other classes and help them prepare their college applications.

Nkauj Choua Shoua describes that she did whatever she could to avoid going to ESL. For her it seemed more an issue of feeling like she was not a second language speaker. In fact, she considers English to be her primary language.

When I was in elementary school, if you were Hmong, you were going to ESL. It was all us Hmong students, and so I hated going to ESL. I thought it was the stupidest thing in the world. I didn't understand why I was in ESL because I considered myself a fluent speaker of English. I was born here, so why would I need ESL? I was in ESL all through elementary school, and I was able to dodge the program for the rest of my sixth through twelfth grade education. I don't know how I dodged it, but I dodged it. After a while, they just quit coming. When I went to middle school, I went to more of a charter school, and after I was there one year, my grades were really high. So I realized that high grades equal no ESL, so after I realized that, my grades got really higher and they quit calling me to go to ESL, so you learn the trends (journal, February 20, 2010; group discussion, February 20, 2010; personal interview, April 30, 2010).

To summarize the experiences and stories about ESL class experiences, the women often did not feel that they were learning anything worthwhile; thus, they were stigmatized and isolated from the mainstream classroom and derived little or no benefits from the experience. Hmong students are often singled out for placement in such classes because of their positioning at the less powerful bilingual end of the bilingual-monolingual continuum; unfortunately, their placement in these classes results in further othering and further distancing from the mainstream student population.

## **The Development of Biliteracy**

The development of biliteracy category of Hornberger's outline contains the L1-L2 transfer continuum, the oral language-written language continuum, and the reception-production continuum, with the production, written, and L2 ends considered the more powerful ends of the continua. The L1-L2 transfer continuum intersects in many ways with the dissimilar-similar structures continuum and the divergent-convergent continuum already discussed above, so it will not be addressed directly at this time. However, it will be apparent from the following information that the transfer of reading and writing skills learned in the acquisition of English, the L2, are successfully transferred for application to Hmong, the L1.

Hornberger (2003) notes that language learning theories often postulate that there is progression from oral to written skills and from receptive to productive skills. In the case of biliterate language development, this progression is not always as straightforward as some theorists believe. Hornberger asserts that language development can begin at any point on one of these continua and then advance in either direction. This will become obvious through the descriptions below. Rather than a neat progression from oral to written and receptive to productive, there is often a back and forth reciprocal relationship between the two ends of the continua.

**The oral-written continuum.** The Hmong have a high regard for their language and culture. This has been instilled in them orally through their parents throughout their lives. On different occasions and in different contexts, several of the women provided a reason for the strong motivation within their culture for maintaining the Hmong language, and this motivation relates back to the fact that they do not have a country that

the Hmong people can call home. Here are some of the references that they made to this fact.

Chu Ka

We didn't have a country or a system in the first place so that like even if we go and learn other languages, it's more valuable because you need that language to communicate to other people, but if you know only Hmong, then you can only communicate between your people and that's going to get you nowhere, because we don't have a system, we don't have our own country where that can be *the* language (group discussion, February 22, 2010).

Hli Chia

That's why like when you see a Hmong person, other Hmong people are like stuck to them, to each other. I don't know why we do that, but I think other Asians do that too. It helps us to identify with each other because we're not alone. Because we already don't have a country. We don't have like a place that we're actually from. We're here in the States, but this is not really home, you know. I mean like with the people that don't have a country, like language is the only thing that's keeping us in contact with each other. And once we lose the language, we won't be able to connect with like the Hmong in China, or like the Hmong in Argentina, or in Australia. There's Hmong in Australia. We heard a song, one of the Hmong pastor missionaries, he named all the states that the Hmong people were in, and there was Argentina, there was Australia, France, England, you know (individual interview, May 5, 2010).

Bao Bai

They're embarrassed because it's like we don't have a home place. Our story... we just don't have a country, and we're not known. [American people] are like, "Oh, are you Chinese?" I mean, it's like, "Where did you come from? Where's your country?" I mean, that's what I hear a lot (individual interview, April 25, 2010)

Youa

I think we're slower to assimilate because we don't have a country. We've always moved from place to place to place and we feel like we need to hold on to that as much as we can, and so that's why it's harder for the Hmong to assimilate when we compare the Hmong to the Vietnamese, when they first came. The Vietnamese, they have always had a country. I feel like they have their country; so in a way, even though they've only come to the United States, about the same amount of years... The Hmong people were mountain people, I mean we came to the United States and we're still like "What the heck is a toilet" and things like

that. We're really trying to hold onto it, and truthfully, I want to try to hold onto it too, because we don't have a country. Because once all of the Hmong are assimilated and there's no more language, how do you know who the Hmong are? There's no country to look at and say "Oh, there's the group called the Hmong." It's more like we don't exist, and I think that's why we're holding on for such a long time or so strongly because there's that pride and that resistance to trying to remember who we really are (group discussion, January 30, 2010; group discussion, April 11, 2010).

Most of the women seemed to have a high motivation to learn and maintain their Hmong language skills. A couple of the women did take Hmong classes which were offered in their high schools, and these classes seem to have reinforced their knowledge of Hmong; however, many have studied written Hmong on their own. As with the acquisition of most languages, they initially had an oral grasp of the language; then some of them intentionally pursued mastery of the written language. Those who learned to write on their own accomplished this task in several different ways. As previous stories have demonstrated, Bao Bai is very interested in maintaining her Hmong language ability.

We all spent about 1-2 hours every night singing songs and reading the Bible. Of course, we were young and my parents didn't go to much school, so we started off singing the Hmong songs that my parents learned/memorized in their youth. That's how I kept up with my Hmong. My mom was the talker of my parents so she always reminded us that we needed to know how to speak both languages! I think she said that exact phrase each night. But I am very thankful for the night Bible studies with my whole family because when I got older, 6, we had the Hmong song books, and the Hmong Bibles which we read from. This is where I learned to read and write. I never did have Hmong writing assignments, but I would read it and remember the sounds and just try to write. So far in the past 14 years, this system has worked. My dad tried to teach us Hmong, but being young, my attention span was zero, so since there were so many different things to know, that pathway led to a dead end (journal, February 20, 2010).

Kaying has a very strong attachment to her Hmong language and states that if she had a choice, she would speak Hmong all the time. Knowing and speaking Hmong is a significant part of her personal identity. She was so motivated to learn how to read in

Hmong that she worked on it by herself. Her story is an excellent example of the manner in which literacy in one language can be used to promote literacy in an additional language. The following is Kaying's story about how she learned to read Hmong with much intentional and deliberate effort.

I just finally know how to read Hmong, so I'm so excited. My little brother was an inspiration for me. We moved to [my hometown] four or five years ago, so they have a [Hmong] class for kids in Sunday school. My brother is a quick learner. He was top of the class and he just came for like two weeks. He learned Hmong quick and I was kind of jealous, so I asked my dad to teach me how to like write in Hmong, but I can't, it's so, so hard. And I was like, "Dad, why am I so dumb? I don't even know how to read." And then I just started reading the Hmong Bible back in, I think it was freshman year or my sophomore year [in high school], cause that's like the only book that I know, so I just like look at it. So like I would look at the American one and the Hmong one and then I would read the Hmong one and if I can't understand it, then I would look at the American one. Then I'd read it and then I would say, "OK, that means that," and then, "OK, that means that." So that's how I kind of processed everything, and then suddenly, I think about a month ago, it clicked and so I was reading so fast. It usually takes me ten minutes just to read like a whole passage, and now it takes like one minute to read like one column. It took me so long. I think like three years, so I'm so excited (individual interview, April 20, 2010).

Chu Ka, another very proud Hmong user, talks about the development of her oral skills in Hmong and her journey to being able to write in Hmong and about other ways in which she uses her two languages.

Reminiscing back to my childhood, literature and reading didn't play a big role in my life. My native language was Hmong, so I spoke Hmong at home and English at school. I remember it was hard for me to understand the teachers and learn how to write my name. Also, there were three other Hmong girls who were in my pre-school class; I felt comfortable being around them, so we would always be together. We often spoke in Hmong because that was the only language we knew, besides learning the alphabet and being spoken to in English. I remember the teacher told us not to speak in Hmong in front of other kids and the teachers because it was rude, so we stopped for a while. Growing up, I can't explain how I learned English, it just came to me as I went to school. I thought it was normal to speak English at school and then another language at home, because that was what I did. School was school, and home was home. My parents didn't know how to read in Hmong or English, they were illiterate because of the way their lives were cultivated in Thailand and Laos. Because of this, we were never read

to, or did we read at home. The only literate thing my parents knew were how to write their own names.

There was a guy in my church, Dr. Something Vang. He was a big guy in like the Caucasian community and stuff. He always encouraged a lot of people to go for education cause he had his doctorate and then he was encouraging the Hmong people. When I was in second grade, he taught this one Hmong class because I think they were feeling like the Hmong young students needed to learn Hmong, like how to read and write, so they offered it in summer school, like while everyone went to their classes. It was funny because I remember sitting in class, I was in second grade. I don't know anything, but I know what he was talking about, but then I never looked back at Hmong again until like when I was probably a fourth or fifth grader and then I looked back and somehow everything clicked and I could just read Hmong. And it was really easy for me to read Hmong. I was like, "Well, OK, I never know that class was going to be useful." I thought I wouldn't remember anything, but that class was very useful.

Of course, I use Hmong with the older folks and my parents. Nowadays, I speak English to my brothers and sisters only, unless there is a different meaning that I want, then I'll use Hmong. The Hmong language contain words that is difficult to find meaning in the English language and vice versa, so it becomes contemplative when one knows two languages because of the knowledge of both languages. I prefer talking Hmong over English when the majority of my audience is Hmong old folks, for example, speaking in front of the congregation of my church. I use English at school because that is the common language in America. My opinions about mixing of the language is that sooner or later, the Hmong language could be lost, or if not, then altered. Most of my generation don't even know Hmong anymore, and if we do, and if we do then we pronounce it wrong. I see that my peers struggle with this, unless they come from a family with older parents. Well, I think that when we were younger, growing up, I think we all had the mindset of we need to learn English to be successful, but as we got older, we're like, we need to learn Hmong to be successful because when you get older, being bilingual, it's very valuable.

Both languages are very valuable to me because it is my identity. I am so glad that I'm bilingual because I love to help those Hmong families that doesn't speak English. It makes me happy knowing that I can be a middle man for those that needs translating, and for my parents. English is important to me because there are vital information about this world written in English and not in Hmong. Hmong is important to me because this is the only element of me that makes me feel complete. I have to admit, it feels different with a crowd of Hmong people than a crowd of Caucasian people. There's nothing greater or less about each group, but there's just a different feel to it. I think there's a understanding that the Hmong people all have when they come together. It's a different understanding maybe. It could be a more cultural understanding. When you talk about something, in a Caucasian group, I think I find it more difficult for us Hmong

people to express ourselves because like in a way, you kind of expect them to understand you but they don't because you have to be more expressive, but with the Hmong people, you can say one sentence and they'll be like "Oh." But with a group of Caucasians you would have to like explain and explain yourself, so [then] they'll be like "Ooooooh." (group discussion, February 22, 2010)

Chu Ka was young when she first attempted to learn the written form of Hmong; however, it appears that as her literacy skills in English progressed, she was quickly able to remember and apply these skills to her Hmong language.

These stories demonstrate that even though Hmong students may initially fall toward the less powerful oral end of this continuum when they enter school, they are able to use the written skills that they develop in English to then develop written language skills in their native language.

**The reception-production continuum.** The reception-production continuum addresses the inter-relationships of the receptive language skills (listening and reading) with the productive language skills (speaking and writing). The women occasionally talked about difficulties with listening and reading, but mostly associated with a limited vocabulary. However, they seemed to have more difficulties on the production end of the continuum. One idea that crossed my mind several times as I listened to these women talk about how they did not feel comfortable with speaking or writing was that perhaps their writing skills were slow to develop because they had little opportunity to practice and develop their productive speaking skills. They describe that throughout their educations, their opportunities for verbal interaction on the subjects that they were learning were often denied them; thus, they were denied the opportunity to practice the academic language associated with the topics that they would ultimately be writing about. The following are several stories highlighting the marginalization of many of the women

in their classroom experiences; this marginalization limited the development of their productive oral skills in English and has continued even at the level of limiting their opportunities to practice and develop competence with college level vocabulary and ideas.

For one of the journal questions, the women were asked to share about experiences in their college classes in which they felt marginalized or did not feel like they were considered full and equal participants. I was intrigued by a shared experience which was remembered and chronicled by two different women—one who had graduated at the beginning of the semester and one who would graduate at the end of the semester in which this research was conducted. This experience occurred in their freshman composition class, and they both remembered it. Here are the versions from each woman's perspective. Paj Chia's story is first.

I think that a lot of people ask minorities, "Do you feel marginalized?" And we always say, "Yes, yes," but we never put our finger on it or say, "This is why." Minorities feel marginalized or that we do not have equal participation because of the way we are treated, and I can share some specific examples. I know that some people do not even know they are making minorities feel this way, but that's not the point. One specific example in my college experience was when I was in an English course with another Hmong student. We were watching an Old English movie, and they were talking Old English like Jane Austen's movies. If you know Jane Austen, you have to listen carefully to Old English, because it is different and I understand them because I watched them since I was young. I love the wittiness of the way they speak and the humor. The other Hmong student and I laughed the most and seemed to enjoy it the most. Then after the movie, the professor said, "I am surprised that you two seemed to enjoy the video more than the others and understand it better," trying to say he was surprised that we understood what was going on. I know it was supposed to be a compliment but it did not feel like it. I felt like we were singled out. I felt that yes, we did enjoy the movie a lot and understood the language, but he did not have to point us out because we were different. So that was one incident. I think we're being sensitive to knowing that they don't know that they're doing it, but at the same time, I don't know how to fix it either. And so I think speaking up at that time would have been good if we knew at that time. Cause you don't know that it's really happening until after you think about it. It takes awhile for me to realize it or to see that it

was offending cause you don't want to just jump on top of it (journal, March 15, 2010; group discussion, March 15, 2010).

As Paj Chia was telling this story in the group discussion context, Emma added the following comment: "Asians weren't supposed to get it. I don't think it's intentional. It's just like cause you have this general idea, 'Oh, Asians they probably don't get this kind of sarcastic humor,' you know." Here is Hli Chia's version of the above incident.

During my freshman year, we watched "The Importance of Being Earnest" in class. Paj Chia and I found the movie to be humorous because we caught the humor. However, the professor openly said that they were surprised that both of us were able to catch the humor. I did not think much of it until Paj Chia brought it up later, and she expressed that she was offended. I became offended too because I realized that the professor belittled our knowledge of American or play write humor. From that point on, I began noticing how the professor would ignore or quickly brush off my comments in class. I remember one time he asked us a question about, I think, a play or something we read and so a lot of students rose their hand, so like I rose my hand and he called on me and I said a more sentimental comment, like I was just expressing that I think the poem or the story we were reading was beautiful and just expressed a lot of beauty and after I said that, he just turned away and was like "OK" and then he just went on to the next thing and then like a lot students just turned back and looked at me, and I was like "Oh, I guess!" Usually he would make a comment, but he didn't. Well, I just felt like in that situation, it was more of like a gender difference. I feel like I was expressing a girly emotion and maybe he didn't know how to respond to it, but yeah, it was a barrier. I don't know, but I never talked to him again (individual interview, March 24, 2010).

These two stories are great examples of the kinds of comments that are often made with reference to minority populations but often slip by without notice. In fact, neither of these women initially felt slighted by this comment, but they later realized that these types of comments are discriminatory and insulting.

Diversity has become a buzzword in education, especially with respect to educational accrediting bodies. Recognizing and celebrating diversity in the educational context is valued and lauded. However, I was interested to find out that, from the perspectives of many of the participants in this study, discussions about diversity in the

classroom context seemed to create and heighten, rather than alleviate, negative feelings about inequality and diversity. Sometimes the very discussions that are intended to address and rectify stereotyping and issues of prejudice end up being discussions that inflame them and lead to a further sense of marginalization. In addition, several of the women voiced that in classes that focused on cross-cultural issues, they often were left feeling that they should fit into the stereotypes about Asians that were discussed. In another case, students described a professor who would often mention that Hmong people tend to act a certain way in class, and the Hmong students then felt compelled to adhere to the description provided of them.

Paj Chia, who is very outspoken, had a lot to say about marginalization in the classroom. She related that she has often felt marginalized by both professors and other students in the college classroom.

We didn't take offense to it, but just so you know, incidents like that happen, you know, but another incident was there's one professor in particular that always talks about Hmong people in class, and I know some people are going to know who he is, but he always says like "They're so quiet and they don't talk much and they're very..., their culture..., they're really shameful and they turn red when they talk in class." He just always brings it up all the time and so it makes you just want to be quiet, like, it doesn't really make you want to participate because it's like, he's already said it. In one sentence he can tell the whole class about all the Hmong students. That is hurtful because it's not true and makes us not want to participate in class. At that time it was not a big deal, but after thinking about it and if I still had him, I would tell him so. They could be more sensitive, you know, especially for the Hmong people. You know if I still had him, I would go and talk to him, but or if I run into him...but, that's one incident. And then you feel really marginalized in class mostly when you're grouped up into small groups with other people. I think that's when I feel the most marginalized by other students, as well. Because, I don't know about you guys, but when I'm grouped up with like Caucasians or other, you know, people who are more efficient in English or they try to put in all their inputs and yeah we are a little quiet and then I will try to say my input and then they don't...it feels like they aren't really listening. They're just like, "Oh, OK," and they go back to what they were doing. Then at the end, they always end up using their ideas instead of mine. If this happened only once, it wouldn't bother me as much, but it has happened more

than once and I would say every time I was in a group with Caucasians. Another time, it was me, another Hmong woman, and three other Caucasians grouped together. After several meetings of discussion, I asked the Hmong woman if she felt ignored, and she said “Yes! They don’t really listen to us.” We are the minorities, we aren’t as efficient in English as Caucasians, and we are also affirmed in many ways verbally and nonverbally. We are asking for sensitivity, at least I am.

Every time race comes up, there’s a lot of tension, even in class or anything. I just hate that tension. It’s like so strong, you know, and then it brings up a lot of hurt and a lot of bitterness too because of how you’re treated in the past and how you grow up and everything and so I admitted too, like I’m still trying to battle with this. I think that it’s always going to be there and so I’m trying to be sensitive to you know that they don’t know either. They don’t understand all that, but at the same time, it’s like, “Whoa, we’re doing our best at understanding too.” So that’s that tension too (journal, March 15, 2010; group discussion, March 15, 2010).

I think it would help if [classmates], especially professors too, understand that it’s a huge step when Asians do speak in class. I think for my experience too, like there was always this one student that talks so much in class and it was just annoying going to that class because you just knew that person would always talk the whole entire period and the teacher didn’t stop him and so it’s just like annoying. But what was I going to say earlier was like how it was so hard for us to say things in class already. I mean I understand the Hmong culture and where they’re coming from. I mean I’m more talkative compared to a lot of Hmong girls, but I think that our culture is not competitive and it’s not aggressive, like if we want to say something, we’re not going to fight to get it out. Like all the Caucasians are raising their hand at once and even though the teacher doesn’t pick on them, they’re still raising their hands. For Hmong people, if you raise one hand and they don’t see you, it’s like, “OK, it’s OK, it’s fine.” It’s not aggressive or it’s not like, “I have to speak my mind!” You know? It’s like “Oh, I learned something, OK, it’s for my benefit.” That’s how I do it. “Oh, OK, I don’t really have to ask this question,” or “Maybe they need it more than I do.” That’s what I think, too (individual interview, March 24, 2010).

Emma also has experienced many frustrations with feeling marginalized in the college classroom, both with group work and due to comments made by professors.

I feel that when I was younger, in elementary, junior high, and high school, people wanted to pick the Asians to be in their group because they thought we were smart. I guess test scores and always carrying around a lot of books helped people to establish that stereotype. I noticed that when I got to college, this was different. I hated doing group work because I’d always be the last one to get into a group. When I did get into a group, no one would ask for my advice or input,

they would do all the work and overlook me. Considering I didn't speak much in class, it is my assumption that this may have come off to my peers that I didn't know anything. All in all, I always hated group work and would rather do projects by myself to save the embarrassment and frustration (group discussion, March 15, 2010).

Emma starts out the following story talking about occasions when professors point about the stereotypical differences between cultural groups and even refer specifically to typified descriptions of Asians in an attempt to help the class understand her better. She shares her response to these types of situations.

I personally hate talking about racial issues in class. Actually, I hate talking about it in general. They bring way too much attention to our differences and, most of the time, they are either way too general to one group (i.e. Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Hmong, etc.) or to one person's personal experience. I remember in one of my classes, my instructor made comments throughout the semester about how I was quiet because I was "Asian." I believed that I was quiet because I didn't have anything to contribute to the class considering it was a completely new concept we were learning and I was merely taking it in for the first time. In another one of my classes, which focused on different cultures, I found myself "trying" to be what the instructor described as "characteristics of Asians"—I was going through an identity crisis during this time and didn't know what to think or who I was. This was so embarrassing and it made me want to miss class when I could. In some ways, by pointing out stereotypical ideas by putting labels on people actually hurts more than fosters growth in a person. Might as well conform to it. He's educating the whole class. You think maybe he's doing it to be respectful but really it's like he's educating the whole class again that you don't speak [in class] because [you're Asian].

I think it was in my sophomore year when I had my first real identity crisis cause I took a class that focused specifically on that and in class, I was like, "Oh my gosh, that's who I'm supposed to be," you know, and so throughout the whole course, I was like "Am I supposed to be that way? Oh my gosh, I'm Asian, I should be that way." You know, because years of study and stuff say that this group of people is like this, like stereotypically, but then when it was being presented, like and because you were the Asians in the class I felt like, "Oh my gosh I had to be that way." It was like an identity crisis. I went home and I was so disturbed by it. Like I was so bothered by who I was and who I wasn't and it was just like the strangest time in my life to get through. You know, I don't think that they're necessarily wrong. I just think that when those studies were done, they were directed toward a certain group. They were completely first generation people and people in their own home [countries]. Whereas we have come to another country and we're trying to bridge and learn and live in a place that is

completely different. So it isn't necessarily that they were wrong; I just think it's that they're talking about a specific group (group discussion, March 15, 2010).

Emma was able to grow through these situations and was given an opportunity to use her experience and understanding during a class presentation which resulted in increased understanding and sensitivity for some of her fellow students.

I remember in one of my psychology courses I had to do my presentation on racial differences and the psychological effects that it can have on a person. I was mainly just talking about how when we talk about racial issues it really focuses in too much on our differences and we forget that we're actually together on this and so I think with that and other students and their questions too, it really went off on different, but good, tangents, because they were all very curious about it. And another one of the students in the class, she was a basketball player and she was Asian and so all her white friends were also in the class and I didn't think she would, but she spoke up. She said, "You know what, I totally resonate with that because whenever like my mom sends me Filipino food, I'm so scared to eat it in front of my white friends because I'm scared, they're going to say, 'Oh look, that's so disgusting! Why are you eating that?'" And so she started crying and all of her friends realized for the first time that they had been so into themselves, they forgot, not that she was different, but they forgot to appreciate her for who she was. It was very emotional, but I thought it was a really good class time. During the discussion, about the whole class was in tears or close to tears when we all realized how egocentric we were and how many of the things that we said or did, consciously or unconsciously, hurt others. The instructor later thanked me for bringing up a very important topic—despite my great dislike of the topic, this was the first time I felt that it got anywhere. I think this has to be such a grace-filled conversation or you just can't really have it. Because you guys [white Americans] grew up with a whole different world view, whereas, we're coming in and trying to just kind of fit. So I think it's OK that people don't understand, but I think it's the response that makes the difference. If people respond and say, "Well, that's not how it's supposed to be," then you just shut everyone else down and said that your worldview is right, as opposed to people who say "You know what? I never knew that. That's so interesting. I'm glad that you told me." There's a difference in response that I can look at people and say, "You're very ignorant and arrogant," and I can look at other people and say, "Wow this person actually cares and is trying to understand as opposed to just being 'This is the way we're supposed to do it.'" (group discussion, March 15, 2010)

Pajka also shared about many different instances when she felt marginalized in her interactions in the classroom.

I remember my freshman year when we were in groups, it was harder to communicate with like other people because they always want to talk first or they're never like "What do you think?" They're always just, "Oh I think this, this, this," and then they never really kind of appreciate the other people. Or kind of like, what do you want, what do you think as a group, and I think the more individual they were, the more I was kind of like, "What's going on here?" Cause we grew up as a collective group and we always asked each other what we wanted and when everybody has the same, similar answers, this is our answer, instead of like, different here, different there. Everybody has to agree on something to do something, and I felt more marginalized like that. Even if I wanted to do something like this, the other person who's more confident, they would have the say in it, [rather] than me (individual interview, April 28, 2010).

Pajka talked specifically about a time when she was in a cross-cultural communication class, and they were learning about the typified Asian. She felt that this discussion affected the way her group interacted with each other in class, even though they were in a group with all Asians.

I feel like sometimes with that, we just get used to it and we become like that. We become what they assumed. That just goes in our mind and we don't want it, but when they keep on informing us about the things that we do, and we don't want it but the more they do that, the more we just like, "Oh, OK. They're not going to think any different." For example, one of my experiences with an Asian group. Last year when I took Communicating Cross-culturally and we had a group with all of our Hmong kids in a group, and it was hard to communicate. I feel like cause they didn't know what to do because it was the four of us, two guys and another girl, and we were all quiet and I didn't want to be the leader too because like I feel like a guy should be the leader, so it's always like that in [my] head. And it was kind of hard to communicate because we didn't know what we wanted because they always said, "I don't know. What do you think?"

We were feeding off each other, and we don't know what to see from the other side, so we just stayed quiet the whole time that we meet. Like we're not into the project, so we're just kind of like, "What does she want us to do," and we're confused, you know, and sometimes I feel like it's intimidating to talk to each other too. Like it was intimidating because we knew each other, you know, and I guess like learning what we were learning made us feel like we were what she was teaching us, what an Asian person was supposed to be. I was just kind of like, "OK, then I should act with that around my people." So it was kind of weird, that

was kind of like the first awkward experience. It helped me understand my parents, though. Like it really helped me to understand like why they did, the way they thought and everything, and it was just really helpful. Like when I started to communicate with my parents differently I saw that they were more responsive and so it was just like, it was more education toward me and my parents rather than our age (group discussion, March 15, 2010; individual interview, April 28, 2010).

Nkauj Ntxawm also talked about an experience she had with a group project in one of her classes. In her case, the purpose of the class was to study small group dynamics for ministry purposes since small group fellowship meetings are becoming very popular in many evangelical circles. Nkauj Ntxawm describes how she felt pressured to be in a group with other Hmong students and then the additional complications experienced when a couple of “American” students had to be added to their group.

When I have Hmong students in classes and there’s group projects, it’s like automatically, “OK, we’re in a group.” This was last semester, we had Small Groups Class and like the first week, the teacher said like “OK, get into groups,” and then [a Hmong guy] is like, “OK, you, me and Mai Mee. Let’s ask [another Hmong guy].” And it was like a whole Hmong group. I remember telling [my boyfriend], the groups weren’t confirmed yet, and he was like, “Go and get with some American people. They’ll probably be better to do it quick.” And I was like, “Well, I think everybody already got into groups, so it’s OK.” But eventually two other people had to come [into our group]. We were a small group that met after class. It was a struggle. I mean, there’s so many stories. So there was just this one story where we had to go to a ministry project after school. The two American kids were dating, which kind of made it weird too. And so they drove in one car and then all of us four Hmong kids drove in one car. So, of course, we’re talking, this was like after three or four weeks of us working together and we were talking and we were like, “Do you think we would have been better if we didn’t have them?” or “Do you think it would have been better if we had different people?” because they just had different personalities and character. And there was this one time, we did like a couple devotions with them and they led, and there was this one time that [one of the Hmong guys] led, and they weren’t there. Maybe cause we know each other a little bit more, but it was totally different from when we usually meet with the American kids. And I think also because one of the American kids talks a lot, and so it would be kind of hard for us to talk. But since they weren’t there, we were able to at least communicate or be a little better (individual interview, April 28, 2010).

Phoua also emphasizes that fact that she often feels like an outsider when it comes to group work in classes. She feels intimidated about speaking up in class; she does believe, though, that she is overcoming some of her inhibitions in this area.

Classes are good but when it comes to group work or teamwork I feel that I'm not a full participant in the group because I feel like an outcast because I'm not white like them and they seem to look down on me because I don't seem as smart. I guess it's just their stares. Because I know like in Biblical Backgrounds class, he makes us do group work. Like every time he says, "OK, get in your groups," it's like "Whoosh," I have a space [around me]. I don't want to do it because I know that my group...I don't know anyone and the whole group are already friends and they know each other. It's kind of like the people around me just kind of like joined in together and I feel like "OK, I don't have a group." I was like, "Can I just join you guys?" and they were like "Sure." So I feel like an outcast, and then like when I go in, they're kind of like, they stare at me, like, "OK, why doesn't she say anything? What is she doing in here?" So it's kind of like, OK, I feel like I'm not a full participant in the group. I give my opinions, but they don't really see my opinions that highly as their friends'. I mean like if I was supposed to state it, they'd be like, "Uh, OK," then like they won't write it on the paper. It's kind of like when you state your opinion, they don't put that into...like, they don't really respect your opinion; it's kind of like, "Am I dumb?" Or like, "Is what I said not right, that you would think that it's wrong?" It just feels...it just puts you down, where like, "OK, maybe I shouldn't say anything within the group because they won't even consider my opinion." And so I'll try a bit, but there's some times when I kind of just sit back.

Sometimes I don't have the guts to speak what I have in mind during class time because I don't want to make a fool of myself by saying the wrong answer. When I know the answer or when I think I know the answer, I don't feel like I want to speak in class, because it might be wrong and then people will look at me like, "Oh my gosh, she just said whatever was wrong and it wasn't that." It's just the thought in me that, I don't know. And so it's kind of like, I want to say it, but what if it's wrong, you know, and people will stare at me like she's dumb or like something like that, you know. I'm getting better at speaking and stating my ideas but it is going to take time and a long process for me to be comfortable. (journal, March 15, 2010; individual interview, March 25, 2010)

Hli Chia shared that she often felt marginalized in high school classes, but she feels that this situation has improved through her experiences in college.

I felt marginalized in class. Maybe it was my lack of aggressiveness or enthusiasm. Other students had the freedom to be creative and I felt like I did not know how to be creative because it was never encouraged for me to think

creatively or critically. No one mentored me through that but other students had their parents to interact with them about school and their parents' experience in school. I felt meek because the students would talk about stuff they watched on TV the night before and I don't usually have time to watch TV, so I had nothing to contribute. It was a bummer that I never had classes with my smart Hmong friends because I usually end up being the only Asian student in class with a bunch of the smartest outgoing students on campus. I know I could be outgoing and break through my shyness, but I felt singled out already. It's weird because when I speak everyone gets quiet. I don't know if it's because I say profound stuff or if they are quiet because they cannot relate to me.

I took a biomedicine class at the charter school my junior year and it was probably the year that I felt most marginalized. There were students from all over the district taking that class with me and some of them straight up dislike Asians. My classmates would ignore me or give me attitudes that made me felt small. Even the teachers had evil smirks on their faces when the other Hmong students and I present our stuff. Two other Hmong girls and I were doing a presentation one day, and one of the girls was really nerdy. She was smart but stubborn and thinks she knows more than everyone else. During the presentation, she got nervous and said some weird stuff that was not a part of our presentation. She became the laughing stalk during our presentation. Even the teacher laughed at us and allowed the class to laugh at us. The teachers would give me belittling stares when I ask questions. They made it seem like I was so stupid, and I asked a common sense question. Anyway, I hated that class even if I learned a lot from it. I always felt like I was the least in the class, even when I am not, because I have been treated that way for so long. Since I feel like I am always the least, I subconsciously am willing to take everyone's junk words, stares and mocking that are thrown at me.

Coming to [this university] brought a lot of healing in that area of my life. Many times I still felt marginalized in class, but I wasn't really being marginalized. There are professors here that single me out but to a lesser degree than from high school. Maybe I was willing to put up with the attitude because it was better than what I received in high school (journal, March 14, 2010).

Nkauj Choua Shoua described a time in high school when she was involved in a discussion of the events of September 11, 2001. During the discussion, she was aware of attitudes about the Arab-American minority population that were unacceptable to her. On this occasion she stayed silent, but vowed that she would never do so again.

Come to think of it there was a time in high school during my senior year in my English class the day after 9-11. We were having a class discussion about what happen to the Twin Towers. The white students were making hateful statements

about Arab Americans. There was this one guy leading the conversation. He sounded like white Americans during Pearl Harbor. He wanted to lock up all of them until “we Americans get to the bottom of the attack.” I was silently angry because I knew what Americans did to the Japanese during WWII and after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. If I could turn back time, I would whack that unempathetic (is that even a word?) arrogant rich white jock with my text book. I wish I had the courage to say something that day. There are times to stay silent and there are times you need to say something—that was a time I needed to say something, but I didn’t. So this kid left the class thinking he is right because no one oppose his crazy idea or prejudice remarks. Reflecting on the reason why I didn’t speak up in defense of Arab people was probably fear and intimidation of my peers. I was a minority in the class full of white students, and this was a new school. Also I felt a lack of confidence because I knew that my opinion about the subject was not popular either. The shy Asian Hmong girl stereotype kicked in and I just sat there quietly—even if I knew what they were saying was wrong. After this day, I told myself I will never be that girl again (journal, March 14, 2010).

In college, Nkauj Choua Shoua did indeed have a second chance to address these types of attitudes in students who were members of the majority culture.

I was in a California history class and we were having a conversation about the Japanese internment that were happening on the West Coast. And the reasons why they were being in these camps, and one of the reasons were that because they were a national homeland security problem. They were imprisoning just not aliens. First, it was just alien Japanese, and they went to citizen Japanese. And so a lot of the citizen Japanese were offended because they were even the veterans that fought in World War I. They were like, “We fought for this country. How can you say we’re not loyal to you?” It’s just because they all look the same, and they all live in cluster communities in high level threat areas. So we were talking about that and we were having a class discussion about it and then we just had a Japanese speaker come talk to us about this. He actually didn’t experience it, but he felt the aftermath of it. It’s like how we feel the aftermath of Vietnam, even though we didn’t go through Vietnam. And so I think the class, I don’t think they got what they needed to get out of that lecture from this guy that came to talk about how emotionally damaging this was to his parents then to him, and for him to realize that even if he speaks perfect English, at the end of the day, he lives in America, but he’s still Asian. He’s still Japanese. He didn’t learn this until he went to college. He realized that he wasn’t getting apartments because he was Japanese, not because there wasn’t any apartments, and it was kind of like a hit in the face. Cause he considered himself as Japanese-American, so we were talking about the internment camps and the class was having a hard time understanding or empathizing with the Japanese people because they didn’t understand where minorities are coming from, and I made a statement after listening to all those people talk about what they think or how they feel about this kind of stuff and

national security. I understand it from a political point of view, because I'm very into politics. I understand that you need to protect your country, but at the same time, where is God in this? And for us to just think about it in a secular point of view, it's not OK. They're human beings. We were talking about [Guantanamo Bay] and I was like there was a lot of people in that little camp, internment camp in Cuba, that are endlessly thrown in there with no accusations. Accusations, but no evidence and I felt bad because as an American, I didn't know that until I started doing my research and then I felt really bad that we've been throwing them in there. So we were talking about that and this one American girl who is from a small white town, said something about how she wanted us to go to war because they blew up the Twin Towers and that we should go over there and bomb all of them. So this brought flashbacks of my high school experience, so this time around, I said something because I was like, I am not taking this again, the second time around. And so I said like, according to like one of our previous campus pastors, that the greatest evil is when you no longer are able to empathize with other people, and our classroom was having a hard time empathizing with minorities. And I told them that. You don't understand it because you guys are white. And you guys will never understand how it feels to be a minority until you...hey you go to South Africa and tell me how it feels to be hated upon...being white is like a death trap in South Africa. And so I was like when you feel people hating on you because of the color of your skin and you feel like a minority, then come talk to me about Japanese internment camps. And when people start racial profiling you at the airport, you come and talk to me about the issues because you don't understand them because you can't empathize with me. You can't even sympathize. I think out of the class, only another girl understood where I was coming from. Another American girl. Because she was saying about how no matter how we put it, it was wrong, so why are you guys trying to justify the right and the wrong, like this was a black and white issue, it was wrong. No matter how you justify it, it was wrong and for them to just keep on trying to justify it. It just made things worse because they weren't admitting that it was wrong and that was their issue. It was wrong because it was racist; it was discrimination; it was racial profiling. And they weren't willing to admit that, and that class is majority all American, white American, and there was only one African American student and three Asians (individual interview, April 30, 2010).

Nkauj Choua Shoua was proud of her ability to fight back in this situation.

However, there are less formal contexts on campus where it is more difficult to fight back. Incidents of marginalization on the college campus are not limited to the classroom. Hli Chia shared briefly about an incident with her freshman roommates.

Yeah, I think my freshman year, it was really hard living with like other girls, me and [another Hmong girl] were together in one room with two other girls. And at that time, I would feel like they were attacking me because we were Asian and

they didn't like our rice cookers...it was so sad, like they didn't like our rice cookers and like they didn't like that we were so Asian and [we] just felt condemned, you know? But then, at the end of it, I realized that maybe I was really Asian, you know? Like maybe if I was in their shoes, I would feel like, "My roommates are foreign," you know? (individual interview, May 5, 2010)

As another example of marginalization outside the classroom, Pajka begins by talking about the fact that she thinks she will always have difficulty fitting into the middle-class American culture. She feels that when she applies for jobs, she will always be passed over in favor of people who are more "like" those who are already working for a particular company. She then moves on to talk about her own experiences working within the majority culture as a Resident Assistant in the dormitory.

For me to go into the community, I don't think they would want me because [I don't] fit in their community they have already. You know, for example, if I was to apply for like a dental place here, and they see that I am more qualified, but at the same time, they're all people who are American in that spot and they want to have everybody the same. It's going to be hard to communicate with them. Even like last year when I was a [Resident Assistant in the dorm], it was so hard for me because I was the only Asian in all the RA's. It was hard for me to communicate with them and it was hard for them to communicate with me because they look at it a certain way, but for me, I'm like, "We're always equal." Why do you always come back to me and say, "Oh, what do you think of this, is it OK?" And I'm always like, "You should really see that we're all equal no matter what, and we shouldn't have that racial..." because I felt like I wasn't able to do what I wanted to do because they have this whole mentality of who I am, so it was kind of hard for me to be that RA that I wanted to be. For example, when my lead RA wanted me to talk to one of the girls and it was my responsibility and I wanted to take it on my own, but at the same time, she wanted it [done] really fast. For me, I wanted to really observe it more because I didn't really know the whole issue, so she just gave it to me expecting that I know it already. And I'm just like, "I don't know it, so I prefer you go do it." And she was like, "No, you need to do it because this is your girl." And then she wants it automatically and I'm like, "I can't do this, and you can't expect me cause I need to observe it," just knowing me, but she wants it automatic and I can't meet her needs because for me I just want to respect that person, too. Most of the girls, like I remember the RAs, they gave levels (levels are like demerits) out like it was candy, and I was like, "You need to really be really serious about this," and when I brought that up to the RAs attention, they were just kind of like, "I don't know what you're talking about." Like I told them how I felt and I feel like they just shunned it, you know, and then when somebody else had the same problem, who wasn't me, then they went, "Oh,

OK, we'll do it." And [my lead RA] started thinking, "Oh, yeah, that is true." And I'm just like, "Uh, that was the same problem that I had, you know." I felt that it was not necessary to give a level out, and they were like on me all the time, "You need to give a level, like for this reason." I don't see this as a reason, and the other girls, like when they said, "There's no reason," my lead RA would say, "OK, you don't need to give it to her then." You know, it was always like I needed to do what they did all the time. And it was hard for me because most of the time, I didn't agree with what my lead RA did. And it was hard because she didn't understand why I did the way I did (Pajka, individual interview, April 28, 2010).

These stories are in fact only a small portion of the extensive discussion that took place surrounding the limitations that these women experienced in their attempts to enter into the classroom conversation at the production end of the continuum. I chose these stories because they were the most intact pictures of specific situations, and they demonstrated the manner in which marginalizing experiences have the potential to rob minority students of chances to develop their language skills by meaningful productive interaction on academic topics and in other social situations on campus. Since the university under discussion is small and most of the students live on campus, the residential life and academic life overlap. As these stories indicate, in various situations, the women were often stymied in their attempts at participation by the indifferent responses of others to what they had to say and by their own perceptions of how group interactions should be conducted. They were often powerless to produce speech and powerless as well to impose reception.

In addition to experiencing discriminating and marginalizing experiences at school, some of the women also shared stories of how they had suffered similar experiences in their workplaces. Bao Bai arrived late for one of our group discussions, and afterward she explained that she had been working in an after-school tutoring program and had been involved in a disturbing exchange with one of the children. After

reflection on this situation and additional discussion in one of her classes, she realized that she had often been treated in certain ways because of the way that she looked but that she had been in denial about that until recently. Bao Bai was fighting back tears as she told this story.

I almost started crying because this little girl just made fun of me, too. So there was a map and a worksheet to fill out for their daily geography, and the question was asking what states are in the northern region. Well since I was there for reading, I asked her to read it to me and then she wanted help on the northeast part and so I read it with her and then when we got to 'region' she pronounced it "rezhion" and I was like, "No it's region." And she was like "rezhion" because that's how you're supposed to pronounce it, and I kind of paused for a minute and then she was like, "You can't speak English clearly, so that's how you're supposed to pronounce it. It's 'rezhion' for you because you're Asian." So there I was with a little third grader and here I am the freshman in college, getting told by a little third grader that I can't pronounce a word right because I'm not supposed to because I'm Asian, and I was like, "I'm not going to talk to you anymore." And the funny part was her classmates caught on to that it hurt my feelings, but she didn't and then finally when they were like pushing her and stuff and telling her that that wasn't really nice, she finally apologized, but, yeah, I didn't think the little girl was going to say something like that. That was an interesting experience. (group discussion, February 1, 2010; individual interview, April 25, 2010)

I found this especially interesting because Bao Bai does not have an Asian accent at all.

In fact, she has a southern U.S. accent. In a later discussion, she elaborated on her reflection of this earlier situation.

When I was working with America Reads, I didn't work with all the teachers, but the ones I did work with, they do know me and they really liked the way that I work and everything. But I only worked with two teachers, so there was the rest of the school. I worked in the afterschool program, and when I would walk up, like some of the teachers, like I just got that vibe finally after like working there for a few months, but you know, it's just that vibe that you can feel like they don't want me to touch any of their kids or say anything to their students. Body language. That's pretty much what it is, body language. Like "Can we see something that says you can be here?" and then I can see a lot in the parents also that come pick up their students, like "Why is that girl here?" When parents would come, and they don't know what's going on, so when they're looking for their child, and I'll see them walking around for like ten minutes or so. Finally, they'll come and be like, "OK, do you work here?" It's like, "I do," and then the

way they talk, their attitude and the words that they're saying, you can just tell that they really don't want to be asking me because I don't look trustworthy, so you could really see it in the parents and see them brush off on their students (individual interview, April 25, 2010).

As much as you want to be American, you can't because, you know, bleach my skin, bleach my hair, I'm not going to look like an American, so if you were to go into an whole new room with people who don't know you, the first thing that comes to their mind is you're not going to be American to them. You can be an American citizen but you're going to be foreign to them and they're gonna see you automatically as English is your second language. Growing up and having a different skin color and a different hair color, you know when you feel like someone is treating you different, and so I was in denial my whole entire life about feeling different and everything, but so when I was in like elementary and high school, I kind of just brushed that off. Because I thought that it was supposed to be school and we were all supposed to be like equal. When I got to my first job at McDonald's, There was like Hmong and a lot of Mexicans and very few, like just the managers, were white. And sometimes, since I worked in the drive through most of the times, when we would get busy and people would come in to the lobby, I would see like some of the adults, some of the older ones come by and there would be a Mexican worker and a white worker and I would just see them make their way over to the white worker, and it's like, "Wow." You know, there are really racist people around still. But at McDonald's nothing was really directed towards me. Now that I think about it... It made me really sad and then, it just made me more sad when I realized that it didn't affect me until something really bad happened, like racially, and so now that I think about it, by the time someone, but the time it finally hurt me, it was like too much. It should have been too much already. (individual interview, March 23, 2010; individual interview, April 25, 2010)

Bao Bai also commented on a different job experience that she had.

I was working at a little family-owned restaurant, and I just switched shifts with two American girls and so this order was in already and I was cooking and the order was done, and she came to get her food and she looked at it and, well, it's just called a Roger burger and you either want...a Roger is just like a little hamburger and you can add a quarter or a third pound to it. And one of the girls did not ask her specifically what kind of burger size she wanted, and so she wanted the bigger one and so I was like, "Well I didn't take this order; I just made what was there." And so she came up to the window first and she was like, "OK, is your manager there?" I can clearly tell that she was a little iffy about me because I was, you know, different, and she was like, "OK, well I'll just take this and go," and she goes and the phone rings a few minutes later and it was her again, and she was like, "I would like to talk to a manager or a boss." And I was like "OK, I'm sorry they're not going to be here until tomorrow." So she was like, "Well what is your name?" so I told her, and she was like you need to tell

your managers that they need to hire people who can speak English because my order was wrong. And I was like, “I didn’t take your order.” I think that was one of the major traumatizations that happened to me (individual interview, March 23, 2010).

Youa voiced her discomfort with the way she feels she is sometimes viewed and treated in professional situations.

I feel that English is important because it is the language of this country. To become successful, knowing English is the key. Sometimes I am sad because I do not know English as well as I feel that I should. I see that it sometimes is the number one thing that limits me in where I want to go and what I want to do in life. I wish I knew more and I wish I was better at it. I especially feel this way when I am at work and in class, vocabulary-wise and grammar-wise. Sometimes I’m quiet because I don’t want to make a mistake in saying something that is not as advanced as it should be or at work, you know I’m not articulate with my spoken language, and so I try not to speak unless I have to. But when I do, sometimes I feel like the way we look as Asians, we’re small, we look younger or whatever, so people already look at you as though you don’t know much because you’re this young girl, yet you’re working this position where you have to meet with parents. You already feel small and then when you speak English and you don’t speak it well or you use the wrong words or you don’t use the words that are more advanced, then it makes you feel even smaller, so you try not to speak as much as you should. I’ve had experiences before. After I graduated from high school I worked as a teller at the bank. And people always said, “Oh my gosh, you’re so small. Are you only like twelve? Why are you working here?” You know? And you’re going, “No I’m 20, not 12.” And you get those and they build up and something simple like that builds up to become something really big where you feel like, man, they see me as this little girl just walking around. They’d be saying “Why should I give my money to you? You’re so small.” It’s maybe a joke but it does affect you. Once again, at the banks, some people are like “Wow, you speak English really well, and so I mean there’s that but at the same time, deep down, you know you have so much you still have to work on, like your vocabulary and then you hear other people speak and you’re like “Wow, I know I didn’t say it in the way that it should have been said.”

Then being here, I started out work as a counselor for the adult program, so I would meet a lot of these adults who are coming in talk about the [degree completion] program, and I’m talking to them about this program and yet you see some of them look at you, meeting you, going “I don’t want to take this program. You’re this little girl telling me how great it is. I don’t trust that.” And it makes you feel like, “I can’t be as great as I could be if only I was a little different.” Blond hair. Blue eyes. Taller. But then if I had better vocabulary, I wouldn’t feel as bad, so I believe that if I was better with my English, so many more doors would be open for me. I could do so many more things, so much more than what

I can do now. And it could be me limiting myself, but that's truly how I feel (group discussion, February 20, 2010).

To recap, on the reception-production continuum, these women have described that as minorities, their experiences fall on the less powerful receptive end of the continuum. They are often robbed of their voice and rendered powerless by their marginalization in various situations. Because they feel unable to speak, they are deprived of opportunities to develop their skills on the more powerful productive end on the continuum.

### **Content of Biliteracy**

The continua related to the content of biliteracy—the minority-majority continuum, the vernacular-literary continuum, and the contextualized-decontextualized continuum—were not a part of Hornberger's original schema. They were added later in collaboration with the findings of Skilton-Sylvester in her research with Cambodian women and girls in Philadelphia (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2003), and they are the most closely tied to power relations and critical interactions. As such, they tend to focus on voice and agency. From my perspective, the three continua in this category are very tightly interwoven, and I had difficulty deciding which topics to address through each continuum. I ultimately decided to address the contextualized-decontextualized continuum through a discussion of the women's perceptions of falling short in terms of the critical thinking skills required for college coursework. This section will also include some brief stories about the manner in which, in high school, Hmong students relied on each other to fill in their gaps of understanding. This type of communal learning became more difficult to practice in college because often they are not in classes with many, if any, Hmong friends. Following this discussion, I will very briefly address the

vernacular-literary continuum, and then end the chapter with an extended discussion of gender issues, which I will position within the minority-majority continuum.

**The contextualized-decontextualized continuum.** Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester (2003) maintain that traditionally within academic discourse, the types of reading and writing that are emphasized and valued take place at the decontextualized end of the continuum: “At the most decontextualized end of this continuum are decontextualized parts of language followed by decontextualized wholes” (p. 52). Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester cite research which demonstrates that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often do not get practice in constructing “wholes” and are more often asked to memorize parts of activities but seldom required to solve problems in totality. The description of ESL intervention presented above reveals that often the ESL instruction provided was completely devoid of integration with the content of the student’s primary classes. Thus, much of the pre-college education of these women focuses on language itself as disembodied from other academic topics.

In addition, by their own admission, Hmong children are culturally taught to see everything as black and white. Therefore, they are not prepared, either by their educations or their home life for the kind of abstract, critical thinking that is valued at the college level. Being able to analyze and produce “whole” texts is what is valued in higher education and what allows a person to use language in a powerful way. According to Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester, minority students are often not prepared to construct coherent texts from parts of language.

The literature offers possible explanations for the struggles that language minority students face in their college experiences, such as lower expectations of secondary school

teachers and under-preparation for academic tasks due to attending sub-standard schools based on their childhood neighborhoods and socioeconomic status (Scarcella, 1990; Rose, 1989). Through their journaling and discussion, the women offered more personal reasons for their success in high school and their struggles in the college environment.

The following discussion on the contextualized-decontextualized continuum will demonstrate that the Hmong women feel that their critical thinking skills are not as keen as those of many of their classmates, which limits their abilities to produce the decontextualized texts that the academic world often requires. It will be obvious from some of the participant responses below that some of the women have studied education theory and that at least all of the upperclassmen have studied intercultural communication, which is a required foundational studies course at their university. They have integrated concepts from these courses into their thinking. Pajka believes that part of the difficulty that students with Hmong backgrounds have with education is that interactions in the home often are not conducive to looking at the big picture.

The disadvantage is just kind of when we were young, just not being able to think critically because coming to college, like they expect you to think critically. Because I felt like my parents are always never going in depth. Even when we're in trouble, they never say, "This is what [you] did and this is what [you] did and this is what you must learn from it," but they always say, "This is what you did," and you were punished. They never really go in depth and never really ask us how we feel that day or what do you want to grow up to be. It's always black and white and now like the more I emphasize what I want to do in detail, they're just like, "Oh, OK, let's stop." They don't want any more information, and it's kind of hard (individual interview, April 28, 2010).

Mai Mee agrees with her sister and asserts that mastering the technical aspects of language for the purpose of writing is less of a problem than learning how to think critically.

Maybe it's not writing because I think it's more of like literature, when you're in literature or in certain classes where you have to critical think a lot. And maybe I'm just struggling in that because there's certain things that I wouldn't catch on and other students would, and I would be like, "Oh, I didn't realize that," and just things like that. Maybe that's just why it's hard for me to write, too. For the critical thought and stuff. I just realize that sitting in class and listening to how other students catch on like with just reading a book or something and just critical thinking about it and disagreeing or agreeing with it...and why they disagree with it, why they agree with it. They understand what the author's trying to say. Like I can't grasp that as fast as they can. Like after they say what their thoughts are, then I would understand it, you know. Cause I know when I read by myself, I understand what the author is trying to say but I don't really go to the point of what he or she is really saying. Sometimes I feel like maybe it's just how we were brought up like in a different culture where we weren't supposed to think critically on our own because a lot of us, like our parents would say, "You know we're right and we're always [right], and you have to listen." And we always listened to them, so when we're in class, we always just listen and we think that the answers are always correct because they know more and...we don't really critically think cause of our parents, how they always tell us to always listen and to always behave in class and how we were brought up in elementary when we were little kids. We always would just listen to the teacher and he or she would just teach us, like for math or like something like that. So coming to college is quite...it's different because you see a lot of students where they challenge the teacher, just whatever's being taught, while I'm just sitting there, like "Oh, OK. Maybe he's right," you know. I'm just listening to whatever he's saying and then sometimes you would have to write papers on what your thoughts are and then it's hard and I struggle a lot in that. And I would take hours and hours of writing. So it's hard (individual interview, March 23, 2010).

Hli Chia notes the vast difference between the demands of higher levels of education compared to those in lower grades.

College is kind of a different story. I guess maybe like most of it is new concepts to me, and so I mean I will understand it at the end of the year which wouldn't matter anymore for my grade, but it will matter for me to like keep that knowledge. I face a lot of fear in like writing papers, just because I feel like I'm incompetent. Maybe because it's new concepts and like it's something that I'm being asked to do that I've never done before.

It wasn't until I took AP Composition [in high school] that I started feeling the weight of unsuccessfulness. I felt like I signed myself up for a class that was too much work for me. Now when I look back at it, the teacher had high expectations of the class and gave little encouragement to me, the only Asian student enrolled in that class. She would encourage the whole class and tell us that she was proud of us, but I knew that she was not talking to me. I was not doing so well in that AP class. I think I got a "D." It was my senior year and I just started work at my job, so I was getting less time to sleep and do homework. I started working because I needed to save so I can go to college. So, working affected my experience in that course. In our class, we wrote an essay within 40 minutes, analyzing poems, every other class period. Sometimes it was hard for me because I did not know what she wanted. It was the first time I was exposed to analytical concepts. It was just assumed that we knew how to analyze poems and what to pick out of it. If I knew then that I could analyze the poem and create my own thoughts on it, that would have been easy for me to do, and I could have done a better job in that class. That wasn't explained to me. I thought there was a right way to understand the poem, so like the whole time I was trying to figure the right way that this poem has been understood, but then it was supposed to be my own thoughts (journal, March 14, 2010; individual interview, March 24, 2010).

Youa described similar experiences to Hli Chia and Mai Mee, wherein she was searching for the "right" answer to questions and struggled with considering the information and project as a whole within the academic context, yet in many ways decontextualized from everyday life.

Well, with like classes like history, you just really need to remember dates, remember names and places and people, while critical thinking, what if you don't...what if my way of thinking is not the correct way, and I think that might be a flaw because I always want, maybe it's a Asian thing, we want to think the way the teacher's thinking. Like if the teacher thinks this is right then that's the way I need to think, and if I don't think that, automatically I feel like I'm not smart or I didn't know it. I don't know if it's a Asian thing, but for me, it might be a Asian thing, it's always, "Well if the teacher says this is so, it has to be so," so with critical thinking classes, it's more like I block myself and I'm more like, "What is the right answer?" I have to think of the right answer and the right answer is what the teacher feels is correct. When the teacher may want you to think about it yourself and come up with something else and reason why. In lower grades, as an Asian student or minorities, we're more like, "Oh, what is the correct answer?" It's always, "Tell me what the correct answer is. I want to please you. I want to know." While Caucasians, because that's how their lifestyle is and their family are more like, "OK, tell me what you think. Let's develop your thoughts." While Asian families, "I am the mom, I am the dad, I am the elder, I know what's right." So I think you take that with you to school and even when

you want to say this or that, sometimes, oftentimes, you hold yourself back because you're thinking, "Well, what if it's not right? I wonder what the right answer is." So I want to know what the right answer is and I don't want to say what I might think because it might not be right and I don't want to be wrong. Plus, once again, culturally, we're not exposed to as much as others, and so in critical thinking classes, I think you need to allow yourself to be open and to take things in and being that we're not, I can't think the way other students would. Like I can't bring up ideas the way other students would because they have all these background things, so then I sit there and when somebody says, "What about this and this and that," I'm like, "Yeah, that's right." Then right when someone says that, I can say, "Oh yeah, that makes sense," but if they didn't say it out loud before and I didn't hear it, I probably wouldn't have thought of it. Not that I didn't know or I don't agree, but I just didn't think of it. I don't know why, but that's how usually I am. In fact, sometimes, I'll sit there and I will try to think of something, but I don't know what would be right, but once people start giving ideas, I'm like, "Oh, yeah, that's true. I see." So yeah, critical thinking courses are harder. Because memorization, you know what's right. You know what you need to do, you know how and what the teacher wants. You just study that, you just learn that and then you're good. So critical thinking classes are hard. For me I get angry at myself. Why am I not as smart as they are? Like, Why do I have to work so hard? I know I shouldn't be angry at myself. I can't blame others because I can't control them. Just cause they're smarter, well God gave them that brain that can soak things up right away. I can't blame them for that, so I blame myself. Why can't I be better? And so you get like those days when you take a test and you know you didn't do well and you studied and you did well all year and yet that test didn't come back as good as you like it to, you get angry at yourself. Why didn't I know more? Why don't I remember more? I work so hard and yet I can't get that grade, and he missed classes all the time and he seems like he doesn't do anything, yet he gets an A. It's not fair. Then I get mad at myself for not being as smart (group discussion March 14, 2010; individual interview, March 21, 2010).

Nkauj Choua Shoua, who tends to be very opinionated and outspoken, has a different take on critical thinking classes, and she has a hard time understanding why others have difficulty with them. She shows a sophisticated understanding of history, but she acknowledges that in many ways, she was not raised in the traditional Hmong way; in addition, she is three or four years older and more mature than many other students who are finishing their undergraduate educations. However, like Youa, Nkauj Choua Shoua

voices frustration with the fact that non-Hmong students seem to be able to easily perform tasks which require an extensive time commitment on her part.

Everyone is having problems with World Civ, which was a breeze for me. It is a lot of memorization, but also I tell people it's more than memorization; it's about knowing the story. If you don't know the story, if you don't know the narrative, you're not going to understand history. History is basically a story. And if you sit there and just cram your notes in your head and learning surface level, you're not going to pass this class. And so a lot of them repeat this course again and again and again and to me doesn't seem that hard, but other people had a hard time, like, comprehending history, so I don't know what's that about, but I'm better at my humanities. I realized this, with like really deep thinking, Hmong students have issues with like critical thinking, like there's not like a right answer for it. We were raised black and white, so it's kind of hard to think outside the bubble. You're either this or you're that. But [in my family], I wasn't raised black and white. I know some students who are C students, but they know a lot more, a lot more, and they're able to regurgitate what they learned. Like A students, some students are just surface level learners and I think that if you're a surface level learner, what's the point of even coming here? Because if you can't critically think and you can't think beyond what your teacher gives you, at the end, you're not really getting an education; you're just learning. You're just learning how to pass exams and you're not getting a real education (individual interview, April 30, 2010).

For me, I excel at those classes [that require critical thinking]. I have more problems with the biology classes and stuff. But when it comes to critical thinking and analyzing things, I'm really good at that. I think it depends, cause like for me personally I had it a little bit easier because I went to a [junior college] before I went to a 4 year college and I've been used to how the teachers are and also I always feel that I always had to work so hard. Cause I don't really think I'm really that smart. I always say that we're not smart, we just work our butt off for our grades. And so I always feel like I always have to work much harder than other students to get my grades the way they are. It's not like I can just...Because I noticed when I was in school, when I transferred to an upper class district, like some of the kids didn't need to study; they just sat in the class and played all year. And they just like get A's. They pass their standardized tests and get high scores and stuff and I was like, "You didn't even study." I was like, "Dude, I studied all...And my scores aren't high as yours." And that's when I get angry that my parents didn't read to me or that they didn't do more things with me when I was little (group discussion, March 14, 2010).

Another possible reason that the women gave for the variance in their success from high school to college was the fact that they relied heavily on each other for help in

high school, and that lifeline was often taken away when they were in college because they are often in classes where they do not have Hmong friends, and they do not feel comfortable asking for help from their non-Hmong classmates. Emma shares how her school friendships prior to college were influential in inspiring her to pursue academics with passion and excellence.

I guess it helped that I wanted to be good at something and had friends who were smart and I wanted to be like them. In Junior High and High School, I made friends with some really smart and competitive girls. We had what I believe was called “STAR testing,” or something like that, in Junior High, where we were to take tests on books that we read and were given points for it. I believe that I had read about 200 books that school year—I guess that wasn’t a hard thing to do considering I was in the library a lot. Again in high school I had a lot of the same smart friends that came to the same school, and it was there that they continued to push me to do well in school and they encouraged me to be in the advanced English courses, which paid off (group discussion, February 20, 2010; journal, February 2010).

Nkauj Choua Shoua provides the following description of her experience in high school in which she viewed her Hmong classmates as forming a tight community of mutually dependent tutors since they could not get help from their parents at home. Nkauj Choua Shoua’s story also shows that she is integrating what she has learned in her education classes with her own experiences as a student.

We’d do it before class starts. We used to meet in the hallway and all be in a little group, and if there’s a question I didn’t get, I know they’ll be there early because we’re all pretty early people and then we’ll all sit there and we’ll talk about our homework assignment. Like, “Did you get this? Did you get that? How did you get this? How come you have that answer?” So we did a lot of that and I realized that it became like a communal tutoring. We did it before school, sometimes after school if we have time. You did it between classes. We did it during class, actually. Cause there’s some subjects I really suck at, like math and stuff, and I was always going and asking students who was better at it about it, and there were some subjects that I was good at and they would come and ask me about it. And so...communal learning. Some people have not mastered comprehending skills and they have a hard time studying cause like everyone has a type of way you study and if you haven’t really mastered that before you come to college, you’re more prone to failure because you don’t know how to study because you haven’t

created good study techniques. And I think that's one of the issues too. Or like you're having problems due to your multiple intelligence. Your professor's not teaching the way that you learn. So if you're all hands and visual learner, and all you have is lecture for four hours, three hours, you're not going to get what you need to get out of that class because you learn at a different pace than the other students and sometimes your professor is speeding through his lecture notes and you're like trying to catch up. You're not there. Or sometimes it's just hard in general because that's just not your subject (individual interview, April 30, 2010).

These few stories in this section explain from the students' perspectives and experiences the difficulties they have with academic tasks on the more powerful decontextualized end of the continuum and the reasons that they believe those difficulties exist. However, these stories also exhibit that these women are developing the ability to integrate pieces of information into wholes.

**The vernacular-literary continuum.** The vernacular-literary continuum refers to the fact that the written texts that are often used in the educational community are positioned at the more powerful literary end of the continuum. The more powerless members of an educational community, which may include ethnic minorities, have difficulty relating to literature and texts that come from the experience of the majority. This same detachment has often been used to emphasize the importance for women to have access to writing by other women. Although there are a few notable female writers who fall into the general category of being "Asian," there are few texts written by Hmong in general and Hmong women in particular. Hence, Hmong students are rarely presented with texts from the vernacular end of the spectrum to which they can establish a personal affiliation. Much of what they read does not resonate with their personal experiences.

Mai Neng Moua, cofounder and editor of the primary Hmong literary journal in the United States is committed to providing a venue for and giving voice to Hmong writers. She contends that young Hmong writers, mostly writing in English, are

emerging, and in 2002, she published an edited volume called *Bamboo among the Oaks* which included poems, autobiographical memoirs, creative non-fiction pieces, drama, essays, and fictional writing from 22 different writers. She included the following poem in her introduction to this book (Moua, 2002, p. 3):

[W]hen we speak  
we are afraid  
our words will not be heard  
nor welcomed  
but when we are silent  
we are still afraid.  
So it is better to speak

audre lorde, "A Litany for Survival"

While not written by a Hmong person, she feels that this poem emphasizes the importance of minority populations producing and utilizing texts produced within their own communities.

Although this was not part of my research, I have on several occasions seen the Hmong students perform skits, tell stories collaboratively, and produce videos that would be considered at the vernacular end of the continuum but are seldom considered as options for classroom work. Thus, I have observed oral language used in creative and critical ways within their community. Although these skits rely heavily on oral and visual modalities, in reality, they are coming from an unwritten text. Therefore, it is likely that many minority students are, in a sense, producing texts which are not being recognized as such and are not available for use in the classroom.

**The minority-majority continuum.** The final continuum is the minority-majority continuum, and the experiences of the Hmong fall once again on the less valued minority end of the continuum. Education in the United States is based on the cultural values and

preferences of the dominant culture, which is very foreign to the Hmong. This dissonance begins in the lower stages of education and continues through the college experience. Little or no attention is paid to the values and preferences of those at the minority end of the spectrum. This leads to frequent experiences of marginalization of these individuals within the learning environment. Stories related to this topic have been presented in earlier sections of this chapter. Aside from the classroom, another setting for the biliterate development of Hmong women is their minority home and cultural community environments. Since the home environment significantly impacts the educational experience, I have decided to include a discussion of Hmong-specific culture and gender issues in this section of the chapter and address the impact that these minority values have on the educational experiences of Hmong women.

The women told many stories demonstrating ways in which strongly ingrained values and role structures of the Hmong culture can further complicate the already-difficult battle they face in the American educational system, which is based on middle-class values. While Hmong parents seem to universally agree that education is very important for the future success of their children, they often do not have an accurate understanding of the time and commitment that is required to achieve true success in education. From the descriptions given by some of the women, their parents seem to view education as an activity that is completely separate from the home environment. Hmong parents expect their children to work hard and be good students at school, but in many cases, home responsibilities and family priorities take precedence at home. The ramifications of this disconnect are evident in many of the stories told by the women throughout the course of this study. I will address some of the most widely-discussed

topics in this final section of the chapter: the expectation that school age children can devote significant amounts of time to home and work responsibilities as required by the needs of the family, parental misunderstandings about the importance of extra-curricular school activities, the difficulties that are experienced by Hmong women as they try to break away from their families to attend college, the conflicts that women experience when trying to meld their educations with the traditional roles of women within the Hmong culture, and the differing views of young men and women regarding the pursuit of a college education.

*Responsibilities outside of school.* Young Hmong women are often assigned heavy responsibilities in their homes because their parents are working very hard to support the family financially, and the responsibilities of taking care of the home and younger siblings often falls on the older girls in the family. Therefore, the practical needs of large families who are lower on the socioeconomic ladder often establish an urgent logistical priority.

Nkauj Choua Shoua shared that she was expected to accept extensive parental and household responsibilities when she was in high school and junior college, regardless of her school and job responsibilities. However, she found a silver lining in these responsibilities--she attributes her comfort and confidence with speaking out in English to all of the language brokering she was required to do when she was a teenager. Her story begins when her family moved from the inner city out to the suburbs when she was in high school.

I was still in school [when we moved], and I was a junior and since I was older, I had to go with my mom to transfer every one of my siblings out of the school and do all the paperwork and stuff. Yeah, older sister, you do all the paperwork with your parents. You sit and do all the paperwork with them and you talk to the

administrators. They're just there to be there, and they just sign the papers. And so there's a trust, that you know what you're doing. They train us since we were little to be translators and so it's something you just get used to as you get older. Sometimes it's a little irritating though cause you just want to sleep in sometimes. Hmong people, they always go really early in the morning, and I was like "Why can't we do it like at 12 or something?" Anyways, you just get used to the system cause what are your parents supposed to do? They don't know what's going on. Sometimes, your parents, they'll give you a pen and paper and they'll go like, "Can you read me this? Tell me what is it saying." Cause I remember when I was home a lot and my dad used to be like, "We're having insurance policy issues. Call the insurance company." And I hate talking to insurance people. They're so irritating. They spoke very standardized English, so I would sit there and comprehend what they're trying to tell me and make sure I understand what they're trying to tell me. Then I will hang up and then I will translate everything to my dad. I'm the middle man, and so then my dad said, "I'm going to call my lawyer and you have to talk to him." So maybe...I just realized...I just had an epiphany, maybe that's the reason why I feel like I'm very comfortable speaking English because I've been doing it for a long time now. Maybe this is the reason why my oral speaking is a little bit more advanced cause I had to talk to all these people all the time and I had to sound professional and I had to understand what kind of language they were using.

I am the third oldest, but I've been playing the role of oldest for a while now because I was the eldest at home for the longest. The role of the oldest is that you get all of the responsibilities. You have to go do the insurance phone calls, the hospital calls, the car accident calls; anything that involves calling American people, you're doing it. If it involves translating, like school functions, you're going. Running errands at nighttime, going to the store, you're going. Or like sending your siblings to church. We're just like their little chauffeurs now. I was like, "Why can't you go?" It's just like things to do around the house, like making sure the house is clean and that kind of stuff. It's you.

I think my responsibilities didn't get crazy until I went to college. And so that's when it became more of dropping kids off, taking kids to the hospital, errands that traditionally your parents are supposed to do. When my grandma was in the hospital and I was the oldest one because my other two sisters were at college, so I was the oldest one at home that could drive. So my grandma was in the hospital, and they needed someone to drop food off for her. Cause my grandmother doesn't eat American food. She wants her Hmong food. And so I was like, I have a job too, and then my dad goes your job is not as important as mine and your mom's, so you have to do it...that means I would probably be an hour late for work. So they're like, "It's OK if you lose your job. Our jobs are more important." So they sent me. I ended up doing the errands in the morning. I was just going to school part-time at the time. But the good thing during this time was where I was working at, they were really nice God-loving people, so they didn't mind me taking off like an hour to go pick up my siblings because I was the

emergency contact person because my dad refuses to take off to go pick up anybody because he feels that it's embarrassing, so he doesn't like us calling him at work. And my mom says, "Don't call me either." Then, so I end up getting all the phone calls. It was like me first, then my mom, but don't ever call Dad cause he's not going to come. So I just sort of got handed the responsibilities [of my parents] and you don't realize it until too late that you have all these responsibilities. You're like, "How did this happen!?" Yeah. I don't know. It just happened that I was homebound for a while.

And so I've been playing that role [of the oldest] for the longest time and then finally I was so happy when I finally was like "Peace out!" I'm not playing this role anymore. I'm going to California. I didn't tell my parents I was going to come to [to this university]. I think the first time my parents and me actually fought were over art and over coming to [here]. They sorta, kinda found out one night. And my mom freaked out and so my mom went and told my dad. And the next day my dad came home, and he's like "I heard you're going to California for school." And then I was like, "When did you hear about this?" And he was like "Mommy told me last night." And my dad started freaking out. He's like, "You can't leave because who's going to take the kids to school?" Like all my responsibilities, he just like threw on the table. He was like "Who's going to do all of these things that you're doing? No one's here." Because both of my sisters are at school. And then my younger brother didn't drive yet. So he's like "No one's going to take them to the school." School is not even that far! It's like half a mile. It's like "Dude, it's right there." I don't know, maybe I felt bad leaving my parents for a while because there wasn't...my sister was at school forever and then my other sister was going to school and then there wasn't anybody to take the kids to school and that kind of stuff. It was really hard to let go because you have all this guilt like, "Who's going to help my parents?" and "Wouldn't coming back help my parents?" But at the same time, you still have to live your life and your parents can't have you forever, so I think parents need to come to that understanding too that your kids are your kids; they'll always love you but they won't be there with you forever. (background questionnaire; group discussion, March 14, 2010; personal interview, March 16, 2010)

Even though Pajka and her sister Mai Mee were only two years apart in age, they were treated quite differently within their family. At one point during our discussions, the women informed me that the youngest daughter, which was Mai Mee's position, is referred to as the "princess," and she is often treated differently than the other daughters.

Pajka starts her story talking about taking responsibility for cooking for the family from a very early age.

I started learning how to cook or be like my mom's apprentice was when I was 5, cause I was always by her. I was always fascinated by her and how she did things. When I was 5 years old, I remember my mother teaching me how to make chili pepper sauce and the way to teach was by oral demonstration. From there on I learned a lot of my cooking skills from oral demonstration. It was never put on a written paper, but always orally. The role of being a woman has changed for my family a lot when I look at my younger sister Mai Mee. Ever since my three sisters who are older than me, all of them got married, that's when my parents automatically said, "You're in charge." They didn't say that orally but like they just did it like in a way where it demonstrated I was in charge of the whole family. Yeah, so it was interesting. For me, being the oldest girl at that time, I had to be in charge of everything. When I was in high school, I would be responsible for taking care of my little brothers, you know, when my parents aren't there. I would be expected to come home and cook and clean automatically and that's my role. Cook, cleaning, and then at the end of the day when I finish all that, I could go do my reading, my writing, my homework, when my [younger] sister did not have to worry about it as much. This really affect my studies because it was not always priority and I didn't have much time to focus on my homework. I would say Mai Mee got more reading and writing done than I did. Because I remember I would be the one who influenced her to read and write more. Because I'm the older one. Being the older one, I had to come home all the time first, get the meal, everything done before I do my homework. If I was in choir and I needed to go to school but my parents needed me to stay home, I had to stay home and watch the kids and pass on going to school. While I'm doing the meal, I have [Mai Mee] do [her homework] first and then she'll do it all evening. Cause I remember when I was in high school, my sister Mai Mee, she would read more than I do.

When we study and spend time reading, my mom would always say, "Oh, go do that later and come cook now," or like when she comes home and the house is messy, she's always saying to us, "Why are you always in your room, come out and clean and cook for the family before you do whatever you're doing," and then by the time we come cook, clean, and then when we start doing our homework and it's late, my parents would always say, "Why are you up all night? What are you doing?" And it's always like they're always right and we always have to follow it and I think that affected me because I didn't have the time to read like for entertainment-wise or like to learn in-depth what I'm learning.

Most of the time, I remember when I was in high school, just studying for my finals, I wouldn't have that much time, and I would know the concept but I wouldn't know it in depth, so it would be hard to take exams. Usually it's so hard for me to take exams because I know the concept, but not know it fully to

understand it. And I guess a lot of those hours when I would be cleaning, taking care of the family, it does take a lot of my time, but I wish I could have like really actually go back and actually start reading more and writing more. I remember it didn't affect my grade in high school, but it did affect me thinking about reading. I would hate reading, and it wasn't until I came to [college], I started...wow, like there's a lot of reading and a lot of writing. And that's when I started to be more fascinated in books, start to read more, and that's when I was like, "Oh. OK, I understand why my sister loves reading," and that's when I started to love reading.

There's no girls at home anymore. It's all guys, but it's always messy. [Now when we go home on breaks,] my mom was like, "You're here now for the weekend, come clean for once. You're always away." Especially for spring break, she doesn't understand that we need time to relax, and she's always like, "Oh, you didn't do this, run errands," and I was just like, "I need rest Mom, I need just time out for a whole day." And sometimes when I don't do anything, she's always referring to that we're lazy or comparing to the other brothers and sisters. And I think it's hard because I think our moms always have this mentality of this is what a good wife is, to instruct your kids this way, a certain way, even if they have all this other stuff, so it's always like family first, no matter what. (journal, February 20, 2010; journal, April 12, 2010; personal interview, April 28, 2010)

A related topic to having extensive home responsibilities was the outside work responsibilities that some of the students accepted with the permission of their parents. Bao Bai talked about the heavy work responsibilities of her job and the impact that her job had on her study time. She admits that it took time away from her studies, but she took pride in providing extra treats for herself and her siblings that her parents couldn't afford.

Since I knew that my mom was going to keep me busy already, I didn't want to be kept busy around the house. And I wanted to do things that would benefit me and so, you know, as soon as I could get a job, I got a job. I worked at McDonald's. I did put down part-time, but I was getting 40 hours a week. And so I worked. School was out at 3:15. I started work at 4, so I had like 15 minutes to dress up and eat something, and then start working. I didn't get off until 10 and so with the school homework that I had, and the upper division classes, I would be staying up until like 2 or 3 and sometimes, I spent a lot nights on the floor and not in bed because I was just studying a lot. I just didn't sleep much. I looked like a monster. Just to show my mom and dad that I can do something because when we went to [a different state], there wasn't much money anymore, and so it was good to have extra money and I wanted to show my parents that I was growing up

and I didn't have to ask them when I needed money. And I could help out too and treat my little siblings to whatever they wanted. I just felt that that was cool. If my brother ever needed money, I'm like, "Come ask me, I have money, you don't need to ask mom and dad," because I knew that we were struggling as a family financially. So just to be working that much, I was making quite a bit, but I encouraged my siblings to go on trips and to get involved in things where they might have to pay like some membership fee. I just spoiled my little sister, like I remember she liked to read ever since she could, so when like the book order forms came in, she was like, "I really want this book." I'd be like, "OK" and give her money for it. I wasn't really giving my parents money, but I was doing fun things. Like I would always bring food home and I would always buy ice cream. I spoiled my whole family (individual interview, March 23, 2010).

Emma stated that she felt it was also important for her to work, but she feels that it did have an impact on the quality of education that she received in her later years of high school.

Well, there was a lot of kids in my family, of course, and so, you know, things I wanted--during that age, you want stuff, you want clothes--I was tired of having the hand-me-downs and having to clean the bathroom every weekend just to get like ten dollars to buy a shirt, and so I would work. I tried so hard to get a job so I went in the work study program. And I got a job when I like 15. I was super excited, finally got money coming in and didn't have to ask my parents for help anymore cause I knew they were struggling too. I didn't want to be a burden on them. And I wanted to have clothes to wear, and so I thought I couldn't do more homework at school. Something had to go. In my freshman and sophomore year of high school, I took advanced English, where I learned the most about how to write and formulate my papers. My junior and senior year of high school, I moved back down to regular English because I couldn't take on the extra challenge with work part-time. These were the worst two years, my teachers didn't seem to care about teaching us much of anything and we never received any feedback on our papers. The class seemed to be a complete waste of time—it was sad to me that some of the students didn't even know about verbs and subjects or how to write a proper sentence in the junior and senior level (Journal 2, March 2010; individual interview, March 24, 2010).

These cases, wherein high school students were expected or allowed to commit extensive amounts of time to obligations outside of their educations, provide evidence for the inaccurate understanding that many Hmong parents have concerning the requirements of a solid education or regarding the time commitment that is needed for their daughters

to excel in their schoolwork. They also do not really understand the purpose of extracurricular sports and activities and the importance of those activities to their children.

*Parental involvement in extracurricular activities.* The next section will address parental involvement in Hmong students' extracurricular activities. This section will also provide me with a good way of showing how the topics were selected for discussion in the groups.

In one of our group discussions, Nkauj Choua Shoua told the following story:

One day I took my little brother to his concert. Him and my little sister and my brother were having this concert and I took them there because my parents couldn't take them and they brought up a conversation. They see it as being neglected by my parents, and my parents not supporting them in school cause they look at their American friends and their parents are always there with little camcorders and everything and they're like, "How come mom and dad can't come support us?" Cause I'm one of the older ones, so I see my parents working very different than how they do. I gave my lecture of a lifetime because I remember telling them like, "You don't understand because like your Caucasian friends are well-off people because they have money." My younger brothers and sisters grew up in suburban schools, so like schools of rich middle-class people and so I told them, "Your friends are more well-off than we are and mom and dad needs to work hard because we need to eat and pay bills, so no one else is going to do that and so they can't always be here—not because they don't want to. It's because they have to work." And I was like, "[This is] why you need to get an education because hard labor is hard labor." And so you look at them and they know how hard labor is because they come home and they smell funny and they look exhausted and they don't need to tell you that education is important, you look at their life and you're like I need an education and so I was telling my brother and sisters that because I was like you guys need to understand where they're coming from because you guys just don't see what they see (group discussion, February 22, 2010).

Since the rest of the women who were involved in the group discussion seemed very interested in this topic, I included a question on this topic for the next journal prompts.

Kaying provided the following response to the journal prompt:

My parents were not very involved with school mainly because my mom didn't know how to speak English that well, and my dad worked very late at 6:00PM until midnight M-F's. I really didn't understand how important it was for my

parents to see what I did in my class or what we are learning in our classes, until I reached my middle school years. I was the only Hmong student in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class and all the American kids had parents coming to see what they had done and the projects that they had worked so hard on, and my work that I did was just shown to other people who I didn't even know and people who really didn't really matter to me. [This] made me realize, "Why? Why isn't at least one of my family members here with me so that I have someone to show what I have done to?"

A few years later, I understood another reason why my parents didn't want to show up at school events. It was because they didn't want us to be embarrassed that we had parents who were "baa-NO" meaning people who didn't know city manners or people who were not very civilized in the city society. I was really sad when I found that out. When I came to visit [this university] on December 8, 2008, my dad has to dress in something really nice because he didn't want me to be embarrass. I remember really well that morning when I was in the bathroom fixing my hair, my dad came in a dark purple silky suit that he wears occasionally to church and nice black suit pants and I just remembered him telling me that he wanted to look nice so that he wouldn't embarrass me. And at that moment I thought that he was just making his regular jokes, but when we arrived [here], he put on his best manners and then I realized that what he told me this morning wasn't a joke but he really was telling me that he didn't want to embarrass me. At this moment I felt so bad that I didn't know what to say to him. I wanted to tell him that no matter what and how he acted, I wouldn't care what other people thought of him because he was my dad and nothing that he would have done regularly would have embarrassed me. I didn't know what to say to him so I just let it go and thanked him for taking me to visit [the school] (journal, March 14, 2010).

For me, one of the most striking stories about the misunderstanding of one of the participant's parents was this story told by Youa. The story relates back to her elementary school days.

When I was in third or fourth grade, I would always get Student of the Month and so when they give you student of the month, they give you a certificate to go to Sizzler to celebrate. And I would always get them, but then, my family, for some reason, don't think that's important to go to, so they would, they would just drop me off at Sizzler. It's not even they're sitting outside waiting for me. It's like they would go home and an hour later they'll come back to pick me up. And I would go in, I would give [the certificate] to them and go check in. I would go and sit down and go and get my food and sit at my own little [table] and after I'm done, an hour later, they'll come and pick me up. So now thinking about... imagine being at Sizzler and seeing this little girl just sitting at a table by herself. But now that I think it, I'm like, "Oh my gosh, that's crazy!" But when I was younger, while it was happening, I was like, "OK I'll go," and they'll just

drop me off. I remember one time I was waiting for them to come pick me up. Cause they were supposed to pick me up and they just never showed, so I kept eating ice cream because I didn't want to look like I'm just sitting there. So I kept going back to get more ice cream. So I got to the point where I couldn't eat anymore. And I just remember going "Man, come pick me up. I'm waiting forever." And I was coughing a lot because I ate too much ice cream, so finally, I got up and went outside and I just sat outside and my sister-in-law came and picked me up. And I was mad. That time I was mad because nobody came back to pick me up, but that was one situation that I can remember that they couldn't come out because money-wise or they didn't understand, but it didn't affect me. I still went. I always thought of myself as being grown up so I still went, but nowadays they don't do that. If they were to do that with my nieces and my little brother, I would totally be like, "No, at least one person has to go." I mean even if they had dropped my mom off with me, so that we could both at least enjoy some food together, enjoy the certificate together. Honestly, a part of me didn't mind it, but a part of me was like, "That's OK, if you guys can't go, I'll go." Nowadays, I don't think that would happen, especially with a little girl (group discussion, March 14, 2010).

Youa also made the following observation in her journal.

Sometimes I felt disadvantaged that my mom was not able to help me with schoolwork growing up, but overall, I do not mind. Sometimes thoughts will come up about the "ifs." If my mom read to me, I may be better at English. If my mom knew English, I wouldn't have had to take so much time going to the store or doctors to translate for her. If my mom was able to help me with homework, I may have been smarter. But in truth, when it comes down to it, I really don't know how things would have been if my mom was a little more American-streamed. Truth is, things may still turn out the way it did. Or, it may have made things different. I may have not seen the world as I have, shaping me to being different than who I am now. And so, at the end of the day, those "if" thoughts disappear (journal, March 14, 2010).

Experiences such as the ones in the next few stories are disheartening for the students because they are unable to share activities that they enjoy with their parents and siblings and their families are unable to share in their accomplishments. In addition, observing the way that other parents participate with their children results in minority students feeling even more like outsiders in the educational environment. Paj Chia talks about being on the tennis team and seldom having her parents come to watch.

When I played tennis in high school, my mom would try to come to my games as much as she can. She couldn't make a lot of them because she had her wifely duties, such as picking up my siblings, cooking for them, cleaning the house, and many other responsibilities as a mother. Other parents, mainly American parents, always brought snacks to our practices. They stayed, and watched, and encouraged their children as much as possible. I remember I used to be so jealous of them. We would go, and all their parents always came all the time. Like, I would always play against this girl, and I would beat her and like her whole family was right there watching, and I have like no one watching on my side. And one time her boyfriend was there and I was like, "Oh dang it." I felt so bad (journal, March 15, 2010; group discussion, March 16, 2010).

Bao Bai's parents were involved in some activities, but not others. She remembers feeling like an outsider after her band concerts when she was waiting outside alone for them to come and pick her up.

During my grade school, I grew up in the city, or a pretty big city, so my parents never let my siblings and I do much. We just went to school, and came back. Period. Sometimes I wish I was Jasmine and have Aladdin come take me away on his magic carpet and show me the world! But that never happened, so when we moved to [another state], the school was smaller, and the population in the town I was living in was way smaller. The town had a population of 600 people. Since each town was so far apart, there was a school district in each different town. So, I guess to my mom, that made her feel a little more safe. But I was recruited into the band because I could somewhat read music notes, and then, later, my brothers joined football too which was a big change. My parents never had time really to participate much in our lives because they sacrificed their time to work all the time, but always made sure that one parent was always home with the kids. My mom would wake up early and go to work and not come home until 4 pm and my dad left for work at 3:15 pm and came home at 11:15 at night. In [our new home] though, since their job was on the farm where we lived, it was just a matter of if our animals were going to be ok. They came to my homecoming when I needed them, and they came to my brother's senior night football games. But they didn't come to my band concerts. It made me really sad. After the band concert everybody would run to their parents, but I would just go outside and go call them to come pick me up, and then I would have to wait for like 30 minutes until they came and picked me up. One thing that I did encourage my parents to do after I graduated was to go to my younger sister's band concerts because, it does mean something to have them there. They liked the academic awards. They would come to that, so that was good, too (journal, March 14, 2010; group discussion, March 14, 2010).

Hli Chia seemed to take the lack of participation by her parents harder than many of the other women did.

I had a hard time writing this because like Bao Bai, I had some teary moments. My parents were not involved much in my educational process because of their lack of education. They supported me in my education but they weren't able to help me with school works or the financial aid application. Many times my parents did not want to go to open school nights because they did not see the importance of it. My mom was late to one of my school nights back in middle school. She was complaining of how tired she was and I made her rush from her previous meeting with our relatives. I was so frustrated, and after that, I never asked them to go to my school nights again. I just gave up trying to get my parents to be involved in my education because it seemed like they were never interested. My parents were not on parent committees with other parents because they would not have known what they can offer, which was totally fine with me. I played volleyball my sophomore year in high school and not one of my family members went to any of the game nights. I played in volleyball for a whole year and every time I asked [my brothers and sisters], "Come see me play, because it's a home game" and they would always make excuses, so it just got to the point where I just gave up. No one from my family went to the only musical play that I have been in too. I remember asking my parents and siblings to come and see me perform in my musical play because it was so important to me. However, not one of them made the effort to come because they all were too busy. I remember asking my sisters, and half of them are like "We don't feel like it, so we're just not going to come." And so my parents, I think they were really tired so they couldn't come. And then one of my sisters apologized. She said that she had to work, do her nursing stuff, so she couldn't come and so I thought "OK, it's OK. I can do this on my own. It's OK," and so as I was driving, I just started crying. I remember crying all the way to the theater as I drove to my rehearsal before the first play time. I was like, "No, it's not OK," and then I was talking to my boyfriend on the way there and driving which is so dangerous, but that was like one of the hardest nights, like I cried the hardest and just when I got to the theater, I just sucked it up and went on stage. My ex-boyfriend felt so bad for me that he begged his sister and her family to come by to see me perform, since he was living out of town. I remember going to plays where other Hmong students' parents were present to see them perform, and I felt singled out. I felt like I longed for that kind of relationship with my parents but I didn't have it. My mom, on occasions, came to my choir performances, and it was really good to see her smile when I was on stage. It was my last choir performance before graduating from high school, and she finally realized how much work I had put into it. She realized that it was important to me and we did an awesome work with our singing. I envy my younger brother and sisters when my parents and older siblings made the effort to go to their game nights, assemblies, choir performances and such. I think, if anything, it made me more motivated (others agree) to like be independent because I just had this sense of feeling like they

didn't care as much so I have to do this on my own in order to pass high school (journal, March 14, 2010; group discussion, March 14, 2010).

Chu Ka recalls awards assemblies and back-to-school nights in which her parents were only minimally involved.

Well, like I remember in grade school, I'd be receiving student of the month all the time, no kidding. I remember, we'll sit and they'd announce "Miss Jones' class," and all the little kids would yell, "Chu Ka, Chu Ka, Chu Ka." I remember that a lot. Then I would go up and I would know that like my parents weren't there, but that didn't really come to my mind, like it didn't matter to me if they came or not because it was the norm and what made me feel proud was that I received that award and that was what made me feel proud. And I knew that [it was not that my parents] didn't want to come. It's that whenever that letter does come to the house, that your student's going to receive that award, they don't know how to read it or like they wouldn't understand it, so like what they would know was that I would come home with that award and they would be proud of me. There was a time when I was really surprised my dad came once. I was like happy, though. It made me kind of want to cry. I have never been more proud of myself than when my parents showed up (group discussion, March 15, 2010)

For 'back to school nights,' my parents never attend because I knew deep down inside, they felt embarrassed that even if they went, they couldn't participate because of their disadvantage of the English language. At the same time, I sometimes wished my parents would attend so that I would have parents to run to when I'm finished performing at back to school nights. I did feel at a disadvantage because my parents weren't there like other parents, almost made me feel sad inside, but I didn't want to feel sad because it wasn't my parents' fault or mines. It was because of their disadvantages, and mines, that caused this. So like for back-to-school nights, we had like a community of Hmong people, so all the kids would gather up and we would just go by ourselves to the back-to-school night because we know our parents wouldn't go because of the disadvantage of not knowing English (journal, March 15, 2010; group discussion, March 15, 2010).

The final story about parental involvement is told by Pajka. Pajka talks about being in the choir and on sports teams. In addition to addressing the fact that her parents rarely came to her games, she also touches on the difficulty of being on a team with no other Asian friends.

I was in the choir and our parents dropped me off, and they leave and they don't come back until later and you just see all these parents so proud of the kids and

you're just like, "OK, whatever." And like you have to go because it's for a grade and it's like we don't really think about it until like we see their parents. The other, the Americans, like their parents are so proud of them. When I was in tennis, I have all these Hmong people and my sister and even if we finish a match and we didn't do good, we would support each other. But in sophomore year, I was on the basketball team and I didn't have anybody, like I was the only Asian on the basketball team. It was hard for me. I remember that I had to...I felt like I had to act different to be on the team. During school time, I'm with my Asian friends, but when I have practice after school I have to act another person to fit in, to understand what they're talking about, and I think that was really hard for me. And when it came to games, like my parents didn't come, but sometimes they would come early [to pick me up] and see like 30 minutes of it, but then that would be it. Sports, it was like an escape for me, you know, cause like I felt like I was just so stuck in the house all the time. We didn't get to go play outside, and they were just very protective, so the only way of getting out of the house and traveling was being in sports. And I realized that in my family, most of the girls were in sports. And the guys, they weren't because they had more freedom than us. Then my junior and senior year, I was in the radio and that really opened me up to see more things and I traveled a lot, and my mom was like, "Why are you traveling so much?" And I was like "School stuff," and then she was like "OK." She believed me and at times, she would doubt. You come home every single day, and they always criticize you for doing what you're doing. My mindset is always like "I'm going to prove it to them. I'm going to prove it to them." When it comes to award night, the coach would actually call the parents to come and without letting us know because they see that like the parents don't come to games, but when it comes to awards, they call the parents to actually come. They come and then my parents are like "OK, I see why you did this." (group discussion, March 15, 2010)

Although these extracurricular activities may not have been directly related to their academic endeavors, their parents' lack of involvement made them feel further othered and alienated from their fellow students in the social context of the educational environment.

*Attending college away from home.* The remainder of this chapter will focus specifically on issues related to gender. Gender is an area that Hornberger does not directly address in her continua of biliteracy; however, gender is a significant issue for Hmong women, and I have chosen to position it also under the minority-majority continuum since the role of women within a minority culture can have a significant

impact of their literacy experiences. Much of the educational literature on women and literacy focuses on literacy and language development at a much lower level than the language being used by women in college; however, some of the principles still apply. Language develops in formal and informal settings, and while the women in this study have implicit access to formal classroom education, they often do not have equal access to the less formal interactions, both inside and outside of the classroom, which would be required to help them develop the proficiency with language that they desire. In addition, they receive mixed messages on the importance of their educations, as shown by the analogies which were provided by three of the women in this study and will be shared below.

The desire of Hmong families to keep the young women close to the home and to retain their “purity” remains very high. They are very concerned that when women go away to college, they will damage the reputation of the family. Actually, in many cases, just allowing the daughters to go away is suspect in itself. Despite all the obstacles, the women in this study have doggedly pursued their educations. Although, these women have been encouraged to pursue higher education, many of them have received some resistance to leaving home to attend this Christian university, in many cases just because they were leaving home and in other cases because of the higher cost of a private school education when compared to a state college or community college education.

Several of the women shared about the struggles that they had trying to get permission from their parents to leave home to attend college. Paj Chia describes the attempts of her family to dissuade her from leaving home by encouraging her to get married.

I knew I wanted a higher education when I was in High School. I wanted to go to college so much, even though all my older 5 siblings did not go. None of them. I'm first generation in my family. So it was a huge shock to everybody. I was excited and couldn't wait to go to college. I also knew I wanted to move away from my family because it was hard enough to concentrate in high school already. I had a lot of struggles going to college. It was kind of like one of the hardest times in my life. I just really pushed to go to college because I knew it was going to be tough because I know my parents were expecting me to stay home. And especially get married. You can say my family is pretty traditional. My sister got married when she was like 11, and I have four older brothers, and they all got married before they turned 18. They all had kids and everything and so me, turning 17, 18, you know, all done with school, they were like, "She's not married yet. She doesn't have a boyfriend." Time to freak out. So my mom was like, "You're getting old. You're 18, you're getting old." So my family is crazy, so even when I think about it back then. They made it really hard for me. My mom was just like, "You're supposed to be married." I was like the sacrificial lamb. Right after I turned 18, my parents tried to marry me off to any of my available uncles or cousins. Anyone who was decent and looking for a wife, I was it. My mom was like calling all my cousins and trying to marry me off. It's crazy. Giving my number out, and so, yeah, I got a lot of calls, but I didn't pick up.

The reason is that I am the first generation to go college in my family, and let me mention "a woman" also. Oh and my family went ballistic and they were livid, especially my four older brothers and my dad, when they found out I was going off to college. We had a family meeting. Like all my brothers came together. It was intense and they would say things like "It is okay if you go to college, but you have to stay in town." "You are a girl; you should be married by now." "You should stay near your parents." "You are not strong enough to be on your own." "You are not ready." They were just like, "You shouldn't be independent. We worry about you." So my parents were really opposed: "You're gonna go sleep with different races and get pregnant." That's understandable now, but they're just really worried. "You're a woman and you are supposed to be taken care of." "You can't go by yourself." "You're gonna live on the campus?!?" And I'm like "Yes" and they're just all really protective and everything.

Despite my family's strong objection to me going to college, I fought and fought. I was always stubborn and very headstrong (that is, in a good way) while growing up so my family knew this was not going to be easy. So they knew that it was going to be easier for me to go and so I came. Despite their objections and everything. And I just knew they would just come along someday. So it's just like, they'll just get it someday and they do. It actually took them like about 6 months to get it. I would at least go home every other weekend, so that they'll see me and they're not like, "Oh she's never home" or anything, but they keep trying to convince me every time I had a hard time. I was homesick and everything, and my mom was like, "Just pack up and come home. Do you want me to come get you?" Every conversation we had, and that makes it hard because you're like

already homesick and then she was “Just pack up and leave.” “Mom, I can’t do that.” But yeah, so they get it, and now they’re like an advocate of college. All my siblings, my mom’s like “You guys all have to go to college.” My victory is going to college! And I love it. (journal, March 15, 2010; group discussion, March 15, 2010)

Hli Chia has several older sisters who have finished college, but none of them went away to school. She describes her battle to be allowed to leave home to pursue the education and the independence that she wanted.

My parents encouraged us to go to college and get married after finishing college, which is very positive encouragement. However, I fought my way to come [here]. I was the first girl from my family to go to college away from home. Two of my older brothers went [away] to college but they came back with a stack of debts for my parents to pay because they were not responsible for it. My parents feared me going away for school. They feared that I will return with debts for them to pay, I will live a hard life as a missionary, and I will not be [financially] successful. I guess all parents share the same fears when their children go away for college, though. I had to fight extra hard because I am a girl. In our culture, girls are given more things but we are limited to what we can and cannot do. I prayed on my knees day and night, and God finally gave me confirmation with my parents’ consent. I wanted their blessings because if I did not get their blessings, then they will spend the next four years making a fuss of every small mistake I make. Yes, it was like the talk of the family. I really wanted to go and feel like God is calling me. I really feel that he opened the door, but then I was like “God, if my parents are not going to allow me to go, how am I going to go? You gave us a command to obey our parents and how are you going to help me on this.” And so I did really like pray day and night, and every day, I had the conversation with my parents, like “Can I go?” and it ends up into like four hours lecture after that question every day. And so finally I told my [admissions] counselor here to shut down my account because I’m not coming. And I went to [the state school] over there and took their placement exam because I was...I guess I just kind of gave up. But then after that, it just it dawned on me that if I don’t go [here], I will regret it for the rest of my life. I will regret the experience of what God was really going to do with me. So I prayed one last time and I went to ask my mom and I just kind of told her, “Mom, I don’t care what you guys say, but I’m going to make my way to go to school. And I’m going to find my own ride. Whatever I have to do, I’m gonna go.” And so there was this silence, and she just said “Because you want it so much your way, then you can just go.” So I just...I didn’t expect that answer, but I just backed out and I went and packed my things.

I got their consent but not their full blessings. My parents did not promise me of financial support when I desperately need it and they did not promise me a car when I desperately need it. I was ok with that because I knew that God will

provide for me. However, when my parents saw how much [this school] had changed me, they were willing to help me out more. (journal, March 14, 2010; group discussion, March 14, 2010)

Youa was also very persistent in her determination to establish her independence in her education and pursuit of a career. After much negotiation, she was given permission to stay on campus at a college only about a half-hour from her home. She explains that she did experience some challenges with living on her own and struggling to get good grades.

I remember wanting to go to a college far away from home. But, my mom would not allow it. My oldest brother would not allow it. They would not even let me visit any school that was not around the area. I remember my brother saying that there was no point in visiting a school where I will not be going anyways. I really wanted to just be able to go out there, and my mom's like "nope" so I said "OK, well if I can't go, then at least let me live away from you guys even though I'm close by." In the end, I made a deal with my mom and brother. If they would not allow me to go far away, they at least let me live on campus away from home. They agreed. I packed up and left to a [state university] thirty minutes away from home. I wanted to go farther away, but my mom would not have that. It was surprising that they said OK. I didn't expect them to say OK, but they did. And they never chewed me down on it while other people talked about it. They supported me. I lived on my own for quite a while. I was very independent. I worked and went to school at the same time. I supported myself. Those I felt were big victories because as a girl we all know how Hmong families sometimes say, "Oh don't let her go, she's just going to go and do bad things" or "She's a girl; you can't trust her being by herself," or you know, whatever. But I stood up to that, and I was one of the first [Hmong] girls in our church, in our city, to go to college and live on campus.

When I did not get the good grades that [I] wanted, those are big struggles for me because throughout high school I always got good grades. But getting to college, when I didn't, it just made me think again about "Whoa, maybe I'm not as good as I thought I was. Maybe this isn't for me. Maybe I can't make it." And balancing work and school and personal life. It was difficult because living on your own, you want to prove to everyone that you're OK and you're doing well. It was really difficult to just balance all that together. A struggle was not following the crowd. Because you know, going to a secular school, there's so many things that you could be doing. And being able to say no, because you don't want to say no because you want to make friends, but at the same time you know that those are not the things that you're there for, and so after that struggling and always feeling like you're alone because you're away from home, yet you're not making

friends because all the people just want to go out and have fun and such and you don't want to be a part of that so you're always by yourself. Or you're always cooped up in your room because you want to do your homework and stuff like that. So that was a struggle too--feeling lonely and such (journal, March 14, 2010; group discussion, March 14, 2010).

In addition to their reluctance to allowing their daughters to go away to school, sometimes parents were very concerned about the financial implications of their daughters living away from home and attending a private school. Meh first talked about coming to visit campus before she decided on a college and then moved on to her parents' reaction about her decision to attend this university.

I think it's the campus, visiting the campus, and it was like feeling what I felt at the moment, like I had a talk with [the university president]. He was like the first person I met when I came onto the campus. I was like, "Wow," and he's all like "Yeah, you gotta love this campus." And you know you, I was like "Dude, I do love this campus." I mean I'm here and the first person I meet is the president. And he was like, "Wow! The Hmong students are here." And I was like "Yeah, I'm Hmong." And he said, "There are a lot of you guys here. Pretty soon one of you guys are going to take over my position."

[My parents] were very objected [to me coming here] because not only is [my boyfriend] here, but also the fact that this private school is very expensive and [the state school] was my second option as a college. They were very mad at me that at the last second I chose to come here. And you know, my parents promised me that if I was able to find the money to come here, they would let me come here. And then when I found all these scholarships, it was like "Mom, I have the money to go to college now," and it's kind of like they betrayed me and our promise, not being satisfied with coming here because of how they wanted me to go to another college. Because the scholarship is like twenty thousand and plus I could be using that for all of the 4 years at State instead of 2 years coming here.

My sister went to community college but that's because of Cal Grant and everything. They give you like an extra thousand dollars to spend on whatever you need it on. And it's not like books cost a thousand bucks, but that's what's beneficial about Cal Grant if you don't go to a private like this. If you were to go to a [state] university, you'd get money back and so like my mom goes, "Why don't you just go to a community college, you get the same [general education] and everything, just get your GE done here," but I'm like, "No, I want to start off at a college." My friends were also a motivation for me to go to like a college. Like a university. Because everybody was getting accepted to universities and I didn't want to stay back home and go to community college. I just felt very

lonely and I just needed like escape or go somewhere, you know? That's why I came here.

My parents are still like, "So, have you thought about transferring?" Cause you know, I've still got the money and boyfriend issue. I'm like "Mom, no, I'm not going to drop out. I'm not going to transfer." It's funny cause like my parents are proud of me coming here but at the same time when I go back home, they're like how are you going to get money to go to school? And I'm like "Mom, you guys are studying to be missionaries and you guys are asking me about money?" And so I'm just like "Mom, what happened to, you know, like trusting God?" (group discussion, March 15, 2010)

Kaying's parents were also concerned about the financial part of attending college away from home, but in the end, her family rallied around to support her financially, although her mother still does not really approve of her decision.

I've always decide that I would get out of high school and go directly to [the state college], because my older sisters have gone there and graduated. I actually have no idea of any other college I should go to. My parents never really cared about which college is better. They just wanted us to get the best education that we got offered. I've always thought about college because it's basically where almost everyone I knew went. What else is there besides going to school to get a higher education...it's what I always thought to myself. Before coming to [this school], it was a really hard decision I had to make because none of my family thought that me taking out loans would be a good idea for my future. Besides that, my parents don't really care much of where I go to college.

It was a sad day, the day where my parents found out that tuition was a lot, but I told them that financial aid paid for the tuition. I just needed like, I think it was \$800 for last semester and this semester, so like I had \$700 and I needed like \$150 more I think, so I was like crying, and my dad was like, "No, you're not going because you're not going to spend all of your graduation money on that," so I was like so sad and I was crying and my dad was all like, "Since you're going to go learn like about God and like just go in faith, I'll let you go," so my dad asked everyone in the house to see if how much they could give me. So it was so sad because like, I don't know, it's like kind of almost the first time that everyone was like together. It was good, but it was just that it's like a good, sad feeling. I don't know. [For the second semester] I worked during the night so I got like, I got \$300 saved up and then my dad, he called me and he told me to not hold my burden anymore because like I had \$500 to pay more, so he gave me \$200 and my sister gave me \$300, so I paid it off. So, yeah. I don't want to ask my dad for money, because he pays for like everything, like the house and stuff and insurance and he's really busy.

I go to school and I learn about education and all the subjects and stuff, but my mom, like she wants me to like be obedient and she wants me to know how to cook and do all the things that she learned when she was small. So I don't know, like, she didn't let me come. It was so quiet. She didn't even talk the day where everyone was giving money. She was kind of mad. And then she was yelling at me. She said that I should have just gone to [the state school] and saved money and get a car and stuff like that, but now she's like kind of adapting to me being gone. (journal, March 15, 2010; individual interview, April 20, 2010)

Emma faced a brief battle at the last minute in her quest to attend college away from home; however, she persisted, and she shares how her family has been and continues to be very supportive of her education, even now that she is attending graduate school.

As a young child, I always knew that one day I would go to college. My parents advocated and pushed for us to pursue higher education so it was nothing new. Dad wanted us to either be doctors or lawyers so we could bring in money to help buy them a big house and put our family out of our misery. When I was a sophomore in high school, I knew that I wanted to go to [this school]. My [church] youth director would take me up to [the recruiting weekend] 3 years in a row and tell me that it would be a great place for me to continue growing and maturing as a leader. All through the years of me coming to [the recruiting weekend], [my parents] knew I was going to come here already. It just so happened that on that very morning when they were taking me to school, both my mom and my dad discouraged the whole time, so three years of nothing, just super-encouraging, saying, "Go" and then that very last day, something happened. It was the strangest thing, all the four hours up here, like both of them were just like "Why are you going there? That's so stupid. You're dumb, you can't do it." Then I was like "Whoa. Where did all this come from?" I felt like the spiritual battle the whole time there, but once I got there, though, immediately it left. My mom and my dad was just so proud of me. I guess it came back to them, "Wow. We didn't mean what we said."

I didn't have much of that struggle where like I always knew my parents always wanted us to go to college. Like my mom never pushed me to get married and she doesn't even still now that I'm 23, and I asked her once because it bothered me. I was like, "Does my mom think [there's something wrong with me]?" I called her one day and I was like "Mom, why didn't you ever push me to get married" and she was saying "Well, why would I? Cause I see life now in this world like if you don't have an education, you can't expect to go very far and get money to help you out for your future, and also when you get married, new struggles come with that. And lot of times you're going to be tied down to kids, wife, family," and so she wanted us to go far and even now that my sister's

married, she doesn't push my sister to have children which is weird for a mom not to push her daughter to have babies, but my mom's just saying "Why do that, because there is more stress?" So I think I felt like I was very blessed to have parents who encouraged me to go, and like they don't ever ask about how my grades are or how I'm doing, you know, and so it's all very much your own...you do it yourself and I mean you find friends who are, you know, good motivators and you kind of make it on your own, almost (journal, March 15, 2010; group discussion, March 15, 2010)

*Gender differences in the attitude toward education.* As mentioned earlier, I chose to include only women in my study for a couple reasons. First of all, I felt that the women would be more open in discussions with each other if there were no men present. Secondly, I suspected that in the Hmong culture, the attitude toward education was very different when it came to men and women. The roles of Hmong women, in general, are closely prescribed by the communities in which they live. After completing my initial literature research about women in the Hmong culture, I was a little dubious that the roles and attitudes described in the literature actually still held true for this generation of Hmong young people. The women on our campus in many ways appeared to be generally like the average female college student. Through our discussions, however, I realized that they live very different lives at home than they live on the college campus. On the college campus, the men and women appear to be equal. In fact, women have often served as leaders in the Asian clubs on campus. Many of them have fought long, hard battles to attend a college away from home, and many of them are still expected to fulfill certain traditional cultural roles even though they are pursuing an advanced education. As I will present later in this section, they are ambivalent themselves about the significance or importance of their educations, yet they persevere despite not doing as well as they would like and despite the obstacles they face within their families, in the college classroom, and in the social environment of the dominant culture

According to our conversations during this study, gender and family roles within Hmong families remain largely prescribed by cultural tradition. Parents have different expectations for their sons than their daughters. Rockhill (1987) emphasizes the extreme differences that exist in the social experiences of immigrant men and women. She further believes that women live sexual oppression in similar ways that they live race, class, and ethnic oppression and contends that few studies in educational research address this similarity. Hmong women in higher education are not only battling prejudices and stereotypes related to their ethnicity, language ability, and social class, but they are also battling attitudes toward gender which come mostly from their own culture.

Although it is difficult to find statistics to confirm that more Hmong women than men are pursuing higher education, most of the women believed that, in their families and communities, women are definitely more proactive in pursuing their college educations than men are. The reason for this is not obvious. Perhaps they are looking for different opportunities and options than those that were available to their mothers, or perhaps higher education is viewed as an investment that may result in increased agency and empowerment. Perhaps they are trying to fulfill parents' expectations that their male counterparts are abdicating. Whatever the reason, there seemed to be an almost universal belief among the participants in this study that Hmong women are surpassing Hmong men in the pursuit of higher education and that the fact that many of their brothers and male cousins are not pursuing higher education seems to be changing some of the family dynamics. The women noticed this trend within their own families and offered some specific examples from their own experiences

When asked if she perceived that more women than men were pursuing higher education, Phoua gave the following response.

I'd say half and half, but back at home, you know, it depends on where you live at. Well, I see that, yeah, women they do want to continue, but it also depends on their family, if the family could support them to go to school. And so, but I know that most of the Hmong guys, they will just go, but they go for a major like doing gaming systems or something like that. That's what they want to pursue instead of getting a business [degree] or something like being a doctor. Like they don't have higher standards than that. They only want to do like go to computer tech or just things that are like just OK (group discussion, April 12, 2010).

Although she was not sure about the actual numbers of men and women, she did feel that men wanted to pursue less ambitious careers than the women.

Emma feels that her parents' positive attitude toward her pursuit of an advanced degree originates partially from the fact that her brothers are not committing themselves to higher education.

I think it has changed for myself anyway, how my family has viewed education, because I think my dad, in the beginning, they place a lot of emphasis on the guys going to college and stuff and getting their Master's and giving the family a name. But now I think my dad recently, he just started realizing that my brothers aren't going to college, that they're not going to pursue their Master's or anything. They're just not . . . they stopped after high school. And he started seeing that if he doesn't encourage his daughters, he's not going to have anybody in his family who will excel. And that's so important to them is when they can brag about one of their children—especially their sons, but now they can't brag on their sons cause they're not going anywhere. So my dad recently he's just started to really encourage me to keep going. You know, it's such a different thing and he knows that he doesn't expect me to be home. Like before, I was the daughter and I was supposed to be home, but now he's just "Go do your thing and come back home when you need to, but we support you." It's just so different. But I really think it's because some fathers, they can't rely on their sons anymore to get them . . . to get an education. So they rely on their daughters to help them. My brother says he's staying with my parents so he can buy all of his toys before he moves out (group discussion, February 1, 2010).

Emma further addressed this issue at a later point in her journal and gave some possible ideas for the reasons that men and women seem to view their opportunities for education differently.

I see my brothers excelling at their work places but have no interest to go back to school (i.e. college). They say that it's "not their thing"—I believe they're saying that they no longer want to read and do school work especially if it's really likely that they won't get a good job when they're done. One of my uncles have graduated for about/over 10 years now and he still hasn't found a good job but moves from one job to another, not being satisfied with the way his life has turned out despite going through school. I believe these sorts of situations may play a big part in the way men view education. Some of the women I've met in my life are eager to keep excelling and aren't as pessimistic about education. They aren't as afraid to try for something and make connections, hoping to get somewhere with what they've acquired at school. Many of the girls I went to school with have gone off and graduated from college already. There was never a doubt in their mind that they wouldn't make it and just kept going. I guess the girls took a chance at pursuing for more education because they saw the life their mothers had, where her obligation was to bear children and become a housewife. Being in America, there are other options for women and that's to go for more education which will then open doors for more opportunities. It's interesting that their brothers are similar to mines and have neglected to pursue more education after high school. Maybe this is because "working to make a living" as their fathers did is no different in their eyes from the life that they'll live if they have a family one day. (journal, April 11, 2010).

Pajka followed up Emma's ideas with the following comments:

That's true. I can relate to that a lot. My dad's realized that about us girls. Just our dedication to education, that he's changed his mind saying, "Oh, I can rely on the girls more than the boys." And my mom's kind of like, she would not encourage me to go to school cause she really wants me to stay home. And like where I am now, just knowing that I'm the first one to graduate in our family. She's kind of realizing "Oh, wow, she is finally finishing college. But I was thinking about going and getting my Master's and she's was just kind of like "I don't know, I'm iffy." She's like "I thought she's going to come home and actually support the family now." But my dad's like "go for it" (group discussion, February 1, 2010).

I do talk to [the guys] sometimes, and I think most of what I've seen like in our community is lack of motivation from the fathers, you know, because like my dad doesn't say much. He just observe and when it's time to say, he'll say it. And I feel like my brothers are being like that, like they don't care. Cause if my dad doesn't say anything, then it's OK. But when my dad doesn't say anything, it

means something different, that he doesn't want to talk to them because they won't listen anymore. And I guess like the nagging from my mom so much, they just kind of ignored it. That they become like my dad, like, "Oh, OK, we'll just be like our dad. Let's just be quiet and not be like motivated because our dad's not even motivating us." So it depends like I'm just saying from like what I've seen within our family (group discussion, April 12, 2010).

In addition to Emma's comment above that boys want to be able to buy toys, there seemed to be a perception among some of the women that their male counterparts are maturing more slowly than they are and, as a result, are still more interested in toys and fun than in thinking about their futures. A couple of the women made some brief comments about men buying extreme toys, like expensive car parts or airsoft guns, or spending ridiculous amounts of money on designer tennis shoes. Chu Ka shared some of her own frustrations and those of some of her female relatives regarding the lack of motivation of their brothers.

It's like half and half growing up. There were some that excelled and some that just gave up. Even for like my brothers, like even though we try to set a good example for them to go to college, they still ended up not going because I think they were just interested into money, work, and friends. Not just that, but like my other relatives, there's seven girls, and they're all educated, like, they're very educated. They all have like their Master's and doctor's and but then the youngest son, which is 18 or 19, I was talking to my cousin. I was like, "OK, what happened to your younger brother?" She was "Oh, he's not going to college. He's just home. He just came back partying hard last night, so he's sleeping in the bedroom." I was like, "Oh wow, what happened to him?" She's like, "I don't know, he just doesn't want to be homeless." He wants to work, but as long as he's not homeless, then he's OK. With guys, it hits them late that education is needed or not just that, but like, you know, you need something to back yourself besides working at McDonald's, you know. Or beside like with their boy toys, it hits them late because they're still in their playing stages all the way up to like 20's, like just hanging out with their friends and kicking back, and that's what they want to do. I asked my brother, "What are you doing," but he didn't go to college. He made an excuse, like "I'm going to sign up," but he never did. Even for summer, "I'm going to sign up," but he never did. I was like "What are you going to do?" when I went home last week. Or two days ago, and then he's like all, "I'm going to go to UTI." I was like, "Why?" He goes, "Because I want to go learn how to fix cars. And it's a guaranteed job." I was like, "Where did you hear that from?" He goes, "A friend. That's what he did and

it's a guaranteed job after." All they care about is the money, you know. And like not just that, but they want something guaranteed for them to do, too. So like and then I handed him over to [Pajka's] sister, because he wanted to go into the police department, but he found that the process is much more difficult, so he just kind of quit. He said, "I'm going to go to UTI because it's easier" So, they always choose. I think they're looking up to guy examples, you know, and there's not that much of like higher education men to look up to (group discussion, February 1, 2010).

Nkauj Choua Shoua also voiced dissatisfaction with the choices of her younger adult brothers because she feels they are not doing much with their lives.

This is how I told my brother. I was like, "Dude, you're like 20 something and you just sit at home. You don't do anything with your life right now," and I feel like, "Dude, if I was the oldest son, I would be pushing to strive to bring honor to my parents because their honor is in their sons, and not in the daughters who leave the family, but if all the girls are bringing degrees in and the sons aren't doing anything, it irritates me. I know it's very patriarchial, very male-dominance, but... (group discussion, February 1, 2010).

*The place of women in the Hmong culture.* During the course of this study, we discussed several different implications of education for Hmong women, including the differences in attitudes about education between men and women and the cultural and familial attitudes toward education presented above. Even though many of the women were encouraged to go to college, their roles within their families and their expected future roles as wives have a tendency to overshadow the value of their educations. A couple of the women have parents who are dubious about the value of their daughters' educations because they have not chosen career paths that will result in financial success and instead have chosen to pursue their dreams which, in some cases, include Christian service careers. Even though most of their families are Christians, their parents do not seem to value Christian service as highly as material gain and financial freedom for the future. They want their children to be more financially stable than they are. Several of

the women voiced that they feel a pressure to use their education to help the family out of its lower socioeconomic state.

One observation that I found particularly interesting was that many of the women themselves, who have fought and pushed to pursue higher education, have ambivalent attitudes toward the conflicting priorities of pursuing careers and further education versus fulfilling their culturally-planned roles as wives and mothers. The two women in the study who are married also talked about the pressures they experience as daughters-in-law and sisters-in-law.

I will begin this discussion of gender issues within the Hmong culture with a poem from the Moua's book (2002), entitled 'We Women of the Hmong Culture':

We women of the Hmong culture  
may now clean the plates  
of what the men have left  
eat the remains while they pick  
their teeth with wooden toothpicks

They call this a privilege,  
to be seated at the table  
of those who were seated before.  
To partake in this feast of remains

is a blessing beyond all measures.  
Yet some she-witched women  
"possessed by this newfound knowledge  
of excessive freedom" are weary

of participating in such patriarchal  
rituals of the old motherhood.  
They stare at the remains of half-eaten  
meat—the imprints of a beloved uncle's

teeth still cut upon them—littered  
among the cuisine grown cold  
from hours of neglect.  
Does no one wish to sit and taste?

The host and hostess invite  
all us women to partake in the feast  
of *laab*—ground beef,  
half-cooked tendons—and chicken

boiled with withered herbs.  
Biting our lips and our tongues,  
we sit. With each bite into the feast  
at hand, we remember

we are women.

(Vang, pp. 154, 155)

Several of the women who participated in the study acknowledged that their identity is strongly tied to the men in their lives, first their fathers, and then their husbands. No matter what their educational status or profession is, they continue to be identified as someone's daughter or someone's wife. Education does not really place a woman in a special category or raise her status significantly within the Hmong community and in some cases not even within her family. The following excerpts from group discussions and individual interviews will provide the perceptions of the women in this study regarding the status of women within the Hmong culture.

Youa provided a general description of the relative unimportance of the names of Hmong women.

You're not called by your name after you get married. You're just called by your husband's name. You're no longer [Mary], you're now Mrs. [Joe]. That's your identity. That's it. The only time they'll ask you for your name is like if another [woman] might ask, "Oh, what's your maiden name?" Because they want to know where you're coming from to see if you're related to them in that way--or I'm a Yang too, or I'm a Lee too--to have that connection, but only another woman would ask you what your name is (group discussion, April 11, 2010).

Nkauj Choua Shoua also addressed the fact that when a Hmong woman gets married her identity shifts from being an extension of her father to being an extension of her husband.

She was also recently surprised to find out that many of the women in her church have college educations.

It's depressing because, I can get as educated as I want. As much education as I receive or how loud I am, I will never have a voice in the Hmong community. I will never have a voice. I will always be someone's daughter or someone's wife, and if you are a guy, you have the voice, even if you're not married. [Even] if you're not educated, you will always have a voice and you choose not to use it. It irritates me. Unless you are a doctor it doesn't matter. No Hmong person will ever ask a Hmong woman what she does for a living. That concept in itself is a Western idea. People expect so much from you, and you sort of lose your identity when you get married. I feel that in a traditional Hmong marriage, you lose your identity and no one will ever know your name unless they're another woman. People never ask you what you do for a living. I didn't know I had so many nurses at my church. No, seriously, I was like, "You're a nurse? You're one too? You're one too?" Cause no one ever talks about it. A lot of the wives are very highly educated; you don't know about it unless you ask them personally. You only know what the husband does for a living; you never know what the wives does. That took me really by surprise. A Hmong woman will always live in her husband's shadow. Her identity is her husband, even her new name. She will never hear her name again and she will only be known for [her] good wife skills. I think Hmong men are terrified of an educated Hmong woman in honest opinion. Most of the single female population who are consider having achieve a higher education are usually the ones who seem to just can't find a husband (group discussion, April 11, 2010).

Bao Bai affirms the lack of significance associated with the names of Hmong women and adds a story about the experiences of her divorced sisters, who have become somewhat excluded from the social activities within their culture.

You lose your name completely after you get married. And you become under you husband and nobody wants to [include] you if you're single. Because it's like here's the list of people who I have helped, and so maybe in the future, when I need their help, it's kind of like, "Oh, can you help back?" and so that's kind of how the Hmong culture is. [Before you get married], technically you're still under your parents and so [when] they invite your parents, that's you also. But my sisters right now are not married cause they're divorced. But my uncle died last summer and usually they'll send letters out to all the adult people who are married to ask for money to help for the funeral, and so my sisters didn't know about it and I was talking to my mom. I was like, "Mom, Why aren't [my older sisters] going?" And my mom said, "They're not married and they're not important anymore because they don't have a husband to go under." She straight out said, "Because they're not married. It's not my fault; it's their fault for

wanting to choose this path.” It’s very embarrassing, so my mom was very angry about it too. Not angry, but she’s bitter about it and it’s embarrassing because they don’t have a husband and people aren’t gonna respect them the same way. And like something that I have seen too is at weddings, the wedding books, the funeral lists, the husband’s name will always come first, and then if you’re single, a single woman and were to go write your name, it just looks awkward. And yeah, seriously, you just don’t get the same respect as you would for your husband. Usually at a party, the husband is the one that’s giving thanks and saying thank you to everyone, and if like my sisters were to help significantly, they would have to call them out by their maiden name and people start thinking, “Oh, why is he using her maiden name? Are they having an affair or something?” So that’s why if you’re single, you really don’t get recognized for anything (individual interview, April 25, 2010).

Emma describes a situation in her church which further reinforces the fact that women within the Hmong culture derive their identities from their husbands or fathers.

It’s really sad when a woman is widowed. She becomes nothing. I have a couple women at my church who are widowed, and when they were married, they were really respected, and now that their husband has passed away, they go with the group of women who have been divorced. The only people who will accept the widows are those women who are known as the adulterous women. Divorced women are thought of as adulterous, you know. The woman that I’m thinking of specifically, she has lost everything, all respect. When [the pastor says], “Go and greet people sitting next to you,” no one greets her anymore. She’s seen as the woman who hangs out with these people, so that’s a bad thing (group discussion, April 11, 2010).

Nkauj Choua Shoua shares that in many cases education does not have a significant impact on the position of women within the Hmong community.

Actually I just realized that no matter how educated you are, when you go back to the Hmong community, you’re still a Hmong woman and they still don’t value your voice. You can have as much PhDs as you want and stuff and you can come back to your Hmong community or your tribe or your clan and they still don’t value your voice cause you’re a woman. That’s when the culture starts to clash. Because you can have as much as you want in the secular world but when you come back into your community you’re not as respected. A guy from high school can say something and they’ll value his opinion a lot more just because he’s a guy. And so there’s still cultural things that you just can’t get rid of (group discussion, January 30, 2010).

Youa confirms the insignificance of education for changing a woman's position within Hmong society, and she tells a story about a workshop that she attended at the Hmong National Development Conference.

There's this workshop about women, Hmong women rising up and the cultural things that affects the Hmong women and [one of the speakers] talks about her personal experience. She has her Master's. She is working on her doctorate degree, and when her dad passed away, she has no say in anything. They wanted to do it the cultural way and she had no voice, no opinion. Whatever she said was not worthy of anybody. Her brothers, who didn't really care about her father, got the last say in what the funeral would look like, how long, if it's going to be Christian way or non-Christian. All those details she had no say in it because she was a woman and because she's married. She's with another family, so she's technically not a part of it. So education is not valued when it comes down to culture. So as a Hmong woman, we are still in that limbo. Whether or not we feel we are, we will be affected by it eventually where education is not that important, so education is something that is a big deal, but at the same time, you know, sometimes it doesn't matter (group discussion, January 30, 2010).

Paj Chia describes a family friend who is a doctor. She is professionally respected for her knowledge and the ways that she can benefit the community, but she does not command personal respect within the community because she is not married.

I know a woman who is a pediatrician. She is part of the family of my best friend from high school. Her whole entire family is very educated, very smart, very driven, you know, and she is one of the older daughters. Their family is very driven, like doctors, and they all went to college at Berkeley. She is the eldest daughter, and she went to school for eight years and came back as a pediatrician. Now, she is back from school, but nobody wants to marry her because she is old. She's not old, but in Hmong terms, it's old. I am so excited for her, but for the Hmong culture, it's nothing. It's like, "All right. When are you getting married? When are you having kids?" Even though she has her highest education and she got it done and everything, she's not married, so that's what they always go back to (group discussion, April 11, 2010; individual interview, May 4, 2010).

Despite the mixed responses in the community regarding education, a couple of the women shared that within their families, they do feel like their education is gaining them respect and altering the usual familial roles based on age and gender. Pajka talks

about being surprised and not knowing how to handle the fact that her older siblings are coming to her for advice.

I've never really got see like what my sisters or brothers thought of me until I came here. So it's different. So now like me being the first to graduate in the family, it's kind of put a burden on me, and now they expect more and I'm just like, "Aaaah, OK," I don't know what to do because I've never been in that position, for the older ones to expect more from me. Like I was telling Hli Chia the other day that even like my oldest brother would take advices from me. I'm like, I don't know, I'm just experiencing this. And my oldest sister will call me, too, and just ask me for advices, and I'm just like, "Huh, interesting" (individual interview, March 1, 2010).

Hli Chia is a ministry major and shared a similar experience about her relationships within her own family. She first talks about the pressure she feels from her family and community because she goes to a Christian college, but she then provides evidence that she has stood the test of this scrutiny and her knowledge and commitment to spiritual issues has earned some respect from her older sisters.

Just like coming to a Christian college, we are automatically a role model whether we want that like connotation or not and like if we do something here that is not really godly, is ungodly and they hear about it at home, they will automatically stereotype [everyone who goes to this university]. Then when we go back home, they watch your every step, they want to know if you're going to be successful in doing God's work. Like they're pushing you, but at the same time, they're watching you if you're going to fall. That's how I feel, but my sisters, three of them are nurses, but they still call me and like, "Can you pray for me? Pray for this and that?" I'm like, "I need prayer. I'm like stressed out. I don't even have time to pray for myself." (group discussion, April 12, 2010)

I want to take this opportunity to remind the reader once again that all of the women in this study are evangelical Christians and are attending this university primarily because it is established on evangelical principles and provides an opportunity for them to integrate their education with their religious beliefs. Conversely, Hmong people traditionally practice shamanism, so the Hmong Christians do not consider themselves to be "traditional" Hmong since their families no longer participate in many of the

traditional religious practices since converting to Christianity. However, they do still continue to follow some cultural customs, such as the paying of a dowry for a wife.

Within the Hmong culture, when a young man wants to marry a woman, he is still expected to pay a dowry to the woman's family. This custom was briefly mentioned by several of the women in this study. The general gist of their comments was that educated women often draw higher dowry prices, which is a source of pride. I have on several occasions heard recently-married Hmong women talk about how high the dowry payment for them was. It is a source of pride and perhaps even friendly competition and joking between them.

Mai Mee talked about the impact that having an education may have on the bride price:

Educated women in the Hmong community, I guess they're viewed with more respect, and I guess you can say viewed higher, like in a higher position or something, and then there's like always this joke, like about women, educated Hmong women, that their dowry will be higher because they're educated, but that's just an example how they view educated Hmong women. And I guess for the men, it really depends on the guy, like if they prefer a woman who's educated or [not]. I think now they do because I guess they just realize how much they can benefit the family or how it will affect the status [of the family] in general. I guess sometimes some parents, like if their kids are married during or after high school or something and their kids don't pursue an education, and they will look upon their nieces who's going to college and they will compare their kids to their sister's kids and stuff. That's what happens a lot in the Hmong community where they'll always compare (group discussion, April 12, 2010)

Nkauj Choua Shoua added the following opinion:

A highly educated Hmong girl is actually pretty valued nowadays when it comes to marriage talking. When they come ask for a dowry and stuff, and they bring up your Master's and stuff, it's like "Hmmm. That's how high your education is." That comes into play now. It's kind of integrated into the Hmong culture now too. So having a very highly educated daughter-in-law is very valued (group discussion, January 30, 2010).

Even though a college education is valued enough to draw a higher bride price, women are still expected to fulfill the traditional roles of wife, mother, cook, and housekeeper. If they are not proficient in the traditional roles, they are frowned upon even if they do work outside the home and have a sizeable income. Paj Chia, who got married before her last semester in college and was 22 years old at the time she made these statements, had the following response when asked about the status of women who have chosen education over starting a family:

I feel as if we are not equal when compared with women my age who have been married younger and have several children. I do not know why that is. My reasoning is because our culture is so set on getting married and having kids, that when the elders look at me and even if I have a higher education, I still do not have kids. For example, one of the ladies at my church, she's got her doctorate and she comes back and she's older. She's like 30, 40 almost. And all the elders meet her and they think she's married because she's older. So it's sad because they ask her where her husband is. That's the first questions they ask: "Oh, who are you? Where's your husband? You don't have a husband?" When she says, "No. I don't have a husband," they're like, "Well how come you're not married?" It just gets really awkward, and they just automatically don't talk to her anymore. And then you can totally see them just scooting away after the conversation's over. And I'm listening the whole time, thinking, "Oh my gosh! Are they really giving her this talk?" Right now, I feel successful; I have my Bachelor's degree, but it doesn't mean that the cultural struggles or anything like that stops. You still deal with the same thing, you know, it's just at different levels. I have my B.A., but we're still compared to women that have kids already, and we're not equal to them. Like I graduated from college, and [my husband's] cousins and them have like three kids each, and we're supposed to have as much kids as they have right now, and we don't and so we're looked down upon. Kind of like, "Why aren't they having kids? What's wrong with them?" If you're not having kids, something's wrong with you. My mother-in-law has pressured me ever since we got married. If I listened to her, then we would have kids by now. That's the culture. Our culture. And they start assuming you can't have kids. (journal, April 11, 2010; individual interview, May 4, 2010)

One of the writings in *Bamboo among the Oaks* (Moua, 2002) is called "HmongSpeak" by May Lee. This article addresses the indirect way that the Hmong culture communicates, but the opening example refers to a daughter-in-law situation:

If you've ever been a daughter-in-law and heard your in-laws saying, "Mai [that's their daughter], clean up the house" or "Mai [same daughter], do the dishes," you know they're not really talking to Mai. They're really talking to you. It's their way of discreetly saying you need to work (Lee, 2002, p. 47).

The two married women in the group related stories not unlike this one regarding the expectations that they feel have been placed on them as daughters-in-law. Sometimes even if their in-laws and husbands are not expecting them to assume these subservient roles, they still feel compelled to because they have been taught all of their lives that they must fulfill their positions as daughters-in-law in order to make their in-laws happy and keep their birth families from being shamed by a daughter who is a lazy wife. Youa and Paj Chia feel differing amounts of pressure from their in-laws; however, both of them pressure themselves because of what they have been taught by their own mothers about the importance of being a good daughter-in-law. Both of them seem to willingly accept the daughter-in-law roles assigned to them by their culture. Paj Chia's story is first.

Now that I'm a sister-in-law, I see that if you're a chef and you cook so good and everything, you're golden. Like that's it! You're good! And that's all they can talk about you. That you're so great, and you're to be praised to be a sister-in-law, but if you don't know anything about cooking and even though you have the greatest education, they don't really praise that education as much as your cooking abilities or your cleaning abilities. Speaking Hmong is also a huge thing. If you can't speak Hmong, then it's like, "Uhhhhh" [disappointed groan]. It's a huge obligation as a sister-in-law. [My husband] always tries to say, "Don't take it so heavy on you, you know, it doesn't matter. You don't always have to do what they say. You don't have to listen to them all the time. They say things, but you can also object." But I'm still learning to be a sister-in-law. If it's not necessary to object, then I don't. If I can do it, then I do it. It's that pressure again; it's kind of like, you don't want to be a bad sister-in-law, like you don't want them to badmouth you to your relatives, to your in-laws. You don't want them to not like you, because the Hmong culture is always about make them happy, make them happy, you know. You were raised to satisfy his family; do whatever they want you to do. I think that comes with a lot of baggage. And then even though his mom is not always that forceful, sometimes she is, and I don't

agree with it, but I do it anyways because I'm doing my sister-in-law, my daughter-in-law duty. It is hard because culturally, if anything ever happened and they wanted you to go home, it's an emergency, so you go there. You don't take your job or your school into consideration if they need you to take her to the doctors. It's not something where you just say, "Oh I have school. I have work. I have to do this." But they really need you, so you go to his family first, you know. So, it's just hard. My mother-in-law has pressured me [to have children] ever since we got married. If I listened to her then we would have kids by now. Even before, like a month before we got married, they started asking already. When it comes to that, it's going to be my decision; when I want to have it, I'll have it. [My husband] and I both, he's like, "We're going to have it because we want to." It's a huge obligation. I feel nothing compared to if I was living with my in-laws. I already have the obligation, and I can't imagine living with them because you always feel like you're cleaning all the time. Cause if you sit down and rest, you feel lazy, and then if there's nothing to do, you're always asking what is there to do. Like, "Mom, what can I help out with? Can I clean? Can I cook? What do you need me to prep?" Like, you're always on the go. It's just that pressure on you. You just have to be that perfect daughter-in-law. And not be lazy (group discussion, January 30, 2010; individual interview, May 4, 2010).

You first talks about her mother-in-law's role in her courtship and then continues with talking a little about trying to fulfill her role as daughter-in-law.

Before I got married, I was like, "Oh my gosh, I hope I will be a good daughter-in-law. I hope I'll be a good wife." I thought, "I'm going to have trouble when I'm married" because I was always an independent woman. But you know, being married, I don't mind being dependent. I changed my whole view. I don't mind asking or letting him know where I'm at. I like it when he calls me and asks me where I'm at. For example, a lot of people have said that my mother-in-law is like very pushy. But that's their view of her, but I take her ways in a good way, because if you look at it in a bad way, the way people look at it, then yeah, she would be because she asks a lot of questions, she always wants to know where we're at, where we're going. She wants to know everything about what we're doing, but I don't take it as a bad thing. If I was to think the way my other sister-in-law thinks of my mother-in-law, I would be like, "Oh my gosh, I hate my mother-in-law," but I love my mother-in-law because I think about it in a totally different way. Before we got married, [my husband] was calling me to try to get to know me and I didn't have time, so he stopped calling me. So my mother-in-law would call me and say "How come you're not talking to my son?" For someone else, they'd be like, "She's so freaky. I don't want anything to do with your son." But I took it, "Oh cool; she likes me. She wants to get to know me." My mother-in-law is really good. I mean growing up, my mom was always like, "When you get married, you gotta wake up at six to vacuum the house and then cook." But I'm sleeping in; my mother-in-law doesn't wake up until 11, and when I first got married, I'm up like cleaning and she'll get up and she's like,

“Why are you doing that? You need to sleep.” I wake up at like 10 and I’m waiting around for them to get up. I’m just like, “Come on, I don’t know what to do.” But I think nowadays they’re more understanding (group discussion, April 11, 2010)

There are certain expectations that are placed on women by the Hmong society of which they are a part. They have the choice whether to bow to those expectations or resist them. In many cases, they continue to adhere to certain practices, not just out of resigned submission, but because they agree with the traditional roles and expectations. During one of our group discussions (April 11, 2010), the women started discussing what type of woman would make a better *nyab*, which is the Hmong word for daughter-in-law. Although I have generally made the choice not to use sections of dialogue in presenting the data from this study, I am going to include part of a discussion here because I think it provides a good example of the ambivalence the women may feel when they are faced with choosing traditional Hmong values or more modern middle-class American values. The question they were discussing was whether they would prefer a daughter-in-law who was educated or one who excelled at the traditional homemaking skills.

Kim: When it comes right down to it, what’s really important is how good of a wife and mother you are.

Nkauj Choua Shoua: Yeah, because you think about it, if you ask any mother-in-law, “Do you want a good *nyab*, a good wife or an educated wife?”

Youa: They would want a good wife

Nkauj Choua Shoua: They would want the good *nyab* without the education.

Youa: I would want a good *nyab* (lots of laughter and agreement) because honestly if they just have the education and they’re not a good *nyab*, I wouldn’t be too happy because it’s like...

Kim: What’s that word? What are you saying? How do you spell it?

Emma: That’s a daughter-in-law. It’s n-y-a-b.

Paj Chia: It’s kind of spelled how you pronounce it.

Kim: So it’s daughter-in-law. OK.

Nkauj Choua Shoua: Because if I was a mother-in-law and I’m looking like my son brings home this girl, and highly educated, but she can’t cook. I don’t know if I would really want her...

Youa: She can’t cook. She can’t clean. She doesn’t have respect.

Emma: If she's teachable, though,...

Youa: If she's teachable, then yeah, OK (everyone is laughing and commenting)

Emma: But that's me!

Youa: All right. She doesn't have to cook and clean and whatever. A good *nyab* means that she's good and she wants to learn. She listens, she has respect, um, she loves my son. That's what a good *nyab* is.

Emma: And she loves you

Youa: And she loves me, but if I'm the type that I have my education, I think I feel that I would be too prideful. You know, if I was just like, you know, "I have education, I don't have to be a good *nyab*." That's too prideful. I don't like prideful people. So that's why I feel like. It is good to be a good *nyab*. I would prefer a good *nyab* over someone who had a good education, BUT if they had a good education, too, well that's even better. (lots of laughter and comments) That's even better.

Emma: You're making me lose hope! Cause like I don't know how to cook very well, but I would love to learn.

Kim: But you're teachable.

Youa: And if you love my son and you love me...

Nkauj Choua Shoua: Because there are...

Emma: I can do that! I can do that!

Nkauj Choua Shoua: Because I've met some Hmong girls who are very educated, very smart, lack the whole...they have a lot of pride

Youa: They have too much pride.

Nkauj Choua Shoua: ...and they refuse to cook...

Paj Chia: uh huh

Youa: They don't want to cook. They don't want to clean.

Nkauj Choua Shoua: ...they're like, you know, I did my duties and so you know when I come home after long days of work, I just want to go to bed and you can take care of the kids and...there's some Hmong girls like that.

While women are admonished to succeed in their educations from a very young age, ultimately, what is most valued by their culture is a woman who is a good housekeeper, wife, and mother. Most of the participants agreed that while education does garner some amount of respect and prestige, the greater determining factor of the value of a woman is whether she can cook and clean. What I found to be especially interesting was that even these young women themselves, despite the sacrifices they are making for their educations, still retain a high sense of value for the qualities that make a woman a good housewife and mother in the traditional Hmong view. I was fascinated at their

commitment to the traditional roles they are expected to fulfill as wives. As this conversation indicates, they look down on women who think they are above cooking and cleaning. While they see the ambiguity, inequality, and unfairness in these attitudes toward women in their communities, the participants in this study have expectations for themselves, and even their future daughters-in-law, which perpetuate the value of the traditional domestic skills over education and development of higher levels of literacy.

For one of the journal questions, I provided the participants with a paraphrase of a statement made in an article by Ngo (2002), entitled “Contesting ‘culture’: The perspectives of Hmong American female students on early marriage.” The paraphrase that I provided read like this:

As Hmong women progress through their secondary education, they realize that even if they complete their educations, they will still have to contend with gender, racial, and cultural inequities in order to meet their professional and economic goals. In the face of the marginalization they experience in their educational settings and within the dominant culture, many opt for the simpler solutions they believe may be found in the traditional female roles. Please give your own thoughts on this statement.

In response to this question, the general gist of their opinions was that going back home after college and “fulfilling the traditional roles” was not a “simpler” thing to do. It would be simpler for them to get their educations and go out on their own, without the encumbrances and responsibilities that come from their extended family structures. Fighting to be allowed to go to college may make it appear that these women are fighting for the independence that an education might give them, but in reality, they do not view

themselves are ever being truly independent. Although they might like more freedom, their intent is not to leave their family and culture.

Chu Ka, who is very strongly connected with her family, shares her perception of the Hmong culture and its strength in drawing a woman back after she finishes college.

My personal thoughts are that Hmong people are a “we” community and not a “I” community. For most Caucasians, they are very independent. For us, even after finishing college, we go home to a family that is extended. We are still very involved in family parties, gatherings, and celebrations. We pursue our education and aim for higher goals, but we are still engraved to our families and the needs of them. Then again, I am a Christian and wherever God calls me I will go. I think that that’s the way most Hmong Christians feel about today. So like for the women, I think they see us going back to simpler solutions, but we still aim for higher goals and like I think it’s changing from a “we” to an “I” for certain people, but like I said, we’re so engraved into our families and their traditions that when we graduate, if we do get married, then we’re gonna be involved with our husband’s family. If we’re not married, then we go home to our family. And we’re, you know, surrounded by, I guess, our tradition and it’s not simpler, going home to be daughters and mothers. For most people, they would call it not simple solutions, they would graduate, go for a Master’s and go for a Doctor’s and they will go on their own. You’re just by yourself. Very independent (group discussion, April 12, 2010).

Youa asserts that no matter what kind of education a woman gets, she is still Hmong.

I wasn’t sure if I agreed or disagreed because everywhere I go there are always gender and racial occurrences, cultural issues present. I feel like every culture and every, like, whether at school, home, church, or work, there’s always something that I have to contend with. There are unwritten rules everywhere I feel. There are underlying beliefs, values, and views within every wall, even, we’re talking culturally, but I feel even like at work I feel there’s things that has, that we women have to deal with being women, so I didn’t really know how to really, I didn’t know if I agree or disagree because I felt it wasn’t just had to do with being a Hmong woman. I think it’s everybody. I think we just tend to work with those things day by day and accept them and pretend we don’t see them and work with them. In my life having an education does not change my cultural views and expectations that are placed on me. I think that I can be educated, but I am still a Hmong daughter and sister and daughter-in-law and those roles have certain expectations that come along with it, so having an education does not excuse me from those roles. I don’t blame Hmong families about using culture or not valuing everyone who has an education because you’re still...personally I feel like I’m still Hmong, I still need to know the Hmong values or know the Hmong culture, even if I don’t follow every single thing or believe everything, it still

should hold true. I still feel that it's important to know so that when you are at someone's house, you still know how to be respectable to them. And so I feel like yeah, you have an education but if you're also a good Hmong woman that has the education [that] will make them see that you're successful because you know your culture too. I think that's very important (group discussion, April 11, 2010).

Pajka indicates that, from her family's perspective, obtaining her college degree was never really an individual endeavor; it was viewed as an accomplishment that would benefit the whole family.

I'm graduating, and I feel like I can't pursue my Master's because of my family and I want to go back and help them. The first to graduate [from college], I guess my parents always thought of it really highly that I have to come home and I have to be the provider. That's how I feel. I think it's harder to go home. For me, like I really want to go into ministry right away, but I feel like at the same my family is stopping me to do what I want to do and I think that's so hard to go home and just kind of be simple at home. But at the same time, the simpler thing for me is to be away from them and to go on further with ministry and school. Even when we were home for spring break, my mom would always say, "Hey, come help me since you guys haven't been here. Replace that time and help me." She wants us to prove to her that we're still her daughters even if we're educated and she feels like we come here and don't really do much and just study. But our minds are like stressed out most of the time and we want to go home and just rest, but she doesn't realize that and she just thinks that we're just here to party. She doesn't understand and that's why it's kind of hard to go home. You need rest, but you feel like you're struggling to be home rather than staying here (group discussion, April 12, 2010).

Phoua is a business major and her family has a dream that she will come home after she graduates and help them to start a business.

This statement depends on certain Hmong woman because it depends if they are traditional or not, but I feel that I am a moderate traditional Hmong woman because I still listen to my parents and want to accomplish their dreams for them. I'm the first one to go to college, so probably I'm going to be the first one to graduate, too. So I feel like they depend a lot on you and that's how you get that feeling of, "I think I really need to do this for them." And so they'll be happy, and you'll be the one who's bringing the money home and stuff like that because, you know, they're getting old, and you know they're working so hard for you. If your older siblings didn't go to college and they're not really, you know doing good, and all, then you're the next one in line to do it, and so, it falls down, and so I think I kind of know how Pajka feels on this, because that's where I stand, too. You have that feeling of, you know, you want to pursue what you want, too, but

you see that you don't want to make your family fall behind (group discussion, April 12, 2010).

Hli Chia seems a little more desirous of being independent from her family, but, in fact, after she graduated, she did go home and take her place there, even though she wants her sisters to have a chance to experience the independence that she has had for a time.

I think there's always that pressure for me like to go back home and be a daughter, and even my mom says, whenever she will just call me out of the blue moon, and ask how am I doing and she'll be like, "So after you graduate, you're going to come back, right?" And I will be like, "No, I don't know yet." I sure don't want to come back because there is no space for me, first of all, and I feel like I'm starting my own life, like I have my own stuff and like I need a whole room to like keep all my stuff in there. So if I go home, there's too many people there. There is like niece and nephews over all the time and I won't be able to feel like I'm flying on my own wings. I feel like I'm going back to settle down, and be the daughter that cleans, which I don't mind, but because I've been gone for so long, they're going to say, "OK, since you're back, it's your turn to do it for the next four years," you know? And so like there's a pressure where like my mom will say "You gotta come home," but then I know that she would appreciate it more in the future. Maybe she's not thinking about it much right now, but if I was to go forward, she might appreciate it in the future. Like it will make our parents prideful that they have a daughter in like high status and everything, but I think the more my mom talks about it, the more I want to do the opposite of what she is telling me. Yeah, like I want to do something radical, not like be the best nurse, or with the high doctor degree or everything, but I want to do something that I want to do but it's the best I can be, you know. And like coming here it was really different from what my family expected of me. And they even discouraged from going into ministry because it's not an income job, but then being here, I know that my sisters are watching me, my older and younger sisters and I'm going back home, I'm trying to kick them out of the house. Like, I'm like, "Go. Live your life. Go off to college. Don't be afraid. Make mistakes." (group discussion, April 12, 2010)

Three of the women provided stories with interesting analogies for how they view their lives as women within the Hmong culture. Bao Bai's story is first; she feels that Hmong families dig trenches to protect their daughters.

The most irritating thing about Hmong people in general, for me, is that they help each other—family included—build trenches in any girl's pathway as she pursues a higher education. There are trenches in her pathway all the way until her work is noticed. It may be that she strolls up in some Mercedes, buys a big house, or

something along the lines of materials that are valuable in the Hmong eyes that would cost a lot of money. That is the only time a Hmong girls' education will be accepted. Like my mom was, when I was doing all those [school] activities, she would just be like, "You don't need to go. You don't need to do any of those things. Why don't you stay home and help me? I need your help around this house and that's why I raised you. You're supposed to help me and nobody helps me," and plays that guilt card and it's just like, "No one's going to drive there. You're not going to have a car, and I'm going to be busy and no one's going to be home to drive you." Then when I was coming here, she was like "Why are you going to go there? It's so far away. Money. You're not going to be able to come home. You're not going to have anything or anybody and why don't you just stay home and go to school here. It's cheaper. You don't need to go over there; you're not going to be the same." Just keep putting this down and like, so literally it looks like you're going to have to bring a grappling hook and hook yourself up there and climb out of this little trench. She was like, "Your brothers don't have to study that hard. Why are you always studying? Why do you always have to go somewhere? Why do you always have to go study with your friends?" and it's like, "Because I'm actually working for it. In order for me to be that good, I need all this extra time." I think that was another one of the trenches. If I was to let her, if I just stopped there, I probably wouldn't have like the grades that I did. I brought out my grappling hook and I made it and showed her that that did benefit me (journal, April 11, 2010; individual interview, April 25, 2010).

Nkauj Choua Shoua compares the life of a Hmong woman to living in a bird cage.

When you finally know what you want to do for God and you jump out of your cage that your parents built around you all of your [life], you fly out and then, "Bam!" You're like "Oh dude, there's a chain!" That's how I felt. Like, "Whew. I forgot about that!" When I think of a Hmong marriage I think of a cage. I think of sacrifice and hard choices. I think of putting someone's needs before mine. I love my freedom and I think the cost is too great at times. I think of always saying yes to please my mother-in-law, so she doesn't talk trash about my clan or family. I think of all the responsibility that comes with the title 'wife' in the Hmong community, and it is just too much! Everyone, especially relatives, always watching and judging; thinking about it is already stressful enough. I don't know how our mothers before us did it. I know that marriage isn't death and that great things come from marriages. I know what is expected from me as a Hmong wife, and I am just not ready to be that. I don't want to conform and be put into a cage with thicker bars because I value my freedom too much. I think that's one of the reasons why I'm still single because I feel that I'm already in a cage, being a Hmong woman, and marriage to me is a bigger cage with bigger bars, and I feel like I can't. And when I feel very caged in, that's when I get offensive, and that's when I feel like I can't breathe, claustrophobic (journal, March 14, 2010; group discussion, March 14, 2010).

Hli Chia uses the analogy of a queen who is restricted because she goes outside of the acceptable standards of behavior for a queen.

Our education definitely has an effect on our status in the Hmong community. Anyone with high education is placed on a pedestal. However, a Hmong woman is like a Queen who is controlled by her greedy mother, relative or her cabinet. She is seen as important but her opportunity to do things in the Hmong community is limited and sometimes forbidden because she is still a woman. It is like cheering someone to do the right thing, not thinking that they would actually survive, and when they do survive, the cheerer tries to tell that person that they have gone too far. It's like, "No, you've got to come back. You can't go that far." So, most often, I feel trapped as a Hmong woman. The key is to move in the direction that God wants me to instead of letting others decide what I am and where I belong as a Hmong woman in the community. I think it's really up to us to say, "No, this is my life. This is what God has," and like we have to do what God has before us, we can't obey our parents if it's against what God wants (journal, April 12, 2010; individual interview, May 5, 2010).

The lives of Generation 1.5 Hmong women contain multiple ambiguities, but one theme that kept surfacing throughout this study was that they have a choice about their futures. Nkauj Choua Shoua compares the experience of Hmong women in higher education today with the experience of American women in the 1960s as it was portrayed in the movie *Mona Lisa Smile*, which starred Julia Roberts as a college professor in a women's college at a time in U.S. history when greater numbers of women were beginning to pursue education and careers.

I was watching *Mona Lisa Smile* and I see a lot of parallels between Hmong women and that movie and how education plays a part and you can't believe we're still in that kind of mind thinking in your culture and stuff. I remember I was having a conversation with my sister, who just got married, and I told her, "You spent seven years on your engineering degree and you just want to be a mom?" And she was talking about this and I didn't understand why she spent so long on her education and decided that she just wanted to be a mom at the end of the end. She was like, "Don't hate on me because I don't have great big dreams." I think what I said offended her. And she told me that just because her dream was to become a mom, I shouldn't look down on that. I think watching *Mona Lisa Smile* again, I just kind of realized that, like how we were talking about it's not that it's an easier route to become a mom, I think it's that some women value having a family and raising a family and there's nothing wrong with that. If they

want to spend 7 years on their education and decide they just want to be a mom, then let them be a mom, because I think it is a calling to be a wife and a mother. It's a calling, and some of us are not called to that. In the movie, Julia Roberts had this conversation with one of the students, she goes "You're so bright. You could go to Yale and get your law degree," and [the girl] goes, "You taught me to want, what I want." And she was like, "I want to have a family. And that's my dream." Not to be highly educated—she wants to have a family. Raise kids. That's what she wants to do, so Julia Roberts had to go through to understanding that. Your dreams might be different, but you still have that choice, and so if some Hmong girls want to be moms, let them be moms (group discussion, April 11, 2010)

Earlier in this paper, Paj Chia emphasized that she and her husband are not having children immediately after getting married as many people in their culture are expecting them to do. She stated that she is happy to have a choice. Hmong young people can decide to turn away from the Hmong cultural values, but from my experience, at this point in time, most are choosing not to turn away. They still tend to marry other Hmong, and they still remain tightly grafted into their family structures. As follows, Paj Chia voiced a sentiment that I believe many of the young women in this study would affirm.

We [Hmong women] have to analyze our choices. Not that all of us are great at it, but I don't know why it's so hard. I think it's because girls are already belittled in the culture, and we have to stay home and we can't go off on our own, reputation-wise, shame. A lot of things that ties with it. That's why we're so sheltered, kind of. "You can't do that." Your brothers could do this, but you can't do that. "It doesn't look good." I feel like they're so used to sheltering the girls, it's like a new thing for them. What I value is that we have a choice, you know. That we weren't forced into it, or we weren't pressured by our culture. I'm glad I have that choice now. I was just talking to [my husband] about it. Like all my friends are either divorced or they married early and they had tons of kids and they didn't choose to be a stay-at-home mom for ten years; they had to because they kept having kids because they don't believe in birth control or things like that. And so it's just sad to see that they never had a choice and now they're in depression or sad because they want to go back to school but they can't. That's why I'm glad that I do have this choice. That I am married and that I have the choice, "Do I want to be a stay-at-home mom or do I want to go for more schooling?" I'm glad that I have this decision. Instead of being indulgent to my culture, and listening to my parents and getting married young, I'm happy at the point that I'm here. It doesn't look like a big success to other cultures, I would think if they didn't

understand the Hmong culture (group discussion, April 11, 2010; individual interview, May 4, 2010)

Paj Chia's individual interview was almost the last one I conducted and her comments about choice seemed to be very apropos for encapsulating the results of this study. Hmong women who are in college choose to pursue higher education for very different reasons. Despite their marginalizing and sometimes discouraging educational experiences and even though their positions at the minority end of the continuum hinder their ability to participate as fully as they would like in their educations, some are even choosing to continue to study beyond their bachelor's degrees. Most are not anxious to break away from their families and culture. Some may decide when their education is completed that they will go back home and fulfill their cultural expectations and joyfully become the best wives and mothers that they can be. Others may pursue professional careers or Christian service. Their hard-earned educations give them a position from which to influence other women within their families and cultures. They have a choice, and most are still choosing to be Hmong.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

#### **Introduction**

In the field of second language acquisition and teaching, much of the literature on Generation 1.5 students focuses on their writing ability, especially in the college and university environment. I naïvely began this project thinking I might be able to add research findings that might help to resolve these writing issues. However, as I listened to the stories told by the Hmong women in my study, I became aware that their language ability and the manner in which they acquired their second language are not really the most important concerns surrounding the biliterate development of this population. While their writing may not be as proficient and precise as most college professors would like, the perceived limitations in their writing and language skills are indicative of more significant social issues related to the education of minority students.

I initially shared with the participants in my study that I was prompted to start this study based on the fact that researchers have observed that, even though many Generation 1.5 students may have been educated in English for their entire educational careers, the writing of Generation 1.5 college students contains language structures and forms which are often associated with second language users. I came into the research with a strong bent toward looking at concrete linguistic problems and solutions. I expected that writing might be a significant topic for our conversations, but I encouraged the participants to identify the challenges that they perceived to contribute to their literacy and language learning experiences. I then followed up with journal prompts which allowed them to

expand on the areas that they identified. Although my original impetus focused on surface language differences, the participants themselves identified deeper language issues, such as a limited understanding of advanced vocabulary and an inadequate command of critical thinking skills. In addition, they recognized and shared more interpersonal relationship issues than I was expecting, and these became a primary focus of the conversations.

Given my initial expectations, probably the most significant outcome of this research is my own ideological transformation. I was predisposed to downplay critical issues related to discrimination, injustice, and inequality because I thought that blaming these larger issues in some sense removes responsibility from educators because these problems are difficult for educators to take personal responsibility for and to feel that they can make a difference for students on an individual level. It is more comfortable to talk about pedagogy and how we can teach better, and it is easier to look at errors in students' language than at gaps and inconsistencies in our ideologies. Problems that address educational techniques and language are easier to identify and control when compared to problems associated with the treatment of minority populations in the classroom and community.

As it turned out, I was unable to avoid these more complicated and nebulous critical issues because they are the ones that came to the forefront in the discussions. Issues related to feelings of being marginalized and othered were discussed most often, most extensively, and most emotionally. The women who participated in this study essentially never voiced any desire to be more assimilated, just more respected. They did not appear as concerned with fitting in to the U.S. educational and social structures as

with being able to acquire the skills that they needed to be successful with their own educational and professional goals. Even though my original idea was that pedagogical deficiencies in the teaching of language were to blame, I have reluctantly come to believe strongly that critical issues truly are a major complicating factor which hinders many Hmong students, and likely other minorities as well, from acquiring the English language with the proficiency that they feel they need for higher-level academic tasks.

As I coded and collated the mountains of conversation and writing that I collected during the research process, prominent themes emerged. I got a glimpse of a group of young people which is in constant battle over its identity, and many of the conflicts are at least tangentially related to language use. They have conflicting expectations and conflicting desires for their educations. As I listened to their many stories, in my mind, I began to picture their educational journey as a prolonged battle comprised of many small skirmishes in which the fighters rarely experience a clear sense of defeat or victory and in which ultimate triumph is elusive. They are suspended between their Hmong language and culture and the language and culture of the American society in which they live, which is dominated by white middle-class values. They struggle to satisfy diverse factions warring for their attention, proficiency, and allegiance. These skirmishes take place in many different social situations and contexts. They experience these conflicts within their families, within their circle of friends, in their classrooms and schools, in the community, in their workplaces, and even within themselves. Their feelings and emotions about language are far from neutral. For them, language is more than just a way to communicate. Language is a source of pride and source of shame; it can bring belonging or alienation. The Hmong language is a symbol of identification, and the

English language is a pathway to greater possibilities and success. In a given context, either Hmong or English may present, for them, a platform for accomplishment or a site for failure.

### **The Hmong Experience in the U.S. Educational System**

Hmong students in U.S. schools do not come from a background of literacy in the sense that refers to the use of the written word. Books and writing were not prevalent or particularly valued in their home lives. Most of their parents are able to read at least a little in Hmong, and some are also able to write in Hmong. Few have extensive literacy skills in English. For the women involved in this study, their personal interest in the written word in Hmong comes largely from its use in the Christian environments of their homes and churches. Most of them attribute their initial interest in learning the Hmong written language for using it to follow worship songs in church or to read the Bible in Hmong. Several women shared that the demands of their studies in school or college were often not well understood by their parents, were undervalued in the home, and were often considered to be secondary to family responsibilities. This is especially true of extra-curricular educational activities. In fact, one of our most emotional group discussions occurred when the group talked about parental involvement in their educations prior to college. In one group, many tears were shed over parents not attending or not understanding the importance of school concerts, sporting events, and awards presentations, prompting one of the participants to comment, “This is like Oprah today, man” (group discussion, March 14, 2010).

Most likely, as children these women entered preschool or kindergarten not speaking English. Young Hmong children are immersed in English-only classrooms, in

which they must initially “sink or swim” in terms of their language development. Although, they were taught in English during the hours they were in the classroom, they were, effectively, not immersed in an English-rich environment. They continued to speak primarily Hmong or *Hmonglish* outside the classroom; once they left the classroom, they returned to their Hmong-speaking homes, in which the English that was used was “broken” and includes frequent code-switching. Unless they were in school districts in which they were truly part of a numerically-small minority, which was not the case with most of the women who participated in this study, Hmong children were drawn by familiarity and language to other Hmong children in their classes, so their circle of friends remained largely Hmong. Indeed, those who tried to establish close relationships with children outside the Hmong community were subjected to pressure from their family and friends to stay within the Hmong community friendship circles and, as a result, often abandoned those outside relationships.

In many cases, they were placed in ESL programs, which further stigmatized and isolated them and did not provide additional support for the activities in their mainstream classrooms. In many cases, the ESL curricula were “teaching” them information which was far below their language ability at the time. In fact, one might argue that time spent in ESL programs and the emotional frustration that they caused may at least partially account for difficulties that some of the women experience with English to this day.

As might be expected with long-term immigrant populations, many Hmong students with whom I have come into contact have difficulty describing their own language identity. Many do not remember not speaking English and acknowledge that their English language abilities far exceed their Hmong language abilities, yet they are

hesitant to call themselves native English speakers because they are often painfully aware that their language abilities often fall short of excellence in classroom situations.

Likewise, they are not able to use their Hmong language to communicate with the depth of understanding that they would like when communicating with their parents and elders.

While Hmong parents acknowledge the importance of education and schooling, they do not really understand the effort and time it takes to be an outstanding student and to prepare adequately for higher education. Teenagers, females in particular, are expected to fulfill time-consuming roles within their families or are expected to begin working as soon as they are able, in order to help support their large families which are trying to live on low paying jobs that their parents or older siblings are able to procure and/or on government-supplemented incomes. This was especially evident in the stories of Pajka (pp. 240-241 of this document) and Nkauj Choua Shoua (pp. 237-239 of this document). Girls and women are expected to fulfill differing roles from their male counterparts within the Hmong community. Traditionally, men are expected to care for their parents, and when women get married, they are essentially no longer considered part of their birth families. They then become responsible for caring for their husband's families; this responsibility is a fundamental piece of the identities of some of the women in this study. As important as they may believe that education is and as passionate and self-sacrificing as they are in pursuing it, at the core of their beings, they maintain a respect for their future roles in their families and long to be the best *nyab* they can be. In addition, by the women's own descriptions, in many cases the young adult male members of the family are abdicating some of these traditional responsibilities and thereby increasing the burden on the young women.

An interesting point to note is what was absent from the conversations about educational experience. The women rarely, if ever, talked about wanting to fit in socially or to become like their peers. Rather, their longings were directed more toward success and acceptance as legitimate students and professionals. Although many of them did have some friends outside the Hmong culture, the majority of their free time was spent with other Hmong, and their socializing was often organized with other Hmong. Their speech patterns demonstrate shared non-native language structures. These young women are unlikely to learn and use mainstream middle-class English because they are not really part of the mainstream middle-class community, either in their educational sites or in the communities outside their insular Hmong societal structures. In their educational experiences, they have always been outsiders, they have lived on the fringes, and they have always been and, from their perspective, continue to be othered, even in the college classroom. Norton (2000) would argue that these young women are not allowed adequate access and entrance into the English-speaking communities in which they live. Sometimes, this is by choice, and sometimes it is imposed by the actions of others.

### **General Observations from the Stories**

Comprehensive discussions about language use must, due to complexity of language, be multifaceted. Hornberger (2003) advocates the use of the term *biliteracy* instead of *bilingualism* because the latter seems to suggest a simplified view in which the use of language exists in isolation from its context. Hornberger's continua, as described earlier in this manuscript, demonstrate the complex relationship between biliteracy and bilingualism and the many intersecting and overlapping factors involved. As the discussion in Chapter Four indicates, any productive discussion of language in use must

also include dialogue about history, culture, and social context, as well as more specific linguistic properties, such as written script and grammatical structures. From the narrative data and analysis in the previous chapter, I have compiled several general observations about the biliterate life experiences of the Hmong Generation 1.5 women who participated in this study:

- In the homes of these women, the written word is rarely used, and teaching and learning are lopsided processes in which the parent talks or “lectures” and the child listens and obeys. The child is strongly discouraged from questioning or challenging authority or, in fact, even entering into a dialogue on many issues.
- The women in this study receive mixed messages about the value of their formal education. Even though Hmong parents and families voice that education is a top priority, education is interrupted or overshadowed in many ways, including family priorities, household responsibilities, and work responsibilities.
- The Hmong women in this study exhibit a pattern of not being full participants in classroom discussions and activities. This pattern begins in lower levels of education and continues into their college experiences. Their reticence to participate in the classroom likely starts with their language limitations when they enter school, but also probably stems from their parents’ admonitions about respecting authority and not questioning their elders. This limited involvement in the classroom has a cyclical outcome. The less they participate, the fewer opportunities they have to use and become comfortable with the language of academia. Because they are less comfortable, they participate less and the cycle continues.

- In their English-speaking classrooms, these women generally feel that they are othered because of their obvious non-white visual appearance, their reluctance to speak out, their lack of full confidence with the English language, and the narrow view of education that permeates their families and culture. They are often reluctant to participate in class because of uncomfortable responses they have received from instructors and other students when they have attempted to participate.
- Since these Hmong women tend to speak Hmong with their friends and in their homes, the classroom is often the only site where English is consistently practiced, and in many cases, in the classroom, they are often passive participants, either by their own choice or by the feeling that silence is imposed upon them. They cannot easily enter the academic conversation because they do not feel confident in manipulating the vocabulary associated with the conversation, and they have not developed a full understanding of the meaning and use of particular words. Once again, this pattern is self-perpetuating in the sense that the lack of participation results in even less opportunity to manipulate the language and subsequently makes fuller participation even more difficult.
- In their pursuit of education, the women in this study are faced with many obstacles related to the traditional view of women within their culture, where gender roles are strongly delineated by history and custom.
- Regardless of their long history of immigration to the United States, the women in this study seem to continue to occupy a position in the borderland between two

cultures and two languages, and they often struggle to establish a sense of belonging in both cultures and a sense of proficiency with both languages.

From the stories shared in the previous chapter, it is clear that the college writing challenges that students in the Generation 1.5 population experience are a result of many intersecting educational, social, and cultural experiences. Their experiences demonstrate conflicting desires and motivations, as well as marginalizing encounters with members of the dominant middle-class culture of the United States. On the one hand, most of them feel a strong affinity or pressure to maintain strong ties to their own culture, and as a result, they voluntarily restrict their contact and interaction with English and English-speaking people. On the other hand, if their interfaces with the mainstream culture were more hospitable, perhaps minority students would feel more welcomed as equal participants in the educational environment and would be able to take advantage of opportunities to nurture the advanced language skills that they need in order to develop the confidence that will allow them to experience a greater sense of success in higher levels of education.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the Hmong were a reluctant immigrant population in their journey to the United States. They did not emigrate because they were unhappy with their previous life situation; they emigrated for fear of their lives for the part that they played in the U.S. war in Southeast Asia. The pride of the older generation in their history and culture has been very effectively passed on to the younger generation as evidenced by their reluctance to give up their language and by their commitment to maintaining a strong Hmong flavor within their families and communities. They do not desire to assimilate in the sense that is often associated with this word. The word

*assimilate* carries a connotation of one group of people becoming like another group of people and being absorbed until it is no longer distinguishable. It is generally the smaller, socially weaker group which is absorbed into the more socially dominant group. Second generation Hmong are more likely to be willing to integrate than assimilate. Inherent in the word *integrate* is the idea of blending groups of people to make a functional whole, with the parts still retaining uniqueness and distinctiveness. The problem is that fear and pride seem to limit the willingness of social groups to accept and live with differences between them, even differences that are likely to make them a stronger whole.

Debates among sociolinguists and second language theorists continue surrounding controversies about the place of vernacular dialects and home languages within the country's formal education system or concerning whether second language students should be held to the same writing standards as native English speakers. While these may be important questions to consider and may help raise awareness of injustices, the foundational issues are much broader. Educators and researchers should be asking questions that address the over-arching societal concepts that impact the education experiences of minority students.

In response to the stories presented in the previous chapter and the literature available regarding an appropriate response to critical issues of minority populations in the educational environment, I have generated the following set of questions which I think should be of interest to members of the educational community in the United States:

- How can our education system begin the process whereby our society will allow minority populations to more effectively integrate into our schools and social

structures? How can minorities be included without being required to give up their ethnic identities?

- How can educators foster an atmosphere of diversity and inclusion in their classrooms, so that all students can be proud and confident in their identities and abilities and feel free to express their thoughts without fear of being humiliated or disregarded?
- How can we acknowledge and equip minority students to deal with the marginalizing issues that they face inside and outside of classrooms in the college environment and ultimately in the mainstream American marketplace and society? And how can this be accomplished without addressing their differences in a way which makes them feel othered or pressured to conform to widely-accepted stereotypical beliefs about their cultures?
- How can concerned and informed educators and researchers support L2 users in their educational experiences? How can we ensure that they are allowed to be active participants and are given the opportunities to develop to their full linguistic and academic potentials? How can we bring them to a point where they can be proud and confident in their English ability and do not feel that their language ability limits them?

Now that I have listed the general observations that emerged from the data and the questions that the data raised, I will turn toward focusing on the most significant issues raised by the stories of the Hmong women and on the ideas that researchers and theorists in bilingualism, biliteracy, and second language acquisition have about the problematic

issues that face minority populations who are trying to succeed academically in a second language.

Generally, language and literacy researchers and educators can agree on the fact that one must have extensive exposure to and effective interactions in the target language in order to develop language and literacy abilities. The question with immigrant populations is whether they are able to gain adequate access to the dominant language of the community and whether they are being allowed to participate as equal interlocutors in various discourses of school and community. Historically, the concepts of language and literacy have been reduced and simplified in attempts to be able to easily understand and address them. However, the distillation of these concepts actually results in disregarding important facets of the nature of these concepts. Some theories of language acquisition reduce the process to either a purely cognitive or a purely socio-cultural activity; in reality, the truth is a complex mixture of these two factors, in addition to many other factors. Generation 1.5 immigrant children in the United States negotiate a complicated and difficult path from their preschool days of living almost entirely in the minority language of their home communities to their college days of needing to operate almost completely in their second language, which is the language of the powerful academic community.

Researchers have provided many different explanations for the failure of educational institutions to engender full participation of minority populations in the everyday life of the classroom. Many of these explanations were evident in the stories told by the Hmong women throughout this study. The remaining pages of this treatise will attempt to offer some possible solutions for addressing these issues using the

information gleaned from this research in combination with the thoughts of other theorists.

### **Drawing on Multiliteracies**

In 1994, a group of friends and colleagues, many of them well-known experts in education and applied sociolinguistics, convened from Australia, Great Britain, and the United States to discuss the intersection of language use with cultural and linguistic diversity. They christened themselves *The New London Group* after the name of the town where they held their first meeting. This group included such notable members as Norman Fairclough, James Gee, and Courtney Cazden (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). They met in response to a common concern regarding the disparities in opportunities which they observed to exist for students from minority language populations in English speaking countries and a desire to develop a philosophy that would eliminate barriers to educational success that arise from culture, language, and gender differences. The New London Group would advocate that new norms in pedagogy must not create situations in which cultures and languages other than English are viewed as deficits and that the real deficit for minority populations is not language, but access to recognition and social power. They believe that schools can be a starting place from which a more equitable ideology can be disseminated to the larger society (The New London Group, 2000). A key outcome of their meeting was a critical pedagogy theory of multiliteracies, consisting of four components: Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice (The New London Group, 2000).

Situated Practice refers to need for learners to be immersed in meaningful interactions in a community that contains at least novice experts (New London Group,

2000). Learners must be allowed to draw on their personal experiences, including their home cultural experiences, and they must be able to take risks and trust their teachers and fellow students. The immersion described by the New London Group assumes that the affective, socio-cultural, and identity needs of all learners are taken into consideration. From the beginning of their educational experiences, the Hmong are physically immersed with their English-speaking classmates who would certainly be considered novice experts in terms of language. However, the key word in the definition of Situated Practice is *meaningful*. From the stories told by the Hmong women of their educational experiences as early as elementary school, it is clear that they do not feel that they are welcomed in meaningful interactions with their English-speaking classmates. If they are welcomed, they are reticent to participate because of their language difficulties, or they are overwhelmed by their “loud, aggressive and rude” classmates (Hli Chia, p. 160 of this document). Unfortunately, this alienation does not end in elementary school as evidenced by the descriptions in the women’s stories wherein they continue to feel like outsiders in their current college experiences.

Overt Instruction refers to intentional efforts on the part of the teacher to scaffold the learning experience so that the learner can build on what she already knows and receive explicit instruction when needed. The New London Group (2000) describes that the defining aspect of Overt Instruction is the intentional use of metalanguage to make students explicitly aware of the form, content, and function of the language itself, as well as the affective and social functions associated with the language, including critical aspects. One might argue that the ESL programs offered to many of the women in this study could be considered a form of scaffolding and an attempt at Overt Instruction

regarding the language. At best, such programs were a feeble attempt at scaffolding. At worst, these ESL programs served to deprive the students of time that might have been better spent in interaction in English in their primary classrooms, which, in turn, might have facilitated their assimilation of the language and content they were learning. The ESL instruction they received appeared to be unnecessarily remedial rather than facilitative. Students seem to have been provided lower level instruction that they did not need and not given instruction in more advanced vocabulary and use of the language that they might have been able to benefit from. In addition, the practice of pulling students out of their primary classrooms for ESL instruction is in direct opposition to establishing members of the minority population as equal participants in the life of the classroom and is likely to result in marginalizing them further.

Critical Framing is the component of the multiliteracies theory wherein the teacher must help the student to position what she is learning about the language, about the world and about herself in the proper historical, social, cultural, political, and ideological context (The New London Group, 2000). Cazden (2000) emphasizes that an important aspect of Critical Framing is how people are viewed in their collective identities—in other words, how they are represented or portrayed by words and by behavior toward them and about them. Several of the women in this study revealed that, in the college environment, they were confused and silenced by typified descriptions of the Asian culture which were meant to help other students understand the limited involvement of the Hmong students in classroom discussions. The Hmong women became aware of the danger and fallacies in such inaccurate descriptions of themselves and their cultures, but they did not have the critical awareness or preparation to fight the

erroneous statements. Several talked about the fact that in some ways they felt compelled to become what the textbooks and professors were depicting them to be (Emma, pp. 213-214 of this document; Pajka, pp. 215-216 of this document). On many occasions, they voiced disappointment and dissatisfaction with their treatment in educational contexts at the hands of professors and other students who are part of the dominant culture, but they lacked the explicit instruction, understanding, and ability to challenge what they were being taught about themselves (Hli Chia, p. 210 of this document; Paj Chia, p. 209-210 of this document). Well-meaning professors were making a weak, if unintentional, attempt at critical framing, which instead served to only further destabilize the identities of the people they were trying to support.

Transformed Practice, in a sense, cycles back to Situated Practice. The students and teachers are expected to reflect on what they have learned and apply their new knowledge and experience in future interactions both in the school culture and in their home cultures (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000). Unfortunately, in many ways, the educational experiences of these women have failed to provide them with adequate support in these four components described; nonetheless, late in their undergraduate experiences, several of them told stories which demonstrated that they have developed an awareness of and an ability to identify unequal educational practices and that they are ready to begin to confront such practices. Unfortunately, this realization has come very late in their educational journeys. Overt instruction and critical framing earlier in their educations might have had the potential to completely transform their educational experiences.

It should be noted that these four components—Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice—are not vital solely for the

biliterate development of minority students. Administered effectively, they would also alter the experiences and understanding of majority students and may result in a more rapid transformation of classrooms, schools, and the society at large. Ideally, critical issues should be addressed in the classroom from when children are very young. Cazden (2000) shows that an awareness of attitudes toward cultural inequalities can begin to be taught in early elementary school. She related a story about a brief classroom discussion that took place in a lower elementary grade classroom in which the teacher was being trained to be intentional about equalizing the roles of students of all ethnicities:

In another situation in the combined first and second grade, during a discussion on what Native American author Michael Dorris might look like, a white child said, 'They [Native Americans] look just like us'. After the teacher gently asked three times, 'Who is "us"?', the child paused and said, 'Oh, I think I meant white people. And we're not all white' (Cazden, 2000, p. 260).

I found this especially interesting because even though the child is white and is not a member of a minority population, she has been made aware of the language choice that she made and the assumptions behind that language choice from a critical perspective. The instruction in this class of young children has obviously been intentional and consistent and demonstrates that the awareness of critical issues can be taught from a very young age. The following sections will provide further discussion and suggestions for implementing a pedagogy of multiliteracies in the classroom.

### **Positive Ways to Transform Classrooms**

As long as a society values certain types of literacy skills over others, conflict and a sense of inadequacy among those who fall nearer to the opposing ends of the spectrums

are likely to persist. Until the entire Western academic culture changes in terms of what it values and lauds, students whose strengths and cultures are not consistent with these standards will continue to feel that they are devalued, that they are not “good enough,” and that they constantly fall short.

Although the continua of biliteracy provide an effective framework for describing the situation of Hmong students in the U.S. educational system, the solutions proposed in much of the literature for bilingual education are not easy to apply in the U.S. educational and social environment because most communities in the United States are not essentially bilingual or biliterate environments. With the realities of the current budget cuts across the board for educational resources, discussions of providing opportunities for students to continue studying in their home languages once they enter public school are unrealistic and unattainable in a multi-linguistic environment. Research on language maintenance and the use of native languages to scaffold and support the development of a second language has yielded conflicting results. Critical pedagogy suggests that educators should focus more on how the educational system can be made more user-friendly for those students who are not part of the dominant culture, rather than on how their native languages can be used to foster and reinforce the acquisition of their second language. Consideration of critical classroom applications may be a more fruitful focus for a linguistically-diverse society like that of the United States, in which people from many diverse backgrounds and cultures must find a way to study, work, and live together. Since the educational system of a country is a productive place to start in effecting societal changes, I would like to propose three positive ways for addressing critical issues in the U.S. educational system. These suggestions include establishing the teacher as an

agent for social change, promoting the right attitudes toward multiculturalism, and legitimizing the minority experience.

### **Establishing the Teacher as an Agent for Social Change**

Street (1984) defines literacy as the “social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (p. 1) and comments that whether or not bilingual education is offered is less important than the atmosphere in which the education is provided. Likewise, the type of education is less important than the power structures and attitudes of the actors involved in the interactions. The development of literacy is never a neutral process for an individual; rather, literacy is “part of a power relationship and how people ‘take hold’ of it is contingent on social and cultural practices and not just on pedagogic and cognitive factors” (Street & Lefstein, 2007, p. 42). From the very beginning, literacy and language development are largely social acts, and as such, are fraught with power relations between the participants. However, education is often a microcosm for the dominant values of the society of which it is a part. Reflexively, society can be transformed by changes in its educational system.

Several of the articles and books that I read while preparing to write this paper made clear that in issues of social power, the social actors who are interacting with biliterate students have a vitally important role in the interactions and can either help or hinder further learning attempts of the minority student (Cummins, 2001; Street, 1984; Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester, 2003; Cazden, 2000). Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester (2003) assert that in order to maximize the ability of biliterate individuals to benefit from the many bicultural and bilingual skills that they possess, the U.S. educational system must evolve in such a way as to allow teachers to develop classroom

practices and philosophies that grant agency and voice to “oral, bilingual interaction at the micro level” (p. 42). In an educational environment, the teacher is the most effective agent for positive change.

A teacher can transform the interactions in her own classroom regardless of the overall philosophies in the institution in which she works and without curricular or administrative directives and support. Teachers, instructors, and educational policy makers are all vital actors in the critical framework of education. Cummins (2003) asserts that classroom interactions are never innocent and that no matter what curriculum a teacher is required to use, she can point out critical issues and teach and encourage students to question and challenge the power relations that permeate their own interactions as well as any curriculum that is being followed. The impetus for change must be implemented at the classroom level:

Individual educators are never powerless, although they frequently work in conditions that are oppressive for both them and their students. While they rarely have complete freedom, educators do have choices in the way they structure the patterns of interactions in the classroom. They determine for themselves the social and educational goals they want to achieve with their students. They are responsible for the role definitions they adopt in relation to culturally diverse students and communities. [. . .] In short, educators define their own identities through their practice and their interactions with students. Students likewise go through a continual process of defining their identities in interaction with their teachers, peers, and parents. This process of negotiating identities can never be fully controlled from the outside, although it is certainly influenced by many

forces. Thus, educators, individually and collectively, have the potential to work towards the creation of contexts of empowerment, defined as the collaborative creation of power. Within these interactional spaces where identities are negotiated, students and educators together can generate power that challenges structures of injustice in small but significant ways (Cummins, 2003, p. x).

The participants in this study indicated that they often felt silenced by professors or other students when their comments in a discussion were not acknowledged or taken up, either in class discussions or in small group interactions. One of the comments that several of the women made about their college professors particularly was that when they ventured to make comments in class, the professors often did not affirm or acknowledge those comments before moving on to the next person. They felt that this was different from how professors responded to other students' comments. The women who voiced these concerns were left to wonder whether their responses were somehow inappropriate or otherwise unacceptable, and more than one of them commented that she never felt comfortable enough to participate in that class again after she perceived that her comment had been rejected. Instructors must realize that the determination of many minority students to participate in class is very fragile. It sometimes takes all of the courage they have to make a comment, and the instructor should be aware that his or her response to these comments may determine whether or not the student will feel comfortable enough to participate in the class in the future. Thus, if a minority student feels belittled by a response from a thoughtless or inattentive professor, that student may be denied the opportunity to benefit from further interactions in that classroom. At formative points in the development of classroom involvement patterns, like freshman college classes

perhaps, until instructors have established a safe environment for discussion and disagreement, instructors should concentrate on developing and encouraging a pattern of participation rather than judging (even inadvertently) whether particular responses are worthy of acknowledgement in the classroom

Individual instructors should realize that they have a significant amount of control over whether they are facilitating or hindering a student's ability to interact in the classroom. During the semester in which I conducted the research, one of the participants, Chu Ka, was in my introductory linguistics class. At one point during our conversation she made a statement to the effect that she participated more in my class than in other classes because she and I had a relationship and she felt more comfortable with me as an instructor. Pajka also talked about a specific professor who had a significant impact on her willingness to participate in class. Here is a short excerpt from her story:

It depends on the teacher cause when I took Spiritual Formation with [a specific professor], it really helped me, like he was very personal, so he actually wanted us to talk more and that's when I finally realized that, "OK, we're all equal," you know. We weren't marginalized because they do want to feed us; they do want to help us think more and that's when I got used to more groups and able to talk more in groups (Pajka, individual interview, April 28, 2010).

Kaying talked about having that same professor for a different class. She describes herself as generally being extremely fearful of speaking in class, but in this particular professor's class, she felt more comfortable participating. By her description, he allows students to first discuss a topic in small groups, and then, rather than calling on individuals, he addresses each group and says, "How about your group?" She then added the following explanation of her involvement in the class: "And then like two people sitting next to me don't say anything, so I was like, 'I'll say something then.' Then I just

answer him” (Kaying, individual interview, April 20, 2010). This type of situation gives the student the opportunity to share what her group thinks, rather than what she thinks, which is much less threatening. In addition, she did not have to think of the answer herself or accept the teacher’s or classmates’ response alone.

If instructors and professors, especially at the college level, have a concern for developing and scaffolding student participation, they should critically evaluate their classroom practices. As I listened to their appreciation for this particular professor, I thought about professors and teachers that I have had in the past and whom I know personally who like to maintain an adversarial, edgy atmosphere in the classroom and enjoy imposing their power on their students and embarrassing anyone who dares to question or give a wrong answer. Professors like this, whether out of arrogance or out of a misguided notion that they are initiating students into the world of academia, are certainly feared by minority students who are already not confident in speaking in the classroom. Unfortunately, this type of instructor will likely always exist, and students will need to learn to adjust to them; however, critically-aware instructors should consider ways to comfortably negotiate the power structures in their student-teacher relationships. In addition to monitoring their own manners of interaction in the classroom, critically-informed professors can often set the tone for the way that the students within their classrooms will interact with each other.

Pavlenko (2004) makes the point that learners who are more accustomed to and at ease with the expected participation practices in classroom situations in the United States will be perceived as better students and will be rewarded in formal ways with good grades and the respect of their teachers as opposed to those who are unable to participate

or who do not accurately understand the appropriate mores for classroom interaction. Alternatively, she states that students who are unable to develop their voice, their right to speak and be heard, are a major concern of critical and feminist approaches to language pedagogy. She further asserts that when the voices of immigrant girls are not recognized in the classroom, they may “lose their desire to learn the language or may even engage in passive resistance to classroom practices and curriculum demands” (p. 59). For me, one of the most amazing aspects of the stories that I heard while doing the research for this project was that the women involved in these stories persisted despite the frequent marginalizing practices which were part of their educational experiences. I often wondered whether I would have been able to persevere through the same circumstances.

Aside from maintaining a critical mindset and making sure that students feel safe and welcomed to explicitly address issues of power in the classroom, there are a few other practical changes that high school and college instructors might be able to use to scaffold interactions and provide time for students to develop their critical thinking skills and allow language minority students to feel more comfortable and prepared to participate in class. In some of their stories, the Hmong women in this study shared that they often were reluctant to participate because they were unsure of the meanings of some of the words the instructors used in their questions; they also felt that they needed more time than other students to process information. This made impromptu classroom discussions very difficult and uncomfortable for them. A possible solution for this would be for instructors to give students discussion topics or discussion questions ahead of time, so they can be prepared for the specific questions that might be asked, allowing them

more time to prepare and formulate answers and giving them opportunities to develop their understanding and confidence regarding the material under discussion.

Bayley and Schecter (2003) make a couple additional suggestions for ameliorating minority silences in the classroom. They agree with the evidence in the student experiences described above that silence often arises from insecurity and lack of trust in the teacher or in the classroom situation. They further suggest that explicit discussions about accents and different dialects of English and reinforcement of the idea that certain dialects should not be considered superior to others will result in improved tolerance of minority dialects by majority students. In addition, they propose that teachers sometimes allow students to work in native-language groups. Whether this is a viable solution is questionable based on the problematic experiences shared by the women in this study about working in homogenous groups with other Hmong. Another interesting suggestion that they had was to design a classroom activity that would require students to complete a task using a foreign language or script, in order to develop a better awareness and understanding of the issues that students from minority language groups may encounter. An example of this type of activity might be to complete a math assignment using Arabic letters.

Instructors also need to search for ways to empower minority students to speak out when they notice that injustice is being perpetuated. A few of the participants in my study voiced a willingness or desire to do this in the future, most notably Paj Chia and Hli Chia (pp. 209-210 of this document) talking about watching an Old English movie in their English class, Emma discussing her presentation in a psychology class regarding issues of diversity on campus (p. 214 of this document), and Nkauj Choua Shoua sharing

about a class discussion on Japanese internment camps (pp. 219-220 of this document). One interesting observation about these four women is that two of them had already completed their undergraduate educations, and the other two were graduating at the end of the semester. This observation encouraged me because I viewed it as possible evidence that perhaps their undergraduate educations had prepared them to be more willing to take risks to combat injustice and inequality. Once they have stepped back and analyzed a situation, they are able to see what was actually happening and consider how they might have responded differently. As they have matured and gained experience in the college classroom and have developed a better understanding of their own feelings, they may be more likely to confront and challenge in similar situations in the future. In other words, they have developed the ability to metacognitively evaluate their interactions with other actors in the classroom situation. Unfortunately, it seems that by the time they reach these conclusions, they have nearly completed the classroom experiences where they might have been able to have the most influence on their peers and their teachers. Educators must find ways to develop this type of awareness as early as possible in the educational experiences of their students and provide safe atmospheres where students are able to speak out when they are ready. Perhaps this can be accomplished by encouraging reflection and inviting all students, both minority and majority, to engage in metacognitive evaluation of their classroom interactions and consider what effect their own involvement has on others and how they might have acted differently.

## **Promoting Critical Multiculturalism in the Classroom**

One of the points that was discussed extensively during our conversations was the fact that often professors, in trying to help students from the dominant culture to understand minority populations, present essentialized descriptions of typified groups of people. Even the most well-meaning professors may tend to over-generalize and create situations in which minority students feel they must conform to the images painted of them. In the situation at the university where this research was conducted, the Hmong are a very visible presence and therefore are often the specific topic of such classroom mini-lectures. Although the women rarely mentioned names of specific professors, I was often able to guess who was involved in the situations that they were describing. Because I know these professors personally, I know that they would be appalled to hear the results that their teaching had on the Hmong students, whom they were trying to help. As the women described, discussions about their differences often created confusion about their own identities and resulted in a resignation to assume the characteristics that they were depicted as possessing. Ryuko Kubota (2004) explains that in order for teaching on multiculturalism to be most effective, it must be approached in a more critically-informed manner.

Kubota (2004) describes the concept of *critical multiculturalism* and puts it in juxtaposition to *liberal multiculturalism* by defining it as a way to achieve “social transformation by seeking social justice and equality among all people rather than merely celebrating differences or assuming a priori that all people are equal” (p. 37). She maintains that most educators and educational institutions fall into the category of practicing liberal multiculturalism which encompasses attitudes which are expressed as a

sensitivity to, an appreciation for, and an acceptance of diversity in race, ethnicity, and language. The U.S. educational system has a tradition of hosting isolated “celebrations” of difference rather than incorporating meaningful discussions into the everyday life of the classroom. Cultural emphases that briefly and intermittently address the distinctiveness of food, dance, music, or dress and leave a fond memory of the novelty of diverse cultures—the exotic food, the beautiful costumes, the unusual customs—usually do not have a lasting effect on the understanding and attitudes of the participants or result in meaningful interactions with one another.

Liberal multiculturalism masquerades as superficial tolerance and understanding. Kubota (2004) further purports that liberal multiculturalists suffer from a form of *difference-blindness* which emphasizes that all members of the human race can succeed if they try hard enough, rather than acknowledging unequal opportunities that exist because of racial and ethnic inequities. Difference blindness denies that power relationships based on race or socioeconomic status exist in U.S. schools and societies (Kubota, 2004).

In an individual interview with Nkauj Ntxawm, she shared about feeling at times like she does not have a personal identity because in people’s minds, she is always viewed as a Hmong person. Nkauj Ntxawm happened to be one of the Hmong students on campus who did not speak much Hmong and her pre-college education was in a school system where there was only one other Hmong family, so prior to college, she did not have a strong association as a member of this ethnic group.

I’m not used to like, “Oh, you’re Hmong students.” Or “How many of you are Hmong?” And so it’s just kind of like, “Yeah, I’m Hmong.” I don’t know if I really don’t like it, or like it. I don’t know if I can decide on that, but it’s just interesting the way that they understand that you are a Hmong person and they kind of understand the history and I don’t know if I can recall like a certain incident, but sometimes the teachers will just ask you, “Are you Hmong?” And

then sometimes I have to hear students say comments about the Hmong people and it's interesting how they just, they clan us up, and I remember a guy was like, "Oh, you Hmong people always sit together." Sometimes that kind of offended me because I feel like, because we're Hmong people, I know that we do clique a lot, but sometimes I feel like we have our own identity too. I remember freshman year Oral Comm, I was partnered with a guy and he was like, "Are you Hmong?" and I was like, "Yeah," and then he's like, "Do you know that Hmong kid up there?" and I was like, "No." And like it was the first couple weeks [of school]. Just cause they assume that we're Hmong, we know each other. And then he's like, "Oh, all you Hmong people sit at lunch together," and then I was like, "No, we don't," because that was like my freshman year. I sat with like American people cause I didn't know any of the Hmong kids, you know? And so it was just like weird that sometimes they make that assumption and it's not really accurate (Nkauj Ntxawm, individual interview, March 19, 2010).

I have noticed that recently many college freshman writing and composition books are including a multicultural flavor in the readings that they contain. In addition, many colleges and universities require courses designed to increase awareness of multicultural issues. Such literature and courses are intended to help students develop an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures, but in reality, these attempts, when not handled with a critical consciousness have the potential to simplify and essentialize differences between cultures and peoples which may result in giving students a false sense of understanding a particular culture when, in reality, they have barely scratched the surface of understanding that culture. This possibility was raised by the stories that the participants told about being confused about their own identities after discussions in class that focused on the characteristics of Asians. Even when essays by minority writers are used, it remains the responsibility of the teacher to make sure that these issues are handled in an appropriately critical manner.

Unlike liberal multiculturalism, which tends to focus on characteristics of individuals within a population, critical multiculturalism highlights the systematic oppression of disadvantaged groups of people (Kubota, 2004). The presentation of

certain cultures as being homogenous results in viewing all members of a population as being the same and often uses white middle class values as the normative value system to which all others are compared. Also, according to Kubota (2004), issues specifically associated with white middle class power and privilege tend to be ignored. The goal of critical multiculturalism is to develop students' awareness of various forms of oppression and discrimination and empower them to act on their own behalves, rather than trivializing difference and upholding equality as liberal multiculturalists might. Educators should consider how minority students may be discriminated against and oppressed through educational placement, testing, and instructional practices. Such marginalizing practices are evident in the stories of the Hmong women as they shared about the ineffectiveness of the ESL instruction that they received and the manner in which they were singled out to be tested to determine if they needed ESL support, which they considered to be remediation. Here is a reiteration of part of Phoua's ESL story:

My language wasn't that much different than the people around me, but I was picked out, just because I had a second language, not based on my ability. They would make us take an English test every year, and I couldn't understand why I got better grades than some of the white students, but they didn't have to take the test. Why can't they take the test, too? So I feel like we were treated differently (Phoua, group discussion, February 20, 2010).

Kubota (2004) explains that critical multiculturalism problematizes culture and language differences as "ever-shifting sites of struggle where different meanings are produced and challenged" (p. 39). Kubota asserts that limiting attention to once-a-year ethnic holidays reinforces that multicultural education can be addressed through occasional attention and need not be addressed on an ongoing basis. Effective attention to critical multiculturalism highlights hegemonic and hierarchical issues which are often inherent in situations where cross-racial relationships exist. It is important that both the

privileged and the oppressed parties understand the inequality that exists. In the case of the Hmong, Pajka shared an instance when she was explicitly taught by her parents that Caucasians are always right:

I think with the Hmong culture, coming to America, we were always oppressed. Because I remember my parents always talking about that Americans are always on top. No matter what we do, they have the say. So I guess for me in my mentality, it's become like my parents where, like Americans always have the say, they have more rights than I do or something like that, because we're the minority (individual interview, April 28, 2010).

Privileged groups should be aware of and be prepared to counteract such ideas about themselves.

Instructors and administrators should search for ways to replace the usual liberal multicultural activities like culture shows and displays of traditional clothing and dancing. For example, in the specific case of the Hmong, a possible activity to promote critical multiculturalism might be a school-wide study of the history of the Hmong, who served a vital part in the U.S. interests in the wars in Southeast Asia. Despite the fact that this is a source of great pride among the Hmong people, it is a little-known fact in mainstream America. Perhaps in schools where large numbers of Hmong exist, this could be a standard topic of study. Results from discussions such as this might result in a better understanding of the world for all students and perhaps would legitimize the Hmong existence in America and engender gratefulness to and appreciation for the Hmong as a people. The Hmong themselves may also develop a greater sense of significance and belonging in U.S. history when their part is acknowledged outside of their own communities.

The culture of white middle-class Americans is often treated as the norm to which all other cultures are compared. Somehow, this practice needs to be altered. I personally

often have trouble finding the right vocabulary to discuss cultural differences in the non-hegemonic way that I would like. Luke (2004), who advocates for a critical approach to second language acquisition, questions “whether it is possible to teach the critical to those who have not had the experience of being Othered” (p. 27). I often question myself as to whether I am qualified to try to address and explain these issues when I have not really experienced them myself. Given the experiences described above wherein professors present themselves as experts on someone else’s culture and experience, perhaps acknowledging that we cannot completely understand the minority experience and inviting the members of said minorities to help us could be an effective way of encouraging participation, modeling an appropriately humble attitude, and facilitating the dissemination of more accurate information.

Kubota (2004) advocates that educational curricula must not only discuss how cultures differ, but they must also address how cultural difference is discursively constructed and perpetuated and how these artificial constructions can influence cross-cultural interactions. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, several of the women in the study talked about the fact that they feel pressured to be what they are constructed to be in textbooks and by their professors, and they are not comfortable with challenging these constructions. They must be given the freedom and the platform to challenge the accepted descriptions of themselves as Asians, and teachers and classmates from the majority culture need to recognize the ways in which they cooperate to perpetuate these essentialized constructions. The New London Group makes the following statement to emphasize the point that no person can be described or understood by the use of general statements about a particular group:

As people are simultaneously members of multiple lifeworlds, so their identities have multiple layers that are in complex relation to each other. No person is a member of a singular community. Rather they are members of multiple and overlapping communities—communities of work, of interest and affiliation, of ethnicity, of sexual identity, and so on.” (2000, p. 17)

### **Legitimizing and Giving Voice to the Minority Experience**

Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester (2003) assert that one way of swaying power away from the traditionally-preferred end of a continuum is to give voice and agency to those who inhabit other points on the continuum. They also suggest that the formal educational context rarely provides exposure to vernacular and minority content or the histories and voices of minority language users. With immigrant groups which have a long history of literacy, finding literature written by members of that minority may not be too difficult. However, with cultures and peoples like the Hmong who do not have backgrounds that encourage the written word as a way of communicating and preserving history and experience, this may be more difficult. This section will explore the importance of legitimizing and giving voice to the minority experience through literature produced by members of their own cultures which can be accessed to inspire those who are struggling and which might encourage others to write about their own experiences.

In some cases minority populations endure oppression because they are accustomed to it. I believe that in many ways, the Hmong are one of these kinds of populations. From what I have read and what I have heard during some of the conversations with the Hmong women, the Hmong have a long history of persecution which has required them to emigrate from country to country. They are primarily

seeking a place where they can be left to live their lives as they wish in their traditional ways. In addition, in many ways the Hmong have a history as a population which passively accepts their position and does not challenge those who hold social power over them. Through my discussions with these women, it has become clear that they often do not acknowledge or discuss their oppression even among themselves. Often after our group discussions, several of the women would comment that they felt as though our discussions were a therapy session during which they talked about issues that were long buried, but still had the potential to stir up strong emotions. They also seemed to feel empowered by their shared past experiences and the interaction about those experiences.

I anticipate that this experience of discussing and confronting issues that perhaps are frequently ignored or hidden will encourage the women who participated in this study to feel less isolated in their experience as part of a minority population and encourage further discussion amongst themselves, resulting in empowerment and, potentially, in action. Providing a platform for such discussions to occur in educational milieu outside of research projects like this is a more difficult problem to solve. In my position as the faculty sponsor for the Asian fellowship, I was involved in discussions on campus regarding how to solve issues related to diversity on campus. I personally tried on several occasions to explain to student leaders and university staff that superficial activities like cultural exchange activities or worship services combining different languages are not effective methods for addressing problems related to feelings of discrimination and inequality. Unfortunately, even campus leaders do not seem to grasp the broader social and critical implications that need to be addressed. Given this situation, change is likely to be slow and difficult.

It is essential for minority communities like the Hmong to express themselves in ways that are accessible to others within their own communities, as well as to other minority populations. Writing is one way to accomplish this goal. In her foreword to *Bamboo among the Oaks*, Moua states that she desires to encourage fellow Hmong “to write our stories in our own voices and to create our own images of ourselves. When we do not, others write our stories for us, and we are in danger of accepting the images others have painted of us” (Moua, 2002, p. 7). Moua has devoted much of her professional life as an author and editor to engendering the production of written experiential and analytical accounts written by Hmong people themselves and finding ways to make those writings available as a way of legitimizing, sharing, and learning from their collective experiences.

Skilton-Sylvester (2003) relates a story in which one of the Cambodian teenagers who was a participant in her research project providentially had an opportunity to read a piece of literature penned by female Asian author Maxine Hong Kingston. The young woman is astounded to read about someone with an experience that she can closely relate to. Such experiences can transform the thinking of minority young people by affirming their own experiences and making those experiences more concrete and understandable. Through the authority associated with publication, these types of writings give credible voice to the experiences of minority populations and can additionally provide non-minority students with increased understanding and empathy with those experiences.

I hope that the writing and discussions associated with this study have had a positive impact on the participants. During the study, they often voiced appreciation for having the opportunity to talk about these issues and experiences which they had ignored

or forgotten. I hope they have been encouraged to speak out for themselves in classroom or social situations in which they feel they are being marginalized or discriminated against. I also hope they will be encouraged to write about and share their experiences with others. To this end, last fall before I left the university, I gave each one of them the book *Bamboo among the Oaks* to give them some samples of the writing that their Hmong peers have done and to encourage them to try writing themselves. Whether in response to this book or not, I was recently rewarded by seeing one of the women make a general post on facebook which simply stated, “Inspired to write more books about the Hmong people. . .and to speak more Hmong :)” When the study was completed at the end of spring semester in 2010, I received an e-mail from another participant saying, “Thank you for allowing us to be a part of this process, I really believe that it really helped us as well.”

Studies like the one that I have conducted raise the awareness of the participants themselves; however, such discussions are difficult to replicate in the everyday life of an educational institution. In the case of my own study, I hope there will be a ripple effect wherein the women will start writing themselves and encouraging their friends to do the same. Educators should also seek to create an environment in which minority students feel empowered to resist stereotyping and essentialization by producing and publishing their own writing. In the case of the Hmong, Moua (2002) is already spearheading such an effort, and Duffy (2004; 2007) demonstrates that the Hmong people are beginning to find and assert their voices through written means, which may have the potential to effect a widespread and lasting impact.

## **Conclusion**

Although critical discussions related to language and ethnicity are a focus for many social and linguistic theorists, classroom teachers and educational professionals, especially those who teach at the elementary and secondary level, are unlikely to be included in these conversations. Their efforts are unfortunately often focused on how to help their students meet standard state and federal guidelines, rather than on the wider social and critical implications of their teaching. When cultural diversity is discussed, it is presented in ways which are more in alignment with liberal multicultural than critical multicultural perspectives. There is more focus on whether or not a student conforms to the language of academia and Standard American English than whether they are able to be integrally engaged in the life of the classroom.

So much of success in education depends on proficient use of the language. Actually it depends on the student's ability to use language in a predetermined "standard" way. It also depends on an individual's ability to fit in to the culture of education. What I have seen in talking to these women and reading their stories is an overall story of struggle: they struggle within their families and in the Hmong community due to language, culture, and gender issues; they struggle in school and in the middle-class American community due to language, culture, and societal issues; and they struggle in higher education due to these same types of issues.

In general, as Hmong students enter college, they are not keenly aware of the shortfalls of their elementary and secondary educations. In fact, their success in high school is likely part of the impetus that compelled them to go to college. As noted in the previous chapter, the women in this study generally achieved very good grades in their

pre-college educations and were rarely made to feel as though they were not performing well academically, except for occasional comments regarding the fact that their writing was “like an ESL student.” Once in college, the English language ability of long-term immigrant Generation 1.5 students like the Hmong is unlikely to prevent them from graduating from college, but the feelings of inferiority that have developed in response to the marginalizing experiences in the classroom may discourage them from pursuing further education in highly competitive fields, like medicine or business. Kubota (2004) cites Pennycook and Canagarajah, who charge educators to facilitate minority voices to develop a fluency in standard English in order to expose and challenge dominant language and social practices (p. 46). As long as the standards and expectations for the use of standard English exist, I feel that as responsible educator, I have an obligation to do the best job I can to help students meet these standards, not in order to assimilate them into the dominant educational culture, but in order to give them the confidence that they need to succeed in their educational and future professional careers, which will provide them with a platform for greater influence within their societies and communities.

At the same time, the strengths that minority students possess should also be affirmed and capitalized upon. The challenge for educators is to figure out how to do this with different populations. As noted by Bayley and Schechter (2003), bilingual individuals have a significant number of linguistic resources available to them; however, these resources are rarely valued or developed within the educational community. Thus, rather than feeling the richness that should be associated with the ability to operate successfully in two languages, they feel poverty regarding their language ability in the dominant language of the society in which they live. In many cases with the Hmong

women, I feel that personally and individually, they have seen and understand the value of their bicultural, biliterate lives, but have accepted that these resources have little value in the U.S. educational system, so they are left to appreciate the value within themselves or between each other.

Despite their success in attending college, they remain outsiders. The challenges of their college experiences are not just related to writing, they are also associated with gaining respect in the classroom from their teachers and other students. While the tendency of their culture is to downplay the value of education for women, this attitude may be changing with the perception presented in the previous chapter that many of the men are choosing not pursue higher education. The women may be the ones who are elevating the educational and socioeconomic status of Hmong families and communities, yet they are doing it quietly and unnoticed in many ways, as evidenced by young women being unaware of the occupations of older women in their communities (Nkauj Choua Shoua, p. 265 in this document) and acknowledging that the domestic skills of women are the ones that are valued and bragged about.

One thought crossed my mind often as I listened to these women describe their difficult and marginalizing experiences in U.S. education and society. I realized that these are the stories of Hmong women who have basically succeeded in pursuing and attaining college educations despite the injustices that they had to endure. My thoughts then turned to consider those who have not been as successful in the educational system. What has the experience been like for those who did not choose to pursue higher education? What about those who did not have the perseverance to persist despite

repeated evidence that in many ways they were not valued or respected? What are their life circumstances now?

As mentioned in the opening pages of this document, since their arrival in the United States, the Hmong people have been a focus for extensive research in many areas of study, including cultural, sociological, educational, and anthropological fields. Perhaps this study will enhance this body of knowledge and provide insight into current trends and changes in the lifestyles and attitudes of Generation 1.5 Hmong women. However, the most valuable outcome may be the potential for change in the individuals involved in the project, both the researcher and the participants. Through their participation in this study, the women were able to share experiences which, by their own admission, had been buried and forgotten. They were able to see that their individual experiences are part of the fabric of the collective experience of the immigrant population of which they are a part. While conducting this study, I was personally gratified by some of the remarks of the participants in response to their participation. I have provided suggestions for changes in educational philosophies; however, a more valuable outcome will be if the participants themselves are better able to critically reflect on their experiences and respond with courage and confidence to injustices and inequality in their education, family, and community experiences and thereby impose reception of their voices within their own communities and the wider U.S. society and educational systems.

## References

- Adger, C. T., Wolfram, W., & Christian, D. (2007). *Dialects in schools and communities* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Atkinson, R. (1998). *The life story interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- American Institutes for Research and Wested. (2006, January 24). *Effects of the implementation of Proposition 227 on the education of English learners, K-12: Findings from a five-year evaluation*. Retrieved April 27, 2009, from [http://www.wested.org/online\\_pubs/227Reportb.pdf](http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/227Reportb.pdf)
- Bamberg, M., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis. *Talk and Text*, 28(3), 377-396.
- Bayley, R., & Schecter, S. R. (2003). *Language socialization in bilingual and multilingual societies*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Block, D. (2003). *The social turn in second language acquisition*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Bosher, S. (1997). Language and cultural identity: A study of Hmong students at the postsecondary level. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 593-603.
- Boudakian, M. A. (1994). Crossing over to the other side. In J. Kadi (Ed.), *Food for our grandmothers: Writing by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian feminists* (pp. 32-38). Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Brodkey, L. (1987). Writing ethnographic narratives. *Written Communication*, 4, 25-40.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

- Cadman, K., Friend, L., Gannon, S., Ingleton, C., Koutroulis, G., McCormack, C., et al. (2007). Memory-workers doing memory-work on memory-work: Exploring unresolved power. Retrieved May 25, 2008, from University of Technology, Sydney, UTS iResearch website: <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2100/411/1/Kate%20Cadman%20et%20al.pdf>
- California Department of Education. (2009). *Data and statistics* [Data files]. Available from California Department of Education website, <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>
- Cameron, D. (2001). *Working with spoken discourse*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cazden, C. (2000). Taking cultural differences into account. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 249-266). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Center for Applied Linguistics. (n.d.). *The Hmong: An introduction to their history and culture*. Retrieved April 27, 2009, from <http://www.cal.org/co/hmong/hlang.html>
- Chan, S. (1994). *Hmong means free: Life in Laos and America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Chiang, Y. D., & Schmida, M. (1999). Language identity and language ownership: Linguistic conflicts of first-year university writing students. In L. Harklau, K. M. Losey, & M. Siegal (Eds.), *Generation 1.5 meets college composition* (pp. 81-96). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ching, R. (2007). Integrating grammar into a high school expository reading and writing course. *The CATESOL Journal*, 19(1), 89-106.

- Choi, J. (2010). Living on the hyphen. In D. Nunan & J. Choi (Eds.), *Language and culture: Reflective narratives and the emergence of identity* (pp. 66-73). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Christian and Missionary Alliance. (2005). *The Hmong people movement: Chosen* (Part 1) [video]. Retrieved from <http://www.cmalliance.org/video/play/90-the-hmong-people-movement-part-1>
- Christian and Missionary Alliance. (2005). *The Hmong people movement: Self-conversion* (Part 2) [video]. Retrieved from <http://www.cmalliance.org/video/play/91-the-hmong-people-movement-part-2>
- Christian and Missionary Alliance. (2005). *The Hmong people movement: Full circle* (Part 3) [video]. Retrieved from <http://www.cmalliance.org/video/play/92-the-hmong-people-movement-part-3>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Collier, V. P. (1987). Age and rate of acquisition of second language for academic purposes. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(4), 617-614.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2000). Multiliteracies: The beginning of an idea. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 3-8). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative research. *Theory into Practice* 39(3), 124-130.

- Cummins, J. (1980). The cross-lingual dimensions of language proficiency: Implications for bilingual education and the optimal age issue. *TESOL Quarterly*, 14(2), 175-187.
- Cummins, J. (2001). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Cummins, J. (2003). Foreword. In N. H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Continua of biliteracy: An ecological framework for educational policy, research, and practice in multilingual settings* (pp. vii-xi). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Destandau, N., & Wald, M. (2002). Promoting generation 1.5 learners' academic literacy and autonomy: Contributions from the learning center. *The CATESOL Journal*, 14(1), 207-234.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Skehan, P. (2003). Individual differences in second language learning. In C. J. Doughty & M. H. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 589-630). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Duffy, J. M. (2004). Letters from the fair city: A rhetorical conception of literacy. *College Composition and Communication* 56(2), 223-250.
- Duffy, J. M. (2007). *Writing from these roots: Literacy in a Hmong-American community*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Erlandson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Faderman, L., & Xiong, G. (1998). *I begin my life all over: The Hmong and the American immigrant experience*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

- Fadiman, A. (1997). *The spirit catches you and you fall down: A Hmong child, her American doctors, and the collision of two cultures*. New York: The Noonday Press.
- Farrar, P. D. (2007). *Too painful to remember: Memory-work as a method to explore sensitive research topics*. Retrieved May 25, 2008, from University of Technology, Sydney, UTS iResearch website:  
<http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2100/414/1/Patricia%20Farrar.pdf>
- Firth, A., & Wagner, J. (1997). On discourse, communication, and (some) fundamental concepts in SLA research. *The Modern Language Journal*, 81, 285-300.
- Foin, A. T., & Lange, E. J. (2007). Generation 1.5 writers success in correcting errors marked on an out-of-class paper. *The CATESOL Journal*, 19(1), 146-163.
- Frodesen, J. (2002). At what price success?: The academic writing development of a generation 1.5 "latecomer." *The CATESOL Journal*, 14(1), 191-206.
- Frodesen, J., & Starna, N. (1999). Distinguishing incipient and functional bilingual writers: Assessment and instructional insights gained through second-language writer profiles. L. Harklau, K. M. Losey, & M. Siegal (Eds.), *Generation 1.5 meets college composition* (pp. 61-79). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gan, Z., Humphreys, G., & Hamp-Lyons, L. (2004). Understanding successful and unsuccessful EFL students in Chinese universities. *The Modern Language Journal*, 88(2), 229- 244.
- Goen, S., Porter, P., Swanson, D., & Vandommelen, D. (2002a). Generation 1.5. *The CATESOL Journal*, 14(1), 103-105.

- Goen, S., Porter, P., Swanson, D., & Vandommelen, D. (2002b). Working with generation 1.5 students and their teachers: ESL meets composition. *The CATESOL Journal*, 14(1), 131-172.
- Harklau, L., Siegal, M., & Losey, K. M. (1999). Linguistically diverse students and college writing: What is equitable and appropriate? In L. Harklau, K. M. Losey, & M. Siegal (Eds.), *Generation 1.5 meets college composition* (pp. 1-14). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Harklau, L. (2000). From the “good kids” to the “worst”: Representations of English language learners across educational settings. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(1), 35-67.
- Hartman, B., & Tarone, E. (2002). Preparation for college writing: Teachers talk about writing instruction for Southeast Asian American students in secondary school. *The CATESOL Journal*, 14(1), 99-118.
- Haug, F. (1987). *Female sexualization: A collective work of memory*. London: Verso.
- Hmong National Development, Inc. and the Hmong Cultural and Resource Center. (2003). *Hmong 2000 census publication: Data and analysis*. Retrieved April 19, 2009, from <http://hmongstudies.com/2000HmongCensusPublication.pdf>
- Holten, C. (2002). Charting new territory: Creating an interdepartmental course for generation 1.5 writers. *The CATESOL Journal*, 14(1), 173-189.
- Holten, C., & Mikesell, L. (2007). Using discourse-based strategies to address the lexicogrammatical development of Generation 1.5 ESL writers. *The CATESOL Journal*, 19(1), 35-52.

- Hornberger, N. H. (2003). Continua of biliteracy. In N. H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Continua of Biliteracy: An Ecological Framework for Educational Policy, Research, and Practice in Multilingual Settings* (pp. 3-34). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Skilton-Sylvester, E. (2003). Revisiting the continua of biliteracy: International and critical perspectives. In N. H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Continua of Biliteracy: An Ecological Framework for Educational Policy, Research, and Practice in Multilingual Settings* (pp. 35-67). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Ingleton, C. (2007). *Meaning-making: Issues of analysis in memory-work*. Retrieved May 25, 2008, from University of Technology, Sydney, UTS iResearch website: <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2100/408/1/Christine%20Ingleton.pdf>
- Innovative Education Management, Inc. (n.d.). *CELDT: California English language development test frequently asked questions*. Retrieved April 10, 2009, from <http://www.ieminc.org/Assessment/2005/celdtfaq05.htm>
- Johnstone, B. (2002). *Discourse analysis*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2000). A multiliteracies pedagogy: A pedagogical supplement. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 239-248). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Koltyk, J. (1998). *New pioneers in the Heartland: Hmong life in Wisconsin*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Krashen, S. D. (1992). *Fundamentals of language education*. Chicago: McGraw-Hill.

- Kubota, R. (2004). Critical multiculturalism and second language education. In B. Norton & K. Toohey (Eds.), *Critical pedagogies and language learning* (pp. 30-52). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Laufer, B. (1997). What's in a word that makes it hard or easy: Some intralexical factors that affect the learning of words. In N. Schmitt & M. McCarthy (Eds.), *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition, and pedagogy* (pp. 140-155). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Lee, M. (2002). Hmong speak. In M. N. Moua (Ed.), *Bamboo among the oaks* (pp. 47-49). St. Paul, MN: Borealis Books.
- Lee, S. J. (2005). *Up against whiteness: Race, school, and immigrant youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Lee, S. J. (2001). More than "model minorities" or "delinquents": A look at Hmong American high school students [Electronic version]. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(3).
- Lee, S. J. (1997). The road to college: Hmong American women's pursuit of higher education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67(4), 803-827.
- Leki, I. (1999). "Pretty much I screwed up": Ill-served needs of a permanent resident. In L. Harklau, K. M. Losey, & M. Siegal (Eds.), *Generation 1.5 meets college composition* (pp. 17-43). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Liamputtong, P., & Ezzy, D. (2005). *Qualitative research methods*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Luke, A. (2004). Two takes on the critical. In B. Norton and K. Toohy (Eds.), *Critical pedagogies and language learning* (pp. 21-29). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Markee, N. (1994). Toward an ethnomethodological respecification of second-language acquisition studies. In E. E. Tarone, S. M. Gass, & A. D. Cohen (Eds.), *Research methodology in second-language acquisition*, (pp. 89-116). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- McKay, S. L., & Wong, S. C. (1996). Multiple discourses, multiple identities: Investment and agency in second-language learning among Chinese adolescent immigrant students. *Harvard Educational Review* 66(3), 577-608.
- Mikesell, E. (2007). Differences between generation 1.5 and English as a second language writers: A corpus-based comparison of past participle use in academic essays. *The CATESOL Journal*, 19(1), 7-29.
- Mitchell, R., & Myles, F. (2004). *Second language learning theories* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Moua, M. N. (Ed.) (2002). *Bamboo among the oaks: Contemporary writing by Hmong Americans*. St. Paul, MN: Borealis Books.
- The New London Group. (2000). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 9-37). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ngo, B. (2002). Contesting "culture": The perspectives of Hmong American female students on early marriage. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 33, 163-188.

- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity, and educational change*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education.
- Norton, B., & Vanderheyden, K. (2004). Comic book culture and second language learners. In B. Norton and K. Toohey (Eds.), *Critical pedagogies and language learning* (pp. 201-221). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Nye, J. (2006). The hidden transcripts of ESL writers: Four longitudinal case studies on the experiences and perceptions of ESL and generation 1.5 students acquiring academic literacy at the community college. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3206652).
- Odlin, T. (2003). Cross-linguistic influence. In C. J. Doughty & M. H. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 436-486). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Onyx, J., & Small, J. (2001). Memory-work: The method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7, 773-786.
- O'Reilly, T. (1998). An investigation of Hmong students' academic success in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 9838612).
- Oudenhoven, E. D. Caught in the middle: Generation 1.5 Latino students and English language learning at a community college. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3212980).

- Pavlenko, A. (2004). Gender and sexuality in foreign and second language education: Critical and feminist approaches. In B. Norton & K. Toohey (Eds.), *Critical pedagogies and language learning* (pp. 53-71). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Pavlenko, A., & Lantolf, J. P. (2000). Second language learning as participation and the (re)construction of selves. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*, (pp. 155-177). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Pfeifer, M. (2005, April 9). *The state of Hmong-American studies*. Paper presented at the Hmong National Conference. Retrieved January 17, 2009, from <http://hmongstudies.com/Hmong-AmericanStudiesEssayRevisedforHSJ.pdf>
- Quincy, K. (1995). *Hmong: History of a people*. Spokane, WA: Eastern Washington University Press.
- Reeves, J. (2004). "Like everybody else": Equalizing educational opportunity for English language learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(1), 43-66.
- Reid, J. M. (1998). "Eye" learners and "ear" learners: Identifying the language needs of international student and U.S. resident writers. In P. Byrd & J. Reid (Eds.), *Grammar in the composition classroom: Essays on teaching ESL for college-bound students*, (pp. 3-17). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist methods in social research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Richards, K. (2003). *Qualitative inquiry in TESOL*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Roberge, M. M. (2001). Institutional responses to immigrant college students: An ethnographic case study of a college composition, basic writing and English as a second language program. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3044651).
- Roberge, M. M. (2002). California's generation 1.5 immigrants: What experiences, characteristics, and needs do they bring to our English classes? *The CATESOL Journal*, 14(1), 107-129.
- Rockhill, K. (1987). Gender, language, and the politics of literacy. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 8(2), 153-167.
- Rodby, J. (1999). Contingent literacy: The social construction of writing for nonnative English-speaking college freshman. In L. Harklau, K. M. Losey, & M. Siegal (Eds.), *Generation 1.5 meets college composition* (pp. 45-60). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Rodriguez, L. A. (2006). The forgotten generation: High school and college generation 1.5 students. *Proquest Digital Dissertations*, (UMI No. 1434461).
- Rose, M. (1989). *Lives on the boundary: A moving account of the struggles and achievements of America's educationally underprepared*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Rumbaut, R. G., & Ima, K. (1988). *The adaptation of Southeast Asian refugee youth: A comparative study*. (Final report to the Office of Refugee Resettlement). San Diego, CA: San Diego State University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED299372).

- Scarcella, R. (1990). *Teaching language minority students in the multicultural classroom*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Schumann, J. H. (1978). The acculturation model for second language acquisition. In R. C. Gingras (Ed.), *Second language acquisition and foreign language teaching* (pp. 27-50). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Schwartz, G. G. (2006). Vietnamese students in mainstream composition: An ethnographic study of academic identities in generation 1.5 students who cross over. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3206670).
- Sparks, R. L., & Ganschow, L. (1991). Foreign language learning differences: Affective or native language aptitude differences? *The Modern Language Journal*, 75(1), 3-16.
- Stake, R. E. (2003). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*, (pp. 134-164). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, B. V., & Lefstein, A. (2007). *Literacy: An advanced resource book*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tarone, E., Downing, D., Cohen, A., Gillette, S., Murie, R., & Dailey, B. (1993). The writing of Southeast Asian-American students in secondary school and university. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 2(2), 149-172.

- Thomson, R., & Holland, J. (2005). 'Thanks for the memory': Memory books as a methodological resource in biographical research. *Qualitative Research*, 5, 201-219.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2004, December). *We the people: Asians in the United States*. Retrieved April 11, 2009, from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/censr-17.pdf>
- Vang, C. T. (2001). Histories and academic profiles of successful and unsuccessful Hmong secondary students. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3039180).
- Vang, C. T. (2004-05). Hmong American K-12 students and the academic skills needed for a college education: A review of the existing literature and suggestions for future research. *Hmong Studies Journal*, Volume 5. Retrieved May 5, 2008, from <http://hmongstudies.com/ChrisVangHSJ5.pdf>
- Vang, M. (2002). We women of the Hmong culture. In M.N. Moua (Ed.), *Bamboo among the oaks* (pp. 154-155). St. Paul, MN: Borealis Books.
- Walker-Moffat, W. (1995). *The other side of the Asian American success story*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Watson-Gegeo, K. A. (1988). Ethnography in ESL: Defining the essentials. *TESOL Quarterly*, 22(4), 575-592.
- Watson-Gegeo, K. A. (2004). Mind, language, and epistemology: Toward a language socialization paradigm for SLA. *The Modern Language Journal*, 88(3), 331-350.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

APPENDIX A  
Informed Consent Form

**Informed Consent Form**

**Working Title:** Language and Literacy Journeys of Hmong Generation 1.5 Women

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask. You are eligible to participate because you are a member of the target population of the study: Hmong Generation 1.5 female college students.

The term Generation 1.5 refers to members of immigrant families who were either born in the U.S. or received all or most of their formal education in the U.S. The term is a reflection of the understanding that this generation differs markedly from the generation of their parents, but also differs from dominant U.S. population and culture. Researchers have noted that many members of Generation 1.5 arrive in the college classroom while still in the process of acquiring academic literacy in the English language. The purpose of this study is to give you, as members of this ever-growing population, the opportunity to present your perspective on the positive and negative aspects of your own literacy and language development experiences. This purpose will be accomplished by facilitating you in the process of reconstructing and interpreting your own experiences through reflective writing, one-on-one interviews, and group discussions.

Participation in this study will require you to spend some time reflecting and writing on your past experiences. In addition, you will be asked to engage in one-on-one interviews with the investigator. These interviews will be approximately 1 hour each and will be scheduled at your convenience over the span of the academic year. In addition, you will be asked to participate in at least 3 group discussions over the same course of time. Each discussion will likely last about 2 hours.

This time commitment is sizable. However, you are very likely to enjoy this reflective and interactive experience. In addition, the information gained from this study may help us to better understand the literacy and language experiences of immigrant populations. Such information can benefit your own families and culture and may even result in future changes in education and socialization procedures for other immigrant population.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator or Simpson University. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying the researcher. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence and will have no bearing on your academic standing or services you receive from the University. Your response will be considered only in combination with those from other participants. The information obtained in the study may be published in professional journals or presented at professional conferences or meetings, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below and return the signed copy to the project director. Take the extra unsigned copy with you. If you choose not to participate, return the unsigned copies to the researcher.

Researcher: Kim Huster, Ph.D. candidate, Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Simpson University, 200 Owens Center  
2211 College View  
Redding, CA 96003  
530-515-0913  
[khuster@simpsonu.edu](mailto:khuster@simpsonu.edu)

Project Director: Dr. Dan Tannacito, Dissertation Advisor  
212 Eicher Hall  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Indiana, PA 15701  
724-357-6944

*This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730). It has also been approved by the Ethics Committee at Simpson University, which is chaired by Dr. Danielle Beck.*

#### **VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:**

**I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.**

**Name (PLEASE PRINT)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone number or location where you can be reached** \_\_\_\_\_

**Best days and times to reach you** \_\_\_\_\_

**I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.**

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_ **Investigator's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
Orientation Handout

**Working Title: Language and Literacy Journeys of Generation 1.5 Hmong Women**

**Orientation Handout**

**What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of conducting this study is to discover and present an “insider’s” perspective (**yours**) of the literacy and language development processes of a narrowly-defined portion of a long-term immigrant population--Hmong Generation 1.5 female college students at a small Christian liberal arts college in northern California. This purpose will be accomplished by allowing the women themselves (**you**), through reflective writing, one-on-one interviews, and group discussions, to reconstruct and interpret their own literacy and language development experiences. This qualitative, narrative study is designed to give voice to the women who participate (**you**) by capturing, presenting, and comparing the educational, social, familial, cultural, political, and personal experiences of this group with respect to its literacy and language development.

**What is Generation 1.5?**

Rumbaut and Ima (1988) coined the term, but they initially used it to refer to young people who were born outside of the United States. Since then, the term has been expanded to include those who are born in the U.S., but are still immersed in their home cultures. Here is how they described this population initially:

*These respondents are members of what we will call the “1.5” generation: that is, they are neither part of the “first” generation of their parents, the responsible adults who were formed in the homeland, who made the fateful decision to leave it and to flee as refugees to an uncertain exile in the United States ... nor are the youths part of the “second” generation of children who are born in the U.S., and for whom the “homeland” exists as a representation consisting of parental memories and memorabilia, even though their ethnicity may remain well-defined. Rather, the refugee youths in our study constitute a distinctive cohort: they are those young people who were born in their countries of origin but formed in the U.S. ... ; they were not the main protagonists of the decision to leave and hence are less beholden to their parents’ attitudes ... ; and they are in many ways marginal to both the new and old worlds, for while they straddle both worlds they are in some sense fully part of neither of them. ... Though they differ greatly from each other in cultural and social class origins, ... they generally share a common psychohistorical location in terms of their age and migration status/role, and in terms of developing bicultural strategies of response and adjustment to that unique position which they occupy as “1.5’ers” in the interstices, as it were, of two societies and cultures, between the first and second generation, between being “refugees” and being “ethnics” (or “hyphenated Americans”).*

As mentioned above, this initial definition has been expanded and the definition used for the purposes of this study is that of Mark Roberge (2002), who argues that, because these American-born children of immigrants share many traits with young people who physically emigrate from other countries, the definition of the term should also include the U.S.-born children of immigrants who are raised in enclave communities where English is not the primary language of the home and community. Inherent in the term Generation 1.5 is reference to the group's "in-between status" (Goen, Porter, Swanson, & Vandommelen, 2002b). Oudenhoven (2006) described the Generation 1.5 Latino students that she studied as being "caught in the middle." The members of the Generation 1.5 can be viewed as straddling multiple chasms, between nations, between languages, between cultures, between educational labels, and between appropriate teaching methodologies.

In the U.S., this population has come to be more noticeable as more and more of its members are attending colleges and universities than in the past. Despite graduating from U.S. high schools and having received all or most of their education in English, Generation 1.5 students are likely to enter college while they are still in the process of acquiring the English language (Harklau, Siegal, and Losey, 1999). Generation 1.5 students often have difficulty describing and categorizing their own language identities. The following description by Rodby (1999), from the California State University in Chico, attempts to present the perspective of many Generation 1.5 students in the university:

*In their own words, they are "still learning English," "struggling with writing and reading," and "having deficiencies in language". They call themselves Hmong, Mien, Cambodian, Lao, Vietnamese, Chicano, Latino, Hispanic although their professors may describe them simply as "ESL students." Many of these students were born in the United States or arrived here when they were small children. ... Mostly they speak a language other than English at home with their parents and extended family, and many continue to speak their first language with their roommates on or off campus. Some appear nearly native in their English proficiency. In elementary or high school, they were tracked into English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and for the most part they do not want to take ESL at the university. (p. 45)*

Another Generation 1.5 student described his association with his two languages in the following way:

*I don't really know if I'm bilingual because I don't really bond with—I don't really connect with the English culture. American culture. I'm kind of in between, I guess. I don't really speak [Chinese] that well, therefore, I'm non-native Chinese. ... But I think more English because I don't use Chinese on a regular basis. ... I don't feel emotionally attached to it, but sometimes I feel guilty when I don't. ... But I feel I should be Chinese. I, like I said, when I, I think in English, it's so easy. When I think in Chinese, I have to think for a while. It's hard. ... I*

*feel like ... a bamboo. Like um, yellow on the outside and white on the inside.*  
(Chiang & Schmida, 1999, p. 86)

Many Generation 1.5 immigrant students develop native competence in everyday usage of the language, they seem to struggle with attaining the level of competence required for success in postsecondary academic endeavors (Bosher, 1997; Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999; Nye, 2006; Roberge, 2001 & 2002; Rose, 1999; and Tarone, Downing, Cohen, Gillette, Murie, & Dailey, 1993).

The following factors have been identified as having an impact on second language literacy: the learner's language background and literacy history, family and cultural influences, educational practices and preparation for college, social issues and socioeconomic status, and conflicting desires and identity formation. It is important to note that these factors do not operate in isolation and, in fact, intricately interface with each other; for instance, socioeconomic status is closely related to family and culture and can influence what types of school a child is able to attend. Likewise, family and cultural influences have a significant impact on educational practices and identity formation. We will explore these factors together and try to determine which factors you feel are the most significant.

Here are some examples of the types of language problems that have been noted in the Generation 1.5 population:

- errors in subject-verb agreement
- inappropriate verb-tenses and endings
- incorrect word forms
- improper treatment of mass nouns
- simplicity in sentence structure
- problems with logical connectors (like *therefore*, *however*, *consequently*)
- difficulty with the use of metacognitive verbs which are frequently used in academic-style writing to paraphrase and summarize and to introduce quotes
- faulty predication which has to do with the grammatical and semantic compatibility of the subject and verb in a sentence
- errors in multiword lexical units, like collocations and idioms or sentence frames, like "according to..." or "based on..." used at the beginning of sentences.

Proposed reasons for the development of these errors:

- Generation 1.5 students tend to be aural (ear) language learners and therefore do not attend to non-salient grammatical features, like morphological endings (past tense, -s endings), and therefore these features never become part of their understanding of the language
- These learners are also not familiar with metalinguistic and grammar terminology.
- The type of instruction that Generation 1.5 students need (form-based instruction) is the very type of instruction that is counter to the way they have learned their second language and is, therefore, not a comfortable or familiar way for them to learn.

- Generation 1.5 students have familiarity with higher level vocabulary words through reading or hearing them for school work, but they do not have a full understanding of the connotation of these words or of the grammatical patterns with which the words are used. They are seldom forced to use these words until they begin writing college level essays. When they begin to use these words, their incomplete understanding becomes evident.

I am hoping to be able to explore some of the following questions, plus whatever you all feel is significant:

- What do Hmong female college students view as the primary facilitating and/or inhibiting factors to their literacy and language development?
- How have their primary and secondary educational experiences contributed to or hindered their literacy and language development?
- What value does Hmong culture place on literacy and English language acquisition?
- What value is placed on preserving Hmong language and forms of literacy? How is this value communicated or implemented?
- How is literacy acquisition promoted in Hmong homes and families?
- How does the minority status of the Hmong in the U.S. affect their literacy development?

My intention throughout this study is to maintain an atmosphere in which you, the participants, are truly co-researchers. Norton (2000) discusses the researcher's relationship with the researched by elaborating on three prepositions: *on*, *for*, and *with*. She advocates that the researcher must always remember that she is doing research *on* real people and that these people should not be harmed by the research. She is investigating *for* her subjects in the sense that research should be aimed at benefitting those who are being studied. Finally, the researcher should seek to empower the participants by, as much as possible, doing the research *with* them. Participants should have significant input on the topics that receive the focus in the study. This model is my goal as we work through this semester. I want to encourage you to be active participants. If you think we should talk about issues that I'm not aware of, you should bring them up. If you feel like I'm directing you toward discussing issues that are not very significant, you say so. I have not lived in your shoes. I need you to direct me toward what is important.

### **Why use the journaling of memories as a research method?**

As I was doing my research, I was captivated by Haug's (1987) description of how the act of writing can turn the subject of the research into a researcher herself:

*Writing is a transgression of boundaries, an exploration of new territory. It involves making public the events of our lives, wriggling free of the constraints of purely private and individual experiences. From a state of modest insignificance we enter a space in which we can take ourselves seriously. As an alternative to accepting everyday events mindlessly, we recalled them in writing, in an attempt*

*to identify points in the past where we succeeded in defending ourselves against the encroachment of others. (p. 36)*

First and foremost, journaling gives you a chance to reflect on your personal experiences. Obviously the best way to get the information that I'm looking for would be to follow students from infancy through the completion of their college education. This would require the rest of my life. As an alternative, I'm asking you to try to remember and write about significant events from your past. There is much evidence to support the use of journaling as a research method.

Since "[e]xperience happens narratively" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19), it can logically follow that researchers should study it narratively. One of the outcomes of this research project will be that the participants will produce a collection of "lived stories." When investigating a process as multifaceted as SLA, the researcher should consider the participants' own words to be a more valuable source of information than the researcher's perceptions and observations. In his doctoral dissertation, Jamey Nye (2006) adopts the term "hidden transcripts" (p. 2) to describe the unique literacy stories of second language students as well as the students' perceptions of how and why these stories unfolded as they did. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) argue that, despite the concerns of empirical researchers, first-person narratives provide a much more meaningful source of data than third-person observations. They also assert that refusing to recognize the importance of first-person accounts of bilinguals regarding their language learning experiences, in effect, subverts the experiences of an already marginalized population. Furthermore, of relevance to this study, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) provide support for legitimizing "'retroactive' first-person narratives" (p. 158) as a valuable source of research data.

Brodkey (1987) shares the following advice regarding the use of stories as a research method:

*One studies stories not because they are true or even because they are false, but for the same reason that people listen and tell them, in order to learn about the terms on which others make sense of their lives: what they take in account and what they do not; what they consider worth contemplating and what they do not; what they are and are not willing to raise and discuss as problematic and unresolved in life. (p. 47)*

Liamputtong & Ezzy (2005) discuss the value of using memories as sources of data and they give the following advice which bodes well for our study:

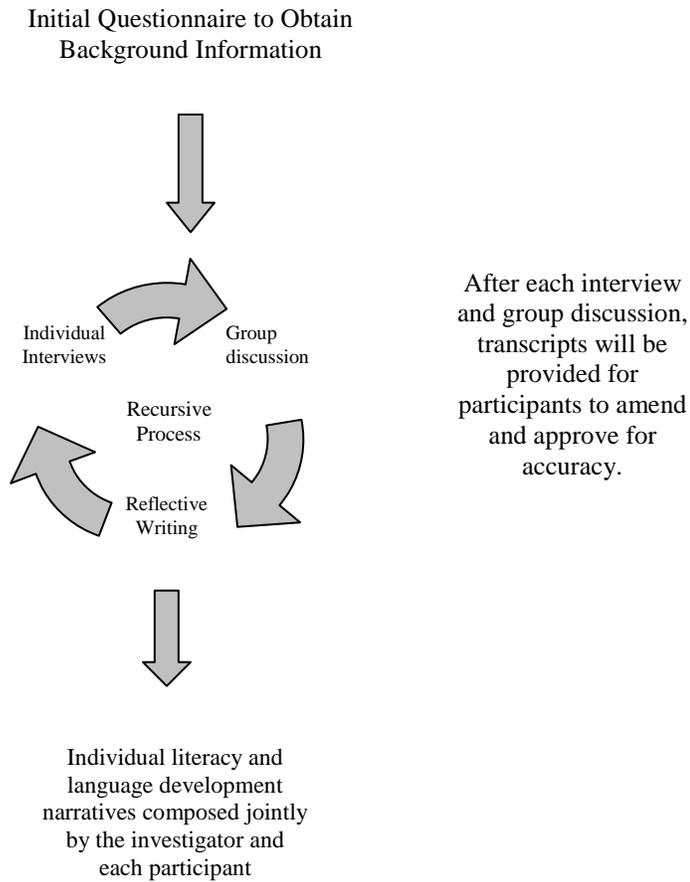
*Memory-work works well when the group is a real group: The members have shared values and interests, they enjoy each other's company and they are willing to work together for a long period of time. Most important of all is the trust between them. Without this trust, the memory-work may not succeed. (p. 156)*

Writing not only has value for gathering information as a research tool; those who participate in writing as research derive personal benefits as well. John Duffy, who has done extensive research on the ways that the Hmong people in the U.S. have begun to use writing to stake their claims in the public sphere of their schools and communities, believes that the Hmong are poised to contribute significantly to educational research through writing.

### **What are your responsibilities in the study?**

- **Reflective Writing:** Participants will individually spend some time reflecting and writing on their literacy and language development experiences, focusing on the agreed-upon topics. I would like to see you spend 1-2 hours per week writing. I would love to have the journals be computer-generated, but if you are more comfortable writing, please write. One of the reasons to use the computer is that you would be able to go back and easily add information that you remember later or during group discussions. I would like to see the journal be a “live” document.
- **Individual Interviews:** I will meet with students individually for personal interviews based on what they have written. I would like to meet with each student 2-3 times during the semester. The interaction will be responsive in the sense that the topics of discussion will not predetermined, but will be dynamic and iterative, based on each participant’s own personal observations and memories.
- **Group Discussions:** There will be three group discussion meetings during the semester. During these discussions, you will share things that you have written in your journals and have an opportunity to discuss the differences and similarities in your experiences. You can then amend or add to your stories as the discussions trigger further memories. During the sessions, each participant will read her written memories, and the other members of the group will be invited to question, challenge, or reinforce what they hear. Copies will be taken of each written memory, and participants will be encouraged to re-write their memories based on the discussion and the memories of the other participants.
- **Optional: Read Group Discussion and Interview Notes and Give Feedback:** Between sessions, I will transcribe the recordings of the group sessions and the interviews and make notes on significant outcomes. The transcribed conversation will be e-mailed to you, so you can have an opportunity to correct any errors in the transcript or clarify the intent of your comments.

## Diagram of Proposed Research Process



### Planning issues:

- Meeting place: I would love to be able to meet at my house in a more informal atmosphere, but I don't know how easy that will be as far as transportation and time commitment. Obviously, it takes more time to travel off campus.
- Meeting times: What times are best for group meetings? I don't know at this point if we will be able to meet all together or if we should meet separately.

Here are some sets of questions which represent possible suggestions for use as writing prompts and/or discussion topics:

1. As a language minority student, do you feel that you have been welcomed as a full participant in the educational and social experiences in your schools and communities? Describe some times when you felt fully accepted and/or when you felt marginalized in your educational experiences.
2. Reflect on your educational experiences. Focus especially on any ESL (English as a Second Language) or other special instruction that you received pertaining to the English language. How long did you receive these services? Were you moved into and out of these specialized services? Think about particular specialized instructional situations with which you were involved. Describe one or two positive or negative episodes from your experiences in these services.
3. Is there conflict between your cultural beliefs and familial obligations and your education? If so, does language contribute to these conflicts? What value do you place on your two languages, and how do you use these languages to construct your identities within the various communities of which you are a part?
4. In your role as a Hmong woman, how has your family viewed your education? Are these views changing? Why or why not? How are they changing? How has your role as a woman affected your educational opportunities? Describe a situation in which you experienced conflict related to the pursuit of education.

**Can you think of other issues related to language and literacy development that would be interesting to explore?**

**What do you think is a good place to start for our first set of writing, so that we will all have been thinking and writing about generally the same topic when we meet for our first group discussion?**

APPENDIX C  
Background Questionnaire

**Background Questionnaire**

**Name:**

**Birthdate:**

**Birthplace:**

**Preferred e-mail:**

**Phone number:**

**When would you prefer to have group discussion meetings? Weekends? Evenings?  
(Consider your class and work schedules.)**

**Current Stage of Education (i.e. year in college or graduation date):**

**Describe your family (include number of siblings, ages of siblings, and where you  
fall in the birth order):**

**Describe where you have lived throughout your life (include cities, states, country,  
urban or rural area and the ages that you moved):**

**I want to get your own perceptions of your English language ability. On a scale of  
1-10, how would you self-rate your English language skills for college work? (10 is  
excellent; 1 is poor) Try to give examples for why you rated yourself the way you  
did.**

**I also want you to self-rate your Hmong language ability on a scale of 1-10 (10 is  
excellent; 1 is poor). Describe the ways that you use Hmong in your everyday life.**

APPENDIX D  
Round 1 Journal Questions

**Journaling and Discussion Round One**

**Here are the topics for you to journal about for the next 2 weeks. Please try to spend at 1-2 hours per week thinking and journaling. Please don't do it at the last minute before the meeting. Try to spread it out, so you have times for your ideas to roll around in your head and bring back memories from the past. I suggest you print this out, so you can keep it out to look at as a reminder. I'd be happy to print it out for you if you come by my office.**

- Think back to your home environment as you were growing up. What kinds of activities related to reading and writing were present in your home? For example, how did your parents use reading and writing in the home (Hmong or English)? Did your parents or older brothers and sisters read to you? Did they encourage you to read? Aside from reading and writing, how did your parents “teach” you the things that they felt were important for you to learn?
- Think about how you use your 2 languages—Hmong and English. When and with whom do you use Hmong? Are there topics or situations in which you definitely prefer one language over the other? Really think about this question and go beyond simple statements like “I use Hmong at home and English at school.” Most likely, you use both languages in many different situations; in addition, there are likely many times when you mix the languages. Think deeply about this and try to describe it as best you can.
- Think about your frustrations and victories with the use of each language. Write about times when you were proud of your use of each language. Write about times when you were disappointed with your use of each language.
- Describe the value that you place on your 2 languages. How important is each language to you? Why? Describe how you use the 2 languages to construct your identities within the various communities (home, school, church, work) of which you are a part?

APPENDIX E  
Round 2 Journal Questions

**Round Two Questions for Journaling**

1. Describe your educational experience prior to college. Include the following information:
  - Did you receive any ESL services? If so, describe when (at what age) you received those services and what they consisted of.
  - Other than ESL, describe any other extra services that you received, like after school tutoring, for example.
  - Describe any advanced or “gifted programs” that you were part of
  
2. Describe your memories of your parents’ involvement in your educational process and in school activities. Did you feel disadvantaged by their limited ability to be as fully involved as mainstream American parents?
  
3. Were there things about the educational system that you really didn’t understand because your parents and older siblings weren’t able to help you negotiate through the system? Some of you have shared already that you “didn’t know” you were in an ESL class. Also, Rebekah told me that she didn’t know she could choose what classes to take in high school. Describe any situations like this that were part of your educational experience.
  
4. America prides itself on providing “equal opportunities” for all students in America’s public schools. Does this equality really exist? Describe any situations that you can remember in which you were marginalized? (Being marginalized refers to being separated from the rest of the society, forced to occupy the fringes and edges and not to be at the center of things.)
  
5. Describe your path to college. How did you decide to go to college? What struggles and/or victories did you encounter along the way?
  
6. Write about your experiences in college classes. Once again, describe times when you feel marginalized or not really a full or equal participant. Be as specific and detailed as possible in these descriptions.

APPENDIX F  
Round 3 Journal Questions

**Round 3 Questions**

The questions for the last group discussion are going to primarily focus on your role as a woman in the Hmong community and how that role has influenced your education and motivation to pursue higher education.

1. In your role as a Hmong woman, how has your family viewed your education? Are these views changing? Why or why not? How are they changing? How has your role as a woman affected your educational opportunities? Describe a situation in which you experienced conflict related to the pursuit of education.
2. How are educated women viewed in the Hmong community, in general? How do the majority of Hmong men view educated wives? Will your education have any effect on your status in the Hmong community? Why or why not? How will it affect your status? How are you viewed in your communities when compared with women your age who have opted to get married and begin having families?
3. Who are the leaders in your communities and churches? How is leadership decided? Is it based on age? Education? Gender? Something else?
4. Here are 3 statements that I came across while doing research on this topic. Please read each statement and reflect on whether you agree or disagree with each statement and **state why you agree or disagree.**
  - a. As Hmong women progress through their secondary education, they realize that even if they complete their educations, they will still have to contend with gender, racial, and cultural inequities in order to meet their professional and economic goals. In the face of the marginalization they experience in their educational settings and within the dominant culture, many opt for the simpler solutions they believe may be found in the traditional female roles. Please give your own thoughts on this statement.
  - b. Many first generation Hmong immigrants view higher education with ambivalence and are faced with a difficult choice. If they resist American education and acculturation, they run the risk of remaining a small, poor minority group within the U.S. Conversely, if they begin to place a high value on literacy and formal education, they may contribute to the breakdown of their traditional cultural identity and practices. This concern for preserving culture becomes heightened when Hmong women are concerned. Please comment on this statement. **Use examples from your own experience to support or refute this statement.**
  - c. Many Hmong women do not view their college endeavor as one with an individual goal and purpose; instead, they view their success or failure as having an impact on their own children, their culture, and their people. How do you feel about this statement? Is this true of you?

- 5.** A few times, we have talked about the fact that Hmong men and women seem to view the value of education differently. The comments that some of you have made seem to indicate that, in general, women view their education much more seriously than men. Of course, this is not true of every man and every woman.
- a.** First of all, do you find this to be true in your experiences in your extended families and friends from high school? If so, share some specific examples. If not, share some specific examples in the opposite direction. (For example, did Hmong girls or boys get higher grades in your education experience prior to college?)
  - b.** Secondly, if you find this to be true, why do you think this is the case? (I understand that this is just speculation, but you are more qualified to speculate than those outside of your culture.)

APPENDIX G  
Final Questionnaire

Did you attend preschool?

Did you speak English at all when you went to school?

What was your high school GPA?

What were your SAT Scores?

What is your current college GPA?

What were your grades in your college writing courses?

Describe your parents' education and language abilities: read/write Hmong, read/write English. What kinds of tasks do they need your help with?

Describe your siblings' experiences in higher education.

Describe the socioeconomic status of your family.

If you have older siblings, how big are their families? How many children do they have?

Would you classify yourself as Americanized or traditional? Why? Give specific examples.

Were your parents more disposed to allow you to go away to come to this college because of its Christian-based status?

Can you describe your writing process for me?

Were Hmong classes offered at your school? Did you take them?

## Appendix H Sample Story with Raw Data

The purpose of this appendix is to address the concerns that some readers may have regarding the changes that I made to the information provided by the participants in my re-construction of their stories. Once again, I was very committed to keeping the words used by the women. My intent in any changes that I made was to make the narrative flow better and to eliminate possible distracting speech, such as the repetitive filler words *like* and *you know*. Also because the participants expanded on and added to their stories in different data collection venues, I wanted to add in additional narrative details provided when they explained more details of their stories.

In order to do this, I am providing one of the stories used in Chapter 4 and providing the raw data which was used to construct that story.

This is a story told by Meh, which appears on page 180. Following the story is the portions of the transcripts from which I constructed this story.

[I stopped talking] towards the end of my junior all the way through my senior year. I mean for me in school I'm always the one that like talks a lot and I'm a person that likes to talk to teachers, but ever since I stopped talking, I just didn't talk anymore. I didn't find a reason to talk anymore. My normal friends were not there anymore. They all graduated. I would lose those friends that I was close to, so in high school when I got to my junior year, I became very unsocial because my senior or my junior friends were not there anymore, and I started working. So I became very unsocial and that's when I just start speaking to myself inside my head. I didn't talk at home anymore. I didn't talk at all. Except for when I worked, but then at work, I worked at Taco Bell. Like, "Salad, no salad? Beef? Cheese? What you like?" And like cause they're all Spanish speakers they don't really understand me and like I'm always the one who like has to answer the phone calls, but it's not like I really talked to customers a lot. I'm just like, "Oh, what do you want? A chalupa? A soft taco?" That's all I ever said, and you know there is no syntax in that. I don't even see grammar anymore and like in high school because I didn't talk a lot, my writing is the only thing that kept me going, even though it sucked. All I know is that I'm not the same. But like now that I'm starting to communicate more, like I realize I'm losing my past and present tense verbs. I mean, my roommates know because I'm always using the wrong words because now that I'm starting to talk again, it's just different. I don't know how to explain it, but if you were me and you didn't speak for like 3 whole years. I mean you did speak but you barely spoke for two years. And then like I forget how to say some words and cause now that I'm starting to speak again like I'm starting to talk more again, I don't feel like I'm able to talk anymore. Lately I've been catching myself saying the wrong word or misusing the wrong word. (group discussion, February 22, 2010; individual interview, March 22, 2010)

*During Meh's individual interview on March 22, 2010, I was following up on information she had provided during the group discussion on February 22, 2010, which is reproduced below. I used the following information to start her story and set the scene:*

Kim: You talked about how in high school, you stopped talking, for a couple years, was it?

Meh: It was just, yeah, towards the end of my junior all the way through my senior year.

Kim: Why do you think you did that? Like was it just a adolescent thing where you were withdrawn, or...

Meh: I didn't find a reason to talk anymore. My normal friends were not there anymore. They all graduated. (p. 10)

*A little later during the same discussion, she said this, which I added on to the end of the story above:*

Meh: Lately I've been catching myself saying the wrong word or misusing the wrong word.

*The rest of the information was taken from Meh's participation in a group discussion on February 22, 2010, in which she was primary storyteller, and others were interrupting and asking questions as she spoke. Here are the excerpts of her speech that I used to construct the story above :*

Meh: I would lose those friends that I was close to, so in high school when I got to my junior year, I became very unsocial because my senior or my junior friends were not there anymore, and I started working. So I became very unsocial and that's when I just start speaking to myself inside my head. (p. 27)

Meh: but I didn't talk at home anymore (p. 28)

Meh: I didn't talk at all. So like (p. 28)

Meh: Except for when I worked, but then at work... (p. 28)

Meh: Yes, very limited, like salad, no salad. Beef? Cheese? What you like? And like cause they're all Spanish speakers they don't really understand me and like I'm always the one who like has to answer the phone calls, but it's not like I really talked to customers a lot. I'm just like 'oh, what do you want?' A chalupa? A soft taco? (lots of laughter) Yeah. That's all I ever said and you know there is no syntax in that, there is no like, I don't even see grammar anymore and like in high school because I didn't talk a lot, my writing is the only thing that kept me going, even though it sucked. But I still don't know how I {unintelligible} 1:18:46 All I know is that I'm not the same (p. 28)

Meh: But like now that I'm starting to communicate more, like I realize I'm losing my past and present tense verbs. I mean they know—my roommates know—because I'm always using the wrong words because now that I'm starting to talk again, it's just

different. I don't know how to explain it but, if you were me and you didn't speak for like 3 whole years. I mean you did speak but you barely spoke for two years... (p. 27)

Meh: And then like I forget how to say some words and cause now that I'm starting to speak again like I'm starting to talk more again, I don't feel like I'm able to talk anymore. I don't why I just... (p. 28)

Appendix I  
Correspondence Regarding Copyrighted Material

The researcher sent the following e-mail to Multilingual Matters to obtain permission to reproduce a figure from Nancy Hornberger's *Continua of Biliteracy: An Ecological Framework for Educational Policy*:

From: Kim Huster Tuesday - August 16, 2011 8:45 PM  
To: info@channelviewpublications.com  
Subject: Copyright permission  
To Whom It May Concern,

I am completing my dissertation at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. In my dissertation, I made extensive reference to Nancy Hornberger's *Continua of Biliteracy*. I would like to reproduce a diagram from her edited book which was published by you (*Continua of Biliteracy: An Ecological Framework for Educational Policy, Research, and Practice in Multilingual Settings*). The diagram that I would like to use is Figure 2.3 on page 39. What is the procedure for getting permission to use this diagram. Also, assuming I may have permission to use the diagram, I was wondering if you might have a digital copy of the diagram that I could obtain. It would reproduce much better than a scanned copy.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Kim Huster  
ESL Director at Nyack College, New York  
Ph.D. candidate at Indiana University of Pennsylvania

The response from Multilingual Matters, granting permission to use the figure, is on the following page.

**From:** Anna Roderick <Anna@Multilingual-Matters.com> **Thursday - August 18, 2011 4:58 AM**

**To:** "'Kim.Huster@nyack.edu'" <Kim.Huster@nyack.edu>

**Subject:** RE: Copyright permission

**Attachments:** Pages from Hornberger on 25 Mar.pdf (54689 bytes)

Dear Kim,

Thanks for getting in touch. I'm happy for you to use the figure as outlined below. You'll need to apply for permission again if you decide to publish your dissertation. I'm attaching the extracted page from the book - hope this helps!

All best wishes,

Anna

Anna Roderick  
Editorial Director  
Multilingual Matters/Channel View Publications  
St. Nicholas House  
31-34 High St.  
Bristol  
BS1 2AW  
Tel: +44 (0)1173158565