M.Ed. In TESL Program
Language Group Specific Informational Reports

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Language Group: Laotian
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LAOTIAN:
AN IN DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE
LANGUAGE AND THE PROBLEMS NATIVE
SPEAKERS WILL FACE

TESL 539: Language Group Specific
Informational Report
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General Facts About Laos

Capitol: Vientiane

Population: Over 6,000,000

Size: 236,800 Sq. Km.

Religion: Buddhist 60%, Animist 40%

Languages: Lao, Hmong, Khmu, Lahu, Mien, Yao, Tibeto-Burman, Austronesia, French, Thai, and English

Ethnicities: Lao Loum, Lao Theung, Lao Soung, Ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese
The Language

The Basics

• Lao is spoken by 15 million people in countries such as Laos, Thailand, USA, France, China, Canada, and Australia.

• It is a tonal and monosyllabic language.

• The language has 33 consonants, 28 vowel sounds, and six tones.
The Language: Consonants

- Consonants are split into three groups. Each group determines the tone of the syllable. The numbers indicate the tone given to that consonant.
  - One indicates a low tone. Two indicates a low rising tone and three indicates a high tone.
- There are 28 vowel sounds which are divided into long and short durations.
- Vowels are indicated with diacritics which occur before, after, below, and around consonants.
- Lao has six different tones which are given different diacritical signs.
- Tones are determined by a combination of group of consonant, type of syllable, tone marker, and the length of the vowel.
- Tones give words and syllables a different meaning.
Examples of Lao at a music award show.
Analytic Language

Problem that will Arise for Laotian Native Speakers

English contains words that are composed of multiple morphemes. So Laotian speakers will have difficulty understanding English’s compositional structure. In particular, Laotian speakers will have trouble with inflectional suffixes. Many SLL will omit the past tense, plural, and the past participle.

Examples:
I clean house yesterday. (I cleaned the house yesterday.)
I have four cat. (I have four cats)
Aspects of Writing

- Laotian does not have spaces between words. If there is a space then that indicates the end of a sentence or clause.
  - Students may have trouble using spaces between words. This may affect their literacy skills in the beginning.

- Punctuation marks are rarely used expect for periods at the end of a sentence.
  - Students may have difficulty comprehending and recognizing the various end marks in English.

- Lao does not use upper or lower case letters.
  - Students may have difficulty knowing when to capitalize letters and understanding why they have to be capitalized.
In Lao, the adjective comes after the noun. So a common problem students will have is reversing the word order while speaking English.

- Ex: I saw the dog brown.
- Ex: I ate the apple red.

Students may have trouble with English phonemes because several phonemes do not exist in the Laotian language.

- Such as V, G, Q, Th, Z etc.
- Another common mistake will be how students pronounce certain consonants and vowels. Certain vowels and consonants are pronounced differently in Lao.
  - Ex: A sounds like a long U.
  - Ex: J sounds like dg.
- Another common error students will make is to pronounce L instead of R. In some instances, R and L will be omitted entirely.
Common Mistakes

Mishandling of Pronouns
- She toy is under the table.
- Him ball is in the street.

Exclusion of the Indefinite and Definite Articles
- I saw monkey.
- Cat crossed street.

Omission of the Possessive
- That is David book.
- This is my mother earrings.

Exclusion of Conjunctions
- She I went to the zoo.
- Seng Dom I went to the store bought cookies.
Communication Rules

- They try to avoid conflicts during conversations. They may say that they agree with you even if they don’t in order to avoid conflict.
- Yes and No may have two different meanings.
- Students may reveal very little about goals or dreams.
- Few expressive features other than *nop*.
- Comfortable with long pauses during a conversation.
Yes

Could mean that they heard you and understood what you said but may not have agreed with it.

Could also mean no because it is considered rude to directly say no.

No

Often means yes.
Communication Rules Cont.

- Pointing is considered rude. Use a palms up gesture to show direction.

- Saving face is very important and they will keep outward composure even if angry or upset.

- Eye Contact is considered rude.

- Public body contact is avoided especially between males and females.

- Do not touch someone’s head and do not point your feet at someone.
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