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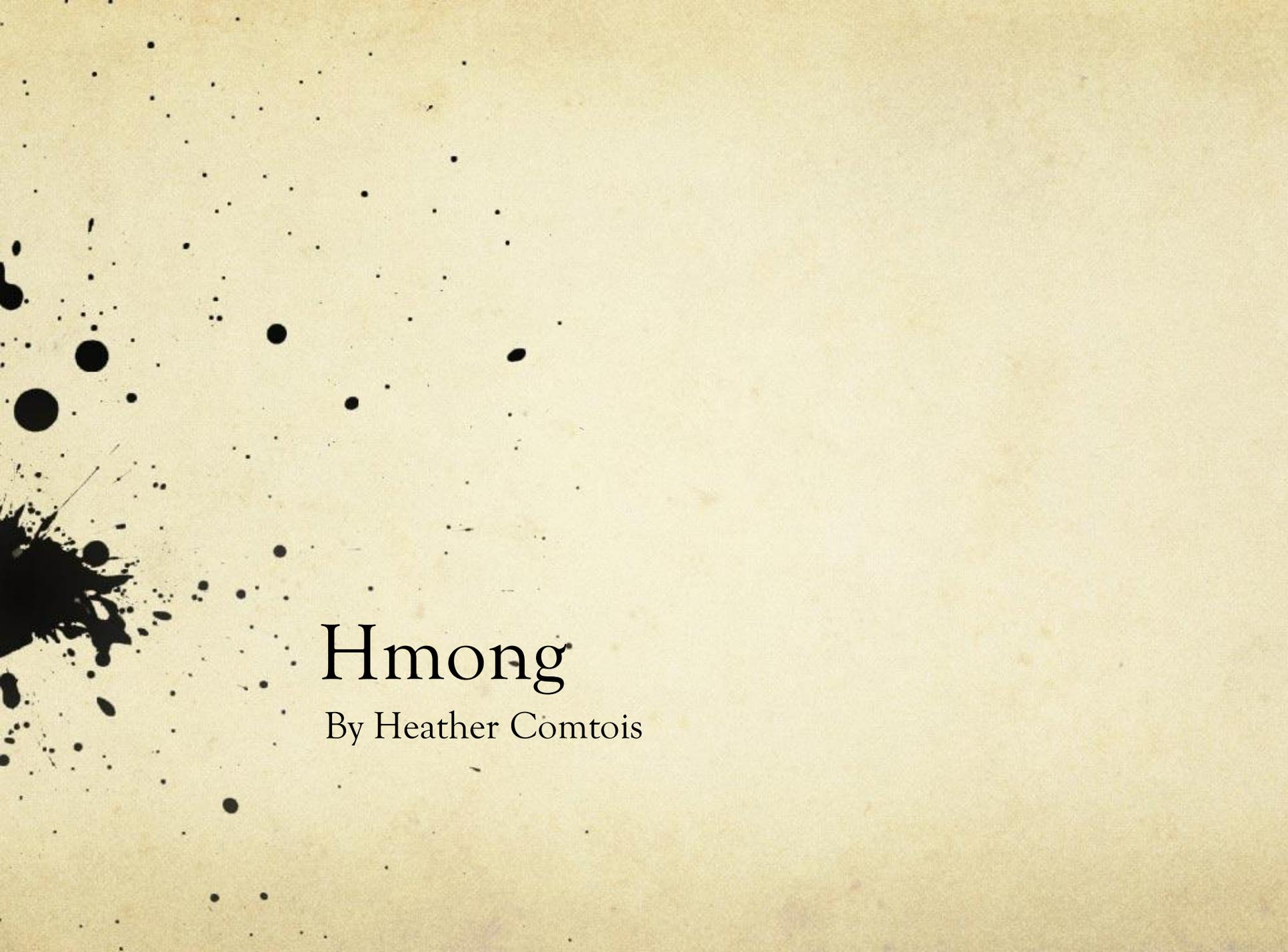
M.Ed. In TESL Program Language Group Specific Informational Reports

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

Language Group: Hmong

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Hmong

By Heather Comtois

Regions where Hmong is found



- Asian ethnic groups from mountain regions of China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand speak Hmong.
- The areas in red on the map show where the language of Hmong is most common.

Hmongmap.jpeg

Facts

- There was a gradual southward migration in the 18th century due to political unrest to find more arable land.
- For many centuries the language of Hmong was firmly an oral communication.
- 4 million people today still speak the language.
- It is considered a minority language of Southeast Asia.
- Many first migrated to the United States in 1975-1985. Roughly 12,000 people settled in Minnesota and Wisconsin.
- The second wave primarily settled in California.

Hmong Dialect

- Hmong is broken down into 2 sub dialects: Green Miao and White Miao.
- The White Miao has been favored while both are mutually intelligible.
- The White Miao is considered more proper to speak and the Hmong written language is based on this dialect.
- Each word is a single syllable featured by an initial consonant or cluster and tone. It is based on lexical use of tone.
- Pitch can change the meaning of words. If you say a word at a high pitch it will have a different meaning when said at a low pitch.
- Tone is as important as consonants and vowels.
- The preference is for monosyllabic words.
- The Hmong written language uses Roman Popular Alphabet.
- The consonants are largely influenced by the Vietnamese writing system.

Written Language



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Common Errors in Phonology

- Common final consonant sounds are less frequent in Hmong resulting in failure to produce the consonant or adding an extra vowel. Hill may be pronounced without the double l or have a drawn out [i].
- The stress and intonation of words are two different concepts.
- Hmong language uses pitch to decide meaning where pitch in English is used to emphasize expression, not to give meaning.
- English has more vowel sounds resulting in pronunciation errors such as :

ship/sheep it/ eat full/fool

Common Errors in Phonology

Cont.

- Diphthongs such as weigh, now, or deer are often shortened to a single sound.
- Among speakers may find it difficult to hear the difference between the /l/ and /r/ sounds. They may mispronounce words like:

rake – lake rice – lice

Another major problem they might face is the common final consonant clusters in English such as :

married warmth bulb

Common Errors in Grammar

- Hmong speakers have difficulty with singular and plural when learning English since in Hmong there is no /s/ after nouns.

For example : I have five pig They do not say pigs because the number five represents more than one.

The Hmong language also uses date, time, and month to indicate when events happen. The verb does not change to indicate the tense.

“Yesterday I go to market.”

Errors in Grammar Cont.

- In Hmong they say “I wash my shirt yesterday” instead of in English we say “I washed my shirt yesterday.”
- In Hmong the verbs and words always stay the same no matter what the pronoun is.
- Hmong speakers have difficulty with our verb system.
- In Hmong classifiers usually appear before the noun that is preceded by a numeral.

Example: one bar of soap or a piece of cake

Grammar Cont.

- Hmong speakers may have difficulty combining particles. For example they may say “When you are going home?”
- In Hmong questions are conveyed by intonation.
- In Hmong SVO patterns are followed as in English
“I saw him/her”

Learning English

- The Hmong speaker may struggle with the initial cluster of sounds such as “this” and “thistle”.
- The Hmong speaker may struggle with the [j] sound in the middle of words such as “suggest”.
- Hmong speakers also struggle with the following because they do not exist in Hmong:

possessive (boy's)

pronouns (she, her, hers)

verb tense (take, took, taken)

Cultural Etiquette

- Hmong consider it inappropriate and rude to make direct eye contact.
- Hmong tend to be humble and may not wish or want to express emotion in front of people.
- It is common to visit each other without making an appointment.
- When visiting it is considered impolite to decline foods or drinks when offered.

Resources

Books

Swan, M. & Smith B. (2001). *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference & other problems*. Second Edition. Cambridge: University Press.

Internet Sites

Lee, G.Y. (2004). *The Hmong: an introduction to their history and culture*. Retrieved April 16, 2012, from www.cal.org/co/hmong/hackno.html.

Resources

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