

- 1) Title: **Contact Pragmatics: Requests in Wisconsin Hmong.**
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## Contact Pragmatics: Requests in Wisconsin Hmong

Since 1975, the population of Hmong people in Wisconsin has grown to approximately 46,000. This has put the Hmong language into extended contact with a language with a different pragmatic system, American English. Close examination of responses to an oral discourse completion task shows that as young Hmong-Americans have grown up exposed to two cultural and pragmatic systems, influence from English has affected these speakers' verbal requests in Hmong.

For this project, thirty Hmong-Americans were interviewed: 10 Hmong elders, who immigrated as adults, were interviewed in Hmong; 10 Hmong-American young adults (age 18-25), who were born in the U. S. or immigrated as children, were interviewed in Hmong, and 10 more in English.

Results show both continuity and change within Wisconsin Hmong: younger speakers showed continuity with elders, in that their use of directness in requests mirrors that of older speakers. In addition, younger speakers have acquired pragmatic particles of Hmong, particles that monolingual English speakers would find difficult. However, a close look at the distribution of these particles in data from younger speakers shows a massively disproportionate use of sentence-initial particle *thov*, in contrast to the elders, who use this particle infrequently. This dramatic increase in use of *thov* can be attributed to its semantic and syntactic similarity with English *please*, features which none of the other Hmong pragmatic particles share. This enthusiastic use of *thov* may strike older hearers as excessively polite, and its frequent use as excessively forward.

Several Hmong elders opted out of requesting a favor from a parent or parent-in-law in interviews, stating that it was embarrassing or shameful. Only one young adult interviewed in Hmong opted out of making such requests. When asked explicitly, however, whether there were addressees to whom one should *not* make requests, young adults gave a variety of responses, indicating that knowledge of the prevailing paths of obligation had been acquired by this generation: men should not ask mothers-in-law for help; people should not ask elders for help if someone younger was available. One younger speaker, however, asserted that one could ask help from any addressee if one included the particle *thov*, 'please,' in the request. Her assertion does not reflect traditional Hmong pragmatics, in which *thov* is rarely used, but rather, reflects influence of Anglo-American pragmatics, in which *please*-usage is encouraged. Thus, English seems to have influenced Hmong metapragmatics as well as Hmong usage in bilingual speakers.