Language and variety mixing in diasporic Hmong

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Laotian Hmong (Hmong-Mien, Laos), as spoken in the Anglophone diaspora, exhibits a "layered language" (Aikhenvald 2006) phenomenon. Specifically, Hmong exhibits layers of historical influence in addition to its native Hmongic grammar and lexicon as a result of contact first with Sino-Tibetan languages, especially Chinese, followed by Lao and Thai, and most recently English. Furthermore, in the diaspora context, the traditional separation between Laotian White Hmong and Green Mong is showing signs of decline, with phenomena that suggest an early stage of merger of the two historical varieties in the migrant context (cf. Kerswill & Trudgill 2005). Altogether, the findings provide a special insight into how a new immigrant variety of a language with a long, varied history of contact begins to emerge in its early years, even while facing potential long-term shift into a national language.

KEYWORDS: Hmong, layered language, migrant language, code-mixing.

1. Introduction

Hmong is a Hmong-Mien language that takes the form of a dialect cluster ranging from southwestern China to northern Thailand in its historical context. Since 1975, the two varieties of Laotian Hmong, White Hmong (WH) and Green Mong (GM; also known as Mong Leng), have begun to be spoken in diaspora communities outside of Southeast Asia, especially in Australia and the United States. These two varieties exhibit influence not only from major languages with which they have historically have been in contact, such as Chinese and Lao or Thai, but also from English, as well as influence from each other.

1.1. Community and sociolinguistic context
Historically, the Hmong likely originated in what is now China, and were generally dominated by a Chinese-administered government for much of the 2,000 years before they immigrated to Laos and other Southeast Asian countries in the 19th century. This is evidenced by a number of phonological layers of borrowing from Sinitic, beginning with Old Chinese (Mortensen 2000, Ratliff 2010). Once in Laos, most Hmong remained in highland regions until the end of the Vietnam War and its ensuing aftermath in 1975.

Affected by the outcome of the war, a large number of political refugees and their relatives departed from Laos, ultimately forming the Hmong diasporic community in Australia, the United States, and elsewhere. More specifically, community members were generally those people who were associated with the Royal Lao government and their relatives before the fall of the government to the communist Vietnamese and their Laotian associates in 1975. The community members generally then either fled across the Mekong River into Thailand, where they were housed in refugee camps for approximately a decade, or attempted to reorganize themselves into a 'resistance' whose purpose was primarily to protect themselves from the Laotian communist government. Many members of this second group successfully escaped to Thailand later. Beginning in the late 1980s and into the early 1990s, several Western governments, including those of the United States and Australia, began to support Hmong refugees to relocate to their countries.

With the arrival in Western countries, the Hmong have had to make significant adaptations from a highland Southeast Asian agricultural lifestyle to a modern, urban situation where social categories and technology differ drastically from their prior experience in Laos. In English-speaking countries, this pressure has created a situation where English is often the language of recourse if a speaker feels that he/she cannot succeed in communicating 'modern' or technological concepts in Hmong, especially if the addressee also speaks English.

1.1.1. Generational profile

In the diaspora context in Australia in particular, older Hmong speakers may be found who speak Hmong and Lao/Thai but not English, middle-aged to older Hmong who speak Hmong, Lao/Thai, and English, and younger adult Hmong who speak Hmong and English. Among older speakers, functional ability in Hmong and Lao/Thai appears to be almost universal, while ability in English ranges from knowledge of a handful of words to professional fluency. Most of the youngest members of the Hmong community appear to be proficient only in English, with some knowledge of Hmong, while young people who have arrived from Laos relatively recently appear to retain full competence in Hmong. Thus, the sociolinguistic situation is one of language shift due to the inability of Hmong to compete with English in the modern Australian context. The situation appears to be roughly comparable in the United States.

Trudgill (1998, 2004, *inter alia*) proposes and utilizes a stage-based system for the formation of new varieties. Kerswill & Trudgill (2005) in

particular describe a three-stage pathway for the emergence of new varieties from the merging of older varieties in a migrant context, as shown in Table 1. In this system, the first generation of migrants exhibit some leveling as a result of their efforts at accommodating one another and avoiding marked variant forms (stage I). A period where the first native-born speakers show a high degree of variability, both within an individual's speech and between individuals, follows (stage II). The emergent variety in subsequent generations (stage III) develops stable, normalized forms ("focusing"), and surviving variants with their origins in different regional dialects are reinterpreted as variants of another kind, such as that of style or social class ("reallocation").

STAGE	SPEAKERS INVOLVED	LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS
I	adult migrants (first generation)	rudimentary leveling
II	first native-born speakers (second generation)	extreme variability and further leveling
III	subsequent generations	focusing, leveling, and reallocation

Table 1. Stages of new-dialect formation (reproduced from Kerswill & Trudgill 2005: 200).

Given the fact that dialect mixing is reported by community members to have begun during the refugee camp stage, older and middle-aged speakers may be considered stage I, while younger adult Hmong may be considered stage II, as they were born in the refugee camps or after arrival in Australia. The youngest community members – that is, the children born to those who were born in the refugee camps or later – may be considered stage III. These stages set the scene for the discussion found in section 4 below.

When considering the likelihood of language shift, however, given the mandatory nature of English-language education for young Hmong in the diaspora, a great amount of pressure is exerted on the Hmong language. As a result, even for some of those younger speakers who are bilingual in Hmong and English, there exist marked gaps in their knowledge of Hmong vocabulary, especially in regard to words related to the natural world. One example of an often-lost vocabulary item is WH *kaj ntug* 'dawn' (Tua Cha, personal communication).

1.2. Laotian Hmong varieties in diaspora
The two varieties of Laotian Hmong – White Hmong and Green Mong (Mong Leng) – have a number of phonological, morphological, and lexical differences that distinguish them. In terms of phonology, there are both vowel and consonant phoneme differences; the differences are shown in Table 2 below.[1]

WHITE HMONG	GREEN MONG
/iɐ̯/	/a/
/a/	/ã/
/ɒ/	/ɒ/, /ɵ/²
/m̥/, /m/	/m/
/n̥/, /n̪/, /mˡ/	/n̪/
/ʔd/	/ʈˡ/
/dʰ/	/ʈˡʰ/
/ⁿʈ/	/ⁿʈ/, /ⁿʈˡ/

Table 2. Contrastive phoneme correspondences between White Hmong and Green Mong.

The tone systems in the two varieties have undergone historical mergers in differing ways, while the actual tone values themselves are generally shared between the two varieties. The correspondences appear in Table 3 below (cf. Mortensen 2000: 14-16).

TONE CATEGORY	WHITE HMONG	GREEN MONG	PHONETIC REALIZATION
A1	*-b*	*-b*	55
A2	*-j*	*-j*	53
B1	*-v*	*-v*	24
B2	*-s*	*-g*	(WH merged with D1, GM merged with C2)
C1	*-Ø*	*-Ø*	33
C2	*-g*	*-g*	42 (male)/53 (female), breathy
D1	*-s*	*-s*	22
D2	*-m*	*-m*	31, creaky

Table 3. Tone systems of White Hmong and Green Mong.

Morphologically, several grammatical morphemes have historically been distinct between the two varieties, for example, the negative irrealis form *txhob* in White Hmong and *xob* in Green Mong and the proximal demonstrative *no(v)* in WH and *nuav* in GM. Likewise, second person dual and plural pronouns differ between the two varieties, and Green Mong lacks a dedicated third person dual pronoun, which White Hmong possesses (*nkawv~nkawd*).

Lexically, the two varieties exhibit a number of minor differences, due to idiosyncratic historical changes, the tone merger listed above, as well as borrowings; some examples appear in Table 4.

White Hmong	Green Mong
luag 'to drag'	*hai* 'to drag'[3]
los 'to come (home)'	*lug* 'to come (home)'
mus 'to go'	*moog* 'to go'
kom 'to order'	*kuas* 'to order'
phauj 'paternal aunt'	*nyaaj* 'paternal aunt'
poj niam 'wife'	*quas puj* 'wife'
(tib) neeg 'human being'	*tuab neeg* 'human being'

Table 4. Examples of lexical differences between White Hmong and Green Mong.

Note that the vast majority of these lexical distinctions are in fact shared with White Hmong and Green Mong varieties in China (see Castro *et al.* 2012: 38ff).

1.3. Layer effects

Both varieties of Laotian Hmong – White Hmong and Green Mong – exhibit a large amount of lexical and grammatical material that has been adapted from contact languages. This has mostly taken the form of successive contact with different languages in different periods of history, resulting in a "layered language" (following Aikhenvald 2006: 5). Hmong has an effective Hmongic core – that is, the set of roots reconstructible to proto-Hmongic as a first-level sub-branch of Hmong-Mien that cannot be attributed to a Sinitic source (see Ratliff 2010). It has a large amount of borrowing of lexical and grammatical content from Sino-Tibetan languages. While almost all of this content derives from Sinitic, an unknown early Sino-Tibetan source has provided the number words *plaub* 'four' through either *cuaj* 'nine' or *kaum* 'ten' (Downer 1971, Ratliff 2010, *inter alia*), and there exists a handful of possible borrowings from Northern Loloish (Sino-Tibetan, China) varieties, such as *tshis* 'goat' and *chiv* 'fertilizer, manure' (Chen 2012: 257-258). Beyond this, some lexical material and grammatical calques can be observed with their sources in Tai languages (i.e. Lao and Thai) and English. This layering effect is schematized in Figure 1.
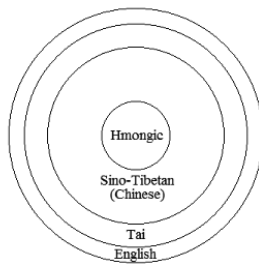
Figure 1. Layers of lexical and grammatical material in Hmong.

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Note that there is an additional factor that must qualify this schematization: the significant influence of Chinese on Tai languages, which has resulted in indirect influence on Hmong (e.g. *thib* 'ORD' in §3.2 below).

1.4. Data sources
Sources for the current paper include texts from and personal interactions with Hmong community members in Far North Queensland, Australia, as well as printed text material and videos posted by community members online.

1.5. Structure of paper
The current paper has five sections. Section 2 discusses lexical change in Hmong due to outside influences, and section 3 focuses on grammatical change. This is followed in section 4 by a discussion on variety mixing between White Hmong and Green Mong, especially in terms of the decline of strict distinctions between the two varieties. The final section provides a brief conclusion.

2. Lexical change

As is the case across Southeast Asian languages in general, lexical change in the form of borrowings represents an important source of potential grammatical change, as many lexical morphemes exhibit polyfunctionality in both lexical and grammatical domains (see Bisang 2008, *inter alia*). Thus, attention to lexical change generally is merited in the scope of the larger discussion on hybridization in grammar in the context of Hmong.

Several layers of borrowings and conventionalized code-mixing – where code-mixing is defined following Muysken (2000: 1) as a situation where lexical and grammatical material in a sentence derive from two languages – may be found in diasporic White Hmong and Green Mong. These reflect adaptations from Chinese, Lao/Thai, and English, in addition to limited borrowing from Tibeto-Burman (see Ratliff 2010). Adaptations from Chinese have generally been fully integrated into the phonological system of Hmong, while Lao/Thai borrowings and English forms often exhibit a distinct system of loanword phonology. In these latter forms, consonant and vowel values often are changed to some extent from their values in the source language, yet are often not fully assimilated, while all borrowings are mapped onto pre-existing Hmong tone categories (White 2020).

2.1. Chinese

Contact with Sinitic has likely caused drastic changes in the Hmong lexicon, to the extent that 30-40 percent of vocabulary reconstructible to Proto-Hmong-Mien is shared with Sinitic, but not with fully consistent sound correspondences. This suggests a significant period of borrowing from Sinitic into Proto-Hmong-Mien (see Ratliff 2010). Since the proto-stage, a large amount of borrowing has taken place from various stages of the Chinese language, with the last stage constituting borrowings from Southwest Mandarin varieties (Mortensen 2000).

The most recent set of borrowings from Chinese were taken separately from Chinese into White Hmong and Green Mong, such that one variety may have a historically Hmongic form (or even an earlier Chinese borrowing) while the other has a (later) Chinese borrowing. Examples appear in Table 5 below.

CHINESE FORM[4]	WHITE HMONG	GREEN MONG	HMONG MEANING
拉 *lā* 'pull'	*luag*	*hai* (historical Hmong)	'drag'
娘 *niáng* 'girl'	*phauj* (historical Hmong)	*nyaaj*	'aunt'
千 *qiān* 'thousand'	*txhiab* (earlier borrowing)	*txheeb*	'thousand'

Table 5. Chinese borrowings distinguishing WH and GM (based on Castro *et al.* 2012, Mortensen 2000, and Xiong 2018).

As a side note, the development of Laotian White Hmong and Green Mong as distinct from their Chinese Hmong counterparts may likewise be evidenced by the lexical replacement of forms borrowed from Chinese in those dialects spoken in China. Some examples from Castro *et al.* (2012) appear in Table 6 below.

CHINESE FORM	AFFECTED CHINESE HMONG VARIETY FORM	LAOTIAN HMONG FORM	VARIETIES AFFECTED
杯 [pei⁴⁴] 'cup'	[pei⁵⁴]	*khob* 'cup'	White Hmong
坏 [xuai¹³] 'bad'	[ɦuai²¹³]	*phem* 'bad'	White Hmong
杉(树) [sa⁴⁴ (su¹³)]	[ʂa⁵⁴ ʂʉ²¹]	WH *ciab*/GM *cab* 'fir tree'	Mong Leng, White Hmong (one local variety)

Table 6. Chinese borrowings distinguishing Chinese Hmong varieties from Laotian ones.

In addition to the above, one lexical item stands out in the transition from Chinese Hmong to Laotian Hmong: *kheej* [kʰẽŋ⁵³⁽⁼ᴬ²⁾] 'round'. Chinese Hmong dialects attest a form [kʰweŋᴬ²],[5] with a [w] glide that historically would not have been part of standard Hmong phonology, re-

flecting Early Mandarin *kʰɥɛn (Castro *et al.* 2012: 49). Given that these forms are identical apart from the glide, this would suggest assimilation of the unusual form to something more 'standard' in the language after the historical separation of Laotian Hmong and Chinese Hmong.[6]

2.2. Lao/Thai

As Lao and Thai are closely related Tai varieties, and determining the exact variety from which Hmong borrowed words is often not straightforward, these two varieties are grouped together here and throughout for the sake of the current discussion.

Lao and Thai have influenced Hmong in recent years, even in the diaspora, as multilingualism in both Lao/Thai and Hmong (in addition to English) is ubiquitous among older speakers, as mentioned in §1.1.1 above. This influence has reinforced the developing distinctions between Chinese White Hmong and Green Hmong/Mong varieties on the one hand and their White Hmong and Green Mong counterparts in Laos and Thailand – as well as their diaspora versions in Australia and the United States – on the other. Borrowings tend to reflect a wide range of vocabulary, from basic, everyday vocabulary, to government/institutional terminology, as reflected in Table 7.

LAO/THAI WORD[7]	HMONG BORROWING	HMONG MEANING
hòòng5 'room'	*hoob* [hə̃ŋ⁵⁵]	room
hoong2mòò3 'hospital'	*hoos maum* [hə̃ŋ²² mau̯ə³¹]	hospital
tha2haan3 'soldier'	WH *thab ham* [t̪ʰa⁵⁵ ha̱³¹]/ GM *thab haam* [t̪ʰa⁵⁵ hã̱ŋ³¹]	soldier
qang3kit2 'English'	WH *a(a)s kiv* [a²² ki²⁴] or [ã̱ŋ²² ki(t̪)²⁴] / GM *aas kiv* [ã̱ŋ²² ki(t̪)²⁴]	English (language)
sam3phaat4 'to interview'	*xam phaj* [ʂam²² pʰa(t̪)⁵³]	to interview
naaj2phon2 '(military) general'	*nais phoo* [ɲai̯²² pʰə̃ŋ³³]	general (specifically the former Hmong general, Vang Pao)

Table 7. A sample of borrowings in Hmong from Lao/Thai.

Evidence that a given Lao/Thai word is a borrowing rather than an instance of code-mixing takes the form of: (1) change in segmental structure to more closely approximate Hmong, including loss of vowel length and deletion of final consonants or assimilation to Hmong nasalized rime patterns; (2) tonal reassignment to Hmong categories; and (3) use of Lao/Thai borrowings even in interactions with younger Hmong who do not speak Lao or Thai.

Other lexical items sourced from Lao/Thai may be found belonging to two classes of words: lexical number words and classifiers. Lexical number words include the term for 'zero', *xum/xoom* [ʂə̰̃n³¹] from Lao *suun3*, and 'thousand', WH *phav/*GM *phaav*, originating in Lao *phan2*. Classifiers include measures of space or time, such as *laij* '20 m² tract' from Thai *râi*, *moo* 'hour, clock' from Lao *moong2*, and *nas thiv* 'minute' from Lao *nathii2*.

Hybrid words also exist, where a compound is formed from a Lao root and a Hmong root, such as *kwj hoob* '(military) trench', which combines Hmong *kwj* 'valley, ravine' with Lao *hòòng5* 'room'.

2.3. English

Before immigration to Australia and the United States, a small number of lexical borrowings took place that exhibit full phonological assimilation into Hmong. These include *mees* [mẽŋ²²] '(land)mine' and *npib* [ᵐpi⁵⁵] 'pen' (from *Bic*).[8] One speaker reports that this latter word may have been borrowed through Thai, which may be the case for all borrowings before migration to the diaspora.

After the migration, a new array of borrowings/code-mixing usages has appeared, rendering the Hmong spoken in the diasporic community distinct from that of Laos. This is characterized by the usage of a large number of English institutional or technical terms, sometimes as borrowed words – a status evidenced by use even with non-English speaking Hmong – and sometimes as ad hoc code-mixing as needed for communication. Given that the pronunciation of the forms tends to follow the ability of the speaker, there is not always a clear distinction between a genuine borrowing and code-mixing, even if code-mixed forms are used with non-English speakers out of necessity. In general, speakers tend to accommodate both the original English phonetics and Hmong phonotactics; more detail can be found in White (2020: 225-226).

The institutional or technical terms exhibited typically refer to things of an 'official' nature, including *constitution, councilor, recommendation, office, income, feedback*, and even *presentation*. Younger speakers may exhibit some longer code-switching in such contexts, where code-switching is defined as the rapid, consecutive use of more than one language in a given speech turn, following Muysken (2000: 1). In this code-switching phenomenon, the use of the English word may trigger entire phrases following it in English. The consideration of whether the use of English words are examples of code-mixing may also be determined by the presence of English suffixes (such as past tense *-ed* or plural *-s*) on the English words:

(1) *no   thov nej   pab   saib   thiab hais   kom   nws   tsis txhob   download*
    this   ask   2PL   help   look   and   say   COMP   3SG   NEG NEG.IRR   download
    games ntawm   peb   cov   computers ntawm   no
    games LOCL:nearby 1PL   CLF:PA   computers   LOCL:nearby   this
    '… please help watch and tell him/her not to download games on our computers here…'

(2) a. *koj   cov   presentation*
       2SG   CLF:PA   presentation
       'your presentations'
    b. *koj   cov   presentations*
       2SG   CLF:PA   presentation
       'your presentations'

In (1) above, code-mixing is evidenced by the use of multiple English words with English suffixes, such as the plural suffix on *games* and *computers*. In (2), example (2a) was accepted as genuine Hmong when posited to a speaker, while (2b) was judged to be English as a result of the plural affix on *presentations*.

A number of classifiers have also been borrowed from English nouns, often associated with experience in Western countries, including *degrees, miles, fortnight,* and *percent,* with the last two showing some degree of phonological accommodation in Hmong as [fɔ²²n̥aɪ²²] and [pʰə³³ʂẽn̥²²], respectively.

2.4. Interaction of layers
One major phenomenon affecting interaction of the various historical layers of borrowing in Hmong is the existence of multiple terms from several language sources and their competition. Some examples appear in Table 8 below.

HMONG	CHINESE	LAO/THAI	ENGLISH
	WH *sab laj/* GM *saab laaj*		*meeting*
	tseem ceeb		*important*
	yawm sij	*kas ces*	*key*
		hoob kaas	*office*
	WH *txhiab/*GM *txheeb* 'thousand'	WH *phav/*GM *phaav*	
plhom			*million*
ntxaiv 'zero'⁹		*xum/xoom*	
WH *mus/*GM *moog* 'go'		*pais*	
luag 'acquaintance'	*phooj ywg* 'friend'		

Table 8. Parallel words and their sources (based in part on Xiong 2018).

Speakers of multiple generations exhibit a tendency to replace Lao/ Thai borrowings with English equivalents; that is, as speakers have shifted from using Lao/Thai as a source language to English, they likewise have replaced the forms, especially if they are aware of Lao/Thai as the source. This significantly affects terms for days of the week, as in the following contrasting examples with 'Saturday' (note that the first example with the Lao/Thai term dates from 1994, the other with the English term from 2018):

(3) *Tag.kis*   *yog*   *hnub*   *Vas.xaum*
    tomorrow   COP   day   Saturday
    'tomorrow is Saturday' (Cha 1994: 198)

(4) *Has*   *los.sis*   *hu*   *rua*   *Xf.*   *Tswv.Kub*   *ua*   *ntej*   *nub*   *Saturday*
    say   or   call   to   Rev.   Chue.Kou   make   before   day   Saturday
    'talk to or call Pastor Chue Kou before Saturday'

Note, however, that words historically borrowed from Chinese do not experience this kind of replacement phenomenon, and Chinese-sourced words are often regarded by speakers as being legitimate Hmong, the result of phonological assimilation combined with loss of community knowledge of Chinese.

One interesting aspect of interacting layers is that the words may be combined in legitimately Hmong ways. For example, a multilingual speaker of Hmong, Lao/Thai, and English speaking to a bilingual speaker of Hmong and Lao/Thai formed a phrase consisting of a Hmong, Lao, and English word, where each word exhibits some phonological assimilation to Hmong:

(5) *peb*   *mus*   *ua*   *plan* ([plɛ̠ŋ̠]) *thib*   *ob*
    1PL   go   make   plan   ORD   two
    'we will do the second plan'

Here, the English noun *plan* is combined with the Lao-sourced ordinal marker *thib* (see 3.2 below) and the Hmong lexical number word *ob* 'two' to form the phrase 'second plan'.

Another aspect is the reidentification of a native word as a borrowing due to phonological loss in Hmong. Historically, Hmong possessed a phoneme /ŋ/ (written as <g> in the Romanized Popular Alphabet orthography),[10] permitted syllable-initially. Over time, each of the words containing this phoneme appear to have shifted to a palatal articulation, merging with /ɲ/. This happened as a gradient processes, as each Chinese Hmong dialect has a differing distribution regarding the presence of /ŋ/ or

/ɲ/ with each of the affected words.[11] Examples of these words and their comparative forms in Weining Ahmao (Parsons & Parsons 2001; GMYZWY 1965), a closely related Hmongic language, are shown in Table 9.

WEINING AHMAO	ATTESTED CHINESE HMONG FORM WITH /ŋ/	LAOTIAN HMONG FORM
ŋa^D1 'small'	ŋua^D2	WH ɲɵɤ̰^D2/C2 <*nyuam/g*>/ GM ɲɵɤ̰^D1 <*nyuas*> 'small'
ŋai^C2 'love'	ŋa^D2	WH ɲḭɤ̰^D2 <*nyiam*>/ GM ɲa̰^D2 <*nyam*> 'like'
ŋu^D1 'goose'	ŋu^D1	GM ŋu^D1 <*gus*> 'goose'

Table 9. Words with /ŋ/ initials in Weining Ahmao and Hmong.

Given that the term for 'goose', *gus* [ŋu$^{22(=D1)}$], remains as the only instance of a /ŋ/ initial in Hmong, speakers have reinterpreted it as a borrowing from the Lao word *nguu2* 'snake', such that GM *us gus* 'goose' is interpreted as 'snake(-necked) duck' (where GM *us* is 'duck').

Finally, an important pattern in borrowings is that borrowed words, or even English words in code-mixing, require the same kinds of modification as Hmong words, as in the case of classifiers modifying nouns. The following are two examples, where each English noun is modified with a Hmong classifier:

(6) *ib-tug*[12]   *councilor*
   one-CLF:ANIM   councilor
   'a councilor'

(7) *koj*   *qhov*   *presentation*
   2SG   CLF:DEFAULT   presentation
   'your presentation'

In (6) above, the classifier *-tug* 'CLF:ANIM' is used to modify the animate noun *councilor*, while in (7), *qhov* 'CLF:DEFAULT' modifies the more abstract noun *presentation*.

3. Grammatical change

Grammatical change due to contact in diasporic Hmong shows several layers. These include earlier stages of the language characterized by interaction with Sinitic in terms of constituent ordering and a large number of grammatical morphemes, later stages with Lao contact – with spe-

cial regard to adaptation of existing morphological content or syntactic ordering in parallel to Lao/Thai – and ultimately calques from English.

3.1. Chinese

A significant number of Hmong grammatical elements are borrowed from Chinese. Examples appear in Table 10 below.

CHINESE	HMONG
的 *de* 'attributive marker'	WH *li* [li³³]/GM *le* [le³³] 'possessive marker'
很 *hěn* 'very (intensifier)'	*heev* [hẽŋ²⁴] 'very (intensifier)'
就 *jiù* 'then (earlier than expected)'	*txawm* [t͡ʂɤ̃i³¹] 'then (in sequence)'
才 *cái* 'then (later than expected)'	GM *txhaj* [t͡ʂʰa⁵³] 'then (in sequence)'
正 *zhèng* 'progressive aspect'	*tseem* [t͡ʃẽŋ³¹] 'still (as progressive aspect)'
整 *zhěng* 'whole, entire'	*tseem* [t͡ʃẽŋ³¹] 'full (time period modifier)'[13]

Table 10. A selection of Chinese borrowings among Hmong grammatical elements (based in part on Xiong 2018 and Xiong & Cohen 2005).

Given the long-term contact situation between Chinese and the Hmong-Mien languages generally, it is impossible to say with certainty what syntactic properties are the result of contact with Chinese; the reader is directed to Li (2008) and Sposato (2014) for some limited discussion on the topic.

3.2. Lao/Thai

While Lao and Thai have not contributed any common grammatical morphological material to diasporic Hmong, they have influenced existing systems in Hmong, especially in terms of syntactic distribution.[14]

One example of this phenomenon is the assimilation of *heev* [hẽŋ²⁴] 'very' to a meaning 'strong', roughly approximating Lao *hèèng2* 'loud, strong, forceful'.[15] This effectively completes the borrowing of the apparent grammaticalization process in Lao from the meaning 'strength' to a post-verbal intensifier with a meaning of 'very, so', compared with the Chinese borrowing *heev* 'very' in Hmong.[16] Hmong has come to imitate the Lao grammaticalization cline to some extent, though note that in Lao the available data attest a variation from noun to verb/adjective to modifying element, while Hmong shows an alternation from verb 'be strong' to modifying element 'very':

(8) Lao
  khòòj5   mii2   hèèng2   khaa3
  1SG   have   strength   leg
  'I feel good (in) my leg(s).' (Enfield 2007: 359)

(9) Lao
    khòòj5   jaan4   hèèng2
    1SG   scared   strong
    '… I was so scared.' (Enfield 2007: 206)

(10) Hmong
    heev   kawg   kiag   li
    be.strong   end   completely   INTS
    '(be) most powerful'

(11) Hmong
    tseem.ceeb   heev
    be.important   very
    '(be) very important'

In addition, Jarkey (2015a) reports that Hmong *tau* 'get; be able to' has developed a syntactic alternation, where Laotian Hmong has what she argues is an earlier post-verbal placement of *tau* indicating ability and a newer placement that may have been influenced by the common Lao ordering, where *tau* follows its object. My data confirm this:

(12) Honghe Green Hmong (Chinese Hmong variety)
    Nil   kheb   dout   cheb.
    Nws~A~   *qheb*   *tau*   *tsheb*~O~.[17]
    3SG   open   can   car
    'She can drive a car.' (Xiong & Cohen 2005: 55)

(13) Lao
    laaw2~A~   *ka0*   *vaw4*   [*phaa2saa3   laaw2*]~P~   *daj4*
    3SG   FOC.PCL   speak   language   Lao   can
    'S/he (also) can speak Lao.' (Enfield 2003: 112)

(14) White Hmong
    a. *Nws*~A~ *tsav*   *tau*   *tsheb*~O.~
       3SG   drive   can   car
       'S/he can drive a car.'
    b. *Nws*~A~ *tsav*   *tsheb*~P~   *tau.*
       3SG   drive   car   can
       'S/he can drive a car.'

Above, the Honghe Green Hmong example exhibits the placement of *tau* 'can' between the verb and object, and the Lao example shows placement of *daj*4 'can' after the object. These two patterns are both reflected in the White Hmong example, where *tau* 'can' may occur in either of the two orders.

In addition to the phenomena above, one significant feature of contact is the general tendency toward convergence of verbal operators and

their ordering relative to the verb. While there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between forms – Lao has some grammatical morphemes for which Hmong does not have exact equivalents, and vice-versa – the general ordering pattern has a number of parallels, as in Table 11 below.

LAO (Enfield 2007: 174)		HMONG (White 2014, *forthcoming*)	
2nd position particles	*kaø* 'topic linker' *phatø* 'contrast linker'	Post-subject	*kuj* 'SEQ'
Pre-neg. aspectual-modals	*haa3-kòò1* 'just now' ñang2 'still/yet' *kamlang2* 'progressive'	Pre-irrealis	WH *nyuam qhuav*/GM *nyav* 'just (now), a moment ago' (*haj*) *tseem* 'still' WH *tab tom*/GM *taab tom* 'IMPF' WH *sam sim*/GM *saam sim* 'IMPF' *pheej* 'continually, repeatedly'
Irrealis	*caø/siø* 'IRR'	Irrealis	*yuav* 'IRR'
Negation	*bòø* 'NEG'	Negation	*tsis* 'NEG'
Achievement	*dajø* 'ACHV'	Attainment	*tau* 'ATT'
Directional	*pajø* 'ablative directional' *maø* 'allative directional'	(Directional verbs)	(*mus* 'go' *tuaj* 'come' *los* 'come (home)')
Postverbal aspectual-modal complex	*lùajø-lùaj4* 'regularly, continually' *juu1* 'continuous' *daj4* 'can' *pên3* 'know how to' *vaj3* 'be possible'	Post-object	(*quj*) *qees* 'continuously' *zuj zus* 'gradually' *tau* 'can' WH *taus*/GM *taug* 'be physically/materially able'

Table 11. Comparison of aspectual-modal elements that have similar functions and positions relative to the verb in Lao and Hmong.

Finally, the Lao ordinal marker *thii1* has been borrowed into Hmong as *thib* [t̪ʰi⁵⁵], and is placed after the noun modified as in Lao. Note that Hmong permits ordinal use of lexical number words by placing them after the noun modified, but the borrowing from Lao adds an explicit marker; an example with the traditional usage, and another with *thib*:[18]

(15) *kaab   cuaj caum   ob*
    CLF:line   nine tens   two
    'line 92 (or, the ninety-second line)'

(16) lub   teb_chaws   thib   peb
     CLF:GNRL field_place ORD three
     'the third country'

Note that the Lao source word *thii1* may have itself been borrowed from Chinese 第, *dì* in standard Mandarin, earlier bearing a form with a voiced stop (in Middle Chinese as *dejH*, per Baxter & Sagart 2015), consistent with the fact that Proto-Tai **d-* became *th-* in Lao (Pittayaporn 2009: 111).

3.3. English

One significant area of influence from English is in the form of borrowing and/or calquing of English surface syntactic patterns in the area of complex numbers, which historically would have been rare or unnecessary in a highland agricultural context in Southeast Asia. Two patterns are found: one which handles decimals, as in (17) below, and another which expresses percents, as in (18-19).

(17) cuaj point   cuaj million
     nine point   nine million
     '9.9 million'

(18) xya   caum feem   pua
     seven tens   CLF:part hundred
     '70%'

(19) plaub   percent ([pʰə ʂẽṇ])
     four   percent
     '4%'

Note also that this last example could be interpreted as having been influenced by Lao, given that one Hmong consultant points out that in Lao the English word *percent* is used as a borrowing;[19] this means that this influence from English likely passed through a Lao layer before being reinforced by English directly.

3.4. Interaction of layers

As mentioned in §3.1-3.3 above, there has been some direct interaction between forms, such as the development of the Chinese borrowing *heev* 'very' and its changed distribution in rough imitation of Lao, as well as (possible) borrowings from Lao with Chinese and English sources.

More significantly, however, is the range of areal phenomena associated with Southeast Asian languages generally; as discussed in the literature, Hmong is a prime example of these phenomena, even when the diaspora varieties are considered. Given that southern Sinitic varieties

and Lao/Thai are likewise members of the Southeast Asian sprachbund (following the definition found in Enfield 2017), this is best considered convergence of form rather than unidirectional influence. Examples of this convergence in the literature include:

1) Patterns of grammaticalization (Bisang 2008, 2009, *inter alia*):
   a) Limited obligatoriness of grammatical categories;
   b) High degree of pragmatic inference as an active component of grammar;
   c) Rigidity in constituent/word order;
   d) Relative lack of "coevolution of meaning and form" (as proposed by Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994: 20); and
   e) Phonetic erosion manifested as vowel quality and duration as opposed to morphologization;
2) Syntactic complexity as a "hidden" phenomenon, i.e. complexity where languages permit certain grammatical categories to be left unexpressed where they are retrievable from the context (Bisang 2009);
3) A high degree of polyfunctionality of morphemes, such as with *tau* 'get' manifested as a shared set of 'come to have', 'succeed', 'can', 'okay, fine', 'achievement/attainment', with other local possibilities (Enfield 2003; cf. Bisang 2008, 2015);
4) Multiple classifier systems, with noun classifiers often correlating with definiteness (see, for example, Simpson, Soh & Nomoto 2011); and
5) A degree of convergence in morphology and syntax, including:
   a) the existence of localizers and final particles;
   b) verbs that are polyfunctional as prepositions;
   c) an existential verb that can express both 'have' and 'there is/are'; and
   d) an alternative proposition pattern for questions (Clark 1989).

4. Interaction of White Hmong and Green Mong

In Australian contexts, mixing of White Hmong and Green Mong forms as well as the breaking down of barriers between the two varieties is observed, even among first generation (migrant) speakers. Mixing may take the form of switching varieties in the middle of a discourse as a speaker shifts from focusing on one listener to another if the audience is made up of speakers of both varieties, as well as outright mixing of the two varieties in a single sentence.

An example of a spontaneous mixed sentence from a first generation speaker is the following from a Green Mong individual, where the verbal operator *nyuam qhuav* 'just (now), a moment ago' is traditionally White Hmong (the Green Mong form is *nyav*) and *taag* 'finish' is Green Mong:

(20) nyuam.qhuav   noj   taag
    just.now   eat   finish
    'I just finished eating'

    In addition, borrowing from one variety to another is acceptable, as with the observed case of Green Mong speakers using the White Hmong negative irrealis form *txhob* rather than *xob*, the form reported for Green Mong in Xiong (2018) and observed in the speech of at least one Australian Green Mong speaker. In fact, this use of the White Hmong form is so prevalent that one second generation Australian Green Mong speaker identified *txhob* as the correct Green Mong form, and failed to recognized *xob* at all.

    Moreover, specific forms show instances of variation, among both first and second generation speakers (cf. Kerswill & Trudgill 2005). One example is the variation in *pes/pis tsawg* 'how many', which Xiong (2018) suggests is a dialectal distinction between White Hmong (*pes tsawg*) and Green Mong (*pis tsawg*); Green Mong speakers have been observed using *pes tsawg*, and at least some Green Mong speakers confirm both *pis tsawg* and *pes tsawg* as acceptable.

    Other forms exhibit some degree of leveling, even among first generation speakers, such as with WH *kom*/GM *kuas* 'to order; PURP; COMP; MNR', where at least one Green Mong speaker has been observed to use White Hmong *kom*, for example:

(21) *Ces   kuv   puj*   *has   tas   kom   peb   muab   kuv*
    then 1SG   grandmother   say   COMP   COMP   1PL   take   1SG
    puj   *tso   tseg   rua   ntawd.*
    paternal.grandmother   put   abandon   to   LOCL:nearby
    'Then my grandmother said that we should leave her there.'

    Lexical leveling can be recognized with Green Mong classifier *phoo* 'CLF:BOOK', which is recognized by Xiong (2018) and one Australian community member as the Green Mong form, though the community member notes that Green Mong speakers generally use the White Hmong form *phau* when speaking.[20] A final example is the use of the lexical item *haum* 'fit, suit' in Green Mong speech (the GM equivalent is *hum*, as confirmed universally by GM speakers consulted), especially in the term *koom haum* 'association'.

    Furthermore, speakers using a non-native variety may calque a form from their native variety incorrectly, resulting in an intermediate form as discussed by Kerswill & Trudgill (2005: 199), where the resulting form is intermediate phonetically between the two varieties. An example from a first generation Australian Green Mong speaker attempting to speak in

White Hmong, where the Green Mong form *nyaav sab* [ɲãŋ²⁴ ʃa⁵⁵] 'worry, be concerned' is produced following an incorrectly identified sound correspondence (see Table 2 in section 1.2 above) as *nyav siab* [ɲa²⁴ ʃiɤ̯⁵⁵], where the true White Hmong form is *hnyav siab* [ɲ̥a²⁴ ʃiɤ̯⁵⁵]:

(22) *kuv   muaj   kev   nyav-siab…*
    1SG   have   NMLZ   be.heavy-liver
    'I have a concern…'

Another feature of the speech community in both Australia and the United States is the favoring of White Hmong by speakers of Green Mong in otherwise White Hmong-only or mixed situations. This is reported to be the result of the social perception that Green Mong, with its possession of the complex initial series /ʈˡ/, /ʈˡʰ/, /ⁿʈˡ/, /ⁿʈˡʰ/, which White Hmong lacks, is too difficult for White Hmong speakers to speak, and thus White Hmong is favored. In some local Hmong communities, White Hmong is reported to be the variety almost exclusively used.

An important social point involving mixing is the breaking down of the identity barrier between White Hmong and Green Mong among individual speakers, especially in the Australian context. One Green Mong speaker, fully competent in the White Hmong variety, reported his critique of a young White Hmong speaker's use of the innovative form *neej neeg* 'story' (formed from the historical *dab neeg*, replacing *dab* 'ghost, evil spirit' with *neej* 'life'), suggesting his perceived ownership of, or perhaps expertise in, White Hmong as his language. This same speaker may be observed speaking to his adult son in White Hmong, suggesting that speakers can effectively be perceived to be valid speakers of both varieties, in cases where both varieties are still discerned to be distinct. In addition to these phenomena, at least some second generation speakers report having difficulty identifying which forms are White Hmong and Green Mong or report disagreements with other speakers about these judgments, consistent with Trudgill's Stage II.

Ultimately, integration into mainstream Australian culture, and, more importantly, Queensland's education system with effective immersion in English, young Australian Hmong of primary and secondary school ages generally speak very little, if any, Hmong. This has resulted in an effective decline in transmission to following generations, meaning that Trudgill's Stage III may be considered effectively unreachable. The story may be more promising in the United States, with the advent of bilingual schools reinforced by Hmong-medium mass media and a large Hmong population base, but this remains to be seen.

5. Conclusion

Altogether, Hmong has experienced major changes through contact with Chinese, Lao/Thai, and English, in each case associated with the separation of one Hmongic variety from another. Furthermore, in the diaspora context, the traditional separation between White Hmong and Green Mong is showing signs of decline, resulting in a situation where speakers of one variety may use the grammatical forms of the other, or even, with certain speakers, more widespread mixing can occur. This situation is combined with younger speakers having increased difficulty distinguishing the forms of the two varieties. Ultimately, diasporic Hmong faces probable long-term language decline and death due to shift into English, which will likely prevent the full merger of the two varieties.

Abbreviations

1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person; A = transitive subject; ACHV = achievement; ANIM = animate; ATT = attainment; CLF = classifier; COMP = complementizer; COP = copula; FOC = focus; GM = Green Mong; GNRL = general; IMPF = imperfect; INTS = intensifier; IRR = irrealis; LOCL = localizer; MNR = manner complement marker; NEG = negative; NMLZ = nominalization; O = transitive object; ORD = ordinal; PA = non-singular/abstract; PCL = particle; PL = plural; PURP = purpose clause marker; RPA = Romanized Popular Alphabet; S = intransitive subject; SEQ = sequential; SG = singular; WH = White Hmong.

Notes

[1]   Sources used to distinguish White Hmong from Green Mong include a community dictionary (Xiong 2018) as well as input and data from community members.
[2]   That is, White Hmong /ɒ/ may correspond either to Green Mong /ɒ/ or /ɵ/, while White Hmong /ɵ/ always corresponds to Green Mong /ɵ/.
[3]   Glosses in some cases rely on Bisang (1993), Jarkey (2015b), and Xiong (2018). Some single-word examples likewise may be corroborated by Xiong (2018).
[4]   Standard Mandarin forms have been provided here for reference; the original Southwest Mandarin source forms are currently unavailable.
[5]   Note that the original source for this form provides the phonetic form [kweŋ^A2], but has the Chinese Hmong orthographic form <kwenx>, with the aspirated initial <k>, both in this example and in one other location. This suggests that the marker of aspiration may simply have been left out by accident, and the discussion here

reflects this understanding. Note also the use here of the tone category A2 to represent the tone; this is done as this word appears in a number of Chinese Hmong varieties (as described in Castro *et al.* 2012), but the specific phonetic representation of the tone differs for each variety.

[6]   One Green Mong speaker provided the form *qeej* [qɛ̃ŋ⁵³] rather than *kheej* [kʰɛ̃ŋ⁵³] (whereas Xiong 2018 has *kheej* for both WH and GM). This idea of assimilation would then apply to both forms.

[7]   Phonological representation of Lao forms follows Enfield (2003, 2007), relying in part on Lew (2014), while phonological representation of Thai forms follows Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom (2005). The forms that appear in this table are those of Lao.

[8]   An anonymous reviewer suggests that these two words may originally have been borrowed from French into Lao, rather than from English, and then from Lao into Hmong.

[9]   This is a neologism in Hmong; as such, it is known by some, but not all, members of the community.

[10]   While the initial velar nasal phoneme is represented as <g> in the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA; Heimbach 1979: xiii), Laotian Hmong speakers may not be aware of this, since only one lexical item contains it.

[11]   This is inferred from Xiong & Cohen (2005), the *Chuanqiandian corpus* (White *n.d.*), and online texts.

[12]   Some quantifier-classifier combinations exhibit a tighter degree of cohesion than others, resulting in compound words, as is the case here. Please see White (2020) for a full analysis of wordhood in Hmong.

[13]   I would like to thank Bai Junwei for pointing this connection out to me.

[14]   Note, however, that a form presumably based on a Lao modal and some other material, taking the form of WH *toob kam*, for example, is available in the awareness of Hmong speakers. It appears to be used as a verb or noun, but is nevertheless marginal in terms of community usage. Enfield (2003: 225) also speculates that the verb *tuaj yeem* 'be able to' is calqued from a Lao aspectual-modal marker, but, as he points out, more research is necessary.

[15]   An anonymous reviewer has pointed out that the Lao word *hèèng2* also has this verb/adjective function with the meaning 'loud, strong, forceful'. The source I rely upon for the Lao examples in this section is Enfield (2007), which only attests a verb 'strong' in a secondary function with another verb.

[16]   I regard *heev* 'very' as originally a borrowing from Chinese as it is attested in a number of Chinese Hmong dialects which lack any contact with Lao.

[17]   The top line represents the example in the original Chinese Hmong orthography found in the source, while the second line converts this orthography to RPA in order to enable comparisons with the other Hmong examples.

[18]   Following White (2020), an underscore indicates a morpheme boundary where the two morphemes have a relationship intermediate between separate grammatical words and a single grammatical word.

[19]   In fact, one anonymous reviewer points out that the word for 'percent' in common use in Lao is in fact *phesen2*, pronounced very similarly to the Hmong here.

[20]   The speaker in question suggested the form *phoo* is the literary form in Green Mong; this is likely due to the use of *phoo* in the most commonly-used translation of the Christian Bible into Green Mong, and the speaker in question is a retired pastor. Two animist Green Mong speakers suggested the Green Mong form is *phau*, identical to the White Hmong form. Note, however, that the retired pastor also suggested the same relationship between *hum* and *haum* in Green Mong.

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