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What is a Heritage Language Learner?

“Heritage Learner” is a relatively new term in the world of language teaching. It was most widely adopted in the language teaching community in the 1990s. It’s often used in the US to apply to the children of relatively recent immigrants who have practical knowledge speaking and understanding the language of their parents (a language other than English) in the home. This is a very different kind of exposure to the language than that which non-native speakers get in a classroom setting. And the term is often in fact used to distinguish learners with home experience in a language from learners whose only exposure to that same language is in a classroom.

Note that we’re only talking about spoken language, so far. There’s no assumption that a heritage learner can read or write the language they’ve learned at home. Probably in the majority of cases, they can’t. Keep in mind that there’s no necessary relationship between any spoken language and a written form of that language. Many people in this world can’t write their native language. In some cases, there are people who speak several languages quite fluently and can’t write any of them. Or sometimes people can’t write their native language but they can write their “national language,” the main language used for public communication in their country. This is the case with the vast majority of the 20 million ethnic Laos living in Thailand, for instance! There’s also no “organic” or natural relationship between a given spoken language and how that language is written. So, Vietnamese used to be written using Chinese characters, now it’s written in a script based on Latin letters developed by Portuguese missionaries. Neither form of writing is any more--or less--“Vietnamese” than the other. Lao is written in a script derived from Khmer which was itself derived from a South Indian script...but there’s no reason Lao couldn’t be written in some other script. In fact, Lao religious literature representing largely Pali language is still often written in a script called “Tham” or “Thai Noi,” (which is very similar to ancient Khmer) which although related to modern Lao script is quite distinct in many ways. In the karaoke videos of Lao language pop songs in Thailand, the lyrics are written using Thai script, even though they represent Lao words. It all gets kind of confusing, doesn’t it?! But the point to remember is, spoken and written languages are quite separate entities. You can be quite expert at speaking a language, but not be able to read or write a word of it, and there’s nothing wrong with that.

Now, the fact that you’re reading this book probably means that you do qualify as a Heritage Learner of Lao. That is, your parents are probably ethnic Lao who migrated to the West from Laos in the 1980s. You can probably at the very least understand your parents when they speak Lao

(and your aunts and uncles, grandparents, etc.). Your speaking ability, however, could be located at any point on a fairly long continuum, from barely being able to speak Lao at all to being able to express yourself quite well. Maybe you can express your thoughts in Lao just as well as (or better) than you can express yourself in English. But in general, especially as time goes on, if you're Lao American and grew up primarily in the US or Canada (and especially if you were born outside of Laos), your English skills all-around are probably a lot stronger than your Lao. That's only natural; growing up, you needed to speak English well, for school, and of course to get a good job. Your parents may even have discouraged the speaking of Lao at home to make sure you learned to speak English well! Note, please, if you happen to not be a Heritage Learner of Lao but a non-native speaker studying Lao at the intermediate or advanced level, it's not that we want you to feel left out. This book is indeed for you, too. But we're treating Heritage Learners as "the norm," partly because for so long in university Southeast Asian language classes, it was non-Heritage speakers who were treated as the norm and heritage learners who were treated as the "odd people out." It works better this way for everyone in the long run, trust me.

So why think of Heritage Learners and non-Heritage speakers of Lao as different? There are many reasons. The biggest reason: your speaking ability as a Heritage Learner. It makes you special, and in a very good way. It means that, to varying degrees, based on your individual experience, you have a big head start on those learning Lao from a "blank slate." Even if you don't consider your Lao to be that good, trust me, it's better than you think if it's there at all. Non-Heritage speakers have to struggle with *everything* about learning Lao: learning to hear differences between vowels, consonants and tones, figuring out the grammar, understanding the culture. In addition, they have to learn how to make all those sounds and tones themselves. These are all areas in which you have a big head start or advantage.

Where you're the same as a non-native speaking learner, of course, is that you can't read or write Lao. And learning to read and write is probably a big part of why you're reading this book, right? Well, your speaking ability is going to give you a big head start in the literacy department, too. So much that you're probably going to be able to read as well in three weeks as a non-native speaker is in five or six weeks. Maybe even faster than that.

Not that you don't have a lot to learn about speaking, too; of course you do. The way you're probably used to speaking Lao at home is very informal, very colloquial. You may not even know the "correct" pronunciations of some words (the pronunciations closest to the writing system). And

of course there's lots of "educated" vocabulary you're not familiar with at all. That's the purpose of this book and the accompanying Multimedia Materials: to help you learn more polished, formal ways of speaking Lao, ways that will serve you in a variety of social situations, especially situations you'll run into in Laos.

In fact, if we have an overall goal here, you could say it's to turn you into an "educated speaker of Lao". Which, as you'll see, is quite a bit different than speaking Lao informally at home or with your friends. The way you speak at home is fine, of course, for that context. You probably have your own dialect of Lao, too, learned from your parents. And nobody's going to tell you to stop speaking that way. But if you're going to interact with Lao people in Laos, especially educated ones, and if you're going to understand modern Lao communication, you are going to need to learn those educated, formal ways of speaking.

And of course, you're going to need to learn to read and write Lao. This includes a wide range of different types of knowledge. Learning to recognize all the parts of the alphabet and how they go together is only one small part of a much larger picture. You also need to learn to recognize lots and lots of specific words. You can even start to work on this before you've learned all the individual parts of the alphabet. Recognizing words and phrases, not individual letters, is how you read in English, so it should be how you read Lao as well.

You're also going to need to learn to understand the different ways of writing in Lao, different types of texts, if you want to read something more interesting than children's books. And I'll tell you right now, you won't find much children's literature in this Textbook. You're an adult, so you should be reading adult material: signs, newspaper headings and articles, posters and other types of mass communication-oriented documents, articles on society, culture, history. Creative literature. And let's not forget poetry, which is what *all* Lao literature consisted of for centuries and centuries. You won't be an expert in any of this after working your way through these materials, but you will have a basic familiarity with all of it.

You should also know right from the start that the state of written material in Laos today, and while we're at it, the written material in Lao in the US or France or Canada or Australia, is not great. To find interesting things for you to read, we had to go back in some cases several decades! And the situation doesn't look like it's going to get better anytime soon. There are many reasons for this. In the US, as I mentioned before, everyone is concerned primarily with learning

to communicate well in English, so little gets written in Lao. There are also all sorts of distractions, things like TV, movies, video games, social media, you name it, to take your time away from writing or reading in Lao. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that a widespread culture of “pleasure reading” never really developed in pre-war Laos, so it’s not likely something your parents could very well pass on to you.

In Laos itself today, the situation is just as bad, if not worse. Sure, people want to learn English, but they also want to learn to read and write Thai. And it’s easy to read Thai if you already know Lao. This is compounded by the fact that such a wide range of written material in Thai is produced in Thailand, and it’s easily available in Laos. This leads lots of Lao people today to read in Thai more than they do in Lao. It’s all a big circle, too: because nobody reads in Lao, very little gets written in Lao. It’s even hard to find a newspaper on the streets in Laos; there are few newspaper stands as such. You need to either go right to the office of the newspaper (if you happen to be in Vientiane), or work somewhere where the newspaper gets delivered. Then again, as you’ll see firsthand, since all the newspapers in Laos are strictly controlled by the government, they’re not, shall we say, the most exciting things to read.

However, you--yes, you!--can do something to change this situation. You can learn to write interesting things in Lao. You can learn to express your opinions, beliefs, humor, sense of creativity in written Lao. So that people will have something interesting to read in Lao. Lao is a beautiful and incredibly expressive and poetic language. This expression has up until now--save for a brief period of flowering of creativity in the 1960s and 1970s, which we’ll study in Chapters Five and Seven--been strictly governed by poetic forms. But there’s no reason you can’t use the Lao language for new types of creativity and expression. Once you learn to write it well, that is. So in this textbook, we’re going to expose you to a really wide range of written Lao: song lyrics in karaoke videos, signs on the street all over Laos, Lao newspapers and magazines, traditional verse poetry, Lao writings on history and culture, and the novels and short stories by the handful of prolific Lao fiction writers over the past several decades. All of this put together will help make you a very proficient reader and writer of Lao. But there’s yet one more goal we have for you in this course: coming to your own understanding of the complexity of Lao history and culture, and what it means to be Lao.

This is a very complex topic, and one highly charged with emotions and political beliefs. And there’s no simple answer to the question “what does it mean to be Lao” either. Does it mean

eating sticky rice? Does it mean producing and consuming mo lam music? Does it mean speaking Lao? Then what about the fact that in the country of Laos itself, there are only about 2 million or so native speakers of Lao, while in northeast Thailand, there are some 20 million? And nobody wants to call those Lao in Thailand “Lao”: not the people in Laos today, and not the people in Thailand (and certainly not the Thai government).? Why are all those Lao even there in Thailand? We will give you an answer to that in this textbook. What we won’t give you is an answer to the larger question of “what does it mean to be Lao”...that’s for you to answer to yourself, on your own. But we will give you the tools to do just that.

There’s another reason to delve into all these questions of Lao history and what it means to be Lao: understanding your parents and other relatives. Don’t laugh, but think about it: did you ever wonder just why they think and act the way they do? After working your way through this textbook, you may not totally understand them, but you will have a much better idea of where they’re coming from.

The author of this book himself takes no political stance on what it is to be Lao, on who is “more Lao” than anyone else. I don’t take sides on the political issues dividing many of those in Laos today from Lao people living in Thailand or especially the US, since the latter are in the US because they fled political developments in Laos in the 1970s and 80s. What you will get here, though, is exposure to the viewpoints of all those various “sides”. The author of this book is also keenly aware that the entity which is “modern state” or country of Laos has only existed for a very, very small amount of time when compared to how long Lao people have been around. The whole concept of the “modern nation state” is a relatively recent one in world history, and we should always try to keep that in mind. We’ll get into this topic in great detail in Chapter Five.

In the end, though, dealing with all these topics described above--no matter how fascinating they are--is only a means to an end, and that end is improving your command of the Lao language, in both its written and spoken forms. This textbook--and indeed, its author-- make no claims to being expert or treating any of these subjects, such as Lao literature, history and culture, exhaustively. But studying them even in just an overview sort of way, in Lao, is a highly effective way to both improve your command of Lao and to understand your identity as a Lao in the world today. So let’s get to work.

What Exactly Do Heritage Learners Need to Learn?

We covered some of this in the introduction above, but here's a more systematic treatment of what it is we think you need to focus on studying in your intensive Lao language course:

Spoken Lao

As mentioned earlier, most Heritage Learners' exposure to/experience with the language of study has taken place in a home or domestic context. And as a Heritage Learner you can often function quite well in the language in such a context. The problem is, home life in the world today is only a small part of life. There's also the contexts of work, academia, and interactions with Lao adults who are not your family members. The latter is especially important if you plan at some point to live, work or conduct research in Laos. And it's especially true for Southeast Asian languages that you simply can't speak the same way in all these other contexts that you can at home. You may not have ever thought about this, but that's okay, it's part of what you're here to learn. The language of the home tends to be highly abbreviated, clipped, dependent even more on shared knowledge and cultural assumptions than the usual socially acceptable ways of communicating in the culture. It's an extreme version of "cultural shorthand."

And if you've only really spoken Lao at home and with close friends, you may not even realize just how specialized for home use--and thus inappropriate for everyday social use--your language really is. That's okay, it's a big part of why you're here: to learn to speak Lao acceptably and correctly in a wide range of social contexts. Part of this means, by the way, studying grammar. And don't believe anyone who tells you Lao grammar is "simple," or even "non-existent"! It's there, it's just structured very differently than English grammar. But it's no less complex, though it is considerably more "economical." I like the term "elegant".

Vocabulary can also be a problem. There are a limited range of words you need to know to function in a language in a home environment only. You may find yourself lacking in vocabulary when it comes to expressing more abstract or theoretical ideas outside the home, especially in an academic context. This is particularly true if you've grown up speaking Lao in the United States (or another Western country). It's only natural that speakers of Lao living in the US would come to adopt a wide range of English vocabulary to describe experiences and concepts that they might have first encountered in this country. So from this point of view, even your parents and other elders in the Lao community may not be a very good model for expressing some concepts in a dis-

tinctly “Lao” way anymore! At least not the ways Lao people in Laos currently do. In time, you and other members of your language community forget that the words you use in a US context even came from English, you come to think of them as simply part of Lao language. That’s fine as long as your language interactions are only with other Lao who grew up speaking both Lao and English in the US. But what happens when you go to visit or work in Laos? Your English substitutions for vocabulary that could be expressed in Lao are not going to get you quite as far there; in fact, they could be a serious obstacle to both being understood by others and for you understanding what others are talking about. So that’s another thing you have to learn here: to learn to communicate your thoughts, feelings and opinions using the educated vocabulary of modern Lao. Every language spoken on earth possesses the tools with which to discuss every aspect of human existence, though depending on culture, languages do this in very different ways, and give priority to one sphere of experience or knowledge over another. It may seem awkward at first to make this switch, but it’ll be worth it in the long run for the improved communication with others it will bring you.

Lao Culture

Culture is another big issue for you as a Heritage Learner. You do know a lot about Lao culture just by growing up speaking Lao and interacting in it. But there’s a lot you don’t know, especially about the more formal or “high culture” of your parents and grandparents. Granted, as a Lao American you have your own culture, something that’s the product of several generations of putting down roots here, learning how to survive here, and combining various aspects of Lao culture with American culture. And of course Lao Americans have created some fascinating new beliefs and expressions and practices in this process. This culture is expressed in the way you dress, the way you speak (both English and Lao), the music you listen to, the car you drive, the ways you relate to your friends who share the same Lao American culture with you. And that culture is totally valid, very important. You should be proud of it. But you also need to recognize that this new culture is a product of several generations of life in the US and is bound to be very different from the culture you’ll find if you go to Laos, or Northeast Thailand. If you’re going to successfully interact with people in Laos, or successfully interact with older members of Lao society in the US, or even if you just want to understand your parents’ or grandparents’ perspective on things, you need to learn about the sources of tradition in Laos, and how to behave ‘properly’ in the context of Lao culture in Laos. You don’t need to change who you are, how you dress, what you believe.

You don’t need to return to some vague “ideal” traditional state of the way people lived and

believed and talked in Laos before the war. That world doesn't exist anymore anyway, no matter what some older members of your culture might say. But if you're going to understand where you came from, where your parents came from, why things are the way they are in Laos right now, and how you can maybe help people there, you need to learn about the history, the traditions and the culture as it's been lived (and has been changing) for centuries.

Reading and Writing Lao

Growing up in an environment--such as the United States--where adult literacy is for the most part assumed and certainly highly valued, we tend to have several assumptions about reading and writing. We assume that it's something humans have always had, and cannot really do without. Indeed, imagine how life would be if you couldn't read or write English? Or what if there were no such thing in the US as reading and writing? We also tend to assume that literacy is a very fundamental and essential part of how we access and understand the rest of the world. Literacy seems in many ways indispensable.

Literacy has not always been there in human society, of course. In fact, given how long humans have been on the earth--perhaps 200,000 years?--we've only been reading and writing for a very short period, maybe 4-5,000 years or so. That's nothing! So what did we humans do before literacy? We told stories. And memorized poetry. And we probably had much better memories. All our knowledge had to be handed down orally and memorized. It was a totally different way of preserving and passing on history and cultural knowledge.

Like many other aspects of human existence, however, once you get used to something, it's hard to imagine ever having done without it (try electricity, for example!). But here's something else to think about concerning literacy: for most of the time that it's been around, literacy wasn't very much at all like it is today. In most societies throughout the history of literacy, and in many still today, only a privileged few had access to learning to read and write. The privileged knowledge of many cultures has traditionally been controlled by the elite; by the leaders, by religious scholars. The notion of virtually everyone in a society learning to read, and actively reading, every day, for not only acquiring information but also for pure pleasure and self-enlightenment, is a very new development in human society in general, and in Southeast Asian societies in particular.

Nevertheless, if you're reading this right now, literacy is a big part of who you are and how you see the world, and certainly a big part of how you learn about the world. And that's what makes it

such a perfect vehicle or tool by which to learn about Lao culture, history and language. So we're going to exploit written Lao as a tool as much as we can here. And we're going to use it in ways more similar to how we relate to written language in the West than how many Lao people in Laos relate to it today. This is because you, by virtue of having grown up as an American, already relate to the written word (English) in this way. And that can be a powerful tool to use in learning more about Lao culture.

You're going to learn the Lao alphabet, how to recognize letters and how they go together in syllables to represent the sounds and concepts of Lao. Even more importantly, you're going to learn the shapes of important Lao words, before you even know the whole alphabet by heart. These words--called sight words--are the ones you're going to see over and over again on signs, in newspapers, on pamphlets, in novels, in personal letters. You're going to also learn about the different types of texts that exist in Lao, and how to predict the content of a given piece of writing based upon its text type, even if you can't understand all the vocabulary in it. Once you get to this stage--and it won't take long--a whole new world will open up, and you can use writings in Lao to learn a wealth of information about culture, grammar, vocabulary, even how to speak properly in formal and educated contexts. Literacy is going to be the cornerstone upon which your Heritage Language education is built. There are more reasons for this than what we've just covered here, but the fact that you're already a skilled consumer of the written word is one of the biggest reasons. Now let's move on to a more detailed description of what's in this textbook and how to use it.

How to Use This Textbook

Remember, you'll only get out of your study of Lao as much as you put in. If you trust me and your instructors as your guides to what's important to study in order to accomplish the goals described in the previous section, you'll spend about 1 hour working with these materials outside of class for every hour you spend in class. If you spend less time studying outside of class, don't be surprised if you learn a lot less than promised in this textbook. We as your teachers and developers of teaching materials can only give you the tools to learn; it's you who needs to do the work. Each chapter of this textbook is organized around a theme. This book was originally written as a learning material at the Southeast Asian Summer Studies Institute (SEASSI), where one chapter would be covered each week (comprising 20 hours of class time per week) for the duration of the

eight week program. In a semester class at a university, it's expected that you would cover four chapters per semester. Each chapter is divided into distinct sections, and in each section you'll find a different type of learning material. You'll learn different things from each, and you'll use the material in each section in a slightly different way, but all will help you advance toward the goals discussed in the previous section.

Introduction and Analysis in English

Each chapter begins with some introductory notes--some will contain more notes than others--relating to the topic of that chapter, written in English. This is because English is presumably your strongest language. Through English, a good deal of your identity is formed, and it's also how you relate to a large part of the world, especially the abstract "world of ideas". Before you can understand many of these topics in Lao (especially written Lao!), you'll need to understand them clearly in English. Also, it's in this section that you'll find analytical discussions of the various topics in a way that your Lao instructors might find difficult, if not impossible, to give you. This section is written by a non-native speaker of Lao (myself), who has the advantage of having studied the language as an outsider, analytically. Your instructors have a different kind of advantage: they're native speakers of Lao, and probably highly educated ones at that. You can get something from them that you'll never get from my writing in this book. However, the reverse is also true. Take the best advantage of your instructors and try to speak only Lao with them. That's why detailed descriptions of things exist in this textbook in English.

From time to time this section will be supplemented with vocabulary lists of important terms related to the topic at hand, with accompanying pronunciation of these terms on the Audio Track files which accompany the Textbook..

Short Samples of Authentic Lao Text

As noted earlier, sprinkled throughout the pages of each chapter are little snapshots of written Lao, examples of Lao text taken from newspaper headlines, street signs, various other sources. Wherever possible, these relate to the topic of a given chapter, but often they cover outside topics as well. The text examples in each chapter are also meant to be appropriate to your command of Lao at that point in time in your study. Take some time to look these over. Try to recognize consonants and vowels in the signs, headlines and book covers. Even more importantly, look for words and phrases that you know. Take into account the visual context of the written material,

and any accompanying English captions. From time to time you'll also be given assignments relating to this collection of Lao text samples.

Scholarly Articles with Lao Terms Inserted

In each chapter you'll also find excerpts of the writings of various scholars of Lao language, history and culture, in English. Here's the catch, though: key terms in these article excerpts have been replaced with Lao terms. These terms were chosen very carefully: they're all words you should learn to recognize in Lao, and knowing them will help you immensely in reading (and conversing) about scholarly topics in Lao. You will not be given the English equivalents of these terms in this textbook. You'll need to do the work of finding out what they mean yourself, by either looking them up in the dictionary or asking your instructor what they mean. Take the time to do this work; it will enable you to more fully understand the articles, of course, and experience and research on language learning has shown that we best remember the knowledge we had to work to get in the first place!

Videos of Lao Speakers

Next, you'll sometimes find video examples of Lao speakers talking about the topic of the chapter. At some times these will be taken from the author's travels in Laos, Northeast Thailand and the US, and represent interviews I did with Lao speakers in those places. At other times the videos will be excerpts from commercially produced videos and movies in which Lao speakers appear. And sometimes the videos will be karaoke videos of Lao music from Laos.

In all cases there will be some explanatory material accompanying the video, in both English and Lao. For some videos, vocabulary lists of relevant words will be provided; for others, full transcripts in Lao. For still other videos, whole articles in Lao which deal with the same or similar subject matter will be provided. (This in fact takes us into the next section of each chapter, described below.)

You should spend a large amount of time watching and listening to these videos. Sometimes you'll be given specific instructions/assignments for using the videos. At all times you can also devise your own activities using the videos: listen to the whole video all the way through for listening practice (if you need it) and understanding, before reading the explanatory material. Stop the video at difficult-to-understand sections, go back, and replay it, as often as necessary.

Articles in Lao

Finally, you'll find at the end of each chapter several articles completely in Lao relating to the topic of the chapter. Sometimes these articles will include explanatory material or vocabulary lists in English, though sometimes they won't. A few--not many--of these articles will include an Audio Track of the entire article being read by a native speaker.

These articles may be used in class and linked to specific assignments. Don't be frustrated if you can't read all the articles in a given chapter. This book was created to be used for both Intermediate and Advanced levels of University-level Lao study at SEASSI, so the articles cover a range of difficulty. If you find yourself running to the dictionary for every other word, the article is probably beyond your current ability. but that doesn't mean you can't still get something out of it. Scan the article for words you DO know. Read the headline or subheadings first, consider the context of the article given in the explanatory notes, and try to make guesses about words, phrases, sentences or even whole sections of the article.

For the articles that you have been assigned to read in class, always follow this procedure:

- 1) *Skim the headline and subheadings of the article to determine the main purposes of each section.*
- 2) *Read through the article as best you can WITHOUT going to the dictionary.* Do this silently, don't try to read out loud. Read simply for understanding, limited though it might be.
- 3) *Read through the article a second time,* trying to make guesses about what unknown words might mean given their context (the overall topic of the article, words that come before and after the unknown words, etc.).
- 4) *Read through the article a third time,* this time making a list as you go of any unknown words.
- 5) *Now go look up the unknown words in your dictionary.*
- 6) *Go back and read the article a fourth time,* with your list of vocabulary words at hand.
- 7) *Now, if you want to, try reading the article out loud.* You might want to do this with a classmate, taking turns reading out loud.

Suggestions for Further Study

At the end of some chapters, you'll be given suggestions of additional activities you can do using the material covered in the chapter. Sometimes these will be suggestions for writing based on the topic of the chapter. Often these will be activities best done with a fellow student. Yes, it

sounds like a lot of work and time, but remember, you only get as much out of all of this as you put in!! In addition, when you come to class each day, please, be prepared! That means you should have already worked your way through all of the material in the chapter that your instructor has assigned before coming to class. Even for material beyond your current reading level, you should still be able to get something out of it, even if that only means recognizing a few words, reading the heading(s) of the article, etc.

Topics of the Chapters

Chapter One: Basics of the Lao Writing System and Introduction to Lao Culture

Here we'll learn to recognize all of the consonants of written Lao and most of the vowels, plus begin to put them together to form syllables. We'll also cover some important (and interesting) facts about the way the alphabet is organized, which can help us in remembering which consonants are which. We'll discuss the rules of tones in Lao relevant to the writing system. We'll also learn to start to recognize some important words in Lao, and start reading real live text right away.

In addition, we'll watch some videos and read some scholarly article excerpts which give some important background to understanding Lao history, culture and language use.

Chapter Two: Lao Buddhism

In this chapter we'll learn about the basic beliefs and practices of Lao Buddhism. We'll learn the story of the life of the Buddha. We'll learn how to chant a few chants in Pali, and how to properly behave around and talk to Lao Buddhist monks. We'll also learn to talk about the life of the Buddha and Buddhism in general in Lao.

In addition, we'll continue our study of the basics of the Lao alphabet, and become acquainted with the rest of the vowels that we didn't get to cover in Chapter One. And we'll cover quite a few more basic Lao sight words, and you'll begin to use these sight words in creative writing assignments.

Chapter Three: The Language of Information and Broad-

casting

In this chapter we'll wrap up our study of the basics of the Lao alphabet, and you'll learn about the important diacritics used in writing modern Lao, as well as various writing conventions. And we'll keep on increasing our sight word knowledge!

The main topic of this unit is specific uses of Lao language for the broadcasting of information to mass audiences. This includes news reporting (both on radio/TV and in the newspaper), various types of public announcements and types of written communication such as writing letters, and advertising. We'll watch informational videos in Lao produced in the US, and listen to recordings of Lao news broadcasts from the Internet and from Lao TV and radio in Laos and Thailand.

Chapter Four: Local History and Folklore

Believe it or not, after three chapters of studying Lao literacy, you'll be ready to read some simple narrative texts in Lao! We'll start with folk tales and other simple narratives, and if you're just learning to read and write, now you can go back and try some of those articles you couldn't read at all before in Chapters Two and Three. We'll also keep packing away those sight words. Trust me, they're important!

In addition to covering lots of folklore, both spoken and written, we'll learn some fascinating facts about local history in Laos, specifically beliefs and tales linked to specific geographical sites. We'll learn about many of what are considered the holiest sites for Lao people in Laos and Northeast Thailand, including watching videotaped interviews done on those sites. And we'll start to learn about the complex but highly interesting topic of Lao history, beginning with the history of the kingdoms which existed prior to the forming of the modern Lao nation state.

Chapter Five: History of the Modern State

In this chapter, we'll start to learn about more recent Lao history. This includes studying the reigns of the most important Lao kings, and Lao peoples' various interactions with neighboring countries, most notably Thailand. We'll examine the period in which Laos was a colony of France, learn why so many Lao people now live in Northeast Thailand, and other important topics.

A good deal of this chapter will be devoted to understanding the complex decades of war in Laos,

and getting acquainted with the creative and intellectual flourishing in Laos amidst all of that turmoil in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Chapter Six: Being Lao in Isaan

In this chapter we'll learn about the history, culture and language of the largest concentration of Lao people anywhere in the world, the 20+ million Lao inhabitants of Northeast Thailand or Isaan. We'll watch excerpts from a popular movie about Isaan topics (made largely in Lao language) from Thailand, which you'll find in your course Multimedia Materials. We'll also examine how the Isaan Lao are treated by the ruling majority in Thailand, and see plenty of examples of the vivid expressive Lao culture--especially music-- produced today in Isaan.

Chapter Seven: Modern Lao Literature

Lao literature has only been written in prose for a very short time, just a matter of decades, compared to centuries for Lao verse literature (poetry). Before you're exposed to the latter, we'll let you get acquainted with the former, which is much easier to relate to and employs a much more familiar vocabulary. We'll read examples of Lao writing from the highly productive period of the 1960s and 70s, as well as more recent creative writing, and watch a videotaped interview with one of the major figures in Lao literature over the past few decades.

Chapter Eight: Classical Lao Literature

In the final chapter of this textbook, you'll be presented with a very surface, very brief overview of several important genres and works of traditional Lao literature--just enough to give you a flavor of this huge topic. This includes basic poetic forms and a type of sung oral poetry called ຂໍ້ບໍ່ .