# GIVING VOICE: English Language Learning, Language Use, and the Resettlement Process of Cambodian Refugees in British Columbia

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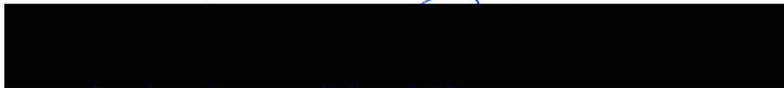

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## ABSTRACT

The acquisition of a new language is among the most profound of the hurdles a newcomer to Canada must face upon arrival. For Cambodian refugees, the process of English language learning must be situated within the context of their lives, taking into account their cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds, their traumatic experiences as refugees, and their experiences as residents in the country of resettlement. The objectives of this thesis are subsequently threefold: first, it aims to elucidate the more personal and experiential aspects of language and language learning. Second, it documents the levels of English language competence of Cambodians in British Columbia and it examines the influence of English language ability on numerous aspects of resettlement. Third, the research identifies barriers which may preclude Khmer individuals from seeking further English language training.

The sample of thirty-seven is divided among two subsets: (1) seventeen adult Cambodian men and women; and (2) twenty service providers (*i.e.* EAL instructors, immigrant and refugee settlement workers and governmental personnel) offering support services to Cambodian clients. All participants are residents of the Greater Victoria or Vancouver areas of British Columbia. Data was collected by myself in the form of open-ended interviews.

The information collected covers a broad range of topics so as to provide a more complete view of the language learning experiences of Cambodians in British Columbia. In their accounts, participants identified a number of variables which are believed to impact the language learning process. Among the more salient factors are (a) trauma associated with the refugee experience; (b) institutional barriers which may prevent access to English training programs, or conversely, make available programs unsuitable; (c) situational barriers (*e.g.* job commitments, home responsibilities, lack of money, and transportation problems); (d) the predominant backgrounds of Khmer refugees; and (e) the linguistic and orthographic distinctions between Khmer and English.

The compilation of contextually-grounded data calls into question the applicability of 'social-process' theories of additional language acquisition advanced by

scholars such as Robert Gardner (1985), H. Douglas Brown (1986, 1994) and John Schumann (1976, 1978). Their notions of motivation, acculturation and social distance are criticized on the following grounds: (1) the theories are formulated in terms which are largely irrelevant to the situations of Cambodian refugees; (2) such explanatory paradigms underscore the behaviors, attitudes and reactions of members of the host society and presuppose that the refugee or immigrant is in a position of power with respect to their changed social milieu and circumstances, such that they are able to manipulate it to ultimately facilitate their adaptation; and (3) theories focusing on inter-group relations fail to recognize intra-group heterogeneity, *e.g.* the different perspectives of men and women, persons of different generations, and individuals hailing from different class or occupational backgrounds.

Data generated from this study further exemplifies problematic aspects of Canadian governmental policy, which accepts immigrants and refugees but does not provide adequate services and/or support to make their adjustment to the Canadian milieu less difficult. This research also illustrates the need for refugees to establish a degree of continuity in the country of resettlement as a means for facilitating their adjustment. Several recommendations, garnered from participants in the sample and reinforced by published materials, emerge from the study.

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family and Gordon Fyvie, I extend my deepest gratitude and affection for always being there.

# DEDICATION

To my mother, Carol May Yates (1943-1989), for her inspiration, encouragement, and love.

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Second World War, approximately one in ten newcomers to Canada has been a refugee fleeing persecution or someone displaced by international or civil strife[1] (Employment and Immigration Canada 1982). Unlike immigrants, these newcomers are not voluntary migrants in search of a better life. Rather, "they are emergencies: the homeless, the stateless, the dispossessed" (Tepper 1980: 5). Many arrive to the country of resettlement with limited English language experience, few recognized occupational skills and little familiarity with 'Western' ways of thinking and acting. The process of adaptation to a completely new life situation is therefore a profoundly difficult one. Cultural, linguistic and social differences permeate and influence every aspect of resettlement. In fact, they lie at the core of the task of adjustment.

Of the more than four hundred thousand displaced persons who have entered Canada since World War Two, many are of Indochinese descent. The political turmoil engendered by the governments of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos during the 1970's precipitated a massive exodus of Indochinese peoples from their homelands. From 1979 onward, more than one hundred thousand Indochinese have settled across Canada. Dorais (1987: 52) estimates that between seventy-five and ninety per cent of these newcomers were unable to communicate in either official language at the time of their arrival.

In pluralistic societies like Canada, the retention of one's native language helps to preserve cultural traditions and beliefs and helps to proclaim one's distinctive identity within the wider society. Yet not surprisingly, some degree of English or French language ability is an integral part of the process of adjustment to Canadian life. As Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services' personnel maintain,

> the refugee's ability to use English will relate to all aspects of his/her resettlement—employment, coping with everyday living, developing friendships and being able to verbalize experiences and feelings for the sake of one's own mental well-being. Building confidence in one's English ability will bring a sense of control and choice into the refugee's

[1] The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1993) estimates that, in 1992, the total number of refugees was 18.2 million people. An additional 24 million were internally displaced, with the result that approximately one in every 130 people on earth has been forced into flight.

> new life. (as cited in the Greater Toronto Southeast Asian Refugee Task Force Report 1981: 48)

To date, research on additional language acquisition[2] (see Berryman 1983; Cumming 1991) suggests that full proficiency in an additional language may take from two to seven years *under favourable conditions*. What, then, are some of the factors or conditions affecting successful language learning? Although of course the list is undoubtedly endless, four scholars (*i.e.* Gardner and Lambert 1959, 1972; Schumann 1976, 1978; Gardner 1985; Brown 1994) have placed strong emphasis on affective characteristics, or emotional responses, aroused by attempts to learn another language. Important aspects in this domain include the concepts of motivation, acculturation and social distance. I would argue, however, that none of the research paradigms proposed thus far is completely sufficient to take into account the complexities of the Cambodian refugee experience.

The data examined here is collected from the responses of thirty-seven persons. Research was conducted by myself in the form of open-ended interviews. For one-quarter of the interviews, a Cambodian translator was required. The sample of thirty-seven is divided among two subsets: (1) adult Cambodian men and women residing in the Greater Victoria and Vancouver areas of British Columbia; and (2) service providers (*i.e.* EAL[3] instructors, immigrant and refugee settlement workers and governmental personnel) offering support services to Cambodian clients in these places. This multi-faceted approach is intended to provide a more holistic view of the language learning experiences of Cambodians in British Columbia. Ultimately, I hope to elucidate information in the following three areas:

> 1. English language proficiency levels for members of the British Columbian Cambodian population (through assessments made by service providers and self-evaluations).

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[2] Additional Language Acquisition is defined as the subconscious or conscious processes by which a language other than the mother tongue is learnt in a natural or tutored setting (Ellis 1985: 6). Throughout this thesis, the terms 'acquisition' and 'learning' are used interchangeably although some scholars (see Kleinmann and Daniel 1981; Dulay et al. 1982) distinguish between conscious and subconscious language development. Stephen Krashen's 'Monitor Model' of additional language development is a notable example.

[3] EAL = English as an Additional Language. Among the seventeen Cambodians I queried, eleven maintained that they were proficient in a language other than Khmer and English.. Consequently, the term 'EAL' will be used throughout the thesis, rather than the more conventional term 'ESL' (English as a Second Language).

2. The influence and affect of English language ability on various aspects of resettlement. These include employment opportunities, ability to access services (*e.g.* health care system), ability to make friends outside the Cambodian community, and mental well-being.

3. The identification of barriers which may preclude further English language training and the inclusion of policy recommendations which address the concerns of this community.

The compilation of such information is intended to provide the reader with a more complete understanding of the Cambodian refugee experience and the resettlement process to Canada. Moreover, this thesis responds to the call (see Fleming 1989; Klassen and Burnaby 1993) for a qualitative approach which explores the personal and experiential aspects of language and language learning.

# CHAPTER TWO:
# HISTORICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

## Historical Background

Within approximately a decade, Cambodia[4] experienced a succession of upheavals that have had serious repercussions for its residents and the world at large. These changes include the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk by Lon Nol in 1970, during which time the country was subject to an extensive 'strategic bombing' campaign by the United States; the assumption of power in 1975 by the Khmer Rouge, who attempted to radically restructure society under the auspices of Democratic Kampuchea; the Vietnamese invasion and subsequent installation of a puppet government, named the People's Republic of Kampuchea (Ebihara 1981; Chandler and Kiernan 1983). The end of the 1970's saw massive movements of Khmer[5] within the country as they searched for lost relatives or returned to their villages, and outside, as they fled to Thailand, Laos or Vietnam in search of food and security (Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994). During the 1980's, the country began the slow path to recovery that extends to the present. Most recently, Cambodia has seen the repatriation of some 370,000 refugees housed in Thai border camps and held 'democratic' elections under the supervision of the United Nations (McLellan 1993b; Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994). While there is a potential for lasting peace, the situation in Cambodia remains uncertain. Several researchers (*e.g.* Ponchaud 1977; Vickery 1984, 1986; Becker 1986; Chandler 1991) have attempted to document and explain the circumstances that gave rise to the transformations in this country. A detailed examination of their accounts is beyond the scope of this paper; however, a short review of Cambodian history and the Khmer Rouge years is

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[4] From 1970 onward, several different regimes have ruled Cambodia, and frequently each polity has changed the country's name upon assumption of power. In this thesis, I use the English name, 'Cambodia', to refer to the country. 'Kampuchea', Cambodians' pronunciation of their country's name in English, is avoided except in reference to governmental structures because of its negative associations with the Khmer Rouge.

[5] The Khmer are the dominant ethnic group in Cambodia, comprising some 85-90 per cent of the population. 'Khmer' also refers to the Cambodian language which is spoken by the majority of Cambodian residents. For stylistic variation, 'Khmer' will be used interchangeably with 'Cambodian' throughout the thesis.

necessary in order to understand Khmer refugee life in Canada and other resettlement countries.[6]

**Pre-Revolutionary Cambodia**

From approximately the ninth to the fifteenth century, Cambodia ascended to a period of political and cultural florescence under the Angkor empire, which extended over parts of present-day Thailand, Vietnam and Burma (Myanmar) (Munson 1968; Marcucci 1986). This time was characterized by a complex sociopolitical organization recognizing divine kinship and producing distinctive art and monumental architecture. By the time of the fifteenth century, however, the Angkor empire began to decline politically and economically as former vassals of the state declared their independence. The Thai, especially, became a major invading force. Their attacks increased until Angkor itself was captured and sacked in 1430-31 (Ross 1990). The fall of Angkor ended the dominant period of the Khmer state. Thereafter, its borders shrank to approximately that of today's Cambodia (Ross 1990; Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994).

With the downfall of Angkor, Thailand and Vietnam became increasingly powerful. The imposition of French protectorate status in the 1860's prevented Cambodia's neighbors from swallowing it up completely. The French consolidated their hold on the country in the following years, only briefly interrupted by the Japanese occupation during World War II (Welaratna 1993). It was not until the late 1940's and early 1950's that the struggle for independence gained prominence among the different levels of Cambodian society (Ross 1990).

Cambodia was granted formal independence from France in 1954 (Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994). The government subsequently organized itself as a constitutional monarchy, with a king as its figurehead, and effective political power vested in a prime minister, cabinet and legislature. The political scene at this time was largely dominated by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who abdicated his position as king in 1955 to become prime minister of the country (Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994). During the first twelve years of his rule, Cambodia was a relatively peaceful and stable entity. Sihanouk's charismatic personality, combined with his links to Cambodian aristocracy, garnered

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[6] Ledgerwood *et al.* (1994) suggest that one may find it heuristically useful or even necessary to use 'pre-revolutionary Cambodia' as a baseline to discuss post-1970 changes in Khmer existence both in the homeland and elsewhere.

him continued support from the rural peasantry. Among the politicized urban elite, however, Sihanouk maintained power by keeping opponents off-balance "through a range of manipulative stratagems, pitting them against one another when he could and co-opting them with governmental positions when he could not" (Ross 1990: xxix).

Toward the end of the 1960's, Cambodia's stability became increasingly threatened by internal and external forces that Sihanouk could not handle. "Economic difficulties, endemic corruption, growing alienation between the people and the government, the growth of a militant communist insurgency, and repercussions from the raging conflict in neighboring Vietnam" shook the country's foundations (Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994: 11). When Sihanouk travelled abroad in January 1970 to solicit Soviet and Chinese assistance in restraining the presence of North Vietnamese sanctuaries on Cambodian soil, domestic opposition to his regime became increasingly outspoken. The Cambodian National Assembly, under the orchestration of Premier Lon Nol, voted to bar the reentry of Sihanouk to the country (Ross 1990). Thereafterwards, Cambodia was plunged into a period of war, chaos, and human suffering perhaps unparalleled in its history (Etcheson 1984; Chandler 1991; McLellan 1993a).

**Revolution in Cambodia**

The Lon Nol government that succeeded the fall of Sihanouk quickly abolished the monarchy and proclaimed itself the Khmer Republic. This polity initially enjoyed strong support among the urban population, but it soon proved itself ill-equipped to the tasks of governing and defending the country and capturing the allegiance of the Cambodian people. From 1970 to 1975, a group of Cambodian communists—dubbed the 'Khmer Rouge' by Sihanouk—rapidly extended control over the country and its population. Fighting between government troops and the Khmer Rouge devastated much of the countryside, as did the United States' policy of 'strategic bombing' (Shawcross 1984; Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994). Although this bombing was undertaken to destroy North Vietnamese enclaves in Cambodia, it also caused heavy damage to civilian areas (Smith 1987). By 1975, the capital city of Phnom Penh was swollen to five times its size by an influx of Khmer fleeing the countryside, while those remaining in rural areas came increasingly under the control of the Khmer Rouge (Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994).

On April 17, 1975 the Khmer Rouge overcame the American-supported Lon Nol forces and marched into Phnom Penh. The communist army, under the leadership of Pol Pot, was initially welcomed by the Cambodian populace, who wished for peace and stability following years of warfare. The new regime's ideals of independence, peace, neutrality, nonalignment, sovereignty, democracy, and prosperity for the Cambodian people (Ngor 1987: 91) appeared to grant the citizenry their hopes for peace. Particularly because the Khmer Rouge cadres were ethnic Khmer, people believed that the Khmer Rouge would uphold the social values and traditions that had evolved from earlier times. Moreover, unlike the two previous regimes, the Khmer Rouge were nationalists fighting for a more just, less corrupt social order. When the communists emerged victorious, Cambodian people believed that the fighting and bloodshed that had ravaged the country would finally end (Welaratna 1993).

The goals of the Khmer Rouge regime were to effect a social, cultural, and economic transformation, without the aid of Western technology or expertise, that would facilitate the creation of a self-sufficient and egalitarian society . However, as time went on, Democratic Kampuchea (the country's revised name) became a highly oppressive state, enforcing radically new forms of organization, ideology, and behavior (Ebihara 1985).[7] Among the most dramatic changes were the following:

(1) Collectivization of the economy. According to the Khmer Rouge, self-sufficiency of the country was to be achieved through accelerated agricultural production, which in turn would provide the impetus to develop other sectors of the economy. City inhabitants were consequently evacuated to the countryside where the entire population was converted into agricultural labourers (see May 1986; Szymusiak 1986; Ngor 1987). Cooperatives were established, communal ownership of property (*e.g.* land, draft animals, tools) emphasized, and communal distribution of goods and produce the recognized ideal (though not always the practice) (Ebihara 1985). The work team, composed of ten to fifteen 'families,' became the basic organizing principle for grouping together larger labour units of varying sizes. The latter were mobilized for

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[7] It must be remembered that living conditions varied through time and in different regions of Democratic Kampuchea. "At the onset of DK, some areas were controlled by factions of the Kampuchean Communist Party that were more moderate than Pol Pot, and these regions experienced tolerable living conditions in terms of work loads, availability of food, and so on. However, after 1977-78, when Pol Pot gained ascendancy over the other factions, harsher circumstances and measures came to prevail virtually everywhere" (Ebihara 1985: 130).

agricultural work and construction projects, particularly the erection of large-scale irrigation projects that were believed to facilitate food production (Ebihara 1985).

(2) Disruption of the family unit. In pre-revolutionary Khmer society, the family—whether nuclear or extended—was regarded as a fundamental socioeconomic unit (Ebihara 1974). Members of a household were united by deep emotional bonds, cooperative efforts in work, sharing of resources and mutual aid—and these sentiments and obligations extended to relatives on both sides of the family. However, the reorganization of Democratic Kampuchea's populace into work teams undermined the authority of the family by subverting the family's control over economic activities, physically separating family members, and eroding domestic life. Children past the age of six or seven were often taken from their parents and placed in separate children's labour camps; adolescents were usually put into mobile work groups and sent to various parts of the country; husbands and wives, too, were sometimes separated. Consequently, the extended family, and very often the nuclear family, ceased to exist as an economic and residential unit, as did its ability to control, support and comfort its members (Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994).

(3) Suppression of religion. Just as Khmer Rouge leaders undertook to destroy the authority and security of the Cambodian family in their efforts to create a new society, so too did they attack Cambodian religious beliefs. Khmer Therevada Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity (the latter practised by only a few Khmer) were ruthlessly suppressed (Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994). Therevada Buddhism, which had been the state religion in Cambodia, saw many of its temples destroyed, numerous monks killed or forced to break their vows, and ritual activity forbidden during the period from 1975-78 (Boehnlein 1987; Welaratna 1993). In its place, the Khmer Rouge instituted a political ideology that stressed new values and codes of conduct. The duty of each individual was to obey Anka, the high revolutionary organization governing the country. Other allegiances—to family members, to one's religion—simply were not tolerated.

Life under the Khmer Rouge resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of Cambodians, with estimates ranging from one to three million persons killed out of a pre-revolutionary figure of seven million (for varying estimates, see Chandler and

Kiernan 1983; Vickery 1984, 1986; Chandler 1991).[8] The Democratic Kampuchean regime was finally thwarted in late 1978, when, as a result of continuing tensions with Vietnam, the Vietnamese invaded the country and captured Phnom Penh. Khmer Rouge cadre were forced west where they established guerilla bases along the Thai-Cambodian border. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese quickly installed a new government, named the People's Republic of Kampuchea, which was composed of Cambodians but bolstered in terms of military capacity by Vietnamese soldiers (Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994).

The following year saw massive movements of Khmer within the country as they searched for lost relatives or returned to their villages, and outside, as they fled to Thailand, Laos or Vietnam in search of food and security. Fighting between the retreating Khmer Rouge cadre and the invading Vietnamese, the migration of Khmer throughout the country, disruption of the agricultural cycle, and a lack of draft animals and seed had created famine conditions that were relieved only by international assistance (Sheehy 1986; Scott 1989; Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994). From the late 1970's onward, literally hundreds of thousands of Cambodians were housed in refugee camps established along the Thai-Cambodian border (Shawcross 1984; Reynell 1989; Scott 1989). There, they lingered until they could be resettled to other countries or repatriated to their country of origin.

Throughout the 1980's, Cambodia slowly began a recovery that continues today. Cities and towns were repopulated, villages rebuilt, families reunited and Buddhism revived. In 1989, the country's name was changed to the State of Cambodia, and a new constitution introduced which included provisions for the ownership of private property and freedom of religion (Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994). Most recently, Cambodia has witnessed the signing of a peace accord between various warring factions (1991), the repatriation of some 370,000 refugees housed in Thai border camps (1991), and in 1993, 'democratic' elections under the supervision of the United Nations (McLellan 1993b; Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994). While there is a potential for lasting peace, the situation in Cambodia remains uncertain. As McLellan (1993b) and Ledgerwood *et al.* (1994) maintain, the continued acts of violence perpetuated by various political factions, in particular by the Khmer Rouge, have not improved the security of the country.

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[8] Most scholars (see Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994) agree that Democratic Kampuchea was responsible for the deaths of at least one and one-half million of its own people.

## Canada's Immigration Policy

Before 1975, there were few immigrants from Indochina in Canada (Employment and Immigration Canada 1982; Van Esterik and Van Esterik 1988). Those that did arrive were often highly skilled and educated, representing the most promising individuals from their respective countries (Indra 1985). These immigrants, the majority of whom were Vietnamese, tended to settle in larger urban centers (*e.g.* Toronto, Montreal and Quebec City) where many of them went on to pursue distinguished careers as engineers, university professors, doctors and accountants (Indra 1985; Van Esterik and Van Esterik 1988). As one claimed,

> Canadians were very impressed with us. They thought we were smart and worked hard. That is because we were a highly selected group. These people paved the way for Canadians to think well of Vietnamese. (as cited in Indra 1985: 443)

The exclusive period of immigration ended in April 1975, however, as communist takeovers in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos signalled the way for a more significant influx of Indochinese arrivals. In response to the changed political situation, the Canadian government declared that Vietnamese and Cambodians already in Canada could apply for immediate immigrant status. The following month, Canada admitted approximately two thousand refugees from evacuation camps in the United States (Employment and Immigration Canada 1982). Another thousand came from other countries, followed thereafter by a small, but continuous, stream of political refugees (Adelman *et al.* 1980; Indra 1985).

Akin to the first wave, the majority of these second phase newcomers were ethnic Vietnamese (Indra 1985). Many had originally fled North Vietnam to escape communist rule, only to leave the Southern region subsequently as conditions deteriorated. The most frequently cited reason for coming to Canada was that many of these newcomers felt uncomfortable about living in the United States. According to Indra (1985: 444), "virtually all had fought together with Americans so when the United States pulled out of Vietnam, they felt they had been deserted."

In Canada, the immigrants established communities across the country, especially in places like Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta (Indra 1985; Dorais 1988). The 1977 governmental policy, in which the federal cabinet voted to

take in fifty families per month (later increased to eighty in 1978), allowed these communities to grow in both size and number. Between 1975 and 1978, it is estimated that 9,060 refugees were admitted to the country (Adelman *et al.* 1980). However, it should be noted that "even at this time Canada carefully selected the individuals who were allowed entry. Although defined as political refugees, those who were able to come were highly skilled" (Indra 1985: 444).

The year 1978 proved a turning point in Canadian immigration policy. In November of that year, the plight of a ship called the *Hai Hong* focused world attention on Southeast Asian problems.[9] Fleeing South Vietnam, the twenty-five hundred refugees on board the *Hai Hong* first sought asylum in various Southeast Asian countries (*e.g.* Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia), to which they were denied entry. The ship docked in Malaysia for months before the refugees could be resettled in other areas. Canada eventually agreed to accept 608 of the escapees—an extraordinary offer since it was initially made by the Minister of Employment and Immigration without prior consent of the federal cabinet (Adelman 1991). This action paved the way for further flexible reactions on the part of the Canadian government.

Unfortunately the *Hai Hong* incident was only one indication of the massive exodus of Indochinese peoples from their homelands. In Cambodia, the 1978 collapse of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime, followed by the invasion of the Vietnamese, precipitated a great outpouring of Cambodians to the borders of Thailand, Vietnam and Laos. According to Aitken (1982), over a quarter of a million people fled to Thailand during the early stages of this crisis. Laos, too, experienced a proportionately large exodus from its borders due to its deteriorating political and economic conditions (Adelman 1982; Scott 1989; Van Esterik 1992). As Laotians and Cambodians fled overland, Vietnamese often escaped from their country by sea, acquiring the name 'boat people.' All in all, by the end of the 1970's there were literally hundreds of thousands of people fleeing Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, often at great risk to their lives (Shawcross 1984; Reynell 1989; Scott 1989).

The Immigration Act of 1976 (proclaimed in 1978) allowed Canada to respond to the escalating crisis. Among the objectives of the revised policy was the following

[9] Some scholars (*e.g.* Tepper 1980) have used the term 'Southeast Asian' to refer to the peoples of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Throughout this thesis, I will employ the term 'Indochinese' except when quoting particular scholars.

commitment to "fulfill Canada's international obligations with respect to refugees and to uphold its humanitarian tradition with respect to the displaced and persecuted" (as cited in Employment and Immigration Canada 1982: 7). Under the new law, the term *refugee* was defined for the first time according to the tenets of the 1951 Geneva Convention. It stated that,

> a 'Convention refugee' means any person who, by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion,
>
> (a) is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, by reason of such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or
>
> (b) not having a country or nationality, is outside the country of his former habitual residence and is unable or, by reason of such fear, is unwilling to return to that country. (cited in Adelman *et al.* 1980: 138)

By adopting this universal definition, the Canadian government was able to respond to international refugee movements in a more efficacious manner. Yet at the same time, the definition proved much too restrictive as it did not recognize humanitarian movements of peoples fleeing war zones, such as those leaving Cyprus, Lebanon and of course Indochina during the 1970's. To compensate for this shortcoming, the government utilized the discretionary powers embodied in Section 6(2) of the Act. In addition to convention refugees, Section 6(2) provided that

> any person who is a member of a class *designated* by the Governor in Council as a class, the admission of members of which would be in accordance with Canada's humanitarian tradition with respect to the displaced and the persecuted may be granted admission subject to such regulations as may be established with respect thereto and notwithstanding any other regulations made under this act. (cited in Adelman *et al.* 1980: 139)

A special provision introduced in December 1978 identified the bulk of Indochinese arrivals as a designated class of refugees under the humanitarian proviso (Adelman *et al.* 1980; Employment and Immigration Canada 1982; Purves 1983).

Besides identifying 'convention' and 'designated class' refugees, two final provisions were introduced within the Immigration Act. The first of these exempted the 'points system' of immigrant selection among those refugees who qualified under the

United Nations Refugee Convention and Protocol (Employment and Immigration Canada 1982). The second, and perhaps more important proviso, maintained that "any church, corporation, or group of five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents could sponsor a refugee" (as cited in Indra 1985: 450). By announcing such a mandate, the government hoped to encourage public awareness and participation. It worked. According to Doreen Indra (1985: 450), "this clause led to a level of public involvement in refugee settlement unique in Canadian history and in the world."

With the new immigration policy in place, the Canadian government set a quota of eight thousand Indochinese refugees for the 1979 year (Adelman 1982). To this, an additional four thousand was added for refugees coming under private sponsorship. The challenge was clearly articulated: "those four thousand people would only be allowed to come if churches, organizations, or groups of private citizens were willing to financially support a refugee or refugee family for up to a year (if necessary). In addition, sponsors would be responsible for a whole range of settlement tasks" (Indra 1985: 450). Despite the obvious logistical difficulties connected to such an undertaking, the public response was overwhelming. Pressure was placed upon the government to adopt a more active refugee program. It responded by offering to raise the quota on privately-sponsored refugees to twenty-one thousand. In addition, it promised to take in an extra twenty-one thousand people on a one-to-one basis for every refugee sponsored by the private sector. The target to the end of 1980 was set at fifty thousand—the original eight thousand, plus the twenty-one thousand privately sponsored individuals and the twenty-one thousand matched government sponsored refugees (Adelman 1982; Employment and Immigration Canada 1982).

It took the private sector only four months to reach the imposed limit (Adelman *et al.* 1980). The strong public response was clearly disturbing to the Conservative government which was apprehensive about surpassing the fifty thousand person limit, lest a backlash movement develop. Consequently, it decided to maintain the restriction by reducing government sponsored refugees and replacing them with private ones. Any extra funds saved from government sponsorships could then be used for Cambodian relief (Adelman *et al.* 1980).

The shift in policy was loudly denounced by the opposition parties in Parliament. Church spokespersons and leaders of private sponsorship organizations, too, sharply criticized the Conservatives for reneging on their promise. The growth in

private sponsorship, the critics argued, mattered little to government efforts. Finally, in an attempt to placate the objections, the newly elected Liberal government pledged to take in an additional ten thousand government sponsored refugees (Adelman 1982; Employment and Immigration Canada 1982). This brought the total number of admitted Indochinese to sixty thousand by the end of 1980 (Purves 1983).

Since that time, the Indochinese have increasingly come to Canada through normal immigration channels (Employment and Immigration Canada 1982). As the numbers of incoming persons steadily declined during the 1980's, so too did the intensity of Canada's innovative immigration program. All in all, by 1981, approximately seventy-seven thousand Indochinese had been admitted to the country (Adelman 1982). In 1991, it is estimated that there were over 115,000 Indochinese in Canada (Statistics Canada 1991).[10]

The process of resettlement to a new and vastly different country has not been an easy one for the majority of Indochinese newcomers (Ottawa-Carleton South-East Asian Refugee Project 1983; Penfield 1986; Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988). Because the third wave mounted so quickly and reached such high proportions, many existing social service facilities were initially ill-equipped to deal with the arrivals (Indra 1985). In addition, the linguistic and cultural variability among these refugees precluded any generalized or unvarying response—a factor which was not always recognized by bureaucrats and sponsors with little knowledge of Southeast Asia (Van Esterik 1980; Indra 1985). Although a number of established second wave Indochinese residents were able to assist the newcomers with housing, employment and translation concerns, many Vietnamese, Lao and Khmer peoples had to initially adjust to their new lives on their own, without substantial support networks. In some cases, this led to profound feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Van Esterik 1980). According to one Lao,

> I went to Peace River, where I was the only Lao. I was so lonely that for months I hated to stay home and spent a lot of time walking. Eventually I went to Edmonton, but I didn't know any Lao there. I was desperate for information about friends and family in Laos. It took a while before I found another Lao—I heard him speaking Lao with another person quite by chance. Through him I was introduced to other people in the community. (cited in Indra 1985: 454)

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[10] The 1991 census figures further suggest that approximately 16, 940 are of Cambodian descent.

As the number of refugees increased in the late 1970's and early 1980's, so too did the effectiveness of the various service and sponsoring agencies (Van Esterik 1980). Yet despite the generous response, agencies, sponsors and volunteers typically dealt with only the most obvious and immediate needs like housing, emergency health care requirements, communication problems and employment (Van Esterik and Van Esterik 1988). Other concerns, such as those related to emotional trauma and anxiety associated with cultural or social discontinuity, tended to be downplayed by resettlement organizations (Indra 1985). For many refugees then, security and stability came not from administrative organizations but rather from personal ties with family members (if available), the community and any formalized ethnic associations (Minister of State Multiculturalism nd; Nann 1984). According to Indra (1985), these ties offer a cultural grounding which provides security and comfort to individuals adapting to a completely different life situation.

Given the profound linguistic, cultural and social differences which divide Canada and Indochina, the process of adjustment will necessarily take many years. As Doreen Indra (1985:463) maintains,

> most Southeast Asians . . . are here because of factors outside of their control. They are involuntary immigrants who would never have considered leaving under normal conditions. They are here, yet they are not entirely reconciled to it: nor have they fully absorbed what has happened to them, to their kin and countries. At the same time they are also being subjected to the demands of Canadian life; they have to learn new ways of thinking and doing things, to find jobs, to learn English, and to obey the laws. Concerns here and overseas are difficult to resolve and sometimes contradictory. In this respect, Southeast Asians today are some of the [country's] most psychologically stressed people.

## Ethnographic Background

### Biases in Data Collection

As any researcher knows, biases and limitations are inherent in most academic studies, whether they are qualitative or quantitative in focus. Consequently, it is not surprising that social science research pertaining to the Indochinese in Canada and abroad is hampered by a number of methodological problems, situational difficulties and instances of distortion or one-sidedness. For the reader or researcher, it is important to be aware of what the potential limitations are and how any future research

can be organized to overcome (or compensate for) some of these shortcomings. In the case of the Cambodian/Indochinese studies thus far assembled, problems include the following:

a). *Gaps in the research record; emphasis on particular research topics to the exclusion of others.*

According to scholars like David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan (1983), very few detailed ethnographic studies on traditional Cambodian life have been undertaken. "As far as we know," they assert, " only half a dozen ethnographic studies of villages in Kampuchea were written before the 1970's, and no serious studies were undertaken of Kampuchean urban life" (Chandler and Kiernan 1983: 6). In contrast, the number of works focusing on life during the Democratic Kampuchean period—arguably the most inaccessible period in Cambodian history—is surprisingly large (Chandler and Kiernan 1983; see Ponchaud 1977; Etcheson 1984; Vickery 1984, 1986; Chandler *et al.* 1988).

b). *Profound cultural changes brought on, in part, by political turmoil and the refugee experience.*

Following the defeat of the Lon Nol government in 1975, a Khmer Rouge official proudly announced that, "more than two thousand years of Cambodian history had ended" (as cited in Chandler 1991: 1). For the Democratic Kampuchean (DK) government, liberation of Cambodian life included, among other things, the destruction of traditional Khmer social structures, the abolition of institutions associated with education, religion and the arts, and the adoption of collectivized and egalitarian living practices (Vickery 1984, 1986; Chandler 1991). The eventual demise of the regime and the great outpouring of refugees to border camps led to further alterations in Cambodian social organization, cultural patterns and individual roles (Marcucci 1986). In his analysis of the camp experience, Marcucci (1986) maintains that camp asylum fostered refugee dependency on relief workers for the basic necessities of food, shelter, medical care and security which in turn contributed to feelings of apathy or depression. Other scholars (*e.g.* Aitken 1982; Shawcross 1984; Reynell 1989) have documented cases of rape, robbery, epidemics and general social malaise. "For the Khmer in the border camps," Reynell (1989: 188) maintains, "the cost of life in psychological, social, cultural and educational terms [was] high."

c). *Research on Indochinese Refugees in Canada: Biases in Data Collection.*

To date, virtually all research on Indochinese refugees in Canada has focused on the Vietnamese or Vietnamese-Chinese, while Lao and Khmer newcomers have been systematically ignored (see Tepper 1980; Indra 1987; Dorais *et al.* 1988; exceptions: Damov 1989; McLellan 1993a, 1993b). In addition, published studies dealing with religious institutions, community level organizations and individual and community attempts at cultural maintenance have remained quite sparse (Indra 1987). Some researchers (*e.g.* Tung 1980, 1984; Thuy 1984; Jones Jr. and Strand 1986) believe that the comparability of the refugee experience among Indochinese groups, along with the exposure of these groups to roughly contemporaneous settlement demands in the receiving country, allows one to draw out a few basic generalities. As Tung (1980: xiii) contends:

> although [scholars] fully realize that, strictly speaking, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and Lao H'mong are different, with distinct cultures and traditions . . . our contention is that, in the context of the refugee experience, all these groups have common features which link them together more than differences that make them separate.

By necessity then, the ethnographic research represented in this thesis will primarily draw on information garnered from studies dealing with the Indochinese refugee population as a whole. Whenever possible, evidence pertaining to Cambodians will be highlighted and emphasized. Although the bulk of these studies are Canadian-based, some U.S. data has also been included for the purposes of comparison. The information gathered focuses on a variety of resettlement issues, ranging from language use to mental health status.

**Ethnographic Characteristics in the Country of Origin**

In earlier portions of the paper, the sociocultural consequences engendered by the implementation of Democratic Kampuchean ideologies and the subsequent camp experiences were briefly alluded to. Yet it must also be remembered that pre-1975 social conditions undoubtedly affected ensuing resettlement demands as well, particularly in the case of elderly Cambodian refugees. Following the demise of the Khmer Rouge regime, many Cambodians hoped (and still hope) for a return to Cambodia's "golden age" of the 1960's, when Prince Sihanouk ruled the country and

life was peaceful (Tasker and Hiebert 1991; Chanda 1992). Evidence collected by Steinberg (1959), Munson (1968), Ebihara (1974) and Garry (1980) make it possible to comment on what they have termed 'traditional' cultural characteristics. While in depth discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, a few of these features are detailed below.[11]

(1) *Social structure.* Traditionally, Khmer society was hierarchically divided into four relatively closed classes: the royalty, the officials, the clergy and the peasantry (Steinberg 1959; Munson 1968). Interactions between each class were marked by formal patterns of respect and behavior. Patron-client relationships were common: high ranking men were called upon to serve as protectors and service providers to lower standing Khmer who in turn paid homage—through labour, food and military service (Marcucci 1986). According to Marcucci (1986: 58), "the structure of subordination and control was dependent on the perceived benefits derived from such reciprocal relationships, and thus were subject to negotiation and change." Because the structure of relationships remained flexible, Marcucci asserts, the social framework continued to be viable, despite political and economic transformations. Some scholars (*e.g.* Garry 1980; Vickery 1986) contend that this structure remained relatively stable from the Angkor period (802-1431) onward through the French protectorate era (1864-1953).

The bestowal of independence in 1954 somewhat modified social patterns for it brought greater opportunities for personal advancement within the system. Subsequent changes included an increase in the size of the bureaucracy and military, as well as the appearance of a small petit-bourgeois sector and proletariat class. Notwithstanding, Cambodians remained class-conscious (Minister of State Multiculturalism nd) and continued to incorporate status distinctions into their interpersonal relationships (Van Esterik 1980; Vickery 1986).

(2) *Primary Occupations.* Given the predominant social structure in pre-revolutionary Cambodia, it is not surprising that the majority of Cambodians hailed from a rural background, where they primarily engaged in agricultural work. Up to ninety per cent of the Khmer population were believed to be rice farmers before the Democratic Kampuchean accession (Garry 1980; Minister of State Multiculturalism nd; Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation 1981; Vickery 1986). Following the Khmer Rouge rise to power, this percentage rose even higher (Chandler 1991).

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[11] When possible, more recent Cambodian data will be combined with pre-1975 information.

In Canada and the United States, evidence garnered from recent Cambodian arrivals corroborates this occupational pattern. For example, sixty-eight per cent of male Cambodian refugees in Dallas reported that they came from rural, agricultural-based villages (Marcucci 1986). In addition to farming, other frequently cited occupations included military-related employment and sales positions (Strand and Jones Jr. 1985; Marcucci 1986; Deschamps 1987). Few Cambodians came from highly skilled backgrounds, although Marcucci (1986) states that a significant proportion of his sample were students at the time of Pol Pot's *coup d'état.* Likewise, few women have indicated that they were employed in a formal capacity during the pre-revolutionary era, though many from rural backgrounds maintained that they were involved in rice harvesting (Marcucci 1986; Deschamps 1987).

(3) *Descent and Residence Patterns.* Evidence pertaining to Cambodian household composition and size is fraught with inconsistencies. Families have alternatively been described as having either patrilineal descent (Minister of State Multiculturalism nd; Indra 1985) or bilateral kinship reckoning (Steinberg 1959; Munson 1968). Likewise, the predominant residence pattern varies, depending on the scholar. Marcucci (1986) states that most Khmer lived in nuclear families during the pre-revolutionary period, while the Minister of State Multiculturalism (nd: 4) maintains that the typical Cambodian family consisted of three generations: "usually a senior couple, a married son with his wife and children and the senior couple's unmarried children."

The above data thus suggest that Cambodian family life was characterized by a great deal of flexibility. Indeed, Ebihara (1974, 1977) notes that preferences to live with one's parents or to live more autonomously varied with each individual. According to Ebihara, such individual variation may have had a practical or survival value since "peasant villagers [could] adjust household size and composition in response to changing circumstances within the family itself and within the larger demographic and economic context" (Ebihara 1977: 65-66, as cited in Marcucci 1986: 113).

(4) *Religion.* Prior to the Pol Pot takeover, to be Khmer was to be Buddhist (Marcucci 1986). Therevada Buddhism was adhered to by almost ninety per cent of the Cambodian population (Steinberg 1959). Rather than a revealed dogma, Therevada Buddhism was a line of conduct—a psychological attitude that was felt to give direction

to one's life. The fundamentals of the doctrine were embodied in the Four Noble Truths. These were

> 1. Existence invariably leads to unhappiness, which follows from the impermanence of all living elements,
>
> 2. Unhappiness is caused by desire *(tanha); tanha* causes people to become attached to the impermanent,
>
> 3. Unhappiness can be avoided by the crushing of desire,
>
> 4. Desire can be crushed by strict adherence to a prescribed moral path (cited in Steinberg 1959: 60).

Following the Democratic Kampuchean rise to power, religious teachings, practices and institutions were branded as subversive and attempts were made to eradicate them. Some recent evidence (*e.g.* Indra 1985; Buchignani 1988), however, suggests that the role of religion is again an important one—particularly for those resettled Indochinese. These studies will be explored in more detail in the proceeding section.

**Ethnographic Characteristics in the Country of Resettlement**

Upon arrival to North America, Cambodian and other Indochinese refugees were faced with a number of resettlement demands associated with language acquisition, employment, and cultural discontinuity. Their process of adjustment has been described and analysed by various researchers (see bibliography for specifics). What follows, then, is my attempt to draw the data together and, in turn, to elucidate the Indochinese (particularly the Cambodian) refugee experience.

1. Demographic Profile

(i) *Age.* As a whole, Indochinese refugees admitted to Canada between the late 1970's and early 1980's constituted a relatively young population. Employment and Immigration Canada (1982) estimates that more than eighty per cent of these newcomers were less than thirty years of age. Of those thirty years and older, seventeen per cent were between thirty and sixty-four years, while less than two per cent were sixty-five years old or more.

When data focusing on Cambodians is isolated, results exhibit a similar pattern—although, in some areas, Cambodians tend to be slightly older than other Indochinese groups. For example, the Ottawa-Carleton South-East Asian Refugee Project (1984: 8) documented the following age distribution scheme for Cambodians residing in the Ottawa-Hull district: sixty-five per cent were 25 years or younger; thirty per cent were between 26 and 55; while just five per cent were 55 years or older. In Vancouver, fifty-eight per cent of the persons represented in the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (1993) report were between the ages of 26 and 65 years, while the very young (0-12 years) and very old (over 65) were virtually non-represented. Similar age distribution patterns have been recorded among various United States Khmer populations (see Jones Jr. and Strand 1986; Marcucci 1986; Zaharlick and Brainard 1987).

(ii) *Sex Ratios.* Evidence garnered from the Vancouver (Immigrant Services Society of B.C. 1993) and Ottawa-Hull (Ottawa-Carleton South-East Asian Refugee Project 1984) Cambodian populations report a sex ratio skewed slightly in favour of women.[12] Other Indochinese groups (*i.e.* Vietnamese and Lao) surveyed for the Ottawa project show an inverse ratio, with slightly more males represented than females. Although this evidence provides a baseline for analysis in the areas under study, it must be remembered that these ratios are highly subject to change and are not intended to represent male/female ratios for the entire Canadian Indochinese population.

(iii) *Settlement Patterns.* Between 1979 and 1986—the apex of Indochinese immigration to Canada—refugees settled across the country. The sponsorship program dispersed these newcomers in cities and towns alike, so that by the mid-1980's, numerous areas were home to at least a small number of Indochinese (Indra 1985; Copeland 1988; Dorais 1988). Notwithstanding, many of those who initially went to the smaller towns have since moved to larger centers where they find themselves less isolated from other refugees, better able to get jobs and to procure familiar items of food and culture (Indra 1985). In Canada, metropolitan cities like Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary and Winnipeg all support substantial Indochinese populations (see Indra 1985; Dorais 1988; Van Esterik and Van Esterik 1988; Immigrant Services Society of B.C. 1993 for statistics). Some medium-sized centers (*e.g.* Victoria, Quebec

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[12] Of a total population numbering 1125 persons in 1991, the Immigrant Services Society (1993) counted 600 females and 525 males. In Ottawa-Hull, there were 124 females and 114 males at the time of the study (Ottawa-Carleton South-East Asian Refugee Project 1984).

City and Ottawa) too, are home to relatively well-developed Indochinese communities (Ottawa-Carleton South-East Asian Refugee Project 1983; Chan and Indra 1988), while most towns, not surprisingly, tend to have fewer Indochinese residents (Indra 1985).

2. Employment and Education

In terms of employment, it seems that generally, most Indochinese refugees worked in an unskilled or semi-skilled capacity upon arrival to Canada (Damov 1989; Sauvé 1990; Boyd 1992). These positions were primarily based in the service industry, although employment in the garment, construction and manufacturing industries was also popular (Greater Toronto Southeast Asian Refugee Task Force 1981; Ottawa-Carleton South-East Asian Refugee Project 1983; Indra 1985; Copeland 1988). Typically, these jobs were low-paying and required low levels of English language proficiency (Anderson and Lynam 1987).

Given the predominant job types, instances of underemployment[13] were common. According to members of the Greater Toronto Southeast Asian Refugee Task Force (1981), few refugees gain employment in occupations similar to those in which they were employed in their country of origin. Among the Indochinese groups, only the Vietnamese (see Dorais 1988) have been represented to any great extent in professional or white-collar positions (*e.g.* office workers, engineers, lawyers, professors, et cetera). For Cambodians and Laotians, the numbers of students and professionals or white-collar workers constitute a very small minority of those employed or otherwise engaged—less than twelve per cent in some areas (Dorais 1988). Factors identified as contributing to this situation include poor knowledge of English, lack of Canadian work experience, insufficient job skills and problems related to educational equivalency (Copeland 1988).

In addition to cases of underemployment, unemployment rates were also high. Often the "last to be hired and the first to be fired" (Beiser 1992), immigrants and refugees in general are more profoundly affected by downturns in the economy than many other Canadians. During the recession in Alberta (1980-1983), for example, it was estimated that thirty to forty per cent of all adult Indochinese in the province were without work (Indra 1985). The weak economic situation of these refugees sometimes necessitates migrations to more economically productive areas; other responses include

[13] Underemployment is here defined as working at a level below occupation in the home country.

taking on two jobs or having a number of family members work in order to, not only survive in the host country, but to have enough income to sponsor the immigration of additional family members (Indra 1985).

Education

Low levels of educational achievement in the home country have been widely documented for many Indochinese refugees. According to the data available (see Ottawa-Carleton South-East Asian Refugee Project 1983; Copeland 1988: 101), approximately three-quarters of the 1979-1982 arrivals did not complete high school and one quarter had received no formal education at all. Given the history of disruption in the countries or origin, such statistics are hardly surprising. They may, however, make learning English more difficult which, in turn, affects job training as well as opportunities for adequate employment.

In Canada, education is recognized as a primary mechanism for economic advancement (Copeland 1988). As such, it tends to be highly valued within Southeast Asian immigrant and refugee communities (Van Esterik and Van Esterik 1988). Copeland's 1984 (cited in Copeland 1988: 101) study of Southeast Asian adolescents in Winnipeg revealed that a large number (45%) expected to complete university or attend at the graduate level. Vocational training was the goal of sixteen per cent, while thirty-six per cent anticipated high school graduation. Only one person did not expect to complete high school.

3. Receptivity of the Host Society

Presently, thirty-five identified hate groups are known to exist in Canada (Beiser 1992). A report released by the All Party Parliamentary Special Committee on Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society (1984) stated that fifteen per cent of Canadians exhibit blatantly racist attitudes and an additional twenty to twenty-five per cent have racist tendencies (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988). Many more Canadians, while not openly racist, are nevertheless felt to harbour private feelings of prejudice (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988; Opoku-Dapaah 1994b).

Sadly, visible minorities like the Indochinese often become the targets for discrimination and displaced hostility brought on by external factors, such as downturns in the economy (Starr and Roberts 1981, 1982; Nicassio 1985; Hein 1991). Non-European immigrants and refugees are frequently indicted for taking jobs and thus driving up unemployment rates among Canadian-born persons or, conversely, for failing to find work and thereby becoming a drain on the country's welfare system. Such negative perceptions are particularly acute in depressed regions (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988).

In a 1977 study of ethno-cultural groups conducted by Barry *et al.* (cited in Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988), Asians and Carribbean peoples ranked at the bottom of a scale of acceptability. Many of those surveyed cited cultural "strangeness" and perceived unwillingness to assimilate as factors influencing their decision. More recent evidence (*e.g.* Copeland 1988; Akbari 1991; Fleras and Elliott 1992) suggests that resistance to Canada's multiculturalist philosophy on the part of some Canadians has continued. A 1993 poll marshalled by *The Globe and Mail* indicated that more than seventy per cent of those surveyed believe that the multicultural mosaic is not working and must give way to the U.S. style of cultural absorption (as cited in Bissoondath 1994). Many respondents mentioned a preference for 'homogenization' of Canadian society through the adoption by immigrants and refugees of Canada's values and way of life. A second poll, conducted for the federal government by Ekos Research Associates Inc., was more forthright. "Four in ten Canadians," it discovered, "believe there are too many members of visible minorities [in Canada], singling out Arabs, blacks and Asians for discrimination" (as cited in Bissoondath 1994: 2). Although the reliability of such polls can certainly be questioned, the results signify that, for some Canadians at least, visible ethnic minorities are believed to have a negative impact on Canadian life.[14]

### 4. The Family and the Community

Given the prejudiced attitudes of many Canadians towards Indochinese groups, it is not surprising that for the bulk of these newcomers, the family is seen as a haven offering security and comfort. The Family Service Association of Metropolitan Toronto, for example, asserts that the support of the family is invaluable in the

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[14] Studies conducted by Starr and Roberts (1981, 1982) in nine American cities found similar attitudes among the respondents.

resettlement process, since it gives people a sense of place and provides support during the tough period of transition (as cited in Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988). The importance of family relationships cannot be understated—either in Canada or in the countries of origin, where the family was often regarded as the fundamental socioeconomic unit (Ebihara 1974; Robinson 1980). In the case of Cambodian people, data from the Minister for State Multiculturalism (nd: 3-4) illustrates this phenomenon:

> typical Cambodian families have worked together, lived together, and met together for traditional observances. People looked first to their families for help and counsel in times of personal crisis.

Political upheaval and the refugee experience have since disrupted family structures and affected family relationships. Various researchers (*e.g.* Chan 1984; Buchignani 1988; Copeland 1988) report that intact families are a relatively uncommon phenomenon among Indochinese refugees coming to Canada. By way of illustration, Copeland (1988: 105) cites her 1984 study among Indochinese adolescents in Winnipeg. Of those adolescents surveyed, only thirty-one per cent indicated having both parents with them. Forty-five percent of those with missing parents reported mothers absent and sixty per cent reported fathers absent compared to absentee rates of just four and nine per cent in the home countries. Copeland maintains that the number of respondents with absent parents was considerably greater than for the population of Manitoba as a whole—in which eighty-six per cent of families with children were two-parent families, twelve per cent were female-parent families and only two per cent were male-parent families.

The disruption of family structures is also evidenced by the mean size of Indochinese households in Canada. Unlike conditions in the home countries—where families were often larger[15] and extended or composite in nature—the normative household type in Canada during the 1980's was that of a nuclear family (parents and dependent children). The average size of these households ranged from three to five persons, depending on the particular Indochinese group[16] studied (Ottawa-Carleton

[15] Data cited by Buchignani (1988) suggests that the joint or extended family was common among Indochinese groups. However, in those instances where the co-dominant family type was of the nuclear kind, families were still often larger than those documented in Canada (Marcucci 1986).

[16] In the Ottawa-Carleton South-East Refugee Needs Assessment Project (1983), Vietnamese and Vietnamese-Chinese households tended to be larger than either Laotian or Cambodian households.

South-East Asian Refugee Project 1983; Buchignani 1988). As Buchignani (1988: 18) stresses,

> duly appreciating the depth of Indochinese concern over family, commentators note that such families typically do not contain a full complement of individuals who made up the functioning household in Indochina. Indeed, all present evidence suggests that the most common family units . . . are either a nuclear family or a nuclear family plus one or two others, typically relatively close kin.

In addition to changes in the family structure, the pressures of resettlement often lead to alterations in familial relationships. Parent-child and inter-generational interactions, for example, are sometimes characterized by role reversals in which the child assumes many of the leadership responsibilities and the adult is relegated to child status[17] (Salvendy 1983: Bottinelli *et al.* 1990). Half of the adolescents surveyed in Copeland's 1984 study reported that they used their more developed English skills to translate for family members in stores, hospitals, schools, at church and with sponsors. The feelings expressed by the respondents about this responsibility ranged from good to embarrassment and shame (Copeland 1988).

Husband-wife relations are also fraught with conflicts. In Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, it was usually the husband who made many of the important decisions for family members while the wife commonly pursued the traditional role of homemaker (Minister of State Multiculturalism nd; Indra 1985; Marcucci 1986). In contrast, the relatively egalitarian nature of Canadian society and the increased opportunities for women has tended to undermine the traditional authority of Indochinese males (Greater Toronto Southeast Asian Refugee Task Force 1981; Salvendy 1983: Chambon 1989). The subsequent changes in role expectations, combined with pressures engendered by other resettlement problems (*e.g.* unemployment, and so forth), has created tensions that can, in some instances, lead to marital breakdowns and severe family disturbances (Salvendy 1983: Chambon 1989).

Despite the problems challenging family relationships, the rates of mixed marriage in the 1980's were relatively low. According to Dorais (1988), the values and attitudes which predominate in North American society are generally considered by

[17] According to Salvendy (1983), children often have a higher degree of adaptability and flexibility than adults, and tend to achieve integration faster than the rest of the family.

Indochinese immigrants in Quebec City as antithetical to their own. While Southeast Asians were felt to put stress on family love and cooperation, many perceived Westerners as aggressive individualists, for whom the family didn't mean much. Consequently, many worried that children born from such a union might adopt the American beliefs and in turn lose their own. As one Vietnamese told Dorais (1988: 176), "local girls are good for fun, but I'll marry a compatriot."

The Community

Besides turning to the family, Indochinese individuals often seek comfort and support from the larger ethnic community. Copeland (1988: 95) describes the importance of such community supports in the citation below. According to this scholar,

> ethnic communities play a transitional role in the resettlement of immigrant populations. As a link between the old and new cultures, they provide practical support and guidance as well as a sense of belonging. These communities may play an important economic role by providing access to employment as well as enhancing the social acceptability of particular jobs. In addition, community membership allows a shared defense against discrimination and offers opportunities for controlling resources. By sharing traditions, values and goals, as well as common problems, members not only preserve their cultural identity and heritage but provide important social, emotional and economic supports for one another.

Community links may operate informally or formally. On a more informal level, needs are met through interpersonal networks of kin and friends. Buchignani (1988) reports that many Canadian Indochinese come from backgrounds characterized by extensive patterns of informal social relations marked by reciprocal visiting and assistance. Although it is impossible to reconstitute the networks of association enjoyed in the countries or origin, research suggests that central organizing factors in Canada include ethnic background, class, gender, political beliefs, age, marriage status and shared flight or camp residence (Stein 1986; Buchignani 1988). In the absence of family members, ties based on common background and/or experience often served as substitutes for missing family relationships (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988). Not surprisingly, evidence further suggests that individuals who were denied access to these community ties experienced higher rates of emotional and mental health disorders (Chan 1984; Nann 1984;

Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988).

On a more formal level, ethnic organizations and mutual-aid associations have been founded in a number of Indochinese communities across the country (see Buchignani 1988; Dorais 1988; Van Esterik and Van Esterik 1988). These institutions provide essential social services for their members (*e.g.* counselling, employment searches, translation services), in addition to offering various sociocultural benefits. Among the Vietnamese, such institutions were particularly well-developed during the 1980's (Chan 1984; Nann 1984). Khmer and Lao people, by virtue of their smaller numbers, often lacked formal community structures except in the larger urban centers (Buchignani 1988; Dorais 1988). As such, many were compelled to rely on immigrant services agencies and/or sponsors for a variety of instrumental and emotional needs (Chan 1984; Buchignani 1988).

Inter-ethnic ties were relatively unusual among the Indochinese during the the same time period (Marcucci 1986; Buchignani 1988; Copeland 1988; Van Esterik and Van Esterik 1988). Although Vietnamese, Cambodian and Lao associations were linked by virtue of the refugee experience and shared resettlement concerns, most organizations were specific to one ethnic group. Frictions both between and within groups were common.[18] According to Buchignani (1988), many barriers arose out of antipathies transported from the countries of origin. Historical/cultural tensions between groups (*i.e.* between the Khmer and the Vietnamese; between the Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese), not to mention differences related to the political ideologies of each group's members, have influenced negative attitudes and, in some cases, actually precipitated group disintegration (Marcucci 1986; Copeland 1988; Van Esterik and Van Esterik 1988). As a result, cooperative efforts between and within ethnic groups were often fraught with difficulties.

<u>5. Interactions with other Canadians/Ethnic Identity</u>

In terms of the larger Canadian context, a number of Indochinese mentioned that they felt it was important to make friends with Canadians in order to "learn and understand the ways Canadian people behave and think" (Ottawa-Carleton South-East

[18] With regard to internal causes of friction, Marcucci (1986) mentions that the social structures of some of the Cambodian associations in Dallas—in which patron-client ties were common—could promote power struggles between high-ranking men and in turn lead to group factionalism.

Asian Refugee Project 1983: 22). Nevertheless, many found it difficult, largely because of linguistic and cultural barriers (Nann 1984; Ebihara 1985; Copeland 1988: Beiser 1992). Copeland (1988) maintains that more than half of the Indochinese youths surveyed in her 1984 study hesitated to speak to Canadians at least half of the time because they feared they would not be understood. In addition, twice as many adolescents maintained that they had more friends in their country of origin than Canadian friends and they reported getting along better with these friends. Twenty-four per cent of the respondents indicated having no Canadian friends whatsoever and forty-five per cent reported never having been invited to the home of a Canadian born person. Studies focusing on Indochinese adults have come to similar conclusions (see Ottawa-Carleton South-East Asian Refugee Project 1983; Beiser 1992).

A few Indochinese, on the other hand, seemed particularly eager to be incorporated into the ethnic majority, despite potential interactional difficulties. In his study of young Quebec City Cambodians, Dorais (1988: 184) found that many liked to stress the fact that they were "genuine Quebecois." Some even wished that they had blond hair, in order to be less conspicuously different from other people (Dorais 1988). Such attitudes were relatively rare among Vietnamese of the same age group, many of whom identified themselves as Vietnamese first, Canadians second (Pilon-Le *et al.* 1984, cited in Dorais 1988). Dorais suggests that the absence of a strong ethnic identity for those Cambodian youth surveyed may be due to the fact that many lived in a cultural vacuum under the Khmer Rouge regime, where the only identity allowed was that of the Young Revolutionaries. Additionally, subsequent camp experiences may have also modified ethnic identity concepts.

### 6. Role of Religion

Although most Indochinese came to North America as (at least) nominal Buddhists, many were quite flexible as far as religion was concerned (Indra 1985; Burwell *et al.* 1986; Dorais 1988). Flexibility arose from the refugee experience, as well as from the nature of the various Buddhist traditions—which stress patterns of personal or familial observance rather than collective church-based rituals and, in turn, allow for limited incorporation of alternative religious elements (Smith 1987; Buchignani 1988). By way of illustration, Indra (1985) reports that a number of Indochinese have found Christian contacts and services to be quite helpful to their social and psychological adjustment to Canada. During their first years of resettlement,

Marcucci (1986) discovered that many Khmer and Lao refugees in Dallas regularly attended Christian church services so that they could utilize the church as a service resource. However, as one Khmer couple explained, "we will always be Buddhists, but we go to different Christian churches because we don't want to offend our American friends" (in Marcucci 1986: 144).[19]

Notwithstanding the few recent conversions to Christianity, Buddhism remains a powerful aspect of Indochinese culture which is especially affirmed at Buddhist holidays and life-cycle rituals (*e.g.* marriage, death). As these events are also central devices for bringing individuals together, it is not surprising that many Indochinese communities in the 1980's were delegating some of their limited resources to the development of religious organizations (Buchignani 1988; Van Esterik and Van Esterik 1988).

## 7. Physical and Mental Health

Evidence (*e.g.* Dahlberg 1980; Employment and Immigration Canada 1980; Robinson 1980; Ebihara 1985) suggests that many Indochinese refugees arrive in North America with significant health problems engendered by the series of traumatic experiences to which they have been exposed. Common physical ailments include intestinal parasites, anemia, skin conditions, dental problems, and tuberculosis. Ebihara (1985: 139) cites one study in California in which eight-four per cent of Cambodian households surveyed indicated they had at least one member presently under a physican's care. Other studies, in contrast, document relatively low utilization rates of biomedical services for the Indochinese population, despite the recognized need for medical services (see Stephenson 1991; D'Avanzo 1992; Uba 1992). Factors seen as contributing to this situation include unfamiliarity with biomedical methods and treatment strategies, different etiologies of illness, distrust of medical facilities, and communication problems (Sargent and Marcucci 1984; Stephenson 1991, 1993; D'Avanzo 1992; Uba 1992).

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[19]In the U.S. and Canada, private sponsorship of refugees is often undertaken by members of church groups. According to Doreen Indra (1985), these sponsors frequently bring refugees to services provided by their respective churches, but whether this leads to long-term conversions is an open question.

Mental Health

According to Morton Beiser (1984: 71), "mental health is a measure of morale and morale is important not only to individuals but to society as a whole. . . [since] people with high morale are best able to be constructive, productive and adaptive in a new society."

Unfortunately, research to date in this area suggests that refugees experience a higher risk of developing mental health disorders than do second and third generation citizens of the host country (Nguyen 1982, 1984; Nicassio 1985; Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988). In his 1983 study among Southeast Asian refugees living in Ontario, San Duy Nguyen (1984: 91) found that most of the refugees' mental health problems were precipitated by the interaction of severe losses and difficulties in adapting to a new culture and environment: "past traumatic experiences, family separation, nostalgia, culture shock, inability to communicate, social isolation, unemployment and financial insecurity all contribute to increasing the refugees' predicament, placing them at high risk for mental disorders."

Common mental health complaints mentioned by refugees include home sickness, loneliness, depression, apathy, chronic fatigue and various psychosomatic disorders—all of which have been classified under the category *Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD)[20] (Nguyen 1982, 1984; Beiser 1984; Nicassio 1985; Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988). Within the Indochinese population as a whole, such suffering is extremely pervasive: in Nguyen's study, the majority of persons (81%) in his sample suffered from one or more emotional complications (Nguyen 1984). Comparable evidence from other parts of the country and the United States (*e.g.* Robinson 1980; Suh 1980; Beiser 1984; Nicassio 1985) attests to the prevalence of emotional complaints.

Notwithstanding the predominance of these problems, a number of studies have found that only a small percentage of the Indochinese refugee population avail themselves of existing mental health services (see Robinson 1980; Suh 1980; Nguyen

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[20]Madakasira and O'Brien (1987: 288) list the following symptoms as constitutive of PTSD: intrusive thoughts, recurrent dreams, diminished interests, diminished libido, detachment, exaggerated startle response, sleep disturbance, survival guilt, memory impairment, concentration difficulty, avoidance of [trauma] reminders, and symptom intensification on exposure to [trauma] scenes.

1982, 1984; Beiser 1984; Nicassio 1985). According to Robinson (1980), much of the reason seems to lie in the stigmatization of mental illness in most Southeast Asian societies. Psychiatric disorders and other emotional problems, when they do exist, are seen as a disgrace to the individual as well as to his or her entire family. Not surprisingly then, many Indochinese immigrants and refugees consider it a collective responsibility of the family to care for the sick member as long as his/her behavior can be managed at home. In these cases, psychiatric help is sought only when the problem can no longer be hidden (Tung 1980; Beiser 1984; Nguyen 1984).

The reluctance of many Indochinese to utilize mental health care services may also be influenced by the commonly-held view that minor emotional difficulties are simply part of the human condition (Tung 1980). Mental suffering, as derived from various Buddhist teachings, is an inevitable facet of everyday life. Accordingly, there is a tendency of the Indochinese to somaticize mental health complaints when they do occur (see Tung 1980; Nguyen 1982, 1984; Beiser 1984).

# CHAPTER THREE: THE LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT IN CANADA

> *Without language, one cannot truly enter a culture.* (cited in the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988: 23)

Most Canadians, if they are not first-generation immigrants themselves, have a relative or friend who came to Canada from another country. In fact, since Confederation, the ratio of foreign-born to Canadian-born has never been less than one in six and has sometimes run as high as one in five persons (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988). To affirm the multicultural nature of Canadian society, the federal government introduced a Multiculturalism Policy in 1971, defining Canada as a country respectful and welcoming of diversity (see Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada 1993). Recognizing, understanding and celebrating Canada's multicultural reality, the policy states, makes it possible for all Canadians to participate in and contribute fully to Canada's social, economic, cultural and political life. In so doing, a country not only benefits from cultural diversity, it also enjoys a strong and progressive sense of nationhood (Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada 1993).

From 1971 onward, Canadians have been encouraged to maintain their heritage languages, customs and beliefs, and to protect the multicultural reality of Canada in their activities at home and abroad. Yet, paradoxically, the multicultural ideology espoused by the Canadian government is not altogether compatible with other governmental policies, particularly in the area of language use. As Burnaby (1984, cited in Piper 1989: 173-174) explains,

> the federal government has a definite national policy on language and culture. Through the Official Languages Act it pledges to do business with any citizen in either English or French. And it supports linguistic and cultural diversity in the country through its multiculturalism policy. The Canadian Bill of Rights also protects speakers of any language in the course of certain official transactions through a provision for interpreters. But there is a difference between the kind of support given to bilingualism and to multiculturalism. The government takes the initiative and the responsibility to provide services in English and French. For support of multicultural and non-official language matters, however, the initiative must come from those who want it.

In order to adequately function in Canadian life then, where two languages—English and French—are officially recognized as the languages of discourse, it is absolutely imperative that one has at least some English or French language experience. For immigrants and refugees, 'successful' adjustment to a new culture is often contingent on their ability to communicate (Dorais 1987). One early immigrant describes her family's experience in the following manner:

> we had to visit the stores and be dressed from head to foot in American clothing; we had to learn the mysteries of the iron stove, the washboard [the washing machine], and the speaking-tube [telephone]; we had to learn . . . not to be afraid of the policemen; above all, we had to learn English. (as cited in Disman 1982: 76)

During the past decade, approximately forty-three per cent of all immigrants arriving in Canada in any given year have spoken neither English nor French (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988; Pendakur and Ledoux 1991). Among Indochinese refugees, the numbers are even higher. For example, in a far-reaching study of immigrant English or French language experience in Canada, Ravi Pendakur and Michel Ledoux (1991) discovered that newcomers from Cambodia constituted the second highest percentage of persons unable to speak an official language at the time of arrival (the Chinese constituted the highest proportion). A similar report by Dorais (1987) states that English or French language deficiency figures for the Canadian Indochinese population may reach as high as ninety percent. Alfred and Wakefield (1991) further maintain that, in the province of British Columbia, English language deficiency rates among the Vietnamese—the largest of the Indochinese groups and arguably the best-educated—may actually approach ninety-two percent.

The studies cited above reveal the percentage of those Indochinese sampled who declared themselves unable to communicate in either official language. The majority of these persons were new arrivals at the time of the data collection. For more established arrivals (*i.e.* those individuals with two to five years of Canadian residency), official language fluency rates have remained limited. Researchers associated with the Ottawa-Carleton South-East Asian Refugee Project (1983) report that seventy-three percent of the two hundred and eight Indochinese respondents surveyed maintained that they comprehended less than half of the English spoken during a conversation, and eight-five percent admitted that they had great difficulty expressing themselves in English.

Only fifteen percent felt they could function in a job requiring English and twenty-seven percent stated that they knew just enough English to get by in every day life. This data implies that additional language acquisition is a long-term process, influencing and influenced by a multitude of factors.

To date, research on additional language acquisition (see Berryman 1983; Cumming 1991) suggests that full proficiency in an additional language may take from two to seven years *under favourable conditions.* Such findings raise a number of interesting questions:

- What factors affect, or are affected by, the process of additional language acquisition?
- Are some learning situations better than others?
- What programs are available to assist newcomers with official language training?

The following sections attempt to answer these questions by discussing several factors related to additional language acquisition and by focusing on the role of language in the wider socioeconomic and cultural context.

# CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

## Outline of Research Problem

In a 1986 article titled, "Beyond the Language Classroom: A Study of Communicative Abilities in Adult Immigrants Following Intensive Instruction," d'Anglejan *et al.* maintain that the acquisition of a new language is among the most profound of the hurdles a newcomer to Canada must face upon arrival. Research discussed in the preceding section (*e.g.* Dorais 1987; Pendakur and Ledoux 1991) demonstrate that the vast majority of Indochinese newcomers arrive to Canada without any substantial English language background. These studies further suggest that English language skills remain limited even for more established residents. By way of illustration, data gathered from the Refugee Resettlement Project at the University of British Columbia reveal that only ten per cent of the Southeast Asian refugees resettling in Canada reported a "good" command of English at the end of their first year in the country. Three years later, the proportion of those surveyed with good English was only twenty per cent (Beiser 1990).

Cumming (1991) stresses that acquiring a new language is a difficult, long-term process. Nevertheless, English language ability is a crucial aspect of the resettlement process, affecting and affected by a multitude of resettlement pressures—among them the pursuit of employment opportunities, the ability to make friends and to access services as well as the ability to verbalize experiences and feelings for the sake of one's mental well-being. Here, I am interested in the levels of English language competence of Cambodians residing in the Greater Victoria and Vancouver areas of British Columbia. In addition, I hope to elucidate the influence of English language ability on numerous aspects of resettlement and to identify barriers which may preclude Khmer individuals from seeking further English language training. Of particular importance in this regard is the refugee experience itself and the residual affects of trauma. These have tended to be de-emphasized or completely ignored in many of the formative language acquisition models thus far assembled (*i.e.* Schumann 1976, 1978; Gardner 1985; Brown 1994).

In sum, my research has two broad goals: (1) to acquire a more complete understanding of the Cambodian refugee experience and the resettlement process to

Canada and (2) to identify barriers which may preclude the Cambodian refugee from further English language training and to include policy recommendations which address the concerns of this community. Moreover, this work responds to the call (see Fleming 1989; Klassen and Burnaby 1993) for a qualitative approach which explores the more personal and experiential aspects of language and language learning. As Klassen and Burnaby (1993: 382) contend:

> the numbers are silent on why individuals have or have not learned English, the personal experience of barriers, and the individual agendas which affect a range of issues related to effective participation in education, employment, and other areas of everyday life.

## Data Collection

Throughout its history, anthropology has been concerned with how people experience themselves, their lives and their culture (Bruner 1986). Conventional ethnographers, through participant observation and extensive periods of time spent in the field, have striven to access the indigenous perspective of the peoples they study. Yet, as Bruner (1986) suggests, the conceptual apparatus for interpreting field data may actually filter out experience. He states that many ethnographies focus on generalized routines, clusters of customs, norms and habits and prevalent patterns of social interactions. The end result is often a synthetic account based on abstractions, with an emphasis on the general at the expense of the unique. This may lead to a situation whereby, in Renato Rosaldo's words, "lived experience is robbed of its vitality" (cited in Bruner 1986: 8).

The "Anthropology of Experience," as conceptualized by Victor Turner and Edward Bruner, attempts to combat these problems by turning attention to experience and its expressions as indigenous meaning. *Experience* is defined as the temporal flow within which images of reality are constantly perceived by the individual consciousness.[21] It can be distinguished from *an* experience which comprises an

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[21] *Experience* is not equivalent to *behavior*. Behavior suggests an observer describing someone else's actions; it also implies a standardized routine that one goes through. An experience, on the other hand, is more personal—it refers to the active self who not only engages in but shapes an action. We can have an experience but we cannot have a behavior; we describe the behaviors of others but we characterize our own experience (Bruner 1986).

intersubjective articulation of experience and which has a beginning and an ending. *Expressions,* on the other hand, constitute the means by which individual experience is framed and articulated into a unit of meaning (Dilthey 1976 as cited in Bruner 1986). The relationship between experience and its expressions is a complex one; it is clearly dialogic and dialectical, for experience structures expressions and expressions structure experience. Wilhelm Dilthey (1976 as cited in Bruner 1986) likened these dialogic relationships of mutual dependence to that of a hermeneutic circle, something which could be worked through. For him, "our knowledge of what is given in experience is extended through the interpretation of the objectifications of life and their interpretation, in turn, is only made possible by plumbing the depths of subjective experience" (Dilthey 1976: 195 as cited in Bruner 1986).

In his 1986 article, Bruner calls for the elevation of the personal and experiential from their position as mere by-products of the anthropological enterprise. By beginning the study of culture through an analysis of expressions, he maintains, "the basic units of analysis are established by the people we study rather than by the anthropologist as alien observer" (Bruner 1986: 9). Nevertheless, Bruner admits that one difficulty with experience is that we can only ever know our own experience. The experiences of others are necessarily filtered through each person's perceptual screen. Even direct narratives of experience are subject to censorship, repression and selective representation. In an effort to overcome the limitations of individual experience, my own research has employed a strategy of multiple representations. By interviewing not only Cambodian adult men and women, but also service providers offering support services to Cambodian clients, I have attempted to weave a number of interpretations into a coherent whole. Ultimately, this process is a twofold one: the people we study interpret their experiences in expressive form and anthropologists, in turn, interpret and organize these expressions into a cohesive framework. The object is to 'get at' a person's or peoples' experience rather than to simply describe their behaviors. With that in mind then, what is the experience of Cambodian refugees in British Columbia as they learn English and resettle to a new way of life?

The data discussed in this thesis are derived from thirty-seven open-ended interviews conducted between the months of October 1993 and March 1994. Initially, I planned to limit my analysis to the experience of Cambodians in Greater Victoria, British Columbia, but given the community's modest size (and the corresponding small number of service providers who have experience working with Cambodians), I

broadened my focus to include Cambodians and service providers living in Vancouver. Contact names and organizations in Victoria were initially provided by personnel at the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria, the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre and Camosun College (Carey Road Campus). In Vancouver, the head of the ESL/Vocational Department at Vancouver Community College kindly provided me with a list of English as an Additional Language (EAL) instructors and settlement organizations working with Cambodians. The use of a 'snowball' sampling method[22] allowed me to approach prospective participants[23] in both cities from a number of different entry points. Ultimately, the sample drew on twenty separate contact sources (see Appendix A).

Potential participants were generally contacted by telephone or letter prior to an interview. Introductions ranged from highly formalized presentations of my research objectives to informal meetings in people's homes over refreshments. Frequent visits with Cambodian people, in particular, allowed me to build a rapport with many persons from both cities. The process of going to people's homes, partaking in Cambodian refreshments and attending cultural festivities like Cambodian New Year enabled me to better understand the dynamics of the Cambodian refugee experience. Additionally, such opportunities afforded me practice speaking and writing Khmer—something I very much wanted to do following a two-month intensive Khmer language course in Seattle, Washington during the summer of 1993. While my efforts were evidently well-received, my language ability, admittedly, remains rather weak. Consequently, I relied on an interpreter for those interviews where the participant's English language ability was limited.[24]

The decision to partake in the research was left up to the participants themselves. Prior to commencing with the interview, the nature and purpose of the study was verbally explained to every participant. Each participant received a copy of

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[22]The snowball sampling method refers to the oft-practised technique of asking respondents to provide further potential contact names.

[23] The terms 'participants' and 'respondents' will be used to denote those individuals who permitted interviews, and whose expert opinions form the basis of this thesis. I've refrained from using the term 'informant,' more traditionally employed in the anthropological literature, for some of the negative connotations it embodies.

[24] An interpreter was required for four of the seventeen interviews with Cambodian men and women. For five additional Cambodian participants, family members or friends were on hand to clarify (in Khmer) aspects of the interview protocol that were unclear or incomprehensible.

the research objectives (see Appendix B) and each was required to read and sign a Letter of Consent (see Appendix C). This document outlines the interviewee's right to anonymity and his or her freedom to withdraw all or part of the information provided subsequent to the interview. The Letter of Consent was retained by me to indicate that participation in the project was completely voluntary. Translations of these materials (verbal and/or written) were available to all participants.

My research sample was ultimately divided into two groups: (1) Adult Cambodian men and women residing in the Greater Victoria and Vancouver areas of British Columbia and (2) Service providers (*i.e.* EAL instructors, immigrant and refugee settlement workers and governmental personnel) offering support services to Cambodian clients in these places. Separate interview schedules were designed for each group (see Appendix D). Though different, these interview protocols address similar themes; in fact, many of the questions are virtually identical—they differ only in their wording and the extent to which they require the participant to generalize his or her answers. Each schedule was designed to 'capture' the experiences of the participant. Accordingly, all questions were open-ended, enabling participants to determine the extent to which they wished to pursue a given topic. In effect, the interview protocols merely served as guides to be modified or elaborated upon by the participant. The initial series of questions were checked for their cultural sensitivity and appropriateness with a Vietnamese service provider, an EAL instructor and two Cambodian men residing in Victoria. Questions were further modified during the interview process to correspond with the informal nature of the conversational exchange.

The duration of each interview ranged from forty-five minutes to two hours, although the time spent with the participant was often much longer. Without exception, the service providers gave the most comprehensive interviews. This is due, in part, to the more extensive background material collected from this group. In addition, the generalized nature of their responses encouraged greater elaboration, comparison and qualification. The testimonies of Cambodian men and women, related in the first person, proved to be the shortest. Yet unlike most service providers, for whom the interview was task-oriented and business-like, many Cambodian participants preferred that I spend some time either before, during or after the interview engaged in social interaction. Such informal exchanges more than compensated for the succinct interviews; the interactions allowed me to establish relationships with many participants as well as their friends and family. A number of persons shared their

stories and insights with me during these informal meetings. Accordingly, this work presents not only the views of those Cambodians who consented to be interviewed, but also those of other Khmer refugees I came to know during the course of my research.

## The Sample

As stated earlier, the thirty-seven participants in my sample fall into one of two groups: (1) Adult Cambodian men and women (n=17); and (2) Service providers (*i.e.* EAL instructors, immigrant and refugee settlement workers and governmental personnel) offering support services to Cambodian clients (n=20). The sample was distributed between Victoria and Vancouver (see Table 1 below).

TABLE #1: Distribution of Sample in Victoria and Vancouver

| | **Cambodians** | **Service Providers** |
|---|---|---|
| **Victoria** | 8 | 10 |
| **Vancouver** | 9 | 10 |
| **TOTALS:** | 17 | 20 |

The 1991 census figures for the Cambodian populations in both cities illustrate their rather uneven distribution.[25] More reliable delphi estimates[26] assess the Vancouver Cambodian population as numbering between 1200-1800 people while 15-25 families currently reside in Victoria. Notwithstanding the disparity, the numbers of persons I accessed from both geographical areas is relatively uniform across the two categories. Why? As a resident of Victoria, I was able to establish closer relationships with some

[25] Statistics Canada (1991) estimates that approximately 1100 Cambodians reside in the Vancouver region and 80 Khmer persons live in Victoria.

[26] Delphi estimates rely on persons or 'oracles' who are knowledgeable about their culture and who have considerable involvement with their community. To arrive at an estimate of community sizes, nine key interlocuters (five from Vancouver and four from Victoria) were asked to judge Cambodian population sizes. From these estimates, ranges (from high to low) were established which could then be averaged to create model means and standard deviations. Stephenson (1993) maintains that delphi estimates are often more reliable than static census data since these figures account for migration to B.C. from other areas in Canada.

Cambodians by virtue of the fact that we lived in the same area and we could see each other on a more regular basis over a longer period of time. The trust which eventually developed between these persons and me influenced my ability to procure interviews. One Cambodian friend, in particular, often organized sessions—inviting Cambodian friends over to his house to meet me and to 'talk.' As a result, I was able to interview a relatively high proportion of the adults from this community.[27]

Service providers in Victoria were accessed in a similar way; that is, we were usually able to establish some essence of rapport long before the interviewing process commenced. Meeting and getting to know potential participants in Vancouver, on the other hand, was more difficult. During the course of my fieldwork, I made two trips to Vancouver. The first—a week-long reconnaissance excursion—was made in mid-November 1993. I travelled to Vancouver again in February 1994 where I conducted extensive fieldwork for one and one-half months. A Cambodian interpreter accompanied me on this second trip and spent five days introducing me to Cambodians he knew in the area. Such a gesture proved immensely helpful; it is unlikely that, without his assistance, I could have accessed many of the Cambodian participants in my Vancouver sample. Other Cambodians agreed to talk to me after I explained my research objectives at a Cambodian community development meeting and following my attendance at two Cambodian parties and several English as an Additional Language classes. On the other hand, service providers were accessed by various means throughout the one and one-half month period. In these cases I often met with them in their places of employment where I was able to gain a better sense of their work and to better contextualize some of the issues affecting the Cambodian community. Even so, the imposed time constraints on my work, as well as my initial unfamiliarity with Vancouver and its social service organizations, limited the number of people I was eventually able to interview.

My decision to rely on alternative expressions—in this case, to afford primacy to the interpretations of Cambodians as well as those of service providers—was based on my goal to elucidate the Cambodian refugee's experience of language learning from a number of perspectives. Besides allowing for a more holistic view of the processes of resettlement, my decision was influenced by the existence of what Fleming (1989)

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[27] This view is based on delphi estimates for the Victoria Cambodian population. Since the number of elderly Cambodians over 65 years and young adults aged between 19-25 is small among other Cambodian populations (see The Immigrant Services Society 1993), I estimate that the majority of these 15-25 families contained approximately two adults per family.

terms the "courtesy bias" phenomenon. Several researchers (*e.g.* Steinberg 1959; Smith 1987; Fleming 1989) have commented on the tendency of the Indochinese to maintain harmony during social intercourse. The inclination, according to these researchers, is that the participants in one's study may inevitably express only those views they believe the researcher wants to hear. Some degree of courtesy bias was expected to emerge in my investigation since it was likely that Cambodian refugees would not wish to be critical of their Canadian hosts.

While the Cambodian participants in my sample were selected to provide personal accounts of English language learning and language use, service providers were sought to provide another dimension of the story. I consulted EAL instructors, immigrant and refugee settlement workers and governmental personnel with the idea that I could circumvent any biases inherent in my interviews with Cambodians. Interviewing persons with different areas of expertise also allowed me to illustrate the complexity of the resettlement process as it pertains to additional language learning and language use. Although settlement workers or governmental personnel may not have been fully equipped to answer specific questions on the length of EAL programs and EAL curricula, they were often more familiar than EAL instructors with the transcendental affects of language inability (*e.g.* like its influence on mental health). The end result was an amalgamation of sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary points of view from persons coming into contact with Cambodians in differing contexts. A detailed discussion of the characteristics of this heterogeneous group is provided in the next section.

## Characteristics of Each Subset

### Cambodian Men and Women

Seventeen Cambodians form the focus of this research and one of the two sample subsets of my data. The seven women and ten men included in this category reside in either Greater Victoria or Vancouver, British Columbia.[28] All are relatively young or middle-aged adults—ranging from twenty-one to forty-nine years of age.[29]

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[28] Of the nine Cambodians interviewed from Vancouver, five were female and four male. In Victoria, I talked with two Khmer women and six men.

[29] For the group as a whole, the average age was 36.85 years with a median of 37.5 years. The standard deviation equals 7.75.

The vast majority of the subset came to Canada under refugee status.[30] A slightly larger proportion of these persons (n=9) were government-sponsored refugees while the remaining eight came to the country under the aegis of churches or private parties.

Residence in Canada ranges from three to fourteen years, with a median of seven years.[31] Before arriving to the country of resettlement, virtually all of those surveyed (n=15) spent time in refugee camps in Thailand. Following the internment—which averaged four years—all but three participants moved to Canada with at least one family member. These included spouses, children, parents and/or siblings. In addition, one participant was adopted by a Cambodian family prior to their arrival to the country while two others were accompanied by close friends they met in the camps.

Many of the participants (n=13) report learning some English whilst in Cambodia or in the refugee camps. Notwithstanding, fifteen of the seventeen respondents maintained that they had limited English language skills upon arrival. In Canada, some English language training was provided for these persons under the auspices of federally funded language programs, church initiatives and immigrant and refugee settlement services. With one exception, all participants in the sample enrolled in English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes subsequent to coming to the country. As the research indicates, however, most respondents feel that their English language ability is inadequate relative to the length of time they have been residents in the country. [32]

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[30] Fifteen participants are considered refugees. Of the remainder, one person immigrated to Canada under the Family Class designation and another was a privately-sponsored immigrant.

[31] The average length of time spent in the country was eight years (SD=2.67).

[32] It must be remembered that there are a number of differences between Khmer and English, such that there is no easy transfer from one language to another. For example, the Khmer language is written in a script derived from India which is substantially different from the English alphabet. Khmer does not have verb tenses; a sense of time is conveyed by phrases indicating past or future action. It also has a somewhat different system of phonemes or meaningful sounds. In my research, I wanted to transcribe my interviews as they were spoken by the participants themselves to maximize their voices and minimize my own, so I consistently quoted Cambodians in the vernacular and in their use of English. I attempted to retain the original phraseology in many cases because I felt the retention of incorrect grammar, particularly in prepositions and verb tenses, lent further veracity and power to their accounts, by reflecting the struggles in learning a new language and culture. In no way is this intended to negatively depict the Cambodian participants or the Cambodian communities in which they dwell.

**Service Providers**

Participants providing social services to a Cambodian clientele were classified under the Service Providers category. Included in this subset were EAL teachers, immigrant and refugee settlement workers and governmental personnel. Of the twenty respondents, three are of Cambodian background while an additional two are Indochinese. The remainder are of diverse ancestry. [33]

Female respondents constituted the majority of the people I interviewed. Fifteen were female compared to just five males. On the other hand, participants were fairly evenly distributed among three age sets. Of the twenty, six fall into the 26-35 age bracket while another seven are aged between 36 and 45 years. The remainder (n=7) lie somewhere within the 46- to 55-year range.

When asked how long each had been employed in their respective professions, the answers varied from six months to twenty years, with an average of 7.4 years. Participants report engaging in one or more of the following activities within the context of their jobs: cross-cultural, orientation and/or employment counselling; EAL instruction; language interpretation; referral of clients to appropriate services; leadership or job training; and administration of a service agency or of a particular project. While fourteen persons work with a number of distinct ethnic groups, six of the Vancouver respondents currently serve an exclusively Cambodian clientele. Seven members of the subset are also involved in a Cambodian community development initiative in cooperation with members of the Vancouver Khmer community. The goals of such a scheme, as articulated by one service provider, are to work *with* the community in order to help them reach out to the larger society and get what they need (*e.g.* government monies for heritage language training; youth programs; a Cambodian temple). While no Victoria service provider worked with Cambodians in such an intimate way, three Victoria respondents indicated that they had seen the majority of adult Khmer in either a professional or personal capacity. Additionally, almost all of the twenty participants mentioned that they had been invited to Cambodian people's homes occasionally and/or participated in Cambodian festivals.

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[33] With the exception of the three Cambodian service providers, none were able to speak Khmer with their clients although two participants had a limited knowledge of the language (*e.g.* Cambodian greetings).

Whether or not they had many personal interactions with Cambodians, those participants working with different ethnic groups (n=14) maintained that the proportion of Cambodians served was low—less than five per cent as suggested by one respondent (Michael).[34] Not surprisingly, these participants felt compelled to make comparisons to time periods like the mid-to-late 1980's when the numbers of Khmer served were greater. This was particularly true for EAL teachers since LINC instruction is unavailable to Canadian citizens and hence, many Cambodian people are now ineligible for training.[35] Given the resultant small numbers of Khmer seen, virtually all of the fourteen participants also discussed Cambodians *vis-à-vis* other ethnic groups—most often comparing Cambodians to the Vietnamese. The ensuing introduction of a cross-cultural comparative component to my research introduced greater depth.

Of the subset as a whole, over half reported that the Cambodians with whom they'd been in contact were young adults—ranging between the ages of twenty and fifty-five. Elderly Cambodians over sixty-five years went unmentioned in virtually all accounts (excepting those of two service providers who recalled having clients in their seventies). Gender divisions, on the other hand, were generally mixed—50:50 according to eleven participants. Of the remainder, four respondents maintained they either saw more Khmer women or served an all female clientele. The rest declined to answer the question since they lacked this kind of information or felt it was not relevant to their work.

Responding to my query about English language skills, nineteen service providers declared that Cambodians' English skills were generally poorer than other ethnic groups with whom they'd had experience. As one Cambodian service provider stated:

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[34] To preserve the anonymity of the participants, quotes taken from my interviews with these individuals will be identified by pseudonyms. A complete list of the pseudonyms assigned to each of the participants is included at the beginning of chapter five.

[35] Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) provides immigrants and refugees with basic communication skills training deemed essential for functioning in Canadian society. By definition, such training is available for recent arrivals only. Those persons who have acquired Canadian citizenship—and this includes the majority of Cambodians in Vancouver and Victoria—are ineligible for LINC.

> if we compare [ourselves] to our neighbor back home—the Vietnamese—[our English skills are not as good] because the Cambodian script is different—it is similar to Thai script or Indian script. In terms of printing the script or writing, it is much easier [for the Vietnamese]. The Vietnamese people can adopt [English] faster. (Sok)

Like Sok, each service provider identified a broad range of factors affecting the English language acquisition of their Cambodian clients. Such factors—among them the linguistic differences between Khmer and English; literacy in the Khmer language; and the refugee experience—will be explored in greater detail in the following two chapters.

# CHAPTER FIVE: ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LANGUAGE USE AMONG CAMBODIAN REFUGEES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

This chapter gives voice to the thirty-seven participants to whom I am greatly indebted for the production of this thesis. The sections which follow correspond roughly with the probes included in the interview protocols (see Appendix D). The reorganization of the order in which some of the questions appear allows for greater clarity.

## Pseudonyms Employed for Members of Each Subset

The pseudonyms listed below refer to each of the individuals included in my sample. Their introduction at this point should permit the reader some familiarity with the persons cited throughout the body of the text. It is important to note that all of these names are fictitious—any resemblance to known individuals is purely accidental.

*Cambodian Women*

Sita
Bhoppa
Dolla
Sophal
Sopheap
Suon
Choun

*Cambodian Men*

Lan
Roeun
Sarith
Yan
Noeun
Sokhoeun
Chhorn
Bol
Chheng
Sokheng

*Service Providers*

Khorn*
Gordon*
Patricia
Michael*
Katherine
Viviane
Debra
Janice
Leslie
Jasmin
Lydia
Justine
Melissa
Nicole
Tam
Sok*
Karin
Dorothy
Dien*
Mai

* the five male members of this subset

## Leaving Cambodia

For many Cambodians, the decision to seek sanctuary in another country was made under considerable duress. Four years of hardship under Khmer Rouge rule, a severe famine in 1979 and 1980, continuing warfare, as well as fears of another Communist government forced hundreds of thousands across the border to Thailand.[36] The process of fleeing Cambodia was not only traumatic for the majority of Khmer, it was often highly dangerous. In his autobiography, Someth May (1986: 258) recounts his escape from the country: [37]

> Just before dawn we came to a large group of refugees, also in single file, walking in the direction of Siem Reap. The two columns joined together. Now we had many more children. The refugees had all their household goods with them. We were going through scrubland where the smugglers told us we were likely to be shelled. They had a method of counting the firing of the gun to the explosion of the first shell. After that, when you heard the gun fire, you counted again the same number and fell flat. In this way you could run between shells. But there was nowhere to hide. It was too dangerous to leave the track. But people did leave it as the shells began to fall. They hit the mines and were blown to pieces. There were fragments of flesh and clothes everywhere—in the trees, hanging from the bushes.

Successfully maneuvering through mine fields and outwitting thieves or bandits did not always guarantee admittance to Thailand.[38] Given the enormous influx of Cambodian refugees, the Thai government initially refused to accept the asylum seekers—calling them "illegal immigrants" (Shawcross 1984).[39] During the late 1970's, large numbers of Khmer were forced back to their homes. Two Cambodian

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[36] Welaratna (1993) estimates that some 600,000 Cambodians fled to Thailand following the Vietnamese takeover in 1979.

[37] May's tragic account has been seconded—to varying degrees—by other Cambodians as cited in Scott (1989) and Welaratna (1993).

[38] Although it is recognized that some Cambodian refugees went to Vietnam and Laos in an attempt to seek security and comfort, all of the participants represented in this sample travelled to Thailand.

[39] Welaratna (1993) specifies two reasons for the Thai government's refusal. First, the Thai had to deal with the economic and administrative problems of coping with a mass of starved and abused people for whom they received little international assistance. Second, a depopulated Cambodia enabled Vietnamese troops relatively easy movement toward the west—signalling a political threat to Thailand. Consequently, the government refused entry to the refugees.

participants in my sample described their arrival to Thailand and their subsequent rejection at the border. In the words of one:

> I left Cambodia in 1979. It take three months to get to Thailand by walking—from January to April. I stay in Thailand for about a month, then they send me back to Cambodia by walking again. It take about a month to get back to Cambodia because we have no food or transportation. We have to walk through the jungle in the rainy season. So we have to make a trip back to Thailand which takes another two months. We [initially] went to Cambodia with 1500 people but we come [back to Thailand] with only 100 people—the rest die on the way.
>
> The second time we got back to Thailand—this time we decided to stay. (Sokheng)

Following the bestowal of international aid to Thailand, several refugee camps were established in the country. Included among them were Khao-I-Dang, Kamput, Sakaeo and Mai Rat—all of which were created between 1979 and 1980 (Welaratna 1993). Additional camps and holding centres were established in the designated free zones along the Thai-Cambodian border. Fifteen of the seventeen respondents told of spending time in one or more of these camps during their stay in Thailand. Of this number, eleven specifically mentioned living in camps like Khao-I-Dang and Mai Rat. Five persons further related experiences of waiting in border camps or holding centres for admittance to the larger Thai camps and from there, eventual resettlement to a third country.

A number of scholars (*e.g.* Aitken 1982; Marcucci 1986; Reynell 1989) have written about the depressing conditions in many of these refugee camps. McCullum (1982: 1, as cited in Gilad 1990: 88), for one, describes such places as follows:

> a refugee camp is a crush of rib-thin people huddled together in big tents or tumbledown shacks. It is a stink from slimy water trickling through open ditches. It is heat, dust, hunger and hopelessness. It is approximately 25 million people.
>
> A refugee camp is a horde of children, dirty, hungry, waiting in long lines for a handout of food. It is more women than men, women trying by sheer will to hold together fragmented families. It is in Chad and Honduras, Sudan and Thailand, Pakistan and Somalia.
>
> A refugee camp is people in flight, on the run, whose fear and need force them to forsake home and often family to seek sanctuary with others.

McCullum's passionate depiction may not be accurate for all Cambodian refugee camps. Conditions in Khao-I-Dang, for example, were characterized by one Khmer woman I spoke with as "not bad at all" (Somaly, personal communication). While housed in these places, camp officials provided the refugees with food, shelter, medical aid, education and assistance with camp adaptation (Welaratna 1993). Five participants—one woman and four men—also related work experiences as United Nations interpreters, hospital staff or entrepreneurs. Even so, Marcucci (1986) maintains that camp asylum fostered refugee dependency on relief workers for the basic necessities of life which in turn contributed to feelings of apathy or depression. I did not ask participants in the sample questions about the ensuing emotions generated by camp life although many gave me the impression that living conditions could often be stressful—particularly for those persons who spent long periods of time in these places. Of the fifteen participants who stated they had lived in one or more of the Thai camps, the duration varied from two months to seven years. Brief stays of less than a year were relatively unusual in my sample (reported by just three respondents). The remainder of persons tell of longer waits of three and one-half years or more.[40]

The eventual decision to settle in Canada was not a conscious one for many of the Cambodians I consulted. Without family members living in the resettlement country, the process of admittance was based on where one was able to procur sponsorship. Describing the process of moving to Canada, Sokheng related that

> we go to the U.N. transit camp and they ask us if we want to go to a third country. If we do, we are to go to a refugee camp: Mai Rat camp. I stayed there over two years. We were interviewed by the U.S. embassy and we ready to go to the U.S. but because the camp was thought to be all Khmer Rouge, they rejected us and transferred all the people to Khao-I-Dang camp (March 1981).
>
> From there, we had to stay [at Khao-I-Dang] until 1984. We were accepted by Canada and next thing we were transferred to a transit camp in Chanburi. All the time, I work for the United Nations as a volunteer.

Desperation to leave the camps and to move to a third country—any country—was expressed by another of my Cambodian respondents. In the words of Noeun:

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[40] Length of stay in refugee camps averaged 4.38 years with a median of four years.

> in the camp, I worked as a nurse's assistant. One of the doctors was from Vancouver General Hospital. He helped me—I got my name on the list of Canadian immigration. I got to get out of the camp as soon as possible . . . I don't mind if I go to France, Canada, Australia—anything. I didn't want to wait to go to the U.S.. And when we looked at the map, Canada was close to the U.S.. The doctor tell me that after three or four months I could apply for citizenship and then I could go visit my sister. She lives in California and the doctor tell me that Vancouver is close to California. So I told the Canadian immigration people—when they ask me where I want to go—I tell them Vancouver, not Montreal or Toronto (where most Cambodians go).

Among the seventeen Khmer participants, over half maintained that they had come to Canada without initially knowing much about the country. Others report choosing Canada to be near relatives residing in the United States. Like Noeun, Sophal claimed that

> the reason I moved to Vancouver is to be close to my family. They live in California so we can drive there.

Sponsorship—whether government or private—often determined where one would live once he or she arrived in the country.[41] Sophal, for example, was initially placed in Montreal. Three additional participants report living in areas like Medicine Hat, Alberta and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan before coming to British Columbia. Surprisingly, thirteen members of the sample maintained that they moved directly to Vancouver or Victoria upon entering Canada.

Length of residence in the country ranges from three to fourteen years, with a median of seven years. For Cambodians in general, such a residence pattern reflects Canadian immigration policy as it pertains to the Indochinese. Research (see Adelman *et al.* 1980; Employment and Immigration Canada 1982; Adelman 1982, 1991) indicates that the vast majority of Khmer refugees arrived to Canada during the mid-1980's (between approximately 1979-1986). Since then, Cambodians have increasingly come to the country through normal immigration channels—in most cases under the auspices of family sponsorship. Many Cambodians I spoke with during the

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[41] As stated in Chapter four, nine of the participants in my sample were government-sponsored refugees while the remaining eight were privately-sponsored.

course of my research made attempts—successful and otherwise—at sponsorship of family members desiring immigration to Canada.

## English Language Learning in Cambodia and Canada

The majority of Cambodians (including those who are not ethnic Khmer) speak Khmer, the official language of the country. Khmer belongs to the Mon-Khmer family of the Austroasiatic phylum of languages. Among the languages represented in this group are Vietnamese, Mon of Lower Burma (Myanmar) and hundreds of related dialects scattered over mainland Southeast Asia (Huffman 1970; Ross 1990). Khmer—like its linguistic neighbors (Thai, Lao and Burmese)—has borrowed extensively from other languages, especially French, Chinese and the Indic languages of Pali and Sanskrit. Yet in contrast to the majority of Southeast Asian countries, Khmer is nontonal; it relies instead on a rich system of affixes for derivation.

Numerous differences between the Khmer language and the English language make a transfer from one language to another a difficult venture. For example, written Khmer is derived from a south Indian script which is strikingly distinct from the English alphabet. The Khmer language has symbols for thirty-three consonants, twenty-four dependent vowels, twelve independent vowels and a number of diacritics (Ross 1990). Most consonants have reduced or modified forms, called subscripts, when they occur as the second member of a consonant cluster. Vowels may be written before, after, over or under a consonant symbol.

In terms of grammatical structure, Khmer lacks verb tenses; rather, a sense of time is conveyed by adverbial phrases (*e.g.* tomorrow, last week) indicating past or future action. Verb conjugations, articles, gender and number are also absent from the Khmer language, although the frequent application of prefixation and infixation result in a somewhat complex morphology (Welaratna 1993). Syntax, on the other hand, is fairly similar to English sentence structure with a normal word order consisting of subject-verb-object.

The cultural values of the Cambodian people are reflected in Khmer, which has four alternative registers denoting social differences in speaking to or about royalty, monks, the elderly or the respected, and equals (Welaratna 1993). By way of

illustration, the Khmer verb 'to eat' differs according to whether monks, nobility, average people, children or animals are eating. Forms of address, too, are largely based on the relative status of one person *vis-à-vis* another. Most Cambodian adults find the practice of addressing people by first names rather uncomfortable, preferring instead to use kinship terms which reinforce social relationships. For many Cambodians, the direct style of North American communication is seen as disrespectful and offensive. Strong feelings about respectful speech are rooted in cultural values denoting respect for those who are older, or who occupy socially esteemed positions.

A final difference between Khmer and English concerns the phonological structure of each language. The sound systems of the two languages differ greatly—for example, the letters *v* and *w* represent distinct phonemes in English but not in Khmer. Additionally, Khmer recognizes some sounds which have no equivalent counterparts in the English language. These include four initial nasal sounds and a rounded (rather than a retroflex) *r*. For all of these reasons, it is neither easy for an English speaker to learn Khmer nor for Khmer speakers to learn English. Several service providers in my sample (n=5) commented on the dissimilarities between the two languages and the resultant difficulties learning English:

> Indochinese students have more difficulties than other students with pronunciation. (Janice)
>
> because they have a different script, it is harder for [Cambodians] to learn our alphabet and to be good at literacy (reading and writing). For the Vietnamese, this is easier because they have the same script as we do. Everyone who has a different script has more problems learning English. (Gordon)

Opportunities to study the English language in Cambodia were uncommon and largely reserved for those persons enrolled in secondary or higher education (see Education Backgrounds section for a description of these educational levels). Among the seventeen Cambodians I queried, only two persons—both well-educated urban dwellers—had studied English whilst in Cambodia.[42] Eleven additional persons told of taking English classes in the refugee camps to prepare for resettlement to an English-speaking country. Notwithstanding such training, virtually all participants (fifteen out of seventeen respondents) maintained that they had limited English language skills upon

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[42] Both of these respondents were female.

arrival to Canada. One typical response was expressed by a woman who characterized her English ability as follows:

> no, I just say 'no/yes.' Not speak. I take some English before I come to Canada. I take English for two months [in the camp]. 'How are you today?,' 'What is the day today?' . . . not too much. I cannot understand much [when I come]. (Sita)

Given the respondents' limited English language knowledge, it is not surprising that sixteen of the seventeen participants enrolled in English as an Additional Language courses subsequent to their arrival to Canada.[43] English language training was available under the auspices of government funded language programs, church initiatives, private organizations and immigrant and refugee settlement services. Fourteen respondents registered in government subsidized EAL classes while four persons told of taking English courses through churches (n=1), private organizations (n=1), and the public school system (n=2).[44] Of the participants who indicated that they attended English classes, fifteen further stated that they had been enrolled for less than one year. An average of seven months since arrival to Canada was spent in formal English instruction.[45] In most cases, individuals enrolled in EAL training during their first or second year of residency in the country. English language instruction during this tumultuous time has been advocated by governmental authorities (among others) as a fundamental means to promote integration into the Canadian milieu. Eligibility criteria, course objectives, and government subsidization of programs and/or applicants reinforce this widely-held belief.[46]

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[43] The Ministry of Education, Province of British Columbia, defines English as an Additional Language courses as "programs designed to provide non-English speaking adults with sufficient skills in English language, citizenship and cultural comprehension to participate effectively as citizens, workers, parents and learners" (cited in Faris 1992: 52).

[44] One person registered in both government-subsidized classes and private English courses.

[45] With the exception of one participant, all respondents indicated that they had been enrolled full-time in EAL training. The average length of time spent in EAL programs (seven months) is consistent with the length of government funded language programs during the 1980's (*i.e.* Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) Labour Market Access Language Training; CEIC Settlement Language Training).

[46] In response to the large refugee movements of the 1970's and 1980's, the federal government increased the scope of its language programs. Newcomers deemed to be eligible for training during the 1980's were subsidized to varying degrees (*e.g.* tuition subsidies, living allowance support, et cetera) according to the particular EAL program (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988; Bassler 1990). In most cases, government-sponsored refugees were required to complete these courses within the first year of residency (Damov 1989).

The majority of Cambodians in the sample supplemented formal English instruction with informal language practice—whether it be in the public domain, at home or in the workplace. In an effort to ascertain the degree of English usage, I asked participants what language was predominantly spoken in their homes. Of the seventeen respondents, sixteen maintained that Khmer was the primary means of communication. This was particularly true of adults living together: virtually all participants stated that they communicated almost exclusively in Khmer with their spouses, parents, siblings and/or other adult relatives. Cambodian children, on the other hand, were more likely to speak English and to feel more comfortable expressing themselves in English. Ten participants claimed that they were often encouraged to speak English with their children since these persons were apt to misunderstand complex Cambodian terminology.[47] Many further expressed guilt at this arrangement, feeling that it was important to pass on the Cambodian language to their children. In the absence of formal Khmer training in British Columbia, such informal language learning was a vital part of their cultural conservation. The testimonies of two Cambodian participants are indicative of their position.

> I speak Khmer. With my daughters, I like to speak Khmer because they are speaking English very well right now. I like to speak Khmer so they will know how to speak it. But they are not very good . . . some words are no good. Khmer is very hard to learn (Chhorn);
>
> To my husband, I talk only in Khmer. To my daughter, sometimes it is easier for her to understand English. But I know that's wrong . . . I should force her to speak in Khmer. (Sophal)

Some Cambodians I queried (n=3) expressed reluctance to speak English with their children because they believed that their English skills were not as developed as they would like.[48] In these cases, the potential for misunderstanding exists, particularly when an idea cannot be effectively transmitted between languages. A number of scholars (*e.g.* Salvendy 1983; Chambon 1989; Bottinelli *et al.* 1990) further suggest that family dynamics may be disrupted when children are forced to assume parental roles by virtue of their superior English language capabilities. The ensuing role reversals may lead to tensions within the family and may compound familial conflicts. Dorothy, a service provider in my sample, concludes that, "the kids seem to

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[47] Fourteen Khmer participants indicated that they had children.

[48] In all three cases, the respondents were female.

learn English quite quickly and that is a source of many problems. The child becomes a 'family broker'—something which is bad for the child and the adult(s)."

When asked to rank their current level of English language proficiency, most respondents (n=14) remarked that their English skills were not good—at least not as good as they felt their English should be. According to one Cambodian man, "[my English] is poor, I would think. I can get around but [I cannot speak English] very deeply" (Yan). Others maintained that, although their understanding of English had improved over time, their speaking and writing skills needed enhancement. Sokheng's comments are illustrative of those speaking to this issue: "I must talk to people a lot and ask questions a lot. The problem still facing me is spelling and pronunciation. [My English] is still not perfectly clear and not as good as I want it."

Such remarks were reiterated in the comments of service providers who were asked to evaluate the English skills of their Cambodian clients. According to several respondents (n=10), Cambodians' English language ability was generally poorer than other ethnic groups before and following language training. Said one, "I would say that [Cambodians' English skills] are low—lower than other groups. With my experience, yes . . . Cambodians do not speak English as well as other [newcomers to Canada]" (Khorn).

From a broad range of factors put forth to explain this discrepancy, the following four were identified most frequently. These were (a) Cambodians' educational and rural backgrounds; (b) lack of literacy in the Cambodian language; (c) the linguistic and orthographic differences between Khmer and English; and (d) trauma associated with the refugee experience.[49] In addition, the structure of various EAL programs—their length, their suitability and their accessibility—were identified by ten service providers as supplemental barriers. Witness the remarks of Gordon, Michael and Sok.

> Our system is inadequate because we really can't address a lot of things like literacy problems and settlement issues. What happens is that people who have more problems than purely [that of a] lack of English tend to fail—we don't call it 'failing,' we say that they don't 'proceed'—which means that they don't pass the test and they don't pass the course. So generally people who are from villages and who are not very educated will not proceed very quickly. They might stay at the

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[49] Each explanation will be explored in subsequent sections of the thesis.

> bottom language level or the second lowest level for two or three or four times. This tends to be the Cambodian experience (Gordon);
>
> Most of the Cambodians [with whom I'm familiar] have not gone through the LINC classes [because they came to Victoria before LINC's inception]. However, many went to classes at Camosun College and they also attended classes offered through the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria. The instructions at that time were quite clear—students could only enrol in the program for a certain period of time. It was a very difficult situation; Canada Immigration stated that the students could not stay beyond five hundred hours of instruction. The Cambodians had a particularly difficult time with that rule, that requirement that after a specific period of time they couldn't come back (Michael);
>
> When Cambodians first came to Canada, the Government of Canada placed them in class right away. But then, problems started in 1989 to about 1991/1992 because the classes were full and [people] were always on the wait list. People lost their eagerness to go to school because they were waiting for too long. They did nothing—they were watching T.V.—because they didn't have any local class to come to. (Sok)

Perhaps due to the 'courtesy bias', barriers pertaining to the accessibility and suitability of EAL programs were virtually unmentioned in the accounts of Cambodian participants. Only two male respondents commented on these factors, one person stating that the waiting lists for programs were too lengthy (Yan) and the other questioning the practicality of some aspects of the EAL curriculum (Noeun). Eight persons stated that they were happy with the courses they had taken and the teaching they had received.[50] Three of these participants further maintained that they found EAL courses helpful but wished the duration of the training period could be extended. As one declared,

> [the EAL classes] are fine for people who know English, but some people don't know a word. And they [the government] puts them in a class for three months and then expects them to find a job. Now put yourself in our position . . . but we all understand that the government can't afford to put people in classes for two years. (Noeun)

Of the Khmer sample as a whole, twelve participants indicated that they desired further English language training. Two of these respondents were presently enrolled in English classes offered through private organizations (Sita) and learning institutions (Bhoppa). At the time of the interviews, the remaining ten persons had not registered

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[50] Seven persons declined to comment on the usefulness of past EAL courses.

in additional English courses. We must bear in mind, however, that eligibility requirements for current government-funded programs (*i.e.* Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada; Labour Market Language Training) restrict the accessibility of courses for many participants. The exclusion of all persons for whom Canadian citizenship has been conferred signifies that many Cambodians are now ineligible for training and must seek alternative program options. While such courses are available in Vancouver and Victoria through immigrant and refugee settlement agencies, private organizations and other institutions, accessibility may be hampered by high tuition rates, lack of childminding facilities, fixed timetables, clients' unawareness of available classes, et cetera. In addition, funding cutbacks threaten the scope of some existing programs and may lead to the wholesale closure of others (Association of B.C. Teachers of English as an Additional Language 1992b, 1993).

Supplemental (but perhaps more important) factors precluding language training concern the personal experiences of the participants themselves. As stated earlier, most Khmer respondents did not identify structural barriers existent in EAL programs as problematic. Rather, it was the personal experiences in their lives which influenced their ability to access training. One Cambodian service provider—with reference to his own situation—described these factors as follows:

> with my experience—I was an ESL student myself—it depends on the support you have at home (financially and emotionally), as well as the background you have . . . schooling and that sort of thing. For people who have nothing, it can take five years or more [to become functional in English]. For people who have something—like me—it can take about three years to become comfortable. And I studied six hours a day and had many friends who were English speaking. (Khorn)

Within the Cambodian sample subset, four participants told me that they simply did not have the time to attend extra EAL classes—they had family responsibilities (*e.g.* child care) and/or they were working full-time. Other respondents (n=4) explained that EAL enrollment conflicted with their ability to provide for their families. "Sometimes I want to go to school but . . . I go to work to take care of my family," said Chhorn. "I have no money if I go to school. So I like to go to work *more* than go to school."

One participant claimed that time constraints or monetary reasons were not factors affecting his ability to seek further language training. Instead, strong family

bonds inhibited his capacity to learn more English. His account, provided below, concludes this section.

> When talking about English, I'm not very happy with my English [ability]. After being here for ten years and learning and taking classes, my English has improved but something has refrained me from learning more. I can see one thing . . . if I can go and share a room with my [non-Cambodian] friends, I can go and learn English from them. But I cannot do it. My mom doesn't speak English—I cannot choose my goal and leave my mom—I feel guilty. I can't get around it . . . I'm learning to live with it. In Eastern [cultures], the boundary of the family is very close. (Noeun)

## Rural Versus Urban Origins

"It is obvious but nonetheless critical to emphasize, " writes May Ebihara (1985: 138), "that the Khmer come from a cultural setting that differs from [North] American society in a host of both conspicuous and subtle ways." Included among these differences is the large proportion of Cambodians (relative to Canadians) who hail from rural backgrounds. Garry (1980) estimates that up to ninety per cent of Cambodia's pre-revolutionary population lived in villages where they engaged in rice cultivation. This percentage climbed even higher following Pol Pot's rise to power and the concomitant evacuation of the cities (Chandler 1991).

Given statistics like these, it is hardly surprising that sixty per cent of the service providers I queried report that Cambodians come from predominantly rural backgrounds. Of the remaining eight, one believed that the proportions of urban and rural Khmer were equal while seven participants did not specify one over the other. Four persons in particular declared that the war in Cambodia had made the village-city delineation inconsequential. Speaking for these service providers, Gordon proclaimed that, "they all come from villages . . . because everyone I know was forced to work in the country side [during the war]."

Among the Cambodian participants themselves, over half (n=9) indicated that they lived in villages before the Khmer Rouge took over the country. The remaining eight resided in cities: Phnom Penh was mentioned by six respondents while two grew up in Kampong Cham City and Battambang City respectively (see Appendix E). All

seventeen participants recalled leaving their homes upon Pol Pot's assumption of power. In the majority of cases, participants moved to rural areas where they worked as rice cultivators or general labourers.

Life under the Khmer Rouge was radically different from life before the coup. Prior to 1975, most Cambodians lived in villages consisting of perhaps a few hundred persons. Each village had a primary economic focus (most often rice cultivation) and little or no occupational diversification beyond part-time specializations (Welaratna 1993). The family was the basic social unit in village life: there were few organized kin groups beyond the household and clubs, political parties or other formal organizations were virtually unknown (Ebihara 1974). Unlike urban areas, Khmer villages were rarely exposed to influence from Westernized countries nor were their inhabitants frequently in contact with nearby villages. Instead, most villagers preferred to stay within the confines of their homes where they felt physically and emotionally secure.

Cities, on the other hand, allowed for more frequent interactions among strangers, including interactions between members of diverse ethnic groups. They were home to the aristocracy, government employees, religious personnel, business owners, among others. Relative to villages, cities were cosmopolitan and westernized: inhabitants were popularly thought to be more 'worldly' and better educated.[51] Yet in the city, as well as the village, the extended or nuclear family remained the fundamental social group (Ebihara 1985; Welaratna 1993).

The 1975 takeover of Cambodia by Pol Pot's communists transformed village and urban ways of life.[52] In the eyes of Khmer Rouge cadre, the creation of a self-sufficient and egalitarian Khmer society could only be accomplished by the eradication of existing social and economic systems. This included the abolition of currency and markets, the removal of educational and religious institutions, the evacuation of cities

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[51] Both participants who reported learning English in Cambodia, for example, had resided in Phnom Penh.

[52] Fighting between Lon Nol's government troops and the Khmer Rouge devastated much of the countryside, as did the United States' policy of 'strategic bombing' (Shawcross 1984; Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994). Although this bombing was undertaken to destroy North Vietnamese enclaves in Cambodia, it also caused heavy damage to civilian areas (Smith 1987). By 1975, the capital city of Phnom Penh was swollen to five times its size by an influx of Khmer fleeing the countryside (Ledgerwood *et al.* 1994).

and towns and the forced transformation of the Khmer population into unpaid agricultural workers. The duty of each individual was to obey Anka, the high revolutionary organization governing the country. Other allegiances—to family members, to one's religion—were suppressed.

Whether or not they had prior exposure to city life, the rural environs championed by the Khmer Rouge and the artificiality of the refugee camps left most Cambodians unprepared for the realities of life in the country of resettlement. For many, coming to Canada resulted in considerable culture shock. The quick pace, the modern environment, and the numerous items of Western technology were often unfamiliar and confusing.[53] By way of illustration, Dolla and her family jokingly related to me how they would stay up all night to watch the television in order to make sure that it did not blow up. Providing an even more dramatic example, one Cambodian service provider recounted that

> some people, they live so far away from the city, they didn't know 'car' . . . when they saw cars, they said, 'What is that animal?' (Tam)

In contrast to rural Cambodians, Khmer city dwellers were usually more familiar with traffic, new technologies and the monetary economy. Persons from Phnom Penh, for example, were definitely accustomed to the faster pace—the hustle and bustle of city life. Yet the ascription of an urban mentality on inhabitants of even the largest of the Cambodian cities may be dangerous. Nicole, a service provider in Vancouver, cautions that

> not having been to Cambodia but knowing a lot about the area and having spent a lot of time in Laos, I know that it is not an urban society any more than Laos is. I mean the capital city of Laos—Vietiane—is like a village in Thailand. I lived in a village in Vietiane and it functioned as a village even though it was a part of the so-called capital: we had a temple in the center of the village and a village headman—it didn't have an urban mentality *at all.* Even though I only went to Phnom Penh once, it was very different from Vietnam where you have large urban centres with a very urban way of life. [italics mine]

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[53] People from rural areas and those who grew up in the spartan conditions of Democratic Kampuchea may have been unfamiliar with basic technological innovations, including electricity, flush toilets, refrigerators, stoves, phones, cars, et cetera.

Whether or not they lived in a village or a city in Cambodia, all seventeen Khmer in my sample were able to overcome their initial unfamiliarity with the 'modern' surroundings. New technologies, in particular, were often eagerly incorporated into their lives. I was frequently struck by the vast array of video, television and stereo equipment in my visits to Khmer homes. Camcorders were usually on hand to record important cultural events, weddings and trips. According to two Cambodian men I queried, recordings are copied and sent to relatives and friends—be they in British Columbia, in the United States or in Cambodia. "This way," said one, "my relatives can know about my life" (Huot, personal communication).

## Educational Backgrounds

Wide-spread education was a relatively new phenomenon in pre-revolutionary Cambodia: prior to the country's achievement of independence in the mid-1950's, most villagers received limited formal schooling (Ebihara 1974, 1985). By and large, only males were educated at Buddhist temple schools during the period when they temporarily became Buddhist monks.[54] Females were denied admission to these monasteries and it was generally thought that girls needed no education beyond instruction in essential domestic tasks. According to Khorn, "in the Cambodian culture, women don't go to school. Traditionally, they have to stay at home and help do the cooking and cleaning."

From the late 1950's onward, the number of public schools increased dramatically. Girls as well as boys were encouraged to attend classes where they could acquire literacy in Khmer and possibly learn another language such as French. The public educational system—fashioned on the French model—was divided into primary, secondary, higher and specialized levels (Ross 1990).[55] Students were awarded

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[54] In pre-revolutionary Cambodia, it was customary for males to become monks at some point in their lives. Monkhood need not be a permanent commitment under Therevada Buddhist precepts; in fact, most males only entered the monastery for a year or more, following which they resumed secular life.

[55] Primary education, divided into two cycles of three years each, was carried out in state-run and temple-run schools. After completing and passing a national examination, pupils advanced from the first to the second cycle—grades four to six. Secondary education was also divided into two cycles, one of four years taught at a college, followed by one of three years taught at a lycee. Ebihara (1985) states that secondary studies are roughly equivalent to high school in North America.

certificates and/or diplomas as they advanced through the various stages. Still, it is estimated (see Steinberg 1959; Ebihara 1974) that a relatively large proportion of students during the pre-revolutionary period dropped out after the first cycle of primary school. Of those persons who carried on to secondary studies, only a very few advanced to the higher and specialized levels (equivalent to postsecondary education) (Ross 1990).

With the exception of one woman who was unable to afford instruction, all Cambodian participants in the sample report having been to school. Three persons—two women and one man—attended classes for three years or less while the remainder were in the process of completing primary or secondary studies. The average length of time spent in formal instruction was six years, with a range of zero (Dolla) to twelve years (Sophal and Suon). Fifteen of the Cambodians I spoke with maintained that warfare had interrupted plans of pursuing their education. Suon, a Khmer woman, typifies this experience: "I didn't get to university. I went to French school up to high school. [There was] a *coup d'ètat* in 1970 so my studies were disrupted."

The removal of Lon Nol's government in 1975 led to further alterations in the educational system. Under the successive government—the Khmer Rouge—education was transformed, focusing entirely on the promotion of agrarian knowledge and one's ability to follow revolutionary dictates. Ngor (1987: 133) quotes a soldier who instructed the populace in their new order of life:

> if Anka says to break rocks, break rocks. If Anka says to dig canals, you must dig canals. If Anka says to farm, you must farm . . . . We don't need the technology of the capitalists. We don't need to send our young people to school. Our school is the farm. The land is our paper. The plow is our pen. We will 'write' by plowing. We don't need to give exams or award certificates. Knowing how to farm and knowing how to dig canals—those are our certificates.

With formal education branded as subversive by the regime, well-educated Cambodians were targeted as second-class citizens and sometimes killed outright. Consequently, many went to great lengths to conceal their identities (as doctors, teachers, et cetera) and to assume new roles as less educated rural people (see May 1986; Sheehy 1986; Ngor 1987). The ruse was not always successful: of an estimated seven million persons under Khmer Rouge rule, Welaratna (1993) calculates that about one and one-half million wealthy and/or educated individuals were killed, or had died

of starvation and sickness.[56] A Cambodian service provider in the sample illustrates this phenomenon as follows:

> if you compare the political problems of Cambodia and Vietnam, the Vietnamese government kill some people. Mostly, [though], they punish them and put [them] in jail or take them away somewhere. But Cambodians kill each other . . . they kill their own people. And then all the educated people are gone. Only the illiterate and lower educated they [the Khmer Rouge] want to keep. Those problems make [it] difficult [for] the Cambodian immigrant to adapt to a new society. (Sok)

Sok's statements were supported by three-quarters of the service providers queried, all of whom maintained that their Cambodian clients tended to have less formal education than other groups with whom they'd had experience. Said one, "they were poorly educated . . . even [those Cambodians who] had come from cities had not had the educational opportunities that one might think they had because they were city people. In almost every case, people had gotten their second or third year education and that's it" (Michael). According to eleven respondents, the adjustment process upon arrival to Canada was compounded by the limited educational backgrounds of the Khmer newcomers. Ease of acquiring English, in particular, was often correlated with one's level of education. An EAL instructor described the Cambodian students in her class and their subsequent difficulties learning English:

> the majority of the women that came into our program—and you have to remember this program was designed for isolated women although I am guessing that what I have to say is representative of the community—they had not had much formal education, in some cases just maybe two or three years. The majority came from a rural background, although there was one exception—one women who came from a different class in Cambodia. The feeling that she was separate and didn't mix was very evident in the group. She had had more education but still not a lot.
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> So, the majority came into [the class] with no English or very little English. The majority would have been Lower Beginner—just very basic English . . . maybe they knew two or three words. And then a couple of them (including this woman who had a higher status) had

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[56] At the beginning especially, the Khmer Rouge killed those they suspected as enemies of the revolution: officials of the former government; the educated and wealthy urbanites tainted with Western ideas; Buddhist monks considered to be living off of other people's labour; the Vietnamese, who were historical enemies of the Cambodian people. As time went by, however, killings became indiscriminate, and no-one—not even the rural peasants the regime had set out to liberate—escaped abuse or death (Welaratna 1993).

> some English and they were at a Higher Beginner/Lower Intermediate level. They were speaking in sentences but their reading and writing skills were not as good as their speaking skills.
>
> As a group, their culture was very different and their adjustment to school . . . I had the feeling that it was a very new experience for them, being in school. And that they hadn't learned to study in the formal academic way [seemed evident]; the way that they approached learning the language was very experiential—it needed to be meaningful to them.
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> I think that between the Vietnamese group who had not had much education and the Cambodian group who did not have much education . . . I don't know if maybe it was because there were less Cambodian people in Victoria . . . the adjustment [process] seemed [more difficult]. It really hit me that everything was a new experience to them and that there was a lot of culture shock when they came. Sometimes they would just sit and smile for the first couple of months and not even say anything. It was a period of almost a year before some of them were ready to be able to begin to learn. (Patricia)

In relation to educational background, literacy [57]—or the ability to read and write in one's home language—was delineated as another variable affecting the rate of English language acquisition. According to a service provider in Vancouver,

> one thing you will always notice about language learning is that the higher the level of literacy and the greater the level of education, the better that person will do in terms of learning English. Many Cambodians that I have had contact with were not literate in their own language. For example, one Cambodian elderly woman I taught had never held a pencil: I had to teach her how to hold a pencil and make a mark on a piece of paper . . . now that was the most extreme case I've had. Generally though, most of the Cambodians I have met have been very minimally educated. (Nicole)

In my conversations with service providers, the numbers of Cambodians deemed to be illiterate ranged from a mere ten per cent of those served (Lydia) to over fifty per cent of the Cambodian population in British Columbia (Khorn). Four respondents further suggested that illiteracy rates were higher among Khmer women, "because in Asia, if your parents are poor, they cannot afford to send all of their children to school. Normally, they will send only the boys to school. The females stay at home and take care of the housework" (Dien).

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[57] According to Fleming (1989) and Crandall (1992), literacy is a difficult term to define, since it encompasses the psychomotor skills needed for encoding text, the cognitive processes for decoding, and the sociocultural knowledge needed to interpret text in socially accepted ways. In this thesis, literacy refers only to the ability to read and write.

Among the Cambodians I spoke with during the course of my research, virtually all (n=15) maintained that they could read and write Khmer.[58] Whether this is due to the fact that the participants I was able to access had, themselves, been exposed to more education or whether some were simply exaggerating their abilities is difficult to ascertain. It may be that they all knew how to read and write, albeit not perfectly well. A service provider, in reference to her Cambodian students, concludes the following:

> I got the impression that the majority could write in Khmer. But I got the impression, again, that they had only been in school for maybe two or three years and that, even in their own language, their skills were limited. (Patricia)

## Occupations

Besides the transformation of educational structures, the Cambodian struggle affected changes in the kinds of employment held by the Khmer population. All seventeen Cambodian participants in my sample reported fluctuating career histories illustrative of the trajectory of war and immigration on their lives. Chheng's testimony best documents this situation. "In the Pol Pot time," he says, "I was a farmer. Before 1975 I was a student. After Pol Pot, I worked as a trader. [Now, I am a cook's helper]."

Among the Cambodians queried, common occupations for the pre-revolutionary period included domestic work (reported by three participants) and farming (five respondents). Others mentioned fishing (Roeun), sales (Sokheng), nursing (Chhorn) and office work (Suon). Of the remainder, seven persons—one woman and six men—declared that they were students at the time of Pol Pot's *coup d'état.*

Subsequent to the Khmer Rouge takeover, most Cambodians engaged in agricultural work and general labour such as digging ditches or carrying cement. Over ninety per cent of the Cambodians in the sample responded that they had been employed in these kinds of capacities. One woman further noted that some Khmer

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[58] Of the two persons who declared themselves unable to read and write Khmer (or who felt their reading/writing ability was limited), one was female and the other was male.

were soldiers in the new regime or held posts in the Khmer Rouge administration—as group leaders, for example (Dolla). Dolla explained that she herself had been a soldier during this period. Although she did not go into combat, she sewed the army's clothing and acted as an aid. Such positions, she argued, did not necessarily imply that one was an ardent supporter of Khmer Rouge policies. Instead, they were often rewards for good work and general obedience (see May 1986; Welaratna 1993).[59]

For many Cambodians immigrating to Canada, the work experience and skills cultivated in their home country were not always directly transferrable to the employment situation here. Speaking to this issue, a service provider stated that

> people worked in a variety of jobs but many of these jobs were specific to Cambodia and did not give them the kind of background for work here. They were soldiers, rice farmers; there were people who worked in coconut groves—agricultural work [was predominant]. The women were mainly agricultural workers too—everyone worked in Cambodia. (Michael)

Several Cambodians (n=6) drew attention to the fact that they lacked the kinds of job experience necessary to procure desired occupations in the country of resettlement. Those persons with professional qualifications had an especially difficult time obtaining equivalent positions in Canada since their credentials were not always recognized. "Usually if they were professionals in their own country," said an EAL instructor, "it is very, very rare for them to work in that same occupation in Canada" (Debra). As a consequence, entry-level, low paying jobs were the norm according to nineteen service providers. These positions were "mainly in the factory field . . . from fish cutting to packaging, [from] making windows to making boxes. It's lucky for women to get these jobs or they would be washing dishes or working at janitorial jobs. All [positions] are [indicative] of a lower level of work" (Khorn). A settlement worker currently involved in employment counselling elaborated upon the job predicaments faced by most Cambodians:

> many of them are still working at entry-level, low-wage jobs. Restaurant work, hotel/motel jobs and janitorial positions [are common]. They have many different skills from their [home] country but when they come here, they cannot find work. Whether they like

[59] I did not ask participants if they were Khmer Rouge supporters although it is likely that such persons currently reside in Victoria and Vancouver. Among the participants in my sample, virtually all spoke of the suffering they had endured under the Pol Pot regime.

> [the position] or not, they work, sometimes for five, six or eight years in [these] jobs. (Dien)

The testimonies of several Cambodian participants corroborated Dien's claim. Twelve reported occupations such as the following:[60] warehouse positions (*i.e.* shipper/receiver, stock keeper, machine operator); tailor; cobbler; restaurant work (*i.e.* cook's helper, waiter, launderer) and janitor. Six persons related that they had worked in the above positions for a considerable length of time—four years, on average. At the time of the interviews, seven of the twelve respondents were still employed; four Khmer—two women and two men—either had been recently laid off or were unable to work because of illness or childcare responsibilities.[61] An additional two persons were not working as each had enrolled full-time in learning institutions.

Some Cambodians have been able to acquire what appear to be, from the perspective of the larger community, more prestigious occupations. Three persons in the sample told of working as an accounting clerk (Sophal), an entrepreneur (Suon) and a security inspector (Yan). In addition, others I met during the course of my research were employed in the medical field, in money management, in family counselling and in teaching. Both the literature (*e.g.* Ottawa-Carleton South-East Asian Refugee Project 1983; Copeland 1988; Alfred and Wakefield 1991) and the responses of the majority of my participants, however, confirmed that such occupations were relatively rare. The comments of a service provider are representative of others speaking to this issue: "mostly [Cambodians work] in the factory. Very few are in [professional designations] in comparison with the Vietnamese" (Mai).

Barriers to employment re-entry for Khmer refugees were identified by Cambodians and service providers alike. These included (a) the acceptance of foreign credentials (n=4); (b) relevant work experience and educational equivalency (n=20); (c) visible minority identification (n=3); and (d) knowledge of English (n =35). In many testimonies, participants spoke of such barriers as being inter-related—impinging upon

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[60] Participants listed previous and/or current positions.

[61] Chhorn, a respondent who had been recently laid off from his job in a restaurant, was in the process of securing employment in a meat warehouse. His desire to work at this new position was due, in part, to his disdain at being on social assistance. Chhorn's views were reiterated by one of the service providers I consulted. "There can be long-term unemployment," he states, "although I think there is a high determination not to be on social assistance. Thus, [Cambodians] will take low positions" (Michael).

one another and compounding their inability to procure desired employment. Witness the remarks of Chhorn, a Cambodian man in Vancouver:

> I worked [in Cambodia] since 1973. I'm a nurse in the hospital. It is difficult for me to work in Canada [doing a comparable job] because I have no experience and [little] English. When I come here I study [English] for about two months, then I go to work [at another job].

Of the barriers put forth by participants in each sample subset, English language ability was mentioned most frequently. Seven Cambodian respondents related their difficulties finding suitable employment: they spoke of their problems filling out job application forms and their difficulties understanding (or communicating with) employers during the interview process. In the words of one Khmer woman,

> I think it's hard for me to fill in the [application] form because I have a big problem with spelling. When I worked at a restaurant I was waitressing so I had to deal with all the customers. That's why my speaking is more improving than [my] spelling, reading or writing. (Bhoppa)

Other participants spoke of the impact of a depressed economy which can lead to increased competition for jobs. In these cases, persons with limited English language experience feel especially disadvantaged *vis-à-vis* other applicants. Dien characterizes the situation as follows:

> since the 1990's, the competition has increased—there is a lot of competition out there. So one does need English to compete in the current labour market. It is harder for a new arrival right now to find a job with little English—it was easier before. For an immigrant without any English, it is like 'mission impossible.' Even dishwashing [jobs are difficult to find].

The remarks of Sokheng add a personal perspective: "I would say it's really hard for a person looking for a job. When you go to a job interview and you can't understand or you can just understand a few [words], then why should the employer hire you."

While several Khmer I queried had found jobs independently, five Cambodian participants conveyed that they had secured positions through the help of friends,

settlement agencies and government job re-entry programs. Settlement agencies and government programs were further identified by four respondents as institutions offering assistance with resume construction, job counselling and employment training. Sarith, for example, spoke of the valuable help he received in resume writing from settlement agency workers. Their assistance, he confided, helped him to procure a job in the restaurant field. Whether the remainder of Cambodians in my sample availed themselves of (or were aware of) such services is unknown. Even more uncertain is the continued existence of some of these services at a time of budget constraints and fiscal 'responsibility'.

It became clear through my conversations with service providers and Cambodian people that a lack of English language ability not only influences the types of employment available but also one's job mobility. Various researchers (*e.g.* Strand and Jones Jr. 1985; Anderson and Lynam 1987; Boyd 1992) have commented on the predominance of non-English speaking immigrants and refugees in the lower echelons of the labour force and the resultant affects on job advancement. The concentration of non-English speakers in positions where proficiency in English is not required, the scholars argue, may hinder the continued development of English language knowledge. In the absence of formal language training, individuals remain trapped in positions which promise little advancement. I asked the Cambodian men and women in my sample whether they had many opportunities to speak English on the job: did they deal with English speaking customers?; did they speak English with their co-workers and employers?; et cetera. Thirteen individuals responded that they did indeed speak English in the context of their positions.[62] All further added that English was the only means of communicating with one's colleagues and employers. Said one, "we speak English every day . . . I mean *everyone* speaks English. You have to speak English— they [my co-workers] couldn't understand Khmer" (Roeun, my italics).

Notwithstanding the fact that English was spoken by all those employed, the degree to which participants felt comfortable expressing themselves in the language varied. Those persons with poor English skills often devised strategies to deal with tasks where English was required. Sopheap, a Khmer woman employed in a meat warehouse, described her use of English on the job. Through an interpreter she

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[62] The remaining four individuals—three of whom were unemployed at the time of the interviews—did not answer the question.

explained that she was hired to answer the phone and take orders even though her English ability was admittedly very weak. In an effort to deal with this shortcoming, she memorized the numerical system along with some common English phrases including "What do you want?", "How many pounds?" and "What company?." If customers had further questions, she attempted to answer them in broken English; if they did not, she did not say anything. Interactions with co-workers were equally brief and relatively infrequent. Sopheap confided that she felt uncomfortable speaking to her Chinese and Vietnamese co-workers—many of whom were non-English speakers—because she could not communicate in their languages nor could they speak Khmer. Mostly she interacted with Cambodian colleagues with whom she shared a common linguistic background. Interactions with others, when they did occur, were minimal and largely restricted to everyday courtesies.

In contrast to Sopheap, eleven Cambodians maintained that they had few problems communicating with or understanding their co-workers and employers. Noeun's remarks are typical of their responses. "I know my English is workable with other people," he states, "so I do not have problems." Yet Noeun, like other Cambodians I consulted during the course of my research, was anxious to develop his English skills so that he could express himself in more complex ways. Three service providers further suggested that most Cambodians needed to work on their reading and writing abilities, which were often poorly developed in relation to speaking skills (Patricia, Lydia and Leslie). In fact, several participants from both sample subsets agreed that the development of English language skills was perhaps the most important key to job mobility. Said one Cambodian, "if I got perfect English maybe then I could be a [restaurant] manager, not just a cook" (Chheng).

Given the barriers faced by numerous Khmer in the process of finding employment, what were the instances of job satisfaction? Were some Khmer in search of better jobs, or did most persons appear to enjoy their present positions? Answers to these questions, not surprisingly, were mixed. "I've had both," responded a service provider. "I've had students who were very discouraged with what they're doing because it's not what they want to do, it's just survival. And I've had others who were very happy" (Janice).

Janice's remarks were reiterated in the statements of the Cambodian respondents themselves. Eleven persons—virtually all those employed—proclaimed

they were happy to be working in their positions for the wages allowed them some degree of financial independence. Cited uses for earnings included the purchase of homes and cars, childrens' education, visits to Cambodia, and so forth. But whether happiness inspired largely by financial self-sufficiency was also indicative of job satisfaction is indeed open to question. While eight Khmer appeared to enjoy what they were doing—describing their jobs as "satisfying," "interesting" or "fun"—two Cambodian men spoke of their employment in terms of their responsibility to their families. In these cases, family welfare took precedence over individual needs. Their frank responses forcefully illustrate this situation.

> Yeah I must [like my job] because I'm working in one place for that long. For me a job is a job. That is my commitment—I have a family—so it doesn't matter if I quit this job and start another job . . . I still have to work. There is no point—except maybe if I win a lottery or something. We just work to survive basically. (Roeun)

> Yes, [I enjoy my job] very much—but even so, my mind is still on and off with my wishes of studying English. If it is possible [to study English], then maybe I can take a different skill. But I never hear anything . . . and my family need [the job]. [Also], I bought this house. So, I would call [my job] a blessing. (Sokheng)

Whether they were satisfied with their jobs or whether they felt compelled to work in a particular position due to economic realities, no Cambodian I spoke with indicated that he or she was currently looking for other employment. Two persons—one man and one woman—were presently enrolled in learning institutions presumably to enhance their job skills and to improve their English. Another indicated that she was taking a job training course through her workplace so as to acquire expertise in a particular area.

## The Social Circle

Research on Indochinese refugee resettlement (*e.g.* Ottawa-Carleton South-East Asian Refugee Project 1983; Chan 1984; Buchignani 1988) suggests that a high proportion of Cambodian individuals arrived to Canada without a full compliment of family members. The traumas of warfare, extensive genocide, mass starvation and disease left few family networks intact. Many families were also separated during the process of leaving Cambodia or divided as a consequence of sponsorship. Unlike

conditions in the home country—where families were often larger and extended in nature—the normative Khmer family unit in Canada was the nuclear family (parents and dependent children). The numbers of unaccompanied minors and female-headed households were also considerably greater than for the Canadian population as a whole (Copeland 1988).

Fourteen Cambodians in the sample stated that they moved to Canada with at least one family member. In most cases (n=12), these persons were spouses and/or dependent children. "[Canadian immigration policy]," explained a service provider, "favours families consisting of at least a husband and wife, and possibly children" (Michael). Four participants declared that they were married in refugee camps while awaiting resettlement, but whether this was done to improve their chances of sponsorship is unknown. One woman indicated that she arrived in Thailand as a single person but later was pressured to marry in the camps (Dolla). Rumours had circulated through these areas which intimated that single persons would be sent back to Cambodia to support the communists. To protect herself from such an eventuality, Dolla married a man from her natal village.

Of the remaining participants in the sample subset, three individuals stated they came to Canada alone,[63] one person was accompanied by his mother, while another was adopted into a Cambodian family prior to their arrival to the country. Adoption, in particular, seemed to be a relatively common practice among the Cambodians I consulted. Two participants—a man and a woman—indicated that they adopted orphaned or abandoned children whilst in the refugee camps. Their testimonies were seconded by other Cambodians I met informally during the course of my research. In addition to adoption, some Cambodians spoke of joining forces with unrelated families or individuals during their flight from Cambodia. Two respondents declared that, besides family members, they were accompanied to Canada by close friends they met in the refugee camps.

For all Cambodians surveyed, sponsorship to a third country invariably separated them from intimate family members.[64] Thirteen participants told of leaving

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[63] None of these persons were minors at the time of their arrival to Canada.

[64] In her description of Cambodian village life, May Ebihara writes, "the strongest and most enduring relationships in village life are found in the bonds between husband and wife, sibling and sibling, and especially parent and child. Even after a family of orientation has split into the various families of

siblings and/or parents in Cambodia. The majority of these respondents (n=12) remained in regular contact with relatives left behind—they wrote them letters and communicated by telephone. Some participants also made trips to Cambodia to visit relatives while others abandoned travel plans so as to accumulate money for the sponsorship of family members. Not surprisingly, all respondents said that they missed their relatives in Cambodia and that they worried about them occasionally. Three participants specifically spoke of assisting family members through financial means. Said one,

> I help my relatives [financially]. Some live in my village and some live in Phnom Penh, in the city. They have their own business—they have a store—like a Super Drug Mart or something. They are not rich and not poor. I just send money to my mom and dad because they getting old. (Chhorn)

Besides relatives residing in Cambodia, four participants reported having family members (*e.g.* siblings, parents, cousins, et cetera) in the United States. Two respondents were able to visit their relations frequently since they lived in relatively close proximity. Another expressed a desire to see his family members but lacked knowledge of their whereabouts. In the words of Sokhoeun, "I have a lot of relatives in the United States but I can't see them because I don't know where they are. We were separated in the camps."

Eight participants in the sample subset spoke of family members who had emigrated to Canada either before or after the respondents themselves.[65] In most cases (n=6), these persons resided in the same geographical area as the participants. Two respondents reported living with their relatives—they had subdivided residences into separate living quarters to accommodate in-laws or siblings and their respective families. Reciprocal visiting and mutual aid commonly occurred between such kinspersons. Many participants related how they and their relatives helped one another through the exchange and sharing of information, material resources, services (*e.g.* child care, transportation, translation), advice, contacts, and so forth. Respondents

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procreation of the different offspring, members of the former often retain deep affection for and frequent contact with one another. According to both legal and cultural norms, family members should (and usually do) offer one another daily support, loyalty, and consideration, as well as special assistance in time of trouble" (Ebihara 1971: 110-111, as cited in Welaratna 1993).

[65] It is unclear whether these family members were sponsored by the participants or whether they had come to Canada through other immigration channels.

were also able to rely on kin for emotional support in times of crisis. Not surprisingly, the existence of family members in close proximity provided the refugees with a crucial means of coping with changed life circumstances.

Also indispensable in assisting Khmer newcomers in their adjustment to Canadian life was the larger ethnic community.[66] According to Nguyen (1982), ethnic communities provide members with a sense of belonging and a link to their history. Organizations and/or individuals may offer much needed information about housing, employment and available social and health services. Nguyen further adds that communities provide valuable assistance in the development of programs crucial to the resettlement process *(e.g.* language programs, translation and orientation services, et cetera). By doing so, they ease the shock of adjustment as well as nurture a sense of self-esteem and self-reliance among the individuals who make up their composition (Nguyen 1982; Stein 1986).

The Cambodians and service providers I consulted maintained that Khmer people had numerous interactions with members of their own ethnic group. These contacts were informal (*e.g.* friendship relations) and formal (*e.g.* ethnic organizations) in nature, although the former was much more extensive.[67] All Cambodians queried stated that they knew many Khmer people and seventy-five per cent of the subset added that they socialized mainly with other Cambodians. For example, when asked if she had many contacts with Cambodians in Victoria, one female participant replied, "there are about twenty-two families [in Victoria]. I know everyone" (Bhoppa). Another respondent in Vancouver declared, "I know a lot [of Cambodians] . . . maybe more than one hundred people" (Chhorn).

Twelve service providers remarked that the tendency of many Cambodians to interact primarily with members of their ethnic community limited their potential contacts with other Canadians. Said one EAL instructor,

> they stay together a lot. I don't feel that they have a lot of contacts with other Canadians and I think that would be a benefit for them—if they

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[66] Frederick Barth (1969: 13, as cited in Skinner and Hendricks nd: 25) suggests that the critical feature relating to ethnic identification is "the characteristic of self-ascription and ascription by others."

[67] Vancouver and Victoria have formal Khmer Associations; however, these organizations have yet to be firmly consolidated. Accordingly, most interactions are informal ones which operate through networks of kin and friends.

> could meet other immigrant groups in Vancouver. The students that I taught at [an immigrant and refugee organization] . . . had many chances to talk together, to share different ideas. I think that maybe the Cambodians could benefit from that but I also think that they are a little bit shy and like to stay together and talk in Cambodian, where they feel comfortable. (Lydia)

Another service provider maintained that, while some Cambodians did indeed socialize with non-Khmer persons, he was unsure of the frequency and extent of such contacts. In the words of Michael,

> some of the members of the [Cambodian] community have made close friends with other Canadians . . . I was quite happy to see how many Canadians were at the last [cultural] event. But how many of these people are actually involved in the lives of the Cambodians, I don't know.

Thirteen of the seventeen Cambodians surveyed stated that they had made some non-Cambodian friends since their arrival to Canada. Friendships were cultivated at the workplace (n=7); in EAL classes (3); in church (1); at neighborhood gatherings (1), among other places.[68] For the majority of participants (n=11), however, these persons were acquaintances rather than close friends. Yan's comments are typical of those queried. "I have friends at work, that's all," he said. "We [see each other] at Christmas parties and things like that. I know these people but we mostly just work together."

A total of sixteen Cambodians in the sample subset stated that they had more friends from their country of origin than Canadian friends and they reported getting along better with these friends. Many participants (n=7) claimed they felt more comfortable with other Cambodians because they shared common experiences, they spoke the same language and they hailed from similar backgrounds. Sophal's comments best reflect the opinions of those speaking to this issue.

> You feel more comfortable with your own people—you talk about different things. You can say little and still be understood. With my friends at work, we talk about different things. It's not just Cambodians . . . it's everyone who does this. For example, with two

[68] Of the sample subset, males (n=6) tended to identify the workplace while females were more apt to say that they interacted with other Canadians at EAL classes, in their neighborhoods, etcetera. Two participants —a man and a woman—stated that they had non-Cambodian friends but they did not provide any further information.

> friends—one white Canadian and one Chinese Canadian—I would have different things to talk about with each of them. You adjust to different people.

Several Cambodians maintained that it was difficult to make friends with other Canadians as a result of linguistic and cultural barriers. In terms of the latter, six participants from both subsets spoke of differences in modes of interaction as potential impediments. Cambodians were described as "shy" and "docile" while persons of Canadian origin were seen as more "aggressive" and "individualistic." As a consequence, interactions between Cambodians and other Canadians were sometimes hampered by conflicting behavioral norms. Khorn explains the dilemma as follows:

> with our culture, if you see someone look at you and smile or talk to you, then you will feel comfortable talking [to them]. But if someone is individualistic and not friendly then Cambodians will not feel comfortable and will be threatened by them.

Three respondents believed that Cambodians were more apt to interact with other Canadians if the latter approached them rather than vice versa. Another suggested that Cambodians tended to be more outgoing if they were living in areas with few Khmer persons.[69] Surprisingly, only one respondent (a service provider) talked of prejudice and/or hostility on the part of some Canadians as a barrier affecting the integration of the two groups. All Cambodians, on the other hand, expressed entirely different sentiments. Said one, "they [Canadians] are good people and they talk to us with respect. They are humble—not arrogant" (Sokheng).

Linguistic barriers were more commonly alluded to by participants in both sample subsets. Six Cambodians queried expressed reluctance to speak with persons of Canadian origin because they feared their English skills were inferior. Other

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[69] Justine states, "I think that Cambodians are pretty out-going . . . they really try to reach out; they are warm, happy people. They do settle amazingly well—however, it really depends on where they are living. If they are living in a place where there are lots of other Cambodians, then they will just stick with Cambodians. But if they are living in areas where there are not too many [Khmer], then they will have to reach out." With regards to my research, however, I found no appreciable differences between the Vancouver Khmer community (many of whom live in East Vancouver) and the much smaller Victoria population (with no clearly defined Cambodian neighborhood). Participants from both areas indicated that they had difficulties interacting with other Canadians and/or few Canadian friends. This may be due, in part, to the limited size of the research sample and the difficulty I had isolating the influence of various variables. It may also be because both communities, irrespective of their size, have been described by several participants (n=12) as "close-knit" and "insular."

respondents (n=6) stated that a hesitancy to practice speaking and/or writing the language inhibited the development of Cambodians' English knowledge. "That's the problem, " exclaimed Sophal. "If they had Canadian friends, they could practice their English. But most of them, they just go to their own people."

Eight participants—five of whom were male—stated that linguistic barriers were not an issue. All of these persons cited numerous opportunities to socialize with persons of Canadian origin—the workplace being mentioned most frequently (n=7). For those Cambodians who were not formally employed, occasions to meet and interact with other Canadians were more limited.[70] Females, in particular, were affected by their roles as homemakers which could serve to isolate them from the larger populace.[71] As one service provider explained,

> males have [more] interactions with other Canadians; the females tend to have [less]. For example, one Cambodian friend invites me to his home. Normally I talk to the man, even my wife talks to him. His wife [stays] in the back of the house, she is in the background. Females are more isolated from the outside world—they confine themselves to the kitchen and stay with their children—except for those women who are working and can meet other people. (Dien)

For Cambodians in general, the length of residency appears to be an important variable affecting integration. Three service providers posit that it is not unusual for first generation immigrants and refugees to be more insular than those following. Integration, according to these individuals, proceeds slowly as the ethnic community becomes increasingly consolidated and as future generations grow up in the Canadian milieu. At present, Cambodians in both Vancouver and Victoria are attempting to build and strengthen their communities. In doing so, they may be more isolated from other Canadians than will subsequent Cambodian generations. Describing the community in Vancouver, Jasmin's comments best illustrate the forces at play in the lives of many Cambodians.

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[70] While two respondents were enrolled full-time in learning institutions (where they were presented with many opportunities to interact with other Canadians), four participants were neither working nor going to school. An additional respondent was enrolled in EAL training, albeit in a class consisting entirely of Cambodian students. Remarks by four of these participants (see following footnote) confirm the fact that they had fewer opportunities to socialize with persons of Canadian origin.

[71] Four participants—three of whom were female—stated that they had no Canadian friends whatsoever. Two of these women were homemakers at the time of the interviews.

> [The community] is quite insular . . . I think that one of the biggest issues that the Cambodian community is facing right now is to be very 'culture-oriented'—to be on their own. They want their own cultural centre and their own temple—there is not a lot of integration. And that's quite normal—I think they feel [uncomfortable] in this element and part of this process is that people seem to 'stay with their own.' Maybe the second generation will start moving on a little more as they become more integrated. But right now, I don't see this happening at all.

## Independence in the Public Domain

Given the profound linguistic, cultural and social differences which separate Indochina and Canada, it is not surprising that most Cambodians queried (n=15) stated that they were initially uncomfortable in the public domain. Going shopping alone, using the public transport system, visiting a doctor's office, and so forth were listed by participants as challenging, largely because of interactional barriers and culture shock. One respondent related her early experiences as follows:

> when we first came to Canada, people would come to visit—they would come over and open the door and say *Hello*. We would close the door [on them] because we couldn't understand. Also, when I take the bus, I don't ring the bell and the bus doesn't stop. I go to the [inter-cultural agency]—I don't know how to read so I walk right past it. [And with walk signs], I don't know the signs so sometimes I stand and stand for a long time. (Dolla)

Five participants told me that they relied on "helpers" to assist them during their initial months of residency in the country. Individuals from rural areas were among those who especially required assistance as they were often unfamiliar with particular items of technology (*e.g.* elevators, stoves, et cetera), the number and scope of available services, as well as the fast pace of city life. "It was really hard at the beginning, " explained one Cambodian man. "Here, it's a modern country and a little bit crowded. I would say for myself it wasn't that bad [though] because we had a family who helped us—they take us to government building, they teach us how to use the buses, they teach us how to use the telephone book and make calls" (Sokheng).

Orientation assistance was provided by relatives, friends, sponsors, EAL teachers, immigrant and refugee settlement personnel, among others. While friends

and family tended to assist the newcomer informally—accompanying him or her to various places and acting as an interpreter—EAL teachers and settlement agency workers were more apt to provide assistance within the context of their positions.[72] One man, for example, mentioned that a settlement agency had assigned him a volunteer to help with shopping, banking and the like. He added that this person's services were not needed for very long. In the words of Sarith:

> [the inter-cultural agency] ask [that the volunteer] help my family for three months, *at least.* But I think after one week, it's all right to do the banking, to pick up the food, to pick up the meat and to use the money to pay for it . . . I say 'Oh, it's easy!' And when I come back home, the volunteer say,'Oh, you can do everything! You understand everything!' After that he say that he try to help me if I need something. So I say, 'If I need help, I call but if I don't need help, I don't respond.' [my italics]

Like Sarith, Choun and Lan reported that they gained increased independence in the public domain by venturing out alone.[73] Their knowledge of the area in which they lived, for example, was gleaned by walking a certain distance and then driving their car to the same area. They explained that they would walk and drive a little further each day. By doing so, they became more comfortable in their new surroundings.

Virtually all Cambodian participants (n=15) maintained that they were now reasonably comfortable in the public domain. Length of residency appears to bear some direct relationship to the level of comfort expressed by participants. The average length of stay in Canada—eight years—afforded opportunities for most participants to become increasingly familiar with the new surroundings, to take English classes, to interact with other Canadians and to utilize services. Notwithstanding, five participants confided that they were more inclined to venture out in public if accompanied by a

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[72] While much of the assistance rendered by EAL teachers and settlement personnel was provided through specific EAL classes or settlement programs, half of the service providers queried said that they assisted clients in ways not articulated in their job descriptions. Ten service providers, for example, stated that they had provided interpretation and/or translation services to their Cambodian clients *(e.g.* accompanying clients to the doctor; making appointments; filling out application forms, et cetera). Other participants (n=4) mentioned taking clients to various places so as to familiarize them with the new surroundings.

[73] Choun and Lan are one of two married couples I interviewed during the course of the research (the other couple is Sopheap and Chhorn). The remainder of the participants have no relationship (*i.e.* consanguineal or affinal) to each other.

friend or family member.[74] Two additional persons stated that, although they were comfortable shopping or attending the doctor's office alone, they usually brought someone with them to various governmental offices. "To go to the shopping centre alone," said one, "that's okay. Going to the government office, that's harder. I don't know the laws" (Chheng).

Those participants who felt comfortable venturing out alone listed shopping, banking, using the public transport system and attending the doctor's office among the activities that they have undertaken by themselves. Other kinds of pursuits—like having dinner at a restaurant or moviegoing—went unmentioned, perhaps because of the social nature of such endeavors (which were not the subject of discussion). Some Khmer participants (n=5) said that, while they were able to negotiate their surroundings unaccompanied, they did so out of necessity. They preferred to go out with somebody given the option. The majority of these persons (four out of five respondents) were females with limited English language skills. They reported that their children, spouses, family members and friends usually accompanied them outside the home.

Obstacles inhibiting the independence of Cambodians in the public domain were identified by participants in both sample subsets. These barriers included (a) limited English language proficiency; (b) issues related to transportation; and (c) cultural differences. One service provider added that the reluctance on the part of many Cambodians to visit governmental offices may be rooted in their experiences in war-torn Cambodia. As suggested by Khorn,

> going to public places, I don't think that this is something many Cambodians feel comfortable about. During the Pol Pot era, going to public places—like the Ministry of Social Services—was dangerous. Many Cambodians will hesitate even to call [these places].

Transportation was a frequently mentioned obstacle by participants in the sample, most especially among service providers. According to seven respondents, Cambodians tended to frequent particular areas and/or places once a routine was established. In most cases, these places were within close proximity to their homes or conversely, they were areas where Cambodians were likely to procur familiar items and/or meet other Cambodians. As one service provider in Vancouver explained:

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[74] Four of the five participants were women. Length of residency in Canada ranges from six to nine years.

> if they start feeling comfortable in one place, then they will just go to that place—they won't go anywhere else. For example, there is a laundromat on Fraser and Broadway [Avenue]—people hang out there, no matter if they live in Little Mountain or the Cedar Cottage area, they come to that laundromat just because it's familiar and there will be other [Cambodian] people there. So I think that once there is familiarity established in a place or an area, they will go there. (Jasmin)

Some service providers (n=3) specifically identified the location of one's residence as a critical factor to his or her ability to function independently outside the home. Parts of East Vancouver, particularly the Mount Pleasant area, provide familiar environments within which Cambodians operate with relative ease. They are able to procur familiar items in Asian stores and access a number of services in the area, many of which are geared specifically towards Cambodians. High residential concentrations of Khmer further encourage the movement of persons from house to house in a given neighborhood. In Victoria, the absence of Cambodian concentrations may somewhat constrain such movements. Shopping facilities, various services, and friends' homes are more likely to be beyond easy walking distance and excursions, while occasionally made on foot, are more often made by motor vehicle. Those persons who do not drive must rely on family members or friends to provide transportation services. Although many participants learned how to take the bus, public transportation was not regularly utilized by respondents in either city. Four participants told me they felt uncomfortable taking buses by themselves because they did not know where the bus stops were located. Another maintained that he preferred to bicycle or walk to a particular destination as "that was what we are used to [doing] in Cambodia" (Yan).

Whether one bicycled, walked, drove or rode the bus, successfully negotiating one's surroundings was more difficult for persons with limited English language proficiency, according to eleven participants from both sample subsets. Without knowledge of English, signs, numbers, even the person's own address are unintelligible. Persons with limited English language skills can move about without recourse to English, provided that they know where they are going and provided they can recognize numbers and landmarks. In the event they become lost, however, asking for directions from passersby may be a frightening prospect. One Khmer service provider in the sample made reference to the differences associated with travelling in public in Canada and Cambodia. He states that,

> in Cambodia, they don't have much problem travelling in public because as long as they have money and they know the direction, [they can get around]. And if they got lost, they can ask for direction in their own language. [Here], if they don't speak the language, they don't know how to escape from their house. They don't know the name of their street [or] the address where they live. In Cambodia, in the village, they don't have house numbers. They use only description—the trees, the colour or whatever. They use the same way to describe their house in Canada—'my house has a blue roof' or 'it has a big tree'—and the driver cannot find the address. (Sok)

Unlike transportation obstacles, shopping was an activity which posed few problems for the Cambodian participants, even for those respondents with admittedly weak English language skills. Three service providers explained that Cambodians did much of their shopping in the Chinatown districts of Vancouver and Victoria, where they were able to procur familiar items in Asian stores. Comprehensive English language ability was not always necessary in these cases. Provided that one could read the prices on various goods, items could be procured and purchased without need for extensive communication. When spoken interactions did occur, they were often simple and of short duration, or conversely, they were in languages other than English. Four Khmer participants told me they had some knowledge of the Vietnamese, Cantonese and/or Mandarin dialects. Eight additional respondents mentioned that they knew other Asian languages, like Thai or Lao.

Several Cambodian participants (n=4) stated that they also went to "Canadian" stores (*e.g.* Safeway) near their homes. Again, it was possible for limited English speakers to manage these expeditions without much recourse to the language. Participants could simply take their goods to the cash register, or point to desired items. Spoken interactions were usually reserved for the payment of items. In situations where one required greater knowledge of English, some participants (n=5) mentioned that they brought helpers with them to act as interpreters. Respondents identified children, spouses, siblings and/or friends as those who fulfill these positions.

While shopping was not felt to be a problem for most Cambodians, difficulties concerning access to health care were identified by participants in both sample subsets. According to the majority of respondents, language barriers, transportation obstacles, and cultural differences deter unaccompanied visits to the doctor by many Cambodians, particularly women. Fourteen Khmer participants stated that they had a family doctor with whom they consulted in the event of a medical problem. Nevertheless, six

persons added that it was not a habit for Cambodians to see the doctor on a regular basis. Sophal's comments are illustrative of those speaking to this issue:

> I think the one thing is that they are not accustomed to it [the medical system in Canada]. See, I will go see the doctor for my yearly exam, but other Cambodians will go see the doctor only when they get sick. It's not the habit to go to see the doctor regularly.

Seven participants from each of the sample subsets stated that some Cambodians hesitated to visit the doctor's office regularly because they or their clients had difficulty understanding the practitioner. "My doctor is from England and he speaks with an [accent]," said one Khmer man. "I can't understand him all the time" (Bol). Other participants (n=2) believed that doctors could help minimize these interactional barriers by taking the time to explain matters in simple, clear English.

> What a doctor should do is to try to explain very simply and then possibly write [the explanation] down in legible, easy-to-read words so that it can be taken home to somebody in the household with better English [to interpret]. (Justine)

The unavailability of Cambodian physicians in Victoria and Vancouver prompted some Khmer individuals to consult Vietnamese or Chinese doctors, especially if these individuals shared a common linguistic background (other than English). Seven service providers also suggested that Cambodians tended to visit Asian doctors when such persons employed familiar healing remedies, like the use of various herbs to cure illnesses. Other respondents (n=5) declared that Khmer people were apt to consult Asian healers for chronic, non-life threatening illnesses; in the case of acute sickness, they usually visited a Western physician.

When they did go to see an English-speaking doctor, six Cambodian participants said that they usually brought someone with them for translation purposes. Family members generally served as interpreters, although friends often fulfilled this role in the event that no relative was available. Three of the six persons stated that they visited the doctor alone for minor problems but felt more comfortable going with someone when the matter was increasingly serious. Said one, "when I have a headache, I go [to the doctor] by myself. When I have [a more severe] problem, some people help me" (Sita). Difficulties explaining one's symptoms and concerns to the

physician—even in the case of an apparently minor ailment—may have important repercussions for effective health care delivery. According to one service provider:

> it is true that if they have an illness—something that is serious for them—they try to say [their problems] to the doctor but they cannot express themselves. Besides saying 'I have a headache,' 'I have a stomach ache.' They don't know that maybe it is a lung problem; and headaches—[there are] many types of headaches. Those are things that we need to address. (Sok)

Two service providers spoke of the need for trained medical interpreters to provide translation services and cultural explanations of procedures, diagnoses and treatment plans to Cambodian patients. The participants argued that increased training opportunities for translators may help some Cambodians—particularly those persons with few social supports—feel more comfortable with the biomedical health care system. In so doing, more effective utilization of health care resources by unaccompanied Khmer persons may be anticipated.

## Mental Well-Being

Individuals coming to a new country face many pressures, among them finding suitable employment, making friends, enduring separation from family members and learning a new language. I asked participants in both sample subsets to rank the importance of English language ability in relation to other resettlement pressures (*e.g.* finding a job, cultural adjustment, separation from family members, et cetera). Of the thirty-seven respondents, the overwhelming majority (over ninety per cent) ranked language in the top three concerns. Twenty-two of these persons specifically identified English language ability as the most important key to successful adjustment. According to one Cambodian participant,

> English, to me, is the most important thing about living in Canada. It's the communication—I need to understand people and I need for other people to understand me. And it is part of the Canadian culture . . . to adopt the new culture, I need to speak and write English.
>
> English is the *bridge.* [You need English] to get whatever it is on the other side of the bridge. (Noeun, my italics)

Like Noeun, many persons spoke of English language proficiency as a linchpin— affecting (and affected by) other resettlement concerns. One service provider described these concerns as a *circle of needs.* "If you don't have English," he said, "then you don't have a job, you don't have any communication [skills] and so on" (Sok). Another stated that,

> [language] is the basis . . . I mean, there are numerous barriers when immigrants move to a new [country] even when they speak English— there is the pressure of finding a place to live, finding a job and getting one's kids in school. But those are surmountable if you have English. English is the single one biggest barrier. (Patricia)

Four persons in the sample did not rank English language ability in the top three concerns. They chose instead to emphasize the more emotional aspects of resettlement: having one's family members present; enjoying a strong sense of community support; et cetera. Melissa's comments are typical of the participants' responses.

> I would say the most important thing is having family with you; the second most important thing is having community supports; the third most important aspect of resettlement is finding a job; the fourth is one's English ability. The reason I say this is that a person can come to Canada with English and job skills and if they don't have any family with them they may find it really difficult. The community often replaces one's family; among Indochinese peoples you often find strong community supports. If you were to put a Cambodian in some area where they were alone, they would not function, they simply wouldn't. In that culture it is extraordinarily important that the people have a community . . . and the Cambodians are one of the most communal people I have worked with. (Melissa)

Nicole, another service provider, believed that an individual's situation must be taken into account when evaluating the importance of different resettlement concerns. "For those people who are the breadwinners of their family or who must contribute financially to the well-being of their family, the importance of English language ability cannot be underestimated," she states. "On the other hand, seniors or anyone else supported by family members may [focus] on other things which are of higher priority."

Whether English language proficiency was felt to be the key to successful adjustment or whether other factors were equally or more significant, all participants

agreed that English ability was an integral part of the resettlement process. Influences affecting the English language acquisition of Cambodian refugees have been identified in previous sections of the thesis. Included among them are (a) Cambodians' educational and rural backgrounds; (b) lack of literacy in the Cambodian language; (c) the linguistic and orthographic differences between Khmer and English; and (d) structural barriers existent in various EAL programs. Another as yet unexamined factor concerns trauma associated with the refugee experience. Most participants believed it was vitally important that English language acquisition also be considered within this context.

In his article titled "The Experience of Being a Refugee: Insights from the Research Literature," Barry Stein (1986) maintains that many people dealing with refugees have difficulty distinguishing a refugee from an immigrant and have little idea how profoundly different the background and behavior of refugees is from underprivileged minorities. Among the service providers in the sample, however, this was not the case. All admitted that being a refugee did not correlate with being an immigrant and that refugees had special needs specific to their experiences. When asked if the refugee experience affected English language learning, one service provider responded as follows:

> I think it affects it tremendously . . . the refugee camp experience, the trauma, the violence or the witness of violence—you know, things like that. Sometimes immigration people feel that once you're here it's the start of your life. [However], people haven't dealt with [the experiences] in their own countries—[loss of] family, the trauma. These people are not *healed*. They have to move on and learn a different language, learn a different culture, participate actively in the new society, and on and on and on. Refugees, especially, have a much harder time than immigrants who have come here voluntarily. (Jasmin, my italics)

Voluntary relocation versus involuntary movement was elaborated upon by another of the service providers. She maintained that the process of adjustment to a new country may be more difficult for the refugee who has fled his or her country involuntarily, sometimes under great duress. These persons may not be able or willing to fully embrace a life outside of their homelands.

> The whole thing about not choosing to be here is a great barrier. And that question can linger for twenty years and create agony for a person.

> By never being able to let go, they are never really able to embrace [the new culture]. And this is just monumental in its implications. (Dorothy)

The process of *moving on*—of resettling in a new country and learning a new language—was most forcefully related in my conversations with the Cambodian participants themselves. Responding to my question as to whether or not it has been difficult for them to learn English as a consequence of their experiences in Cambodia and in the refugee camps, many replied in the affirmative. Difficulty concentrating in class, problems incorporating much of the new material—because according to three persons, "the brain does not remember"—were mentioned. At times, recounting their experiences could be highly emotional and painful. Speaking through an interpreter, one Cambodian woman recalled how she had lost four of her children immediately before she entered the Thai border. When she arrived at the border, she was pregnant—but at that time, in 1979, there was little food available for all of the refugees. She dug up some roots to eat but the roots poisoned the baby and she aborted the fetus. When she came to Canada and went to school it was very hard for her to concentrate. She kept thinking about her children starving, asking for food (Choun).

Virtually all Cambodian participants spoke of the suffering they had endured under Khmer Rouge rule.[75] According to several respondents, the interaction of severe traumas and difficulties in adjusting to a new culture and environment has profound repercussions for additional language learning. Witness the remarks of Justine, Yan and Sopheap:

> I think that the traumas the Cambodians experienced have had a major impact on their ability and speed in learning English. People who have been through such trauma have lots of problems—sleep disorders, worrying about relatives they've lost or left in Cambodia, problems within the family [in the Canadian context]—these can have a major impact on their English language learning. When someone is worried about something, it makes it hard to learn . . . [and although every newcomer to Canada] experiences stresses [upon arrival], these stresses seem much more severe in the case of Cambodians (Justine);

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[75] In five cases, participants related instances of torture or spoke of the death of family members. The disruption of war on one's life, separation from family members and/or refugee camp experiences were recounted by all respondents.

> at the time [I arrived to Canada] I don't think it was very good . . . everything was hard. A new country, a new culture—your life is completely changed. And you go to school [but] it seems like you're just attending—you're not *getting* to it. You just go (Yan, my italics);
>
> she thought of Cambodia . . . she thought of going back when she was in the classroom. She wondered why she was in this country. (Sopheap, related through translator)

Nine service providers—all of whom were EAL instructors—stated that they took the experience of their refugee clients into account when teaching. Although their methods remained the same, materials were chosen with care and dissemination of the information was often much slower. Other EAL teachers in the sample (n=3) maintained that the composition of the classroom—the inclusion of students from various backgrounds with different levels of language proficiency—made imparting information in a gradual manner more difficult. Said one,

> because most classes are quite multi-level it's really difficult to aim—to take the right direction. If you aim too low, then the people who are more adept are going to be bored and if you aim too high, then the top people will be challenged but the bottom ones will be completely lost. But definitely, particularly with this group, I find that learning is sort of at a plodding pace. And because they don't practice or they don't have the study skills, it seems to take a lot longer for the language to stick with them. (Karin)

Over half of the participants in the service providers category (n=12) stated that counselling services were provided through their workplaces for those students having problems. Notwithstanding, the number of Cambodians who actually avail themselves of such services remains unknown. One service provider believed that, while some Khmer may be willing to talk about the details of their lives with friends or family, the idea of sharing intimate information with a stranger was unknown. "Having worked in [the refugee camps] in Thailand," said Michael, "I knew that the concept of counselling wasn't understood by many Cambodians. If there was any counselling, it was [done] as a friend."

## Attachments to the Country of Origin

For the seventeen Cambodians queried, residence in Canada ranges from three to fourteen years, with a median of seven years. Such statistics raise some interesting questions: Is there a point at which people feel a more concrete sense of Canadian citizenship?; Do these persons ever really shed the identity of being an immigrant or refugee?; Do many envisage a permanent return to their homelands? (see Ervin 1991 for similar questions). I attempted to shed light on these and other issues through my conversations with the Khmer men and women represented in the sample.

Eight participants related that they had visited Cambodia at least once since their arrival to Canada. The remainder of persons in the sample had not traveled to Cambodia although virtually all (n=8) expressed a desire to see the country again. Said one,

> I think I want to go back and visit because there are a lot of people I haven't meet for a long time. Before—after the war—my village, it totally burn to the ground so I don't know how many people survived through it. I want to go back there and visit. (Roeun)

Like Roeun, many participants related a desire to witness the transformations in Cambodia since their departure and to sojourn with friends and relatives. Two respondents maintained that they were planning to visit the country but presently were unable to travel because of unfulfilled Canadian citizenship requirements. An additional three persons commented on the expense of an overseas trip. Instead of accumulating funds for a vacation in Cambodia, one Khmer man preferred to save money for the sponsorship of family members. In the words of Chhorn,

> it costs a lot of money to go over there. I spend on the plane ticket, I give [money] to my brothers and sisters and all of my friends. You have to take a lot of money. I work hard here [instead] of going over there.

While the majority of participants (n=16) stated that they desired to visit Cambodia, most dismissed the idea of a permanent return to their homeland unless conditions in the country vastly improved. "Right now I don't think I go back to live . . . just for a visit," said Sarith. "In the future, I don't know yet—if the situation

change, if the politics change. In the future, if it is safe, I will [go back]. But right now, I don't know what the situation is." Another stated that,

> I think it's too early to come to a decision. There's a lot of things that are dependent on [returning] . . . there is the political situation. I can say for now that I might go back and live in Cambodia—not permanently [though]. Do I want to get back my Cambodian citizenship and my passport . . . no, never. I know that for sure. It doesn't mean that I don't like my country. It doesn't mean that I'm not a Cambodian nationalist. To me, it means that [as] a human being, I love democracy. And it is my right to choose what I want. (Noeun)

Given the length of time many Cambodians have been residents in Canada, I asked participants in the sample whether they identified themselves as 'Canadian' and whether they felt accepted as Canadian citizens. Of the twelve persons who responded to the question, over half saw themselves as both Canadian and Cambodian. Many spoke of the difficulties reconciling the two disparate identities:

> sometimes I got a funny feeling because when I look at how long I've been living in Cambodia and how long I've been living in Canada—it's half now. And I was too young to learn about Cambodian culture and heritage. But I know a lot about Canadian culture because I've been educated here.
>
> So the answer is tough . . . I feel Canada is like home. But when I look at the T.V. and see scenes—like farms and fields—I miss Cambodia. And one thing I cannot change is that I am Cambodian. (Noeun)

In contradistinction to Noeun, three persons in the sample were reluctant to call themselves Canadian because of the conditions which precipitated their flight. For these refugees, Canada was chosen as a place to live solely because it offered refuge from war.

> Why we're here is . . . we don't have a choice. We don't have a good education because of civil war. The Khmer Rouge forced us to become slave laborers—we work so hard to get through—and many people don't survive. Like me, I was very close to being executed many times. Some people think of suicide—I was even thinking about that too—because [life] is meaningless.
>
> When the Vietnamese invade Cambodia then we have a chance to get away. That's why we are here—to find someplace that can give us a better life. (Roeun)

According to another,

> for me, I'm still Cambodian because the word 'Canadian', it doesn't affect me, it just means government regulations. Our minds are always Cambodian and we want to keep it that way and implant it in our children's minds as well.
>
> I have an example. If you have a corn [seed] from Africa and you plant it in Canada—I guess it's 'Canadian corn' but it was originally from Africa. Even though the corn is used to meet Canadian needs, it's still African. That's how I see our situation. (Sokheng)

Even those persons who were Canadian citizens did not always feel accepted by others as such. Three participants in the sample commented on their visible minority status with regards to their identity. Said one,

> I think the thing is that we consider ourselves Canadian but everywhere we go, they consider us something different. Our identity is visible. I have a friend that is Japanese and everywhere she goes, people see her as Japanese [not Canadian]. (Sophal)

Two Khmer men spoke of the difficulties procuring employment for visible minorities. They maintained that some employers were reluctant to hire them because of their Cambodian backgrounds, and more particularly, their accents. Job advancement was perceived as especially difficult:

> when I start working, I understand the job but I cannot explain myself. I cannot look like a businessman, a gentleman—no, I cannot because my accent is horrible. It's a terrible accent. (Sarith)

Other participants (n=2) related their difficulties reconstituting their lives in the country of resettlement. Of primary importance in this regard concerned the sponsorship of family members to Canada. A number of Cambodians I met during the course of the research told me that their attempts to sponsor relatives desiring immigration to this country were unsuccessful. They spoke of the costs involved in such undertakings, the immigration requirements that they could not fulfill, the "red tape." Many Khmer attempted to improve their chances for successfully sponsoring a

relative by taking on two jobs or having more than one family member work. In the meanwhile, these persons also attempted to provide for any family here to the best of their capabilities. Sometimes, as articulated in the comments of Sokheng, the two aspirations were incompatible. His frank observations form the conclusion of the section.

> We want to be close and keep in touch with our own brothers and sisters or relatives in Cambodia. If it's possible, we want to bring them here, but it's not possible . . . we don't have the collateral [to sponsor them]. We miss them so much—we want to see them—so we spend money to go to Cambodia instead of saving it. We looking at our relatives in the distance and we are looking at our families here. We know that we will need a better house, a better life, but we aren't able to get it.

# CHAPTER SIX: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

## Factors Influencing Additional Language Acquisition

When it comes to language learning, there is no single way in which learners acquire knowledge. Successful additional language learning is the product of many factors pertaining both to the learner and to the learning situation. The identification and interpretation of important influences has been conducted by various scholars, among them applied linguists, psychologists and education specialists. Some scholars (see Gardner and Lambert 1959, 1972; Schumann 1976, 1978; Gardner 1985; Brown 1994), in particular, have placed strong emphasis on affective characteristics, or emotional responses, aroused by attempts to learn another language. Gardner (1985) describes such theories as 'social process models'—"conceptual formulations concerned less with the linguistic details of language proficiency than with the social factors that motivate individuals to learn languages or prevent them from doing so" (as cited in Bourghis 1990: 138). Important factors considered in this domain include the concepts of motivation, acculturation and social distance. I would argue, however, that none of these research paradigms is completely sufficient to take into account the complexities of the Cambodian refugee experience.

### Willingness to communicate in an additional language (Motivation)

The current view of the affective domain in additional language research has been greatly influenced by the work of Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1959, 1972, see also Gardner 1985). Over a period of twelve years, these scholars extensively studied additional language learners[76] in Canada, several parts of the United States, and the Philippines in an effort to determine how attitudinal and motivational factors affect language learning success (Gardner and Lambert 1972). 'Motivation' was identified in terms of the language learner's overall goal or orientation while 'attitudes' were seen as the persistence shown by the learner in striving for the goal. During the course of the research, these scholars distinguished two basic types of motivation which were believed to affect the rate[77] and overall success of additional

[76] Gardner and Lambert largely restricted their analysis to the experiences of English-speaking students learning French in high school settings.

language acquisition. An individual's motivation was said to be *instrumental* in form if the purposes of language study reflected utilitarian goals: furthering a career, passing an examination, performing a translation, and so forth. In contrast, Gardner and Lambert (1972) also argued that persons learning an additional language benefited from a positive orientation toward learning the language. A desire to identify with or closely associate with members of the target culture, termed *integrative orientation,* was posited to promote language learning success. In this context, the social consequences of language learning (*i.e.* second culture learning) were emphasized over more instrumental concerns (*i.e.* learning a language for more functional purposes, like finding a job). The scholars argued that integrative orientation was perhaps the more important of the two variables in the majority of additional language-learning contexts under their consideration.

Gardner elaborated upon much of his own and Lambert's research in a 1985 volume entitled, *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning.*[78] Here, he introduced supplementary variables which were posited to affect additional language acquisition, including individual differences like language aptitude, intelligence and situational anxiety, as well as the broader social milieu.[79] These individual variables, together with motivation and attitudinal factors, were believed to either inhibit or facilitate proficiency in another language. Such factors were further grounded within a particular social milieu or cultural context. Gardner hypothesized that the nature of the cultural context—defined here as the beliefs in the community concerning the importance and meaningfulness of learning another language—not only influenced the general level of linguistic proficiency but also, and more importantly, those factors that

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[77] *Rate* = the speed at which one develops additional language proficiency (Ellis 1985: 303).

[78] The central premise of this book concerns the development and description of an additional language acquisition theory which Gardner terms the 'socio-educational model'.

[79] Gardner (1985: 147) identifies the variables as follows: (1) 'language aptitude': correlated with intelligence; a series of verbal and cognitive abilities (*e.g.* memory ability, inductive abilities) that are expected to play a role in language learning since individuals with high levels of competence will be able to generalize these abilities to the new language; (2) 'intelligence': determines how well or how quickly individuals understand the nature of any learning task or any explanations provided; (3) 'situational anxiety': individuals with high levels of anxiety are expected to be less successful in learning additional languages than more relaxed individuals; (4) 'motivation': refers to the effort, want (desire), and affect (attitudes) associated with additional language acquisition and is seen as important in determining how actively the individual works to acquire language material; (5) 'social milieu' or 'cultural context': beliefs in the community concerning the importance and meaningfulness of learning another language.

affected individual differences in achievement. In his view (1985: 125), learning another language necessitated modifications in an individual's self-image:

> the acquisition of a language involves social adjustment . . . . Languages are acquired in order to facilitate communication, either active or passive, with some cultural community. When a second language is involved, this necessitates some form of interest in another cultural community. It requires introduction to *their* vocabulary, *their* way of ordering words, *their* way of pronouncing things, etc. Regardless of whether or not students have any desire to integrate with another group . . . they nonetheless are forced with having to cope with material characteristic of another cultural community. Emotional adjustments are involved and these are socially based.

Of the variables introduced by Gardner, the concepts of motivation and attitudes remained paramount. "Attitudes and motivation are important," he stated, "because they reflect an active involvement on the part of the student in the entire process of learning a second language" (Gardner 1985: 61). Two kinds of attitudes were identified as especially significant in this regard: attitudes toward learning another language and attitudes toward the additional language community. Gardner maintained that these attitudinal categories, along with effortful behavior and the desire to attain a goal, formed the three elements of the motivational construct. Together, such factors reflected the ultimate orientation of the learner—the reasons he or she had for achieving the more immediate goal of language learning. Consistent with his earlier research (see Gardner and Lambert 1959, 1972), the primacy of the integrative motive[80] was emphasized, although Gardner affirmed that other meaningful orientations were certainly involved in additional language study, albeit in a secondary manner. He reasoned that,

> motivation always has an integrativeness [*sic*] component. Even when we speak of an instrumental motivation, this has associated with it some level of willingness to interact with other communities or the specific community in question. Learning another language in order to 'get a job' or 'improve one's education', etc. belies an interest in interacting at some level at least with the other ethnic community. To the extent that it is a powerful motivator, it will influence achievement, but the major aspect in it is not the instrumentality *per se* but the motivation. (Gardner 1985: 168)

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[80] The 'integrative motive', as defined by Gardner (1985: 82), concerns the motivation to learn an additional language because of positive feelings toward the community that speaks that language.

According to Gardner, motivation was a major determinant of additional language acquisition, affecting linguistic (*i.e.* vocabulary knowledge, grammar, pronunciation, et cetera) and non-linguistic (*i.e.* attitudes, values, et cetera) outcomes in achievement. Other variables—particularly language aptitude—were also involved in the language learning process but these factors were often of a secondary nature. Even the orientation of the learner was relatively unimportant, provided that motivation for language learning was aroused. In the epilogue of his book, Gardner (1985: 168-169) reiterated the following points:

> a central concept of the socio-educational model is motivation, and this motivation has a social dimension reflecting individuals' reactions to out-groups in general and the other language community in particular . . . motivation is a major determinant of second language acquisition. The source of the motivating impetus is relatively unimportant provided that motivation is aroused.

The applicability of Gardner's model to different language learning contexts has been examined by numerous scholars, among them, Cummins *et al.* (1990), Cumming and Gill (1992), and Kraemer (1993). Since Gardner's analysis is largely restricted to the experience of anglophone majority group speakers learning French as a second language in Canada, Cummins *et al.* (1990) maintain that it is essential to test the validity of such a theory with language minorities who have little choice in deciding whether or not to learn the language of the dominant majority. Cumming and Gill (1992: 242; see also Kleinmann and Daniel 1981) further argue that "contextually-grounded data are needed to refine current notions of 'motivation' and 'accessibility' to language and literacy instruction, since these notions are currently formulated in terms which are largely irrelevant" to the situations of immigrants and refugees. These scholars contend that even those sociolinguistic theories which have begun to account for the influence of the social milieu, intergroup relations, and ethnic vitality on additional language acquisition of populations of immigrants (*e.g.* Clement 1980, Giles and Byrne 1982, see Bourghis 1990) fail to account for the personal experiences of adult immigrants and refugees, the specificity of these processes on particular cultural groups, and the influence of educational policies on additional language acquisition. What is needed, they maintain, is a contextually-grounded approach to issues of motivation in additional language learning "in order to provide data which might supplement and help to refine the less fine-grained survey approaches which have dominated most previous studies" (Cumming and Gill 1992: 243).

As illustrated in the works of Barudy (1989), Bottinelli *et al.* (1990), Eisenbruch (1990, 1991), and others, a review of the refugee literature reveals some fine examples of the type of contextually-rich studies advocated by Cumming and Gill. These researchers suggest that various resettlement and mental health issues—including additional language learning—can only be understood by taking into account the experiences of the refugee him- or herself. Unlike immigrants who may be *pulled* to the country of resettlement by promises of economic advancement and a new life, a refugee, as defined by Egon Kunz (1981), is *pushed* from his or her homeland. This 'push' impetus is the result of many factors: it may be politically motivated, it may be the response to an impending loss of life or livelihood, it may be due to a fear of prosecution in the home country, and so forth. Whatever the ultimate reasons, flight is typically sudden, forced and unplanned (Stein 1986; Gilad 1990). Many refugees are compelled to leave their homes, their possessions, and very often their family members behind in the course of the escape. The journey to seek sanctuary is fraught with hardships: persons may be exposed to a variety of traumatic and hostile experiences, including robbery, separation from relatives, assault, and starvation (May and Fenton 1986; Scott 1989; Haines 1993). The process of flight may also include a protracted stay in refugee camps where the migrants wait in a 'state of frozen time' for a solution to their predicaments (Beiser 1987). Whether these individuals eventually return home, whether they remain in the country of first asylum, or whether they resettle in another receiving country, such persons are faced with continued, traumatic situations (Farias 1991; McLellan 1993b). Indeed, as Bottinelli *et al.* (1990) and Farias (1991) indicate, the exile of refugees should be characterized as a prolonged stress situation which differs from brief periods of strife more readily assimilated into life's experiences. The forced nature of the migration process, they argue, does not involve "a single traumatic occurrence, or the sum of disagreeable or disturbing events, but rather a *series* of threats, traumas, and losses" which can prove extremely deleterious to a refugee's physical and mental well-being (Bottinelli *et al.* 1990: 23, my italics). These traumatic experiences may be long-term, multigenerational and on-going in the country of resettlement (Farias 1991).

Some scholars (*e.g.* Kinzie *et al.* 1984; Smith 1989; Carlson and Rosser-Hogan 1993) believe that the Cambodian refugee experience can be distinguished from other refugee movements (particularly other Indochinese refugee movements) by the autogenecidal program of the Cambodian leadership and the totality of the imposed

changes. The atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge in their plan to transform Cambodian society were directed towards other Cambodians, independent of their ideological stance (including their support for or opposition to the Khmer Rouge). Those who occupied high status positions, who were well-educated and/or wealthy, were among the persons systematically targeted for execution. In addition, the Khmer Rouge attempted to destroy the basic fabric of Cambodian life. Families were shattered, beliefs and traditions rendered meaningless, educational structures abolished, and religion suppressed. Many Cambodian refugees were subsequently left with an overwhelming sense of powerlessness (Kinzie *et al.* 1984). Smith (1989: 46), for example, quotes one Cambodian man who related his feelings as follows:

> the hardest thing for me to explain, and the one thing that has broken my heart and troubled my spirit so, is that Pol Pot is a Khmer, just like me! Those [Khmer Rouge] soldiers were all Khmers, and they killed so many other Khmers. I don't know why.

Dorothy, a service provider represented in my research sample, adds,

> among refugee groups the Cambodian population is incredibly affected because of the totality of the trauma. One thing that the Cambodian situation has had that others may not have had was the systematic destruction of families throughout the country (because one wasn't to have allegiance to anyone except to those who were giving the orders that day). In the Cambodian situation, attempts were made to destroy a whole way of life, including the family structure.
>
> [Although] there is not a hierarchy of suffering [when one speaks about the 'refugee experience' and compares refugee groups], the Cambodian experience was such that the recovery period will be longer than it will be for other groups, like the Vietnamese.

Studies conducted by Hays (1991) and Carlson and Rosser-Hogan (1993) document high levels of emotional distress among Cambodian refugees resident in the United States.[81] Incidences of depression, anxiety, difficulties concentrating, and sleep disturbances—encapsulated under the category 'Post-traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD)—were found to be considerably higher among this group than for non-refugee populations as a whole. Mollica *et al.* (1987) add that the Cambodian men and women in their study experienced more trauma and/or torture than many Vietnamese or Laotian

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[81] According to Carlson and Rosser-Hogan (1993), most of the Cambodian refugees now living in the United States have experienced severe traumas, including the deaths of loved ones, witnessing and experiencing torture, forced migration, and the loss of all personal possessions. Hays (1991) further maintains that high levels of emotional distress were found among Cambodians of all ages.

participants similarly represented. Despite their suffering, the vast majority of these Khmer participants were reluctant to seek help from others, family members included. A distrust of human bonds was also recorded in the higher perceived rates of hostility and prejudice directed towards Cambodians by other ethnic groups. According to Mollica *et al.* (1987), the inhibition that such distress engenders exacerbates the refugee's ability to seek help. Suffering may continue undiminished, perhaps augmented, for many years. As Carlson and Rosser-Hogan (1993: 229) conclude, "even ten years after they had left their homes in Cambodia, these refugees are still suffering considerable mental distress."

Not surprisingly, the high levels of distress experienced by many Cambodian people significantly impacts their ability to function successfully in the country of resettlement. Several studies (*e.g.* Boehnlein *et al.* 1985; Mollica *et al.* 1987; Chambon 1989) indicate that many refugees in Canada and the United States have difficulties learning English because of trauma engendered in the home and receiving countries. Despite a willingness to learn the language, an inability to concentrate on the material may limit the amount of language acquired and in turn further deepen feelings of social inadequacy and hopelessness (Mollica *et al.* 1987). The reader may recall the example of Choun, whose memories of her dead children severely interfered with her ability to concentrate in the classroom. The responses of three additional participants in my sample illustrate the need to situate language learning within the broader context of the refugee's life experiences:

> English is most important because when I come to Canada, [people] speak English, not Cambodian. I want to learn English, but my brain does not remember (Sita);
>
> as time passed by each of us has a lot of things on their mind so it's hard to concentrate on the language (Sokheng);
>
> at the time [I arrived to Canada] I don't think it was very good . . . everything was hard. A new country, a new culture—your life is completely changed. And you go to school [but] it seems like you're just attending—you're not *getting* to it. You just go. (Yan, my italics)

Eisenbruch (1988, 1990, 1991) has introduced the concept of 'cultural bereavement' to describe the grief and anxiety experienced by Cambodian refugees as a result of being forcibly uprooted, losing their primary social and economic structures, their basic systems of cultural meaning and very often their significant family members.

This scheme maps the subjective experience of refugee clients—*i.e.* what the trauma means to them, cultural cues for signalling distress, cultural strategies for overcoming suffering, and the cultural interpretation of symptoms that, according to a Western biomedical framework, resemble Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Symptoms are then translated into indicators of the refugee's normal and adaptive response to traumatic circumstances. Working through this grief, Eisenbruch concludes, may require a moratorium whereby individuals are temporarily removed from resettlement pressures, including additional language learning. He argues that refugees must have time to consolidate their own cultural identity and retrieve some of what has been lost in the process of flight. Without such a moratorium, the benefits of rapid integration into the host country may be offset by the risks of increased alienation and uncompleted grieving (Eisenbruch 1988).

Based on their findings among Central American refugees living in Mexico City, Bottinelli *et al.* (1990) posit that the tremendous losses suffered by refugees and the stresses experienced en route to the country of refuge undoubtedly affect the process of mourning. In order to cope with more immediate concerns, the refugee represses the mourning process until situations of relative stability force it to the surface. The return of repressed thoughts and feelings is usually expressed as a symptom—"depression or somatizations, unjustified outbreaks of aggression, or difficulties in inter-personal relations" (Bottinelli *et al.* 1990: 26). Rather than 'working through' the loss to the point where the individual can accept it and establish new attachments and relationships, the refugee may lapse into state of prolonged mourning, a state often regarded as abnormal, pathological (*e.g.* Kinzie *et al.* 1980). Bottinelli *et al.* (1990) introduce the concept of "prolonged propositive mourning" (PPM) to reflect the phenomenological experience of the refugee. In these particular cases, the prolongation of mourning serves to keep the lost object alive and active. While the 'normal' process of mourning involves the metabolization and synthesis of the lost object, with a consequent resolution of ambivalence toward it, individuals who engage in PPM increase the ambivalence toward the object in such a way that it becomes completely disassociated. The good object (manifested as memories, longings, yearnings) is idealized as extremely positive and the bad object (the reality that produced the forced migration) is seen as a repository of all that is negative. This ambivalence may be detected in an individual's relationship *vis-à-vis* their homeland, as the following remarks seem to indicate:

> he would want to go but with the conditions over there right now—he can't live over there. So he probably doesn't want to stay there. But at the same time, he wants to go. If the conditions in Cambodia changed, he would go (Lan, related through translator);
>
> no . . . no way [will I return to Cambodia to live]. But who knows. Unless [things] here changed . . . then I might think of going back. But only if I'm sure that its one hundred per cent safe. (Sophal)

Alternatively, the refugee's often fervent desire to return to the home country may result in a distorted notion of time, described by Bottinelli *et al.* (1990) as "frozen time", or the sense of "meanwhile." Despite the unreality of return to one's homeland, the refugee remains oriented to a time of "since we left" and "until we get back." This temporal disturbance permits individuals to sustain an illusion of provisionality regarding their stay in the receiving country, even among persons who have spent years away from their native soil. As a consequence, they are not successful in experiencing a process of mourning for that which is lost, nor, for that matter, do they functionally adapt to current realities that allow them to plan for the future (Bottinelli *et al.* 1990). A service provider in my own research sample explains the ramifications of involuntary migration on the individual's ability or willingness to embrace a life outside of their homeland:

> the whole thing about not choosing to be here is a great barrier. And that question can linger for twenty years [or longer] and create agony for a person. By never being able to let go of [this question], they are never really able to embrace [the new culture]. And this is just monumental in its implications. (Dorothy)

For the individual who engages in PPM, additional language learning may imply a denial of one's native culture and identity and in turn intimate the impossibility of some day returning to one's home country. The 'normal' process of grieving—which supposes that the individual will eventually be in a position of acceptance *vis-à-vis* his or her changed circumstances—is experienced as highly threatening because it involves the loss or questioning of the meaning of life, desire, continuity, and identity. Rather than a pathological or abnormal reaction to suffering, Bottinelli *et al.* (1990) conclude that PPM is an intense and active defense to preserve life and elements of identity. If indeed this analysis applies to other refugee groups, such conclusions seriously call into question the applicability of Robert Gardner's motivational construct to the refugee's experience of additional language learning.

**Acculturation and Social Distance**

In addition to and associated with motivational influences, the process of acculturation has also been mentioned as a factor affecting additional language acquisition. Acculturation, as defined by John Berry (1990: 91), refers to culture change that results from continuous, first-hand contact between two distinct cultural groups.[82] It may be experienced as both a group-level and an individual-level phenomenon. At this second level, acculturation is associated with changes in an individual (both overt behavior and covert traits) whose cultural group is collectively experiencing acculturation pressures. Among the changes imposed by acculturation are physical changes (*e.g.* a new place to live, increased or decreased population density), political modifications (usually involving a change in the level of relative autonomy), economic transitions (*e.g.* changes in occupational types), social relationships (including inter-group and inter-personal changes), cultural changes (alterations in linguistic, religious, educational and technical institutions), and psychological modifications (Berry 1990). Additional language learning, in this context, involves the acquisition of not only a new language, but also the development of a new identity as the individual incorporates aspects of the previously unfamiliar culture. Some scholars (*e.g.* Schumann 1978; Acton and Walker de Felix 1986; Brown 1986, 1994) suggest that the pattern of additional language learning should subsequently reflect the process of acculturation:

> second language acquisition is just one aspect of acculturation and the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target language group will control the degree to which he [or she] acquires the second language. (Schumann 1978: 34)

The difficulty lies then in the identification of significant acculturation processes. Although many scholars have proposed models, one of the better known—H. Douglas Brown's (1994: 171) acculturation model—consists of the following stages:

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[82] Berry (1990) states that while mutual changes are implied in this definition, most changes actually occur in the non-dominant group as a result of influence from the dominant group.

> Stage 1 - a period of excitement and euphoria over the newness of the surroundings.
>
> Stage 2 - culture shock, when the individual feels the intrusions of more cultural differences into his or her image of self and security. The individual relies on and seeks out the support of his or her fellow compatriots in the second culture.
>
> Stage 3 - gradual, tentative recovery. The person begins to accept the differences that surround him or her, slowly becoming more empathetic with persons in the second culture.
>
> Stage 4 - near, or full recovery, either assimilation or adaptation, as the person accepts the new culture and the new self that has developed.

By focusing on the idea that language is a reflection or expression of culture, successful additional language learning (*i.e.* proficiency and eventual fluency) is posited to occur only after the critical sociocultural period (following stages one and two). Brown suggests that those persons who fail to master an additional language may for a host of reasons have failed to synchronize linguistic and cultural development. "The adult who has achieved nonlinguistic means of coping in the foreign culture," Brown (1986: 42) states,

> will pass through Stage three and into Stage four with an undue number of fossilized forms of language, never achieving mastery. He [or she] has no reason to achieve mastery since he [or she] has learned to cope without sophisticated knowledge of the language; he [or she] may have acquired a sufficient number of the functions of a second language without acquiring correct forms.

Like Brown, John Schumann (1978) argues that persons who fail to become acculturated into the target language group will develop pidginized[83] forms of speech in that language. Concerned with the processes of 'natural' additional language acquisition—that is, "learning a language without instruction and in the environment where it is spoken" (cited in Gardner 1985: 135)—Schumann introduces causal variables which may act on the individual to inhibit additional language learning. In his view, acculturation (and hence additional language acquisition) is determined by the degree of social and psychological distance between the learner and the target language culture. Social distance is the result of numerous factors which affect the learner as a

[83] Defined by Hymes (1971: 69, as cited in Sandhu 1984: 8), *pidginization* refers to "the consistent reduction of the functioning of language both in its grammar and its use."

member of a social group in contact with the target language group. Psychological distance, on the other hand, includes various affective factors like motivation, culture shock and ego permeability which concern the learner as an individual. Schumann hypothesizes that social factors are the primary variables; psychological factors are expected to come into play in cases where the social distance is indeterminant (*i.e.* where the social factors constitute neither a clearly positive or negative influence on acculturation). In his article titled, "Social Distance as a Factor in Second Language Acquisition," Schumann (1976:136) describes social distance as consisting of the following parameters:

> in relation to the TL [target language] group, is the 2LL [second language learning] group politically, culturally, technically or economically dominant, non-dominant, or subordinate? Is the integration pattern of the 2LL group assimilation, acculturation, or preservation? What is the 2LL group's degree of enclosure? Is the 2LL group cohesive? What is the size of the 2LL group? Are the cultures of the two groups congruent? What are the attitudes of the two groups toward each other? What is the 2LL group's intended length of residence in the target language area?

Schumann uses the above factors (dominance, integration pattern, cohesiveness, congruence, attitude and length of residence) to identify hypothetically 'good' and 'bad' learning situations. Two hypothetically 'bad' learning situations are described as follows:

> 1. One of the bad situations would be where the TL group views the 2LL group as dominant and the 2LL group views itself in the same way, where both groups desire preservation and high enclosure for the 2LL group, where the 2LL group is both cohesive and large, where the two cultures are not congruent, where the two groups hold negative attitudes toward each other, and where the 2LL group intends to remain in the TL area only for a short time.
>
> 2. The second bad situation has all the characteristics of the first except that in this case, the 2LL group would consider itself subordinate and would also be considered subordinate by the TL group. (Schumann 1976: 139)

In contrast, a 'good' language learning situation, according to Schumann's model

> would be one where the 2LL group is non-dominant in relation to the TL group, where both groups desire assimilation (or at least

> acculturation) for the 2LL group, where low enclosure is the goal of both groups, where the two cultures are congruent, where the 2LL group is small and non-cohesive, where both groups have positive attitudes towards each other, and where the 2LL group intends to remain in the target language area for a long time. Under such conditions social distance would be minimal and acquisition of the target language would be enhanced. (Schumann 1976: 141)

In sum, Schumann's hypothesis is that the greater the social distance between two cultures, the greater the difficulty the learner will have in acquiring the additional language. Conversely, the smaller the social distance (the greater the social solidarity between two cultures), the better the language learning situation. Those persons who fail to become acculturated into the target language group will most likely develop pidginized forms of speech in the additional language as a result of decreased use and input. Schumann (1978) explains that language has three broad functions: (1) a communicative function, which allows for the transmission of purely referential, denotative information; (2) the integrative function, which involves the use of language to delineate the speaker as a member of a particular social group; and (3) the expressive function, which consists of the use of language to display linguistic virtuosity (*e.g.* literary uses of the language) (see Ellis 1985: 253). While native speakers of the language and additional language learners who do not fossilize in the early stages of development will be able to use the target language for both communicative and integrative purposes, pidgins remain restricted to the communicative function. Language development, in these cases, is 'frozen': it does not develop into a fully communicative, elaborated code. Speakers of a pidginized language are thereby 'fossilized' (*i.e.* fixed in one place, highly resistant to change) both linguistically and socially (Acton and Walker de Felix 1986).

The acculturation models put forth by Schumann and Brown have been supported by other acculturation studies, with slight modifications (see Acton and Walker de Felix 1986; Nguyen 1987; and Sharma 1991 for examples). In the majority of these schemes, additional language learners are said to pass through hierarchically-ordered levels as they become adapted to the new surroundings. The process of acculturation may lead to a variety of outcomes, including assimilation, integration/adaptation, separation, and marginalization[84] (Berry 1990, 1992).

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[84] Four varieties of acculturation have been identified by Berry (1990: 93). The *assimilation* option involves relinquishing one's cultural identity and moving into the larger society. The *integration* option, on the other hand, implies some maintenance of the cultural integrity of the group as well as

Acculturation is deemed 'successful' when (and if) the individual passes through the acculturation threshold as one transformed: he or she, replete with a new identity, accepts the new social milieu and is able and willing to fully function within its parameters.

Notwithstanding the considerable popularity of acculturation schemes as explanatory paradigms, a number of scholars (*e.g.* Farias 1991; Sharma 1991; Stephenson 1993; Koehn 1994) have identified serious flaws associated with the underlying assumptions of many of these models. For example, in order to be judged viable, such theories presuppose that the refugee or immigrant is in a position of power with respect to their changed social milieu and circumstances, such that they are able to manipulate it to ultimately facilitate their adaptation. Institutions are assumed to be in place and, more importantly, to be accessible and/or suitable for those who need services, whether they be language training opportunities, settlement orientation, support for victims of torture or political violence, and so forth. As demonstrated in the comments of three of my participants, however, various structural barriers inhibit the effective utilization of services.

> When Cambodians first came to Canada, the Government of Canada placed them in class right away. But then, problems started in 1989 to about 1991/1992 because the classes were full and [people] were always on the wait list. People lost their eagerness to go to school because they were waiting for too long. They did nothing—they were watching T.V.—because they didn't have any local class to come to. And [even though] these people can go to school, at the same time they have financial problems, family and cultural differences. So I would say that [Cambodian people tend to be enrolled in EAL classes] a lot less than one year (Sok);
>
> [The EAL classes] are fine for people who know English, but some people don't know a word. And they [the government] puts them in a class for three months and then expects them to find a job. Now put yourself in our position . . . but we all understand that the government can't afford to put people in classes for two years (Noeun);
>
> [Cambodians] finished their five hundred hours under the Settlement Language program and they graduated and then most of them became Canadian citizens. So they weren't eligible to come back to our funded programs. There is no childcare in our volunteer classes and I don't see

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movement to become an integral part of the larger societal framework (some scholars, *e.g.* Brown 1987, refer to this process as *adaptation*). When there are no substantial relations with the larger society, and this pattern is imposed by the dominant group, the *segregation* or *marginalization* option may be the result. On the other hand, the maintenance of a traditional way of life outside full participation in the larger society may be desired by the acculturating group and thus lead to an independent existence. Berry (1990) defines this last option as *separation.*

> most of them anymore, with the exception of four [people]. I think that there are probably women out there, who are Canadian citizens and who might go to school if there was childminding [available] and if there was a class easily accessible to them. (Patricia)

A second problem noted in many acculturation models (*e.g.* Brown's acculturation scheme) concerns the de-emphasis of the behaviors, attitudes and reactions of persons within the dominant group and the relationship of these factors to additional language learning. For example, the negative orientation of some Canadians toward immigrants and refugees may have repercussions in the area of additional language acquisition by influencing official language educational policies or by affecting the extent of personal interactions. Speaking to the experiences of Greek immigrant women in Montreal, Margaret Lock (1990) identifies an almost unspoken understanding among many Canadians that immigrants and refugees should be thankful about coming to Canada, for their movement constitutes almost all gain and little loss. Those who do not 'successfully' adapt to their new circumstances are accused of being ungrateful, of failing to recognize the comfort and security that the host nation provides. The assumption of a necessary adaptation to the new country—masked by the rhetoric of a multicultural Canadian mosaic—intimates some important contradictions. Can one be different—that is, ethnically, linguistically and culturally distinct—and still be recognized as a deserving Canadian? Although instances of intolerance were rarely reported by the Cambodian participants in the sample, Sophal's comments certainly attest to the reality of such sentiments:

> I think the thing is that we consider ourselves Canadian but everywhere we go, they consider us something different. Our identity is visible. I have a friend that is Japanese and everywhere she goes, people see her as Japanese [not Canadian].

Various researchers (*e.g.* Bottinelli *et al.* 1990; Hopkins 1992; Krulfeld 1993; Stephenson 1993) stress the need to conceptualize acculturation in processual terms—that is, "the creation, re-creation, negotiation, and manipulation of culture and identity by the refugees themselves as well as by members of the societies in which these refugees have resettled" (Krulfeld 1993: 31). They point to the fact that present acculturation schemes underscore the complexity of the acculturation process by their depiction of its hierarchical stages in which persons progress toward a final, desired outcome (usually assimilation or integration). The focus in many cases is on learning a

new culture rather than on the retention of original culture. These two ideas—learning a new culture and retaining the old—are generally seen as quite different processes, and indeed sometimes even as diametrical opposites (Hopkins 1992). As Hopkins (1992: 71) maintains, however, culture acquisition and culture maintenance need not be exclusive:

> the retention of a traditional or ethnic culture and the learning of a new one should not be looked at as antithetical, nor even as two points on a continuum. The transmission and/or acquisition of a new culture can occur simultaneously with the transmission, acquisition and/or maintenance of traditional culture.

In her analysis of resettled Cambodian refugees in the United States, Hopkins (1992) suggests that Khmer who adopt some aspects of American culture—particularly English language, urban job skills and technology—may be better able to preserve aspects of Cambodian culture. What Hopkins does not incorporate in her examination, however, are the specificities of culture contact—particularly the stresses engendered by such contact which may be uniquely experienced by different generations, by men and women, and by persons hailing from different class or occupational backgrounds. Other researchers (*e.g.* Chambon 1989; Bottinelli *et al.* 1990) have provided more meaningful critiques of present acculturation schemes by drawing out many of the particularities of culture contact. Speaking to the experiences of Central American refugees living in Mexico City, Bottinelli *et al.* (1990) introduce the concept of 'double bind' to illustrate the dynamic interplay between culture maintenance and culture acquisition and the interpretations of each by different age cohorts. The double bind describes a situation wherein the refugee receives two simultaneous messages: (A) I want to be who I was, who I am; (B) I want to and must become another. Although contradictory, Bottinelli *et al.* (1990) maintain that both messages must be obeyed since each contains vital physical and conceptual elements of survival. Generally the desire for A is greater than for B; however, the authors suggest that this dilemma may be manifested differently among various age cohorts. Adolescents and young adults, for example, may have greater ambivalence with respect to the past than their seniors, whose images and memories of home are often more positive. Consequently, young people may feel considerable guilt for desiring acculturation (B) over continuity (A) because they fear that their desires will be discovered by family members and be misinterpreted as disloyalty (Bottinelli *et al.* 1990).

Speaking to this issue, one participant in my sample (Chhorn) described an altercation he had with his uncle in which the latter described Chhorn as "Canadianized" and therefore no longer Cambodian. Chhorn maintained that he found these comments "extremely upsetting." Likewise, another participant in the research sample related his troubles learning English since his arrival to Canada. According to Noeun, these difficulties could be attributed to strong family bonds.

> When talking about English, I'm not very happy with my English [ability]. After being here for ten years and learning and taking classes, my English has improved but something has refrained me from learning more. I can see one thing . . . if I can go and share a room with my [non-Cambodian] friends, I can go and learn English from them. But I cannot do it. My mom doesn't speak English—I cannot choose my goal and leave my mom—I feel guilty. I can't get around it . . . I'm learning to live with it. In Eastern [cultures], the boundary of the family is very close.

For many of the participants in my research sample, continued additional language development outside the classroom (*i.e.* in a natural environment) was subject to numerous contextual factors, several of which have not been taken into account by acculturation schemes such as Schumann's social distance model. The concentration of non-English speakers in occupations where proficiency in English is not required, for instance, may hinder the continued development of English language knowledge, as attested by the comments of Sopheap, the Khmer woman employed in a meat warehouse. Persons who are not formally employed may have increased difficulties meeting and therefore interacting with other English-speaking Canadians, which according to another of the participants, may affect additional language proficiency levels as well. In the case of Khmer women working in the home, Dien explains that,

> males have [more] interactions with other Canadians; the females tend to have [less]. For example, one Cambodian friend invites me to his home. Normally I talk to the man, even my wife talks to him. His wife [stays] in the back of the house, she is in the background. Females are more isolated from the outside world—they confine themselves to the kitchen and stay with their children—except for those women who are working and can meet other people.

While twelve of the Cambodian participants I accessed expressed a desire to further their English language training, supplemental factors prevented them from doing so. Four participants told me that they simply did not have the time to attend extra EAL

classes—they had family responsibilities (*e.g.* child care) and/or they were working full-time. Other respondents (n=4) explained that EAL enrollment conflicted with their ability to provide for their families. "Sometimes I want to go to school but . . . I go to work to take care of my family," said Chhorn. "I have no money if I go to school. So I like to go to work *more* than go to school" (italics mine).

Factors associated with the refugee experience are likewise overlooked in Schumann's acculturation model. Trauma engendered in the home and receiving countries, postponed mourning, disempowerment associated with uprooting, a lack of trust in human bonds, and the destruction of personality are just some of the variables associated with the refugee experience which may profoundly affect the additional language learning process. Farias (1991) argues that acculturation models must address the refugee's experience of inequality, the abuse of power in relationships, and the sense of powerlessness, of hopelessness. These factors may have as much bearing, perhaps more, on additional language acquisition than many of the social distance variables advocated by Schumann. Klassen and Burnaby (1993) further maintain that the emphasis on social group relations fails to account for the personal experience of barriers and may ignore systemic obstacles which prevent immigrants and refugees from obtaining further educational opportunities or participating in the majority society at large. According to these authors,

> the numbers are silent on why individuals have or have not learned English, the personal experience of barriers, and the individual agendas which affect a range of issues related to effective participation in education, employment, and other areas of everyday life. (Klassen and Burnaby 1993: 382)

Despite the fact that Schumann's model ignores many of the particularities of the individual refugee's life, it should be noted that the concept of social distance and its relationship to additional language learning is not without its merits. Several examples of social and psychological distance were elicited by participants in the course of this research. They included instances of culture shock, cultural incongruence, linguistic shock, and cultural preservation, among others. Service providers, for example, identified the predominantly rural backgrounds of Cambodians and their relatively low levels of formal education as barriers affecting English language proficiency levels. According to these persons, Cambodians coming to Canada often experienced considerable culture shock:

> if you compare the political problems of Cambodia and Vietnam, the Vietnamese government kill some people. Mostly, [though], they punish them and put [them] in jail or take them away somewhere. But Cambodians kill each other . . . they kill their own people. And then all the educated people are gone. Only the illiterate and lower educated they [the Khmer Rouge] want to keep. Those problems make [it] difficult [for] the Cambodian immigrant to adapt to a new society. (Sok)

The adjustment process upon arrival to Canada—for example, the process of learning English in a classroom setting—may be further compounded when a newcomer is completely unfamiliar with the milieu. In the words of another service provider:

> the majority of the [Cambodian] women that came into our [English language] program—and you have to remember this program was designed for isolated women although I am guessing that what I have to say is representative of the community—they had not had much formal education, in some cases just maybe two or three years. The majority came from a rural background, although there was one exception—one woman who came from a different class in Cambodia. The feeling that she was separate and didn't mix was very evident in the group. She had had more education but still not a lot.
>
> So, the majority came into [the class] with no English or very little English. The majority would have been Lower Beginner—just very basic English . . . maybe they knew two or three words. And then a couple of them (including this woman who had a higher status) had some English and they were at a Higher Beginner/Lower Intermediate level. They were speaking in sentences but their reading and writing skills were not as good as their speaking skills.
>
> As a group, their culture was very different and their adjustment to school . . . I had the feeling that it was a very new experience for them, being in school. And that they hadn't learned to study in the formal academic way [seemed evident]; the way that they approached learning the language was very experiential—it needed to be meaningful to them.
>
> I think that between the Vietnamese group who had not had much education and the Cambodian group who did not have much education . . . I don't know if maybe it was because there were less Cambodian people in Victoria . . . the adjustment [process] seemed [more difficult]. It really hit me that everything was a new experience to them and that there was a lot of culture shock when they came. Sometimes they would just sit and smile for the first couple of months and not even say anything. It was a period of almost a year before some of them were ready to be able to begin to learn. (Patricia)

In relation to educational background, some service providers delineated literacy—or the ability to read and write in one's home language—as another variable affecting the rate of English language learning, particularly for women. However, the extent of illiteracy rates among the Cambodian population in British Columbia remains ambiguous. While some service providers felt that illiteracy rates for Cambodians were high—over fifty per cent in some cases (Khorn)—the majority of Cambodians (n=15) I consulted declared themselves able to read and write Khmer. Whether this is due to the fact that the participants I was able to access had, themselves, been exposed to more education or whether some were simply exaggerating their abilities is difficult to ascertain. It may be that they all knew how to read and write, albeit not perfectly well. Patricia, with reference to her Cambodian students, concludes the following:

> I got the impression that the majority could write in Khmer. But I got the impression again that they had only been in school for maybe two or three years and that, even in their own language, their skills were limited.

Perhaps a more significant barrier to English language acquisition for the participants represented in this study concerns the linguistic and orthographic discrepancies between Khmer and English—factors which Schumann encapsulates under the category of language shock. In this context, respondents identified differences in the respective scripts as a factor affecting the rate of English language learning. Gordon, an EAL teacher, maintains that,

> because they have a different script, it is harder for [Cambodians] to learn our alphabet and [consequently] to be good at literacy (reading and writing). For the Vietnamese, this is easier because they have the same script as we do. Everyone who has a different script has more problems learning English.

Many Cambodians I met during the course of the research attributed their difficulties learning the English language to grammatical, phonological and orthographic distinctions between Khmer and English. Problems with pronunciation were perceived as especially significant by three Khmer participants. One such respondent believed that his accent impeded his ability to advance in the workplace.

> When I start working, I understand the job but I cannot explain myself. I cannot look like a businessman, a gentleman—no, I cannot because my accent is horrible. It's a terrible accent. (Sarith)

Six of the seventeen Cambodian participants surveyed expressed a reluctance to interact with other Canadians—whether it be in the work environment, in a doctor's office, or in one's neighborhood—because they feared that their English skills were inferior. Others (n=7) explained that, while they had non-Cambodian friends with whom they conversed in English, they preferred to interact with Cambodian people because they shared common experiences, they spoke the same language and they hailed from a similar cultural background. The reader may recall the comments of Sophal, who stated that persons often relate on a deeper level with members of their own ethnic group, since they can "say little and still be understood." Alternative explanations were rendered by six participants from both sample subsets who spoke of the differences in modes of interaction as potential impediments. Cambodians were described as "shy" and "docile" while persons of Canadian origin were seen as more "aggressive" and "individualistic." As a consequence, interactions between Cambodians and other Canadians were sometimes hampered by conflicting behavioral norms. Khorn explains the dilemma as follows:

> with our culture, if you see someone look at you and smile or talk to you, then you will feel comfortable talking [to them]. But if someone is individualistic and not friendly then Cambodians will not feel comfortable and will be threatened by them.

While virtually all Khmer participants stressed the importance of proficiency in English because, in the words of one respondent, "we aren't going back [to Cambodia]" (Roeun), the preservation of their culture and language was also seen as vitally important. Several persons spoke of the need to pass on the Cambodian language to their children, whose English skills were usually more developed than their corresponding Khmer ability. Said one, "sometimes we ask our kids something in Khmer and they respond in English. Its really hard . . . I guess we have to do something about it" (Chheng). Another participant responded to this issue more forcefully. He states that,

> our minds are always Cambodian and we want to keep it that way and implant it in our children's minds as well. (Sokheng)

According to three service providers in the sample, the strong emphasis on cultural and linguistic preservation is not unusual for first generation immigrants and refugees. Integration, these persons maintain, proceeds slowly as the ethnic community becomes increasingly consolidated and as future generations grow up in the Canadian milieu. At present, Cambodians in both Vancouver and Victoria are attempting to build and strengthen their communities. In doing so, they may be more isolated from other Canadians than will subsequent Cambodian generations. Describing the community in Vancouver, Jasmin's comments best illustrate the forces at play in the lives of many Cambodians.

> [The community] is quite insular . . . I think that one of the biggest issues that the Cambodian community is facing right now is to be very 'culture-oriented'—to be on their own. They want their own cultural centre and their own temple—there is not a lot of integration. And that's quite normal—I think they feel [uncomfortable] in this element and part of this process is that people seem to 'stay with their own.' Maybe the second generation will start moving on a little more as they become more integrated. But right now, I don't see this happening at all.

### Factors Affecting the Rate of English Language Acquisition for Cambodian Refugees

In an article titled, "Motivation or Accessibility? Factors Permitting Indo-Canadian Women to Pursue ESL Literacy Education," Cumming and Gill (1992) argue that present theoretical paradigms of additional language acquisition which focus on the influence of motivation and intergroup relations often fail to account for the personal experiences of immigrants and refugees engaged in the language learning process, and the specificity of these processes with various cultural groups. What is needed, these researchers maintain, is contextually-based research which incorporates such experiences and is relevant to the situations in which language learning takes place. As illustrated in the preceding sections, my own research with Cambodian refugees in British Columbia calls into question the applicability of 'social-process' theories advanced by scholars such as Robert Gardner (1985), H. Douglas Brown (1986, 1994) and John Schumann (1976, 1978). Their notions of motivation, acculturation and social distance are criticized on the following grounds: (1) the theories are formulated in terms which are largely irrelevant to the situations of Cambodian refugees; (2) such explanatory paradigms underscore the behaviors, attitudes and reactions of members of the host society and presuppose that the refugee or immigrant

is in a position of power with respect to their changed social milieu and circumstances, such that they are able to manipulate it to ultimately facilitate their adaptation (institutional barriers to language learning are included here); and (3) theories focusing on inter-group relations fail to recognize intra-group heterogeneity, *e.g.* the different perspectives of men and women, persons of different generations, and individuals hailing from different class or occupational backgrounds. Open-ended interviews with Cambodian refugees and service providers in British Columbia, on the other hand, identified several factors affecting additional language acquisition which are not congruent with the matrices of variables put forth by the aforementioned additional language acquisition theories. Among the more salient factors identified by participants were (a) trauma associated with the refugee experience; (b) institutional barriers which may prevent access to English training programs, or conversely, make available programs unsuitable; (c) situational barriers (*e.g.* job commitments, home responsibilities, lack of money, and transportation problems); (d) the predominant backgrounds of Khmer refugees (*e.g.* rural versus urban origins; educational levels); and (e) the linguistic and orthographic distinctions between Khmer and English. While some of these factors have been incorporated into language learning models (*e.g.* Schumann's social distance/pidginization model), they are often not central to their discussion. Data generated from this research indicates that more comprehensive, contextually-based information is needed to fully understand the process of additional language learning for the refugee.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

While the last chapter emphasized factors affecting the rate of English language acquisition—particularly variables which may act on the individual to inhibit acquisition—it must be noted that the majority of Cambodian refugees I consulted managed most aspects of their lives quite effectively, despite a lack of English proficiency. Virtually all respondents (n=13) were formally employed or attending educational institutions at the time of the interviews. Most had few problems interacting in the public domain and the majority of persons (n=13) had made some non-Cambodian friends since their arrival to Canada. The stereotype of the refugee as hopeless, helpless—'looking for the handout'—is simply unfounded in the case of the participants surveyed in this study. Nevertheless, the data generated from open-ended interviews with Cambodian refugees and service providers exemplify problematic aspects of Canadian governmental policy, which accepts immigrants and refugees but does not provide adequate services and/or support to make their adjustment to the Canadian milieu less difficult (see also Klassen and Burnaby 1993). This research also illustrates the need for refugees to establish a degree of continuity in the country of resettlement as a means for facilitating their adjustment. Several recommendations, garnered from participants in the sample and reinforced by published materials, emerge from the study.

(1) Increased Accessibility to Language Training for Canadian Citizens. Additional language learning takes time. For refugees and other involuntary migrants, the language learning process may be exacerbated by factors such as trauma associated with political violence and uprooting, illiteracy in the home language, unfamiliarity with a classroom setting, and so forth. Dorothy explains one aspect of the refugee's predicament:

> a culture of silence is pervasive in a refugee's life which affects every aspect of existence, including language learning. Refugees live in a time bubble—the past is very painful, the future is very scary and everything is predicated on the present. Language learning is a long-term process . . . and thus, you can see the difficulties.

While sixteen of the seventeen participants in the sample subset attended EAL classes subsequent to their arrival, virtually all of these persons (n=12) desired further language training. We must bear in mind, however, that eligibility requirements for current government-funded programs (*i.e.* Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada [LINC]; Labour Market Language Training) restrict the accessibility of courses for many participants. The exclusion of all persons for whom Canadian citizenship has been conferred signifies that many Cambodians are now ineligible for training and must seek alternative program options. While such courses are available in Vancouver and Victoria through immigrant and refugee settlement agencies, private organizations and other institutions, accessibility may be hampered by high tuition rates, lack of childminding facilities, fixed timetables, clients' unawareness of available classes, et cetera. In addition, funding cutbacks threaten the scope of some existing programs and may lead to the wholesale closure of others.

Supplemental factors precluding language training concern the personal experiences of the participants themselves—their job commitments, familiy responsibilities, and so on. As one service provider maintains,

> there are many individuals from these communities who still have need of language training on an on-going basis to meet their needs and their schedules—particularly women because of [their] childcare responsibilities and their need to work in jobs where often they are isolated linguistically. If they become Canadian citizens and they don't have the financial resources, the options are really limited. If you have a part-time job and you have little kids, what time do you have to go to [an EAL class] and [how can you afford] to get a babysitter? Do you have the money to pay for the classes or is that money you are earning in a restaurant going towards feeding the kids? I would like to see universal accessibility to language training for Canadian citizens. At least up to the level provided for by LINC. (Patricia)

Like Patricia, nine service providers emphasized the need for increased accessibility to EAL classes for Canadian citizens. They spoke of increased training options, flexible timetables, affordable training rates, and childminding facilities for women with children. Their recommendations have been supported by various published studies, including d'Anglejan *et al.* (1986), Damov (1989), and Klassen and Burnaby (1993).

(2) Suitability of EAL programs. According to ten participants from both sample subsets, EAL classes must be adapted to reflect the student's experiences and to meet his or her needs.

> ESL classes should be much more related to the lives of the immigrants; we need to listen and learn from these people . . . The LINC program works really well for people who have had fairly good education in their home country, who are fairly motivated and who have the time and energy needed to study English. But I also think that not everyone is like that and considerations must be taken. Now, literacy classes have been set up for those [people] with lower scores, but aside from that there needs to be more integration with what happens in the ESL class and what happens in people's lives. (Justine)

Among the recommendations mentioned most frequently by participants are: (a) additional pre-literacy classes and increased literacy training for teachers; (b) classes and classroom materials which are sensitive to the experiences of victims of torture or political violence; (c) more 'English for Specific Purposes' classes, language training for accreditation, and employment-related courses that include a language component. In regards to the last suggestion, one service provider maintains that,

> if language learning was linked to an employment assistance, skill-building, mentoring program, then the [learning] process would be much faster and [language] learning would have an applicable component. Learning doesn't occur in a void . . . by marrying language learning with an employment component, people will tend not to get so bored, frustrated and demotivated. (Dorothy)

Klassen and Burnaby (1993) further argue that it would not cost substantially more to offer EAL training programs that suit the needs of a wider range of immigrants and refugees. Indeed, by doing so, they suggest that there might be savings in terms of efficiency.

(3) Trained, Qualified Interpreters in Classroom and Natural Settings. The use of bilingual interpreters in the EAL classroom, particularly in cases of low literacy, has been advocated by several participants in this study as well as by researchers elsewhere (*e.g.* Boyd 1992; Burnaby 1992; Immigrant Services Society of B.C. 1993). One participant further suggests that, in some cases, grouping students of a particular ethnic group into a special class may actually facilitate their adjustment.

> One thing presently being done which may be useful in some cases—for example with the incoming Kurdish refugees—is to group them and put them together in a special class. That class, I believe, had some bilingual support and was created, not only to teach these people English, but to help them adjust [to life in Canada]. In this particular case, I think that was very appropriate. These people came from such an extremely [different] cultural background—for instance, in some cases the women had never seen a diaper, had never operated a stove, they didn't know what a refrigerator was—[so to group them in a special class] was really appropriate. (Nicole)

In addition to the classroom, the use of bilingual interpreters in the health care system has been suggested as a means to encourage increased accessibility and utilization of health care resources (see also Stephenson 1991; D'Avanzo 1992; Uba 1992; Immigrant Services Society of B.C. 1993). Two service providers spoke of the need for trained medical interpreters to provide translation services and cultural explanations of procedures, diagnoses and treatment plans to Cambodian patients. The participants argued that increased training opportunities for translators may help some Cambodians feel more comfortable with the biomedical health care system. In so doing, more effective utilization of health care resources by Khmer persons may be anticipated.

(4) <u>Qualified Help for Victims of Torture and Political Violence.</u> The majority of Cambodian participants represented in this study spoke of the suffering they had endured under Khmer Rouge rule. In some cases, the effects of those experiences—encapsulated under the category Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder—mitigated against additional language learning. These included difficulty concentrating on language materials, intrusive thoughts and images of traumatic events, and numbing of responsiveness to people and events. Accordingly, some participants maintained that increased training opportunities for psychiatrists, psychologists and lay persons on issues relating to torture and political violence are needed. In addition, the establishment of organized support systems for Cambodians reluctant to avail themselves of mental health services is required.

(5) <u>Increased Flexibility of Immigration Requirements for Family Sponsorship.</u> A number of Cambodians I met during the course of the research told me that their attempts to sponsor relatives desiring immigration to this country were unsuccessful. They spoke of the costs involved in such undertakings, the immigration requirements that they could not fulfill, the "red tape." Many Khmer attempted to improve their

chances for successfully sponsoring a relative by taking on two jobs or having more than one family member work. In the meanwhile, these persons attempted to adjust to a new life in the Canadian milieu. However, as ten participants in the sample maintain, the existence of family members in close proximity provides the refugees with a crucial means of coping with changed life circumstances. Melissa's comments are typical of the participants' responses.

> I would say the most important thing is having family with you; the second most important thing is having community supports; the third most important aspect of resettlement is finding a job; the fourth is one's English ability. The reason I say this is that a person can come to Canada with English and job skills and if they don't have any family with them they may find it really difficult.

(6) Strengthening and Rebuilding Cambodian Community Supports in British Columbia. Also indispensible in assisting Khmer newcomers in their adjustment to Canadian life is the larger ethnic community. Several participants in both sample subsets spoke of the need for Cambodians to reconstitute such links in the country of resettlement. Of particular importance was the conservation of cultural practices and beliefs, including the Cambodian language, religion, festivals, and so forth. The establishment and/or rebuilding of community organizations was regarded by many persons in the sample and larger communities as a fundamental means to preserve Cambodian culture as well as to assist Khmer in their adjustment to Canadian life. In a February 1994 community meeting of Cambodian individuals in Vancouver, the following goals were identified as particularly important: (a) to build a united Cambodian community and to have a single organization that represents everyone's interests; (b) to develop a Cambodian language newsletter; (c) to maintain Khmer culture and language (via radio, television, language programs); (d) to have programs for women and youth; and (e) to have accessible English and job training (Cambodian Community Development Meeting, February 17, 1994, Vancouver). My conversations with Khmer individuals in Victoria suggest that these goals are shared elsewhere.

Two participants in the service providers category maintained that the strengthening of community support organizations may be beneficial in other ways. More specifically, the development of community structures may lead to the assumption of some responsibility for the provision of services by these groups, where traditionally

this has been the domain of government. Speaking to this issue, Mai emphasized the need for ethnic communities to become increasingly self-sufficient.

> In terms of the community itself, I see the need to create leadership in the community and to assist the community to help itself. I think that all immigrant groups—not just Cambodians—have to stop looking at settlement services as the 'be all and the end all.' All communities have to be self-sufficient.

(7) <u>More Involvement of Canadians in the Lives of Immigrants and Refugees.</u> As one participant so aptly puts it,

> my own personal experience has said that what most immigrants need is a good solid Canadian friend to help them integrate—a close friend, outside their community, who is around for years. Many Canadians don't go out and say,'Oh, there's an immigrant family, I wonder if they need a friend?' Instead we say, 'Oh, they are Romanian and the other Romanians are there to help them.' However, the other Romanians may be working at two jobs and not have time to assist a new family. And they may have been on the other side of the political fence. . .
>
> Many of the immigrants and refugees I've spoken with say that the one thing they are missing is a Canadian friend. Many of them have never been invited into the home of Canadian person, or if they do it is only for special occasions like Christmas. I hear that because, for many of the people that I work with, I am the only Canadian person they know. And some of these people have lived in Canada for several years. (Melissa)

Other participants in the sample emphasized the benefits of social interactions—whether they be at work, through 'buddy systems' organized by immigrant and refugee settlement agencies, or within the context of one's neighborhood—between Canadian-born persons and newcomers to the country. Benefits included cultural exchanges, the development of friendships, and, for the immigrant or refugee, the opportunity to practice their English in a natural setting. Befriending someone of a different cultural or racial background, these persons further assert, may contribute to increased tolerance of difference in the broader social context.

## <u>Conclusions</u>

The recommendations advanced above are intended to address the concerns of Cambodian individuals in British Columbia and to facilitate the adjustment of these

persons to the Canadian milieu. For many Cambodians, arrival to Canada is precipitated by the interaction of severe losses and traumatic experiences in the country of origin. These stresses often continue in the country of resettlement. To quote Jasmin, a service provider represented in the sample:

> sometimes immigration people feel that once you're here it's the start of your life. [However], people haven't dealt with [the experiences] in their own countries—[loss of] family, the trauma. These people are not *healed.* They have to move on and learn a different language, learn a different culture, participate actively in the new society, and on and on and on. [my italics]

Recognizing and/or understanding the contexts in which additional language learning takes place, the personal experiences of immigrants and refugees engaged in the language learning process, and the specificity of these processes with various cultural groups provides an indispensible grounding. Implementation of the recommendations above is the next necessary step.

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# APPENDIX A: Contact Sources

Anglican Refugee Ministry, Diocese of British Columbia

Association of B.C. Teachers of English as an Additional Language

Camosun College

English as a Second Language Resource Centre, S.J. Willis School

ESL Network Group, Victoria

Kampuchean Civilization Charity Association

Khmer Association of Victoria

Kimberley Cambodian Support Group

Known to interpreter

Known to other participant(s)

Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia

Inland Refugee Society of British Columbia

Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria

MOSAIC

Mount Pleasant Neighborhood House

Pacific Immigrant Resources Society

Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Social Services

Vancouver Community College

Vancouver School Board

Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre

# APPENDIX B: Explanation of Research Project

## THE RESEARCHER

Caroline Francis is a graduate student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Victoria. Information derived from these interviews will form the basis of a thesis required for the completion of a Master of Arts degree in Anthropology. Ms. Francis' thesis supervisor is Dr. Peter H. Stephenson, an Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria.

## GOALS OF THE RESEARCH

The research is intended to focus on English language use and adaptational strategies among Cambodians residing in Vancouver and the Capital Regional District. By doing so, it hopes to identify any potential difficulties involved in the delivery of EAL programs to Cambodians and it strives to contribute to an increased understanding of the refugee experience.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Interviews will be conducted with persons from two groups: (1) Cambodian refugees residing in Vancouver and the Capital Regional District; (2) EAL teachers and service providers with experience dealing with Cambodian clients. PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY. All participants will remain anonymous, and interviews are completely confidential. Participants are free to stop the interview or retract information provided during the course of the interview at any time within a three month period following the interview. Information beyond that period will be incorporated into the thesis analysis.

## FINAL REPORT

It is expected that the research will be completed and the results offered for evaluation to the researcher's thesis committee at the University of Victoria by December 1994. Provided the thesis is deemed acceptable by the committee, a copy of the thesis will be available in the MacPherson Library, University of Victoria. A summary of research findings will also be provided to the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (I.C.A.), the Vancouver Multicultural Society (V.M.S.) and the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (I.S.S.).

## ENQUIRIES

If you have any further questions, or decide that you would like something added to (or deleted from) the interview record, please do not hesitate to call me, Caroline Francis, at 598-8417. If I am not available, you can leave a message for me at the Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria, at 721-7046 (between 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.).

Your cooperation in this project is greatly appreciated.

## APPENDIX C: Letter of Informed Consent

I understand that any part of my discussion with Ms. Francis regarding language use and adaptational patterns among Cambodian refugees is intended for her use as data on which her M.A. thesis in Anthropology is to be based. Ms. Francis may use this material in future publications or public presentations that may follow from this research.

My participation in the project has been completely voluntary. I understand that my name shall not be used and that the interview(s) conducted between the researcher, Caroline Francis, and myself are completely confidential. Ms. Francis must abide by these conditions in order to use the information provided for any purpose.

Ms. Francis will remove from the record all or part of any information provided by me during the interview(s), providing I make this request within three months after our last interview.

______________________________ ____________________

(Participant's signature) (Date)

# លិខិតឲ្យច្បាប់ប្រើពាក្យក្នុងការសម្ភាសន៍

ខ្ញុំយល់ជាក់ស្តែងថា ពាក្យដែលខ្ញុំមាននិយាយជាមួយលោកស្រី Francis ដល់របៀបប្រើភាសាហើយនិងរបៀបចូលរួមក្នុងសង្គមខាណាដានៃជនភៀសខ្លួនខ្មែរ ពាក្យនោះដែលគាត់នឹងវែកញែកនិងបញ្ចូលក្នុង thesis របស់គាត់ខាង Anthropology ថែមលោកស្រី Francis អាចប្រើសេចក្តីវែកញែកនោះក្នុងអត្ថបទ បោះពុម្ពផ្សេង ៗ នៅពេលអានាគត ។

ខ្ញុំបានចូលរួមក្នុងកម្មវិធីស្រាវជ្រាវនេះដោយស្ម័គ្រចិត្តទេ ។ ខ្ញុំដឹងថាលោកស្រី Caroline Francis គ្មានប្រើឈ្មោះខ្ញុំក្នុងការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះទេ ថែមគាត់នឹងទុកពាក្យទាំងអស់នោះជាសេចក្តីដ៏សម្ងាត់ ។ លោកស្រី Francis ត្រូវតែធ្វើស្របនឹងវិន័យទាំងអស់នេះ ទើបគាត់អាចបញ្ចូលពាក្យដែលខ្ញុំនិយាយក្នុងអត្ថបទដែលគាត់តែងបាន ។

លោកស្រី Francis នឹងលុបចេញសេចក្តីណាមួយដែលខ្ញុំបាននិយាយពីពាក្យដែលគាត់បានកត់ ឲ្យតែខ្ញុំសុំគាត់លុបក្នុងរយៈពេល ៣ ខែក្រោយសេចក្តីសម្ភាសន៍ចុងក្រោយបង្អស់ ។

______________________________ ____________________

(ហត្ថលេខាអ្នកចូលរួមក្នុងការស្រាវជ្រាវ) (ថ្ងៃខែ)

# APPENDIX D: Interview Schedules

## Interview Protocol #1 - Cambodian Men/Women

A. Background - Immigration Experience

1. How long have you lived in Canada?

2. What part of Cambodia did you come from?

   a) - Did you come from a city, town or village?

3. Did you come here from Cambodia, or did you go to another country first?

   a) - If so, how long did you stay in the other country(ies) before coming to Canada? In which refugee camp(s) did you live?

4. Did you come to Canada alone or in the company of others?

5. Who sponsored you to come to Canada? (government versus private sponsorship)

6. Did you live in other areas of Canada before coming to British Columbia?

7. If they speak some English now: Did you speak any English before you arrived in Canada?

B. Background - Personal Information

8. How old are you?

9. Have you been able to find work? If so, what kind of job do you have? (OR Are you looking for a job?)

   a) - If you are unemployed, when was the last time you had a job?

   b) - If you are a student, what are you studying?

10. Did you work in Cambodia? What did you do?

11. Did you go to school in Cambodia? For how long? (*i.e.* did you finish high school; did you receive any graduate/vocational training?)

12. Do you still have close relatives in Cambodia? Do you hear from them by letter or telephone?

    a) - Do you worry about them?

13. Do you have any family members living in Victoria/Vancouver? Canada?

14. Do you have many friends in the Cambodian community in Victoria/Vancouver?

a) . . . outside the Cambodian community?

15. Do you think much about your life in Cambodia?

a) - Have you been able to go back to Cambodia?

b) - Do you think about returning for good some day?

C. EAL Information

16. What languages do you speak (can have a conversation in) and write?

17. What language do you usually speak at home?

18. Are you (or have you been) enrolled in an EAL program? If so, please identify program(s) and elaborate on length and place(s) offered.

19. Was (Were) the program(s) helpful (*i.e.* did it/they improve your English)? Was (were) the program(s) sufficient in terms of length/content? If they were not sufficient, do you have any suggestions for improvements?

20. If you have never enrolled in an EAL program, please elaborate on the reason(s) why you haven't used them (*e.g.* not helpful; unsuitable; waiting list; family responsibility; et cetera)

21. If you had the chance to take more English classes, would you? If so, what is stopping you (*e.g.* time constraints, monetary reasons, eligibility requirements, et cetera)?

22. How would you rank your English language proficiency:
- excellent
- good
- adequate
- minimal
- none

D. Language Use and Resettlement

*i) Employment (see Section B for background information)*

23. Did you use English when looking for your last/present job? Was it difficult to find work based on your English ability?

24. Does your present/last job require that you speak much English? Elaborate.

25. Have you ever had difficulty communicating with your employer(s)/co-workers? Elaborate.

26. Do you enjoy your job? Do you think that if you more fluent in English, you would be able to get a better job (or an equivalent job to the position you held in Cambodia)?

*ii) Ability to Access Health Services*

27. When you or one of your family members get sick, what do you do? Do you use Western medical services in your community, such as nurses, doctors, dentists, hospitals, and so forth? If not, why not?

28. Is it ever difficult for you to communicate your symptoms to these practitioners? Is it difficult for you to understand practitioners' explanations of their procedures?

a) - Do you ever hesitate to see a medical practitioner because of these problems?

29. Do you usually go to the doctor alone or do you bring someone (*e.g.* spouse, daughter/son, friend, et cetera) for translation purposes?

*iii) Public Domain/ Interactions With Other Canadians*

30. Based on your English language ability, do you feel comfortable using the public transport system? going shopping alone? using immigrant support facilities? seeking legal advice? voting?

31. If you have friends outside the Cambodian community (see Section B), do you ever have difficulty communicating with them? Elaborate.

32. If you do not regularly interact with other Canadians, is lack of English language fluency a barrier inhibiting contact?

*iv) Mental Well-Being*

33. Has it been difficult to learn English because of your experiences in Cambodia and in the refugee camps?

34. In terms of adjusting to life in Canada, how would you rank the importance of English language ability in relation to other resettlement pressures (*e.g.* finding a job; cultural adjustment; separation from family members; establishing a social support network, et cetera)? Would English speaking ability be ranked in the top 3 concerns? The top 5 concerns? The top 10 concerns?

35. In terms of your identity, do you feel a concrete sense of Canadian citizenship or do you still see yourself as a Cambodian refugee living in Canada?

E. Other Information

36. Do you have anything you would like to add about taking EAL courses or about the resettlement process?

37. Is there any other person(s) you would feel comfortable suggesting I contact?

F. Miscellaneous Information

Complete after interview

*Rate English language proficiency*

Circle one - Excellent / Good / Adequate / Minimal / None

*Interview conducted in English or Khmer*

- If Khmer, detail translation arrangements (name of translator, their relationship to interviewee, etc.)

*Any additional comments*

**Interview Protocol #2 - Service Providers**

A. Background - Experience with Cambodian Clients

1. Location of service?

2. Service provider's ethnic background?

3. What is your position? With which organization (company)?

4. How long have you worked with EAL speakers in British Columbia?

5. Do you see many Cambodian clients? If so,

    a) - What is the proportion of Cambodians serviced, as compared to other ethnic groups?

    b) - What is the age and gender breakdown of these clients?

    c) - How are their English language skills in relation to other ethnic groups with whom you have experience?

    d) - What is their length of residence in Canada (if known)? Do you know whether or not your clients come from villages or cities in Cambodia? Proportions?

    e) - What are their educational and employment backgrounds (if known)? (*i.e.* do they tend to be highly/poorly educated? do they tend to be underemployed?)

    f) - Are many of these clients illiterate in their home language(s)? Proportions?

6. Do you have/have you had other kinds of interactions with Cambodians in Canada? (informal, previous job, volunteer work, research, et cetera)

    a) - Do you know much about Cambodian/Vietnamese/Lao cultures? (*i.e.* have you ever travelled to any of these areas; do you have friends from any of these areas; have you read about any of these cultures?)

    b) - Do you speak any Khmer/Lao/Vietnamese?

B. Perceptions of Major Issues

*EAL Programs/Issues*

7. What is the general length of an EAL course (in weeks or months) offered through your organization? How long do immigrants/refugees generally spend in these EAL courses (has the length of time spent changed following the initiation of federal language programs like LINC/LMLT)? Does the amount of time spent in EAL training differ for males/females and for persons of different age groups?

8. Based on your perceptions, what is the fluency level of immigrants and refugees following completion of EAL training? Is their English ability sufficient for the work place; does it permit them to access governmental services; are they able to fully function in Canadian life?

9. Are the programs offered flexible in terms of time and day offered? Do you have waiting lists for admittance into EAL courses? Do you offer childcare on the premises? Are classes accessible to those who need them?

10. What kinds of courses does your organization offer (*i.e.* language for the work place; conversational English; academic English)?

a) - Who designs the curriculum? What is emphasized (*i.e.* what are the goals of the language program[s])?

*Language Use and Resettlement*

*i) Language Fluency Levels/ Role of the EAL Provider*

11. Based on your dealings with Cambodian clients, how long do they tend to be enrolled in EAL training? What is (are) the fluency level(s) of this group before and following the completion of EAL training?

12. In addition to providing EAL services for Cambodians, are you ever called upon to do any translating/interpreting (*e.g.* accompanying clients to the doctor, immigrant service agencies, et cetera)? How often?

13. Are you ever called upon to provide counselling services? Elaborate.

a) - Do you have any training in this regard?

*ii) Employment*

14. Do your Cambodian clients report difficulties finding suitable employment because of a lack of English language fluency? Elaborate.

a) - If working, what kinds of jobs do members of this group commonly hold? Are many of your Cambodian clients unemployed/underemployed (see Section A)?

b) - Are many Cambodians (with whom you have experience) working at jobs which require little English speaking ability? Do they have access to language programs through work?

c) - Do these persons enjoy their jobs? Are many of your Cambodian clients enrolled in EAL training so as to improve their English language ability and t hereby procure better jobs?

*iii) Ability to Access Health Services*

15. Do the Cambodians with whom you have contact utilize Western medical services within their communities (*e.g.* nurses, doctors, dentists, hospitals, et cetera)?

16. Do these persons ever report difficulties communicating their symptoms to medical practitioners? Do they have difficulty understanding practitioner's explanations of their procedures?

17. Is there a tendency for your clients to underutilize health services because of linguistic barriers?

*iv) Public Domain/Interactions With Other Canadians*

18. How comfortable are your Cambodian clients in the public domain? (*i.e.* do they feel comfortable using the public transport system? going shopping alone? using immigrant support facilities? seeking legal advice? voting? ) Do they feel more comfortable in this regard following EAL training?

19. Do your clients commonly interact with members of their own ethnic communities? Do they have many contacts (*i.e.* particularly social contacts) with persons from outside their ethnic communities?

20. Do your clients ever report difficulty communicating with other Canadians (*i.e.* persons from outside their ethnic community)? Elaborate.

> a) - Do linguistic barriers prevent some of your clients from establishing social ties with other Canadians? Elaborate.

*v) Mental Well-Being*

21. In terms of adjusting to life in Canada, how would you rank the importance of English language ability in relation to other resettlement pressures (*e.g.* finding a job, cultural adjustment, separation from family members, the refugee experience, et cetera)?

22. As you are probably aware, many Cambodians came to Canada under abrupt and traumatic circumstances. How does the refugee experience affect language training and language learning (if at all)? Do you modify your teaching methods when dealing with refugees? What do you do?

C. Other Information

23. Do you have any policy recommendations to make which you think might improve both your work, and care for individuals from these communities?

24. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

D. Miscellaneous Information
Complete after interview

*Gender:*

*Approximate age of interviewee:*

> Circle one - 18-25 / 26-35 / 36-45 / 46-55 / 56-65 / 65+

*Any additional comments*

## Map 1: Map of Cambodia

United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs (1990: 2)

# VITA

Surname: FRANCIS Given Names: CAROLINE ANNE

## Educational Institutions Attended:

| | |
|---|---|
| University of Victoria | 1991 to 1995 |
| University of Alberta | 1989 to 1991 |
| University of Alberta | 1983 to 1987 |

## Degrees Awarded:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| B.A. (Special) | University of Alberta | 1987 |

## Honours and Awards:

| | |
|---|---|
| Sara Spencer Research Foundation Award | 1993-94 |
| Dean's Scholarship | 1993-94 |
| Robert Spence Research Foundation Award | 1993-94 |
| Graduate Students' Society Bursary | 1993-94 |

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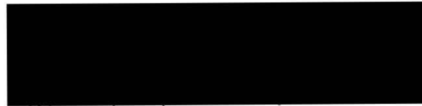
Title of Thesis: Giving Voice: English Language Learning, Language Use, and the Resettlement Process of Cambodian Refugees in British Columbia

Author 
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Caroline Anne Francis
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January 30, 1995
(Date)