

Lawrence J. Levy
Higher Education Adviser
Ecole Superieure de Pedagogie
Sisavangvong University

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TO : Mr. Norman Green, Chief, USAID/Education

SUBJECT: A Recommendation Regarding Language and
Language Training

Although there appears to be no clear policy concerning it, English as a Foreign Language has been given a place in the curriculum of the secondary schools of Laos. Teaching of English as a Foreign Language is done primarily by native speakers from several English speaking countries. To supplement these teachers and, eventually, to replace them, Lao teachers of English as a foreign language must be/are being trained. The only school in Laos where a program exists for the training of Lao teachers of English is at the English Section of the Ecole Superieure de Pedagogie at Dongsaphangmeuk.

The "English Section at Dong Dok" has produced some excellent speakers of English. Several have earned AFS tours and scholarships to English speaking countries for diplomas, and for undergraduate and graduate degrees. Many of these have returned to responsible positions

in the Lao educational system. But "Dong Dok" has produced only a handful of teachers of English as a foreign language.

In June, 1972, the largest (20) and the longest-trained (seven years in English language studies) group of students will graduate from the English Section. They and the four seven-year classes that follow them represent the bulk of the Lao Teaching of English staff of the country. Some of these will have their abilities improved by short-term certificate programs like that at RELC. Others will earn degrees abroad. Some may return to positions of leadership and advanced level teaching, and some of that leadership may find its way back to the English Section. But, to judge by this group the prospects for quality and quantity in the teaching of English as a second language by Lao nationals are not promising.

In the ten years of its history, the English Section at Dong Dok has undergone frequent changes of program, of staff, of materials--even, perhaps, of philosophy and purpose. The most recent and significant change is the decision to begin the "Section" at the second cycle of the secondary school system, grade 5 (American equivalent-grade 11) (dropping gradually the first four years), and to expand it, perhaps starting in 1973, to the upper cycles of the College of Education.

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There have been and there are now good texts used; there have been and there are good people employed, mostly volunteers. What is lacking in the English program at this time, however, is leadership which is professional, which is linguistically sound, and which promises some degree of stability and constancy. (This in no way reflects on the present administrative leadership of the school.)

If the purpose for which the English Section seems primarily to exist is to be fulfilled; if there are to be capable Lao teachers of English as a foreign language to spread the teaching and learning and using of English in Laos, then such leadership must be found--to organize and maintain, to give quality direction to the curriculum at the English Section and to its staff. It would seem appropriate that this leadership be supplied by USAID/Education on a professional contract basis, although other agencies (e.g. Fulbright, British Council) might well contribute.

A man who fills the qualifications is available. The curriculum vitae of James Chamberlain is attached. A former IVS, former Fulbright, he has had advanced training in Lao linguistics and TEFL. He could, starting in July, 1972, begin the task of stabilizing the curriculum, of increasing and improving teaching materials--eventually

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to produce new and especially prepared materials based on contrastive linguistics, of moulding and training a staff, of leading the students toward acceptable standards of performance (as compared with other non-native speakers) in English and in teaching of English. He should be hired immediately, with full recognition that the job as described is only a beginning that will need both time and additional staff.

While the foregoing is a separate and self-contained recommendation, it represents only the introduction to the major proposal.

The basic educational problems of Laos are language problems, and they begin with the Lao language. Lao must become the primary language of instruction in the school system. To achieve this goal:

1. The Lao language needs analysis and control--of grammar, vocabulary, spelling--to accommodate to advanced fields of knowledge and new worlds of thought.
2. The production of teaching materials in Lao for all levels of the school system needs to be vastly increased; the need is for both original production and translation.
3. The modern study and teaching of Lao can extend its use into the political, social, cultural communication of the country.

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4. Teachers of Lao language need to be trained to improve the teaching of Lao in the school system.
5. Teachers of all subjects need, in addition to materials, assistance in teaching, in Lao, the subjects they have learned in other languages.

Finally,

6. Careful study of Lao, particularly through contrastive analysis, can improve the teaching of all foreign languages via teacher-training and production of materials.

The goal of Laoization of education is now being achieved partially by the Fa Ngum School project and, to a lesser degree, by national language projects at the Elementary, Adult, and ENI levels of education. The goal can be more rapidly and systematically achieved through centralized, national supervision. For this purpose, a National Linguistic Institute, based at the College of Education, is proposed. Such an Institute would guide and direct, coordinate and multiply, the Lao language aspects of Lao education. Such an Institute would either contain or marshall the efforts of a team of linguists, textbook writers, translators, master teachers, foreign language teaching experts, etc.

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The Institute begins with:

1. The recognition of the need for language control.
2. The belief that it is desirable to focus this control in a research center that is University-based.
3. The employment of a staff and the assignment to it of responsibilities.

It is this Institute which is the major proposal of this paper. Ministry of Education's acceptance of this idea could result in Foundation or other support. For the acceptance of this proposal and the eventual accomplishment of its larger aims, the hiring of a Staff Linguist at the Ecole Superieure is an introductory recommendation. If the positions of Staff Linguist and TEFL expert could be filled separately in 1972-73, even greater progress could be made.

The intermediate step between the introduction and the major proposal is the creation of a unified, Lao College of Education. Such an institution will have Lao as its major language of instruction--in the training of teachers for the teaching of social sciences, math, natural and physical sciences, art, music, perhaps technical subjects. It will also have a Lao Department which will assume the task of training

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teachers of Lao language and literature for the secondary schools. It will have separate departments (size depending on need and the determination of national policy) of English and French and perhaps other languages. It may be that all of these languages will be combined into a Language Department, for which the Institute would be a major source of research and assistance. The College of Education, Sisavangvong University, in the end, becomes the parent:

1. of high quality departments for the training of Lao teachers of foreign languages and other subjects;
2. of a research and training Language Institute or Research Center which contributes to the health and development of the national education system.