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SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEES IN NEW ZEALAND:
LANGUAGE NEEDS AND PROVISIONS.

A thesis completed in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Philosophy in Education
at Massey University, Palmerston North.

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1988

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank all the people who helped me to make this thesis a reality - those who guided and those who encouraged, those who gave access to resources and those who gave information about themselves which could be used in this piece of research. In particular, my thanks are due to my supervisors, Mr Eric Archer, Dr Noel Watts and Dr Ross St George of Massey University's Departments of Education and Modern Languages, for their guidance and encouragement with a first thesis which became a magnum opus completed over several years. I should also like to thank Dr Andrew Trlin of the Department of Sociology for his encouragement and his advice regarding sampling techniques, the consultants at the Computer Centre for their assistance with data processing, and Professor Cropp and the staff of the Department of Modern Languages for their on-going support and provision of access to wordprocessing facilities. Grateful thanks are also due to the Immigration Division of the Department of Labour for granting me access to their refugee files and for providing me with valuable information regarding refugee resettlement in New Zealand. My thanks are also due to all those others who have been involved in refugee resettlement and the provision of English as a second language in New Zealand and who gave of their time to provide me with information. Finally, but certainly not least, my humble thanks are due to the refugees who helped me with this study, to Sun Kong, Khieng Hann, Minh Huynh and Mai Ton who used their expertise in their several languages to translate and back-translate the questionnaires used in the local study, and to all those who answered the questionnaires. I hope sincerely that this piece of research may provide information that will, in return, help them and their children and those who are yet to arrive.

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ABSTRACT

The resettlement of a particular group of non-Western refugees in New Zealand is studied from a sociolinguistic perspective. The language needs of the group are assessed together with the provisions that have been made to meet these needs. A review of pressures associated with refugee status and resettlement is provided. In addition, the provision of English as a second language (ESL) and the broader linguistic issues of bilingualism including language shift and language maintenance are discussed.

The resettlement of over 7000 Vietnamese, Cambodian and Lao refugees in New Zealand since 1979 under a special Southeast Asian refugee resettlement programme has challenged the resources of government and voluntary agencies alike. Consequent ad hoc provisions of ESL have now become more-or-less permanent, bureaucratized and extended to cater for the ESL needs of other refugee and migrant groups. Nevertheless, many of the language programmes remain officially tied to the Southeast Asian resettlement scheme and are thus provisional and restricted in nature.

The nature and extent of government and voluntary language provisions are assessed through an analysis of Department of Labour and Department of Education programmes. School, technical institute and home tutor provisions are surveyed, and supplemented by interviews and by questionnaires undertaken in local schools which have Southeast Asian refugee children. This information is set against on-arrival and post-arrival follow-up data derived from a sample of 230 case studies involving 785 individual refugees. These data cover the demographic, occupational, educational and linguistic characteristics of the Southeast Asian refugee sample. The study raises questions about the relationship between perceived and real language needs and between the language provisions which have been provided to meet these needs and the short- and longer-term effects of these provisions.