

Text and Worksheet: Primary Source: Interview with the Tran Family

In 1997, Joseph Hieu wrote his master's thesis entitled "A Study of Parental Interviews on Bilingual Programs for Vietnamese Students." In it, he interviewed several Vietnamese families. The following are excerpts from those interview transcripts.

Background information at the time of the interview :

- **Interviewee:** Mrs. Xuan Tran (age 63) is the mother of nine children. Her highest level of education is college. Mrs. Tran worked as a consultant for a manufacturing firm and made \$35,000 per year. In Vietnam, she had an import-export business.
- **Time of immigration:** Tran and her husband, Thinh Tran (age 69), immigrated during the first wave but had greater difficulty escaping Vietnam because they had become separated from their children. Seven of their children managed to escape on their own. Tran and her husband finally came to the United States with their two youngest sons in 1979.
- **Family Background:** The Tran family consists of 11 people: 2 parents and 9 children. The oldest child, Khoa (age 40), had been in the United States before the rest of the family, arriving as a foreign exchange student in 1974. Four of the Trans' children live in different states, two live in Paris, and the youngest two, Hung (age 19) and Cuong (age 18), live in Uptown Chicago with their parents. Cuong attends a bilingual program in a Chicago public secondary school. After their arrival in the United States., the Trans owned a grocery store for several years and then bought a restaurant. Both have been sold, and Thinh is retired but active in community organizations. Both Tran and her husband speak French and English; they attended public schools and college in Vietnam. All subjects in the schools they attended were taught in French, and English was taught for one hour per week in the high schools.
- **Place of Interview:** The interviews took place at the Trans' house.

OBSERVE Identify and note details. What seems important to you? What seems interesting to you?	READ THE TEXT Interview with the Tran Family	QUESTION What do you wonder about? What confuses you? What do you want to further investigate?
	<p>INTERVIEWER: Why did you decide to leave your country?</p> <p>TRAN: I left Vietnam for the U.S. because my family and I did not like the Communist regime. We escaped Vietnam by boat in 1975 and, fortunately, were soon rescued at sea and brought to Palawan refugee camp in the Philippines. We had to stay in the camp for two years before the U.S. delegation approved our request to reunite with my son in the United States.</p> <p>INTERVIEWER: Why did you choose Chicago?</p>	

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TRAN: My husband and I decided to live in Chicago because my son Khoa had come to Chicago in 1974 on a student visa. He now works as executive director of a social service agency for Southeast Asian refugees. His younger brothers Khai, 26, now an accountant, and Khoi, 24, now a teacher, arrived in Chicago from Paris in 1979. They, too, had left Vietnam by boat and were picked up by a French merchant ship. They lived in France for a while before their brother Khoa sponsored them to Chicago.

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INTERVIEWER: I understand that your youngest child is attending a bilingual program. What is your opinion of this program?

TRAN: My youngest son knew no English when he arrived in Chicago. But soon, if a person spoke to him slowly, he could understand some of what was being said. So I enrolled him in a so-called "pull-out" bilingual program. He had no classes conducted in Vietnamese, but he took ESL courses. He took all the regular courses taught in English. My son depended upon help from his understanding teachers and classmates. Also, he used television to help him learn English, and today he encourages new arrivals to give this instrument considerable attention. He feels that English is more "scientific" and better suited for life here in the United States. English idioms are more difficult and important than idioms in Vietnamese, and they are easier to learn on television. He and his brothers often speak among themselves in English. However, we all speak Vietnamese in the family group, even though we also speak fluent English. Our children feel, as we do, that retaining our culture is easier when we use our native language. [Note: There was no indication that the parents had unduly influenced the sons' use of the Vietnamese language at home.]

INTERVIEWER: What are your opinions regarding the use or non-use of Vietnamese by your child in school?

TRAN: Although my son struggled in his first months in school because of his limited ability in English, we do not believe that teaching classes in Vietnamese was necessary for him or desirable. When Vietnamese is used, my son told me, students tend to think in Vietnamese and continue to discourse in that language with other students and the teacher. People are normally reluctant to change and adapt to a new environment. They must be forced to break out of their shell. My son affirmed that he did not need Vietnamese in classes.

INTERVIEWER: So there is no need for bilingual programs?

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Name _____

Date _____

	<p>TRAN: Oh, no! Don't misquote me on that. For newly arrived immigrants, bilingual programs may be necessary. Bilingual education would be helpful in teaching abstract concepts, especially for those students who have gaps in their education. In striving to learn English, and you must go beyond the abstract, bilingual programs can be a help. Bilingual programs may be quite useful to some people but not to all; it can be a stepping stone.</p> <p>Our family believes that the challenge to learn English quickly can be met by high achievers, but we also recognize that there are differences among individuals and their circumstances. Our family did not need bilingual programs. Our children did well in their English-taught classes and acquired fluent English by virtue of their personal efforts, which included relying on their teachers and classmates for assistance and cultivating a wide variety of friendships with all the nationalities represented in their daily contacts.</p>	
REFLECT	What more did you learn from reading this person's firsthand account? Why is this source important?	

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