

The Patterns of Language Use in the Southernmost Provinces of Thailand

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บทความนี้ต้องการนำเสนอรูปแบบการใช้ภาษาของชาวไทยมุสลิมเชื้อสายมาเลย์ที่พูดภาษาปัตตานีมาเลย์เป็นภาษาแม่ในจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ (ปัตตานี ยะลา นราธิวาส และบางอำเภอของสงขลา) ข้อมูลที่ใช้ในการเขียนบทความนี้มาจากการศึกษาเอกสาร การสอบถามพูดคุยกับครูและประชาชนในพื้นที่ และประสบการณ์ตรงของผู้เขียน ในฐานะผู้ที่อยู่ในสังคมมุสลิมจังหวัดสงขลามากกว่าสามสิบปี ผลการศึกษาพบว่ารูปแบบการใช้ภาษาของชาวไทยมุสลิมที่พูดภาษาปัตตานีมาเลย์เป็นภาษาแม่มีรูปแบบการใช้ภาษาที่แบ่งหน้าที่ของภาษาอย่างชัดเจน ภาษามาเลย์มาตรฐานและภาษาอาหรับใช้ในการศึกษาศาสนา ภาษาไทยมาตรฐานใช้ในการศึกษา การติดต่อกับเจ้าหน้าที่ของรัฐ และในสถานการณ์ที่เป็นทางการกับคนอื่นนอกสังคม ภาษาปัตตานีมาเลย์และภาษาไทยใต้เป็นภาษาไม่เป็นทางการใช้กับคนไทยมุสลิม และคนไทยในพื้นที่ภาคใต้ สำหรับนโยบายการศึกษาสำหรับคนไทยมุสลิมที่พูดภาษามาเลย์เป็นภาษาแม่ ผู้เขียนบทความมีความเห็นว่าควรส่งเสริมการเรียนแบบสองภาษามากกว่าบังคับใช้ภาษาไทยเพียงภาษาเดียว ทั้งในโรงเรียนของรัฐและโรงเรียนเอกชนสอนภาษาอิสลาม

คำสำคัญ : รูปแบบการใช้ภาษา จังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ ชาวไทยมุสลิม ทวิภาษา

Abstract

This article aims to depict the patterns of language use of Muslims who are ethnic Malay and use Pattani Malay as their mother-tongue in the southernmost provinces of Thailand (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and some parts of Songkhla). The data used for this article is based on the examination of documents and interviews of teachers and people in the region including the writer's personal observation as a person who has been living in the Muslim community in Songkhla province for more than thirty years. It is found that the patterns of language use among these people shows a consistent diglossic practice. Standard Malay and Arabic are used in Islamic education. Standard Thai is used widely in government, education and in formal situations with strangers. Pattani Malay and Southern Thai are informal languages used with in-group and out-group in informal situations. For the education policy in the southernmost provinces, the article recommends that instead forcing Muslim students to study only Thai in government schools, it is better to promote bilingualism in both government schools and Islam private schools.

Keywords : pattern of language use, southernmost provinces of Thailand, Muslims, Bilingualism

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1. Introduction

Since January 2004, the insurgency in the southernmost provinces of Thailand (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and some parts of Songkhla) has resulted until now in the deaths and injuries of thousands people. The unrest in the South has raised national concern about how to bring about peace to the crisis, how to rebuild peaceful relations between the Buddhist and Muslim sections of the country and continue on the path of building civil society in Thailand.

There are 1.3 million Muslims of the total 1.8 million populations in the south. (Data from American Foreign Policy Council: Thailand). However, not all of them are alike in term of language and ethnicity. There are three main different characteristics namely: Muslims who are ethnic Malay and speak Pattani Malay, Muslims who are ethnic Malay but speak Southern Thai and Muslims who are ethnic Thai and speak Southern Thai. Certainly, Muslims whose mother-tongue is Thai have no language conflicts like Muslims who speak Pattani Malay. Muslims focused in this article are particularly the group of people who are the ethnic Malay and speak Pattani Malay in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and some parts of Songkhla.

Muslim population in the southernmost provinces

	Nara	Pattani	Yala	Satun	Songkhl
Muslim population (per cent)	82	80.7	68.9	67.8	73.2
Population speaking Malay (per cent)	80.4	76.6	66.1	9.9	4.6

Source: NSO, population and Housing Census, 2000.

First of all, we have to admit that Muslims who are ethnic Malay and Buddhists in the southern border provinces are unique in many ways. They have their own different identities according to their culture, beliefs and practices. The differences are revealed by their historical awareness, traditions, religions and languages. These differences may easily lead to misunderstanding and conflict between the two socio-religious groups.

The problems of the Thai Muslims in those provinces can be viewed in three dimensions: culture, politics, and linguistics. Culturally, the Thai Muslims of southernmost provinces in Thailand belong to the Malay world. They are Muslims and speak Malay. Politically, they are part of the Thai nation-state whose state religion is Buddhism. Linguistically, Pattani Malay, a dialect of Malay is a mother-tongue for most people in the area, differing from other parts of the country, where Thai language is used.

Due to cultural, religious, and ethnic similarities, people in those provinces usually identify themselves with Malays more than with Thais. The self-identification “Malay-Muslims” contrasts with the classification of the “Thai-Muslims” for them given by the Thai government (Herriman: 2005). Having different language from the mainstream of population makes Muslims who are ethnic Malay think that they are not Thais. Moreover, Malay dialect does not have the specific meaning of the word ‘nationality’. There is only the word ‘basa’ that means ‘nationality and language’; when they say ‘basa malayu’ it can refer automatically not only to language but to nationality as well. That causes most Thai Muslims want their children to study Standard Malay and Arabic in religious institutions more than in government schools.

The difference of religion and language plays an important role in the alienation between the Buddhists and the Muslims as Surin Pitsuwan (1985:24) points out:

“[...] the religion and language are both the strongest elements of the Malay Muslims identity and ones which isolate them from the mainstream of the population most decisively. The Malay society is considered society due to its tendency to shun strangers, particularly people of other faiths.”

For the Thai state, the identification of Malays for the Muslims in the four southernmost provinces has been a threat to the stability and the sovereignty of the country. Thus, the government has been struggling with assimilating Muslims in the southernmost provinces to be Thai Muslims for a long period of time. A strategy that the government has used is through education and language. However, persuading Muslims in those provinces to attend Thai schools and speak Thai language was not an easy task. This is due to the fact that for Thai Muslims, attending Thai schools and speaking Thai language were associated with being Buddhists as most government schools were located within temple boundaries. For the government, studying in government schools is a brilliant plan to instill a sense of Thai-ness among Muslim children. However, for Muslims in the southernmost provinces, this idea backfires. It is seen as a direct attack on their religion because the Thai language and secular studies are based on the Buddhist ideology (Pitsuwan: 1985, Suhrke: 1989) Consequently, instead of attending Thai schools, Muslim parents usually send their children to Pondok, which is an Islamic institution that teaches Islamic codes and Arabic script. For long time, the differences in language used have been

an issue of concern for the Thai government. At present, the government operates a special education policy, which accepts the use of Malay language as a medium of instruction in schools in the southernmost provinces of Thailand.

2. Analysis of Findings

2.1 Language characteristics

Languages used in the southernmost provinces are: Pattani Malay, Southern Thai, Standard Thai, Standard Malay and Arabic. The characteristics of each language (or dialect) are as follows:

2.1.1 Pattani Malay

Pattani Malay, often referred to in Thailand as Yawi, is a dialect of standard Malay (Bahasa Malaysia) spoken in the southernmost provinces of Thailand along the border of Malaysia (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and including some of Songkhla districts). Pattani Malay itself is generally not a written language, but it is sometimes written in informal settings. When writing is needed, an old-fashioned variety of Standard Malay is used. It is written in a modified form of the Arabic alphabet adapted for writing Malay, known as Jawi. This is also the norm for written communication across the border in Kelantan (Malaysia).

2.1.2 Southern Thai

Southern Thai is a dialect of Standard Thai spoken in the southern part of Thailand from Chumporn province to Narathiwat province. It is the dialect that Thai Buddhists and Thai Muslims in the southernmost use as their mother tongue. There is no recognized system of orthography for this dialect as separate from that of the Standard Thai which is officially used over the whole

country. Of all linguistic features, the major distinctions between Southern Thai and Standard Thai seem to involve the phonological and lexical systems rather than their syntax. Tone is the major feature distinguishing phonological systems.

2.1.3 Standard Thai

Thai is a member of southern branch of the Thai language family. Standard Thai is a dialect of Thai spoken in Thailand. The linguistic features of Standard Thai such as consonants, vowels, tones and vocabularies are similar to the Thai dialects in central Thailand. For the reason that the speakers of Standard Thai live in every province, it is suitable to claim it as a particular variety.

Standard Thai is a prestigious variety used widely in government, education, television and radio broadcast include internet media. It is the dialect taught in schools. Since Standard Thai is supposed to be the medium of instruction in schools, all pupils automatically learn Standard Thai. Some of them who are non-Thai speakers may forget it after leaving school while many continue using it.

2.1.4 Standard Malay

Malay is a member of the Indonesian branch of Austronesian family. Malay is spoken in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Brunei and five southern provinces of Thailand (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and Songkhla)

Standard Malay is the national language of Malaysia and Indonesia. It is called Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia respectively.

2.1.5 Arabic

Arabic is a Semitic language. The spoken Arabic (or colloquial Arabic) and the written (or

literary Arabic) are different. The Arabic which people in southernmost provinces are familiar with is the Classical Arabic.

Classical Arabic is essentially the form of the language in Qur'an. Muslims believe that Allah revealed the Qur'an to the prophet Muhammad. For Muslims, not only the sense but also every word of sacred text are inspiring, and that is why in the Islamic world, the Qur'an is recited not in the vernacular but in the original Arabic.

2.2 Patterns of language use

This paper aims to show the patterns of language use in the area, hoping it may enable a way for us to understand Muslims through their language uses. As Walker (1981:6) commented:

“The pattern of language use in a multilingual community tells us much about the attitudes and values that are driving forces in that society. Their attitude toward neighboring communities, the national community, and their value as a district subculture is reflected in the way people use the language in their repertoire. The value they place on change vs. maintenance on earlier time in their life and glory as a person is revealed by the way a community chooses to limit the appropriation of one language over another in various situation.”

There are wide variations in patterns of language use in multilingual societies and most multilingual people restrict one of their languages to certain use. Two basic functions of a language used in a community can be classified as ‘formal’ and ‘informal’.

In the situation of Muslims in the southernmost provinces, ‘informal language’ is identified with the language of home and hearth,

the language of daily pursuits. Pattani Malay is the language at home used in personal situation for daily life. With the in-group (Malay speakers) they certainly use Pattani Malay. With out-group (Thai speakers) there are three dialects to be chosen, Pattani Malay, Southern Thai or Standard Thai. Southern Thai is the language of intimacy with non-Malay speakers either in-group or out-group people in informal situations. Standard Thai may informally use with the strangers or non-southern people.

'Formal language', on the other hand, is that variety used for government, education, high culture and religion. Standard Thai fulfils some of the functions of the formal language for it is the national and official language. Arabic is used exclusively for religion and so functions as a formal language as well. Standard Malay is the in-group language with the Malay speakers in Malaysia or other countries using Bahasa Malaysia such as Indonesia, Brunei etc. However, many know that in other countries English is much more useful and effective as a medium of international communication.

The basic social situation of language choices shows variation in patterns of language use among Muslims in the southernmost provinces. The stable patterns of language use reveal that people restrict one of their languages to certain uses. However, except Arabic which is the language for reading and study Qur'an, we can say that Muslims in the southernmost are a stable bilingual society using Thai and Malay languages. Their domain separation in language use agrees with Fishman's comment in Penalosa's (1981:119):

"In stable bilingual societies, languages tend to be reserved for different domains of life in

the community. Whereas in unstable bilingual societies without diglossia, the domain separation in language use disappears and both languages come to be used alternatively, especially in the family and friendship domain."

In addition to the relationship, the patterns of language use variation depend on their interlocutors' language proficiency or their preference. Sometimes the topic and setting are also criteria for the language choice. For example, in public speaking using a microphone in the village, the announcer prefers to use Standard Thai. It is obvious that Standard Thai can convey the official news more directly and accurately. The pattern of language use according to the topic and setting actually determined by three factors namely: activities which customarily take place in them, physical orientation of participants and the presence and absence of other persons in the environment.

2.3 Functions and values of languages

According to the basic social situation of language choices, it can be seen that there is wide variation in patterns of language use in the southernmost provinces. The stable patterns of their language choices show that people restrict one of their languages to certain uses. In consequence of the restrict pattern of language use, it is obvious that each language used there carries culture and emotive values. To specify these values will help us understand why the use of one language is chosen over the use of another in various cultural and situational contexts.

Pattani Malay functions as a medium of communicating among Malay speakers. It is the language of primary identity Muslims in the southernmost provinces that see themselves as

part of the Malay ethnic group. Pattani Malay is used in most informal situations with other Malay speakers, including those who speak Malay by virtue of the fact that they married a Malay speaker and more to settle in Malay speaking villages.

Southern Thai functions as a medium of informal communicating among the southern Thai Buddhists and non-Malay speakers in the southern part. In Pattani and Narathiwat where Muslims ethnic Malay are the majority, they do not speak Southern Thai but would rather speak Standard Thai to the strangers. However, Muslims in Songkhla province commonly used Southern Thai with local merchants and traders. Even if many traders know some Malay and often use it with Malay speakers, it is more comfortable to contact in Southern Thai dialect. Primary school children like to speak Malay among themselves, but in secondary schools or upper education they are willing to speak southern Thai with their friends whose mother tongue is southern Thai. Southern Thai is also used among young people, especially when one of the speakers has spent considerable time away from the village, as for example, when they went to continue studying in towns elsewhere. Moreover, there are large number of loanwords from Southern Thai and Pattani Malay. This makes people more easily understand Southern Thai than Standard Malay. For Muslims in the south, the value of Southern Thai dialect is for broader group identity as southern people.

Standard Thai functions as a medium of instruction in all. It is the language used in formal secular situations. It is the language of government and education including television and radio broadcasting. It is used on formal occasions even in the rural villages. When the officials want

to make public announcements to the villagers and when there is an official meeting in the village, it is more convenient to use Standard Thai than Southern Thai. For everyone who had passed school at least for the compulsory education, they should have studied and able to use Standard Thai. People see its value as the socio-economic advancement and to be as a member of national culture.

Standard Malay functions as a medium of religious study. It is the language some people can use when they go to Malaysia, Indonesia or Singapore for their business. It is the language to study in Pondok (Islamic institution). Muslims in southernmost provinces of Thailand prefer to study religion from Malay texts than Thai texts. They believe that the Malay text of Qur'an is more accurate than the Thai translation. However, except the script from texts, most people cannot understand Standard Malay in common usage because there are numerous features that have developed in Pattani Malay that make the dialect quite different from Standard Malay.

Arabic functions as a medium of sacred religious texts and religious ceremony. It is the language that is used on a regular basic. It is the ritual language of religion. Arabic is for reading Qur'an at least the praise for Allah. Arabic fills a well defined social slot as the ritual language of religion, though people do not understand the content expressed by it. It has the value of establishing their identity as members of the brotherhood of Islam. The Pondok students study Arabic at school because they want to be Islamic teachers in the villages. The one who knows Arabic and able to read Qur'an are honored and respect by Muslims. For Muslims the high value of Arabic is the broader group identity as a brotherhood of Islam throughout the world.

In addition to Malay and Thai, English and Chinese are the international languages that are very useful for communication with the outside world. Even when they go to Mecca for the sacred practice, they find out that it is easier and more practical to communicate with Islam brothers from other countries around the world in English.

2.4 Language attitudes

Generally, we consider Muslims in the southern border areas as a non-Thai speaking minority, but in their hometown it is the contrary. As Amon Thavisak (1988) comments in her research:

‘Linguistically speaking, the Malay dialects in Thailand are dialects of the standard Malay. But socially speaking, they are vernacular of sizable minority in Thailand. Though the Malay-speaking people are only a small minority in the larger Thai society, they make up the majority in their ancestral land.’

Within the southernmost provinces, the Muslims are the majority: they constitute approximately 90 percent of the entire Muslim population in Thailand. However, as 95 percent of Thailand’s overall population are Buddhists, the Muslims in the southernmost provinces are regarded as a minority group of less than 5 percent of the country’s population (Suwannathat: 2008) This make them a distinctive case from other minority groups. Muslims in the southernmost provinces have cultivated very strong Muslim and Malay cultures. They speak the Pattani dialect of Malay language as their mother tongue. Their ways of life are strictly regulated by the Islamic codes from birth to death. This contrasts sharply with the majority of other Thais whose lives are premised on the Buddhist culture.

In the southernmost provinces, Pattani Malay is still the most important language which Muslims need to speak or learn to speak. Pattani Malay plays its important role as a defining characteristic of ethnic group membership and the link between language and ethnicity is strong and obvious. For people in the southernmost provinces, reading and writing Thai are not seen as merely the act of mastering the language, it is the act of being Buddhist altogether. Owing to the fact that Thai language is associated Buddhism the same way as the Malay language is associated with Islam. Thus, one of the biggest challenges for the Thai government, concerning the policy in the three southernmost provinces, is to make people in the provinces speak Thai language.

According to the compulsory education law, it can be said that at the present time every child in Thailand should know Thai at least when they are at school. For the children who further study in Pondok after compulsory education, more or less they also learn Thai language. It is for this reason that Pondok is not only the school for religion but it is the school for languages as well. There are many students from many villages who come to study at Pondok. Some of them cannot speak Pattani Malay; some of them cannot speak Thai. In Pondok, these students exchange their language proficiency. Generally, students do not mind speaking Thai with their friends who cannot speak Pattani Malay. Code switching is very common between Pattani Malay and Southern Thai. Children chatting often insert Southern Thai words, phrases and sentences into a conversation mainly dominated by Pattani Malay. They feel free to switch back and forth in their informal conversation. Moreover, there was a recommendation that Thai language be used as a

medium of instruction in Pondok and the time allotted for the Islamic studied has to be used for the secular education (Chaipranee and Suwannathat:1981). Therefore, Pondok is considered as a good place for Muslim students to study languages: Southern Thai, Standard Thai, Standard Malay and Arabic. It is noticeable that, the higher they study, the more positive attitude they have toward other languages.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1 Conclusion

The objective of this article is to find out the patterns of language use of Muslims in the southernmost provinces of Thailand. The district functions of the languages show the consistently diglossic practice. Pattani Malay and Southern Thai are informal languages (dialects) used with in-group and out-group people respectively. Arabic, Standard Thai, Standard Malay are formal languages used for religion and secular. Arabic and Standard Malay are used in religious study. Standard Thai is used in school and official contacts. The consistent patterns of language use show that in most bicultural societies, there are quite explicit norms regarding the appropriate language to be used in formal contexts. The article also reveals the constraints that determine language selection for people. The selection of language use varies according to the interlocutors' relationship, language proficiency, topics and settings.

People in southernmost provinces use their languages purposively. They naturally choose a particular speech variety with the interlocutors and their relationship including consider the notion of topics and settings. The influence of Southern Thai

and Pattani Malay upon each other is great to the point that both have large numbers of loanwords from the other. Compare to the difference of Pattani Malay and Standard Malay, the comprehension between them is more difficult. The conflicts between Muslims and Thai nation-state come from cultural and political conflicts much more than from language conflict.

3.2 Recommendation in promoting bilingualism

It is the policy of the Thai government to promote higher standard of education in the southernmost provinces; however, the number of population not attending school in these provinces

Education in the southernmost

	Nara	Pattani	Yala	Satun	Songkhil
Average years of education attainment population under 15	5.9	6.0	6.6	6.7	7.5
Population aged 6-24 years not attending school (per cent)	38.2	39.4	34.9	36.8	36.5

Source : NSO, Population and Housing Census, 2000.

still rather high.

Most primary-aged children study at government school at least six years according to the Educational Compulsory Act but not many continue their studies. One of the important barriers is their Thai proficiency. Many Muslim children who are ethnic Malay have a lot of problems in learning at school. Based on information from the National Educational Assessment Office, in five southernmost provinces,

only primary students in Songkhla province meet or exceed the national average of student achievement scores. (NSO: 2003) Obviously, if they cannot learn Thai well at the beginning, they may fail to continue their higher studies. Hence, before promoting higher education, it is important to promote efficient bilingualism (Thai and Malay). Some researchers who support a bilingual primary program have lobbied the government to issue a National Language Policy which allows Thai language, as well as other dialects, to be regarded as national language (Premsrirat: 2008). They also commented that the use of Malay language, thus, is used as a bridge for students to learn Thai language, not the full recognition of Malay language as the language to be used throughout the area.

After the outbreak of violence in the southernmost provinces; while the causes of the insurgency are unclear, many are concerned with the education of Muslim students. Although literacy rates have been increased, many students are still not fluent in reading and writing in Thai language. This language barrier is attributed as a major cause for the low academic achievement. Therefore, instead of using language as a political tool, it is recommended that the government looks at language as an important cultural identity of students. This cultural identity should be used in schools to create an equal educational opportunity. In 2004, the ministry of Education issued historic new measures related to education in the south. It has committed to a number of changes, including enhancing the quality of private Islamic schools, strengthening local hiring in government schools,

developing special programs for non-Thai speaking children. (<http://www.unicef.org/thailand/ArtSouth> June, 19, 2011)

However, teaching Thai language to Muslim children may be different from other non-Thai speaking children. In addition to teaching techniques we must also aware of their attitudes. The major obstacles may come from their negative attitudes toward Thais. Thai teachers should be aware of not adding too much Buddhist ideology into Muslim students. If the teaching in a classroom does not put an emphasis on acceptance and value awareness, the conflict of living together may occur. Cultural integration is the acceptance of cultural diversity. This does not mean to be worried about other cultures but to respect them.

In addition to the efficient formal teaching in school, the natural promoting through mass media should be a more fruitful method. The progress of TV broadcasting may make the Muslims more interested in Thai society. Even though it is difficult to bring the Thai Muslims into the Thai national life, TV, radio, newspaper and internet are good media to bridge the cultural gap. Most of all it is the most effective language teaching. However, the government should be much more aware of culture conflict. How to promote monolingual Malay speakers to be bilingual (Thai and Malay) is delicate and sensitive. Nevertheless, we must be sure that promoting bilingual must foster cooperation not conflict in intergroup interaction.

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