

การใช้ภาษาและพลังชีวิตของภาษาที่มีการพลัดถิ่นในประเทศไทย:

กรณีศึกษาภาษาอีสาน ในจังหวัดพะเยา

Language Use and Language Vitality of a Displaced Language
in Thailand: A Case Study of Isan language in Phayao Province

สุทธิณี พรหมกันตร

Suthinee Promkandorn

ภาควิชาภาษาอังกฤษ

Department of English

คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

มหาวิทยาลัยพายัพ

Payap University

บทคัดย่อ

หมู่บ้านร่องสำน ต.ร่มเย็น อ.เชียงคำ จ.พะเยา คือหนึ่งในชุมชนอีสานที่ตั้งรกรากอยู่ท่ามกลางหมู่บ้านของชาวเหนือในช่วงห้าทศวรรษที่ผ่านมา หมู่บ้านร่องสำนถือเป็นหมู่บ้านที่มีความหลากหลายทางภาษาอย่างแท้จริง เนื่องจากมีผู้คนจากหลายชนเผ่า อาทิ คนอีสาน คนเหนือ คนม้ง และคนไทลื้อ กรณีศึกษานี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการใช้ภาษา และพลังชีวิตของของภาษาอีสานซึ่งมีการพลัดถิ่นจากรกรากดั้งเดิม การศึกษาครั้งนี้เก็บข้อมูลจากผู้บอกภาษาจำนวน 18 คน แบ่งเป็นชาย 9 คน และหญิง 9 คน ในสามช่วงอายุ ได้แก่ วัยรุ่น (15-25 ปี) วัยกลางคน (35-50 ปี) และวัยสูงอายุ (60 ปีขึ้นไป) ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ผู้บอกภาษาในทุกช่วงอายุยังคงใช้ภาษาอีสานในชีวิตประจำวันมากที่สุด มีการใช้ภาษาอีสานในการสนทนาภายในกลุ่ม และใช้ภาษาไทยถิ่นเหนือเพื่อวัตถุประสงค์ของงานชุมชน นอกจากนี้ยังพบอีกว่า การใช้ภาษาสัมพันธ์กับอายุของผู้บอกภาษา แต่ไม่พบความแตกต่างเรื่องเพศ จากการวิเคราะห์สถานการณ์

ปัจจุบันของการใช้ภาษาภายในหมู่บ้าน พลังชีวิตของภาษาของภาษาอีสานในหมู่บ้าน
ร่องสำนจึงถูกจัดไว้ในกลุ่ม 6b (ถูกคุกคาม) ในมาตร EGIDS โดยมีข้อเสนอแนะว่า
ชาวบ้านควรจะรักษาภาษาพูดอีสานไว้เพื่อให้ภาษาอีสานเลื่อนขึ้นไปอยู่ในกลุ่ม 6a
(มีพลัง) เพื่อให้มีการใช้ภาษาพูดอย่างยั่งยืน

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาพลัดถิ่น, การใช้ภาษา, พลังชีวิตของภาษา, ภาษาอีสาน

Abstract

Rongsan village, Romyen Sub-district, Chiang Kham district, in Phayao province is one of the Isan communities, which is settled among Northern villages for over the past five decades. The village is a truly multilingual community which includes people from various ethnic groups, i.e. Isan, Northern Thai, Hmong, and Tai Lue people. This study aims to assess language use and language vitality of the Isan language which is displaced from its original location. The data was collected from 18 subjects; nine males and nine females from three different age groups: young (15-25 years old), middle-aged (35-50 years old), and elderly (over 60 years old). The findings indicated that the people of all age groups used Isan the most in their daily lives. Isan was used as an 'in-group' language, while Northern Thai was mostly used for community purposes. It was found that the use of Northern Thai correlated with the age of speakers, whereas there was not much distinction regarding genders. Having analyzed the current situation of language use within the village, language vitality of the Isan language in Rongsan village is in level 6b (threatened) in the EGIDS scale. It is recommended that the villagers keep maintaining Isan orally to move the language up to level 6a (Vigorous) to reach a sustainable level of language use.

Keywords: displaced languages, language use, language vitality, Isan

Introduction

A community where its members are able to speak two or more languages is called a multilingual society. In many parts of the world, it is a normal interaction that people speak several languages: one at home, another in the village, still another for market trades, and even an entirely different code for political or governmental purposes. These interactions are natural and subconscious, and are found in many areas of Thailand -- a country where diversity emerges both culturally and linguistically.

Northeastern Thailand¹, or Isan, is one of the six major regions in Thailand. The region is typically poorer than most other parts of Thailand because there is insufficient rainfall and limited arable fertility. Many Isan people have moved outside the region in order to work in the industrial sectors, particularly in Bangkok. Around the mid-20th century, a number of Isan people migrated to the Northern region as they sought a better place to live. Many of the migrants gathered in Chiang Rai province, while some of them proliferated to adjoining provinces such as Phayao province in Chiang Kham district.

Settled among northern Thai villages, Rongsan village in Phayao province is known to be one of the multilingual communities in the North of Thailand. The village is mainly comprised of Isan people who originally migrated from many northeastern provinces². Over time, the village came to include people from several ethnic groups, i.e. Isan, Northern Thai, Hmong, and Tai Lue. Because of differences in language and culture of each ethnic group, Tai Lue people were the first group who moved to other parts of the district and settled their own communities. Northern Thai and Hmong people also wanted to separate

¹ Isan is generally known as 'Isan', which is of Pali-Sanskrit origin, meaning 'Northeast'. This paper uses the term 'Isan' to refer to Northeastern Thai throughout the document.

² The information was taken from the Village Leader SLQ.

themselves from the Isan people and established their own villages. As a consequence, in 1976, Rongsan village was divided into three smaller villages including:

1. Rongsan village (Moo.8) where the majority of the population are Isan people,
2. Thung Ruangthong village (Moo.12) where the majority of the population are Northern Thai people and,
3. Prachaphakdee village (Moo.13) where the majority of the population are Hmong people.

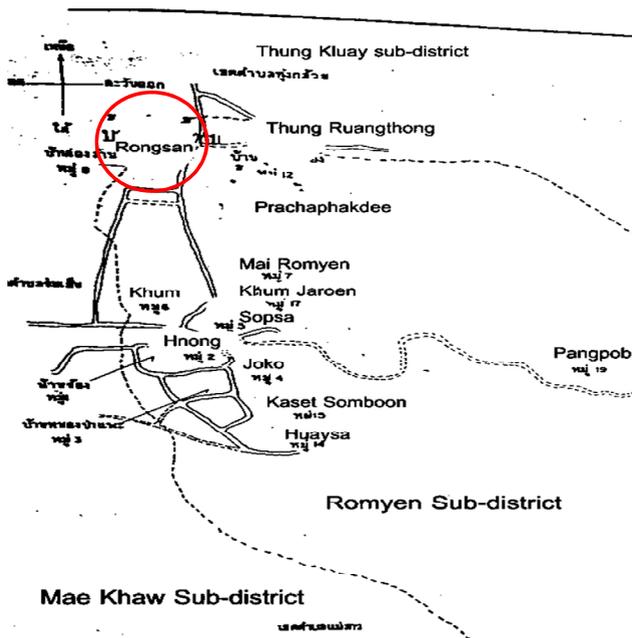


Figure 1 Map of Rongsan village, Romyen sub-district, Chiang Kham district, Phayao province (adapted from Romyen sub-district Community Plan 2014)

When people speaking different languages live together in the same area, it is impossible to avoid language contact. Extensive contact with people from other speech communities has forced the villagers to choose which language they are going to use under different circumstances. In addition, having settled in a community where they are regarded as a minority, the Isan people in Rongsan village have got a strong pressure from a language of wider communication, namely Northern Thai; and Central Thai which is an official and a national language of Thailand, to ignore their vernacular language.

This paper, as a consequence, seeks to describe the choices that Isan people make about which speech varieties to use in particular situations and to assess language vitality to see whether Isan, which is displaced from its original location, will be shifted or maintained within the community.

Literature Review

Language Contact

Language contact has been an interesting issue among linguists for decades. As defined by Crystal (2008: 107), language contact is “a situation of geographical continuity or close social proximity between languages or dialects.” Whenever people of two or more languages come into contact in the same geographical area, speakers usually make some contact with one another.

Language contact also involves face-to-face interactions among groups of speakers, often those who speak more than one language. In these cases, there may be mutual bilingualism or multilingualism (Thomason 2001: 4). In multilingual environments, people often have to make choices about which language they will use when they meet people from other speech communities. According to Blair (1990: 107), the study of language use seeks to describe the choices people make about what languages to use in particular situations,

which is referred to as *domain*. Language use is what people actually do with their language. The concept of language domain was first proposed by Fishman (1972: 82). He defined the term as

“a socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships and interactions between communicators and locales of communication in accordance with the institutions of a society and spheres of activity of a culture in such a way that individual behavior and social patterns can be distinguished from each other and yet related to each other.”

Blair (1990: 108) provided examples of language domains including family, friendship, neighborhood, school, work, government, and religion. He further said that it was important that language use be studied with the domains which were relevant to that particular community. In a bilingual environment, people often accommodate their speech to meet the expectations of people in their networks. The variation ranges from different pronunciations of certain words to a choice between different languages (Decker & Grummitt 2012: 85).

The notion of language domains enables us to know which speech variety is relevant to certain language choice and we can possibly draw a conclusion regarding the norms of language use for the community (Holmes 2008: 23). It is clear that some social factors which affect choices of language use involve interlocutors, social setting, and topic of the discussion.

Language Vitality

Decker and Grummitt (2012: 88-89) stated that people in particular speech communities who are in contact with others may be motivated to select other languages in communication than their own. In some communities, people keep strong ties to their heritage language and satisfy the needs of their

community. In other communities, people switch to other languages, especially those who use second language in social or economic status-raising domains. When speakers choose other languages in more and more domains, language shift may take place. Positive attitudes can provide support to sustain the language. In contrast, weak attitudes toward ethnic identity and language are likely to reinforce the pressure. They may lose commitment and resources to maintain their own language and shift to other languages. When people stop using and transmitting their native language, language death may occur.

Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) has been used for decades as an evaluative framework of language vitality. It focuses on the key role of intergenerational transmission of a language and provides a means of evaluating where a language is on the scale of disruption from full use (level 1) to no use by any users (level 8) (Lewis & Simons 2010: 6). Apart from Fishman's GIDS, there are some other frameworks developed from UNESCO and Ethnologue. UNESCO emphasizes the intergeneration transmission using overall nine factors, while Ethnologue focuses on the number of first-language speakers. This research assessed language vitality of the Isan language in Rongsan village using an Expanded GIDS (EGIDS) proposed by Lewis and Gary (2010), which is a combination of GIDS, UNESCO, and Ethnologue together. EGIDS maintains correspondence with Fishman's GIDS (level 1 – 8), but there are some additional levels in order to be applied with all languages of the world. The table below provides detailed description of EGIDS with its corresponding level in UNESCO.

Table 1 Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (Lewis & Simons 2010)

LEVEL	LABEL	DESCRIPTION	UNESCO
0	International	The language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.	Safe
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the nationwide level.	Safe
2	Regional	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services.	Safe
3	Trade	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.	Safe
4	Educational	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.	Safe
5	Written	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community.	Safe
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.	Safe
6b	Threatened	The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children.	Vulnerable
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves but none are transmitting it to their children.	Definitely Endangered
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation.	Severely Endangered
8b	Nearly Extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.	Critically Endangered
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community. No one has more than symbolic proficiency.	Extinct
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes.	Extinct

The current status of a language can be assessed by using five key questions about language use within the community. The questions below are reproduced from Lewis & Simons (2010: 16-19) and were used to assess the current status of a language. The key questions with possible answers for each question are presented below.

Key Question #1: What is the current identity function of the language?

Key Question #2: What is the level of official use?

Key Question #3: Are all parents transmitting the language to their children?

Key Question #4: What is the literacy status?

Key Question #5: What is the youngest generation of proficient speakers?

The EGIDS scale is particularly helpful for language planners to address appropriate issues for language development. As mentioned earlier, Rongsan villagers are in contact with people from other linguistic groups, demanding them to select appropriate language(s) in different situations. Using the EGIDS framework and the five key questions above can help assess current language situation and determine the level of language vitality of the Isan language in Rongsan village.

Research Methodology

Research Instruments

Three types of sociolinguistic questionnaires (SLQs), namely Individual SLQ, Teacher SLQ, and Village Leader SLQ, were used in the field to collect the data. The individual SLQ was used to investigate the subjects' linguistic and language contact background information. This part questioned the speakers' choice of language in different domains, with closed questions asking which languages, i.e. Central Thai, Northern Thai, Isan, or others, they use in different

situations. The Village Leader SLQ was used to discovered demographic information from knowledgeable people's perspectives, for example, how many people are in the village, or what their language behavior is in particular situations. This questionnaire provides a bigger picture of how languages were used in the area. Finally, the Teacher SLQ was particularly designed to find out about language use at school. The questionnaire was a simple one-page survey designed to be an easy method to elicit information on how teachers perceive students' language use at school. This questionnaire was highlighted because of its value regarding language learning and language behavior at school.

Apart from the provided questionnaires, informal interviews were conducted with the villagers. The interviews provided additional information which could be used to interpret the results of the questionnaires. An informal interview is a conversation with the villagers without guided questions. The conversation served as a tool to help understand the language use situation within the village. In addition to the interviews, some observations were made during the fieldwork. The researcher visited a number of places during the survey, e.g. a market, a village hospital, a grocery store, villagers' houses, etc. in order to observe the actual language use. This allowed the researcher to see the villagers' natural interactions in different situations. Some key information obtained from the observation was written down to help the researcher's understanding of the language use and language attitudes of the Isan people in Rongsan village. The information could later be used as a supplement to the analysis.

Subject selection

The subjects in this study were chosen by using a 'quota sampling' method. The sample size was 18 people from Rongsan village, 6 people from each age group with an equal number of people from both genders. The sample design is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Quota sample design by age groups and genders

Sample Size by Strata		Age			Total
		15-25	35-50	60+	
Gender	Female	3	3	3	9
	Male	3	3	3	9
Total		6	6	6	18

Data Collection

The researcher was accompanied by a language helper who was an Isan native speaker. In case that there were any problems regarding language communicative issues, the language helper would help clarify during the data collection process. Central Thai was used as the language of elicitation with occasional use of Northern Thai language. The subjects mostly responded in Isan language. They also used Central Thai and Northern Thai in some cases.

The qualified subjects were interviewed by going through all the questions in the Individual SLQ. All conversations were tape-recorded. They were asked about their choices of language use in different domains. During the stay in the village, the researcher visited a village school to gain information regarding language use in the School domain. The individual SLQ was conducted with a few students whose age reached the criteria (over 15 years old). The Teacher SLQ was distributed to a number of teachers and school staff who were knowledgeable of the children's language use patterns at school.

In addition, the Village Leader SLQ was used when the researcher met someone who was knowledgeable of the village situation in the bigger picture, such as a village leader, a monk, or a teacher. The questionnaire was also used when a group of villagers sat together. This was to gain demographic information and general ideas from the villagers' perspective.

Findings and discussions

Language Use in Rongsan village

Fasold (1984: 183) defines language domain as a social context in which one speech variety is more suitable than another. The domains in this study included Family domain, Village domain, Northern Thai Village domain, Public domain, and School domain. In each domain, there are sub-domains according to interlocutors or settings. For example, the interlocutors i.e. spouse, father/mother, children, etc. are listed as sub-domains under the family domain; and settings, i.e. temple, market, workplace, etc. are listed as sub-domains under the public domains. In total, there are 27 sub-domains under five major domains.

Language use as presented in the figure below was calculated from the percentage of total situations in which each language was employed. Overall, it was found that Isan people in the village still used Isan (51%) as a main language in most situations. This was followed by Northern Thai (27%) and Central Thai (22%).

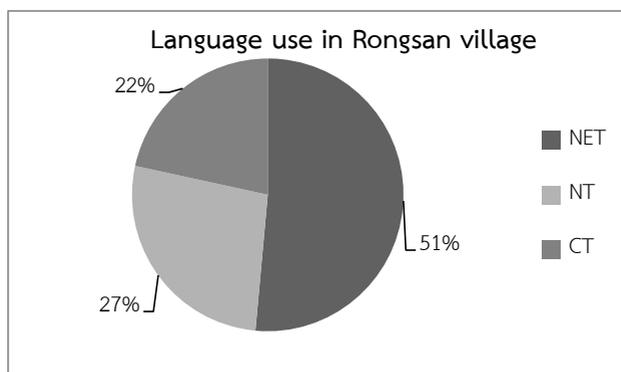


Figure 2 The average percentage of each language use in Rongsan village³
Language use by different age groups

The data presented in Figure 3 revealed that Isan was the primary language of people of all ages. The language has been predominantly used among elderly, middle-aged, and young people of Rongsan village. Middle-aged and elderly people used Isan in most situations, followed by Northern Thai and Central Thai and the level was much greater.

The elderly demonstrated the use of Northern Thai and Central Thai language almost at the same level. In middle-aged people, Northern Thai was used in one out of three situations, while Central Thai usage was the lowest among the three age groups. Young people, on the other hand, chose Central Thai (31%) as their preference next to Isan (42%). Northern Thai (27%) was the least popular among the young people.

³ NET, NT, and CT in this research refer to Northeastern Thai (Isan), Northern Thai, and Central Thai respectively.

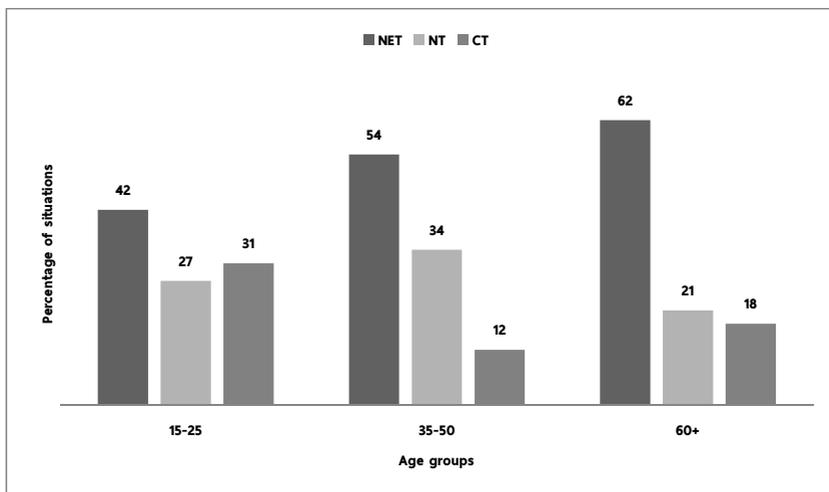


Figure 3 Percentage of language use⁴

Figure 4 below illustrates an upward trend of language use according to the speaker's age. It was found that the elderly used Isan language at the highest rate, followed by middle-aged and the young respectively. It can be deduced that the younger generation is less likely to use Isan in their daily conversations and that other languages might be more preferable to them in the near future. Focusing on genders, men and women demonstrated almost the same level of Isan language use in their daily lives. There was approximately 10 percent distinction between different genders in each age group. Males, except in the young generation, showed a higher use of Isan than females.

⁴ Language use at school is excluded as it focuses on children only and will be discussed later.

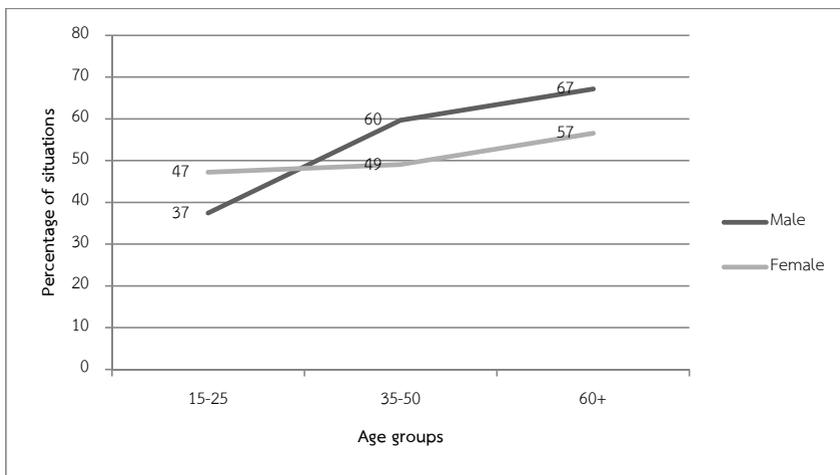


Figure 4 Isan use by age groups

Language use in different domains

The following sections discuss language use in the five major domains including Family Domain, Village Domain, Northern Thai Village Domain, Public Domain, and School Domain. The number in the table demonstrates the percentage of language use of each language in that domain. The subjects were allowed to provide more than one language use in any sub-domain and each subject weighs 100 percent. So, when they answered more than one language use in each sub-domain, the percentage would be distributed equally to each response.

Family Domain

The Family Domain refers to language use at home with family members or relatives. Most cases of language loss start with the loss in the home domain. Once family domain is affected, intergenerational language transmission is interrupted and the language may become endangered in the future (Crystal 2002: 81). The family domain in this study includes different family members; spouse, father/mother, children, grandchildren, grandparents, and other relatives.

Table 3: The percentage of language use in family domain

Interlocutor	15-25				35-50				60+			
	NET	NT	CT	n ⁵	NET	NT	CT	n	NET	NT	CT	n
1. Spouse	25	75	0	2	100	0	0	2	100	0	0	2
2. Father / mother	92	0	8	6	100	0	0	6	100	0	0	6
3. Children	25	25	50	2	100	0	0	2	83	0	17	2
4. Grandchildren	100	0	0	3	92	8	0	3	92	8	0	3
5. Grandparents	92	8	0	6	100	0	0	6	100	0	0	6
6. Other relatives	83	8	8	6	92	8	0	6	83	8	8	6
Average	69	19	11		97	3	0		93	3	4	

We can see that Isan was used the most among family members in all age groups. The elderly and the middle-aged people largely used their native language with all family members, and it sharply dropped in the young generation.

From the table, we can see that the percentages of language use in the two older generations reveal quite the same pattern. Their use of Isan stayed very high in the home domain. There was a surprising figure of Central Thai

⁵ Since the number of respondents in each sub-domain is not the same, n refers to the number of the respondents in each sub-domain.

usage with children in the elderly group. Language use of the young generation with family members seems to show a worrying situation. The use of Northern Thai was the highest between husband and wife (75%). Even though there were only two respondents to this question, both of them married to Northern Thai people. This may suggest that cross-marriage to Northern Thai people is common and acceptable in the community. In addition, a half of the responses used Central Thai with their children. It can be said that the people of younger generations may use even more Northern Thai with spouse and Central Thai with children in the future.

In conclusion, Isan is still the language which has been used predominantly at home. The high percentage of Isan in the family domain indicates that the villagers preserve the language in all generations and the language has been transmitted to younger generations. Nevertheless, it is regrettable that not all the subjects pass down the Isan language to their children. This might be an indication of language shift or even language death in the future.

Village and Northern Thai Village Domain

These two domains represent language use inside and outside the village with people from different ethnic groups. Minor domains involve interlocutors from different ethnic groups, i.e. Isan people, Northern Thai people, Hmong people, and Visitors or Strangers. The use of language in Village and Northern Thai Village domains reveal similar patterns. It implies that interlocutors play an important role in selecting the code. We can see from Table 4 that people involved in the conversation affects which language the villagers are going to use. It does not matter how much they use each language inside or outside the village, it depends mostly on whom they are talking to. Location does not noticeably affect people's choices regarding language use.

Language use in Rongsan village can be classified based on interlocutors into four major groups, i.e. Isan people, Northern Thai people, Hmong people, and Strangers. The table below shows the average percentage of language use with different people both in the Village and Northern Thai village domains. Note that this measures the number of situations rather than the volume of communication since we do not know how often people meet in different locations.

Table 4: The percentage of language use based on interlocutors

Interlocutor	15-25			35-50			60+		
	NET	NT	CT	NET	NT	CT	NET	NT	CT
1. Isan people	92	0	8	100	0	0	96	0	4
2. Northern Thai people	8	71	21	20	78	3	25	58	17
3. Hmong people	0	29	71	28	53	20	19	28	53
4. Visitors, strangers, etc	0	13	88	0	33	67	19	3	78

The table showed that the subjects used a particular language with certain groups of people. Nearly all respondents chose Isan to talk with Isan people no matter where they are. However, it is surprising to find that some still used Central Thai with people from their own group. Besides, the majority of the subjects spoke Northern Thai with Northern Thai people. The young and old generation preferred Central Thai when they met Hmong people, while the middle-aged group selected Northern Thai. Lastly, when they met strangers, Central Thai was the language of choice in all age groups. It is also obvious that the level of Isan decreases when they meet people from other groups.

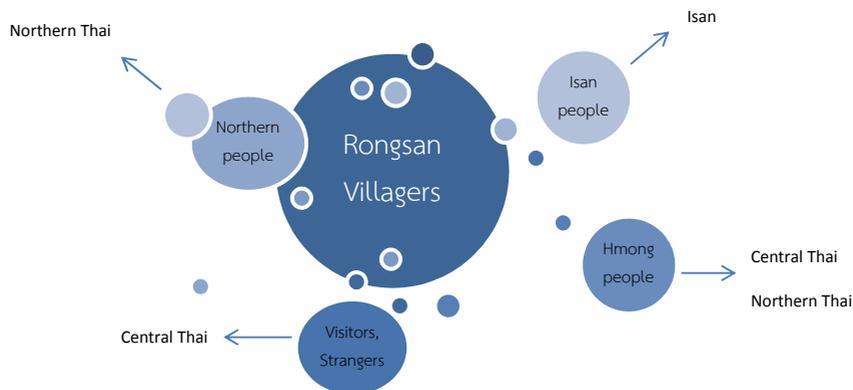


Figure 5 Language use based on interlocutors

Figure 5 is a visual presentation of language choices of Rongsan villagers based on the people they meet. It was found that certain languages were chosen with particular groups of people. Isan was used with Isan people, Northern Thai with Northern Thai people, both Northern Thai and Central Thai with Hmong people, and Central Thai with visitors or strangers.

Public Domain

This section discusses language use at different places other than those in the previous sections. This part asks what languages they are going to use when they encounter strangers in different places.

Table 5: The percentage of language use in the public domain

Settings	15-25			35-50			60+		
	NET	NT	CT	NET	NT	CT	NET	NT	CT
Temple	67	0	33	100	0	0	83	0	17
Market in the village	75	17	8	42	58	0	75	25	0
Market in town	0	83	17	8	83	8	31	64	6
Workplace	0	67	33	58	42	0	72	22	6
Hospital in the village	17	58	25	8	83	8	33	58	8
Hospital in the city	0	67	33	6	72	22	33	58	8
Government offices	0	42	58	0	67	33	33	50	17
Village meeting	92	0	8	75	0	25	83	0	17
Funeral ceremony	92	0	8	75	25	0	100	0	0
Average	38	37	25	41	48	11	61	31	9

In case that the interlocutors' ethnicity was not known or could be predicted, it can be seen that Isan and Northern Thai were chosen to communicate in other places. Isan was the language choice of most people at a temple, a village market, workplace, a village meeting and a funeral ceremony. Northern Thai was used considerably in more formal places, i.e. a downtown market, the hospitals, and government offices. It was expected that people would use Central Thai at official places; however, Rongsan villagers chose Northern Thai instead.

According to the data, most Rongsan villagers use Isan for religious purposes as we can see that the use of Isan stays very high at the temple and a funeral. In addition, Isan is selected as an in-group language where the speakers are surrounded by other Isan people (a village market, a village meeting). In other places which become more formal and involve people from other ethnic groups, Northern Thai is more preferable even in governmental establishments, such as hospitals, the post office, the downtown market, etc.

This is due to the fact that most of the governmental officers are Northern Thai. The use of Central Thai stayed relatively low and is used only by a few people at some government places.

According to the findings based on settings, it is obvious that the languages of choice at various places can be grouped into two main categories in which each language is prioritized as shown in Table 6. In-group domains, where the villagers expect to meet people from the same group, are clearly governed by the Isan language. In addition, community domains, where the villagers meet various groups of people, are employed mostly by the Northern Thai language.

Table 6: Domains of language use based on locations

Informal settings (In-group Domain)	Formal settings (Community Domain)
Temple Village market Village meeting Funeral ↓ Isan	Town market Hospitals Workplaces Government offices ↓ Northern Thai

School Domain

School domain is categorized as a separate domain because language use at school only focuses on children. The answers were taken from the young subjects aged 15-25. According to the findings from the Teacher SLQ, when asked 'Do the ethnic groups split up to play or do they play together?', the teachers said that most of the time they played together. There might be some times when they separated into each group, but not very often. Some of the teachers added that the students looked happy and joyful when they played together. In addition, they said that the students did not seem to discriminate against friends from other ethnic groups. When asked about the languages that the children used when they were playing, all the teachers said that children used 'Central Thai' when they played together because the students were from different ethnic groups and speak different languages. The children would use their own language only if they played with friends from the same group. All of the teachers did not mind if students spoke Isan at school. They further added that it was very common for students to use their home language at school. Central Thai was required only when discussing formal topics learnt in class.

In addition, when asked about the children's capability in Northern Thai or Central Thai when they first started school, the teachers said that Isan children were able to speak other languages to some extent. Although they might not be able to speak Northern Thai or Central Thai well, they had a good understanding towards the other two varieties without much struggle. Considering the future of the Isan language in the village, the teachers said that children would still speak Isan in the next twenty years, but their speech might be largely influenced by Central Thai in terms of vocabulary and accent. Some of the teachers said that Isan children nowadays were using a lot of Central Thai words in their conversation in Isan, which did not make it difficult for teachers to understand.

Children's language use at school reveals that the Isan language stays alive in the school. Though Isan children are surrounded by people of various ethnic groups and they are only a small group of children at school, a half of them still used Isan with friends and teachers around them. This has shown that the language is successfully passed down to younger generations and they are not embarrassed to use Isan with non-Isan people. However, the result from Teacher SLQ indicates that children have used Central Thai words extensively and this will increase in the future. The table below provides the percentage of students who use each language in the School domain.

Table 7: The percentage of language use in school domain

Interlocutors	Isan	NT	CT
Teachers	12	0	88
Isan friends	75	0	25
Northern Thai friends	12	50	38
Hmong friends	21	33	46
Average	30	21	49

From the findings, it was found that the largest group of children used Central Thai at school (49%), followed by Isan (30%) and Northern Thai (21%) respectively. When talking to teachers, most of them used Central Thai, but one out of ten students still persisted to use Isan. Some of the children said that they switched to Central Thai in order to be more 'formal and polite'. Therefore, Central Thai was often used to discuss academic topics. Three out of four used Isan with Isan friends, and a quarter of them used Central Thai. They said that

sometimes Central Thai was needed because there were friends from different ethnicities in the conversation too. Half of the children used Northern Thai with Northern Thai friends, while some selected Central Thai (38%) and Isan (12%).

Conclusion and discussion

Even with extensive contact with people from several ethnic groups and a pressure from languages of wider communication, the findings reveal that Isan is still the main language of the community and is mainly used by people of all age groups. The elderly use the language at the greatest rate and the use declines in younger generations. Considering gender, males and females use almost the same level of Isan in the village. In multilingual settings as in Rongsan village, language contact is inevitable and people need to make choice regarding language use in different domains.

Figure 6 below summarizes the percentage of the Isan language use in five major domains: Family, Village, Northern Thai Village, Public, and School domains.

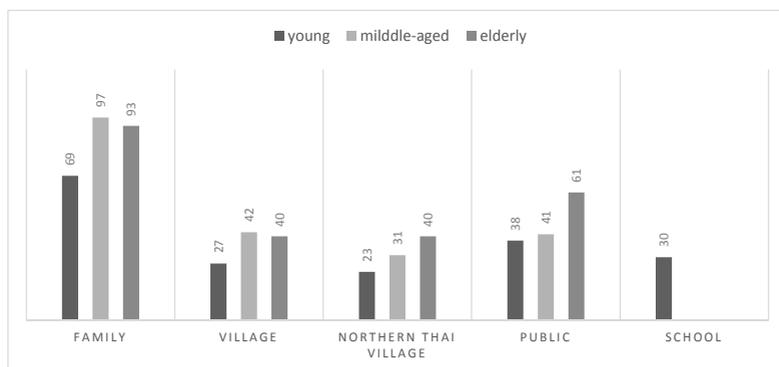


Figure 6 The percentage of Isan language use in different domains

One of the most noticeable points is that the use of Isan is very high in the home domain. In other places, the use of language is largely influenced by three factors: interlocutors, formality of the settings, and topics. In Village and Northern Thai Village domains, choice of language relies heavily on interlocutors. In other words, language use with different people depends on the language of the person they are talking to. In public locations, two main languages are exercised by the villagers: Isan and Northern Thai. Isan represents the in-group language, where the villagers use in informal settings. Northern Thai, on the other hand, accounts for the community language, which is governed by the formality of the setting. Isan is used mainly in places which are quite informal, such as a temple and a village meeting, whereas Northern Thai is spoken in more formal places, e.g. hospitals and government offices. School is the only place where Central Thai is used the most because educational materials are only available in Standard Thai and the students will have to switch to Central Thai to discuss various academic topics in class. In summary, Isan is still the language which is used the most by Rongsan villagers in most situations and the language stays alive in the village.

From the current situation of language use within the village, the Isan language in Rongsan village is primarily used for home domain, but not all parents transmit the language to their children. Besides, the youngest proficient of the language is children. From the chart (Figure 8) below, it demonstrates that the language is at level 6b (threatened), in which the language is used orally by all generations, but it is not fully transmitted to the children. We can say that the language has not yet shifted to other languages, and will still be spoken by future generations of Rongsan village. However, a significant effort must be made to move the speech community to a higher level or at least prevent the language from being shifted to the next level down the scale where the last proficient generations are parents.

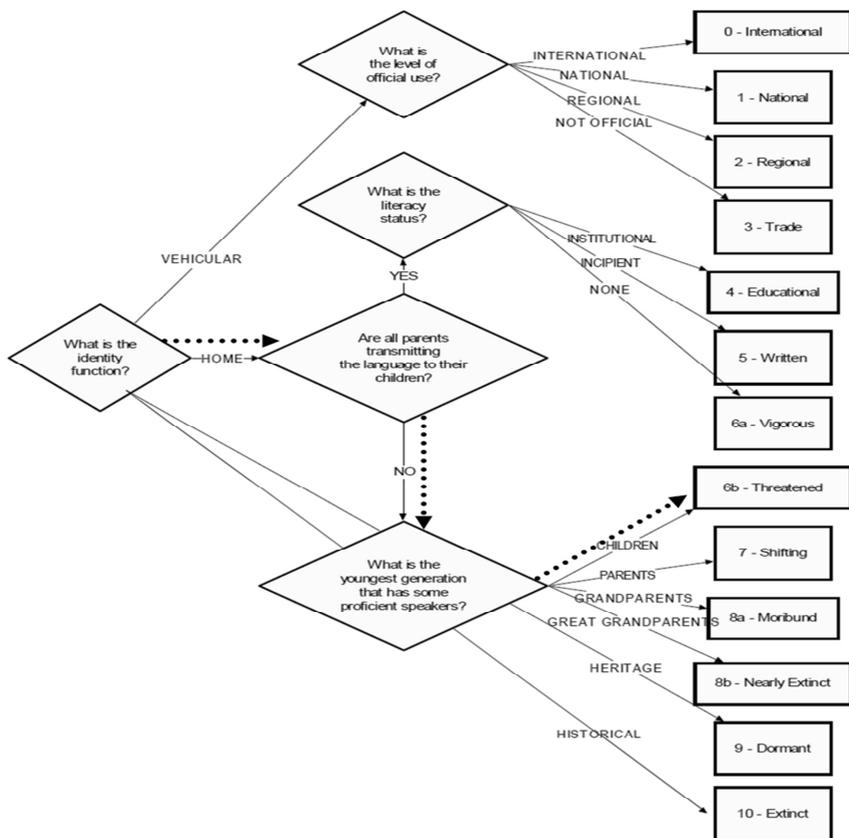


Figure 7 Isan language current situation in EGIDS Diagnostic Decision Tree (applied from Lewis & Simon 2010: 30)

Suggestions on how to reverse language shift

Lewis M. Paul & Gary F. Simons (2011) proposed 'The Sustainable Use Model for Language Development' and mentioned four levels of Sustainable Language Use. This includes Sustainable Literacy, Sustainable Orality,

Sustainable Identity, and Sustainable History, hierarchically. The four levels of language use correspond directly to four levels on the EGIDS:

- Sustainable Literacy = EGIDS 4, Educational
- Sustainable Orality = EGIDS 6a, Vigorous
- Sustainable Identity = EGIDS 9, Dormant
- Sustainable History = EGIDS 10, Extinct

These four levels above are sustainable if the sustainability conditions are maintained in the community. The language situation of the Isan language in Rongsan village (6b, threatened) is considered inherently unstable which will drop down further in the EGIDS if the community lacks efforts to move the language up the scale (6a, Vigorous). In order for the language to reach sustainable orality, the community must work to reach FAMED conditions of sustainability as represented in the following table.

Table 8: FAMED conditions for Sustainable Orality (level 6a) (Lewis & Simons 2011: 34)

FAMED	Conditions	Level of Use in EGIDS in the village: 6b (Threatened)
Functions	The language is used orally to meet the functions of communication within the home and community.	Adequate oral use exists in every domain. A heavy use of the oral Isan exists in the Home domain.
Acquisition	There is full oral transmission of the language to all children.	Oral transmission of the vernacular language is partial. Not all children are learning the vernacular language from their parents as first language and using it at an early age.
Motivation	Speakers perceive the benefits (economic, social, religious, and identificational) of using their language orally.	Most members of the community perceive the benefits of using the language orally, but they perceive no benefits in reading and writing it. Central Thai is preferable as a writing language.
Environment	Official government policy affirms the oral use of the language.	Official government policy allows the community members to use the language freely.
Distinct Niche	Members of the language community have a set of shared norms as to when to use the local language orally versus when to use a more dominant language.	There is no clear differentiation of when to use the vernacular language and Languages of Wider Communications (LWCs) orally.

Of all the five FAMED conditions, the people in the village have reached a satisfaction level in Functions and Environment as mentioned above. Therefore, the other three conditions, i.e. Acquisition, Motivation, and Distinct Niche need to be strengthened in order to move the language up to level 6a. By doing so, the Isan community may be able to reach the Sustainable Orality level and maintain the use of language, even if displaced, from generation to generation.

Suggestions for further studies

The number of subjects in this study is limited to only 18 subjects. This created some difficulties in analyzing the data in some parts. For example, only four subjects were qualified for this part when dealing with language use at school, or only two subjects in the young generation responded when they were asked about language use with their spouse. Thus, it would be better to get more people involved in the study. This would benefit greatly especially in language use sections and could probably lead to more accurate results.

In addition, the study does not include other issues on bilingualism, e.g. bilingual proficiency or attitudes towards other languages in a community. Further studies, if possible, are needed to discover the relationship between the exposure to a second language and language use patterns.

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