

การศึกษาการดำรงอยู่ของภาษาถิ่นโคราช

A Study of Vitality of Korat Dialect

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาการคงอยู่ของภาษาถิ่นโคราชโดยสำรวจว่าปัจจัยทางสังคมวัฒนธรรมใดที่มีอิทธิพลต่อทัศนคติ และมุมมองของชาวพื้นเมืองต่อภาษาถิ่นโคราชเมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับภาษาไทยมาตรฐานซึ่งเป็นภาษาไทยสำเนียงภาคกลาง งานวิจัยนี้ทำการศึกษา ณ อำเภอปักธงชัย จังหวัดนครราชสีมา โดยให้ผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามจำนวน 291 คน ตอบแบบสอบถามซึ่งดัดแปลงมาจากแบบสำรวจความเชื่อเกี่ยวกับการดำรงอยู่ของภาษาถิ่นโคราช (belief on ethnolinguistic vitality questionnaire) โดย ฮาเวิร์ด ไกล์ และบอริส (2537) รวมถึงใช้การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก จากนั้นทำการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยสถิติบรรยายและการจำแนกแบบทางเดียว

ผลการศึกษา พบว่า มีเพียงระดับการศึกษาและกลุ่มอายุที่มีอิทธิพลต่อทัศนคติของชาวพื้นเมืองต่อการดำรงอยู่ของภาษาถิ่นโคราช โดยชี้ว่าการใช้ภาษาถิ่นนั้นลดลงบ้างในกลุ่มสมาชิกที่มีอายุน้อยและมีการศึกษาที่สูงกว่า

คำสำคัญ: การดำรงอยู่ของภาษาถิ่นโคราช ทัศนคติ ภาษาถิ่นโคราช ภาษาถิ่นอีสาน

Abstract

This research examines vitality of Korat dialect by exploring socio-cultural factors that may have influence on the attitude of indigenous people on vitality of Korat dialect and the way in which the dialect is perceived in comparison with standard Thai - Central Thai dialect. Conducted in Pak Thong Chai district of Nakorn Rachasima, a set of questionnaire adapted from belief on ethnolinguistic vitality questionnaire (Harwood, Giles & Bourhis, 1994) was distributed to 291 respondents; also an in-depth interview was conducted. Analyzed with descriptive statistics and One-way ANOVA, the data revealed that only education attainments and age group have influences over the indigenous' attitude on the vitality of Korat dialect suggesting that the use of such dialect slightly decreased in younger and more educated members of the community.

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Introduction

Although locating in the Northeastern region of Thailand (Isan area), Nakorn Rachasima province (also known as Korat) possesses a distinctive dialect which is distinct from Isan dialect practiced in other provinces. Conversed only in Korat and a few neighboring areas, Korat dialect (henceforth KD) is; therefore, a minority dialect (Metkarujit, 2007). According to Beadnok (1989), J. Marwin Brown concluded that KD is a hybrid dialect originating from Central Thai dialect (henceforth CT) which is, in turn, developed from Lao. Moreover, Beadnok added that the majority of KD lexical items was derived from CT whereas approximately one third of the items was developed from Lao and less than five percent was from other languages i.e. Khmer.

In another study, Tianmee (1983 as cited in Beadnok, 1989) reveals that KD possesses 3 levels of tones; the criterion which has divided the indigenous users into two groups in accordance with ethnicity of their antecedents, thus there are groups of Lao-Korat and Thai-Korat despite their assimilated dialects. Also Rischel (1998) asserted that due to its different tones in the syllables, KD has been excluded from dialect cluster of Shan, Northern Thai, Lao, Central Thai and Southern Thai. In terms of sociolinguistic practice, Beadnok (ibid.) slightly mentioned that people in different professions would orient to different dialects i.e. traders used CT more frequent than did farmers and civil servants. Though it seemed a divergent point to study sociolinguistics and minority status of KD, it has been scarcely explored.

Frequently, the researches pertaining minority status of dialects in Thailand especially in Northeastern area have emphasized on Isan dialect as a regional representative. The study of McCargo and Hongladarom (2004) has pointed out the struggling identity construction of Isan people. They suggest that the construction of either Thai or Lao identity has resulted from political and economic contest in which the inferior status has historically been assigned to Lao thus, devaluing Lao-ness. Accordingly, the Isan people are likely to disconnect to this Lao-identity, although cultural similarities have been found among the group of Isan and Lao people. Another relevant research has been conducted by Draper (2010) on the vitality of Isan dialect proposing that there is high possibility of language shift from Isan to CT especially in a

group of young, more educated and wealthier members of the community. In detail, financial reward for professional career has been one of the factors instrumentally influences and motivates younger generation to practice more CT. Other salient findings include the Isan people's desire for multilingual education to include formal Isan literacy and to extend role of Isan dialect in public media. The study of McCargo and Hongladarom (2004) and that of Draper (2010) though provided better insight into minority status and perception of Isan people and Isan dialect in Thailand, the status and perception of KD are much to be explored.

Purposes of the research

1. To discover whether or not socio-cultural factors namely gender, age, education attainments, career and income have influences on vitality of KD.
2. To explore the indigenous' perceived status of KD in comparison with CT.

Scope of the research

Due to its presumed various cultural identities and population density, this study was conveniently carried out Don sub-district, Pak Thong Chai district. The sub-district hosts twelve villages with a total of 35,723 households comprising 116,157 inhabitants out of which 56,517 were male and 59,640 were female (Department of Inferential Statistics, n.d.). 291 convenient respondents were selected based on Krejcie and Morgan table; each represented one household. To explore possible influences of sociocultural factors on the vitality of KD, gender, education attainments, occupation, age, income per month were brought into consideration.

Methodology

In this study, a set of the beliefs on ethnolinguistic vitality questionnaire (BEVO) (Harwood, Giles & Bourhis, 1994) was distributed to 291 participants who were representatives of their families during July to August, 2017 following by in-depth interviews with a community leader and a non-formal education teacher. The data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics, crosstab and ANOVAs so as to find whether any significant relation between the indigenous perception and the socio-

cultural factors given. Identified for key issue and themes from the interview were complementary for quantitative findings in the study.

Results

To answer research question 1, it is found that only education attainments and age group have influences on the beliefs of the indigenous users on vitality of KD as shown in table 2. Other factors used in this study which were gender, occupation and income per month, however, did not show statistical significance.

Table 2 ANOVAs results for relationship of education level and age group on Beliefs on Ethnolinguistic Vitality

	Beliefs on Ethnolinguistic Vitality	Mean Values		ANOVAs results	
		B/W groups	W/I groups	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
<i>Education attainments</i>					
	General belief	1.483	.545	2.723	.045
<i>Age</i>					
	Personal belief	7.164	2.295	3.122	.027
	Normative belief	5.520	1.891	2.919	.035
	Goal belief	5.028	1.813	2.774	.042

* $p \leq 0.05$

Tending to research question 2, there are accounts pertaining the indigenous' perceived status of KD in comparison to CT.

Education Attainments and Vitality of Korat Dialect

It was revealed both groups of people (more educated and less educated people) agreed that KD is acceptable dialect in both local and national level (90.9% and 87.5% respectively). However, the majority of less educated group (56.2%) responded to negative view on the acceptance of their dialect on national level which might have resulted from the ideology on social classes relayed from previous

generation. In terms of self-efficacy on linguistic competence, the more educated participants reported higher competence in both KD and CT (84%) whereas only half of their counterparts admitted competence in both dialects (42%); interestingly, there were some less educated people admitting scarce competence for KD (5%). This was probably due to their inability to fully master all skills especially writing. In addition, the communicative competence was reported quite different between the two groups. The use of CT among friends, in other social activities and in governmental service was gradually increased among group of more educated people and vice versa for another group in which the use of CT in other domains was approximately alike (28.6%). Still, the use of KD in home domain was reported in quite similar fashion for both groups (59.1% and 59.6%). Accordingly, it could be assumed that KD might be used to maintain strong bond within families. Such strength was probably supported by the fact that both groups revealed highly attached to Korat community (72.5%) compared to their attachment to Thai society as a whole (40%). Regarding to how well KD was presented through media, both groups expressed their concern over scarce display of KD in mainstream media (72.7% of more educated group and 62.5% of less educated group). Tending to the question of using KD in local schools, about two-third of less educated people (62.5%) opined that there was rarely used, whereas half of more educated people (54.5%) showed indifference on the issue.

Age and Vitality of Korat Dialect

Referring to the acceptance of KD in local level, all age groups showed concurrence, still the percentage of such agreement increased in according to the age group that is 80% for the adult, 85.7% for the late adult, and 87.2% for the middle aged. The people's perception on local level was in contrast with the decline on national level responded by each group (67.8%, 60% and 42.8 % respectively). In the issue of cultural representation and use of KD as their unique linguistic performance was perceived quite different between the adult (82.14%), the late adult (40%), and the middle aged group (42.8%). Among the three groups, the adults reluctantly showed their linguistic competence in KD (53.5%) while the rest displayed higher confidence in KD pragmatically (80% and 71.4%); such result was reversed in the displayed of linguistic competence CT of (82.1%, 60% and 42.8 % respectively).

The same patterns of using each dialect in different social activities and government services were found that the adults used more of CT (75%) than the late adult (60%) and the middle aged group (42.8%). Such responses could result from the adult's need to practice CT for work thus perceiving KD not as instrumental device but rather the cultural identity. Pertaining their belonging to the Korat community, the adults reported 71.4% whereas the other two revealed higher percentages (80% for the late adult and 85.7% for the middle aged). However, all three groups largely perceived themselves as parts of the Thai society (89.2%, 80% and 85.7% respectively). Although the KD was reportedly used in many domains of lives, it was requested to be used for a wider range of social activities. The use of KD in the media was requested more prominently in the group of adults (89.2%) who viewed KD not only as their unique dialect but also identity marker. Such concern positively correlated with their view on the existence of KD in the next few decades which gradually increased in the group of adult (78.5%), late adult (80%) and middle aged (85.7%).

Discussion

The findings from this study confirm that education attainments and age of the indigenous people have influences on the vitality of KD. Such findings yield positive relationship with the study of Draper (2010) on Isan speakers who shift to using CT partly due to its social status. Although Dapper's study and this study asserts that young, more educated people are likely to shift to frequent use of CT; there is also dissimilarity. While Draper's (ibid.) study showed that self-identified Lao-Isan people may feel unsupported and excluded from their fellow Thai citizens, the Korat people in this study are found referring to themselves as Thai-Korat. This concept, thereby only divides the respondents from their fellow Thais in term of geography, but not in term of identity thus, may prevent them from feeling separated from the rest of the nation.

Besides, the possible causes of the respondents' perception may stem from many years of schooling and engagement in the wider society by means of social media. These involvements which normally require extensive use of CT may normalize the use of CT in daily life of the indigenous people. Another possible explanation is that the area where the study was conducted is surrounded by a higher education

institution as well as a number of tourist attractions which constantly welcome non-users of KD. Thereby the indigenous may be encouraged to practice CT more often and potentially become familiar using CT outside work domain.

Through immense education, the indigenous people may view CT as mundane mediation for social activities; still they are likely to assert confidence in linguistic competence and possess positive perception towards both dialects. It is noted that although the indigenous people are among the most eager to demonstrate their collective identities through linguistic performance of KD and other cultural activities, they are aware of such practice once encountered with the city dwellers possibly for fear of being labelled rustic. The contrasting practice might stem from the difference in linguistic practice in which one respondent pointed out that the city dwellers may have more chances to interact with people from diverse regional backgrounds, thus CT was often employed. This practice, in turn, could effortlessly raise perceived social status of CT and thereby, an individual's background might be assumed based on these dialects.

It is also important to note that how the indigenous people identify themselves could affect their beliefs on the survival of their dialect. In this study, it is found that the indigenous people perceive themselves as Thais. As a result, such perception perhaps constantly registers the indigenous people as part of a larger group of their fellow Thais and thus mentally accepting the use of CT without much questioning. This possibility; however, could weaken the desire to protect their cultural heritage including the dialect. This statement is in line with Lee (2014) whose study showed a possibility of assimilatory change in patterns of dialect and dialect identity of the Chinese descendants who live in Bangkok area. Although, this seems possible for the indigenous people in Nakorn Ratchasima area since they too feel being part of the entire Thai society, there are some opinions strongly arguing that the KD is seen as one of the Korat identities and should be presented more in the mainstream media to acknowledge its existence to the outsiders. This type of opinion could be seen as an indicator for a dialect survival in the future.

From this perspective, it is relatable with the earlier literature (Lenk, 2007; Komondouros & McEntee-Atalianis, 2007) in the sense that although the members of the ethnic group express anxiety over the possibility of the dialect extinction; there

is possibility of language lost due to its limited domains of use. Still, the seemingly lesser used KD could have provided strength of preservation once the members realize its significance as unique identity marker. Although the findings in general is quite similar to the study of Draper (2010) that young and well- educated members of the community express high potential of linguistic shift from KD and CT. Distinctively emerged is that the respondents seem to give equal value to both dialects for different purposes; thus the encouragement and promotion of more use of KD is in demand in order to preserve the existence of the dialect.

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