Thai-ization

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Abstract

There are two meanings of Thai-ization: Thai domination and using Thai characters in written system á la Romanization. In the case of the Chong ethnic language in Rayong, Chanthaburi, and Trat provinces where there is no written system, Thai-ization is used to preserve local identity. In the case of the Malayu Patani ethnic language in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces, Thai-ization is used for the sake of bilingual education.

Key words: Thai-ization, phonemic transcription, phonetic transcription, Romanized transcription, Thai-ized transcription

Introduction

There are two meanings of "Thai-ization". The broader meaning includes everything that reflects "Thainess" or "being Thai", which may be expressed in both verbal and non-verbal aspects. This process may be compared to the Romanization of Britain.

> The story of Romanization, often in the past seen as the coming of civilization to Britain, can alternatively be seen as the military imposition of a new fashionable culture, of change rather than necessarily improvement or progress. The Romans are credited with bringing city living, literacy and economic development to Britain. (www.britishmuseum.org)

The same process may be seen in Latinization, the changing of names into Latin.

> Latinisation is the practice of rendering a non-Latin name in a Latin style. This may be done so as to more closely emulate Latin authors, or to present a more impressive image. It is done by transforming the name

into Latin sounds (*e.g. Geber* for *Jabir*), by translating a name with a specific meaning into Latin (e.g. *Venator* for *Cacciatore*), or by choosing a new name based on some attribute of the person (e.g. *Noviomagus* for *Daniel Santbech*, possibly from the Latin name for the town of Nijmegen). (Dan H. Nicolson 1974)

Thai-ization in the cultural context, however, may be discomfiting in certain cases, particularly as it impacts negatively upon relationships between the Thai state and its ethnic minorities or neighboring countries. Laos is a good example. The Laotian government is somewhat uncomfortable with the flood of Thai culture pouring into Laos through the media. Yet if "Thai-ization" is seen as cultural expansion, northern Thailand seems to even more greatly affected. **(**www.imamreza.net) (Niti Pawakapan: 2002) Current undercurrents in Thai society reflect the same attitudes of conservative groups that are not happy with Americanization, Japanization, or Koreanization of their culture.

The narrow definition of "Thai-ization" refers to the use of Thai characters in writing words, including those from both foreign and ethnic languages, either having or lacking their own writing systems. This paper deals with "Thai-ization" in this narrow sense.

Romanization and Thai-ization

In linguistics, Romanization, or Latinization, is the representation of words or sounds with Roman (or Latin) characters. The original language may or may not have its own character set. The representation of words is the process of transliteration, whereas the representation of sounds is the process of transcription. There are two kinds of transcription: phonemic transcription and phonetic transcription. Phonemic transcription is the process of representing the distinctive sound units of a language, whereas phonetic transcription is the process of representing the sounds of an actual spoken utterance. For example, the phonemic sound of /r/ in Thai may be uttered differently in various regions and social groups in Thailand. If a phonetic transcription is used there must be various representations of [r] sounds to distinguish all the specific features.

Roman characters were used in the development of the writing systems of most languages in Europe and North America. Later, for a variety of reasons, the use of Roman characters to represent the sounds of each language spread

to Australia, Africa, and Asia. Some characters, however, were used to denote particular sounds in one language that did not represent the same sounds in another language. For example, in Chinese Pinyin /b/ is different from English /b/. Thus "Beijing" is pronounced [peɪdʒin], not [be [peɪdʒin]. (Royal Institute, 2002, 2007)

In the same manner, Thai characters may be used in representing the sounds of other languages, which we can describe as 'Thai-ization' of the writing system. If languages without a writing system can be Romanized they can also be Thai-ized. This is particularly true of languages within the boundaries of Thailand. If languages with their own writing systems can be Romanized as an alternative way of writing, they can be Thai-ized as well.

Thai-ization of Languages without a Written Alphabet

As mentioned, languages without an alphabet, or writing system, may be Romanized; an example of this process can be seen in Hawaiian. In 1826 American missionaries used Roman characters to represent the sounds of Hawaiian. The system may be called a Romanized transcription.[1]

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[1] Thanks to Doris Wibunsin who suggested the terms Romanized transcription and Thai-ized transcription.

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In the same way, a Thai-ized transcription maybe used to represent the sounds of Thai dialects or languages of ethnic groups in Thailand that do not have writing systems.

Thai-ization of Chong

Suwilai Premsrirat, of Mahidol University, has reported that there are about 70 social groups in Thailand speaking different languages or dialects, including Central Thai dialects (37%), Northeastern Thai dialects (28%), Northern Thai dialects (10%), Southern Thai dialects (9%), Thai-Khmer dialects (3%), and Thai-Malay dialects (2%), with the remaining 11% speaking other Thai dialects or ethnic languages (Suwilai Premsrirat, 2007; Suwilai Premsrirat *et al.*, 2004). A number of those dialects and ethnic languages lack a writing system; the Chong language is one such example.

Chong, a language belonging to the Mon-Khmer Austro-Asiatic family, is spoken by about 5,500 people in Chong communities in Rayong, Chanthaburi and Trat, and about 5,500 people along the Thai-Cambodian border between Chanthaburi in Thailand and Phothisat in Cambodia. Many place names in those three provinces are derived from the Chong language; *e.g.* the name of the province, Rayong (pronounced with a long final vowel), comes from the Chong word, 'rayong' (pronounced with a short final vowel), the name of a local tree,

called Pradu in Thai. Although there are slight variations in the Chong spoken in different areas, there is mutual understanding among the Chong people.

At present, however, the survival of the Chong language is in a critical state. Many Chong senior citizens are afraid that the language may disappear, since there are only about 500 fluent Chong speakers in Chanthaburi/Trat, and most are over 50 years of age. Mahidol University is now trying to revive and revitalize the language by urging the local people to participate in recording the spoken language and by transcribing it into written form. A local school, Ban Khlong Phlu, is now offering a course on the Chong language to students from Prathom 3 (Grade 3) to Prathom 5 (Grade 5) as part of the local curriculum content. (Suwilai Premsrirat *et al.*, 2007).

The revival of dialects such as Chong by creating a writing system using Thai characters is one means of preserving the local culture. Thus, in 2009 the Royal Institute appointed a Committee to Create a Writing System Using Thai Characters for Thai Dialects and Ethnic Languages (Royal Institute 2009).

ตัวชะระ

-ะ	-า	-	-	เ-ะ	เ-	แ-ะ	แ-
กะละ	กะตา	มัคตะงิ	ซี	เละ	เปล	แพ่ะ	แช
-	-อ	เ-อะ	เ-อ	-	-	โ-ะ	โ-
กรีบ	กะพือ	เล่อะ	กะเซ่อ	กะชุ่	กะพู่	คะโมะ	กะโค
เ-าะ	-อ	เ-ย	เ-อ	-ว	-า	ไ-	เ-า
เง่าะ	ซอ	ซุกเปีย	เกือก	บัว	กำตี	ไฮ	เอา

A sample of Thai-ized Chong is shown in the pictures below.

Thai-ization of Languages with Their Own Writing Systems

In the case of languages that already have a writing system, another system may be developed for some particular purpose; *e.g.* the Thai-ization of Sanskrit words (Chirapat Prapandvidya, 1997). In the case of the Thai language, using Roman characters to write Thai words may be considered Romanization of Thai words (Royal Institute 2000).

ประกาศสำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี

และ

ประกาศราชบัณฑิตยสถาน

เรื่อง การเขียนชื่อจังหวัด เขต อำเภอ และกิ่งอำเภอ

และ

เรื่อง หลักเกณฑ์การถอดอักษรไทยเป็น
อักษรโรมันแบบถ่ายเสียง

Thai-ization of Malayu Patani

Malayu Patani is the language used in the area of the former "Patani Region" which incorporates present day Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces. For a long time this language has been written using an adapted version of Yawi, an alphabet derived from Arabic characters.

Thai-ization of Malayu Patani has been introduced to support bilingual education in that region. Students are being encouraged to use both the Thai Malayu dialect (Malayu Patani/Stun) and the Thai language as the learning medium. It is believed that reading and writing Malayu Patani using Thai characters will lead to better learning of the Thai language as well as the content of other subjects. And, at the same time, Thai government officials working in the Southern border region as well as others interested in the language may easily learn the Malayu Patani language.

Another advantage of Thai-ization of Malayu Patani is the development of bilingual dictionaries of Malayu Patani − Thai for a better understanding of both languages. This writing system is based on the sound system of Amphoe Mueang Pattani, which is understood in the three provinces along the Southern border (Royal Institute 2010).

Prior to the introduction of the bilingual curriculum, students were unhappy with their classes, as lessons had been taught in Thai only, and they could not understand the content of what was being taught. That has since improved.

On July 11, 2010, the Bangkok Post reported that Thai language skills of students under the bi-lingual project had improved by 35%, an improvement greater than that at schools not involved in the project. Teachers reported that students were better at their studies, paid more attention in class, and were not hesitant in expressing their views. Most students were happier with their classes and absenteeism had been reduced markedly.

Conclusion

The use of Thai characters to transcribe Thai dialects and ethnic languages, whether it is Thai-ization or a Thai-ized transcription, not only encourages the preservation and revitalization of languages in jeopardy of disappearing, but also supports a better understanding among those in the same country who use different mother tongues, and benefits the learning of students whose mother tongue is not Thai, not only of the Thai language, but of content subjects such as mathematics, science, and history.

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