

Patani-Malay Language: The Decline of Mother Tongue Usage

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The number of Thai-Malayu children who speak Patani-Malay language in the Deep South of Thailand is tending to decrease. A survey on the use of language in Thailand's Deep South showed that the new generation children between 15-24 years old were using Malay to communicate with their parents less and less and were using Malay mixed with Thai more.



The survey of the current language usage situation in Thailand's Deep South in a research project entitled "Thailand Malayu: A Study of Language Situation, Language Development, and Language Planning for Quality Education and Mass Media in Thailand's Deep South" was conducted by researchers from the Center for Documentation and Revitalization of Endangered Language at RILCA (Research Institute), Mahidol University. This research received financial support from the Research Center for Peace Building. The Center also supported a survey of Thai-Malayu residents' language

usage including attitudes towards different languages and language ability for use in daily life. The findings have led to a focus of language management to sole language and cultural conflict in education and communication between local people and government officers.

The sample population for this survey was 1,255 residents in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat (606 male and 649 female). There were 4 groups of different ages; young persons (15-24 years old), working persons (25-45 years old), middle-aged persons (46-59 years old) and elderly persons (60 years old up). The survey showed that Patani-Malay language was widely used by every age-group in all situations. The population used Patani-Malay at home and in the community for general, political or social communication. They also thought in Patani-Malay. The survey revealed the obvious strength of local languages in Thailand's Deep South and was also evidence that the mother tongue of Thai-Muslims in this area is Patani-Malay.

However, even though the overall of language usage showed the strength of Patani-Malay, the tendency of its use was decreasing. From the collected data, when looking at different age-groups, the researcher found that the group using Patani-Malay the least was the young person age-group. Thai-Malayu persons aged from 15-24 years old (331 from the total sample) used Thai mixed with Malay, especially those who living in the major cities of each province. Educated young persons tended to use Patani-Malay mixed with Thai more those without education.

The use of Thai and Patani-Malay by young persons in the Deep South suggests the weakness of the local language and the failure of Thai language learning administration in those areas. The mix of Thai and Patani-Malay does not indicate the strength of Thai usage ability but rather emphasizes the weakness of both languages.

“แก บัวะ เนื่องจาก อะไร?”

แก ทำ เพราะ อะไร?

(Why did you do that?)

(Example of Patani-Malay and Thai from an 18-year old person)

“มาแก ดูบะ ก่อนอาหาร ปื่อราชา อาลง ปื่อโระ ตลอดเลย”

กิน ยา ก่อนอาหาร รู้สึก คลื่นไส้ ตลอดเลย

(I feel queasy after taking medicine before meals.)

(Example of Patani-Malay and Thai from an 23-year old person)

Note: The bold words are Thai.

From these examples, we can see the use of Thai in a Patani-Malay sentence. The Thai words used in these sentences are not proper nouns or borrowed words from example “แก” (you) “อะไร” (what) which means “บอ/ดียอ” and “กาปอ” in Patani-Malay.

This language mixing does not conform to correct and proper language usage norms. The standard use of language is to choose language appropriate to the person and context, not mix up or use borrowed words as substitutes.



The data collected from the language survey and the evidence of language mixing by young persons in those areas indicates the setback to the use of Patani-Malay language and a of lacking Thai language skills. The diminishing use of Malay language might also affect Malayu cultural strength. Native speakers and those sharing common culture need to realize the importance of local language and make efforts to preserve it. As well, they must be strict on the correct use and standards of the local language and promote the use of appropriate Thai so as to prevent more language mixing in the future.

Reference:

Suwilai Prempri, et al. 2007. Situation Project.

Waemayi Paramal, et al. Patani-Malay Writing Script Manual.

Example sentences from Russadee.