

The Evaluation of Endangered languages of the 17-upper North Province in Thailand

Sudarat Leerabhandh. Hatfield
Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University —Thailand

Abstract

Thailand, situated in South East Asia (SEA), with its more than 70 ethnolinguistic groups, represents the definitive characteristic of SEA as one of the most complex areas of languages and ethnicities in the world (Premsrirat & Malone, 2003). However, languages in Thailand are facing the same destiny as the world's other minority languages; they are declining at different rates. The major regional Thai languages (Northern, Northeastern and Southern Thai) shows sign of language contraction, especially in the loss of vocabulary and aspects of grammar, while some small languages have ceased being the language of the speech community or even the language in the home. At the moment there are at least 14 languages in Thailand that are imminently endangered. This situation affects the North of Thailand too. Besides Northern Thai language, there are a lot of ethnolinguistic minority groups which belongs to Tai, Austroasiatic, Sino-Tibetan, and Miao-Yao language family. Some of these languages have no hope for survival after the next one or two generations because the few speakers left cannot provide a foundation of preservation against the dominant Thai language.

However, practitioners in applied linguistics and minority language education are developing participatory ways of assisting such communities in the process of language development. These include collaborations in designing or revising appropriate writing systems for the languages and for promoting mother tongue literature.