



Intro: It is an honor to be here--know you all are tired, etc.

I would like to start by telling a true story.

There is a village in the country. The villagers have lived there for hundreds of years. Most villagers are farmers.

### Searching for an Explicit Language Policy...

- 24 June 1932 Field Marshal Phibunsongkram declares Thai the national language (State Convention #1)
- Language status not mentioned in Thai constitution
- Practice



### Does Thailand Need a Language Policy?

- May 2006: First World Congress on the Power of Language (Bangkok): Dr. Prasenjit Na Nagara, Dr. Udom Warotamankhachai (Royal Institute); Dr. Susan Malone, Dr. Dennis Malone, Dr. Kirrme Knutzen (SIL International)
- Additional consultations with Thai and international scholars (Spolsky, Tollefson, Bradley, Lu Bianco)
- December 2006: Committee to Draft the National Language Policy commissioned, under the Royal Institute

## Committee to Draft the NLP

- "How can this resource of language be developed to benefit the country as a whole, as well as individuals within the country?"
  - Influenced by outlook of *Australian National Policy on Language (2005)*
- 6 Subcommittees
  - Thai for Thai Students and Thai Networks
  - Regional Languages (including ethnic minority languages)
  - Languages of Commerce, Neighboring Languages, and Working Languages
  - Teaching Thai to Migrants Seeking Employment in Thailand
  - Language Needs of the Visually and Hearing Impaired
  - Translation, Interpretation, and Localization Standards

## Activities

- Committee & Subcommittee Meetings
- Public Forums involving stakeholders (government ministries, NGOs, businesspeople, professional translators, ethnic minorities, United Nations agencies etc.)
  - Radio, Internet TV broadcasts
- International Conferences (in cooperation with UN Agencies, SIL International, others)





### *Thai for Thai Students and Thai Nationals*

- Probably the "easiest" policy point, as it fits naturally into the traditional role of the Royal Institute

1



### *Findings*

- The Thai language will need continued development to mitigate impact of globalization
- National test scores for the Thai subject go down every year, and many students report Thai as their "least favorite" subject.
  - New approaches to teaching Thai are needed!
- Trend for middle-upper class students to attend international and bilingual schools --> inadequate Thai language skills
- Additional support for overseas Thai needed

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### *Policy Statement*

- "Every Thai citizen will effectively learn and use the Thai language, which is the national and official language."

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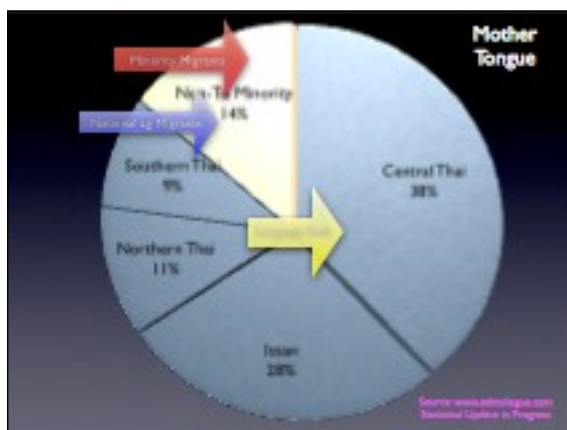
## Regional/Ethnic Minority Languages

- Probably the most controversial policy point, due to language beliefs: "everyone speaks Thai" and "one nation=one language"

19



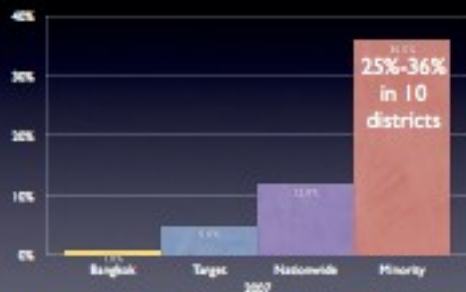
So, what are all these languages, and where are they spoken. The following maps give some ideas of language distribution in Thailand. Central Thai is the main language of the central region. The further you go from the central region, the more languages you encounter—not only in the north, with the hilltribes, but also in the Northeast and the South. I think that you will also find that the minority language areas are also often the poorest areas. So there is a definite link between poverty and language. UNESCO statistics have found this link in many countries.



- School performance of children speaking non-Thai languages have lowest school performance, highest drop-out rates.
- 2006 Controversy: 400,000-1.2 million migrant/minority children are not in school (MOE and UNESCO)
- MOE taking steps to correct the issue
- World Bank: 50% of world's out-of-school children do not speak the school language

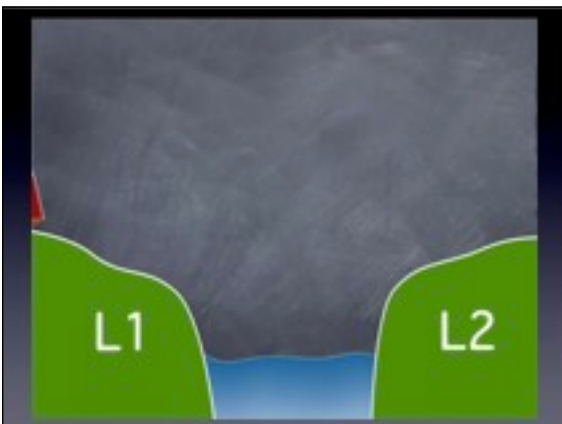
Thailand: 98% literacy rate?  
Not everywhere!

Second Grade Illiteracy in Thailand (2007)



Source: The Nation July 9, 2007

Dr. Ko Chi Tung, UNESCO Institute of Statistics: "During the past 30 years, many initiatives for literacy, health, and economic development have been launched. However, they have not always been as successful as was hoped. We now realize that this has been especially true among ethnic minority groups—people who often have very little understanding of the national language. In order to meet their Millennium Development Goals, therefore, many countries must bridge the language gap."



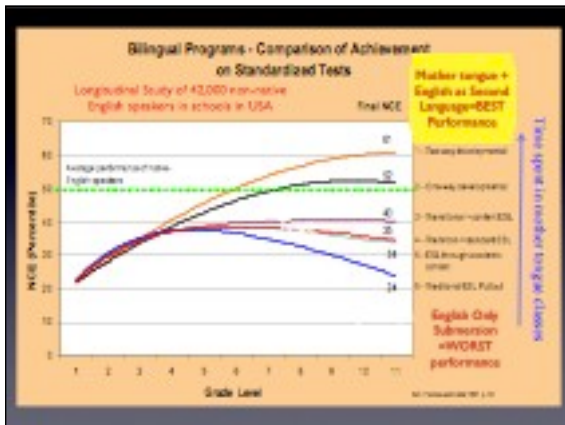
### *Key Policy Recommendations*

- Language revitalization projects in endangered languages
- Mother-Tongue First, Multilingual Education (MLE) in larger groups where suitable
  - Children (and illiterate adults!) learn to read and write their mother tongue first, then learn the national language.

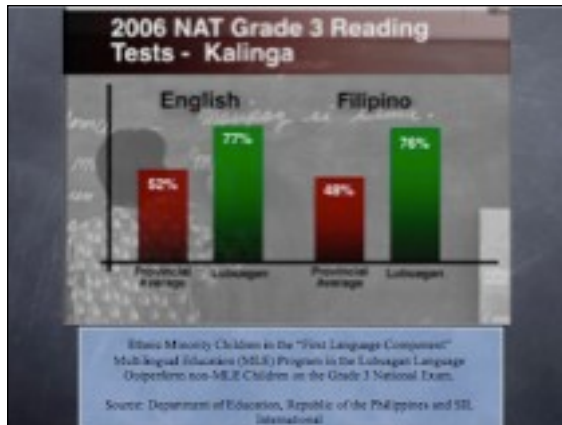


### MLE Language Bridge

Gr	En	Pr	Sp	Wt	Re	Co	So
Build L2 Learning Speaking Skills L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Build expertise in oral and written forms L2, L1 L2 L1	L2 L1 L2 L1	L2 L1 L2 L1
Common L2 Learning Speaking Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1
Common L2 Learning Speaking Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1	Common L2 Learning Speaking Reading Writing L2 L1







- ## MLE in Thailand...
- Languages: Hmong, Mon, Pwo Karen, Malayu, Thai Khmer
  - Main Actors: Local Communities, Mahidol University, Foundation for Applied Linguistics, SIL International, UNICEF, Ministry of Education (formal and non-formal systems)
  - Early results show:
    - Improved attendance
    - Increased enjoyment of school
    - Improved academic performance (40% higher Thai scores in South)

UN NEWS CENTRE

### UNESCO urges teaching from earliest age in indigenous mother languages

20 February 2010 - With an average of five indigenous languages dying every month, the United Nations cultural agency has called for national education systems to teach children in mother tongues from the earliest age as a means both of maximizing learning ability and preserving the world's rich heritage of linguistic diversity.

"It is widely acknowledged worldwide that teaching in both the mother tongue and the official national language helps children to thrive better results and stimulates their cognitive development and capacity to learn," the Director General of the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Koichiro Matsuura, said in a message for International Mother Language Day, which is celebrated on 21 February.

UNESCO's General Conference 1999 proclaimed the Day in recognition of the importance of the world's linguistic diversity and to promote mother tongue languages. But it carries heavy undertones by the agency's insistence that although the use of mother languages as a medium of instruction is gaining ground, few countries have incorporated the idea into their education systems.

The study shows that Italy is one of the world leaders in the development of multilingual education systems, with about 80 languages being used to teach children at different levels of schooling. But across Africa, where an estimated 2,811 languages are spoken, the languages of the former colonial powers - English, French, Spanish and Portuguese - still dominate education systems. A similar situation prevails in Latin America.

UN News Centre



**An International Conference on:  
Language, Education and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**  
November 9-11, 2010 \* Bangkok, Thailand

*1st Assessment & Call for Papers*

An international conference on "Language, Education and the Millennium Development Goals" will be held November 9-11 in Bangkok, Thailand sponsored by a consortium of organizations from the Asia Multilingual Education Working Group including UNESCO/UNICEF, SEANEDU, Mahidol University, AIT International, Save the Children, CARE, Asia Pacific Basic and Adult Education, Asia Institute of Technology and the Royal Thai Institute.

**Promoting  
Mother Tongue-based  
Multilingual Education**

Multilingual Education  
Channel (YouTube)

**Resources from UNESCO-Bangkok**

MLE Toolkit: Information for Policy Makers, Legislators, and Communities

Mother Tongue-based Learning and Education for All (2005)	Mother Tongue-based Learning and Education for All (2005)	MLE Toolkit: Information for Policy Makers, Legislators, and Communities (2007)	Manual for Developing Content and Adult Education Programmes in Minority Languages (2004)

Free Downloads from [www.unesco.org/elt/publications](http://www.unesco.org/elt/publications)

## Areas for Research

- School performance by ethnic group
- 2010 Census results and language (first time since 1960 there has been a language question)
- How differences in phonetics, phonology, and grammar impact minority students' learning of Thai



### *Languages of Commerce, Neighboring Languages, and Working Languages*

- English in paramount position, with Chinese gaining in importance, alongside Japanese and Korean
- Trade with neighboring countries increasing

19



### *English Concerns*

- Thai children study English starting in grade 1, yet English levels remain low
- Increasing numbers of middle-upper class children attending "bilingual" and "international" schools
  - Questions about quality of some such--"bilitrate in 2 languages"
  - British Council: warning that too much English too soon can be worthless or even damaging
- Detailed research required to determine best approaches

20



## October 2010 English Controversy

- Minister of Education declared he would...
  - Make English the official "second language" of Thailand effective 22 October 2010
  - Import thousands of native-speaker teachers
  - Teach high school math and science in English
- Storm of protest
  - Policy Lessons
    - Simplistic "solutions" are dangerous
    - Language specialists need to speak against "language myths" (such as "submersion is the best method," "native speakers are the best teachers," etc. )

11



## But...

- English is not the only language Thailand needs

11





Keng Tung: 3 days to 3 hours!



Add photos!







**Thailand's resources?**

- Most Thais are not interested in studying these languages (but neighbors are studying Thai)
- 40-50,000 ethnic Vietnamese in Northeast Thailand (since 1940s)
- Nearly 1 million Thai-Khmer speakers
  - Heritage language classes to maintain language, special "Vietnamese/Cambodian for business" classes
  - Produce translators, as well as business workers




41

**Other language resources...**

- Burmese migrants
- Malayu language/culture a resource for trade with Indonesia
- Muslims who speak Arabic=bridge to Arab world
- Lahu in Thailand and western Yunnan
  - Therefore, linguistic diversity can be seen as a national resource, not a problem!

42





### *Policy Statement*

- "The government shall encourage the populace to attain abilities in the use of important languages, including such official and national languages that offer occupational benefits."

11



### *Translation, Interpretation, and Localization*

12



### *Findings...*

- Thailand's strategic position as "crossroads of Southeast Asia"
  - MICE Industry (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Events\_
  - UN Agencies (3000-4000 people)
  - International Businesses
  - Machine translation





### *Issues to Address...*

- No standards or certification system for professional translators
- Few university translation programs
- Labor laws discourage international translation professionals/businesses
  - Ministry of Public Health frustrated in efforts to hire Burmese, Mon translators/interpreters
  - Hilltribe, migrant communities at high risk for starting epidemics

11



### *Court Interpreters*

- Currently no right to have a court interpreter (for Thais or foreigners!), although can be requested
- Activists claim some ethnic minorities in prison (up to 80%?) because of language barrier
- ASEAN 2011 meetings called attention to need for translators/interpreters to fight human trafficking

12



### *Teaching Thai to Migrants Seeking Employment in Thailand*

- Least active subcommittee
- 1-2 million legal and illegal migrants working in Thailand--most from Myanmar
- Office of the Non-Formal Education Commission has begun offering classes

13



## Visually and Hearing Impaired

- Strong rights-based policies already in place
- Emphasis on equal access to information

48



## Policy Statement

- "The government shall ensure that people with disabilities are able to access and understand the media."

49

## Policy Status

- 7 February 2010: Prime Minister approved policy; ordered formation of a strategic implementation committee (to begin meeting October 2011)
- National Economic and Social Development Board will include some points in next 5-year plan
- National Security Council head, Army chief supportive



Video of PM's Speech

## Please Help!

- Become informed of the issues
- Consider doing research/assigning thesis topics related to language policy issues
- Defeat the language myths!

ขอบคุณครับ

### Grade 3 Thai Reading /Writing Abilities in South (2008)



Source: Bangkok Post October 3, 2010