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In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 160 (2004), no: 4, Leiden, 511-531

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Introduction

Language endangerment and death is the salient issue in linguistics at the dawn of the twenty-first century.¹ And for a very good reason: of the estimated 6,000 to 7,000 languages now spoken in the world, at least half are expected to become extinct before the end of the century (Nettle and Romaine 2000:27; Janse 2003:ix; Newman 2003:1). While language endangerment has been the subject of numerous books and articles published in recent years, the endangerment and death of dialects is not often addressed. This is despite the fact that, as Crystal (2000:38) points out, 'dialects are just as complex as languages in their sounds, grammar, vocabulary, and other features', so '[d]ialect death is language death, albeit on a more localized scale'. This article presents one case study of dialect endangerment, and spells out the historical reasons that have led to the situation.²

Tucked among the rice fields and orchards of Nonthaburi province in central Thailand are about a dozen villages inhabited by Muslims. Although Thai is now the dominant language in these villages, speakers of Malay can still be found in the more isolated ones. Together with Malay speakers in nearby provinces, they form a speech island, or rather a 'speech archipelago', comprising tiny specks in an ocean of Thai speakers.

¹ The author wishes to express his thanks to the United States Department of Education, which supported the research on which this article is based via a Fulbright grant. Endless thanks are also due to the Malay villagers of Nonthaburi, and especially Haji Hamzah Rakthai and Mr Ismail Mangmi and their families.

² All translations from non-English sources in this article, unless otherwise specified, are by the author, who bears all responsibility for any discrepancies.

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Map 1. Major Malay population centres in southeastern and central Thailand

To the author's knowledge, there is no published work about Nonthaburi Malay or other Malay dialects of central Thailand.³ The existence of Malay speakers in central Thailand is briefly mentioned by Maxwell (1907:2), Amon (1987:7), and Seni (1990:939), but no details are given. The only publication to mention the Malay of central Thailand and also give a brief description of the dialect is Golomb (1985). This account, brief as it is, gives a fairly accurate picture.

In a few scattered central Muslim villages, older people still converse in colloquial Malay. Younger villagers, however, are more likely to command only a limited Malay vocabulary, including kinship terms, food names, and an extensive Malay-Arabic religious terminology. The dialect of Malay spoken in central Thailand is a mixture of the Patani⁴ dialect and literary Malay and has been heavily influenced by Thai phonology, syntax, and semantics. (Golomb 1985:25.)

Nonthaburi Malay has no written form, nor does it have a prestigious or standard variety. It can claim no monolingual speakers, nor is there a nearby 'unilingual hinterland'.⁵ No prestige or social value is attached to the knowledge of Malay, and no domain or social function is exclusively its own. In other words, Nonthaburi Malay has none of the hedges which have helped other minority languages resist contact-induced change. These facts make Nonthaburi Malay an ideal language in which to investigate language contact phenomena. This will be left for a future article; in this article, I would like to explore how Malay came to be spoken in villages located almost 1,000 km from Malaysia, how this dialect has been able to survive until now, and why it is now moribund.

The origins of Thailand's Malay communities

The first independent Thai state in the Chao Phraya basin was Sukhothai (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries). It is therefore considered by modern Thais to be a forerunner of the modern kingdom of Thailand. The most important document of the Sukhothai period is the King Ram Khamhaeng inscription, also known as Inscription no. 1, composed in 1292.⁶ The inscription gives a

³ There are two unpublished studies of Malay dialects in central Thailand, Thawika 1990 and Phongthep 1990. Although not very useful in terms of linguistic analysis, they do provide some valuable background information.

⁴ Patani is the name of an old Malay kingdom, located in the south of present-day Thailand. It is also the name of an important Malay dialect spoken in the area of the old kingdom. Pattani (with two t's) is the name of a modern Thai province, covering part of the old kingdom of Patani.

⁵ For a discussion of this concept, see Weinreich 1963:84.

⁶ It has been proposed by Thai art historian Piriya Krairiksh and others that the Ram Khamhaeng inscription is not authentic. For extensive discussion of the controversy that ensued,

detailed description of the kingdom, stating that its limits extended south to include Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, and Thammarat (Nakhon Si Thammarat). The latter, known in Malay as Ligor, was in the past an important Malay centre, believed to be the site of the ancient kingdom of Tambralinga. If it was indeed part of Ram Khamhaeng's kingdom, this would constitute the earliest Malay community living within the Thai state.

At about the same period, the northern Malay states, including the important sultanates of Patani and Kedah, came under Thai suzerainty. According to Andaya and Andaya (1982:30),

In the late thirteenth century the chiefs of Ligor in southern Thailand were also extending their control over the northern Malay peninsular states, which then became vassals of the Thai kings of Sukhothai. Thai ambitions became greater after 1351 with the rise of an energetic new kingdom, Ayudhya. Pushing down into the peninsula, the kings of Ayudhya demanded a closer relationship, a more formal mode of homage from their Malay vassals, thus initiating a tradition of tension which was to endure for centuries afterwards.

Thai rule over the northern Malay states was not direct. Rather, Malay rulers were required to pay a regular tribute to the king of Ayutthaya⁷ in the form of gold and silver trees, called *bunga mas*. Beyond this, and beyond the fact that they were not permitted to form alliances with other powers, these states were autonomous.

Whenever the Malays felt strong enough, they reasserted their independence and tried to break apart from the Siamese empire. Thus, during the fifteenth century both Patani and Kedah acknowledged the suzerainty of the powerful Malay sultanate of Malacca, rather than that of Ayutthaya (Andaya and Andaya 1982:64). It may be assumed that as soon as Malacca fell to the Portuguese in 1511, these states came back into the fold. An early rebellion in a Malay vassal state was recorded in 1630, when Patani attacked the Thai centre of power in the south, Nakhon Si Thammarat.⁸ The rebellion finally came to an end peacefully when Patani's queen, Raja Ungu, died (Andaya and Andaya 1982:67-8). Such rebellions occurred repeatedly, down to the present century; they were all eventually put down.

see Chamberlain 1991. Based on linguistic and other evidence, I am personally convinced of the authenticity of the inscription. A discussion of this evidence, however, would be outside the scope of this article.

⁷ This name is sometimes spelled Ayudhya, to reflect its Indian origins. I prefer the spelling Ayutthaya, which reflects the actual Thai pronunciation.

⁸ Wyatt 1982:110-1. Sawvanee (1987:81) gives a similar account, but there seem to be some problems with the dates.

The Malay communities of central Thailand

The Malay communities in the kingdom of Ayutthaya were not confined to the southern limits of the empire. By the seventeenth century, the city of Ayutthaya had a thriving Muslim community, which included merchants from the Near East and South Asia, a Cham contingent in the army, and other Southeast Asian Muslim groups such as Javanese, Makassarese, and Malays (Sawvane 1987:101-2; Wyatt 1982:108). Patani Malays were among the groups that helped King Narai seize the throne in 1656 (Smith 1977:35). La Loubère (1693:112) estimated that when he visited Ayutthaya in 1687-1688, there were 'three to four Thousand *Moors* [...] and perhaps as many *Malays*' living in the city. The Malay quarter is clearly marked on his map of Ayutthaya (La Loubère 1693:7), in the southwestern corner of the city, next to the Makassarese quarter.

In 1686, the Makassarese community staged an unsuccessful rebellion. The rebellion was crushed, and the Makassarese quarter was reduced to rubble (Wyatt 1982:114-5). Many of the Makassarese fled south to Bangkok, and settled near a French fort which afforded them protection. The area where they settled is still known as Makkasan, a 'Thaified' form of the name Makassar.

The Muslims of Ayutthaya were a diverse community. In addition to merchants and diplomats, Muslims were also engaged in the court and the government, and a few reached very prominent positions (Wyatt 1994:90-7). The position equivalent to prime minister was held for a period by descendants of Sheik Ahmad, a wealthy Persian merchant who settled in Ayutthaya in the sixteenth century. The positions of admiral of the navy and harbourmaster were also traditionally held by Muslims (Sawvane 1987:98-103).

In 1765, the Burmese invaded the kingdom of Ayutthaya. After more than two years of warfare and siege, they captured the Thai capital, sacked it, and burned it to the ground. The surviving population, which would have included the Malay community, was scattered around the countryside (Wyatt 1982:136-7). The modern province of Ayutthaya still has an unusually large Muslim population, many of whom are probably descendants of this old Malay community. According to Sawvane (1987:107), nearly 10% of the province's population is Muslim, and there are 54 registered mosques within its boundaries. These Muslims, no longer separated along ethnic lines, have blended together to form a single Thai-speaking community.

The majority of the Muslims in the central region, however, do not descend from the old Muslim communities of Ayutthaya. Rather, they owe their presence in the area to an old Southeast Asian war custom. When enemy territory was captured, the winning side would remove its leaders as well as substantial numbers of the inhabitants to the vicinity of its own capital. There, the leaders were closely guarded, while the commoners served as slave

labourers. As an early European account indicates, capturing slaves was an important reason for waging wars in seventeenth-century Southeast Asia:

The Opinion of the *Metempsychosis* inspiring them with an horror of blood, deprives them likewise of the Spirit of War. They busie themselves only in making Slaves. If the *Peguins*, for example, do on one side invade the lands of *Siam*, the *Siameses* will at another place enter on the Lands of *Pegu*, and both Parties will carry away whole Villages into Captivity. (La Loubère 1693:90.)

This practice caused frequent and sizable population movements in the region. The phenomena of bilingualism and language shift which eventually followed such displacements have greatly contributed to the formation of the Southeast Asian *Sprachbund* (a 'linguistic area' where unrelated languages gradually become similar to each other).

Following the Burmese victory over Ayutthaya in 1767, Patani became independent, more as a side effect of Ayutthaya's defeat than through any action of its own. In 1785, just three years after the establishment of the present Thai dynasty with its capital at Bangkok, the Burmese invaded again. The attack was massive and well coordinated. Burmese troops penetrated the country concurrently at nine different points, including the far south. Here, opinions vary as to what exactly took place. Either in reaction to a Malay assertion of independence, or as a pre-emptive strike to prevent Patani from joining forces with the Burmese, the Thai army took the city of Patani (Wyatt 1982:151; Andaya and Andaya 1982:107; D.G.E. Hall 1981:627). The raja and his family, along with members of the nobility and thousands⁹ of commoners, were taken prisoner and carried off to Bangkok.¹⁰ It is ironic that the commanders of the army and the navy who led the attack on Patani were both Muslims themselves¹¹ (Sawvane 1987:107-8). Supphathorn (1987:224-5, quoted in Sawvane 1987:108) reports that following Patani's defeat, its soldiers were put on boats together with their families and taken to Bangkok as captives. King Rama I then granted them land east of Bangkok, in the districts of Minburi and Nong Chok, on which to settle. This area, which today forms part of Bangkok province, is still densely populated by Muslims.

Malay captives were settled in other areas as well. Somkhit (1973:457) reports:

Members of the [Patani] royal family and of the nobility were settled at Bang Khaek intersection. The commoners were settled in Tok Road up to Ban U; at

⁹ According to Andaya (1986:178), as many as 9,000 prisoners were carried off.

¹⁰ Some writers are of the opinion that mass deportations of Malays to the central region took place as early as the Ayutthaya period (Golomb 1985:11; Sawvane 1987:107; Nonthaburi 1993:15). However, no evidence is presented to support these claims.

¹¹ These were Phraya Rachabangsan (Maen) and Phraya Phatthalung (Hun).

Pratu Nam (on Saen Saeb canal) up to Tha Khai intersection; Paklat; Phetchaburi; Chachoengsao; Nakhon Nayok; and Pathumthani. From there they spread along the sea eastwards to Chonburi.

Although imprecise,¹² this report is important in correctly pointing out that members of Patani's royalty and nobility were settled in Ban Khaek. During a visit to the area some years ago, I was fortunate to attend a traditional ceremony of royal origin at the house of a well-to-do Muslim family, descendants of Patani royalty.

Sawvane (1987:109) reports that Malay war captives were settled in Thung Khru (Samut Prakan province); Bang Kholaem, Mahanak, Phra Khanong, Khlong Tan, Minburi, and Nong Chok (all in Bangkok province); central Nakhon Nayok province; Chachoengsao; Phetchaburi; Ayutthaya; Tha It village in Nonthaburi; Tha Thong village in southern Surat Thani province; and Nakhon Si Thammarat. The last two locations are in southern Thailand; all the rest are in the central region.

In 1791, a major rebellion broke out in Patani. An expeditionary force was sent to quell the rebellion (Wyatt 1982:158), and again thousands of Malays were led into captivity in central Siam (Sawvane 1987:109). A rebellion in 1795 met with the same fate (Andaya and Andaya 1982:107). In 1821 the Sultan of Kedah refused orders to report to Bangkok, and in return his state was conquered by Thai forces (D.G.E. Hall 1981:554). In 1831, a rebellion which had started in Kedah quickly spread to other Siamese-held areas, including Patani, Kelantan, and Terengganu. It was suppressed during the following year (Wyatt 1982:172). Terwiel (1989:175) reports that 4,000 to 5,000 captives from that war were brought to Bangkok.¹³ The last major rebellion in the nineteenth century took place in Kedah in 1839 (Wyatt 1982:173). Sawvane (1987:84) points out that 'the result of each suppression of a rebellion, not only in Patani but in Kedah as well, was that Malay-Muslims were deported as war captives and brought to the outskirts of Bangkok and nearby provinces'.

The captured Malays were treated as *chaloei*, a term derived from Khmer, meaning 'war captives used as labourers'. Their status, although very low in the hierarchy of old Siamese society, was nevertheless higher than that of ordinary slaves (*phrae*). The *chaloei* could own land, and eventually win back their

¹² The places mentioned are obviously modern locations where Malays are found, so this is not a completely reliable description from a historical point of view. Particularly anachronistic are references to roads and intersections, since the first roads in Bangkok were not built until the late nineteenth century. An obvious omission from this account is, of course, the Malay community of Nonthaburi.

¹³ Wyatt (1982:172) also reports on the outcome of this suppressed rebellion: 'the Siamese armies returned home, accompanied by several thousand prisoners and considerable war booty'.

freedom.¹⁴ Regarding the Malay *chaloai* in central Thailand, Golomb (1985:11) says that 'they appear to have been treated practically as well as freemen and were permitted to settle as rice farmers in communities near the capital'.

In contemporary accounts of western travellers, there are some mentions of Malay settlements in central Thailand. According to Terwiel (1989:124), during the early nineteenth century '[t]he first settlement on the outskirts of the town [Ayutthaya] was Ban Cho'ng, where the inhabitants showed in their faces and by their speech that they originated from Pattani'. There was also a 'cluster of Malay villages north of Ang Thong' (Terwiel 1989:151). In Pallegoix's account (1854:25) of Thailand, we note under the heading 'Patani': 'Once, this country was all Malay; but because it wanted to break away from the empire of Siam, it was treated as rebellious; more than half of the inhabitants were taken captive and replaced by Siamese'.

The Malays who were settled around Bangkok served various functions for the Thai government. The countryside surrounding Bangkok was at that time underpopulated, and a chain of settlements around the new capital provided a barrier against invasion. These settlements were also a source of fresh agricultural products for the city's growing population.

Since much of the Chao Phraya basin consisted of swamps and marshlands, the government initiated drainage and irrigation projects. Numerous canals were dug, which also served for communication and transportation purposes. Most notably, Malays were the chief source of labour in the construction of Saen Saeb canal in the 1830s (Terwiel 1989:167). They were later permitted to settle on the adjacent land and cultivate it (Sawvanee 1987:92).

It is interesting to note that all major nineteenth-century Malay settlements around Bangkok were in districts inhabited primarily by Mons: Sam Khok in modern-day Pathumthani province; Paklat in modern-day Phrapradaeng district, Samut Prakan province; and Pak Kret district in Nonthaburi province, where the original Malay settlement of Tha It (see below) is located. The reason for this settlement pattern is not yet understood.

The Malays who were transplanted to central Thailand continued to speak their language. Terwiel (1989:124), based on early nineteenth-century accounts, reports that speakers of Patani Malay lived in central Thailand. Writing in 1881, Maxwell (1907:2) notes that 'Siam proper has a large Malay population, descendants mainly of captives taken in war, and the language is therefore in use there in places'. These were the ancestors of today's Malay-speaking communities in central Thailand.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the institution of *chaloai*, see Terwiel 1983:131-2.

The modern period

Two events had a profound influence on language use in the Malay villages of central Thailand. The first was the establishment of rural government schools throughout Thailand during the 1930s. Although elementary education had been made compulsory in 1921, full implementation of this law outside Bangkok did not start until after the revolution of 1932 (Terwiel 1991:76-8). Before then, Malay villagers in central Thailand had little contact with Thai speakers, and were on the whole monolingual in Malay. Since the sole medium of instruction at Thai government schools has always been Thai, children had to learn that language. Older villagers recount that during the initial years of compulsory education, all children, regardless of age, were required to study side by side. This had the result that within a few years the entire younger generation became bilingual. Only then did the present system, whereby children enter school at the age of six, come into effect.

While the introduction of Thai-language schools in Malay villages gave their inhabitants the possibility of learning Thai, another event gave them the impetus to do so. Following the 1938 general elections, Luang Phibunsongkhram, usually referred to by western writers simply as Phibun, became prime minister. Phibun was a high-ranking army officer with fascist tendencies. Among other things, he 'encouraged the publication of books and articles admiring authoritarian leaders like Mussolini and Hitler' (Wyatt 1982:253). After coming to power, Phibun immediately moved to formulate and implement a policy he called *ratthaniyom*, a term usually translated as 'nationalism', but actually derived from the word *rat* 'state'.

The policy of *ratthaniyom* was spelled out in twelve 'cultural edicts', reinforced by 'cultural maintenance acts', enacted by the Phibun regime between 1939 and 1942.¹⁵ The First Edict changed the country's official name from Siam to Thailand. The reason given for the change was that 'Siam' was how the country was called by foreigners, while the people themselves had always used the term 'Thai'. However, while not stated explicitly, the name change also expressed the government's position that there was no room in the new Thailand for ethnic minorities. All citizens had to be 'Thai'; those who were not Thai were to be assimilated, by force if necessary.

Intolerance towards minorities, while only implied in the First Edict, became increasingly salient in subsequent edicts. The Second Edict stated that 'the government feels that the Thai should have the highest esteem for the nation above all else'. The Third Edict forbade the use of terms such as 'northern Thais, northeastern Thais, southern Thais, and Islamic Thais', and required all citizens to 'use the word Thai for all Thais without any of the aforementioned

¹⁵ All official documents cited in this section are published in Thak 1978.

divisions'. The Ninth Edict declared that '[e]veryone must consider that being born as a Thai means having Thai blood and speaking the same language'. In case anyone had any doubts as to what that 'same language' was, the edict went on to say that 'Thais must respect, honour, and venerate the Thai language, and must feel honoured to speak or to use the Thai language'. However, there was 'no conflict in being born in different localities or speaking the Thai language in different dialects'. In other words, the use of any Tai¹⁶ language was permissible, but the use of non-Tai languages, such as Malay, was not.

The Tenth Edict required all Thai citizens, whenever appearing in public, to wear official uniforms, western clothing, or 'traditional dress'. As implied in the preamble, the term 'traditional' referred exclusively to Thai traditions. The Cultural Maintenance Act of 2483 (1940) stated that it was 'the duty of Thai people to practice national customs', and that 'national customs [...] are subject to local variations'. Yet the *Decree prescribing customs for the Thai people*, published in the following year, made clear that local variations did not mean ethnic variations: it explicitly forbade the wearing of sarongs in public.

An important medium used to indoctrinate the public with the government's ideology was the radio. Throughout the war years, a series of 'conversations' between two fictitious characters was broadcast on the state radio. The speakers discussed current events such as war news and recent government edicts and decrees. The topic of the 8 May 1942 broadcast was language. One of the speakers expressed his firm belief that Shakespeare sounded better in Thai than it did in English. His friend summarized the situation: 'Our language is easy to write and easy to speak. How then can we not be proud of our language?' (Thak 1978:300).

The linguistic repercussions of the *ratthaniyom* policy on the Malays of central Thailand were significant. The prohibition on speaking Malay in public caused Malay to lose ground to Thai, at least in the case of people who studied or worked outside the community. The aggressive promotion of the Thai language also had an impact. For Malay parents, the acquisition of Thai by their children as early and as well as possible was seen as a way of reducing hardships in the future.

Dorian (1981:51) describes an important phenomenon associated with language obsolescence:

In terms of possible routes toward language death it would seem that a language which has been demographically highly stable for several centuries may experience a sudden 'tip' after which the demographic tide flows strongly in favour of some other language.

¹⁶ Tai (without h) is the name of a language family of Southeast Asia, of which Thai, Lao, Zhuang, and Shan are important members.

Nonthaburi Malay experienced such a 'tip' during the early 1940s. Before then, the principal language of the community was Malay, with Thai enjoying only limited use. Afterwards, members of the community became increasingly bilingual, and then rapidly started shifting to Thai as their principal language.

Several factors converged to bring about this shift. In 1940, the use of Malay and all other non-Tai minority languages in public was banned, as the government sought forcibly to assimilate minority groups. By that year, the entire younger generation of Malays in central Thailand had become bilingual, due to the introduction of compulsory Thai-language elementary education. Finally, war hardships caused the cessation of oral literary activities in the Malay community (see below), which restricted language use and contributed to a change in speakers' attitudes towards their language.

Today, hundreds of thousands of Muslims of Malay descent still live in Bangkok and the surrounding provinces. Exact population figures are not available, because the Thai government still does not recognize ethnic minorities, and does not keep figures on their numbers. From visits to numerous Muslim communities in central Thailand, and from information obtained from various officials and scholars, I estimate that there are approximately 300,000 people of Malay descent in central Thailand, including over 200,000 in Bangkok province, and the remainder in Nonthaburi, Pathumthani, Samut Prakan, Chachoengsao, Ayutthaya, and Nakhon Nayok. The Malay language has all but died out in Bangkok province itself, but in the more remote villages of other provinces, especially Pathumthani and Nonthaburi, there are still thousands of Malay speakers.

The Malays of Nonthaburi

Historical documents relating specifically to the Malay community of Nonthaburi are lacking. A search in Bangkok's major libraries and archives did not yield relevant materials. Terwiel (1989) made a thorough study of travellers' accounts (both native and foreign) of central Thailand in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although special care was taken to note every mention of minority ethnic groups, there was no mention of Malays in Nonthaburi. Other books about Thai history are equally silent on the subject. Because no written records are known, we must rely mainly on indirect evidence and on oral history.

According to older villagers, in the past elders, in the evenings, used to relate chapters of their community's history to younger people. This practice died out before World War II (about two generations before the present study was conducted), so that most members of the community today are not familiar with the details of their group's history. Informants who were

Map 2. Research sites in Nonthaburi

over sixty when interviewed could sometimes recall stories they heard from their grandparents as young children. It is interesting that stories recounted by different villagers were, down to small details, very similar.

In the absence of documentary evidence on the history of the Malay villages of Nonthaburi, it is of particular importance to emphasize the meticulous way in which oral history was transmitted. This is illustrated by the following exchange, translated from a tape-recorded conversation in Malay between R.U., a young man from Yala, and H.R., a 66-year-old Malay from

Nonthaburi. The speakers were comparing oral traditions regarding the capture and deportation of Malays from Patani to central Thailand.

- R.U. pah adɔ hɔʔ tɔ ɔye tʰuwa di ttaniŋ la doʔ ɣɔjaʔ tɔ jɔ igaʔ ɔye niŋ cucoʔ di kətiŋ
 H.R. toʔ che ɣɔjaʔ lah tu
 R.U. lɔniŋ adɔ doʔ gi ɔye tʰuwa tʰuwa kɔdi tu lək tʰa:n kato kʰəno cɔcɔʔ suŋ⁸oh
 H.R. cɔcɔʔ tiŋɔ ni aci luwah mulɔh cʰe ɣɔjaʔ mulɔh toʔ dulu hayi tu ʔɔye jamɛŋ
 dulu niŋ na jɔ tɔʔ pəyiəŋ supɔ lɔni cɔcɔʔ tiŋɔ cɔcɔʔ tiŋɔ tu luwah ni ni mayi
 hubɔŋ ka ɔye ni
- R.U. There are those who say... old people in Pattani, they say that they caught these people and pierced their heels.
 H.R. My grandfather told me about that.
 R.U. Are there very old people who still have evidence, who say they really got pierced?
 H.R. They pierced the ears like this until [the hole] was wide. My late grandfather told me so, [and] my late grandmother. They, in those days, the people of that period, they didn't conduct wars like now. They pierced the ears wide, and then tied the people [to each other]. They pierced them, and then took rope, and tied them together.

Although asked about heels, the informant insisted it was rather the ears which were pierced. This detail was recounted to me by elders in other villages, and was mentioned by Malays in Pathumthani province as well (Thawika 1990:13). This meticulous way in which oral history was evidently related in the past, and the fact that it is sometimes corroborated by external sources, lends it considerable credibility.

According to the Malays of Nonthaburi, their community consists of four groups:

- 1 The old inhabitants, referred to as *khaek kao* (Old Muslims/Malays), who have been there since the Ayutthaya period;
- 2 The war captives who were settled in Tha It, whence they spread to establish other villages;
- 3 Some villages established by Malays who had come from Paklat, south of Bangkok;
- 4 The Malays of Takhlai canal, who had come from Ayutthaya relatively recently.

This information was partially corroborated by the following piece, which appeared in a Thai-language, Bangkok-based Islamic periodical (*Nonthaburi* 1993).

Nonthaburi

According to historical evidence it has been noted that Thai Muslims who reside in the Province of Nonthaburi migrated from Patani in two large groups. The first group came during the Ayutthaya period. They settled in the northern part of Nonthaburi, when the administrative centre of the province was still at Talat Khwan. This site is now the location of Phranangklaao Hospital. The second group came during the Bangkok period, and settled at Tha It subdistrict, Pak Kret district. It is believed that the Muslims who had come earlier were the ancestors of the Thai Muslims who, when the second group came, were residing in Bang Kaso subdistrict, Meuang district.

The Muslims who came with the second group settled in Tha It subdistrict on the right bank of the Chao Phraya river. Later the number of Muslims in Tha It grew, so they enlarged their settlement and eventually left it to establish new settlements in various places, such as Bang Talat, Lahan canal, Lak Khon canal, and Lamri canal in Bangbuathong district, Rong Suat, and Lower Tha It.

It has been noted in history that Tha It was an important place of recreation for King Chulalongkorn. He used to frequent the *maprang*¹⁷ groves of Tha It and savour their fruit.

The Muslims who now reside in Bangbuathong district, Nonthaburi, in addition to those who spread out from Tha It, also came from Paklat in Phrapradaeng. These Muslims migrated to Thailand together with those who settled in Tha It. They settled in Rong Kajom, Jek canal, Tachom canal, Masong canal, and Takhlai canal; some sources say the last group had come from Ayutthaya. The second group of migrants maintains their identity by speaking the Yawi¹⁸ language, especially in Tha It.

According to the inhabitants, Tha It village was founded around 1800 by a Malay clan from Patani, led by a person called Toki Wangkama. (This seems to be a corruption of To' Ki Wan Kamal, where the first three elements are epithets). After some years, a mosque was established in the village, and a member of the old Malay community of Ayutthaya became the first imam. By the end of the nineteenth century, the population had grown to such an extent that the village could no longer contain it, nor could the surrounding fields supply enough rice to feed the entire population. Small groups started leaving Tha It, and spread northwards. They reclaimed land covered by marshes and thickets, and built villages along the drainage canals they had dug.

An indication that Nonthaburi Malays had already achieved considerable size and importance at that period is found in an interesting eyewitness account by Prince Damrong, recounted by Virulrak (1980:319). The prince

¹⁷ A small, yellow fruit with firm sweet flesh (*Anacardiaceae* sp.).

¹⁸ Patani Malay and its subdialects are often referred to in Thai as Yawi, from the Malay term Jawi. This term now refers to the Malayo-Arabic writing system, but in the past was sometimes used as a name for the language itself.

reported observing a group of Malays from Nonthaburi perform religious chanting at the Grand Palace in Bangkok as part of the memorial ceremonies for Queen Sunanthakummarirat in 1880. This is probably the earliest mention in the literature of Nonthaburi Malays.

When compulsory education was introduced in the 1930s, Malay children in Nonthaburi were required to attend government schools, which initially consisted of converted religious schools located at Buddhist temples. This was not deemed appropriate by the Muslim Malays, who petitioned the government to build schools in their own villages. The official reason cited was the long walking distance to the temple schools. The government agreed, as long as *waqf* (mosque-owned) land was used. Thus, public schools were built on mosque grounds in the Malay villages, modelled after the public schools located in Buddhist temples.

Arguably the most difficult period in the history of the Malay community of Nonthaburi was during the *ratthaniyom* years. Older villagers recount in detail the depredations they had to endure. Malay could not be spoken in public, and children who spoke Malay in school were beaten by their teachers. The practice of Islam was also severely restricted. I.M., an older inhabitant of Rong Suat village, reported that his father was arrested for teaching the Qur'an at a small religious school (*bale* in the local Malay dialect). After his release, he continued to teach clandestinely. The ban on wearing sarongs in public was strictly enforced. Beyond the humiliation of being deprived of their traditional dress, many villagers could not afford to buy trousers. To avoid arrest, whenever leaving their village they would wear improvised trousers made by joining together two empty rice sacks.

In addition to deliberate discriminatory policies, there were also economic hardships brought about by the war. Before the war villagers had supported themselves by subsistence agriculture and by selling surplus rice. Now this was no longer sufficient. The villages then diversified their agricultural endeavours by planting coconuts and other fruit trees as well as by commercial animal husbandry. This changed their lifestyle considerably. Until then, most of the villagers' work in the fields was concentrated in three months of the year. Now, they had to spend practically every day of the year tending to their orchards, animals, and fields. This meant they no longer had time for organizing folk performances or rehearsing folksongs and dances for special occasions.

The loss of performance arts was a further step in the overall demise of Malay culture in the villages. It also bore linguistic consequences, because it meant that Malay had now lost an important domain of use. The loss of 'literary' Nonthaburi Malay impoverished the dialect stylistically, and did away with its poetic function. This not only reduced the speakers' esteem of their dialect, a factor in the obsolescence process, but it also opened the door for Thai eventually to replace Malay in this domain.

The post-war years brought substantial improvements in the lives of the Malay villagers of Nonthaburi. Agricultural diversification, initially a necessity brought about by the hardships of war, was now the source of some prosperity. The oppressive cultural edicts issued under the *ratthaniyom* policy were repealed, and Malays were again free to wear their traditional dress, practice their religion, and speak their language.

The teaching and practice of Islam quickly recuperated, and started filling an increasingly important role in the villagers' lives. However, Malay language and culture never recovered from the blow it was dealt by Phibun's policies. There are several reasons for this. First, because of their newly diversified economy, Malay villagers were now in daily contact with Thai speakers, selling their produce and obtaining other goods in return. Improved transportation conditions, which brought highways to within walking distance and motorboats right into the villages, also decreased the Malays' isolation. Moreover, the proportion of elementary school graduates among Malay villagers was rapidly increasing. These graduates were all bilingual and 'Thaified' to varying degrees. Finally, although the use of Malay was no longer banned, villagers regarded the language as having decreasing relevance for their lives, while proficiency in Thai was seen as the key to success.

Representative of this trend is I.I., a male villager who was 54 years old at the time of his interview. I.I. reported that his parents were both native speakers of Malay, who knew some Thai because they used to hire Thai-speaking farmhands. They used only Malay among themselves and with their relatives and neighbours of an equal or older age; however, with I.I. and his siblings they used Thai whenever possible. Consequently, I.I. grew up bilingual, and his proficiency in Thai was reinforced when he entered elementary school. I.I. was the oldest speaker interviewed for this study who reported having spoken Thai with his parents. Speakers older than I.I., without exception, reported having spoken only Malay with their parents, while all but two speakers younger than I.I. reported speaking at least some Thai with their parents. This is a clear and rather vivid illustration of the notion of 'tip'; the shift in allegiance from Malay to Thai was sudden and nearly absolute.

Today, the Malays of Nonthaburi number about 25,000. They live in about twenty communities, a dozen of them rural. According to my rough estimate, less than 1,000 can still communicate effectively in the dialect. Almost all speakers are over fifty years of age, and most are over seventy.

The Malay community of Tha It and its offshoot villages still maintain close contacts with the Malay communities of Bangpho (Pathumthani province) and Paklat (Samut Prakan province), where closely related varieties of Malay are used. Members of these three communities have been intermarrying for generations, and are connected by numerous social and family ties.

Interestingly, marriages with members of the large Malay community of

eastern Bangkok province are uncommon, and marriages with Malays from the nearby provinces of Chachoengsao and Nakhon Nayok are even more uncommon. In fact, some villagers of Nonthaburi were surprised when told about the existence of ethnic Malay villages in Chachoengsao and Nakhon Nayok. One possible explanation is that the Malays of Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, and Samut Prakan are all descended from the same group of war captives who had been transported to central Thailand together, while those of Chachoengsao and Nakhon Nayok came at different times or from different areas. Many of the latter were reportedly from Terengganu, Kelantan, and Kedah,¹⁹ while Nonthaburi Malays all trace their origin to Patani.

Maintenance and shift

An interesting question, which has only been dealt with in passing until now, is how the Malays of Nonthaburi were able to maintain their language for centuries, despite being cut off from the main body of Malay speakers, and living in the midst of an overwhelming non-Malay majority.²⁰ Several factors have contributed to this, first and foremost the relative isolation in which the community lived until recently. Roads only reached the villages in the 1980s and 1990s. Until then, the only means of transportation to and from the village was by small rowboat. During the dry season, the water level in the smaller canals would run low or even dry up, effectively cutting off some villages from the outside world. Even the villages built along larger canals were self-contained units, whose inhabitants had little contact with outsiders. Most Malays were subsistence farmers, and had little need or reason to interact with non-Malays.

A factor which added to the villagers' isolation was religion. Practically all the other ethnic groups of Nonthaburi are Buddhist, including the Mons, the Chinese, the Lao, and the Thai. The Malays, on the other hand, were all Muslims, who followed very different customs and traditions that governed their entire lives. Not only was intermarriage with non-Malays rare, but even ordinary social activities like eating at a Buddhist home were proscribed, because of the strict Muslim dietary laws. As a result, the Malays had very little social contact with non-Malay speakers.

On the other hand, as noted above, the Malay villages did maintain contacts with each other. The various villages of Nonthaburi, almost all of them offshoots of the original Malay settlement in Tha It, were in particularly close

¹⁹ Interview with Mr Yahya To' Mangi, 23 March 1991.

²⁰ For a classic study of language maintenance and shift, see Gal 1979. For a thorough and interesting case study in a Southeast Asian setting, see Florey 1990.

contact. Contacts were also maintained with the larger Malay community of nearby Pathum Thani province, and to a lesser extent with the community of Paklat, south of Bangkok. Friends and relatives would visit each other, sometimes for extended stays, and marriages would frequently take place between members of these communities. While the dialects spoken in these three areas were not identical, they were not so different as to hinder communication. These intercommunity contacts no doubt helped keep Malay alive and vibrant.

Finally, the population of Nonthaburi until recent decades was mostly of non-Thai origin. Mons, Laos, Chinese, and Malays lived side by side, each community maintaining its own language. There was no majority language which exerted pressure on the use of other languages, and there was little impetus for the Malays to shift to another language. While Thai may have been used for interethnic communication, interviewees reported that in the past it was more common to know your neighbour's language rather than the national language. Thus some Malays spoke Mon, and some of the Chinese merchants in Bangbuathong spoke Malay.

The shift from Malay to Thai only started after the 'tip', which took place around 1940. As mentioned above, the major reasons for the tip were the introduction of compulsory Thai-language education, and the discriminatory *ratthaniyom* policy which discouraged the use of Malay and other non-Tai minority languages. Another factor was the increased contact with Thai speakers. In addition to teachers, these included district officials and other civil servants who started to play an increasingly important role in the villagers' lives. Due to the hardships brought on by World War II, some Malays were forced to look for work in towns, which entailed acquiring a working knowledge of Thai. Some children, after graduating from elementary school in their village, were enrolled in middle schools and high schools in Bangkok, which increased their exposure to Thai language and culture.

More recently, Thai-language media have been playing an increasingly intrusive role in the villages, especially radio and television. The radio set, and later the television set, replaced Malay storytellers and singers as the chief providers of entertainment. Villagers of all ages became exposed to a daily bombardment of Thai-language programmes. Any conversations among Malays about topics related to radio and television programmes, such as politics, sports, world events, and popular music, tended to be conducted in Thai as well. Even the most fluent Malay speakers lacked the nomenclature to discuss these topics in Malay. The presence of a radio or television set in practically every Malay home was the final blow to the use of Malay in Nonthaburi, from which it will probably not be able to recover.

Summary

The history of the Malay dialect of Nonthaburi presents an interesting case of dialect endangerment. The dialect was brought to central Thailand by war captives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The language was able to survive in the midst of an overwhelming non-Malay majority mostly because of the cultural and geographical isolation of its speakers. However, a linguistic tip occurred around 1940, due to the introduction of compulsory Thai-language education, coupled with a government policy which discouraged the use of the language. Following the tip, children started to acquire Thai, first as a second language and eventually as a first language. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Nonthaburi Malay is still used by some elderly speakers in a few remote villages. However, with most speakers aged over seventy, and with no children acquiring the dialect, it seems destined to become extinct.

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