Literacy in Thailand*

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1. Language in Thailand

There are four major dialects of Thai: Northern (Kam Mueng, Yuan), Northeastern (Isan, Lao), Central (Siamese), and Southern (Pak Tai). Standard Thai, the official language of instruction, is based on a prestigious social class dialect of Siamese. In addition to Thai, a great number of other languages are spoken by indigenous peoples, of whom some individuals are literate in their native languages. Foreign languages used in Thailand consist of classical (Pali, Sanskrit, Arabic) and modern (English, Chinese, French, Japanese, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Arabic). English is the most widely used foreign language.

2. The Media

To serve a population of about forty-nine million there are published ten daily Thai newspapers, and three each in English and Chinese. Circulation of these newspapers is: Thai 1,191,000; English 70,000; Chinese 149,000. Furthermore, twenty-two general interest magazines and five trade and technical magazines written in Thai are regularly published with a total circulation of 1,442,800, whereas thirteen such magazines are published in English with a circulation of 94,000. The broadcast media consist of fifteen radio and four television stations.

3. Compensatory Education in Thailand

Although compulsory education began in 1921, by 1960 twenty-nine per cent of the population remained illiterate. Eighty-five per cent of the population lives in rural areas, a situation giving limited access to the media and schooling. An adult education division in the Ministry of Education was established in 1940 in order to promote literacy through evening courses for adults. In 1947 the UNESCO model

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of Fundamental Education (that is, elementary and vocational training for adults) was adopted. In 1965 an urban adult education program was begun. In 1970 the Functional Literacy Project sought to remedy the shortcomings of the Fundamental Education program by trying to get illiterates to change their attitudes toward new ideas and development. A wide variety of materials and practices have been developed to reach these goals. Among them are walking teachers, bilingual programs for minority groups, adult education centers, radio correspondence courses, village newspaper reading centers, public libraries, mobile classrooms, and special vocational training programs. In 1979 a department of nonformal education was established to further these ends.

Today about 14.5% of the population (age 10–) is considered to be illiterate. Of the Thai population about 41.5% (20 million) are of school age (7–24), but only 9.4 million have the opportunity to attend school. It is hoped that the activities of the Department of Nonformal Education will better the situation of the unfortunate ones who, in addition to being illiterate are the poorest, worst fed, and least cared for.

Note

Many bibliographics list Thai authors by their first names. It is prudent when searching to try both names.

Annotated Bibliography

Brudhiprabha, Prapart. 1978. An approach to functional literacy in Thailand : A response to the challenge of illiteracy. *On some recent issues in language education : The Southeast Asian Perspective.* Bangkok : Department of Linguistics, Srinakharinwirot University at Prasarnmit. Mimeo. [Occasional papers no. 1.]

This paper is a description of the Thai Functional Literacy Project and its background and history. This project replaced the UNESCO model of Fundamental Education and flourished during the preceding five-year plan (1977–1982). A strong case is made for regarding the acquisition of literacy as a consequence of changed attitudes toward new ideas and practices. Family planning, public health, agricultural techniques, and transportation are seen as the keys to rural development.

Gainey, J. W. and Therapan Thongkum. 1977. *Language Map of Thailand and language map of Thailand handbook.* Bangkok : Indigenous Languages of Thailand Research Project. Central Institute of English Language. Office of State Universities. [In Thai and English.]

The map is based on data obtained with a questionnaire in 1976. Eight hundred and sixty-one District Officers, Community Development Officers, and foreign

missionaries were asked to give the names and locations of villages where minority languages are spoken. A prompting list of sixty–seven names of languages and dialects, with alternate names and spellings, was provided. Also, respondents were asked details about the number of speakers, age groups, refugees, migrants, etc. After an estimated 90% of the questionnaires were returned, and in spite of questions of reliability of the data, of obvious gaps, of confusion of names of languages and of places, these data were somewhat arbitrarily placed on the 1974 Administrative Division Map produced by the Geography Division of the Royal Thai Survey Department. The *Handbook* contains a brief discussion of several dozen problems in the data that cause the map to be to some degree incomplete and inaccurate. For example, no attempt was made to locate the thousands of refugees then, as now, in Thailand. Nor does the map give details on numbers of speakers, although the authors offer to provide these data on demand.

Besides Thai dialects, approximately forty–nine other languages, grouped in seven families, are spoken in the country. These families are : Tai, Mon–Khmer, Malayo–Polynesian, Tibeto–Burman, Karen, Miao–Yao, and Chinese.

The map is a first step towards the vast amount of research and data collection that remains to be done. It is no doubt useful to linguists and scholars and administrators in many fields.

International Communication Agency. 1978. *Media habits in Thailand 1976.* Bangkok : Deemar. [Research report M–9–76.]

This is a report on the reading habits of a "priority audience"–– government officials, businessmen, professionals, and university students. In Thailand, unlike in "advanced societies," newspapers are favored over radio and television. In Bangkok 80% of government officials read a daily newspaper; 65% of businessmen; 76% of students. Of the Thai general public, 48% read a daily. Of the surveyed group 71% (60% upcountry) read a daily. English language newspapers are read by 10% of Bangkok government officials and students, are by 1% of upcountry businessmen.

Chinese dailies are read by 1 to 4% of businessmen and upcountry students and a few government officials and professionals.

One–third of the general public reads magazines along with 53 to 70% of government officials, professionals, and students, and 23 to 28% of businessmen.

Two per cent of the Bangkok priority audience reads *Time, Newsweek,* or *Reader's Digest.* One per cent of Bangkok students read *Newsweek* or *Reader's Digest* in Chinese, as do 4% of upcountry students.

Kaewsaiha, Tongyoo. 1975. Towards a national mode of adult functional literacy education in Thailand. Florida State University. Ph.D. diss.

The study covers needs assessment, goals, objectives and principles, program design, management, and evaluation. It recommends nonformal education and more mass communications for rural people, and suggests that adult education should have equal status with other levels. It appears that these recommendations have been taken seriously.

Kanchana Sinthawanon, et al. (eds.) 1980. *Report: English at university level and needs of the present society.* Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute. Thammasat University. [In Thai.]

Two pertinent sets of information gleaned from the report are that 80% of university students are required to study a foreign language (p. 8), most choosing English, and the following table (p. 137):

Survey of 400 government and business offices

in Bangkok on the use of foreign languages

	most	much	some	little	not at all
Chinese	4.2	9.0	9.2	13.8	63.8
English	52.8	20.8	16.2	8.0	2.2
Japanese	1.0	5.0	3.2	10.2	80.6
French	1.0	4.5	8.8	18.2	67.5
German	.0	3.8	4.5	12.0	79.7

Smalley, W. A. (ed.) 1976. *Phonemes and orthography: Language planning in ten minority language of Thailand.* Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.

This book is an overview of writing systems based on the Thai alphabet for ten important minority languages in Thailand. Their purpose is to make the development of literacy in Thai a possibility for speakers of these languages, so that bilingual education can proceed, thus giving speakers of these languages "a window on the world." The languages are: Hmong (Meo, Miao), Northern Khmer, Lisu, Akha, Phlong (Pro Karen of Hot District, Chiang Mai), Mien (Yao), Mal (Thin), Kuy, Lavüa (Lawa, Lua'), and Urak Lawoi' (Orang Laut). Minority peoples of Thailand speak a variety of languages. Such peoples comprise the "hill tribes" (a misnomer; they are not tribes, and some do not live in the hills), the plains people of the Northeast (e.g., the Khmer), Negritos, Malays, and Chinese and Indian language speakers in the towns. The Mien (Yao) use Chinese writing for ritual language. Many of them can read Chinese in Mien or in Yunnanese. Many individuals schooled in Burma can read English. Some can read Burmese and Lao. Some Tay Yay can

read Tay Yay and Thai. Most Khmer (800,000 people in 1976) cannot read Khmer (Cambodian). Lao is a regional language in Thailand, not a minority language. It is very similar to Thai. There are more Lao speakers in Thailand than in Laos. Many Malays in the South read Malay.

The book contains extensive discussion of the technical problems that arise from adapting the Thai alphabet to represent orthographies of the ten languages that are both adequate and yet true to the Thai Devanagari. It is no doubt a seminal work and a model of its kind.

Sunanchai, Sunthorn. 1981. *Thailand's functional literacy programme: A case study of activities in Educational Region 8.* Bangkok : UNESCO.

This book presents a history of literacy education and a description of adult education programs is seven northern provinces. It describes two needs assessments done in 1970 and 1974 and the resulting curriculum, textbooks, teaching techniques, and evaluation and revision of the program. The curriculum is based on four major topics: agriculture, health, economics, and civics. This is a thorough study that is a extremely clear.

Syme Media Enterprises, Ltd. 1982. *Asian press and media directory: 1981-82.* Hong Kong: Syme Media Enterprises, Ltd.

The section on Thailand contains, in addition to the numbers of types of publications and their circulation figures cited in the essay at the beginning of this article, names and addresses of the publications and of 3 media representatives, 6 press associations, 3 press training schools, 8 news agencies, 55 foreign correspondents, 15 radio stations, 4 televition stations 1 educational, television service, 7 film and production companies, 36 advertising agencies, and 2 advertising and public relations schools.

UNESCO. 1982, Literacy data peper: Thailand. Regional Workshop on Planning and Management of Literacy Programmes. Chiangmai, Thailand, 21 November- 12 December 1982. Bangkok. [ROEAP-82/RLW/2-Thailand.] Mimeo.

A brief paper of 21 pages, this report presents hards data on population development as part of the National Social and Economic Development Plan (1982-1986). Following an overview and definition of literacy, there is a sketch of the consequences of illiteracy to various parts of the population according to age groups and regions. The Functional Literacy Program, part of the work of the Nonformal Education Department, is exhaustively described. When "illiterate" is defined as "above 14 years of age and cannot read or write simple Thai," it is found that only 7.8% of the population is illiterate. At the end of the present plan, in 1986, it is expected that 600,000 of the

nearly 4 million illiterates will have been educated. The report includes statistics on both formal and nonformal education and the institutional network of schools, libraries, newspaper reading centers, and centers for research, development, and training that is dedicated to social transformation.

Wangsotorn, Achara, et al. 1980. UNESCO-RELC conference on language teaching issues in multilingual environments in Asia and Oceania: A report from Thailand. In R. Noss (ed.) 1982. *Language teaching issues in multilingual environment in Southeast Asia.* Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.

This report gives much of the information on minority languages in Gainey 1977 and comments on the Thai·government's encouraging the use of Thai script for the writing of these languages. It describes the policies of the Ministry of Education and the Office of University Affairs in regard to language in education. It explains the teaching of foreign languages and Thai and the curricula developed for these ends. A further description of current methodologies and the sources of teaching materials leads to a discussion of the main problems in language teaching in Thailand and to a set of recommendations for solving the problems. Like most such reports, this one is wide ranging and professionally concerned, but it lacks any statistical information, except in the training of teachers.

Wanichagul, Chumpot, 1979. Non-formal education to help Thailand read and write. *The nation review.* 4. 1021. [10, 14, 18 November 1979.] Adapted as Non-formal literacy training in Thailand. *Education in Asia and Oceania: Review, reports, and notes.* 1980. 17. UNESCO.

This essay describes the rationale of the Non-Formal Education Department, the creation of Life–Long Education Centres, the purpose of the new curriculum, the spread of Village Newspaper Reading Centres, and, briefly, a proposed teacher–training program for turning out specialists in rural development.

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RELC REGIONAL SEMINAR

Patterns of Classroom Interaction in Southeast Asia
Singapore, 21-25 April 1986

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Regional Language Centre (RELC) will hold its 21st regional seminar, 21-25 April 1986 in Singapore. The theme of the seminar is "Patterns of Classroom Interaction in Southeast Asia".

The objectives of the seminar are:

* To report and review significant studies of classroom interaction conducted in recent years, particularly in Southeast Asia

* To discuss the findings of these studies in the light of theoretical knowledge derived from recent developments in sociolinguistics, language pragmatics, ethnomethodology, discourse analysis, language acquisition research, etc.

* To study the influence of sociocultural factors on patterns of classroom interaction, both verbal and non-verbal

* To study The pedagogical implications of research in classroom interaction : in particular, the implications for teacher training, evaluation of teaching, methodology and curriculum development, with special reference to Southeast Asia

* To make recommendations for the improvement of classroom organisation and teaching, teacher training and teacher evaluation, curriculum development, etc., in the light of the findings from recent research

* To consider and suggest guidelines for future research in the area.

Further information and invitations to participate in the seminar can be obtained from the following address:

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(Attention: Chairman
Seminar Planning Committee)
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