

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine a language phenomenon resulting from language contact in the border area of Mae Sai District of Thailand, opposite the Tachilek province of the Union of Myanmar. The study focused on both phonetic and phonemic change as a result of such contact. Other factors, such as culture and ethnic group or other conditions caused by language contact within a group of people who live in the Thailand-Myanmar border area, were also explored.

The study was conducted in relation to three main variables: the general demographic situation of people living in the Thailand-Myanmar border area, the languages used as media of their business communication and language changes resulting from the language contact in the border.

The general demographic data showed that people who either lived or ran their business in Tachilek province, the Union of Myanmar and Mae Sai district of Chiang Rai, Thailand, varied in their nationalities, cultures and religions. Most of them were Thais, Burmese, Shans, Chinese, Tai Lue, Akhas, Laotians, Philipinos, Bangladeshis, and Peguans, respectively. Most of the population were women less than 30 years of age; their religions were either Buddhism, Islam, or Christianity. Most of them were employees with lower than bachelor's degree education and had been working in the border area of Tachilek province, the Union of Myanmar and Mae Sai, district, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand, for less than five years.

The main languages that these people used for communication were Thai and Burmese, respectively. Even though the Burmese language was less used compared with the Thai language, it could be observed that, in Tachilek district, the Union of Myanmar, the Burmese language played an important role as a medium of communication within the local community and among Burmese people. The research participants displayed good Thai listening and speaking skills, but they were less proficient in reading and writing skills. In contrast, the research participants' ability to use Burmese was best in speaking skill, but they were less proficient in listening, reading and writing skills. Some Thai-English bilinguals and Thai-Chinese-

Burmese multilinguals were also found. The choice of language use in careers and communication was contextually and situationally governed.

With respect to the phonetic and phonemic changes resulting from language contact in the Thailand-Myanmar border area, there were instances of deviation of some vowels and tones among the Burmese, and there were some words borrowed from English. However, those changes did not have any semantic impact on the vocabulary. It was also found that personal traits and cultural environment were the two main factors influencing people to attempt to protect their identities from cultural assimilation as a by-product of the language contact.

In conclusion, the study area of Tachilek, the Union of Myanmar and Mae Sai district, Chiang Rai, Thailand, was a multilingual society, with various ethnic groups and cultures. As a result, the language changes found in this area included code mixing, code switching, linguistic borrowing and linguistic interference. However, these changes did not obviously affect Standard Thai; nor did they affect the local dialects in any significant way. Instead, there were other cases of cultural adjustment and assimilation, such as costumes, ways of life and traditions for the purpose of social harmonisation.