The Malay Dialects of Central Thailand: a Preliminary Survey[1]

Uri Tadmor
University of Hawaii at Manoa

1. Introduction

The first mention of Malay speaking communities in central Thailand is found in Maxwell's 'Manual of the Malay Language', written in 1881. In the introduction, there appears the following sentence: "Siam proper has a large Malay population, descendants mainly of captives taken in war, and the language is therefore in use there in places..." (Maxwell 1907(1881):2). By using the term 'Siam proper', the writer could not have meant the northern Malay sultanates which had come under Siamese suzerainty, but rather the core Thai area.

Over a century later, Seni Mudmarn, in an article on the issue of language loyalty in southern Thailand, mentioned having visited some groups of Muslims "around Bangkok" who still used the Malay language[2]. Thus, at least some of the Malay speaking communities mentioned by Maxwell have survived the present time. They are the topic of this paper.

I would like to mention that after having arrived in Thailand, I discovered that phonological sketches of two Malay dialects of central Thailand had recently been written: Thawika 1990 and Phongthep 1990. These provided me with invaluable background information.

2. Historical Background

It is not known exactly when the first Malay speaking communities in Thailand were founded. We do know that in 17th-century Ayutthaya, there were many foreign settlements, including a Malay one. Many muslims who are descended from these (and other) Muslim settlers at Ayutthaya still live in this province today. However, they no longer use the Malay language.

In 1785, as part of a larger campaign to repulse a Burmese invasion, the northern Malay sultanate of Pattani was conquered by Siam (Wyatt 1984:151). Many of the vanquished Pattani Malays were taken to the vicinity of the victors' capital, to serve as slave laborers, as was the custom in those days (Saowani 1989:108). In 1791, Pattani rebelled against Siamese rule (Wyatt 1984:158).

The rebellion was crushed, and again many prisoners of war were brought up to central Siam (Thongkham 1983:1), not only to serve as laborers, but also as a measure to prevent future revolts. Another revolt in 1820 met with the same fate (Thongkham 1983:2). In 1831, there was yet another major rebellion, which started in Kedah, but then spread to Pattani, Kelantan, and Terengganu. By 1832, the rebellion was suppressed, and again thousands of war captives were carried away to the vicinity of Bangkok (Wyatt 1984:172).

These Malay captives, who were brought to central Thailand between a century and a half and two centuries ago, are the forefathers of today's Malay speaking communities of central Thailand.

3. The geographical setting of the dialects

James T. Collins, has already demonstrated that Malay dialect research in Malaysia should not be conducted following the modern state boundaries, which mean little as far as dialectology is concerned. Rather, the proper parameters are topographical in nature: river basins and coastal strips (Collins 1989). In Malay dialect research in central Thailand, coastal strips are not relevant, but river basins still are, and even more so - canals. Mosques are also of great importance. Let me illustrate this point with the speech community group in which I have been doing most of my work.

From the official point of view, this is not a community at all, but rather many unrelated communities: about seven or eight villages (mubahn) located in four subdistricts (tambon) and two districts (amphur). However, when one talks informally to the villagers, they never refer to their communities in these terms. Rather, they say 'my son lives by so-and-so canal', or 'I was born by such-and-such mosque.' From their perspective, which is the dialectologically correct one, their speech community is divided primarily into three adjacent canals : Khlong Phraphimon, Khlong Lamri, and Khlong Ladkhon. However, there are other villages along these canals, including Muslim village which no longer use Malay, and non-Muslim villages. In order to distinguish themselves from these villages, the Malay speakers call their villages by the popular names of their mosques: the Green Mosque, the Red Mosque, and the Middle Mosque. (These mosques all have official Arabic names, but these are rarely used in everyday conversation.)

Officially, these are not villages, and sometimes there is even a subdistrict division line running through the middle of a village. But as far as the villagers

(and their speech) are concerned, that does not make any difference.

Going by such guidelines instead of administrative division lines, the communities I visited include nine villages, four in Nonthaburi Province, four in Pathumthani Province, and one in Samut Prakan Province. These represent the main body of Malay speakers in Nonthaburi and Pathumthani.

In addition to these villages, I have reliable reports of pockets of Malay speakers in various areas in eastern Bangkok province: Minburi, Nongchok, Phrakhanong, and Bang Kapi. I have not had the chance to do any research in thses communities yet, but it appears that only some of the oldest residents have any knowledge of Malay. The shift to Thai has been practically completed.

4. The nature of the dialects

From the initial findings, it would appear that all varieties of Malay spoken in central Thailand are ultimately derived from Pattani Malay, with various independent innovations and possible interference from other peninsular Malay dialects. Also, these dialects have been influenced to a greater extent by Thai than the Pattani dialect. Another point in which the local Malay dialects are different from Pattani is the total lack of direct loans from English.

These linguistic facts regarding both the geographical origin and the time-frame of the Malay speakers of central Thailand seem to correspond to the historical facts, obtained from older informants as well as from independent sources. Most Malays in the central area are descended from Pattani Malays, which explains why their dialects resembles Pattani Malay so closely. These Malays were brought here before the massive British penetration into the peninsula, which accounts for the lack of direct loans from English.

4.1 The Phonology

Overall, the phonology of the Malay dialects of central Thailand shows close resemblance to Pattani Malay. However, there are some interesting differences, not only between Pattani Malay and central Thail Malay, but also among the dialects of central Thailand themselves. Time and space do not allow me to discuss all of them, but following are some interesting examples.

One the best known features of Pattani Malay is the change of final /-aN/ to /-E/. Thus the Standard Malay sentence (1) <u>orang makan ikan semalam</u> would be (2) /orE makE ikE s@malE/. This rule, which can be noted

informally as (3) /a/ --> /E/ / _N#, is interesting, because it appears to lack phonological motivation. The study of the Malay dialects of central Thailand is enlightening in this case, because it helps explain this obscure sound change. In central Thai Malay, we find that Pathumthani Malay has the same sound rule, and the above sentence would sound about the same in it as it does in Pattani Malay (example no. 2 above). However, the Samut Prakan dialect seems to preserve an earlier stage of development: the vowel /a/ is maintained, and so is the nasalization which had been left behind after the final nasal deleted. Here, the rule should be written as two:

(4) V --> [+nas] / _ N and (5) N --> 0 / a_# .

Our shibboleth in Samut Prakan would thus yield

(6) /ora~ maka~ ika~ s@mala~/.

Nonthaburi Malay has another kind of mutation: the combination sequence /-aN#/ becomes /-i@ng/. On the one hand, the final nasal is maintained (as a neutralized /ng/); on the other hand, the vowel is changed even further, and diphthongized into /i@/:

(7) /ori@ng maki@ng iki@ng s@mali@ng/.

It would thus appear that the Pattani Malay rule (3) did not operate abruptly, as the notation implies: prior to deleting, the final nasals had all neutralized to /ng/, and after deleting, the vowel must still have been nasalized for a while. It is this nasalization that had caused the raising of /a/ to /E/. Again, the evidence that there is something in the nasalization that causes the vowel to rise is gleaned from a Malay dialect of central Thailand.

In Pattani Malay, there is a rule that changes /a/ to /O/ in a final syllable if it is open or ends in a glottal: (8) /a/ --> /O/ / _ { 0 } #.
{[+glot]}

For example, Standard Malay (9) ayah anak itu ada banyak tanah ('that child's father has a lot of land') is (10) /ayOh anO' tu adO banyO' tanOh/.

In Pathumthani Malay, we find that in some words, this /O/ is raised to /u/: (11) /ayOh anu' tu adO banyu' tanuh/. Similarly, the final vowel /E/, whether derived from an original /-ai/ (see below) or /-aN/, is sometimes raised to /i/. Thus Standard Malay (12) enam orang dalam sungai (meaning 'six people in the river') yields

(13) /nnE orE dalE sunga/ in Pattani Malay, but

(14) /ni orE dalE sungi/ in Pathumthani Malay.

A closer look at examples (11) and (14) would reveal that the vowel is raised in Pathumthani Malay only if it occurs after a nasal stop, in other words when it is

nasalized. For a reason which I have not been able to explain yet, this nasalization causes the vowels to rise. From this we might assume that nasalization was also the reason for the raising of /a/ to /E/ in the obscure Pattani rule (1) above.

Another Pattani Malay sound change deletes final liquids and semivowels: (15) C

[-nas] ---> 0 / _#.
[+cont]

Thus, SM (16) jual gulai di pulau besar ('selling curry on the big island') yields PM (17) /juwa gula di pula b@sa/.

Generally, the Malay dialects of central Thailand also have this rule, but peculiarly /ay/ becomes /E/: (18) /juwa gulE di pula b@sa/. I say 'peculiarly', because it seems fairly obvious that we are talking about one process, and it is hard to understand why /y#/ was not deleted along with the other non-nasal continuants, but rather coalesced with the preceding vowel to form a monophthong. We are tempted to assume that /ay/ was still a diphthong when the ancestors of the Malay speakers of central Thailand were brought up there. However, then we would have to assume that all other deletions are independent, shared innovations of Pattani and central Thai Malay, which seems to much to be the result of mere coincidence. Moreover, from a purely phonological point of view, it makes little sense for /ay/ to contract into /E/ while /au/ is not contracted to /O/, but is rather simplified to /a/. Also, the contingency that /ay/ changed first into /a/ and then for some reason into /E/ seems remote, not only because this would lack phonetic motivation, but also because other final /a/ sounds, which are not derived from /ay/, did not change into /E/.

I think that the only viable possibility left is dialect interference. Historically, we know that some of the Malay war captives who were carried away to Thailand were not from the Pattani speech area. Notably, the 1831 rebellion had started in Kedah. The captives of that rebellion were settled in existing Malay settlements, and thus were in a position leave their imprint on the nascent dialect already in existence. And indeed, in certain varieties of the Kedah dialect /ay/ is contracted into /E/.

Since I cannot discuss here the many other interesting phonological features of the Malay dialects of central Thailand, I will just mention one other phenomenon, which has to do with Thai influence: the development of aspirated stops.

Malay, like most other Austronesian languages, does not have aspirated stop phonemes. However, the Malay dialects of central Thailand do. The sources of the aspirated stops are many. Some are due to a vowel deletion, and were originally clusters of a stop + /h/: /phang/ 'tree' (SM pohon), /thang/ 'year' (SM tahun), /thari/ 'sun' (SM mata hari), /khanO'/ 'want' (SM kehendak), /chayO/ (SM cahaya).
Another source is loanwords from Thai: /mEkhi/ 'matches' (Thai /maay khiit/), /thoR@sa'/ 'telephone' (Thai /thoorasap/), /pha'lom/ 'electric fan' (Thai /phat lom/).

The third category is the most interesting: words of obvious Malay origin, in which voiceless stops had for some reason (still mysterious to me) developed aspiration: /khirO/ 'calculate' (SM kira), /kh@ni@ng/ 'to like' (SM berkenan), /b@chi/ 'to hate' (SM benci), /ch@ma/ 'dirty' (SM cemar).

A fourth source, only for /kh/, are loanwords in which this sound represents an Arabic voiceless velar fricative /x/: /khamih/ 'Thursday' (Ar. /xami:s/), /khaba/ 'news' (Ar. /xabr/), /akhe/ 'last' (Ar. axi:r), /makh@lo'/ 'the animal world' (Ar. /maxlu:k/ 'creature').

4.2 The morphology

Generally speaking, the Malay dialects of central Thailand lack any productive morphology, whether inflectional or derivational. Common SM affixes like /di-/, /-nya/, /-i/ and /-kan/ are simply non-existent. Other exist only in the form of frozen traces, for example /-an/, /per-/, /m@N-/, and /ber-/. This might be due to Thai influence, but also to the fact that the dialects in question are totally isolated from SM, the morphologically most productive of all Malay varieties. Also, it should be noted that Pattani Malay, the ancestor of these dialects, also lacks productive morphology, although it has many more frozen affixed forms than do the dialects of central Thailand. Some of the few examples I could find for traces of affixes in central Thai Malay are the nominalizer -an in the word (ni)si@ng 'palm sugar' (cf. SM manisan 'sweets'), the causative per- in the word /panga'/ 'to warm up' (<*perhangat), the prefix ke- in /khanO'/ 'want' (SM kehendak), the intransitive verbalizer b@r- in the word /branO'/ 'to be born, to have children' (SM beranak). Also, sometimes a /m@N-/ crops up, although only in careful, formal speech, and with no apparent change in meaning or function. Thus /nyanyi/ and /m@nyanyi/ both mean 'to sing', and /m@nari/ and /nari/ both mean 'to dance'.

4.3 The syntax

The syntax of the Malay dialects of central Thailand closely resembles the syntax of Pattani Malay, but has been influenced by Thai to an even greater extent. Following are a few examples.

An interesting areal feature of Southeast Asian languages is serial verbs, a succession of verbs which together form one lexical item. For instance, Thai has no single lexeme for 'bring'; instead, on says /'aw maa/ 'take come'. The Malay dialects of central Thailand also have serial verbs, patterned after the Tha; their term for 'to bring' is /me' mari/ (SM ambil mari), also meaning literally 'take come'. The root bawa 'bring' is unknown here. Following are some examples I collected in Nonthaburi:

(19) NM me' a^{e}' boh tuyen siki'
Thai 'aw naam say tuu yen nOy
Eng. take water put refrigerator a little
'Please put the water in the refrigerator'
cf.SM tolong simpan air di peti ais

NM ame' sura' ni gi hata rongrian
Thai 'aw nangsyy nii pay song rongrian
Eng take letter this go send school
'Deliver this letter to school'
cf.SM bawakan surat ini ke sekolah

Another interesting structure borrowed from Thai is periphrastic passive. Standard Malay has passive verb constructions with the prefix di-; however, this prefix is completely unknown in the Malay of central Thailand. Instead, another construction, using the auxiliary verb /khanO/ (SM kena) 'to undergo (something bad), to be adversely affected by', is used. It should be noted that both in Thai and NM the usage of this construction is very restricted, and limited to adverse actions. Some peninsular Malay dialects have similar usages of kena, but not constructions which resemble the Thai ones so closely. Some examples:

(21) NM anO' khanO ayOh puko
Thai luuk thuuk phOO tii
Eng. child undergo father strike
'The child was beaten up by his father'
cf.SM anak itu dipukul (oleh) ayahnya

NM cuwi khanO puli' taka'
Thai khamooy thuuk tamruat jap

Eng. thief undergo policeman catch
'The thief was caught by the policeman'
cf.SM pencuri itu ditangkap oleh polis

A few more sentences, exhibiting typical Thai structures, will show just how much the syntax of the Malay dialects of central Thailand has been affected by Thai.

(22) NM k@le' umOh kan ba^{e}' lagi
Thai klap baan kan dii kwaa
Eng. go back house recip. good comp.
'Let's go home'
cf.SM mari kita balik/pulang

NM tulong kato' api gate'
Thai cuay pit fay duay
Eng. help close fire also
'Please turn off the light'
cf.SM tolong matikan lampu

NM hari ni wa' kiyO tO' leh
Thai wan nii tham ngaan may day
Eng. day this do work not can
'I can't work today'
cf.SM saya tak dapat bekerja hari ini

4.4 Lexicon and Semantics

The lexicon of the Malay dialects of central Thailand bears a close resemblance to that of Pattani Malay. However, there are some interesting differences. Most striking are the much more prevalent Thai loanwords. This has to do with the fact that the Malay speaking communities of central Thailand are tiny islets in an ocean of Thai speakers. This linguistic isolation from the main body of Malay speakers brought about the phenomenon that when a native Malay word becomes obsolete by the normal process of language change, it is usually replaced by a Thai-derived word rather than a Malay-derived one. Another important factor is bilingualism. While bilingualism in the Pattani speech area was relatively rare until the 1970's, all adult Malays in central Thailand have been bilingual (or monolingual in Thai) for at least two generations. This widespread bilingualism has greatly facilitated the process of linguistic borrowing. Some common Thai loanwords in NM are /to'/ 'table' (Thai /to'/, cf. PM /mejO/), /t@la'/ 'market' (Thai /talaat/, cf. PM /k@da/), /a'/ 'money' (Thai /at/ 'an old coin worth 1/64 of a baht').

In addition to countless content words, many Thai function words have been borrowed into Nonthaburi Malay, e.g. the reciprocal particle /kan/, the emphatic particle /l@y/, the preposition /ka'/ ('with', from Thai kap), the progressive particle /kamlang/, etc.

Pattani Malay words that have to do with modern technology are often borrowed from English. This is understandable, given the geographical contiguity of the Pattani speech area with the main Malay-speaking area, into which modern technology was introduced by the British. However, since the Malays of central Thailand migrated there before the massive British penetration into the Malay peninsula, they were not in a position to borrow these English terms. Rather, Thai terms are used. Some examples:

(23)	PM	English	NM	Thai
	tEsEng ('train station')	station	thani	sathaanii
	tEkE' ('ticket')	ticket	tua	tua
	bE' ('handbag')	bag	kapaw	krapaw
	ssika ('bicycle')	bicycle	jakayan	jakrayaan

Some common, native Malay words have fallen out of use in the central Thai region, and replaced either by other Malay-derived forms.
Some examples:

(24)	PM	SM	NM	cf.
	kici' ('small')	kecil	haloh	SM halus
	k@da ('market')	kedai	tela'	Thai talaat
	pakE ('to use')	pakai	suroh	?
	tE ('tea')	teh	a^{e}' panah	SM air panas
	kEcE' ('speak')	?	cEka'	cakap

A Pattani trend of replacing common Malay words with calques from Thai is carried further in NM:

(25)	SM	minum	kirim	pulang	gaji

Thai	kin naam	song pay	klap baan	ng@n dyan
Eng.	eat water	send go	return house	silver month
PM	makE a^e	hata gi	k@le' ka-rumOh	gaji
NM	maki@ng	hata gi	k@le' umOh	pERO' buli@ng

Some Malay words remained in use, but only in set expressions patterned after Thai:

(26)	SM	pohon	bunga	buta
	Thai	ton maay	dOOk maay	taa bOOt
	NM	phang kayu	bungO kayu	matO butO
	Eng.	plant wood 'tree'	flower wood 'flower'	eye blind 'blind'
	SM	lapar	ingat	bekerja
	Thai	hiw khaaw	jam day	tham ngaan
	NM	lapa nasi'	inga' buleh	wa' khiyO
	Eng.	hungry rice 'hungry'	remember can 'remember'	do work 'work'

The semantics of Thai as influenced the vocabulary of the Malay dialects of central Thailand to a great extent. Many native Malay words changed or extended their meaning to conform with an equivalent Thai words. Here are some examples.

(27)	SM	cucu 'grandchild'
	NM	/cucu/ 'grandchild / niece / nephew'
	Thai	/laan/ 'grandchild / niece / nephew'
	SM	asam 'sour, tamarind'
	NM	/asi@Ng/ 'sour, orange'
	Thai	/som/ 'sour, orange'
	SM	boleh 'be able to'
	NM	/buleh/ 'be able to, get'
	Thai	/daay/ 'be able to, get'

I would like to stress here that many borrowed Thai features, including some mentioned above, are by no means unique to the Malay dialects of central Thailand, and may be found in some northern Malay dialects. However, the presence of so many Thai features in one variety, and the high frequency of their occurrence, seem to be limited to central Thai Malay. The syntactic and semantic structures of these dialects, especially Nonthaburi Malay, are so close, as to permit morpheme-by-morpheme

translatibity of the type described in Gumperz and Wilson 1971.

Another phenomenon is manifested in lexical differences between the different Malay dialects of central Thailand. This difference no doubt developed due to the small size of the communities and their isolation. Here are some examples for differences between the Nonthaburi and Pathumthani dialects.

(28)	Pathumthani	Nonthaburi	meaning
	j@n@rO	l@la'	'to be asleep'
	cabE	ladO	'chili pepper'
	ladO	ladO b@na	'black pepper'
	kapa	p@ru api	'motor boat'
	aRna'	plano'	'rabbit'
	biring	kameng	'sheep'
	gulO	saka	'granulated sugar'
	g@lah	maku'	'drinking glass'
	kisi	kudO	'chair'
	lima manih	asi@ng	'orange (fruit)'
	matO	puli'	'policeman'
	wE	yi@ng	'grandmother'

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I presented some of the initial findings of my research on the Malay dialects of central Thailand. A study of these dialects reveals some interesting phonological, syntactic, and semantic phenomena. The analysis of these phenomena sometimes helps clarify obscure features of Pattani Malay. Morover, we can find a direct correlation between socio-historical facts and linguistic facts, again demonstrating that language cannot be studied independently of its social and historical context. Dialectologically, it is interesting to note the development of fairly distinct dialects within a relatively short period of time. Also, we see again how political and administrative boundaries may have little meaning as far as dialect research is concerned; topographical features often play a much more important role.

A topic which I have researched but have not been able to discuss here due to space limitations are the soiciolinguistic factors that influence the processes of language maintenance and shift in the Malay villages of central Thailand. It was found that religion, age, gender, socio-economic status, and degree of contact with non-speakers, all play important roles.

Notes

1. I hereby wish to express my gratitude to the United States Department of Education, which has provided the funds for this research project, and to the Thailand - United States Educational Foundation, which has facilitated it.

2. "Saya pernah menghadiri beberapa majlis pernikahan di beberapa kawasan yang terdapat kelompok-kelompok Muslim di sekitar Bangkok yang tetap menggunakan bahasa Melayu." (Seni 1990:939).

Bibliography

Collins, James T., 1989: Malay Dialect Research in Malaysia: The Issue of Perspective. Bijdragen toot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 145:235-264.

Gumperz, John J., and Robert Wilson, 1971: Convergence and creolization: a case from the Indo-Aryan/Dravidian border in India. In Hymes, Dell H., ed.: Pidginization and creolization of languages. Cambridge University Press.

Maxwell, W.E. , 190 (1881)7: A manual of the Malay language with an introductory sketch of the Sanskrit element in Malay. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co.

Phongthep Bunrueng, 1990: A Phonological Study of Tha-it Malay, Pakkret District, Nonthaburi Province. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Bangkok: Mahidol University.

Saowani Chitmuat, 1989. Quoted in Thawika 1990:11; no further details given.

Seni Mudmarn, 1990: Persoalan Kesetiaan Bahasa di Kalangan Orang Melayu-Muslim di Selatan Thai. Jurnal Dewan Bahasa, Disember 1990:932-940.

Thawika Raiwong, 1990: A Phonological Study of Pathumthani Malay. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Bangkok: Mahidol University.

Thongkham Phannatthi, 2526 (1983): Suan Phrik Thai (Black Pepper Plantation). Quoted in Thawika 1990:11; no further details given.

Wyatt, David K., 1984: Thailand: A Short History. London: Yale University Press and Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich Co..