The Isan Culture Maintenance and Revitalization Programme

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Abstract

This paper introduces the Isan Culture Maintenance and Revitalization Programme, a four-year 540,000 euro project 90% funded by the European Union and designed to aid the culture of Isan people in Northeast Thailand through local government projects. The paper describes issues affecting the situation of the Isan people, including literacy in Isan and the Isan people's appreciation of their culture, together with the main issues involved, and how these relate to local government agencies (the ICMRP’s partners) and globalization. After describing the conceptual framework, the paper describes the partners in the project, all municipalities in Khon Kaen Province, together with the associated action plans, such as traditional clothing, multilingual signage, Isan language as a formal subject, and cultural performances ranging from lullabies to popular music and shadow plays. Finally there is a discussion of how the actions help the municipalities' stakeholders, followed by a discussion and conclusion.

Keywords: Eastern Culture, Revitalisation Programme, Musical Cultural Heritage, Local Government

Introduction

The Isan Culture Maintenance and Revitalisation Programme (ICMRP) is a comprehensive, transformative and ambitious four-year plan to revive and implement Isan literacy, taking a postmodern socio-institutional approach that includes cultural performances and emphasizes performances as living texts or discourses. It is costed at approximately 540,000 euro, 90% funded by the European Union under the EuropeAid/131209/L/ACT/TH call for proposals, applicable to Non State Actors and Local Authorities in Development. Muang Phon Municipality is the contract signator, and equal partners with Muang Phon are the Municipalities of Ban Phai, Chum Phae, Khon Kaen and the semi-autonomous College of Local Administration at Khon Kaen University in Northeast Thailand. It is therefore interesting to note that 'global' funding is involved in a programme focusing on local government.

First of all, it should be understood that the ICMRP proposes a transformative series of events over the four years of the Programme. The fact that five major local government organizations are willing to devote the resources to the programme is testimony to the fact that there is credible evidence that locally-based socio-cultural local governance planning can improve the lot of the Isan people in terms of their rights, ways of life and ambitions. If successful in its implementation, the Programme will change the way Isan people both see themselves and are seen in Thailand through the local governance projects. Four years will not be enough to fully achieve this, nor will Khon Kaen acting as one province alone. However, the ICMRP will create a generation of children in the capital of Isan who will have had access to their mother tongue, to their own history in their own words, and who are shown how to respect the products of their own cultural discourses in the form of living performances and dress. This generation will also be helped to understand that they should be proud of their own
language, whether in the oral form or as a written literacy. All this encourages the likelihood that Isan will be granted an official status in formal education, in wider Thai society, and eventually in the Constitution.

Solving the 'Isan problem

The Northeast, Isan, is the poorest region in Thailand, and its education system is poorly developed (Rogers, 1996). Isan is also the language and the people (a majority of which are Lao Isan) of the region, who can be seen as standing somewhere in the middle of a paradigm of Thai nation statehood and Lao identity (McCargo & Hongladorom, 2004; Enfield, 2002). This paper takes the standpoint that if the situation is not improved, Isan as a language, and possibly as a culture, will, after a long process of language shift, die in the next 100-200 years, and that this is a 'problem' for local government as well as the national government. Tossa is less optimistic, and argues that the next generation is crucial, with mutual incomprehensibility already manifesting itself in the case of urban and rural Isan, and significant culture death already occurring. Without a written language, the likelihood is that Isan will never attain "safe" status and consequently will be one of the 6,000 languages that will die out over the next century. While Isan people's

1 For more on the history of the Isan, see Breazeale (1975) and Rogers (1996), and for Isan people and language, readers are directed to Draper (2010, forthcoming) and Keyes (1991, 2003). For a glimpse of the anthropology see Lefferts, (2006/2007).

2 Such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (especially Articles 29(1) and 30), the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (especially Articles 5 and 6) and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (especially Articles 13(1), 14(1) and 14(3)).

3 Such as Save the Children (2007) and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).

linguistic and cultural rights are enshrined in internation treaties, are supported by international NGOs, and as regards culture are protected in Section 60 of the 2007 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, this project sees the principle of informed consent as crucial to the framework and methodology. Thus, it is always cognizant of the fact that if Isan people, drawn to a certain extent by the modernity inherent in increasing globalization to economic capital, do not wish to invest in the resources to prevent the death of Isan's linguistic and cultural capital, then the Isan language and culture should simply be recorded, catalogued and preserved, for posterity and academic purposes.

The need for such a programme is clear because the current situation in Isan is, in many ways, disastrous. The 2006 and 2010 results from the Thai National Institute of Educational Testing Service indicate that the Isan region is the second lowest scoring region after the Deep South in Thai, English and Social Sciences in the Grade 9 tests, and in some years Isan provinces score even lower than one or more of the Deep South provinces. Even

1 This consent is crucial at each stage of this programme, from allocation of responsibilities between the Five Partners to each major implementation step. At first sight, this approach may appear to be high risk. However, it is the strong belief of the Five Partners that if clear information on people's rights are provided, if linkages are shown between linguistic and cultural capital and economic capital, if people are informed of how other minorities in the North and the South have used their rights, and if people are helped to understand the multiple implications of the fact that the Thai state has itself has moved in a direction of unity through plurality (pahulak) rather than rule by assimilation (ekkalak) (as noted by Luangthongkum (2007), then they will choose to maintain and revitalize both their language and culture rather than lose them. Thus, at strategic points in each action line, there will be surveying of the population, interviewing and focus groups, both to inform them of their rights and to verify their wishes.

2 The three southern provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani, which are predominantly Muslim.
the best Isan provinces do not score in the top 30 provinces academically. In addition, the 2003, 2007 and 2010 UNDP reports all show that Isan provinces are among the poorest in the country. In terms of political stability, the last five years have seen the arson of both schools and provincial administrative centers in Isan provinces. At issue is Isan identity and Isan prestige, and the Thai nation state faces a challenge in how to move from a deep-rooted policy of assimilation to a policy of plurality, a step first taken in words but less in action in the 1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (Council of State, 1997), that addresses not the surface issues such as road building or the installation of an electricity power grid but the heart of the matter: how the education system has been used over the last century to create a policy of unity, at all costs.

The ICMRP provides an initiative which is fully compatible with the Thai nation state under a monarchy, and in some cases is already welcomed, for example in the form of multilingual signage in the North. Also promoted are indigenous knowledge systems or ‘local wisdom’ as part of the social sciences subject, but it should be emphasized that tolerance of minor steps that cost the Thai state little are meaningless if not fully funded and supported by the community, starting at the local government level. This is not a new idea: for the past five years a pilot study guided by the Research Institute for the Languages and Cultures of Asia at Mahidol University has studied how Yawi can be integrated into the curriculum and the classroom in the Deep South, where it is already being used in the community, for example on signs. However, there is no indication of when the pilot study will be rolled out throughout the entire region, and while initial reports see the plan as successful, the project still adopts a ‘Thai first’ mentality, and tellingly, a Bangkok university is the lead researcher, thus the project is still in the world of academia. The ICMRP adopts a different approach, one based in local governance, where local municipalities plan and implement their own ethnolinguistic and cultural revival. It assumes that the majority of the local citizenry want peace, stability, and social and economic development for the wider region, development based on mother tongue education and the careful commodification of local cultural discourses along with prestige building to create a united and more economically developed society.

Crucially, due to the effect of introducing a Western-style education as part of globalization, Isan is running out of time to take this route. Those who can remember written Isan are few in number and passing away every day. Critically, the loss of this community memory will likely make a real choice almost impossible within another generation. Currently, written Isan stands at Stage 8 of Fishman’s GIDS scale, and spoken Isan at 6 or 7. If written Isan died completely, the effort needed to reestablish it as a viable option would be immense.

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<tr>
<th>Stage 8</th>
<th>Stage 7</th>
<th>Stage 6</th>
<th>Stage 5 &gt; Stage 4</th>
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<td>Language and identity socialization takes place in home and community.</td>
<td>Language socialization involves extensive L1 literacy, usually including L1 schooling.</td>
<td>L1 is used in children's formal education in conjunction with national or official language.</td>
<td>L1 is used in the workplaces of larger society, beyond the normal L1 boundaries.</td>
<td>Lower govt. services and local mass media are open to L1.</td>
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<td>The L1 (ethnic) community is recognized nationally.</td>
<td>The L1 is used at upper govt. level.</td>
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General benefits of the Programme

The benefits of the ICMRP are many. Use of the vernacular has proven results in increasing the efficacy of education systems, and for a recent UNESCO-sponsored summary of the benefits of mother-tongue-based education in the early years, readers are directed to Ball (2011). UNESCO states that "Studies have shown that, in many cases, instruction in the mother tongue is beneficial to language competencies in the first language, achievement in other subject areas, and second language learning" (2003, p. 15). Economic benefits would possibly result.

In addition to academic benefits, the psychological and sociocultural benefits of such a reform are significant. Siegel (1999, 2002) notes education in a language other than the first language causes disadvantages, including negative attitudes from teachers, negative self-image of students, inhibition of selfexpression, and difficulty in acquiring literacy. Taken in turn, in Isan, negative attitudes from teachers towards students is not a major concern, as the majority of teachers and students are Isan. However, classroom communication breakdown between Isan teachers and students can occur as they are required to communicate in a second language. Anecdotal evidence suggests teachers and students become co-conspirators in the occasional use of Isan to solve communication breakdowns resulting from the use of Thai. The result is an academic muddle.

Despite occasional exceptions, only when an Isan student goes to Bangkok is explicit prejudice from teachers encountered, in the form of jokes referring to socioeconomic, cultural, or linguistic status. Furthermore, indications of subconscious bias against the use of non-standard aspects of language use are evident in the American context (e.g., McGroarty, 1996), and it is likely that a similar subconscious bias is encountered by Isan students in Bangkok universities. In addition to rejection by teachers, there is also a risk that Isan students reject the education system in which they are studying. Mangubhai (1997) notes that minority student attitudes toward the dominant or majority educational system take the form of either a desire to integrate while preserving the L1 culture or a rejection of the L2 educational system. There is also a third phenomenon: integration into the L2 system while rejecting the L1 culture, but in Isan, this implies a rejection of the parental culture and so cognitive

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3 For further studies, Hinton (2001) refers to Bialystock's (1991) and Diaz and Klinger's (1991) findings that bilinguals possess enhanced cognitive abilities in the form of metalinguistic skills, concept formation, classification, creativity, analogical reasoning, and visual-spatial skills. Litteral (1999) provides evidence that education in the vernacular language academically benefits minorities; in one case study in Papua New Guinea, students educated in the vernacular outperformed students educated in the first language by three hundred percent in high school selection tests (Litteral, 1986, cited in Litteral 1999). Siegel (1999), reporting on previous research by the same author (1992, 1997), describes higher academic results, when compared with English-only education, for prep-school children instructed in the vernacular with English as a second language. These benefits extended to subsequent education, suggesting that Isan students taught initially in Isan would perform better in later Thai-medium education at the high school and university level.
dissonance results. Finally, one wonders how much integration is truly possible for Isan people. The average Isan person, even if fluent in written and spoken Thai, can still be differentiated by anthropological features. Thus, bias due to underlying ethnic identity issues including perceptions of poverty and lack of education are a serious issue (McCargo & Hongladorom, 2004).

Turning to self-image, identity and language are interwoven (e.g., Hornberger, 2002). While the trend is towards a more positive portrayal of Isan people, decades of linguistic indoctrination in the media and negative media have persuaded Isan students their own language is an embarrassment; by implication, they may see themselves as substandard citizens. Consequently, parents might attempt to deprive their offspring of the vernacular for fear of ghettoisation, or native speakers, particularly those with education outside the vernacular area, may reject their vernacular out of disdain (the phenomenon of *auto-odi*, e.g., Bartens, 2001). Isan as a language can also be stigmatized for its resemblance to Lao, the language of The People's Democratic Republic of Laos, a country generally viewed until recently by Thais as inferior to their own. However, there is also a developing discourse idealizing and romanticizing the Lao PDR as a pristine place of culture and charm in movies such as *Sabaidi Luang Prabang, Sabaidi 2: From Pakse with Love* and *Sabaidi 3: Wedding Day* (Deenan, 2008, 2010, 2011).

As regards the media, Thai television soap operas rarely portray Isan business people or academics; more frequently they are labourers or peasants, less generously country bumpkins or petty criminals. In addition, the Central Thai spoken by Isan people can be ridiculed when the phonetic and lexical influences of Lao show through. The psychological effects of speaking a language outlawed in the classroom, and being forced to use a second language for all educational and official purposes, effectively delegitimize a people. That rifts occur in the psychological and sociocultural fabric is not surprising. One frequently expressed sentiment in Isan stories is parents' fear of rejection and abandonment by one's "Thaiified" offspring (e.g., see the writings of Pira Sudham, for instance *Monsoon Country*, 1993). Legitimization of language, and the higher academic prowess that would result from vernacular use, would increase pride and self-worth (e.g., Burtoff, 1985, cited in Siegel, 1999).

Considering now self-expression, drawing on concepts of sociopolitical and educational rights, UNESCO began recommending use of the vernacular for basic education in 1953 (cited in Litteral 1999). It seems reasonable to expect that acceptance of one's own language as a writing form will encourage self-expression through endowing the ability to write poetry, stories, songs, diaries, essays and academic articles. Heath and McLaughlin (1993; cited in McGroarty 1996) note that public speaking and dramatic performance (e.g. the shadow plays of the Northeast, for which see Brereton & Yencheuy, 2007) in the vernacular can develop transferable personal and public skills. The resulting psychological and educational benefits have even been accepted by some opponents of vernacular education (e.g. Bull, 1955, cited in Litteral 1999).

As noted above, the difficulties in acquiring literacy in the Isan language are quite apparent. The lack of a living alphabet is one problem, resulting in a current Isan literacy rate of almost zero (although it can be approximated in Thai). Nevertheless, there are very good reasons for supposing that the legitimisation of Isan will increase literacy levels. Siegel (1999, 2002) notes UNESCO's (1953) support for vernacular as a language of literacy and academic development, drawing on research demonstrating a link between literacy and cognitive development (such as the ability to reason critically) and first language instruction. As regards literacy in Thai, while the overall country rate is around 89% (according to the *Ethnologue* Thailand entry), it is generally recognized that literacy rates outside urbanized areas in Isan are unsatisfactory. A disadvantaged educational
system is a potential cause of unsatisfactory levels. According to the Thai Ministry of Education (n.d.), poverty, geographical distance, and a lack of teachers are some of the factors limiting the education system, especially in rural areas. This should not be underestimated: in 2009 the UNDP, while emphasizing that double-digit poverty levels were now rare, still reported 5 million below the poverty line, many of whom are in the Northeast. For example, Buri Ram and Si Sa Ket Provinces reported 23.8% and 27.8% poverty respectively. To sum up, legitimising the vernacular through the introduction of a suitable orthography appears to be a valid method of increasing literacy rates. Notably, Siegel (1999, 2002) and Boggs (1985, cited in Bartens, 2001) found that the benefits of L1 primary education also extended to literacy in the L2. The implication is that Isan children who were taught initial literacy in Isan, and who then studied Thai, would outperform Isan children taught only in Thai.

Moving now to economic and cultural benefits, cost-benefit theory has been applied to language planning since at least the 1970s. It was formerly an extremely contentious and problematic area of language planning. However, Baker (2002), citing Dutcher's 1995 World Bank paper, notes that the development of the mother tongue appears to be critical for cognitive development and learning a second language, and states that "developmental maintenance bilingual education creates cost savings for the education system and for society" (p.240). This occurs through lower drop-out rates, faster academic achievement, and the acquirement of "productive characteristics" facilitated by studying in the native language.

In addition, cultural benefits, such as an Isan ethnic revival based on the production of Isan-language materials, performances, and cultural commodification, may directly benefit the Isan regional economy through the multiplier effect on increased internal consumption of cultural goods (e.g., clothing), together with the benefits of reducing urban migration, especially of young mothers, as well as internal tourism and increased numbers of foreign visitors. Ultimately, multilingual plurality as part of a multicultural approach to the nation state would likely also strengthen Thai political and economic transboundary linkages with Lao and Cambodia.

**Conceptual Framework**

**Methods of implementation**

The ICMRP has used and proposes to continue to use attitude surveying and frameworks such as Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (Allard & Landry, 1992, 1994), Hornberger's model (below) for language maintenance and revitalization has and will be used as a general guide. This framework is flexible enough to serve as a matrix for identifying and following up on action lines, through a combined process of surveying and description. This applies for the majority of the bid, including Action 3, as following a post-structuralist theory of the text, a text will be deemed to include intangible heritage and any kind of performance, whether music or puppetry, etc. As such, Action 3 is represented by 'Corpus' in the Table 2 below.

**Role and Participation of Actors and Stakeholders and Rationale**

**Action 1:** The expected results of Action 1 are that a center of excellence is created in
Dutcher's World Bank report is unambiguous, and Baker (2002) cites Dutcher's examination of Guatemala as a case study. Due to lower drop-out and repetition rates, faster achievement, and improved results (including in the L2 national language, Spanish), US$5.6 million (227 million baht) were achieved in cost savings per year, and US$33.8 million (1.4 billion baht) per year in cost benefits. This is impressive for a country one third smaller than Isan with a similar socioeconomic background. By analogy, it can therefore be hypothesized that a better-educated Isan people will be more economically successful; the correlation between high levels of education and economic prosperity is generally accepted and is prominent in UNDP reports (2003, 2007, 2009).

One could envisage a situation very similar to Chiang Mai's periodic celebrations of Lanna culture and civilization. Isan, containing Thailand's major Khmer historical sites as well as Lan Chang monuments such as That Panom, could be ideally placed to enjoy the economic benefits of such a revival.

Khon Kaen Municipality that is able to develop a curriculum and materials for teaching oral and written Isan from grades 1-12, together with an Isan dictionary and grammar. Through this center, enough teachers will be trained for all four municipalities to establish a training program accessible to other municipalities. Then over the four-year period, approximately 1,400 students will be taught both the oral and the written Isan language to various levels.

It is envisaged that this will be achieved through a series of three consultative workshops that then become a series of expert meetings by a Tai Noi commission. The workshop and subsequent commission will include curriculum experts, Tai Noi experts from both Khon Kaen University and Mahasarakham University, monks from the Khon Kaen branch of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, municipal officers, parent representatives and student representatives. The commission will be tasked with providing a curriculum, materials, a 7000-word master academic dictionary, a grammar suitable for four academic levels from beginner to high intermediate, a series of textbooks for each level, and an exercise workbook for the first level. 3,000 Thai-Tai Noi-English dictionaries will be created, and 1,000 copies of the curriculum will be published, for schools, parents and student committees. In addition, 75 multimedia exercises will be produced with the aim of integrating them into the school textbooks, 25 for each level, either available on a website or as part of an accompanying CCD, or both. Another focus will be to train 17 teachers, one from each municipal school, to be the Isan teacher. Grades 1-12 will be introduced in 2013 and in 2014 to schools in other municipalities.

Table 2: Hornberger's 1994 Language Planning Goals

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<tr>
<th>Policy Planning (on form)</th>
<th>Cultivation Planning (on function)</th>
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<td><strong>Types</strong></td>
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<td>Status Planning (about uses of language)</td>
<td>Standardization</td>
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<td>Acquisition Planning (about users of language)</td>
<td>Status</td>
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<td>Corpus Planning (about language)</td>
<td>Officialisation</td>
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<td>Prescription</td>
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<td>Group</td>
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<td>Education/School</td>
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<td>Literature</td>
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<td>Religion</td>
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As for the content of this initiative, the curriculum will promote both oral and written forms of literacy, utilizing texts ranging from textbooks to palm leaf manuscripts. As well as more modern content and childhood standards such as Aesop's fables, students will, if in agreement, be taught the Isan classics, such as the Sinsai epic poem, the epic *Pha Lak Pha Lam* (Tinh, 1972) the Isan version of the Rama epic, the tales of *Xieng Mieng* (the Thai trickster figure Si Thanonchai), *The White Nightjar*, and various Buddhist parables and fables. Thus, the content will range from a modern, practical literacy aimed at daily education as well as a certain degree of literacy in the form of traditional Isan tales and epics. Oral performances will also focus on practical oral and written Isan for communication as well as artistic performances of traditional Isan literacy, for example in dance forms in drama classes. Finally, it is possible that some of the content will be licensed from other publishers.

As part of this process, students, parents and teachers will be surveyed as regards the introduction of mother tongue education, with a positive response rate of a 67% super majority being the critical level for permission from the community for the project to continue. As part of this surveying, the respondents will be informed of their rights and of the average educational achievement of Isan schools on a national basis, as well as of other similar mother tongue initiatives in the North and in the Deep South. The respondents will also be informed of the theoretical benefits of multilingual education. There is an argument that the respondents should be informed of the arguments against multilingual education, but it is the opinion of the ICMRP that the benefits so far outweigh the negatives and that the status quo is so utterly disastrous that only the benefits will be stressed, although counter-arguments to common arguments against mother tongue first multilingualism will also be applied. This stance has been adopted by the European Commission and the European Parliament and implemented in many EU countries such as Spain (for example Catalan and Basque), the UK, and Norway (with Sami).

This action will thus develop Khon Kaen Municipality as a center for excellence for the construction of a curriculum and teaching materials such as textbooks, by its actions both achieving significant steps in status planning, (as the language and spelling etc. are standardised, and as language learning becomes part of an official school subject), in acquisition planning (as works of literature are created for acquisition by school children), and corpus planning (through the standardization of grammar, construction of a dictionary, and adoption of a standard font and orthography). The municipality was chosen for this action due to some previous experience with teaching the Isan epic Sinsai (for which see e.g., Yencheuy, 2002) at the primary level in municipality schools, as well as its proximity to KKU’s Thai Department. Lexical modernization will be achieved as a certain number of Thai words will enter the dictionary, though the project will seek to preserve original words, perhaps in the form of 'high' literature (extracted from classical Isan works, e.g., see Poonotoke, 1995) or in original folk tales and folk songs. This initiative will work closely with the ILMRP and the Thai Department at KKU, which has developed

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<th>Mass Media</th>
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<td>Work</td>
<td>Renovation</td>
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<td>Standardization</td>
<td>Purification</td>
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<td>Corpus</td>
<td>Reform</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auxiliary Code</td>
<td>Stylistic Simplification</td>
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<td>Graphisation</td>
<td>Terminology Unification</td>
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a-proficiency in Tai Noi (the proposed Isan orthography) and Isan. Whether Isan becomes a major or elective school subject is a delicate area and will be negotiated with both teachers and students. What is clear, however, is that there is a dire need to instill a respect and love for literacy and Thai literature in schoolchildren (Masavisut, 2005).

**Action 2:** The expected results of Action 2 are that a project office is created in Ban Phai Municipality for public relations tasked with the conducting of research and promotion of Isan prestige, as symbolized and popularized by an 'Isan Day'. It should be stressed that raising prestige was the first and foremost issue in their minds of the Five Partners as so many children and adults have low self prestige in their Isan identity, for reasons explained in the introduction to the description. This will be achieved by a large-scale publicity initiative, an attitude survey which will also provide information about mother tongue education and other examples of multilingual initiatives such as multilingual landscapes in Thailand. An additional result is that the population will be better informed of their rights to celebrate local culture, and it is anticipated based on previous research that Isan Day will achieve a high approval rating. A total of 4,000 informational attitudinal surveys will be administered, one thousand in each municipality.

In order to go ahead, the ICMRP has set itself the target of a simple (unqualified) two-thirds super majority for all four municipalities before going ahead with the celebration of Isan Day. Critically, the project will also be consulting internally with its own municipal officers as well as with parent-teacher associations, schoolteachers, and students, and it is possible that focus groups may supplement surveying or that a percentage of survey forms may be set aside for students. If the campaign is successful and the super majority achieved, Isan Day will be initiated in Ban Phai in Year 3. By Year 4 it will be initiated in the other three municipalities, following a publicity campaign in each one and assuming super majorities in the attitudinal surveys).

Moreover, there will be an economic effect as the local economy of village-produced textiles created through schemes such as *One Tambon One Product*

\[9\] For which see Draper, J. (Forthcoming).

(OTOP), will be significantly increased and that local jobs will be created in areas such as Chonnabot, the silk-making heartland of Isan, and elsewhere. There exists the possibility for this initiative to overlap with OTOP initiatives, thus bringing wider visibility for the EU. However, the project will be careful to source from manufactories that employ the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), such as Cleaner Production (CP) or Cleaner Technology (CT), both derived from the Pollution Prevention (PP) initiative. The aim is to promote cultural maintenance and kick-start the local economy and produce a large, sustainable internal market.

One way this will be accomplished is that an order for 4,000 garments, including traditional Isan skirts and shirts, will be placed with various village-based garment manufactories in order to provide Isan Day uniforms for municipal workers and school teachers, as well as uniforms (subsidised in the case of poverty) for grades 9-12 students in local schools. This will help the older members of society, the traditional weavers and garment manufacturers, and provide employment for younger, less educated and typically female members of society who otherwise may be attracted to seasonal urban migration, thus weakening the sustainability of the traditional rural economy as a safety net, as discussed in the introduction to the description. In many cases, no villages are training their youth in weaving, although sometimes older seasonal migrants returning to the villages because they are too
old to work in the factories or other urban industries and take up weaving. The broad situation is similar to the
one in Table 1: there is a risk that without the kind of intervention proposed by this action the intergenerational
bridge of indigenous knowledge regarding silk weaving will be lost.

This action will thus seek to obtain the consent of a large internal market (public offices, schools, colleges
and universities) to adopt the concept of an Isan Day, which will play a significant role in the officialization of
Isan language and culture by encouraging people to speak Isan in the workplace, on official occasions and at
festivals in an official 'Isan Day' (and so serve as acquisition planning in both the work and education domains).
Ban Phai Municipality has been chosen for this initiative because it is the municipality nearest to Chonnabot, the
center of Isan silk manufacture. Action 2 will seek to work with the One Tambon One Village initiative in the
area to provide locally manufactured traditional outfits for an Isan internal market to purchase as a sign of
solidarity, further improving the status of Isan.

Action 3: This action sees the creation of a Phon Municipality center of excellence for intangible heritage in the
form of cultural performances. One direct result will be an online multimedia database of 100 performances by
Isan singers, musicians and other performers, transcribed into Isan and Thai, and linked to the Northern Illinois
University SEASite, the website of one of the most authoritative sites for Lao and Thai studies in the world.
Collecting the data will be achieved over a year as 18 fieldworkers each locate, record and secure copyright to an
average of six traditional Isan performances, such as dances, songs, and puppetry, each.

Seventy-five of the best performances in the online multimedia database will be transcribed into Isan
before being translated into Thai and English; the remainder will remain online, accompanied by multilingual
summaries. These will then be sorted by academic level (e.g. Grades 1-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12) and turned into
academic exercises in the form of listening comprehension texts for Action 1. This will help remind students that
theirs is a living, vibrant culture. In addition, the database will be backed up both in Phon and at the ICMRP office
at COLA. The ICMRP has a relationship with Northern Illinois University, and it is hoped that a mirror of the
website will be maintained at NIU.

Furthermore, a tradition of monthly or quarterly school-based Isan minifestivals will initiated, perhaps
in schools in the four municipalities. The importance of holding these festivals in schools has been highlighted in
the introduction above. Essentially, the experience of seeing and hearing performers using Isan will remind
schoolchildren that Isan is an acceptable language in the school system. While these will be monthly mini-festivals
in Phon at first, it will subsequently be four times per year in all four municipalities. This could occur more
frequently, but it would require schools absorbing the costs into their internal budgets, which is not certain, or
further external sources of funding or sponsorship. A further role of the online database is that it will act as a
directory of performers that people can use to hire performers, thus making available to the public both the contact
details and a sample of performances. Finally, if direct funding or sponsorship is secured, Phon will plan for and
advertise an international festival of Isan performing arts to be held in Khon Kaen Province, which will hopefully
become an annual Isan festival if it can be made cost-neutral to the Partners.

To sum up, this action will aid with officialization of Isan traditional performances by massively
increasing the available corpus. Traditional performances from across Isan will be videotaped, described and
transcribed in multimedia form, which will aid in terms of creating an online multimedia database which can be

\footnote{For example the Bun Prawes festival, for which see KKU (1991) and Lefferts (2006/2007); also see the
National Library (1988), for the Isan version of the \textit{Vintara Jataka}.)}
sourced by mass media for the purpose of news stories or by Action 1 to serve as educational materials. Given the fact that there are approximately 14 dialects of Isan, the corpus will help with preserving stylistic variety even while the necessary standardization occurs. Phon has been chosen for this action as it will require complex interactions with COLA, and COLA has extensive relations with the mayor of Phon Municipality. It is anticipated that this will lead to live presentations at schools and monthly festivals in the municipalities, with an annual international festival if successful.

**Action 4:** Action 4, based in Chum Phae Municipality and selected for this action by default, will further develop the work of the ILMRP by surveying an urban population regarding multilingual signage. It is assumed that the results will lead to the design and installation of multilingual signage in Chum Phae Municipality, a major step forward in officialization. Feedback from the installation of the signs will be compiled, and multilingual signage will be rolled out in the other municipalities. Turning to English, the aim is to reshape the linguistic landscape so that English is seen as a potential language of the community; that is, to encourage a transition in the status of English from a foreign language to a second (or third) language. In this action, a project office will be created in Chum Phae to coordinate surveys about and implementation of multilingual signs. Subsequently, multilingual signs will be erected on street signs, schools, and official buildings in downtown Chum Phae. Following further surveying of opinion, multilingual signage will then be rolled out to street signs, schools, and official buildings in the other three municipalities.

The main initiatives of Action 4 thus include providing information about the project and its aims in terms of publicity, surveying whether or not people would welcome multilingual signage, producing and installing multilingual signage for road signs, direction signs and public buildings, conducting a follow-up survey and then basically repeating the process in the other three municipalities, which will result in the administering of 5,200 surveys. As with previous actions, students, parents and teachers, as well as the general citizenry, will be surveyed as regards the introduction of mother tongue education, with a positive response rate of a 67% super majority being the critical level for permission from the community for the project to continue. It should be noted that previous research by the ILMRP has found approval ratings for multilingual signage of approximately 85% in three research studies in both a semi-rural agricultural setting and in an urban educational setting.

In this initiative, the Chum Phae office will be greatly aided by preceding academic work undertaken on the 'linguistic landscape' (for which see Gorter, 2006) at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences by the Isan Languages Maintenance and Revitalization Programme (Draper, 2010; Draper & Nilaiyaka, manuscript), including knowledge of limitations on design features in order to give prominence to Thai as the national language and how to create aesthetic multilingual Thai-IsanEnglish signage.

**Action 5:** COLA will serve as the hub for the project and house the official ICMRP office (5.1.1), which in essence will involve the transfer of the Isan Languages Maintenance and Revitalization Programme (ILMRP), currently based in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and affiliated with the Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region, to COLA (5.1.2). This will also involve the transfer of the project library, one of the best private specialist libraries on sociolinguistics and multilingualism in Thailand. This library will also archive print copies of bimonthly reports, annual reports and research papers etc. This move will also bring with it a network involving Tai Noi specialists in the Lao and Isan studies sections of the Thai Department of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Khon Kaen University (KKU).
The ICMRP office will develop an official programme website, which will publish bi-monthly progress reports in Thai, English and Isan, which will include brief reports of completed and forthcoming events, as well as research results, together with additional publications about the programme such as annual reports. Thus, the status of the projects will be made public and will be transparent. The ICMRP project officer and project assistant will attend all important meetings of the four partners, meeting each partner at least once a month, and ensure all partners will be on schedule. The ICMRP, in cooperation with the EU, will ensure progress is accurately and effectively publicized by all partners in a way that gives credit for the EU funding. In order to do this, the ICMRP will request oversight of both internal and external communications by the other partners. As well as ensuring prominence for the EU, this function will aid in creating more beneficial communications in terms of editing, formatting and content.

With its inherited experience of attitudinal surveying as well as its experience in curriculum design and creating multilingual signage, such as that of the Faculty of Humanities and Social sciences at KKU, the ICMRP office will effect practical and useful knowledge transfer on these and other issues during its monthly meetings with the other partners. Provision of additional information will include information about other similar mother tongue projects in the country and overseas, using EU and Southeast Asian countries as examples. In addition, information about national and international policy documents will be précised and made available at these monthly meetings, as and when appropriate. In essence, COLA through the ICMRP office will continuously confirm with all project partners a detailed research agenda, methodology and implementation pathway. The ICMRP office will also build on the publications progress made by the ILMRP, a programme with seven years' experience of conducting research on multilingualism in Isan. As such, research papers will be delivered at national conferences and through publication introduced to the international community. The ICMRP office will also seek alternative options for funding such as sponsorship during the four years in order to expand on actions, and especially in Year 3 in order to seek sufficient funding to make the programme sustainable.

To sum up, this action will coordinate the timetable and budgeting for all four prior actions and act as a hub for internal and external communication, ensuring that all Five Partners are on message. For example, ICMRP COLA will create bimonthly reports in both English and Thai for the project partners and for the EU. It will also serve as the home to the ICRP office and library / archive. It will also be responsible for calling in Internal Audit.

Team: The Dean of COLA serves as the Project Leader. The project officer will be inherited from the ILMRP. There is also a project assistant and a project accountant.

Main means proposed for implementation of action: Assisting with surveying stakeholders, maintaining project library, monitoring project milestones, conducting research, archiving communications, coordinating internal and external communications, purchasing of laptop and desktop pcs.

How the situation of the municipalities' target groups will be improved

The Programme's main final beneficiaries are the ethnically Lao Isan people. As noted in the introduction, the current situation regarding education, prestige and poverty are disastrous. Multilingual and multicultural revival could benefit the wider Isan community if taken up in other local government schools, communities and provinces. Focusing on the specifics of the bid, the objectives aim to ameliorate mother-tongue education, prestige, language use and the financial status of a section of the Isan people in the capital of Isan. The successful attainment of these
goals is newsworthy, and the ICMRP see external publicity directed at the wider Isan community through several actions.

Firstly, a teacher-training center for the Isan language will be established in Khon Kaen Province and will seek to be expanded to serve the broader Isan community with the official support of the Ministry of Education, which will serve as an additional source of publicity. Secondly, it is anticipated that the initiation of Isan Day in Ban Phai Municipality and subsequently in the other three municipalities, which includes changes to local school uniforms, will be newsworthy stories sufficient to attract regional and national interest. Thirdly, the initiation of monthly school festivals in Phon Municipality will likewise attract regional and international interest, as will the installation of multilingual signage in Chum Phae Municipality and in the other three municipalities. In fact, all these local government centers have their own publicity mechanisms and some of them will be evident to outsiders merely by driving through the city.

In addition, the ICMRP will be producing bimonthly multilingual reports on its website and promoting the project at academic conferences. It is estimated that within two years, substantial interest among neighboring provinces will be evident. Then, by the end of the four-year project, officials, educators, local municipalities and members of the public throughout Isan will be aware of the transformative changes in Khon Kaen. In practice, the ICMRP focuses on the 1.7 million people of Khon Kaen Province, broken down into students, traditional village based clothing manufacturers, traditional performers of Isan ethno-musical cultural heritage, the general population, and local government technical and management capacities, each of which is analysed below.

Students

Part of the fundamental overall objective of the project is improved education, for the reasons discussed previously. The first specific objective of is that improved quality of mother tongue education for Isan students is achieved in local government schools in the four municipalities. The ICMRP especially recognizes that the attitudes of the students and teachers of the languages is crucial and worthy of academic study in any attempt to revitalize a culture or language (Huguet, 2006). This is because research shows (in this case in Catalonia with the example of Catalan), the students of the languages constitute the most dynamic sector of the population and the future of those languages, while the influence of teachers on those students can be profound due to psychological effects (Huguet & Lasagabaster, 2006). Teachers are therefore powerful mediators of the linguistic environment for students. Hence, studying the attitudes of students and teachers to the introduction of mother tongue education, multilingual Thai-Isan-English signage, the revitalization of cultural performances, the promotion of Isan prestige and the revitalization of traditional Isan dress in Khon Kaen Province is fundamental in order to discover how and whether official multilingualism and multiculturalism can develop in the Thai local government context. Thus, student opinion will be sought both to fill a gap in the academic literature but also as an active part of planning for and effecting official multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Huguet and Lasagabaster note that, in its Action Plan Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity (European Commission, 2003), the European Commission sees the role of teachers as exponents of the principles of "openness to others, tolerance of differences and willingness to communicate" (2003, p. 10). - 752
This is evident in Action 1, which aims for 85% of KK municipality students (and subsequently students in other municipalities) to pass a test of Isan literacy comparable with the corresponding Thai test, verified by Ministry of Education auditing. This is direct introduction of mother tongue education and exceeds anything attempted in the Deep South, which is still an academic pilot project. During the introduction, student representatives will have a place in the workshops and commission that will develop the curriculum and will be able to input student opinion through their own social networks; they will aid in contributing to the dictionary and grammar and also be part of designing the pre- and post-survey to measure their attitudes to the introduction of mother tongue education.

At the same time, students in higher grades will be shown how a local market for Isan cultural goods could improve the lot of rural local manufacturers of garments and offered the chance to participate in the development of an 'Isan Day' concept and associated prestige-raising initiatives and permitted to wear traditional Isan clothing to school as part of Isan Day (providing over 67% of students agree). This Isan Day concept will be married to the introduction of monthly cultural performances at their schools designed to show them living cultural discourses in action, covering Isan history, the Isan way of life, and Isan hopes and aspirations, i.e., the typical subject matter of Isan song and art forms. This will be supplemented in the classroom by access to multimedia exercises of graded listening exercises for each level of student that will contextualise and explain performances in more detail. The resulting effect will be to improve Isan students' prestige, with all the concomitant benefits explained above.

**Traditional village-based clothing manufacturers**

This target group forms nearly the entire focus of Action 2, and provided municipal officials, teachers, parents and students agree, they are the direct beneficiaries of an order for 4,000 traditional Isan cotton or silk garments, which will be provided for municipal officials and teachers for free (a normal practice when supplying a uniform to staff) and offered to students at subsidised rates where necessary. Oversight will ensure that their order is sourced from local cooperative manufactories such as the ones in Chonnabot, or other OTOP certified cooperatives throughout Khon Kaen and neighbouring provinces. Action 2 also provides for publicity for both Isan Day and the re-invention of traditional clothing. It is envisaged that, in sustaining the action beyond Year 4, uniforms will be provided for lower grade students right down to Grades 1-3 (currently beyond the capacity of the manufactories), and it is also envisaged that this initiative will extend to other schools in Khon Kaen Province, other schools in the region, and Khon Kaen University students. The end result, if successful, is the creation of a large internal market for Isan clothing of the kind enjoyed by the North. It is also anticipated that this market will be attractive to tourists, but the ICMRP will limit itself to putting a value on the Year 4 market and leave financial projections to others. A benefit of this action mentioned in the introduction is that more people, traditionally women with a low level of education, will be employed in village based-garment manufacture. Such women often otherwise go to urban areas to work as nannies and maids, often leaving their babies behind with their own parents and experiencing forms of cognitive dissonance as they live in heavily commoditised areas very different to their origins, or they enter the sex trade in places like Pattaya, in many cases with resulting socio-psychological damage and exposure to STDs such as AIDS.
Traditional performers of Isan ethno-musical cultural heritage

Traditional performers are the direct beneficiaries of Action 3 of the ICMRP. They used to be the lifeblood of the Isan people in that they regularly performed at the 12 annual festivals of the Isan cultural year, putting on performances about history, everyday events, romances, and political changes, in a range of discourses from the comedic to the tragic, in song forms, musical performances and puppetry. While greatly diminished in the frequency of their performances and in many cases superceded by the racy 'Moh Lam Sing', which is influenced by global trends in music, such performers still exist. The action seeks to bring them into the heart of the urban landscape, first by recording them in situ in a traditional setting and then by having them perform at local government schools, firstly on a monthly basis in Muang Phon, and to a lesser extent in other municipalities, although if sponsorship can be secured this monthly basis will be continued into other municipalities. It is envisaged that the performances will reflect the Isan language and culture that the students are studying in that month. In addition, a database of their performers will be maintained on the project website with contact details for the performers as well as an example of their trade, which may help with publicity for the performers. Finally, as part of the sustainability, it is envisaged that local government schools will build these performances into their normal budgets and that a sponsored an annual cultural festival will be initiated that will attract internal and foreign tourists.

The general population

The urban populations of all four municipalities will be exposed to a degree of publicity, including local radio, local and national TV, loudspeaker trucks, billboards, posters, brochures, and leaflets about the benefits of mother tongue education, together with the benefits of preserving cultural discourses such as clothing and artistic performances. In addition, Action 4 will ensure a permanent reminder of an official local government desire for multilingualism and multiculturalism in the form of temporary and permanent signage employing the Isan language via the use of Tai Noi. In many cases, the urban population will be directly surveyed and asked to comment on these developments sometimes before and sometimes after the event. In effect, it is hoped that all these events will raise questions in people's minds about the future of their communities, and if the programme is successful in securing additional sponsorship or in energizing other schools and municipalities both in Khon Kaen and in other Isan provinces, similar such questions will be raised in other provinces. These questions feed back to the main objectives of the action regarding education and prestige, and the bid actions, if successful, will demonstrate that an alternative imagined future where Isan people are responsible for their own education and enjoy commercial activities that celebrate their own culture is possible.

Local government technical and management capacities

Responsibility for semi-autonomous local education is a relatively new concept for local government, and the ICMRP project office (Action 5, situated at COLA) works closely with Action 1 (Khon Kaen Municipality) in designing a curriculum through knowledge transfer and with the Faculties of Education and Humanities and Social Sciences at Khon Kaen University. Also, the ICMRP project office will transfer knowledge as regards all the local surveying and polling in terms of ethical research, invitational letters, the design of the surveys, the administration of surveys, data entry and data analysis, to all who ask for it. This will significantly enhance the future research ability of the municipalities. In addition, the project office will communicate information
regarding international and local rights in the area of language, culture, and education, within the framework of a Thai nation state under a monarchy. It will undertake these responsibilities in regular monthly meeting with the project offices for Actions 1-4 as well as on specific occasions, such as the workshops envisaged. The ICMRP project office will also work with every other project offices in the local municipalities to create texts for internal and external audiences which are simple and clear enough to explain what can sometimes be complex issues regarding rights or policy.

Discussion and Conclusion
To sum up, the overall objective of the action is to contribute to the improved education, self-confidence, and prestige of Isan people. Also, the specific objectives are to improve the quality of mother tongue education for Isan students in schools in the four municipalities and to enhance Isan prestige, language use and financial status. The municipalities concerned are the four largest municipalities in Khon Kaen, and they are complemented by the partnership of one of the largest institutions in Thailand for training officials in local administration, the College of Local Administration (COLA) at Khon Kaen University. Actions have been divided between the Five Partners but based on constant intercommunication and frequent interlinkages, with a dedicated project office at COLA acting as a hub for communications, as a facilitator of actions and research, and as a center for coordinating publicity. Contact has also been made with the Ministry of Culture, whose Department of Culture Promotion is currently working with the ICMRP, and close cooperation with the Ministry of Education is anticipated at the end of Year 1 and beginning of Year 2. Typically, by Year 3 each municipality will have shared its blueprint for success with the other three municipalities so that after four years, there will be a thoroughly tested set of blueprints for Isan culture maintenance and revival that can be passed on to the Provincial Administration Authority, other municipalities, other provinces, and even local governments in other countries in similar positions.

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