

Introducing Multilingual Thai-Isan-English Signage in a Thai University

John Draper, Khon Kaen University

Abstract

This article documents the introduction of multilingual signage in the regional university for Northeast Thailand (Isan), Khon Kaen University. Northeast Thailand is home to Thailand's largest minority, the Isan (Lao), who no longer have a written form of their language in the area. The introduction of Thai-English-Isan signage in an official Thai government institution is therefore important for the semiotic implications. The article begins with a short note on the importance of a sign and then reviews background information on the region, the language, and the University, together with the program responsible for maintaining and revitalizing the language. The importance of the mother tongue in education is then discussed. The article then reviews how the program can be situated within linguistic landscape theory before presenting an account of the design and installation of the signage, which comprised three multilingual Thai-Isan-English signs and employed an archaic Lao (and Isan) orthography, *Tai Noi*. Student attitude was assessed using an attitude survey through convenience sampling of students. Student attitude towards the tripartite nature of the signs and national identity was investigated using linguistic landscape theory, and a figure for the overall level of student support for the multilingual signage was obtained.

Keywords: mother tongue education, multilingualism, language attitudes, Northeast Thailand, Isan, language minorities, linguistic landscape

Background

The Significance of a Sign

This paragraph seeks to explain the significance of the signage in the study reported herein and is based on Chandler,¹ who provides an excellent entry into the world of semiotics. Briefly, the signs described in this article are the first Thai-Isan-English signs ever to be installed in an official Thai government institution, i.e., the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Khon Kaen University. In fact, they may be the first Thai-Isan-English signs ever to be created. At a very simple level, a sign signifies something. For example, a picture of a red Ferrari *denotes* (or shows) a red Ferrari. However, the *connotations* (or implications) of a picture (or video – the modality in this case not mattering much) of a red Ferrari are many: speed, luxury, wealth, a playboy type, a show off, etc. In the case of the signs reported in this article, in many cases the audience did not understand either the denotations or connotations of the Isan (using

¹ Daniel Chandler. *Semiotics: The basics*. (Florence, Kentucky: Routledge, 2001).

the *Tai Noi* orthography) in the signs. Many students did not understand what the script was and how to read it, or why it was there. The majority of young Isan people do not know they had a literacy before the Thai hegemony expanded to include the whole of the Khorat Plateau.² However, it could be interpreted that the multilingual signs had connotations of an 'imagined reality' or 'proposed world' in which Isan had a formal place in the education system and in the administration of public institutions. And, in fact, this is what has begun to happen. Perhaps because of the very high approval ratings for the multilingual signage, in mid 2011 the Khon Kaen University Office of Culture also introduced multilingual signs around its offices using *Tai Noi*. In March 2012, a major 540,000 Euro, four-year program of research-based pilot studies – 90% funded by the European Union and housed at the College of Local Administration at KKU – began with three of its four aims being the introduction of oral and written Isan (using *Tai Noi*) in Khon Kaen primary schools (aided by the Faculties of Education and of Humanities and Social Sciences at KKU), the creation of multimedia Isan-language listening materials (using *Tai Noi* for transcription), and the development of more multilingual signs throughout selected municipalities in Khon Kaen Province. After all, the connotations concomitant with the development of such signage imply readers, writers – and potentially the revitalization of an entire ethnolinguistic culture in a plurality-based education system which could see both the studying of historical manuscripts and the writing of new Isan epic poetry and literature. Right now, there are plans to adapt the main KKU North and South Gates' signs by adding Isan. Such signage could imply Isan becoming a mandatory university subject. The article therefore documents the very beginnings of what currently appears to be the nexus of a successful linguistic and cultural revival of Isan in Khon Kaen, one that could spread throughout relevant provinces in Northeast Thailand. The author believes it is therefore worth documenting.

A Brief Socio-Political History of Northeast Thailand

Isan, meaning 'Northeast', is the Thai (Sanskrit-derived) word for Northeast Thailand, the 20 provinces on the Khorat Plateau, a highly contested area which was for several centuries fought over by Myanmar, Khmer, Thai and Laotian kingdoms.³ Throughout the historical period, Isan for the most part formed part of a Lao Northeastern polity separate from Central Thai kingdoms such as Sukothai and Ayudhaya. Both the present Lao People's Democratic Republic and Isan once formed part of Lan Xang, a massive Tai/Dai polity created as a Khmer vassal state in the 14th century which achieved independence and temporarily incorporated the Tai/Dai kingdom of Lanna (Northern Thailand) in the 16th century.⁴ However, by the 18th century, after periods of subservience to Myanmar, the Lan Xang hegemony had splintered into the three kingdoms of Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Champasak. After an abortive raid on Bangkok by King (or Prince, depending on the perspective)

² John Draper. "Inferring ethnolinguistic vitality in a community of Northeast Thailand". *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development* 31, no. 2 (2010): 135-147.

³ Peter Rogers. *Northeast Thailand from prehistoric to modern times* (Bangkok: Suk Soongswang, 1996).

⁴ Nicholas Tarling, ed. *The Cambridge history of Southeast Asia* (Vol. 1, Part 2). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Anouvong in 1826-27, the sack of Vientiane in 1828-29 saw the beginning of the end of the independence of these three Laotian kingdoms. By the end of the 19th century, all three were vassal states of Siam, though not directly administered outer provinces.⁵ Isan formed part of the kingdoms of Vientiane and Champasak until all territory west of the Mekhong was finally ceded to Siam in Franco-Siamese treaties in 1893 and 1907.⁶

Siamese influence in the Northeast since the early Ayudhaya period is testified to by the presence of certain Central Thai-style Buddha images, but Lao influence due to ethnic Lao population influx since the 14th century seems to have been greater.⁷ Central Thai bureaucratic influence did not extend beyond Khorat until the end of the eighteenth century, and then only in the form of tribute or protection to local rulers, who were allowed to use Thai gubernatorial titles.⁸ This situation continued until the annexation of the Northeast by Siam. The extension of Siamese influence encountered opposition within the Northeast. This includes two 17th century Khorat rebellions;⁹ apparent Isan acquiescence in the 1826 Lao uprising by King Anouvong of Vientiane;¹⁰ the Holy Man's Rebellion of 1902;¹¹ rebellions in 1924, 1936 and 1939;¹² and armed Communist Party of Thailand insurrection in the pre-World War II period.¹³

While the present political geography of Isan was achieved only after the Second World War, the Thai Rama dynasty was successful in establishing a kingdom resembling a nation state that included the Northeast in theory by the end of King Rama V.^{14,15} Then in the 20th century a combination of the education system and the bureaucracy were deployed in order to educate the regions in Thai political thinking oriented around the Monarchy, the Nation and Religion.^{16,17} This was generally successful in minimizing internal unrest in the areas in the Northeast bordering Lao, some of which became heavily involved in the ongoing communist rebellion in the 1960s, later incorporating student armed insurrection against the Central Thai government in the 1970s and 1980s.^{18,19} At the same time, Thailand began opening up to and interfacing with the world at large, partly due to the Vietnam War,²⁰ which brought with it a substantial US

⁵ Rogers, *Northeast Thailand*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 205-6.

⁷ Vallibhotama 1990, cited in Rogers, 162.

⁸ Rogers, 190-1.

⁹ Rogers, 176-7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 194-6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 196-8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 211.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 212-3.

¹⁴ David K. Wyatt, ed. *Studies in Thai history*. (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1994).

¹⁵ Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit. *A history of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Charles F. Keyes, "The proposed world of the school: Thai villagers' entry into a bureaucratic state system," in *Reshaping local worlds: Formal education and cultural change in rural Southeast Asia*, ed. Charles F. Keyes (Newhaven, CT: Yale University, 1991): 89-130.

¹⁷ Chayan Vaddhanaputi, "Social and ideological reproduction in rural Northern Thai schools," in *Reshaping local worlds: Formal education and cultural change in rural Southeast Asia*, ed. Charles F. Keyes, (Newhaven, CT: Yale University, 1991): 153-173.

¹⁸ Rogers, 215-20.

¹⁹ Tarling, *The Cambridge history of Southeast Asia*.

²⁰ Niels Mulder. *Inside Thai society* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2000).

military presence in the Northeast.²¹ The communist rebellion in the area reached its apex in the 1970s and had petered out by 1990.²² Nevertheless, in the late 20th century, Isan NGO opposition to perceived Central Thai corruption and abuse of human rights continued,²³ and from 1995, members of the Assembly of the Poor, an influential NGO originating in Isan, can be seen as having continued the conflict with central government bodies over local issues such as land, forests and rivers.^{24,25}

The last 15 years of Thai history have again brought tumultuous change, again centering on or directly involving Isan. The rise²⁶ and fall of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his *Thai Rak Thai* party and its successors²⁷ have been tied to populist policies successful in uniting the rural (and north/northeastern) regional polities behind a charismatic and shrewd modern businessman,²⁸ the apogee of Thailand's opening up to a full market economy. The 2008-2010 crisis is well documented and saw multiple governments fall while a 'red-shirt' movement based in the Northeast and the North established itself as a political movement loyal to former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and a minority of the movement have apparently been prepared to both live and die by the sword, setting fire to buildings in Bangkok and provincial buildings in the Northeast (e.g., Khon Kaen Provincial Hall on May 19th) and incurring 85 dead and hundreds injured in the May 2010 street protests.²⁹ New elections in 2011 brought Thaksin Shinawatra's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, to power along with *Thai Rak Thai's* replacement, *Peua Thai*, on a similar raft of populist policies to her brother's. The United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship or 'red shirt' movement that enabled this assumption of power is broadening to encompass whole political districts in what seems to be an attempt to create a long-term powerbase,^{30,31} though its ideological foundations, beyond poverty reduction and reduced taxation for middle income earners, are unclear. However, some of its leaders, such as Thida Thavornseth, are both former fighters for democracy and Communist Party of Thailand members, thus raising the specter of transboundary 'interactions' with neighboring communist countries – a specter not diminished by former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra holding a

²¹ Rogers, 216.

²² Baker and Phongpaichit, 197.

²³ Peter Vandergeest, "Constructing Thailand: Regulation, everyday resistance, and citizenship," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 1 (1993): 133-158.

²⁴ Chris Baker, "Thailand's Assembly of the Poor: Background, drama, reaction". *South East Asia Research* 8, no. 1 (2000): 5-29.

²⁵ Bruce D. Missingham. *The Assembly of the Poor in Thailand: From local struggles to national protest movement* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2003).

²⁶ Baker and Phongpaichit, 258-260.

²⁷ James Ockey, "Thailand's 'professional soldiers' and coup making: The coup of 2006," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 19, no.1 (2007): 95-127.

²⁸ James Ockey, "Introduction: Alternative explanations for the 2006 coup," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 19, no.1 (2007): 5-19.

²⁹ King-Oua Laohong, Pradit Ruangdit, and Subin Kheunkaew, "Full investigation promised into riots," May 22 2010. *Bangkok Post*, p.1.

³⁰ *Isaan Record*, "In Udon, red villages grow into red districts," 19 November 2011. <<http://isaanrecord.com/2011/11/19/in-udon-red-villages-grow-into-red-districts/>> (18 June 2012).

³¹ *Isaan Record*, "One thousand red villages open in Isaan," 21 February 2011. <<http://isaanrecord.com/2012/02/21/one-thousand-red-villages-open-in-isaan/>> (18 June 2012).

meeting with Peua Thai MPs on April 11, 2012 in the Lao PDR,³² thus perilously coming close to closing the circle in Enfield's position³³ that linguistic differences between Lao, Thai and Isan identities are mostly subjective conceived differences, with Isan varying at times along an imagined line of continuity between Thai and Lao which at time appears to cause genuine cognitive dissonance, especially in Isan youth.³⁴

The Isan Language

Isan is the largest minority dialect or language in Thailand, with a population of around fifteen to twenty million ethnically Lao speakers.³⁵ It is described in more detail in Li³⁶, and Brown³⁷ describes three major dialects of Lao in Isan, Luang Phrabang, Vientiane and Sakon Nakhon. Jantao,³⁸ Akharawatthanakun³⁹ and Sansamak⁴⁰ have found clear language shift in the direction of Thai. Dictionaries for Isan, mainly by amateurs, also exist (for example by Phinthong⁴¹ 1989; Khon Kaen University and Sahawittayalai Isan⁴² 1989, and Mollerup⁴³). In terms of sociolinguistic attitudinal differences, matched guise tests by Chanyam⁴⁴ and Palikupt⁴⁵ found the Isan guise scored lowest in terms of factors such as beautiful and educated (where Standard Thai scored highest or second highest after Northern Thai) and highest in typically rural aspects such as hard-working and naïve.⁴⁶ In addition, Draper⁴⁷ found that a sample of Isan people saw themselves portrayed in the media as hard-working innocent comedians.

Isan has been written in a number of ways, often, but not always, decided by the subject matter. A good basic reference on the origins of Isan literature is Dhawat

³² Amy Sawitta Lefevre, "Exiled Thaksin inches closer to return to Thailand," 11 April 2012. *Reuters*. <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFBRE83A0XR20120411?sp=true>, (18 June 2012).

³³ Nick J. Enfield, "How to define 'Lao', 'Thai' and 'Isan' language. A view from linguistic science," *Tai Culture* 7 no.1 (2002): 62-67.

³⁴ Duncan McCargo and Krisadawan Hongladarom, "Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of politics and identity in Northeast Thailand," *Asian Ethnicity*, 5 no. 2 (2004): 219-234.

³⁵ Martin P. Lewis, ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*. 16th ed. (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2009).

³⁶ Fang-kuei Li, *A handbook of comparative Thai* (Hawaii: University Press of Hawaii, 1977).

³⁷ James Marvin Brown, *From ancient Thai to modern dialects* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1985), especially 90-1.

³⁸ Rattana Jantao, "Code-mixing between Central Thai and Northeastern Thai of the students in Khon Kaen province" Master's thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Mahidol University, Bangkok, 2002).

³⁹ Phinnarat Akharawatthanaku, "Tonal variations and changes in a language mixture area: A case study of Northeastern Thailand (Isan)," In Thai. *Manusya* 5, no. 2 (2002): 30-51.

⁴⁰ Natthaya Sansamak, "A sociolinguistic study of address system in the Northeastern Thai dialect system in Muang District, Ubonratchathani Province" (Master's thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Mahidol University, Bangkok, 2002).

⁴¹ Preecha Phinthong, *Isan-Thai-English Dictionary* (Ubol Ratchathani, Thailand: Siritham Press, 1989).

⁴² Khon Kaen University and Sahawittayalai Isan, *The Isan - Central Thai dictionary*. (Khon Kaen, Thailand: Siripan Offset, 1989).

⁴³ Asger Mollerup, *Thai - Isan - Lao phrasebook* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2001).

⁴⁴ Niramol Chanyam, "A study of language attitude toward Thai dialects and their speakers: A case study of four campuses of Rajamangala Institute of Technology" (Master's thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Mahidol University, 2002).

⁴⁵ Deeyoo Palikupt. 1983. "Central Thai and Northeastern Thai: A linguistic and attitudinal study" (Ph.D.-diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1983).

⁴⁶ Draper, 135-6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

Poonotoke.⁴⁸ Regarding the orthography, five main scripts that emerged from the migrations of the Southwestern branch of the *Tai-Kadai* ethnolinguistic group into the area of the present Lao PDR, the Khorat Plateau and Thailand in general were known as (a) *Vattellutu* (an ancient South Indian script from which aspects of *Mon* and *Khom* were derived); (b) *Tai Tham* (or Dharma script, a simplified script derived from ancient *Mon* for Buddhist religious material originally in *Pali*, perhaps using *Vattellutu*), with two main branches developing into the *Yuan*, or *Tua Muang* of Lanna, and the *Tham* of Isan;⁴⁹ (c) *Tai Yai*, representing the *Shan* language subgroup in Myanmar; (d) *Khom* – old Cambodian – which served a role in incantations, rituals and magic after the fall of the Khmer Empire and continues to do so in the modern era; and (e) *Tai Noi*, which appears to be a Sukhotai-period script “adapted from the fonts of King Ramkhamhaeng”⁵⁰ together with an influence from the *Fuk Kham* orthography of Lanna, itself possibly introduced to Lanna by a religious mission from Sukothai.⁵¹ All five scripts have been found on stone inscriptions as well as on palm leaf manuscripts.

Ronnakiat⁵² states with some confidence that *Tai Noi* derives from the time of the Sukhothai period King Lithai (r. 1347-1368) and notes that the earliest *Tai Noi* engraving was found on an inscription dated 1510. A paleography of *Tai Noi* and its spread from the Sukhothai sphere of influence to the Lan Xang hegemony, including the Khorat Plateau, was conducted by Poonotoke.⁵³ Apparently, *Tai Noi* was popular throughout the Sukhothai area of influence, throughout the area of the Lan Xang empire and its successors and in the more northern provinces of the Khorat Plateau right into the 1900s. It was mainly used for more secular purposes than *Tai Tham* such as stone carvings and for the writing of epic poetry such as *Pa Daeng*, *Nang Ai* and *Phayakhankhak*, as well as folk tales such as those of the trickster figure *Xieng Mieng* and Southeast Asian versions of Aesop’s *Fables*, although many of these stories were integrated into Buddhist religious literature.

Five characteristics of Isan literature evolving from the early literary period have been detected.⁵⁴ First, religion rather than the monarchy appear to have been responsible for spreading significant chronicles and didactic literature such as *Urangkathat* and *Khun Borom*, respectively, and for transforming local folk tales into Jataka religious tales and incorporating these into the *Pali* canon. Secondly, temples rather than the monarchy appear to have been responsible for creating an epic literature, such as *Sang Sinsai* and *Pu Son Lan*. In addition, rather than a code of laws, which the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya was developing, it appears that traditional

⁴⁸ Dhawat Poonotoke. 1995. “A comparative study of Isan and Lanna Thai literature,” in *Thai literary traditions*, ed. Manas Chitakasem (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University), 248-264.

⁴⁹ Poonotoke, 1995, 253.

⁵⁰ Somchai Lamduan, Songkoon Chantachon, and Sittisak Jambadaeng, “The development of the alphabet, characters and orthography in the stone inscriptions of Isan,” *European Journal of Social Sciences* 22, no. 4 (2011): 531-535.

⁵¹ Poonotoke, 1995, 253-4.

⁵² Nantana Ronnakiat, 1992. “Evidence of the Thai Noi alphabet found in inscriptions,” in *The Third International Symposium on Language and Linguistics, Bangkok, Thailand*. (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1992), 1326-1334.

⁵³ Dhawaj Poonotoke, 1979. *Thai Noi paleography*. In Thai. (MA thesis, Department of Oriental Languages, Silapakorn University, Thailand, 1979).

⁵⁴ Poonotoke, 1995, 254-260.

seasonal customs such as *Hit Sip Song Khong Sip Si* and *Khong Khun Borom* dominated: 'Religious and didactic literature performed the role of societal control'.⁵⁵ Thirdly, non-religious literature such as *Khunlu Nang Ua* were effectively absorbed into Buddhist non-canonical materials such as apocryphal Jataka tales and, unlike Central Thai equivalents, did not stress a relationship with the monarchy. Fourthly, Isan literature such as *Sang Sinsai* served as a body of literature for chanted public performances at funerals, known as *Ngan Hua n Di*, and these were both entertainment and moral teacher. Finally, didactic religious-related literature typically chanted by monks taught societal beliefs and roles, including the role of the monarchy, for example *Thammada Son Lok*, in a more direct way than in central Thai works:

Didactic works in Isan such as *Kala Nap Mu Suai* teach people to fear the disappearance of Buddhism from the world. Other works in Isan include: *Pu Son Lan*, *Lan Son Pu*, *Inthiyan Son Luk* (which teaches women's behavior) *Phraya Kham Kong Son Phrai* (which teaches how various classes should interact in society), *Siri Canthowat Kham Son* (which chooses how to choose a proper mate) etc.⁵⁶

To conclude, following Poonotoke, we can see that Isan literature formed a temple-based system of oral and written literacy that included area-specific philosophical literature governing such issues as how evildoers, even of high status, can be overcome by supernaturally protected heroes; separation from the home due to inherited bad karma and overcoming this hindrance; and the blending of reality and the supernatural, such as *Phayakhankhak* and *Thaw Khathanam*. Finally, the Isan hero figure possesses specific abilities such as intelligence, a concern for the public weal and high moral values rather than good looks, the latter being feature of central Thai literature.

Returning to the issue of orthography, King Photisarath of Lan Xang (r. 1520-1547) is credited with developing scripts that likely included *Tai Noi* in the direction of old Laotian (pre Lao PDR reforms),⁵⁷ King Narai's (r. 1656-1688) work on a Thai orthography⁵⁸ developed aspects of *Tai Noi* together with other scripts into a visually distinct orthography which eventually became modern Thai. Thus, the *Tai Noi* orthography is close in form to modern Laotian but generally lacks tone markers; it is comprehensible as an alphabet to a contemporary Lao citizen. However, modern Thai readers find the *Tai Noi* alphabet only partially comprehensible. Ronnakiat notes that *Tai Noi* was being used in Northeastern schools until the 1871 Primary School Act imposed Standard Thai,⁵⁹ and later reforms under King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910) reinforced a standardized Thai script as part of monastic reforms in 1898.⁶⁰ *Tai Noi* was thus one of the last widespread orthographies of an Isan education system that was

⁵⁵ Ibid., 255.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 259-60.

⁵⁷ Lamduan, Chantachon, and Jambadaeng, 531.

⁵⁸ Ronnakiat, 1326.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1326-7.

⁶⁰ Paisal Visalo, "Buddhism for the next century," not dated, <<http://www.visalo.org/englishArticles/nextcentury.htm>>, (19 June 2012).

temple based (but integrating secular folktales and epic poems) before the modern Thai nation state evolved.

Multilingualism in Khon Kaen

The study reported herein sought to investigate student attitudes towards multilingual Thai-Isan-English signage at the Faculty of Humanities at Khon Kaen University (hereafter KKU) in Khon Kaen City, the capital of Northeast Thailand. As of 2011, KKU provided 31 International programs and 11 English programs for approximately 34,000 Thai and foreign students.⁶¹ Thus, KKU is an international university with a large number of international students and faculties. KKU places a heavy emphasis on the promotion of Thai, English, and Isan. The promotion of Thai can be seen in the emphasis on a “national development-based university,” while the promotion of Isan can be seen in the emphasis on “strengthen the community and society,” “wisdom,” and “the arts, culture and heritage.” Finally, the promotion of English can be seen in the emphasis on “global development,” which assumes a university able to undertake international research in English, Thailand's first foreign language. However, according to anecdotal evidence, foreign visitors (e.g., academics, exchange students, casual visitors) and foreign faculty who come to visit KKU have problems in reading the signs within the campus because most of the signage is only in Thai.

In particular, this study represents the first time that a written form of the Isan language has been used in an official central government educational institution for over a century and publicly affirms a policy in favor of multilingualism and plurality, replacing Thai-only signage. This was anticipated to result in secondary effects both within KKU and the wider community, particularly in Khon Kaen City, in terms of centralized planning in favor of multilingualism and more attention on the Thai-Isan-English linguistic environment. For example, based on the study reported herein and on previous studies, the four municipal authorities of Khon Kaen Province – Ban Phai, Chum Phae, Phon, and Khon Kaen City – together with the College of Local Administration at KKU, have successfully sought 540,000 Euro in funding from the European Union for the installation of multilingual signage in their municipalities, for the revitalization of traditional cultural performances and weaving, and also for the revitalization of mother tongue Isan (Lao) literacy in the form of mother tongue education in municipal schools. The study reported herein was part of a wider program supporting such initiatives, the Isan Languages Maintenance and Revitalization Program (hereafter ILMRP), which began in 2003 and was affiliated with the Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region based at KKU, before transforming into the Isan Culture Maintenance and Revitalization Program on March 1, 2012 upon reception of the European Union grant. The ILMRP previously conducted a survey of 300 inhabitants of a peri-urban community in 2007 as to whether they wanted the introduction of multilingual signage. This previous study found 86% approval.⁶²

However, determining the level of student support for multilingual signage was deemed critical before advancing the ILMRP further because, while the preceding study

⁶¹ Khon Kaen University, “Vision and mission,” not dated, <<http://www.news.kku.ac.th/eng/news/content/view/79/45/>>, (18 July 2011).

⁶² Draper, 141.

suggests a high level of support from a peri-urban community, basically composed of farmers, a knowledge of student opinion in particular was lacking due to systematic absenteeism on the part of students in the previous study. The ILMRP recognized that the attitude of the speakers, especially of the students and teachers of the languages, is crucial and worthy of academic study.⁶³ This is because 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 and Lasagabaster⁶⁴ note that the European Commission⁶⁵ sees the role of teachers as exponents of the principles of “openness to others, tolerance of differences and willingness to communicate.”⁶⁶ Teachers are therefore powerful mediators of the linguistic environment for students. Hence, studying the attitudes of students and teachers to the introduction of multilingual Thai-Isan-English signs in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at KKU was fundamental in order to discover how and whether official multilingualism could develop in the Thai context. Thus, student and teacher opinion was sought both to fill this gap in the literature and as an active part of planning for and effecting official multilingualism. It is anticipated that a similar study will be conducted in the future using an urban sample to complete the triangulation of the issue. In the present article, only the attitudes of students are reported. A short report concerning the attitudes of members of the Faculty can be obtained from the author.

Based on this rationale, four research questions were asked:

- (1) How do Thai students see the position of the Thai language within tripartite multilingual signage in which priority is given to Thai?
- (2) What is the attitude of the students to the English language on the signage and do they think it can help them to study English?
- (3) What is the attitude of the students to the Isan language on the signage and do they think it can help to preserve the local language, Isan?
- (4) What is the level of student support for multilingual signage?

The Issue of Mother Tongue Literacy

While the general international position is that mother tongue education is best, at least in the early years,^{67,68,69} the difficulties in acquiring literacy in the Isan language

⁶³ David Lasagabaster, “Language use and language attitudes in the Basque Country,” in *Multilingualism in European bilingual contexts*, ed. David Lasagabaster (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006), 65-89.

⁶⁴ Ángel Huguet and David Lasagabaster, “The linguistic issue in some European bilingual contexts: Some final considerations,” in *Multilingualism in European bilingual contexts*, ed. David Lasagabaster (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006), 234-251.

⁶⁵ European Commission, “Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity: An action plan 2004-2006,” 2003, <http://ec.europa.eu/education/doc/official/keydoc/actlang/act_lang_en.pdf>, (3 October 2007).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁷ UNESCO, *The use of vernacular languages in education. Monographs on Fundamental Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 1953).

⁶⁸ UNESCO, *First language first: Community-based literacy programs for minority language contexts in Asia* (Bangkok: Author, 2005).

⁶⁹ UNESCO, *Mother tongue-based literacy programs: Case studies of good practice in Asia* (Bangkok: Author, 2007).

are quite apparent. The lack of a suitable living alphabet is one problem, resulting in a current L1 literacy rate of close to zero, the exception being some elderly monks and former monks. Nevertheless, there are very good reasons for supposing that the legitimization of Isan will increase general literacy levels. Siegel^{70,71} notes UNESCO's⁷² 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%,⁷³ it is generally recognized that literacy rates outside urbanized areas in Isan are unsatisfactory. Legitimizing the vernacular through the introduction of a suitable orthography appears to be a valid method of increasing literacy rates. Notably, Siegel⁷⁴ and Boggs⁷⁵ found that the benefits of L1 primary education also extended to literacy in L2. In the Isan context, Isan now only exists as an oral language and so is only used in micro settings. This is despite the fact that the region of Isan itself is a multilingual setting where approximately 14 languages are spoken.⁷⁶ However, in formal written contexts Isan schools only use the L2 as there is no L1 literacy, and schools pay little attention even to developing oral skills in L1 as Isan is not a school subject. This, together with poverty and the lack of basic nutrition, may be at the root of Isan students' poor academic performance in formal written (L2) academic tests and low educational attainment.^{77,78,79} To sum up, 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. Theoretically, this improvement would also transfer to subsequent languages, such as English. This provides one theoretical basis for expanding Isan literacy; others include the fact that students are likely to be more knowledgeable about their own history and culture.

Understanding the Relevance of the Linguistic Landscape to the ILMRP

The ILMRP, at the time responsible for erecting the multilingual signage within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at KKU except for the main Faculty sign, which was installed by the Dean's Committee, operated (and continues to operate as the

⁷⁰ Jeff Siegel, "Creoles and minority dialects in education: An overview," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 20, no. 6 (1999): 508-529.

⁷¹ Jeff Siegel, "Pidgins and creoles," in *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, ed. Robert B. Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 335-351.

⁷² UNESCO, 1953.

⁷³ Lewis.

⁷⁴ Jeff Siegel, "Mixing, levelling and pidgin/creole development," in *The structure and status of pidgins and creoles*, ed. Arthur K. Spears and Donald Winford (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1997), 111-149.

⁷⁵ 1985, cited in Angela Bartens, "The rocky road to education in creole," *Estudios de Sociolingüística* 2, no. 2 (2001): 27-56.

⁷⁶ Lewis.

⁷⁷ Pennapa Hongthong and Sirinart Sirisunthorn, 11 January, 2002, "Children IQ tests reflect regional divide," *The Nation*, <<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/home/CHILDREN-IQ-tests-reflect-regional-divide-54014.html>>, (18 May, 2011).

⁷⁸ UNDP, *Thailand Human Development Report 2003* (Bangkok: Author, 2003).

⁷⁹ *The Nation*, "Isaan being failed by inequalities in education system," July 28 2011, <<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2011/07/28/opinion/Isaan-being-failed-by-inequalities-in-education-sy-30161350.html>> (29 July 2011).

ICMRP) within a language planning framework provided by Hornberger,⁸⁰ based on previous work by Harrmann,⁸¹ Haugen⁸² and others. The study reported herein can be seen within this framework as “status planning,” much as Backhaus⁸³ refers to status and corpus planning in the cases of the “linguistic landscapes” (LL) of Quebec and Tokyo. The ILMRP has also made use of Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory,^{84,85} for surveying and analyzing a large corpus of data.⁸⁶ However, given the increasing theoretical attention being given to what can be seen as a sub-discipline of branches of social sciences, cultural anthropology and linguistics,^{87,88} the author would be remiss not to consider how the present article can be situated within LL theory. The linguistic landscape is commonly defined as:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. It is the dynamic physical and social context in which people interact through language.⁸⁹

However, Coulmas⁹⁰ and Spolsky⁹¹ both appear to favor the use of “cityscape,” seeing the LL as an urban phenomenon, and Ben-Rafael, who sees the LL as a central, public focus of language facts (derived from “social facts”⁹²) containing crowds who create a public space, also apparently sees the LL as an urban phenomenon, influenced by

⁸⁰ Nancy H. Hornberger. 1994. “Literacy and language planning,” in *Sustaining local literacies*, ed. David Barton (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1994), 75-86.

⁸¹ Harald Harrmann, “Language planning in the light of a general theory of language: A methodological framework,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 86 (1990), 103-126.

⁸² Einar Haugen, “The implementation of corpus planning: theory and practice,” in *Progress in language planning: International perspectives*, ed. Juan Cobarrubias and Joshua A. Fishman (Berlin: Mouton, 1983), 269-290.

⁸³ Peter Backhaus, “Rules and regulations in linguistic landscaping: A comparative perspective,” in *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery*, ed. Elana Shohamy and Durk Gorter (London: Routledge, 2009), 157-172.

⁸⁴ Real Allard and Rodrigue Landry, “Ethnolinguistic Vitality Beliefs and language maintenance and loss,” in *Maintenance and loss of minority languages*, ed. Willem Fase, Koen Jaspaert, and Sjaak Kroon (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1992), 171-195.

⁸⁵ Real Allard and Rodrigue Landry, “Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality: A comparison of two measures,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 108 (1994), 117-144.

⁸⁶ Draper, 2010.

⁸⁷ Durk Gorter, ed., *Linguistic landscape: A new approach to multilingualism* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006).

⁸⁸ Elana Shohamy and Durk Gorter, eds., *Linguistic landscapes: Expanding the scenery*. (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁸⁹ Rodrigue Landry and Richard Y. Bourhis, “Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study,” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 16 (1997): 23-49; quote is from 25.

⁹⁰ Florian Coulmas, “Linguistic landscaping and the seed of the public sphere,” in *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery*, ed. Elana Shohamy and Durk Gorter (London: Routledge, 2009), 13-24.

⁹¹ Bernard Spolsky, “Prolegomena to a sociolinguistic theory of public signage. In *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery*,” ed. Elana Shohamy and Durk Gorter (New York: Routledge, 2009), 25-39.

⁹² Durkheim 1964/1895, cited on 43 in Elizer Ben-Rafael, “A sociological approach to the study of linguistic landscapes,” in *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery*, ed. Elana Shohamy and Durk Gorter (London: Routledge, 2009), 40-54.

cosmopolitization via globalization. It is therefore interesting that the actual impetus for the installation of the signs at KKU derived from a survey of a semi-rural Thai community, which indicated an 86% approval rating for multilingual signs to be established in the community. This was similar to the percentage in the same study who wanted formal Thai-English-Isan multilingualism established in the local school. In fact, even in very rural areas of Thailand, in areas that are still developing, signage, both permanent and temporary, is quite evident in the form of sometimes quite massive signage both at the front of public agencies, including schools, and within them, and also in more temporary forms as roadside advertising hoardings and political billboards. Small village shops may bear advertising awnings, and temples also sometimes carry signs. This would support the position of Malinowski,⁹³ who notes that there is “a growing body of literature in modern-day media studies, cultural anthropology, language and literacy acquisition, and other venues that suggests that *all* communication needs to be understood as multimodal.” Thus, a traditional structuralist approach to the linguistic landscape is doomed unless it can account for language participants who may be concentrated in cities but who interact with and are interacted with by those in more rural areas in the form of networks. This may be particularly the case in developing countries where the barrier between urban landscape and rural landscape is porous due to both extended and disparate family groupings, and seasonal urban migration, as in the case of Thailand. In addition, televisions, SMS messaging and even the use of the Internet have penetrated many rural Thai villages, and text messaging has become widespread in political maneuverings.⁹⁴

Unlike in Backhaus' accounts,^{95,96} in the present study the authority in the *top-down* process^{97,98} is the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at KKU, who is also the Head of the Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region, the funding body for the ILMRP. Thus, the locus for the physical start of a maintenance and revitalization program is a university faculty. Turning to Backhaus' two subjects, in the case of Quebec, a government *Commission de toponymie* is responsible for implementing relevant pro-French legislation on signage⁹⁹ and for Tokyo local administrations, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, and the national government have issued a variety of instructions for languages on signage, including Japanese, romanized Japanese, English, Chinese, Korean and the Furigana Japanese orthography.¹⁰⁰ The dean mentioned above is also part of a network that includes the Dean of the College of Local Administration

⁹³ David Malinowski, “Authorship in the linguistic landscape: A multimodal performative view,” in *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery*, ed. Elena Shohamy and Durk Gorter (London: Routledge, 2009), 107-125. Malinowski cites Finnegan (2002), Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), and Lemke (1998) in support of his position.

⁹⁴ Heike Hermanns, “Mobile democracy: Mobile phones as democratic tools,” *Politics* 28, no. 2 (2008), 74-82.

⁹⁵ Peter Backhaus, “Multilingualism in Tokyo: A look into the linguistic landscape,” *International Journal of Multilingualism* 31 (2006), 52-66.

⁹⁶ Backhaus, 2009.

⁹⁷ Elizer Ben-Rafael, Elana Shohamy, Muhammad Hasan Amara, and Nira Trumper-Hecht, “Linguistic landscape as symbolic of the public space: The case of Israel,” in *Linguistic landscape: A new approach to multilingualism*, ed. Durk Gorter (London: Routledge, 2006), 7-30, especially 10.

⁹⁸ Ben-Rafael, 49.

⁹⁹ Backhaus, 160.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 164-165

and the mayor of Khon Kaen city, both of whom are backing, together with other Khon Kaen Province mayors, the Isan Culture Maintenance and Revitalization Program, the successor program to the ILMRP. Thus, a very small network of influential figures is responsible for endorsing an inherently true *social fact*,¹⁰¹ i.e., that Isan people want both multilingual Thai-Isan-English signage and education, which has grown into what one branch of sociology would deem a *social field* in itself.¹⁰² In both the Quebequois and Japanese contexts, and in other LL contexts, it would be interesting to trace which committees headed by which individuals made the key decisions: “we seldom look at the process by which a particular sign is produced...What we need are more studies that will trace the decision back to the sign initiator, failing which we are risking speculation based on our own prejudices.”¹⁰³ The present study attempts to rectify that by making all decision making as open and transparent as possible.

However, in doing so it is drawn to Ben-Rafael's sociological approach, which in a post-structuralist approach views the LL as a gestalt or semiotic aggregate that is greater than the component of its parts. While the LL can be simply described in terms of symbolic and informational meaning, Ben-Rafael sees the LL as a structuration process in its own right, at first glance undefinable because of its a priori definition from each individual's own will, but in fact measurable both as a psychological *habitus* and as a sociopsychological *field* along the lines of Bourdieu. In other words, Ben-Rafael notes certain sociological principles can be applied to an LL item at a macro level. Ben-Rafael's first principle,¹⁰⁴ is “presentation of self,” which basically sees the actor behind an LL item or aggregate of LL items as competing with others in the public space. A second principle is the “good reasons” principle, a tendency for convergence that derives from the fact that those creating LL items to influence people necessarily are appealing to social classes' existing tastes.¹⁰⁵ The third principle is “collective identity”, which results from globalization, and accounts for how actors assert themselves (or not) in terms of forms of multiculturalism. The fourth principle is “power relations”, which refers to how one group of people may be able to assert themselves over another, and “may come about through the stronger party's imposition on weaker actors of a given language, or kinds of wordings or styles, thereby limiting the weaker in their use of linguistic resources of their own”.¹⁰⁶ We shall return to these principles later in the light of the results of the present study. For a micro level, we see 'nexus analysis' as in Hult's¹⁰⁷ reading of Scollon and Scollon¹⁰⁸ not as a theory of explanation but as a theory of description that can then be linked to Ben-Rafael's principles, as capable of

¹⁰¹ Ben-Rafael, 43, citing Durkheim 1964/1895.

¹⁰² Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara and Nira; and Ben-Rafael, both citing Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinsky*, 31. *social critique of the judgment of taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

¹⁰³ Spolsky, 31.

¹⁰⁴ Derived from Erving Goffman, *Behavior in public* Bourdieu.

York: Routledge, 1963) and Erving Goffman, *Forms of talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

¹⁰⁵ Bourdieu.

¹⁰⁶ Ben-Rafael, 47.

¹⁰⁷ Francis M. Hult, Language ecology and linguistic landscape analysis. In *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery*, ed. Elena Shohamy and Durk Gorter (New York: Routledge, 2009), 88-104.

¹⁰⁸ Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Discourse in place: Language in the material world* (London: Routledge, 2003).

describing the physical details of the look of a place. Thus, nexus analysis is applied in this study where possible.

Finally, in the Thai context, the importance of the linguistic landscape is already well recognized. For example, Smalley,¹⁰⁹ in a large study of signs on the Charansanitwong, Yawarat, and Sukhumwit Roads, noted that Chinese store signs were particularly common on the Yawarat Road in Bangkok, with bilingual Chinese and English, Thai and English, and Chinese and Thai signs in evidence on all three roads. Huebner¹¹⁰ similarly investigated the multilingual landscape in Bangkok, finding a preference for the use of more English as a symbol of internationalization near and in sky train stations. Huebner¹¹¹ also noted there is a constraint on what signage can be constructed in the form of a piece of legislation that penalizes the omission of the Thai language on foreign language signs. Also, it appears to be a *presentation of self* principle¹¹² that Thai be prominent on official municipal, provincial and central government buildings, even in areas where the Central Thai language is a minority presence, for reasons of national ideology linked to the promotion of the national language from around 1909 onwards^{113,114} and cemented in position under the authority of a Buddhist King who is at the very 'top'¹¹⁵ of all Thai *social facts*, real (i.e., in the form of billboards of the King on overhead bridges) or unreal (in the form of a public sign). This King-Religion-Nation *social fact* is made more concrete by the creation of Thai as the national language by Prime Minister Field Marshal Pibul Songgram after his taking office in 1939 in his 9th *Rattaniyon* (dictat),¹¹⁶ which effectively doomed other orthographies except for Pali and Sanskrit, used for religious purposes. It thereby effectively sounded the death knell for the written Isan language.

Methodology

The research consisted of a mixed methodology research project that made use of three instruments. First, there was a custom survey (see **appendix 1**), partially derived from Draper,¹¹⁷ which was administered to 300 participants through the use of convenience sampling in and around the canteen of the Faculty of Humanities and Social

¹⁰⁹ William A. Smalley, *Linguistic diversity and national unity: Language ecology in Thailand* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹¹⁰ Thom Huebner, "Bangkok's linguistic landscapes: Environmental print, codemixing, and language change," in *Linguistic landscape: A new approach to multilingualism*, ed. Durk Gorter (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006), 31-51.

¹¹¹ Huebner, 2006 and Thom Huebner, "A framework for the linguistic analysis of linguistic landscapes," in *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery*, ed. Elena Shohamy and Durk Gorter (New York: Routledge, 2009), 70-87.

¹¹² Ben-Rafael, 2009, 45.

¹¹³ David K. Wyatt, "Education and the modernization of Thai society," in *Studies in Thai history*, ed. David K. Wyatt (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books 1994), 219-244, especially 242.

¹¹⁴ Charles F. Keyes, "The politics of language in Thailand and Lao," in *Fighting words: Language policy and ethnic relations in Asia*, ed. Michael E. Brown and Šumit Ganguly (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2003), 177-210.

¹¹⁵ Mulder, 110.

¹¹⁶ Keyes, 191.

¹¹⁷ John Draper, *The Isan languages maintenance and revitalization program attitude survey report*. (Khon Kaen, Thailand: Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region, 2007).

Sciences. The survey was piloted in July 2009 and conducted in June 2010. The survey consists of 18 questions. The first five establish basic demographic data. Questions six to 12 address the ethnicity of the respondent. Question 13 asks if the respondent recognizes the Isan language component of the signage. Question 14 asks if the respondent is aware that there used to be an Isan literacy. Question 15 asks if the respondent would like to see more multilingual signage. If the respondent responds negatively or with a 'don't know' to Question 15, the respondent is shown pictures of multilingual signage at Chiang Mai University, the regional university for Northern Thailand, and re-asked Question 15 as Question 16. Question 17 asks how the respondent feels to see each linguistic component of the signage, while Question 18 asks if the respondent has any questions.

Secondly, there was an interview protocol for the senior members of the faculty (not included), and thirdly there was an observation protocol (not included).¹¹⁸ The field of research is an interdisciplinary one covering education planning (language education), anthropology (semiotics) and sociology (sociolinguistics).

Design of Signs

The design of the signs for the main study was facilitated by the Dean of the Humanities and Social Sciences deciding to replace the existing monolingual Thai sign of the faculty with a multilingual sign similar to the ones for the study. This led to two roughly parallel design processes with two different commissioning authorities, the ILMRP and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences itself. While some of the design processes overlapped, the result was two different design paths. As can be seen from **table 1** below and the pictures of the signs themselves in **appendix 2**, the two different design paths resulted in two different sets of signs, which can be described in terms of two different *preferred codes*,¹¹⁹ or preferred ways to see the signs.

In the case of signs for the Student Union and canteen signs, pragmatic convenience influenced the choice of the sign material, i.e., wood, although the president of the Student Union, the designer, and the author's research assistant, also a Thai, strongly endorsed the use of wood as a 'natural' and 'warm' material that was more suitable for the canteen and for the Student Union. It is, however, terminologically a more *temporal* (less permanent) material.¹²⁰ The designer also rejected sharp angling, which is why both signs are irregularly shaped. The golden wood color of the sign and the white font were chosen as presenting a good contrast, and the golden color of the wood was seen as a warm color. The use of gold or red for the font or sign color was rejected during the design stage as being too 'Chinese'. That the Thai language was placed centrally was due to the fact that it was seen as needing more prominence, i.e., to maximize the indexicality of the preferred code, as can be seen in Kress and Van Leeuwen's triptych¹²¹ or in other words, an acceptance of the supremacy of the Thai nation state. The choice of the font as Angsana New, a quasi-official Thai font, was for

¹¹⁸ Based on Scollon and Scollon, 45-81.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 116-28.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹²¹ Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 197.

the same reason. English was placed above, and Isan below, the Thai in order to signify a peripheral code of modernity and tradition, respectively. These fonts were slightly adapted to appear somewhat similar to the Thai font during the engraving stage for purely aesthetic reasons.

The faculty sign presents a very dissimilar picture. Thai is again clearly the preferred code, as it is both larger than and above the other two languages, with Isan on the left and English on the right, again presenting an ideology portraying Isan as traditional with English as modern. However, the Thai font strongly resembles the Isan font in what may be a design feature intended to signify ideological unity. Also, the size and materials of the installation (metallic silver, chrome and marble), and even the arrow-like design of the sign, together with Isan to the left and English to the right, suggest a geopolitical ideology with roots in tradition but fully embracing modernity.¹²² Notably, the installation completion date for this sign was only three days before the Graduation Ceremony for the university, meaning that all students returning for graduation saw the sign, and anecdotal evidence suggests that many had their photographs taken in front of it.

Table 1: Design of the three multilingual faculty signs.

	CANTEEN SIGN	ST. UNION SIGN	FACULTY SIGN
Commissioning authority	ILMRP	ILMRP	Faculty Committee
Prestige level	Low	Medium	High
Location	<i>public space</i> above passage in <i>special use space</i> (canteen)	<i>public space</i> in passage in front of <i>special use space</i> (Student Union)	<i>public space</i> in front of main entrance to <i>special use space</i> (Faculty)
Approval for spelling / vocab	Faculty Thai Dept., the Venerable Suthep (July 24, 2009)	Faculty Thai Dept., the Venerable Suthep (July 24, 2009)	Faculty Thai / History Depts., the Venerable Suthep (July 24, 2009)
Design owner	Student Union	Student Union	Faculty of Architecture
Design approved	August 6, 2009	August 6, 2009	Design process given to Fac. of Archit. following August 11, 2009 meeting
Inscription (English)	“Please clear away your dishes after eating”	“Student Union of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences”	“Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences”
- English font	based on <i>Times New Roman</i>	based on <i>Times New Roman</i>	unknown
- Thai font	based on <i>Angsana New</i>	based on <i>Angsana New</i>	based on Isan font
- Isan font	<i>Tai Noi</i>	<i>Tai Noi</i>	<i>Tai Noi</i>
- Font color	white	white	metallic silver
- Font effect	engraved	engraved	embossed (raised)
- Font material	paint	paint	metal
- Sign color	golden brown	golden brown	grey
- Sign material	wood	wood	grey marble; metallic chrome adjunct (poles)
- Layers; other?	none; double sided	flowers at base	national / royal flags

¹²² Following Scollon and Scollon’s framework.

			(March, 2010)
Code (language) preference	Thai (larger, centered)	Thai (larger, centered)	Thai (larger, above other languages)
Secondary languages	English above, Isan below	English above, Isan below	Isan à English (left to right)
Installation date	September 3, 2009	August 27, 2009	December 18, 2009
Installation type	suspended from beam	suspended from cradle frame	free standing; on marble plinth
Approximate dimensions	35cm high x 1.2m wide; 2.75m above ground	frame: 1.7m high x 2.1m wide; sign: 35cm high x 1.8m wide	3.15m tall (w/o flags) + 35cm plinth x 6.07m wide
Approximate shape	irregular oval	irregular rectangle	trapezoid

Installation

The student union sign (appendix 2, **figure A**) was installed on the evening of Thursday, 27 August 2009, and the canteen sign (appendix 2, **figure B**) was installed on the evening of Thursday, 3 September 2009. Installation of the main faculty sign began on 17th November 2009 and was completed on Friday, 18 December 2009. Each sign was observed by discretely situated trained teams of student assistants using an Observation Protocol for a period of three hours the morning following the installation of the sign. The protocol was designed to capture the movement of social actors past the signs and to identify social interaction events. To this end, the number of social actors ('single' or 'with'), the gender of the social actor, the occupation of the social actor, the vector of action, the nature of interaction and any oral performances were recorded by hand on sheets of paper. This data was then entered into a spreadsheet and analyzed. Results are not reported herein due to the word length but are available from the author.

The student union sign (appendix 2, **figure A**) was installed outside and, if facing it, to the left of the Student Union. This area is an open passageway linking classroom buildings with the canteen of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Following Scollon and Scollon's framework, the installation of the sign was therefore in a frontstage (or public) passage-style semiotic space between two special use semiotic spaces. It was also outside (and referencing) a public semiotic space from the point of view of students, but one that is also used for social purposes and is not commonly entered by teachers except with permission, thus possessing private characteristics. The sign reads "Student Union of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences" in English, Thai and Isan.

The canteen sign (appendix 2, **figure B**) was installed in a covered passageway directly connecting the drinks purchasing facility and the food ordering facility in the canteen at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The canteen is a major hub for students and educators both from the Faculty and from other faculties. Following Scollon and Scollon's framework, the installation of the sign was therefore in a frontstage (or public) passage-style semiotic space between two special use semiotic spaces. The sign reads "Please clear your dishes away after eating" in English, Thai and Isan.

The main faculty sign (appendix 2, **figure C**) was installed on a grass verge between the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the main entrance to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Following Scollon and Scollon's framework, the installation of the sign was therefore in a frontstage (or public) passage-style semiotic space between two special use semiotic spaces. The sign reads "Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences" in English, Thai and Isan. The Thai is at the top and in a larger font, with Isan below to the left, and English below to the right. The Isan font was based on an existing Isan font, and the Thai font was customized to match the Isan font to demonstrate unity. The letters are metallic silver raised on grey marble. The sign is approximately six meters long and is approximately 3.15 meters tall, atop a 35 cm red marble plinth, supported by posts.

Results of the Student Attitude Survey

Accidental (convenience) sampling was employed because of the difficulties posed by random sampling. In order to improve the reliability of the sampling, a large sample of 300 was elicited, and sampling took place from the 7th June 2010 to 14th June 2010 in and around the environs of the canteen of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Student survey administrators who had previously been trained as part of a pilot study phase were employed. There were 247 female respondents (82%) and 53 male respondents (18%), from 35 different provinces throughout Thailand, but mainly from the major population centers of the Northeast. The respondents had a mean age of 20, which is to be expected from students in four-year degree programs. The respondents came from thirteen different majors in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Post hoc testing using the figures for four years of student enrollment from 2007-2010 indicated that the representativeness of the sample was sufficient.

Ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity, the majority of respondents self identified themselves as Isan (63%), possibly meaning Lao Isan, though a significant number identified themselves as Thai (15%), perhaps meaning Central Thai, and 10% of respondents were Thai Chinese. Smaller ethno-linguistic groups including Thai Vietnamese (4%), Korat, a creole based in Nakon Ratchasima (1%), and Pu Thai (1%), a Tai language, were also represented, though in much smaller numbers.

As self reported ethnicity does not indicate exactly how Isan someone is, 'Isanness' was constructed as a composite measure of Lao identity, using a 10-point rating scale from 0-9. This scale was composed of: (a) self-identification as Isan, a psychological marker; (b) identification of Isan as the parental language when the student was absent, referring to the domain of the home; (c) the number of Isan grandparents (also home domain); (d) the use of Isan for dreaming, a psychological marker; (e) the use of Isan for thinking (cognitive domain), and whether or not Isan was reported as the language of the close friends of the respondent. The majority of the scale components had previously been tested by Draper and found to be satisfactory in terms of reliability.

Figure 1 (below) shows the frequency by response for this composite measure, and the mean for this value was 3.8, indicating that the average respondent probably

saw themselves as middling Lao. Similarly, while the mode was 6, indicating that a large number of respondents saw themselves as quite Isan, the second most common value was 0, reflecting the Central Thai, Thai Chinese, Thai Vietnamese and other minorities noted above.

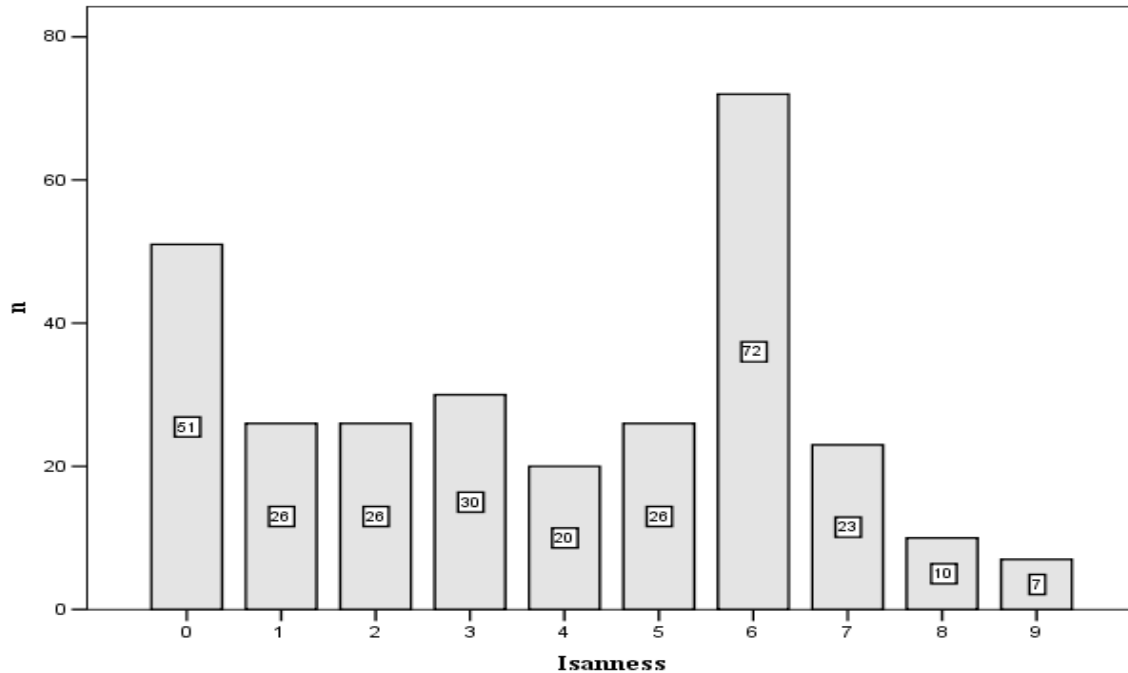


Figure 1: Isanness of respondents.

Recognition of the Language

Turning to recognition of the third language of the signs, i.e., Isan (Lao), using the *Tai Noi* orthography, 39 respondents who stated Thai, English or who gave no response were discounted. It was then found that the majority of the sample (83%) correctly identified the language or the orthography as either Lao, the Isan variant of Lao, or *Tai Noi*. It should be noted that this figure may be higher than in other locations as Laotian, Isan history and to some extent the Isan language are studied in the faculty.

Awareness of a Historical Isan Language

Turning to awareness of a historical Isan language, 219 respondents (73%) stated that they had not known that an orthography was used in Isan before Thai had been introduced into the region, while 79 respondents (26%) professed a knowledge of a pre-Thai orthography in the region, and two did not respond (1%). Even within a 'high Isanness' (Isanness ≥ 5) subset of the sample, only 25 respondents (18%) replied positively, thus indicating that the majority of Isan students had no understanding of

their own history in this area. The lack of knowledge confirms previous research findings suggesting that the younger generation is not aware of a previous literacy.¹²³

Receptiveness towards More Multilingual Signs

Moving to receptiveness towards the signs, in an initial response, 254 respondents (85%) indicated that they would like to see more multilingual signs, while 12 (4%) said that they would not like to see more signs, and 34 (11%) professed no idea. At this point, those who had responded negatively or neutrally were shown three multilingual Thai-Kammuang-English signs of Chiang Mai University, the regional university for Northern Thailand, where multilingual signage has already been introduced, and asked to reconsider. Following this step, 272 respondents (91%) stated that they would like to see more multilingual signs, while 11 (4%) replied negatively, and 17 (6%) replied neutrally. Thus, while only one respondent previously identified as negative switched opinion, 17 undecided respondents switched to a positive one, a total conversion rate of 39%. Thus, the provision of information showing that other regions are implementing multilingualism has an effect on opinion. In general, this high level of endorsement of Thai-English-Isan signage confirms previous research in a peri-urban setting, which found 86% approval when participants were informed of the Chiang Mai University signage.¹²⁴

Attitude towards the Multilingual Signs

Respondents were then asked about their opinion on the multilingual signs as well as on the individual languages on the signs. Two hundred and eighty five respondents commented on the multilingual sign, consisting of 267 who had expressed a desire for more signs and 18 who had expressed no idea or were against more multilingual signs. In both cases, while some comments were simple, others contained multiple semantic constructs. These semantic constructs were counted, and for the 12 most common constructs, the results are shown below in **figure 2**. In order of most expressed comment, 37% of respondents (n = 300) noted that the signs were good, or that they liked the signage, or so on. It is noteworthy that one frequently expressed sentiment (15%) made reference to the fact that the signs were preserving language, culture, or both. This concept of preserving local knowledge based systems was endorsed by official Thai discourse in 1997, as the *Eighth National Socio-economic Development Plan* which endorsed cultural pluralism rather than the previous model of assimilation,¹²⁵ with the Thai words *ekkalak* and *pahulak* representing these two concepts of assimilation and plurality.

¹²³ Ibid., 2007, 66.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 2010, 141.

¹²⁵ Theraphan Luangthongkum, "The positions of non-Thai languages in Thailand," In *Language, nation and development in Southeast Asia*, ed. Lee Hock Guan & Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: ISEAS, 2007), 181-194.

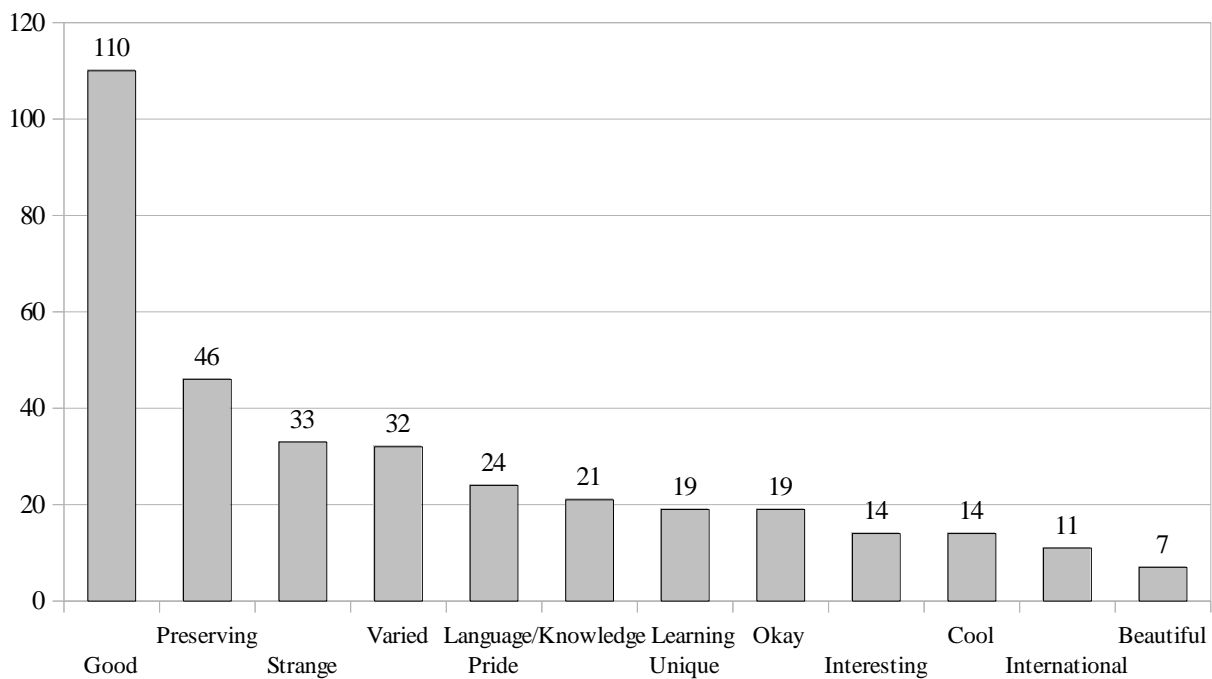


Figure 2: Comments on multilingual signs by respondents answering 'Yes' to more signs by semantic construct.

In addition, the *National Education Act of 1999*, in Section 7, refers to 'local wisdom', basically indigenous knowledge systems, in terms of developing a 'sound awareness' of it.¹²⁶ Indigenous knowledge systems generally refer to knowledge about the environment but can also refer to the linguistic environment, and it received special focus in *Agenda 21*,¹²⁷ developed out of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development ('Earth Summit'), and strongly endorsed as a concept in Thailand.

Also of note, 11% of respondents noted that the signage showed variety or diversity in the form of many languages. Again, for reasons described above, the concept that diversity (*pahulak*) is worthwhile has been promoted in Thailand in recent years. Next, 8% of respondents stated that the signage made them feel proud, most obviously of being Isan. Pride in local languages is a natural result of promoting a discourse of diversity. Turning to the next construct, 7% of respondents stated that the signage aided in teaching them language (both Isan and English) or otherwise provided knowledge. This is noteworthy as this concept of using language to promote language learning is one of the perceived benefits of wider implementation of multilingual signage. This is also noteworthy, for as Shohamy and Gorter remark, "...not very much attention has been given to the effect of language displayed in public texts as sources for language learning. At the same time, it is very clear that little children start noticing signs in the public space at a very early age."¹²⁸ This study raises the possibility that language students at the university level may also benefit from multilingual public signage. Finally, and remarkably, only 4% noted the international component of the sign in this question. In this context, Thai concepts of modernity typically (but not always) stress

¹²⁶ Thai Ministry of Education, *National Education Act of 1999* (Bangkok, Author, 1999).

¹²⁷ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Agenda 21* (New York: Author, 1992).

¹²⁸ Shohamy and Gorter, 3.

that whatever is international is modern and therefore good.^{129,130,131} Finally, turning to those 18 who expressed negative or neutral comments to implementing more multilingual signage, even with these respondents four commented that the signs were 'good', while eight stated that they were 'okay'. A further two each stated that the signs were 'simple' or 'strange'.

Attitude towards the Thai in the Signs

In general, comments addressed the language rather than the orthography or design aspects of the sign. Of the total number of respondents (n = 300), 30% essentially stated that the Thai was good, while 12% expressed pride in being Thai. This sense of pride in being Thai is a common artifact of the Thai educational system.¹³² Of note, another 7% stated it was the national or official language. A further 6% noted that the sign expressed Thai uniqueness or identity. Another 5% noted that Thai was beautiful, while 4% noted that Thai sounded beautiful, both common sentiments about prestige languages.¹³³ Next, 3% noted that Thai was difficult, and that Isan people find Thai difficult has been reported on previously¹³⁴ and is evident in national test scores.^{135,136} Finally, 3% noted that Thai should be used correctly or lamented the fact that it was not being used correctly at present, probably a reflection of an ongoing Thai discourse focusing on the importance of the Thai language¹³⁷.

¹²⁹ Huebner, 2006, 33.

¹³⁰ Mulder, 5.

¹³¹ Vandergeest, 141.

¹³² Keyes, 1991, 2003.

¹³³ For examples of the Thai context see Chanyam and Palikupt.

¹³⁴ Draper, 2010, 142.

¹³⁵ National Institute of Educational Testing Service, "O-NET [English] Results of Year 2006 by Province" [ผลการทดสอบทางการศึกษาระดับชาติด้านพื้นฐาน (O-NET) ปีการศึกษา 2549 ระดับจังหวัด], not dated, <<http://www.dekchalad.com/fckeditor/editor/filemanager/browser/default/connectors/php/images/file/O-NET2548/O-NET2459/Test%20Result%20by%20Province/provinceEng.pdf>>, (18 December 2009).

¹³⁶ National Institute of Educational Testing Service, "Basic Statistics for the O-NET Results for Mattayom Six Students by Province for Year 2010," [ค่าสถิติพื้นฐานผลการทดสอบทางการศึกษาระดับชาติ (O-NET) ช่วงชั้นที่ 4 (ม.6) ปีการศึกษา 2553 จำแนกตามเขตจังหวัด] (Bangkok: Author, 2011). <<http://www.niets.or.th/upload-files/uploadfile/9/40faf7edfb767401bd0b85a4fb44cabf.pdf>>, (July 29 2011).

¹³⁷ For example, see *The Nation*, "Prem: Love Thai language," July 26 2007, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2007/07/26/national/national_30042558.php>, (18 July 18 2011).

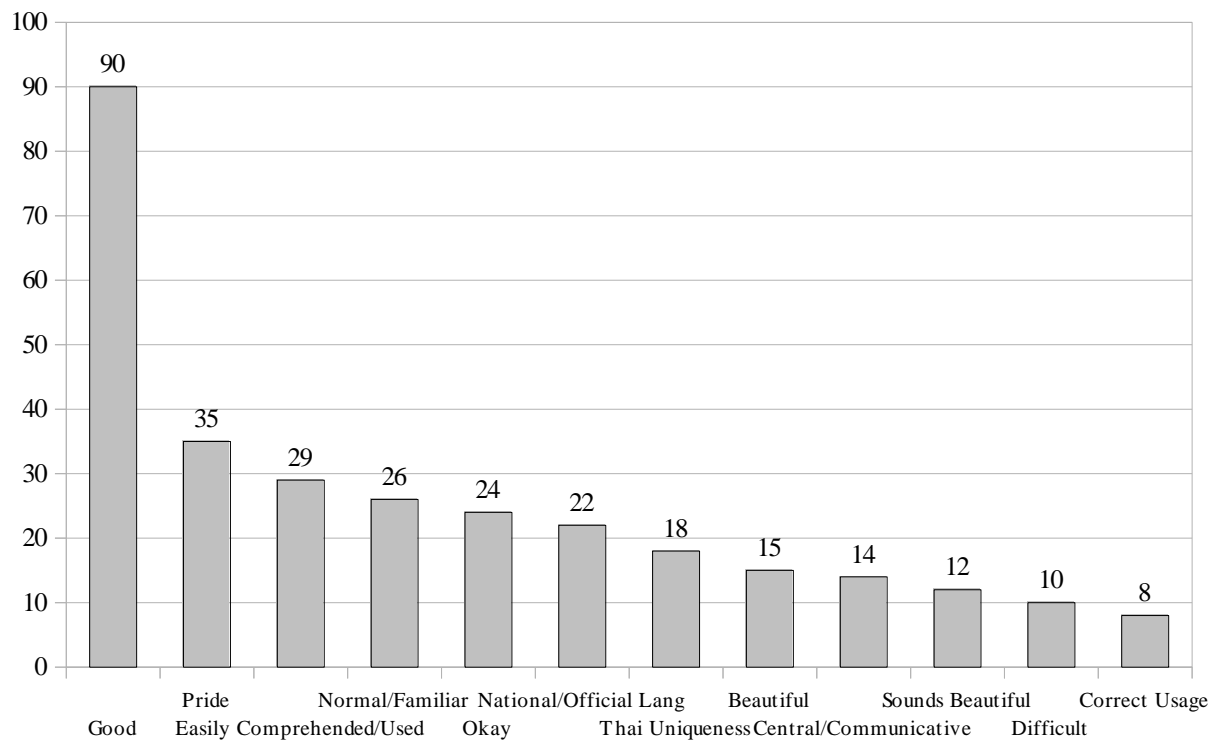


Figure 3: Respondents' comments on Thai by semantic construct.

Attitude towards the Isan in the Signs

Of the respondents, 285 commented on the Isan language, and a histogram of the 12 most common expressions is presented in **figure 4** below. As can be seen, 24% of respondents ($n = 300$) basically stated that they thought the Isan language was good, and a further 10% stated that they were proud of the Isan language; 9% stated that it was worth preserving, while 9% simply noted that it was the local language; 8% commented on the uniqueness of Isan, while 7% noted that it looked strange; 4% stated that it was interesting, while a similar percentage noted that it represents Isan. A further 3% each noted that it was 'fun' or 'funny' to speak or listen to, and in this context Draper found that Isan people saw themselves as frequently portrayed as comedians in the media,¹³⁸ a common perceived role for lower prestige language speakers.¹³⁹ Interestingly, a further 3% noted that the language was 'cute', a concept that may be related to the previous two but possibly more positive. Even more positive, another 3% stated that the language sounded beautiful. Compared to 5% for Thai, these two figures are surprisingly similar given the different statuses of the languages.

¹³⁸ Draper, 2010, 140.

¹³⁹ For example, see Tony Mitchell, Wogs still out of work: Australian television comedy as colonial discourse. *Australasian Drama Studies* 20, (1992):119-133.

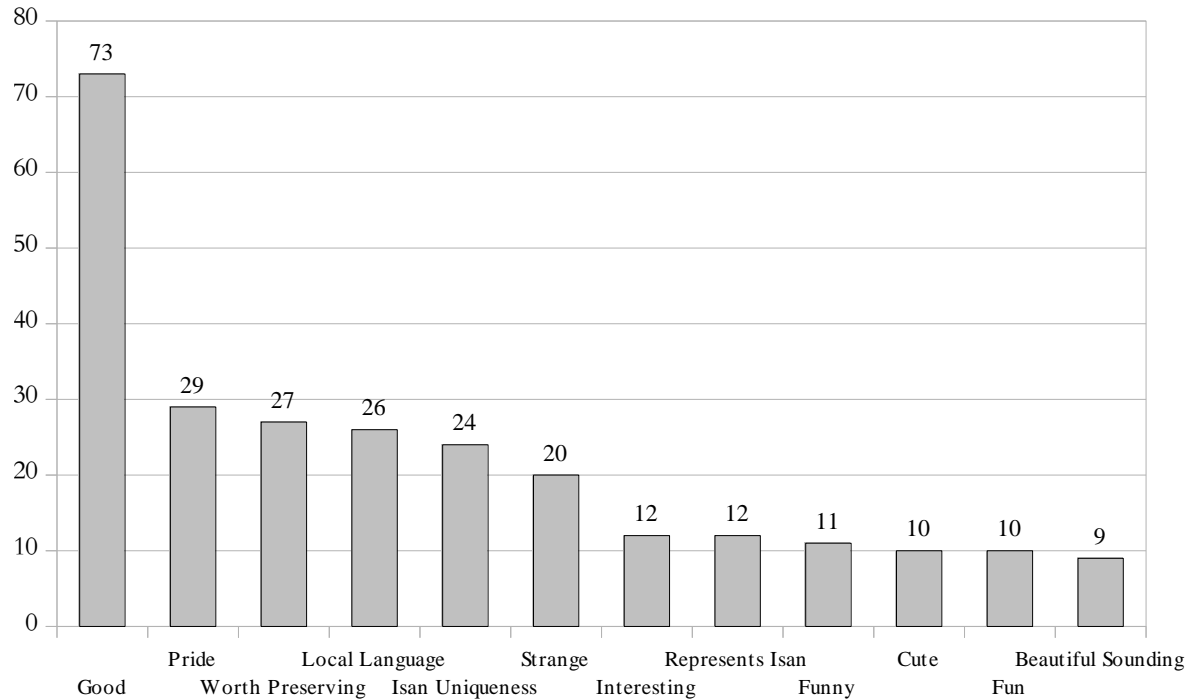


Figure 4: Respondents' comments on Isan by semantic construct.

Attitude towards the English in the Signs

Two hundred and eighty-one respondents commented on the English, and a histogram of the 12 most common expressions is presented in Figure 5 below. As can be seen in **figure 5**, 26% of respondents ($n = 300$) basically stated that the sign was good, while another 26% commented on the international nature of English; 8% noted that English should or had to be known, a reference to the fact that it is now a compulsory course in Thai high schools and universities, while 7% each stated that English was OK or noted that English was difficult; 4% noted that English provided knowledge or access to knowledge, while 3% noted that English was a language of communication; 3% each also noted that English was normal or that it would help foreigners, i.e., by helping them with identifying their location; 2% each stated that English sounded beautiful or was a second or other language, similar to the 'international language' construct. Finally, 2% also expressed the aspiration that they improve at English.

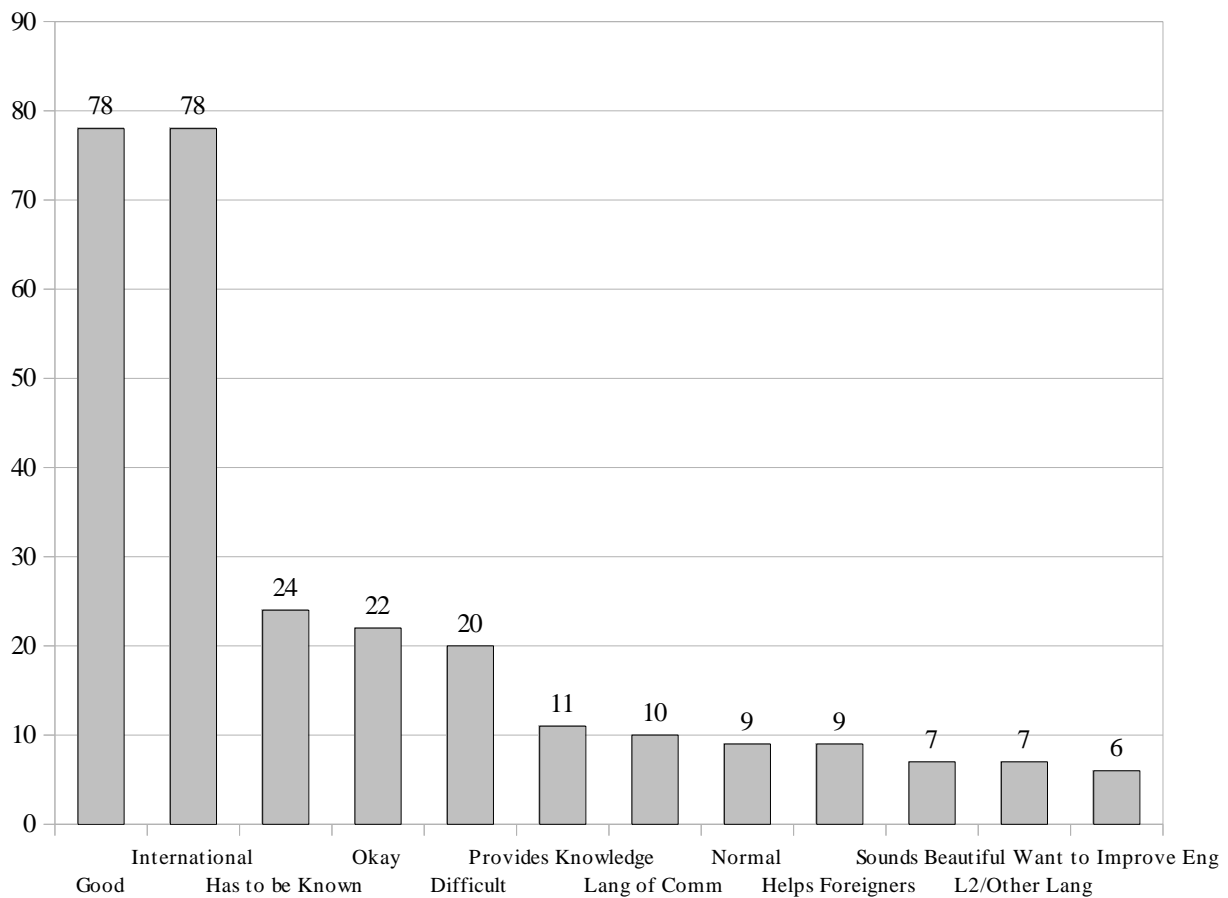


Figure 5: Respondents' comments on English by semantic construct.

Significant Effects

All initial 'no' or 'no idea' responses were recoded to 'not yes' and Pearson's chi square tests were performed, which found that neither gender nor ethnicity were significant indicators of response. Thus, other than two qualitative comments noting that the use of Isan was not official, it is not clear why some respondents did not want multilingual signage.

Discussion

Recalling the purpose of the study, the four research questions considered in this study were:

- (1) How do Thai students see the position of the Thai language within tripartite multilingual signage in which priority is given to Thai?
- (2) What is the attitude of the students to the English language on the signage and do they think it can help them to study English?

- (3) What is the attitude of the students to the Isan language on the signage and do they think it can help to preserve the local language, Isan?
 (4) What is the level of student support for multilingual signage?

These research questions are considered both in terms of Ben-Rafael's four principles¹⁴⁰ and with reference to Hult's nexus analysis, essentially the "discourses in place" (current discourses in society), "interaction order" (potential interpretations of signage from various perspectives) and "historical body" (the totality of individual experience).¹⁴¹ In answering the first research questions, the study clearly illuminated the fact that students valued the Thai language on the sign highly. The sample assigned it positive semantic values by expressing the sentiment that it was intrinsically 'good,' by expressing pride, and by expressing further sentiments along the lines that it was the *de facto* standard for communication, normal, or easily used. Some respondents explicitly stated that it was the official or national language, and others praised it for its aesthetic values, including uniqueness or beauty. In terms of nexus analysis, the signage was therefore successful in continuing or reinforcing individuals' conceptions of a state-backed discourse of the Thai language representing Thai identity, though on this occasion within a multilingual framework. In other words, it appears that sufficient respect was paid to Ben-Rafael's "collective identity" principle,¹⁴² i.e., that all the actors both creating, consuming and commenting on the sign were Thai citizens, as well as the "power-relations" principle,¹⁴³ as the primacy of Thai as a language was not challenged due to its prominence. Finally, those who stated that the Thai on the signs was beautiful may have been comparing the Thai to the other languages on the same signs or to other Thai signs in the University; in this case, the force of the "presentation of self principle" is unclear.¹⁴⁴ In terms of the "good-reasons" principle,¹⁴⁵ the Thai on the sign invokes a shared consensual patriotism through the King-Religion-Nation association discussed above.

Turning to the second question, interpreting the English aspect of the signage poses a complex issue. With reference to nexus analysis, many students saw it as intrinsically good, and others saw it as international, a positive interpretation of the sign reflecting Thai people's view of Western-derived modernity as generally positive or as a language of communication, a similar sentiment. Thus, it seems likely that the installation of the signage added to the creation of the discourse of Khon Kaen University being an 'international' environment. This interpretation is compatible with Ben-Rafael's "presentation of self" principle in that both the actors and the consumers of the sign appear to want to be seen as part of a globalized world that includes English, though whether as a status symbol or in this case as a means to acquire English is unclear. Stressing the international nature of the faculty, which is home to the Department of Foreign Languages (including English), may also highlight the faculty

¹⁴⁰ Ben-Rafael, 44-8.

¹⁴¹ Hult, 90-5.

¹⁴² Ben-Rafael, 46-7.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 47

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

being in competition with other faculties with bilingual or multilingual signs for student applicants. The “good-reasons” principle may also apply as within the last five years, a predominance of bilingual Thai-English signs have appeared in the University both to mark the location of faculties, other university buildings and road signs. Thus, the faculty sign may be seen as 'joining' for good reasons these other bilingual signs throughout the university. The “collective identity” principle is seen at work as the signs' designers, the faculties and the University itself all want to be seen as international, as referred to earlier. The “power relations” principle is evident in the design of the signage, with English being less prominent, but it is somewhat remarkable in that the students' comments on the English on the signage appear to be at least as positive as for the Thai.

It is also noteworthy that relatively small numbers of students volunteered statements indicating that the signage would help with learning. Nevertheless, the fact that some students did state that the English language provided knowledge or that the signage made them want to improve their English does provide some support for the hypothesis that the provision of multilingual signage could enhance English language ability through the provision of vocabulary. This relationship between the linguistic environment and language acquisition, including attitudes towards it, is worth further investigation.¹⁴⁶

Considering the third research question, some respondents clearly expressed sentiments indicating a belief or discourse that the signage in some ways represented Isan, including its unique nature, and the belief was also expressed by some students that the Isan language is worth preserving. Pride was also expressed in seeing the sign, as was the belief that the Isan language as expressed on the signage was implicitly 'good'. These sentiments can be seen as resting on individuals' historical bodies of knowledge. The signage, the first of its type in Isan, therefore appears to have been somewhat successful as an act preserving local values and customs, or in Ben-Rafael's terminology, the signage represents a significant effect with both a top-down and bottom-up dynamism that points towards the “collective identity” of the faculty including Isan language and socio-cultural identity. While a substantial number of respondents saw Isan as 'strange', 'cute', or 'funny', a number also reported on it sounding 'beautiful', a characteristic normally attributed to a prestigious language. The fact that the language is also seen as 'strange', 'cute', or 'funny' reflects the fact that a minority language is often seen as inferior, as noted above. Thus the installation of the signage is a bold step to announcing a “self perception' that is associated with Isan, as well as one that boldly challenges the “good reasons” principle, as it introduces a language on a sign that, in very few ways, is bound to consensual ideals for languages on signs, being the first such signs in the region of 19 million inhabitants. However, even here, it should be noted that the font style of the Isan and the Thai on the main faculty sign are deliberately similar, a decision made by the faculty committee in an attempt to ensure unity with the Thai font and to achieve harmony – an excellent example of the

¹⁴⁶ As suggested by both David Lasagabaster, “Language use and language attitudes in the Basque Country,” in *Multilingualism in European bilingual contexts*, ed. David Lasagabaster (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006), 65-89 and Ángel Hugué, “Language use and language attitudes in Catalonia,” in *Multilingualism in European bilingual contexts*,” ed. David Lasagabaster (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006), 17-39.

“good-reasons” principle. Conversely, the decision by the student designers for the fonts on the other two signs, to basically be written in their default orthographies but with prominence for the Thai, may be seen as a combination of respect for the “presentation of self” principle as well as the “collective identity” and “power relations” principles, given the lack of any kind of “good reasons” principle for such novel signage in the collective student consciousness. To sum up, it is clear that the use of Isan does not support a challenge by Isan people to Thai state ideology of the sort documented by Missingham.¹⁴⁷

Addressing the fourth research question, determining the level of student support for multilingual signage has been successful, given the extremely high endorsement of such signage evident in the results. This endorsement fills a gap in the general research and planning agenda of the then ILMRP noted in Draper¹⁴⁸ by providing evidence of the attitude of a younger, more educated and generally less rural constituency towards both the Isan language, and initiatives to maintain and revive it. That the great majority of respondents wanted to see more multilingual signage including Isan suggests that the signage should be seen as a successful first step to officialize the Isan language, thus making it a successful “status planning” initiative within Hornberger’s framework.¹⁴⁹ Basically, it confirms the support for official multilingualism in the domain of formal education of 75%¹⁵⁰ and multilingual signage of around 85%¹⁵¹ agreement in the community. It is therefore some way to confirming as a “social fact” that the majority of Isan people want more multilingual signage, possibly concomitant with the introduction of formal multilingual Thai-Isan-English education in schools, a discourse perhaps representative of the so-called ‘ethnic revival’ in Thailand.¹⁵²

To conclude, the development of multilingual signage and hence a more multicultural setting in the Faculty of Humanities at KKU is an initiative that is clearly welcomed by the student body. While not reported in detail in the present article, interviews with faculty staff detected a minority of somewhat guarded opinions towards the signage, in nexus analysis terms perhaps due to concern about asserting the Isan sociocultural identity on the public scene, a concern perhaps both related to ongoing discourses of Isan political aspirations as well as individual historical understandings of the roles of language in Thai nation building. In addition, more needs to be done to understand how private entrepreneurs see the use of Isan, and educational offerings that include the Isan language, need to continue to be offered. The president of the University should be consulted as to whether the installation of multilingual signage would be welcome more widely. Furthermore, it should be remembered that at the time of writing, Khon Kaen’s municipalities are implementing

¹⁴⁷ Bruce D. Missingham, “Forging solidarity and identity in the Assembly of the Poor: From local struggles to a national social movement in Thailand,” *Asian Studies Review* 27, no. 3 (2003):317-340.

¹⁴⁸ Draper, 2010, 144-5.

¹⁴⁹ Hornberger, 78.

¹⁵⁰ Draper, 2010, 141, at 75%.

¹⁵¹ Draper, 2010, 141,

¹⁵² Patrick Jory, “Multiculturalism in Thailand? Cultural and regional resurgence in a diverse kingdom,” *Harvard Asia Pacific Review* Winter (2000),

<http://hcs.harvard.edu/~hapr/winter00_millennium/Thailand.html>, (21 June 2012).

ways to give the Isan language higher prestige, and they are currently working on proliferating multilingual signage containing Isan as part of an initiative to maintain and revitalize Isan culture as well as to introduce multilingual education using the mother tongue. All these events and individuals in themselves are worthy of study as part of the interaction order of nexus analysis. To sum up, within the “field” of Thai identity, a chain of social effects is slowly emerging,¹⁵³ driven by a small but increasing number of powerful patrons, which stresses the Isan “collective identity” and which may one day see formal multilingual education in Isan emerge as a “social fact.” Progress in this field should attempt to track this emerging chain of structuration effects using all the sociological tools available, and it is hoped that the present study outlines how Ben-Rafael's theoretical principles¹⁵⁴ together with nexus analysis can be utilized in a brief analysis of results.

I would like to acknowledge a grant from the Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region at Khon Kaen University as well as European Union Grant EuropeAid/131209/C/ACT/T, both of which made this research possible.

¹⁵³ Bourdieu, 1984.

¹⁵⁴ Ben-Rafael, 44-48.

Appendix 1: Student Attitude Survey (English Version)**ILMRP Multilingual Landscape Study: Attitude Survey**

Research Participant Number:

1) Age:	2) Gender:	3) Town & Province of Birth:	4) Faculty:	5) Major:
6) What is your ethnicity? (MAKE SURE e.g., Central Thai, Southern Thai, Southern Thai Muslim, Lanna, Sino-Thai, Vietnamese Isan, Cambodian Isan, 'Real' Isan, Pu Thai, So, etc.)				
7) What language do your parents speak when you're not there?				
8) How many of your grandparents come from Isan?				
9) What is the mother tongue (e.g., Central Thai, Chinese, 'Real Isan', etc.) of your				
a) Paternal grandfather:		b) Paternal grandmother:		
c) Maternal grandfather:		d) Maternal grandmother:		
10) What languages do you speak with your closest friends?				
a) Main language:		b) Other languages:		
11) What language do you usually think in?		12) What language do you usually dream in?		
13) SHOW SIGNS 'A', 'B', and 'C'. What language is the second language of these signs?				
INFORM LANGUAGE OF SIGNS				
14) Did you know that there used to be an alphabet used in the Isan region before Thai?				
YES <input type="radio"/>		NO <input type="radio"/>		
15) Would you like to see more Thai-Isan-English signs like this in the University?				
YES <input type="radio"/>		NO <input type="radio"/>		NO IDEA <input type="radio"/>
IF 'YES', GO TO Q17. IF 'NO' OR NO IDEA, SAY THIS: "CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY HAS MULTILINGUAL THAI-LANNA-ENGLISH SIGNS." SHOW SIGN OF CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY (D, E and F). THEN ASK...				
16) Now would you like to see more Thai-Isan-English signs like this in the University?				
YES <input type="radio"/>		NO <input type="radio"/>		STILL NO IDEA <input type="radio"/>
IF 'Yes', GO TO Q17. IF 'NO', GO TO Q18)				
17) How does it make you feel to see Thai-Isan-English signs?				
About Thai:	About Isan:	About English:		
18) Is there anything you would like to ask?				

Appendix 2: Faculty Signs

Figure A. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Student Union sign.



Figure B. Canteen sign.



Figure C..Main faculty sign.

