

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 The Lanna language

Nowadays if you ask people in North Thailand the question, "Do you know the Lanna language?", the majority of the people will answer, "What? What is the Lanna language?" or "Is Lanna<sup>1</sup> the same as Kammuang?" Lanna has become an unknown language for the majority of Northern Thai people.

Hundreds of years ago, Lanna was a well-known language among the Lanna or Northern Thai people. More recently, the Central government declared that everyone in Thailand had to learn Standard Thai (Central Thai) in school. Standard Thai became the language of government, schools, and mass media throughout Thailand. Kammuang, the modern spoken form of the old Lanna language, is still spoken widely throughout the north, but the old Lanna script has been almost forgotten. There are now only a few people, usually old people, who know how to use it. Even though spoken Kammuang is widespread, it has been greatly influenced by Standard Thai. Fortunately, some scholars are now trying to preserve the Lanna language by holding conferences about Lanna and teaching the Lanna script in schools, churches and temples.

There are many reasons why this researcher chose this thesis topic. The birth of the idea of doing the thesis about the Lanna language was prompted by Aj. Mark Osborne, who was the researcher's anthropology teacher. Aj. Mark suggested that more Northern Thai people are interested in the Lanna language now because the

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, the word 'Lanna' represents the written form or script (orthography) but the word 'Kammuang' represents the spoken form.

present Prime-Minister of Thailand is a Northern Thai resident and has introduced policies that attempt to support and preserve the Lanna language. The second reason is because the national government has recently permitted the Lanna script to be taught in schools. Some students have a chance to study Lanna at school, so the researcher would like to know how these students feel about learning a script that is mostly considered a 'dead alphabet.' The last reason is the researcher is also a northerner who has lived in the north of Thailand all her life, so the researcher thinks that it will be a good thing to do something that is useful and helpful to the language that the researcher uses everyday.

## **1.1 About the language and people of Northern Thailand**

In this thesis, Northern Thai (Khammuang) is considered to be a language, not a dialect. While Northern Thai is sometimes considered to be a dialect of Thai, Ruengdet (1982: 1-2), argues that it should be considered a language because the Northern Thai people have their own script, literature and culture. According to Wantanee (1983), using vocabulary as the criterion, Khammuang has two dialect groups; western Khammuang and eastern Khammuang. The western Khammuang dialect is found in the area of Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, Lamphun and Chiang Rai, and eastern Khammuang is found in the area of Lampang, Phayao, Phrae and Nan. The boundary area of these two dialects is near Lampang-Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai-Phayao.

### **1.1.1 Linguistic classification**

Northern Thai is a member of the Tai language family. According to Edmondson and Solnit (1997), Tai is part of Tai-Kadai language family. Figure 1 shows the sub-branches of the Tai-Kadai language family.

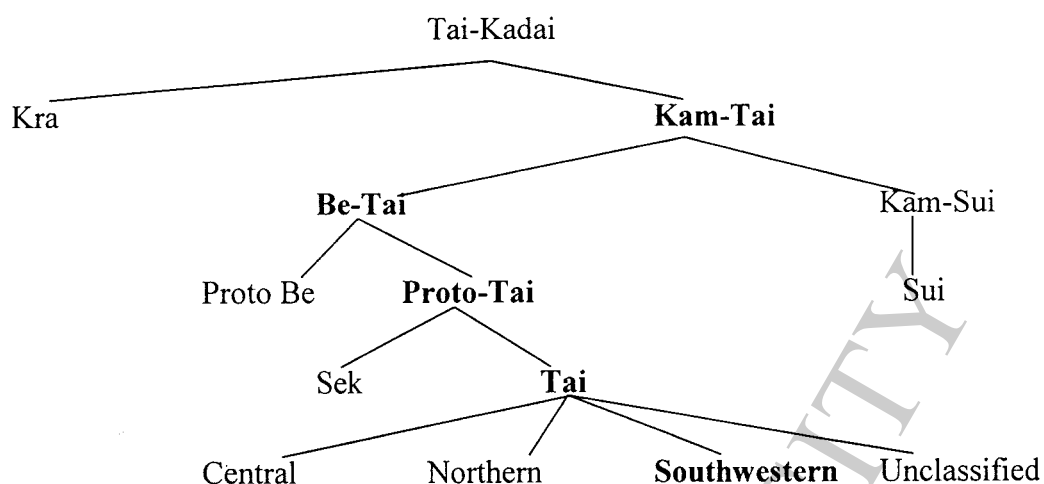


Figure 1: The family tree of Tai languages

The sub-classification of Southwestern Tai languages (SWT) is shown in Figure 2. Northern Thai is under the Southwestern group and is in the same group as Tai Dam and Tai Daeng. The following figure is a sketch based on a combination of several sources e.g. Li (1960), Tingsabath and Abramson (2001), International Conference on Tai Studies (1998), and Edmondson and Solnit (1997).

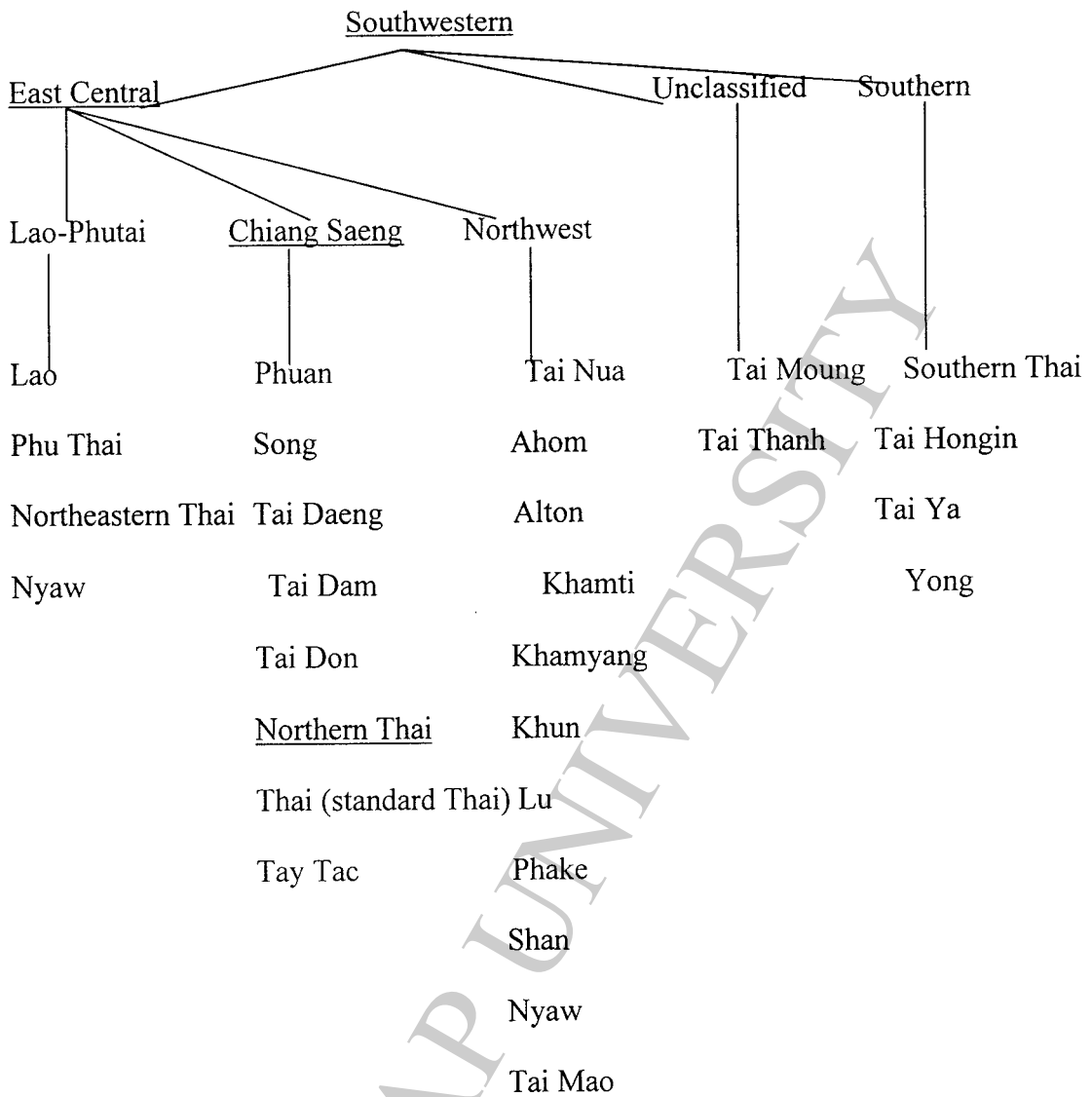


Figure 2: SWT language subdivision

There are four different names that have been used to refer to the Northern Thai language: Thai Yuan, Thai Payap, Northern Thai, and Kammuang (Wantanee, 1983). The Ethnologue has some alternate spellings as well as some historical and contemporary dialect names: Lanna, Lan na, Lana Tai, 'Yuan', Phyap, Phayap, Payap, Kammuang, Kammyang, Myang, Kam muang, Muang, Khon muang, Khon Myang, Tai Nya, La Nya, Northern Thai, Western Laotian (Grimes, 2004)

### 1.1.2 Location

Thailand is divided into five regions; North, Northeast, Central, East, and South, as shown in Figure 3.

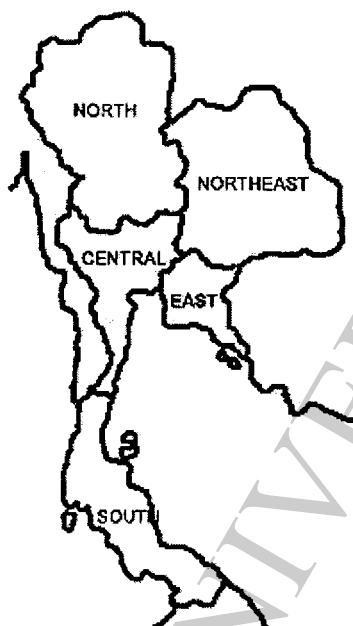


Figure 3: The five regions of Thailand

Northern Thai is the regional language in the eight-northernmost provinces of Thailand; Chiang Rai, Phayao, Lampang, Phrae, Nan, Mae Hongson, Lamphun, and Chiang Mai (Renu, 2000: 1) as shown in Figure 4. There are more than 6,005,000 speakers of this language in Thailand (Grimes, 2004). Each province has a slightly different variety of Kammuang. These Kammuang varieties are not very different in terms of vocabulary and tone, and people from each province are still able to understand each other. Kammuang speakers are able to guess where certain speakers come from by listening to the way they speak (Wantanee, 1983). Of these varieties,

the variety that is regarded as the most pleasant sounding is Chiang Mai, because it has a moderate tempo and soft sound (Preeya, 1989: 61).

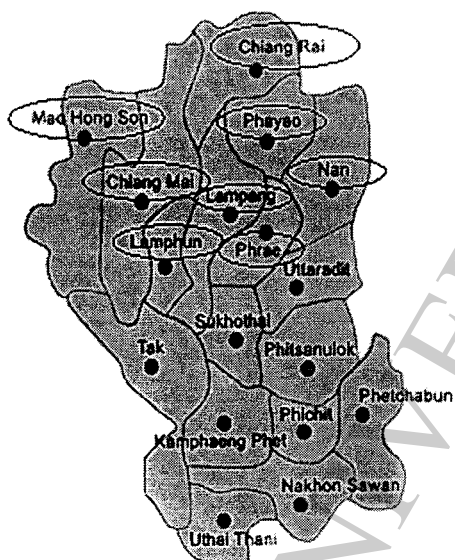


Figure 4: Map of the Northern region: area of the Lanna Kingdom circled

Even though many people believe that Northern Thai and Standard Thai are closely related, Northern Thai has many characteristics that are different from Standard Thai, including sound system, grammar and vocabulary. For example, the Lanna script represents six tones, but Standard Thai has only five tones. Some consonants that occur in Standard Thai do not occur in the Lanna script e.g. /tʃʰ/ and /r/. Generally, Kammuang speakers are able to understand Standard Thai more than vice versa because they have exposure to Standard Thai in the mass media and educational system (Person, 1998: 3).

In the past, Central Thai people called the people who lived in the northern part of Thailand 'Yuan' or 'Thai Yuan,' and called language 'Thai Yuan' (Ruengdet, 1982: 2). In the past, Central Thai people (especially those from Bangkok) and some foreign visitors called the northerners "Lao," because of the similarity of Northern Thai and Lao language and culture. However the Northern Thai people did not call themselves 'Lao,' nor did they like others to call them 'Lao' because they consider that, even though Lao people have a similar appearance to Northern Thai people, the culture of the Lao and the culture of the Northern Thai is different (Suthep, 2003: 70-89). Now, the native speakers of Northern Thai call their language 'Kammuang,' which means 'town language'. ('Kam' means language or word and 'muang' means town). The reason why they called this language 'Kammuang' is because they used this language in the towns where they lived together, which were surrounded by mountainous areas where there were many hill tribe people. The native speakers of Northern Thai call themselves 'Khonmuang,' which means 'the people of the town', and they call their former kingdom 'Lanna' or 'Lanna Thai.' Thus Northern Thai can also be called the 'Lanna Thai' language. Historically, the Lanna people had their own script, literature and culture. Now the Lanna script is mainly used for religious purposes by Buddhist monks (Ruengdet, 1982: 2).

### **1.1.3 Brief history of the Lanna Kingdom**

King Mengrai (born in Chiang Saen in 1239) is credited as the founder of the Kingdom of Lanna. In 1262, he established a new city at Chiang Rai, where he moved his capital. Later he extended his influence into the Fang area, where he planned to take over the Mon Kingdom of Haripunjaya (modern Lamphun). He eventually became the king of Haripunjaya in 1281. At the same time, he extended his power to Phayao through an alliance with Ngam Muang, and had a good relationship with King Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai. Then in about 1289, Mengrai began to make plans to conquer Pegu, the capital of a Mon area in Burma. When

Mengrai and his army arrived in Mae Hong Son, he met the King of Pegu and established an alliance with him.

In 1292 Mengrai chose the present site of Chiang Mai to be his new capital. However, the threat of an invasion of Mongols from the north delayed the beginning of construction until 1296.

At the height of his power, Mengrai ruled over many different peoples, including a variety of Tai, Mon and other ethnic groups. He ruled over a large area of what is now Northern Thailand. The mix of these groups of people led to what is now called Lanna culture. Mengrai also introduced a new Buddhist sect to the area. Thus "in piety no less than through military and political successes, the population of Lanna could express a common identity that only gradually became what is now thought of as Tai Yuan, 'Northern Thai'" (Kobkan and Messenger, 1995: 3-4).

After King Mengrai's reign, the power of the Kingdom of Lanna began to decrease but then increased again in the time of King Ku Na (1355 - 1385). There were several generations of Lanna kings after King Ku Na. The most notable was Tilokaracha, who reigned from 1441 to 1487. During Tilokaracha's time the Lanna kingdom was constantly at war with the Kingdom of Ayudhya. "Tilokaracha made Lanna a regional power whose influence extended hundreds of miles in every direction" (Kobkan and Messenger, 1995: 4).

By the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Lanna had lost its independence. In 1558, Chiang Mai fell to the Burmese. The Kingdom of Lanna was under the domination of the Burmese for a long time and then for many years was under Siamese rule. In the late 1800's King Chulalongkorn consolidated administrative and political control over his kingdom, including Chiang Mai and the Lanna area.



In 1933, much of the territory of Lanna was formally incorporated into the state of Thailand when the Thai government declared that the status of provinces was to be subordinate to the Thai Ministry of the Interior (Kobkan and Messenger, 1995: 2-6).

## **1.2 Research questions**

This thesis focuses on the following three research questions. Each of these examines a different aspect of Kammuang and Lanna script usage. The first question is: What are the problems Kammuang speakers experience when they learn to read and write the Lanna script? Although Kammuang is the modern spoken version of the Lanna language, there are a number of differences between spoken Kammuang and written Lanna, especially with respect to consonant clusters and final consonants.

The second research question is, What are the attitudes of students and their parents in Northern Thailand towards Kammuang and the Lanna script? The researcher believes that most students have a positive attitude towards Kammuang and the Lanna script. They feel that Kammuang and the Lanna script must be preserved. Additionally, the factors that affect these attitudes must be examined. This thesis will examine such factors as the student's major, parental attitudes, residence, and gender.

The third research question is; How are Kammuang and the Lanna script presently used in Northern Thailand? In Northern Thailand we can see many posters, signboards, political leaflets and road signs that are written in the Lanna script and also with Kammuang in Thai script. Many schools have introduced Lanna classes and clubs. Television and radio stations use Kammuang often.

### **1.3 Research objectives**

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- 1) To identify the problems Kammuang speakers experience when they learn to read and write the Lanna script.
- 2) To discover the attitudes of students and their parents in two schools in Northern Thailand towards Kammuang and the Lanna script, and analyze the factors that affect these attitudes.
- 3) To explore the present use of Kammuang and the Lanna script in Northern Thailand.

### **1.4 Methodology**

This section describes the methodology used for this research.

#### **1.4.1 Kammuang phonology and the Lanna orthography**

As part of the researcher's description of Kammuang phonology and Lanna orthography, the researcher analyzed a list of two hundred words provided by Aj. Kirk R. Person. In this wordlist, there are six columns: Kammuang, Phonetic transcription, written Lanna script, Thai transliteration of the Lanna script, IPA transliteration of the Lanna script, and English meaning. The researcher asked Aj. Manop Panyo to pronounce each word to check the transliteration in the Lanna script. Analyzing this list helped the researcher to see the problems of Kammuang speakers when they learn to read and write the Lanna script. The researcher also interviewed two teachers who teach Lanna: Aj. Mongkhon Tuknuk, who teaches at Lampang Kanlayanee School in Lampang, and Aj. Manop Panyo, who teaches at Chiang Mai First Church in Chiang Mai. The questions mostly concerned the problems of

Kammuang speakers when they learn to read and write the Lanna script. Both teachers have noticed these problems when they teach Lanna in class.

### **1.4.2 The attitude survey**

The second section of this thesis studies the attitudes of Northern Thai youth towards Kammuang and the Lanna script.

The population studied consisted of three groups of people: forty grade ten English-French program students at Lampang Kanlayanee School (LKS), forty grade ten English-Social Science program students at Lampang Kanlayanee School, and forty first year Computer program vocational students at the Lampang College of Commerce and Technology (LCCT). The parents of each student in every group were also included in the survey.

These three groups of students were different in terms of having a chance to study Lanna at school. The first group of forty students were studying in the grade ten English-French program at Lampang Kanlayanee School. A Lanna class was an compulsory subject for these students. They have to study Lanna and take mid-term and final examinations for this subject. The second group of forty students was studying in the grade ten English-Social Science program at Lampang Kanlayanee School. A Lanna class was an elective for them. They could choose whether they wanted to study Lanna or not. The third group was forty first-year vocational students who are in the computer program at the Lampang College of Commerce and Technology. Lanna classes are not available in this school. Thus the students in this school have less of a chance to study the Lanna language.

The instruments employed in this study are a questionnaire given to the students in each school and a separate questionnaire for their parents. The questionnaires used in

this study were inspired by Baker (1992: 138-144). A copy of both questionnaires, in Thai and English, can be found in Appendix II.

The first questionnaire was designed for the students. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part asked for demographic information. The subjects were asked for personal information such as age, gender, birthplace, residence, and major area of study. The second part was the language use and language attitude section. Language use is investigated to find out the choice of language use with different individuals in each domain. For language attitudes, the investigation focused on subjects' attitudes in three areas: the importance of Kammuang for different activities (e.g. to make friends, to earn plenty of money, to get a job etc), evaluation of positive and negative statements regarding Kammuang, and an evaluation of statements regarding the Lanna script. The third part of the questionnaire asked the students to evaluate their spoken Kammuang and written Lanna script abilities<sup>2</sup>. Most of the questions used in the students' questionnaires were closed-questions, with only one open question.

The second questionnaire was designed for the parents. This questionnaire was much shorter than the student one. It consisted of two parts. The first part was biodata. The subjects were asked for personal information such as age, gender, education, birthplace, and residence. The second part focused on language attitudes towards Kammuang and the Lanna script. The majority of language attitude questions were related to their children.

The questionnaires were distributed to the students at the beginning of a class period. The researcher was present in the class to clarify and answer questions from the students. After the students completed their questionnaires, the researcher gave them

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<sup>2</sup> Although the results of self-assessment questions can be subjective, such responses are used by sociolinguists to shed further light on language attitudes. Higher ability in a minority language may lead to better attitudes toward the language.

the questionnaires for their parents. They were asked to take them home and ask their parents to complete them and then bring them back to school on the following day.

### **1.4.3 The current use of Kammuang and the Lanna script**

The third section of this thesis is the current use of Kammuang and the Lanna script. For this the researcher did observations around Chiang Mai, Lamphun and Lampang by focusing on signboards, posters, road signs and names of places. The researcher also photographed signs that were interesting. A variety of places were observed, including temples, schools, etc. The researcher also asked Aj. Mongkhon and Aj. Manop about school courses, programs or clubs that support the Lanna language and anything else they were aware of regarding the use of Kammuang or the Lanna script. The researcher also studied the internet and magazines to see how people use Kammuang and the Lanna script nowadays and what they are doing to help preserve Kammuang and the Lanna script.

### **1.5 Limitations of the study**

There are a number of limitations in the research described in this thesis. The problems Kammuang speakers experience when they learn to read and write the Lanna script that are mentioned in this thesis are only some examples of the many problems that people could have. The researcher did not identify every problem that could occur. The second limitation is with respect to the current use of Kammuang and the Lanna script. Because of the limitations of time, the researcher could travel to only three provinces: Chiang Mai, Lamphun and Lampang. Nevertheless, the researcher has surveyed newspapers, radio, television and other media in order to find how Kammuang and the Lanna script are used. The last limitation is with respect to the attitude of Northern Thai youth towards Kammuang and the Lanna script. Questionnaires were only given to three classes in two schools in one town of North

Thailand. Thus, this study may not fully apply to other Northern Thai youth in other provinces.

PAYAP UNIVERSITY