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Attitudes towards Thai, Patani Malay, and English of Thai Undergraduates: A Case Study at Prince of Songkla University Pattani Campus, Thailand

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Abstract

The paper will shed light on the multilingual phenomena of Thai undergraduates from the southernmost provinces where multilingualism is particularly vital. This paper focuses on attitudes towards the Thai, Patani Malay, and English languages of Thai undergraduates, exploring their reasons behind their attitudes. Data was collected by interviewing 30 undergraduates from Prince of Songkla University Pattani Campus, Thailand. A qualitative approach was used for data analysis. The results revealed the positive attitudes towards the three languages by most students, though their underlying reasons varied.

Keywords: Language attitudes; Thai as the majority language; Patani Malay as the minority language; English as the foreign language; Thai undergraduates; Prince of Songkla University Pattani Campus

1. Introduction

Thailand--officially known as the Kingdom of Thailand (previously called Siam)--situated in Southeast Asia is “both multilingual and multiethnic” (Rappa & Wee, 2006, p. 105; Phillips, 2007). The country is composed of five regions, sharing borders with four countries: the north borders on Myanmar and Laos, the northeast borders on Laos.

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and Cambodia, the south borders on Northern Malaysia, and the west borders on Myanmar (Phillips, 2007; London, 2008). It is a constitutional monarchy with a democratic parliamentary system of government (Phillips, 2007).

The current population is approximately 65 million including various ethnic minorities: indigenous Thai (75%), Thai Chinese (14%), Malay (3%), and the rest are Vietnamese, Khmers, Indians, Mons, and hill tribes, such as the Karens, Lahus, and Lissus (Smalley, 1994; Rappa & Wee, 2006; Peleggi, 2007; Phillips, 2007; London, 2008).

The main varieties of the Thai language can be divided into four based on regional features, that is, “Kammuang” (Northern Thai), “Isan” or “Lao” (Northeastern Thai), “Klang” or “Thaiklang” (Central Thai), and “Tay” or “Paktay” (Southern Thai) (Smalley, 1994, p. 67; Warotamasikkhadit & Person, 2011, p. 34). Apart from these major varieties, over 70 minority languages are used in the country; for instance, Patani Malay and Thai Khmer have more than 1 million speakers (Smalley, 1994; London, 2008; Warotamasikkhadit & Person, 2011). There are also varieties of Chinese spoken among the Chinese communities (Smalley, 1994).

1.1. Thai or Standard Thai

Though Thailand is home to various minority languages, the only language with privilege is Standard Thai (hereafter Thai), the sole national and official language of the country defining the Thai national identity and strengthening national unity (Rappa & Wee, 2006; Lee Hugo, 2013). Due to its status, Thai is therefore widely used throughout the country in all domains, including government and in education (Lee Hugo, 2013). If to fully feel part of the country, one must learn and speak Thai (Rappa & Wee, 2006). Furthermore, it is the main medium of instructions in the Thai educational system (Bradley, 2006; Rappa & Wee, 2006), albeit education sometimes shifts to the local varieties in rural schools (Rappa & Wee, 2006). The language is standardized by the Royal Institute guidance (Bradley, 2006).

1.2. Thai Malays and Patani Malay

The Thai Malay communities are predominantly in the far south of Thailand, specifically in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun provinces close to northern Malaysia (Rappa & Wee, 2006). The majority of these Malay speakers are Muslims, descending from the Malay ethnic group. They speak Patani Malay vernacular as their mother tongue (Burarungrot, n.d.; Rappa & Wee, 2006; London, 2008; Nookua, 2012; Premsrirat & Uniansasmita, 2012). Thus, the Thai Malays in this region are unique and distinct from the Thai majority who speak Thai as their mother tongue.

Although they are Malay descendents, the Thai Malays do not speak English as Malays in Malaysia, because they are Thai citizens and in the same circle - expanding circle (see the three concentric circles of Asian Englishes in Kachru, 2005), as citizens of the rest of the country. Therefore, English is a foreign language to them as well.

Thus, for the Thai Muslims in these southernmost provinces, Patani Malay is their mother tongue with Thai as their second language, and English as a third language which they learn at school (Srisueb & Wasanasomsithi, 2010).

1.3. English in Thailand

Historically, in 1826 during the reign of King Rama III (ruling 1824-51), the English language came to Thailand via British diplomats from the British East India Company for international trading between Thailand (at that time “Siam”) and Britain (Phillips, 2007; London, 2008). King Rama IV (ruling 1851-68) realized the usefulness of English in preserving the independence of the country and preventing it from the European powers, and thus demanded a good knowledge of English as a tool to modernize the country (Rappa & Wee, 2006; Phillips, 2007; London, 2008; Kachru & Nelson, 2011). Initially, English was exclusively used among the royal members and the Siamese elite during the reigns of King Rama IV and V onwards (Phillips, 2007; London, 2008; Yiamkhammun, 2011). Later, not only the royal family but also the Thai government felt the importance of English for the global economy and for establishing Thai modernity; therefore, the need for more Thais to know English increased with more contacts with western countries (Rappa & Wee, 2006). Consequently, in 1913, English became part of the Thai educational curriculum (Kachru & Nelson, 2011); as a result, it became the first foreign language subject in the Thai educational system.
It is clear that English has been of value to the country as key for widening knowledge and for international communication (Kachru & Nelson, 2011). The English Language was initially used for international trade and diplomacy (Rappa & Wee, 2006), but it is also widespread among other classes because of the requirement to learn English. In addition, those who know English can gain social mobility, including positions in government (Rappa & Wee, 2006).

Today, English has become the most popular and “the main foreign language in Thailand” (Rappa & Wee, 2006, p. 107). It has remained a part of the national curriculum for Basic Education and Higher Education (Ministry of Education, n.d.). In this way, the majority of Thai students learn English at school.

As a multiethnic and multilingual country, Thai people speak varieties of the Thai language adjacent to their regional origins and/or speak their heritage languages (e.g., Chinese, Patani Malay, Burmese, etc.). In addition, they might have knowledge of other foreign languages which they use. These people have more than one language in their linguistic repertoire, knowing when to use them – they are classified as bilinguals or multilinguals. This phenomenon has attracted many scholars to examine individual attitudes to these languages in order to explain the phenomenon and to understand better language situations as in Europe where bilingualism is promoted.

2. Language Attitudes

The traditional works of language attitudes emanate from the social psychology paradigm (O’Rourke, 2011), where attitude is treated as a vital concept for studying. Taken into account, the concept of language attitudes therefore has no general agreement as the concept of attitude itself. In this paper, we followed the language attitude concept of Ryan, Giles, and Sebastian (1982): that is any indicator, which might be feelings, knowledge, or behaviour or verbal statement, of evaluated reaction towards a given code or language or the speakers of the language. More specifically the researchers followed this method to infer attitudes towards Thai, Patani Malay, and English via their responses to the three languages.

In terms of language, people may hold attitudes towards any aspect of a language, such as accents, words, grammar, dialects and languages (Garrett, 2010). When a view is held towards any aspect of a language, eventually such view reflects attitudes to the users of that language (Edwards, 1982; Fasold, 1984; Preston, 2010; Van Herk, 2012) and its usage (Holmes, 2008).

Fasold (1984) explains the rubric for studying language attitudes based on the nature of attitude. There are two orientations that researchers can take into account for studying language attitudes: mentalist view and behaviourist view. The former concerns the inner state of readiness that can be inferred via behaviours or reports of attitudes. The latter refers to responses to social situations for a given language. Fasold (1984); Akande and Salami (2010) note that most studies on language attitudes are based on the mentalist orientation. In this paper, we also adopt this approach to infer attitudes based on subjects’ responses. Thus, the direct approach was used by asking participants directly about their attitudes towards the three languages. Their underlying reasons would give more insight into their attitudes.

Language attitude is significant in sociolinguistics, because it influences people’s decision to use a language. On the one hand, attitudes help explain the present behaviour and help predict the future acts. Positive attitudes promote the effective use of languages (Marti et al., 2005). Language attitudes may shed light on awareness of language situations (Garrett, 2001) and help understand social structure (Fasold, 1984).

3. Problem Statement

Studies on language attitudes are limited, especially in the southernmost region of Thailand. There were some studies focusing on language use alone in the southernmost region. These studies showed that people used their ethnic vernacular (i.e., Patani Malay) in informal domains, such as home and their communities (see Burarungrot, n.d.; Nookua, 2012), and in local mass media (see Uniansasmita, 2010). In addition, the studies revealed that these people used Standard Thai (the national language) in formal contexts, such as government and education (see Nookua, 2012), using Standard Malay/ Central Malayu written in Jawi script and Arabic in the religious domain (see Nookua, 2012; Premsrirat & Uniansamita, 2012). Though some have investigated language attitudes and/or language use in some parts of Thailand, including the far south and have identified the use of the minority language (Tai dialects, Yong,
Patani Malay) and the majority language (Thai), none has focused on attitudes towards the foreign language (English), which use has been promoted by the government and educators in preparing for the launch of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). As well, there are no clear empirical data identifying patterns of attitudes towards Thai and Patani Malay in the far south of Thailand, although it is obvious that this region is linguistically diverse. In this way, the researchers investigated attitudes in the region more than had been previously documented (esp., in Pattani).

To sum up, in Thailand, especially in the province of Pattani, there were no studies focusing on the following: 1) attitudes towards the majority language (Thai), the minority language (Patani Malay), and the foreign language (English) in Pattani; 2) language attitudes of university students, who will be key citizens in the future. Therefore, the present study is intended to fill these identified research gaps with the specific objectives to discover language attitudes of Thai undergraduates of Prince of Songkla University Pattani Campus (hereafter PSU Pattani) towards Thai, Patani Malay, and English, including their underlying reasons. In this manner, the following research questions were addressed: (1) What are the attitudes of Thai undergraduates towards Thai, Patani Malay, and English?; and (2) Why do the students have such attitudes?

4. Methodology

To answer the research questions, a qualitative method design was adopted.

4.1. Subjects

The participants consisted of 30 undergraduates who studied at PSU Pattani. They were second year students from six faculties: Faculty of Education (6 students), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (7 students), Faculty of Communication Sciences (5 students), College of Islamic Studies (5 students), Faculty of Science and Technology (5 students), and Faculty of Political Science (2 students). Seventy percent were women and 30% were men. Their average age was 20 years and 3 months. All of them started acquiring Patani Malay from birth. Their average age of beginning to acquire Thai and English were 5 and 6 years old respectively. All of them were Muslims from the southernmost provinces—Pattani (19), Narathiwat (8), Yala (2), and Songkhla (1)—with Patani Malay as their mother tongue. Before they enrolled at university, 73.3% attended public school for kindergarten and primary levels. About 87% received secondary education in Islamic Private Schools.

4.2. Instrument

Semi-structured questionnaire were used for the interviews. A semi-structured interview allows the participants to elaborate on their answers with particular topics, as the questions are open-ended as asked by the interviewer who follows guiding questions (Dornyei, 2007, p. 136).

The semi-structured interview questions were developed from Lasagabaster and Huguet (2007)’s instrument and Salasiah (1996)’s instrument, with a voice-recorder used during the interview session. The semi-structured questionnaire consisted of (1) demographic data of the students, and (2) language attitudes questions about the three languages: Thai, Patani Malay, and English, with the reasons for their attitudes. The questions were tested with 5 students before using for the entire sample. After testing, some changes were made on language attitude questions because of its ambiguity.

4.3. Data collection procedures

The data was collected in the second semester of Academic Year 2014 from February 19 to March 6, 2015. The students were approached with the assistance of a lecturer from PSU Pattani, who asked for cooperation with the interviews from undergraduates, selecting them based on the convenience sampling technique. Thirty undergraduates were chosen from those whom were willing to participate. We then made appointment with them for their availability. Hence, all the participants were scheduled for interview sessions at different times. Two weeks were spent on data collection during weekdays and weekends.
For sessions, the researchers and the participants developed a rapport before starting the interview. All the interview sessions were conducted in Thai, because it made the participants more relaxed by using a language they were familiar with, easing the participation.

Before the interview began, the researchers as the interviewers briefed them about the study’s objectives, informed them about the voice recording and assured them that the data was confidential. Then the participant was asked to sign the consent form. These processes followed those suggested by Dornyei (2007), encouraging the participants to talk openly as they understood the objective of the questions and what would happen to their answers. Then we asked each guiding question, allowing the participant to talk freely with each voice recorded without being interrupted. After the participant answered all the questions, the researcher showed gratitude to the participant for the cooperation, including a token of appreciation. These steps were reiterated with all participants.

Each interview session took about 20 minutes to complete. Thus, the total recordings totaled about 600 minutes.

4.4. Data analysis

The qualitative data were derived from the 30 undergraduate interviews. A content analysis method was used to analyze the qualitative data, coding the themes manually. Dornyei (2007, p. 245) explains this as themes or “qualitative categories” which inductively emerge when analyzing the data.

The recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. After that was completed, we had an expert in Thailand proofread the transcripts. Then the transcripts were assessed following content analysis; that is, any emerging theme in the responses that was relevant to attitudes towards Thai, Patani Malay, and English was coded. The same favourable, neutral, or unfavourable attitudes towards each language were grouped together, with their reasons behind it were grouped as well.

5. Results

The main objective of this paper was to investigate attitudes towards Thai (the majority language), Patani Malay (the minority language), and English (the foreign language) among Thai undergraduates in PSU Pattani, a linguistically diverse institution. Reasons underlying their attitudes were also discussed.

5.1. Attitudes towards Thai

When analyzing the attitudes towards Thai, 80% of the students showed positive attitudes, with only 20% of the students reporting neutral attitudes.

Reasons for having favourable attitudes towards Thai

A. Thai was a language for communication with in-group and out-group communities in general and as a necessity.
Eleven students were in favour of Thai because they thought it was useful for communication as dictums:

Example (1)

Student 5: It is the dominant language that I can use around Thailand.
Student 9: I learn Thai and I think it is easy. We can use it to communicate with others.
Student 10: We use Thai to interact with people in the country. We can use it with people from other regions. When we use Standard Thai, the whole people can comprehend it. If we use Patani Malay, only those Patani Malay speech community understand the language. We can’t use it with the out-group.
Student 17: I can use Thai with everybody no matter if they are Thai Buddhist friends or Thai Muslim friends who can’t speak Patani Malay. Besides, when I use Patani Malay with Patani Malay speaking friends who are from other provinces, they sometimes don’t understand my variety. Thus, I don’t have to interpret if I use Thai.
When asking the students why they had positive attitudes towards Thai, Student 5 and Student 9 were similar in their responses that Thai was useful for communicating with other Thai people in general whereas Student 10 and Student 17 were more specific that the language was used for non Patani Malay speakers in Thailand.

Apart from its generality, three students expressed the necessity for Thai as illustrated below:

Example (2)
Student 2: The Thai language is essential that we have to use in this country as it is the official language.
Student 3: Patani Malay is used in the three southernmost provinces. When we go to other provinces and use Patani Malay with other people, they might not understand it. Thus, we have to use Thai. In this way, Thai is essential.
Student 16: It is because it is essential to use the language. We have to take into account what language people use in the society. It is not congruent if they use Thai while we use Patani Malay.

As seen from the excerpts, it was clear that Thai was vital for these students (Students 2, 3 & 16) to use in Thailand because it is the official language used by the majority people. Besides, these students were from the southernmost provinces who spoke Patani Malay as their mother tongue, they might feel that they needed Thai to communicate with those outsiders, the non Patani Malay speech community otherwise these people would not comprehend them. In this way, they showed positive attitudes towards Thai.

B. The students were familiar with Thai.

Eight students liked Thai due to their familiarity with it as shown in excerpts below:

Example (3)
Student 8: I have studied Thai since I was in a primary school.
Student 14: I have heard it since I was born.
Student 20: When I go out, I will see signs in Thai.

These students held positive attitudes towards Thai because they were used to the language, having known it for a long time. Some recognized it well whenever they saw signs.

Besides, some expressed their frequency of use for their favourable attitudes towards Thai:

Example (4)
Student 1: I have used it since I was young. I always use some Thai words when I interact. As a result, I enjoy using the language.
Student 2: I often use it, so I like it.

Apart from being familiar with Thai since childhood, Student 1 likely used some Thai words in interaction which made her attitude towards Thai more favourable. Similarly, Student 2 had positive attitudes towards Thai because she used it frequently.

C. They were Thai.

Three students expressed that they were in favour of Thai because they were Thai citizens:

Example (5)
Student 21: I am a Thai, so I have to be able to speak Thai.
Student 26: At least I live in Thailand; I should maintain the Thai culture by using the Thai language.
Student 30: The Thai language is the identity of Thailand because it is only used in this country. Besides, Thai is the national language which reflects Thai identity. I am proud of it because we have our own language.

As illustrated in the excerpts, these three students (i.e. Students 21, 26, &30) maintained their Thai identity by using Thai as people in the rest of the country. In this manner, their attitudes towards Thai were positive.

D. They liked the characteristics of Thai.

There were three students showing favourable attitudes towards Thai because of their own interest as dictums:

Example (6)
Student 18: I like it because it isn’t like other languages. When I listen to it, it sounds polite because it has particles (tone of voice).

Student 25: I like it. The Thai language sounds polite...

Student 28: ...I think I like it because it is easy to understand.

The three students liked Thai because of its characteristics of politeness and it was easy to understand.

Reasons for having neutral attitudes towards Thai

The reasons for neutral attitudes varied as shown below:

Example (7)

Student 6: It is because I always use the language. I get used to it although I can’t use it correctly.

Student 7: It is neither easy nor difficult to use. I just feel indifferent.

Student 11: It is because I am a Thai and I can speak Thai.

Student 15: Language is a mean of communication. So, Thai is a medium of communication with others... Yes, it is used for communication.

Student 27: It is because we use Patani Malay at home.

Their responses indicated the following:

1. Thai was just used for communication.

   Unlike others, Student 15 thought that Thai was just used for communication with others, so he felt indifferent because of this.

2. Thai was frequently used.

   Student 6 felt indifferent due to her familiarity of Thai and how often she used it.

3. Thai was not frequently used.

   Student 27 didn’t use Thai at home, so he felt indifferent towards Thai.

4. Thai was not difficult to use as reported by Student 7

5. It was common to speak Thai.

   Student 11 just felt that it was natural for him to speak Thai as he was a Thai.

5.2. Attitudes towards Patani Malay

The attitude towards Patani Malay was rated a bit higher for favourable attitudes (about 83% of cases). About 17% had neutral attitudes.

Reasons for favourable and unfavourable attitudes towards Patani Malay

A. They were familiar with PM.

Sixteen students (i.e. Students 2,3,5,8,9,11,13,16,19,20,21,25,26,28,29 & 30) had positive attitudes towards Patani Malay because they felt familiar with the language as dictums:

Example (8)

Student 2: Patani Malay is my mother tongue. So, I like it and regularly use it.

Student 3: I like it. I have acquired Patani Malay as my first language since I was born. So, I like it.

Student 8: I was born among the Patani Malay speakers.

Student 13: I like it too because I can understand Patani Malay better than Thai. Besides, my whole family also speaks Patani Malay.

Student 28: Of course, I was born with this language. I think it should be maintained.

Student 29: I like it because it is the language of my parents. I have acquired it automatically since I was born. It is in my vein.

Student 30: I like it too because it is the indigenous language which has been used since my ancestors.
These students showed familiarity with Patani Malay as it was their mother tongue; they have acquired it since birth and use it frequently; it was used by their ancestors and is still used in their home, resulting in their favourable attitudes towards the language.

Unlike these sixteen students, four students (i.e. Students 4, 6, 12 & 27) showed neutral attitudes because of their familiarity with their own mother tongue. For instance, when asking why they felt indifferent towards Patani Malay, Student 12 and Student 27 said the following:

Example (9)
Student 12: I am familiar with it. So, I don’t really care either way. It is my mother tongue.
Student 27: It is because people in this area use Patani Malay and my parents use it as well.

As shown in the box, the students’ responses illuminated that though they were born with Patani Malay as their mother tongue and were surrounded by the Patani Malay speakers, they just felt too familiar with the language. As a result, their attitudes towards their own indigenous language were neutral.

B. It was their personal interest.

Two students showed personal interest towards Patani Malay, but their attitudes were opposite. One student (Student 1) showed favourable attitudes towards Patani Malay because she felt it was interesting whereas the other (Student 23) had neutral attitudes because she thought her own language was plain and not beautiful:

Example (10)
Student 1: I also like it. It is interesting.
Student 23: I also neither like nor dislike it. Patani Malay is just a vernacular… It is not as beautiful as Standard Malay. The latter sounds beautiful whereas the former sounds plain.

Personal interest reflects one’s own interest towards any aspect of a language. As shown from the excerpts, it was clear that the preference towards Patani Malay varied from positive to neutral. Student 1 didn’t fully explain why she felt the language interested her, but Student 23 was more specific about the characteristics of her own language—vernacular and plain.

C. It was easy to use and to understand.

There were three students (i.e. Students 7, 10, &17) who felt more comfortable with Patani Malay, especially at home, so their attitudes towards the language were positive:

Example (11)
Student 10: I also like it. When I am at home, I don’t have to speak Thai. I can use Patani Malay with anybody such as neighbors. It is easy to use. I don’t have to make it more formal.
Student 17: I like it. When I am at home, I speak Patani Malay with my parents. I also use it with my close friends because we can understand each other better than using the formal Thai language.

Both students were comfortable using their own vernacular, especially with their family members and their close friends. Their responses indicated that Thai was more formal than Patani Malay, and inferring that Thai was used in more formal domains rather than in informal domains, such as home and friendship. The rest (i.e. Student 7) were at ease because Patani Malay was easier to use.

D. It was unique.

Two students (i.e. Students 14 & 15) showed favourable attitudes towards Patani Malay because of its uniqueness as illustrated below:

Example (12)
Student 14: It is unique as it is only used in the three southernmost provinces.
Student 15: I like it because it is unique. Patani Malay and its varieties (e.g. in Narathiwat, in Yala) have different accents.

The responses of Student 14 and Student 15 had a sense of identity that their mother tongue was special, since it was only spoken in the southernmost provinces which were linguistically diverse. They considered the language of their community as unique. Although Patani Malay was the minority language, it marked their identity.
Apart from the reasons mentioned earlier for attitudes towards Patani Malay, two students had other reasons for favouring the language. One student (Student 18) liked Patani Malay because it was a variety of Standard Malay, whilst the other (Student 24) liked it because of the self-satisfaction of being considered bilingual for knowing Thai and Patani Malay.

5.3. Attitudes towards English

With regard to attitudes towards the foreign language (English), about 77% showed favourable attitudes, 13.3% had neutral attitudes, and 10% held unfavourable attitudes.

Reasons for favourable attitudes towards English

A. English was useful for international communication.
Thirteen students shared common attitudes that English was important for use around the world; thus, they had positive attitudes towards it as exemplified below:
Example (13)
Student 3: English is important when we go abroad because most people use it.
Student 10: I think it has a lot of advantages. We can use English in every country.
Student 18: English is a lingua franca. If I go to other countries, I have to be able to use English because it makes us easier to communicate.
Student 30: English is a lingua franca which can be used around the world.
These students realized that English was a lingua franca that could be used around the world because most people widely use it for international communication.

B. They liked the characteristics of English.
Eight students (Students 2, 10, 11, 14, 17, 23, 25, & 28) showed their own interest towards English as shown below:
Example (14)
Student 10: I like to listen to the language. I am interested in English. I want to be able to use it. I enjoy listening to others interacting in English.
Student 11: I like its accent. People in each country may speak English but with different accents. It looks as if it is identical, but it is not.
Student 17: I want to be good at English... I like to listen to people communicating in English. It sounds smooth and wonderful.
Student 25: When people interact in English, it sounds prestige.
These students held positive attitudes towards English because it sounded wonderful and of its prestige, including the accent used by native English speakers. Others liked English in terms of the choices of English words (Student 23) and for listening to English songs (Student 28).

C. They have good experiences.
Two students liked English because they had good experience with English during their childhood:
Example (15)
Student 7: I have liked it since I was in a primary school. The teacher taught well, so I like the language.
Student 9: When I was in my primary school, I won a prize in an English competition.
Because of the teacher’s abilities and for winning a competition, Student 7 and Student 9 showed positive attitudes towards English.

Reasons for neutral attitudes towards English

Four students showed neutral attitudes towards English because some (Students 1, 15, & 16) were not good at English and one rarely used it except when she studied (Student 19).
Reasons for unfavourable attitudes towards English

Three had negative attitudes towards English because they were not good at it (Students 4 & 8), and one thought he had little chance to use it (Student 12).

6. Discussion

The present study confirms previous studies (i.e. Nookua, 2012; Premsrirat & Uniansasmita, 2012) indicating that Patani Malay speakers are largely Muslims and from the southernmost provinces of Thailand.

Attitudes towards Thai, Patani Malay, and English

Overall the students held positive attitudes towards Thai, Patani Malay, and English, with the number of students holding positive attitudes towards the three languages slightly different: 25 cases for Patani Malay, 24 cases for Thai, and 23 cases for English. Though there were not much differences in these cases, such findings coincide with previous studies (see Huguet, 2007; Gutierrez et al., 2007; Lasagabaster, 2007; Caruana, 2007; Laugharne, 2007), finding that their subjects’ attitudes towards the minority languages were more positive than towards the majority and foreign languages—as Likewise found in the present study. The findings are also congruent with the studies of Tuwakham (2005) and Chirananthanaporn, Chinakharaphong, and Singnoi (2008), revealing that subjects had positive attitudes towards their own languages as well as Standard Thai. Neutral attitudes and unfavorable attitudes were very low in percentage, with no subjects reporting unfavourable attitudes towards Thai and Patani Malay.

In addition, the positive attitudes towards the minority language ensure its vitality—in this case Patani Malay—as noted by Baker (1992) and McKenzie (2008).

Reasons for favourable and neutral attitudes towards Thai, Patani Malay, and English

It can be seen that the reasons given for favourable and neutral attitudes towards the three languages overlap. Thus, we classify the similar responses as means of communication, familiarity and personal interest. These three themes are found across the three languages.

Means of communication refers to the importance of a language as a means for communication in in-group and out-group communities. This theme is in line with Baker (1992)’s instrumental attitudes, referring to the desire to achieve something. According to Baker (1992), learning a second language or maintaining a minority language for the purposes of personal success, basic security, or survival, are all encompassed in instrumental attitudes. It is manifested in excerpts (1, 2, & 13) when students affirmed that Thai was important and necessary for several reasons for communication among Patani Malay speakers with different varieties as well as with non Patani Malay speakers. They also expressed instrumental attitudes when the students wanted to preserve Thai culture through speaking Thai and to preserve Patani Malay which might be for maintaining its vitality (in Example 8, Student 28). And they lastly expressed these attitudes when they wanted to know English for widening their knowledge of the world or communicating with foreigners, as the language serves as a lingua franca which can be used worldwide.

The positive attitudes towards the foreign language because of its international communication reflect the intention of King Rama IV to modernize Thailand. According to Rappa and Wee (2006); Kachru and Nelson (2011), the King realized the importance of English as a tool to widen knowledge and to communicate with foreigners, so as a result English was placed in the Thai educational system. These patterns of thought emanating from these original intentions have been transmitted across time via the reform of school curriculum which has included English as since 1913 (Kachru & Nelson, 2011).

Moreover, Thai has shown a significant role as a means for communication in in-group (i.e. Patani Malays) and out-group (i.e. Non Patani Malays) communities who don’t share a common language. As a result, Thai is a lingua franca in Thailand. This notion supports Rappa and Wee (2006)’s description that Thai is the primary language serving the communicative function inside the country.

Despite its utility, one student showed neutral attitude towards the majority language because of this (in Example 7, Student 15). Perhaps, to some students though a very small case, Thai is not as prestigious as claimed by Rappa and Wee (2006).

In addition, the findings are congruent with Baker (1992)’s integrative attitudes concerning the acceptable desire from another speech community or wanting to be a part of the outside group (Baker, 1992). Example 5 above reflects...
this type of attitude well. The students’ attitudes via their responses signal in-group membership. So, Thai is the sole language to signal national identity in Thailand like Nigerian Pidgin English reflects national identity in Nigeria (see Akande, & Salami, 2010). Additionally, the responses support Rappa and Wee (2006) that the Thai language symbolizes Thai national identity.

Familiarity encompasses reasons for attitudes towards Thai, Patani Malay, and English, which might be favourable or neutral. Examples of familiarity expressed include when the students said they got used to a language, they used or knew it for ages, they were surrounded by people who used the language, the language was their mother tongue, or they grew up with it (see Examples 3, 4, & 8). Due to the fact that they were familiar with Thai or Patani Malay, their attitudes would be expected to be favourable or neutral. These positive attitudes are more desirable because it helps ensure the status and the vitality of Thai as the majority language and/or Patani Malay as the minority language as pointed out by Baker (1992), McKenzie (2008), or Garrett (2010). Such positive attitudes also help promote the use of Thai and Patani Malay which is consistent with Marti et al. (2005)’s claim.

Furthermore, the degree of familiarity towards Patani Malay might be stronger than Thai because Patani Malay was their mother tongue predominantly used, especially at home. As pointed out by Branum-Martin, Mehta, Carlson, Francis, & Goldenberg (2014), the parents’ language use (at home) can influence the amount of the mother tongue spoken. The students’ favourable attitudes might relate to other variables related to the mother tongue (see Caruana, 2007; Gutierrez et al., 2007; Huguet, 2007; Jorda, 2007; Lasagabaster, 2007; Laugharne, 2007; O Laoire, 2007; Ytsma, 2007) and the dominant language use in their hometown (see Caruana, 2007; Huguet, 2007; Jorda, 2007; Gutierrez et al., 2007; Lasagabaster, 2007; Laugharne, 2007; Mettewie & Janssens, 2007), as found by previous studies that examined attitudes towards the minority language.

However, the neutral attitudes towards the minority language (see Example 9) indicate the potential language shift/loss in the near future, as Burarungrot (n.d.) found that the use of Patani Malay declined among the young people in urban areas.

Personal interest refers to the interest in any aspect of a language. Personal interest pinpoints the direction of attitudes towards Thai, Patani Malay and English, whether favourable or neutral. Expressions in excerpts (6, 10, & 14) illuminate this well. Again the more favourable the attitudes, the more vital the language is. Neutral attitudes due for this reason can harm the vitality of the minority language in the future, as the subject might shift to the preferred language as pointed out by Burarungrot (n.d.), though the causes of this are still unclear.

Reasons for unfavourable attitudes

Unfavourable attitudes were found only in the case of English. The lack of proficiency with less chance to use it (Student 12) can create undesirable attitudes towards the language. These findings do not accord with the expectations of Thai educators or the Thai government, particularly with the launch of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015. The government has urged the educational sectors to prepare Thai students to be competitive in job hunting for positions with foreign companies, which requires English proficiency across ASEAN countries. Teachers have been tasked with improving English curricula at the tertiary level, so that Thai students will be well prepared for the job market (Marukatat, 2012).

If the government is concerned about the readiness of these future job seekers with the launch of ASEAN Community, they should develop English curricula that fosters student learning, while enhancing more positive attitudes.

The notion of language choice relating to attitudes is supported by the data (see Examples 1 & 2), when the students considered their surroundings such as people and places for their language use, for example saying they liked Thai. These findings support scholars (i.e. Fasold, 1984; Baker, 1992; Holmes, 2008; Garrett, 2010) who point out the relationships between language attitudes and language use. In addition, attitudes and language use are related in several instances (Examples 4, 7, & 8) above when the direction of their attitudes (i.e. favourable or neutral) towards a language (the majoring and the minority languages) due to their frequency of use.

7. Conclusion

Overall attitudes towards the three languages are positive. The positive attitudes towards the minority language confirm the vitality of Patani Malay. Their positive attitudes towards the majority language (i.e. Thai) confirm its privileged status as the main medium of communication inside the country, as well as the national language. Positive
attitudes towards English signal a good sign for educators as they improve the English curriculum to respond to students’ needs.

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