Conceptual System of the Code Switching between Khmer Dialect and Central Thai

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Abstract—This is a sociolinguistic research aiming to study the code switching between Khmer dialect and Central Thai among the speakers in the village of Ban Nongkhe, Tambon Sukhaibun, Amphoe Soengsang, Nakhonratchasima province. Data collection was conducted through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The subjects are categorized depending on the social factors: gender and age. It also aims to analyze factors impacted on code switching and language choice among the subjects.

The analysis shows that code switching between Thai and Khmer occurs among both the male and female subjects. Code switching is predominantly at the word level in the younger speakers, while in the older speakers having code switching at the sentence level is predominantly. The factors affected on code switching and language choice are interlocutors, topics of conversation, relationship between the interlocutors, and places of conversation.

An analysis of language choice according to the domain of language use reveals that in family domain the male and female speakers use Khmer with their family members, close friends, and monks.

According to the domain of language use, it is found that both the male and female subjects speak Khmer to their family members, close friends, and monks in home domain. While in the domains of community or village, such as schools, fresh food markets, and the city hall, as well as in hospital domain, the subjects of both genders use only Thai in the conversation.

Keywords—code switching, language choice, code mixing

I. INTRODUCTION

SITUATIONS of using more than one language give rise to language contact, and one language having influence on another causes code switching. Blom and Gumperz [1] have studied language use of the people in Hamnesberget, a small town in Northern Norway, and found code switching between a standard dialect, Bokmal, and a regional dialect (Ranamal). Code switching was then found two types. The first type, a situational code-switching, is code-switching by means of situation of language use. The second, metaphorical code-switching, is code-switching by means of topics of conversation but the situation remains the same.

Moreover, Gumperz [1] addressed another type, a conversational code-switching -- code-switching from one to another language in the same sentence for no significant purpose, and especially, using the two languages proportionall. Prasitratthasin [8] called this type as code-switching in conversation.

Romaine [10] explained that code-switching arises from the speakers who use two or more languages alternatively, and appears in language use at least at the phrase level. Usually, code-switching occurs in any community whose population use two or more languages. The language users at that level must be fluent in those languages equally and use them naturally.

Romaine, in addition, addressed 2 types of code-switching, intra-sentential switching occurring in the same clause or sentence, and inter-sentential switching occurring between the clauses or sentences, such as using one language in the first clause and altering to another in the second, without code mixing in each clause. For instance, Sano etta tulla tanne etta I’m very sick. (Finnish/English bilingual) : ‘Tell them to come here that I’m very sick. In each of switching, the speaker may switch properly from one to another language according to language situations, including interlocutors, or topics of conversation, while the language situation remains the same.

Romaine explained the meaning of ‘code’ in ‘code-switching’ as a language variety, including languages, and dialects. Code-switching occurs with any speaker, whether monolingual or bilingual. Choosing any of language varieties means the difference between ‘we’ and ‘they.’ ‘We’ here means a language of minority, suggesting a relationship within their groups, informality, and private activities. While ‘they’ means a language of majority, suggesting a relationship outside the groups and more formality.

Bangkok Thai dialect is the official and national language of Thailand. But Thais do not use only Bangkok dialect in their communication, but also other regional dialects. The regional Thai dialects are manifold, including Central Thai, Northern Thai, Northeastern Thai, and Southern Thai. Prasitratthasin [8] stated that most Thais people believed that regional speakers always use their regional dialects. In fact, this is not always true, for there are some communities in which their people are multilingual and fluent in those languages equally. She [8] proposed aspects concerning a multilingual person that “multilingualism means a state that any individual has knowledge of, or can speak more than one language, or a state that any individual can speak more different languages or dialects, especially other dialects. An individual who is in a state of knowing many languages is called a polyglot or multilingual person.

Code switching is a phenomenon appeared when a person who knows two languages, or a multilingual, uses two or more languages alternatively. This causes the two languages influence on each other. In multilingual communities, there is switching in conversation, called code switching. Accordingly,
The code switching happens when a person use more than one languages, usually two languages, alternatively at the sentence level, for example, speaking Thai in 2-3 sentences, and switching to English in 2-3 sentences naturally. Otherwise, they use a variety alternatively, such as while speaking Bangkok Thai and switching to Songkhla Thai, or speaking formally and speaking informally afterwards. To use two languages at the word level is called code mixing.

Most villagers in the community of Ban Nonkhe communicate in a Khmer dialect, but they also use other dialects, including Central Thai, Northeastern Thai dialect or Isan, Khroat Thai, and Suai in their conversation. While the surrounding communities use other languages, i.e., Thai, Isan, and Thai Khorat -- language switching occurs in conversation at the word level, called code mixing, code switching, and language choice. At the early stage, the researchers thought that language use in multilingual communities should cause many conflicts and troubles, because in those communities there are various ethnic people and languages to communicate. Prensirat (2004: 7) opined that difference of language and ethnos in a community is troublesome, and difficult to manage. Because difference of forms, thoughts, believes, social status, and behaviors, may cause social, political, and administrative problems. Sometimes, these bring about conflicts which need time, cost, and special strategies to overcome in each matter. Basically, the assumption that difference gives rise to troubles causes policies and attempts to reduce or remove the difference: assimilation of the smaller groups to be the same as the larger groups by allocating them to use only the central dialect or culture, or culture of majority, enforcement of the same rules directly or indirectly such as using the official language only in schools, mass media, or business, etc. without considering the basic difference of the population, nor whether and how the population can access the services and facilities of the state. Thus, there are resistance, conflict, disturbance, or losing of identities. Eventually, the native cultures and dialects are endangered, and lost. This causes the societies weak. Parts of people, usually minority, can adapt themselves to the large societies and cultures. But most population cannot adapt themselves nor access state’s resources and thought. These methods are used widely in many societies and countries, but it is found that the people in those societies are difficult to develop. Later, the researchers found that this assumption is not always true, for the people in those areas use different dialects, but mixing and sharing aspects of language and culture.

II. Research findings

2.1. Code switching

Code switching among the male representative subjects between 10-15 years old of the youths in Ban Nonkhe, is counted 26.66 percent of frequency from all code switching. The most found in the conversations is code switching at the word level, using Khmer intervened with Thai. The second frequency is Thai and intervened with Khmer. While code switching at the sentence level is found only that there is 25 percentages of all conversations.

Code switching among the female subjects, between 10-15 years old, assigned as the younger representatives in the village of Ban Nongkhe, is counted 15.00 percent of all code switching. It consists of Khmer with intervened Thai sentences, counting 3.33 percent, and Thai with intervened Khmer 11.66 percent. Code switching is at the word and sentence levels. Thai use intervened with Khmer is the highest rate at 66.66 percent. The most found in code switching is at the word level, 88.88 percent. While code switching at the sentence level is found only in switching of Thai with intervened Khmer sentences, only 11.11 percent.

Code switching among the male subjects, from 45-55 years old, assigned as the older representatives in the village of Ban Nongkhe, is found 16.66 percent of frequency from all code switching. The most found in code switching is at the sentence level, 80 percent, i.e., Khmer with intervened Thai sentences. The second is Thai with intervened Khmer sentences. While code switching at the word level is found only that there is 25 percentages of the conversations.

Code switching among the female subjects, from 45-55 years old, assigned as the older representatives in the village of Ban Nongkhe, is found 31.66 percent of frequency from all code switching. The most found in code switching is at the sentence level, 73.67 percent, i.e., Khmer with intervened Thai sentences as 57.89 percent. The second is Thai with intervened Khmer sentences, 15.78 percent. While code switching at the word level is found only that there is 26.2 percentages of the conversations.

2.2. Language choice

The subjects in the study are the ethnic Khmers obtaining by simple random sampling from 40 persons, consisting of 20 males, and 20 females. The study is divided into 2 topics: language use in community domain, and language use in outside community domain.

2.2.1 language use in community domain: home domain

In the ethnic Khmer families, the male subjects chose Khmer to speak with their family members at the most rate as 75.00 percent. In conversation with other ethnic groups, such as, Laos, Thais, Khroat Thais, they chose to use only Thai as 25 percent. While the female subjects chose Khmer in conversation with the family members in the ethnic Khmer groups at the most rate of 80.00 percent. They chose Lao to converse with the ethnic Laos, rating 10.00 percent, chose Thai with the ethnic Khroat Thais and ethnic Thais, rating at 7.5 percent, and chose Suai with the ethnic Suais, as 2.5 percent.

: village domain
The male subjects chose Khmer to converse with the neighbor of the ethnic Khmers and Suais at the most rate, 77.5 percent, chose Thai with the ethnic Thais of 10 percent, and chose Lao with the ethnic Laos as 12.5 percent.

The female subjects chose Khmer with the ethnic Khmers and Suais at the most rate, 67.5 percent, chose Thai with the ethnic group of Khmers, Thais, Laos, and Khorat Thais at the second rate, 22.5 percent, and chose Lao with ethnic Laos as 10 percent. An analysis of language choice among the male subjects with their neighbors is found that they use Thai to converse with the ethnic Khmer, Thai, and Thai Khorat, at the most rate of 45 percent. They chose Khmer at the second rate of 35 percent, to converse with the ethnic Khmer neighbors. They chose Lao to communicate with the ethnic Lao neighbors, rating 25 percent. Among the female subjects, they chose Thai to communicate with their neighbors at the most rates of 52.5 percent, consisting the ethnic Khmers as 22.5 percent, and the ethnic Thais as 20 percent. The second rate is choosing of Khmer with their neighbors as 30 percent, consisting of the ethnic Khmer neighbors of 20 percent, and the ethnic Khmer and Thai neighbors of 5 percent each. But they used Lao to converse with the ethnic Lao neighbors, rating 17.5 percent.

An analysis of language choice among the male subjects with the monks shows that Khmer was used to communicate with the ethnic Khmer monks at the most rate of 87.5 percent, and Thai was used with the ethnic Khmer monks at the second rate of 12.5 percent. The female subjects chose Khmer to communicate with the ethnic Khmer monks at the most rate of 66.7 percent, and chose Thai to communicate with the ethnic Khmer monks of 33.3 percent.

A study of language choice with the strangers among both the male and female subjects reveals that Thai was chosen the most for it was used with the strangers who speak Thai and Lao.

To speak with the vendors, the male subjects chose Khmer of 45 percent, and chose Thai of 30 percent with the strangers. The female subjects chose Thai to speak with the vendor at the most rate of 47.5 percent, chose Khmer with the vendors of 37.5 percent, and chose Lao of 15 percent.

**Outside community**

In school domain, in conversation with the teachers, the male and female subjects chose Thai to communicate always, counting 100 percent, in any situation within or outside class rooms.

To speak with friends, the male subjects chose Thai in conversation at the most rate of 82.5 percent. Khmer and Lao were chosen by the subjects only of 10 and 7.5 percent respectively. The female subjects chose Thai in conversation at the most rate of 95 percent, while Lao was used only with the ethnic Lao friends only 5 percent.

In domain of fresh-food market in Soengsang district, the male subjects chose Thai to converse with the vendors at the most rate of 92.50 percent. Khmer was chosen by the subjects only with the ethnic Khmers of 7.50 percent. While the female subjects always chose only Thai to speak with the vendors in conversation of any ethnic group.

To converse with ordinary men, the male subjects always chose Thai in conversation with the vendors of the ethnic Khmers, Isan, Thais, or Khorat Thais. While the female subjects chose Thai at the most rate of 92.50 percent, and Khmer was chosen to use only with the ethnic Khmers of 7.50 percent.

In domain of city hall, in conversation with the officers, the male and female subjects chose Thai always, counting 100 percent. With ordinary people, the male subjects chose Thai at the most rate, 86.84 percent, Khmer was used only for speaking with the ethnic Khmers of 5.25 percent, and Lao was used to speak with the ethnic Laos of 7.89 percent. The female subjects chose Thai at the most rate, 94.59 percent, and mostly used it with the ethnic Thais of 40.54 percent, with the ethnic Laos of 35.14 percent, and with the ethnic Khmers of 18.92 percent. While Khmer used only to speak with the ethnic Khmers of 5.41 percent.

In hospital domain, in conversation with the medical officers, the male and female subjects chose only Thai, counting 100 percent. With ordinary people, the male subjects chose Thai at the most rates, 80 percent, Khmer was used 12.5 percent, and Lao 7.5 percent. The female subjects chose only Thai, counting 100 percent, with any ethnic interlocutors.

**III. DISCUSSION**

A study of code switching between Khmer and Central Thai among the villagers in Ban Nongkhe, Sukphaibun, Soengsang, Nakhonratchasima province, reveals that code switching in the community had an aim to communicate with clear perception. They switched words or sentences for emphasizing the meaning and understanding. They used Khmer with their family members to teach and practice them. They also used Thai idioms, loan words, or Thai words to convey an idea which Khmer words cannot. Moreover, code switching has many supporting factors such as gender and age. The social factors affected on code switching among the villagers of Ban Nongkhe are interlocutors, topics of conversation, a relationship between the interlocutors, and a place of conversation. While career and education are not factors of code switching in this community, for most population are agriculturists and graduated primary school. This agrees with Vajarintarangoon [4] who has studied multilingualism in the community of Ban Yawuek, Amphoe Chumphonburi, Surin Province, and found that career and education were not factors of code switching. Probably, both the communities of Ban Yawuek and Ban Nongkhe are in rural areas, the population’s education mostly is primary school, and agriculture is a main career, and these cause both career and education do not effect on code switching.

Code switching occurs in any situation of conversation, more or less. It appears at the word or sentence levels depending on the language competence of the interlocutors. This also agrees with Vajarintarangoon [4] who suggested that code switching of the Khmers occurs in case the different ethnic people are in conversation, for giving chance to the listeners to understand the meaning, give opinions, and able to get the matters in the conversation. For example, if the subjects knew what ethnic groups the interlocutors are, and which languages they could speak, they can switch the languages properly for leading the conversation to their aims.
An analysis of language choice among the villagers of Ban Nongkhe, Nakhonratchasima province, reveals that most people chose Khmer, which is their first and main language for communication in the community at the family level of the same ethnic group. The both male and female subjects chose Khmer to communicate in their community. This shows their proud and recognition of importance of the native language. These facts, also, agree with Chunthawithet [7] and Vajarintarangoon [4]. In case some families have members of other ethnic people such as Laos, Thais, Khorat Thais, who mostly come in as new members by marriage, or even by migration for occupation, those new members must learn Khmer to be able to communicate, though having less competence than the old residence, and at least can listen at the word level or at the short sentence level. This causes Ban Nongkhe villagers can choose Khmer, Thai, and the language of the different ethnic interlocutors. This is not only show the dignity of the Khmer dialect in the community of Ban Nongkhe, but also the usage as the community’s main language, and the ability of multilingualism of the villagers. It means that the people have ability to learn the languages of their neighbors in the same community and the communities nearby to improve their relationship. Bang Nongkhe, in early time was Ban Nongkhe and Nong tum, was then divided into smaller villages according to majority of ethnic groups in the communities and language competence to choose languages to communicate with different ethnic people in the same village to reach their aim of communication.

Outside the community, language choice of the villagers of Ban Nongkhe changes, the most prominent case is in domain of official places, in which both male and female subjects chose Central Thai for their communication, showing language use properly of places, times, and persons. For example, in domain of school, the subjects who are students, both boys and girls, chose to use only Thai to converse with the teachers both in class and outside. This shows that Thai has influence on the youths for it is necessary for studying, but it is not mean that the youths are not find an importance of Khmer, since the youths still use Khmer in conversation in their family or community, though at the word level, or at the short sentence level. What shows the youths give precedence to their native Khmer is an ability to comprehend long sentences, especially in conversation with the adults in the family, since the elders usually use both Thai and Khmer alternatively in conversation with their children learned many languages.

Outside the community, however, the villagers of Ban Nongkhe still use Khmer with the same ethnic Khmers without embarrassment. As noticed from the field work, the subjects decided to use Thai at the first time they met the strangers, and switched to the interlocutor’s tongue immediately when the interlocutor changed to their first tongue. This shows their ability to choose a proper language for effective communication, i.e., they know which language should be used for whom, in which places and situations. But this phenomenon is not occurring only in Bang Nongkhe. A numbers of researches, both Thais and foreigners, found a certain similar phenomena, especially Kongchatree [5], Boonprasert [2], Liamprawat [6], Rojana-earp [9], Chunsuvimol [3], and Tomioka [11]. They agreed that those who can choose languages properly to situations and persons could not cause communication problems. Moreover, Ure [12] has studied a pattern of language choice in multilingualism among the primary schools’ teachers in Ghana in conversation with younger interlocutors, especially of 20 years old or less. The findings were that situations are important for language choice and the Ghana youths used Ghana and English in a pattern of complementary distribution, that is, they used Ghana at home and English at school.

A tendency found in language choice in the community of Nan Nongkhe is that in some families the parent advises their children to use Central Thai and did not teach Khmer, causing the children in many families of the village unable to speak nor listen to Khmer clearly. In addition, the children went to school and must use Thai in communication and studying, causing a role and importance of Khmer declines both at home and at the school.

This research of code switching between Khmer and Central Thai and language choice in certain domains shows that the villagers in Nan Nongkhe, Tambon Sukphai, Amphoe Soengsang, Nakhonratchasima Province, still use and protect their native tongues for their dignity, and importance of families and community. While they know it is necessary to learn other ethnic languages, for language competence enable them to communicate and learn customs and cultures which need good relationship in the community.

REFERENCES