ABSTRACT - Social inclusion fostering language growth: Case of the Deaf Thai

Charles Reilly, Ph.D.

A dramatic opening of the social structure to a neglected group, the Deaf Thai, has compelled a shift in orientation to self, community, and the use of languages. Traditionally, in agrarian nations, a minority of deaf people transmits and uses the indigenous sign language in the shadows of society, i.e., in cliques and residential schools. The majority of deaf people will not have access to the sign language and so live in a state of near-languagelessness. Interactions with hearing-speaking people tend to be limited to basic gestural and oral communication.

In Thailand, democratization has produced a legal framework of equal rights for disabled people, recognition and use of Thai Sign Language by non-deaf people, and extension of deaf education from pre-school through university. The paper describes how vigorous response of Deaf individuals to educational opportunity has compelled them to develop new ways of thinking about and using languages. Those who entered university have enhanced the capacity of Thai Sign for use in scholarship (including sign analysis), while embracing the now necessary task of becoming literate. A Deaf grassroots movement spreading Thai Sign to rural areas has created activities with reflective processes that foster non-academic discourse about human learning and language acquisition.

Through such diversified activity new Thai Deaf communities are emerging. Drawing on Dahrendorf (1979) and LeVine and White (1986), who show how expanded educational options tend to weaken traditional social attachments while creating new linkages, we consider the implication of our findings for the vitality of a fragile language.
SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Social inclusion fostering language growth: Case of the Deaf Thai

Charles Reilly

   a. Deaf Thai move from a state of unity-by-exclusion to a dynamic of opportunistic collectives of individuals alongside the traditional groups. Moreover, the entry into hitherto closed domains has led to emergence of distinct sub-groups of deaf people who share common aims and specialized sign terminology. In effect, through immersion in these new domains deaf participants are undergoing a re-orientation to self, community, and general society. There has been a breakdown of the traditional solidarity of the Deaf community (gemeinschaft).

   b. As Thai Sign Language has gradually come out of the shadows to be openly used, the language has become intertwined with many new concepts and experiences. Expansion of vocabulary and development of new tasks for this language (academic, political administrative) has been steadily occurring. This growth response contradicts the widespread view among the populace that the sign language is inherently incapable as a vehicle for conveying complex concepts. Rather, social opportunity has meant diversification in language repertoire by users of the national sign language.

2. Deaf people vigorously respond to opportunity that produces growth in Thai Sign Language (new functions, vocabulary)
   a. Example 1 - Community organizing and demonstration of need, including advocacy and rural outreach (language to isolated non-signers).

   b. Example 2 - Higher education

3. Recognition of Thai Sign Language leads to…first formal SL teaching.
   a. Surprise! Unexpected behavior by Deaf teachers adopting rote methods.

   b. It contrasts sharply with the traditional strategies of elaborated/creative narrative and participatory dialogue seen among deaf people in the residential school—the major setting of Thai Sign Language transmission.

4. There is a need to Deaf Thai people to reflect upon their language and its current situation, and how it is most effectively taught. Carefully designed research can assist.

5. The paper recommends a research process to document the traditional and emerging strategies of language teaching in various settings, as well as the attitudes and influences that shape the decisions about instructional approach by teachers. Ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods would be used. It is intended that this research will foster a process of reflection by Deaf teachers and other educators about the nature of language learning and the impact of specific language behaviors by adults on what deaf children learn.

THIS PAPER HAS AN ACCOMPANYING MOVIE ENTITLED “MECHANISMS OF LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION-THAI DEAF-1990-2005”, SHOWING EXAMPLES OF KEY POINTS. FOR A COPY, CONTACT charles.reilly@gallaudet.edu
Presentation notes/handout. There is an accompanying movie entitled, “Language Mechanisms_TSL.”

Social inclusion fostering language growth: Case of the Deaf Thai-
Charles Reilly with assistance of Nipapon Reilly

The general question is raised, “How might economic, social, and internal community changes induced by modernization and democratization influence the way that deaf people view and use their national sign language? A recent opening of the social structure to a neglected group, the Deaf Thai, has compelled a shift in their orientation to self, community, and the use of language. As background, the paper describes how the opening of two domains to Deaf people: community organizing and higher has led to expanding functions and vocabulary of Thai Sign Language.

The paper focuses on the impact of recognition of the sign language on the settings and strategies used by Deaf people to transmit their language. Tonight highlight one example: the advent of formal sign language teaching by Deaf Thai and specifically the teaching of young deaf children.

Caveat: Of the 67,000 deaf people in Thailand, a vast majority are unschooled individuals who have never had the opportunity to acquire Thai Sign Language or any indigenous/original variety. Our focus here on budding opportunity do not overshadow the fact of widespread isolation and unemployment among deaf people in the nation.

Background:
1. A booming economy, persistent disabled people’s movement, and active Royal patronage, has contributed to an expansion of life chances for blind, physically disabled, and deaf people in Thailand.

2. Deaf people are vigorously responding to opportunity, as seen in two domains:
   a. Community organizing and demonstration of need, including advocacy and rural outreach (language to isolated non-signers).
   b. Higher education

3. Expansion of vocabulary and development of new tasks for this language (academic, political-administrative) has been steadily occurring. Social opportunity has meant diversification in language repertoire by users of the national sign language.

4. Deaf participants are undergoing a re-orientation to self, community, and general society. There has been a breakdown of the traditional solidarity of the Deaf community (gemeinschaft).

5. Recognition of Thai Sign Language leads to advent of formal SL teaching.
For the first time, deaf people are facing decisions (and pressure) about how to relate to the children, instructional strategies, and use of the sign language in academic setting. They must decide a personal stance about the appropriate degree of intimacy and rapport with the children. Having grown up learning a hidden language in the shadows of the institution, they are now being employed to explicitly transmit the language under the eye of government officials.

Surprise! Deaf Thai who are teaching deaf children tend to mirror the rote teaching methods\(^1\) conventionally used by hearing-speaking teachers in the deaf schools. Exhibit high teacher control, ritual drilling, and didactic manner.

**DURING MOVIE—focus on the children’s response**

Contrasts sharply with the varied, rich strategies of elaborated/creative narrative and participatory dialogue seen among deaf people in the residential school—the major setting of Thai Sign Language transmission.

Why? Many factors: Rote methods are dominant, discount their own upbringing, Lack models of successful child-rearing, feel low-language children don’t need grammar/dialogue to learn,

Feelings of motivation to teach, uncertainty about what to do, fearful of doing wrong, feel pressured by hearing-speaking educators, frustrated with children’s slowness to learn (generally and esp. using rote methods).

Respond with acquiescence, quiet resistance and modifying teaching methods, delight when they are in all-deaf team and can be creative and innovative.

There is a need for Deaf Thai teacher to reflect upon the language and how it is most effectively taught with reference to their views towards languages, child learning, and the power relations that influence their ways of using the language. There is a precedent for uplifting “process of discovery” by Deaf Thai—the 1982-90 making of the Thai Sign Dictionaries.

The paper recommends a research process to document the traditional and emerging strategies of language teaching in various settings, as well as the attitudes and influences that shape the decisions about instructional approach by teachers. Ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods would be used. It is intended that this research will foster a process of reflection by Deaf teachers and other educators about the nature of language learning and the impact of specific language behaviors by adults on what deaf children learn.

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\(^1\) “Rote” is defined as the mechanical repetition of something so that it is remembered, often without real understanding of its meaning or significance. From the Encarta World English Dictionary (1999).
Social inclusion fostering language growth: Case of the Deaf Thai
Charles Reilly

A paper to be presented at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting, December 1, 2005. Washington, D.C.

Session Title- ENDANGERED WORLD LANGUAGES: SIGN LANGUAGES AND THEIR VARIATIONS

Organizer: Barbara C LeMaster Chair: Angela M Nonaka
Participant(s): Barbara C LeMaster, Charles B Reilly, Rezenet Moges, Nobutaka Kamei, Julie A Guberman
Discussant(s): Richard J Senghas, Carol J Erting
Abstract

A recent opening of the social structure to a neglected group, the Deaf Thai, has compelled a shift in their orientation to self, community, and the use of languages. As background, the paper describes how the opening of domains, such as community organizing and higher education, to Deaf people has led to expanding functions and vocabulary of Thai Sign Language. The paper focuses on the impact of recognition of the sign language on the settings and strategies used by Deaf people to transmit their language. While traditionally Thai Deaf people have primarily taught their language through informal interactions as children in residential schools, now for the first time Thai Deaf people are now being trained and employed to formally teach their language for the first time.

A preliminary look at observation and interviews of Deaf Thai who are teaching pre-school deaf children suggests that new Deaf teachers tend to mirror the rote teaching methods conventionally used by hearing-speaking teachers in the schools for the deaf. This method entails high level of teacher control, a didactic manner seldom allowing true dialogue, and activities that elicit single sign responses and imitation from the child. The approach contrasts sharply with the varied, rich strategies of elaborated/creative narrative and participatory dialogue seen among deaf people in the residential school—the major setting of Thai Sign Language transmission.

The paper recommends a research process to document the traditional and emerging strategies of language teaching in various settings, as well as the attitudes and influences that shape the decisions about instructional approach by teachers. Ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods would be used. It is intended that this research will foster a process of reflection by Deaf teachers and other educators about the nature of language learning and the impact of specific language behaviors by adults on what deaf children learn. The paper concludes with a tentative list of questions, issues, people, and settings to incorporate in research along these lines. This may be useful to nations that are at the nascent stage of recognizing and their indigenous sign languages and utilizing its native users in education.

2 “Rote” is defined as the mechanical repetition of something so that it is remembered, often without real understanding of its meaning or significance. From the Encarta World English Dictionary (1999).
Background: the evolution of Deaf Thai’s orientation to languages during a period of rapid modernization and democratization

The key to understanding language in context is to start, not with language, but with context… Only by viewing the relationship from the side of contexts can we see an essential part of what is going on when language is taught and used” (Hymes, 1972, xix).

Given the major structural changes in Thai society, it is useful to begin with a national level and the status and prospects of Thai Sign language and its users. The question is raised, “How might economic, social, and internal community changes induced by modernization and democratization influence the way that deaf people view and use their national sign language? We first describe the opening of opportunity for Deaf Thai, and how their intensive participation in opened domains of activity has spurred growth in the Thai Sign Language.

Broadened life chances foster language growth
Recently Thailand has adopted laws and regulations, and made substantial investment, towards equalizing opportunity for disabled citizens. In 1991, the Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons Act gave disabled people the rights to services such as medical, educational, and occupational rehabilitation; job placement; and community support (Patibatsarakich 2002). In 1997, the new constitution of Thailand provided clearly that “the state should provide accessibility and basic welfare for persons with disabilities” and prohibited discrimination against “race, religion, gender, and physical condition” (Patibatsarakich 2002). This is part of a general value shifts in this capitalistic economy towards democracy, pluralism, and meritocracy. A booming economy, persistent disabled people’s movement, and active Royal patronage, has contributed to an expansion of life chances for blind, physically disabled, and deaf people in Thailand. “Life chances” is defined as the joint product of the options (choices) and ligatures (social attachments) made possible by the social structure (Dahrendorf 1979 quoted in LeVine and White, 1986, p.18). Initiated in the modern capitol, Bangkok, the message of equal opportunity has been pushed into the rural areas, where 90% of the people reside, by governmental and non-governmental education and social welfare agencies. While real change in life chances has reached only a small percentage of disabled people, the rate of reform in laws and public practices has brought global attention and praise to Thailand.

For the Deaf Thai most of the benefits during this early period of equalizing opportunity have accrued to the active urban leaders and those of school age. Of the 67,000 deaf people in Thailand, a vast majority are unschooled individuals who have never had the opportunity to acquire Thai Sign Language. In this light, the reader should not allow our focus here on budding opportunity to overshadow the fact of widespread isolation and unemployment among deaf people in the nation. At the same time, there has been a fortuitous channeling of new educational and job opportunity in ways that are intended to benefit the broader deaf population.

Structurally, the opening of the society has brought the Deaf Thai from a state of unity-by-exclusion to a dynamic of opportunistic collectives of individuals alongside the traditional groups. Moreover, the entry into hitherto closed domains has led to emergence of distinct sub-groups of deaf people who share common aims and specialized sign terminology. In effect, through immersion in these new domains deaf participants are undergoing a re-orientation to self, community, and general society. There has been a breakdown of the traditional solidarity of the Deaf community (gemeinschaft). As Thai Sign Language has gradually come out of the shadows to be openly used, the language has become intertwined with many new concepts and experiences. Expansion of vocabulary and development of new tasks for this language (academic, political-administrative) has been steadily occurring. This growth response contradicts the widespread view among the populace that the sign language is inherently incapable as a vehicle for conveying complex concepts. Rather, social opportunity has meant diversification in language repertoire by users of the national sign language.
Deaf Thai’s vigorous response can be seen in two domains—(a) organizing to secure community representation and demonstrate Deaf people’s needs and, (b) university education. These examples show how the opening of social opportunity to deaf people can fuel growth of a national sign language.

The community organizing movement brings the language out of the shadows
Until 1982, the Thai Deaf had created no organization through which they could express and work for common interests. Most Deaf Thai had no experience with organizations beyond attending residential schools (where older students became proxy supervisors of younger children after-hours). A few graduates formed the Center for Deaf Alumni at the Sethsatin School for The Deaf in Bangkok, where signs like ‘president’, ‘treasurer’, and ‘member’ were in use. However, they lacked in-depth experience and therefore the terminology for what organizations did, such as ‘plan’, ‘budget’ and ‘services.’ From 1982-1990 an intensive effort, guided and financed by American and Swedish aid workers, saw the formation of the deaf-run National Association of the Deaf in Thailand, comprising a secretariat and a nationwide network of clubs (Suvunnus in Suwanarat et al, 1990). During this period, many new signs were coined by the Deaf participants to use during first-time activities such as membership service, handicrafts production and sales, and sign language dictionary making. Below is a page from a 198X handout used by Deaf organizers to share their signs with the broader deaf community.

ADD page OF ORGANIZ SIGNS FROM CDA CIRCA 1981-2

During 1982-90, intensive research on vocabulary structure of modern Thai Sign Language inspired new signs for elements of a language (‘grammar’, ‘phonology’, ‘meaning’), to convey fine distinctions among formation of signs and meanings (‘orientation’, non-manual versus affect) and work tasks such as illustrating signs (point-of-view, specific arrow for motions).

The quantity and complexity of issues participated in by the Deaf Thai leadership has increased steadily year by year, fueling the expanding body of social knowledge possessed within the group. For several years before the passing of the Rehabilitation Act in 1991, and continuing until today, the Deaf Thai political leadership have been increasingly involved in alliances with disabled groups and advocacy to national government. The Royal Thai government’s growing commitment to working partnership with civil society engaged the Thai Deaf political leadership in a hitherto closed domain of policy consultation and human service program development. Deaf people now have “a seat at the table.” The acquiring of a steady stream of income from lottery proceeds by NADT in 1998 has led to a great increase in membership (to over 5,000 people), and the intensifying of electoral politics and persuasive strategies by aspiring Deaf politicians (including platforms, and campaigning).

Outside of Bangkok, the regional and local clubs have experienced less dramatic, yet steady mobilization of Deaf individuals. In short, Deaf people have been strengthening and expanding the social relationships among isolated people, and simultaneously expanding the number of users of the language and settings where it is used, through outreach activities. A new generation of Deaf activists has recently founded or revitalized a number of local clubs (ex. Roi Et, Kanchanaburi, Phitsanulok among others). Because the transition from dependency on the central secretariat to local leadership of self-help efforts by and for deaf people mirrors the decentralization movement underway in Thai public sphere, provincial and municipal agencies are openly providing moral support and resources.

The outreach and mobilization process typically follows a process described next. First, a small cadre is involved in groundbreaking grassroots organizing. The locals’ efforts to build up their capacity have been bolstered by training in project development led by a long-time Deaf organizer from the Northeast; in the process new concepts and signs have been introduced into the Deaf community for at least ten years. Under the leverage of the 2000-2005 “Campaign To Promote Thai Sign Language Nationally”, this outreach work has been expanded to reach many nascent local deaf clubs. New concepts and new signs for ‘goal-setting’, ‘work planning’, and ‘grant writing’ have spread nationwide; the motivation to learn such is in no small part
due to recently available public funding for local disabled people’s efforts. Second, because the purpose of the activities is to mobilize people to action, there is absorption of new ways of using the sign language by all involved. The interaction serves to enhance the linguistic repertoire of the participants, both Deaf organizer and deaf beneficiary. In other words, the new concept and corresponding sign is introduced (if you want to do something, here’s steps to funding), discussed and tied to specifics from locals’ view of their situation (our problem and goal is…), then the local people use the language to conduct the activity. Third, Deaf people outside Bangkok are now broadly beginning to engage in dialogue and collaboration with hearing-speaking leaders about issues of shared concern. Fourth, since many local deaf groups are focusing their efforts on creating local opportunities for non-signing adults and children to learn the Thai Sign Language.

The effort merges resources of Deaf sign language teachers and Deaf community workers, and in the process highlights their diverging orientations towards self and community; this is a topic deserving separate attention in a future paper. The end result is that the sign language is being transmitted and used by a broadened segment of the rural deaf populace, who are beginning to use the language to participate in the local group and in society.

Opening of higher education ushers in formal sign language teaching

The advent of university education using Thai Sign Language has been embraced eagerly by hundreds of Deaf individuals, who have been thus compelled to develop new ways of using their language and written Thai. In 1998 a new faculty of Mahidol University, Ratchasuda College, opened for blind, physically disabled, and deaf people; Suan Dusit University began to serve signing deaf people. The university experience has asserted a powerful influence on the enrolled individuals, and caused some to shift their personal values towards individual career pursuit (gesellschaft) and social linkages with hearing-speaking people in the education system. A new reference group of college-educated Deaf Thai has emerged with markedly different ways of operating socially than the traditional Deaf leadership. The re-orientation towards career and self-interest by college-educated Deaf has moved them socially and linguistically away from the majority of Deaf Thai. Language-wise, the sign language is being used for the first time to conduct and to report on academic research and to instruct at the college level. Within a short time deaf students have coined new, sign vocabulary to convey newly introduced concepts in pedagogy, sign language analysis, language teaching, deaf studies, and Buddhism. They have embraced the now necessary task of becoming literate in written Thai.

Thai Sign Language and deaf people’s valued role as native users

Education has been by far the most responsive sector within the government. The most notable change has been the recognition of the Thai Sign Language as a medium of instruction by the government. In 1999, a resolution by the Ministry of Education acknowledged Thai Sign Language as the first language of Thai Deaf people and called for expanded research and teaching of the language, with deaf people as teachers:

These actions regarding Thai Sign Language will benefit the education of deaf people in many ways:

1. All the schools for the deaf will use the same Thai Sign Language.

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3 The demand for interpreters is high, and practically no certified interpreters work outside of the education sector in the provinces. The desire for dialogue with deaf people has far outpaced the learning of Thai Sign language by hearing-speaking people, frustrating collaboration. Outside of Bangkok deaf people must still largely use in-group resources. This is not entirely a problem because these nascent groups often need a fair amount of internal discussion and learning before they are ready to undertake a funded activity independently.

4 Doing text messages on cell phones has become a stimulus for reading and writing by the many Deaf Thai who have become dependent on this communication tool.
2. People who are expert in the Thai Sign Language and are able to be good teachers of the Thai Sign Language are deaf people. Thus deaf people have greater career opportunities by becoming a teacher of Thai Sign Language.

3. Deaf students will have a chance to get information the same as the general public through the sign language interpreters.

4. Teachers in the schools for the deaf will receive training in the use of Thai Sign Language in order to use it in communicating with students and in teaching their subjects. This will allow the children to have more understanding of the content of their various subjects.

5. There will be a curriculum for teaching Thai Sign Language in the deaf schools from kindergarten up to twelfth grade (Mayathom 6) in order for them to learn the sign language and the culture of deaf people.

6. Hearing-speaking students will be able to choose to study Thai Sign Language. They can use it to communicate with deaf people and to use in careers such as sign language interpreters, sign language linguist, or teacher in schools for the deaf.

7. There will be training for sign language interpreters to provide service to deaf people in the areas of education, occupation, and everyday life.

Date: 17 August 1999,
Mr. Surat Silapra-anan, Permanent Secretary for Education

The acceptance of Thai Sign Language as a means for improving the quality of deaf education has focused attention on Deaf Thai individuals as a source of teaching the language. As of 2005, up to 100 deaf people have received training in early or primary education or basic-level sign language teaching certification (certificate and B.A. level). Virtually all of the 22 deaf schools, and several of the provincial special (early) education centers have at least one deaf person on staff.

On a small-scale as of 2005, Deaf people are formally teaching Thai Sign Language to:
1. Hearing-speaking teachers through courses at the university, school for the deaf, and teacher training colleges.
2. Deaf children in kindergartens within special schools.
3. Pre-school age children in homes and special (early) education centers in several provinces.
4. Non-signing deaf adults through short workshops in the provinces.

With a high demand for learning the language by hearing-speaking people, and the enthusiasm of Deaf people to spread the language, it can be said that the national Thai Sign Language is not endangered, but flowering. Nonaka (2004, 742) confirms the point, while emphasizing that indigenous and original sign language varieties in Thailand are endangered. It is quite remarkable to long-time observers that Thai Sign Language

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5 Ratchasuda College is the premier site of teacher training up to the B.A. level. In 2005 Gallaudet University, in cooperation with the Thai Sign Language Teachers Club and Natl. Association of the Deaf, taught a certificate course that trained 10 deaf people as mentors for children 0-3 years and their families.

6 Practically none of them have civil service positions, but rather are hired on annual contracts. There have been deaf people working as aides for many years under funding from the Foundation for the Deaf. The Foundation supports up to 20 people per year; they tend to have lesser training and not work in the classrooms.
has been elevated from a hidden way of communicating, used only amongst deaf people in deaf-only settings, to a welcomed language used openly in community and university.

**Dilemma for pioneers in formal sign language teaching**

The individual pioneers in teaching the sign language in Thailand are wrestling with difficult choices about how to use their language in public. For the first time, deaf people are facing decisions (and pressure) about how to relate to the children, instructional strategies, and use of the sign language in academic setting. They must decide a personal stance about the appropriate degree of intimacy and rapport with the children. Because deaf education is where Deaf people and their language are considered a key to reform in deaf education, it is in schools that their behavior is most under scrutiny. Having grown up learning a hidden language in the shadows of the institution, they are now being employed to explicitly transmit the language under the eye of government officials.

In next section we consider “What is the language behavior of Deaf teachers in formal teaching situations?”; “What are their belief and attitude about how learn language?” and “What examples and sources do deaf people draw upon in teaching?”

We will focus on only one subset of sign language teaching in Thailand- deaf people teaching young deaf children. The other settings also need to be examined. Here we describe unexpected findings about language behavior and attitudes by new deaf teachers who are educating deaf children 0-4 years and their families.

**Deaf adults encounter 0-4 year old deaf children.** Until the 1990s Deaf Thai adults had extremely limited contact with deaf pre-school age children. Now many deaf schools have kindergartens serving 4-5 year old children, with at least six of those schools engaging deaf people in the kindergarten classroom. With the inception of special education centers in all provinces in 2000-1, the attention has now turned to the needs of 0-3 years age deaf children. The first opportunity for Deaf Thai to interact with 0-3 age deaf children in a systematic, ongoing way is the “NST 0-3” project. Intended as a deaf community outreach to deaf children, the project secured agreement with the deaf club in the southern town of Nakon Sri Thammarat to initiate a partnership with the special early education center (a provincial branch of the national government’s special education bureau). Subsequently ten deaf people and two hearing teachers, were given 30 days of hands-on training in early education and language acquisition. Seven of the deaf trainees were locals with 7-10 years of schooling and three trainees, all with some college education, were working elsewhere in schools or special centers. The trainers were a Deaf American and a Deaf Thai who are teachers at the Clerc National Deaf Education Center at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.

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7 There are some intriguing personal dynamics in situations with deaf teachers and hearing-speaking adult learners, which for the first time puts deaf people in the honored position of teacher in front of their own former schoolteachers.

8 Five experimental bi-lingual education schools in the provinces and Sethsatian School in Bangkok.

9 Part of the 2003-2005 “Campaign to Promote Thai Sign Language Nationally” of the Thai Sign Language Teachers Club and National Association of the Deaf in Thailand, with Gallaudet University and UNESCO funding and technical assistance.

10 The training was done in three stints over eight months, giving opportunity for trainees to digest new concepts and do practice teaching. Videotape was extensively used so there is good documentation of home and class activities, with and without foreign trainers.
We did a preliminary review of these ten Deaf individual’s behavior and statements about teaching 0-4 deaf children. The data we used is listed at the end of this section.

From review of videotaped teaching sessions in homes and classrooms, we (unexpectedly) found an inclination towards:

1) rote methods, i.e., pointing to object and telling/asking name of sign; excessive repetition of single signs; encouraging imitation of signing;
2) didactic manner- telling children what to do, limited dialogue.
3) ritualistic behavior with heavy emphasis on child’s proper behavior and conformity.

SHOW CLIPS: Mechanisms of Language Transmission (partial)

Based on preliminary review of a two-hour focus group discussion and interviews with deaf teacher trainees and aides, these themes were raised and were seen as of general concern:

- Motivated to give to children and believe that they have something to offer.
- Uncertainty about what to do, about “what’s right to do”.
- Fearful of conflict, of doing it wrong (as judged by others, especially hearing-teachers or the head of the teachers college who pays their salary under grant).
- Feel pressured to instruct the way preferred by the hearing-speaking teachers or administrator.
- Frustrated with the children’s slowness to learn
  - They are frustrated at how long it takes some children to learn, which seems related to their notion that dialogue with low-language children is a waste of time; they need vocabulary drilling.
- Frustrated with the ineffectiveness of the word-by-word drilling and rote method pushed by hearing-speaking teachers.

More consensus views in the group:

1. They clearly know there is a distinction between the rote methods and the more interactive approach to learning advocated by foreign trainers and some Thai educators. The choice between instructional methods is generally referred to as <the hearing way> and the <signing way> or <Deaf-signing way> One person called her modifications of lessons, “what they do to make it work better.”
2. Until asked, there is no reference to their own experience learning from peers, as a source for what they do in classrooms. However, when asked, “How did you learn to sign?” the unanimous answer was, “In school from students who were good signers (literally <skilled hands>).”
3. There are settings, esp. schools, where we don’t feel comfortable to sign in our own way because of fear of being seen as disagreeable by the hearing-speaking teachers and administrators.
4. They feel supported in the training group because of the team work, chance to be creative and constructive in materials and lesson development, and feel others understand both their signing and “where they are coming from” when they choose to sign in a particular way.

Individual’s response to the situation above:

Several accept the dominance of the hearing-speaking teachers/administrators and use their preferred methods of signing and instructing.

11 The training aimed at 0-3 age children but with a weak early identification system the government center found only children age 3 and older.
Miss J acquiesces under duress, and is willing to disagree with the hearing-speaking teacher (who is her supervisor).

“When we are with the hearing teacher, it doesn’t feel like we really have a clear method. What do to with the children? I do the ‘show-picture, give-sign’ activity over and over….The way you are showing us, fluent signing, is smoothly applied to the children. It’s easy.” (08-05-05, focus group)

Miss P acquiesces all the time, even when not being watched. She is concerned that the children trained under the “fluent signing/interactive” way will somehow be incompatible with the children taught under the method advocated by the head of the teachers college. She discusses how she will draw a line between those children who come to school without sign and those who have learned sign under the 0-3 project. (Intends to surreptitiously favor and support the latter group after they enter school?)

Miss A. attended a school using Pidgin Sign Thai (heavy initialized signs in order of written Thai). She initially tried rote methods with her students because she was frustrated by this kind of interaction with students. Exposure to different models of using language at college, including foreign linguists and early educators, had at least informed her that there were alternative ways and that the onus was on teachers to find effective ways. If not for that experience she would have accepted the prevailing idea in the school that deaf children couldn’t learn. So she changed her methods, and saw how children responded positively to her when she became more interactive with them. For example, she pushed the children to express themselves clearly and in detail. The children gained trust in her. She felt rewarded.

OTHER INDIVS TO BE ADDED

The data supporting the tentative points made above, and which we used to generate the draft research design below are as follows. All of the data below is captured on videotape.

Videotaped teaching
--Numerous learning activities between deaf early educators (in training) with deaf children ages 0-4 years in both homes of 4 children and the classroom of the Special Education Center in the rural town of NST (also site of the “family mentor” training).
--Teaching by Jirawan, one of the trainees while teaching in a northeastern special education center (home and class lessons). Two sets: May 2005 and Aug. 2005 (latter during Solit-WeniStock-Reilly visit)
--Teaching of kindergarten by Miss Prachuab Khiri Khan. (She participated in 7-day workshop by C. Reilly-N. Reilly in NST in 2003; N.R. observed her teaching in 2004.
--Teaching by Pannipa while teaching kindergarten in a government school

Videotaped interviews
--Focus group discussion with ten trainees in “family mentor” training. Videotape.
--Interview Ampaporn (Ning)- November 2005. NR observed her 2 days in Prachuab-2004.
--Teaching by Kritsana-attended 1 of 3 parts of NST workshop, sent videotape of her teaching (2005), and NR interviewed her (not on tape).
--Interview of Miss Phuket at NST school - Attended 2 parts of NST workshop
Outline of research to track the evolution of language transmission

This section proposes a research process to document the traditional and emerging strategies of language teaching in various settings, as well as the attitudes and influences that shape the decisions about instructional approach by teachers. Our aim is less to explain the reasons for why they behave in this way, but rather to look at outcomes—how deaf teachers use language in different settings (function, manner) and what this offers to the learner who has only the deaf adult as language model.

Identifying dimensions of inquiry to understand deaf people's behavior and views on language learning—early notes

Why does the switch flip, that is, deaf teachers behave more like hearing teachers than the way they would among themselves? While the choice of how to teach the language is personal, there are some underlying factors that have great weight in the minds of many sign language teachers.

Didactic manner and rote methods (tell, copy, recite) are the norm among hearing-speaking teachers, and thus a large part of their own experience when they were students. Notably, the low status and authority which Deaf people have in the school system means that many of these people are inclined to follow the approach preferred by the hearing-speaking overseer. But there are many forces at play that shape how language is used with learners.

But the signing Deaf teacher has deeper linguistic resources available because of their mastery of TSL, including the ability to express and understand nuances of meaning, functions, and registers. They also have the long childhood experience of seeing and using elaborative/creative and participatory forms of the language. These Deaf teacher trainees were not naturally inclined to draw upon their own experience in teaching and learning from peers in the school. Yet they personally knew the residential school as a place of enculturation in the visual channel to the ways and knowledge of both the Thai hearing-speaking and Deaf groups. “Many residents attribute their interaction with schoolfellows as the main source of worldly knowledge while growing up. The social relations formed are so strong and satisfying they become lifelong bonds that continue in a signing, deaf adult community (25)

There is a need to Deaf Thai people to reflect upon their language and its current situation, and how it is most effectively taught. In choosing which strategies to use in teaching the sign language, Deaf Thai can not draw from experience or example, as the language has not been formally taught before. What they do possess is a long personal background of successful yet implicit learning and teaching of signs with their fellow students in school. They have long experience with the teaching style used in their classrooms by mostly non-signing hearing-speaking teachers. And they have theory and technique acquired during training at the hands of Thai and foreign instructors (not necessarily in agreement). Each of these models creates a different relationship between teacher and learner, the way language is used. In the end, their behavior will shape how the language is learned by deaf children, hearing-speaking adults, and non-signing deaf adults.

Carefully designed research may assist understanding of the interplay of these factors. Moreover, participatory research can be helpful to Deaf people themselves as they approach their decisions about teaching. What this research might entail is the topic for the next section.

We consider only primary language teaching and learning by deaf children; there is need for separate consideration of research on teaching of nonsigning deaf and hearing adults.

There is a precedent for it in Thailand. From 1982-1990 a team of deaf people engaged in research of Thai Sign vocabulary structure with guidance by foreign linguists and aid workers. The visible product was a two-volume Thai Sign Language Dictionary. But the process of research stimulated the Deaf participants to a new way of thinking and talking about their language. During the period of discovery about the vocabulary
structure of modern Thai Sign Language the team coined new signs for elements of a language (‘grammar’, ‘phonology’, ‘meaning’), to convey fine distinctions among formation of signs and meanings (‘orientation’, non-manual versus affect) and work tasks such as illustrating signs (point-of-view, specific arrow for motions).

Benefits of the process of discovery during dictionary making
- understanding of distinctions between meaning-form root groups (and shortcomings of simple handshape classification)
- concept of regular patterns in language, i.e., types of verb inflection
- ADD addtl benefits from research process

One of the most lasting impacts of the dictionary making was the discovery about the complexity and sophistication of their language. They learned that their mastery of the language was a kind of knowledge that Deaf people alone possessed. And when called upon, as during the disability rights movement, there were Deaf individuals who were able to demonstrate how vocabulary was modified to change meanings, the role on nonmanuals, and more.

Now, confronted with the challenge of figuring out how to explicitly teach their language, deaf people may find value in inquiry about language in use.

The research would aim at helping Deaf people:
- reflect upon the nature of language and how children learn language.
- assess their own practice with learners of the sign language
- consider the efficacy of various approaches in advancing specific learning objectives of the learner.

It is absolutely imperative that we separate the inquiry from the training. We played a strong role in devising and conducting the training. We have never looked at the collected tapes for research purposes. And we are clearly biased towards deaf teachers picking up knowledge, behavior, attitudes, and beliefs that we feel are most likely to help them in providing full language to deaf children.

In traditional settings, standard ethnographic sensitivities to observation and interview got us entry. But now there is a more self-conscious sense because the language teaching is an explicit objective. Also, the influence of hearing-speaking people in the event and in the school is clearly influential.
Research questions

FOLLOWING PART IS INCOMPLETE. NEED TO ADDRESS VARIABLES/DIMENSIONS

Potential research questions include
What are the traditional means of transmission of the sign language?
What impact might mandated, formal teaching of a national sign language have on the deaf community’s traditional mechanisms of language transmission?
What do new Deaf sign language teachers draw upon as sources in developing formal teaching methods?
Are traditional practices retained? Incorporated into formal teaching, i.e., use of storytelling? Do we want/need to sustain the traditional methods of language teaching?

ISSUE- sustaining robust teaching –learning among deaf children
To ascertain how schooling conditions relate to social interaction and learning, in-depth study of interactional relationships within other schools with deaf children needs to be undertaken. This approach involves documenting not only the particulars of each case but also those school-level conditions (characteristics) that may influence interaction. The theoretical goal is to ascertain the relationship between the schooling conditions and the characteristics of interaction and language use by deaf people in the setting. The pragmatic aim is to describe the complexity, with an aim of ensuring effective and sustainable language transmission.

Dimensions of inquiry

See STAR methods of research as potential model.

Individual background
Language repertoires
Example: Some Deaf Thai were “sign masters” while in residential school and can be primary source of elaborate/creative narratives. Other deaf people admire such skill, while some see it as frivolous and inappropriate for classroom.

Language background-
Many have sparse exposure to language even once they got school.

Deaf people's knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes
About language

About children and their learning

Background info:
The traditional, still prevailing view in Thai society is that infants and toddlers’ brains are not really “turned on” until they approach school age.

Palpable and influential ideas
Organization's climate and mission
Growth or diminishment of invented codes
General society prevailing “received truth” about young children’s learning.
Thai Example: a major campaign to promote brain dev.
Behavior in learning settings
Characteristics of child-driven teaching and learning
Describe the learning and teaching in voluntary settings, i.e., children in peer groups outside classrooms.

Organization of teaching
Do the Deaf teachers arrange their classes in way that might take advantage of the ways that are seen among deaf people in voluntary settings in the school?

Do teachers show awareness of the children’s cognitive and language status into account when designing activities?

In voluntary activities the children based on judgments about the individual’s cognitive and language skill select the membership:

These [conversational] circles were an excellent example of cooperative learning, and they were observed among boys and girls in the regular and senior status. Most of the participatory interactions were among children of similar gender and age. Thus, the difficulty of play and discourse was tailored to comfortably allow equal understanding and contribution. The exclusion of younger and less capable individuals stemmed in part from the intent to create a fully participatory gathering (193).

Language behavior of teachers
Precisely how teachers use language with deaf children in different activities. Related: in terms of deaf person’s control over it.

Control in the instructional setting, inter-personal dynamics:
Solo teaching or team/ hearing-speaking partner or Deaf
Actual control over teaching, personal power, position
Number of deaf teachers in the school
Change in degree of sign language use among hearing-speaking teachers
Change in degree of hearing-speaking teachers’ motivation to engage.
Ascertain the level of control that deaf people have in instructional setting, as to setting learning objectives, devising curriculum, planning and carrying out activities.

Example-
--Nilwan initiative is individually led and done within the deaf community.
In contrast with most deaf SL teachers work as indivs within school or agency.
Not cut and dry. Even in deaf-led structures, like NST home visits, people still hesitate to use their full lang. Climate under the govt umbrella? Ingrained response to formal teaching situation?

External measure of behavior: the teacher’s behavior vis a’ vis established standards
If the focus is pre-school deaf children who have not acquired sign language skills.
1. Obtain checklist of ‘things parents should do to stimulate language development in young children.’
2. Observe variety of interactions with deaf people and deaf children. Describe the adults’ behavior using language item-by-item (from the checklist).
3. Try to explain differences between adults' behavior by considering other factors, such as “extent to which deaf people have control over the purpose, conduct, and evaluation” of the activity.
Conclusion

Clearly, when given the opportunity for new intellectual experience, the users of the Thai Sign Language have responded with conceptual and language growth (functions and vocabulary).

How can we retain control over the very thing—Thai Sign Language and its mechanisms of transmission—that allow us to become fully functioning individuals and citizens?

In our study of self-education among deaf children, we stated:
The condition of deafness highlights the need for two elements that contribute to full-bodied interaction: the requirement for a shared channel of communication between interlocutors and the embedding of a vehicle of meaning, that is, a natural language. The response of caregivers (parents, teachers) to deaf children’s visual orientation has specific implications for these children’s ease of interaction and learning” (Reilly & Reilly 2005, 186).

By the term “response” we meant that people should “sign like deaf people.” However, it has become clear that there is a wide range of language behavior among deaf people in teaching situations. The answer appears to lie in the area of personal response to tension between what hearing-speaking people assert and what Deaf people feel/know. This was well-stated by Erting (1982, 5-6):

The forces propelling deaf individuals toward community with other deaf people exist in opposition to the dependence and family ties moving them in the direction of mainstream hearing-speaking society…The challenge to integrate these two identities and resolve the tension these competing and conflicting ideologies and heir symbols generate is perhaps the greatest and most constant challenge faced by the deaf individual.

The decisions about identity made by deaf people will determine what language teaching (and, ultimately, the outcomes by deaf learners) will look like. The inclination of Deaf teachers to follow the approach asserted by more powerful people endangers the (transmission of the) sign language in a subtle, powerful way.

This leads us to propose a new direction of research study. It is intended that this research will foster a process of reflection by Deaf teachers and other educators about the nature of language learning and the impact of specific language behaviors by adults on what deaf children learn.

Those developing nations that are in early stages of shifting attitudes and practices towards deaf people provide tremendous opportunity for considering the interplay of traditional ad emerging mechanism of language transmission.
References


