

Endangered Language Networks: Thailand's Mahidol Model for language revitalization and maintenance

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In Thailand at least 15 languages out of 70 languages are classified as seriously endangered at various stages (Suwilai 2007). Other languages are not safe and show signs of contraction whereas the large language groups in the border regions are facing language identity issues, cultural conflict, and political unrest, especially in Thailand's deep south.

This paper discusses the community-based language revitalization model generally known as "Mahidol Model" which is the result of a 10-year cooperative effort between 20+ ethnolinguistic communities and Mahidol linguists and their partners in related fields such as education, botany, public health and cultural experts. The model is comprised of 11 component activities including preliminary linguistic research; awareness raising and mobilizing partners; teaching Mother Tongue as a subject or Mother Tongue – Based Bilingual Education; community learning center & local museum; traditional knowledge studies and revival efforts; project facilitation, monitoring and evaluation; stakeholder networking; and a supportive national language policy and educational policy. The approach selected for each ethnic community varies according to their unique context but interprets best practices, experiences and expertise from a wide and varied range of stakeholders and interested parties.

A special focus therefore, is on networking among the speakers of endangered language communities themselves and the stakeholders from private and government agencies, as well as international organizations.