URAK LAWOI LANGUAGE ON BULON ISLAND: DOCUMENTING AND CHARACTERIZING A NEAR–VANISHING LANGUAGE

ภาษาอูรักลาโว้ยบนเกาะบูโหลน:
การจารึกและศึกษาคุณลักษณะภาษาที่กำลังเสี่ยงต่อการสูญหาย

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Abstract[2]

Urak Lawoi language is spoken by a group of minority people whose settlement scattering in different islands of the 6 Southern provinces of Thailand-Phuket, Krabi, Pang-nga, Ranong, Trang and Satun. In 2005, only 4,200 people (middle-to-old-aged) were reported still communicating through this generations-long spoken language. Importantly, the number of Urak Lawoi speakers tends to be decreasing due to the influence of different factors.

A well-accepted fact concerning world languages is that any language having its own written form can hardly be in danger of extinction. In order to prevent this sea people's language from vanishing, as has occurred to thousands of minority languages once existed in the World's 5 continents, this study was conducted with the objectives to: 1) search for and document the spoken words of the language into the written form using the International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA); 2) quantify the words actually spoken by the residents of Bulon Island; and 3) characterize words and phrase of the language. The language data were collected from a sample group consisting of thirty-eight informants-22 males and 16 females having elementary to degree education and those having no Thai literacy, residing on Bulon Island, in Satun Province of Thailand. Small group interviews using 1,200 pictures and word cue cards, together with in-depth interviews were performed to collect data. Information of each lexical token was hand-written in Thai language orthography and cross checked twice for accuracy before transcribed using the IPA, followed by corresponding English meanings.

Research results indicates that we successfully found and recorded in writing with IPA symbols 759 Urak Lawoi words spoken by residents of Bulon Island. Urak Lawoi words and

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phrases share certain characteristics with Malay while borrowing a number of Thai words in coining new words. Compound words and phrases are head noun-fronted. Also found is that Urak Lawoi language lacks nuances, for colors, for instance.

Keywords: Urak Lawoi minority language conservation, language vanishing, lexicon in International Phonetic Alphabets, Bulon Island.

บทคัดย่อ

        ภาษาอูรักลาโว้ย เป็นภาษาที่ใช้พูดสื่อสารโดยชนกลุ่มน้อยกลุ่มหนึ่งที่ตั้งถิ่นฐานกระจัดกระจายอยู่ในเกาะต่างๆ ในภาคใต้ 6 จังหวัดของประเทศไทย ได้แก่ ภูเก็ต กระบี่ พังงา ระนอง ตรัง และสตูล เมื่อปี ค.ศ. 2005 ได้มีรายงานว่ามีผู้ที่ยังสื่อสารด้วยภาษาอูรักลาโว้ยซึ่งเป็นภาษาพูดที่เก่าแก่นับหลายชั่วอายุคนอยู่เพียง 4,200 คน (ซึ่งเป็นผู้ที่อยู่ในวัยกลางคนถึงวัยชรา) ที่สำคัญคือจำนวนผู้พูดภาษานี้ได้ลดลงอย่างต่อเนื่องอันสืบเนื่องจากอิทธิพลของปัจจัยต่างๆ

        ข้อเท็จจริงที่เป็นที่ยอมรับประการหนึ่งเกี่ยวกับภาษาของโลกคือภาษาใดๆ ที่มีภาษาเขียนจะมีความเป็นไปได้น้อยที่จะสูญสิ้นไป เพื่อป้องกันไม่ให้ภาษาของชาวเลกลุ่มนี้สูญหายไปเหมือนดังที่ได้เกิดขึ้นแล้วกับภาษาชนกลุ่มน้อยต่างๆ ที่เคยดำรงอยู่ในทวีปต่างๆ ทั้ง 5 ทวีป การศึกษาวิจัยนี้จึงมีจุดประสงค์เพื่อ (1) สืบค้นและบันทึกคำศัพท์ภาษาพูดของภาษาอูรักลาโว้ย บนเกาะบูโหลน ไว้เป็นลายลักษณ์อักษรด้วยสัญลักษณ์ทางสัทศาสตร์สากล (International Phonetic Alphabets: IPA) (2) ศึกษาจำนวนคำศัพท์ที่ชาวเกาะบูโหลนใช้พูดสื่อสารกัน และ (3) ศึกษาคุณลักษณะทางภาษาของคำศัพท์และวลี ข้อมูลทางภาษาในโครงการวิจัยนี้สืบค้นจากผู้ให้ข้อมูลชาวอูรักลาโว้ยที่อาศัยอยู่ที่หมู่เกาะบูโหลน จังหวัดสตูล จำนวน 38 คน เพศชาย 22 คน และเพศหญิง 16 คน มีระดับการศึกษาตั้งแต่ประถมศึกษาถึงปริญญาตรี และผู้ให้ข้อมูลที่ไม่รู้หนังสือไทยเก็บข้อมูลด้วยการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกกลุ่มย่อยประกอบการใช้บัตรภาพและบัตรคำ 1,200 บัตร ข้อมูลคำศัพท์ที่สืบค้นได้ถูกบันทึกด้วยมือเป็นภาษาไทย และตรวจสอบความถูกต้อง 2 ครั้งก่อนบันทึกด้วยสัญลักษณ์สัทศาสตร์สากลพร้อมคำแปลภาษาอังกฤษ

        ผลการวิจัยในการศึกษาครั้งนี้คือ ได้ค้นพบและบันทึกคำศัพท์ภาษาอูรักลาโว้ยด้วยสัญลักษณ์ทางสัทศาสตร์สากล จำนวน 759 คำ คำศัพท์และวลีภาษาอูรักลาโว้ยมีลักษณะบางประการเหมือนภาษามาลายู อีกทั้งยังพบว่าได้มีการยืมคำภาษาไทยประกอบการประดิษฐ์คำศัพท์ใหม่ในส่วนของลักษณะทางภาษาของคำศัพท์ พบว่าคำผสมและวลีในภาษาอูรักลาโว้ย ประกอบด้วยนามหลักอยู่ต้นคำตามด้วยส่วนขยาย นอกจากนี้ พบว่าภาษาอูรักลาโว้ยขาดคำเพื่ออธิบายความหลากหลายและละเอียดอ่อนทางความหมายของบางสิ่ง เช่น คำสำหรับอธิบายความแตกต่างของระดับของสีแต่ละสี เป็นต้น

คำสำคัญ : ภาษาชนกลุ่มน้อยอูรักลาโว้ย การอนุรักษ์ภาษา การสูญหายของภาษา สัญลักษณ์ทางสัทศาสตร์สากล
              เกาะบูโหลน

Introduction

Urak Lawoi sea gypsies, also known as Orang Laut, Chaw Talay, Chaw Nam, and Lawto (http://school.obec.go.th, August 9, 2012), were leading their lives on boats called Jukok sailing around from one island to another in the Indian Ocean for centuries. It is believed that some of them ended the nomad live and landed for permanent settlement in Indonesia, some in the jungles of the west coast of Malaysia, while the others in Thailand.

In Thailand, the first group of the sea gypsies settled on Lanta Island in Krabi Province (Srisuksai, 2002), from which some of them moved to other coastal areas of the Siam Kingdom as well as different islands of the Andaman Sea in the South. Consequently, at present besides Lanta Island, Urak Lawoi people live in several islands in the Andaman Sea, such as Le Peh, Adang-Rawi in Satun Province; Libong Island in Trang Province; and certain coastal villages in Phuket, Phang-nga and Krabi Provinces.

The existence of Urak Lawoi people in Bulon archipelago of Satun Province, however, had not been officially known of until Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn made a royal visit to Bulon Archipelago in 2011.

Similar to other minority groups, Urak Lawoi has inherited the tribe's own culture from their ancestors. The generations-long culture includes wisdoms, ways of life, customs, and tradition. In particular, they have their own language (Chantaramanee, 2000). Urak Lawoi language is spoken language used exclusively by Urak Lawoi speech communities for everyday life communication. Unfortunately, the number of people who actually speak this language is becoming smaller. Currently, only those in their middle or old age still speak Urak Lawoi. It was reported that in the year 2000 around 3,000 people (http://th.Wikipedia.org, August, 17, 2012) and in 2005 about 3,200 people spoke Urak Lawoi language (http://www.Joshuaprojejct.net, August 30, 2011).

Previous Urak Lawoi-related studies mostly focused on socio-economic, cultural, and educational issues, such as the projects conducted by (Srisuksai, 2002, Arunothai, et al., 2007, and Wongbusarakum, 2007). Urak Lawoi language, on the other hand, has marginally attracted Thai researchers' interest, i.e., at most the Urak Lawoi language tokens were simply attached as appendices, but not the main study.

This research article, one of the projects motivated by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's concerns about Bulon Archipelago dwellers' quality of life, reports on the study which was proposed to search for the words and phrases spoken by this minority group of sea people and records the found data systematically using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The study included the study of the characteristics of words and phrases of the language.

Review of previous studies on minority languages

In the midst of the main stream language in any country of the five continents there exist

a number of minority languages. Linguists have estimated that about 7,000 minority languages scattering in America, Europe, Australia, and Africa. About half of the number, however, are in danger of disappearing, and anticipated to vanish in a few decades (Wilford, 2007). Alarmingly, the risk of extinction seems to become worse incessantly. The concern of minority language vanishing was raised up in the 35th General Assembly of the UNESCO in 2011 during which a focus was on the protection of the minority groups and their endangered languages (http://komchadluek.net, October 11, 1012). It was officially reported that examples of death and near-extinct languages were found in all parts of the world.

In the United States of America, many minority languages are spoken by a limited number of people. In Oklaoma, for example, about 10,000 people belonged to an Indian tribe called Natchez. However, it was found that only 6 people spoke the tribe's language (http://www.upi.com, August 20, 2011).

A worse situation appeared to Siketz language, one of the 54 tribal languages in the North western high land of the USA, especially in the states of Oregon, and Washington. Only 1 speaker of Siketz was found still speaking the language (http://www.upi.com, August 20, 2011).

The crisis related to minority language survival in Australia is rather similar to those in the United States. About 231 tribal languages were found in the continent. All of these spoken languages are at risk of vanishing. It was found,

for instance, that only 3 people spoke Magati Ke language, which is the same case as Yawuru language. A hopeful sign, however, was found for Amudag language; one speaker of this spoken language was found still alive despite its official declaration as a dead language (http://www.upi.com, August 20, 2011).

In addition to the risk of extinction found in North America and Australia, minority and indigenous languages, as well as dialects, of the South East Asian region are also experiencing the vanishing of minority languages. A number of young Singaporeans, for instance, have no awareness of their ancestral roots. Moreover, several minority languages in this country have died. The loss in existence of minority languages in this country, thus, has triggered concerns from all sectors, the civil society in particular. The Singaporean government has been called for its alertness and sincerity in conserving all the dialects existing in the country, namely Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka, and Hainanese (http://chemgen.wordpress.com, August 20, 2011).

Regarding minority language extinction in Thailand, the situation seems to be as serious. Thus, Som-suda Leeyawanitch, the Director of Fine Art Department, addressed (in Thai language) that attempt should be made to conserve the minority languages

Over 70 minority languages… are in the critical situation risking of vanishing due to the death of last speaker of each language. The lack of systematic record has also resulted in the extinction of many minority languages in Thailand… It is, thus, urged that all related

sector realize the vitality of those minority languages and work cooperatively to conserve them before extinction. Attempts should be made in seeking approaches to record the languages. Minority languages, especially those without written forms are most risky to extinction. These minority languages are predicted to vanish from Thailand in 5-10 years provided no effective measure launched to help conserve them...At least 14 minority languages in Thailand are in critical situation." (Komchadluek.net, October 11, 2012, translated into English by P.Aksornjarung).

Previous studies on factors causing language vanishing

Having realized the risk of minority language vanishing, sociologists and humanities researchers and scholars in the USA and Australia started to pay attention to those endangered and near-extinct languages. As it has been maintained that certain languages had completely lost, and that there is no possibility to revive them, to investigate the factors that had caused the disappearance of those languages have, thus, particularly been in their attention (Wilford, 2007). It is believed that minority language extinction in all parts of the world has been resulted from various reasons.

It is observed that modernization and main stream languages could have played an influential role. Observably, minority people are all willing to open their arms wide to adopt the convenience from modernization: transportation, technology and all kinds of mass media.

One obvious fact is that modernization is interrelated to the use of the main stream language. The majority of television programs in every country, for instance, are broadcast through her mainstream language. Young people of each minority tribe have received the language input through the mass media and other different kinds of communication channels (Srisuksai, 2002). Undoubtedly, thus, the main stream language of the country where minorities live is found having caused the loss of those lessprivileged languages.

In addition, Wilford (2007) reported that the young people of those minority groups are required by law to attend formal education of the settlement country where the main stream language is used as the instruction medium. In Thailand, for example, the youth of hill tribes and sea people have to attend compulsory education where the Thai language is the only language used by both teachers and learners. In the school context, all children also do outside classroom activities using Thai language. Cumulatively, the children expose to the main stream language for at least 10 hours a day (Chantaramanee, 2000). In some countries where more than one official language is considered as mainstream languages, the vanishing of minority languages occurred even at a faster speed and broader areas because the minority children are automatically made to learn multiple official languages. In certain countries in South America, for example, Spanish and Portuguese main stream languages have wiped out many of the Indian tribal languages from the Andes.

The influence of mainstream languages is imposed on speakers of tribal languages not only through the spread of the language (through the mass media, education, and language use in other forms, such as signs used for commercial purposes), but also by the political power. In the East Siberian region, for instance, all individuals are required by the Russian government to speak only Russian or dialects of Russian, such as Sakha (Wilford, 2007).

Similarly, the enforcement of monolingual policy or national language policy in certain South East Asia countries could have caused extinction to some underprivileged languages. An example is witnessed in Singapore. The country's Mandarin-Only Policy, under which Mandarin is the only language for official and educational purposes since the 1950s, has led to young people's loss of Baba Malay, their ancestors' language (http://chemgen.wordpress.com, August, 20, 2011).

Another as serious cause of the death of several minority languages is their being spoken languages. As is reported, all the dead and endangered languages in all parts of the world are those having no written characters (Wilford, 2007). This inferiority, was, thus a factor causing the death of many languages. When the last speaker of a particular language died, the language also died leaving no trace of any form of the languages.

Generally, thus, it is evident that being spoken language, without written orthographic representation, seems to be a serious inferiority of most indigenous and former nomad languages.

The overwhelming exposure to mainstream language in the school context, the bombarding of the mainstream language input through various channels of mass media, coupled with the minority people's positive attitudes towards the mainstream language, could also have accentuated the significance of the official language while minimized the role of their ancestral languages. All of these factors have led to the acceleration of language vanishing, virtual improbability of revival, the disappearance, and decease of certain endangered languages.

The incidences of the death of minority languages in different parts of the world, including the USA, Australia, India, and Singapore, thus, have aroused the society, linguists in particular, to be aware of the importance and values of those less privileged languages. These various aspects of the influential modernized societies surrounding those minority languages, including Urak Lawoi, have triggered concerns among scholars from different fields. Correspondingly, financial assistance for research projects have been provided by government and non-government sectors in many countries in hope for preserving those minority languages and maintaining their coexistence in the modern society where mainstream languages are inevitably more important and have tremendous influence on minority language speakers (http://chemgen.wordpress.com, August 10, 2011).

Related studies on Urak Lawoi Language

Minority groups in Thailand consist of at least 10 highland and sea people groups. These

major minority groups have over 70 dialects and minority languages, most of which are hill tribal languages www.baanmaha.com, March 15, 2013). Only 3 groups of sea people are known in Thailand, namely Moken, Morgland, and Urak Lawoi. Although the population of sea people is considerably smaller than that of the hill tribe minority groups, their lives and cultures, including Urak Lawoi, however, have attracted certain extent of attention from Social Sciences researchers for a few decades.

Srisuksai (2002) investigated the socio-economic and cultural changes of Urak Lawoi people in Sanka-U village in Lanta Island of Thailand, the settlement of the largest group of Urak Lawoi people. She found that the spread of monetary-oriented economy, government power, and tourism business have almost wiped out the Urak Lawoi's in-group self-sustainable economy. A more commercial oriented production has replaced their tradition simple way of living. The consequence of modernity is seen in the change in all facets of their lives: Money plays a more important role in their lives; different new jobs have been created; more social interaction with out-group people have been observed; and Urak Lawoi people became more materialistic.

Another study, also focusing on Urak Lawoi's economics, was conducted by Arunotai, et al (2007). The investigation was aimed at surveying supplementary and alternative careers of Urak Lawoi people in Phuket province. It was found that most of the 94 informants maintained that despite their living amongst the modernity of

tourism business, they still want to follow their former generations' path, i.e., fishing for living. It was also found that besides economic difficulties the sea people in Phuket were facing another challenging problem, i.e., young people's illiteracy, which could have been resulted from the socio-economic disadvantages.

Not surprisingly, thus, the issue of education and studies in search of education development for the underprivileged group has been in researchers' concern. Chantaramanee's (2010) study, for example, aimed at finding alternative approaches to provide informal education to Lawoi people in 3 provinces: Phuket, Krabi, and Satun. Three hundred and fifty five Urak Lawoi people aged 15 and above, answered the questionnaire. Another important finding is about the people's literacy level: The largest number of the sample group had elementary education, and a smaller number had no literacy or failed to achieve any education level.

The studies reviewed above have reported information essential for government and non-government sectors to launch projects or develop and implement measures to help improve Urak Lawoi's living standard and different aspects of cultures. In contrast, although Urak Lawoi language has started to attract humanities researchers, studies focusing on language conservation, however, were still limited.

In the case of Urak Lawoi people in Thailand, the main stream language (Thai), which is heavily bombarded through various channels, personal contact in everyday life with Thai people and

mass media, has played the most significant role in the decrease in number of Urak Lawoi language speakers. This minority group, especially the younger generation, has continuously exposed to the main stream Thai language virtually all the time since their first day of life.

An empirical study pertaining Urak Lawoi language was conducted by Thongkamchum (1998). She investigated the phonological system of the language using Tagmemic theory. Among others, it was discovered that the phonological system of Urak Lawoi language contains 2 intonation groups and 3 types of stress. Although her major informants were the Urak Lawoi in Cam Island, she also made a comparison of the language spoken on that island with that spoken on Lanta Island, Krabi province, from which she found certain similarities leading to her conclusion that Urak Lawoi people living on Cam Island could have migrated from Lanta Island as previously believed.

Studies that aimed specifically to investigate this minority language have not yet found. The present study was, thus, proposed to collect and document this minority language lexicon. The findings and output of this ethnographic study are, thus, expected to (1) help Urak Lawoi young generation aware and proud of their root, and (2) conserve the endangered language.

The present study

The general purpose of this empirical research is to study Urak Lawoi language spoken by people in Bulon Island. In particular, it was aimed at 1) searching for words and phrases of Urak Lawoi language actually spoken for every communication and recording them in a written form using the International Phonetic; 2) quantifying the number of words known and spoken by the people on Bulon Island, and 3) studying the characteristics of the language. To this end, 3 research questions are formed.

1. What is the lexicon size do Urak Lawoi people in Bulon Island, Satun province of Thailand possess?

2. What are the characteristics of the language?

3. How are words and phrases coined?

Research methodology

Participants

Thirty-four Urak Lawoi people residing in Bulon Island participated as research informants. Eighteen were female and sixteen were male having ages ranging from 20-74 years. All male participants were fishermen, among them 12 had supplementary jobs as boat operators, local administrative officials, and owners of small business related to tourism on the 2 main islands of Bulon Archipelago, Bulon Don and Bulon Lay. The female participants, on the other hand, were housewives carrying out 2 responsibilities: raising the children and doing unpaid job sorting the fish caught upon each of their husbands' fishing trips Regarding education level, most participants had elementary and junior-high education although a few had university degrees and two had no Thai literacy.

Research Instrument

Two sets of cue cards containing 1,200 target words were employed as research instrument in the present study: colored-picture cards and word cue cards. The picture cards were used to collect words and phrases representing concrete nouns or verbs. The word cards, on the other hands, were employed to elicit those representing abstract identities. In conducting individual and small group interviews, the researcher and research assistants asked questions together with showing them the corresponding picture or word cue cards.

Data collection procedure

Data collection was carried out on Bulon Don and Bulon Lay islands of Satun Province with the cooperation of all the community members. Four trips were made in the non-monsoon seasons during the 12-month research timeframe. The first trip was made in search of community's leaders for their subsequent cooperation. Two leaders, also informants, agreed to arrange all the researcher-informant meetings. The second and third trips were made mainly for interviews. The final trip, which was 5 months after the data collection, was made for the purpose of data cross–examination, to confirm the accuracy in pronunciation and semantics.

In each interview 14-20 students, having been coached prior to each trip, performed the interview procedure together with the researcher. They were assigned to work in pairs or small groups, as seen in Picture 1. This is crucial for the reason that in eliciting and recording each spoken word the interviewers needed to handwrite each word together with all unexpected information the informants gave in Thai. As described above, they performed the interviews using the picture and word cards. In eliciting Urak Lawoi words using picture cue cards, they simply presented each picture to the informants together with asking questions and modifying their questions when asked for clarification. In case of eliciting words of abstract representation, however, besides reading the Thai word on each card, they had to act out and give details of each particular identity the cases that the informant failed to understand the target terms. Each interview took place at the informants' place; interviewers walked from one house to another throughout the 2 islands to carry out the task.

Picture 1: Atmosphere of small group interview using picture and word cue cards

Regarding the informants, they were interviewed based on their availability and convenience. In certain cases, an interview consisted of 2 interviewers and 2 or 3 informants. In such cases, the informants tended to give information in an overlapping manner enthusiastically to provide information. In other cases, a translator was needed to elicit information from senior informants because the informants spoke only Urak Lawoi language, but not Thai, the interviewers' mother tongue, as shown in picture 2.

Picture 2: A senior informant, a translator and 2 student interviewers

When all the interviews were completed, the gathered data (words, and phrases) were cross-examined using the same procedure as the data collection procedure. A difference between the data collection and data cross-examining lied in the informant; a word elicited from one informant was tested for accuracy by asking another informant. Transcribing and translation

procedure were performed subsequently using the International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA) as shown in Table 1. The language transcription was conducted using all the consonants and vowels presented in Table 1. The diphthongs were also employed. It should be noted, nonetheless, that some of the IPA symbols were excluded from the present study since the sounds represented by those symbols were not found in the present study.

Table 1: IPA symbols used in transcribing Urak Lawoi language

Consonants	Vowels
[p], [pʰ], [b], [t], [tʰ], [d], [k], [g], [m], [n], [f], [s], [h], [l], [w],[ŋ], [tʃ], [dʒ], [j], [ɲ], [ʔ]	[ɑ],[ɑ:], [ɪ],[i:],[ə],[ɜ:], [ɔ], [ɔ:],[ʊ],[u], [ʌ],[æ],[e], [o]

However, certain special characteristics are added to transcribe Urak Lawoi words. For example, the super script [h] is attached to [t] and [p] to distinguish the 2 sounds of [t] and [p], respectively. Followings are examples of English words containing [p], [pʰ], [t], and [tʰ], sounds; the [p] and [t] occur both at word initial and after [s] in Urak Lawoi while they only appear after [s] in English.

[pʰ]: *p*ark *p*eak, *p*ray , *p*in
[p]: s*p*ark s*p*eak s*p*ray s*p*in
[tʰ]: *t*one *t*op *t*ake *t*ack
[t]: s*t*one s*t*op s*t*ake s*t*ack

Also added are the [ʔ] and [ɲ] sounds, as the example shown below.

[ʔ] [lɑ:-ŋeʔ] = sky
[ʔɑ-kə] = root
[ɲ] [ɲɑ:-mɔh] = mosquito
[hɑ:-ɲʌp] = chicken
[ŋɑ:-ɲɔh] = paddle

These two special sounds of Urak Lawoi language, which do not appear in the English language phonological system, are [ʔ] and [ɲ]. The symbol [ʔ] represents the sound having half of the utterance of a sound, sounding similar at to [ə] (glottal stop) with a higher pitch. In Urak Lawoi language this sound appears both pre and post syllabic positions. The symbol [ɲ] is a nasal sound comparable to the [Ñ] in Spanish.

Results

Results of the investigation relevant to the research objectives and questions are presented in 3 parts below.

Number of words spoken by Bulon Island residents

Out of the 1,200 target words and phrases prepared in the form of picture and word cards, we were able to elicit and record in IPA 759 words. (The full complete list of words was presented in the form of 3-language mini-dictionary and submitted to Chaippattana Foundation, but not attached in this paper). The rest, almost 400 words, were not known

to the informants. They revealed that there were no words for some of the Thai words presented to them. They also said many of they had heard their elder relative used when they were young but they could not remember or recall them.

Characteristics of Urak Lawoi words and phrases

Regarding the characteristics of Urak Lawoi language, it has been known that Urak Lawoi language is categorized as one of those in the Austronesian language family; within this group there exist 70 languages families (www.baan maha.com). Through our empirical investigation, the data found in the present study confirmed that Urak Lawoi is closely related to the Malay language.

Table 2: Urak Lawoi-Malay cognates having identical phonological and semantic properties to those of the Malay language

Part of speech	American English	IPA Transcription
		Urak Lawoi and Malay
Noun	shirt	[bɑ:-ju]
	cap / hat	[tɔ:-mɪ]
	stone	[bɑ:-tu]
	fire	[ɑ:-pi:]
	eye	[mɑ:-tu]
Pronoun	we	[ki-tɑ:]
Verb	like	[su-gɑ:]
	sneeze / cough	[bɑ:-toəh]
	know	
	sit	[tɑ:-hu]
	burn	[du-du]
		[tu-nu]
Adjective	this	[i-ni]
	that	[i-tu]
	green	[hi-d:dʒɔ:]

Its lexicon system can be categorized into 3 groups: (1) words having exactly the same sound as those of Malay, (2) those partly similar to words in Malay, and (3) those considered as genuine Urak Lawoi language. Shown in Table 2 are examples of words having identical sounds to Malay, and in Table 3 are examples of words having similar sounds to the language. The words belonging solely to Urak Lawoi language are not presented because they are the majority of the lexical body found in this study.

Table 3: Urak Lawi lexicon sharing similarities in sounds with the Malay language

Part of speech	American English	IPA Transcription	
		Urak Lawoi	Malay
Noun	fish	[i-kʌt]	[i-kʌn]
	bird	[bʊ-rʊk]	[bʊ-rʊŋ]
	tree	[pu-hʊəd]	[pu-hɔn]
	person	[u-rʌk]	[ɔ:-rʊŋ]
	star	[bi-tʌk]	[bi-tʌŋ]
Pronoun	I	[ku]	[ɑ-ku]
	you	[kɔ:]	[əŋ-kɔ:]
	all	[sə-mu-hɑ:]	[sə-mɑ:]
Verb	see	[li-hɑi]	[li-hɑt]
	walk	[dʒɑ:-lʌt]	[dʒɑ:-lʌn]
	give	[bri]	[bə-ri]
	eat	[mɑ:-kʌt]	[mɑ:-kʌn]
	sleep	[ti-nu]	[ti-du]
Adjective	big	[bə-sə]	[bə-sɑ:]
	long	[pɑ:-dʒʌk]	[pʌn-dʒʌŋ]
	red	[mi-rɑh]	[me-rɑh]
	hot	[hɑ-ŋɑi]	[hɑ-ŋɑt]
	black	[hi-tʌp]	[hi-tʌm]
	white	[pu-teh]	[pu-tih]

Word formation system

The data found in the present study show that Urak Lawoi language is a non-inflectional language; prefixes, infixes and suffixes are not components of this language. Words in this minority language can be 1, 2, or 3 syllables. As for compound words, the language has a rather rigid system in forming words. Generally, compound words are formed by combining 2 words to form a new word which contains the meaning of both. The order of particles is different from how an English compound or phrase is formed. In English, a modifying word (a noun or adjective) is placed in front of the head word. In Urak Lawoi, in contrast, the head word is followed by a modifying word, as shown by the examples below.

Example: words relating to coconut, [kɑ:-me] in Urak Lawoi language

    [mi-ɲɑ:kɑ:-me] = coconut oil
    [pu-hoədkɑ:-me] = coconut tree
    [pu-rʊkkɑ:-me] = coconut shell

These 3 examples show that the modifying part of each word is [kɑ:-me], meaning coconut, and placed after its head noun. Table 4 shows more examples of word-formation pattern, compound noun and noun phrase.

Table 4: Word formation in Urak Lawoi language

Word components		New words
Head word	Modifying word	(compound noun)
1.[tu-hʌd] = owner	[l-tl] = duck	[tu-hʌd l-tl] = duck owner
2.[lʌk] = people	[tu-ɑ:] = old	[lʌktu-ɑ:] = old people
3.[i-gʌd] = fish	[mɑ:-sen] = salty	[i-gʌdmɑ:-sen] = salty fish
4.[bu-li] = bottle	[ɑ:-jei] = water	[bu-li ɑ:-jei] = water bottle
5.[nʌk-si] = rice	[rɑ-nʌk] = fried	[nʌk-sirɑ-nʌk] = fried rice

Interestingly, a number of nouns are found based on the main attribute of each identity. Any identity having property of liquid, for instance, is given a name containing [ɑ:-jei] (water), as shown in the examples below.

Example: Compound nouns having meaning relating to liquid

    Note: [ɑ:-jei] = water)

    [ɑ:-jeipɑ:-sʌk]   = high tide
    [ɑ:-jeisu-rui]   = low tide
    [ɑ:-jeitɑ:-rʌp]   = flood
    [ɑ:-jeii-gʌt]   = fish sauce
    [ɑ:-jeikɜ:-meh]   = urine
    [ɑ:-jeili-jei]   = saliva
    [ɑ:-jeibɑ:-tu]   = ice

Following the same word formation, thus, any noun denoting 'to embrace' or 'wrap' or 'detain' is given a name derived from the combination of the denotation and the identity or the like, as shown below.

Example: Nouns containing the denotation of 'embracing', 'wrapping', or 'detaining' [sɑː-rʌk]

[sɑː-rʌkglɑː-wɑː] = spider + web (wrap + spider)

[sɑː-rʌkmɑː-tu] = beehive (wrap + bee)

In terms of language development, it is believed that Urak Lawoi was coined and spoken for centuries (http:// school.obec.go.th, September 9, 2012). Thus, it can probably be claimed that this language has gone through some change as time has passed. However, compared with the English or Thai language, Urak Lawoi language lacks nuances in word meanings in certain categories, such as degree of feelings, tone or shades of colors, types of certain identities, as shown in table 5. In English, for example, there are 2 different words to refer to 2 different physical conditions—'cough', and 'sneeze'. Similarly, there are 2 words for these 2 conditions in Thai—[ai] = cough, and [dʒɑːm] = sneeze. In Urak Lawoi language, on the other hand, the word [bɑː-toəh] is used to refer to both 'cough' and 'sneeze'. Table 5 also shows other examples of the lack in nuances in Urak Lawoi language.

Table 5: Comparison of 3 languages

English	Thai	UrakLawoi
1. Cough Sneeze	1. [ai] [dʒɑːm]	1. [bɑː-toəh]
2. Green Navy blue Blue Light blue	2. [hkiæw] [groəm-mɑ-tɑː] [nɑːm-ŋən] [fɑ]	2. [hi-dʒɔː]
3. Plate Bowl	3. [dʒɑːn] [tʃɑːm]	3. [si-jʌp]

Another aspect of language development can be seen in the limitation of word formation. Certain identities, both abstract and concrete nouns that have been assigned nouns in other languages, such as English and Thai, were not named in Urak Lawoi language. Instead of creating a name for each identity, Urak Lawoi simply add another particle or word to one of which the meaning is shared. A comparison is made with the English language lexicon system, presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Word coinage in Urak Lawoi

English words	Urak Lawoi	Explanation of the word combination
1. bark	[kuɡɑ:-ju]	[ku] = skin [ɡɑ:-ju] = tree
2. belt	[pi-ŋʌktɑ:-li]	[pi-ŋʌk] = waist[tɑ:-li= rope]
3. nipple	[dɑ:-dɑ:pɑ:-lɑ:]	[dɑ:-dɑ:] = brest[pɑ:-lɑ:] = head

Table 6 shows that Urak Lawoi did not create words for some identities. It lacks the specific word for 'bark' (noun), for example. To refer to this identity, they simply coined a word by combining [ku] or 'skin' with [ɡɑ:-ju] or 'tree' to refer to this identity. Likewise, 'nipple' is coined by combining [dɑ:-dɑ:] or 'breast' with [pɑ:-lɑ:] or 'head'.

In addition, nouns given to some identities are coined by combining one Urak Lawoi word and one Thai particle or word. Besides such code mixing, borrows were found; a lot of Thai words are purely used to refer to some identities. Table 7 below shows examples of words Urak Lawoi use exactly the same as Thai. Table 8 shows words coined from an Urak Lawoi word and a Thai particle or word.

Table 7: Words borrowed from Thai

Words used as the Thai language	
Word	Meaning/explanation
1. [mʌŋ-kʊd]	mangosteen
2. [ɑ-ŋun]	grape
3. [rɑ:-tʒɑ:]	king
4. [roəŋ-riæn]	school

Table 8: Words coined from one Urak Lawoi and one Thai word

Words with combination of Thai and Urak Lawoi word		
Urak Lawoi +Thai	Meaning new word	Meaning of each word
1. [bʊ-ŋa:ɡa-lʌm-pli]	1. Coli flower	1. [bʊ-ŋa:] = flower [ɡɑ-lʌm-pli] = cabbage
2. [hɑ:-jʌbdʒæ]	2. A variety of chicken with 2 or times smaller in size than regular chicken	2. [hɑ:-jʌb] = chicken [dʒæ] = a Thai word

Each of the examples shown in Table 8 contains one Urak Lawoi (1st word) and one Thai (the 2nd word). Example 1 consists of one Urak Lawoi word [bʊ-ŋɑ:] meaning 'flower', and a Thai word [gɑ-lʌm-pli] meaning 'cabbage'. Example 2 consists of one Urak Lawoi word [hɑ:-jʌb] meaning 'chicken' and a Thai word [dʒæ] referring to a small breed of Gallus gallus.

Summary and discussion

The present study collected Urak Lawoi language words and phrases by eliciting the language data from a minority group of sea people living on Bulon Islands of Satun Province in Thailand. Data collected answered the 3 research questions formulated.

Research question 1, asking about the vocabulary size of the language, was aimed at recording the lexicon found through in-depth interviews using picture and word cues. Seven hundred and fifty-nine (759) words were documented using IPA transcription (The complete version in the 3-language mini-dictionary format was submitted to The Chaipattana Foudation). It is not intended, nonetheless, to conclude that the vocabulary size of this minority group is 759 words. In fact, we were unable to elicit about 400 targeted words which we prepared with picture and word cue cards. This can be due to that fact that this study was carried out on Bulon Island, where a smaller number of Urak Lawoi people live resulting in the limited number of lexicon tokens collected. A concern triggered by this study is that some informants told us that they heard some other words but

they were unable to recall those forgotten words. Thus, it can be interpreted that Urak Lawoi people on Bulon Island might have been heavily influenced by the main stream language (Thai). This minority group, especially the younger generation, has continuously exposed to the main stream Thai language virtually all the time since their first day of life. Observably, they are immersed in Thai language environment almost all the time through various channels, especially personal direct contact with Thai people in everyday life. Mass media has also played a significant role in the decrease in number of Urak Lawoi language speaker sleading to forgetting words or language.

Regarding research questions 2 and 3, the data collected confirmed that the language is categorized as one of the languages in the Austronesian language family (th.wikipedia.org, translated, Retrieved Aug, 7, 2011). In particular, evidence shows certain relation with the Malay language, which is also in the Austronesian language family. In terms of words formation, a modifying word is attached after the head noun (post-noun modifier), which is unlike the word formation system in English where the modifier is placed before the head noun (pre-noun modifier).

Finally, it was found that the development of Urak Lawoi language is rather limited. Certain identities, to which specific names are assigned in other languages (English and Thai, for example), do not have specific words to refer to. The term *belt*, for instance, is formed by combining 'waist' and 'rope'. They also lack nuances for

certain identities; there are at least 4 words used for different shades of blue color in Thai while there is only one in Urak Lawoi, for instance.

To conclude, the main purpose of the present study was to search for and record Urak Lawoi words in writing form in order to prevent the language from vanishing. In other words, it was carried out at a word level. It is, thus, recommended that further research be conducted at the syntactic level to better conserve this endangered minority language.

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