

Code Switching in Tai dam classrooms in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

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Abstract

Tai Dam, an ethnic language of Vietnamese immigrants, is among the minority languages facing a decline in their use among the younger generation in Thailand. Efforts have been made to preserve the ethnic language through education programs. Based on an awareness that the proper use of students' first language serves useful pedagogical and social functions in multi-ethnic classrooms, the present case study thus examined: 1) the teacher's beliefs about Tai Dam teaching and learning, classroom language and codeswitching; 2) his classroom language use, code switching types and functions; and 3) his students' language use and functions. The observational and interview data, collected from one native teacher of Tai Dam and his students at two schools in Nakhon Pathom, revealed: 1) the teacher's belief in teaching Tai Dam to preserve the language and culture through traditional methods, using Tai Dam as a sole classroom medium; 2) his small number of switches to Central Thai, most of which were inter-sentential switches used to present new information; and 3) his students' main use of Tai Dam for passive functions. Overall, the study shed some light to language teachers on appropriate codeswitching, and to policy makers in providing appropriate training to teachers of ethnic languages.

Keywords: Tai Dam, classroom interaction, codeswitching, pedagogic goals

Introduction

Thailand is a multidialectal and multicultural society. Central Thai was established as the official national language; yet the national language policy also recognizes other