

# The Evolution of Thai Language

Apsorn Tiewcharoenkij\* Veerakarn Kanokkamalade\*\*

Ruengdet Pankhuenkhat\*\*\*

Faculty of Humanities, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand

## Abstract

The academic article is conveyed to present the evolution and history of Thai language by means of honouring King Ramkamhaeng the Great of the Sukothai period of Kingdom of Thailand, who invented Thai alphabets as a written language, admiring, propagating knowledge of, conserving and approving Thai language which is very important not only as being a national language of Thailand, but also is a very important common language spoken among foreigners from the Southeast Asia who come to stay, do a business, study and work in Thailand. Thai language is the national language of Thai society. It has changed since the Sukhothai period, Ayutthaya period and the Rattanakosin period. Language change occurs gradually and are driven by internal and external factors. External, which a change in the aforementioned factors of the Thai language may change both the pronunciation, Audio system, the meaning of words and their functions in different contexts. Thai language is a cultural heritage. It is the wisdom that the ancestors have created and passed on to the descendants. Studying the Thai language allows us to understand the origin of our people and learns about the culture through the Thai language that has developed and changed until now and can maintain our good culture for a long time. This is the main reason that the author absolutely realizes and sees the importance of presenting the evolution of Thai language to remind the Thai readers not to forget the origin of Thai language; moreover, this information will be very beneficial for those who are studying linguistics.

**Keywords:** The Evolution, History, Conserving, Thai Language, National Language, Thailand.

### Definition of Language Evolution

The Royal Academy (2013: 1124) has given the meaning of "Evolution" that is the process of changing or resolving to a better state.

Mallika Mapha (2016: 10) Language often changes with each era. Changes in language will gradually occur and progress, or may change when. Changes to language, in addition to the factors in the language, may also be caused by factors in the language. It can also be caused by external factors, such as the influence of other languages. Language may change in pronunciation, sound system, word meaning and function of words in different contexts

### Factors causing language change

Proposed the concepts of the factors that cause language change can be summarized as follows.

1. The difference between languages that exist in society.
2. Psychological condition of language speakers
3. Phonetic characteristics of language speakers
4. Advancement in science
5. Language qualifications
6. Language changes due to borrowing of foreign language words.
7. Language changes because of geography.

### Language Change Theory

Thawat Punnotok (2010: 17-22) explained the theory of language change (Rule of Language Change) according to the theory of linguists as follows:

1. Internal Change means the process of changing the structure of words and the phonemes of a language, which are natural and their influence, are not influenced by other languages mixed in.
2. External Change is a change that is influenced by other languages that have inherited cultural relations. In ancient times, the language that

influenced the Thai language from the past was Pali, Sanskrit and Khmer language. In the present, English has had a great influence on the Thai language because Western nations have enjoyed great prosperity in science, medicine, education and modern science. Western academics studying technology from the Western zone therefore often incorporate English words into the Thai language, both academic vocabulary and general vocabulary. In addition, the younger generation of Thais often speak English mixed with Thai, which causes more English words to be mixed up, such as e-mail, Internet, digital, etc.

3. Changes in character (Paleographic Change): Thai script is one of the topics in the study of the evolution of the Thai language, but linguists will not as important as the alphabet as spoken language, because the characters of the nations which are sounded did not match the voice. Therefore, it came up with a new symbol for speech called "Phonetic Alphabet" and saw that it was the most effective in recording speech.

### **Prototype of Thai Alphabets**

According to Bureau of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Bangkok. (2013: 45-50) mentioned that Before the emergence of the Sukhothai Kingdom, Thai people have gathered together to form a community, living mixed with the Khmer and Mon people, and even though they were united and ready to be independent, they still had no chance because they were still under the political influence of the Khmer Empire which still had the power and was very strong. The Thai people therefore could only strengthen their own culture and groups, especially culture of writing books, such as large Thai people, have adapted the Mon script used to record the Tai Yai language. The Yonok people adapted Mon's script to record the local Thai language, Nua (Yuan script or Muang letter) and Thai Ahom people have adapted the Mon script to be their own written language until becoming a document named "Ahom Ancient Ji" or "Ahom Boran Ji".

Learning the culture of writing that book occurred in both the Thai people in the north, which has influenced the ancient Mon script writing culture to use in recording the Northern Thai language. The Thai people in the central region also adopted Khmer culture in writing stories. Various parties, both the Kingdom and the church, both Thai and Pali or even the Khmer language used the Khmer script of the Khmer Empire, Phra Nakhon, because during that time it was a group of people with more advanced cultures.

However, when the Khmer Kingdom in Phra Nakhon declined power down around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Thai people led by Pho Khun Pha Muang and Pho Khun Bang Klang Hao have defeated. "Khmer Sombad Kholampong", the authority has governing the city of Sukhothai. Later, the Sukhothai Kingdom was established, with Pho Khun Sri Indra Thit as the First King to rule the Sukhothai Kingdom and the next Reign, Pho Khun Ban Muang's language and alphabet. Later in the Reign of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great, he has made a Thai script in 1205, as indicated in the 1<sup>st</sup> main stone inscription, which corresponds to A.D. 1826.

Thai script that King Ramkhamhaeng the Great has invented is the first set of Thai script because it does not appear to have any inscription or Thai script before King Ramkhamhaeng the Great.

Scholars assumed that Lai Sue Thai or Thai script that King Ramkhamhaeng the Great invented, probably based on the original characters, namely Ancient Khmer script and ancient Mon script, etc.

### **Thai pattern of King Ramkhamhaeng**

#### **1. Alphabet patterns of Lai Sue Thai:**

Thai Lai Sue that King Ramkhamhaeng invented in 1826 is composed of consonants, vowels, tonal and numbers. In addition, it was found the use of symbols instead of vowels of 2 forms: Phon Thong sign and the Nikhahit mark. As for the writing mark was found with 2 forms, which are symbols of Message Prefix and Message Separator.

## 2. Orthography of Lai Sue Thai:

Consonants and vowels which are on the same line with the same size are different from the font of a prototype that places vowels around the original consonant. Since King Ramkhamhaeng requires all consonants to be placed on the same line; therefore, His Highness canceled the use of consonants and writing of double consonants like the original consonants therefore, there is only one set.

In summary, there are 39 Thai alphabet and 20 vowels as shown in the table below.

### Consonances

ก	ข	ฃ	ค	ฅ	ฆ	ง	จ	ฉ	ช	ซ
ฌ	ญ	ฎ	ฏ	ฐ	ฑ	ฒ	ณ	ด	ต	ถ
ท	ธ	ฬ	บ	ป	ผ	ฝ	พ	ฟ	ภ	ม
ย	ร	ล	ว	ศ	ษ	ส	ห	ฬ	อ	ฮ

[https://www.google.com/search?ลายสือไทยสมัยพ่อขุนรามคำแหง.\(พ.ศ. 1835\).](https://www.google.com/search?ลายสือไทยสมัยพ่อขุนรามคำแหง.(พ.ศ. 1835).)

### Vowels

สระ

ก ๕	ข ๖	ค ๗-๘	ฅ-ฌ ๙-๑๐
ง ๑๑	ช ๑๒-๑๓	ฌ ๑๔	ญ ๑๕-๑๖
ด ๑๗	ต ๑๘	ถ ๑๙-๒๐	ด-ต ๒๑-๒๒
ธ ๒๓	ด-ธ ๒๔-๒๕	ฉ ๒๖	ช-ฌ ๒๗-๒๘
น ๒๙	ณ ๓๐	ญ ๓๑-๓๒	ญ ๓๓
บ ๓๔	ป ๓๕-๓๖	พ-ภ ๓๗-๓๘	พ ๓๙
ผ ๔๐	ฝ ๔๑	ผ ๔๒-๔๓	ผ-ฝ ๔๔-๔๕

<https://www.google.com/search?ลายสือไทยสมัยพ่อขุนรามคำแหง>. (พ.ศ. 1835).

### Phaya Lithai Script

In the Phaya Lithai period, it was found that the Thai alphabet system had changed again. This shows that the Thai script in the period of King Ramkhamhaeng was used as an official character, but Thai people in general still prefer to use orthography of Khmer fonts or Mon letters that place vowels above and below consonants because it has been used for a long time and at the same time also read scriptures in Pali which were written in Khmer script; therefore, Thai people did not feel comfortable with the adjustment to use orthography with the Thai pattern.

#### Thai characters appearing in the Phaya Lithai inscriptions

There was a change in the orthography system by Khmer and Mon orthography were used as an official script instead of Pho Khun Ramkhamhaeng's Thai script. It was evidenced by the Phaya Lithai inscription which was found that there were 38 consonants and 22 vowels. The tonal part is still used like Lai Sue Thai.

**Thai Script in Ayutthaya period is divided into 3 eras as follows:**

**1. Early Ayutthaya period (1893-2034):**

The Ayutthaya Kingdom did not invent the alphabet itself, but was influenced by the Thai script in the Phaya Lithai period of Sukhothai. Most of the ancient documents that have been passed down to this day are ancient documents inscribed on hard materials such as silver, tin, stone and various metals, creating a Buddha image, making merit and setting up the sacrament etc.

In the early Ayutthaya period, there was no evidence of the use of more consonants and vowels from the Sukhothai period. But it was found an additional symbol for writing, which is the Yamok symbol (ไ้ม้ยมก) in the 44<sup>th</sup> main inscription of Wat Songkrob 3, 1976. That is the first time of using the Yamok symbol.

From the inscription evidence above, it was found that the Thai script in the early Ayutthaya period still had a very similar morphology to the Phaya Lithai script, that is, the curved line, rounded and wide characters. There are only some characters where the letter lines and letter angles begin to be square, such as the /ธ/ and /พ/. After a period of time, the letter will be gradually unfold. The morphology begins to form almost all the characters. It is clearly visible in the 50<sup>th</sup> main inscription (in 1956 A.D.) and the 44<sup>th</sup> main inscription at Wat Songkhob 3 (in 1976 A.D.).

The use of Khmer script and orthography style in Thai words is found to be used to write both words in conjunction with writing ligatures, and use some Khmer letters inserted in syllables or in Thai words. This is found a lot in the main inscriptions 44 and 51.

**2. Middle Ayutthaya period (2034 - 2231)**

The middle Ayutthaya period started from the King Phra Ramathibodi 2<sup>nd</sup> period until the Reign of King Narai the Great. During this period is about 200 years old, which is longer than the Early Ayutthaya period. In this era, the country has the most prosperity in terms of politics, government, economy, foreign affairs and literature especially during the Reign of King Narai the Great,

it was considered the golden age of Kingdom of Ayutthaya, because of the foreign trade dealings that there was a trade treaty with France and the civil friendship between Ayutthaya and France as well.

#### **Number of characters**

The number of consonants has not been found to increase from the Sukhothai period, but found two symbols for vowels: the sign of the vowels “ไม้ไต่คู้” firstly found used in the word “กี” and the rat tooth “ฟันหนู”. Both of these marks were found in the Royal Chronicles of Luang Prasert Aksornit Scripture, 1780.

#### **Alphabet shapes**

From the study of the ancient Ayutthaya period, found 2 types of letters as follows:

Plain font which is the original font inherited from the early Ayutthaya script. But during this period, the morphology has evolved into a clearer square shape. Written letters are not rounded and also the letters are leaning slightly to the right.

Thai abbreviated characters are characters that have a recessive shape. This type of typeface is a decoration of ordinary calligraphy that is normally used to be more elaborate and beautiful. However, it may have been an example from Khmer script, which has been used in conjunction with Thai script since Sukhothai, and from the ancient documentary evidence as far as there is, it is found that the Thai abbreviations were firstly used in Somdej Phra Chao Songtham period and found that it was very popular in the Reign of King Narai the Great. This is most commonly used for official and religious records.

### **3. The letters of the late Ayutthaya period (1788 - 1767) to the Thonburi period (1768 - 1781)**

Number of characters: in the late Ayutthaya period, found that the alphabet increased by 2 characters, /t<sup>h</sup>/ (๓) and /h/ (ฮ), found that all of the abbreviations of Thai characters appeared in Nantopananthasutkamluang in 1736 A.D., decorated in the Reign of King Borommakote with 44 consonants.



### Vowels

In this era, there were 5 more vowels: /e/ (สระเอะ), /**เ**/ (สระเอียะ), /**อ**/ (สระเอื้อะ), /**า**/ (สระอ้าวะ) และ /**อ**/ (สระเออะ) found in Jindamanee Book during the Reign of King Borommakote. There were a total of 32 vowels in 1732 A.D.

**Tonal marks:** Thai Book of Jindamanee during the Reign of King Borommakote which was found in London, England, found the Tri and Jatawa tonal marks (“วรรณยุกต์ตรีและจัตวา”). Therefore, if accepting the Thai book of Jindamanee in the Reign of King Borommakote, found in London is the real version by not copying in the late period, it can be said that these two tones firstly appeared in 1732.

The letters found in 2 types are the same as in the Central Ayutthaya period as follows:

1. Plain fonts: this type of script is the original typeface used from the Central Ayutthaya period, but the line of letters has evolved into a straight line. The letters are angled until they are square more than the ones in Central Ayutthaya period.

2. Thai abbreviations are also commonly used in Thai abbreviations for recording on both copper stone, Thai book and shaft paper. Most of the evidence appears to be used in documenting religious stories and scriptures. Thai abbreviations that are considered the most elaborate and beautiful appear in the Thai book “Nantopananthasutkamluang”.

### The Script in the Early Rattanakosin Period and Its Development

The story of Thai script in the Early Rattanakosin period will mention only the Thai script from King Rama I (1782 A.D.) to the Reign of King Rama III (1851 A.D.), that is during the 24th century only because during the 25th century onwards, it was printed in Thailand that made Thai characters after the early Rattanakosin period at the beginning have no development that would change the character form.

### Style of letters

Style of letters in Thonburi and Early Rattanakosin periods, that is, before there was a printing business, it was found that the morphology of the letters was square. It focuses on straight, broken corners, clear angles, but not popular with long tails and recesses like the government documents in the Reign of King Narai called "Thai abbreviations". The orthography uses the same system continuously. Tonal marks in the Rattanakosin period were found all 4 forms; Ek, To, Tri, and Jattawa (เอก โท ตรี จัตวา) with the same appearance as the present.

The character of morphology in this era was considered including the documents of Thonburi period because they are the same until indistinguishable and the number of documents in the Thonburi period is less; therefore, they were brought together in the same place.

In conclusion, the morphology of consonants in the Early Rattanasin period in general, the structure is like the one of the late Ayutthaya period. As for the calligraphy, it is slightly different depending on the popularity of each period, see the document from the Thonburi period.

The shape of vowels in the early Rattanakosin period is not different from the late Ayutthaya period. If it is somewhat different, it is due to the author's handwriting, scabble handwriting, or only elaborate.

The Tri and Jattawa forms have recently appeared in Rattanakosin period. However, It was found that they were used in writing very few documents at the beginning of the Rattanakosin period. The 4 tonal forms are completely found in the Rattanakosin period.

### The Development of Thai script in the Rattanakosin period

There are 3 types of Thai specific fonts as follows:

1. The Ariyaka of King Mongkut, King Rama IV
2. The new orthography of King Rama VI
3. Thai language orthography of Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkram (Used in official characters for a while).

The government of Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkram tried to compact the Thai language and define it for the broad use of language for the people of those days to follow. However, this kind of orthography is not accepted because when the Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkram lost his power in 1944, this type of orthography was discontinued. People have turned back to the same script and orthography once again.

After the Royal Society Dictionary was released in 1950, the Thai writing system became more stable because it takes the word in the dictionary as a standard. At present, a dictionary of the edition of the Royal Institute of Thailand 2011 was revised and used.

## Conclusion

The evolution of Thai language and script is a change that began in the Sukhothai period where evidence of the invention of the Thai script by King Ramkhamhaeng by adapting the script from the ancient Khmer script and the ancient Mon to be used in the Early Ayutthaya period, Central Ayutthaya period, Late Ayutthaya period and Early Rattanakosin period. In addition, to the evolution of the script for each era, there are also specific fonts that have been created specifically such as being used for reading Pali, adjusted to make the Thai language more modern and convenient to be used. But these specific fonts were not used until eventually discontinued. Specific fonts are: Ariyaka of King Rama IV, new orthography of King Rama VI, and Thai language orthography of Field Marshal P. Pibulsongkram.

Changes or evolution of language is a natural change in language, especially the spoken language that is communicated in our daily lives in which the aforementioned language has changed quite a bit depending on the internal factors such as changes in vocabulary, meaning etc. Besides internal changes, there are also changes in language caused by external factors such as geography, religion, technology, etc. This factor caused the borrowing of the language itself.

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