

LANGUAGE VITALITY AND LANGAUGE ATTITUDE OF THE KAREN ETHNIC GROUP IN THE WESTERN REGION OF THAILAND: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

Somsonge Burusphat¹
Sumittra Suraratdecha²
Patama Patpong³
Amon Saengmanee⁴

Abstract

This paper presents preliminary findings of the research project entitled “Ethnicity, Language, Culture and Ethnic Tourism Development.” It has three goals. First, it aims to identify the Karen language spoken in six provinces in the western region of Thailand, namely, Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Suphan Buri, and Nakhon Pathom. The next goal is to explore Karen language use and attitudes towards languages of the wider community. The final goal is to evaluate the development of sustainable ethnic tourism in the region. A preliminary survey of language use and attitude of Karen people towards the Karen language and Ethnic Tourism Development (ETD) in these six provinces was carried out using a qualitative approach. Thirty subjects made up of local administrators and community leaders were interviewed using two kinds of

guided questionnaires, community and personal questionnaires.

The villages where the Karen language is spoken are presented on an ethno-linguistic map, linked with cultural information about the Karen. The interviews with participants yield preliminary findings on the language vitality and attitude of Karen people towards the Karen language and ETD in the six provinces. Karen in Prachuap Khiri Khan has the strongest language vitality whereas Karen in Nakhon Pathom has the weakest. In the other provinces, around fifty percent of Karen people still speak Karen.

Language attitudes among middle aged and older people are positive in all provinces. Karen people in these age groups wish their children could speak Karen because they are proud of their language, which is unique to the Karen community and helps to unite the Karen people into a powerful ethnic group. Karen people in Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, and Suphan Buri believe that ETD will improve the Karen economy and help to preserve Karen language and culture as well as refocus Karen children’s attention on their own language and culture. In Nakhon Pathom the Karen community is too small to develop ethnic tourism and has become highly integrated into the Thai community.

Introduction

Background

No one community is monolingual. Thailand is no exception. Linguistic diversity can be found in all regions of Thailand. Unfortunately, with the rapid development of information technology world-wide, such diversity is threatened. Bradley (2009: 2) points out that “Languages have been disappearing for

¹ Professor of Linguistics, Mahidol University

² Lecturer, Department of Linguistics, Mahidol University

³ Lecturer, Department of Linguistics, Mahidol University

⁴ Associate Professor of Linguistics, Mahidol University

at least ten thousand years. If the language density and number of speakers of each language now seen in Papua New Guinea were present worldwide, there would be many times the number of languages, currently spoken (6912, if we accept Lewis 2009, the latest edition of the *Ethnologue*), even allowing for increased population density based on agriculture and technology.”

These past years, many organizations campaigned for the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity in many countries. To name a few, UNESCO declared its Policy on Linguistic Rights in 1997; the United Nations announced a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in 2007 and declared the year 2008 International Year of Languages and 2009 International Year of Indigenous People.

Having seen the importance and value of linguistic and cultural diversity in Thailand, the present research project, “Ethnicity, Language, Culture, and Ethnic Tourism Development” set as its objectives to explore the impact of globalization on ethnic peoples, particularly their indigenous languages and cultures. The findings of the research can be used as a basis for national language planning and sustainable ethnic tourism plans. During the first year of the research project, the research team will collect and analyze sociolinguistic data of eight ethnic groups residing in eight provinces: Nakhon Pathom Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Suphan Buri, Samutsakorn, Samutsongkram, Phetchaburi, and Prachuap Khiri Khan, in the western region of Thailand. These ethnic groups are Mon, Karen, Thai Song Dam, Thai Yuan, Lao Khrang, Lao Tai, Lao Phuan, and Lao Wiang. During the second year, the research team will select one ethnic

community as a model community to develop sustainable ethnic tourism. The ultimate goals of the project are to promote diversity in unity and the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures, as well as to strengthen the ethnic communities.

The present paper is an outcome of the initial six-month research of the “Ethnicity, Language, Culture and Ethnic Tourism Development” project. The goals of the paper are to (1) identify the Karen language spoken in the western region of Thailand, (2) explore Karen language use and attitudes towards the languages of the wider community, and (3) evaluate the development of sustainable ethnic tourism in the region. The research outcomes of these goals include:

1. An updated linguistic map of areas inhabited by Karen, overlapped with multiple layers of cultural information about the Karen
2. A summary of community leaders’ language use and attitudes towards their own language and culture in Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Suphan Buri, and Nakhon Pathom in the western region of Thailand.
3. The community leaders’ perspectives on a prospective sustainable ethnic tourism plan

The Karen language that this study focuses on is spoken by the Karens in Thailand. They are made up of four main groups: Sgaw, Pwo, Pa-O, and Kayah.⁵ Most Karen in the western region of Thailand are Pwo Karen designated by Thai as Kariang Daeng (Red

⁵ See Lewis (2009) for more kinds of Karen, some reside in Thailand.

Karen) or Yang Daeng. In Huaysatyai District, Amphur Hua Hin, Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, the majority of Karen are Sgaw. In this area, there are a number of Pwo Karen who migrated from Phetchaburi Province.

The Karen migrated from China to Burma in the early part of the Christian era. During the reign of King Rama I, Karen from Burma settled in Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand. The Pwo Karen people have resided in Thailand for 200 years (Phillips 1996). In addition to Kanchanaburi province, Karen also migrated from Burma into Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, and Prachuap Khiri Khan. The Karen in Nakhon Pathom migrated from Bongti District, Amphur Saiyok, Kanchanaburi Province. Those in Suphan Buri came from Namphu village, Amphur Srisawat, Kanchanaburi Province and Amphur Banray, Uthaithani Province.⁶

Pwo Karen belongs to the Karenic group of the Tibeto-Burman language family as shown in figure 1.

⁶ Amphur is an administrative division of a province headed by an officer whose duties are roughly similar to those of a county clerk (So Sethaputra 1992).

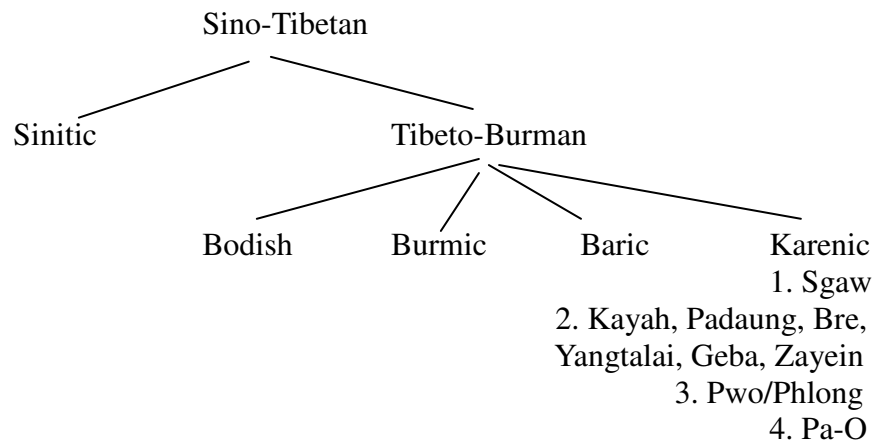


Figure 1: Karen language affiliation
(Benedict, 1972; Matisoff, 1978; Jones, 1961; Bennett, 1992)

Concerning attitude and language use

Speakers' attitudes towards their own language are an important factor used to determine the linguistic situation of the language, or even the life span of the language. How the speakers view or think of their own language and languages of the wider community and how they use their language in their daily life; e.g., to whom, on which occasions, and where, can help determine the future of the language. According to Smalley (1994), there are many languages spoken in Thailand, all of which can be grouped into different hierarchies, with Standard Thai at the top and ethnic languages at the lowest level of the hierarchy. Speakers tend to be interested in learning the languages at the higher levels than the one at which their language belongs. Accordingly, speakers

tend to ignore the languages at the lower level of the hierarchy because they are less prestigious than those at a higher level. Previous work has shown that speakers' attitudes towards languages play an important role in their use of language(s). Such work would also consider the 'domain' of language use, or the place where the language is spoken, e.g., home, school, work, governmental offices, temple.

Sustainable ethnic tourism and ethno-linguistic vitality

The outcome of the study concerns ethnic tourism. As is widely recognized, tourism is now one of the fastest growing industries in the world. With its strong commercial standing in the world economy, tourism creates employment and benefits in all nations as a whole. In addition, the tourism industry was the

first enterprise to enact the United Nations' Agenda 21 concerning sustainable development. Sustainable tourism is supposed to support integrity of place, benefit residents, conserve resources, respect local culture and traditions, strive for quality over quantity, not abuse its products, and aim to satisfy visitors to the point that they are happy to re-visit and encourage their friends to have a similar experience. Some of the most important principles of sustainable tourism development include (Jamieson, Walter and Alix Noble, "A Manual for Sustainable Tourism Destination Management" CUC-UEM Project, AIT, 2000 as cited in The Sustainable Tourism Gateway, n.d.: under Sustainable Tourism):

1. Tourism should be initiated with the help of broad-based community-inputs and the community should maintain control of tourism development.
2. Tourism should provide quality employment to its community residents and a linkage between local businesses and tourism should be established.
3. A code of practice should be established for tourism at all levels –national, regional, and local– based on internationally accepted standards. Guidelines for tourism operations, impact assessment, monitoring of cumulative impacts, and limits to acceptable change should be established.
4. Education and training programmes to improve and manage heritage and natural resources should be established.

To become sustainable, the ethnic tourism industry should also enforce the

role of indigenous people, Agenda 21: Chapter 26: Recognizing and strengthening the role of indigenous people and their communities (Indigenous People 2009).⁷

Methodology

The first step of this research is to locate the Karen ethnic group. An ethno-linguistic map of the Karen ethnic group is constructed to portray the distribution of the Karen language found in the western part of Thailand. To construct the map, data was collected including the locations where the Karen language is spoken, and still pictures and videotape of the Karen cultural activities. To obtain the linguistic data, the researcher first conducted library research on previous work, gathering information as to which districts or sub-districts are home to the Karen people. After the secondary data was collected and summarized, a survey form was constructed for a postal survey. The survey form was sent out to all relevant district and sub-district offices. The purpose of the survey was to obtain updated and detailed

⁷ Some people, especially Thai specialists on ethnicity, are worried that increased tourism may not be of benefit to the Karen communities in Thailand, even though some respondents say they are in favor of it. It would be unfortunate if the effort to increase tourism were to lead to a huge influx of outsiders who are insensitive to Karen cultural values, as seen in "Hill Tribes Shows", where members of various minority groups are made to sing and dance for tourists. In many villages, people charge tourists for taking photographs, which cannot be good for the local people. The researchers of this project are aware of negative effects of ethnic tourism development in Thailand and will make sure that the Karen community plays a major role in ethnic tourism development as mentioned above.

information on the Karen language spoken in each location. To assure the validity of the data received, the research team also went to field locations to collect more data on the general living environment, seeking information on the vitality of ethnic languages and cultures, as well as cultural activities.

An in-depth interview, a qualitative research technique, was selected as a method of data collection in probing and exploring the speakers' feelings and perspectives on their own ethnic language. According to Milena et al (2008: 1282), “qualitative research methods are also

preferable when the investigation is oriented to determine motivation, perceptions or beliefs.” The in-depth interview is used to obtain self-reported data about speakers' attitudes towards their language as well as their language usage. Two kinds of guided questionnaires were constructed for the in-depth interview, i.e., community and personal questionnaires.

The participants in the present paper are community leaders who live in the following locations as shown in table 1:

Table 1: Research sites and number of participants

| Provinces | Amphurs | Number of participants |
|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Kanchanaburi | Saiyok | 7 |
| Ratchaburi | Suanphueng | 7 |
| Phetchaburi | Kaengkrajan Nongyaplong | 3 2 |
| Prachuap Khiri Khan | Hua Hin | 3 |
| Suphan Buri | Danchang | 4 |
| Nakhon Pathom | Kamphaengsaen | 4 |
| Total | | 30 |

As the data collection is based on a qualitative research technique, the data is analyzed in terms of scale or continuum of language vitality and attitude, ranging from the strongest degree down to the weakest degree. The result from this method of data collection and analysis will be used to complement and extend the findings of results from a quantitative method to be conducted later to achieve the goals of the research project. It is also expected that this combination of methodologies will enhance the convergent validity of this research.

Constructed ethno-linguistic maps of Karen ethnic group

The Karen communities in the six provinces in the western region of Thailand are identified by using three criteria. First, the Karen communities are settled communities where Karen people have lived for over a hundred years. Second, areas where Karen refugees live are excluded. Third, other ethnic communities where some Karen people have moved in and the Karen language is not used in everyday life are also excluded. Based on these criteria, a number of villages are screened for

display on the ethno-linguistic maps. By using a geographical information system, maps of the Karen villages where the Karen language is spoken, overlapped with multiple layers of cultural information of ethnic groups, are displayed. The following sections consist of the linguistic information and cultural information.

Linguistic information in the maps

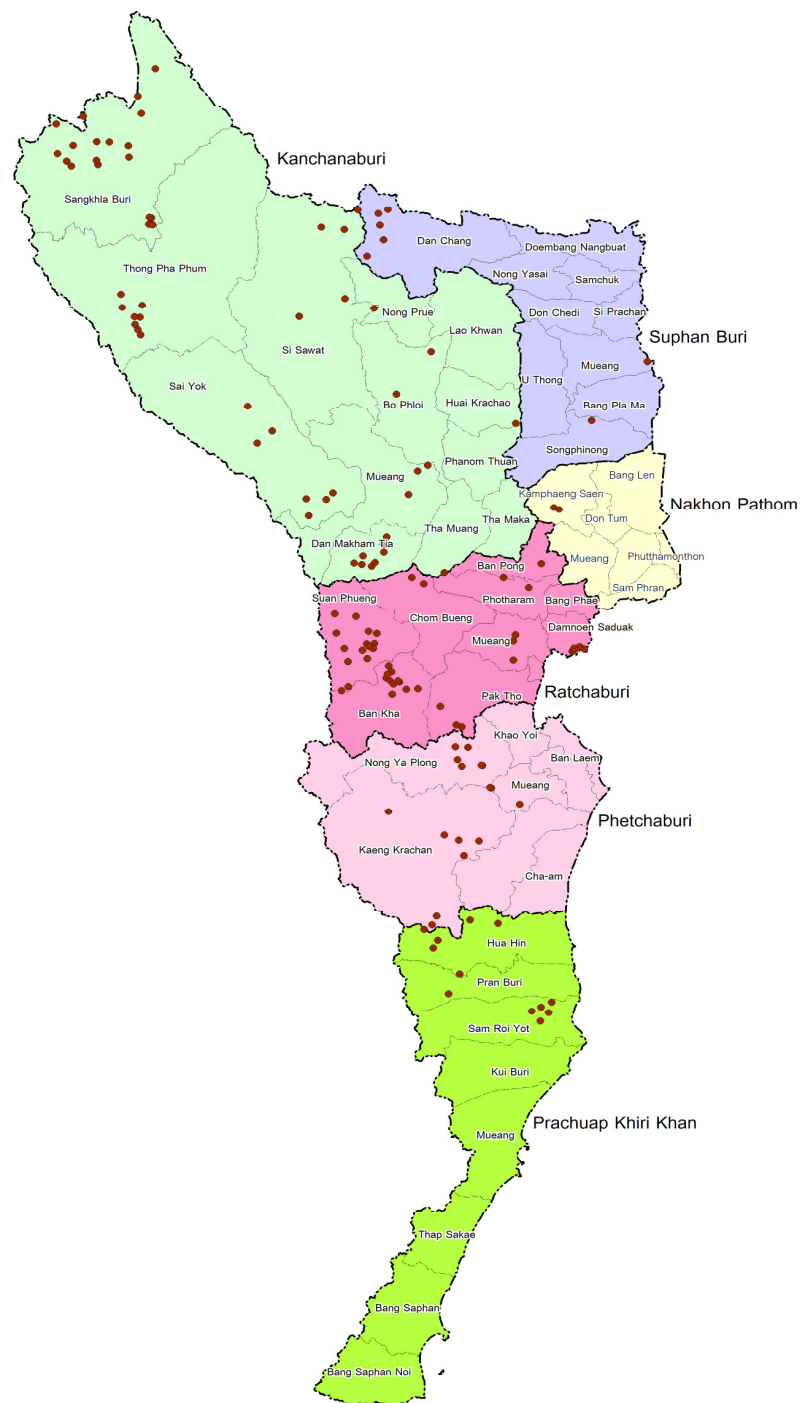
The linguistic information includes the residency of Karen in six provinces and the Karen residency in each amphur. Table 2 lists the six provinces where the Karen language is spoken, including the numbers of amphurs, districts, and villages. This table shows that the province where the majority of Karen people live is Kanchanaburi and the province where the

fewest Karen people live is Nakhon Pathom.

As stated above, Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, and Prachuap Khiri Khan are long settled provinces. The Karen people who live in these four provinces have traditionally been upland rice growers. Some of the inhabited areas in which they lived were designated as national park. Consequently, a number of Karen people have been moved to lowland areas. The Karen people in Nakhon Pathom and Suphan Buri migrated from Kanchanaburi. Tables 3–8 list the amphurs in each province and the numbers of districts and villages (Moo Ban หมู่บ้าน) in each amphur. A map displaying the villages where the Karen language is spoken is also provided.

Table 2: The provinces where Karen people reside

| Provinces | Amphurs | # of Districts | # of Villages |
|------------------------|---------|----------------|---------------|
| 1. Kanchanaburi | 9 | 15 | 49 |
| 2. Ratchaburi | 8 | 11 | 44 |
| 3. Phetchaburi | 3 | 5 | 15 |
| 4. Suphan Buri | 3 | 5 | 9 |
| 5. Prachuap Khiri Khan | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Nakhon Pathom | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Total 6 | 27 | 41 | 125 |



Figures 2: Map of Karen villages in Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Suphanburi, and Nakhon Pathom

Table 2: is separated into individual tables listing the Amphur names in each province as well as the numbers of districts and villages in each Amphur as follows:

Table 3: Amphurs in Kanchanaburi

| Amphurs | # of Districts | # of Villages |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| Sangkhlaburi | 3 | 20 |
| Danmakhamtia | 2 | 8 |
| Saiyok | 2 | 7 |
| Sisawat | 2 | 5 |
| Mueang | 1 | 3 |
| Thongphaphum | 1 | 2 |
| Bophloi | 2 | 2 |
| Thamuang | 1 | 1 |
| Huaikrachao | 1 | 1 |
| Total 9 | 15 | 49 |

Table 4: Amphurs in Ratchaburi

| Amphurs | # of Districts | # of Villages |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| Suanphueng | 2 | 15 |
| Bankha | 1 | 11 |
| Damnoensaduak | 1 | 6 |
| Mueang | 2 | 4 |
| Paktho | 2 | 4 |
| Chombueng | 1 | 2 |
| Banpong | 1 | 1 |
| Photharam | 1 | 1 |
| Total 8 | 11 | 44 |

Table 5: Amphurs in Petchaburi

| Amphurs | # of Districts | # of Villages |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| Nongyaplong | 2 | 8 |
| Kaengkrachan | 2 | 6 |
| Banlat | 1 | 1 |
| Total 3 | 5 | 15 |

Table 6: Amphurs in Prachuap Khiri Khan

| Amphurs | # of Districts | # of Villages |
|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| Hua Hin | 2 | 3 |
| Samroiyot | 1 | 1 |
| Pranburi | 1 | 1 |
| Total 3 | 4 | 5 |

Table 7: Amphurs in Suphan Buri

| Amphurs | # of Districts | # of Villages |
|-------------|----------------|---------------|
| Danchang | 2 | 6 |
| Songphinong | 2 | 2 |
| Mueang | 1 | 1 |
| Total 3 | 5 | 9 |

Table 8: Amphurs in Nakhorn Pathom

| Amphurs | # of Districts | # of Villages |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| Kamphaengsaen | 1 | 3 |
| Total 1 | 1 | 3 |

Cultural information in the maps

In addition to the linguistic information, the map displays a still picture and video link of cultural information which is typical of Karen. The following section provides a brief description of Karen rituals, ceremonies, folk plays, and costumes which are still preserved in some locations.

Rituals and ceremonies

There are a number of rituals and ceremonies which are found in some provinces. Among these rituals and ceremonies, one called *Mi-bong* 'sticky rice wrapped in banana/coconut/bamboo leaves' is strongly preserved in three provinces, i.e., Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi,

and Prachuap Khiri Khan. This ceremony brings villagers together. It is an occasion to meet relatives and visit elderly people. An activity called *Ku-wila* 'to bring back one's spirit' is part of this ceremony. The *Mi-bong* ceremony usually lasts for fifteen days. While some ceremonies are maintained in Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, and Prachuap Khiri Khan, cultural practices in Suphanburi and Nakhon Pathom are very limited.

Folk plays

Karen people in Phetchaburi still preserve some folk plays such as *Li-khu* 'to throw a cloth ball to each other', *Chu-thi* 'water splashing', and *Kha-meke* 'Tossing the fruit of the snuffbox bean' which is also found in Ratchaburi, Suphan Buri, and Prachuap Khiri Khan. *Thou-li*, or *Ram-tong*, is a folk dance which is typical of the Karen. It is still preserved in Sangkhlaburi, Kanchanaburi, Suphanburi, and Prachuap Khiri Khan. In Sangkhlaburi, villagers have tried to pass down their traditional folk plays to Karen children by training them to perform folk plays such as *Ram-tong*. In Nakhon Pathom, no folk plays have been preserved.

Costumes

Traditional costumes are still worn in everyday life by elderly women in Prachuap Khiri Khan. In Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphanburi, Karen people wear them on special occasions. The Karen in Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province have tried to promote their traditional costumes by wearing them every Friday. In some locations such as Nongyaplong District, Phetchaburi Province, adapted costumes are found. Cloth weaving is still found in Prachuap Kiri Khan, Kanchanaburi, and Ratchaburi but is dying out. Some houses

have looms but no one uses them. In all five provinces, teenagers wear modern dress. In Nakhon Pathom, Karen villagers no longer wear Karen costumes.

The cultural information described above reveals that the Pwo Karen people in the western region of Thailand have been losing their cultural traits due to social changes as noted below:

The Karen in Thailand, like all other ethnic groups, are now confronted with social change. As much as they want to maintain their Karen ethnic identity within the country of Thailand, they are being pressured to assimilate into the larger society. Some of these social changes promote what Karen consider to be a better life for their families--they have greater access to education, health care, food, transportation, communication, better housing, ample water, warm clothing, and energy to light their homes and cook their food. Yet, such benefits may come at the cost of losing their Karen culture. (Sgaw Karen Profile, 2008)

Language vitality of Karen

In terms of language vitality, it is found that the Karen people in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province have the strongest language vitality. In the surveyed village, *Pa-la-u*, Huaysatyai District, Amphur Hua Hin, Prachuap Khiri Khan, the Karen language is used as a mother tongue. All generations of Karen use Karen in daily life. It is interesting to note that the youngest generation still uses Karen. In terms of language contact, where Thai is the dominant language, all generations can

understand and speak Thai. The older generation speaks Thai with a Karen accent.

After the Karen in Prachuap Khiri Khan are the Karen in Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphanburi who show language vitality to a medium degree. That is, the Karen language is used mostly by Karen people over 30 years of age. Karen people use both Karen and Thai fluently in different domains.

Generally, the language vitality of Kanchanaburi and Ratchaburi provinces are the same. Karen is the mother tongue of most Karen speakers over 30 years of age. The first language learned at school is Thai. Therefore, many Karen in all provinces under study are bilingual. The Karen language is used among closed groups (i.e., family and friends), while Thai is widely used when Karen speakers communicate with outsiders.

Thai is the language that some Karen speakers use in all domains. Many Karen speakers admit that they are fluent in Thai; Thai is the language that they can use the best. However, many of them are bilingual. They are as fluent in Thai as they are in Karen, which is their mother tongue. Thai tends to be used in the public domain (i.e., contacting non-Karen speakers, contacting government officers).

Karen speakers aged 35–40 years in Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphanburi use Thai with their children, who can understand the Karen language but cannot communicate in it. Thus, Thai functions as the language of responses when they talk to their parents or other older community members. Among Kanchanaburi Karen, Thai is also used in village activities related to customs

and religion. However, the Karen language continues to be used in some Karen ritual activities. In Bongti District, Kanchanaburi, the Karen language is used mainly in church services as most Karen are Christians. This situation is in contrast with the Karen in Phetchaburi and Suphan Buri where the Karen language is used in all Karen rituals.

In addition, usage of Karen or Thai is based on context and interlocutors. If a Karen meets another Karen, they will speak Karen. If they communicate with Thai or non-Karen people, they will switch to Thai. Moreover, heterogamous families tend to switch between Thai and Karen depending on the interlocutors. The older generation of Karen uses Karen at home. In a heterogamous context, the older Karen generation must use Thai to communicate with their in-laws. This situation is widely seen in all Karen communities.

In terms of learning the Karen language, Karen lessons, especially the writing system, are taught informally at the local church on Sundays, as many Karen in Kanchanaburi, especially in Bongti District, are Christian (Protestant or Seventh-day Adventist). They have to learn to read the Bible, and are taught by a local expert who knows the Karen language. Only spoken Karen is taught Prachuap Khiri Khan, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi and Suphanburi.

In addition, older Karen say that the younger generation tends to use less Karen in their daily life, especially those who work in cities.

A better education for the younger generation has also had an effect on the vitality of the Karen language, especially in Suphanburi.

At present younger Karen (19–25 years old) are educated up to the undergraduate level and prefer to work outside their villages. Therefore, the domain in which Karen is used tends to be narrow (i.e., among closed groups who are Karen).

Nakhon Pathom has the weakest Karen language vitality. There are only three villages in Huaymonthong District, Amphur Kamphangsaen where Karen people live, that is, villages 5, 9, and 11. Fifty percent of the Karen people in village number 5 still use the Karen language. In village number 9, only twenty percent of the villagers use Karen in their daily life. The Karen speakers in these two villages, all of whom are over thirty years

old, are bilingual in Karen and Thai. In village number 11, nobody speaks Karen. The villagers speak only Thai. It should be noted that half of the Karen people in village number 5 still preserve their language because intermarriage with Thai and other ethnic groups is less common than in the other two villages. Considering all three villages, the Karen language is used by a minority of Karen people and thus the Karen language vitality of Nakhon Pathom is analyzed as weakest among all the provinces included in this study.

Karen language vitality can be summarized by the following vitality scale as shown in figure 3:

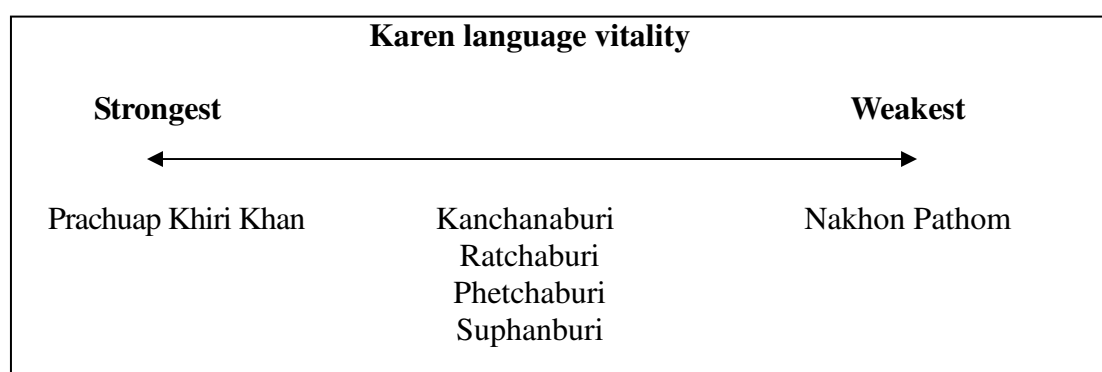


Figure 3: Karen language vitality scale

Strongest: The Karen language is used by Karen people of all ages. Over ninety percent of the villagers speak Karen.

Medium: The Karen language is used mostly by Karen people over 30 years old. Fifty percent of the villagers speak Karen

Weakest: The Karen language is used mostly by Karen people over 30 years old. A minority of Karen people speak Karen and the majority speaks Thai.

Karen language attitudes

The attitude of Karen people in Prachuap Khiri Khan towards their language correlates with language vitality. That is, Karen people in this province have the strongest language vitality and thus they have a very strong attitude towards their language. Many Karen speakers believe that the Karen language should be preserved and used among Karen of all ages.

Karen people in the other five provinces also have a positive attitude towards the Karen language though not as strong as the Karen of Prachuap Khiri Khan. This is because Karen in the five provinces have been more influenced by the Thai language. In Suphanburi, a local administrator recounts that seventy percent of Karen people have been assimilated into the Thai community. However, most Karen people think that speaking Karen is not inferior. Being competent in Karen is an advantage. It is the language of their ancestors and the language used in rituals. Speaking Karen is the best way to preserve a language which is gradually diminishing in terms of its usage and vitality. Karen is a 'secret' language among Karen speakers.

The older generation would like Karen to be maintained and widely used by the younger generation. Karen parents would like their children to be competent in both Karen and Thai. Some consider Thai as the most important language in the current situation as Thai is widely used in the public domain, especially in contacting governmental organizations or outsiders. Nevertheless, the Karen language is a useful language and is widely used in all Karen communities.

Some Karen speakers anticipate that in the near future the Karen language will be used less and less. In the next 10-20 years Karen will decline. However, the situation in Kanchanaburi is better because of the number of immigrants crossing the Thai-Burma border. As a result, Karen language usage in Kanchanaburi is not at risk.

However, there are some negative attitudes towards Karen especially amongst young Suphanburi Karen. Mr. Sa-ne, a local administrator, reasoned that negative attitudes towards Karen are because

"Karen of the young generation may be shy to be known as a Karen. Karen people have been insulted by Thai people and are addressed by the derogatory term *Kariang-lang-khaw* 'uncivilized Karens'.⁸ Being Karen is viewed negatively by some younger Karens themselves. A middle-aged Karen recounted that, as an adolescent, he was shy because he was a Karen among Thais.

In Nakhon Pathom, though Karen language vitality is weakest, Karen people of all ages retain positive attitudes towards their language. Mr. Kowit, the head of village number 11, is a Karen who no longer speaks Karen but hopes to see Karen language instructors teaching Karen in the village.⁹

Attitudes towards the Karen language can be summarized by the following Karen language attitude scale:

⁸ An Interview with Mr. Sa-ne Sra-hong-thong, 54 years old, local administrator of Ong-phra District, Amphur DanChang, Suphanburi Province, September 8, 2009.

⁹ An interview with Mr. Kowit Thanamtuen, 56 years old, the head of village number 11, Huaymonthong District, Amphur Kamphangsaen, Nakhon Pathom Province, November 13, 2009.

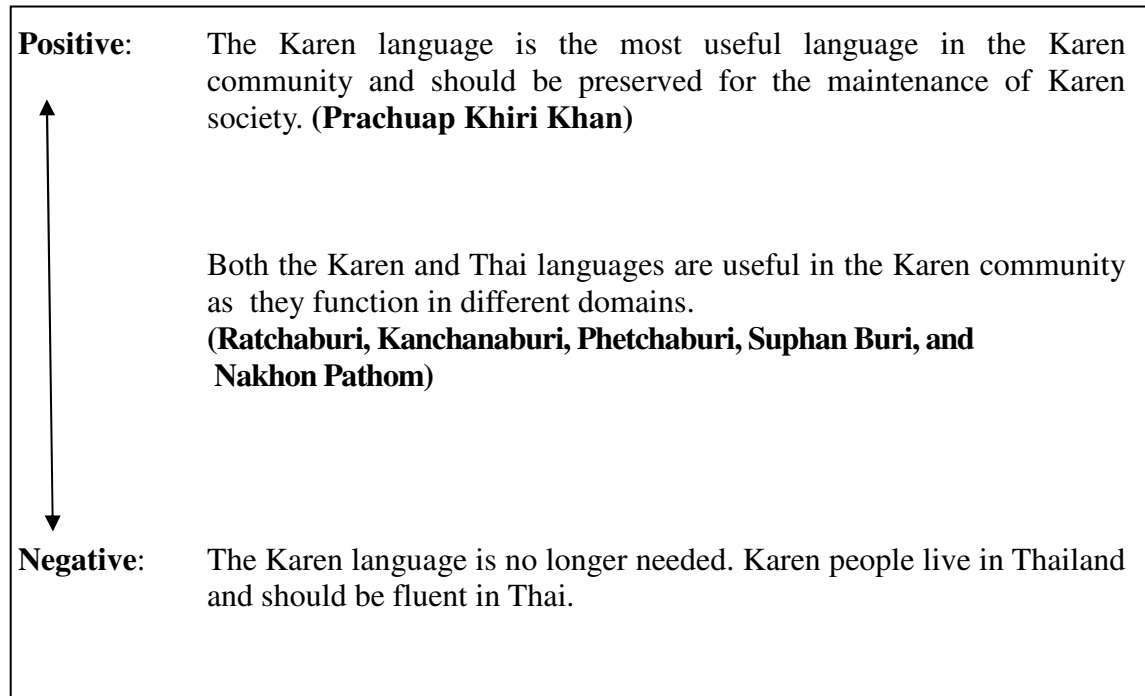


Figure 4: Karen language attitude scale

Karen attitudes towards ethnic tourism development (ETD)

The preliminary survey of Karen attitudes towards ethnic tourism development reveals that Karen in three provinces, i.e., Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, and Prachuap Khiri Khan, have the most positive attitudes towards ethnic tourism development.

The Karen people in Saiyok, Kanchanaburi live near tourist attractions such as caves and historic train tracks. Numbers of tourists visit these tourist attractions regularly so ethnic tourism development can be implemented depending on the season. Once implemented, there will be economic growth in Karen villages and villagers need not seek jobs outside their villages. However, in some Karen

communities, people live in remote areas and thus they do not form a united community in order to develop ethnic tourism.

Karen in Suanphueng District, Ratchaburi, fully support ethnic tourism development. The beautiful environment in this area can serve tourism. The Karen people there believe that they can sell forest products. They are especially eager for tourists to visit village number 6 because it still preserves its cultural identity and practices. Villagers are united as a group to promote home-stay tourism in their villages. In addition, a Royal Folk Arts and Crafts Training Center has been established in some villages and has provided work for villagers. Despite this positive attitude towards ethnic tourism

development, a local administrator opined that ethnic tourism development may cause problems such as water shortages and villagers trespassing into the deep forest.

The Karen ethnic group in Prachuap Khiri Khan is looking forward to ethnic tourism development as they live in areas with tourist attractions. The *Pa-la-u* waterfall is visited by many tourists and has increased villagers' income. A preservation project entitled *Pakaya-kator-Pa-la-u* 'Karen people preserve *Pa-la-u* village',¹⁰ has also been initiated by Rajamangala University of Technology, Klaykangwon, to promote ethnic tourism. However, this project is in the beginning stages and needs financial support for further development.

In Phetchaburi and Suphanburi, Karen people also have positive attitudes towards ethnic tourism development as they believe that it will help to preserve Karen culture and refocus Karen teenagers' attention on their own language and culture. However, there have been some impediments such as a lack of promotion and official support from the government. They are, therefore, trying to develop ethnic tourism by themselves.

In Nakhon Pathom, only the Karen language has been preserved. Though some Karen cultural practices still exist, they are dying out. Consequently, ethnic tourism development appears impossible. Karen attitudes towards ethnic tourism development can be summarized in figure 5.

¹⁰ *Pa-la-u* was adapted from the Thai word *Pa-lau* 'forest-a kind of bamboo' and *Pakaya-kator* is in Karen.

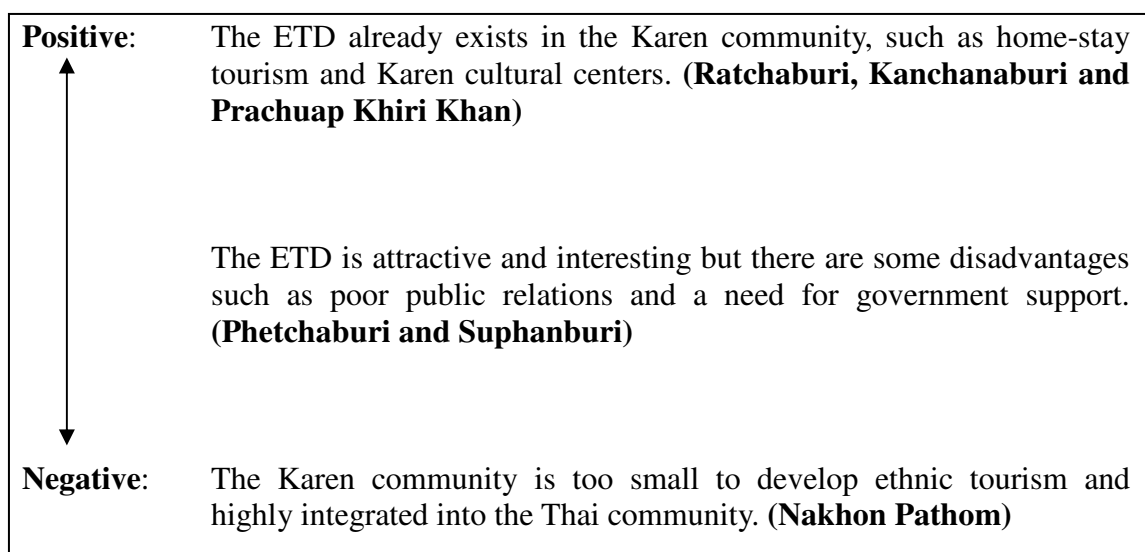


Figure 5: Attitude towards ETD scale

Conclusion

This paper presents preliminary findings of the research project entitled “Ethnicity Language Culture and Ethnic Tourism Development.” An initial attempt to locate the Karen ethnic groups residing in the western region of Thailand was made. Then a survey form was devised for data collection in Karen areas. Based on the collected data, an ethno-linguistic map of areas inhabited by Karen, overlapped with multiple layers of cultural information about the Karen, was prepared. A preliminary survey of language use and attitudes of Karen people towards the Karen language and ethnic tourism development was carried out using a qualitative approach. Two kinds of guided questionnaires were constructed for data collection, community and personal questionnaires. Key persons living in each Karen community were interviewed using the guided questionnaires. Thirty subjects, who are community leaders, were interviewed.

The interviews yielded preliminary findings on language vitality, cultural preservation, and language attitudes of Karen people as well as attitudes towards ethnic tourism development in six provinces. These findings are supplemented by a quantitative method which is in progress. As the collection of quantitative data in Nakhon Pathom Province has been completed and the data have been analyzed using SPSS, the data analysis is displayed in the appendix to illustrate that the quantitative method agrees with the qualitative method used in this paper.

Karen in Prachuap Khiri Khan has the strongest language vitality. Karen speakers of all generations still use Karen in their daily lives. On the other hand, Karen in Nakhon Pathom has the weakest language vitality as the Karen language is only used within a small group of people-the majority preferring to speak only Thai. In Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi,

and Suphanburi, around fifty percent of Karen people still speak Karen. Older people still preserve their language while younger speakers use Thai more than Karen. Though children and teenagers still use Karen among themselves, they feel embarrassed when speaking Karen in public.

Language attitudes among middle aged and older people are positive in all provinces. The Karen people in these age groups wish their children could speak Karen because they are proud of their language, which is unique to the Karen community and helps to unite Karen people as a powerful ethnic group. In addition to language, the Karen people in Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, and Suphanburi still preserve cultural traits such as ritual practices. Though folk plays and traditional costumes are dying out, Karen people have tried to revive them by wearing Karen traditional costumes at ceremonies or adapting traditional costumes for modern use. Karen people in Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, and Suphanburi believe that ethnic tourism development will improve the Karen economy and help to preserve Karen language and culture as well as refocus Karen children's attention on their own language and culture. In Nakhon Pathom, the Karen community is too small to develop ethnic tourism and is highly integrated into the Thai community.

The preliminary results of Karen studies in Nakhon Pathom Province concluded above can be confirmed by more results from the quantitative analysis shown in the appendix. First and second generation speakers of Karen speak both Karen and Thai whereas third generation speakers speak only Thai. All generations speak

Thai the best. The Karen language is still used by first and second generation speakers in the family domain. In community and public domains, Thai is predominantly used by all generations. Despite the weak language vitality, Karen people in Nakhon Pathom have a positive attitude towards their own language. They trust that they can be identified as Karen only by their language as they no longer preserve any cultural activities or wear traditional costumes. Without such cultural traits, it seems impossible to be able to develop ethnic tourism in the Karen community of Nakhon Pathom Province.

Based on these preliminary findings, a quantitative method, combined with participant observations, will be applied to the Karen language use and attitude data. Finally, the data analysis will be followed by participatory action research (PAR). In carrying out the PAR plan, one model community will be selected based on a number of supporting factors such as overall community strength, availability of manpower, the authenticity of the linguistic and cultural data available in the community, and most importantly the willingness of the whole community to participate in tourism development. After a model community is selected, the research team will proceed by preparing the community and providing all the relevant information. The research team will re-visit the field site and discuss the objectives of the whole project in detail with the community, looking for leaders, community developers, and coordinators for the project. Essentially, the research team will be working together in partnership with the community, as consultants rather than directors. There will be a series of activities and discussions between the research team and the community to promote mutual

understanding and cooperation, and to ensure an active role for the community in sustainable ethnic tourism.

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Appendix

Quantitative Analysis of Karen language vitality and attitude towards ethnic tourism development in Nakhon Pathom Province

1 = first generation (over 60 years old)

2 = second generation (36–59 years old)

3 = third generation (18–35 years old)

TC = Total count of three generations (Average)

NA = Non-applicable

Table 9: Karen language repertoires, percentages and averages based on age groups

| Question \ Answer | Karen | | | | Thai | | | | Both Karen and Thai | | | | NA | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|----|----|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------------------|-------|----|------|-------|----|----|------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC |
| 1. What is your mother tongue? | 100.0 | .0 | .0 | 33.3 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 | .0 | 100.0 | .0 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - |
| 2. What languages can you speak? | - | - | - | - | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 | 100.0 | 100.0 | .0 | 66.7 | - | - | - | - |
| 3. What languages can you write? | - | - | - | - | .0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 66.7 | - | - | - | - | 100.0 | .0 | .0 | 33.3 |
| 4. What language do you speak best? | - | - | - | - | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Table 10: Karen language use, percentages and averages based on age groups

| Question \ Answer | Karen | | | | Thai | | | | Both Karen and Thai | | | | Others | | | | NA | | | |
|---|-------|-------|----|------|------|----|-------|------|---------------------|-------|----|------|--------|---|---|----|----|---|---|----|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC |
| Family Domain | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. What language do you speak with your grandparents? | 100.0 | 100.0 | .0 | 66.7 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 6. What language do you speak with your parents? | 100.0 | 100.0 | .0 | 66.7 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 7. What language do you speak with your siblings? | 100.0 | .0 | .0 | 33.3 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 | .0 | 100.0 | .0 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|----|------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|----|------|---|---|---|---|-------|-------|-------|
| 8. What language do you speak with your children? | .0 | 100.0 | .0 | 33.3 | 100.0 | .0 | 100.0 | 66.7 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 9. When you are at home, what language do you use most? | - | - | - | - | 100.0 | .0 | 100.0 | 66.7 | .0 | 100.0 | .0 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Community Domain | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10. What language do you speak with your friends when you are in your village? | 100.0 | .0 | .0 | 33.3 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 | .0 | 100.0 | .0 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 11. What language do you speak at a temple or at a festival? | - | - | - | - | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 | 100.0 | 100.0 | .0 | 66.7 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 12. What language do you speak when you are working in the paddy fields? | - | - | - | - | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 | .0 | 100.0 | .0 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - | 100.0 | .0 | .0 |
| 13. What language do you speak at shops in the village? | 100.0 | .0 | .0 | 33.3 | .0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 66.7 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Public and Official Domains | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 14. What language do you speak with your friends when you are outside your village? | - | - | - | - | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 | 100.0 | 100.0 | .0 | 66.7 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 15. What language do you speak at work (e.g. a | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| Question | Answer | Yes | | | | No | | | | Not sure | | | | NA | | | |
|--|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------|---|---|----|----|----|-------|------|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC |
| 28. You think that a person who can speak the Karen language well is respected and a role model for others. | | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 29. You think that knowing the Karen language offers you support from people who are from the same ethnic group (e.g., getting a good discount). | | - | - | - | - | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 30. You think that your community should have a Karen language learning and teaching class at school. | | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Negative attitude | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 31. You are ashamed when you speak the Karen language in front of others because other people will view you as inferior. | | - | - | - | - | 100.0 | 100.0 | .0 | 66.7 | - | - | - | - | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 |
| 32. In 30-40 years, no one will speak the Karen language because Karen people will speak Thai instead. | | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 33. You think that the Karen language is difficult to learn. | | 100.0 | 100.0 | .0 | 66.7 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 34. You think that learning the Karen language is a waste of time. | | - | - | - | - | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 35. You think that a person who still speaks the Karen language is an “old thinking” person. | | - | - | - | - | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Table 12: Karen cultural preservation and Karen attitudes towards ethnic tourism development, percentages and averages based on age groups

| Question | Answer | Yes | | | | No | | | | Not sure | | | | NA | | | |
|--|--------|-------|-------|----|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------|---|---|----|----|----|-------|------|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC | 1 | 2 | 3 | TC |
| 36. Do villagers have Karen cultures, customs, beliefs, and rituals that are unique? | | 100.0 | 100.0 | .0 | 66.7 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 37. Do villagers have Karen costumes, and accessories that are unique? | | - | - | - | - | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 38. Should villagers preserve their unique Karen language, cultures and customs? | | 100.0 | 100.0 | .0 | 66.7 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | .0 | .0 | 100.0 | 33.3 |

[illegible]