

## Sociolinguistic Survey of the Mal-Prai (“Lua”) speech varieties spoken in Nan Province, Thailand

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### Abstract

This article shares the results of the sociolinguistic survey of the “Lua Bo Kluea” (LBK) speech community in Bo Kluea District, Nan Province, Thailand. The survey research aimed to further investigate the language situation of the “Lua Bo Kluea” speech community in Bo Kluea District, Nan Province, Thailand, building on the research documented in (Jeske, 2022) and filling in the gaps from that research.

The first purpose of the research was to assess how well the “Lua Bo Kluea” understand the Prai ‘R/Y’ speakers of Chiang Klang District, since this closely-related speech variety already has a written form and a body of literature materials available. If the LBK speakers do understand Prai ‘R/Y’ adequately, the second purpose was to assess the attitudes towards the Prai ‘R/Y’ language variety and its speakers. If the attitudes are positive, the next step was to assess if the “Lua Bo Kluea” would consider using the existing Prai ‘R/Y’ literature materials.

The research methods included comprehension testing, dialect mapping, and interviews regarding LBK speakers’ comprehension of and attitudes towards the Prai ‘R/Y’ speech variant which already has a body of literature. Results showed low tested comprehension (RTT village average scores ranging from 58% to 78%, with an overall average score of 71%). Results also showed low perceived comprehension, low levels of contact, communication difficulties, and a high perceived degree of difference between these speech varieties. Thus, we conclude that the Lua people from Bo Kluea District cannot understand the Prai ‘R/Y’ speech variety adequately without some type of adaptation, training, or more contact promotion. The people from Bo Kluea District generally have positive attitudes toward the Prai ‘R/Y’ people. They identify as part of the same ethnic and linguistic group and are open to intermarriage among them. However, both adaptation (checking the words, expressing it in the LBK dialect) and literacy training (teaching people to read the script) would be needed in order to be able to use the existing Prai literature materials in their communities.

**Keywords:** sociolinguistic survey; Lua Bo Kluea; Prai; dialect comprehension; dialect attitudes; Recorded Text Testing (RTT)

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## Introduction

This report presents the results of the 2023 sociolinguistic survey fieldwork trip to the Lua speakers in Bo Kluea District, Nan Province, Thailand.

The first purpose of the research was to assess how well the “Lua Bo Kluea” (LBK) understand the Prai ‘R/Y’ variety of Chiang Klang District, which already has a body of literature. If they do understand Prai ‘R/Y’ adequately, the second purpose was to assess their attitudes towards the Prai ‘R/Y’ language variety and its speakers. If the attitudes are positive, the next step was to assess if the LBK would consider using the existing Prai ‘R/Y’ literature materials.

To obtain comprehensive and in-depth research results about the language situation, the survey team used interviews, dialect mapping participatory tools, and comprehension testing using Recorded Text Testing (RTT).

## *Rationale*

This current research study builds on the foundation provided by Jeske’s thesis (2022), which represents a snapshot of the Lua Bo Kluea language situation. Jeske (2022) found that the degree of lexical similarity between Lua Bo Kluea, Prai ‘R’, Prai ‘Y’, Lao-Prai and Southern villages was over the 70% threshold (which is the cut-off for determining separate languages), and an observed degree of understanding between Lua Bo Kluea speakers from Ban Den village and speakers of the Prai ‘R’ variety was found. However, this initial research did not represent the full picture of the language situation in that region, and further research, especially with comprehension testing (RTT), was recommended. In addition, the sociolinguistic survey of the Prai from Jordan-Diller & Diller (2004) shows that there are gaps in what is known about the linguistic situation in the eastern region of Nan Province. Some of the villages in Bo Kluea were identified as “Undetermined”. This current study seeks to fill in those research gaps by investigating the language situation in the eastern region of Bo Kluea, Nan Province more in-depth.

To address this, the survey team traveled to Nan Province in the month of November 2023, visiting several villages located around Na Pong village, as well as other areas of Bo Kluea District reaching the Thai/Laos border, to collect language data using the above-mentioned tools.

Background

The survey primarily focused on the Lua speech community located in the Bo Kluea District of Nan Province, Thailand. The geographical location is depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Five districts of Nan Province (created<sup>1</sup> by Jeske, 2024)

Situated on the eastern border with Laos, Bo Kluea District is bordered by four other districts. To the north lies Chaloem Phra Kiat, while Pua and Santi Suk are to the west, and Mae Charim is to the south, as depicted in Figure 1.

When we refer to the ‘Lua Bo Kluea’ (LBK) language, we are speaking about the language spoken in the villages which were visited in the Bo Kluea District, Nan Province,

<sup>1</sup> For developing the map in Figure 1 source data was taken from OpenStreetMap (<https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=12/19.5562/101.0172>) and modified by including village names with Inkscape (<https://inkscape.org/>), Excel, and Paint 3D (Microsoft).

maintaining consistency with the term used by Jeske (2022). Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that this language variant is academically identified as Prai.

According to the Ethnologue, Prai [prt] is referred to by various alternate names including Lao Prai, Lua Prai, Lua', Phai, "Thin", and "Htin", with the last two being viewed as pejorative terms (Eberhard et al., 2024). Prai is assigned the ISO 639-3 language code [prt] and is a part of the Austroasiatic language family. It further branches into the Northern-Austroasiatic group and then into the Khmuic subgroup, as depicted in Figure 2 (Eberhard et al., 2024; Sidwell, 2021).

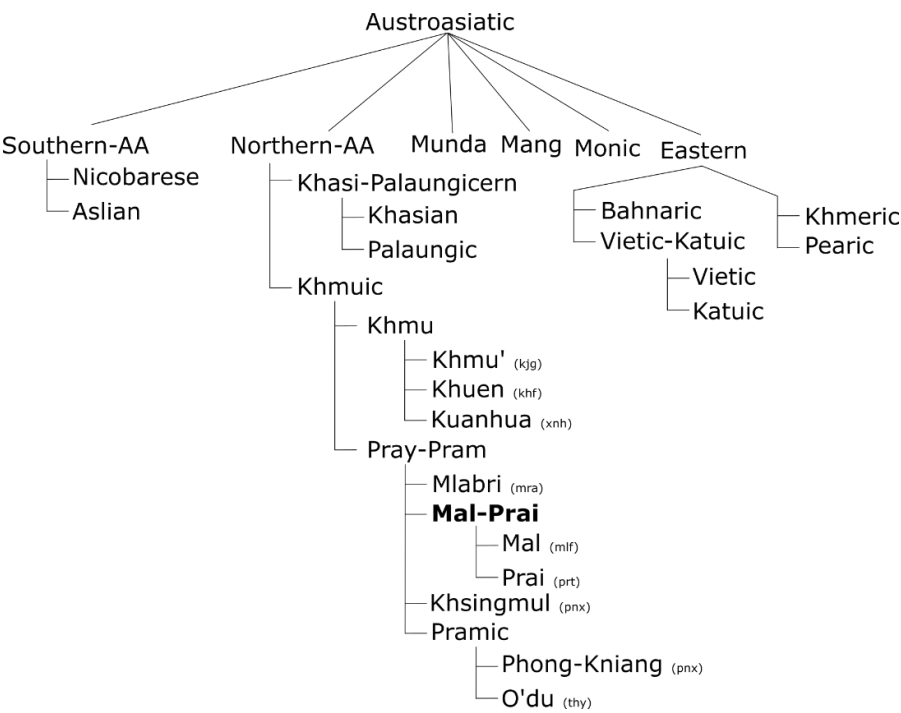


Figure 2: Prai Language classification (Sidwell, 2021, pp. 180-192)

Sidwell (2021) provides an additional map of mainland Southeast Asian Austroasiatic languages as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Map of MSEA Austroasiatic languages (Sidwell, 2021, p. 180)**

The Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2024) states that the Prai language has three dialects, which are: Southern Prai, Ban Wen, and a primary dialect that further splits into two sub-varieties, R and Y which are extremely similar and differ mainly in the middle r vs. y sounds (Jordan Diller & Diller, 2004).

Mal [mlf] represents another language of Nan Province. Even though “Prai” and “Mal” are closely related, they are mutually unintelligible (Eberhard et al., 2024).

The history of LBK is linked to the people previously referred to as “T’in”, a term meaning *earth, ground* in Thai, and now considered pejorative (Filbeck, 1978). However, Filbeck (1978) acknowledges that while “T’in” may not reflect current identities, it remains relevant as a historical concept. The term encompasses both Prai and Mal groups. Other researchers (Rischel, 1995; Unchalee, 1988) note that the government has used “T’in”, but the people themselves prefer the term “Lua” to describe both groups<sup>2</sup>. Filbeck (1978) further states that ‘lua?’ is the ethnonym used in Nan Province. Within Bo Kluea, people identify as Lua rather than Prai or Mal. During this research, speakers referred to people from other villages as “different Lua” or “Lua from Laos”, while those from the western parts of Nan Province used the term Prai.

Jordan Diller & Diller (2018) describe how research on Prai history has been limited, partly due to what Rischel (1992) called their “invisibility”—a theme also noted in prior studies. Several researchers have explored the history of the Prai, including Filbeck (1978), Unchalee (1988), Malapol (1989), Boonprasert (1988), Satyawadhna (1991), and others (Diller, 2008; Diller & Jordan-Diller, 2004, 2008, 2010; Jordan Diller, 2008). Filbeck (1978), who studied these groups for many years, focused mainly on the Mal people.

Filbeck (1978) also suggests that the Lua (‘T’in’) may have been among the original inhabitants of this region in Thailand. However, estimating their exact population is difficult. The Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2024) estimates 20,000 Lua in Thailand and 28,700 in Laos, while Schliesinger (2003) provides a broader estimate of 48,000, including both Prai and Mal. No recent census data is available for Bo Kluea, and no specific population figures were collected during this survey.

### ***Language Development Situation***

According to L-Thongkum & Intajamornrak (2008), there are thirteen ethnic groups in Nan Province. This research focused only on the LBK language spoken in Bo Kluea District.

David Jordan has been involved in language development among the Prai in Thung Chang District for about 45 years. His efforts contributed to the publication of a large body of Prai literature in 2019, based on the ‘R’ variety. In addition to Prai, the Mal [mlf] language was researched by David Filbeck in the 1970s, leading to literature being based on the Mal variety from Pa Klang village, Pua District, published in 2015. However, the Mal literature has seen limited use, as most Mal-speaking communities primarily use Thai literature.

For both Prai and Mal literature, the Thai script was used, with modifications to accommodate phonological differences. The orthographies of these two languages also varied in aspects such as word breaks and nasalization (Jordan, 2023, personal communication).

Regarding language development in the Bo Kluea area, research remains limited. A Finnish couple has been working with the LBK community for about six years. In 2018, they formed a language team to develop written materials using a Thai-based script.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “Lua” is also utilized by other groups, such as Eastern Lawa and Western Lawa (Diller & Fraiser, 2022)

### ***School Situation***

The Lua people, along with other ethnic groups living in the hills, primarily engage in agriculture and farming. As a result, many do not pursue higher education, deeming it unnecessary for their professions. Central Thai is the medium of instruction in schools. However, for higher education, they must leave Bo Kluea. Approximately half of these children proceed to secondary school, but few manage to graduate due to high dropout rates (Stephan & Jeske, 2021).

People who were interviewed during the survey trip explained that nowadays all kids attend at least primary school from grade 1 to 6. During the survey trip, a school in Pa Kam Village was visited. The teacher from that school was very proud of being Lua and interested in Prai materials, although some vocabulary was different. However, we stopped at a different village on the way home, and learned that there is no school in the village, so the children have to go down to the town of Sapan to go to school.

Observations from the research team confirm that LBK children receive education in Central Thai but have no exposure to education in LBK.

### ***Bilingualism Situation***

Bilingualism is very high among the Lua speakers. The Ethnologue states that in addition to their heritage language, a significant number of Prai individuals also speak Northern Thai<sup>3</sup> [nod] and Central Thai [tha] in certain contexts (Eberhard et al., 2024). When visiting LBK villages, we observed and learned by asking multiple individuals that many people speak Northern Thai and Central Thai besides their heritage language, in different domains of life. Most of the interviewees speak their own Lua variety as their first language, while only a few speak Tai<sup>4</sup> or Northern Thai instead.

More than half of the participants speak Northern Thai as their second-best language, followed by Tai<sup>4</sup> and Central Thai.

Most people speak Central Thai as a third language and only some speak Northern Thai.

These results show that Northern Thai and Central Thai are the second- or third-most commonly-spoken languages among the LBK community. This is not surprising as LBK people study Central Thai (the national language) in school and Northern Thai is used as a regional Language of Wider Communication (LWC), as well as a trade and work language in that region.

### ***Linguistic Background and Previous Research***

Maxwell (2018, as cited in Van Rooy, 2020, p. 1) writes that the distinction between language and dialect hinges, in essence, on the historical context of the speech community, its social standing, and its involvement in positions of authority or lack thereof. The Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics provides the following meaning of the word “dialect”: “a regionally or socially distinctive variety of language, identified by a particular set of words and

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<sup>3</sup> Northern Thai in all cases means the Northern Thai variety of Nan Province, which some subjects specified as being different from the Northern Thai of Chiang Mai (which one of the survey team members speaks).

<sup>4</sup> It is assumed that Tai in this case means Tai Lue [khb].

grammatical structures. Spoken dialects are usually also associated with a distinctive pronunciation, or accent” (Crystal, 2008, p. 142). In simple terms, as Decker & Grummitt (2012) say, each variant of a language can be classified as a dialect. Wardhaugh & Fuller (2015, pp. 27-29) highlight that languages emerge as a result of the various linguistic varieties existing within a language.

The Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2024) characterizes languages using the ISO 639-3 standard and outlines three criteria for language identification.

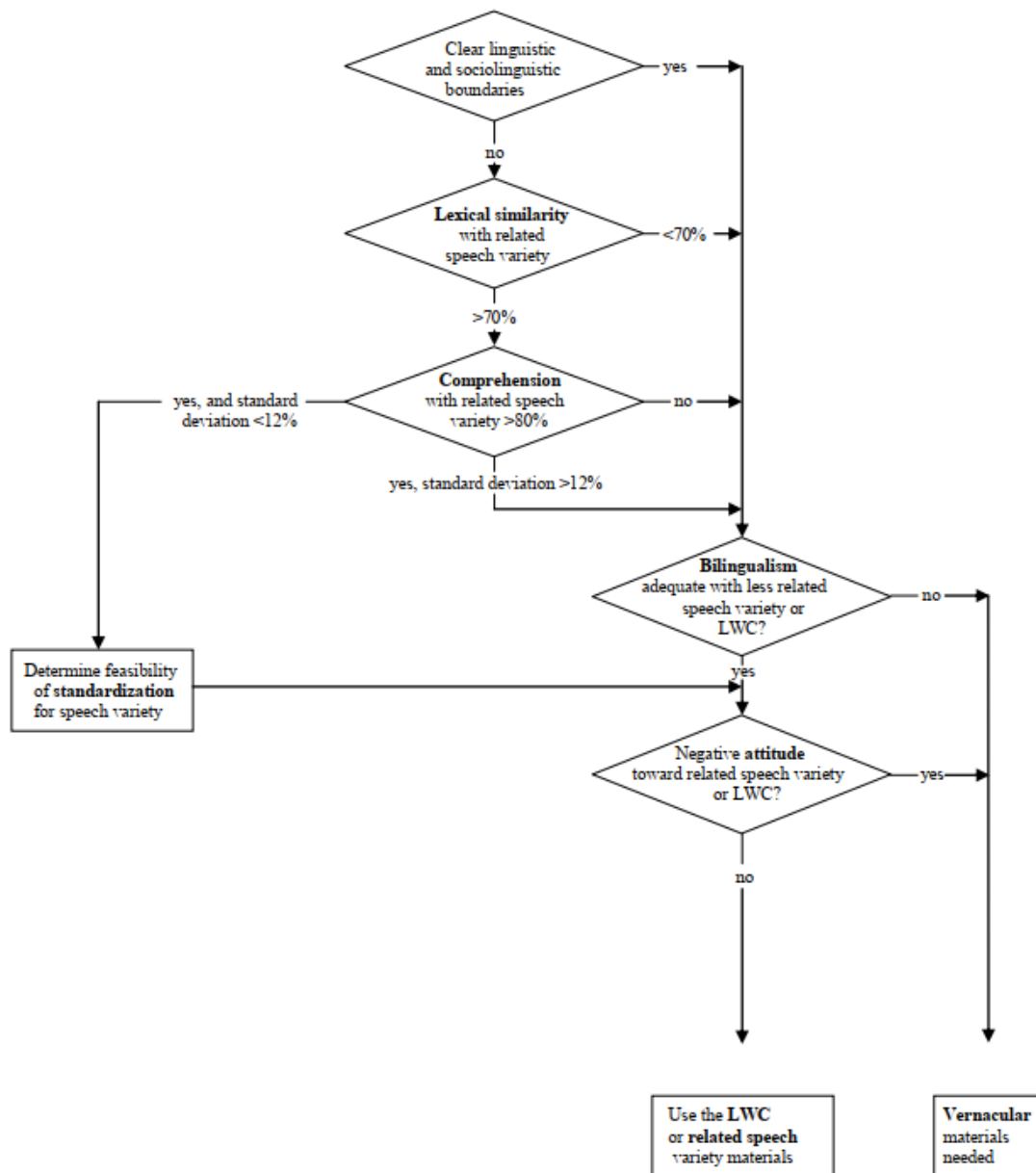
- Two related language varieties are normally considered to belong to the same individual language if speakers of each language variety have inherent understanding of the other language variety at a functional level (i.e., they can understand each other based on knowledge of their own language variety without needing to learn the other language variety). Where such mutual intelligibility does not exist, the two language varieties are generally seen to belong to different individual languages.
- Where spoken intelligibility between language varieties is marginal, the existence of a common literature or of a common ethnolinguistic identity with a central language variety that both speaker communities understand is a strong indicator that they should nevertheless be considered language varieties of the same individual language.
- Where there is enough intelligibility between language varieties to enable communication, they can nevertheless be treated as different individual languages when they have long-standing, distinctly named ethnolinguistic identities coupled with established linguistic normalization and literatures that are distinct.

“These criteria make it clear that the identification of ‘a language’ is not based on linguistic criteria alone” (Eberhard et al., 2024).

Jeske (2022) asserts that discerning whether Lua Bo Kluea constitutes a distinct language or merely a dialect necessitates an understanding of various factors. These factors include the degree of lexical or grammatical similarity, mutual intelligibility, and fundamental linguistic characteristics. Additionally, Bickford (2016, as cited in Jeske, 2022), highlights that published literature, ethnic identity, and political boundaries should also be taken into account.

Jeske (2022) in his thesis on Lua Bo Kluea used wordlists for lexicostatistics to provide a measure of lexical similarity. To present reliable results on the level of intelligibility he used a modified survey decision flow chart taken from Nahhas (2007) as shown in Figure 4.





**Figure 4: Survey Decision Flowchart (Nahhas, 2007, p. 7)**

Jeske (2022) used a 70% threshold as suggested in Figure 4 above (Nahhas, 2007). He suggested that further research on comprehension is needed, which is what was undertaken in this current research.

Hiroz (2024) examines Mal-Prai historical linguistics, highlighting phonological changes like consonant cluster shifts and syllable reduction. He notes the challenge of distinguishing Mal and Prai due to overlapping lexical and phonological traits, further complicated by Thai loanwords.

Badenoch (2023) explores Lua linguistic diversity, shaped by interactions with neighboring groups. He argues that Lua communities reflect broader cultural and social shifts in Northern Thailand, emphasizing the deep connection between language, culture, and identity.

Diller et al. (2023) discuss Prai ethnic identity, contrasting external labels from Thai society with internal identity formation through oral and written traditions. They highlight historical marginalization but also the role of folk stories in reinforcing community values and resilience.

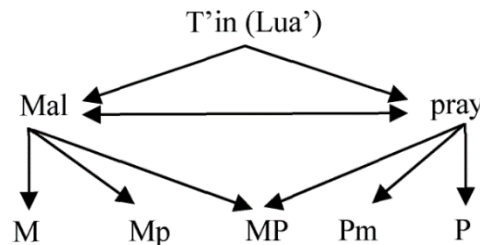
Diller & Fraiser (2022) studied adult interest in Prai literacy, analyzing how reading is integrated into daily life. Jordan Diller & Diller (2018) examined Prai folk tales in a similar context.

Intajamornrak (2010) investigates the influence of Thai loanwords on Mal phonetics, showing how multilingualism has shaped Mal speech patterns.

Diller (2008) provides insights into Prai literacy, tracing its introduction in the 1980s.

L-Thongkum & Intajamornrak (2008) analyze tonal variation in Lua, showing Thai language influence on Prai and Mal dialects in Bo Kluea District.

Jirananthanaporn (1993, as cited in L-Thongkum and Intajamornrak (2008)), conducted a lexical study of Mal and Prai and agrees with Filback (1978, as cited in L-Thongkum and Intajamornrak (2008)) that Mal has three sub-dialects but argues that Prai does not have only two sub-dialects but rather five. The reason for this assumption is based on the different criteria used by Filbeck and Jirananthanaporn. L-Thongkum and Intajamornrak (2008), however, based on their data and by a supplemental questionnaire, divided the Mal and Prai into five groups as shown in Figure 5.



**M** = Typical Mal

**Mp** = Basically Mal with some Pray elements

**MP** = Unable to identify clearly whether Mal or Pray

**Pm** = Basically Pray with some Mal elements

**P** = Typical Pray

**Figure 5: A synchronic classification of the T'in (Mal and Pray) language taken from L-Thongkum and Intajamornrak (2008, p. 58)**

In L-Thongkum and Intajamornrak (2008), Mal appears to be the primary focus, as the evidence suggests the presence of two pitches in their speech. While there is some indication of pitch in Prai as well, it lacks consistency throughout the speech.

Jordan Diller & Diller (2004) conducted a sociolinguistic survey on Prai, examining spoken varieties and comprehension of written materials. Their study highlighted gaps in research, particularly in Bo Kluea, where several villages remained linguistically unclassified.

Unchalee (1988) compared the phonological systems of Prai and Mal in an unpublished master's thesis, treating them as dialects rather than separate languages.

Filbeck (1978) was one of the earliest researchers on the T'in (Prai and Mal), primarily focusing on Mal's historical background. His dissertation and subsequent works (Filbeck, 1971b, 1971a, 1972, 1973, 1987, 1989a) contributed significantly to this field.

Overall, research on Prai over the past 30 years has covered anthropology, grammar, phonology, and literacy. However, sociolinguistic studies remain an area requiring further exploration.

### **Trip Purpose and Research Questions**

The primary and most crucial objective of this research was to continue and complete the work initiated by Jeske (2022).

On the basis of the purpose mentioned above, three research questions were developed.

- 1) How well do speakers of LBK understand the Prai 'R/Y' speakers of Chiang Klang District?
- 2a) What is the attitude of the speakers of LBK towards Prai 'R/Y' language variety and its speakers?
- 2b) Would speakers of LBK consider using the existing Prai 'R/Y' literature and other materials?

### **Methodology<sup>5</sup> and Instruments**

To address the research questions, the following instruments were used:

Dialect Mapping Tool (DMT) was a participatory discussion about Lua village dialects with a group of about 6-12 Lua participants of mixed ages and genders utilized in three villages. It visualizes a geographical area according to the language situation as perceived by the community, identifying closely-related languages and ranking the perceived similarities. In addition, it provides information on frequency of contact (Contact), dialect differences (Comprehension), and level of dialectal intelligibility (Communication).

The Knowledgeable Insider Sociolinguistic Questionnaire (KISLQ) consisted of a formal questionnaire utilized with a native knowledgeable leader of the village. There were questions related to the speech community and language.

The Individual Sociolinguistic Questionnaire (ISLQ) consisted of a formal questionnaire utilized with individuals of mixed ages and genders of the village. It contains the

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<sup>5</sup> The survey fieldwork was conducted by two members of the Wycliffe Thai Foundation, Ratrada Piwthong and Saifon Manee.

following topics: Subjects’ Background Information, Children’s Language, Ethnolinguistic Identity, Bilingualism, Prai/Lua Literacy Classes, and Contact with Other Lua villages. ISLQ Data was collected in all eight of the visited villages (Huai Sai Khao, Huai Mi, Huai Thon, Khun Nam Chon, Ko Kuang, Na Pong, Na Pu, and Pa Kam) from native speakers of the village.

A Recorded Text Test (RTT) is a brief test in which the person listens to a short story in another speech variety and then demonstrates his/her level of comprehension of that speech variety (Casad, 1987). An RTT-Retelling is a variation of a standard RTT; the main difference is that RTT-Retelling does not require the subject to answer specific comprehension questions but instead retell the test story in their own words (Kluge, 2006; Decker & Grummitt, 2012). During this survey, the RTT-Retelling method was used to determine whether speakers of Lua in the Bo Kluea area could comprehend the Prai ‘R/Y’ speech variety. A Post-RTT Interview was conducted right away after the main RTT. Here the participants were asked about their perceptions of the test they had just completed. The answers to the post-RTT questionnaire revealed the subject’s perceptions about his/her level of comprehension and attitudes towards the storyteller.

Team Personal Observations (TPO) were notes made by the survey team about their observations in each village.

**Site Selection**

The choice of location was based on trying to cover the region as thoroughly as possible geographically and in terms of dialectal and religious variation, based on our background research and the recommendations of our local guides.

Table 1 below provides a list of the villages we visited during the trip, with its dialect classification according to Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2024) and Jordan Diller & Diller (2004). In addition, the table gives information on the tools used in each village to show what kind of data was collected.

**Table 1: Villages visited during the second trip**

People Group	District	Village <sup>6</sup>	Reason chosen	Tools utilized
Lua Bo Kluea	Bo Kluea	Huai Mi ‘LBK*’	Very remote	ISLQ+RTT, TPO
		Huai Thon ‘LBK*’	Very remote	ISLQ+RTT, TPO
		Khun Nam Chon ‘R*’	Very remote, a school in the village	SLQ+RTT, TPO
		Ko Kuang ‘S’	‘S’ variety speaking village	ISLQ+RTT, TPO
		Na Pong ‘LBK*’	Language helper from this village	ISLQ+RTT, OS, DMT, TPO
		Na Pu ‘LBK*’	Recommended by the language helper	ISLQ+RTT, DMT, TPO
		Pa Kam ‘S’	‘S’ variety speaking village	ISLQ+RTT, TPO
		Salai Noi ‘LBK*’	South of Chaloeam Phra Kiat	KISLQ, TPO

### Subject Selection and Screening Criteria

When conducting ISLQs, participants are selected based on three specific criteria to ensure they are native speakers of the language variety being tested.

- The subject is “from the village”. This is defined as growing up in the village, living in the village at present, and, if they have lived elsewhere, their time elsewhere is not more than five years.
- The subject speaks the variety as either their first or best language.
- The subject has at least one parent from the interview village who is a mother-tongue speaker of the variety and that parent spoke the variety with him/her when he/she was a child (Nahhas, 2007, pp. 72-73).

Only residents of the village who met all three criteria for a given variety are considered part of the target population (Nahhas, 2007, pp. 72-73). If a participant did not satisfy all the criteria for a particular variety, they were excluded from that target population and were not included in the testing.

<sup>6</sup> Speech varieties with an asterisk indicate our tentative classification of a “likely” speech variety. The information on varieties without the asterisk are taken from Jordan Diller & Diller (2004).

When conducting the RTT testing, a modified desired sampling size, as suggested by Blair (1990) and Statezni & Statezni (2016), was taken as a template for this survey, as shown in Table 2. The aim was to have a realistic mix of participants of different genders and ages. For each of the three listed age groups, a minimum of 1 participant in each of the male and female categories was desired. However, a larger number of two or more for each age group and gender would be ideal. Unfortunately, the size of the sample was limited due to the village and time situation. In all the villages visited by the team, women were the main respondents, as the men were at work and not available to be interviewed.

**Table 2: Desired sample size by age and gender**

	Gender	Male	Female	Total
Age	Young (13-29)	1-2	1-2	2/4
	Middle (30-49)	1-2	1-2	2/4
	Old (50+)	1-2	1-2	2/4
Total min/max		3/6	3/6	6/12

## Research Results

### *Research Question 1: Comprehension of the Prai 'R/Y' speech variety*

The first research question of this survey aimed to check how well speakers of LBK understand the Prai 'R/Y' speech variety.

#### *Tested comprehension*

To investigate how well the LBK understand the Prai 'R/Y' speech variety, the team prepared a test: a three-minute narrative story spoken by a Prai 'R' speaker who was from Phae Klang Village, Thung Chang District. The subjects listened to the story chunk by chunk and were asked to retell the content.

Table 3 shows the relationship between the average score and standard deviation of test scores, adapted from Blair (1990, p. 25) and Statezni & Statezni (2016, p. 24).

**Table 3: Relationship between test average and standard deviation (Blair, 1990, p. 25)**

		Standard Deviation	
		Low (<12%)	High (12%+)
Average percentage	High (90%+)	The subjects understand the story well.	Most subjects understand the story well, but some do not.
	Medium (80% - 90%)	It is not clear how well the subjects understand the story.	
	Low (<80%)	The subjects do not understand the story adequately.	

High RTT percentages with low standard deviations usually indicate that the participants understand the speech variety presented in the recording well. By contrast, low RTT percentages indicate limited understanding. If the RTT percentages are between 80% and 90%, it is unclear how well the participants understand the tested speech variety. A combination of a high average RTT percentage and a high standard deviation could indicate that some participants are very familiar with the language variety, while others have little to no exposure to it. Consequently, those with less exposure may have difficulty understanding the variety adequately (Statezni & Statezni, 2016).

Table 4 shows the results from the LBK RTT tested in the visited villages throughout Bo Kluea District. The villages that do not adequately understand the tested variety are shaded.

**Table 4: RTT scores from Bo Kluea District**

Village tested	Conclusion	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Number of Subjects
Huai Mi	Do not understand	72%	14%	4
Huai Thon	Do not understand	64%	17%	5
Khun Nam Chon	Do not understand (but small sample size)	58%	33%	2
Ko Kuang	Do not understand	66%	5%	5
Na Pong	Do not understand	71%	12%	14
Na Pu	Unclear due to small sample size	90%	8%	2
Pa Kam	Do not understand	78%	11%	6

According to the RTT results, although a few residents of Na Pu, Huai Thon, Na Pong, and Pa Kam villages understood the Prai ‘R’ story well (mainly due to contact with the Prai ‘R/Y’ variety), the average score of those villages and the rest of the other villages was low.

### **Contact situation**

Relevant factors in language interaction include exposure, comprehension, and communication. In this section, we focus on **contact**, referring to the level of exposure between different linguistic groups. Exposure determines the extent to which these groups interact, which influences opportunities for comprehension and communication. We will present the exposure situation of the visited villages based on data from the DMT.

More than half (58%) of the subjects reported that they had been to the storyteller’s area, although several (26%) had not. Although some subjects with more contact have higher comprehension scores, overall, there is not a strong correlation.

When asked where the storyteller came from, a mixed response about his place of residence was given. Out of 46 participants, more than half (56%) guessed that the storyteller belonged either to the ‘R’ variety or ‘Y’ variety. Only 18% correctly stated that the storyteller comes from a Prai ‘R’ variety village. Some (13%) assigned the storyteller to the Southern (‘S’) dialect, and surprisingly, a few (9%) said the storyteller was from a ‘LBK’ spoken area. Many (22%) of the participants did not know where the storyteller was from.

The tables below will show the contact situation between one Lua/Prai village and other villages according to their dialect level (same dialect, slightly different dialect, very different dialect), and speech varieties (R = Prai ‘R’, Y = Prai ‘Y’, LBK = Lua Bo Kluea, S = Southern, M = Mal (other language)).

Table 5 below shows the contact situation organized by “dialect” between Na Pong village in Bo Kluea District and other Lua/Prai villages in different districts.

**Table 5: Dialect Contact – Na Pong, Bo Kluea District (LBK)**

		<b>Frequent (Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Few times a year)</b>					<b>Non-frequent (Yearly, Rarely)</b>				
<b>Speech Variety</b>		<b>R</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>LBK</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>LBK</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Dialect level</b>	<b>Same dialect</b>		2	20				4	2	2	
	<b>Slightly different dialect</b>	1	5		1	1		2	1	1	
	<b>Very different dialect</b>	1	1		2		5	4	1	2	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>



In general, the subjects from Na Pong village have **the most frequent contact with villages that speak the same or a very similar dialect to theirs**, totaling 22 similar-dialect villages that they have contact with frequently, and 8 villages that speak a slightly different dialect than theirs. **They have mainly non-frequent contact with villages that speak a very different variety than theirs**, totaling 14 very-different villages that they have rare or no contact with.

Table 6 below shows the contact situation organized by “dialect” between Na Pu village in Bo Kluea District and other Lua/Prai villages in different districts. Low contact levels are shown in shading.

**Table 6: Dialect Contact – Na Pu, Bo Kluea District (LBK)**

		Frequent (Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Few times a year)					Non-frequent (Yearly, Rarely)				
Speech Variety		R	Y	LBK	S	M	R	Y	LBK	S	M
Dialect level	Same dialect		1	17	2				5		
	Little different dialect	1	3	2			1	6	1	2	
	Very different dialect	1	1		2		4	6		1	3
Total		2	5	19	4		5	12	6	3	3

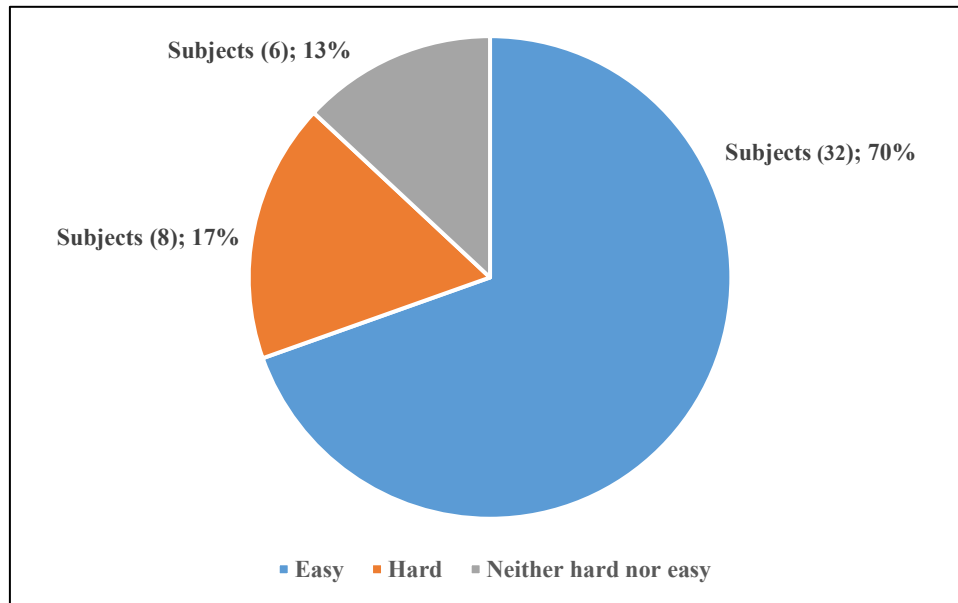
In general, the subjects from Na Pu village have **the most frequent contact with villages that speak the same or a very similar dialect to theirs**, totaling 20 similar-dialect villages that they have contact with frequently, and 6 villages that speak a slightly different dialect than theirs. **They have mainly non-frequent contact with villages that speak very different variety than theirs**, totaling 14 very-different villages that they have rare or no contact with.

According to the ISLQ, the individual subjects from LBK area reported that almost all (90%) of them visit other Lua villages, predominantly other LBK villages, with more than half (61.5%) making at least one visit per year. Two subjects reported a maximum of 20 visits per year. The most commonly reported reasons for these visits were visiting family or friends, religious-related activities, ceremonies, and work. However, the LBK individual subjects reported very low contact with Prai ‘R/Y’ villages.

***Perceived comprehension***

Perceived **comprehension** is sometimes different from tested comprehension. Perceived comprehension shows the degree of perceived understanding between different speech varieties. We will present the perceived comprehension levels of the visited villages based on data from the post-RTT and DMT tools.

Figure 6 shows the subjects' perceptions of how easy or hard it was to understand the storyteller, during the post-RTT interview.

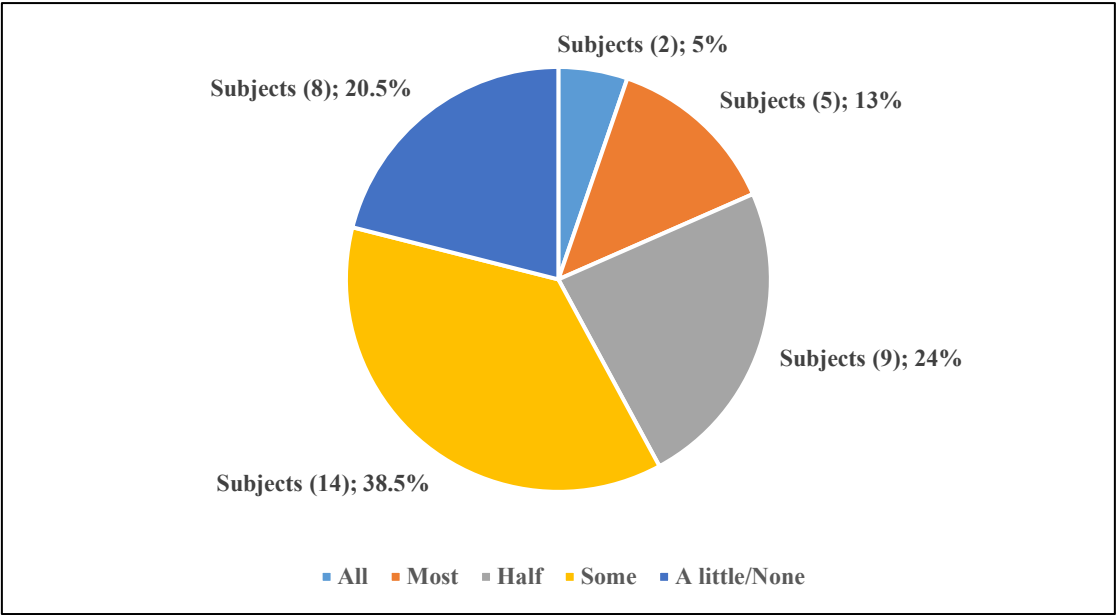


**Figure 6: Individual subjects' perceptions of understanding the storyteller**

Out of 46 participants, most (70%) said it was easy, some (17%) said it was hard, and a few (13%) said it was in the middle, neither hard nor easy. Of those who said it was easy some scored well on the RTT and others scored poorly. The average score of those who said it was easy was 79%.

Only slightly more than half (58%) of the LBK subjects reported that they understood all or most of the Prai 'R' RTT story they listened to, in comparison with RTT scores ranging between 53% and 98%. Out of the remaining 16 (42%) subjects, 8 subjects reported that they understood only half of the story, with RTT scores ranging between 34% and 88%. The other 8 subjects who reported that they understood some or little had RTT scores ranging between 53% and 74%.

Figure 7 shows the individual subjects’ opinions about their children’s assumed comprehension of the Prai ‘R’ storyteller.



**Figure 7: Children’s assumed comprehension of Prai ‘R’**

When the subjects were asked about their opinion of their children’s comprehension of the Prai ‘R’ storyteller, the majority (83%) thought that their children would only understand half or less of the story. Only a few (17%) thought that their children would understand the story well (all or most).

Table 7 shows the Huai Sai Khao village pilot-test subjects’ perceived comprehension of the Lua/Prai and other surrounding speech varieties. Low comprehension (half or less) is shown in shading.

**Table 7: Village Comprehension – Huai Sai Khao, Chalom Phra Kiat District (Lua/Prai)**

Speech Varieties	All	Most	Half	Little	None	Total
	Number of villages					
‘R/Y’	9	17	4	1		31
‘LBK’		2	3	2	11	18
‘S’		1	4		2	7
‘Mal’					3	3
Total	9	20	10	3	16	59

The Huai Sai Khao ('Y') subjects reported understanding most of a total of 2 LBK ('LBK') villages (Huai Thon, Na Khuen), while a total of 5 'LBK' villages are understood only partially or a little. The remaining total of 11 'LBK' villages are not understood by them at all. One Southern village (Nam Phae 'S') is understood well, but the others are not. The subjects reported understanding none of the 'Mal' villages' speech varieties.

Table 8 shows the Na Pong village subjects' perceived comprehension of the Lua/Prai and other surrounding speech varieties. Low comprehension (half or less) is shown in shading.

**Table 8: Village Comprehension – Na Pong, Bo Kluea District (LBK)**

Speech Varieties	All	Most	Half	Little	None	Total
	Number of villages					
'LBK'	20	2	1	1		24
'R/Y'		6	7	7	4	24
'S'		2	2	3		7
'Mal'			1		2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>58</b>

The Na Pong ('LBK') subjects reported understanding all or most of 22 'LBK' villages, while Salai Luang and Salai Noi are only half or less understood. They understand 6 'R/Y' villages well but grasp only half or less of 14 others, with four completely unintelligible. Additionally, they understand Huai Lom 'S\*' and Huai Loi 'S\*' well, but most Southern villages only partially. Of the 'Mal' villages, Yot Doi 'Mal' is half understood, while two are not understood at all.

Table 9 shows the Na Pu village subjects' perceived comprehension of the LBK and other surrounding speech varieties. Low comprehension (half or less) is shown in shading.

**Table 9: Village Comprehension – Na Pu, Bo Kluea District (LBK)**

Speech Varieties	All	Most	Half	Little	None	Total
	Number of villages					
‘LBK’	16	7	3			26
‘R/Y’		1	11	10	2	24
‘S’		2	2	3		7
‘Mal’				1	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>60</b>

The Na Pu (‘LBK’) subjects reported understanding all or most of 23 ‘LBK’ villages, while Khun Nan, Huai Khwak, and Huai Pong—near the district border—are only half understood. They understand Sa Kiang (‘R/Y’) well but only half of 11 ‘R/Y’ villages, with the remaining 12 barely or not understood at all. Additionally, they understand Huai Lom ‘S\*’ and Huai Loi ‘S\*’ well, two Southern villages halfway, and three only a little. One ‘Mal’ village is slightly understood, while two are not understood at all.

### ***Communication***

In this section, we focus on **communication**, which describes how communication is happening between groups. Communication data provide further insight into comprehension, showing not only if understanding is possible but also whether and how it occurs in practice. We will present the communication situation of the visited villages based on data from the post-RTT and DMT tools.

Most (68%) of the LBK subjects reported that they can use their own language variety when communicating with people like the storyteller, during the post-RTT interview. Only some (13%) need to either switch to one or the other’s dialect, or modify their own dialect a little. However, some (16%) of the subjects reported that they need to change the language and both use Northern Thai, or a mix of LBK and Northern Thai.

Table 10 shows the Huai Sai Khao village pilot-test subjects’ perceived communication choice between Huai Sai Khao and other surrounding villages.

**Table 10: Village Communication – Huai Sai Khao, Chalom Phra Kiat District (Lua/Prai)**

Communication choice	R	Y	LBK	S	M
	Number of villages				
Both use own dialects	8	18			
Both switch to Northern Thai	6	6	1		
Both switch to my dialect and Northern Thai	1		14	2	2
Both switch to Central Thai	2	2	4	4	

The table above shows that when Huai Sai Khao people communicate with people of more different dialects (LBK, S, M), they tend to use a mix of their own dialect and Northern Thai or Central Thai. They cannot communicate with them in their own dialects exclusively.

Table 11 shows the Na Pong village subjects' perceived communication choice between Na Pong and other surrounding villages.

**Table 11: Village Communication – Na Pong, Bo Kluea District (LBK)**

Communication choice	R	Y	LBK	S	M
	Number of villages				
Both use own dialects	4	14	22	6	1
Both switch to Northern Thai	3	2		1	2

According to the table above it is clear that people from Na Pong (LBK) village predominantly use their own dialect when communicating with people from the same variety. In many cases, they can also use their own dialect with people from 'R', 'Y', 'S', and 'M' speaking villages. They sometimes use Northern Thai for communication with 'R', 'Y', 'S', and 'Mal' speaking villages.

Table 12 shows the Na Pong village subjects' perceived communication choice between Na Pu and other surrounding villages.

**Table 12: Village Communication – Na Pu, Bo Kluea District (LBK)**

Communication choice	R	Y	LBK	S	M
	Number of villages				
Both use own dialects		4	24	2	
I switch to their dialect	4	3	2	5	
Both switch to Northern Thai	2	9			2
Both switch to Central Thai	2	3			1

The table above shows that people from Na Pu (LBK) village mainly use their own dialect when communicating with villages of the same language variety (LBK). In a few cases, they can use their own dialect with villages from ‘Y’ and ‘S’ varieties. With some villages (R, Y, LBK, S), the Na Pu people tend to switch to the other’s variety when communicating. However, they reported mainly switching to Northern Thai or Central Thai when communicating with ‘R’, ‘Y’, and ‘M’ speaking villages.

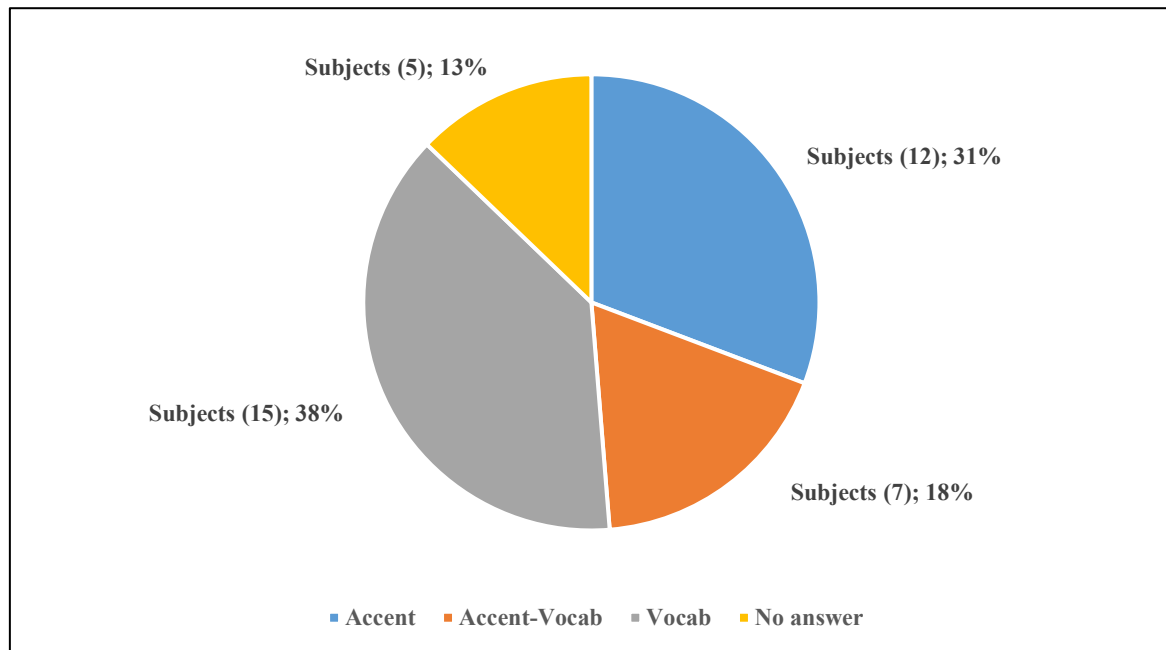
According to ISLQ, most (69%) of the subjects reported using their own variety when communicating with people from other Lua villages, while three (8%) subjects reported switching to the other person’s variety. The remaining (15%) subjects reported that either both would modify their own variety, or the other person would switch to their variety, or both of them would switch to Northern Thai.

### *Perceived difference*

Questions were asked during the post-RTT interviews about how different LBK speakers feel the Prai ‘R/Y’ speech variety to be from theirs. This data also gives insight into comprehension as well as dialect attitudes.

Most (81.5%) of the LBK participants reported that the storyteller spoke very differently or somewhat differently from the way they speak. The remaining participants reported that she spoke only slightly differently.

Figure 8 shows the subjects' opinions about the speech differences between them and the storyteller.



**Figure 8: Differences between own variety and speech variety of the storyteller**

When the subjects were asked how the storyteller's speech variety differs from their own, many (38%) mentioned that the vocabulary was different, and another 31% attributed the difference to the accent. The remaining several (18%) subjects said it is both accent and vocabulary and the rest (13%) did not give any answer.

#### **Research Question 2a: Attitudes of Lua Bo Kluea towards Prai 'R/Y' language variety**

The second research question (part A) of this survey was to check the attitudes of the speakers of LBK towards Prai 'R/Y' language variety and its speakers.

According to the individual subjects, most (84%) of them said that they like the way the Prai 'R' storyteller speaks. However, some (17%) said that the speaker did not speak good Lua.

According to the individual subjects, all the participants said that they would agree to intermarriage between their people and people from the Prai 'R' area. The reasons given for this included: it is up to them, we are the same people, we speak the same language, we can communicate with each other, we can learn each other's accents, I cannot forbid them, and it is okay.

According to the village head interviewed in Salai Noi Village, the people from Salai Noi Village intermarry with people from other Lua villages. Those villages include Sa Kiang, Sa Chuck, and Huai Fong, which are all located in Chaloe Phra Kiat District and are likely identified as Prai 'Y'.



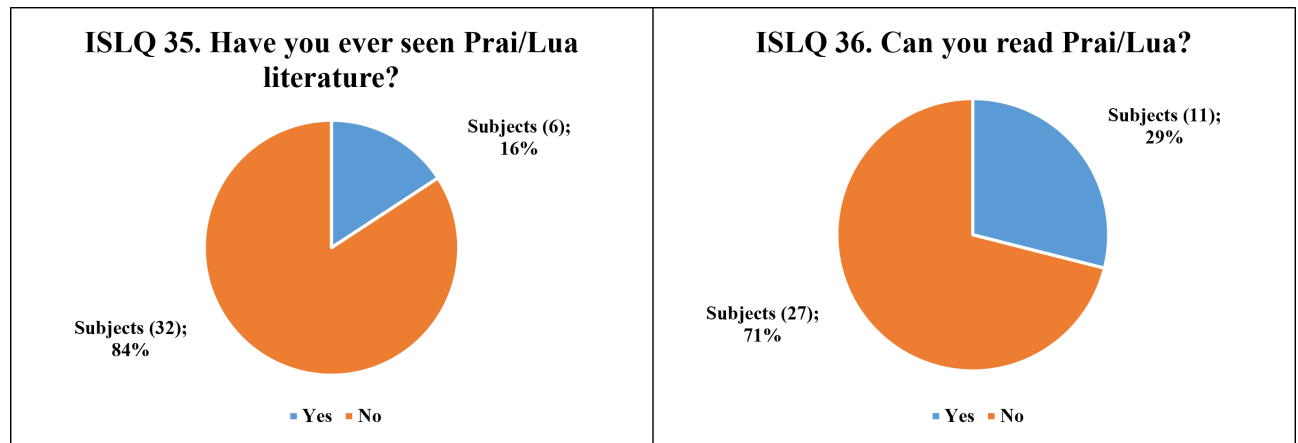
### Research Question 2b: Lua Bo Kluea consideration of using existing Prai ‘R/Y’ literature materials

The second research question (part B) of this survey was to check if the LBK would consider using any existing Prai ‘R/Y’ literature materials.

In general, people from Ban Wen, Pa Kem, Ko Kuang, Na Pong, and Salai Noi are very interested in ‘Lua’ materials and are open to teaching people to read and write. However, when seeing the Prai ‘R/Y’ materials, most of the same people reported that reading is very hard for them.

According to one knowledgeable insider, he has never seen any Prai/Lua literature and none of the people from the Salai Noi village can read Prai or Lua.

Figure 9 shows the LBK individual subjects’ responses about their knowledge of and ability to read Prai/Lua literature.



**Figure 9: Individual subjects’ Prai/Lua literature exposure**

According to the individual subjects, most (84%) of the interviewees have never seen any Prai/Lua literature, and most (71%) cannot read Prai. Of the 11 subjects who reported that they can read the Prai materials, two subjects (Ko Kuang ‘S’, Pa Kam ‘S’) mentioned that they can read only a little.

In connection with this, it should be noted that none of the individual subjects from the villages in the LBK region (100%) had attended any Prai/Lua literacy classes.

### Conclusions

#### *Purpose 1: Comprehension of Prai ‘R/Y’ Variety*

The first purpose of this survey was to assess how well the speakers of LBK understand the Prai ‘R/Y’ speakers of Chiang Klang district, which has a large body of literature.

In terms of tested comprehension, the RTT scores across most of the LBK villages ranged from 58% to 78%, with an overall average score of 71%. This is below the 80% cut-off which would indicate adequate comprehension. Thus, based on these low average RTT scores, it can be concluded that *the Lua people from Bo Kluea District cannot understand the Prai*

***‘R/Y’ speech variety adequately without some type of adaptation, training, or more contact promotion.***

Furthermore, in terms of perceived difference, the post-RTT interviews indicate that the Lua people from Bo Kluea District feel that the Prai ‘R’ speech variety differs significantly from theirs in both accent and vocabulary.

In terms of communication and perceived comprehension, although over half of the individual subjects felt they could understand the RTT story fairly well and most can communicate to some degree with Prai speakers using their own dialects, the vast majority believed that their children would struggle to understand the Prai ‘R’ variety.

The DMT results show that Prai ‘R/Y’ people in general perceive themselves to understand very little of LBK, Southern, and Mal speech varieties, while LBK people in general perceive themselves to understand other ‘LBK’ varieties quite well. They seem to understand ‘Southern’ varieties somewhat, but they perceive themselves to understand very little of Prai ‘R/Y’ and Mal speech varieties. In fact, they perceive their communities to only understand half or less of Prai ‘R’. Although they can communicate in their own dialects with Prai ‘R’ people to some extent, they also find the need to modify their speech or switch into Thai to be able to communicate.

Thus, based on results regarding perceived comprehension, it can be concluded that ***the Lua people from Bo Kluea District do not feel that they can understand the Prai ‘R’ speech variety adequately. Consequently, some type of adaptation is necessary for LBK speakers to fully comprehend written or oral materials.***

Additionally, regarding contact patterns, the DMT and individual interview results show that the Lua people from Bo Kluea District in general have very little contact with Prai ‘R/Y’ people. They mainly have contact with other Lua people who live nearby and speak very similarly to them.

### ***Purpose 2: Attitudes toward the Prai ‘R/Y’ Variety and Potential Usage of Prai Literature***

If the Lua Bo Kluea people understand Prai ‘R/Y’ adequately, the second purpose (2a and 2b) was to assess the attitudes towards the Prai ‘R/Y’ language variety and its speakers. If the attitudes were positive, the next step was to assess if the Lua Bo Kluea people would consider using the existing Prai ‘R/Y’ literature materials.

To summarize the results relevant to this section, the LBK people from Bo Kluea District generally have positive attitudes toward the Prai ‘R/Y’ people. They identify as part of the same ethnic and linguistic group and are open to intermarriage among them.

However, the LBK leaders realize that ***both adaptation (checking the words, expressing it in the LBK dialect) and literacy training (teaching people to read the script) would be needed in order to be able to use the existing Prai literature materials in their communities.*** Distribution of Prai materials has not been done widely in the LBK region and very few people have copies of the materials or have learned to read the script.

Thus, it seems the people from the Bo Kluea area have very low exposure to any Prai/Lua literature materials. People do not have access to the apps or print materials. There

has never been any literacy training in the Bo Kluea area, so the majority of them cannot read Prai/Lua. Literacy training (teaching people to read the script) would be needed in order to be able to use the existing Prai literature materials in their communities.

Finally, to answer Research Questions 2a and 2b, we base our conclusion on the above results. LBK people have positive attitudes toward the Prai 'R/Y' people and language. But *in order to consider the possibility of LBK people using the existing Prai 'R/Y' materials, adaptation, literacy training, distribution, and promotional efforts would be necessary.*

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