

The Political Appeal of Language: Dialect and Voter Opinion in Thailand

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Abstract:

This paper examines whether using different linguistic approaches increases the appeal of politicians to voters. While academics have long known that language is important for establishing ethnic identity, we have only preliminary research on the effect of political appeals through different types of speech. Using a survey experiment in Northeast Thailand, I test a series of hypotheses about the effect of different linguistic appeals on respondent opinions. Relying on two distinct treatments, one based on an ethnic language and one using a formal language register, I show that the use of an ethnic language increases the appeal of a speaker in many aspects, most especially in identifying ethnic group membership. The use of formal language, though, has mixed effects, creating social distance between the speaker and listener while also signaling the speaker's fitness for political office. The findings provide an important contribution to our understanding of how politicians' linguistic choices can influence voter opinion.

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1. Introduction

Social scientists have long recognized the political power of language (Anderson, 1990; 1991). With a few exceptions (McCauley, 2014; Varshney, 2002), much of the ethnic politics literature relies on linguistic identifiers to one degree or another as a proxy for ethnic identity (Posner, 2005; Fearon, 2003). Indeed, the term ethnicity frequently serves as short-hand for ethno-linguistic group. Brown and Ganguly (2003, 3) further highlight that for many ethnics, “language is not just *a* marker, it is *the* marker” that distinguishes them, serving as an important cue and one of the most powerful signals for identifying co-ethnics (Habyarimana Humphreys, Posner, and Weinstein, 2009: 54-56). Beyond ethnicity, the use of certain language patterns, accents, and grammar all work together to both reinforce class distinctions (Bernstein, 1971; Hasan, 2009) and tie speakers to listeners. In essence, language, i.e. the choice of how one speaks, generates a number of political and power cues.

While intuitively we are aware that certain types of language hold greater appeal than others, we don't yet have extensive research about the power of that appeal (Chang & Lu, 2014; Dunning, 2010). Linguistic cues have been a part of the growing experimental literature from Africa, but language has been used as an ethnic identifier rather than holding its own explanatory power (Harris & Findley, 2014; Habyarimana et al., 2007; 2009). Thus we are left with the question: What is the effect of different types of linguistic appeals on the political opinions of listeners? The answer has broad importance in political science. The constructivist approach to ethnicity argues that one of the paths to ethnic identity mobilization is via elite manipulation of identifiers, such as language (Fearon & Laitin, 2000). Linguistic cues have also been shown create other appeals beyond ethnicity, such as the “dog whistle” effect (Albertson, 2015). Understanding the impact of linguistic cues grants us a more complete understanding of how, why, and under what circumstances mobilization occurs.

Employing a survey experiment of 750 respondents spread across three provinces in Northeastern Thailand, I show that linguistic cues do serve as a potential tool for elites to shape political opinions and inculcate support. Thailand provides a unique opportunity to better understand the effect of linguistic cues, as the country is home to a diverse linguistic population that has faced a long history of political pressure to unite under a monolingual regime (Liu & Ricks, 2012; Selway, 2007). While the vast majority of the country speaks central Thai today, large swaths of Thai people actually speak different languages at home, with the most prominent mother tongue being a dialect more closely related to Lao than central Thai (McCargo and Krisadawan, 2004). Beyond ethnic differentiation, Thai is also a language with a series of separate linguistic registers, each with their own vocabulary; the more formal registers are commonly accepted to be a symbol of education, refinement, and higher social status. Thus an individual, especially a politician, can grant a number of both ethnic and social class cues about his or her status in society as well as regional origin by choosing to adopt a certain speech patterns.

The findings presented below show that the use of ethnic language in a political speech does serve as a cue signifying ethnic group membership. Ethnic appeals also improve respondent opinions about the speaker's electoral allure as well as his persuasiveness. Simultaneously, though, ethnic language does not improve respondent opinions regarding a speaker's fitness for political office. In contrast, the use of a formal language register does signify fitness for political office. Even so, formal language creates social distance between the speaker and listener, which has a chilling effect on political attractiveness. Thus a politician's choice of speech patterns can truly affect his appeal to supporters.

These results in Thailand serve as a crucial case (Gerring, 2007). Ethnicity is not formally recognized as a salient cleavage in the political sphere, thus it is less likely that an ethnic or linguistic appeal should hold sway. Even so, language serves as an important ethnic

and social identifier (Selway, 2015). As we see that language does have a political effect, the results can be interpreted as stronger confirmation that linguistic appeals shape opinions and can potentially be used to mobilize political support.

The remainder of this essay is structured as follows. In Section 2 I turn to the literature on ethnicity, language, and politics, detailing the link between linguistic cues and political preferences. Then, in section 3, I provide more background information about linguistic variation in Thailand, explaining the value-added of the Thai context. I also present my hypotheses. Section 4 describes my research design and sampling procedures. In Section 5 I discuss the findings of the survey. The conclusion identifies the implications of these findings for our understanding of both Thailand and the broader world.

2. Ethnicity, Language, and Political Appeals

The study of ethnicity and ethnic appeals “has become one of the most important research questions in comparative politics in the last 20 years” (Chandra & Wilkinson, 2008: 515). As such, there is a broad literature investigating the effect of ethnicity and ethnic diversity on almost all aspects of political life, ranging from violent conflict (Horowitz, 1985; Varshney, 2002) to coalitional pressures (Liu, 2015; Liu & Ricks, 2012) to public goods provision (Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly, 1999; Habyarimana et al., 2009) to economic growth (Easterly and Levine, 1997; Posner, 2004). Ethnicity is central to politics.

Despite the historical shadow of primordialist theories, scholars have long recognized that ethnicity can be mobilized or socially constructed to garner political support (Anderson, 1991; Fearon and Laitin, 2000). Indeed, politicians around the world have been found to draw on ethnicity to build backing for their causes. In Latin America, politicians and political parties have been able to mobilize indigenous voters by tying their ethnic appeal to populist policies (Madrid, 2012). In India, ethnicity has also been shown to be an important component in electoral outcomes (Chandra, 2007). In Africa, an increasing supply of

experimental research has shown the effect of ethnicity serves as a shortcut for voters (Ferree, 2006). While these ethnic appeals have been shown to have their limits (Carlson, 2015; Conroy-Krutz, 2013; Dunning and Nilekani, 2013), they still remain an important path for politicians to link with their potential constituents (Posner, 2005). Indeed, racial and ethnic appeals have a strong effect on voter behavior (Dunning, 2010; Adida, 2015).

Ethnic group identity can be built on a number of potential indicators: skin color, phenotype, religious beliefs, caste, or cultural practices. The challenge for an elite hoping to mobilize their supporters using ethnicity is to offer a series of ethnic cues which create an identifiable link between themselves and their target audience. This is not always easy (Harris and Findley, 2014). Elites must be able to clearly signal either their own membership in a group or at least their sympathy toward that group's wishes.

Language serves as one of the most effective ways to identify co-ethnicity (Habyarimana et al., 2009: 54-56; Madrid, 2012). Linguistic cues are so powerful for a number of reasons. First, language is frequently the main signal of membership within an ethnic group, or as Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, and Grancea (2006: 218) write in regard to ethnic identification in Romania, "Language is not only an indicator, but a criterion of ethnicity." Speaking a language or using language cues with a degree of fluency indicates membership within the same social group or circle. This is especially true of those languages not taught in public schools, as fluency indicates a closer ethnic connection. Also, as adopting a new language is costly, speaking it serves as a barrier between in-group and out-group.

Second, and relatedly, the use of an ethnic language establishes group solidarity, a solidarity which often aligns with class distinctions. Sociologists and linguists have established that varying patterns of speech align with class categories and serve to reinforce those distinctions (Berstein, 1971; Hasan, 2009). Researchers in American politics have also shown that linguistic cues can help a politician distinguish themselves for their supporters

(Albertson, 2005; Hall-Lew, Coppock, and Starr, 2010). These distinctions are much stronger when tied with ethnic and linguistic divisions, wherein routes to economic success are closely tied with speaking a national tongue rather than an indigenous dialect. As such, even though a certain type of speech might be economically or socially less desirable, individuals may continue to use it as a point of pride or ethnic solidarity when they are outside the workplace, even in light of national pushes toward standardized language (Hoon 2003).¹ Language thus not only identifies ethnicity; it also positions one socially.

Third, language has a symbolic appeal (Brown and Ganguly, 2003). Chomsky (1979: 191) declared, “questions of language are basically questions of power.” Non-national languages are often excluded from the halls of political power, which establishes a hierarchy of ethnicities. Languages which do not have direct access to politics may carry a great deal of historic symbolism of exclusion and/or loss. The people or ethnic groups which speak these languages often derive part of their ethnic myth from that exclusion, creating a group memory that helps the identity endure. On the other hand, the use of a national language or other linguistic cues may serve to identify fitness for power, a high level of education or competence, and the dominance of a certain ethnic group.

In sum, linguistic cues can play an important role in the political sphere. Despite recent advances in the study of ethnicity, though, the political effect of language has yet to be fully tested. Part of this is due to the confluence of language and other indicators of ethnicity, which confuses the effect of language. Previous experiments have used video treatments, which expose respondents to both visual and linguistic cues regarding ethnicity (Dunning, 2010; Habyarimana et al., 2009; Harris and Findley, 2014). While these experiments were designed to tease out these effects, the language treatment was never fully independent of the visual cues. Where visual cues have not been used (McCauley, 2014; Adida, 2015), ethnicity

¹ See also Gwee Li Sui, “Do you Speak Singlish?” *New York Times*, 13 May, 2016.

has been identified, but the effect of language on political opinion was not the primary subject of these tests.

A second challenge in identifying the effect of language is that the treatment must have substantial variation while remaining legible to the respondents. In other words, the respondents must be able to understand both the treatment and the control in order to make the test valid, otherwise the researcher is testing separate language populations. In highly fragmented societies this is difficult, as most work must be conducted in the national language. Harris and Findley (2014) used only greetings in a native tongue, while Dunning's (2010) treatment involved a statement about native language and a few phrases from the tongue. Habyarimana et al. (2009) also presented linguistic information in the form of a short greeting. The linguistic treatments in these cases were limited and did not rise to the level that a politician might use to mobilize support; the main message was relayed in the lingua franca. Thus completely teasing out the effect of language alone is difficult.

The research design laid out below overcomes these two challenges. First, it involves only a recorded speech with no video presentation. Thus the effect of language is isolated from any visual clues which may confound the findings. Second, Thailand's unique ethnic divisions and almost hegemonic dominance of the Central Thai language in education, television, and official government discourse has created a population who is relatively fluent in both the national language as well as in their home dialect. Thais, at least those who speak an alternative language at home, are able to understand both the official government language of Central Thai as well as their mother tongue. In the next section I discuss the Thai case further and tease out a series of hypotheses before turning to my experiment.

3. Language and Ethnicity in Thailand

From outside, Thailand is often thought to be a relatively homogenous country, especially in reference to some of the other states of Southeast Asia. This perception, though, is the result

of a century-long series of government policies, which have striven to unify all people within Thailand under a single, government-approved “Thai” ethnicity (Liu & Ricks, 2012; Selway, 2007). Efforts to homogenize the nation focused on language, religion, and symbols of national unity, such as the monarchy (Thongchai, 1994; Handley, 2006; Ricks, 2008; Streckfuss, 2015). Portraying unity, both to external and domestic audiences, has masked a great deal of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Fearon (2003), using language as a proxy for cultural diversity, ranks Thailand as the eighth-most fractionalized country in Asia, despite overlooking regional dialects, which are the main identifiers of ethnicity in Thailand. Including those raises the level of fractionalization to the medium-high range (Selway, 2014). Keyes (1997; 2003), notes that only about one-half of the entire population are native speakers of the central Thai dialect. Smalley (1994) argues that this number is even lower, with only about one-quarter of Thais speaking the national language as a mother tongue. Lewis, Simons, and Fennig (2015) report that only about one-third of the population speaks central Thai at home, of these, almost one-fourth are ethnic Chinese who have adopted the tongue. In essence, Thailand remains linguistically and ethnically diverse under the veneer of a government-mandated and -approved language and identity.

The main identifiers which divide ethnicities in Thailand are regional languages. These include: (1) Central Thai, which is found primarily in the central plains as well as extending south to about the Kra Isthmus; (2) Northern (*Lanna*) Thai, found among the northern provinces bordering Burma and Laos; (3) Northeastern or *Isan*, a dialect more closely related to Lao, which is predominant in the region ranging from the western edge of the Khorat Plateau to the border with Laos; (4) Southern Thai, which is spoken in the 15 southernmost provinces; and (5) Various other minor language groups, the largest of which include Khmer, Malay, Chinese, and Phu Thai. Percentages of speakers of the largest dialects are presented in Figure 1.

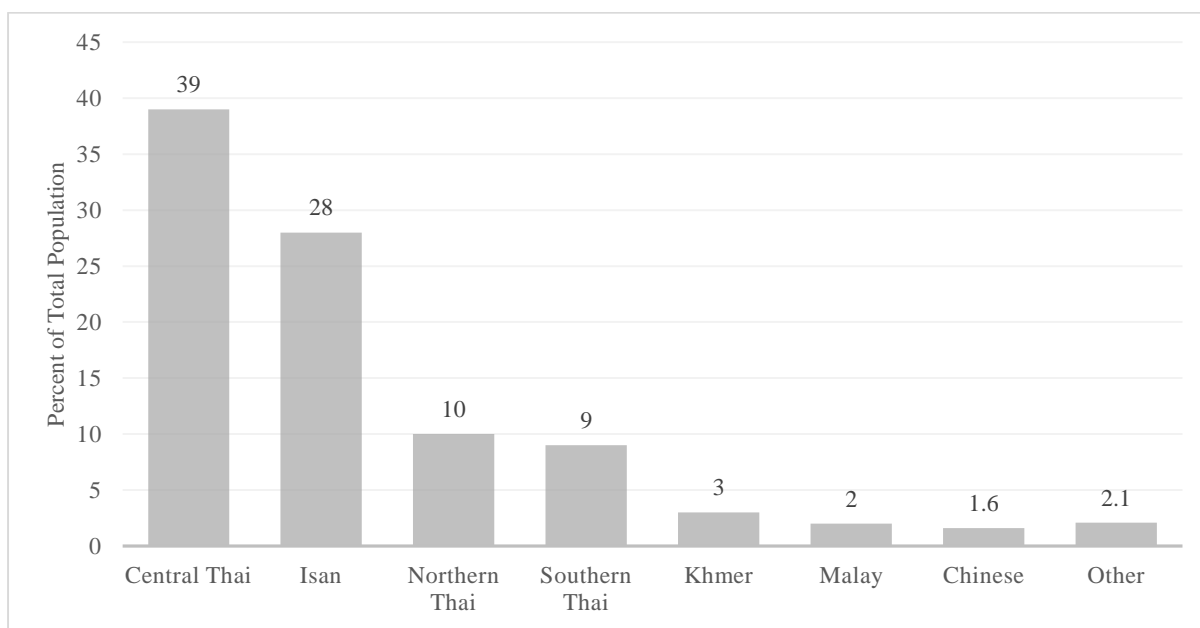


Figure 1. Language Groups in Thailand

Source: Lewis et al. (2015); Suwilai Premsrirat et al. (2004)

As the largest alternate linguistic group in Thailand, the people of the Isan have remained a point of anxiety for the central Thai state. During the initial years of state-building, the Isan was of special concern due to its potential for rebellion and its proximity to the colonial borders of the aggressive French (Vickery 1970; Thongchai, 1994). After the brutal suppression of a rebellion in the region in the early 1900s as well as the eventual disappearance of the French threat, the region was largely ignored in the state's drive for development until the mid-20th century. The Isan became mired in poverty, and little effort was spared to improve the livelihood of its inhabitants. Indeed, many people in the region suffered both implied and real slights at the hands of Central Thai-speaking government officials. Thus, when the ideology of Communism arrived, its egalitarian promise held broad appeal for the people of this region. In response the Thai state, with backing from the United States, sought ways to address the "Northeastern Problem" (Keyes, 2014: chapter 5). The push for development in order to win the hearts and minds of the people was only secondary

to the security concerns presented by the state, and by the 1980s and 1990s, as Thailand's economy boomed, the Isan still bore a disproportionate amount of the country's poverty (Somchai and Richter, 2007).

All the while, the Thai state has continued to promote a unified Thai identity in order to reduce the propensity for threats to the state from within, which has served to neutralize threats from alternative ethnic groups. Despite this, and perhaps partly because of it, a politically-neutral Isan identity has persisted and strengthened as a counter to the official Thai discourse (McCargo and Krisadawan, 2004). While Isan people must negotiate their identities within the official requirements of the Thai state, "being Isan" became more prominent during the 2000s (Hesse-Swain, 2011), even spurring efforts to promote and preserve the area's unique cultural identity from the European Union (Draper, 2012; Draper and Anong, 2015). The primary identifier of the Isan people is their language, *phasa isan*, which, "despite being regarded as a dialect of Central Thai ... has distinct lexical and phonological properties" (Saowanee and McCargo, 2014: 60). Indeed, for many Central Thai speakers, Isan is considered unintelligible.

The combination of economic disparity as well as regional identity directly fed the rise of the Thaksin Shinawatra and the Thai Rak Thai party in 2001 to national prominence (Pasuk and Baker, 2009). Thaksin offered more programmatic policies than had been available in previous administrations, with many of them accused of being populist, and his efforts were rewarded at the ballot box (Selway, 2011). The Isan people became the largest single group of supporters for the Thai Rak Thai party and its successors, and their support for Thaksin has remained strong at the ballot box despite multiple protests, a brutal military crackdown, two coups, imposed governments, and efforts by opposition governments, both

civilian and military, to offer similar subsidy programs (Pasuk and Baker, 2013; Keyes, 2014).²

With the confluence of ethnicity, social class, and policy targeting that exists in Northeastern Thailand, the environment is ripe for the potential mobilization of political power via ethnic cues (see also Madrid, 2012). While some politicians, including Thaksin, have used minor ethnic cues such as local greetings or donning local garb in their campaigning and speeches, this practice is relatively limited. Ethnicity has not yet become a major political identifier. There are no regionally-based or ethnicity-based political parties, nor are there any serious separatist movements based on ethnicity.³ As such, ethnic politics in Thailand are relatively neutral in contrast to many other countries where political fault lines coincide with ethnic groups. This provides an excellent opportunity to test the effect of ethnic-based appeals in a relatively neutral setting. If ethnic appeals actually do have an effect in a country without politicized ethnic lines, the results could be considered especially pertinent (Gerring, 2007).

Beyond this, the official government language of Central Thai also bears multiple linguistic registers. Social class cues that occur frequently in other languages are formalized and made official in Thai.⁴ At the top of the hierarchy is the royal register; below that is the formal bureaucratic language of government. A distant third is the everyday pattern of speech used by most Central Thai speakers. Below this are levels considered more crass or intimate, used only among friends, family, or the objects of insult. Each register includes special and distinct pronouns, verbs, and sentence structures that are designed to signify one's social status and standing in relation to the hearer. Formal bureaucratic Thai is considered to be the

² The Isan remains a point of special concern for the current military junta. Achara Ashavagachat, "Isan Offers No Easy Path for CDC Draft," *Bangkok Post*, 16 May, 2016.

³ With the exception of the Malay-based insurgency in the Southernmost three provinces (see McCargo, 2008).

⁴ Examples include Received Pronunciation in the United Kingdom or, on the opposite scale, speaking with a southern accent or using colloquial phrases in the United States.

most refined level that a non-royal would use, and it signifies one's education, expertise, and proximity to political power. Thais have long been conditioned that in order to be a good politician, one must have a strong command of the higher registers of the Thai language (Diller, 2002). As such, we can also take advantage of the variation found in Central Thai, wherein higher registers might actually provide better draws for voters.⁵

Thai elites, thus, are left with at least three potential linguistic appeals. First, they may speak in informal Central Thai, which is the lingua franca of the country and commonly used throughout the kingdom. Second, they might use a more formal Bureaucratic Thai, which would signal their level of education and, potentially, their fitness for political office. Third, they may choose to employ an ethnic language, which for our purposes is Isan.

Drawing on the literature highlighted above, we can hypothesize that linguistic cues have the following five effects:

Indicate ethnic group membership. As ethnicity can serve as a basis for electoral support, the first task a politician faces when building up such a support group is indicating his or her own membership in the group. Linguistic cues can serve this purpose (Habyarimana et al., 2009). Thus the use of a local language should convince listeners that the speaker belongs to their same ethnic group.

Mobilize electoral support. A subsequent goal, after indicating one's own membership in the ethnic group, is to mobilize co-ethnics to provide an elite more support because of his or her membership in the ethnic group. Thus using a local language should provide a speaker with greater electoral support.

⁵ Indeed, during discussions with Thai academics in preparation for this research project, the maxim was often repeated that voters would not prefer a candidate who they saw as poorly educated. Their impression was that speaking exclusively in Isan would be taken as a cue that the candidate was uneducated and not a "good person," therefore they would be unable to serve as a representative.

Increase persuasiveness. Political figures seeking to mobilize support need to convince their listeners that they share the same political opinions and policy preferences. Thus using a local language should serve to improve the speaker's persuasiveness.

Increase likability. Much of appeal can be reduced to likability. The use of colloquial language or code words can provide politicians a special link to their listeners, a phenomenon that has been labelled "dog-whistle politics" in the American setting (Albertson, 2015). The use of cues can improve one's appeal to voters. Thus the use of a local language should improve one's appeal.

Signify fitness for political office. Almost on the opposite end of the scale, the use of a local language may also signal to voters that one is less educated or unfit for public office. Alternatively, the use of an official language may signal the opposite. Much as Received Pronunciation in the United Kingdom serves as a status symbol, linguistic cues can serve to highlight one's capability as a politician.⁶ Thus the polished use of a lingua franca may encourage more positive reception of the speaker.

The research design described below applies two different linguistic treatments to gauge the effect of language on each of these five hypotheses.

While this test is being conducted in Thailand, it speaks to the broader literature on ethnic politics and language. The question of linguistic choice has wide application as

⁶ The use of "posh" language may also engender a backlash or political movement to support more working class accents, as seen among some left-leaning UK politicians or in George Bush's repeated use of the word "nuclear." See also Chumbawumba's song "RIP RP (Received Pronunciation)."

countries around the world encapsulate a variety of ethnicities that play important roles in electoral politics (Chandra, 2007; Madrid, 2012). Also, in an extension often neglected in the ethnicity literature, the use of different registers of Central Thai also indicates the effect of social class cues. Now I turn to a description of the survey experiment before turning to the results.

4. Research Design⁷

To better evaluate linguistic effects on opinions, it is essential to separate out the effect of language from all other potential factors. I did this by employing a survey experiment of 750 respondents carried out in three provinces in Northeastern Thailand where Isan speakers dominate: Khon Kaen, Udon Thani, and Buriram.⁸ Khon Kaen and Udon Thani were chosen as they are well-known as centers of Isan culture as well as strongholds of the pro-Thaksin movement. I also included Buriram, a province bordering Khon Kaen on the south which bears strong similarities to the rest of the Isan, but has a few important differences. First, a minority of Buriram's population speak a Cambodian dialect at home rather than Isan or Thai; this mixing of Cambodian ethnicity, Isan, and Thai has produced a slightly different set of speech patterns. Second, the politics of Buriram are also somewhat distinct from the rest of the Isan, due to the dominance of Newin Chidchob, a prominent politician who has changed parties repeatedly but has retained political control over his home province.

The treatment for the survey was one of three different audio recordings of an excerpt from a political address, which lasted approximately two minutes. The substance of the speech was identical; it only varied according to language. The control group heard the speech recorded in informal Central Thai (*phasa thai klang*). This is the speech register used

⁷ This project followed IRB-approved protocols; Singapore Management University IRB approval number: IRB-15-076-A085 (1015).

⁸ Respondents self-identified the language spoken at home as follows: (1) Isan, 87.07 percent of the sample or 653 individuals; (2) Central Thai, 8.00 percent of the sample or 60 individuals; (3) Cambodian, 3.60 percent of the sample or 27 individuals; (4) Lao, 0.80 percent of the sample or 6 individuals; (4) Other, 0.53 percent of the sample, or 4 individuals.

in every day intercourse, and it is the type of speech most frequently applied in political speeches in recent years. One treatment group heard the speech recorded in formal Bureaucratic Central Thai (*phasa ratchakan*), which is the version of Central Thai used primarily in government documents as well as in the occasional political speech. Historically, this form of speech was frequently employed in political addresses. A second treatment group heard the speech recorded in Isan (*phasa isan*), the regional language. While Isan is informally used in local political discourse, it is often avoided, especially in Bangkok or in national speeches, due to a negative stigma assigned to it by Central Thais (see McCargo and Krisadawan, 2004; Saowanee and McCargo, 2014).

All three levels were recorded by the same individual, a male native to the Isan. Due to his background in the area, he was able to record the speech in fluent Isan, embodying the region's accent. Having pursued a post-graduate degree, he was also able to record the two versions of the speech in central Thai, mimicking a central Thai accent. The actual recordings are available through an online appendix. The use of the same speaker across all three levels of speech reduced the possibility that any difference in results could be derived from variation in vocal appeal of the speaker. This also offered the opportunity to evaluate whether or not respondents could identify ethnicity based on accent.

The treatment was a slightly modified excerpt from an original speech given by Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn during the announcement of the Third Five-Year National Development Plan (1972-1978) on 17 September, 1971. Appendix A contains the adapted text of the address. This speech was chosen for three main reasons. First, the text of the speech does not identify any policy issues which might be seen as linked with either the pro-Thaksin or anti-Thaksin movements. The adapted text is relatively neutral in its claims and contains no political cues which might link it to any current political ideologies. Thus this reduced the chance that the experiment results would be affected by current politics. Second,

and relatedly, by using an historic excerpt, none of the speaking patterns of current politicians could be easily identified by respondents. This is particularly important as recent prime ministers in Thailand have distinct speaking patterns and tones that might be identifiable to respondents, which could influence their responses. Third, the speech was given in formal, bureaucratic language and includes a number of personal pronouns and other terms which are among the most important identifiers of Thai speech. For instance, the first person pronoun “I” could be translated differently depending on speech register. In Bureaucratic Central Thai, the term is *khaphajao*; in Informal Central Thai, the term is *phom*; and Isan speakers use the word *khoi*. Thus this speech allows for clear differentiation between three different levels of speech.

The survey took place during one week in January, 2016 throughout the three provinces identified above. The survey team conducted 750 surveys, evenly split with 250 in each province following weighted, cluster random sampling methods, which were similar to those used by the World Values Survey during their Thailand survey.⁹ All surveys were conducted primarily in Informal Central Thai, but the survey team members were conversant in Isan and able to use the tongue as necessary. During each face-to-face meeting, respondents first answered a set of demographic and background questions prior to listening to the treatment.

⁹ The sampling procedure proceeded as follows. (1) For each of the three provinces in the survey, I randomly selected a list of ten districts (*amphoe*), with the districts being weighted according to district populations in the provinces. Each of those ten districts was assigned twenty-five surveys. (2) Within each of the selected districts, I randomly selected two sub-districts (*tambol*), with sub-districts being weighted according to their populations. Each of these sub-districts was then assigned either twelve or thirteen surveys. (3) The survey team then travelled to each of these assigned sub-districts, arriving in the same village as the sub-district office. There the survey team would begin at a residential street, and using a skip number of three, choose homes to approach for the interview. If no suitable respondent was available, the team would move to the next house. In each sub-district, the survey continued until the target number of respondents was met. The distribution of the control and treatment groups for each sub-district was assigned prior to the survey team’s visit.

Table 1: List of Survey Statements

	English	Thai
1	The speaker likely understands the challenges facing me and my family.	ผู้พูดน่าจะเข้าใจสถานการณ์ที่ท่านและครอบครัวของท่านกำลังเผชิญอยู่
2	The speaker was likely born in the same region as myself.	ผู้พูดน่าจะเกิดในภูมิภาคเดียวกับท่าน
3	The speaker and I likely share some of the same political opinions.	ผู้พูดและท่านน่าจะมีความคิดเห็นทางการเมืองคล้ายคลึงกัน
4	I would enjoy sitting down to have a conversation with the speaker.	ท่านรู้สึกยินดีที่จะร่วมสนทนากับผู้พูด
5	The speaker is well prepared for the responsibilities of national leadership.	ผู้พูดมีความพร้อมเป็นอย่างดีสำหรับการเป็นผู้นำประเทศ
6	The speakers would likely be able to represent my interests in government.	ผู้พูดน่าจะสามารถเป็นตัวแทนของท่านในการนำเสนอให้รัฐกำหนดนโยบายที่จะเอื้อประโยชน์ให้กับท่าน
7	The speaker is well-educated.	ผู้พูดมีการศึกษาที่ดี
8	The speaker is persuasive.	ผู้พูดมีการพูดที่โน้มน้าวใจได้เป็นอย่างดี
9	I would trust the speaker to represent my village or hometown.	ท่านไว้วางใจให้ผู้พูดเป็นตัวแทนท่านหรือคนที่เกิดในหมู่บ้านเดียวกับท่าน
10	The speaker likely has a similar background to my own.	ผู้พูดน่าจะมีพื้นเพคล้ายคลึงกับท่าน
11	The speaker's suggestions are good.	ข้อเสนอแนะของผู้พูดเป็นข้อเสนอแนะที่ดี
12	The speaker would be a good member of parliament from my region.	ผู้พูดจะเป็นสมาชิกสภาผู้แทนราษฎร (ส.ส.) ที่ดีจากภูมิภาคของท่าน
13	The speaker would be a good member of the sub-district government.	ผู้พูดจะเป็นสมาชิกที่ดีของสภาตำบล
14	The speaker is a good person.	ผู้พูดเป็นคนดี
15	The speaker likely comes from the same social class as I do.	ผู้พูดน่าจะมียุทธศาสตร์ทางสังคมเช่นเดียวกับท่าน
16	I would consider voting for the speaker if he were running for office in the next election.	ท่านจะลงคะแนนเสียงให้แก่ผู้พูดถ้าผู้พูดลงรับสมัครเลือกตั้งในครั้งหน้า

After the initial questions were completed, the respondent listened to one of the three recorded audio clips, with the treatment effect randomly assigned in order to achieve 250 responses at each level.¹⁰ Following the audio clip, the respondent was then asked to score sixteen statements along a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly

¹⁰ Due to a brief misassignment in the field of one survey team member, the actual numbers resulted in 252 Central Bureaucratic Thai treatments, 250 Central Thai treatments, and 248 Isan treatments.

agree. Table 1 lists these statements in the same order as they were presented in the survey.¹¹

Respondents were also asked two open-ended questions regarding their feelings as to whether the speaker portrayed in the audio clip would be a good member of parliament or not. In most cases, the survey took between twenty and thirty minutes to complete.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Covariate Balance across Treatment Groups					
	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Min.	Max.
Age					
Informal Central Thai Group	249	46.00	14.388	19	87
Bureaucratic Thai Group	252	48.95	15.720	18	88
Isan Group	248	47.13	14.186	20	93
Male					
Informal Central Thai Group	250	0.436	0.497	0	1
Bureaucratic Thai Group	252	0.480	0.501	0	1
Isan Group	248	0.444	0.498	0	1
Estimated 2014 Income					
Informal Central Thai Group	212	154863.2	134731.4	8400	960000
Bureaucratic Thai Group	213	177352.1	331531.2	10000	4300000
Isan Group	239	127171.5	122580.9	10000	1000000
Education Level					
Informal Central Thai Group	250	2.036	1.128	1	4
Bureaucratic Thai Group	252	1.948	1.144	1	4
Isan Group	248	1.823	0.994	0	4
Pheu Thai Supporters					
Informal Central Thai Group	138	0.725	0.448	0	1
Bureaucratic Thai Group	159	0.799	0.402	0	1
Isan Group	149	0.805	0.397	0	1
Isan Spoken at Home					
Informal Central Thai Group	250	0.896	0.306	0	1
Bureaucratic Thai Group	252	0.869	0.338	0	1
Isan Group	248	0.847	0.361	0	1
Informal-Bureaucratic 2-group Hotelling		F(6,248) = 1.2659 Prob > F(6,248) = 0.2737			
Informal-Isan 2-group Hotelling		F(6,260) = 1.7495 Prob > F(6,260) = 0.1099			
Isan-Bureaucratic 2-group Hotelling		F(6,273) = 0.9342 Prob > F(6,273) = 0.4708			
Notes: Education ranged from 0 (no formal education) to 4 (university degree). Income numbers are in Thai Baht.					

¹¹ There is some concern that the treatment's effect may have dissipated over the time that it took to gather responses across all sixteen statements. Despite this, we can be reasonably confident that the effect of the two-minute treatment lasted during the brief response window (approximately ten minutes). Also, tellingly, difference of mean tests for the treatments across the last two questions were still found to be statistically significant as discussed in the results section below. Thus, even if the impact of the treatment diminished slightly during the survey, responses continued to exhibit an effect.

Respondents received no remuneration for their participation, and completing the survey was completely voluntary. Almost all respondents completed the entire survey, although on occasion a respondent refrained from answering specific questions, most notably questions regarding their political affiliation and their income levels. Through random selection, the three groups exhibited roughly comparable demographic composition, as demonstrated in Table 2.

In sum, the survey experiment was designed to isolate the effect of linguistic cues on listener opinions. The audio recording discussed only neutral policy topics and was fashioned to avoid any links with current political debates to avoid potentially contaminating the responses. The only real difference in the treatment was the linguistic register or language used. One-third of respondents served as a control group, being exposed to Informal Central Thai. One-third of the sample was exposed to a local ethnic language native to the region, Isan. The final third of respondents heard Bureaucratic Central Thai in order to test the effect of social class cues on their opinions. This design allows for a clear test of the five hypothesized effects of linguistic cues.

5. Results and Discussion

I present the results of the survey experiment as a series of five charts below, each aligned with one of the hypotheses outlined above.¹² In this section, for the sake of clarity and to distinguish the treatments from general discussion, I refer to the treatments as ICT (Informal Central Thai), BCT (Bureaucratic Central Thai), and ISAN (Isan).

5a. Ethnic Group Membership

The first set of results aims to test the hypothesis that linguistic cues can serve to convince listeners that the speaker is a co-ethnic. As ethnicity in Thailand is largely marked by language use (Selway, 2015) and is geographically distinct, we should expect that

¹² A table with the numeric results is included as Appendix B.

respondents who heard the Isan recording should be convinced that they share characteristics with the speaker. As identifying oneself as any ethnicity other than “Thai” is socially undesirable in Thailand (McCargo and Krisdawan, 2004), I chose to measure this through four indicators that do not directly reference ethnicity, presented in figure 2.

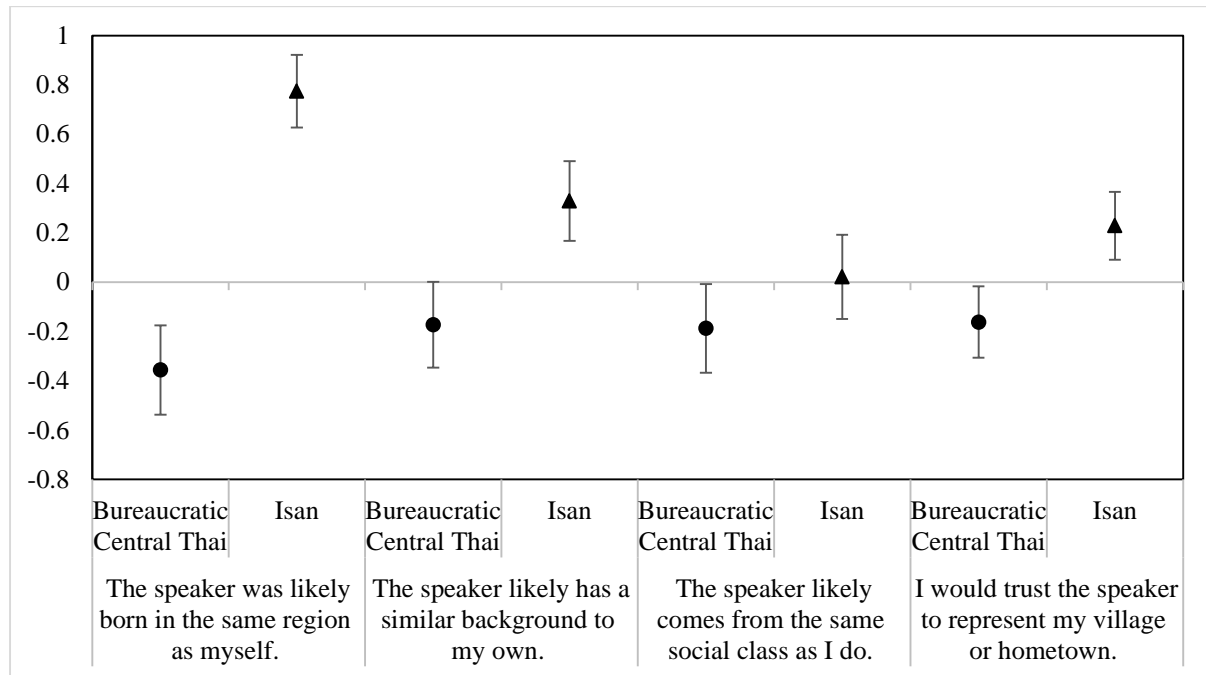


Figure 2. Treatment Effects, Ethnicity Indicators

Notes: The circles and triangles indicate difference of means of the treatment group versus the control group (Informal Central Thai). Bars indicate 95-percent confidence intervals. These conditions hold for Figures 2 through 6.

As shown, the effect of hearing the ISAN clip has a strong positive impact on the respondent’s feelings that that the speaker was a native to the Isan region. Participants who heard the ISAN clip were much more likely to agree or strongly agree (89.1 percent of respondents) that the speaker was a native to the region in relation to the control (ICT) group (52.8 percent of respondents). A similar, although more muted effect, was observed from those who agreed or strongly agreed that the speaker shared a similar background to themselves (62.90 percent versus 43.20 percent, respectively). The difference in the groups

was statistically significant in both cases ($p < .001$). In contrast, the groups that heard the BCT clip were much less likely to feel that the speaker was from their region. Fewer than 40 percent of respondents correctly identified the BCT speaker as being from the Isan region.

This indicates, as expected, that the use of a local language creates a co-ethnic cue whereby people identify group membership, at least in terms of geography. What is perhaps just as interesting is that the speaker, when employing Central Thai, at both the informal and formal level, was able to reduce respondent's ability to correctly identify that he was a native to the region. As ethnicity is often difficult to distinguish (Harris and Findley, 2014), this suggests that elites could perhaps disguise their ethnic origins by using a different type of language.

Expanding the idea of geographic links to ethnicity, and anticipating the electoral support hypothesis, the ISAN treatment group was most likely to feel that the speaker could be a trusted representative from their village or hometown. 62.10 percent of the ISAN treatment group either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while only 46.80 percent of the control group felt likewise. The BCT treatment group again had the lowest scores at below 40 percent who responded the same. Thus it appears that ethnic cues do create a perception of shared identity.

When testing for the confluence of social class and ethnicity, though, we cannot reject the null that there was no difference between the ISAN group and the ICT control group. While the BCT group registered a relatively negative reaction to this statement, ISAN appears to have no effect. It appears that using the local language does not provide much information to voters regarding social class; using formal speech, though, does create a social distance in the mind of listeners.

5b. Mobilizing Electoral Support

As noted above, the experiment has already demonstrated a difference in regard to respondent's willingness to trust a politician to represent their hometown based on hearing the ISAN treatment. Pursuing this line of thought further, a set of three more statements were posed to gauge whether language could assist in mobilizing electoral support, as seen in figure 3.

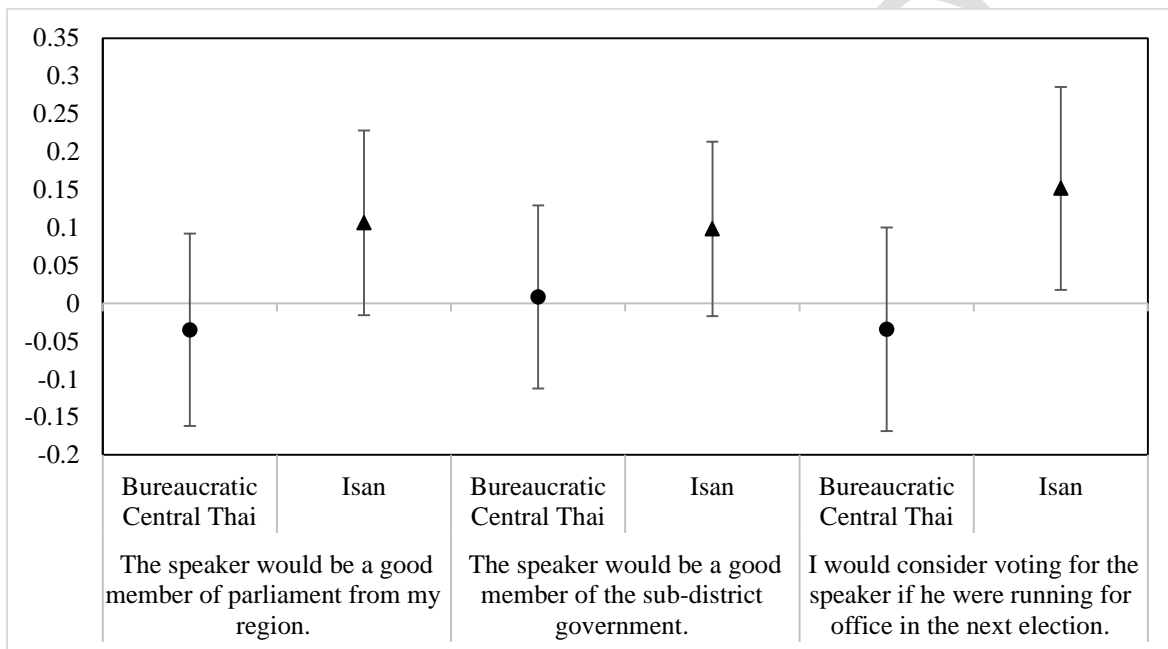


Figure 3. Treatment Effects, Electoral Support Indicators

The differences seen in these three indicators are smaller than those seen regarding ethnicity, likely reflecting the fact that ethnicity is not politically charged in Thailand. Even so, there is some effect. The final statement in the battery was whether or not the respondent would consider voting for the speaker, which meant that this response was the most distant from the treatment. Even so, there remains a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference between the control (ICT) and ISAN language treatment group. While this effect is smaller than those observed previously, almost 43 percent of those who experienced the ISAN treatment either agreed or strongly agreed that they would consider supporting the speaker in

the next election, while only 36 percent of the control group (ICT) and 28 percent of the alternate treatment (BCT) felt the same.

In contrast, both of the other indicators measuring whether the respondent felt like the speaker would be a good representative had a smaller impact. If we evaluate them at the 90-percent confidence interval, though, both do have an effect (parliament: $p = 0.089$; sub-district: $p = 0.096$). While the results are relatively small, it does seem that a politician using Isan language in the region would have an advantage over one who conversed only in Central Thai.

Qualitative responses provide some additional insight on this issue. At the end of the response block, respondents were asked to explain why they did or did not feel that the speaker would be a good member of parliament, with no prompting given regarding language. While there were relatively fewer responses to these open-ended questions, some of those who did respond provide clues as to the effect of language on perceptions about the speaker.¹³ One respondent who heard the ISAN treatment and had agreed that they would trust the speaker to represent their hometown related that the speaker would not be a good member of parliament because, “[He] speaks too much Isan.”¹⁴ Another respondent who heard the ISAN treatment and disagreed with the statement that the speaker would be a good member of the sub-district government noted, “[He] doesn’t communicate in Central Thai.”¹⁵ In contrast, another respondent from the ISAN treatment group praised the speaker, claiming that he would be a good member of parliament as, “[he] was very persuasive by using

¹³ There were 463 qualitative responses, or 61.7 percent of the surveys. By far the most common type of response at this point was a complaint that the audio clip didn’t provide enough information for respondents to evaluate the speaker sufficiently.

¹⁴ In Thai: *phuud isan maak keurn pai*

¹⁵ In Thai: *mai chai phasa klang nai kaan suesan*

language that the public can easily understand.”¹⁶ Yet another respondent similarly pointed out that the speaker’s, “speaking style used local language that was easily understandable.”¹⁷

While these qualitative responses do signify that language does have an effect, the scarcity with which respondents mentioned language¹⁸ indicates that language is operating in the background rather than a conscious driver of opinion. Still, though, the statistical findings indicate that the language of the speaker does have an effect on respondent support for the candidate.

5c. Increase Persuasiveness

The next hypothesis supposes that using an ethnic language can increase a speaker’s persuasiveness. I again used three indicators to gauge the effect of language on persuasion, as seen in figure 4.

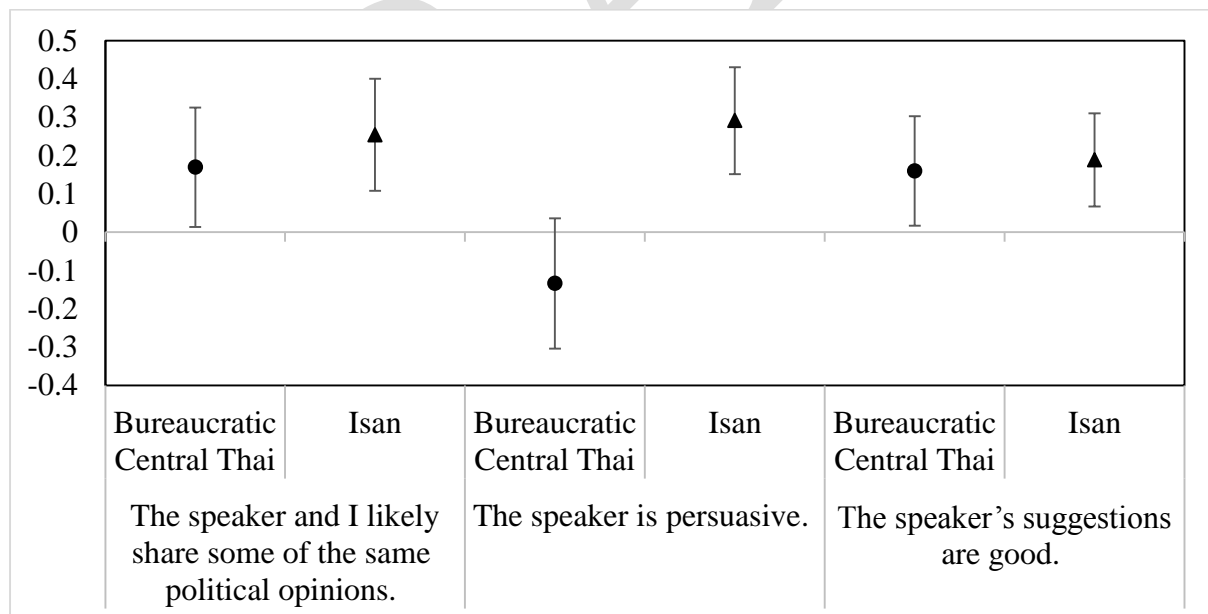


Figure 4. Treatment Effects, Persuasiveness Indicators

¹⁶ In Thai: *mii kaan nomnaw jaidii lae chai phasa hai prachachon khawjai dai ngai*

¹⁷ In Thai: *laksana kanphud mi lakkan phasa ban khawjai ngai*

¹⁸ Only seven respondents specifically highlighted language in their comments, while another four mentioned manner of speech. The subject of the remaining qualitative comments varied widely.

In this case the survey directly asked respondents to evaluate their feelings about the speaker's persuasiveness. Two additional statements about the similarity of political opinions and the good-ness of the speaker's comments were also included. Here we see a distinct effect of the ISAN treatment across all three indicators. More respondents exposed to the ISAN treatment felt that speaker was persuasive, had good suggestions, and shared their own political opinions than evidenced in the control group. Each of these differences in the groups was statistically significant at a high level ($p < .001$). The strongest effect was on whether or not the speaker was persuasive. 81.05 percent of the ISAN treatment group agreed or strongly agreed that was the case while only 66 percent of the control group felt the same. Using the ethnic language does improve the persuasiveness of the speaker.

Interestingly, though, the BCT treatment group's mean score on persuasiveness was much lower, although not sufficiently so to allow us to conclusively state that it was different from the control group. The other two indicators, though, show that Bureaucratic Thai has a positive influence on political opinions, although not as strong as the effect of the ISAN treatment. This is somewhat surprising, as the hypothesis did not anticipate this effect and it runs counter to the perception displayed on the persuasiveness indicator. The difference may be due to the effect that the BCT treatment evoked a degree of impressiveness or social hierarchy that influenced respondents, as discussed below in section 5e.

5d. Increase Likability

The fourth hypothesis poses that using ethnic cues or an ethnic language might improve the likability of a politician. Three indicators were built into the survey to evaluate this hypothesis, as seen in figure 5.

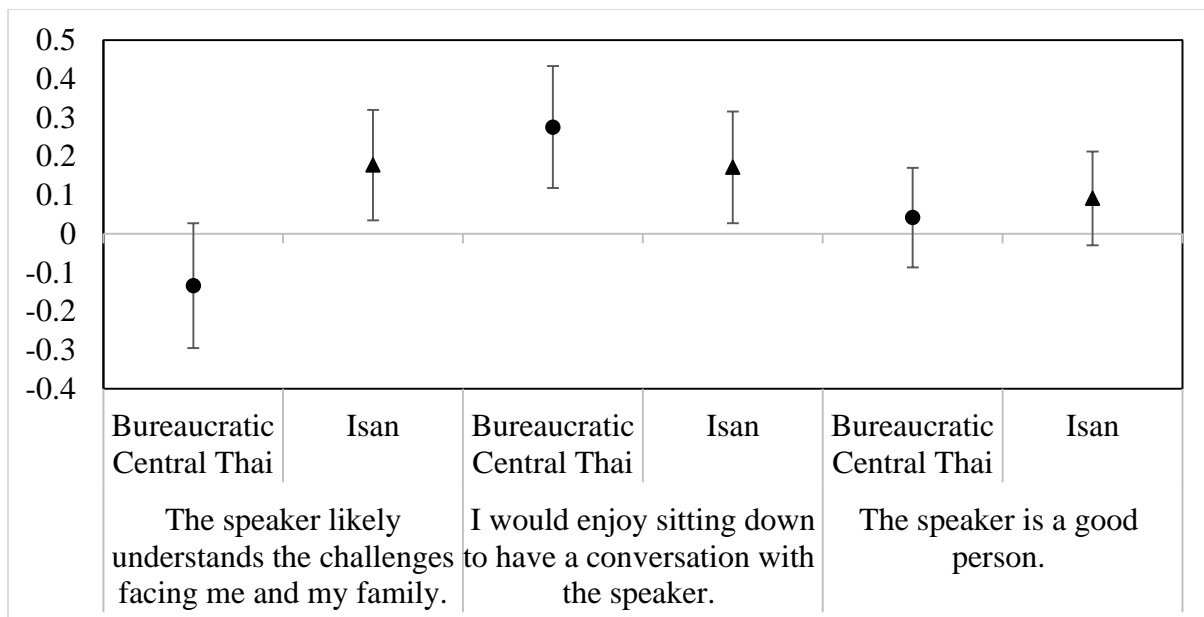


Figure 5. Treatment Effects, Likability Indicators

As before, language seems to have some effect on whether or not the speaker is evaluated positively, at least on two indicators. The ISAN treatment group, on average, felt that the speaker was more likely to understand their challenges and would be more pleasant to engage in conversation than the ICT group. The exception is the statement that the speaker is a “good person,” wherein there no clear statistical difference between responses of the ICT and the ISAN groups.¹⁹

The BCT treatment only affected whether or not the respondent would like to have a discussion with the speaker. This effect, though, could be due to either likability or a desire of respondents to correct or better understand the speaker. Thus this finding is somewhat inconclusive. In essence, the main conclusion that can be drawn from this indicator is that the ICT group felt less inclined to converse with the speaker than either treatment group. We are unable to dismiss the null hypothesis for the other two indicators, although the negative effect

¹⁹ In Thailand, the label “good person (*khon dii*)” carries great cultural and political weight, making this of interest to the Thailand-specific audience. A common claim is that a “good person” is highly-educated and well-connected to historic centers of power; thus it was somewhat unexpected to see no significant difference between the BCT treatment and the other groups.

of BCT on the feeling that the speaker understood the challenges facing the respondent's family was almost significant at the 90-percent level ($p = 0.1052$). This lends some credibility to the idea that the desire to converse with the speaker was not linked directly to his likability in the mind of respondents.

5e. Fitness for Office

The final hypothesis draws from the claim that ethnic cues may reduce the appeal of a politician, as they may signify that the candidate is not properly equipped for political office. Alternatively, using more formal language could serve to improve a politician's appeal on these indicators. As before, this evaluation relied on three indicators identified in figure 6.

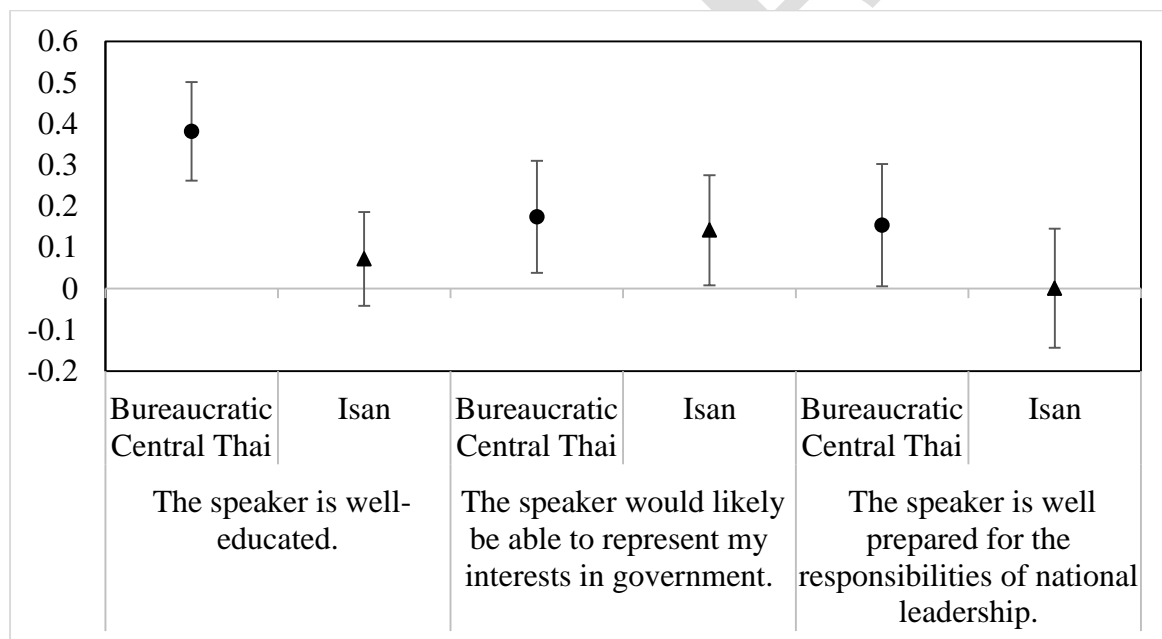


Figure 6. Treatment Effects, Fitness for Office Indicators

The group that heard the ISAN language treatment was statistically indistinguishable from the group that heard ICT treatment on two of the indicators: education and preparation for national leadership. This is in line with some of the qualitative responses discussed above, wherein the use of Isan was seen as a weakness rather than appealing. In contrast,

respondents who hear the ISAN treatment were more likely to feel that the speaker could represent their interests in government. These findings can be seen as highlighting the fact that an ethnic language can both increase one's appeal based on ethnicity as well as reduce the perception of one's preparations for national office.

In contrast, the BCT treatment group was more likely to react positively across all three indicators than the control group. This implies that hearing formal speech serves as a cue that the speaker is fit for office.

5f. Summary

In sum, these results show that using a local language in political speech creates a number of positive appeals, and, at least among this sample, practically no negatives. For ten of the indicators used in the survey, the ISAN treatment group scored the speaker more positively than the control group; for another two indicators, the effect was positive at the 90 percent confidence interval. More specifically, the use of Isan language signaled ethnic group membership, positively influenced the speaker's persuasiveness, and improved respondents' perceptions about the speaker's electability. The findings on likability are more mixed, although this limited effect may have been due to the survey instrument. Finally, the ethnic language fails to improve a speaker's credentials for national office, but it does not negatively impact them.²⁰

At the same time, using a more formal language register decreases the co-ethnic appeal across all indicators. In contrast, though, using formal language does improve the perception of a candidate's fitness for political office. Findings on other hypotheses in relation to formal language were mixed or statistically indistinct from hearing the informal register.

²⁰ The analysis was also conducted using ordered logit in order to exclude the possibility that any difference between the treatment groups was driving the results. Findings were largely consistent with those presented here. See Appendix C.

6. Conclusion

This article contends that the use of different forms of language affects the political appeal of a speaker. The constructivist literature on ethnicity has long argued that elites are able to influence and shape their followers' opinions and identities, mobilizing certain identities to create political support. Alternatively, relying on ethnic forms of communication may actually reduce a politician's appeal due to his or her appearing unfit for political office, and a more formal approach may be better received.

Using a survey experiment in Thailand, I have shown that using an ethnic language does in fact help a politician to establish his or her identity as a member of an ethnic group. Ethnic overtures do influence people's perception about the suitability of the candidate as a representative and his persuasiveness, and a candidate using such language will likely gain some benefits. Even so, the candidate runs the risk of appearing less fit for political office than another who signals his or her education and capacity via formal language cues.

The findings presented here provide a number of contributions to our understanding of linguistic appeals to voters. First, in the Thailand-specific literature, the findings here indicate that language truly matters. While this has been argued by others (Diller, 2001; McCargo and Krisadawan, 2004; Saowanee and McCargo, 2014), the experimental design allows me to show conclusively that the use of a local dialect would improve the capacity of politicians to connect with their audiences. Such a finding is important in Thailand as the country continues to struggle with the effects of internal colonization and the fact that over half the population speaks an alternative language at home (Vickery 1970; Keyes, 2014). Beyond mere politics, this is also important as it highlights that a pure focus on the central Thai dialect in education marginalizes large portions of the population.

Second, on a broader scale, these findings contribute to the growing literature regarding ethnicity and political opinion. While there is an expanding mass of empirical data

that ethnic appeals can shape voter behavior, we are still learning about the effect of those approaches. Language use, as the direct subject of research, has received relatively light consideration (Chang and Lu, 2014). The findings presented here clearly show that linguistic appeals can matter even in a state that many observers consider to be monolingual.

While these findings are drawn from Thailand, they are highly relevant beyond the Thai borders. Politicians in a variety of states frequently turn to ethnic appeals, including language. Anecdotally, Prabowo Wiranto, a candidate in the 2014 Indonesian presidential election, was known to have used Javanese linguistic flourishes in his speeches in hopes of attracting more voters (Mietzner, 2014: 21). In South Africa, linguistic appeals have been shown to have some effect as well (Dunning, 2010). Further testing is likely required, but the findings from Thailand indicate that language does shape opinions and can enhance the political appeal of a speaker.

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APPENDICES

The Political Appeal of Language: Dialect and Voter Opinion in Thailand

Jacob I. Ricks

Appendix A: Survey Treatment

Survey Treatment

Original text in Bureaucratic Central Thai. Adapted from a speech by Field Marshall Thanom Kittikachorn, Prime Minister, “On the Event of the Announcement of the Third Five-Year Development Plan, 2515-2519 (1972-1977).” Given on 17 September, 1971. Accessible: <<http://www.nesdb.go.th/Default.aspx?tabid=85>>

ท่านครับ เท่าที่ข้าพเจ้ากล่าวมาแล้วนี้ ท่านทั้งหลายก็คงเห็นได้ว่ารัฐบาลมีเจตนารมณ์อย่างแท้จริงที่จะเร่งรัดพัฒนาประเทศชาติที่รักของเราให้ก้าวหน้าไปโดยมีแผนและนโยบายพัฒนาที่แน่นอน

ในด้านปฏิบัตินั้น ข้าพเจ้าจะทำให้ส่วนราชการและหน่วยงานของรัฐทุกหน่วย ให้ยึดถือแนวทางดำเนินการตามแผนพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจและสังคมนี้ โดยเคร่งครัด กับทั้งให้ปฏิบัติหน้าที่ด้วยความเข้มแข็ง มีประสิทธิภาพและด้วยความเป็นมิตรกับราษฎร โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่ง ในด้านอำนวยบริการแก่ประชาชน อย่างไรก็ตามก็ดีความสำเร็จในการพัฒนาประเทศ อันเป็นที่มุ่งหมายใฝ่ฝันของชาวไทยทุกคนนั้น แม้รัฐบาลจะพยายามกระทำทุกสิ่งทุกอย่างโดยทุกวิถีทาง ก็ยังต้องอาศัยความตั้งใจอันแน่วแน่ของประชาชนที่จะสร้างชาติของเราให้เจริญก้าวหน้าทัดเทียมอารยประเทศ

ประเทศไทยของเรานี้อุดมด้วยพืชพันธุ์ธัญญาหาร มีแร่ธาตุทรัพยากรนานาชนิด ประชากรชาวไทยก็มีสมรรถนะประจำตน ซึ่งเมื่อได้รับการฝึกฝนอบรมแล้ว ก็จะสามารถเพิ่มพูนผลิตผลของชาติ ได้อย่างเต็มที่

ข้าพเจ้ามีความมั่นใจอย่างยิ่งว่าอนาคตของชาติไทยก็จะแจ่มใสมั่นคง ข้าพเจ้าจึงใคร่ขอเชิญชวนให้ท่านทั้งหลาย ได้ร่วมแรงร่วมใจสมัครสมานสามัคคีเป็นอันหนึ่งอันเดียวกัน พัฒนาประเทศไทยที่รักยิ่งของเราให้วัฒนาถาวรสืบไป

Rough Translation:

Dear listeners, as I have explained, you can see that the government truly desires to develop our beloved nation and country according to a clear plan. In implementing that plan, I will ensure that the civil service and all government departments follow the plan to develop the country and society. They will effectively fulfil their duties and maintain positive relationships with the people, especially in public service provision to help achieve the development goals and dreams of all Thai people. The government will endeavour to accomplish all these things using all possible means, but it will depend on the willingness of the people to work together in building the nation.

Our Thailand has great bounty in crops. There are many mineral resources. The Thai people have skills that can be trained to fully improve the productivity of the nation.

I am confident that the future of the Thai people can be bright. I desire to invite you all to join together to develop our beloved Thailand.

Appendix B: Data Table

Table B1 below presents the results of the t-tests between samples, with the Informal Central Thai group acting as the control.

Table B1: Treatment Effects

		BCT Effect (Difference of Means)	ISAN Effects (Difference of Means)
Ethnicity	Same Region	-0.356*** (0.092)	0.774*** (0.075)
	Similar Background	-0.173* (0.089)	0.330*** (0.082)
	Social Class	-0.187** (0.092)	0.022 (0.087)
	Trust	-0.162** (0.074)	0.229*** (0.070)
Electoral Support	Good MP	-0.035 (0.065)	0.106* (0.062)
	Good Local Rep	0.009 (0.059)	0.098* (0.059)
	Vote	-0.034 (0.069)	0.152** (0.068)
Persuasive	Same Opinions	0.169** (0.080)	0.254*** (0.074)
	Persuasive	-0.134 (0.087)	0.291*** (0.071)
	Good Suggestions	0.160** (0.073)	0.188*** (0.062)
Likable	Understands	-0.133 (0.082)	0.177** (0.073)
	Conversation	0.276*** (0.080)	0.171** (0.074)
	Good Person	0.042 (0.066)	0.092 (0.062)
Fit For Office	Well-Educated	0.382*** (0.061)	0.072 (0.058)
	Able to Represent	0.174** (0.069)	0.142** (0.068)
	Well-Prepared	0.154** (0.076)	0.001 (0.074)

Notes: The cells record the difference of means between the respective treatment group and the control (Informal Central Thai) group. All responses were on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Appendix C: Alternate Tests

While tests of the data do allow for me to treat it as a random sample, I also conducted the analysis via an ordered logit regression to exclude the possibility that differences between the groups was driving the results. Those findings are presented here.

Summary statistics of the control variables as well as the string of sixteen statements can be found in Table C1. There are a few important points to highlight regarding the control variables. First, the reported number of Pheu Thai supporters is lower than expected for this region. This was due to the current political situation in Thailand. Due to the military's dogged prosecution of the Red Shirt movement which is associated with the Pheu Thai party, many respondents expressed hesitation at providing this information. In the end, 347 of the 750 respondents positively identified themselves as Pheu Thai voters. 99 indicated that they voted for other parties. The remaining 304 respondents did not provide a response to this question. Rather than drop all of these respondents from the data due to missing values, I kept them in the data as zeroes. Second, most of the respondents spoke Isan at home (636 respondents with another 17 speaking a mix of Isan and other languages at home). This was expected in the region. While reducing the alternative language groups into one category means mixing the remaining respondents, this was done due to the expectation that a home tongue would have a stronger effect than hearing alternative styles of speech.

Table C1: Summary Statistics of the Survey

	Obs	Mean	St Dev	Min	Max
Dependent Variables					
1) The speaker likely understands the challenges facing me and my family.	749	3.51	.884	1	5
2) The speaker was likely born in the same region as myself.	749	3.50	1.054	1	5
3) The speaker and I likely share some of the same political opinions.	749	3.64	.866	1	5
4) I would enjoy sitting down to have a conversation with the speaker.	749	3.92	.878	1	5
5) The speaker is well prepared for the responsibilities of national leadership.	750	3.66	.841	1	5
6) The speakers would likely be able to represent my interests in government.	750	3.68	.761	1	5
7) The speaker is well-educated.	749	4.07	.687	2	5
8) The speaker is persuasive.	748	3.68	.918	1	5
9) I would trust the speaker to represent my village or hometown.	750	3.41	.830	1	5
10) The speaker likely has a similar background to my own.	748	3.26	.982	1	5
11) The speaker's suggestions are good.	749	3.96	.762	1	5
12) The speaker would be a good member of parliament from my region.	749	3.43	.716	1	5
13) The speaker would be a good member of the sub-district government.	749	3.45	.678	1	5
14) The speaker is a good person.	749	3.26	.709	1	5
15) The speaker likely comes from the same social class as I do.	749	3.05	1.025	1	5
16) I would consider voting for the speaker if he were running for office in the next election.	750	3.35	.768	1	5
Control Variables					
Age	749	47.37	14.82	18	93
2014 Income	664	152110	216212	8400	4,300,000
Education	750	1.936	1.093	0	4
Pheu Thai Supporter	750	0.463	0.499	0	1
Isan Spoken at Home	750	0.848	0.359	0	1
Burriram Variable	750	0.333	0.472	0	1

As the dependent variables in my analysis were categorical, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, I implemented an ordered logit model as follows:

$$Y_{\text{respondent opinion (1-16)}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{\text{treatment}} + \beta_2 X_{\text{age}} + \beta_3 X_{\text{income}} + \beta_4 X_{\text{education}} + \beta_5 X_{\text{Pheu Thai Voter}} + \beta_6 X_{\text{Isan at home}} + \beta_7 X_{\text{Burriram}} + \varepsilon$$

The results of the ordered logit models are reported in Table C2. In the ordered logit model the informal central Thai version of the treatment was used as the base category, thus leaving two reports: Formal Bureaucratic Thai and Isan Thai. These are summarized in Table C3, which reports only the significant effects at the 90-percent level ($p < 0.1$) of the ordered logit models. The final table also includes the treatment effects reported in the paper in order to facilitate clear comparison.

The results show that the findings were largely consistent, which lends additional strength to the claims made in the paper. The only differences occurred in regards to the BCT in three instances. First, ordered logit found that the BCT had a negative effect on responses to “The speaker likely understands the challenges facing me and my family” at the 0.1 level. The strength of the effect in t-tests, though, was more limited ($p = 0.1052$). Second and third, the BCT treatment had positive effects on responses to both “The speaker is well-prepared for the responsibilities of national leadership” and “The speaker is a good person,” while the effect was not seen in the ordered logit tests. These three variations in the data are due to the inclusion of the series of control variables, and serve as a cautionary note. That said, as the use of ordered logit regression models imposes assumptions on experimental data, it is better to rely on the t-tests.

Table C2: Ordered Logit Regression Results

Dependent Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
BCT	-0.340* (0.190)	-0.597** (0.181)	0.310* (0.187)	0.534** (0.188)	0.297 (0.186)	0.322* (0.189)	0.963** (0.200)	-0.251 (0.188)
Isan	0.487** (0.189)	1.892** (0.202)	0.643** (0.184)	0.314* (0.181)	0.041 (0.178)	0.369** (0.184)	0.067 (0.189)	0.661** (0.182)
Age	0.019** (0.007)	-0.002 (0.006)	0.021** (0.006)	0.023** (0.006)	0.028** (0.006)	0.012* (0.006)	0.011* (0.007)	0.013** (0.006)
2014 Income	0.000 (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Education	0.129 (0.084)	0.051 (0.081)	0.046 (0.837)	0.155* (0.083)	0.084 (0.082)	0.135 (0.083)	-0.062 (0.085)	-0.076 (0.082)
Pheu Thai Voter	0.043 (0.168)	0.073 (0.161)	0.243 (0.168)	0.662** (0.168)	0.171 (0.163)	0.270 (0.167)	0.725** (0.176)	0.222 (0.165)
Isan Spoken at Home	0.448* (0.237)	0.503** (0.229)	0.392* (0.233)	0.007 (0.234)	0.312 (0.235)	0.568** (0.240)	0.378 (0.245)	0.618** (0.240)
Burriram Dummy	0.473 (0.192)	0.102 (0.180)	0.103 (0.184)	-0.217 (0.184)	1.318** (0.190)	0.987** (0.191)	0.547** (0.193)	1.114** (0.191)
N	662	662	663	662	663	663	662	661
Chi-squared	32.42**	182.08**	40.14**	58.02**	70.11**	30.25**	69.73**	65.91**
Pseudo-R squared	0.022	0.099	0.025	0.036	0.043	0.020	0.052	0.040

Standard Errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.1$

** $p < 0.05$

Table C2: Ordered Logit Regression Results (continued)

Dependent Variable	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
BCT	-0.313* (0.183)	-0.393** (0.179)	0.284 (0.195)	-0.180 (0.189)	-0.118 (0.190)	0.048 (0.198)	-0.316* (0.177)	-0.121 (0.193)
Isan	0.651** (0.181)	0.740** (0.179)	0.424** (0.186)	0.331* (0.183)	0.304* (0.184)	0.217 (0.191)	0.197 (0.171)	0.548** (0.187)
Age	0.019** (0.006)	0.011* (0.006)	0.024** (0.007)	0.010 (0.006)	0.004 (0.006)	0.022** (0.007)	0.017** (0.006)	0.013** (0.007)
2014 Income	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Education	0.058 (0.080)	0.137* (0.080)	0.131 (0.085)	0.026 (0.083)	0.024 (0.083)	-0.001 (0.086)	0.156** (0.078)	-0.039 (0.085)
Pheu Thai Voter	0.122 (0.162)	0.239 (0.162)	0.169 (0.169)	0.340** (0.166)	0.182 (0.166)	0.472** (0.175)	0.036 (0.157)	0.063 (0.170)
Isan Spoken at Home	0.541** (0.226)	0.411* (0.220)	0.354 (0.241)	0.611** (0.241)	0.449* (0.239)	0.191 (0.245)	0.244 (0.218)	0.411* (0.237)
Burriram Dummy	1.098** (0.185)	0.133 (0.180)	0.125 (0.188)	0.808** (0.189)	0.501** (0.190)	0.779** (0.195)	0.651** (0.176)	0.760** (0.193)
N	663	661	662	662	662	662	662	663
Chi-squared	69.24**	51.49**	26.77**	29.75**	14.63*	38.78**	27.32**	32.92**
Pseudo-R squared	0.042	0.029	0.019	0.021	0.011	0.028	0.015	0.022

Standard Errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.1$

** $p < 0.05$

Table C3: Ordered Logit Effects ($p < 0.1$) compared with Treatment Effects ($p < 0.1$)

		Ordered Logit		Treatment Effects	
		BCT	Isan	BCT	Isan
1	The speaker likely understands the challenges facing me and my family.	—	+		+
2	The speaker was likely born in the same region as myself.	—	+	—	+
3	The speaker and I likely share some of the same political opinions.	+	+	+	+
4	I would enjoy sitting down to have a conversation with the speaker.	+	+	+	+
5	The speaker is well prepared for the responsibilities of national leadership.			+	
6	The speaker would likely be able to represent my interests in government.	+	+	+	+
7	The speaker is well-educated.	+		+	
8	The speaker is persuasive.		+		+
9	I would trust the speaker to represent my village or hometown.	—	+	—	+
10	The speaker likely has a similar background to my own.	—	+	—	+
11	The speaker's suggestions are good.		+	+	+
12	The speaker would be a good member of parliament from my region.		+		+
13	The speaker would be a good member of the sub-district government.		+		+
14	The speaker is a good person.				
15	The speaker likely comes from the same social class as I do.	—		—	
16	I would consider voting for the speaker if he were running for office in the next election.		+		+

In order to further examine the effect of hearing Isan on political opinions, I conducted a second analysis to obtain the marginal effects of the treatment. To do this, I dichotomized the series of dependent variables into binary variables. This was done by collapsing the ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ categories into ‘1.’ The three other responses, ‘strongly disagree,’ ‘disagree,’ and ‘neutral’ into ‘0.’ This was done to capture only those responses which were clearly positive in this variable.

I also created two new independent variables. In the first, I included all 750 respondents, with those who heard the Isan clip coded as ‘1’ and those who heard other clips coded as ‘0.’ The second variable was designed to test the effect of Isan against only the baseline or control group, which heard the informal central Thai clip. Respondents who heard Isan were again assigned a ‘1’ and those who heard informal central Thai were coded as ‘0.’ In this variable all those who heard the formal Bureaucratic version of the clip were dropped. The control variables were maintained as in the previous equation. As the dependent variables were now dichotomous, I used a logit model:

$$Y_{\text{binary variables (1-16)}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{\text{Isan}} + \beta_2 X_{\text{Age}} + \beta_3 X_{\text{Income}} + \beta_4 X_{\text{Education}} + \beta_5 X_{\text{pheu thai voter}} + \beta_6 X_{\text{Isan at home}} + \beta_7 X_{\text{burriram}} + \epsilon$$

The complete results are not reported here; instead I present plots of the marginal effects of the analyses using both the two new treatment variables. These are found in Figures C1 and C2.

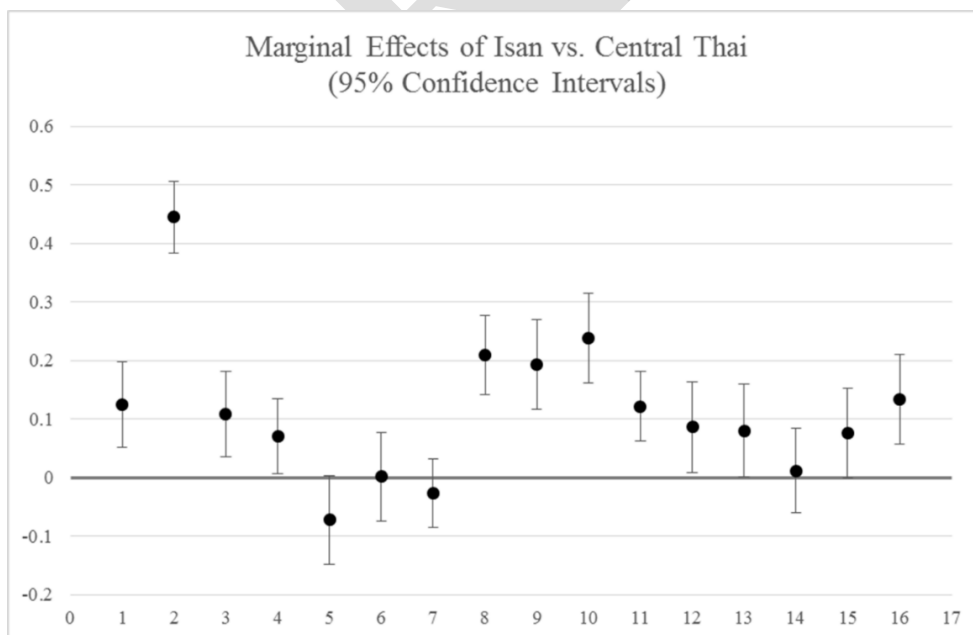


Figure C1. Marginal Effects of Isan vs. Central Thai (Both Registers)

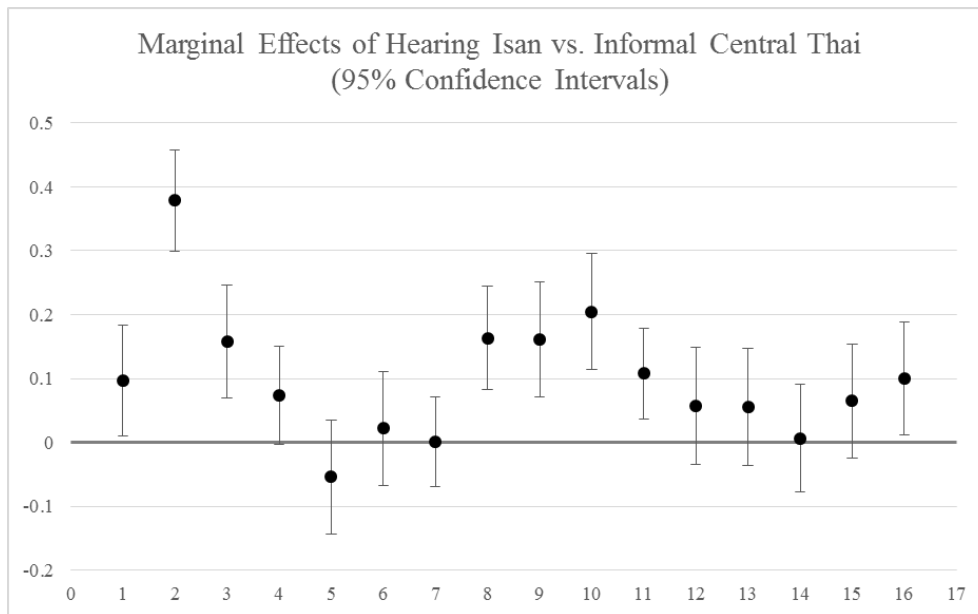


Figure C2. Marginal Effects of Isan vs. Informal Central Thai

As shown, the results are largely consistent with those from the ordered logit models, but there are a few important differences. First, in both cases, respondent opinions regarding the preparedness of the speaker for national leadership became negative. While in neither case would I be able to reject the null hypothesis that there was no effect, this is still a substantial difference from the findings of the ordered logit findings in which all responses were positive. This provides some very weak suggestion that people in the region may feel that a purely Isan speaker would not be prepared for national leadership. Second, when the respondents who heard formal bureaucratic Thai are removed from the sample, only eight of the responses remain significantly positive in contrast to the twelve which were found to have a significant positive relationship in both the ordered logit models and those which included the formal bureaucratic Thai treatments. This indicates that, at least among these four responses, some of the effect was due to a contrast between formal Thai and Isan. The most important of these were the two opinions that the speaker would be a good member of both the parliament and the sub-district government.

In the end, though, with eight responses remaining significant, we are able to dismiss the null hypothesis that hearing a politician speak in Isan rather than in one of the central Thai registers has no effect. The marginal effects indicate that hearing a political speech in Isan increases the probability that a respondent will feel that the speaker is persuasive by 16.37 percent over hearing a speaker who spoke only informal central Thai. Likewise, Isan increased the probability that a respondent would feel favorably about voting for such a candidate by almost 10 percent. The respondent is also 16.06 percent more likely to trust that the speaker can represent their village or hometown. In sum, the survey experiment shows that using a local or ethnic language can actually improve a candidate's chances of connecting with the voters he or she is targeting.

These findings lend additional credibility to the findings presented in the main paper.