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**WRITING LAWA:  
STIMULATING INDIGENOUS OWNERSHIP OF  
VERNACULAR LITERACY THROUGH ACTION  
RESEARCH**

A thesis  
submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
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## Abstract

The Eastern Lawa people of Northern Thailand have not had a practical or standardised method of writing their own language. This research began in response to an informal request that help be given to the teachers at Bo Luang school to write Lawa language using Thai script.

The exploratory and informal nature of the project led me to use action research's cyclical concept of action, followed by feedback, followed by planning for further action. This allowed for adjustments to both research goals and methods in response to the Eastern Lawa community. I was also able to document practical language development issues in the context of an ancient but rapidly changing indigenous Mon-Khmer community in Northern Thailand.

I began with the traditional linguistic assumption that building a foundation for vernacular literacy would consist of three consecutive phases. A draft orthography would be prepared with the community. Community acceptance of this would allow a working orthography to be used by the teachers of Bo Luang school. The third phase would then be official regional or national recognition of a formal orthography. I also believed that community ownership was the key to all three phases.

In reality I encountered a constant tension between trying to force the pathway of language development that I had envisaged and coming to terms with the linguistic and social situation which I discovered within the Bo Luang Lawa community. My plans for action research came to be grounded in a critical, reflexive ethnography. Community ownership became the major goal and the *raison d'être* for my research instead of just an outcome of good language development practice.

My initial emphasis on linguistic development has transformed into a desire to base both research goals and orthographic objectives on the history, identity and aspirations of the indigenous people. It is my intention that this thesis will be part of the growing body of work that recognises the limitations of Western empirical research models and the necessity for and practicality of alternative approaches.

*If you don't know the words, ask your mother; if you don't know the path, ask your father.* (Traditional Lawa saying)

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The six-year development of a methodology for community ownership of an orthography within the Eastern Lawa group is described by this thesis. The development of my method was increasingly guided by the goal of shifting the ownership of the project away from myself and onto the community.

A brief timeline of this development begins with my initial contact and phonological research with the Eastern Lawa Bo Luang community in 2007. From 2008 to 2010, I experimented with orthography from my role as a visiting voluntary English teacher at the Bo Luang school. During 2011, I began to explore and promote oral culture, particularly Lawa proverbs in the community. This allowed a less rigid approach to writing down Lawa. During 2012, the lessons I had been learning from my interaction with the community helped to develop a participant driven approach to collecting phonological data.

During the period from 2006 to 2012, I worked as a lecturer in the Applied Linguistics department of Payap University, Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand. I was also a member of the linguistic organisation, SIL International (formerly known as Summer Institute of Linguistics). My main fields of interest were multilingual education and minority language development. A colleague, Ramzi Nahhas, was just completing a sociolinguistic survey of Eastern and Western Lawa (Nahhas, 2007). Eastern and Western Lawa are two categories (ISO 639-3 *lwl* and *lcp* respectively) given to two indigenous Mon-Khmer languages still spoken in Northern Thailand (Lewis, 2009).

An immediate result of this survey was a request by Eastern Lawa participants for ongoing help from the Payap University Linguistics Department. The school in the main Eastern Lawa township, Bo Luang,

wanted to develop a writing system for Eastern Lawa. Two Lawa teachers at the school had already developed a course book (in Thai language) for their students to learn about Lawa history and culture (Juwen & Juwen, 2006). However, the lack of a Lawa writing system had hindered the further development and use of such a book.

### **1.1 Research Objective, Anticipated Outcomes and Thesis Structure**

In carrying out this project, my objective was to empower the Eastern Lawa community to read and write in Eastern Lawa, their unique oral language. Such ownership of vernacular literacy is a community rather than an academic objective. However, academic results can be listed as additional anticipated outcomes. These are:

1. Increased documentation of an ancient and little known ethnic group called the Eastern Lawa, their culture and their language.
2. Documentation of the critical application of action research to the process of orthography development.
3. Discovery of linguistic and cultural guidelines for the development of vernacular literacy and other indigenous research within the Eastern Lawa community.

These outcomes are achieved in the documentation of this thesis. Chapter one introduces the context of this thesis, that is, the Eastern Lawa community. The first section of chapter two brings together previous research on Eastern Lawa in the form of a literature review. My intention is that these two chapters and the accompanying songs and proverbs found in the appendices will contribute to general documentation about Eastern Lawa culture, language and identity.

The second outcome of documenting action research applied to orthography development is fulfilled through the remaining chapters. Literature concerning the motivations for and methodology of orthography development is discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.3 respectively. The application of action research to orthography development is introduced and applied in chapter three, which also grounds the research ethically and practically in an ethnographic framework. Chapters four and five reflect the ability of action research to go beyond the initial framework of 'first loop learning' (how to write a language) into deeper systematic issues of 'second loop learning' (e.g. why should a language be written and who should be deciding on how to write it) (Argyris, 2003).

The final outcome of linguistic and cultural guidelines is an objective that has grown during the research. It is an impossible objective for an outsider to achieve but I hope that the final two chapters of this thesis will stimulate and encourage further research by the Eastern Lawa people themselves, which will promote development without sacrificing identity. I have limited myself to beginning a discussion on local methodology of language investigation and seeking cultural principles through the *oral literature* of Lawa proverbs. The local application is described in chapter five and then linked to international literature on indigenous research in chapter six.

## **1.2 Background to the Eastern Lawa Community**

The Lawa people are located in Northern Thailand. The word *Lawa* is not familiar to most Thai or even Lawa people. However, it has been the common word used to refer to this people group in the English language research literature (Kunstadter, 1966a; Lewis, 2009; Schlatter, 1976). The common Thai term [luəʔ] for the Lawa people is considered impolite by the Lawa. The indigenous name [ləʔwiəʔ] is only used outside the community by a few specialists in Thai minority languages (Smalley, 1976, 1994). I have chosen the Anglicised word Lawa because it contains no negative

connotation and is able to be written in Roman characters. It seemed to be generally accepted by Lawa people as the foreign pronunciation of their own word [ləʔwiəʔ].

### **1.2.1 Vitality of the Eastern Lawa language.**

In discussing language use in Thailand, Smalley (1994) offers a sociolinguistic account of Lawa. He relies on dated sources (Kunstadter, 1966a; Schlatter, 1976) but his analysis is still important. Smalley describes how Thailand has maintained linguistic unity through Central Thai language while also allowing diverse regional, border and enclave languages to exist. An *enclave language* is described by Smalley as a language spoken by viable speech communities wholly contained within Thailand whose populations are small and usually relatively well integrated into the regional language and culture. Smalley (1994, p. 255–263) categorises Lawa as an enclave language. In the Eastern Lawa case, Northern Thai is the regional language and culture. Most of Smalley's discussion of Lawa refers to Western Lawa but he does point out that both the language and Buddhist culture of Bo Luang (Eastern) Lawa are quite different from the language and animist/Christian culture of the Western Lawa.

In 2006, a linguistic survey was undertaken to compare the two main geographic groupings of the Lawa language (Nahhas, 2007). While the two groupings are known as Eastern and Western Lawa, they are more clearly described by the two neighbouring provinces they occur in: Chiang Mai Lawa is the Eastern dialect and Mae Hong Son Lawa is the Western dialect. Eastern Lawa could be clarified even more by calling it Bo Luang Lawa after the name of the biggest township in the group. Both Western Lawa and Eastern Lawa languages are estimated (Lewis, 2009) as containing around 8,000 speakers each. I was able to confirm the Eastern Lawa estimate by conservatively adjusting recent local government figures.

Tables 1 and 2 show the population and location of Eastern Lawa speakers. They are based on figures from a local government census that took place in September 2011. I received the figures from officials in the two local government offices of Bo Luang and Bo Sali districts (like provinces, districts are named after the main village or town in the area). These are the two Eastern Lawa speaking districts. I am not aware of any other published source, Thai or English, where recent village populations have been identified with language for these districts.

Table 1 lists Bo Luang, Bo Sange and Bo Pawen as three separate villages. These villages have actually merged together into one small town, which is served by the Bo Luang school. References in this thesis to Bo Luang are to the combined township unless otherwise stated.

**Table 1: *Eastern Lawa villages and populations in Bo Luang district***

Village (English name)	Village (Thai name)	Population
1 Bo Luang	บ่อหลวง	966
2 Wang Kong	วังทอง	729
3 Khun	ขุน	892
4 Nafon	นาฝอน	1384
5 Kiulom	กิ่วลม	565
6 Maelanam	แม่ละนาม	295
7 Bo Sange	บ่อสะแง้	642
8 Bo Pawen	บ่อพะแวน	1552
Total		7025

**Table 2: *Eastern Lawa villages and populations in Bo Sali district***

Village (English name)	Village (Thai name)	Population
1 Bo Sali	บ่อสลี	1134
2 Kong Loi	กองโลย	1579
3 Thung	ทุ่ง	665
Total		3378

The tables are extracted from an overall census that included non-Lawa villages. The eleven villages listed are considered Lawa villages by the local authorities because nearly all members of the population are thought to speak Lawa. Although this is indeed true for Bo Luang district (Table 1), I discovered by visiting the villages in Bo Sali district (Table 2) that community leaders believed this was not true in the villages of Bo Sali and Thung.

Eastern Lawa is only spoken by people older than 60 in Bo Sali village and by people older than 30 in Thung. Kong Loi is the only community where the language is still transmitted to and used by children. I have added the Kong Loi village population only from Table 2 (Bo Sali) to all the villages in Table 1 (Bo Luang) to reach an approximate Eastern Lawa speaking total of 8,000 people. The similar Western Lawa population figure is based on estimates in the SIL publication *Ethnologue* (Lewis, 2009) but I have not been able to check the accuracy of these figures.

The total population of Bo Luang district was only 11,858 people. Bo Sali district was 7,837. This makes Lawa speakers in Bo Luang district a significant majority at around 60% of the population with 7025 of the 11,858 population. The percentage of Lawa in Bo Sali is lower, especially considering the doubtful number of actual speakers in Bo Sali and Thung.

The point needs to be made that identifying and quantifying a language community is not an exact science. The census figures are recent but individuals have not been questioned about which languages they speak. A village is simply labelled as Lawa, Northern Thai, Karen or another ethnic identity. I have interviewed school teachers, leaders or village representatives from each of the villages listed to confirm these labels. For example, in Bo Luang school, teachers could identify one, sometimes two, students in each year group who did not speak Lawa as their first language. This confirmed popular opinion that more than 90% of people in Bo Luang, Bo Sange and Bo Pawen were native Lawa speakers.

In terms of the relationship between Eastern and Western Lawa, Nahhas's (2007) survey found that the two varieties of speech are not mutually comprehensible despite a high level of mutually cognate words (greater than 90%). It is possible that the lack of comprehension is mainly because of the difference in high frequency grammatical morphemes such as the equivalent of the definite article (/hej/ in Eastern Lawa, compared with /se/ in Western Lawa).

Nahhas's survey also concluded that both Eastern and Western Lawa have strong language vitality because the current generation of children continues to use Lawa as their mother tongue. My own observation was that this is only true for families who have not moved away from their traditional villages. The children of Lawa speakers (both Eastern and Western) that I know in Chiang Mai city do not speak Lawa.

In terms of Fishman's (1991) eight stage *graded intergenerational disruption scale*, Eastern Lawa appears to be at level six where socialisation of children is still carried out by the community in the minority language but there is no literacy, formal education or mass media use of Lawa. Level eight signifies language death.

Although the main Eastern Lawa community of Bo Luang is increasing numerically, Lawa continues to be an endangered language, safe only as long as the population remains in the enclave of the Bo Luang area. Urbanisation is a threat to the continued vitality of Lawa. The provision of good schooling and financial benefits attract Lawa speakers to the urban centre of Chiang Mai. At the same time, non-Lawa are also being increasingly attracted to immigrate into the Bo Luang area as communication and facilities develop. Both of these factors could lead to eventual language death.

Eastern Lawa is considered one of the least developed minority languages in Thailand in terms of language research, orthography, printed literature and language resources (Wannemacher, 1998). By the same criteria, Western Lawa is considered one of the most developed languages.

Previous literacy and literature in Western Lawa is closely tied to religion. As noted above, the Western Lawa are either Christian or Buddhist-animist. Literacy work has taken place among the Christian Western Lawa since the 1950s resulting in a viable orthography, although its use appears to be limited to members of rural Christian churches.

It is significant that a group with such a small population should have a complete Old and New Testament in Western Lawa (Thailand Bible Society, 2001). It is also significant that neither orthography nor vernacular literacy appears to have transitioned to domains outside of the church. Kunstadter (1966a) records some use of written Western Lawa during the 1960s in courtship and divination practices amongst Lawa who had been in contact with Christian missionaries. However, I have not observed or heard reports of any sustained use of vernacular literacy outside of Christian churches in recent history. I attended church meetings of two different Western Lawa groups in Chiang Mai city and observed that those who made use of Western Lawa Christian literature (hymn book and Bible)

were all older than 40 and had acquired vernacular literacy skills in rural village churches.

### **1.2.2 Self-definition of what it means to be Lawa.**

Without an orthography it is difficult for a society to write about its identity, even if literacy in another language is widespread. However, oral societies have their own system of transmitting key concepts through songs, chants and proverbs. Like writing, this system is formal, structured and semi-permanent (Chafe, 1981); but unlike writing, oral composition has the added advantage of being formed by phrases created by numerous authors and over generations. In this tradition of oral composition, the song presented in this section was composed and performed by a middle-aged Eastern Lawa woman in her family home at Bo Luang. I had asked Teacher A (§3.2.4, category 2), one of the Lawa teachers who first expressed interest in writing, if we could record a song in the Lawa language. She introduced me to this woman and her family in my role as a university lecturer helping to write down Lawa words. The song was immediately performed and recorded. A transcription and direct translation is found in Appendix A. The process of both transcription and translation involved ongoing revision and consultation with participants during my six years with the community as relationships and my own proficiency increased.

This song offers evidence that the Eastern Lawa people perceive themselves to be a distinct ethnic group, with an identity that is separate from others in Thailand. At the same time, the song's composer appears to acknowledge that the Lawa identity is under threat, and that the Lawa themselves have contributed to this threat.

## Lawa identity song

1. We are Lawa, people who don't like to lie.
2. We are Lawa from the ancient times.
3. We like to make merit (do good deeds for spiritual reward).
4. Lawa people eat and then give offerings.
5. To be Lawa you go to the temple.
6. Our children listen and remember.
7. When our mother or father speak to us, they do not scold.
8. Our mothers and fathers are our priests.
9. Why do people not believe that we are Lawa?
10. You do not have special tribal clothing.
11. We migrated, ran to the mountains.
12. We were no longer able to follow our traditional occupations.
13. We are from the old, original Lawa village.
14. We used to live in Chiang Mai city.
15. We migrated, ran away from the red Karen (Sgaw Karen).
16. We settled at La-up and La-ang villages.
17. We settled at low and high villages.
18. We settled at villages on the plains and in the rough.
19. We settled at villages of wood and bamboo.

20. We settled at the Mae Hia and Mae Wang rivers.

21. We settled at Lampang and Lamphun provinces.

22. We have no one to encourage us.

23. You Lawa, you always surrender to others.

While composition and delivery is typical of orality's extemporaneous style, the song itself is not necessarily old. There are a number of Thai and Northern Thai borrowings included, such as the words meaning 'migration' and 'tribal clothing'.

Key themes in the song are the sense of being an ancient and honest people. Buddhism, mutual respect and love within the family are all important. There is also reference to the fact that unlike other ethnic groups, Eastern Lawa do not have their own ethnic clothing. From this statement we can infer that the lack of a distinct style of clothing may cause others to doubt that Lawa are different from other Northern Thai.

The historical event referred to in line 15 is when Lawa were forced out of Chiang Mai city and into the hills. Following this is a description and a list of place names where Lawa communities are still found to this day. The song finishes with a sense of Lawa being criticised (by the singer) for their peaceful attitudes. The one doubtful assertion is blaming the Sgaw Karen for the dispersion of Lawa (line 15). The two significant historical events which could have caused Lawa to leave Chiang Mai city are the Mon conquest (c. 750 AD) and the Burmese invasion of Chiang Mai (c. 1558 AD). It is likely that the Karen had nothing to do with either event but Karen refugees from Myanmar are the current threat to Lawa occupation of Northern Thailand territory. Perhaps the Karen are identified in the historic context of the poem because, like the Mon, they are also from the territory of modern day Myanmar.

### **1.2.3 Lawa identity in practice.**

A recent tangible rallying point for Eastern Lawa identity assertion is based around the historical/mythical figure of the last Lawa king, Wilanka (c. 700 AD). In February, 2008 I witnessed the inaugural ceremony of a devotional statue erected in front of the district council building next to the main highway linking Chiang Mai province with Mae Hong Son's province. What follows is a brief snapshot of the day, illustrating the complex wider community in which the modern-day Lawa community is located.

The activities lasted for the whole day, beginning around 10 a.m. and included entertainment at night. A large group of people (more than 5000) mainly in Northern Thai farmers' clothing (faded blue cotton) observed different activities. Inside an open-walled marquee about 100 honoured guests in Thai military-style uniforms were seated. These included local government officials, teachers from the school, police and army representatives. There was also a contingent of monks (seven to ten) on a raised platform in front of the marquee chanting the usual Pali (language of Theravadan Buddhist scripture) ceremony performed at the start of spiritual gatherings in Thailand. On the fringes of the crowd, clusters of Karen tribal people stood in their traditional clothing.

The purpose of the gathering was to set up a statue of their last king, King Wilanka. This king is revered as an ancestor by the Lawa. He ruled over what is now the area around Chiang Mai city and was defeated by Queen Jamatiwi who established the Haripunjai kingdom over Northern Thailand. However, their history now includes mythological stories of superhuman beauty, feats of strength and magic surrounding the relationship between the Mon queen and the Lawa king. Their tragic love story was sung in Northern Thai from a stage at one side of the gathering. At a table, video compact disks (vcds) and booklets (in Thai) about the Lawa people were

sold by local government officials. At the front of each book and vcd cover was a picture of the statue about to be erected.

Guests and representatives of families were requested to come forward and lay orchid flowers or coins on the ground over which the statue would be placed. Incense sticks were also lit. One of the elected council representatives told me that the Eastern Lawa call themselves /kuən/ Wilanka (children of Wilanka). As I walked around I could hear the Lawa people excitedly talking to each other in Eastern Lawa and to non-Lawa in Northern Thai.



Figure 1: Dedication of King Wilanka statue

Food stalls were set up in a row down one side, each with the name of one of the Eastern Lawa villages, corresponding to the names of the villages listed in Table 1 and Table 2 (§1.2.1). They each sold one dish, which was meant to represent the specialty of that village. Some of the dishes were exclusive to Lawa people (e.g. /səʔuək/, a local pork curry/rice dish and /pak kat/ a local sweet cake). Others were eaten all

over Thailand (e.g. Pat Thai). Various agricultural product stores were also set up representing fertilizer and seed companies. They were hoping to extend their business with the Lawa community. At the far end of the row of food stalls, Karen villages were also permitted to promote their town and specialty dish but the festival was based around Lawa identity. These Karen villages are much newer and have been caused by refugee migration from Myanmar over the last half century. Unlike Lawa, many Karen still have limited legal and social acceptance as citizens of Thailand.

In another area, an invited group of Western Lawa were performing a traditional dance for men jumping in and out of two long bamboo poles that were being clapped together. This group was dressed in the traditional Western Lawa clothing of coarse white cotton and headbands.

Traditional Northern music was played, characterised by Lanna string instruments (seung and salaw). There was also Thai pop music blaring out from a number of car stereos surrounded by young people on the periphery.

The master of ceremonies was a leading monk from Chiang Mai who grew up in the Lawa community and is related to many of the observers. He used central Thai when speaking on the microphone but when he saw my wife and me, he called out his few words of English over the loud speaker, "Good morning, good morning!" He then introduced us to all those gathered as foreigners interested in preserving Lawa language by writing it down. (We had previously introduced ourselves to him in Chiang Mai and interviewed him for our first list of Lawa words.)

This scene (as illustrated in Figure 1) richly introduces the complex context of the Lawa language community. The concept of a language community is not easily definable or particularly concrete (Romaine, 2004). Rather, a language community exists as a fluid and dynamic

grouping of individuals and families belonging to multiple language communities. Buddhism, Northern Thai, national Thai, modern youth culture, Western Lawa, district identity (the inclusion of Karen villages) and Eastern Lawa were all intertwined around the veneration of a semi-mythical figure more than 1000 years old.

Yet, there is also strength in this complexity. The Eastern Lawa are displaying an adaptability rooted in extended family (represented by the presence of all the villages), history and current political reality. This complexity may partly explain the ability of these Eastern Lawa communities to maintain their identity despite high integration with Thai society and education over the last fifty years. Wenger (1998) highlights the importance of maintaining a complex form of identity in relation to membership of multiple communities:

Learners must often deal with conflicting forms of individuality and competence as defined in different communities.... I am suggesting that the maintenance of an identity across boundaries requires work and, moreover (this work)...is at the core of what it means to be a person. (Wenger, 1998, pp. 160–161)

The above passage focuses on the situated nature of learning in particular communities and the identities that come to be developed. Wenger points out that moving between communities entails a reconciliation of identities. Our identity is both asserted and shaped through interaction. This dynamic emergent concept of identity contrasts with traditional sociolinguistic models, which portray identity as a pre-existing psychological state causing rather than resulting from linguistic interaction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Understanding identity as a result rather than a cause of linguistic interaction highlights the idea that the languages we use affect our identity and learning. This is clear in the Eastern Lawa context. The acquisition of Thai culture, Thai education and Thai languages add complexity and competencies to the Lawa identity. The on-going losses of Lawa language and culture subtract a unique type of complexity and competence from Lawa society.

Chapter two will explore relevant literature on these relationships, both in Eastern Lawa society and in the broader international context of research on orality, writing and vernacular education.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Typical of action research (§3.1), this project has involved on-going consultation with literature rather than a linear process beginning with a literature review, leading into a methodology and resulting in field research. The literature included in this chapter was evaluated in terms of its applicability and relevance to the Eastern Lawa context. Although this chapter is a literature review, frequent references are made to my experiences with the Eastern Lawa community.

This chapter uses existing literature to answer three groups of questions:

1. Who are the Eastern Lawa? How has Lawa identity and language remained vital as traditional Eastern Lawa society has acquired the competencies required to function in the modern Thai state? What features of the interaction between identity, language and learning can inform a methodology for the construction and use of an Eastern Lawa orthography?
2. Why should Eastern Lawa be put into writing? What are some key arguments for persuading stake holders that vernacular literacy is important for the future of Eastern Lawa people?
3. How should Eastern Lawa be put into writing? What process is recommended in academic literature for the researching of an oral language and the reducing of its sounds into a written system (an orthography).

### 2.1 Who Are the Eastern Lawa?

A simple answer to the question “Who are the Eastern Lawa?” is that they are the Eastern Lawa speaking people who live in Bo Luang and Bo Sali districts of Chiang Mai, Thailand. Lawa is part of the Waic branch in the

Palaungic family of Mon-Khmer languages (Lewis, 2009). It is only spoken in Northern Thailand with Eastern Lawa being spoken in the province of Chiang Mai and Western Lawa in the neighbouring province of Mae Hong Son.

As stated in the introduction, my involvement with this project originated from Nahhas's (2007) original sociolinguistic survey of Eastern and Western Lawa. Using recorded dialect testing, Nahhas was able to show that Eastern and Western Lawa are not mutually comprehensible. On this basis Eastern Lawa can be called a language. Moreover, it is a language that is being still being passed on to and used by children of the current generation. Eastern Lawa identity includes competency in the language. Nahhas was able to show through interviews, group consultations and surveys that there are strong positive feelings towards the Eastern Lawa language among those using it. Despite being used by only around 8,000 speakers, the language has remained vital.

An alternative definition of a language is given by the title of Andersen's (2005) paper, *A language is a dialect with a missionary*. His point is that minority languages are often dependent on external authorities for recognition and promotion. This often occurs when missionaries or associated groups such as SIL become associated with a language community.

I began my reading of the existing literature about Lawa identity with two guiding questions.

1. How have Lawa identity and language remained vital as traditional Eastern Lawa society has acquired the competencies required to function in the modern Thai state?

2. What features of the interaction between identity, language and learning can inform a methodology for the construction and use of an Eastern Lawa orthography?

My starting point for literature was reviewing articles cited by Nahhas (2007). Most English language literature referred to by Nahhas concerned the Western Lawa. Literature that referred to Lawa in general was generally historical or mythical (e.g. Chareonwong, 1988; Ninmanhaeminda, 1967; Wichienkeo, 2000). Exceptions to this in Nahhas are a thesis which compares Eastern and Western Lawa phonology (Mitani, 1978) and a hand-written phonological account provided by a New Tribes missionary who was living in Bo Luang around thirty years ago (Lipsius, n.d.).

One reason for this focus on Western Lawa is because of the work of Peter Kunstadter (1966b), an anthropologist who published his work in *National Geographic* (Kunstadter, 1966a), bringing the Lawa to world attention. Kunstadter worked with the Western Lawa and was critical that previous work had been focused on Bo Luang Lawa, who he claimed were atypical because of their long exposure to Buddhism and adoption of Thai customs (Nahhas, 2007, p. 62). Since then, most research about Lawa culture (Satyawadhana, 2001; Suriya, 1996), language (Komonkitiskun, 1992; Ratanakul & Daoratanahong, 1986; Schlatter, 1965, 1976) and agriculture (Schmidt-Vogt, 2008) has been on Western Lawa, who are seen as genuine Lawa.

A second reason for the linguistic focus on Western Lawa has been the number of Christian churches that have been established among the Western Lawa since the 1950s. A phonology and orthography have been published for Western Lawa by Donald Schlatter (Schlatter, 1976). This orthography subsequently resulted in a complete Bible translation

(Thailand Bible Society, 2001). In contrast there is no Christian church movement or accepted orthography among the Eastern Lawa.

Given the contemporary failure to recognise Eastern Lawa as a people or language, it was necessary to consult more historic articles. These contain descriptions of the Eastern Lawa that gave me valuable insights both in my theoretical understanding of language change and in my understanding of what I experienced and observed in the contemporary Lawa community.

Three older (pre-Kunstadter) sources for Bo Luang Lawa culture and language in the *Journal of the Siam Society* (Kerr, 1924, 1927; Seidenfaden & Hutchinson, 1935) are easily accessible in PDF format on the internet (<http://www.siam-society.org/>). Also accessible is an account of nineteenth century travel in Lawa territory (Hallett, 1890). These earlier writings on Lawa are based on the Eastern Lawa, who were easier to access and had more contact with Thai and foreign travellers. Although written by travelling foreigners, these articles are relevant because they give a useful baseline to consider Lawa population and language changes.

The earliest article by Kerr (1924) is interesting for a number of reasons. He reports that there is little previous written information (in English) on Eastern Lawa except for some references in a nineteenth century classic travelogue (Hallett, 1890). Kerr (1924, p. 135) comments that this is surprising considering the location of the Eastern Lawa villages on the best known route between Chiang Mai and Moulmein (in Burma). Kerr then states that there were seven Lawa villages on the Bo Luang plateau and that he visited “Na Fawn” and “Baw Luang”. “Baw Sali” is also named. Tables 1 and 2 (§1.2.1) have up-to-date population statistics of these villages. The Eastern Lawa were Buddhist and considered the Western Lawa “wild” because of their lack of Buddhism.

According to Kerr, there was little contact with the Karen people except for trade but there were good relationships (including marriage) with Northern Thai. Indeed, the Lawa called themselves “half blood” because their habits were so similar to the Northern Thai. They also had a different vowel sound for their name */luwa/* to differentiate themselves from the Western *Lawa*. Modern Eastern Lawa informed me that */Luwa/* was actually a derogatory term used by Thai for Lawa people in general.

Eastern Lawa villages were prosperous and well kept compared with the Karen villages. Lawa men dressed identically with Northern Thai, but women were a little different, wearing Karen style clothing and silver bracelets. Crop growing and iron smelting were the main industries, with iron smelting peculiar to the Eastern Lawa. No cloth was woven by Eastern Lawa, which may explain the lack of their own ethnic dress. The people reported they had always lived there and that once there had been a great king called Wilanka (§1.2.3). Many borrowed Thai words existed for horticulture and cultivated plants but native trees and plants had their own Lawa words. Kerr makes the comment that they communicated much more pride in adopted Northern Thai customs than their own.

Kerr’s description of Eastern Lawa is very similar to the situation I encountered 90 years later. Increased interaction between Thai and Lawa had not driven Lawa language or culture to extinction. The main noticeable change is the absence of an iron goods industry because of cheaper imported goods from China. Even so, I saw several examples of home industry smelting forges where this technology was passed on to interested young people.

Hallet’s (1890) book is also available online. Hallet had little hope for the future of the Lawa language, as is reflected in the following statement,

In a few years the language of this interesting race will be extinct, as the race has gradually been absorbed into the Shan and Peguan population, and Shan as well as Lawa is now being spoken in their few remaining distinct villages. (Hallet, 1890, preface)

Peguan refers to the Mon language and I interpret this statement to mean that no Lawa is recorded in Burma because it had already merged into Mon and that the villages in the Bo Luang plateau were already bilingual in Northern Thai. I suspect Hallet mistakenly refers to Northern Thai as “Shan” in the same way that Kerr calls the Northern Thai language “Lao”.

The purpose of Kerr’s (1927) article was to publish a short collection of Lawa words (48) from Bo Luang that he had collected in his previous visit in 1923 and to compare these words with the Wa language of Burma as well as with another list from a group whom Thai also called Lawa further south (“Kanburi”, perhaps modern Kanchanaburi). Kerr concludes that there is a strong connection between Wa and Bo Luang Lawa but the Kanburi Lawa have no connection and closely resemble Tibeto-Burman groups like Akha and Lisaw.

What is significant in this article (Kerr, 1927) is that both sets of so-called Lawa words were transcribed for the author by a companion (Mr. Noe Israngura) using Thai characters. It was interesting to see the features of the transcription trying to overcome the same problems that are described in chapter five of this thesis. For example, the voiceless ‘l’ is transcribed as ‘hl’ using the Thai characters but the writer tries to indicate breathy ending through the use of a tone marker. The Roman script transcriptions make use of diacritics to indicate non-English vowels. The Thai writer (Mr. Noe) is unable to make similar adjustments to the Thai orthography in his transcription of these vowels.

It appears that the Royal Society of Siam had a questionnaire that was used to compile vocabulary lists of ethnic groups in Thailand. *The Lawa in Northern Siam* (Seidenfaden & Hutchinson, 1935) is about a trip to the village of Bo Luang in 1932 to compile such a list. Unfortunately, the Lawa word list was not published. The article claims there were two groups of Eastern Lawa villages. The largest group was the Bo Luang group made up of Bo Luang, Bo Pak Wen, Bo Sangae, Bo Nil Fon and Bo Wang Kong (350 households 100% Lawa). The second smaller group was Kong Loi and Bo Sali (100 households but mixed Lawa and Northern Thai). The spelling of Pak Wen and Nil Fon are interesting but all these names are Thai words; the Lawa have their own names for the villages. Seidenfaden & Hutchinson (1935, p. 154) claimed that the road these villages were on was very busy during the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Burmese kings ruled over Chiang Mai.

A 17<sup>th</sup> century Thai poem *Khlong Nirat Mangtra Rop Chiang Mai* also testifies to the busyness of the road through the Eastern Lawa villages. This poem tells the story of forced resettlement of Thai into Burma. The poem specifically mentions Bo Luang during the journey as a place of iron smelting (Renard, 2001, p. 68).

A large part of Seidenfaden and Hutchinson's (1935) article is devoted to customs and beliefs with an appendix of body measurements of 57 Lawa people. They cite Northern Thai sources which are found in a group of legends called *The Chiang Mai Thai Chronicles*. These were written on palm leaves in 1827 using the Lanna language but have been translated into Thai and English (Wichiankhieo & Wyatt, 1998). Three differences from the Western Lawa are also described by Seidenfaden and Hutchinson (1935, p. 155).

Firstly, religion was quite different as the Eastern Lawa were strong Buddhists but there was little evidence of Buddhism among the Western

Lawa. Secondly, ability to speak Northern Thai was also different. Seidenfaden and Hutchinson were able to communicate through Northern Thai with many Eastern Lawa but not with the Western Lawa. Thirdly, some dietary differences were noted. Eating dog meat was common with the Western Lawa but not known amongst the Eastern.

Mention is also made by Seidenfaden and Hutchinson (1935, p. 172) of a section in Ptolemy's *Geographia* (written in the second century AD) about an area named *Malava* situated between the Salween and the Mekong rivers. The closeness of the names Malava and Lawa ([v] and [w] are allophones in both Thai and Lawa) and the location (Northern Thailand) suggest that the Lawa people inhabited this area at least as early as the time Ptolemy was writing.

One surprising feature of Seidenfaden and Hutchinson's article was that I found many statements repeated from it in the Bo Luang school publication (Juwen & Juwen, 2006). Seidenfaden and Hutchinson must have been translated into Thai at some point and was being used as a source for Lawa children to learn about their own culture. It would seem that the published account of two Englishmen's Christmas holiday journey in 1932 had been given more weight than living oral history.

A later article (Flatz, 1970) is about a small group of Lawa living north of Chiang Mai. It includes a 140 word list comparing their language to that of the Bo Luang Lawa (possibly originating from Seidenfaden and Hutchinson's 1932 visit) and to several other Mon-Khmer languages. Flatz estimates the number of Eastern (Bo Luang) Lawa as "several thousand" (p.87) in 1968. All of the Lawa words in the list continue to be used in Bo Luang, although it is difficult to compare pronunciation because the phonetic system used is not precise.

The surprising baseline that these historical articles establish is that Eastern Lawa was apparently in a weaker position 100 years ago than it seems to be now. Eastern Lawa villages have increased in size and number, and there is a strong sense of community. This is despite the advent of compulsory schooling in Thai and much greater interaction with Thai speaking communities. Admittedly, the current situation is not strong, but the resilience of this community over the last 100 years is a surprising indicator that cultural and linguistic survival does not depend on isolation or cultural artefacts such as clothing and handicrafts.

Several Thai writers (Chareonwong, 1988; Ninmanhaeminda, 1967; Wichienkeo, 2000) have published articles about Lawa culture and religion. Ninmanhaeminda (1967) discusses Lawa religious ceremonies which have been adopted by the Northern Thai living in Chiang Mai. An appendix contains Thai language invocations to various Lawa spirits. These invocations are also repeated in the Bo Luang school text (Juwon & Juwon, 2006).

Wichienkeo's (2000) article is similar in that it focuses on shared customs and traditions of Northern Thai and Lawa with oral and written proofs of a long history of interaction and shared Buddhist faith. Chareonwong (1988) details the importance of Lawa to the foundation and spiritual prosperity of Chiang Mai city.

One conclusion that I draw from this literature is that both Northern Thai and Eastern Lawa identity are intertwined. Northern Thai are distinct from other types of Thai partly because of the influence of Lawa. Similarly, Eastern Lawa are distinct from Western Lawa because of the strong influence of Northern Thai, especially in Buddhism. To only focus on pure Eastern Lawa culture ignores the reality of complex identity formation which is typical of ethnic groups within a modern nation state (Hutnik, 1991).

With the exception of the self-published manual by Juwen and Juwen (2006), there is no indigenous research on Lawa. As already mentioned, the book by Juwen and Juwen contains large extracts from previous researchers, both foreign and Thai. However, the opinions and observations of the authors regarding their own community make this document valuable. The authors found that they were not able to transcribe a number of sounds into the national alphabet. As an outside reader I also got the strong impression that, by writing in Thai, some Thai concepts were applied to Lawa customs that masked the complete significance of particular Lawa customs, especially in religious and social matters. These customs included the religious invocations already mentioned and positions of leadership in society. These two issues (orthography and cultural translation) helped fuel a desire for an Eastern Lawa orthography, at least among the Lawa teachers of Bo Luang school.

In relation to my guiding questions about the interaction of learning, language and identity, it is evident that, because of the location of their villages, the Eastern Lawa have mixed with Northern Thai for many centuries. Buddhism, trade, government education and Northern Thai language have been enthusiastically embraced. Despite this, Lawa language and identity has remained strong. The populations and number of Eastern Lawa villages have increased over the last century, and nine out of eleven villages still achieve intergenerational transmission of Eastern Lawa language.

Interestingly, the two villages (Bo Sali and Thung) which have not passed on Eastern Lawa language to the younger generation are the two most remote villages with the least contact with Northern Thai people. It is possible that this remoteness has forced younger people to spend more time in Chiang Mai city for work and education. It is also possible that lack of interaction has caused complacency and a lack of commitment towards

maintaining traditional ways as people struggle to acquire Thai competencies more available to villages on the main trade route. I was told by a community leader in Kong Loi (a Bo Sali district Lawa community) that retaining language and culture was a deliberate decision by the whole of the Kong Loi community.

Another important factor is that interaction has been two-way. While the Eastern Lawa have integrated Buddhism into their world-view, Northern Thai have also integrated traditional Lawa territorial spirits, legends and artefacts into their own system of folk Buddhism. Ancestral Lawa spirits are still feared and appeased by Northern Thai. There was a shrine to Lawa spirits less than two kilometres from our home in Chiang Mai city. Eastern Lawa may purchase Thai clothing instead of making their own, but they also supply large amounts of horticultural products throughout Thailand. Similarly, while there are many Thai words in the Lawa vocabulary, a case could be made that many Northern Thai words have Lawa or Mon-Khmer origins.

I would suggest that the key to the vitality of Eastern Lawa language and culture has been the successful negotiation of complex identity described by Wenger (1998, pp. 160–161), which I have already referred to in section 1.2.3. The Lawa have been able to incorporate change without being assimilated. A second key factor implicit in the literature is the continued existence of extended family life on ancestral land. Horticultural prosperity and strong family ties have countered some of the pressures of urban drift.

These insights can inform the methodology and application of Lawa orthography. An important fact is that Northern Thai and Eastern Lawa identity are complementary, not contradictory. This explains the desire for a writing system as similar as possible to Thai orthography. This desire was expressed by all of the Eastern Lawa participants. Just as important

was my growing understanding that research and promotion must be based at a grass-roots family level. Despite major social changes through external contact over the centuries, Eastern Lawa language has remained rooted in the local land and family, independent of external forces such as government or Christian mission.

## **2.2 Why Should Eastern Lawa be Put Into Writing?**

Despite some initial enthusiasm from Lawa school teachers, I found that most Eastern Lawa people did not feel there was a need to write in their language. The literature referred to so far justifies this view. Eastern Lawa speakers have increased in population and vitality, compared with negative assessments nearly 100 years ago, despite not having a writing system.

This section reviews three theoretical perspectives which argue for the introduction of an orthography for indigenous minority languages. These perspectives can be summarised as language, learning and identity arguments.

### **2.2.1 The language argument.**

The language argument is a political argument. It is based around which languages are used in the different domains of public and family life in a bilingual society. Bilingualism refers to an individual's or community's ability to speak more than one language (Bussmann, 1996, p. 52). A more appropriate term when referring to a bilingual community is *diglossia*. Ferguson (1959) originally defined diglossia as a stable situation where two dialects of the same language were used in different domains (e.g. family, friendship, religion, business, school). The high status variety was used in formal domains, especially those involving writing. The low status variety was used for everyday oral use. Fishman (1967) redefined

diglossia to include unrelated languages complementing each other in high and low status domains.

Lawa society is diglossic or bilingual in the Fishman sense. Standard Thai is the written language used at school and with government. Lawa is not linguistically related to Thai, but Lawa is the informal oral language used at home.

It is this sense of high status and low status that makes the argument for extending Lawa language into the written domain political. Smalley (1994) has pointed out that Thailand has maintained both linguistic diversity and national unity through a clear hierarchical system of languages. Thai is the national language that dominates over widespread regional dialects such as Northern Thai. Northern Thai is the dominant regional language over localised enclave languages (§1.2.1) such as Lawa.

It could be argued that there is no need to extend Lawa into the high status written domain if the diglossic situation is stable (as originally presented by Ferguson (1959)). However, many minority languages are disappearing. Crystal (2002) argues that language death is caused by a monolingual situation (i.e. Lawa) shifting to bilingual (diglossia in Thai and Lawa), then shifting to monolingual in the new language (Thai). Proponents of language revitalisation (Fishman, 1991; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006) see orthography as an essential factor in preventing the decline and death of a language because it allows the minority language to participate in all domains (particularly those where literacy is required).

Given the vitality of Eastern Lawa in contact with Thai language and culture, I believe it is important to think in terms of incorporation rather than intrusion of Thai language in Lawa society. Similarly, Lawa can be incorporated into domains previously dominated by Thai, such as formal education. One example of incorporation is *code switching* where

speakers shift from one language to another, sometimes in the same utterance. Code switching was seen as the intrusion of one language over another in a situational domain. It can also be seen as a conscious or unconscious means of asserting and incorporating opinion and identity. This kind of deliberate choice is called “metaphorical switching” (Holmes, 2008, p. 41).

It is interesting that the initial request to write Lawa came from the context of a textbook (in Thai) where Thai words were deemed lacking when trying to express Lawa cultural concepts and values. Thai citizenship and language are now integral parts of being Lawa, but appreciation of the benefits and dangers of bilingualism can be used to value Lawa language without rejecting national identity.

### **2.2.2 The learning argument.**

There is an abundance of literature arguing for the use of the mother tongue in education (Baker, 2006; Cummins, 1979; Thomas & Collier, 2002; UNESCO, 2003). However, the majority of cited literature is based on Western languages with long traditions of literacy. There are also arguments focused on individual benefits and transferability to the national language. This kind of research seldom incorporates a diglossic or bilingual understanding of domain relevance or the value of traditional oral forms of education.

The main theoretical argument for multilingual education has been based on Cummins’s (1979) *developmental interdependence hypothesis* which proposes that gains in a second language are partially dependent on earlier cognitive and linguistic development in the first language. Therefore, first language medium instruction should continue as long as possible even while a second language is being acquired.

Eastern Lawa children are immersed in Thai language instruction upon entering school from around the age of four years old, They continue to use Lawa in the domains of playground friendships and at home. These children quickly acquire basic communication skills and they are able to converse freely with outsiders in Thai. However, educational leadership at both local and regional levels expressed concern to me that Lawa children were significantly below average in national Thai language medium exams at both elementary and high school level. They attributed this to the lack of Thai proficiency amongst Eastern Lawa children. A popular answer to such a problem is to increase exposure and use of Thai language for children, even if this means a loss of their heritage language.

Cummins's developmental interdependence hypothesis provides an alternative solution to this gap in academic achievement. Development of basic academic concepts in core areas of reading, writing and mathematics through Lawa language could provide transferable skills into Thai based education. Children raised in a Lawa speaking home environment are just as capable of learning academic concepts as children raised in a Thai speaking home environment. The problem is that the language of instruction at school is Thai. Instead of keeping pace with other students, Lawa children must learn to function academically in Thai before they can master academic concepts taught in Thai. It would make sense to introduce academic concepts in the mother tongue while children are still developing proficiency in the national language.

Literacy acquisition in the mother tongue has several fundamental premises. Firstly, reading requires comprehensible text. Secondly, the skills involved in reading are transferable from one language to another. Thirdly, children learning to read in a language that is not their mother tongue are significantly disadvantaged. Cummins (1979) adds a *threshold hypothesis* to the developmental interdependence theory. The threshold

hypothesis is that certain cognitive levels (thresholds) of attainment need to be achieved in the first language for transfer to take place. Mother tongue literacy in the early school years attempts to develop the first language to the extent that literacy skills can be transferred to the national language.

In theory, offering Lawa kindergarten children the opportunity to learn basic reading skills using their own language should be both productive and efficient. Classes at the Bo Luang school comprised nearly all Lawa speaking children and most of the teachers at kindergarten spoke Lawa because they needed the language to communicate with the children during the first year. For this reason Lawa teachers generally teach the younger children, although I met three Northern Thai kindergarten teachers in the Eastern Lawa schools who were able to communicate in Eastern Lawa with their students.

Early education in the mother tongue is also consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979, pp. 255–263) ecological model of human development where what happens in the classroom is dependent on the environments linking home with school and the larger community with home. It allows parental involvement in education and reinforces respect for traditional culture and language, ultimately reinforcing self-respect of the individual learner. However, I met strong resistance from children and teachers when we trialled simple reading instruction in Lawa language (§4.3.1). This resistance is described in chapter four but it is not inconsistent with the picture already described of Lawa language and identity being independent of institutions such as school and government.

A recent trend that has taken place in discussion of vernacular literacy is a growing awareness of the limited benefits and possible harm that can be caused by outside linguists seeking to promote vernacular literacy. In a review of Micronesian literacy programmes, it was found that (despite

large amounts of documentation, money, time and training being poured into programmes) vernacular literacy had not necessarily been advanced by the work of foreign linguists (Rehg, 2004). One of the main reasons claimed for this was that linguistic orthographic laws (such as one grapheme for one phoneme) did not hold weight in the real world of dialectical and individual variation, historical preference and competing languages. Some authors such as Mühlhäusler (1996) go so far as to claim that the standardisation caused by vernacular literacy can lead to language death. Rehg's remedy for this kind of problem is that standardisation needs to take place within a community over a long period of time rather than being enforced by foreign linguists or government departments.

William Smalley is a key figure in the study of orthography creation in Thailand. He has written the definitive text on sociolinguistics for Thailand (Smalley, 1994) as well as editing and contributing to a collection of papers on creating orthographies in ten Thai minority languages (Smalley, 1976). This collection is dated because it reflects an historical situation when many minority groups in Thailand were pre-literate (as opposed to the current situation where literacy in Thai already exists). However, it is also a unique and valuable discussion of how the Thai script may be applied to a variety of language groups. Smalley (1976, p. 3) also restricts the discussion to include only orthographies promoted with reading programmes and publication of literature. He excludes efforts by both indigenous individuals and foreign linguists or anthropologists who have not been able to follow up their work with local publications or literacy projects. Consequently the cases are confined to cases of Christian missionaries working with minority tribal groups.

Spolsky (2004, p. 28) reports that the desire to promote literacy in the national language by adapting its script to be used as a minority

vernacular script continues to this day in missionary organisations worldwide, with SIL at the forefront of studying and developing literacy in 1,320 languages.

A recent publication by SIL linguists working in Thailand (TU-SIL-LRDP Committee, 2002) covers five minority language orthographies. The introduction of this report (TU-SIL-LRDP Committee, 2002, p. xx) comments that the common thread of all five case studies is that none have been established or accepted by the communities. Each case study is proposed from a positivist rather than sociolinguistic paradigm. Once the facts have been described the linguist leaves the community with the expectation that the community will be convinced by their logic and get on with the actual implementation of the orthography.

Well-meaning foreign advocates often promote vernacular literacy as a bridge to success in the national language (Malone, 2005). While there is growing evidence that this kind of programme can benefit a community, the context is usually within a larger minority group with an established orthography and written heritage.

I was uneasy with using the goal of doing better in the Thai language education system as a motivation for vernacular literacy in the local school. Lawa culture and language must be valued beyond simply being an initial means of better integration into Thai language and society. There is strong evidence from New Zealand (Bishop & Glynn, 2003) showing that empowerment of cultural identity in schools is actually more important than the language of instruction. Learning is a means for building identity, not the other way around. In other words, the use of Lawa at school should be motivated by recognition and respect for Lawa identity. "Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity" (Wenger, 1998, p. 215).

One means used to determine the success of an orthography is the amount of literature produced using it. A useful review by Wannemacher (1998) takes 31 minority languages in Thailand and ranks them according to this criteria (i.e. whether there is a dictionary, established orthography, religious material, educational primers etc.) Eastern Lawa scores the lowest of the 31 languages. According to Wannemacher the sociolinguistic forces contributing to written development but lacking in Eastern Lawa are: high populations, existence of a main language group outside of Thailand, Christian use of the language, low levels of bilingualism (in Thai) and of Thai language education and the presence of outsiders wanting to learn the language. Wannemacher concludes that where these forces are lacking, even languages with high vitality and positive identity are unlikely to develop written language to a high level. Outside help is also unlikely to make a significant difference. Wannemacher (1998, p. 13). says that (Christian) religion is “the primary domain for the use of written minority languages in Thailand.”

However, I would contend that a possible motivating force outside of religion is an awareness of language endangerment. The extent that this awareness motivates ownership of written development is a theme of this study.

My conclusion is that although there is some literature supporting the use of vernacular literacy in education, the practical application and value of this in the Eastern Lawa situation remains doubtful. Section 4.3 will give further evidence for hesitation based on the results of my initial attempts at introducing a Lawa orthography at kindergarten level. This does not negate the importance of promoting Lawa language and identity in school. However, vernacular literacy programmes should not be dependent on government approval and outside controlled research and implementation.

### 2.2.3 The identity argument.

It is misleading to present language, learning and identity as three separate arguments for the introduction of vernacular literacy. Each of the arguments already given for language and literacy combine elements of each other and are also based on concepts of individual and group identity. Sustainable vernacular literacy is seldom an end in itself, as it is nearly always associated with political and religious movements. One clear example has been the use of the vernacular writing in African education following and supporting the African struggle to decolonise (Thiongo, 1994).

Unlike the African situation, there is no clear pre-colonial and post-colonial dichotomy in Thailand. The Eastern Lawa community has Lawa, Thai, Northern Thai and Buddhist identity constructs. Each of these overlapping identities is related to separate but overlapping languages (Lawa, Central Thai, Lanna or Northern Thai and Pali-Sanskrit).

One dichotomy that does exist is between written and oral languages. Lawa identity relies solely on intergenerational oral transmission. Thai identity is imposed and perpetuated through written language, compulsory education and mass media such as internet, television, radio and newspaper. These are the powerful tools of nationalism which can replace traditional community identity (Anderson, 1991).

Traditional oral transmission (called orality as opposed to literacy) is an art form in itself. It includes the ability to compose sayings, stories and songs spontaneously based on an understanding of oral formulae, proper names and traditional thematic material (Foley, 1985; Jousse, 1992; Lord, 2000; Magoun, 1953; Parry, 1930). I would argue that oral language transmission without these skills is an indicator of future language death.

Evidence of this loss of orality among Eastern Lawa under the age of 60 is the lack of knowledge of proverbs. Proverbs are a key oral form for transmitting cultural values and identity; they can be called “a compact treatise on the values of culture” (Seidensticker, 2000, p. 8). It is argued that cultures have a *paremiological minimum* (Permyakov, 1973), which means knowledge of a basic set of proverbs that is essential for full membership of a community. When a language has an orthography it is possible to transform this kind of cultural knowledge from an oral to a written form and incorporate that knowledge in practices of literacy. Without a writing system this kind of cultural knowledge is lost through the dislocation of modern life where children are separated from elders by both schooling and urbanisation. Chapter six describes the Lawa community’s reaction to our initial use of vernacular literacy to display Lawa proverbs.

A new form of orality is also emerging in the age of electronic media, especially internet (Finnegan, 1992; Foley, 2002; Pettitt, 2007). This kind of social practice has similar characteristics to orality because electronic media can involve appropriation of collective knowledge and thematic networking (Kenny, 2011, p. 32). Texts, emails and chat rooms also decrease the formality of the writing domain and of orthography restraints. The undermining of orthodox spelling by youth in electronic media is a common complaint in Thai newspapers. I have seen several tentative examples of communication in Lawa using these domains. Access and incentive to develop these skills has been lacking but there is interest and potential among the Eastern Lawa youth.

An example of this potential is the interaction I observed between high school students from Bo Luang attending a seminar presented by a Payap University student. He spoke about his own project using Zhuang orthography in China on a facebook type site. This generated a strong

interest by the Lawa students to develop a Lawa orthography for internet use. Further development of this interest would require school support because that was the main source of internet access for the students.

There has also been a movement in recent years to document endangered languages through digital technology (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006; Grenoble, 2010; Himmelmann, 1998). Like vernacular literacy, technology controlled and understood only by outsiders is unlikely to generate community ownership and sustainability. Digital literacy may be an important factor for both language development and vernacular literacy. The lack of formality and networking in internet communication provide potential for experimentation and group participation in orthography design.

It is important to recognise that identity is not transmitted by language alone, but also by the form and uses that language is put to. Oral cultures are dependent on art forms such as songs, proverbs and story telling for the transmission of identity to the next generation. These are often lost in modern Thai society where education and mass media are important transmitters of identity. Access to these transmitters usually depends on written rather than oral communication. Supporting oral cultures by preserving oral content with a community orthography is an important aspect of language revitalisation. Contemporary digital technology offers a possible merging of orality and literacy. The internet allows a grass roots exploration of language using speech, writing and images. Networking and lack of standardisation may enable community collaboration that is difficult to create through academic research.

### **2.3 How Should Eastern Lawa be Put Into Writing?**

An orthography can be defined as a writing system which is standardised in both content (graphemes and punctuation marks) and in application

(rules for writing and pronunciation) (Coulmas, 2003, p. 35; Seifart, 2006, p. 277). There are a number of reference books and articles which contain descriptions and classifications of existing and historical orthographies (Bright & Daniels, 1996; Coulmas, 2003; H. Rogers, 2005). However, I have tried to review the more specialised literature covering the creation of an orthography.

An emphasis on a phonemic basis for new orthographies can be found in most of the practical guides for language development workers that have been published over the last 60 years (Pike, 1947; Smalley, 1963; Gudchinsky, 1973; Malone, 2004; Powlison, 1968; Robinson & Gadellii, 2003). There is also a strong bottom-up reading assumption (i.e. we read by decoding graphemes, then syllables, then words, then phrases etc.) implicit in the belief that phoneme-grapheme correspondence is very important for reading. Gerbault (1997) describes the approach to orthography design of the Central Institute of Indian Languages in India:

First, a linguistic description is obtained or made. Secondly, the phonemic inventory is mapped onto the alphabet of the standard script of the language used at the state level; thirdly a trilingual dictionary of about 2,000 words is prepared. Rules for the spelling system are evolved, and primers written. The primer and dictionary are handed over to the State Education Department for use in primary schools. The basic purpose is to provide initial literacy to the child in his own tribal language and to ensure a gradual transfer to the state's standard language and its writing system. (Gerbault, 1997, pp. 178–179)

Analysis of this approach, which I label as *positivist*, clarifies key issues in orthography research. The approach described is based on synchronic descriptive linguistics. It treats language as an autonomous object which may be studied and used as the key criteria for orthography decisions. The foundation of such an approach is that, “a good orthography is simply one which represents all phonological contrasts” (Seifart, 2006, p. 275). The goal of an orthography is simply to enable a person to “read and understand everything he would have understood if it had been spoken to him; and to write, so that it can be read, anything he can say” (Bhola, 1994, p. 8).

The approach is also prescriptive. Based on the supposed factuality of the linguistic description, a top-down solution to the writing problem is provided by the state to the linguistic community. This top-down solution covers all three aspects of language planning (Cooper, 1989): corpus planning, acquisition planning and status planning. Prescribed orthographies are examples of corpus planning because they are generally followed by an official dictionary showing what words belong to the language and how these words should be spelt. Gerbault’s (1997) description includes materials (a primer) and an agent (the state education department) for the acquisition of the desired orthography. The desired status of the language belonging to the new orthography is made explicit in that the desire is for “gradual transfer to the state’s standard language and its writing” (Gerbault, 1997, p. 179).

Examples of positivist, prescriptive approaches are common and not just confined to state governments. From earliest times, the process of putting speech into writing has been associated with religious activity. This association is summarised by the claim that “alphabet follows religion” (Diringer, 1948). Over the last century much of the research on putting minority languages into writing has been associated with Bible translation

(Nida, 1990; Pike, 1947; Smalley, 1963) and accompanying vernacular literacy programmes (Gudchinsky, 1973; Stringer, 1987; Waters, 1998). These writers recognised the importance of community acceptance of an orthography but better linguistic description was promoted as the means to that acceptance.

One problem with a linguistic focus is that linguistic issues are separated from social ones. A second problem is that an artificial barrier is drawn around language that hides the multilingual nature of real life discourse. Lawa, like most minority languages, has imported many words from the national language. This means that orthographic depth (semantic representation) and similarity to national script become the same issue (i.e. should the Thai root word be recognisable in Lawa script or should the script reflect the way the word is pronounced within the Lawa phonology). Furthermore, the rules of how Thai script is used and pronounced are based on Thai phonology and are not as flexible as those concerning an alphabetic writing script, which most theoretical discussion of orthography development is limited to (Seifart, 2006). Nearly all writing systems are adaptations of previously existing ones (Spolsky, 2004, p. 28). If linguists confine their analysis within one language system, their recommendations will be theoretically correct but practically unusable.

An alternative approach is to shift the context of linguistic research from being within the confines of a given (idealised) language to a more ecological model (Haugen, 1972). Research can then incorporate variation, other relevant languages, domains of use and historical and sociological aspects.

This more ecological approach was already apparent in an early paper by Sjoberg (1964). Sjoberg identified the following three topics as important in developing a writing system: orientation towards the larger society, the

history of writing systems in the area, and the extent the writing system must cover several divergent dialects.

The first significant text on orthography from a sociolinguistic perspective was Joshua Fishman's *Advances in the Creation and Revision of Writing Systems* (1977). Fishman chose case studies of languages which were well established with clear majority or minority power status. This placed orthography development into the academic discourse of language policy and planning (Cooper, 1989; Fishman, 1974; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Spolsky, 2004).

However, as already seen in Gerbault's (1997) description of orthography design in India, there are problems with a language planning model. It is often centralised, top down, intolerant of diversity and insensitive to actual practices and beliefs of a society. One response to this kind of centralisation of orthography design is found in Mark Sebba's work (2007, 2009), where he argues that there is no reason to believe that uniformity is an essential component of successful orthography. Sebba promotes recognising the natural development of orthography and makes the case for this historically and in contemporary society through electronic writing such as texting and internet.

Another response to top down planning is made by Eira (as cited in Sebba, 2009, p. 41), who believes that the clash between political and social considerations in orthography design can be analysed into conflicts between different types of discourses: scientific, political, religious, technological, historical, and pedagogical. What is important in one discourse is irrelevant in another. The danger is that these discourses become irrelevant to communities because they are only partial analyses of a complex problem.

Writers concerned with language policy are increasingly drawing on these diverse discourses in their research. Spolsky (2004, pp. 39–42) described his own language policy theory as having four main features:

1. theory is not just concerned with named varieties of languages (scripts) but with all the individual elements such as pronunciation, spelling, lexical choice, grammar and style.
2. theory operates in a speech community of any size from a family to a village organisation to local government to national government and beyond.
3. theory can be divided into three parts: practices, beliefs, and plans and policies which attempt to modify these practices and beliefs.
4. theory operates in a complex ecological relationship among a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic elements.

The application of Spolsky's language policy theory to orthography development highlights the key issues discussed in this section. Languages are not monolithic; they are made up of diverse elements such as pronunciation and lexical choice. These elements are also diverse because they differ between communities, especially between smaller community levels like families and villages. The belief that orthographies are based on scientific descriptions of *the language* hides the political reality of decisions in research which favour one variety of language over another. This issue is at the centre of the problems I experienced that are described in chapter four.

Secondly, there is no necessary alignment between what a community practises, what it believes it practises and what others want it to practise (plans and policies). This is the fundamental issue of community ownership of orthography development.

Thirdly, language (and writing) cannot be separated from the historic, political, social, religious, cultural and economic influences on a community's or individual's identity. The lack of commonality between these discourses in academic theory highlights the need for a more ecological approach.

While action research offers a solution to the problem of alignment between beliefs and practices, action research will not automatically recognise this multiple discourse perspective of identity. Chapter three describes a holistic type of action research based on the various streams of action research as well as concepts and practices from the discipline of ethnography. I developed this approach in response to the issues of diversity, authenticity and complexity that have been raised in this chapter. I am not claiming that problems were comprehensively solved but there was a growing clarity during the research because of the methodology chosen.

## Chapter Three: Methodological Approach

The literature reviewed in chapter two identified problems with the generally positivist paradigm found in field linguistics and orthography research. These problems have led me to develop a more flexible and holistic methodology. This methodology is most accurately described as action research grounded in ethnography.

At the heart of action research is a cyclical concept of action, followed by feedback, followed by planning for further action. This means context and feedback dictate the ongoing design and objectives of research. Action research may seem pragmatic but there is freedom to make explicit and challenge theoretical issues at a paradigmatic level.

Methodology is normally determined by the paradigm (Kuhn, 1970) a researcher works from (i.e. the beliefs, values and techniques belonging to the scientific community which the researcher is part of). Guba and Lincoln (1994) claim there are four major research paradigms: positivism, constructivism, critical theory and realism. Action research is not necessarily attached to any of these paradigms. This gives the researcher freedom to include and act upon all forms of data. Such an open approach is ideal for the kind of exploratory research required for Eastern Lawa and for the holistic research needed for language policy and planning. However, research is intrusive, especially action research. In the words of Anderson and Herr:

... (action) research is all about delving deeply into areas and sites in which they (the researchers) are already involved with the intent to disturb the settings they investigate. (Anderson & Herr, 2010, p. 313)

Given this concern for disturbance, I have sought guidelines from another methodology, ethnography, which deal with the conduct and positioning of an outside researcher within a community.

The first part of this chapter describes the influence that various branches of action research theory have had on my evolving methodology. Section 3.2 discloses important elements of my relationship with the Lawa community. Guidelines from ethnography highlight the importance of both considering and disclosing these elements. Despite these guidelines, this research recognises the limitations of research which is controlled and carried out by someone outside an indigenous community. Section 3.3 introduces the concept of indigenous research methods contrasted to both action research and ethnography.

### **3.1 Types of Action Research**

Action research is a term first used by the social psychologist Kurt Lewin, who was concerned with Jewish minority identity and integration in post-war America (Lewin, 1946). According to Laluevein (2006), Lewin was a key figure in social and educational psychology, laying theoretical foundations for the later theories of community, identity and learning which were constructed by both Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Wenger (1998) and discussed previously in section 2.2.2.

It was Lewin's desire to turn social psychology theory into a research model that would help to change society for the better. This continues to be an objective of action research. The researcher is freed from the role of outside observer and is able to acknowledge the influence their research has within a community. Theory combined with practice becomes what Paulo Freire called *praxis* defined as, "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2000, p. 51).

Praxis is obviously political in that it concerns issues of power. Action research is often aligned with Freire's political views to stop research becoming a tool for continued social prescription imposed by the powerful upon the powerless. For example, if vernacular orthography is imposed on a community as a stepping stone to literacy in the national language, then such an act is quite similar to Freire's "false generosity" (Freire, 2000, p. 44) which simply reinforces the status quo.

This concept of *false generosity* is particularly important when working with minority indigenous people. An agenda set by outsiders may appear to be participatory in that a community is consulted and involved. However, it is still an outside agenda because outsiders are acting as advocates of an oppressed group in the belief that they know better than members of that group.

Simply listening to the diverse views of a group is, however, not necessarily less prescriptive. Action research that empowers needs to reveal more than contemporary popular opinion. This is the most obvious problem in a purely participatory approach. Empowerment implies the ability to recognise and examine values which are held and the sources of those values. Most Eastern Lawa people I spoke with initially saw no value in putting their own language into writing. They were concerned with the economic future of their communities and academic success of their children in the Thai education system. These objectives were understandable but outside influence had already imposed a lack of connection and value to traditional culture and language because of these goals.

Action research aimed at empowerment rather than a simple survey of popular opinion has tried to incorporate a variety of techniques including needs assessment, problem solving, collaboration and demystification (Reinharz, 1992). Emphasis on one dimension has led to at least five

action research streams (Bradbury-Huang, 2010). These streams, while not mutually exclusive, highlight the strengths of action research. They are: Action Science (Argyris, 2003; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Senge, 2006), Cooperative (Appreciative) Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Heron & Reason, 2006; Seel, 2008), Participatory Action Research (Archer & Cottingham, 1996; Freire, 1972), Developmental Action Inquiry (Fisher & Torbert, 1995; Torbert, 2001, 2004) and Living Theory Approach (McNiff, 2002; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006; Whitehead, 2008).

Common to all streams of action research is a methodology consisting of repeated cycles of reflection, planning, action, and observation (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). These repeated cycles allow for changes in methodology, objectives and interpretation during the course of a research project.

Argyris (2003) founded so called *action science* on the ideas of both Kubie (1958) and Fromm (1955) claiming that injustices, inefficiencies and neurotic practices cannot be righted by simplistic changes (e.g. the introduction of a writing system) to the social and physical environment people live in. A deeper systematic change is required. Action science practitioners call this *double loop learning* because feedback on initial actions is reflected on and further action is then planned to address systematic causes of the original issue. The structure of this thesis reflects the concept of double loop learning. Chapter four reports on my attempts to introduce writing in the Eastern Lawa language. Chapter five addresses more systematic issues that are revealed in chapter four. The double loop learning that takes place is in the breaking of my preconceived model of how to do orthographic research.

Argyris (2003, p. 1189) acknowledges that a significant proportion of his work is devoted to questioning the ideas and norms of the scholarly research community. Argyris (2003, p. 1181) cites Kuhn's (1970) portrayal

of disciplinary paradigms as evidence of academic disciplines' inability to break out of single-loop learning where the values and norms of neither the researchers nor the researched are questioned. Underlying beliefs and values within a community are often ignored by academic disciplines such as linguistics. Values and motivations may not be easily measured or recorded but they are essential information to social innovations such as vernacular literacy.

Stegen (2003) describes an orthography design project amongst Rangi speakers in Tanzania as participatory action research. The research is significant because participants were invited into the research process. These participants worked in groups that were representative of major interests (religious, traditional and economic). The participants understood the goals of the project and were encouraged to write their own words during phonology elicitation and to discuss linguistic hypotheses. Such an approach would create better community involvement than that which is normally created by basing an orthography on a word list transcribed by an outside linguist. However, the influence this involvement has on decision making would depend on the flexibility and willingness of the coordinator to go beyond pre-set outside objectives. Involvement also necessitated that participants were literate in the national language, educated and bilingual. Such people may not be the best advocates of traditional identity as they may represent only an elite few. Furthermore, their advanced education experiences may have distanced them from traditional forms of beliefs and educational practices. The dependence on bilingual, educated participants arose from the researcher (like myself) lacking fluency in the local language and being dependent on the national language.

Given the difficulty of an outsider authentically researching and representing an indigenous community, it is tempting to categorise my

experience with Lawa orthography simply as a personal growth project for myself. One branch of action research, Developmental Action Inquiry (Fisher & Torbert, 1995; Torbert, 2001, 2004), focuses primarily on the personal development of the inquirer (researcher). McNiff (2002, p.7) calls action research “an enquiry conducted by the self into the self.”

However, action research can produce more than the personal growth of the researcher. The emphasis on cooperation with a community should transform both researchers and the community as they learn to appreciate the strengths that already reside in that community. This is the main theme of Cooperative (Appreciative) Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Seel, 2008). In my case, transformation came from recognising the power and importance of orality for a language without writing. My thinking shifted from advocating orthography as a means of advancement (deficit thinking) to advocating orthography as a means of sustaining what was already there (appreciative thinking). It would be disappointing if this change in me did not also stimulate changes in the Eastern Lawa appreciation of their own identity. Heron and Reason (2006, p. 152) declare that the ideal outcome of action research is “transformative practice that changes our way of being and doing and relating, and our world.”

The lack of a common paradigm within action research has attracted accusations of causing “‘weak’, ‘messy’, ‘muddled science’ and ‘sloppy research’” (Piggot-Irvine & Bartlett, 2008, p. 16). The weakness of these accusations is that it is difficult to understand why the current world-view of a group of adherents to a particular academic discipline would somehow be more valid or relevant than the values, beliefs and methodologies of the people group that the research is about. Even so, without established guidelines to communicate research findings, action *research* is only action *learning* (Zuber-Skerritt, 2005). One essential distinction that turns

learning into research is the ability to communicate to outside parties because of an understandable framework.

Whitehead (2011) uses the philosophical ideas of both Polanyi (1974) and Habermas (1976) to defend validity of his Living Theory approach to action research. This has given a philosophical foundation to Living Theory's academic journal *EJOLTS* (<http://ejolts.net/>) and a number of educational theses that have been written recently within the Living Theory framework (<http://www.actionresearch.net/>).

Whitehead desires reconciliation between academic validity and the researcher's subjective interaction during action research. I found myself as the researcher also seeking to reconcile the indigenous paradigm of the Eastern Lawa with expected norms of the Western academic paradigms. This three way interaction of indigenous community, researcher and academic paradigms is not addressed by action research. Similarly, an ethnographic approach as described in section 3.2 addresses the interaction between the researcher and the community, not the challenge of an indigenous world-view to academic paradigms. This limitation will be discussed further in section 3.3.

While action research may not address issues at a paradigm level, it has enabled me to become aware of these issues. Participatory Action Research rooted in Freire's concern for empowerment has forced me to not only record but to also respond to the actions and words of participants. The goal has been ownership rather than passive assent to an orthography designed according to preset linguistic theory. Cooperative (Appreciative) Inquiry has allowed me to give weight to opinions expressed by the community as well as to the Indic (Brahmi) tradition of script design (C). Action Science, however, provides a caution to the assumption that an expressed opinion represents the authentic beliefs and values of a community. This caution creates an awareness of the need to

find data outside of simple survey or interview methods. Both Developmental Action Inquiry and Living Theory have focused more on accounting for my own position and growth as a researcher than on interaction with indigenous communities. This has also indirectly supported indigenous research methodologies by exposing the myth of objectivity in research and providing examples of academic research that are not based on claims of objective researcher-independent science.

Although action research as described above should begin to reveal culturally appropriate means of research, there is no explicit objective of cultural investigation. Nor is there a specific set of guidelines for dealing with an indigenous culture different from that of the researcher's. For this reason I have added ethnographic guidelines to the concepts of action research. The guidelines are quite similar to those promoted by Whitehead's (2011) Living Theory approach because they are built around disclosure by the researcher protecting participants and improving communicability. The ethnographic dimension discussed in section 3.2 is not a separate dimension from the streams of action research already described. It simply helps to make explicit the relationship between action research and the issues that arise when a Western researcher interacts with an indigenous community.

### **3.2 The Ethnographic Dimension**

Ethnography is the science committed to describing an insider's view (Malinowski, 1922; Spradley, 1979). Despite much progress since Malinowski, our ability to achieve this goal will be limited as long as the one doing the describing is an outsider. This describer has classically been a Western academic who presents examples of the community's world-view in the form of key cultural themes. Interviews (Spradley, 1979) or observations (Spradley, 1980) are means of gathering data but the themes are generally revealed through the process of critical reflection by

the researcher. Ideally (from the perspective of action research which seeks positive change in the community) this critical reflection should come from within the community. The action research processes I have used are aimed at progressively shifting the act of critical reflection away from myself and more onto indigenous participants.

Clifford James Geertz (1926-2006) was a key figure in shaping the disciplines of anthropology and ethnography in the second half of the twentieth century and has produced a criterion of validity for ethnography which addresses some of the concerns raised by action research literature. Geertz emphasised that ethnographies should not be treated like positivist, experiment-based, research reports. “They are interpretations, or misinterpretations, like any others, arrived at in the same way as any others, and the attempt to invest them with the authority of physical experimentation is but methodological sleight of hand” (Geertz, 1973, p. 23).

Geertz suggested that validity could be found by including what he called a *minimally acceptable table of contents* in a methodological description (Geertz, 1988). Geertz gives six headings for such a table of contents. I have used these as the five sub-headings in the rest of this section (headings four and five are combined into section 3.2.4).

1. **The researcher’s preconceived ideas.** Although action research may be paradigm independent, the researcher is not. It is important to be explicit about preconceived ideas even though these may change during the course of research. These preconceived ideas will also influence the researcher’s motivations and personal interests.
2. **The researcher’s modes of entry and exit.** These are ethically important because they reveal the consent and

expectations by the community as well as the fulfilment of these expectations by the researcher.

3. **The researcher's sustained method of presence or participation.** Understanding how the researcher operates within a community gives greater understanding of how data was collected and how conclusions were made.
4. **The responses of others on the scene to the researcher's presence and vice-versa.** Action research by definition involves interaction between the researcher and the community. In ethnography the interaction is reported on. Action research goes further by making observations and reflection on interaction to be part of the data for decision making on how the researcher will interact next.
5. **The nature of the researcher's relationship with various categories of informants.** The word *informants* comes from ethnography. The type of action research I have pursued seeks to encourage community members to be participants in research rather than simply informants. Participants have some ownership and management of research, whereas informants are simply sources of data. The categorisation and description of types of people involved reveals to what extent each group was able to be developed as participants.
6. **The researcher's modes of data collection, storage, retrieval and analysis.** These will take quite different forms depending on the level of participation of the community. The less participation the community has, the greater the need for detailed data management because the researcher is often analysing the data at a physical and time distance from the community.

Conversely, the more a community participates, the more the researcher is likely to focus on the findings of the community rather than his or her independent findings.

### **3.2.1 Preconceived ideas, motivations and personal interests.**

I began with a positivist approach to data collection and analysis. I expected my role in orthography creation would be to provide linguistic facts. I also believed in a clear division between languages so that both outsiders and insiders could identify when a member of the community was speaking Lawa or Thai or Northern Thai. Related to this is the idealised notion that all languages are equal, or, in the words of Hymes, “the common assumptions of American linguists that languages are immune to inadequacy, that their historical evolutions do not affect the essential equality and functional equivalence of all languages in their communities” (1977, p. 72).

Another assumption I held was that the preservation of indigenous language and culture is a good thing given the rapid destruction of the world’s languages in the face of modern communication, mobility and compulsory education (Crystal, 2002). I linked this assumption to the belief that literacy in Lawa would be a desired commodity as an important step in reversing language loss (Fishman, 1991).

In terms of motivation, my own world-view made me sympathetic to the conservative moral values reflected in Lawa family structures and proverbs. I was not, therefore, an unbiased observer, but an active participant in promoting the preservation of Lawa culture and identity, which I viewed positively. This personal interest enabled me to consult and enlist the help of the leading Buddhist monks in the community in both endorsing and displaying the initial steps towards Lawa orthography that

were contained in the proverb signs we used to promote the writing of Lawa (§5.3).

An expert on Christianity and indigenous African culture, Bediako (1999) has pointed out two distinct attitudes towards culture that have been evident in the Christian church from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. One attitude embraces all cultures as containing different expressions of truth (following Clement of Alexandria). Another sees diverse cultures as competition for the one true expression of a Christian world-view (following Tertullian). I place myself in the Clement of Alexandria camp. Although this was tentatively true at the beginning of my research, exposure to Lawa traditional wisdom has increased my commitment to this position.

In terms of my interests in the Lawa orthography project, I identified with the following words of Dunn:

It is obvious that professional scholars working in linguistics are likely to have a high esteem for the written word, and that linguistic fieldworkers have a vested interest in vernacular languages. For many, linguistic scholarship is a vocation, and important aspects of the fieldworker-linguist's identity are built around concern for the many small and endangered languages of the world. A neutral perspective is difficult to achieve in these circumstances. (Dunn, 2007, p. 218)

It was my initial awareness of this academic interest that prompted me to undertake my research in an action research mode. I had made an assumption that the Lawa community would be as vitally interested in orthography and language preservation as myself. This false assumption that academic interest presupposed widespread community interest was soon exposed.

There is also the question of my being identified with the Christian missionary movement. Christian volunteer workers in Thailand tend to be called *missionaries* by Thais. SIL (which I was a member of) is involved in minority language Bible translation projects, and orthography development is a first step towards this process. Similar to other members of SIL, I would claim that my presence with the Lawa people was spiritually motivated from the sense of valuing culture and the individuals within it.

I am aware of the suspicion that some academics have towards SIL. There has been an ongoing dichotomy of academic anthropologists being portrayed as the preservers of culture and evangelical missionaries typically presented as antagonistic to traditional culture. Edwards (2009, pp. 123–125) devotes three pages in a text on language and identity to a critical account of SIL's work with minority languages, claiming that SIL's respect for indigenous cultures and desire to facilitate moral transformation is rather illogical. He questions, "Why should native cultures, 'blessed of God', stand in need of transformation at all?" (Edwards, 2009, p. 124). This is a philosophical and theological argument that I will not pursue here. I believe a more important question concerns the practical outcomes of a Christian-based organisation working with indigenous people groups, specifically SIL in Northern Thailand.

Edwards cites Headland's (1996) article dealing with the relationship between evangelicals and academics. Edwards agrees with Headland that,

The real reason for the ever-present tensions here has less to do with the documented instances in which missionaries have created cultural and linguistic problems where none need have arisen, and much more to do with the clash of ideologies: secular

liberalism versus conservative fundamentalism.  
(Edwards, 2009, p. 125)

I agree with both Edwards and Headland on this point. The clash they refer to belongs to conservative fundamentals and secular liberals in the Western academic community rather than to daily relations in Northern Thailand. Spirituality is an expected and accepted part of life in a society where young men are expected to be trained as monks when they enter adulthood. Christianity tends to be viewed favourably as part of Western culture and Christian workers are welcome as long as the monarchy and Buddhism are not criticised.

### **3.2.2 Mode of entry and exit.**

My mode of entry into the community is described in chapter one. My mode of exit became an important guiding consideration during my research. A thesis written in English or even an academic summary or translation in Thai would be irrelevant to nearly all members of the community. My mode of exit consisted therefore of seeking to empower Lawa participants in ongoing research as well as the traditional publishing of Lawa proverbs in a traditional orthography. These are described in chapter five.

There are also visible and anticipated continuing effects of my research. The relationships I formed within the community have made this an ongoing research site for linguistics students from Payap University. One student is currently (i.e. 2013) working on learning the language in order to produce a grammar and dictionary for his Masters thesis in linguistics. It is also my intention to translate key parts of this thesis into Thai so that members of the Lawa community can critique it. This critique is not designed to authenticate my research but rather to use it as part of the

ongoing dialogue required within the community to establish their own system of writing.

### **3.2.3 Sustained presence in the community.**

Spending periods of time in the community resulted in my assuming at least three roles when interacting with the community. I was welcomed as a doctoral student from New Zealand. I was also known as a lecturer from Payap university. I was also valued as an English teacher at the school. Each role created opportunities for different kinds of engagements. For example, in my role as a lecturer from Payap university I was able to bring two teams of graduate students to the Bo Luang village for linguistic research. A highlight of this relationship was a graduate student from a minority people group in China (Zhuang) giving a seminar to Lawa students and teachers on how he and other members of his people group have promoted their identity and language through both the internet and rock music.

In my role as an English teacher I was able to interact with and observe daily life in the Bo Luang community. I was also able to encourage the use of Lawa in the classroom and in formal school life including songs and a speech competition (§4.3).

However, there was also an ambiguity in each of my additional roles. The students I introduced from Payap university were focused on their own objectives and paid for participants to help their linguistic research. This endangered the collaborative environment which I had tried to build with the community. Use of Lawa in the English classroom was tolerated but not really understood by my Thai teaching colleagues. I was also giving a mixed message by introducing the goal of better marks in external English examinations along with the importance of being Lawa. Ultimately, my role

as English teacher endangered my research because there was no community ownership of my classroom lessons.

I have already discussed the tension of conflicting and overlapping identities with regard to Lawa identity (§1.2.3). It is not surprising that I should discover similar tension in my roles during action research. I believe that resolution to both types of tension comes from recognising and honouring the indigenous knowledge of the Lawa. By the time I left in 2012 I had discarded my other roles and was simply a doctoral student acknowledging my desire to learn from Lawa culture. This meant a shift in my perspective from seeing myself as one with much to offer to seeing myself as one with much to learn.

#### **3.2.4 Relationship to participants.**

I classify participants in this study into five categories: Lawa school students, Lawa school teachers, non-Lawa members of the school community, Lawa members of the outside (non-school) community and non-Lawa members of the outside (non-school) community. These classifications were based on cultural identification through language (Lawa or non-Lawa) and relationship to the school where I was initially based (student, teacher, community member).

I acknowledge that this kind of classification leans heavily on the informant rather than the participant side of the community ownership continuum. Participant self-classification would be a much more desirable approach. However, action research did provide a theoretical foundation for re-focusing on different types of participants. For example, category four developed from my arbitrary concept of committee members into contributors of proverbs and songs and empowered participants.

## **Category 1: Lawa students at the school.**

**Description:** Lawa students at school were children aged from four to seventeen. They were divided into three sections: kindergarten, elementary and high school. Boys and girls were mixed at all age levels. There were approximately 500 children at the school. Teachers' estimates of how many spoke Lawa varied from 95% to 100%. I occasionally met a non-Lawa speaking student, but the language of the playground that I witnessed was certainly Lawa.

**Kinds of data collected:** The main form of data recorded from students was in my notes gathered through participant observation as well as teacher reports from the classroom (§4.3).

The older students enjoyed listening in to their teachers when I was recording phonological data and they would often contribute vocabulary or pronunciation. I was also given the results of an exercise which asked students to write Thai words in English and Lawa (an exercise that the English teacher had given to the high school students). Both of these types of interaction contributed to the results found in sections 4.1 and 4.2.

Written permission to do this kind of research in the school was given to me by the school principal and by the education area office. Permission from families and individual students was neither expected within the community culture nor practical. I therefore felt an ethical commitment to ensure that my research was mainly participant observation and my role when participating was contributing to the education of the children.

**Reaction to my presence:** The students were quite shy about speaking English and refused to do so outside of formal classroom activities. However, they delighted in testing my Lawa language to see how much (little) progress I was making. Classroom interaction was noisy and it was difficult to maintain attention. Playground and

community interaction was always pleasant, as long as I did not try to elicit English language from them. When I did they would quickly disappear with embarrassed shrieks and giggles. This was a little uncomfortable as the principal and other staff kept urging me to improve the students' English.

The second stage of my research (chapter five) moved away from student participation because I was trying to encourage adult community ownership of the process. However, my previous interaction with students had constructed a common cause with older members in the community, as my research was considered at least benign and perhaps beneficial.

### **Category 2: Lawa teachers at the school.**

**Description:** During the course of this research there were between four and seven Lawa teachers at the school. All were born in the community and were related to many of the students. Two of them (Teacher A and Teacher B) initially requested help in writing down their language for local curriculum activities. At the beginning of the project, all Lawa teachers worked at the lower end of the school where students' Thai language was weakest. Unfortunately, after one year the principal at the time stopped this policy and put Lawa teachers into the high school where discipline was difficult for Thai teachers.

**Kinds of data collected:** Phonological data was collected from teachers A, B and C. All Lawa teachers expressed opinions and views through both interviews and casual conversations. These teachers signed individual informed consent forms for involvement in this research (Appendix E).

**Reaction to my presence:** Although Teacher A and Teacher B were strong joint participants in the phonological research, both got promotions in non-Lawa speaking schools and moved away.

However, both my wife and I became involved with their extended family (they are sisters) and attended Teacher B's wedding and visited Teacher A in hospital after the birth of her son.

Teacher C became a strong collaborator from the end of 2009. I was asked by the school to help provide funding for her salary during 2010 because the Thai government took funding away from special needs. However, I made it clear that the funding was for her work as a special needs teacher not for the research, which was voluntary. In 2011 Teacher C was suddenly widowed leaving her with two small children. She was beginning to supplement her income by making wooden signs from the traditional Lawa proverbs we had made to be posted in temples, the school and the wider community. By 2012 she was re-employed at the school and strongly supportive of using Lawa in the classroom but, understandably, very busy with a young family and work demands.

Teacher D was the kindergarten teacher and her increasingly negative reaction to using Lawa at school is reported in chapter four.

The other teachers (E, F and G) were less personally involved but were connected through extended family (all Lawa teachers in the community seemed to be related in some way) and were supportive and interested in the research I was doing.

Similar to students, as my focus shifted to the community outside of school in stage two, so my interaction with most teachers decreased. The exception to this was Teacher C, who had not been trained externally at Thai university and could not easily move location to a non-Lawa community.

### **Category 3: Non-Lawa teachers at the school.**

**Description:** All other teachers at the Bo Luang school, except for myself, were Northern Thai. There were from 12-20 other teachers at any one time on campus. There was a rapid turnover of teachers but

several teachers were long-term (including Teacher H, the English teacher). These long-term teachers took up residence in the school compound or in the village and raised their children in the community. Most teachers, however, commuted weekly and lived in temporary housing for four nights before returning to their homes near Chiang Mai city. The two principals and deputy principals I worked with were in this category.

**Kinds of data collected:** Data originated as comments from casual conversations and participant observation.

**Reaction to my presence:** I noticed some divisions between the Lawa and non-Lawa teachers. For example, there was a period of strikes protesting against the first principal. The Lawa teachers carried on teaching while the non-Lawa stayed away. This did not seem to affect my relationship with the non-Lawa teachers. They enjoyed practising English with me and appreciated my attempts at the Northern Thai dialect.

The school also proudly displayed my name in gold letters on the office wall staff list and I was welcome to attend staff meetings. Although it was acknowledged that I was researching Lawa language, my position was described as *special English teacher*. I know of three non-Lawa teachers who tried to learn some Lawa but the majority said it was too difficult and complained about the behaviour of the children.

It seemed to be a matter of pride to have a native English speaker on staff and I was often invited to formal occasions and meetings by the school principal whenever these involved visitors to the school.

Although relationships remained good there was little formal interaction during the second stage of research. One exception to this was the seminar for teachers and students I arranged with the graduate Zhuang student (§2.2.3). This was a joint seminar and the

first speaker was a Thai graduate student who spoke about methods of improving English language. It was this seminar which the school wanted to promote but the students responded very warmly to the minority language presentation also. Even so, the platform of English language teaching remained an ambiguous means of promoting Lawa language use. Stage two involved a decision to move away from this platform and consequently away from frequent interaction with Lawa students.

**Category 4: Lawa members of the outside (non-school) community.**

**Description:** Subcategories within this are:

- a. members of the language committee
- b. contributors of songs and proverbs
- c. empowered participants

**a. Members of the language committee:** The language committee existed for about four months and included all Lawa teachers at the school, the town doctor, the head monk at the main temple, a local council representative, the town elder and the elected deputy mayor. All Lawa teachers were female, all other members of the committee were male. All members of the language committee signed informed consent forms (Appendix E) during the first meeting.

**Kinds of data collected:** These consisted of participant observation and casual conversations and formal interviews summarised and translated by P (category 5).

**Reaction to my presence:** Although enthusiastic at first, the committee quickly lost interest in discussion of orthography issues. I found that the only way to obtain ideas was through individual interviews which I employed P to undertake.

**b. Contributors of songs and proverbs:** Formal elicitation took place with older members of the community. The main informants were three women and two men. The concept of informed consent was difficult to convey. The oldest member became visibly annoyed when I tried to obtain oral consent. She insisted emphatically that if she had not wanted to tell me she would not have. Now that she had told me, the words were mine to do with as I wished. It was not appropriate to ask for written consent because the consent paper (in Thai language) was viewed with suspicion. The idea of individual intellectual property rights was a very Western concept. While participants were very willing to share oral information freely, signing a paper was threatening and damaging to relationships.

Another problem with the informed consent was that as time passed the specific activities referred to such as committee meetings, dictionary making and storying workshops became redundant. Even so, the administration of the form provided an opportunity to clearly explain the purpose of my research, the participants' rights and their totally voluntary involvement. This allowed the participants in the language committee to withdraw when they lost interest, a frustrating but authentic development.

In addition to those who formally contributed language material, there were also many casual participants who were members of the community that offered comments and opinions. For example, I walked around the village with proverb signs and asked people who greeted me if they could read and understand what was written. The longer I stayed in the village, the more often people would hail me and begin a conversation. Conversations took place in a mixture of Thai and Lawa. Conversations initiated by me seldom lasted long. It was best for me to be approached by individuals when they had the time and inclination to talk to me.

**Kinds of data collected:** These consisted of quotations from conversations and recorded songs and proverbs. The songs and sayings were then translated with help from Teacher C (category 2) and from P (category 5).

**Reaction to my presence:** I was treated as an honoured guest by these participants, who appreciated outside interest in their culture and language. One participant went as far as composing songs in my honour whenever I visited her. Participants appreciated CD copies of songs that I recorded.

**c. Empowered participants:**

*Empowered participants* refers to the five Lawa adults who participated in the improved phonology procedure described in section 5.1. A full description of participants, relationship and data collection will be found there because these are important results from the process of action research. Empowered participants are referred to as: Bpu K<sup>h</sup>rey (younger sister), Ar Ra (older sister), lak Ra (older brother), Bpu Bpria (younger brother) and Bpu Hmew (friend) according to their age and gender relative to me. Bpu Hmew is male and the same age as me.

Empowered participants played a different role from contributors of songs and proverbs because they directly engaged in phonological and orthographic research. However, unlike the language committee members, their traditional abilities were honoured regardless of formal education,. The need for this kind of participation will be explored over the following two chapters.

**Category 5: Non-Lawa members of the community.**

**Description:** P, an English speaking Northern Thai monk, was a major character in my research and thus needs a separate classification. The other non-Lawa members were mainly local

government workers or monks appointed to live at the village temples. P (28 years old at the time of writing) was different from most as he had been raised in the community and had a strong understanding of Lawa language. His English was also good and he had completed an undergraduate degree in English teaching while still an apprentice monk.

**Kinds of data collected:** P helped with collection, translation and interpretation of interview data, songs and proverbs. He was also instrumental in collaborating with Teacher C in the special needs class (§4.3.2) and sending me reports from Teacher C about the progress of the class.

Other non-Lawa members of the community (such as local body and education officials) were not actively involved in my research but I tried to keep them informed by calling in to the council and education offices sporadically.

**Reaction to my presence:** P was with me in my first contact with the school and took it on himself to act as translator and host when I was in the community. Similar to many apprentice monks (*nen*), P left the monkhood once he entered adulthood. At this point P helped as a translator at my university department and then undertook some introductory study in linguistics. P became an active collaborator and I became involved in his personal life, visiting his sick father in hospital and later attending his father's funeral. P stayed with my family in Chiang Mai city and I stayed at his family home in the village several times.

P was reluctant to accept money from me for his help with my research but I was able to arrange part-time work for him as a research assistant and translator at Payap University's linguistic department (for graduate student research). I was also able to contribute to his living costs while he worked with the special needs class. This was different from other participants because he was

working for the linguistics department and the school respectively rather than directly for my own research.

### **3.2.5 Modes of data entry, storage and analysis.**

Initially I collected large amounts of data in the form of audio recordings and transcriptions from word list collections with participants. I then attempted to analyse these using computer software produced by SIL called *Fieldworks* (a recent description of the this package can be found in the online journal, *Language Documentation and Conservation* (C. Rogers, 2010). My own field notes (in English) were also typed into the data notebook section of this integrated language package. Recordings in Thai or Lawa that these field notes were based on were generally not transcribed but were linked as raw sound files to the English field notes.

There were a number of problems with this approach. Firstly, storage and analysis by computer hides but does not change the subjective origin of the data. This will be discussed in chapter four. Secondly, *Fieldworks* is a technical programme which is quite impossible for non-English speakers who have not been trained in linguistic theory and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to use. Thirdly, I found myself spending large amounts of time at the computer making linguistic decisions in total isolation from the community. The community were informants not participants in the processing, analysis and storage of the data.

As I progressed from words to meaningful oral texts, such as conversations, monologues, proverbs and songs, I needed to involve participants by playing back recordings and collecting phrase-for-phrase or sometimes word-for-word translations into Thai. This generated helpful discussion and interest, but the next step was input into my computer

database which further emphasised that I was the researcher and the community were informants.

Later work was able to be more participatory as I gave up the pursuit of a *correct phonology* and *scientifically proven* orthography proposal. The trial orthography described in chapter five was able to be used for texts such as songs and proverbs. This enabled entry and editing with computers that were owned by two participants (Teacher C and Bpu Hmew) on simple word processors. Even so, there was little public engagement with the orthography except in the format of proverb signs (§5.3), which could be physically presented and commented on.

What became important by the end of the research was the realisation that I was modelling appreciation of Lawa culture and knowledge. I was also inviting participation into and giving permission for community analysis of sounds and community authorisation of a writing system. In addition I offered a simple suggestion for adapting the Thai writing system, but even that was based on an ancient tradition which the Lawa community was part of because of their Buddhist identity. The entry, storage and analysis of these phenomena are through interaction with individuals and the community, not through an integrated data package, no matter how sophisticated.

### **3.3 Limits to Ethnography and Action Research**

The disclosures of the previous section (§3.2) have made explicit three areas that are critical to responsible action research: my roles as a researcher (§3.2.1-3.2.4), my relationships with participants (§3.2.5) and the recognition and analysis of data (§3.2.6). These three areas (roles, relationships and data) changed significantly in nature during the course of the research.

My role changed from that of outside analyst and informer to one of outside encourager and documenter. This impacted both the manner of my relationships and whom my relationships were perceived to be with. I began to relate not just to individuals but also to a community of both living and past Eastern Lawa. The oral texts of previous generations became included in my interactions with the community. These texts included sayings, remembered events and people, and narratives expressed in song. Such texts form the data of what are called *indigenous research methodologies* (Chilisa, 2011).

Chilisa begins by contrasting three so-called Euro-Western research paradigms (positivist /post-positivist, interpretive and transformative) with each other and with what she calls a *postcolonial indigenous research paradigm*.

Positivist epistemology is based on the empirical proving of theory. Post-positivism may recognise practical limitations to this, especially in social sciences. However, empirical proof is still the goal of post-positivism. As discussed in chapter four, positivism is the dominant paradigm in most branches of linguistics.

Conversely, my ethnographic approach arose from an interpretive paradigm where reality is considered to be socially constructed (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The importance of context and the declaration of the researcher's personal interest led to Geertz's (1988) minimal list of declarations (§3.2) to ensure validity in interpretive paradigms such as ethnography.

According to Chilisa's categorisation, action research typically operates under neither positivist nor interpretive paradigms. Instead it belongs to a critical research grouping of paradigms labelled "transformative" (Chilisa, 2011, p. 36). This paradigm views research as a moral and political activity

and is influenced by Marxist concepts of alienation and exploitation. Whether action research can operate within the two previous paradigms is debatable. It was action research (i.e. being forced to respond to the local situation) that made both interpretive and positivist paradigms ultimately untenable for me. However, my responses to the local situation were not previously informed by economic materialist views such as Marxism.

The idea of an indigenous research paradigm seems paradoxical because the word *indigenous* highlights the importance and difference of the local, while the word *paradigm* has the connotation of a global approach. Perhaps the main point of an indigenous paradigm is that it is a counter or alternative paradigm. New Zealand Māori research is developing a paradigm explicitly based on the aspirations and cultures of the New Zealand Māori people (kaupapa Māori). Bishop (2008) calls this a counter narrative to the dominant narrative of Western research. Central to this counter narrative is the belief that “answers lie in the sense making and knowledge-generating processes of the culture that the dominant system has sought to marginalize for so long” (Bishop, 2008, p. 457).

There are strong similarities between trends in indigenous research and the shifts in role, relationships and data which I experienced during my research. While I am pleased to find evidence of external transferability between my research and other situations, I am also aware of the temptation to impose a collective definition or ethnophilosophy (Hountondji, 1996) upon the Eastern Lawa people. It is this kind of external defining that indigenous research methodology seeks to combat (Smith, 2012).

As an outsider, the validity of my research should be questioned and interrogated. I have simply sought to move my methodology of research in a direction based on the principles of ethnography and action research. Authenticity is only claimed for direction, not the final product. I do not

claim to be doing indigenous research; I am only pointing out the desirability of, and some possible beginnings for, such research.

Neither action research nor ethnography should be used as justification for speaking on behalf of an indigenous group that the researcher does not belong to. My research remains that of an outsider and cannot claim the title of *indigenous research*. The only *ethnophilosophy* I can ultimately speak for is my own.

## Chapter Four: Preliminary Results

As described in chapter three, a key theme in action research is the cyclical concept of action, followed by feedback, followed by planning for further action. I have thus divided my results between two types of action research: a preliminary stage (chapter four) and a developed stage (chapter five). Each stage grew cyclically with results from my actions being observed, considered and then acted upon. Differences in research philosophy between the two stages (chapters) are also a direct consequence of this cyclical nature. The preliminary results in chapter four are important because they are the building blocks and rationale for the development of the type of action research that is reported in chapter five.

In the traditional positivist approach, orthography creation is broken into three sequential steps. The first step is the phonological description of a language. This involves a technical analysis to establish the inventory of contrasting sounds that speakers use. Once this inventory has been established, the second step is the proposal of orthographic symbols for each sound (a draft orthography). The third step is the actual implementation of the draft orthography in the community so that it becomes an official orthography.

In nearby centrally planned communities (e.g. in China, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam) a government organisation will often approve a draft orthography before it is used. Thailand does not have such an authority. Ideally, this makes it possible for local institutions such as schools, temples and churches or local committees and individuals to try out, adapt and own research that has up to this point depended mainly on outsiders.

Section 4.1 presents my initial tentative phonology for Eastern Lawa in the contexts of Central Thai phonology, previous research and the uncertainty I increasingly felt as my research progressed. An explanation for this

uncertainty is also presented. Section 4.2 describes the issues that arise when this Thai orthography is adapted to Eastern Lawa phonology. Section 4.3 is a description of the local implementation of Eastern Lawa orthography at the Bo Luang school.

#### **4.1 Eastern Lawa (and Thai) phonology.**

I began my investigation into Lawa phonology by interviewing four adult participants associated with the Bo Luang school. All four participants were fluent and literate in Central Thai. Over six months I transcribed their translation (from Thai into Lawa) and pronunciation of nearly 500 words each into IPA (international phonetic alphabet) symbols and made hours of digital recordings. I entered these transcriptions and recordings onto a database and looked for patterns and distinctions between phonetically similar sounds.

Progress seemed rapid at first, but as my data grew, so did my feeling of inadequacy. My description of Lawa was similar to a description of the sounds of Thai language except for a lack of contrast between tones and long and short vowels. It seemed that Lawa had many homophones (words which sounded identical) and very few minimal pairs showing phonemic contrast. When I thought I had identified a contrast, I would become frustrated because I could not identify that contrast consistently with the other speakers or even with repeated pronunciations by the same speaker.

The following table of syllable structures show the similarities of Thai and Lawa words. My list is based on a description of the main Thai syllable as  $C_1(C_2)V_1^T(V_2)(C_f)$  (Iwasaki & Preeya, 2009, pp. 3-4) where brackets indicate optionality, C stands for consonant and V stands for vowel. Iwasaki and Preeya make  $C_1$  optional on the grounds that a glottal stop (/ʔ/) before a vowel is predictable in the absence of another initial

consonant. I have shown C<sub>1</sub> as compulsory as /ʔ/ is listed as a phoneme in both Thai and Lawa. All words listed are mono-syllabic and use identical phonemes except that Thai (unlike Lawa) distinguishes between short vowels (V) and long vowels (V:) and has syllabic tone which I have marked on the first vowel (V<sup>m</sup> ‘mid tone’, V<sup>l</sup> ‘low tone’, V<sup>f</sup> ‘falling tone’, V<sup>h</sup> ‘high tone’ and V<sup>r</sup> ‘rising tone’), The Lawa transcriptions come from the first six months of interviewing described above while the Thai transcriptions are from a Thai-English dictionary (Rohrer, 2008).

**Table 3: Comparison of similar Thai and Lawa words**

Syllable Structure	Lawa words	Thai word
C <sub>1</sub> V <sub>1</sub>	/tɔ/ ‘to run’ /ʔɛ/, ‘chicken’	/tɔ:l/ ‘wasp’ /ʔɛ:m/ ‘name of vowel sound ɛ’
C <sub>1</sub> V <sub>1</sub> (C <sub>f</sub> )	Lawa: /juk/ ‘dirty’ /sɔm/, ‘to eat (rice)’	/ju <sup>h</sup> k/ ‘age, era’ /sɔ:f <sup>m</sup> / ‘to repair’
C <sub>1</sub> V <sub>1</sub> (V <sub>2</sub> )	/pui/ ‘person’ /huə/, ‘to vomit’	/pu <sup>i</sup> / ‘fertiliser’ /hu <sup>r</sup> ə/ ‘head’
C <sub>1</sub> V <sub>1</sub> (V <sub>2</sub> )(C <sub>f</sub> )	/kuət/ ‘cold’ /kiət/, ‘to bite’	/ku <sup>l</sup> ət/ ‘to tighten’ /ki <sup>l</sup> ət/, ‘to honour’

C= consonant, V=vowel, <sup>l</sup>=low tone, <sup>h</sup>=high tone, <sup>m</sup>=mid tone, <sup>r</sup>=rising tone, <sup>f</sup>=falling tone.

A word may be defined phonetically, as an unbroken series of sounds, or grammatically, as a series of sounds which can stand on their own and have meaning. I have chosen a more grammatical definition because my interest is in the simplest representation for a written language. Longer compound words (defined phonetically) such as /pi-ʔə.piŋ/ ‘woman’ exist. For the purposes of this discussion I have treated such phrases as two words (/pi/ ‘person’ and /ʔə.piŋ/ ‘female’) because there are two morphologically separate concepts.

Lawa words defined in this way can be either mono-syllabic or sesquisyllabic. Sesquisyllabic (Thomas, 1992) refers to words that have an optional minor unstressed syllable followed by a major syllable. The Lawa minor syllable has a limited phonological range. Of the 492 words I initially accumulated among the first four participants in Eastern Lawa

about one quarter (116) were sesquisyllabic with only five obvious types of minor syllables. Examples of each minor syllable are:

/kə-/ e.g. /kə.nom/ 'where'

/mə-/ e.g. /mə.lɔŋ/ 'sky'

/sə-/ e.g. /sə.kʰrak/ 'red'

/lə-/ e.g. /lə.haʔ/ 'to play'

/ʔə-/ e.g. /ʔə.viə / 'tiger'

While not a characteristic feature of Thai, there are a number of Thai words that contain this minor unstressed (and non-tonal) syllable structure. Thai has a wider range of possible minor syllables but several examples for each of the five Lawa minor syllable types can also be found in Thai such as:

/kə-/ e.g. kə.tʰiʰʔ/ 'coconut cream'

/mə-/ e.g. /mə.kʰaʳm/ 'tamarind tree'

/sə-/ e.g. /sə.taːm/ 'destiny'

/lə-/ e.g. /lə.kʰɔːmɲ/ 'theatrical performance',

/ʔə-/ e.g. /ʔə.raːmj/ 'what?'

Unlike Lawa, multisyllable words are common in Thai but these are nearly all clear borrowings from Indo-European families because of religion (Pali-Sanskrit e.g. /bɔːriʰ.caːk/ 'to donate') or modern innovations (especially English e.g. /kʰɔːmm.phimw.təːm/ 'computer'). These words also appear in Lawa conversations but they were never offered as Lawa words during elicitation. In contrast, mono-syllabic and sesquisyllabic words from Thai were often given as Lawa words during elicitation (e.g. [mi], 'bear'),

[k<sup>h</sup>ə.nom], 'snack'). Indigenous Lawa words often existed (e.g. /k<sup>h</sup>rɛjʔ/ 'bear') but I did not hear these words used by Eastern Lawa people under the age of 60.

Initial discussions with participants indicated that Eastern Lawa could be written by simplifying Thai phonology and orthography, by removing the need to indicate tones and mark vowel length. However, the intermittent occurrences of non-Thai sounds, especially in vowel and consonant combinations, hinted that Eastern Lawa phonology had a rich and complex structure that was being simplified in bilingual conversation.

These non-Thai combinations were difficult to consistently elicit, document and establish but they could be heard in casual conversation when the speakers perhaps forgot that there was a non-Lawa audience present or perhaps relaxed enough to talk with a natural Lawa phonology to their kin. Lawa words were pronounced with a Thai phonology and exceptions when queried 'reverted' to this kind of simplified Thai phonology, without tone or vowel length.

At this point I turned to four previous previous linguistic studies of Eastern Lawa that were carried out in the 1970s (Mitani, 1978; Lipsius, n.d.; Diffloth, 1979; Shorto, 2006). These are additional to the earlier journal articles reviewed in chapter two (Hutchinson, 1935; Kerr, 1927; Seidenfaden & Hutchinson, 1935). After these four studies from the 1970s, the Eastern Lawa language appears to have been considered documented and no further study in English is available. There also appears to be no phonological study made by Thai researchers for Eastern Lawa, although there has been some interest in Western Lawa (Ratanakul & Daoratanahong, 1986).

The phonological studies are quite diverse. There are two word lists recorded during the 1970s for Mon-Khmer comparative studies by

Western linguists (Diffloth, 1979; Shorto, 2006). These are stored on the South East Asian Language Resource site, [www.sealang.net/monkhmer/database/](http://www.sealang.net/monkhmer/database/). The most detailed analysis is a Cornell University Ph. D. thesis describing phonologies for four varieties of Lawa including Bo Luang Lawa (Mitani, 1978). There is also a thorough handwritten phonology written by a German missionary, Friedhard Lipsius, who lived with the Eastern Lawa during the 1970s (Lipsius, n.d.). Lipsius continues to live in Northern Thailand and I was able to meet and correspond with him.

There is general agreement regarding consonant phonemes but there are some differences in vowels between each of these studies. For example, Shorto (2006) and Diffloth (1979) merge /a/ and /ə/ into one vowel /a/. Mitani (1978) writes /ɛi/ for words which Shorto (2006) transcribes as /əi/. Lipsius (n.d.) gives evidence for a ninth vowel, the low back rounded /ɔ/. However, I believe a detailed comparison of these studies would place too much importance on limited (except for Lipsius) and subjective (albeit informed) transcriptions. It is not my intention to “prove” the accuracy of any of the transcriptions. Instead I have tried to summarise a general picture to highlight the challenges of writing Lawa using Thai script.

Table 4 has been constructed by reproducing a table for Thai consonants (Iwasaki & Preeya, 2009, pp. 3-4) and adding three Eastern Lawa consonants that do not appear in Thai: /ɲ, ɟ, g/. These three consonants fill ‘holes’ in the Thai voiced stop and nasal places of articulations. I call these ‘holes’ because the two sets of voiceless stops (aspirated and unaspirated) have Thai phonemes in all four positions of labial, alveolar, palatal and velar. Lawa fills the missing palatal and velar positions for voiced stops with /ɟ/ and /g/ and the palatal nasal position with /ɲ/. The relevance of this to orthography will be explained in section 4.2. Phonetic

features that distinguish Lawa consonants from Thai, such as prenasalisation of voiced stops [ᵐb, ᵐg, ᵐj, ᵐd], are ignored.

**Table 4: Thai and Lawa consonant inventory**

Manner / Place	Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Other
<b>Stops</b>					
Voiced	b	d	ɟ*	g*	
Voiceless unaspirated	p	t	c	k	ʔ
Voiceless aspirated	p <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>	c <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup>	
<b>Fricatives</b>					
Voiceless	f	s			h
<b>Nasals</b>					
	m	n	ɲ*	ŋ	
<b>Liquid</b>					
		l			r
<b>Glides</b>					
	w		j		

A similar chart is constructed for vowels in Table 5. There is no need for any addition or deletion from the Thai chart (Iwasaki & Preeya, 2009, p. 5) except that the contrast between short and long vowels in Thai is not present in Lawa. Unlike Iwasaki and Preeya (2009) I have shown the high central vowel as /i/ instead of /u/ as both symbols are used to represent the same Thai and Lawa sound by different scholars.

**Table 5: Lawa vowel inventory**

	Front	Centre	Back
High	i	ɨ	u
Mid	e	ə	o
Low	ɛ	a	ɔ

Although Table 4 and Table 5 suggest that Thai and Lawa have very similar phonemic inventories, an examination of the phonological organisation (phonotactics) of the two languages reveals fundamental differences. Iwasaki & Preeya (2009, pp. 3-4) apply the following restrictions to Thai syllable structure:

$$C_1 (C_2) V_1^T (V_2) (C_3)$$

$C_1$  = A compulsory consonant from the 21 Thai consonants in Table 4  
 $C_1C_2$  = /pr/, /pʰr/, /tr/, /kr/, /kʰr/, /kw/, /kʰw/, /pl/, /pʰl/, /kl/, /kʰl/  
 $V_1$  = any vowel from Table 5  
 $T$  = Tone (low<sup>l</sup>, mid<sup>m</sup>, high<sup>h</sup>, falling<sup>f</sup>, rising<sup>r</sup>)  
 $V_1V_2$  = /iə/, /iə/, /uə/  
 $C_3$  = /p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /j/, /w/

Lawa can be represented in the same way except that most  $C_3$  consonants are now  $C_4$  because unlike Thai, /j/ and /w/ can be followed with a second final consonant. Certain restrictions apply (Mitani, 1978, pp. 30-32) such as  $C_3C_4$  combinations may only have a single vowel before them. The occurrence of this combination and other non-Thai phonotactic patterns below distinguish Lawa from Thai at a syllable level.

$$C_1 (C_2) V_1 (V_2) (C_3) (C_4)$$

$C_1$  = A compulsory consonant from the 24 Lawa consonants in Table 4  
 $C_1C_2$  = /kr/, /kʰr/, /pr/, /pʰr/, /pl/ and the non-Thai combinations:  
 /gr/, /br/, /bl/, /hŋ/, /hn/, /hŋ/, /hm/, /hl/, /ŋŋ/, /ŋn/, /ŋm/, /ŋj/, /ŋb/, /ŋd/  
 $V_1$  = any vowel from Table 5  
 $V_1V_2$  = /iə/, /iə/, /uə/ and the non-Thai combinations: /eə/, /oə/, /əi/, /ai/  
 $C_3$  = /j/, /w/  
 $C_4$  = /p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /h/, /ʔ/

The critical part of the summaries above is the identification of Lawa phonemes and phoneme combinations which are not found in Thai. This is because these are the sounds which will be difficult to represent using Thai orthography. There are five kinds of difficulties represented:

- a. Single initial consonants not found in Thai : /g/, /j/, /ŋ/.

- b. Initial consonant clusters not found in Thai: /hŋ/, /hn/, /hŋ/, /hm/, /hl/ and /ŋŋ/, /ŋn/, /ŋm/, /ŋj/, /ŋb/, /ŋd/.
- c. Diphthongs not found in Thai: /eə/, /oə/, /əi/, /ai/.
- d. Final consonants and VC combinations not found in Thai: /h/, /ɔj/, /ɛj/ and /əw/. /ŋ/ does appear in Thai in open syllables ending in short vowels.
- e. Final consonant clusters not found in Thai: /wh/, /wp/, /wm/, /jh/, /jk/, /jŋ/.

Having constructed this summary of the Lawa phoneme inventory and syllable structure my next step was to test it. I did this using four methods: checking my own data for consistency with the summary above, eliciting more word lists to confirm previously published data, asking fellow researchers to test the same data and using computer analysis of recorded sounds.

My earlier data agreed with the summary for the single consonants common to both Thai and Lawa. I had also identified two of the three initial phonemes exclusive to Lawa /g/ and /ŋ/. /g/ was clearly a non-Thai sound e.g. /gap/ 'chin'; /gɛ/ 'pine tree'. [ŋ] occurs frequently in Northern Thai phonology as the dialect allophone for Central Thai /j/. However, Lawa has minimal pairs which show contrast. e.g. /jum/ 'to die', /jum/ 'delicious'. My data did not contain evidence of the sound /j/ identified by previous researchers. Single Lawa final consonants and initial consonant clusters common to both Thai and Lawa as well as those beginning with /h/ were confirmed by the transcriptions I had already made.

However, my transcriptions had not produced the orderly phonological contrast of initial clusters beginning with /ŋŋ/, /ŋn/, /ŋm/, /ŋj/, /ŋb/, /ŋd/ nor was there a clear pattern for non-Thai vowel combinations such as /eə/,

/oə/, /ai/, /əi/. Final consonant combinations forms (C<sub>3</sub> C<sub>4</sub>) were present but it was difficult to identify what kind of vowel was present because of creakiness which came and went in repeated articulations by the same speaker.

Although I felt as if I was cheating by not letting the description fall naturally from my own surveyed words, I began to check the proofs or minimal pairs which Lipsius and Mitani offered in their phonologies. I was particularly interested in the sounds that I was still confused about. The problem with this kind of method is that I was looking for a particular kind of evidence, and thus I began to hear what I wanted to hear (i.e. contrasts in sound). My language consultants offered accommodating but ultimately contradictory evidence. They tended to say that contrasting words were spoken the same way and then, when pressed, they would politely agree with me that they must be different.

I was concerned that a reason for the failure of the expert linguist paradigm could have been lack of expertise in the linguist (i.e. me). I decided to enlist the help of other outside linguists to check my analysis. These experts took the form of graduate students in the Linguistics department at Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

I was responsible for two graduate class field trips during my research period and I was able to have both classes (one of fifteen and one of seven students) analyse Lawa over a period of eight weeks. I had hoped these students would be more precise than I was in their phonetic transcriptions but none were. This was despite many having undergraduate degrees in linguistics and all being multilingual with a variety of first languages (English, Thai, German, Portuguese, Burmese, Mandarin, Karen, Hmong and Wa).

The reference points for the graduates were the languages they were literate in. If these languages did not contain Eastern Lawa contrasting sounds then students had difficulty in identifying them. Even when their first language was similar to Lawa (e.g. Wa) and their first language was not a language of literacy, then contrasts were not recognised. This was exactly the problem that Lawa informants had. Literacy in Thai created an awareness of Thai phonemes but this did not extend to the special Lawa phonemes. The graduate students were competent in analysing already transcribed data but needed much more field work to accurately transcribe this unique language.

In an attempt to improve the student accounts, I deliberately primed the students' elicitation lists with the contrasting words used by Mitani and Lipsius. Unfortunately, however, neither the students, participants nor I were able to get consistent results for non-Thai vowel combinations in Lawa, or for initial glottal stops in consonant combinations. These sounds appeared to be present at times and absent at other times without systematic explanation.

Several meetings were arranged with an SIL consultant who confirmed that my transcriptions were too broad and I needed to be more precise. Improving my level of precision was helpful in identifying the initial consonant clusters /ʔŋ/, /ʔn/, /ʔm/, /ʔj/, /ʔb/, /ʔd/.

However, despite my improved proficiency in identifying these sounds, I could not get consistent examples from or between participants. The glottal stop at the beginning of words was often dropped. Without the initial glottal stop, the word would apparently be pronounced with a Thai accent.

A bigger problem concerned the number of vowels and vowel clusters or diphthongs. Typical of Mon-Khmer languages, Eastern Lawa has a large number of these. When comparing my transcriptions with the consultant's

efforts, I was surprised to discover that IPA symbols for vowels were relative to each other rather than being based on absolute frequencies. In other words, the vowels which I as a New Zealander classified as [i] were not identical to those classified as [i] by an American, German or Thai linguist. Lawa also had inconsistent laryngeal constriction and loosening (heard as creaky and breathy voice) which could affect the entire syllable, including the vowels.

I experimented with acoustic phonetics in an effort to establish some objective measurements of the vowel sounds which I had recorded using the SIL computer programme *Speech Analyzer*. My method was to measure the two lowest formants (F1 and F2) of vowels to identify which group a particular vowel might belong to. The conclusion from this method was simply a reinforcement of my initial confusion over variation in vowel pronunciation both between speakers and by the same speaker. I also discovered frequent occasions when I was making subjective choices for beginning and ending measurement points as I determined the length of vowels, especially for diphthongs. Laryngeal constrictions inconsistently appeared as glottal stops in the middle of the diphthongs that were different from Thai. In practical terms, this meant that one and the same word could be pronounced in different ways by different speakers or even by a single speaker.

This failure to establish my own internally consistent phonology as well as the failure to confirm that of others led me to seek factors outside of my own recording and analytical skills. I believe that two important factors contributing to inconsistent pronunciation were language contact and the register system within Mon-Khmer languages. These factors are explored in sections 4.1.1 - 4.1.2.

#### 4.1.1 Language contact contributing to phonological uncertainty.

Contact with the Thai language continues to change Eastern Lawa language. Although there has been language contact for centuries, the influence of Thai has been magnified because of the three ingredients that build a modern state: the impact of nationalism, mass media and compulsory education (B. Anderson, 1991).

It is expected that this kind of language contact will cause words to be imported into Lawa. However, the concept of clear separation of languages is also contestable. Confusion was a common reaction to my request for a person to speak in Lawa. The same Lawa word (/k<sup>h</sup>rəiŋ/) is used for the concepts of 'speech' and 'words'. It is only when national languages are being contrasted such as Thai and English that a formal borrowed (Thai-Sanskrit) word is used to refer to the notion of 'language' (/p<sup>h</sup>asa/). The term (/p<sup>h</sup>asa/) when used by Eastern Lawa refers only to standardised, written, official, world languages. The preferred Lawa term for Lawa language (/k<sup>h</sup>rəiŋ/) is more equivalent to 'verbal communication'. This verbal communication is characterised by code switching, that is, switching between Lawa and Thai.

The traditional approach of structural linguistics for analysing changing languages is not particularly successful in cases where there has been extended contact with a dominant language. The heirs of Saussure have placed linguistic constraints on language change based on the internal structure of an idealised language (Thomason & Kaufman, 1991, p. 13). In reality, "all aspects of language structure are subject to transfer from one language to another, given the right mix of social and linguistic circumstances" (Thomason, 2008, p. 16). In Lawa, Thai phonology has affected both the range and perception of phonemes. As already described, the participants I interviewed and recorded would often not

differentiate phonemes and phoneme sequences that had no differentiation in standard Thai language. These same contrasts had been recorded and proven by Lipsius and Mitani decades earlier to be contrasting sounds in Lawa.

Non-Thai combinations of vowels and vowel plus glide caused the most confusion in transcription and analysis because of inconsistency. The vowels concerned are: /eə/, /oə/, /əi/, /ɔj/, /ɛj/ and /əw/. These sequences were usually pronounced as the closest vowel clusters found in Thai.

The following extract from an orthography committee meeting (October, 2009) illustrates the problem of Thai pronunciation interacting with Lawa. In Thai there is no vowel combination /əi/. All of the 1970s studies have this combination as a diphthong. However, many Lawa seem to revert to the closest Thai diphthong /aw/ when pronouncing words containing this sequence.

Recollecting the committee meeting, there were four Lawa participants involved (the youngest, P4, was 46 years old while the other three, P1, P2, P3, were above 60). P4 seemed to have his mind on something else and was looking out a window. I was trying to describe the phoneme combination /əi/ by eliciting examples from the participants.

Researcher: How do you say 'wind' in Lawa? (This sentence was spoken in Lawa except for 'wind' where I used the Thai word, /lom/.)

P1: [kaw]

P2: [kaw]

P3: [kaw]

P4: (distracted) [uhh]?

Researcher: How do you say 'wind' (/lom/) in Lawa?

P4: [kəi]

Researcher: (speaking Thai) That's not the same.

P1: (speaking Thai except for key word) [kaw], [kəi]. It doesn't matter.

Researcher: (speaking Thai) Could you say 'wind' (/lom/) again please?

P4: [kaw]

P4 seemed to have been oblivious to the answers of the other three participants in his first reply. It is possible P2 and P3 were influenced by P1's initial answer. P4 seems to have been influenced by the other speakers in his final answer. It is also possible that participants feel that making something sound more Thai is polite when speaking with an outsider. P1's day dreaming may have elicited the natural Lawa response.

To provide a little more background to this process of making Lawa more Thai, the hierarchical structure of Thailand's language use (Smalley, 1994) needs to be recognised. Even within monolingual Thai language use, there are two clear linguistic varieties which coexist with specific functions. Thai speakers have a so-called "elaborate" Thai with abundant Indic loan words, passive voice, nominalization and tense indicators. They also have an ordinary variety with simpler words, pragmatic particles, verb serialisations and ellipses (Iwasaki & Preeya, 2009, p. 21). Those who receive a Thai school education are able to move freely between these two varieties.

With this situation existing in idealised *monolingual* Thai society, it is not surprising that the language used by Lawa speakers would depend very much upon the function of the communication. Specifically, more formal communication and topics when spoken "in Lawa" use Thai phonology and vocabulary (often of the learned variety). In contrast, less formal contexts have a clearer non-Thai Lawa vocabulary and phonology. In both

types of communication Lawa is being spoken, but the formal context is more heavily influenced by Thai.

In other words, Thai used nationally is an example of what is called classic diglossia (Ferguson, 1959) where a high (written and formal) language variety coexists with a low (vernacular) variety. Lawa is an example of what is called *extended diglossia* (Fishman, 1967) where the two languages are not related and where the relationship is not stable because the minority vernacular language is normally displaced by the dominant majority language (Fishman, 1967, p. 36). More discussion of this phenomenon can be found in section 2.2.1.

The vowel (and final) combinations not used in Thai (/eə/, /oə/, /əi/, /ai/, /ɔj/, /ɛj/ and /əw/) could be called *marked vowel combinations* (i.e. they showed someone was speaking in a Lawa way, as opposed to a Thai way.) Participants usually pronounced these vowel combinations in their nearest Thai equivalent when speaking to me. As the Lawa communities become more linguistically diverse it is possible (without intervention) that these marked vowel combinations will disappear.

#### **4.1.2 Register contributing to phonological uncertainty.**

A complementary way to understand what is described above is by using the concept of phonological register. Lawa is typical of Mon-Khmer languages in that there are a great variety of diphthongs and vowels. Mon-Khmer languages are labelled as register languages based on a classic paper by Henderson (1952), which describes Cambodian phonology from the perspective of the Khmer writing system by dividing vowels into two types of register. Although register was initially associated with tightening and relaxing of the larynx, it came to be recognised that register is actually “a constellation of activities” at various levels of the vocal tract (Laver, 1980, p.94).

This “constellation of activities” has been grouped into two typical types of register complexes which contrast with unmarked (modal) voice. Thurgood’s summary (2000, p.12) of these three classes of register is abbreviated in Table 6 below.

F1 corresponds with the height of the tongue while F2 corresponds with the frontness or backness of the tongue body. Both F1 and F2 are frequencies of vowel formants which are measured in hertz.

**Table 6: *The three most common register complexes***

	tense register	unmarked	breathy register
voice quality	creaky, tense, harsh	modal (clear)	breathy
state of larynx	tensed		lax
vowel quality	lower (higher F1), more fronted (higher F2), tendency to diphthongisation		higher (lower F1), more backed (lower F2), tendency to centralization
length	often shorter		often longer
pitch distinctions	higher; associated with initial /ʔ/		lower; associated with /h/
original proto-initials	proto-voiceless	voiced/ voiceless	proto-voiced

(Adapted from Thurgood, 2000)

Table 6 shows that register analysis based on voice quality is also linked to tone, vowels and historical inheritance. Matisoff (1973) described the link as being between voicing, register and tone-genesis (the origin of tone in South East Asian languages). Huffman (1985, p. 144) gave an idealised diachronic path from proto language voiced distinction to possible destinations of register, tone or restructured vowels. This path is directly linked to the origin of diphthongs in Lawa by Thurgood (2000). The relationship between voice quality and vowels can also be explained physiologically because the larynx is connected to the tongue root by the pharynx. Therefore, changes in the larynx will have an impact on the

position of the tongue and therefore the vowel qualities (Watkins, 2002, p. 135).

Contrasting features of the two types of register include: a tendency towards diphthongisation, breathiness /h/ and glottalisation /ʔ/ as well as voicing of the initial consonant in the proto-form. These features, described for Mon-Khmer languages as a whole, are identical to the non-Thai features that are currently causing difficulty in Eastern Lawa orthography.

A Western segmental approach to phonological analysis, which relies on recording sound and distinguishing between semantic and purely physiological causes for sound differences, has difficulty coping with register's constellation of activities. The activities are not consistent and are often better understood by diachronic change in the language.

Instead of clear register minimal pairs, I encountered a variety of homophones, which sometimes showed register differences but were inconsistent with respect to which register was used with each item in the pair. Examples of such homophonous pairs are: /k<sup>h</sup>ɛjʔ/ 'moon' or 'firewood'; /k<sup>h</sup>rɛjʔ/ 'bear' or 'unmarried woman'; /tajʔ/ 'hand' or 'soil'; /sajŋ/ 'bird' or 'ripe'; /hmajŋ/ 'male' or 'to ask' or 'fingernail'; and /khreə/- 'to disappear' or 'gold'.

These homophones usually carried one group of the features that Thurgood (Table 6 above) separates under tense and breathy registers; however, not in a way that would distinguish them from the other homophone(s). For example, both meanings of /sajŋ/ ('bird' or 'ripe') could be pronounced with or without the tense register.

Orthographically, the presence of homophones (converted into homographs) did not appear to be a problem for Lawa speakers. What was of concern was that the "constellation of activities" sometimes

encountered in these words made them sound quite different from Thai words. There was a desire to contrast these, not with each other, but with standard Thai pronunciation of vowel combinations.

## **4.2 Preliminary Orthographies**

The purpose of this section is to describe the graphemes used in Thai and how these have been adapted to Lawa. The subsequent discussion mainly refers to the international phonetic alphabet (IPA) but a presentation of the actual writing systems is included to give the reader a more detailed understanding of the issues involved.

Thai script is semi-syllabic and is based on Brahmi script (the original script of Theravadan Buddhist writing). It is written from left to right, has spaces at clause (not word) level and vowels may be placed under, over, to the left, to the right and around the preceding consonant graphemes.

Brahmi is the parent of not only Thai, Mon, Khmer and Burmese scripts but almost all modern Indian scripts (Patel, 1995, p. 266). Brahmi based scripts are usually presented in a matrix where the consonants are arranged in five columns to represent Pali-Sanskrit distinctions between aspiration and voicing of stops. The rows represent places of articulation in the mouth.

The genius of Brahmi based scripts is that the matrix of columns was adapted in South East Asia to contrasts other than aspiration or voicing. These contrasts were in tone as in the Thai, Lanna and Burmese scripts or voice register as in the Mon and Khmer (Henderson, 1952).

There are varying historical, linguistic and orthographic steps between Brahmi and these South East Asian scripts (Court, 1996, p. 448) but the adapting of the original Brahmi matrix contrast of voicing and aspiration is made quite clear by the order of the graphemes in the new contrasts of

tone or register. I believe it is possible that these early orthography creators recognised an historical linguistic theory only recently proposed by 20<sup>th</sup> century linguists. Matisoff (1973) proposes an historical development where initial consonant voicing became tone over time. Later writers such as Thurgood (2000) propose initial voicing could also develop into register patterns.

This ordering can be found in the first 31 graphemes of the Thai orthography shown in Table 7. Each grapheme is followed by a corresponding IPA symbol. The rows are sorted according to places of articulation in the mouth. The columns represent classes of consonants for tone purposes rather than aspiration and voicing. There are three classes of consonants: mid, high and low (nasals are all low class). A series of rules spell out the relationship between the class of the initial consonant, the vowel and the tone of the syllable. I have condensed these rules into two sentences:

1. Live syllables (open long vowel ending or closed ending with a nasal) beginning with a high class consonant have a rising tone, all other live syllables (beginning with a low or mid class) have a mid tone.
2. Dead syllables (open short vowel ending or non-nasal closed ending) all have a low tone except for those beginning with a low class consonant which have a high tone for short vowels and a falling tone for long vowels.

These rules can be over-ridden by four diacritic markers which specify the tone of the syllable depending on the class of consonant they appear above.

**Table 7: Thai consonants in dictionary order**

	mid class	high class	low class	nasal
Velar	ก /k/	ข /k/	ค /k <sup>h</sup> /	ง /ŋ/
Palatal	จ /c/,	ฉ /c <sup>h</sup> /	ช /c <sup>h</sup> / ช /s/ ฉ /c <sup>h</sup> /	ญ /j/
Dental 1	ฎ /d/ ฏ /t/	ฐ /t <sup>h</sup> /	ฑ /t <sup>h</sup> / ฒ /t <sup>h</sup> /	ณ /n/
Dental 2	ด /d/ /ต /t/	ถ /t <sup>h</sup> /	ท /t <sup>h</sup> / ธ /t <sup>h</sup> /	น /n/
Labial	บ /b/ ป /p/	ผ /p <sup>h</sup> / ฟ /f/	พ /p <sup>h</sup> / ฝ /f/ ภ /p <sup>h</sup> /	ม /m/
Other	ย /j/, ร /r/, ล /l/, ว /w/, ศ ษ ส /s/, ห /h/, ฬ /l/, อ /ʔ/, ฮ /h/			

The linguistic ordering of Table 7 is also the dictionary ordering of Thai orthography. The last 11 consonant characters of Thai do not follow the same pattern as the previous 31 because they are not plosives or nasals. In dictionary order they are: ย /j/, ร /r/, ล /l/, ว /w/, ศ ษ ส /s/, ห /h/, ฬ /l/, อ /ʔ/, ฮ /h/. These are all low class consonants except for อ /ʔ/, which is high class, and ห /h/ and the /s/ graphemes, which are high class. Low class consonants become high class if preceded by an initial ห /h/. (Five words are also made mid-class by being preceded by an initial อ /ʔ/. There is some redundancy in the Thai consonants (e.g. rows “Dental 1” and “Dental 2” in Table 7) because of the need to spell Pali language Buddhist terms using characters equivalent to the original Brahmi script.

Possible initial consonant clusters are written as follows (the aspirated stops have high and low class combinations): /pr/ ปร, /p<sup>h</sup>r/ พร or ผร, /tr/ ตร, /kr/ กร, /k<sup>h</sup>r/ คร or ขร, /kw/ กว, /k<sup>h</sup>w/ คว or ขว, /pl/ ปล, /p<sup>h</sup>l/ พล or ผล, /kl/ กล, /k<sup>h</sup>l/ คล or ขล. The phonemic restriction on consonant clusters is important for orthography because other consonants read together have an inherent vowel (/a/ or /o/) between them. Even the combinations written here can be read as single consonants with a vowel between them in some words. This ambiguity can only be solved by word recognition. Both initial and final consonants are ambiguous because they could be read as stand

alone syllables with the inherent vowel. The lack of word spacing intensifies this ambiguity for readers not fluent in Thai.

The ambiguity described in the above paragraph is further complicated by an overrepresentation of characters for final consonants. Section 4.1 tells us that final consonants of syllables are restricted to eight phonemic values (not counting a glottal stop after an open short vowel): /p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /j/, /w/. However, Thai orthography has the added complication of these eight sounds being represented by many consonants. Only /m/, /ŋ/, /j/ and /w/ have one on one grapheme to phoneme correspondence. The other four final phonemes are represented by several graphemes (some of which change their value from the initial position) i.e. /p/ ป, ฝ, พ, ฟ, ภ; /n/ ณ, ญ, น, ฃ, ฅ, ฌ; /t/ จ, ฌ, ฎ, ฏ, ฐ, ฑ, ฒ, ณ, ด, ต, ถ, ท, น, บ, ป, ผ, ฝ and /k/ ก, ข, ค, ฌ.

Vowels in Brahmi derived scripts are treated separately to consonants. Although there are currently only 42 used consonants in Thai, there are a further nine single vowels (i, ī, u, e, ə, o, ε, a, ɔ) which have at least two graphemic representations depending on whether they are short or long (a third representation is also used for some vowels when there is a final consonant). Added to this are graphemes for three diphthongs (iə, iə̄, uə̄), each of which have long and short forms. There are also special ways of writing /am/, /aj/ and /aw/ in some words. The important orthographic limitation that Thai vowels have is that these are the only recognisable vowel combinations. This limitation needs to be consciously overcome by bi-lingual readers of other languages using Thai script where there may be other diphthongs needing to be represented.

Table 8 shows the accepted Thai vowel symbols and combinations. Added to this are graphemes for the three diphthongs (iə, iə̄, uə̄) and the last line of special ways to write the VC combinations /am/, /aj/ and /aw/.

**Table 8: Thai vowels**

อะ /a/	อา /a:/	อิ /i/	อี /i:/
อึ /ɨ/	อื /ɨ:/	อุ /u/	อู /u:/
เอะ /e/	เอ /e:/	แอะ /ɛ/	แ /ɛ:/
โอะ /o/	โอ /o:/	เอะ /ɔ/	อ /ɔ:/
เออะ /ə/	เออ /ə:/	เอียะ /iə/	เอีย /i:ə/
เอือะ /iə/	เอือ /i:ə/	อัวะ /uə/	อัว /u:ə/
อำ /am/	ใ /aj/	ไ /aj/	เอา /aw/

An everyday example of the Thai closed set of vowel combinations is that English transliteration into Thai script strongly resists any non-Thai vowel combinations. However, nearly all consonant combinations can be accommodated through the use of a silent diacritic ( $/ʰ$ ) above the consonant which would not be pronounced in Thai. For example the final 'r' ร of 'computer' is written in Thai but not pronounced by the use of this diacritic ร์ (คอมพิวเตอร์).

The syllabic and complex nature of Thai writing has two major implications when writing other languages using Thai script. Firstly, vowels and vowel combinations are the least flexible feature of the Thai orthography. Secondly, there is a suprasegmental component to consonant graphemes which combine systematically to produce tones. These implications are likely to result in the need to both create new vowel graphemes (or grapheme combinations), while at the same time reducing the number of consonant graphemes. In addition, the system marking tones will either

need to be adapted to fit the tone patterns of other tonal languages or discarded for non-tonal languages such as Lawa.

A practical illustration of these issues can be shown by using the common Lawa word /majt/ meaning 'pleasant', 'good' or 'beautiful'.

1. There is only one grapheme available for the initial /m/ in Thai orthography: ม. However, ม is a low class consonant and /majt/ is classified as a dead syllable because it ends in /t/. This forces a low tone onto the syllable using Thai orthography. It is impossible to write a dead syllable beginning with /m/ as a mid or flat tone which is how /majt/ is spoken in Lawa.

2. Thai orthography allows /aj/ to be treated as a vowel-consonant combination (VC) by writing a separate character for /a/ and /j/ so that the sound /maj/ is written as มาย for a long vowel or มัย for a short vowel. A more common alternative is to treat /aj/ as a diphthong and use the vowel character ใ /ai/ which is placed before the initial consonant and is written as ใม /mai/. None of these three possibilities allow for the final consonant /t/ to follow in the same syllable. If a final consonant was to appear in Thai orthography after /aj/ or /ai/ it would be either silent or pronounced with an inherent vowel (e.g. /mai.ta/).

3. If the orthographic rule was broken and /t/ did appear, Thai orthography allows for 16 possible characters or graphemes to be used to represent that final /t/ sound: จ, ช, ฌ, ฉ, ฌ, ฎ, ฏ, ฐ, ฑ, ฒ, ฒ, ฒ, ฒ, ฒ, ฒ, ฒ, ฒ.

The question must be asked whether Thai orthography should be used at all for Lawa. Wannemacher (1998, p. 14) lists ten minority languages in Northern Thailand which have high or medium written language vitality. Nine of the ten use an adapted Burmese script (Karen languages), adapted Lanna script (Shan), their own script (Lisu) or a Roman script (the

majority). Only Western Lawa (ranked medium vitality) relies on a Thai based orthography.

However, the reasons for the Western Lawa orthography's success (relative to other minority adapted Thai scripts) are also relevant to Eastern Lawa. Unlike the other nine minorities listed by Wannemacher (1998) there is no Lawa community outside of Thailand. Secondly, Thai education is strong in the Lawa villages making most Lawa already literate in Thai. There was also strong support from the school and from local authorities for the use of Thai script.

The initial orthography which we used at Bo Luang school was largely based on the Western Lawa orthography as described by Schlatter (1976) and used in the Western Lawa Bible. The only alteration we made was to simplify by ignoring some phonemic distinctions in Western Lawa which were insignificant in modern Eastern Lawa and difficult to show using the Thai script (e.g. preglottalised consonants).

**Table 9: *Lawa consonant grapheme proposal***

	mid class	high class	low class	nasal
Velar	ก /k/		ค /k <sup>h</sup> /	ง /ŋ/
Palatal	จ /c/,		ฉ /g/ ช /c <sup>h</sup> / ซ /s/ ฌ /j/*	ญ /ɲ/*
Dental 1				
Dental 2	ด /d/ ต /t/		ท /t <sup>h</sup> /	น /n/
Labial	บ /b/ ป /p/		พ /p <sup>h</sup> / ฟ /f/	ม /m/
Other:	ย /j/, ร /r/, ล /l/, ว /w/, อ /ʔ/, ฮ /h/			
Finals:	ก /k/, ง /ŋ/, ต /t/, น /n/, บ /p/, ม /m/, ฮ /h/, อ /ʔ/			

Typical of other minority language adaptations of Thai script (Smalley, 1976), only common mid class and low class consonant graphemes are

used and there is a one to one correspondence between grapheme and phoneme (except the /b/ final and /d/ graphemes are unvoiced in final position). The nature of the orthography has changed from the original Thai because the script is no longer an abugida with an inherent vowel and there is no tone represented. The loss of an inherent vowel makes it theoretically possible to have consonant clusters other than those in Thai (marked as \*).

**Table 10: *Lawa vowels proposal***

อา /a/	อี /i/	อี /i/	อุ /u/
เอ /e/	แ /ɛ/	โ /o/	อว /v/
เออ /ə/	เอียบ /iə/	เอือ /iə/	อัว /uə/
เอา /aw/	โ /aj/	เออ /eə/*	อว /oə/*
เออี /əi/*	อี /ai/*	อะ /ə/	

The short vowels are removed in the proposed orthography except for the อะ /ə/ which is used for minor syllables. The extra diphthongs (\*) are created by either unusual combinations or, where that is not possible, a small dot (Pali dot) is added to the bottom right of the vowel. The Pali dot is discussed further in section 5.2.

The initial reaction of all participants when shown Western Lawa writing was that it could not be used for Eastern Lawa. Their reason was that the Western Lawa do not speak the same as people from Bo Luang. This objection is best understood through Seifart's (2006, p.277) definition of an orthography as being, "the conjunction of a set of graphemes, such as an alphabet, and a set of accompanying rules regulating their use. The third

defining feature is that both the symbols and their usage are standardized and codified.”

I was seeking opinions about the first and second defining features of the Western Lawa orthography (grapheme set and rules) and its relevance to Eastern Lawa. However, I was not suggesting duplication in standardisation or codification (i.e. identical spelling). Nahhas (2007) had already shown that the two versions of Lawa were not mutually intelligible despite strong lexical similarity.

The initial community objection to the use of the proposed orthography was easily avoided by abandoning the promotion of the suggested orthography as Western Lawa orthography. However, more fundamental objections were raised because of the differences between Schlatter’s Thai-based orthography and standard Thai language orthography.

I have classified these objections with a numeric value for the perceived difficulty level they create in writing Lawa using a Thai script. The numeric category of difficulty refers to the resistance I observed in Eastern Lawa participants using the described Western Lawa orthography convention. Level 1 difficulties were simply conventions that participants adopted after some short discussion. Level 2 difficulties were agreed to but often forgotten in practice. Level 3 difficulties were disagreed with at a conceptual level. The separate groups at each level indicate a higher level on the continuum of difficulty.

**Table 11: Levels of difficulty in writing Lawa**

Level	Description	Phonemes
0	No difficulty in using Thai graphemes to represent this sound	Grapheme combinations which cause Thai syllables to have a mid-tone.
1a	Supra-segmental difficulties	All other grapheme combinations causing low, high, rising or falling tones in Thai.
1b	Aesthetic difficulties	The minor syllable /sə/ is written with a high class consonant in Thai.  The finals /t/ and /p/ are typically written as /d/ and /b/ in Thai even though they are not voiced in Thai or Lawa final position.
2a	Use of the Thai character for non-Thai Lawa pronunciation	C1 <sup>a</sup> : /d/, /b/, /ŋ/, /g/, /gr/, /j/ Cf <sup>b</sup> : /h/,
2b	Use of /h/ in consonant clusters or as a final.	/hŋ/, /hn/, /hŋ/, /hm/, /hl/
3a	Use of vowel grapheme combinations for Lawa sounds that do not occur in Thai orthography	/eə/, /oə/, /əi/, /ai/, /ɔj/, /ɛj/, /əw/
3b	Use of a Thai tone marker to indicate the presence of a glottal stop as an initial consonant	/ʔŋ/, /ʔn/, /ʔm/, /ʔj/, /ʔb/, /ʔd/

<sup>a</sup>C1=initial consonant, <sup>b</sup>Cf=final consonant,

#### 4.2.1 Level 1 orthographic difficulties.

Level 1 difficulty is a change to Thai orthography at the supra-segmental level. As shown in Table 4, Thai orthography denotes tone by having three classes of consonants. These classes need to be ignored when Thai script is used to write non-tonal languages such as Lawa.

This is not a major practical issue because I have noticed many Lawa ignoring tone in Thai words when speaking without losing intelligibility. It also greatly simplifies the spelling system if Lawa can agree to avoid graphemes made redundant by no longer needing differentiation on the basis of tone.

I found that all Eastern Lawa participants quickly accepted that it was possible to discard these inherent tones. The avoidance of high class consonant graphemes definitely limited tone issues in reading. However, in writing most participants wanted to write the high class character for /s/ rather than the recommended low class one. The reason for this is simply that this is a much more common character, especially in the unstressed minor syllable. The problem was clearly one of habit rather than conceptual.

A similar issue relates to the range of Thai characters that are used to represent the same final consonant. This comes from the original Pali-Sanskrit spellings. Again, identifying only one character to use for each phoneme should be seen as a simplification rather than complication of using Thai script when writing Lawa.

Unfortunately, from a prescriptive linguistic view, in both Thai and Lawa the finals /t/ and /p/ are unvoiced but Thai orthography prefers to write these characters with the graphemes for voiced /d/ and /b/. Western Lawa following linguistic principles writes these as the unvoiced graphemes. However, this appeared unusual to Bo Luang participants who insisted on following the Thai practice.

#### **4.2.2 Level 2 orthographic difficulties.**

Level 2 difficulties caused more confusion and disagreement. Level 2 involved changing the phonetic value of a Thai character to match a Lawa phoneme. The first two phonemes listed, /d/ and /b/, are the natural Lawa

nasalisation of voiced consonants when speaking Thai (i.e. Thai words with these voiced initial consonants are pre-nasalised by Lawa speakers). As this is done naturally there was no objection expressed to using the normal Thai characters.

Similarly, /ɲ/ is the natural pronunciation for most people in Northern Thailand of the central Thai phoneme /j/. However, unlike Thai, Lawa makes a phonemic distinction between /ɲ/ and /j/. The Thai orthography has two characters for /j/ because the Pali-Sanskrit language had the same phonemic difference as Lawa.

This difference was recognised and agreed upon by the early participants in my research (Lawa teachers at the school.) However, when these participants were asked by the school to advise on signage for a house that said /ɲuang ɲiə/ 'village house' the teachers used the character ญ for /ɲ/ in both words making the transcription /ɲuang ɲiə/ (ญวง ญื่อะ). They were careful to use the innovation of the correct character for /ɲ/ but over applied it by using it for /j/ also.

The Lawa phonemes /g/ and /ɟ/, like /ɲ/, have usable characters in the Thai orthography following the conventions used for writing Pali-Sanskrit. However, these are not natural Thai sounds and required more agreement and discussion. Neither representation for /g/ or /ɟ/ were used consistently by the Eastern Lawa participants in my research. After explanation the Western Lawa character for /g/ was agreed on (ก) but observation showed that it was ignored by participants when writing. Instead, confusing consonant combinations were used (e.g. กค /ɲk/). The phoneme /ɟ/ was ignored because of its very low frequency. When asked, participants wrote this with the Thai character for /j/ (ย).

The pre-aspirated sounds represented described in Table 11 as /hɲ/, /hn/, /hɲ/, /hm/ and /hl/ at level 2b are not found in Thai orthography. Similar to

the final /h/, the combinations may not occur in Thai orthography but the meaning is obvious when the relevant character is used, and thus the initial /h/ appears to be accepted.

The final /h/ does not occur as a final consonant in Thai but it does appear in the Western Lawa orthography. The use of /h/ as a final looks strange when written in the Thai character, but the meaning is obvious and its use appeared to be accepted.

#### **4.2.3 Level 3 orthographic difficulties.**

Level 3 difficulties fit along a continuum from unnatural combinations in Thai to needing an entirely new character. The unnaturalness is both conceptual and, in the case of the combinations /ai/ and /əi/ mechanical, because the characters required cannot be typed with an ordinary Thai font.

Unnatural combinations of vowel symbols in the Thai writing system seem to present a bigger problem than that of consonants. This is perhaps because the combined vowel symbols appear to be learnt and perceived as single units. Consonant blends occur in Thai orthography and introducing new consonant blends adds to a potentially open set of orthographic combinations. However, the set of vowel combinations appears to be a more strongly closed set.

Thai orthography allows for eight such combinations. Bo Luang Lawa phonology requires an additional seven diphthongs, making a total of fifteen. In addition to this increase in number, the standard Thai orthography has a very limited range of final consonants following diphthongs. Therefore, even though the same diphthong might be present in Thai, it is conceptually impossible to add any final consonant to it in the Thai writing system.

The final set of problems listed in level 3b is the presence of an initial glottal stop before another consonant in the original Western Lawa orthography. Not only is there no orthographic convention for this, it is also difficult to capture and describe conceptually. Schlatter's use of a tone marker symbol for the initial glottal created confusion because it was interpreted as a low tone marker.

#### **4.2.4 Non-linguistic differences between Eastern and Western.**

It is important to reflect on why the issues described above do not seem to have been a problem for the Western Lawa, who have been using their orthography for approximately fifty years. Firstly, the community using it were Western Lawa Christian churchgoers wanting to read the Bible and sing hymns in their own language. The community was motivated to use the proposed orthography and, once in use, the controlled translation and production of both Bible and songbooks provided a clear standardisation.

Secondly, all the Western Lawa people I know who continue to use this orthography learnt it as their first script before they learnt to read or write in Thai. The reason for this was that schooling was very limited and the first exposure to literacy was in the church. In other words the direction of transfer of skills was from Western Lawa (first language) to Thai (second language). There was no interference with previous understanding of Thai orthography.

This lack of awareness of Thai writing conventions means the levels of difficulty in my analysis were only relevant to the Western Lawa when those already literate in Lawa come to write Thai. At the time of transfer to standard Thai orthography, any Thai writing conventions would have been accepted unconditionally because it is the national language with a centuries old history of literature and standardisation.

In contrast, there were no Christians or church in the Eastern Lawa community. This made the orthography an end rather than a means. In other words, there was more emphasis in the language committee on how to represent the language correctly rather than on what would be a usable method of communicating meaning. The variety of pronunciation even between geographically close Lawa villages made progress in standardisation difficult.

The direction of transfer of literacy skills is from Thai to Eastern Lawa. In other words, participants from the community normally have some level of literacy in Thai and thus the expectation of conforming to Thai orthographic rules. There is no (accepted) standard provided by Lawa literature or written tradition for the Buddhist-animist people of Bo Luang.

It might be possible to initially limit the use of Eastern Lawa literacy to only people matching the two categories of people who are using Lawa orthography among the Western Lawa (those without training in Thai literacy and those wanting to read the Christian Bible if it existed in Eastern Lawa language). However, this would not promote community ownership or support of an orthography.

There are strong non-linguistic differences between the social settings of the Eastern Lawa now and that of the Western Lawa fifty years ago. It is reasonable to expect that the process of adoption of a local writing system for Eastern Lawa is likely to be quite different from that experienced by the Western Lawa.

#### **4.3 Educational Application of Lawa Orthography**

Despite difficulties with both phonology and orthography, my position as a guest English teacher in the Bo Luang school allowed me both opportunity and influence at a school level. This section describes the third stage of orthography creation, implementation. I report on initiatives at the

classroom level in kindergarten and special needs as well as at a wider school level.

I had hoped that the difficulties in adapting Thai script for use in Eastern Lawa were theoretical and would disappear when the orthography was used in the school classroom. This was not the case. The following vignette drawn from my field notes illustrates the pervasiveness of resistance to using Thai orthography for writing the mother tongue.

After careful phonological investigation and community checking, I am ready to introduce a Lawa consonant chart to the teachers and children in the Year 2 kindergarten class at Bo Luang.

The children have already turned, or are close to turning, five. There are 38 of them sitting on mats in the classroom. Two Lawa kindergarten teachers are present as well as the head teacher of the kindergarten who is Thai, not Lawa. Also present are five Payap university graduate students who are studying multilingual education.

The children are excited to have the students and myself with them and are listening enthusiastically. The children have all been introduced to Thai script in Year 1 kindergarten. They are familiar with the names of graphemes but are not able to read.

Thai characters are not an *alphabet*. As described in section 4.2, the dictionary order begins with the velar sound /k/ and the script is presented as a chart of consonants that have the same inherent vowel (/ɔ/). The

correct term is an *abugida* (Ager, 2012). However, I have chosen to use the term alphabet in this vignette to aid the understanding of readers who are not familiar with the Thai script.

In Thai the first character of the alphabet is called ‘chicken’ in the same way that “A” is often called “A apple” in English. In English, however, “A” could also be called “ant”, “apple” or “acorn”. In Thai /k/ can only ever be called /kaj/ ‘chicken’. Similarly, the second grapheme of the “alphabet” /kʰ/ can only be called /kʰaj/ ‘egg’ etc.

I ask my Payap students to present an alphabet chart and song composed and checked with Lawa research participants as part of our multilingual education class. We have grapheme and picture cards to hold up for the song. There is also a simple work-book based on the song designed for students to practise writing some Lawa words in.

The presentation begins with a Payap student holding up a picture of a fish and the teacher asking (in Lawa) what it is. The children reply with the Thai word /pla/ ‘fish’ but the teacher asks for the word in Lawa language. This time the children reply with the Lawa word /kaʔ/. The teacher then says (in Lawa), ‘fish’ (/kaʔ/) begins with /k/.”

Then the Thai grapheme for /k/ is held up. A number of children call out /kɔ/. The teacher says “/kɔ kaʔ/” (the Lawa word for ‘fish’). Some children look confused and say /kɔ kaj/ (the Thai word for ‘chicken’ and the Thai

official name of the grapheme). The teacher explains that we are learning to read and write Lawa language and the Lawa word for chicken is /ʔɛ/ which does not start with the sound /k/. Four more characters and pictures are explained in the same way and the first verse of the song is taught.

However, one of the boys begins to behave strangely as we sing the song. He covers his ears with his hands and then begins to repeat “/kɔ kaj/” (the Thai name for the grapheme). Several other boys join him. The majority of the class join in the song copying the teacher but these few boys refuse to participate and seem upset at the use of Lawa.

At the end of the class the kindergarten teachers are very concerned. They insist that this grapheme must be called by its name in the Thai alphabet, /kɔ kaj/, ‘chicken’. They also point out that ‘fish’ represents another grapheme /pɔ pla/. When I ask if we should replace ‘fish’ with a different word that did not appear in the Thai “alphabet” I am told that will not help because the first grapheme must be called ‘chicken’. The teachers suggest that we should just translate the Thai grapheme words into Lawa. (Unfortunately, only one word, when translated into Lawa, has the same initial consonant as its Thai counterpart.)

The head teacher is concerned that it is already difficult teaching the Thai “alphabet” to Lawa students. She believes that using Lawa words will just confuse the

children she says. She tells me that the boy who has reacted so strongly to calling graphemes by Lawa names has much difficulty in class because of his own limited Thai language.

It was a disappointing result for what I had hoped would be a powerful introduction to using the mother tongue in the classroom. The Thai head kindergarten teacher had already attended a five-day training course at Payap university about introducing mother tongue to the classroom. I began to question whether and how my actions had sabotaged an initially positive environment in the school.

Shortly after this interaction, the Lawa teacher who had been asked by the school principal to pilot using Lawa to teach the “alphabet” told me that she was no longer willing to use Lawa in her classroom as she was “too busy”.

#### **4.3.1 Reification of literacy.**

An orthography is an abstract concept. It becomes concrete when it is expressed in the form of an alphabet chart which contains letters, sounds and sample words. An alphabet chart is an example of *reification*, which Wenger defines as “both the process and product of giving form to our experiences by producing objects that congeal this experience into ‘thingness’” (Wenger, 1998, p. 58).

My reasons for wanting to use an alphabet chart as an introduction to reading were:

1. Shapes of grapheme should be identified with initial sounds in key words. Learning a grapheme matched with a common concrete word is much easier than matching it with an abstract sound.

2. Movement, rhythm and visualisation should all help children retain the sounds of the alphabet and the link between grapheme symbols and phonemic sounds. This makes it important to back up an “alphabet” chart with an alphabet song.

3. An alphabet chart along with a corresponding song is an ideal first text for both pedagogical and political reasons. Politically, it lifts the status of an oral minority language towards the status of a national written language. In the minds of the community, real languages (i.e. Thai) have alphabet charts and songs; Lawa did not.

The powerful teaching tool of having a common concrete word associated with a grapheme in a script is already firmly entrenched in Thai literacy education practice. This process of reification has a double edge. The mnemonic can become a substitute for a deeper understanding of what literacy is:

But the power of reification – its succinctness, its portability, its potential physical persistence, its focusing effect – is also its danger...The tool can ossify activity around its inertness. Procedures can hide broader meanings in blind sequences of operations. And the knowledge of a formula can lead to the illusion that one fully understands the processes it describes. (Wenger, 1998, p. 61)

The teachers’ comments indicate that the concept of the first grapheme being called ‘chicken’ had gone from being a useful mnemonic in Thai script to becoming identified with the name of the grapheme. This was not usually an issue in Thai language but when used in Lawa the name no longer had a correspondence to the sound of the grapheme. The strong resistance by the teachers to changing the Thai name for the grapheme

indicated their lack of understanding of the potential for using the Eastern Lawa language to master the sounds of Thai graphemes.

Although I could have insisted upon the school principal's endorsement of our programme, I was unwilling to force teachers to use a pedagogical tool they did not agree with. It was theoretically possible to call the graphemes by their Thai names but this would have forced a Thai phonology (including tone rules) upon Lawa children that negated the proposed benefits of initially learning script in the mother tongue.

A meeting was called with the early childhood teachers involved and we concluded that we would not continue with the proposed trial of introducing literacy in the mother tongue in kindergarten classes. Although several of the kindergarten teachers were mother tongue Lawa speakers who used Lawa in informal interaction with children and parents, they were not willing to extend Lawa to the domain of alphabet learning.

However, one of these Lawa teachers, Teacher C, declared her own belief in the usefulness of such an approach. Although supervised by the kindergarten, she actually taught older children in the special needs class who were unable to read and write Thai.

#### **4.3.2 Using mother tongue in the special needs class**

With the endorsement of Teacher C, the special needs teacher, I embarked on a course of lessons to develop literacy in older special needs Lawa children. The lessons described took place from November 2010 to March 2011. They were designed to last for about an hour and to be carried out five days each week. This was seldom the case because of many interruptions with non-attendance, cancelled school days and outside school activities. On one level the programme could be considered successful if judged by the response of both teacher and students. On

another level, judged by sustainability in both the school and the individual students, the lessons were not successful.

There were six students in the special needs class aged between nine and twelve years old. Examination of portfolios of their previous schoolwork showed that they had little written ability except for copying their names and a few basic words. Their teacher, teacher C, was very innovative but without formal teaching qualifications.

The first five weeks of instruction consisted of the teacher reading a series of stories to the class. Stories were based around the life of a naughty 6-year-old boy (Ai Kawng) growing up in the village. Each story featured the key word for the grapheme that was being learnt. These stories were initially prepared by myself and P (§3.2.4, category 5) in English and then Thai. The special needs teacher was then asked to help translate these into Lawa. However, she preferred to read the story in Thai silently and then retell the story in Lawa to students without any form of written text.

After each story the key grapheme and word for the day were learnt and students were invited to contribute other words in their language beginning with this sound. Each student then constructed a drawing that featured the new grapheme and pictures of words beginning with that grapheme. At the start of the next day's lesson, students would present their picture to their classmates and orally describe it (in Lawa), pointing out the words beginning with each sound.

One advantage of the technique was that there was no difficulty about the way vowels and diphthongs should be represented because only the initial grapheme was shown. There was also no difficulty with using Lawa or Thai words because we were only concentrating on the initial sound of the word. For the first grapheme students could draw a picture of both a

chicken and a fish and anything else they chose which had an initial sound beginning with the grapheme for /k/.

Students' pictures were posted on the wall of the classroom and there was a real sense of progress and individual contribution as the lessons went on. The lessons were enjoyable for all involved because of the oral descriptions by students in their own language. Once again, there was significant affirmation for the children's cultural and linguistic identity as they used basic reading and writing skills. One boy was totally uncommunicative when I first observed him during lessons conducted in Thai. He became very animated during the Lawa exercises, fully participating each day in Lawa.

The second step in the programme was to introduce vowels and diphthongs. Vowels and final consonants were introduced and students matched these to initial consonants in a group discovery exercise to identify real words. Vowels were linked with stories and play acting to make each lesson memorable. For example, the vowel /a/ was linked to a story about the main character (Ai Kawng) going to a doctor who looked down his throat. Students practiced making the sound "aaaa" and opening their mouths wide.

Following this, the teacher wrote all the consonants that had been learnt on the board and students tried putting the vowel /a/ after each consonant to discover if this created a word. The following Lawa words were generated: /ka/ 'seed', /ca/ 'to get sick from magic or spirit', /pa/ 'to touch or catch', /p<sup>h</sup>a/ 'to go through', /ra/ 'to make smooth', /ha/ 'mould' and a verb /ʔa/ which when combined with the Lawa word for mouth (/ʔa ʔaʔbawm/) had the meaning to open the mouth wide. This direct connection between sound and meaning reinforced the lesson. Thai words were also generated or Northern Thai pronunciations of Thai words such as /ta/ (Thai /t<sup>h</sup>a/) 'to anoint', /fa/ 'mole on face' etc. The nature of the

exercise did not require any artificial boundary between Thai and Lawa language.

The next day a glottal was added after the vowel and students practiced making the open mouth sound and then cutting it short. The symbol for writing this was shown and a similar exercise was made of discovering new words on the board with the set of consonants learnt. I think all the words generated this day were Lawa (i.e. words that are not found in Central Thai or colloquial Northern Thai): /kaʔ/ 'fish', /taʔ/ 'taking water off field', /gaʔ/ 'empty', /caʔ/ 'human rump' or 'fire place in house', /ŋaʔ/ 'itchy feeling in throat', /saʔ/ 'basket', /taʔ/ 'grandfather', /naʔ/ 'sour', /paʔ/ 'come to collect someone', /maʔ/ 'mother', /raʔ/ 'big'.

The other six possible final consonants (k, t, n, p, m, h) were then introduced over the rest of the week with similar results. I have only listed the Lawa words, which were in fact the majority of words. However, Thai words were not discouraged.

The difficulty with Thai words was that often the spelling was not consistent with the simple phonetic spelling introduced in Lawa. There are several Thai initial consonant graphemes for the same sound, usually to reflect tone. Final consonants also have several graphemes, usually reflecting derivation from Sanskrit. Therefore, while not discouraged, some Thai words were affirmed and then ignored.

Student confidence and speed increased with each final consonant introduced until the final /h/ was encountered. I believe that the difficulty with this sound is that it is a remnant of a breathy register (§4.1.2) rather than a true final consonant. The emphasis in the class was on helping children to learn the Thai graphemes by reading and writing Eastern Lawa words. Problems with the draft orthography were simply noted but not dwelt on.

This sense of fun continued as other vowels were introduced. In the oral stories Ai Kawng encounters different animals representing other vowel sounds (e.g. /u/ for monkey, /i/ for mosquito with words based on these vowels called *monkey words* and *mosquito words*). The lessons were noisy, imaginative and productive.

Both the kindergarten supervisor and the special needs teacher informed me that they believed at least two of the students in the special needs class of six students were unable to read because of difficulty with Thai language rather than any specific reading disability. There is international agreement that second language learners are generally “under-diagnosed and over-represented in special education classes” (Woolley, 2010). The situation in Bo Luang is different from the Western context of this international agreement as nearly all students in the school were learning Thai as second language learners. However, it is important that these teachers still saw language as the cause for at least some of the designated “special needs” students’ academic difficulties.

Our initial success with students comprehending our trial Lawa script and using it in writing confirmed these teachers’ suspicions. After one semester’s work using Lawa for reading and writing, the special needs teacher’s main concern was that “students were able to read and write Lawa words but they still could not read Thai words”. It is not surprising that students who were struggling academically would be unable to gain basic literacy skills through the Thai language. It is significant that progress was noted in words from Lawa language only, which indicates that it was language rather than the methodology, or the material, that was contributing to the increased literacy of all students.

The list of Lawa words that students were able to read and write is remarkable for several reasons. Firstly, it comes from illiterate students (with limited help and much affirmation from their teacher). Secondly, it

includes a number of abstract and grammatical terms that would normally be difficult to elicit. Most importantly, it is the result of the students being fully engaged with the concept of sound and meaning represented through written symbols.

Literacy was introduced using the students' prior understandings of their mother tongue oral language. Experimenting with sounds and words encouraged deeper understanding of the complex conceptual framework of Thai graphemes. Most importantly, students were taking active control over the learning process. These principles of using prior understanding, linking experience with abstract concepts and active control are considered key to effective learning (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

Sadly, our intervention was cut short by outside circumstances. The school removed Teacher C from the special needs class because no one was available to teach Year One. Our subsequent inability to continue working with these special needs students highlights the serious limitations of an outside researcher using action research in a community operating within quite different goals and budget constraints. This lack of priority for special needs education existed at a national level also. Special needs funding for teachers was drastically cut during the time of research to the point where the school could not support the wages of such a teacher.

Six months later, Teacher C was able to work with these children again and I had the chance to interact with them. There seemed to be little retention of what they had learnt. Four of the five students could name graphemes and vowels but were unable to put two graphemes together to read a two grapheme word. The one remaining student, an 11-year-old boy, had some ability to read simple words in Lawa and Thai but was unable to focus for more than a few minutes.

The students were quite unsettled after their time out of the special needs class environment. It appeared that there was no retention by students of what seemed to be a successful programme the previous semester.

My experiences in the kindergarten and the special needs class reinforce two foundational principles in an ecological approach to education. Firstly, the wider context of the learning environment is critical for students to benefit from a classroom innovation such as using their mother tongue (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Secondly, mother tongue literacy just like national literacy must be addressed at a systematic level for sustainable gains (Bhola, 1994).

#### **4.3.3 Using mother tongue in the English class.**

As I interacted with the school, there was increasing pressure for me to contribute to the English language programme there. I was happy to do so as English lessons are a possible platform for using Lawa as a medium of dialogue and instruction within the classroom.

English classrooms in Thailand are still heavily influenced by the belief that English is best learnt from native speakers who do not use the first language of the student. These beliefs are increasingly being challenged in academic literature (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Gill, 2005; Weschler, 1997; Widdowson, 2003). The basic idea that the mother tongue is the ideal medium of instruction for learning new skills (§2.2.2), can also be applied to foreign language learning.

My practice for using Lawa in the English classroom consisted of three main activities: translation of popular English teaching songs into Lawa, bilingual *identity books* and using Lawa language to supplement monolingual English techniques.

#### ***4.3.3.1 The use of Lawa and English in learning songs.***

*Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* is a popular action song for students being exposed to English language. 6-year-old children were quickly able to translate the body parts for me into Eastern Lawa as I used sign language to indicate which body part was being referred to. With the help of their Lawa teachers, I attempted to write these in Thai script to introduce the students and teachers to the idea that their language could be written down. Another popular song was a counting song which students knew in Thai and English. They readily added the third language of Lawa. The songs were then sung in both Lawa and English, as well as Thai for the counting song.

The concrete content of the songs (numbers and body parts) made translation easy despite the limited English of the students and my own limited understanding of Lawa. Although this technique sounds simplistic, the consequent result was profound. Students performed the two songs at the school assembly and then taught the rest of the students. To my knowledge this is the first time the indigenous language has been officially used during a school assembly. The desire to use English created a forum for the public use and encouragement of Lawa.

#### ***4.3.3.2 The use of Lawa and English in identity texts.***

A common method for teaching local literacy is the use of big books for classroom reading and small books for individual reading. Traditional stories and songs are often used for these books. Sometimes these books appear as diglots with the national language and the local language appearing on the same page. My personal experience of these diglots in several countries and languages was that they were useful for students with little capacity in the national language but caused problems for students already literate in the national language. Students already literate

seemed to show a preference to read the national language and to ignore the new orthography of their own mother tongue.

However, this was not the case when English was used with Lawa in a diglot. Students strove to decipher the Lawa language in order to help them understand the English. By taking liberty with translation, the English sentences were simplified in both vocabulary and grammar. I tried to use the English translation as paradigms for basic English structures. Students enjoyed participating in the construction of small books by drawing their own pictures.

After recording a Lawa lullaby from one of the older women in the community who is renowned as a singer, I constructed an English version of the same song, taught this to 14-year-old and 15-year-old students and then encouraged them to draw and write a diglot picture book based on the song. An example of this diglot is found in Appendix B. The orthography used was similar to the Lawa orthography described in Tables 11 and 12 and written by me with some input from students who agreed or disagreed with my attempts at different words.

Cummins et al. (2005) describe a technique for immigrant students in Canada which produces dual language identity texts similar to the lullaby text I constructed with the Lawa students. Another strength documented by Cummins et al. (2005) is the potential for high levels of community involvement in the construction of such texts. I also found that the use of a well-known oral tradition for a small book allowed non-literate older family members to experience and contribute towards what their children were doing in the English classroom.

#### ***4.3.3.3 Adapting monolingual English teaching techniques to include L1.***

I hope that the days of the use of the mother tongue (L1) being seen as a handicap in English language learning are slowly drawing to a close. Realising that L1 is actually an asset opens the door for its creative use in the English language classroom. I was able to adapt a technique from the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach (Asher, 1965) by taking the role of language learner and having the class become my teacher as I had to respond to their instructions in Lawa. We then exchanged roles and the class responded to my English instructions. The subtle message that was being conveyed was that Lawa language had the same value as English and it was my desire to learn it in the same way that the students wished to learn English.

A similar technique was used for asking questions. Some of the first English words I taught were *who, what, where, why, when, how* (based on Kipling's poem about six honest serving men in *The Elephant Child*). Students were able to understand my questions but did not have the English capacity for answering in English. The technique I adopted was that the question was asked in English but students were encouraged to reply in Lawa. I took small groups outside and asked questions like what is this, who is this, where is this, why is this here, how is this used, when is this? This technique was then extended to the construction of stories similar to the game of consequences. Each student would contribute another line to a story answering who, what, where, why, when or how. Initially, a line was said in Lawa and then translated by me into English. Each subsequent student had to repeat the story so far and then add another line (in Lawa). I would repeat the English translation with each line and then ask all the students questions about the story using English. I

found that students increasingly answered in English as their confidence improved.

The critical factor with both of these techniques is that English input is being responded to with comprehension rather than meaningless repetition.

#### ***4.3.3.4 Evaluation of using Lawa in the English language classroom.***

My original goal in teaching English was to promote literacy in L1 through the English language class. I eventually abandoned this project because I discovered that I lost the participation of the Lawa teachers at the Bo Luang school as they were not involved in English teaching (the only English teachers were Thai). Moreover, a working orthography had still not been agreed on by the community and I felt uncomfortable promoting a non-official orthography through the English language class.

However, the initial circumstances which led to my experiment remain. Although there may be limited resources and enthusiasm for indigenous language development within Thailand's formal education system, there is much enthusiasm for English language education. My experiment capitalised on this enthusiasm by using English language as a vehicle for the promotion of vernacular literacy.

In conclusion, I would recommend the use of English teaching as a limited vehicle for community engagement and research into a minority language and culture. These techniques are no substitute for community ownership and participation, but they provide a strategic initial position by which a foreign linguist may influence, encourage and inform future development. If the English language teachers had been members of the Lawa community, then this approach may have been more beneficial and sustainable.

#### 4.4 Conclusions from Initial Results

I was unable to validate either my own or an earlier linguist's phonology through the various activities reported in this chapter. The nature of vowel groups and initial consonant clusters were especially difficult to get consistent results for. Experiences described in section 4.1 indicate that this may be the result of working with a Mon-Khmer language that is in close contact with Thai. The lack of consistency may be both because of ongoing language change caused by the influence of Thai and the constellation of activities which reflect register in a Mon-Khmer language such as Lawa (§4.1.2).

Inconsistency in pronunciation should still have allowed progress to be made in agreeing on a suitable method of portraying Lawa sounds using Thai script. My initial course of action was to use the Western Lawa orthographic system in an attempt to show that Lawa could be written. In doing so I discovered that objections were mainly raised to inconsistencies between the proposed Lawa orthography and the normal use of Thai script. Issues were much more orthographic than phonological. What I mean by this statement is that the legitimacy of Thai script representations of Lawa sounds was a consistent difficulty. This difficulty increased as representations increasingly departed from standard Thai use. Concerns over how words were actually pronounced (phonological issues) were seldom raised and there was general acceptance of a range of pronunciations.

The initial environment I worked in at Bo Luang school seemed to be an ideal community platform for the promotion of both Lawa language and writing. However, the priority of Thai language was a consistent theme in this formal educational setting. Despite success in the special needs classroom, there was little support or interest in an ongoing programme of mother tongue literacy beyond the initial desire to write Lawa words in

Thai text. One exception to this was in English classes conducted by myself where Lawa was a useful tool for students seeking to understand English. However, there was no outside community involvement in this strategy.

As already discussed (§3.1), critical reflection and ongoing adjustment of research is intrinsic to action research. Reflection on the results described above led to the following three groups of conclusions.

1. I needed to abandon my objective of proving a standard Lawa phonology based on outside observations. Instead I would seek a better understanding of how the Eastern Lawa viewed their own phonology.
2. Minimal change to Thai orthography was a highly desirable attribute for an Eastern Lawa orthography. Adopting the Western Lawa orthography was appropriate phonologically. However, all Eastern Lawa participants complained that the Western Lawa orthography contained too many changes to Thai writing conventions.
3. Using the school as a medium for the promotion of Lawa language and writing had led to my isolation from the adult Eastern Lawa community. I decided to link further research more with traditional ways of learning rather than with formal education.

## Chapter Five: Improved Results

According to Argyris's (2003) theory of action science, social change requires a paradigm shift away from an old self-perpetuating system towards a new liberating model of behaviour where theory in use matches espoused theory.

The process of action research revealed the differences between my research paradigm and the reality of researching and promoting a written script within Eastern Lawa society. I mistakenly believed that the paradigm problem was with the community who were rejecting the innovation of vernacular literacy. I now believe that the problem was with my own paradigm of how vernacular literacy should happen.

Lewin (1946), writing at the end of World War II, uses the image of planning a bombing raid, carrying out the raid, then taking reconnaissance to check for damage as a metaphor for the planning, acting and evaluating cycle of action research. At the end of the activities described in chapter four it was clear that my metaphoric bombs had not hit the target of community ownership.

The actions described in this chapter took place between November 2010 and November 2012. They resulted from reflection over the results described in chapter four and are described in this chapter using a similar framework of discovering phonology, adapting an orthography, and use and ownership in the community.

### 5.1 Improved Phonology: The Participant Phonology Approach

One important difference between action research and typical linguistic research is that action research is diachronic rather than synchronic. Action research allows results to emerge over time. The results from later action research are more reliable than the results from previous action

research. In my case, later research reflected an ongoing paradigm change in me, the researcher, and this impacted my linguistic analysis.

The basic problem with my early research was that there was indigenous support for my research but no ownership. To generate ownership I needed to abandon the image of the foreign expert, to lessen the influence of the Thai language and writing system, and to find a means of elicitation and analysis that was usable for all parties. I have called this means a *participatory phonology approach*.

The participatory phonology approach I devised was initially trialled and improved on through 2012 with four participants consisting of two men and two women (aged between 30 and 63) from the villages of Bo Pawen, Bo Luang and Ban Khun; villages all within five kilometres of each other. These participants are referred to by Lawa titles: Bpu Khrey (younger sister), Ar Ra (older sister), lak Ra (older brother) and Bpu Bpria (younger brother) according to their age and gender relative to me. In November 2012, a fifth participant (a 52-year-old male from Ban Khun) enthusiastically embraced the process and then went on to collaborate in completing a useable orthography as will be described in the following section. I have referred to him as Bpu Hmew (friend) as we are similar ages.

The core of the participatory phonology approach was asking participants to group words together that had the same vowel sounds. The focus of my research had become the vowels of Lawa because these vowels presented the greatest obstacle to writing. As described in the previous chapter, a large number of contrasting vowels and diphthongs are characteristic of the Lawa languages. These contrasts were not easily shown using Thai script and had been difficult for me to hear and for even for participants to apparently use consistently.

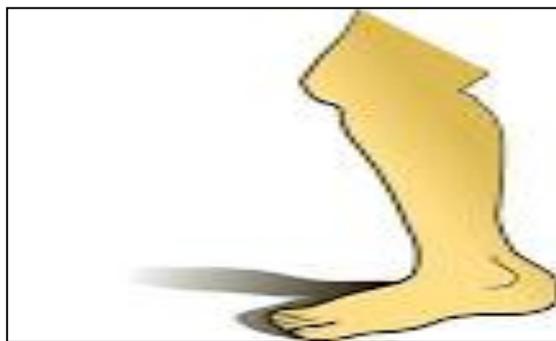
My methodology evolved over time. lak Ra translated words from Thai into Lawa and then classified these words into vowel groups. However, I was concerned that the large amount of Thai being used during elicitation was shifting the Lawa vowels towards their closest Thai equivalents. Table 12 shows that lak Ra separated fewer vowel groups than the later participants.

Bpu Bpria was an English teacher and the interview process was carried out in English with Bpu Bpria translating from English directly into Lawa before sorting words. However, there was little difference between the results of Bpu Bpria and lak Ra. To become an English teacher Bpu Bpria had studied and worked away from the Lawa community more than most Lawa speakers. He was also the youngest participant interviewed (30 years old). Bpu Bpria was the most fluent Lawa English speaker that I met. I had no other contacts that could have used English in an interview process.

At this point I converted as many words as practical from my basic word list into pictures and then asked individual participants to sort these pictures into groups (placed in named plastic bags) according to the vowel sound of the main syllable. Pictures were selected from clipart used for literacy projects by SIL as well as images found on the internet. Figure 2 below shows the picture used to generate the word for /kuət/ 'old' (person). Figure 3 is the picture used for /cuəŋ/ 'lower leg'.



**Figure 2: Picture card for 'old'**



**Figure 3: Picture card for 'lower leg'**

The picture card method was used with Ar Ra, Bpu Khrey and Bpu Hmew. Ar Ra separated more groups than any other participant because she would not initially group the same vowels with different finals together. She was slowly becoming adept at showing these as subgroups of the same vowel. Unfortunately, we were not able to complete the exercise in the time we had available. Illiteracy did not prevent fine level discrimination between vowel and final consonant sounds. However, unfamiliarity with the phonemic concept which literacy provides did make it difficult to see similarities at first.

Bpu Khrey worked well with the pictures and found them helpful to distinguish sounds that she had had difficulty pinpointing in previous involvement. Unlike Bpu Bpria, Bpu Khrey had not lived or trained outside

of the Lawa community. She had also spent several years participating in the previous explorations I had made described in chapter 4. (Bpu Khrey is the special needs teacher whose previous contribution is discussed in sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2).

The clearest results came with Bpu Hmew who went on to develop an orthography for each of these vowel groups. Bpu Hmew had already been exposed to the orthography developed by Lipsius (see §4.1.1) but not used by the Lawa community. However, I believe the main difference between Bpu Hmew and the other participants was the longer space of time given for his analysis (five days as opposed to one or two). The difference also reflects a more careful explanation and trialling by me based on experiences with the other participants. For example I encouraged Bpu Hmew to use minimal pairs (/kuət/ 'old' and /koət/ 'cold') in naming his groups.

It could be argued that the use of minimal pairs is the same procedure as the traditional linguistic approach. While the methods are not mutually exclusive, the critical difference is ownership of the procedure. The participant initiated the contrast in the group names and there is no correction made by the researcher on those who do not choose to make that contrast. The plastic bags are physical objects that groups or individuals can return to and re-analyse in their own time. For practical purposes I summarised the bags by reprinting the pictures of each group together on one page. These pictures could be cut out and physically manipulated again by the participants, unlike data stored in a researcher's notes or database.

Table 12 summarises the results of four participants by using the vowel groups Bpu Hmew categorised in his orthography. The first three columns show the identifying number and key words (Lawa IPA and English translation) that eventually emerged for Bpu Hmew. The next four columns

show the number of cards placed by each participant in each vowel category.

The categories did not always contain exactly the same words (pictures) for each speaker, what is important is the identification of the categories. There was also some variation in each participant's choice of key words. Although I have standardised the key words in the table I encouraged participants to choose their own key words to maximise participant control.

The numbers in Table 12 differ considerably for each participant. This is because some participants began to suggest their own examples for vowel groups. Another reason is that some pictures were discarded because they were deemed to be ambiguous. This meant that the final set of words grouped by each participant differed.

**Table 12: Results of participatory phonological sorting**

			<b>lak Ra</b>	<b>Bpu Bpria</b>	<b>Bpu Khrey</b>	<b>Bpu Hmew</b>
<b>1a</b>	/kuət/	old	20	19	16	6
<b>1b</b>	/koət/	cold			3	6
<b>2a</b>	/pɔŋ/	window	9	11	8	10
<b>2b</b>	/pɔŋ/	stairs	4	11	5	7
<b>3a</b>	/to/	shallow	3		2	3
<b>3b</b>	/too/	meat	11	7	9	7
<b>4a</b>	/roj/	house fly	3	8	3	10
<b>4b</b>	/rɔj/	choose	4		4	7
<b>5a</b>	/kaj/	to have	20	11	11	5
<b>5b</b>	/kajn/	head				7
<b>6a</b>	/jiəp/	to wink	10	11	10	7
<b>6b</b>	/ceəp/	to flash				4
<b>7a</b>	/pleʔ/	fruit	4		4	4
<b>7b</b>	/lejt/	pig	6	4	7	4
<b>8a</b>	/maw/	to crawl	8	11	7	7
<b>8b</b>	/mawh/	ring	6	8	4	6
<b>9a</b>	/hak/	skin	30	28	27	7
<b>9b</b>	/haʔik/	hair	8	2	2	7
<b>10a</b>	/nəŋ/	to bend	22	13	8	4
<b>10b</b>	/pɛʔiŋ	to shoot				7
<b>11a</b>	/ew/	to walk		3	2	4
<b>11b</b>	/mewp/	cow			1	4
<b>12a</b>	/jum/	dead	12	11	11	11
<b>12b</b>	/jujt/	drunk				3
<b>13</b>	/kih/	salt	6	4	4	4
<b>14</b>	/cik/	field	4	3	4	4
<b>15</b>	/ɲiəʔ/	house	11	7	7	6
<b>16</b>	/ʔɛ/	chicken	10	11	11	7

Vowels which were indicated by Bpu Hmew as being different to those which were written in Thai orthography are labelled (by Bpu Hmew) as ‘b’ or non-modal (i.e. 1b-12b). Thai sounding (modal) vowels which were

close to these non-modals are labelled as 'a' of the same number (i.e. 1a-12a). This results in twelve pairs of modal and non-modal vowels. An additional four vowel groups (13-16) are also listed which do not have non-modal pairs and occur in both Thai and Lawa.

The two groups described as "old words" (1a) and "cold words" (1b) by Bpu Hmew illustrate the results in Table 12. The diphthong sounds /uə/ and /oə/ do not contrast in Thai and they are not consistently contrasted in modern Lawa. Bpu Hmew eventually created two clear groups from these sounds. *Old words* were analysed as: /kuət/, 'to be old'; /lasuək/, 'ear'; /muən/, 'fun'; /cuəŋ/, 'leg'; /kuəŋ/, 'dig' and /kuət/, 'to want' (apparently a homophone with /kuət/, 'to be old'). *Cold words* were analysed as /koət/, 'to be cold'; /poən/, 'to eat (rice)'; /p<sup>h</sup>oən/, 'five'; /moən/, 'pillow'; /foən/, 'dance' and /koə/, 'ten'. Therefore '6' appears under Bpu Hmew's name for groups 1a and 1b.

It is clear that while some vowel groups were obvious to all, others are not unanimous. In the cases where participants did not separate words that Bpu Hmew had separated, words were simply grouped by participants in the closest modal vowel group. This group was not always the same choice for each participant, especially for categories 8, 9 and 10. Participants other than Bpu Hmew tended to place the same non-modal vowels across all three modal vowel groups.

I have only transcribed a difference between modal and non-modal vowels for seven of the twelve pairs (1,2,3,4,6,9,10). The other five (5, 7, 8, 11, 12) which were considered different vowel groups had the 'b' non-modal groups consisting of final consonants /j/ or /w/ followed by a second final consonant. Traditional phonological analysis would not separate the 'a' and 'b' groups for 5, 7, 8, 11 and 12 but I agree with the separation made by Bpu Hmew. All twelve 'b' pairs often presented with some kind of

register effect spread over the whole syllable such as creakiness or glottalisation.

I would argue that these results are actually more objective than traditional linguistic analysis because the data is not contaminated by the subjective phonetic transcription of the linguist. I have, however, included my own phonemic transcription as a guide rather than as an expert outside analysis.

A second advantage of this method is that participants could analyse their language without the use or influence of another script. In fact, Ar Ra (older sister) was completely illiterate. Although it took some time to communicate the idea of vowel sounds, her analysis became quite precise and resulted in several levels of groups and sub-groups. Unfortunately, we did not have enough time to complete the process with her for a clear comparative set of results.

The result of this experiment in participatory phonology is not a polished academic statement of standardised Eastern Lawa phonology. It is, however, a practical methodology and application for engaging a community in researching their own language.

## **5.2 Improved Orthography**

It may seem that these variable results brought us no closer to a usable orthography but the variability itself was the important finding. If there was little agreement on the pronunciation of words that had non-Thai sounding vowels, there was little point in trying to find agreement on how to represent these vowels in an orthography.

Furthermore, the development of paired vowel groups where one group sounded the same as Thai while the other was similar but different also suggested a possible way forward. Pairs like these are typical of register

languages (§4.1.2) where there is a modal (unmarked) pronunciation and a non-modal (breathy or creaky) pronunciation. While register is normally connected with breathiness or creakiness, it is also recognised that this can develop into an elaborate set of vowel contrasts such as in the Khmer language.

The traditional (i.e. Mon and Khmer orthographies) way of dealing with these contrasts is by having classes of consonants in the orthography that toggle the pronunciation of the vowels. This is not possible with Thai orthography because Thai classes are based on tone contrasts. I do not believe I would have explored traditional Mon and Khmer orthographies if I had not been guided by the action research values of appreciative inquiry (§3.1). By looking outside of the Western formula of “one grapheme; one sound” I was able to develop a simple but very versatile means of writing Lawa vowels.

When Pali language (the language of Buddhist scriptures) is written in Thai, final consonants are written with a small dot under them to show that this is a final and should not be pronounced in the same way (with an inherent vowel) as an initial consonant. (Spaces are not used between words in normal Thai orthography.) The dot signals a change from normal pronunciation.

I suggested this as a simple toggle that would allow Eastern Lawa vowel contrasts to be shown without needing to use new vowel graphemes or strange combinations of graphemes as in Western Lawa. Syllables which contain vowels that are different from those in Thai should be written with the closest Thai vowel and a so-called Pali dot on the bottom right of the final grapheme to signify this is a change to normal Thai pronunciation of the vowel grapheme. This was a significant breakthrough in my research because it was quickly picked up and used by participants.

The Pali dot was optional for Lawa writers. This reflected the lack of agreement between participants in pronunciation of diphthongs and my own desire not to impose any particular form of pronunciation over another. The dot has been used by linguists in other Mon-Khmer minority languages in Thailand (TU-SIL-LRDP Committee, 2002) to extend the grapheme set of vowels by one or two graphemes, but never as a systematic innovation which can be applied simply across all modal and related non-modal vowels.

The only mechanical problem is that modern computer programmes only allow the dot under consonants so all syllables which have the dot must contain a final consonant. However, this did not prove to be a problem because most non-modal syllables did end with a final consonant or semi vowel (/w/ or /j/), which are considered consonants in Thai anyway. The group which did not have a final consonant (3b in Table 13 below) had a vowel grapheme which is always written to the left so the dot can be placed under the initial consonant because that is the final grapheme.

The complete set of vowel contrasts using Bpu Hmew's organisation are found in Table 13 below. Further development of these groupings can be seen in Appendix D which is a glossary of Lawa words written with the orthography so far and sorted according to the 28 groups shown in Table 13.

**Table 13: Proposed Lawa vowel sets in new orthography**

Group	Modal (unmarked)			Non-modal (marked)		
	key word	IPA	ortho.	key word	IPA	ortho.
1a and 1b	'old'	/kuət/	กวัด	'cold'	/koət/	กวัด
2a and 2b	'window'	/pɔŋ/	ปอง	'stairs'	/pɔŋ/	ปอง
3a and 3b	'shallow'	/to/	โต	'meat'	/too/	โต
4a and 4b	'fly'	/roj/	โรย	'to pick'	/roj/	โรย
5a and 5b	'to have'	/kaj/	ไก	'head'	/kaj̄n/	ไกน
6a and 6b	'to wink'	/jiəp/	เยียบ	'to flash'	/ceəp/	เจียบ
7a and 7b	'fruit'	/pleʔ/	เปละ	'pig'	/lejt/	เลด
8a and 8b	'to crawl'	/maw/	มาว	'ring'	/mawh/	มาวฮ
9a and 9b	'skin'	/hak/	ฮาก	'hair'	/haʔik/	ฮาก
10a and 10b	'to bend'	/nəŋ/	เนิง	'to shoot'	/pɛʔiŋ/	เปิง
11a and 11b	'to walk'	/hew/	เฮว	'cow'	/mewp/	เมวบ
12a and 12b	'person'	/puj/	ปุย	'drunk'	/jujt/	ยุด
13	'rice field'	/cik/	จีก			
14	'salt'	/kih/	กิช			
15	'house'	/ŋiəʔ/	เญื่อะ			
16	'chicken'	/ʔɛ/	แเอ			

The modal group in Table 13 consists of vowel sounds that are similar to Thai vowel sounds. The non-modal group consists of those that are sometimes pronounced differently to Thai vowels. The Pali dot can be seen under the last grapheme of each word in the orthography of the non-modal groups. My attempt at transcribing the non-modal vowels using IPA is limited because the difference was identified by the participant and not necessarily heard by me. Secondly, the difference was generally at a register level and could take one or a combination of the register features described in Table 6 (§4.1.2).

### 5.3 Improved Application

My beginning assumption was that writing would be introduced to a community through the formal school system starting at the kindergarten level. Chapter four shows that this assumption was idealistic and unpractical. One incident that happened during the end of this first phase captured the problem well. I was working with a male student from the school who also happened to be an apprentice monk. The research was taking place in a public place, the temple, when a passer-by stopped and called out in Lawa, "Why do you ask children? Ask the old people!" It is difficult to introduce change into a community through an education system that ignores traditional leadership roles of older people. However, older Lawa people were seldom involved in the education system because of their limited literacy in Thai.

I began to take a more open ethnographic style rather than a predetermined idealistic approach to discovering how mother tongue writing could be introduced to the community. My most useful interviews were with P, a Northern Thai monk who had grown up in the Lawa community. P had also experienced life in the main city of Chiang Mai, training in Buddhism and English as an apprentice monk (nen).

The results of the interviewing were as I expected. Little use was made of written text outside of what was seen on television and in school. However, one previously ignored aspect of community literacy became apparent. Small wooden signs (/pai sup<sup>h</sup>asit/) were displayed around temple grounds with proverbs for people to meditate on. These were written in Thai or in Pali-Sanskrit as they were Buddhist religious proverbs.

The focus of our interviews changed to a taxonomy of types of proverbs. I discovered that a possible reason for the failure of my initial attempts to discover traditional Lawa proverbs was that I only used the Thai word

/sup<sup>h</sup>asit/ ‘proverb’, which carried language (Thai or Pali) and formal connotations. However, there were other less formal words which I could use such as /k<sup>h</sup>amk<sup>h</sup>wan/ ‘slogan’ or /k<sup>h</sup>amson/ ‘teaching’.

We did not know at that time if traditional Lawa proverbs existed other than simply as translations of Sanskrit or Thai proverbs. However, if they did exist, they would provide a rich source of both Lawa world-view, and Lawa vocabulary and grammatical structure.

At this point I visited my first Lawa contact, the head monk of a temple in Chiang Mai city. Our relationship was relaxed and friendly but it was not possible or appropriate for me to conduct some kind of analytical ethnographic interview with someone of such high office. Therefore, the structure of the interview was directed by him, and several important points emerged.

1. Lawa proverbs did exist but they were generally only known to people at least over eighty years old. Younger people were probably familiar with them but would not recognise them as traditional Lawa sayings or feel confident in passing them on.
2. The best word to use to elicit these traditional proverbs was the Lanna (Northern Thai dialect) phrase /kam bɔ kaw bɔ kɛ/. This phrase means ‘words that are not old’, which seemed a contradiction to the idea of a traditional proverb. My impression was that they are called this to show their enduring value.
3. These sayings were an important part of Lawa culture and were in danger of disappearing. Any contribution I could make to recording them would be very much appreciated.
4. Temples in Lawa areas would be very happy to put such proverbs up as public signage.

My three main initial sources for /kam bɔ̄ kaw bɔ̄ kɛ/ were, contributor T, a 94-year-old woman; contributor M, an 83-year-old man, and contributor K (a man in his late sixties). These sources were nominated by other community members who perceived them as trustworthy transmitters of traditional oral sayings. The sayings stood out from ordinary conversation in two ways. Firstly, the structure of the sayings had clear features of oral literature such as rhyme, rhythmic balance and repetition. Secondly, most of the words used were Lawa not Thai, especially the key words identifying the subject of the saying. These words were repeated in other sayings.

Much more material exists outside of the 30 sayings that are recorded in Appendix C. Consideration of this other material is essential for a good understanding of Lawa culture. My limited goal was only to begin recording and expressing this material in a manner that could be used by the Lawa community for their own future research. During the course of my recording I came across a body of oral literature (traditional spiritual healing chants) that seemed foundational to Lawa identity. I treated some extracts from these chants as sayings because they were included by contributors and because they seemed to have an instructive as well as a healing purpose.

The results of this improved application were small but pleasing. The main temple in the village proudly displayed five proverb signs in Lawa, each with an English translation written below. Some Thai (school) officials expressed the concern that a translation into Thai was needed for those who did not speak Lawa. Based on my experience in other contexts promoting minority orthographies, I was concerned that translating into Thai would cause people to read the Thai and ignore the new Lawa script. The compromise was made that there was an English translation. The English gave a sense of prestige to the Lawa oral sayings and I did not

meet any Lawa people who could comprehend the English without understanding the Lawa orthography first.

A second result was that on the annual King Wilanka day described in Chapter One, Teacher C independently posted Lawa proverbs on trees around the main meeting area. This included several proverbs that were independently researched and recorded by her. The inclusion of the Pali dot seemed to encourage her in this enterprise. However, the vowel groups had not been clearly systematised as in Table 13 and she still expressed some hesitancy with the spelling, wanting to refer to me as an outside authority.

A new list of 30 proverbs was then generated by the 52-year-old male Bpu Hmew (§5.1), who had developed a consistent orthography based on the phonology testing he participated in. This list was developed after consultation with his parents by using the proverbs I had discovered earlier as prompts to confirm those I had recorded and to elicit new examples. The list is found in Appendix C.

Besides promoting discussion on orthography, the proverbs also exist as evidence of important values within Lawa society. Themes that have begun to emerge from my own analysis of these proverbs are family, community, individual responsibility to provide, joy and goodness. There is also an emphasis on instruction being passed down from the older generations through the medium of the Lawa language.

Key words that are used repeatedly for these themes are: /k<sup>h</sup>rəiŋ/ (เครื่อง), 'language or words'; /muən/ (มวน), 'happiness or joy'; /majt/ (ไมต), 'good'; /ʔaik/ (อาท), 'to live or dwell'; /sawp/ (ซาวบ), 'to provide'; /kun/ (กุน), 'merit'.

These values need to be incorporated into research and innovation for community ownership to be possible among the Eastern Lawa. A good model for this can be found in the New Zealand work by Bishop and Glynn

(2003, p. 213) who identify principles which need to be followed for indigenous research among Māori. I believe many of these principles are relevant for most indigenous research contexts including Lawa. These principles include self-determination (tino rangatiratanga), valuing cultural aspirations (taonga tuku iho), reciprocity of teaching and learning (ako) and the honouring of family and collective identity (whānau).

It was beyond the scope of my research to fully develop the kind of indigenous foundation which I have just described. Such a foundation must be built by the community itself. In the past, value has been given to outside methods rather than indigenous values (§2.1). One remedy for this legacy of academic imperialism is for Western academics such as myself to begin engaging with and valuing traditional wisdom. The concluding chapter of this thesis attempts to model this with a particular emphasis on Lawa proverbs and the indigenous research principles concerning orthography which may be found within them.

## **Chapter Six: Concluding With An Alternative Paradigm**

This concluding chapter shows a possible future for community-owned development of an Eastern Lawa orthography. It does this in section 6.1 by summarising the issues that have been raised already and then modelling an indigenous approach to these issues in section 6.2.

It is ironic that I began chapter three with the claim that action research is a methodology and not a paradigm. This may be true, but the critically reflexive nature of action research allows and can even demand shifts in an initial paradigm.

### **6.1 Summary of Results So Far**

This thesis began with three objectives: improved documentation of Eastern Lawa language and culture, the application of action research to orthography creation and the discovery of appropriate guidelines for this application.

The background to these objectives was given in chapter one. Eastern Lawa is only spoken by around 8,000 people and there is little observable difference between these people and Northern Thai except for the Eastern Lawa language. However, that language continues to be passed on to the next generation for the villagers living in the Bo Luang subdistrict of Hot, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Eastern Lawa people who have attended school are usually fluent in oral Thai and most people under 40 show literacy skills in Thai. Despite this, Eastern Lawa language is the mother tongue for the Eastern Lawa people, and oral literature, such as songs, sayings and chants in Eastern Lawa continue to be evident. An example of this was given in the form of an identity song about the history of the Lawa people. Typical of most multilingual societies, Lawa identity is a complex balance

of modern and traditional objectives blended with local and external influences.

This background generated three key questions for the literature review in chapter two:

1. Who are the Eastern Lawa?
2. Why should their language be put into writing?
3. How should their language be put into writing?

Answers to the first question from published literature (§2.1) revealed that the limited descriptions of Eastern Lawa language and culture have come from outsiders. Even descriptions from the local school have cited literature originally published by Westerners. This outside definition of Lawa has also led to an academic focus on isolated Western Lawa villages rather than the more integrated Eastern Lawa. An exception to this is some Northern Thai recognition of the historical importance of Lawa to Chiang Mai city.

Section 2.2 reviewed political, educational and identity arguments for promoting the writing of Lawa. The problem with a political argument (setting Lawa identity against Thai identity) was that it creates an artificial separation in an integrated community. Educational arguments for learning to read and write in the mother tongue tend to treat oral languages as identical to languages with long histories of literature. They also emphasise external goals such as achievement in national examinations. I have claimed that arguments for writing Lawa from an identity perspective resonate more with the Eastern Lawa context. Vernacular literacy is simply a tool to support traditional content and methods of orality that are being lost in modern life.

This identity-based motivation remains in sharp contrast to the literature on orthography creation that is reviewed in section 2.3. Lip service may be given to the importance of non-linguistic factors but the priority objective for orthographies remains an idealised phonological representation of spoken languages. However, more recent theory in language policy and planning (Spolsky, 2004) is emphasising an ecological approach.

Chapter three described an eclectic methodology of action research grounded in ethnography. This methodology has been central to the structure of both my research and this thesis. The critical reflection that has led to my advocacy of indigenous research methods is a direct result. At the same time, the inadequacy of my conclusions as a non-member of the Lawa community are also highlighted.

Chapters four and five describe the outworking of the action research proposed in chapter three. My initial attempts at orthography development and application in chapter four contrast with the direction and motivation of the research in chapter five.

The results of chapter four represent the limitations of using a traditional linguistic approach in the Eastern Lawa context:

1. I could neither confirm nor create an internally consistent phonological statement based on my recordings and transcriptions of Lawa words.
2. The main problem was that the Lawa phonological features that differed to those found in Thai were often avoided or were inconsistent. However, previous researchers in the 1970s had documented these sounds.
3. Possible causes for this inconsistency are language contact and Mon-Khmer phonological register.

4. Eastern Lawa participants met additions or changes to Thai orthography for the purposes of writing Lawa with strong resistance.
5. The most likely cause for this resistance is the high level of literacy and fluency that Eastern Lawa have in Thai. A second likely cause is a lack of alternative educational influence to the Thai education and religious systems. This is quite different from the historical situation when Christian missionaries introduced vernacular literacy to the Western Lawa prior to literacy in Thai.
6. Despite the good will of the school and community, I was unable to encourage a sustainable programme of vernacular literacy. This is not surprising given my lack of systematic influence outside of the classroom. Vernacular literacy is not a priority in the state school.

Chapter five uses a more ecological approach with both complex identity and traditional orality as the base for orthography development. It is by no means a complete thesis on how indigenous research should be carried out. However, it does show the positive results of using an action research framework to address the problems listed above. The ethnographic goal of seeking an inside perspective is extended into enabling an insider's perspective. In other words, I have sought to decrease my role as an interpreter and to seek methods which enable a more authentic Lawa voice to be heard. Such a voice is still compromised by translation (into Thai and English) and the status given to me as a Western researcher. The results described may seem small steps but, as I have claimed in section 3.3, I believe they are steps in the right direction.

Significant results from chapter five are:

1. Participants are capable of analysing their own language by sorting pictures into groups with the same vowel sound.

2. The initial results of these groups are not always consistent but the technique allows for informed community discussion to take place that is not dependent on transcribing in either phonetic script or Thai graphemes.
3. My previous approach had sought to standardise the language so that an orthography could be created. My new approach was to provide an orthographic convention that would cope with the lack of standardisation. It also needed to inflict minimal change on the Thai orthography from which it was derived.
4. This orthographic convention was a Pali dot added to the last consonant in a syllable that indicated that the vowel sound was close but not the same as in Thai.
5. Twelve pairs of dotted and undotted vowel sets have appeared so far. More work is needed on this but this appears to confirm a register hypothesis of marked and unmarked syllables.
6. The use of this convention has allowed Lawa participants to write Lawa in Thai characters using words they previously thought were impossible to write. No detailed instruction is needed because the writer intuitively chooses the closest unmarked vowel (i.e. that which is able to be written using Thai) and then uses the dot to signify that the vowel is different.
7. This has been publically successful both in the unaided collection of traditional sayings and the making of proverb signs by Lawa participants.
8. An unexpected result of this research into writing traditional Lawa sayings has been my recognition that they can be used to begin the

construction of a community-owned indigenous methodology of research.

## **6.2 Application of the New Paradigm to Orthography Ownership**

The process of both action research and respect for indigenous culture demanded by ethnography has resulted in the recognition and some documentation of indigenous knowledge found within the Lawa community. This knowledge represented by traditional sayings does not give immediate answers to orthography decisions. However, it is a vital resource for understanding indigenous values and achieving the three objectives of this thesis.

If traditional sayings are to be considered part of the foundations of a culture, it is important to understand that these sayings are usually not seen as unbreakable rules. Instead they are lessons from the past that have been packaged in such a way that they can be used in different contexts of time and situation. The distinctive approach of an indigenous paradigm is a different way of looking at rules.

In discussing a New Zealand Māori approach to decision making and research (kaupapa Māori), Patterson (1992) identifies whakataukī (proverbs) and pepeha (localised sayings) as important sources. He says that whakataukī are neither a clear system of absolute rules for a culture to follow nor simply pragmatic, situational ethics. Their value is in highlighting traditional values that need to be balanced with each other for authentic cultural decision making (Patterson, 1992, p.27). Proverbs offer diachronic evidence of both language and culture. They have the ability to “reunite the listener with his or her ancestors” (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2009, p. 29).

I have attempted to demonstrate this by addressing orthography questions through traditional Eastern Lawa proverbs. The following five questions have been raised during community discussion about the value of writing Lawa. A traditional academic approach is to simply record such questions or to enter a dialogue by offering external research or case studies to influence a community towards the goals of a research project (i.e. adoption of a writing system). I am suggesting that a more authentic approach is to suggest traditional sayings that can begin an indigenously owned and directed discussion.

This is not indigenous research because the suggestions come from an outside researcher. However, I hope they will serve as a catalyst to promote future application by the Eastern Lawa of traditional values to modern issues.

### **6.2.1 Why are Lawa language and culture important now?**

The question of value is a question of axiology. What is important? What needs to be preserved? Fishman (1991) argues passionately for what he calls *rooted identity* described as “our local life of intimacy, family and community”. He goes on to say that this most basic identity is under threat from “national and international involvements and intrusions, the destruction of local life by the forces of mass market hype and fad, of the weak by the strong, of the unique and traditional the uniformizing, purportedly ‘stylish’ and purposely ephemeral” (Fishman, 1991, p. 4).

Although this argument is articulate and powerful, it is difficult to communicate into the daily life of the Eastern Lawa people. However, the honouring of the wisdom of those who have come before is implicit in the following proverbs (the numbers refer to Appendix C which contains the original wording and translation):

Do not forget the words of your mother and father. (2)

If you don't know the words ask your mother; if you don't know the way, ask your father. (9)

Listen to the words of your mother and father; your grandfather and grandmother. (10)

When you see someone over 50, someone over 65, respect them. (24)

The point of using these proverbs is that the argument for preserving the past comes from within the community. By using the culturally appropriate writing of proverbs on signs displayed at the temple, the link between orthography and preservation of previous oral teaching (§5.3) was clear. A new technology was being used (i.e. an orthography) as a means of promoting traditional values in a traditional community space (the grounds of the temple).

### **6.2.2 What is the point in being Lawa?**

Do not live together just to become a slave. (4)

There is no reason to honour Buddha if you do not honour your parents. (22)

Desire what is good; reject what is bad. (28)

Work with the same attitude as your grandfather and your father. (30)

The intent of the question is similar to the previous one concerning the value of Lawa identity, specifically when Lawa people already identify with Thai. The first proverb (4), which is about retaining individual identity in marriage, can apply to Lawa who identify as Thai citizens without forsaking Lawa identity. Similarly, the national religion of Buddhism does

not negate keeping the traditions of parents and earlier generations (proverb 22). Lawa people have a choice to adapt the good of Thai culture and reject the bad (proverb 28). The final proverb (30) could also be used to emphasise that the Lawa forefathers have worked hard to maintain their ethnic identity and language for thousands of years.

### **6.2.3 Why should we write Lawa?**

If your spade is not sharp, lengthen the handle. If you don't understand, study. (25)

This proverb epitomises the application of traditional wisdom to modern life. Practical examples from the forest and field generate attitudes towards work and study in the modern world. The younger generation can still speak Lawa but many older words are being forgotten along with the culture these words come from. Writing is a technology that can preserve these words and the values behind them. Oral language was a powerful tool to transmit culture in the past but it is limited in the current age of mass media and computer technology.

It might be asked, "Why not just sharpen the spade?" In other words, should Lawa vocabulary be extended to incorporate aspects of modern life? Is there harm in simply using Thai words within sentences? Who would do the sharpening? These are all questions that can come out of the metaphor. The point is that they are technical questions that can be grounded in a traditional metaphor to initiate and empower community discussion and ownership.

### **6.2.4 Why not just write Lawa using the Thai orthography?**

Work like others, but not the same as others. (14)/

Eat like others, but not the same as others. (15)

When you see the elephant poo, don't try to poo like the elephant. (20)

These proverbs emphasise that Lawa should emulate others (especially Thai) but not be the same as others. In other words (14), Lawa need to work hard but at their own specialties (e.g. iron in the past; horticulture and water buffalo now). Similarly, eating healthily is important but there is no need to buy expensive food from elsewhere when healthy produce is available at home. The last proverb (20) is a Thai proverb translated into Lawa, but it carries a similar meaning of not trying to copy someone who is rich or powerful.

In the context of orthography these ideas serve to emphasise that while Thai characters can be used, they are not all needed or all adequate to express the sounds of the Lawa language, which is quite different from Thai.

#### **6.2.5 How can Lawa language help our children?**

Love your mother and father. (1)

Leave well; return with joy. (27)

Don't roam around everywhere without a reason or cause. (6)

There is much joy from living in our own village. (29)

Wenger's concepts of overlapping identities and competencies (§1.2.3) make sense to a Western educator but I have not found these abstract concepts easily communicable. However, the proverbs above carry the same message. The best-known Lawa proverb (1) situates the most basic identity in the childhood home. Proverb 27 is a common farewell and blessing but conveys the idea that good preparation for leaving will be a

good foundation for a future happy return. Proverb 6 talks about the need for meaning and that meaning is found in the rooted identity of community life described in proverb 29. It is the same rooted identity already discussed in section 6.2.1.

Urbanisation may be a fact of modern Thai life but a living culture and language is a strong root which will draw generations back. Perhaps it will even promote the care of Lawa language and culture in the urban environment of Chiang Mai.

### **6.3 Final Words**

There are many pathways which could be followed from this point. For those interested in phonology, encouraging participants to interact and agree on word sets using pictures as described in section 5.1 would be an interesting study. More discovery and dissemination of songs and sayings using the Pali dot convention described in section 5.2 would be another useful activity. Research and articulation of the key concepts found in the Lawa world-view need indigenous development of the introduction I have given in section 5.3.

What is most important is that this work is controlled by the Eastern Lawa people, even though other Thais or foreigners may contribute to the motivation and consideration of this world-view.

It may seem strange that the promotion of writing has led to a recognition of the value of orality and of traditional beliefs. The common factor is identity. The act of writing in the vernacular is an assertion of indigenous identity. I had not intended, when I began, for my research to be more than a simple linguistic exercise giving technical answers to a community issue. Instead I found a much richer task that ultimately belongs to the Eastern Lawa people themselves. That task is the recognition and articulation of a world-view based on authentic identity. Such an identity is

rooted in the family and history of the Lawa, but is also developing in a complex modern world. It is an identity which is not dependent on the translation, interpretation or labelling of an outsider.

My limited form of outside-directed action research could not adequately represent Lawa identity. However, I believe the tools and examples that I have developed (participant controlled phonology, flexible orthography for vowel sets and an emphasis on traditional sayings) point towards principles that empower the Lawa community to develop their own answers.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Lawa Identity Song

As described in section 1.2.2, this song was recorded during the first phase of research. The words are transcribed by myself into a broad IPA and then gradually translated over time as my contact with Lawa people and knowledge of Lawa language grew.

Line A in each section is my attempted meaningful translation into English with numbers matching section 1.2.2. Line B shows my broad IPA transcription of the Lawa words in each phrase. 5. Line C is a word for word gloss wherever possible. Sometimes it has been necessary to gloss whole phrases. Thai words are marked as “Th” after the English gloss.

A 1. We are Lawa, people who don't like to lie.

B mah lawiəʔ mah təw pi ʔiə sawb brɔw

C to be Lawa to be not people to like to deceive false

A 2. (We) are Lawa from the ancient times.

B mah lawiəʔ newm ɡɔw

C to be Lawa years old

A 3. (We) like to make merit.

B mah pui sawb bəŋ

C to be people to like merit

A 4. Lawa people eat and then give offerings.

B mu ʔeʔ lawiəʔ mah pui kin pui tan

C We Lawa are people eat people to offer (Th)

A 5. To be Lawa you go to the temple.

B mah paʔ laʔwiaʔ mah pui huək wiət huək wa

C to be you Lawa to be people go temple go temple

A 6. Our children listen and remember.

B kudɔwh kundɪək ta? ɲo? ʔuət ʔaŋ

C child child of our listen remember

A 7. When mother or father speaks, they do not scold.

B paŋ ma? piə? te? kʰrəŋ la? pa? mah təw sa?

C when mother father reflexive speak to you to be not fierce

A 8. Our mothers and fathers are our priests.

B ma? pəa? mu ʔe? mah pa? pʰaciə jə ʔe?

C mother father group us to be priest lord of us

A 9. Why do people not believe that we are Lawa?

B təwm pui ʔu kuət cia laʔwiə? mu ʔe?

C why people not able to believe Lawa group us

A 10. You do not have special tribal clothing.

B ʔu pa? kaj kʰriə lape? cʰut pracam phaw

C not you to have clothing clothing tribal uniform (Th)

A 11. We migrated, ran to the mountains

B ʔop pʰajop kra? tɔ? ia? pa? huək mɔh mək

C migrate(Th) path run tour you climb mountain

A 12. We were no longer able to follow our traditional occupations.

B tɔ kɔ pʰai ʔeŋ man ʔu pʰrɔw rək ʔachip te?

C to follow old to return not traditional job reflexive

A 13. We are from the old original Lawa village.

B juan ɡɔw juəŋ dəm laʔwiə mu ʔe?

C village ancient village original (Th) Lawa group we

A 14. We used to live in Chiang Mai City.

B ʔək təw miəŋ ciŋ mai

C to live old city Chiang Mai

A 15. We ran away from the Red Karen.

B ʔopp<sup>h</sup>ajop k<sup>h</sup>raʔ to pa p<sup>h</sup>iə ɲaŋ dɛŋ

C migrated (Th.) road run they because Karen red (Th.)

A 16. We settled at La'up and La'ang villages.

B p<sup>h</sup>ot juəŋ la ʔup la ʔaŋ

C settled village La'up La'ang

A 17. We settled at low and high villages.

B p<sup>h</sup>ot juəŋ ndiəm juəŋ hluəŋ

C settled village low village high

A 18. We settled at villages in plains and in rough areas.

B p<sup>h</sup>ot juəŋ den juəŋ duh

C settled village plains village rough

A 19. We settled at villages with wood and with bamboo.

B p<sup>h</sup>ot juəŋ rɛ /khɔp/ rɛ ʔɔʔ

C settled village root trees root bamboo

A 20. We settled at the Hia and Wang rivers.

B p<sup>h</sup>ot mɛ hiəʔ mɛ waŋ

C settled river hia river wang

A 21. We settled at Lamphang and Lampun provinces.

B p<sup>h</sup>ot lampaŋ lampoon

C settled Lampang Lampoon

A 22. No one encourages us.

B ʔu kaj pi ciə cun

C Not have person encourage

A 23. You Lawa, you always surrender to others.

B paʔ laʔwiə mu ʔeʔ mah paʔ piʔ ɲɔm tiə pui

C you Lawa we to be you people surrender other people

## Appendix B: Diglot Identity Book

The following pages of a diglot (two language) identity book were made by four 13 and 14-year-old female students as part of the English class I was taking (§4.3.3.2). The first panel lists the authors (in Thai), while all other pages are in Lawa (top) and English (below). The words come from a traditional lullaby. The Lawa orthography used in this book is adapted from the Western Lawa orthography as described in chapter four.

<p>โดย นางวันดี คำมูล ภาพ</p> <p>ด.ญ. กาญจนา कुเมา ด.ญ. ดลพร จุเวณ ด.ญ. อรุณี เทิมป็น ด.ญ. นันทวรรณ कुเบ้า</p> <p>ภาษาอังกฤษ อ. มรรค ฮอด พระภาวนอินทร์จันทร์</p>	 <p>A Lawa Song for Mothers Day Bo Luang School August 2008</p>
<p>อาม แมฮ มุ มะ</p>  <p>Oh, Mothers!</p>	<p>อา เปน ทอฮ อาม มาม ป็ รอก</p>  <p>Who are you? What do you want?</p>

รอก กวน ชาง  
ต่าง อะโปย



Do you want a baby elephant?  
Long Trunk

รอก กวน โมย  
ต่าง อะดัต



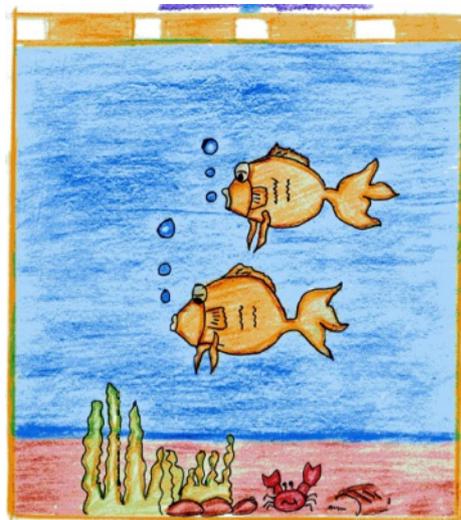
Do you want a baby buffalo?  
Long Horns.

รอก กวน กิต  
ต่าง ชะตะ



Do you want a baby bird?  
Long Tail

รอก กวน กะ  
โพยต อะบอม



Do you want a baby fish?  
Pointy Mouth.

## Appendix C: Lawa Proverbs

A description of the collection and original transcription of these proverbs is found in section 5.3. Line A in each proverb is my attempted meaningful translation into English of the following proverb. Line B shows the broad IPA transcription of the Lawa words in each phrase. Line C is the Eastern Lawa orthography devised by Bpu Hmew (§5.2). The IPA I have written in line B is based on this orthography. Line D is a word for word gloss wherever possible. Sometimes it has been necessary to gloss whole phrases. Thai words are marked as “Th”.

### A Lawa proverbs

B	k <sup>h</sup> rɛʔiŋ	sə-tok	lə-wiəʔ
C	เคริง	ชะตอก	ละเวือะ
D	words	to teach	Lawa

### A 1. Love your mother and father.

B	rak	maʔ	rak	piəʔ	paʔ
C	ราก	มะ	ราก	เปือะ	ปะ
D	love	mother	love	father	you

### A 2. Do not forget the words of your mother and father.

B	caʔ	liə	k <sup>h</sup> rɛʔiŋ	maʔ	k <sup>h</sup> rɛʔiŋ	piəʔ	paʔ
C	จะ	เลือ	เคริง	มะ	เคริง	เปือะ	ปะ
D	do not	forget	words	mother	words	father	you

### A 3. If you want to dwell together then become a worthy husband and a shining wife.

B	ʔiəʔ	keʔ	poʔ	teʔ	pui
C	เฮียะ	กะ	โปะ	เตะ	ปุย
D	to want	together	dwell	reflexive	person

B	piən	puə	kɛw	mia	sɛŋ	pui
C	เป็ยน	พั	แกว	เมีย	แซง	ปุย
D	become	husband	worthy	wife	bright	person

A 4. Do not live together just to become a slave.

B	ke?	ʔiə?	tew	po?	te?
C	กะ	เอ็ยะ	เตว	โปะ	เตะ
D	together	to want	not	dwell	reflexive

B	piən	hmiə	piən	k <sup>h</sup> ra	te?
C	เป็ยน	เฮมีย	เป็ยน	ครา	เตะ
D	to become	wife	to become	slave	reflexive

A 5. Work together for unpleasant jobs, speak together for truth.

B	juh	ke?	pi	na?
C	ยู่ฮ	กะ	ปี	นะ
D	work	together	things	unpleasant

B	ʔah	ke?	pi	nawm
C	อาฮ	กะ	ปี	นาวม
D	speak	together	things	true

A 6. Don't roam around everywhere without a reason or cause.

B	pu	ca?	ʔiə	kəhɔ	kahe
C	ปู	จะ	เอ็ยะ	กะฮอ	กะเฮ
D	not	not (future)	to tour	there	here

B	pu	ca?	ʔiə	lak	lon	ton	ten
C	ปู	จะ	เอ็ยะ	ลัก	โลง	โตน	เตง
D	not	not (future)	tour	without cause			

A 7. Travelling with people who are not good is like having friends who are not human. So they say.

B	ʔiə	pa?	hew	ʔmiəh	pui	majt	tew
C	เอ็ยะ	ปะ	เฮว	เม็ยฮ	ปุย	ไมต	เตว
D	to travel	you	to go	with	person	good	not

B ʔiə paʔ kop pui ʔu mah pui  
 C เอีย ปะ คบ ปุย อุ มาฮ ปุย  
 D to travel you to mix (Th) person not to be person

B ʔah jaŋ he  
 C อาฮ ยาง เฮ  
 D to say type (Th) this

A 8. If your friends are bad then you will become bad.

B kop paʔ pui not good  
 C คบ ปะ ปุย อุ ไมต  
 D to mix you people not good

B piən paʔ pui ʔu majt miəh ŋ  
 C เปียน ปะ ปุย อุ ไมต เมียฮ ง  
 D to become you person not good with particle

A 9. If you don't know the words, ask your mother; if you don't know the way, ask your father.

B ʔu paʔ joŋ kʰrɛʔiŋ hmaŋ maʔ paʔ  
 C อุ ปะ โยง เคริง ไฮมน มะ ปะ  
 D not you to know word ask mother you

B ʔu paʔ joŋ kʰraʔ hmaŋ pʰia paʔ  
 C อุ ปะ โยง คระ ไฮมน เปื่อะ ปะ  
 D not you to know way ask father you

A 10. Listen to the words of your mother and father; your grandfather and grandmother.

B ʔuat kʰrɛʔiŋ maʔ kʰrɛʔiŋ pʰiə  
 C อวด เคริง มะ เคริง เปื่อะ  
 D to listen words mother words father

B kʰrɛʔiŋ taʔ kʰrɛʔiŋ jiə paʔ  
 C เคริง ตะ เคริง ยื่อ ปะ.  
 D words grandfather words grandmother you

A 11. Eat only enough.

B kok mah hac mah di

C โภก มาส ไซด มาส ดี

D to eat to be sufficient to be good (Th)

A 12. Think about every word you speak; don't speak every word you think.

B kit k<sup>h</sup>reʔiŋ mojn pi ʔah paʔ

C กิด เครื่อง โมยน ปี อาส ปะ

D to think words every which to say you

B pu caʔ ʔah k<sup>h</sup>reʔiŋ mojn pi kit paʔ

C ปู จะ อาส เครื่อง โมยน ปี กิด ปะ

D not not to say words every which to think you

A 13. If you get up early, your work will be skilled.

B ɲap koʔ kan jiəŋ

C งาน โกะ การ เสียง

D get up early work (Th) skilled

A 14. Work like others, but not the same as others.

B juh jaŋ pui pu caʔ juh miəŋ pui

C ยูฮ ยาง ปุย ปู จะ ยูฮ เหมือน ปุย

D work type person not not work same (Th) person

A 15. Eat like others, but not the same as others.

B kok jaŋ pui pu caʔ kok miəŋ pui

C โภก ยาง ปุย ปู จะ โภก เหมือน ปุย

D to eat type person not not to eat same (Th) person

A 16. Be friends with good people until you become good.

B kop pui majt tiəŋ paʔ sam majt miəŋ pui

C คบ ปุย ไมต เตือน ปะ ซาม ไมต เหมือน ปุย

D mix people good until you future good same people

A 17. Those who eat little, eat long.

B kok siə siə kok paŋ den

C โกก เข็ย เข็ย โกก ปาง เดน

D to eat little little to eat when long

A 18. Hard working friends make you hard working; lazy friends make you lazy.

B kop pa? pui diən piən pa? pi diən

C คบ ปะ ปุย เดียน เปียน ปะ ปี่ เดียน

D to mix you people diligent to be you which diligent

B kop pa? pui klɛ? piən pa? pi klɛ?

C คบ ปะ ปุย แกละ เปียน ปะ ปี่ แกละ

D to mix you people lazy to be you which lazy

A 19. If you see a crooked tree don't remove it. If you see a beggar don't laugh at it.

B jo? pa? /kʰbo/ nəŋ pu ca? pʰamat

C โยะะ ปะ โคอ นิ่ง ปู่ จะ พามาต

D to see you tree crooked not not to criticise

B jo? pa? pi tuk pi ak pu ca? jiə? ke?

C โยะะ ปะ ปี่ ตุก ปี่ ญาก ปู่ จะ เข็ยะ เกะ

D to see you poor hard up not not to laugh him

A 20. When you see the elephant poo, don't try to poo like the elephant.

B jo? pa? saŋ ʔiəŋ

C โยะะ ปะ ซาง เข็ยง

D to see you elephant to excrete

B pu ca? ʔiəŋ kɛ? saŋ

C ปู่ จะ เข็ยง แคะ ซาง

D not not to excrete like elephant

A 21. Work harder than others to achieve the same as others.

- B juh soh p<sup>h</sup>a? pui  
C ยุส โยส พะ ปรย  
D work hard than people

- B tien po? sawp mah hmo? pui  
C เตือน โปะ ชาวน มาส โสมะ ปรย  
D until dwell provide to be like person

A 22. There is no reason to honour Buddha if you do not honour your parents.

- B waj pa? p<sup>h</sup>racuə ʔu pa? waj ma?  
C ไว ปะ พระจัว อุ ปะ ไว มะ  
D salute you Lord not you salute mother

- B waj p<sup>h</sup>iə te? waj paŋ la?man  
C ไว เป็อะ เตะ ไว ป่าง ละมาน  
D salute father reflexive salute then worthless

A 23. When you stay with another, don't be lazy; look for frogs and fish for their children.

- B ʔaik pa? ɲa? pui pu ca? ʔaik klɛ? sawp klɛ? lazy  
C อาก ปะ ญะ ปรย ปรุ จะ อาก แกละ ชาวน klɛ? lazy  
D to live you with person not not to live lazy provide

- B pɔk kop pɔk ka? la? kuən ke?  
C ปอก กบ ปอก กะ ละ กวน เกะ  
D hunt frog (Th) hunt fish for child they

A 24. When you see someone over 50, over 65, respect them.

- B jo? pa? pi kuət pi swŋ  
C โยะ ปะ ปี กวด ปี ซอง  
D to see you years (Th) old years (Th) high (Th)

- B tɔŋ pa? waj  
C ตอง ปะ ไว  
D must (Th) you salute (Th)

A 25. If your spade is not sharp lengthen the handle. If you don't understand, study more.

B ʔapit paʔ ʔu lom juh k'ɔŋ ciən ciən

C อาปัด ปะ อุ ลอม ยูฮ ครอง เจียน เจียน

D spade you not sharp make handle long long

B ʔu paʔ kaj kam jonɯ hliən soh soh

C อุ ปะ ไก่ กาม โยง เฮลีน โหะ โหะ

D not you have words to know study strong strong

A 26. When you work in the field, work well.

B juh paʔ cik juh majt

C ยูฮ ปะ จิ๊ก ยูฮ ไมด

D to work you field to work good

A 27. Leave well; return with joy.

B hew majt ʔen muən

C เฮว ไมด เอน มวน

D to go good to return joy

A 28. Desire what is good; reject what is bad.

B p+iŋ majt ʔiəʔ p+iŋ ʔu majt pu caʔ ʔiəʔ

C ปีน ไมด เอียะ ปีน อุ ไมด ปู่ จะ เอียะ

D if good to want if not good not not to want

A 29. There is much joy from living in our own village.

B muən luən ʔaik juəŋ ʔeʔ

C มวน ลวน อาก ยวง เอะ

D joy very to live village our

A 30. Work with the same attitude as your grandfather and your father.

B hew juh jaŋ taʔ jaŋ piəʔ paʔ

C เฮว ยูฮ ยาง ตะ ยาง เป็อะ ปะ

D go work type grandfather type father you

## Appendix D: Glossary of Lawa Words

The Lawa words generated from the second, more participatory stage of research, are listed below in a working orthography based on the vowel sets described by Table 13 (§5.2). They are listed according to Thai dictionary order for each group.

The transcriptions (both IPA and Lawa trial orthography) are consistent with my use in chapters five and six of this thesis but they are not intended to standardise Eastern Lawa. Standardisation is a choice which depends on the agreement of the Lawa community. However, the system of vowel pairs and vowel categories presented in this thesis offer a framework for further community discussion and decision making. Furthermore, the community can use the system of participant controlled sorting which generated these transcriptions for further refinement and testing.

Orthography	IPA	Gloss	Group
กวง	/kuəŋ/	'to dig'	1 A
กวด	/kuət/	'old' (person)	1 A
กวด	/kuət/	'to want'	1 A
กวน	/kuən/	'child'	1 A
จวง	/cuəŋ/	'leg'	1 A
มวน	/muən/	'joy'	1 A
ยวง	/juəŋ/	'village'	1 A
ลวน	/luən/	'very'	1 A
ละซวก	/lə.suək/	'ear'	1 A
กวด	/koət/	'cold'	1 B
กั้ว	/koə/	'ten'	1 B
ปวน	/poən/	'to eat'	1 B

Orthography	IPA	Gloss	Group
พวน	/p <sup>h</sup> oən/	'five'	1 B
ฟวน	/foən/	'to dance'	1 B
มวน	/moən/	'pillow'	1 B
มวก	/moək/	'to cough'	1 B
กะฮ้อ	/kə.hə/	'there'	2 A
ครอง	/k <sup>h</sup> rɔŋ/	'handle'	2 A
งอ	/ŋə/	'fire'	2 A
ชะตอก	/sə.tək/	'to teach'	2 A
เซาะ	/səʔ/	'dog'	2 A
ตอม	/təm/	'egg'	2 A
ปอก	/pək/	'hunt'	2 A
ปอง	/pɔŋ/	'window'	2 A
มะลอง	/mə.lɔŋ/	'sky'	2 A
ลอม	/lɔm/	'sharp'	2 A
อาบอม	/ʔa.bɔm/	'mouth'	2 A
เอาะ	/ʔəʔ/	'bamboo'	2 A
ฮ่มอง	/hmɔŋ/	'to listen'	2 A
เฮาะ	/həʔ/	'bark'	2 A
เฮาะ	/həʔ/	'rice stalks'	2 A
ซอม	/sɔm/	'to eat rice'	2 B
ตอง	/tɔŋ/	'rice pot'	2 B
ตอม	/tɔm/	'liver'	2 B
นอง	/nɔŋ/	'seed'	2 B
ปอง	/pɔŋ/	'stairs'	2 B
มอ	/mɔ/	'mountain'	2 B
ลอง	/lɔŋ/	'to float'	2 B
โกก	/kok/	'to eat a snack'	3 A
โจง	/coŋ/	'to stand'	3 A

Orthography	IPA	Gloss	Group
โศษ	/soh/	'hard'	3 A
โถ	/to/	'shallow'	3 A
โปะ	/poʔ/	'dwell'	3 A
โยง	/jɔŋ/	'to know'	3 A
โยะ	/joʔ/	'to see'	3 A
โคอ	/kʰoʔ/	'tree'	3 B
ชะโมอ	/səmpoʔ/	'stone'	3 B
โตอก	/took/	'smoke'	3 B
โตอ	/tooʔ/	'meat'	3 B
โบรอก	/brook/	'elephant tusk'	3 B
อะโปอ	/ʔə.pooʔ/	'spirit', 'kʰwan (Th)'	3 B
อะโมอ	/ʔə.mooʔ/	'to dream'	3 B
โงย	/ʔŋoj/	'thirty'	4 A
โจย	/coj/	'to reach'	4 A
โปยด	/pojt/	'to pinch'	4 A
โปยด	/pʰojt/	'tip'	4 A
โมนน	/mojn/	'every'	4 A
โยย	/joj/	'to slip'	4 A
โรย	/roj/	'housefly'	4 A
ละโอย	/lə.ʔoj/	'three'	4 A
โอยด	/ʔojt/	'to tickle'	4 A
โฮยด	/hojt/	'to finish'	4 A
จอยฮ	/cojh/	'traditional song'	4 B
ดอยฮ	/dojh/	'finger'	4 B
ทอย	/tʰoj/	'plate'	4 B
รอยฮ	/rojh/	'to choose'	4 B
วอยฮ	/wojh/	'crooked mouth'	4 B

Orthography	IPA	Gloss	Group
อาปรอยส	/ʔa.projʰ/	'to shiver'	4 B
อามอยส	/ʔa.ʔmɔjʰ/	'banana'	4 B
กะไน	/kənaj/	'inside'	5 A
ไก	/kaj/	'to have'	5 A
จิใจ	/ciʔ.caj/	'quickly'	5 A
ไว	/waj/	'to waj'	5 A
ไกนุ	/kaʔjn/	'head'	5 B
	/soh		
โซส ไมนุ	maʔjn/	'tired'	5 B
ไมด	/maʔjt/	'good'	5 B
ไรด	/raʔjt/	'grass'	5 B
ไอด	/ʔaʔjt/	'to sleep'	5 B
ไฮมด	/hmaʔjt/	'sand'	5 B
เจียน	/ciən/	'long'	6 A
เซี่ย	/siə/	'little'	6 A
เปี่ยน	/piən/	'to be'	6 A
เมี่ยส	/miəh/	'with'	6 A
เยียบ	/jiəp/	'to wink'	6 A
เอี่ย	/ʔiə/	'to travel'	6 A
เอี่ยง	/ʔiəŋ/	'to excrete'	6 A
เอี่ยะ	/ʔiəʔ/	'to want'	6 A
เจียบ	/ceəp/	'to blink'	6 B
เตียนุ	/teən/,	'hard working'	6 B
เนี่ยนุ	/neən/	'to look'	6 B
เวี่ยนุ	/weən/	'mirror'	6 B
		'him, they,	
เกะ	/keʔ/	together'	7 A
เครส	/kʰreh/	'bear'	7 A

Orthography	IPA	Gloss	Group
ญะ	/ɲeʔ/	'needle'	7 A
เตะ	/teʔ/	'one, reflexive part.'	7 A
เปละ	/pleʔ/	'fruit'	7 A
เอะ	/ʔeʔ/	'our, us'	7 A
กะเฮ	/ka.he/	'here'	7 B
เจด	/ɲejʔ/	'to stab'	7 B
เลด	/lejt/	'pig'	7 B
เอน	/ʔejn/	'to return'	7 B
เฮลต	/hlejt/	'iron'	7 B
นาวม	/nawm/	'to urinate'	8 A
ปลาวม	/plawm/	'land leech'	8 A
มาว	/maw/	'silver'	8 A
มาว	/maw/	'to crawl'	8 A
ละอวม	/lə.ʔawm/	'water'	8 A
อากวม	/ʔa.k <sup>h</sup> awm/	'dust'	8 A
ญาวม	/ɲawm/	'to sit'	8 B
นาวม	/nawm/	'true'	8 B
มาวฮ	/mawh/	'ring'	8 B
กะ	/kaʔ/	'fish'	9 A
กาก	/kak/	'branch'	9 A
ครา	/k <sup>h</sup> ra/	'slave'	9 A
จะ	/caʔ/	'not (future)'	9 A
ซาง	/saŋ/	'elephant'	9 A
ซาม	/sam/	'future'	9 A
ญะ	/ɲaʔ/	'with'	9 A
ตะ	/taʔ/	'grandfather'	9 A
นะ	/naʔ/	'unpleasant'	9 A

Orthography	IPA	Gloss	Group
ปะ	/paʔ/	'you'	9 A
ปาง	/paŋ/	'bottle'	9 A
ปาง	/paŋ/	'when'	9 A
พะ	/pʰaʔ/	'compared to'	9 A
พามาต	/pʰa-mat/	'to criticise'	9 A
มะ	/maʔ/	'mother'	9 A
มาฮ	/mah/	'to be'	9 A
ยูฮ กาน	/juh kan/	'to work'	9 A
ราก	/rak/	'love'	9 A
ละ	/laʔ/	'for'	9 A
ละมาน	/laʔ.man/	'worthless'	9 A
อาฮ	/ʔah/	'to say'	9 A
ฮนาม	/hnam/	'blood'	9 A
ฮลาด	/hlat/	'afraid'	9 A
ฮาก	/hak/	'skin'	9 A
คราง	/kʰraʔiŋ/	'drum'	9 B
ปาง	/paʔiŋ/	'four'	9 B
ละฮาก	/lə.ʔaʔik/	'to be hot'	9 B
ฮาก	/ʔaʔik/	'to live'	9 B
ฮงาก	/hŋaʔik/	'to smell'	9 B
ฮมาก	/hmaʔik/	'smoke'	9 B
ฮลาก	/hlaʔik/	'deaf'	9 B
ฮาก	/haʔik/	'hair'	9 B
งอ	/ŋə/	'alone'	10 A
เซอ	/sə/	'straight'	10 A
		'to bend,	
เนิง	/nəŋ/	crooked'	10 A
เอ็ง	/əŋ/	'alone'	10 A

Orthography	IPA	Gloss	Group
เคริง	/k <sup>h</sup> rɛʔiŋ/	'speech, words'	10 B
ชะเอ็ง	/sə.ʔɛʔiŋ/	'snake'	10 B
ซาเบ็ง	/sa.bɛʔiŋ/	'star'	10 B
เทิก	/t <sup>h</sup> ɛʔiŋ/	'to spit'	10 B
เบริก	/brɛʔik/	'chilli'	10 B
เป็ง	/pɛʔiŋ/	'to shoot'	10 B
เตว	/tew/	'not'	11 A
ปุ เฮมว	/pu hmew/	'friends'	11 A
เปว	/pew/	'to fly'	11 A
เฮมว	/hmew/	'to snore'	11 A
เฮว	/hew/	'to go'	11 A
เจวบ	/cewp/	'to meet'	11 B
เปวบ	/pewp/	'to break'	11 B
เมวบ	/mewp/	'cow'	11 B
เลวบ	/lewp/	'a pile'	11 B
จุด วู	/cut vu/	'mist'	12 A
นุง	/nuŋ/	'mosquito'	12 A
ตุม	/tum/	'ripe'	12 A
ตุย	/tuj/	'fat'	12 A
ปุ	/pu/	'thick'	12 A
ปุ	/pu/	'not'	12 A
ปุย	/puj /,	'person'	12 A
พัว	/p <sup>h</sup> uə/	'husband'	12 A
ยุ	/juʔ/	'to push'	12 A
ยม	/jum/	'to die'	12 A
ยฮ	/juh/	'to work, to make'	12 A
สะปุย	/sə.puj/	'egg plant'	12 A
อู	/ʔu/	'not'	12 A

Orthography	IPA	Gloss	Group
ปุยด	/pujt/,	'peak'	12 B
ยุยด	/jujt/,	'to be drunk'	12 B
อาชุยด	/ʔa.c <sup>h</sup> ujc/	'to scold'	12 B
กิด	/kit/	'to think'	13
จิก	/cik/	'rice field'	13
ดิง	/diŋ/	'short'	13
ป็น	/pin/	'if'	13
รี	/ri/	'big'	13
ปี	/pi/	'who, which'	14
อาปีด	/ʔa.pit/	'spade'	14
เญื่อะ	/ŋiəʔ/	'house'	15
เตื่อน	/tiən/	'until'	15
เตื่อะ	/tiəʔ/	'buttocks'	15
เปื่อะ	/piəʔ/	'father'	15
เฟื่อะ	/fiəʔ/	'monkey'	15
เยื่อ	/jiə/	'grandmother'	15
เยื่อะ	/jiəʔ/	'to smile or laugh'	15
ละเวื่อะ	/lə.wiəʔ/	'Lawa'	15
เลื่อ	/liə/	'forget'	15
อาเวื่อะ	/ʔa.wiəʔ/	'door'	15
แคะ	/k <sup>h</sup> ɛʔ/	'to be like'	16
แจะ	/cɛʔ/	'wet'	16
แด	/dɛ/	'forehead'	16
แรฮ	/rɛh/	'root'	16
แว	/wɛ/	'trousers'	16
อาแมะ	/ʔa.mɛʔ/	'male'	16
แอ	/ʔɛ/	'hen'	16
แฮ	/hɛ/	'bee'	16

## Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

ผู้ที่เซ็นแบบฟอร์มนี้ยอมรับตกลงว่าเห็นด้วยกับเงื่อนไขดังต่อไปนี้

The person signing this form acknowledges that:

1. พวกเขามีความเต็มใจที่จะเป็นอาสาสมัครสมาชิกกรรมการภาษาละเวอะและเข้าร่วมการอบรมและดำเนินการสิ่งนี้/

1. they are willing to voluntarily be part of a language committee and receive training in and carrying out these tasks:

i. การตกลงการใช้รูปแบบระบบการเขียนของภาษาละเวอะของชาวบ่อหลวง

i. agreeing on a trial writing system for Bo Luang Lawa

ii. การใช้ระบบนี้เพื่อสร้างพจนานุกรมสามภาษาคือ//ภาษาไทย//ภาษาอังกฤษ// และภาษาละเวอะ//พจนานุกรมเล่มนี้เป็นสมบัติของโรงเรียนบ่อหลวง//

และสามารถทำการคัดลอกและกล่าวถึงในการวิจัยจะต้องได้รับอนุญาตจากทางโรงเรียนบ้านบ่อหลวงและจากคณะกรรมการภาษา

ii. using this writing system to produce a bilingual dictionary in Thai and English for Bo Luang Lawa. This dictionary is the property of the Bo Luang School and may only be reproduced or cited in research with the permission of both the school and the language committee.

iii. การเตรียมเรื่องราวของชุมชนและบทเพลงจะถูกบันทึกไว้วัฒนธรรมของชาวละเวอะ// เอกสารนี้เป็นสมบัติของโรงเรียนบ่อหลวง//

และสามารถทำการคัดลอกและกล่าวถึงในการวิจัยจะต้องได้รับอนุญาตจากทางโรงเรียนบ้านบ่อหลวงและจากคณะกรรมการภาษา

iii. organising a community story and song writing event to record Bo Luang Lawa traditions. The written documents produced are the property of the Bo Luang School and may only be reproduced or cited in research with the permission of both the school and the language committee.

iv. การสัมภาษณ์บทภายในสามภาษาภายในสามครั้งเกี่ยวกับความหมายและการใช้ภาษาละเวอะ ข้อมูลนี้ถูกรวบรวมโดยอาจารย์//Mark Holt จะถูกใช้โดย//อาจารย์/Mark Holt เพื่อการเขียนงานวิจัยที่มหาวิทยาลัย//Waikato, ที่ประเทศ//New Zealand การค้นคว้านี้และ/

การสัมภาษณ์นี้จะต้องได้รับการยอมรับจากคณะกรรมการของบอหลวงเพื่อยอมรับเอกสารนี้ก่อนการตีพิมพ์เพื่อเป็นบทความทางวิทยานิพนธ์

iv. be interviewed up to three times about the meaning and use of Lawa words. The information collected will be used by Mark Holt for the writing of a Doctoral thesis at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. The findings of these interviews will be submitted to the Bo Luang language committee for approval before the publication of the thesis.

v. สำหรับการวิจัยนี้จะไม่มีการระบุชื่อของผู้ร่วมทำการวิจัยในงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้

v. Individual participants will not be identified in the written findings or in the thesis.

vi. อนุญาตให้คณะกรรมการประชุมเพื่อทำการบันทึกเป็นลายลักษณ์อักษรและย่อ/สำหรับงานวิจัยนี้

vi. allow committee meetings to be recorded, analysed and summarised for the purposes of this research.

vii. เพื่อบรรลุเป้าหมายของชิ้นงานนี้คณะกรรมการจะต้องเข้าประชุมเป็นเวลา/๕/ครั้ง ของวันเสาร์ประมาณ/๕/ชั่วโมงต่อวันในช่วงเดือนมกราคม//ถึง//เดือนมีนาคม/๒๕๕๒

หลังจากนี้คณะกรรมการจะตัดสินใจอีกครั้งและนานเท่าไรที่ต้องการดำเนินการภายใต้เงื่อนไขที่กำหนดข้างต้น/การสัมภาษณ์จะไม่ใช้เวลาเกินกว่า/๓/ชั่วโมงและจะดำเนินการในช่วงเวลา

ที่เหมาะสมของผู้เขียนเอกสารนี้ในช่วง/ปีพุทธศักราช/๒๕๕๒

vii. To achieve these tasks the committee will meet for five Saturdays for approximately five hours each day during the months of January, February and March 2009. After this the committee will decide on the frequency and time needed to continue working on the tasks stated above. The interviews will take no longer than three hours and will be conducted at a time that is convenient to the signer during the calendar year of 2009.

2. ข้อที่ควรรู้สำหรับผู้ทำการเซ็นเอกสารชิ้นนี้

2. The person signing knows that:

i. สำหรับผู้ที่ทำการเซ็นเอกสารชิ้นนี้มีความประสงค์ที่จะหยุดงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้และไม่เข้าร่วมประชุมประจำชุมชนหรือการ/แนะนำตัว/

โดยปราศจากการลงโทษจากทางโรงเรียนนักวิจัยหรือสมาชิกของภาษาท้องถิ่น

i. at any time they may choose to either freely quit from the research programme or not to attend a committee meeting or interview without punishment from the school, researcher or other members of the language committee.

ii. งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้จะต้องไม่มีการจ้างงานเกิดโดยวิธีใดวิธีหนึ่งโดยนักวิจัย//คุณ/มาร์ค/ฮอลท์//หรือ/โดยโรงเรียนบ่อหลวง/เพื่อ/

การเข้าร่วมในการทำงานวิจัยและสำหรับผู้เข้าร่วมไม่มีข้อผูกพันเพื่อดำเนินการต่อ/หรือ/เพื่อใช้สำหรับฝึกอบรมซึ่งคุณได้รับ

ii. No payment will be made by the researcher, Mark Holt, or the Bo Luang School for participation in this research and the participant has no obligation to continue in or to use the training that they receive.

iii. ถ้าบุคคลใดต้องการยกเลิก/

พวกเขาควรเขียนข้อความเป็นลายลักษณ์อักษรเพื่อให้หรือถอนสิทธิ์การอนุญาตงานของเขาที่เกี่ยวข้องกับงานวิจัยได้

iii. If the person quits they should give the language committee a letter to give or withdraw permission for their work to be used in the research.

3. สำหรับข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลหรือการวิพากษ์วิจารณ์/

ซึ่งอาจจะเป็นภัยต่อบุคคลผู้เข้าร่วมหรือสมาชิกคณะกรรมการจะไม่ถูกบันทึกไว้/

หรือจะถูกทำการลบทิ้งก่อนที่ข้อมูลเหล่านี้ถูกบรรจุ//

สำหรับผู้เข้าร่วมมีสิทธิที่จะขอให้มีการลบ คำ/หรือ/

ข้อความในการเขียนงานวิจัยหรือ/การบันทึก

3. Any data containing personal information or criticism that may harm any participant or member of the Bo Luang School or community will not be recorded or will be deleted before the data is stored. All participants have the right to request the deletion of any words from the researcher's notes or recordings.

4. สำหรับผู้เข้าร่วมให้ความยินยอมในแต่ละกลุ่มสำหรับการแนะนำ/บันทึกสั้นๆ/

ของคณะกรรมการและชาวละวา/

เพื่อตรวจสอบและเข้าถึงจุดมุ่งหมายสูงสุดของงานวิจัยนี้

4. The participants give their individual and group consent for interviews, the minutes of the language committee and Lawa language materials produced, to be examined and archived for the purposes of this research.

Participant's Name:

Signature:

Date

Researchers Name: Mark Holt

Signature:

Date

หากพวกเรามีความเห็นเกี่ยวกับงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ลายเซ็นต์ของพวกเราจะปรากฏข้างใต้นี้

We agree with content of this form and research and our signatures are shown below:

\_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Principal, Bo Luang School. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director, Area 5 Formal Education, Chiang Mai.

*Copies of this form are to be kept by each participant, the school principal,  
the area education office and the researcher, Mark Holt.*