

# Testing Chong orthography in Thailand<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

*Working together with mother tongue speakers from the Chong language community, a team of Thai linguists developed an orthography for the Chong language using Thai script. After the tentative orthography was agreed upon, the next step was to develop an appropriate method for testing the orthography. The test that was developed had two main purposes: to determine whether the orthography was acceptable to the mother tongue speakers or needed to be refined; and to determine the usability and readability of the orthography among literate mother tongue speakers of Chong. Testing covered three levels: 1) reading at the word level, 2) reading and writing at the sentence level, and 3) reading at the story level. Informants' opinions as well as possible difficulties in reading and writing Chong were also investigated.*

*The findings demonstrated that all the informants could read Chong and most could also write Chong using the tentative orthography. The main conclusion is that those who speak fluent Chong and have good Thai reading skills found the orthography easy to read, even when reading Chong for the first time. The people having difficulties fell into two groups: 1) people with limited Thai reading skills, and 2) people with limited knowledge of the Chong language. The Chong orthography thus meets general criteria of a well-devised writing system that will facilitate transfer of literacy skills between languages.*

*This paper describes the different phases of testing the Chong orthography. The paper focuses on the role of community in the preparation and implementation of the test.*

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to describe the process of testing the tentative Chong<sup>2</sup> orthography. More elaborate accounts of the Chong project are provided elsewhere (Kosonen 2002a, 2002b, 2004; Malone 2001; Suwilai 2000, 2002). Although this writer was responsible for developing the test, Chong community members produced all texts and pictures used in the test. Likewise, a Chong monk and two graduate students from the Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development, Mahidol University, conducted most tests after receiving a short introduction to the purpose and details of the test. I hope that this account of testing the Chong orthography will be useful for those planning and implementing orthography tests in other languages.

## **Background**

The tentative Chong orthography (Suwilai 2000) was based on earlier linguistic research as well as new data on the phonology of the language that had been collected by graduate students in linguistics. A team of Thai linguists headed by professor Suwilai Preamsirat from the Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development, Mahidol University, developed the first draft orthography in collaboration with representatives of the Chong community. The draft employed the Thai script. The draft was processed in three orthography workshops between November 1999 and November 2000. In these meetings, the Chong participants and the linguists came to a consensus about fundamental elements of the orthography. The tentative orthography was approved after the last workshop.

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<sup>2</sup> The Chong language group lives in Chantaburi Province, Thailand. The Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development began working with the Chong community to initiate a language revitalization program in 2000. The author was involved in the program from 2000 to 2002.

After the tentative orthography was agreed upon, a need arose for an appropriate Chong orthography test. The intention was either to refine the alphabet or accept and approve it as a part of the established Chong orthography. The basic idea of the test was to determine the usability and readability of the tentative Chong orthography (*see appendix 1*). The most difficult step in this process was to find suitable texts to use for testing. But with a little encouragement, some language committee members quickly agreed to write short stories in Chong. In addition, committee members wrote sentences based on the key words chosen for the teaching of the alphabet. These texts were then used in designing a test instrument.

### **Data collection**

In July and August 2001, a group of testers—Chong and outsiders—conducted the orthography test with 33 informants. The informants represented both genders (female 46 % and male 54 %), different age groups (11-81 years of age, average age 39), educational backgrounds (the most common education: 4 years of primary school, but some had higher education) and different home villages.



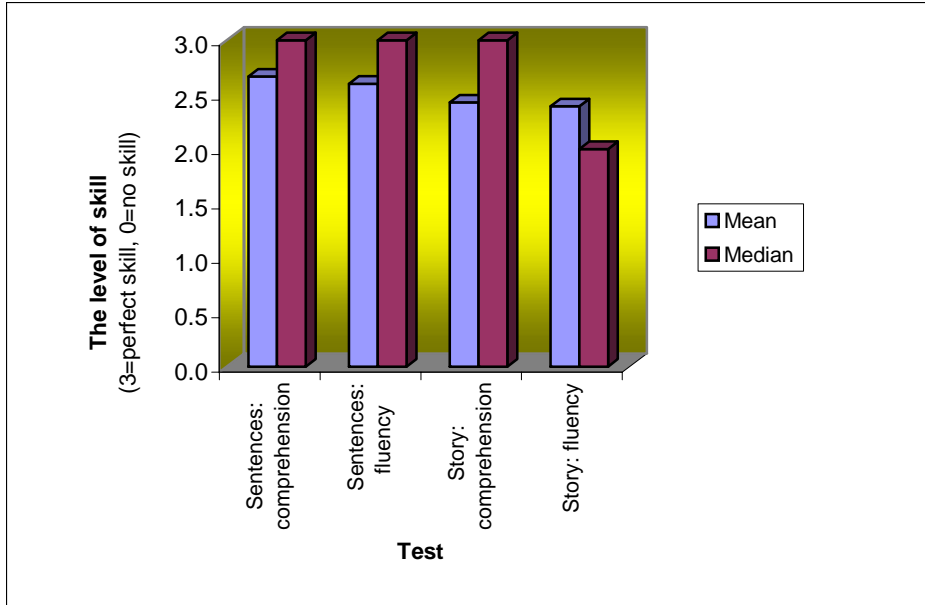
*Picture 1. Testing at the word level.*

The test took place at three levels: 1) reading at word level, 2) reading and writing at sentence level, and 3) reading at story level. In the test at *word level*, informants matched laminated word and picture cards that had the same meaning. The word-level reading test included about 40 words representing the entire sound system of the language. In the test at *sentence level*, the informants read ten sentences of various stages of difficulty and wrote four simple sentences (*see appendix 2*). In the test at *story level*, the informants read a short story and answered comprehension questions (*see appendix 3*). After each stage, testers asked informants' opinion about reading and writing Chong using this writing system. In addition to opinions, testers noted down difficulties that informants encountered. All test information was recorded on the observation sheet (*see appendix 4*).

The test was limited to those claiming to speak Chong and to read Thai. The purpose of the test was also clearly explained. At different stages, testers explained the main differences between Chong and Thai alphabets, paying particular attention to the letters and diacritics representing different values in each system.

### **Findings and conclusions**

Analysis of the test data shows that the tentative Chong orthography is usable and learnable. All informants could read it, more than half of them very well, and most could use it for writing (*see figure 1*).



*Figure 1. Informants' skills in reading Chong.*

The main conclusion is that the people who speak fluent Chong and have good Thai reading skills find the Chong orthography very easy to read, even when reading Chong for the first time ever. This shows that the designed orthography is viable for writing Chong, at least from the learning point of view. The people having difficulties fell into two groups: 1) people with limited Thai reading skills, and 2) people with limited knowledge of the Chong language. The Chong case thus confirms Smalley's (1994, 284) argument that native-speakers of a minority language already literate in Thai can easily learn a well-devised Thai-based writing system of their own language. The Chong case also demonstrates that the transfer of literacy is quite easy for bilingual speakers of languages using the same script.



*Picture 2. Reading test at the sentence level.*

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## References

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## Appendices:

Appendix 1. Orthography Test Plan and Schedule

Appendix 2. Sentences for Reading Test (two set of 10 sentences, without and with wordbreaks)

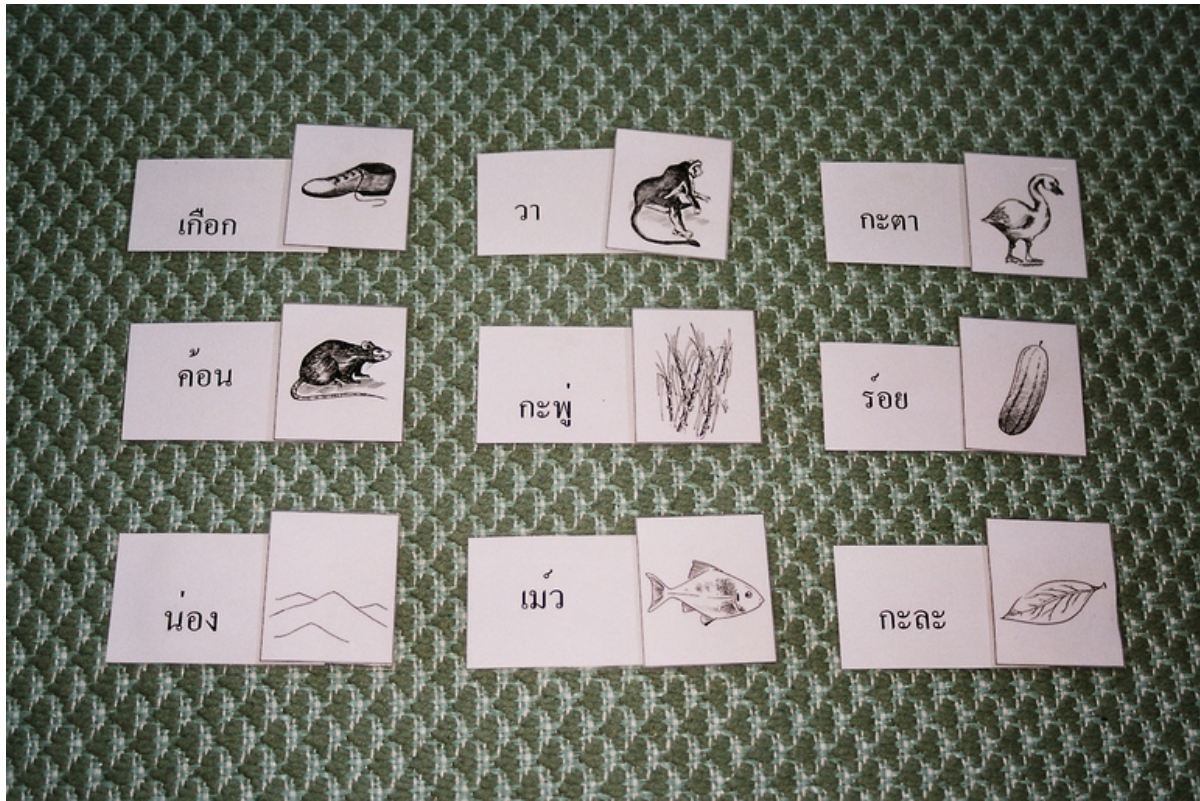
Appendix 3. Stories for Reading Test (three stories, without and with wordbreaks)

Appendix 4. Observation sheet – English translation





Picture 4. Selected word and picture cards to be matched.



*Picture 5. Selected word and picture organized in matching pairs.*

## Appendix 1

# Chong Orthography Test Plan and Schedule

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## 1 INTRODUCTION:

**STRATEGY:** Test the readability of the tentative Chong orthography that is based on linguistic research, and consequently 1) refine and re-test or 2) accept and approve as an established, “official” orthography for Chong language. The test will be conducted on a sample of about 50 people.

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES:** By October 2001 sufficient evidence exists to approve the tentative Chong orthography as it currently stands or with minor modifications.

**IDEA OF THE TEST:** The test occurs at three levels: 1) reading at the *word* level, 2) reading and writing at the *sentence* level, and 3) reading at the *story* level.

### Word level

- 1) The informants are asked to search for pairs of cards containing a Chong word and a picture, respectively.
- 2) About 40 words (pairs of a written word and a picture) representing the whole sound system of the language.
- 3) Two sets of cards. The first set only includes words without register. The second set includes all four registers.
- 4) After matching the pairs, the informants are asked their opinion about reading Chong using this system.
- 5) The tester notes down possible difficulties the informants encounter.

### Sentence level

#### Reading

- 1) The informants are given 10 Chong sentences to read.
- 2) The informants are asked some relevant questions about the sentences.

#### Writing

- 1) The informants hear four sentences, and they are expected to write them down.

### Story level

- 1) The informants are given a Chong story (one of the three available) to read.
- 2) The informants are asked some relevant questions about the text.

## PRINCIPLES:

- Test only those claiming to speak Chong and to read Thai (or have at least some background in reading Thai, e.g. minimum 3-4 years of primary education).
- Test a range of informants (age, gender, home village, occupation, level of education etc.)
- Fill an observation sheet for each informant, write all notes on the sheet.
- Clearly explain the purpose of the test.
- Clearly explain what the informants are expected to do, show sufficient examples.

- Clearly and briefly explain the main differences between Chong and Thai alphabets, particular attention to “yoo ying” vs. “nyoo nyeny”, and the meaning of the “tonemarks” – register in Chong.
- Only the ones getting “sufficient” correct marks at the alphabet level test should proceed to the sentence level test.

### **ACTION POINTS:**

Select relevant key words (*May*)

Prepare word cards and matching picture cards (*May, edited July*)

Prepare data collection sheet (*August*)

Select 3 relevant Chong stories (*June*)

Edit and type into an “easy to read” format (two versions: word breaks / sentence breaks) (*July*)

Prepare the questions about the stories. (*June in Chantaburi*)

Pre-test the instrument (*5 people tested in June in Chantaburi*)

Find the Chong testers. (*August in Chantaburi*)

Train testers to conduct the test (*August in Chantaburi*)

Collect the data (*August- September*)

Analyze the data (*August-September*)

Write a report (*September-October*)

1. แม่เลี้ยงเคน
2. ทูเรียนพี
3. อิณฮอบปล็องทุ่กอว
4. ซึ่มท่อบุก
5. ชู้จดับคึด
6. กะวายดับเจ็ด
7. ท้ามอินร้ายพลู่
8. กะยางโจกกะทะกะท่ง
9. เม้วฮอบท่ากลิ้ง

## 10. กะอองหุ้งโตดซุกพรุฮ

Appendix 2b Sentences for Reading Test

1. แม่ เลียง เคน
2. ทุเรียน พี
3. อัญ ฮอบ ปลีอง ทุก อาว
4. ชั้ม ท่อ บุก
5. ชู้จ ตับ คัด
6. กะว้าย ตับ เจ็ด
7. ท้าม อีน ร่าย พลู
8. กะยาง โจอก กะทะ กะท่ง

9. เมี้ยว ซ็อบ ทาก ลิ่ง

10. กะออง หุ่จ โตด ซุก พรุฮ

อ่านเรื่องชอง 1:

วา น่อง

วา น่อง ฟุง เจว วัต ชา พลี อุด ตาม น่อง ตัวกะล่อง เจว  
เจอะ เชาะ ระกำ มอบ ชา รีดราด ชัก ระกำ ติด กอก โสจ  
ตัว คีน วุ่นวาย ปริกซา ม่อง ฟุง กะล่อง พัย ฮีด ฮัจเจว  
ฮัจเจ้น เลย ชับ กราง อุด พลาด กะลัก โตด ฟาด กะโมะ  
โสจ ฟุง ฮัจเจว ฮัจเจ้น ทั้ง กะซึ่ม กอก กะเพลิง เลย  
โจก จุฮ เทะ กะว้าย ทั้ง มอบ ตะครุบ ชา จน อิจ ปัจ  
กะว้าย ทั้ง กะซึ่ม โจก ทุ เจว กะทะ เน้ม ยาง จน คล่า ตำรา  
มัด

โดย นายเจียน พันผาย

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## วาน้อง

วาน้องฟุ้งเจว่วัดชาพลีอุตตามน้อง

ตัวกะล่องเจวเจอะเซาะระกำ มอบชารัตราด

ชั้กระกำติดกอกโฮจตัวคีนุ่นวาย ปริกชาม่องฟุ้ง

กะล่องพัยฮีด ฮัจเจวฮัจเจئنเลยชั้บกรางอุตพลาด

กะลักโตดฟาดกะโมะโฮจ ฟุ้งฮัจเจวฮัจเจئن

ทั้งกะซึ่มกอกกะเพลิง เลยโจกจฮุสทะเล

กะว้ายทั้งมอบตะครุบชาจนอิจปัจ

กะว้ายทั้งกะซึ่มโจกทุ้เจวกะทะแน้มยางจนคล่า ตำรามัด

โดย นายเขียน พันผาย

อ่านเรื่องชอง 2:

แพ้ว นัก เจว เทียวฟรี

แพ้ว นัก โบต ลึง ฟุ่ย กัน ซ่า แทก ซา เจว เทียว ฟรี เจว  
เทียว จัก ซัด เจว ตาม ครา เจอะ โลต โม้ย ตัว โบต ลุ่ม  
จัก ต้อย ลึง พุด ม่อง โบต ฟุ่ มัย จัก เลย  
อิด อิญู จัก ต้อย เลย โบต ก็ อิด ลึง จัก เลย ลึง ก็ จัก  
โดน โลต ญัก ก็ เลย โจก เจว น่อง พัย ญัก ก็ แพก ซา  
เลย ซับ กะโซบ โลต เลย โลต ทิบ เจิง ง่าย ลึง โลต โจก  
เจว ฮีด เลย ฮีอด ซา เลย

โดย นายเจียนน พันผาย

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แพ้วนักเจวเทียวฟรี

แพ้วนักโบทลิ่งพุกันซ่า แพกซาเจวเทียวพรี  
เจวเทียวจักซัด เจวตามคราเจอะโลดโมยตัว  
โบลุ่มจักต้อย ลิงพุดมองโบท พุ่มยจักเลย อิดอิญจักต้อย  
เลยโบทก็อิดลิ่งจัก เลยลิ่งก็จักโดนโลดญัก  
ก็เลยโจกเจวนอง พัยญักก็แพกซา เลยซับกะโชบโลด  
เลยโลดทีบเงิงง่ายลิ่ง โลดโจกเจวฮีด เลยฮือดซาเลย  
โดย นายเนียน ผันผาย

**ชู้จมะฮอง**

ชู้จมะฮอง	ญ่ายมองเคน	อิเบนง่าย
ชากะนาย	โม้ยอ่าว	ทิ่งระคุง
มัดร่ายตัว	มองโม้ยพลาก	พียงตุง
น้ำแต้มคุง	อุญจะญ่าย	ฮิดฟ้ายเซ

โดย นายจารึก แก้วสว่าง

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**ชู้จ มะฮอง**

ชู้จ มะฮอง	ญ่ายมอง เคน	อิเบน ง่าย
ชา กะนาย	โม้ย อ่าว	ทิ่ง ระ คุง

มัด ร่าย ตัว ม่อง โหมย พลาก พี่ ยั้ง ตุง  
น้ำ เต็ม คง อุญ จะ ญา ย อืด พ้าย เซ

โดย นายจารึก แก้วสว่าง

## **DATA COLLECTION & OBSERVATION SHEET – CHONG ORTHOGRAPHY TEST**

(Tambons: Takhianthong – Khlongphlu)

Date: day/month/year \_\_\_\_\_

Observer's name: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Part 1 Background information**

1.1 Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 Home village: \_\_\_\_\_ Tambon: \_\_\_\_\_

1.3 Age: \_\_\_\_\_

1.4 Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

1.5 Marital status: \_\_\_\_\_

1.6 Profession: \_\_\_\_\_

1.7 Level of education \_\_\_\_\_ grades, altogether \_\_\_\_\_ years

1.8 *Understanding* and the *ability to use* **Chong** language:

-*Listening*: everything \_\_\_\_\_, sufficient \_\_\_\_\_, with difficulty \_\_\_\_\_, not at all \_\_\_\_\_

-*Speaking*: fluent \_\_\_\_\_, satisfactory \_\_\_\_\_, a little bit \_\_\_\_\_, not at all \_\_\_\_\_

1.9 *Reading ability* in **Thai**:

everything \_\_\_\_\_, sufficient \_\_\_\_\_, with difficulty \_\_\_\_\_, not at all \_\_\_\_\_

### **Part 2, stage one-A – reading simple words without diacritics**

*(SHOW EXAMPLES FIRST!)*

- Which words does the reader finds first / last? (2-4 words) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- General observations or comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Part 3, stage one-B – reading words with the four registers**

*(SHOW EXAMPLES FIRST!)*

- Which words does the reader finds first / last? (3-6 words) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- General observations or comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 4, stage two – reading sentences** *(two versions: with and without wordbreaks)*

*(LET THE READER READ ALL SENTENCES AT HER / HIS OWN PACE!*

*AFTER THE READER HAS FINISHED, ASK SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CONTENT!*

- Does the reader understand the meaning of the sentences? \_\_\_\_\_

- If no, which sentences are difficult and why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- Observations about the fluency of reading: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- Which version the reader prefers: with wordbreaks \_\_\_\_\_, without wordbreaks \_\_\_\_\_

- Why? \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 5, stage three – reading a story** *(two versions: with and without wordbreaks)*

*(LET THE READER READ THE STORY AT HER / HIS OWN PACE!*

*AFTER THE READER HAS FINISHED, ASK THE 2 QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CONTENT!*

- Does the reader understand the meaning of the sentences? \_\_\_\_\_

- If no, which parts are difficult and why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- Observations about the fluency of reading: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- Which version the reader prefers: with wordbreaks \_\_\_\_\_, without wordbreaks \_\_\_\_\_

- Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 6, stage four – writing sentences:**

*(A CHONG SPEAKER DICTATES FOUR SENTENCES, THE “WRITER” WRITES THEM DOWN ON THIS SHEET BELOW!)*

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4.

\_\_\_\_\_