

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of the Study

It is generally accepted in linguistic circles that there are many links between language and culture. Subsequently, it is often difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins. In fact, language both affects and reflects culture, and the same could be said about culture in reference to language. Many different areas of study have touched on the relationship of language and culture through the years, as van Dijk (1989b:1) outlines:

Phenomenology, qualitative and cognitive sociology, microsociology, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, the sociology of everyday life, formal sociology, and the ethnography of speaking have been the inscriptions on the signposts that have guided the various developments leading to a common interest in the study of natural discourse.

So one might ask, “Why analyze natural dialogue?” van Dijk (1989b:2) points out in some of his writings that one of the best reasons for studying natural dialogue, or everyday talk, is the seemingly trivial circumstance that people do it all the time. He states, “Talk is a prominent part of our everyday activities, and such everyday activities are the basis of the social world.”

Though there are many discourse analyses of “organized” narratives such as folk tales and written stories, little work has been done in the area of discourse structure of first person narratives, more commonly called “life stories.” Most life story accounts are found in ethnographies, in the field of anthropology, but seldom are they analyzed linguistically.

Nevertheless, there is great value in analyzing natural discourse for the purpose of cultural understanding. van Dijk (1989b:6) points out that “more than written texts or institutional communication, everyday talk is seen as the primary and elementary use of language in the social context.” He also stresses that in natural discourses, such as these stories, the narrator’s understanding of his/her social context is often times explicitly expressed.

In order to exemplify the link between ethnography and narrative discourse, I have chosen these life stories, all by the same author, to take an in-depth look at one person’s life and how it is communicated, not to make generalizations about Kammuang first person narrative. As Longacre (1983: xviii) states, “Just as we cannot analyze isolated sentences apart from their linguistic context, so ultimately, we cannot analyze discourses aside from the behavioral context which is relevant to them.” Thus, my goal in this thesis is to examine one woman’s discourse style in its socio-cultural context. The context of these stories not only involves prominent Northern Thai cultural themes, but encompasses Mae Laa’s feelings about her topics, her role as the last born in her family, and her role in the rest of society.

1.2 Linguistic Affiliation

Northern Thai, or Kammuang, is spoken by approximately 6 million people in the northern region of Thailand, parts of Laos, and by isolated pockets of speakers in other parts of Thailand (Grimes, 1992: 752). The Kammuang language area is considerably smaller than the Thai government’s Northern administrative area, and the border of Kammuang is not as sharp as might be drawn on a map. There are considerable provincial variations of Kammuang as well as quite a bit of mixture with Standard Thai in the cities. According to William Smalley (1994: 72), the major

dialects of Kammuang can be grouped in the provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai-Phayao, Lampang, Nan-Phrae, Tak, and the Mae Sariang District of Mae Hong Son. Kammuang is the major trade language for hill tribe groups also.

Kammuang is a language of the Southwestern branch of the Tai family. It is related to Tai Lue, Lao and Standard Thai (Smalley, 1994: 298). Though many believe that Standard Thai and Kammuang are closely related, Kammuang differs from Standard Thai in sound system, grammar, and vocabulary. For example, Kammuang has 6-7 tones (depending on the individual dialect) compared to the 5 tones of Standard Thai. It also differs in its system of initial consonants. On the whole, Standard Thai is more comprehensible to Kammuang speakers than the reverse, because they have greater exposure to it in mass media and the educational system.

Some examples of differences between Kammuang and Standard Thai follow.

1.2.1 Tonal Differences

Figure 1 is based on the Gedney's (1973) "A check list for determining tone in Tai dialects" and demonstrates the tonal differences between Standard Thai and the Kammuang dialect spoken in Chiang Rai Province:¹

¹ The Gedney chart represents a compilation of some 64 words found in most languages of the Tai family. The rows 1-4 represent the initial consonants of the words (voiceless fricatives, voiceless unaspirated stops, glottals, and voiced sounds, respectively) as they appeared centuries ago in proto-Tai. The columns A-C correspond to the tone markers found on words that end in vowels in standard Central Thai (no marker, *mai eek*, and *mai thoo*). The D-Short and D-Long columns represent words ending in the consonants /p/, /t/, /k/, or /ʔ/ preceded by short or long vowels, respectively.

	A	B	C	D-S	D-L
1	Rising <i>Rising ă</i>	Low <i>Low à</i>	Falling <i>High narrow falling ã</i>	Low <i>High á</i>	Low <i>Low à</i>
2	Mid <i>Rising ă</i>	Low <i>Low à</i>	Falling <i>High narrow falling ã</i>	Low <i>High á</i>	Low <i>Low à</i>
3	Mid <i>Mid rising a</i>	Low <i>Low à</i>	Falling <i>High narrow falling ã</i>	Low <i>High á</i>	Low <i>Low à</i>
4	Mid <i>Mid rising â</i>	Falling <i>Mid falling ä</i>	High <i>High wide falling â</i>	High <i>High narrow falling ã</i>	Falling <i>Mid falling ä</i>

Figure 1. Comparison of Central Thai and Chiang Rai Kammuang tones (Kammuang in italics).²

²This thesis follows the phonological transcription system for Chiang Rai Kammuang set out in Purnell 1963. Purnell indicates tone as follows: rising (ˇ), low (˘), high (ˊ), high narrow falling (˜), high wide falling (ˆ), and mid falling (˘). The mid rising tone is unmarked. The tone markings for Standard Thai are the same except there is no high narrow falling tone.

1.2.2 Vocabulary Differences

Though many words are the same in Standard Thai and Kammuang, the differences in vocabulary still play a major role in comprehension. Some differences can be quite confusing, as words with similar sound correspondence may occur in both languages, but with different meanings, as illustrated by the underlined words in Smalley's (1994:75) selected list below.

Standard Thai	Kammuang	English
<i>ʔaròj</i>	<i>lam</i>	delicious
<i>p^hi sǎaw</i>	<i>p<i>ii</i> sǎaw</i>	older sister
<i>k^hǎw</i>	<i>pǝn</i>	3rd person sing/plural
<i>hâj</i>	<i>hǎu</i>	to give
<i>ʃiisǐp</i>	<i>saaw</i>	twenty
<i>talàat</i>	<i>kàat</i>	market
<i>p^héé</i>	<i>kâan</i>	be defeated
<i>ts^hanáʔ</i>	<i>p^héé</i>	win
<i>p^héé</i>	<i>p^héé</i>	be allergic to
<i>fɔŋ, p^hon, lûuk</i>	<i>kàen</i>	cl for eggs, fruit, etc.
<i>p^hrâʔ</i>	<i>tǔʔ</i>	priest
<i>neen</i>	<i>p^hǎʔ</i>	novice priest

Figure 2. Select list of Standard Thai/Kammuang lexical items.

1.2.3 Grammatical Differences

Even though the grammars of Standard Thai and Kammuang are largely the same, the differences are enough to cause barriers in comprehension. Compound words, for example, may be formed from the same two elements, yet be reversed in order. When the Kammuang order occurs in Standard Thai, the meaning can be completely different, as illustrated in the underlined words below from Smalley (1994: 77). Furthermore, Kammuang sometimes has words with this compounding sequence where Standard Thai does not have a compound at all.

Standard Thai	Kammuang	English
<i>mêe náam</i>	<i>nâm mēe</i>	river
<i>kók náam</i>	<i><u>nâm kók</u></i>	metal dipper
<i><u>nám kók</u></i>		tap water
<i>bòo náam</i>	<i><u>nâm bòo</u></i>	well
<i><u>nám bòo</u></i>		well water
<i>môo náam</i>	<i>nâm mōo</i>	water pot
<i>k^hont^hoo</i>	<i>nâm tōn</i>	pitcher
<i>kràbuaj</i>	<i>nâm buaj</i>	coconut shell dipper
<i>k^hrú?</i>	<i>nâm t^hũu?</i>	woven water bucket
<i>t^hǎj</i>	<i>nâm k^hũ?</i>	metal pail
<i>t^hōo</i>	<i>nâm lin</i>	drain

Figure 3. Lexical mismatch on reversed words.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Data Collection

This study is based on a corpus of six autobiographical stories, narrated by Buanguen Nongduan, hereafter referred to as “Mae Laa.”³ Mae Laa is a fifty five year old widow who has lived all of her life in Huaj San Phlap Plaa Village, Mae Lao District, Chiang Rai Province. She makes a living by selling *k^hānǒm* ‘sweets’ in the market each day, and by dividing the profits of her rice fields with those who work them.

My husband and I have had the privilege of knowing Mae Laa over the course of the past two years, and have lived with her for a total of four months, as we were doing research on the Kammuang language and culture. In the course of cultural study, we asked Mae Laa if she would be willing to have an interview session with us. We recorded these stories in April of 1996.

Mae Laa was more than willing to tell her story, in fact, after recording them she listened to the cassette tape again and again. She was eager to make copies for her daughter and future grandchildren, so that they could understand what life was like when she was young. And even though Mae Laa is not able to read or write, she was keen on having someone write the stories down and translate them so that “both Northern Thai young people and foreigners could learn more about Northern Thai culture.”(her words)

The second and possibly most crucial method of investigation was being “adopted” as Mae Laa’s children; or in more anthropological terms, becoming a participant

³ *lāa* means ‘youngest child’ in Kammuang and is often used as a nickname for females.

observer. Our acquaintance with Mae Laa began with her daughter, Maleewan “Tom,” when we worked together in Lampang for three years. When she heard that we wanted to learn more about Kammuang language and culture, she suggested that we live with her mother. We traveled to Chiang Rai together and she introduced us and told her mother to treat us as her own children. So from that day on, she called us her *liuk* ‘children’ and treated us accordingly.

As van Dijk (1989b:3) says, “...a serious understanding of everyday life and talk needs a detailed analysis of how people observably go about their daily business.” Because I had the opportunity to become Mae Laa’s “adopted” daughter, I was able to help her make *k^hānǒm* and sell it in the market, do the household chores, shop for food, cook meals, visit neighbors, gather firewood, attend village events, listen to gossip, and become a part of her social group. This group consisted of her family, her fellow market merchants, and her close neighbors. Mae Laa’s willingness to share her feelings and opinions about people or circumstances was also invaluable to my understanding of the context of her stories. These unique opportunities for “participant observation” have resulted in a pool of previous knowledge that effects the analysis of what is actually seen and heard in this specific narrative.

The first recorded story called “My Life” is Mae Laa’s response to the question, “Could you please tell us everything you can remember about your life since the time you were a child?” This text is thus an overview of her life from the time she was two years old until the present. This account has been the base text for a discourse analysis of surface structure and particles. The rest of the texts have been compared to this first one in those two specific areas, and have also been rich sources of Mae Laa’s rhetorical devices.

The second story called “Lang San” is Mae Laa’s response to the question, “How did you meet Lang San?” The third text, “Games We Played,” is an expository discourse with an embedded narrative, “The Bad Man.” The bulk of this exposition is Mae Laa’s detailed explanation of the different games she used to play with her friends when she was a child. Though explanatory in nature, this account is rich with rhetorical devices and cultural details. The embedded narrative “The Bad Man,” the most emotional of the entire corpus, describes a frightening experience in which an older man stole Mae Laa’s clothes while she and her friends were playing in the stream.

The fourth story, “Paa Daa and Lung Too,” is Mae Laa’s own transition into the subject of courtship, specifically the courtship and marriage of a close friend. The fifth story, “Mae Cum” is about Mae Laa’s favorite older sister’s life. Mae Laa describes Mae Cum’s courtship, marriage, and children. The sixth story, “When Tom Was Young,” is Mae Laa’s response to our question, “What was your daily life like when Tom was a child?” This text is again full of details of her daily life as she worked hard to put her daughter through school.

All of these stories were transcribed in Kammuang by a native speaker, using a very phonetic rendering of the Standard Thai script. This script was used because there is yet to be established a standardized orthography for writing Kammuang in the Standard Thai script. Therefore, the transcriber decided to be quite literal in her renderings so that accuracy would be maintained. These transcripts were then checked by several native speakers and myself to ensure accurate representation of the recorded accounts. The texts were then transcribed into the International Phonetic

Alphabet with the exception of tone markings, which reflected by and large the transcription used by Purnell (1963).

1.3.2 Analysis of Texts

The first step in the analysis of these stories was to annotate them using the Interlinear Text processor (IT) program for the Macintosh computer (1993)⁴. This process matches each Kammuang word with its phonetic transcription and English gloss, followed by the free translations of each sentence.

These texts were then examined using a variety of analytical processes. Charts were made of verb density, boundary markers, and distribution of particles. These charts proved very helpful in the analysis of surface structure, particles, and rhetorical devices.

1.3.3 Interactive Nature of Texts

Because Mae Laa wanted to be sure we understood her story, these texts are different from an interchange with friends that Mae Laa has known for a long time (who already know her life story and would probably never ask to hear it all at once). She is telling us about the olden days--things we have never experienced. She is teaching us. We, the audience are not only new to the Kammuang language, but also did not grow up as she did, in a rural village setting. Our world views are completely different.

⁴The Interlinear Text processor (IT) program for Macintosh is a computer program which manages a corpus of interlinear texts. This program views text as a sequence of text units, each of which contains a text line plus a multidimensional set of annotations provided by the analyst. IT ensures consistency in annotations by retrieving all interlinear word and morpheme annotations from an on-line database of lexical information which is constantly updated as new data is entered.

For these reasons, she tries to paint a picture for the audience of how she went about her daily life. She links the story to recent experiences of the audience--to people they have met, places they have been, events they have observed, and conversations that have already occurred. Therefore, in many ways, though the discourse is mainly in the form of a story, it is interactive in nature as well. As van Dijk (1989b:5) explains,

Everyday talk, as well as formal dialogues, does not take place in isolation. Each turn or move of the ongoing discourse as well as the whole verbal exchange is an integral part of a situation and inextricably connected with a relevant selection of social objects, namely, the context.

1.4 Review of Relevant Literature

This thesis draws most of its theoretical background on discourse from Robert E. Longacre. Thus, in the following section I will first give an overview of his ideas and works as they are relevant to the discourse aspect of the study at hand. As for the link between discourse analysis and cultural studies, most of the theoretical inspiration comes from Teun van Dijk and Dell Hymes. Following these discussions, we will turn to several works on Thai discourse by Somsonge Burusphat and others. Examples of cultural studies from other areas of Asia are examined in the works of Marilyn Gregerson, Frances Woods, and Francisco Col-om Polenda. As for focusing on Northern Thai cultural studies, I have gained great insights from Konrad Kingshill, Richard Davis, and Sulamith Potter.

1.4.1 Discourse Analysis

In the 1960's, Robert Longacre began in-depth discourse analysis of a number of non Indo-European languages. Following a basically tagmemic model, Longacre devised practical methods for identifying how discourses were constructed.

Longacre defines four different discourse types: narrative (telling a story), expository (explaining something), procedural (giving instructions) and hortatory (influencing behavior). Each of these types of communication have certain unique grammatical realizations in any given language. In English, for example, past tense verbs are used to tell stories and present tense verbs are used to give instructions.

A discourse can be divided into distinct parts on the basis of linguistic criteria. These parts have both a surface structure (the actual words and phrases used) and a deep structure (the underlying plot or communication strategy). For example, the surface structure of a narrative may contain a title, aperture, stage, pre-peak episodes, peak, post-peak episodes, closure, and finis; which in turn would have the deep (semantic) structure counterparts of exposition, inciting moment, developing conflict, climax, denouement, final suspense, and conclusion.

Another prominent theme of Longacre's analysis is the idea of "storyline," which is the main event line that propels a discourse to move forward. As mentioned above, in English, the storyline is marked by past tense action verbs. "Non-storyline" grammatical features function in other ways (e.g. to make the story more interesting) but do not "keep the story moving" in the same way.

1.4.2 Discourse Analysis in Context

As this thesis examines Kammuang discourse in its socio-cultural context, the works of Teun van Dijk, Dell Hymes, and Michael Stubbs have been quite helpful. These works interweave discourse and culture by focusing on everyday, natural conversation and what it can tell us about the larger cultural context. As van Dijk (1989b:11) states,

The disciplinary boundaries between sociology (or different sociologies), anthropology, and sociolinguistics have been blurred in favor of a common interest for the detailed, ethnographical, multilevel analysis of actual language use, especially spoken dialogues, in the sociocultural context.

Van Dijk's *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (1989) is a collection of articles relating discourse to "everyday talk", or natural discourse. Some of the most applicable articles address intonation in discourse (Brazil), the analysis of laughter (Jefferson), analysis of nonverbal behavior (Scherer and Wallbott), and the interactional nature of dialogue (van Dijk).

Dell Hymes' concept of "the ethnography of speaking" has brought valuable insight to the study of Kammuang first person narrative. Hymes focuses on the various factors that are involved in a communication act. These factors are setting/scene, participants, ends (expected outcome), act sequence (form and content of what is said), key (tone or manner of speaking), instrumentalities (oral vs. written), norms of interaction, and genre. These factors serve to remind us that everyday talk can be a complex activity, and that each discourse is actually a piece of skilled work.

Michael Stubbs' *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language* (1983) stresses once again how the meshing of language and culture affect every instance of speaking. He states (1983:8):

There is no use of language which is not embedded in the culture; on the other hand, there are no large-scale relationships between language and society which are not realized, at least partly, through verbal interaction.

1.4.3 Thai Discourse

The leading authority on Thai discourse is Somsonge Burusphat, whose book *The Structure of Thai Narrative* (1991) investigated Thai folk tales, applying Longacre's methodologies of analyzing discourse. As professor at Mahidol University's

Institute of Language and Culture, she has subsequently guided several masters theses on other aspects of Thai discourse. A few of these are Payung Puttapongs' *A Study of Thai Procedural Discourse* (1990), Nantawan Mongpin's *Cohesion in Thai Conversation* (1989), and Chalermchai Chaichompoo's *A Discourse Analysis of Lanna Buddhist Sermons* (1995).

Other valuable sources about Thai discourse were master's theses written at Payap University under the guidance of Frances Woods. Kirk Person's *Discourse Considerations in the Hortatory Speech of Phra Phayom* (1993) was especially helpful in the area of rhetorical devices, as he described Phra Phayom's use of the particle *nǎa* to involve the audience. Usitara Juntawieng's *A Discourse Study of a Selection of the Northern Thai Sermons of Phrakhru Sophon Boonyaphorn (Tu Cok)* (1997), also hortatory in scope, looked at the way this humorous Kammuang speaking monk packaged his sermons. He used many Northern Thai cultural phrases to identify with and entertain the audience.

1.4.4 Cultural Studies in Asia

As for studies of culture and language in the wider Asia area, three works have inspired this thesis. Frances Woods' *The Interrelationship of Cultural Information, Linguistic Structure, and Symbolic Representations in a Halbi Myth* (1980) is a multi-faceted study of one Halbi myth. As Woods (1980: v) says:

Discourse analysis also calls for an analysis of the cultural setting and of the dynamic interplay between the culture and language in terms of the message (or meaning) of a given myth within a given culture.

Marilyn Gregerson's *The Rengao of Vietnam: An Ethnography of Texts* (1991) is a description of Rengao culture by means of the Rengao themselves--by their own discourses. The goal of this analysis of oral and written texts is to understand the

Rengao culture from the insider's point of view. It is an attempt to take the language of the narrator very seriously as he constructs his own version of the world.

The third work, *A Voice from the Hills* (1989) by Francisco Col-om Polenda is a very extensive and rich description of the culture and world view of the Western Bukidnon Manobo people of the Philippines. It is a series of texts about various topics of culture and daily life, written by a Manobo and translated by Richard Elkins. These translations have been a great example for me as I undertake the challenging task of translating Mae Laa's stories into English. They are also a wonderful example of the richness of first person narrative and expository discourses.

1.4.5 Northern Thai Cultural Studies

Where specifically Northern Thai cultural works are concerned, Konrad Kingshill's *Ku Daeng-thirty years later: A village study in Northern Thailand 1954-1984* (1991) is a foundational work. Kingshill's study of a Northern Thai village in Chiang Mai province began in 1957 and has been updated periodically to the present. He discusses a wide range of topics including kinship, economics, village politics, religious beliefs, and division of labor. Kingshill identifies seven major cultural themes underlying Northern Thai behavior. These are utility, profit, fun, individuality, communal responsibility, "Do good, receive good--Do evil, receive evil," and playing it safe.

Richard Davis' *Muang Metaphysics: A study of Northern Thai myth and ritual* (1984) is focused mainly on Northern Thai calendrical rites; those rituals which occur at prescribed points in the calendar. He examines these rites for their mythological significance, and how they relate to a "common Northern Thai rationale" (1984:13).

He makes use of a number of written texts culled from temples and the collections of rural householders in Nan province to examine the cosmology, agricultural rites, rites of territory and clanship, and yearly celebrations such as the New Year and Buddhist Lent. His chapter on Muang kinship and community was especially revealing for my study of Mae Laa's roles in her family and greater society.

Sulamith Heins Potter's *Family Life in a Northern Thai Village: The Structural Significance of Women* (1977) is an in-depth study of the structure of a Northern Thai family, and how individuals experience this structure in their daily lives. In contrast to many other anthropologists' views that Muang family life is loosely structured, she stresses that "lineality is traced through women, rather than men, and authority is passed on affinally, from father-in-law to son-in-law, by virtue of their relationships to the line of women." (1977: 123) She states that without recognizing the importance of women to Northern Thai society, the system is unintelligible. Potter's work has been especially valuable to the study of Mae Laa's role as the youngest child, and explains why the majority of Mae Laa's stories focus on the women in her life--she talks much more about her mother and sisters than her father and brother.

1.5 Overview of the Study

This study begins in chapter two with descriptions of the plot and surface structures of Mae Laa's stories. The stories' sections are outlined according to Longacre's divisions, followed by an in-depth description of the boundary markers and verb density of the story "My Life."

Next, chapter three discusses sentence-final particles and their various functions in Mae Laa's stories. These particles are divided into those which are internal to the storyline and those that are external to the storyline. Mae Laa employs question, command, and intensifier particles in material which is internal to the storyline. Particles external to the storyline serve to involve the audience and reflect value judgments.

Chapter four is a description of the rhetorical devices Mae Laa employs to entertain the audience. These include intonation at word and phrase levels, reduplication, reported speech, audience involvement devices, author intrusion, cultural phrases and expressives.

Chapter five integrates the discourse structure findings with the Northern Thai socio-cultural setting. Focusing on the cultural themes proposed by Kingshill, this chapter explores how these themes are incarnated, or "fleshed out" in the structure of Mae Laa's discourse. The four main groupings of themes explored are utility and profit, communal responsibility, cause and effect, and fun. Finally, chapter six concludes and summarizes the thesis, integrating the two streams of language and culture as they have been realized in Mae Laa's stories.

The nature of this thesis as a whole mitigates against a deep examination of some of the phenomenon (cohesion, participant reference, mainline, verb ranking, etc.) commonly found in discourse studies. These would make worthwhile thesis topics in and of themselves! It would also be interesting to compare Mae Laa's story to other first person narratives in Kammuang and other Tai languages.