

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary

This thesis has examined in detail six life history stories told by Mae Laa-- “My Life,” “Lang San,” “Games We Played,” “Paa Daa and Lung Too,” “Mae Cum,” and “When Tom was Young.” This investigation resulted in a description of discourse structure, discourse particles, rhetorical devices, and the relationship between these discourse elements and the socio-cultural context of the stories.

The majority of Mae Laa’s stories follow a fairly well-defined structure. Each discourse can be divided into discrete plot and surface structure units. The plot structure units include exposition, inciting moment, developing conflict, climax, denouement, final suspense, and conclusion, while the surface structure units include aperture, stage, optional pre-peak, peak, post-peak, and closure. The analysis of boundary markers and variations of verb density lend insight into how Mae Laa’s stories are constructed, as well as what elements are considered of special importance to the overall flow of the text.

Kammuang particles, despite their intricate functions and sometimes ambiguous meanings, add vividness and a sense of balance to Mae Laa’s stories. They sometimes serve structural purposes, but perhaps more often reflect Mae Laa’s attitudes toward events and participants. Particles can thus serve as a bridge between linguistic structure and culturally-based value judgments.

Mae Laa employs a variety of rhetorical devices to increase the vividness, audience involvement and entertainment value of her stories. These include changes in pitch, reduplication, reported speech, audience involvement devices, author intrusion, cultural phrases, and expressives.

Mae Laa's stories provide many interesting insights into Northern Thai culture. The culture itself serves as a persistent backdrop to the texts; in order to understand the texts, one must understand something of the culture. On occasion, various cultural elements are highlighted through structural means, including the use of particles and other rhetorical devices. All these cultural and linguistic elements combine to help give Mae Laa her village-wide reputation as a great story teller.

6.2 Further Investigation

In the course of this study, many different possibilities for further investigation have come to the surface. In the area of discourse, it would be interesting to compare Kammuang life stories with life stories from a variety of Tai languages. The discourse functions of intonation, reported speech, and particles may be especially revealing.

In the sociolinguistic area of study, a comparison between spontaneous and prepared narratives, (e.g. life story narratives vs. folk tales) would be interesting, as well as linguistic differences between life stories told by men and women. As for anthropological linguistics, further links between particles and cultural values would provide many opportunities for research.

6.3 Implications

Though primarily descriptive in nature, my hope is that this study would encourage readers to do more research in the area of "real life stories," not only to document

cultural values in this rapidly changing world, but also to learn more about what motivates people. I would hope Mae Laa's stories and others like it would be helpful to translators, development workers, researchers, and any others who live in Northern Thailand and desire to understand the language and culture in a more meaningful way.

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