Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages: Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun*

Kittinata Rhekhalilit**

Abstract

Tai Lue is a Tai language spoken by an ethnic group called the Lue, mostly found in southern parts of China, some parts of Laos, and the Northern parts of Thailand. This present study aims at analyzing the personal pronoun system spoken among Tai Lue native speakers in the Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province of China, hereafter TLX. The study is based on in-depth sociolinguistic interviews of six Tai Lue informants, along with observation and field notes of the researcher. All informants use Tai Lue as their vernacular and may use Mandarin Chinese as their official language. The study reveals 12 personal pronouns, including one plural prefix /mǔɯ/. In addition, two main groups of semantic features were found as follows: 1) grammatical features, namely person and number, and 2) social factors, divided into two groups: inherent features, namely gender and status; and interpersonal features, namely relative status, deference, and intimacy. The data analysis also shows that the register of

Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun

90

person deixis of the TLX personal pronoun system reflects the hierarchical society of the speaker. In conclusion, this analysis provides insight into the complicated TLX personal pronoun system through the use of the componential analysis method. Furthermore, the pronoun variation in three Southwestern Tai languages was compared to show the different usage of personal pronouns and a possible changing path of personal pronoun use in Tai languages is implied.

Keywords: *Tai Lue Xishuangbanna, Personal Pronoun, Componential Analysis*

การเปรียบเทียบระบบบุรุษสรรพนามในภาษาไทตะวันตกเฉียงใต้
สามภาษา: การแปรทางความหมายและการบ่งชี้
การเปลี่ยนแปลงในสรรพนามพหูพจน์บุรุษที่หนึ่ง*

*กิตตินาถ เรขาลิลิต***

บทคัดย่อ

ไทลื้อเป็นภาษาตระกูลไทที่พูดโดยกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ ลื้อ ซึ่งสามารถพบได้มากในทาง
ตอนใต้ของประเทศจีน บางภูมิภาคในประเทศลาว และหลายจังหวัดทางภาคเหนือ
ของประเทศไทย การศึกษาครั้งนี้มุ่งที่จะศึกษาองค์ประกอบทางความหมายของระบบบุรุษ
สรรพนามในภาษาไทลื้อ ที่พูดในเขตสิบสองปันนา จังหวัดยูนนาน ประเทศจีน โดยกลวิธีที่ใช้
มาจากการสัมภาษณ์ทางภาษาศาสตร์สังคมและจากการสังเกตรวมถึงการจดบันทึกของ
ผู้วิจัยเอง ผู้วิจัยสัมภาษณ์ผู้บอกภาษาจำนวนหกคน มีอายุระหว่าง 45 ถึง 71 ปี โดยผู้บอก
ภาษาต้องใช้ภาษาไทลื้อเป็นภาษาท้องถิ่นแต่อาจใช้ภาษาจีนกลางเป็นภาษาราชการได้
จากการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล ผู้วิจัยพบว่า บุรุษสรรพนามในภาษาไทลื้อสิบสองปันนามีทั้งสิ้น 12 คำ
และมีหน่วยคำอุปสัค (prefix) พหูพจน์ 1 หน่วยคำ ได้แก่ /ทนัน/ นอกจากนี้ จากการวิเคราะห์
ผู้วิจัยยังพบว่า บุรุษสรรพนามในภาษาไทลื้อมีองค์ประกอบทางความหมายหลักสองประเภท
ได้แก่ 1) องค์ประกอบทางไวยากรณ์ อันได้แก่ บุรุษและพจน์ ส่วน 2) ปัจจัยทางสังคม
ประกอบด้วย ลักษณ์ประจำตัวผู้พูด ได้แก่ เพศและสถานะ และลักษณ์แสดงความสัมพันธ์
ระหว่างผู้ร่วมสนทนา ได้แก่ ความสัมพันธ์ที่เกี่ยวข้อง ความเคารพ และความสนิทสนม
ยิ่งไปกว่านั้น จากการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล ระบบบุรุษสรรพนามในภาษาไทลื้อสิบสองปันนา ยัง
สะท้อนให้เห็นสังคมลำดับขั้นในชุมชนภาษานี้อีกด้วย นอกจากนี้ ผู้วิจัยยังได้เปรียบเทียบรูปแปร
ของบุรุษสรรพนาม /raw/ หรือ /baw/ ในสามภาษาตระกูลไทตะวันตกเฉียงใต้เพื่อแสดงให้เห็น
ความแตกต่างของการใช้และนำไปสู่การสันนิษฐานการเปลี่ยนแปลงของบุรุษสรรพนามอีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ: *ภาษาไทลื้อสิบสองปันนา ระบบบุรุษสรรพนาม การวิเคราะห์องค์ประกอบ*

** นิสิตปริญญาดุษฎีบัณฑิต ภาควิชาภาษาศาสตร์ คณะอักษรศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
254 ถนนพญาไท แขวงวังใหม่ เขตปทุมวัน กรุงเทพฯ 10330 ประเทศไทย

Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun

92

Introduction

"A language without the expression of person cannot be imagined."

(Beneviste, 1971 cited in Siewierska, 2004)

A language is not only a tool of communication but is also a reflection of the way in which humans socialize and the relationship between conversational participants (Agha, 2007). One way in which these relationships are encoded in language is through the use of pronouns. As quoted above from Beneviste, the distinction of the linguistic expression of person is found in every language. A study that reflects the many ways in which person is expressed in a language, such as in Tai Lue, can provide insights into the identity or social relations of the speakers of that language.

A large number of studies have revealed the analysis of personal pronouns as a social index marker. In European languages (Brown and Gilman 1960), personal pronouns are not only marked by grammatical categories, namely person or number, but also social indexing markers, i.e. power and solidarity between participants. Similarly, the personal pronoun systems in Tai languages, e.g. Proto-Tai (Strecker, 1984), Zhuang (Kullavanijaya, 2008), Standard Thai (Cooke, 1968; Palakornkul, 1972; Simpson, 1997), and Standard Lao (Enfield, 1966; Compton, 2002) are also social indexes, such as gender, intimacy, politeness, etc. The purpose of this study is twofold: first it provides a comprehensive analysis of the personal pronoun system in Tai Lue spoken in the Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province of China; second, it compares the Tai Lue pronominal system described here with that of three other Southwestern Tai languages, specifically Standard Thai, Standard Lao, and Tai Lue, to show the variation in personal pronoun usage and to suggest possible paths for personal pronoun change in Tai languages.

Romaine (2000) proposes that synchronic variation is a straightforward tool to explain the language change phenomenon. Based on the assumption that linguistic variation is rooted in society, she suggests that sociolinguists can use *"the present to explain the past and the past to explain the present"* (p. 144).

In other words, we can use the variations gathered during a particular period of time to predict the direction of language change, either that which has taken place or that which will take place.

Based on the Labovian uniformitarian principle (1994), it is assumed that the motivating forces of language change in present days are similar to those in the past and that *"these influences continue to operate today in the same way that they have in the past"* (p. 275). The principle allows sociolinguists to reveal the complete changing pattern of language. In his work on the English vowel shift, Labov gathered several regional varieties of English, such as those in New York, Detroit, London, Glasgow, Sydney, and Atlanta, and he found that English vowels varied systematically, as illustrated in the following diagram.

The Northern Cities Shift
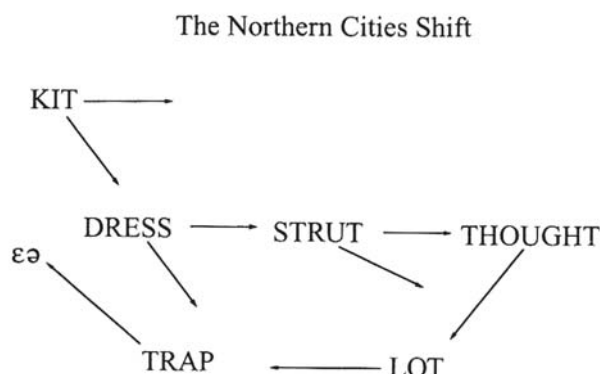
Figure 1: The Northern Cities Shift (Thomas, 2007: p. 220)

From Figure 1, it can be seen that if a shift occurs, the change will affect the entire vowel system. This vowel shift is similar to that which occurred in the past, known as the Great Vowel Shift (GVS). As a result, Labov's study helps to shed light on the mysterious GVS through a social perspective. In the same vein, this study investigates the pronoun variations in order to offer a possible explanation for the Tai personal pronoun system.

Personal Pronoun Features

In grammar books, a pronoun is traditionally referred to as "a closed set of lexical items that, it is held, can substitute for a noun or noun phrase" (e.g. Swan, 1980). They are treated as an independent word class, as opposed to nouns. However, such a definition applies primarily to third personal pronouns (Dixon, 2010: p. 190).

For example,

1. *The old man$_i$* bought *a book$_{ii}$,* and *he$_i$* kept *it$_{ii}$* for his son.

In sentence 1, the pronouns *he* and *it* replace the NPs *the old man* and a book respectively in the previous clause. In contrast, first and second person pronouns tend not to have such a replacement function.

In addition to this, another approach to the study of personal pronouns is to consider them not only as a word class, functioning as a substitute for a noun phrase, but also as consisting of several semantic features. In other words, personal pronouns can be seen as a *bundle of features* (Thomas, 1993; Harley & Ritter, 2002; Givon, 1984). According to Finch (2005), a technical term *feature* is used to refer to *"any typical or noticeable property of spoken or written language"* (p. 19). Traditionally, features are marked by two distinctive values indicated by a plus (+) or a minus (-) sign, so-called *binary features.*

Modelled after phonological analyses, a morphosyntactic *feature geometry*, proposed by Harley & Ritter (2002), is used to explain the distinctions among personal pronouns, as seen in the following figure.
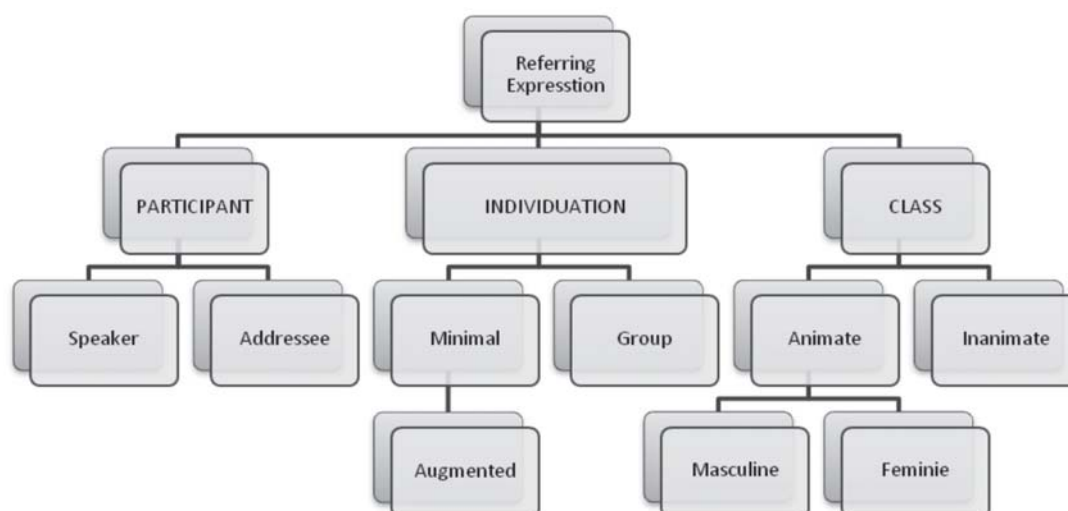
Figure 2: Morphosyntactic Feature Geometry (adapted from Harley & Ritter, 2002)

From the above tree diagram, it can be seen that pronouns share the same set of semantic features as other referring expressions; that is, as nominals. Harley & Ritter classified these features into three main groups: Participant (cf. person), Individuation (cf. number) and Class (including gender and other features).

The analysis shown below illustrates how first person pronouns in English, for example, are assigned distinctive features. The pronoun "I" consists of Speaker, indexing first person, and Minimal feature, indexing singularity, whereas the pronoun "we" consists of the Speaker feature and Group feature, indexing plurality.
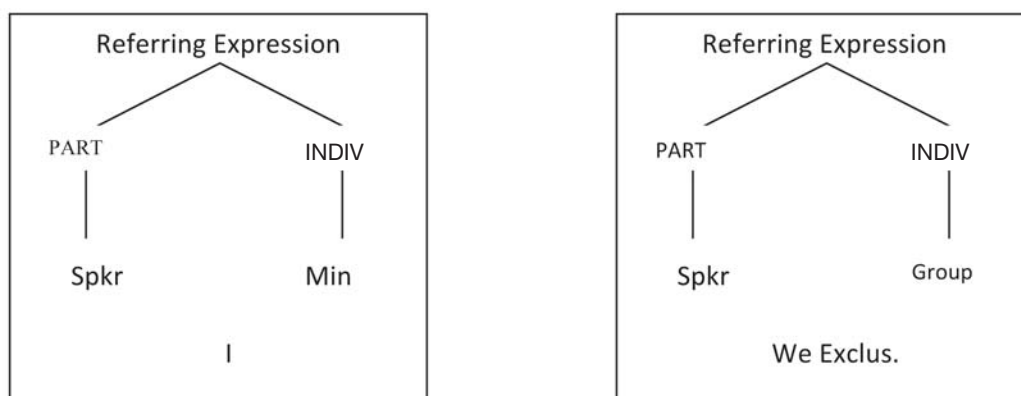

Figure 3: The Analysis of English Pronoun Features (adapted from Harley & Ritter, 2002)

96

Another approach to the study of meaning by using features is componential theory, developed by American anthropologists in the 1950s (Finch, 2005). Some linguists believe that all lexical items can be decomposed into a unified set of semantic features. For example, linguists can distinguish the following set of lexical items, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Woman	[+female]	[+adult]	[+human]	
Bachelor	[+male]	[+adult]	[+human]	[+unmarried]
Spinster	[+female]	[+adult]	[+human]	[+unmarried]
Wife	[+female]	[+adult]	[+human]	[+married]

Figure 4: The Componential Analysis of Lexical Items Woman, Bachelor, Spinster, and Wife (adapted from Finch (p. 148)

According to the above table, it is clear that the four lexical items can be decomposed into three or four semantic features, such as female/male, adult, human, and married/unmarried. These semantic features can differentiate the meaning of *spinster* from *wife*; that is, the former is single [+unmarried] but the latter is not [+married]. As a result, the use of semantic features allows us to describe the different senses of words more precisely.

Southwestern Tai Linguistic Background

Standard Thai, Standard Lao, and Tai Lue are considered sister languages in the Southwestern branch of the Tai-Kadai language family (i.e. Li, 1977; Chamberlain, 1975, and so on). They are all isolating tonal languages with a basic S-V-O word order. They also share a head-modifier syntactic pattern with no inflectional morphology or restricted derivational word formations.

Modern Lao has become the national language of the Lao Democratic Peoples Republic through the effort of standardization (Enfield, 1966). It seems that most previous linguistic work on Lao was comprised of grammatical textbooks and dictionaries. In his intensive work on Lao grammar, Enfield systematized the Standard Lao pronoun, as illustrated in the following table.

		1st person	2nd person	3rd person
Singular	Bare	kuu3	mùng2	man2
	Familiar	haw2	too3	laaaw2
	Polite	khòòj5	caw4	phen1
	Formal	khaa5-phacaw4	thaan1	thaan1
Plural	Bare	phuak4-kuu3	suu3	khaw3
	Polite	cu-haw2 (incl.) cu-khòòj5 (excl.)	cu-caw4 phuak4-caw4	khacaw4

Figure 5: Standard Lao Pronoun System (adapted from Enfield, 1966: p. 77)

Next, in the following paragraphs, I would like to provide a brief overview of the Tai Lue linguistic background for those that might not know about the Tai Lue language.

Tai Lue is a language spoken by about 700,000 members of an ethnic group called the "Lüe" or "Tai Lue" in several areas of Southeast Asia, specifically in the Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province of China, in Luang Prabang Laos, and in some provinces in the northern part of Thailand, as well as in areas of Burma and Vietnam. It is classified as a member of the Southwestern Tai Language branch of the Tai language family. Despite its widely-dispersed speakers, Tai Lue is regarded as a minority vernacular in all of the countries in which it is found. In Thailand, for example, it is considered a displaced language

Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun

98

(Prasithrathsint, 2005; Smalley, 1994). The largest population of Tai Lue speakers is in Xishuangbanna, and as one travels through the prefectural capital of Jing Hong, unlike the communities in Thailand and Laos where Tai Lue is spoken, one is struck by the proliferation of the Tai Lue script in the public space and the large numbers of Tai Lue native speakers. One might assume, therefore, that the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Tai Lue community there is stronger than in other countries. For these reasons, the language of this historic capital of the former Tai kingdom of Xishuangbanna was chosen for the study of Tai Lue pronouns.

There are a huge number of linguistic studies on the Tai Lue language; however, most of them focus on its sound system. Tai Lue is known as a tonal language. Weroha (1975) and Li (1977) both agree that there are six tones in Tai Lue as follows:

1) High level tone (55), indicated in this study by (´)
2) Falling tone (31), indicated by (ˆ)
3) High rising tone, indicated by (ˇ)
4) Mid level tone (33), no indication
5) Low level or low rising tone (11 or 13), indicated by (⌃) and
6) Mid low level tone (22), indicated by (‾)

In addition, Ampornpan's Tai Lue grammatical sketch provides an overview, including the sound system, word formation, and basic syntactic structure, of the Tai Lue spoken in Nan province, Thailand. She found 15 personal pronoun forms, as shown below[1].

1) 1st person pronoun

    a. ***kuu*1** is used to refer to the speaker (not impolite) when talking to people of the same age or younger.

    b. ***prn*6** is used to refer to the speaker, indicating politeness, when talking to people of the same age or older, whether intimate or not.

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[1] In her work, Ampornpan (1986) used a single digit number indicating tone; however, in this study, the tone marker is employed as shown above.

    c. ***haw2*** is used to refer to the speaker, indicating politeness, when talking to people of the same age, whether intimate or not, or it is used to refer to a monk as the speaker.

    d. ***haa2*** is used to refer to a male speaker.

    e. ***khiŋ2*** is used to refer to a female speaker when talking to a female addressee.

    f. ***khɔɔj6*** is used to refer to the speaker when only talking to a monk.

    g. ***muu5haw2*** is used to refer to a group of speakers when talking to people of the same age or older.

2) 2nd person pronoun

    a. ***muuŋ2*** is used to refer to an addressee of the same age as the speaker or younger.

    b. ***kɛɛ1*** is used to refer to an addressee of the same age as the speaker or younger.

    c. ***taan4*** is used to refer to an addressee who is a monk or a highly-respected person.

    d. ***suu1*** is used to refer to an addressee both in the singular and plural, indicating politeness.

    e. ***haa2*** is used to refer to a male addressee.

    f. ***khiŋ2*** is used to refer to a female addressee.

3) 3rd person pronouns

    a. ***kaw1*** is used to refer to people of the same age or younger, indicating politeness.

    b. ***taan4*** is used to refer to older or respected people.

    c. ***man2*** is used to refer to people, animals, or things.

    d. ***muu5khaw1*** is used to refer to a group of people of the same age or younger, indicating politeness.

Interestingly, in her analysis, Ampornpan reveals that pronoun ***haa2*** and pronoun ***khiŋ2*** are marked by a gender distinction, not grammatical person. That is, they can refer to either the first or second person, but only to males or females respectively.

Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun

100

Rhekhalilit (2010) provides a componential analysis of the semantic features of the Kham Mueang and Tai Lue personal pronoun systems. It reveals 14 personal pronoun forms in the Tai Lue spoken in Lampang province, Thailand. The study suggests 8 dimensions of contrast in the personal pronoun system; namely 1) person, 2) number, 3) gender of speaker, 4) gender of addressee, 5) formality, 6) relative status, 7) intimacy, and 8) the presence of a monk.

Even though these abovementioned studies analysed Tai Lue personal pronoun spoken in two different communities, their sources of data collection were from Tai Lue in Thailand, which is considered a displaced language. There is still no present work on the Tai Lue personal pronoun system spoken in the Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province of China, which is a major Tai Lue speech community, as mentioned earlier. Thus this study mainly focuses on TLX personal pronouns to provide a description of personal pronoun usage.

The Present Study

Adopting the bundle of features approach, the present study focuses on the componential analysis of the Tai Lue personal pronouns paradigm as spoken in the Autonomous Prefecture of Xishuangbanna. Based on the pronominal paradigms in other Tai language (Cooke, 1968; Palakornkul, 1972; Panagiotidis, 2002), this study has hypothesized that the personal pronoun system in TLX consists of five different dimensions of contrast; that is, Person, Number, Relative Status, Deference, and Intimacy.

The scope of this study is limited to data elicited by oral interview; written discourse and spontaneous unstructured oral conversation were excluded. In addition, the collected data represent a synchronic description. Moreover, other referent terms or pronominals, such as factive kinship terms, occupational terms, and proper names found in the interviews, were excluded from the analysis.

The research methodology employed in this study was a sociolinguistic interview along with participant observation. According to Milroy and Gordon

(2003), sociolinguistic interviews have been the most common strategy for data collection. Compared to survey questions, they are relatively flexible and open-ended. The primary objective of sociolinguistic interviews is to stimulate the interviewees' *natural* usage of language. Labov's Philadelphia project (1984) shows the achievement of well-prepared questions, set in terms of *modules*, or questions related to a controlled topic. Then these modules can be organized into *conversational networks.* Moreover, these modules should be selected based on two criteria: (a) previous experience of the interviewees, and (b) the social norms of the selected community. With these two criteria, interviewees would be more familiar with the modules, making it easier to answer the interview questions.

Adopted from the above approach, I have set the conversational networks or a set of modules as a tool of conversation as follows:
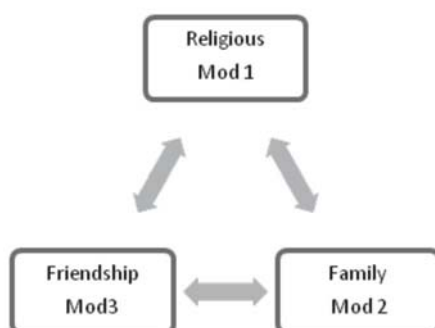
Figure 6: Characteristics Networks of Modules for Tai Lue Native Speakers in Xishuangbanna

The diagram above represents the interchangeable relationship of modules which could be selected in any order while interviewing the informants, depending on their individual characteristics. For example, informant A might be interviewed beginning with Module 1, then Module 3 and Module 2, or vice versa, whereas informant B might start from Module 2 instead (see Appendix 1).

102

Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun

Each interview took an average of 30 minutes. The six interviewees, aged from 45 to about 71, were selected based on the following criteria.

1) They had to be Tai Lue native speakers.

2) They could be bilingual, but Tai Lue vernacular was definitely required.

3) They were expected to have lived in the village longer than half of their life.

Then, they were asked to talk about the given topic of each module according to their experience, after which they were asked to create or translate a set-up conversation on the related topic, which was set to control the relationship of the participants. Finally, they were asked directly how they would refer to themselves or to an addressee or even non-participants in the conversation. For instance, "How do you refer to yourself while talking to your parents?" or "How do you refer to your friend at school," *etc.* After the interview, the data were verified using a sentence completion test in which the interviewer used the elicited personal pronouns to fill in a set of sentences to check their acceptability. For example, "Can we use X to talk about Y?" or "Can we say X, which is a dog, is coming?" to verify the data collection as to whether a pronoun could be used to refer to Y or not.

Apart from the abovementioned sociolinguistic interview, participant observation was used to collect information on the use of TLX personal pronouns in the selected community. Participant observation is another primary sociolinguistic method of ethnography (Johnstone, 2000). As Stocking (1983) has indicated, an important element of participant observation is for the researcher to enter the selected community as a stranger and to investigate the native's point of view as reflected in the way he or she behaves. In the present study, while I was interviewing the informants, I was also observing the natural use of the personal pronouns of the native speakers, not only those that were being interviewed but also the surrounding participants at the time of the interview.

Data Analysis

TLX Personal Pronoun

Analysis of the data collected revealed 12 personal pronouns and one plural prefix, namely /mǔu/, placed in front of a singular personal pronoun. For example, the plural pronoun /mǔu. sǔu/, "you all," can be formed by adding /mǔu/ to the singular second-person pronoun, /sǔu/ "you" (sing). TLX personal pronouns can be set in a paradigm as follows:

	Singular	**Plural**
First	khòj khà kuu tuu haw$_1$	*(mǔu).haw[2]
Second	m ǐ ŋ khiŋ sǔu	mǔu. sǔu
Third	pə̀n man	mǔu. pə̀n

Figure 7: TLX Personal Pronoun Paradigm

The personal pronouns in TLX consist of two main groups of inherent features: grammatical categories and social factors, as illustrated in the following diagram.

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[2]   Note that the prefix / mǔu/ is optional with the pronoun /haw/ to mark plurality.

Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun
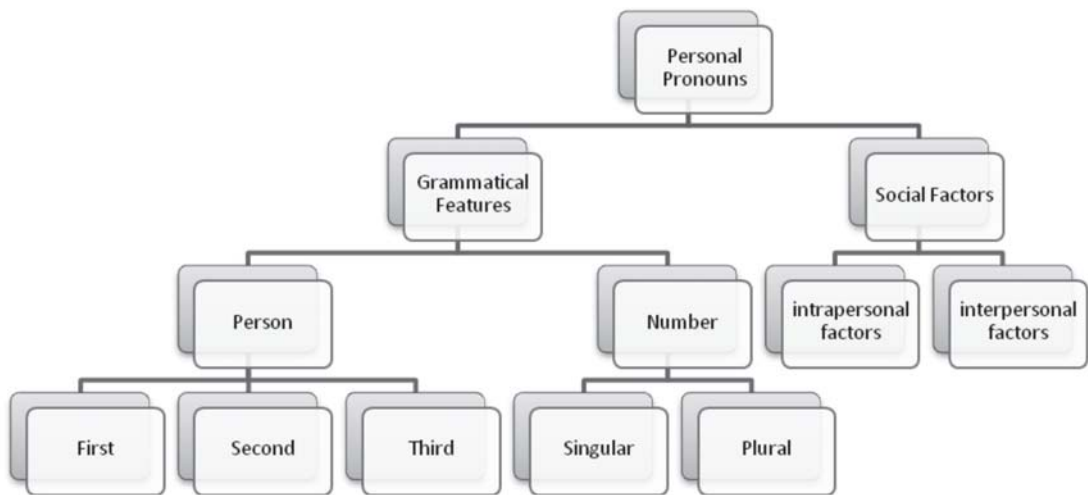
104

Figure 8: The Grammatical Categories of TLX Personal Pronouns

The above diagram shows that the grammatical categories of personal pronouns consist of two features, namely person and number. The former can be divided into three subclasses, *First* (speaker referent), *Second* (addressee referent), and *Third* (non-participants), whereas the latter, number, consists of only two factors, namely *Singular*, indexing the minimal number of referent, and *Plural*, indexing the group of referents.

The classification of social factors in TLX personal pronouns is represented in Figure 9.
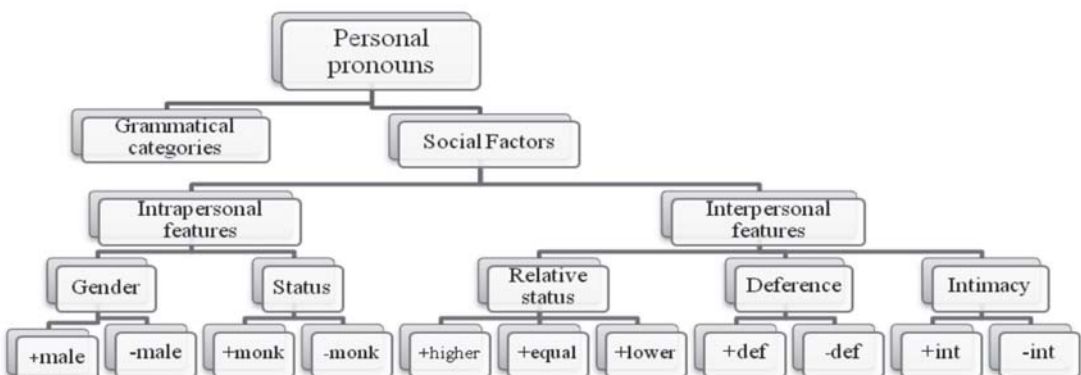

Figure 9: The Social Factors in TSL Personal Pronouns

From Figure 9, it can be seen that social factors are divided into two main features: *Inherent features* entail the inner characteristics of the referent, specifically *Gender* and *Status*. By contrast, *Interpersonal features* focus on the relationship between the participants or the non-participants, specifically: 1) *Relative Status,* indicating the hierarchical status of the participants in a conversation, 2) *Deference*, showing the deference in a conversation, and 3) *Intimacy*, labeling the proximity among participants. For example, feature [+higher] indicates that the participant in the conversation is superior to the speaker, whereas [+lower] shows that the participant is inferior to the speaker. Another example is [+def], which is used in a conversation in which the speaker is paying respect to his or her addressee, while feature [-def] is the opposite situation. All semantic features are summarized in the table below.

Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun

106

Dimension of Contrast	Semantic Feature Symbols	Meaning
Person	+First	Speaker
	+Second	Addressee
	+Third	Non-participant
Number	+Singular	Minimal number of referents
	-Singular	Group of referents
Gender	+male	Male referent
	-male	Female referent
Status	+monk	The referent is a monk.
	-monk	The referent is not a monk.
Relative status	+higher	Superior to the speaker
(either age or social	+lower	Inferior to the speaker
class)	+equal	Equal to the speaker
Deference	+defer	Deference is shown
	-defer	Deference is not shown
Intimacy	+intimacy	Participants are close
	-intimacy	Participants are not close

Figure 10: The Significance of Symbols and Dimensions of Contrast in TLX Personal Pronouns

Pronouns	Person	Number	Gender	Status	Relative status	Deference	Intimacy
khòj	+First	+Singular			+higher	+def	
khà	+First	+Singular				+def	-int
kuu	+First	+Singular	+male		+equal	-def	+int
haa	+First	+Singular			+equal	-def	+int
tuu	+First	+singular			+equal	+def	+int
haw₁	+First	+Singular	+male	+monk	+lower	+def	
haw₂	+First	+plural					
miŋ	+Second	+Singular	+male		+equal	-def	+int
khiŋ	+Second	+Singular			+equal	-def	+int
sǔu	+Second	+Singular			+equal	+def	+int
pə̀n	+Third	+Singular			+higher	+def	-int
man	+Third	+Singular			+lower	-def	

Figure 11: TLX Personal Pronoun Features

Figure 11 shows the componential features of TLX personal pronouns, set in the first column. The other columns are arranged in priority from left to right. In other words, the grammatical categories, namely person and number, are more salient than deference and intimacy, which are social factors. That is, the features in the left column were used more frequently than those in the right column, suggesting that the inherent grammatical categories are rigid and obligatory in the TLX personal pronoun system. This is probably because the inherent grammatical categories are rigid and obligatory in the personal pronoun system, whereas the social factors are not. Moreover, among the social factors,

108

Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun

gender indexicality is more salient than relative status and deference. (The marker + indicates the appearance of features within the personal pronouns, while the marker – indicates the opposite reading.)

Discussion I

Register of Person Deixis

Agha (2007) has proposed that pronoun usage is based on "a reflexive reanalysis of patterns of deictic usage of human languages" (p. 278); that is, the way people convert *the patterns of participant deixis,* or linguistic elements denoting speaker or addressee, into *stereotypic social indexicals,* which index the attributes of the speaker, himself or herself, or the relationship between participants, resulting in *the register of person deixis.* An example is the classic account of European pronouns T and V by Brown and Gilman (1960). Pronoun T and V forms in many European languages are similar in that they both denote the addressee as a referent. However, in terms of stereotypic social indexicals, the latter is considered polite and denotes social distance, while the opposite is true for the T forms.

A body of studies, including that of Brown and Gilman (1960), accounts for the pronouns usage to label the interrelationship between participants in a conversation, such as politeness, intimacy, and so on. Such labels assign particular stereotypic social indexical values to the lexeme of the speakers. Interestingly, some values can be more salient in a sub-group of the community. As Cooke (1968) found in Thai pronoun usage, stereotypic gender indexicality can be reflected in the use of pronouns /phǒm/, literally male speaker, and /dichǎn/, literally female speaker, among homosexuals, in which females prefer the former, while males prefer the latter (Agha, 2007). As masculinity is attached to pronoun /phǒm/ and femininity to /dichǎn/, the use of self-reference forms opposite to biological sex emphasizes the significance of social values in pronoun use.

In TLX, the register of person deixis is obviously marked in first person pronouns. As demonstrated in Figure 11, there are six forms of personal pronouns (exclude haw$_2$, which is marked plurality), sharing the same grammatical

categories; that is, person and number. However, the variation of personal pronouns results in a contrast of registers. As seen earlier, pronouns are marked by social factors, both inherent and interpersonal, so their variation depends upon the context of the conversation, not only the grammatical but also the social context. For example, pronoun /kuu/, "I," is used to refer to a male speaker in an intimate conversation, whereas pronoun /haa/, "I," used in the same conversational context, does not significantly mark masculinity.

Discussion II

This study also shows an interesting implication of the Tai personal pronoun system. Compared to other Tai languages, it can be seen that TLX also shares some forms of the personal pronoun, derived from the same cognates in its sister languages, as discussed below.

Pronoun /raw/ vs. Pronoun /haw/

In Standard Thai, a large number of studies (e.g. Simpson, 1997; Higbie & Thinsan, 2003; Cooke, 1968) show multiple meanings of the pronoun /raw/. It is proposed that this pronoun is primarily used as a first person plural pronoun. In addition, it is sometimes used to refer to a singular definite self-referring expression; in other words, pronoun /raw/ refers to only speaker him/herself, mainly indexing intimacy between conversation participants.

In addition, Cooke (1968), and Higbie & Thisan (2003), agree that the pronoun /raw/ can be used as an addressee-referring expression, specifically towards children or inferiors. Simpson has also proposed that the pronoun /raw/ may be used as an impersonal or generic pronoun.

As mentioned earlier, Enfield's analysis (1966) is a grammatical sketch of Standard Lao. He suggests that the pronoun /haw/ in Lao can be used with either a plural or singular meaning (p. 77). Contrary to the abovementioned Standard Thai, the Lao singular pronoun /haw/ is mainly used by children, especially when talking to their parents, in order to lower the formality in the family conversation.

Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun

110

In the current study, multiple meanings of the pronoun /haw/ in TLX can also be found. As summarized in Figure 11 above, there are two forms of pronoun /haw/: the basic plural pronoun and the singular definite self-referring term, exclusively used by monks. This result was also found in Ampornphan's abovementioned sketch. However, surprisingly, the pronoun /haw/ in Tai Lue Lampang (Rhekhalilti, 2010) is not used in a singular meaning, but only with a plural reference.

The above comparison of personal pronouns in the three SWT languages implies variations in the social indexicality of the definite singular pronoun /raw/, or its equivalent /haw/. It can be seen that either pronoun /raw/ or /haw/, which reduces its grammatical category, namely *plurality*, at the same time increases its social indexes, namely *intimacy*, in Standard Thai and Lao. However, pronoun /haw/ indicates monkhood status in TLX and Tai Lue spoken in Nan province.

As mentioned earlier, synchronic variation can be an indicator to explain the past. This study reveals the possible path of changing patterns in the Proto-Tai personal pronoun system into that of its daughter languages, namely Standard Thai, Standard Lao, and Tai Lue, spoken in different regions. However, this hypothesis still requires further diachronic study to verify this possibility.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the analysis of personal pronoun usage in the Tai Lue spoken in Xishuangbanna in China. Contrary to the hypothesis, which stated that there were only five dimensions of contrast in the TLX personal pronoun system, the study reveals the intrinsic features of personal pronouns classified into two main types, obligatory grammatical categories and social factors. The social factors are a reflection of the attributes of the speakers and also the relationship between the participants. As Agha (2007) has suggested, personal pronoun usage not only reflects the relationship of participants but also the characteristics of the speakers as *"emblematic through role designations of age, urban/rural provenance, gender categories, relative status, and the like"* (p. 284). As a result, the analysis reflects the hierarchical nature of the TLX speech communities, where the participants have to adjust their linguistic varieties, specifically their choice of personal pronoun, to accommodate each other within a conversation. In conclusion, the TLX personal pronouns are summarized in the schema below:

Forms & Gloss	Grammatical categories	Register of person deixis
khòj 'I'	1st singular	Used mostly while speaking to higher addressee
khà 'I'	1st singular	Used mostly while speaking to a stranger or an acquaintance
kuu 'I'	1st singular	Used primarily by males in an intimate conversation reciprocal to / miŋ/
haa 'I'	1st singular	Neutral gendered term, used mostly in an intimate conversation reciprocal to /khiŋ/
tuu 'I'	1st singular	Neutral gendered term, used mostly in a polite and intimate conversation reciprocal to / sǔu/
haw₁ 'I'	1st singular	Exclusively used by monks
haw₂ 'I'	1st plural	Used to refer to a group of speakers
miŋ 'you'	2nd singular	Used primarily by males in an intimate conversation reciprocal to /kuu/
khiŋ 'you'	2nd singular	Neutral gendered term, used mostly in an intimate conversation reciprocal to / haa/
sǔu 'you'	2nd singular	Neutral gendered term, used mostly in a polite and intimate conversation reciprocal to / tuu/
pə̀n 'he or she'	3rd singular	Used to refer to a non-participant who is higher in status than or equal to the speaker
man 'it'	3rd singular	Used to refer to a non-participant who is lower than the speaker

Figure12: Summary of TLX Personal Pronoun Usage (adapted from Agah, 2007: 285)

Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun

112

Moreover, the paper has compared the personal pronoun variation in three different Southwestern Tai languages with a specific focus on the pronoun */raw/ or /haw/,* to suggest a hypothetical changing pattern in which its grammatical meaning, *plurality*, is bleached to index different social values, such as familiarity, in Standard Thai and Standard Lao, and the status of the speaker in Tai Lue spoken in both Xishuangbanna, China and in Nan province, Thailand, as summarised in the diagram below.
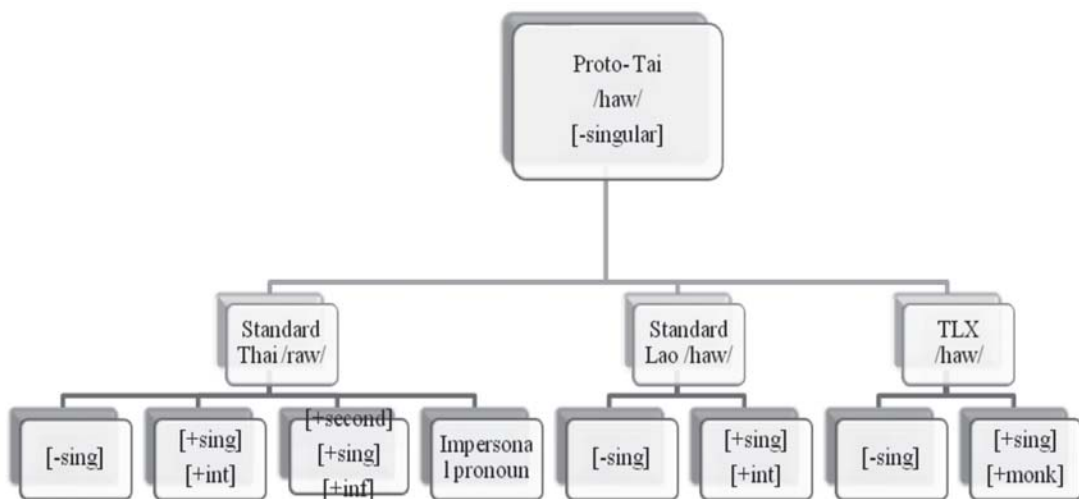

Figure 13: Pronoun /raw/ and /haw/ in Three SWT Languages

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Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun

114

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Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun

116

Appendix 1: Translation of Interview Questions

(Please note that the questions are tentative and can be adjusted flexibly in conversations. Some of them were added to make the conversation sound natural.)

Personal Details

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your occupation?
4. Are you married or single?
5. If so, what is the ethnic background of your spouse?
6. What is your highest education level?
7. Have you ever been out of the village? If so, for how long?

Conversational Network

Module 1 Religion Situation

1. Would please tell me how villagers invite monks on special occasions, such as wedding ceremonies or new house celebration ceremonies?
2. When you meet an old monk in a temple, how do you call him? And how does he call himself?
3. How many monks are normally invited to a holy ceremony?
4. If your son entered the monkhood, how would you address him?

Module 2 Family Situation

1. Let's imagine you are talking to your spouse about a new house celebration ceremony. How would you ask for his/her opinion?
2. Would you please tell me more about your children?
3. If you would like to invite your older relatives to a new house celebration ceremony, how would you tell them?
4. If you would like to ask your younger brother or sister to help you prepare the ceremony, how would you tell them?
5. Normally, how many monks are invited to a wedding ceremony?

Module 3 Friendship Situation

1. Would you please tell me about your friends?

2. If you would like to invite your neighbors to a new house celebration ceremony, how would you tell them?

3. If you want your friend to accompany you to…, how would you tell them?

Direct Questions

How would you call yourself and your addressee when talking to …?

PARTICIPANT	YOURSELF	YOUR ADDRESSEE
1. Grandparents		
2. Parents		
3. Children		
4. Grandchildren		
5. Niece/Nephew		
6. Husband/Wife		
7. Teacher (of your child)		
8. Older sibling		
9. Younger sibling		
10. Close friend/ neighbor		
11. Older friend/ neighbor		
12. Younger friend/ neighbor		
13. Stranger		
14. Shopkeeper		
15. Employer		
16. Employee		
17. Authority		

Comparison of the Personal Pronoun System in Three Southwestern Tai Languages:
Semantic Variation and Possible Implications for Change in the First Person Plural Pronoun
118

Data Verification

For example,

1. Can we call dogs "x"?
2. Can we call monks "x"?
3. Can we call parents "x"?
4. Can we call a child "x"?