

การดำรงอยู่ของอัตลักษณ์ในวัยรุ่นชนเผ่าอาข่า: กรณีศึกษาหมู่บ้านป่าชางนาเงิน อำเภอแม่ฟ้าหลวง จังหวัดเชียงราย

The Maintenance of Akha Ethnic Adolescence Identity: A Case Study at Pasangnangeon Village, Mae Fahluang District, Chiangrai Province

วีระยุทธ ใจสุรราช^{1*}
Weerayuth Jaisurach^{1*}



บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการดำรงอยู่ของอัตลักษณ์ในวัยรุ่นชนเผ่าอาข่าที่หมู่บ้านป่าชางนาเงิน การศึกษานี้ศึกษาและวิเคราะห์ให้เห็นถึงอัตลักษณ์ของกลุ่มวัยรุ่นอาข่า

การศึกษานี้ศึกษาพื้นฐานของชาติพันธุ์และภาษาศาสตร์ สามารถตรวจสอบถึงอิทธิพลของอัตลักษณ์ทางชาติพันธุ์ อัตลักษณ์ทางสังคม อัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรม และอัตลักษณ์ทางภาษาศาสตร์ของวัยรุ่นอาข่า การเลือกตัวอย่างวัยรุ่นอาข่าโดยใช้การสุ่มเพื่อดำเนินการศึกษาข้อมูลและข้อมูลที่ถูกเก็บมาจากการบันทึกและสัมภาษณ์โดยมุ่งเน้นที่ตัวตนของวัยรุ่นอาข่า นักวิจัยเลือกเพียง 20 คน ซึ่งคิดเป็นประมาณร้อยละ 80 ของประชากรหนุ่มสาวจากประชากรในหมู่บ้านทั้งสิ้น 359 คน

ผลของการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่าความแตกต่างที่มีผลต่อปัจจัยทั้งหมดขึ้นอยู่กับสถานการณ์และมีอิทธิพลต่ออัตลักษณ์ทางชาติพันธุ์ อัตลักษณ์ทางสังคม อัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรม และอัตลักษณ์ทางภาษาศาสตร์ การศึกษาพบว่าในด้านอัตลักษณ์ทางชาติพันธุ์ การรับรู้และตระหนักถึงความเป็นชาติพันธุ์ เป็นสิ่งที่แสดงออกทางชาติพันธุ์ตามทัศนคติที่มีต่อเชื้อชาติและพฤติกรรมทางกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ ในด้านอัตลักษณ์ทางสังคม บุคลิกภาพถือว่าเป็นสิ่งที่แสดงถึงอัตลักษณ์และบทบาททางสังคม ในด้านอัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรม ประวัติศาสตร์การดำรงชีวิตเป็นสิ่งที่แสดงถึงบรรทัดฐานทางวัฒนธรรม มุมมอง และการรักษาทางวัฒนธรรม ในด้านอัตลักษณ์ทางภาษาศาสตร์ พลังของภาษาจะแสดงให้เห็นถึงทัศนคติที่มีต่อภาษา การเลือกใช้ภาษารวมถึงการรักษาภาษา ดังตัวอย่างเช่น เยาวชนอาข่าชอบที่จะปรับให้เข้ากับวิถีชีวิตที่จะต้องสร้างสิ่งใหม่ๆ แต่พวกเขายังคงใช้ภาษาอาข่าในทุกสถานการณ์ ซึ่งมีระดับของความสับสนเกิดขึ้นในการใช้ภาษา โดยมีการผสมและยืมคำศัพท์เพื่อใช้ในกระบวนการสื่อสาร เพราะภาษาไทยไม่ได้เป็นภาษาแม่ของพวกเขา บางครั้งพวกเขาไม่สามารถที่จะสื่อความหมายในบริบทต่างๆ ได้อย่างชัดเจน

¹ ศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาภาษาอังกฤษ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏเชียงราย

¹ Master of Art, English, Chiangrai Rajabhat University

* Corresponding author. Tel. 081-0279457 E-mail: deogenius@gmail.com

คำแนะนำจากการศึกษาครั้งนี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่าวัยรุ่นอาข่าควรรักษา ปกป้องและสืบทอดอัตลักษณ์ของชาวอาข่าในทุกๆ ด้าน พวกเขาควรตระหนักในแง่ของการสร้างสภาพแวดล้อมที่ดีต่อการเรียนรู้และส่งเสริมให้ชาวอาข่ามีการเรียนรู้ในเรื่องเชื้อชาติของพวกเขา

คำสำคัญ: อัตลักษณ์ของวัยรุ่น, อัตลักษณ์ทางสังคม, อัตลักษณ์ทางชาติพันธุ์, อัตลักษณ์ทางภาษา



Abstract

This qualitative research describes the objectives of the maintenance of Akha ethnic adolescence identity at Pasangnangeon village. This study investigates and analyzes the four identities of young Akha people.

The study based on ethnolinguistics and sociolinguistics. It examined the influence of ethnic identity, social identity, cultural identity, and linguistic identity of the Akha adolescents. In order to select several young Akha sample by random to continue a further study, the information and data were collected from recording and interviewing, focusing on Akha ethnic adolescence identity. The researcher selected only 20 samples that are closely 80% of young population from 359 citizens.

The results of the study showed the differences were effective in all domains, depending on their individual situation and the influence of ethnic identity, social identity, cultural identity, and linguistic identity. The study showed that the percentage of ethnic identity in the individual's perception of the ethnic awareness was the highest, followed by ethnic self-identification, ethnic attitude, and ethnic behaviors. The finding in the absence of social identity, personality was the first rating, followed by self-concept, and social role. In cultural identity life history and celebration was the most, followed by group belonging, cultural norms and perspective, and cultural maintenance. For linguistic identity, language vitality was the highest ranking followed by language attitude, language choice, and language maintenance. As an example of the Akha youth prefer to adapt their lifestyle with something new, but most of them still use the Akha language in all situations. The contingent level of confusion, mixing, and borrowing words are in the process of communication. Because standard Thai is not the native language of their own, sometimes they are not able to express the meaning in various contexts clearly.

The recommendation from this study is that young Akha should preserve, protect, and maintain the inherited Akha identities in all aspects. They should provide some areas in terms of creating a better environment of learning Akha and encourage learners to learn their ethnic identities.

Keywords: Adolescence identity, Cultural identity, Ethnic identity, Linguistic identity, Social Identity.



Introduction

Ethnic Akha are descended from the unknown. The Akha live scattered in northern Thailand, Chiang Tung, Shan State of Myanmar and the Xishuangbanna region of southern China. Akha language is placed in Chinese but it is not quite Chinese because it has a need to associate with many tribes. Akha is spoken from the fields of the Lolo tribe and is similar to phu (Lahu), and Lisu, there are no characters used in Akha language. The culture of the ethnic Akha, is that they look at life in sequence, children are born to ensure that tribes are not extinct. When they grow up to become a tribe they are a keeper of the “Akha way of life” eventually they die and become the ancestral spirits to protect the children of these rules covering the whole tribe. From morning until bedtime, from birth to death they are teachers in all matters of law, medicine, religion, tribal traditions, architecture, agriculture, etc. Culture makes it easier to remember, and they do not use written words and have no written records. Their history is a legend saying Akha traditions and ceremonies are for the perception of the race and their appreciation of the Akha. The paternal ancestors can be traced back to the “prototype” and feel that you are born as the gift of heat. Living a long time ago, this is part of the chain dealing with their history. (The Mirror Foundation, <http://www.hilltribe.org>, 2012)

Focusing the Akha in Pasangnangoen village located in Mae Fah Luang Sub-District, Mae Fah Luang District, Chiangrai Province, and the village has 64 households with a total population of 359 people living in the area by the Royal Doi Tung Development Project. This is an area that is remote from the ground community. This Akha group is known as “Akha Thai”, their ancestors had migrated from Chiang Tung, Myanmar to Doi Tung settlers and Mae Fahluang District, Chiangrai Province; the term “Uloe” as the Akha language to mean “sharp cap” when Akha woman married her cap will be sharper. The study points on ethnic identities of young Akha generation in Pasangnangeon village, Mae Fahluang District, Chiangrai Province by providing into three main studies; cultural identity, linguistic identity, and social identity.

As this paper is to show that apart from maintaining the world’s biodiversity of language, cultural, and social domain also play important roles in the stability of a nation as well. Now that the stage is set, the researcher is particularly interested in studying the ethnic adolescence identity in Pasangnangeon village. My particular interest in this location is because the village is located close to the border of Myanmar, and it is an area with powerful economic and sociocultural forces. Here it is diverse in terms of ethnic population, culture, and various language uses in ethnic groups. In some places in the highlands it has been observed that in common places people still communicate with each other in several different languages, and also, in some places, Akha language as a lingua franca is used among the highlanders, in Pasangnangeon village. To the researcher, there is an interesting power relation in languages in Chiang Rai (Matisoff, 1989: 56; Muhlhausler, 1998: 219).

Due to immense domain and diversity, this area has long been of interest to researchers both ethnolinguistics and sociolinguistics. Studies of hilltribes identity were conducted but most of them were mainly conventional linguistics, culture, and social studies of recording the unwritten languages. There appears to be little research on language situation and how it came about, including how the knowledge of language ecology can be used. The only research which has been conducted was on a broad spectrum of the language of Thailand which gives an expansive picture of languages in Thailand since 1994 (Smalley, 1994: 146).

This study assesses the identities of Akha teenagers and suggests issues to be considered in striving to revitalize the Akha identities. To our knowledge, none of these ideas have been pursued in relation to Akha in Thailand. Three different perspectives on language domain, language maintenance, and the Akha identity are applied to survey data. First, Fishman's GIDS is described, and some suggestions about language use among the Akha language are proposed. Second, some issues highlighted by Crystal (2000: 130) on language maintenance prerequisites are also considered in relation to the Akha language. Finally, the factors relating to the Akha identity which was suggested by UNESCO are considered and applied. Consequently, the present survey of young Akha identities is to help Akha people acquire the dominants. The study is expected to shed some light on language, culture and social teaching and learning development for any future generations on Akha. In addition, study will improve the understanding among the young Akha generation of their language and identity, share their beliefs with the senior generation and maintain their ancient and precious culture.



Purpose of the Study

The aim of the research is to study what domain affects to the young Akha identities in Pasangnangeon village, Mae Fahluang District, Chiangrai Province by studying about what are Ethnic Akha identities and how do the Akha adolescents maintain and preserve their identities.



Methodology

Population and Sample

The study site is Pasangnangeon village, Mae Fahluang District, Chiangrai province. To narrow down the study sampling (age between 10-19 years old; World Health Organization: 2000) select 20 adolescence samples (10 males and 10 females) from 45 adolescences by

simple random technique, I only selected the adolescence based on the diversity in terms of age (Hall, G. Stanley, 1904: 135)

Data collection

Multiple interview questionnaires, observation, and recording were constructed according to the diversity of interviewees and organizations to be interviewed, such as head of the village, the young villagers and the people who are the outsider. Interview questionnaires were then translate into Thai. During fieldwork, some interviewees were interviewed on the spot and the questions were instantaneous. If any questions arose after the interviews the researcher had opportunities to make appointments for later clarification and talk on certain topics.

Observation

Participant observation is the central research method of ethnography. It means engaging with people in as many different situations as possible. This is important because we are looking at what people actually do as well as what they say and do (as in interviews or documents), and we are looking at what they do and say in the real flow of events.

The basic idea of ethnographic fieldwork is that ‘everything is material’. Any conversation or encounter can be a source of insight (it doesn’t matter if it did not happen in a formal ‘research situation’). Even the most apparently trivial detail can help develop your understanding as I fit it into the evolving picture. I must try to observe everything and put as much detail as I can in my field notes. For example–I am observing a computer class. Think about: the space itself (layout, color, lighting), who is sitting with whom, what they are doing, and what they are saying).

Interview

The information presented here is based on (1) the author’s observations and extensive interaction with speakers during the language study and (2) conversations and recorded interviews specifically targeting issues of language and identity during the data collection. There are many different kinds of interviews, from casual chats to long and more formal conversations. Some are fairly structured; I have a list of questions that I want to ask everyone I interview. Others are quite unstructured, I might have some topics in mind, but the conversation develops in terms of what the interviewee says and what they want to talk about.

Data analysis

According to the research, the process will be conducted under the linguistic theories method based on the findings of ethnolinguistics and sociolinguistics as the following process:

1. Gather the data from the Akha adolescents.
2. Translate any data collection from interviewing into English.

3. Categorize the information into themes.
4. Analyze and describe linguistic theories based on the findings of ethnolinguistics and sociolinguistics.
5. Interpret the identities.
6. Summarize and report the result of the research.



Results

From the analysis, there were taken 4 identities as ethnic identity, social identity, cultural identity, and linguistic identity with 4 domains as student domain, family domain, community domain, and outside contact domain appeared that the identities of the Akha youth in Pasangnangeon village when focusing on how they are manifested in action, the gaze are actually turned towards society at large. Because of the changes in Akha actions must in some ways to response the changing conditions in society.

Akha ethnic identities

Ethnic identities refer to ethnic awareness, ethnic self-identification, ethnic attitudes and ethnic behaviors (Phinney, 1996: 143-152). Contextually, most of Akha youth are proud to be themselves because they are Akha. They have their own native language, beautiful culture, and it is also different from others. As they said that they were proud to be Akha because when they were a child they were not interested in Akha history or what Akha are culture important for, but now, they studied higher education and they can study more about Akha. Linguistically, they use the words, phrases, and sentences in the conversation to compare two buildings between the old one and the new one as “*toe thee jeoi hmue ngahngah nae hor (it looks strange beautiful)*”. They thought that it is different from the traditional house and quite modern.

Culturally, there were much concern among Akha parents in the village, regarding the loss of their culture and identity. They had concerned about the disintegration of the awareness, self-identification, attitude, and behavior which accompany them. As some young Akha said that nowadays, the Akha will lose something about Akha culture and identity. They thought the majority of the Akha would abandon their culture when the modern lifestyles are affected with their original culture.

Akha social identities

Social identities refer to personality, self-identification, and social role (Tajfel & Turner, 1986: 7-14). Contextually, they wake up early every day for going to the field with their neighbors. The study found that they had a close relationship with their neighbors to help

each other to work, therefore, they did not employ someone to work with them but they used their labor and help altogether as they used to invite the people to come like “noh ngarh chae khah gah chor bah leh mah lah (Do you mind if I invite you to help us to grow crop?)” that means they can ask someone to help from working and they are willed to accept the invitation.

Socially, the Akha people love to work in group with their neighbors and they always help each other in many activities. It shows their close relation all around the village; moreover, they also look after the babies' altogether, they trust to each other when they have joined to do together and they believe that the other can do as well as theirs.

Akha cultural identities

Cultural identities refer to grouping belonging, life history and celebration, cultural norm and perspective, and cultural maintenance (Adamson Hooble E., 1993: 30). Contextually, they were talking about the swing tradition which they usually do every year in October. They want to maintain their traditional culture so they provide the same activities as they do from the past and nowadays they also want to promote for other people. As they said that “Nghah erh nue nueh nah mi ner goh luae yah jerngh nga (I think we should celebrate as same as last year.)” that showed they want to preserve their culture as well and “Ar chor yah koo lah ngarh (We should invite the outside people for joining us.)” to spread their traditional activity to the other to know about the fabulous culture respectively.

Culturally, the Akha people get the important of all their tradition along the years. They have to do lots of activities that concern with natural and spiritual because they believe that it will protect their life as usual in every month. They still do the same things as their ancient have done in the past. Because their daily life remain with the traditional culture even though nowadays some modern lifestyles have adapted with them but they also do as the previous time.

Akha linguistic identities

Linguistic identities refer to language choice, language vitality, language attitude, and language maintenance. Contextually, the two young Akha were talking about how happened in their village and now a senior has got an accident and cure himself in the hospital. There appeared that many borrowing words were used by young Akha people in the conversation.

Linguistically, they lost more Akha words so they used Akha with a combination of standard Thai while communicating in their interaction as they said “A yuh gah mah mar cher yah. Umm meio gerh lah bi lah maeh (Now, he cannot walk well and he is quite thin. Many people came to visit him and they always encourage him to get better soon.)”. The meaning is as common as changes in form. This means that the Akha people still use their language but nowadays there are many new things come to their life, eventually, they do not appear in the previous time so they have tried to mix the borrowing word into their style in the communication.



Conclusions and Discussion

The purposes of this study were investigating and analyze the maintenance of Akha ethnic adolescence at Pasangnangeon village. In order to select several representative Akha youth to continue a further study with the purposive sampling, the information and data were collected from the informants, focusing on Akha ethnic adolescence identity. The researcher selected only 20 representations that are closely 80% of young population from an estimated citizen of 359. Accordingly, the study can be categorized into 4 sections and summarized in the followings:

1. Ethnic identity
2. Social identity
3. Cultural identity
4. Linguistic identity

The result of the study demonstrated that there were vary effectiveness in all domains which depended on each situation influence to ethnic identity, social identity, cultural identity, and linguistic identity. The study showed in each identity as ethnic identity was found that ethnic awareness is the highest and follows by ethnic self-identity, ethnic attitude, and ethnic behavior. In social identity was found that personality is the highest and follows by self-concept, and social role. In cultural identity was found that life history and celebration is the highest and follows by group belonging, cultural norm and perspective, and cultural maintenance. And in linguistic identity was found that language vitality is the highest and follows by language attitude, language choice, and language maintenance. As the example, young Akha generation prefer to adapt their lifestyle to the modernization but most of them still use Akha language in all situations accidentally exposed some degree of confusion, mixing, borrowing in the process of communication. Because of standard Thai is not their native language, sometimes they were not able to express the meaning in various contexts.

The purpose for this study was to examine the maintenance of Akha ethnic adolescence identity at Pasangnangeon village. The results add to the existing literature on ethnic identity, social identity, cultural identity, and linguistic identity by providing evidence that ethnic identity: ethnic awareness, ethnic self-identification, ethnic attitude, and ethnic behavior which concern with social identity: personality, self-concept, and social role which relate with cultural identity: group belonging, life history and celebrations, cultural norm and perspective, and cultural maintenance and also linguistic identity: language choice, language vitality, language attitude, and language maintenance to observe in four domains: student domain, family domain, community domain, and outside contact domain.

Akha ethnic identity

The theoretical approaches proposed for understanding ethnic identity are in the four domains. The component of ethnic identity consists of commitment and a sense of awareness, self-identification, attitude, and behavior, altogether with pride and positive feelings about their group. This aspect of ethnic identity can be understood in terms of ethnic identity achievement (Phinney, 1996: 143-152) which purposes that ethnic identity, as a general construct, involves feelings of awareness, self-identification, attitude, and behavior to a group and to the associated with that sense of belonging.

It appears that the commitment that is part of ethnic identity achievement is associated closely with affirmation of a group and is perhaps indistinguishable from such affirmation; that is, a commitment to a group necessarily carries with it a sense of belonging and positive feelings. The component involves the process through which individuals explore, learn about, and become involved in their ethnic group. Behavior that indicate involvement with an ethnic group appear to be part of the exploration process rather than either a separate component or part of the subjective sense of belonging that is associated with social identity theory. This result is consistent with descriptions by Cross (1991: 316) and including that exploration often includes active involvement in the person's group.

Akha social identity

At first sight, it would seem that processes associated with the collective self are often similar to those that occur for the individual self, except that they occur at the group level instead of at an individual level. However, the inclusion of group-based aspects of self and identity also implies that additional issues and processes come into play, so that theoretical and empirical insights on topics such as self-perception, self-esteem, or self-presentation cannot simply be transferred from the individual level to the group level (e.g., Schmitt et al. 2000,: 1598-1606; Schopler & Insko, 1992: 121-151). Moreover, the interaction and competition between the personal and collective levels of self-add a further level of complexity (Spears, 2001: 164).

One source of confusion in the literature is that the term "social identification" has been used to refer to the content of the identity itself, as well as to indicate the strength of the association with a particular social category. These are essentially different components of the social identity, which although related, may operate relatively independently of each other (Ellemers et al., 1999b: 371-398; see also Jackson, 2001: 164; Smith Murphy & Coats, 1999: 94-110). To avoid confusion here, we reserve the term "social identity" to refer to the nature or content of a particular identity, whereas we use the term "commitment" to indicate the strength of people's ties with that particular group.

Akha cultural identity

The major identifying value among the Akha is their group belonging, life history and celebration, cultural norm and perspective, and cultural maintenance. All participants were proud of their origins and particularly of the Akha faith that regards communication with God a personal activity requiring no intermediaries (Alamuddin and Starr, 1980: 30). When participants were asked to evaluate their cultural identity, most of them responded that they embraced the faith's values and beliefs which included high morals, pure heart, kindness, respect for others and upholding the commandments. The social and moral values of the Akha culture of which the participants are most proud include: honesty, generosity, unity, faith, sincerity, origins, and respect for elders, respecting others' beliefs, faith as the foundation of life, language, dignity and reputation.

The sense of belonging to an extended family within the Akha community is reinforced by the widely held belief that all Akha are like brothers and sisters (Alamuddin and Starr, 1980: 30). However, participants in the present study reported various levels of commitment to Akha community life. At different stages in their lives they reported having attended social and religious events, prayer, and religious committee, representation of Akha in broader community, paying respects to families within the Akha community, attending dancing, language classes and parties. Many participants stated they had been encouraged by their parents and families to become involved in community activities.

While the maintenance of Akha culture was generally considered the duty of the parents, the teaching of religion and language is rarely considered the responsibility of the community and in particular. The local government held at the Akha hall has provided a more formal vehicle for the preservation of Akha culture, values and identity among the younger generations. Some participants also advised that they would take their children for extended periods to enable to provide the children with a good appreciation of their heritage, the language and the culture.

Akha linguistic identity

There are four identities this research project seems to indicate that the long-term outlook for the Akha language is good. According to the researcher's observations and to the subjects' own estimate, the Akha people use their native language in many situations. They feel sufficiently positive enough about the language to use it in front of and with non-Akha people. Attitudes toward Akha are good among a wide range of social groups. Young people and educated people, who are often considered trendsetters in a community, felt positively about the Akha language. Cultural events based on promoting the Akha language were common in the community, as were organizations which were actively trying to preserve Akha culture and traditions. Radio programs broadcast the Akha language to all parts of the Akha speaking region. All of these are signs of strong language attitudes and good prospects for language maintenance.

There are some danger signals as well. The most serious of these was the increase of use of standard Thai with children. In order to preserve a minority language, intergenerational language transfer is essential (Fishman, 1991: 92). This seems to be more of a problem among urban educated Akha people. Even though many educated people said they support Akha and believed it will be spoken for many generations to come, in actual fact they spoke standard Thai to their children. Such people need to see that they are part of the language maintenance problem, and that loss of the home domain will weaken the Akha language considerably. The other danger signal is the gap between urban Akha and their village-dwelling counterparts. City dwellers have little instrumental motivation to use Akha. Their main interest in retaining Akha is integrative, to remain part of the Akha community. Village dwellers have a much higher regard for the instrumental use of Akha in the market and in the community. This difference is not a serious problem in itself, but if more people move to the city, or as the countryside becomes more industrialized, it is possible that even the integrative motivation to speak Akha could begin to weaken.



Recommendations

Recommendations for Application

1. Akha village should create favorable language activities for the children.
2. School should play a major role in preserving Akha culture and language such as providing preservation native club. The teachers should encourage students to learn and preserve their culture and language by pointing the importance of how being Akha.
3. Especially young Akha who are the informants in this study exposed various problems, such as borrowing and mixing, difficulty in speaking a certain language. Instead, they may speak modern Akha language they feel comfortable to speak out but however, they should maintain their native language.

Recommendations for Further Study

Because the researcher had limited time to do this research, only one Akha community in Mae Fahluang District, Chiangrai province namely Pasangnangeon village was studied. Thus, some recommendations for the further research were provided as followings:

1. In order to gain more data about the pattern of the maintenance of Akha ethnic adolescence identity, other Akha communities in Chiangrai or in Chiangmai, or the other provinces should be investigated.
2. Nevertheless, the further studies should be more deeply and compare with other generations about Akha ethnic identity, social identity, cultural identity, and linguistic identity.



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