

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.0 Introduction

There were two main areas of focus in this study: lexicostatistics and sociolinguistics. This chapter summarizes the results and evaluates the methodology used in the research. At the end of this chapter there are recommendations for further research and study.

#### 7.1 Lexicostatistic results

According to the lexicostatistic results, the percentages of lexical similarity of Tai Nua speech varieties between Mangshi and Zhefang is the highest at 96% while Mengting (in the south) and Simao show the lowest.

Even if all 22 speech varieties including Tai Lai, Tai Mao and Tai Ya are compared, the highest is still Tai Nua speech varieties from Mangshi and Zhefang while the lowest or 74% is Tai Nua in Lincang and Tai Lai in Ketda, as well as Tai Nua in Simao and Tai Lai in Khatcho.

Comparing Tai Nua speech varieties with Tai Mao, Tai Ya and Tai Lai, it is shown that the highest lexical similarity of 92% is between Tai Mao in Namkham and the Tai Nua speech variety in Mangshi. It is also presented that the Tai Nua speech variety in Jinggu shares the highest percentage of 85% with Tai Ya and, Tai Nua speech varieties in Ruili and Zhefang share the highest with Tai Lai in Katcho Maungkham.

Moreover, the tree diagram shows that among Tai Nua speech varieties, there are two main divisions. The first one consists of Tai Nua in Baoshan, Mangshi, Ying Jiang, Zhefang, Ruili, Mengting in the North, and Mengting in the south. Another group consists of Tai Nua in Shuang Jiang, Gengma, Jinghong, Jinggu, Lincang,

Fengqing, Canyon, and Simao. There are two main mountains and rivers which divide these groups. Though Tai in Mengting are grouped with another group on the other side of the river, they are not really in the same subgroups as the others as is illustrated in Figure 40. Unlike the rest of the varieties in this subgroup, the speech varieties in Mengting the North and the South show more distance of lexical similarities than others in the same group.

Interestingly, Gengma and Mangshi are, in fact, located in the middle of their groups and share the highest lexical similarity with the other varieties. This might be explained by the phenomena called dominance pattern.

## 7.2 Sociolinguistic results

This section presents the results of the sociolinguistic research into language identity, language choice, reported comprehension, language attitudes, orthography and bilingualism.

The majority (98%) of those people interviewed indicated that they were able to speak Tai Nua and Chinese to a certain degree. Some (19%) living mainly in border areas indicated they could speak more than two languages. It was also indicated that the previous generation (their parents) were able to speak both Tai Nua and Chinese. Most Tai Nua speakers interviewed indicated they were from families where both parents speak Tai Nua as their first language.

Tai Nua is still learned by most of the children (91%) as their first language. It is also used among children when they play. It seems that Tai Nua is being passed on to the next generation.

Language choice was investigated using reported information on language use across domains. There are 15 domains investigated: home, parents, spouse, children, siblings, grandparents, friends, classmates, teachers, work place, markets, funerals, village meetings, temples, and district centers. Tai Nua is used in every domain, especially in domains associated with family such as home, with

parents, spouse, children, siblings and grandparents. This is very important because if the language is no longer used in the family domain, then the language is weak in vitality and there is an increased possibility of language replacement. Tai Nua was used the least among students with their teachers and classmates, as Chinese is primarily used more for educational domains.

When the informants were asked where people spoke the language exactly the same, a little different, and very different from the language of their village, they gave answers based on their limited understanding of the situation, although some of them had never visited the other areas they described. In Dehong and Baoshan prefectures, the interviewees indicated that they could understand Tai Nua in Mangshi very well, though some reported a slightly different accent between the speech varieties. Within Lincang prefecture, most of the interviewees said that they could understand the speech varieties well in other sites: Shuangjiang, Mengting, Gengma, and Canyon. Only Lincang was noted to be different since there were so few Tai Nua villages where Tai is used there. The speech variety used in Gengma was mentioned as the variety they liked the most. In Simao and Sibsongbanna prefecture the interviewees said they could understand Tai Nua in Dehong prefecture well even though they had never heard it spoken.

Social network analysis also indicates that there are two cores of the network: the first core consists of Ying Jiang, Baoshan, Ruili, Zhefang and Mangshi; the second core consists of Lincang, Gengma, Mengting, Shuan Jiang and Canyon. Mangshi and Gengma have the highest degree of being connected within their cores. In another words, they have the highest degree of centrality and show the star network pattern.

There are two kinds of Tai Nua scripts people are familiar with: the new one is called the long script, and the old one is called the round script (apparently also called Gengma script). The majority (85%) of the interviewees were aware of the existence of Tai Nua scripts. The long and round scripts are used in different domains; the old round script is used for religious stories and the new long script

is used for common literature. Most of the interviewees did not express a strong feeling about which script was best; however, the long script may be slightly more popular as it is taught in some local schools.

For reported bilingualism, over half of those interviewed indicated a bilingual proficiency of level 4 in Chinese. This is indicative of fairly good Chinese proficiency. Gender does not seem to have a marked effect on bilingual ability.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

Tai Nua appears to be strongly used and continues to be used in most of the Tai Nua communities surveyed. The language is being passed on to the next generation. This use and projected continued use is reflected through the reported language use of Tai Nua at home. There is no domain in which language shift has completely moved to another language. The Tai Nua have their own scripts, although most of the people interviewed are not able to use these scripts.

From the lexical comparison, the Tai Nua spoken in Gengma and Mangshi share the highest lexical similarity with the other varieties. The sociolinguistic data provides some support for the popularity of Tai Nua in Mangshi.

### **7.4 Evaluation of methodology**

This section provides an evaluation of the methodology. Wordlist collection is a popular and effective way to determine how different or similar the speech varieties are based on lexical comparison. However, there are some technical problems that might affect or lead to miscalculations of the lexical similarity percentages. For example, in some cases synonyms with different forms may be compared when other more similar forms exist in the speech varieties. Furthermore, the type of language grouping derived from lexical comparison should not be confused with the more thorough generic relationships derived from the use of the comparative method used in Historical linguistics.

Sociolinguistics questionnaires are a good and effective method since they provide some indications of language maintenance, language shift, and language replacement. However, it may be difficult to keep the subject's interest in the questionnaire. The subject's attention seemed to wane during the language choice and bilingual sections of the questionnaire. In the language choice section, the interviewees didn't like to respond to all of the questions but said that they will speak Tai Nua with Tai Nua and Chinese with Chinese. For this reason some of the reported information in this section was omitted since the interviewees refused to carefully consider their language use in different domains. In the bilingualism section, the subjects may have felt the pressure of losing face if they said they couldn't successfully do some things in Chinese.

A more complete understanding of the sociolinguistic situation would come from longer observation. This would give helpful or supportive information for the survey.

### **7.5 Application of the research results**

The investigation of language vitality helps the language researcher and local community to determine what type of language program could be profitable. The situation among the Tai Nua surveyed indicated that Tai Nua as a spoken language is used broadly, but the written language is not used very much. One potential language development program would be in Tai Nua literacy. Though some schools in local areas provide Tai study in the class, there isn't much opportunity to practice reading and writing the language. Consequently, when they finish school, the students forget how to read and write. In addition many adults have never been to school and can't read and write at all in Tai. A literacy program could also help to promote the language. Some of the interviewees showed no interest in the written language because they thought that only monks or a few old people needed to know the script. If there were literature written about the topics they are interested in, this could serve to motivate the people to learn to read and write their own language.

This research should be helpful for the future study of Tai Nua. This thesis suggests sites for researchers to visit and collect data. It is also hoped that this research will provide direction for future language development among the Tai Nua.

## 7.6 Recommendations for further studies

One of the surprising results of this research is that Tai Ya, Tai Lai, and Tai Mau share more lexical similarity with most Tai Nua locations than they do with Tai Nua in Simao. It would be interesting to investigate in other areas such as grammar and discourse, and to investigate the contribution of these areas toward intelligibility. Lexical similarity alone is not enough to form conclusions about intelligibility.

More thorough language survey is recommended for further research. For example, in order to measure the intelligibility, recorded text testing (RTT) could be done. Sentence repetition testing (SRT) should also be conducted to gain a clearer understanding of bilingualism among the Tai Nua in Chinese.

Since the lexical similarity between Simao and Ying Jiang is quite different compared with other speech varieties, it would be interesting to test the intelligibility between these speech varieties.

The relationship between Tai Lai and Tai Nua should be studied as Tai Lai appears to be an intermediate branch between two Tai Nua branches in the lexical comparison.

Additional historical and anthropological studies may help in understanding the relationship between these groups such as the history of migration and shared cultural or social patterns.