

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Analysis of the VSQ and SNA indicates the presence of a Thai speech community in King County, WA. Tables 9 - 12 show how often respondents do use Thai with other Thais in the community. Figure 14 in Section 4.4 is a map displaying the network which was introduced to the researcher, showing how individuals know each other. This information and that which was presented in Chapter 4 are analyzed to answer the question of how strongly this network is connected and how strong their language vitality may be.

5.1 Summary of analysis

This Thai speech community gives indications of hanging in the balance of endangerment if looked at in isolation. Although second and third generation Thais are a welcome part of the speech community, in addition to their lesser ability in the Thai language, they do not show a strong participation in the community (see Section 4.5). Since much of the strength of the speech community rests with first generation Thais, the life of the speech community depends on a continued influx of new immigrants from Thailand. This fact indicates that Thai is not being passed on between immigrant generations to the extent where future generations could depend on either learning the language or seeking out Thai communities. Factors critical to the state of endangerment include the following:

- 1) Although Thai immigrants have found a common forum of solidarity (in the Buddhist temples), they do not all attend with enough regularity to preserve the Thai language between generations (as indicated in VSQ conversations). An exact percent of frequency of attendance was not obtained, hence this generalization.
- 2) Although interviewed Thais show some history of returning to Thailand at some point in their lives (88%), there is no indication that frequency and duration of exposure to the Thai language is a critical means of gaining or maintaining Thai

for them if they were born in the US or had left Thailand before the age of 5 (as indicated by SRT results).

- 3) Although positive VSQ responses regarding value and usage of Thai indicate a strong expressed value in language vitality, there is a reality of switching between English and Thai between generations (as indicated by PO at temple and party settings and interview of individuals.).

Intentional use of Thai by both younger generations as well as first generation Thai immigrants is necessary for strong language vitality (see Tables 32 and 33, in Section 5.1.2). In comparison, Thais in Teachout's study of language maintenance and identity within the Thai temple in New York City (see Section 2.4.1.2.3.1), were observed to maintain their Thai language ability through classes offered at the temple. It should be noted, however, that respondents within Teachout's survey were not limited to immigrants but included those who had come to the US for economic and educational purposes, and intended on returning to Thailand.

This conclusion is similar to that which studied the use of Turkish and Telugu for immigrants of those languages in the Netherlands and New Zealand (see Section 2.4.1.2). Both of these speech communities reported that the LWC was vital to their livelihood and existence as immigrants. Their children spoke their mother tongue less frequently the longer they had been in the countries of their immigration. Language endangerment for them was a real issue as it is for the Thai immigrant community in King County, WA.

Because Thai seems to rest mainly with first generation Thai immigrants and is not being extended to second and third generation Thais, the Thai speech community is as vital as its influx of first generation Thais.

5.1.1 Summary relating to research objectives

The first research objective was to do the following:

Discover through Social Network Analysis the extent to which the Thai immigrant community in King County, WA, has strong, innovative ties with multiple relations, or even if there is a Thai speech community present.

By looking at trends suggested by SNA under Section 4.4, this network does have opportunity for information to enter into the whole King County network from other

networks (i.e. Thai Association of Washington State or Thai restaurants), via key actors with few relationships such as, Wanna, a Thai restaurant owner, Niphon, a key temple helper with the Buddhist temples in both King and Thurston, Counties (see Section 4.4), and Bunliang and Ritthi, Head Abbots of the two WA State temples. It also has potential for the exchange of information between individuals via its Boundary Spanners: PaTom, an active member of the Attama Temple, connecting two hubs, her own and Peter's; Peter, the president of the state Thai association, connecting his family hub with PaTom's temple hub; and Niphon, connecting a triad within Washington temple to a member of the Attama temple. This network does have a quantitative density with an inclusivity of .90 and a network degree of 130. This high inclusivity does indicate that there are few isolated actors. However, there is indication of the network being centralized where information is limited to pathways passing via hubs. For this reason, the researcher sees an indication that this network may be a weaker network system.

Participant Observation indicates that the 4 cliques shown in the sociogram (Figure 14, Section 4.4) are generally part of one speech community in that interviews indicate parishioners beyond those involved in the VSQ are linked by Washington Temple, and therefore form a more connected map than indicated by the SNA. Parishioners recognize each other although they are not generally known by name to each other. Although there is an attempt by some Thais to mix culturally among Cambodians, Vietnamese and Westerners at the temples, they generally mix among themselves. All interviewed Thais indicate that their only Thai contacts besides their family members are those made at the temples.

Although there is indication that innovative ties do exist within this speech community, there is also indication that the network in general may be centralized with limited paths for the flow of information.

The second objective of this thesis was to do the following:

Assess whether language attitudes and usage supports the preservation of Thai as an immigrant language or if there is indication of language endangerment for this small speech community in WA State.

At first, expressed language values and attitudes here indicate that the Thai language is highly regarded by Thai immigrant respondents, as can be seen in Tables 16, 19 and 24 in Section 4.1.1. Analysis of data in these tables shows that 67% of respondents do have Thai friends they speak Thai with, that 77% believe that Thai immigrant kids in the US

should learn Thai, and as many as 46% respondents did believe that Thai was necessary for their life and relationships. However, when PO was brought to bear on the question in conjunction with SRT scores, as indicated in Figure 13, as well as comparisons made in Tables 13 and 18, the reality is that the good intentions of passing on and preserving the Thai language is not being put into practice here. All US-born respondents but one, and all Thai-born respondents immigrating prior to the age of 5 received SRT scores of no more than an RPE of 2. As was discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the researcher suspects that the vitality of the Thai language hinges on the flux and flow of first generation immigrants, indicating the presence of language endangerment. This is a tentative suggestion, however, as the research sample is significantly inadequate, requiring more data to draw a decisive conclusion.

The third objective of this survey was to do the following:

Discover if the Thai language of the immigrant community here is vitally strong or not.

The conclusion to this question will be answered in the process of addressing the research hypotheses in the following section.

5.1.2 Summary relating to research hypotheses

It is clear from results of the VSQ, in collaboration with RPE scores, that all those respondents who grew up in Thailand, immigrating after the age of 5, have retained strong language vitality. Table 25, Section 4.1.2, indicates that 42% of US-born respondents and Thai-born respondents immigrating before the age of 5 had visited Thailand. Exposure to Thai in this way has not impacted their language ability, however, since 20 out of 37 respondents (54%) to Q 20 What language do you speak best? preferred English (see Table 13, Section 4.1.1). Four out of four Thai-born SRT participants who immigrated after the age of 5 received an RPE of above 4 on the SRT. All but one US-born participant received an RPE of 2 and below. All those who immigrated before the age of 5 had as weak a language vitality as those who were born in the USA. Some respondents were unable to respond clearly to when their first visit back to Thailand may have been, whether it was exactly within their first year of immigration, or generally within 1-5 years. In such cases the researcher allowed for generalizations. However, although as many as 88% have visited Thailand at some point since immigration or birth in the USA, there does not seem to be an indication of this exposure playing a vital part in language maintenance.

The researcher's first hypothesis was the following:

Depending on how long respondents have resided in the USA, Thai immigrants here who have grown up in Thailand will show stronger Thai language vitality than those who immigrated before the age of 5, and especially more so than those who have not visited Thailand within their first year of immigration.

There was indication by PO and limited RPE scores that this hypothesis is for the most part true. There was no apparent recession of language vitality for first generation immigrants, however, no matter how long they had been away from Thailand. As long as they had immigrated after the age of 5, their Thai has remained strong. Exposure or lack of exposure to Thailand within the first year of immigration does not seem to be a consequential factor here.

The researcher's second hypothesis was as follows:

Second and third generation Thais will not have strong Thai language vitality but this will not define their sense of Thainess.

The researcher discovered through VSQ responses that a Thai heritage was a more definitive marker for Thai immigrants than was language. Table 21 (Section 4.1.1), analyzing Q83 What makes a Thai person Thai? shows that 52% of respondents believe that ancestry is a mark of Thainess while 31% believe it is the ability to speak the Thai language. Second generation respondents revealed that they feel they are either Thai or Thai-American (12 out of 15) and that they tested low in RPE scores (between RPE 0-2 except for 1 respondent with an RPE of 5), an indication of weak language vitality for them (see Table 23, Section 4.1.1 and Table 26 section 4.2).

The Thai language also seems endangered in this WA speech community due to their embracive language attitude. When compared and contrasted to the 'us and them' attitude of Thais in Thailand, it can be seen that for the former the attitude revolves around heritage (see Section 4.1.1), whereas for the latter it revolves around language (see Section 2.1.2). A 'pure Thai identity' (Rappa 2006: 109) for them is based more on heritage than, as for Thais in Thailand, being based on language and more specifically on Standard Thai. For this reason non-Thai speakers, such as second and third generation Thais, are still considered just as Thai as those who are able to speak Thai are considered to be Thai. This move away from their nation's value of keeping

Standard Thai the measure of 'in or out' may be the reason this speech community has a weak language vitality (see Figure 15, Section 4.5).

The researcher's third hypothesis is as follows:

A local Thai social network with just as strong ties to non-Thais as with other Thai immigrants will not negate Thai immigrants' sense of Thainess. This unusual situation may or may not be due to the hierarchical phenomenon described by Smalley (1988). In Thailand this hierarchy allows a sense of freedom in moving up or down the social hierarchy without detracting from one's identity.

Thai identity for this community remains tied to ethnicity and heritage despite the fact that many Thais are now born in the USA and do not speak much Thai. This inclination does not seem to reflect Rappa's observation of hierarchy within Thailand (see Figure 1). Briefly, as has been mentioned previously, this hierarchy of languages is a unique situation to the people of Thailand in that it, the hierarchy, does not define them. To the contrary, as long as an individual masters the social and linguistic markers at levels they desire to move in, the Thai language hierarchy gives him breadth to do so. For this reason, there is no social shame associated with a member of a language ranking lower on the hierarchical structure to identify himself with members of higher ranking languages. Again, in so far as this hierarchical notion is expressed among the Thailand's spectrum of languages, social stigmas are associated with an inability to master the appropriate hierarchical markers. Thais who have immigrated to the US have similarly learned the hierarchical markers for English, the LWC in their new nation of residence. Dissimilarly, however, despite picking up English (and for those who are second and third generation, not picking up Thai), they have not lost a sense of their Thai identity in the process. Embracing English has not created a sense of being 'American' so much as speaking Standard Thai was able to do for those moving up the language hierarchy in Thailand. Thai participants in this study do not feel they have forfeited their sense of Thainess.

On the same comparative note, however, as indicated in Figure 15, the researcher understands that the prominent place of influence Standard Thai holds in Thailand is not the same place it holds for the immigrant community here. Instead, English is in that prominent place of influence. Through VSQ, SRT and PO analysis, English can be seen as being an acceptable language of communication for this community. For this

reason, the hierarchical language structure here may in fact be endangering Thai language vitality.

A Thai speech community does exist within King County. As participant observation and SNA indicate, this is due to the existence of the two temples in these areas. However, the study was not able to show one way or the other whether it has strong, innovative ties with multiple relations. Ties do at least move in single directions. Although casual interviews show that many connections are merely acquaintances, there is potential that a few are more complexly integral to the social network than was apparent through this preliminary SNA. Also from casual interviews, it was noted that those who are of Peter's family network have more innovative ties, given the relational commitment due to being a close-knit family (members decisively relocated from California to Washington to be closer to family). PaTom shows indication of being a stronger innovative tie in that her tie extends beyond the temple network to a business contact (Wanna). The same can be said of Niphon, the researcher's initial contact, met at a restaurant, who introduced her to both temple networks.

Every Thai person lives in American environs, including that of work, home, and errands run around town. They do not choose to necessarily do business with other Thais, nor to marry within the Thai community. There is a distinct difference between first generation Thais and US-born (and those immigrated before age 5) Thais. In the first instance, there is no overture towards having any strong friendship ties with Americans. Hence, for them there is an apparent dichotomy between their necessary lives and the one they choose to 'be themselves in'. Dissimilarly, for the second generation Thais, there are strong relationships with Americans, in friendships, sports, education and work. This being the case, although there is a definite speech community here, it has not impressed itself effectively upon the second generation.

Case studies of other Asian communities in the UK have shown similar results in this area (see Section 2.4.1). When Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi were surveyed they reported that they too lived in non-Asian communities where mother-tongue language impute was limited to places of worship and radio and television broadcasts. Although they desired to be bilingual, maintaining their own languages, they reported that their children used less of their mother-tongues than they, responding in to their own languages with English.

There is significant reason to be concerned that Thai is being lost in the Thai speech community here. According to Fishman (1989), a healthy language is one which is

being spoken by the children as well as parents and elderly in the context of the home. Table 32 below describes aspects of Fishman's GIDS as it applies to the Thai immigrant language situation. There is some indication of language ability among second generation respondents when effort is made to acquire Thai. Two out of 18 US-born respondents are able to speak Thai fluently. For this reason the researcher tentatively has placed this speech community at a level 6 (that there is an intergenerational context of language learning) on Fishman's GIDS when other indications point to the language vitality of this community being at a level 7 (that language is not being transmitted to children).

In King County, WA, Thai is generally not being transferred effectively between parent and child. Although Thai immigrants desire that their children learn Thai, there is evidence that Thai is not being acquired by their children. Exposure to Thailand has not made an impact in diverting this end. Choices which parents and children are making in regards to language use and acquisition are eroding the transfer of their Heritage Language. The researcher therefore also finds the Thai language amongst the target community to be at a 7 on the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale. Regardless, a sense of Thai identity does remain despite evidence of weak Thai language vitality.

Table 32 Aspects of Fishman's GIDS applied to this Thai speech community

STRENGTH	LEVEL	THAI SPEECH COMMUNITY IN KING COUNTY, WA, USA
<i>Weak side</i>	8 Only grandparent generation can speak language	The elderly do speak Thai. For one interviewee, her grandmother only spoke Thai, not English.
	7 Language not transmitted to children	Parents speak Thai but not the children. Although Thai immigrants desire that their children learn Thai there is evidence that Thai is not being acquired by the second generation.
	6 Intergenerational context of language learning	2 of 18 second generation participants demonstrated ability in Thai. There is presence of some Thai acquisition here.
	5 Language is vital with use of literacy	Literacy is a viable option for Thai immigrants since opportunity to learn and use Thai is abundant, on the internet, cable TV, in magazines and books. Thai is also offered as a second language in some universities, and by CD in local libraries.

Although there is opportunity for second generation Thais to acquire the language, it is evident that concerted effort is necessary for this to happen. First generation immigrants have maintained their Thai well but are not effectively passing it on to their children.

Aspects of UNESCO's factors are also applied to the Thai speech community in King County, WA in Table 33 below. On this intergenerational language transmission scale the language situation here seems severely endangered, according to tentative findings in this research. The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up. The proportion of speakers within the total reference group is between 'definitely endangered and critically endangered': The majority who does speak Thai is made up of first generation immigrants; second and third generation immigrants who do speak Thai are very few. There are shifts in the domains of language use as English encroaches into home domains. Although many community members support language maintenance and there is a superlative level of materials available towards language maintenance, there is pressure from the wider society (of the USA) to assimilate and to learn English.

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Table 33 Aspects of UNESCO's 9 factors applied to this Thai speech community

FACTOR	POSSIBLE DEGREE OF ENDANGERMENT FOR THAI SPEECH COMMUNITY IN KING COUNTY, WA, USA
1. Intergenerational language transmission scale: 'Speaker Population'	<i>Severely endangered:</i> The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
2. Absolute number of speakers	No population estimates within this speech community was to be had, therefore the researcher has not included this aspect of analysis.
3. Proportion of speakers within the total reference group (population)	Between: <i>Definitely endangered and critically endangered:</i> The majority who do speak Thai are 1 st generation immigrants. Those of the 2 nd or 3 rd generation immigrants who speak Thai are very few.
4. Shifts in domains of language use	<i>Dwindling domains:</i> Thai is used in home domains, as well as between friends and at temple, but the dominant (English) language has definitely penetrated these domains.
5. Response to new domains and media: 'New domains and media accepted by the endangered language'	<i>Minimal:</i> Thai is used only in a few new domains.
6. Materials for language education and literacy: 'Accessibility of Written Materials'	5: There is an established orthography, literacy tradition with grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature and everyday media (on cable TV and internet).
7. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies: 'Official attitudes toward language'	<i>Passive assimilation:</i> No explicit policy exists for minority languages; the dominant language prevails in the public domain.
8. Community members' attitudes towards their own language	3: <i>Many</i> members support language maintenance from the 30+ age group. However, this value is not so strong amongst those who are second generation immigrants.
9. Type and quality of documentation	<i>Superlative:</i> There are comprehensive grammars and dictionaries, extensive texts; constant flow of language materials. Abundant annotated high quality audio and video recordings exist.

The researcher has not made use of UNESCO's method of calculating the unit of the measure of language vitality. This is because her sample was not enough to offer a significant data sample for these measures. As can be deduced from the above summary, however, the conclusions are similar to what was discussed in the GIDS conclusions. There is concern for the vitality of Thai language here, although there are forums where Thai may be used there is little transmission of the language between generations.

5.2 Evaluation of methodology

Time and financial and travel constraints played large roles in methodological decisions made regarding this sociolinguistic survey of Thai language vitality. Initial indications were that Thai restaurants in Seattle, WA would form the survey pool from which SNA would begin. However, for the sake of the above mentioned practicalities, and in consultation with this thesis committee, the researcher changed the survey pool to that of temples within King County, which also was in the vicinity of the city of Seattle.

This concept had also been suggested in the beginning stages of methodological planning. It was decided that because a majority of Thais are from a Buddhist tradition of faith, they would naturally, as immigrants, find temples to be a place to come together as a social group. This was proven to be so as 65% of respondents answered that they do not choose to eat out at Thai restaurants, rather choosing to eat home-made Thai food. Initial survey of Thai restaurants in Puyallup, Pierce County, WA, also showed that the majority of restaurant workers were non-citizens of the USA. Therefore, changing to Thai temples proved to be the better place to begin survey work of the Thai language vitality.

Pilot tests were not performed on the consequently revised Vitality Survey Questionnaire, based on Thai Buddhist Temples, although they were performed on the initial version, based on students attending Payap University. The revised VSQ was updated only as it pertained to the location and particulars pertaining to the new pool of participants.

The use of social networks as a means of surveying the Thai people proved both revealing and yet inconclusive as a method of discovering linguistic vitality, especially as it pertains to first generation Thai-Americans. They are distinguished from second and third generation Thai-Americans based on Participant Observation and interviews that demonstrated a larger base of social networking between Thais within the temples than the participants were willing to acknowledge in formal VSQ. This may be due to a number of reasons, some being that the Thais in their social networks may include non-citizens, because they are casual acquaintances to which they did not feel comfortable imposing on for the sake of the survey, time constraints, because their social network did not include other Thai people, or because of a lack of interest in the survey. Participants more often than not preferred that the researcher make a convenience sample of Thais in the temple rather than introduce the researcher to people they personally knew. The VSQ revealed that 33% of respondents did not have other Thais in

their social network. These SNA difficulties pose both limitations to analysis and an informative view of the Thai language vitality.

Regarding the two supporting tools of the SRT and RCA used in this survey, circumstantial difficulties presented the researcher with non-optimal settings for analysis and recordings. Informants willing to participate in the SRT often agreed to take it at the time they took the questionnaire, while surrounded by small and large disturbances, and included such environments as standing under a tree and at a picnic table at a social event. This made it difficult for the researcher to make fine-tuned analysis pertaining to how many words the participant used with incorrect tones. In this regard the researcher combined the tonal mistakes as 1 point.

In the same way, the opportunities to use the RCA was limited to settings where participants were not interested in an initial interview, limiting the researcher's knowledge of their age, citizenship and sociolinguistic background. The settings in which the recordings were made were also of that of temple and social functions where it was difficult to cut out background noise to distinguish what participants in the conversations were saying in every instance.

5.3 Limitations

In conjunction with aforementioned evaluations of methodologies used in this survey, the limitations in this survey work are presented in the following sections.

5.3.1 Limitations of the sentence repetition tests

Over-the-phone-administered-VSQ ruled out the possibility of using the SRT. This occurred a few times when the volunteer was not comfortable setting up an appointment to meet with the researcher but was willing to participate in the VSQ over the phone.

Given the nature of the interview environments which the researcher was able to take opportunity of, the SRT was a difficult test to administer succinctly. Some volunteers agreed to participate but were in a crowded environment where the researcher administered the test standing up. This made it difficult for records to be made perfectly.

The final limitation which the researcher found in using the SRT was in that it lengthened the interview process by 10-15 minutes, which seemed to discourage some

volunteers from participating in it after having finished the VSQ. Busy schedules did not allow for appointments to be made later in order to complete the SRT.

Due to these limitations the researcher was able to find a total of 37 volunteers to participate in the VSQ and 12 to also participate in the SRT. These are not adequate samples, however, and proved inconclusive in determining an accurate portrayal of Thai immigrant language vitality.

5.3.2 Limitations of the Questionnaire

As a point of interest, the researcher has found that although many middle-aged Thais support her research endeavor, they do not want to be involved by taking the questionnaire nor are they comfortable making introduction to their Thai friends, if they have any. They will instead suggest she does a convenience sample at the temple, or get the younger ones to take the survey. This was the case despite the fact that 20 out of 30 respondents said they had Thai friends with whom they communicated in Thai. As a result the researcher found that 1) Initial contacts are happy to help, but only in an informal way (i.e. by encouraging convenience sampling), 2) initial informants happily take the survey but are not able to introduce the researcher to other Thais as they simply do not have Thai friends either professionally or socially. Further they may not want to inconvenience their Thai acquaintances, or perhaps may only have Thai contacts who are not US citizens; and 3) Peter was the only contact who demonstrated a social network which led to 5 introductions, whose network also happened to be his own extended family.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

A broader view of WA State Thai immigrants would offer an interesting perspective. The researcher would recommend that sociolinguistic survey be made of Thai professors and teachers in the area of King County because two potentially informative contacts were made in this field while at a New Year party, both being university professors. Also, surveying Thai members of the Buddhist temple in Olympia may offer interesting comparative data.

A comparative study would also be of value, sociolinguistically looking at speech communities in counties of other states known to have a denser immigrant population, such as ones in California.