

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.0 Summary of Findings

This thesis examines the nature of ‘face’ idioms in the Thai language. Evidence from the analysis of the Thai ‘face’ idioms has supported the claim that idioms are not unanalyzable and non-compositional in meaning, i.e. the figurative meaning of idioms are not arbitrary. It has been shown that the meanings of individual words in the idioms contribute to the overall figurative interpretation of those idioms (cf. Lindner 1981). What motivates the relationship between the literal words of the idioms and its meaning is, in part, the conceptual metaphor which is the base for mapping a concept from one domain (the source) to a concept in another domain (the target). This mapping from the source to the target domain is unidirectional, and it is generally from concrete to abstract (cf. Sweetser 1990:30).

In Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, it has been shown that the meanings of the Thai ‘face’ idioms are motivated by the Thai speakers’ encyclopedic knowledge of the concepts to which the idioms refer to. In particular, for the Thai, the lexeme *nâa* ‘face’ is used as a metonym for the person. Elaborations (or variants) of this metonymy focus on specific aspects of a person, namely one’s personality, countenance, honor and emotions. Moreover, the face is seen as the ‘representation of ego’ and is therefore closely associated with one’s self-esteem, dignity, pride and honor. This conceptualization of *nâa* contributes to the understanding of the ‘face’ idioms. Hence, this supports the claims of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lakoff (1987), Langacker (1987, 1991, etc.) and other cognitive linguists’ claim that the way people conceptualize their experience in the world contributes to the meaning of linguistic

expressions. This finding lends credence to the main claim of cognitive linguistics, which is that meaning is grounded in human experience; it implies that language and thought are interdependent (cf. also Langacker 1991:2).

In the analysis of the Thai 'face' idioms, it was found that the concept of shame shows up time and again, whether it has to do with expressing the feeling of shame, manifesting behaviors that are shameful or prevent shame, or demonstrating reactions to shame. Shame is found to be closely interconnected to the Thai concept of 'face' and honor. The numerous 'face' idioms related to shame highlight the salience of shame in the Thai culture.

The emotion of shame can be described as a sequence of several phases-a scenario which includes the cause of shame, the reactions to shame and the actions to remove this shame. This is reminiscent of Sweetser's analysis of English *lie* (Sweetser 1987). Interpersonal relationships are involved since shame always requires an audience. Shame is also used in the Thai society as a social sanction to make people conform to the acceptable norms of the society. This characterization of Thai shame is also parallel in a number of ways to Kövecses' characterization of English emotion terms (cf. Kövecses 1986, 1993).

5.1 Further Investigation

Some *nâa* expressions are not as easily accounted for by the above analysis (idioms F1 to F4). It is hoped that they can be treated in future research. The source for idioms in future research could include a Thai thesaurus, when there is one available. Also, an interesting study would be to do a comparative study of 'face' idioms in the various dialects of the Thai languages of Thailand. Furthermore, the use of *nâa* in other idioms in which *nâa* has definitions other than 'face' could also be investigated.

There are numerous idioms in the Thai language which contain words for parts of the body. Future studies which would be interesting include the study of the metaphoric and metonymic uses of other body parts in the Thai language, such as *tʃaj* 'heart,' *hu* 'a head,' *taa* 'eye' or *muuu* 'hand'.

5.2 Implications

Cognitive linguistics is especially appropriate for grappling with and explaining the complex metaphorical and metonymical usages of the multitude of Thai idioms, whose ubiquity in the mental lexicon is amply demonstrated by almost any Thai dictionary. It is hoped that this study will encourage readers to do more research in this area of linguistics and thus further elucidate the influence of culture on language. It is also hoped that the findings of this research will be helpful to anyone who is learning the Thai language and desires to understand the language and culture in a more meaningful way.