CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Research Problem and thesis background

It can be observed for a long time that men are more visible and prominent in society and seem to have more opportunity and freedom in work, education, and scope of behavior than women. Even though, nowadays, the roles, rights, and abilities of women are more widely accepted, men still fill the more important positions in society such as positions in work or in government. It is noticeable that there are only a few female politicians in the Thai government especially when compared with the number of male politicians[1]. It is noticeable that there are few women who fill important positions in Thai society such as judge, minister, or general, especially in comparison with the number of men. In contrast, it is obvious that more women but fewer men are nurses.

The roles attached to women seem to stem from cultural values instilled from youth since parents expect their sons and daughters to behave, and think differently. The study of the Thai world view[2] of women from proverbs and metaphors can help to understand what people in a particular society and culture think about the world. Moreover, it is interesting to apply a conceptual blending model to Thai data and develop it by integrating concepts from other semantic theories such as image-schema, force dynamics, reference point constructions, and conceptual metaphor.

---

[1] The Nation for August 9, 2002 had an article on how female MPs are harassed by male MPs-until they get fat.

[2] For purposes of this thesis, Burnett's definition of world view as a set of assumptions or models to explain reality and relates to how people perceive the world is utilized (1990: 11-24).

The research question of this thesis is how does meaning arise from proverbs and metaphors in Thai? The hypothesis is that meaning is processed by invoking certain domains of experience, which are based on specific cultural models, projecting them into temporary mental spaces established for reasoning and understanding. This is reflected in the Thai language.

One way we can study world view is from metaphors and sayings. Palmer (1996: 116) states " building metaphorically on emergent image-schemas, people create their world views through performance, practice, and discourse and abstract a distillation of world view for presentation in the frames of language." To illustrate, consider the proverb *du: tɕá:ŋ hâi du: hǎ:ŋ du: na:ŋ hâi du: mɛ̂*[3]

'If someone wants to look for a (white) elephant, they should look at its tail first'. By analogy, if someone who wants to look for a girl, he should look at her mother's character as well'. There are two roles of woman expressed here; wife/ girl friend and mother/ mother- in- law. This proverb shows that mothers influence the character of their daughters for married life. The status of mother and wife are basic and important for woman in society. Therefore, it can be expected that language will reflect this importance. Language also shows that marriage in the Thai world view does not mean just the relationship between two persons but it also deals with the relationship of two families. The association of the 'white elephant' with good luck and honor relates to a good wife, who is likewise rare and can bring good luck and honor to the husband.

1.1 Research objectives

In relation to the research question, "How does meaning arise from proverbs in Thai?" I want to identify semantic frameworks that apply to the interpretation of Thai

---

[3]ดูช้างให้ดูหาง ดูนางให้ดูแม่

proverbs about women. These frameworks will be explained in chapter 2. I also want to identify valid traditional cultural models relevant to the interpretation of Thai proverbs about women, and demonstrate how the semantic frameworks and the cultural models integrate to produce meaning in Thai proverbs. Chapter 3 and 4 will show achievement of the last two objectives, respectively.

1.2 Methodology

In this section, I explain the methodology for this research, including data collection, brief review of the theories used in the analysis, and analysis procedure.

1.2.1 Data collection

I have found that most books and articles present only separately the meaning of proverbs or roles of women. No research relates proverbs, metaphors and women's roles in relation to the traditional and the present world view. Therefore, it is of interest to study the roles of women from proverbs and sayings and then analyze the traditional world view. Moreover, it is necessary to know the present point of view about women to compare with the traditional one to realize how society changes.

The data for the analysis are gathered from several books that collect Thai proverbs and metaphors with their meanings. I tried to find validation of the interpretation of proverbs by checking the application and connotation with 8-10 native Thai speakers in order to get a folk understanding of each saying. A folk understanding is the common Thai speaker knowledge of what each saying means. This folk understanding portrays how women should function in society. What does this proverb mean? Is it meaning negative or positive? And is it from the male or female perspective? What situations we can use this proverb in or when do we use this proverb? I start checking by asking them individually these questions. I chose this

group from people of Thai society for checking because they have different levels of education, age, and gender that ensures the meaning, application, and connotation of the proverbs or metaphors are consistent across these variables.

1.2.2   Brief review of the theories used in the analysis

In order to analyze the Thai traditional view from the proverbs and metaphors, two major theoretical models that are applied. They are the conceptual metaphor analysis based on Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and the conceptual integration network of Fauconnier (1994, 1997), and Fauconnier and Turner (2000).

According to Lakoff and Johnson, a metaphorical concept is the understanding of one thing in terms of another such as ARGUMENT IS WAR, or TIME IS MONEY in English (1980: 4-9) as shown in the following examples.

Your claims are *indefensible.*

His criticisms were *right on target.*

These two sentences express the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. The source domain is WAR and the target domain is ARGUMENT. The relation of these two domains is the concept of battle. The arguing is verbal battle and the war is actual battle.

You are *wasting* my time.

How do you *spend* your time these days?

In this analysis, there are two conceptual domains, source and target, that are associated to each other. The source domain is MONEY, and the target is TIME. Likewise, the concept of time can be seen in terms of the concept of money as a valuable commodity, and limited resource.

Fauconnier and Turner (2000) propose a theoretical model for exploring information integration in what is called conceptual blending. A major model in a blending process is the conceptual integration network. The network consists of three different kinds of spaces. The input space is structured by the information in each separate conceptual domain. There is also a generic space that consists of common structure from all input spaces. A blended space contains selected information from each input space and reflects its own emergent structure, that is a product of the integration process.

These two models involve a conceptual analysis that will help to find the underlying idea people have about how they perceive the world through the language used.

1.2.3   Analysis procedure

In chapter 3, I first analyze the roles of women that are mentioned in the proverbs to find Thai ideas about women, i.e., as Thai cultural models that frame the meaning construction of the proverbs. Then I interview different groups of native Thai speakers distinguished by age, sex and education level to get the present point of view. They are interviewed regarding their attitudes and interpretation of the data by the following questions.

1. When we talk about 'woman', what characteristic do you think of that can identify the condition of being a woman?

2. What are the basic roles of an ideal woman?

3. What are the basic roles of a woman nowadays (in reality)?

4. What are the qualities of a good woman?

5. What are the characteristics of a bad woman?

6. What do you think about this proverb?

7. What jobs or positions are suitable and not suitable for women? Why?

I then analyze the answers and compare them with the traditional view based on the proverbs analysis.

In chapter 4, I categorize the proverbs into five major groups of metaphors that are often used in comparison to women. I then analyze the metaphorical concept of each group. Each group of real world objects contains several examples of the proverbs. The conceptual integration network (Fauconnier 1994; Fauconnier 1997; and Fauconnier and Turner 2000), and other semantic models are integrated to account for each example based on cultural knowledge.

1.3 Limitations of the research

This thesis, seeking to combine linguistics with anthropology, has limited its data sources to proverbs, and sayings, i.e. how Thai speakers creatively talk about their core values.

The interview limitation is that most of the subjects had spent several years in an urban area (Amphour Muang, Chiang Mai Province), so the result of the interview may represent the urban people's attitudes rather than those of Thai people in general. Therefore, the number of survey is not statistically valid, but to try to understand a general Thai view as held by urban people from several provinces.

1.4 Overview of the thesis

The first chapter is the introduction of the thesis. It discusses the motivation in doing the thesis, the research question, methodology of the research, brief information

about the theoretical models that are used in the analysis, and an overview of the thesis and its limitations.

The second chapter is a literature review that will discuss the important background information from sources related to the research. The third chapter presents the cultural models used in the interpretation of proverbs, including the traditional roles and qualities of woman, comparing them with a current world view that is inferred from the interviews. The fourth chapter describes the findings about the traditional view on woman from the analyses of the conceptual integration network and conceptual metaphor. This is an intentionally linguistic analysis because this chapter applies many linguistic models to investigate language in terms of how language and concept is connected. The fifth chapter is the conclusion of the thesis, summarizing the overall findings and implications of this research.