

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the relevant literature, including language maintenance and shift, language use and language attitudes, and language policies in China and Thailand.

2.1 Language maintenance and shift

Language maintenance and shift has long been an important study with sociolinguistics. Fishman's recent work (1992) focuses on various aspects of language maintenance, shift and minority languages. Edwards (1997) explained why discussions of language maintenance and minority languages naturally coincide. In his opinion, this coincidence is due to the implication of maintenance and the property of being a minority: on one hand, maintenance requires the continuity of a language from one generation to the next; on the other hand, the minority languages tend to be assimilated by other neighboring languages with more prestige (Edwards 1997: 30).

2.1.1 Ethnolinguistic vitality

Ethnolinguistic vitality is a factor in various states of a language's existence such as language maintenance, shift, death and spread. It plays a crucial role for the sociolinguistic surveyor in multilingual societies. According to Giles, Bourhis and Taylor, ethnolinguistic vitality is "that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations" (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977: 308). This definition attempts to link social psychological processes with its socio-cultural contexts. They suggested that vitality could be "objectively" assessed on the basis of information about three types of factors describing the situation of a group within its broader societal context: (1)

demographic characteristics, (2) the social status accorded members, their language, and their culture and (3) the degree of institutional support for the group's existence.

Building on Giles (1977), Bourhis, Giles and Rosenthal (1981) expanded ethnolinguistic vitality to include the perceptions of the majority and vernacular language communities regarding the position of majority and minority languages (Bourhis, Giles and Rosenthal 1981: 147), which is commonly known as SEV (Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality). This theory was enlarged by Bourhis, et. al. in the same year by adding the concept of using subjective factors to predict ethnolinguistic behavior rather than objective assessments of group vitality (Bourhis et al 1981). They proposed that a group's subjective assessment of its relative position on the variable effecting EV (Ethnolinguistic Vitality) may be as important in determining its inter-ethnic behaviors as its more objective position on these variables.

Allard and Landry (1992) put forward a way of evaluating SEV by testing four types of beliefs (general belief, normative belief, personal belief, and goal or desire belief). They proposed that a person's network of linguistic contacts in both the first and second language determines his competence in these languages as well as his beliefs, attitudes and values about that language (Allard and Landry 1992: 175). They proposed two kinds of beliefs, namely self beliefs and non-self beliefs, which will be introduced as follows:

Self beliefs focus on the feelings of the ethnic groups as to what is important in their mind and what they think is appropriate. Self beliefs concern person's habit, sensations and aptitudes, including valorization (the value being linked with group identification), belonging (the feeling of belonging to that group), personal efficacy (the degree a person feels they achieve personal goals as a member of that group), and goal belief (a person's desire and goal).

Non-self beliefs focus on the feeling of group members about any facts influencing the vitality of the ethnic group. It consists of general beliefs and

normative beliefs. The former include present vitality, future vitality and socio model; the latter are interpreted in terms of legitimacy that refers to the awareness of people about appropriate sociological factors that contribute to ethnolinguistic vitality in the present.

In summary, the development of language vitality can be illustrated in Figure 5:

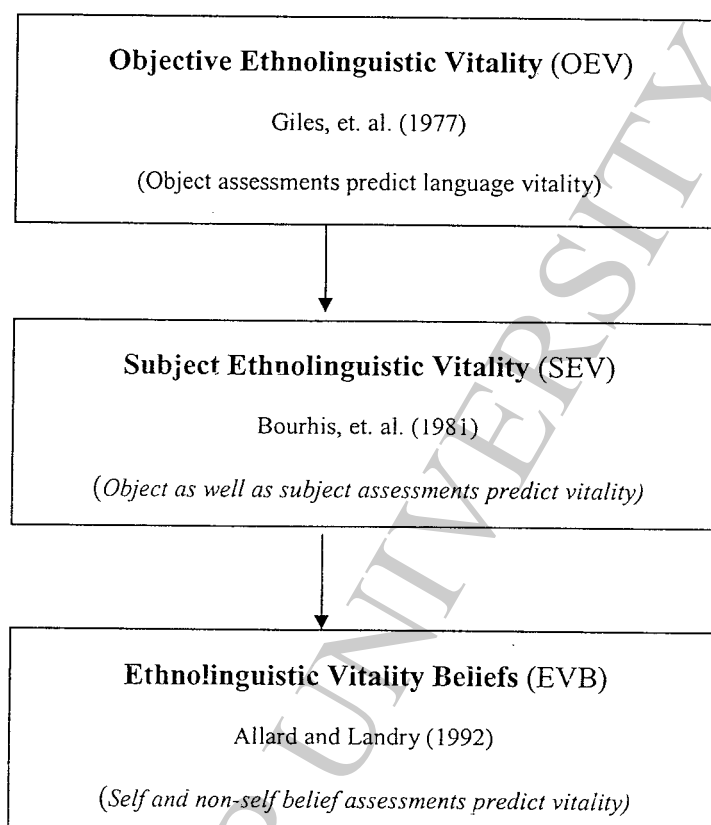


Figure 5. The development of EV theories

In the article entitled "Ethnolinguistic vitality, prejudice, and family language transmission", Carol Evans introduced the investigation testing the hypothesis that ethnolinguistic vitality determines family policies about the transmission of Spanish among Mexican Americans in the Southwest. The findings demonstrate that ethnolinguistic vitality is an important determinant of family transmission policies, and the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality is useful for predicting

language maintenance behaviors among groups who might be in the process of language shift (Evans 1996).

Theories about EV suggest that information on the SEV of a group's members could help explain their intergroup attitudes, attitudes towards the use of a language, and language shift strategies. That is to say, various indicators such as language use and language attitudes help explain the vitality of a language.

2.1.2 Factors affecting language maintenance and shift

Numerous authors have studied language maintenance and shift from the point of view of social factors that affect language maintenance and shift. Factors, variables, and contextual variables are the common terms linked to the maintenance of a certain language.

Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) discuss three categories of variables affecting language maintenance and shift, namely, status factors, demographic factors and institutional support. They are defined as follows:

Status factors include economic status, social status, socio-historical prestige, and status of the language both within and outside the community.

Demographic factors include number of members, distribution, concentration, proportion, birthrate, marriage pattern, as well as patterns of immigration and emigration.

Institutional support factors include any formal or informal support gained from any organized institutions such as mass media, government service, school, church and so forth.

In the discussion of methodology of studying language maintenance and shift, Fasold summarized factors causing language shift based on previous studies. These factors include population, age, migration, industrialization, school language and other government pressures, higher prestige of the language being

shifted to, urbanization, and economic changes (Fasold 1984: 214-218). In addition, he also points out the relationship between the language being shifted from and the language being shifted to by stating that most language shift concerns “the shift of small, lower-status linguistic groups who shift to the language of a larger, higher status group” (Fasold 1984: 217).

Age and gender are also often linked with surveys regarding language maintenance and language shift (Blair 1990, Boehm 1997). This may be due to the traditional role of woman and older people. In many countries, especially in remote places, women tend to lead a more conservative life than men, which leads to women having less chance to receive education and communicate with outsiders.

In addition to the factors above, Gardner and Lambert (1972) also state some motivational factors which can affect language maintenance and shift such as the degree of ethnic identity and language attitudes.

2.1.3 Measurements in studies of language maintenance

Numerous direct or indirect measurement tools have been used in the study of language maintenance and shift. Questionnaires, interview, observation and matched guise tests are the methods commonly adopted by social researchers in a field survey. The advantages and disadvantages of these methods will be discussed below.

Questionnaires are a series of written questions focusing on a topic or set of topics to be answered by an interviewee or test subject either orally or in writing. It is a direct measurement, including both open questions and closed questions. Closed questions have answers that are preselected by the researcher, and limit the subject's responses to the questions, while open questions allow subjects to express their feelings freely in their own words and sometimes can reveal unexpected answers, but are difficult to analyze and rate (Walker 1991, Hatfield 1994).

The use of questionnaires in a survey can yield valuable information about language use pattern within a short period of time. Its disadvantages involve the respondents' low degree of consistency between self-reported and their actual behavior (Agheyisi and Fishman 1970: 150). That is why Blair cites Grimes's comments that "Questionnaires ask only for opinions; the results need to be verified...by direct testing of actual proficiency and by observation" (Blair 1990: 106).

Observation is the most indirect method mentioned and also the most subjective and the most difficult to interpret (Walker 1991). It can be used in combination with questionnaires and interviews to verify the results obtained.

Interviews are essentially orally-administered open-question questionnaires, or interview schedules. It can assess the respondent's mood and more accurately direct his attention to the focal point of the research. But the main problem has been in recording and evaluating the data (Walker 1991).

A **matched guise test** is an indirect method of eliciting information about language attitudes (Blair 1990). In the test, bilingual respondents are asked to read a passage, their voices are taped and then presented to judges who are asked to evaluate the respondents' characteristics according to their voice in terms of intelligence, kindness and so on.

A criticism of the matched guise technique is that it oversimplifies the multilingual situation. Differing social situations and the function of language varieties in these situations have a great effect on language choice and language attitudes. The matched guise technique can obscure these distinctions rather than clarify them (Walker 1991).

2.2 Language use and attitudes

Research in language maintenance and language shift can take many forms such as ethnolinguistic case studies, code switching and code mixing and so forth.

One of the basic underlying factors in such research is the current pattern of language use in the community and people's attitudes toward that language. Language use patterns reflect the actual norms being used within the group, and language attitudes provide "social indicators of changing beliefs and the chances of success in policy implementation" (Baker 1992: 9). Simply put, language use concerns how people actually speak; language attitudes concern what they feel about their language. Both of them are helpful to assess the maintenance and vitality of that language.

Language use and attitudes are often studied simultaneously because together they give a truer picture of any given language situation (Varenkamp 1996: 1). This section previews some theoretical background as well as previous research work regarding language use and attitudes.

2.2.1 Language use

Varenkamp (1996) points out that language use actually involves language choice in a bilingual situation. Given that language maintenance and shift are "the long-term, collective results of language choice" (Fasold 1984: 213), the choice of language involves the norms for language within a group. Thus the choice of language in interaction with other group members is central to the question of language maintenance, because "As long as there is a minority group, as long as the minority group is not demographically broken up, the use of the minority language will not disappear unless the norms for language use within the group are changed" (Fase et al. 1992: 7).

One way to study language use patterns is by applying the concept of "domain," which was first proposed by Fishman (1984). Simply put, domains are certain situational contexts denoting a bundle of factors (such as location, topic and participants) in which one variety is more likely to be appropriate than another (Fasold 1984: 183). Some common domains include home, school, work place, state administration and so forth. Among these domains, Fasold points out that

typically, the language with less prestige is selected in the home domain whereas the language with more prestige is often used in a more formal domain (Fasold 1984: 183).

Edwards (1977) emphasizes the salience of the home domain in the maintenance of a language. He states that the home domain is related to the most central aspects of people's lives. The use of a language must be "necessary or at least very important in the family domain for the language to survive" (Edwards 1997: 34). In this sense, it is reliable to predict language vitality by looking at how frequently that language is used in the home domain.

Predicting language vitality through the use of that language in the home domain has been explored by many researchers. One such study is Boehm's (1997) study of Tharu, a minority language in Indo-Nepal. She analyzed language use patterns among the Tharu according to five variables (age, gender, education, location of residence and language domain). The language use patterns demonstrated strong Tharu language maintenance and language vitality.

Another similar study was carried out by Varenkamp (1996). In his "Sociolinguistic study of eastern Tamang dialects in Nepal", Varenkamp presented the use of Tamang in thirteen specific domains with the assumption that "the more the language is used, the more vital it is, the longer it will last" (Varenkamp 1996: 82). He concluded that the vitality of Tamang was strong due to its extensive use among the speakers.

Research regarding language use and language vitality can also be found in several research papers. In a paper named "The search of indicators of language vitality", Varenkamp (n.d.) identifies various indicators which help explain the vitality of a language, emphasizing the importance of indicators directly related to language use, such as official and public use, home domain.

Kuo (1985: 37-48) did a survey regarding language use in the family domain by asking the respondents what languages they used most frequently when talking

with their family members (including grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters, spouse, children and grandchildren). By revealing the complex language use patterns in the family domain, the author identified the trend of language shift within the family domain over generations.

As for the use of minority languages in China, Huang Xing (2003) pointed out that they are fundamentally used in the daily life where people do not know Chinese. In formal domains, minority groups without a writing system exclusively use the Chinese language and writing system or other more prevailing minority languages and scripts; thus, their vernacular languages are limited to use around their villages and households.

2.2.2 Language attitude

Similar to language use, language attitudes are an important aspect in the study of language maintenance and shift, especially in sociolinguistic research on language planning. "In terms of minority languages, attitudes, like Censuses, provide a measure of the health of the language" (Baker 1992: 9). It is assumed that the members of a speech community share a set of attitudes and beliefs about language, and the members do something about their language.

Most of the research on language attitudes takes the mentalist point of view, that is, an attitude is "an intervening variable between a stimulus and a response" (Fasold 1984: 176). Herriot (1988) explained the three-component view of attitudes proposed by Rosenberg and Hovland (1960). That is, attitude is assigned the status of an intervening variable between "stimuli" and "response" of various kinds to these stimuli (Herriot 1988: 23). The three components of attitudes are defined as affect, cognition and behavior. "Affect" includes beliefs concerning feelings, evaluations and emotion; "Cognition" includes beliefs about whether something is true or false. "Behavior" focuses on intentions and decisions to act. The three- component view of attitudes is shown in Figure 6.

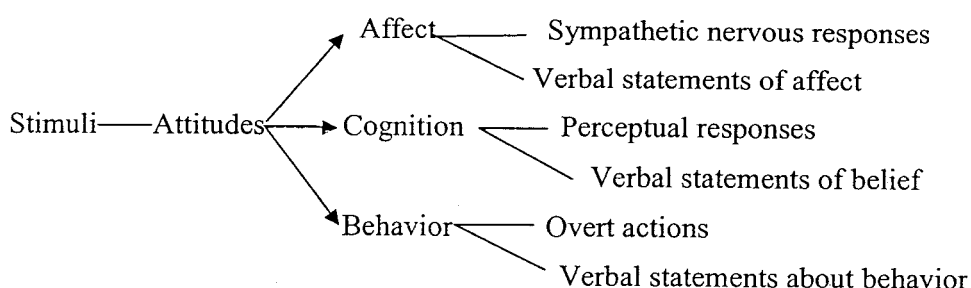


Figure 6. The three component view of attitudes
 (adapted from Rosenberg and Hovland, cited in Herriot
 1988: 24)

In his research in Welsh, Baker (1992) shed light on some key issues in research on attitudes and bilingualism, pointing out that language attitudes are obviously important to the prediction of language proficiency. The two components of language attitudes, namely instrumental attitudes and integrative attitudes, were also distinguished. In his opinion, the status, value and importance of a language can be measured by attitudes held by its speakers. In this project, language attitudes to Welsh were compared by gender, age, language background, type of school and ability in Welsh among 797 children from three different schools in North and Mid Wales. This study is an example of how the concepts about a language (such as its status, value and function) can be measured through an investigation of attitudes held toward that language.

Preeya (1989) researched attitudes towards Central Thai and Northern Thai by applying the technique of matched guise tests. Passages in Central Thai and Northern Thai were recorded by four balanced bidialectals. Then these recordings were presented to two groups of informants who were asked to evaluate each voice on fourteen personality characteristics such as physical attractiveness, self-confidence, trustworthiness, gentleness and so forth. The results showed that Central Thai was favorably related to characteristics of competence and status dimension such as education, social and economic status, whereas Northern Thai is favorably related to characteristics of the personal integrity and social

attractiveness dimensions such as friendliness, sincerity, and trustworthiness. This finding was interpreted as evidence of language loyalties as well as social significance of the urban versus rural speech styles (Preeya 1989).

In China, many scholars have also contributed to the study of language attitudes. In his article "On bilinguals' language attitudes and influence", Zhang Wei (1988: 57-59) generalized two categories of language attitudes among bilinguals, namely: attitudes towards maintaining the mother tongue and attitudes towards giving up the mother tongue. These two different attitudes determine people's positive or negative attitudes toward their vernacular language.

More commonly, the study of language attitudes is combined with the study of language use to predict the vitality of that language. Many theses have realized this goal in various languages. These include: Benjamas Khamsakul's (1998) research of the So language in Sakon Nakhorn province, Thailand; Duan Lei's (2004) research of the Bai language in China; Natnapang Burutphakdee's (2004) research concerning attitudes of Northern Thai youth towards Kammuang and the Lanna script and Maliwan Tuwakham's (2005) research of the Yong language in Lamphun, Thailand. All of these studies involve language attitudes and language use among the speakers of that speech community. The main methods used were questionnaires. A brief summary of each study follows.

Benjamas Khamsakul (1998) investigated the attitudes of the So ethnic group towards the So language and their use of So in daily life. Questionnaires were used to collect data from 121 respondents and all the data were analyzed according to four variables, namely sex, age, education, and ethnic group. The result showed that the attitudes of So toward their own language and linguistic group were neutral, and that age, education and ethnicity were significant factors in explaining differences in So language use. That is, those who are young, ethnically mixed and with higher education use So less than those who are older, pure So and with lower education.

Duan Lei (2004) investigated language vitality and language attitudes of Bai people in China by eliciting data from 252 informants. The use of the Bai language was examined in seven domains (family, trade, education, workplace, strangers, government, and religion). Language attitudes towards Bai were studied through questionnaires regarding attitudes towards Bai language, culture, speakers and related language development. The results of both language use and attitudes data show the strong vitality of the Bai language and potential for Bai language development.

Natnapang Burutphakdee (2004) examined Kammuang, the Northern Thai language, and the Lanna script used in Northern Thailand. Current language use of Kammuang and the Lanna script and the attitudes towards Northern Thai among the Northern Thai youth were studied. She elicited data from three groups of students in two schools as well as from the parents of each student. Questionnaires regarding attitudes showed that both students and parents had positive attitudes towards Kammuang and the Lanna script; Natnapang is optimistic towards the future of Kammuang and the Lanna script.

Maliwan Tuwakham (2005) investigated the language vitality and language attitudes of the Yong people in Lamphun Province. The data was collected from 48 Yong people on the basis of four variables: age, gender, education and place of residence. The analysis showed that Yong people continue to maintain their language in many domains. The older, lower-educated people and rural dwellers used the Yong language with higher frequency than the rest. As for attitudes, Yong people in Lamphun generally had positive attitudes towards their own language, and the older people tended to have stronger positive attitudes than the younger people.

2.3 Language policy

Language usage also reflects politics (Ramsey 1987: 160). In a multilingual society, people are sensitive to their own vernacular language and their language.

use. Their equality of language represents, to a great degree, their equality of ethnicity. Therefore, language policy is important in a country, especially if the country is multilingual. It can even influence the country's peace and stability. To help understand the status of the Bisu language, it is worthwhile to have a look at language policies in China and Thailand.

2.3.1 Language policy in China

In China, bilingualism (one ethnic minority language plus Chinese) and multilingualism (more than one minority language plus Chinese) are common in the ethnic minority language areas. At present, the language situation in China is that Chinese is prestigious and influential, whereas minority languages are weakening (Huang Xing 2003).

Huang Xing classified the minority languages in China into three levels. Languages of level 1 all have a traditional writing system with a total population of thirty-one million people. Languages of level 2, like Zhuang (a predominant minority language in Guangxi province), are used for limited areas of life with a total population of thirty-five million speakers. Level 3 consists of more than one hundred languages spoken by seventeen million speakers from thirty-three minority nationalities, none of them have written system and their languages are seldom used in formal settings (Huang Xing 2003). According to this classification, Bisu is one of the small minority languages of level 3.

As a multiethnic country with 55 national minorities and the Han Chinese majority, China's nationalities policy follows that of former Soviet Union: small tribes and groups are amalgamated into larger nationalities (Bradley n.d.). Language policy in China, on one hand, all nationalities have equal right to use their language, as stated in the 1982 Constitution of China (Article 4) "the people of all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written language....." On the other hand, the promotion of pǔ tōng huà (standard Chinese) is called on throughout the country (Article 19).

The Language situation and language policy in China provide a foundation for the development of Bisu, especially for any future literacy programs.

2.3.2 Language policy in Thailand

The Ethnologue lists 74 languages spoken in Thailand. These languages differ in terms of prestige and development (Gordon 2005: 513). Smalley (1994) gives a description of languages spoken in Thailand. He groups the languages spoken in Thailand into a hierarchy. Standard Thai, the national language, occupies the highest level of the hierarchy. This is the language of education, government, and the media, reflecting Central Thai as spoken in Bangkok. It is second in prestige only to English, the global language whose mastery indicates a truly elite position in Thai society. On the next level are the four 'regional' languages. These include Central, Northeast, North, and Southern Thai. They are used in their respective regions on the village and household level, and sometimes in the markets with a small amount of use in the local media. Compared with Standard Thai, the regional languages are less prestigious; they often serve as the language of wider communication for the sub-regional languages. Next to regional languages, there are some sub-regional languages including enclave languages, town and city languages, displaced Tai languages and marginal languages. Enclave languages include most of the northern hill tribes, which represent islands of Mon-Khmer and Tibeto-Burman speakers. Town and city languages include Phuan and Song, whose speakers were brought into Thailand during military campaigns. The marginal languages are those whose main population is located outside of Thailand, thus including groups like So and Northern Khmer. The Linguistic hierarchy in Thailand is shown in Figure 7:

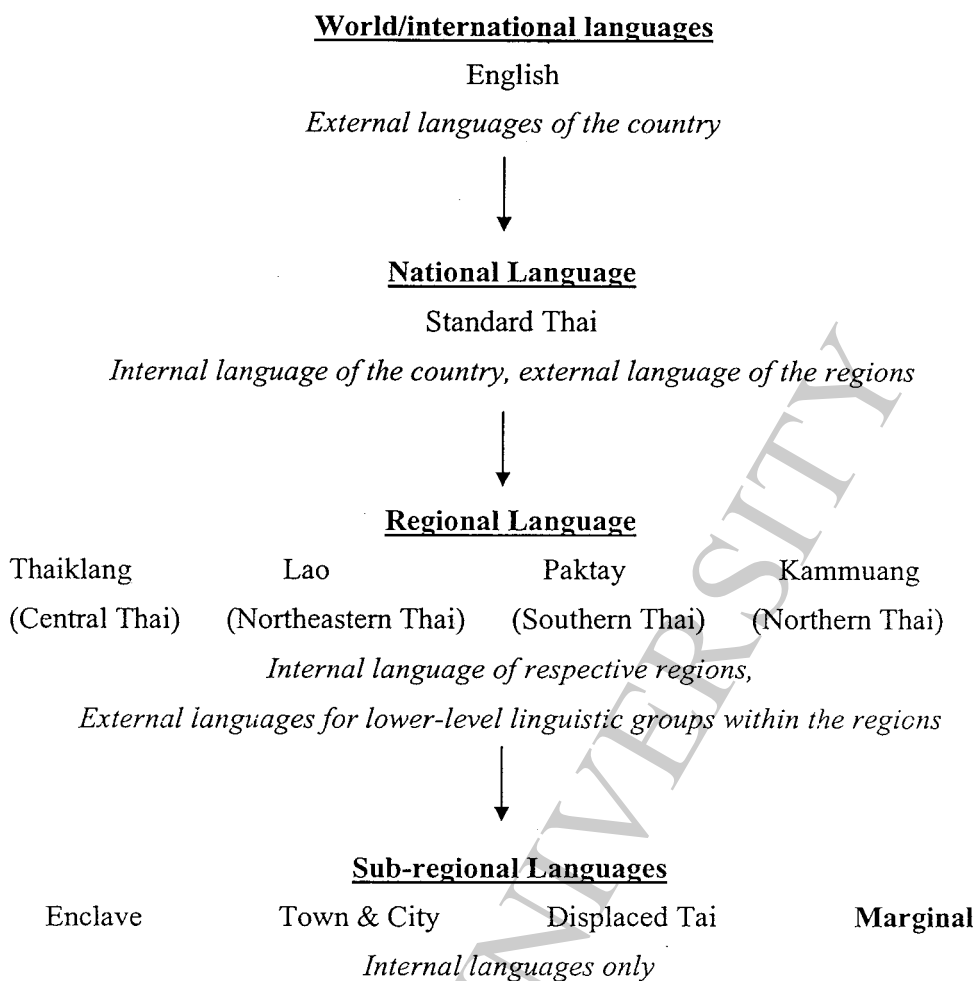


Figure 7. Linguistic hierarchy in Thailand (adapted from Smalley 1994: 69)

People tend to learn languages higher in the hierarchy than their own but not those on their level or lower. Based on this hierarchy, Bisu could be considered as a marginal language. That is, it is found at the lowest category and is only used internally. To communicate with outside people, Bisu speakers shift to external languages such as Northern Thai (Kammuang) or Standard Thai. This limits the use of Bisu to within the Bisu group.