

CHAPTER 4

LANGUAGE USE PATTERNS OF BISU

4.0 Introduction

Like most minority languages, Bisu is in a state of flux and change. The influence of LWCs is extensively affecting Bisu via education and the mass media. This prompts several questions: Do Bisu people often use their language? How and where is the Bisu language used? The data presented in this chapter will provide answers to these issues.

Three aspects are involved in this study: personal proficiency in the Bisu language, language use patterns of Bisu, and some factors influencing the use of Bisu. The patterns of Bisu usage are discussed in terms of three domains (home, in-group and out-group) according to three variables (place of residence, age and gender) in order to predict any language use differences resulting from these social variables.

4.1 Personal proficiency in the Bisu language

Given that language maintenance refers to both retention of use and proficiency (Fase 1992: 4), the 144 respondents' proficiency in Bisu is examined before the discussion of language use. This section presents the answers to four questions concerning personal proficiency in the Bisu language (Questions 26 through 29). The respondents were asked the language they first learn, the language they speak best, and the language they use when they think. Also the Bisu language was compared with the LWC (Chinese or Thai). The six villages were divided into two groups: Strong Villages and Weak Villages. The former includes two villages in

China (Laopin, Zhutang), and the two Thai Bisu villages (Doi Chompuu and Doi Pui); the latter includes the two villages of Cimizhu and Nanya. The reason for the division of answers was that the researcher discovered that in two of the villages where Bisu had previously been spoken, Lahu had become the predominant language. These two villages were thus classified as Weak Villages. The other four villages show strong use of Bisu and were thus classified as Strong Villages. Language proficiency in Bisu among the respondents of Strong Villages and Weak Villages shows great differences, as in Table 4:¹³

¹³ In this table, Northern Thai and Central Thai are for the respondents of the two Thai Bisu villages. In the investigation, they are equivalent to Yunnanese and Mandarin as regional and national languages, respectively.

Languages Questions	Strong Villages					Weak Villages							
	Bisu	Bisu and Y	Y (NT)	Lahu	M (CT)	Total	Bisu	Y and Lahu	Y	Lahu	Bisu and Lahu	No idea	Total
26 The language you learned first	96 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	96	12 (12.5%)	1 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	34 (70.8%)	1 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	48
27 The language you speak best	90 (93.8%)	4 (4.2%)	2 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	96	6 (6.3%)	6 (12.5%)	2 (4.2%)	31 (64.6%)	3 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	48
28 The language you use when you think ¹⁴	89 (92.7%)	4 (4.2%)	2 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.0)	96	7 (7.3%)	1 (1.0%)	4 (4.2%)	33 (68.8%)	2 (4.2%)	1 (2.1%)	48
29 Is it easier to think in Bisu than in Chinese (Thai)?	Yes	No	The same	No idea	Total	Yes	No	The same	No idea	Total			
		5 (20.8%)	2 (2.1%)	5 (5.2%)	96	11 (22.9%)	29 (60.4%)	2 (4.2%)	6 (12.5%)	48			

Table 4. The respondents' language proficiency in Bisu (self-reported)

Note: "Y" stands for "Yunnanese"; "M" stands for "Mandarin"; "NT" for "Northern Thai" and "CT" for "Central Thai".

¹⁴ This question was paraphrased to the respondents during the investigation in order to make it easier for the respondents to understand.

The results show that almost all the respondents in the Strong Villages learned Bisu as their mother tongue, while for the majority in the Weak Villages, Lahu was the language they first learned.

As for the language they spoke best, 93.8 % of respondents in the Strong Villages answered Bisu compared with only 12.5% of these in the Weak Villages. The majority answer of Weak Villages was still “Lahu”.

When asked about which language was used for thinking, only 14.5% of respondents in the Weak Villages said “Bisu” compared with 92.7% of respondents in Strong Villages.

When comparing ease of thinking in Bisu and the LWC (Chinese or Thai), less than a quarter of the respondents in Weak Villages (22.9%) answered that Bisu was easier, while most respondents in Strong Villages (87.5%) feel it is easier to think in Bisu.

It is clear from the answers to these four questions that the division of the six villages into Strong Villages and Weak Villages is valid. The respondents from Strong Villages have a higher self-reported proficiency in Bisu than those from Weak Villages with over half of them having lost their Bisu language and shifted to Lahu. This also indicates the potential for the maintenance for the Bisu language in the Strong Villages, and the likely loss of Bisu in the Weak Villages.

4.2 Language use patterns of Bisu

Fifteen questions (Questions 30 through 43, and 48) were asked to explore the frequency of Bisu use in various settings, such as at home, school, the work place, and so forth. Respondents were asked whether they used Bisu in a given situation often, sometimes, rarely or never. These fifteen questions are grouped into three

language use domains, namely home, in-group settings and out-group settings, with each question representing a particular sub-domain, as shown in Table 5. Language use patterns of Bisu in this section will be presented in terms of these three domains.

Given that this study is of current Bisu use, however, the two sub-domains of “talk with friends outside school” and “talk with friends at school” involve the usage of Bisu about ten or twenty years ago, since most respondents were not currently students. Therefore, these two sub-domains will be excluded in the discussion of Bisu use in the in-group domain, and they are marked with * in Table 5.

Domains	Questions	Sub-domains	Settings
home	30	Stay at home	Daily communications with the members of one's core family and extended family
	31	Talk with father	
	32	Talk with mother	
	33	Talk with grandparents on mother's side	
	34	Talk with grandparents on father's side	
	35	Talk with your spouse	
In-group	36	Talk with your children	Simple greetings or serious talking
	37	Meet with Bisu people	
	38	Attend sacrifice activities	Praying to ancestors, reciting sacrificing words
	39	At work on the fields	Laboring cooperation at fields
	40*	Talk with Bisu friends outside school	Communications outside school
41*	Talk with Bisu friends at school	Communications at school	
Out-group	42	Go shopping in the local market	Communications with merchants
	43	Talk to friends outside of the village	Communications with intimate outsiders
	48	Speak with government officials	Communications with strangers or acquaintances

Table 5. Domains and sub-domains of Bisu usage

4.2.1 The use of Bisu in the home domain

The data collected shows that Bisu is used at different degrees in the six villages. It is the norm being used in the Strong Villages, while seldom used in the two Weak Villages. Table 6, below, shows the results for language use in the home domain by village, averaged over the seven family sub-domains. For example, the percentage “99.25%” for Laopin-Often indicates that, for the seven family sub-domain questions, the average percentage of respondents who answered “often” was 99.25%.

		Bisu usage			
		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Strong Villages	Laopin	99.25%	0.75%	0.00%	0.00%
	Zhutang	98.81%	1.19%	0.00%	0.00%
	Doi Chompuu	90.42%	5.06%	0.00%	4.52%
	Doi Pui	94.36%	1.68%	1.44%	2.52%
Weak Villages	Nanya	39.59%	14.62%	7.03%	38.76%
	Cimizhu	11.34%	3.94%	0.60%	84.13%

Table 6. The use of Bisu in the home domain¹⁵

The differing frequency of Bisu use in the home domain is graphically shown Figure 8.

¹⁵ Percentages in this table are averages over the seven sub-domains. In each sub-domain (see Table 1 in Appendix 7), the percentages are of the number of non-NA respondents.

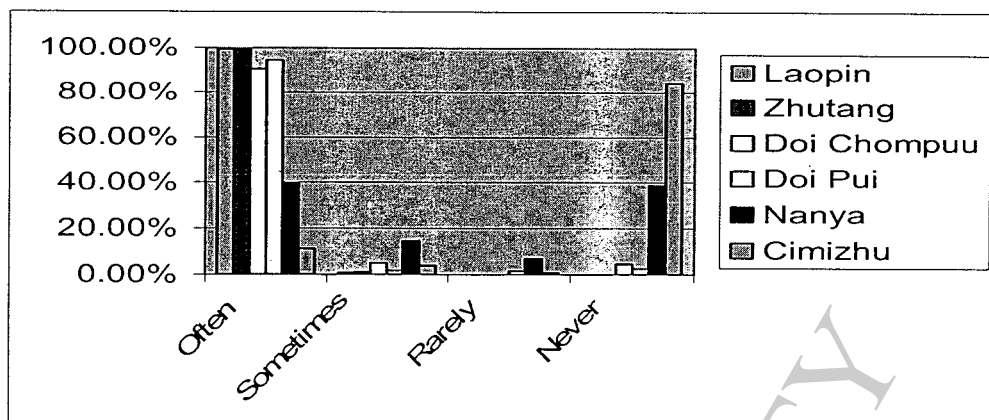


Figure 8. The use of Bisu in the home domain

In Laopin and Zhutang, almost all respondents often speak Bisu in the home domain. Only a very tiny proportion of the respondents chose “sometimes”, and nobody chose “rarely” or “never”. That is to say, Bisu is the predominant language being used in the home domain. It is the norm for communication among family members such as the grandparents, parents, spouses and children. In their own words, speaking the Bisu language is “a habit since our childhood” and they “feel natural” to use Bisu in the home domain. Bisu is also the norm being used in the home domain in the villages of Doi Chompuu and Doi Pui: over 90% of the respondents answered that they “often” use Bisu. The high percentage of “often” answers in these four strong villages indicates a strong linguistic vitality for Bisu.

By contrast, most respondents in Cimizhu and more than one-third of respondents in Nanya never use Bisu in the home domain. The percentages of often-use Bisu in these two villages are 39.59% and 11.34%, respectively. This indicates that Bisu in these two villages has weak vitality, and is in the process of being replaced by another language.

Language shift and replacement has already occurred for many respondents in these two villages, especially in Cimizhu. Over half of the respondents cannot speak Bisu although they know that they are descendants of Bisu. Instead, Lahu, the local predominant language, is mostly used in the home domain. In Cimizhu, Bisu is only spoken within the old generation (above 70 years of age), and the majority of young respondents said they had never even heard Bisu spoken since they were born. During the investigation, the researcher had the chance to meet the oldest Bisu man (107 years old) in Cimizhu. He was fluent in Bisu and Lahu, but none of his children could speak Bisu. The reason is, as he said, everyone spoke Lahu there, and they had no chance to practice the Bisu language.

In summary, the majority of respondents in the Strong Villages chose to use Bisu in the home domain, and the contrasting percentages of “often” using Bisu in the Strong Villages and Weak Villages suggest different language vitalities in these two groups of villages.

4.2.2 The use of Bisu in the in-group domain

Interlocutors in this domain are not as intimate as those in family settings, but still revolve around in-group relations in the village. Most Bisu people own their own land in both China and Thailand, and since the fields lie close to the villages, farming is considered an in-group domain. Similarly, religious activities such as sacrificing are also considered to involve fellow Bisu villagers; therefore it is also included in the in-group domain.

The use of Bisu in this domain shows a similar pattern to the use of Bisu in the home domain: often used in the Strong Villages and rarely or never used in the Weak Villages, as shown in Table 7 and Figure 9.

Bisu Usage		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Villages					
Strong Villages	Laopin	90.28%	9.90%	0.00%	0.00%
	Zhutang	98.61%	1.57%	0.00%	0.00%
	Doi Chompuu	81.58%	13.98%	0.00%	0.12%
	Doi Pui	78.06%	19.04%	1.45%	1.45%
Weak Villages	Nanya	1.39%	37.5%	18.39%	43.06%
	Cimizhu	4.23%	0.00%	4.29%	91.49%

Table 7. The use of Bisu in the in-group domain¹⁶

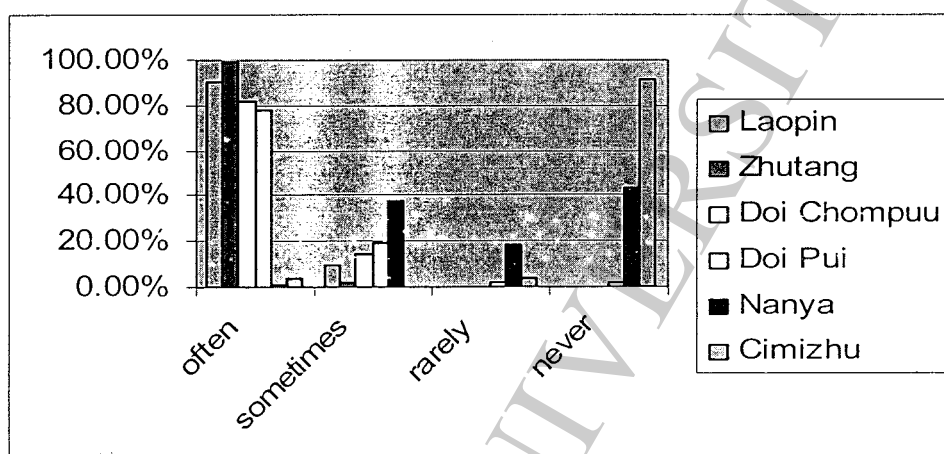


Figure 9. The use of Bisu in the in-group domain

Table 7 shows that Bisu is still the predominant language being used in the Strong Villages. In particular, almost everyone in Laopin and Zhutang answered “often” and nobody answered “never”. As for the villages of Doi Chompuu and Doi Pui, there is still a majority of the respondents who answered “often”. In contrast, the

¹⁶ Percentages in this table are averages over three sub-domains: attend sacrifice activities, at work in the fields, and go shopping in the local market. The two sub-domains of “talk with Bisu friends at school” and “talk with Bisu friends outside school” are excluded from the in-group domain, because they do not reflect current Bisu usage.

number of those who answered “often” is almost zero in the Weak Villages; most of them said they “rarely” or “never” used Bisu.

Based on Fase’s statement that “changes in language choice in intragroup communications are the result of changes of norms” (Fase 1992: 7), this also suggests strong vitality for Bisu in the Strong Village and language shift in the Weak Villages.

4.2.3 The use of Bisu in the out-group domain

Communications with interlocutors in markets, friends outside the village and government officials are grouped into a mixed domain that represents a mixing of in-group-intimate and out-group-distant factors. In each of them, there are aspects of intimate, in-group characteristics but also aspects of out-group, less intimate characteristics, depending on the interlocutor. For example, talking with friends outside the village can be an intimate domain if the friend is Bisu, shopping in the local market also can represent an in-group domain if the merchant is Bisu, but if the merchant is a stranger, shopping represents an out-group domain. However, given the fact that most merchants near Bisu communities are from other ethnic groups such as Lahu, Han and Thai, there is little chance of speaking Bisu in the market, thus, this mixed domain is considered an out-group domain.

Among the six villages being investigated, three of them (Nanya, Doi Chompuu and Doi Pui) have a small shop within the village, mainly selling snacks and cooking material such as eggs and vegetables. Shopping in such kinds of local shops, for sure, deals with in-group domains. However, the term “shopping” in the investigation was specified to be shopping in the local country market that is usually located in a bigger unit of residency like a town. It excludes “shopping in the village shops”. In this sense, Question 42 “go shopping in the local market”

was interpreted the same by each respondent. The average use of Bisu in the out-group domain is shown in Table 8 and Figure 10.

Bisu Usage		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Villages					
Strong Villages	Laopin	2.17%	34.51%	38.22%	25.09%
	Zhutang	10.24%	2.08%	22.92%	64.58%
	Doi Chompuu	33.79%	27.81%	25.45%	12.95%
	Doi Pui	40.04%	25.91%	10.60%	23.46%
Weak Villages	Nanya	0.00%	6.25%	39.58%	54.17%
	Cimizhu	2.08%	0.00%	0.00%	97.92%

Table 8. The use of Bisu in the out-group domain¹⁷

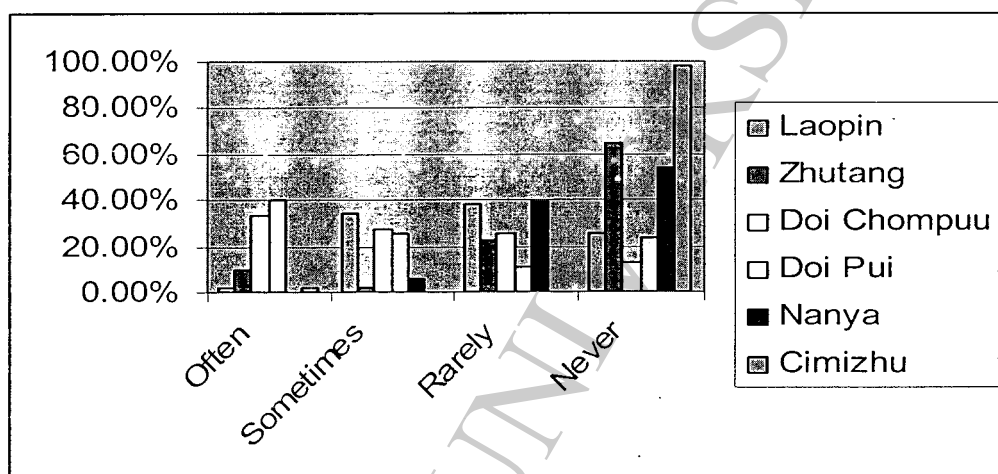


Figure 10. The use of Bisu in the out-group domain

Table 8 shows that the use of Bisu in the out-group domain is different from its use in the domains of home and in-group. First, it is less often used in each village; second, the villages where Bisu is most often used changed from Laopin and Zhutang to the two Thai villages.

¹⁷ The percentages in this table are averaged over two sub-domains: going shopping in the local market and talking to friends outside of the village, the third sub-domain "What language do you speak with government officials?" will be discussed separately since the possible answers differ.

Among the six villages, the frequency of “often” use is highest in Doi Pui, followed by Doi Chompuu, then the villages of Laopin and Zhutang, finally the two weak Bisu villages. However, the percentages of “often-use” Bisu are quite low, which indicates that Bisu is not the predominant language in the out-group domain for any of the villages.

The reasons why Bisu is used with higher frequency in the two Thai villages than in the villages of Laopin and Zhutang may be due to many factors. It is plausible to say that it is related to the communications at different levels among the Bisu villages. During the investigation, the researcher noticed that Bisu people from the two Thai Bisu villages have more communications with each other than those from the four Chinese Bisu villages; they even have cooperation regarding Bisu literacy programs, which result in their using more Bisu. In contrast, the respondents from the Chinese Bisu villages are rarely in contact with each other, and therefore “friends outside of the village” are mostly not Bisu. This can be seen through the answers to Q43 “how often do you use Bisu when you talk to friends outside of the village?” (see Appendix 7): the percentages of “often-use” are much higher in the two Thai villages than in the four Chinese villages. Answers to Q42 “go shopping in the local market” do not show much difference among the six villages.

As for talking with government officials, the dominant group language, instead of Bisu, is the norm. Among the Bisu communities in China, code mixing (Yunnanese together with their local predominant ethnic language such as Lahu or Tai) is quite common, and the main language being used in this sub-domain is Yunnanese, followed by Lahu, then the predominant local minority language, like Tai in the Laopin village. For example, 55% of respondents speak Yunnanese in the Laopin village. As for the villages in Thailand, Northern Thai is the predominant language being used in government domain. 100% and 92% of

respondents in Doi Chompuu and Doi Pui, respectively, answered Northern Thai. The languages being used in the government sub-domain are shown in Table 9.¹⁸

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¹⁸ “NA” in Table 9 means those who have never gone to government officers and talked with government officials. To show actual use of Bisu, the percentages in Table 9 are of the number of non-NA responses.

Domains Villages		Q 48 What language do you speak with government officials?											
		Yunnanese (Northern Thai)	Lahu	Tai	Mandarin (Central Thai)	Yunnanese and Tai	Bisu Yunnanese and Tai	Bisu Yunnanese and Lahu	Bisu and Yunnanese	Yunnanese and Lahu	Total (Non- NA)	NA	
Strong Villages	Laopin	6 (30%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	11 (55%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20 (100%)	4
	Zhutang	17 (82.6%)	2 (8.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (8.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	23 (100%)	1
	Doi Chompuu	22 (91.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (8.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	24 (100%)	0
	Doi Pui	24 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	24 (100%)	0
Weak Villages	Nanya	15 (65.2%)	6 (26.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	23 (100%)	1
	Cimizhu	9 (47.4%)	6 (31.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	19 (100%)	5

Table 9. Languages being used when talking with government officials

4.3 Summary of language use patterns of Bisu

The Bisu language is used at different degrees in the three domains (home, in-group and out-group). The frequency of “often-use” Bisu shrinks along these domains: most often used in the home domain, less usage in the domain of in-group, and least usage in the out-group domain.

The data shows that Bisu is used at differing levels in the six villages. Generally, Laopin, Zhutang, Doi Chompuu and Doi Pui are the four villages where Bisu is exclusively used among the respondents for communications with family members or Bisu speakers. By contrast, Bisu is rarely or never used in the two villages of Cimizhu and Nanya where most respondents have shifted to Lahu, the local dominant language.

The data analysis also predicts strong language vitality of Bisu in the Strong Villages and language shift in the Weak Villages. The high percentages of often-use Bisu in the Strong Villages indicate that Bisu will be maintained in the foreseeable future. By contrast, in the Weak Villages of Cimizhu and Nanya, the percentages of often-use Bisu in the home domain are far below 60%,¹⁹ which indicates the loss of the Bisu language in some Bisu communities.

4.4 Factors affecting language use of Bisu

From the above analysis, it is seen that Bisu is used with different frequency in the three domains. It is also known that Bisu is often used in the Strong Villages and rarely used in the Weak Villages. What are the factors that might affect the use of Bisu? Is it related to gender, age or some other factors? This section aims to explore some social factors affecting Bisu language use.

¹⁹ 60% was stated as the cut-off below which vitality would be considered weak. See Section 3.2.2.1.

4.4.1 Place of residence

The analysis of language use in the three domains shows that the use of Bisu varies from village to village. Among the six villages, Laopin, Zhutang, Doi Chompuu and Doi Pui are the four villages where Bisu is strongly used, and the villages of Cimizhu and Nanya are the two villages where Bisu is rarely used. This difference can be seen in the use of Bisu in each of the three domains.

Based on these differences, an analysis of the effects of age and gender on language use will be done separately for the Strong Villages and Weak Villages. For the convenience of readability, hereafter the respondents of the Strong Villages are titled "Group A" and those of the Weak Villages are titled "Group B".

4.4.2 Age

Age tends to be a factor influencing the use of an ethnic language, (e.g Baker 1992, Kuo 1985, Benjamas 1998). This section focuses on the relationship of language and age with the hypothesis that elderly people use Bisu with higher frequency than the young.

The respondents are divided into three age groups as follows: young (15 to 30 years), middle-age (31 to 50 years) and elderly (51 to 70 years). For these respondents, the relationship between language use and age differs across domains. In addition, it also differs between Group A and Group B. It is fairly consistent that, in some domains, the use of Bisu increases with age both in Group A and Group B. However, the different frequency of using Bisu resulting from age is greater in Group B than Group A. For example, the often-use Bisu percentages in the home domain increases from 94.45% (young group) to 100% (elderly group) in Group A compared with 1.59% (young group) to 48.39% (elderly group) in Group B. That is to say, the difference among the three age groups along the range from "often use" to "never use" is gentle in Group A while

sharp in Group B. This indicates that Group A use Bisu at all ages, and Group B are in the midst of language shift.

The use of Bisu in the home domain by age is shown in Table 10.

Age	Group A				Group B			
	often	sometimes	rarely	never	often	sometimes	rarely	never
15-30	94.45%	4.36%	0.00%	1.19%	1.59%	0.00%	1.79%	96.63%
31-50	96.56%	2.43%	0.00%	1.00%	23.99%	13.69%	5.65%	56.67%
51-70	100%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	48.39%	12.62%	2.68%	36.31%

Table 10. The use of Bisu in the home domain by age

Table 10 shows that, for the home domain, the hypothesis of increased Bisu use with age is supported in Group B but not in Group A. This does not imply that age causes increased vernacular usage, but that in Group A, Bisu is used by everyone, while Group B is in the process of language shift with the younger generations using Bisu less and less. The difference of Bisu use by age in the home domain is also illustrated in Figure 11.

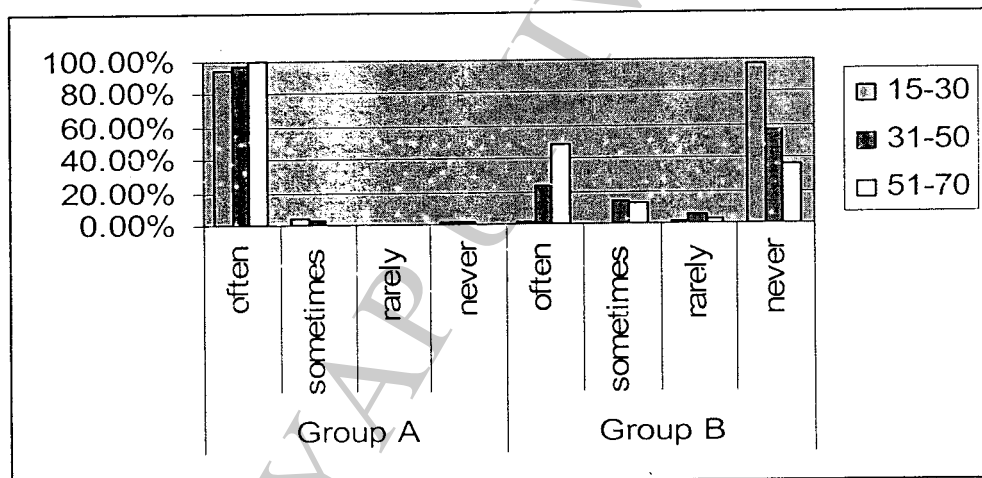


Figure 11. The use of Bisu by age in the home domain

As for the use of Bisu in the in-group domain, the use of Bisu is greater in the elder generations. In Group A, the rarely or never-use Bisu percentages decrease gradually with age while the percentages of often-use Bisu increase with age.

However, this pattern is not as clear in Group B. From the young group to the middle group, the percentages of often-use and sometime-use Bisu did increase with the percentages of rarely-use and never-use decreasing. But from the middle to the elderly, the percentages of often-use Bisu did not increase and the middle age group shows more usage of Bisu than the elderly age group, as shown in Table 11.

Age	Group A				Group B			
	often	sometimes	rarely	never	often	sometimes	rarely	never
15-30	73.29%	19.24%	2.71%	4.76%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
31-50	80.61%	17.30%	0.71%	1.38%	9.08%	18.08%	19.50%	53.33%
51-70	82.28%	17.10%	0.00%	0.63%	4.31%	22.39%	14.20%	59.09%

Table 11. The use of Bisu by age in the in-group domain

The use of Bisu by age in the in-group domain is also illustrated in Figure 12.

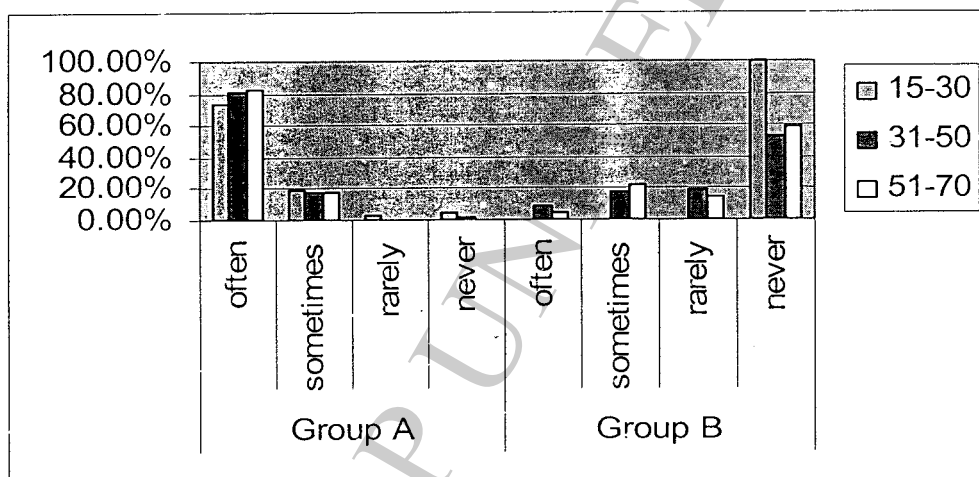


Figure 12. The use of Bisu by age in the in-group domain

Regarding the use of Bisu by age in the out-group domain, the pattern of increased Bisu usage with age only occurs in Group B: the percentages of never-use decrease gradually along the three age groups. This supports the hypothesis that the elderly use Bisu with higher frequency than the young. However, the percentages in Group A show an opposite pattern. It seems that the use of Bisu

decreases with age, that is, the young use it more than the elder generation. This can be seen through the decreasing percentages of often-use and increasing percentages of never-use Bisu. See Table 12.

Age	Group A				Group B			
	often	sometimes	rarely	never	often	sometimes	rarely	never
15-30	28.13%	12.50%	25.00%	34.38%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
31-50	7.81%	23.44%	23.44%	45.31%	6.25%	9.38%	18.75%	65.63%
51-70	6.57%	28.66%	24.25%	40.52%	0.00%	0.00%	43.75%	56.25%

Table 12. The use of Bisu by age in the out-group domain

The decreasing often-use Bisu in Group A and increasing never-use by age in Group B are also shown in Figure 13.

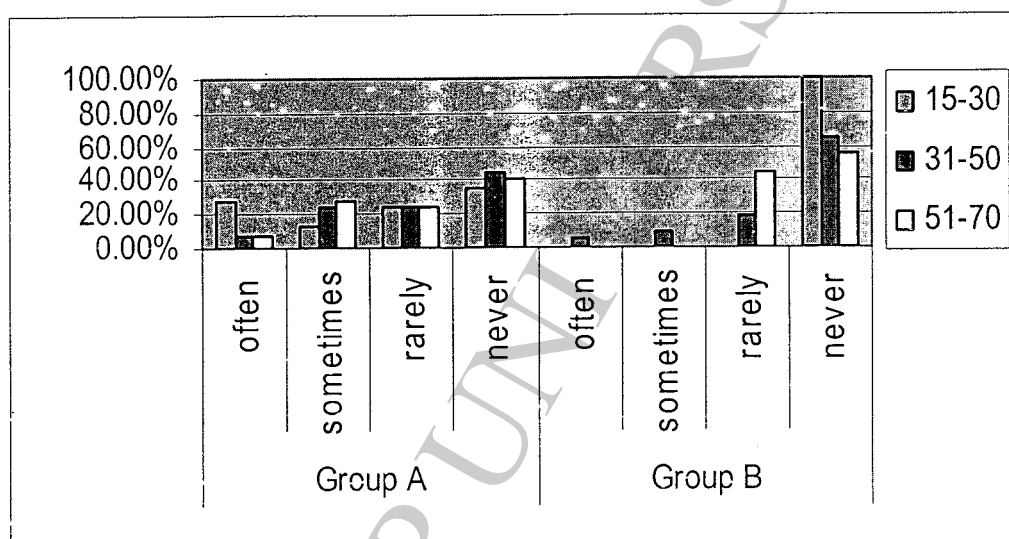


Figure 13. The use of Bisu by age in the out-group domain

The opposite Bisu usage patterns by age are found in China strong villages and the two Thai Bisu villages. In the out-group domain, the young use Bisu more than the elderly. This may be due to the scope of communications with friends outside the village. Young people normally have more friends out of villages than the elderly people, the wider scope of friends among the young people may lead to the possibility of using Bisu more than the elderly ones. Or maybe the identity as Bisu

is getting better over time, so more young people are willing to use Bisu in the out-group. For the Thai villages, the high often-use percentages could be due to the high level of contact between villages. The increasing percentages of “never-use” among the China Strong Bisu and the decreasing percentages of “often-use” among the Thai Bisu are bolded in Table 13, below.

Village Age	China Strong Bisu				Thai Bisu			
	often	some-times	rarely	never	often	some-times	rarely	never
15-30	9.38%	9.38%	43.75%	37.50%	45.88%	15.63%	6.25%	36.25%
31-50	3.13%	43.75%	31.25%	43.75%	12.5%	25%	15.63%	46.88%
51-70	6.25%	24.11%	19.65%	50%	7.14%	34.82%	29.47%	28.57%

Table 13. The contrasting use of Bisu in the out-group domain

As for the third sub-domain Q48 “What language do you speak with government officials?” the answers do not show much difference between age groups. The majority answer in Group A and Group B is Yunnanese (Northern Thai for Thai villages), as in Table 14.

Groups Languages	Group A				Group B			
	15-30	31-50	51-70	Total (Non-NA)	15-30	31-50	51-70	Total (Non-NA)
Local LWC (such as Tai, Lahu)	2(7%)	2(6%)	2(6%)	6	3(20%)	3(21%)	6(46%)	12
Yunnanese (NT)	23(82%)	22(69%)	24(77%)	69	10(67%)	10(71%)	4(31%)	24
Mandarin (CT)	1(4%)	1(3%)	0(0%)	2	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0
Bisu and Yunnanese	1(4%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	1	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0
Bisu, Yunnanese and local LWC	0(0%)	2(6%)	0(0%)	2	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0
Yunnanese and local LWC	1(4%)	5(16%)	5(16%)	11	2(13%)	1(7%)	3(23%)	6
Total (Non-NA)	28	32	31	91	15	14	13	42
NA	4	0	1	5	1	2	3	6

Table 14. Answers to Q48 by age²⁰

²⁰ The percentages exclude the numbers of non-NA.

In summary, this section compares the use of Bisu and age with the hypothesis that “the elderly use Bisu more than the young.” This hypothesis is generally supported by the use of Bisu in the three domains.

However, the use of Bisu by age varies from Group A to Group B. As far as Group A is concerned, the hypothesis is not supported by the use of Bisu in every domain. In the home domain, since almost everyone uses Bisu, the age relationship cannot be evaluated, but the use in the in-group domain indicates that the elder respondents use Bisu more than the young by gradually increasing percentages of often-use Bisu. The use of Bisu in the out-group seems to contradict the hypothesis. This may be due to some factors like the scope of the communications with outside friends, or perhaps young people do not know the LWC well or that the Thai Bisu villages have much more contact between Bisu villages.

As for Group B, the use of Bisu in three domains shows the same pattern: the elderly respondents use Bisu more than the young. That is to say, there is a clear age relationship in the weak villages. The reason for it is language shift, leading to shrinking usage of Bisu among young people.

4.4.3 Gender

Men and women who speak a particular language use it in different ways (Wardhaugh 2002: 309). Paulston says that language shift frequently begins with women (Paulston 1994: 13). Language use also tends to be linked with gender. Boehm’s study of Tharu language maintenance shows that gender is an important factor influencing language use, with female language patterns supporting maintenance (Boehm 1997). In addition, Zhao mentioned in his field notes that Bisu men tend to know more languages than women (Zhao 2002). If so, what are the patterns of Bisu use among the male and the female respondents? Will the women’s lack of proficiency in other languages lead to their using more Bisu?

This section discusses gender relationships related to the use of Bisu with the hypothesis that women use more Bisu than men.

Similar to the age relationship, the gender relationship in this section is also discussed through the use of Bisu in the three domains among the two groups of respondents. Average percentages of Bisu use in each domain are used to evaluate whether there are any distinct patterns resulting from gender. Results are shown in Table 15.

Group Domain		Group A				Group B			
		Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never
Home	M	98.54%	1.46%	0.00%	0.00%	27.46%	13.99%	5.16%	53.39%
	F	97.38%	1.54%	0.69%	0.39%	30.37%	3.71%	4.93%	60.98%
In-group	M	78.09%	19.58%	0.95%	1.38%	5.37%	12.85%	16.55%	65.23%
	F	79.72%	13.79%	2.21%	4.27%	0.87%	16.00%	7.41%	75.72%
Out-group	M	20.92%	31.74%	30.54%	16.80%	4.17%	2.08%	14.58%	79.17%
	F	22.24%	12.95%	20.15%	44.66%	0.00%	4.17%	25.00%	70.83%

Table 15. The use of Bisu by gender in three domains

The differences between men and women shown in Table 15 are not consistent and are not of a practically important magnitude. It seems that gender is not a factor when compared with language use among the six villages. Bisu use by gender in each domain is illustrated in Figures 14, 15 and 16.

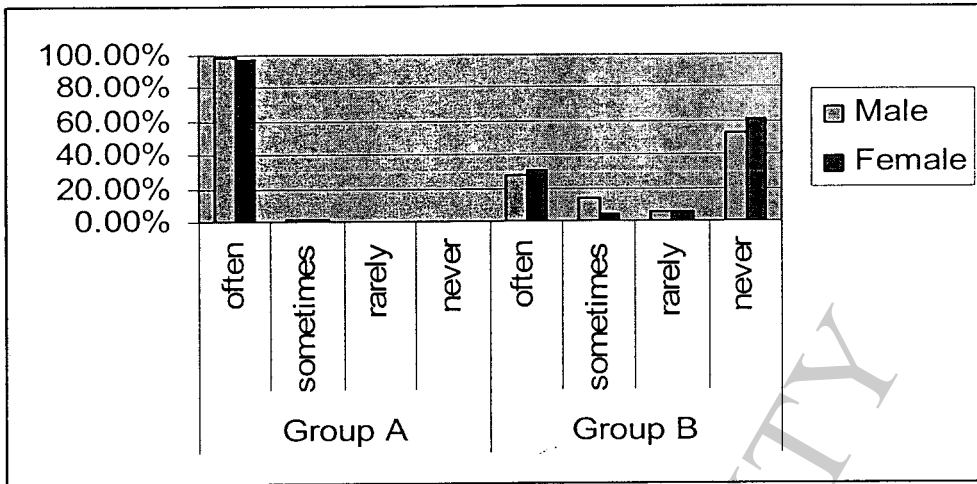


Figure 14. The use of Bisu by gender in the home domain

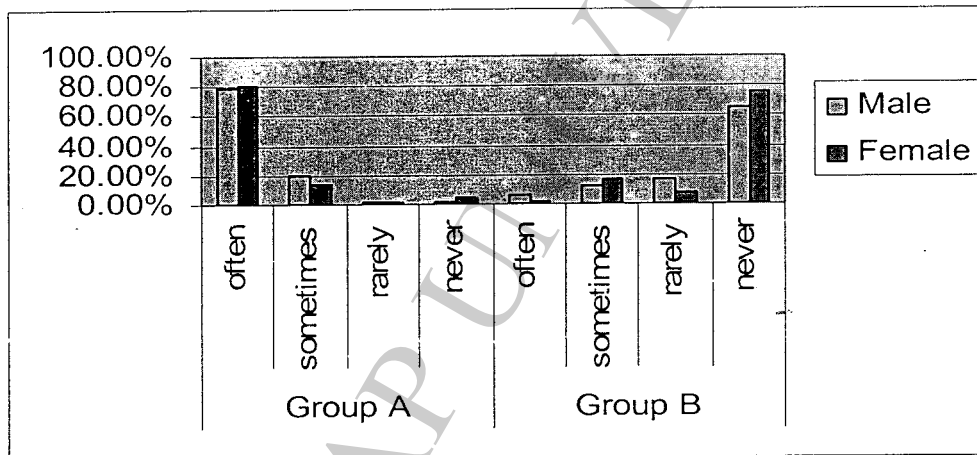


Figure 15. The use of Bisu by age in the in-group domain

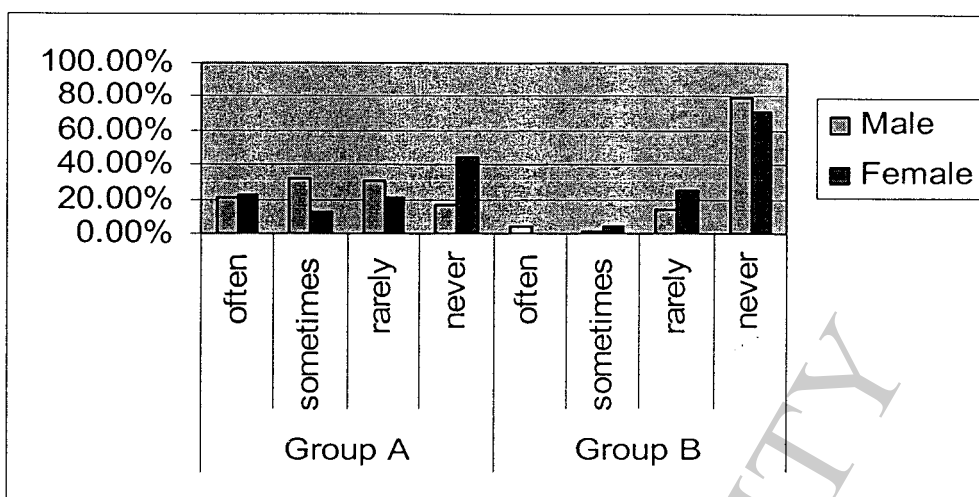


Figure 16. The use of Bisu by age in the out-group domain

As for languages used when talking with government officials, no gender-related patterns in the use of Bisu are shown through the answers to Q48. Bisu is not used in any village, Yunnanese (Northern Thai for Thai villages) are used with the highest percentages among other languages, as in Table 16.

Q48 What Language(s) do you speak with government officials?	Group A			Group B		
	Male	Female	Total (Non-NA)	Male	Female	Total (Non-NA)
Local LWC (such as Tai, Lahu)	2 (4%)	4 (9%)	6	4 (18%)	8 (40%)	12
Yunnanese (Northern Thai)	33(70%)	36(82%)	69	15(68%)	9 (45%)	24
Mandarin (Central Thai)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	2	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0
Bisu and Yunnanese	1(2%)	0 (0%)	1	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0
Yunnanese and local LWC	7 (15%)	4 (9%)	11	3 (14%)	3 (15%)	6
Bisu, Yunnanese and local LWC	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	2	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0
Total (Non-NA)	47	44	91	22	20	42
NA	1	4	5	2	4	6

Table 16. Answers to Q48 by gender²¹

²¹ The percentages are calculated based on the numbers of Non-NA.

4.4.4 Other factors influencing the use of Bisu

In addition to age and gender, there also exist other factors that may influence the language use patterns of Bisu. This section will discuss the factors of personal language proficiency in Bisu, and parental effect.

4.4.4.1 Personal proficiency in Bisu

Section 4.1 shows that respondents' proficiency in Bisu is different, some people have spoken Bisu since their childhood while some have totally lost it. Their proficiency in the Bisu language determines their ability to use Bisu. Those who have lost the Bisu language, for sure, cannot use it in any domain. For example, most respondents in the two weak villages have never heard Bisu; they have no way to use Bisu although they might want to use it. In contrast, most respondents in the four strong villages can speak Bisu fluently; it is a habit for them to speak Bisu at home and talk with their family members.

4.4.4.2 Parental effect

Bisu speakers in China do not have any written materials in Bisu, so the only way it can be passed from one generation to the next is for the parents to teach it to their children. To a great degree, the parental effect determines the mother tongue retention through the family. Keeping the vernacular language as the mother tongue means maintaining Bisu, while mother tongue shift implies a process of ethnic assimilation.

In the two weak villages, it is common for parents not to teach their children to speak Bisu. Instead, Lahu, the local dominant language, is taught when their children begin to speak. In the four strong villages, it is the habit for most of the Bisu people to speak Bisu at home. As a result, the parents always teach their children to speak Bisu from the time they begin to speak. Some Bisu children even do not know how to speak Chinese when they first go to school. This does not mean their parents only know Bisu; actually most of them are bilingual or

trilingual. It is just a habit for them to communicate with each other in Bisu as long as they stay at home.

The influence of the parental effect can be predicted through the answers to Q 46 “Do you know Bisu people who do not speak Bisu?” and Q 47 “If yes, how did this happen?” In the two weak villages, 100% of the respondents reported that most people in their village did not speak Bisu any more, and the reason was mostly “their parents spoke other languages to them” or “our parents did not want us to learn Bisu first”. By contrast, in the four Strong Villages, only 2 out of 96 (2.1%) respondents answered “most people do not speak it anymore”, because “it is a habit to speak Bisu in our village”. The answers to Q 46 are shown in Table 17.

Q46 Do you know Bisu people who do not speak Bisu?	Group A	Group B
a. Everyone speaks Bisu	56 (58%)	0 (%)
b. Some people don't speak Bisu	38 (40%)	0 (0%)
c. Most people don't speak Bisu	2 (2.1%)	48(100%)
Total	96	48

Table 17. A summary of the answers to Q46

4.5 Summary

This chapter analyzes the use of Bisu in the three domains to find out the current language use patterns of Bisu. The focus has been on analyzing how frequently Bisu is used in the home domain. In addition, factors that influence language use among Bisu speakers have also been discussed.

It is assumed that the choices people in an ethnolinguistic community make in regard to language use in certain domains reflect trends toward language maintenance or language shift. Bisu is used with different frequency in various domains. It depends on the interlocutors and the communication settings. The data shows Bisu is the overwhelming, nearly exclusive language used for home communications in the four Strong Villages, and it is also used with high frequency in the domain of in-group. Therefore, the present vitality of the Bisu

language is strong in the Strong Villages. By contrast, the data also shows, that Bisu is rarely used outside of Bisu groups given the predominant influence of local minority groups. For communications with outsiders, LWCs such as Yunnanese (Northern Thai for Thai villages) or local dominant minority languages like Lahu or Tai are chosen. This can be a threat to the vitality of the Bisu language. For example, in the two weak villages, most respondents have already stopped using the Bisu language in most situations, and language shift and replacement have occurred. As a result, Bisu has lost its vitality in the Weak Villages.

The data from these respondents indicates that age is related to language use in the Weak Villages. In general, the elderly respondents use Bisu more than the young, which supports the hypothesis of a relationship between age and the use of Bisu. But the hypothesis of gender relationship turns to be incorrect; the data shows that men and women use Bisu with about the same frequency in both the Strong and Weak Villages.

Bisu is often used in the Strong Villages while rarely or never used in the Weak Villages. This may be due to many social factors such as parental effect and community location.