

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

6.0 Introduction

This study has been an attempt to assess Bisu language vitality through studying language use and language attitudes among Bisu speakers in China and Thailand. These concepts are closely related to the maintenance of the Bisu language in the foreseeable future. The data gathered were the self-reports of 144 respondents, as well as informal observation. The patterns of Bisu use are illustrated by three domains (home, in-group and out-group) with an emphasis on the home domain. The usage of the Bisu language in each domain is discussed by place of residence, age and gender so that any differences resulting from these social factors can be evaluated. The attitudinal study of the Bisu language is realized from four points of view: attitudes towards language use and language displacement, general attitudes towards the Bisu language, attitudes towards Bisu speakers, and attitudes towards a possible Bisu literacy program. Each of these points is discussed by place of residence. In addition, the social factors of age and gender are taken into account in the discussion of general attitudes towards the Bisu language.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study, which will be presented below.

6.1 Conclusions regarding the Bisu language use patterns

Language use patterns show that the Bisu language is used at differing levels in the six villages being investigated. It is the norm being used within the Strong Villages (the villages of Laopin, Zhutang, Doi Chompuu and Doi Pui). By contrast, in the Weak Villages (the villages of Cimizhu and Nanya), people have shifted to speaking Lahu, the local dominant language. In the Strong Villages, Bisu is used exclusively in the home domain and within the Bisu group (see Section 4.2), but is not used for communications with non-Bisu. This conclusion can be drawn from the following results:

Language proficiency in Bisu: The Bisu language is mostly acquired as the mother tongue in the Strong Villages. Almost all respondents in the Strong Villages consider Bisu language to be easier than other language(s), and Bisu is the language they speak best and use to think about problems in their daily life. The continuity of Bisu language acquisition in the Strong Villages provides the foundation for its dominant use within the Bisu group. By contrast, in the Weak Villages, the Bisu language has been replaced with most of the respondents having shifted to Lahu.

The use of Bisu in the home domain: For both Strong and Weak Villages, Bisu is used with highest frequency in the home domain. The high percentages (above 90%) of “often-use” Bisu in the Strong Villages show the predominant use of Bisu in the home domain. It also indicates that the Bisu language is the norm being used for communication with family members in the Strong Villages. By contrast, in the Weak Villages, the percentages of “often-use” Bisu are far below 60%. Instead, a large number of respondents declare they “rarely” or “never-use” Bisu. All this shows the strong vitality of the Bisu language in the Strong Villages and language shift in the Weak Villages.

The use of Bisu in the in-group domain shows a similar result to the use of Bisu in the home domain: the percentages of “often-use” Bisu are much higher in the Strong Villages than those in the Weak Villages with over 60% of respondents in the Strong Villages saying they “often use” Bisu, while less than 4% percent of the respondents in the Weak Villages “often use” Bisu. The results show that, for communication within the Bisu group, Bisu is still the dominant language being used in the Strong Villages, but it is rarely used in the Weak Villages.

The use of Bisu in the out-group domain shows the lowest frequency of “often-use” Bisu among the three domains. The small “often-use” Bisu percentages in the out-group domain indicates Bisu is not the language being used for communications with non-Bisu. However, the percentages of “often-use” Bisu in the out-group domain are still higher in the Strong Villages. This suggests that

the usage of Bisu in this domain is consistent to that in the previous two domains: a higher percentage use of Bisu in the Strong Villages and a lower percentage use of Bisu in the Weak Villages.

6.2 Conclusions regarding attitudes towards the Bisu language

Based on this analysis, conclusions regarding attitudes towards the Bisu language can be summarized in Table 45 below.

Respondents		Strong Villages	Weak Villages
1	Attitudes towards the maintenance of Bisu	Positive	Negative
2	Statements about the Bisu language	Positive	Less positive
	Instrumental attitudes	Positive	Negative
	Integrative attitudes	Positive	Negative
3	Attitudes towards Bisu speakers	Positive	Negative
4	Attitudes towards a possible Bisu literacy program	Positive	Negative

Tabel 45. Findings regard language attitudes

Attitudes towards language use and language displacement show a positive attitude towards the language maintenance of Bisu in the Strong Villages and a negative attitude in the Weak Villages, where people were more favorable to Lahu. The data indicate that the more Bisu is used, the more positive attitudes are held by its speakers (see Section 5.1).

General attitudes towards the Bisu language examines the respondents' answers to some statements about the Bisu language. In addition, instrumental and integrative attitudes towards the Bisu language are also tested. The results show that the respondents generally answered positively to the statements regarding the Bisu language, with the answers are more positive in the Strong Villages than those in the Weak Villages.

As for the instrumental and integrative attitudes towards Bisu, the data shows great differences between the Strong Villages and the Weak Villages. Respondents from the Strong Villages reported positive attitudes toward the Bisu language. Those from the Weak Villages responded negative attitudes. The data also shows that for both Strong Villages and Weak Villages, the respondents integrative attitudes towards the Bisu language are more positive than the instrumental attitudes. This is closely related to the sociolinguistic situation of Bisu; since it is not a prestigious language, its instrumental functions, such as to having more chances to make money, to go shopping etc, are not significant to most respondents. The respondents' positive integrative attitudes towards Bisu indicates that Bisu people have a strong desire to be identified as Bisu.

Attitudes towards Bisu speakers show that respondents of both the Strong Villages and the Weak Villages generally have positive attitudes towards Bisu speakers, and Bisu speakers are commonly regarded as insiders although most respondents from Weak Villages have shifted to speaking Lahu.

Attitudes towards a possible Bisu literacy program show that respondents from all six villages generally hold positive attitudes towards a potential Bisu literacy program. Among the six villages, the two Strong Villages in China (namely Laopin and Zhutang) show the strongest desire to have a Bisu literacy program. This would provide a good foundation for future Bisu literacy development in China.

6.3 Conclusions regarding social factors influencing language use and language attitudes

Social factors which influence Bisu language use and attitudes in this study include: place of residence, age, gender, personal proficiency in Bisu and parental effect. Among these factors, place of residence is considered as the first factor. The discussions regarding the Bisu language use in three domains (see Section 4.2) and attitudes towards the Bisu language (see Section 5.2) show a great

difference between the Strong Villages and the Weak Villages. The respondents from the Strong Villages use much more often than those from the Weak Villages and value the Bisu language slightly more than those from the Weak Villages. That is to say, the respondent's place of residence is a factor influencing the use of Bisu and attitudes towards Bisu.

Personal proficiency in the Bisu language and parental effect are two additional social factors which are considered to impact the usage of Bisu. Personal proficiency in Bisu determines his/her ability to use Bisu, the higher Bisu proficiency a person has, the more possibilities for Bisu to be used. Similarly, parental effect is directly related to the continuity of Bisu use through the family. The more emphasis on speaking Bisu made by the parents, the more chances that Bisu will be passed on to the younger generation.

The influence of age and gender upon language use and attitudes among the Bisu speakers is summarized in Table 46 below.

Factors Respondents	Age		Gender	
	Strong Villages	Weak Villages	Strong Villages	Weak Villages
The use of Bisu	No	Yes	No	No
Attitudes towards Bisu	No	Yes	No	Yes

Table 46. Findings regarding the influence of age and gender

As shown in Table 46, the influence of age and gender upon the use of Bisu and attitudes towards Bisu varies from the Strong Villages to the Weak Villages. In the Strong Villages, the relationship between the use of the Bisu language and age is not clear, but in the Weak Villages, the analysis shows that the elderly respondents use Bisu more often than the younger respondents. This is due to language shift which leads to a shrinking use of Bisu among the younger people in the weak villages.

As for the influence of gender upon the use of Bisu, the hypothesis that women use Bisu more than the men is not supported in this study. There was not much difference in the frequency of use between men and women for both Group A and Group B.

As for the influence of age and gender upon the attitudes towards Bisu, the findings show that respondents from the Strong Villages generally value their vernacular language, their answers are not influenced by age or gender. That is to say, no differences due to age or gender were observed among the respondents from the Strong Villages, but this could be due to the fact that most of them use the Bisu language at similar degree and generally value their vernacular language, so no age or gender differences, if they exist at all, could be observed. By contrast, age and gender are the two factors influencing attitudes towards Bisu among the respondents from the Weak Villages. The elderly people use the Bisu language more than the younger people, women have slightly more positive attitudes towards the Bisu language than men. Their language use difference resulting in age may be due to a language shift occurring in the Weak Villages.

6.4 Conclusions regarding the relationship between language use and language attitudes

Language use and language attitudes are both discussed according to the division into Strong and Weak Villages. This discussion was made, on the one hand, because of the different degrees of Bisu usage in the villages being investigated; on the other hand, the division is an attempt to explore the relationship between language use and language attitudes to test the hypothesis that the more the Bisu language is used, the more positive attitudes are held by its speakers.

The hypothesis is supported by the data discussion of “attitudes towards language use and language replacement” (see Section 5.1), and “general attitudes towards Bisu” (see Section 5.2).

6.5 Conclusions regarding the maintenance and vitality of the Bisu language

This whole study is an attempt to predict the maintenance and vitality of the Bisu language through a discussion of language use and language attitudes among its speakers. It can be concluded that the Bisu language is enjoying a healthy vitality in the four Strong Villages, and that the Bisu language will not disappear in the foreseeable future. This conclusion is drawn based on the following results:

1. **The predominant use of Bisu in the home domain:** Bisu is the dominant language being used in the home domain in the Strong Villages. Although language shift has occurred in some Bisu speech communities, this has not influenced the general continuous use of the Bisu language. The data shows that the Bisu language is still the norm being used for home and internal communications in some Bisu speech communities. As Fase states, “The use of the minority language will not disappear unless the norms for language use within the group are changed” (Fase 1992: 7).
2. **Positive attitude towards the Bisu language:** Although there is some individual variation, most respondents value their ethnic language. This is manifested by the analysis regarding attitudes towards Bisu (see Chapter 5). It is encouraging to see that even in the Weak Villages where most Bisu people have shifted to another language, most respondents still hold positive attitudes towards the Bisu language.
3. **Language policies in China and Thailand:** Both the Chinese and, to a lesser degree, the Thai governments encourage the development of minority languages. This is manifested by the statements regarding the protection of minority languages which have been recorded in the Chinese Constitution (Article 4), and the Thai government’s growing awareness of ethnic diversity (Person 2000: 27).
4. **Bisu language development:** Bisu has aroused a good deal of interest in enhancing its development. Several books and articles related to Bisu have been

published and two hundred small books written in the Thai based Bisu orthography have been published (Person 1999). The continuous training of Bisu teachers and forthcoming research work regarding the Bisu language will help the Bisu language keep fresh and alive in the ocean of other languages.

6.6 Evaluation of the questionnaires

The conclusions above are drawn based on the data which was gathered through the orally administered questionnaires. It is worthwhile to evaluate the questionnaires, especially the individual questionnaires being used in this study.

It was valuable to have the community questionnaire so that demographic information about the villages could be gathered and compared. Given that this profile was only administered to the village head, the evaluation of the questionnaires is focused on the individual questionnaire. Generally, the individual questionnaire succeeded in eliciting the desired information, but there were still some points which need to be improved, as described below:

Points which need to be added: The use of the Bisu language in the home domain included communication with father, mother, grandparents, spouse and children, but communication with siblings was not included. As the key domain to analyze the use of Bisu, the home domain should also include communication with siblings.

In addition, in the eleven statements about the Bisu language (Questions 62 through 72), which contained six positive statements and five negative statements, another negative statement could have been added in order to achieve more balance.

Redundant questions: Some questions may be redundant. For instance, Q90 "Do you want to have a Bisu literacy program carried out in the village?" and Q91 "If someone was going to teach you how to read and write Bisu in your village, would you go?" Each of these two questions aimed to elicit whether the

respondents would welcome a Bisu literacy program. They could have been combined into one question.

Questions that measure more than one concept: Some questions are related to both language use and language attitudes. The division between language use and language attitudes is ambiguous. For example, Q44 “Do you think young Bisu people speak as well as the old?” and Q45 “How do you feel about marrying a non-Bisu person?” were both put into the language use profile, although they could have been put into the language attitude profile.

Abstract questions: Some questions were a little bit too abstract for the audience to respond. For example, Q53 “In your opinion, what is the best language?” There is no specific standard for the respondents to judge the “best” language, it might be better to narrow down the question so that it would be easier for the respondents to answer.

Lastly, the individual questionnaire is a little bit too long; it took each respondent about half an hour to answer the 104 questions. More work is required to reduce the questions so that the respondents will not lose interest.

6.7 Implications of the study

6.7.1 Significance of the study

This study provides the current language use patterns and language attitudes among Bisu speakers in China and Thailand. The results will benefit those who plan to develop programs for Bisu people in the future.

This study shows that most Bisu people value their language and it would be worthwhile to carry out Bisu literacy programs, especially among the respondents of the two Strong Villages in China. Since Bisu is a minority language, people value its integrative function more than its instrumental function; thus, it might be better to have some literacy books specifically emphasizing Bisu identity.

This study is closely related to the maintenance and vitality of the Bisu language in the foreseeable future. It should be noted that the maintenance of the Bisu language is an urgent and long term project. More social attention should be given to the development of Bisu.

6.7.2 Suggestions for future study

Language attitudes in this study were assessed by applying a direct method, namely a questionnaire. An indirect matched-guise method could be applied in future attitudinal studies.

The school domain in this study was excluded in the data discussion because it does not reflect current usage of the Bisu language. A future investigation among current student respondents could be carried out in order to understand usage in the school domain.

In closing this study, it should be noted that Bisu, needs to be developed sooner rather than later. Although it will not disappear within the next few generations, it has shifted to other languages in some places. It is an urgent task to protect and develop the Bisu language, for, as one Bisu poet said, "If we do not keep speaking Bisu, who will?" (Person 2002).