CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This chapter presents a brief description of the theoretical basis for the methods used to answer the research questions in this study. The methods fall into four categories, viz. lexical comparison; phonological comparison; sociolinguistics and literacy. These will be described in turn in the following sections.

3.1 Lexical Comparison

3.1.1 Wordlists

Wordlists are common instruments for data collection. The composition of the wordlist has a major impact on the analysis. Since the amount of data that can be collected in survey situations is often very limited, the choice of words on the wordlist is significant. Swadesh (1955) proposed a list of 100 words representing 'core vocabulary' that should be relevant for all languages. Mann (2004) compared various wordlists that have been used in Southeast Asia including universal lists such as that of Swadesh (1955) and lists that claim to be culturally relevant to the language families of either the wider Asian region or Mainland Southeast Asia in particular. The total number of items on all of the lists amounted to 511. By combining 'similar' wordlists to avoid biasing the results Mann essentially counted how many lists contained each individual item to arrive at a ranking of the 511 items. The items ranked highest were thus those items that are contained in several of the different wordlists. Mann proposed that the higher-ranked items be given priority when comparing languages of the region.

Woranut (1978) devised a wordlist organised in sections related to phonological features of Tai languages expressed in terms of Standard Thai. The sections are given in Table 11.

Ref	Phonological Feature
1	tones
2	initial consonants
3	final consonants
4	vowels
5	Standard Thai ร [r]
6	consonant clusters
7	Standard Thai ย [j] and ญ [j]
8	Standard Thai diphthong เ◌ือ [ɯa]
9	Standard Thai triphthong เ◌ือย [ɯaj]
10	Standard Thai triphthong เ◌ียว [iaw]
11	Standard Thai triphthong อวย [uaj]
12	Standard Thai ท [t^h]
13	Standard Thai ช [$tɕ^h$]
14	Standard Thai ค [k^h]

Table 11 Phonological features used by Woranut (1978)

The approach of targeting specific phonological features of Tai languages has the advantage of being very systematic. The number and choice of words in each section of this particular wordlist however have some shortcomings for use in a field situation where the language of elicitation is not Standard Thai.

Milliken and Milliken (n.d.) devised a list for use with the Tai languages of China. They also provide a list of notes clarifying the sense of a particular item to ensure greater consistency in elicitation in a field situation. For example, they constrain the English gloss 'spit' to refer to spitting out a watermelon seed. Another feature of their wordlist is that the items are organised by semantic domain to enable the LRP to make natural associations between words that occur together and hence improve the accuracy of the information given by the LRP.

Gedney (1972) provided a checklist of words for establishing the tonal system for any Tai language as mentioned in Section 2.2.3.

M.R. Kalaya et al. (1999) provide lists of words illustrating contrasts for the phonemes of Standard Thai. Although their list was not designed for cross-linguistic comparison, it nevertheless serves as a useful reference.

3.1.2 Lexicostatistics

In general, the term 'lexicostatistics' refers to the use of quantitative techniques in the comparison of lists of words from two or more speech varieties. Lexicostatistics is often equated with glottochronology whose aim is to estimate the date of divergence of two related speech varieties assumed to derive from a common ancestor. This thesis however follows Busenitz and Martens (1979:11) in using the term 'lexicostatistics' in the broader sense of comparing lexical items with no attempt made to estimate the time depth of divergence of the speech varieties being compared. The main purpose is to provide a measure of the closeness of two speech varieties by comparing a set of common vocabulary items from the two speech varieties. The greater the percentage of lexical items that are 'similar', the closer the two speech varieties are considered to be. Fox (1995:279-291) gives a good summary of the method and the debate surrounding its validity. Romaine (1994:5) described ranges for interpreting lexical similarity percentages as shown in Table 12 remarking that they were popular with those who use lexicostatistics.

Percentage range	Interpretation
Between 81% and 100%	Varieties both belong to the same language
Between 21% and 80%	Varieties both belong to the same language family
Between 0% and 20%	Varieties are from different language families

Table 12 Guidelines for interpreting lexical similarity percentages (Romaine 1994:5)

Such ranges are however rather arbitrary and Joseph Grimes (1995:8) emphasises that lexical similarity scores on their own provide insufficient evidence upon which to base practical decisions about the priority of individual language development projects.

> Lexical similarity figures should never be treated as anything more than a crude, unreliable approximation to what a survey needs to

> find out. The fact that the numbers are easy to calculate is not enough to commend them. (Joseph Grimes 1995:8)

One reason for the deficiency of lexical similarity scores in this context is that there is no guaranteed relationship between them and intelligibility for any given pair of speech varieties (Joseph Grimes 1988; Barbara Grimes 1988.) Notwithstanding this deficiency, Joseph Grimes (1988:33) still identifies a role for lexical similarity scores in the process of identifying situations where there is a need for a language development project. The role is to provide an initial indication of speech varieties that are sufficiently different to require separate language development programs. Thus speech varieties showing lexical similarity of less than 60% are assumed to need separate language development programs whereas languages with at least 61% lexical similarity should be further investigated by intelligibility testing.

Simons (1977b) lists seven potential sources of error in the computation of lexical similarity percentages. The consequence of the potential for errors from various sources is that the lexical similarity percentage is a random variable with an assumed normal distribution. Simons therefore uses standard statistical methodology to deduce tables of significance for wordlists comprising various numbers of words. He further proposes a method of adjusting the level of significance of a difference between two similarity percentages to allow for the reliability of the data. At one end of the reliability spectrum lies data resulting from years of fieldwork in a particular language group and at the other end of the spectrum lies data that was collected in a one hour monolingual elicitation session on a survey fieldtrip.

Having computed lexical similarity percentages for all pairs of language varieties these are usually displayed in the form of a matrix as shown in Figure 38 for four hypothetical speech varieties V_1, V_2, V_3, V_4.

V_1	100			
V_2	59	100		
V_3	74	62	100	
V_4	71	58	80	100
	V_1	**V_2**	**V_3**	**V_4**

Figure 38 Lexical similarity matrix for speech varieties V_1, V_2, V_3, V_4

Identifying patterns from such a matrix becomes increasingly difficult as the number of varieties increases so branching diagrams[23] (or *dendograms*) are often used to visualise the data. Joseph Grimes (1995:69-78) describes various methods that can be used to create dendograms from a similarity matrix. The most commonly used by linguists is the Average Link Method also known as the Unweighted Pair-Group Method using Arithmetic Average (UPGMA). This thesis uses the PHYLIP computer software package to create the dendogram structures from the similarity matrix and then the TREEVIEW software (Page 1996) to draw the dendograms. The TREEVIEW software offers several ways of displaying tree structures. Of particular use in this work will be the phenogram – the term given to dendogram in which items are linked by estimates of overall similarity. McInerney et al. (n.d.) give good descriptions of various terms and techniques used in the subject area of phylogenetics, which they define as the study of relationships between items in a classification system.

A key feature of lexicostatistics is that the researcher seeks to compare words with the same contemporary meaning in each of the speech varieties under investigation.

> If English and French, or English and German were compared, for example, the French and German equivalents of English *head* would be *tête* and *Kopf* rather than *chef* and *Haupt*, since although the latter two words are cognate with *head* they are not the usual words for this concept, but are semantically and/or stylistically more restricted. (Fox 1995:282-3)

[23] The term ‘ branching diagram’ is preferred to ‘tree diagram’ because ‘tree’ has connotations of a genetic relationship between the items being classified but lexicostatistics only shows similarity which may be due to genetic relationship, borrowing and/or parallel drift.

Care must therefore be taken to try to ensure that one is comparing equivalent terms especially if more than one language is used in the elicitation of the wordlists in different speech varieties. Matisoff (1978) highlights this issue in his description of semantic shift in Tibeto-Burman languages. Another area where great care must be taken is when two or more words exist for the same concept. Rensch (1992:13) lists various reasons why different words might be given by speakers of two particular speech varieties even though similar words might exist and be in common use. These reasons include a more generic word being given as opposed to a more specific word and the situation when there are two words that are synonyms. Rensch and his colleagues found that for these and other reasons between five and ten percent of the words on their lists would be unnecessarily classified as dissimilar (Rensch 1992:14). A further complication is presented by languages such as Standard Thai which has several stylistic registers that are differentiated lexically. Smalley (1994:48-50) describes four stylistic registers (he refers to them as categories along the dimension of social value) namely elegant, simple, slang and vulgar. These are illustrated for the verb 'eat' in Table 13 (reproduced from Smalley 1994:48). The final two columns of the table show another feature of Standard Thai, namely what Smalley refers to as the 'sacred range' of the language. This refers to the collection of vocabulary and grammatical norms that are used when speaking about royalty or Buddhist monks.

Social Value	**Ordinary**	**Sacred (priests)**	**Sacred (kings)**
Elegant	bɔː^{1}ri^{4}p^{h}oːk^{3}, rap^{4}pra^{2}t^{h}aːn^{1}, t^{h}aːn^{1}	kra^{2}t^{h}am^{1}p^{h}at^{4}ta^{2}kit^{2}	sa^{2}wɤ̌ːj^{5}
Simple	kin^{1}	c^{h}an^{5}	rap^{4}pra^{2}t^{h}aːn^{1}
Slang	ciaʔ^{4}, faːt^{3}, lɔː^{3}		
Vulgar	yat^{4}, dɛːk^{2}		

Table 13 Standard Thai words[24] for 'eat' (Smalley 1994:48)

Words used in the different registers often have different sources, as explained by Smalley (1994:49).

> The simple variety in the dimension of social value is the variety for everyday situations. Most of its vocabulary is descended from the ancient Tai parent language called Proto-Tai. Elegant terms, used in more specialized circumstances, tend to be built on roots taken from the three classical sources of borrowed words in Standard Thai: Khmer, Pali and Sanskrit.

Having discussed how the sets of words to be compared are established, there remains the exact method of determining whether or not two forms are to be considered lexically similar. Simons (1977a) emphasises the importance of perspective and purpose in comparing wordlists: if the purpose is to determine genetic relationships between languages, then the researcher will have a diachronic perspective whereas if the primary purpose is to investigate the extent to which two communities can communicate with each other then the researcher will have a synchronic perspective. The perspective of the researcher impacts various aspects of the work including the method of determining whether or not two words can be considered lexically similar. Simons (1977a) used the terms *diachronic lexicostatistics* and *synchronic lexicostatistics* to make explicit the role of the researcher's perspective in the computations of lexical similarity percentages.

Adopting a diachronic perspective involves use of the comparative method. The comparative method seeks to determine genetic relationships between speech varieties by establishing regular sound correspondences between the various speech varieties under investigation. Words that conform to these regular sound correspondences are considered to be cognate, that is, they can plausibly be argued to derive from the same ancestral root form. In general terms the greater the length of time since two speech forms diverged from their common source, the greater the scope for differences between the speech varieties to develop. In diachronic lexicostatistics, two words are considered lexically similar if they are cognate. Thus depending on the speech varieties concerned, words can be

[24] Words are transcribed phonemically using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The tonemes and their phonetic descriptions are as follows /1/: [33] mid; /2/: [21] low; /3/: [42] falling; /4/: [45] high; /5/: [24] rising (Noss 1964 :18-20; M.R. Kalaya et al. 1999:149).

lexically similar but contemporary speakers of those speech varieties would not be able to understand each other.

A researcher who adopts a synchronic perspective is much more concerned with the potential of speakers of the speech varieties concerned to communicate with each other. Words are considered to be lexically similar on the basis of phonetic similarity. This can be done with various degrees of rigour. Blair (1990:31-33) described a method for comparing two words phone by phone. Each phone pair is classified into one of three categories – category one at one end of the spectrum being for identical or near identical phones and category three at the other end being for phone pairs that are not phonetically similar. Mann (2001) cited in Apiradee (2007:37) contextualised Blair's category definitions to the Southeast Asia context as shown in Table 14.

Category One
a. Exact consonant matches
b. Vowels or diphthongs differing by 1 or fewer features
c. Phonetically similar consonants in 3 or more word pairs
d. A deletion in 3 or more word pairs

Category Two
a. Phonetically similar consonants in less than 3 word pairs
b. Vowels differing by 2 or more features

Category Three
a. Non phonetically similar consonants
b. A correspondence with nothing in less than 3 word pairs

Ignore
a. A regularly occurring epenthesis

Table 14 Criteria for lexical similarity (Mann 2001 cited in Apiradee 2007:37)

The combination of the number of phones and the categories of the various phone pairs determines whether or not the words are considered lexically similar. Table 15 lays out the limits for lexical similarity. For words with two phones, both phone pairs must lie in Category one. Words with three phones will be considered lexically similar if two phone pairs lie in Category one and one pair lies in Category two. However, words with three phones are also considered lexically similar if all three phone pairs lie in Category one. Thus the table gives the weakest case that is still deemed acceptable.

Word Length	Category One	Category Two	Category Three
2	2	0	0
3	2	1	0
4	2	1	1
5	3	1	1
6	3	2	1
7	4	2	1
8	4	2	2
9	5	2	2
10	5	3	2
11	6	3	2
12	6	3	3

Table 15 Word length and lexical similarity (Blair 1990:32)

The result of applying a Blair-type method is a classification of each word pair as lexically similar or not. Sanders (1977) describes alternative schemes which allow for degrees of lexical similarity. Such schemes are only appropriate in the context of a synchronic perspective. Sanders also gives a brief summary of different approaches handling multiple entries for a single concept.

3.2 Phonological Comparison

3.2.1 Consonant and vowel inventories

Comparison of the phonological segments of two speech varieties provides an indication of the degree of relatedness of those varieties. The comparison can be done informally or via various quantitative methods. Simons (1977c:155) defines *phonostatistics* as 'any analytical technique which seeks to quantify the phonological differences between speech groups.' He describes 12 phonostatistic methods and compares their various strengths and weaknesses as well as championing their advantages over lexicostatistic methods. An alternative approach is demonstrated by Duong (2003). He first reconstructed the proto form of the varieties he was studying. He then used a quantitative method based on comparing the phonological innovations of various varieties from the proto form. This thesis will use informal, i.e. non-quantitative, comparison of the consonant and vowel inventories of the various speech varieties under investigation.

3.2.2 Tonal splits and mergers

Tonal patterns are a vital component in the comparison of Tai languages. Regarding the importance of tonal systems in comparative Tai research, Chamberlain (1979:122) asserts that

> …tone split patterns in Tai have been shown to be the most stable part of the phonology (Brown 1965, Chamberlain 1972), and they provide a wealth of evidence for determining genetic relationships.

Moreover patterns of tonal splits and mergers constitute three out of four criteria in the hierarchy of phonological features proposed by Chamberlain (1975:50) to classify SWT languages. Robinson (1994) also makes use of tone splits and mergers in further subdividing SWT 'P-Group' languages[25]. As described in Section 2.2.3 Gedney's tone box framework provides the basis for the description of the tone system of any particular Tai speech variety and hence facilitates the comparison of different speech varieties. Gedney (1972:423) describes their importance as follows:

> Indeed the most useful criterion for dialect boundaries within the Tai-speaking area is perhaps that of tonal systems; in travelling from place to place…one may consider that one has crossed a dialect boundary if he finds an increase or decrease in the number of tones in the system, or if he finds that a list of morphemes which in the previously studied dialect agreed in tone is now distributed among two or more different tones. Or conversely, that a previously noted tonal distinction is now lost, with most or all of the morphemes previously noted as showing a tonal distinction now merging into a single list having the same tone.

3.3 Sociolinguistics

In his discussion of the nature of sociolinguistics, Wardhaugh (2002:11) concludes that 'sociolinguistics, whatever it is, is about asking important questions concerning the relationship of language to society.' Many of the specific research questions under investigation in this thesis come under this general heading of

[25] See Section 1.1.1 for more details on SWT P-group languages.

sociolinguistics. The following subsections describe specific sociolinguistic issues and methods for studying those issues. Section 3.3.1 describes bilingualism since proficiency in both regional and national languages will be investigated – neither of which are expected to be spoken as mother tongue by the target population. Bilingual situations give rise to choices regarding which language is used in a particular social context and so Section 3.3.2 describes Language Choice. Section 3.3.3 describes Language Vitality since one of the main goals of the present study is to investigate Khuen Language Vitality. Closely related to vitality is the issue of Language Attitudes, as described in Section 3.3.4.

3.3.1 Bilingualism

Clyne (1997:301) explains that while there are probably more bilinguals in the world than monolinguals, there are not perceived to be many people who use more than two languages habitually. The term *bilingualism* is therefore also used to cover multilingual situations where individuals have some competence in three or more languages. Spolsky (1998:45) defines a bilingual person as 'a person who has some functional ability in a second language'. Clyne (1997:301) notes that such a definition is typical of more recent research in that there is no requirement that the person have equal competence in the two languages.

Blair (1990:51) observes that bilingualism is not uniformly distributed throughout a community. Researchers should therefore attempt to describe the distribution of bilingualism rather than characterising the whole community as being bilingual. This involves identifying one or more social factors that can explain the variation in bilingual ability. Blair (1990:54-64) discusses various factors including age, gender, education, occupation, frequency of contact with the second language that have been known to correlate with bilingualism. These factors should be considered in any survey aiming to investigate bilingualism in a community.

Blair (1990:67-106) describes several methods of assessing the bilingual ability of an individual and lists advantages and disadvantages. Self-evaluation questionnaires consist of a series of questions asking each subject whether or not

they are able to perform a particular task using the speech variety of interest. The questions are usually asked in order of increasing difficulty, that is, the later in the sequence the question appears, the greater the command of the second language required to carry out the task described in the question.

3.3.2 Language choice

Fasold (1984:180) observes that the whole field of sociolinguistics is based upon the fact that there are choices involved in using language. *Code switching*, *code mixing* and *variation within the same language* are three kinds of language choice which are best thought of as a continuum rather than clearly separate discrete points (Fasold 1984:180-181). At the one extreme of the continuum, code switching involves a choice between two languages. For example a person who can speak two or more languages must choose which language to use in any given social situation. Code mixing involves the use of 'pieces' of one language – typically words or phrases – in a discourse primarily spoken in another language. At the other end of the continuum is variation within the same language. Pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar can all be varied and speakers make choices depending on the particular social setting. Although in principle an individual has a great deal of choice, depending on the particular situation the choice might be highly constrained (Edwards 1995:72).

The issue of language choice has been studied in different ways by researchers from different disciplines. Sociologists seek to explain language choice in terms of abstract social constructs; social psychologists are more concerned with the psychological processes that lead a particular individual to make certain choices in a particular environment. Anthropologists seek to identify 'the values of a sociocultural group and the cultural rules of behaviour that reveal those values' (Fasold 1984:192). One approach to studying language choice from a sociology point of view was proposed by Fishman (1964). Fishman proposed the concept of a *domain* – an institutionalised context in which one speech variety is more likely to be chosen than another. Domains are defined by various factors such as

location, topic and participants. If an individual is at home talking to another member of their family about an everyday topic then that individual could be said to be in their 'family' domain.

3.3.3 Language vitality

Language vitality refers to the ongoing use of a particular language by a community of speakers. Languages that continue to be in active use are thus said to be 'alive' in contrast with 'dead' languages, the speakers of which have either all died out or ceased to use the language (Wardhaugh 2002:37). Researchers of language vitality have specified three broad states, namely language maintenance, language shift and language death. Fasold (1984:213) defines language shift to be when 'a community gives up a language completely in favour of another one.' This obviously takes place over time and it is a process that might take generations to complete. The ultimate end of the process of language shift is language death. Language maintenance on the other hand is when a community collectively decides to continue using the language or languages it has traditionally used. Both language shift and language maintenance are therefore 'the long-term, collective results of language choice' (Fasold 1984:213). Landweer (2000:20) describes eight indicators of ethnolinguistic vitality that have been 'discovered, developed and documented in the Papua New Guinea context through the years of SIL's experience in nearly 300 speech communities.' These are listed in Table 16.

No.	Description of ethnolinguistic vitality indicator
1.	location and access of the speech community relative to urban communities or other population centers where people of mixed ethnolinguistic heritages congregate,
2.	number of domains within the society in which the language is used,
3.	the frequency and type of code switching behavior of speakers,
4.	whether or not there is a core of fluent speakers and how that core is impacted by the language behavior of immigrants,
5.	the network of social relations within the community,
6.	the kind and strength of both internal and external prestige of the group,
7.	the relative prestige of the language within the local repertoire of languages,
8.	and the economic base perceived as necessary within the language group.

Table 16 Ethnolinguistic vitality indicators (Landweer 2000:20)

Edwards (1997:34) emphasises the importance of the family domain in language maintenance.

> The home is perhaps the most important of all language domains – but it is immediately apparent that for this central domain to continue, there must usually exist other extra-domestic settings within which the language is necessary, or at least of considerable importance.

Edwards points out that different domains make unequal contributions to language maintenance. He differentiates between *domains of necessity* (such as home, school and the workplace) which typically relate to the central aspects of peoples' lives and domains in which participation is voluntary or sporadic (Edwards 1997:34).

When a speech community begins to use a new language in domains formerly reserved for the old one, it may be a sign that language shift is underway. If the community eventually allows the new language to dominate all domains then language death will result. Fasold (1984:240) observes that while bilingualism is a virtual prerequisite for language shift, many bilingual communities are perfectly stable.

3.3.4 Language attitudes

A person's attitude towards a particular speech variety can have a great impact on the effectiveness of that speech variety as a means of communication. Fasold (1984:149) describes a study by Cooper and Fishman (1974:16-17) which revealed a dramatic difference in response apparently attributable to the subjects' attitudes to the languages concerned. Baker (1992) examined components of language attitudes, in particular whether the orientation of a particular aspect is *instrumental* or *integrative*. An instrumental orientation is individualistic and reflects pragmatic, utilitarian motives. Examples of instrumental orientation are the perception that knowledge of a particular language will enhance business or employment opportunities or other means of self-advancement or support basic

security or survival (Baker 1992:32). An integrative orientation on the other hand is more interpersonal and social and linked with the need for affiliation. Examples of integrative orientation are the desire to be identified with a particular language group and their cultural activities (Baker 1992:32). Ji Hongli (2005) studied language attitudes to Bisu, a minority language in China. In particular she compared language attitudes in a group of villages where use of Bisu was strong with a group of villages where Bisu use was much weaker. She found that both integrative and instrumental attitudes towards Bisu were much more positive in the villages where Bisu language use was strong (Ji Hongli 2005:89-99).

While the research in this thesis was not designed to formally measure integrative and instrumental orientations, these categories will be used where they provide insight to the responses to questions relating to language attitudes.

Any study of language attitudes must adopt a philosophical stance as to the nature of attitudes. Fasold (1984:147) describes two competing theories. The *mentalist* theory holds that attitudes are internal and therefore unobservable whereas according to the *behaviourist* theory attitudes are to be found simply in the responses people make to social situations. Adopting a behaviourist stance makes data collection easy but the observed response to one particular social situation does not permit one to make inferences concerning any other situation. For this reason most research on language attitudes adopts a mentalist stance but since attitudes are not directly observable, 'a great deal of effort in language-attitude research has gone into devising ingenious experiments designed to reveal attitudes without making subjects overly conscious of the process' (Fasold 1984:147).

Fasold (1984:149-152) describes various methods of assessing language attitudes. A commonly used method is to administer a questionnaire. When using a questionnaire, a totally *direct* approach would ask subjects how they feel towards a particular speech variety. This is very simple to do but the responses are of questionable validity. Still using a questionnaire, it is possible to ask a series of questions that relate to language attitudes more indirectly. Blair (1990:113) gives such a list all of which require a 'Yes' or 'No' response. It is hoped that the

combined responses to these questions will provide a good indication of the subject's attitude to the speech variety of interest.

3.4 Literacy

There are many conceptualisations of literacy which can largely be attributed to the diversity of backgrounds and perspectives of those who have engaged in the debate. Walter (1996) summarises some of the main categories of literacy conceptualisations and points out that the debate as to what literacy actually is, is a relatively recent debate. In the traditional view, literacy was a learned cognitive skill enabling one to read and write. Such a view of literacy has come to be referred to as *autonomous literacy* (Street 1998). Gudschinsky's definition of literacy falls into this general category:

> That person is literate who, in a language that he speaks, can read and understand anything he would have understood if it had been spoken to him, and who can write, so that it can be read, anything that he can say. (Gudschinsky 1973:5)

Waters (1998:396) points out that Gudschinsky's definition also includes mention of the language of literacy ability – a key issue in the context of a minority language.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of conceptualisations of literacy is *ideological literacy* (Street 1985). Whereas autonomous literacy views literacy as a skill or set of skills to be acquired by an individual with no reference to the broader context in which the individual lives, ideological literacy views literacy as an integral part of a whole social system.

> Literacy is understood and used in myriad ways in the function of the social system. Literacy is a measure of social position, a metric of job eligibility, a tool for job performance, a device for exercising influence, and a medium for interpreting the world. (Walter 1996)

Other conceptualisations of literacy can be thought of as lying between the two extremes of autonomous literacy and ideological literacy. One of the most prominent conceptualisations of literacy in recent times is literacy as competence

in some particular context. This context might be the workplace or some more specific task – the phrase *computer literate* is now commonly used to describe someone who is adept at using a computer. In this view of literacy related to a particular context, the term *functional literacy* has been widely used. Bhola (1994:28-34) discusses many definitions of literacy and describes how what is referred to as functional literacy has changed over time. In one sense all literacy is functional: 'how can literacy not acquire a function?' (Bhola 1994:32). At first the meaning of the term 'functional literacy' was general, namely, the ability to function effectively in a particular cultural context. However, at a UNESCO conference in Tehran in 1965 the definition of functionality was changed to be more directly linked to economic functions (Bhola 1994:32). Community development issues such as agriculture, health and economic awareness are thus prominent in functional literacy programmes such as in Thailand (Sunthorn 1981:53-66). More recently however there has been a move away from this narrow economic understanding of literacy – literacy has other functions apart from earning more money and growing better crops (Waters 1998:397). This broadening of the conceptualisation is reflected in the following UNESCO definition of literacy.

> Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. (UNESCO 2004:13)

UNESCO (2007:4) emphasises the importance of language of literacy and points out that biliteracy is implicit in the above definition of literacy.

In this thesis the conceptualisation of literacy follows that used in the Lao National Literacy Survey (LNLS) (Lao People's Democratic Republic 2004) which tested people's skills in reading, writing and numeracy. The test questions were arranged in order of increasing difficulty, measured by which grade of the Lao education system (formal or non-formal) the question topic was taught at. The

questions generally concerned areas of everyday life such as reading a bus timetable and writing one's address or a short letter. Three different levels of literacy were defined in terms of a subject's performance on the tests. Each test had a maximum score of 30 points. The levels are defined in Table 17.

Level	**Definition**
Basic	if a person gets a score of **at least 8 in every test**, then that person is deemed as having 'basic literacy skills'.
Functional	if a person gets a score of **at least 14 in every test**, then that person is deemed as having 'functional literacy skills'.
Sustained functional	if a person gets a score of **at least 22 in every test**, then that person is deemed as having 'sustained functional literacy skills' (or sometimes mentioned as 'self-learning level'.)

Table 17 Definitions of literacy levels in LNLS (Lao People's Democratic Republic 2004:51)

Having outlined the broad theoretical framework for the present study, the following chapter describes the design of the first of the two surveys conducted to collect information to answer the research questions of interest.