A Comparative Analysis of the use of First-Person Pronouns in Chinese and Thai

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ABSTRACT

In modern Chinese, the use of the first-person pronouns has gone through a process from complex to simple, and finally mainly uses "我". However, although the first-person pronouns in Thai have also undergone historical development, they are diversified in forms and complicated in use. Different words are often used according to the differences of the speakers' age, social status, gender and so on. From the perspective of morphology, singular and plural, and grammatical comparison, this paper takes the first-person pronouns as the discussion object, aiming to summarize and compare the similarities and differences of first-person pronouns between Chinese and Thai. Such different use of person pronouns has certain theoretical significance and reference value for cross-cultural language communication.

KEYWORDS
grammar; person pronouns; chinese-thai

INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool for human to communicate with each other and a unique way of communication. 叶蜚声，徐通锵（2010）No matter what language people use, they want to establish good interpersonal communication. Language and culture are interdependent and influence each other. Different languages have different cultures. Due to the differences in language and culture, it is not easy for people with different language backgrounds to understand each other, and communication between different cultures often encounters difficulties. Cultural exchanges may have various ways and means, but there is one thing that can't be avoid, that is how to call themselves (including speakers and addressees), namely the first person. Choosing the appropriate person according to the context of the speakers and the relationship between the speakers and the addressees is a key to deal with cultural blending. *Modern Chinese* pointed out: Chinese and Thai belong to sino-tibetan language. Chinese and Thai are inseparable from each other in terms of origin and cultural integration. In Chinese and Thai communication, the first-person pronoun is an important choice of appellation, which can have a variety of different strategies of appellation.

Compared with Chinese first-person pronouns, Thai has more kinds of first-person pronouns and their usage is more complicated.

Person pronouns are an important part of cross-cultural language teaching. For the ethnic groups of China and Thailand, although the languages are different, there are still some identities and similarities in the use of the first-person pronouns. The identity mainly refers to the grammatical function and use occasions. For example, "我" (ฉันchan^R , ผมphohm^R and so on) can be the subject or the object. While"老子" (กูguu^M) is used as a non-polite and informal term on special occasions. In addition to these similarities, there are many differences between Chinese and Thai. Some terms are unique to Thai. For example, Thai uses different person pronouns according to gender and the relationship between the speaker and the listener, which does not exist in Chinese. Therefore, when teaching this part, the similarities and differences between the two are important teaching contents, especially the differences. The use of person pronouns can be considered from the relationship between language and culture. It can be seen that there are a large number of person pronouns in Thai. In addition to the obvious relationship between superiority and inferiority, closeness and distance, elder and younger, superiors and subordinates, there are also features in morphology, singular and plural, and grammatical function. Person pronouns in Thai have honorific term, modest term, even term, common term, derogatory term, etc. In *Language and Culture*, Luo Changpei mentioned that choosing appropriate language according to the context of the speaker and the relationship between the speaker and the addressee is a key to handle cultural blending well. 罗常培（2017）Most Indo-European languages, represented by English, embody grammatical category through conjugation and other grammatical forms. While Chinese and Thai, like other Chinese-Tibetan languages, generally embody the grammatical category through certain grammatical markers due to the lack of morphological changes in a strict sense. This can explain language rules and rules of use in terms of social factors, which corresponds to the structure of each language that William Labov(1971) analyzed, aiming to understand how systems and rules are used. Language learning must consider both language structure and social structure. If just looking at a certain aspect of the study, the understanding of language is incomplete. Therefore, the author of this paper uses this concept to compare first-person pronouns in Chinese and Thai, summarize and compare the similarities and differences between first-person pronouns in Chinese and Thai. This paper will compare and analyze the connections and differences between first-person pronouns in Chinese and Thai in terms of morphology, singular and plural, and grammar. The purpose is to draw people's attention to some social phenomena so as to make the use of language civilized and correct.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is qualitative. The first-person pronouns in Chinese and Thai are studied by Content Analysis and comparison. The literature and research are as follows:

1. Study the literature and research related to the use of person pronouns in Chinese and Thai. It is dominated by *2011: Thai Dictionary of the Royal Society of Thailand*, *2004: Thai Mathihong Dictionary* and *Editions 1-3, 2007: Dictionary of New Thai Words, The Contemporary Chinese dictionary, 7th edition.*

2. According to Amara,P (2013) theory of sociolinguistics (gender, terminology, age and the relationship between speaker, listener and respondent), analyze and compare the similarities and differences of the first-person pronouns in Chinese and Thai.

3. Comparison of differences in the usage of person pronouns between Chinese and Thai.

4. Makes a comparative analysis of the use of person pronouns according to theory of sociolinguistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
1. First-person pronouns in Chinese

黄伯荣，廖序东（Modern Chinese，1997） The word "person" comes from the Greek translation of "dramatic character", which is called "persona" in Latin. The main character in a play is in the first person; the secondary character is in the second person; the rest of the characters are in the third person. In modern Chinese, Chinese person pronouns include two parts: the three-person pronouns referring to the first, second and third person and the topic pronoun (referring to the central, non-central and universal topic pronoun). The three-person pronouns expressed the objective relationship among people in conversation. In conversation, a three person relationship is formed based on the speakers. The first and second person indicate that the two sides of the conversation are opposite, and the two sides of the conversation are opposite to the third person.

In pre-Qin Chinese, the first and second person pronouns have been recorded, while the third person pronouns have not been produced. The person pronouns at that time can be divided into two groups according to the description of Mr. Xing Gongwan's *Treatment of Different Reference Words in the Analects* :

Treatment of Reference Words of "汝我" :吾、我、予——女、尔、子、儿

Treatment of Reference Words of "人己"：人——己、自

The first-person pronouns of ancient Chinese can be found in the literature, such as "我", "吾", "余(予)" and "朕". Among them, "我", "吾" and "朕"appeared first. In the inscriptions on bones of Yin and Shang Dynasties, only these three first-person pronouns were used. These three words were widely used in early ancient documents, such as oracle bone script, inscriptions on ancient bronze objects, *the Book of Shang*, *Court Hymn* and *Eulogy* in *the Book of Songs*. After the Spring and Autumn period, the words "余"and "朕" began to shrink. Later, "身" appeared as the first-person pronoun in the Qin and Han Dynasties, but it was rarely used. The use cases gradually increased in the Southern and Northern Dynasties, but it did not continue to develop like "我". By the late Southern and Northern Dynasties, the use of "身" as a pronoun had declined, and at the latest, the first person pronoun in actual spoken Chinese had been completely unified as "我" in Tang and Five Dynasties. The Chinese first-person pronoun system has changed greatly during the late Tang and Five Dynasties. Some old grammatical forms had gradually weakened, such as "余"，"吾"，"尔"，"儿" and so on. While the new grammatical form "我" has developed

rapidly and occupied a dominant position in the whole system. This change has laid a solid foundation for the establishment of the first-person pronoun system in modern Chinese.

The first-person pronouns preserved in modern Chinese are mainly "我（我们）", "咱（咱们）". In *Modern Chinese* by Huang Borong and Liao Xudong, person pronouns can be divided into three-person pronouns and non-three-person pronouns. 黄伯荣 (1997)The three-person pronoun can be divided into the first, second and third person. The first-person refers to the speaker's side. The book focuses on the difference between the use of "我们" and "咱们". "咱们" includes both the speaker and the listener, which is called inclusive usage and is used in spoken Chinese. When "我们" and "咱们" appear on the same occasion, "我们" only includes the speaker and excludes the listener, which is called exclusive usage. For example, "我们" is the exclusion form in"我们走了，咱们再见吧", and "咱们" is the inclusion form. When the word "我们" is used only in conversation, it can be used in both exclusive and inclusive forms. For example:

(1)．我们都是中国人，我们热爱自己的祖国。（inclusive）

(2)．你放心走吧，过几天我们一定去看你。（exclusive）

Sometimes "我们" actually means "我". For example, "我们认为，可以争论的并不是语法事实，而是语法体系。" This is a polite and modest way of saying.

From the whole development history of Chinese first-person pronouns, it can be seen that the form of first-person pronouns has undergone many changes. The internal system of Chinese first-person pronouns is an open system which is constantly updated and gradually stable.

2. First-person pronouns in Thai

In 1893, the earliest inscriptions were found by Sukhothai, the ancient capital site of Thailand--the Ram khamhaeng inscriptions during Sukhothai Dynasty, which showed the system of ancient Thai writing and ancient documents. Since the inscriptions were produced in the 13th century, 1826 by Buddhist calendar (1283 by Gregorian calendar), it was very important for the study of Thai at that time. Although the letters of the Ram khamhaeng inscription look very different from the later letters, it is the same system as the modern Thai, but the structure of the words has changed. The writing system is still divided into three parts: vowels, consonants and tones. The letters of the vowels and consonants in the inscription show the shape of the initial stage. The modern Thai script developed on the basis of inheriting the ancient Thai script. The oldest surviving written inscriptions show that the dominant first-person pronoun used at the time were กูguu[M] and เราrao[M] . Among them, กู guu[M] refers to the singular "I", and เราrao[M] refers to the plural "we". In modern Thai, เราrao[M] can be used in exclusions or inclusions, translated as "我们" (we).

Like Chinese, the first-person pronoun in Thai has also undergone a series of evolution. Different from Chinese first-person pronoun, the first-person pronoun in modern Thai still retains various forms, and the usage situation is much more complicated than that in modern

Chinese. When both the speaker and listener use the first-person pronoun, the speaker will choose to use different words because of their gender, age difference and status disparity. Next, the first-person pronouns in Thai are described in terms of male and female:

2.1 Male first-person pronouns

The main forms are as follows:

2.1.1 For male speakers, it is more common to omit the subject in the conversation between the two parties if the other side is lower in status, younger than the speaker and close to the speaker.

2.1.2 ผม(phohm^R) is the most used first-person pronoun. Male speakers are more likely to use ผม(phohm^R) when faced with someone of a certain status or who is older and less familiar to them. Especially they use more often to male than female.

2.1.3 Kinship terms are often used in male speakers and those with similar status, slightly younger than themselves and close relationships, especially for female speakers.

2.1.4 Nickname is commonly used among close friends. Especially among senior female interlocutors who are older, male speakers tend to use their own nicknames.

2.1.5 The word เรา(rao^M) itself can refer to the singular and plural of the first-person. In the singular case, this word is often used between people of similar status, age who are familiar and intimate to each other, especially if the other side is a woman.

2.1.6 The word กู(guu^M) sometimes translated as "老子我" in Chinese with dismissive, arrogant, and impolite emotional feeling, but in Thai it does not have a strong emotional feeling, nor is it polite or formal expression. While it is used mostly in calling themselves between men of roughly the same status and very close relations. This is especially used in calling oneself for men who are slightly younger than the speakers.

2.1.7 Job title like "teacher" and so on, very few Chinese people take their job title to call themselves, which is the difference between Chinese and Thai. This is often used when the addressee is much younger than the speaker and the two sides are close. It is commonly used when teachers speak to their students, often calling themselves ครู(khruu^M) "teacher", showing amity.

2.1.8 The word ฉัน(chan^R) was originally a typical female first-person pronoun, but men themselves are relatively young, or male speakers face very close female friends, or addressees who are slightly younger than themselves and have similar status, will also use ฉัน(chan^R) to call themselves.

2.2 Female first-person pronouns

2.2.1 Generally speaking, female speakers tend to omit calling themselves when facing female friends of similar status and age.

2.2.2 The word ดิฉัน(di^L chan^R) is relatively formal and is used to call oneself when the other side is not too familiar with, especially if the other side has a higher status or of the same age. When men and women talk to each other, women also use ดิฉัน(di^L chan^R) to call themselves.

2.2.3 The word เรา(rao^M) is mostly used in situations where both sides are in a close relationship, of equal status or where the listener is in a slightly lower status but must be about the similar age. In this case, the use of the word is not affected by gender.

2.2.4 The word หนู(nuu^R) is used by female speaker in the case that the status of the listener may be higher or lower than the speaker but the age is higher, and the relationship is relatively close.

2.2.5 The word ฉัน(chan^R) is used when the status of the listener is higher than the speaker but of the similar age and both of them are familiar with each other, especially in the face of women listener, the women speaker would use the word to call herself.

2.2.6 Kinship terms. In Thai, women often use kinship terms to call themselves when the other side is younger, of equal or lower status, regardless of whether both sides of the conversation are familiar with each other.

2.2.7 Nickname is commonly used among close friends. The usage of nickname is basically the same as in Chinese. The difference is that in Chinese, childhood name is used to address the other side. In Thai, women often use their nicknames when talking with people who are older or have a higher status than themselves.

2.2.8 The word นี่(nee^F) is used more often when the listener is in a distant relationship and is lower in status but younger than the speaker. It is used more often among women.

2.2.9 Women use job titles in the same way that men use them above.

2.2.10 The word กู(guu^M) must be used in conversation between people of the same sex, close friends of the same age whether male or female.

3. Comparison of Chinese and Thai first-person pronouns

3.1 Morphological Comparison of first-person pronouns in Chinese and Thai

The development history of first-person pronouns in Chinese has been described previously. Chinese first-person pronouns have been unified from "我", "吾", "余（予）", "朕" in ancient times to "我", "我们", "咱" and "咱们". First-person pronouns "我", "我们", "咱" and "咱们" in modern Chinese do not distinguish the gender of the speaker, but those are different in Thai. According to gender first-person pronouns in Thai can be divided into eight kinds in male: ผมphohm^R, กระผมgra^L phohm^R and so on, and ten kinds in female: ดิฉัน di^L chan^R , หนู nuu^R , นี่nee^F and so on.

The biggest difference in the first-person pronouns of Chinese and Thai is that the occupational name, kinship terms and diminutive names can be used as first-person pronouns, for example, when teachers talk to students, they often use ครูkhruu^M ("teacher") as first-person pronoun.

Example:

Teachers talk to students: ครูไม่เข้าใจเลย (khruu^M mai^F khao^F jai^M leeuy^M) 我一点都不懂。

("ครู khruu^M" can refer to himself, translated as the first-person pronoun "I")

Similarly, there are many words for kinship terms, such as: ตา(dtaa^M) grandfather, แม่ maae^F mother, พ่อ phaaw^F father, ลูกluuk^F sons and daughters, etc.

Example:

ลูกluuk^F（孩子）：แม่ ！ลูกหิวแล้ว (maae^F luuk^F hiu^R laaeo^H) 妈！孩子饿了。

แม่ maae^F（妈妈）：แม่กำลังทำอาหารอยู่ สักครู่นะลูก ! (maae^F gam^M lang^M tham^M aa^M haan^R yuu^L sak^L khruu^F na^H luuk^F) 妈妈正在做饭，等一下啊！

In the sentence, the child uses the word "ลูกluuk^F" as "I" when saying "I am hungry", and when the mother answers, the "I" in "妈妈正在做饭" also uses the word "แม่ maae^F". this kind of conversation is very common in Thai. According to the listener of the conversation and the kinship relationship between each other, the speaker chooses appropriate kinship title to call himself.

The use of nickname is also roughly similar to the above, mostly used between close and familiar friends, or between the younger generation and the elders.

Example:

สุรี（Suri）：พี่จะไปไหนน้ำไปด้วยได้ไหมคะ 姐姐要去哪里？楠可以一起去吗？

（phee^F ja^L bpai^M nai^R naam^H bpai^M duay^F gan^M dai^F mai^H kha^H)

มานี（Marney）：พี่จะไปตลาดได้ค่ะ ไปซิ 姐姐要去市场，可以的，走吧。

（phee^F ja^L bpai^M dtaL laat^L dai^F kha^H bpai^M si^H ）

When สุรี (Suri) asks for advice whether she can go together, she uses her nickname น้ำ (naam^H) "楠" to call herself. In the sentence: "楠可以一起去吗?", the "我" in this sentence is Suri's nickname "楠".

This linguistic phenomenon is rarely seen in modern Chinese except on special occasions, such as when a mother coax her baby to sleep, she often says "妈妈来了，宝宝不要哭!"; This is also used between lovers, women will use their nicknames to call themselves, but this situation is relatively rare.

3.2 The comparison of first-person pronouns in Chinese and Thai

The plural of the first-person pronoun "我" has been used in Chinese for a long time, and the use of "我" in ancient Chinese has reflected the changes in number. In the common language of Yin and Shang, "我" referred to the plural while "余" and "朕" referred to the singular. In the early Western Zhou Dynasty, the plural "我" was more common, and in the middle and late Western Zhou Dynasty, the singular "我" became more and more common. In the subsequent development, the singular "余" and "朕" were eventually replaced by the singular "我". In modern Chinese, the singular forms of the first-person pronouns such as "我" "咱" are directly combined with the endings of the plural "们", namely "我们" and "咱

们". 季羡林. 吕叔湘(2002) Thus it can be seen that the plural form of the first-person pronoun in modern Chinese is formed by the combination of the word "们", and its form is relatively simple and fixed.

The plural form of the first-person pronoun in Thai is a separate word "เรา rao^M". And this word, like the ancient Chinese "我" 廖宇夫(2008), having the function of referring to the plural and singular. The use of "เรา rao^M" is more flexible, such as:

First-person singular:

พรุ่งนี้เราจะไม่อยู่ (phroong^F nee^H rao^M ja^L mai^F yuu^L)明天我将不在。

First-person plural（Not including the addressee）:

พรุ่งนี้เราจะไม่อยู่ (phroong^F nee^H rao^M ja^L mai^F yuu^L) 明天我们将不在。

From the perspective of word formation, the singular form of first-person pronouns in Chinese and Thai is very different from its corresponding plural form. The conversion of singular and plural forms in modern Chinese is realized by bonding the word "们", while the singular and plural forms in Thai have completely different words. For example, as "我们", in contrast to the singular form of "ผม phohm^R" "ฉัน chan^R" "หนู nuu^R" and so on, "เรา rao^M" is a totally different word.

(3) Comparison of grammatical functions of first-person pronouns in Chinese and Thai

First-person pronouns in Chinese can generally act as subject, object, attributive and concurrent phrase in sentences, while those in Thai can also act as these components in sentences. Here are some examples to illustrate:

1. ผมเกิดวันที่ 1 เดือนมกราคม 裴晓睿(2001)（我生于一月一日）

（phohm^R geert^L wan^M thee^F neung^L deuuan^M mohk^H ga^L raa^M khohm^M)

（ผม phohm^R "我" is the subject, and the subject of the sentence in Chinese is also "我"）

2. ไม่ทราบว่าคุณมาหาน้องทำอะไร（不知道你找我做什么?）

（mai^F saap^F waa^F maa^M haa^R naawng^H tham^M a^L rai^M）

（น้อง naawng^H "妹妹或弟弟 younger sister or younger brother" is the object. In Thai, kinship appellation can be used as the first-person pronoun to call oneself, which is equivalent to "我" in Chinese, and "我" is served as the object in this sentence in Chinese.）

3. แม่ผมเป็นชาวนา（我妈妈是农民。）

（maae^F phohm^R bpen^M chaao^M naa^M)

（ผม phohm^R "我" is the attributive. "我" is served as the attributive in this sentence, modifying the subject "妈妈".

4. คุณแม่ให้หนูช่วยทำความสะอาด 妈妈让我帮忙打扫卫生。）

(khoonM maae^F haiF nuu^R chuay^F tham^M khwaam^M sa^L aat^L)

（ หนู nuu^R "我" is the concurrent phrase. It is still the same in Chinese. "我" is the object of the first predicate "让", and at the same time it is the subject of the latter sentence "我打扫卫生".

CONCLUSION

To sum up, both Chinese and Thai belong to the Sino-Tibetan languages. However, there is more difference than commonality between the two person pronouns in terms of appellation function and grammatical features. We can see that the first-person pronouns in modern Chinese are relatively simple, only "我(我们)，"咱(咱们)" with obvious characteristics of "allusion" (allusion refers to the discrimination of people according to their gender, appearance, age and so on). In Thai, there are many kinds of person pronouns. Different person pronouns are chosen according to the influence of context, age, status and other factors. Modern Chinese has imperfect modest appellation. The "identity" of the first-person pronouns in Thai is much greater than the "allusion", and there is a relatively perfect modest honorific system. The first-person pronouns in Thai have many appellation functions, such as modest appellation, honorific appellation, nickname, derogatory term and vulgo name. The selection of person pronouns must strictly follow the principle of potential position. The grammatical meaning of person pronouns in Thai is much richer than that in Chinese. There is a common trend in the development of Chinese and Thai person pronouns: the number of person pronouns is decreasing and the function of appellation is simplifying.

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