# THAI GENDER IDEOLOGY: A VIEW FROM REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL ACTORS IN CRIME NEWS HEADLINES

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## Abstract

*This study examines the linguistic structure used for uncovering gender ideologies through crime news headlines. It's based on the idea that languages represent reality and different linguistic choices indicate different points of view of reality. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1990,VanDijk 1995, Simpson 1993) is used in this study. The main objectives of the study are 1) to study the differences of representation between male and female social actors (Van Leeuwan 2008) in crime news headlines and 2) to study power relations, gender identities and the reproduction of patriarchal society through crime news headlines. Samples of 1,815 crime news headlines are analyzed in this study. The result shows that Thai crime news constructs gender identities based on gender ideology. Thai crime news headlines convey a variety of linguistic meanings which allow for varying forms of representation of social actors, including exclusion and inclusion of social actors. The exclusion of male social actors in headlines may be ideologically motivated by obscuring the responsibility of male actors for negative actions, whereas the exclusion of female social actors does not have the same effect because their referents can be inferred from the headline context. In addition, the inclusion of social actors varies according to the social actor's sex. Male actors are usually referred to using a functionalization form or an appraisement form, whereas female actors are usually referred to using an identification form. These representations reflect the role of masculinity and femininity among men and women in the society.*

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## Introduction

News is said to be the social construction of reality. Fowler (1991) explained that language in the news is not facts about the world, but, in a very general sense, "ideas," "beliefs," "values," and "ideology." What events are reported involves the news production process: selection, interpretation, and use of language to construct reality in newspapers. So, it is undeniable that news reports produce meaning that constructs an ideological representation of the social world. Fairclough (1990) added that mass media discourse, as well as newspaper reporting, is interesting because news is a cultural product that reproduces dominant cultural assumptions and plays a powerful role in enacting ideologies. Recent studies on media discourse in the field of critical discourse analysis have investigated how news reports, especially news headlines, construct ideological representations in the news coverage.

This is a study of how ideologies are embedded in the linguistic forms of news headlines. Headlines are a summary of the news story and express the most important information of the news story (Van Dijk, 1988). There are always different ways of representing the same event in headlines.

Differences in representation carry ideological distinctions (Fairclough 1990,Simpson 1993). The choice of words is important in providing readers with cues for interpreting events. Apart from readers' comprehension of the news, lexical items in the headlines have expressive value implying the writers' evaluation of events. Consequently, the selection of word-meanings can be regarded as reflections of ideologies.

In this study, Thai crime news headlines are analyzed in order to explore how news headlines construct ideology. In general, crime news reports any act of violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to someone. The forms of violence are associated with power, especially inequality in power between men and women. Therefore, gender ideology is repeatedly constructed through crime news headlines. To reveal gender ideology in Thailand, we examine representations of men and women in these headlines using Van Leeuwan's (2008) concept of social actors. In Van Leeuwan's view, social actors are not only represented as agents but also patients. The main objectives of the study are 1) to compare the forms of representation of social actors between "men" and "women," including agents and victims in crime news headlines and 2) to study power relations, gender identities and the reproduction of patriarchal society through Thai crime news headlines.

## Theoretical and analytical framework

This section will introduce the theoretical and analytical framework of analysis, including critical discourse analysis, representation of social actors, definition of news headlines, some concepts of gender ideology and gender identity, and the data of the analysis.

## Critical Discourse Analysis

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Critical Discourse Analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis sees language use in text and talk, discourse, as a form of social practice. It implies a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure; discourse constitutes and is constituted by social structure. CDA studies the way social power, dominance, and ideologies are reproduced in discourse. Richardson (2007) indicated that questions of power are central in critical discourse analysis, since power and ideologies may have an effect on each of the contextual levels of production, interpretation and consumption of discourse. Critical discourse analysis aims at uncovering the role of language in constructing social identities and ideology in discourse. (Fairclough 1990,Van Dijk 1995)

Fairclough (1990) proposed three dimensions of critical discourse analysis. The first stage, the description of the text, is the level of textual analysis; the second and third stages are the consideration of contextual analysis and the interpretation of the relation between linguistic structure and socio-cultural perspective in the text.

CDA draws on a wide variety of analytical tools for analyzing discourse. The major analytic framework used by CDA for analyzing texts is Systemic-Functional Grammar. Halliday (1985) regards language as a network of options from which language users make selections that are ideologically significant. Thus, meaning is generated from the choice made, or not made, by text procedures.

## Representation of social actors

The paper focuses on analyzing referential social actors including agents and victims in crime news headlines. The selection of word-meaning to refer to social actors connotes meaning and social values and the high frequency of wording indicates a key concept or particular preoccupation which gives certain meanings the producer of the texts intends to convey. (Fowler1991, Richardson 2007) An assumption of this paper is that the way that social actors are always referred to in crime news headlines can reflect gender identities regarding masculinity and femininity in society.

In defining the representation of social actors, I use the "sociosemantic" system network for the representation of social actors in discourse established by van Leeuwan (2008: 24). This refers to the way social actors can be represented both linguistics and sociological criteria. He explains that the socio-semantic system can solve the problem of the lack of bi-uniqueness. For example, Halliday (1985, cited in Van Leeuwen 2008: 24) explains that a clause likes "the report confirms…"does not require a human "sayer" in subject position.However, Van Leeuwen argues that "sayer" in such a clause implies that the socio-semantic "authority of utterances" can be found in the context of the official status. It may reflect ideological meaning because the writer chooses the representation form in order to obscure actor. Therefore, the choice of the representation social actor is based on the text and the writer's intention.

The representation of social actors can be excluded or included in the text. Excluded social actors in a text can be represented with two types of forms, suppression and backgrounding. Suppression is a form of reference which leaves no trace in the representation, excluding both the social actor and activity. For example, the sentence "In Japan similar *concerns are being expressed* about a mere trickle of Third World immigrants' tells us that "concerns are being expressed," but not who is expressing them. (Van Leeuwen 2008: 29) Backgrounding involves reference when the activity is included and a trace of the actor can be inferred. For example, in the sentence "To maintain this policy is hard," the social actors are excluded but included later in the text by adding "for local education authorities." (Van Leeuwen 2008: 29) Exclusion is important because it may be ideologically motivated by obscuring the responsibility of the actor.

When a social actor is included in the text, the choices of representation forms convey the imprint of social and value judgments. The meaning of each form implies social actors' identity and the function that they share with others in the social context. For example, the press represents men and women in different ways. Men are represented in the term "funtionalization form" such as "interviewer" while women are represented in the term "identification form" such as "his wife." It shows that the press constructs men and women in different social identities.

In Thai crime news headlines, social actors are represented using the two exclusion types of reference (suppression and backgrounding) and six inclusion types of reference.

**Exclusion**

1) Backgrounding: social actors are excluded but they are identified through the context.

2) Suppression: social actors are excluded from the text.

**Inclusion**

3) Functionalization: Actors are described in terms of what they do, that is, an occupation or role such as *nak-rong*/นักร้อง'a singer', *tam-ruat*/ตำรวจ'a police man', *khru*/ครู'a teacher.'

4) Identification: Actors are described in terms of what they are. Van Leeuwandistinguishes three types of identification:Classification, Relational identification and Physical identification.

   4.1) Classification concerns the ways a given society differentiates between classes of people by age, gender, class, race, religion, or sexual orientation such as *sao18*/สาว 18 'a 18 year old girl ,'*num-kan*/หนุ่มกาญ 'a young man who lives in Kanchanaburi province.'

   4.2) Relational identification refers to personal, kinship or work relations between actors such as *phi*/พี่ 'an elder brother or sister,' *pho*/พ่อ 'a father,'*phuean*/เพื่อน'a friend,' *faen*/แฟน'a lover,'*a-ri*/อริ 'a foe.'

   4.3) Physical identification represents actors by way of physical characteristics such as *sao-sai-diao*/สาวสายเดี่ยว 'a girl in a

sexyblouse,'*num-phi-kan*/หนุ่มพิการ'a crippled man.'

5) Appraisement: Actors are evaluated as good or bad by a distinguishing characteristic, such as *ai-khlang*/ไอ้คลั่ง 'a crazyman,' *tho-ra-phi*/ทรพี 'an ungrateful man,'*huen*/หื่น'a man who cannot control his sexual desire.'

6) Nomination: Actors are described in terms of their unique identity, such as their name.

7) Indetermination: Actors are described as unspecified or anonymous such as *ni-ra-nam*นิรนาม'an unknown man.'

8) Impersonalization: Actors can be impersonalized, described in other means, for instance, by concrete or abstract nouns whose meanings exclude the semantic feature "human." For example,

*phuen-yao*/ปืนยาว 'a rifle' Social actors are represented by means of reference to the instrument with which they carry out the activity.

*Uthenen*/อุเทน 'an institute's name' Social actors are represented by means of reference to the institute at which they study.

*taek-si*/แท็กซี่ 'a vehicle' A driver is represented by means of reference to his or her vehicle.

**Headlines**

This paper looks at how the discourse of Thai crime news headlines constructs gender ideology. Headlines are meant to

summarize the main news story and attract readers' attention. Moreover, they evoke readers' emotions through the choice of expression. They reflect the feelings, opinions and attitudes toward issues in the news (Conboy, 2007).

Newspaper headlines function as the title of the news story and show the most prominent and relevant information of the news discourse. They are used by the editors, who choose emotive vocabulary, as well as rhetorical devices, to make an impact on readers. Readers often read and recall only headlines which construct not only preferred meaning for the news text but also the most prominent ideological views of the text. In order to investigate gender ideology in Thai crime news discourse, crime news headlines are examined.

## Gender ideology and gender identities

The literature on language and identity distinguishes among the concepts of "sex," "gender" and "sexuality" as follows: while sex denotes the innate biological characteristics, gender concerns culturally and socially constructed understanding of masculinity and femininity and sexuality is a variable element in gender identities, denoting a sense of self-understanding and contributing to articulating one's place within hierarchies of power and status. (Jackson 1999, Cameron 2003)

In order to examine the gender identity revealed by news headlines, we focus on concepts of gender role, and gender ideology. Gender is an ideological structure that divides people into two classes between men and women, based on hierarchical relations of dominance and subordination (Lazar 2005: 7).

Gender roles are constructed through people's everyday experiences. Moreover, they are influenced by the cultural meaning of women's and men's habitual and differential participation in social practice. People are characterized by masculinity and femininity in the community. This reflects a gender ideological structure that gives privileges to men.

Masculinity is often associated with characteristics such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, dominance, strength, courage and control, while femininity is often associated with characteristics such as kindness, modesty and lower power. These characteristics result from a combination of biological, cultural and social influences, and relate to our understanding of power in society as a whole (Lazar 2005).

Gender ideology is hegemonic in that it seems acceptable in a society and such knowledge is taken for granted to mystify or obscure the inequality in power relations and the differentiation of gender roles. For example, traditional gender ideologies in Thailand focus on the role of men's and women's habits which vary according to time and place. Men are expected to be a key person for providing financial support to wife and children. Such activity provides men with opportunities to get out of the house. As a result, men occupy both the public and domestic domains. By contrast, women are expected to be good wives and good mothers who should be able to take care of their husbands and children; therefore women occupy only the domestic domain (Jackson 1999).

## Data

The data were collected from crime news in four popular daily newspapers in Thailand, *Thairath*, *Daily News*, *Khaosod* and *Komchadluek* from 2006 to 2007 and looked at those crime news headlines that involved interpersonal acts of violence.

The 1,815 Thai crime news headlines examined can be divided into 6 groups of data according to the agent and victim's sex, including 1) 866 (47.71%) examples of men-on-men violence, 2) 564 (31.07%) examples of men-on-women violence, 3) 55 (3.03%) examples of women-on-men violence, 4) 22 (1.21%) examples of women-on-women violence, 5) 227 (12.51%) cases of unidentified agents[3]against men violence and 6) 81(4.46%) cases of unidentified agents against women violence.

The scope of this research focuses on crime news in which the sex of the agent and victim is clearly referred to. As a result, only those headlines with identifiable male and female social actors are analyzed (data groups 1 to 4 discussed above).

## Representation of social actors between men and women in Thai crime news headlines

This section reports on the representation of male and female social actors in Thai crime news headlines. Which choice do the newspapers use to refer to agents and victims? The analyses reveals how men and women are described in news reporting, examining first representations of agents in Thai crime news headlines, followed by representations of victims in Thai crime news headlines.

## Representation of agents in Thai crime news headlines

This section presents the representation of agents according to the agent's sex and the victim's sex in order to examine how the agent and victim's sex affects the selection of the agent's representation.

### Representation of male agents in Thai crime news headlines

The result shown in Figure 1 is the comparison of male agents' representation in the cases of men-on-men violence and men-on-women violence. In men-on-men violence, the most frequent form of representation of male agents is backgrounding form (22.98%), followed by suppression form (21.13%), and functionalization form (20.55%), such as *khru*/ครู 'ateacher,' *pho-kha*/พ่อค้า 'a merchant,' while in men-on-women violence, the most frequent form of the male agent is appraisement form (28.37%)such as *ai-hot*/ ไอ้โหด 'a cruel man,' *num-huen*/หนุ่มหื่น 'a man who cannot control his sexual desire' followed by backgrounding form (21.28%) and functionalization form (19.50%), such as *tha-han*/ทหาร 'a soldier

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[3]The case of unidentified agent in crime news reports only victim's information and no information about agent, so there won't be any suppression in this analysis.
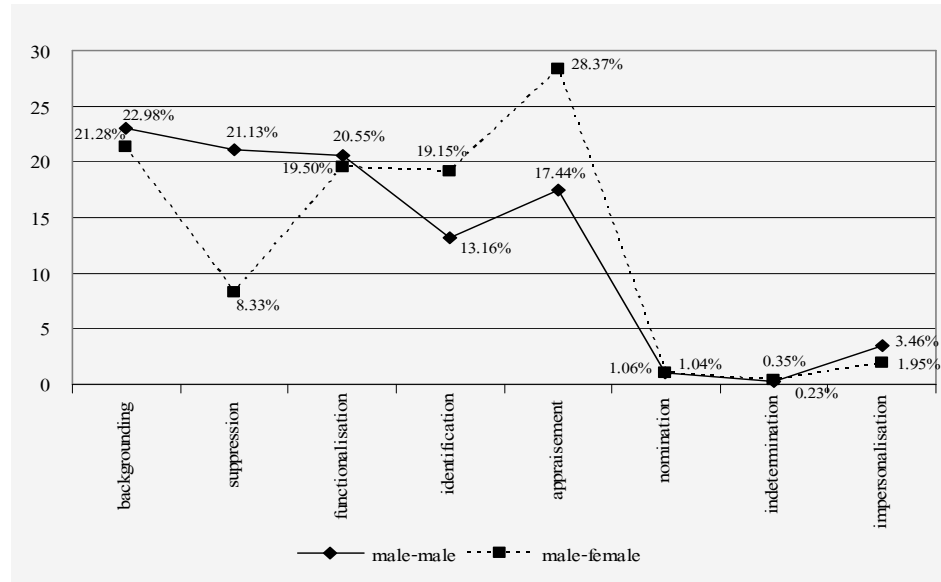
Figure 1: Representation of male agents in Thai crime news headlines

The result indicates that the form of male agents' representation differs in relation to the victim's sex. Male agents in men-on-men violence are often excluded in the headlines. On the other hand, male agents in men-on-women violence are often presented in an appraisement form, such as *huen/*หึน 'a man who cannot control his sexual desire.' The exclusion of the male agent in men-on-men violence indicates that the agent is assumed to be male because readers have a shared assumption about stereotypical traits of men such that a man should be strong and stand on his dignity. On the other hand, the use of appraisement form in men-on-women violence news, especially sexual violence, seems to take the side of the women victims and blame the male agents for their bad behavior and their loss of self control. But by using bad appraisement forms for these male agents as social outcasts, men at large are excluded as they do not behave that way. As a result, the reputation of men in general is not tarnished.

**Representation of female agents in Thai crime news headlines**

The comparison of female agents' representation found in women-on-men and women-on-women violence news headlines are shown in Figure 2. In women-on-men violence, the most frequent form of female agents is identification form (43.64 %), such as *phi-sao/*พี่สาว 'an elder sister,' *mae/*แม่ 'a mother,' followed by functionalization form (34.55%), such as *nak-rong/*นักร้อง 'a singer,' *sao-bank/*สาวแบงค์ 'a bank officer' and backgrounding form (20.55%), In women-on-women violence, the most frequent form of the female agent is also identification form (45.45%), such as *mia-noi/*เมียน้อย 'a minor wife,' followed by functionalization form (22.77%), such as so-cho-ying/สจ.หญิง 'a woman who is a member of the Provincial Counci'l and backgrounding form (13.64%)
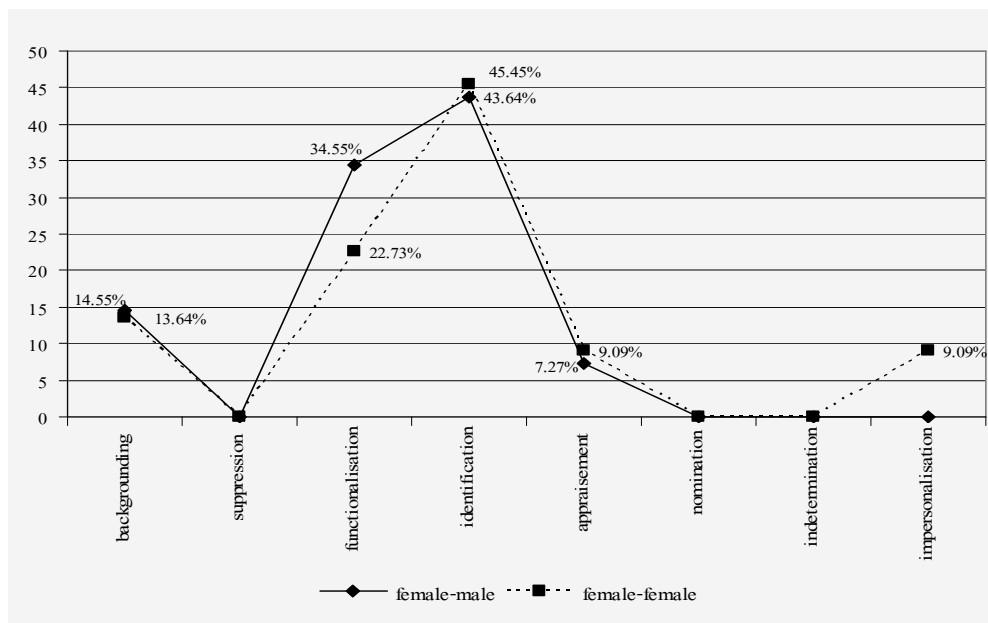
Figure 2: Representation of female agents in Thai crime news headlines

The result shows that female agents' representation is often presented in identification form in both women-on-men and women-on-women violence news, such as *mae/แม่* 'mother' *mia/เมีย* 'wife.' It can be inferred that newspapers use such a form to enact women's role expected from Thai society. Female agents are constructed according to the roles of mother and wife in the domestic domain.

In summary, the choices of agents' representations clearly reveal that male and female agents are focused on in different ways. The forms of male agents' representation vary according to the victim's sex but those of female agents don't. Male agents are represented in two forms, backgrounding exclusion form in men-on-men violence and appraisement form in men-on-women violence while female agents are usually represented in identification form both in women-on-men violence and women-on-women violence. In the case of male agents, newspapers exclude them in headlines. It is consistent with the notion proposed by Van Leeuwen (2008: 28) and Van Dijk (1995) that the reason for excluding social actor in the text may be inferred on the basis of shared knowledge. As a result, newspapers use forms of male agent representation in order to obscure the responsibility of the male for negative actions and such actions seem acceptable in society. Gill (2007) explains that men's violence is a key determinant of inequalities in gender relations. In addition, men's "natural aggression" is often invoked as a defining characteristic of an essential gender difference. Men may seek affirmation of their masculinity through irresponsible acts of violence (Jackson 1999).

## Representation of victims in Thai crime news headlines

This section presents the representation of victims according to the victim's sex in order to examine whether different sexes of agents would affect the selection of the victims' representation.

## Representation of male victims in Thai crime news headlines

The comparison of the representation of male victims in the case of men-on-men and women-on-men violence is shown in Figure 3. In men-on-men violence, the

most frequent form of male victims is functionalization form (33.37%), such as *nak-thu-ra-kit*/นักธุรกิจ'a businessman,'*tam-ruat*/ตำรวจ'a police man,' followed by identification form (29.91%), such as khu-a-ri/คู่อริ'a foe,' andbackgrounding (25.52%), while in women-on-men violence, the most frequent form of male victims is identification form(40%), such as *sa-mi*/สามี'a husband,'*luk*/ลูก'a child,'followed by functionalization form (30.91%) such as *sale*/เซลล์'a salesman,' and backgrounding form (18.18%).
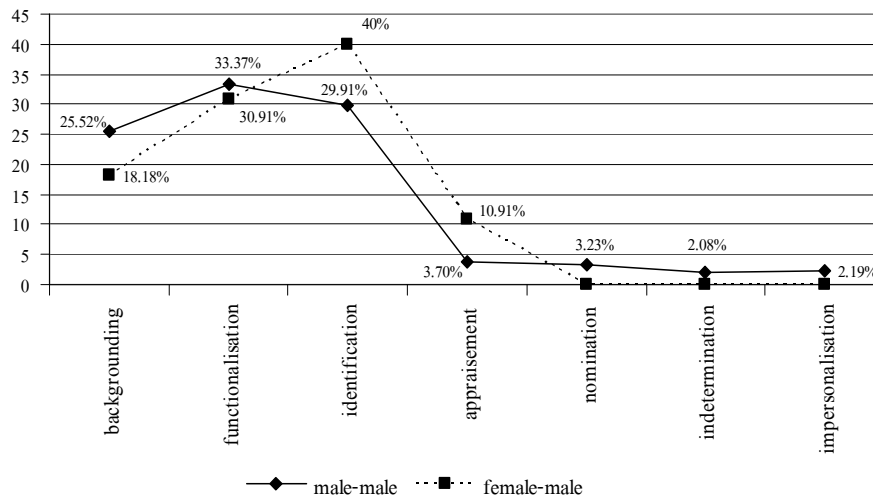


Figure 3: Representation of male victims in Thai crime news headlines

The result shows that the forms of male victims' representation differ in relation to the agent's sex. In men-on-men violence news headlines, male victims are often presented in functionalization form, such as their occupations *tha-han*/ทหาร 'solider,'*tam-ruat*/ตำรวจ'police', the position of authority *phu-yai-ban* /ผู้ใหญ่บ้าน 'a village

headman,' while male victims in women-on-men violence news headlines are often represented in identification form, such as *pho*/พ่อ/'father,' *sa-mi*/สามี'husband' The difference indicates that male victims' representation is selected differently with respect to the agent's sex. In relation to men, newspapers use functionalization form for men to enact the role in the public

domain or outside the house because men are permitted to participate with others in society and are expected to provide financial support for the family. Moreover, in relation to women, newspapers use identification form for men to enact the role in the domestic domain e.g. father, husband.

**Representation of female victims in Thai crime news headlines**

The comparison of female victims' representation found in men-on-women and women-on-women violence news headline is shown in Figure 4. In men-on-women violence, the most frequent form of female victim is identification form (60.82%,), such as *faen*/แฟน 'a lover,' *mae-mai*/แม่ม่าย 'a widow' followed by functionalization form (22.87%) such as *kru-sao*/ครูสาว 'a teacher,' and backgrounding form (14.72%), and in women-on-women violence, the most frequent from of female victim is identification form (63.64%), such as mia-noi/เมียน้อย 'a minor wife,' followed by backgrounding form (36.36%).
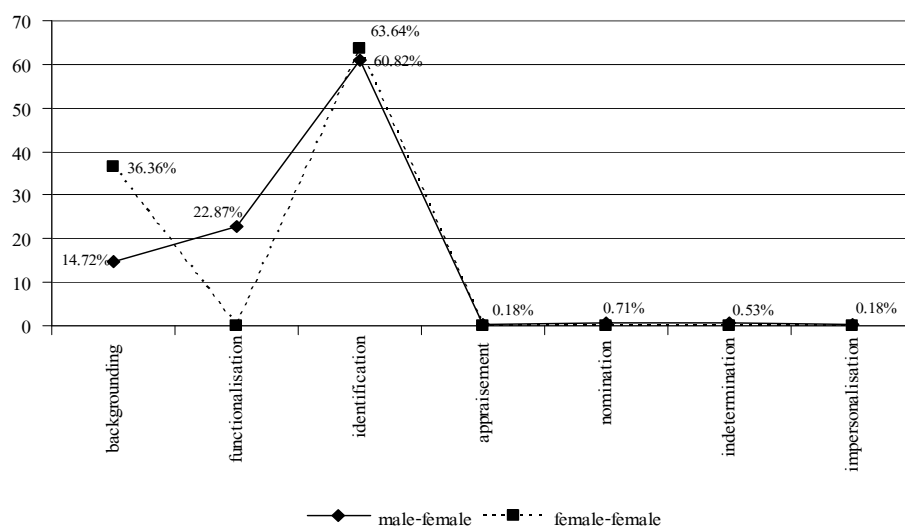


Figure 4: Representation of female victims in Thai crime news headlines

The result shows that the forms of female victims' representation are often presented in identification form regardless of the agents' sex, such as *mae*/แม่ (mother) *mia*/เมีย 'wife.' This is similar to what is found in women agents' representation.

In summary, the forms of male victims' representation vary according to the agent's sex but female victims' representation do not. Male victims are described in two forms, functionalization form in men-on-men violence and identification form in women-on-men violence while female victims are repeatedly presented in identification form in men-on-women and women-on-women violence news.

The differences of representation form may be explained in relation to the domains of violence. According to the data, men-on-men

violence typically occurred in the public domain while women-on-men violence occurred typically in the domestic domain. This explains why women are represented mostly using identification forms. Nevertheless, the differences of representation forms of men and women as represented in the headline news do play a role in shaping different images of men and women for the public. The differences reflect gender ideology, such as traditional gender roles and power relations. Men and women are focused on in opposite terms of gender role. Men are focused on in authority roles and domestic roles, including their occupation and being head of the family while women are focused on in domestic roles and childcare responsibility. It can be concluded that newspapers construct women's identity

mediated through her relationship to a man, which ensures lower status in society. The finding shows that representations of social actors in headlines reflect gender roles and power relations based on gender ideology in society.

## The reproduction of gender ideology through Thai crime news headlines

The study of the representation of social actors in Thai crime news headlines shows that men are portrayed in different ways depending on their status (as agents or victims) and their relation to the other participant's sex while women are repeatedly portrayed using identification form. See also figure 5
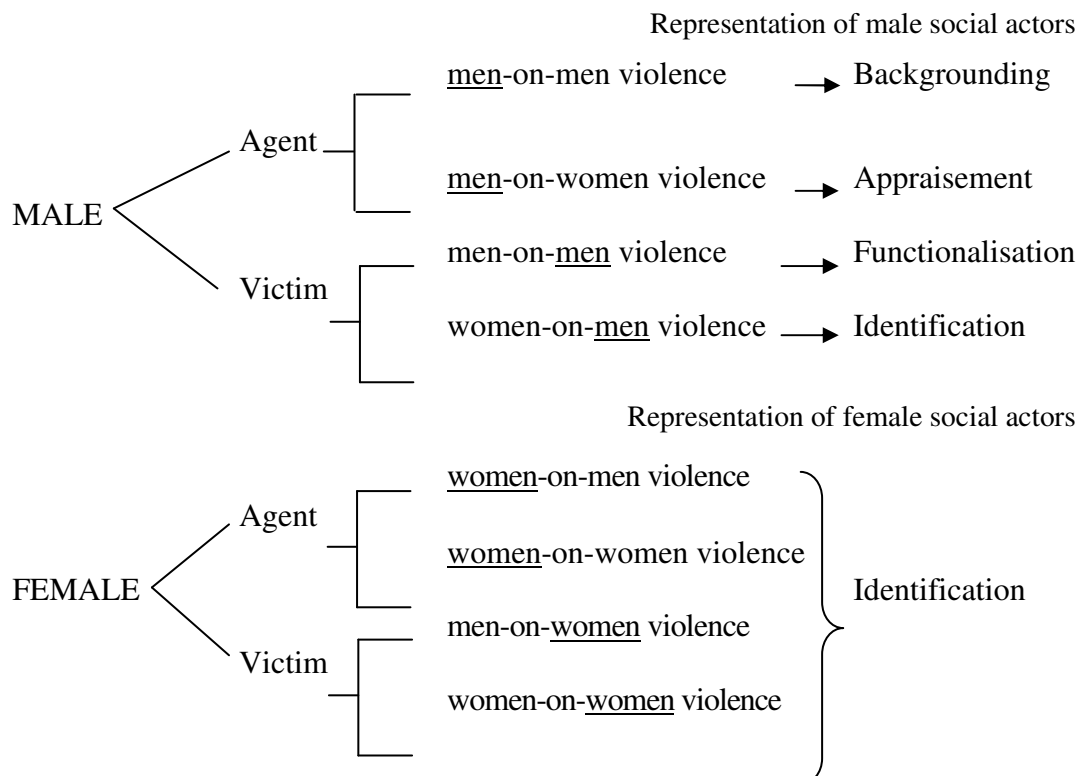


Figure 5: Representation of social actors in Thai crime news headlines

The representation of social actors in Thai crime news headlines indicates that newspapers construct men and woman in crime news headlines differently through the forms of representation used to describe them. Newspapers construct men and women in different ways in order to motivate the readers to realize the construction of reality that is not neutral; Newspaper headlines imply an asymmetry of power relations. As a result, linguistic forms used to represent social actors contribute to the construction of relations between women and men in society.

In the case of agents' representations, male agents are constructed in newspapers without being mentioned in the headlines. If they were mentioned, they would be judged as persons with bad behavior and loss of self control. On the other hand, female agents are constructed as normal and referred to through the roles of mother and wife. This interpretation of the data supports the idea proposed by Gill (2007) that the newspapers use the different ways of representation between men and women concerning gender ideologies that are articulated though language.

Through the representation of agents, newspapers give a distorted view of the agent of violence. Men agents are excluded in headlines and the readers can assume that the actors in the crime news are mostly male actors because they have a shared assumption about stereotypical traits of men, such as aggressive, strong. Moreover, such traits of men are acceptable in society. Another form used for male agents is appraisement. It establishes beliefs that males are characterized by their lack of self control and their sexual desire. By contrast, women agents are described in identification forms that reflect their identities such as mothers and wives. The

representation of agents reflects the obscuring of the responsibility of male agents for negative actions in crime news headlines. It reflects that newspapers present a consistently male-dominated view of society that exists in actuality, such as inequality power relation between men and women.

In the case of victim's representation, male victims are constructed in the role of occupation and the role of head of the family, while female victims are constructed in the role of mother and wife again. Such representations reflect the reproduction of the ideological position of men's superiority over women. Newspapers use different representation forms in constructing masculine and feminine identity. The construction of masculine identity is categorized as role of head of the family in the private domain and by occupation in the public domain. Traditionally, males should be strong, aggressive and dominant. Feminine identity is categorized as mother and wife in the domestic domain. Women are expected to be inferior and weak. These distinct characterizations reflect inequality in power, the traditional gender roles between men and women, and the stability of gender ideology in Thai society.

## Conclusion

This paper has focused on gender ideologies in Thailand from the perspective of language, as seen in the representation of male and female social actors, agents and victims in crime news headlines. The representations of social agents and victims are analyzed to show how language plays a significant part in reproducing masculinity and femininity. Thai society values the power of males and their dominance. Men are always represented as leaders and the stronger while women are always

represented as followers and the weaker. Language in the news is a powerful medium reflecting the views of the world, which are dominated by a male perspective.

## Acknowledgements

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