

MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF THE PRONOUN /HAW/ IN TAI LUE¹

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Abstract

In many languages, personal pronouns are used to imply characteristics of speakers and social relationships between participants (Agha 2007). This is particularly true of members of the Tai language family, such as Zhuang (Kullavanijaya 2009), Standard Thai (Cooke 1968; Palakornkul 1972; Simpson 1997), Standard Lao (Enfield 1966; Compton 2002), Kham Mueang and Tai Lue (Rhekhalilit 2010). A number of studies of Southwestern Tai languages have found that the first person plural pronoun /haw/ or /raw/ can be used in several contexts, apart from referring to a group of speakers. For example, the pronoun /raw/ in Standard Thai indexes intimacy between participants when being used by particular individual speakers. The current paper investigates the Tai Lue first person plural pronoun and how it can be used in wider contexts. Adopting a qualitative approach, it aims at analyzing the pronoun /haw/ spoken in three dialects

of Tai Lue, namely Tai Lue Chiang Mai (TLC), Tai Lue Luangphrabang (TLL), and Tai Lue Xishuangbanna (TLX). The data were collected through Labovian sociolinguistic interviews (1984), by which 27 informants were asked to narrate a story on controlled topics, and through participant observation. The analysis shows that the three selected dialects of Tai Lue concur in their use of the pronoun /haw/ as first person plural pronoun. However, it is found that each dialect uses pronoun the /haw/ with different shades of meaning when being used by individual speakers. Two dialects, TLC and TLL, tend to use the pronoun /haw/ to index intimacy while talking to addressees of younger age or lower social status. In TLX, pronoun /haw/ seems to be different in that it is exclusively used by monks. In conclusion, this study describes sociolinguistic use of the pronoun /haw/ in Tai Lue. It can be used either with unmarked first person plural meaning or first person singular meaning with some social indicators such as intimacy between participants and the status of monkhood.

Introduction

A large body of research generally agrees that the use of personal pronouns in several languages is a primary method used to encode the relationships between the participants of the conversation (such as Agha 2007). According to Brown and Gilman (1960), European second person pronouns V and T function as a social marker, indicating power and solidarity between the participants respectively. Similarly, Tai personal pronouns are also marked by social meanings. In Standard Thai, for example, first person pronoun /phǒm/ is typically used by a male speaker in formal contexts whereas its counterpart /di.chán/ is used by a female speaker. In

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casual contexts, the first person pronoun for males is unmarked /kuu/ which is reciprocal to the pronoun /mɪŋ/, a second person pronoun. In other Tai languages, a paper on Zhuang pronoun systems by Kullavanijaya (2009) describes personal pronoun systems in some dialects of Zhuang as also being marked by social indexes, such as politeness, intimacy, and social status. For example, pronoun /kʰo:i³⁵/ in Debao dialect is used as a humble self-referring term, reciprocal to pronoun /tsau³⁵/, showing respect to the addressee.

In Rhekhalilit (2010), the pronoun systems of Kham Mueang and Tai Lue are analyzed to show the different dimensions of contrast between these two sister languages. The analysis reveals that pronoun systems in both languages are marked by eight dimensions of contrast. Both Kham Mueang and Tai Lue pronoun systems share the five similar features of 1) person, 2) number, 3) relative status, 4) intimacy and 5) the presence of monk. However, they are different in other dimensions. In Kham Mueang, there are three additional dimensions namely, 6) gender, 7) inclusiveness and 8) deference. Compared to that of Kham Mueang, Tai Lue pronoun system spoken in Lampang province consists of three additional different dimensions of contrast, specifically, 6) gender of speaker, 7) gender of addressee, and 8) formality.

As mentioned in earlier paragraphs, personal pronouns in Tai languages are marked by social markers, particularly the first person pronoun /haw/ or its equivalent /raw/. Many studies of the Standard Thai pronoun system share the same conclusion that there are multiple meanings of the pronoun /raw/ (i.e. Simpson 1997; Higbie and Thinsan 2003;

Cooke 1968). Pronoun /raw/ is primarily used as a first person plural pronoun as in the following examples,

(1) อยู่ ๆ ครูก็พูดขึ้นมาในสิ่งที่พวกเรากำลังรอ
jùu.jùu kru kɔw phuut
 suddenly teacher PART say
khîn maa naj sɨŋ thî
 ascend come in something which
phûak.raw *kam.laŋ rɔɔ*
 we PROGRESS wait
 “Suddenly, the teacher said something we are waiting for.”

In (1), the pronoun *เรา* /raw/ is marked by pluralizing marker *พวก* /phûak/, literally meaning ‘group’, emphasizing the group of the speakers, in this case, students.

These studies also reveal that the pronoun /raw/ is used to refer to a singular definite self-referring expression, mainly indexing intimacy between conversation participants. For example,

(2) ดิฉันอยากร้องไห้เรารักเขาแทบตายทำไมเขาไม่รู้
di.chăn jaak rɔɔŋ.hâaj
 I(female) want cry
raw *rák khăw thêɐp taaj*
 we love he almost die
tham.maj khăw mâj rûu
 why he NOT know
 “I (female) want to cry. I love him so much. Why he doesn’t even know.”

From (2), the pronoun /raw/ is used to refer to the speaker herself as equivalent to the pronoun *ดิฉัน* /di.chăn/ in the previous clause. This example shows the singular meaning of pronoun /raw/ in Standard Thai. Moreover, Cooke (1968) and Higbie and Thinsan (2003), confirm that the

pronoun /raw/ is also used as a second person singular pronoun, exclusively when referring to lower or inferior addressee. For example,

(3) แม่ว่าเราอย่าใจร้อนไปเลยลูก

mêæ wâ **raw** jàa caj rǝwŋ
mother COMP we don't heart hot
paj loej lûuk
go PART child
"I think that **you** shouldn't be hot-tempered, my son."

From (3), the mother, who is speaking to her son, refers to him as /raw/, showing the lower status of the addressee.

Lastly, Simpson (1997) also adds its generic function, equivalent to generic *we* in English. For example,

(4) เราจะเอาแต่ใจตัวเองก็ไม่ได้ เราต้องดูรอบข้างด้วยว่า
เหมาะสมหรือเปล่า (Simpson 1997:171)

raw cà? aw tɛɛ caj
we will take but heart
tua.ʔeŋ kǝw mâj dâj
self PART NOT get
raw tǝŋ duu rǝwŋp khâaŋ
we must look all around
dúaj wâa mòʔsǝm rǝi plàaw
also COMP appropriate or not
"**We** can't just satisfy our own desire; **we**
have to look around too and see if it's
appropriate or not."

The example (4) from Simpson (1997: 173) shows the generic use of the pronoun /raw/ in order to "downplay the speaker's personal experience" and in order to emphasize the shared standpoint of a larger group instead.

To sum up, from the previous studies, the pronoun /raw/ in Standard Thai has four different meanings: 1) first person plural, 2) first person singular with intimacy, 3) second person singular with lower status, and 4) generic meaning.

In Standard Lao, Enfield's analysis (1966) suggests that the pronoun /haw/ can also be used with either a plural or singular meaning. In contrast with Standard Thai, it is commonly used by children, especially when talking to their parents, in order to lower the formality in a family conversation.

This multiple usage of pronoun /haw/ is also found in northern branches of the Tai language, such as Zhuang. Kullavanijaya (2009) analyses different dialects of Zhuang and finds that pronoun /ɣau³¹/ in Debao dialect has three different meanings, that is 1) first person plural; 2) first person singular indexing intimacy; and 3) second person singular indexing lower status and intimacy.

In conclusion, these three examples from Tai personal pronoun analysis agree that the pronouns /raw/, /haw/, and /ɣau³¹/ share the multiple meanings of first person pronoun; that is, the unmarked plural meaning and the singular with some social indexes as summarized in Table 1 below.

Table1 A comparison of meanings of the first person plural pronouns in some Tai languages

	<i>Standard Thai /raw/</i>	<i>Standard Lao /haw/</i>	<i>Zhuang Debao /rau³¹/</i>
First person plural	X	X	X
First person singular indexing intimacy	X		X
First person singular lowering formality in a conversation		X	
Second person singular indexing lower status of the addressee	X		X
Generic meaning	X		

Table 1 summarizes the multiple meanings of pronouns /raw/, /haw/ and /rau³¹/ in some Tai languages. Clearly, these pronouns share the first person plural meaning, but their singular meanings are differently marked by some social indexicalities such as intimacy and lower status of either the speaker (as found in Standard Lao /haw/) or the addressee (as found in Standard Thai /raw/ and Zhuang /rau³¹/). It is also found that pronoun /raw/ in Standard Thai can have a generic function, equivalent to ‘anybody’ in English. In order to contribute to the body of literature on the multiple meanings of the pronoun /haw/, the current study aims to investigate whether the first person plural pronouns in the three dialects of Tai Lue in three different countries share the same sociolinguistic meanings or not.

Background of Tai Lue

Tai Lue is selected in this present study because despite the wide population of its

native speakers, the number of studies on the use of personal pronouns in this dialect are still limited. As a result, this paper aims to provide an insightful explanation of the pronoun /haw/ in Tai Lue to fill in the gap in the literature in this area.

According to Lewis, Simons and Fenning (n.d.), Tai Lue is a literary Tai language spoken in several areas of Southeast Asia, such as Xishuangbanna in Yunnan province in China, Luangphrabang in Lao PDR, some areas in Vietnam and some provinces in Northern Thailand. It is a tonal language with six distinctive tones in its phonological system (Gedney 1996). Syntactically speaking, it is also classified as an S-V-O language with head-modifier pattern, and serial verb constructions.

In addition, Tai Lue is normally treated as a minority language in countries where it is spoken. For example, according to Prasithrathsint (2005), Tai Lue is regarded as a displaced language in Thailand. It is mainly spoken in family and friendship domains as a vernacular, and most of its

native speakers are bilingual in Tai Lue and Kham Mueang in Chiang Mai, and in Tai Lue and Standard Lao in Luangphrabang, as well as in Tai Lue and Mandarin in Xishuangbanna.

Fieldwork conducted for the present study revealed that linguistic landscape also reflects the minority status of Tai Lue in the chosen communities. In Chiang Mai and Luangphrabang, Tai Lue written scripts are rarely found in public spaces. Most public signs are written only in Standard languages of each country: Thai in Chiang Mai and Lao in Luangphrabang. This might suggest the lower status to Tai Lue in that the language policy of the authorities does not support the languages of an ethnic minority. For example, Figure 1 shows the public signpost of Tai Lue village, Ban Pha Nom, which is known to be a Tai Lue community. Despite the ethnic majority of the village being Tai Lue, its signpost name is still written monolingual Standard Lao. In contrast, Tai Lue in Xishuangbanna is widely supported by the local government as reflected in its regional linguistic landscape. For example, Tai Lue scripts are normally written above that of Mandarin in traffic signs authorized by the local government, as shown in Figure 2. This might imply governmental support towards Tai Lue as the largest minority language group in the region. According to Casas (2011), Old Tai Lue script was used as a means of teaching in Xishuangbanna Autonomous prefecture until the Chinese government attempted to reform the educational system in 1952. Now Modern Tai Lue script plays an important role in official documents and signs as mentioned earlier.



Figure 1 A signpost of Tai Lue village where only Standard Lao scripts are written



Figure 2 Traffic sign in Xishuangbanna where Tai Lue scripts are written

The present study

As mentioned above, some studies on Tai pronouns agree that first person pronoun forms such as /raw/ and /haw/ can be used with different shades of meanings. However, there are still a limited number of studies on Tai languages which are spoken in different countries. Most of previous studies focus specifically to a language spoken only in one particular country. As a result, this study intends to study a language which is mostly found in different countries: Tai Lue. The purpose

of this study is to describe the use of first person plural pronoun /haw/ in three dialects of Tai Lue spoken in Chiang Mai (TLC), Luangphrabang (TLL), and Xishuangbanna (TLX). This present study gathered data from three different dialects of Tai Lue to widen the scope of analysis. The dialects of Chiang Mai and Luangphrabang can be considered similar in term of their minority language status while the dialect of Xishuangbanna is different in that it is obviously supported by the local authority. Thus, it is interesting to study the language of the same minority ethnic groups such as Tai Lue, which is spoken in different countries with different social backgrounds to compare the language use, in this case pronoun /haw/.

It is hypothesized that, based on other Tai languages studies, pronoun /haw/ in Tai Lue has multiple meanings in which it mutually refers to a group of speakers and is also used to refer to an individual speaker with social meanings, such as relative status and intimacy.

The data were collected by a Labovian sociolinguistic interview (1984; cited in Milroy and Gordon 2003) and through participant observation. According to Milroy and Gordon (2003), sociolinguistic interviews have been the most common strategy for data collection. Compared to survey questions, they are relatively flexible and open-ended. The primary objective of sociolinguistic interviews is to stimulate the interviewees' *natural* usage of language. The interview in this present study was designed based on Labov's Philadelphia project in 1984. The questions were set into three different sets based on the daily life and familiar experience of the interviewees.

Twenty seven participants, aged from 10 to 71, were selected based on the following criteria: 1) they had to be Tai Lue native speakers; 2) they could be bilingual, but Tai Lue vernacular was definitely required; and 3) they were expected to have lived in the village longer than half of their lives. Next, they were asked to narrate a story based on the three sets of modules: 1) family domain; 2) religion domain; and 3) friendship domain as illustrated in Figure 3.

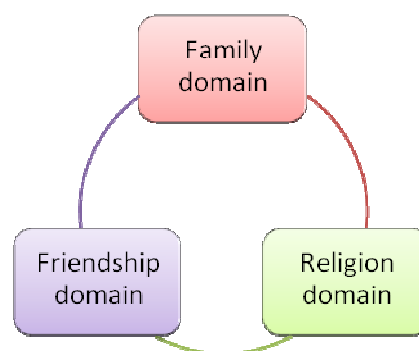


Figure 3 Characteristics networks of modules for Tai Lue native speakers

It is noted that the organization of these three modules can be shuffled in each interview, so that interviewee A might be asked firstly about friendship domain while interviewee B might be asked about religion domain first. This was in order to start the interview with the most familiar domain of questions based on the background experience of the interviewees. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes.

They were then asked to create or translate a conversation from Standard Thai or Lao or Chinese to Tai Lue on the related topic which was set to control the relationship of the participants. Finally, they were asked directly how they would refer to

themselves or to an addressee or even non-participants in the conversation. For instance, “How do you refer to yourself while talking to your parents?” or “How do you refer to your friend at school?” *etc.* After the interview, the data were verified using a sentence completion test in which the interviewer used the elicited personal pronouns to fill in a set of sentences to check their feasibility. For example, “Can we use X to talk about Y?” or “Can we say X to refer to a dog, as in “X is coming?” This technique was used to verify the data collection as to whether a pronoun could be used to refer to Y or not.

Apart from the sociolinguistic interview, participant observation was used to collect information on the use of personal pronouns in the selected community. Participant observation is another primary sociolinguistic method of ethnography (Johnstone 2000). As Stocking (1983) has indicated, an important element of participant observation is for the researcher to enter the selected community as a stranger and to investigate the native’s point of view as reflected in the way he or she behaves. In the present study, while I was interviewing the informants, I was also observing the natural use of the personal pronouns of the native speakers, not only those that were being interviewed but also the surrounding participants at the time of the interview.

Findings

The data analysis reveals the multiple meanings of pronoun /haw/ in the selected dialects of Tai Lue as hypothesized earlier. This section describes the sociolinguistic usage of pronoun /haw/ presented as follows.

Unmarked first person plural meaning

The basic function of pronoun /haw/ is unmarked first person plural pronoun, like its counterparts in other Tai languages. For example,

(5) A male TLC native speaker aged 41 talking to the interviewer.

*pá.ka.tí **haw** cà? ní.mōon túu.cáo káo tōon*

“Normally, we will invite nine monks.”

From (5), pronoun /haw/ is spoken by a male TLC speaker when the interviewer asked him to narrate an event about a Buddhist ceremony. Pronoun /haw/ is used to refer to his family as a whole. Generally, unmarked first person plural pronoun can co-occur with pluralizing morpheme /mùu/, literally meaning ‘group’ to emphasize the plural meaning as /mùu. haw/.

Not only is this found in the TLC dialect, but the unmarked first person plural function of pronoun /haw/ is also found in TLL dialect as shown in Example (6) below. For example,

(6) A female TLL informant aged 66 talking to the interviewer

*nai bāan **haw** nia mii hōong.hian tī diaw*

In our village, there is (only) one school

Surprisingly, it can be noticed that TLL first person plural pronoun /haw/ can co-occur with pluralizing morpheme /phuak/, instead of /mùu/ as found in TLC as shown in Example (7).

- (7) *phuak.haw bɔɔ mak kin cín*
we NEG like eat meat
“We don’t like to eat meat/beef”

Sentence (7) shows that a TLL native speaker chooses the pronoun /phuak.haw/ when referring to her family.

I have hypothesized that the possible reason is that pluralizing morpheme /phuak/ has been borrowed from either Standard Thai or Standard Lao as a means of public communications. Even though, TLL native speakers lived in Lao PDR, the main broadcasting programs on televisions are transmitted from Thailand. Thus, it is very common for TLL speakers may acquire some grammatical elements of Standard Thai, in contrast to Tai Lue speakers in Thailand who may realize the differentiation between their Tai Lue vernacular and Standard Thai taught at school. However, a deeper study must be conducted to prove this hypothesis.

Undoubtedly, pronoun /haw/ in TLX also refers to a group of speakers, as with its counterparts in TLC, TLL and in other Tai languages. For example,

- (8) A female TLX informant talking to the interviewer

khon baàn haw ca? ni.moon tu?
taan.bun

“We, the villagers, normally invite monks to make merit.”

Just like /haw/ equivalents in other Tai languages, in (8) the pronoun /haw/ refers to the villagers.

First person dual meaning

Interestingly, TLC native speakers aged over 60 tend to use the pronoun /haw/ as a

first person dual pronoun, in contrast to plural form /mùu.haw/. For example,

A male TLC informant aged 65, talking to his wife

- (9) *haw cà? ni.mōon tǔu.cáo kǐi tǔon?*
“How many monks will we invite?”

Example (9) shows that a male TLC native speaker who is 65 years old employs pronoun /haw/ to refer to his wife and himself.

From the in-depth interview, it is noted that this dual meaning usage is only found in TLC native speakers aged over 60. However, those who are under 60 tend not to apply this meaning to their pronoun system. On the other hand, this may suggest different pronoun systems across generations, and it implies pronoun change in progress in TLC. According to the variationist approach of language change (such as Romaine 2001), the synchronic variation across age groups can indicate language change in progress where the variety of older generation represents the variation which may be lost in the future; while, that of younger generation represents the new form of the language. That is, this dual pronoun usage in TLC may be lost through time.

First person singular indexing intimacy between participants

As in other Tai languages, pronoun /haw/ in TLC is used to refer to an individual speaker, mostly when talking to intimate addressees. For example,

- (10) A male TLC informant aged 10, talking to his classmate.

haw *húu wâa tǝo bǝǝ maa*
“***I*** knew you didn’t come.”

Example (10) shows the first person singular meaning of pronoun /haw/, equivalent to pronoun ‘I’ in English. In addition, it also indexes the intimate relationship between the speaker and the addressee, in this example, a classmate.

In addition, pronoun /haw/ in TLL also refers to a single speaker as a self-referring expression, especially in intimate conversation. For example,

(11) A TLL female informant aged 23, talking to her younger sister.
haw *câ? paj tǝoi*
“***I*** will go too.”

Sentence (11) shows the use of pronoun /haw/ as a single self-referring expression to show intimacy between participants in the conversation, in this case, between two female siblings.

However, it is not found in the interview that TLL native speakers use pronoun /haw/ to refer to only two speakers as found in TLC dialect. That is, there is no dual and plural distinction between pronoun /haw/ and /phuak.haw/. They can be used interchangeably by the native TLL speakers.

First person singular indexing status of monkhood

Uniquely, when used with definite singular meaning, pronoun /haw/ in TLX is exclusively used by monks, unlike its counterparts found in TLL and TLC, as in the following example.

(12) A monk TLX native speaker talking to a villager

haw *ca? tǝn bǝǝk cǝo*
“***I*** will explain and tell you.”

Example (12) shows the use of singular meaning of the pronoun /haw/ in TLX. This usage, according to Ampornpan’s (1986) Tai Lue Nan grammatical sketch, is also found in Tai Lue spoken in Nan province in Northern Thailand too.

To conclude, this section provides the sociopragmatic description of pronoun /haw/ spoken in three dialects of Tai Lue. The data analysis reveals that pronouns /haw/ in all three dialects share the first person plural meaning of the pronoun. However, they might acquire additional social indexicality when being used as a single self-referring expression, that is, intimacy in TLC and TLL dialects, and monkhood status in TLX as summarized in Table 2 below.

Discussion

In the previous section, it was found that pronoun /haw/ in Tai Lue spoken in three different dialects can be used to refer to either a group of speakers or an individual speaker. The latter usage is marked by a social index, such as intimacy and status of monkhood. When compared to its equivalent in other Tai languages mentioned previously—that is pronoun /raw/ in Standard Thai, pronoun /haw/ in Standard Lao, and pronoun /rau³¹/ in Debao Zhuang—it is seen that they mutually share the plural meaning. As a result, we may conclude that the plural meaning of these three equivalents is unmarked in the Tai pronoun system.

According to some linguists (such as Agha 2007 and Siewierska 2004), personal pronoun usage in some languages relies on

the reanalysis of multiple meanings in which the speakers of such languages tend to convert the linguistic units denoting speakers or addressees into the social

indexicals reflecting the characteristics of the speakers or the relationships between the speaker and the addressee in the conversation.

Table 2 Multiple meanings of the pronoun /haw/ in Tai Lue

	Tai Lue Chiang Mai	Tai Lue Luang Phrabang	Tai Lue Xishuangbanna
First person plural	X	X	X
First person dual	X	-	-
First person singular indexing intimacy	X	X	-
First person singular indexing status of monkhood	-	-	X

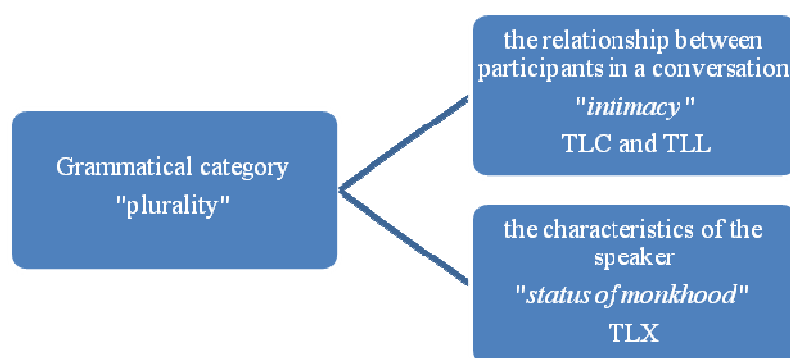


Figure 4 The possible changing pattern of the participant deixis in pronoun /haw/ in Tai Lue.

In the case of Tai Lue in this study, the grammatical category of pronoun /haw/, a plural marker, is converted into the indexicals reflecting the relationship between participants in a conversation, which is *intimacy* in TLC and TLL, and the inherent characteristics of the speaker, which is the *status of monkhood* in TLX as summarized in Figure 4.

Additionally, this phenomenon is not idiosyncratic to the Tai personal pronoun systems. A cross-linguistic study of the conversion from speaker-addressee referents to social index by Head in 1978 reveals that a large number of languages convert number distinction (that is, singular & non-singular) in the personal pronoun system to convey the social meaning. The very well-known account,

mentioned in the introduction, of T and V pronouns in European languages by Brown and Gilman (1960) might be a good example of this. In French, second person pronouns *vous* and *tu* were formerly different only in terms of number. Pronoun *vous* was basically used to denote a group of addressees, a plural entity, while pronoun *tu* was mainly used to denote only one, a singular entity. Later on, pronoun *vous* was used to denote the king with his accompany. As a result, pronoun *vous* changes its basic meaning from the plural meaning to show the power of the addressee instead. On the other hand, pronoun *tu* is used to show solidarity between participants in the conversation.

Apart from the addressee-referring terms, the self-referring terms in many languages also match this pattern of conversion in their meanings. In 18th century Chinese (Lee 1999), when talking to a superior addressee, a native speaker of Chinese, especially women, servants, and children, normally chose the first person plural pronoun when denoting to him/herself in order to show a sense of inferiority to the addressee.

From these two examples, it can be noticed that the meaning of personal pronouns, i.e. *vous*, meaning 'you', in French and *women*, meaning 'we', in Chinese, both denoting a plural entity has been changed to index the different social relationship between participants. The former reflects the superiority of the addressee while the latter reflects the opposite meaning, the humbleness of the speaker.

The above-mentioned examples from Tai languages, French, and Chinese illustrate the changing pattern of personal pronouns,

especially those denoting a plural entity, into the social indexicals, or the relationship between the participants.

Conclusion

This study examines the sociolinguistic usage of the pronoun /haw/ in three dialects of Tai Lue. As hypothesized earlier, it is found that pronoun /haw/ is typically used to refer to a group of speakers in all selected dialects. In TLC, speakers who are older than 60 tend to use pronoun /haw/ as a dual pronoun to refer to only two speakers, as opposed to /muu.haw/ which is marked with plurality meaning more than two speakers.

When referring to an individual speaker, the pronoun /haw/ in TLC and TLL is marked by social index, showing intimacy between the participants in a conversation or speaker and addressee whereas in TLX it is used exclusive by a monk when referring to himself. That is, it shows the attribute of monkhood of the speaker. This pattern of multiple meanings of pronoun /haw/ in Tai Lue can be also found in other Tai languages such as in Standard Thai, Standard Lao, and in Zhuang.

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