



**MAHIDOL
UNIVERSITY**
Wisdom of the Land

Language of death & Language of depression

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Introduction

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Graduated from Macquarie University,
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Discourse Studies: Systemic Functional
Linguistics (SFL)

Doctoral degree: A Systemic Functional
Interpretation of Thai Grammar: An Exploration
of Thai Narrative Discourse



Research interest (1)

(1) Discourse Analysis

- Corpus-based study
- Discourse analysis of different text types / registers
 - ♦ Narratives
 - ♦ News reports
 - ♦ Talisman advertisements
 - ♦ Ritual manuscripts: ancestor worship and death ritual
 - ♦ Weblogs: depression



Research interest (2)

(2) Language Documentation

(3) Syntax

- **Systemic Functional Linguistics**
- **Tagmemics**

(4) Language typology

- **Verbal Group Complexes / Serial Verb Constructions**
- **Negation**
- **Interrogation**



Research motivation

Rites of passage (Warner, 1959;
van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1970)



Life crisis rites: death

Warner (1959: 303-304) describes life-crisis rites and significant life changes: **birth, puberty, marriage, and death**. The change is marked by a transitional period, usually involving specific rituals – symbolic activities.



Life crisis rites: death

Death is given social attention in all societies. Most commonly, rites at death are elaborate, and they include clearly all of the stages of **separation**, **transition**, and **reincorporation** as noted by van Gennep (1960).

Encyclopedia Britannica. Available at
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/rite-of-passage>
Retrieved April 1st, 2021.



My Black Tai family



Phi Huu Chang Community, Nakhon Pathom



Black Tai beliefs

Life after death is a common belief shared by many ethnic groups in Southeast Asia (Black Tai, Red Tai, and White Tai).

The Black Tai are animists and their religious beliefs are centered on the worship of *phi* (spirits/ghosts), *khwan** (soul/life essences), *thaen* (spirits in the sky/gods), and *cosmology*.

The life after death of *khwan kok* is guided according to social structure: aristocratic or commoner – aristocratic individuals stay at *Muang Lien Pan Luang*, while commoner individuals stay at *Muang Lam Doi*.



Black Tai death ritual

- ◆ Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1985, 1995; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014)
 - ◆ **Linguistic aspects**: how human experience is construed
- ◆ Nexus analysis or Mediated Discourse Analysis (Scollon, 2001; Scollon & Scollon, 2004, 2007)
 - ◆ **Discursive practices** of the Black Tai death ritual as the site of engagement.



Salient features

A connection between **documentary linguistics** and **ethnographic discourse analysis**

Ethnographic discourse analysis



Methodological model

Ethnographic approach: ethnographic descriptions of Black Tai funerals

Discourse approach: language materials used in socially communicative events



Ethnographic data

- 1) Documentary study
- 2) In-depth interviews key participants by using guided interview questions
- 3) Participant observations of Black Tai death rituals
- 4) Field notes



Discourse data (1)

- 1) Language in action
- 2) Cultural tools
- 3) Site of engagement: Black Tai death ritual
- 4) Community practices



Discourse data (2)

- 1) **Shamans' manuscripts**
- 2) Funeral participants' **interactions**: casual conversations, ceremonial conversations
- 3) **In-depth interviews** on beliefs on *phi* (spirits/ghosts), *khwan* (soul/life essences), *thaen* (spirits in the sky/gods), and cosmology.
- 4) **Field notes** and **audio records** of funeral manuscript glossing sessions: in-depth interview with a key local wise man



Research participants

- 1) **Shamans** (*khoej kok*): aristocrat surname shamans (*Phu Tao*) and commoner surname shamans (*Phu Noi*)
- 2) **Shamans' assistant**: *Mae Hid* (female assistants working on fabric-based handicrafts), *Phor Luaeng Daeng* (male assistants working on bamboo handicrafts)
- 3) **Local wise men**: Mr. Chavalit Arayayutitham
- 4) **Funeral hosts**
- 5) **Community leaders**

Bok Tang : Sending souls to *Muang Fa Muang Thaeng*

Khery kok's task is to lead or guide the *khwan* (soul) of the dead from earth (the house of the dead person) to heaven (the spiritual sky).





people, cultural tools
in action



discourse, practices
in action



BT death
ritual





Research Challenges

1. Unexpected calls
2. Dealing with descendant's grief
3. Require a great deal of time - The death rituals comprised three main days: *wan chut sop* (cremation day), *wan phaew huen* or *sen kwad kway* (cleaning the household day), and *wan aw phi khun huen* or *choen phi khun huen* (inviting the deceased's soul to the house day).



Black Tai Death ritual

Death rite is a good instance of rite of passage. It is **a mediator stage** of life course. It links network relationship among Black Tai individuals and it is also a mediator functioning as **a transitional stage** from life to death and as **connecting thoughts and beliefs** between **human world** and **spiritual world** (i.e., life after death) manifested in death ritual practices.



Language of depression

Language, communication, and socio-cultural context:
a discourse analysis of language use of individuals
with depression in social media
for a suicidal precaution



Objectives

1. to compile a specialized corpus of depression
2. to investigate language use of individuals with depression in social media (personal blogs and weblogs)
3. to explore socio-cultural aspects of individuals with depression
4. to identify patterns of depressive and suicidal communications



Theoretical frameworks

Language and communication:

Systemic Functional Linguistics

Socio-cultural aspects:

Netnography (Kozinets, 2010)

Depression and Suicide

Psychiatric nursing theories

Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (Joiner, 2005)



Salient features

- ◆ Interdisciplinary research

Social science (Linguistics) & life science (Psychiatric nursing)

- ◆ Ethnographic discourse analysis

Ethnographic data: documentary study; in-depth interviews of 10 research participants; a psychiatrist and a psychiatric; participant observations (via Netnography framework)

Discourse data: journals taken from personal blogs & weblogs (a specialised corpus of depression)



Research Challenges

1. **Recruitment** and **conducting in-depth interviews** of research subjects as they are vulnerable individuals
2. Analysing the specialised corpus of depression (470 posts). Currently they are analyzed manually. **Automation** and **machine learning** are highly required.
3. Interdisciplinary research collaboration of **computational linguistics** and **information technology** is highly required.



Thank you for your kind attention