Kathoey “imitation” of women’s speech and the construction of gender identity

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Outline

• Background of the study
  ▫ Kathoey or so-called ladyboy
  ▫ Kathoey’s linguistic practices

• Online dataset
  ▫ Self-reference terms
  ▫ Kathoey vs women

• Naturally occurring data
  ▫ Ongoing fieldwork
  ▫ Lengthening
Kathoey

- Male-to-female transgenders in Thailand
- *Toot (Tootsie)*
- *Phu-ying praphet song* ‘second type of woman’
- *Ladyboy*
- *Phet-thi-sam* ‘the third sex/gender’ -- Buddhism
Kathoey (Cont.)

- Sex work, prostitution, entertainment, beauty
- Comic, uncouth, exhibitionist, aggressive
- No legal recognition
- Activist movements
- A marginal but recognized position in Thai society (Jackson 1997)
Kathoey’s linguistic practices

  - Invariably the female pronouns and particles
  - Arguably language may not be a good indicator of identity. A more direct indicator might be to ask people what they think they are.

- Kongtrakool (1996)
  - “Kathoey’s language,” “gay’s language”
    - e.g. Nunti Watwipa (2004)

- Vocabulary
- Imitation of women’s speech
Research questions

• How do kathoey identify or categorize themselves? What are the kinds of subjectivities they perform?
• How does language participate in kathoey’s construction and performance of subjectivities? How do they use the linguistic resources that are shared among other Thai speakers for their own purposes?
Online dataset

- **Online web-boards**
  - Comparing the use of self-reference terms of kathoey and women
  - 250 postings from 3 web-boards
  - 3,380 tokens self-reference terms

- **First-person personal reference terms**
  - Terms used to refer to a speaker
  - Personal pronouns, personal names, occupational titles and kin terms (Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom 2005)
Standard first-person personal pronouns in Thai
(adapted from Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gender-neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High formality</strong></td>
<td>kraphom</td>
<td>dichan</td>
<td>khaphacaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kuphom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mid formality</strong></td>
<td>nu</td>
<td>chan</td>
<td>raw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low formality</strong></td>
<td>khaw</td>
<td></td>
<td>ku</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

- Personal pronouns: 87.82%
- Personal names: 74.37%
- Kin terms: 14.84%
- Kin+name: 9.85%
- ‘the post owner’: 0.94%
- TLBz: 0.12%
- Jeban & Pantip: 0.66%
Results (Cont.): Personal pronouns

χ²=98.8  
*p < 0.000

χ²=214.1  
*p < 0.000

Male  
TLBz: 2.13  
Jeban & Pantip: 1.70

Female  
TLBz: 3.06  
Jeban & Pantip: 25.95

Gender-neutral  
TLBz: 71.92  
Jeban & Pantip: 95.24
Results (Cont.)

- Hyperadaptation (Trudgill 1986)
- Speakers of one variety attempt to speak like those of another variety but “overdo” it
- The female pronoun *dichan*
The female pronoun *dichan*

- Kathoey
  - ติ้นั้น (*dichan*) อยู่พัฒนาดี ถ้าจะไปตัดที่ลพบุรี ไป - กลับ แล้วคิดว่าผลจะบวมไหมค่ะ ติ้นั้น (*dichan*) จะไหวมิค่ะ
  - I live in Kalasin. Do you think it’s possible for me to undergo the surgery at Lopburi in one day for a round trip? Will I be able to stand the pain?
The female pronoun *dichan* (Cont.)

- **Women**
  - แต่ก่อนเรา (*) มีปัญหาเรื่องสิวอุดตันค่ะ เป็นทั้งหน้าเลย อักเสบทีนึงนี้ทิ้งรอยแดงและหลุมไว้ตลอด ก็รักษาด้วยตัวเองมาเรื่อยๆ ใครว่าดีไหนดี ติชัน (*dichan*) ลองมาหมด
  - *I used to have pimples all over my face. They leave red marks and holes on my face. I’ve tried to take care of them myself. Which kind of medicine is said to be good, *I’ve tried all.**
Results (Cont.)

- Both kathoey and women use the female pronoun *dichan*, but they use it for different purposes.
- Kathoey: default
- Women: emphatic purpose
- Gendered linguistic resources
- Reinterpretation of a linguistic form
Naturally occurring data

- Ongoing fieldwork
- Ethnographic method
  - Participant observation
  - Snowball sampling
  - Friendship groups
  - Fieldnotes, audio-recordings of group activities
  - Approximately 8 months
  - Bangkok
Lengthening

Max  mueng [ku yak pai baep
Pong  [cha chuan pai ottrelia
Max  uem
Mik  [oi pai yurop mai a
Pong  [ tua muen
Max  tua tharai=
Pong  = tua muen [nit nit
Max  [ba
Mik  ui ba thuk chang
Max  ching pa nia [muea rai
Pong  [ching di tua khong=
Max  = khong arai=
Pong  = khong brunai
Max  tae pai kap khropkhrua mueng (laugh)
Mik  man bok wa [(inaudible)
Pong  [mai mai mai ku pai to ottrelia eng
Max  [o
Pong  [ tae ni tae ni yang khuenyukap wa=
Max  = mi thiphak duai na mueng ku mi phuean yu lai khon
Lengthening (Cont.)

Tony: phi koet ma tong long thuk yang na mi arai kan thang kon kap faen bang arai bang
Som: (laugh)
Fon: ba mai ao rok prasat
Yoot: ao hen tham chang
Tony: hen phi ya ngai [phi tong patibat
Fon: [ko baep songsai ngai wa ko man mi baep yang ngia muean [kan mi
Tor: [ngan theo tong long loe=
Yoot: =mai mai mi limit chiwit koen roi chai mai ha
Lengthening (Cont.)

- Social meaning
- Shared linguistic resources
- Ideologically related meanings
- Indexical field (Eckert 2008)
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References

References (Cont.)


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