

Study of the Variation of Words in Thai Language: LINE Stickers

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Abstract

The study of the variation of words in Thai language LINE stickers aims to present the results of a study of the variation of words in Thai language on various sets of LINE stickers. The data were purposively selected from 132 sets of LINE stickers with Thai words that are used to call people and made available in May 2023. There are a total of 4,724 stickers. The study found that of all the stickers with Thai words used to call people, there are 8 types of variation: phrases showing feelings, words for calling relatives, words for calling people by animal names, shapes, and features, transliterated words, dialects, occupations, and age. The variation type most frequently found was phrases expressing feelings on 940 stickers or 20.00 percent, words for calling relatives on 472 stickers, or 10.00 percent, and followed by transliterated words on 296 stickers, or 6.26 percent. Regarding linguistic variation, six types were found: variations of initial consonant phonemes, variations of final consonant phonemes, variations of vowel phonemes, variations of tonal phonemes, variations with the addition of consonants, and variations with the deletion of syllables. However, the format for changing words in the Thai language LINE stickers has changed according to periods. Moreover, the choice of words for calling or addressing people had to be consistent with the person, occasion, and social status of the communicators as well. The study suggests that the variation of words in Thai language LINE stickers reflects the creativity and diversity of the Thai language and culture, as well as the influence of globalization and technology on language use and communication.

Keywords: Types of Variation, Words for Calling People, LINE Stickers

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Introduction

Language variation refers to the different forms a language can take, which, while diverging from the standard form, remain sub-forms of the same language variant. Examples include ‘mai kwat’ and ‘mai fat’ (The Royal Society, 2013). Predicting which variation a user may choose at any given time is challenging, often leading the public to perceive language variation as arbitrary, without any factors dictating the choice of form or the interchangeability of variations. This phenomenon, known as free variation, challenges the view of linguists who argue that variation selection is not random but influenced by social factors such as gender, age, class, and place of residence (Charunrot, 2016, pp. 97-98). Consequently, social change invariably leads to language variation.

Address terms, integral to language usage, evolve with societal changes. Various factors within a society, including occupation, location, time, and race, influence language use. Gender, age, and the relationship between the speaker and listener also contribute to linguistic diversity (Sarawit, 2016, p. 171). ‘Calling words’ are employed to capture someone’s attention, enabling the speaker to proceed with communication. Typically placed at the beginning of a sentence, calling words can also recur within or at the end of a sentence, especially in dialogues. These terms encompass personal names, kinship terms, titles, and second-person pronouns, primarily addressing the listener (Phanthametha, 2015, pp. 138-139). Notably, such terms are prevalent across various communication platforms, including the LINE application.

LINE, an informal social networking app, has prompted Thai sticker artists to create LINE stickers featuring non-standard language to cater to user preferences (Sudhinont, 2020, p. 53).

These stickers serve as crucial tools for expressing emotions and sentiments, often substituting lengthy messages and reflecting linguistic shifts (Sudhinont, 2020, p. 54). This study aims to explore the word variations in Thai LINE stickers, which vividly illustrate the evolution of calling words in Thai society and the broader linguistic transformations in contemporary Thailand.

Objectives

To study the variations of words in Thai language LINE stickers.

Methodology

1. **Sample Selection:** A purposive sample of 132 sets of LINE stickers featuring Thai calling words was selected from a total of 4,724 stickers made available in May 2023.
2. **Research Tool Development:** A table was created to collect, classify, and analyze the Thai language LINE stickers based on the aforementioned criteria.
3. **Data Collection and Analysis:** The Thai language LINE stickers were collected, classified, and analyzed according to societal language use factors such as occupation, location, time, race, etc., including gender, age, and the relationship between speakers and listeners (Sarawit, 2016, p. 171).
4. **Presentation of Results:** The results of the qualitative analysis were presented rhetorically, accompanied by examples.

Results

The analysis identified eight distinct patterns in the variation of calling words used in Thai language LINE stickers, including phrases that express feelings, words used for calling relatives, animal names, physical appearance descriptors, transliterated words, dialect words, occupation-based words, and age-based words. The details are as follows:

1. LINE Stickers With Phrases Expressing Feelings

These are words used to convey emotions such as heartbreak, shock, happiness, sympathy, surprise, pity, doubt, and pain (Thai Language Institute, 2012).

The analysis of Thai language LINE stickers revealed variations totaling 940 images, representing 20% of all stickers. For example:

Example 1



(LINE Store, 2023)

This sticker is number 17 from a total of 132 sets of the LINE stickers, from the set “Hua Fu’s Chat Calling Words and Polite Conversations,” favored by fans.

The featured word “Oooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh” [ʔûu hũu] denotes surprise, characterized by elongating the sound and adding the final consonant ‘w’ to “huuuuuu” [hũu].

2. LINE Stickers With Words Used for Calling Relatives

On the stickers, these terms function as pronouns for non-relatives, such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, and siblings (Prasitratsin, 1990).

The analysis revealed 472 images, accounting for 10% of all stickers. For instance:

Example 2



(LINE Store, 2023)

This is the first sticker from a total of 132 sets of the LINE stickers, from the set “This is Your Wife, and Your Wife’s Chatting is Lovely,” created by Artist Ongsa S.

The term “Papa” [paa cǎa] is traditionally used for ‘father’ but here refers to a husband, with the addition of “ja” [cǎa] to denote intimacy.

3. LINE Stickers With Animal Names as Calling Words

These include terms for various animals. The analysis of Thai language LINE stickers showed diverse patterns in the use of animal names.

It also revealed 280 images, accounting for 6 percent of all stickers. An example is:

Example 3



(LINE Store, 2023)

Sticker number 88 from a total of 132 sets of stickers, from the set “My Babe, My Boo, My You, My Love” by Artist Mango Charm.

The phrase “Ai Yuk Ma” [ʔaj júuk mǎa] is a playful term for a puppy or a baby, derived from “luuk ma” [lûuk mǎa], meaning ‘puppy’. The variation includes changing the initial consonant phoneme /l/ to /y/ or /j/ and altering the tone from a mid-tone to the rising tone / ́ /.

4. LINE Stickers With Physical Appearance Descriptors as Calling Words

Physical appearance descriptors refer to terms that describe physical traits such as being fat, thin, dark-skinned, or fair-complexioned.

The analysis of Thai language LINE stickers identified a total of 291 images, accounting for 6.61 percent of stickers using physical appearance descriptors as calling words. An example is:

Example 4



(LINE Store, 2023)

Sticker no. 57 from the set “Khaimuan: Words for Use with Girlfriends or Boyfriends” by Khaimuan.studio.

It features the phrase “Where’s the fat?” [ʔûan jùu nǎj]. The term “fat” [ʔûan] describes someone with a plump build (The Royal Institute, 2013), used here in a playful manner within the question “Where are you?” [jùu nǎj].

5. LINE Stickers With Transliterated Words

Transliteration involves adapting words from one language into another by changing the script.

The analysis of Thai language LINE stickers showed the use of transliterated words totaling 296 images, accounting for 6.26 percent of all LINE stickers. For instance:

Example 5



(LINE Store, 2023)

Sticker no. 124 from the set “Riak Mae Si (Call Me Mom)” by Ladybam uses the phrase “Tua Mother” [tua maa thâo]. The term “Mother” [maa thâo] is transliterated to refer to someone who excels in a particular field, while “tua” [tua] is a classifier typically used for animals and objects (The Royal Institute, 2013).

6. LINE Stickers With Dialect Words

Dialects are regional variations of a language. The analysis of Thai language LINE stickers found the use of dialect words totaling 156 images, accounting for 3.3 percent of all LINE stickers. For example:

Example 6



(LINE Store, 2023)

Sticker no. 60 from the set “Luna: Wan ni khikhan ae 5” by RoboMolly features the phrase “Ple said it already...” [pên wâ léew]. “Ple” [pên] is a Northern Thai term for “I,” showcasing a dialectal shift from the standard final consonant phoneme /n/ to /l/.

7. LINE Stickers With Occupation-Based Words

Occupation-based words relate to one’s regular work. The analysis of Thai language LINE stickers highlighted the use of occupation-based terms totaling 163 images, accounting for 3.5 percent of all LINE stickers. As an example:

Example 7



(LINE Store, 2023)

Sticker no. 3 from the set “CoCo and Ichiko” by MEANMEAN includes the exclamation “Ho Chan” [hǒ caan]. The term “chan” [caan], derived from “Achan” (teacher or professor), is used before a person's name to show or praise the person's expertise or having knowledge in some subjects (The Royal Institute, 2013). The initial syllable of the word is omitted and preceded by the interjection “ho” [hǒ] to express shock or surprise.

8. LINE Stickers With Age-Based Words

Age represents the length of time a person has lived, from birth to the present moment. The analysis of Thai language LINE stickers revealed the use of age-based words, totaling 238 images, accounting for 5 percent of all LINE stickers. An example is:

Example 8



(LINE Store, 2023)

Sticker no. 111 from the set “Ikonmon 2” created by Immondeejackkhong features the phrase “my old person” [khon kèe khǎw khǎw]. The adjective “kae” [kèe] signifies being old or elderly, as in ‘old person’ or ‘old woman,’ (The Royal Institute, 2013) combined with the possessive “khong” [khǎw], meaning ‘of,’ and “khao” [khǎw], referring to oneself.

Conclusion

The study of calling word variations in Thai language LINE stickers identified common patterns: 940 expressions of feelings (20%), 472 references to relatives (10%), and 296 transliterations (6.26%). Additionally, six types of variations were observed, including changes in initial and final consonant phonemes, vowel phoneme variations, tone changes, added consonants, and syllable reduction. These findings are consistent with research on sound changes that reflect spoken sounds, influencing the current use of Thai sounds in LINE stickers (Sudhinont, 2020). The study highlights the extension of short vowel sounds into long ones to soften abruptness or convey pleading, mirroring spoken communication. Moreover, consonant sounds are sometimes altered, along with deviations in tone from the standard pronunciation. These trends illustrate the evolving preferences in the Thai language within Thai society. However, the choice of stickers should be made with consideration for the age, occasion, and social status of the conversational participants.

Recommendations

1. Further research should be undertaken to explore language variation in diverse contexts.
2. An examination of the changes in the Thai language across different applications is recommended to gain clear and comprehensive insights.
3. A study on the adoption of newly coined Thai phrases in contemporary society should be conducted.

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