

Color Terms in Thailand***Kanyarat Unthanon¹ and Rattana Chanthao²****Abstract**

This article aims to synthesize the studies of color terms in Thailand by language family. The data's synthesis was collected from articles, theses and research papers totaling 23 works: 13 theses, 8 articles and 2 research papers. The study was divided into 23 works in five language families in Thailand : 9 works in Tai, 3 works in Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer), 2 works in Sino-Tibetan, 2 works in Austronesian and 2 works in two Hmong- Mien. There are also 5 comparative studies of color terms in the same family and different families. The studies of color terms in Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian and Hmong- Mien in Thailand have still found rare so it should be studied further, especially, study color terms of languages in each family and between different families, both in diachronic and synchronic study so that we are able to understand the culture, belief and world outlook of native speakers through their color terms.

Keywords: Color terms, Basic color term, Non-basis color term, Ethnic groups

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1. Background

The studies of color terms in Thailand are the research studies of languages in ethnic linguistics (Ethnolinguistics) by collecting language data derived directly from the key informants, which is called primary data or collection data from documents which is called secondary data. And no matter from which sources, the results from these color terms studies make the concept creation system that is derived from basic color terms. In addition, the results from the color terms studies also reflect the natural perception, environment, values and living of the native speakers that are found out from non-basic color terms. The means to obtain the basic color terms and non-basic color terms is based on the theory of Brent Berlin and Paul Kay who studied the color words of the various languages in 20 languages around the world in "Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution" in 1969. Their study became the prototype of color terms research around the world. The result of their study showed that all languages have

2-11 basic color terms, and each language has a similar evolutionary sequence. This is the summary of 7 sequences of basic color terms evolution, as shown in the following figure:

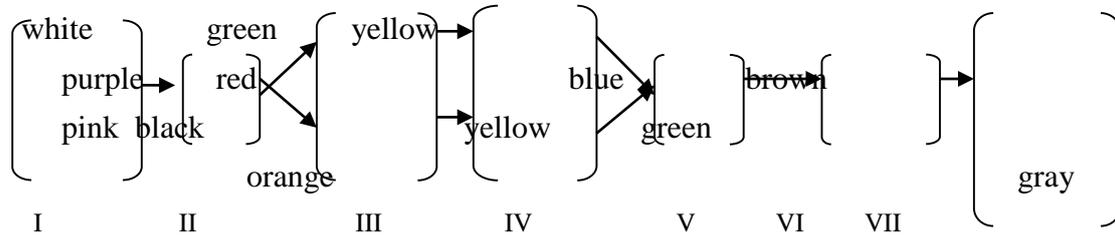


Fig. 1 : Basic color terms evolution (Berlin & Kay, 1969 : 4)

However, in 1975, Paul Kay (1975: 258-262) proposed the change of color terms evolution that they had ever proposed in 1969, because many languages were found that green terms were combined with light blue or blue so Kay used the word GRUE instead of green, light blue and blue combined. The summary is the following figure:

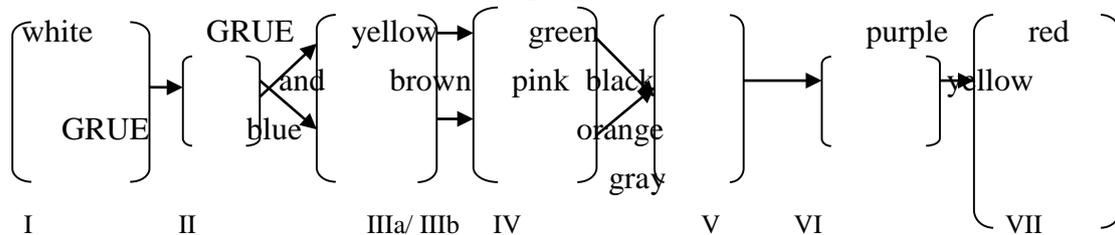


Fig.2 : Basic color terms evolution of Kay (Kay, 1975 : 260)

In addition, Berlin And Kay also made observations about the basic color terms as : the languages that have the evolution in the early stages, such as phase 1 or phase 2, or phase 3, are often the basic color terms of people who live in non-complicated technological society whereas the languages that have the evolution of basic color terms until phase 7 are often the languages of people who live in the complicated technological society.

Moreover, the results of the studies in color terms are according with the theory of Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis : language determines the thoughts and worldviews of people. So, color terms analysis in one language is not only make us understanding their thought but also their culture, physical environment and social environment of the native speakers.

2. Methods

The studies of color terms in Thailand are synthesized from 1985 until 2018, there are 23 works which were studied color terms in Tai family and other families that occur in Thailand. The studies of color terms are found as articles, theses and research papers. Every study is the work that studied basic color and non-basic color terms. But there hasn't been had synthesis of color references in Thailand yet. This article focuses on the studies of color terms in Thailand. The data is synthesized by dividing them into families according to the classification of language families in Thailand of Suwilai Premasri et al. in research "Ethnolinguistic Maps of Thailand

(2004) that presented 5 ethnic groups: Tai, Austro- Asiatic (Mon-Khmer), Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian and Hmong- Mien.

3. Results

The studies of color terms in various language families in Thailand are presented in language families and published year of studies respectively. There are 23 studies of color terms in Thailand : Tai, Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer), Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian and Hmong- Mien. There were 9 works in Tai, 3 works in Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer), 2 works in Sino-Tibetan, 2 works in Austronesian and 2 works in Hmong- Mien. There are also 5 comparative studies of color terms in the same family and different families.

3.1 The studies of color terms in Tai

Tai language family is mostly spoken in Thailand about 94 % of population in country, divided into 2 groups : Tai-Saek and Tai-Tai. (Suwilai Premsrirat et al.,2004:18-20) The first color terms study in Tai was research of Kancana Naaksakul (1985). She studied color terms formation in Thai language. The results have shown that color terms in Thai language are consisted of basic color terms, comparative color terms, words modified by basic color terms and words modified by comparative color terms.

In 1986, Pranuch Witchurot studied color terms in Central Thai language in Master's degree thesis "Color terms and color perception : the study at Tambol Na-in, Amphoe Phichai, Changwat Uttaradit." She used 3 social factors:gender age and occupation, to analyze the data and found that gender is the important factor which is the variable for the difference in usage of color terms between male and female.

In 2000, Supamas Engchuan presented comparative studied "Color terms and the concept of color of the Thais in the Sukhothai period and at the present time." The results have shown that there are 5 basic color terms in Sukhothai period: white, black, red, yellow and green and there are 12 basic color terms in the present time : white, black, red, yellow, green, light blue, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange and grey. This result made the obviously basic color terms evolution; basic color terms in Sukhothai period is in phase 4 whereas basic color terms in the present time is in phase 7 which conform to Berlin and Kay's theory.

In 2007, Narongkan Phumaran studied color terms in Central Thai language from dictionary in "Color terms in Royal Academy's dictionary in 1999" and found that color terms' system in Thai language is composed of basic color terms and non- basic color terms and there is non-basic color terms formation from modifying basic color terms by things' names.

After Supamas Engchuan had presented comparative study "Color terms and the concept of color of the Thais in the Sukhothai period and at the present time" in 2000, Wipatee Tipkongka studied color terms of Central Thai language in the next era from Sukhothai period to Ayatthaya

period in “Color terms in Thai in the Ayatthaya period” in 2010. The results have shown that there are 9 basic color terms in the Ayatthaya period as white, black, yellow, green, pink, orange, light blue and purple.

In 2014, Thanatthakul Phornthippayaphanit studies color terms in Central Thai language in “Color Terms in Thai during the Thonburi and Rattanakosin Period.” The result has shown that there are 6 basic color terms in Thonburi Period: white black, red, yellow, green and purple. This result doesn’t conform to the study of Wipatee Tipkongka that there are 9 basic color terms in the Ayatthaya period. Its number is less than Thonburi Period which was the later era. However, the result of basic color terms in Thai language in the present time accorded with the study of Supamas Engchuan that there are 12 basic color terms in Central Thai language .

Moreover, there is the study of color terms of children by Atchasee Prommayon in “Color Naming in 3-6 year-old Thai Children” in 2009. She presented the conclusion that 3-6 year-old Thai children are significantly better on the naming than the identification task.

In 2007, Sarisa Unthanon presented color terms in Lao language in article “Lao Color Terms.” The results have shown that there are 5 basic color terms in Lao: white, black, red, green and yellow and 6 non-basic color terms in Lao: blue, brown, purple, pink, orange and grey. These color terms are non-basic color terms because the words mean these colors are the words also called things. The result also shows that gender is the important social factor for usage color terms as women are able to call color terms than men.

The last study of color term in Tai family is the study of Rattana Chantao in her article “Different Occupations, Different Colors : Linguistic Perspective” in 2018. She used social factor ,occupation, to study color terms of people in Khon Kaen province, in the Northeast region of Thailand and found that people with different occupations also see different colors according to their experience and environment. Moreover, the finding found that the farmers will have more color references to their environment than other occupations.

3.2 The studies of color terms in Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer)

Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer) in Thailand is divided into 3 groups:Northern-Mon- Khmer, Eastern Mon-Khmer and Southern Mon-Khmer. This language family is widely spoken throughout Thailand about 4.3 % of Thai population. (Suwilai Premsrirat et al.,2004:18-20)

There are 3 works of color terms in Austro-Asiatic in Thailand. The first study is “Color in Khmer : Perception and Grammatical Constructions” in 2005 and the second is “Characters of color terms in the Khmer language” in 2005. Both studies are possessed by Somkiet Wattanawongsakul . The last study is “Color terms in Nyakur” of Kaptipat Keadnok in 2013. For the studies of Somkiet Wattanawongsakul who studied color terms in Khmer in his Ph.D thesis “Color in Khmer : Perception and Grammatical Constructions.” He presented his results that there are 5 basic color terms in standard Khmer and also in Northern Khmer : white, black,

red, yellow and blue. The results of color perception show that standard Khmer and Northern Khmer speakers similarly perceive the boundaries and foci of the basic color terms.

Furthermore, Somkiet Wattanawongsakul also presented “Characters of color terms in the Khmer language” in his article in 2005. The results have shown that color terms in Khmer have the duty to be grammatical unit into 4 types : noun modifier, subordinate verb, noun and verb complement. Thus, the studies of Somkiet Wattanawongsakul are different from other studies which analyzed the data in order to differentiate basic color terms and non-basic color terms but he analyzed the grammatical function of color terms.

For the study of Kaptipat Keadnok in his master’s degree thesis “Color terms in Nyakur” in 2013. He concluded that there are 5 basic color terms in Nyakur : white, black, red, yellow and GRUE. The non-basic color terms were found that there are 4 strategies of non-basic color terms : loan word from other dialects, compounding word from basic color terms and non-basic color terms, compounding word from basic color terms and modifier and referring to specific objects. The studies of color terms in Mon-Khmer in Thailand are rare. Otherwise, there are many Mon-Khmer speakers in Thailand. So it should be studied furthermore, especially study in non-basic color terms which may reflect the change of culture, thought, belief and world outlook of speakers.

3.3 The studies of color terms in Sino-Tibetan

Sino-Tibetan is spoken in the North of Southeast-Asia where is near the border of China. It was also found mostly in the North and the West of Thailand. And since Chinese people immigrated to Thailand for a long time, there have been Chinese Thai people throughout Thailand. There are 1.1 % Sino-Tibetan speakers in Thailand, divided into 2 groups: Tibeto - Burman and Sinitic. (Suwilai Premssirat et al.,2004:18-20)

There are 2 studies in color terms of Sino-Tibetan in Thailand. The first is “Color Terms Formation of the Chinese with Different Ages” by Chen Dongmei in 2014, this study used social factor, age, to be the variable. The data was collected from Chinese people in Beijing, the Republic of China, divided into 3 groups : teenager generation, middle-aged generation and elderly generation. The finding found that teenager generation has more basic color terms than middle-aged generation and elderly generation. The result has also shown that teenager generation has the means to form non-basic color terms differently from middle-aged generation and elderly generation.

The second study is “Color Terms of Chinese people in Bangrak community” in 2017 by Butsabong Kowin. The results have shown that there are 8 basic color terms in Chinese language of Chinese people in Bangrak community : white, black, red, green, blue, brown, purple and yellow. Their non-basic color terms reflect the perspective of nature, focus the importance of things in nature and also reflect their food and lucky things. There are a few



studies of color terms in Sino-Tibetan in Thailand although it isn't Tai family but there are many Sino-Tibetan speakers in Thailand, especially Chinese Thai people who have lived in Thailand. So the study of their color terms may reflect their culture, thought and belief that may be changed from the influence of their habitats where they have lived with Thai people.

This issue is interesting for the further study.

3.4 The studies of color terms in Austronesian

Austronesian or Malayo-Polynesian are spoken of tribes on islands in the South of Southeast Asia such as: Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, etc. They are found in the South of Thailand. There are 0.3 % speakers of population in country, divided into 3 groups: Melayu or Yawi, Urak Lawoy and Moken or Moklen. (Suwilai Premsrirat et al., 2004:18-20)

There are 2 studies of color terms in Austronesian. The first is "A study of Pattani Malay color terms" by Masvinee Saleh in 2009. The results have shown that there are 7 basic color terms in Pattani Malay: white, black, red, green, yellow, blue and grey. The result also show that colors of the culture of Pattani Malay native speakers is influenced by non-basic color terms through their belief and traditional ceremonies.

The second study is "Color Term of Urak Lawoy' in Phuket dialect" by Narongkan Rotsap in 2014. The study findings show that there are 8 basic color terms of Urak Lawoy in Phuket dialect: white, black, red, green, yellow, grey, blue and light blue. And there are 4 non-basic color terms: purple, brown, pink and orange which Narongkan analyzed all 4 colors as non-basic color terms because the word that means purple in of Urak Lawoy is the word means a kind of fruit, brown is the word means red sugar, and there are no words mean pink and orange in Urak Lawoy, but use the same word of purple and orange in Urak Lawoy, respectively. The number of color terms studies in Austronesian in Thailand is few, same as Austro-Asiatic and Sino-Tibetan. It should be great to study languages of people in the South of country that may lead to understand their culture, belief, thought and world outlook so that every people in every region will understand each other more.

3.5 The studies of color terms in Hmong- Mien

Hmong-Mien is spoken mostly by people in the North of Thailand. There is 0.3 % speakers of population in country. It was divided into 2 groups: Hmong and Mien. (Suwilai Premsrirat et al., 2004:18-20) Color terms studies of Hmong-Mien in Thailand are found 2 works: the first is "Color Terms in Yao (Mien)" by Theraphan Luangthongkum in 1992. The study findings show that there are 6 basic color terms of Yao (Mien): white, black, red, yellow, green and blue. The result also shows that Yao (Mien) speakers give the importance for the color intensity in their living and arts. They have the positive attitude for darkened color and bright color. They think that these colors are beautiful so they choose them in their handicraft and arts.



In 2012, Narongkan Rotsap studied “Color terms in White Hmong language.” The result has shown that there are 10 basic color terms of White Hmong: white, black, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, pink, orange and grey. And there are 6 non-basic color terms in White Hmong: light blue, purple, beige, gold, silver and crimson. Narongkan analyzed them as non-basic color terms because the White Hmong word that means light blue means blue-white so this word is non-basic color terms. For purple in White Hmong word means dark blue so this word is also non-basic color terms as well. Hmong-Mien is the language family which there are many speakers in the North of Thailand. So it should be studied their languages, accompany with their culture, thought, belief and the influence of Central Thai words that may be borrowed in Hmong-Mien.

3.6 The comparative studies of color terms in the same family and different families

There are 5 comparative studies of color terms in the same family and different families in Thailand as the details follow: In 1995, Amara Prasithratsint studied comparative study of color terms in the same family in “Zhuang and Thai Color Terms and Color Perception.” Both Zhuang and Thai are in Tai family. The study findings show that there are 6 dialects of Zhuang and there are different numbers of color terms in each dialect. This result is the same with Thai in 4 dialects that there are different numbers of color terms in each dialect. Amara also concluded the non-basic color terms formation in both languages, and the finding is the same. There are 3 means to form non-basic color terms in Zhuang and Thai: compound basic color term together, compound basic color term with modifiers and usage words called things as color terms.

In 1998, Satanan Chua-Maharwan studied comparative study in 4 different families in “Color terms and color perception of Tai Lue, Lua, Hmong and Karen speakers in Chiangrai and Phayao.” Tai Lue is in Tai family, Lue is in Austro-Asiatic, Mong is in Hmong-Mien and Karen is in Sino-Tibetan. The results have shown that there are 12 basic color terms in Tai Lue:, 5 basic color terms in Lua, 6 basic color terms in Hmong and 5 basic color terms in Karen. The result of this study is coherent with the study of Amara Prasithratsint of which non-basic color terms formation. There are 3 means to form non-basic color terms like Zhuang and Thai : compound basic color term together, compound basic color term with modifiers and usage words called things as color terms.

In addition, there is the comparative study of color terms between Thai and Lao language by Apinya Petwichit in “Color Terms Formation in Thai and Lao Language.” in 2002. The study findings show that there are 12 basic color terms in Thai language: white, black, red, yellow, green, light blue, brown, grey, purple, pink and orange. This result is the same as the study of

Amara Prasithrathsint (1995), Supamas Engchuan (2000) and Thanatthakul Phornthippayaphanit (2014). And there are 11 color terms in Lao: white, black, yellow, green, light blue, gold, grey, orange, purple, pink and orange. It is interesting that Apinya Petwichit concluded that “gold” is basic color terms in Lao language that isn’t coherent with the Berlin and Kay’s Theory which word that is used for calling things can’t be basic color terms. However, the result of this study is coherent with the studies of Amara Prasithrathsint(1995), Theraphan Luangthongkum(1992) and Satanan Chua-Maharwan(1998) of which non-basic color terms formation; there are 3 means to form non-basic color terms: compound basic color term together, compound basic color term with modifiers and usage words called things as color terms.

In addition to study of color terms in Thai and Lao, there is also the comparative study between Thai and Vietnamese by Rujiwan Laophairoj in “A comparison of Thai and Vietnamese color terms” in 2009. The result of basic color terms in Thai are 12 basic color terms, same as other studies. For Vietnamese, there are 9 basic color terms: white, black, red, yellow, GRUE, brown, purple, pink and grey. The result also show that non-basic color terms formation of Thai and Vietnamese are 4 similarly means: compound basic color term together, modification basic color terms, modification non-basic color terms and usage words called things as color terms.

The last comparative study of color terms is presented by Narumon Siriphan in “Color Terms and Attitude toward Color of Thai, Pwo Karen, Mon and Khmu in Amphoe Si Sawat Kanchanaburi Provinc” in 2011. She studied comparative study in 3 different families. Thai is inTai family, Pwo Karen is in Sino-Tibetan, Mon and Khmu are in Austro-Asiatic. The results have shown that there are 12 basic color terms in Thai, 4 color terms in Mon and 5 color terms in Khmu. In regard to attitudes towards colors, the speakers of all languages have positive attitudes towards dark colors and negative attitudes towards light colors.

Additionally, their color terms are able to reflect their beliefs in forces, purity, luck, aging and change of status, religion and gender as shown in their ceremonies.

The comparative studies of color terms in the same family and different families are the studies that reflect thought and world outlook of speakers well. However, there are a few comparative studies in Thailand. If there are comparative studies between 2 languages or 2 families or various languages, it will make us understand each other. The studies will help

Thai people to accept and respect the variety of different languages’ speakers and it will help us to live together happily.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

From the synthesis studies of color terms in Thailand from 1985 to 2018, there are 23 works, divided into 5 groups as language family, 9 works in Tai, 3 works in Austro-Asiatic, 2 works

in Sino-Tibetan, 2 works in Austronesian, 2 works in Hmong-Mien and 5 works in comparative studies as shown in the following chart:

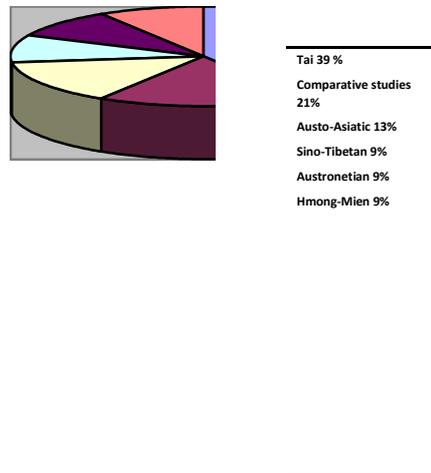


Fig.3 : Percentage of Color terms Studies in each family in Thailand

All studies in color terms in Thailand applied Berlin and Kay's theory (Berlin and Kay, 1969, 1975) to analyze the basic color terms and non-basic color terms. Collecting data from key informants used in methodology by asking color terms from the color cards and things in their environment, this primary data collection is 87% from the total color term studies. And some studies collected data from the documents because it isn't able to collect data from the person due to the old period such as: Sukhothai, Ayuttaya or Thonburi period, this secondary data collection is 13% from the total color term studies. In Thailand, there many different language speakers who have many various culture and we have lived together. If we are able to understand each other through languages, it will bring love, unity of people in our country. Therefore, the more studies in various languages in country we research, the more understanding each other we get.

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