

Pronominal References in Standard Thai:  
Mirror of Interpersonal Relationships and Socio-Cultural Perspectives  
in Thai Society

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**Abstract**

The paper entitled “Pronominal References in Standard Thai: Mirror of Interpersonal Relationships and Socio-Cultural Perspectives in Thai Society” mainly aims at illustrating the usage of Standard Thai’s pronominal references. The distinct uses of pronominal references include personal pronouns substituting for nouns denoting first, second, and third referents and also other nominal terms of address functioning the same way as personal pronouns, namely, kinship terms, status terms (title nouns), and personal names (given names and nicknames). This paper attempts to explain the interpersonal relationships between the five significant social classes of Thai people through the use of Standard Thai pronominal references. Furthermore, socio-cultural perspectives mirroring the true insights of Thai society are significantly and interestingly reflected in the analysis of how Thai people identify their social hierarchy and interpersonal relationships through these pronominal references.

**Keywords:** pronominal references, Standard Thai, interpersonal relationships, socio-cultural perspectives

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความเรื่อง “การใช้คำเรียกขานในภาษาไทยมาตรฐาน: ภาพสะท้อนความสัมพันธ์ทางสังคมระหว่างบุคคลและลักษณะเฉพาะทางวัฒนธรรมของสังคมไทย” มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่ออธิบายการใช้คำเรียกขานในภาษาไทยมาตรฐาน อันประกอบไปด้วย คำบุรุษสรรพนาม คำเรียกญาติ คำนามบ่งบอกยศตำแหน่ง และ คำนามในการเรียกชื่อบุคคล โดยศึกษาประกอบกันกับปัจจัยทางสังคม เช่น เพศ อายุ (ความอาวุโส) ความสัมพันธ์ทางเครือญาติ อาชีพ การศึกษา บริบทในการใช้ภาษา และสถานภาพทางสังคมของ 5 กลุ่มคนในสังคมไทย ได้แก่ (1) พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัวและสมเด็จพระบรมราชินี (2) พระราชวงศ์ลำดับชั้นรองลงมา (3) พระสงฆ์ไทย (4) ข้าราชการระดับสูง และ (5) ประชาชนทั่วไป นอกจากนี้ บทความนี้มุ่งสะท้อนถึงความสัมพันธ์ทางสังคมระหว่างบุคคลที่ผู้ใช้ภาษาไทยเลือกใช้คำเรียกขานในการบ่งบอกสถานภาพทางสังคมของตนเองและของบุคคลอื่น ที่สำคัญอีกประการหนึ่งคือบทความนี้มุ่งสะท้อนเอกลักษณ์หรือลักษณะเฉพาะทางวัฒนธรรมของสังคมไทยผ่านมุมมองจากการใช้คำเรียกขานในภาษาไทยมาตรฐาน ซึ่งก่อให้เกิดประโยชน์ในการเข้าใจวัฒนธรรม ความเชื่อ ขนบธรรมเนียม แนวปฏิบัติในสังคม ความเป็นอยู่และคนในสังคมไทยได้เป็นอย่างดี

**คำสำคัญ:** คำเรียกขาน/ ภาษาไทยมาตรฐาน/ ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างบุคคล/ ลักษณะเฉพาะทางวัฒนธรรมสังคม

## 1. Introduction

Thailand, well-known for centuries by outsiders as 'Siam', is a predominantly Theravada Buddhist kingdom governed by a democratic parliamentary system with a unique monarchy since 1932. Under the present Constitution, His Majesty the King is officially regarded as Head of the State, Commander-in Chief of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, and Upholder of all religions in the nation in which religious freedom and all faiths are allowed to practice. Throughout Thai history, the monarchy and Buddhism have cemented the nation together.

Like other communities, Thai citizens are socially organized and aggregated into hierarchically ordered social groups, or classes. Generally speaking, there are five classes of Thai people: (1) His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen, (2) members of the royal family, (3) Thai Buddhist monks, (4) high-ranking government officials, and (5) commoners. Forming the pattern of social organization in the Thai hierarchy, social and cultural rules, systems or beliefs consequently play an important role in governing Thai people's codes of physically social behavior and the linguistic features of their spoken interaction. From early childhood, Thais learn from their parents or elders in their family the differences in the social levels which exist between individuals. Children are primarily taught about that social code in order to learn and accept their place in the family hierarchy and to act or behave accordingly when later they venture out of their house to deal with the other hierarchies of school, office, government and so on.

In addition to pride for their monarchy, Thai people have a proper sense of pride for the unique culture, traditions, beliefs, and language developed throughout the country's long history. Standard Thai, or specifically Bangkok Thai, is the national official language of the kingdom of Thailand. Standard Thai has its own beautiful, decorative, historically rich script which carries overtones of ancient Sanskrit, Pali, Mon and Khmer, and Chinese languages through political influence and Buddhism by way of highly civilized neighbours like India, Cambodia, and China. The Standard Thai language is widely spoken and understood by the

majority of Thai people; moreover, it is used as the medium for instruction in schools, colleges, and universities throughout the country.

Nakhornthap (2004) mentions that one of the interesting characteristics of Standard Thai, which could identify the value and glory of the language, is the variety of language usage. Knowing what the language means and its grammatical structure may not be sufficient. Thai native speakers have to learn and consider what to say, when to say it, how to say it, and to whom they are speaking. At all levels of society, there are socio-cultural and linguistic systems and attitudes influencing and governing interpersonal speech interactions. Jain (1999) states the relationship between language and society occurs twofold – functionally and existentially. Considered functionally, language and society are autonomous, while existentially, they are interdependent and inseparable. Hartzler (1965) also mentions that the language system and the socio-cultural context cannot be separated, and each reflects the other. Friedrich (1966) presents that speech usage is determined by cultural principles. Therefore, it would be impossible to say that there is no correlation between language and society, and Standard Thai speakers should be necessarily aware of the choices they make with their utterances.

According to Thai cultural beliefs and social practices, both spoken and written language usage are actually determined by several social factors or variables. These include age, gender, family lineage or kinship, social class or status, and occupational rank. Phanthumetha (1983) states that people in Thai society are different in terms of their physical, geographical and social identities. The selection of appropriate words or vocabulary is crucial. If language is used with impropriety or without consideration for those social factors, the message could be understood severely and perceived as a remark of contempt, irresponsible indifference, or even offensiveness. Language such as this may facilitate a failure in communication or various undesirable consequences in any particular speech interaction. Ketprathum (2003) says that the selection of the proper word in speech interaction might be compared with the ability to select a quality piece of cloth and use it properly for any specific purpose. For instance, one piece of cloth is used as clothing for a particular occasion and

another is used for cleaning the floor. A person, who uses the same piece of cloth over and over again, for every purpose, is analogous to one who uses language without any consideration for the words they select and the perception they create.

Hence, it would seem possible to categorize that there are five different language varieties socially used in the Standard Thai speech community.

1. The royal language variety for Their Majesties and Royalty
2. The ecclesiastic language variety for Buddhist priests
3. The polite formal language variety for High-ranking government officials
4. The polite everyday vernacular among commoners
5. The earthy offensive slang and informal vulgar speech variety to avoid

## 2. Definitions of 'Pronominal Reference'

As language is a social phenomenon, language use highly correlates with social structure, and people purposefully use language in order to identify and define their social relationship to each other in their speech community. Simply speaking, people use language to identify who they are in the eye of their society. In addition, the language functions as a medium to communicate or express ideas, thoughts, beliefs, opinions, comments, and emotions. Kellogg (1876) explains that the pronominal strategy involves linguistic rules which indicate the grammar of personal pronouns and sociolinguistic rules that signify the social appropriateness of language usage. The pronouns symbolize one's social position in relation to people around them; therefore, the selection of pronouns is really important in any social interaction. Thus, pronominal usage becomes a projection of the speaker's competence in verbal etiquette.

Cooke (1968) interestingly explains and discusses the term 'pronominal reference' as usage related to personal pronouns and also to other forms which, like them, are used as sentence subjects and objects to denote first or second person referents. Pronominal reference pertains to personal pronouns or words occurring in first or second person contexts with first or

second person meaning which function in much the same way as personal pronouns do. Cooke finds that pronominal usage includes personal pronouns, kintype nouns (i.e. kin terms and status terms), and name nouns.

Siewierska (2004) states that, in principle, there is no limit to the nature of lexical expressions that a speaker may use to refer to themselves. In contrast, it would be dysfunctional for languages to have a wide range of expressions to denote the discourse roles of speaker, addressee and third party. Consequently, in certain situational contexts, speakers not only use personal pronouns to refer to themselves (the first person) and their addressees (the second person) or referents talked about (the third person), they may occasionally use their proper names, the kinship terms identifying the relationship between them, or their titles or occupational roles.

Mashiri (1999) studies the terms of address in Shona, a principal language of Zimbabwe, and presents an interesting statement that 'terms of address' refer to proper names, nicknames, titles, pronouns, prefixes and other referent terms with semantic significance. Naming and addressing practices are dynamic and they reflect very broad categories of social meaning including respect, intimacy, praising, 'playful' or 'abuse', contempt, and patronage, among others. Therefore, the use of address forms and cultural values are closely interrelated.

According to Braun (1988), there are many different types of 'nouns of address' or 'nominal address forms' which include names, kinship terms, titles like 'Mr/Mrs' in English, 'Señor/Señora' in Spanish, governmental or state titles such as 'Senator' or 'Duke', abstract nouns like 'Your Excellency' or 'Your Honor', occupational terms like 'doctor' or 'waiter' in English, and so on.

Jain (1999) presents the interesting point of view that pronominal usage has great social relevance. It seems to be highly correlated with the social structure of the speech community. Jain further states that the pronominal referents systematically indicate people's social status in terms of class, age, gender, education, and social rank. Speakers are not free to

choose any of the possible alternations available to them in the language. They have to select only pronominal referents which are socially acceptable and appropriate for their identity as perceived by others.

In conclusion, 'pronominal references' include personal pronouns that substitute for nouns denoting first, second, and third referents and functioning as either a subject or an object in a sentence. Also included are other nominal terms of address functioning the same way as personal pronouns. Pronominal references could possibly be grouped into four categories, namely: personal pronouns, kinship terms, status terms (title nouns), and personal names (given names and nicknames).

### 3. Classifications of Standard Thai Pronominal References

#### 3.1 Personal Pronouns

In a society, a person who is a member of various different social groups has to play many different social roles. The multiplicity of social roles the person has to play or perform determines the use of the personal pronouns and other pronominal references which exist in most of the world's known languages. In fact, pronominal reference usage is a universal feature of human language. The selection of pronominal references is dependent upon the role played by the speaker in that particular situational interaction, and also which social group they are participating with. In other words, the choices of pronominal references are not determined solely by the grammatical designation of person (first, second, or third) or the number (singular or plural). Instead, the speaker's choice of words to address themselves or another person signifies their evaluation of their own social status and that of the other person as well as their social and interpersonal relationship. As Keshavarz (2001) puts it, "linguistic forms that are used to address others can mirror the complex social relations of individuals in a speech community" (p.6).

According to Jespersen (1936), pronouns are recognized everywhere as one of the word classes. The old definition is long embodied itself: pronouns stand in for the names of

people or things. Lee and Klima (1963) remark that the pronoun is understood traditionally and etymologically as a class of so called 'function-words' used in the place of noun.

Cooke (1968) defines the term 'personal pronouns' semantically as forms which have differentiation of person as the main feature of their class of meaning. That is, they usually denote only first, second, or third person. He further mentioned that personal pronouns may be said to constitute a class of substantives which never occur when followed and modified by nouns or verbs, and very seldom by clauses.

Gessom (1983) presents the definition of the term 'personal pronouns' that they, like nouns, function as either subject or object in a sentence without any change in their forms. In addition, various classes of nouns such as some common nouns, kinship terms, proper nouns, ranking nouns or social status nouns are also used as personal pronouns.

Jain (1999) states the definition of the term 'personal pronouns' as having often been considered to be merely a substitute for nouns. These are words which are used partly for the sake of brevity, partly to avoid the unnecessary and clumsy repetitions of a noun, and partly to avoid the necessity of definite statement.

According to Finegan (2007), "personal pronouns are primarily distinguished from one another by representing different parties in conversation. This aspect of pronoun is called 'person': the first person is the speaker or speakers; the second person is the person or persons spoken to (the addressee); and the third person is the person, persons or things spoken about" (p.38).

Nanbakhsh (2011) mentions that personal pronouns can vary over a number of dimensions, the most common of which are person, number, and gender. Pronouns may show several number distinctions, i.e. dual (two), trial (three), or plural (more) to refer exclusively to persons or things. In addition, pronouns may be inclusive or exclusive, depending upon

whether or not the listener is included or excluded in speech. Pronouns may also vary for gender (masculine, feminine, or neutral).

Furthermore, pronouns may vary with reference to the relative social relationship of the participants in a speech event, creating the honorific dimension of personal pronouns, especially address pronouns (Head, 1976).

The determinants for the selection of pronouns are constrained in use and may vary from one culture or society to another, from one group within the same culture or society to another or from one moment to another in the speech of the same individual (Mühlhäusler and Harré, 1990). Similarly, Brown and Gilman (1960) note that the notion of pronominal choice is bound with the social structure and ideology of particular societies.

Standard Thai is known for its complexities in the choices of personal pronouns and other nominal terms of address available to its speakers. The Standard Thai personal pronoun system reflects a range of power or status, level of intimacy, politeness, deference and respect (or disrespect). The investigation of such complexities could illustrate the close, interesting link that exists between language use and social structure. This link could lead to greater insight into both language and society.

Cooke (1968) finds that a large number of personal pronouns in Standard Thai are monomorphemic and several personal pronouns, especially highly deferential ones, are set phrases which are conventionally used for personal reference. Baron (2001) mentions that Standard Thai has an elaborate system of expressions used to refer to the speaker, the addressee, and others. Personal reference terms in Standard Thai carry with them a range of different meanings and are used differently by men and women. Palakornkul (1972) attributes the use of Standard Thai personal pronouns to numerous social factors: power and status, age, kinship and family relationship, friendship, ethnic-religious group, occupation, gender, genealogical distance, intimacy, respect, solidarity, formality, presence of child, presence of

non-acquaintances or people of power and status, length of acquaintance, and emotional manifestation.

According to Clyne, Norrby, and Warren (2009), the way in which people address themselves or one another - the use of first, second and third personal pronouns such as English 'I/ We', 'You', individuals' first names (or last names and titles) or 'He/ She/ It' - is crucial to marking and expressing social relationships and is closely linked with the cultural values of that speech community. In Standard Thai, there are many forms for the first, second, and third personal pronouns ranging from the most inferior (the least respectful and most intimate) to the most superior (most respectful). Moreover, the Standard Thai personal pronoun system makes a semantic distinction between honorific, non-honorific, and general usage.

				SCALE OF DEFERENCE		
				FIRST PERSON FORMS	SECOND PERSON FORMS	THIRD PERSON FORMS
Less respectful (most intimate)  				/ku:/, /khâ:/	/mɔ̀ŋ/, /eŋ/, /kæ:/	/man/
				⇓	⇓	⇓
				/kan/	/l'ɨn/, /câw/, /na:y/, /tua/, /raw/	/phû: kæ:/, /kæ:/
				⇓	⇓	⇓
				/kháw/	/thɯ:/, /nɔ̀u:/	/câw'ɨn/
				⇓	⇓	⇓
				/raw/	/khun/, /yo:m/	/l'ɨn/
				⇓	⇓	⇓
				/chán/, or /chɔ̀an/, /nɔ̀u:/	/thân/	/thɯ:/, /khɔ̀aw/, or /kháw/
				⇓	⇓	⇓
				/à:ttama:/, /phɔ̀m/	/phrádè:tphrákhun/	/thân/
				⇓	⇓	⇓
				/à:ttama:phâ:b/, /kraphɔ̀m/, /dichán/, or /dichɔ̀an/	/phrákhunthân/ ⇓ /phrákhuncâ:w/ ⇓ /phrâoŋ/	/thu:nkram'ɨm/, ⇓ /thu:nkram'ɨmyɔ̀iŋ/ ⇓ /phrâoŋ/

 <p>Most respectful (less intimate)</p>	/khâ:phacâw/	↓	/tâ:ythá:w/
	↓	↓	↓
	/klâ:wkrâph <sup>4</sup> om/	↓	/tâ:ythá:wkaruna:/
	↓	↓	↓
	/kram`]m/,	↓	/fâ:phrâbà:t/
	/m`]mchán/	↓	↓
	↓	↓	/tâ:y fâ:phrâbà:t/
	/klâ:wkram`]m/,	↓	↓
	/klâ:wkram`]mchán/	↓	/tâ:yfâla]:] phrâbà:t /, /b]:phít/
	↓	↓	↓
/khâ:phráphúthacâ:w/	↓	/tâ:yfâla]:] thúli: phrâbà:t /,	
		↓	/s <sup>4</sup> omdètphrâb]:romb]:phít
			phrâra:tchas <sup>4</sup> ompha:ncâ:w/

### 3.2 Kinship Terms in Standard Thai

The best way to understand the social organization of any society is to examine the basic unit of social structure, the family. A typical Thai family will almost always extend beyond the nucleus of parents and their offspring to include grandparents and paternal and maternal relatives. The very real feeling of togetherness within the Thai family circle is a heart-warming sense of certain security, happiness and pleasure.

Every household has within it a system of dynamics and attitudes governing family members' physical and linguistic interactions. The socialization process in Thai society clearly and significantly distinguishes between seniors and juniors (or subordinates) describing the relationships between parents or other older relatives and children as well as between siblings of different ages. The more advanced one's age, the greater their position in the family hierarchy. Children would be taught to learn and determine their position and relationship with other family members in the family hierarchy, and they would also be trained to act and behave

accordingly and appropriately. Moreover, in Thai society, it would be noted that the children's deference towards their elders would be maintained throughout their life.

In Thai society, the tie of kinship strongly shows the individual's status differentiation and social distinction within the family. The spirit of family solidarity is a cornerstone of Thai society. Thai family life is on the whole far more closely knit than is usual in the West. One of the main factors forming these strong bonds of attachment is a universal love and respect for elders. Seniority is the primary emphasis and the most important concern in the blood-relative relationship for matters of courtesy and respect deeply rooted in Thai social structure. The traditional Thai social practice of expressing respect for elders is paramount in a society where age is considered an unfailingly accurate gauge of wisdom and virtue. Therefore, within the family, all members who are elder to the speaker such as grandparents, father, mother, etc. are to be addressed (and referred to) with terms of respect.

Cooke (1968) defines the term 'kinship noun' as noun forms which denote either blood kinfolk or people possessing a given status in the society, and which are also used in pronominal reference. He further stated that kinship nouns differ from personal pronouns in the way in which they are used both nominally and pronominally, and both usages are closely linked semantically to each other. Similarly, Jain (1973) suggests that the use of kinship terms of address is not independent of pronominal usage. Kinship terms of address are governed by the same rules used for pronominal usages.

In Standard Thai, there are thirty-seven pronominally used kinship terms basically divided into two main categories, namely, twenty-five kinship terms denoting blood kinfolk, and twelve terms denoting relations of affinity created by marriage. Moreover, it is found that there are five dimensions of contrast used for specifying and differentiating the semantic features of Standard Thai kinship terms. These five dimensions of contrast are explained as follows.

(1) **Generation** refers to seven different generations in a typical Thai family: G+0 (Ego and sibling), G+1 (one generation above Ego i.e. parental generation), G+2 (two generations above Ego), G+3 (three generations above Ego), G-1 (one generation below Ego), G-2 (two generations below Ego), and G-3 (three generations below Ego).

(2) **Lineality** refers to line of descent which can be identified as (+ Lineal) referring to 'in the direct line of descent' and (- Lineal) referring to 'descended from a common ancestor but in a different line' or 'in a relation of affinity created by marriage'.

(3) **Age** refers to the biological age of each relative in a family, i.e. (+ Age) 'elder sibling of Ego or other relatives' and (- Age) 'younger sibling of Ego or other relatives'.

(4) **Gender** refers to the physical gender of each relative in a family identified as (+ Male) denoting 'male' and (- Male) denoting 'female'.

(5) **Parental Side** refers to parental side or line of each relative in a family, divided into (+ Paternal) 'on the paternal side' and (- Paternal) 'on the maternal side'.

Gen.	Parental Side	Age	Lineality			
			(+ Lineal)		(- Lineal)	
			(+ Male)	(- Male)	(+ Male)	(- Male)
G+3	(+ Paternal)		'paternal great-grandfather' ทวด	'paternal great-grandmother' ทวด		
	(- Paternal)		'maternal great-grandfather' ทวด	'maternal great-grandmother' ทวด		
G+2	(+ Paternal)		'paternal grandfather' ปู่	'paternal grandmother' ย่า		
	(- Paternal)		'maternal grandfather' ตา	'maternal grandmother' ยาย		
G+1	( + Paternal)	( + Age)	'uncle' ลุง	'aunt' ป้า	'uncle-in-law' ลุงเขย	'aunt-in-law' ป้าสะใภ้
			'father' พ่อ		'paternal father-in-law' พ่อสามี/ พ่อผัว	'paternal mother-in-law' แม่สามี/ แม่ผัว
	(- Age)	'younger brother/ sister of father' อาผู้ชาย/อาผู้หญิง		'younger brother-in-law' อาเขย	'younger sister-in-law' อาสะใภ้	
	( - Paternal)	( + Age)	'uncle' ลุง	'aunt' ป้า	'uncle-in-law' ลุงเขย	'aunt-in-law' ป้าสะใภ้
				'mother' แม่	'maternal father-in-law' พ่อตา	'maternal mother-in-law' แม่ยาย
	(- Age)	'younger brother/ sister of mother' น้าชาย/น้าสาว		'younger brother-in-law' น้าเขย	'younger sister-in-law' น้าสะใภ้	
G+0 EGO	( + Age)	'elder brother' พี่ชาย	'elder sister' พี่สาว	'elder brother-in-law' พี่เขย	'elder sister-in-law' พี่สะใภ้	
		(- Age)	'younger brother' น้องชาย	'younger sister' น้องสาว	'younger brother-in-law' น้องเขย	'younger sister-in-law' น้องสะใภ้
G-1			'son' ลูกชาย	'daughter' ลูกสาว	'son-in-law' ลูกเขย	'daughter-in-law' ลูกสะใภ้
G-2			'nephew' หลานชาย	'niece' หลานสาว	'nephew-in-law' หลานเขย	'niece-in-law' หลานสะใภ้
G-3			great-grandchild เหลน (ชาย/หญิง)			

### 3.3 Status Terms (Title Nouns) in Standard Thai

Pronominally used status terms (or ‘title nouns’) in Standard Thai significantly identify or denote individuals’ social status and rank due to their superiority or inferiority and also are used to intentionally or unintentionally express speakers’ respect, honor, politeness, contempt, or insult towards their conversational interlocutors. For example:

Title Nouns	Literal Meaning and How to Use
/พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัว/ /phrábà:ts4omdètphrácâ:wỳù:hûa/	‘the great foot of the great Lord’/ ‘His Majesty the King’; a title noun pronominally used to substitute or precede the royal name or designation of His Majesty the King who has been officially and completely crowned in the ceremony of royal coronation
/สมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัว/ /s4omdètphrácâ:wỳù:hûa/	‘the great Lord or priest’; a title noun pronominally used to substitute or precede the royal name or designation of His Majesty the King who has not been officially and completely crowned in the ceremony of royal coronation
/สมเด็จพระนางเจ้าพระบรมราชินีนาถ/ /s4omdètphrána:ŋcâ:wphrábɔ:romra:chíni:nâ:t/	‘Her Majesty the Queen’; a title noun pronominally used to replace the royal designation of Her Majesty the Queen who has been conferred the royal rank of the Great Queen, or the Queen who has been conferred as the royal Viceroy while the King who occasionally could not be in charge of the royal responsibilities
/พระครู/ /phrákhru:/	‘a priest who is a teacher’; a title noun pronominally used to substitute the ecclesiastical designation of an abbot’s assistant
/พระอธิการ/ /phráàthíka:n/	‘an abbot’; a title noun pronominally used to replace the ecclesiastical designation of an abbot of a particular Buddhist temple
/สามเณร/ /sa9:mmáne:n/	‘novice’; a title noun pronominally used to substitute or precede the designation of a Buddhist novice

Title Nouns	Literal Meaning and How to Use
/คุณชาย/ /khuncha:y/	'Respected Gentleman'/ 'Your Highness'; an informal title noun pronominally used to address the Prince
/คุณหญิง/ /khunyi9ŋ/	'Respected Lady'; an informal title noun pronominally used to address a female high-ranking government official
/ท่าน/ /thân/	'Respected Sir/ Madam'; a deferential second personal pronoun and a title noun pronominally used to address both male and female high-ranking government officials
/ท่านผู้ว่า/ /thânpû:wâ:/	'The Provincial Governor'; a title noun pronominally used to address the government executive governor of a province
/นายอำเภอ/ /na:yampho:/	'Head Officer of the District Administration Office'; a title noun pronominally used to address a Head Officer of a District Administration Office
/กำนัน/ /gamnan/	'Sub-District Headman'; a title noun pronominally used to address the Sub-District Headman assigned to administer a sub-district area
/ผู้ใหญ่/ /phû:yài/	'Village Headman'; a title noun pronominally used to address the Village Headman, a government officer appointed to administer a single local village
/อธิการบดี/ /àthiika:nb]:di:/	'The President of a University';
/คณบดี/ /khanáb]:di:/	'Dean'; a title noun pronominally used to refer to the Dean of a particular Faculty in a college or university
/ครูใหญ่/ /khru:yài/	'Principal'; a title noun pronominally used to address the Principal of an educational institute from primary to secondary school
/ครู/ or /อาจารย์/ /khru:/ or /a:ca:n/	'teacher' or 'lecturer'; an occupational noun and a title noun pronominally used to address or precede the first name of a teacher or a lecturer in a particular school or university respectively

Title Nouns	Literal Meaning and How to Use
/คุณ/ /khun/	'merit, goodness'/ 'respected You'; a second personal pronoun and a title noun pronominally used to address or precede the first name of both male and female commoners in order to express politeness or respect
/คุณผู้ชาย/ /khunphû:cha:y/	'Sir/ 'Master'; a title noun pronominally used by a male or female servant to address his/ her male master, particularly in a well-financial family
/คุณนาย/ or /คุณผู้หญิง/ /khunna:y/ or /khunphû:yi9ŋ/	'Madam, Lady'; a title noun pronominally used by male or female servant to address his/ her female master, particularly in wealthy families
/คุณหนู/ /khunnu9:/	'Little Master'; a title noun pronominally used by male or female servant to address his/ her master's children, particularly in wealthy families

### 3.4 Name Nouns (Given Names and Nicknames) in Standard Thai

Names are nouns used to denote a particular person, animal, place, thing, conceptual idea, or emotional feeling. For a human being, an individual has both a given name (also called a first name, given to a newborn baby by its parents shortly after birth) and a surname (or family name, that all the members of the same family share). Generally, a Thai citizen's full name is arranged with the given name preceding the surname, and no middle name. In Thai society, a child's given name is ordinarily conceived and given by a respected Buddhist priest or astrologer. In addition to given names and surnames, in some societies an individual also has a nickname by which he is always known among his family members or friends. One's nickname is generally an informal name, often humorous, connected with his real name, his personality or appearance, or occasionally it is a term of endearment given by parents. The given name in Standard Thai, including the abbreviated names, and nicknames can be used pronominally in the first, second, and third person.

### 3.4.1 Given Names in Standard Thai

Given names in Standard Thai may be composed of one or more syllables and are usually compound names which generally convey the meanings related to the concepts of being beautiful, precious, prosperous, wealthy, good, holy, auspicious, strong or powerful. For example, it is interesting to note that Standard Thai given names usually start or end with words like /ph]:n/ 'blessing', /bun/ 'merit, goodness', /sɔ̃rɔ̃/ or /sr4i:/ 'glory', /s4om/ 'fulfilment', /th]:ŋ/ 'gold', or /thawi:/ 'to increase', etc. Most often, given names in Standard Thai are generally used pronominally in the second and third person, either with or without the title preceding the names. Should one's title be used before the given name, it is used formally with superiors or unknown non-intimates by placing a polite title such as /khun/ 'merit, goodness' or /than/ 'respected You' before the individual's given name, for instance, /khun ládda:wan mi:sùk/ 'Mrs. (Miss) Laddawan Meesuk'. The title /khun/ 'merit, goodness'/'you' can be preceded by the person's nickname as well. The title /thân/ 'respected You' is formally used with a superior of high social status like the Prime Minister, Minister, or Ambassador. The title /thân/ 'respected You' is rarely used with commoners' given names. The usage of the given name as the first person rarely occurs, and if so, it is used without title by small children or young women. Interestingly, some given names in Standard Thai are abbreviated from polysyllabic to monosyllabic names; these shortened given names informally become the individuals' nicknames.

The title /khun/ 'merit, goodness'/'You' can precede the kinship terms of address in order to express one's attitude of respect or politeness toward any respected, older relatives, followed by the person's given name. For example, /khun ná: ládda:wan/ 'respected younger maternal aunt Laddawan'. For informal, familiar situations within a particular family, the use of kinship terms of address without title can precede the given names of the elder relatives; for instance, /luŋ s4omcha:y/ 'uncle Somchay'.

Some pronominally used title nouns referring to an individual occupation in Standard Thai can precede that individual's given name; for instance, /khru: duanɕai/ 'teacher Duangcai', or /m4]: s4anti/ 'Doctor Santi'. Furthermore, it is acceptable to place the title /khun/ 'merit, goodness'/ 'you' before the pronominally used title nouns in order to express respect; for example, /khun khru: duanɕai/ 'respected teacher Duangcai'.

Another interesting characteristic of Standard Thai given names is that the meanings of most men's given names tend to emphasize qualities of physical strength, financial prosperity, masculinity, leadership, eminence, and power. For example, /wanchay/ 'the day of victory' literally /wan/ 'day' and /chay/ 'victory' or /s4omcha:y/ 'being manly', literally /som/ 'being fulfilled with' and /chay/ 'male, masculine', are common male names. Conversely, most given names for women are concerned with or related to qualities of gentleness, beauty, feminine virtue, glory, and prosperity, or are names of flowers. Popular names include: /w!ɔlai/ 'being beautiful' or /ph]:nth!ɔp/ 'splendid wish or blessing', literally /ph]:n/ 'wish or blessing' and /th!ɔp/ 'being splendid'.

### 3.4.2 Nicknames in Standard Thai

In addition to given and surnames, in some societies, an individual also has a nickname by which he is always known among his family members or friends. One's nickname is generally an informal monosyllabic name for a person, often humorous, connected with his given name, his personality or physical appearance, or sometimes a term of endearment given by his parents. Nicknames are given to children for the primary purpose of convenience when addressing their offspring and sometimes to wish their children health, wisdom, or wealth, for example, /ph]:y/ 'gemstone, jewel' or /kèŋ/ 'being clever or intelligent'. It could be said that nearly every Thai man, woman, and child has a nickname. Nicknames are usually used to indicate the connotation of friendship, affection or endearment. However, occasionally a person may acquire an additional nickname from those close to them, one which is used sarcastically for their personality or physical appearance; for example, /ûan/ 'fat', or /yô:ŋ/ 'tall, sarcastically

too tall'. Nicknames are used pronominally in the first, second or third person. They are used intimately and affectionately without a preceding title between siblings or intimates.

Sometimes, in order to slightly show respect to someone intimate but who may be a superior, the title /khun/ 'merit, goodness'/ 'You' could precede the person's nickname. For instance, /khun lék/ 'respected Lek' could be used for a listener nicknamed 'Lek', which literally means 'being small' (a gender-neutral nickname for males and females), who may be intimate with the speaker as co-workers in the same company, but is also the speaker's superior. In order to express affectionate and intimate relationships in the Standard Thai speech community, kinship terms of address can precede an individual's nickname, for example, /phî: phim/ 'elder sister Pim'. Semantically and pragmatically, the kinship term / phî:/ is used as prefix denoting 'elder brother or sister', here it denotes 'elder sister' because the nickname /phim/ 'Pim' is a female nickname.

#### 4. Interpersonal Relationships and Socio-Cultural Perspectives in the Standard Thai Speech Community through Pronominal Reference Usage

##### 4.1 Interpersonal Relationships in Standard Thai Speech Community through Pronominal Reference Usage

###### 4.1.1 The Familial Relationship (Non-Ceremonial Kin)

In any particular social structure, family is the smallest human network, connected through numerous members extending both paternally and maternally. The relationship within the family group could be said to be permanent in nature. In the other words, within the family a person would not have to change their role or relationship with other members in the same way they modify the temporary roles they occupy in a society or profession.

The pronominal usage between a speaker and listener within a familial relationship, on either the paternal or maternal side, is naturally and generally chained by the use of kinship terms and name nouns. The Standard Thai speech community is faithful to the cultural norm that

younger people refrain from calling their parents or elder relatives solely by name nouns or second personal pronouns. If younger speakers were to call or refer to their elders as such, it would be quite inappropriate and disrespectful.

### A. The Parent-Child Relationship

The relationship between parents and their children is an intimate tie originating from an unconditional, deep, tender, loving care, affection and concern towards their beloved children. In general, within upper and middle-class Thai families, parents rarely use vulgar language with their children. In the same way, a son or daughter is expected to have a great attitude of respect, deference, and fondness for their parents. The relationship between parents and children, despite being shaped by respect, is mostly informal even in the presence of outsiders.

Affectionately, in normal, everyday situations, parents generally address their children by using the kinship term /lû:k/ 'child', 'offspring' which can refer to either a son or daughter. This neutral kinship term implies the deep sense of love, care, affection, and solidarity given to their children. Additionally, parents ordinarily call their children, either within or outside the family, by their nicknames, with or without the kinship term /lû:k/ preceding their nicknames. Children normally use the reciprocal usage of kinship terms /m^æ:/ 'mother' and /ph^ɔ:/ 'father' in order to address their mother or father respectfully in all ordinary situations.

### B. The Brother-Sister Relationship

The relationship between brothers and sisters in nearly every Thai family is strongly connected to birth, closeness, affection, and respect, if the speaker is older than the addressee. It can be noted that relative age is an important determinant for the usage of pronominal references in the brother-sister relationship. This reflects Thai social norms and traditional practices concerning seniority.

### C. The Grandparent and Elder Relative-Grandchild Relationship

Within typical Thai families, children not only receive unconditional, affectionate love and care from their parents and/or siblings, but they also get the same kind of deep love from their grandparents and elder relatives on both sides of their family. Ideally, children would be cared for affectionately by their grandparents or elder relatives when their parents have occasional professional responsibilities.

#### 4.1.2 The Familial Relationship (Ceremonial Non-Kin)

This kind of relationship originates from and is bonded by the ceremonial marriage of a couple. Familial relationships include those between husband and wife, son-in-law/ daughter-in-law with his or her parents-in-law, or relationships between the members of each family.

##### A. The Husband-Wife Relationship

In middle-class Thai families, the relationship between husband and wife is familiar and generally informal, chained by their love, attachment, caring and closeness. Today, men and women in Thailand seemingly have equal rights and status; however, the position of the husband is socially regarded as superior to that of the wife. A husband typically addresses himself by using the first person pronoun /chán/ 'I, me' (male/ female speaker), or in some cases he might affectionately use the kinship term /phî:/ 'elder brother/ sister' for himself. He would address his wife by using the second person form /the:/ 'you' (male/ female listener), or by her name or nickname.

On the contrary, a wife would generally use the first personal pronoun /chán/ 'I, me' (male/ female speaker) if she is the same age as her husband, or she might use her own name or nickname to address herself. At times she may use the first person form /n9u:/ 'mouse' 'I, me' (boy or girl) if she is younger than her husband and to express her love towards her husband. Generally, she addresses her husband by using the second person form /khun/ 'merit' 'you' (male/ female listener) to show her slight respect, or she would use the kinship term /phî:/ 'elder

brother/ sister' alone, or preceding his name or nickname, in order to show her attachment or his seniority.

In middle-class families, a husband may use the kinship term /phŋ]/ 'father' and /mŋæ:/ 'mother' to address himself and his wife respectively in the presence of their children. This situation displays teknonymy usage of pronominally used kinship terms.

Among lower-class families, spouses may normally address each other with the intimate first-person form /ku:/ 'I, me' (male/ female speaker) and second person form /mɔ̃/ 'you' (male/ female listener) reciprocally. It is interesting to note that these intimate first and second personal pronouns are used by middle-class spouses when they are angry.

#### **B. The Parent-in-law and Son/Daughter-in-law Relationship**

In Thai society, a man's relationship with his wife's parents is one of great respect and distance. Even in normal situations, the behaviours he has to perform on behalf of his mother-in-law and father-in-law seem quite formal. A husband would normally address his in-laws by the kinship terms his wife uses for her parents. He would do the same for her other relatives. For example, he would call his wife's mother /mŋæ:/ 'mother' or /khun mŋæ:/ 'respected mother', the latter showing greater respect. Similarly, a woman would address her husband's parents and relatives using kinship terms based on her husband's relationships with those relatives.

A man would address himself by using the first person form /phŋom/ 'hair on human's head' / 'I, me' (male speaker) when talking with his wife's parents and relatives. A woman might use the first personal pronoun /nŋu:/ 'mouse' / 'you' (boy or girl) for herself while having conversations with her husband's parents and other relatives. This reference decreases the distance between her and parents-in-law and shows her affection. However, it is found that a husband and wife may use their nicknames to address themselves when speaking with their in-laws after few years of their marriage, when the two families are closer and more familiar.

For mothers and fathers-in-law in Thai society, it is commonly found that they use the first person form /chán/ 'I, me' (male/ female speaker) to address themselves, and the second person form /the:/ 'you' (male/ female listener) to address their son/daughter-in-law. Affectionately, they may use the kinship term /lû:k/ 'child, offspring'(son or daughter), or use their son/ daughter-in-law's name or nickname to show familiarity and closeness.

#### 4.1.3 The Social Relationship

Human beings are social creatures generally unable to stay alone; therefore, they form their own social groups or participate in other social communities. Accordingly, they perform many different social roles and interact physically and verbally with others outside of their families; consequently, various kinds of social relationships develop.

##### A. The Social Relationship between Friends

Friends are people whom individuals create social contact with or relate to either by themselves (direct friends) such as friends in the same class, school, university, or workplace, or by getting introduced by someone else (indirect friends) like one's brother's friends or a friend's colleagues. Outside of the family, friends are the closest people to an individual. Friends allow one to open their heart, share ups and downs, and seek needed advice or suggestions. The relationship between friends is normally informal, and the status among friends tends to be equal. It is found that age, gender, and the context of the speech event are significant social determinants in the linguistic variations of pronominal reference usage among friends.

##### B. The Social Relationship between Strangers

In social interactions, a person is involved with many different social groups and meets various kinds of people. Strangers are people met for the first time, their true social status difficult to identify. The social distance between speakers and addressees is made apparent accordingly. In such interactions, called 'the zero address form' by Wolfson and Manes (1979), speakers might politely choose to avoid the use of personal pronouns and other references.

However, this avoidance is temporary and would cease as soon as the status of the addressee is identified.

A male or a female addresser would formally use the polite first personal pronoun /ph<sup>9</sup>om/ 'hair on human's head' / 'I, me' (male speaker) and /dichán/, or /dich<sup>9</sup>an/ 'I, me' (female speaker) to address themselves while speaking with strangers of both sexes. To address the stranger, generally a male or female speaker would use the polite second person form /khun/ 'merit' / 'you' (male/ female listener). It is also possible in the Thai speech community to address strangers using kinship terms if the speaker considers the listener's age and seeks to decrease the social distance and increase the intimacy between them. In this situation, the speaker may use the title /khun/ 'merit' / 'you' (male/ female listener), 'Mr., Mrs., Ms.' followed by the kinship term of address relative to the age of the addressee.

### C. The Social Relationship between Professionals

People interact with others whose professions are related to them directly or indirectly. Colleagues in the same company or office, doctors and nurses at the hospital, or shopkeepers and their customers are all related one way or another. In different circumstances, pronominal usage varies. The usage of pronominal references is based on the acquaintance (or length of association between the individuals), relative age, relative status, gender, and personal relations between the speaker and the person who they are having professional contact with. For instance, within an educational institute in a Thai community, lower-ranked staff members generally address lecturers with the respected status term /a:ca:n/ 'teacher, lecturer'(male/ female) followed by his or her first name. If that lower ranked staff member is female, she would formally use the polite first personal pronoun /dichán/, or /dich<sup>9</sup>an/ 'I, me' (female speaker) with lecturers to express respect. If the staff member speaking is male, he would use the polite first person form /ph<sup>9</sup>om/, literally 'hair of the head' / 'I, me' (male speaker) while talking with the lecturer. The superior would use the polite second person form /khun/ 'merit' / 'you' (male/ female listener) to address the staff member, reciprocally.

The relationships between an employer and their subordinates are typically examined under variables such as superiority status, non-solidarity, and seniority. It is generally found that there is formality and respectable social distance within superior-subordinate relationships. In the Thai speech community, subordinates use the respected second person form /thân/ 'you' (male/ female), or /khun/ 'merit/ 'you' (male/ female listener) to address his or her boss, and he or she would use the first personal pronoun /phǒm/, literally 'hair of the head/ 'I, me' (male speaker) and /dichán/, or /dichǎn/ 'I, me' (female speaker) for themselves respectively. It is worth noting that should the superior be younger than their subordinates, the respectful, non-reciprocal usage of the polite first personal pronouns /phǒm/, or /dichán/, or /dichǎn/ 'I, me', and the second personal pronoun /thân/, or /khun/ 'you' prevail over the factor of relative age.

In relationships between shopkeepers and their customers, it is noted that in the Standard Thai speech community, both the speaker and the listener generally use kinship terms of address in order to show intimacy and kin-alike. It should be noted that the use of kinship terms might be a tactic to entice customers to buy articles or products from their store. These relationships involve the various social factors of both the shopkeeper and customer. These factors include the customer's sex, relative age, social status, and length of acquaintance. Ordinarily, a male shopkeeper would use the general first person form /phǒm/, literally 'hair of the head 'I/me' (male speaker) to refer to himself when speaking with a customer who is the same age or older. The shopkeeper intimately uses kinship terms for his customer depending on the said social factors. For example, he would use the kinship term /pâ:/ 'aunt' or /khunpâ:/ 'respected aunt' for a non-kin female customer who is older than him, and whom he regards and treats as his own relative. This is an example of the use of pseudo kintype. Should the shopkeeper and customer be familiar or have known each other for some period of time, they may address each other by their names or nicknames.

## 4.2 Socio-Cultural Perspectives in the Standard Thai Speech Community through Pronominal Reference Usage

### 4.2.1 Power Distance (Hierarchical Society)

Power Distance describes the degree to which large differences in status exist among people in a society and also the extent to which these variances in power are accepted (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). Hofstede (1983) and (1991) describe 'Power Distance' in terms of the prevailing norms of inequality within a culture. Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. According to Hofstede (1991)'s research, the Power Distance dimension in Thailand is high, indicating a high level of inequality of power and wealth: "superiors and subordinates consider each other as existentially unequal ... [and] subordinates are expected to be told what to do" (p.35). Vance et al. (1992) found that Thai subordinates accept a hierarchical order and appreciate strong leadership.

As Thai society is a hierarchical society comprised of five social classes of people, taking individuals' different dimensions of power distance (i.e. age, social class and status, occupational rank, or even life experience) into consideration is vital. Behaving with proper social manners and expressing oneself verbally using the most appropriate pronominal references is truly essential. Baron (1998) interestingly states that, in the Standard Thai pronominal reference system, choosing appropriate personal pronouns or other nominal terms of address involves taking into account (1) conversational interlocutors' social identities and social status, (2) interlocutors' social and interpersonal relationships, and (3) the social setting of the interaction and its level of formality.

The concept of being 'superior-inferior' or 'younger-elder' signifies an asymmetrical relationship between interlocutors and one of the most interesting socio-cultural perspectives in Thai society, seniority. Seniority implies that an individual has more experience and is more knowledgeable and more capable (Khanittanan, 2005). Rojanapanich (2010) mentions that Thai culture revolves largely around Buddhism and respect for seniority, whether in terms of age,

social class or social status, educational background, occupational rank, or even wealth. Notwithstanding the respect given to seniority, Buddhist priests receive absolute deference and it is common to see healthy young Buddhist priests sitting on buses while elderly passengers stand. Seniority has different forms: younger people respect elders, the poor look up to the rich, and common citizens defer to politicians and high ranking military personnel (Mulder, 2000). Titthummo (2004) states that young Thai people believe in “expert” decisions - that is, they have a strong respect for authority. Thai children, accordingly, are brought up to believe in the virtue of obeying parents, teachers and other adults.

#### 4.2.2 Conflict Avoidance/ Non-Confrontational Society

The importance of the concept ‘saving face’ is a significant social concern for people in a collectivist society. Thai people are normally concerned about what others think of their actions. Consequently, they tend to try to gain respect by acting or expressing themselves in a way that best and most appropriate meets the expectations of the individuals around them. Moreover, if possible, Thai people usually avoid any linguistic and non-linguistic expressions that might cause personal conflicts or unsatisfied situations between themselves and their interlocutors.

#### 4.2.3 Collectivist Society

Komin (1991) described collectivism as a society characterized by a tight social framework in which people expect others in groups of which they are a part (such as an organization) to look after them and protect them when they are in trouble. In exchange, they feel they owe absolute loyalty to the group. Thailand is a collectivist society, where “people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioned loyalty” (Hofstede, 1988, p.78). Furthermore, Thai society’s collectivist identity is evidenced by a sense of long term responsibility to the group, the family (especially the extended family), or other extended social groupings. Loyalty in a collectivist culture is dominant, overriding many other societal rules and

regulations and the society promotes strong relationships within organizations, such that everyone takes responsibility for each other (Buriyameathagul, 2013).

#### 4.2.4 Politeness and Honorificence

In Standard Thai, choosing a personal pronoun or another nominal term of address, in any particular situational context, not only formulates or ties social and interpersonal relationships between conversational interlocutors, but also signals honorificence (honored and unhonored) and politeness (polite and impolite) toward other referents (Baron, 1998).

Khanittanan (2005) states that age is the most important factor in the politeness strategies of Thai society. One strategy utilizing verbal politeness in Thai society involves addressing strangers or unknown people with a kinship term. For instance, the speaker may address the listener with the term /ta:/, 'maternal grandfather' or /yai/, 'maternal grandmother' preceding his or her names, to show the higher status of the addressee. If the speaker addresses the listener with /phî:/, 'elder sibling', or /n!๑:η/, 'younger sibling', this manifests solidarity with the addressee (pp. 316-317).

## 5. Conclusion

Language is a social phenomenon, and language use is highly correlated with social structure. People purposefully use language in order to identify and define their social relationships with others in the speech community. People use language to identify who they are in the eyes of their society in addition to the language functioning as a medium to communicate or express ideas, thoughts, beliefs, opinions, comments, or emotional feelings. In other words, people use language, both intentionally and unintentionally, to express the interpersonal relationships between themselves and others. Speakers convey significant socio-cultural perspectives reflecting their own social practices or cultural beliefs.

Like other communities, Thai citizens are socially organized and aggregated into hierarchically ordered social groups, or classes. Generally speaking, there are five classes of Thai people: (1) His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen, (2) members of the royal

family, (3) Thai Buddhist monks, (4) high-ranking government officials, and (5) commoners. The pattern of Thai hierarchical social organization, social and cultural rules, and systems or beliefs consequently play an important role in governing the codes of physical, social behavior and linguistic speech interactions. Both spoken and written language use in the Standard Thai speech community are actually determined by cultural beliefs, traditionally transmitted social practices and several social factors or variables such as age, gender, family lineage or kinship, social class or status, occupational rank, and situational context.

Therefore, it would be possible to categorize the language socially used in the Standard Thai speech community into five different language varieties:

1. The royal language variety for Their Majesties and Royalty
2. The ecclesiastic language variety for Buddhist priests
3. The polite formal language variety for High-ranking government officials
4. The polite everyday vernacular among commoners
5. The earthy offensive slang and informal vulgar speech variety to be avoided

In a society, a person who is a member of various different social groups has to play many different social roles. The multiplicity of social roles the person has to play or perform determines their use of the personal pronouns and other pronominal references which exist in most of the world's known languages. The selection of pronominal references is consequently dependent upon which role a speaker is playing in that particular situational interaction, and to which social group they belong. The terms a speaker chooses to address themselves or another person signifies their evaluation of their own social status and that of the person in a social and interpersonal relationship with them.

Pronominal references include personal pronouns that substitute for nouns denoting the first, second, and/or third referents functioning as either a subject or an object in a sentence. These also include other nominal terms of address functioning as personal pronouns. Pronominal references could be grouped into four categories: personal pronouns, kinship terms,

status terms (title nouns), and personal names (given names and nicknames). Standard Thai is known for its complexities in the choices of personal pronouns and other nominal terms of address available to its speakers. Standard Thai pronominal references reflect a range of power or status, levels of intimacy, politeness, deference and respect (or disrespect). An investigation of such complexities would interestingly illustrate and mirror the close link that exists between language use and social structure, leading to greater insight into both language and society.

Summarily, when confronted with differences in social status between individuals, and recognizing that seniority is an important social norm, Thai (or specifically Standard Thai) speakers have to know what to say, when to say it, how to say it, and to whom. Generally, from a very early age, every Thai child is taught a code of behaviour to relate to people around them. Children learn over time how and when, and to whom to express their respect, politeness and honour to respected superiors. Also, they have to learn and accept their place in the social hierarchy and act accordingly. Proper use of language concerning socio-cultural variables between speakers and the addressees (or referents) plays an important role in expressing respect, honour, and politeness to those a speaker is interacting with. On the contrary, lacking interest in those social and linguistic factors results in contempt, insults, and irresponsible indifference; this consequently creates undesirable responses in speech interactions.

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