CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In studying conversation, scholars usually put great emphasis on the verbal means of communicative language. In fact, another kind of communication which is no less important than verbal communication is identified as nonverbal communication; that is, the transfer of information between persons without the use of words. Visual perception is a fundamental channel in receiving messages through the use of various nonverbal actions. In some circumstances, especially when secrecy and/or privacy is a major concern, we apply body language such as facial expressions, head movements, body positions and acts to convey a secret message among group members. However, people who have lost their sight make use of alternative devices to perform secret communication with other members of their peer groups in similar circumstances. This is the issue which will be explored in this thesis.

A few research papers have revealed that the language use of the Thai blind is distinct from the language use of other groups in Thai society. Maneesai (1993) has discovered that the Thai blind of Bangkok make use of verbs of visual perception somewhat differently from sighted people. In my previous research paper in the Seminar in Syntax course, I also pointed out that the Bangkok blind apply distinctive discourse markers to communicate among themselves (Umpornpaiboon 1998). The following conversation which was overheard and recorded on cassette at a restaurant near the Thailand Association of the Blind on August 13, 1998, will illustrate another aspect of the language used by the Thai blind.

(1)   A: /ʔàʔcɔ̂ːt   pàʔcen   jaŋŋaj bâːŋ/ *

        /ʔɔ̂ːt   pen   jaŋŋaj bâːŋ/

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* In this thesis, words of more than one syllable would be transcribed without any syllable boundary marker either a dot or a space. The reader has to figure it out by the Thai phonological and phonotactic rules.

	Odd	be	how	PAR

"How do you feel about Odd?"

B: /bà: wannán lɔ́:tʔú:t lenpɔŋ jaŋŋaj bâ:ŋ mâ:/

/ʔə: wannán ʔɔ́:t pen jaŋŋaj bâ:ŋ máj:/

Well!	that day	Odd	be	how	PAR	PAR

"I will tell you about Odd that day."

B: /khæ̂:bæ̀:p khonta:bɔ̀:t ma: kin khâ:w cə:

/bæ̀pwâ: khonta:bɔ̀:t ma: kin khâ:w cə:

When	man blind	come	eat	rice	meet

læ:ŋmɔŋlà:psù:p dùaj/

mæ:ŋsù:p dùajlâʔ/

cockroach	PAR

"When a blind man came to have a meal, he found a cockroach, too."

From this dialogue, A and B exchange their words by applying phonological patterns to syllables of the Thai words used in the conversation. A word is split into two separate syllables, and some phonological segments are added to the newly occurring syllables. This linguistic phenomenon is evident from the fact that the source word and the derived word possess some similar phonological properties. Instead of stating the name of the person /ʔɔ:t/, the speaker splits the source word into two separate syllables, and adds some sound segments to the newly occurring syllables of the derived words. The new words /ʔaʔcɔ́:t/ and /lɔ́:tʔú:t/ are then used in the above conversation to replaced the word /ʔɔ́:t/ in Bangkok Thai to avoid being perceived by the outsiders. This is just one example of phonological variations in the language used by the Thai blind.

In the Socio-linguistics course, I conducted a study by interviewing a group of twelve blind men and women of different ages and education on their language use at the Bangkok School for the Blind (BSB) and Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB). I interviewed them about the general information concerning the special language used in their community and their attitudes toward the language. I also told them to utter sentences in their in-group language. When I analyzed the data, I found that there are various

phonological traits which distinguish the language used by the blind from the Thai used by sighted native speakers (Umpornpaiboon 1997).

In the interview, I told the interviewees to say /paj/ (= "to go") using the in-group language. When collecting all data from the interviews, I found that there were six phonological patterns altogether as shown below:

(2)   A.   /lajpɔŋ/

      B.   /lajpuj/

      C.   /pàʔcaj/

      D.   /paː/

      E.   /pàʔcaː/

      F.   which and (see 6.2.1 for further detail)

To modify syllables of words with phonological devices is a common technique in some languages. This linguistic phenomenon also occurs in English through various forms of verbal play such as pig Latin. Let us consider the following examples:

(3)   Eakspay igpay atinlay = "Speak pig Latin." (Random House Webster's Electronic Dictionary 1989)

(4)   H-op-ow op-are y-op-ou? = "How are you?"

(5)   Pithigig lithigatithigin = "Pig latin."

(6)   Hub-ell-ub-o = "Hello." (http://linguist.emich.edu/~carnie/)

The data in (1) suggests one interesting point that needs investigation. It is obvious that the speech of the Thai blind consists of words in normal Thai and words of their own invention. From my observation of the speech of the Thai blind, I suspect that there might be certain regulations imposed on the application of the in-group language; i.e., the blind may apply their in-group sound patterns only with some kinds of words in their utterances. For instance, we can see from (1A) that the word /ʔɔ́ːt/, the name of a person, is transformed into the in-group sound pattern while some words such as /jaŋŋaj/ are not modified by the in-group phonological patterns. Hence, it is interesting to study which types

of words are usually modified through the application of the in-group sound patterns.

There is also the question of why the blind have found it necessary to create their in-group language. In reality, sighted people usually communicate their secrets among their peer groups through the use of nonverbal communication. Various nonverbal communicative actions need visual perception such as gestures, posture, facial expression and eye contact; those actions take priority in communication. Like other members in society, people with visual disability sometimes find it necessary to achieve their goals in communication with other members in their group without being understood by outsiders. For example, when they do not feel happy in some social environments, they would like to share their unhappy feelings with other members without permitting sighted outsiders to perceive these feelings.

Laver (1976) suggested that specific acts have specific meanings. Head and facial movements, for instance, give the most information about the type of emotion being expressed; body position and tension can indicate how people feel about others. Eye contact is especially important in signaling changes in ongoing interactions. In order to understand the communicative intent, participants in a conversation not only have to decode what the other participant is saying, but also have to be able to draw conclusions about the speaker's personal characteristics, in terms of his physical, social, and psychological attributes and his momentary mental state so as to shape their own behaviors into an appropriate relationship with him.

The study of nonverbal communication, sometimes called body language, consists of two sciences called 'kinesics' and 'proxemics'. Kinesics is 'the study of body and facial movements as an accompaniment to speech'. It was developed by the American anthropologist Ray L. Birdwhistell, who used slow-motion films of speakers to analyze their gestures and expressions (Birdwhistell 1970). Whereas, 'proxemics' was derived from the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1959), studying how people in different cultures use speaking distance, and other nonverbal signals to communicate their feelings and social status. In some situations, people feel uncomfortable putting such information into words, but proxemics allows people to send and receive messages without the use of words.

Obviously, nonverbal communication is essential in our daily lives and needs further examination. According to Laver, nonverbal types of communication are classified into two subcategories: 'the audible paralinguistic features' and 'the visible, paralinguistic features'.

These two subcategories, in addition to verbal communication, are incorporated in a conversation to communicate the complete thoughts of a speaker.

Obviously to communicate with their group members the blind are unable to apply some paralinguistic devices, especially those requiring visual perception. No matter whether a blind message sender is capable of applying such paralinguistic devices to convey a message to a blind receiver, it remains impossible for the receiver to perceive the message through his or her visual perception. It is intriguing to observe how the Thai blind compensate by applying alternative channels of communication in place of the visual communicative one.

My pilot study which I have conducted in the blind communities has indicated that one of the essential channels of communication of the Thai blind is to modify normal Thai with special phonological patterns to communicate secrets among themselves (Umpornpaiboon: 1997). They exploit their remaining verbal patterns which are modified from regular linguistic forms to fulfill the communicative impairment. From my observation as a participant in the conversations of the Bangkok blind interlocutors, I have found that they create their in-group language by applying special phonological patterns with each syllable of normal Thai words to pass secret messages among themselves.

In addition, there are some tabooed words which are unacceptable for the general public. It is interesting that blind speakers still use these tabooed words in the form of in-group phonological patterns to make it less irritating to the blind listeners. As Miss Oraporn Nangratoak, a former committee member of the Thailand Association of the Blind, said, "A wide variety of words in Thai are not acceptable in general public. Using those words may show that the speaker is rude or uneducated." However, as she points out, some blind people still bring those words into their conversations by applying their in-group phonological patterns with those socially unaccepted words. For example, educated Bangkokians do not use the word /tòt/, which means "to expel intestinal gas through the anus", in public since this word is considered impolite; yet, the blind still use this word in their group by applying a special phonological pattern which can disguise the pronunciation of the source word.

The following sentence which was overheard and recorded at the School for the Blind on October 9, 1998 clearly demonstrates this linguistic feature:

(7) /khraj tà: wá: hùaj thɔ̀:/ *

      /khraj tòt wá: jæ̂: caŋ/

      Who break wind PAR bad PAR

      "Who breaks wind! That's terrible."

The example above reveals that instead of pronouncing the word /tòt/, the speaker turns to use the word /tà:/ as a euphemism.

There is also some evidence showing that the special language is a tool to create in-group solidarity. Blind people of different ages, sexes or social status tend to use the language with people who have similar disabilities to show intimacy. Also, the ambiguity lying between normal Thai and the in-group language is a source of jokes that circulate amongst them.

Up to the present, there have been few studies in the field of language used among visually impaired people all over the world. One of the main objectives of special education is to focus on people with visual disability and it puts a great deal of effort on the study of physical and social barriers which obstructs the full achievements of the visually disabled, but there are still few studies carried out in the field of socio-cultural aspects of this group, especially linguistics. It is of particular interest to me to investigate this area of the special language used in this community since I have the following assumptions in mind: There would be various phonological patterns used to modify syllables of normal Thai words to create the special language of the Thai blind. It is also assumed that those phonological patterns are applied only in the place of content words. Additionally, there will be some motivation behind the use of these deviant patterns. I expect that this thesis will make a great contribution to some related fields of study in Thailand, especially blind-oriented studies and verbal play.

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* In this thesis, the length of short and long diphthongs would not be marked as in short and long monopthongs. One would recognize a short diphthong when it is followed by a glottal stop. Short diphthongs can also be followed by other consonants. However, words with diphthongs are quite rare in the language; mostly they are expressives, borrowed words, and onomatopoeia, e.g. [phĩap] -a lot, plenty, [phĩa/]-to hit (Chinese loan word), [dĩa/]an expressive word to describe a way of quick climbing, etc.

1.2 Purposes

1.2.1 To analyze the phonological patterns of the secret language used by the Thai blind.

1.2.2 To discover in which grammatical categories the phonological patterns occur.

1.2.3 To study the motivation for the use of the secret language.

1.3 Hypotheses

1.3.1 The secret language used by the Thai blind is constructed by modifying Thai words with phonological processes.

1.3.2 The Thai blind apply the phonological processes to content words only.

1.3.3 There are three objectives in using the secret language among the blind:

1.3.3.1 To conceal their secrets from outsiders;

1.3.3.2 To create euphemisms;

1.3.3.3 To show the group's solidarity.

1.4 Scope of the Study

1.4.1 Study the language of the Thai blind speakers who use Bangkok Thai in their daily lives;

1.4.2 The speakers must be proficient in using the special or secret language.

1.5 Contributions

1.5.1 The study provides new knowledge of verbal play;

1.5.2 It also provides an understanding of phonological processes in Thai;

1.5.3 The findings can be used as a reference for a blind-oriented study in Thailand.

1.6 Research methodology

In studying the language of the Thai blind, I carried out the following procedures:

1.6.1 Documentary research

First, I started the research by doing documentary research related to the field of the study both in printed and electronic documents. As mentioned earlier, there were very

few research papers directly related to the language use of the blind in general. Therefore, I tried to locate papers concerning the topics found in this research work which are summarized in the following chapter.

1.6.2 Data collection

1.6.2.1 Observing the natural conversations of the Thai blind

The next step of my research methodology was to collect data from natural conversations of the Thai blind. First, I began to observe the conversations of blind interlocutors at the Association of the Blind and the Bangkok School for the Blind, and recorded the conversations containing the secret language on cassette. I also went out with a group of blind people to some places such as shopping centers, restaurants, and some seminars set up by various organizations of the blind so as to observe and record their conversations. To make this research most reliable, I also used a phone conference service to listen to the blind interlocutors conversing naturally on the telephone, and recorded their conversations on cassette. After recording the conversations, I transcribed the entire turns of blind speakers which contain words of phonological deviations by applying phonetic symbols and recorded the sex and age of the transcribed speakers to prepare for my analysis. Altogether 234 utterances were used for my analysis.

1.6.2.2 Interviewing the speakers of the secret language

In order to determine the motivations behind the application of the in-group language, I interviewed 80 Bangkok blind speakers of different sexes and ages from April 1 to June 15, 1999 at the five blind institutes:

    A. Bangkok School for the Blind (BSB), April 1-15, 1999.
    B. Sampran Rehabilitation and Training Center for Blind Women, May 2-5, 1999.
    C. Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB), May 10-28, 1999.
    D. Caulfield Foundation, June 4-11, 1999.
    E. Skill Development Center for Men June 15, 25, 1999.

I collected data from the above communities because I realized that the members of the communities shared something in common. They gathered together at the institutes to participate in various activities and that would have much influence on adopting the in-group language within their peer groups.

The five institutes can be classified into two groups in terms of social interaction among in-group members in the communities. The first three institutes consisting of the Bangkok School for the Blind, the Skills Development Center for Blind Men and Sampran Rehabilitation and Training Center for Blind Women are centers for the blind where the members spend most of their time in joining together to participate in various activities since those blind members have to work and live in the communities. The other two institutes, Caulfield Foundation of the Blind and Thailand Association of the Blind, have members who come to the institutes from time to time. Since the members of these two institutes spend most of their time outside the blind communities, they use the special language less than the former group.

In interviewing the blind speakers who use the secret language, I tried to relax them by making the conversation as casual as possible. During the interview, each interviewee was asked three sets of questions: the first set of questions concerned the speaker's personal information such as age, sex, and length time of participating in the blind community. These questions would, first, be a tool to select appropriate interviewees, i.e., the interviewees who are selected for the interviews must speak the language well enough. Also, the questions were useful information in analyzing the data and presenting the findings of the research work.

Another set of questions were related to the subject of this study. Here are some examples of such questions asked in the interviews:

A. When do you use the secret language?
B. Do you use the language with blind people only? If not, who else?
C. With whom do you never use the language?
D. With whom of the following persons in the blind community do you use the language?
    - Close friends;
    - Younger people;
    - Older people;

- People with whom you have met for the first time.
E. What factors do you think motivate a group of the blind to use a different language from other people?
F. Do you think this language has a great impact on your daily life? If so, in what ways?

Another set of questions were related to the decoding of the sampled data which I transcribed from actual speeches of the Thai blind. Those questions were designed to verify that my linguistic models in chapter 3 could be used to decode the blind in-group language precisely. The following are examples of such questions:

Please translate the following speeches into normal Thai:

A. /khraj maʔcaw hǎ: ʔét/

B. /pà:nnîi: khǎw mi: phǎ: pentuapenton paj lǽ:w/

C. /kɔ̂: kæ: læ̀ʔ do:n là:dù: ʔe:ŋ/

D. /jà: phəŋ khuj lúktɔŋ jù: khâŋbon/

E. /cɔ:nɔ:thɔ̂:   mà: daŋ   khǎm thɔ̀:/

F. /faʔca: ʔàj taʔcɔ̌j ŋaj lâw/

1.6.3 Data analytical procedures

1.6.3.1 Marking boundaries of words

After transcribing the collected data, I marked the boundary of each word so as to make it easy for analyzing the data in the following steps. In this step I applied some criteria in word segmentation. For example, a group of words in adjacent position was counted as a single word if this word group was a compound word (e.g. /tû:sûaphâ:/ = "closet"), complex word (e.g. /sǔajŋa:m/ = "beautiful, elegant, etc.") or repetition word (e.g. /dèkdèk/ = "children").

1.6.3.2 Marking sound patterns of words

After marking word boundaries in the data, I observed the phonological patterns within each word and classified all words found in the data into categories according to their phonological patterns. At the very beginning of this step, the data from natural conversations and the data from the translation in the interviews were compared in order to derive prototypes of each deviant sound pattern. Then, the deviant words were classified according to their sound patterns.

To simplify the analysis, I used the numbers ranking from 0 to 6 to represent an individual sound pattern by putting the number after each analyzed word. The table below is a list of the numbers of the sound patterns and their descriptions:

Table 1.1 Definitions of the sound patterns used in the secret language of the Thai blind

Patterns	Definitions
0	no modification of Thai words
1	insertion of phonological segments between the onset and the rhyme of the source syllable
2	syllable shuffling
3	syllable shuffling with more complex phonological rules
4	replacing the rhyme of the source syllable with the /aː/ sound
5	mixing type
6	replacing the rhyme of the source syllable with the /ɔː/ sound

1.6.3.3 Analyzing the phonological patterns of the secret language

To analyze the derivation of the secret sound patterns, I first compared the data of the secret language with the decoded data obtained from the interviews, as described in 1.6.2.2. Then, I constructed a linguistic model in describing the derivational process of the secret sound patterns by applying the concepts of onset and rhyme. In addition, I also constructed some phonological rules such as sound split rule, phonological insertion rule, etc. to describe the derivational process.

1.6.3.4 Classifying the Words of the Deviant Sound Patterns into Content and Function Words

To determine whether all deviant words were content or function words, I examined the syntactic occurrences of those words in the utterances. For example, the deviant words

occurring in place of nouns or verbs would be labeled as content words while the words in the position of prepositions, conjunctions, particles, etc. would be labeled as function words.

1.6.3.5 Investigating the motivations behind the use of the secret language

The motivations behind the use of the secret language were investigated through the interviews of the blind speakers and my observations of the natural conversations of the blind interlocutors in various situations. After compiling the data from the two sources, I made generalizations and discovered that there are three motivations behind the use of the secret language, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.