Chapter 7

Thai Cultural Characteristics

Reflected in the Findings of the Linguistic Analysis

And the expression in writing and conversation, there is a

Thai way of doing it that is not similar to any other nation.

(M.R. Kukrit Pramoj)[1]

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of the analysis of features of contemporary Thai narrative language will be related to Thai cultural characteristics. As has been discussed in chapter 2, cultural characteristics reflected in linguistic usage can best be described in terms of the concept of world view. The areas of the linguistic analysis (chapters 3 to 6) have not been selected to suit a certain preconceived outcome of the study. Instead, they have been chosen according to four fundamental functional aspects of language, communication about time, causality, people and places - as they are represented in standard narrative texts. The extent to which certain linguistic phenomena can be related to the Thai world view varies naturally. The linguistic analysis has shown that in the case of terms of address, the relationship between language and culture is fairly obvious and it can be presumed that the linguistic material to a certain extent influences the perception of the world. The same can be said about the characterization of people in terms of action. This is partly a result of the absence of adjectives. In the cases of

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[1] see Beek (1983: 204)

chronology and causality, however, the influence of the language on the perception of the world is not so obvious. It can be assumed that it exists but it is methodologically problematic to pinpoint it and make exact statements about it.

Apart from that, it should be remembered that the Humboldtian view of language as the only possible means to conduct and communicate intellectual activity should not be misunderstood to the effect that different languages provide concepts and patterns of thinking that are mutually *exclusive*. Nor should it be interpreted as a limitation of a person's outlook on the world. People learn other languages and the reason for doing so is precisely to get aquainted with different ways of understanding and interpreting the world.

7.2. The Perception of Time

7.2.1. The Impact of the Absence of Morphological Time-Marking on the Perception of Time

Thai has no morphological device to indicate tense. The natural chronological succession of events or non-morphological means to indicate time are the only way to distinguish between past and present. Consequently, the narrator's or speaker's point of reference is always situated in the present time. There is no morphological marking of the past tense as in Western languages that would allow the speaker or narrator to establish a second point of reference within the past. It is important to realize that the selection of a point of reference in Western languages is not a matter of voluntary choice. There is no escape from choosing a specific indication of time. Such obligatory time-marking is missing in Thai. Explicit indications of time by non-morphological means may be required to convey a message properly but they are by no means obligatory.

The absence of morphological time-marking and the optional character of non-morphological marking strengthens the linguistic representation of time by means of the chronological order. Since the speaker or narrator has only one point of reference and is not forced to make a choice between past and present, the chronological order dominates the discourse. It is at least inconvenient *not* to mention first in the linguistic

representation of events what has actually *happened* first. Purposes, for instance, are not mentioned before the purposeful action while causing events are not mentioned after the result.

The absence of morphological time-marking does not only strengthen the dominance of the chronological order of narration. By doing so, it further supports a tendency to neglect specific and exact marking of time. Since chronological order has to be assumed in practically every kind of conventional narration, it becomes self-evident. It would be superfluous to add specific markings of time, unless, of course, it is indispensable to fulfill the proper function of a text, as, for instance, in a police report.

7.2.2. The Use of Non-Morphological Indicators of Time

Non-morphological means to indicate time are adverbial expressions like *yesterday*, *tomorrow* or *at twenty past six*, adjuncts of time like *then* or *after that* or the reference towards historical dates and events. Generally, they are used to mark an approximate time or time range but not exact time. In "Si Phaendin", for instance, it is conspicuous how vague the indication of time can be compared, for instance, to the accuracy in the description of places and considering the fact that the novel is intended to be realistic. The imprecise time-marking by non-morphological means supports the general impression that time is perceived as something vague. At least, accuracy in matters of time does not seem to be of great importance, a notion that is confirmed by the general habit among Thai people to make appointments. They are usually not made for an exact time but for approximate time ranges such as ช่วงเย็น *(in the evening)*, ช่วงเที่ยง *(around noon)*, ช่วงบ่าย ๆ *(in the early afternoon)*.

7.2.3. The Vague Perception of Time and the Buddhist World View

The chronological order presents time as a continuous flow of present moments. Exact indication of different time levels within the past is rarely found and generally vague. The focus remains on what is happening presently. According to Fieg (1989:23), "Thais, and Asians generally, tend to view time as a circle with recurring phases: one season follows the next, one life leads into another [...]" while "with their lineal view of

time, Americans divide up the future into discrete segments; they then plan, schedule, and compartmentalize these segments." (ibid.) A circle with recurring phases certainly makes divisions quite difficult. Grammatical time-marking, however, tries exactly that: a division of time into segments.

The perception of time as something vague appears to be in accordance with the Buddhist teaching of *impermanence*. Impermanence means that things "never persist in the same way, but that they are vanishing and dissolving from moment to moment." (NYANATILOKA, 1972: 14) Since everything changes permanently, an overt concern for the past is of no avail. Things of the past don't belong to the present. They have changed already and are not real anymore. Accuracy in matters of the perception of time is as illusory as the attempt to parcel out water. There is no point in being too much occupied with **what** has happened **when** in the past. It is much more important to concentrate on the present. This is what Kukrit Pramoj himself says: "I don't try to memorize the past at all. What's done is done. I'm either enjoying the benefit of it or suffering as a result of it. I merely regard the present and the future." (BEEK, 1983:189)

It may be argued here that it is too far-fetched to link the absence of morphological time-marking and the optional character of non-morphological time marking with the Buddhist concept of impermanence. After all, the Chinese language has the same linguistic features as Thai with respect to indication of time whereas the ancestry cult very much indicates a strong appreciation of the concept of permanence. It should be pointed out here that the specific features of indicating time in Thai narratives may not make it *impossible* to mark time correctly. According to my data material, however, they seem to make it *inconvenient* and thus support a tendency to neglect exact time marking. Any examination of linguistic phenomena - this is, in fact, the whole point of my study - has to consider both the linguistic material *and* the way it is used. The fact that the Chinese language has to indicate time by purely non-morphological means does not necessarily mean that it has to indicate time in the same way as Thai does. It is possible that Chinese has other non-morphological means to indicate time or

that it uses the common ones like adverbials and conjuncts in a different way.[2] Apart from that, I doubt whether the ancestry cult does indeed indicate a perception of permanence in a realistic sense. Although, for instance, paper replicas of everyday life's commodities like houses and cars are prepared at Chinese funerals for the deceased to enjoy in his other life, everyone knows that these replicas are not the "real thing". After all, they are made from paper and they are burnt at the funeral.[3] Reverence and respect for one's ancestors and an elaborate ancestry cult do not have to stand in the way of a general perception of the world and of reality as impermanent.

The concentration on the present which can be a consequence of a thorough understanding of the concept of impermanence also coincides with the important Buddhist practice of สติพัฒนา (*mind development*). (NYANATILOKA, 1972: 165-167) สติพัฒนา (*mind development*) is a contemplation of the body, the feeling, the mind and mind-objects in their *present state of being*. It is done to realize that everything changes all the time and that any dwelling on the past is useless and futile. Although this is a monastic practice, no Thai would call the wisdom behind สติพัฒนา (*mind development*) into question or hesitate to recommend it in times of trouble because of its healing effect.

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[2] *Time marking* would be an interesting topic for a comparative study of Thai and Chinese.

[3] There is a passage in "Si Phaendin" where Ploi's brother Perm and her son Oot discuss what kind of things should be rebuilt in paper in order to be enjoyed by Khun Prem after his cremation. (คึกฤทธิ์ :2523, 975-976) The main topic of the discussion is the question whether paper models of beautiful girls should be made so that Khun Prem could enjoy in his next life what he did not in his earlier life because of his own high moral standards. Both uncle and nephew are not sure if Khun Prem would accept the girls. The question is settled by Oot who suggests that if Khun Prem has no use for the girls he could return them to Khun Perm later when his time to die and enter another life has come. The whole dialogue is rather funny and ironical. It shows that the idea that people use items of everyday life after their death and that a comfortable life after death can be ensured by building luxury item from paper and burning them together with the body is not taken too seriously.

7.3. The Understanding of Causality

The interest in causes is motivated by a universal human desire to understand. Curiosity only stops when a satisfying answer to the question "why" has been given. It can be assumed, therefore, that every language has means to convey causality. However, causality does not refer to the perception of a concrete object, a place, or a living being. The only "objectivity" or universal agreement found in the perception of causality is of a temporal nature: the causing condition or event must be temporally somehow located *before* the resulting condition or event. All other aspects of causality are matters of interpretation. The causal link between two or more events, states or conditions is an abstract and highly complex part of men's reality construction activities. It is, therefore, not surprising that not only the causal aspects in the relationship between events are subject to interpretation but also that different concepts of causality as such exist. At least, the concept of causality is not the same in the Western and in the Buddhist perception of the world.

7.3.1. The Western Concept of Causality

The Western concept of causality is an essential part of rationalism that is built upon the principles of Aristotelian logic. Christian religion has never discarded these principles. The Scholasticism of the Middle Ages incorporated it into the Christian world view. Later Protestantism, itself unthinkable without Humanism,[4] the rediscovery of pre-Christian ancient philosophy, turned out to be most favourable for the development of rationalism in the Age of Enlightenment. The success of Western economy, science and technology in the last three centuries is due to a rationalism that has, as Max Weber pointed out, developed under the influence of the Protestant (Calvinist) ethic.[5]

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[4] Erasmus von Rotterdam's reconstruction of the original of the New Testament was the basis for Martin Luther's translation into German. This translation turned out to be the foundation of Protestantism.

[5] Different Protestant ethical attitudes have combined to make the "formula of success" of the Western economic system: Luther's view of profession as a calling, Calvin's attitude towards life in this world as a task which automatically excludes any hedonistic enjoyment of one's material achievements but instead instills a sense of duty and responsibility. (WEBER, 1987: 79-81, 98-128)

The essence of the Western concept of causality is the principle of verification. A cause is credible if it is verifiable. The cause of the bubonic plague that killed nearly half of the German population in the 14th century was at that time understood to be the wrath of God. Today, we don't accept this as an explanation because we know that the plague is an infectious disease caused by germs that have been imported from overseas by rats in trading ships. Thus, the rational i.e. verifiable explanation takes precedence over the non-rational, no matter how plausible the latter may have been at a certain time. In fact, there are no non-rational causes. There are superstitions and beliefs that stand in for verifiable causes as long as these causes have not been discovered. The wrath of God could be regarded as the cause of the plague 600 years ago for lack of scientific knowledge. Today, it doesn't qualify as a cause because the explanations of modern medicine are much more convincing.

7.3.2. The Karmic Understanding of Causality

The karmic law of cause and effect is of Buddhist origin. It is rational in its own right, although not neccessarily verifiable in an Aristotelian sense. In Thailand, cause and effect are often linked according to the karmic world view of Buddhism. The illness of cancer for instance is often regarded in the West as the result of an unhealthy diet, environmental pollution or extreme stress. According to the Buddhist world view, these causes may be perfectly valid but the fact remains that there are other people living under equally unhealthy conditions who do not develop cancer. This indicates that the ultimate reason for this grave illness is of karmic nature, the result of one's own bad behavior, probably in a former life. Depending on the severeness of these past actions, one may be able to recover, maybe with the help of a change in diet and lots of merit-making or one has to die, however great the effort may be one makes to get well. Suffering, in the Buddhist view, may befall a perfectly good person because of his deeds in a former life of which the suffering person doesn't know anything. To be able to verify the cause is of no avail to the present situation. What is more important is the way one deals with the present situation. The most important task for the cancer patient is to deal with his illness in a mindful and generally appropriate way - not to dwell upon its causes.

7.3.3. The Karmic Concept of Causality and its Reflections in the Thai Language

At first sight, the linguistic representation of causality in Thai does not differ very much from that in Western languages. The language provides, for instance, the conjunction เพราะ whose semantic and syntactic properties appear to be roughly equivalent to those of the English conjunction *because*. There are also a conjunction to indicate purpose and conjuncts to point to results. At a closer look, however, the use of the different conjunctions and conjuncts does not always correspond to the use of these markers of causality in Western languages. These differences can be seen as relating to the differences in the Western and the karmic concepts of causality.

The linguistic marking of causality in Thai is generally conditioned by the absence of a morphological indication of time which, as we have seen, results in a strengthening of the chronological order of narration. Since causing events or conditions are temporally located before the resulting events or conditions, the natural order of chronology becomes automatically the natural order of causality. As long as this order is obvious, causality does not have to be marked specifically. As a result, there may not be any difference between the marking of causality and asyndetic coordination of clauses, i.e. no marking at all. Marking of causality can be redundant and the function or the semantic properties of markers of causality may not always be clearly defined. The conjunct ก็, for instance, functions both as an indicator of result and as an indicator of the chronological succession. The conjunction เพราะ does not always refer to direct causes and reasons but also to events or conditions that are *not* primary causes. Apart from that, the perception of time as something vague poses, in some cases, a difficulty for the accurate conveyance of cause and effect. An exact temporal identification of an event is sometimes necessary to relate it unambiguously to its effect. It is conspicuous that the conjunction เพราะ (*because*) never refers to a single event located in the past that would require an exact temporal identification. Instead, เพราะ (*because*) is used in the overwhelming majority of cases to refer to qualifications or simuoultaneously happening events.

On a syntactic level, the prominence of the chronological order tends to put the focus from the cause to the result. The direction of the general outlook is thus looking forward rather than looking back. The focus on the result, together with the perception of time as something vague and the liberties in the marking of causality correspond to the attention paid to the consequences in the natural dynamics of cause and effect as found in the karmic world view.

In the karmic world view, wholesome and unwholesome actions are the driving forces of ordinary human existence. The Pali word "kamma" means "action". (NYANATILOKA,1972: 77) Every kind of action inevitably has an effect.[6] Every activity should therefore be considered with regard to its possible results. What makes it even more important to be extremly careful in what one does is the fact that one cannot foresee the results - at least not in the long run. Activities in this life may well affect one's status and well-being in the next life. In difficult situations, it is often advisable not to act at all in order to avoid possible negative results. It is of special importance not to contribute to one's own bad karma and to get unneccessarily involved in other people's karma. Good deeds have to be done and merit has to be accumulated to counterbalance any as yet unknown negative results of one's actions.[7] In comparison to this orientation towards possible future results, the past is insignificant. It is gone and thus not real anymore. It has, according to the universal law of impermanence, changed already. It is, therefore, difficult to establish a direct causal connection between the past and the present. There is simply no use in getting too much interested in it.

In everyday life, a common practical advice in the face of misfortune is อย่าคิด มาก (Don't think too much). This is not meant to stop anyone from intellectual activity but from tormenting oneself with questions like Why did it happen? It is considered to be a pointless question. Often, the advice is combined with the consoling wisdom ทุกสิ่งทุก

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[6] To avoid a misunderstanding: I am not saying here that, according to Buddhism, everything is the result of previous action. This would be a repetition of the old Western misconception of Buddhism as a fatalistic doctrine. The contrary is true: every Buddhist is free to act in a way he deems suitable or not to act at all. He will keep in mind, however, that his actions will have a result.

[7] Karma can be without Karma-result. Ineffectual Karma can be, among others, the result of counteractive Karma. (NYANATILOKA, 1972: 78)

อย่างเปลี่ยนแปลง (*everything is in the process of change*). Since nothing remains the same, what's the point in looking back and worrying about something that has passed already? Why not hoping for something better to come?

7.4. The Characterization of People

7.4.1. The Prominence of Verbs and the Characterization Through Action and Behavior

According to the karmic world view, a person's position in life and his fortunes and misfortunes largely depend on his actions. A person is who he is because of what he has *done* and he will be able to exert a certain influence on his present or his future life by what he is doing. "Ultimately life is conditioned by the law of Karma [...]" (MULDER, 1990:35) For the contemporary Thai, it is common knowledge "that to do good will improve one's karmic position and that to do evil worsens it." (ibid:34) In accordance with the literal meaning of the word กรรม (*Karma / "action"*, NYANATILOKA, 1972:77) deeds are the crucial factor to determine one's position and fortunes in life. It is, therefore, perfectly plausible to characterize, evaluate and judge someone by what he does. A person reveals his true character in his deeds and his behavior.

The Thai language seems to reflect this attitude through the prominence of verbs and the absence of adjectives. Qualifying words are never used in pre-modifying position so that verbal expressions dominate the narrative discourse. In Western languages, characterization is done rather by the use of adjectives than by the use of verbs. Adjectives are employed to describe and characterize, for instance, emotions and the physical appearance of people or images of nature. Western narratives can be very inventive in their creation of adjectives by means of compounding or derivation. The use of adjectives can also be very artistic. Several adjectives with semantic properties that may complement, intensify or weaken each other can be strung together in front of a single noun. This makes the use of adjectives much more economical and practical for descriptions than the use of verbs. Verbs are the core of the predicate and sentence clauses cannot have more than one predicate. Complex description by means of verbs

may, therefore, require several sentence clauses. A noun prase, however, can contain different adjectives and only one, however complex, sentence clause may be enough to give a detailed description. A master in the art of using adjectives and constructing complex sentences was the German writer Thomas Mann. The following example contains five adjectives (underlined).

Mit dem In-Erfüllung-Gehen von Prophezeiungen, sagte ich, sei es ein eigenes Ding; sie bewahrheiteten sich oft nicht wortwörtlich, sondem auf eine andeutende Weise, die etwas von ungenauer und bestreitbarer, doch aber unverkennbarer Erfüllung habe. (MANN, 1949:6)
(*There is, I said, something peculiar about the coming true of prophecies. They often do not come true in a literal sense but by way of intimation which carries an air of vague and disputable but unmistakable fulfillment.* [my translation])

Such a description is not easily done by means of verbal expressions. It is no surprise that the long descriptive passages so typical for the 19th century European novel, are difficult to reproduce in Thai and are usually absent from Thai narratives, at least from "Si Phaendin". The absence of adjectives and other pre-modifying qualifying words somewhat hampers elaborate linguistic descriptions, character evaluations, subtle psychological analyses and mimetic reproductions of landscapes.

7.4.2. The Ritual Character of Oral Communication as a Consequence of the Characterization Through Action and Behavior

The importance of one's deeds may be responsible for the often ritual use of the spoken language. Since the true personality reveals itself in what one does and not in what one says, words are to a large extent "downgraded" to an exchange of formalities. They are needed to convey politeness, show respect, to protect oneself from shame and embarrassment and to avoid conflict. They belong to the world of outward appearance like clothing and manners. As any Thai television soap opera will prove, the principle of

saving face and the fear of rejection are stronger impulses than the impulse to reveal one's thoughts and emotions in spoken words. Revealing one's true character is not so much a matter of language but of action. Deeds will speak for themselves and don't have to be announced, commented upon, analyzed and evaluated. To brag about one's good deeds is of bad taste and to reveal one's mistakes is unskillful and useless.

One of the functions of a ritual use of spoken language is to counter the effects of wrongdoings. Saving face, apologizing, finding excuses, avoiding confrontation are all important speech acts of the Thai language. This may result in what is sometimes misunderstood as a discrepancy between one's true feelings and attitudes and one's words. Thais do not regard language as a means to confess and "talk it all out" but as a means to uphold social harmony and one's personal standing.

The attitudes of Ploi and her brothers and sisters towards their eldest sister Oon is a good example for the predominantly ritual function of spoken language and the importance of deeds. Khun Oon is always shown the proper respect by way of words and ritual. But when Khun Choey finally runs away with Khun Luang, the doctor who treated Chao Khun father and who is going to be Khun Choey's husband soon afterwards, she reveals her true feelings towards Khun Oon, that is contempt and disrespect. She does not ask Khun Oon in her capacity as head of the household and most senior person for advice. She does not even take leave. In fact, she does not say anything but just runs away. This destruction of the image of a decent and harmonious family clan causes such shame and embarassment for Khun Oon that reconciliation becomes impossible. Khun Oon feels she will never be able to forgive her sister, not even beyond death, the harshest possible kind of social punishment. What finally causes Khun Oon to change her mind is not Choey's pleading for forgiveness and not Ploi's own request to let bygones be bygones but the fact that this request is uttered by Ploi whose acts of kindness have proved her goodness beyond doubt. It is these deeds that cause Khun Oon to be indebted to Ploi and to give in to her request to forgive their sister Choey - not an insight into her own failures or a simple act of generosity.

There are many more examples in "Si Phaendin" that show how language is used to retain a proper and decent outward appearance. When Un, in the following passage,

announces to his mother that his French wife Lucille will be taking a home leave, he gives a perfectly harmless and socially acceptable explanation for something very embarrassing and disturbing: the end of his marriage. In her answer, Ploi moves smoothly within the polite linguistic framework by assuming that Lucille is indeed doing nothing more than going to visit her family but nevertheless her admonition that too long a separation is not good for a young couple shows that she senses the truth behind her son's words. At least her son thinks so and feels the necessity to reassure his mother that nothing is wrong in order to excuse himself (แก้ตัว) for any disturbance of the family harmony to come.

ในตอนปลายเดือนพฤษภาคมปีนั้นเอง ตาอั้น มาหาพลอยวันหนึ่ง แล้วพูด ขึ้นว่า "คุณแม่ ลุซิลล์เขาอยากกลับไปเยี่ยมบ้านที่ฝรั่งเศส ผมก็ว่าจะให้เขาไป" "คิดดูดีแล้วหรือลูก?" พลอยพูดขึ้น "ธรรมดาผัวเมียไม่ควรจะจากกันนาน ตั้ง แต่แม่แต่งงานกับคุณพ่อ ยังไม่เคยจากกันเกินกว่าเดือนหนึ่งเลย จะมีบ้างก็ เวลาคุณพ่อไปราชการ ไปซ้อมรบเสือป่าบ้าง ไปตามเสด็จบ้าง แต่นั่นก็เป็น ธรรมดา.." "เปล่า ไม่มีอะไรหรอกครับคุณแม่" ตาอั้นพูดแก้ตัว "ลุซิลล์เขาไม่ ใช่คนไทยจากบ้านมาหลายปีเขาก็ต้องคิดถึงบ้านเขา[...]"   (1009-1010)

(*One day in the beginning of May that year, Un went to see his mother and said: "Mother, Lucille wants to visit her home in France. I think I will permit her to go." "Have you thought about it well, son?" Ploi started to answer. "Normally, husband and wife should not be separated for long. Since I married your father, we have never been separated for longer than one month, only when your father was on official duty, rehearsing the Tiger corps, accompanying His Majesty, but that were normal things ... " - "No, no, there is nothing, mother" Un said [to avoid his mother would get the wrong impression], "Lucille is not a Thai and she has been separated from her home for several years. She must miss her home [...]"*)

Un's answer เปล่า (*No, no, there is nothing, mother*) is not an answer to what his mother said but to what he thinks she meant to say. Also, the linguistic surface of what

Ploi is saying doesn't give any indication as to why Un should feel the need to แก้ตัว (*save face*). (Interestingly, this piece of dialogue has not been translated into the English version of "Si Phaendin". Instead, there is a narrator's summary of what Ploi says about herself and Khun Prem in direct speech.)

The relationship between the importance of deeds and the role of language as a means of ritual communication becomes obvious when it comes to promises. One has to be extremely careful in what one says because it has to be honoured by one's deeds sooner or later. The use of language as a predominantly ritual means of communication may occassionally lead to the wrong assumption that one does not need to take one's own words too seriously. Discrepancy between words and deeds is quite common but ultimately one's social standing and reputation is eroded by words that are not honoured and promises that remain unkept. Politicians serve as a good example of how people are looked down on upon who try to fool others by words. Some people acquire quite a reputation with their masterly use of words and their skilful avoidance to commit themselves but ultimately they are judged by what they do and not by what they say. In any case, it is prudent and advisable not to commit oneself too much by words.

7.4.3. Terms of Address and the Characterization Through the Position in the Hierarchy

The hierarchical character of Thai society has often been pointed out by scholars of Thai Studies. "The primary direction of integration among people appears to be vertical." (MULDER, 1990:108) A look at the Thai language shows that it is impossible to perceive and describe the world as non-hierarchical in Thai. The hierarchical character of the Thai language becomes evident in the terms of address. These terms are chosen according to the position in which the speaker sees himself in relation to the addressee. Equality or symmetrical relationships do exist but they are rare compared to hierarchical relationships. Equality is expressed by the reciprocal use of the first name only. It always denotes a lack of distance which carries both a negative and a positive aspect. The negative aspect is the absence of formal respect, the positive aspect is a high degree of intimacy as in close friendships or partnerships. Lack of formal respect and presence of

intimacy as denoted by the use of the first name only also applies for the relationship between parents and children or boss and employee but in these cases first names cannot be used reciprocally. Children never call their parents by their first name.

There is one equal pair in "Si Phaendin": Ploi and Choi. They are of the same age, same social background and same upbringing but they are not members of the same family.Traditionally, equality does not apply to family relationships. There is always a hierarchy between elder and younger sibling, children and parents, husband and wife. Although Ploi feels very close to her elder sister Choey, she never addresses her by her first name only.

The hierarchical differences between husband and wife, however, are decreasing in modern Thai society. More and more couples regard themselves as equal partners and address each other by first names only. (TINGSABADH & PRASITHRATHSINT, 1989: 142) This development may be indicative of a slow process towards the equality of women in urban middle-class society.

7.4.4. Hierarchy and Thai and Western Concepts of Individuality

The hierarchical world view also has an impact on what is meant by "individualism". As with the term "causality" much confusion is caused by using one and the same word for different concepts. The term "Thai individualism" (PHODISITA, 1985: 42-44) is misleading because it implies a Western concept of individuality. Western individualism is based on the assumption of the fundamental equality of every human being. Equality here does not mean equality of social status - it is impossible for everyone to hold the same social status - but equality of one's value as an individual with regard to one's fellow human beings and to society. Status may be different but one's individual worth is equal and should not be measured according to social status. Again, this concept is influenced by Christianity: everyone is equal in the eyes of God. As the chapters on hierarchy and status have shown, such a concept of equality is alien to the Thai world view. Since status depends on the degree of accumulated merit or demerit, it is inconceivable that everyone has the same individual worth.

The difference between "Thai individualism" and "Western individualism" clearly shows in the terms of address and in the means of pronominal reference. I have already pointed out how rarely Thai people address each other by first names only. In the West , however, the name has a special function within the concept of individualism. It serves to identify someone as an individual. It symbolizes difference in personality and equality in individual worth. In Thai, people are often referred to by their social position. Teachers are addressed อาจารย์ or ครู (*university teacher / school teacher*) and refer to themselves as อาจารย์ or ครู in communication with their students instead of using their name. In the same way, doctors are referred to by their position. Among friends, colleagues and relatives, people of seniority are referred to or refer to themselves as พี่ (elder sister / brother) without using their proper names.

The notion of "Thai individualism" stems from Embree's famous ethnological case study which led him to the assumption of Thai society as being loosely structured, indicating a high degree of independence and individualism of the Thai people. (EMBREE, 1969: 4-5) Although this hypothesis has been questioned by pointing out the hierarchical structure of Thai society and the strong sense of reciprocal duty (MULDER, 1990), the idea of Thai individualism is often supported with reference to the Buddhist teaching that "By one's self the evil is done; by one's self one suffers; by one's self evil is left undone; by one's self one is purified. The pure and the impure are individual; no one can purify others." (PHODISITA, 1985: 43) This teaching, however, does not point to individualism in the Western sense. It just underlines the importance of doing things (again implying that words without deeds are worthless). It does not mean that Thais conceive of themselves as being loners or being free of social obligations. Certainly, the moral value of one's deeds can only be determined in relation to other people and beings. Good deeds that accumulate merit are deeds that are good for others and demeritorious deeds are bad because they cause hardship and misfortune to others. Only the fact that "no one can purify others" prevents people from rigidly enforcing social rules. No one can force another person to be good. But that doesn't mean that Thais think of themselves as independent individuals in a Western sense.

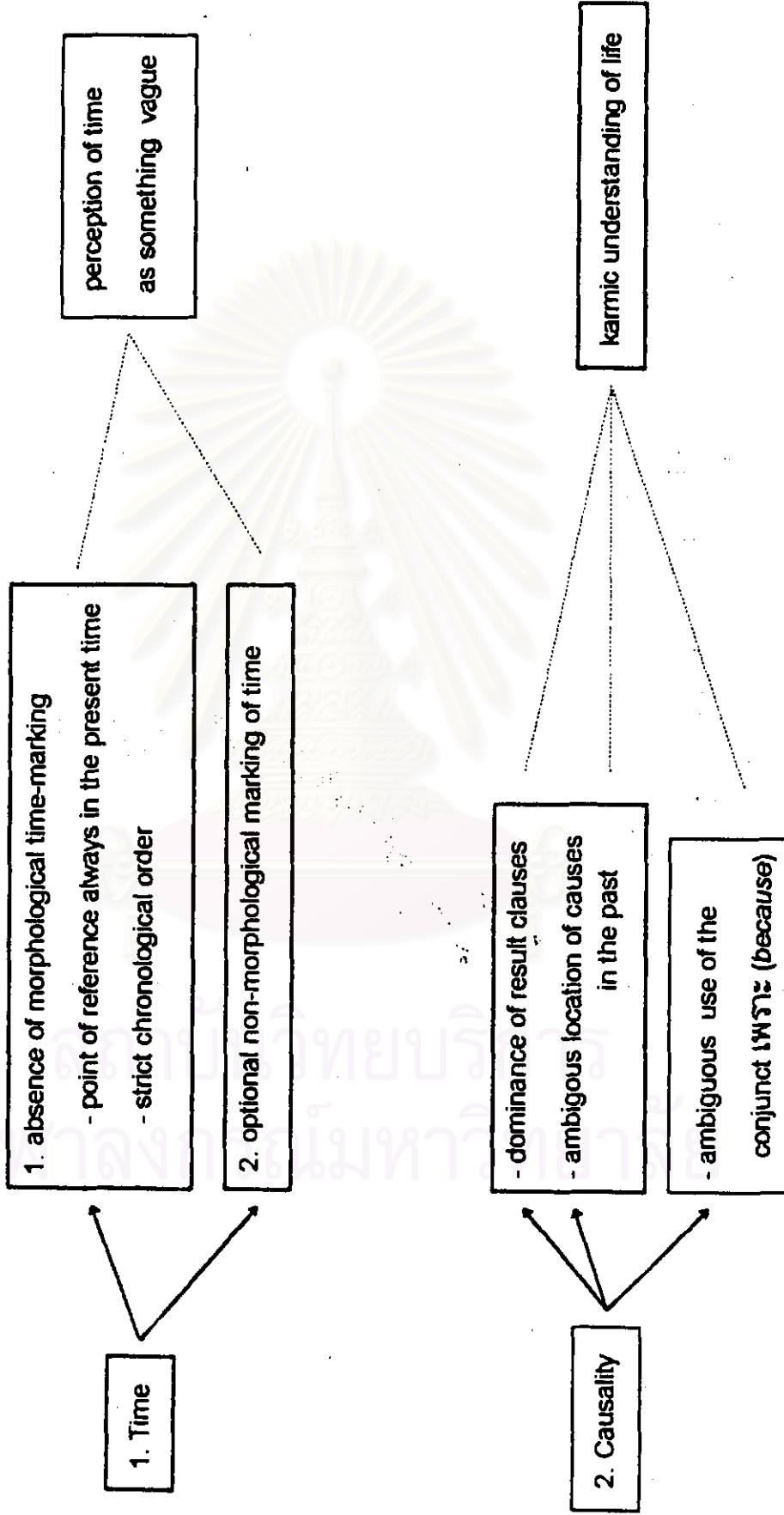## 7.5. The Accurate Description of Places and their Metaphorical Value

In contrast to the linguistic representation of time, the description of places is very accurate. An indication that this is not an idiosyncrasy of the novel "Si Phaendin" is the common Thai greeting ไปไหน or ไปไหนมา literally meaning "*Where are you going?*" or *From where are you coming?*"

The accurate description of places becomes plausible if one considers the metaphorical equation of place with status. The perception of the world as hierarchical is a logical consequence of the karmic world view. The different positions in the social hierarchy depend on the amount of accumulated merit. One obvious and, as far as I know, universal way to visualize different status is by equating them with places in a vertical order. The Thai language expresses social standing, for instance, by describing the different levels of residences. High ranking people live on the top floor of their houses. They are literally above other people. More than that, the word บ้าน (*house*) is used synonymously for *village, community* and *domestic matters*. (HAAS, 1964:289) The equation of the small and private social entity found in a house and the larger social entities like a village or the state is expressed in compound words such as บ้านเมือง (*country*), บ้านนอก (*rural area* [as opposed to the city]), ผู้ใหญ่บ้าน (*village headman*). (ibid.) บ้าน (*house*) thus not only means "*building used as a private place of living.*" It becomes a microcosmic symbol of the macrocosm of Thai society. The hierarchical family structure manifests itself in the structure of the traditional Thai house. It is the pattern for the Thai social structure in general. Consequently, the King, occupying the highest position, is regarded as the father of all Thais. Although this particular aspect has not changed, Westernization has brought changes to the architectual structure of Thai houses and to the perception of Thai society as an extended family - at least in Bangkok and other municipal centers which have grown to large to be perceived in terms of family structures . The elaborate description of a traditional Thai house, however, remains more than a realistic atmospheric detail. It is a description of the traditional Thai social hierarchy wich is an essential part of the Thai culture.

Chart 7:

Linguistic Features of Thai and their Relation to Aspects of Thai Culture and the Thai World View

Area of Analysis

Linguistic Features

Thai World View / Thai Cultural Characteristics

1. Time
- 1. absence of morphological time-marking
  - point of reference always in the present time
  - strict chronological order
- 2. optional non-morphological marking of time

perception of time as something vague

2. Causality
- dominance of result clauses
- ambigous location of causes in the past
- ambiguous use of the conjunct เพราะ (because)

karmic understanding of life

Continuation of

Chart 7:   Linguistic Features of Thai and their Relation to Aspects of Thai Culture and The Thai World View

Area of Analysis

Linguistic Features
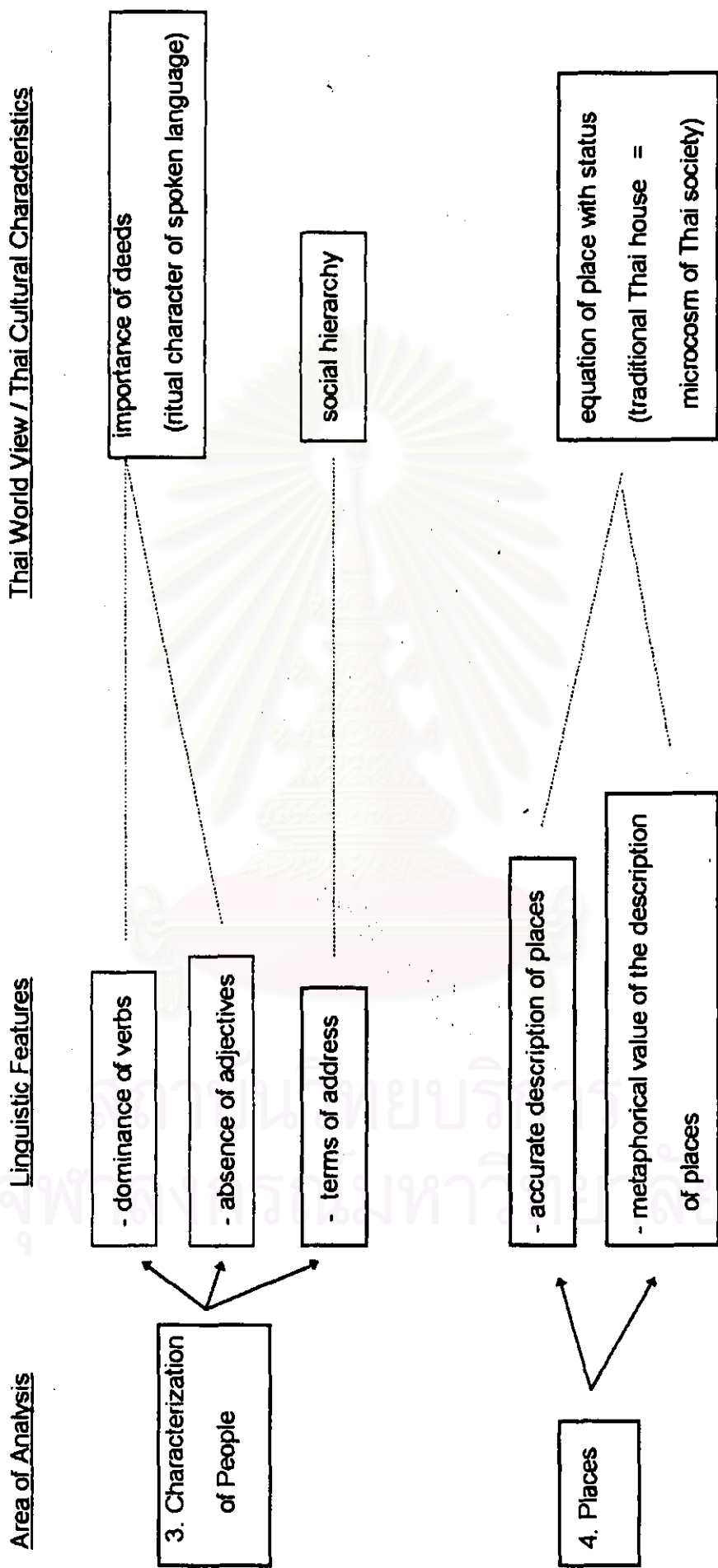
Thai World View / Thai Cultural Characteristics

Area of Analysis	Linguistic Features	Thai World View / Thai Cultural Characteristics
3. Characterization of People	- dominance of verbs - absence of adjectives - terms of address	importance of deeds (ritual character of spoken language) social hierarchy
4. Places	- accurate description of places - metaphorical value of the description of places	equation of place with status (traditional Thai house = microcosm of Thai society)

Explanation of Chart 7:

Chart 7 is a short and comprehensive overview of the findings of the linguistic analysis and their relation to aspects of Thai culture and the Thai world view. On the left-hand side are the four areas of analysis: 1. Time, 2. Causality, 3. Characterization of People and 4. Places and Space. Arrows point to the right towards the linguistic features. From there, pointed lines stretch out to the corresponding aspects of the Thai world view. I have chosen pointed lines to indicate that these relationships are not neccessarily relationships of direct causality.