

An Investigation of Self-Mention and Identity Construction in Chart Korbjiti's "The Judgment" of Thai Written Novel

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Abstract

This research article aims to explore the use of self-mentions “I” expressed by the characters in the novel “the Judgment”, the famous novel in Thailand. The results revealed that the facets of critical discourse and context interpretation cannot be separated. That is, discourse also plays a vital role in projecting an individual’s subjectivity through the use of language, non-verbal interaction and expression. Fak, the main protagonist and the villagers are the key parts of societal discourse, with the former as a victim of the villagers’ discourse and the latter as victims of their own. The use of self-mentions “I” and identity construction could manifest the intended meaning that each character conveys. The analysis underlines the concept sociolinguistics and discourse should be considered as an interesting medium in Thai thought domination found in the novel. Moreover, instructors of the English language can apply the results of this study as a guideline for raise students’ awareness of competent novel writers with the sociolinguistic and critical discourse interpretation, along with the necessity to understand the underline meaning of Thai cultures while creating novel.

Keywords: Self-mention, Identity construction, Thai novel, Written discourse

Introduction

The identity of characters within a particular work on literary criticism could be one central area in textual analysis [1] and critical discourse analysis. That is to say, not merely is it focused on the matter of linguistic practice, but literary writing is also very much tightly linked to socio-political domains [2]. Apart from other literary works, the novel author in particular normally attempts to project his or her knowledge of worldview and socio-cultural perspectives through human characters that captivate the reader’s interest, which leads to acknowledgement and awareness of social issues in the community they live in. Therefore, the understanding of identity in terms of both personal and social identity is very important and applicable to analyzing a diverse range of cultural groups [3].

In novels, engaging readers in consequence largely involves the construction of character identity. As Ivanič [4] stated that “Writing is not just about conveying content but also about the representation of self” (pp.373). In this case, identity could convey from authors to readers via written discourse. Similar to Matsuda [5]’s concept of the complex phenomenon of identity in written discourse, he posited that writing does not merely narrate the content but it also conveys the role of authorial self or identity of the writer. All elements of scholarly language use, particularly various kinds of linguistic markers and discourse features, including personal pronouns and a range of cohesive and interpersonal features play

a significant role in shaping and revealing writer's identity or subject position which contribute to construct the persuasive effect while engaging the readers through the text and relate a text to its own context. The term writer identity can be divided into two facets. That is, the identity positions of the writer which refers to the demographic information of the writer's individual characteristics and the writer's identity which is constructed through the social interaction and various elements of textual features within the particular context [6]. When they are combined with content of subject matters, the first-person pronouns, namely "I" and 'we' or the so called 'self-mentions' [6] functions as the crucial communicative devices which facilitate the pragmatic functions rhetorically employed in the written text so that the reader can gain better understanding of the content and the characters through self-mentions employed within the target text of particular settings [6-8]. Self-mentioning is thus a crucial feature demonstrating the authorial identity of novel characters. It creates cohesion and coherence in text by the effective interaction between the characters in a novel and the reader by means of interpersonal communicative strategies. The reader then established their attitudes, evaluation, commentaries, and so on for novel characters.

In Thai novels, the works of Chart Korbjitti has been well-known and prominent in Thai modern literature. His publication of *Khamphiphaksa* or *The Judgment* in 1981 received the S.E.A. Write Award in 1994. It reveals the socially conscious literature and reflects the social realism and discourse in Thai society. Therefore, during the recent decades, a number of studies concerning the language use and socio-cultural dimensions embedded in the novel have been conducted within the literary studies both local and international settings. These includes stylistic feature on non-verbal communication analysis (e.g. Endoo, 2012), neo-liberal development in Thai society (e.g. Matthew & Ozea, 2008), self-existence and individual's subjectivity (e.g. Hideki, 2005). Most of these previous studies were based on the critical analysis of social dimension in the novel. However, it has been found that there is still a dearth of studies on the characters' identity which can shed another important light for socio-cultural dimensions in Thai society.

Research Questions

1. What are the different functions of the self-mentions employed by the characters in the *Judgment*?
2. How do the self-mentions used in the *Judgment* reflect the socio-cultural dimensions?

Purposes of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate Chart Korbjiti's character identity construction through the use of self-mentions 'I' with the hope to point out some other interesting socio-cultural perspectives based on its discourse.

Literature Review

The influence of human societies in terms of socio-cultural identity could be realized based on each speech community discourse which tends to have its own ways of norms and conventions [9]. Besides, the identity has long been developed through the social interaction within their community of any particular context [4, 6, 9]. Apart from the cognitive factor in terms of linguistic competence, the socio-cultural factor as well as linguistic environment also play indispensable parts of identity construction in each member of that society [10].

The investigation of identity could be conducted through various kinds of linguistic features or discourse markers, including a wide range of cohesive devices or interpersonal features (e.g. hedges, attitude emphatic markers) play a significant role in shaping and revealing the identity of speakers. Among the items used to identify classification, self-mention [6-8] or the use of first-person pronoun 'I', is one of the crucial linguistic features functioning in demonstrating the 'self' identity of a language user.

In this study, self-mention refers to the first-person pronoun 'I' expressed via the novel's characters in diverse communicative contexts. This key interpersonal feature could powerfully address:

1. Characters' social identification (identity) in the novel
2. The degrees of power distance and relationship embedded in discourse
3. The linkage to other linguistic features reflecting socio-cultural perspectives

Theoretical framework of self-mentions

The main theoretical framework used for this study include:

1. Tang and John's [11] continuum of authorial presence of self -mention "I"

From the theoretical framework, focus of this analysis of "I" can be represented into in the main 5 level classification. The first level of "I" is as a "representative" which assumes that the writer and the reader share the same background knowledge in their discourse communities. The second level of "I" is as the "guide". This means that the writer helps the reader to form an opinion or decision through his or her writing. The third level of "I" is as the "architect" which helps organize, structure or outline the writing. The fourth level of "I"

as the “opinion holder” that the writer expresses an opinion or attitude towards the reader. The fifth level of “I” is as the “originator”. The writer creates the content or formulates ideas in the writing.

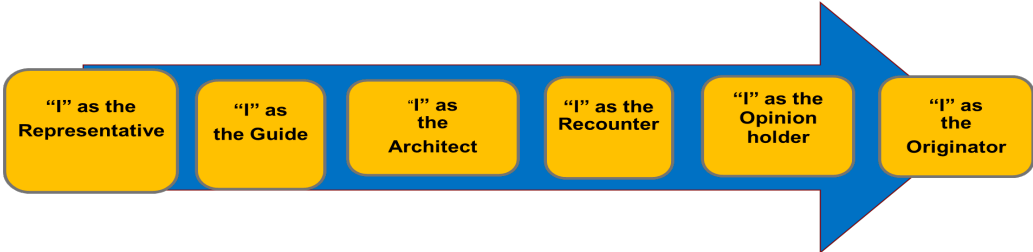


Figure 1 Tang and John’s (1999) Continuum of Authorial Presence in Academic Writing

As shown in the Figure, “I” as the representative is the least powerful of presenter and “I” as the originator is the most powerful of presenter. In this study, as a result, the theoretical framework is adopted from Tang and John’s continuum [11] to reveal the use of “I” in the novel as follows:

Table 1 the theoretical framework adopted from Tang and John’s continuum (1999) to reveal the use of “I”

| Self-mention of “I” | Description |
|-------------------------|--|
| I as the representative | As part of a group or community, ‘I’ voices the presence of the speaker to show some kind of relationship with others. |
| I as the Guide | To attract the listener’s attention, ‘I’ allows the speaker to personally explain things to lead the listener to understand or do something as a result. |
| I as the Architect | As an organizer, ‘I’ states or proposes an idea, claim, purpose, result to the listener. |
| I as the Recounter | ‘I’ as the recounter describes reasons or steps to be used as persuasive justification in expressing oneself. |
| I as the Opinion holder | Knowing information or established fact, ‘I’ enables the speaker to share an opinion or attitude confidently. |
| I as the originator | As an authority, ‘I’ reveals the contribution of valuable opinion to a group, community, or society. |

Supported theoretical framework employed to investigate: “I” status in particular context of the target novel

1. Theory of politeness: Face and politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson’s ‘Politeness’ Theory [12]

1.1 ‘Positive politeness’ is expressed by satisfying ‘positive face’ in two ways; By indicating similarities & expressing an appreciation of the interlocutor’s self-image.

1.2 “Negative politeness” is found in the various ways of mitigating an imposition.

EX: Hedging: Er, could you, er, perhaps, close the, um, window? Indicating deference: Excuse me, sir, would you mind if I asked you to close the window?

2. Theory of Speech Act based on Austin (1962) and Searle (1969)

There are two aspects of speech act that could be used to analyze:

2.1 Illocution: the intended meaning of the utterance by the speaker

2.2 Prelocution: the action that results from the locution

In this study, the five categories of speech act based on their functions assigned to them are used to analyze the “I” status in particular context of the novel as follows:

Table 2 the five categories of speech act based on their functions

| Category | Description | Direction of it |
|-------------|---|-------------------------|
| Assertive | Utterances that commit the speaker to the expressed truth proposition. | claims suggestions |
| Commissive | Utterances that commit the speaker to some future action. | promises vows |
| Declarative | Utterances that bring about some change of the reality in accord with the proposition of the declaration. | decrees declarations |
| Directive | Utterances that consist of an attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do something or take a particular action. | requests commands |
| Expressive | Expresses the speakers emotional or psychological attitudes towards audience | thanks apologies |

3. Theory of Expression

Pathos: the power of performance, description, etc. to produce and evoke feelings of sadness and sympathy. It could be language choice affects the audience’ emotional response. Types of Pathos include:

3.1 Emotionally loaded language and emotional examples

3.2 Emotional tone (humor, disappointment, excitement, fear, anger and etc.)

3.3 Anecdotes, testimonies, or narratives about emotional experiences or events

3.4 Vivid descriptions

3.5 Figurative language

4. Theory of Critical discourse analysis (CDA): Power and Distance based on Fairclough and Wodak [13]

They proposed that Language use in speech and writing is governed by the social process, and a form of social action that is socially shaped. With CDA, the theory emphasizes on uncovering texts which are shaped ideologically by relations of power. For example, the use of language could be controlled by the power status of people in the particular society and societal structure. Besides, the concepts of CDA highlights the ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations between the interlocutors. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language and influences all social practices. Therefore, based on CDA, the following aspects could be analyzed to examine the intended meaning of the particular situational communication:

4.1 Power and status of interlocutors

4.2 Power and social status of interlocutors

4.3 Class and status of interlocutors based on age, gender, occupation, social position, the ranking in society and etc.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research study utilizes the mix-mode design of quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the use of self-mentions “I” with content analysis. There are two steps of research procedure:

Step1: Quantitative method (Corpus-based approach)

Step 2: Qualitative method (Content analysis)

Table 3 research questions and steps of research procedure

| Research Questions | Research Method | Purpose |
|--|---|---|
| 1. What are the different functions of the self-mentions employed by the characters in the Judgment? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● All the self-mention data items from the Judgment novel will be extracted by corpus-based approach.● All data will be counted in numbers and divided into each category of the functions of the self-mentions based on the model frameworks of self-mention used (Tang and John’s continuum, 1999) | ■ To find out whether there are any different functions of the self-mentions “I” employed by the characters in the Judgment |
| 2. How do the self-mentions used in the Judgment reflect the socio-cultural dimensions? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● The total numbers of data items will be investigated based on the theoretical frameworks of Critical discourse analysis and socio-cultural aspects | ■ To find out how the self-mentions “I” used in the Judgment reflect the socio-cultural dimensions. |

Technical support

Corpus and analysis procedure

The corpus-based approach will be used as a data collection tool. That is the corpus is transformed into .txt format in Microsoft Notepad. It is processed in the concordance program, AntConc (Version 3.4.4) [14]. Only the core content of the novel will be kept and the irrelevant elements (e.g. titles, pictures, publishing date and place, writers’ names and other notes) will be taken off so that the text will be ready to analyze.

Then, Tang and John’s [11] model will be used to identify the first person pronouns in its different sub-categories. Together, the examples selected from the corpus will be elaborated and discussed in details based on the theoretical frameworks.

Example of self-mention “I” data collected with the corpus concordance program:

Next, all data of the self-mention “I” in the Judgment will be counted in numbers and qualitatively elaborated into different categories to show the socio-cultural perspective of its identity construction.

Moreover, even though the analysis is thoroughly conducted by the researcher, another academic expert in discourse analysis research will be invited to be an inter-coder to ensure the reliability of the analysis.

Document investigation

The Judgment was written by Chart Korbjitti is the target novel selected to analyze for this study. The researcher selected this novel since it is well-established Thai novel which has been translated into many languages and accredited by peer-review from international level. The novel is a literary piece which unexpectedly grabbed the attention of the people, winning the Thai Literature Council’s 1981 Book of the Year and the 1982 Southeast Asian Writers Award.

For the socio-perspective, this work portrayed the life of the society in which the protagonist is the member. The use of linguistic functions in terms of discourse level could reflect many interesting points through the conflict and imbalance of power and status in Thai society. After conducting pilot study, it was found the possibility to conduct this study since the novel contains a lot of self-mentions “I” corresponding with the theoretical framework and could reveal socio-perspectives and the discourse of social context in Thai society in terms of power and social class, the role of influencing society and norms.

Result and Discussion

From the result aspects of six sub-categories of self-mentions, the identity of the author could be revealed through Tang and John’s [11] continuum of authorial presence of self-mention “I”.

Table 4 Tang and John’s (1999) continuum of authorial presence of self-mention “I”

| Self-mention of “I” | Description |
|-------------------------|--|
| I as the representative | As part of a group or community, ‘I’ voices the presence of the speaker to show some kind of relationship with others. |
| I as the Guide | To attract the listener’s attention, ‘I’ allows the speaker to personally explain things to lead the listener to understand or do something as a result. |
| I as the Architect | As an organizer, ‘I’ states or proposes an idea, claim, purpose, result to the listener. |
| I as the Recounter | ‘I’ as the recounter describes reasons or steps to be used as persuasive justification in expressing oneself. |
| I as the Opinion holder | Knowing information or established fact, ‘I’ enables the speaker to share an opinion or attitude confidently. |
| I as the originator | As an authority, ‘I’ reveals the contribution of valuable opinion to a group, community, or society. |

The self-mention “I” were frequently used to write in more informal styles as found in this story. It was found that the majority marked feature of self-mentions among the six is “I” as the representative due to the main protagonist’s role (FAK) in society he lived. The examples and explanation are as follows:

Example 1: p. 113

Fak shyly revealed his intention to the headmaster.

“Oh, good,” the headmaster said. “It’s a good idea to cremate the body.”

FAK: “Do I have to bring an invitation card to Kamnan Yorm also, **sir**?”

Headmaster: “Oh no!, Sending out invitation as well, eh?”

Example 2: p.114

Fak said to the Kamnan

The Kamnan: “What’s the matter?”

FAK: “I’ve come to let you know, sir, that I’m going to cremate my father’s body on the seventh,” Fak said most respectfully, even though his voice was shaking.

The Kamnan: “Oh, good.”

Table 5 I as the Representative

| Self-mention “i” [11] | | Speech Act | Expressions | CDA |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|
| I as the Representative | As part of a group or | Illocutionary | Pathos: | Power and |
| | community, ‘I’ voices | Directives: | Sadness | Distance |
| | the presence of the | Request | | Social Class: |
| | speaker to show some | Perlocution | | - As the janitor |
| | kind of relationship | | | - Politeness |
| | with others. | | | |

From example 1-2, self-mention “I” could be analyzed based on the framework: Analyzing the first personal pronoun in terms of frequency related to the context

Table 6 First Personal Pronoun Word List from the Corpus

| No. | Rank | Frequency | Words |
|-------|------|-----------|-------|
| 1 | 2 | 204 | I |
| 2 | 10 | 68 | my |
| 3 | 16 | 51 | me |
| 4 | 28 | 31 | we |
| 5 | 86 | 12 | our |
| Total | 366 | | |

According to the clearly result in table 1 via Antconc program in word list function in the table 1 reveals that the used of “I” run in the highest place of word list. According to the example of “I” as the representative, it reflects that the self-mention “I” expressed by Fak as the representative who voices the presence of the speaker to shows the relationship with the interlocutor “Headmaster” and “Kamnan”.

We can see from the item that the situational context of this short represents some kind of Thai social circumstance. Based on the speech act theory, Fak used the directive way to show his request with politeness strategy. We can see from the word “sir” followed the sentence. Considering social status perspective, the first dimension found is large power distance. This is because the occupation in Thai society could determine individual status’s role. That is, Fak as the janitor is seen as an inferior group of people in society. So, the language use in the conversational context could reveal the power and distance of interlocutor. The strategy from politeness theory of “Negative politeness” is found in this context. That is, the method of mitigating an imposition of the speaker by using “Sir” followed the questions in order to ask for permission can show that he is very humble and polite. This also indicates the inequality in one society which might be more or less different from the others. Hence, the use of self-mention “I” in example 1-2 as the representative could demonstrate that Fak has his least powerful person and lowest authorial presence in his community, since he has to express his voice merely as the representative of his group using politeness in asking for permission from other key people in his society when he wants to do anything. He cannot make decision to guide or give order to other people such as Kamnan or the Headmaster who are in higher status than him. He cannot make decision by himself in any situations. As affirmed by Ivanic [15], he stated that discursal self through the use of self-mentions or identity which conveys the social constructs in individual’s social status and the social context in which they speak or communicate. To elaborate, hierarchy is enormously important in Thai life and influences on Thais’ language use. We can see that one of the things that’s interesting about the Thai language are the number of different pronouns for speaking to people of different status.

Example3: Page. 227

The headmaster said to Fak and stood in front of the villagers:

“I’m not angry with you for accusing me of cheating you, but I’m concerned about the children. I’m worried that they won’t be able to study properly. If you don’t have any money, you can always come and ask me. I haven’t got a heart of stone. You and I used to work together. I’m always willing to forgive. I know you did it only because you were drunk, Mr. Fak.

Tears streamed down Fak’s face. He let them out unashamedly. None of the three teachers had any way of understanding the feelings concealed behind his tears. Still crying, Fak went down the staircase of the teachers’ quarters and cut across the school lawn. The eyes of the three teachers followed him until he disappeared into the coconut grove.

Table 7 I as the Guide

| | Self-mention “i” [11] | Speech Act | CDA |
|-------------------|--|--|--|
| I as the Guide | To attract the listener’s attention, ‘I’ allows the speaker to personally explain things to lead the listener to understand or do something as a result. | Illocutionary Directives: Request & Command Perlocution | Power and Distance Social Class: -As the Headmaster Words and context |

From example 3, self-mention “I” could be analyzed based on the framework:

From example 3, the self-mention “I” was used by the headmaster to represent as the Guide or navigator. The main role of self-mention “I” at this situation aims to organize or provide a frame for the listeners to believe and trust on the speaker (the headmaster). Even though the headmaster used self-mention “I” followed by the polite language filled with modest, kind and sympathetic feeling, the real intended meaning based on the speech act theory is to request and command all the villagers to trust on him and blame Fak for this situation. Supported by the theory of power and distance in social class by looking upon the context and scene, The headmaster stands at the front of the village line. This is impossible for the village to imagine that the headmaster could have cheated Fak. Due to Fak’s low status as the janitor, his punishment by the village is very intensified. Therefore, the contextual analysis at this scene could affirm the use of self-mention “I” which has the role in navigating the villagers all to believe in the speaker’s status and appearance rather than the truth.

Table 8 I as the Opinion holder

| | Self-mention “i” | Speech | Expression | CDA |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| I as the Opinion holder | Knowing information or established fact. ‘I’ enables the speaker to share an opinion or attitude confidently. | Illocutionary Assertive: Share feeling Perlocution | Pathos: Sadness The agony of the characters due to the personal relationships context | Power and Distance Social Class: - As the Undertaker - Words and |

In terms of the Pathos theory of expression, this example expresses the pathos in the way that Fak becomes sad and has tragic emotion from being cheated money from the headmaster. We can see from the narration:

“Tears streamed down Fak’s face. He let them out unashamedly. None of the three teachers had any way of understanding the feelings concealed behind his tears. Still crying, Fak went down the staircase of the teachers’ quarters and cut across the school lawn. The eyes of the three teachers followed him until he disappeared into the coconut grove”.

This situation reveals the emotional tone of sadness and disappointment in line with the vivid descriptions. It could disclose the psychological and physical condition of Fak being on suffering because people in the village misunderstand him as a person who cheated money from the headmaster.

So, with the contextual and discourse analysis based on aforementioned theories, we could see the use of self-mention “I” to convey the intended meaning which firmly associated with the determination of social and psychological aspects and the power and distance in society.

Example 4 : Page. 150

Uncle Khai (the undertaker) said to Fak

“Do you think it’s fun to be an undertaker?” “Think about it. Have you ever seen anyone sit and eat with me when there’s a festival at the temple?

“No, I always eat alone. Nobody wants to eat with me. They’re afraid of getting infected. Put yourself in my shoes and you’ll know how I feel when everybody’s eating and chatting away happily and I’m sitting there all by myself eating in silence. When kids see me, they run away because they’re scared of the undertaker. Their mums and dads have told’em the undertaker lives with ghosts. If I try to touch’em, they will start wailing.”

Example 4

Identity of the character of could be classified as the self-mention “I” as the opinion holder. At this point, the speaker is the undertaker who is in the same rank of social status as the listener “Fak” in the same discourse society. Considering the power and social class based on critical discourse analysis, the occupation is another key factor which determines the social position and the way individual behaves towards another. In this example, it could illustrate that since the speaker is the undertaker and stands at the same bottom rung of the society as the listener. It could be assumed that he know the information and share the same opinion and attitude with the listener “FAK” very well. The use of self-mention “I” in this case could show the level of perceived intimacy between friends of the speaker and

listener together with sharing the same opinion and feeling. To elaborate, the undertaker has known that, with the same social status, Fak's troubles is very intensified. Fak is also tormented by the villagers. Fak goes to the school and the headmaster lies and claims that he never held any money for Fak. Fak publicly accuses the headmaster of cheating him and is laughed at by the villagers. In this situation, the undertaker understands Fak and expresses that he shares the common depression of being powerless, moneyless and friendless. In the aspect of Speech Act theory, the speaker feels assertive to behave confidently and is not frightened to say what he truly believes to the listeners. This is because he would like to share his depressed emotion with Fak. Based on the Pathos theory of expression, the use of self-mention "I" is expressed with the emotion of agony of the character due to his personal relationship with the listener. At this point, there is the description with the emotionally loaded language and vivid narration such as "If I try to touch'em, they will start wailing. This reveals his feeling which makes him a long, high cry, usually because of his pain and sadness.

Conclusion

In sum, from this study, it reveals the possibility to conduct the full-scale research. It was found that the use of self-mentions "I" expressed by the characters in the novel "The Judgment" cannot be separated from the discourse and context analysis. That is, discourse also plays a major role in constituting and deconstructing an individual's subjectivity through the use of language, non-verbal interaction and expression. Fak, the main protagonist and the villagers are the key parts of societal discourse, with the former as a victim of the villagers' discourse and the latter as victims of their own. The use of self-mentions "I" and identity construction could manifest the intended meaning that each character conveys.

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