

การใช้สรรพนามบุรุษที่ 1 ในการพูดสร้างสรรค์ภาษาไทยถิ่นอีสาน The Use of First-Person Pronouns in Isan Creative Speech

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มุ่งวิเคราะห์การใช้สรรพนามบุรุษที่ 1 ในการพูดสร้างสรรค์ภาษาไทยถิ่นอีสาน ซึ่งเป็นรูปแบบการพูดในที่สาธารณะเชิงวาทศิลป์ที่ใช้ภาษาไทยถิ่นอีสานในภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศไทย การพูดสร้างสรรค์เป็นการใช้ภาษาเชิงวาทศิลป์ในลักษณะการแข่งขันที่ผสมผสานการโน้มน้าวใจ การเล่าเรื่องเชิงวัฒนธรรม และการแสดงอัตลักษณ์ของภูมิภาค แม้ว่าจะงานวิจัยที่ผ่านมาเกี่ยวกับสรรพนามในภาษาไทยจะมุ่งเน้นศึกษาการใช้ในปฏิสัมพันธ์ในชีวิตประจำวันและกลยุทธ์ความสุภาพเป็นหลัก แต่งานวิจัยที่ศึกษาการใช้สรรพนามในบริบทของการพูดเชิงวาทศิลป์ยังมีอยู่ค่อนข้างจำกัด

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ 3 ประการ ได้แก่ (1) เพื่อจำแนกรูปสรรพนามบุรุษที่ 1 ที่ใช้ในการพูดสร้างสรรค์ภาษาไทยถิ่นอีสาน (2) เพื่อวิเคราะห์ความถี่และการกระจายตัวของสรรพนามดังกล่าว และ (3) เพื่อวิเคราะห์หน้าที่ทางภาษาศาสตร์สังคมของสรรพนามด้านการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ การวางตำแหน่งตัวตนของผู้พูด และการแสดงจุดยืนเชิงวาทศิลป์

งานวิจัยนี้ใช้ระเบียบวิธีแบบผสมผสาน โดยผลจากการวิเคราะห์เชิงปริมาณด้านความถี่เข้ากับการวิเคราะห์หาทฤษฎีเชิงคุณภาพ ข้อมูลที่ใช้ในการศึกษาประกอบด้วยบทพูดจำนวน 30 บทจากการประกวดการพูดสร้างสรรค์อีสานในช่วงปี พ.ศ. 2564–2566 (เก็บข้อมูลโดยพลอยไพลิน ผลสงเคราะห์)

ผลการศึกษาพบสรรพนามบุรุษที่ 1 จำนวน 5 รูป ได้แก่ เา ผม ช้อย ช้อย และ ดิฉัน โดยพบว่า เา มีความถี่สูงสุด คิดเป็นร้อยละ 90.8 ของการปรากฏทั้งหมด รูปแบบดังกล่าวสะท้อนแนวโน้มที่เด่นชัดในการสร้างอัตลักษณ์แบบหมู่คณะและการเชื่อมโยงกับผู้ฟังในฐานะกลุ่มเดียวกัน ขณะที่สรรพนามอื่น ๆ ได้แก่ ผม ช้อย ช้อย และ ดิฉัน ปรากฏในความถี่ที่ต่ำกว่า และถูกใช้ในลักษณะเชิงกลยุทธ์เพื่อแสดงจุดยืนส่วนบุคคล อัตลักษณ์ทางเพศ หรือการเน้นย้ำเชิงวาทศิลป์

จากการบูรณาการผลการวิเคราะห์เชิงปริมาณร่วมกับการตีความในระดับวาทกรรม การศึกษานี้แสดงให้เห็นว่าการเลือกใช้สรรพนามบุรุษที่ 1 ทำหน้าที่เป็นทรัพยากรทางวาทศิลป์ที่สำคัญในการพูดสร้างสรรค์ภาษาไทยถิ่นอีสาน โดยช่วยให้ผู้พูดสามารถสร้างอัตลักษณ์ทางสังคม ถ่ายทอดคุณค่าทางวัฒนธรรม และเสริมสร้างการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้ฟังได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาไทยถิ่นอีสาน; สรรพนามบุรุษที่ 1; ภาษาศาสตร์สังคม; การพูดสร้างสรรค์; ดัชนีบ่งชี้อัตลักษณ์

Abstract

This study examines the use of first-person pronouns in *Isan Creative Speech*; a stylized public speaking genre performed in the Thai-Isan dialect in northeastern Thailand. Creative speech is a competitive rhetorical performance that combines persuasive discourse, cultural storytelling, and regional identity expression. While previous research on Thai pronouns has focused primarily on everyday interaction and politeness strategies, relatively few studies have investigated pronoun use in performative speech contexts.

The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to identify the forms of first-person pronouns used in Isan Creative Speech, (2) to analyze the frequency and distribution of these pronouns, and (3) to examine their sociolinguistic

functions in terms of identity construction, personal positioning, and rhetorical stance. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative frequency analysis and qualitative discourse analysis. The dataset consists of 30 speeches from the Creative Isan Speech Contest held between 2021 and 2023 (Data collected by Ploypailin Ponsongkhor).

The findings reveal five first-person pronouns, namely **เฮา** /haw/, **ผม** /phǒm/, **ข่อย** /khøj/, **ข้อย** /khôj/, and **ดิฉัน** /dì?-chǎn/. Among these forms, **เฮา** /haw/ overwhelmingly dominates the dataset, accounting for 90.8% of all pronoun tokens. This pattern reflects a strong orientation toward collective identity construction and in-group alignment with the audience. Less frequent pronouns, such as **ผม** /phǒm/, **ข่อย** /khøj/, **ข้อย** /khôj/, and **ดิฉัน** /dì?-chǎn/, are used strategically to express personal stance, gender identity, or rhetorical emphasis.

By integrating quantitative distribution with discourse-level interpretation, the study demonstrates that first-person pronoun choice functions as an important rhetorical resource in Isan Creative Speech, enabling speakers to construct social identity, express cultural values, and strengthen audience engagement.

Keywords: Isan dialect; first-person pronouns; sociolinguistics; creative speech; identity indexing

1. Introduction

Pronouns play a fundamental role in the construction of social identity in language use. In sociolinguistics, first-person pronouns are not only grammatical markers of self-reference but also pragmatic devices that signal speaker stance, intimacy, politeness, authority, and cultural alignment (De Fina, 2017; Kiesling, 2018). The use of personal pronouns varies considerably across languages and dialects, reflecting the intricate ways in which speakers navigate social relationships and contextual roles.

This paper investigates first-person pronouns in Isan Creative Speech; a stylized form of competitive public speaking performed in the Thai-Isan dialect during regional cultural contests in northeastern Thailand. This genre combines persuasive rhetoric, narrative storytelling, humor, and cultural references, and reflects both formal speech conventions and local linguistic identity. The performances are marked by stylistic fluency, humor, and sociocultural references, often blending formal rhetoric with local identity expression. While studies on Thai pronoun usage have addressed issues of formality, politeness, and gender (Kraonin, 2021; Wathavanitchapong, 2020), however, few studies have examined how first-person pronouns function in stylized, performative discourse, particularly in structured public speaking genres such as Isan Creative Speech, where linguistic choices may be strategically employed for rhetorical and identity-related purposes.

Isan, the northeastern region of Thailand, retains distinct linguistic and cultural features rooted in Lao heritage. Isan speakers draw from a rich inventory of first-person pronouns, including pronouns such as ข้า /khôj/, อ้าย /ʔáaj/, ข่อย /khøj/, and เฮา /haw/, each varying in terms of age, intimacy, gender, and social status (Phuphaiboon & Rojanavipark, 2018). However, systematic studies of their use in public, scripted speech genres remain limited.

This study aims to address this gap by employing a mixed-methods approach to analyze first-person pronoun use in Isan Creative Speech. Using data from 30 speeches from 2021 to 2023, this research identifies the word forms of first-person pronouns, quantifies their frequency, and explores their pragmatic and sociolinguistic functions.

2. The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1) To identify and classify the various forms of first-person pronouns used in Isan Creative Speech.

- 2) To analyze the frequency and percentage of each pronoun form to determine the most commonly used.
- 3) To investigate the sociolinguistic functions and purposes of each pronoun form within the context of Isan Creative Speech.

Through this investigation, the paper contributes to sociolinguistic discussions on pronoun variation, identity indexing (Ochs, 1992), and language performance (Bauman & Briggs, 2019), while also advancing documentation of regional Thai language practices in cultural performance contexts.

3. Literature Review

In this study, Isan Creative Speech refers to a stylized form of competitive public speaking performed in the Thai-Isan dialect, typically presented in academic or cultural contests in northeastern Thailand. This genre combines persuasive rhetoric, narrative storytelling, humor, and cultural references, and is characterized by a balance between formal speech conventions and local linguistic identity. As a performative genre, creative speech allows speakers to strategically manipulate linguistic resources, including pronoun choice, to construct identity, engage audiences, and convey cultural values.

To contextualize the present study within relevant theoretical and empirical frameworks, this section reviews key literature on pronouns, identity, and sociolinguistic variation. The review is organized thematically, beginning with foundational perspectives on the relationship between pronouns and social identity, followed by research on Thai and Isan pronominal systems, and concluding with insights into language use in performance and regional discourse.

3.1 Pronouns and Sociolinguistic Identity

Personal pronouns are central to sociolinguistic analysis because they are directly tied to the speaker's presentation of self. According to Ochs (2022), first-person pronouns index the speaker's role, authority, and social alignment

within discourse. In many languages, including Thai, the use of personal pronouns is highly sensitive to contextual factors such as formality, intimacy, power relations, and group affiliation (Wathavanitchapong, 2020; De Fina, 2017). Pronoun selection thus reflects a speaker's negotiation of identity in relation to their audience (Kiesling, 2018).

In Thai and other Southeast Asian languages, pronoun systems are elaborate, featuring a wide range of alternatives for the first-person singular depending on age, gender, and sociocultural context (Enfield, 2020). This flexibility enables speakers to perform multiple aspects of identity within a single interaction.

3.2 First-Person Pronouns in Thai and Isan

Previous research on Thai first-person pronouns has primarily examined their roles in expressing politeness, gender identity, and social hierarchy in everyday communication (Kraonin, 2021; Hoonchamlong, 2016; Wathavanitchapong, 2020). These studies demonstrate that pronoun selection in Thai is highly sensitive to contextual factors such as formality, interpersonal distance, and speaker-listener relationships.

In the context of the Isan dialect, studies have highlighted a wider range of pronoun forms and their strong socio-indexical meanings, particularly in informal and community-based communication (Phuphaiboon & Rojanavipark, 2018). For example, forms such as ข่อย /*khøj*/ and เฮา /*haw*/ are associated with regional identity, familiarity, and local cultural affiliation. Research on Isan discourse has also shown that speakers may shift between pronoun forms to express stance, emotional involvement, or solidarity (Chumsai & Khamphai, 2020).

However, most previous studies have focused on everyday conversation, media discourse, or general spoken interaction. There remains a lack of research examining how first-person pronouns function in performative speech genres, particularly in structured and competitive contexts such as Isan

Creative Speech. As such, the present study extends existing research by investigating pronoun use not only as a reflection of social categories but also as a strategic resource in rhetorical performance.

3.3 Language, Performance, and Indexicality

Isan Creative Speech belongs to a wider tradition of stylized, competitive public oratory in Thailand. These performances are not only informative but also expressive, blending persuasive rhetoric, humor, traditional forms, and personal narrative. The use of pronouns in such contexts may shift rapidly to index speaker stance or modulate proximity to the audience (Bauman & Briggs, 2019). This reflects the performative nature of language, where speakers actively construct identity through linguistic choices (Coupland, 2021).

Within performance, pronoun shifts may also serve metapragmatic functions—drawing attention to the act of speaking or enacting local authenticity (Johnstone, 2018). In regional genres like Isan Creative Speech, such shifts are often intentional, aiming to blend formality with intimacy and tradition with modernity (Chaiyasit & Sitthirak, 2022).

3.4 Research Gaps

While Thai sociolinguistic literature addresses pronoun variation in everyday speech and online discourse (Wongmontha et al., 2018; Wathavanitchapong, 2020), few studies have explored pronoun use in Isan speech performances. This is particularly true for first-person pronouns, which carry significant cultural and identity-related functions in Isan. As such, the current study fills a key gap by systematically analyzing both the frequency and functions of first-person pronouns in this unique oral genre.

In particular, little attention has been given to how pronoun choice operates within structured performance contexts, where linguistic forms may be deliberately selected to achieve rhetorical and cultural effects.

4. Research Methodology

To address the research objectives concerning the forms, frequency, and sociolinguistic functions of first-person pronouns in Isan Creative Speech, this study employed a carefully structured methodological approach. The following subsections describe the design of the study, data sources, units of analysis, and the procedures used to analyze both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the dataset.

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative analysis focuses on identifying and calculating the frequency of first-person pronouns across a corpus of Isan Creative Speech. The qualitative analysis interprets the sociolinguistic functions of those pronouns in their discourse context, drawing on frameworks in identity and discourse analysis (De Fina, 2017; Ochs, 2022).

4.2 Data Source

The dataset for this study consists of 30 speeches delivered by student participants in the Creative Isan Speech Contest, held annually from 2021 to 2023 and organized by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University. The contest is a well-established academic and cultural event that promotes the use of the Isan dialect in formal public speaking contexts.

Across the three years, approximately 10 participants were selected each year to perform in the final round of the competition, resulting in a total of 30 speeches used in this study. These speeches were selected as the complete set of finalist performances, ensuring that the dataset represents high-quality, carefully prepared examples of Isan Creative Speech.

The dataset consists of 30 speech texts collected from the Creative Isan Speech Contest held between 2021 and 2023. The data were compiled

by Ploypailin Pongsongkhor, a graduate student and native speaker of the Isan dialect with experience in linguistic data transcription.

For each year, a total of 10 speech texts were selected. Five texts were obtained from award-winning participants, including first prize, first runner-up, second runner-up, and two honorable mentions. The remaining five texts were randomly selected from the pool of non-award-winning participants. This sampling approach ensured a balanced representation of both high-performing and general participants, resulting in 10 texts per year and 30 texts across the three-year period.

All selected speeches were delivered in the Isan dialect and were part of the official competition. Only recordings of sufficient quality and completeness were included to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

The speech texts were transcribed by Ploypailin Pongsongkhor, with careful attention to preserving key linguistic features, including pronoun usage, lexical choices, and syntactic structures specific to the Isan dialect. To ensure reliability, the transcriptions were cross-checked by the primary researcher and further reviewed by an additional Isan-fluent linguist for accuracy and consistency.

Although the themes of the competition varied slightly each year—such as topics related to cultural identity, local development, and contemporary social issues—these thematic differences were not found to significantly affect the use of first-person pronouns. This is because the use of pronouns in Isan Creative Speech is primarily driven by rhetorical strategies and audience engagement rather than topic-specific content. Therefore, the dataset is considered sufficiently comparable across years for the purposes of analysis.

The resulting corpus contains approximately 12,000 words and represents authentic, stylized oral performances that reflect both linguistic creativity and sociocultural expression in the Isan context.

4.3 Units of Analysis

The unit of analysis is the first-person pronoun in any syntactic role (subject, object, possessive). All pronoun tokens were identified and categorized based on:

- 1) Lexical form (e.g., ข่อย /khøj/, เฮา, /haw/ ดีฉัน /dìʔ-chañ/, and ผม /phǒm/)
- 2) Semantic orientation (e.g., singular vs. plural, formal vs. informal)
- 3) Social and discourse function (e.g., stance-taking, identity indexing).

4.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis was conducted in two complementary stages to reflect the study's mixed-methods approach. Quantitative analysis was used to identify the frequency and distribution of pronoun forms, while qualitative analysis focused on interpreting the pragmatic and sociolinguistic functions of those forms in context. Each stage is described in detail below.

4.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Each occurrence of a first-person pronoun was manually tagged and counted. The frequency and percentage distribution of each form were calculated to determine usage patterns across the full speech dataset. Results were organized in descending order of usage.

4.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

To interpret pragmatic and sociolinguistic functions, the study employed discourse analytic methods (Johnstone, 2018; Coupland, 2021). Each pronoun was examined in its immediate speech context, focusing on how speakers used pronouns to:

- 1) Establish intimacy or distance,
- 2) Perform humility, leadership, or community identity,
- 3) Signal narrative or personal involvement.

Coding categories were developed inductively and revised through comparative analysis of usage patterns across speeches.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

Reliability was ensured through double-coding and consistency checks. All data were analyzed by the researcher and independently reviewed by a second Isan-fluent linguist for coding accuracy and interpretation. Validity was supported through methodological triangulation—integrating quantitative frequency with qualitative interpretation and grounding in sociolinguistic theory.

Ethical considerations were observed by anonymizing data and using publicly available materials. No personal identifiers were included in the analysis.

5. Results

This section presents the results of the analysis based on three research objectives. First, it identifies and classifies the forms of first-person pronouns used in the dataset. Second, it outlines the frequency of each form across the 30 speeches. Third, it explains the sociolinguistic functions of these pronouns through real usage examples. All examples were drawn directly from the transcribed speeches of the Creative Isan Speech Contest (2021–2023).

5.1 Forms of First-Person Pronouns Used in Isan Creative Speech

A total of five distinct forms of first-person pronouns were found across the dataset:

เฮา /haw/ – plural or inclusive first-person

ผม /phǒm/ – formal, male speaker

ข่อย /khøj/ – informal Isan variant for “I”

ข้อย /khôj/ – orthographic variant of ข่อย /khøj/

ดิฉัน /dìʔ-chǎn/ – formal, female speaker

The following examples illustrate how first-person pronouns are used in the speeches.

Example 1: เฮา /haw/

เขาเป็นคนยุคใหม่ ให้เขาพัฒนา ให้เขาศึกษา ให้เขาสืบสาน ของเก่าอย่าลืม
ของใหม่กะมาแทน

“We are the new generation. Let us develop, educate, and carry on.
Don’t throw away the old, let the new complement it.”

Example 2: ผม /phǎm/

ความภาคภูมิใจของผมคือการได้เกิดเป็นคนอีสานครับ

“My greatest pride is being born as an Isan person.”

Example 3: ข่อย /khøj/

ข่อยใจหลายกะปานนั้น

“I’m really amazed by that.”

Example 4: ข้อย /khôj/

ชุมเฮาเจ้าข้อยต้องช่วยกัน

“All of us — me included — must help each other.”

Example 5: ดิฉัน /dìʔ-chǎn/

จังหวัดที่ดิฉันอาศัยอยู่

“The province where I live.”

5.2 Frequency and Distribution of Pronoun Forms

Quantitative analysis of the dataset reveals the frequency and distribution of first-person pronouns across the 30 speeches, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency and Distribution of First-Person Pronouns

Pronoun	Frequency	Percentage
เฮา /haw/	316	90.8%
ผม /phǎm/	21	6.0%
ข่อย /khøj/	6	1.7%
ข้อย /khôj/	3	0.9%
ดิฉัน /dìʔ-chǎn/	2	0.6%
Total	348	100%

As shown in Table 1, the pronoun เสา /haw/ overwhelmingly dominates the dataset, accounting for 90.8% of all occurrences. This indicates a strong preference for collective self-reference in Isan Creative Speech. By contrast, other pronouns such as ผม /phǒm/, ข่อย /khøj/, ข้อย /khôj/, and ดีฉัน /dì?-chăn/ occur at much lower frequencies, indicating that they are used more selectively for specific rhetorical or sociolinguistic purposes rather than as default forms of self-reference.

In terms of distribution across the dataset, เสา /haw/ appears in all 30 speeches, while ผม /phǒm/ occurs in a smaller number of speeches, primarily those delivered by male speakers. The pronouns ข่อย /khøj/ and ข้อย /khôj/ are used only occasionally, and ดีฉัน /dì?-chăn/ appears exclusively in speeches delivered by female participants.

5.3 Functions and Sociolinguistic Purposes of Pronoun Use

The analysis identifies three primary sociolinguistic functions of first-person pronouns in Isan Creative Speech: (1) in-group alignment, (2) personal positioning, and (3) rhetorical stance-taking. In this study, *in-group alignment* refers to the use of pronouns to construct a shared collective identity between the speaker and the audience. *Personal positioning* refers to the use of pronouns to signal individual identity, including gender and level of formality. *Rhetorical stance-taking* refers to the expression of personal attitudes, emotions, or evaluative positions within discourse. These functions are grounded in sociolinguistic theories of indexicality and stance, which view pronouns as linguistic resources for constructing social identity and managing speaker–audience relationships (Ochs, 1992; De Fina, 2017).

1) In-group alignment (Collective Identity)

This function refers to the use of pronouns to construct a shared identity between the speaker and the audience. According to Ochs (1992), linguistic forms such as pronouns index social relationships indirectly by

signalling alignment, stance, and participation roles. In this study, the pronoun เสา /haw/ performs this function by emphasizing inclusiveness and solidarity.

The pronoun เสา /haw/ constructs solidarity with the audience by framing issues in collective terms.

Example 6: เสาคนยุคใหม่ ทันสมัยมีเทคโนโลยีเข้ามา

ให้เสา นำเอา มาพัฒนาบ้านเกิดเมืองนอนเสาได้

“We, the modern generation, should use technology to develop our homeland.”

2) Personal positioning (Individual identity / Formality)

This function involves the use of pronouns to signal the speaker's individual identity, including gender and level of formality. The pronouns ผม /phǒm/ and ดิฉัน /dì-chǎn/ both function as formal first-person singular forms; however, they differ in terms of gender marking. ผม /phǒm/ is typically used by male speakers, whereas ดิฉัน /dì-chǎn/ is used by female speakers in formal contexts. Their use reflects not only individual identity but also adherence to socially recognized norms of politeness and gender expression in Thai discourse.

Example 7: ผมสัญญาทุกท่านไปเชียงใหม่ งาม ๆ ภาษาอีสานเขาว่าฟังแล้วมันหู

“I will take everyone to enjoy the richness of the Isan language — it's so pleasant to hear.”

3) Rhetorical stance-taking (Assertion and identity marking)

This function refers to the use of first-person pronouns to express personal stance, emotion, or emphasis within discourse. Unlike in-group alignment, which constructs a collective identity, rhetorical stance-taking allows speakers to momentarily foreground individual voice and perspective. In the present study, this function can be divided into two sub-types based on the sociolinguistic meanings associated with different pronoun forms.

(a) Informal and emotive stance (Isan identity)

Less frequent pronouns such as ข่อย /khǒj/ and ข้อย /khǒj/ are used to convey authenticity, emotional involvement, and strong personal viewpoints. These forms are associated with informal and regionally marked

speech, allowing speakers to shift from collective identity to a more personal and expressive voice. Their use often occurs in moments of emotional emphasis or when speakers wish to highlight sincerity and personal connection with the message.

(b) Formal stance and gendered identity (Standard Thai femininity)

In contrast, the pronoun ดิฉัน */dìʔ-chǎn/* is used to index a formal and polite stance, particularly associated with female speakers. This form reflects adherence to standard Thai norms of politeness and gender marking, and is typically used in more formal or rhetorically emphasized segments of the speech. Its use demonstrates how speakers strategically shift linguistic style to align with expectations of formality and to project a respectful or authoritative voice.

Example 8: ดิฉันกะอยากฝากไว้ว่า “อย่าสูลืมถิ่นพงศ์พันธุ์พี่น้องเก่า...”

“I would like to urge you not to forget our ancestral roots...”

The use of ดิฉัน */dìʔ-chǎn/* in this example reflects a formal and persuasive stance, reinforcing the speaker’s authority and emotional appeal. Although less frequent than เสา */haw/*, such pronouns play an important role in structuring rhetorical emphasis and expressing individual identity within the performance.

The analysis of 348 first-person pronouns across 30 speeches indicates a strong tendency toward collective identity construction through the frequent use of เสา */haw/*. This indicates that speakers in Isan Creative Speech actively engage their audiences as part of a shared collective. In contrast, the use of ผม */phǒm/* reflects formality and male self-reference, while less frequent forms such as ข่อย */khøj/*, ข้อย */khôj/*, and ดิฉัน */dìʔ-chǎn/* mark moments of personal stance or rhetorical emphasis.

Overall, these patterns demonstrate that first-person pronoun choice in Isan Creative Speech is systematic and closely linked to rhetorical goals and sociocultural meanings. The dominance of เสา */haw/* highlights the importance of collective identity construction, while less frequent forms serve specialized functions related to individual identity, gender expression, and emotional emphasis.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Having presented the quantitative distribution and qualitative functions of first-person pronouns in the previous section, this part of the paper now turns to a deeper interpretation of the findings. The following discussion considers how these patterns relate to sociolinguistic theory, cultural norms in Isan society, and the rhetorical strategies of speakers. Through this lens, the implications of pronoun use in Isan Creative Speech are examined in terms of identity, stance, and audience engagement.

6.1 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that first-person pronouns in Isan Creative Speech are not only grammatical elements but also indexical markers of identity, stance, and audience orientation. The overwhelming use of เสา /haw/ (316 out of 348 tokens) highlights the speakers' intention to construct a collective identity rather than emphasize individual self-reference. This pattern aligns with sociolinguistic theories of indexicality and stance (Ochs, 1992; De Fina, 2017), where pronouns reflect how speakers align themselves within the sociocultural space.

From a socio-cultural linguistic perspective, the dominance of เสา /haw/ reflects broader cultural values in contemporary Isan society, particularly the emphasis on collectivism, community solidarity, and shared identity. In modern Isan contexts, especially among younger speakers participating in public speech competitions, language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a means of expressing regional pride and cultural belonging.

In this context, เสา /haw/ serves as a rhetorical device that unifies the speaker and audience by reinforcing shared values, experiences, and goals. Its frequent use indicates that speakers position themselves not as isolated individuals but as representatives of a larger collective—a key feature of public discourse in Northeastern Thailand.

The analysis further shows that there is a meaningful distinction between first-person pronouns derived from Central Thai (e.g., ผม /phǒm/, ดิฉัน /dìʔ-chǎn/) and those from the Isan dialect (e.g., เฮา /haw/, ข่อย /khøj/, ข้อย /khôj/). Central Thai pronouns tend to index formality, politeness, and standard language norms, whereas Isan pronouns carry strong regional and cultural associations. The selective use of Central Thai forms in the dataset suggests that speakers strategically adopt them in more formal or self-reflective moments, while relying primarily on Isan forms to maintain authenticity and local identity within the performance.

These patterns can also be interpreted in relation to individual pronoun functions. The pronoun ผม /phǒm/, used 21 times, indicates formality and self-positioning by male speakers, often in moments of personal reflection, identity assertion, or respectful narration. This contrasts with ข่อย /khøj/ and ข้อย /khôj/, which are less frequent but carry strong regional and informal associations. When used, they emphasize personal sentiment or stance, often in expressive or emotionally charged statements. These forms reflect an authentic Isan voice, despite their limited use in formal speech genres.

ดิฉัน /dìʔ-chǎn/, which appears only twice, functions as a formal female self-reference, demonstrating the intersection of gender and linguistic politeness. Its rare occurrence may reflect the predominantly male speaker profile or the influence of performative norms, where regional identity often overrides gender-based variation.

Within the tradition of Isan Creative Speech, which is a stylized rhetorical performance combining persuasive discourse, cultural narration, and linguistic creativity, the use of language is shaped by both formal rhetorical expectations and local performance conventions. Speakers are expected to demonstrate linguistic creativity, persuasive ability, and cultural knowledge, often blending formal structures with regional linguistic features. In this context, pronoun choice becomes a key rhetorical tool, enabling speakers to shift

between collective and individual perspectives, balance formality and familiarity, and engage audiences effectively.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on Thai and Isan pronoun use, which highlight the role of pronouns in expressing social relationships and identity (Wathavanitchapong, 2020; Phuphaiboon & Rojanavipark, 2018). However, unlike studies focusing on everyday interaction, the present study demonstrates that in performative speech contexts, pronoun use is more systematic and rhetorically motivated. In particular, the overwhelming dominance of inclusive forms such as เเฮา /haw/ suggests a stronger emphasis on collective identity than has been reported in conversational data.

In addition to pronoun choice, other contextual elements—such as narrative structure, thematic content, and audience expectations—also contribute to meaning-making in Isan Creative Speech. Pronouns interact with these elements to shape interpretation, indicating that linguistic analysis should be understood within a broader discourse context rather than as isolated forms.

These patterns can be more clearly understood in relation to the three sociolinguistic functions identified in Section 5.3. First, the dominance of เเฮา /haw/ strongly reflects the function of in-group alignment, as speakers consistently construct a shared identity with their audience. Second, the selective use of ผม /phǒm/ and ดิฉัน /dì?-chǎn/ corresponds to personal positioning, where speakers index formality, gender, and individual identity within the discourse. Third, the use of less frequent pronouns such as ขอย /khøj/ and ข้อย /khøj/, as well as ดิฉัน /dì?-chǎn/ in specific contexts, illustrates rhetorical stance-taking, allowing speakers to express personal emotion, emphasis, and evaluative stance.

This alignment between functional categories and actual usage patterns demonstrates that pronoun choice in Isan Creative Speech is not only systematic but also analytically explainable through sociolinguistic functions. These patterns further demonstrate that pronoun selection is strategic, as

speakers tailor their language to balance formality, cultural identity, and rhetorical engagement. The results confirm that pronouns are not neutral choices but reflect social meanings and ideological positioning (Coupland, 2021).

6.2 Conclusion

This study examined the forms, frequency, and functions of first-person pronouns in Isan Creative Speech using a mixed-methods approach. Based on a corpus of 30 speeches from 2021–2023, five pronoun forms were identified: เสา /haw/, ผม /phǒm/, ข่อย /khøj/, ข้อย /khøj/, and ดิฉัน /dì?-chǎn/. The analysis identified a total of 348 pronoun tokens, among which เสา /haw/ overwhelmingly dominates, accounting for 90.8% (316 occurrences).

This distribution reflects a strong orientation toward collective identity construction, indicating that speakers position themselves as part of a shared social group rather than as isolated individuals. The dominance of เสา /haw/ highlights the importance of community, shared experience, and regional belonging in contemporary Isan society, while less frequent pronouns reflect more specialized functions related to formality, gender identity, and rhetorical emphasis.

These findings contribute to sociolinguistic research by demonstrating that first-person pronouns function not only as referential forms but also as strategic linguistic resources for constructing social identity, building solidarity, and engaging audiences in culturally meaningful ways. In the context of Isan Creative Speech, pronoun choice plays a central role in shaping both discourse structure and social meaning. One limitation of this study is that the dataset is restricted to contest-based speech performances and may not fully represent spontaneous Isan spoken interaction.

Future research could extend this study by examining second- and third-person pronouns, comparing male and female speech styles, or analyzing pronoun use in other Isan oral genres such as หมอลำ /mǎw-lam/ or storytelling. Additionally, comparative studies between Central Thai and Isan public speech may provide further insight into how regional variation influences pronoun use and discourse strategies.

7. Research Contribution

Building on the findings and discussion presented above, this section outlines the key research contributions of the study. Rather than restating empirical results, it focuses on explaining how the findings extend existing sociolinguistic research on first-person pronouns, identity construction, and language performance in Thai and Isan contexts. By positioning the results in relation to prior studies, this section highlights the theoretical and conceptual insights generated by the analysis. The research contributions are organized into three interrelated aspects, which address the strategic use of inclusive pronouns, a process-based understanding of pronoun choice, and a conceptual link between linguistic form, cultural values, and social impact.

7.1 Strategic Use of Inclusive First-Person Pronouns in Performative Discourse

The first contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that the use of first-person pronouns in Isan Creative Speech constitutes a deliberate and systematic rhetorical strategy rather than a spontaneous or purely grammatical choice. While previous studies on Thai and Isan pronouns have largely examined everyday interaction, politeness, or gendered reference, this research shows that speakers in a performative public speech genre consistently prioritize inclusive first-person forms, particularly เสา /haw/, to construct collective identity and align themselves with their audiences. The overwhelming dominance of this pronoun across the corpus indicates a genre-specific pattern in which speakers position themselves not as isolated individuals but as representatives of a shared social and cultural community. This finding extends existing sociolinguistic knowledge by highlighting how pronoun use operates strategically at the level of whole speech performance, rather than at the level of isolated utterances, a perspective that has not been sufficiently addressed in prior research.

7.2 Process-Based Understanding of Pronoun Choice and Identity Construction

The second contribution of this study is the articulation of a process-based explanation of how first-person pronouns function in identity construction and stance-taking throughout Isan Creative Speech. Rather than treating pronoun variation as a static reflection of social categories, the findings reveal that speakers dynamically alternate between dominant inclusive forms and less frequent marked forms, such as ผม /phǒm/, ข่อย /khøj/, ข้อย /khôj/, and ดีฉัน /dìʔ-chǎn/, at salient moments of the speech. These shifts serve to index formality, emotional intensity, gender identity, or personal positioning, allowing speakers to manage their relationship with the audience across different rhetorical stages. This process-oriented account contributes new theoretical insight by showing how pronoun choice unfolds sequentially and functionally within performance, thereby extending sociolinguistic theories of indexicality and stance beyond everyday conversational contexts.

7.3 Conceptual Contribution: Linking Pronoun Use, Performance, and Social Impact

The third contribution of this study is the proposal of a conceptual framework that links linguistic choice, cultural values, and performative outcomes in Isan Creative Speech. By integrating quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative discourse interpretation, the study demonstrates how first-person pronouns function as a mechanism connecting individual expression with broader social and cultural meanings. This framework shows that pronoun use contributes not only to audience engagement but also to the reinforcement of regional identity and cultural solidarity within institutionalized speech performance. In doing so, the study advances existing research by explaining how grammatical elements operate as drivers of social cohesion and cultural affirmation. This contribution offers a transferable analytical perspective for future research on pronoun use in other regional, performative, or institutional discourse contexts, thereby extending the scope of sociolinguistic inquiry beyond descriptive analysis toward explanatory and applied models.

Taken together, the three research contributions proposed in this study can be synthesized into a process-based conceptual framework illustrating how first-person pronoun choice in Isan Creative Speech operates as a dynamic sociolinguistic mechanism linking linguistic form, identity construction, rhetorical performance, and broader social outcomes. Figure 1 summarizes the relationship between these interconnected dimensions.

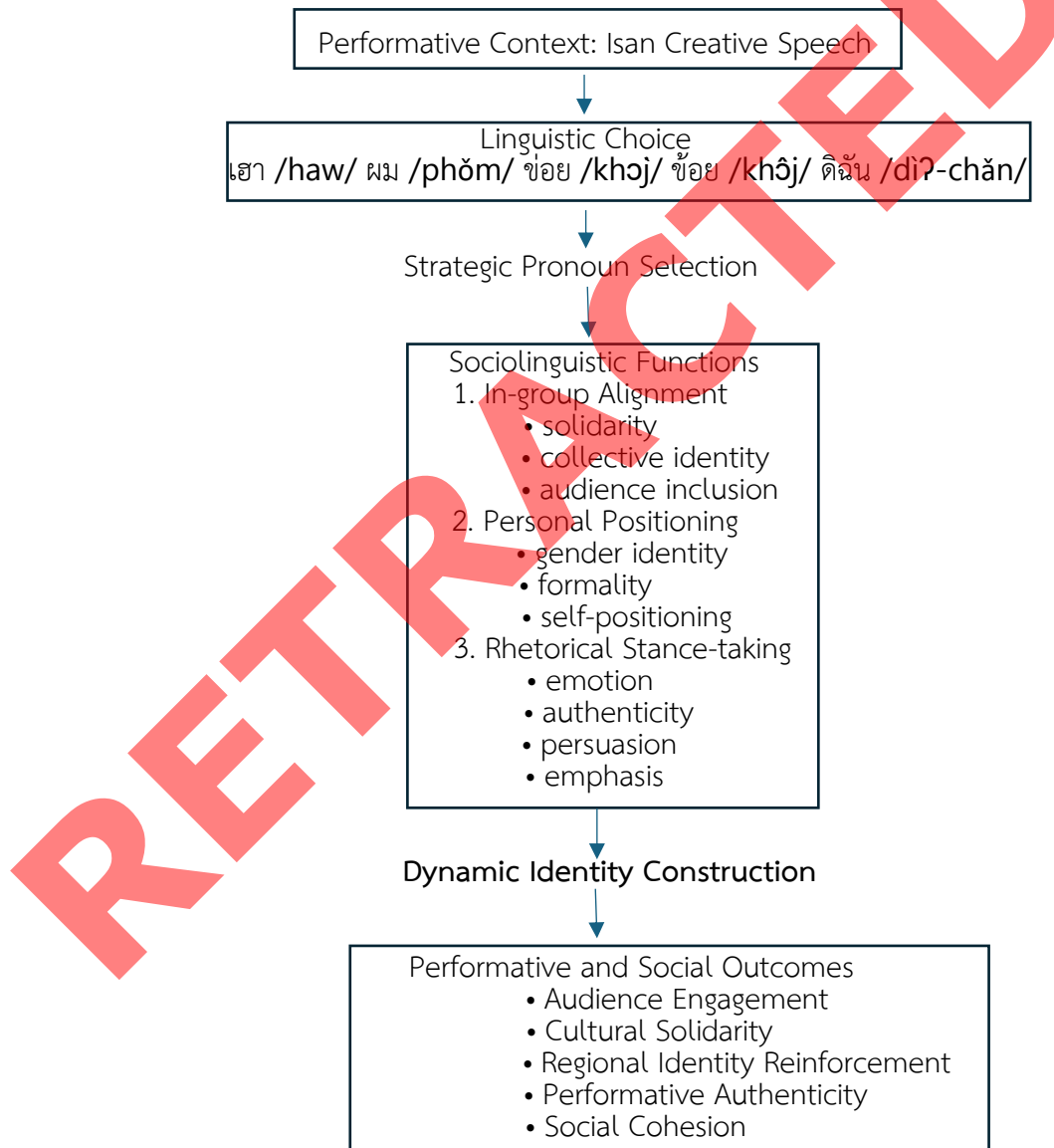


Figure 1. A Process-Based Model of Pronoun Choice, Identity Construction, and Social Impact in Isan Creative Speech

This conceptual model synthesizes the study's findings and theoretical contributions by demonstrating how first-person pronoun choice in Isan Creative Speech functions beyond grammatical reference. The model illustrates a dynamic process in which linguistic forms operate as sociolinguistic resources for identity construction, rhetorical stance-taking, and audience alignment, ultimately contributing to broader performative and socio-cultural outcomes within institutionalized regional speech performance.

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