

A Comparative Study of Thai and Chinese Internet Language¹

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Abstract

There are both similarities and differences between the Thai Internet language and the Chinese Internet language. The purpose of this study is to compare the characteristics of Thai and Chinese Internet language, as well as the reasons why both languages are used widely.

According to this study, it has been found that there are many similarities between Thai and Chinese Internet language: the use of homophones or words pronounced like numbers, the use of emoticons, the use of old words with new meanings, the creation of new words, and the use of words influenced by soap operas, news, or online games. In contrast, there are some differences between Thai and Chinese Internet languages in areas such as: the use of English words, their use of English abbreviations, and the use of ancient words and dialects.

Thai and Chinese Internet languages have been extremely popular because users can save time typing, communicate informal expressions to interlocutors, and express their feelings with facial expressions and emotions through Internet languages.

Keywords: Internet language, Thai language, Chinese language

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การเปรียบเทียบลักษณะภาษาอินเทอร์เน็ตในภาษาไทยและภาษาจีน

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บทคัดย่อ

ภาษาอินเทอร์เน็ตของภาษาไทยและภาษาจีนกลามมีทั้งความคล้ายคลึงกันและความแตกต่างกัน บทความเรื่องนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายในการศึกษาเพื่อเปรียบเทียบลักษณะภาษาอินเทอร์เน็ตในภาษาไทยและภาษาจีน และมุลเหตุที่สนับสนุนให้มีการใช้ภาษาอินเทอร์เน็ตในภาษาไทยและภาษาจีนอย่างกว้างขวาง จากการศึกษาพบว่าภาษาอินเทอร์เน็ตในภาษาไทยและภาษาจีนกลามมีความคล้ายคลึงกันหลายประการ ได้แก่ การใช้คำพ้องเสียงหรือออกเสียงใกล้เคียงกับตัวเลข การใช้สัญลักษณ์แสดงอารมณ์ การนำคำเดิมกลับมาใช้ในความหมายใหม่ การเขียนคำใหม่ และการใช้คำที่ได้รับอิทธิพลมาจากละคร ข่าวสาร หรือเกมออนไลน์ ในด้านความต่างกันของภาษาอินเทอร์เน็ตในภาษาไทยและภาษาจีน ได้แก่ การใช้คำภาษาอังกฤษ การใช้คำย่อภาษาอังกฤษ และการนำคำโบราณและภาษาถิ่นมาใช้

มุลเหตุที่ทำให้ภาษาอินเทอร์เน็ตในภาษาไทยและภาษาจีนกลามได้รับความนิยมอย่างกว้างขวาง เนื่องจาก ภาษาอินเทอร์เน็ตช่วยประหยัดเวลาในการพิมพ์ การใช้ภาษาอินเทอร์เน็ตช่วยแสดงความเป็นกันเองระหว่างคู่สนทนา และยังเป็นการเพิ่มอรอร่าสในการสนทนาโดยการแสดงสีหน้าและอารมณ์ผ่านทางภาษาอินเทอร์เน็ต

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาอินเทอร์เน็ต ภาษาไทย ภาษาจีน

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The Internet was brought to Thailand and China at about the same time. In Thailand, the Internet became available in 1987, and by 2009, there were above 18 million Internet users (National Electronics and Computer Technology Center, 2011.) In China, the Internet was used first in 1989, and by 2010, China had the most Internet users in the world; more than 380 million users.⁴

As a result of the growth in Internet use, communication and shared information have increased worldwide. It has become a new social network to chat and share ideas. With the Internet, communication is fast and effective. For these reasons, a new language called “Internet language” has been created.

Generally, there are two meanings of Internet Language or Net Language or Cyber-language (吴传飞, 2003.) There is a general meaning and a specific meaning. The general meaning of Internet language is a specific language for Internet use, with terms such as *web page* (网页) *browser* (浏览) *download* (下载), while examples of specific meaning are, patterns and characteristics of a language used on the Internet. **Internet language** in this article means a language used on the Internet with a specific meaning, and this study compares the use of Thai and Chinese Internet language through Internet access.

Characteristics of the Thai and Chinese Internet language

A breakthrough in communication technology, plus the increasing popularity of using computers, has led to a process of learning and imitation of language widely used in communication throughout the Internet. Even though there are differences in the use of Internet language in each group of languages, on the whole, there are many similarities. Likewise, there are both similar and different characteristics in Thai and Chinese Internet language.

Popular Thai and Chinese Internet language groups have been categorized into eight sections as follows:

1.1 Homophones or words pronounced like numbers

Sounds of numbers have been used instead of words. In Thai Internet language, 55 has been used the most because it is pronounced like a laugh (ha ha) in Thai, while there are many sounds of numbers used in Chinese Internet language such as 555 (呜呜呜, for a cry), 94 (就是, for yes, *I agree.*), 42 (是啊, for *yeah*), 88 (拜拜, for *bye*) to name a few.

There are more sounds like numbers used in Chinese Internet language than in Thai, because Chinese people have stressed the importance of homophones of number sounds with other words for a long time. Also, they have a strong belief in the use of numbers, so they are familiar with using numbers to convey their message indirectly.

⁴ China has a population about 1,300 million.

For instance, they do not like “4” because its pronunciation is like 死 (*Su:*) which means “*die*”. However, they like “8”; it is used to give a price on products since it sounds like “*prosperity*” (Yang, 2011.) Similarly, in Thai Internet language, Thai people also have a similar belief in numbers, for example, “9” is popular because it sounds like “*progress*” in Thai. Likewise, “1” is commonly used because it represents “*the first*”. There aren’t any groups of words which can be combined to make a longer word; therefore, there are no compound words from Thai numbers in Thai Internet language.

1.2 Emoticons

Emoticons have influence on conversations on the Internet. Emoticons like :-) were used for the first time on 19th September, 1982 in an announcement from Carnegie Mellon University, USA (郑玮, 2010.) Since then, symbols from a keyboard have been created to express feelings. They have become more popular, and the use of symbols has spread so rapidly that other symbols are now used extensively; for instance, :-(means *frown* or *unhappy*, (^0^) expresses *happiness*, and T_T represents *to cry*. These symbols are accepted as another language which everyone around the world can understand without a learning process because the meanings of emoticons can be guessed.

Use of emoticons is widely used in both Thai and Chinese Internet language. As for Thai Internet language, some symbols have been added to represent Thai identity, such as ^\^ which shows “Wai” (Thai greeting gesture) or thanking, and so on.

1.3 Using old words with new meanings

Communication technology is a resource which supports a learning society culture and a variety of languages among teenagers. For these reasons, popular new words on the Internet have been created for communication among teenagers. Most of the created words are from old ones, but they are used with new meanings, for instance, the word “*Krien*”, was originally defined by The Royal Institute Dictionary (RID) 1999 edition, as ‘having very short hair. However, on the Internet, it means a person who is aggressive.

A further example (based on the RID 1999 edition) is “*Keng*”, which is a ruminant animal in the Cervidae family. It is small, brown to dark brown in color, but on the Internet, it is a homosexual man (gay). It can be used indirectly. In addition, “*Kak*”, which originally means ‘a used object that has been left’, translates as ‘terrible or not good’ on the Internet.

Wieng originally means ‘to swing’ (RID, 2003 edition), while in Internet language, it means be ‘in a bad mood, moody,’ and so on.

In Chinese Internet language, this kind of language can also be seen, for example, 青蛙 originally means ‘a frog’. Its new meaning is ‘a man who is not good looking’.

Another example is 恐龙 which means ‘a dinosaur’, but its new meaning is ‘a woman who is not beautiful’.

杯具 or a tea set replaces 悲剧, meaning ‘to grieve’ because these two words are homophonous. A famous sentence structure which has been imitated is 人生是一张茶几, 上面摆满了杯具 (Our life is like a tea table full of a tea set (full of sorrow)); now 杯具 is one of the most popular words used on the Internet in China.

1.4 English or words written from English characters

Typing English to converse on the Internet is not popular among Thais because a Thai keyboard is separate from an English one. Thai users feel that switching keyboards between Thai and English is not convenient, so they do not want to waste time in switching the keyboards. Thai characters are used instead of English ones like คราเม (drama), พระต (proud), and so on. In addition, there has been another written type of word. English characters, which are like Thai ones, are mixed with the Thai ones to make a new word such as *Inw* which is like *mn* in Thai or *USJ*, which is *uss*, and so on.

In the Chinese Internet language, there have been a lot of compounds of Chinese and English. For instance, **High** is used in the meaning of joyfulness and enjoyment. **Out** (which is from *Out of Date*) means old fashioned, not modern. Furthermore, adding a suffix –ing to a Chinese word represents an action happening at the time of speaking such as 吃饭 ing (to be eating). It is noticeable that switching keyboards between English and Chinese is easy; users need only press the button **Shift**. It is more convenient and faster than switching a Thai and English keyboard. Also, most Thai users are more familiar with typing in Thai than in English.

1.4 Abbreviations

The use of abbreviations in Thai and Chinese Internet languages are extremely different. In Thai, words are abbreviated; for example, by removing the middle syllable of words like ชูปตาร from ชูปเปอร์สตาร (superstar). The last syllable is also discarded in ใจฟ for self-confidence, and the first syllable is removed in นาห from พานา นาห (paranoid). On the other hand, abbreviations in Chinese Internet language have been shortened from Pinyin⁵. For example GG (哥哥 : gē ge) means ‘an older brother’, MM (美眉 : měi méi) means ‘a beautiful lady’, PMP (拍马屁 : pāi mǎ pì) means ‘to praise’. Also, there has been the use of abbreviations to avoid using injective directly, such as in TMD (他妈的 : tā mā de), (奶奶的 : nǎi nai de), and so on.

1.6 Creating new words

Another similar characteristic of both Thai and Chinese Internet languages is creating new words by writing an original word in a new pattern. This conveys an effective meaning which expresses liveliness, humor, or a new image to make the language more powerful. This characteristic contrasts with the others since Internet

⁵ 拼音 (Pinyin) is the standard system of Roman spelling in Chinese

language is generally created for rapidity. Examples of creating new Thai Internet words with an altered structure are ชิม (ชิ่ม: is that right?), จ๊ะ (จ๊ะ: yep), บ๊ะ (บ๊ะ: crazy), เทอร์ (ເຕົກ: you), and so on. In Chinese, 木有(没有 : none), 童鞋 (同学 : friends), 神马 (什么 : what), 抓鸡 (手机 : telephone), 稀饭 (喜欢 : to adore), and so on. This kind of word use usually confuses an interlocutor. For instance, if someone says “母鸡花生神马事情”, it can be translated word for a word to mean ‘a hen, a peanut, a sacred horse, a story’. There is only one correct word in the translated sentence; that is 事情, which means ‘a story’. The other words have been modified. In fact, it should be 喇知发生什么事情. However, many people still do not understand it because an author chose 喇知, which is Cantonese, to replace 不晓得 which means “do not know”. In Cantonese, this sentence means “do not know what has happened”.

1.7 Using ancient words and dialects

Another special characteristic of the Chinese Internet language is using ancient words and dialects. For example, 囔 is an ancient word which originally means light (Thienchai, 2005.) Its character looks like a confusing face, so it has a new meaning which is feeling confused and discouraged. As for using dialects in the Chinese Internet language, 僮 means I. It is a dialect in the northern and north-eastern part of China, and it has replaced 我 (I) in the Chinese Internet language. However, there are no ancient words or dialects which are widely used in the Thai Internet language.

1.8 Using words influenced by news, soap operas, or online games

Apart from the mentioned characteristics of Thai and Chinese Internet language, news, soap operas, and online games have an influence on widely used Internet language. For example, Reya is a main character in the soap opera “Gold Orange Flower.” It was on air and was one of the most popular soap operas in 2011. “Reya”, which means histrionic and lying, has been used widely on the Internet. An example of words influenced by news stories is the case of Nathan Oman. He used to be a famous singer. His name has been used widely to signify lying, after he was accused of being dishonest and lying.

In Chinese, there have also been some words from news, soap operas, and online games. For instance, 给力 was first originated in a Japanese comedy cartoon named 西游记 : 旅程的终点 (Journey to the West: End of the Journey). In Chinese Internet language, it means ‘to be satisfied’. Furthermore, the catchphrase 我爸是李刚 (My Dad is Li Gang.) has been extremely popular on the Internet after a news release about a university student who crashed his car into two pedestrians. He was not responsible for anything, but he said *sue me for the damages, if you want. My dad is Li Gang.* Mr. Li Gang is a Deputy Director of Public Security Bureau.

According to the study, Comparisons of Thai and Chinese Internet language are shown in the table below:

	Thai	Chinese
1. Homophones or words pronounced like numbers	55 (a laugh) 94 (就是 : Yes, I agree.) 78 (去吧 , 去吧 : go ahead) 88 (拜拜 : bye)	555 (嗚嗚嗚 : a cry) 94 (就是 : Yes, I agree.) 78 (去吧 , 去吧 : go ahead) 88 (拜拜 : bye)
2. Emoticons	:-) smile :-(angry, unsatisfied :-P stick a tongue out ^-^ smile T_T cry	
3. Using old words with new meanings	Krien (aggressive) Keng (gay) Kak (terrible) Jat pai (OK, I will do.) Mai Wai Ja clear (Do not want to explain anymore.)	打酱油 (not involve) 杯具 (sad from the word 悲剧) 青蛙 (not a good looking man) 恐龙 (not a good looking woman) 强 (excellent) 潜水 (showing an offline status despite being online)
4. English or words written from English characters	lnw (إنو) uou (ອອນ) llSJ (ລາງ) ດຣາມາ (Drama: pretend) ພຣາວັດ (Proud)	High (joyfulness, enjoyment) Out (out of date) V+ing (to express an action that is happening at the time of speaking such as 玩 ing: playing) N (A large number of such as N 次: many times)

	Thai	Chinese
5. Abbreviations	<p>ซุปตาร์ (ซุปเปอร์สตาร์: Superstar)</p> <p>เชลฟ์ (เชลฟ์ คอนฟิเด้นซ์: Self-confidence)</p> <p>นอยด์ (พารานอยด์: Paranoid)</p> <p>ชิม (อิมพอสซิบิล: Impossible)</p>	<p>GG (哥哥 : an older brother)</p> <p>TMD (他妈的 : *invective)</p> <p>NND (奶奶的 : * invective)</p> <p>SB (傻逼 : * invective)</p>
6. Creating new words	<p>ชิม (ใช่ไหม: Is that right?)</p> <p>จ๊า (จ๊ะ: Yep)</p> <p>คร้าบ (ครับ: Yes (for a man))</p> <p>บ้า (บ้า: crazy)</p> <p>เทอว์ (ເທວ: you)</p>	<p>木有(没有 : none)</p> <p>童鞋 (同学 : friends)</p> <p>神马 (什么 : what)</p> <p>抓鸡 (手机 : telephone)</p> <p>稀饭 (喜欢 : preference)</p> <p>鸭梨 (压力 : pressure)</p>
7. Ancient words and dialects		<p>囧 (confused, amazed)</p> <p>俺 (I (for a man))</p>
8. words influenced by news, soap operas, or online games	<p>เหง: Wheng (lying, unreliable)</p> <p>เทพ: Thep (great, excellent)</p> <p>เรยา: Reya (histrionic, lying)</p> <p>นาธาน: Nathan (lying)</p>	<p>给力 (You said it, excellent)</p> <p>牛 (excellent)</p> <p>俯卧撑 (Something is getting lower and getting higher later.)</p>

Table1: A comparison of Thai and Chinese Internet languages

Reasons supporting the wide use of the Thai and Chinese Internet language

Internet language has been popular among teenage users. The numbers of words as well as users tend to increase continuously for three main reasons.

2.1 An Internet language helps save time typing.

The main reason to use an Internet language is to save time typing, so communication can be faster. In fact, there has been the use of brief and shortened messages for a long time, such as telegrams. However, it did not prove as popular as Internet language nowadays. Dr. Nenagh Kemp, a psychologist from the University of Tasmania, Australia, studied the behavior of using a short language with 55 students. It was found that the use of a shortened word and slang can help the students send a message faster than typing a grammatically correct message. A receiver, however, has to spend more time to decode that message (BBC, 2008.) It was revealed that an Internet language can reduce the time to convey a message, but there has been a problem in the length of time taken to decode the message because it is not standard and users are not familiar with the writing system.

2.1.1 Difficulties with typing Thai

Since there are 44 consonants, 21 vowels, and 5 tonal marks in Thai, all of them have to be divided into two sets to be on one keyboard. The button “Shift” is used to switch a set of characters to the other set, so typing some words can be slower. Users avoid using the Shift button; as a result, the misspelling of Thai words can be found in words such as เทอ (ເທືອ), ค່າ (ຄ່ະ), ພູ (ອໝູ). In some cases, “້” is omitted such as ຈິງ (ຈົງ), ຄັບ (ຄົວບັນ), and so on.

2.1.2 Difficulties with typing Chinese

In Chinese, there are two main types of typing. WBX or 五笔 is a typing system where users have to memorize the positions of word structures in Chinese. The other type is Pinyin or 拼音. It is the most popular typing technique among users because it is easy to memorize. Also, an English keyboard is used in Pinyin. For example, in 大 (dà), we need to type D and A. In this type, there are no tonal marks (à has a tonal mark above a), so this word can signify other words including “DA”. These characters have the same pronunciation. In addition, words with the same consonants and vowels, but different tonal marks are 打 (dǎ) 达 (dá) 搭 (dā) 答 (dá), etc. These characteristics cause slower typing, so some users use an abbreviation instead to save time, such as GG, MM, PMP, etc. These days there are a lot of typing programs which help people type faster by memorizing frequently typed words, including words in general situations, or words from individuals. The program records the words typed so that future typing is more convenient and faster.

Picture 1 Table of Chinese WBX typing 98 and 86

Source : <http://hi.baidu.com/youwhoop/album/>



Picture 2 Example of skin for Pinyin typing

Source : <http://pinyin.sogou.com/>

Apart from using numbers for words such as 555, 78, 94, and abbreviations, other forms of Internet expressions do not seem to follow the same reasoning because these other forms need time to be typed grammatically and correctly. In some cases, typing an Internet language might take longer to choose a correct word. For instance, if you want to type 鸭梨 which is Internet language replacing 压力, it means “pressure”. We have to type Y A L I, the first word appearing will be a frequently typed word with a different meaning. Therefore, 压力, which is in its correct form, will appear. Then users need to spend additional time selecting the correct option, which is 鸭梨. As for other words, such as 神马 and 童鞋, they need extra time to press the keyboard to get the right word. The time taken can be equal to the time needed to type a

grammatically correct word. Therefore, saving time is not the only reason to support the wide use of an Internet language.

2.2 An Internet language can express friendliness between interlocutors.

Most internet users are teenagers of the same age, so the use of language is the same. In addition, they do not have face to face communication. As a result, during communication, appropriate word choice is not taken into account. In Thai, when interlocutors know the age of each other, an appropriate word choice will be used properly, such as a correct title of brotherhood or address, tone of voice, etc. However, in Chinese, word choices with an interlocutor are not emphasized, especially with communication via the Internet. All users feel that they are equal. The ages are the same. Words showing seniority are not used. This is different from Thai. Every user uses 你 for you and 我 for I. Therefore, Chinese Internet language does not emphasize on word choices with an interlocutor.

Furthermore, using an Internet language is also relaxing. 刘娟 (2011, 90) pointed out that humans are under pressure due to many circumstances, so they find ways to relax themselves. Accessing the Internet is convenient and effective in the reduction of stress because users can use emoticons, abbreviations, homophones, and altered words based on their preference to create interesting words and entertain themselves in their conversations.

It can be seen that word choice in an Internet language is not simple, but there is a sense of humor and friendliness behind it.

2.3 An Internet language can express users' facial expression and emotions through letters.

One problem in communicating through the Internet is users cannot see an interlocutor's facial expression, so they cannot guess the interlocutor's tone of voice, emotion or reaction. Using emoticons such as :-(^_^ T_T or sounds such as ha ha, Ah, ei ei, 哟 (Ahh), 啊? (ha?), 嘻嘻(ei ei), 噤(Umm), can help communicate more effectively.

Opinions on use of an Internet language

Although Internet language has been popular among teenage users, and it has been accepted by some users, it is not acceptable with all users. Opinion regarding the use of Internet language cannot be summarized clearly. Generally, opinion falls into two groups. The first group does not accept an Internet language and claims that an Internet language can destroy a language culture, which has been invented and reinvented for many hundreds of years. For example, Dr. Trairong Suwankiri, the ex-deputy prime minister, has criticized the phrase “欸” (Is that right?) which is widely used, especially in the name of a movie. In contrast, the other group does not

pay any attention to the above issue, but they think words are used inappropriately. It is understood that it is normal for language use and teenage users. Both Ajarn Nittaya Kanchanawan, an Associate Fellow from the Academy of Arts of the Royal Institute of Thailand and Ajarn Kanchana Naksakul, a Fellow in Language Arts support this idea (Khaosod, 2010.)

Conversely, some scholars express opinions that an Internet language has both advantages and disadvantages. They point out the advantage is students are enthusiastic to learn word origins so that it is enjoyable and inspires students to create new words. On the contrary, they also emphasize the previous idea; if an Internet language has been used for a long time, it might be considered the right language and the identity of the language will disappear (李容耿, 2010.)

Summary

The use of Internet language is a phenomenon of a new language in international communication because of the development of computer technology and telecommunications in information services. Therefore, language culture has been transmitted to Internet users. There have been similarities and differences between the characteristics of Thai and Chinese Internet languages. Both languages have used emoticons, new word creations, or abbreviations. There are differences in the use of ancient words, dialect words and in the creation of new words from English. Thai and Chinese Internet languages have gained in popularity because of the shortened time needed in communication. Besides, users of this kind of Internet language can be considered modern and sociable. This language can also help express the feelings of the sender effectively.

An Internet language might not destroy national language culture easily because it will take many years for language change. Internet language has been used for a period of time because it is slang. In addition, a language is a part of culture which has always been changing. It has a cycle; an origin, an existence, and an extinction. It has been found that many words used in the past are not used nowadays; however, users have to be aware of using appropriate words in each situation and social context.

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