

# What do the Terms “Chinese” and “Phasa Chin” Really Mean? คำว่า “Chinese” และ “ภาษาจีน” นั้น แท้จริงแล้วหมายความว่าอะไร

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## บทคัดย่อ

คำว่า “Chinese” และ “ภาษาจีน” ครอบคลุมหมายความหมาย ในงานวิจัยเรื่องภาษาที่เกี่ยวข้องกับประเทศไทย คำเรียกทั้งสองดังกล่าวเป็นปัญหาเนื่องจากน้อยครั้งนักที่ผู้ใช้กำหนดความหมายเฉพาะของมันไว้ งานวิจัยขึ้นนี้ศึกษาความหมายที่เป็นไปได้ของคำทั้งสองในงานวิจัย 28 ชิ้น นอกจากนี้ยังได้แนะนำการใช้คำดังกล่าวให้ชัดเจนในแต่ละบริบท เราสามารถนิยามคำว่า “Chinese” และ “ภาษาจีน” ได้ว่าเป็นตระกูลภาษาจีนประกอบด้วยลักษณะทางภาษาศาสตร์ จำนวนหนึ่ง หรือเป็นกลุ่มภาษาจีนซึ่งมีบทบาทและหน้าที่ร่วมกันในสังคมไทย บริบทเหล่านี้ช่วยให้คำว่า “Chinese” และ “ภาษาจีน” มีความหมายชัดเจน อย่างไรก็ได้ ผู้วิจัยได้พบลักษณะการใช้คำเรียกทั้งสองที่สื่อความหมายถ้ากวน เช่น คำว่า “ภาษาจีน” ถูกใช้ในความหมายว่าเป็น ภาษาจีนชนิดหนึ่ง (ภาษาแต่จีว หรือ ภาษาจีนกลาง เป็นต้น) และ/หรือ กลุ่มภาษาจีนที่มีสถานะ หน้าที่และบทบาทแตกต่างกันในประเทศไทย ปอยครั้งที่คำอธิบายความหมายของคำว่า “Chinese” และ “ภาษาจีน” มิได้ปรากฏไว้ในงานวิจัยบางชิ้นที่ศึกษา ยิ่งไปกว่านั้น งานวิจัยเหล่านี้มิได้กำหนดใช้คำดังกล่าวไว้ที่ความหมายหนึ่ง ทำให้ผู้อ่านเข้าใจงานวิจัยผิด และทราบปัจจุบันนี้ยังมิได้มีผู้ได้ชี้ความบกพร่องของการใช้คำเรียกทั้งสอง

## Abstract

The terms “Chinese” and “phasa Chin” embrace a wide variety of meanings. In language studies related to Thailand, these two terms are problematic because their users seldom specify the meanings they denote. The current work investigates their possible meanings in twenty-eight different studies. It also suggests how to use these terms without ambiguity in each context. The terms can be defined as the Chinese language family characterized by a number of linguistic properties or a group of Chinese varieties sharing some roles and functions in Thai society. Such contexts

sufficiently render the meaning of these two terms unambiguous. However, other findings display ambiguous usages. For instance, the term “phasa Chin” refers to either a particular Chinese variety and/or a group of Chinese varieties with different statuses, functions, and roles in Thailand. Very often there is no explanation of the exact meaning of the problematic terms, their application is not consistent at all. As a result the readers are frequently mislead and no one has pointed out this shortcoming so far.

## 1 Introduction

In the studies related to languages used in Thailand, the English term “Chinese” and the Thai term “phasa Chin” are problematic. This is because they embrace a wide variety of meanings, and their users seldom specify what meanings they are referring to in the subjects under discussion. Interpreting such terms, accordingly, is a challenge. The current research intends to investigate their meanings in twenty-eight studies of the Chinese languages as related to Thailand.<sup>1</sup> These works were published during the last three decades. The present study also attempts to suggest how to disambiguate the two problematic terms. The following sections will discuss the complexity of the Chinese language family, introduce works in my sample, analyze the usages

of the two problematic terms in these works, and provide suggestions.

## 2 Complexity of Chinese

### 2.1 Oral Chinese

Spoken Chinese comprises numerous varieties, many of which are mutually unintelligible. They differ significantly in pronunciation, lexical items, and grammatical features. The scholars of Chinese dialectology classify them in various ways and call each group differently. Arguments on such diverse categorization and terminology are not the focus of this study. I follow the classification shared by Ramsey (1987), Norman (1988), and Li (1992). They divide varieties of spoken Chinese into seven groups which I consider to be, in DeFrancis's term, “regionalects”, i.e., regional speech groups (DeFrancis 1984:57).

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Chinese Regionalects**

<b>Regionalect</b>	<b>Where Spoken</b>
1 Guanhua <sup>ii</sup> (Mandarin) <sup>iii</sup>	North, Southwest
2 Wu	Jiangsu, <sup>iv</sup> Zhejiang, Anhui
3 Yue	Guangxi, Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macau
4 Xiang	Hunan
5 Min	Fujian, Northeast of Guangdong, Taiwan
6 Kejia	Communities in Yue and Min-speaking area
7 Gan	Jiangxi

Sources: Applied from Ramsey (1987:87), Norman (1988:189), and Li (1992:257-259).

Each regionalect consists of varieties, many of them mutually intelligible (Table 1). For example, Chaozhouhua, Hainanhua, and Xiamenhua, belonging to Southern Min, are more or less mutually intelligible, whereas these in comparison with other non-Min varieties are not (Table 2). For instance, Chaozhouhua and Beijing-based Putonghua ("Putonghua") of the Northern Guanhua regionalect are as different as French from Italian

(Norman 1988 : 187). If speakers of Chaozhouhua and Putonghua were to communicate with each other orally, on any simple everyday topic in their home language--that is the kind of speech they usually use with their fellow speakers of Chaozhouhua and Putonghua--the degree of intelligibility would be very minimal. The sound systems are very different, a large proportion of the basic vocabulary is also different, and there are grammatical discrepancies.

**Table 2**  
**Chinese Varieties in Thailand**

**Non-Standard**

- 1 Min:
  - Chaozhouhua (Teochiu or Swatow)
  - Hainanhua (Hainanese)
  - Xiamenhua (Hokkien or Amoy)
- 2 Yue:
  - Guangzhouhua (Cantonese)
- 3 Kejia (Hakka):
  - Meixianhua
- 4 Guanhua:
  - Yunnanhua (Yunnanese or Ho)

**Standard**

- 5 Guanhua:
  - Putonghua (Guoyu, Huayu, or Mandarin)

Linguistically, we can say that “the Chinese language,” as a spoken language, is in fact a family of languages not always mutually intelligible. Nonetheless, in everyday spoken Thai, the Thai term “phasa Chin,” meaning the Chinese language, often contains different shades of meanings. For example, one says, “My grandma speaks Chinese.” A moment later he/she might say, “I study Chinese at school.” The grandmother’s Chinese is probably spoken Chaozhouhua and the subject taught at school is elementary Putonghua. This ambiguity is found even in written Thai, and I will discuss it when analyzing the meanings of “Chinese” and “phasa Chin” in the studies in my sample.

The Chinese varieties spoken in Thailand can be classified into two categories: the standard form and the non-standard forms of Chinese (Table 2). The term “standard form of Chinese” (SFC) here implies no prestigious connotation but denotes the variety of Chinese used in the mainstream institutions such as mass media and education in the People’s Republic of China and taught as a foreign language in Thailand. Some scholars in the Thai academic community regard SFC as the “*lingua franca*” in the linguistically heterogeneous community of Chinese in Thailand. I disagree with their assessment because the Chinese on many occasions communicate with each other in Thai or in non-standard forms of Chinese. Simultaneously, I use the term “non-standard forms of Chinese” (NSFsC) without a derogatory

implication. Such a label significantly refers to the other category of spoken Chinese in Thailand.

### 2.1.1 Standard Form of Chinese in Thailand

The SFC is developed from a Beijing-based regionalect. In Chinese-speaking countries, it performs the following functions: (1) the official spoken language in the People’s Republic of China, called “Putonghua”, (2) the official spoken language in the Republic of China, called “Guoyu”; and (3) one of the official languages in Singapore, called “Huayu”. In the overseas Chinese community in Thailand, “Guoyu” and “Huayu” are the conventional names of the SFC. For consistency in this study, I call it “Putonghua”.

Out of the Chinese languages spoken in Thailand, Putonghua has the highest status. It is used in the local Chinese press and in several social gatherings of the Chinese. Furthermore, it is taught as a foreign language in some Thai mainstream schools. In those days when many students of Chinese ethnicity spoke a non-standard form of Chinese (NSFC), their ancestors’ first language, schools teaching Putonghua might have taught it through the medium of the students’ Chinese ancestral tongue. Nonetheless, non-standard forms of Chinese (NSFsC) have never been the target variety of Chinese to be learned. Due to an increase in the economic cooperation between Thailand and Chinese-speaking countries, the

study and the use of Putonghua in Thailand will continue to flourish.

### **2.1.2 Non-Standard Forms of Chinese in Thailand**

Many Chinese immigrants in Thailand come from southern China.<sup>v</sup> They and some of their Thailand-born children constitute the typical group of Chinese who speak NSFsC belonging to the Min, Yue, or Kejia regionalelect (Table 2). They speak an NSFC at home, in their neighborhoods, in Chinese associations, and in areas of business run by Chinese. Chaozhouhua is the most dominant NSFC and ancestral Chinese tongue.

However, like many overseas Chinese communities elsewhere, the use of ancestral Chinese tongues in Thailand is declining. Chokkajitsumpun (1998) attributes the decline to the following factors:

First, the speakers become old and die. Second, the massive immigration of China-born Chinese into Thailand ceased after the Second World War. Third, to be in a good position in the mainstream society of Thailand, Thailand-born Chinese need to master Thai and English. They become less motivated in learning their ancestral Chinese tongues, most of which are of low prestige.

(ibid.:34-35)

My observation on the decline of NSFsC can be supported by the result of Srinarawat et al.'s survey in 1994.<sup>vi</sup> They find that the questionnaire respondents who are Thailand-born Chaozhou Chinese neither speak

Chaozhouhua with their children nor expect them to speak it. Without a growing number of speakers, NSFsC in Thailand will continue to dwindle.

## **2.2 Literary Chinese**

Written Chinese comprises diachronic varieties of Chinese. They are classical literary, vernacular literary, and modern standard literary.

### **2.2.1 Classical Literary Chinese**

Classical literary Chinese (CLC) is developed from the late Zhou prose classics (before 221 B.C.) to the Han prose classics (206 B.C. to 220 A.D.). There are stylistic differences in vocabulary that do not reveal much about the geographical origin of the writer. Nonetheless, its grammar is the same everywhere and it is written in the unified writing system of China. CLC used to function as the only medium of written communication in China and was adopted in Vietnam, Korea, and Japan in 111 B.C. (DeFrancis 1984:4).

### **2.2.2 Vernacular Literary Chinese**

The only vernacular literary Chinese (VLC) is based on a northern Chinese language in the Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.). It became the medium of a vernacular literary tradition in the dynasties of Song (960-1279 A.D.) and Yuan (1271-1368 A.D.). CLC and VLC have been used throughout most of Chinese history (Norman 1988:2).

### **2.2.3 Modern Standard Literary Chinese**

Modern standard literary Chinese (MSLC) is developed from

CLC and VLC. Although many lexical items and structural patterns in MSLC have been carried over from CLC, the semantic structure of these two varieties of Chinese are very different. Therefore, knowing MSLC may not enable one to understand CLC texts despite being written in Chinese characters and read in Putonghua.

The comprehension of the Chinese who speak mutually unintelligible varieties of Chinese improves when they communicate in writing, because all of them are taught to write in MSLC. This means that native speakers of non-standard forms of Chinese (NSFsC) are used to code-switching from their spoken varieties to a kind of language closer or equal to MSLC, according to their ability. Aiming at the same kind of language is the key to Chinese written communication. Chakkajitsumpun (1998) clarifies the widespread perception of spoken and written Chinese. She writes:

The belief that Chinese people who speak mutually unintelligible varieties can still communicate in writing, is true as long as they write in the literary or Mandarin style of the Chinese language [MSLC], which is the medium of instruction in schools, and therefore understandable to both educated speakers of Chaozhou and Mandarin [Putonghua].

(ibid.:32)

Local varieties of the Chinese regionalects are sometimes used in writing, but only for literary purposes. In many cases, this may require the use of

non-standard characters to write the vernacular words. The percentage of written Chinese of this kind is very small and, of course, intelligible only to the speakers of each particular variety of Chinese.

#### **2.2.4 Literary Chinese in Thailand**

Having observed materials written in Chinese by the Chinese community in Thailand--for example, fiction, newspaper, correspondence, etc.--I find that they try to follow MSLC. Nonetheless, there is a large number of contemporary expressions in CLC and in NSFsC. Cheng (1978:370) points out that elements of CLC survive in the overseas Chinese communities because their members attempt to preserve the culture of old China for political and sentimental reasons. Elements of NSFsC appear in the materials mentioned because they are used in the daily lives of the Chinese immigrants.

In short, spoken Chinese is a language family comprising seven major groups with synchronic distinctions. Written Chinese consists of three main written forms with diachronic differences.

### **3 Studies in My Sample**

Based on the kind(s) of Chinese studied in the works in my sample, I classify these works into five groups: (1) studies on a single variety of Chinese, (2) studies on different varieties of Chinese, (3) studies on the Chinese language family and its varieties, (4) studies on the Chinese language family

and its regionalects, and (5) studies on the Chinese language family, its regionalects, and its varieties. The following subsections introduce these studies prior to an analysis of the two problematic terms “Chinese” and “phasa Chin”.

### **3.1 Studies on Single Variety of Chinese**

In my sample, 12 out of 28 studies (approximately 42.86%) deal with a single variety of Chinese spoken in Thailand (Table 3 below). Among them three works fall into the category of applied linguistics. Ostapirat (1990) studies Putonghua pronunciation as transcribed in various romanization systems. Wattananon (1994) examines how to transcribe proper names of Putonghua in the Thai writing system. Premsrirat et al. (1997) point out where Chaozhouhua is spoken in northeastern Thailand. Three other studies fall into the category of educational linguistics, comparing and contrasting a Chinese variety with standard Thai. One of them is Atchariyasucha’s 1982 analysis of Chaozhouhua and Thai phonologies. Fu (1983) concentrates on Putonghua and Thai reduplications, and Ren (1986) looks at the predicates of simple sentences in Putonghua and Thai.

In the three studies examining the structure of a Chinese variety, Poonwathu (1984) investigates Yunnanhu phonology, Varalakkanakul (1989) explores the morphology of Chaozhouhua reduplication, and Chanrungkanok (1993) conducts a

semantic analysis of meaning in Northern Mandarin nominals. Two other studies are multidisciplinary. One of them is Wachirapinpong’s (1987). She has chosen Chaozhouhua to be the Chinese variety studied, and examines the attitudes of her informants towards “the Chinese language” and its speakers in Bangkok. The other work is by Engchuan (1994). She compares and contrasts Xiamenhu kinship terms as used in southern Thailand and in Penang Island in Malaysia. In her study of historical linguistic theories, Khanittanan (1983) observes the pronunciation of Chaozhouhua loanwords in Thai.

### **3.2 Studies on Different Varieties of Chinese**

The following nine studies, approximately 32.14% of the studies reviewed, deal with varieties of spoken Chinese in Thailand (Table 4 below). Four of them are multidisciplinary works. Namely, Smalley (1994) and Prasithrathsint (1997) explore the linguistic diversity of Thailand. They discuss the roles, statuses, and functions of Chinese varieties in Thai society. Thongkum (1984) provides a bibliography of Chinese varieties related to Thailand. Another study is a survey research by Srinarawat et al. (1994) who investigate the attitudes of ethnic Chaozhou Chinese (irrespective of their ability in Chaozhouhua) in Bangkok towards Chaozhouhua and Thai. They also discuss the roles of standard and non-standard forms of Chinese in Thailand.

Two out of nine studies are conducted by Pankhuenkhat (1988 and 1995). They fall into the category of applied linguistics. A study in 1988 presents the numbers of speakers of non-standard forms of Chinese in Thailand and the regions where these forms are spoken in the People's Republic of China. The other work, in 1995, investigates place names written in the Thai writing system as transcribed from Putonghua and Chaozhouhua.

There are two historical linguistic studies, one of which is by

Manomaivibool (1975). She analyzes 620 words in standard Thai appearing to be phonologically related to Chinese words in pre-modern periods. The other study is of Gyarunsut (1983). She traces the origin and the sound change of 463 Chinese loanwords in Thai. In her study of sociolinguistic theories, Truwichien (1988) mentions the influence of Chinese varieties on Chinese people's pronunciation of Thai. Like Smalley (1994) and Prasithrathsint (1997), she points out the prestige of "Chinese" taught as a foreign language in Thailand.

**Table 3**  
**A Particular Variety of Chinese**

Year	Author	Title
1 1982 English M.A. thesis Educational linguistics	Atchariyasucha, Wichet	A phonological study of Swatow of Chinese as spoken in Bangkok with comparisons to Thai
2 1983 Thai M.A. thesis Educational linguistics	Fu, Zhengyou	Khamsam nai phasa Chin lae phasa Thai: kansuksa priapthiap
3 1983 Thai book Historical linguistics	Khanittanan, Wilaiwan	Phasasat choeng prawat: wiwatthanakan phasa Thai lae phasa Angkrid
4 1984 English M.A. thesis Language structure	Poonwathu, Panchai	The Yunnanese Chinese phonology
5 1986 Thai M.A. thesis Educational linguistics	Ren, Yi-xiong	Phaksadaeng nai prayok khuamdia khong phasa Chin lae phasa Thai: kansuksa priapthiap
6 1987 Thai M.A. thesis Multidisciplinary	Wachirapinpong, Nantaka	Kansuksa thatsanakhati thang phasa thi mi to phasa Chin lae phuphet phasa Chin nai Krungthepmahanakhon
7 1989 Thai M.A. thesis Language structure	Varalakkanakul, Saovapak	Laksana khamsam nai phasa Chin Taechiu

8	1990 Thai article Applied linguistics	Ostapirat, Weera	Rabop kanthaithot siang phasa Chin duai akson Roman
9	1993 Thai M.A. thesis Language structure	Chanrungkanok, Potchanee	Khuammai nai choeng atthasat champhuak nam nai phasa Mandarinnoei
10	1994 Thai M.A. thesis Applied linguistics	Wattananon, Noppawan	Kankamnot huaroeing phasa Thai chak khamwisamanyanam Chin
11	1994 Thai M.A. thesis Multidisciplinary	Engchuan, Supamas	Khamriakyat phasa Chin Hokkian nai phak Tai khong prathet Thai lae ko Pinang
12	1997 Thai article Applied linguistics	Premsrirat, Suwilai et al.	Phaenhi phasa khong klum chattiphan tangtang nai prathet Thai

**Table 4**  
**Different Varieties of Chinese**

	Year	Author	Title
1	1975 English Ph.D. dissertation Historical linguistics	Manomaivibool, Prapin	A study of Sino-Thai lexical correspondences
2	1983 Thai M.A. thesis Historical linguistics	Gyarunsut, Pranee	Khamyum phasa Chin nai phasa Thai patchuban
3	1984 English book Multidisciplinary	Thongkum, Theraphan L.	Bibliography of minority languages of Thailand
4	1988 (2 <sup>nd</sup> edition) Thai book Applied linguistics	Pankhuenkhat, Ruengdet	Phasathin trakun Thai
5	1988 Thai book Sociolinguistics	Truwichien, Aim-on	Phasasat choeng sangkhom
6	1994 English book Multidisciplinary	Smalley, William A.	Linguistic diversity and national unity: language ecology in Thailand

7	1994 Thai report Multidisciplinary	Srinarawat, Deeyoo et al.	Kanchai phasa Thai khong khon Chin nai Krungthep
8	1995 Thai article Applied linguistics	Pankhuenkhat, Ruengdet	Kansuksa chusathanthi phasa Thai lae phasa Chin nai prathet Thai
9	1997 Thai book Multidisciplinary	Prasithrathsint, Amara	Phasa nai sangkhom Thai: khuamlaklai kanplianplaeng lae patthanakan

### 3.3 Studies on Chinese Language Family and Its Varieties

Three out of 28 works (approximately 10.71%) in my sample fall into the category of historical linguistics dealing with the Chinese language family and varieties of

Chinese as a foreign language in Thailand (Table 5). Their authors, Bandhumedha (1977), Saengphonsit (1981), and Getrot (1989), describe the characteristics of the Chinese language family and Chinese loanwords in the Thai language.

**Table 5**  
**Chinese Language Family and Its Varieties**

	Year	Author	Title
1	1977 Thai book Historical linguistics	Bandhumedha, Banchob	Phasa tangprathet nai phasa Thai
2	1981 Thai book Historical linguistics	Saengphonsit, Wichitra	Khuamru roeing phasa tangprathet nai prathet Thai
3	1989 Thai book Historical linguistics	Getrot, Thongsuk	Phasa tangprathet nai phasa Thai

### 3.4 Studies on Chinese Language Family and Its Regionalects

Ratanakul's 1994 study is the only one in my sample (approximately

3.57%) which deals with the structure of the Chinese language family and its regionalects (Table 6).

**Table 6**  
**Chinese Language Family and Its Regionalects**

Year	Author	Title
1994 (2 <sup>nd</sup> edition)	Ratanakul,	Nana phasa nai Asia Achane phakti nung
Thai book	Suriya	phasa trakul Austro-Asiatic lae trakul
Language structure		Chin-Thibet

### 3.5 Studies on Chinese Language Family, Its Regionalects, and Its Varieties

Another 3 out of 28 studies (approximately 10.71%) fall into the category of descriptive linguistics covering the widest range of “Chinese”

-- the Chinese language family, its regionalects, and its varieties (Table 7). These works are (1) Anumanratchathon’s study in 1972, (2) his study of general linguistic theory in 1989, and (3) Burusphat’s 1995 translation of Bauer’s work.<sup>vii</sup>

**Table 7**  
**Chinese Language Family, Its Regionalects, and Its Varieties**

Year	Author	Title
1 1972	Phraya (title of nobility)	Thai-Chin
Thai book	Anumanratchathon	
Descriptive linguistics		
2 1989	Phraya	Niruktisat
Thai book	Anumanratchathon	
Descriptive linguistics		
3 1995	Burusphat,	Phasa Chin lae phasatin
Thai translating work	Somsonge	tangtang
Descriptive linguistics		

### 4 Analysis of “Chinese” and “Phasa Chin”

The English term “Chinese” and the Thai term “Phasa Chin” in a number of studies in my sample have a clear meaning. However, the meanings of the term “phasa Chin” in a small group of studies are confusing. Consequently, assigning a proper meaning to each of

the usages of the term is not an easy task.

#### 4.1 Unambiguous

The English term “Chinese” or its Thai counterpart “phasa Chin” in 14 out of 28 studies (approximately 50%) in my sample has a clear meaning (Table 8).

**Table 8**

<b>Meanings of “Chinese” and “Phasa Chin”</b>			
<b>Number of Studies</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Usage</b>
14	50	Clear	The two terms modified by a specific variety of Chinese, e.g. “Yunnanese Chinese” and “phasa Chin Hokkian”
13	46.43	Ambiguous but interpretable	“phasa Chin” interpreted as: 1) a particular variety of Chinese, 2) a group of Chinese varieties sharing some roles, or 3) a language family
3	10.34	Confusing	“phasa Chin” denoting a particular variety of Chinese or used with various meanings within a passage
Total	*28 (30)	*106.77	

\* The actual number of studies in my investigation is twenty-eight. Some studies use the term “Chinese” or “phasa Chin” clearly and ambiguously. Therefore, I count these studies twice, making the total number of studies be thirty and the percentage be far beyond one hundred.

Nine of them concentrate on one or more than one particular Chinese variety. Their authors explicitly specify the variety of Chinese under discussion; for example, “Yunnanese Chinese”, “phasa Chin Hokkian” (Xiamen Chinese), “phasa Chin Taechiu” (Chaozhou Chinese), etc. These works consist of Atchariyasucha’s (1982), Gyarunsut’s (1983), Thongkum’s (1984), Poonwathu’s (1984), Pankhuenkhat’s (1988 and 1995), Varalakkanakul’s (1989), Chanrungkanok’s (1993), Engchuan’s (1994), and Premsrirat et al.’s (1997). Manomaivibool (1975:19), in addition, specifies that the Chinese lexical items in her sample are from synchronic varieties of Chinese. These include Archaic Chinese, pre-Ancient Chinese, Middle Chinese, and late Middle Chinese.

Three other studies use the Thai term “phasa Chin” or the English term “Chinese” without ambiguity in various ways. For instance, Ratanakul (1994:247) distinguishes between the meaning of the term “phasa Chin” as understood by western linguists and the other meaning as understood by the public in Thailand. The former denotes the entire Chinese language family, while the latter refers only to one Chinese variety. In parts of his study, Smalley (1994:15, 23) utilizes the terms “a Chinese language” and “Chinese languages” to differentiate one form from different forms of spoken Chinese in Thailand. In similar fashion, Prasithrathsint (1997:35) has the term “phasa Chin” followed by a plural modifier “tangtang” (meaning various) to denote several forms of spoken Chinese.

#### 4.2 Ambiguous but Interpretable

Thirteen studies, approximately 46.43%, in my sample use the two problematic terms ambiguously (Table 8). Nonetheless, several factors support a proper choice of interpretation. The first factor is that the context provided in some studies renders the term “phasa Chin” unambiguous. For instance, Anumanratchathon (1972:71), Saengphonsit (1981:33), Anumanratchathon (1989:63), and Getrot (1989:33) describe the features of “phasa Chin”. They later point out that there are many Chinese varieties in the People’s Republic of China. Accordingly, the term “phasa Chin” mentioned early in their discussion is a collective name denoting the Chinese language family.

Looking at the Chinese loanwords in Thai, Bandhumedha (1977:11), Gyarunsunt (1983) in the title of her study, and Saengphonsit (1981:34) call these words “kham phasa Chin” meaning Chinese words or “khamyum phasa Chin” meaning Chinese loanwords. They then provide examples of loanwords from different Chinese varieties; for example, Chaozhouhua and Xiamenhua. Accordingly, “phasa Chin” in this context means a group of Chinese varieties sharing one characteristic; i.e., some lexical items of these varieties have become loanwords in Thai.

In a discussion of Chinese loanwords in Thai, Khanittanan (1983:130) provides examples of loanwords from, in her term, “phasa Taechiu” meaning Chaozhouhua.

Pointing out that the sound system of Thai is similar to the sound system of Chaozhouhua, she further states that “kham Chin” meaning Chinese words, therefore, still maintain their pronunciation better than English loanwords. The Chinese words in this context would most probably mean lexical items in Chaozhouhua adopted into Thai.

Investigating Chinese proper names, Wattananon (1994) defines the term “phasa Chin” as a foreign language whose proper names have not been transliterated by the Royal Thai Institute. Without specifying the variety of Chinese meant, her definition is still unclear. Later, as all of her examples are lexical items in Putonghua, it appears likely that the term “phasa Chin” in her study should denote Putonghua.

The second factor promoting a proper interpretation of the term “phasa Chin” in some studies reviewed is the definition of the term followed by its consistent application. Early in these works, Fu (1983:2), Ren (1986:2), and Ostapirat (1990:6) use the term “phasa Chin” to mean Putonghua and apply this definition throughout their works.

The third, final factor is that the reader’s knowledge of linguistic ecology of Thailand assists in understanding the possible meaning of the two problematic terms discussed. Namely, Truwichien (1988:86) and Prasithrathsint (1997:46) call the Chinese language taught as a foreign language in Thailand “phasa Chin”, whereas Smalley (1994:23) calls

it “Chinese”. The linguistic ecology of Thailand suggests that these two terms here mean the standard form of spoken and written Chinese based on Putonghua because this form is a school subject taught as a foreign language in Thailand.

### 4.3 Confusing

The meanings of the term “phasa Chin” in 3 out of 28 studies (approximately 10.71%) in my sample is confusing in different aspects (Table 8). For example, Wachirapinpong (1987) has chosen to examine Chaozhouhua and later has generalized it to mean the Chinese language. This work has a Thai title which I translate as “A study of the linguistic attitude toward the Chinese language and the Chinese-language speakers in Bangkok.” In her literature review, Wachirapinpong (1987:8) is aware of the different varieties of spoken Chinese in Thailand. She further justifies her choice of studying the Chinese and the Chinese language in Thailand on the grounds that they influence every aspect of Thai society. She is the first who has examined the attitude of the Chinese and the Thais toward each other’s language. The general term “phasa Chin” as used in the rationale for her study is understandable, i.e., a group of Chinese varieties spoken in Thailand. Nonetheless, she later defines the Chinese-language speakers in her study as people who speak Chaozhouhua within their families and are brought up in the Chinese way, etc.

Up to this point, it is questionable whether her study focuses on Chaozhouhua, a variety of Chinese,

or the whole group of Chinese varieties in Thailand. Another question is whether the inputs from her questionnaire respondents are based upon their view of Chaozhouhua or upon a group of Chinese varieties to which they have been exposed. Her conclusion about the Chinese language is misleading since it relies solely on an investigation of Chaozhouhua and its speakers in Bangkok.

Two other studies use the term “phasa Chin” with different meanings within a passage. One of these studies is by Srinarawat et al. (1994) and the other is Burusphat’s 1995 translation of Bauer’s work. Assigning a proper meaning to each usage of such term is not an easy task.

Srinarawat et al. (1994) has surveyed how 319 Chaozhou Chinese in Bangkok use and think about the Thai language. In their sample, they have found that the attitude of the more educated Chaozhou Chinese toward Chaozhouhua is less positive than the attitude of the less educated groups. The researchers conclude in Thai, which Chokkajitsumpun (1998:33) has translated as:

[we] believe that . . . subsequent generations of Chinese will recognize the importance of the Chinese language for several reasons. For example, Chinese is an international language used in many countries throughout the world. Learning Chinese (here we have to include learning to read and write) is not only profitable for one’s life but also useful to one’s work. In addition, Chinese is an ancestral

language worthy of study. It is also currently being taught in private schools and in institutions of higher education such as vocational colleges and universities. In these institutions, Chinese is taught as a foreign language and as an international language. The ethnic Chinese are a people important to the Thai economy and society. Furthermore, they are still unified socially in various forms, for instance, in associations of surnames and of dialects, and in charitable organizations. Also, they still operate various kinds of businesses in which the Chinese language is used or used along with Thai. [Given all these facts], therefore, we expect that the Chinese language in Thailand will continue to be used and there will be people to study it. It will not be lost nor will it die out although the number of people who know and use it may tend to be low. (Srinarawat et al. 1994:49)

Early in the present study, I have discussed the Chinese varieties used in Thailand. They can be classified into two groups. One is the standard form of Chinese, an international language and a language taught as a foreign language in some Thai mainstream schools. The other is a group of non-standard forms of Chinese, the first languages of many Chinese immigrants in Thailand. The term “phasa Chin” in different parts of the text cited above has different meanings and Chokkajitsumpun (1998 : 35) writes :

Given the sociolinguistic profile of Chinese varieties used in Thailand, the term “phasa Chin” in Srinarawat et al.’s study (1994) simultaneously refers to: (1) Mandarin [standard form of Chinese (SFC)] and (2) non-Mandarin Chinese languages [non-standard forms of Chinese (NSFsC)]. When they discuss the

language used in the Chinese community including home, associations, and business contacts, and the language which is in a state of decline due to the decrease of its speakers, the term “phasa Chin” denotes the Chinese ancestral tongues most of which are non-Mandarin [NSFsC]. However, when the term “phasa Chin” is used to mean the Chinese language taught in educational institutions, the Chinese language which is one of the international languages, and the Chinese language worthy of learning [study], this expression “phasa Chin” then denotes Mandarin [SFC].

The term “phasa Chin” within a passage in Burusphat’s 1995 translation from Bauer’s work can also be interpreted with various meanings. I translate her writing from Thai as follows:

Chinese is known widely for two reasons. The first reason is that it is the language which has the greatest number of speakers in the world . . . The Hui nationality (Muslims) who live in many parts of the People’s Republic of China speak Chinese. (Burusphat 1995:8)

The term “phasa Chin,” which I have translated as “Chinese” in the beginning of the text cited should mean the Chinese language family. This language family is widely known because the speakers of one of its varieties, Putonghua, are the most numerous. Unlike the beginning of the text, the term “Chinese” at the end of the text should refer to Putonghua, the SFC whose use the Chinese government has promoted throughout the People’s Republic of China.

## 5 Conclusion

Some studies in my sample use the English term “Chinese” or the Thai term “phasa Chin” clearly, since these studies deal with a single variety of Chinese and such terms are modified by the name of a Chinese variety in focus. A number of studies use the problematic term “phasa Chin” ambiguously. However, there are several factors which help make a proper choice of meaning. The term refers to either a particular Chinese variety, a group of Chinese varieties sharing one or more features, or the Chinese language family. A small number of studies use the problematic term “phasa Chin” with different meanings within a text or applies it to a single variety of Chinese. Since there is no explanation of the exact meaning of the term, its application is not consistent at all. As a negative consequence, the reader is frequently misled.

There are two suggestions to disambiguate the two problematic terms “phasa Chin” and “Chinese” in future studies. First, researchers (writers or authors) should specify exactly what they mean by the term “Chinese” or “phasa Chin”—whether they mean a language family, a regionalect, or a particular variety of Chinese. Second, researchers should use the meaning of the term “Chinese” or “phasa Chin” consistently in accordance with these specifications of their own.

### Notes

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<sup>ii</sup> All Chinese names in this study are rendered in Putonghua and transcribed in Hanyu pinyin, the official romanization of the People’s Republic of China. Some names bear additional English transliteration in different systems.

<sup>iii</sup> The term “Mandarin” in this study has two meanings. In a wide sense, it refers to the Northern regionalect (Table 1). In a narrow meaning, it denotes the standard form of Chinese belonging to the Northern regionalect (Table 2).

<sup>iv</sup> All Chinese place names except for Hong Kong and Macau are names of provinces in the People’s Republic of China.

<sup>v</sup> I preserve the country’s name “China” in reference to the country before the 1949 liberation.

<sup>vi</sup> Works in Thai have their publication year indicated the Buddhist era. Nonetheless, the present study follows the international style sheet. Therefore, each citation contains the author’s family name and the publication year in the Christian era. In the referential list, an author’s family name precedes his/her given name, the year in the Christian era, and the year in the Buddhist era.

<sup>vii</sup> No referential detail of Bauer’s work is available in Burusphat’s translation (1995).

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