Influences of Social Media on the Use of Thai Language

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Absract

The internet has become an essential elevator to change the standard and lifestyle of message senders and receivers. The majority users of internet are youngsters who pass the messages to each other quickly and effectively, in which the usage trend of new kind of language which is called "Netspeak" (the words, idioms, and peculiarities of spelling and grammar that are characteristics of online documents and communication) has become an irreplaceable choice for Internet users. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate how social media influences users behavior of Thai language on the social media including the internet and the social network and thus its trend in the future. This study used qualitative research approach consisting of two methods: observation and face-to-face in-depth interview. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted by five interviewers who were Thai with 21 social media users in total and all key informants were Thai social media users. As for the observation, all messages displayed by 21 selected users on Twitter.com and Facebook.com were observed. The findings show that all respondents talked about the popularity of using cyber Thai language on social media including words and symbols. This could be the opportunity to research and develop new products related to this type of language.

Introduction

Rapid development in the globalized world has resulted in an enhancement of information technology especially for the internet applications. Thus, people are simply connecting to each other through the online devices such as e-mails, websites, forums, chatting programs and social networks (Northong, 2009). The internet has become an essential elevator to change the standard and lifestyle of message senders and receivers (Dutta, 2010). Approximately 30 million people world-wide use the Internet and on-line services daily. The Net is growing exponentially in all areas and a rapidly increasing number of people are finding themselves working and playing on the Internet. According to Fagan and Desai (2003), the most percentage use of internet users are those in the age of 16-18 youngsters by 90 percentages. College graduates use the internet in the second rank of 86 percentages. The third rank those who are of individuals without a high school diploma use the

Internet by 33 percentages. The least users are those who are over 66 years old using internet only 33 percentages. Social networks represent the stage of social interaction that modern societies have entered: In Europe, Dutch users use social networking for internet banking; North Americans and Australians use it for posting photos; and in Asia, South Koreans use it as a game whereas the Japanese use social networking amongst closest friends (Piskorski, 2010).

In Thailand, Thai facebook users with the ages between 18-24 (38.5%) years old have hit the highest rate of facebook profile registration with the amount of 237,960 profiles while the ages between 25-34 (36.6%) years old are in the second rank with the amount of 26,460 profiles whereas the ages between 35-44 (10.1%) years old are in the third rank with the amount of 62,180 profiles and the ages between 14-17 years old (8.9%) are the least rate of facebook registration with the amount of 54,940 profiles (Piskorski, 2010). Nowadays, in order to pass the message to other Internet users quickly and effectively, the usage trend of new kind of language which is called "Netspeak" is getting popular. In additional, since social media is the poor method of communication as its missing of body language, "Netspeak" is irreplaceable choice for Internet users. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate how social media influences users behavior of Thai language on the social media including the internet and the social network and thus its trend in the future.

Literature Review
Evolution of Language

In a review of two recent books on the evolution of language, Bicker ton (2001, p.590) makes note of those "who write about language evolution in blissful ignorance of what it is that evolved". What evolved is a crucial question in the study of language evolution, but the answer for this question is unclear. This study hypothesized that oral conversational interaction is what has evolved, but since many linguists are unfamiliar with spontaneous oral language ("language in the wild"), this paper will begin with a short review of the literature which characterizes such language.

Conversational analysts see the basic unit of a language as the turn constructional unit. Turns are not isomorphic with sentences or with any unit of grammar, although sentences and their concomitant grammar can appear within turns and across them. Therefore, to understand what it is that evolved, it is necessary to explain the ability to do conversation. From the perspective of complex adaptive systems (Lee and Schumann, 2003), studying conversation means studying the interaction from which grammar is an emergent property. Grammar emerges as an epiphenomenon of conversational interaction. Hopper (1998) sees grammar as emergent in the sense that it is the product of communicative interaction and not the cause of it. In conversational interaction certain forms (words, morphemes, and word order) become frequent. These forms, in Hopper's view, are temporary solutions to the communication of certain meanings. In trying to determine what it is that evolved, it is necessary to imagine language before it was influenced by writing. Written language is language transformed by a cultural technology, and it may be similar to foods that have been genetically altered to have a longer growing season, to resist insects, or to last longer after harvesting (McWhorter 2001). If sometime in the future, scientists were to try to explain how such food evolved and were unaware of the artificial genetic alteration, their accounts of the food's evolution would be inaccurate. The capacities needed to produce language for conversational interaction may be very different from those necessary to produce isolated grammatical sentences. Human brains may have evolved the psycholinguistic abilities to do conversation, but they may also be able to incorporate into the spoken language forms developed under the very different processing constraints that obtain
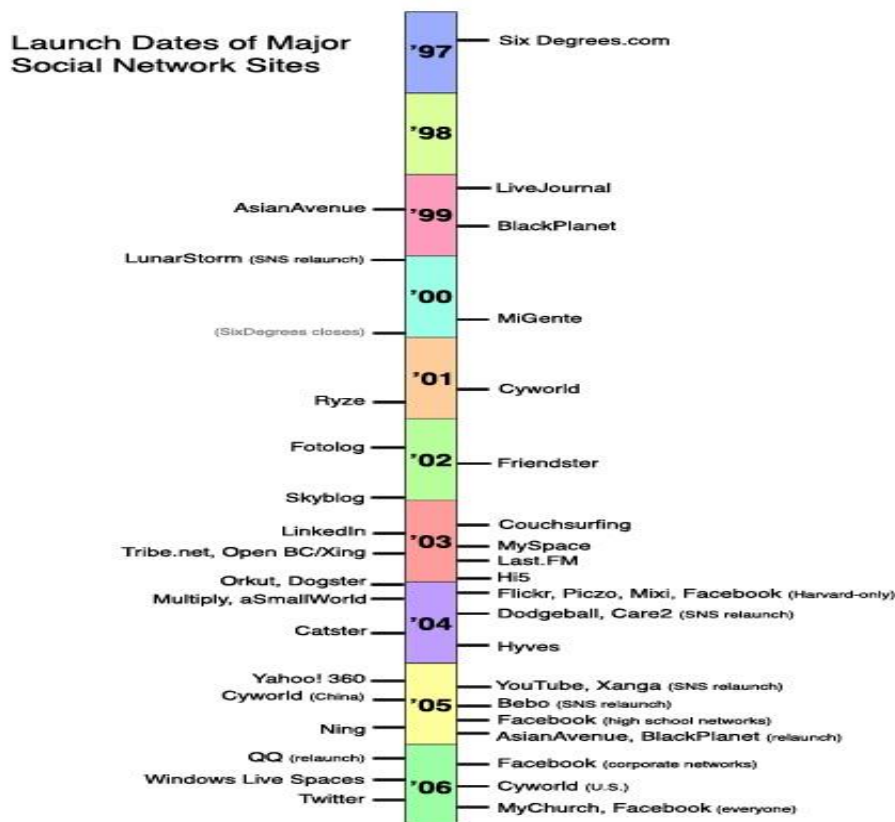
in reading and writing. Such composed texts are held in memory and could be grammatical zed over time in ways that make them different from spontaneous speech. Current linguistic research that does not strictly distinguish between oral and written language may provide accounts of grammatical structures that are perhaps marginally relevant to an evolutionary perspective and a neurobiological perspective on language. However, such forms are very rare in English. Tao and Meyer (Schumann, 2007) observe that although there have been approximately 160 published studies of gapping in the syntax literature, an examination of the one million word British component of the International Corpus of English produced only 120 tokens of this structure (from 17,629 instances of local coordination). Additionally, they found that this form never appears in the interactive speech, and it is even very rare in written language, appearing mainly in press reportage.

Social Media

Social media are defined as a group of Internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Heinlein, 2010). Weingart (2009) describes that today social media is whatever the user wants it to be. Accessible by Mobile, Application, or Website, Social Platforms can be updated and used on a frequent basis. Because the speed of Social Media consumptions has rapidly increased, platforms are visible in multiple locations. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers (Solis, 2010).

The nature and nomenclature of social media connections may vary from site to site. While social network sites have implemented a wide variety of technical features, their backbone consists of visible profiles that display an articulated list of friends who are also users of the system. Profiles are unique pages where one can "type oneself into being" (Sundén, 2003, p. 3). After joining an SNS, an individual is asked to fill out forms containing a series of questions. Most sites also encourage users to upload a profile photo. Some sites allow users to enhance their profiles by adding multimedia content or modifying their profile's look and feel. Others, such as Facebook, allow users to add modules ("Applications") that enhance their profile.

According to the timeline below mentioned, the first recognizable social network site, SixDegrees.com, launched in 1997, allowed users to create profiles, list their Friends and, beginning in 1998, surf the Friends lists. Each of these features existed in some form before SixDegrees, of course. Profiles existed on most major dating sites and many community sites. AIM and ICQ buddy lists supported lists of Friends, although those Friends were not visible to others.

Launch Dates of Major Social Network Sites (Marklund, 2009)

Classmates.com allowed people to affiliate with their high school or college and surf the network for others who were also affiliated, but users could not create profiles or list Friends until years later. SixDegrees was the first to combine these features. While SixDegrees attracted millions of users, it failed to become a sustainable business and, in 2000, the service closed. From 1997 to 2001, a number of community tools began supporting various combinations of profiles and publicly articulated Friends. AsianAvenue, BlackPlanet, and MiGente allowed users to create personal, professional, and dating profiles—users could identify Friends on their personal profiles without seeking approval for those connections (Wasow, 2007).

The next wave of SNSs began when Ryze.com was launched in 2001 to help people leverage their business networks. In particular, the people behind Ryze, Tribe.net, LinkedIn, and Friendster were tightly entwined personally and professionally. They believed that they could support each other without competing (Festa, 2003). In the end, Ryze never acquired mass popularity, Tribe.net grew to attract a passionate niche user base, LinkedIn became a powerful business service, and Friendster became the most significant, if only as "one of the biggest disappointments in Internet history" (Chafkin, 2007, p.1). The visibility of a profile varies by site and according to user discretion. By default, profiles on Friendster and Tribe.net are crawled by search engines, making them visible to anyone, regardless of whether or not the viewer has an account. Alternatively, LinkedIn controls what a viewer may see based on whether she or he has a paid account. Sites like MySpace allow users to choose whether they want their profile to be public or "Friends only" Facebook takes a different approach—by default, users who are part of the same "network" can view each other's profiles, unless a profile owner has decided to deny permission to those in their network. Structural variations

around visibility and access are one of the primary ways that SNSs differentiate themselves from each other.

Review on Netspeak

Netspeak is the words, idioms, and peculiarities of spelling and grammar that are characteristics of online documents and communication" (McFedries, 2004). It is a mode of communication composed of initialisms, abbreviations and acronyms as well as symbols and intentional misspellings. Nowadays, together with the number of Internet usage is rapidly growing, the number of initialisms and symbols are getting huge.

According to Plag (2003), abbreviation is a popular way of forming words. Abbreviations are similar in nature to blends, because both blends and abbreviations are amalgamations of different parts of words. Like truncation and blending, abbreviation involves loss of material, but it differs, however, from truncation and blending in that prosodic categories do not play a prominent role. It is considered that orthography plays a central importance. Abbreviations are used for a variety of reasons: to avoid repetition, save space, or conform to conventional usage. Leading authorities cannot agree on the capitalization or punctuation for many abbreviations. Therefore, there are no set rules. In general, it is wise not to abbreviate unless there is a good reason to do so and the writer knows that the reader will understand. Abbreviations are most commonly formed by taking initial letters of multi-word sequences to make up a new word: EC (European Community), FAQ (frequently asked question). Apart from words composed of initial letters, there are also abbreviations that incorporate non-initial letters: Inc. (Incorporated). The spelling and pronunciation of abbreviations offer interesting perspectives on the formal properties of these words: CARE (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere), VAT/vat (value added tax). Abbreviations can be spelled with either capital or lowers-case letters, and they can be pronounced either by naming each individual letter (socalled initialisms, as in CEO [si:i:ˈǩʊ]) or by applying regular reading rules (OPEC [oupek]). In the latter case the abbreviation is called an acronym.

One perceived limitation of social media is it is reliance on verbal communication – the non-verbal channel is excluded. Besides, the lack of body language such as facial expression or tone of voice, symbols or glyphs were created. It is a representation of a facial expression formed by a short sequence of keyboard characters (usually to be viewed sideways) and used in electronic mail, etc., to convey the sender's feelings or intended tone. It has been noted that when "properly used, a smiley can spice up virtually any form of written communication. Now you can say 'Boy, isn't he intelligent :-)' and make it quite clear you think the subject is an idiot" (Godin, 1993).

The phenomenon of Netspeak is going to change the way we think about language in a fundamental way, because it is a linguistic singularity—a genuine new medium" (Crystal, 2001). Netspeak provides a creative way to communicate faster, in a world where timeliness is held at the same level or in some cases a higher level, as accuracy, in terms of priorities. Moreover, the use of imagery also promotes a more positive attitude than text alone (Mitchell, 1986).

Review on Thai Netspeak

An important factor affected language change contributed by the growth of the internet and electronically-mediated communication is the prominence of English as the "lingua franca" of the globalized communication. At the dawn of 21st century, the internet has given English a genuine global presence, reaching around 470 million non-English speakers on the internet which constitutes

about two-thirds of all internet users (Atlas, 2003, as cited in Danet and Herring, 2003). The influence and effects of English on local language have thus been accelerated and more widespread than ever as well as in Thailand.

English has had an important status and influence in the Thai society since the eve of the westernization of Thailand in the reign of King Rama VI (Monkut, 1851-1868). English first began to be taught and learned in the palace. Later on, King Rama V (Chulalongkorn, 1868-1910) sent his sons, noblemen and also commoners' sons to study in Europe, mainly to England. Upon their returns, they became an elite leader in the society. Since then, not only has westernization of Thailand and the contact with the West brought about numerous important social and cultural changes, but it has also opened the door to learning of English by Thais. As a result, the English influence on the Thai language started. Many loan works from English have entered the Thai language, and some grammatical changes in Thai have been fostered by English. Prasithrathsint's study shows that the change and increase in the passive constructions in Thai can be attributed to influence from English (Danet and Herring, 2003).

The term "E-Thai" has first brought out in the search of Thai Language in the New Millennium by Yuphahann. "E-Thai" is used to refer to both novel variety of Thai- the Thai "Netspeak" used in "electronically-mediated communication", and the English influenced Thai in contemporary Thai society. According to Yuphahann's study, the characteristics of Thai net speaking including abbreviation and condensation of words and phrases; pronunciation spelling; international deviant spelling to avoid censorship; international deviant spelling to get attention; and orthographic strategies to show paralinguistic features and gestures or emotions. Yuohahann also pointed out that, for Thai, the noticeable impact on the language is that some deviant spellings and pronunciation spelling of some words that used to be the in-group jargon of chatroom users have reached the mainstream and have appeared in traditional print media. The increasing visibility and pervasive presence of this new variety of language is naturally a cause for concern for language purists and language conservationists, who feel that the "proper" standard of language, especially the written language, is being threatened.

Research Methodology

This study used qualitative research approach consisting of two methods: observation and face-to-face in-depth interview. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted by five interviewers who were Thai with 21 social media users in total and all key informants were Thai social media users. The main objectives of this study were to investigate how social media influenced the use of Thai language in the cyber world (online environment), and to anticipate the trend of cyber Thai language users in the future. The study focused on three main factors which are: personal factor, psychological factor, and media factor. In this frame, the study emphasized on the most accepted characters which involved the prospect factors as the following criteria: first, personal factors which classified by Purpose of using social media and Experiences on Cyber Thai Language. Second, Psychological Factors were categorized by "Wanting to be part of the group" and "Wanting to have another identity in the Cyber world". Last, Media Limitation Factors were sorted by "Limitation of connection channel". The in-depth interview guidelines were used to screen the subjects to identify purposes of using the social media predominantly facebook and Twitter.

As for the observation, all messages displayed by 21 selected users on Twitter.com and Facebook.com were observed on September 1st to 20th, 2010 between 9.00hrs to 18.00hrs. To ensure

the validity, users whose behavior were selected to observe are indeed the team's members' friends or on-line colleagues or the members' close friends who were using the social media while they were observed during the specified period.

Analysis of Findings
Types of Thai Cyber Language: From the observation of Thai language usage behavior on Facebook, 10 types of Thai cyber language were classified as follows:

Distinctive Spelling: The language users intended to make the word spelling different from the original words. Some words were based on pronunciation and some words were based on the way it was spelled.

Distinctive Graphology: Characters were type in special order that look like graphics, indicating the meaning of that graphic such as :-) is smiley. Some characters were used specifically with some special interest group such as "Inw" which looked like a Thai spelling that means "God". Inw was used to call for person who performing impressive in an online game.

Foreign Word: English word which is well known among Thai people, but in different meaning than in original language. For example, "key" which means "entry" in Thai.

Transliterate Word: Some English word which is well known among Thai people, were used as the Thai word such as "sure".

Abbreviation: Some English words that were shortened, such as thks (thanks) and lol (whoa).
Connotations: Some word that should imply another word or meaning indirectly. Such as "Rum Yong" which is the character of a drunk woman in a well-known Thai soap opera was used to describe the "drunk" and unsuitable behavior of a woman.

Rude Word: Some Thai word which was considered rude or inappropriate were modified to avoid both word censor software or to moderate the feelings of others. The modification can be both character replacement and adding more characters in. For example, k-u-a-y which means penis.

Jargon: Thai word that was made specially and be known exclusively in group. But on some matter, the word may widely been used, if it sound catchy.

Emotional Expression: Different words or characters combination were written try to imitate the emotion of the writer.

Graphic to express Feeling: Using Picture, graphics or Image to express on writer feeling.
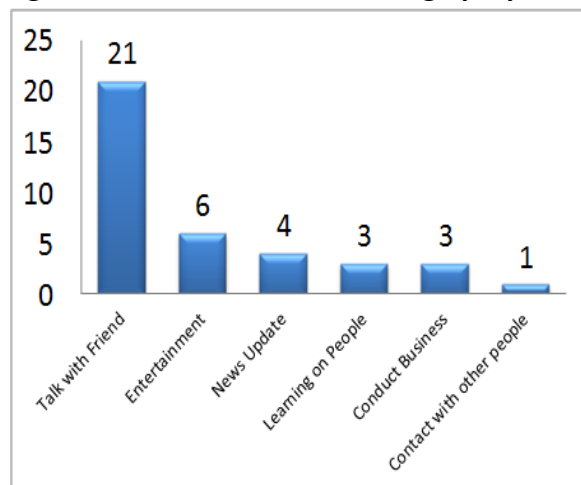**Interview Result**
From 21 interviewees age ranged from 15 – 27, 5 people are male and 16 people are female.

The Purpose of Using Social Media

On the question asking why they use social media, all interviewees (100%) gave the reason about making contact with friend or friend conversation. It indicated that all of our interviewee ranked social contact as the first priority. Some of them gave more reasons such as for entertainment, update information and so forth. Figure 4.1 will show on how interviewee response on the purpose.
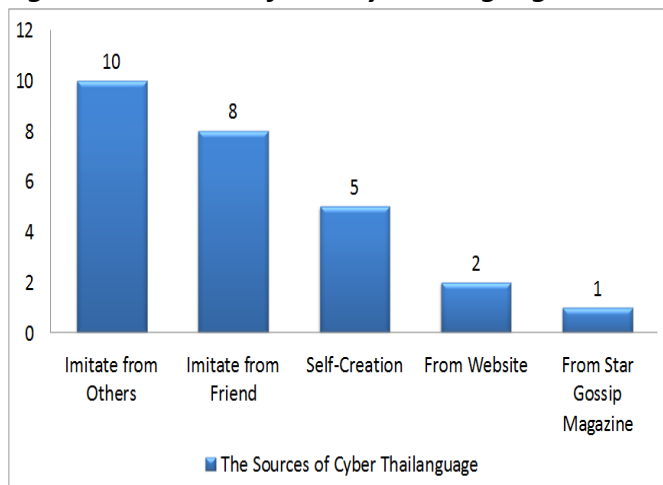
Figure 4.1 The Social Media usage purpose

Sources of Cyber Thai Language

On the question asking where do they got the Cyber Thai words from, the top reason received from the interviewees is "Imitate from others" 10 responses from 21 interviewees (47.61%), while the next top reasons are "Imitate from friend" (38.09%) and "Self-Create" (23.8%). These response indicate that people usually "borrowed" the word from the other people (both friends and others), but some time they also create some. If that word is catchy or been accepted others, it will be imitated by other person and use by community. Figure 4.2 will show interviewee response on how they get their Cyber Thai language.
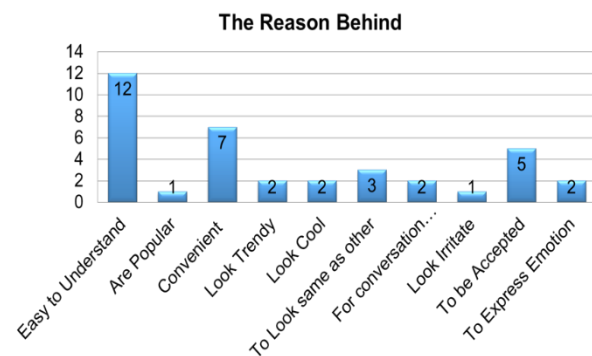
Figure 4.2 Sources of Thai Cyber Language

4.2.3 The Reason behind using Cyber Thai Language

When asking about the reason interviewee decided to use Cyber Thai Language in conversation instead of conventional language, the majority of interviewees (12 from 37; 32.43%) gave the reason that because it is "easier to use" and the 2nd rank response is "Convenient" (7; 18.92%). They indicate that interviewees decided to use Thai Cyber Language based on their familiar and comfortable with the word itself not because of any special purpose. Figure 4.3 will show the reason behind interviewee language usage (each interviewee can answer more than 1 reason).

Figure 4.3The Reason behind Cyber Language Using

The Reason Behind

The Limitation of Hardware and Software

When asking about the limitation of hardware and software affected the way interviewees used social network or not, 15 out of 21 interviewees (71.43%) responded that the device (hardware and software) did not affect the way they used the language.

Do Thai Cyber Language can reveal true personality?

When asking if Thai Cyber Language can reveal true personality of language user? 15 out of 21 interviewees (71.43%) did not agree. That means the majority of interviewees believed that Thai cyber language's users may not using their true personality when using the social media. Because social media like Facebook is the electronic-society, people can create their second identity and can even disguise to be the person they are actually not.

The Future of Cyber Thai Language

When asking about the future of Cyber Thai Language, there are 19 responses indicating that more Cyber Thai Language will be in use. Other than that, they also believed that more people will use Cyber Thai Language and Official Thai Language Will Be Distorted (9 and 8 responses respectively). That means Thai cyber language tends to increase because the number of users will increase and the society tends to expand owing to the purposes of chatting with friends and others to build and maintain relationship as well as to exploit access to the e-society to gain acceptance. This is largely because of the ease of understanding and convenience of using the cyber Thai language.

Conclusions

This study presents an overview of cyber Thai language user behavior. The majority of key informants used social media and cyber Thai language for contacting friends. But in the case of contacting a senior user or unknown user, they tended to use official Thai language. This is intriguing

because it does not seem to be typical Thai social communication compared with the offline, face-to-face or telephone. Therefore, the social media could be a new alternative channel of communication at present. This can be seen as a shift of broadcast mechanism rooted in the conversations among peer groups, business users, or even strangers.

The majority of key informants knew and learned cyber Thai language from friends and gave reasons that they used this kind of language because it was easy to understand and communicate with others. The result also supports Mitchell (1986) that cyber language provided a creative way to communicate faster.

The findings show that the majority of key informants did not believe that the characteristic of cyber Thai language could reveal true personality and they did not think that the limitation of devices such as a mobile phone, a personal computer, a laptop, etc. could affect cyber Thai language user behavior. The findings argued Wasow (2007) that users could identify friends on their personal profiles without seeking approval. The results showed that most users did not believe all behavior and opinions of users on social media were their true personality.

Finally, trend of cyber Thai language in the future from key informants' aspects seemed to be as follows: (1) More new cyber Thai language, either words or symbols will be created, (2) More users will use cyber Thai language in communication, and (3) Official, conventional Thai language will be more distorted. The result supports Crystal (2001)'s idea that cyber language was going to change the fundamental way of communication, because it was a linguistic singularity and a genuine new medium.

This research generally supports the view that cyber language production process for conversational interaction is different from grammatical sentences. Kalmar (1985) describes it might be the result of the influence of writing on speech due to the psychological processing constraints, especially wide spread in societies through the media.

Recommendations

It is clear that all respondents talked about the popularity of using cyber Thai language on social media including words and symbols. This could be the opportunity to research and develop new products related to this type of language, for examples: a keyboard with special symbol or emotional buttons, a dictionary of cyber language for a personal computer or mobile phone, a t-shirt for a traveller which has got a variety of sign language for the sake of global communication. In addition, a popular cyber word could be used for branding or advertising some products.

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