



Socio-Cultural Reflections on the Address Terms in the Lyrics of Thai Country and City Songs¹

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the address systems and the socio-cultural reflections embedded in these systems in the lyrics of Thai country and city songs. It appears that there are specific characteristics of address systems in these songs which are different from a previous study (Tinhsabadh and Prasithrathsint, 1986). That is, the address terms in these two forms of songs can be any one or a combination of two or more of the following: pronoun, kinship terms, rank, occupation/title, name, and expressive terms. The three most frequently used forms of address terms in Thai country songs are pronoun/title, kinship terms, and expressive terms, respectively. In contrast, the three most frequent address terms found in Thai city songs are in a different order, pronoun/title, expressive terms, and kinship terms. The study also shows that the various forms of address in Thai country and city songs not only indicate the degree of intimacy between the singer and the addressee, but also reflect the social relationship between men and women in Thai society.

Introduction

Address terms are interesting linguistic phenomena that appear in many languages, especially in Southeast Asian languages. As a result, many linguists try to study forms and uses of address terms to account for the social situation. They have found that address terms are not only complicated and elaborate, but also embedded in the socio-cultural reflections.

In some languages, such as Thai, a great number of address terms are found. Tinhsabadh and Prasithrathsint (1986) noted that there are at least two specific characteristics of forms and uses of address systems in Thai: firstly, the address

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term consists of two important parts, i.e., an obligatory and an optional part. The first part can be any one or a combination of two or more of the following words, arranged in this order: pronominal, kinship terms, rank, occupation/title, name and expressive terms. The other part is one of the sentence-ending particles that convey social information, such as /*kháp*/ (a polite particle for males) or /*khá*/ (a polite particle for females). The three most frequently used forms of address terms, however, are name, pronominal + name, and pronominal. The terms of forms of address which a speaker selects for an addressee are determined by the degree of respect and intimacy.

The purposes of this paper are to investigate the address systems and their socio-cultural implications in Thai country songs, /*ple:ŋ lû:k thûŋ*/ and Thai city songs, /*ple:ŋ lû:k kruŋ*/.² The data used in this study were collected from 474 Thai country songs and 483 Thai city songs. Most songs were from the Half-Century of Thai Country Song Program, the Royal Phonograph Record Contest, and the Golden Antenna Awards; in addition, they include popular songs from song books, magazines, CDs, VCDs and cassette tapes.

The study of terms of address is an analysis of language in context. An in-depth study of address terms used in these two types of songs will help us understand more about language situations in Thai. A comparative study of the forms and use of address terms in Thai country and city songs will also provide a better understanding of the characteristics of language used in each type of song.

Basic concepts of address terms

This section provides the basic concepts: terminology, definitions, and classification of address terms. The concept of address terms has long been an issue of interest in linguistic studies, especially in sociolinguistics. Many linguists have provided the terminology and definitions to elucidate phenomena involved in addressing or naming other persons. Address terms are a well-known linguistic concept, known variously as “vocative”,³ “address terms”, “address forms”, “forms of address”, and “theory of address”. Trudgill (1972: 9) defines address terms as “words or phrases used to address other people in conversation, meeting, letters, etc”. Similarly, Bruan (1988: 7) states that address terms are “words and phrases used for addressing. They refer to the collocutor and thus contain a strong element

² The contents of Thai country and city songs are different; i.e., those of Thai country songs mainly reflect the people’s way of life in rural society, whereas Thai city songs always reflect urban society.

³ This term is a grammatical rather than a sociolinguistic term. It refers to a form of a noun, a pronoun or an adjective used in some languages when addressing a person or thing.

of deixis. Often they designate the collocutor(s), but not necessarily so, since their lexical meaning can differ from or even contradict the addressee's characteristics". These two definitions can be summarized by stating that address terms are words or phrases that a speaker uses to call or speak to a listener.

Studies of address terms generally focus on eliciting and comparing the systems of classification or taxonomies of address systems in each language. They also attempt to relate address terms to the socio-cultural context or situations in which address terms may occur. In other words, the study of address terms is based on the sociolinguistic perspective "address behavior". The main idea of this view is that the way in which an addresser correctly uses and selects address variants suitable for the addressee in a given context, and variations in forms and uses of address terms, reflects the relationship between the addresser and the addressee, depending on the differences in age, sex and social status.

Previous research carried out by linguists supports the idea that address behavior is normally influenced by social factors and linguistic backgrounds. The classic and most influential study of the differences in second-pronoun usage in several European languages, which has become a model of address term study, is by Brown and Gilman (1960). They found that the use of "familiar second pronoun T" and "polite second pronoun V"⁴ was governed by two social features: "power semantics" and "solidarity semantics". Historically, these two semantic features were used to determine the use of European second pronouns in different periods of time. That is, power semantics, which derived from superior and inferior social status and governed the non-reciprocal and asymmetrical relationships⁵ in the use of two pronouns was primarily used in the Middle Ages, whereas solidarity semantics, which involved the degree of closeness and intimacy and led to a reciprocal and symmetrical relationship, was secondarily applied in later centuries. Moreover, apart from their major analysis of the development and changes

⁴ The symbols T and V were applied by Brown and Gilman to designate the deferential second pronoun usage in such European languages as French, Italian, and German, originating from the first letter of the Latin words "tu" and "vos". These two words were earlier used to identify the difference between a "singular/familiar pronoun" and "plural/polite pronoun". In sociolinguistics, this concept is currently known as "T and P pronouns".

⁵ "Reciprocity and symmetry", the two terminologies suggested by Brown and Gilman (1960), and even more emphatically by Brown and Ford (1964), are used for explaining the concept of use and relationship of address terms. That is, "address is reciprocal when two speakers exchange the same form of address (or equivalent ones). ... Correspondingly, address is nonreciprocal when the forms used by the two speakers in a dyad are different (or non-equivalent). ... All forms of address in a given dyad being used reciprocally, the address relationship is symmetrical. When different forms are used, the address relationship is asymmetrical. A relationship can be called partly symmetrical if part of the forms are used reciprocally." (Bruan, 1988: 13)

in power and solidarity semantics, Brown and Gilman drew another conclusion worth mentioning about address behavior in French, German, and Italian. They discovered that, by the mid-twentieth century, solidarity semantics almost completely dominated power semantics as the most important choice-governing factor in selecting T/V pronouns. Solidarity has now become the important factor for speakers of all three languages.

In English, as well as other languages, the selection of a variant addressing form system is in many ways parallel to the T/V dichotomy. Two classical studies of American English address term use conducted by Brown and Ford (1964) and Ervin-Tripp (1972), together with the researches of Lambert and Tucker (1976), Bates and Benigin (1975) and Paulston (1976), followed the Brown and Gilman methodology and came to the conclusion that the involvement of power and solidarity semantics can “vary substantially not only from language to language, but from one community where the language is spoken to another, and from one social grouping to another in the same community” (Fasold, 1984: 35).

Besides the two semantic factors mentioned above, many linguists who have studied address form systems have also found that the use of address forms was based on other social factors and linguistic background such as demographic characteristics, age, sex, social class (Lambert and Tucker, 1976), religious prohibition, economic status (Das, 1968), and ethnicity (Friske, 1978).

According to Bruan (1988: 7), the classification of address terms in most languages can be generally divided into three word classes: (1) *Pronouns of address*, (2) *Nouns of address*, and (3) *Verb forms of address*, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 does not mean that all languages must have all forms of address terms. The variations and variants of address forms differ, depending on the available forms and the socio-cultural factors in each language. That is, in all societies, there are norms concerning who uses which form to whom, what the social implications are of using one form or another, and on which occasions particular forms may be used. Bruan (1988: 12) observes that,

the system of address terms comprises the totality of available forms and their interrelations in one language. Languages as well as varieties of languages differ in their repertory of address and in the number of variants. In some languages there is only one pronoun of address for an individual addressee (English), in others two (German), three (Romanian), or many (Sinhalese). It goes without saying that the existence of several variants, pronominal or other, makes nonreciprocal usage easier and more frequent and allows a more detailed encoding of differences in age, sex, social, or occupational status. Moreover, cultural norms and values can be reflected

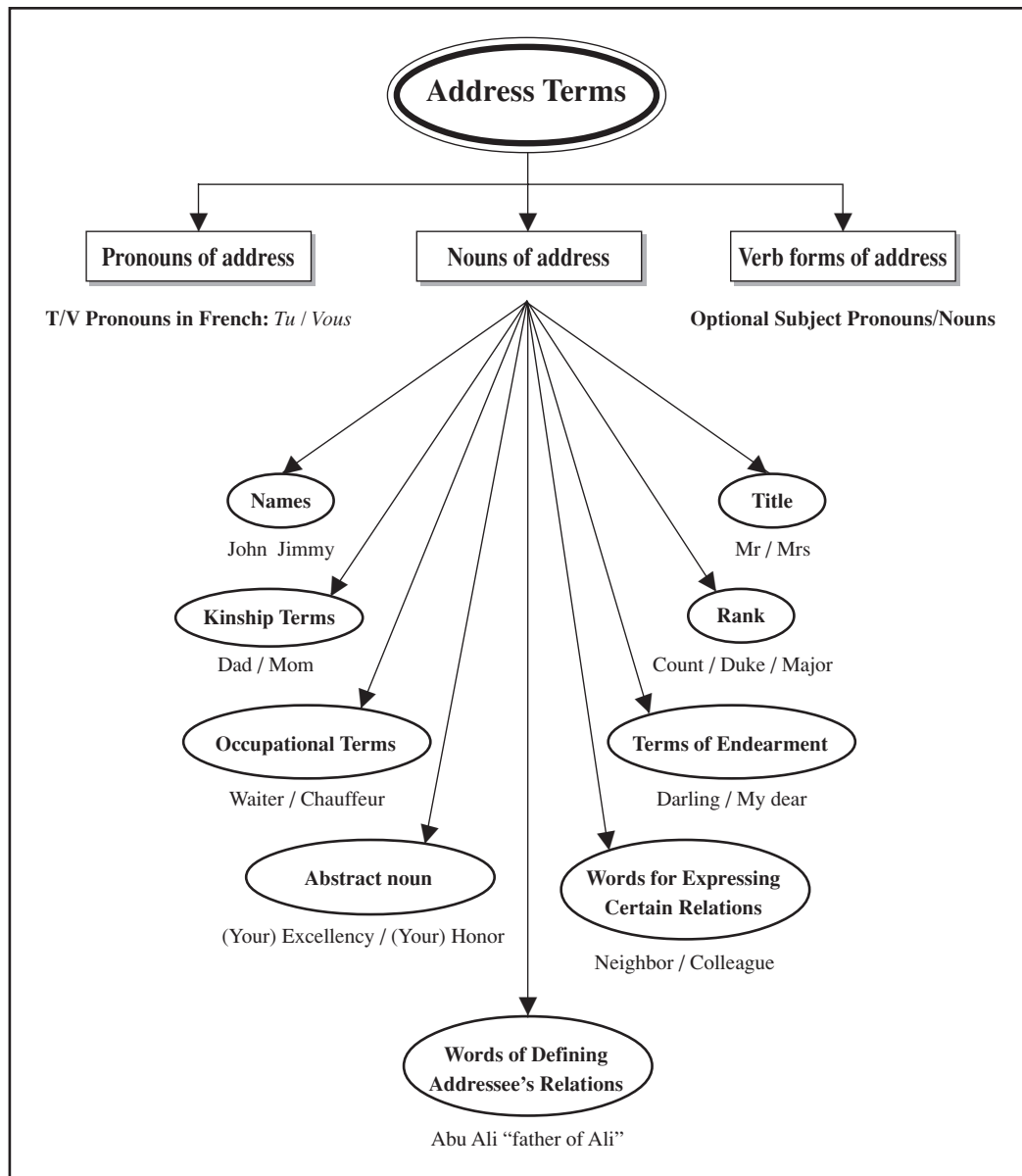


Figure 1. The classifications of address terms (adapted from Bruan, 1988: 9–11)

in an address system.

Address systems in the lyrics of Thai country and city songs

The data analysis shows that address terms appearing in the contents of Thai country and city songs are varied in form and use. The songwriters always use address terms as language strategies in order to address a receiver of or listener to the message, as if he/she were the speaker. Consequently, it could be said that the song texts are full of address terms, as illustrated by the following examples.

(a) Use of address terms in the lyrics of a Thai country song

From the song /pu: khàj kàj lǒŋ/⁶ “crab full of eggs goes astray”

tchâ:ŋ thỳ⁷ **khon ŋa:m** khǒ: plò:j ta:m wâ:sà:nǎ:
 forget it Exp.⁷ let release along fortune
 “A beautiful girl! Let it be as my fortune is.”

phî: mâj mi: parinja: **khwǎn ta:** mɔ:ŋ nâ: tham mɯ:n...
 1st Pro. not have a degree Exp. look face do turn away
 “I do not have a degree so you are not interested in me.”

phî: tɕon khon ráj ŋɯn
 1st Pro. poor person without money
 “I am poor and penniless.”

dɯ:n jâm tók **nó:ŋ** bò:k wâ: so: ...
 walk step idly Kin. say that poor
 “I have to walk idly so you say I am a pauper.”

kò:t kàp khon tɕon **nâ:mon tɕáo** bòn wâ: mǎn
 hug with person poor Exp. 2nd Pro. complain that bad smell
 “When I embraced you, you complained that I was smelly.”

⁶ This song is a popular Thai country song originally sung by Chaythong Songphon in 1972.

⁷ The abbreviations used in these excerpts from the contents of songs are: *Exp.* = expressive term, *Kin.* = kinship term, *Pro.* = pronoun, and *Par.* = final particle. *Transcription.* The phonetic transcription in this study is based on the work of M.R. Kalaya Tingsabadh and Arthur S. Abramson (1999: 147–150).

kɔ:t kàp khon mi: khi: bé:n **nuá jen** tɕaj
 hug with person have drive Benz *Exp.* heart
 tên ta: to:...
 beat eye big
 “When you hugged a rich man driving a Mercedes, you were
 overwhelmed and delighted.”

(b) Use of address terms in the lyrics of a Thai city song

From the song /mê: jô:t rák/⁸ “my sweetheart”

suíŋ tɕaj **mê: jô:t rák**
 appreciate heart *Exp.*
 “My sweetheart! I appreciate you.”

phî: plu:m tɕaj nák dáj **nóŋ** ma: khiankrɔ:ŋ
 1st Pro. please very get *Kin.* come possess
 “I am very delighted that you are mine.”

ŋa:m **nóŋ** ŋa:m tchâj ŋa:m tɛ: phiaŋ rû:p thɔ:ŋ
 beautiful *Kin.* beautiful not beautiful but only shape golden
 “Your beauty is not only your golden shape...”

nóŋ ŋa:m tháj tɛ:tɕaj...
Kin. beautiful both mind
 “...but also your mind.”

nóŋ ?v:j phî: tɕèp khra:w nán...
Kin. + Par. 1st Pro. hurt time that
 “My dear! When I was hurt at that time.”

tɕáo maj diattchăn klájtcít khɔ:j jia:wja:
 2nd Pro. not disgust close wait heal
 “You did not mind taking care of me.”

ŋa:m ná:m tɕaj hă: khraj mǎj kɔ:n **kê:wta:**
 beautiful kindness find who not over *Exp.*
 “In the beauty of the two your kindness no equal can be found.”

⁸ This song is a popular Thai city song originally sung by Winai Phanthurak in 1981.

In the lyrics of the two songs above, it is noticeable that such address forms as *expressive term* (/khon ɲam/ “a beautiful person”; /khwǎn ta:/ “my darling, my sweet heart”; /nâ: mon/ “lovely face”; /nuía jen/ “cool skin”), *kinship term* + (final particle) (/nó:ɲ/ “younger sibling”; /nɔ:ɲ ʔɻ:j/ “younger sibling + final particle”), and *pronoun* (/tɕâo/ “2nd Pro.”) are used by the singers in order to refer to the listener or addressee, as illustrated by the figure below.

The data analysis of 656 and 618 address forms appearing in the lyrics of Thai country and city songs presented in Table 1 reveals that there are seven patterns of address forms in each type of song. Considering the structural combination of each pattern, the data show that the address terms used in Thai country and city song are composed of two important parts: obligatory and optional parts, as illustrated in the diagram below.

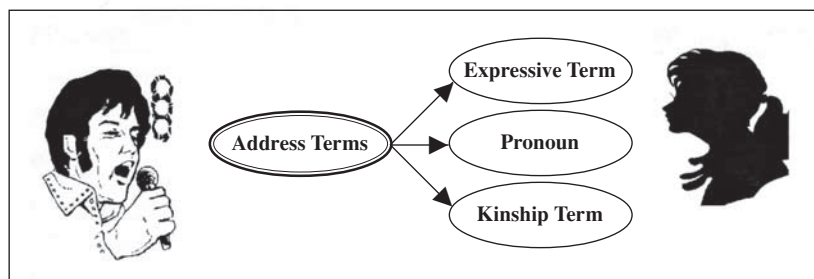


Figure 2. The address terms used in the lyrics of Thai country and city songs

Obligatory + (Optional₁) + (Optional₂)⁹

As the above structural diagram shows, the obligatory part can be a single unit or a combination of two or more units of the following types: pronoun/title, expressive term, kinship term, occupational term and name. The optional part can consist of two parts. That is, the first position of the optional part (Optional¹) is more limited: it may be only an expressive term, and the second optional part (Optional²) is a final particle. From the data analysis, there are six final particles used in this part: viz., khráp (ครับ), khá? (คะ), tɕǎ: (จ้า), ʔɻ:j (เอ๋ย), ʔɻ:j (เอ้ย), and khǎ: (หา).

⁹ The parentheses indicate that the component is optional.

Patterns of Address Terms	Number of Occurrences			
	Thai country songs		Thai city songs	
	Raw Score	Percentage	Raw Score	Percentage
1. Pronoun / Title (+Final Particle)	309	47%	340	55%
2. Expressive Term (+Final Particle)	132	20%	138	22%
3. Kinship Term (+Final Particle)	168	25%	103	17%
4. Name (+Final Particle)	6	0.9%	16	2.6%
5. Occupational Term	20	3%	-	-
6. Pronoun / Title + Expressive Term	25	4%	9	1.5%
7. Kinship Term + Expressive Term	5	0.75%	5	0.8%
8. Name + Expressive Term	-	-	4	0.6%
Total	656	100%	618	100%

Table 1. The number of occurrences of address terms for each pattern in the lyrics of Thai country and city songs

Figure 3 shows the percentage of the three most frequent address terms found in the lyrics of Thai country and city songs. In country songs these were pronoun/title, kinship term and expressive term. Pronoun/title occurred the most frequently (309 words, or 47%), followed by kinship term (168 words, or 25%) and expressive term (132 words, or 20%). Meanwhile, in the three most frequent address terms found in the lyrics of Thai city songs, the last two terms appear in a different order: pronoun/title, expressive term and kinship term. Pronoun/title was the most frequently used (340 words, or 55%), followed by expressive term (138 words, or 22%) and kinship term (130 words, or 17%).

Socio-cultural reflections in the lyrics of Thai country and city songs

As mentioned earlier, social factors and linguistic background are the two important factors governing the use of address form. At the same time, differences in forms of address terms also provide socio-cultural insights concerning society. This is true in the study of address terms in Thai country and city songs. All possible forms of address terms found in this study are governed by social factors such as social status, age and sex differences. Moreover, the results of this study show that the song genre is another important factor governing the use of address forms in the lyrics of both types of songs. That is, songwriters use address forms as language strategies to refer to the addressee depending on the genre of the song.

It was found that both song genres are mostly love songs that normally reflect relationships between lovers and partners and almost all song lyrics were

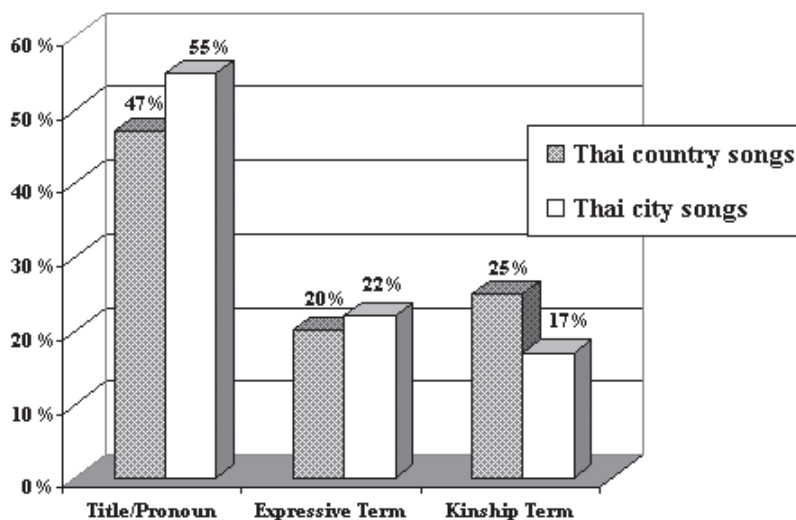


Figure 3. The three most frequent address terms found in the lyrics of Thai country and city songs

songs sung by male singers. Consequently, the social distance and social relationship between men and women were manifested in many complex selections in the use of address forms in the lyrics. Several address forms appearing in male singers' songs reveal that women's social status is different from men's. The selection of address forms exhibits the social relationship between the addresser and the addressee in Thai society. After a closer look at the data, we found that the patterns of address terms are chosen according to the social relationship between men as the addresser and women as the addressee. When the lyrics concern the relationship between lovers, such address forms as name (/tchǎnthana:/, /pia/); name + final particle (/kàj tɕǎ:/, /da:w ʔɤ:j/, /riam ʔɤ:j/); expressive terms (/sa:m waj/, /núa jen/), and pronoun/title (/thɤ:/, /khun/, /tɕâ:o/), and pronoun/title + final particle (/khun khráp/, /sǎ:w ʔɤ:j/) are used to signal a symmetrical/reciprocal relationship (equivalent stature and intimacy). Surprisingly, the patterns of address terms change to an asymmetrical/non-reciprocal relationship (non-equivalent and superior status) when the lyrics concern a relationship between spouses. A man as a husband uses more non-deferential and intimate patterns of address terms such as kinship terms (/nó:ŋ/, /mê:/); kinship terms + final particle (/mia tɕǎ:/); expressive terms (/khwǎn ta:/, /khon di:/, แก้วตา /kê:w ta:/), and kinship terms + expressive terms (/nó:ŋ khon di:/, /nó:ŋ kê:w/), to address a wife, while such address terms as kinship terms (/phî:/) and kinship terms + expressive terms (/phô:khwǎn ruan/, /phô: kìŋ thɔ:ŋ/, /phǔa thî: rák/) and kinship terms + final particle (/phǔa tɕǎ:/), which indicate deference and intimacy, are used by a wife to address her husband.

More interestingly, some restricted forms of address terms reflect puritanical Thai cultural values concerning sexual relations between men and women. Traditionally, a Thai woman should remain a virgin until her wedding day and should not strongly express her reciprocal love. The expression /rāk nuan səŋŋuan tua/, “to preserve virginity for the one who she loves”, is a clear reflection of this belief and is also displayed in the selection of address forms by songwriters. Comparing the frequency of occurrence of address terms appearing in songs sung by male and female singers, it was found that expressive terms, words or phrases, which the singers employ in order to express their special feeling to the addressee, support Thai cultural values. Among the 132 and 138 occurrences of such words (see Table 1) found in the lyrics of Thai country and city songs, almost all were in songs sung by men, as shown in Figure 4.

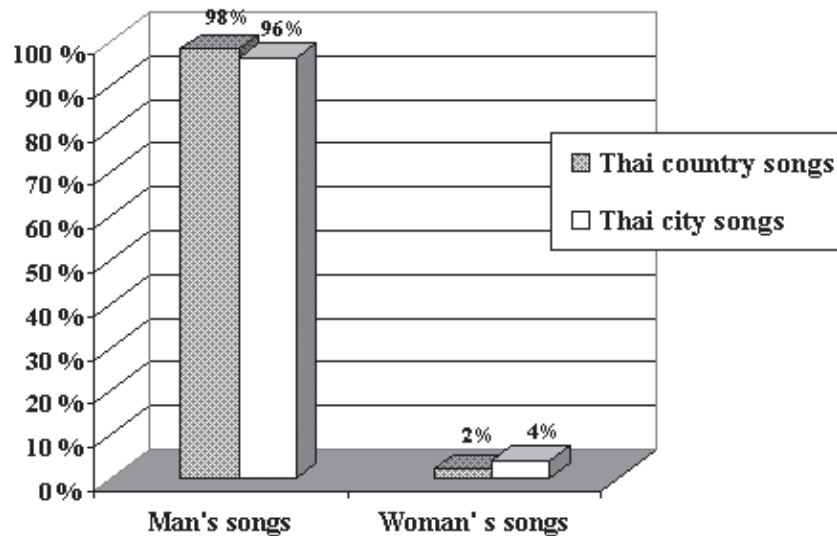


Figure 4. The frequency of expressive terms in the contents of Thai country and city songs

Conclusion and discussion

The findings of this study were different from those of Tinhsabadh and Prasithratsint (1986) in that the three most frequently used address forms differed due to the difference in the sources from which data were collected. Moreover, the results of this study also confirmed the idea that the language of song lyrics differs from ordinary texts; as Merriam (1980: 188) remarked: “... language behavior in song is a special kind of verbalization which sometimes requires special knowledge of the language in which it is couched.” Many forms of address terms such as expressive terms, which are a common feature in songs, are elaborate language

used only in song texts. However, the study of address terms in Thai country and city songs also leads to the conclusion that not only can language be used to express a way of thinking, but it also provides insight into the culture and society with which it is intimately associated. Analysis of address terms in Thai country and city songs yields evidence which confirms that language is, as always, related to culture and society.

Appendix Some examples of forms of address terms found in the lyrics of Thai country and city songs

Patterns of Address Terms	Thai Country songs	Thai city songs
1. Pronoun / Title (+ Final Particle)	/thɯː/ (2 nd Pro.), /thɯː tɕǎː/, /tɕǎːw/ (2 nd Pro.), /tɕǎːw ʔɯːj/, /khun/ (2 nd Pro.), /khun ʔɯːj/, /thâːn/ (2 nd Pro.), /thâːn kha/, /kɛː/ (2 nd Pro.), /lɛŋ/ (2 nd Pro.), /khǎo/ (3 rd Pro.), /naːŋ/ (Lady/Mrs.), /sǎːw/, /sǎːw tɕǎːw/, /mêː sǎːw/, /mêː naːŋ/ (a young lady/Miss), /khun phûːjǐŋ/ (Lady/Madame)	/riam/ (1 nd Pro.), /thɯː/ (2 nd Pro.), /thɯː ʔɯːj/, /tɕǎːw/ (2 nd Pro.), /tɕǎːw ʔɯːj/, /khun/ (2 nd Pro.), /khun khǎː/, /thâːn/ (2 nd Pro.), /khǎo/ (3 rd Pro.), /naːŋ/ (Lady/Mrs.), /sǎːw/ (a young lady/Miss), /noŋ raːm/, /noŋ khraːn/ (a beautiful girl), /júpʰin/ (a beautiful woman)
2. Expressive Term (+ Final Particle)	/khon diː/ (a good person), /khon ŋaːm/, /ŋaːm ŋɔːn/, /ŋaːm khǎm/ (a beautiful girl), /tɕɔːm khwǎn/, /tɕɔːm tɕaj/ (a beloved woman), /taː wǎːn/ (lovely eyes), /nâː mon/ (lovely face), /jɔːt rák/ (my sweetheart), /thîː rák/ (my dear), /thîː rák tɕǎː/, /wǎːn tɕaj/ (my honey), /tɕhɔːm ŋaːm sam tɕheːj/ (a lovely girl)	/kêːw taː/ (my daring, my beloved), /khwǎn tɕaj/, /khwǎn taː/ (my daring, my sweetheart), /khon diː/ (a good person), /duaŋ tɕaj/ (my beloved, my sweetheart), /duaŋ tɕaj ʔɯːj/, /jɔːt rák/ (my sweetheart), /jɔːt jǐŋ/ (the perfect woman), /sùt thîː rák/ (my dearest), /sam tɕheːj/ (an attractive woman), /saːm waj/ (a young woman), /núa thɔːŋ khǔːŋ phîː/ (my golden skin)
3. Kinship Term (+ Final Particle)	/phôː/ (father), /mêː/ (mother), /mêː tɕǎː/, /phǔa/ (husband), /phǔa tɕǎː/, /mia/ (wife), /mia tɕǎː/, /phîː/ (older sibling), /phîː jaː/ (male older sibling), /nóːŋ/ (younger sibling), /nóːŋ tɕǎː/, /nóːŋ ʔɯːj/, /nóːŋ jaː/ (female younger sibling)	/phôː/ father), /mêː/ (mother) /mêː tɕǎː/, /phîː/ (older sibling), /phîː ʔɯːj/, /nóːŋ/ (younger sibling), /nóːŋ ʔɯːj/, /mia/ (wife), /mia ʔɯːj/
4. Name (+ Final Particle)	/tchǎntanaː/, /taːn/, /thom/, /lânthom/, /lǎːw/, /káj tɕǎː/, /riam ʔɯːj/	/khwǎn/, /mûaj/, /mûaj tɕǎː/, /tɕantraː/, /pia/, /pia tɕǎː/, /jǎt rún/
5. Occupational Term	/tchaːw naː/ (farmer), /tchaːw raj/ (agriculturalist), /lúːk tháp ʔakát/, /lúːk tháp fáː/ (Airman), /mêː khá/ (female shopkeeper), /sǎːw suan tɕeːŋ/ (melon gardener), /láj nùm taŋ keː/ (fisherman)	Not found

Appendix Some examples of forms of address terms found in the lyrics of Thai country and city songs (continued)

Patterns of Address Terms	Thai Country songs	Thai city songs
6. Pronoun / Title + Expressive Term	/mê: khon sǔaj/, /mê: tɔɔ:m khwǎn/, /mê: jɔ̌t rák/, /mê: ta: wǎn/	/tɔ̌w jɔ̌t jǐŋ/, /mê: duan tɔaj/, /mê: jɔ̌t rák/
7. Kinship / Title + Expressive Term	/nɔ̌ŋ khon di:/, /nɔ̌ŋ khon ŋam/, /nɔ̌ŋ khon sǔaj/	/nɔ̌ŋ khon di:/, /nɔ̌ŋ kɛ̌:w/, /phɔ̌: nák bun/
8. Name + Expressive Term	Not found	/khwǎn tchu: tɔ̌w/, /jǎ:t rúŋ khon di:/, /kùsùma: jɔ̌t tchú:/

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