

15 Sign Languages and Deaf Identities in Thailand and Viet Nam

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Recent research (Woodward 1996, 1997, 2000, forthcoming) has revealed the existence of at least seven distinct sign languages in Thailand and in Viet Nam. This research has also shown that these seven languages belong to three different language families. Some rather unexpected, surprising relationships have been found among the sign languages, however, that need to be explained. Before attempting this explanation, it is useful to review the sources of comparative data for sign language varieties in Thailand and Viet Nam and summarize the findings of previous comparative lexical research on sign language varieties in those countries.

SOURCES OF DATA

THE TYPE OF LINGUISTIC DATA COLLECTED

The amount of data available on the language varieties determines the historical-comparative technique that should be used to analyze the data. Standard books on historical linguistics (including Crowley 1992; Lehmann 1992) point out that lexicostatistics is often used for determining relationships across unwritten languages that are underdescribed or undescribed and for which relatively limited amounts of data are available. Because all seven sign languages examined in this chapter are unwritten and are either underdescribed or undescribed and because data on six out of the seven languages are limited, lexicostatistics was chosen as the appropriate historical-linguistic technique for analysis.

Lexicostatistics . . . allows us to determine the degree of relationship between two languages, simply by comparing the [core or basic] vocabularies of the languages and determining the degree of similarity between them. . . . [C]ore vocabulary includes items such as pronouns, numerals, body parts, geographical features, basic actions, and basic states. (Crowley 1992, 168–69)

Although the original 200-word Swadesh list is commonly used to compare for cognates in basic vocabulary across spoken languages (Crowley 1992, 170-71), using the same list for sign language research is not desirable because that use may result in slight overestimation of the relationship of closely related sign languages, moderate overestimation of the relationship of loosely related sign languages, and great overestimation of the relationship of historically unrelated sign languages (Woodward 1993a). The original 200-word Swadesh list contains many items such as body parts and pronouns that are represented indexically (often, simply by pointing) in many sign languages. The comparison of these indexic signs (NOSE, EYE, ME) results in a number of false potential cognates.

To avoid these problems of overestimation, a special vocabulary list (see table 15.1) has been used for comparisons of sign language varieties within Thailand (Woodward 1996, 1997), within Viet Nam (Woodward forthcoming), and between Thailand and Viet Nam (Woodward 2000). The list in table 15.1 that removes typically indexic signs is a modification of the 200-word Swadesh list and has proven useful in earlier comparisons of sign languages (Woodward 1978, 1991, 1992a, 1993a, 1993b).

TABLE 15.1 Special Modified Swadesh Vocabulary List for Sign Languages

1. all	26. grass	51. other	76. warm
2. animal	27. green	52. person	77. water
3. bad	28. heavy	53. play	78. wet
4. because	29. how	54. rain	79. what
5. bird	30. hunt	55. red	80. when
6. black	31. husband	56. right/correct	81. where
7. blood	32. ice	57. river	82. white
8. child	33. if	58. rope	83. who
9. count	34. kill	59. salt	84. wide
10. day	35. laugh	60. sea	85. wife
11. die	36. leaf	61. sharp	86. wind
12. dirty	37. lie	62. short	87. with
13. dog	38. live	63. sing	88. woman
14. dry	39. long	64. sit	89. wood
15. dull	40. louse	65. smooth	90. worm
16. dust	41. man	66. snake	91. year
17. earth	42. meat	67. snow	92. yellow
18. egg	43. mother	68. stand	93. full
19. fat/grease	44. mountain	69. star	94. moon
20. father	45. name	70. stone	95. brother
21. feather	46. narrow	71. sun	96. cat
22. fire	47. new	72. tail	97. dance
23. fish	48. night	73. thin	98. pig
24. flower	49. not	74. tree	99. sister
25. good	50. old	75. vomit	100. work

THE BACKGROUND OF THE DEAF CONSULTANTS

Sign translations of the basic vocabulary list in table 15.1 were collected from fluent deaf signers in four signing communities in Thailand and three signing communities in Viet Nam. The locations of these communities are shown on the map in figure 15.1, and the distances between the communities are shown in table 15.2.

The four signing communities in Thailand include (1) the Ban Khor signing

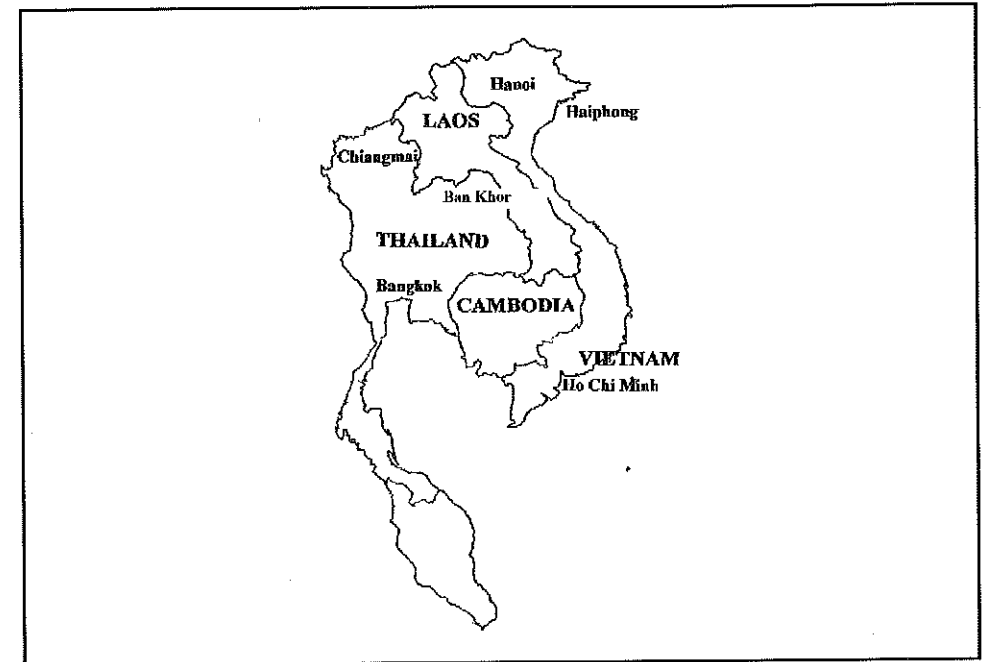


FIGURE 15.1 Map of Thailand

TABLE 15.2 Distances in Miles between the Seven Signing Communities

	Ban Khor	Original Chiangmai	Original Bangkok	Hai Phong	Ha Noi	Ho Chi Minh	Modern Thai
Ban Khor	0	394	381	268	260	474	12*
Original Chiangmai		0	364	519	472	757	364**
Original Bangkok			0	637	615	467	0**
Hai Phong				0	54	695	256*
Ha Noi					0	710	248*
Ho Chi Minh						0	462*
Modern Thai							0

*Nakornpanom City

**Bangkok

community, (2) the original Chiangmai signing community, (3) the original Bangkok signing community, and (4) the modern Thai signing community.

The three signing communities in Viet Nam include (1) the Hai Phong signing community, (2) the Ha Noi signing community, and (3) the Ho Chi Minh City signing community. See table 15.3 for specific information with respect to data collection.

Previous research has compared for cognates in basic vocabulary across the four signing communities in Thailand (Woodward 1996, 1997), across the three signing communities in Viet Nam (Woodward forthcoming), and between each of the signing communities in Viet Nam and each of the sign signing communities in Thailand (Woodward 2000). Table 15.4 shows a summary of the results of the cognate comparisons of the sign language varieties used in the seven communities.

According to standard lexicostatistical guidelines (Crowley 1992; Lehmann 1992), if language varieties have 80% or fewer cognates in basic vocabulary, they should be classified as separate languages. The percentages of cognates in table 15.4 indicate that the seven sign language varieties should be classified as seven separate languages.

Having determined that the seven sign language varieties are seven separate languages, we can now ask which of these seven languages should be classified as belonging to the same language family and which should be classified as belonging to different language families. According to standard lexicostatistical guidelines (Crowley 1992; Lehmann 1992), if languages have from 36% to 80% cognates, they should be classified as belonging to the same language family. Thus, retaining the percentages above 35%, we see the language family relationships shown in table 15.5.

We can summarize the language family relationships in table 15.5 as follows:

1. The seven sign languages in Thailand and in Viet Nam can be classified into three language families.
2. The first language family includes Ban Khor Sign Language. Ban Khor Sign Language is the only known member of this sign language family.
3. The second language family includes Original Chiangmai Sign Language, Old Bangkok Sign Language, and Hai Phong Sign Language.
4. The third language family includes Modern Thai Sign Language, Ha Noi Sign Language, Ho Chi Minh Sign Language, and Hai Phong Sign Language.

PROBLEMS IN USING PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED INFORMATION TO EXPLAIN THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Normally, we would expect to be able to explain these language family relationships by referring to previously published information about relationships between language and nationality, language and geographical proximity, and language and ethnic identity in the communities studied. However, when we attempt to explain findings 2, 3, and 4 in terms of what is already published about language in relation to nationality, geographic proximity, and ethnic identity, we immediately run into problems.

First, traditional notions of nationality, geographical proximity, and ethnic

TABLE 15.3 Summary of Information about the Seven Signing Communities

Signing Community	Location	Age of Community Members	Source of Signs	Year Signs Were Collected
Ban Khor	Certain rice farming Villages in Ban Khor, Northeastern Thailand	All ages	9 females, 5 males (with ages ranging from 13 to 60)	1996
Original Chiangmai	Metro Chiangmai, Northern Thailand	Certain signers above 45	1 male (late forties)	1996
Original Bangkok	Metro Bangkok, Central Thailand	Certain signers above 45	1 male (late fifties) 1 female (late forties)	1996
Modern Thai	Urban areas in Thailand	Under 40, certain signers Above 40	Bangkok: 2 males & 2 females (under 40) Nakornpanom City: 2 males & 2 females (under 40)	1996
Hai Phong	Metro Hai Phong, Northern Viet Nam	All ages	2 females (late twenties) 1 male (early twenties)	1996
Ha Noi	Metro Ha Noi, Northern Viet Nam	All ages	1 male (late twenties)	1997
Ho Chi Minh City	Metro Ho Chi Minh City, Southern Viet Nam	All ages	2 females (early twenties)	1997

TABLE 15.4 Percentages of Cognates across Seven Sign Language Varieties

	Ban Khor	Original Chiangmai	Original Bangkok	Hai Phong	Ha Noi	Ho Chi Minh	Modern Thai
Ban Khor	>81%	34%	33%	26%	19%	18%	24%
Original Chiangmai		>81%	65%	46%	33%	23%	29%
Original Bangkok			>81%	48%	31%	25%	26%
Hai Phong				>81%	54%	54%	40%
Ha Noi					>81%	58%	45%
Ho Chi Minh						>81%	39%
Modern Thai							>81%

TABLE 15.5 Language Family Relationships of Sign Languages in Viet Nam and Sign Languages in Thailand

	Ban Khor	Original Chiangmai	Original Bangkok	Hai Phong	Ha Noi	Ho Chi Minh	Modern Thai
Family 1 Ban Khor	>81%						
Family 2 Original Chiangmai		>81%	65%	46%			
Original Bangkok			>81%	48%			
Hai Phong				>81%			
Family 3 Hai Phong				>81%	54%	54%	40%
Ha Noi					>81%	58%	45%
Ho Chi Minh						>81%	39%
Modern Thai							>81%

identity cannot explain finding 2. Hearing people living in Ban Khor share the same Thai nationality, speak the same language, and belong to the same ethnic group as hearing people living in Nakornpanom City, only 12 miles away from Ban Khor. Yet deaf people in Ban Khor use a completely different sign language in a completely different language family from that used by deaf people in Nakornpanom City, less than 12 miles from Ban Khor.

Second, traditional notions of nationality, geographical proximity, and ethnic identity cannot explain finding 3. Young hearing people living in Hai Phong do not share the same nationality, speak the same language, or share the same ethnic identity as older hearing people living in either Chiangmai or Bangkok. Yet younger deaf people in Hai Phong use a language that belongs to the same language family as that used by older deaf people in Chiangmai and in Bangkok. (Note also that, even though Ha Noi is only 54 miles from Hai Phong, Ha Noi Sign Language does not show the same relationship to Original Chiangmai Sign Language and Original Bangkok Sign Language as Hai Phong Sign Language does.)

Finally, traditional notions of nationality, geographical proximity, and ethnic identity cannot explain finding 4. Young hearing people living in Bangkok do not share the same nationality, speak the same language, or share the same ethnic identity as younger hearing people living in Hai Phong, Ha Noi, or Ho Chi Minh City. Yet younger deaf people in Bangkok use a language that belongs to the same language family as that used by younger deaf people in Hai Phong, Ha Noi, and Ho Chi Minh City. (Note also that, even though Bangkok is closer to Chiangmai (364 miles) than it is to Ho Chi Minh City (467 miles), Ha Noi (615 miles), and Hai Phong (637 miles), Modern Thai Sign Language belongs not to the same language family as Original Chiangmai Sign Language but to the same family as Hai Phong Sign Language, Ha Noi Sign Language, and Ho Chi Minh City Sign Language.)

After having examined traditional notions of nationality, geographic proximity, and ethnic identity from previously published information, we still have not been able to explain the following:

1. Why doesn't Ban Khor Sign Language, which is used in Thailand, belong to a language family that includes other Thai sign languages? Why is it separate from all the other sign languages examined?
2. Why doesn't Modern Thai Sign Language belong to a language family that includes other Thai sign languages? Why does it belong to a language family that appears to be made up mostly of sign languages used in Viet Nam?
3. How can Hai Phong Sign Language, which is used in Viet Nam, belong to two separate language families, especially when one of these language families appears to include only original Thai sign languages?

It is useful at this point to consider the hypothesis that the explanations for the linguistic findings in this chapter can be found in unique events in Deaf histories in Thailand and Viet Nam.

ASPECTS OF DEAF HISTORIES IN THAILAND AND VIET NAM THAT CAN EXPLAIN THE LINGUISTIC RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE SEVEN SIGN LANGUAGES

BAN KHOR

Ban Khor Sign Language has developed over the last 80 years as a unique response to a substantial increase in the number of deaf villagers. Some villages in Ban Khor such as Mu 2 and Mu 10 have more than one deaf person per 100 people,

which is from five to ten times the expected population of one to two in every 1,000 and from five to ten times the actual percentage of deaf people in the other six communities. Deaf and hearing people in Ban Khor have chosen to respond to this increase in ways that are similar to responses of other small communities found in many parts of the world with similarly large proportions of deaf people: the South Pacific (Kuschel 1973), the Caribbean (Washabaugh, Woodward, and De Santis 1978), North America (Groce 1985), Africa (Frishberg 1987), and South America (Johnson 1991; Woodward 1992b). The great majority of hearing people in Ban Khor have adopted either neutral or positive attitudes toward deaf people. As a result of these attitudes, hearing people and deaf people have developed a purely indigenous sign language for use in the local area—a sign language that developed without any significant outside contact and that is maintained without outside contact and influence. This sign language is used by the overwhelming majority of deaf people in Ban Khor as their first and only language and by the large majority of hearing people bilingually. Ethnographic field observations would suggest that, although both hearing and deaf people are aware of other sign languages in Thailand, they have no desire to change or replace their indigenous sign language for one that did not develop inside their own local community.

In summary, Ban Khor Sign Language patterns differently from other sign languages in Thailand because the history of deaf people in Ban Khor is not shared by Thai deaf people who use Original Chiangmai Sign Language, by Thai deaf people who use Original Bangkok Sign Language, or even by Thai deaf people 12 miles away in Nakornpanom City who use Modern Thai Sign Language.

MODERN THAI SIGN LANGUAGE

Modern Thai Sign Language has developed over the last 50 years as a unique response to the introduction of an almost exclusively hearing-controlled centralized system of formal education for Thai deaf people (see Reilly 1995). During the development of this centralized system, several highly influential Thai hearing people introduced American Sign Language (ASL) vocabulary into the emergent educational system. This introduction of ASL vocabulary into a school deaf population almost totally lacking in deaf children of deaf parents has resulted in a 52% absorption rate of ASL cognates into basic vocabulary in Modern Thai Sign Language in the last 50 years (Woodward 1996).

Given the great amount of foreign contact and borrowing that has influenced Modern Thai Sign Language's development and use and the lack of this contact and borrowing in other sign languages in Thailand, little doubt should remain as to why Modern Thai Sign Language is not closely related to any other sign language in Thailand and why it belongs to a language family separate from any other sign language in Thailand. But why then does Modern Thai Sign Language appear to belong to the same family as sign languages in Vietnam?

The relationship of Modern Thai Sign Language to sign languages in Vietnam in fact is not a result of direct contact but of indirect contact. Ha Noi Sign Language, Ho Chi Minh Sign Language, and Hai Phong Sign Language all show very strong influences from French Sign Language, which was introduced into Vietnamese schools for the deaf. French Sign Language and American Sign Lan-

guage have a 61% rate of shared cognates in basic vocabulary and, therefore, belong to the same language family (Woodward 1978). Thus, the influence of ASL on Modern Thai Sign Language and the influence of French Sign Language on Ha Noi Sign Language, Ho Chi Minh Sign Language, and Hai Phong Sign Language result in a large number of shared cognates between Modern Thai Sign Language and sign languages in Vietnam.

In summary, Modern Thai Sign Language patterns differently from other sign languages in Thailand because the history of deaf people who use Modern Thai Sign Language is not shared by Thai deaf people who use Original Chiangmai Sign Language or by those who use Original Bangkok Sign Language or Ban Khor Sign Language. At the same time, Modern Thai Sign Language patterns similarly to Ha Noi Sign Language, Hai Phong Sign Language, and Ho Chi Minh Sign Language because all of these sign languages have been strongly influenced by one or more sign languages from the French Sign Language family.

HAI PHONG SIGN LANGUAGE

Ha Noi Sign Language, Ho Chi Minh Sign Language, and Hai Phong Sign Language have all three been influenced by French Sign Language. However, Hai Phong signers, perhaps because of their relative isolation from Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City, have managed to preserve more original Southeast Asian signs than the other signers in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Even when Hai Phong has borrowed a French sign for a vocabulary item, Hai Phong signers sometimes keep the original Southeast Asian sign along with the French sign. This practice has resulted in pairs of cognates for a number of words. One sign in the cognate pair is cognate with original sign languages in Thailand and one with French Sign Language. Examples of this pairing can be found in signs for WIFE, HUSBAND, and PIG, among others. Because of these pairs, Hai Phong Sign Language shows strong similarities to Southeast Asian sign languages that have not been influenced by French Sign Language or ASL (Original Chiangmai Sign Language and Original Bangkok Sign Language) and also shows strong similarities to Southeast Asian sign languages that have been influenced by French Sign Language or ASL (Ha Noi Sign Language, Ho Chi Minh Sign Language, and Modern Thai Sign Language). When we put all of these facts together, an interesting picture of linguistic relationships emerges. This picture is graphically represented in figure 15.2.

TYPES OF SIGN LANGUAGES IN THAILAND AND VIET NAM

Figure 15.2 suggests that four types of sign languages are found in Thailand and Viet Nam: "indigenous," "original," "link," and "modern." Each of these types results from differences in the history of deaf people in the signing community, especially in relation to the amount and type of outside contact the signing communities have had.

Indigenous sign languages like Ban Khor Sign Language developed independently of contact with other Southeast Asian Sign Languages and independently of contact with Western sign languages such as French or American sign lan-

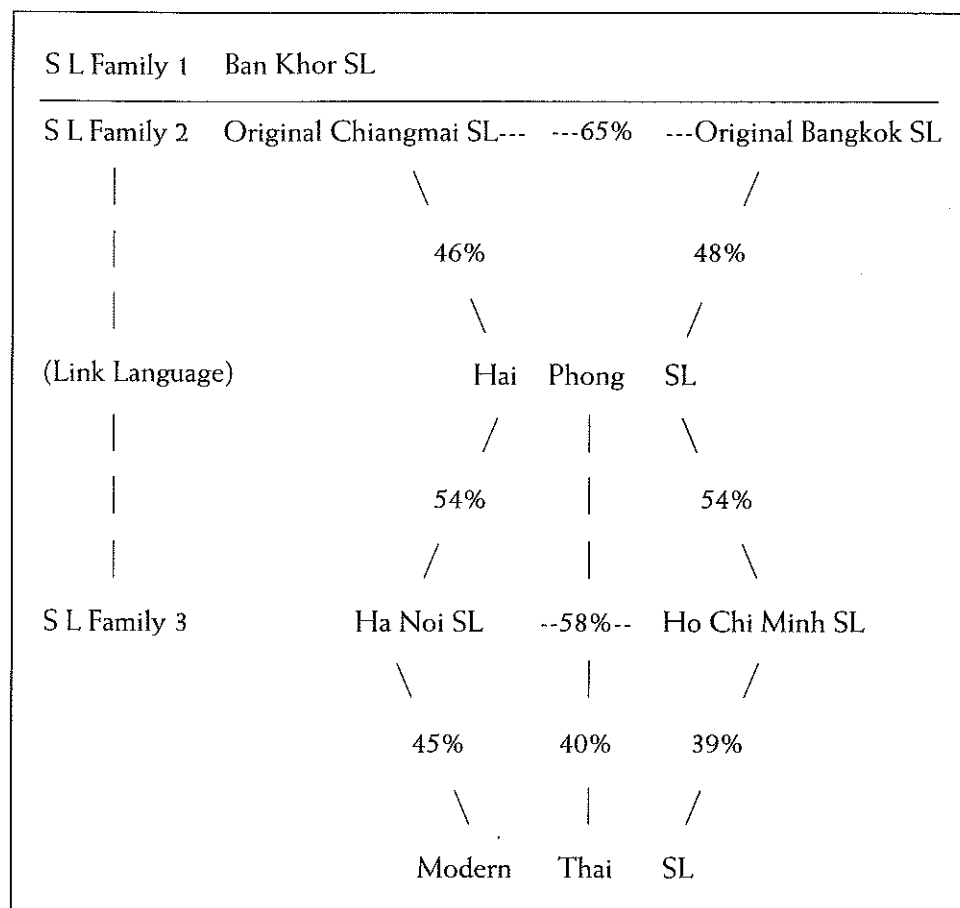


FIGURE 15.2. Linguistic relationships between sign languages in Thailand and Viet Nam

guages. Therefore, indigenous sign languages will belong to different language families from original, link, and modern sign languages.

Original sign languages like Original Chiangmai Sign Language and Original Bangkok Sign Language developed out of contact with other Southeast Asian sign languages and independently of contact with Western sign languages. Therefore, original sign languages will belong to different language families from indigenous and modern sign languages and will probably be grouped with link sign languages.

Link sign languages like Hai Phong Sign Language developed out of contact with other Southeast Asian sign languages and Western sign languages. Link sign languages show strong relationships to both original sign languages and modern sign languages and will probably appear to belong to an original sign language family and to a modern sign language family. Thus, link languages can be viewed as linking two separate language families and showing a continuum of historical relationship between the two families.

Modern sign languages like Ha Noi Sign Language, Ho Chi Minh Sign Lan-

guage, and Modern Thai Sign Language developed out of contact with other Southeast Asian sign languages and Western sign languages. Modern sign languages, however, show less relationship to original sign languages than they do to Western sign languages and will belong to different language families from indigenous and original sign languages.

DIFFERENCES IN THE LINGUISTIC AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES OF DEAF PEOPLE IN THAILAND AND VIET NAM WHO USE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SIGN LANGUAGES

Deaf people who use the four types of sign languages in Thailand and in Viet Nam display clear differences in linguistic and social identity. Major differences can be summarized by asking and answering four questions.

First, do deaf people maintain a separate linguistic identity by using a (sign) language that the majority of hearing people in the community do not know?

For six of the seven situations, the answer is yes. In only one case, Ban Khor, where an indigenous sign language is used, is the answer no. Deaf people in Ban Khor do not maintain a separate linguistic identity from that of hearing people in the area because the great majority of hearing people in Ban Khor know and use Ban Khor Sign Language.

Second, do deaf people maintain a separate social identity by creating, maintaining, or participating in deaf social institutions such as deaf schools, deaf clubs, or deaf associations?

For four of the seven situations (all of the link and modern sign languages) the answer is yes because deaf people in these four situations attend special schools for the deaf and maintain deaf clubs. For the other three situations (all of the indigenous and original sign languages), the answer is no. Specifically, in the case of the indigenous sign language situation, deaf people in Ban Khor simply do not have and do not want to have a culturally Deaf social identity. Deaf people in Ban Khor have traveled to nearby Nakornpanom City and to Bangkok; have met culturally Deaf Thai adults who use Modern Thai Sign Language; and have had the opportunity to learn Modern Thai Sign Language, to attend special schools for deaf people, and to enter the national Thai Deaf Community. However, deaf people in Ban Khor have expressed in ethnographic interviews that they do not identify with and do not want to identify with culturally Deaf people in Thailand and that they have no desire to form a social, cultural, or linguistic group that is distinct from hearing people in Ban Khor. In the case of the original sign language situations (Original Chiangmai Sign Language and Original Bangkok Sign Language), deaf people did not attend deaf schools because no special schools for deaf people existed in Thailand at that time (approximately 50 years ago). Users of original sign languages in Thailand also did not establish and maintain deaf clubs or other formal deaf organizations.

Third, do deaf people organize "Deaf-only" social events where the norm is for hearing people, especially nonsigners, to be excluded?

For three of the seven situations (all of the modern sign languages) the answer is yes because deaf clubs in these three situations organize many of their events exclusively for their deaf membership. For the other four situations (all of the indigenous, original, and link sign languages) the answer is no. In the case of Ban

Khor, an indigenous sign language, all social events include hearing and deaf people on an equal basis. At these events, deaf and hearing people converse and socialize freely and on an equal basis in Ban Khor Sign Language.

In the case of the original sign languages, it is clear that deaf people and hearing people attended many of the same social functions. Because this interaction occurred approximately 50 years ago, it is somewhat difficult to determine the type and extent of interaction of hearing and deaf people. However, because relatively few hearing people signed, deaf and hearing people probably did not often converse at these events but, rather, interacted in other ways.

In the case of Hai Phong Sign Language, a link language, I was able to attend a typical meeting of the Hai Phong Deaf Club, which shows a particularly interesting inclusion of hearing people. At this evening meeting, about 60 deaf people and about 15 hearing people, most of whom could not sign, were present. The first half was a business meeting conducted in Hai Phong Sign Language by deaf people. During this time, most of the hearing people sat in the back of the room and talked quietly to each other. After the business meeting, the deaf and hearing people took part in group and individual dancing for the rest of the evening. No one was left out of any dance, everyone was expected to participate, and even reluctant dancers such as myself were gently pulled out on the dance floor by small groups of deaf people. There was little conversation and little need for conversation, but deaf people and hearing people in Hai Phong truly seemed to enjoy this type of intergroup interaction.

Finally, we consider the fourth question, do deaf people have a national sense of deaf identity?

For one of the seven situations (Modern Thai Sign Language) the answer is yes because Modern Thai Sign Language is the only national sign language of the seven languages and because it is the only community associated with a national association of deaf people, the National Association of the Deaf in Thailand (see Suwanarat et al. 1986; Suwanarat et al. 1990). For the other six sign languages, the answer is currently no.

At this point, it will be helpful to summarize the differences in linguistic and social identity in chart form. Table 15.6 shows answers to the four questions in a graphic format. The table shows that the answers to the four questions fit into an implicational scale. This implicational scale can be explained as follows:

- The existence of a separate national identity implies the existence of separate Deaf-only events (Modern Thai Sign Language), but not vice versa (other modern sign languages).
- The existence of separate Deaf-only events implies the existence of separate Deaf institutions (all the modern sign languages), but not vice versa (link sign languages).
- The existence of separate Deaf institutions implies the existence of a separate linguistic identity for Deaf people (link and modern sign languages), but not vice versa (original sign languages).
- Finally, the implicational scale shows that the existence of a sign language does not imply the existence of a separate Deaf linguistic identity (Ban Khor Sign Language).

TABLE 15.6 Summary of Differences in Linguistic and Social Identity

Language Name	Language Type	Q1 Separate Deaf Linguistic Identity	Q2 Separate Deaf Social Identity With Deaf Social Institutions	Q3 Separate Deaf Only Events	Q4 National Deaf Identity
Ban Khor Original	Indigenous	No	No	No	No
Chiangmai Original	Original	Yes	No	No	No
Bangkok Original	Original	Yes	No	No	No
Hai Phong	Link	Yes	Yes	No	No
Ha Noi	Modern	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Ho Chi Minh	Modern	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Modern Thai	Modern	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In summary, this chapter has shown the following:

1. The sign language family relationships in Thailand and in Viet Nam differ from the spoken language family relationships in the same communities.
2. The sign language family relationships are not explainable from what is known about language in relation to the nationality, geographic proximity, and ethnic identity of hearing people in Thailand and in Viet Nam.
3. The sign language family relationships are explainable from what is known about unique aspects of Deaf histories in Thailand and in Viet Nam.
4. A separate sign language is a necessary condition for the development of separate Deaf linguistic and social identities (all original, link, and modern sign languages).
5. A separate sign language is not a sufficient condition for the development of separate Deaf linguistic and social identities (indigenous sign languages such as Ban Khor).
6. A separate Deaf linguistic identity can develop without formal social institutions (such as schools and clubs) for deaf people (original sign languages such as Original Chiangmai Sign Language and Original Bangkok Sign Language).
7. The existence of formal social organizations of deaf people is a necessary condition for the existence of "Deaf-only" events and the general exclusion of hearing people, especially nonsigning hearing people, from these events (all modern sign languages such as Ha Noi Sign Language, Ho Chi Minh Sign Language, and Modern Thai Sign Language).

8. The existence of formal social organizations of deaf people is not a sufficient condition for the existence of "Deaf-only" events and the general exclusion of hearing people, especially nonsigning hearing people, from these events (link sign languages such as Hai Phong Sign Language).

In addition to the eight findings discussed above, the linguistic and ethnographic data on these communities suggest the following additional trends for the four types of sign languages.

Indigenous sign languages tend to occur in relatively small village communities where there is a larger proportion of deaf people than expected and where a large proportion of hearing people have contact with deaf people and learn the signing that naturally developed. In indigenous signing communities, deaf people are well integrated into the village community. Most people in the village have similar occupations (farmers, fishermen, etc.), and deaf people have equal access to these occupations. Most deaf people do not attend special schools for deaf people.

Most deaf people do not participate in formal associations of deaf people. Most deaf people in the village do not want to form or belong to a separate deaf community. Because of their full participation in village life, they do not see themselves as intrinsically different from hearing people in the village. Thus, it is the norm for deaf people who use an indigenous sign language not to form a separate community or to have a linguistic and social identity that is intrinsically different from that of hearing people in the same community.

Original sign languages tend to occur in larger, more urban areas where few hearing people learn to use the signing that is used by deaf people in the area. Thus, it tends to be the norm for deaf people who use an original sign language to have a linguistic identity that differs in important ways from the linguistic identity of hearing people in the same urban area. Original sign languages and the linguistic identities associated with them tend to be regionally limited. Although some contact may occur among signers from different regions in the country (or between neighboring countries) and although this contact may result in closely related sign languages and linguistic identities, this contact is not extensive enough to result in deaf people having the same language and linguistic identity. In addition, it appears that these kinds of regional communities do not consider systematic contact with other deaf communities—nationally or internationally—to be a high priority. In original sign language communities, there have been no reported efforts to establish formal separate institutions of or for deaf people, including special schools, regional associations of deaf people, a national association of deaf people, or to establish a national Deaf identity or sign language. When schools or organizations are established with link or modern sign languages, deaf users of original sign languages tend to gradually give up their original sign language and linguistic identity for a new identity based on a link sign language or on a modern sign language introduced into the school system.

Link sign languages, which are partial mixtures of original sign languages with foreign sign languages (typically French Sign Language, American Sign Language, or both), have been introduced in schools in relatively isolated urban areas such as Hai Phong. Link languages preserve many older forms that still connect sign languages in modern sign language families with certain sign languages in

original sign language families. Although link languages are associated with schools for deaf people and with the formation of local and regional deaf clubs and associations, users of link sign languages may still retain a significant amount of deaf-hearing interaction in their social events.

Modern sign languages, like link sign languages, have resulted in the mixing of original sign languages with foreign sign languages, typically French Sign Language, American Sign Language, or both. In most situations, modern sign languages have replaced original sign languages and have endangered the existence of original sign languages. Modern sign languages are often promoted through schools for deaf people in Southeast Asia (Reilly 1995), and in general, modern sign languages tend to be used in somewhat wider regions than original sign languages. Users of modern sign languages tend to establish formal social institutions that promote contact and interaction with other deaf associations. These associations often start at the local level through schools and ultimately open the door for the establishment of a national Deaf identity and a national sign language.

It is important to note that a national identity for deaf people most probably would not have developed in Thailand or would not be in the process of developing in Viet Nam without the establishment of a national association of deaf people, and the establishment of a national association of deaf people would most likely not have developed in Thailand or in Viet Nam without international contact with other national or international associations of deaf people.

In Thailand, the formation of local associations led rather quickly to contact with national associations of deaf people outside of Thailand and with the World Federation of the Deaf. This contact was fostered by foreign experts working in Thailand. The contact, in turn, led to the establishment of the National Association of the Deaf in Thailand and to the development of a national linguistic and social identity for Deaf people in Thailand. While the linguistic and social shift to a national Deaf identity has provided a nationally unifying force for empowerment of Deaf people in Thailand, ironically, it has endangered at the same time an important part of Thai Deaf history and culture—the original sign languages in Thailand that developed internally in Thailand with little, if any, outside influence.

The movement toward a national association of deaf people in Vietnam and toward the development of a national Deaf identity in Vietnam has moved at a slower pace. However, Vietnam is now poised to establish a national association of deaf people, which can be attributed in large part to recent contact with the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (the Asia Pacific regional representative for the World Federation of the Deaf) and the National Association of the Deaf in Thailand. This contact was fostered through a meeting in Ha Noi that was sponsored in part by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP).

In fact, the sign language data from Hai Phong were collected at that meeting in Ha Noi. It was not surprising to find Deaf people from Viet Nam arguing for "standardization" of regional sign languages into one national sign language. It was also not surprising to find hearing people in Viet Nam suggesting importation of vocabulary from Western sign languages, including American Sign Language. Nevertheless, it was refreshing to note that all international participants

(deaf and hearing) at the conference strongly recommended intensive study and documentation of sign languages in Viet Nam before any formal language policy be considered.

After discussion, participants from Viet Nam and international participants were able to unanimously agree on strategy. In the report of the meeting in Viet Nam, they resolved to do the following:

- (8) Encourage the documentation and description of Vietnamese sign language(s), (and) the development of reference materials related to Vietnamese sign language(s), including dictionaries, grammatical handbooks and sign language instructional materials, and the formal training of Vietnamese sign language interpreters. (UNESCAP 1996, 1-3)

The formal documentation and description of sign languages in Viet Nam began in early 1999. Linguistic work related to sign languages in Viet Nam will include formal training in basic sign language linguistic research for deaf people as part of the process of documentation and description of sign languages in Viet Nam. The linguistic research will have two primary foci. One primary focus will be the study of any remaining original sign languages in Viet Nam. The second primary focus will be the study of modern "link" sign languages such as Hai Phong Sign Language, which preserve older forms and which still link certain sign languages in modern sign language families with certain sign languages in original sign language families.

At this point, it remains uncertain what effect the establishment of a national association of deaf people in Viet Nam will have on distinct sign languages in Vietnam such as Hai Phong Sign Language, Ha Noi Sign Language and Ho Chi Minh Sign Language. Researchers hope that the training in sign language linguistics provided to Deaf people in Viet Nam will help lessen or eliminate potential negative effects on these sign languages.

In conclusion, although we have gained some knowledge about the relationships of linguistic and social identities of deaf people in Southeast Asia, a great deal of work remains. Other related indigenous sign languages may be found in other small villages with large deaf populations in the same general region as Ban Khor in Northeast Thailand. For example, the villages of Pla Bag and Bang Na, which are relatively close to Ban Khor, also appear to have larger deaf populations than expected, and Pla Bag and Bang Na may have sign language varieties related to Ban Khor. In addition, other indigenous sign language families may be found in Thailand, in Viet Nam, or in both countries. Researchers also will probably find other sign language families of the indigenous type spread throughout Southeast Asia. For example, Miller (forthcoming) reports an indigenous sign language community in Bali, Indonesia.

In relation to original sign languages, it is likely that there are original sign languages in the northeastern and in the southern parts of Thailand in addition to those found in Chiangmai and Bangkok. In addition, an Original Hai Phong Sign Language, an Original Ha Noi Sign Language, and an Original Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) Sign Language most likely were in use before French Sign Language had an effect on sign languages in Viet Nam. Other original sign languages have also probably been used in other parts of Southeast Asia. Some of these

original sign languages may still exist among older signers. Some probably have already died out. These original sign languages may belong to the same original sign language family as those in Thailand and Viet Nam or to another original sign language family or families.

With respect to link sign languages, the possibility exists that, in addition to Hai Phong Sign Language, other link languages will be found in relatively isolated deaf communities in Viet Nam. Other link sign languages may also be found in other countries in Southeast Asia. These link languages are very important because they provide important clues about the history of sign languages and Deaf identities in Southeast Asia.

Gaps also remain in our knowledge of modern sign languages, but these gaps are not so crucial at the present time. Modern sign languages are mixtures, probably creolizations, of original sign languages with French Sign Language, American Sign Language, or both. Modern sign languages have already replaced original sign languages among younger signers in Thailand and in Viet Nam as well as in Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines and have endangered the continued existence of original sign languages. Within 50 years, the likelihood is high that all original sign languages in Southeast Asia will be extinct, dying out with the users who still remember them.

What is needed at this point is a large-scale, in-depth sociolinguistic study of sign languages in Southeast Asia combined with an extensive ethnographic study of Deaf identities in Southeast Asia. The combined study must look at a large number of deaf people who have competence in one or more sign languages in Southeast Asia. These deaf people must be selected from various stratified age groups and various regions of Southeast Asia, and these deaf people should represent various deaf and Deaf social identities in Southeast Asia. This research needs to include communities using original, indigenous, and modern sign languages and needs to focus primarily on communities where sign languages are most endangered and where link languages are used. Link languages, which preserve older forms and which still link certain sign languages in modern sign language families with certain sign languages in original sign language families, provide important clues about the history of sign languages and deaf identities in Southeast Asia.

At this point, we know that the great majority of users of original sign languages in most countries in Southeast Asia are approximately 50 years old. If the documentation of these original sign languages is not completed in one generation, these sign languages quite likely will be lost to linguistic study forever because we currently have no records of these sign languages.

If original sign languages in Southeast Asia die before they can be properly documented and described, Deaf people in Southeast Asia will lose a valuable part of their history, all Southeast Asian people will lose a valuable part of their national or regional heritage, and the rest of us will lose one of the important keys to understanding the history of sign languages and deaf identities in Southeast Asia.

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