

Digital Thai Language Change in Contemporary Society through Communication Identity and Cultural Transformation

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ABSTRACT : This academic article examines language change in contemporary Thai society through the interrelated dimensions of digital communication, identity construction, and cultural transformation. It argues that Thai language is not being weakened by digital media; rather, it is expanding into new forms, functions, and domains of use. From sociolinguistic and digital communication perspectives, the article explores Thai speakers' linguistic adaptation to online platforms and digital communities. The discussion shows that abbreviations, slang, English-Thai code-mixing, emojis, memes, hashtags, Romanized Thai, dialect use, and creative spelling are meaningful linguistic resources for expressing emotion, humor, intimacy, modernity, social stance, regional belonging, gender identity, class position, and lifestyle. The article further examines tensions between informal digital Thai and Standard Thai in terms of accuracy, politeness, public discourse, education, and cultural continuity. While digital language practices encourage creativity, participation, and social connection, they may also produce miscommunication, conflict, cyberbullying, language anxiety, and unequal participation caused by the digital divide. The article proposes that Thai language education should move beyond a simple opposition between "correct" and "incorrect" language by promoting register awareness, digital literacy, ethical communication, and multilingual competence. These findings indicate the need for future Thai language policy and pedagogy to balance Standard Thai, regional diversity, digital innovation, and responsible public communication. Overall, the article concludes that digital language change in Thai society should be understood as sociocultural adaptation rather than linguistic decline. Thai remains a living, flexible, and culturally meaningful language as speakers negotiate tradition, modernity, identity, and global digital culture.

KEYWORDS- Language change; Thai digital communication; Identity construction; Cultural transformation

I. INTRODUCTION

Language change in contemporary Thai society has become an important academic issue because language reflects communication, social values, cultural identity, technological adaptation, and power relations. Thai has never been a static system; it has changed continuously through historical contact, regional diversity, modernization, education, media, and globalization. In the Thai context, language change can be observed in vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, discourse style, politeness markers, address terms, code-mixing, and the increasing use of English and other foreign elements in daily communication. Prasithratsint (2002) explains that Thai society is characterized by linguistic diversity, social variation, and language development, showing that Thai is shaped by both internal linguistic processes and external social forces. Similarly, Khanittanan (2004) shows that Thai has historically developed through contact with neighboring languages and cultures, particularly in the Chao Phraya Basin. Pittayaporn (2009) further demonstrates that Tai languages have undergone systematic phonological transformation, confirming that language change is a natural linguistic process rather than an abnormal deviation from standard language. In addition, Naksakul et al. (2005) emphasize that Thai usage, spelling, and word meaning are closely related to social understanding and cultural appropriateness, while Premsrirat et al. (2004) show that Thailand is ethnolinguistically diverse. Therefore, Thai language change must be understood through both Standard Thai and the multilingual realities of Thai communities.

In the digital age, Thai society has experienced a rapid transformation in communication practices. Digital communication through Facebook, LINE, X, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, online forums, and messaging applications has reshaped how Thai people write, speak, read, interact, and represent themselves. Language in digital spaces is often shorter, faster, more creative, and more multimodal than traditional written language. Thai users frequently combine Thai script, Romanized Thai, English words, abbreviations, emojis, stickers, hashtags, memes, and sound-based spellings to express emotion, humor, intimacy, and group identity. Crystal (2001) argues that the Internet does not destroy language but creates new communicative environments in which users develop new styles and linguistic creativity. Androutsopoulos (2014) similarly explains that digital media contributes to sociolinguistic change because users adapt their linguistic repertoires to mediated contexts. In Thailand, digital communication has created new norms among young people, professionals, fan groups, gamers, influencers, political communities, and local communities.

The relationship between social change and language use in Thailand can be understood through sociolinguistic theories of variation and change. Labov (1994) argues that linguistic change is socially patterned and that variation among speakers provides evidence of change in progress. This applies to Thai society, where age, gender, region, education, occupation, class, ethnicity, and digital participation influence language use. Younger Thai speakers may use more English loanwords, internet slang, shortened forms, and playful spelling, while older speakers may prefer standard forms and formal registers. Trudgill (2002) emphasizes that language variation is connected with social contact, networks, and community interaction. In Thailand, digital networks have expanded social contact beyond local communities, allowing new words and expressions to circulate rapidly. Aitchison (2012) also explains that language change should not be judged simply as progress or decay, but as a natural consequence of human communication.

This article examines language change in contemporary Thai society by focusing on digital communication, identity, and cultural transformation. It argues that digital language does not replace Thai language; rather, it expands the ways Thai speakers construct meaning, identity, and social relationships. New linguistic forms such as English–Thai code-mixing, online slang, creative spelling, emojis, memes, and hybrid expressions perform important social functions, including expressing emotion, creating humor, signaling intimacy, showing modernity, and marking group membership. Therefore, language change in Thai digital society should be understood as social and cultural adaptation rather than linguistic decline. This perspective helps move

the study of Thai language beyond the issue of correctness and toward a deeper understanding of language as a living system shaped by social interaction, cultural negotiation, and technological transformation.

II. THAI SOCIETY AND THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF COMMUNICATION

Communication in contemporary Thai society has been transformed by social change, technology, globalization, and digital media. Traditional communication, once shaped by hierarchy, politeness, community relations, institutions, and mass media, has shifted toward immediate, interactive, public, and multimodal digital networks. This transformation affects language form, tone, function, and social meaning. Thai communication should therefore be viewed as part of broader social change, shaped by linguistic diversity, expressive needs, globalization, cultural change, and technological advancement (Prasithratsint, 2002; Dechwilai, 2024).

Digital technology has become central to everyday communication among Thai people. Mobile phones, messaging applications, social networking platforms, video platforms, search engines, online learning systems, and digital payment services have changed how people maintain relationships, study, work, exchange information, consume entertainment, participate in politics, and present identity. Herring (2001) defines computer-mediated discourse as communication produced through networked technologies, a concept highly relevant to Thai digital interaction today. Baym (2015) also emphasizes that digital communication does not replace social relationships but reorganizes how people create, maintain, and interpret personal connections. In Thailand, this is evident in LINE family groups, Facebook communities, TikTok trends, YouTube learning, and workplace communication through online platforms. Naksakul et al. (2005) stress the importance of appropriate Thai usage and meaning; however, digital appropriateness is increasingly determined by platform, relationship, speed, audience, and purpose.

Social media has also become a new public space in Thai society. Unlike traditional public communication, which was largely controlled by newspapers, television, universities, state agencies, and formal organizations, social media enables ordinary users to publish opinions, respond to public issues, criticize institutions, mobilize groups, create trends, and circulate alternative narratives. Castells (2010) explains that network society is shaped by information flows across social, economic, political, and cultural networks. Ramasoota (2016) shows that online spaces in post-2014 coup Thailand were linked to social surveillance and cyber-witch hunting, while Sinpeng (2021) demonstrates that digital media has played a major role in political mobilization and polarization. Papacharissi (2015) further argues that digital publics are affective publics, where emotion and shared feeling shape online political and social communication.

The shift from traditional communication to digital interaction has reshaped Thai communicative behavior. Although indirectness, politeness, hierarchy, face-saving, and respect for seniority remain central to Thai communication, these values are now expressed through digital forms such as particles, emojis, stickers, delayed responses, softening expressions, and playful spelling. Rather than weakening standard language, digital communication fosters linguistic creativity (Crystal, 2001), while mediatization encourages sociolinguistic change as speakers adapt language to media environments (Androutsopoulos, 2014). Contemporary Thai speakers therefore move across formal, informal, regional, English-mixed, political, professional, and fandom-based styles, making Thai communication increasingly immediate, interactive, multimodal, networked, and identity-oriented. This transformation is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Flow of Communication Change in Contemporary Thai Society

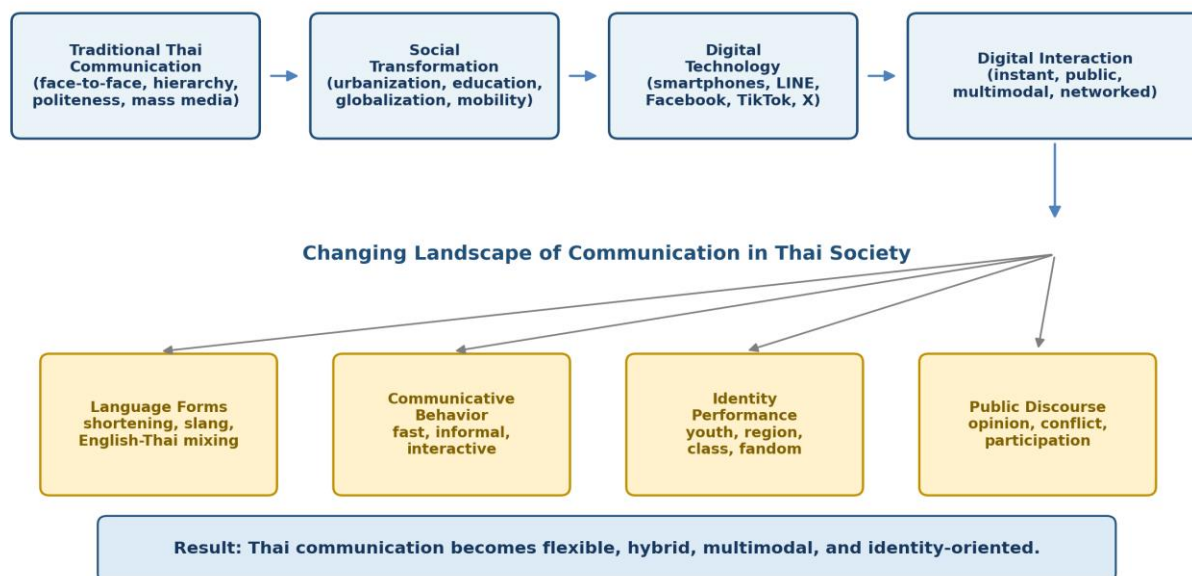


Figure 1 illustrates the shift in Thai communication from traditional face-to-face interaction to digital, networked, and multimodal communication. Traditional communication was shaped by hierarchy, politeness, community relations, and mass media, while social change and digital technology have introduced new platforms such as LINE, Facebook, TikTok, X, and other online spaces. These platforms have reshaped language forms, communicative behavior, identity expression, and public discourse. The figure indicates that this transformation is not merely technological but also social, as Thai speakers adapt language to speed, visibility, creativity, and participation in digital society. The key dimensions of this change are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Changes in Thai Society and Communication

Dimension	Traditional Communication	Digital Communication	Main Implication
Channel	Face-to-face, print, radio, television	LINE, Facebook, TikTok, X, Instagram, YouTube	Communication becomes instant and platform-based.
Language style	Formal, hierarchical, context-bound	Short, hybrid, multimodal, emotionally expressive	Users shift between standard and informal registers.
Social relation	Family, school, community, institution	Online groups, fan communities, influencers, public networks	Identity is performed across multiple audiences.
Public space	Institutionally controlled public communication	User-generated posts, hashtags, memes, comments	Participation expands, but conflict also increases.
Competence needed	Politeness and standard language accuracy	Digital appropriateness, multimodal literacy, ethical awareness	Speakers need flexible communicative competence.

Table 1 summarizes the major contrasts between traditional and digital communication in Thai society. It shows that communication has changed in five dimensions: channel, language style, social relation, public space, and communicative competence. Traditional communication relied more on face-to-face interaction, hierarchy, and institutional channels, whereas digital communication is faster, more interactive, multimodal, and user-generated. The table also highlights that digital language is not simply informal language; it requires new skills,

including register awareness, platform awareness, multimodal literacy, and ethical communication. Therefore, contemporary Thai speakers must communicate appropriately across both formal and digital contexts.

III. THE EVOLUTION OF THAI LANGUAGE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Thai language in the digital age reflects the dynamic relationship among language, technology, identity, and everyday communication. New words, slang, abbreviations, and online expressions emerge from youth culture, media, games, fandoms, politics, consumer culture, and viral trends. Rather than representing linguistic decline, these forms perform social functions such as humor, emotion, intimacy, group identity, mitigation, and digital self-presentation. Digital Thai should therefore be examined as social variation and linguistic adaptation, consistent with studies on language change, internet language, and online community discourse (Prasithratsint, 2002; Rungruang, 2012; Choomthong, 2017).

Abbreviations and shortened forms are also important in Thai digital communication. Because online interaction often involves fast typing, small screens, short attention spans, and rapid message exchange, users frequently shorten words, omit letters, reduce syllables, use initials, or mix Thai and English abbreviations. These forms save time, reduce formality, create group identity, and make messages sound conversational. Dechwilai, Sukchuay, and Osiri (2024) explain that Thai online language change is influenced by internal factors, such as ease of pronunciation and emotional expression, as well as external factors, including globalization, technological development, and social change. Baron (2008) argues that online and mobile communication changes how people read, write, speak, and listen, but such change does not necessarily destroy literacy. Therefore, abbreviated digital Thai should be understood as context-specific language rather than a replacement for standard Thai.

Informal Thai language use has become common in online spaces because digital platforms often blur the boundary between private and public communication. Facebook comments, LINE chats, TikTok captions, and X posts encourage casual tone, playful spelling, expressive particles, emojis, stickers, memes, and spoken-like sentence endings. Kanokpermpoon (2025) found that Thai university students view social media as personal space, society, information, communication, addiction, and necessity, showing its strong connection with self-expression and everyday life. Androutsopoulos (2014) argues that media environments shape sociolinguistic change because users adapt language to platform-specific contexts.

Another major feature is the blending of spoken and written Thai. Digital writing often imitates speech, tone, rhythm, emotion, and interpersonal feeling. Users may repeat letters, extend sounds, alter spelling, or add emojis to show friendliness, sarcasm, hesitation, excitement, or politeness. Herring (2001) and Crystal (2001) explain that computer-mediated communication often combines features of speech and writing. Overall, digital Thai should not be viewed as the decline of standard Thai, but as the expansion of Thai communicative resources. It demonstrates that Thai remains alive, adaptive, flexible, and culturally meaningful in response to technological change, social transformation, and new forms of identity.

IV. THAI LANGUAGE, ENGLISH INFLUENCE, AND GLOBAL DIGITAL CULTURE

English loanwords, Thai-English code-mixing, and hybrid expressions have become highly visible features of Thai digital communication because contemporary Thai speakers increasingly encounter English through technology, education, business, tourism, entertainment, advertising, and global online media. In digital spaces, English words often appear in Thai conversations about lifestyle, fashion, work, sport, education, and social issues. These words may be written in English script, transliterated into Thai script, adapted to Thai pronunciation, or combined with Thai grammatical patterns. Saengin and Manying (2024) show that English loanwords in Thai new-word dictionaries reflect social change and are integrated through transliteration, translation, and coinage. Similarly, Rungrojsuwan (2023) explains that English borrowing and code-mixing in Thai are shaped by language contact, meaning, and social use. Thus, English loanwords are not simply foreign intrusions; they are linguistic resources that Thai speakers localize for new communicative needs.

Code-mixing and code-switching between Thai and English are also central to contemporary Thai communication. Poplack (1980) views code-switching as a systematic bilingual practice rather than evidence of

linguistic weakness. In Thailand, Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003) found that English-Thai mixing appeared widely in television programs, especially through English nouns and nativized forms. This pattern has expanded into digital communication, where users insert English words to sound modern, humorous, professional, fashionable, or emotionally expressive. Chatpunnarangsee (2023) found that young Thai speakers frequently use English nouns and noun phrases in formal and informal conversations, while Thongsombat (2021) shows that Thai-English mixing can be meaningful within professional domains such as golf instruction. Baker (2011) further argues that code-switching can mark emphasis, solidarity, identity, topic shift, and accommodation. Therefore, Thai-English mixing should be analyzed as a flexible communicative resource rather than a direct threat to Thai language.

Among younger generations, Thai-English hybrid expressions are especially common because young people participate actively in global digital culture, social media, gaming, streaming platforms, fandoms, and pop culture. Kong-in (2015) found that Facebook contexts influenced Thai EFL students' perceptions of English, while Pilanun (2021) showed that podcast discourse circulates Thai-English code-mixing in spoken digital media. Pennycook (2007) argues that global English is reinterpreted through local cultural practices, which helps explain why Thai youth use English not to replace Thai but to perform identity, trendiness, irony, expertise, intimacy, and group belonging.

Global media and popular culture influence Thai language through music, films, series, online games, beauty culture, celebrity culture, and influencers. Media technologies accelerate sociolinguistic change through circulation and audience participation (Androutsopoulos, 2014), while digital communication expands linguistic creativity (Crystal, 2001). However, English influence also creates tension between linguistic globalization and Thai language identity. Although appropriate Thai usage, spelling, and meaning remain important (Naksakul et al., 2005), Thai has long been shaped by diversity and change (Prasithrathsint, 2002). The central issue is therefore not the rejection of English, but the development of critical language awareness for using Thai, English, and hybrid forms appropriately across formal, informal, local, and global contexts. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Conceptual Flow of English Influence in Thai Digital Communication

Conceptual Flow: Thai Language, English Influence, and Global Digital Culture

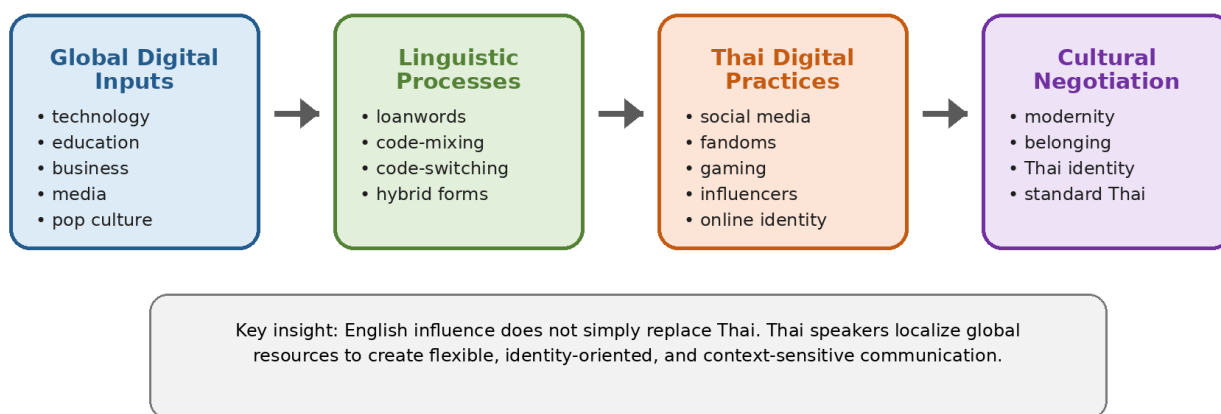


Figure 2 illustrates how global digital inputs, including technology, education, business, media, and popular culture, enter Thai communication through loanwords, code-mixing, code-switching, and hybrid forms. These linguistic processes circulate through social media, fandoms, gaming communities, influencers, and online identity practices. The final stage involves cultural negotiation, in which Thai speakers balance modernity, group belonging, Thai identity, and Standard Thai. The figure shows that English influence does not replace Thai but is localized and reshaped into flexible, identity-oriented, and context-sensitive forms of communication. The major dimensions of English influence and Thai digital language change are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of English Influence and Thai Digital Language Change

Dimension	Main Change	Communicative Function	Example
Loanwords	English words enter Thai digital topics.	Names new ideas and signals modernity.	online, content, platform
Code-mixing	Thai and English appear in the same sentence.	Marks identity, expertise, humor, or style.	work ni busy mak
Youth hybrid forms	English terms combine with Thai particles or grammar.	Shows trendiness, intimacy, and group belonging.	vibe di mak; mood dee
Pop culture influence	Media and fandoms circulate global expressions.	Creates shared cultural references.	ship khu ni; fan meeting
Language identity	Standard Thai and hybrid Thai coexist.	Balances correctness, creativity, and belonging.	formal Thai vs. online Thai

Table 2 summarizes major forms of English influence in Thai digital communication. It shows that loanwords, code-mixing, youth hybrid expressions, pop-culture language, and language identity are connected to different communicative functions. English words may name new concepts, express modernity, build group identity, or create humor. At the same time, Standard Thai remains important in formal contexts. The table therefore supports the main argument that Thai digital language change is not simple linguistic decline. It is a context-sensitive process in which Thai speakers select, adapt, and combine linguistic resources for social meaning.

V. LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THAI DIGITAL SOCIETY

Language in Thai digital society functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a symbolic resource for constructing identity. On social media, Thai users present themselves through usernames, captions,

hashtags, comments, emojis, stickers, spelling styles, English-Thai mixing, dialect use, and degrees of politeness. Goffman's (1959) concept of self-presentation is useful here because online communication allows users to manage impressions before different audiences. Similarly, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that identity is produced through linguistic and semiotic practices rather than being a fixed personal quality. In Thai contexts, expressions such as 'productive mak taе nueai sut sut' (very productive but extremely tired), '*khop khun thuk kamlangjai na kha*' (thank you for all encouragement), '*pang mak*' (excellent), '*jueng*' (impressive), and '*mood di*' (good mood) show how language can signal modernity, politeness, emotion, humor, and lifestyle identity. Prasithratsint (2002) explains that Thai language reflects diversity, change, and social development, while Dechwilai, Sukchuay, and Osiri (2024) show that Thai social media language changes through borrowing, abbreviation, sound representation, and meaning shifts.

Generational identity is especially visible in Thai youth language. Younger speakers often use informal spelling, English words, memes, emojis, hashtags, and playful particles to show closeness, creativity, and digital competence. Ming (2022) indicates that Thai youth identities are connected with online activities, influencers, and hashtags. Phrases such as '*mood di mak*' (very good mood), '*pai tor mai wai laeo mae*' (I cannot go on anymore), and '*mai wai taе wai yu*' (I cannot handle it, but I am still holding on) express humor, irony, and shared group feeling. Eckert (2000) views linguistic variation as social practice, which explains why youth expressions spread quickly across TikTok, X, Facebook, Instagram, and LINE.

Regional identity also appears strongly online. Thailand contains Northern, Northeastern or Isan, Southern, and minority language varieties, and Premsrirat, Padung, and Buasuang (2004) emphasize this ethnolinguistic diversity. Online expressions such as '*saep lai*' (very delicious, Isan), '*pai aew kan ko*' (shall we go travel, Northern Thai), and '*roi jang hu*' (very delicious or enjoyable, Southern Thai) mark local pride and authenticity. McCargo and Hongladarom (2004) show that Isan identity is socially complex, while Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital helps explain why dialect may index intimacy and locality, whereas Standard Thai still carries institutional prestige.

Gender, social roles, class, education, and lifestyle are also constructed through digital language. Particles such as '*khru*,' '*kha*,' '*ja*,' '*na kha*,' and playful forms such as '*mae*,' '*tua mae*,' or '*phi sao*' can express politeness, softness, admiration, humor, or solidarity. Phovatis (2019) shows that media language has consequences for gender representation. Professional posts may use formal Thai and English terms such as 'communication skills,' while lifestyle captions such as '*cafe ni vibe di mak*' (this cafe has a very good vibe) construct urban and cosmopolitan identities. Therefore, Thai digital language shows that identity is fluid, relational, and continuously performed through everyday online choices.

Figure 3: Conceptual Flow of Language and Identity Construction in Thai Digital Society

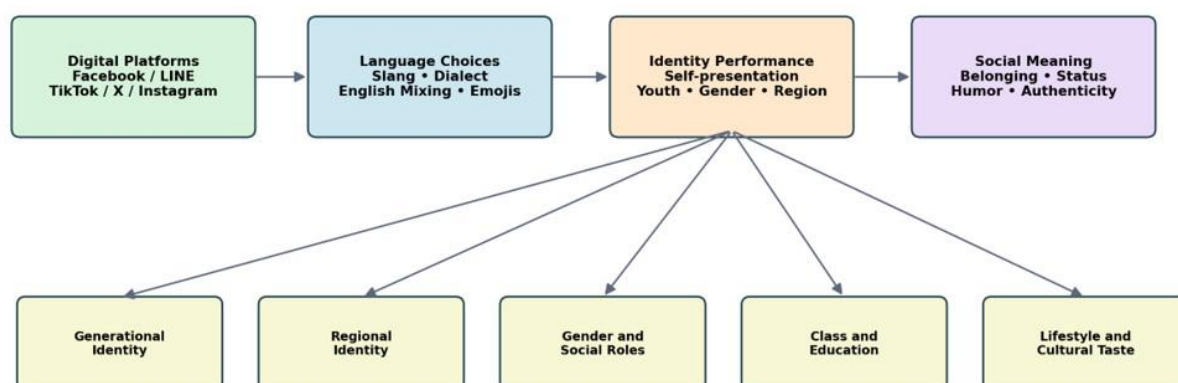


Figure 3 illustrates how Thai digital identity is shaped through the interaction of platforms, language choices, identity performance, and social meanings. Platforms such as Facebook, LINE, TikTok, X, and Instagram enable users to select slang, dialects, English-mixed words, politeness particles, emojis, and hashtags to express generational, regional, gendered, class-based, educational, and lifestyle identities. Digital language is therefore not

merely informal expression but a resource for signaling belonging, status, humor, modernity, authenticity, and cultural taste. In Thai digital society, identity is continuously constructed through everyday online communication. The main dimensions of this process are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Identity Construction through Thai Digital Language

Identity Dimension	Digital Language Forms	Example	Social Meaning
Self-presentation	Captions, emojis, English-Thai mixing	productive mak; khop khun na kha	Modern, polite, emotional self-image
Youth identity	Slang, memes, playful particles	pang mak; mai wai tae wai yu	Creativity, humor, peer belonging
Regional identity	Dialect and local expressions	saep lai; pai aew kan ko	Local pride and authenticity
Gender and roles	Particles, address terms, community slang	kha; khrup; mae; tua mae	Politeness, solidarity, gender performance
Class and lifestyle	Formal Thai, English terms, lifestyle captions	communication skills; vibe di mak	Education, professionalism, urban taste

VI. DIGITAL LANGUAGE PRACTICES IN THAI ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Digital language practices in Thai online communities show how Thai speakers adapt language to different platforms, audiences, and communicative purposes. On Facebook, language is commonly used for storytelling, public commentary, product selling, community discussion, and group interaction. Posts often combine formal Thai, informal expressions, English words, hashtags, emojis, images, and shared links. On X, formerly Twitter, language is usually shorter, faster, more affective, and more hashtag-oriented because users respond quickly to public issues, entertainment, political events, and social trends. Charoenthansakul and Natee (2023) show that Twitter played an important role in Thai protest communication, as highly retweeted posts circulated grievances, information, and public sentiment through hashtags. Instagram language is closely linked with lifestyle, image, branding, and self-presentation, as seen in expressions such as *“wan ni vibe di mak”* (“today has a very good vibe”) or *“cafe ni mood suai”* (“this café has a beautiful mood”). On TikTok, short captions, spoken catchphrases, subtitles, remix sounds, and interactive comments help create viral language. Huttayavilaiphan (2024) explains that Thai TikTok creators use English and cultural presentation to connect local content with global audiences. LINE communication, meanwhile, is often intimate and practical, using short replies, stickers, emojis, and particles such as *“na,” “ka,” “krub,”* and *“ja”* to maintain politeness and emotional tone. These examples support Herring’s (2001) view that computer-mediated discourse develops platform-specific patterns.

Memes, hashtags, emojis, and visual communication have become central to Thai digital interaction because they express meanings that words alone may not fully convey. Shifman (2014) argues that internet memes spread and transform through digital participation, while Zappavigna (2011) explains that hashtags create ambient affiliation among users. In Thai contexts, expressions such as *“mai wai tae wai yu”* (“I cannot handle it, but I am still holding on”) humorously communicate stress and resilience. Likewise, “555” represents laughter because the Thai pronunciation of the number five is *“ha,”* and *“chai loei 555”* means “Exactly, haha.” Emojis and stickers add affect, tone, humor, intimacy, and social positioning to messages (Danesi, 2016).

Online humor, satire, fan communities, gaming groups, influencers, and content creators further accelerate Thai digital language change. Thai users create wordplay, irony, playful spelling, reaction memes, and code-mixed expressions to entertain, criticize, and build solidarity. For example, *“pang mak”* means “very

excellent,” while “*jing jing mai jing jo*” means “seriously? Are you joking?” Beauty pageant fan pages also use community-specific slang to build group identity (Yiemkuntitavorn et al., 2023). In fan culture, “*don tok*” means becoming attracted to a celebrity, while “*ship khu ni*” means supporting a preferred pairing. Gaming communities adapt English terms such as “rank,” “buff,” “nerf,” and “carry” into Thai sentences. Influencers and creators intensify these trends because their repeated phrases, captions, gestures, and hashtags are widely imitated. Therefore, Thai online communities function as dynamic spaces where language is selected, styled, circulated, and normalized.

Figure 4: Digital Language Practices in Thai Online Communities

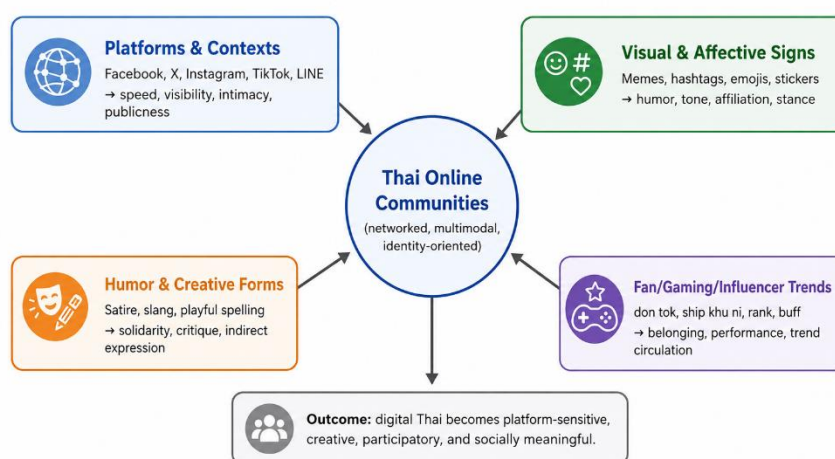


Figure 4 illustrates how Thai online communities transform language through platform-specific communication, visual and affective signs, online humor, and community-based trends. Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and LINE encourage different communicative styles, while memes, hashtags, emojis, and stickers add tone, emotion, and group affiliation. Fan, gaming, and influencer communities circulate terms such as “*don tok*,” “*ship khu ni*,” “rank,” and “buff,” turning repeated expressions into recognizable digital trends. Overall, digital Thai becomes platform-sensitive, creative, participatory, and socially meaningful.

VIII. IMPACTS OF DIGITAL LANGUAGE CHANGE ON THAI SOCIETY

Digital language change has produced both positive and negative impacts on Thai society. On the positive side, online communication has expanded creativity, participation, and social connection. Thai speakers do not simply move offline language into digital platforms; they actively create new forms through abbreviations, playful spelling, hashtags, emojis, memes, English-Thai mixing, and multimodal communication. These practices help users express emotion, humor, solidarity, and identity quickly and creatively. Crystal (2001) argues that internet language should not be viewed only as a threat to language standards because digital communication also generates linguistic creativity. In Thai online contexts, expressions such as “*pang mak*” (“very excellent”), “*jueng mak*” (“very impressive”), and “*mai wai tae wai yu*” (“I cannot handle it, but I am still holding on”) show how language can express admiration, surprise, stress, and humorous resilience. Rungruang (2012) also shows that Thai internet language includes new words, old words with new meanings, abbreviations, and media-influenced expressions, confirming that online Thai is creative and socially meaningful.

Digital language also increases public participation. Users can join conversations through comments, hashtags, shares, and short posts. Jenkins (2006) describes participatory culture as a media environment in which

users are both consumers and producers of meaning. In Thailand, phrases such as “*khit muean kan*” (“I think the same”) and “*kho share praspakan*” (“let me share my experience”) allow people to join collective discussions and create shared feelings.

However, digital language change may also cause miscommunication, conflict, and anxiety about language quality. Because online messages are often fast, brief, and lacking voice tone or facial expression, replies such as “ok” or “*laeo tae*” (“up to you”) may be read as neutral, angry, sarcastic, or dismissive. Dechwilai, Sukchuay, and Osiri (2024) explain that Thai social media language changes through sound representation, abbreviation, borrowing, blending, clipping, and meaning shift. Such creativity can support communication, but it may also confuse users who do not share the same digital background. Androutsopoulos (2014) notes that mediated communication reshapes language practices and social interpretation.

Concerns about Standard Thai and language accuracy remain important. Standard Thai is still necessary in education, government, academic writing, journalism, law, and formal communication. Naksakul et al. (2005) emphasize that Thai usage, spelling, and word meaning are central to formal literacy. Yet informal forms such as “*krub*,” “*ka*,” “*mai pen rai na*,” or “*dee makkk*” may be appropriate in casual online interaction but unsuitable in official writing. Therefore, Thai education should teach register awareness rather than simply condemn digital language. Prasithrathsint (2002) and Aitchison (2012) both suggest that language change is natural, but users must understand how different varieties function.

Digital inequality further affects linguistic participation. Sukphan (2024) and Chamwong, Chomtohsuwan, and Charoenphandhu (2024) show that unequal access to technology and digital skills continues to shape participation in Thailand. Finally, digital media can support cultural continuity by sharing regional words, local stories, and community knowledge. As Premririt et al. (2004) and UNESCO (2003) suggest, language vitality depends on community use and new domains. Thus, Thai language can remain culturally rooted while adapting creatively to digital society.

Figure 5: Impacts of Digital Language Change on Thai Society

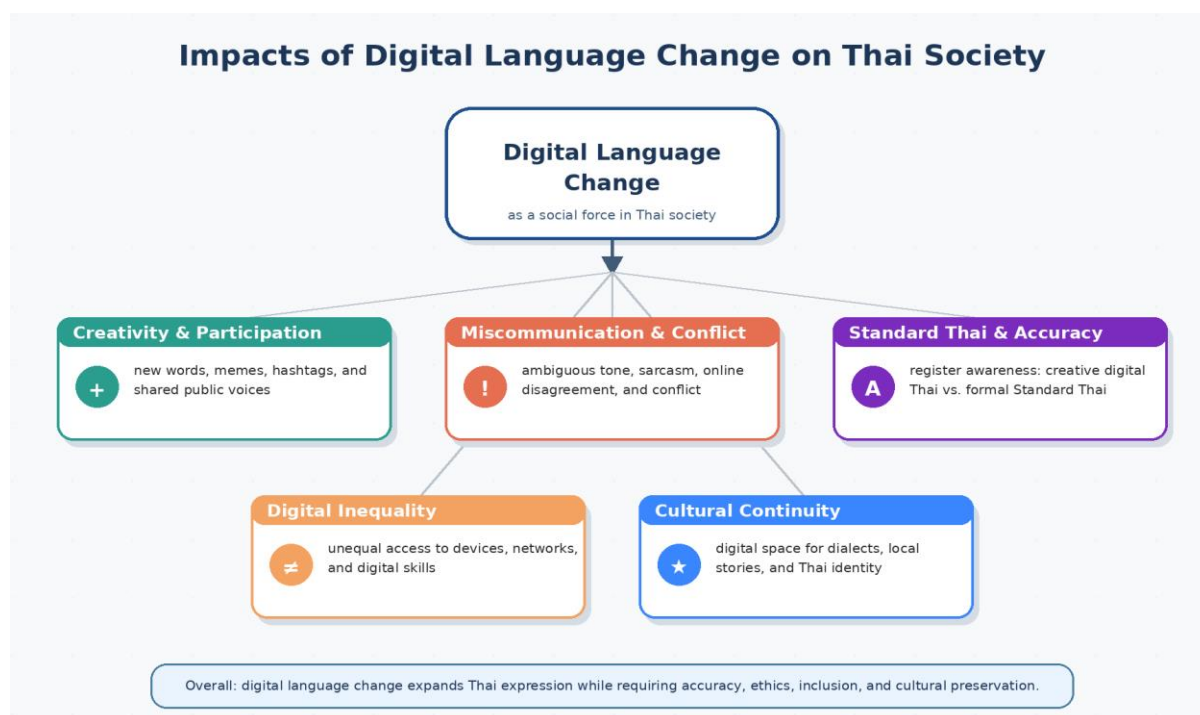


Figure 5 presents a balanced model of how digital language change affects Thai society. The central box positions digital language change as a social force, while the five surrounding impact areas show its main

consequences. Creativity and participation highlight new words, memes, hashtags, and public voices. Miscommunication and conflict show risks caused by ambiguity, sarcasm, and online disagreement. Standard Thai and accuracy emphasize the need for register awareness. Digital inequality points to unequal access to devices, networks, and skills. Cultural continuity shows that digital platforms can support dialects, local stories, and Thai identity when used responsibly for society today sustainably.

IX. IMPLICATIONS FOR THAI LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

The rapid transformation of Thai language in digital society requires Thai language education to be reconsidered in both content and pedagogy. Traditionally, Thai language education has emphasized standard grammar, spelling, reading comprehension, writing accuracy, literature, and formal communication. These areas remain essential for academic writing, official documents, public communication, and cultural transmission. However, learners today also encounter Thai through Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, LINE, online games, memes, hashtags, subtitles, captions, and AI-supported tools. Therefore, digital language should not be treated only as incorrect or harmful. Instead, learners should be guided to understand how language varies according to context, platform, audience, and purpose. Prasithrathsint (2002) explains that Thai language is connected with diversity, change, and development, while Naksakul et al. (2005) emphasize the importance of correct Thai usage and meaning. Thus, Thai language education should combine correctness with communicative appropriateness. For example, *kho anuyat sadaeng khwam khit hen* ("May I express my opinion?") is suitable for formal contexts, whereas *kho share idea noi na* ("Let me share an idea") is more informal and digitally friendly.

Digital literacy is another important implication for Thai learners. It should include not only the ability to use devices but also the ability to search, evaluate, interpret, create, and communicate information ethically. UNESCO (2011) emphasizes media and information literacy, while the New London Group (1996) argues that multiliteracies are necessary because communication now occurs through multiple modes, languages, and cultural contexts. In Thailand, Ongardwanich (2022) highlights digital competence as an educational priority, and Chanunan et al. (2019) show that instructors' digital literacy affects learning quality. Learners should therefore be trained to analyze captions, comments, memes, hashtags, and online debates by considering credibility, tone, bias, audience, and consequences. For example, "555" means laughter, while "*viral laeo*" means "it has gone viral," but both are informal and context-bound.

Teaching Standard Thai alongside contemporary language practices is also necessary. Learners need to move appropriately between formal and informal registers. Standard Thai remains important for national communication, academic success, professional credibility, legal clarity, and cultural continuity. At the same time, learners should understand everyday digital Thai, English-Thai mixing, youth slang, regional expressions, emojis, and platform-specific styles. Dechwilai et al. (2024) show that Thai social media language changes through borrowing, abbreviation, clipping, blending, reduplication, sound change, and meaning shift, while Crystal (2001) argues that internet language creates new linguistic possibilities. Therefore, Thai classrooms should develop register awareness rather than simply divide language into "correct" and "incorrect" forms.

Ethical and responsible online communication should also be central to Thai language education. Aryuyuen (2024) emphasizes digital citizenship in Thailand, while Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory shows how language can reduce conflict. Learners should know how to disagree respectfully, protect privacy, avoid hate speech, verify information, and cite sources. For instance, *chan mai hen duai phro wa...* ("I disagree because...") is more constructive than personal attacks such as *mai mi samong* ("no brain").

Finally, Thai learners must be prepared for multilingual and digital communication. Thailand is ethnolinguistically diverse (Premrirat et al., 2004), and contemporary communication increasingly involves Thai, English, regional dialects, minority languages, and digital symbols. Canagarajah (2011) and García and Wei (2014) argue that multilingual resources can be used strategically. Therefore, Thai language education should prepare

flexible communicators who can use Standard Thai, informal Thai, English, regional varieties, and digital modes appropriately, ethically, and creatively.

X. NEW KNOWLEDGE AND CONCLUSION

Digital language change has created important impacts on Thai society in creativity, participation, communication quality, inequality, and cultural continuity. On the positive side, Thai speakers do not simply move offline language into digital platforms; they create new expressions through abbreviations, playful spelling, emojis, hashtags, memes, English-Thai mixing, and multimodal communication. These practices help users express emotion, humor, solidarity, and identity quickly. Crystal (2001) argues that internet language should not be viewed only as a threat to standards because it also generates linguistic creativity. In Thailand, expressions such as pang mak (very excellent), jueng mak (very impressive), and mai wai tae wai yu (I cannot handle it, but I am still holding on) show how digital Thai communicates feeling and group identity. Rungruang (2012) also found that Thai internet language contains new words, old words with new meanings, abbreviations, and media-influenced expressions, confirming that online Thai is creative and socially meaningful. Digital language also supports participation, since users can join public discussion through comments, hashtags, shares, and short posts, consistent with Jenkins's (2006) view of participatory culture.

At the same time, digital language change creates risks of miscommunication, conflict, and anxiety about language quality. Because online messages are fast, brief, and often lack voice tone or facial expression, meanings can be misunderstood. A short reply such as ok or laeo tae (up to you) may sound neutral, angry, or sarcastic depending on context. Dechwilai, Sukchuay, and Osiri (2024) explain that Thai social media language changes through sound representation, borrowing, abbreviation, blending, clipping, and meaning shift. These forms support creativity but may confuse users outside particular communities. Androutsopoulos (2014) similarly notes that mediated communication reshapes language practices and interpretation.

Concerns about Standard Thai and accuracy remain significant. Standard Thai is still necessary in education, government, academic writing, journalism, law, and official communication. Naksakul et al. (2005) emphasize correct Thai usage, spelling, and meaning, while Prasithrathsint (2002) explains that Thai language is shaped by diversity, change, and development. Therefore, the central issue is not stopping change, but teaching register awareness: when to use creative digital Thai, when to use Standard Thai, and how to maintain clarity and appropriateness.

Digital inequality affects linguistic participation in Thai society. Although digital platforms expand communicative opportunities, unequal access to the internet, digital skills, and social inclusion continues to limit participation (Hargittai, 2002; Warschauer, 2003; Sukphan, 2024; Chamwong et al., 2024). At the same time, digital language change raises questions of cultural continuity in an ethnolinguistically diverse country (Premssirat et al., 2004). Since language vitality depends on community use and expansion into new domains (UNESCO, 2003), digital platforms can support the preservation of regional words, local narratives, and Thai identity while enabling language to adapt to contemporary society. The major social impacts of digital language change are summarized in Figure 6.

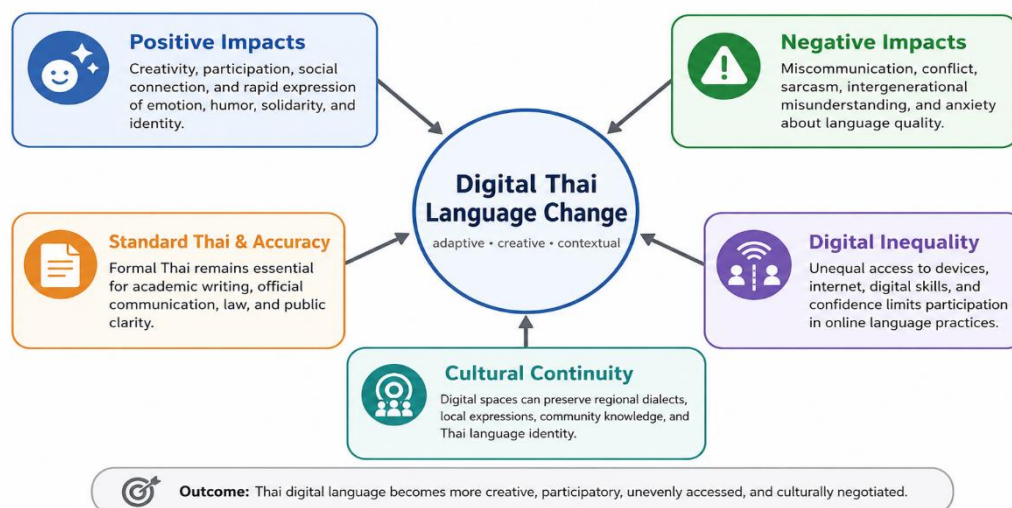
Figure 6: Impacts of Digital Language Change on Thai Society

Figure 6 presents digital language change as a balanced social process rather than a simple problem or benefit. At the center, digital Thai language change is shown as adaptive, creative, and contextual. The five surrounding dimensions show its major impacts: creativity and participation, miscommunication and conflict, concerns about Standard Thai, unequal digital access, and cultural continuity. The arrows indicate that these impacts interact with one another. For example, online creativity can strengthen identity, but it may also create misunderstanding if users lack shared context. The figure therefore highlights the need for flexible language awareness, digital literacy, and cultural responsibility.

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