

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18886540

THE REPRESENTATION OF SOUTHERN THAI WOMEN IN FEMALE ARTISTS' SONGS: A CASE STUDY OF RATCHANOK SUWANNAKET

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Received: 27/05/2025
Accepted: 27/08/2025

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the linguistic representation of women in southern Thai country songs, employing linguistic strategies as a framework for textual analysis. Utilizing textual data from eight songs by Ratchanok Suwannaket, the study reveals that these songs utilize linguistic strategies. The use of titles, verb choices, and causal connectives. The analysis demonstrates that the language constructs an image of southern Thai women within a novel conceptual framework: they are portrayed as patient, emotionally resilient, decisive, and rational. This portrayal signifies a departure from traditional representations of southern women, particularly in their agency to direct their own lives. This shift reflects a transformation in gender roles within Thai society, moving from a conservative framework towards a greater awareness of gender equality.

KEYWORDS: Southern Women, Female Representations, Linguistic Strategies, Southern Country Music.

1. INTRODUCTION

Songs are recognized as a form of musical art. Coser (1964) posited that songs function to mitigate aggression and conflict by alleviating stress and pressure associated with daily tasks. Furthermore, songs are considered a literary genre through which writers express their thoughts, reflecting societal norms, lived experiences, cultural values, and, at times, political phenomena, by integrating lyrics with musical composition (Phinyo Chittham, 1973). Vocal expression has emerged as a means for rural populations to articulate social conditions. In Thailand, diverse regional musical traditions, each characterized by unique melodic structures, are prevalent. Examples include "Choi" in the Central region, "Mor Lam" in the Northeast, and "Phleng Bok" in the South.

'Luk Thung music' is a type of music that has evolved from basic songs or folk songs that are sung for ceremonies, lullabies, or used to stimulate human thoughts in society. It is also a type of literature that can reach the general public better than other types of literature because it is literature that provides listening skills only and is the most relaxing listening experience for people in today's society. This is because songs are something that the author composes by picking up experiences, political phenomena, or social issues to reflect social problems, including conveying ideas, discourses, and various frameworks of thought through songs (Suntaree Duangthip, 2015). Therefore, it cannot be denied that 'songs' are a type of literature that can convey ideas or present images of human thoughts in society, especially the image of women.

The portrayal of women in songs presents a multifaceted area of interest, particularly regarding efforts to establish women's agency and gender equality. For instance, Thongklang and Nisayan (2020), in their study of spousal representations in Isan country songs, found that these songs endeavored to grant women agency in financial management and familial decision-making, including the potential to assume the role of family head. Conversely, Rotkliang (2021), in her analysis of lullaby imagery, observed that while women had begun to acquire managerial and proxy roles for men in certain instances, they retained their traditional, inescapable role as mothers. The present researcher is interested in analyzing the representation of women through musical literature, specifically within the under-researched genre of southern Thai country songs. Furthermore, the researcher posits that southern Thai country songs employ language that reflects a distinct image of women, as detailed

below:

Example 1: You also have a soul, and I want you to understand. If you talk about it, can you accept it? (Stop eating kratom and then come love me, 2016)

Example 2: How did we love each other? Do you remember, my dear? It's over and done with. I'm willing to be sorry. (Hurt, 2016)

Example 3: Even if miracles do happen, everything is destined. Don't force it. (Love at the wrong time, 2020)

Analysis of the examples reveals the use of verbs that underscore women's emotional resilience and strength. For instance, the phrase "I'm willing to be sorry" (acceptance), while containing the verb "to be sorry" (to accept), connotes a deeper meaning, indicating that women endure prolonged and repeated adversities before considering the termination of a relationship. Similarly, the verb phrase "don't go" (don't force it), when deconstructed, demonstrates resistance and resolute determination. Collectively, these examples illustrate the songs' portrayal of southern women as determined and emotionally robust. Consequently, this study aims to elucidate the contemporary image of southern Thai women, providing societal insight into their characteristics and experiences.

2. OBJECTIVE

The researcher study to analyze the linguistic representation of women in southern Thai folk songs.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employed a methodological approach that commenced with a review of relevant literature and existing research to identify pertinent areas of inquiry. This review revealed a dearth of studies concerning the representation of women in southern Thai country songs. Consequently, this study aimed to investigate the linguistic representation of southern Thai women, utilizing the aforementioned sources as a case study. The following criteria were employed to select songs by Ratchanok Suwannaket (Jenny). The researcher can describe the songs utilized in the analysis as presented in the table.

The accompanying table presents the song type, title, year of public release, and a link to the song. The number of followers for each song is also shown, which can be verified by readers via the provided links. The songs were released in different years, serving as the data source for the researcher to study both the number of followers and the language used to reflect the image of southern Thai women. This analysis will be used to support the study's findings

and conclusions about the representation of southern Thai women.

Table 1: Shows the Song Information.

Song Title	Release Year	Song Type	Music Link
Reclaim	2021	Luk Thung Song	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YY2HSs_rbsl&list=RDYY2HSs_rbsl&start_radio=1
Stop drinking kratom and then love each other	2016	Luk Thung Song	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3xEhDrUGgw&list=RD_3xEhDrUGgw&start_radio=1
Want to be weak with someone	2022	Luk Thung Song	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8LYzkFn0yg&list=RDc8LYzkFn0yg&start_radio=1
I can do it all if I'm fresh	2017	Luk Thung Song	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEZ160UEUC4&list=RDIEZ160UEUC4&start_radio=1
Love at the wrong time	2020	Luk Thung Song	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WftcOvaby9k&list=RDWftcOvaby9k&start_radio=1
I'm done	2017	Luk Thung Song	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYrgRZWXtjU&list=RD_rYrgRZWXtjU&start_radio=1
Hide the corner	2018	Luk Thung Song	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpspSxycy-s&list=RDhpspSxycy-s&start_radio=1

Songs by Ratchanok Suwannaket were selected for analysis due to her native southern Thai identity and consistent use of the southern dialect in daily communication, which lends authenticity to her musical compositions. Furthermore, the selection criteria mandated that each song included in the analysis must have garnered a minimum of 2 million views. Based on these criteria, eight songs were deemed suitable for analysis. The data, comprising a total of 160 verses, was collected in textual format for subsequent analysis, as detailed in the following table.

The following table presents the selected song lyrics for analysis. The researcher will extract textual data pertaining to women across various domains, including their actions, behaviors, decisions, emotions, and knowledge. This extracted data will then be analyzed within the established conceptual framework and theoretical underpinnings of the study.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Fairclough emphasizes the significance of textual analysis in examining the relationship between language and society. Consequently, the text is considered a primary analytical focus, as Fairclough posits that linguistic texts are comprised of a series of choices. Specifically, texts select particular linguistic forms from a range of options at various levels, including lexical and structural levels (Phanphothong, 2013). Complementing Fairclough's focus on textual analysis, Van Dijk (1997) highlights the importance of interpreting the inherent intentions and ideological power embedded within language. He argues that linguistic communication is inherently purposeful. Therefore, the explication of concealed ideas within language use is crucial for

comprehending the intended meaning of a text. Accordingly, the characterization of language features employed in textual presentation, which reveals underlying communicative purposes, is termed linguistic strategies.

The linguistic strategies to textual analysis facilitates the interpretation of language in order to reveal constructed images. This is predicated on the understanding that images are formed through specific linguistic choices. As Hall (1977, p. 8) elucidates, language serves as a representational system, employing written and auditory symbols to convey the perspectives, thoughts, attitudes, and emotions of individuals within a culture or society. Consequently, language constitutes a pivotal process in the construction and presentation of diverse images or representations, reflecting the viewpoints and ideologies prevalent within a given social context. Therefore, this study employs the concept of linguistic strategies to analyze the representation of southern Thai women in the selected country songs, operating within the analytical framework of Hall's (1977) concept of representation.

5. RELATED RESEARCH

This research reviewed studies on the representation of women across various media, including songs, films, textbooks, and other forms of content that reflect female representation.

Lan Chiew and Chansuda Chairasert (2024) examined the portrayal of women in Chamanat Award-winning novels from 2020 to 2023. Their study revealed a predominantly traditional depiction of women, characterized by the roles of dutiful wife and mother, as well as compliant follower. While the authors attempted to introduce elements of modern womanhood, such as female leadership, these efforts

were ultimately overshadowed by the persistent image of women confined to domestic roles, particularly that of nurturing mother. Furthermore, an analysis of the linguistic strategies employed in these novels demonstrated the use of language that reinforces societal and cultural expectations of women.

However, the research also identified the use of language to construct a secondary discourse concerning the role of contemporary women striving for gender equality. This discourse emphasized attributes such as strength, intellectual pursuit, and gratitude. This finding aligns with the research of Lan Chiew and Chan Suttha Chaiprasert (2023), 'Representations of Thai Women in Reincarnation Thai Drama Series During 2008-2023,' which revealed that gratitude and deference to elders, particularly husbands, were presented as markers of 'modern womanhood.' Consequently, the portrayal of modern women remained tethered to traditional roles of obedience and subservience, with the maternal role remaining inescapable. Furthermore, Piyathida Ketchat and Wanporn Phongpeng (2017) explored the representation of women in adult romantic literature published by Light of Love Publishing House.

This study examined the female protagonists in ten literary works published by Light of Love Publishing House and revealed that they were predominantly portrayed as sexual objects, childbearers, and dutiful wives. This portrayal reinforces traditional female stereotypes through prescribed roles and obligations. This finding aligns with the research of Gestos, M., Smith-Merry, J., & Campbell, A. (2018), which investigated the representation of women in video games. Their study found that women in video games are frequently objectified sexually through physical contact and the undermining of their self-confidence, leading to a diminished sense of self-worth.

Umarin Tularak (2010) conducted a study on the portrayal of women in the Lao textbook 'Mathayom 3: Beautiful People.' The research revealed that the literature within 'Beautiful People' presents women as contributors to societal good, aligning with state ideals, and as political actors fulfilling civic duties on par with men. This finding is consistent with the work of Pantakan Tanont (2018), who examined the evolving representation of rural migrant women in Thai country songs. Tanont's study demonstrated that, since 2000, Thai women have been increasingly depicted as individuals striving to enter urban environments for work, education, and knowledge acquisition, and as assuming roles as family heads.

Furthermore, Phichchawee Thongklang and Jamjuree Nisayan (2020) explored the portrayal of husbands and wives in Isan country songs.

Findings from the research indicated that, despite periods of brief male authority, women demonstrated considerable influence in management, decision-making, and the performance of delegated tasks. The central role of 'motherhood' remained prominent. This is consistent with the research of Ibinga, S. S. (2007), which examined the representation of African women in the context of political transition. Ibinga's study found that post-apartheid South African literature facilitated a shift in women's portrayal, emphasizing racial political issues and the social roles of women's gender. This led to the depiction of African women as political participants and economic leaders, though these roles were later subject to religious restrictions, as explored in Zine, J. (2002).

In a study of the representation of Muslim women in political roles, Zine, J. (2002) found that these women possess the ability and desire to engage in political mediation and understand ideology. Yet, the contemporary image of these women has undergone a transformation, now emphasizing their religious observance, including veiling, and their roles as virtuous mothers. This is consistent with Siriporn Rotkliang's (2021) research, which investigated the representation of women in southern Thai lullabies. Rotkliang's study highlighted the prevalence of the maternal role, with southern Thai women particularly emphasizing the teaching of patience, virtue, and ethics to their children. These studies collectively indicate that women's representation is still often characterized by the stigma of followership. Based on this review of related research, several evolutions in the study of women's representations can be identified. Initially, literature and media tended to depict women as subservient to men. However, the emergence of a more democratic political environment has led to the portrayal of women as political participants and recognized economic and social leaders. Nonetheless, the core role of 'mother' in child-rearing persists, despite increased social opportunities.

6. RESULTS

Utilizing the framework of linguistic strategies, this study analyzed language data from selected songs. The analysis, which focused on textual elements, is presented in accordance with the principles of linguistic strategies analysis, as follows.

Lexical strategies, as defined by Chantima Angkaphanichkit (2019, p. 180), pertain to the

selection of vocabulary to convey a sender's thoughts or experiences. **They serve as a means of expressing and representing the sender's cognitive processes, and can be further elaborated as follows**

The use of titles involves the employment of words or phrases that signify an individual's identity and role, as well as the nature of the interaction between the sender and the receiver. In the analyzed examples, the utilization of titles serves to establish the speaker's self-identification as a woman.

Example 4: How many times have Nong had to endure a useless person? It is so painful that I want to punch you in the face. (Reclaim, 2021).

Example 5: Nong also have a soul, I want you to understand. If you talk it out, can you accept it? Expressing action (Stop drinking kratom and then love each other, 2016).

Example 6: I've been through a lot. There's both bad and good. I've been hurt and endured until I almost died. And In the end, I'm still here. (Want to be weak with someone, 2022).

Example 7: I (Ku) can do anything if you're cheerful. Let me (Ku) fall down standing up. I (Ku) won't be tired. Let you be happy and happy enough. (I can do it all if I'm fresh, 2017).

The examples illustrate a hierarchical progression in the use of female terms, ranging from those denoting lower status to those signifying equality. For instance, the noun 'น้อง' (Nong) is employed to refer to individuals who are younger or perceived as younger. In Thai society, 'น้อง' (Nong) is commonly used to address women, particularly in romantic relationships. Even when the wife is older, she may refer to herself as 'น้อง' (Nong) as a gesture of respect towards her husband. Furthermore, the use of 'กู' (ku) in the analyzed text, while conventionally associated with informality and even vulgarity, also signifies equal status between the interlocutors. In the context of a song performed by a female singer, the character's use of 'กู' (ku) suggests that southern Thai women perceive themselves as equals to men.

Use of verbs Chanthima Angkhaphanitkit (2019, p. 191) elucidates that verbs are typically words employed to express events, actions, thoughts, feelings, or states of being pertaining to individuals, animals, or objects. The verb often serves as the central element of a sentence, as exemplified in the following illustration.

The use of action verbs serves to depict the actions of southern women as portrayed in the song, encompassing qualities such as patience, decisiveness, and reflective thought. **Examples of this usage are presented**

6.1. The Use of Verbs Denoting Endurance

Example 8: I can do it all if you're fresh, let me fall down standing up, I won't be tired, let you be happy, let you be happy, let you be enough, let you be handsome, have fun to the fullest, as for me, I don't mind (I can do it all if I'm fresh, 2017).

Example 9: How many times do I have to pretend to smile, it seems like it's okay (Want to be weak with someone, 2022).

Example 10: How much did you hurt me? It took me a long time to get over it, I had to get up and wipe away My own tears, how long will it take (Reclaim, 2021).

Analysis of the examples revealed the utilization of action verbs. In example 8, the verb 'not' functioned as the main verb, followed by the verb phrase 'no matter what.' Example 9 featured the verb phrase 'pretend to smile,' while example 10 contained the verb unit 'get up and wipe.' Contextual analysis of the surrounding text indicated that these verbs were employed within narratives of women confronting challenges related to love and male behavior. These verb groups collectively reflect women's endurance in the face of adversity, encompassing actions such as feigning smiles, concealing tears, and disregarding negative experiences. The phrases 'not prue' and 'no matter what' suggest that these women have developed resilience in managing such difficulties. **However, the song also incorporates action verbs that convey emotional strength, which will be further elaborated upon below**

6.2. Using Verbs to Express Action to Emotional Strength

Example 11: You also have a soul, and I want you to understand. If you talk about it, can you accept it? (Stop eating kratom and then come love me, 2016).

Example 12: How did we love each other? Do you remember, my dear? It's over and done with. I'm accept and regret. (Hurt, 2016).

Example 13: Even if miracles do happen, everything is destined. Don't force it. (Love at the wrong time, 2020).

Analysis of the examples revealed the utilization of verbs to articulate emotional strength. The verb 'to talk' was identified as expressing an action related to feelings, specifically the decision to vocalize rather than suppress them. Similarly, the phrase 'accept and regret,' while containing the verb 'accept,' also implied that women had endured prolonged and repetitive challenges before yielding. The sequential verb unit 'don't force,' which can be parsed into 'don't' (prohibition) and 'force' (resistance),

demonstrated a resolute determination. Further analysis of the song revealed an example that explicitly showcased a woman's unwavering resolve.

6.3. Use of Verbs Showing Women's Decision-Making

Example 14: I love you with all my heart. I have to let go if it's this much. Let's love each other again. The day I quit taking drugs (Stop taking kratom and then we'll love each other, 2016).

Example 15: Are you done yet? I don't care. I'm done today. Let's go our separate ways. Don't come and beg me. Go down. I Don't listen. Let's end it. (I'm done, 2017).

Example 16: From now on, let's not cremate each other. It's time for me to come and claim it back. (Reclaim it, 2021).

Analysis of the examples revealed the use of verbs that illustrate women's decisiveness in problem-solving, particularly concerning emotional and romantic issues. The verb phrase 'have to let go' was identified, comprising the auxiliary verb 'must,' which denotes certainty or obligation, and the verb 'let go,' signifying severance or reduction. Similarly, the verb phrase 'don't come to ask' conveys a negative imperative. Contextual analysis of the surrounding text indicated that this phrase reflects a woman's resolute decision not to pardon the man's actions. Furthermore, the verb phrase 'let's not cremate,' within the context of Thai society, employs 'not cremate,' a term associated with funeral rites symbolizing the burning of a deceased body. In accordance with Thai funeral customs, the phrase is preceded by 'don't,' an adverb modifying the verb to express prohibition. The phrase 'don't burn the ghost' thus carries a negative connotation, implying that even in death, the individual is unwelcome at the speaker's funeral. Within Thai societal context, such a declaration represents a definitive severing of the relationship, extending from the moment of utterance to the speaker's demise.

The analysis of action verb usage revealed that the song underscores women's agency across diverse domains, notably their capacity for patience. While Thai society traditionally ascribes emotional sensitivity and complexity to women, the song demonstrates that patience with male behavior, particularly in romantic relationships, cultivates emotional strength and empowers women to make decisive choices. The song's lyrics employ language that portrays women's fortitude, derived from their resilience in the face of adversity, thereby amplifying their emotional resilience. This assertion is substantiated by the song's depiction of women's

ability to thrive independently of men, a decision that signifies their courage to sever ties. This act of severance reflects women's determination and fortitude, stemming from their patience and emotional strength. Moreover, women's 'decisions' are presented as rational and logical, rather than being driven by mere emotion or sentiment. The researcher identified sentence structures within the song that illustrate cause-and-effect relationships, culminating in women's decisive actions, as detailed below.

The use of causal connectives involves words that explicitly indicate cause-and-effect relationships. The context surrounding these words within a sentence typically pertains to a singular event or situation. Causal connectives, such as 'but,' 'because,' and 'therefore,' function to delineate cause-and-effect relationships between clauses, as illustrated in the following examples.

Example 17: You like to take drugs. I've never been fickle, but not good. (Stop eating kratom and then love each other, 2016).

Example 18: Even though I didn't tell anyone that you dumped me, but it's true today (Hide the corner, 2018).

Example 19: Our love, the more I look, the further away it gets. Is it wrong that we love each other? But this relationship This time, there's no sign. It has to end, you and me, you know (Wrong time love, 2020).

Example 20: That pain that time, I won't endure it, because it taught me that being a playboy is a nature that I won't endure (Reclaim, 2021).

Example 21: It must end, you and I, you know we love each other very much, but the truth is It's impossible (Love at the wrong time, 2020).

Analysis of the song's examples revealed the utilization of causal connectives, specifically 'but' and 'because,' which, in certain instances, function as prepositions to denote distinct relationships within the linguistic context. For example, in example 17, 'but' serves as a preposition, indicating the preceding event: the man's substance abuse and association with undesirable companions, which prompted the woman to reconsider the continuation or development of their relationship. In example 19, the woman's deliberation and subsequent decision to terminate the relationship are linked by 'but,' which functions to introduce the cause, with the following clause presenting the result of her decision. In example 20, the connective 'because' is employed to illustrate a cause-to-effect relationship. The clause preceding 'because' represents the result of the woman's decision, while the subsequent clause, 'It taught me that being a playboy is a nature that I will

not tolerate,' articulates the cause. This clause reveals that the man's philandering had become an ingrained habit, ultimately leading to the woman's decision to sever the relationship.

7. CONCLUSION

The analysis of causal connectives revealed that women's decisions, as portrayed in the song, are not driven by emotion or sentiment, but rather by reason and a logical assessment of the situation or event. This includes a careful consideration of men's behavior, which enables women to exercise their judgment and formulate their own reasoned conclusions, thereby serving as the cause for their decisions. While Thai society often stereotypes women as followers, limited to making decisions based on feelings and confined to domestic matters, the song's analysis demonstrates that women possess the agency to make independent decisions grounded in reason. This highlights women's capacity for critical thought and rational problem-solving.

This research employed the concept of linguistic strategies as a framework for analyzing language texts presented in southern Thai country songs. Data were collected from eight songs, yielding a total of 160 language texts for analysis. The analysis revealed the use of 30 recurring terms of address, notably 'พี่' and 'น้อง,' which signify power dynamics through kinship nouns. 'พี่' (Pee) is used to address men, implying seniority and authority, while 'น้อง' (Nong) is used to address women, suggesting youth and subordinate status. The analysis of verbs categorized women's portrayal into three key concepts: the patience of southern Thai women, their emotional strength, and their decisiveness.

8. DISCUSSION

This research examines the representation of southern Thai women through a linguistic analysis of the song 'Jenny, If You Are Fresh (Ratchanok Suwannaket).' It highlights the construction and evolution of women's roles, which transcend the conventional framework that prioritizes 'motherhood,' to encompass individuals who possess the agency to make independent decisions and lead autonomous lives. This aligns with feminist principles that advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment.

The study revealed that southern Thai women are not confined to the role of selfless mothers but can also assert their agency in determining their own lives, particularly in contemporary society where women are empowered to work, generate income, and assume economic leadership within their

families, mirroring the capabilities of men. This finding aligns with the research of Pantakan Tanont (2018) and Pitchayawee Thongklang and Jamjuree Nisayan (2020), which demonstrated that the portrayal of women in Luk Thung songs has evolved to reflect greater independence, notably in economic and life management domains.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates that the portrayal of southern Thai women in contemporary songs extends beyond traditional depictions of sacrifice and male dependence, emphasizing self-determination and resilience in evolving contexts. This aligns with Ibinga's (2007) study on women's representation during Africa's political transition, which revealed women's capacity for self-determination independent of male authority. Although this research and Ibinga's study are not directly related, a significant commonality emerges: women can make critical life and political decisions autonomously. This research underscores the contemporary representation of southern Thai women, which transcends the sole role of 'motherhood.' While Siriporn Rotkliang's (2021) study on women's representation in southern Thai lullabies highlighted the maternal emphasis on child-rearing, this research illuminates another dimension of southern Thai women, characterized by patience, intellectual strength, and independent decision-making, enabling them to fulfill the role of 'motherhood' dynamically and distinctively from traditional approaches.

While this research focuses on analyzing the representation of southern Thai women through the songs of southern artists, the reflected issues can be connected to the concept of transnational feminism, which emphasizes women's potential to fulfill diverse roles beyond the traditional family structure's confines of motherhood or caregiving. This aligns with Ge *et al.* (2022), who assert that women's empowerment, gender equality, and the eradication of discrimination against women and girls are crucial for long-term economic and social prosperity, as well as sustainable development across all nations. Specifically, economic empowerment and freedom have a positive impact on individuals' income and well-being. Consequently, this study contributes to expanding the body of knowledge concerning women's roles in contemporary culture and reflects the evolving dynamics of gender values within Thai society.

This study also aligns with feminist principles that emphasize gender equality and women's decision-making power at all societal levels, encompassing both personal and public domains.

The findings of this study reveal that southern Thai women exhibit distinct statuses and roles compared to their traditional counterparts, particularly in their capacity to determine their own life trajectories. This

reflects a process of gender role transformation, transitioning from a conservative perspective to a more gender-equal mindset within Thai society.

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