

Epistemic Modality Degrees of Chinese Fortune Sticks' Prophecies:
A Case Study of Watthaisamakkhee's Prophecies in Chinese fortune sticks
ระดับของคำแสดงทัศนภาวะปริชานของคำทำนายในใบเซียมซี:
กรณีศึกษาในคำทำนายใบเซียมซีจากวัดไทยสามัคคี

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Abstract

The practice of Chinese fortune sticks is a kind of fortune-telling that can be accessed easily by all genders and all ages while visiting the temples in Thailand for them to make merit. In addition, it is popular activity among Thai people. This study examined degree of epistemic modality in Chinese fortune sticks' prophecies that appear in different topics, such as finance, work, health and love. The data collection was gathered from Watthaisamakkhee, Mae Kasa, Mae Sot District, Tak Province. To ensure the reliability of the written prophecies used in this study, the researcher selected the written prophecies translated by an assistant professor from a prestigious university in Thailand. The data collection in this study was 28 written prophecies translated into English which were made up of 49 sentences. The data collection was collected in Microsoft Excel. The data analysis followed thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006), which are divided into 6 stages for qualitative analysis. The results in this study show that the epistemic modality with the level of probability was the highest at 93.88 percent. Moreover, approximately 90 percent of the written prophecies were written with positive semantic denotations, while only 10 percent were written with negative semantic denotations. It is expected that the results of this study will be useful for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in order to study epistemic modality marked in different texts and be able to apply them in actual use correctly and approximately.

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บทคัดย่อ

กิจกรรมการเสี่ยงเซียมซีเป็นกิจกรรมการทำนายดวงชะตารูปแบบหนึ่งที่เข้าถึงง่ายสามารถปฏิบัติได้ทุกเพศทุกวัยในขณะที่ไปทำบุญที่วัดและยังได้รับความนิยมอย่างแพร่หลายในกลุ่มของคนไทย งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาระดับของคำแสดงทัศนภาวะของทำนายในใบเซียมซีเพื่อศึกษาการเลือกใช้ระดับคำแสดงทัศนภาวะที่ปรากฏในหัวข้อต่างๆ เช่น การเงิน การงาน สุขภาพและความรัก ชุดข้อมูลในการศึกษาคำแสดงทัศนภาวะในงานวิจัยครั้งนี้เก็บรวบรวมมาจากคำทำนายจากวัดไทยสามัคคีซึ่งตั้งอยู่ในจังหวัดตาก เนื่องจากเป็นคำทำนายที่มีความน่าเชื่อถือและคำแปลเป็นภาษาอังกฤษโดยผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์จากมหาวิทยาลัยแห่งหนึ่งที่เป็นที่ยอมรับในประเทศไทย ใบเซียมซีจำนวนทั้งสิ้น 28 ใบประกอบด้วย 49 รูปตัวอย่างประโยคที่ใช้ร่วมกับคำแสดงทัศนภาวะในระดับต่างๆ ชุดข้อมูลถูกเก็บใน ไมโครซอฟต์ เอ็กเซล การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพดำเนินการตามแบบของ Braun และ Clarke (2006) ซึ่งแบ่งการวิเคราะห์เชิงคุณภาพออกเป็น 6 ขั้นตอน ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่าคำแสดงทัศนภาวะในระดับที่มีความเป็นไปได้ (probability) ปรากฏในความถี่ที่สูงเป็นจำนวนร้อยละ 93.88 นอกจากนั้นคำพยากรณ์ประมาณร้อยละ 90 สื่อความหมายเชิงบวกและมีคำพยากรณ์ประมาณร้อยละ 10 เท่านั้นที่สื่อความหมายเชิงลบ ผลการศึกษาในครั้งนี้สามารถอธิบายได้โดยหลักการการหลีกเลี่ยงความไม่แน่นอนที่อาจเกิดขึ้นในอนาคต (*uncertainty avoidance*) นักวิจัยหวังเป็นอย่างยิ่งว่าผลการศึกษาครั้งนี้จะเป็นประโยชน์สำหรับผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ (EFL) เพื่อศึกษากลวิธีการใช้คำแสดงทัศนภาวะในตัวบทแตกต่างกันออกไปเพื่อที่จะสามารถนำมาปรับใช้ได้อย่างถูกต้องและเหมาะสม

คำสำคัญ: ระดับของคำแสดงทัศนภาวะปริชาน, คำทำนาย, ใบเซียมซี

Introduction

In the 21st century, the living conditions of Thai people have drastically changed since they are now living in an era of scientific progression and technological development. Still, one thing that has never changed among Thai people is the intensive belief in fortune-telling. Fortune-telling is generally known as the prediction of events in the future about someone's life regarding finance, work, love and health. Examples of fortune-telling are various such as, such as an explanation by gypsy, crystal balls and Chinese fortune sticks. Interpreting dreams and reading palms and Chinese fortune sticks are popular in telling the future in Thai culture as they are easily accessible and inexpensive. Not only are ordinary people in Thai culture usually interested in fortune-telling desiring to know their future life in advance, but also well-educated Thai people as well as top managers like different kind of fortune telling. According to Phonpirut and Sakakorakul (2010), Thai people with Bachelor's degree and higher were apt to believe and follow the fortune-telling guideline.

Numeric data from Tancharoenphanit's survey revealed that 71 out of 102 participants were educated to Bachelor's degree and higher and 36 of these said that they usually agree to follow the guidance from fortuneteller and the practice of Chinese fortune sticks (Chalermnan & Weeraphan, 2022).

There are different mediums of fortune-telling practice in Thailand, such as Tarot reading, palmistry, astrology, necromancy and scrying using a crystal ball. However, one of the most popular fortune-telling in Thailand is Chinese fortune sticks. Chinese fortune sticks are usually available in temples, which are considered as the center where Thai people go to meet each other to make merit, meditation and to release fish. This activity can be done by all genders and all ages when they go to make merit at the temple and cost of doing this activity is lower when comparing to other kinds of fortune telling available in Thailand. These reasons support the fact that the fortune telling Chinese fortune sticks are highly popular among different groups of Thai people. The specialty and popularity of Chinese fortune sticks' prophecies is that one written prophecy contains various issues, such as health, finance, and love. So, one predication can reveal many things in the future at the same time.

The written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks are made up of good, neutral and bad semantic denotations (Rattanapian, 2017). After reading the written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks, the prophecies that contain negative denotations will not be bought home. However, if the written prophecies received are good, they tend to feel relieved about their future and bring the prophecy back home. It seems that the written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks are not just a piece of written papers, but they are influential to the readers' psychology. This could make the reader become more suffering or become happier. Thus, it is intriguing to study the discourse analysis in written prophecies to gain insightful information about the semantic denotation concerning agony and happiness recorded in the prophecies.

The most written properties of Chinese fortune sticks predict their future. Hu and Li (2015) stated that the linguistic features frequently used for prediction or opinion expression are epistemic modality markers. This is because there are various degrees that the writers can use based upon their evidence or information. The results of this study allow us to learn different topics written in prophecies and when one variant of epistemic modality markers is used in the written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks.

Objective of the Study

To investigate the degree of epistemic modality markers used in written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks

Research Question

What epistemic modality markers are used in written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks?

Literature Review

This section provides a literature review of degrees of epistemic modality markers divided into three degrees. Previous studies relating to different degrees of epistemic markers in different text varieties were reviewed. Information of properties on Chinese fortune sticks was also provided.

Degrees of Epistemic Modality Markers

This current study focuses on epistemic modality markers in the written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks. Epistemic modality marker are modalities or modal verbs that communicate the speaker's or writer's opinions, prediction, attitudes or subjective viewpoints towards certain entities (Swan, 2016). In order to understand the principles of epistemic modality markers, an example is contrasted with deontic modality markers, as in (1).

(1)

(a) Jane **may** come to the party tonight after her meeting.

(b) Peter **cannot** swim and he **cannot** drive as well.

Examples (1) reveals the different types of modality markers in English. Example (1a) represents epistemic modality makers where the speakers predict or express their opinions. On the other hand, example (1b) presents deontic modality markers, or the agents' ability to perform certain actions.

The epistemic modality markers in English are divided into three degrees. The first one is the degree of certainty and the modal verbs in this category include *have to*, *must* and *have got to* (Swan, 2016). The second degree is the level of probability that includes the modal verbs *will*, *would*, *shall*, *should* and *ought to*. The third degree is possibility and the modal verbs in this category are *can*, *could*, *may* and *might*. The different degrees of certainty are presented into context as in (2).

(2)

(a) You **might** read this book before your exam.

(b) You *should* read this book before your exam.

(c) You *must* read this book before your exam.

Using the epistemic modality marker *might* in (2a) makes it sound optional or additional where knowledge can be acquired from the book. On the other hand, using the epistemic modal marker *must* in (2c) makes it sound compulsory as part of content in the book is likely to be asked in the exam.

It is true that there are various syntactic categories, such as epistemic modality markers, verbs and nouns that can be used to express opinions. However, Hu and Li (2015) found that epistemic modality markers are mostly used when speakers would like to express their opinions or predict certain actions in the future. To follow the majority, this study focuses on different degrees of epistemic modality markers to study how the writers address their opinions.

Related Previous Studies

This section provides information on the use of epistemic modality in different text varieties, referring to different genres. Different types of texts are likely to have their own preferences for different degrees of epistemic modality markers.

One of the studies used a variety of psychological texts to investigate the use of epistemic modality markers in English (Martin, 2001). The results of his study show that the epistemic modality markers with the degree of possibility, such as *may* and *might* occur frequently in this text type.

It is tentatively suggested that the congenitally blind **may** show different learning strategies from the sighted as a result of allocating more attention to sensory information processing

(Martin, 2001, 203)

Martin (2001) suggested psychology is likely to use a lot of epistemic modalities, especially the degree of possibility. Most psychological research studies employ qualitative methods so the results of the study cannot be generalized. So, using a strong degree of certainty could affect *the* reliability.

Wongkittiporn (2021) used Buddhist texts to investigate the use of epistemic modality in English. In this study, the degrees of certainty were divided into three levels: certainty, probability and possibility. Out of 181 tokens, 72.37 percent appeared with the level of possibility. The topics used with this epistemic modality are unproven modality, estimation, and future predictions, such as (3).

(3)

(a) After this life, you **may** be reborn in a realm filled with extreme suffering.

(b) It **might** seem strange to Western ears to hear that rebirth in heaven is not the ultimate goal.

(Wongkittiporn, 2021, 189)

As explained by Wongkittiporn (2021), the epistemic modality with the level of possibility is frequently used with the semantic denotation of rebirth because the writer claims of unproven situation. In order to avoid controversial issues that may occur, the writers are likely to use epistemic modality with the lowest degree of certainty.

Chinese Fortune Sticks

Despite having various methods of fortune telling, one of the popular fortune-telling media is called *Chinese fortune sticks* originated in Zhong Dynasty. Chinese fortune sticks are an ancient Chinese fortune-telling. The bamboo is made as a long container where bamboo sticks coated with different numbers are put inside the bamboo container. The ritual of doing Chinese fortune sticks is prevalent in China, Japan and Thailand. Chinese fortune sticks had initially entered Thailand since Ayuthaya era. The evidence of Chinese fortune sticks was first found in Kalayanamitr Varamahavihara Temple, Thonburi during the reign of King Rama 5.

The written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks provides various topics of prediction. According to Sawangboonsatit (2018), nine topics of prediction were found in the fortune telling in the medium of Chinese fortune sticks. These include finance, society, love, health, work, family, travel, behavior and education. Sathitawakul (2022) added two topics: lawsuits and offsprings. With these topics, the semantic denotations of prophecies' Chinese fortune sticks are made up of good, neutral and bad interpretations. Good and neutral meaning are combined in approximately 70 percent of cases, whereas bad meanings occur in only 30 percent. This could be one of the reasons for supporting mental relief when reading prophecies' Chinese fortune sticks as the majority denote a positive meaning (Rattanapian, 2017).

Methodology

There are five steps for the methodology in this study.

Sample

The four step was to choose the reliable prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks for the analysis in this study. Not every written prophecy of Chinese fortune telling can be reliably applied in conducting the research study as the translation version in English is

unreliable and inconsistent with the Thai version. The samples used in this study were written properties gathered from Watthisamakkhee, Mae Kasa, Mae Sot District, Tak Province. However, Watthaisamakkhee's written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks were translated by a university lecturer who has an academic profession as an assistant professor and a professional translator. Therefore, it was reliable to use the written prophecies from this temple as the sample in this current study so as to increase reliability of the results of the current study.

Data Collection

The second step was the process of data collection. The whole written prophecies available at Watthisamakkhee were collected for this study. The current study included 28 written prophecies in this current study. An excerpt exemplification in written prophecies is as follows:

You are like a blooming flower that modestly struggles to resolve your suffering. Leave it to your fate if you like. Resorting to that in a haste **will** only make things worse and gloomy. Think about given yourself something beneficial before you rest in peace. It is something like growing fruit trees and left behind for other people to harvest and eat. You **will** have a baby girl. A lawsuit will end up with a draw for both parties. Clearly your supporters are not available now. It **will** be hard to find good luck.

(Tanjai the Prophet, Prophecy No.26, Watthisamakkhee)

Each written prophecy contains a short paragraph between events to ten sentences. The sentence that was written with epistemic modal verbs, such as *will*, was extracted to examine the degree of epistemic modality markers via concordance lines. The third step is to create concordance line of the data analysis in Microsoft Excel as presented below.

Concordance Lines

1. Resorting to that in a haste **will** only make things worse and gloomy.
2. You'll have a baby girl.
3. It **will** be hard to find good luck.
4. You **can** expect having a baby boy.

(Tanjai the Prophet, Prophecy No.26, Watthisamakkhee)

As illustrated, the data in written prophecies were extracted to be kept into Microsoft Excel systematically and consistently for the convenience of the study and the ability to go back to check. It is important to note that the data collection this study was rather limited as the data in this study was part of the main study. In addition, this study is qualitative

research, so the number of data collection presented in this study was considered adequate to understand the phenomenon.

Data Analysis

The fourth step was the data analysis. The data analysis in this study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. There were six steps to follow when conducting thematic analysis in a qualitative research study. The first step was that the researcher is required to familiarize with his/her own data collection. In order to make familiarization of the data collection, it is recommended that the researcher needs to read the data collection again and again. Noting down the initial idea is also suggested if needed. The second step was the generating of initial code. The data that is relevant to the code or the keywords must be collect systematically. The third step was that the researcher needs to search for themes. The themes that emerged at this stage are relevant to the code received in the previous stage. The fourth step was the revision of the themes. This step requires the researcher to make sure that every single piece of information is placed into the right place or categories. The fifth step was that each name of the theme must receive the definition. The last step was to produce the report.

In terms of the framework of epistemic modality markers, this study follows McEnery and Kifle (2002) who clearly divided the epistemic modality markers into three degrees: certainty, probability and possibility. The epistemic modality markers in the degree of certainty include *must*, *have to* and *have got to*. The epistemic modality markers in the degree of probability include *will*, *would*, *should*, *ought* and *shall*. The epistemic modality markers in the degree of possibility include *may*, *might*, *can* and *could*. The data analysis in this study is exemplified as in (4).

(4)

You are like a blooming flower that modestly struggle to resolve your suffering. Leave it to your fate if you like. Resorting to that in a haste will only make things worse and gloomy. Think about given yourself something beneficial before you rest in peace. It's something like growing fruit trees and left behind for other people to harvest and eat. You'll have a baby girl [EPISTEMIC MODALITY: PROBABILITY].

(Tanjai the Prophet, Prophecy No.26, Watthisamakkhee)

The modality marker will be interpreted as epistemic as it predicts an even in the future. The degree of this epistemic modality is interpreted as probability. This methodology leads to the results of this study.

The Results

Degrees of Epistemic Modality Markers in Prophecies of Chinese Fortune Sticks

This section presents the results of this study. With 28 written prophecies, 49 tokens were used with epistemic modality markers. The overall frequencies and percentages of different degrees of epistemic modality are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Frequency and Percentage of Degrees of Epistemic Modality Markers

Degrees of Epistemic Modality Markers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Certainty	0	0
Probability	46	93.88
Possibility	3	6.12
Total	49	100

Table 1 presents different degrees of epistemic modality markers in the written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks. The use of epistemic modality markers is divided into three different degrees which are certainty, probability, and possibility. The highest percentage was for the probable degree of epistemic modality at 93.88 percent. The possible degree of epistemic modality markers was 6.12 percent. However, a certain degree of epistemic modality markers was not found in this study. Some examples are given below.

(5)

(a) You *will* recover from illness.

(b) Waiting a bit more, you *can* be closer to achievement.

(Tanjai the Prophet, Watthisamakkhee)

Example (5) shows the predictions about health and one's achievement. Example (5a) shows a degree of probability, while example (5b) shows a degree of possibility.

Topics in Written Prophecies in Chinese Fortune Sticks

The topics of written prophecies were divided into nine semantic denotations or nine themes. There were luck, health, parents, children, companions, love, lawsuits, travel and goals. The frequencies and percentages of each theme were summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Topics in Written Prophecies in Chinese Fortune Sticks

Topics in Prophecies in Chinese Fortune Sticks		Positive Denotations		Negative Denotations	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	Luck 1.1 Your luck will be very good. 1.2 It will be hard to find good luck.	2	4.08	1	2.04
2.	Health 2.1 You'll get well from illness. 2.2 Your illness will be difficult to heal.	15	30.61	1	2.04
3.	Parents A flight with mother will end.	2	4.08	0	0
4.	Children You can expect having a baby boy.	2	4.08	0	0
5.	Companion Lost friends will be found.	3	6.12	0	0
6.	Love 6.1 You will have a very nice and good-looking soul mate. 6.2 Being too fuzzy and choosy, your soul mate to be won't be available for now.	6	12.24	1	2.04
7.	Lawsuit 7.1 You'll win a lawsuit. 7.2 Fighting a law suit will not be a success as it is hard and difficult to escape.	7	14.29	2	4.08
8	Travel Your trip to anywhere will be good and serving the purposes	2	4.08	0	0
9	Goal Your future will be a happy and prosperous one without worried.	5	10.20	0	0
	Total	44	89.80	5	10.20

Table 2 presents topics in prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks which are divided into positive and negative denotations. The overall percentages of positive and negative

semantic denotation are approximately 90 percent and 10 percent. This means that only one person out of every ten people will receive a negative prophecy. Among nine themes, five themes, which were more than half, always appear of to be positive. These themes include the goal in one's life, travel, companions, children and parents. In terms of health, lawsuits, and love, the negative semantic denotations are relatively lower. These frequencies and percentages lead to the following discussion below.

Discussion

High Frequency of Probability in Prophecies

The degree of probable epistemic modality markers in prophecies was the highest at 93.88 percent. This degree was frequently found in all themes or semantic denotations written in written prophecies. When comparing the result of this study with psychological texts (Martin, 2001), when psychiatrists or psychologists express their opinions, they prefer to use the epistemic modality markers with degree of possibility, such as *may* and *might* as *this treatment may help you recover* from depression. In contrast, the prediction in fortune telling, especially with Chinese fortune sticks, appear to be probable with a higher degree that psychological texts. In addition to the frequent use of the epistemic modality marker *will* for positive prediction in prophecies, it helps boost higher levels of confidence or promise that different aspects of one's life is likely to be better. As mentioned by Bishop and Willis (2014), hope in life is so important to everyone. The deployment of probable epistemic modality markers would help create impact of positive hope in ones' life.

The results of this study go along the same line with Rattanapian (2017) who stated that approximately 70 percent of the prophecies in his study is positive outcome, whereas the bad meaning are 30 percent. The reasons to support the higher positive outcomes is mental relief when reading prophecies' Chinese fortune sticks. In addition, the topics of properties comply with Sawangboonsatit (2018) who showed nine topics of prediction including finance, society, love, health, work, family, travel, behavior and education. The topics of health and work are the most concern

Religion Influence

One of the main reasons as to why Chinese fortune sticks are popular in Thailand is their religious influence. The majority of the Thai population is Buddhist (94.6 percent), which is practically regarded as a Thai national religion. With regard to Buddhism's doctrine, there are several core beliefs, which comprise a spiritual renewal commonly known as rebirth, Karma [good and bad actions], and Samsara. According to this belief, Karma is driven as a

cycle to be reborn. Rebirth will perpetually repeat as if it is the cycle of conditioned ways of living. This is called Samara. Good and bad Karma doing today will have an influence on tomorrow or the rebirth in the next life. Thai people are usually taught that good behavior and contributing actions in the present day will have a consequence in the future, perceived as Karma. Religion is usually used to control their mind to be calm and serene. When Thai people feel uncomfortable; stressed, frustrated, angry and more, they will visit a temple to relax their mind. Not only do Thai people do meditation and pray in front of the Buddha Statue, but also they find activities inside the temples to do in order to relax their mind, such as Chinese fortune sticks.

Positive Motivation

Skinner (1990), American Psychologist, addressed that people are likely to repeat certain behaviors again and again if positive outcomes are likely to be received continuously. Reading written prophecies predicting about own success in the future or wish is a way to gain happiness.

Buddhism does not teach all kind of fortune-telling (Neulip, 2020). This may be true. Nevertheless, it can be argued that fortune-telling is not forbidden by Buddhist teaching as long as it does not negatively impact people. Fortune-telling is prevalent in the cultures of traditional Asian Buddhism seeing that this practice was widely spread at the time of Buddha (approximately 2500 years ago). Additionally, there is a clear relevance between the Buddhist religion and lifestyle among Thai people. In other words, the lifestyle of Thai people relies significantly upon religion. Kheourai (2007) stresses that the lifestyle of Thai people appears to be where people seek spiritual goals, things beyond nature, and the outlook of life. This is seen as the integration of mythical, supernatural, and philosophical respects in Buddhist religious beliefs that shape the Thai way of life. To illustrate, similar to when the doctor prognosticates so as to cure physical sickness, some Thai people visit temples and make the fortune telling of Chinese fortune stick to relieve the symptoms of spiritual ailments (Vongvipanond, 1994). For Thai people, visiting psychiatrists seems to be uncommon practice or the last choice in one's life. This study supports why Thai people addicts to read writer prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks for self-positive motivation or positive reinforcement. Approximately 90 percent of the prophecies always says good thing about one's future, such as health, love and achievement in ones' life. When someone got sick severely, such as cancer, heart disease, chronic diseases, a proper treatment in the hospital with expert doctors cannot reach aimed results. Going to the temple and reading prophecies of Chinese fortune stick could help encourage someone with hope to continue their life.

The Intertwines of Superstition and Thai Cultures

The second perspective why fortune telling is widespread in Thai culture is probably because of the cultural values of Thai people. One of the values of Thai people learned through upbringing is obviously superstition. Superstition is irrational beliefs of what a society regards to be true and sensible. This is not regulated by the laws of science. They also express that not only do culture that have a high value of superstition substantially regard spiritualists as business consultants in making business decisions, but these cultures also pay great attention to palmistry and fortune telling as having a big impact on their lives and businesses. On top of that, Broman and Warren (2005) highlight that it is believed among Thai people that strong unseen spirits called “Phii” exist, are both good and bad. To elaborate, it is Thai belief that each land has its own guardian spirit. This unseen guardian spirit lives in traditional Thai houses as if it is a Buddhist temple. Broman and Warren point out astonishingly that a Thai politician positioned as Minister of Finance also paid respect to this unseen spirit and prayed for guardian spirits at their spiritual dwellings on the first day of his work. Likewise, Servaes (2000), one of the Thai values systems is religio-psychical orientation, which refers to karma and superstition. It is pointed out in Servaes’ s study that the practices of fortune- telling and lucky numbers are more popular among “Bankokians” than farmers. Also, the factor of education levels did not make any difference on their observation. Moreover, Thai People also have an outstanding value that they are external locus of control, which is dominated over by nature so that they would like to live harmoniously with nature; otherwise, they will be punished by nature. According to Neuliep (2020), a culture that believes in a harmonious relationship with nature has low income and low literacy skills. In addition, the uses of land are mainly for farming. They have tendencies to be exposed to the risk of great natural damage. It is commonly known that Thailand is an agricultural country where large numbers of population are farmers. Thai farmers usually pay respect to *Pra Pirun*. The Thai god of rain so that he will give the rain to them in all agricultural seasons. In my point of view, as Thai people have a fundamental belief in unseen and spiritual things, and it is one of the relevant links between the cultural values of Thai people and the high level of popularity of fortune- telling among Thai people since fortune- telling, in itself, is an untouchable belief.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Thai people tend to fear the unknown and ambiguous situations. According to the Hofstede (2011), his model of cultural dimensions exhibits the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance, of which overall 120 nations were scaled in his work. The uncertainty avoidance in Thailand is scored among the highest at 64 compared to other Buddhist religious nations such as

China and India who are equally scored at 40. This can be seen that the level of uncertainty avoidance in Thai society is relatively high compared to other Buddhist religious societies. Dicksona, Hartogb and Mitchelson (2003) explained that high uncertainty avoidance societies normally concentrate on career stability and family. This reflect the results of this study why the issues of parent, children and accomplishment in one life always appear positively. This seems to concur with the results of Lillian and Jeanette (2012) mentioning that the employees in strong uncertainty avoidance cultures expect to be employed over a longer time. This can be the answer to a question of why Thai education people enjoy doing Chinese fortune sticks to predict their career stability and advancement.

Epistemic Modality Markers and their Usage

This section reflects the use of epistemic modality markers in English. As mentioned by Swan (2016), epistemic modality markers in English can be expressed in various degrees and this links with the language users' evaluation or subjectivity toward certain events in the real world. The results in this study allows us to see that degrees of evaluation in one's belief are expressed via a moderate degree or degree of probability. Making the statement via a degree of possibility may not enough to convince the readers. Likewise, making the statement via a degree of certainty could lead to exaggeration. Wongkittiporn (2021) study could be used to support this claim. He studied the epistemic modality markers on Buddhist texts which are relevant to people believe. The results of the study are the same where the epistemic modality with the degree of probability is frequent. In conclusion, it is fair to highlight the epistemic modality with the degree of probability and linguistic expressions of people' belief.

This current study examines the different degrees of epistemic modality markers as used in written prophecies of Chinese fortune stocks in order to answer the following research question.

What are the epistemic modality markers used in written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks?

The results in this study show that 93.88 percent of epistemic modality markers in written prophecies in Chinese fortune sticks is used with the degree of probability. Although nine themes or prophecies such as health, love and lawsuit were found in this study, approximately 90 percent of prophecies in these topics are always written with positive denotations.

With the results concluded above, the level of confidence addressed with epistemic modality marker is rather high concerning one's future with positive outcomes. This could help answer the question why reading prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks is popular among Thai people as it creates promise that one life is going to continue to a good

direction. This leads to hope for one to continue their life and help one reduce anxiety about the up-coming events in the future.

Although the practice of Chinese fortune sticks in Thailand is not new, it is part of Thai people's belief to create positive motivation. The distinctive characteristics of Thai people are that they try to avoid the uncertainty in their life, such as jobs, education and love. This could be because Thai society is a collectivistic society where we stay to gather as a bigger family and the lifestyle of Thai people tends to depend upon each other. Making mistake or fail to accomplish their goal could create negative reputation to their family. Accordingly, fortune-telling is a way that allows them to know their future and consequence of a certain action in order to get rid of mistake as much as possible.

The benefits of this study are viewed in terms of cultural awareness. Although different people have different belief based upon their own religious, we will not judge which one is better than the other. This allows people from different religions to stay together in the nation harmoniously. In addition, this study also provides benefits to English language learners in order to use epistemic modality markers appropriately as epistemic modality markers requires personal evaluation and judgement. Despite having the interesting findings, the results of this current study are applicable to only the written prophecies of Chinese fortune sticks. Generalizing the results of the study to other texts, such as academic prose and newspapers. With the future of the study, it is recommended that the future research papers in the field should focus on the epistemic modality markers in other text varieties, such as legal texts and argumentative essays in order to contribute something new to the field.

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