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Vanishing Taboos and Shrinking Language Domains: Evidence from Liangmai

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Abstract

*This paper describes a range of traditional taboos known as **niuhbo** observed by the Liangmai community, a Tibeto-Burman-speaking Indigenous group of Northeast India. Once central to moral reasoning and social regulation, many of these taboos are now fading amid shifting generational values and the weakening of oral transmission. Drawing on fieldwork and interviews with elders in Liangmai villages, the study identifies and categorises taboos related to food, ritual practice, kinship, gender roles, and human-environment relations. It examines their perceived consequences, the moral beliefs they reflect, and their role in maintaining social balance. It also examines how the decline of these cultural practices parallels the shrinking use of the Liangmai language within traditional domains. As taboos are forgotten, the sociocultural contexts where Liangmai is actively spoken—such as ritual speech, agricultural practices, and oral storytelling—are also diminishing. This process not only affects cultural knowledge but also reduces the contexts in which Liangmai is actively and functionally used. Documenting these belief systems thus contributes not only to cultural preservation but also to understanding processes of domain loss and language shift within Tibeto-Burman communities.*

Keywords: Liangmai, taboo, belief systems, language domains

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Vanishing Taboos and Shrinking Language Domains: Evidence from Liangmai*

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1. Introduction

Every society operates on a set of shared expectations—principles and rules that guide how individuals think, behave, speak, dress, and eat. These expectations, often expressed as social norms and taboos, play a central role in maintaining social order and cohesion. A taboo refers to an action or behaviour considered forbidden or unacceptable within a culture, often grounded in deeper moral or cosmological beliefs. In linguistic contexts, taboo language involves words and expressions that are socially restricted or avoided because they are considered inappropriate or offensive within particular cultural settings (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Alongside these taboos are cultural beliefs, or the ideas that communities hold to be true or important. Together, these norms and beliefs regulate behaviour, reinforce identity, and ensure the smooth functioning of communal life.

Among the Indigenous peoples of Northeast India, such norms and taboos continue to shape local worldviews, although many are increasingly under threat. The Liangmai, a Tibeto-Burman-speaking ethnolinguistic group belonging to the Western Naga sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman language family (Post & Burling, 2017), are one such community. The Liangmai form part of the broader Zeliangrong cultural constellation, comprising the Zeme, Liangmai, and Rongmei communities, which are widely regarded as sharing a common ethnic, linguistic, social, and cultural origin (Kamei, 2004). While this study focuses specifically on the Liangmai, it is important to note that many of the norms and taboos discussed here may also be found across the wider Zeliangrong and Naga cultural context and among neighbouring Kuki-Chin and Boro-Garo groups. At the same time, certain taboos may be specific to particular villages or regions and therefore may not represent the practices of the entire community. The Liangmai are primarily found in the Tamenglong and Senapati districts of Manipur and the Peren district of Nagaland. According to the 2011 Census of India, the Liangmai population was 49,811, with the majority residing in Manipur (Office of the Registrar General, India 2018).

The Liangmai traditionally followed *Poupe Racheng*, meaning ‘the religion of the ancestors,’ which involved reverence for nature spirits, sacred stones, and the supreme deity *Tinggen Rawang*. These beliefs gave rise to intricate social rules concerning food, kinship, gender roles, ritual practices, and human-environment relations. However, the influence of modernisation, formal education, and globalisation has profoundly transformed cultural life in Liangmai villages. As new belief systems and lifestyles are adopted, many traditional practices—particularly taboos—have been marginalised, forgotten, or reinterpreted. Yet, traces of these earlier beliefs remain embedded in everyday expressions, ritual vocabulary, and the collective memory of elders.

This study documents selected traditional taboos observed in the Liangmai community and examines their cultural meanings and role in structuring and regulating social life. It demonstrates that the weakening of these belief-based practices contributes directly to the shrinking functional domains

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of Liangmai, particularly in contexts such as ritual performance, agricultural activities, and oral transmission of knowledge. Drawing on language domain theory, the study explains how the decline of cultural practices leads to the gradual loss of certain areas of language use and traditional ways of expression. By examining these taboos in relation to wider social and cultural changes, the research shows how closely culture and language are connected. Through community-based documentation, it aims both to record valuable cultural knowledge and to contribute to ongoing discussions about language maintenance, language shift, and revitalisation.

2. Theoretical framework

This study is guided by language domain theory as developed by Joshua A. Fishman (1972). Fishman explains that language use depends on social contexts, which he calls ‘domains.’ A domain refers to a regular social situation in which a particular language or variety is normally used. It is shaped by who is speaking, where the interaction takes place, and for what purpose. Common examples of domains include the home, religion, education, work, and community gatherings.

According to this theory, language use is closely connected to social organisation. Certain words, expressions, or styles of speaking become associated with particular domains. When a domain continues across generations, the language associated with it also continues to be used and maintained. However, domains are socially sustained and therefore subject to change. They exist only as long as the social practices that support them remain active. When these practices weaken or disappear, the related domains also decline. As a result, the language forms tied to those domains may be used less frequently and may gradually disappear (Fishman, 1972).

The ideas of Charles A. Ferguson (1994) further support this perspective, especially his discussion of how shared linguistic patterns are shaped by social structure and maintained through community conventions. When social institutions, belief systems, and cultural practices change, patterns of language use also change.

In the Liangmai context, many traditional taboos shape speech practices in areas such as ritual performance, naming, kinship terms, mourning, agriculture, and healing. These practices form important cultural domains in which specific linguistic forms are required. As these belief-based practices decline, the domains connected to them are also shrinking. This study therefore examines how the weakening of taboo practices contributes to the reduction of Liangmai language use in these traditional domains.

3. Methodology

This study is based on community-based documentation conducted in Namtiram and neighbouring Liangmai villages in Tamenglong District, Manipur, Northeast India. The author, a native speaker of Liangmai and a member of the community, has direct knowledge of the cultural framework that sustains many of the traditional norms and taboos examined in this paper. These practices have traditionally been transmitted orally through elders, who instructed younger generations on appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Such guidance is commonly conveyed through everyday advice, narratives, ritual instruction, and cautionary sayings.

Data for this study were collected over an eight-year period (2016–2024). Information was gathered through informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation during village visits, festivals, family gatherings, and ritual events. Approximately five to six elderly speakers (aged approximately 40–80) were consulted, including both men and women recognised within the community for their cultural knowledge. These interactions were largely conversational in nature, allowing speakers to recount memories, explanations, and narratives in their own terms.

The documentation focused on identifying (i) the nature of specific taboos, (ii) the social and ritual contexts in which they operated, (iii) the linguistic expressions associated with them, including avoidance forms, proverbs, blessings, and cautionary sayings, and (iv) community perceptions regarding their decline. Notes were taken during or immediately after these interactions, and particular attention was paid to lexical items, euphemistic expressions, and context-bound speech forms.

The data were analysed qualitatively within the framework of language domain theory, with attention to how specific taboo practices structured domains of language use. Taboos were categorised according to the social domains in which they functioned (e.g., naming, ritual, kinship, forest contexts, social hierarchy). The analysis examined how each domain required specific linguistic forms and how the weakening of associated practices affects the use and transmission of these forms.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and verbal consent was obtained prior to documentation. Personal identities have been anonymised. The research was conducted with sensitivity to cultural values and with awareness of the researcher's dual role as both insider and analyst. One limitation of this study is that much of the data relies on retrospective accounts from elders, reflecting memory-based reconstructions of past practices. However, the recurrence of the same taboos across multiple consultants and villages strengthens the reliability of the findings. These accounts nevertheless provide valuable insight into the relationship between taboo systems and language use in the Liangmai community.

4. Types of taboos and social norms in Liangmai society

In Liangmai society, taboos form an important part of everyday life. They help maintain social balance, moral order, and spiritual well-being. These practices are transmitted orally, mainly through elders and family members, and are closely linked to traditional beliefs about life, death, health, and community harmony. Violating certain taboos is believed to result in misfortune or spiritual repercussions for both individuals and the wider community.

Many of these taboos are associated with specific domains of language use, such as naming, ritual speech, kinship terminology, and avoidance forms. As traditional practices decline, the use of Liangmai within these contexts is also diminishing, particularly among younger speakers. The following sections outline various taboo-related norms, organised according to these linguistic domains.

4.1 Naming taboos in Liangmai culture

Naming practices in Liangmai culture are closely tied to social identity, kinship, and respect. Names are not just labels, they carry cultural weight, signal gender and family roles and reflect the community's values. Certain rules around naming and name usage also function as taboos, meant to maintain respect and social harmony.

In terms of structure, Liangmai names often include gendered suffixes. Female names usually end with *-liu*, as seen in names like *Ariliu*, *Asiliu*, and *Abamliu*. Male names commonly end with *-bou* (e.g., *Athiubou*, *Ashibou*), *-ang* (e.g., *Dithinang*, *Lukamang*), or *-lung* (e.g., *Majilung*, *Thuinilung*). These suffixes are still recognised and help mark gender identity in both formal and informal settings. They remain a strong part of traditional Liangmai identity.

There are also social rules regarding how people address one another. Using kinship terms instead of personal names remains a common norm, especially when speaking to elders. For example, one might use *achi* 'elder brother/sister', *apou* 'grandfather', *ape* 'grandmother', *anai* 'aunt', or *piau/apiu* 'uncle'. These forms not only mark respect but also reflect the speaker's position in the social hierarchy. Avoiding personal names in these contexts is not just politeness, it's a culturally expected form of speech, and using someone's name directly can be seen as disrespectful.

A key naming taboo in Liangmai society is that husbands and wives traditionally do not call each other by their personal names. Instead, they use teknonyms, referring to each other through the

name of their first child, for example *Abungpui* ‘mother of Abung’ and *Abungpiu* ‘father of Abung’ — or they use nicknames or affectionate names of their own. This practice reflects modesty and reinforces the idea that personal identity is closely tied to family and relational roles. In this way, teknonymy forms part of a specific linguistic domain connected to marriage and family life, where particular address terms are socially expected. However, as younger couples increasingly call each other by name or adopt modern address terms such as *daddy* or *mummy*, this traditional domain is weakening. When the social practice declines, the specialised kinship vocabulary associated with it also loses its function. The weakening of this taboo therefore illustrates how the erosion of a cultural domain leads to the shrinking of a distinct lexical domain in Liangmai.

A similar naming taboo exists among young couples and lovers, who traditionally avoid using each other’s personal names due to the belief that doing so may bring misfortune or even early death. Although younger generations do not always strictly follow this practice, the belief continues to persist, particularly in rural areas. In such situations, individuals may use nicknames or indirect forms of reference instead. This reflects the understanding that personal names are not neutral labels but are believed to carry spiritual or emotional force.

Finally, naming children after deceased ancestors was and still is a common practice, usually done to honor the memory of the deceased ancestors and to maintain family lineage. However, there has long been a strong taboo against naming a child after someone who died in an unnatural way, such as by suicide, drowning, or a fatal accident. It is believed that giving a child such a name could bring about a similar fate. These taboos not only reflect cultural ideas about death and the afterlife but also show how language—especially naming—can become a way of navigating spiritual risk.

In recent decades, however, traditional naming practices have begun to change. Many parents increasingly choose biblical or foreign names such as David, John, Hannah, and other Christian names rather than traditional Liangmai ancestral names. As a result, the cultural knowledge associated with ancestral naming practices and the taboo-based rules governing name selection are becoming less prominent. This shift contributes to the shrinking of a traditional naming domain in which Liangmai personal names served as markers of kinship, ancestry, and cultural identity.

4.2 Death and funerary taboos in Liangmai society

Death in Liangmai society has traditionally been treated with deep seriousness, and a range of taboos are observed to show respect for the deceased and to protect the living from spiritual harm. These practices are not merely rituals; they are closely connected to beliefs about purity, fate, and community responsibility. Many of these practices are transmitted orally, often through fixed phrases or conventional expressions, and they shape the language used in contexts of death and mourning.

When someone dies in the village, it becomes taboo to continue with regular activities such as fetching water, weaving, or farming. People are also discouraged or forbidden from leaving the village on the day of the death. Traditionally, the occurrence of a death is communicated through a distinctive ringing of a bell known as *saikang* ‘death bell’, (from *sai* ‘death’ and *kang* ‘bell’). The bell is struck in a specific pattern, with a single loud strike that is allowed to resonate until the sound gradually fades away before the next strike is made. The long interval between successive strikes signals to the entire village that a death has occurred. It is a dreaded sound, immediately recognised by community members. Once the *saikang* is heard, all forms of singing, laughing, playing, hunting, and work cease, and silence prevails throughout the village as people gather to mourn and reflect on the loss. The sounding of the *saikang* therefore functions not only as a social signal but also as a culturally meaningful communicative practice that marks the beginning of a distinct funerary domain.

The funerary domain is further characterised by specialised expressions of condolence and farewell. Upon entering the house of the deceased, village elders traditionally utter formulaic expressions addressed to the dead, such as *Napuilian wiju tadlo, tingien lam wiju mathak lo* ‘May

your journey be smooth; rest well in heaven' and *Nangra asuang tadrai lan mi, wjiu tad lo* 'You have gone ahead of me in all good things; rest well.' Such expressions form part of a larger repertoire of ritual speech used specifically in mourning contexts and are rarely employed outside funerary occasions. These sayings not only express grief and respect but also reinforce communal beliefs about death, the afterlife, and the relationship between the living and the deceased.

As traditional funeral observances become less common, specialised condolence formulas, farewell sayings, ritual speech, and other death-related expressions are increasingly falling out of use. The decline of these practices therefore contributes to the shrinking of the funerary linguistic domain and the gradual loss of culturally embedded forms of speech.

The grave site must be chosen with great care, with attention to the soil and terrain, and once selected, it cannot be abandoned, even if it proves difficult to dig due to stones or hard ground. Leaving such a site unused is believed to invite another death, as the space is thought to require symbolic completion. Traditionally, the commencement of grave-digging was accompanied by ritual utterances recited by village elders. These utterances formed part of a specialised funerary register associated with burial practices and were intended to ensure the proper completion of the ritual and to protect participants from misfortune. Those who assist with grave-digging or coffin-making are not allowed to return home until the funeral is completed, and they are forbidden from bringing any soil or mud from the grave into their houses. Before re-entering their homes, those involved in the burial must undergo ritual cleansing, which typically involves bathing and washing themselves to remove any spiritual impurity associated with the grave. These practices reflect the belief that death creates a state of spiritual vulnerability, and that careful observance of ritual rules is necessary to protect both the family and the wider community from further misfortune.

However, as death-related taboos have gradually weakened and many traditional funerary practices have fallen into disuse, the ritual utterances and specialised forms of speech associated with them have also begun to disappear. Today, community members often remember that such ritual speech once existed but are unable to recall its actual wording. The decline of these taboos has therefore contributed not only to the disappearance of ritual practices but also to the erosion of a specialised funerary linguistic domain. This illustrates how the loss of taboo-based practices can lead to the disappearance of culturally embedded vocabulary, ritual expressions, and traditional communicative practices.

There are also specific practices associated with particular types of death. In the case of twins, when one dies, a banana stem is buried alongside the body to symbolically provide companionship and prevent the death of the surviving twin. If a baby dies, it is taboo to bury the baby's carrying cloth called *paliat*, as it is believed that doing so may burden the child's spirit in the spirit world. These customs reflect symbolic reasoning and ritual metaphor and are associated with culturally specific beliefs and practices that were traditionally transmitted orally across generations.

Today, however, many of these taboos are no longer actively observed. Most community members, particularly younger generations, are unfamiliar with the practices, while others only recall having heard about them from elders. As belief in these taboos decline, people have largely stopped narrating the stories, explanations, and ritual practices associated with them. The disappearance of these customs therefore contributes not only to the loss of traditional cultural knowledge but also to the erosion of the linguistic domain in which such beliefs were discussed, explained, and transmitted.

When someone dies from unnatural causes such as suicide, drowning, or an accident, additional taboos apply. People are expected to spit before mentioning the name of the deceased to avoid invoking the same fate. Village elders may even insult or scold the dead body, sometimes using strong or tabooed language, as a symbolic act of rejecting the cause of death. This speech act is not intended to show disrespect; rather, it serves as a warning to the living, especially young people, encouraging them to remain strong, learn necessary skills such as swimming, and avoid similar misfortune. Such ritualised

scolding may include expressions such as *Nang mpiumai makma?* ‘Are you not a man?’ and *Mangam makma?* ‘Are you not ashamed to die in water?’. Elders traditionally shouted these expressions in a loud voice so that the entire village could hear them, reinforcing the moral lesson associated with the death. If the death occurs outside the village, the body is not brought into the house or the village. Instead, it is buried at the outskirts, reflecting the belief that unnatural death brings ritual contamination. These spatial and verbal taboos help maintain social order, reduce perceived spiritual risk, and preserve the ritual purity of the village space.

Today, however, many of these practices are no longer widely observed. Only a few elderly community members still remember the ritual scolding expressions, and younger generations are often unfamiliar with both the wording and the circumstances in which they were used. As the taboos surrounding unnatural death gradually disappear, the specialised vocabulary, formulaic expressions, and communicative practices associated with them are also falling out of use. This process contributes to the shrinking of the funerary linguistic domain and the loss of culturally embedded forms of speech.

Another important death-related practice formerly observed among the Liangmai was *Tadiabo*, a period of mourning during which the soul of the deceased was believed to remain in the household. During this period, a ritual object known as *Tala* was carefully preserved by the family. It consisted of the deceased’s thumbnail inserted into a special ginger called *Majatbiu*, wrapped in cloth, and kept as part of the mourning observances. Several taboos governed this period. Family members avoided participation in joyful social activities, and great care was taken when offering food and drink to the deceased’s soul. Spilling food during these offerings was considered taboo, as it was believed to anger the soul and bring misfortune upon the household. The mourning period concluded with a communal ritual known as *Tala Thuanbonai* ‘day of throwing away the Tala’, during which ritual specialists recited prayers and farewell expressions urging the soul to depart peacefully for *Charuiram*, the land of the dead (Newmei, 2012). These practices were accompanied by specialised ritual vocabulary and ceremonial speech forms associated exclusively with mourning and ancestor-related observances. Today, however, *Tadiabo* is no longer widely practiced, and many younger Liangmai are unfamiliar with terms such as *Tala*, *Majatbiu*, *Tala Thuanbonai*, and *Charuiram*, as well as the ritual expressions once used during the ceremony. The disappearance of these practices has contributed to the erosion of a distinct funerary linguistic domain and the gradual loss of culturally embedded forms of speech.

4.3 Norms and taboos related to hunting

Hunting holds a central place in the traditional life of the Liangmai people, as it does among many Naga communities. It is not only a source of food but also a cultural activity closely linked to values of discipline, self-control, courage, and respect for the natural world. A number of ritual taboos and behavioural norms are observed before, during, and after a hunting expedition. These practices are transmitted orally across generations and are followed as part of customary knowledge rather than through formal instruction.

One of the most important taboos requires a hunter to observe a restriction called *nthiangbo*. Although difficult to translate precisely, the term refers to the disciplined observance of ritual guidelines and self-restraint despite temptation. In hunting contexts, *nthiangbo* commonly involves sexual abstinence on the night before a hunt and is believed to purify the body and increase the likelihood of success. On the way to the hunting ground, speech is discouraged and, in some cases, strictly prohibited. Hunters may remain silent or avoid unnecessary conversation. Such verbal restraint functions as a form of ritual discipline, intended to prevent misfortune and to maintain concentration. Silence itself becomes a meaningful practice, reflecting control, focus, and respect for the activity.

Hunting also involves a system of non-verbal communication that requires alertness and shared cultural knowledge. A hunter must carefully observe signs along the forest path. For example, a branch or cluster of leaves deliberately positioned in a particular direction indicates that another hunter has

already moved that way. Recognising such markers is crucial in order to avoid accidental encounters or misdirected shooting. These signs function as conventional signals understood within the hunting community. Experienced hunters are able to interpret these directional markers immediately, while younger hunters today may not recognise their meaning unless they are explicitly instructed. The ability to interpret such signs is therefore not merely practical knowledge but part of a shared communicative system embedded in hunting practice. As traditional hunting declines and taboos such as *nthiangbo* are less frequently observed, the specialised knowledge, vocabulary, and communicative practices associated with hunting are also gradually disappearing. Consequently, the linguistic domain connected with hunting is shrinking, and many younger speakers are unfamiliar with terms and practices that were once widely understood.

Physical taboos are equally strict. No one should step over a hunter's legs, weapons, or tools, as this is regarded as disrespectful and capable of jeopardising the hunt. Similarly, urinating or defecating during the hunting expedition is forbidden, as these acts are considered to disrupt the hunter's spiritual focus and compromise the ritual integrity of the environment. If the hunt is successful, additional norms apply. On the day a hunter kills an animal, he is not permitted to return to agricultural work. Doing so is interpreted as *agembo* 'greed', suggesting dissatisfaction with the reward already received. Such behaviour is believed to result in crop failure or unsuccessful future hunts. This taboo reinforces a cultural ethic of moderation and expresses a principle of reciprocity between humans and the natural world.

Terms such as *agembo*, together with other hunting-related expressions and customary knowledge, form part of a specialised linguistic domain associated with hunting practices. As traditional hunting activities and the taboos surrounding them become less common, many of these expressions are no longer regularly used or transmitted to younger generations. The decline of hunting traditions therefore contributes not only to the loss of cultural practices but also to the gradual erosion of hunting-related vocabulary and communicative knowledge.

In the case of large game that cannot be immediately carried home, the hunter is required to cut off some portion of ear and take it as proof of the kill. The removed piece of ear functions as a symbolic marker of ownership. It is believed that once the ear has been taken, even wild animals will not claim or disturb the carcass. This practice reflects a culturally constructed understanding of recognition between human and animal realms, suggesting a form of regulated interaction rather than domination.

Taboos are also observed during fishing, which is typically carried out communally. On designated fishing days, men are prohibited from touching a woman's clothing, as such contact is believed to result in an unsuccessful catch. This gender-based restriction reflects ideas of ritual propriety and reinforces gender roles and boundaries in subsistence activities.

Although hunting is less common today, many of the taboos, behavioural norms, and communicative practices associated with it are no longer strictly observed. As a result, specialised terms such as *nthiangbo*, expressions relating to *agembo*, and the traditional knowledge required to interpret forest markers are becoming less familiar to younger generations. Many young people have limited experience with the norms of silence, non-verbal signalling, and ritual restrictions that once structured hunting activities. As fewer community members participate regularly in hunting and fishing, the linguistic and communicative domain associated with these practices continues to shrink, reducing the transmission of specialised vocabulary, cultural meanings, and customary knowledge. Documenting these norms therefore preserves not only Liangmai cultural traditions but also the unique forms of communication through which these traditions have historically been expressed, interpreted, and maintained.

4.4 Social and communal taboos in Liangmai society

Social taboos in Liangmai society are based on shared community values, traditional beliefs, and ideas about purity, reciprocity, and spiritual order. Many of these taboos are part of everyday life and form an unwritten moral code. This code guides how people interact with objects, spaces, and one another. These norms are passed down through oral teaching, family example, and community correction. They influence patterns of behaviour and shape language use in daily life, especially in expressions of avoidance, respect, and metaphor. This shows that language practices are closely connected to social organisation and cultural systems (Duranti, 1997).

Like other Zeliangrong groups, the Liangmai observe a range of social taboos regulating kinship relations, gender interaction, clan boundaries, and territorial ethics. These taboos function to maintain social structure, preserve communal harmony, and affirm ancestral continuity. They are articulated through moral teachings, ritual speech forms, and culturally embedded expressions passed down across generations.

One of the most strictly enforced social taboos concerns incest. Sexual relations or marriage within the same clan, known as *jairiang nabo* 'close bloodline', are strictly prohibited and regarded as a serious violation of both social and spiritual order. Because clan membership is traced through shared ancestry, such unions are understood as disrupting the moral boundaries that structure kinship and social organisation. The transgression is treated as a grave offense not only at the communal level but also in cosmological terms, as it is believed to disturb the spiritual equilibrium of the village.

According to elders, individuals who violate this taboo risk giving birth to children referred to as *kahebona* 'children with disabilities', a belief that serves as a powerful deterrent against such unions. The use of culturally specific terms such as *jairiang nabo* and *kahebona* illustrates how moral values and social norms are encoded in language and transmitted through oral tradition.

Those who violate this norm are traditionally banished from the village and are not permitted to return, since their continued presence is believed to invite calamity or supernatural retribution upon the community. The decision of expulsion rests with village elders, particularly members of the customary court known as the *paih*. This reflects the collective and institutional nature of moral governance in Liangmai society. Kamei (2012), citing Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak (2006), notes that this prohibition is absolute and non-negotiable. The taboo therefore reinforces the moral code of the community, safeguards clan exogamy, and affirms the centrality of lineage identity within Zeliangrong social organisation.

As traditional systems of customary law and clan regulation become less influential, the cultural meanings associated with terms such as *jairiang nabo* and *kahebona* are becoming less widely understood among younger generations. This contributes to the gradual shrinking of the linguistic domain associated with kinship regulation, customary law, and traditional moral instruction.

Cross-dressing is likewise considered taboo. Wearing clothing traditionally associated with the opposite sex is viewed as a disruption of both social order and culturally defined gender boundaries. It is believed that if a man wears or uses the traditional wraparound waist cloth worn by women, known as *tanina*, he may become unlucky in hunting or fail to achieve success in life. Similarly, women are discouraged from wearing items traditionally associated with men. Such acts are often interpreted as inviting misfortune or disrupting the natural order associated with gendered responsibilities.

This taboo is reflected not only in behaviour but also in language and material culture. Distinctions between male and female identities are encoded through gender-specific clothing terms such as *tanina* and *bungkam*, as well as through personal names and forms of social identification (see Section 4.1). Traditional teachings concerning appropriate dress and behaviour were commonly transmitted through oral instruction and corrective expressions used by elders. Examples include *Mathiang mariang lo* 'live a pure and disciplined life' and *Tacheng tajai mating lo* 'follow rules and

regulations'. Such expressions reinforced culturally recognised expectations regarding proper conduct, self-discipline, and social roles.

Today, however, these restrictions are less strictly observed than in the past. Many women now freely wear trousers, jeans, and other forms of clothing that were previously considered inappropriate for women. Nevertheless, certain contexts continue to retain elements of the older norms. For example, women often avoid wearing trousers during religious services, formal ceremonies, or important community gatherings, where traditional expectations regarding dress remain influential. This suggests that while the taboo has weakened considerably, traces of it continue to shape patterns of dress and social behaviour in specific domains.

As these restrictions become less strictly observed, the cultural meanings associated with gender-specific vocabulary and traditional forms of social guidance are gradually weakening among younger generations. The decline of these practices therefore contributes to the shrinking of the linguistic domain associated with gender roles and customary social norms. In this way, the taboo functions as a mechanism for maintaining visible and symbolic distinctions between male and female social identities while reinforcing culturally recognised patterns of behaviour.

During times of inter-village conflict or warfare, Liangmai villages were traditionally fortified with thorny bamboo fencing, particularly at the main entrances, to prevent enemies from entering. On the day of fortification, men were prohibited from touching women. This temporary restriction marked a significant shift in social status and responsibility, as all adult men assumed the role of defenders known as *riphienmai* 'village guardians'. The period of abstinence was observed as part of the preparation for defence and was considered necessary for fulfilling their duty to protect the community. In this context, the taboo was not merely a rule of conduct but formed part of a broader system of customary practices associated with collective security and warfare.

The observance of this taboo was accompanied by specialised terminology and oral instructions related to defence, vigilance, and communal responsibility. The designation *riphienmai* itself reflected a culturally recognised social role that became active only during periods of danger. Through such practices, concepts of duty, protection, and self-discipline were communicated and reinforced within the community. As inter-village warfare and traditional village fortification have disappeared, the social contexts in which these practices were enacted have also vanished. Consequently, terms associated with village defence, together with the customary instructions and cultural knowledge linked to them, are no longer widely understood by younger generations. The disappearance of these practices therefore contributes to the shrinking of a distinct linguistic domain associated with traditional systems of warfare, defence, and communal protection.

One important social taboo concerns the three hearth stones arranged in a tripod to support cooking pots over the traditional fireplace, known as *nsa*. It is forbidden to touch or rest one's feet on these stones or on the firewood while warming oneself near the fire. Children who unknowingly place their feet on a hearth stone are immediately corrected by elders, often with expressions such as *Nsa nchai niuh e* 'It is taboo to touch the hearth stone with one's foot'. Through such verbal admonitions, the taboo is transmitted across generations. The hearth is regarded as a sacred domestic space because it is where food for the household is prepared and shared. Consequently, it must be treated with care and respect.

Spitting into the fireplace is also strictly prohibited. Elders traditionally warn that such behaviour may shorten the lifespan of one's parents, linking respect for the hearth with respect for family relationships and household well-being. These taboos are reinforced through everyday instructional expressions and corrective speech, making the hearth not only a physical space but also a domain of socialisation and cultural transmission.

Today, however, traditional fireplaces have largely been replaced by gas stoves and other modern cooking systems. As a result, younger generations have fewer opportunities to learn the

practices, beliefs, and verbal instructions associated with the *nsa*. Expressions such as *Nsa nchai niuh e*, once commonly heard in Liangmai households, are becoming increasingly rare. The decline of the traditional hearth has therefore contributed to the gradual disappearance of the taboos, corrective expressions, and cultural knowledge once associated with it. This process illustrates how changes in material culture can lead to the shrinking of a distinct linguistic domain embedded in everyday domestic life.

There is also a commonly observed belief that members of the same household should not travel in opposite directions on the same day if they have stayed under the same roof the previous night. This taboo is commonly expressed through the saying *Tingmik akhat ga tat mpek niuh e* 'It is taboo to travel separately on the same day'. If family members do so, it is believed that misfortune, accidents, or other undesirable events may occur to one or both of them. When travelling in opposite directions cannot be avoided, families may delay the departure of one person until the other has safely reached the destination, or they may choose to spend the previous night under separate roofs.

This taboo reflects the belief that family unity should be maintained not only through social relationships but also through coordinated movement and shared journeys. Travelling in opposite directions immediately after spending the night together is therefore viewed as undesirable and potentially harmful. The practice reflects ideals of togetherness, mutual care, and collective well-being within the household.

The belief is transmitted through everyday advice, warnings, and corrective expressions, particularly from elders to younger family members. Expressions such as *Tingmik akhat ga tat mpek niuh e* serve not only as warnings against potential misfortune but also as vehicles for transmitting cultural values concerning family solidarity and responsibility. Although the taboo is still observed in some Liangmai families, it is less strictly followed than in the past. As patterns of travel, education, and employment increasingly require family members to move independently, the social context in which this belief was traditionally maintained has begun to change. Consequently, the expressions and cultural knowledge associated with the taboo are becoming less prominent among younger generations, contributing to the gradual shrinking of this domain of customary social discourse.

These social taboos continue to influence behaviour and social interaction within the Liangmai community. They also shape language use through corrective speech, avoidance practices, ritual expressions, moral instruction, and forms of respect employed in everyday life. Many of these linguistic practices are transmitted orally through family interaction and community participation, making them an important means of passing cultural knowledge from one generation to the next.

However, as traditional taboos become less strictly observed, the linguistic domains associated with them are also shrinking. For example, as modern kitchens replace traditional hearths, lexical items related to the fireplace are gradually disappearing. Terms such as *nsa* 'hearth stones', *karap* 'a wooden platform above the hearth used to dry items such as paddy and meat', and *nsing* 'a storage space above the karap' are becoming unfamiliar, as many younger Liangmai no longer encounter the traditional domestic setting in which these terms were regularly used. Likewise, corrective expressions such as *Nsa nchai niuh e* 'It is taboo to touch the hearth stone with one's foot' and moral instructions such as *Mathiang mariang lo* 'live a pure and disciplined life' are heard less frequently than in previous generations.

The decline of these taboos therefore involves more than the loss of particular customs. It also results in the erosion of specialised vocabulary, formulaic expressions, oral instruction, and culturally embedded ways of communicating social values. As the practices disappear, the linguistic resources through which they were expressed, transmitted, and understood are increasingly lost. The gradual weakening of these taboos thus contributes directly to the shrinking of important cultural and linguistic domains within the Liangmai speech community.

4.5 Environmental taboos

Environmental taboos among the Liangmai guide how people relate to land, forests, water, and other natural elements. These beliefs are not only concerned with protecting resources but are also rooted in the understanding that nature is inhabited by unseen beings and must be treated with respect. Traditional rules govern the cutting of trees, the use of water sources, the marking of natural resources, the construction of houses, and the handling of fire. Through these practices, environmental taboos regulate human interaction with the natural world while reflecting values of restraint, balance, reciprocity, and proper conduct.

One important belief concerns fruit-bearing plants and trees in the forest. People may mark trees, bamboo, cane, or firewood for later use by clearing the surrounding area or, in some cases, by tying a rope around them. Fruit-bearing trees, however, should never be marked or claimed for personal ownership, nor should their branches be cut unnecessarily. Elders traditionally instructed younger generations with expressions such as *Namhang rasibang hem dulo* or *Charasibang hang dulo* 'Do not mark or claim wild fruit trees for yourself'. Such expressions served not only as practical advice but also as reminders of communal responsibilities toward shared natural resources.

It is believed that if someone marks or claims a fruit-bearing tree, it may cease to bear fruit. Wild fruits are understood to be available not only for humans but also for animals and unseen beings inhabiting the forest. Claiming them exclusively for oneself is therefore regarded as improper. In this way, the taboo discourages individual ownership of naturally occurring food resources and promotes a principle of shared access. The belief also reflects a broader ecological ethic in which humans are viewed as participants in, rather than owners of, the natural environment.

Today, however, such instructions are heard less frequently than in the past. As younger generations spend less time gathering resources from the forest, the practices and expressions associated with these taboos are gradually disappearing. The decline of these environmental beliefs therefore contributes not only to changes in customary behaviour but also to the erosion of the specialised vocabulary, oral instruction, and cultural knowledge through which relationships with the natural world were traditionally expressed.

Water sources are treated with great caution in Liangmai society. It is forbidden to build a house across the channel of a stream or river, as these places are believed to be pathways used by unseen beings. Elders traditionally warned against such actions through cautionary expressions such as *Wabek ga chaki thiu niuh e* 'It is taboo to construct a house across the channel of a stream or river', reminding younger generations to respect waterways and avoid interfering with their natural course. Disturbing these channels is believed to invite misfortune, including damage to the house or harm to its occupants. This belief not only regulates settlement patterns but also helps prevent the obstruction of water bodies while promoting respect for the natural environment and places regarded as spiritually significant. Today, however, as traditional environmental taboos become less influential, many of the verbal instructions and expressions associated with these practices are no longer regularly used. As a result, a body of culturally embedded environmental knowledge, together with the linguistic forms through which it was transmitted, is gradually disappearing.

House construction is also surrounded by ritual restrictions. Special significance is attached to the number and arrangement of certain structural components of a traditional house, especially the *tachiang* 'house poles' and the tilting fillets known as *kajien*, small triangular wooden strips used in roofing. These components must be arranged in an odd number. The sequence traditionally begins and ends with what builders describe as a "life" pole and alternates between "life" and "death" poles. An even number is believed to invite quarrels, disunity, or other forms of misfortune upon the household. For this reason, elders and experienced builders carefully instruct younger workers during construction and ensure that the correct arrangement is followed.

The transmission of this taboo depends not only on the construction practice itself but also on the specialised vocabulary and oral instructions associated with it. Knowledge of terms such as *tachiang*, *kajien*, *kare*, *pungrang*, and *kachum* was traditionally acquired while participating in house-building and learning the customary rules governing the placement and arrangement of structural components. As modern concrete houses increasingly replace traditional wooden houses, these construction-related taboos are less frequently observed, and the associated vocabulary is gradually disappearing from everyday use. Many younger Liangmai are now unfamiliar with both the traditional building terms and the customary instructions that once accompanied them. The decline of these practices has therefore contributed to the shrinking of a specialised linguistic domain connected with traditional architecture, ritual knowledge, and environmental adaptation.

Territorial ethics are expressed through the concept of *rambau*, a protected zone that extends around the village. Cutting down any standing tree within this area is forbidden. Elders traditionally warned against such actions through cautionary expressions such as *Rambau ga tasing hui niuh e* 'It is taboo to cut trees in the *rambau*', reminding younger generations to respect the protected boundary and preserve its resources. The *rambau* is understood not only as a physical boundary but also as a space associated with ancestral protection and communal well-being. People believe that violating this taboo may bring misfortune and even lead to the end of the offender's family line. In this way, the taboo helps preserve the forest surrounding the village while maintaining a balance between human activity and the natural environment.

Today, however, village expansion, road construction, and other development activities have resulted in the clearing of trees within areas that were once protected. As these practices become more common, the beliefs associated with *rambau* are gradually weakening. Consequently, the traditional knowledge, cautionary expressions, and cultural meanings connected with the concept are no longer transmitted as consistently as before. The decline of the taboo has therefore contributed not only to environmental change but also to the gradual disappearance of a specialised linguistic domain associated with territorial boundaries, customary law, and environmental stewardship.

Finally, fire is treated as a sacred communal resource. It must never be sold or exchanged for payment. Anyone who needs fire should receive it freely. Elders traditionally expressed this norm through the instruction *Chami man lu niuh e* 'It is taboo to take payment for fire', emphasising that fire is a shared necessity rather than a commodity. The belief holds that profiting from fire may bring destruction, as the fire may return to consume the possessions of the seller. This taboo reflects values of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and communal responsibility, while affirming that certain natural elements are shared resources that should not be commercialised. Today, however, as traditional practices of sharing fire have become less common with the widespread use of modern cooking and heating technologies, the beliefs and expressions associated with this taboo are gradually fading from everyday use. As a result, the cultural knowledge and linguistic forms through which this practice was transmitted are also becoming less familiar to younger generations.

These environmental taboos are reflected not only in behaviour but also in linguistic practice. Knowledge about forests, water sources, house construction, territorial boundaries, and the sharing of natural resources is transmitted through specialised vocabulary, cautionary expressions, and oral instructions. Through such expressions, distinctions between permission and prohibition, proper conduct and transgression, and human responsibility toward the natural environment are communicated and maintained.

Today, however, many of these taboos are no longer observed as strictly as in the past. As traditional environmental practices decline, the specialised vocabulary, cautionary expressions, and cultural meanings associated with them are used less frequently and are becoming unfamiliar to younger generations. Consequently, changes in environmental practices are accompanied by the shrinking of the

linguistic domains through which ecological knowledge, customary law, and moral values have traditionally been transmitted.

4.6 Taboos against harming others

Everyday household tools such as *takiam* 'weaving tool', *tienpek* 'ladle', and *nphiak* 'broom' carry symbolic meaning in Liangmai culture. It is considered a serious taboo to strike someone with these objects, because they are closely associated with domestic care, food preparation, and other nurturing activities within the household. Elders traditionally warned against such behaviour through the expression *Takiam/tienpek/nphiak niu chamai tu lek niuh e* 'It is taboo to beat someone with a weaving tool, ladle, or broom.' To use these objects as instruments of violence is regarded as a misuse of their proper purpose and a violation of customary norms. It is believed that a person beaten with such tools may suffer misfortune or even die prematurely. The taboo therefore reflects cultural values concerning respect, proper conduct, and the appropriate use of household objects. As traditional forms of instruction and correction become less common, the expressions and beliefs associated with this taboo are also gradually fading from everyday use.

Likewise, physically assaulting one's parents is strictly forbidden. Elders traditionally expressed this prohibition through the saying *Puipiu khuga chabien khai niuh e* 'It is taboo to lay hands on one's parents.' The expression serves both as a moral instruction and as a warning against violating one of the most fundamental principles of Liangmai society. It is widely believed that those who beat their parents will not live a long life. This belief reflects the strong value placed on respect for parents, parental authority, and family harmony within the community. Through such cautionary expressions, moral teachings concerning proper behaviour and intergenerational respect are transmitted from one generation to the next. Today, however, many traditional forms of oral instruction are used less frequently, and younger generations are increasingly unfamiliar with the sayings and beliefs that once guided family relationships. As a result, the linguistic expressions associated with these moral taboos are gradually falling out of use.

These taboos against harming others reflect important Liangmai values concerning respect, self-control, and proper social behaviour. They are transmitted not only through beliefs and customary practices but also through cautionary sayings and oral instructions that guide everyday conduct. As traditional forms of moral instruction become less common, many of the expressions associated with these taboos are used less frequently and are becoming unfamiliar to younger generations. The decline of these practices therefore contributes to the gradual loss of a linguistic domain through which moral values and social norms have traditionally been communicated.

4.7 Taboos against howling during harvest

Howling has long been a common practice in Liangmai villages, often used to scare off wild animals or warn of approaching enemies. However, during *achiet*, the busiest agricultural season when people race to harvest ripened rice before it is consumed by birds and wild animals, howling was traditionally forbidden. Elders expressed this prohibition through the warning *Achiet ting ga nkiak niuh e* 'It is taboo to howl during the busiest season.' It was believed that such sounds could frighten away the rice spirit and result in poor harvest yields.

Another related taboo prohibited standing on a termite mound while howling. Elders cautioned against this practice through the expression *Kapungbut ga chaplu nkiak niuh e* 'It is taboo to stand on a termite mound and howl.' Although the precise reasons are not always remembered today, the prohibition formed part of a broader set of customary rules governing behaviour during important agricultural activities.

These taboos reflect a symbolic connection between sound, speech, and agricultural success. Human vocal behaviour was expected to conform to seasonal rhythms and customary practices

associated with harvesting. The prohibitions were transmitted through oral instructions, cautionary expressions, and traditional beliefs that guided behaviour in the fields. Today, however, many younger Liangmai no longer observe these restrictions, and the expressions associated with them are heard less frequently. As these practices decline, harvest-related vocabulary, warnings, and culturally embedded forms of speech are also gradually disappearing, contributing to the shrinking of another traditional linguistic domain.

4.8 Respect for elders and social hierarchy

Taboos also regulate respect, obedience, and social hierarchy in Liangmai society. These norms govern relationships between generations, define appropriate behaviour, and maintain social order within the community. They are transmitted through oral instruction, cautionary sayings, and customary practices that teach younger people how to interact with elders and other members of society.

Respect for elders is expressed through a range of verbal instructions and behavioural restrictions. Items should not be handed to elders with the left hand, and quarrelling with or provoking elders is strongly discouraged. Elders traditionally reminded younger people of their responsibilities through expressions such as *Kachingmai lad njai lo* 'Obey the words or instructions of elders.' Such teachings emphasise respect, obedience, and the importance of maintaining harmonious relations between generations.

Respect for elders is further reflected in food-sharing practices. When food and drink are served, elders eat first, and younger people partake only after elders indicate that the food is safe. Certain foods, particularly those served in customary courts or during ritual acts of reconciliation, are reserved for elders. This restriction is expressed through the saying *Kaching tek nahmai tiuniuh e* 'It is taboo for younger people to consume food reserved for elders.' Those who violate this taboo are believed to shorten their own lifespan. At the same time, elders are discouraged from cursing children, as their words are believed to carry lasting consequences. These beliefs reflect the special status accorded to elders and the importance of maintaining respect within the family and community.

Social hierarchy is also reflected in gender-based divisions of labour. Men are not permitted to carry a woman's bamboo basket (*kaluang*) in the manner women carry it. Elders traditionally warned against this through the expression *Mpiumai kaluang phung niuh e* 'It is taboo for men to carry a bamboo basket.' Men are also discouraged from weaving clothes, as it is believed that doing so may cause them to become *n'gou*, a Liangmai term referring to a man who is considered unlucky in hunting or unsuccessful in life. These restrictions reflect culturally recognised expectations concerning gender roles and appropriate forms of behaviour.

These taboos influence not only behaviour but also language use, particularly in situations involving respect, authority, and social interaction. They are reflected in cautionary sayings, oral instructions, and expressions that guide relations between generations and reinforce social responsibilities. Today, however, many of these practices are no longer observed as strictly as in the past. As traditional forms of social interaction and customary instruction decline, the expressions associated with them are becoming less familiar to younger generations. Consequently, the linguistic domain through which respect, authority, and social hierarchy have traditionally been communicated is gradually shrinking.

4.9 Taboos related to social conduct and respectful behaviour

Social etiquette in Liangmai culture is governed by a number of taboos that regulate appropriate behaviour, respectful interaction, and consideration for others. These norms are transmitted through oral instruction, everyday correction, and customary teachings that guide social conduct within the community. They reflect broader cultural values concerning respect, self-restraint, and harmonious social relations.

One such taboo concerns behaviour when visiting another person's home. It is considered improper to enter a house through the front door and leave through the back door. People believe that doing so may bring poverty or misfortune upon the household. This prohibition encourages visitors to behave respectfully and acknowledges the symbolic importance of domestic space. In this way, even seemingly ordinary actions within the home are understood to carry social and cultural significance.

Respectful speech is equally important in Liangmai society. Mocking, insulting, or ridiculing widows, orphans, persons with disabilities, or other vulnerable individuals is strongly discouraged. Elders traditionally warned against such behaviour through expressions such as *Kasuan kahemai tu tanui thiu du lo* 'Do not make fun of the weak and persons with disabilities.' Those who engage in such behaviour are believed to invite misfortune upon themselves, and their actions are regarded as inconsistent with proper social conduct and community values. The expression therefore serves both as a moral instruction and as a reminder to treat vulnerable members of the community with dignity, compassion, and respect.

Many of these norms were traditionally taught through cautionary sayings, corrective speech, and everyday verbal instruction. Children learned appropriate behaviour through repeated reminders and guidance from parents and elders, often expressed through general instructions such as *Chakhuang charau phunglo* 'Be respectful.' Today, although many of these behaviours continue to be valued, the traditional expressions associated with them are used less frequently. As these expressions gradually fall out of use, an important linguistic domain through which social etiquette, moral values, and respectful behaviour have traditionally been transmitted is also weakening.

4.10 Linguistic taboos and avoidance speech in forest contexts

In the forested areas surrounding Liangmai villages, people traditionally observed linguistic taboos that restricted the use of certain words and expressions. Dangerous animals such as tigers and bears were not referred to by their actual names, as it was believed that mentioning them aloud could attract them. Instead, speakers employed euphemistic or avoidance expressions. For example, a tiger might be referred to as *miksiu dipiu* 'big eyes' rather than by its direct name. This type of indirect reference is a common feature of taboo language, whereby sensitive, dangerous, or feared entities are avoided through alternative expressions (Allan & Burridge, 2006).

Such practices demonstrate that language was not regarded as merely descriptive. Within the Liangmai belief system, words were understood to have real consequences. Naming a dangerous animal directly was believed to increase the likelihood of encountering it. Elders explain that referring to a tiger by name could draw its attention and place people at risk. This reflects a broader cultural understanding that patterns of speaking are shaped by shared beliefs, social norms, and local knowledge (Hymes, 1974). In this context, avoidance speech functioned as a form of protection, allowing people to communicate about dangerous animals while minimising perceived risk.

Linguistic restrictions were accompanied by behavioural taboos. For example, burning crabs in the jungle was forbidden because it was believed to attract wild animals. Together, these speech and behavioural restrictions reflect the perception of the forest as a sensitive and potentially dangerous environment requiring caution in both language and action. The forest was therefore not only a physical space but also a distinct communicative domain governed by specialised forms of speech and culturally prescribed behaviour.

Today, however, many of these beliefs and practices are no longer widely observed. Encounters with large wild animals have become less common, and the avoidance forms once used in forest contexts are heard less frequently. As a result, expressions such as *miksiu dipiu* are becoming unfamiliar to younger speakers, many of whom no longer recognise the cultural meanings associated with them. The decline of these linguistic taboos has therefore contributed to the erosion of a specialised vocabulary

and a distinct communicative domain that once played an important role in Liangmai interactions with the forest environment.

The taboos discussed in this section illustrate that Liangmai taboos are closely intertwined with language use across a wide range of cultural domains, including kinship, death, hunting, social relations, environmental practices, and interactions with the natural world. These taboos are expressed and transmitted through specialised vocabulary, ritual expressions, avoidance forms, cautionary sayings, and oral instructions. As many of these practices become less frequently observed, the linguistic forms associated with them are also gradually falling out of use. The decline of taboo observances has therefore contributed to the weakening of several traditional communicative domains and the loss of culturally embedded knowledge. The following section examines more directly how these changes affect language use and contribute to domain loss in contemporary Liangmai society.

5. Language use and domain loss

The decline of taboos in Liangmai society has direct implications for language use. Traditionally, many of these cultural rules were embedded in oral practices such as ritual speech, kinship terms, avoidance language, cautionary sayings, and storytelling. These linguistic forms were closely tied to specific cultural domains and served as important vehicles for transmitting traditional knowledge, values, and social norms. As these cultural domains weaken or are restructured, the active use of Liangmai within them also declines. This pattern corresponds to what Fishman (1991) describes as domain shrinkage in the process of language shift.

One area of shrinkage is ritual speech. Funerary expressions, ritual idioms, and speech acts associated with death and mourning are now rarely performed, as many traditional funerary practices and the taboos associated with them are no longer widely observed. Specialised expressions connected with practices such as *saikang*, *Tadiabo*, and *Tala Thuanbonai* have consequently fallen out of active use, leaving fewer opportunities for their transmission to younger generations. As the rituals disappear, the linguistic forms that once accompanied them also lose their social function and gradually become forgotten.

Kinship and naming practices are also undergoing change. While teknonyms and the avoidance of spousal names continue in some families, younger speakers increasingly disregard these conventions, preferring modern address terms or nicknames. For example, many children now address their parents as *daddy* or *mummy* rather than using traditional forms of address. In such cases, the older system persists only partially, while its social and pragmatic functions are gradually reduced as newer forms take precedence.

Oral storytelling, once a key medium for transmitting both cultural knowledge and language, is also in decline. Elders continue to recall folktales, myths, and moral narratives in Liangmai, but younger generations increasingly prefer regional languages, translated versions, or digital forms of entertainment. Mobile phones, changing leisure activities, and shifting family practices mean that many children no longer hear stories narrated in the traditional manner. As a result, storytelling is becoming a less productive domain for the intergenerational transmission of Liangmai language and cultural knowledge.

Other activity-based domains show similar patterns. Hunting, agriculture, environmental practices, and traditional house construction once involved specialised vocabulary, ritual expressions, and customary instructions. Expressions such as *Namhang rasibang hem/hang dulo*, *Achiet ting ga nkiak niuh e*, and *Rambau ga tasing hui niuh e* are becoming less frequently used as the practices and beliefs associated with them decline. Likewise, younger speakers are increasingly unfamiliar with the communicative conventions that once governed hunting, harvesting, and interactions with the natural environment.

Lexical loss is another consequence of domain shrinkage. As traditional practices decline, many culturally specific terms associated with funerary rituals, hunting, house construction, environmental knowledge, and domestic life are becoming unfamiliar to younger speakers. Words such as *Tala*, *majatbiu*, *Charuiram*, *nsa*, *karap*, *nsing*, *tachiang*, *kare* and *kajien* are increasingly restricted to the speech of older generations. The disappearance of the activities and beliefs associated with these terms reduces opportunities for their use and transmission, contributing to the gradual erosion of Liangmai cultural vocabulary.

Taken together, these patterns demonstrate a clear case of domain loss. As taboos, rituals, and customary practices decline, the linguistic forms associated with them—including ritual expressions, avoidance terms, oral instructions, specialised vocabulary, and storytelling traditions—are also becoming less frequent. The findings suggest that cultural change and language change are closely interconnected processes. When cultural domains weaken or disappear, the linguistic domains that depend upon them are likewise reduced, resulting in the gradual erosion of culturally embedded knowledge and traditional forms of expression in Liangmai.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined a range of taboos (*niuhbo*) in Liangmai society, including those related to naming, funerary practices, hunting, social relations, environmental practices, and interactions with the natural world. The study demonstrates that these taboos extend beyond behavioural restrictions and form an important part of the Liangmai linguistic and cultural system. They are expressed and transmitted through specialised vocabulary, ritual expressions, avoidance forms, cautionary sayings, kinship terms, and oral traditions. In this way, language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a medium for preserving cultural knowledge, regulating behaviour, and maintaining social relationships.

The findings further show that the decline of many traditional taboos has direct consequences for language use. As funerary rituals, hunting practices, environmental restrictions, customary social norms, and other cultural activities become less frequently observed, the linguistic forms associated with them are also gradually falling out of use. Ritual speech, mourning formulas, avoidance expressions, oral instructions, and culturally specific vocabulary are becoming increasingly unfamiliar to younger generations. At the same time, oral storytelling, once a major vehicle for transmitting both language and cultural knowledge, is declining in importance. These developments contribute to the shrinking of traditional communicative domains in which Liangmai was formerly used and transmitted. The study therefore suggests that cultural change and language change are closely interconnected processes. The disappearance of taboos does not only affect cultural practices; it also influences the vitality of linguistic domains and the transmission of culturally embedded knowledge. Documenting taboos is consequently important not only for cultural preservation but also for understanding language maintenance and language shift. When traditional practices disappear, the linguistic forms associated with them often lose their context of use and gradually become obsolete. For this reason, efforts to document and maintain the Liangmai language should pay equal attention to the cultural practices through which language is expressed and transmitted.

Future research may explore how younger generations perceive and interpret traditional taboos, whether new forms of expression are emerging to replace older ritual speech and avoidance forms, and how changing cultural practices continue to shape language use. Further investigation of oral narratives, ritual registers, and evolving communicative domains may provide deeper insight into the relationship between cultural transformation and language change. Such research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of language vitality and cultural continuity in Liangmai society.

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