

What's in a Name? An Ethnosemantic Study of Muslim Mosque Names in Southern Thailand

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Abstract—Religious faith tends to vacillate in multicultural societies where religion influences social behavior and culture. However, this study has found a vividly different experience in Thailand's four multicultural southern border provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Songkla. These areas are notable for their high level of political and religious violence. This study is conducted via an ethnosemantic approach to find out how the Islamic faith culture echoed from their mosque names remains stable in those four provinces where religious and ethnic conflict is a daily experience. The sample comprises 1,637 Muslim mosque names of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Songkla. Muslim mosque names used in those four provinces were collected and analyzed. It was found that Muslim mosques in the four multicultural provinces are named through varied naming strategies with Arabic, Malay dialect, and Thai, respectively and four syllabic names are mostly found. In terms of meaning, the mosque names are directly related to God (called Allah in Arabic) as well as Allah's last savant, Prophet Muhammad. Those names are also related to good deeds, virtue, and harmony. The meanings of the names show Muslims remain faithful to Allah and his last savant despite the surrounding turmoil. However, some Thai names which are not Muslim names were also found in the study. This variant is probably due to the language contact phenomenon occurring in these four provinces.

Index Terms—mosque names, ethnosemantics, southern Thailand

I. INTRODUCTION

By pedagogical definition, "ethnosemantics" or "ethnolinguistics" are the linguistic concepts concerning a significant role of a language or a term in portraying or reflecting the worldview or conceptual system of people speaking a language (Frake, 1962). Ethnosemanticists have been able to figure out what the speaker's worldview looks like by analyzing his terms through Componential Analysis (CA). The term is analyzed in terms of its semantic features with either the positive or the negative value called a binary feature.

On the basis of these elements, ethnosemantic study then requires analyzing every term in a language and revealing its true cognitive or conceptual system or worldview of a speaker of that language. This extends to the names of people in a society where their underlying truth can be explored, especially their ways of thinking or mindset (Prasithrathsint, 1986). For example, Parnthip (2002) studied the family names royally provided by King Rama VI of Thailand and found that those family names were auspicious ones related to happiness, prosperity, qualification, and wealth.

This reflects that the Thais cherish happiness, prosperity, and wealth, and they put the emphasis on the patrilineality. In the study on the first names of the Thai people in the four regions of Thailand, Somchai (2002) found that most of their first names were heavily concerned with virtue, progress, wealth, knowledge, honor, and power. Also, it was found that people in the later generations tended to use the auspicious names more than those in the past. In addition, in a study of color terms and color concepts in the Sukhothai and Rattanakosin eras, Engchuan (2000) found that some color terms have now been changed to include less color space when compared with some in the Sukhothai period, thus resulting in greater number of color terms at the present time.

Names, especially the place names are of the main interest of researchers in the ethnosemantic study as they provide the true cognitive or conceptual system of the owners—for example, providing their ways of thinking or worldview, providing their worldview conducive working environments, practicing democratic leadership, and practicing compromise and practicing multidirectional communication. According to Nida (1979), the ethnosemantic study is truly eligible through Componential Analysis (CA) that the underlying belief can be demonstrated clearly via the analysis of the terms.

Regarding previous investigations into names of religious places, certain aspects have been considerably examined ethnosemantically. First and foremost, a study conducted by Muhr (2016) offered a view toward the relation between an aspect of paganism and names of places and elements. The investigation findings suggested that names of places are under great influence of the pagan religion of Ireland, thereby holding a specific characteristic reflecting both the religion and local convention toward naming. Another captivating ethnosemantic study was conducted by Yulianti et al. (2020). In the study, toponyms or names of places in particular geographical area were investigated ethnosemantically. The results indicated that names of places in the Kalimantan region was related to rivers, the highest venerated matter of people. Most of the names held parts of the rivers in them: upstream or downstream, for example. This highly reflected

that Kalimantan people revered rivers so much that their sacredness in the belief system of Kalimantan locals was reflected in the region.

Research into names and objects in daily life has been considerably explored. However, as Muhr (2016) implied, the importance of the names and objects varies from an influence of one religion to another and connotes different revered matters and sacredness. Such an influence is reflected through terms or names and naming patterns assigned to places and objects in different cultures. A great number of studies have discussed and suggested toward specifications of such an issue in terms of people's names (Alvard, 2011; Nakilawi, 2016), Hindu religious places (Benjasri, 2015; Wafa, 2018), names of places (Yulianti et al., 2020), among the others. Yet, religious places especially Muslim mosques in southern border of Thailand – unlike in other regions – have been less explored. With the great aim to comprehend underlying beliefs of people in the Thai regions mentioned, this present research study has been hence of great importance.

The objectives of this research are threefold. This study first and foremost approached the naming strategies of the mosques. In addition, their meanings as well as the cultural characteristics reflected from those mosque names, specifically the culture of Muslim disciples reflected through the names of their mosques situated in Songkla, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces of Thailand, were to be explored.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking about ethnosemantics, this term derives from the study on ethnolinguistic study, the study to find out the cultural systems of an ethnic group via the analysis of their terms used. Ethnosemantics is the way to explore a cultural system or a worldview of an ethnic group through the semantic analysis of their terms used. Componential Analysis was proposed by Goodenough (1956) as the approach used in analysing the meanings of the terms. This approach acts as the vital tool in helping reveal the worldview or the cultural dimensions or systems of the speakers. Kinship terms and color terms were significantly studied in the early stage of the approach development. Nowadays, ethnosemantic study has been well-known in the field of semantic study in order to explore worldview or cultural system of speakers of an ethnic group. Variety of terms used in languages have been studied in the ethnosemantic way including sound terms, ghost terms, taste terms, cooking terms, plant terms, among the others.

Engchuan (2020) ethnosemantically investigated the Malay Muslim men names and the internal conflict in the southern provinces of Thailand and found that 70% of the Malay Muslim men's names were rendered in a Malay dialect and 20% in Arabic due to the former influence of Arabic language in those areas. However, some Thai names were found but in a few number when compared with those Arabic names. Ethnosemantically, 70% of the names were directly related to Allah and 20% to Prophet Muhammad. Examples of the names pertaining to Allah were Abdullorh, Abdulhakeem, Abdulkareem, Abdurormarn, Abdulsamud, Abdulwahub, and Abdulhafaet. The prefix Abdul means "servant of." Examples of the names pertaining to the Prophet were Muhammad, Ibrorheem, Yousoub, Daawood, Arbuubucks, Hamid, Ahmed, and Sullaman. The person bearing the name Muhammad or its variants is thought to be praiseworthy and possess fine qualities. The reasons why Muslim men were named after Allah were that they believed that they would be closer to God and would feel happier and more secure and protected especially during suffering times.

Alhussaini et al. (2016) conducted the ethnosemantic study of affinal kinship terms in Arabic and Arab cultures and found that "the domain of affinal kinship relations is very important in the Arab and Islamic culture because it establishes a kind of relatedness or alliance between two families or tribes. Generally, the act of marriage is regarded as a sacred contract between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation and supporting kinship relations in all civilised societies. Due to its important role within the Islamic and Arab societies, the lexical term *الزواج* *al-zawaaj* (marriage), which denotes an act of marriage in Arabic language, has been denoted by different synonymous terms that are slightly different from one Arab culture to another. In order to avoid cultural misunderstanding in the Arab societies, anthropologists, stakeholders and translators who are interested in the Arab cultures may find this study interesting as it explained many terms that refer to marriage relations. These terms include *القشاي* *al-Qiran* (marriage, but literally means conjugated or coupled with), *النِّكَاح* *al-Nika'h* (marriage), *الْإِمْلاأَک* *al-Emla'ak* (marriage, literally make him/her owner), *النَّضْغ* *al-Buḍa'* (means an act of marriage and a sexual relationship), *النَّطء* *al-Waṭa'a* (means marriage, but literally sleep with or sexual relationship), and *النَّشْأ* *al-Bina'a* (to consummate the marriage, literally house or building a home). Generally, the use of these terms depends on the setting and the context of an utterance." (Alhussaini et al., 2016, pp. 244-245).

Agyekum (2017) carried out the ethnosemantic study on Proverbs of *ohia*, "poverty" in Akan. The findings demonstrated that the concept of 'poverty' in Akan is best viewed from Akan language ideology and proverbs. It is also interesting to note that in spite of the negativity of poverty, some proverbs console the poor, and stress that poverty is not the only adversity as other conditions in life are more stressful than poverty.

In 2019, Sopheak tra Hien conducted the ethnosemantic study on euphemism in Khmer and found out that the meaning of euphemisms used in Khmer primarily concern with body organs, followed by physical appearance, animal, waste and drainage system, sexual activity, sickness, career, psychological state, intelligence, ethnicity, and death respectively. The three worldviews reflected from the semantic analysis were world of nature, world of merit and sin, and world of equality.

Hasmawati et al. (2020) carried out the ethnosemantic study of the lexicon “KUBURAN” in the Toraja people and from the findings, it was found that “there are nine lexemes of *kuburan* known by the Toraja people, such as *liangsilli*, *liangerong*, *liangtoke*, *liangpak*, *tangdan*, *patani*, *lamunan*, and *pasillirankayu*. These nine lexemes can be classified based on their social stratification level, age category, and any shapes or positions of the grave. Generally, each lexeme has differences in their function and features. The Toraja culture considers death as the orientation in life. Hence, they relate many things to death, and one of them is grave” (Hasmawati et al., 2020, p. 368).

III. METHODS

The qualitative research approach – Componential Analysis –was utilized. The instrument used in this study was the recording of the mosque names. 1,637 mosque names in the four provinces in the borderline of the country were collected, and these names were elicited from all those mosques situated in the four studied areas. Data were analysed and displayed with the aids of descriptive statistics: frequency and percentage. The statistical analysis representations in diagrams further contribute to discussions toward underlying beliefs of locals in the region.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From all 1,637 mosque names collected in the four studied provinces, the results indicate that in terms of the strategy used in naming, 84% of the names are in either whole Arabic name, whole Malay dialect name, or whole Thai name, while 16% in the combinations of Arabic, Malay dialect, or Thai (as shown in Figure 1 below).

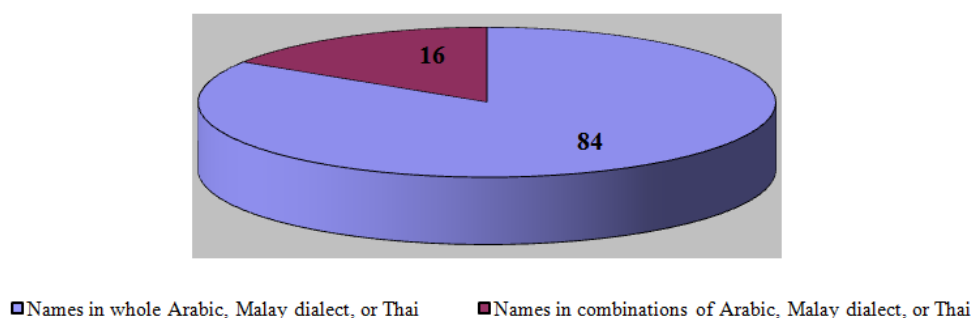


Figure 1. Strategies Used in Mosque Naming

Regarding the naming strategies, 49.6% of the mosque names are in whole Arabic, 22.2% are in whole Malay dialect, and 12.2% are in whole Thai, respectively (as shown in Figure 2 below). Noteworthy is the naming patterns. That is, though all places in this study are situated in Thailand where Buddhism appears to influence almost all aspects of naming patterns, mosques that are entirely named in languages other than Thai account for more than two-thirds underline the influence of such languages. To be more specific, both Malay and Arabic are usual languages spoken in Muslim communities across the globe.

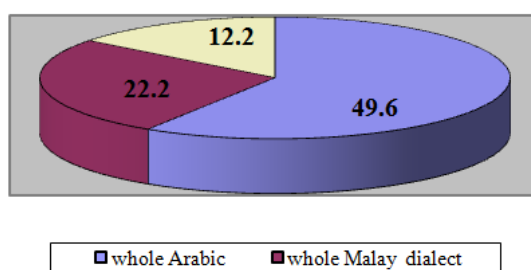


Figure 2. Proportion of Mosques Named in One Language

In terms of the combination, it is found that 16% of the mosques are named using 6 strategies via two languages: 1) ARABIC NAME + MALAY DIALECT NAME (12.7%); 2) MALAY DIALECT NAME + ARABIC NAME (1.5%); 3) MALAY DIALECT NAME + MALAY DIALECT NAME (0.91%); 4) ARABIC NAME + ARABIC NAME (0.30%); 5) MALAY DIALECT NAME + THAI NAME (0.12%); and 6) ARABIC NAME + THAI NAME (0.12%), and 4 strategies through three languages; 1) MALAY DIALECT NAME + MALAY DIALECT NAME + MALAY DIALECT NAME (0.12%); 2) MALAY DIALECT NAME + MALAY DIALECT NAME + ARABIC NAME (0.12%); 3) ARABIC NAME + MALAY DIALECT NAME + MALAY DIALECT NAME (0.06%); AND 4) ARABIC NAME + MALAY DIALECT NAME + THAI NAME (0.06%) (as shown in Figure 3 below). It is worth noting that most combinations rarely underline Thai language influence on the mosque naming combinations.

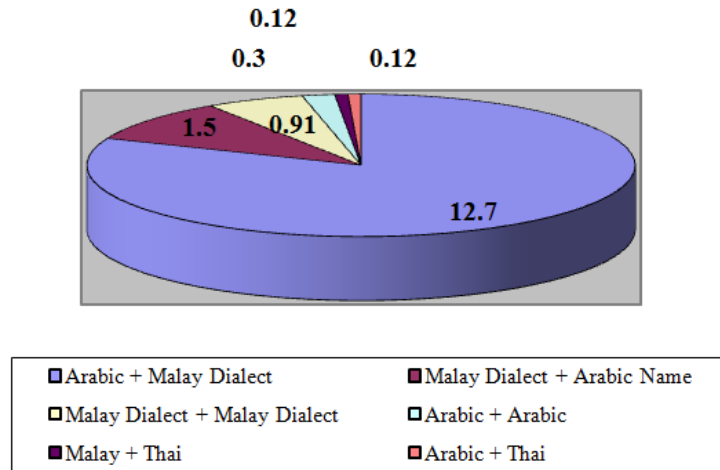


Figure 3. Proportion of Mosque Names in Combination of Languages

In terms of the syllables of the studied mosque names, it is found that 80% of the names are four-syllabic names, followed by the five syllabic names (10%), the six syllabic names (5%), the seven syllabic names (4%), and the ten syllabic names (1%) (as shown in Figure 4 below), while it is interesting to note that the disyllabic names were rarely found.

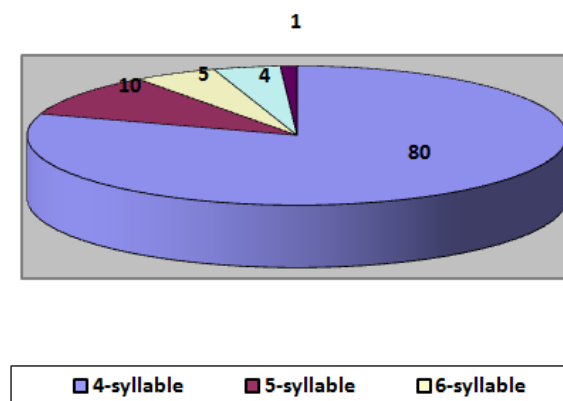


Figure 4. Proportion of Mosque Name Syllable

Prior to further discussion, mosque naming in Thailand as studied in this project revealed the influence of Muslim culture – through the uses of Arabic and Malay languages – rather higher than Thai language. When considered in terms of religion-based angle, this phenomenon is beyond the boundary of language along, but rather the impact of religions which are found to be behind naming in most naming studies (Muhr, 2016; Nakhilawi, 2016).

When further compared with the ethnosemantic research studies exploring first names and family names especially those of Muslim people in the border provinces of Thailand, it can be obviously seen that no studies have found any names whose structure or the syllable were in the five, seven, or even ten syllabic form. This could be due to the strong faith of the Muslims in the four southern border provinces of Thailand, and the fact that they try to heavily rely on the Arabic names, which signify the origin of the Islamic faith in Islam. Hence, their mosque names are long and complicated, thus helping maintain the wider space of meanings.

For the names' meaning signified by the semantic feature analysis through Componential Analysis (CA), it is revealed that most mosque names' meanings are directly related to Almighty God (called Allah in Arabic) (70%), followed by those concerned with Allah's last savant, Prophet Muhammad (10%), and other Prophets apart from Prophet Muhammad (10%). Apart from these principal meanings, most of the mosques in these four areas are also named as great and good deed of Islam, great ray of virtue, great harmony, great kindness, and great faith in Islam (10%), respectively (as shown in Figure 5 below). This obviously suggests that the Muslim people in the four southern border provinces of Thailand be faithful to their Almighty God (Allah in Arabic) as even the place name is also signified by His name. In addition, it is more interesting to note that even though the Muslims in the studied areas have their names in Thai as found in the study on Muslim Men Names by Engchuan (2020), the meanings of their religious names still focus on their Almighty God (Allah in Arabic) as well as the great good deeds he contributed to his Islam people, thus signifying that their faith is still strong, not swinging to the opposite direction.

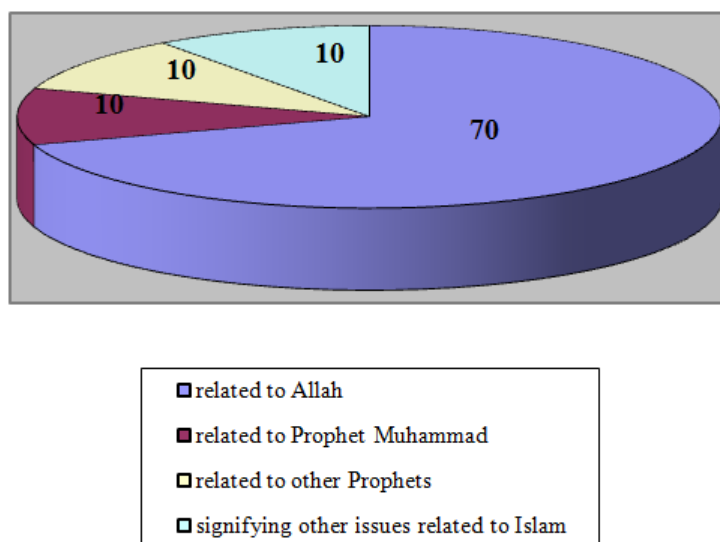


Figure 5. Meanings of Mosque Names in Studied Provinces

The analysis on the meanings of the mosque names found in the study shows that most meanings of the names were related to Almighty God (Allah in Arabic), while some meanings were concerned with Allah's last savant, Prophet Muhammad and other Prophets. In addition, still some meanings relate to great good deed Muslim people must rely on, great harmony they search for eventually, great virtuous ray of light that will lead them to their Almighty God (Allah in Arabic). For the Prophet Muhammad related meaning, the Muslim people in the studied areas name their mosques as the Prophet Muhammad's savants, or the place where the prophet stays. Apart from these, the Muslims in the four southern border provinces of Thailand name their mosques as they name themselves with the names, whose meanings are related to the famous public figures in Islam, virtue, desire, peace and security, power, integrity, unity, wisdom, rank, and knowledge among the others. This considerably underlines the phenomenon that is beyond the influence of languages alone.

In terms of language contact phenomenon, this study finds that as the Muslims in these areas are bilingual or some are trilingual, they can immediately use two or three languages interchangeably at one time. For this issue, it is very interesting to note that the Thai name is used to name the mosques in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat except Songkhla province. 25 Thai names are found in Pattani while 11 Thai names are found in Yala and Narathiwat provinces. Also, they borrow some Thai names to use as their mosque names as mentioned above. When asked why they used the Thai names, their answers are that they use Thai names because they are easy for them to look for or think of the names and they just utilize the village names to name their mosques in the areas. Sometimes, they translate the Thai names into Arabic names and use the Arabic names for the mosques. Most of the time, they name their mosques in Thai names in both Thai meaning and pronunciation. With this issue, it is also interesting to note that some Muslim village heads said that although some mosques are named in Thai names, they still prefer to use either the Arabic or the Malay dialect names as this signifies their faith to their Almighty God (Allah in Arabic). They once used to name themselves in the Thai names, but they had them changed afterwards because they saw that it was rather insecure to use the Thai names in the studied areas. According to the study on the Muslim male names of Engchuan (2020), for the male Muslims in the three southern border provinces of Thailand studied, most of them said that they preferred to use the Arabic names rather than the Malay dialect names, and they said that the Arabic names truly signified the Islamic faith when compared to the Dialect Malay names. When they recall their names, they will be always close to their Almighty God (Allah in Arabic). Nevertheless, the language contact phenomenon in using the Thai name to name the mosques in the studied areas is increasingly popular.

The analysis, in terms of the cultural implication echoed from the componential analysis of the names, obviously demonstrate that the most significant worldview of those Muslims in the four southern border provinces of Thailand is faith conveyed to their Almighty God (Allah in Arabic). This worldview is strikingly shown amidst the chaotic situations in the areas where they were usually blamed for the terrorisms or the chaos taken place all the time. The chaotic situation cannot swing them back and forth. They still have faith in their Almighty God for their security and happiness in their life. They believe that if they have their strong faith in their God, He will always help and protect them, especially in the suffering times. The talking with the Muslims in the areas, particularly with the young generations of them shows that if they are asked to change their mosque names to Thai names, they will firmly reject to do so with no reason. This can clearly prove that the faith and culture of the Muslims in the four southern border provinces of Thailand is still strong and firm amidst the chaos in the areas.

Apart from the cultural inference signifying the strong faith in the Almighty God, the Muslims in the areas, in terms of naming their mosques, always have the mosque names linked to the savants or the prophets of their Almighty God. This show that they, especially the village heads or the head of a community, will feel safe and secure even though

some of the mosque names in his community cannot be named with the ones related to their Almighty God. They believe that Almighty God's savants can also help save and protect them from sufferings. Moreover, if they cannot name their mosques with the ones related to their Almighty God and his savants or prophets, they will think of things concerned with good value and beauty, and they will name themselves with those names accordingly. As aforementioned, the Muslims in the areas name their mosques with the names related to ray of great virtuous light, peace and security, virtue, and knowledge among the others. This way of thinking exhibits that they try to please their Almighty God, and even when the time has elapsed, they still have faith in the Almighty God, feel safe and secured. The names signifying power and peace might also indicate that their Almighty God is eternally powerful and always provides them peace and security.

Furthermore, delicacy, virtue, desire, and integrity all signify that the Muslims in the areas have to behave and lead their life in the delicate way with virtue and integrity once they have their faith in their Almighty God. They also desire to do only good deeds at all times. From the interviews, it is found that some of them eventually have their desire to be with their Almighty God, serving him as faithful savants.

Culturally speaking, it still indicates that although living amidst multiculturalism, the Muslims in the areas can live together in harmony with the other people from different religions and beliefs. They said that every religion teaches its disciples to do only good deeds as their religion does. They understand multiculturalism well and do not discriminate or isolate themselves. Multiculturalism and terrorism in the areas cannot swing them back and forth as said. Their faith is still strong and will be like this forever. Due to this strong faith in their Almighty God, they can lead their life in the good and prosperous ways. The strong faith acts as the key driving in making them peaceful and feel secured in the areas.

The results discussed in this report might serve as a guide for the Thai Ministry of Culture as well as Ministry of Education in implementing more appropriate cultural and religious management policies and measures to decrease the prejudiced or discriminated behaviours when dealing with the Muslim people in the four southern border provinces of Thailand. Cooperation and understanding definitely help drive the ways of living of all peoples in the areas to higher levels of well-being and integration. There is a need to understand the cultural contexts as well as their implications influencing performances and outcomes when coping with the four southern border provinces of Thailand.

V. CONCLUSION

From the study, it can be concluded that most meanings of the mosque names found are related to Almighty God (Allah in Arabic), while some meanings are concerned with Allah's last savant, Prophet Muhammad and other Prophets. Moreover, some mosque meanings relate to great good deed Muslim people must rely on, great harmony they search for eventually, great virtuous ray of light that will lead them to their Almighty God (Allah in Arabic). For the Prophet Muhammad related meaning, the Muslim people in the studied areas name their mosques as the Prophet Muhammad's savants, or the place where the prophet stays. Apart from these, the Muslims in the four southern border provinces of Thailand name their mosques as they name themselves with the names, whose meanings are related to the famous public figures in Islam, virtue, desire, peace and security, power, integrity, unity, wisdom, rank, and knowledge among the others. This considerably underlines the phenomenon that is beyond the influence of languages alone.

Nonetheless, as this study studied only the four southern provinces situated in the southern border of Thailand that might be regarded as the study's limitation, it still provides the clearer picture of the Muslim world as well as their faith there amidst the politically chaotic situation. From this study, it could be recommended that further studies on Muslim mosques in other areas in Thailand as well as those in the world should be conducted when compared with these four studied areas. Moreover, further studies on Muslim in other dimensions should be also carried out.

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