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Typology and universality of languages without the adjectival category: A dilemma in labeling the so-called adjectives in Thai

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ABSTRACT

Word classes in Thai, an isolating language in which morphological marking is totally absent, are not easily categorized and identified. The most controversial class is the so-called adjectives, which have been labeled as such by linguists who depend on semantic and functional criteria, and as verbs by those who notice their similarity to verbs. Despite a great deal of argument on the controversy, there has not been any study that provides convincing evidence to determine their identity. This paper, which is a result of research on parts of speech in Thai based on syntactic distribution and co-occurrences, shows that in actuality the so-called adjectives in Thai behave virtually the same as verbs in main syntactic environments. Both are used as sentence predicates and nominal modifiers. Both occur in negative and imperative sentences. They co-occur with the same aspect markers and nominalizers. They both can be modified for intensification and comparison and can co-occur with classifiers in a noun phrase construction. Thus, it is concluded that typologically Thai belongs to the group of languages which do not have the distinct category Adjective and that the so-called adjectives are actually a sub-class of verbs.

Keywords: adjectives, parts of speech, word classes, typology, universals, Thai

1. Introduction

Among universal fundamental categories, adjectives seem to be recognized as distinctive as nouns and verbs. Croft (1990: 13, 69) considers "adjective" to be a "fundamental grammatical category" among other familiar categories such as *noun, verb, subject, object, head, modifier, main clause, subordinate clause*, etc. He also labels adjectives as a "major syntactic category equal to nouns and verbs". Bhat (1994) shows that in many languages the *adjectival category* has identifiable characteristics that distinguish it from the *nominal, verbal* and *adverbial categories*.

However, the universality of the adjectival category has been doubted. According to Dixon (1982: 2), all languages seem to have Noun and Verb, but "not all languages have the major word class Adjective. Either they have no Adjective class at all, or else there is a small non-productive minor class that can be called Adjective. In either of these cases it is interesting to ask how the language gets along without a full Adjective class. That is, how does it express concepts that are expressed through adjectives in languages, like English, which do have this major class? There is no simple answer to this question. Some adjective-deficient languages express all adjectival concepts through intransitive verbs (as in the case of Chinese); others express some through nouns and some through verbs (for example, Hausa), and others invoke further means (Chinook renders adjectival concepts through the major classes Noun and Verb and the minor class Particle)."

Bhat (1994:165-186) shows that adjectives can be identified with nouns in several languages, such as Sanskrit, Turkish, Dyirbal, and Huallaga Quechua. In these languages, adjectives and nouns are marked the same for number and cases. He also gives examples of languages (Bhat 1994:187-209) in which adjectives are identifiable with verbs; for example, Garo, Khasi, Manipuri, in which words meaning 'good', 'angry', 'big', 'long' and 'red' behave syntactically as such words meaning 'eat', 'die', 'read', 'cry', etc.

In fact, the similarity and overlapping between verbs and adjectives have been noticed by several linguists, who tend to place verbs and adjectives in the same group as opposed to nouns. Jespersen (1924:207, cited in Bhat 1994:45) pointed out that the plurality in a noun denoted that of its referent, but that in an adjective or verb, it denoted the plurality of the head noun or subject. Keenan (1979:168) separates verbs and adjectives on the one hand as opposed to nouns on the other. He calls the former "function words", the meanings of which depend upon the nouns or "argument expressions" with which they occur. So the word "flat" in "flat road", "flat beer", "flat tire" and the word "cut" in "cut the finger", "cut the cake", "cut the hair" are similar in their "function". Langacker (1987: 189, cited in Bhat 1994: 45) divides "predicates" into two major groups, called nominal and relational. The former (nouns) indicate a 'thing', whereas the latter indicate either a process (verbs) or a temporal relation (adjectives, adverbs, etc.). The essential difference between nominal and relational predications, according to him, is that the latter put interconnections in profile rather than simply presupposing them as part of the base. For example, the noun "square" differs from the adjective "square" in that the noun presupposes the interconnections between the four lines and profiles only the region that is established by them, whereas the adjective profiles those interconnections themselves. Lyons (1966: 221, cited in Bhat 1994: 45) points out that there is generally an overlap between adjectives and verbs in that both of them may denote states and that the distinction between adjectives and verbs, unlike the one between nouns and verbs, should not be regarded as a substantive universal of grammatical theory. Hudson (1984:164, cited in Bhat 1994: 46) tries to represent the similarity between adjectives and verbs in his theory of Word Grammar by suggesting that the notion of "subject" can be extended from sentences to noun phrases; thus, the head noun in "legal argument" can be regarded as the subject, the same as that in "this argument is legal." According to him, both can mean either that the argument is legitimate or that it is about the law.

In addition to the above, there are some linguists who seem to suggest grouping both verbs and adjectives in certain languages into the same category. Matisoff (1973: 193, cited in Bhat 1994: 192) points out that in Lahu one may distinguish between "action-verbs" and "adjectival verbs", but the distinction is largely a semantic one; there are only relatively minor syntactic differences to keep the two classes apart...Both take the relativizing particle *ve*.... Also, Chao (1968: 687, cited in Bhat 1994: 192) suggests that adjectives in Chinese

be treated as a species of verbs; they can function as predicates without requiring a verb 'to be' to occur with them.

Muller-Gotama (1997) recognizes the problem of identifying word classes in Indonesian, particularly the question whether Indonesian has a distinct category "adjectives". He disagrees with other scholars who divide parts of speech into discrete categories. Adopting a prototype analysis, he aims to demonstrate that "adjectives" and "verbs" form a continuum in Indonesian with no clear dividing line between them. He concludes that while clusters of typical morpho-syntactic properties can be established for both verbs and adjectives, the properties of the individual lexical items do not add up to create two separate groups but rather form a network of overlapping and crisscrossing properties. In brief, he recognizes that there are verbal and adjectival categories in Indonesian but that they overlap to a considerable extent.

As can be seen from the literature review above, there are suggestions and studies concerning the similarity between adjectives and verbs and the justification for grouping them into a single category. However, there has not been a comparable study that concentrates on a typical isolating language of the type Subject-Verb-Object and Head-Modifier word order, such as Thai.

Therefore, in this essay, I intend to support the view expressed by Dixon and Bhat that typologically, there are languages which have no distinctive category called "adjectives" and that the so-called adjectives in Thai are actually verbs. I hope that this essay will not only be useful in further analysis of the syntax of such a language as Thai, but also shed some light on the typology and universality of parts of speech in general.

The data on which my analysis is based are from a corpus of two million words of current Thai covering many different genres. In discussing the problem, I will use the word *dii* 'good' as a representative of the so-called adjectives in Thai.

2. Previous analysis of the so-called adjectives in Thai

There is a dilemma in identifying and classifying such a word as */dii/* 'good' in Thai; i.e., whether it should be labeled an adjective or a verb. Such a word can occur in two types of environments as follows:

- (1) S[NP__]S : */dii/* occurring as a constituent of NP in a sentence; e.g.:
 khǎw dii
 he/she good
 'He/she is good.'
- (2) NP[N__]NP : */dii/* occurring as a constituent of N in a noun phrase construction; e.g.:
 (*chǎn chǎp*) *khon dii* OR *khon dii* (*chǎp chǎn*)
 I like person good person good like I
 '(I like) good people.' 'Good people (like me).'

In (1), the word */dii/* 'good' is the predicate of the sentence. In (2) it is not the predicate but a constituent of the head noun, which is subject or object of the sentence. Such a word never changes in form--it has no marking no matter where it occurs. Only its position can tell us how it is related to other words in a sentence. In (2) the word */dii/* follows a noun in a PHRASE (NP) construction. In (1) it is different--it is a constituent in a CLAUSE construction. Generally, linguists would regard any word in the position of */dii/* in (1) as a verb and that in (2) as an adjective. Indeed, so far there have been three approaches to the analysis of such a word depending on criteria used: 1) **functional criterion**: classifying it as a verb and an adjective; 2) **semantic criterion**: classifying it as an adjective only; 3) **syntactic criterion**: classifying it as a verb only.

2.1 Functional criterion: Classifying the word /dii/ 'good' as a verb and an adjective

Using **function** as a criterion in classifying words, one may consider such a word as /dii/ 'good' in Thai to be **one word with two functions**; i.e., the same form /dii/ is labeled as a "verb" when it functions as the *predicate* of a sentence, and as an "adjective" when it functions as a noun *modifier*.

Schiller's (1992) *autolexical* approach to classifying parts of speech in Southeast Asian languages seems to be based on this criterion; one word can be a member of any syntactic category if it is used as other members of that category. For instance, if the word is in the syntactic position of a noun, it will be treated as a noun; if it is in the position of a main verb, it will be regarded as a verb, and so on. This approach involves "complete autonomy between modules (called Dimensions) of a grammar, among them syntax, semantics, and morphology. Regular correspondences between categories of these different dimensions are noted in the form of default relations." For example, the word /trəw/ in Khmer, which can occur in every syntactic environment except that of a preposition, will be listed, under the autolexical approach, as "Syntax: [-P], Semantics: default". This listing indicates that the word can be a member of any syntactic category except that of a preposition (Schiller 1992: 783-4). Thus, even though Schiller did not mention adjectives in Thai, we can predict that he would consider such a word as /dii/ 'good' as a verb when it is the predicate of a sentence and as an adjective when it functions as a modifier.

An advantage of this approach is that it conforms to the universality of verb-adjective distinction in function; i.e., **predicate vs. modifier** (See Croft 1991:93). Also it is easy to identify which is a verb and which is an adjective in a sentence.

However, this approach has some drawbacks. First of all, since all such words as /dii/ 'good' that can occur in (1) can also occur in (2), a dictionary of Thai would have to label all such words as both verbs and adjectives or, following the Autolexical approach, specify what parts of speech they cannot be (leaving it understood that they can be members of any category except the specified ones). Secondly, it is generally found that not only can such a word as /dii/ 'good' occur in both (1) and (2), but other words that are normally labeled as "verbs" in Thai can as well. The following sentences show that such words as /yīm/ 'smile' and /phūut/ 'speak' would also have to be classified as both a verb and an adjective because they can occur in the same environments as /dii/ 'good', as (3)-(6) show:

(3) khǎw yīm

he/she smile

'He/she smiles.'

(4) (chǎn chōp) khon yīm

I like person smile

'(I like) smiling people.'

OR khon yīm (chōp chǎn)

Person smile like I

'Smiling people (like me).'

(5) khǎw phūut phasāa-ciin

he/she speak Chinese

'He/she speaks Chinese.'

(6) (chǎn chōp) khon phūut phasāa-ciin

I like person speak Chinese

'(I like) Chinese-speaking people.'

OR khon **phūut** phasăa-ciin (chôp chăn)
 Person speak Chinese like I
 'Chinese-speaking people (like me).'

To consider the words meaning 'smile' and 'speak' in (3) and (5), respectively, as verbs would be acceptable to all linguists because they are predicates of the sentences, but to consider the same forms in (4) and (6) as adjectives may not be acceptable to some linguists even though they function as nominal modifiers because universally a word signifying action should not be regarded as an adjective.¹ Indeed, all the verbs, including action verbs like /khâa/ 'kill', /khian/ 'write', /wîj/ 'run', /lên/ 'play' would all be classified functionally as adjectives because they can be used as noun modifiers as in (4) and (6). Therefore, if we use function as a criterion in classifying words, we will have a complete overlapping when dealing with verbs and adjectives in Thai. This is certainly ambivalent and makes the concept of "class" or "category" meaningless.

It should be noted that one may avoid this overlapping by maintaining that actually such a word as /dii/ 'good' is **homophonous**--there are two words or lexical items of the same form /dii/ (with the same pronunciation); one form functions as a verb and the other functions as an adjective (**two words--two functions**). This then will help keep the two classes distinct. Panupong (1989: 56) argues for this principle, citing /kâw/ 'old' as an example. According to her, there are two words of the same form /kâw/; one is an intransitive verb (meaning 'to be old') and the other an adjective (meaning 'old'). However, this will lead to another problem; i.e., one class will be an unnecessary doublet of another. Therefore, to analyze one word as belonging to two classes is certainly not an *economical* syntactic approach. In brief, whether we regard an identical form as one word or two words does not eliminate the problem of redundancy or lack of economy.

2.2 *Semantic Criterion: Classifying the word /dii/ 'good' as an adjective only*

Those who use the **semantic** criterion in classifying words regard such a word as /dii/ as an **adjective only** (e.g., Upakitsilapasarn 1937, Noss 1964, the Royal Institute Dictionary 1982, Sookgasem 1996). Based on this criterion, meaning overshadows syntactic distribution. Thus, adjectives would be defined as words that tell the *quality* of something. This is not a problem when it occurs in environment (2); i.e., as a noun modifier. However, when it occurs in (1), as the predicate of a sentence, it would be unacceptable to say that adjectives act as main verbs. Some linguists argue that when such a construction occurs, it is in the surface structure and that actually in the deep structure, the construction contains a linking verb /pen/ 'be' (like verb *to be* in English) and also that the linking verb is finally deleted by a transformational rule. This analysis is, of course, out of date, and nobody is convinced by this kind of argument any longer.

Sookgasem (1996) argues for labeling such a word as /dii/ as an adjective only. Obviously, she maintains that Thai has a separate category or part of speech called "adjectives", which are divided into two types: *attributive and predicative*. She would call /dii/ in (2) an **attributive adjective** and the one in (1) a **predicative adjective**. Based on semantic criterion, she defines adjectives as "a syntactic category the members of which describe permanent states of or tell something about their subject. They describe persons, things, situations, etc. They say what persons or things are like or seem like. They give information about their subjects. The information includes quality, color, shape, size, age, temperature, distance, time and origin." (Sookgasem 1996:579)

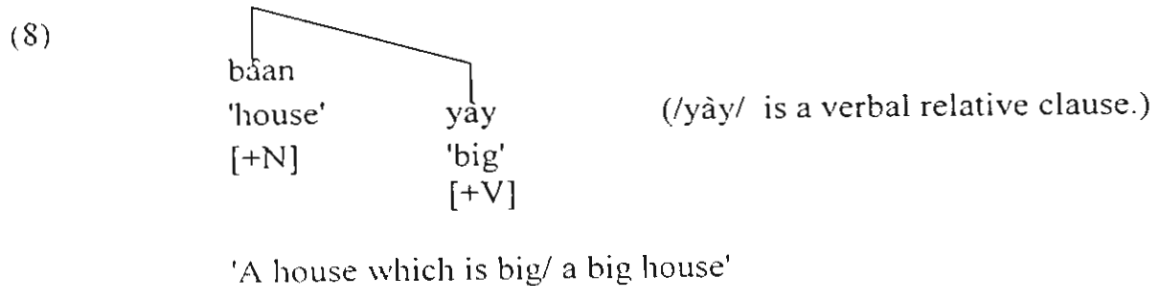
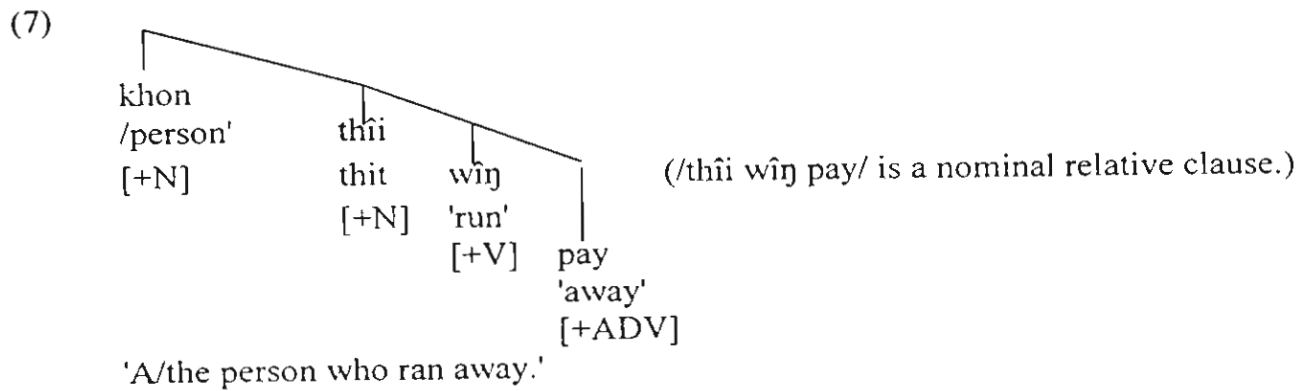
A problem often occurs as to how we agree on what should be or should not be adjectives if based on the meaning only. Meanings are sometimes subjective and depend very much on individual interpretation, especially connotative meanings. The following are words in Thai that have ambiguous meanings and might be either a verb or adjective if based on semantic criterion: /tèek/ 'break, broken', /tôm/ 'boil, boiled' /kêe/ 'get old, old', /taay/ 'die, dead', /sâw/ 'to be sad, sad', /dœɛŋ/ 'to get reddened, red', /daŋ/ 'to become loud, loud', etc.

More examples reveal more problems if we adopt the semantic criterion to label words. Some words classified by Sookgasem as adjectives are inherently nouns in Thai; for example, /adiit/ 'past', /pât Cuban/ 'present', /anaakhót/ 'future', /ciin/ 'Chinese', /thay/ 'Thai', /faràn/ 'western', /khêek/ 'Indian'. Evidence which confirms that they are nouns is that they can be sister constituents of prepositions, forming a prepositional phrase, e.g. /nay adiit/ 'in the past', /nay pâ Cuban/ 'at present', /nay anaakhót/ 'in the future'. They can also function as subject or object of a clause--main functions of nouns, e.g., /anaakhót pen sɨŋ mây nêe noon/ 'The future is not a certain thing.' / (/anaakhót/ is subject). In /faràn khon nán kamlan lŏŋ-thaay/ 'That western man is getting lost.' The word /faràn/ is subject of the clause. In /chăn hên khêek dœn maa sŏŋ khon/ 'I saw two Indians walking this way.' The word /khêek/ is object of the clause. Therefore, to define "adjectives" semantically is not valid because words that can qualify or describe other words can be nouns, too. Indeed, the NP construction in which the head noun is modified by another noun is a common pattern in language. In English, we have noun phrases like "university student", "stone house", "world language", "computer science", "hotel management", etc. In Thai, this pattern is very common, e.g., /aacaan mahâawithayaalay/ (lecturer, university) 'university lecturer', /săaysŏy thœŋ/ (necklace, gold) 'gold necklace', /săt paa/ (animal, jungle) 'wild animal', /panhăa sŏŋkhom/ (problem, society) 'social problem', /sŏŋkhom mian/ (society, town) 'urban society'. Therefore, words that describe nouns need not be adjectives. The point I want to emphasize here is that to define adjectives by the semantic criterion alone is not valid.

2.3 Syntactic criterion: Classifying the word /dii/ 'good' as a verb only

A number of linguists (e.g., Haas 1964, Starosta 1994, Indrambarya 1994, Savetamalya 1996, Warotamasikkhadit 1996) maintain that such a word as /dii/ 'good' is a **verb only**. Based on syntactic distribution, they argue for the principle of **one word-one class**; i.e., *a word can belong to only one class*. The word /dii/ occurs in the same environments (See (1), (3) and (5)) as all other *typical* verbs in Thai; namely, as those meaning 'run', 'speak', 'eat', etc. It can also be negated in the same way--preceded by the word /mây/ 'not'. So a Thai speaker says /mây kin/ 'not eat' as well as /mây dii/ 'not good'. Therefore, they argue that /dii/ should be classified as a verb.

What follows is how to deal with /dii/ in (2) where it functions as a noun modifier. How can one justify that it is a verb in such a context? Savetamalya (1996) solves the problem by labeling those "verbs" that modify nouns in an NP construction "verbal relative clauses". She divides relative clauses into 2 types: *nominal relative clauses* and *verbal relative clauses*. The former is marked by the relativizer /thîi/, whereas the latter does not contain such a marker. Examples (7) and (8) below are NP constructions containing nominal and verbal relative clauses, respectively.



Based on the above criterion, the modifier of the subject NP (/thii dii/ and /dii/) in sentences (9) and (10) below would be considered a relative clause, no matter whether it contains the relativizer /thii/ or not.

- (9) nākrian thii dii cà prasòp khwaam-sămrèt
 Student who good will meet success
 'Students who are good will be successful.'

In (9), /thii dii/ 'who are good' is a relative clause modifying the noun /nākrian/. In (10) the word /thii/ is missing but the sentence remains perfectly grammatical.

- (10) nākrian dii cà prasòp khwaam-sămrèt
 Student good will meet success
 'Good students will be successful.'

As can be seen in (9) and (10), the word /dii/ is surely a verb in the relative clause, only the relativizer is not present in the latter pattern. Therefore, there is no need to label such a word as /dii/ in (10) as an adjective.

3. My position

My position is different from three above, but close to 2.3; i.e., I regard such a word as /dii/ as a **verb only**. This also implies that I maintain that there is not an "adjectival category" in Thai. Thus, I will label the word /dii/ in environments (1) and (2) a verb. I agree with Savetamalya that the word /dii/ in (10) is a relative clause modifying the head noun. However, I will not divide relative clauses into nominal and verbal relative clauses like her. Structurally, I will regard both as an **embedded clause**. Functionally, following Halliday (1994: 244), I will regard them as **defining relative clauses** functioning as a **qualifier** of the

"thing" in an experiential structure² or, in a logical structure, as a **modifier** of the **head**, as can be seen in the following diagram.

(11)		nākrian	thīi dii (finite relative clause)
		student	who good 'good student/'
(12)		nākrian	dii (non-finite relative clause) ³
		student	good 'good student'

Experiential Structure	Thing	Qualifier
Logical structure	Head	Modifier

Thus, I will maintain that /dii/ 'good' is always a verb. When it is a constituent in an NP, I analyze it as a non-finite relative clause, varying with /thīi dii/ (a finite relative clause). Both variants of the relative clause function as qualifier of a thing or modifier of a head.

4. Criteria for identifying the so-called "adjectives" as verbs

Thai is not the only language in the world in which adjectives can be identified as verbs. As mentioned above, a number of languages share this typological feature. In this section, I will provide proof for my argument that such a word as /dii/ 'good' is a verb in Thai. I will show how /dii/ 'good' and other so-called adjectives in Thai behave like verbs first. Then I will provide evidence of how verbs behave like /dii/ 'good'.

4.1 How /dii/ 'good' (so-called adjective) behaves as a typical verb

The word /dii/ 'good' behaves as a verb in 4 aspects: 1) occurring in the predicative position 2) negation 3) imperative and 4) occurring with words signifying aspect.

4.1.1 Occurrence in the predicative position

According to Bhat (1994: 189), the ability of adjectives to take, directly, the inflectional affixes of verbs when used in the predicative position in a sentence, has probably been the most important characteristic prompting grammarians of the languages under consideration to claim that adjectives and verbs constitute a single category. In Thai, however, we cannot use this criterion because verbs are never marked by any inflectional affix for any grammatical category (e.g., tense, aspect, mood). All verbs maintain the same form in all contexts. Like all verbs, the word /dii/ 'good' can also occur in the predicative position without any inflectional marking. The only marking of predication in Thai is the position of the word--following the subject of the sentence, as in the following examples.

- (13) khǎw dii
he/she good 'He/she is good.'
- (14) khǎw wîŋ
he/she run 'He/she runs.'
- (15) khǎw kin
he/she eat 'He/she eats.'

As can be seen from (13-15) above, /dii/ 'good' takes the predicate position, the same as typical verbs meaning 'run' and 'eat'.

4.1.2 Negation

Negation is a criterion used for testing whether a word is a verb in Thai (See Panupong 1989, Hennequin 1991, Intratat 1996). Words that can be preceded by /mây/ 'not' are verbs, as in (14) below:

- (16) khăw mây wîŋ
he not run 'He does not run.'

We can negate any verb, but not nouns and prepositions, e.g., */mây khruu/ 'not a teacher', */mây phîa khun/ 'not for you'.

The word /dii/ 'good' and all the other so-called adjectives in Thai can co-occur with /mây/: e.g., /mây dii/ 'not good', /mây sŭay/ 'not beautiful', /mây yaaw/ 'not long', /mây khem/ 'not salty', /mây sa-áat/ 'not clean', /mây rŭu-răa/ 'not luxurious', etc. Thus, /dii/ 'good' behaves like a verb in negation, as in (17).

- (17) khăw mây dii
he/she not good 'He/she is not good.'

4.1.3 Imperative

Further evidence confirming the similarity between dii 'good' and other typical verbs is that all of them can be in the imperative construction, as in (18) and (19) below.

- (18) karunaa yŋm kîn nŏy
please stand up Prt. 'Please stand up.'
- (19) karunaa dii kîn nŏy
please good up Prt. 'Please improve yourself.'

The word /dii/ 'good' in (19) is clearly a verb meaning 'be good'.

4.1.4 Co-occurrence with words signifying aspect

There are words that co-occur with verbs to signify aspect, as /léew/ 'already' (perfective), /kamlaŋ/ 'happening now' (progressive) and /câ/ 'will' (future). These words can also occur with /dii/ 'good' as in the examples below.

- (20) khăw kîn léew
he/she eat already 'He/she has eaten.'
- (21) khăw dii léew
he/she good already 'He/she is already good.'
- (22) khăw kamlaŋ kîn
he/she now eat 'He/she is eating.'

- (23) khǎw kamlan dii
 he/she now good 'He/she is good now.'
 (24) khǎw cà kin
 he/she will eat 'He/she will eat.'
 (25) khǎw cà dii
 he/she will good 'He/she will be good.'

4.2 How verbs behave like /dii/

In the section above we see how /dii/ 'good' behaves syntactically like typical verbs. In the following I will provide evidence, on the other hand, to show how some verbs behave like /dii/.

4.2.1 Nominal modification

In (2) we see /dii/ 'good' function as the modifier of the noun /khon/ 'person/ people' and in (4) and (6) we see /yîm/ 'smile' and /phûut/ 'speak' function as noun modifiers as well. More examples showing the similar role of /dii/ 'good' and other verbs are:

- (26) thuk khon chǎp khon dii
 every person like person good
 'Everyone likes good people.'
 (27) thuk khon mǎy chǎp khon sùup burii
 every person not like person smoke cigarette
 'No one likes a person who smokes.'

The verb (+ its complement) -- 'sùup burii' 'smoke cigarettes' in (27) behaves exactly like /dii/ 'good' in (26): i.e., they both modify the head noun /khon/ 'person'. In this paper both are regarded as defining relative clauses.

4.2.2 Nominalization

In Thai, verbs are nominalized by adding the prefix /kaan/ or /khwaam/ (meaning 'matter' or 'affair'): e.g., /khwaam dii/ 'goodness', /kaan kin/ 'eating', /kaan sùup burii/ 'smoking (cigarettes)', etc.

Since all the so-called adjectives in Thai occur with /khwaam/; e.g., /khwaam sǎy/ 'beauty', /khwaam yaaw/ 'length', /khwaam sùk/ 'happiness', /khwaam rūu-rǎa/ 'luxury', /khwaam daj/ 'loudness', /khwaam rew/ 'rapidity', etc., it is likely for some linguists to claim that any word that is nominalized with /khwaam/ is an adjective and that any word nominalized with /kaan/ is a verb, such as /kaan kin/ 'eating', /kaan dǎn/ 'walking', etc. However, evidence shows that this is far from being true. Many verbs are nominalized with /khwaam/, too; for example:

khwaam rāk	'love'
khwaam khǎw-cay	'understanding'
khwaam sǎn-cay	'interest'
khwaam rǎpphitchǎp	'responsibility'

khwaam rūammii	'cooperation'
khwaam praphrit	'behavior'
khwaam plian-plēen	'change'
khwaam tōjkaan	'want, need'
khwaam khawrōp	'respect'
khwaam phānphūan	'fluctuation'

This shows that we cannot distinguish the so-called adjectives from verbs by the criterion of nominalization. In other words, evidence from the nominalizing process shows that the two groups overlap to such a great extent that they both seem to form only one category.

4.2.3 Intensification

In Thai, one way to intensify the meaning of a word is reduplication, and it has been suggested that words that are normally intensified are those so-called adjectives, for example:

dīi dīi	'very good'
kláy klay	'very far'
khaaw khāaw	'very white'
rēw rēw	'very fast'
suay suay	'very beautiful'

The rule of reduplication in this case is that the reduplicated part precedes the original word and always has a high tone no matter what tone the original element has.

It must be noted that all typical verbs can also be reduplicated in the same way, for example:

dōon dōon	'walk and walk and walk'
phūut phūut	'talk a lot, talkative, talk many times'
rāk rāk	'love very much'
kīn kīn	'eat a lot'
tham-nāan tham-nāan	'work very hard'
etc.	

Therefore, this is another piece of evidence to confirm that the so-called adjectives and verbs in Thai form a single category.

4.2.4 Comparison

Universally, all languages seem to have various ways of showing the degree of adjectives in terms of comparison; e.g., *as beautiful as*, *more beautiful than*, and *most beautiful* in English. In Thai, all so-called adjectives have the following patterns of comparison.

- (28) rōt-yon **rew thāw**⁴ rōt-fay
 car fast equal train
 'Cars are as fast as trains.'

- (29) a. rōt-yon **rew kwàa** rōt-fay OR b. rōt-yon **rew māk kwàa** rōt-fay
 car fast than train car fast much than train

- 'Cars are faster than trains.'
- (30) a. **khriɔŋ-bin rew thii-sùt** OR b. **khriɔŋ-bin rew mâak thii-sùt**
 airplane fast most airplane fast much most
 'Airplanes are the fastest.' 'Airplanes are the fastest.'

All verbs in Thai can occur in 'as...as' comparison (28), the comparative (29b) and the superlative degree (30b) as can be seen in (31), (32) and (33), respectively.

- (31) **khǎw thamjaan thǎw phǔu-càt-kaan**
 he work equal manager
 'He works as much as the manager.'
- (32) **khǎw thamjaan mâak kwàa phǔu-càt-kaan**
 he work much more manager
 'He works more than the manager.'
- (33) **khǎw thamjaan mâak thii-sùt**
 he work much most
 'He works most.'

As for the patterns in (29a) and (30a), verbs fitting into these patterns are rare. It seems that only ones denoting feelings (e.g., those meaning 'like', 'love', 'hate', 'to be infatuated', etc.) can occur in such patterns, as (34) and (35) below show.

- (34) **khǎw chǎp rôt-yon kwàa rôt-fay**
 he/she like car than train
 'He/she likes cars better than trains.'
- (35) **khǎw chǎp rôt-yon thii-sùt**
 he/she like car most
 'He/she likes cars most.'

Other kinds of verbs do not fit in the patterns. So (36) and (37) are ungrammatical.

- (36) ***khǎw thamjaan kwàa phǔu-càt-kaan**
 he work more manager
 'He works more than the manager.'
- (37) ***khǎw thamjaan thii-sùt**
 he work most
 'He works most.'

4.2.5 Co-occurrence with classifiers

Panupong (1989: 56) points out a distinguishing characteristic of (so-called) adjectives: namely, they can co-occur with nouns and classifiers forming definite noun phrases, implying that verbs cannot, as in the following pattern:

- Noun + Classifier + (so-called) Adjective**
- (38) chaay **khon** sǔuŋ

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------------|-------|-------------------|
| | man | Class. | tall | 'the tall man' |
| (39) | nok | tua | lék | |
| | bird | Class. | small | 'the small bird.' |

However, I have found a number of noun phrases of this pattern containing true verbs in Thai; for example:

- | | | | | | | |
|------|-------|-------------|------|-------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| (40) | chaay | khon | sây | sîa | sîi-khîaw | |
| | man | Class. | wear | shirt | color-green | 'the man wearing a green shirt.' |

- | | | | | | |
|------|------|------------|-----|------|------------------------|
| (41) | nok | tua | bin | sûuj | |
| | bird | Class. | fly | high | 'the high-flying bird' |

The examples above show that verbs like /sây/ 'put on, wear' and /bin/ 'fly' can also occur in the same pattern of NP as /sûuj/ 'tall' and /lék/ 'small'. This supports the grouping of the two kinds of words into one category.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary

In the preceding pages, I have provided evidence to prove that the so-called adjectives in Thai are actually verbs. This supports the theory that not all languages have the major word class Adjective--some languages may express adjectival concepts through nouns, others through verbs. Typologically, Thai belongs to the latter group.

Since Thai is a non-inflectional language, syntactic distribution or co-occurrence seems to be the best criterion in distinguishing parts of speech. We cannot depend on morphological marking of words as in many Indo-European languages. The review of previous studies on Thai grammar shows that word classification based on the semantic criterion fails to recognize the fact that in actuality the so-called adjectives and verbs in Thai behave virtually the same in main syntactic environments. Both are used as sentence predicates and nominal modifiers. Both occur in negative and imperative sentences. They co-occur with the same aspect markers and nominalizers. They both can be modified for intensification and comparison. Finally, both of them can co-occur with classifiers in an NP construction.

It should be noted that even if the so-called adjectives in Thai can be identified with true verbs, we can still separate them from "action verbs" and regard them as a subcategory of verbs called "adjectival verbs" (following Matisoff 1973) by the semantic criterion and certain patterns of comparison (See (29b.) and (30b)), which are rarely used with other verbs. However, it is important to recognize them as members of the major category Verb.

5.2 Implications for linguistic typology and universals

The result of my study seems to contribute to the constraints on part-of-speech variation among languages. Most of the points summarized below may help clarify some questions posed by Anward et al (1997: 179-181).

- 1) Languages without the adjectival category tend to be isolating and agglutinative languages. Chinese, which has often been cited as a typical example of a

language without adjectives, and Thai, which is the focus of this paper, are isolating languages. Other languages found to lack an adjectival category, such as Khasi, Manipuri (See Bhat 1996), are agglutinative languages.

- 2) A language of the S-V-O and Head-Modifier type may be more prone to identify adjectives as verbs than other types. Chinese is like Thai in the S-V-O order but it is of the Modifier-Head type. Research by Deng et al (1996) reveals that there is quite a large number of the "so-called" adjectives in Chinese that cannot function as predicates of a sentence. In Thai, as far as evidence shows, there are no such words. It seems all "so-called" adjectives in Thai can be predicates.
- 3) It seems true that if adjectives are marked for the superlative degree, they are also marked for the comparative.
- 4) The analysis shows that there are languages where parts of speech can be distinguished solely on the syntactic basis.
- 5) Nouns and verbs seem to be two major categories that exist in all languages.

5.3 Suggestions

As Whorf has suggested in his work (Whorf 1956:212), the grammar of each language has influence on the speaker's mental activity. It may be interesting to find out whether speakers of languages of different grammatical types have different ways of thinking. Is the lack of the distinct category Adjective in Thai related to a Thai speaker's thought? There has not been any experiment which gives an answer to the question. However, Schalbruch (1996) in his study on "features of contemporary Thai narrative texts and their relation to Thai cultural characteristics" argues that in European novels a person's character is usually conveyed through elaborate and detailed descriptions of individual features of facial expressions and gestures, of emotions or of scenes of nature and that adjectives are used in such descriptions. Adjectives also convey metaphorical value; e.g., *dark*, *narrow*, *thin*, and *small* may convey negative connotations, whereas *light*, *broad*, and *tall* connote positive characteristics. He points out that such descriptions are not found in Thai narratives. The reader does not know what a character looks like. He does not know the color of his/her eyes, the complexion of his/her skin, or any characteristic lines or other features of his/her faces. Positive and negative character in Thai narratives is more often conveyed through positive and negative action or behavior. (Schalbruch 1996: 212) Even though Schalbruch does not conclude that the reason for using such a strategy in narrative characterization is due to the lack of the adjective class in Thai, this can easily be inferred. Indeed, I would say that a language like Thai in which adjectives are identified as verbs is "an action-oriented language."

I agree with what Bhat (1997: 275) says at the end of his book: "...we need to recognize the possibility of languages using fundamentally different strategies for their structuring of sentences. Such differences affect not only the types of word classes that the languages manifest, and the types of morphosyntactic constraints which affect them, but also the types of concepts that the languages can or need to express."

Another point that I would like to suggest at the end of this essay is that other Southeast Asian languages that have the same word order as Thai are likely to belong to the same type as Thai as far as adjectives are concerned, such as Malay, Cambodian, and Sino-Tibetan languages spoken in Thailand. To study the grammars of these languages would not reveal their true typological features if linguists still analyzed them in the framework of Indo-European grammars.

Notes

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¹ Semantically such words as those meaning 'smile' and 'talk' do not fall into any of the seven semantic types which make up the word class Adjective as proposed by Dixon (1982: 17-18). They are 1) dimension, 2) physical property, 3) color, 4) human property, 5) age, 6) value, and 7) speed.

² In Halliday's model of functional grammar, the three functional components of language--**ideational**, **interpersonal**, and **textual**--are realized throughout the grammar of a language. At the same time, in interpreting group structure, he splits the ideational component into two: **experiential** and **logical**, implying the functions of language as organization of experience and the expression of logical relations. (See Halliday 1994: 179-180)

³ In Thai, finite and non-finite verbs cannot be distinguished from each other by any morphological marking, but we can separate them by adding the word /cà/ 'will', marking some "future aspect", in front of them. Any verb form that can be preceded by /cà/ is considered here to be *finite*; one that cannot *non-finite*. Thus, the NP /nákrian **thîi** cà **dii**/ is grammatical, but the NP /nákrian cà **dii**/ is not.

⁴ There are some variations of this pattern. Words like /thâw kâp/ 'equal to', /raaw kâp/ 'to be about the same as' or /phəəphəə kâp/ 'to be about equal to' can also be used instead of /thâw/.

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Syntactic distribution and communicative function of the /kh/ polite particles in Thai

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Abbreviated title: Function of polite particles in Thai

Abstract

Previous studies dealing with polite particles in Thai split into two sides; those who consider them to be final elements in a sentence and ignore their pragmatic function, and those who look at their function in discourse without paying attention to their distribution. Neither approach is unable to yield a complete picture of such particles. This study serves as an interface between the syntactic and pragmatic approaches to this kind of discourse markers in Thai. The purpose is to analyze the syntactic and pragmatic roles of /kh/ polite particles in Thai. The data was taken from a corpus of approximately 70,000 words in the form of dialogues taken from J.S. 100 radio program. The results show that syntactically /kh/ polite particles can occur alone, after a word, a group of words, a clause and a complete sentence. Pragmatically, they are used alone or with some pragmatic markers in interpersonal communication, in which the interlocutors play the alternate roles of giving and demanding. The /kh/ polite particles add positive politeness to the giving part and mitigation to the demanding part.

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Language modernization in Thai society

Parts of speech in Thai: a syntactic analysis

Syntactic distribution and communicative function of the /kh/ polite particles in Thai¹

Amara Prasithrathsint

I. Introduction

Polite particles in Thai are normally the final element in an utterance. If there are several final particles co-occurring, these polite particles will follow all the other final particles. They mark several degrees of respect the speaker wants to show to the addressee. This paper will focus on the polite particles that are the most commonly used among common people (not used by monks or used for talking to the royalty). They all begin with a 'kh' sound, hence they will be called 'kh' polite particles. They are 'khá', 'khā' and 'khāa' used by a female speaker and 'khráp' and 'khráp-phǒm'² used by a male speaker.

With reference to word classes, previous studies that deal with these particles classify them as *particles* or *final particles*. Haas (1964: xxii) defines "particles" as sentence-ending words that "fall into two classes, those indicating mode and those connoting the social status and sometimes the sex of the speaker." Thus, the 'kh' polite particles are a kind of status particles. Bhamoraput (1971) also calls these particles "status particles" because they indicate the status including the sex of the speaker. The /kh/ particles signify that the speaker is lower than or equal to the hearer in social status. Noss (1964: 55, 200, 215-216) regard the /kh/ particles a kind of "sentence particles".

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According to him, /khráp/, /khá/ and /khâ/, are used for speaking to superior, elder or non-intimate equal person. As for /khráp-phǒm/, it is used by a male speaker for speaking to highly superior, revered or noble personage. Panupong (1989: 62-63) explained that all the /kh/ particles are used by a subordinate speaker to a person of a higher status to show respect. Warotamasikkhadit (1996: 109) argues that the /kh/ final particles are in the surface structure only. The choice of a female or a male form depends on whether the speaker is male or female in the deep structure.

In usage, these polite particles do not play a significant role at the sentence level. On the contrary, they are essential in interpersonal discourse. Booppanimit (1996), Vasavarnond (1996, and Suwannoy (1998: 84-87) regard these particles as *discourse markers* the main function of which is to show politeness and turn-taking.

Discourse markers have been found to serve numerous pragmatic functions. According to Otsman (1981: 39-40, 1982: 150-152), discourse markers may operate simultaneously on two levels; on the structural level, they may serve a clausal or a textual function, and on the pragmatic level, they may serve an interactive or an attitudinal purpose. Schiffrin (1987: 31-32) defines discourse markers "in relation to *unit of talk*, rather than a more finely defined unit such as sentence, proposition, speech act, or tone unit". According to her, discourse markers often precede sentences; i.e., syntactic configurations of an independent clause plus all clauses dependent on it, but they are independent of sentential structure. In other words, removal of a marker from its sentence initial position leaves the sentence structure intact.

Discourse markers that are initial elements of a unit of talk are, for example, *well*, *I mean*, *oh*, *and*, *because*, *you know*, *you see*, in English (See Fraser, 1980, 1990; Ostman,

² The word /khráp-phǒm/ is a compound deriving from the polite particle /khráp/ plus /phǒm/ 'I/me (for a male speaker)'.