THE ADVERSATIVE PASSIVE MARKER
AS A PROMINENT AREAL FEATURE
OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN LANGUAGES

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1. Introduction

It has been suggested in my previous studies (Prasitrathsint 1985, 2001) that the adversative passive is an areal feature of Southeast Asian languages. It is marked by a word regarded here as an auxiliary verb meaning 'to come in contact with or undergo (an unpleasant experience)'; for example, /thùuk/ in Thai, /bi/ in Vietnamese, and /trəw/ in Khmer.

Such words are not transparent or simple semantically and syntactically. Dictionaries normally list several meanings of the words, as in the Vietnamese-English Dictionary by Nguyen-Dinh-Hoa (1966), the Vietnamese-Thai Dictionary by Watcharaprapa (1986), and The Thai Royal Institute Dictionary (1982). Others give several entries of the words, such as the Thai-English Dictionary by Haas (1964), and the Khmer-Thai Dictionary by Phraya Anuman-Rachathon (1974). In any case, all we are shown is that these words have multiple meanings, some of which are equivocal. Grammar books tend to overlook or underrate these words. Their grammatical function is not unanimously accepted among linguists--some regard them as auxiliary verbs functioning as passive markers; others maintain that they are lexical verbs that have nothing to do with passives.

In brief, we never have a clear description of these words--what they mean and how they are used in sentences. So far there has been no study that focuses specifically on the semantic and syntactic features of these words. This study\(^1\) thus aims to fill that gap. Its purpose is to analyze the multiple
meanings and diverse syntactic environments of the adversative passive markers in Southeast Asian languages, hypothesizing that the features that are found are parallel in the languages.

The data used in the analysis was taken from grammar textbooks, dictionaries, and informants. The languages in focus are Thai, Vietnamese, Khmer (Buriram dialect), and Malay. In addition, for some particular points, I also allude to Tai Nuea (spoken in Yunnan Province, China), Zhuang (spoken in Guangxi Province, China), and Phuthai (spoken in Mahasarakham, Northeast Thailand).

It is hoped that the findings in this study will contribute to the areal approach to linguistic research, language contact, and grammaticalization. The study also reveals that Malay has a typical Southeast Asian adversative passive, which seems to have been overlooked in previous linguistic studies.

2. The adversative passive markers in Southeast Asian languages

The analysis shows that the adversative passive markers in Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Malay are exactly the same semantically and syntactically. They mean 'to come in contact with or undergo'. Syntactically, they are verbs preceding a transitive verb that has an unpleasant or unfavorable meaning, as in the following examples.

Thai  (1)  kh้าw  thùuk  khâa  
he/she  PSSV.  kill  
'He/she was killed.'  
(Prasithrathsint 2001)

Viet. (2)  nó  bĩ  đánh  
he/she  PSSV.  beat  
'He/she was beaten.'  
(Thạch 1991)²
Khmer (3)  
ki:  trəw  wəy  
he/she  \textit{PSSV.}  beat  
'He was beaten.'  

(Informant)

Malay (4)  
budak jahat itu  \textit{kena}  pukul  
boy naughty the  \textit{PSSV.}  beat  
'The naughty boy was beaten.'  

(Sulaiman 1995:121)

As shown in (1)-(4) above, the passive marking verbs /θùuk/, /bi/, /trəw/, and /\textit{kena}/ are followed by verbs with unfavorable meanings (i.e., 'kill', 'beat'). The sentences are regarded here as \textbf{adversative passive constructions}.

It should be noted that in all the languages, there are other ways of marking the adversative passive. These passive markers in Thai, Vietnamese, and Khmer may be replaced by other words with the same meaning and function, as in (5)-(7). In Malay, the situation is different. This will be explained further.

Thai (5)  
khāw  \textit{doon}  khâa  
he/she  \textit{PSSV.}  kill  
'He/she was killed.'  

(Prasitrathsint 2001)

Viet. (6)  
nó  \textit{phai}  dánh  
he/she  \textit{PSSV.}  beat  
'He/she was beaten.'  

(Thịch 1991)

Khmer (7)  
ki:  paʔ  wəy  
he/she  \textit{PSSV.}  beat  
'He was beaten.'  

(Informant)
The words /doon/, /phai/, and /paʔ/ can be used as alternative adversative passive markers in Thai, Vietnamese and Khmer, respectively, but they occur less frequently than /thùuk/, /biʔ/, and /trəw/.

In Malay, /kena/ does not have an alternative that behaves like it, but the language has other devices for formulating passive constructions. The most common one is to add the prefix /di-/ to the verb stem as in (8 b), and also optionally add the preposition /oleh/ 'by' in front of the agent NP as in (9 b).

Malay (8a) (active)
salji tebal meliputi kemuncak gunung fuji
snow thick cover summit mount Fuji
'Thick snow covers the summit of Mount Fuji.'

(8b) (passive)
kemuncak gunung fuji diliputi salji tebal
summit mount Fuji Passive+cover snow thick
'The summit of Mount Fuji is covered by thick snow.'

(9a) (active)
ali membersihkan bilik itu
Ali Active+clean room the
'Ali cleaned the room.'

(9b) (passive)
bilik itu dibersihkan oleh ali
room the Passive+clean by Ali
'The room was cleaned by Ali.'

It is interesting to note that all transitive verbs in Malay can be passivized by adding the prefix /di-/ but that only transitive verbs with unpleasant meanings, such as /pukul/ 'to beat', /langgar/ 'to knock down', /bom/ 'to bomb', and /curi/ 'to steal', can occur with /kena/ to form adversative passive constructions. (Sulaiman 1995: 121)