

RESTRICTED PHONOLOGY IN CERTAIN THAI LINKER-SYLLABLES

Peter Bee
University of London

Phonologists agree that vowel quantity is phonemic in Thai. The syllables which I wish to term linker-syllables have as vowel the phoneme /a/, a short vowel quantitatively speaking, usually realized as [ə]. Here are some examples, the linker-syllable being the middle one of the three: rátthabaan sàppadaa ; ʔèekkarâat ; phannanaa ; kammakaan ; thépphanom ; sàttawát etc.¹ But the definition cannot rest here. To leave them as phonemically short syllables is not merely inadequate but misleading: they do not conform to the accepted phonological rule that all Thai syllables which are phonemically short must close with some final consonant or other.² Only in artificial 'dictation' style do they close with a glottal final. Only in dictation style, moreover, do they bear the phonemic tone we would expect from their spelling. Otherwise, (in normal speech, that is) the pitch of the syllables seems to be self-adjusting, as unobtrusive as a linker should be, accommodating itself to the clear realization of tones in what went before and what is to come after.

These phenomena may be associated with the characteristics of the commonly found syllable of unstressed prefixation.³ A better way of describing it here (since prefixation is a morphological term, and the use of infra-lexical prefixation is not found in Standard Thai morphology) is as a trip-syllable or anacrusis syllable that ushers in the fully tonal, fully stressed, and fully formed syllable that succeeds it. The point at issue is not why it is there (borrowing, analogy, reduction of full word-prefixation etc.), but what it normally sounds like. Examples are found in kradaat, pratuu, saphaan, khanóm, lakhon, maphráaw etc. Moreover, pitch behaviour suggests a talent for accommodation that has been held to be characteristic of linker-syllables.⁴ Evidence for this can be heard in the pronunciation of the minimal tone-pair khanàʔ (๗๗๗) and khanáʔ (๗๗๗). The letter khǒɔ (๗) of khanàʔ produces a higher pitch than might be expected from the orthographic rules for tone; the khɔɔ (๗) of khanáʔ a lower one. Both syllables seem to be acting as the pitch equivalents of upbeats in rhythm (shall we say 'non-tonemes') in order to enhance the downbeats (the tonemes) of their succeeding syllables.⁵

The iambic foot (↘ ↗) which conveniently defines the rhythm⁶ of these words can easily be expanded into the cretic foot (↗ ↘ ↗) by the preposing of a stressed beat. This is the framework in which

we can expect to find a linker-syllable. I wish, however, to focus attention upon a particular sort of linker-syllable. The examples chosen at the beginning of the paper, rátthabaan, sàppadaa etc., contained what appeared to be geminate articulations. The final closure of the first syllable was held over to become the initial stop for the linker-syllable. I say 'appeared to be' since I doubt whether the aural evidence for geminates (double consonants) is strong enough in every case to uphold the usual phonological requirement that final-stop phonemes and initial-stop phonemes in Thai never coincide utterly, never--as it were--conflate to a single phoneme doing the work of two.⁷ However, this point can be left in abeyance. (Double consonants will be written in this paper throughout for such linkages out of deference to the lexicographical *status quo*.) Whichever solution is preferred, gemination or conflation, I wish to concentrate on a sequence in the speech-stream passing from the vowel of the first syllable to the vowel of the second via a single consonantal stop-articulation only. Thus, I wish to exclude from consideration linker-syllable examples such as láksaná?, sǎnkharaat, càkraphát etc., excluding too, it is worth mentioning, such 'orthographo-phonemic' changes arising out of, say, the letters ฃ, ค, ฅ or ฆ as occur in words like ráatchakaan, phanrajaa, phǒnlamáaj and ʔátsawin.

My final request by way of preliminary preconditions is that all words of obviously Indic origin be henceforth excluded from consideration for the time being. This cuts down the raw material dramatically. Every one of the above examples of linker-syllables is now ineligible. The reason for this precondition is that a knowledge of Indic morphology, combined with a knowledge of what conversion table should be applied to arrive at an acceptable Thai pronunciation for the borrowed morphology, leave no questions to be asked about the nature or the environment of linker-syllables in Thai once given the Indic stimulus.⁸ The basic fact is the borrowing; the linker-syllables are here, for Thai, secondary phenomena of predictable occurrence. Thus, it is not surprising to find no Indic borrowings with /ŋ/ as the consonant playing the final/initial articulation role for a linker-syllable sequence: /ŋ/ cannot be an initial articulation in Indic phonology. It cannot have been borrowed, so there was never a need, never a challenge to produce it. However, it is mildly surprising to find that there are no ŋ-initial linker-syllables in Thai at all, neither in Indic borrowings nor in native Thai words. We have good reason for excluding Indic borrowings from ŋ-initial possibilities, but what could the reason be for lack of ŋ-initial linkers in Thai? The quickest answer would be analogy. Some sort of *Sprachbund* influence due to heavy borrowing from Indic, with consequent heavy utilization of linker-syllables, inhibited the full range of eligible articulations in Thai (/ŋa-/ is found as a trip syllable in iambic rhythm⁹ and, of course, it is one of the normal final-stop consonants in Thai.) If we add glottal stop to the list of 'missing linkers' too, then a similar argument applies. Indic sandhi removed any possibility of a hiatus except for the visarga (not itself a glottal stop hiatus, incidentally) conventionalized at many removes as the Thai vowel sign ๐. Now the

visarga in Indic phonology was a final articulation only; it could, therefore, never serve as initial to an on-going syllable. It is pointless, therefore, to seek ʔ-initial linkers in Indic borrowings. But there is some point in asking why native Thai forms refrain from its use too. It is eminently fitted to be both initial and final and shows evidence of participation in trip-syllables (ʔaròj, for instance).

Let us at this juncture, however, provide some examples of some non-Indic, cretic rhythm trisyllables which are, for the most part, common enough as everyday Thai words. Only the n-linkage items seem, to my mind, rare and thus on the margins of a speaker's experience.

- kk- sòkkapròk; ʔykkathýk; ʔèekkarèek; túkkataa; cákkacîi;
sákkaláat; chúkkachii.
- kkh- ʔèekkanèek.
- tt- ʔèttaroo; bèttalèt; ʔùttalùt; ʔàttakhát; ʔýttapyy.
- pp- sàpparót; sàppadon; sàppanòk (variant: sàpphanòk)
- pph- sàpphajòk.¹⁰
- nn- channatùʔ; channaroon; channakàat.
- mm- kammajii; kammathán; rammanaa; sámmalee.

Two sorts of comment may be made about these examples (which are not exhaustive, of course); one is to question the degree of 'nateness' in any of them;¹¹ the other is to call for their rating in order of versatility--the degree of variety in phonemic make-up found under each heading. Dealing with the first comment, the series of examples beginning with the syllable /sàp-/ remind us of the common Pali word-prefix sabba- which converts to สัพพ- (sàp-) in Thai (the Sanskrit form is sarva-, appearing in Thai as สรรพ-, which may be either /sàp/ or /sán/ in the first syllable), though we would expect an aspiration, /-pph-/, for the linker-syllable initial, which we regularly get in the Thai conversion of the Sanskrit form. sàpphajòk is a case in point. The preponderance of /sàp-/ syllables, therefore, might well be put down as a prefixation habit from a specific Indic form, leaving in doubt the native propensity to use p-initial linker-syllables. Similar remarks may be made about the /chan-/ syllable in the n-initial linkages. Though extremely common in Indic, n-linkages are hard to find in native Thai. Whether chan is Indic in origin is highly questionable--it combines with a syllable spelled sūtra (Thai sūt, สุต) in the word channasūt, and the Thai word channatùʔ looks suspiciously like jantu,--but, whatever its origin, the highly restricted class of n-linkages is striking. With m-linkages the restrictions, though less striking, are still severe. The first syllable always ends in /-am/. Is this an analogical effect from Khmer infixation, perhaps, explaining why no /-im, -um, -em etc./ endings are utilized?

The suggestion to be put forward is that the p, n, and m-linkages are, on the whole, a suspicious lot for native Thai, whereas k and t-linkages are respectably normal. They are also more versatile in their compatibility with differing phonological environments, as will be shown.

Aspiration, however, seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Until it can be known for certain that all the data are gathered in, or that our sample sizes are proportionally representative in the fairest way, an impression is all that can be offered. For what it is worth, the impression is of scant findings for native Thai productive linking procedure with nasal consonants (none for velars, rare for dentals, and some few for bilabials), scant findings for bilabial stop linkage, and good, though admittedly modest, findings for velar and dental stops. In all the items so far cited, very few examples contained a first syllable of long vowel-quantity (ʔə̀əkkàrə̀ək and ʔə̀ekkhànè̀ek) and very few had aspirate release for the linker's initial (ʔə̀ekkhànè̀ek and sà̀pphàjò̀ok, also perhaps sà̀pphànò̀k), the widest scope for variation in vowel quality, quantity and alternation between aspirate and non-aspirate plosion across the linkage itself being found in velar stop linkages. This was in striking opposition to the total absence of linkage possibilities for velar nasals.

These were but impressions, however. Are there other indications that non-nasal velarity provides a focus for native Thai linkage procedure? The reply to this question leads us from morphology to low-level syntax: it leads us from the one-word polysyllable to the juxtaposition of two words. Now it would be extremely easy to produce long lists of examples to suit any articulation desired for some sort of geminate juncture. For instance, taking as a basic pattern a monosyllabic word first plus an iambic rhythm word second (kradàat, pratuu etc.) almost any cretic foot can be arranged:

-kk-	<u>kh</u> lúk- <u>ka</u> pìʔ;	-kkh-	<u>th</u> òk- <u>ka</u> mǎen;
-tt-	<u>kh</u> àat- <u>ta</u> làat;	-tth-	<u>b</u> òt- <u>tha</u> nǎn;
-pp-	<u>r</u> áp- <u>pa</u> thaan;	-pph-	<u>th</u> áp- <u>pha</u> mâa; etc.

This can hardly be called linkage at all, however, and remains mere syntactic juxtaposition. There is almost certainly true gemination here, unquestioned here, moreover, as a junctural feature that is not restrictive, and, given sufficient ingenuity, there might well be examples forthcoming of juxtapositions that have been impossible hitherto either on Indic or on native Thai phonological grounds.¹² This is what is to be expected with the move into syntax. Phonological environments can no longer be restrictive at word-boundaries as they were at syllable boundaries within the word. But what if linkage, in addition to being catered for, speciously, by ingenuity, can actually be produced out of nothing in certain cases at this low syntactic level? What if a linker-syllable--and a true one at that--is, as it were, felt to be appropriate when passing from one monosyllabic word to the next?

There is in Bangkok vernacular Thai a very small group of two-word locutions in which a linker-syllable is found that is not found in Standard Thai. Where Standard Thai keeps to two stresses only (a spondee), vernacular Thai inserts an unstressed syllable to create the cretic foot we are now familiar with. The locutions are