A Comparative Study of chāk and rā:m in Thai

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Abstract

The present study is an expansion of the paper, 'The Study of the Perfective chāk in Thai,' (Burapacheep 1995). The present work deals with the function and meaning of the perfective chāk in comparison with the verb rā:m. The former is commonly used in colloquial Thai but not normally found in formal usage, whereas the latter can be used in both. In carrying out the analysis we shall examine the cooccurrence of chāk on the one hand, and rā:m on the other, with the different categories of verbs proposed in the present study. It will be suggested that the two forms which seem to be semantically similar and can often be used interchangeably have some significant differences in their meaning and usage.

1. Introduction

This paper presents a comparative study of the perfective chāk and the verb rā:m in Thai. Chāk is generally used colloquially and is not normally found in formal usage, whereas rā:m is commonly used both in colloquial and formal Thai. Apart from the difference in the level of formality, the two forms can be used interchangeably in several contexts, expressing similar meaning. The meaning of the verb rā:m is generally given as 'to begin, to start', whereas chāk, a perfective aspect marker indicates the beginning of a situation with an implication that the situation referred to is different from the previous one (Burapacheep: 1995).

The analysis deals with the combination of chāk, on the one hand, and rā:m, on the other, when each of them occurs preceding the verbs of the proposed categories. The study is expected to lead to a better understanding of the behaviour of the two forms.

2. Present treatment

The present study examines the behaviour of chāk and rā:m on the basis of their co-occurrence with the proposed categories of verbs which are classified according to the kind of situation they normally indicate in a simple sentence without temporal adverbials or aspect markers. The framework adopted here is based on Vendler (1967), Comrie (1976) and Lyons (1977).
For the purpose of the present study, Thai verbs will be broadly divided into two main categories:

1. Verbs indicating states which are further divided into
   1.1 verbs indicating permanent states
   1.2 verbs denoting temporary states

2. Verbs indicating dynamic situations, which are further subclassified into

   2.1 verbs indicating processes
   2.2 verbs denoting events

We shall proceed by examining the use of ข้ and ของ when they occur singly with the proposed categories of verbs, starting from their occurrence with state verbs.

2.1 The co-occurrence of ข้ with verbs indicating states

The perfective ข้ frequently occurs with verbs indicating both permanent and temporary states. Examples illustrating the use of ข้ with permanent state verbs are given in (1) and (2) and with temporary state verbs in (3) and (4) below:

(1) ข้ ข้ ข้ นิ
    he (perf.) be healthy
    He is beginning to be healthy.

(2) ข้ ข้ ข้
    he (perf.) be old
    He is starting to get old.

(3) ข้ ข้ หมู่
    he (perf.) be hungry
    He is starting to feel hungry.

(4) ข้ ข้ หมู่
    he (perf.) be tired
    He is beginning to feel tired

Sentences (1) - (4) refer to the inception of situations with an implication that they are different from previous ones. For instance, in sentence (1) it would normally be taken that the person in question was previously not in good health.
2.2 The co-occurrence of \( \hat{r}m \) with verbs indicating states

Generally speaking, \( \hat{r}m \) can freely occur with verbs denoting both permanent and temporary states and indicate the beginning of a situation. The verb \( \hat{r}m \) can replace chák in all the examples above denoting similar meaning.

Consider (5) - (8) below:

\[(5) \quad \begin{array}{l}
\hat{v}u \quad \hat{r}m \quad \hat{v}n \quad \hat{r} \eta \\
\text{he (begin) be healthy}
\end{array} \quad \text{He is beginning to be healthy}
\]

\[(6) \quad \begin{array}{l}
\hat{v}u \quad \hat{r}m \quad \hat{c} \quad \hat{c} \\
\text{he (begin) be old}
\end{array} \quad \text{He is beginning to get old.}
\]

\[(7) \quad \begin{array}{l}
\hat{v}u \quad \hat{r}m \quad \hat{u} \\
\text{he (begin) be hungry}
\end{array} \quad \text{He is starting to feel hungry.}
\]

\[(8) \quad \begin{array}{l}
\hat{v}u \quad \hat{r}m \quad \hat{n}ai \\
\text{he begin be tired}
\end{array} \quad \text{He is starting to feel tired.}
\]

Sentences (5) - (8) refer to the beginning of situations and it's understood that they are different from the preceding ones. The meanings of these sentences are similar to those of (1) - (4) except that the latter sound more informal. Apart from the difference in the level of formality, chák and \( \hat{r}m \) seem to be semantically similar and they can often be used interchangeably when occurring with state verbs. However, there are cases where the two differ. Consider, for instance, the sentences below:

\[(9) \quad \begin{array}{l}
\hat{v}u \quad \hat{r}m \quad \text{pen} \quad \hat{v}n \quad \hat{c} \text{u} \\
\text{he begin be soldier (perf.)}
\end{array} \quad \text{He has become a soldier now.}
\]

The sentence may be uttered in a context such as when the person was known to have been drafted and now he has begun his days in military service.

\[(10) \quad * \begin{array}{l}
\hat{v}u \quad \text{chák} \quad \text{pen} \quad \hat{v}n \quad \hat{c} \text{u} \\
\text{(perf.) be soldier (perf.)}
\end{array}
\]

Sentence (10) is normally ungrammatical but it may be accepted if the sentence is taken as referring to a change in the behaviour of the person in question i.e. that he is now behaving in a soldierlike manner.
Notice that if we add some words to (10) so that it is understood as expressing a change, the sentence will be perfectly acceptable as in (11) below:

(11) khâu chák pen tha hà:n thi: di: lê:u
    he (perf.) be soldier (rel.pro.) good (perf)
    He is becoming a good soldier now.

The use of chák which implies a change from the previous situation fits in this context. The verb ri:m can replace chák as in (12) below, expressing a similar meaning:

(12) khâu ri:m pen tha hà:n thi: di: lê:u
    he begin be soldier (rel.pro.) good (perf)
    He is beginning to be a good soldier now.

2.3 The co-occurrence of chák and ri:m with verbs indicating dynamic situations

2.3.1 Chák and ri:m with verbs indicating processes

With verbs indicating processes, the differences in the behaviour of chák and ri:m can be seen more clearly. As with verbs denoting states, ri:m can freely occur with process verbs to indicate the beginning of a situation. The use of chák with process verbs, on the other hand, is restricted. Normally, the co-occurrence of chák with process verbs is unacceptable if the situation is interpreted as a single incident. To illustrate the point (13)-(16) are given below; (13) and (14) are grammatical, whereas (15) and (16) are not:

(13) khâu ri:m dàn
    he begin walk
    He is beginning to walk.
(14) khâu ri:m lá:n ca:n
    he begin wash dish
    He is starting to do the washing up.
(15) * khâu chák dàn
    he (perf.) walk
(16) * khâu chák lá:n ca:n
    he (perf.) wash dish

Sentences such as (15) and (16) can be made acceptable with the addition of phrases such as reu khûn ‘faster’ and di: khûn ‘better’ which indicate a change. Consider (17) and (18) below, to which reu khûn and di: khûn are added, respectively: