

FORMS AND MEANINGS OF THE THAI PARTICLE *na*

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0. SUMMARY OF ARTICLE

The form *na* belongs to the class of sentential postposition particles. It has five primary variants, /ná/, /nâ/, /náa/, /nâa/ and /naa/, each of which signals the message that some response is desired or expected by the speaker, and each of which also signals some distinctive meaning of its own. These five primary variants can also be subjected to secondary modifications involving changes in volume, pitch, extra vowel length and terminal /h/, thus expressing things such as semantic intensification, hostility and personal concern. This paper describes and exemplifies in some detail the meaning and usage of each of the primary variants, and also briefly discusses the nature and effect of the secondary modifications.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 FOCUS OF STUDY

This article¹ provides a fairly detailed study of the varied forms and meanings of a single Thai particle *na*,² a form which signals a speaker's desire for or expectation of a response from the addressee. This paper is also, in effect, a continuation of the similar one dealing with the particle *si* (signalling an expectable response). And both papers were, in turn, originally conceived as parts of a still larger whole – as precursors to a more general investigation of the whole sentence-final particle system, with each paper providing a part of the necessary database of detailed information on the different particles within that system.

This larger investigation of the particle system has since been completed (see the monograph above), but the present paper, along with the previous one on *si*, provides a more detailed picture of the relevant phenomena than was possible in the wider study. I therefore present this paper as a fuller and more narrowly focused view of the behaviour and usage of this one particle. And I also present it as a sort of microcosm of the kinds of patterns and processes to be encountered in the larger particle system.

1.2 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A large part of my data and conclusions has been derived from direct questioning and discussion with native speakers of Thai.³ I have also gleaned examples of usage from novels and short stories, but this usage has in turn been checked against that of native speakers whom I have questioned. In addition I have consulted such few scholarly works⁴ as were available at the time I conducted my research, but these have figured only minimally in the present work – partly because this paper is primarily data oriented, and partly also because I have already discussed the relevant literature elsewhere (1979).

1.3 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF *na*

The form *na* belongs to the class of sentential postposition particles, and it is one of a pair of such forms (the other being *si*) that belong in a class by themselves, for these two forms are subject to more, and more clearly defined, variation in form and meaning than any other postposition particle except the speaker-addressee-relationship particle *wa*.

The variations of *na*, upon which this paper is large focused, may be viewed in terms of primary variants on the one hand, and secondary modifications on the other. The primary variants are /ná/, /nâ/, /náa/, /nâa/ and /naa/,⁵ and all of these convey the message that the speaker wants or expects some response from the addressee, whether by way of action (or non-action), agreement, acquiescence, confirmation of information. Each particular variant conveys some additional shade of meaning that distinguishes it from any of the others. The secondary modifications are elements of volume, pitch, vowel length and terminal /h/ that can occur with the primary variants to further modify or add to their meanings, expressing things such as impatience, urgency, deepened concern.

1.4 PROPOSED TREATMENT OF SUBJECT MATTER

My approach in handling the phenomena at hand will be first to discuss, in turn, each of the primary variants, to provide examples of occurrences in various types of usage, and to account for the meaning each shares with other variants and for that which distinguishes them. Then I shall discuss the secondary modifications, and I shall conclude with a general summary that attempts to pull the phenomena together in a reasonably comprehensive and coherent manner.

2. THE PRIMARY VARIANT /ná/

Of all the primary variants mentioned above, /ná/ is undoubtedly the most common; it also occurs in the widest variety of kinds or contexts of usage. It will be helpful, therefore, to take this variant first.

2.1 USAGE OF /ná/ IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS

This may be illustrated by examples 1-37 below. These examples are arranged according to four fairly well defined types of usage: action-inducement utterances (examples 1-15); statements eliciting agreement or acquiescence (16-25); questions (26-30); and vocatives (31-37).

In all types of usage, the occurrence of /ná/ signals the general meaning (shared with other variants of *na*) that the speaker wants and calls for a given response from the addressee. In addition, most occurrences convey the sense of a mild question in which the speaker asks for a given response by way of action, acknowledgment, agreement or acquiescence. Such occurrences also imply that the speaker does, in fact, expect the response in question and often simply assumes that that response will be forthcoming. The general effect of the /ná/ in most of its occurrences is very similar to that of English expressions such as, 'okay?', 'huh?', 'won't you?', 'would you (please)?', 'isn't it?', 'did you get that?', 'are you with me?'

There are, however, cases where the /ná/ conveys hostility, irritation or rebuke. In such usage the addressee is or has been showing some resistance to or neglect of the speaker's wishes, and the latter expresses himself or herself accordingly. Often, too, the speaker conveys his or her displeasure by raising the volume and perhaps also the pitch of the utterance.⁶

In the examples cited below, and throughout this paper, each vocabulary item in a given Thai sentence is identified by a subscript number, and the sentence is accompanied by a translation that includes glosses to match each numbered item. However, particles (whose meanings are often vague and difficult to handle) are neither numbered nor glossed. Also, in cases where the English translation leaves no satisfactory place for providing particular numbered glosses, a literal translation of the given sentence, or a relevant part thereof is provided within parentheses, and this literal translation is accompanied by the appropriate numbered glosses. Square brackets mark information as to possible situations in which the given utterance might occur. Where more than one such situation is specified, the different possibilities are identified as a, b, c etc.

As for the English renderings of the Thai examples cited here and throughout the paper, it will be noted that I have often provided colloquial speech translations. This reflects the fact that the Thai utterances themselves have or may have a colloquial flavour. Furthermore, in a number of cases I have found it necessary to render a given sentence in American colloquial speech, since this is the only colloquial I can handle with sensitivity. This means, unfortunately, that some of my renderings may lack clarity or stylistic acceptability for readers who are not at home with American colloquial speech. If so, I can only apologise in advance for any resulting obscurities and infelicities.

2.1.1 ACTION-INDUCEMENT UTTERANCES WITH /ná/

These are utterances of various kinds in which the speaker is prompting the addressee to perform, or not perform, some particular action. They include commands (examples 1a, 1b, 2a, 3a, 4a, 5a), instructions or warnings (1c, 2b, 3b, 3c, 4b, 5b, 5c, 6, 7), requests (8-12) and invitations (13-15).

2.1.1.1 EXAMPLES OF ACTION-INDUCEMENT UTTERANCES

(1) /pəət pratuu ná./

1 2

'Open the door!' 'Hey, open the door!' '(Now) open the door. Got it?'

1 2

[a. A child has deliberately locked the door against his mother, and the latter is expressing her impatience. b. A parent is demanding for the second or third time that the child do as he is told. c. Speaker is giving one of a series of instructions for setting up a trap.]

- (2) /yàa dâu ná./
 1 2
 'Don't be (so) stubborn!' 'Don't act up now, okay?'
 1 2
 [a. Parent rebukes a child for refusing to do as she is told. b. Parent is leaving daughter with a babysitter and gives the child a good-natured warning to behave herself.]
- (3) /pay rewrew ná./
 1 2
 (go quickly) 'Hurry up and get going?' 'Be as quick as you can, okay?'
 1 2
 'Hurry back now.'
 [a. Parent is rebuking child for dawdling. b. Mother is sending child off on an errand and urges him to hurry. c. A friend is off to buy something that both he and the speaker need.]
- (4) /yàa càp ná dǎaw tòk tèek./
 1 2 3 4 5
 (don't grasp, in a minute (it will) fall break) 'Don't touch that, you'll break it.'
 1 2 3 4 5
 [a. Adult angrily warns child for the umpteenth time not to touch a fragile vase. b. Adult gives child a first-time, good-natured warning.]
- (5) /sày sâa tua deej ná./
 1 2 3
 'Put (that) red shirt on (right now)!' 'Wear the red shirt, okay?'
 1 3 2 1 3 2
 [a. Child is refusing to do as he is told. b. Child has raised the question as to what shirt to wear, and Mother tells him what she wants. c. Wife tells husband what she wants him to wear for the special occasion she is planning.]
- (6) /loŋ pây nâa ná./
 1 2 3
 'Get off at the next stop, okay?'
 1 3 2
 [Bus driver or fellow passenger instructs someone where to get off the bus.]
- (7) /dæŋ troŋ pay thaŋ nǐ ná. pho thǔŋ sǐ yêk ná, léew líaw sáy ná.../
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
 (walk straight going this way, when reach intersection, then turn left.)
 1 2 3 5 4 6 7 8,9 10 11 12
 'Walk straight ahead this way, okay? And when you reach the intersection, turn left. Got it?...' [Speaker gives directions to addressee.]
 (Note, here, that the /ná/ is added at the end of each one of a series of sentences or clauses. Note too, however, that the members of such a series need not all be action-inducement utterances.)