A THAI DISCOURSE PATTERN

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Introduction

In recent years more and more attention has been paid by linguists to the analysis of units of discourse larger than the sentence; for it has been found that analysis of sentences in isolation misses many important meaningful relationships that exist between sentences—that sentences are not thrown together indiscriminately, but there is selection (conscious or unconscious by the speaker) and ordering. Therefore, no matter what the "difference in theory, terminology ... all this can be said to have a common concern—the isolation of linguistic features that differentiate a coherent (connected) sequence of sentences (a text) from an agglomerate of sentences."¹ But preoccupation with merely surface structure features such as sentence connectivity or equivalence chain recursions as was attempted by Harris (1952, 1963) can also be misleading and unrewarding unless meaning is brought into the analysis. This latter Harris was not willing to allow for.

Many linguists, therefore, are beginning to probe beneath the surface phenomena of language to ascertain the meaningful relationships that reside at the more abstract levels of language. Thus, the notion that all that linguists need to study and analyze are well-formed sentences in isolation, which are the product of an homogeneous speech community (Chomsky, 1965), or that one must be confined to sentence boundaries, is becoming increasingly suspect as more and more investigation is being pursued to ascertain the true status of deep structure and the relation of semantic configurations to syntactic structures. The Chomskyan notion of deep structure as being composed of "lexical items each with its complement of grammatical features" which are transformed into surface structures,² and that the semantic component is, as it were, off to one side and available to both the deep structure and surface structure for picking meanings through rules of semantic interpretation, has been seriously questioned by linguists such as McCawley (1968, 1971) Chafe (1970) and, recently, Lakoff (1971). McCawley insists that it is in the deepest structure of deep semantics that the plot, setting, participant identification and other information resides. For instance, in reference to the choice of pronoun morphemes in Japanese, McCawley says, "I believe that what is going on here is that the choice of pronouns and verbs is dependent on features attached to the entire discourse rather than to individual lexical items and that the politeness morpheme maš is attached by a transformation to the appropriate verb if the relevant discourse features are present."³ In this same vein he says, "In the case of non-anaphoric (that is, deictic) pronouns, the choice of gender is always made on the basis of presuppositions concerning the intended referent."⁴

In Standard Thai, before using a first person pronoun, the
speaker employs certain sociolinguistic rules (rules internalized since childhood) that determine which pronouns, out of a grid of over twenty, will be used (Cooke 1968; Palakornkul 1972; Hatton 1973). "A choice of pronominal variants is not made arbitrarily. On the contrary, there are systematic rules to guide and govern the speaker's choice." Of course, in most instances, the factors of sex, age, social status, etc., are well-known by the speaker, but in other instances there is a conscious selection on the part of the speaker. In both cases there is first a cognitive decision affected by the rules mentioned above and then there is a selection of a linearized lexical item which verbalizes the speaker's intention.

Chafe (1970) equates the deep structure of language with semantics and insists that these semantic configurations are linearized in post-semantic processes, and then are realized in the surface structure through various transformations. Further processes take place before the realization of these configurations on the phonological stratum. 

One of the more serious attempts at discourse analysis on a deeper and more abstract level has been attempted recently by Grimes and Glock (1970) in their analysis of Saramaccan narrative patterns. They note several interesting things:

1. Verb Phrase Strings. They observe first of all the difficulty of dealing with verb phrase strings where there are "referential restrictions that involve partial ordering of events by time, so that no verb in a string denotes action that takes place before the action of a verb that comes earlier in the string. There are also restrictions on the place of occurrence of certain verbs relative to others. These restrictions are hard to manage in terms of surface grammars alone; but in terms of the relation of deep structures to grammar . . . "

It seems, though, that the relationships of these verbs described by Grimes and Glock could take the form of types or roles and case relations (Fillmore 1968). Some work on this aspect has been done by Taber (1966), Nida (1973) and recently by Grimes (1972). The work of the latter two is of special interest for the theoretical working out of this present paper and will be discussed in more detail later (cf. Method of Analysis, p. 7).

2. Old and New Information. There is also the problem of new and old information which is vital to an analysis of discourse structure (Halliday 1967). Grimes and Glock note in their article that often because of the constraints of old information, sentences can carry very little new semantic material. So that in a sentence such as a-ba Sopu 'he-bought soap,' both the subject a- 'he' and the verb bai 'buy' are old information carried over from preceding sentences. Only Sopu 'soap,' being new information, is added by the semantic deep structure.

3. Semantic Redundancy. These linguists also trace the use of
'motion verbs' which recur regularly in the narration of a trip, and how these are cycled through the discourse. They note that in one discourse unit, semantic information (motion verbs) which is spelled out in four sentences, uses only two sentences later on to state a similar amount of information. They conclude, "It is evidence of the kind just given that makes sentence oriented grammars seem less complete than they once did. It is also one reason why sentences are treated as part of the surface grammar and not as part of the deep structure."^8

4. Directional Verbs. Grimes and Glock were also able to deduce that a certain Saramaccan text, which they elicited, must have been uttered in the area of Paramaibo. They based this conclusion on an analysis of the patterns of distribution of the verbs 'come' and 'go'.^9 This phenomenon appears in Thai discourse also, and will be discussed later in this paper.

There is one further factor which needs consideration, for it has loomed large in recent discussions by linguists—and that is the matter of language competence and the related notion of well-formed and ill-formed sentences. The idea that all linguists need to do is to analyze well-formed sentences in isolation is becoming increasingly suspect as more and more work is being done on the true role of deep structure and its relationship to semantics. The notion of well-formedness needs to be widened to take in the discourse unit as a whole, for a sentence that might be considered ill-formed in isolation might actually be well-formed when taken in relation to the whole discourse. Conversely, a so-called well-formed sentence in isolation might be ill-formed when placed in the context of extended discourse and in the light of socio-cultural rules. For instance, there might be a noun or a noun phrase in the subject position when a pronoun would be adequate, as the noun or noun phrase has become old information. But a supposedly ill-formed sentence might have ellipsis where a pronoun does not appear in the surface structure at all, and yet when the sentence is considered in the light of the discourse context, the pronoun which represents old information is obviously present at some deeper level, and is certainly present as a semantic unit.

Palakornkul in her discussion of Thai pronominal strategy says, "... in dyadic speech communication in Thai which involves one sender, one receiver and one referent, all nouns and pronouns can be deleted and the sentence remain perfectly grammatical."^10 The point here, though, is that deleted nouns or pronouns which appeared as linearized lexical items in the surface structure are still present as semantic units even though surface ellipsis has occurred.

Linguists are still grappling with the problem of determining on which level of the grammar these pronominalized forms are realized. Chafe reasons that "... if linear order is relevant to the determination of what can be pronominalized, then pronominalization must take place after linearization."^11 But in extended discourse, as long as the noun or noun phrase is old information, whether it appears in pronominalized form or not, in the surface structure, it still continues on as seman-
tic 'stuff' or information in a deep level of abstraction. This also will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

A sentence in well-formed discourse will have such features as anaphora in the form of third person pronouns or articles ('the' in English) which have the intra-textual function of pointing back to old information, or there may be ellipsis such as in a one-word answer given to a question composed of several words. This one-word answer is a well-formed sentence when considered in the light of previous discourse.

Furthermore, the notion of linguistic competence must go beyond the purely grammatical rules of language (Hymes 1968) and take in the socio-cultural rules of language use. Chomsky admits that "grammaticalness is only one of the many factors that interact to determine acceptability." But he nowhere allows for socio-cultural factors that will mold the meaningful relationships between elements in sentences or elements across sentence boundaries. Because of this lack in Generative Transformational theory, Hymes argues for a theory of competence where "socio-cultural factors have an explicit and constitutive role." In the same vein Chafe says, "...a theory of competence must bear a relationship to language use, and there is no reason that it is a virtue for this relationship to be as obscure as possible...a theory of competence which is more closely related to performance is preferable to one which is more distantly related." Fortunately, many linguists are taking this avenue of linguistic research seriously and are presently carrying on research in many languages. This present paper is a modest attempt to deal with a feature which plays an important role in Thai discourse, namely, directional verbs.

Method of Analysis

General. The following analysis of Thai discourse will attempt to use some of the notions advanced by scholars who were mentioned in the introduction to this paper, in order to find the meaningful relations in the deep semantics of Thai discourse. I will take a short unit of Standard Thai discourse (a paragraph of narrative) which has appeared in a novel called The Four Kingdoms by Kukrit Pramoj, a famous Thai novelist and newspaperman. Particular attention will be paid to the sentence S6 (cf. Thai text, p. 10) which will be used as a sample sentence. I will not rigorously define the notion 'sentence' because throughout this analysis I will be dealing with the manner in which the elements that form these surface sentences relate to other elements in the discourse unit in terms of their deep semantic components. I will attempt to show that such sentences as S6 are ambiguous when analyzed in isolation and considered in their surface form only. In other words, S6 can be translated cross-culturally (in this paper into English) only when the semantic structure of this sentence and surrounding sentences has been analyzed.