CHANGES IN THE PITCH CONTOURS
OF UNACCENTED SYLLABLES IN SPOKEN THAI

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(This article is in fact a summary of Chapter VIII of the author’s thesis: Samang 1971. In the thesis, she has set out to investigate the role of accent in Thai Grammar. The result of the investigation has led her to conclude that accent is a phonological feature, the various degrees of which are predictable by a series of 4 phonological rules operating on the surface structures of utterances. The generative approach is used in the thesis. According to this approach, accent has two functions in the grammar: the syntactic function and the interpretative function. The four previously mentioned phonological rules serve the syntactic function as they, in assigning various degrees of accent to syllables in utterances, show how utterances, with identical phonological representations, are contrastive. The interpretative function is to map the phonological representation of an utterance in a given surface structure onto its phonetic representation. Rules which serve the second function are called “Phonetic realization rules” and the changes in the pitch contours of unaccented syllables in spoken Thai may be predicted by some of these rules. However, since this is a phonetic conference, the author will not talk about the rules in this paper; but will confine herself to a discussion on how systematic the changes in the pitch contours of the tonal configurations of unaccented syllables are.)

Introduction

The changes in the pitch contours of unaccented or unstressed syllables in spoken Thai have been mentioned by most linguists working on Thai phonology. Whitaker (1969); from his own and other linguists’ findings, has summarized the changes in the following 5 rules. The symbols ~ and ←——→ are used by Whitaker to represent the changability of the tones.
(1) Rule 1: low - mid Applies to unstressed modals and unstressed syllables in derived polysyllabic words.

khāw tōa? paj ←→ khāw tōa paj

"เขำทูป"

Rule 2: high - mid Applies to same as rule 1.

sōnthā?nāa ←→ sōnthānāa

"สนทนา"

Rule 3: high - fall Applies to sentence final particles

sā? baaj dīi rūm khā ←→ sa baaj dīi khā

"สบายค่ำยัง" "สบายค่ำยัง"

Rule 4: rise - high Applies to Q-morpheme and certain pronouns:

tēhāj māj ←→ tēhāj māj

"ไม่ให้"

khāw pāj rūm plāaw ←→ khāw pāj rūm plāaw

"เขำไปหรือเปล่า"

Rule 5: fall - high Applies to certain modals and neg-morpheme:

?āa kāat māj tēhāj rōn ←→ ?āa kāat māj tēhāj rōn

"อย่าไปไม่ใช่ร่อน"

khāw māj khōj jāak tōa? paj ←→ khāw māj khōj jāak tōa paj

"เขำไม่เกี่ยวกับอะไรใน"
Unaccented syllables

Before going on to describe the changes in the pitch contours of unaccented syllables, it is essential that the reader knows what the author means by “unaccented” so that he may compare the author’s findings with the pitches in his own pronunciation. Without going into the author’s accent placement rules, one may define unaccented syllables as follows:

(i) non-final syllables(s) in all polysyllabic words.
   Examples: /wit thā jaa laj/  “วิทยาลัย”

(ii) monosyllabic words which belong to the following word classes:
   a) Personal pronouns
   b) Demonstrative pronouns, when used anaphorically:
      Example: /thān nīi tā? paij nāj/  “เรียนจะไปไหน”
   c) Classifiers
   d) Prenumerals
      Example: /?iik sāam wan/  “สีสามวัน”
   e) Preverbs
      Example: /māk tā? tōo paij tham ṇaan/  “มากจะต้องไปทำมาก”
   f) Postverbs
      Example: /lēn jūu khā/  “เล่นอยู่”
   g) Verb modifiers
      Example: /dēn tōo pai/  “เดินออกไป”
h) Prepositions
Example: /jùu bon tó?/ "อยู่บนโต๊ะ"

i) Conjunctions
Example: /wìŋ sìa nùŋaj/ "วังเสียเหนื่อย"

j) Negator
Example: /māj māj/ "ไม่ทำ"

k) Sentence particles
Example: /paj rūŋ māj paj tōa/ "ไปหรือไม่ปะจี""ไม่ทำ"

l) The following verbs:
/mii/ "มี" /māa/ "มำ"
/paj/ "ไป" /juu/ "อยู่"
/paw/ "เอํ" /pen/ "เป็น"

(iii) The first syllable of an institutionalized compound.²
Examples: /khāat thun/ "ข้าทุน"
/rōŋ thāaw/ "รองเท้า" /jāŋ raj/ "อย่างไร"

(iv) The completely reduplicated forms:
Examples: /khon bāa bāa/ "กอนบ้าบ้า" /jāŋ jūŋ jūŋ jūŋ/ "อย่างจ๋างจ๋างจ๋าง"

Patterns of changes in the pitch contours

The changes in the pitch contours of unaccented syllables may be summarized as follows:

(4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone Type</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All mid tone</td>
<td>→ mid pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low tone</td>
<td>→ { mid pitch, if the syllable is of the type C(C)V ? (iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high tone</td>
<td>→ { modified low pitch / elsewhere (iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>falling tone</td>
<td>→ high pitch in all cases (vi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rising tone</td>
<td>→ { modified low pitch, if the syllable has a voiceless initial (vii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high pitch / elsewhere (viii)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>