Verb Intensifying Devices in Bangkok Thai

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INTRODUCTION

It can be said that intensity in a language has not been given as much study as other linguistic topics. Grammar books in general treat intensity in the section of adverbs as verb intensifiers or in the section of superlative forms of attributive adjectives. In recent years, however, intensity has been given more attention not only in the form of an adverbial intensifier list but as “the emotional expression of social orientation toward the linguistic proposition: the commitment of the self to the proposition” (Labov, 1984). Covert forms of intensity such as the use of quantifiers and aspect are mentioned by Labov (1984). Intensity markers in written texts has been studied (Dorfmueller-Karpusa, 1990). In Bangkok Thai, to my knowledge, intensity has not been seriously studied. Reduplication has been studied as to its patterns and related meanings, but its aspect in connection with intensity has been ignored. In this article, I would like to explore intensity in Bangkok Thai and will limit myself to the scope of “intensifying devices for verbs.”

TYPES OF INTENSIFICATION

Following Labov (1984), intensity works on a scale with unmarked expression as the center. The marked expression can be either positive or negative. For Labov, the positive marked expression is aggravated or intensified and the negative marked expression is mitigated or minimized. The term “amplifiers” is used by some grammarians for intensifiers above the assumed norms and “downtoners” for intensifiers below the assumed norms. Despite the use of different terms, it seems that both intensification or amplification and minimization or downtoning result in intensity.

VERB INTENSIFYING DEVICES IN BANGKOK THAI

As Labov said, there is no closed set of intensity markers. Therefore, a complete list of verb intensifiers will not be attempted. Instead, from a preliminary study of verb intensification in Bangkok Thai, the following observed intensifying devices for verbs are dealt with:

a) Vowel lengthening device
b) Morphological devices
c) Modifying adverbial devices
Vowel Lengthening Device

The vowel lengthening device is used on the verb itself to mark intensity. From my data, this device is found usually with verbs containing long vowels, although some examples can be observed on short vowels.

Examples:
(1) khāu chɔːp+ aitim
   ‘He is crazy about ice-cream.’
(2) pàak thɔɔ bāaŋ+
   ‘Her lips are extremely thin.’
(3) amaraa rāːk+ mēew
   ‘Amara is extremely fond of cats.’

The use of : after vowels indicates an extra length. This extra vowel length is accompanied by a varying degree of pitch change. The second example, bāaŋ+, shows a change from mid tone baaŋ, to high tone bāaŋ+. The first and third examples show pitch change in a relatively smaller degree. There seems to be a pattern of pitch change, but this is outside the scope of this paper.

In written Thai, this type of verb intensification is represented by dots followed by an interjection mark. Pitch change is marked by an appropriate tone marker.

Examples:
(4) khāu chɔːp+ pissāa
   ‘He is extremely fond of pizza.’
  ∴ ข้า ชอบ ปิซซ่า
(5) pàak thɔɔ bāaŋ+
   ‘Her lips are extremely thin.’
  ปาก เซ็ง ปาก...ง!

Morphological Device

Reduplication

The most common morphological device is reduplication. Reduplication can be one, two-, or four-time repetitions of the base word with certain patterns of pitch and vowel length.

a) One-time repetition. In this type of reduplication, if the tone of the base form is other than the high tone, the reduplicated form will always be placed before the base word and will always carry a high tone with short sharp fall. If the base word carries the high tone already, the reduplicated form is still placed before the base word and the vowel is given extra length.

Examples:
(6) sūa deŋ kháu khāu
   ‘Daeng’s blouse is so white.’
(7) nām thàlee sīi fāa:+ fāa
   ‘Sea water is very blue.’
(8) naaŋ sâau thai súai súai
‘Miss Thailand is very pretty.’

b) Two-time repetition. Several pitch patterns and vowel length are found in this type.

Pattern 1:
Reduplicated Form Reduplicated Form Base Word
High tone Mid tone and short vowel

In this pattern, the two reduplicated forms are placed before the base word. The first reduplicated form always carries the high tone, while the second one, the mid tone with a short vowel.

Examples:
(9) muûa waan òaakàat rûn rûn rûn
‘It was terribly hot yesterday.’
(10) bâan yâa kâu kâu kâu
‘Grandma’s house is so shabby.’
(11) mèe khâu sâau sau sâau
‘His mother looks so young.’
(12) dam phûut phut phûut
‘Dam talked a lot!’

Pattern 2:
Base Word Reduplicated Form Reduplicated Form Sharing base word’s tone
High tone

In this pattern, the base word begins the sequence. Only other tones than the high tone are allowed for the base word. The first reduplicated form always carries the high tone, while the second reduplicated form shares the same tone as the base word.

Examples:
(13) khâu phûut muûan dêam chán bûa bûa bûa
‘He spoke in the same fashion; I am terribly bored!’
(14) chán nji’ khâm khâm khâm
‘I felt so much like laughing!’

c) Four-time repetition. This type of reduplication is not as common as the first two types. In fact it is the first pattern of the two-time reduplication followed by a repetition of the second reduplicated form and the base word.

Two-Time Repetition Second Reduplicated Base Word
Pattern 1 Form of Pattern 1
Examples:
(15) wanníi ñaakñat róon róon róon róon róon
   ‘It is insufferably hot!’
(16) sii stúa khoa deen deen deen deen deen
   ‘Her blouse is so red!’
(17) mêe bôn bon bôn bon bôn
   ‘Mother really complained!’

Use of suffix

This intensifying device, which can be said to be a recent device, is the borrowed plural English allomorph /-s/. The allomorph probably was first added to quantity words like mäak ‘much’ to give the meaning of ‘a lot.’ The use has been extended to adjectival verbs such as wän ‘sweet, simple’ and man ‘having great fun.’

Examples:
(18) khóo sōop wanníi wâans
   ‘The examination today was really simple!’
(19) näng rûañ níi ráprûñ mans
   ‘(I guarantee that) this movie is a lot of fun.’

Modifying adverbial device

Modifying adverbials to express intensity of the verbs comprise from one word to a clause. These adverbials can occur in a pre- or post-position of the verb.

Examples:
(20) aacaan caidii sût
(21) aacaan caidii sût khiit
   ‘The teacher is so kind!’
(22) dêk khon níi nño boorísût
   ‘This child is absolutely stupid.’
(23) bâan lân níi vài too mahôoraan
   ‘This house is so huge.’
(24) mamûañ luuk níi wâan vàa bóok khrai
   ‘This mango is really sweet.’
(25) näng rûañ níi yêt ca sanûk
   ‘This film is a lot of fun.’
(26) taa kée bâan níi khoót ca dù?
   ‘The old man in this house is so touchy.’
(27) aacaan sût ca caidii
   ‘The teacher is so kind.’

The underlined items in the above examples are modifying adverbials. As seen, they range from a word such as sût ‘end,’ boorísût ‘pure,’ yêt (ca) ‘top,’ khoót (ca) ‘the entire family’ to phrases such as vài too mahôoraan, the repetition of