THE SO-CALLED PASSIVE IN THAI

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Thai students studying English often equate the English passive construction with the thùuk or doon construction in Thai. This paper offers a different approach to the so-called passive in Thai.

Thai thùuk is generally analysed as an auxiliary verb whose function is to mark the preceding NP as the subject of the passive construction. Another morpheme that is used in the same way is doon. Both thùuk and doon can be main verbs meaning 'touch or come into contact with something'. However, doon is felt to be colloquial. This "passive construction" analysis equates thùuk sentences with the English passive. Chalyaratana (1961:26) observed, for example, that thùuk was used of something unpleasant; she derived thùuk sentences through the application of a transformational rule that converts one string into another. According to her, we should only find verbs signifying suffering and destruction occurring with thùuk. Phya Upakit (1948a), however, pointed out that thùuk also occurs with verbs that on their own do not imply anything unpleasant, e.g. chœn 'invite', chom 'praise'. By contrast, Warotamasikkhadit (1963:32) uses a derivation from two strings with thùuk + COMP occurring in the matrix S.

It is a well-known fact that the same situation can be described in many ways depending on what the speaker chooses to talk about. Each of the following sets of sentences describes the same situation:

(1) a. sùdaa chœn dœŋ
   Suda invite Dang
   Suda invited Dang.

   b. dœŋ sùdaa chœn
   Dang Suda invite
   Dang was invited by Suda.
c. ดาแงะ ทุกสุดาอาเช่น
    Dang     Suda invite
    Dang was invited by Suda (but he did not want to be invited).

(2) a. สุดาอาเช่น ดาแงะ
    Suda praise Dang
    Suda praised Dang.

b. ดาแงะ สุดาอาเช่น
    Dang  Suda praise
    Dang was praised by Suda.

c. ดาแงะ ทุกสุดาอาเช่น
    Dang     Suda praise
    Dang was praised by Suda (but he did not like being praised).

In the (a) sentences สุดาอา is the topic, the speaker tells the
listener what she did; in (b) the topic is ดาแงะ. The (a) and the (b)
sentences are synonymous in so far as the content is concerned; that is,
if one is true, the other cannot be false. They are not completely
synonymous, for they are not interchangeable. The appropriateness of
(a) and (b) depends on the topic of the conversation.

The (c) sentences, however, are different from the others in that
they are appropriate only if the speaker thinks that Dang dislikes being
invited in the case of (1c) or dislikes being praised in (2c). The dif-
ference between (c) and the others is clear if Suda is the speaker, in
which case ชน or some other pronouns will replace all the occurrences
of สุดาอา in (1) and (2).

(3) a. ชนเช่นเช่น ดาแงะ
    I invite Dang
    I invited Dang.

b. ดาแงะ ชนเช่น
    Dang  I invite
    Dang was invited by me.

c. ดาแงะ ทุกชนเช่น
    Dang  I invite
    Dang was invited by me (but he did not want to be invited).

(4) a. ชนเช่น ดาแงะ
    I praise Dang
    I praised Dang.
b. ดูด ชัก ชอม
Dang I praise
Dang was praised by me.

c. ดูด ทุก ชัก ชอม
Dang I praise
Dang was praised by me (but he did not like being praised).

Sentences (3c) and (4c) are odd while (1c) and (2c) are not. On syntactic grounds, there is no reason why (3c) and (4c) should not occur as frequently as (1c) and (2c). The oddity of (3c) and (4c) can be accounted for if we take the position that ทุก is used to indicate that something hurts or affects someone adversely. When the speaker uses ทุก, he is asserting that an animate being suffers the effect of an event or an action. The occurrence of ทุก in (3c) and (4c) implies that the speaker knows he is hurting someone. Since, within the conventions of Thai etiquette, it is unlikely that a speaker will consider his invitation or praise as an act of hostility, we have grammatical sentences that do not occur in actual speech.

In traditional Thai grammar (a) and (b) belong to different sentence types, (b) and (c) are grouped together, with (b) deriving from (c). This classification ignores the fact that except for focus (a) and (b) are synonymous, and that although (b) and (c) focus on the same item, they differ greatly as far as meaning is concerned. Moreover, the rule that moves the object to the front and inserts ทุก would only work with sentences like (3) and (4). It cannot account for the following:

(5) ดูด ทุก หิมะ ถ่ม บ้าน
Suda thief enter house
Suda's house was burglarised.

(6) ดูด ทุก ป่า ป่า คุณ แม่
Suda father open letter
Suda's letter was opened by her father.

The passive rule as formulated by Tonglaw (1952:283), a grammarian of the traditional school, is the same as the rule that Chaiyaratana (1961:5) has for her transformational grammar of Thai; it moves the whole NP to the front. Tonglaw's rule for changing an active sentence into a passive sentence consists of two operations:

i. The object is moved to the subject position.

ii. The subject is placed between the auxiliary ทุก and the verb, and becomes a part of the predicate.
Warotamasikkhadit (1963:32) has a different rule. He derives the thûuk construction from two strings. His rule requires that the NP that occurs with thûuk be identical with the NP object in the embedded S. These rules, however, cannot derive (5) and (6) from the following active sentences:

(5') khamooy khîn bân sûdâa
    thief enter house Suda
    A thief broke into Suda's house.

(6') phôô pat cût-mây sûdâa
    father open letter Suda
    Father opened Suda's letter.

If we modify the rule so that it can also move the NP inside the NP object to the front, we will get (5) and (6) from (5') and (6'). The new rule, however, will produce ungrammatical as well as grammatical strings from the following:

(7) khruû tîi lûuk sûdâa
    teacher beat child Suda
    The teacher beat Suda's child.

(8) sûdâa chom nûog dâmê
    Suda praise sister Dang
    Suda praised Dang's sister.

If we move the whole NP object to the front, we get acceptable sentences. If we only move the NP inside the NP object, we get strings that are unacceptable.

(7') a. lûuk sûdâa thûuk khruû tîi
    child Suda    teacher beat
    Suda's child was beaten by the teacher.

b. *sûdâa thûuk khruû tîi lûuk
    Suda    teacher beat child

(8') a. nûog dâmê thûuk sûdâa chom
    sister Dang    Suda praise
    Dang's sister was praised by Suda.

b. *dâmê thûuk sûdâa chom nûog
    Dang    Suda praise sister

The fact that none of the passive rules can account for all the occurrences and non-occurrences of thûuk makes one question the assumption