

THE PHONOLOGY OF THAI PET NAMES

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Names of Thai people can be divided into the formal and informal, formal being first and family names, while the informal ones are pet names and nicknames. Indeed, the Thai people have a widely popular practice of informally addressing one another with names other than the legal first family name. These so-called pet names and nicknames may have a meaning or may be onomatopoeic or just nonsense words; those with meaning conform to the general patterns of monosyllabic words, whereas those without possess the phonological patterns of onomatopes or of English and Chinese loanwords.

Development of pet names

The first names of the Thai are those given to them by their parents in childhood. They are, it seems, legally the equivalent of the Christian names of European and Christian people, but in reality they have little connection with Buddhism, the state religion of Thailand. A Thai first name is not given to a baby at its first religious ceremony, although in the majority of cases it *is* given to a baby either by a priest or a parent, or by a respectable elder, in accordance with the baby's horoscope, in order to bless the baby with luck, ability, prosperity, wealth, honour, grace, or a combination of such blessings. There are also cases in which ugly names are given to fool the devil who might take the child away if it were considered to be a good-looking baby. The practice is possible because all Thai first names have a meaning. In olden days, such first names were the only names given to Thai people; in the Sukhothai period, Thai names were mostly simple Thai words, some loanwords from Khmer and Sanskrit. In the Ayutthayā period, however, more Sanskritic loans were used as names, especially for members of the royal family. Traditionally, it is believed that the name of a person has an effect on the ups and downs of its owner's life. Generally, words which have a meaning in accord with the blessing that should be due to a child as noted in his or her horoscope are used. A boy named /mii/ 'to have' is expected to grow up rich or, at least, to know no poverty. Likewise, it is hoped that a girl named /sūaj/ 'beautiful' will grow up into a good-looking woman. In the context of such practices, a person who becomes ill or poor may change his name if he thinks that the one he possesses does not fit well with his horoscope and his expectations of life. *In the early Ratanakosin period, the names of commoners were still*

simple Thai words, with the inclusion of some short Sanskritic loans, whereas the names of members of the royal family were made up of long coinages from Sanskrit.

In 1913 King Rama VI introduced family names into Thai law. The family names given by the King were mostly Sanskritic words having a form and meaning related to the name of a particular ancestor of a given person. Common people generally combined the names of their parents to make up their family names. In such cases a family name could be, and usually, longer than the owner's first name. First names at this time also began to change their form from simple Thai words to more complex forms of Sanskritic origin. The name /mii/ 'to have', for example, presents a variety of choices such as /sèet-thĩi/ or /sèet-thǎa/ 'a rich man' (Skt. śreṣṭha), the second being used only as a name; /thanaa/ 'money' (Skt. dhana), /sáp/ 'treasure' (Skt. dravya), and so on. With time, the first names of the younger generation seemed to become longer and longer. Thus, one finds names of three, four or five syllables, all similarly related to 'wealth', as follows:

/sáp-praphaa/	'Radiant Wealth'
/thaná?-phan/	'Silvery Complexion'
/wóorasáp/	'Excellent Treasures'
/sèet-thaphon/	'Wealthy Clan'
/sèet-siri?/	'Wealthy Glory'
/thaná-phát/	'Wealth Prosperity'
/thanawát-thaná?/	'Wealth Prosperity'
/thaná-siri?/	'Wealth Glory'
/sáp-monkhon/	'Lucky Treasures'
/sáp-thawii/	'Multiplying Treasures'
/sáp-manii/	'Precious Gems'

With the advent of family names and the consequent usage of Sanskritically-derived names for both first and family names, it was natural that Thai people should revert back to the use of the simple name-words with which they were more familiar in order to address one another. At first, only part of a polysyllabic first name was used in addressing someone; for example, /phai-buun/ 'abundance' is shortened to /buun/ with a virtual loss of the correct meaning of the original first name as used in full. In some cases, this shortening of names can cause confusion, since there may be occasions on which more than one person with the same shortened name is present; these people may all be called /buun/, for example, although their first names may well be /sǎm-buun/ 'perfect', /thaná-buun/ 'full of money', /thiirá-buun/ 'perfect as a sage', /phátchara-buun/ 'full of diamonds', and

/kittibuun/ 'full of fame'.

The problem of calling for someone by part only of the first name, combined with the familiar use of simple Thai words signifying the particular characteristics of a person, was, in fact, the origin of the now popular practice in family circles, among classmates, close friends and work colleagues, of using pet names and nicknames to address one another.

Pet names are generally given to children by their parents and thus express fondness and affection, while nicknames are generally created by and used among friends or classmates to express familiarity or friendly mockery. However, some nicknames can be so widespread that their use is extended into wider circles of friends and close acquaintances. Most Thai people nowadays have pet names, and a number of them have both pet names and nicknames, which may last, and by which they may be addressed till the latter part of their lives.

Grammatically, a pet name plays the role of a personal pronoun. For example, a person whose pet name is /nít/ 'tiny' may use the words /nít/ in a sentence such as '/nít/ wishes to have a birthday party with /nít/'s friends, so please let /nít/ have a new dress for the occasion'. A nickname may also play the role of a personal pronoun but is rarely used as the first personal pronoun, since some people accept, but do not particularly like, the nickname given to them.

Classification of pet names

Pet names can be classified semantically into three groups; namely, semantic pet names, onomatopoeic pet names, and nonsense pet names.

(i) Semantic pet names make up the largest group. They are given, or used, to show special affection and also for convenience in addressing one another. They are expressions of miniaturization, flowers, fruits, vegetables, sweets, toys, pets, offspring, as well as descriptions of the appearances of the name-owners. Nicknames are also grouped with semantic pet names since they all have meanings, generally used in teasing or mockery of the person named. Examples of such pet names are:

Miniaturization:	/nít/	'tiny'
	/lék/	'small'
	/nóoj/	'a little'
	/cǐw/	'very little'
	/cǐit/	'very little'

Flowers:	/bua/	'lotus'
	/piip/	'name of a flower' (Millingtonia hortensis)
	/têw/	'name of a flower' (Cratoxylon prunifolium)
	/jîi-thôo/	'name of a flower' (Nerium oleander)
Fruits:	/klûaj/	'banana'
	/sôm/	'orange'
	/ŋôʔ/	'rambutan'
	/khanûn/	'jack-fruit'
	/nốj-nàa/	'sugar-apple' (Annona reticulata)
	/chom-phûu/	'rose-apple' (Eugenia jambos)
Vegetables:	/tɛɛŋ/	'collective name for melons, etc.'
	/fɛɛŋ/	'a kind of squash' (Cucurbitaceae)
	/fâk/	'a king of squash' (Cucurbitaceae)
	/thûa/	'bean'
Sweets:	/ʔom-jîm/	'lollipop'
	/lûuk-kwàat/	'candy'
	/kốo/	'a kind of sweet'
Toys:	/lûuk-pồoŋ/	'balloon'
	/lûuk-hĩn/	'marbles'
	/wâaw/	'kite'
	/túk-kataa/	'doll'
Pets:	/mɛɛw/	'cat'
	/ka.j/	'chicken'
	/nốk/	'bird'
	/tâw/	'turtle, tortoise'