PHONOLOGICAL REDUCTION OF SOME FINAL PARTICLES IN MODERN THAI

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In spoken Thai, particles are used a great deal, especially in casual speech; it seems that the more casual the utterance, the greater the use of particles. Some particles, such as the following, occur before the verb.

kô as in: chán kô khít yaññän meñkan
I pt think like that also
'I think so too.'

câ as in: khâw ca pay meñ thay phrûnnîi
he pt go Thailand tomorrow
'He is going to Thailand tomorrow.'

mây as in: thât mây thoo mâa chân kô mây pay
if not call come I pt not go
'If you don't call, I won't go.'

çûng(thûng) as in: thât tûng thoo mâa chân thûng ca pay
you must call come I pt will go
'You must call, then I will go.'

Most particles, however, whether they occur in phrases, clauses or sentences, appear in final position, as in the following examples:

rû as in: thât mây pay thamûaan rû
you not go work Q pt
'Aren't you going to work?'

sî as in: pay sî
go pt
'Yes, I am.' (Of course I am.)

thà as in: yûu bâan thà?
stay home pt
'Please stay home.'
læy  as in:  yàa  pay  læy  
don't  go  pt  
'Don't go.'

lā  as in:  thammāy lā  
why  pt  
'Why?' (Why not?)

nɔ̀y  as in:  yùu  pen  phwān  chān  nɔ̀y  
stay  be  company  I  pt  
'Please stay and keep me company.'

rɔ̀k  as in:  māy  dɔ̀y  rɔ̀k  chān  tôŋ  thamǒan  
not  can  I  pt  I  must  work  
'I can't, I have to work.'

nā  as in:  thāa  yaŋɡān  chān  pay  kāp  theo  nā  
if  I  like  that  I  go  with  you  pt  
'In that case can I go with you?'

sīa  as in:  thāa  ca  pay  kō  pay  tēŋ  tua  sīa  
if  will  go  pt  go  get  dressed  pt  
'If you want to go, then go get dressed.'

etc.

Most of these final particles are used in utterances to reveal the speaker's attitude, thought, emotion, mood, etc. regarding the situation at the time of speaking.

The final particles which will be discussed in detail in this paper share a common pattern of phonological reduction of initials, finals, vowels and tones; they can, but do not always, reduce to a common form, with or without final glottal stop (?), and with one of the three tones, mid, low, or low falling.

The particles to be discussed here are ɯɛ /nāʔ/, ɯɛ /lāʔ/, ɹɛ /lāʔ/, ɯwɛ /lɛʔ/, and ɹwɛn /rɔ̀k/. The particle ɯɛ /nāʔ/, while it does not undergo consonant, vowel, or tone reduction, is also included in this discussion because of its close semantic relationship with ɯɛ /nāʔ/, which does undergo reduction.¹

Mary Haas (1964) gives a general description of these particles in her Thai-English Student's Dictionary which I have taken into account and to which I have added some detail. I have also taken into account Richard Noss's mention of these particles in his Thai Reference Grammar (Noss 1964).

We will now look at the way each of these particles is used in utterances, along with examples, most of which are taken from spontaneous conversation. Following this, we will examine the phonological reduction mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Note that reduction
to a with one of the tones mentioned above is not possible in all functions of a particle; in some cases only partial reduction occurs. Where complete reduction is possible, the example is marked with the symbol #.

PARTICLE USE

/ɔː/ /nâʔ/ is used in sentences:

1. Indicating urging, insisting, persuading, or importuning, such as in the situation in which one is invited to go somewhere and answers rather negatively, or shows reluctance to accept the invitation, the inviter might say:

(1a) pay /nâʔ/  
go pt  
'(Come on!) Please go.'
or in persuading one's guest to stay as in:

(1b) yùu koɔɔn thɔ /nâʔ/  
stay before pt pt  
'Please stay for a while.' (Don't go yet.)

2. Expressing the speaker's belief,\(^2\) which, the speaker realises, contrasts slightly with the addressee's belief, as in:

(2a) chån wɔa khàw maa ɛtɔw /nâʔ/  
say he come already pt  
'I believe he has already come.'

(2b) thɔw-ni ɔ ca phɔɔ ruɛ / khɔɔ phɔɔ /nâʔ/  
this much will enough Q / surely enough pt  
'Will this be enough? / It should be.'

3. Marking the topic of that which immediately follows. The topic, which precedes the particle, can be a simple noun, a phrase or a clause (short or long), as in:

(3a) ɔɔn /nâʔ/ khraikhray kɔ yaɔ-k-dɔay  
money pt anybody pt want  
'Money! Anybody wants it.'

(3b) phʊu-yɪɔ /nâʔ/ tɔɔ-tua chaɔ thɔ ɪsʊt  
girl pt get dressed slow most  
'Girls! They get dressed the slowest of all.'

(3c) tɔɔn thɔe pay dìi-sì  
when you go Washington, D.C. pt  
'n not well  
'When you went to Washington, D.C., I was sick.'
Sometimes the topic comes after the main clause and functions as a
declaration. Some people call this an afterthought topic, as in (3d).
Examples (3a), (3b) and (3c) could also be rewritten or spoken in this
form as well.

(3d) mây mìi khray maa kəp khun leeŋ rūụ thīi sōp khəw dǎǎy
not have person come with you at all Q that test enter able
/ˈnâʔ/ pt
'Didn't anybody come with you, from among those who passed the
entrance exam?'

4. Indicating the speaker's annoyance. This is used with firm tone of
voice.

(4a) yūt rōŋ sī-a-thii thē /ˈnâʔ/
stop cry pt pt pt
'Please stop crying.' (Would you please stop crying?)

(4b) rūụ leঙ /ˈnâʔ/, mây tōŋ maa bōŋ sām-sām-sāk
know already pt not must some tell repeatedly
'I know. You don't have to tell me over and over again.'

5. Indicating response of limited concession, acceptance or agreement
on a result. This type of statement usually has the pattern
'verb₁ /ˈnâʔ/ verb₁ + clause' or 'verb₁ /ˈnâʔ/ neg. verb₁ + clause'.
The clause that follows shows that there is some contradiction within
the statement, and the pattern is used to show that the speaker is
aware of the contradictory nature of his utterance.

(5a) rūụ /ˈnâʔ/ rūụ, tēt tham ?aray māy dāǎy
know pt know but do anything not able
'I know, but there is nothing I can do (about it).'

(5b) hāŋ /ˈnâʔ/ mây hāŋ rōŋ, tēt ruư wāa khəw pen khon ?aw-pay
see pt not see pt but know that he be person take
'I know I didn't see him taking it but I'm sure he is the one
(who took it).'

6. Ending the utterance with some focus or emphasis, mostly in
questions as in:

(6a) (ca) pay nāy /ˈnâʔ/
will go where pt
'And just where are you going?'

(6b) maa thammay /ˈnâʔ/
come why pt
'And just what are you here for?'