VERBAL RELATIVE CLAUSES AS ADNOMINAL MODIFIERS IN THAI

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the relative clause structures which appear as the modifier of a noun in Thai. Apart from having different types of modifiers such as determiners, adjectives, prepositional phrases, complement clauses, and classifier constructions, nouns in Thai also allow relative clauses to appear as modifiers. The kind of relative clause which has usually been described in the literature consists of the relative noun thii ‘that’ followed by a verbal complement, but there are in addition verbal relative clauses without thii which can also modify nouns. The objective of this paper is to examine the different types of verbal relative clause and to explain their syntactic characteristics within the constraints of the lexicase framework. It will be shown that some structures which appear to be verbal relative clauses are in fact not, but they are either constituent parts of a compound noun or are themselves pseudo-compound verbs.

2. Relative clauses as adnominal modifiers

2.1. Nominal relative clauses

In Thai, there are two types of relative clause that can appear as adjuncts to modify regent nouns. These constructions differ because of the syntactic category to which the head of the relative clause belongs (Savetamalya 1989:120). The main distinguishing characteristic of these two constructions is that the head of the first construction is a nominal headed by the relative noun thii (1-2), whereas the head of the second construction is a verb (3).

1. nāŋsýy thii chān tāaŋ
   book that I write
   ‘the book that I wrote’

2. nākriōn thii sōop tōk
   student that take an exam fail
   ‘the student who failed the exam’

3. bāan jāj
   house big
   ‘house which is big’
In (1), the noun phrase consists of the head noun nāgṣyī ‘book’ and it is modified by an adjunct thīi chān tāēn ‘that I wrote’, which is a nominal relative clause headed by thīi. The structure of this noun phrase is shown below:

In (2), the noun phrase consists of the head noun nākriān ‘student’ and it is modified by an adjunct thīi sācap tōk ‘who failed the exam’, which is a nominal relative clause headed by thīi. The structure of this noun phrase is shown below:

In (3), the noun phrase consists of the head noun bāaan ‘house’ and it is modified by an adjunct jāy ‘big’, which is a verbal predicate clause. The structure of this noun phrase is shown below:
The nominal relative construction illustrated in (1-2) is the type of construction which in traditional descriptions of Thai grammar has been called a relative clause. A structure headed by ที่ ‘something (that)’ however may be either a relative clause, that is, an adjunct of a head noun, or it may be a complement of a verb. As a relative clause, ที่ is a nominal predicate as in (4), but when ที่ is the head of a nominal complement in a sentence, it is assigned case by the verb that is the head of that sentence as in (5).

4. ขอน ที่ วิ่ง ไป ย้าย ชาย น้อง ชาย
   person that run go not brother I
   ‘The person who has just run away is not my brother.’

5. ที่ วิ่ง ไป ย้าย ชาย น้อง ชาย
   someone run go not brother I
   ‘The one who has just run away is not my brother.’

The structures of the sentences (4-5) are shown below:

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Other forms of relative nouns in Thai, ซึ่ง, or an meaning ‘that’ are also found. In this paper, only the relative noun ที่ will be discussed.
When thīi appears as the head of a nominal relative clause or as a complement of a verb, it requires either an intransitive (as in 4-5) or a transitive verbal sister (as in 6-7).

6. rūup thīi chān wāat dāy raŋwan
   picture that I paint get prize
   'The picture that I painted won the prize.'

7. thīi chān wāat dāy raŋwan
   something I paint get prize
   'Something I painted won the prize.'