

The Predicative-Adjective Construction in Thai

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1. Introduction

One of the syntactic categories in Thai which are rather problematic for grammarians and linguists is adjective. To my knowledge, adjectives in Thai have not yet been thoroughly analyzed despite the fact that they are always mentioned about when morphological and syntactic analyses are made. Many traditional grammarians and linguists in Thai view what are called adjectives in different ways. Thonglao (1966) does not have the term "adjective" in his grammar, but he includes adjective elements in a category "wiseet" or modifiers. There are various kinds of modifiers in this category. Suree Pancharoen (1966) attempts to distinguish adjectives from intransitive and transitive verbs by using the test frames as proposed by Vichintana (1964). However, her analysis is based on the syntactic positions only; this is why her work is not well-justified. Songwiththaya & Songwiththaya (1976) do not mention about the term "adjective" in their grammar book. Instead, they treat as minor intransitive verbs what have been analyzed as adjectives. Wongsiri (1982) proposes six types of intransitive verbs based on Fillmore's (1970) Case Grammar. She treats adjectives like *suay* 'pretty' and *ruay* 'rich' as intransitive verbs with Objective Case.

This study presents a linguistic analysis of the syntactic category "adjective" in Thai. We will first explore the morphological, syntactic and semantic characteristics of what are called or should be called adjectives as well as their distribution. Based on this analysis, we will classify adjectives into subtypes. Next we will examine the syntactic and semantic properties of each subtype of this syntactic category. The investigation will finally indicate the constructions in which each type of adjectives occur. The study focusses on constructions of predicative adjectives in Thai.

I divide the study into three main sections: 1. Introduction, 2. The Analysis, and 3. Conclusion. The Analysis section is divided into 2.1. The Definition; 2.2. The Characteristics of Adjectives in Thai; 2.3. Attributive Adjectives; and 2.4. Predicative Adjectives.

For convenience, I use the symbol I for the short central high vowel, II the long central high, E the short central mid, EE the long central mid, O the short back low, OO the long back low, x the short front low and xx the long front low, respectively.

2. The Analysis

This section presents an analysis of adjectives in Thai. The focus is on adjectives which function like verbs. Using a definition of "adjective" by Crystal (1985:7-8), I analyze its types, the semantic and

syntactic characteristics of each type as well as syntactic elements required to occur with them. Then I argue for the sentencehood of the predicative-adjective construction, and finally the subjecthood of an element which occurs in this construction.

2.1. *The Definition of "Adjective"*

I follow Crystal (1985:7-8) in defining the term "adjective":

"Adjective is a term used in the grammatical classification of words to refer to the main set of items which specify the attributes of Nouns. From a formal point of view, four criteria are generally invoked to define the class in English: they can occur within the noun phrase, i.e. they function in the 'attributive' position, e.g. the big man; they can occur in a post-verbal or 'predicative' position, e.g. the man is big; he called it stupid; they can be premodified by an intensifier, such as very, e.g. the very big man; and they can be used in a comparative and superlative form, either by inflection (e.g. big, bigger, biggest) or periphrastically (e.g. interesting, more interesting, most interesting.) However, not all adjectives satisfy all these criteria, and the sub-classification of adjectives has proved quite complex. Both narrow and broad applications of the term 'adjective' will be found in grammars. In its broadest sense it could include everything between the determiner and the noun, in such a phrase as the vicar's fine old English garden chair; but many linguists prefer to restrict it to the items which satisfy most or all of the above criteria (to include only fine and old, in this example), the other items being called 'adjective-like', or 'adjectivals'. Adjectives may also be the heads of phrases ('adjective phrases', such as 'that's very important') and an adjectival function is sometimes recognised for certain types of clause (e.g. he's the man I saw)."

2.2. *The Characteristics of Adjectives in Thai*

My analysis of adjectives in Thai is based on the narrower definition of "adjective" by Crystal above as well as the morphological, syntactic and semantic characteristics of what are called "adjectives", all of which are presented and discussed in the following subsections.

2.2.1. Forms and Meanings of Adjectives

Adjective is a syntactic category the members of which describe permanent states of or tell something about their subjects. They describe persons, things, situations, etc. They say what persons or things are like or seem like. They give information about their subjects. The information includes quality, color, shape, size, age, temperature, distance, time and origin. Illustrated in (1) are some examples of adjectives in Thai.

- (1) Quality: dii 'good', yxx 'not good, terrible',
 suay 'pretty', naarak 'lovely, nice',
 khxx 'hard', OOn 'soft, weak', etc.
- Color: (sii)dxn 'red', (sii)khiaw 'green',
 (sii)dam 'black', (sii)muang 'purple',
 (sii)khaaw 'white', etc.
- Shape: klom 'round', siliam 'square, rectangle',
 saamlam 'rectangle', etc.
- Size: lek 'small, little', yay 'big, large',
 yaaw 'long', san 'short', etc.
- Age: kxx 'old', OOn 'young', num 'young (for
 male), saaw 'young (for female), etc.
- Temperature: roOn 'hot', naaw 'cold', yen 'cool',
 ?un 'warm', etc.
- Distance: klay 'far', klây 'near'
- Time: chaw 'morning', saay 'late in the morning',
 thian 'noon', baay 'afternoon',
 yen 'evening', dïk 'late at night',
 ?a?diit 'past', patcu?ban 'present', ?a?naakhot
 'future', etc.
- Origin: ciin 'chinese', thai 'Thai',
 farang 'western', khxxk 'Indian', etc.

The adjectives shown above occur within the scope of the noun phrase. They function as modifiers or adjuncts of head nouns they modify. Their use and occurrence is optional. They are thus called attributive adjectives (AA) by function.

Most of the attributive adjectives shown above can also function as predicates. That is, they occur in sentences and function like intransitive verbs. They describe permanent states of or tell something about their subjects in sentences. They fill the predication part of sentences. In this manner their use is obligatory. By function, they are thus called predicative adjectives (PA). Adjectives of this type occur outside the scope of the noun phrase.

Let us now consider some examples of both attributive and predicative adjectives in various syntactic constructions. (2a) shows the attributive adjective **suay** 'pretty' within the scope of a noun phrase. Here **suay** modifies the noun **dek** 'child'.

- (2)a. [_{NP} dèk [_{AA} suây] khon níl]
 child pretty n.classifier this
 "This pretty child"

(2b) shows the adjective *suây*, which has the same form and meaning as *suay* in (2a). Here *suay* does not modify the noun *dèk* because it is not located within the scope of a noun phrase. Instead, the adjective *suay* functions as a predicate, describing the permanent state of an NP subject of the sentence. I thus analyze *suây* in the sentence (2b) as a predicative adjective.

- (2)b. [[_{NP} dèk khon níl] [_{PA} suây]]
 child n.cl this pretty
 "This child is pretty"

From the evidence above, adjectives can be divided into two types: attributive adjectives (AA) and predicative adjectives (PA). Both types are similar in form and meaning. They differ in syntactic position and function in constructions in which they occur.

In this analysis, predicative adjectives can occur in the position of attributive adjectives, but the reverse is not always true for attributive adjectives. There are a few attributive adjectives which can not function as predicate adjectives; these include adjectives indicating time, as shown in (1) and those indicating sequence such as *kOOn* 'former', *lăŋ* 'latter', *rxxk* 'first', *sutthāay* 'last, final'. These AAs occur with noun classifiers only, as illustrated in (2c). *khon* is a noun classifier and *kOOn* 'former' the attributive adjective.

- (2)c. [_{NP} hūānāa khon [_{AA} kOOn] (khon) nān]
 boss n.cl former n.cl that
 "That former boss"

AA *kOOn* cannot occur as PA in the predicate scope (PRED), as shown in (2d).

- (2)d. */?? [_S [_{NP} hūānāa khon nān] [_{PRED} khon [_{PA} kOOn]]]
 boss n.cl that n.cl former
 "That boss is the former one"
 * [_S [_{NP} hūānāa khon nān] [_{PRED} hūānāa khon [_{PA} kOOn]]]
 boss n.cl that boss n.cl former
 "That boss is the former one"
 * [_S [_{NP} hūānāa khon nān] [_{PA} kOOn]]
 boss n.cl that former
 "That boss is the former one"

To make the sentences in (2d) grammatical, the copula *pen* 'be' is required in the predicate, as shown in (2e).