THE NATURE OF THAI VILLAGE NAMES: A CASE STUDY OF KANCHANABURI PROVINCE

Sujaritlak Deepadung
Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development
Mahidol University

1. Introduction
Hymes (1964:176) defined the investigation of the toponym as "the study of linguistic designations for places and other aspects of geographical reference." To this he added that

Often the interest is historical or local curiosity, but especially when approached in terms of structural analysis, involving the organization of such designations into sets and on the basis of underlying components, the topic broaches the problems of spatial orientation in general, both as a cognitive activity and a factor of social life and cultural values.

Also Franz Boas in his article "On geographical names of the Kwakiutl Indians" (1964:171) stated that "geographical terminology does not depend solely upon cultural interests, but is also influenced by linguistic structure."

So far, there is no study of toponyms, specifically those concerning the village names of the Western region of Thailand\(^1\). Therefore, the aims of this paper are: 1) to analyze the linguistic structure of village names in Kanchanaburi Province\(^2\), 2) to set up dimensions or categories of meaning of the generic nouns used in the village names and 3) to see the spatial orientation of the village names in Kanchanaburi.

2. The Data
The village names studied below are drawn from a complete list of names in Tham-niap Thongthii 2535BC (2535:55-74)\(^3\) (Provincial Records 1992, 1992:55-74). It
states that Kanchanaburi has 10 amphoes (10 districts) and 1
king-amphoe (1 sub-district) as follows:-

1. Amphoe Muang Kanchanaburi  88  mubaans (villages)
2. Amphoe Thaa-ma-kaa  130  mubaans (villages)
3. Amphoe Thaa-Muang  98  mubaans (villages)
4. Amphoe Boo-Ploy  83  mubaans (villages)
5. Amphoe Pha-nom-thuan  127  mubaans (villages)
6. Amphoe Sai-yook  52  mubaans (villages)
7. Amphoe Thong-pa-pum  38  mubaans (villages)
8. Amphoe Sang-khla-buri  19  mubaans (villages)
9. Amphoe Lao-Khwan  61  mubaans (villages)
10. Amphoe Sii-sawat  29  mubaans (villages)
11. Amphoe Daan-makham-tia  36  mubaans (villages)
The total corpus for this study is  761 village names.

3. The linguistic structure of village names in
Kanchanaburi Province

In his article, Boas (1964:171-176) illustrates how the
affixation in Kwakuitl expresses "the specific location of a
place," and "the range of concepts," that is, how the
geographical names "[are] influenced by linguistic structure." He also compares the structure of the Kwakuitl geographical
terms with those of other American Indian groups, especially
the ones that use compounding to express concepts which can
coop-occur with place names. In his own words "...the form of
each language limits the range of terms that can be coined."

As is known, Thai is dominantly a monosyllabic
language. Unanalyzable polysyllabic words also exist.
Moreover, word-compounding and reduplication are very
productive procedures in Thai. Modifiers follow the words
they modify and, of course, the possessor follows the
possessed. And Thai has prepositions. While its morphology
differs from that of English, the Thai sentence has the same
basic order as that of English, i.e., Subject-Verb-Object. Thus,
we can say that Thai is typologically a (SVO/Pr/NP/NA)
language.

Given that there is no productive inflection in Thai
and that compounding is a very lively process, Thai village
names should reflect this linguistic special structure. From the 761 village names in Kanchanaburi, the findings are:

1. One single noun, a preposition or an adjective. There are just a few village names of this construction. Examples are:

บ้านป้อง (bāan ‘a village’⁴ - bīj ‘a large swamp’), บ้านตะเคียน (bāan ‘a village’ - dōn ‘highland’), บ้านนอก (bāan ‘a village’ - nōok ‘outside’), บ้านใน (bāan ‘a village’ - nay ‘inside’), บ้านใหม่ (bāan ‘a village’ - māy ‘new’), บ้านงาม (bāan ‘a village’ - yāam ‘beautiful’), etc.⁵

2. Two nouns. Both of the two nouns are monosyllabic, the first noun being usually geographical terminology, plant or animal names, or gathering places, and the second noun a plant or animal name or geographical terminology, for example:

เน่อนถ่าย (nōy ‘swamp, lagoon, large pool’ - saay ‘sand’), บ้านหล่ม (bīj ‘a large swamp’ - lōm ‘a muddy place’), โคกไผ่ (khōok ‘mound, knoll’ - phāy ‘bamboo’), ต้นไม้ (dōn ‘highland’ - yīw ‘cotton tree, bombax malabaricum’), ต้นมะพร้าว (tōn ‘tree’ - maphrāaw ‘coconut’), ตลาดสุกแก้ว (talāat ‘market’ - hūkkkāe ‘unknown meaning’)

3. Two nouns. The first noun is a monosyllabic noun of geographical terminology or plant name and the second noun is a compound noun, for example:

ปีกหัวแครง (bīj ‘a large swamp’ - hūa + wārān ‘head + ring’), ต้นตาลตู (dōn ‘highland’ - tau + ʔit ‘stove + brick’), ต้นไม้แดง (tō ‘stump of a tree’ - māy + dāēy ‘tree + red’)

4. Two nouns and adjectival modifiers or prepositions. The first two nouns are usually monosyllabic nouns expressing geographical terms. The third word, which expresses a signifying characteristic, shape, age or direction, modifies the first two head nouns. For example:

เน่อนบางแก้ว (nōy ‘swamp, lagoon, large pool’ - bāan ‘waterway, locality along a waterway’ - kāw ‘old’), วังลานใต้ (way ‘a deep pool (in a large body of water)’ - laan ‘an open,
wide, level area' - ตาเย้ ‘south’), ท่าโรงยาว (ท่า ‘port, harbor, pier, wharf, landing’ - นวย ‘wood’ - ยาว ‘long’), หน้าตะกั่วตะวันออก (หิน + ดาด ‘a rock ledge’ - ตะวันออก ‘east’)

There are also some villages in Kanchanaburi that have Sanskrit or Pali names or modifiers of the head nouns of the names, for instance:

เจริญทรัพย์ (carəən ‘to progress, advance’ - ราษ ‘wealth, money, treasure’), ศรีมังคล (สัน ‘splendor, beauty, excellence’ - มงคล ‘auspicious sign’), หนุนศรีมังคล (นุ ‘swamp’ - สัน ‘splendor, beauty, excellence’ - มงคล ‘auspicious sign’), พระยานครชัย (สัน ‘pool, pond’ - seet-thu ‘rich person’), ต้นสมบูรณ์ (ดอน ‘highland’ - สมบูรณ์ ‘to be abundant, plentiful’), etc.

One can thus summarize the linguistic structure of village names in Kanchanaburi Province as follows:

1. About 90% of 761 village names in Kanchanaburi consists of two nouns, the first word is monosyllabic word, the second word may be a monosyllabic word or a compound word.

2. Most of the two-word village names consists of a noun and a noun, a few consists of a noun and an adjective or a preposition.

3. If there is the third word in a village name, the third is usually a modifier of the first two nouns.

4. The word order of words in a village names follows the basic word order of the linguistic structure of the Thai language, i.e., a head noun followed by a modifier. And the compounding process is also very productive in the naming of villages.

4. **Semantic dimensions of the village names in Kanchanaburi province**

Based on meanings of the generic nouns that are the first or the head words of village names⁶, there are five major categories or dimensions as follows: