

DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS OF THAI DEMONSTRATIVES: A CASE ON PRAGMATICALLY CONTROLLED IRREGULAR FUNCTIONS.

Unchalee Singnoi
Naresuan University

1. Introduction

In Thai, demonstratives can be divided into two types morphologically and syntactically: DEMONSTRATIVE ADJECTIVES, hereafter DADJ (*nii* 'this/that', *nán* 'that/those', *nóon* 'that/those', and *níun* 'that/those'), and DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS, hereafter DPRON¹ (*nîi* 'this/these', *nân* 'that/those', *nôon* 'that/those', and *nûun* 'that/those'). Generally speaking, a DADJ functions as a modifier indicating deixis and definiteness while a DPRON functions as a reference. However, with some pragmatic forces, these functions are found to become vague or even reversed. In this paper, in order to construe the syntactically irregular uses of demonstratives, I need to begin with the (simple) syntax of demonstratives, both internally and externally. I then discuss their roles in semantics and pragmatics, which are significant to the syntax of demonstrative construction as well as the selection of particular lexical demonstratives in different contexts.

2. Syntactic Structures of Demonstratives

2.1. Internal syntax

The internal structures (morphology) of these two types of demonstratives are related to each other, in that they contain the same demonstrative stem, /n/. DADJs are marked with a high level tone as /n' / (e.g. *nii* 'this/these') and DPRONs with a falling tone as /n_ / (e.g. *nîi* 'this/these'). In parallel, these two demonstrative types are possibly distinguished by up to four degrees spatially and temporally from the speaker, as represented by four distinct vowels scaled from the most

unrounded vowel to the most rounded vowel, /i,a,o,u/. The four-term system of demonstratives is presented in the table below:

Table1: Thai Demonstrative System

		Distance/Tempo			
		nearer		farther	
		<----->			
		i	a	o	u
Adjective	'	níi	nán	nóon	núun
Pronoun	^	nîi	nân	nôn	nûun

2.2. External Syntax

2.2.1. Syntactic Structure

A DADJ always occurs, in the scope of a noun phrase (hereafter NP), to the right of the head noun that is generally a common noun, as exemplified.

- (1) [bâan nán] sǎay
house that beautiful
'That house is beautiful.'

In the demonstrative construction, a classifier, which normally can occur before any modifier such as a relative clause, possessive phrase, or prepositional phrase (see Singnoi (2000) for further details), can also occur before a DADJ, as shown:

- (2) [bâan lǎŋ nán] sǎay
house CLF that beautiful
'That house is beautiful.'

A DPRON substitutes for an NP, as shown:

- (3) nân khɛɛ rooŋ rian
 that be school
 ‘That is a school’

It is odd or even ungrammatical if the correspondent DADJ occurs in this slot:

- (4) nán khɛɛ rooŋ rian
 that be school
 ‘That is a school’

Also a DPRON is able to stand for a classifier phrase (where the head noun is a classifier) like *lǎŋ nán* in (2):

- (5) bâan [lǎŋ nán]
 house CLF that
 | |
 bâan nân

Its modifying of a noun or classifier is ungrammatical:

- (6) *[bâan lǎŋ nân] sǔay
 house CLF that beautiful
 ‘That house is beautiful.’

However, the choice of using the two types of demonstratives is not determined solely by such syntactic facts. Rather, it is the semantics and/or pragmatics that also determine the usage of demonstratives. In fact, a DADJ may also modify a proper noun or pronoun and even be used as a pronoun. These uses are pragmatically driven (that is, the pragmatic facts drive the syntactic irregularity of these demonstratives) as discussed in section 4.

2.2.2 Syntactic Functions

The demonstratives have a primary syntactic function in marking a boundary of an NP. That is to say, they mark where NPs end. The boundary-marking function of

demonstratives is quite rigid, so that other things preceding or following them are considered in or out of the scope of the NPs, respectively. Thus consider:

- (7) a. [bâan nán] lék mâak
 house that small much
 'That house is very small.'
- b. [bâan lék nán] mâak
 house small that much
 'Those little houses, there are a lot of them.'
- c. [bâan lék mâak nán]
 house small much that
 'that very small house'

We can see that, by placing the demonstrative *nán* before the verb as in (7a), after the first verb in (7b), and finally as in (7c), the verbs 'small' and 'much' are excluded from the NP, the former is included in the NP, and both of them are included in the NP, respectively. Consider also:

- (8) a. [bâan lăŋ thîi-sǎŋ]
 house CLF second
 'the second house'
- b. [bâan nán] lăŋ thîi-sǎŋ
 house that CLF second
 'the second house'
- (9) a. [bâan khǎŋ chǎn]
 house POSSM 1
 'my house'
- b. [bâan nán] khǎŋ chǎn]
 house that POSSM 1
 'That house is mine.'