

# **THE ADVERSATIVE PASSIVE MARKER AS A PROMINENT AREAL FEATURE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN LANGUAGES**

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## **1. Introduction**

It has been suggested in my previous studies (Prasithrathsint 1985, 2001) that the adversative passive is an areal feature of Southeast Asian languages. It is marked by a word regarded here as an auxiliary verb meaning 'to come in contact with or undergo (an unpleasant experience)'; for example, /thùuk/ in Thai, /bì/ in Vietnamese, and /trəw/ in Khmer.

Such words are not transparent or simple semantically and syntactically. Dictionaries normally list several meanings of the words, as in the Vietnamese-English Dictionary by Nguyen-Dinh-Hoa (1966), the Vietnamese-Thai Dictionary by Watcharaprapa (1986), and The Thai Royal Institute Dictionary (1982). Others give several entries of the words, such as the Thai-English Dictionary by Haas (1964), and the Khmer-Thai Dictionary by Phraya Anuman-Rachathon (1974). In any case, all we are shown is that these words have multiple meanings, some of which are equivocal. Grammar books tend to overlook or underrate these words. Their grammatical function is not unanimously accepted among linguists--some regard them as auxiliary verbs functioning as passive markers; others maintain that they are lexical verbs that have nothing to do with passives.

In brief, we never have a clear description of these words--what they mean and how they are used in sentences. So far there has been no study that focuses specifically on the semantic and syntactic features of these words. This study<sup>1</sup> thus aims to fill that gap. Its purpose is to analyze the multiple

meanings and diverse syntactic environments of the adversative passive markers in Southeast Asian languages, hypothesizing that the features that are found are parallel in the languages.

The data used in the analysis was taken from grammar textbooks, dictionaries, and informants. The languages in focus are Thai, Vietnamese, Khmer (Buriram dialect), and Malay. In addition, for some particular points, I also allude to Tai Nuea (spoken in Yunnan Province, China), Zhuang (spoken in Guangxi Province, China), and Phuthai (spoken in Mahasarakham, Northeast Thailand).

It is hoped that the findings in this study will contribute to the areal approach to linguistic research, language contact, and grammaticalization. The study also reveals that Malay has a typical Southeast Asian adversative passive, which seems to have been overlooked in previous linguistic studies.

## 2. The adversative passive markers in Southeast Asian languages

The analysis shows that the adversative passive markers in Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Malay are exactly the same semantically and syntactically. They mean *'to come in contact with or undergo'*. Syntactically, they are *verbs preceding a transitive verb that has an unpleasant or unfavorable meaning*, as in the following examples.

Thai (1)      khǎw **thùuk** khâa  
                  he/she *PSSV*. kill  
                  'He/she was killed.'

(Prasithrathsint 2001)

Viet. (2)      nó **bị** đánh  
                  he/she *PSSV*. beat  
                  'He/she was beaten.'

(Thạch 1991) <sup>2</sup>

Khmer (3)      ki:      *trəw*      wəy  
                   he/she *PSSV*. beat  
                   'He was beaten.'

(Informant)

Malay (4)      budak jahat      itu      *kena*      pukul  
                   boy      naughty the      *PSSV*. beat  
                   'The naughty boy was beaten.'

(Sulaiman 1995:121)

As shown in (1)-(4) above, the passive marking verbs /thùuk/, /bì/, /trəw/, and /kena/ are followed by verbs with unfavorable meanings (i.e., 'kill', 'beat'). The sentences are regarded here as **adversative passive constructions**.

It should be noted that in all the languages, there are other ways of marking the adversative passive. These passive markers in Thai, Vietnamese, and Khmer may be replaced by other words with the same meaning and function, as in (5)-(7). In Malay, the situation is different. This will be explained further.

Thai (5)      khǎw      *doon*      khâa  
                   he/she *PSSV*. kill  
                   'He/she was killed.'

(Prasithrathsint 2001)

Viet. (6)      nó      *phai*      đánh  
                   he/she *PSSV*. beat  
                   'He/she was beaten.'

(Thạch 1991)

Khmer (7)      ki:      *pa?*      wəy  
                   he/she *PSSV*. beat  
                   'He was beaten.'

(Informant)

The words /doon/, /phai/, and /pa?/ can be used as alternative adversative passive markers in Thai, Vietnamese and Khmer, respectively, but they occur less frequently than /thùuk/, /bị/, and /trəw/.

In Malay, /kena/ does not have an alternative that behaves like it, but the language has other devices for formulating passive constructions. The most common one is to add the prefix /di-/ to the verb stem as in (8 b), and also optionally add the preposition /oleh/ 'by' in front of the agent NP as in (9 b).

Malay (8a) (active)

salji tebal meliputi kemuncak gunung fuji  
snow thick Active+cover summit mount Fuji  
'Thick snow covers the summit of Mount Fuji.'

(8b) (passive)

kemuncak gunung fuji *diliputi* salji tebal  
summit mount Fuji Passive+cover snow thick  
'The summit of Mount Fuji is covered by thick snow.'

(9a) (active)

ali membersihkan bilik itu  
Ali Active+clean room the  
'Ali cleaned the room.'

(9b) (passive)

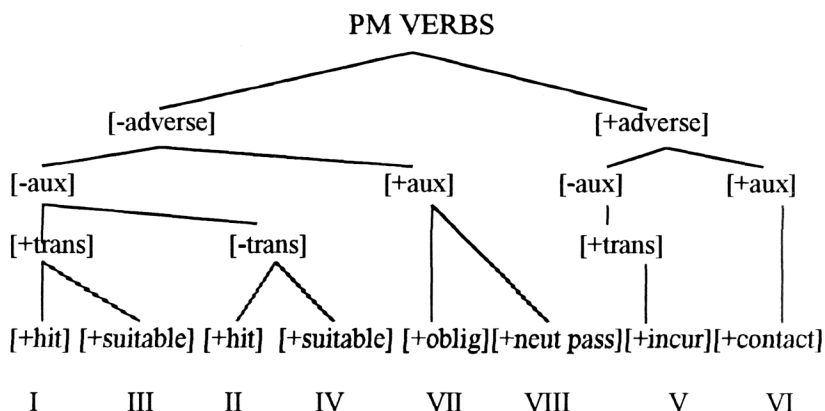
bilik itu *dibersihkan* oleh ali  
room the Passive+clean by Ali  
'The room was cleaned by Ali.'

It is interesting to note that all transitive verbs in Malay can be passivized by adding the prefix /di-/ but that only *transitive verbs with unpleasant meanings*, such as /pukul/ 'to beat', /langgar/ 'to knock down', /bom/ 'to bomb', and /curi/ 'to steal', can occur with /kena/ to form adversative passive constructions. (Sulaiman 1995: 121)

### 3. The multiplicity of passive marking words in Southeast Asian languages

The words /thùuk/, /bì/, /trəw/, and /kena/ in Thai, Vietnamese, Khmer, and Malay, respectively, all have multiple meanings and functions which are strikingly similar. The result of the analysis of their syntactic and semantic features reveals that these words can be organized into eight categories, which are differentiated from one another by two significant syntactic features; namely, [auxiliary] and [transitive], and six semantic features: [adversative], [target hitting], [suitability], [incur], [obligation], and [neutral passive]. The [adversative] feature is the most important because the word that marks adversative passives is likely to develop its adversative meaning from originally non-adversative words. This feature is thus divided into [+adverse] and [-adverse]. The [auxiliary] feature is divided into [+aux] and [-aux]. The difference is that the former occurs with other verbs but the latter does not. Also, only [-aux] verbs can be divided into [+trans] (transitive verbs) and [-trans] (intransitive verbs). It would be irrelevant to classify [+aux] verbs into transitive and intransitive. The semantic features are not binary. They have only positive values. The configurations of the features and the eight categories of passive marking words (henceforth "PM VERBS") are shown in the diagram below.

**Figure 1: Configurations of the syntactic and semantic features of passive marking verbs**



The eight categories are described as follows:

- I. the non-adversative transitive verb meaning 'to touch or hit off exactly'
- II. the non-adversative intransitive verb meaning 'to touch the right spot'
- III. the non-adversative transitive verb meaning 'to be suitable to or compatible with'
- IV. the non-adversative intransitive verb meaning 'to be proper or suitable; to be right; to be exact'
- V. the adversative transitive verb meaning 'to incur; to be hit by'
- VI. the adversative auxiliary verb functioning as the adversative passive marker meaning 'to come in contact with or experience'
- VII. the non-adversative auxiliary verb meaning 'must or have to'
- VIII. the non-adversative auxiliary verb used as the neutral passive marker

### 3.1 The non-adversative transitive verb meaning 'to touch or hit off exactly' (I)

The first category of the multiplex verbs /thùuk/, /bì/, /trəw/, /kena/ is their usage as non-adversative transitive verbs meaning 'to touch or hit off exactly'. The structure of a construction in which this category of verbs occurs is as follows.

NP	+	<b>PM VERBS I</b>	+	NP
		[-adverse, -aux, +trans, + 'hit', ]		[+target]

Hence the term "PM VERB" with a Roman numeral (I, II, etc.) will be used to represent a category of the multiplex verbs that have the same form as the adversative passive markers. Those in the first category are transitive (+trans), and signify the meaning 'to hit', which does not suggest any adversity. The first NP is the subject of the verb. The NP that follows them is something like a target. The following are examples from Thai, Khmer, and Malay. (No data from Vietnamese).

Thai (10)    mîit    *thùuk*    mîi  
              knife *hit*       hand  
              'the knife hit the hand.'

(Prasithrathsint 1985, 2001)

Khmer (11)    cōr    thama: *trəw*    sawa:y  
              throw stone *hit*       mango  
              '(He) threw a stone and it hit the mango.'

(informant)

Malay (12)    *kena*    batang hidung dia  
              *hit*       bridge nose    he  
              '(It) hit him right on the bridge of the nose.'

(Coope 1995: 170)

### 3.2 The non-adversative intransitive verb meaning 'to touch the right spot' (II)

The second category of the verbs is very likely to derive from the first. The only difference is that here the verbs are intransitive. The structure of the construction in which they occur is:

NP	+	<b>PM VERB II #</b> [-adverse , -aux, -trans, , +'hit the right spot']
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The symbol # signifies that these verbs are not followed by an NP. Examples from Thai, Vietnamese, Khmer, and Malay are as follows.

- Thai (13)    yɪŋ    mây    *thùuk*  
                  shoot not    *touch the right spot*  
                  'The shot missed the target.'  
    (informant)
- Khmer (14)    kii    cɔr    man    *trəw*  
                  he    throw not    *touch the right spot*  
                  'His throw did not touch the right spot.'  
    (informant)
- Malay (15)    tak    *kena*  
                  not    *touch the right spot*  
                  '(It) missed the target.'  
    (Coope 1995: 170)

### 3.3 The non-adversative transitive verb meaning 'to be suitable for' (III)

The third category is the transitive verb meaning 'to be suitable for or compatible with'. It occurs in a construction as follows:

NP	+	PM VERB III		+ NP
		[-adverse, -aux, +trans, , + 'suitable']		





- (20) tham yaaŋ nĩ mây *thùuk*  
do like this not *right*  
'To do like this is not right.'  
(informant)

- Malay (22) baju itu *kena* benar pada mu  
shirt that *right* exact to you  
'That shirt is just right for you.'  
(Echols & Shadiny 1994: 279)

- (23) tafsiranmu                      *kena*  
 your interpretation        right  
 'Your interpretation is *right* (on the mark).'  
 (Echols & Shadiny 1994: 279)

The fifth category of PM VERBS is the transitive verb with the adversative meaning of 'to incur or be hit by (an unpleasant thing or experience)'. It occurs in the following structure.

NP	+	<b>PM VERBS V</b>	+	NP
		[+adverse, -aux, +trans, + 'incur']		[+unpleasant]

This type of verb is a transitive verb occurring with an NP which refers to an unpleasant thing. The following are examples from Thai, Vietnamese, Khmer, and Malay.

- Thai (24)    khǎw    *thùuk*    yaa-phĩt  
                  he        *incur*    poison  
                  'He was poisoned.'  
    (Prasithrathsint 1985, 2001)

- Viet. (25)    anh áy *bị*        tai nạn  
                  he        *incur*    accident  
                  'He had an accident.'  
    (Thạch 1991)

- Khmer (26)    koon    *trəw*    phliiŋ  
                  child    *incur*    rain  
                  'The child got wet in the rain.'  
    (informant)

- Malay (27)    dia        *kena*    denda  
                  he        *incur*    fine  
                  'He incurred a fine.'  
    (Coope 1995: 170)

- (28)    tangannya    *kena*    cat        basah  
                  his hand        *incur*    color    wet  
                  'He got wet paint on his hands.'  
    (Echols & Shadiny 1994: 279)

### 3.6 The adversative auxiliary verb functioning as the adversative passive marker meaning 'to come in contact with or experience' (VI)

The sixth category is the type that this study focuses on. It is the auxiliary verb functioning as the adversative passive marker. Its meaning is similar to the fifth category, but since it occurs with another verb referring to an unpleasant action, the meaning of PM VERBS in this category is 'to come in contact

with or undergo'. The subject is always animate. The structure of the adversative passive is as follows.

NP + PM VERBS VI + V  
[+animate] [+adverse, +aux, + 'contact'] [+trans, + 'unpleasant']

Examples of the verbs in this category are (1)-(4) above.

### 3.7 The non-adversative auxiliary verb meaning 'must or have to' (VII)

This category of verbs has the meaning of *obligation*, which I interpret as non-adversative. However, it is not difficult to see how such a meaning is derived from the meaning of 'undergo' in the sixth category. When one undergoes an unpleasant experience, one does not like it. If one cannot avoid it, one has to do it as an obligation. There is a sense of being forced to do it. The unpleasantness of the action is implied. Syntactically, the verb is an auxiliary followed by another verb. The subject is always animate. The structure of a construction containing this type of verb is as follows.

NP + PM VERBS VII + V  
[+animate] [-adverse, +aux, +'obligation']

### Examples:

Thai (29) chǎn *thùuk* pay ɲaan theɛn câaw-naay  
 I *have to* go party replace boss  
 'I had to go to the party on behalf of my boss.'  
 (informant)

Viet. (30) tôi *bị* đi ngay bây giờ  
I *have to* go right now  
'I have to go right now.'

(Thach 1991)



#### 4. Grammaticalization

Evidence from my studies of change in the passive in Thai (Prasithrathsint 1985, 2001) reveals a process of grammaticalization of a lexical verb into a passive marking auxiliary verb. At the final stage the passive marker becomes a real grammatical word--the meaning has been bleached and very generalized. The lexical verb /thùuk/ 'to touch or hit off the target' in Thai has developed into /thùuk/ meaning 'to incur', which later became an auxiliary marking an adversative passive. Then this auxiliary became the marker of the neutral passive in Thai. These four stages of development are clearly supported by diachronic evidence. They are represented by Categories I, V, VI, and VIII shown in Section 3. The emergence of the other categories cannot be definitively determined due to a lack of evidence.

Evidence from some other Southeast Asian languages that do not have passive constructions also supports the grammaticalization process. Since items at later stages imply those at earlier stages, we can formulate a theory for Southeast Asian languages that if a language has a neutral passive marker, it is likely to have an adversative passive marker and a lexical verb meaning 'to incur' and one meaning 'to hit off exactly.' On the other hand, if it does not have a passive, it may have a lexical verb with related meaning. The first one to emerge should be the one meaning 'to hit off exactly' (Category I) followed by the others in the order signified by the numerals in 3. Phuthai and Nantan Zhuang have only two categories (I and II)--the transitive and intransitive verbs meaning 'to hit off exactly'--/thĩʔ/ in Phuthai and /tĩw/ in Nantan Zhuang.

Evidence from Tai Nuea spoken in Yunnan Province, China, supports the stages of grammaticalization. The word /cò/ in this language has multiple meanings, which are parallel to the PM VERB categories shown above. The adversative passive marker in this language is also likely to have developed from /cò/, meaning 'to incur'. The sixth category in which /cò/ is an

auxiliary functioning as the adversative passive marker is also found in this language, but always with an Agent NP, such as /kón-khǎw/ 'men' or 'they' in Example (34) below.

Tai Nuea (34) *cò*      kón-khǎw      sēw      kǎa  
*PSSV.* men/they      catch      go  
 '(He) was caught by some men.'  
 (Prasithrathsint 1992:887)

It is very likely that this pattern foreshadows the adversative passive without the Agent NP.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings in this study show that the passive markers in Southeast Asian languages are auxiliary verbs that are grammaticalized from lexical verbs originally meaning 'to touch or hit off exactly.' The process of grammaticalization is complicated and involves several stages. This brings about the multiple meanings of the words.

It is remarkable that all the stages of grammaticalization are common to all the Southeast Asian languages under study, as evidenced in the parallel multiple meanings or polysemic characteristics of the words, which in one type of environment are used as the adversative passive markers in the languages. Further study is needed to determine whether the semantic change inferred from this study is a specific Southeast Asian areal feature or a universal trait.

## Notes

1. I am grateful to Jim Placzek, Nick Enfield, Pranee Kullavanijaya, and Kingkarn Thepkanjana for their valuable comments, which have helped me improve this paper. Many thanks go to Michael Crabtree for editing this paper.
2. In his paper, Thạch (1991) argues that there is not a passive voice in Vietnamese. He regards the verb / bị/ as a lexical

verb and functions as the main verb in a sentence. Therefore, it should be emphasized here that I only took examples from his paper, but my position is opposite to his. I maintain that there is a passive in Vietnamese and such a sentence such as (2) is a passive construction with /bɨ/ as a passive marker.

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