

NOMINALIZATION AND CATEGORIZATION OF VERBS IN THAI¹

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1. Introduction

Nominalization refers to “the process of forming a noun from some other word class (e.g. *red-ness*) or (in classical Transformational Grammar especially) the derivation of a noun phrase from an underlying clause (e.g. *His answering of the letter...* from *He answered the letter*)” (Cystal 1991: 232-234).

This study deals with the first type of nominalization, which is labeled as “lexical nominalization” by Givón (1984: 498)². It is a process of lexical formation or word formation. In Thai, lexical nominalization means the process of deriving nouns from verbs, which can be done in several ways. The present study focuses only on deriving abstract nouns from verbs. This process may be specially labeled as “abstract nominalization” and the derived nouns as “abstract nominals” (see Prasithrathsint 1997).

Abstract nominals in Thai are marked by either *kaan-* (การ) or *khwaam-* (ความ); for example:

1. <i>kin</i>	‘to eat’	→ <i>kaan-kin</i>	‘eating’
2. <i>phátthanaa</i>	‘to develop’	→ <i>kaan-phátthanaa</i>	‘development’
3. <i>sadεεŋ</i>	‘to perform’	→ <i>kaan-sadεεŋ</i>	‘performance’
4. <i>sùk</i>	‘to be happy’	→ <i>khwaam-sùk</i>	‘happiness’
5. <i>yúttitham</i>	‘to be just’	→ <i>khwaam-yúttitham</i>	‘justice’
6. <i>cīŋcay</i>	‘to be sincere’	→ <i>khwaam-cīŋcay</i>	‘sincerity’

According to Prasithrathsint (1997), the nominalizers *kaan-* and *khwaam-* developed from the lexical nouns *kaan* ‘work, affair, matter’, and *khwaam* ‘sense or substance of a matter; legal case, lawsuit’, respectively. The study also shows that *kaan-* nominalization emerged after *khwaam-* nominalization. In the Sukhothai period (the 13th century), three incidences of *khwaam-* nominalization were found. The *kaan-* nominalization, which is the most general pattern today, emerged in the late Ayutthaya period, i.e. around four centuries later, but became productive in the 20th century.

There are interesting questions concerning these two nominalizers in Thai; for example: “Why does Thai need two nominalizers?” “How are they different?” Are they complementarily distributed among the verbs in Thai? Prasithrathsint (1996) shows that

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² The other type of nominalization is “grammatical nominalization”, which refers to “the process via which a prototypical verbal clause—either a complete sentence (including the subject) or a verb phrase (excluding the subject) is converted into a noun phrase.” (Givón 1984: 498)

the two nominalizers differ in their occurrence in speech styles; i.e., *kaan-* nominals tend to occur more frequently in academic writing and *khwaam-* nominals in description and narration.

It is important to note that choosing *kaan-* or *khwaam-* to add to a verb is not at all arbitrary. There seem to be some rules that control the choice. However, so far there has been no attempt to explain precisely when to use *kaan-* and when to use *khwaam-*. On the contrary, there are only observations; for instance, Haas (1964: 29, 82) notes that when placed before active verbs to form noun derivatives, *kaan-* can almost always be rendered in English by the suffix *-ing* and sometimes by *-ion*, *-sion*, *-al*, *-ance/-ence*, and *-ment*. As for *khwaam-*, she says that it is usually rendered in English by *-ness*, *-ity*, *-ment*, *-ance/ence*, *-(t)ion*, *-(t)ude*, *-ure*, *-y*, *-ery*, *-ship*, *-dom*, and sometimes *-ing*. Yaemnadda (1987) suggests that *khwaam-* occurs with verbs, adjectives³, and nouns, but *kaan-* with verbs only. He also adds that generally nominals with *kaan-* are similar to gerunds in English and that *kaan-* signifies movement whereas *khwaam-* signifies stability.

Suggesting that they are differentiated by types of verb, Morev (2004) states that *kaan-* is used for converting verbs, particularly action verbs, into abstract nouns, and that *khwaam-* is used for turning non-action verbs; i.e., verbs denoting states, feelings, qualities and properties into abstract nouns. He also suggests that in some cases both can be used with the same verb, but the meaning of the derived nominals will be different, e.g. *kaan-taay* ‘dying’, ‘death’ (a name of process) vs. *khwaam-taay* ‘death’.

As can be seen from the above observations, *kaan-* and *khwaam-* overlap to a considerable extent. Nevertheless, it can be generalized that *kaan-* is used with action verbs and *khwaam-* with non-action or stative verbs. However, this generalization is not completely valid because there are counterexamples. In actuality, some non-action verbs, which should be nominalized with *khwaam-*, are found to be nominalized with *kaan-*; for example:

7. <i>rápuruú</i>	‘to perceive’	→ <i>kaan-rápuruú</i>	‘perception’
		* <i>khwaam-rápuruú</i>	
8. <i>dâyvin</i>	‘to hear’	→ <i>kaan-dâyvin</i>	‘hearing’
		* <i>khwaam-dâyvin</i>	
9. <i>dâyklîn</i>	‘to smell’	→ <i>kaan-dâyklîn</i>	‘smelling’
		* <i>khwaam-dâyklîn</i>	
10. <i>rianruú</i>	‘to learn’	→ <i>kaan-rianruú</i>	‘learning’
		* <i>khwaam-rianruú</i>	
11. <i>tràtsaruú</i>	‘to be enlightened’	→ <i>kaan-tràtsaruú</i>	‘enlightenment’
		* <i>khwaam-tràtsaruú</i>	
12. <i>damrogyuú</i>	‘to exist’	→ <i>kaan-damrogyuú</i>	‘existence’
		* <i>khwaam-damrogyuú</i>	
13. <i>wíkhŕɔ́</i>	‘to analyze’	→ <i>kaan-wíkhŕɔ́</i>	‘analysis’
		* <i>khwaam-wíkhŕɔ́</i>	
14. <i>phakphǎn</i>	‘to rest’	→ <i>kaan-phakphǎn</i>	‘rest’
		* <i>khwaam-phakphǎn</i>	

³ In this study, adjectives in Thai are considered to be a sub-class of verbs called “adjectival verbs”, because syntactically they behave like verbs.

In addition, some verbs are found to occur with both *kaan-* and *khwaam-*; for example:

15. <i>rŭ̄prǎn</i>	‘to hurry’	→ <i>kaan-rŭ̄prǎn</i>	‘hurry’
		→ <i>khwaam-rŭ̄prǎn</i>	‘hurry’
16. <i>klomklĭn</i>	‘to assimilate’	→ <i>kaan-klomklĭn</i>	‘assimilation’
		→ <i>khwaam-klomklĭn</i>	‘assimilation’
17. <i>rŭ̄ammĭ</i>	‘to cooperate’	→ <i>kaan-rŭ̄ammĭ</i>	‘cooperation’
		→ <i>khwaam-rŭ̄ammĭ</i>	‘cooperation’
18. <i>klĭanwǎy</i>	‘to move’	→ <i>kaan-klĭanwǎy</i>	‘movement’
		→ <i>khwaam-klĭanwǎy</i>	‘movement’
19. <i>chŭ̄aylĭa</i>	‘to assist’	→ <i>kaan-chŭ̄aylĭa</i>	‘assistance’
		→ <i>khwaam-chŭ̄aylĭa</i>	‘assistance’
20. <i>anukhrǎ</i>	‘to subsidize’	→ <i>kaan-anukhrǎ</i>	‘subsidy, subsidization’
		→ <i>khwaam-anukhrǎ</i>	‘subsidy, subsidization’
21. <i>taay</i>	‘to die, to be dead’	→ <i>kaan-taay</i>	‘dying, death’
		→ <i>khwaam-taay</i>	‘dying, death’
22. BUT <i>kĕt</i>	‘to be born’	→ <i>kaan-kĕt</i>	‘birth’;
		→ * <i>khwaam-kĕt</i>	‘birth’

The examples above show irregularities in deriving abstract nouns from verbs in Thai. However, those irregularities may be superficial, and there may be some explanations for their occurrences. This study aims to provide such explanations. The above-mentioned suggestions given by Morev (2004) serve as hypotheses on the difference between the two nominalizers with reference to verbal categories in Thai.

Therefore, this study attempts to find out which types of verbs are nominalized by *kaan-* and which by *khwaam-* and in what ways they are differentiated.

The data on which the analysis is based are 5,600 verbs in Thai, which consist of *kaan-/khwaam-* nominalized verbs found in a two-million-word corpus of current Thai, and verbs taken from *the Royal Institute Dictionary of Standard Thai* (1999).

2. The frequencies of three patterns of nominalization in Thai

Based on an analysis of the frequency of the occurrences of verbs with *kaan-*, *khwaam-*, or both *kaan-* and *khwaam-* in the data, it can be summarized that abstract nominalization in Thai can be divided into three patterns, and that the *kaan-* pattern is the most frequent. Next is the *khwaam-* pattern, and the *kaan-/khwaam-* pattern is the least frequent (see Table 1). The result confirms the findings in Prasithrathsint (1997) that *kaan-* is the most general nominalizer in present-day Thai.

Table 1: *The frequencies of the three patterns of nominalization in Thai*

Patterns of nominalization	Frequency (percentage)
<i>kaan-</i>	51
<i>khwaam-</i>	33
<i>kaan-/khwaam-</i>	16
total	100

3. Three categories of verbs in Thai

An analysis of each of the nominalized verbs in the data and its syntactic-semantic environments enabled me to divide the verbs into three categories according to their occurrences in each of the nominalization patterns mentioned in Section 2. The three categories of verbs are labeled here as **perceptible**, **imperceptible**, and **balanced** verbs.

3.1 Perceptible verbs

Perceptible verbs occur with *kaan-* only. They represent concepts that are easy to understand or characterize. They may be action or non-action verbs, and their meanings are perceivable due to certain common features or standards shared by native speakers.

Examples:

23. <i>kôm</i>	‘to bend’	→ <i>kaan-kôm</i> ; * <i>khwaam-kôm</i>
24. <i>klàaw</i>	‘to state’	→ <i>kaan-klàaw</i> ; * <i>khwaam-klàaw</i>
25. <i>kəət</i>	‘to be born’	→ <i>kaan-kəət</i> ; * <i>khwaam-kəət</i>
26. <i>kin</i>	‘to eat’	→ <i>kaan-kin</i> ; * <i>khwaam-kin</i>
27. <i>khăy</i>	‘to sell’	→ <i>kaan-khăy</i> ; * <i>khwaam-khăy</i>
28. <i>khuy</i>	‘to talk’	→ <i>kaan-khuy</i> ; * <i>khwaam-khuy</i>
29. <i>khamooy</i>	‘to steal’	→ <i>kaan-khamooy</i> ; * <i>khwaam-khamooy</i>
30. <i>khəəpkhun</i>	‘to thank’	→ <i>kaan-khəəpkhun</i> ; * <i>khwaam-khəəpkhun</i>
31. <i>càtkaan</i>	‘to manage’	→ <i>kaan-càtkaan</i> ; * <i>khwaam-càtkaan</i>
32. <i>khâwruâm</i>	‘to participate’	→ <i>kaan-khâwruâm</i> ; * <i>khwaam-khâwruâm</i>
33. <i>khoónphóp</i>	‘to discover’	→ <i>kaan-khoónphóp</i> ; * <i>khwaam-khoónphóp</i>
34. <i>nénam</i>	‘to introduce’	→ <i>kaan-nénam</i> ; * <i>khwaam-nénam</i>
35. <i>páíruúp</i>	‘to reform’	→ <i>kaan-páíruúp</i> ; * <i>khwaam-páíruúp</i>
36. <i>àthibaay</i>	‘to explain’	→ <i>kaan-àthibaay</i> ; * <i>khwaam-àthibaay</i>
37. <i>àphípraay</i>	‘to discuss’	→ <i>kaan-àphípraay</i> ; * <i>khwaam-àphípraay</i>
38. <i>huǎrɔ́</i>	‘to laugh’	→ <i>kaan-huǎrɔ́</i> ; * <i>khwaam-huǎrɔ́</i>
39. <i>hây</i>	‘to give’	→ <i>kaan-hây</i> ; * <i>khwaam-hây</i>
40. <i>yùt</i>	‘to stop’	→ <i>kaan-yùt</i> ; * <i>khwaam-yùt</i>
41. <i>hăyay</i>	‘to breathe’	→ <i>kaan-hăyay</i> ; * <i>khwaam-hăyay</i>
42. <i>sănyaa</i>	‘to promise’	→ <i>kaan-sănyaa</i> ; * <i>khwaam-sănyaa</i>
43. <i>sănsăən</i>	‘to praise’	→ <i>kaan-sănsăən</i> ; * <i>khwaam-sănsăən</i>
45. <i>sòŋsăəm</i>	‘to promote’	→ <i>kaan-sòŋsăəm</i> ; * <i>khwaam-sòŋsăəm</i>
46. <i>ànúyâat</i>	‘to permit’	→ <i>kaan-ànúyâat</i> ; * <i>khwaam-ànúyâat</i>

As can be seen from examples 23-46 and also examples 7-14 in section 1, the concepts represented by the verbs are discernible no matter whether they are associated with physical or mental activities. In terms of syntactic characteristics, they can be transitive or intransitive. In terms of semantic features, they can be verbs of activity, process, bodily sensation, transitional event, etc.

3.2 Imperceptible verbs

Imperceptible verbs occur with *khwaam-* only. In contrast with perceptible verbs, imperceptible verbs represent concepts that are difficult to understand or characterize.

Their meanings may vary among native speakers. In accordance with Morev's observations, these verbs denote values, feelings, qualities and properties.

Examples:

47. <i>klom</i>	'to be round'	→ <i>khwaam-klom</i> ; * <i>kaan-klom</i>
48. <i>klâa</i>	'to be brave'	→ <i>khwaam-klâa</i> ; * <i>kaan-klâa</i>
49. <i>kwâaŋ</i>	'to be wide'	→ <i>khwaam-kwâaŋ</i> ; * <i>kaan-kwâaŋ</i>
50. <i>sûuŋ</i>	'to be high, tall'	→ <i>khwaam-sûuŋ</i> ; * <i>kaan-sûuŋ</i>
51. <i>sadùak</i>	'to be convenient'	→ <i>khwaam-sadùak</i> ; * <i>kaan-sadùak</i>
52. <i>khayǎn</i>	'to be diligent'	→ <i>khwaam-khayǎn</i> ; * <i>kaan-khayǎn</i>
53. <i>khǒm</i>	'to be bitter'	→ <i>khwaam-khǒm</i> ; * <i>kaan-khǒm</i>
54. <i>campen</i>	'to be necessary'	→ <i>khwaam-campen</i> ; * <i>kaan-campen</i>
55. <i>cûucûi</i>	'to be fussy'	→ <i>khwaam-cûucûi</i> ; * <i>kaan-cûucûi</i>
56. <i>chalàat</i>	'to be intelligent'	→ <i>khwaam-chalàat</i> ; * <i>kaan-chalàat</i>
57. <i>ŋôo</i>	'to be stupid'	→ <i>khwaam-ŋôo</i> ; * <i>kaan-ŋôo</i>
58. <i>rew</i>	'to be quick'	→ <i>khwaam-rew</i> ; * <i>kaan-rew</i>
59. <i>rîap</i>	'to be smooth'	→ <i>khwaam-rîap</i> ; * <i>kaan-rîap</i>
60. <i>rîapŋâay</i>	'to be simple'	→ <i>khwaam-rîapŋâay</i> ; * <i>kaan-rîapŋâay</i>
61. <i>méettaa</i>	'to be kind'	→ <i>khwaam-méettaa</i> ; * <i>kaan-méettaa</i>
62. <i>mâncay</i>	'to be confident'	→ <i>khwaam-mâncay</i> ; * <i>kaan-mâncay</i>
63. <i>rûŋriáŋ</i>	'to prosper'	→ <i>khwaam-rûŋriáŋ</i> ; * <i>kaan-rûŋriáŋ</i>
64. <i>caydam</i>	'to be merciless'	→ <i>khwaam-caydam</i> ; * <i>kaan-caydam</i>
65. <i>caysô</i>	'to be easily scared'	→ <i>khwaam-caysô</i> ; * <i>kaan-caysô</i>
66. <i>caydôn</i>	'to be soft-hearted'	→ <i>khwaam-caydôn</i> ; * <i>kaan-caydôn</i>
67. <i>cayhăay</i>	'to be shocked'	→ <i>khwaam-cayhăay</i> ; * <i>kaan-cayhăay</i>
68. <i>khriŋ</i>	'to be solemn'	→ <i>khwaam-khriŋ</i> ; * <i>kaan-khriŋ</i>

Examples 47-68 show that imperceptible verbs in Thai tend to be adjectival verbs, which are rendered in English by adjectives. Syntactically, they are intransitive verbs. Semantically, they are verbs of quality. Their meanings are not easy to discern because their semantic components seem to vary among speakers. However, the degree of quality represented by *khwaam*- nominals derived from an imperceptible verb can be measured by certain values or standards and perceived as a volume or amount. Thus, when one says *khăw mii khwaam-campen* (he has necessity) or *khăw mii khwaam-méettaa* (he has kindness), it means something like 'he has/possesses an amount of necessity' and 'he has/possesses an amount of kindness.' This is evaluated or judged by the speaker's own values.

3.3 Balanced verbs

Verbs of the third category are the most problematic; they are ambivalent as to their ability to occur with either *kaan*- or *khwaam*-. They are labeled here as "balanced verbs", which seem to have characteristics of both perceptible and imperceptible verbs. Actually, the fact that this category exists seems to strengthen the belief that *kaan*- and *khwaam*- have certain inherent meanings. Examples of balanced verbs are 15-22 above and the following examples (69-90).

69. <i>krat^hh^hlón</i>	‘to be enthusiastic’
70. <i>klomkl^hin</i>	‘to assimilate’
71. <i>klua</i>	‘to be afraid’
72. <i>kròot</i>	‘to be angry’
73. <i>kháw^hcay</i>	‘to understand’
74. <i>khóikooŋ</i>	‘to cheat’
75. <i>kháatwǎŋ</i>	‘to expect’
76. <i>rak</i>	‘to love’
77. <i>ŋǎp</i>	‘to be silent’
78. <i>carəəntəəptoo</i>	‘to grow’
79. <i>ch^hamān</i>	‘to be sure’
80. <i>taay</i>	‘to die, to be dead’
81. <i>thəmtua</i>	‘to be modest’
82. <i>thaarun</i>	‘to be cruel’
83. <i>napth^h</i>	‘to respect’
84. <i>pramàat</i>	‘to be careless’
85. <i>plianpleeŋ</i>	‘to change’
86. <i>tháathaay</i>	‘to challenge’
87. <i>maw</i>	‘to be drunk’
88. <i>sǎncay</i>	‘to be interested’
89. <i>phǎaphêe</i>	‘to be generous’
90. <i>óuàt</i>	‘to boast’

The following sentences show some balanced verbs in context. It will be interesting to see that the nominals with *kaan-* and those with *khwaam-* have different meanings.

91. *taay* ‘to die, to be dead’

- *kaan-taay* *yàaŋ-saŋòp* *pen* *thǐ-pràatthanaǎ* *khǎŋ* *thuk khon*
dying like-peace be place-desire of every person
‘Peaceful dying is desirable to everyone.’ (Here *kaan-taay* means the act of dying.)
- *chǎn* *dāay* *khàaw* *kaan-taay* *khǎŋ* *khǎw* *lǎew*
I get news death of he already
‘I have heard the news of his death.’ (*kaan-taay* refers to an objective incident in life.)
- *khwaam-taay* *pen* *sŋ* *nāa-klua*
death be thing fearful
‘Death is a fearful thing.’ (The speaker means ‘the body of death’)

92. *klua* ‘to be afraid’

- *kaan-klua* *phǐ* *pen* *sŋ* *thǐ* *athibaay* *dāay* *yāak*
fear ghost be thing that explain can difficult

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‘Fear of ghosts is something difficult to explain.’ (generally speaking)

- *thuk khon mii khwaam-klua kɔ̀ɔn sɔ̀ɔp*
every person have fear before taking an exam
‘Everyone has fear (an amount of fear) before taking an exam.’

93. *kròt* ‘to be angry’

- *kaan-kròt àat tham-hây khun kɛ̀ɛ rew*
Getting angry may cause you to be old fast
‘Being angry may cause you to get old fast.’ (generally speaking)
- *chǎn kamlaj phayaayaam rájáp khwaam-kròt*
I PRO try stop anger
‘I am trying to stop my anger.’ (specific meaning)

94. *kháwcay* ‘to understand’

- *kaan-kháwcay phuu-ín pen sîŋ campen*
understanding others be thing necessary
‘Understanding others is a necessity.’ (general meaning)
- *khɔ̀ɔpkhun sǎmráp khwaam-kháwcay*
thank you for understanding
‘Thank you for understanding.’ (specific meaning)

95. *khóikooŋ* ‘to cheat’

- *kaan-khóikooŋ tham-hây khǎw tít-khuŋ*
cheating cause him imprisoned
‘Cheating caused him to be imprisoned.’ (an act of cheating)
- *khwaam-khóikooŋ pen laksanà dèn khɔ̀ɔŋ khǎw*
cheating be characteristic prominent of he
‘Cheating is a prominent characteristic of his.’ (the quality of cheating)

96. *kháatwǎŋ* ‘to expect’

- *kaan-kháatwǎŋ àat tham-hây khun phítwǎŋ*
expectation may cause you be disappointed
‘Expectation may cause you to be disappointed.’ (general meaning)
- *chǎn mii khwaam-kháatwǎŋ súŋ kǎw-kàp ŋaan khɔ̀ɔŋ khǎw*
I have expectation high about work of he
‘I have high expectation about his work.’ (specific meaning)

97. *rak* 'to love'

- *kaan-rak* *khon-ĭn* *tham-hây* *raw* *mii* *khwaam-suk*
 loving others cause we have happiness
 'Loving others makes us happy.' (general meaning)
- *dèk* *thĩ* *kàat* *khwaam-rak* *mak* *mii* *panhăă*
 child that lack love tend to have problem
 'A child who needs love tends to have problems.' (amount of love)

4. Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have attempted to show how *kaan-* and *khwaam-* nominalizers are different in their inherent meanings and their distribution with verbs. It is found that verbs in Thai can be divided into three categories according to their ability of occurring with *kaan-* or *khwaam-*; i.e., perceptible verbs, imperceptible verbs and balanced verbs.

Perceptible verbs are the majority of verbs in Thai. They are either transitive or intransitive, action or non-action, physical or mental. They are different from imperceptible verbs in that they represent concepts that are more perceivable and do not designate a quality or a property of a person or a thing. When they are nominalized they tend to be more objective, more scientific and less specific than imperceptible verbs, which, in contrast, are less objective in terms of the perceived concepts, less scientific, more personal and more specific. Also, nominals with *khwaam-* tend to signify an amount or volume of a certain quality, which is mostly value-oriented. In addition, imperceptible verbs are normally adjectival verbs, which equal adjectives in English.

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