

Foreign Language Compounds in Thai: Evidence for Morphological and Structural Influence

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1. Introduction

Among the things that impress students of the Thai language are the richness and flexibility of the language, an important source of which are the numerous loan words in Thai from other languages - Sanskrit, Pali, Khmer, Chinese, Malay, Portuguese, English, etc. Thai has borrowed a large number of words from the older Indo-Aryan (Indic) languages Sanskrit and Pali and continues to use these two classical languages (especially Sanskrit) as sources for much of its learned and technical vocabulary. In more recent times, English has served as a source for vocabulary, especially for words referring to material items and concepts associated with Western culture.

This paper looks at nominal compounds in Thai of the type adjunct noun + head noun (e.g. "classroom," "schoolteacher") that have been formed from Indic and English elements and investigates to what extent this pattern of compound formation has influenced Thai nominal compound formation, originally of the type head + adjunct.

Noss (1964) classifies among "exceptions to this [i.e. head + adjunct] pattern" in Thai those compounds where "the first constituent is not the head, and hence the compound is irregular." (Noss 1964: 64). He cites a number of examples of this type of "irregular" compound including:

mahāa widthajalaj
great college
'university'

èeg àg-kharāad-cathūud
first high-ranking diplomat
'ambassador'

Interestingly, Noss cites the following example as containing the "same morpheme /èeg/ in normal compound lexeme: /naan/ 'woman' /naan-èeg/ 'heroine'" (Noss 1964: 65).

In this paper it will be argued that both types of noun compounds (adjunct + head and head + adjunct) are "regular" in Thai in as much as both types are more or less productive. The native Thai formation (head + adjunct) is the unmarked type and is used to form compound

nouns from native Thai elements, but frequently also from originally non-native elements. The other type of formation (adjunct + head) is used to form compound nouns from mainly non-native (Indic and English) elements, but is used in certain circumstances with native elements or in mixed native + non-native formations. It appears that the choice of which type of formation to use is based, to some extent at least, on stylistic and semantic/functional considerations.

The discussion of nominal compounds in this paper is restricted mainly to binary collocations of nouns. Thai compounds of the type noun + verb phrase (e.g. rāan khāay yaa 'drugstore,' literally 'store sell drug'), noun + adjective (e.g. caj dii '(to be) kind,' literally 'heart good') or adjective + noun (e.g. dii caj '(to be) glad,' literally 'good heart') are not dealt with here in detail.

The data for this paper was gleaned from books, newspapers, journals, commercial signs, telephone directories, and radio broadcasts. All of the Thai examples have been checked with native speakers of Thai.¹ The transcription used here for Thai is based on that found in Noss (1964) and Haas (1982). The transcription for Sanskrit is the standard system as found in Gonda (1966).

2. Nominal Compound in Indic (Sanskrit and Pali) and English

The older Indo-Aryan languages, Sanskrit and Pali, are well known for their extensive use of often long nominal compounds. For the purposes of this paper, two related types of Indic compounds are of interest: dependent (tatpuruṣa) compounds and descriptive (karmadharāya) compounds. Both types are grouped together as determinative compounds. This type of compound noun is characterized by an inflected head noun preceded by an uninflected noun or adjective stem (i.e. not marked for number and case). Whitney (1889: 489) describes determinative compounds in Sanskrit:

A noun or adjective is often combined into a compound with a preceding determining or qualifying word - a noun, or adjective, or adverb....

This is the class of compounds which is of most general and frequent occurrence in all branches of Indo-European languages.

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The following are some examples of Sanskrit determinative nominal compounds: (Whitney 1889: 489-490, 495)

adjunct + head

deva senā

god army

'army of gods'

jīva loka

life world

'world of the living'

brahma gavi

priest cow

'the priest's cow'

eka vīra

one hero

'sole hero'

rāja rṣi

king sage

'king-sage'

English compound nouns are generally of this type also: an inflected head noun preceded by a uninflected (i.e. unmarked singular) qualifying adjunct noun:

adjunct + head

tooth brush (toothbrush)

Other similar examples of English compound nouns include: notebook, telephone directory, toolmaker, city hall, scholar-poet, classroom, schoolteacher, department head, football, bookshelf, etc.

3. Nominal Compounds Used in Thai

3.1 Nominal Compounds of the Type Head + Adjunct

Noss (1964: 63) describes compounds in Thai as

characteristically endocentric: the first constituent is the head and

all other constituents are modifiers; ... In nearly all cases, moreover, the form-class of the compound lexeme is the same as that of the head constituent when it occurs as an independent lexeme.

The examples below show the the type head + adjunct. The term "adjunct" is used here in Noss's sense of "modifier." This order of elements is the canonical Thai type: a head followed by modifiers, which include adjective phrases, demonstratives, complexes of numeral + classifier (but not cardinal numerals used without classifiers), relative clauses, and noun adjuncts. A number of compounds of non-native elements are also of the type head + adjunct. (An asterisk * appears before items in this sub-section which have the order adjunct + head.)

- | | <u>head</u> | <u>adjunct</u> | |
|----|--|------------------------|------------------|
| 1) | khryaŋ
equipment
'curry ingredients' | karii
curry | (Noss 1964: 61) |
| 2) | khii
excrement
'eye secretion' | taa
eye | (Noss 1964: 661) |
| 3) | hōŋ
room
'bathroom' | náam
water | |
| 4) | dèg
child
'temple boy' | wád
temple | |
| 5) | máleeŋ
insect
'house fly' | wan
day | |
| 6) | ráan
shop
'restaurant' | aahāan
food | |
| 7) | sāmūd
book
'telephone directory' | thoorásab
telephone | |

- 8) biə sɪŋ (biə < English 'beer'; sɪŋ < Sanskrit simha 'lion')
 beer Singha
 'Singha Beer' (a popular brand of Thai beer; literally: "Lion Beer")

But notice the following brand name, which is probably more closely associated with Western products because of its name. It shows the order adjunct + head.

- *9) kalsbæg biə
 Carlsberg beer
 'Carlsberg Beer'
 (a more recently introduced beer, brewed in Thailand by a subsidiary of a Danish brewery)
- 10) thánaakhaan krunthêeb phaandichakaan
 bank Bangkok commerce
 'Bangkok Bank of Commerce'
- 11) mahāawidthajalaj thammaśāt
 university jurisprudence
 Thammasat University'

But the following name of another major Bangkok university, named after King Rama V, has the word order adjunct + head. Possibly because it is based on a proper name, it has this order.

- *12) culaalonṅkoon mahāawidthajalaj
 Chulalongkorn university
 'Chulalongkorn University'
- 13) sataj kantrii (from English)
 style country
 'country style'
- 14) sataj jūrōob (from English)
 style Europe
 'European style'

But notice the following formation with English loans which shows the English order adjunct + head:

- *15) thaj sataj (from English)
 Thai style
 Thai style'

One informant stated that this formation (thaj sataj 'Thai style') always occurs with this order (adjunct + head), while compounds of sataj 'style' with ameerikan 'American' or jüròob 'Europe(an)' have the order head + adjunct (i. e. sataj ameerikan 'American style' and sataj jüròob 'European style').

- 16) sàadsànáa phúd (< Sanskrit śāsana 'religion,' buddha 'Buddha')
 religion Buddha
 'Buddhism'

Parallel to (16) is a compound with the opposite order:

- *17) phúdtá sàadsànáa ²
 Buddha religion
 'Buddhism'

One informant stated that there is a semantic/functional distinction between (16) and (17). (phrá) phúdtá sàadsànáa refers to the totality of Buddhism as a way of life while sàadsànáa phúd refers to Buddhism as a religion among religions.

3.2. Nominal Compounds of the Type *Adjunct + Head*

A large number of compound nouns are used in Thai that have the order adjunct + head. The elements of these compounds are mostly loan words from Indic and English. Thomas J. Hudak (1987: 758) has written of compounds of Indic elements used in Thai that "most of these compounds seem to have been formed in modern Thai since they do not appear in either Sanskrit or Pali." Official and formal terms and proper names, especially names of business firms and newspapers, are frequently of this type. Occasionally the adjunct noun in the compound is a native Thai word while the head noun is originally a loan from Indic or English (see [27] and [32] below), but in (28) both parts of the compound are formed from native Thai elements. This type of

² or phrá phúdtá sàadsànáa with the honorific prefix phrá.

formation with a proper name as the adjunct preceding the head seems to be especially popular for the names of business firms. (An asterisk * before an item in this sub-section means that it has the order head + adjunct.)

adjunct + head

- 18) sǎjǎam rád (rád < Pali rattha 'kingdom, country')
Siam nation
'Siam Rath' (a major Thai daily newspaper)
- 19) krunthéeb thúrakit
Bangkok business
'Bangkok Business' (a Bangkok daily newspaper)
- 20) jǐipùn sǎan (sǎan < Sanskrit sāra 'summary, epitome')
Japan magazine
Japan Letter (newsletter of the Japan Foundation, Bangkok)
- 21) khǎaw sǎan (sǎan < Sanskrit sāra 'summary, epitome')
news message
'information'
- 22) thantà phēed (< Sanskrit danta 'tooth,' vaidya 'physician')
tooth physician
'dentist' (formal term)

The informal native Thai term for 'dentist' shows the usual Thai head + adjunct order:

- *23) mǎo fan
physician tooth
'dentist' (informal term)
- 24) naam bāt (< Sanskrit nāma 'name,' patra 'document')
name card
'business card'
- 25) sūriwong bók sentǎe (bók sentǎe < English 'book center')
Suriwong book center
'Suriwong Book Center' (a large bookstore in Chiang Mai)

- 26) chian màj pháat sàppalaaj (pháat sàppalaaj < English 'part supply'
Chiang Mai part supply
'Chiang Mai Parts Supply' (a business firm in Chiang Mai)
- 27) chian màj khòodsanaa (khòodsanaa < Sanskrit ghoṣaṇa
Chiang Mai advertising 'proclamation')
'Chiang Mai Advertising' (a business firm in Chiang Mai)
- 28) chian màj ryan phée
Chiang Mai house raft, float
Chiang Mai Floating Restaurant
(a lakeside Chiang Mai restaurant floating on pontoons)

This compound is itself formed from two compounds of the type head + adjunct and both parts are composed of native Thai words:

chian + màj (literally: 'city new')
head adjunct

ryan + phée
head adjunct

The following names of public (non-business) institutions in Chiang Mai (29, 30, 31), however, have the order head + adjunct:

- *29) mahāawidthajalaj chian màj
university Chiang Mai
'Chiang Mai University'
- *30) sūan sàd chian màj
garden animal Chiang Mai
'Chiang Mai Zoo'
- *31) sanāam bīn chian màj
field fly Chiang Mai
'Chiang Mai Airport'

The following medical term is composed of a native Thai adjunct noun followed by a borrowed English head word.

- 32) l̥yāt krúp (krúp < English 'group')
 blood group
 'blood type'

4. Conclusion

Formation of compound nouns of the type adjunct + head has been shown to be productive in Thai, especially when the elements used are non-native (Indic and English). This type of formation is also used occasionally to form compounds from native elements and from mixed native + non-native elements. From the examples presented here (and numerous others not shown) one can conclude that the importation and assimilation of Indic and English loan words and their characteristic pattern of compound formation (adjunct + head) has resulted in a widening of the stylistic and semantic repertoire of Thai rather than in replacement or structural change per se. The words for 'dentist' discussed above, mōo-fan and thantā-phēed, the one homely and informal, the other formal and official sounding, exemplify two currents that serve to make up the semantic and stylistic richness of the Thai language.

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