

# CHANGES IN THE PITCH CONTOURS OF UNACCENTED SYLLABLES IN SPOKEN THAI

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(This article is in fact a summary of Chapter VIII of the author's thesis : Samang 1971. In the thesis, she has set out to investigate the role of accent in Thai Grammar. The result of the investigation has led her to conclude that accent is a phonological feature, the various degrees of which are predictable by a series of 4 phonological rules operating on the surface structures of utterances. The generative approach is used in the thesis. According to this approach, accent has two functions in the grammar : the syntactic function and the interpretative function. The four previously mentioned phonological rules serve the syntactic function as they, in assigning various degrees of accent to syllables in utterances, show how utterances, with identical phonological representations, are contrastive. The interpretative function is to map the phonological representation of an utterance in a given surface structure onto its phonetic representation. Rules which serve the second function are called "Phonetic realization rules" and the changes in the pitch contours of unaccented syllables in spoken Thai may be predicted by some of these rules. However, since this is a phonetic conference, the author will not talk about the rules in this paper; but will confine herself to a discussion on how systematic the changes in the pitch contours of the tonal configurations of unaccented syllables are.)

## Introduction

The changes in the pitch contours of unaccented or unstressed syllables in spoken Thai have been mentioned by most linguists working on Thai phonology. Whitaker (1969); from his own and other linguists' findings, has summarized the changes in the following 5 rules. The symbols ~ and  $\leftarrow \longrightarrow$  are used by Whitaker to represent the changability of the tones.

- (1) Rule 1 : low ~ mid Applies to unstressed modals and unstressed syllables in derived polysyllabic words.

khǎw tɛaʔ paj      ←————→      kháw tɛa paj  
 “เขาจะไป”

- Rule 2 : high ~ mid Applies to same as rule 1.

sǒntháʔnaa      ←————→      sǒnthanaa  
 “สนทนา”

- Rule 3 : high ~ fall Applies to sentence final particles

sàʔ baaj dii rūuu khá      ←————→      sa baaj dii khá  
 “สบายดีหรือคะ”      “สบายดีค่ะ”

- Rule 4 : rise ~ high Applies to Q-morpheme and certain pronouns :

tɕháj mǎj      ←————→      tɕháj máj  
 “ใช่ไหม”

khǎw paj rūuu plaaw      ←————→      kháw paj rūuu plaaw  
 “เขาไปหรือเปล่า”

- Rule 5 : fall ~ high Applies to certain modals and neg-morpheme :

ʔaa kàat máj tɕháj rǒɔn      ←————→      ʔaa kàat máj tɕháj rǒɔn  
 “อากาศไม่ใช่อุ่น”

khǎw máj khǒɔj jáak tɛaʔ paj      ←————→      kháw máj khǒɔj jáak tɛa paj  
 “เขาไม่ค่อยอยากจะไป”

Whitaker calls these rules “stylistic tone changing rules”; but clearly the change which takes place in Rule 3 is a syntactic change and *not* a stylistic one; since by changing the tone on the final particle /kha/ from the high tone to a falling tone, we change an interrogative sentence into an answer or a statement. One thing which has been overlooked by Whitaker is the fact that the syllables in which these tone changes take place are all unaccented or unstressed (only Rule 1 and Rule 2 mention this). Moreover, the environment for these tone changing rules is much wider than what was stated by Whitaker. Rule 4, for instance, does not apply just to the so called “Q-morpheme” and certain pronouns; but also to the following unstressed syllables:



(2)

<u>sǎe</u> ʔòk <u>sǎe</u> tɕaj	↔	<u>sǎe</u> ʔòk <u>sǎe</u> tɕaj
“เสียอกเสียใจ”		
phít <u>mǎan</u> kan	↔	phít <u>mǎan</u> kan
“ผิดเหมือนกัน”		
<u>mǎaj</u> mǎaj wáj	↔	<u>mǎaj</u> mǎaj wáj
“หมาย ๆ ไว้”		
tham <u>sǎe</u> nǔaj	↔	tham <u>sá</u> nɯaj
“ทำเสียหน่อย”		

### Unaccented syllables

Before going on to describe the changes in the pitch contours of unaccented syllables, it is essential that the reader knows what the author means by “unaccented” so that he may compare the author’s findings with the pitches in his own pronunciation. Without going into the author’s accent placement rules, one may define unaccented syllables as follows:

- (3) (i) non-final syllable(s) in all polysyllabic words.

Examples : /wít thá jaa laj/ “วิทยาลัย”

- (ii) monosyllabic words which belong to the following word classes :

a) Personal pronouns

b) Demonstrative pronouns, when used anaphorically :

Example : /thɯɯ nii tɕaʔ paj nǎj/ “เธอจะไปไหน”

c) Classifiers

d) Prenumerals

Example : /ʔiik sǎam wan/ “อีกสามวัน”

e) Preverbs

Example : /mák tɕaʔ tɕɔŋ paj tham ɲaan/ “มักจะต้องไปทำงาน”

f) Postverbs

Example : /lèn jùu khá/ “เล่นอยู่ค่ะ”

g) Verb modifiers

Example : /dɯɯn ʔòk paj/ “เดินออกไป”

## h) Prepositions

Example : /jũu bon tóʔ/

“อยู่บนโต๊ะ”

## i) Conjunctions

Example : /wĩŋ sǎə nùəj/

“วิ่งเสียเหนื่อย”

## j) Negator

Example : /máj máj/

“ไม่ไหม”

## k) Sentence particles

Example : /paj rũu māj paj təa/

“ไปหรือไม่ไปจะ”

## l) The following verbs :

/mii/ “มี”

/maa/ “มา”

/paj/ “ไป”

/juu/ “อยู่”

/ʔaw/ “เอา”

/pen/ “เป็น”

(iii) The first syllable of an institutionalized compound.<sup>2</sup>

Examples : /khâat thun/ “ขาดทุน”

/rɔŋ tháaw/ “รองเท้า”

/jàaŋ raj/ “อย่างไร”

## (iv) The completely reduplicated forms :

Examples : /khon bāa bāa/

“คนบ้า ๆ”

/jaŋ jũn jũn jũn/

“ยังยุ่ง ๆ อยู่”

**Patterns of changes in the pitch contours**

The changes in the pitch contours of unaccented syllables may be summarized as follows :

## (4)

<u>All mid tone</u>	→	<u>mid pitch</u>	(i)
<u>low tone</u>	→	{ <u>mid pitch</u> , if the syllable is of the type C(C)V ?	(ii)
		<u>modified low pitch</u> / elsewhere	(iii)
<u>high tone</u>	→	{ <u>mid pitch</u> , if the syllable is of the type C(C)V ?	(iv)
		with the exception of all proper nouns.	(v)
		<u>high pitch</u> / elsewhere	(vi)
<u>falling tone</u>	→	<u>high pitch</u> in all cases	(vii)
<u>rising tone</u>	→	{ <u>modified low pitch</u> , if the syllable has a voiceless initial	(viii)
		<u>high pitch</u> / elsewhere	

In fact, one can see that there have been a collapsing of the pitch contours of five tones (three level tones and two dynamic tones) in accented syllables into 3 level pitch namely, mid [from (i, ii, iv)], modified low [from (iii) and (vii)] and high [from (v, vi, viii)]. We may present this contrast by using the diagrams below :

(5)

