

THAI AND VIETNAMESE : SOME ELEMENTS OF NOMINAL STRUCTURE COMPARED

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Professor Allen has remarked on the 'definition of languages as brothers if and only if they were once their father'.¹ This is a comment of wit upon Professor A. S. C. Ross's famous dictum which expressed, in somewhat extreme form, a fundamental assumption of traditional comparative philology.² Those who work in the field of South East Asian languages, dealing with problems of comparison of special complexity, will not be inclined to accept a simple hypothesis of genetic relationship as a basis for work. There is, rather, an attraction to the belief that useful work can be done by studying the relationships of linguistic systems and sub-systems without making an immediate assumption of relationship in genetic terms between language and language.

W. S. Allen has laid down certain fundamentals for such studies, one of the chief of which is the aim 'to reduce the stock of categories by the erection of more general systems than those established for the single languages'.³ In applying such methods it must be remembered that we are studying linguistic systems set up by investigators and not languages. Nevertheless the writers believe that it is not incorrect to reconnect with languages at an appropriate stage of the investigation. Work on system relationships ought eventually to be related to relationships between languages. By accepting the convenience of avoiding the intrusion of the genetic hypothesis at every turn, that concept need not be dismissed for ever.

Professor Nils M. Holmer has referred to languages where 'foreign elements often represent a heavy portion of the entire word material'.⁴ This statement is relevant to the languages under discussion here, where a very high proportion of lexical items in Vietnamese is attributable to Chinese loans (c. 50 per cent), and where Thai contains much lexical material of Khmer and Indic origin. We should perhaps be wise, therefore, to enter a warning against the immediate assumption that the existence of sets of cognates in two languages in our area affords evidence of genetic relationship between those languages. Even if the material concerned appears to be of considerable age we cannot dismiss the possibility that it results from a loan relationship.

In South East Asia we are in touch with receptive cultures in more or less

¹ W. S. Allen, 'Relationship in comparative linguistics', *TPS*, 1953, pp. 52-108.

² A. S. C. Ross, 'Philological probability problems', *J. R. Stat. Soc.*, ser. B, vol. 12, 1, pp. 19 ff.

³ Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁴ Nils M. Holmer, 'Lexical and morphological contacts between Siouan and Algonquian', *Lunds Universitets Årsskrift* N.F. Avd. 1, Bd. 45, 4, 1949, pp. 1-36.

close contact for prolonged periods at varying times and we have to deal with a remarkable and highly complex process of synthesis. This applies, in fact, not only to language as such but also in the fields of literature, religion, art, government and so on. By comparing in systematic typological terms we are not at once committed to a decision in terms of genetic relationship. We can in this way pay full regard to, for instance, the *Sprachbund* hypothesis,¹ which has interesting possibilities in our region. The idea of the 'mixed' language as expressed by H. Maspero with reference to Vietnamese may have its application at any rate at an intermediate stage of the investigation.

In an attempt to class phonetic, morphological, and syntactic elements with regard to relative age Professor Holmer has tentatively assigned syntactic elements to an early level. In the belief that the comparative study of syntactic structures *may, in this sense, eventually prove of value the writers offer, in this paper, some remarks on nominal phrase structures in Thai and Vietnamese.* The study is synchronic, based on the modern spoken language of the educated in Bangkok and Saigon. In making statements of this sort a common method of analysis and a common terminology are essential. No full and satisfactory statements of the Thai and Vietnamese structures under discussion have yet been published. The writers have found it useful to refer to the method and terminological framework used by H. F. Simon in his study of 'standard Chinese'.² Moreover, 'standard Chinese,' or rather the system constructed by H. F. Simon for the description of the nominal complex, is taken as a system of reference for the other languages.

Simon makes a statement of classes within the noun complex. The writers find that this method of analysis is meaningful in the cases of Thai and Vietnamese though they themselves prefer to adopt a method which takes account of dependent-non-dependent relations between the classes.

The Simon analysis applied to the three languages would give :

<i>Chinese</i>		<i>Thai</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>
Determinative	(Dave)	Determinative	Determinative
Determinator	(Dor)	Determinator	Determinator
Noun	(N)	Noun	Noun
Determinate	(Date)	Determinate	Determinate
Substantival suffix	(-S)	Preposition	Preposition
Substantival desegment (de-seg)		Attributive linking particle (ALP)	Attributive linking particle
		Post-noun particle (PNP)	Post-noun particle

¹ Trubetsky ; see M. B. Emeneau, 'India as a linguistic area', *Language*, 32, 1956, pp. 1-2.

² H. F. Simon, 'Two substantival complexes in Standard Chinese', *BSOAS*, 15, 2, 1952, pp. 327-55.

Class correspondences between the systems may be tabulated as follows :

	Chinese	Thai	Chinese	Vietnamese
Totals :	6	7	6	7
Correspondences :		13		13
		4		4
		<hr/>		<hr/>
		9		9
		<hr/>		<hr/>
		Thai	Vietnamese	
		7	7	14
Totals :				7
Correspondences :				<hr/>
				7
				<hr/>

Thus by creating generic systems from pairs of individual language systems it appears :

- (a) that a significant reduction of the number of classes is effected ;
- (b) that the reduction as between Thai and Vietnamese is greater than that between either of these systems and that of Chinese.

Furthermore, Thai-Vietnamese correspondences are again most numerous when sub-classes are examined. The Simon analysis of the noun complex in Chinese requires three sub-classes of Determinative and Determinator, and two sub-classes of Determinate.

The three systems include unrestricted determinates, but restricted determinate is not a useful sub-class in the case of Thai or Vietnamese.

The sub-class restricted determinator is not applicable to Thai or Vietnamese, though it is useful to state Generic and Measure determinators as sub-classes for all three systems.

A close examination of class members, the paradigmatic rather than the structural aspect of the analysis, might reveal closer correspondences between Thai and Vietnamese. For instance, it is interesting to note that within the paradigm of demonstrative determinatives Thai and Vietnamese exhibit three-term deictic systems as opposed to a two-term system in Chinese.

Chinese	Thai	Vietnamese	
<i>jeh</i>	<i>nîi</i>	<i>này</i>	this here
<i>nah</i>	<i>nân</i>	<i>đó</i>	that there
	<i>nôn</i>	<i>kia</i>	that yonder

ORDER IN THE NOUN COMPLEX

Chinese	Thai	Vietnamese
D-Dave G-Dor N	N G-Dor D-Dave	G-Dor N D-Dave
<i>jeh been shu</i>	<i>nánhsúuu lêm nîi</i>	<i>quyển sách này</i>
this item book	book item this	item book this
	' this book '	

In Thai and Vietnamese D-Dave occurs in final position.

The Simon analysis does not include a class of noun attribute because 'forms of an adjectival kind' are regarded as an integral part of the determinative noun.¹ The writers would prefer to set up such a class for Thai and Vietnamese regarding the 'stative verbs' when used as 'adjectives' as being down-grade forms within the nominal complex. In the following examples a class *attribute* is included for each language. The nature of the relationship of the general systems set out above is not affected by this since one term would be added to the class count of all three systems.

With attribute

Chinese	Thai	Vietnamese
D-Dave (G-Dor) Att N	N (G-Dor) Att D-Dave	(G-Dor) N Att D-Dave

In mooted contexts² Thai and Vietnamese exhibit an exact structural correspondence :

Thai	Vietnamese
G-Dor Att D-Dave	G-Dor Att D-Dave
<i>lèm yǎy nǐ</i>	<i>quyển lớn này</i> 'this large one'
item large this	item large this

With numerator

Chinese	Thai	Vietnamese
D-Dave N-Dave G-Dor N	N N-Dave G-Dor D-Dave	N-Dave G-Dor N D-Dave
<i>jeh leang been shu</i>	<i>nǎngsǔu lèm nǐ</i>	<i>hai quyển sách này</i>
this two item book	book two item this	two item book this
	'these two books'	

In mooted contexts Thai and Vietnamese exhibit exact structural correspondence

D-Dave N-Dave G-Dor	N-Dave G-Dor D-Dave	N-Dave G-Dor D-Dave
<i>jeh leang been</i>	<i>sǔu lèm nǐ</i>	<i>hai quyển này</i>
this two item	two item this	two item this

With attribute and numerator

Chinese	D-Dave / N-Dave G-Dor / Att N	A / B / C
Thai	N Att / N-Dave G-Dor / D-Dave	C / B / A
Vietnamese	N-Dave G-Dor / N Att / D-Dave	B / C / A

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 338, 348.

² Continuation expressions where the topic of discussion has already been raised verbally or by non-verbal action, e.g. gesture.

Abstracting the common element N-Dave G-Dor (B) we have the formulae :

	Chinese	Thai-Vietnamese
	AC	CA
Chinese	<i>jeh leang been dah shu</i> this two item large book	
Thai	<i>nán̄súuu yǎy sǎw̄n lēm nūi</i> book large two item this	‘ these two large books ’
Vietnamese	<i>hai quyển sách lớn này</i> two item book large this	

Also to be noted is the exact structural correspondence : N Att in Thai and Vietnamese as opposed to Att N in Chinese.

A point of difference in nominal structure between Chinese and Thai/Vietnamese is the existence of the substantival suffix in the former system. A roughly equivalent set of structures in the latter is effected in prepositional terms.

Chinese	Thai	Vietnamese
V N-S	V Prep N	V Prep N

Examples

<i>tzay utz-lii</i> to be [in place] room-inside	<i>yǎu nay hòw̄n</i> to be [in place] in room ‘—is in the room’	<i>ở trong buồng</i> to be [in place] in room
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Chinese	<i>baa shu getzay juotz-shang</i> take book(s) put on table-on top	
Thai	<i>waan nán̄súuu bon tô² nân</i> put book(s) on table that	‘ put the books on that table ’
Vietnamese	<i>đẻ sách trên bàn kia</i> put book(s) on table that	

Structurally the latter example being :

Chinese	Thai	Vietnamese
V-N-V N-S	V-N Prep N D-Dave	V-N Prep N D-Dave

The Chinese structures collected under the head of De-seg in the Simon analysis are several. In Thai/Vietnamese a series of different but mutually corresponding structures has to be considered. When an attributive expression occurs the concept of the down-graded sentence can apply in all three languages. The linking details differ.

Chinese	Thai	Vietnamese
De-seg D-Dave G-Dor	G-Dor ALP seg	G-Dor ALP seg

Example (mooted context)

Chinese *nii tzwo-tian mae-de ney been*
you yesterday buy-de that item

Thai *lèm thui khun sūuu muiəwaan nīi*
item ALP you buy yesterday

Vietnamese *quyển mà anh mua hôm-qua* ‘ the one you bought yesterday
item ALP you buy yesterday

However, the application of De-seg extends, for example, to the ‘ possessive

Chinese	Thai	Vietnamese
De-seg N	N PNP Pr	(G-Dor) N PNP Pr
<i>wo-de shu</i>	<i>nānsūuu khǒn phóm</i>	<i>[quyển] sách của tôi</i>
I-de book	book object I	[item] book object I
	‘ my books ’	

In this case the Thai/Vietnamese structures show closer correspondence.

The place of determinate structures in all three systems is comparable structural differences within the expressions again show Chinese opposed Thai/Vietnamese.

Chinese	Thai	Vietnamese
D-Dave Date	Date D-Dave	Date D-Dave
<i>ney tian</i>	<i>wan nān</i>	<i>hôm ấy</i>
that day	day that	day that

Chinese exhibits special characteristics in certain expressions, e.g. :

Chinese	Thai	Vietnamese
<i>tian-tian</i>	<i>thūk wan</i>	<i>mọi ngày</i>
day-day	every day	every day
reduplication	N-Dave Date	N-Dave Date

and

Chinese *woomen yiijing tzooule [ellshyr lii luh] dahjia dou-ley-de-yawsy*
we already walked [twenty mile road] all all-de tired very

Thai *rau dʏʔn [yìisʔp kiiloomèet] maa lēəuthūk khon kǒʔ nǔəi màak*
we walk [twenty kilometres] come already every person also t
very

Vietnamese *ta đi [hai mươi cây số] rồi và ai cũng mệt lắm*
we go [twenty kilometres] already and every one also tired ver
‘ we have already walked twenty miles (kilometres) and everyone is tired out

In Thai and Vietnamese the structure N-Dave Date is not marked by a part
Note also with reference to the verbal system, not treated in this paper, the Chi
// Thai-Vietnamese structures in relation to the place of the aspect particles.

A Chinese // Thai-Vietnamese opposition is also shown in certain extended structures. An example of an extended D-Dave structure in mooted context is given below :

Chinese			Thai			Vietnamese		
D-Dave	N-Dave	G-Dor	ext	N-Dave	G-Dor	ext	N-Dave	G-Dor
ext				D-Dave			D-Dave	
Chinese		<i>jeh-leang been yiiway</i>				this	two item	except
Thai		<i>nòkkaak sǎw lēm nūi</i>				except	two item	this
Vietnamese		<i>trừ hai cái này</i>				except	two item	this
		'apart from these two'						

The comparison of descriptive systems for the noun complex in Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese shows that considerable general similarity exists in terms of class, order, and, to some extent, in class content. However, as a more detailed analysis proceeds, Thai and Vietnamese are revealed as exhibiting closer correspondences than Chinese can show with either of them. It would be premature to draw any firm conclusions from such facts, but it would be interesting to extend the work by (a) comparing descriptive systems of the verbal complexes of the three languages, and (b) by attempting to apply the method of description to the nominal systems of, say, Khmer and Malay. The existence of special processes of word formation in the latter languages, making necessary, probably, a morphological level of analysis not appropriate for Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese, complicates the comparison. Syntactically, however, it is obvious at first glance that some interesting correspondences can be adduced in terms of order in the main nominal classes. As far as Malay is concerned Gustav Schlegel long ago drew attention to syntactical correspondences between that language and Siamese (Thai).¹ H. Maspero has referred briefly to syntactic correspondences between Vietnamese, Thai, and Mon-Khmer languages.² Further synchronic work in classifying structural features would produce results which might, at length, be compared with the results of diachronic investigations within and between language systems even though the lack of historical material creates grave difficulties in the case of a number of languages.

In discussion on this paper Professor Søren Egerod drew attention to the greater extent of correspondence between the 'nominal classes' of Thai/Vietnamese and earlier states of Chinese. He suggested that such diachronic comparisons involving several languages would be valuable if reconstruction were the end in view.

The fact of syntactic change in Chinese is obviously of great interest in itself, and synchronic analyses of the present type can at once point to the existence of

¹ G. Schlegel, *Toung Pao*, N.S. 2, 1901, pp. 76-87.

² H. Maspero, 'L'Annamite', *Langues du Monde*, 1952, p. 583.

syntactic change in languages of comparable type, the historical nature of which can best be examined, in the view of the writers, by diachronic method within language and dialect groups in the first instance. The linguistic history of Thai and Vietnamese is relatively short in terms of reliably dated documents which reveals, in fact, a slow rate of change.¹

Mr. H. L. Shorto said that 'word-class' and 'function' should be distinguished as guiding notions. If it is recognized that some languages are more suitably dealt with by 'function systems' and others by 'word-class' systems, an important difference in language types may be indicated thereby.

In the absence of morphological systems of the inflective type in Thai and Vietnamese, classes are certainly established by syntactic function, in which order is an important criterion. The fact that large numbers of homonymous forms may be seen to exist between certain classes, e.g. nominal attribute and stative verb, is irrelevant at the grammatical level because the differing grades of such forms can be determined by grammatical means. The concept of the down-grade of sentence, phrase, and class must be recognized as valuable, perhaps essential, in the analysis of languages of the type under discussion.

¹ Except in the language of modern newspapers where, in the present century, the influence of Western languages, notably English and French, has induced syntactic change.