ARE THERE PREPOSITIONS IN THAI?

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Abstract

Within the lexicase dependency grammar framework, this paper investigates the class of Thai words which traditional grammarians have called 'prepositions' and which lexicase studies of Thai have analyzed as non-extension prepositions to see what syntactic categories they belong to. I argue that there are in fact prepositions in Thai but that they are limited in number.

The paper discusses possible criteria for distinguishing prepositions from nouns and other syntactic categories as well as in order to identify non-extension prepositions in Thai.

1. Introduction

Various Thai linguists have looked into what the traditional grammarians refer to as prepositions and have reanalyzed them into various categories, for example, verbs (Warotamasikkhadit 1990); coverbs, for prepositions which derive from verbs (Kullavanijaya 1974, Clark 1975); relator nouns, for nouns which carry the localistic features for their dependent nouns (Kullavanijaya 1974, Clark and Prasithrathsint 1985, Savetamalaya 1989); and conjunctions (Warotamasikkhadit 1990). In his paper 'There are no prepositions in Thai', Warotamasikkhadit (1990) claims that there are no prepositions in Thai. Instead, words which are called prepositions are actually verbs, nouns, or conjunctions.

Working within the lexicase dependency framework (which maintains that there are eight word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, determiners, adverbs, prepositions (or postpositions), conjunctions, and sentence particles), I will argue that there are, in fact, prepositions in Thai, but that they are limited in number. In this paper, I have selected words which the traditional grammarians refer to as prepositions and have proposed criteria to identify their syntactic categories.

In lexicase, prepositional phrases are regarded as exocentric constructions containing more than one obligatory head. Two kinds of prepositions are non-extension prepositions, which require a noun phrase co-head, and extension prepositions, which require a clausal co-head. Extension prepositions are referred to as 'subordinate conjunctions' by traditional and

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transformational grammarians and as 'complementizers' by the Government and Binding Theory syntacticians. Lexicase makes a distinction between extension prepositions such as *wâa* 'that' and *thâa* 'if', and (coordinate) conjunctions in that only the latter coordinate two constituents of the same syntactic category. Thus, conjunctions have two dependents while extension prepositions normally have a single co-head dependent. Conjunctions in Thai include *tεε* 'but', *lε?* 'and', and *kàp₁* 'and'. This paper focuses on the prepositions which occur with a noun phrase dependent. Thus, the term 'prepositions' refers to non-extension prepositions.

2. Criteria for identifying non-extension prepositions in Thai

Before discussing the criteria for identifying the syntactic categories of words traditionally referred to as prepositions, I have chosen one of the least controversial words to represent for each syntactic class the characteristics of that class.

Preposition: *kàp₂* 'with'

The preposition, *kàp₂* 'with', has been selected to represent the characteristics of prepositions, since, synchronically, it does not have corresponding verbs in the language.

(1)   dεεng   khuy   kàp₂   lék
        Dang   talk   with   Lek

'Dang talked with Lek'.

Relator noun: *bon* 'on, top; surface'

(2)   dεεng   waang   nángsɨɨ   bon
        Dang   lay   book   on

        tó?   níi
        table   this

'Dang put a book on this table'.

Verb: *cɛɛk₁* 'to distribute'

(3) dɛɛng sɨɨ₂ khanom cɛɛk₁
Dang   buy   sweets   distribute

dèkdèk
children

'Dang bought sweets to distribute to the children'.

Adverb: *wáy* 'lying'

(4) kháw thíng nángsɨɨ wáy
he   abandon book   lying

bâan nán
house that

'He left a book at that house'.

2.1. Criteria distinguishing prepositions from verbs and adverbs
2.1.1. Topicalization of the following noun phrase - 'stranding'

A preposition and a relator noun cannot be stranded, while a verb and an adverb can.

Preposition

(5) *lék nàʔ dɛɛng khuy kàp₂
Lek   TOP   Dang   talk   with

'Lek is the person with whom Dang talked'. (Lit. 'Lek, Dang talked with'.)

Relator noun

(6) *tóʔ níi dɛɛng waang
table   this   Dang   lay

nangsɨɨ bon
book   on

'This table is the place where Dang put a book on'. (Lit. This table, dang put a book on'.)

Verb

(7)　dèkdèk　　　ná?　　dɛɛng　　sɨ́2
　　　children　　　TOP　　Dang　　buy

　　　khanom　　　cɛɛk1
　　　sweets　　　distribute

'These children are the ones to whom Dang bought sweets to distribute'. (Lit. 'The children, Dang bought sweets to distribute to'.)

Adverb

(8)　bâan　nán　　nà?　kháw　thíng
　　　house　that　　TOP　he　　abandon

　　　nángsɨɨ　　wáy
　　　book　　　lying

'That house is where he left a book'. (Lit. 'That house, he left a book at'.)

2.1.2. Topicalization of the word in question together with the following noun

While both a prepositional phrase and a relator noun, together with their dependents may be topicalized, as shown in (9) and (10), neither a verb, plus its dependent, nor an adverb together with a following noun, may be topicalized, as in shown in (11) and (12), since they do not form a constituent.

Preposition

(9)　kàp2　lék　　dɛɛng　khuy　tɛɛ
　　　with　Lek　　Dang　talk　but

　　　kàp2　nídaa　dɛɛng　mây　khuy
　　　with　Nida　Dang　not　talk

'With Lek, Dang talked, but with Nida, Dang did not'.

Relator noun

(10)　　bon　　to?　　níi　　dɛɛng
　　　　on　　table　　this　　Dang

　　　　waang　　nángsɨ̵
　　　　lay　　book

　　　　'On this table, Dang put a book'.

Verb

(11)　　*cɛɛk₁　　　　dèkdèk　　dɛɛng
　　　　distribute　　children　　Dang

　　　　sɨ̵₂　　khanom
　　　　buy　　sweets

　　　　'To distribute to the children, Dang bought sweets'.

Adverb

(12)　　*wáy　　bâan　　nán　　kháw
　　　　lying　　house　　that　　he

　　　　thíng　　nángsɨ̵
　　　　abandon　　book

　　　　'At that house, he left a book'.

2.1.3. Choice of negation word

A predicate preposition and a predicate noun phrase occur in construction only with the negation word *mâychây* while a verb and an adverb may occur in construction with either *mây* or *mâydây*.

As a test, we try to negate the word in question in the position in a clause with no contrast involved. If neither *mây* nor *mâychây* are applicable, as found for most words, we try to negate them in a contrastive clause. (Here I show only the applicable negation with a contrastive clause.)

Preposition

(13)　　dɛɛng　　khuy　　kàp₂　　lék
　　　　Dang　　talk　　with　　Lek

　　　　*mây/mâychây　　　　kàp₂　　ɔɔy
　　　　NEG　　　　　　　　　with　　Oi

　　　　'Dang talked with Lek, not with Oi'.

Relator noun

(14)　dɛɛng　　waang　　nángsɨɨ　　bon
　　　Dang　　lay　　　book　　　on

　　　tóʔ　　níi　　*mây/mâychây
　　　table　this　　NEG

　　　bon　　sofaa　　nán
　　　on　　sofa　　that

　　　'Dang put a book on this table, not on that sofa'.

Verb

(15)　dɛɛng　sɨ₂　khanom　cɛɛk₁
　　　Dang　buy　sweets　distribute

　　　dèkdèk　　　mây/mâydây/*mâychây
　　　children　　NEG

　　　cɛɛk₁　　　laan
　　　distribute　niece

　　　'Dang bought sweets to distribute to the children, not to her nieces'.

Adverb

(16)　kháw　thíng　　nángsɨɨ　wáy
　　　he　　abandon　book　　lying

　　　bâan　　níi　　mây/mâydây/*mâychây
　　　house　this　NEG

　　　wáy　　　bâan　　nán
　　　lying　　house　that

　　　'He left a book at this house, not at that house'.

2.2. Criterion for distinguishing prepositions from verbs: The root predicate with the negation word _mây_

If a form never occurs as a root predicate in the language, such a form is not a verb. If, on the other hand, one finds that a form may occur as a root predicate, three possibilities are: a) the form is a verb (e.g. _klây_ 'to be near'); b) the form is a non-verb predicate (e.g. _samràp_ 'for'); or c) the form in question has a

homophous verb (e.g. *càak₁* 'to distribute', *hây₁* 'to give'). There are multiple possibilities because a predicate can be a verb, a noun or a preposition (Starosta 1988:235).

In this situation, the choice of negation word must be reapplied to see if the form in the root predicate position is a verb. If it can occur with the negation word *mây*, the form in that position is a verb. If it can occur with the negation word *mâychây*, it is either a predicate noun or a predicate preposition (i.e. *samràp* 'for').

In order to identify whether the verb in the root predicate position is the same lexical item as the word in question, the meaning preservation must be taken into consideration. If the verb in the root predicate preserves the meaning of the word in its original position, the form belongs to a single lexical entry (e.g. *klay* 'to be far'). If it does not, the word in question has a homophonous verb (e.g. verb *càak₁* 'to depart': preposition *càak₂* 'from': noun *càak₃* 'from';verb *hây₁* 'to give': adverb *hây₆* 'for').

Examples (17), (18), and (20) show that *kàp₂* 'with', *bon* 'surface', and *wáy* 'lying' never occur as root predicates and therefore are not verbs. *Cɛɛk₁* 'to distribute' may occur as a root predicate, as in (19a), and occurs with *mây* 'not', as in (19b), which reveals that it is a verb.

Preposition

(17)   *dɛɛng   káp₂   lék
          Dang   with   Lek
          'Dang with Lek'.

Relator noun

(18)   *nángsɨ   bon   toʔ
          table   on   table
          'The book is on the table'.

Verb

(19) a. dɛɛng   cɛɛk₁   nángsɨ
          Dang   distribute   book

          dèkdèk
          children

          'Dang distributed books to the children'.

b. dɛɛng   mây/mâydây   cɛɛk₁
    Dang   NEG   distribute

    nángsɨ̈   dèkdèk
    book   children

    'Dang does not distribute books to the
    children'.

Adverb

(20)   *kháw wáy   nángsɨ̈   bâan   nán
        he   lying   book   house   that

        'He left a book at that house'.

2.3. Criterion for distinguishing prepositions from nouns: Determiner modification

Only a noun can be modified by the determiners *níi* 'this', or *nán* 'that'.

Preposition

(21)   *dɛɛng   khuy   kàp₂   nán
        Dang   talk   with   that

        'Dang talked with that'.

Relator noun

(22)   dɛɛng   waang   nángsɨ̈   bon   nán
        Dang   lay   book   on   that

        'Dang put a book on that'.

Verb

(23)   *dɛɛng   sɨ̈₂   khanom   cɛɛk₁
        Dang   buy   sweets   distribute

        nán
        that

        'Dang bought sweets to distribute to that'.

Adverb

(24)   *kháw thíng   nángsɨ̌ wáy   nán
       he   abandon   book   lying that

'He left a book at that'.

Savetamalaya (1989:149-150) notes that a few relator nouns may not occur with the determiner *nán* 'that', including *nɨa* 'above', *klaang* 'middle', and *lang* 'back'. In this case, if a noun phrase headed by the word in question can occur as a subject of a sentence, then the form is considered to be a noun.

To summarize, topicalization of the following noun (stranding), topicalization of the word in question together with the following noun, and the choice of negation word show that prepositions and nouns act similarly, while verbs behave similarly to adverbs. The negation word *mâychây* occurs with a noun phrase or a prepositional prhase. *Mây* and *mâydây*, on the other hand, occur with a verb or an adverb. A root predicate distinguishes a verb from an adverb. Determiner modification distinguishes a noun from a preposition. The summary of test results is shown in Figure 1.

Categories	Strand	TOP with following noun
Prepositions	-	+
Nouns	-	+
Verbs	+	-
Adverbs	+	-

Categories	NEG	Det. mod.	Root predicate w/*mây*
Prepositions	*mâychây*	-	-
Nouns	*mâychây*	+	-
Verbs	*mây*,	-	+
	mâydây	-	+
Adverbs	*mây*,	-	-
	mâydây	-	-

Figure 1 Summary of test results

3. Applications

In this section, I discuss the results of applying the five tests summarized above to the words in question, using the following seven steps:

(a) a sentence containing the word in question

(b) the application of topicalization of the following noun - stranding (See 2.1.1)

(c) the application of topicalization of the word together with a following noun (See 2.1.2)

(d) the application of choice of negation in a non-contrastive clause or in a contrastive clause, if the former is not applicable (See 2.1.3)

(e) the application of determiner modification (See 2.3)

(f) the application of the root predicate test (See 2.2)

(g) the application of choice of negation word to the root predicate (See 2.2)

3.1. Prepositions

Prepositions in Thai include con_1 'until', $krath\hat{a}ng_1$ 'until', $d\hat{u}ay$ 'with', $dooy$ 'by means of', $k\grave{a}p_2$ 'with', $k\grave{a}\textrm{?}$ 'with', $k\varepsilon\varepsilon$ 'to', $t\varepsilon\varepsilon$ 'to' $samr\grave{a}p$ 'for', $ph\hat{t}a$ 'for', $c\grave{a}ak_2$ 'from', $phr\textrm{ɔ}\textrm{?}_1$ 'because', $n\acute{a}\textrm{?}$ 'at', etc.

càak₂ 'from'

The form $c\grave{a}ak$ has various homophones. $C\grave{a}ak_1$ 'to leave, to depart' is a verb; $c\grave{a}ak_2$ 'from' is a preposition; $c\grave{a}ak_3$ 'from' is a noun. Examples (25b) to (25d) show that $c\grave{a}ak$ which occurs as dependent of a regent verb could be either a preposition or a noun.

(25) a. dɛɛng   dɔɔn   càak   bâan   kháw
          Dang   walk   leave   house   he

'Dang walked from his house'.

b. *bâan   kháw   dɛɛng   dɔɔn   càak
    house   he   Dang   walk   leave

'His house, Dang walked from'.

c. càak   bâan   kháw   dɛɛng   dɔɔn
    leave house   he   Dang   walk

'From his house, Dang walked'.

d. dɛɛng dɔən càak bâan kháw
Dang walk leave house he

*mây/mâychây càak roongrian
NEG leave school

'Dang walked from his house, not from school'.

Example (25e) reveals that *càak* in (25a) cannot be a noun and hence must be a preposition.

e. *dɛɛng dɔən càak nán
Dang walk leave that

'Dang walked from that'.

Example (25f) shows that there is a corresponding verb *càak*$_1$ in the language.

f. dɛɛng càak$_1$ bâan kháw
Dang leave house he

'Dang left his house'.

I do not consider the form *càak* in (25a) to belong to the same lexical item as the one in (25f) because of the different distribution of *càak* when occurring as a root predicate, as illustrated in (25g). That is, *càak* in (25f) may occur in construction with the negation word *mây* but not *mâychây* in contrast to (25d), which is *càak*$_2$.

g. dɛɛng mây/*mâychây càak$_1$
Dang NEG leave

bâan kháw nɛɛ
house he sure

'Dang will certainly not leave his house'.

However, in expressions referring to time, such as (25h), *càak* can be modified by the determiner *nán* 'that', revealing that it is a noun. I consider this form in (25h) to be *càak*$_3$.

h. càak3   nán   kháw   mây phûut
    from   that   he   NEG speak

    kàp2   chán   lɔəy
    with   I   at all

'From then he no longer speaks to me'.

Further, *càak2* in (25a) does not share the same meaning with *càak1* in (25g) and *càak3* in (25h). While the verb *càak1* carries the meaning of 'to leave, to depart', the preposition *càak2* and the noun *càak3* carry the meaning 'from'. The justification for this claim derives from the fact that *càak2* and *càak3* do not neccessarily involve motion, as shown in (25i), while *càak1* always involves a movement from one place to another.

(25) i. mɨangthay   hàang   càak
          Thailand   far   from

          ameerikaa   mâak
          America   much

      'Thailand is very far from America'.

3.2. Relator nouns

Relator nouns in Thai include *nâa* 'front', *lang* 'back', *càak3* 'from', *khɛɛ* 'only', *mɨa* 'when', etc.

tangtɛɛ 'since'

The distribution of *tângtɛɛ* in (26b) to (26d) shows that it could be either a preposition or a noun. Example (26e) reveals that *tângtɛɛ* is a noun. Example (26f) shows that there is no corresponding verb in the language and thus the form cannot be a verb.

(26) a. kháw   mây   phûut   kàp2   chán
          he   NEG   speak   with   I

          tângtɛɛ   mɨawaan
          since   yesterday

      'He has not talked to me since yesterday'.

b. *mîawaan   kháw   mây   phûut
   yesterday   he   NEG   speak

   kàp₂   chán   tângtɛɛ
   with   I   since

   'Yesterday, he has not talked to me since'.

c. tângtɛɛ   mîawaan   kháw
   since   yesterday   he

   mây   phûut   kàp₂   chán
   NEG   speak   with   I

   'Since yesterday, he has not talked to me'.

d. kháw   mây   phûut   kàp₂   chán
   he   NEG   speak   with   I

   *mây/mâychây   tângtɛɛ   mîawaan
   NEG   since   yesterday

   'He has not talked to me not since
   yesterday'.

e. kháw   mây   phûut   kàp₂   chán
   he   NEG   speak   with   I

   tângtɛɛ   nán
   since   that

   'He has not talked to me since then'.

f. *kháw   tângtɛɛ   mîawaan
   he   since   yesterday

   'He was since yesterday'.

3.3. Verbs

Verbs include *klây* 'to be near' and *klay* 'to be far', *thîng* 'to arrive', etc.

Klay 'to be far'

(27) a.   bâan   kháw   yùu   klay   roongrian
          house   he   stay   far   school

          'His house is far (from) school'.

b. roongrian   nà? bâan   kháw
   school   TOP house   he

   yùu   klay
   stay   far

   'School, his house is far (from) school'.

c. *klây   roongrian   bâan   kháw yùu
   near   school   house   he   stay

   'Far (from) school, his house is'.

d. bâan   kháw   yùu   mây/mâydây/
   house   he   stay   NEG

   *mâychây   klay   roongrian
   NEG   far   school

   'His house is not far (from) school'.

e. *bâan   kháw   yùu   klay   nán
   house   he   stay   far   that

   'His house is far (from) that'.

f. bâan   kháw   klay   roongrian
   house   he   far   school

   'His house is far (from) school'.

g. bâan   kháw   mây/mâydây/*mâychây
   house   he   NEG

   klay   roongrian
   far   school

   'His house is far (from) school'.

3.4. Adverbs

Adverbs include *hây₆* 'to, for'.

hây₆ 'for, to'

Examples (28b) to (28d) show that *hây* in (28a) behaves like a verb or an adverb. Example (28e) confirms that the form is not a noun.

(28) a. lék   khian   còtmaay   hây   sudaa
          Lek   write   letter   for   Suda

          'Lek wrote a letter for Suda'.

      b. sudaa   nàʔ   lék   khian   còtmaay
          Suda   TOP   Lek   write   letter

          hây
          for

          'Suda, Lek wrote a letter for'.

      c. *hây   sudaa   lék   khian   còtmaay
          for   Suda   Lek   write   letter

          'For Suda, Lek wrote a letter'.

      d. lék   khian   còtmaay   hây   sudaa
          Lek   write   letter   for   Suda

          mâydây/*mâychây   hây   suwanna
          NEG   for   Suwanna

          'Lek wrote a letter for Suda, not for
          Suwanna'.

      e. *lék   khian   còtmaay   hây   nán
          Lek   write   letter   for   that

          'Lek wrote a letter for that'.

Example (28f) shows that there is a form of *hây* which occurs as a main verb in the language and carries the meaning of 'to give', but not 'for'. Thus, I consider *hây* in (28a) to be a separate lexical items from *hây* in (28f). Since there is no verb *hây* in the language carrying the meaning 'for, to', I consider (28a) to be an adverb.

      f. lék   hây   sudaa
          Lek   give   Suda

          *'Lek for Suda'.
          'Lek gave Suda (something)'.

g. lék   mây/mâydây/*mâychây   hây
    Lek   NEG   give

    sudaa
    Suda

    'Lek did not give Suda (anything)'.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have proposed a few criteria to identify and distinguish prepositions in the Thai language from other syntactic categories. The criteria employed are: topicalization of the following noun (stranding); topicalization of the word in question together with the following noun; the choice of negation; determiner modification; and the root predicate with the negation word *mây*. By applying these criteria to words which are traditionally called 'prepositions', I have shown that there are, indeed, prepositions in Thai. Furthermore, some words which are traditionally referred to as prepositions could, in fact, be identified as prepositions, nouns, verbs or even adverbs.

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