

# **Verb Intensifying Devices in Bangkok Thai**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

It can be said that intensity in a language has not been given as much study as other linguistic topics. Grammar books in general treat intensity in the section of adverbs as verb intensifiers or in the section of superlative forms of attributive adjectives. In recent years, however, intensity has been given more attention not only in the form of an adverbial intensifier list but as “the emotional expression of social orientation toward the linguistic proposition: the commitment of the self to the proposition” (Labov, 1984). Covert forms of intensity such as the use of quantifiers and aspect are mentioned by Labov (1984). Intensity markers in written texts has been studied (Dorfmler-Karpusa, 1990). In Bangkok Thai, to my knowledge, intensity has not been seriously studied. Reduplication has been studied as to its patterns and related meanings, but its aspect in connection with intensity has been ignored. In this article, I would like to explore intensity in Bangkok Thai and will limit myself to the scope of “intensifying devices for verbs.”

## **TYPES OF INTENSIFICATION**

Following Labov (1984), intensity works on a scale with unmarked expression as the center. The marked expression can be either positive or negative. For Labov, the positive marked expression is aggravated or intensified and the negative marked expression is mitigated or minimized. The term “amplifiers” is used by some grammarians for intensifiers above the assumed norms and “downtoners” for intensifiers below the assumed norms. Despite the use of different terms, it seems that both intensification or amplification and minimization or downtoning result in intensity.

## **VERB INTENSIFYING DEVICES IN BANGKOK THAI**

As Labov said, there is no closed set of intensity markers. Therefore, a complete list of verb intensifiers will not be attempted. Instead, from a preliminary study of verb intensification in Bangkok Thai, the following observed intensifying devices for verbs are dealt with:

- a) Vowel lengthening device
- b) Morphological devices
- c) Modifying adverbial devices

### Vowel Lengthening Device

The vowel lengthening device is used on the verb itself to mark intensity. From my data, this device is found usually with verbs containing long vowels, although some examples can be observed on short vowels.

Examples:

- (1) khǎu chōw:p+ aitim  
'He is crazy about ice-cream.'
- (2) pàak thəə báa:ŋ+  
'Her lips are extremely thin.'
- (3) amaraa rá:k+ mēew  
'Amara is extremely fond of cats.'

The use of : after vowels indicates an extra length. This extra vowel length is accompanied by a varying degree of pitch change. The second example, **báa:ŋ+**, shows a change from mid tone **baa:ŋ**, to high tone **báa:ŋ+**. The first and third examples show pitch change in a relatively smaller degree. There seems to be a pattern of pitch change, but this is outside the scope of this paper.

In written Thai, this type of verb intensification is represented by dots followed by an interjection mark. Pitch change is marked by an appropriate tone marker.

Examples:

- (4) khǎu chōw:p+ pissâa  
'He is extremely fond of pizza.'  
เขา ชอบ...บ! พิซซ่า
- (5) pàak thəə báa:ŋ+  
'Her lips are extremely thin.'  
ปาก เหนียว...ง!

### Morphological Device

#### *Reduplication*

The most common morphological device is reduplication. Reduplication can be one, two-, or four-time repetitions of the base word with certain patterns of pitch and vowel length.

*a) One-time repetition.* In this type of reduplication, if the tone of the base form is other than the high tone, the reduplicated form will always be placed before the base word and will always carry a high tone with short sharp fall. If the base word carries the high tone already, the reduplicated form is still placed before the base word and the vowel is given extra length.

Examples:

- (6) sūa deej kháau khǎau  
'Daeng's blouse is so white.'
- (7) nám thàlee sǐi fáa:+ fáa  
'Sea water is very blue.'

- (8) naaŋ sǎau thai súai sǎai  
'Miss Thailand is very pretty.'

b) *Two-time repetition.* Several pitch patterns and vowel length are found in this type.

Pattern 1:		
Reduplicated Form	Reduplicated Form	Base Word
High tone	Mid tone and short vowel	

In this pattern, the two reduplicated forms are placed before the base word. The first reduplicated form always carries the high tone, while the second one, the mid tone with a short vowel.

Examples:

- (9) mǔa waan ʔaakàat rón rón rón  
'It was terribly hot yesterday.'
- (10) bǎan yāa kǎu kǎu kǎu  
'Grandma's house is so shabby.'
- (11) mēe khǎu sǎau sau sǎau  
'His mother looks so young.'
- (12) dam phǔut phut phǔut  
'Dam talked a lot!'

Pattern 2:		
Base Word	Reduplicated Form	Reduplicated Form
	High tone	Sharing base word's tone

In this pattern, the base word begins the sequence. Only other tones than the high tone are allowed for the base word. The first reduplicated form always carries the high tone, while the second reduplicated form shares the same tone as the base word.

Examples:

- (13) khǎu phǔut mǔan dǎm chán bǔa bǔa bǔa  
'He spoke in the same fashion; I am terribly bored!'
- (14) chán nǐ? khǎm khǎm khǎm  
'I felt so much like laughing!'

c) *Four-time repetition.* This type of reduplication is not as common as the first two types. In fact it is the first pattern of the two-time reduplication followed by a repetition of the second reduplicated form and the base word.

Two-Time Repetition	Second Reduplicated	Base Word
Pattern 1	Form of Pattern 1	

Examples:

- (15) wannii ʔaakàat rón rón rón rón rón  
‘It is insufferably hot!’  
(16) ši sũa khǎu déŋ deŋ deŋ deŋ  
‘Her blouse is so red!’  
(17) mēe bón bon bòn bon bòn  
‘Mother really complained!’

### *Use of suffix*

This intensifying device, which can be said to be a recent device, is the borrowed plural English allomorph /-s/. The allomorph probably was first added to quantity words like **mâak** ‘much’ to give the meaning of ‘a lot.’ The use has been extended to adjectival verbs such as **wǎan** ‘sweet, simple’ and **man** ‘having great fun.’

Examples:

- (18) khôo sòp wannii wǎans  
‘The examination today was really simple!’  
(19) nǎŋ rũaŋ níi rápròŋ mans  
‘(I guarantee that) this movie is a lot of fun.’

### *Modifying adverbial device*

Modifying adverbials to express intensity of the verbs comprise from one word to a clause. These adverbials can occur in a pre- or post-position of the verb.

Examples:

- (20) aacaan caidii sùt  
(21) aacaan caidii sùt khǐit  
‘The teacher is so kind!’  
(22) dèk khon níi ŋôo bòorisùt  
‘This child is absolutely stupid.’  
(23) bāan lǎŋ níi yài too mahǒoraan  
‘This house is so huge.’  
(24) mamũaŋ lûuk níi wǎan yàa bòok khrai  
‘This mango is really sweet.’  
(25) nǎŋ rũaŋ níi yôot ca sanùk  
‘This film is a lot of fun.’  
(26) taa kēe bāan níi khôot ca dù?  
‘The old man in this house is so touchy.’  
(27) aacaan sùt ca caidii  
‘The teacher is so kind.’

The underlined items in the above examples are modifying adverbials. As seen, they range from a word such as **sùt** ‘end,’ **bòorisùt** ‘pure,’ **yôot (ca)** ‘top,’ **khôot (ca)** ‘the entire family’ to phrases such as **yài too mahǒoraan**, the repetition of

words meaning 'big,' and to clauses like **yàa bòok khrai** 'do not tell anybody.' Also, it can be seen that some of the adverbials can occur in the post position of the verbs, some in the pre-position, and some like **sùt** can occur in either position.

What is interesting with modifying adverbials is their semantic aspect. Modifying adverbials form an open-ended class. New modifying adverbials are added to the class. However, the adverbials must have certain semantic characteristics in order to be included in the class. Some of these semantic characteristics are given here.

*a) Adverbials signifying the highest degree.* Adverbials with the meanings of highest degree, e.g., the first, the very end, the top, are eligible to be adverbials expressing intensity.

Examples:

(28) **sùt** 'the very end': **khău lỏ sùt; khău sùt lỏ**

'He is extremely handsome.'

(29) **yỏt** 'top': **năŋ ruŋ nủ yỏt ca sanủk**

'This film is a lot of fun.'

(30) **chán nủn** 'first': **plaa ráan nủ sỏt chán nủn**

'The fish at this stall is really fresh.'

*b) Adverbials signifying 'purity, truth, completion.'* Adverbials that express the absolute degree of purity, truth, completion, or the like suggest intense qualifications.

Examples:

(31) **bỏorisỏt** 'pure': **khău ŋỏo bỏorisỏt**

'He is entirely stupid.'

*- polysemous property  
of this class*

(32) **ciŋ** 'true': **khău daŋ ciŋ**

'He is really well known.'

(33) **dẻt khằt** 'competely': **lỏn pủau dẻt khằt**

'She is so flirtatious.'

*c) Synonymous adverbials.* The use of synonyms as intensifying adverbials is not rare.

Examples:

(34) **yủi** 'big,' **too** 'big,' **mahỏoraan** 'big':

**bỏan lắŋ nủ yủi too mahỏoraan**

'This house is so huge.'

(35) **mỏak** 'much', **maai** '?', **kỏai** '?', **kỏỏŋ** 'heap':

**khon mỏak maai kỏai kỏỏŋ**

'There are a lot of people.'

*d) Adverbials signifying impossible event.* Events or occurrences that can hardly be realized or hardly occur may suggest a high degree of intensity, since they are beyond common experience.

Examples:

(36) **pen bỏa** 'to become crazy': **phủuỷŋ khon nỏn sủai pen bỏa**

'That woman is madly pretty.'

- (37) ca? taai 'to become dead': chǎn hǐu ca? taai yùu léeu  
'I am so hungry.'

e) *Adverbials signifying incapability.* Similar to impossible occurrences above, inability to do things suggests uncommon experience and thus indicates intensity.

Examples:

- (38) bòok mâi thùuk 'cannot express correctly':  
khanǒm nǐi ?arði bòok mâi thùuk  
'This cake is more than delicious.'  
(39) lǔa chũa 'unbelievable':  
khǎu son lǔa chũa  
'He is so naughty, beyond any imagination.'  
(40) yàa bòok khrai 'do not tell anybody':  
khanǒm nǐi ?arði yàa bòok khrai  
'This kind of dessert is incredibly delicious.'

f) *Metaphoric adverbials.* Metaphor is a common device to express intensity. Some examples are given here.

Examples:

- (41) dèk khon nán son yaŋ kàp liŋ  
'That boy is as naughty as a monkey.'  
(42) khǎu sũuŋ pen sǎu faifǎa  
'He is as tall as a lamp post.'  
(43) khruu hǎi khanēn yǎak  
khruu kradùuk  
'The teacher is careful with his marks.  
The teacher is bone hard.'

It can be observed that the intensifying devices discussed in this paper allow additions to be made to the list for each device. This is to be expected since intensifiers are emotional expressions. Common expressions wear out and new expressions are needed to convey intense feelings of the speakers. However, there seems to be a framework for coining new intensifiers. This framework is phonological and morphological, as well as semantic.

## REFERENCES

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