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 (Dorfmueller-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. khāu chāɔːp+ aitim
   ‘He is crazy about ice-cream.’
2. pāak thāɔ bāːŋ+
   ‘Her lips are extremely thin.’
3. amaraa rāːk+ 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, bāːŋ+, shows a change from mid tone baaːŋ, to high tone bāːŋ+. 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. khāu chāɔːp+ pīsāː
   ‘He is extremely fond of pizza.’
   เขา ชอบ ชมพู
5. pāak thāɔ bāːŋ+
   ‘Her lips are extremely thin.’
   ปาก สวย ลอย

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 deŋ khāau khāau
   ‘Daeng’s blouse is so white.’
7. nām thālee sī sāː+ fāa
   ‘Sea water is very blue.’
(8) naaŋ sāau thai súai súai
    ‘Miss Thailand is very pretty.’

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern 1:</th>
<th>Reduplicated Form</th>
<th>Reduplicated Form</th>
<th>Base Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High tone</td>
<td>Mid tone</td>
<td>and short vowel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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) mūta waan ?aakåat rōn rōn rōn
    ‘It was terribly hot yesterday.’
(10) bāan yāa kāu kāu
    ‘Grandma’s house is so shabby.’
(11) mēe khāu sāu sau sāu
    ‘His mother looks so young.’
(12) dam phúut phut phúut
    ‘Dam talked a lot!’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern 2:</th>
<th>Reduplicated Form</th>
<th>Reduplicated Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base Word</td>
<td>High tone</td>
<td>Sharing base word’s tone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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) khāu phúut muīan dōm chān būa būa būa
    ‘He spoke in the same fashion; I am terribly bored!’
(14) chān nī? khām khām khām
    ‘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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two-Time Repetition</th>
<th>Second Reduplicated</th>
<th>Base Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pattern 1</td>
<td>Form of Pattern 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples:
(15) wanníi ʔaakâat rêon ron rêon ron rêon
   ‘It is insufferably hot!’
(16) sii sûwà khau deŋ deŋ deŋ deŋ deŋ
   ‘Her blouse is so red!’
(17) mée bôn bon bôn bon bôn
   ‘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 máak ‘much’ to give the meaning of ‘a lot.’ The use has been extended to adjectival verbs such as wãaŋ ‘sweet, simple’ and man ‘having great fun.’

Examples:
(18) khôô sëɛp wanníi wáaŋ
   ‘The examination today was really simple!’
(19) nànŋ rûaŋ nii râplâŋ 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 sût
(21) aacaan caidii sût khiiit
   ‘The teacher is so kind!’
(22) dète khon nii ñëò boorisût
   ‘This child is absolutely stupid.’
(23) bâan lân nii vâi too mahooraan
   ‘This house is so huge.’
(24) mamûaŋ lûuk nii wãaŋ vâa bôok khrai
   ‘This mango is really sweet.’
(25) nànŋ rûaŋ nii vâôt ca sanûk
   ‘This film is a lot of fun.’
(26) taa këe bân nii khôôt ca duŋ?
   ‘The old man in this house is so touchy.’
(27) aacaan sût 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 sût ‘end,’ boorisût ‘pure,’ vâôt (ca) ‘top,’ khôôt (ca) ‘the entire family’ to phrases such as vâi too mahooraan, the repetition of
words meaning ‘big,’ and to clauses like yàa bóok 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 sût 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) sût ‘the very end’: khâu lôc sût; khâu sût lôc
    ‘He is extremely handsome.’

(29) yāot ‘top’: nān rūaŋ níi yāot ca sa:nûk
    ‘This film is a lot of fun.’

(30) chán nûŋ ‘first’: plaa ràan níi sôt chán nûŋ
    ‘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) boorsût ‘pure’: khâu nōo boorsût
    ‘He is entirely stupid.’

(32) ciŋ ‘true’: khâu daŋ ciŋ
    ‘He is really well known.’

(33) dêt khàat ‘completely’: lòon prîau dêt khàat
    ‘She is so flirtatious.’

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

Examples:

(34) yài ‘big,’ too ‘big,’ mahooraan ‘big’:
    bāan làŋ níi yài too mahooraan
    ‘This house is so huge.’

(35) màak ‘much’, maaì ‘?’, kàaì ‘?’, koon ‘heap’:
    khon màak maaì kàaì koon
    ‘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 bāa ‘to become crazy’: phūuyîŋkhon nán sùai pen bāa
    ‘That woman is madly pretty.’
(37) ca' taai 'to become dead': chään hâu ca' taai yâu lêeu
'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) bôök mái thûuk 'cannot express correctly':
    khanôm nîi ?arôi bôök mái thûuk
    'This cake is more than delicious.'
(39) lûa chúía 'unbelievable':
    khâu son lûa chúía
    'He is so naughty, beyond any imagination.'
(40) yàa bôök khrai 'do not tell anybody':
    khanôm nîi ?arôi yàa bôök 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) dêk khon nán son yañ kâp liŋ
    'That boy is as naughty as a monkey.'
(42) khâu sùunŋ pen sâu faiñáa
    'He is as tall as a lamp post.'
(43) khrûu hâi khaneen yâak
    khrûu kradûuk
    '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
