THE SO-CALLED PASSIVE IN THAI

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Thai students studying English often equate the English passive construction with the thùuk or doon construction in Thai. This paper offers a different approach to the so-called passive in Thai.

Thai thùuk is generally analysed as an auxiliary verb whose function is to mark the preceding NP as the subject of the passive construction. Another morpheme that is used in the same way is doon. Both thùuk and doon can be main verbs meaning 'touch or come into contact with something'. However, doon is felt to be colloquial. This "passive construction" analysis equates thùuk sentences with the English passive. Chalyaratana (1961:26) observed, for example, that thùuk was used of something unpleasant; she derived thùuk sentences through the application of a transformational rule that converts one string into another. According to her, we should only find verbs signifying suffering and destruction occurring with thùuk. Phya Upakit (1948a), however, pointed out that thùuk also occurs with verbs that on their own do not imply anything unpleasant, e.g. chën 'invite', chom 'praise'. By contrast, Warotamasikkhadit (1963:32) uses a derivation from two strings with thùuk + COMP occurring in the matrix S.

It is a well-known fact that the same situation can be described in many ways depending on what the speaker chooses to talk about. Each of the following sets of sentences describes the same situation:

(1) a. sùdaa chën dāmŋ
*Suda  invite  Dang
Suda invited Dang.

b. dāmŋ sùdaa chën
*Dang  Suda  invite
Dang was invited by Suda.
c. đăm thưuk sùdaa cheen
  Dang Suda invite
  Dang was invited by Suda (but he did not want to be invited).

(2) a. sùdaa chom đăm
  Suda praise Dang
  Suda praised Dang.

b. đăm sùdaa chom
  Dang Suda praise
  Dang was praised by Suda.

c. đăm thưuk sùdaa chom
  Dang Suda praise
  Dang was praised by Suda (but he did not like being praised).

In the (a) sentences sùdaa is the topic, the speaker tells the listener what she did; in (b) the topic is đăm. The (a) and the (b) sentences are synonymous in so far as the content is concerned; that is, if one is true, the other cannot be false. They are not completely synonymous, for they are not interchangeable. The appropriateness of (a) and (b) depends on the topic of the conversation.

The (c) sentences, however, are different from the others in that they are appropriate only if the speaker thinks that Dang dislikes being invited in the case of (1c) or dislikes being praised in (2c). The difference between (c) and the others is clear if Suda is the speaker, in which case chăn or some other pronouns will replace all the occurrences of sùdaa in (1) and (2).

(3) a. chăn cheen đăm
  I invite Dang
  I invited Dang.

b. đăm chăn cheen
  Dang I invite
  Dang was invited by me.

c. đăm thưuk chăn cheen
  Dang I invite
  Dang was invited by me (but he did not want to be invited).

(4) a. chăn chom đăm
  I praise Dang
  I praised Dang.
b. ด้วง ช่ำน ช่ำน
   Dang  I   praise
   Dang was praised by me.

   ด้วง ท่ำค ช่ำน ช่ำน
   Dang  I   praise
   Dang was praised by me (but he did not like being praised).

Sentences (3c) and (4c) are odd while (1c) and (2c) are not. On syntactic grounds, there is no reason why (3c) and (4c) should not occur as frequently as (1c) and (2c). The oddity of (3c) and (4c) can be accounted for if we take the position that ท่ำค is used to indicate that something hurts or affects someone adversely. When the speaker uses ท่ำค, he is asserting that an animate being suffers the effect of an event or an action. The occurrence of ท่ำค in (3c) and (4c) implies that the speaker knows he is hurting someone. Since, within the conventions of Thai etiquette, it is unlikely that a speaker will consider his invitation or praise as an act of hostility, we have grammatical sentences that do not occur in actual speech.

In traditional Thai grammar (a) and (b) belong to different sentence types, (b) and (c) are grouped together, with (b) deriving from (c). This classification ignores the fact that except for focus (a) and (b) are synonymous, and that although (b) and (c) focus on the same item, they differ greatly as far as meaning is concerned. Moreover, the rule that moves the object to the front and inserts ท่ำค would only work with sentences like (3) and (4). It cannot account for the following:

(5) สวดา ท่ำค ขโมง ข่ม บ้าน
    Suda  thief  enter house
    Suda's house was burglarised.

(6) สวดา ท่ำค พ่อ ผ่าต คอ แมย
    Suda  father  open letter
    Suda's letter was opened by her father.

The passive rule as formulated by Tonglaw (1952:283), a grammarian of the traditional school, is the same as the rule that Chaiyaratana (1961:5) has for her transformational grammar of Thai; it moves the whole NP to the front. Tonglaw's rule for changing an active sentence into a passive sentence consists of two operations:

i. The object is moved to the subject position.

ii. The subject is placed between the auxiliary ท่ำค and the verb, and becomes a part of the predicate.
Warotamasikkhatit (1963:32) has a different rule. He derives the thūuk construction from two strings. His rule requires that the NP that occurs with thūuk be identical with the NP object in the embedded S. These rules, however, cannot derive (5) and (6) from the following active sentences:

(5') khamooy khīn bāan sūdaa
    thief enter house Suda
    A thief broke into Suda's house.

(6') phōo pāat cōt-māay sūdaa
    father open letter Suda
    Father opened Suda's letter.

If we modify the rule so that it can also move the NP inside the NP object to the front, we will get (5) and (6) from (5') and (6'). The new rule, however, will produce ungrammatical as well as grammatical strings from the following:

(7) khruu tii lūuk sūdaa
    teacher beat child Suda
    The teacher beat Suda's child.

(8) sūdaa chom nōong dānng
    Suda praise sister Dang
    Suda praised Dang's sister.

If we move the whole NP object to the front, we get acceptable sentences. If we only move the NP inside the NP object, we get strings that are unacceptable.

(7') a. lūuk sūdaa thūuk khruu tii
    child Suda teacher beat
    Suda's child was beaten by the teacher.

    b. *sūdaa thūuk khruu tii lūuk
        Suda teacher beat child

(8') a. nōong dānng thūuk sūdaa chom
    sister Dang Suda praise
    Dang's sister was praised by Suda.

    b. *dānng thūuk sūdaa chom nōong
        Dang Suda praise sister

The fact that none of the passive rules can account for all the occurrences and non-occurrences of thūuk makes one question the assumption
that thùuk is the marker of the passive construction in Thai.

In the Fillmorean case framework, the relationship between sentences like (1a) sùdąa chèan đàməŋ and (1b) đàməŋ sùdąa chèan can be accounted for quite naturally through two processes: subjectivalisation and topicalisation. In the case of (1a) sùdąa chèan đàməŋ only subjectivalisation applies. As for (2b) đàməŋ sùdąa chèan topicalisation moves đàməŋ to the front after subjectivalisation has applied. We can account for the following in the same way:

(9) a. phɔɔ̀ pèat còt-māay sùdąa mǐa-waan-níi
   father open letter Suda yesterday
   Father opened Suda's letter yesterday.

   b. còt-māay sùdąa phɔɔ̀ pèat mǐa-waan-níi
   letter Suda father open yesterday
   Suda's letter was opened by Father yesterday.

   c. mǐa-waan-níi phɔɔ̀ pèat còt-māay sùdąa
   yesterday father open letter Suda
   Yesterday, Father opened Suda's letter.

Here (b) and (c) differ from (a) in that topicalisation applies as well as subjectivalisation. They differ from one another because in each case a different item is topicalised. Note that topicalisation cannot apply twice, for we do not get

   d. *mǐa-waan-níi còt-māay sùdąa phɔɔ̀ pèat
   yesterday letter Suda father open

   e. *còt-māay sùdąa mǐa-waan-níi phɔɔ̀ pèat
   letter Suda yesterday father open

Since subjectivalisation and topicalisation account for the occurrence of an NP at the beginning of a sentence, the NP that precedes thùuk in (1c) đàməŋ thùuk sùdąa chèan must have been moved to that position by one or both of these processes. Another related problem is the status of thùuk: Is it an auxiliary verb as most grammarians claim; and if it is, at what point is it introduced?

If we start with the assumption that thùuk is an auxiliary verb, we can account for its occurrence by a phrase structure rule that expands an AUX node or a transformation that inserts it into the string. Chaiyaratana introduced thùuk by an optional transformation. In Warotamasikkhadit's grammar thùuk is introduced by a phrase structure rule, but not as an expansion of AUX. According to him, thùuk is a main verb which has a special property of triggering the passive transformation.
In case grammar, it is possible to have a rule stating that a non-normal choice of subject has to be registered in the V as Fillmore (1968a: 37) proposes for the English passive. This rule will move O or E over the verb and provide a condition for the insertion of ðuuk; it will not give us the correct surface structure, for A is still left behind. In Thai, the Agentive has to occur before the verb; we therefore need another rule to place A between ðuuk and the verb. This set of rules will handle sentences like (1c) ðamÒ ðuuk sûdaa chëen and (2c) ðamÒ ðuuk sûdaa chom. Deletion of ðuuk will yield (1b) ðamÒ sûdaa chëen and (2b) ðamÒ sûdaa chom. Since sentences with ðuuk and those that are supposed to have ðuuk deleted are not synonymous, this solution is not satisfactory. Moreover, it cannot handle sentences like (5) and (6). If we assume that (6) sûdaa ðuuk pëat cõt-mâay comes from the same proposition as pëat cõt-mâay sûdaa, the rules needed to derive (6) will be different from those that give (1c) and (2c). The structure underlying (6′) could be roughly represented as follows:\footnote{sûdaa in (6′) probably comes from an S with sûdaa occurring in the Agentive or the Dative, for cõt-mâay sûdaa can mean a letter that Suda wrote or a letter that someone wrote to Suda. Since sûdaa can come from two different sources, (6′) is ambiguous.}

(10)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
S \\
M \\
P \\
\quad \begin{array}{c}
V \\
\quad \begin{array}{c}
O \\
\quad \begin{array}{c}
K \\
NP \\
\quad \begin{array}{c}
N \\
open \\
pëat \quad K_O \\
letter \\
cõt-mâay \\
sûdaa \\
\end{array}
\end{array}
\end{array}
\end{array}
\quad \begin{array}{c}
A \\
\quad \begin{array}{c}
K \\
NP \\
\quad \begin{array}{c}
N \\
K_A \\
father \\
sûdaa \\
\end{array}
\end{array}
\end{array}
\end{array}
\]
If we make the subjectivisation rule move a part of an NP over to the front, we may be able to get (6) but at the same time it will give ungrammatical sentences like

(11) a. *thíi dăng Khían thưuk phó pêat cót-mañay
    that Dang write to Suda father open letter

    b. *thíi sudaäkhían thưuk phó pêat
    that Suda write father open

It seems that we have problems in accounting for (5) and (6) because we assume that thưuk gets into the string by a rule or a set of rules. Since we can derive surface structures AVO and OAV through the application of subjectivisation and topicalisation rules, there is no need to consider deriving OAV from the thưuk construction.

We have seen that the analysis of thưuk as proposed by grammarians working in the traditional and transformational framework cannot adequately account for the occurrences and non-occurrences of thưuk in (1) – (8). It is also evident that the introduction of thưuk by a rule similar to the one used by Fillmore to account for the English passive does not solve all the problems either. The theory of case relationship, however, makes it possible to analyse the thưuk construction differently. In this new analysis thưuk will be treated as a verb. It can be described as a verb that takes an Experiencer and an Objective which expands as an S. (6) can be represented as follows:

(12)
Subjectivalisation of E in the top S and A in the lower S will give

\[(13)\]

\[S_O\]
\[\begin{array}{c}
E \\
M \\
P \\
K \\
NP \\
K_E \\
sùdāa
\end{array}\]
\[\begin{array}{c}
\begin{array}{c}
V \\
O \\
K \\
NP \\
K_0 \\
thùuk
\end{array}
\end{array}\]
\[\begin{array}{c}
A \\
M \\
P \\
K \\
NP \\
K_A \\
phọc
\end{array}\]
\[\begin{array}{c}
\begin{array}{c}
Pọéát \\
K_0 \\
côt-mâay
\end{array}
\end{array}\]

With thùuk as a verb we can account for the occurrence and non-occurrence of the following:

\[(14)\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
a. \quad sùdāa \text{ thùuk hây thàọŋ nàŋŋ̕i} \\
Suda \quad \text{study book} \\
Suda \text{ was made to study the book.}
\end{array}\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
b. \quad *sùdāa \text{ thùuk hây rúu nàŋŋ̕i} \\
Suda \quad \text{know book}
\end{array}\]

\[(15)\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
a. \quad dàŋŋ̕ \text{ thùuk sùdāa mọong} \\
Dang \quad Suda \quad \text{look} \\
Dang \text{ was stared at by Suda.}
\end{array}\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
b. \quad *dàŋŋ̕ \text{ thùuk sùdāa hën} \\
Dang \quad Suda \quad \text{see}
\end{array}\]

by stating that thùuk requires an activity verb in the embedded sentence.

As a lexical item, thùuk can have a meaning and there is no reason why it should not mean 'suffer, or experience something unpleasant', the meaning attributed to the thùuk construction. With this meaning we can
see why (1b) ดopez สด้าา เช่น is not quite the same as (1c) ดopez ทูค สด้าา เช่น. Another advantage in having ทูค as a verb with its own meaning is that we can account for the feeling that the following are not Thai sentences but translations of the English passive:

(16) นั่งสีที่ ทูค สด้าา หาย ดopez
    book   Suda  give  Dang
    The book was given to Dang by Suda.

(17) นั่งสีที่ ทูค สด้าา แปล
    book   Suda  translate
    The book was translated by Suda.

Moreover, with this analysis we do not have to have a special condition on the subjectivalisation rule and we do not need the notion "non-normal choice of subject".