

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. Chaiyaratana (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. *chèen* '*invite*', *chom* '*praise*'. By contrast, Warotamasikkkhadit (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. *sùdāa chēen dāəŋ*
Suda invite Dang
Suda invited Dang.
- b. *dāəŋ sùdāa chēen*
Dang Suda invite
Dang was invited by Suda.

- c. *dæŋ* *thùuk sùdaa chøen*
Dang Suda invite
Dang was invited by Suda (but he did not want to be invited).

- (2) a. *sùdaa chom dæŋ*
Suda praise Dang
Suda praised Dang.

- b. *dæŋ sùdaa chom*
Dang Suda praise
Dang was praised by Suda.

- c. *dæŋ thùuk 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 *dæŋ*. 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 *chǎn* or some other pronouns will replace all the occurrences of *sùdaa* in (1) and (2).

- (3) a. *chǎn chøen dæŋ*
I invite Dang
I invited Dang.

- b. *dæŋ chǎn chøen*
Dang I invite
Dang was invited by me.

- c. *dæŋ thùuk chǎn chøen*
Dang I invite
Dang was invited by me (but he did not want to be invited).

- (4) a. *chǎn chom dæŋ*
I praise Dang
I praised Dang.

b. dǎəŋ chǎn chom
 Dang I praise
 Dang was praised by me.

c. dǎəŋ thùuk chǎn chom
 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 *thùuk* is used to indicate that something hurts or affects someone adversely. When the speaker uses *thùuk*, he is asserting that an animate being suffers the effect of an event or an action. The occurrence of *thùuk* 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 *thùuk* would only work with sentences like (3) and (4). It cannot account for the following:

(5) sùdaa thùuk khəmooy khɨn bāan
 Suda thief enter house
 Suda's house was burglarised.

(6) sùdaa thùuk phǎw pəət cət-mǎay
 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:

1. The object is moved to the subject position.
- 1i. The subject is placed between the auxiliary *thùuk* and the verb, and becomes a part of the predicate.

Warotamasikkhadit (1963:32) has a different rule. He derives the *thùuk* construction from two strings. His rule requires that the NP that occurs with *thùuk* be identical with the NP object in the embedded S. These rules, however, cannot derive (5) and (6) from the following active sentences:

(5') khəmooy khîn bâan sùdaa
thief enter house Suda
A thief broke into Suda's house.

(6') phôo pèet còt-măay sùdaa
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 lûuk sùdaa
teacher beat child Suda
The teacher beat Suda's child.

(8) sùdaa chom nố๓ງ dæ๓
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. lûuk sùdaa thùuk khruu tii
child Suda teacher beat
Suda's child was beaten by the teacher.

b. *sùdaa thùuk khruu tii lûuk
Suda teacher beat child

(8') a. nố๓ງ dæ๓ thùuk sùdaa chom
sister Dang Suda praise
Dang's sister was praised by Suda.

b. *dæ๓ thùuk sùdaa chom nố๓ງ
Dang Suda praise sister

The fact that none of the passive rules can account for all the occurrences and non-occurrences of *thùuk* 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) *sùdaa chæen dæəŋ* and (1b) *dæəŋ sùdaa chæen* can be accounted for quite naturally through two processes: subjectivalisation and topicalisation. In the case of (1a) *sùdaa chæen dæəŋ* only subjectivalisation applies. As for (2b) *dæəŋ sùdaa chæen* topicalisation moves *dæəŋ* to the front after subjectivalisation has applied. We can account for the following in the same way:

- (9) a. *phôɔ̀ pèet còt-mǎay sùdaa mǎa-waan-níi*
father open letter Suda yesterday
Father opened Suda's letter yesterday.
- b. *còt-mǎay sùdaa phôɔ̀ pèet mǎa-waan-níi*
letter Suda father open yesterday
Suda's letter was opened by Father yesterday.
- c. *mǎa-waan-níi phôɔ̀ pèet còt-mǎay sùdaa*
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

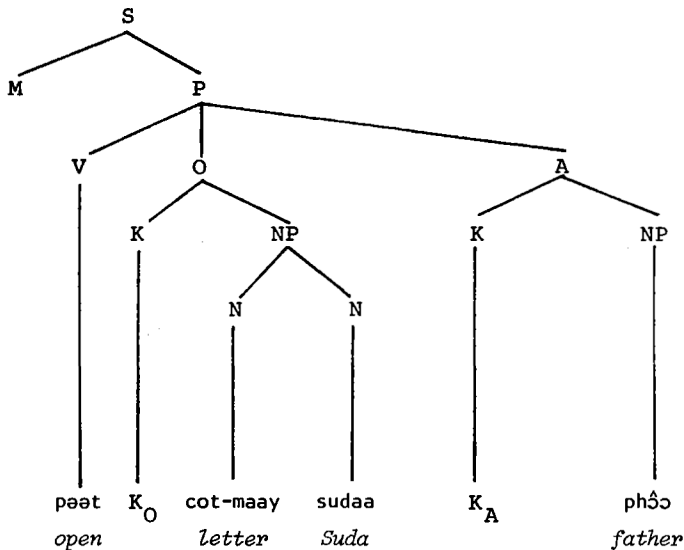
- d. **mǎa-waan-níi còt-mǎay sùdaa phôɔ̀ pèet*
yesterday letter Suda father open
- e. **còt-mǎay sùdaa mǎa-waan-níi phôɔ̀ pèet*
letter Suda yesterday father open

Since subjectivalisation and topicalisation account for the occurrence of an NP at the beginning of a sentence, the NP that precedes *thùuk* in (1c) *dæəŋ thùuk sùdaa chæen* 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 *thùuk*; 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 *thùuk* and the verb. This set of rules will handle sentences like (1c) *dæŋ thùuk sùdaa chæen* and (2c) *dæŋ thùuk sùdaa chom*. Deletion of *thùuk* will yield (1b) *dæŋ sùdaa chæen* and (2b) *dæŋ sùdaa chom*. Since sentences with *thùuk* and those that are supposed to have *thùuk* deleted are not synonymous, this solution is not satisfactory. Moreover, it cannot handle sentences like (5) and (6). If we assume that (6) *sùdaa thùuk phôc pèet còt-măay* comes from the same proposition as *phôc pèet còt-măay sùdaa*, 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:¹

(10)



The subjectivalisation rule could move A over giving *phôc pèet còt-măay sùdaa* or O, a non-normal choice of subject, and the surface string would be *còt-măay sùdaa thùuk phôc pèet*. To get *sùdaa thùuk phôc pèet còt-măay* we have to move not O but an element inside an NP dominated by it.

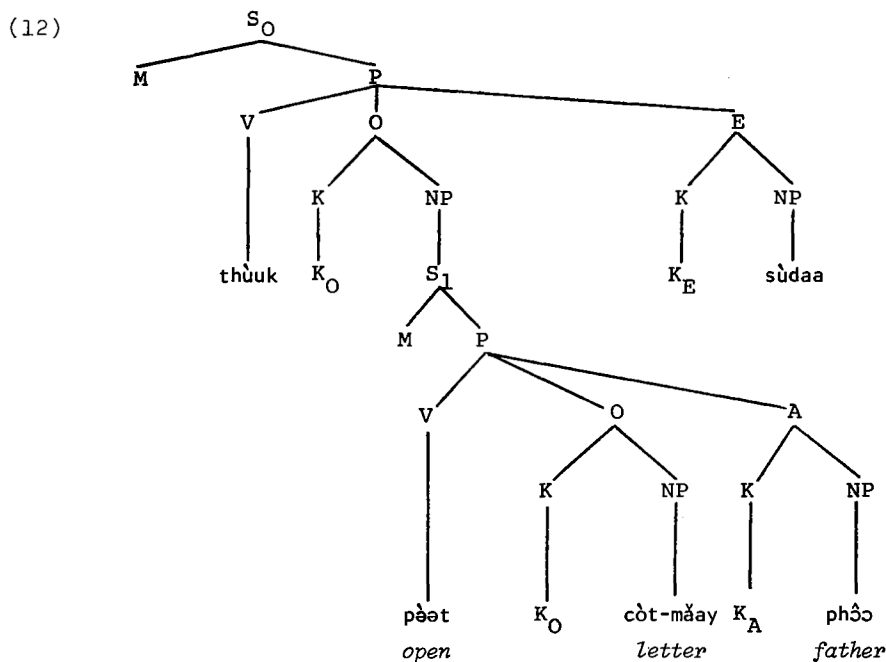
¹*sùdaa* in (6') probably comes from an S with *sùdaa* occurring in the Agentive or the Dative, for *còt-măay sùdaa* can mean a letter that Suda wrote or a letter that someone wrote to Suda. Since *sùdaa* can come from two different sources, (6') is ambiguous.

If we make the subjectivalisation 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. *thîi dæŋ khĭan thŷŋ sùdaa thùuk phôo pèet còt-măay
 that Dang write to Suda father open letter
- b. *thîi sùdaa khĭan thùuk phôo pèet
 that Suda write father open

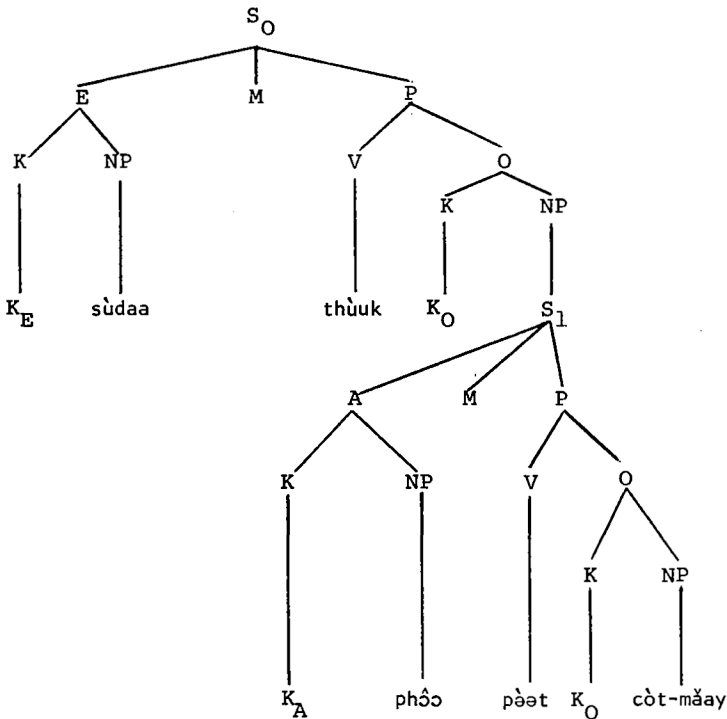
It seems that we have problems in accounting for (5) and (6) because we assume that thùuk gets into the string by a rule or a set of rules. Since we can derive surface structures AVO and OAV through the application of subjectivalisation and topicalisation rules, there is no need to consider deriving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

We have seen that the analysis of thùuk as proposed by grammarians working in the traditional and transformational framework cannot adequately account for the occurrences and non-occurrences of thùuk in (1) - (8). It is also evident that the introduction of thùuk 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 thùuk construction differently. In this new analysis thùuk 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:



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

(13)



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

(14) a. *sùdaa thùuk hây thớng năngs††*
Suda study book
Suda was made to study the book.

b. **sùdaa thùuk hây rúu năngs††*
Suda know book

(15) a. *dæŋ thùuk sùdaa mớng*
Dang Suda look
Dang was stared at by Suda.

b. **dæŋ thùuk sùdaa hễn*
Dang Suda see

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) *dæŋ sùdaa chœn* is not quite the same as (1c) *dæŋ thùuk sùdaa chœn*. Another advantage in having *thùuk* 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) *nǎŋsǎi thùuk sùdaa hây dæŋ*
book Suda give Dang
The book was given to Dang by Suda.

(17) *nǎŋsǎi thùuk sùdaa plæ*
book Suda translate
The book was translated by Suda.

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

