

LOSS OF PREEMINENCE OF CITATION FORMS IN THE STUDY OF TONES IN THAI DIALECTS

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Linguists have investigated the tone systems of Thai dialects for three decades. Up to the end of the 1970s they were interested in Northern Thai, Northeastern Thai and Southern Thai, and paid little attention to Central Thai. Since 1979 a few linguists including myself have become interested in studying tonal variation among the accents of this neglected dialect. The studies of Central Thai have pointed out the necessity of turning our attention away from tonal realizations in the unnatural citation style to those in the natural discourse style in the quest for complete understanding of tonal variation in Thai dialects.

The tonal studies of Thai dialects that have been carried out so far have been of several types. Some studies dealt with the phonological system as a whole including the consonant system, the vowel system, and the tone system (e.g. Chantavibulya 1959, Chanaingoon 1970, L-Thongkum et al. 1978). Others investigated only the tone system (e.g. Court 1972, Malaichalem 1987). Some studies were descriptive, analyzing the tone system of just one dialect (e.g. Dumruks 1970, Rinprom 1977). Others were comparative, investigating the tone systems of more than one variety (e.g. Withayasakphan 1979, Tingsabadh 1980, Ratanadilok Na Phuket 1983). Some studies were carried out by a native speaker of the dialect under study (e.g. Boonabha 1969, Changphrai 1977). Others were investigated by outsiders, either foreign or Thai linguists who do not speak the dialect under study (e.g. Haas 1958, Brown 1965, Tingsabadh 1980, Debavalya 1983).

A survey of the tonal studies shows that their data consisted mainly of monosyllabic words spoken in isolation, or citation forms. This was the case with all of the types of studies mentioned above. In my opinion there are two reasons for this adherence to citation forms in tonal studies of Thai dialects.

Firstly, tone is a complex phenomenon. The way each tone is realized phonetically may vary considerably in different linguistic contexts, for example, in stressed positions as opposed to unstressed positions. Faced with this problem linguists have found it necessary to limit the scope of their study of tones on monosyllabic words which were elicited in one style only, that of citation. The data thus obtained can be readily analyzed both auditorily and instrumentally.

Secondly, in the discipline of comparative and historical Tai linguistics, there is a method for analyzing the tone system of a language or a dialect in the Tai family, known as the tone checklist or the tone box (Gedney 1973). The objective of this method is to show how the tone systems of the languages and dialects in the Tai family have developed from the tone system of the Proto-Tai language. Seeing how easy it is to analyze the tone system of a Thai dialect with the help of the tone box, Thai dialectologists borrowed this method into their discipline and have been using it as the main method for tonal analysis ever since. As the wordlist used in the tone-box method includes only monosyllabic words of Tai origin; the use of this method further reinforces the preeminence of citation forms in the study of tonal variation in Thai dialects.

In my first study of Suphanburi Thai (Tingsabadh 1980), I followed the other tonal studies that had been carried out previously and restricted my data to citation forms. A wordlist of more than 400 items was used in the study. The elicitation technique in that study was the questioning method, which consists of the setting up of a set of questions for use in eliciting the words required. For example.

/nii³ 2a2² rai¹ /
 What is this? (pointing at a picture or an item)
 /rau¹ riak³ sat² thii³ mii¹ piik² bin¹
 daai³ waa³ 2a2² rai¹ /

How do we call the animal which has wings and can fly?

The questioning method was used instead of the more convenient reading method in order to minimize interference from Standard Thai. In that study of Suphanburi Thai the informants were asked to say each word three times. The result of the study was based entirely on these monosyllabic utterances. Nevertheless, I did elicit some connected speech from each informant. It was analyzed but the result was not included in the main part of the report.

At that time I already saw that at least one of the tones in Suphanburi Thai was realized differently in connected speech. The tone in question is tone 3 (the tone is equivalent to the high - falling tone in Standard Thai). It was always realized as high - delayed - falling [441] in citation forms, but in connected speech it was regularly realized as high - rising [45] or high - level [44].

I became very interested in this discrepancy and carried out another research project to investigate this particular problem (Tingsabadh, forthcoming). In this study, I found that, apart from tone 3, some other tones in Suphanburi Thai were also realized differently in connected speech. They are tone 1 and tone 5. The former is equivalent to the mid tone, and the latter to the low - rising tone in Standard Thai.

Tone 1 is a very interesting case. In citation forms some informants pronounced the words that carry this tone (e.g. /taa¹ / "eye", /daaw¹ / "star", and /naa¹ / "ricefield") as mid - rising - falling [343] or mid - level [33]. However, in connected speech, they often pronounced these words as mid - rising [34] or mid - level [33]. Moreover, some informants

pronounced the words that belong to the tone - boxes A2 and A3 differently from those in the tone - box A4 in connected speech, even though they pronounced the words in the three tone - boxes in the same way in citation forms. That is, in connected speech, the words in the tone - boxes A2 and A3 were pronounced as mid - rising [34] or mid - level [33] while those in the tone - box A4 were pronounced as low - delayed - rising [114] or low - level [11].

Turning to tone 5 some informants pronounced it as mid - falling - rising [325], high - falling - rising [523], or low - delayed - rising [115]. In connected speech, however, the tone is often realized as high - falling [51]. The two falling - rising pitch contours also occurred in connected speech.

The discrepancy raised an important question. Which set of realizations, those in citation forms or those in connected speech, should be selected as representative of the Suphanburi Thai tone system? An impressionistic review of the data showed that while connected speech sounded natural, citation forms sounded emphatic and unnatural. Moreover, it is generally known that as far as styles are concerned the citation style rarely occurs in everyday speech, found only in single - word answers, and the pronunciation in this style is usually deliberate and even exaggerated. Consequently, I came to the conclusion that tonal realizations in connected speech should be regarded as the type that represents the true picture of the Suphanburi Thai tone system.

This conclusion received most encouraging support recently. In a study of tonal variation in Ang Thong and Ayutthaya Thai, Malaichalern (1987) found that one of the diagnostic tonal features of the varieties spoken in these provinces is the realization of tone 3. She found that the informants living in Ang Thong province pronounced the tone as high - rising [45] or high - level [44], while those living in Ayutthaya province pronounced the tone as high - delayed - falling [441]. The result of this study therefore supported my decision to place emphasis on the results obtained from connected speech.

Malaichalern's study is illuminating in another aspect as well. The data in that study consisted only of monosyllabic and polysyllabic words, and the questioning method was used to elicit them. It seems as if my proposal put forward above concerning the significance of connected speech has been contradicted. However, it is important to note that Malaichalern

herself came from Ang Thong and speaks the local dialect fluently. In the interviews, she managed to make the informants feel as if they were having an ordinary conversation with another speaker of the same area. What has been learned from this study is that the most important type of data in a tonal study of Central Thai is the NATURAL type.

For a researcher who is an outsider it is very difficult to obtain natural data because of the well-known phenomenon of the observer's paradox. That is, in an interview the researcher needs the most natural form of speech, but his presence as well as that of a tape recorder make it impossible for the majority of the informants to speak naturally. I have found that for the researcher who is an outsider, the most natural type of data that can be obtained is connected speech. The way to elicit natural speech is to look for some topics that the people in the area of study like talking about. Once the topics are found it is reasonably easy to acquire a recording of connected speech lasting about twenty minutes or half an hour. I have found that that amount of recording is sufficient for use in the analysis of the tone system.

Since connected speech is rather difficult to analyze, I recommend that the data elicited from each informant should consist of both citation forms and connected speech. The latter should be elicited first so that the most natural form of speech is obtained.

In the analysis, on the other hand, the former should be analyzed first so that the researcher can have a rough idea of the tone system and feel more certain to go on to the analysis of tones in connected speech. Nevertheless, it is recommended that the final result should be based solely on the tonal realizations in connected speech.

In the case of those researchers who are themselves the native speakers of the variety under study, it is possible to rely on the analysis of monosyllabic and polysyllabic words, as in the case of Malaichalemn. However, they have to make sure that the data obtained are not in the citation style but are completely natural. Therefore, these researchers must be very careful with their elicitation techniques.

In my opinion, it should be possible to transfer what has been learned from the studies of Suphanburi, Ang Thong and Ayutthaya Thai to the tonal study of other varieties of Thai as well. Although the studies of other dialects which relied on citation forms seemed to show the tonal characteristics that differentiate them, a further inquiry using connected speech may give us a different and probably a better picture. It is therefore proposed that future tonal studies of Thai dialects concentrate on tones in connected speech. This direction, if taken, should give us very interesting results.

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