THAI SENTENCE FOCUS

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1. Introduction

No one will deny that in his daily conversation, certain elements of the sentences he utters are in focus while some others are not. Sentence focus brings the element in question to the center of attention, provides a contrast with other elements, and emphasizes the element in question to be remembered in later discourse. The element in focus must be either a noun phrase or a verb in a matrix sentence. Longacre 1976 believes that "focus is a relatively superficial phenomenon or, in terms of constructional derivation, a relatively late rule in progressing from the semantic depth towards the surface." This analysis suggests that the element in focus is given a semantic feature [+focus] in the deep structure. This paper aims to show how sentence focus in the Thai language works.

2. Focus on noun

Any noun in the deep structure, including a noun in a prepositional phrase in a matrix sentence, can be focused but a noun phrase in an embedded sentence cannot. When the [+focus] feature appears in any noun phrase, the third person pronoun attachment transformation is applied as follows:

\[(1) \quad X \quad NP \quad Y \quad \Rightarrow \quad X \quad NP \quad \left[ [+\text{PRO}] \right] Y \quad \left[ [+\text{focus}] \right] \quad \left[ [+\text{III}] \right] \quad Y \quad \text{must not be} \quad \left[ [+\text{PRO}], \quad [+\text{III}] \right], \quad \text{or} \quad \text{khọọ}. \]

Rule (1) will introduce a pronominal segment attached to the noun phrase by incorporating the feature [+PRO], [+III], to the rightmost position of a noun phrase, and copying significant features from the preceding noun to signify pronominal status. The pronominal added will be realized as follows:

\[(2) \quad \left[ [+\text{PRO}] \right] \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{man} \quad \text{'}it'\]

\[\left[ [+\text{III}] \right] \quad \left[ [-\text{human}] \right] \]
(3) 

[+PRO]  
[+III]  
[+human]  
[+monarch], [+prince]  

⇒ phéọtôŋ thạn  'he, she'

(4) 

[+PRO]  
[+III]  
[+human]  
[+monk], [+prince 2],  
[+high ranking official]  

⇒ thạn  'he, she'

(5) 

[+PRO]  
[+III]  
[+human]  
[+older person]  

⇒ kæœ  'he, she'

(6) 

[+PRO]  
[+III]  
[+human]  
[+feminine]  
[+polite]  

⇒ thœ  'she'

(7) 

[+PRO]  
[+III]  
[+human]  
[+polite]  

⇒ khâw  'he, she'

(8) 

[+PRO]  
[+III]  
[+human]  
[+foreigner], [-polite]  

⇒ man  'he, she'

Consider, for example, the following sentences:

(9) phó chô dop sûa tua nán  
father like shirt classifier that  
father likes that shirt.
(10) pàak không phụu yıŋ khon nán baaŋ
mouth of woman classifier that thin
That woman's lips are thin.⁶

If the nouns in (9) and (10) are focused, rule (1) will apply to
(9) and (10) yielding (11) and (12) respectively.

(11) a. phó than châop sīa tua nán man
father he like shirt classifier that it
Father, he likes that shirt.⁷

b. phó kâe⁸ châop sīa tua nán man
father he like shirt classifier that it
Father, he likes that shirt.

c. phó khâw⁹ châop sīa tua nán man
father he like shirt classifier that it
Father, he likes that shirt.

(12) pàak không phụu yıŋ khon nán thẹe baaŋ⁷⁰
mouth of woman classifier that she thin
That woman's lips are thin.

When the focus element is pre-sententially transposed, it becomes
the topic¹¹ of the sentence. (11) and (12) will become (13) and (14)
respectively.

(13) a. sīa tua nán phó than châop man
shirt classifier that father he like it
That shirt, father, he likes it.

b. sīa tua nán phó kâe châop man
shirt classifier that father he like it
That shirt, father, he likes it.

c. sīa tua nán phó khâw châop man
shirt classifier that father he like it
That shirt, father, he likes it.

(14) *không phụu yıŋ khon nán pàak thẹe baaŋ
of woman classifier that mouth she thin
That woman, her lips are thin.

On the evidence cited above, one can propose the following trans-
formational rule, the focus-preposing transformation.

(15) # X (P) NP [+[PRO]] Y ➔ # (P) NP X [+[PRO]] Y
   [+[focus]] [+[III]] [+[focus]] [+[III]]
A noun phrase or a prepositional phrase containing a noun in focus is transposed to a pre-sentential position but the pronominal segment introduced by the third person pronoun attachment transformation is not.

Note that thân 'he, she' in (13), man 'it' also in (13), and thế 'she' in (14) are not preposed with the noun phrase.

When rule (15) is applied, any other element in focus to the right of the preposed noun phrase is defocused. This can be represented by the following rule.

(16) X NP Y NP / Z X NP Y NP Z
     [+focus]  [+focus]  \rightarrow  [+focus]

This rule prevents other focus elements from being transposed to a pre-sentential position.

Rule (16) will block bố 'father' in (13) and participación 'mouth' in (14) from being preposed to a pre-sentential position because they no longer contain the [+focus] feature.

If the matrix sentence with the noun phrase in focus is a question, the question element is transformed to the right of the preposed noun phrase in rule (15) and this can be represented as follows:

(17) X NP Y Q Z X NP Q Y Z
     [+focus]  \rightarrow  [+focus]

Suppose that (13a) and (14) contain a question element as the following:

(18) sìa tua nán phó thân châu man rỉi
    shirt classifier that father he like it question
    That shirt. Does father like it?

(19) khách phụ yển khorn nàn phó thể bà ng rỉi
    of woman classifier that mouth she thin question
    That woman. Are her lips thin?

When rule (17) is applied, (18) and (19) will become (20) and (21) respectively.

(20) sìa tua nán rỉi phó thân châu man
    shirt classifier that question father he like it
    That shirt? Does father like it?
(21) khợợn phụuyĩn khon nán rị̀ pàak thee baŋ
day woman classifier that question mouth she thin
That woman? Are her lips thin?

Then khợợn 'of' preceding the preposed noun phrase which is under
focus and the pronominal segment introduced by the third person pronoun
attachment transformation will be deleted by the khợợn and pronominal
segment deletion transformation as follows:

(22) X khợợn NP₁ Y \([+\text{PRO}]\)
[+focus] \([+\text{III}]\)
Z \(\Rightarrow\) X NP₁ Y (\([+\text{PRO}]\)
[+focus] \([+\text{III}]\)

Applying rule (22), (14) and (21) will become (23) and (24) respec-
tively.

(23) phụuyĩn khon nán pàak baŋ
woman classifier that mouth thin
That woman. Her lips are thin.

(24) phụuyĩn khon nán rị̀ pàak baŋ
woman classifier that question mouth thin
That woman? Are her lips thin?

When thị̀ precedes the preposed noun phrase under focus, thị̀ is
optionally deleted.

(25) X thị̀ NP Y \(\Rightarrow\) X NP Y
[+ focus] [+ focus]

Note that rule (25) must not be applied before rule (15). Consider
the sentence below:

(26) khǎw māy yàak yùu thị̀ bân
he not want stay at home
He does not want to stay home.

By applying rule (1) and rule (15), (26) will become (27).

(27) thị̀ bân khǎw māy yàak yùu mān
at home he not want stay it
At home, he doesn't want to stay.

If rule (25) is applied to (27), (27) will become (28).

(28) bân khǎw māy yàak yùu mān
home he not want stay it
Home, he doesn't want to stay.
The pronominal segment introduced by rule (1) can be deleted by the pronominal segment deletion transformation as follows:

\[(29) \quad X \quad \text{NP}_1 \quad Y \quad \begin{array}{c} \text{[+PRO}_1\text{]} \\ \text{[+focus]} \end{array} \quad Z \quad \Rightarrow \quad X \quad \text{NP}_1 \quad Y \quad Z \quad \begin{array}{c} \text{[+focus]} \end{array} \quad \quad \text{[+focus]} \]

Thus (13a), (20), and (23) will become (30), (31), and (32) respectively.

(30) sêa tua nán phó thân chỏop
    shirt classifier that father he like
    That shirt. Father, he likes it.

(31) sêa tua nán rîg phó thân chỏop
    shirt classifier that question father he like
    That shirt? Does father like it?

(32) bàn khôw máy yàak yùu
    home he not want stay
    Home, he doesn't want to stay.

One might wonder whether a sentence like (33) is grammatical. If it is so, the rule similar to rule (29) is needed to delete the pronominal segment which follows the nonfocus noun phrase.\textsuperscript{12}

(33) sêa tua nán phó chỏop
    shirt classifier that father like
    That shirt, father likes (it).

(33) is grammatical but we do not need an extra rule to delete the pronominal segment like rule (29) because rule (1) does not apply to the noun phrase phó 'father' from the beginning and the pronominal segment yielding thân 'he' will not appear anywhere.

If the noun phrase under focus is definite and it contains a determiner, nîi 'this', nán 'that', or nõon 'that yonder', the definite particle incorporation transformation is applied.

\[(34) \quad \begin{array}{c} \text{a. } X \quad \text{NP} \quad Y \quad \Rightarrow \quad X \quad \text{NP} \quad \begin{array}{c} \text{[+def]} \\ \text{[+focus]} \end{array} \quad Y \\ \begin{array}{c} \text{[+focus]} \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{c} \text{[+def]} \end{array} \quad \quad \text{Y must not contain [+def].} \end{array} \]

b. X [+] Y \quad \Rightarrow \quad X \quad lè \quad Y \begin{array}{c} \text{13} \end{array} \]

By applying rule (34) to (30), (31) and (32), they will yield (35), (36), and (37) respectively.
(35) sâa tua nân là phổc thân chôop
shirt classifier that definite father he like
That shirt, father likes.

(36) sâa tua nân là ríi phổc thân chôop
shirt classifier that definite question father he like
That shirt? Does father like it?

(37) sâa tua nân là phổc chôop
shirt classifier that definite father like
That shirt, father likes.

The noun phrase under focus may undergo the noun intensification transformation by incorporating the particle ná after it.

(38) a. X NP Y \rightarrow X NP [+focus] Y
[+focus]
b. X [+focus] Y \rightarrow X ná Y

Thus (35), (36), and (37) will become (39), (40), and (41) respectively.

(39) sâa tua nân ná là phổc thân chôop
shirt classifier that intensif. definite father he like
That shirt, father likes.

(40) sâa tua nân ná là ríi phổc thân chôop
shirt classifier that intensif. definite question father he like
That shirt? Does father like?

(41) sâa tua nân ná là phổc chôop
shirt classifier that intensif. definite father like
That shirt, father likes.

3. Focus on predicate

There are two alternatives in focus on predicate: the verb reduplication and the verb intensification. The speakers of Thai may choose either of the two freely.

3.1 The verb reduplication

The verb under focus may undergo the verb reduplication transformation which copies all the features of the verb under focus so that the whole verb is reduplicated as follows:

(42) X V Y X [+V reduplication]V Y
[+focus]

Consider the sentences which rule (42) has been applied:
(43) dêk khon nī ki'n ki'n ?aahǎn thǔk yàan¹⁴  
child classifier this eat eat food every kind  
This child eats all kinds of food.

(44) khâw dēn réw réw  
he walk fast fast  
He walks rather fast.

The application of (42) to the verb signifies the more intensifying action or state of the verb.

Most female speakers intensify the action or state of the reduplicated verb derived by rule (42) to a greater degree by incorporating a high tone into the first part of the reduplicated verb as follows:

(45) \[ X \quad [ + V \text{ reduplication}] \quad Y \quad \implies \quad X \quad [ [+ V \text{ reduplication}] \quad Y \quad [ + \text{high tone} ] \]

By applying (45) to (43) and (44), we will obtain (46) and (47) respectively.

(46) dêk khon nī ki'n ki'n ?aahǎn thǔk yàan  
child classifier this eat eat food every kind  
This child eats all kinds of food (and nothing is left).

(47) khâw dēn réw réw  
he walk fast fast  
He walks very fast.

If rule (42) and rule (45) are applied to (23), it will become (48).

(48) phûuyīŋ khon nàn pàak báŋ báŋ  
woman classifier that mouth thin thin  
That woman's lips are very thin.

3.2 The verb intensification

The verb under focus is intensified in formal speech or by most of male speakers through the verb intensification transformation.

(49) \[ X \quad V \quad Y \quad \implies \quad X \quad V \quad [ + V \text{ intensification}] \quad Y \quad [ + \text{focus} ] \]

When rule (49) is applied, the [+focus] feature on the verb is deleted and the verb intensification segment is inserted after the verb. All inherent features in the verb under focus are copied into the verb intensification segment. If the verb is marked with pertinent features of the intensifying element,¹⁵ the right intensifier or the general
intensifier, mâak, is inserted after the verb. If the verb is not marked, the general intensifier, mâak, is inserted.

Consider the following sentences (50) - (55):

(50) phûuyîn khon nân phûut cûo woman classifier that talk talkative
That woman is talkative.

(51) phûuyîn khon nân phûut mâak woman classifier that talk a lot
That woman talks a lot.

(52) khaw mîan phôo plâp he look alike father very much
He looks very much like father.

(53) khâaw mîan phôo mâak he look alike father a lot
He looks a lot like father.

(54) phûuchaay khon nân phôm khâaw phloon\textsuperscript{16} man classifier that hair white all
That man's hair is all white.

(55) sfa tua nîi raakhaa thûuk mâak shirt classifier this price cheap a lot
This shirt is very cheap.

4. Conclusion

There seems to be a general phenomenon called FOCUS which appears in many languages. When focus is attached to the noun phrase and the noun phrase under focus is pre-sententially transposed, such an element is the TOPIC. When focus is attached to the verb, it signifies the intensification of the action or state of the verb.

NOTES

\textsuperscript{1} The early version of this paper was presented at the Tenth International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. on October 14-16, 1977.

\textsuperscript{2} The term 'representative function' used by Robert Hetzron 1975 somewhat overlaps with the term 'focus' used here and by many others.

4 One may treat focus as a constituent in the deep structure as 'question' or 'negative' is. It will later be attached to the node dominated by either a noun phrase or a verb. This solution will work if only one element in each matrix sentence is under focus. In reality, there is more than one constituent in a sentence which can be focused. It is difficult to attach a single constituent to two or more constituents in the same sentence at the same time. The second alternative is to derive the focus element from a performative sentence as in Ross 1970, and Warotamasikkhadit 1975 where the performative verb of the deleted higher clause is yâm 'emphasize'. The focus element is attached to the node dominated by either a noun phrase or a verb. This will not resolve the problem of plural focusing either.

5 Rule (1) prevents the noun phrase under focus to undergo the third person pronoun attachment transformation. This paper follows Chomsky 1970: 200-207 in treating a possessive noun phrase as a base form.

6 In Thai culture, thick lips are considered ugly.

7 This type of sentence is not considered vulgar or substandard as compared with English. The third person pronoun thân 'he, she' is widely used among educated and city people.

8 kæ 'he, she' is mostly used among uneducated and country people.

9 Educated and city people may use khâw 'he, she' in place of thân in informal speech.

10 Suppose that pàak 'mouth' in (12) is focused but rule (1) cannot be applied and a pronominal segment cannot be incorporated after pàak.

11 Li and Thompson 1976: 464 defines topic as the "center of attention."

12 Note that rule (29) will not apply because the noun phrase preceding the pronominal segment is no longer under focus by rule (16).

13 For many speakers, lâ is a variant of lâ.

14 When the reduplicated verb is a transitive verb, the noun phrase following it can be deleted. Thus (43) may become

dèk khon nî kîn kîn
child classifier this eat eat
This child keeps eating.
Some verbals carry the features [+V intensification] and the intensifier while some do not, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>khoa 'look for'</th>
<th>phuut 'talk'</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[+VB]</td>
<td>[+VB]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+V]</td>
<td>[+V]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+V intensification]</td>
<td>[+V intensification]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+khwâk]</td>
<td>[+câõ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>laap 'asleep'</th>
<th>daæen 'red'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[+VB]</td>
<td>[+VB]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-V]</td>
<td>[-V]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+V intensification]</td>
<td>[+V intensification]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+pûy]</td>
<td>[+cææ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>deæen 'walk'</th>
<th>mii 'have'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[+VB]</td>
<td>[+VB]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+V]</td>
<td>[+V]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>thûuk 'cheap'</th>
<th>sûay 'beautiful'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[+VB]</td>
<td>[+VB]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-V]</td>
<td>[-V]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The noun phrase phûuchaay khon nán 'that man' is under focus, and so is the verb khoaaw 'white' which takes the intensifier phloon 'all white'.

REFERENCES


