

THAI SENTENCE FOCUS¹

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1. Introduction

No one will deny that in his daily conversation, certain elements of the sentences he utters are in focus² 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."³ This analysis suggests that the element in focus is given a semantic feature [+focus] in the deep structure.⁴ 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:

$$(1) \quad \begin{array}{ccccc} X & & NP & & Y \\ & & [+focus] & & \end{array} \Rightarrow \begin{array}{ccccc} X & & NP & & \left[\begin{array}{c} [+PRO] \\ [+III] \end{array} \right] Y \\ & & [+focus] & & \end{array}$$

Y must not be [[+PRO], [+III]], or khǎwǎn.⁵

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:

$$(2) \quad \left[\begin{array}{c} [+PRO] \\ [+III] \\ [-human] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \text{man} \quad \text{'it'}$$

- (3) $\left[\begin{array}{l} [+PRO] \\ [+III] \\ [+human] \\ [+monarch], [+prince] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \text{phrá?on thân} \quad \text{'he, she'}$
- (4) $\left[\begin{array}{l} [+PRO] \\ [+III] \\ [+human] \\ [+monk], [+prince 2], \\ [+high ranking official] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \text{thân} \quad \text{'he, she'}$
- (5) $\left[\begin{array}{l} [+PRO] \\ [+III] \\ [+human] \\ [+older person] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \text{kææ} \quad \text{'he, she'}$
- (6) $\left[\begin{array}{l} [+PRO] \\ [+III] \\ [+human] \\ [+feminine] \\ [+polite] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \text{thəə} \quad \text{'she'}$
- (7) $\left[\begin{array}{l} [+PRO] \\ [+III] \\ [+human] \\ [+polite] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \text{khăw} \quad \text{'he, she'}$
- (8) $\left[\begin{array}{l} [+PRO] \\ [+III] \\ [+human] \\ [+foreigner], [-polite] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \text{man} \quad \text{'he, she'}$

Consider, for example, the following sentences:

- (9) phôô chôôp sĩa tua nán
 father like shirt classifier that
 Father likes that shirt.

- (10) pàak khǒŋ phûuyǐŋ khon nán baan
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. phôo thân chồp sĩa tua nán man
father he like shirt classifier that it
Father, he likes that shirt.⁷
- b. phôo kae⁸ chồp sĩa tua nán man
father he like shirt classifier that it
Father, he likes that shirt.
- c. phôo khăw⁹ chồp sĩa tua nán man
father he like shirt classifier that it
Father, he likes that shirt.
- (12) pàak khốŋ phũuyĩŋ khon nán theə baan¹⁰
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. s̺a tua nán phôo thân chồp man
shirt classifier that father he like it
That shirt, father, he likes it.
- b. s̺a tua nán phôo kœ chồp man
shirt classifier that father he like it
That shirt, father, he likes it.
- c. s̺a tua nán phôo khăw chồp man
shirt classifier that father he like it
That shirt, father, he likes it.
- (14) *khốɔŋ phũuɣĩŋ khon nán pàak thœ baan
of woman classifier that mouth she thin
That woman, her lips are thin.

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

- $$(15) \quad \# \text{ X (P) NP } \begin{bmatrix} [+PRO] \\ [+III] \end{bmatrix} \text{ Y} \Rightarrow \# \text{ (P) NP X } \begin{bmatrix} [+PRO] \\ [+III] \end{bmatrix} \text{ Y}$$

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 *thəə* '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.

$$(16) \quad \begin{array}{ccccccc} X & NP & Y & NP & Z & X & NP & Y & NP & Z \\ [+focus] & [+focus] & & & \Rightarrow & [+focus] & & & & \end{array}$$

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

Rule (16) will block *phôo* 'father' in (13) and *pàak* '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:

$$(17) \quad \begin{array}{ccccccc} X & NP & Y & Q & Z & X & NP & Q & Y & Z \\ [+focus] & & & & \Rightarrow & [+focus] & & & & \end{array}$$

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

(18) *ṣa tua nán phôo thân chôp man ṛi*
 shirt classifier that father he like it question
 That shirt. Does father like it?

(19) *khốŋ phũuyĩŋ khon nán pàak thəə baŋ ṛi*
 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) *ṣa tua nán ṛi phôo thân chôp man*
 shirt classifier that question father he like it
 That shirt? Does father like it?

The pronominal segment introduced by rule (1) can be deleted by the pronominal segment deletion transformation as follows:

$$(29) \quad X \quad \text{NP}_1 \quad Y \quad \begin{bmatrix} [+PRO_1] \\ [+III] \end{bmatrix} \quad Z \quad \Rightarrow \quad X \quad \text{NP}_1 \quad Y \quad Z \\ [+focus] \quad \quad \quad [+focus]$$

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

(30) sfa tua nán phôo thân chồp
shirt classifier that father he like
That shirt. Father, he likes it.

(31) sfa tua nán rfi phôo thân chồp
shirt classifier that question father he like
That shirt? Does father like it?

(32) bân khăw mây 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.¹²

(33) sfa tua nán phôo chồp
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 phôo '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, níi 'this', nán 'that', or nóon 'that yonder', the definite particle incorporation transformation is applied.

$$(34) \quad a. \quad X \quad \text{NP} \quad Y \quad \Rightarrow \quad X \quad \text{NP} \quad [+def] \quad Y \\ \begin{bmatrix} [+focus] \\ [+def] \end{bmatrix} \quad \quad \quad \begin{bmatrix} [+focus] \\ [+def] \end{bmatrix}$$

Y must not contain [+def].

$$b. \quad X \quad [+def] \quad Y \quad \Rightarrow \quad X \quad là \quad Y^{13}$$

By applying rule (34) to (30), (31) and (32), they will yield (35), (36), and (37) respectively.

- (35) s̄a tua nán là phỏc thân chỏp
 shirt classifier that definite father he like
 That shirt, father likes.
- (36) s̄a tua nán là r̄i phỏc thân chỏp
 shirt classifier that definite question father he like
 That shirt? Does father like it?
- (37) s̄a tua nán là phỏc chỏp
 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 n̄a after it.

- (38) a. X NP Y \Rightarrow X NP [+focus] Y
 [+focus]
 b. X [+focus] Y \Rightarrow X n̄a Y

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

- (39) s̄a tua nán n̄a là phỏc thân chỏp
 shirt classifier that intensif. definite father he like
 That shirt, father likes.
- (40) s̄a tua nán n̄a là r̄i phỏc thân chỏp
 shirt classifier that intensif. definite question father he like
 That shirt? Does father like?
- (41) s̄a tua nán n̄a là phỏc chỏp
 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) dèk khon níi kin kin ʔaahǎan thúk yàaŋ¹⁴
 child classifier this eat eat food every kind
 This child eats all kinds of food.

- (44) khǎw dǎen rew rew
 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) $X [+V \text{ reduplication}] Y \Rightarrow X \left[\begin{array}{l} [+V \text{ reduplication}] \\ [+high \text{ tone}] \end{array} \right] Y$

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

- (46) dèk khon níi kín kin ʔaahǎan thúk yàaŋ
 child classifier this eat eat food every kind
 This child eats all kinds of food (and nothing is left).

- (47) khǎw dǎen réw rew
 he walk fast fast
 He walks very fast.

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

- (48) phûuyǐŋ khon nán pàak báaŋ baan
 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) $X \quad V \quad Y \Rightarrow X \quad V [+V \text{ intensification}] Y$
 $[+focus]$

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) *phûuyŋ* *khon* *nán* *phûut* *côo*
 woman classifier that talk talkative
 That woman is talkative.

(51) *phûuyŋ* *khon* *nán* *phûut* *mâak*
 woman classifier that talk a lot
 That woman talks a lot.

(52) *khaw* *mŋan* *phôo* *píap*
 he look alike father very much
 He looks very much like father.

(53) *khăw* *mŋan* *phôo* *mâak*
 he look alike father a lot
 He looks a lot like father.

(54) *phûuchaay* *khon* *nán* *phôm* *khăaw* *phloon*¹⁶
 man classifier that hair white all
 That man's hair is all white.

(55) *sŋa* *tua* *níi* *raakhaa* *thùuk* *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

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.

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

- ³ See Longacre 1976: 67.
- 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 *yám* '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 *kææ* 'he, she' is mostly used among uneducated and country people.
- ⁹ Educated and city people may use *khăw* '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, *là* is a variant of *læ*.
- ¹⁴ When the reduplicated verb is a transitive verb, the noun phrase following it can be deleted. Thus (43) may become

dèk khon nîi kin kin
 child classifier this eat eat
 This child keeps eating.

- 15 Some verbals carry the features [+V intensification] and the intensifier while some do not, for example:

hăa 'look for'	phûut 'talk'
$\left[\begin{array}{l} [+VB] \\ [+V] \\ [+V \text{ intensification}] \\ [+khwâk] \end{array} \right]$	$\left[\begin{array}{l} [+VB] \\ [+V] \\ [+V \text{ intensification}] \\ [+côo] \end{array} \right]$
lâp 'asleep'	dæŋ 'red'
$\left[\begin{array}{l} [+VB] \\ [-V] \\ [+V \text{ intensification}] \\ [+pŭy] \end{array} \right]$	$\left[\begin{array}{l} [+VB] \\ [-V] \\ [+V \text{ intensification}] \\ [+cǣ] \end{array} \right]$
dæen 'walk'	mii 'have'
$\left[\begin{array}{l} [+VB] \\ [+V] \end{array} \right]$	$\left[\begin{array}{l} [+VB] \\ [+V] \end{array} \right]$
thùuk 'cheap'	sŭay 'beautiful'
$\left[\begin{array}{l} [+VB] \\ [-V] \end{array} \right]$	$\left[\begin{array}{l} [+VB] \\ [-V] \end{array} \right]$

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

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