

# THERE ARE NO PREPOSITIONS IN THAI

Udom Warotamasikkhadit

## 0. Introduction

It is not necessary that all languages have prepositions. Whitney ( 1889 : 403 ) states that " The indeclinable words are less distinctly divided into separate parts of speech in Sanskrit than is usual elsewhere in Indo - European language--owing to the fact that the class of prepositions hardly has a real existence, but is represented by certain adverbial words which are to a greater or less extent used prepositionally. " The term " preposition " did not appear in Thai grammatical terminology until Uppakitsinlapan ( 1953 : 58 - 70 ) wrote his *Siamese Grammar : Morphology* in 1953. He defines a preposition as a kind of word that precedes a noun, a pronoun, or a certain kind of verb in order to indicate the function of the noun, the pronoun, and the verb it precedes.<sup>1</sup> A Thai preposition is somewhat different from an English preposition because the English preposition connects words. The Thai preposition is the word used in front of a noun which Thai grammarians add in front of a noun to signify the different cases in the translation of the noun declension in Pali.<sup>2</sup> Kullavanijaya's analysis of coverbs and noun auxiliaries ( Kullavanija 1974 : 72 - 93 ), Clark's analysis of coverbs and relator nouns ( Clark 1975 : 222 - 247 ), Clark and Prasithratsint's analysis of relator nouns ( Clark and Prasithratsint 1985 : 53 - 65 ), and Sayankena's analysis of relator head nouns ( Sayankena 1985 : 82 - 83 ) are heading in the same direction as mine. It is evident that the words which are called prepositions in the traditional Thai grammar do not constitute a single form class like English as defined by Curme ( 1947 : 27 - 29 ) or by Fries ( 1952 : 95 - 96 ).<sup>3</sup>

## 1. VERBS MISTAKENLY CALLED PREPOSITIONS

Action verbs like taam 'to follow', càak 'to leave, to depart', thǎn 'to reach', sùu 'to reach', kràthǎn

'to touch on', con 'to end', tɔɔ 'to connect, to build, to continue', and etc. are all verbs in their occurrence, but their translation into English are often prepositions, for example: taam 'along', càak 'from', thǎn 'to', sùu 'to', kràthǎn 'until', con 'until', tɔɔ 'to'. I consider them verbs because they can be negated when occurring as a main verb signifying propositional semantic interpretation or when occurring as the last member of a verb string signifying the same semantic interpretation as the main verb.

### 1.1 taam 'to follow'

- (1) khǎw taam hǎa lûuk  
he follow search child  
He was searching for his child.
- (2) khǎw dɛen taam hǎa lûuk  
he walk follow search child  
He was walking in search of his child.
- (3) khǎw dɛen taam lûuk  
he walk follow child  
He walked, following his child.
- (4) khǎw dɛen taam thǎn ǎn  
he walk follow street  
He walks along the street.
- (5) dèk dèk nǎn taam raaw sǎphaan  
child sit follow rail bridge  
Children sit on the bridge rail.

No one will deny that taam 'to follow' in (1) is a verb because it occurs after a pronoun khǎw 'he' which is the subject of the sentence and can be negated. taam 'to follow' in (2) is also a verb but it occurs as a second member of the verb string signifying functional meaning ( Filbeck 1975 : 112 - 129 ). taam 'to follow' in (3) is also a verb where khǎw 'he' follows and lûuk 'child' precedes. taam 'to follow' in (4) is considered a preposition by traditional Thai grammarians because they do not see the semantic equivalence between taam 'to follow' in (3) and (4) and the translation of taam 'to follow' in

(4) is rather closer to 'along' than to 'to follow'. Our argument is that (3) and (4) are structurally the same and the meaning of *taam* 'to follow' remains the same in both sentences. The only difference is that the nominal actant *lôuk* 'child' in (3) is an animate noun and the nominal actant *thànôn* 'street' in (4) is an inanimate noun. Thus *taam* 'to follow' in (3), (4), and (5) are all verbs, not prepositions.

### 1.2 *càak* 'to leave, to depart'

(6) *khăw càak bâan maa*  
he leave home come  
He left home (to come here).

(7) *khăw maa càak bâan*  
he come leave home  
He came from home.

It is evident that *càak* 'to leave, to depart', in (6) is a verb where *bâan* 'home' is the object. *càak* 'to leave, to depart' in (7) is not semantically different from the one in (6). I see no point in calling *càak* 'to leave, to depart' in (6) a verb and *càak* 'to leave, to depart' in (7) a preposition. Kulavanijaya (1974 : 82 - 83) considers *càak* 'to leave, to depart' a coverb or a derived preposition.

(8) *khăw rîiprôon dœn càak raw pay*  
he hurry walk leave we go  
He hurriedly walked away from us.

(9) *khăw rîiprôon dœn càak pay*  
he hurry walk leave go  
He hurriedly walked away.

*càak* 'to leave, to depart' in (9) functions as a member of a verb string *rîiprôon dœn càak pay* 'hurriedly walked away' and its meaning is the same as *càak* 'to leave, to depart' in (8) where *raw* 'we' is not deleted as it is in (9). I find no reason to classify the two *càak* 'to leave, to depart' differently.

### 1.3 *th̃ŋ* 'to reach'

(10) *khăw cà th̃ŋ bâan kh++n nîi*  
he will reach home night this  
He will arrive home tonight.

(11) *khăw cà pay th̃ŋ Chiangmày*  
he will go reach Chiangmai  
*kh++n nîi*  
night this  
He will arrive in Chiangmai tonight.

(12) *khăw cà pay mây th̃ŋ Chiangmày*  
he will go not reach Chiangmai  
*kh++n nîi*  
night this  
He will not reach Chiangmai tonight.

He will not arrive in Chiangmai tonight.

*th̃ŋ* 'to reach' in (10) is definitely a verb because it follows a preverb *cà* 'will' and can be negated. In traditional Thai grammar *th̃ŋ* 'to reach' in (11) is considered a preposition even though it can also be negated as in (12). To me there is no possibility of classifying *th̃ŋ* 'to reach' in either case as a preposition.

### 1.4 *sùu* 'to come to'

(13) *raw cà mây sùu khăw lôuksăaw*  
we will not come to ask for daughter  
*khăw kôn r++*  
he before question

Should we not ask for his daughter's hand before doing something else?

(14) *khăw hăn nâa pay th̃it ña*  
he turn face go direction north  
He turned to face north.

(15) *khăw hăn nâa sùu th̃it ña*  
he turn face come to direction north  
He turned toward the North.

*sùu* 'to come to' in (13) is definitely a verb because it occurs after a preverb *cà* 'will' and can be negated. In traditional Thai grammar *pay* 'to go' in (14) is considered a secondary verb (Uppakitsinlapasan 1953 : 68, Haas and Subhank 1948 : 376 - 378, and Warotamasikkhadit 1972 : 18, 34) and *sùu* 'to come to' a preposition (Uppakitsinlapasan 1953 : 139). Because the two sentences reveal the same structure, both *pay* 'to go' and *sùu* 'to come to' should be the same part of speech, namely verbs.

### 1.5 *kràthân* 'to touch on'

(16) *khî++n kràthân fân*  
wave touch on shore  
Waves dash against the shore.

(17) *săamii phanrayaa yom*  
husband wife should  
*kràthôpkràthân kan sàmœ*  
strike against each other always  
Husband and wife usually clash with each other.

(18) *khăw rōo khun kràthân thian*  
he wait you touch on noon.  
He waited for you until noon.

*kràthân* 'to touch on' in (16) is definitely a verb because it occurs after the subject *khî++n* 'wave' and before the object *fân* 'shore'. *kràthân* 'touch on' rarely occurs independently to signify pro-

positional meaning but rather occurs as a compound verb *kràthópkràthân* 'to strike against, to touch on' as in (17). *kràthân* 'to touch on' in (18) is considered a member of a verb string *รอต* *khun kràthân* 'wait for you until' to signify a functional meaning 'touching on'.

#### 1.6 *con* 'to end'

- (19) *khăw con mum*  
he end corner  
He is cornered.

- (20) *khăw khooy khun con sàwàan*  
he wait you end dawn  
He waited for you until dawn.

*con* 'to end' in (19) is definitely a verb because it occurs after the subject *khăw* 'he' and before the object *mum* 'corner' and it can be negated. It seems to me that both *con* 'to end' in (19) and (20) signify the same meaning with (19) showing a propositional meaning and (20) showing a functional meaning.

#### 1.7 *tòc* 'to connect, to build, to continue'

- (21) *phôm tòc pleen càak khruu*  
I build song leave teacher  
I practiced the song with my teacher.

- (22) *thanaay yá+n khamróon tòc*  
lawyer file complaint connect  
săan  
court

The lawyer filed the complaint to the court.

*tòc* 'to connect, to build, to continue' in (21) is definitely a verb because it occurs after the subject *phôm* 'I' and can be negated. *tòc* 'to connect, to build, to continue' in (22) is a member of a verb string *yá+n khamróon tòc* 'to file the complaint with' shows a functional meaning.

## 2. STATIVE VERBS MISTAKENLY CALLED PREPOSITIONS

Some words which are called prepositions in traditional Thai grammar are stative verbs or descriptive verbs, such as *klay* 'far' and *klây* 'near'.

#### 2.1 *klay* 'far'

- (23) *bân khăw yùu klay*  
home he be far  
His house is far (away).

- (24) *bân khăw yùu mây klay*  
home he be not far  
His house is not far (away).

- (25) *bân khăw yùu klay càak bân chăan*  
home he be far leave home I  
house is far from my house.

- (26) *bân khăw yùu klay bân chăan*  
home he be far home I  
His house is far from my house.

*klay* 'far' in (23) and (24) is definitely a verb because it can be negated as in (24). *klay* 'far' in (25) is a member of a verb string *yùu klay càak* 'to be far away from' showing that it is a verb and *klay* 'far' in (26) is structurally and semantically the same as in (25) except *càak* 'to leave, to depart' is deleted in (26).

#### 2.2 *klây* 'near'

- (27) *bân raw yùu klây kan*  
home we be near each other  
Our houses are near each other.

- (28) *bân raw yùu mây klây kan*  
home we be not near each other  
Our houses are not near each other.

*klây* 'near' in (27) and (28) is definitely a verb because it can be negated as in (28).

## 3. NOUNS MISTAKENLY CALLED PREPOSITIONS

I believe that any word which can be modified by one of the determiners. *níi* 'this', *nán* 'that', or *nóon* 'that yonder' is called a noun. Thus, a classifier is a noun under the above definition as also in Uppakitsinlapasan (1953: 21 - 28). I consider *khōon* 'thing', *hæn* 'place', *thîi* 'place', *nay* 'inside', *nōok* 'outside', *bon* 'top', *nâa* 'face', *lăŋ* 'back', *klaaŋ* 'middle', *khâaŋ* 'side', *nŋa* 'north', *tâay* 'south', *rim* 'edge, rim', *mŋa* 'time', *tâŋtæ* 'time starting', *tæ* 'starting from'<sup>4</sup> are nouns according to the above definition. Starosta (1967) and Kullavanijaya (1974: 88 - 91) call this type of noun "noun auxiliary"; Clark (1975: 239 - 243), Clark and Prasithrathsint (1985: 53 - 62), and Sayankena (1985: 82 - 83) call it "relator noun".

#### 3.1 *khōon* 'thing'

- (29) *sŋa khōon khun sŋa*  
shirt thing you pretty  
Your shirt is pretty.

I consider s<sup>4</sup>a kh<sup>3</sup>oŋ khun 'your shirt' in (29) a noun phrase with a string of three nouns, where kh<sup>3</sup>oŋ 'thing' is a noun according to the above definition. We ignore the translation of kh<sup>3</sup>oŋ 'thing' as 'of' in English. Prasithrathsint (1985: 94 - 95) also considers kh<sup>3</sup>oŋ 'thing (of)' as a noun.

### 3.2 h<sup>3</sup>əŋ 'place'

(30) th<sup>3</sup>uk khon t<sup>3</sup>oŋkaan l<sup>3</sup>ook h<sup>3</sup>əŋ  
each person want world place  
s<sup>3</sup>ant<sup>3</sup>i ph<sup>3</sup>āap  
peace

Everyone wants a peaceful world.

h<sup>3</sup>əŋ 'place' in (30) is a noun in the noun string l<sup>3</sup>ook h<sup>3</sup>əŋ s<sup>3</sup>ant<sup>3</sup>i ph<sup>3</sup>āap 'world of peace'.

### 3.3 th<sup>3</sup>i 'place'

(31) kh<sup>3</sup>aw kamlan c<sup>3</sup>a pay h<sup>3</sup>āa  
he progressive will go visit  
khun th<sup>3</sup>i b<sup>3</sup>aan  
you place home  
He is going to visit you at home.

### 3.4 nay 'inside'

(32) ph<sup>3</sup>om k<sup>3</sup>ep p<sup>3</sup>in w<sup>3</sup>ay nay  
I keep gun keep inside  
l<sup>3</sup>inch<sup>3</sup>ak n<sup>3</sup>i  
drawer this

I kept my gun in this drawer.

nay 'inside' in (32) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase nay l<sup>3</sup>inch<sup>3</sup>ak n<sup>3</sup>i 'in this drawer'.

### 3.5 n<sup>3</sup>ook 'outside'

(33) kh<sup>3</sup>aw y<sup>3</sup>in r<sup>3</sup>oo y<sup>3</sup>uu n<sup>3</sup>ook b<sup>3</sup>aan  
he stand wait be outside home  
He stood waiting outside the house.

n<sup>3</sup>ook 'outside' in (33) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase n<sup>3</sup>ook b<sup>3</sup>aan 'outside the house'.

### 3.6 bon 'top'

(34) n<sup>3</sup>əŋs<sup>3</sup> kh<sup>3</sup>ray wa<sup>3</sup>əŋ y<sup>3</sup>uu bon  
book who place be top  
t<sup>3</sup>o n<sup>3</sup>an  
table that

Whose book is placed on that table?

bon 'top' in (34) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase bon t<sup>3</sup>o n<sup>3</sup>an 'on the table'.

### 3.7 n<sup>3</sup>aa 'face'

(35) ph<sup>3</sup>an ph<sup>3</sup>om r<sup>3</sup>oo y<sup>3</sup>uu n<sup>3</sup>aa r<sup>3</sup>aan  
friend I wait be face store  
My friend is waiting for me in front of the store.

n<sup>3</sup>aa 'face' in (35) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase y<sup>3</sup>uu n<sup>3</sup>aa r<sup>3</sup>aan 'in front of the store'.

### 3.8 l<sup>3</sup>əŋ 'back'

(36) d<sup>3</sup>ek d<sup>3</sup>ek l<sup>3</sup>en kan y<sup>3</sup>uu  
child child play each other be  
l<sup>3</sup>əŋ w<sup>3</sup>at  
back temple

Some children are playing behind the temple.

l<sup>3</sup>əŋ 'back' in (36) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase l<sup>3</sup>əŋ w<sup>3</sup>at 'back of the temple'.

### 3.9 kla<sup>3</sup>əŋ 'middle'

(37) kh<sup>3</sup>aw n<sup>3</sup>əŋ kla<sup>3</sup>əŋ th<sup>3</sup>an<sup>3</sup>on  
he sit middle street

He sits in the middle of the street.

kla<sup>3</sup>əŋ 'middle' in (37) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase kla<sup>3</sup>əŋ th<sup>3</sup>an<sup>3</sup>on 'in the middle of the street'.

### 3.10 kh<sup>3</sup>aaŋ 'side'

(38) th<sup>3</sup>ee y<sup>3</sup>in kh<sup>3</sup>ian kh<sup>3</sup>aaŋ kh<sup>3</sup>aw  
she stand close side he  
s<sup>3</sup>am<sup>3</sup>ee  
always

She always stands side - by - side with him.

kh<sup>3</sup>aaŋ 'side' in (38) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase kh<sup>3</sup>aaŋ kh<sup>3</sup>aw 'on his side'.

### 3.11 rim 'edge, rim'

(39) kh<sup>3</sup>aw y<sup>3</sup>in r<sup>3</sup>im s<sup>3</sup>a  
he stand edge pond

He stood on the edge of the pond.

rim 'edge, rim' in (39) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase rim s<sup>3</sup>a 'on the edge of the pond'.

### 3.12 n<sup>3</sup>ya 'north'

(40) kh<sup>3</sup>aw th<sup>3</sup>een kh<sup>3</sup>oŋ w<sup>3</sup>ay n<sup>3</sup>ya h<sup>3</sup>ua  
he place thing keep north head  
He places something on top of his head.

n<sup>3</sup>ya 'north' is a relator head noun in the noun phrase n<sup>3</sup>ya h<sup>3</sup>ua 'on the top of his head'.

### 3.13 t<sup>3</sup>ay 'south'

(41) m<sup>3</sup>æw n<sup>3</sup>oon t<sup>3</sup>ay t<sup>3</sup>o  
cat sleep south table

The cat is sleeping under the table.

t<sup>3</sup>ay 'south' in (41) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase t<sup>3</sup>ay t<sup>3</sup>o 'under the table'.

### 3.14 m<sup>3</sup>ta 'time'

(42) kh<sup>3</sup>aw m<sup>3</sup>aa m<sup>3</sup>ta ch<sup>3</sup>aa  
he come time morning

He came this morning.

m̄a 'time' in (42) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase m̄a cháaw 'this morning'.

3.15 t̄nt̄æ 'time starting'

(43) khǎw maa t̄nt̄æ  
he come time starting  
t̄i h̄a  
strike five

He has come since 5.00 a.m.

t̄nt̄æ 'time starting' in (43) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase t̄nt̄æ t̄i h̄a 'since 5.00 a.m.'.

3.16 t̄æ 'starting from'

(44) khun maa t̄æ n̄y  
you come starting from where  
Where do you come from?

t̄æ 'starting from' in (44) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase t̄æ n̄y 'from where'.

#### 4. CONJUNCTIONS MISTAKENLY CALLED PREPOSITIONS

Some words such as, ph̄a 'for', t̄æ 'but', s̄mr̄ap 'for', k̄ap 'with' which are called prepositions in Uppakitsinlapasan (1953 : 64) or intrinsic or non-derived prepositions in Kullavanijaya (1974 : 72 - 81) are considered conjunctions, not prepositions, because they conjoin two sentences.

4.1 ph̄a 'for'

(45) ph̄m tham̄aan n̄ak ph̄a l̄uuk  
I work hard for child  
ph̄m cà yūu yàan s̄abaay  
I will be kind happy  
I work hard so that my children  
will live happily.

(46) ph̄m tham̄aan n̄ak ph̄a l̄uuk  
I work hard for child  
I work hard for my children.

I consider (46) is derived from (45) where ph̄a 'for' is a conjunction.

4.2 t̄æ 'but'

(47) khǎw mây ch̄op tham̄aan t̄æ  
he not like work but  
khǎw ch̄op th̄iaw  
he like roam

He does not like to work but he likes to roam around.

(48) khǎw ch̄op t̄æ th̄iaw

he like but roam

He likes to roam around only.

(48) is considered to derive from (47), but a negative is also deleted.

4.3 s̄mr̄ap 'for'

(49) raw mii r̄ot s̄mr̄ap raw n̄an  
we have car for we sit  
We have a car for riding in.

(50) raw mii r̄ot s̄mr̄ap n̄an  
we have car for sit  
We have a car for riding in.

s̄mr̄ap 'for' in (49) and (50) functions as a conjunction conjoining two sentences.

4.4 k̄ap 'with, and'

(51) ph̄o kin kh̄aw k̄ap m̄æ  
father eat rice and mother  
(kin kh̄aw)  
(eat rice)

Father eats with mother.

It clearly shows that k̄ap 'with, and' in (51) is a conjunction.

(52) ph̄m tham̄ man k̄ap m̄i  
I make it with hand  
I made it with my own hand.

k̄ap 'with' in (52) is a variant of d̄uay 'with', an instrumental marker, which is derived from ch̄ay 'to use', to be discussed below.

#### 5. DERIVATION OF WORDS IN THE DEEP STRUCTURE TO NEW WORDS

d̄uay 'with' and k̄æ 'to' are considered prepositions in Uppakitsinlapasan (1953 : 64) and also in Kullavanija (1974 : 74), but I consider them being derived from ch̄ay 'to use' and h̄ay 'to give' respectively.

5.1 d̄uay 'with'

(53) khǎw ch̄ay ch̄oon kin kh̄aw  
he use spoon eat rice  
He uses a spoon in eating.

(54) khǎw kin kh̄aw d̄uay ch̄oon  
he eat rice with spoon  
He eats rice with a spoon.

(54) is derived from (53) where a movement transformation is applied and ch̄ay 'to use' becomes d̄uay 'with' to signify an instrumental case (Warotamasikkhadit 1986, 239 - 246). k̄ap 'with' can be a variant of d̄uay 'with' as in (52).

## 5.2 kǽə 'to'

(55) khǎw hây nən khǎw hây lûuk  
 he give money he give child  
 He gives the money to his children

(56) khǎw hây nən (kǽə) lûuk  
 he give money to child  
 He gives the money to his children.

I consider kǽə 'to'<sup>5</sup> derived from hây 'to give' to signify a dative case.

## 6. CONCLUSION

It should be concluded that the Thai language does not contain prepositions. Some words which are called prepositions in traditional Thai grammar are verbs, nouns, conjunctions, or a derivation of other words. There are still further problems concerning prepositions to be investigated.

## NOTES

1. If we follow Uppakitsinlapasan strictly, numerals will be considered prepositions because they precede classifiers which are also nouns.

2. Uppakitsinlapasan (1953 : 59) states that a word, a preposition, is inserted in front of a noun translated from Pali words to signify the Pali declension, such as, ʔan wâa theewadaa 'god (nominative)', S+ŋ theewadaa 'god (accusative)', dûay theewadaa 'god (instrumental)', kǽə theewadaa 'god (dative)', and khâa tǽə theewadaa 'god (vocative)'.

3. Curme (1962 : 27) defines a preposition as "a word that connects a noun, or pronoun with a verb, adjective, or another noun or pronoun by indicating a relationship between the things for which they stand." Fries (1952 : 95 - 96) calls what others call prepositions "function words group F".

4. tǽə 'starting from' is homophonous to tǽə 'but', a conjunction.

5. dǽə 'to' is considered a variant of kǽə 'to' used in addressing the Royal family, any high personage, or a group of Buddhist monks.

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