THERE ARE NO PREPOSITIONS IN THAI

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0. Introduction

It is not necessary that all languages have prepositions. Whitney (1889: 403) states that “The indelincelable 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 Uppaksinlapasan (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. 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. Kullavanijaya’s analysis of coverbs and noun auxiliaries (Kullavanijaya 1974: 72-93), Clark’s analysis of coverbs and relator nouns (Clark 1975: 222-247), Clark and Prasitratthesint’s analysis of relator nouns (Clark and Prasitratthesint 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).3

1. VERBS MISTAKENLY CALLED PREPOSITIONS

Action verbs like taam ‘to follow’, caak ‘to leave, to depart’, thron ‘to reach’, sùu ‘to reach’, krathang ‘to touch on’, con ‘to end’, tso ‘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’, caak ‘from’, thron ‘to’, sùu ‘to’, krathang ‘until’, con ‘until’, tso ‘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) khaw taam haa luuk
he follow search child
He was searching for his child.

(2) khaw deen taam haa luuk
he walk follow search child
He was walking in search of his child.

(3) khaw deen taam luuk
he walk follow child
He walked, following his child.

(4) khaw deen taam thanon
he walk follow street
He walks along the street.

(5) dek dek nag taam raaw saphaan
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 khaw ‘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 khaw ‘he’ follows and luuk ‘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 lœuk 'child' in (3) is an animate noun and the nominal actant thantom 'street' in (4) is an inanimate noun. Thus taam 'to follow' in (3), (4), and (5) are all verbs, not prepositions.

1.2 çák 'to leave, to depart'
(6) khàw çák bân maa
He leave home (to come here).
He left home (to come here).
(7) khàw maa çák bân
he come leave home
He came from home.

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

(8) khàw riippoko dëen çák raw pay he hurry walk leave we go
He hurriedly walked away from us.
(9) khàw riippoko dëen çák pay he hurry walk leave go
He hurriedly walked away.

cák 'to leave, to depart' in (9) functions as a member of a verb string riippoko dëen çák pay 'hurriedly walked away' and its meaning is the same as çák '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 çák 'to leave, to depart' differently.

1.3 ṭhêŋ 'to reach'
(10) khàw cà ṭhêŋ bân khîîn nîi
He will reach home night this
He will arrive home tonight.
(11) khàw cà pay ṭhêŋ chiangmây he will go reach Chiangmai
khîîn nîi night this
He will arrive in Chiangmai tonight.
(12) khàw cà pay mày ṭhêŋ chiangmây he will go not reach Chiangmai
khîîn nîi night this

He will not arrive in Chiangmai tonight.

ṭhêŋ 'to reach' in (10) is definitely a verb because it follows a preverb cà 'will' and can be negated. In traditional Thai grammar ṭhêŋ '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 ṭhêŋ 'to reach' in either case as a preposition.

1.4 sùú 'to come to'
(13) raw cà mây sùú khàw làukaaw
we will not come to ask for daughter
khwàw kóon riî
he before question
Should we not ask for his daughter's hand before doing something else?
(14) khàw hàn nàa páy thìî nîa
he turn face go direction north
He turned to face north.
(15) khàw hàn nàa sùú thìî nîa
he turn face come to direction north
He turned toward the North.

sùú '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 sùú 'to come to' a preposition (Uppakitsinlapasan 1953 : 139). Because the two sentences reveal the same structure, both pay 'to go' and sùú 'to come to' should be the same part of speech, namely verbs.

1.5 krâthân 'to touch on'
(16) khîîn krâthân faç wave touch on shore
Waves dash against the shore.
(17) sàamlî phànaraya vôm husband wife should
krâthôkrâthân kan same smile against each other always
Husband and wife usually smile at each other.

khrâthân 'to touch on' in (16) is definitely a verb because it occurs after the subject khîîn 'wave' and before the object faç 'shore'. krâthân 'touch on' rarely occurs independently to signify pro-
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 Klay ‘near’.

2.1 klay ‘far’
(23) bāan khāw yūu klay
home he be far
His house is far (away).

3. NOUNS MISTAKENLY CALLED PREPOSITIONS


3.1 khōng ‘thing’
(29) sāa khōng khun sūay
shirt thing you pretty
Your shirt is pretty.
I consider ต้อง ศรีวิชัย ขุน 'your shirt' in (29) a noun phrase with a string of three nouns, where ต้อง 'thing' is a noun according to the above definition. We ignore the translation of ต้อง 'thing' as 'of' in English. Prasithratnsint (1985: 94 - 95) also considers ต้อง 'thing (of)' as a noun.

3.2 ห่าง 'place'
(30) ทุกคนต้อง ลักษณะ โลก ห่าง ที่ห่าง ที่คบ
each person want world place สังติภาพ
peace
Everyone wants a peaceful world.

ห่าง 'place' in (30) is a noun in the noun string โลก ห่าง สังติภาพ 'world of peace'.

3.3 ที่ 'place'
(31) ที่อยู่ กรรม
he progressive will go visit ที่บ้าน
you place home
He is going to visit you at home.

ที่ 'place' in (31) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase ที่บ้าน 'in this drawer'.

3.4 อยู่ 'inside'
(32) เป็นกั้นเพื่อ ว่ายน้ำ อยู่ I keep gun keep inside ลิ้นชัก นิั้ที่
drawer this
I kept my gun in this drawer.
อยู่ 'inside' in (32) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase อยู่ 'in this drawer'.

3.5 นอก 'outside'
(33) ข้ามผ่าน รถ ยู่น นอก บ้าน he stand wait be outside home หน้า
He stood waiting outside the house.

นอก 'outside' in (33) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase นอก บ้าน 'outside the house'.

3.6 บน 'top'
(34) น้ำสั้น ขวาง น้ำบน บน book who place be top ต้นน้ำ
table that
Whose book is placed on that table?

บน 'top' in (34) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase บน 'on the table'.

3.7 นำ 'face'
(35) ผ่าน ผ่าน รถ ยู่น น้ำ ร้าน friend I wait be face store น้ำ
My friend is waiting for me in front of the store.

นำ 'face' in (35) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase ยู่น น้ำร้าน 'in front of the store'.

3.8 แล้ว 'back'
(36) ดีเด็ก ล้น หน้า ยู่
child child play each other be แล้ว ว่า
back temple
Some children are playing behind the temple.

แล้ว 'back' in (36) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase แล้ว ว่า 'back of the temple'.

3.9 กลาง 'middle'
(37) กลาง วัน เหล้า ที่กลาง
he sit middle street
He sits in the middle of the street.

กลาง 'middle' in (37) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase กลาง 'in the middle of the street'.

3.10 กลาง 'side'
(38) ที่อยู่ ค่น ก้าว กลาง ก้าว
she stand close side he สัมผัส
always
She always stands side-by-side with him.

กลาง 'side' in (38) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase กลาง 'on his side'.

3.11 รอบ 'edge, rim'
(39) กลาง ว่น ริม สะ
he stand edge pond
He stood on the edge of the pond.

รอบ 'edge, rim' in (39) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase รอบ 'on the edge of the pond'.

3.12 น้ำ 'north'
(40) ข้ามผ่าน ตรง น้ำ น้ำ น้ำ น้ำ be place thing keep north head น้ำ
He places something on top of his head.

น้ำ 'north' is a relator head noun in the noun phrase น้ำ 'on the top of his head'.

3.13 ทาย 'south'
(41) น้ำ น้ำ น้ำ น้ำ น้ำ cat sleep south table
The cat is sleeping under the table.

ทาย 'south' in (41) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase ทาย 'under the table'.

3.14 เวลา 'time'
(42) กลาง กลาง กลาง กลาง กลาง he come time morning
He came this morning.
məə ‘time’ in (42) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase məə chäaw ‘this morning’.

3.15 təŋtəm ‘time starting’
(43) khəaw məa təŋtəm
he come time starting
tii hāa
strike five
He has come since 5.00 a.m.

təŋtəm ‘time starting’ in (43) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase təŋtəm tii hāa ‘since 5.00 a.m.’.

3.16 təm ‘starting from’
(44) khun məa təm nəy
you come starting from where
Where do you come from?
təm ‘starting from’ in (44) is a relator head noun in the noun phrase təm nəy ‘from where’.

4. CONJUNCTIONS MISTAKENLY CALLED PREPOSITIONS

Some words such as, phəa ‘for’, təm ‘but’, səmrəp ‘for’, kəp ‘with’ which are called prepositions in Uppakittatnapan (1953: 64) or intrinsic or non-derived prepositions in Kullavanija (1974: 72-81) are considered conjunctions, not prepositions, because they conjoin two sentences.

4.1 phəa ‘for’
(45) phəm thamgəan nək phəa lūuk
I work hard for child
phəm cə yuə yəan səbaay
I will be kind happy
I work hard so that my children
will live happily.

(46) phəm thamgəan nək phəa lūuk
I work hard for child
I work hard for my children.

I consider (46) is derived from (45) where phəa ‘for’ is a conjunction.

4.2 təm ‘but’
(47) khəaw nəy chəop thamgəan təm
he not like work but
khəaw chəop thəaw
he like roam
He does not like to work but he likes
to roam around.

(48) khəaw chəop təm thəaw
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 səmrəp ‘for’
(49) raw mii rōt səmrəp raw nən
we have car for we sit
We have a car for riding in.
(50) raw mii rōt səmrəp nən
we have car for sit
We have a car for riding in.

səmrəp ‘for’ in (49) and (50) functions as a conjunction conjoining two sentences.

4.4 kəp ‘with, and’
(51) phəc kın khəaw kəp məa
father eat rice and mother
(kin khəaw)
(eat rice)
Father eats with mother.

It clearly shows that kəp ‘with, and’ in (51) is a conjunction.

(52) phəm tham man kəp məa
I make it with hand
I made it with my own hand.

kəp ‘with’ in (52) is a variant of dəəw ‘with’, an instrumental marker, which is derived from chəaw ‘to use’, to be discussed below.

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

dəəw ‘with’ and kəə ‘to’ are considered prepositions in Uppakittatnapan (1953: 64) and also in Kullavanija (1974: 74), but I consider them being derived from chəaw ‘to use’ and həa ‘to give’ respectively.

5.1 dəəw ‘with’
(53) khəaw chəaw chōon kın khəaw
he use spoon eat rice
He uses a spoon in eating.
(54) khəaw kın khəaw dəəw chōon
he eat rice with spoon
He eats rice with a spoon.

(54) is derived from (53) where a movement transformation is applied and chəaw ‘to use’ becomes dəəw ‘with’ to signify an instrumental case (Warotamasikkkhatit 1986, 239-246). kəp ‘with’ can be a variant of dəəw ‘with’ as in (52).
5.2 ƙàé ‘to’

(55) ƙàw hày ƙàn ƙàw hày ƙàmk
he give money he give child
He gives the money to his children
(56) ƙàw hày ƙàn (ƙàm) lùùk
he give money to child
He gives the money to his children.
I consider ƙàm ‘to’ derived from hày ‘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, ƙàn ƙàm theewadaa ‘god (nominative)’, ƙìñ theewadaa ‘god (accusative)’, dùay theewadaa ‘god (instrumental)’, ƙàm theewadaa ‘god (dative)’, and ƙàm ƙàm 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. ƙàw ‘starting from’ is homophonous to ƙàw ‘but’, a conjunction.

5. dàm ‘to’ is considered a variant of ƙàm ‘to’ used in addressing the Royal family, any high personage, or a group of Buddhist monks.
REFERENCES


