Semantic Characteristics of Constructions in Thai with Two Participants

Makoto Minegishi

mmine@aa.tufs.ac.jp

Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA)

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

Topics

1. Examining syntactic environments of Thai verbs with two participants (nominal constituents)

2. Examining semantic roles of two participants

Characteristics of Thai similar to those of SAE

1. An isolating language
2. Basic word order: SVO, NA
3. Two-place or one-place verbs, with exceptional three-place verbs

Above superficial resemblances with modern Standard Average European (SAE) have lead linguists to adopt approaches similar to those for SAE.

Western (SAE) approaches to SVO languages

- 'Human-centered' approaches to languages:
1. Presuming nominative-accusative case marking in SVO constructions
2. Regarding two-place constructions as transitive constructions, by assuming semantic roles Agent to S, Patient to O in SVO

Characteristics of Thai as one of mainland Southeast Asian languages

1. Topic Prominence

2. Pro-Drop; presence or absence of (pro) nominal participant is conditioned by contexts.

3. Adjectives as a verbal subclass: cf. Prasithrathsint (2000)

- These are also found in East Asian languages such as Chinese and Japanese

Research Questions

1. Whether Thai, along with other languages in Southeast (and East) Asian languages, can be best described from the Western (SAE) perspective?

2. In particular, how should we analyze the topic-prominence with the pro-drop feature in the above languages?

Proposal of an 'Eastern perspective'

Previous Works
Minegishi (SEALS XX), (2011)

1. Due to the Pro-drop feature, distinguishing transitive from intransitive verbs is practically difficult.
2. Contrast between Voluntary (V_vol) and Spontaneous verbs (V_sp) is relevant to basic sentence constructions.
3. Semantic features [+vol] [+sp] are consistent regardless of absence or presence of Os.
4. Directions of Affectedness are important in analyzing antiparallel causatives and passives.

Methods for Examination

1. Examining the most basic words in ILCAA Linguistic Questionnaire (1979)
2. Finding encoding patterns which are typical and particular in Thai.
3. Analyzing semantic roles of nouns in the following syntactic environments:
   1. N_1-V-N_2 (Subject-Verb-Complement)
   2. N_1-N_2-V (Topic-Subject-Verb)

Basic assumptions for examining semantic roles of participants

1. Humans have 'minds and physical bodies' 'transitive' activities: [+Voluntary, +Kinetic, +Control, (S→C)]
2. Humans have 'minds'; feelings, perceptions: [+Spontaneous, -Kinetic, -Control, (S←C)].
3. Humans have 'minds'; obtain perceptions: [+Voluntary, +Spontaneous, -Kinetic, -Control, (S→/←C)]
4. Humans and things as physical existences: [+Spontaneous, -Kinetic, -Control: S (Theme?)]
5. Humans and things related to one another: [+Spontaneous, -Kinetic, -Control: S (Theme?)]

Results

- Thai has two major sentence types:

1. "$Noun_1$ Verb $Noun_2$"
   [Subject Verb Complement (SVC)]

2. "$Noun_1$ $Noun_2$ Verb"
   [Topic Subject Verb (TSV)]

- Among approx. 300 verbs,
  148 verbs with Human subjects only,
  58 verbs with Thing subjects only,
  94 verbs with both Human and Thing
  Subjects.

Findings 1a: 148 Verbs with Human Subjects [+H] only

1. 87 Verbs with high transitivity
2. [+Voluntary, +Kinetic, +Order, Patient Affected (S→C)]
3. Semantic roles: S (Agent)_C (Patient)
4. Ex. *tii1* (hit), *chok4* (punch), *sadɛɛŋ1* (show), *phuut3* (say),etc.

Findings 1b: 148 Verbs with Human Subjects [+H] only

1. 26 Verbs with low transitivity
2. Among the 26, 7 Verbs for motion/location [+Voluntary, +Kinetic, +Control, Patient not Affected], such as: *khaw3* (enter), *waay3naam4* (swim), *nii5* (run away), *kradoot2* (jump), *aasay5* (dwell), *khii2* (ride), *naŋ3* (sit).
3. Semantic roles: S (Agent)_C (Locus)
4. Rest of the 26 are Verbs for perception, feeling (12), *mental activities* (2), or estimation of states.
5. [+Spontaneous, -Kinetic, -Control, Subject affected by Patient], such as: *tʉʉn2* (awake), *puat2* (ache), *nʉay2* (tired), *hiw5* (hungry /thirsty), *kroot2* (angry), *klua1* (afraid), etc.
6. Semantic roles: S (Recipient/Experiencer)_C (Locus of Stimulus)

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Findings 1c: 148 Verbs with Human Subjects [+H] only

1. Feelings or perception verbs (9) for actively attempting to obtaining perception

2. [+Voluntary, +Spontaneous, -Kinetic, -Control, Subject try to get Affected (S→/ ←C)], such as *duu1* (watch), *faŋ1* (listen)

3. Semantic roles: S (Agent/Experiencer)_C (Patient/Locus of Stimulus)

Findings 2: 53 Verbs with Thing Subjects [+T] only

- Among 53, 39 adjectival Verbs with one participant only (intransitive verbs).

- The rest 14 verbs include feeling, (change of) states, identifying verbs [+Spontaneous, -Kinetic, -Control, ~~Patient Affected (S→C(P))~~], such as: *khom5 paak2* (bitter to mouth), *klay1* (far to eyes), *may3* (burn sthg).

- Semantic roles: S(Theme)_C(Locus), or S (Cause) _C (Patient)

Findings 3: 94 Verbs with Human or Thing Subjects [+H/+T]

- Among 94, 19 Verbs with one participant only (intransitive verbs) [+Spontaneous, -Kinetic, -Control], for denoting (change of) states, such as *khaaw5* (white), etc..

- Among the rest 75, 40 verbs for describing actions or physical process affecting Patients: [+/-Voluntary, -/+Spontaneous], S(Agent /Cause)_C(Patient), such as *hak2* (break), *cap2* (touch).

- Among the rest 75, 27 verbs for movements, locations, with Patient not affected [+/-Voluntary, +/-Kinetic, +/-Control]: S(Agent /Theme)_C(Locus), such as *yuuun1* (stand up), *luk4* (rise), *bin1* (fly).

Findings 4: 96 Verbs in N_1-N_2-V Constructions

1. 96 Verbs in N_1-N_2-V Constructions
2. Among them, 58 verbs are one-place verbs.
3. Among the 96, 72 adjectival Verbs for describing states [+Spontaneous, -Kinetic, -Control], such as *khaw4 nitsay5 dii* (He is good-natured.)
4. The rest includes feeling verbs [+Spontaneous, -Kinetic, -Control], and motion verbs [+/-Voluntary, +Kinetic] denoting the state, or results of actions:

Semantic Features of participants in SVC with different directions of Affectedness

Subject H/T	Directions of Affectedness	Object H/T	Verbal Semantic Type
1. H	affect →	H/T	[+vol] actions
2. H	are affected by ←	H/T	feelings, perceptions
4. T	affect →	T/*H	[+sp] phenomena
5. T	are affected by ←	T/*H	[+sp] phenomena

If a human is one of the participants, the human is always in the position of Subject.

"The news surprised me" impossible in Thai

Conclusive Remarks

1. Both 'N_1-V-N_2' and 'N_1-N_2-V' are popular constructions.

2. Typical pattern 'N_1-V-N_2' for denoting actions with $S(A) \rightarrow C(P)$

3. Verbs for feelings and perception has 'N_1-V-N_2' with $S(A/E) \leftarrow C(L, S)$

4. 'N_1-N_2-V' for describing states with not only 'adjectival', but also 'action' verbs.

Topic Overwhelms in 'Verby' Constructions

Ex. *dɛɛŋ1 day3yin1 siaŋ5-rɔɔŋ4 kɔɔ3 tok2-cay*
   tuɯun2 khɯn3 maa1 lɛɛw4 kɔɔ3 ---

Daeng hear voice-crying *LINKER* surprised wake up
   come *PERFECT LINKER ---*

   wiŋ3 rɔɔŋ4-takoon1 ɔɔk2 caak2 baan3 pay1.
   run shout out from house go)

(Daeng was surprised to hear someone crying, woke
   up, and ran out of the house shouting.)

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