



## On Impersonal Subjects in Thai

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## Definition

- Impersonal subjects / non-referential subjects
  - subjects which have no reference or unspecified for their reference
  - null subject

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## Problems 1 Null Subjects

- As a pro-drop language, Thai allows its subjects to be omitted within contexts.
  - With reference
  - Without reference

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## Null Subjects in Thai

- (1) pakpratʃatʃipat cà càttan̄ sǎakhaaphak pen khrán̄ rĕĕk  
 Democrat will set up party branch be time first  
 nay kò? samŭi phǎa hây pratʃatʃon i dâyráp  
 in island Samui for give people receive  
 khwamsaduak \_\_\_ i / kháw i may tǎn̄ dɔnthaaŋ  
 convenience he not need travel  
 pay phĕndin yàw  
 go land big

**With reference**

‘The Democrat party will set up its first branch outside Bangkok at Koh Samui in order to facilitate local people. There is no need to get off the island to the mainland.’

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## Null Subjects in Thai

- (2) sǎmràp ʔaptətʃók lǎasùt nĭi  
 for after shock last this  
 \_\_\_ rúusĭk dây thĭŋ khwaamrunrɛŋ  
 feel able about turbulence

For the latest aftershock, one can feel the turbulence.

**referred to unspecified person** **without Reference**

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## Problems 2 Pronouns

- Most pronouns are referential but some pronouns are non-referential.
- Indrabarya 2011 identified /man/ ‘it’ as impersonal subject in Thai.

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## Examples of impersonal /man/ 'it'

- (3) man mây mii panhãa ròok  
it not have problem Prt  
'There is no problem.'
- (4) kwàa cà? thĩj bân man ca? ðik mâak  
more will arrive house it will late much  
'By the time (we) get home, it will be very late.'

Without Reference

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## Problems 2

- Some pronouns are non-referential.
- Indrambarya 2011 identified /man/ 'it' as impersonal subject in Thai.
- Two other pronouns which are non-referential are found : /thân/ 'he,she' and /kháw/ 'he,she'

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## Personal Pronouns /thân/

- (5) thân cà klàp kii moon khá?  
you will return how many time PRT  
'What time will you return?'
- (6) thân mây yuu khà?  
he/she not live PRT  
'He/She is not in.'

2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun

3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun

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## Impersonal /thân/ 'he/she'

- (7) námmon khin canpen thân wâa  
Holy water night full moon s/he say  
khlaǎj  
magical power  
'Holy water in full moon night, it is said to have a magical power.'

Unspecified reference

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## Impersonal /kháw/ 'he/she'

- (8) kháw lĩĩ kann wâa bân nĩi  
he/she rumor together that house this
- mii phĩ*  
have ghost
- Unspecified reference
- 'It is said that this house was haunted.'

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## Objectives

- Explore explicitness of null and overt impersonal subjects in Thai
- Explore how each of the overt impersonal subjects exhibit distance between speakers
- Look into the co-occurrence of impersonal pronouns and co-occurring verbs

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## Data

- Various language registers
  - Spoken
    - Daily use language
    - News report (TVs, radios and newspaper)
    - Speech, interview of politicians
  - Written
    - Academic document
    - Legal document

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## Results

- Explicitness
  - Referential vs. Non-referential
- Distance
  - Referential vs. Non-referential

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## Overt Referential Subjects

Ex-Prime-minister Abhisit

- Personal pronouns
- (9) phǒm yàak bòk kàp phīnǒng wāa  
 I want tell with sibling that  
 phǒm rúu wāa weela khǒng phǒm thīi  
 I know that time of I that  
 patibàtnâathīi yâak phianj day  
 function difficult only Q  
 ‘I would like to tell all of you that I knew  
 how difficult my time on duty was.’

Very explicit

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## Null Referential Subject

- (10) phanakjaan cà? dâyrâp ñənbamnət m^a \_\_\_ laaʔɔk  
 workers will receive pension when quit  
 \_\_\_ tɔŋ thamjaan maa léew mây khâw  
 must work come already not explicit  
 nǒy kwàa hâa pii +++  
 less more five year

A worker would receive his pension when quitting. He  
 needs to work there for no less than 5 years. (legal  
 document)

Refer to a specific person

Less explicit than overt subject

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## Overt Non-Referential Subject

- (7) thān wāa nāmmon khin canpen  
 he/she say Holy water night full moon  
 khlaŋ  
 magical power  
 ‘Holy water in full moon night, it is said to  
 have a magical power.’

Unspecified reference: someone respectful ++

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## Overt Non-Referential Subject

- Impersonal Pronouns
- (11) khâw wāa kan wāa phûyŋ tʃɔp phûʃaay  
 he/she say together say woman like man  
 sɛəʔəə  
 surrealistic  
 ‘It is said that women like ‘surrealistic’ men.’

Not specified who exactly is /khâw/ ++

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## Overt Non-Referential Subject

(12) man kəət ʔaray khân  
it happen what up  
'What is happening?'

/man/ does not refer to anyone.

It emphasizes the incident

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## Null Non-Referential Subject

(13) thâa \_\_ phûut thîŋ sèethakît \_\_ tŏŋ bŏk  
If speak about economics must tell  
wâa tŏn nîi sèethakît thay nâa pen hŭaŋ  
that part this economics Thai tend be worry  
'If one talks about economics, it should be noted  
that Thai economics now is at stake.'

- (Economic News)

Unspecified person: I, we, anyone

+

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## Null Non-Referential Subject

(14) kaantruatsŏp pàan pay nîn pii léew  
investigation past go one year already  
t̄e \_\_ duu wâa yaŋ may kh̄pnaa mâak nak  
but look that yet not progress much PRT  
'The investigation has begun a year ago but  
there seems to be not much progress. (Radio news)

Unspecified person: I, we, anyone

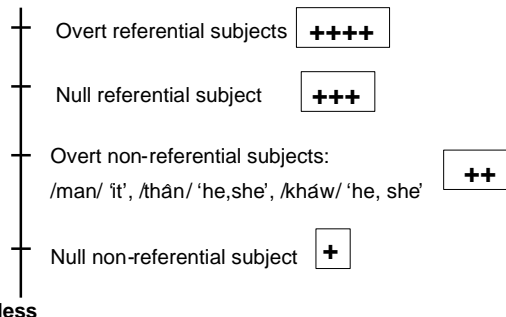
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## Degree of Explicitness

more



less

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## Space and distance between speakers

- Null impersonal subject reflects a gap between speakers, yet unclear how distant they are.

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## Null Subject

Anyone, visitors,

(15) pakati phînthiii sàan nîi \_\_ cà  
regular space section this will  
khâw maa dâi \_\_ tŏŋ dâyrâp  
enter come able must receive  
khamtʃəŋ càak sǎmnákphraratʃwaŋ  
invitation from bureau of royal household  
'Normally, this section are permitted to enter  
upon invitation by royal palace bureau.'

Keeping certain distance from hearers.

Unspecified relationship between speakers

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## Impersonal pronoun /thân/

- Found in criminal codes (archaic :1911 – 1933)
- **thân** – originally refers to the King Rama VI who had criminal codes written. It is later referred to the utmost law of the country (absolute monarchy)

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## Impersonal pronoun /thân/

- (16) **thahăan** khon day tham phit nôkcàak thii  
soldier CL which do wrong apart from that  
pramuan wáy nay kòtmăay ?aayaa  
combine lying in law criminal  
**thân** wăa man khuan râp ayaa taam  
they say it should receive criminal follow  
lâksana? phrârâat?akamnôt  
quality royal act

'Any soldier who did wrong act apart from what was written in the criminal codes, it is said that he should get punished according to the Royal Act.'

Keeping a distance from hearers.

Seeking for authority from those with higher status

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## Impersonal pronoun /thân/

- Found in old text, legends, traditional medical recipe
- **thân** – originally refers to the elder, the wise

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## Impersonal pronoun /thân/

- (17) **thân hây** aw tônmayarâap tônkrôpcakrawan maa  
They make take mimosa plant come  
lâaj naam sa?aat hàn pen f?y  
wash water clean chop be shred  
taak hây hêj khua fay hây sùk  
dry till dry roast fire till cooked  
rin namyaa râprathan taaj naamcha  
pour medicine eat instead of tea  
'It is said that, to cure diabetes, mimosa and krob chakrawaan plants, after washed with clean water, shredded, dried and roasted till fully cooked, it should be taken as tea.'

(Traditional recipe for curing diabetes)

Keeping a distance from hearers.

Seeking for authority from those with higher status

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## Impersonal Pronoun /kháw/

- (16) **kháw** wăa \_\_\_ lôot thóon  
he/she say go underneath abdomen  
cháaη léεw \_\_\_ cà? klôot ηăay  
elephant already will give birth easy

'It is said that if a pregnant woman passes underneath an elephant, she will have a smooth delivery.'

Keeping a distance from hearers.

Seek authority from claim made by others

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## Impersonal Pronoun /man/

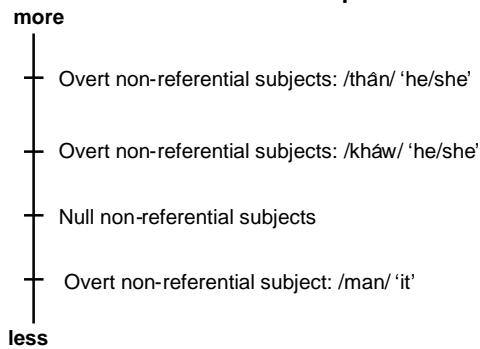
- (17) **man plia phî maý yàak yím**  
It tired I not want smile  
**maý yàak pay naý**  
not want go where  
**man plia man mot reη**  
I tired it no more energy  
'I'm tired. I don't want to smile. I don't want to go anywhere. I'm tired. I'm so exhausted.'

Reflects alienation from oneself and closer to listeners

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## Distance between speakers



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## Distance vs. Power

- Distance correlates with power over interlocutors.
- thân – respectable elderly
- Khâw --- some other people of the same social status

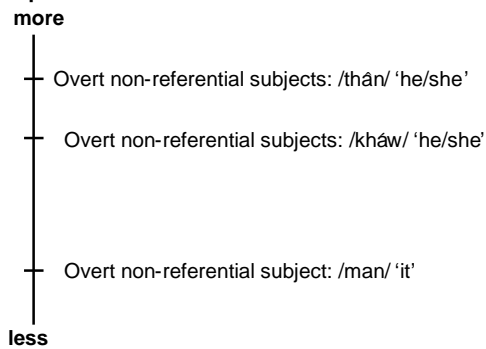
Thais always follow what the elders do or tell you to do

By claiming the authority of elders and what other people have done or said, it would be easier to make others believe what one said.

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## Impersonal Pronouns and Power



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## Impersonal /thân/ 'he, she' vs. Verbs

- limited to two speech verbs:
  - wâa 'say' --- make a claim
  - hây 'have something done' --- have it done as told

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## Examples of impersonal /thân/ 'they'

(7) námmon khin canpen thân wâa  
 Holy water night full moon they say  
 khlǎŋ

magical power

'Holy water in full moon night, it is said to have magical power.'

Unspecified reference

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- (15) thân hây aw tônmayarâap tônkrôpcakrawan  
 They make take mimosa plant  
 maa laán naam sa'raat hàn pen fǎy  
 come wash water clean chop be shred  
 'It is said that, to cure diabetes, mimosa and  
 krob chakrawaan plants is to be washed with  
 clean water, shredded...'

(Traditional recipe for curing diabetes)

Keeping a distance from hearers.

Seeking for authority from those with higher status

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## Impersonal /kháw/ 'he,she' vs. Verbs

- limited to verbs of speech and belief:
  - wáa 'say', t̄j̄iá 'believe' --- make a claim
  - háy 'have something done' --- have it done

## Examples of impersonal /kháw/ 'he,she'

(6) kháw l̄i kan wáa bân níi  
They rumor together that house this

*mii* *phǐ*  
have ghost

'It is said that this house was haunted.'

## Use of Impersonal Subject Pronouns

- /man/ - daily use, news, political language, (not in academic, legal document)
- /thân/ - archaic (legal document)
  - limited in informal, daily use
- /kháw/ - limited in informal, daily use (not in academic, formal language)
- Null subjects – news, academic, legal document,

## Conclusion

- Null Subject is less explicit than overt subjects
- Referential Subjects are more explicit than non-referential subjects

## Conclusion

- Overt subject exhibit various degree of distance and power between speakers
  - /thân/ allows speakers to use the authorities of high rank officials or elders of the old days to make a claim or have someone do something.

## Conclusion

- Overt subjects exhibit various degree of distance and power between speakers
  - /kháw/ allows speakers to make a claim based on what other people have done or said.
  - /man/ allows speakers to alienate from oneself and get closer to hearers.
- Null subject reflects a distant relationship between speakers .

Q & A

*Thank You*



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