Three ways to modify classifiers in Thai

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1. Introduction

Research Question: Semantically distinct groups of modifiers can license classifiers in Thai. What is the nature of these constructions, and can they be unified?

Claim: Modifier-classifier sequences form three distinct constructions in Thai (*contra* Haas 1942, Hundius & Kölver 1986, Singhapreecha 2001, Visonyangoon 2000).

Evidence: The three constructions have clearly different syntactic and semantic properties. Diagnostic tests reveal the proper analysis of each construction.

2. Three ways to modify classifiers

- The three sequences below appear syntactically parallel:

Type (1)   **Classifier/measure + physical adjective:**

a.   *măa   tua   jàj*   b.   *naám khùat lék*
dog   CLF   big   water bottle small
'(a/the) big dog(s)'   'a/the small bottle of water'

Type (2)   **Classifier + deictic modifier:**

a.   *măa   tua   níi*   b.   *mɔ̌ɔ   khon   diw*
dog   CLF   this   doctor   CLF   sole
'this dog'   'the sole doctor'

Type (3)   **Classifier + relative clause (or other XP):**

măa   tua   [_RC thîi __   kàt   dèk]
dog   CLF   REL   bite child
'the dog that bit the child'

- Hass (1942:204) conflates (1) and (2), labeling both
  "NOUN+CLASSIFIER+INDICATOR/ADJECTIVE."

- Yet the interpretations provide an early clue that these sequences are distinct (Visonyanggoon 2000):

  ➢ The noun phrases in (1) can be interpreted as indefinite; both (2) and (3) must be definite.

  ➢ The noun phrases in (1) can be interpreted as plural; both (2) and (3) must be singular.

- Based on their shared interperative differences from (1), Visonyanggoon (2000:67-70) conflates (2) and (3).

- Yet the semantics of the modifiers in (2) and (3) are distinct:
  - ➢ The modifiers in (3) are intersective predicates, while the modifers in (2) are non-predicative deictic items.
- Syntactic tests are needed to more clearly distinguish between these three kinds of modifiers.

3. Different behaviors of classifier-modifier sequences

Type 1: Clf + Size.Adj

Test 1: Omit the classifier
(4) *mǎa   jàj*
    dog   big
    'big kinds of dogs' (*e.g.* rotweilers)
➢ The adjective now modifies the dog-kind.

Test 2: Change the noun
(5) *mɔ̌ɔ   tua   jàj*
    doctor body big
    'the large doctor' = big-bodied
➢ The 'body' classifier is retained, otherwise restricted to animals, furniture, and clothing.

Test 3: Use *clf-mod* sequence as a predicate
(6) *mɔ̌ɔ   khon   níi   tua-jàj*
    doctor CLF   this   body-big
    'This doctor is big-bodied.'
➢ The putative *clf-adj* sequence can be used as a predicate.

➢**This "classifier" is part of a compound predicate (cf. Visonyanggoon 2000)**.

Type 2: Clf + Deixis

Test 1: Omit the classifier
(7) * *mǎa níi / diiw*
     dog this / sole
➢The classifier cannot be ommitted.

Test 2: Change the noun
(8) *mɔ̌ɔ   khon   níi / diiw*
    doctor CLF[person]   this / sole
    'this doctor' / 'the sole doctor'
➢The classifier for humans must be used.

Test 3: Use *clf-mod* sequence as a predicate
(9) **mɔ̌ɔ   khon   níi   khon diiw*
    doctor CLF   this   CLF   sole
    'this doctor' / 'the sole doctor'

➤ This is not a well-formed sentence or DP.

➤ **The classifier in this construction is genuine and obligatory**.

Type 3: Clf + XP

Test 1: Omit the classifier
(10) *mǎa   thîi __   kàt   dèk*
     dog   REL   bite   child
     '(a/the) dog(s) that bite children'

➤ Plural and indefinite meanings emerge.

Test 2: Change the noun
(11) *mɔ̌ɔ   khon   thîi __   kàt   dèk*
     doctor CLF^{person} REL   bite   child
      'the doctor that bites children'

➤ The classifier for humans must be used.

Test 3: Use *clf-mod* sequence as a predicate
(12) * *mɔ̌ɔ   khon nií   khon thîi __   kàt   dèk*
      doctor CLF this CLF REL   bite   child
      'this doctor that bites children'

➤ The Clf-RC sequence is now appositive, a pause is needed after the demonstrative.

➤ **The classifier here is genuine but leads to a definite interpretation**.

4. Possessor control and the complex predicate

• The Clf-Adj sequence in Type 1 is a compound predicate:

(13) | a. | *tua-sǔuŋ* | body-tall | 'tall' |
	b.	*hùn-dii*	figure-good	'in good shape'
	c.	*phǒm-sǐi-kém*	hair-color-dark	'brunette'
	d.	*soŋ-klom*	shape-round	'round'
	e.	*caj-yen*	heart-cool	'calm'

•These sequences pass criteria for Thai adjective-hood, such as intensive reduplication (Visonyanggoon 2000: p. 201):
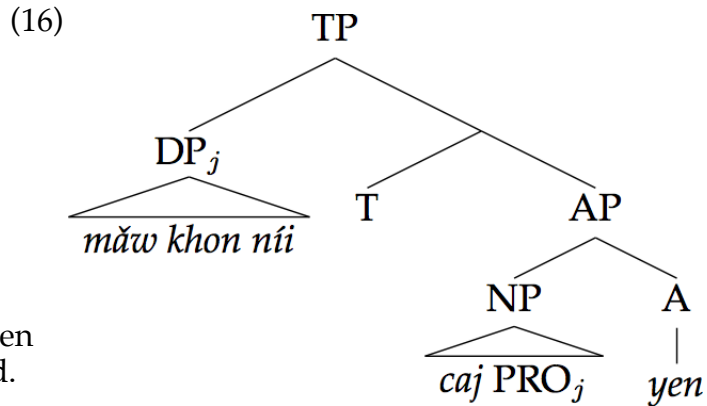
(14)   *mɔ̌ɔ   khon   níi   caj-[yen-yen] / [[caj-yen]-caj-yen]*
         doctor CLF   this   heart-cool
         'This doctor is quite calm.'

(15)   **Generalization**: [$_\text{NP/DP}$ Possessor [$_\text{A}$ Possessum – Adj]]

•(13-15) follow if a PRO-possessor is associated with N →

(16)

•In noun phrases AP is adjoined to NP.

•Evidence against movement: Idiomatic meanings are lost when Clf-Adj sequences are separated.

## 5. Deictic modifiers and classifier obligatoriness

•Deictic modifiers can be either head-like (a-c) or phrasal (d):

(17)   a.   *mɔ̌ɔ khon **níi***   this   'this doctor'

         b.   *mɔ̌ɔ khon **niŋ***   one   'a certain doctor'

         c.   *mɔ̌ɔ khon **rɛ̂ɛk***   first   'the first doctor'

         d.   *mɔ̌ɔ khon [**thîi sǎam**]* third   'the third doctor'

•In some cases deictic modifiers can recur:

(18)   *mɔ̌ɔ   khon   rɛ̂ɛk   níi*
         doctor CLF   first   this
         'This first doctor.'

- **(17-18) follow if deictic modifiers are adjuncts to ClfP:**

(19)
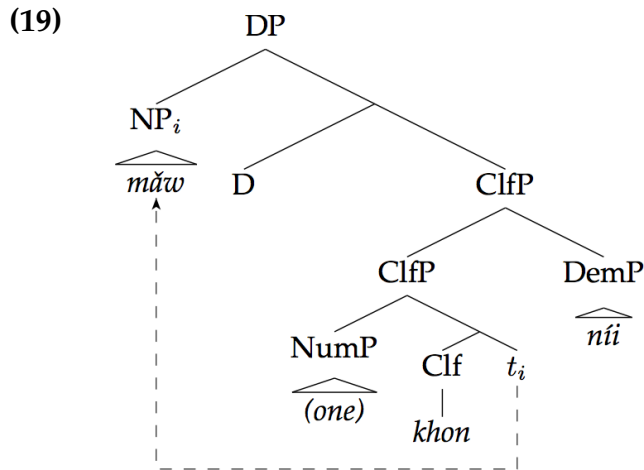
- *Definiteness* arises due to a null determiner.
- *Singularity* arises due to a null numeral 'one', licensed by D.
- For NP-movement, see Visonyanggoon (2000), Simpson (2005), a.o.

## 6. Null determiners and the CMC

- The null determiner and numeral 'one' in (19) are ad hoc. **The Type 3 "Classifier-Modifier Construction" (CMC) provides further support for them.**

- Only predicative modifiers appear in the CMC, semantically distinguishing the CMC from deictic modifiers:

(20) a. *nâk-tên   sǔaj*   b. *nâk-tên   **khon**   sǔaj*
        dancer   beautiful   dancer   CLF   beautiful
        i. 'a good dancer'   'an attractive dancer' (only)
        ii. 'an attractive dancer'

- While the classifier is optional, somehow it is licensed by the predicative modifier, a puzzle:

(21)   * *mɔ̌ɔ   khon*
        doctor   CLF

- Recall that the CMC must be definite and singular (*see* 10).

- **(20-21) can be derived if the predicative modifier is a relative clause complement of D** (Kayne 1994):

(22)
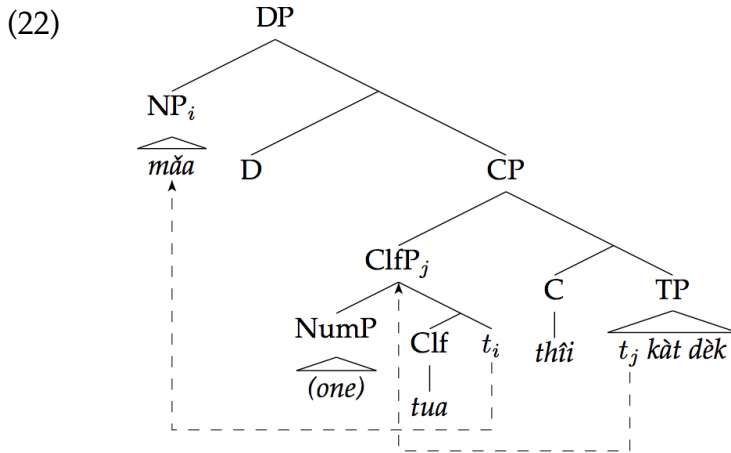
- The classifier in (21) is ruled out due to the availability of definite bare nouns (Piriyawiboon 2010) in Thai via *structural economy* (Jenks 2011).

- The classifier is licensed in (22) because the classifier is no longer a complement of D (see Jenks 2011 for details).

8. Conclusions

- The three constructions in (1-3) require three different structures despite superficial similarities.

- The putative "classifier" in (1) is not a classifier at all, but the nominal component of a compound predicate.

- Closer investigations of (2-3), on the other hand, provide support for the presence of a null D head in Thai.

Acknowledgments

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