

## POST-VERBAL NOUN FOR A PART IN THAI

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### 1 Introduction

It is often observed that Thai speakers add a noun representing a part of something whole (e.g. body-part noun, plant-part noun) after an intransitive verb that normally does not require an object argument, as exemplified in examples (1) to (4) below. The verb is mostly a stative verb (e.g. *thanàt* 'be skillful,' *saʔàat* 'be clean') or an unaccusative verb (e.g. *ʔòk* 'exit,' *tòk* 'fall') whose single argument is a theme or an undergoer but not an agent.<sup>1</sup> A noun placed in front of the verb, if any, does not represent an agent proper, either. The pre-verbal noun just signals a presupposed entity functioning as a 'topic' (Li 1976). A topic provides the circumstances or the reference frame in which a certain state of affairs is found. It is a kind of reference point, with respect to which the following predicate (called 'comment') is properly interpreted (Langacker 1993). The topic noun can be suppressed when sufficiently recoverable from the extra-linguistic context. The post-verbal noun, which is our present concern, represents a part entity in general.

- (1)    *tôn nǐ*                    *ʔòk*    *phǎn*  
      this tree                exit     fruit  
      This tree bears fruits.

- (2)    *kháw*    *thanàt*    *muu khwǎa*  
      he        skillful   right hand  
      He is right-handed.

- (3)    *kháw*    *tòk*        *cay*  
      he        fall        heart  
      He takes fright.

- (4)    *man*        *saʔàat*    *taa*  
      it        clean     eye  
      It is clean to the eyes.

In example (1), the post-verbal noun represents a fruit, a plant part. The tree is described to undergo an event of bearing fruit. In example (2), the post-verbal noun represents the right hand, a body part. The person is characterized as being skillful with the right hand. In example (3), the post-verbal noun represents the heart, a body part. The heart is thought to be a place in which feelings originate. The person is said to undergo a sudden 'fall of the heart,' which idiomatically means astonishment. In example (4), the post-verbal noun represents the eyes, body parts. Our eyes contribute to our evaluation of some entity when

the evaluation is based on visual perception by the eyes. Here, something is described as being clean, which could be warranted by everyone with visual perception. As known from my English translations, I consider the referent of the post-verbal noun to be a non-specific, general part entity. That is, its individual identity is not important to the speaker. I will return to this point later on.

The purpose of this study is to closely examine the function of a noun for a part in general that is placed after an intransitive verb in Thai. Based on empirical data that I have gathered from Thai books, I regard the post-verbal noun as a peculiar kind of adverb that indirectly indicates the speaker's evaluation with respect to the proposition. Thai grammar has such a device to allude to the speaker's subjective perspective viewing the situation in question.

## 2 Discussions

The examples (1) to (4) above seem to have nothing in common, but in fact they fall into the same general construction as diagrammed in (5), where the verb designates a state or a change of state/location, the post-verbal noun names a theme or undergoer, and the pre-verbal noun names a topic entity.

(5)	Noun	[Intransitive Verb	Noun	]
		STATE or CHANGE OF STATE/LOCATION	THEME or UNDERGOER (PART)	
	TOPIC	[	COMMENT	]

Apparently, this construction in Thai is similar to what is called 'double unaccusative construction' in Sinitic languages (Chappell 1999), one type of 'external possessor construction.' Below are examples cited in Chappell (1999).

- (6) *wo da-bu-chulai hong le lian*  
 I answer-NEG-out red PERF face  
 I couldn't answer and went red in the face. (Mandarin)
- (7) *poh1 sue6 lok6 joh2 ho2 doh1 yip6*  
 CLASS REF tree fall PERF very many leaf  
 That tree has lost many leaves. (Cantonese Yue)
- (8) *kui5 sei2 joh2 taai3taai2*  
 3 SG die PERF wife  
 He was bereaved of his wife. (Cantonese Yue)

The structure of the double unaccusative construction as in examples (6) to (8) is schematically shown in diagram (9).

(9)	Noun	[Intransitive Verb	Noun	]
	EXPERIENCER	CHANGE OF STATE/LOCATION	UNDERGOER	
	(POSSESSOR)		(POSSESSUM)	
	TOPIC	[	COMMENT	]

This construction is used to express an ‘adversitive’ situation that something happens to the whole (possessor) in terms of an event affecting a part (possessum).

The Thai construction (diagram 5) and the Sinitic construction (diagram 9) are similar in that both are Topic-Comment constructions and contain a noun following an intransitive verb. The post-verbal noun represents, in a broad sense, a part or constituent having reference to something whole. A part entity has the low degree of categoriality (Hopper and Thompson 1984) for it is undifferentiated from the whole entity. Thus, the post-verbal nouns are referentially non-salient or non-individuated, and therefore they do not express discourse referents. It is likely that they are semantically incorporated into the predicate. Because of this unity of the verb plus post-verbal noun, we may say that the structure of a clausal comment in these constructions is the pragmatic equivalent of noun incorporation.

However, the Sinitic construction (diagram 9) has more specific semantic constraints imposed on its constituents than the Thai construction (diagram 5). First, the verb in the Sinitic construction (diagram 9) has only an inchoative reading. That is, it always represents the situation as occurring spontaneously. Second, the pre-verbal and post-verbal nouns in the Sinitic construction (diagram 9) denote a possessor and its possessum, respectively, and their relationship must be that of ‘inalienable possession’ such as one held between a body part (or plant part) and its possessor, as in examples (6) and (7), or kinship, as in example (8). The affected experiencer role of the possessor comes from this relationship. The rationale is that a change of the state of an entity inalienably possessed must result in some influence on its possessor. Semantic conditions on the Thai construction (diagram 5), on the other hand, are not so strict. The verb represents either a state or a change of state/location, and the referents of the two nouns do not have the relation of inalienable possession. Crucially, the referent of the post-verbal noun is not a particular entity possessed by someone.

Iwasaki (2002) analyzed a specific type of the Thai construction (diagram 5), namely, those including a body part as undergoer of physical sensation or emotion, like example (3) above (i.e. *kháw tòk cay* ‘he + fall + heart: He takes fright’). He named those expressions ‘proprioceptive-state expressions.’ The diagram (10) below represents the structure of the expression.

(10)	Noun	[Intransitive Verb	Noun	]
	EXPERIENCER	STATE or CHANGE OF STATE/LOCATION	BODY PART	
	TOPIC	[	COMMENT	]

The Thai proprioceptive-state construction (diagram 10) is similar to the Sinitic double unaccusative construction (diagram 9), but the post-verbal noun in the Thai proprioceptive-state construction (diagram 10) represents a body part only.

Likewise, Clark (1996) examined exclusively a stative-verb construction with a pre-verbal noun representing an animate entity and a post-verbal noun representing its body part, which is attested in Mainland Southeast Asian languages. According to Clark, this construction, just like proprioceptive-state expressions, expresses that an animate entity has the condition described by the verb located in that body part of the animate entity. For example:

- (11) *kháw cèp taa*  
 he sore eye  
 He has sore eyes.

What I think is important is Clark's remark that a body part named by the post-verbal noun may have merely an indirect attributive reference to an entity represented by the pre-verbal noun, as illustrated in example (4) above and example (12) below.

- (12) *man klay taa*  
 it far eye  
 It (something external) is out of sight.

Moreover, she pointed out that sometimes non-stative verbs are combined with body part terms to form stative and other predicates, as in example (3) above and example (13) below, or stative verbs are combined with body part terms but form non-stative predicates, as in example (14) below.

- (13) *man sadùt hũu*  
 it trip over ear  
 It sounds odd.

- (14) *man màn sây*  
 it persevere intestine  
 It repels (me).

But unfortunately she did not discuss these types of the intransitive-verb plus body-part-noun construction.

Relying on the theory of Construction Grammar (Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor 1988; Kay and Fillmore 1999), Iwasaki (2002) argues that in Thai grammar the [Vi N (for body part)] order of a clausal comment has a structural meaning of 'proprioceptively registered experience' in contrast to the [N (for body part) Vi] order encoding an external state. For example:

- (15) *kháw dii cay*  
 he good heart  
 He is happy.

- (16) *kháw cay dii*  
 he heart good  
 He is kind.

Iwasaki explained that the sentence (15) expresses an internal state, i.e. proprioceptive state, as registered by the experiencer ('He is happy'), while the sentence (16) expresses an externally observable state ('He is kind').

However, it seems to me that the notion of 'proprioceptively registered experience' is too specific for a structural meaning. In this study, therefore, I propose a new perspective

which treats proprioceptive-state expressions and so-called ‘event-perception’ expressions as subclasses of the clausal structure [Vi N (for part)] in Thai. The structure does express a proprioceptively registered experience when the post-verbal noun represents a body part where sensation or emotion comes into existence. But the structure can express other meanings, as illustrated in the following examples.

- (17) *man loŋ râak*  
 it descend root  
 It takes root.
- (18) *yaay kèe tua*  
 grandmother old body  
 (My) grandmother is aged.
- (19) *fõn loŋ mét*  
 rain descend drop  
 It begins to rain.
- (20) *kháw mâak rûaŋ*  
 he many affair  
 He is difficult to suit.

Note that the post-verbal noun may represent not only a body or plant part, as in example (17), but also the body or looks which is part of personality, as in example (18), a drop of rain which is part of the atmosphere, as in example (19), an affair the person cares about which is part of the state of affairs in daily life, as in example (20), and so on. I argue that what is common among the referents of the post-verbal nouns in these examples is their status in terms of information structure (Lambrecht 1994), namely, they are all non-specific.

In Iwasaki’s (2002) view, sensations described by the [Vi N (for body part)] structure must be strong and/or sudden. Therefore, physical sensations associated with some prolonged, slow process such as numbness and dislocation pain is incompatible with this structure. For this reason, the expression (21) below is unacceptable. According to Iwasaki, numbness and dislocation pain can be regarded as an ‘externalized’ sensation resulting from some prolonged process and therefore is coded by the [N (for body part) Vi] structure instead, as in example (22).

- (21) \* *chán chaa khăa*  
 I numb leg  
 My legs become numbed. (intended meaning)
- (22) *chán khăa chaa*  
 I leg numb  
 My legs are numbed.

The true reason why the expression (21) is normally out, I am suggesting, is not concerned with such an aspectual consideration. My claim is that there is a fundamental semantic

condition on the post-verbal noun in the [Vi N (for part)] structure, namely, the referent of the post-verbal noun must be non-specific. Specifically, it is a part entity in general. The infelicity of the expression (21) comes from our everyday experience that when we, at least most Thai speakers, talk about a numbed leg, the leg is a specific one. Numbness and dislocation pain is not our usual experience, and therefore it is somewhat difficult for us to imagine a general scene of undergoing such a pain.

In fact, the [Vi N (for body part)] structure can express a reflective, prolonged feeling which, however, is not the speaker's feeling in itself but rather an idealized experiencer's feeling. Consider examples (4) and (12) again, which I repeat here as examples (23) and (24).

- (23) *man saʔaat taa*  
 it clean eye  
 It is clean to the eyes.

- (24) *man klay taa*  
 it far eye  
 It is out of sight.

The following are additional examples of this type.

- (25) *man năa taa*  
 it thick eye  
 It (the crowd) is thick to the eyes.

- (26) *man sùt lûuk hǔu lûuk taa*  
 it beyond ear eye  
 It is out of hearing and sight.

- (27) *man plèek taa plèek cay*  
 it strange eye strange heart  
 It is strange-looking and amazing.

- (28) *kháw sabaay ʔòk sabaay cay*  
 he comfortable chest comfortable heart  
 He is contented.

- (29) *kháw nàk ʔòk nàk cay*  
 he heavy chest heavy heart  
 He is heavy-hearted.

- (30) *kháw nɔ́ɔy núua tà̃m cay*  
 he little flesh low heart  
 He feels hurt.

I argue that the post-verbal nouns in these examples denote general body parts that every human being is assumed to have. They do not denote body parts of a particular person, neither of the speaker nor of the topic person. It follows that these expressions do not designate the speaker's or the topic person's immediate experience. Rather, they express the speaker's characterization with respect to the topic entity by referring to our visual and auditory experience in general. The speaker of the sentence (23), for instance, characterizes the topic entity to be clean which could be guaranteed on the basis of everyone's visual perception.

The post-verbal nouns in examples (2) and (18), which are repeated as examples (31) and (32) below, represent body parts having no organs of visual or auditory sense.

- (31) *kháw thanàt muuw khwǎa*  
 he skillful right hand  
 He is right-handed.

- (32) *yaay kèε tua*  
 grandmother old body  
 (My) grandmother is aged.

At first glance, it seems that the referents of the pre-verbal and post-verbal nouns in these examples hold a relationship of inalienable possession. That is, we are apt to understand that the post-verbal noun in example (31) refers to the right hand of that person, and that the post-verbal noun in example (32) refers to the body of that grandmother. In my opinion, however, the right hand in example (31) and the body in example (32) are non-specific and general. The person in example (31) and the grandmother in example (32) are characterized as being skillful and being aged, respectively. In example (31), the type of the skillfulness is specified by the added post-verbal noun referring to the right-hand. Generally we human beings are skillful with either one or the other hand. The specification is effective due to this world knowledge. In example (32), the agedness of the grandmother is modified by the added post-verbal noun referring to the body or looks. Generally again, we know that when we become aged the agedness physically manifests itself all over the body as well as mentally influences the way of thinking. The modification is neat by virtue of this world knowledge. It should be noted that adding a post-verbal noun for a part promotes the level of granularity or complexity of the description in question. Now, we can easily understand that the post-verbal noun in example (20), which is repeated as example (33) below, represents non-specific miscellaneous affairs. The person is characterized as being frequently involved in such affairs, to which he is sensitive. We humans are concerned with many concrete things we physically possess as well as many abstract things we mentally care about.

- (33) *kháw mâak rûaŋ*  
 he many affair  
 He is difficult to suit.

The [Vi N (for part)] structure may express an inchoative event when the included verb is a motion verb, as illustrated in examples (1), (3), (17) and (19) which I repeat here as examples (34) to (37).

- (34) *tôn nîi*            *ʔəək*      *phôn*  
          this tree            exit      fruit  
          This tree bears fruits.

- (35) *kháw*    *tòk*      *cay*  
          he        fall      heart  
          He takes fright.

- (36) *man*      *loŋ*      *râak*  
          it        descend root  
          It takes root.

- (37) *fôn*      *loŋ*      *mét*  
          rain      descend drop  
          It begins to rain.

The referents of the post-verbal nouns in these examples are non-specific also. In example (34), the tree is described as undergoing an event of fruit-emergence. In example (35), the person is described as undergoing an event of something like heart-falling. In example (36), the plant is described as undergoing an event of root-extension. In example (37), the atmosphere likely to rain is described as undergoing an event of drop-falling.

Relevant to this is the fact that the post-verbal noun in ‘event-perception’ expressions, as in examples (38) and (39) below, also represents a non-specific entity taking place or disappearing. An ‘event-perception’ is a simple recognition by perception of the existence of an actual situation, in other words, a perceptual intake of information about an actual situation (Kuroda 1992).

- (38) *kəət*      *panhăa*  
          happen problem  
          Some accident occurs.

- (39) *mòt*      *panhăa*  
          exhaust problem  
          No problem remains now.

In the case of event-perception expressions, the topic must be the whole background situation in which an event of some entity’s appearing or disappearing takes place. Since the whole background situation is the given setting for an event of appearing or disappearing of something, there is no need to mention it. It is noteworthy that the post-verbal noun in event-perception expressions also represents a part entity in a highly abstract sense, i.e., a constituent of the whole continuous situation. The predicate as a whole expresses a foreground event against the unnamed background situation. On this

basis, I take the event-perception construction indicated in diagram (40) as a peripheral member of the [Vi N (for part)] structure.

- (40) [Intransitive Verb    Noun]  
CHANGE OF STATE  
(APPEARANCE or DISAPPEARANCE)

Iwasaki (2002) also commented on the topicless form [Vi N] which encodes an event-perception. He stated that the topicless [Vi N] structure in general is a basic means to index an experiencer of an immediate emotion, sensation, or perception. I also think that the clausal structure [Vi N] without a topic implies the existence of an experiencer behind the scene described, but I do not think that the implied experiencer is identical to the speaker. Rather, I consider the implied experiencer to be an idealized experiencer, namely, any human being who could experience emotion, sensation, or perception in an ideal way. The topicless structure [Vi N] implies that an idealized experiencer would recognize the described situation in that way.

Iwasaki (2002) cited the sentence (41) as a token of the event-perception construction which is preceded by a topic (*mît lêm nû* ‘this knife’). In his analysis, this topic is an adverb added in order to specify the location of an event, which is allowed to be included in the event-perception construction.

- (41) *mîit lêm nûi*      *khûn*      *saným*  
 this knife          stand      rust  
 This knife gets rusty.

I regard the expression (41) as an ordinary token of the [Vi N (for part)] structure, since the post-verbal noun represents rust which can be regarded as a part entity of a knife. In the expression (41) the knife is described as undergoing an event of rust-gathering, parallel to the expression (42)=(1)) where the tree is described as undergoing an event of fruit-bearing.

- (42) *tôn nūi*                      *ʔòək*                      *phǒn*  
 this tree                      exit                      fruit  
 This tree bears fruits.

### 3 Conclusion

This study has inquired into the function of a post-verbal noun in the [Vi N (for part)] structure in Thai. I have claimed that the post-verbal noun represents a non-specific part entity, and it functions as adverb that indirectly indicates the speaker's evaluation of the described situation and his multi-dimensional perspective as well. Put differently, the structure expresses a state of affairs with the speaker's subjective modification.

I tentatively classify characteristic meanings expressed by the structure, as indicated in Table 1 below. When the verb in the structure is a dynamic verb, the structure expresses the result of a certain change, namely, Discovery or Sensation/Emotion. Discovery involves some external stimulus, while Sensation/Emotion involves some internal stimulus. So-called event-perception may be classified into a special type of

Discovery. When the verb in the structure is a static verb, on the other hand, the structure expresses the speaker's characterization with regard to the proposition, namely, Characterization in terms of descriptive granularity or Characterization in terms of an idealized experiencer's feeling. The former involves some external stimulus, while the later involves some internal stimulus.

**Table1: A tentative classification of characteristic meanings expressed by the [Vi N (for part)] structure in Thai**

	<i>External stimulus</i>	<i>Internal stimulus</i>
<i>Dynamic description</i>	Discovery, e.g. (1)	Sensation/Emotion, e.g. (3)
<i>Static description</i>	Characterization in terms of granularity, e.g. (2)	Characterization in terms of feeling, e.g. (4)

### Notes

I would like to thank Robert De Silva for his stylistic suggestions. All errors and inconsistencies are my own.

1. I have found a few examples including an unergative verb followed by a noun representing a part entity. For example:

(i)      *dəən*    *tháw*  
           walk    foot

(ii)     *yâaŋ*    *tháw*  
           walk    foot

I do not regard these verbs as the transitive alternate of an intransitive verb, since the post-verbal noun does not denote a patient.

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