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COMPLEXITIES OF THAI COPULAR CONSTRUCTIONS

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis of syntactic and pragmatic characteristics of copular constructions in Thai with both elicited data and data taken from naturally occurring texts. In this article, we claim that Thai presents copular-construction complexities. We have found that there are a number of verbs such as *pen*, *jù:*, *k^hi:*, *dâ:jkê:* and *tɛ^hâj* functioning as copulas. They not only link subject and non-verbal predicates but also verbal predicates that normally form predicates on their own. Not all of these copulas can freely carry verbal features to copular clauses. We also illustrate that Thai copular constructions can be best accounted for in terms of pragmatic interpretations. While the copulas *pen* and *jù:* are predicational, *k^hi:* and *dâ:jkê:* convey non-predicational readings. The copula *dâ:jkê:* is a variation of *k^hi:* in specificational readings. In contexts other than declarative statements, the copula *tɛ^hâj* is preferable to the others available in COP-NP constructions. In addition, copular omission is allowed in either some clausal structures subject to verbal features or certain pragmatic environments.

Keywords: copular constructions, syntactic characteristics, pragmatic interpretations

ISO 639-3 codes: tha

1 Introduction

Traditionally, the word “copula” lexically means connection or linking. A typical definition of “copula” is a “word that links a subject and a predicate” (Narahara 2002:16). Studies in different linguistic perspectives have modified the definition that characterize the grammatical category of “copula” and the grammatical relations among “subject”, “copula”, and “predicate”.

Based on morphologically complex languages such as English and other European languages, the term “predicate” has been traditionally taken as the combination of a copula and a post-copula grammatical category such as nominal predicate and adjectival predicate. The copula functions as a linker between the subject and the predicate element and carries verbal inflectional features. Lyons (1968), for instance, claims that the principal function of the copula ‘to be’ in Russian, Greek and Latin is to serve as the locus in surface structure for the marking of tense, mood and aspect. Stassen (1977) considers the copula to be a dummy which does not contain any meaning. This work proposes the Dummy Hypothesis in which the copula is basically a “hat-rack” for categories of verbal morphology. Hengeveld (1992) proposes that the copula is meaningless or “semantically empty”, merely carrying inflectional features—marking for tense, aspect and modality—for predicate phrases. Radford (1997) defines the copula as a verb used to link a subject with a non-verbal predicate. Considering the copula as a verb, this work implies that it has the morphological property that can carry a range of inflections including past tense.

In the functional-typological perspective, Li and Thompson (1976), for instance, have generally described the subject of a clause as the phrase that has a ‘doing’ or ‘being’ relationship with the verb in that sentence. The predicate, in contrast with the subject, commonly refers to the function of a verb phrase even though a predicate is not necessarily a verb phrase. This means that in a language with verbless clauses, two juxtaposed noun phrases such as *John teacher* can express a characterizational meaning such as the copular clause ‘John is a teacher’. Arguably in such a construction, ‘teacher’ functions as a predication but is not a

verb phrase. Accordingly, Givón (2001) specifically proposes that a copular clause is a simple clause (main, declarative, affirmative and active clause) which semantically represents a state, either permanently or temporarily. The subject of a copular clause, thus, occupies the semantic role of either patient or dative of state. Most of the lexical-semantic load of the predicate is not carried by the copula itself, but rather by its non-verbal predicate, either a noun phrase or adjective phrase. In many languages other than European, copulas are needed only in tense-aspects other than present and habitual. This means that a non-verbal element like ‘teacher’ can function as a predicate on its own.

1.1 Previous Studies on Thai Copulas

Cross-linguistically, copular constructions have been the focus of a large number of studies. Following Higgins’ taxonomy which pragmatically distinguishes four types of copular clauses—predicational, specificational, identificational and equational (Higgins 1979)—quite a number of works have investigated copular clauses in particular languages in semantic and functional terms. Certain pieces of work (e.g., Curnow 1999, Givón 2001) point out that while certain languages have only one copular construction, others have two or sometimes three different constructions. The choice of construction in these cases depends upon discourse and grammatical factors such as tense-aspect, polarity, the status of the clause as main or subordinate, the person of the copula subject, and the semantic relation expressed.

Other studies (e.g., Pustet 2003, Niimura 2007) report that some languages obligatorily have an overt copula which heads the verb phrase of a copular construction, while in some other languages, the copular construction may consist of constituents that are just juxtaposed without any copular verb. In languages such as Russian, Arabic (Avgustinova and Uszkoreit 2003), an Ogoni language in Nigeria (Anyanwu, 2004), and Qiang, a Tibetan language (LaPolla and Huang 2007), for example, copulas are absent in the present tense but must be present in the future/past tense. This is very common in languages that have verbless clauses. The default is taken as being the present moment, but if, for example, a characterizational clause is located in another temporal setting, then a copula serves as the vehicle for carrying the tense-aspect-modality marking. In a language such as Chinese (Tang 2001), however, the copula can be freely optional in a copular construction.

As for the sources of copulas, it has been observed that copulas are mainly from verbs and pronouns. The grammaticalization process which turns full verbs or the other non-copular elements into copulas has been termed “copularization” (Hengeveld 1992, Stassen 1997, though see Pustet 2003 for a slightly different terminology). It is well-attested in the literature that full verbs may develop into functional elements including copulas. This has even happened in English; the past tense forms of *be* come from *wes* meaning ‘to stay, to remain’ (Devitt 1994). Moreover, as revealed by LaPolla (2006), the copula in the Rawang language, a Tibeto-Burman language of northern Myanmar, is an intransitive verb in that it takes intransitive morphology, but is not like other intransitive verbs in not being able to take the causative prefixes and in being able to take two unmarked arguments. One of the most widely known cases where demonstratives or pronouns have become copulas is illustrated in Li and Thompson (1977), a seminal paper on the development of copula morphemes. The work shows that the Modern Mandarin *shì* in equational sentences has been copularized from a pronoun since there was no copula in Archaic Chinese (11th -3rd B.C.), and *shì* occurred as a pronoun.

In Thai, there are a number of studies focusing on certain copulas. They focus on the interpretation differentiation of the copulas *pen* and *k^hi:* and their aspectual properties. Kuno and Wongkhomthong (1981), to start with, provide a discussion of the distinguished use of the two copulas. The article relates the copula (COP) *pen* to Higgins’ predicational clauses and *k^hi:* to his specificational and identificational ones, as in (1)¹.

- (1a) *k^hon* *t^hî:* *tɛ^hǎn* *rák* **pen/k^hi:* *tɛɔ:n*
 person REL² I love COP John
 ‘The person that I love is John.’

¹ Tonal transcriptions in this article are from the version of Haas (1964) where the middle tone is shown by no mark, the low tone by / ` /, the falling tone by / ^ /, the high tone by / ' / and the rising tone by / ~ /.

² relative

- (1b) *jì:pùn* *pen/*kʰi:* *pràʔtʰé:t* *ʔùʔsǎ:hàʔkam*
 Japan COP country industry
 ‘Japan is an industrial country.’

Kuno and Wongkhomthong indicate that the sentence carrying *kʰi:* in (1a) is used in a clause that identifies the person that the speaker likes best as *John*. It cannot be interpreted as a clause that presents as one of the characteristics of the person that the speaker likes best the fact that he is *John*. Therefore, the clause is exclusively identificational. The copula *pen* appears in predicational clauses like (1b). Also, they claim that either copula can appear in the same clause depending on the speaker’s intention. That is, in the example (2), if the speaker intends to present one of John’s characteristics, *pen* is used. On the other hand, if the speaker intends to equate *John* and the person he (the speaker) likes best, then *kʰi:* is used.

- (2) *tɛɔ:n* *pen/kʰi:* *kʰon* *tʰi:* *tɛʰǎn* *rák*
 John COP person REL I love
 ‘John is the person that I love.’

Takahashi and Shinzato (2003) follow Kuno and Wongkhomthong (1981) in spirit. Specifically, their study investigates the difference between the two Thai copulas, *kʰi:* and *pen*, and illustrates that the underlying principle to account for the difference between these two copulas is the cognitive psychological dichotomy of “fast/sensation-like vs. slow/ thought-like” processing, or “holistic vs. analytic” processing, thereby implicating the increasing degree of the speaker’s information processing time. There are many pieces of evidence to support this characterization such as the co-occurrence with epistemic modals or modal adverbials, hypothetical situations, combination with a negative marker, difference in meaning, and referentiality. In addition, the study compares these copular clauses to copularless clauses, and analyzes them using Langacker’s (1990) stage model, specifically the concept of viewing arrangements. It is argued that they parallel Langacker’s distinction between “off-stage” vs. “on-stage” viewer. That is, copular clauses tie in with the off-stage viewer (subject noun phrase is not at the scene) while copularless clauses are associated with the on-stage viewer role (subject noun phrase is at the scene). In a wider perspective, this study was an attempt to account for the two Thai copular clauses and copularless clauses with more comprehensive and broader principles rooted in cognitive psychology. In this attempt, many seemingly unrelated semantic/pragmatic concepts (identificational vs. predicational; high modality vs. low modality), and structural dichotomies (copular vs. copularless; *kʰi:* vs. *pen*) can be found to be connected.

Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom (2005) propose that the two different copulas play the roles in different pragmatic contexts, namely, *pen* in attributive while *kʰi:* in definitive contexts. In this work, *pen* is treated differently as a semi-verbal which indicates that an object, a person, or a concept is in some state. The copula *kʰi:*, on the other hand, is a linker which introduces the name, label, or definition of an object, person, or concept.

Hedberg and Potter (2010) confirm Kuno and Wongkhomthong’s analysis by presenting relevant data to large groups of participants, to examine some gaps in the data they discussed, and to bring the Thai data to bear more concretely on the current copular clause controversy. The small differences in the survey data are explained in terms of “type shifting”; namely, different participants construed the sentences in different ways, consistent with different ways of type shifting the sentence elements.

Recently, Chiravate (2012) has also provided a study on the two copulas, *pen* and *kʰi:* based on the observation that the copula *kʰi:* only occurs in a positive environment, whereas the copula *pen* can occur in both positive and negative environments. This study attempts to explain why the two copulas differ based on the notion of polarity-sensitivity since the polarity-sensitive copula in Thai does not carry the type of meanings that English polarity-sensitive items do. Having found that aspect is a restriction over a verb phrase similar to polarity-sensitivity, this study also investigates the aspectual properties of the two copulas. It proposes that the difference in polarity-sensitivity is due to the status of *pen* and *kʰi:* as verb and non-verb, respectively. What possibly makes *pen* a verb and *kʰi:* a non-verb is their aspectual properties of [-stativity] and [+stativity], respectively. Contributing to the study of aspect and polarity sensitivity, this study demonstrates how Thai copulas differ from the copula *be* in English. That is, in English, the copula *be* is used for a variety of senses including characterization (or attribute) and identification (or designator). In Thai, however, *pen* deals with characterization and *kʰi:* with identification, respectively. Moreover, while a

copula is typically considered a verb in the same way *be is* in English, the copulas in Thai are not necessarily verbs. Here, in accordance with Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom (2005), *pen* is considered a verbal copula while *k^hi:* is considered a non-verbal copula. That the copulas in Thai differ from the copula in English in characteristics and classification suggests that the macro-category of the so-called copulas is too vague to describe cross-linguistic variation.

Up to this point, we have seen that the past studies have provided somewhat satisfying accounts for the difference between the uses of the two typical copulas, *pen* and *k^hi:*. However, we have observed that there are some other verbs, such as *jù:*, *dâj kè:* and *té^hâj* functioning as copulas that should not be left undiscussed. These additional copulas operate in different syntactic structures and pragmatic/communicative contexts from the ones where the former two copulas occur. Therefore, to provide an insightful account of copular constructions in Thai, a discussion should be holistic or characterized by comprehension of the parts of the copular system as intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole. Specifically, we investigate plausible copulas, syntactic structures and pragmatic aspects and hope to illustrate that all the types of information act in such a way as to have an effect on another.

In the following sections, we start with some grammatical aspects of the Thai language that are essential to our analysis. In section 2, we discuss syntactic characteristics of Thai copular constructions and point out how Thai copulas conform to or deviate from the notion of “prototypicality”, with data both elicited and taken from naturally occurring texts. We next attempt to examine the pragmatic aspects of all copulas exhaustively in section 3. Finally, we examine constraints on copular omission in section 4.

1.2 Some Basic Information and Grammatical Aspects in Thai

The Thai language is spoken in Thailand located in Southeast Asia; it belongs to the Southwestern Tai branch of the Tai language family. There are four major Thai dialects: Northern, Northeastern, Southern and Central Thai. The dialect discussed here is the Central Thai variety mainly spoken in Bangkok and the central part of Thailand. This dialect is also the official variety in Thailand.

Grammatically, the Thai language, like some other Asian languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean, is best characterized by having a topic-comment clausal structure (Ekniyom 1977, 1982 and Burusphat 1982) in which the noun phrase of the most salient and/or topical referent occurs first in a clause, as shown in (3).

- (3) *k^hǎw* *ʔa:júʔ* *ji:n*
 s/he age stand
 ‘S/he has a long life.’

In (3), the topic is *k^hǎw* and the comment consists of *ʔa:júʔ* as the subject and *ji:n* as the verbal predicate. This characteristic is identical to typical clauses in Chinese.

In terms of morphology, Thai is classified as an isolating language, a type of language with a low morpheme-per-word ratio. Most words are composed of a single morpheme displaying one or more syllables, and new words are mainly formed via the process of compounding. An example of a simple clause is shown in (4).

- (4) *ma:li:* *k^hǎ:j* [*k^hâ:w* *kɛ:ŋ*] *naj* [*tàʔlà:t* *sòt*]
 Malee sell rice curry in market fresh
 ‘Malee sells rice and curry in a fresh market.’

Nouns can be modified by various modifier phrases following them such as qualitative as in (5a), demonstrative as in (5b), attributive as in (5c), attributive as in (5d), and possessive as in (5e) either with or without a classifier (CLF), as stated in Singnoi (2000).³ The reading with a classifier pragmatically differs from the one without a classifier involving the degree of specificity (Singnoi 2000 and Singhapreecha 2001). This is one typologically notable property of Thai.

³ Also see Kookiattikoon (2001), Singhapreecha (2001), Jenks (2011 and 2012), and Huang and Jenks (2014).

- (5a) *bâ:n* [sǔ:ŋ *lǎŋ*]
house two CLF: ‘back’
‘two houses’
- (5b) *kʰon* [*pʰûak* *nán*]
people CLF: ‘group’ that
‘that people group’
- (5c) *dinsǎ:* [*tʰɛ:ŋ* *sân*]
pencil CLF: ‘stick’ short
‘that short pencil’
- (5d) *dèk* [*kʰon* *tʰi:* *ma:* *sǎ:j*]
child CLF: ‘human’ REL come late
‘the child who came late’
- (5e) *nǎŋsǎ:* [*lêm* *kʰǎ:ŋ* *tɛʰǎn*]
book CLF: ‘book’ POS⁴ I
‘the book which is mine /my book’

Aside from being the head of a noun phrase, a noun itself can modify another noun without any classifier, appearing immediately after the modified noun, as shown in (6).

- (6) *râj* *ʔǎ:j*
farm sugarcane
‘sugarcane farm’

In Thai, verbs display a distinct category which reveals various characteristics and grammatical functions. In terms of transitivity, even though they are generally classified as intransitive as in (7a) or transitive as in (7b), without making use of morphology, transitivity seems to be not that absolute: a number of Thai verbs are neither clearly transitive nor intransitive.

- (7a) *kʰǎw* *lɔ:j* *dâ:j*
s/he float can
‘S/he can float (in the air/water).’
- (7b) *kʰǎw* *lɔ:j* *kràʔtʰoŋ*
s/he float flower basket
‘S/he floated a flower basket’

Also, verbs can be semantically divided into action as in (8a) or state as in (8b), as shown below.

- (8a) *kʰǎw* *nɔ:n* *dik*
s/he sleep late
‘S/he sleeps late.’
- (8b) *kʰǎw* *tɛʰàʔlà:t*
s/he clever
‘S/he is clever.’

⁴ possessive

Either state or action verbs can also function as nominal modifiers, the concepts represented by adjectives in English, as respectively shown in (9).

(9a) *k^hǎw pen dèk di:*
s/he be child good
'S/he is a good child.'

(9b) *k^hǎw pen dèk rian*
s/he be child study
'S/he is a studious child.'

In addition, state verbs can function as adverbs following the main verbs in the clauses. As exemplified in (10), the verb *di:* functions as an adverb modifying the verb *rian*.

(10) *k^hǎw rian di:*
s/he study good
'S/he studies well.'

It is common in Thai that a verb, as a predicate, can occur in adjacent to another, without any morphological connection, to show a particular semantic relation. This syntactic aspect is known as serial-verb construction, a well-known characteristic of the Thai language (Thepkanjana 2006 and Wongwattana 2012). An example is shown in (11).

(11) *k^hǎw dǎ:n kin ʔajtim*
s/he walk eat ice-cream
'Walking, s/he ate ice-cream.'

Consequently, a number of second verbs, especially directional verbs, have been grammaticalized to act as prepositions, as shown in (12).

(12) *k^hǎw dǎ:n paj ro:ŋrian*
s/he walk go school
'S/he walked to school.'

However, not all second verbs as such have completely changed to be in the new category. A large number of them still maintain the former function—main verbs—in the present. The verb *paj* is among those that still acts as the main verb, as illustrated in (13).

(13) *k^hǎw paj bâ:n t^húk ʔa:t^hít*
s/he go house every week
'S/he goes home every week.'

2 Syntactic Characteristics of Copulas

According to the definitions of copulas in morphologically complex languages above, we can summarize the prototypical characteristic of copular clauses by means of the syntactic functions of copular verbs as shown below.

- 1) A predicate marker that is added to grammatical categories that do not form predicates on their own
- 2) A linker between either patient or dative subject and non-verbal predicate
- 3) A syntactic carrier to carry tense and other verbal inflectional features to a clause that contains a non-verbal predicate

The definition repeats or emphasizes the predicate as non-verbal and suggests that a copular verb functions as a predicate marker added to the grammatical categories that normally do not form predicates on their own. This is true for languages such as English and other European languages. Example (14) presents the occurrences of the Standard English copula *be* with its post-predicates such as a noun phrase (NP), adjective phrase (AP) and prepositional phrase (PP) since they cannot function as predicates on their own. In contrast, a verb phrase (VP) which can function as a predicate on its own prohibits the occurring of the copula (Zhan and Sun 2013).

- (14a) *This is a cup.* (COP-NP)
 **This a cup.*
- (14b) *The cups are full.* (COP-AP)
 **The cups full.*
- (14c) *The cup is on the desk.* (COP-PP)
 **The cup on the desk.*
- (14d) **He was break the cup.* (COP-VP)
He broke the cup.

In Thai, we argue that copular clauses deviate from these copula characteristics in that there are many copulas, that copular clauses can convey verbal predicates, and that some copulas do not carry verbal features. Therefore, to provide the syntactic discussion of Thai copular clauses, we would divide it into three sections: copulas, syntactic and semantic properties and verbal features, as below.

2.1 Copulas

There appear five copulas in Thai; that is, *pen*, *jù:*, *k^hi:*, *dâ:jkè:* and *tɛ^hâj*, as exemplified below.

- (15a) *k^hǎw pen p^honlá[?]mian di:*
 s/he COP citizen good
 ‘S/he is a good citizen.’
- (15b) *mɔ:tə:saj jù: naj bâ:n*
 motorcycle COP in house
 ‘The motorcycle is in the house.’
- (15c) *nân k^hi: k^hamtò:p*
 that COP answer
 ‘That is the answer.’
- (15d) *p^hû: tɛ^há[?]ná[?] dâ:jkè: buak^hǎ:w pɔ: prà[?]múk*
 person win COP Buakaw Por Pramuk
 ‘The winner is Buakaw Por Pramuk.’
- (15e) *man tɛ^hâj panhá: máj*
 it COP problem Q
 ‘Is it a problem?.’

All the copulas have been copularized from lexical verbs, for example, *pen* ‘to be able, to be alive’⁶, *jù:* ‘to live, to be available’, *k^hi:* ‘to resemble’⁷, *dâ:jkè:* ‘to go to’ and *tɛ^hâj* ‘affirmative, to be right’ (Royal

⁶ Also see Jaratjarungkiat (2012) working on the development of *pen* in Thai.

Academy of Thailand, 2011). Not only did these copulas come from verbs, but they can still be used as main verbs in modern Thai, as shown below.

- (16a) *pla: tua ní: pen rǎ: ta:j*
 fish CLF this be alive or die
 ‘Is the fish alive or dead.’
- (16b) *kʰǎw jù: di: kin di:*
 s/he live good eat good
 ‘S/he lives happily.’
- (16c) *man kʰi: kǎn*
 they resemble REF⁸
 ‘They are similar.’
- (16d) *ra:ɣwan tɕʰáʰnáʔ lǎ:t dâ:jkè: tʰi:m sǐ: dɛ:ɣ*
 award win best go to team color red
 ‘The first winner award goes to the red team.’
- (16e) *tɕʰáj, tɕʰǎn tʰam ʔe:ɣ*
 right, I do REC⁹
 ‘Yes, I did it myself.’

The first three copulas—*pen*, *jù:* and *kʰi:*—operate in different copular syntactic structures as discussed in section 2.2 below while, unlike English and some other languages, the last two copulas—*dâ:jkè:* and *tɕʰáj*—are variations used in different pragmatic/communicative contexts as discussed later on in section 3.

2.2 Syntactic and Semantic Properties

Formally, it seems that any kind of complement is possible in copular clauses in Thai. Post-copula elements can be not only non-verbal elements such as noun phrase, prepositional phrase and clause (S) but also verbal elements such as verb phrase and adjective phrase¹⁰ regardless of the high restriction of some types, as discussed below. This results in five copular clause forms—COP-NP, COP-PP, COP-AP, COP-VP and COP-S. This is not incompatible with the first prototypical syntactic principle of copulas stating that a copula is added to grammatical categories that do not form predicates on their own. Examples are in (17).

- (17a) *kʰǎw kʰi: kʰâ:ttàʔkɔ:n* (COP-NP)
 s/he COP murderer
 ‘S/he is the murderer.’
- (17b) *kʰɔ:ɣ jù: bon tóʔ* (COP-PP)
 thing COP on table
 ‘The belongings are on the table.’
- (17c) *kʰǎw pen bǎ:* (COP-AP)
 s/he COP insane
 ‘S/he is insane.’

⁷ However, this lexical verb is not generally communicated in the present: it is still found in certain Thai dialects other than the central Thai, especially in the north and northeastern areas.

⁸ reflexive

⁹ reciprocal

¹⁰ As illustrated earlier, all state verbs also function as adjectives without any morphological marker.

(17d) *kʰǎw mâj-cʰâj kʰê: kin kɛŋ, d̄i:m kɛŋ d̄uaj* (COP-VP)
 s/he NEG¹¹-COP merely eat much, drink much too
 ‘S/he not only eats a lot but drinks a lot as well.’

(17e) *pʰǒn kʰi: kʰǎw sò:p tók* (COP-S)
 result COP s/he do an exam fail
 ‘The result is that s/he failed the exam.’

Each copular form allows a different number of copulas and carries particular mappings of syntactic and pragmatic properties or argument structures, as illustrated in the following discussions.

2.2.1 COP-NP

COP-NP copular clauses allow most of the four copulas, namely, *pen*, *kʰi:*, *dâ:jkê:* and *tɛʰâj* to lead patient (PAT) noun phrases, resulting in the argument structure COP-NP/PAT, as respectively shown in (18) below.

(18a) *kʰǎw pen pʰáʰnákɲa:n bɔ:ríʰsàt ʔè:kkàʰtɛʰon*
 they COP personnel company private
 ‘They are private company personnel.’

(18b) *man kʰi: wɛ̄:n nê:nê:*
 it COP ring sure
 ‘It is a ring for sure.’

(18c) *pʰû:tɛʰáʰnáʰ dâ:jkê: mǎ:jlê:k sɨp*
 winner COP number ten
 ‘The winner is number ten.’

(18d) *kʰǎw kɔ: mâj-cʰâj kʰon le:w mâ:k*
 s/he then NEG-COP person bad very
 ‘Then s/he is not a very bad person.’

However, in a highly restricted context such as actual or current situations like introducing someone or something, it seems that a noun phrase can form a predicate on its own, as shown in (19).¹²

(19) *nî: ma:ríʰʔô:*
 this Mario
 ‘This is Mario.’

2.2.2 COP-PP

COP-PP copular clauses involve two copulas; namely, *jù:* and *pen* in different semantic contexts. The copula *jù:* leads either locative (LOC) or temporal (TEM) prepositional phrases, while *pen* leads possessive phrases, resulting in three different argument structures—COP-PP/LOC, COP-PP/TEM and COP-PP/POS—as respectively shown in (20).

(20a) *pà:kka: jù: bon tóʰ*
 pen COP LOC table
 ‘The pen is on the table.’

¹¹ negative

¹² This case is discussed as copula omission constraints in section 4.

(20b) *ʔa:rom jù: naj pàtcùʔban*
 temper COP LOC present
 ‘The temper is in the present.’

(20c) *bâ:n ní: pen kʰɔ̃:ŋ sǒmtɛʰa:j*
 house this COP POS Somchay
 ‘This house is Somchay’s.’

There is something concealed in the structure COP-PP/POS where the semantic role POS is marked with the preposition *kʰɔ̃:ŋ* indicating that the patient subject is possessed by the post-copula part. As indicated in Huang and Jenks (to appear), since the phrase *kʰɔ̃:ŋ*-NP can occur with the predicative copula *pen*, *kʰɔ̃:ŋ* is still a noun denoting ‘possession, belonging’, a fact which finds support from its inability to be negated. We, however, have evidence that the lexical noun ๗๗๗๗ has been grammaticalized to function as a preposition used to indicate not only possession but also separation as in (21a), connection as in (21b), association as in (21c) or particular item within a category as in (21d), just like the English preposition *of* does.

(21a) *pʰâ:k nǎa kʰɔ̃:ŋ tʰaj*
 part north POS Thai
 ‘the northern part of Thailand’

(21b) *wáttʰáʔnáʔtʰam kʰɔ̃:ŋ tʰaj*
 culture POS Thai
 ‘the culture of Thailand/the Thai culture’

(21c) *kʰrɛ̃aŋmɪ: kʰɔ̃:ŋ ka:n-pʰáttʰáʔna:*
 device POS NOM¹³-develop
 ‘the device of development’

(21d) *kʰwa:m-mǎ:j kʰɔ̃:ŋ wáttʰáʔnáʔtʰam*
 NOM-mean POS culture
 ‘the meaning of culture’

Also, there is an argument that *kʰɔ̃:ŋ* is a preposition in *pen kʰɔ̃:ŋ*; namely, the copula *pen* can occur before these uses of *kʰɔ̃:ŋ* in appropriate contexts, as exemplified in (22).

(22) *pʰâ:k nǎa pen kʰɔ̃:ŋ tʰaj, mâj-tɛʰâj kʰɔ̃:ŋ mianma:*
 part north COP POS Thai, NEG-COP POS Myanmar
 ‘The northern part is Thailand’s, not Myanmar’s.’

Therefore, we can conclude that *kʰɔ̃:ŋ* in a copular construction does function as a preposition which has been grammaticalized from the lexical noun *kʰɔ̃:ŋ* and still denotes possession when indicating the possessor of the subject. It has been generalized so far to indicate other features than possession. Since it used to be a noun phrase, it can be led by the copula *pen* just like a noun phrase can. This is a piece of evidence showing that it is the semantic complexity of the prepositional phrase, rather than the form itself, that makes the combination *pen*-PP possible.

2.2.3 COP-AP

COP-AP copular clauses involve the copula *pen* and non-inherent and non-evaluative adjectives (NON-INH), resulting in the argument structure COP-AP/[NON-INH]. In our analysis, it is found that state verbs that denote non-inherent and non-evaluative qualities—for example, *bâ:* ‘insane’, *jàj* ‘important’, *sùk*

¹³ nominalization

‘happy’, *pòkkà²tì²* ‘normal’, *ʔitsà²rà²* ‘free’, *sò:t* ‘single’, *tɛiŋ* ‘true’, *t^hét* ‘false’, and the like—should be distinguished from state verbs denoting inherent and evaluative qualities since only those verbs are allowed in the post-copula position in this copular form. This characteristic is different from the competitive form COP-VP with the copula *tɛ^háj* where the post-copula element is not restricted to any type of verbs, either state or action. Regarding this limited syntactic characteristic (even though it seems that there is not any other syntactic evidence that they are different from other adjectives), it is possible to say that the Thai language encodes non-inherent states as “true adjectives”. Consider the COP-AP/[NON-INH] clauses in (23) in which the post-copula elements in (23a-c) denoting non-inherent qualities are acceptable, while the one in (23d) denoting inherit and evaluative qualities are not.

- (23a) *k^hǎw* *pen* *bâ:*
s/he COP insane
‘S/he is insane.’
- (23b) *mê:* *k^hô:nk^hâ:ŋ* *pen* *jàj*
mother somewhat COP big
‘The mother is somewhat big/important.’
- (23c) *tɛittɛaj* *raw* *pen* *sùk*
mind we COP happy
‘We are happy.’
- (23d) **k^hǎw* *pen* *dì:/sǔaj/sǔ:ŋ/k^hǎ:w*
s/he COP good/pretty/tall/white
‘S/he is good/pretty/tall/white.’

2.2.4 COP-VP

A COP-VP copular clause licenses the copula *tɛ^háj* to lead a verb phrase displaying an event (EVE) in a negative environment, resulting in the argument structure [NEG-COP]-VP/EVE. The subjects of the verb phrase and main clause are coreferential, and thus the subject of verb phrase is obligatorily equi-deleted. Even though this copular form does exist in Thai, it is restricted to informal contexts such as daily conversation, web boards and the like, as shown in (24).

- (24a) *raw* *ʔɛ:p* *tɛ^hô:p* *k^hǎw* *kò:n,* *mâj-tɛ^háj* *rák* *lə:j*
I secretly like him first, NEG-COP love then
‘Firstly, I secretly like him, but didn’t fall in love with him.’
- (24b) *klàp* *t^hǎŋ* *bâ:n* *kô:* *tô:ŋ-ʔà:pnâ:m* *kò:n,* *mâj-tɛ^háj* *nɔ:n* *lə:j*
return to home then must-take a bath first, NEG-COP sleep then
‘When I got back home, I had to take a bath first, but didn’t go to bed immediately.’

Conveying the negative sense, the copula may appear without the negative marker in certain contextual environments (as discussed in details in section 3), as exemplified below.

- (25) *tɛòp* *k^hɔmp^hiwtâ:* *kô:* *(mâj-)tɛ^háj* *tɛà²-sôm* *k^hrîaŋ* *pen*
graduate computer then (NEG-)COP IRR¹⁴-fix engine able
‘Graduating in computer science does not mean that s/he can fix a computer.’

¹⁴ irrealis

2.2.5 COP-S

A COP-S involves the copula *kʰi:* and a propositional complement (PRO), resulting in the argument structure COP-S/PRO. The COP-S/PRO copular structure should be syntactically separated from COP-VP/EVE clauses in a couple of reasons. Certainly, one reason is that they license different copulas; that is, while COP-VP/EVE clauses allow the copula *tɛʰâj*, COP-S/PRO ones allow the copula *kʰi:*. Also, the imbedded clause in COP-S/PRO is more finite; that is, the subjects of the imbedded and main clauses are not coreferential and thus the former is not equi-deleted and may be present. Examples of COP-S/PRO clauses are provided in (26).

- (26a) *pʰõn kʰi: tɛʰǎn tɔ̃:ŋ-tɛ̀à:j pʰê:m*
 result COP I must-pay add
 ‘The result is that I must pay more (money).’

- (26b) *kʰwa:m-fǎn kʰɔ̃:ŋ raw kʰi: jà:k mi: lû:k*
 NOM-dream POS we COP want have child
 ‘Our dream is that we want to have a child.’

2.3 Verbal Features

The last prototypical function of copulas stated above is that a copula is a syntactic carrier to carry verbal features to a clause. It is not, however, applicable to all copulas in Thai. In Thai, only the copulas *pen* and *jù:* can be marked to denote negation and modality (M) in the same fashion as typical verbs can, as respectively shown in (27).

- (27a) *kʰǎw kʰoŋ-mâj-pen kʰru:*
 s/he M-NEG-COP teacher
 ‘S/he might not be a teacher.’

- (27b) *kʰǎw kʰoŋ-mâj-jù: naj-bâ:n*
 s/he M-NEG-COP in-house
 ‘S/he might not be in the house.’

The copula *tɛʰâj*, which is restricted to the negative marker sometimes, can also carry a modal, as shown in (28).

- (28) *kʰǎw kʰoŋ-mâj-tɛʰâj kʰon tʰaj máŋ*
 s/he M-NEG-COP person Thai Q
 ‘S/he might not be a Thai, might s/he?’

Unlikely, the copulas *kʰi:* and *dâ:jkê:* cannot be marked with any of those verbal features,¹⁵ as shown in (29).

- (29a) *pʰû:tɛʰá?ná? *kʰoŋ/*mâj-kʰi: sě:nsàk*
 winner M/NEG-COP Sansak
 ‘The winner might be/is not Sansak.’

- (29b) *pʰû:tɛʰá?ná? *kʰoŋ/*mâj-dâ:jkê: sě:nsàk*
 winner M/NEG-COP Sansak
 ‘The winner might be/is not Sansak.’

¹⁵ This is in accordance with Chiravate (2012) proposing that the copula *kʰi:* can only occur in a positive environment and cannot take any aspectual properties.

The syntactic characteristics of the Thai copula *k^hi:* are similar to the Chinese copula *shì*, which has come from a pronoun as illustrated in Zhan and Sun (2013). The Chinese copula *shì* is not subject to any of tense, aspect or modality marker, be it perfective (P) *-le*, experiential (EXP) *-guò*, or imperfective (IMP) *-zhe*, as exemplified in (30).

- (30a) *tā* *shì* **-le*/**-guò*/**-zhe* *lǎoshī* (Chinese)
 s/he COP-P/EXP/IMP teacher
 ‘S/he was/used to be/ is a teacher.’
- (30b) *k^hǎw* **k^hǎ:j*/**jaŋ-k^hi:* *k^hru:* **lɛ:w* (Thai)
 s/he EXP/IMP-COP teacher P
 ‘S/he used to be/ is still a teacher.’

This suggests that the verbal function of *k^hi:* shown in (16c) above might not be the origin of this word. Since such a diachronic study is beyond our concern, we will not examine further than the present use.

To conclude, we claim that, syntactically, the Thai language exhibits particular and complex characteristics, deviating from those in morphologically complex languages. The syntax of copular clauses is best discussed in terms of argument structures or the mappings of syntactic and semantic properties. Structurally, copular clauses display five different predicates—noun phrase, prepositional phrase, adjective phrase, verb phrase and clause. The five predicates display seven semantic properties—patient, locative, temporal, possessive, non-inherent, eventive and propositional. It is the prepositional phrase that displays three semantic roles (possessive, locative and temporal). The argument structure with the patient noun phrase accepts four copulas. We then have come up with ten mappings between argument structures and copulas as shown figure 1. Moreover, not all the copulas can freely carry verbal features to copular clauses: *pen*, *jù:* and *tɛ^hǎj*, but not *k^hi:* and *dâ:jkè:*, can be marked to denote negation and modality.

Figure 1: Seven syntactic varieties of copular argument structures in Thai.

syntactic forms	semantic relations	copulas
COP-NP	COP-PAT	<i>pen</i> , <i>k^hi:</i> , <i>dâ:jkè:</i> , <i>tɛ^hǎj</i>
COP-PP	COP-LOC	<i>jù:</i>
COP-PP	COP-TEM	<i>jù:</i>
COP-PP	COP-POS	<i>pen</i>
COP-AP	COP-[NON-INH]	<i>pen</i>
COP-VP	COP-EVE	<i>tɛ^hǎj</i>
COP-S	COP-PRO	<i>k^hi:</i>

3 Pragmatic/Communicative Aspects

The discussion above has demonstrated five copulas in Thai—*pen*, *jù:*, *k^hi:*, *dâ:jkè:* and *tɛ^hǎj*—that operate in different argument structures. It is from COP-NP which can allow most copulas, four of them: *pen*, *k^hi:*, *dâ:jkè:* and *tɛ^hǎj*. For the copula *jù:*, its occurrence is restricted to the form COP-PP. To differentiate the occurrences of all the copulas exhaustively, we further examine the properties such as pragmatic/communicative interpretations

As proposed by Higgins (1979) analyzing English copular clauses, copulas are classified into four types: predicational (PRE), specificational (SPE), identificational (IDE) and equational (EQU), as exemplified by Mikkelsen (2005) in (31).¹⁶

- (31a) *Susan is a doctor* (PRE)
 (31b) *The winner is Susan* (SPE)
 (31c) *That woman is Susan* (IDE)
 (31d) *She is Susan* (EQU)

¹⁶ see also Niimura (2007) and Von Heusinger et al. (2011)

While the copula *be* typically displays all the interpretations in English, such copular interpretations involve different copulas in Thai declarative clauses. Predicational copular clauses carry the copulas *jù:* and *pen* whereas non-predicational ones associate with the copulas *k^hi:* and *dâ:jkè:*. Also, it has been further found that not all the copulas can be used in some other pragmatic contexts. In other contexts, the copula *tɛ^hâj* is found obligatorily replacing some of those copulas. In this section, we then discuss, on the one hand, the two different interpretations and, on the other hand, other pragmatic contexts that are constraints on sets of copulas.

3.1 Predicational Copulas

Since the copulas *pen* preceding noun phrases and *jù:* preceding prepositional phrases can be marked for any verbal feature in the same fashion as typical verbs can (as illustrated in section 2.4 above), both of them are clearly considered predicational. We only consider the copula *pen* here, however, as only it is in competition with the other copulas which are allowed in the structure COP-NP.

Cross-linguistically, predicational copular clauses occurring with the predicate COP-NP have subjects referring to some individuals and predicates characterizing individuals or stating individuals' properties. The subject noun phrases refer to something and hence are referential. In contrast, predicate noun phrases do not have references and function like adjectives. Therefore, they are not referential. In Thai, the copula *pen* marks for predicational copular clauses to exhibit this notion, as shown in (32).

- (32) *k^hǎw pen dèk*
 s/he COP child
 'S/he is a child.'

In (32), the noun phrase predicate *dèk* does not refer to any child: it attributes the subject as being a child just like an adjective does. In an obvious predicational or attributive context, any non-predicational copula that competes with *pen* is not even accepted to be structurally interchangeable, as in (33).

- (33) *k^hǎw pen/*k^hi: dèk mâ:kmâ:k*
 s/he COP child very
 'S/he is really a child/S/he is very childish.'

Moreover, the use of the predicational *pen* in Thai is comparatively wider than the copula *be* in English and some other European languages. It includes the description of the subject's health problems such as diseases and symptoms whereas English offers different verbs, as exemplified in (34).

- (34) *k^hǎw pen má[?]reŋ₁/k^hâj₂/wàt₃/lom₄*
 s/he COP cancer₁/ fever₂/cold₃/wind₄
 'S/he got cancer.'₁
 'S/he had a fever.'₂
 'S/he caught a cold.'₃
 'S/he fainted.'₄

3.2 Non-predicational Copulas

Non-predicational clauses in the form COP-NP involve the two copulas *k^hi:* and *dâ:jkè:* with different constraints. The copula *k^hi:* can denote up to four distinctive non-predicative senses; namely, specificational, indentificational, equational and definitional, which can also be characterized by means of referentiality. The copula *dâ:jkè:* is a variation in certain specificational contexts.

3.2.1 Specificational Interpretation

In general, specificational copular clauses are used to specify who (or what) someone (or something) is, rather than to say anything about that person (or entity). In other words, they are the type in which the

referent of the noun phrase predicate is the entity that meets a condition denoted by the subject noun phrase which is non-referential. In Thai, it is the specificational clauses that associate with both the copulas *kʰi:* and *dâ:jkè:*, but not *pen*, as in (35).

- (35) *pʰû:teʰáʰnáʰ* *kʰi:/dâ:jkè:/*pen* *sě:nsàk*
 winner COP Sansak
 ‘The winner is Sansak.’

In the specificational interpretation, the two copulas *kʰi:* and *dâ:jkè:* are used differently in two binary contexts: indirect versus direct declaration and individual versus list.

3.2.1.1. Indirect vs. direct Declaration

The use of *kʰi:* is preferable in indirect declaration. A clear indirect declaration clause that allows *dâ:jkè:* to occur as a copula is somewhat odd, as exemplified in (36).

- (36) *kʰǎw* *kʰít* *wâ:* *pʰû:teʰáʰnáʰ* *kʰi:/?dâ:jkè:* *buakʰǎ:w pɔ: pràmúk*
 s/he think that winner COP Buakaw Por Pramuk
 ‘S/he thinks that the winner is Buakaw Por Pramuk.’

As for the copula *dâ:jkè:*, it is preferable in the direct declaration sense such as lot-drawing or game winner announcement, as respectively exemplified in (37).

- (37a) “*lê:k* *tʰi:* *ʔɔ:k* *dâ:jkè:/?kʰi:* *506260 !*”
 number REL come out COP 506260
 ‘The coming number is 506260.’
- (37b) “*pʰû:teʰáʰnáʰ* *dâ:jkè:/?kʰi:* *buakʰǎ:w pɔ: pràmúk!*”
 winner COP Buakaw Por Pramuk
 ‘The winner is Buakaw Por Pramuk!’

3.2.1.2. Individual vs. List

In contexts other than declaration, the copula *kʰi:* is preferable in leading an individual item, while the copula *dâ:jkè:* is preferable in leading a list: the subject of a specificational clause acts as the head of the list and the post-copula elements serve as items on that list, as exemplified in (38).

- (38) *ʔa:hǎ:n* *tʰi:* *mi:* *kʰa:bo:hajdrè:t* *sǔ:ŋ* *dâ:jkè:* *kʰá:w* *klûaj* *man*
 food that have carbohydrate high COP rice banana yam
 ‘Foods that are high in carbohydrate are rice, banana and yam’

3.2.2. Identificational Interpretation

Identificational copular clauses are cross-linguistically defined as the type in which a clause is to identify the references of the two noun phrases, the subject and predicate, both of which are referential. It is also stated by Higgins (1979) that identificational clauses are characterized by having a demonstrative pronoun or demonstrative phrase in the subject position. The demonstrative must be understood as having deictic, not anaphoric, reference. The subject of identificational clauses is referential, while the predicate is ‘identificational’ and thus referential. As regards their actual function, Higgins has posited that these sentences are typically used for teaching the names of people or of things. In Thai, identificational copular clauses are also displayed by the copula *kʰi:*. Likewise, the type is also used for teaching or introducing the names of people or of things. Examples are provided in (39).

(39a) *nî:* *kʰi:/*pen* *ma:ríʔʔô:*
 this COP Mario
 ‘This is Mario.’

(39b) *nî:* *kʰi:/*pen* *má:*
 this COP horse
 ‘This is a horse.’

3.2.3. Equational Interpretation

Equational copular clauses are generally defined as the type in which a clause is to equate the references of the subject and predicate noun phrases, both of which are fully referential. Since equational clauses differ from identificational ones in the degree of reference, they should be considered separate interpretations. In Thai, equational clauses are also displayed by the copula *kʰi:*, as exemplified in (40).

(40a) *sàʔǎ:m* *kʰi:/*pen* *pràʔtʰê:t* *tʰaj*
 Siam COP country Thai
 ‘Siam is Thailand.’

(40b) *wan* *nî:* *kʰi:/?pen* *wan* *tean* *tʰi:* *teèt* *mi:na:kʰom*
 day this COP day Monday at seven March
 ‘Today is Monday, March 7.’

3.2.4. Definitional Interpretation

In Thai, an additional interpretation that should be separately addressed since it denotes a distinct communicative sense is definitional copular clauses. In a definitional clause, the subject noun phrase is a concept which is unknown or unclear, and the post-copula noun phrase defines it rather than characterizing it. Both the subject and post-copula noun phrases are generally stated and thus are non-referential. In this interpretation, the copula *kʰi:* is preferable to *pen*, as shown in (41).

(41a) *sàʔtìʔ* *kʰi:/?pen* *ka:n-rú:sik-tua*
 consciousness COP NOM-feel-body
 ‘Consciousness is being aware of something within oneself.’

(41b) *pʰumpanja:* *kʰi:/?pen* *pʰi:n* *kʰwa:m-rú:*
 wisdom COP ground NOM-know
kʰɔ̌: ɲ *kʰon* *naj* *sǎŋkʰom* *nánnán*
 of people in society that
 ‘Wisdom is the fundamental knowledge of people in a society.’

All five distinct communicative interpretations indicating distinct referentiality patterns—the mappings of subject-predicate—with specific copulas could be conclusively shown in the following figure.

Figure 2: Referentiality patterns of declarative copular clauses in Thai

Communicative interpretations		NP subject	Copula	NP predicate
PRE		referential	<i>pen</i>	non-referential
SPE	direct declaration, individual	non-referential	<i>kʰi:</i>	referential
	indirect declaration, list	non-referential	<i>dâ:jkê:</i>	referential
IDE		referential	<i>kʰi:</i>	referential
EQU		fully referential	<i>kʰi:</i>	fully referential
DEF ¹⁷		non-referential	<i>kʰi:</i>	non-referential

¹⁷ definitional

3.3. Constraints on Sets of Copulas

We have also found that there are some other pragmatic contexts that are constraints on the uses of copulas. They are non-declarative speech acts such as negation¹⁸ and *yes/no*-interrogatives on the one hand and stronger affirmative uses on the other. In such contexts, the copula *te^hâj* is obligatorily used as a variation of some declarative copulas: that is, it replaces the non-predicational copula *k^hi:* in the former context type and the predicational *pen* in the latter. The predicational copula *jù:* is still possible in the two types. As for the declaration copula *dâ:jkê:*, it is not possible in any type here.

3.3.1. Non-declarative Speech Acts

In non-declarative speech acts, such as negative and *yes/no*-interrogative, the copulas *jù:* and *pen* still perform their functions while the copula *k^hi:* must be replaced by the copula *te^hâj*. In general, negative clauses are typically marked with the negative marker *mâj*. When the copulas are in negative environments, the copulas *jù:* and *pen* are also marked with *mâj*. The two copulas can be accompanied with the grammaticalized modal *dâ:j*, marked for realis (R). The copula *k^hi:* must be replaced by the copula *te^hâj* in all communicative interpretations, as exemplified in (42).

- (42a) *pà:kka: mâj-(dâ:j)-jù: bon tó? (jù:-PRE)*
 pen NEG-(R)-COP on table
 ‘The pen is not on the table.’
- (42b) *krà[?]t^hú: ní: mâj-(dâ:j)-pen ka:n-ri:wiw (pen-PRE)*
 post this NEG-(R)-COP NOM-review
 ‘This post is not a review.’
- (42c) *p^hú:te^há[?]ná[?] mâj-te^hâj/*k^hi: sě:nsàk (SPE)*
 winner NEG-COP Sansak
 ‘The winner is not Sansak.’
- (42d) *nî: mâj-te^hâj/*k^hi: ma:rí[?]ô: (IDE)*
 this NEG-COP Mario
 ‘This is not Mario.’
- (43e) *sĭamrĭap mâj-te^hâj/*k^hi: prà[?]t^hê:t t^haj (EQU)*
 Siemriep NEG-COP country Thai
 ‘Siemriep is not Thailand.’
- (42f) *bà:p mâj-te^hâj/*k^hi: sĭj di: (DEF)*
 sin NEG-COP thing good
 ‘Sin is not a good thing.’

Our finding of the negation of the copula *pen*, in which the negative marker is accompanied with *dâ:j*, is in accordance with Chiravate (2012), who claims that the copula *pen* can occur in negative environments marked with the negative form *mâj-dâ:j*. However, we posit that the copula *pen* is normally negated by the sole negative marker *mâj* in the irrealis reading. The combination *mâj-dâ:j* does not work well in such reading, as in (43).

¹⁸ Here, negation is considered a speech act type in contrast with affirmative assertion according to Givón (2001: 372) proposing that negative assertion is “a distinct speech act, used with different communicative goals in mind than affirmative assertions. In using a negative assertion, the speaker is not in the business of communicating new information to the hearer. Rather, s/he is in the business of correcting the hearer’s misguided belief.”

- (43) *k^hwa:m-k^hít* *p^hǒm* *ʔà:t-tɛ̀à²-mâj-ʔdâ:j-pen* *prà²jò:t*
 NOM-think I M-IRR-NEG-R-COP profit
 ‘My idea may not be any profit.’

Moreover, in a more specific negative context like contrastive-focus (CON-FOC) typically marked with the expression such as *t^hí:-nǎj-kan...tà:ŋ-hà:k* (‘elsewhere...instead’), the combination of *mâj-tɛ̀hâj* somehow has gone through the process of meaning transmission where the negative sense has been transmitted from the negative marker *mâj* to the copula *tɛ̀hâj*. The result is that the sole presence of *tɛ̀hâj* can be used to denote the negative sense of the non-predicative interpretations, as exemplified in (44).

- (44a) *p^hû:tɛ̀hâ²ná²* *ɛ̀hâj* *sù²tɛ̀hâ:t* *t^hí:-nǎj-kan,* *sě:nsàk* *tà:ŋ-hà:k* (SPE)
 winner COP Suchart CON-FOC Sansak CON-FOC
 ‘The winner is not Suchart, but Sansak.’

- (44b) *nî:* *tɛ̀hâj* *mà:k* *t^hí:-nǎj-kan,* *ma:rí²²ô:* *tà:ŋ-hà:k* (IDE)
 this COP Mark CON-FOC Mario CON-FOC
 ‘This is not Mark, but Mario.’

- (44c) *sĭamrĭap* *tɛ̀hâj* *t^haj* *t^hí:-nǎj-kan,* *k^hà²mĕ:n* *tà:ŋ-hà:k* (EQU)
 Siemrieb COP Thai CON-FOC Khmer CON-FOC
 ‘Siemrieb is not Thailand, but Cambodia.’

- (44d) *bà:p* *tɛ̀hâj* *sĭŋ* *dĭ:* *t^hí:-nǎj-kan,* *sĭŋ* *le:wrá:j* *tà:ŋ-hà:k* (DEF)
 sin COP thing good CON-FOC thing bad CON-FOC
 ‘Sin is not a good thing, but a bad thing.’

Similarly, in *yes/no*-interrogatives—either open or alternative *yes/no*-interrogatives which are typically marked with the question markers *mâj* or *rĭ:-plà:w* (or-not) respectively—the copulas *jù:* and *pen* are also allowed, while the copula *k^hí:* must be replaced by the copula *tɛ̀hâj* in all communicative interpretations, as shown in (45).

- (45a) *pà:kka:* *jù:* *bon* *tó²* *mâj/ rĭ:-plà:w* (*jù:-PRE*)
 pen COP on table Q
 ‘Is the pen on the table?’

- (45b) *k^hǎw* *pen* *k^hon* *dĭ:* *mâj/ rĭ:-plà:w* (*pen-PRE*)
 s/he COP person good Q
 ‘Is s/he a good person?’

- (45c) *p^hû:tɛ̀hâ²ná²* *tɛ̀hâj/*k^hí:sě:nsàk* *mâj/ rĭ:-plà:w* (*SPE*)
 winner COP Sansak Q
 ‘Is the winner Sansak?’

- (45d) *nî:* *tɛ̀hâj/*k^hí:ma:rí²²ô:* *mâj/ rĭ:-plà:w* (*IDE*)
 this COP Mario Q
 ‘Is this Mario?’

- (45e) *sà²jǎ:m* *tɛ̀hâj/*k^hí:t^haj* *pàtcù²ban* *mâj/ rĭ:-plà:w* (*EQU*)
 Siam COP Thai present Q
 ‘Is Siam Thailand at the present?’

- (45f) *sàʔtìʔ* *tɛʰáj/*kʰi:ká:n-rú:sìk-tua* *máj/ rǐ:-plà:w* (DEF)
 consciousness COP NOM-feel-body Q
 ‘Is consciousness being aware of something within oneself?’

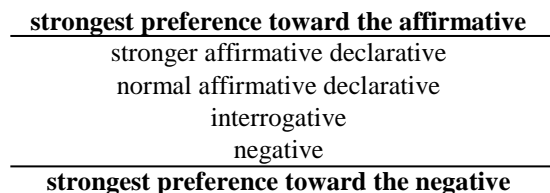
In contrast, in constructing other interrogatives such as *wh*-interrogative and alternative interrogative where two alternative answers are provided, the use of a declarative copula, no matter what it is, remains acceptable, but not the copula *tɛʰáj*, as shown in (46).

- (46a) *pʰû:tɛʰáʔnáʔ* *kʰi:/*tɛʰájkʰraj* (wh-Q)
 winner COP who
 ‘Who is the winner?’
- (46b) *pʰû:tɛʰáʔnáʔ* *kʰi:/*tɛʰájsǎ:nsàk* *rǐ:* *tɛʰâ:ttɛʰa:j* (or-Q)
 winner COP Sansak or Chatchay.
 ‘Is the winner Sansak or Chatchay?’

3.3.2. Stronger Affirmative Use

The stronger affirmative use involves a systematic preference toward either the affirmative or negative (Bolinger 1978b, Givón 2001). The preference is graded from the strongest preference toward the affirmative (or the strongest bias to the negative) to the strongest preference toward the negative (or the strongest bias to the affirmative). In this scale, the affirmative declarative speech act is considered the strongest preference toward the affirmative, next comes the interrogative speech act, and the negative speech act is the strongest preference toward the negative. In this continuum, it is evidential in Thai that copular clauses in the affirmative declarative one could be further graded as normal and stronger affirmatives, resulting in a more elaborate continuum, as shown below.

Figure 3: A systematic preference toward either the affirmative or negative speech act



By normal affirmative, we mean declarative assertions. We consider the stronger affirmative as a type of speech acts that is different from declarative assertions. It should be recognized that stronger affirmatives are not in the same categories as copular clauses in which predicates are focused. Typically, any clause type in Thai including the copular type can be focused on its predicate by adding deontic morphology or words such as modals and adverbs, as exemplified in (47).

- (47) *man* *tǎn-pen fajfá:* *lát* *woŋtɛɔ:n* *nê:nê:*
 it M-COP electricity short cut circuit sure
 ‘It must be a short circuit for sure.’

The modal and adverbial devices are not used to mark a stronger affirmative. Rather, carrying the predicative focus as such, a copular clause can obtain a stronger favour toward the affirmative by making use of the copula *tɛʰáj*. Consider the example (48) in which the focused copular clause in (47) above is occupied by a corresponding copular clause carrying a stronger affirmative (STR-AFF), either before or after it.

- (48) *man* *tǎn-tɛʰáj* *nê:nê:, tǎn-pen fajfá:* *lát* *woŋtɛɔ:n* *nê:nê:*
 it M-[STR-AFF] certainly M-COP electricity short cut circuit sure
 ‘It surely is. It must be a short circuit for sure.’

been found that the omission of copulas is also subject to some pragmatic aspects, as illustrated in the following discussion.

A copular clause displaying either the form COP-AP or COP-VP certainly allows the absence of the corresponding copula since both adjective phrases and verb phrases can function as predicates on their own, as in (50a) and (50b).

(50a) *k^hǎw* (pen) *bâ:* (COP-AP)
 s/he COP insane
 ‘S/he is insane.’

(50b) *ra:k^hâ:* (mâj-c^hâj) *p^hɛ:ŋ* *mâ:k* (COP-VP)
 price NEG-COP expensive much
 ‘The price is not very expensive.’

Also, a copular clause displaying the form COP-NP that carries either the copula *pen* or *k^hi:* allows the absence of the corresponding copula in some interpretative environments, leaving the noun phrase to be adjacent to the subject, as exemplified in (51).

(51a) *wan* *ní:* (pen) *wan* *tean*
 day this COP day Monday
 ‘Today is Monday.’

(51b) *nî:* (k^hi:) *ma:rí[?]ô:*
 this COP Mario
 ‘This is Mario.’

Among non-predicational copular clauses with the form *k^hi:-NP*, only the identificational interpretation, introducing someone or something, licenses the optional presence of the copula, as exemplified in (52).

(52a) *nî:* (k^hi:) *ma:rí[?]ô:* (IDE)
 this COP Mario
 ‘This is Mario.’

(52c) **p^hû:* *te^há[?]ná[?]* \emptyset *sě:nsàk* (SPE)
 person win COP Sansak
 ‘The winner is Sansak.’

(52d) **sà[?]jă:m* \emptyset *t^haj* *pàtteù[?]ban* (EQU)
 Siam COP Thai present
 ‘Siam is Thailand in the present.’

(52e) **sà[?]tì[?]* \emptyset *ka:n-rú:sìk-tua* (DEF)
 consciousness COP NOM-feel-body
 ‘Consciousness is being awakened.’

The optional presence of the identificational copula *k^hi:* also extends to its variant, *te^hâj*, in an alternative *yes/no*-interrogative, as shown below.

(53) *k^hon* *ní:* (te^hâj) *ma:rí[?]ô:* *rě:-plà:w*
 person this COP Mario Q
 ‘Is this person Mario?’

Moreover, a copular clause displaying the argument structure COP-PP/POS allows the absence of the corresponding copula *pen*. This is not that surprising since, as discussed earlier, the preposition *kʰɔ̃:ŋ* has been grammaticalized from the lexical noun which still performs its original function as a lexical noun. The absence of the copula is even preferable in certain informal spoken-contexts, as exemplified in (54).

- (54) *bâ:n nĩ: (pen) kʰɔ̃:ŋ tɛʰǎn*
 house this COP POS me
 ‘This house is mine.’

In copular clauses displaying the form either COP-AP or COP-VP, the omission of the corresponding copulas is still possible when a verbal feature is added, as shown in (55).

- (55a) *tʰə: tɛà²-bâ: rĩ:* (COP-AP)
 you IRR-insane Q
 ‘Are you insane?’
- (55b) *ra:kʰa: tɛà²-pʰɛ:ŋmâ:k* (COP-VP)
 price IRR-expensive much
 ‘It will be very expensive.’

In contrast, in copular clauses displaying the form COP-NP and COP-PP/POS carrying the copula *pen*, this copula must be present when a verbal feature is added as a prefix, as exemplified in (56).

- (56a) *wan nán kʰoŋ-pen/*ø wan tean*
 day that M-COP day Monday
 ‘That day might be Monday.’
- (56b) *bâ:n nĩ: tɛà²-pen/*ø kʰɔ̃:ŋ tɛʰǎn*
 house this IRR-COP POS me
 ‘This house will be mine.’

As for the copula *kʰi:* in an identificational COP-NP clause, its omission has nothing to do with the addition of verbal features since the copula cannot take any verbal one. Rather, its presence or absence seems to be accounted for in terms of formality; namely, its presence is more formal while its absence is less formal.

5. Conclusion

Copular constructions in Thai display complexities and particular characteristics deviating from those of morphologically complex languages. In Thai, there appear a number of copulas such as *pen*, *jù:*, *kʰi:*, *dâ:jkè:* and *tɛʰâj*. They precede not only non-verbal predicates such as noun phrases, prepositional phrases and clauses but also verbal predicates such as verb phrases and adjective phrases that normally form predicates on their own in Thai. Copular clauses also display distinct mappings of syntactic and semantic properties (or argument structures) on the one hand and copulas on the other hand. That is, beside five different forms of complements, they display seven semantic properties of complements such as patient, possessive, locative, temporal, non-inherent, eventive and propositional. It is the prepositional complement that expresses more than one semantic property (possessive, locative and temporal). Such different mappings or argument structures allow particular copulas, resulting in up to ten different patterns of copular constructions; that is, *pen*-NP/PAT, *kʰi:*-NP/PAT, *dâ:jkè:*-NP/PAT, *tɛʰâj*-NP/PAT, *jù:*-PP/LOC, *jù:*-PP/TEM, *pen*-PP/POS, *pen*-AP/[NON-INH], *tɛʰâj*-VP/EVE, and *kʰi:*-S/PRO. Not all the copulas can freely carry verbal features to copular clauses; namely, the three copulas *pen*, *jù:* and *tɛʰâj* can be marked to denote negation and modality while the other two, *kʰi:* and *dâ:jkè:*, cannot.

Even though four copulas—*pen*, *kʰi:*, *dâ:jkè:* and *tɛʰâj*—can operate in the argument structure COP-NP/PAT, they can be exhaustively differentiated with respect to certain pragmatic/communicative aspects.

The copulas *jù:* and *pen* appear in predicational clauses, whereas the other copulas appear in non-predicational clauses such as specificational, identificational, equational, and definitional. Here, the difference of all communicative interpretations is accounted for in terms of referentiality patterns. Both *k^hi:* and *dâ:jkê:* are used in specificational clauses, but they can be differentiated by the pragmatic binary environments such as indirect versus direct declaration and individuals versus lists. In other environments, the copula *te^háj* is obligatorily used as a variation of some declarative copulas; that is, it replaces *k^hi:* in non-declarative contexts and *pen* in stronger affirmative contexts. The copula *jù:* still works well outside the declarative one. As for the copula *dâ:jkê:*, it is not possible in any use other than declarative.

In addition, most copular clause structures license the optional occurrence of copulas. Among these structures, some allow copula omission with respect to syntactic factors such as structures and verbal features, while the others allow copula omission with respect to certain pragmatic aspects.

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