

THE SO-CALLED PASSIVE IN THAI

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Thai students studying English often equate the English passive construction with the *thùuk* or *doon* construction in Thai. This paper offers a different approach to the so-called passive in Thai.

Thai *thùuk* is generally analysed as an auxiliary verb whose function is to mark the preceding NP as the subject of the passive construction. Another morpheme that is used in the same way is *doon*. Both *thùuk* and *doon* can be main verbs meaning '*touch or come into contact with something*'. However, *doon* is felt to be colloquial. This "passive construction" analysis equates *thùuk* sentences with the English passive. Chaiyaratana (1961:26) observed, for example, that *thùuk* was used of something unpleasant; she derived *thùuk* sentences through the application of a transformational rule that converts one string into another. According to her, we should only find verbs signifying suffering and destruction occurring with *thùuk*. Phya Upakit (1948a), however, pointed out that *thùuk* also occurs with verbs that on their own do not imply anything unpleasant, e.g. *chæn* '*invite*', *chom* '*praise*'. By contrast, Warotamasikkhadit (1963:32) uses a derivation from two strings with *thùuk* + COMP occurring in the matrix S.

It is a well-known fact that the same situation can be described in many ways depending on what the speaker chooses to talk about. Each of the following sets of sentences describes the same situation:

- (1) a. *sùdaa chæn dæŋ*
Suda invite Dang
Suda invited Dang.
- b. *dæŋ sùdaa chæn*
Dang Suda invite
Dang was invited by Suda.

- c. dæŋ thùuk sùdaa chœn
 Dang Suda invite
 Dang was invited by Suda (but he did not want to be invited).

- (2) a. sùdaa chom dæŋ
 Suda praise Dang
 Suda praised Dang.

- b. dæŋ sùdaa chom
 Dang Suda praise
 Dang was praised by Suda.

- c. dæŋ thùuk sùdaa chom
 Dang Suda praise
 Dang was praised by Suda (but he did not like being praised).

In the (a) sentences sùdaa is the topic, the speaker tells the listener what she did; in (b) the topic is dæŋ. The (a) and the (b) sentences are synonymous in so far as the content is concerned; that is, if one is true, the other cannot be false. They are not completely synonymous, for they are not interchangeable. The appropriateness of (a) and (b) depends on the topic of the conversation.

The (c) sentences, however, are different from the others in that they are appropriate only if the speaker thinks that Dang dislikes being invited in the case of (1c) or dislikes being praised in (2c). The difference between (c) and the others is clear if Suda is the speaker, in which case chǎn or some other pronouns will replace all the occurrences of sùdaa in (1) and (2).

- (3) a. chǎn chœn dæŋ
 I invite Dang
 I invited Dang.

- b. dæŋ chǎn chœn
 Dang I invite
 Dang was invited by me.

- c. dæŋ thùuk chǎn chœn
 Dang I invite
 Dang was invited by me (but he did not want to be invited).

- (4) a. chǎn chom dæŋ
 I praise Dang
 I praised Dang.

b. dǎəŋ chǎn chom
 Dang I praise
 Dang was praised by me.

c. dǎəŋ thùuk chǎn chom
 Dang I praise
 Dang was praised by me (but he did not like being praised).

Sentences (3c) and (4c) are odd while (1c) and (2c) are not. On syntactic grounds, there is no reason why (3c) and (4c) should not occur as frequently as (1c) and (2c). The oddity of (3c) and (4c) can be accounted for if we take the position that *thùuk* is used to indicate that something hurts or affects someone adversely. When the speaker uses *thùuk*, he is asserting that an animate being suffers the effect of an event or an action. The occurrence of *thùuk* in (3c) and (4c) implies that the speaker knows he is hurting someone. Since, within the conventions of Thai etiquette, it is unlikely that a speaker will consider his invitation or praise as an act of hostility, we have grammatical sentences that do not occur in actual speech.

In traditional Thai grammar (a) and (b) belong to different sentence types, (b) and (c) are grouped together, with (b) deriving from (c). This classification ignores the fact that except for focus (a) and (b) are synonymous, and that although (b) and (c) focus on the same item, they differ greatly as far as meaning is concerned. Moreover, the rule that moves the object to the front and inserts *thùuk* would only work with sentences like (3) and (4). It cannot account for the following:

- (5) sùdaa thùuk khəmooy khɨn bāan
 Suda thief enter house
 Suda's house was burglarised.
- (6) sùdaa thùuk phǎw pǎet còt-mǎay
 Suda father open letter
 Suda's letter was opened by her father.

The passive rule as formulated by Tonglaw (1952:283), a grammarian of the traditional school, is the same as the rule that Chaiyaratana (1961:5) has for her transformational grammar of Thai; it moves the whole NP to the front. Tonglaw's rule for changing an active sentence into a passive sentence consists of two operations:

- i. The object is moved to the subject position.
- ii. The subject is placed between the auxiliary *thùuk* and the verb, and becomes a part of the predicate.

Warotamasikkkhadit (1963:32) has a different rule. He derives the *thùuk* construction from two strings. His rule requires that the NP that occurs with *thùuk* be identical with the NP object in the embedded S. These rules, however, cannot derive (5) and (6) from the following active sentences:

- (5') khəmooy khɪn bāan sùdaa
 thief enter house Suda
A thief broke into Suda's house.

- (6') phôɔ pəət còt-măay sùdaa
 father open letter Suda
Father opened Suda's letter.

If we modify the rule so that it can also move the NP inside the NP object to the front, we will get (5) and (6) from (5') and (6'). The new rule, however, will produce ungrammatical as well as grammatical strings from the following:

- (7) khruu tii lûuk sùdaa
 teacher beat child Suda
The teacher beat Suda's child.

- (8) sùdaa chom nɔɔŋ dæŋ
 Suda praise sister Dang
Suda praised Dang's sister.

If we move the whole NP object to the front, we get acceptable sentences. If we only move the NP inside the NP object, we get strings that are unacceptable.

- (7') a. lûuk sùdaa thùuk khruu tii
 child Suda teacher beat
Suda's child was beaten by the teacher.

- b. *sùdaa thùuk khruu tii lûuk
 Suda teacher beat child

- (8') a. nɔɔŋ dæŋ thùuk sùdaa chom
 sister Dang Suda praise
Dang's sister was praised by Suda.

- b. *dæŋ thùuk sùdaa chom nɔɔŋ
 Dang Suda praise sister

The fact that none of the passive rules can account for all the occurrences and non-occurrences of *thùuk* makes one question the assumption

that *thùuk* is the marker of the passive construction in Thai.

In the Fillmorean case framework, the relationship between sentences like (1a) *sùdaa chæen dæən* and (1b) *dæən sùdaa chæen* can be accounted for quite naturally through two processes: subjectivalisation and topicalisation. In the case of (1a) *sùdaa chæen dæən* only subjectivalisation applies. As for (2b) *dæən sùdaa chæen* topicalisation moves *dæən* to the front after subjectivalisation has applied. We can account for the following in the same way:

- (9) a. *phôc pèet còt-măay sùdaa mġa-waan-nġi*
father open letter Suda yesterday
Father opened Suda's letter yesterday.
- b. *còt-măay sùdaa phôc pèet mġa-waan-nġi*
letter Suda father open yesterday
Suda's letter was opened by Father yesterday.
- c. *mġa-waan-nġi phôc pèet còt-măay sùdaa*
yesterday father open letter Suda
Yesterday, Father opened Suda's letter.

Here (b) and (c) differ from (a) in that topicalisation applies as well as subjectivalisation. They differ from one another because in each case a different item is topicalised. Note that topicalisation cannot apply twice, for we do not get

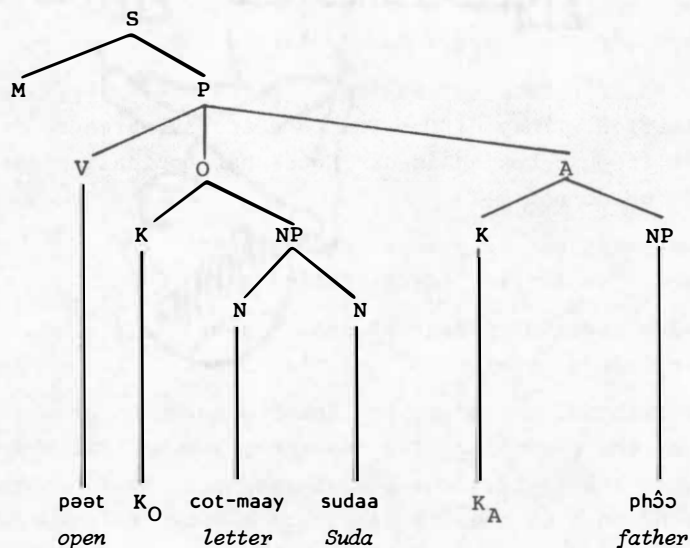
- d. **mġa-waan-nġi còt-măay sùdaa phôc pèet*
yesterday letter Suda father open
- e. **còt-măay sùdaa mġa-waan-nġi phôc pèet*
letter Suda yesterday father open

Since subjectivalisation and topicalisation account for the occurrence of an NP at the beginning of a sentence, the NP that precedes *thùuk* in (1c) *dæən thùuk sùdaa chæen* must have been moved to that position by one or both of these processes. Another related problem is the status of *thùuk*: Is it an auxiliary verb as most grammarians claim; and if it is, at what point is it introduced?

If we start with the assumption that *thùuk* is an auxiliary verb, we can account for its occurrence by a phrase structure rule that expands an AUX node or a transformation that inserts it into the string. Chaiyaratana introduced *thùuk* by an optional transformation. In Waro-tamasikkhadit's grammar *thùuk* is introduced by a phrase structure rule, but not as an expansion of AUX. According to him, *thùuk* is a main verb which has a special property of triggering the passive transformation.

In case grammar, it is possible to have a rule stating that a non-normal choice of subject has to be registered in the V as Fillmore (1968a: 37) proposes for the English passive. This rule will move O or E over the verb and provide a condition for the insertion of *thùuk*; it will not give us the correct surface structure, for A is still left behind. In Thai, the Agentive has to occur before the verb; we therefore need another rule to place A between *thùuk* and the verb. This set of rules will handle sentences like (1c) *dæŋ thùuk sùdaa chæen* and (2c) *dæŋ thùuk sùdaa chom*. Deletion of *thùuk* will yield (1b) *dæŋ sùdaa chæen* and (2b) *dæŋ sùdaa chom*. Since sentences with *thùuk* and those that are supposed to have *thùuk* deleted are not synonymous, this solution is not satisfactory. Moreover, it cannot handle sentences like (5) and (6). If we assume that (6) *sùdaa thùuk phôo pèet còt-măay* comes from the same proposition as *phôo pèet còt-măay sùdaa*, the rules needed to derive (6) will be different from those that give (1c) and (2c). The structure underlying (6') could be roughly represented as follows:¹

(10)



The subjectivalisation rule could move A over giving *phôo pèet còt-măay sùdaa* or O, a non-normal choice of subject, and the surface string would be *còt-măay sùdaa thùuk phôo pèet*. To get *sùdaa thùuk phôo pèet còt-măay* we have to move not O but an element inside an NP dominated by it.

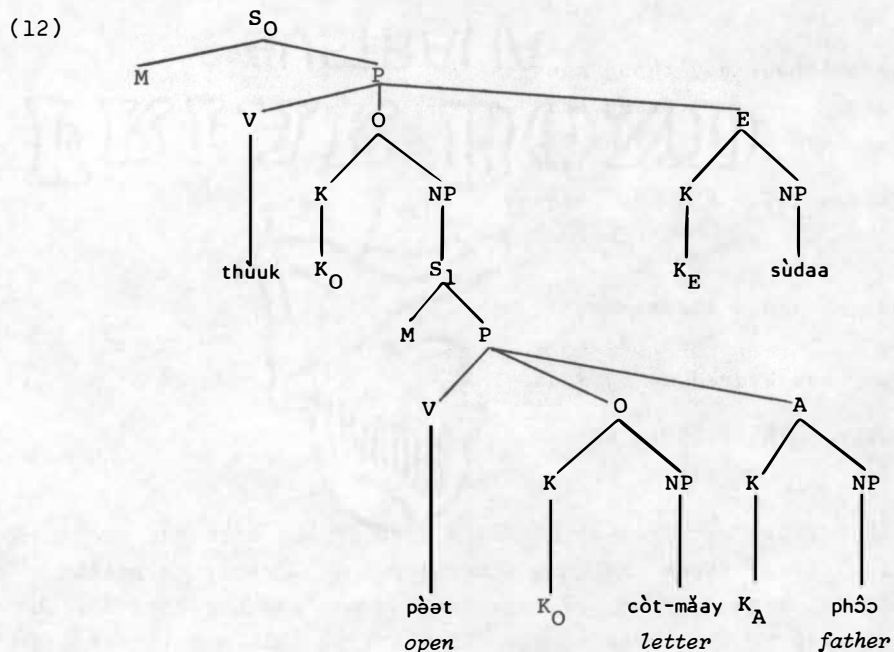
¹*sùdaa* in (6') probably comes from an S with *sùdaa* occurring in the Agentive or the Dative, for *còt-măay sùdaa* can mean a letter that Suda wrote or a letter that someone wrote to Suda. Since *sùdaa* can come from two different sources, (6') is ambiguous.

If we make the subjectivalisation rule move a part of an NP over to the front, we may be able to get (6) but at the same time it will give ungrammatical sentences like

- (11) a. **thīi dæŋ khǎn thǎŋ sùdaa thùuk phǎo pàet còt-mǎay*
 that Dang write to Suda father open letter
 b. **thīi sùdaa khǎn thùuk phǎo pàet*
 that Suda write father open

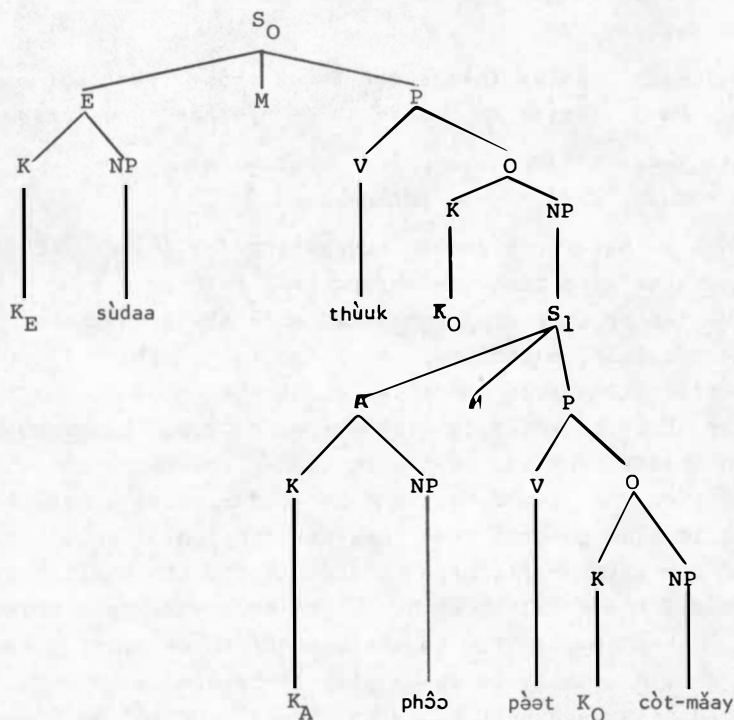
It seems that we have problems in accounting for (5) and (6) because we assume that *thùuk* gets into the string by a rule or a set of rules. Since we can derive surface structures AVO and OAV through the application of subjectivalisation and topicalisation rules, there is no need to consider deriving OAV from the *thùuk* construction.

We have seen that the analysis of *thùuk* as proposed by grammarians working in the traditional and transformational framework cannot adequately account for the occurrences and non-occurrences of *thùuk* in (1) - (8). It is also evident that the introduction of *thùuk* by a rule similar to the one used by Fillmore to account for the English passive does not solve all the problems either. The theory of case relationship, however, makes it possible to analyse the *thùuk* construction differently. In this new analysis *thùuk* will be treated as a verb. It can be described as a verb that takes an Experiencer and an Objective which expands as an S. (6) can be represented as follows:



Subjectivalisation of E in the top S and A in the lower S will give

(13)



With thùuk as a verb we can account for the occurrence and non-occurrence of the following:

- (14) a. sùdaa thùuk hây thôoŋ năŋsɿɿ
 Suda study book
 Suda was made to study the book.

- b. *sùdaa thùuk hây rúu năŋsɿɿ
 Suda know book

- (15) a. dæŋ thùuk sùdaa mɔoŋ
 Dang Suda look
 Dang was stared at by Suda.

- b. *dæŋ thùuk sùdaa hěn
 Dang Suda see

by stating that thùuk requires an activity verb in the embedded sentence.

As a lexical item, thùuk can have a meaning and there is no reason why it should not mean 'suffer, or experience something unpleasant', the meaning attributed to the thùuk construction. With this meaning we can

see why (1b) *dæŋ sùdaa chœn* is not quite the same as (1c) *dæŋ thùuk sùdaa chœn*. Another advantage in having *thùuk* as a verb with its own meaning is that we can account for the feeling that the following are not Thai sentences but translations of the English passive:

- (16) *nǎŋsǎi thùuk sùdaa hây dæŋ*
book Suda give Dang
The book was given to Dang by Suda.

- (17) *nǎŋsǎi thùuk sùdaa plæ*
book Suda translate
The book was translated by Suda.

Moreover, with this analysis we do not have to have a special condition on the subjectivisation rule and we do not need the notion "non-normal choice of subject".

