

Naming Characters in Thai Children's Narratives: a Developmental Perspective¹

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Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the referential forms used in naming narrative characters by Thai children and examining the developmental path of Thai children in character naming. Data from 40 narratives by 4, 6, 9 and 11-year-old children collected by Zlatev and Yangklang (2018) were used. Classified by the number of free morphemes, findings show that two types of referential forms are used: single and combined units. Single-unit forms can be nouns and pronouns, while combined units include two and three-unit combinations with various internal structures. It was found that older groups of children produced more combined-unit referential forms than single-unit ones. This implies the order of acquisition for single units is (COMMON NOUNS > PRONOUNS > PROPER NOUNS) and combined units (N+MOD > N+Det > N+POSS+N/Pron > N+Rel CL.)

Keywords: Child Language, Narratives, Frog Story, Character Reference, Thai Children

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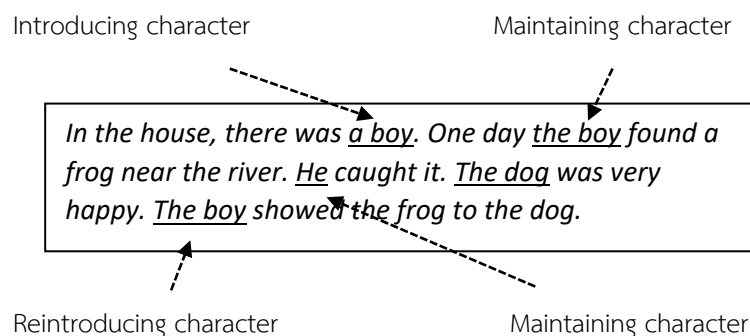
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1. Introduction

Telling a story is a process of relating events to serve a particular motivated plot structure. From developmental perspective, according to Berman and Slobin (1994, 1), children in different ages have different ways to describe the same picture of a story. As a consequence, the study of narratives could lead us not only eventually to the examination of children's developmental capacities to describe situations, but also to the observation of how they employ linguistic devices to serve such functions. In other words, the study of storytelling in children is another means that may shed light on the discovery of language development.

It is reported in many studies that children start using referential communication at around 8 to 12 months when they acquire their first set of words (Bates, Dale, and Thal 1995; Benedict 1979; Goldfield and Reznick 1990; Rungrojsuwan, 2003; Smith, 1926). By that period, children's production is limited to one-word utterances. However, after two years of age, they start producing two- or multi-word utterances and their linguistic capacities tend to develop dramatically. This is the period where they learn how to form some syntactically related constructions. This is also true for the use of reference. Research studies in character reference in children's narratives reported that children as young as three to five used various referential forms to depict narrative characters (Aksu-Koç and Nicolopoulou 2015, 67; Almgren, Beloki, and Manterola 2008, 153-154; Disbray 2016, 8-9; Jisa and Kern 1998, 644; Matthews 2014, 522). It is agreed that referential forms are nominal, and the forms could range from one single unit—such as common nouns (*dog*), proper nouns, pronouns (*that*, *I*)—to noun phrases—such as *the boy*, *a bunny*, *my dog*, *the dog eating your dinner*—, or something unfamiliar—such as *the boy I*.

In terms of functions and usage, referential forms were explored in narratives, based on three main functions: introducing characters, maintaining characters and reintroducing characters. Introducing characters is the function where a new character appears for the first time in the story. Maintaining character is the function where the introduced character is continuously referred to in the next situation or sentence. However, in the case where a narrator shifts his focus to another character and comes back to the previous character again, then the use of referential expression will be regarded as reintroducing the character. The following example shows how nominal forms are used in the three functions.



In relation to this, it is found that children employ various referential forms for the same function. For example, according to Aksu-Koç and Nicolopoulou (2015, 70), 3 to 5 years old Greek children used pronoun, definite NP, or indefinite NP to introduce a new narrative character. However, older children tended to employ indefinite NP—which is the most appropriate form for an introducing function—in higher percentage, compared to those older. This is quite similar to the case of German children. Bamberg (1994, 223) found that German 3-year-old children used mostly definite nouns for the first reference, while the use of indefinite nouns increased continuously from 5 to 9 years of age.

In order to maintain the same characters, instead of using pronouns, many studies found that children used ellipsis or omitted the referential form in the subject position. Berman and Neeman (1994, 323-324) found that Hebrew children at the age of 5 preferred the use of topic ellipsis over the use of pronouns. Similar to the case of Thai children, Ratitamkul (2010) reported that 4-year-old Thai children preferred the use of lexical forms (nouns) in all functions except that of the maintaining function. The children most used null forms, followed by lexical (nouns) and pronominal forms, respectively, when referring to the noun in the previous clause.

In terms of usage, Disbray (2016, 8-9) explored reference realization in narratives of Wumpurrarni English children and used proportion of the use of various types of referential forms in different referential functions to postulate ‘five discourse strategies’: pronominal, nominal, local anaphoric, thematic and anaphoric. For example, the local anaphoric strategy refers to the use of high proportion of nominal for reference maintenance and some use of anaphoric pronouns for reference to the main character/s, while the anaphoric strategy involves reference to the main character/s with a nominal and maintenance with a pronominal. Results found that the proportion of anaphoric strategy increased across ages, while that of local anaphoric strategy showed up minimally at the age of 10.

From the past studies (Aksu-Koç and Nicolopoulou 2015; Almgren, Beloki, and Manterola 2008), it can be observed that referential forms were mostly viewed as linguistic devices that served different referential functions. In other words, forms and functions cannot be separated. The selection of when to use some particular forms can be varied and is said to be choices of use for language users. However, in terms of child language development, it might be questioned whether the disrupted use of forms in children indicate either their freedom of choices or their limited linguistic capabilities. That is to say, how can we be sure that children use some particular referential forms to serve some particular functions? It might be that children prefer a particular referential form and use it repeatedly in every context or function just because it is the only form they knew. Accordingly, the emergence and frequency of forms can possibly be another focus for the investigation of language development. In addition, forms seem to be taken as a minor element to explore the use of character reference, as can be seen in the ignorance of attention on their internal structure, but rather focused on the broad concept of definiteness of the forms and their functions (Aksu-Koç and Nicolopoulou 2015; Almgren, Beloki, and Manterola 2008). It is then claimed in the present study that detailed classification of internal structure of forms, their

emergence and frequency of occurrences in children's narratives can come across the order of acquisition. In this study, then, it is questioned 1) what are referential forms and their internal structures Thai children use in their narratives? and 2) which forms can be acquired earlier and later? Therefore, the main objectives of this study are 1) to investigate the linguistic forms used in naming protagonists by Thai children and 2) to examine the developmental path of Thai children in naming.

2. Methods

2.1 Data

The source of data for this study was the Thai narratives corpus developed by Zlatev and Yangklang in 2001 (retrieved in 2018). The corpus is freely downloadable from the CHILDES website (www.talkbank.org). The data from the corpus are narratives elicited from Thai children narrating a picture book 'Frog, where are you?' written by an American children's book writer and illustrator Mercer Mayer (Mayer, 1969). The contributors developed the corpus by following the framework of Berman and Slobin (1994). Thai language is one among narratives of 15 languages in the website. The story is about a boy and his dog looking for their missing frog. Data used for the present study focused on the linguistic forms children used to depict the three main characters of the story, namely, the boy, the dog and the frog. The corpus consists of narratives of 4-, 6-, 9-, 11- and 20-year-old Thai participants. For the purpose of child language development in this study, data of 20 years old adults were excluded. Consequently, a total of 40 narratives from the four age groups of children—10 narratives for each age—were retrieved. It should be noted that because the author did not directly collect the data and socio-cultural backgrounds of the children are not provided in the corpus guideline, the children's backgrounds cannot be possibly specified.

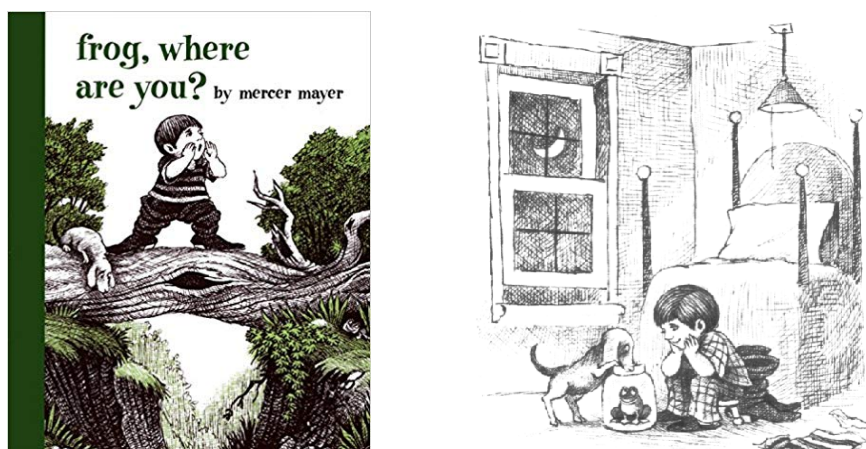


Figure 1 The storybook 'Frog, where are you?' by Mayer (1969)

It should be noted that, in Thai education, 4 years old is the preschool age, while 6 years old is the last year for kindergarten—Thai children start their primary school at the age of 7. The lower primary level ends at the age of 9 (Grade 3), while those 11 years old would normally be in the second year of the upper primary level (Grade 5). Accordingly, children in this study were in different education levels: preschool (4 years old), kindergarten (6 years old), lower primary (9 years old) and upper primary levels (11 years old), respectively. Therefore, the children in this study were of two groups: those who were not yet in the official school system, 4 and 6 years old, and those who were in school age, 9 and 11 years old.

2.2 Analytical framework

In order to analyze the data, qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. Qualitatively, children's protagonists naming will be classified according to two dimensions: types of units and internal structure. Quantitatively, frequency of occurrence of names will be viewed in terms of degree of complexity.

2.2.1 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis employs two major principles: types of units and internal structures.

a) Types of Units

The data were primarily classified according to their types. Types of units were divided into primary and secondary categories. On the one hand, primary categories include major parts of speech such as noun (N), pronoun (Pron.), etc. and other syntactically larger units such as noun phrase (NP). On the other hand, secondary categories include subcategories such as common noun and proper noun which are secondary categories of the noun category.

b) Internal Structure

In addition to types, the morphological aspect of how many morphemes a particular linguistic form contains was also taken into account. For this criterion, two types of internal structures of forms, namely, single units and combined units, were postulated. Single units refer to any linguistic forms which have only one free morpheme—such as noun, pronoun—,while combined units include those containing more than one free morpheme—such as noun + modifier (*dèk dîi* – 'child' + 'naughty'), noun + determiner (*dèk nán* – 'child' + 'that').

2.2.2 Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis considers the degree of complexity. In order to find the pathway of development, the order of acquisition is said to be the ultimate goal of this study. It should be noted that the order of acquisition was explored from the emergence and the usage of certain linguistic devices by the children. The forms used the most, for example, can be said to be acquired before those that are hardly or not at all found in any child. Accordingly, the frequency of use of linguistic forms was explicitly counted. The more frequent some particular forms were used/found, the earlier those forms were acquired. On the other hand, the forms hardly used/found would be acquired later when they got older. The frequency of occurrence of forms would also imply their complexity. That is to say, frequently used forms were said to be easier/less complex than those rarely used, as shown in Figure 2. Therefore, in terms of analysis, frequency of occurrence and proportion linguistic forms were basically used for the postulation of order of acquisition.

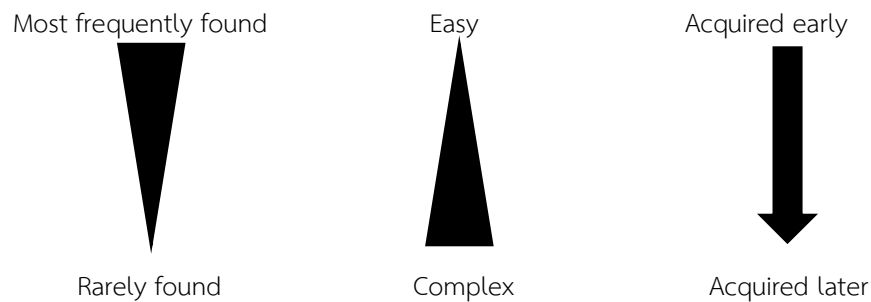


Figure 2 Relationship between frequency of forms, degree of complexity and order of acquisition.

3. Results

According to the research objectives, results were divided into two main parts: linguistic forms of names and developmental path of naming in Thai children.

3.1 Linguistic Forms of Names

From the data, linguistic forms of names were mainly divided into single units and combined units.

3.1.1 Single Units

The term 'single units' refers to the linguistic forms consisting of only one free morpheme, possibly with or without bound morpheme/s. From the data, two primary categories and two secondary categories were found.

a) Nouns

In order to talk about the three main characters, single nouns were significantly used by children such as *dèk* ‘child’, *mǎa* ‘dog’ and *kòp* ‘frog’. The use of nouns for names could be subclassified into two subtypes: common nouns and proper nouns.

Common Nouns

Children, especially those in preschool age, tended to use common nouns to refer to the three characters, as shown in the following examples.

The boy	The dog	The frog
<i>dèk</i> (child), <i>k^hon</i> (person), <i>p^hûuc^haaj</i> (man), <i>p^hûujǎ̃</i> (woman)	<i>mǎa</i> , <i>sùnák</i> , <i>câw mǎa</i> , <i>câw sùnák</i> (dog)	<i>kòp</i> , <i>câw kòp</i> (frog), <i>lôok</i> (baby)

Proper Nouns

In addition to common nouns, some children assigned proper names for the two characters, the boy and the dog. It should be noted that proper nouns, especially western styles of proper names, were popularly used in school age groups. No proper name for the frog was found. One possible explanation for western names might be that the picture of the boy, the main protagonist, looks western and this affects the naming of both the boy and the dog, his pet, to be western.

The boy	The dog	The frog
<i>cɔɔn</i> (John), <i>t^hɔm</i> (Tom), <i>lɔkkîi</i> (Locky), <i>t^hoonîi</i> (Tony), <i>coo</i> (Joe), <i>ʔaléksaandôo</i> (Alexander)	<i>frénfraaj</i> (French Fries), <i>débbîi</i> , <i>câwdébbîi</i> (Debby), <i>dúkkîi</i> , <i>câwdúkkîi</i> (Duky)	N/A

b) Pronouns

In addition to nouns, surprisingly, the use of personal pronouns was also found in every age group, especially the children in preschool age. Interestingly, all three personal pronouns, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, could be found in the case of 'the boy', while the second and the third person pronouns were used for 'the dog' and 'the frog'. This shows that children perceived the boy as their own selves and narrated the story from their point of view. That was why they used the first-person pronoun to depict only the boy.

The boy	The dog	The frog
<i>c^hǎn, k^hâa, raw, p^hǒm</i> (I), <i>t^hǎə, câw</i> (you), <i>k^háw, k^hǎw</i> (he), <i>man</i> (it)	<i>câw</i> (you), <i>man</i> (it)	<i>câw</i> (you), <i>man</i> (it)

Considering the frequency of occurrence of the two subclasses of nouns and pronouns, Figure 3 illustrates the use of single-unit names across ages.

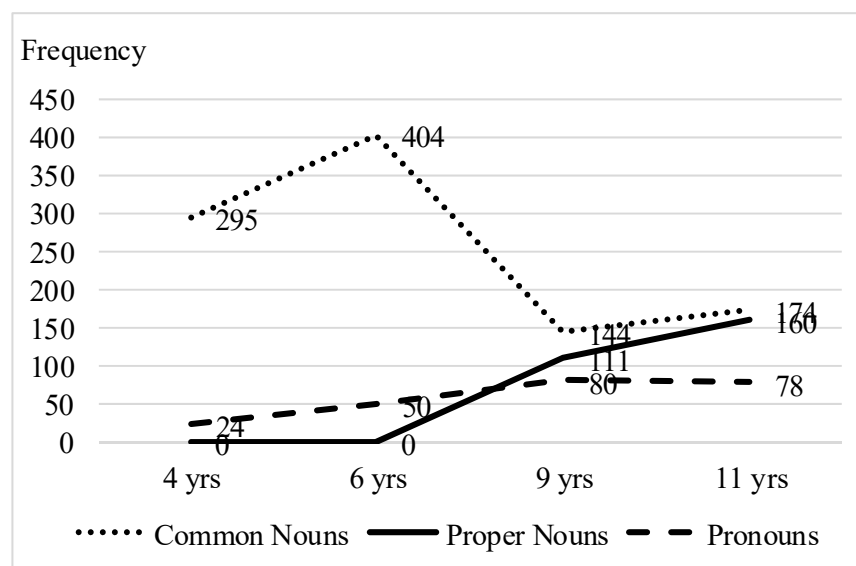


Figure 3 Frequency of occurrence of single-unit names of the four groups of children

From Figure 3, it can be seen that the number of times children produced common nouns—dotted line—outnumbers other types of single units across ages. However, in terms of development, the frequency of common nouns drops in 9 and 11 years old. On the contrary, the frequency of proper nouns—solid line—is zero in preschool age groups, 4 and 6 years old, and increases dramatically in 9 and 11 years. Such opposite direction of development seems to indicate some specific characteristic of naming in narrative tradition that characters have their own names and children seem to recognize this

when they get older. Accordingly, they give names to those characters. In addition, although nouns are used dominantly, the use of pronouns—dashed line—gradually increases across age groups. This shows that children tentatively used more pronouns to substitute nouns once they learned and recognized the useful functions of pronouns.

3.1.2 Combined Units

In addition to the single units of forms, combined units were also found in certain amount. Combined units contain names with at least two free morphemes with or without bound morpheme/s and/or grammatical word/s. Accordingly, all combined units were in the form of phrase and the only phrase found in the data was ‘noun phrase’. Examining the internal structure of the noun phrases, both two and three combined units were found. Each type contained different subtypes as follows.

a) Two Combined Units

Names with two combined units can be found in one of the following four internal structures: N + (POSS) + N/Pron, N + N/Adj, N + (CLF) + Det, and N + Rel CL.

N + (POSS) + N/Pron

The first subtype of two combined names consisted of a noun (N) + a noun (N) or pronoun (Pron) with or with a possessive marker (POSS) *kʰɔ̌ɔŋ* in between. Possessive noun phrases found in the data were used to depict only the dog and the frog, as shown.

The boy	The dog	The frog
N/A	<i>sùnák kʰɔ̌ɔŋ tʰɔ̌m</i> (dog+POSS+Tom), <i>sùnák kʰǎw, mǎa kʰǎw</i> (dog+he), <i>sùnák kʰɔ̌ɔŋ kʰǎw, mǎa kʰɔ̌ɔŋ kʰǎw</i> (dog+POSS+he)	<i>kòp kʰɔ̌ɔŋ kʰáa, kòp kʰɔ̌ɔŋ cʰǎn</i> (frog+POSS+I), <i>lúuk kʰɔ̌ɔŋ kʰáa</i> (child+POSS+I), <i>lúuk kʰɔ̌ɔŋ kʰǎw</i> (child+POSS+he), <i>kòp kʰǎw, kòp kʰɔ̌ɔŋ kʰǎw</i> (frog+(POSS)+he)

N + N/Adj

The second type of names with two free morphemes comprised a noun (N) + a noun (N) or an adjective (Adj). This structure could be widely found in all three characters. Note that the second noun can be either a common noun or a proper noun.

The boy	The dog	The frog
<i>dèk^haaj bóp</i> (boy+Bob), <i>dèk cəɔn, dèk^haajcəɔn</i> (boy+John), <i>dèk p^huuc^haaj</i> (child+male), <i>dèk nój</i> (child+little)	<i>mǎa nój, cāwmǎa nój</i> (dog+little), <i>sùnák tua nój</i> (dog+CLF+little)	<i>cāwkòp nój, kòp nój</i> (frog+little)

N + (CLF) + Det

The third type of names with two free morphemes was equivalent to the English definite noun phrase. It contained a noun (N) + a determiner (Det) with an optional classifier marker (CLF) *k^hon* or *tua* in between. The form of determiner could be varied such as, *níi* 'this' or *nán* 'that', as shown.

The boy	The dog	The frog
<i>k^hon núun</i> (man+that), <i>k^hon níi</i> (man+this), <i>dèkk^honníi</i> (child+CLF+this), <i>dèk k^hon nán</i> (child+CLF+that), <i>p^huuc^haaj k^hon nán</i> (male+CLF+that), <i>dèk^haaj k^hon nán</i> (boy+CLF+that)	<i>mǎa tua nán</i> (dog+CLF+that), <i>sùnák tua níi</i> (dog+CLF+this)	<i>kòptuaníi</i> (frog+CLF+this), <i>kòptuanán, cāwkòptuanán</i> (frog+CLF+that)

N + Rel CL

The last subtype of two combined units was constituted from a noun (N) + a relative clause (Rel CL). Note that the relative clause in Thai found in this study usually started with the relative clause markers *t^híi* 'that'. This marker linked the antecedent noun and the modifying clause, as shown. Note that this structure could only be found in the case of the dog and the frog.

The boy	The dog	The frog
N/A	<i>mǎa t^híi k^hǎw líaŋ wáj</i> (dog+that he feeds)	<i>kòp t^híi k^hǎw càp dāaj, kòp t^híi k^hǎw càp maa</i> (frog+that he has caught), <i>k^hòp t^híi man tōŋkaan</i> (frog+that it wants), <i>lúuk kòp t^híi raw líaŋ wáj</i> (baby frog+that we feeds)

b) Three Combined Units

Polymorphemic noun phrases were rarely found in the children's data. Only one three combined unit was found from the naming of the boy and the frog. It can be either N+N+CLF+Det or N+CLF+Adj+Det with low frequency. Accordingly, data in this part were excluded for the quantitative analysis.

The boy	The dog	The frog
<i>dèk p^huujĩn k^hon nán</i> (child+female+CLF+that)	N/A	<i>câwkòp tua nój nán</i> (frog+CLF+little+that)
<i>dèk p^huc^haaj k^hon nán</i> (child+male+CLF+that)		

In order to see how children employed complex NP structures in naming across ages, Figure 4 is drawn. Note that the focus was only on the frequency of occurrence of two combined units.

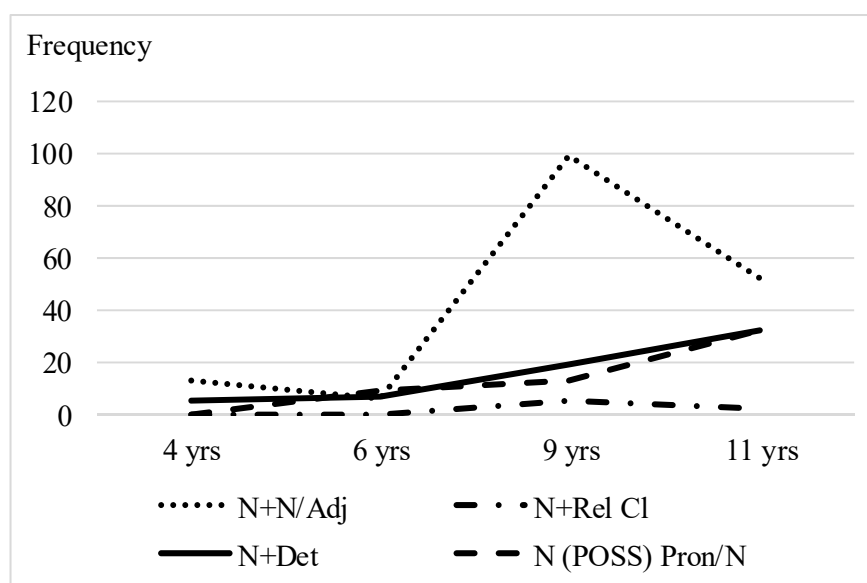


Figure 4 Frequency of occurrence of two-combined-unit names of the four groups of children

From Figure 4, it can be observed that the structure N+N/Adj—dotted line—seems to be found the most across ages. It increases dramatically after school age but, however, drops at 11. The definite and possessive structures—full line and dashed line—share the same behavior, that is, gradually increases across ages. It should be noted that the increase of the use of the two structures seems to substitute the decrease of the N+N/Adj structure. Noticeably, children in preschool age cannot produce the N+Rel CL names, while those in school age find it quite a challenge to use this structure. Considering in details, it can be seen that the first three structures, namely, N+N/Adj, N+Det and N+(POSS)+N, contain

only two free morphemes, while the construction of the N+Rel CL needs not only more morphemes but also the knowledge of how to arrange those morphemes in the modifier part—relative clause—into a grammatical structure. This might be a hard work even for those who are 9 and 11 years old.

In order to examine whether the number of morphemes found in naming of children would be different between the preschool and school ages, the total number of frequency of names—divided according to number of morphemes per unit—of children in four age groups are plotted as in Figure 5.

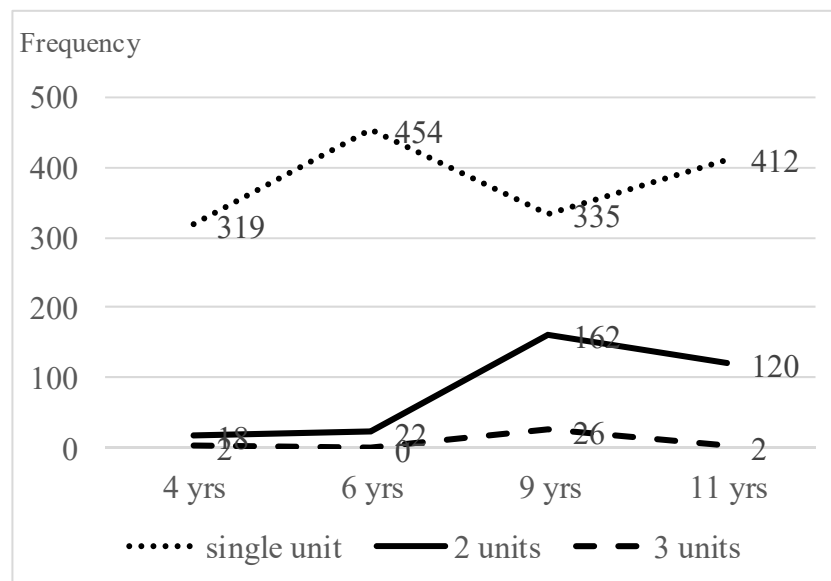


Figure 5 Frequency of occurrence of single, two and three combined unit names across ages

Figure 5 obviously illustrates the overwhelming use of single-unit names of Thai children across ages—dotted line. The frequency of occurrence of single, two and three combined units reduces, respectively. Such popularity of usage seems to imply the simplicity of acquiring simple structure—single unit—over complex structures—two and three combined units. Moreover, it can also be seen that the frequency of use of combined-unit names, especially two combined units, increases dramatically at school age, 9 and 11 years of age. This shows that children tend to provide more information about the characters and are able to “play” more with language by using different types of modifier such as nouns, adjectives, determiners and relative clauses.

3.2 Developmental path of naming in Thai children

In order to examine the developmental path of children in naming, data of frequency of occurrence of forms used by the four groups of children will be converted into proportion. Proportion of forms indicates two different aspects: types of names and frequency of use. Types of names show what

type of forms children in the particular age can produce, while frequency of use implies the difficulty/complexity of each form. The form with higher frequency is said to be more simply learned/acquired than that with lower frequency. As a consequence, the order of acquisition can be assumed. This section explores three dimensions of order of acquisition: number of units, single units and two combined units.

3.2.1 Number of units of names

In the history of child language studies, it is known that children usually acquire something easier or simpler first. By simpler, it may mean some particular sounds that can be pronounced and perceived clearer than others such as plosive sounds—such as [p] and [m]— said to be simpler than fricative sounds—such as [s] and [z] (Rungrojsuwan 2003). In terms of syntactically combined units, short units are said to be simpler and easier to acquire than longer units. For example, the order of phonological development of Thai children is V/CV > CVC/CVVC > CCVC (Rungrojsuwan 2003). In addition, children normally produce one-word utterances before two- or multi-word utterances (Ingram 1989). Accordingly, this study takes the overall number of free morphemes into consideration. Figure 6 illustrates proportions of single-, two- and three-unit names produced by Thai children in a storytelling task.

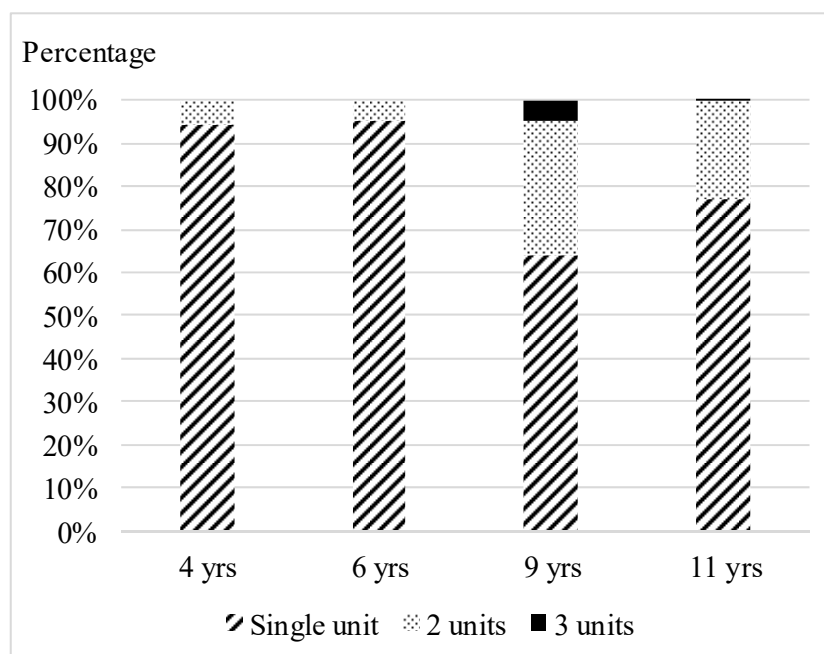


Figure 6 Proportion of single and combined units across ages

From Figure 6, only single- and two-unit names are found in groups of 4 and 6 years old with very high proportion of single-unit names over that of the two-unit names. This shows that children in

preschool age would acquire single-unit names first. The use of two-unit names by these two age-group children seems challenging. When children grow up, the proportion of the two-unit names increases quite significantly. This indicates that more complex structures of names become an alternative function for school age children to describe narrative characters. Following the two-unit names are names with three morphemes. The small number of proportion of three-unit names might occur because of two possible reasons. Firstly, children might find it difficult to form names with three, or more, morphemes due to their limited level of linguistic competence. In order to prove this, further study about the syntactic complexity might be explored. Secondly, regardless of linguistic competence, the style of storytelling might be the key factor governing the way a narrator names characters. That is to say, storytelling especially in children seems to require an easy-to-understand language style because the audience is children with limited linguistic knowledge and without ability to go through complex cognitive processing procedures as the adults. Accordingly, easy and familiar vocabulary, short names and sentence structures might be the goal for general narrators. For the case where children place themselves as narrators, these linguistic-related components would become more and more simple relevant to children's linguistic capacity. Therefore, the order of acquisition of names in relation to their number of units/morphemes would be SINGLE UNITS > TWO COMBINED UNITS > THREE COMBINED UNITS.

3.2.2 Single-Unit Names

In details, secondary categories for single units and substructures for two combined units are further explored so that the order of acquisition can be suggested. The proportion of three subtypes of single unit, namely, common nouns, proper nouns and pronouns, is illustrated in Figure 7.

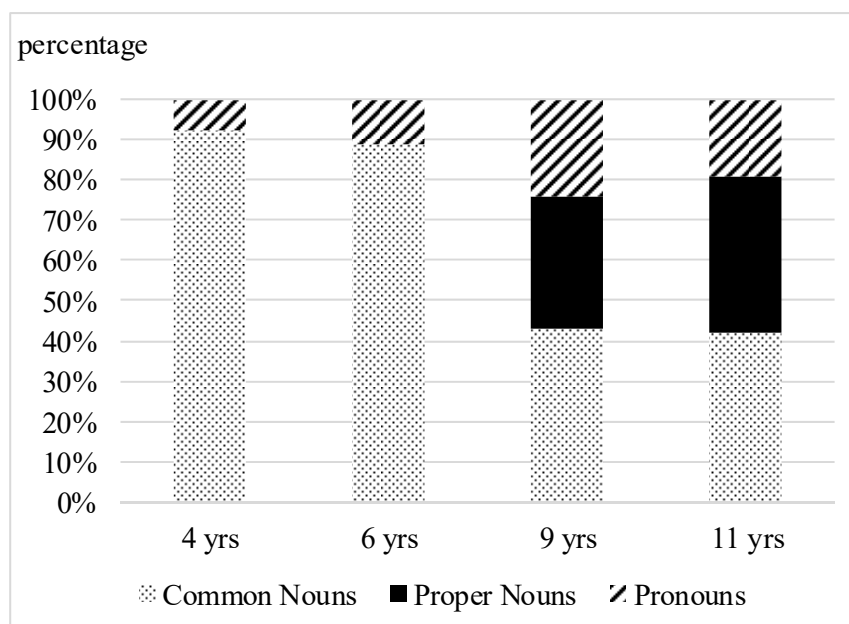


Figure 7 Proportion of single-unit names of the four groups of children

From Figure 7, it is obvious that preschool children, 4 and 6 years old, used common nouns the most with about 10% of pronouns. It can be primarily concluded that names which are common nouns are the most basic device and firstly acquired by young storytellers. Moreover, it is surprising that young children already learn how to use pronouns to substitute nouns/characters; though it is limited to a small number of pronouns—*tʰəə* ‘you’, *man* ‘it’, *kʰǎw*, *kʰáw* ‘he/it’. At school age, 9 and 11 years of age, the use of proper nouns is prominent. Children tend to give specific names for the characters, especially the boy and the dog. In case of multiple characters, it should be noted that the use of proper names helps reduce ambiguity in the references. Moreover, as can be found in many child-oriented narrative/short story, each character usually has his/her own name. Accordingly, the abrupt use of proper nouns in 9 and 11 years old children indicates that children realize and recognize the tradition of storytelling in terms of character naming. In addition to proper nouns, the use of pronouns is also increased both in terms of types and tokens. A variety of pronouns can be found in the data of school age children—*kʰâa*, *cʰǎn*, *pʰǒm* ‘I’, *raw* ‘we’, *tʰəə*, *câw* ‘you’, *kʰǎw*, *kʰáw* ‘you/it’, *man* ‘it’. Therefore, the proposed order of acquisition for types of single units is as follows: COMMON NOUNS > PRONOUNS > PROPER NOUNS.

3.2.3 Two-Unit Names

Focusing on more complex structures, Figure 8 shows the proportion of types of structures with two combined units produced by children across ages.

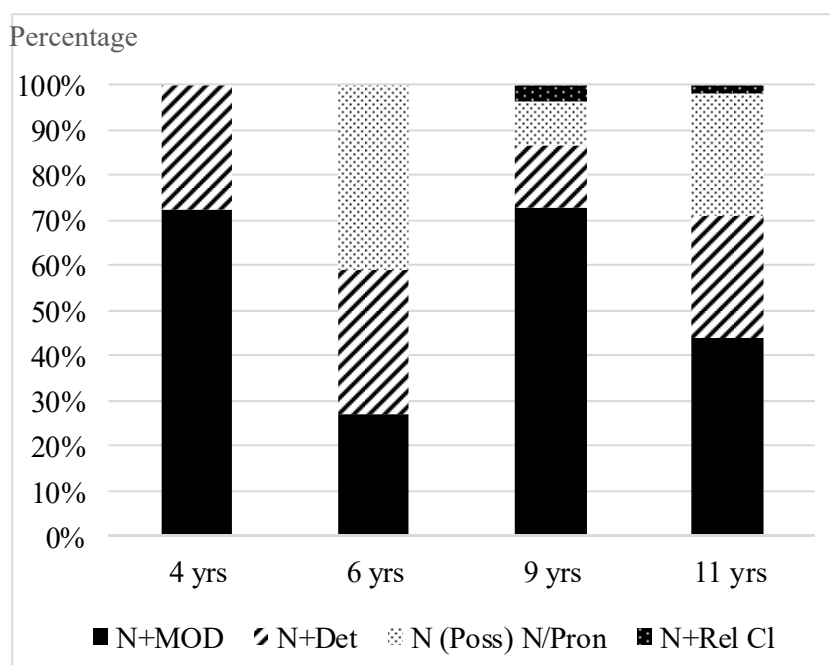


Figure 8 Proportion of two-combined-unit names of the four groups of children

Considering types of structures found in the four age groups, in Figure 8, it can be suggested that the order of acquisition of two combine unit names would be $N+MOD (N/Adj) > N+Det > N+(POSS)+N/Pron > N+Rel$ CL. However, the proportion of the four substructures seems to be disrupted, especially in the case of $N+MOD$ and $N+(POSS)+N/Pron$ where the percentage of proportions increases and decreases across ages. Such unsystematic change does not indicate developmental dimensions in using one structure over another, but rather shows popularity of choices. In other words, the structure with higher proportion is likely preferred. In addition, the focus of attention is also another possible factor to determine the frequency of use, for example, the case of $N+(POSS)+N/Pron$ used significantly to depict the dog and the frog—in possession of the boy—by children in 6 years old group. From the data, it was found that children at this age talked a lot about the dog and the frog. Accordingly, this might affect the high proportion of the $N+(POSS)+N/Pron$ structure.

4. Conclusions and Discussions

From the investigation of Thai children's narrative elicited from the free online-access Thai narrative corpus developed by Zlatev and Yangklang (2001), this research article has examined the use of linguistic devices in referencing three characters of the story 'Frog, where are you?' namely, the boy, the dog, and the frog. Moreover, developmental path—order of acquisition—was also proposed.

Linguistic aspects of forms were examined by the classification of types and internal structures of names. Results showed that names of characters in children's narratives are of two types, according to the number of free morphemes composed in the names: single-units and combined-units. Single-unit names can be further classified into nouns and pronouns, while nouns can be either common nouns or proper nouns. For combined-units, it was found that children produced four substructures of two-unit names and one substructure of three-unit names.

In relation to linguistic forms, qualitatively, it was noticed that all children used proper nouns with western names, not Thai. This can be explained that the picture book which was the instrument for data collection was written by a western illustrator upon western culture (Mayer 1969). Accordingly, this made the main character, especially the boy, looked western. As a consequence, the young narrators assigned western names to the boy. Influenced by the name of the boy, the names of the dog and the frog were also western.

Moreover, similar to Aksu-Koç and Nicolopoulou (2015), it was found that the use of pronouns is acquired since early age—4 years old—and increases continuously until the age of 11. Although its use is limited to only some particular forms, this is an evidence to support that children in preschool age could recognize the function of pronouns, which are grammatical words, and can use them consistently and appropriately in storytelling. In other words, children can observe the referential relationship between an

antecedent noun and a pronoun in the sense that they share the same referent and use the pronoun to substitute the noun properly. Such use of pronouns in early period of development was also reported in other languages (Aksu-Koç and Nicolopoulou 2015; Almgren, Beloki, and Manterola 2008; Disbray 2016; Jisa and Kern 1998).

For combined-unit names, it was found that children inconsistently insert words functioning as grammatical markers into complex structures. For example, children sometimes omit the possessive marker *k^hǎw* for some possessive noun phrases such as *mǎa k^hǎw* (dog+he) instead of *mǎa k^hǎw k^hǎw* (dog+POSS+he) or sometimes omit the classifier in the definite noun phrase structure such as *kòp níi* (frog+this) instead of *kòp tua níi* (frog+CLF+this). These are evidences that young children are in the period of learning and mastering grammar of their mother language by trial and error.

In relation to developmental path of naming, frequency and proportion of names in different aged were compared. It was found that short names are less complex and can be acquired easier and earlier in young children. Such simple-to-complex principle conforms to the general order of child language development (Ingram 1989). The order of acquisition of names according to the number of morphemes is SINGLE UNITS > TWO COMBINED UNITS > THREE COMBINED UNITS.

For single-unit names, results found that common nouns are overwhelmingly used in the onset of development, while proper nouns can firstly be found at 9 years of age in significant numbers. Regardless of types of names—either Thai or western, this implies children acquisition of naming characteristic in narratives. In other words, children realize that, in storytelling context, characters usually have names so they give them specific names using proper nouns. On the other hand, the use of common nouns decreases because common nouns are replaced by proper nouns. In addition to common and proper nouns, the use of pronouns can also be found. Small children used small number of forms and pronouns classes. Only second and third person pronouns were found in 4 and 6 years old groups, while first person pronouns were added in the school age groups, 9 and 11 years old. One interesting observation is that younger children used the word *k^hǎw*, *k^háw* ‘he’ to refer to the boy, while older children alternatively used the word *c^hǎn* and *p^hǎm* ‘I’. This finding indicated that young children regarded themselves as an observer with no direct involvement in the story, while older children threw themselves into the story pretending that they were the boy and observed the story as an insider. Such behavior is another explicit evidence to confirm that, at the school age, children acquire some key characteristics of narratives and, at the same time, the function of pronouns, as reported in the study of Wumpurrarni English children (Disbray 2016). Finally, the order of acquisition for single-unit names is as follows: COMMON NOUNS > PRONOUNS > PROPER NOUNS

For combined units, only two-unit names were focused. Results found that the order of acquisition of substructures in the two-unit names is N+N/Adj > N+Det > N+(POSS)+N/Pron > N+Rel CL. It was also found that the proportion of these four structures is quite disrupted across ages. It was explained, then, that preference of choices of linguistic devices plays an important role. In other words, children could

freely select their word choices, according to their convenience and focus. The high frequency and proportion of some structure is the result of how much children prefer to talk about some particular character. However, the order of acquisition can still be proposed based on the emergence of the particular structures in each age group.

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