

# Predicative Adjectives in Thai: Diachronic Changes in the Past Century<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The present study has two main aims. The first is to categorize predicative adjectives in Thai in order to bring to light a rarely-mentioned group of adjectives that differ from prototypical adjectives. The second is to explain the diachronic changes that took place with regard to Thai adjectives by contrasting their behavior in two different eras—the Rama V era (from 1868 to 1910) and Modern Thai. The results of the present study show that predicative adjectives in Thai can be categorized into two different groups: *prototypical adjectives* and *peripheral adjectives*. Prototypical adjectives constitute the majority of adjectives used since the past and are syntactically similar to verbs (e.g. they may co-occur with the negation marker /mây/, auxiliary verbs, but not with the copula /pen/), even to the extent of being regarded as a subclass of verbs. Peripheral adjectives, on the other hand, bear resemblance to both nouns and verbs from a syntactic standpoint (e.g. they may co-occur with the negation marker, auxiliary verbs and even the copula /pen/). A comparison between the adjectives of the two eras reveals a total of 18 adjectives (e.g. /sabaay/ ‘comfortable,’ /thùuk/ ‘correct’) that may co-occur with the copula /pen/ in the Rama V era but not in Modern Thai. The reason behind this change is that these 18 adjectives once shared a noun-like property in which they performed the function of abstract nouns, but have since lost this property which accounts for why they may no longer co-occur with the copula /pen/. This change is

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Abbreviations used in this article: COP = copula; CLS = classifier; NEG = negative; PROG = progressive; NOM = nominalizer.

accounted for by two parameters of grammaticalization: desemanticization and decategorialization.

**Keywords:** predicative adjectives, prototypical adjectives, peripheral adjectives, grammaticalization, Thai

## Introduction

Adjectives are words that can indicate not only the physical properties of nouns (e.g. size, shape, and color), but also qualities such as ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ Generally speaking, adjectives may perform two functions: as a noun-modifier in a noun phrase (e.g. a *beautiful* woman), or as the predicate modifying the subject in a sentence (e.g. the woman is *beautiful*). The former case is termed an *attributive* adjective while the latter a *predicative* adjective. The present study deals exclusively with predicative adjectives (Tallerman, 2011: 56-57).

As attested cross-linguistically, predicative adjectives may or may not co-occur with a copula as exemplified below:

- |     |                         |      |      |            |
|-----|-------------------------|------|------|------------|
| (1) | This cup is full        |      |      | (English)  |
| (2) | Dàming                  | hěn  | gāo  | (Mandarin) |
|     | Da-Ming (name)          | very | tall |            |
|     | ‘Da-Ming is very tall.’ |      |      |            |

Example (1) is from English in which the adjective ‘full’ co-occurs with the inflected form of the copula ‘to be,’ while example (2) is from Mandarin in which the adjective *gāo* ‘tall’ may not co-occur with the copula (Pustet, 2003: 3; Tallerman, 2011: 56-57).

By analyzing predicative adjectives in Thai based on the syntactic criterion of whether they may co-occur with the copula /pen/, we find that they can be classified into two types. The first type is where the predicative adjectives may not co-occur with the copula /pen/ (akin to the case in example (2) above). One example is the adjective /sūay/ ‘pretty’ which may not co-occur with the copula /pen/.

- |      |                    |        |      |
|------|--------------------|--------|------|
| (3a) | sudaa              | sūay   |      |
|      | Sudaa (name)       | pretty |      |
|      | ‘Sudaa is pretty.’ |        |      |
| (3b) | *sudaa             | pen    | sūay |
|      |                    | COP    |      |

The second type of predicative adjectives may co-occur with the copula /pen/ as follows:

- |      |  |          |         |       |      |      |       |     |      |
|------|--|----------|---------|-------|------|------|-------|-----|------|
| (4a) | phīi   | khon     | cà      | khít  | wâa  | chán | bâa   | nêe | nêe  |
|      | you  | probably |         | think | that | I    | crazy | for | sure |
|      | ‘You probably think for sure that I am crazy.’ |          |         |       |      |      |       |     |      |
| (4b) | chán   | rúu      | léew    | wâa   | chán | pen  | bâa   |     |      |
|      | I  | know     | already | that  | I    | COP  | crazy |     |      |
|      | ‘I know I am crazy.’                           |          |         |       |      |      |       |     |      |

The adjective /bâa/ ‘crazy’ in example (4) differs from /sūay/ in example (3) in that /bâa/ may co-occur with the copula /pen/ without rendering the sentence ungrammatical.

Almost all predicative adjectives in Modern Thai are of the first type, while there are only a handful of predicative adjectives that fall under the second type, of which Taladngoen (2012) estimates that there are only approximately 20 such adjectives. Other such adjectives include /huan/ ‘worried,’ /kanwon/ ‘worried,’ /sòt/ ‘single,’ /ciŋ/ ‘true’ and so on.

When looking at predicative adjectives used during the Rama V era more than 130 years ago, some interesting observations can be made for a number of adjectives:

- |      |  |       |                  |             |     |             |        |  |  |         |
|------|--|-------|------------------|-------------|-----|-------------|--------|--|--|---------|
| (5a) | rúduu  | nây   | sabaay           | kwàa        | kan |             |        |  |  | W.6(14) |
|      | season   | which | comfortable      | than        | one | another/the | others |  |  |         |
|      | ‘Which season is more comfortable than the others?’ <sup>1</sup> |       |                  |             |     |             |        |  |  |         |
| (5b) | rúduu  | fõn   | pen <sup>2</sup> | sabaay      |     |             |        |  |  | W.6(14) |
|      | season   | rain  | COP              | comfortable |     |             |        |  |  |         |
|      | ‘The rainy season is comfortable.’                               |       |                  |             |     |             |        |  |  |         |

<sup>2</sup> The context of this utterance is comparing among three seasons (hot season, cold season, and rainy season).

<sup>3</sup> Note that while the copula /pen/ is pronounced with a short vowel /e/ during both the Rama V era and in Modern Thai, its spelling is <๗๗> in the Rama V era and <๗๗> in Modern Thai, the former to be pronounced as /peen/ according to modern orthography rules. However, in *An Elementary Hand-book of the Siamese Language* (Cartwright, 1906: 53), a textbook on the Thai language written during the Rama V era, it is written that “The accent ๗ is usually omitted from the word ๗๗ (to be), but this word must always be pronounced as if the accent ๗ were written there, e.g. ๗๗ = pen not pane.”

- (6a) rǒtfay kàp rǒt raaj khray cà rew kwàa kan W.8(37)  
 railway and tram who will fast than each other  
 ‘Which one is faster, the railway or the tram?’
- (6b) kaan baanchii tham dūay lūukkhít pen rew kwàa W.7(3)  
 bookkeeping do with/by abacus COP fast than  
 tham dūay siŋ ʔàun  
 do with/by other thing  
 Bookkeeping with an abacus is faster than bookkeeping with something else.’
- (7a) phayanchaná 44 tua níi tua nǎy cà ɲaam W.6(9)  
 consonant 44 CLS this CLS which will aesthetic  
 kwàa kan  
 than one another/the others  
 ‘Which of these 44 consonants is more aesthetically pleasing than the others?’
- (7b) phayanchaná tǎjtɛ kɔɔ pay con hɔɔ tua nǎy W.6(9)  
 consonant from k until h CLS which  
 pen ɲaam kwàa kan  
 COP aesthetic than one another/the others  
 ‘Which consonant from /k/ to /h/ is more aesthetically pleasing than the others?’

Examples (5) to (7), taken from texts written in the Rama V era, show that the three predicative adjectives /sabaay/, /rew/, and /ɲaam/ can occur with or without the copula /pen/. Examples (5b), (6b) and (7b) would be deemed ungrammatical in Modern Thai as these three adjectives may no longer co-occur with the copula /pen/. For this reason, we are interested in finding out what other adjectives share the same characteristics as these three adjectives.

The present study has two main aims: the first is to categorize predicative adjectives in Thai based on syntactic criteria while the second is to explain the diachronic changes pertaining to predicative adjectives that took place in the past century by contrasting their usage in the Rama V era with Modern Thai. In particular, we will look at the predicative adjectives’ co-occurrence with the copula /pen/ as well as analyze the syntactic changes in the construction [Subject (+ /pen/) + Adjective].

The data analyzed in the present study comes from Volumes 5 to 9 of *Wachirayan Wiset*, an anthology of written texts retrieved from a database called /nǎŋsǔu kàw chaaw sayǎam/ ‘Siam rare books’ compiled by the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (2008). *Wachirayan Wiset* is considered an important piece of old writing that is suitable for study and research in various fields, including linguistics. For this reason, the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre decided to digitize it so as to provide convenient access to its content for scholars and researchers as well as for efficient data collection.

Furthermore, this collection of written texts comes from a variety of genres as well as contributions by a number of people from different backgrounds, hence the variant of Thai used in the writings may be considered to be representative of the variant used especially in the period from 1889-1893, which coincides with the Rama V era (1868-1910), rather than some idiosyncratic variant exclusive to only select individuals. Additionally, the present study chooses to analyze data from the Rama V era because the data collected from the anthology is based on the Thai variant spoken over 100 years ago. Therefore, linguistic differences between the Rama V era and Modern Thai would be more distinct than those between Modern Thai and another more recent era that comes after the Rama V era.

In the present study, sources from *Wachirayan Wiset* will be referred to using the format “W.Volume (Issue).” For example, “W.6(1)” means *Wachirayan Wiset* Volume 6, Issue 1.

As for the data analysis procedure in the present study, native-speaker grammaticality judgments will be made to see if those sentences containing predicative adjectives found in these historical texts would be considered grammatical if used in Modern Thai. In addition, the data for Modern Thai is gathered from the Thai National Corpus (TNC) managed by the Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University (2013). Two hundred tokens of each of the following types of textual documentation were randomly selected: fictional works, newspapers, academic publications, non-academic

writings, statutes, and miscellaneous texts. Together, these give rise to a total of 1,200 lines of writing that came under analysis for this study.

The present study is divided into seven parts: The first part is the introduction; the second is the literature review pertaining to the adjectives as a lexical class; the third discusses the relationship between nouns, verbs, and adjectives in Thai; the fourth covers the types of predicative adjectives in Thai; the fifth deals with the diachronic changes pertaining to predicative adjectives in the past century; the sixth covers the diachronic changes of adjectives and grammaticalization; and the seventh is the conclusion.

### Adjectives as a Lexical Class

The idea that **lexical** words (vis-à-vis **grammatical** words) in a language can be decisively placed into specific categories such as *noun*, *verb*, and *adjective* is presumably familiar to most who speak a language. The existence of the lexical trinity of noun, verb, and adjective—each considered an individual, distinct lexical class—is attested not only in Indo-European languages, but also recognized and formalized by lexicologists for languages of different genealogies (e.g. Mandarin<sup>4</sup>, Korean<sup>5</sup>).

While this tripartite lexical classification has been supported easily by morphosyntactic evidence in Indo-European languages, the question as to whether the lexical class of *adjective* should be considered a linguistic universal has been a topic of contention among scholars. As Dixon (1997) points out in his cross-linguistic investigation, the adjective class in a language may be open (e.g. English, Dyirbal) or closed (e.g. Bantu languages) with as few as ten members. More extremely, some languages (e.g. Samoan and Yurok) may entirely lack the adjective class on morphosyntactic grounds (ibid.: 46), in which

<sup>4</sup> The (Mandarin) Chinese dictionary 现代汉语词典 *xiàndài hànyǔ cídiǎn* (7<sup>th</sup> Edition) (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2016) indicates what lexical class a word belongs to: 名词 (*míng cí*) for nouns, 动词 (*dòng cí*) for verbs and 形容词 (*xíng róng cí*) for adjectives.

<sup>5</sup> Daum dictionary (2021) is an online Korean language dictionary that has specific technical terms differentiating nouns (명사 *myeong-sa*), verbs (동사 *dong-sa*) and adjectives (형용사 *hyeong-yong-sa*) for its Korean-Korean dictionary.

case adjectival concepts are expressed formally through another lexical class instead, typically the noun class or verb class.

In light of the uncertain universality of adjectives, the notion that they are perhaps some kind of intermediate or “hybrid” between nouns and verbs has been championed by some scholars (Croft, 1991; Dixon, 1997; Pustet, 1989; Stassen, 1997). Croft (1991: 130) remarks that “[t]he most obvious evidence for the intermediate status of adjectives with respect to verbs and nouns is the sharing of morphological inflections with one or the other of those categories.” Syntactic criteria have also been used to shed light on the issue. For example, Prasithrathsint (2000: 251) claims that the so-called “adjectives” in Thai—based on their syntactic distribution and collocation with certain grammatical words—do not constitute a distinct lexical category of their own, but rather are subsumed under verbs as a subclass. The linguistic phenomenon where adjectives behave almost identically to verbs from a morphosyntactic point of view has also been attested in Lao (Enfield, 2004), Burmese (Pustet, 2003), Mandarin (Li and Thompson, 1981), and Korean (Kang, 2005). Conversely, there is no formal distinction between adjectives and nouns in Dyirbal, in which an adjective “has exactly the same inflectional and derivational possibilities as a noun, and can comprise a complete NP, as can a noun” (Dixon, 1997: 45).

Apart from the abovementioned morphosyntactic observations, some semantic theories have also been used to support the hybrid status of adjectives. For example, the time-stability scale of Givón (1984) is used to lexicalize experiences or “phenomenological clusters” based on how relatively resistant to change they are with respect to time. Phenomenological clusters that remain relatively stable over time tend to lexicalize as nouns, while those that denote rapid changes in the universe are lexicalized as verbs, whose degree of time-stability is further divided into instantaneous verbs (which encode extremely rapid change), activity/process verbs (which encode a much slower process of change), and long-lasting states (which encode either no change or very slow change). As for phenomenological clusters that are

of intermediate time-stability (i.e. encoding states of varying degree of intermediate duration), Givon claims that they will lexicalize as adjectives in languages that have a formal adjective class. However, the more time-stable (i.e. permanent) qualities are more likely to lexicalize as nouns, and the less time-stable (i.e. temporary) qualities as verbs.

Also rooted in semantics is the flagship empirical cross-linguistic study on *copularization* of Pustet (2003), which analyzes the use of copulas with nominals, verbals, and adjectivals<sup>6</sup> in 131 languages, from which a sample of ten genetically diverse languages was drawn. Her theoretical approach draws inspiration from Givon's time-stability scale as well as markedness theory in which lexical minimal pairs (i.e. pairs of lexemes that are semantically synonymous but differ with respect to copula usage) are contrasted in terms of three semantic parameters: valence, transience, and dynamicity. She proposes the implicational hierarchy of NOMINAL > ADJECTIVAL > VERBAL following her findings that the copularizing lexeme is always less transitive, less transient, and less dynamic (i.e. more noun-like) than the non-copularizing lexeme.

Based on the copularizing patterns of the 131 languages surveyed, each language is assigned a language type. The dominant types are AN (41.2 percent), AV (20.8 percent) and the non-copularizing types (31.5 percent). AN languages (e.g. English) copularize nominals and adjectivals only, AV languages (e.g. Thai) copularize nominals only, and non-copularizing languages (e.g. Tagalog) do not use copulas with nominals, adjectivals, and verbals (ibid.).

From the above analyses, it is clear that Thai belongs to the AV language type, in which adjectives and verbs exhibit similar syntactic behavior, that is, neither co-occurs with a copula. We will discuss this phenomenon in further detail in the following sections.

<sup>6</sup> According to Pustet (2003: 28), *nominals*, *verbals*, and *adjectivals* are lexical items belonging to the semantic macro-classes of *entity concepts*, *event concepts*, and *property concepts*, respectively. They differ from nouns, verbs, and adjectives in that nouns, verbs and adjectives are not only associated with one of the three semantic prototypes of object, event, and property, but also imply certain structural and behavioral features, whereas nominals, verbals, and adjectivals are exclusively defined in semantic terms.

## The Relationship between Nouns, Verbs, and Adjectives in Thai

One method of differentiating the lexical class of adjectives in Thai is that adjectives may co-occur with words that signal the comparative /kwàa/ and superlative /thîi sùt/ (Thai Language Institute, 2009: 33), as exemplified by the adjective /sũuŋ/ 'tall' in example (8) below:

(8a) kháw    sũuŋ    kwàa    (khun)  
S/he    tall    than    you  
'S/he is taller (than you).'

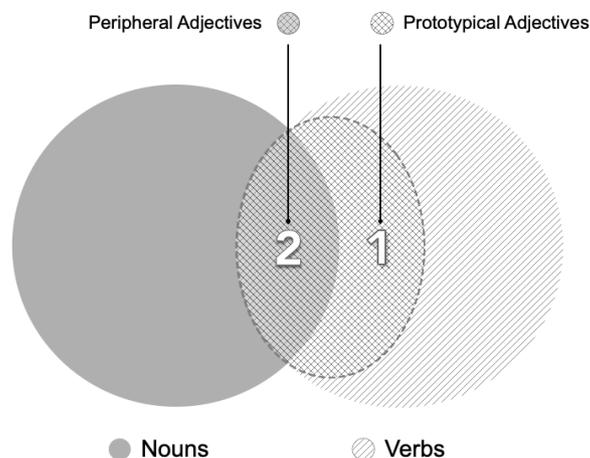
(8b) kháw    sũuŋ    thîi sùt  
S/he    tall    the most  
'S/he is the tallest.'

As an analytic language, Thai lacks auxiliary support from inflectional morphology in the lexical categorization of its word stock. Instead, syntactic distribution and co-occurrence with other words are the primary rulers in determining lexical class. One of the syntactic tests used to differentiate between nouns and verbs is the use of the copula /pen/—in the predicate position, nouns may be preceded by /pen/ whereas verbs may not. Adjectives (i.e. words expressing *property concepts*) in Thai—at least the majority of them—also may not be preceded by the copula /pen/. This non-occurrence with /pen/ (9)—along with many other syntactic tests such as being able to be directly preceded by the negation marker /mây/ (10) or co-occur with an auxiliary such as /khon/ (11)—has calcified the belief that predicative adjectives in Thai form a subclass of verbs instead of their own lexical category.

(9) \*suda    pen    sũay/kin  
Suda (name)    COP    pretty/eat  
'Suda is pretty.' / 'Suda eats.'

(10) suda    mây    sũay/kin  
NEG  
'Suda is not pretty.' / 'Suda does not eat.'





**Figure 1** The relationship between nouns, verbs, and adjectives in Thai

In Figure 1, the solid gray circle on the left represents nouns, the circle with lines in one direction on the right represents verbs, while the oval with a dashed border represents adjectives. Adjectives can be further divided into two types, namely prototypical adjectives (with a lighter background) which are also a subclass of verbs, and peripheral adjectives (with the gray background) which share the properties of both nouns (able to co-occur with the copula /pen/) and verbs (able to co-occur with the negation marker and auxiliary verbs).

The next section will discuss in greater detail prototypical and peripheral adjectives in the Thai of the Rama V era and Modern Thai, along with some examples.

### The Types of Predicative Adjectives in Thai

Predicative adjectives in Thai can be categorized into two groups based on the syntactic criterion of whether they may or may not co-occur with the copula /pen/, namely prototypical adjectives and peripheral adjectives.

#### 1. Prototypical Adjectives

As mentioned in the previous sections, prototypical adjectives are adjectives that do not co-occur with the copula /pen/, instead occurring in the construction [Subject + Adjective]. Prototypical adjectives constitute the majority or the “main group” of adjectives in Modern Thai as well as in Thai of the Rama V era.

In *An Elementary Hand-book of the Siamese Language* (Cartwright, 1906: 61, 83), a textbook on the Thai language written during the Rama V era, it is written that “[the verb /pen/ ‘to be’] is always omitted when used with a predicative adjective,” as exemplified by (16) below.

- (16) chán cèp  
I ill  
‘I am ill.’

The textbook also explains in that one may not say /chán pen cèp/, which is also the case in Modern Thai.

From the data gathered, it was found that there is a large number of adjectives that are prototypical adjectives in both the Rama V era and Modern Thai (e.g. /ʔaròy/ ‘delicious,’ /cay dii/ ‘kind,’ /khîi kiát/ ‘lazy,’ /khayǎn/ ‘hardworking,’ /róon/ ‘hot,’ /yen/ ‘cold,’ /nǎaw/ ‘chilly,’ /phèt/ ‘spicy,’ /ruay/ ‘rich,’ /con/ ‘poor,’ /mày/ ‘new,’ /kàw/ ‘old,’ /ʔûan/ ‘fat,’ /phǒm/ ‘skinny,’ /sân/ ‘short,’ /yaaw/ ‘long,’ /hǐw/ ‘hungry,’ /ʔim/ ‘full,’ /dii cay/ ‘glad,’ /sǎ cay/ ‘sad,’ /nùay/ ‘tired,’ and so on).

#### 2. Peripheral Adjectives

Peripheral adjectives are adjectives that are marked in that they may optionally co-occur with the copula /pen/. In other words, they can occur in a [Subject (+ /pen/) + Adjective] construction unlike prototypical adjectives found in both the past and the present.

In the extant literature, peripheral adjectives in Thai functioning as predicates have received relatively little attention by scholars, one of whom is Taladngoen (2012) who looked at the semantic differences between adjectival predicates that contain the copula /pen/ and those that do not. Based on her analysis of 22 peripheral adjectives, Taladngoen

concludes that the marked use of the copula changes the meaning of the adjectival predicate from one that is *stative* (i.e. representing an ordinary state) to one that is *inchoative* (i.e. a change from one state into another).

- (17a) nákrían khon níi baa  
 student CLS this crazy  
 ‘This student is crazy.’
- (17b) nákrían khon níi pen baa  
 student CLS this COP crazy  
 ‘This student has become crazy.’

However, we do not agree that the marked use of the copula /pen/ necessarily entails a change in state as in (17). It is possible for /pen/ to be used when the student was already in the state of being crazy (Jarátjarungkiat, 2019: 12-13). Furthermore, both are stative, but there seems to be a difference in duration, that is, the former is more temporary while the latter is more permanent.

In the Rama V era, peripheral adjectives also existed. Examples (18) are found in *Wachirayan Wiset*.

- (18a) níi thán baa kramañ W.6(2)  
 DP sir crazy perhaps  
 ‘You are crazy or something/Perhaps you are crazy.’
- (18b) [khon khon níi] khəy pen baa W.9(34)  
 person CLS this crazy COP crazy  
 ‘[This person] was once crazy.’

Upon inspection of predicative adjectives found in *Wachirayan Wiset* written around 1889-1893 (i.e. during the Rama V era), we found that certain prototypical adjectives in Modern Thai, such as /sabaay/ ‘comfortable,’ /rew/ ‘fast,’ and /ñaam/ ‘pretty,’ as exemplified in (5b), (6b), and (7b), respectively, were once able to co-occur with the copula /pen/ without rendering the sentence ungrammatical. Presumably, then,

the number of peripheral adjectives must have decreased from this historical period until today. More details on this point will be given in the following section.

That peripheral adjectives can co-occur with the copula /pen/ in the same syntactic position as nouns suggests that perhaps these adjectives also share some properties that are typical of nouns, which in this case is the expression of abstract meaning. This is corroborated in *An Elementary Hand-book of the Siamese Language*, mentioned above, in which it is said that the copula /pen/ is used with both nouns and adjectives that are equivalent to nouns (Cartwright, 1906: 83). Some examples from *Wachirayan Wiset* are the following:

- (19a) kaan baanchii tham dūay lūukkhít pen rew kwaa W.7(3)  
 bookkeeping do with/by abacus COP fast than  
 ‘Bookkeeping with an abacus is faster.’
- (19b) dāy sáap withii thii khít lūukkhít léew kô W.7(3)  
 find out method that calculate abacus already then  
 hěn waa pen kaan rew  
 see that COP method/thing/way fast  
 ‘After finding out how to use the abacus, we find that it is fast.’
- (20a) yàaṅ thii sām pen yāak kwaa nāa thii yàaṅ W.6(1)  
 CLS third COP difficult than duty CLS  
 ?àun ?àun  
 other  
 ‘The third duty is harder than the other duties.’
- (20b) yàaṅ níi mây pen kaan yāak W.6(1)  
 CLS this NEG COP work/method/way difficult  
 ‘This way is not difficult.’

Examples (19) and (20) show that the adjectives /rew/ and /yāak/ may occupy the position right after the copula /pen/, which is the same position occupied by the noun phrases /kaan rew/ and /kaan yāak/ (which mean ‘fast method/thing/way’ and ‘difficult work/method/way,’

respectively). In addition, taking the context into account, we find that the adjectives /rew/ and /yâak/ in (19a) and (20a) also have the meanings of abstract nouns, namely, ‘faster way/method’ and ‘difficult duty’ respectively.

(21a) *nɔɔn tãŋtɛ̃ hũa khâm talòt rûŋ pen sabaay* W.6(37)  
 sleep from evening throughout dawn COP comfortable  
 ‘Sleeping from the evening until dawn is comfortable.’

(21b) *kaan nɔɔn thãŋ sɔɔŋ yãaŋ* W.6(34)  
 NOM sleep both two CLS  
*nãy cã pen khwaam sabaay kwãa kan*  
 which will COP NOM comfortable than each other  
 ‘Which of the two ways of sleeping is more comfortable?’

Example (21) shows that the adjective /sabaay/ may occupy the position right after the copula /pen/, which is the same position occupied by the noun phrase /khwaam sabaay/ (which means ‘comfort’). Taking the context into account, we find that the adjective /sabaay/ in (21a) also has the meaning of an abstract noun, namely ‘comfort.’

One reason why peripheral adjectives may occur in the same syntactic position as nouns could be that the noun or noun phrase is omitted in the sentence, as exemplified by (22):

(22) *kháw faŋ khray lãw ?aray maa léew kô khít*  
 S/he listen someone narrate something come then think  
*wãa rũa<sub>1</sub> nãn pen (rũa<sub>2</sub>) ciŋ pay sã mòt*  
 that matter that COP matter real totally  
 ‘S/he heard someone say it, and (s/he) thought that matter<sub>1</sub> was totally (a) true (matter<sub>2</sub>).’

Example (22) shows that /rũa<sub>1</sub>/ and /rũa<sub>2</sub>/ have the same meaning ‘matter/story,’ but the occurrence of /rũa<sub>2</sub>/ is optional. This is the case of “nominal ellipsis,” where a noun head can be omitted after it has been mentioned in the earlier part of the text (Chanawangsa, 1986; Halliday and Hasan, 1976). When /rũa<sub>2</sub>/ is omitted, it creates cohesion between the unit right before and the unit right after the copula /pen/ to let people know that both units are referring to the same referent. This omission is likely to have happened also in (19a) and (20a) in which the noun /kaan/ ‘action’ has been omitted.

Another reason why peripheral adjectives may occur in the same syntactic position as nouns could be due to the nature of analytic languages in which certain words may perform multiple functions despite having the same form. Thai, being an analytic language, lacks inflectional morphology that would otherwise have made the lexical distinctions between nouns, verbs, and adjectives clear (Jaratjarungkiat, 2012: 369-370). This “looseness” or “flexibility” ultimately results in some adjectives occupying the syntactic position of nouns or even being semantically noun-like without requiring an explicit nominalizer to mark the nominal status. This linguistic phenomenon is widespread in Thai and is not exclusive to the position right after the copula /pen/:

(23a) *nít thon lambàak dâay*  
 Nit (name) endure troublesome can  
 ‘Nit can endure hardship.’

(23b) *nít thon khwaam lambàak dâay*  
 Nit (name) endure NOM troublesome can  
 ‘Nit can endure hardship.’

Example (23a) can be viewed as a case of serial verb construction where more than one verb occur together consecutively. Alternatively, Bandhmedha, a renowned Thai linguist, states that the adjective /lambàak/ ‘troublesome’ and the noun /khwaam lambàak/ ‘troublesomeness/hardship’ in (23) both occupy the same syntactic position and also perform the same function, namely the direct object to the verb /thon/ ‘endure’ (Bandhmedha, 2009: 285). Traditionally speaking, the function of a direct object is typically performed by nouns, yet the adjective /lambàak/ in (23a) may perform the same function possibly because it has the meaning of a noun. In other words, the word /lambàak/ could very well also be glossed as a noun, such as ‘troublesome state,’ on top of its traditional adjectival definition of ‘troublesome,’ but it does not require an explicit nominalizer /khwaam/ to indicate its nominal status.

(24a) *kháw faŋ khray lãw ?aray maa léew kô khít*  
 S/he listen someone narrate something come then think

- wâa rûaŋ nán pen ciŋ pay sá mòt  
 that matter that COP real totally  
 ‘S/he heard someone say it, and (s/he) thought that matter was totally true.’
- (24b) kháw faj khray lâw ?aray maa léew kô khít  
 S/he listen someone narrate something come then think  
 wâa rûaŋ nán pen khwaam ciŋ pay sá mòt  
 that matter that COP NOM real totally  
 ‘S/he heard someone say it, and (s/he) thought that matter was totally the truth.’

In the same vein as (23), example (24) shows that the adjective /ciŋ/ ‘true’ can occupy the same post-copula position as the noun /khwaam ciŋ/ ‘truth.’ This is likely due to the adjective /ciŋ/ itself having the meaning of the abstract noun ‘truth’ without the need for an explicit nominalizer /khwaam/ to indicate its nominal status (Jarattjarungkiat, 2019: 12-13). To put it another way, the word /ciŋ/ could very well be a noun that is derived from the adjective by means of a zero marker (Brinton and Traugott, 2005: 37).

**The Diachronic Changes of Predicative Adjectives in the Past Century**

Based on the data collected from *Wachirayan Wiset*, a group of 18 adjectives considered to be prototypical adjectives in Modern Thai were found to be peripheral adjectives in the Rama V era Thai based on their optional co-occurrence with the copula /pen/. The 18 adjectives are the following:

sabaay	rew	ŋaam	dii	leew	yâak
‘comfortable’	‘fast’	‘pretty’	‘good’	‘bad’	‘difficult’
ŋâay	thùuk	phít	sámkhan	‘nàk’	phoo
‘easy’	‘correct’	‘wrong’	‘important’	heavy	‘enough’
nâa sǒŋsǎy	klây	nâa phítsawǒŋ	troŋ	ŋôo	sanúk
‘suspicious’	‘near’	‘astonishing’	‘straight’	‘stupid’	‘fun’

The peripheral adjectival status of the first three adjectives /sabaay/, /rew/, and /ŋaam/ has been illustrated in examples (5) to (7). The following examples retrieved from *Wachirayan Wiset* will show the peripheral adjectival status for the next seven adjectives as follows:

- (25a) kháw dii kwâa raw W.8(33)  
 S/he good than we  
 ‘S/he is better than us we.’
- (25b) kaan ?aan nǎŋsǎu pen dii thîi nùŋ W.8(3)  
 NOM read book COP good first place  
 ‘Reading books is the best.’
- (26a) châat day cà leew kwâa thúk châat W.9(37)  
 nation which will bad than every nation  
 ‘Which nation is worse (musically) than all the others?’<sup>7</sup>
- (26b) thay raw pen leew kwâa thúk châat W.9(37)  
 Thailand we COP bad than every nation  
 ‘We Thais are worse (musically) than any other nation.’
- (27a) kaan càay ŋon kô mây yâak W.6(1)  
 NOM pay money also NEG difficult  
 ‘Paying is also not difficult.’
- (27b) nâa thîi yàaŋ thîi sǎam pen yâak kwâa nâa thîi W.6(1)  
 duty CLS third COP difficult than duty  
 yàaŋ ?uun ?uun  
 CLS other  
 ‘The third duty is harder than the other duties.’
- (28a) man ŋâay thîi sùt W.5(21)  
 it easy the most  
 ‘It is the easiest.’
- (28b) phút níi ?eeŋ pen ŋâay kwâa thúk yàaŋ W.7(25)  
 speak this itself COP easy than everything  
 ‘Speaking itself is easier than everything.’
- (29a) kaan thîi thǎu chên níi mây thùuk lǎoy W.8(28)  
 NOM that rely like this NEG correct at all  
 ‘Relying on this idea is not correct at all.’
- (29b) khâaŋ nǎy pen thùuk W.5(40)  
 side which COP correct  
 ‘Which side is correct?’

<sup>7</sup> The context of this utterance is in terms of the musical competency of each nation.

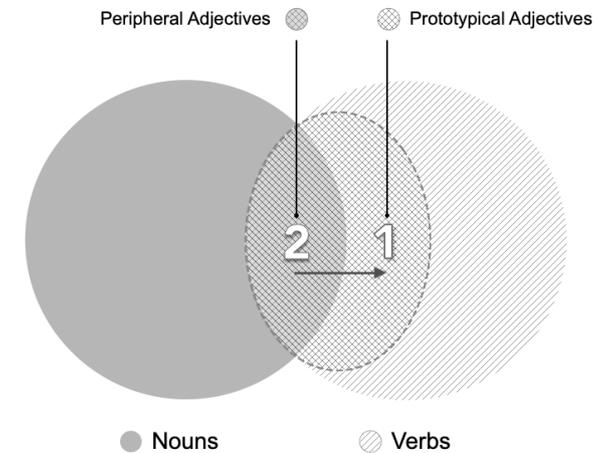
- (30a) khray phit W.8(45)  
 who wrong  
 ‘Who is wrong?’
- (30b) khwaam hěn chên nîi pen phit W.6(39)  
 opinion like this COP wrong  
 ‘An opinion like this is wrong.’
- (31a) [ráduu] rón năaw mây sǎmkhan thâw fôn W.6(16)  
 season hot cold NEG important equal rain  
 ‘The hot or cold season is not as important as the rainy season.’
- (31b) chāj khǎn pen sǎmkhan kwàa W.8(42)  
 draughtsman COP important than  
 chāj thāj puaj  
 craftsman/expert whole lot  
 ‘The draughtsman is more important than any other craftsman/expert.’

Of the ten adjectives illustrated above from (5) to (7) and (25) to (31), only examples (a) in which the adjectives do not co-occur with the copula /pen/ are considered grammatical in Modern Thai, while examples (b) are all deemed ungrammatical.

Thus, one may derive the following conclusion regarding the diachronic change of the predicative adjectives in Thai which is grammatical in nature:

<b>Rama V era</b>		<b>Modern Thai</b>
Peripheral adjectives	>	Prototypical adjectives
[Subject (+ /pen/) + Adjective]		[Subject + Adjective]

The change shown above is a grammatical change in which the 18 adjectives that could optionally co-occur with the copula /pen/ during the Rama V era have lost this property in Modern Thai. In other words, these 18 adjectives went from being peripheral adjectives to becoming prototypical adjectives as illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2** The grammatical change from being peripheral adjectives to becoming prototypical adjectives for the 18 adjectives

As mentioned earlier, the idea that nouns, adjectives, and verbs form a continuum in which adjectives are of an intermediate or hybrid status between nouns and verbs has been supported by some semantic theories (Givon, 1984; Pustet, 2003) to explain the status of the adjectival lexical class cross-linguistically. Thus, it is not surprising when adjectives change grammatically to become more like nouns or verbs.

In the case of the Thai language, generally speaking, prototypical adjectives are more verb-like in nature compared to peripheral adjectives. Peripheral adjectives, on the other hand, can be considered a link between nouns and verbs.

When comparing the behavior of these 18 adjectives in Rama V era and Modern Thai, we find that they have all lost their noun-like property of functioning like abstract nouns (or expressing the meaning of abstract nouns) as seen in (19a), (20a), and (21a). This diachronic change is one where these adjectives shift towards the verb-end of the continuum in Figure 2, thereby becoming more verb-like, which explains why they may no longer co-occur with the copula /pen/. In other words, they have changed from peripheral adjectives to prototypical adjectives (Jarattjarungkiat, 2012: 376-377).

### The Diachronic Changes of Adjectives and Grammaticalization<sup>8</sup>

The diachronic changes of adjectives in the past century are in line with—and related to—the important linguistic process that is grammaticalization. Grammaticalization refers to the development of lexical elements into grammatical ones, or grammatical to even more grammatical forms (Heine and Kuteva, 2002: 2, 2007: 32).

Hopper and Traugott (2003: 4) state that “content words” or “lexical items” are words used to describe things, actions, and qualities. Words belonging to this category include nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Conversely, “grammatical words” are words that perform a more grammatical function (e.g. prepositions indicate the relationships of nominals to each other, connectives link up parts of a discourse, and so on).

Giacomone Ramat and Hopper (1998: 5) mentioned one type of non-directional change called “lateral conversions,” which refer to changes from one category to another on the same level of grammaticality, for example “to shoulder” (noun > verb) or “the poor” (adjective > noun) (Norde, 2001: 234). These changes are not considered grammaticalization based on the above definition since nouns, verbs, and adjectives are viewed to be of the same status.

However, Hopper and Traugott (2003: 107) explain that even though nouns, verbs, and adjectives all belong to the category of “content words,” they do not share the same status. Nouns and verbs constitute “major categories” or categories that are relatively “open” lexically, while adjectives make up an “intermediate category” between the major and minor categories, the latter being relatively “closed” categories.

Moreover, using Figure 3 below, Heine and Kuteva (2007: 111) demonstrate that nouns, verbs, and adjectives all belong to different “layers” of grammatical development.

<sup>8</sup> The adjectives analyzed in this section are words “denoting qualities” in contrast to nouns and verbs, which are words “denoting things” and “denoting actions,” respectively, in line with universal criteria found in existing literature on grammaticalization (Heine and Kuteva, 2007: 60; Hopper and Traugott, 2003: 4). These adjectives are not viewed as a subtype of verbs as is the categorization of adjectives in Thai by other scholars.

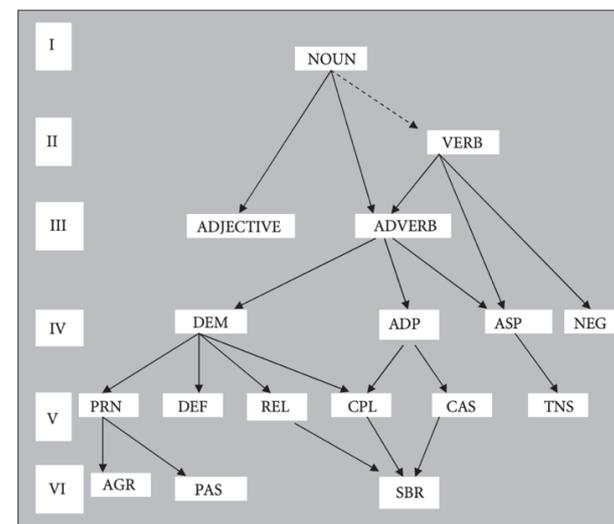


Figure 3 Layers of grammatical development (Heine and Kuteva, 2007: 111)

“Layers” in this context refer to “clusters of categories that show the same relative degree of grammaticalization vis-à-vis both the categories from which they are derived and which they develop into” (ibid.: 59). Among the categories of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, adjectives tend to be a closed class comprising only a limited number of words in many languages unlike nouns and verbs<sup>9</sup> (ibid.: 61).

As shown in Figure 3, nouns develop into adjectives. Heine and Kuteva (ibid.: 60) write that

[n]ouns typically denote tangible and/or visible things that refer, while adjectives denote qualities relating to such conceptual domains as dimension (‘large,’ ‘small’), age (‘old,’ ‘young’), color (‘green’), or value (‘good,’ ‘bad’). In many languages a

<sup>9</sup> Generally speaking, nouns and verbs are the only items that are cross-linguistically fairly stable and clearly behave like open-class categories (Heine and Kuteva, 2007: 59). Yet Heine and Kuteva (2007: 101) have shown that these two lexical classes have different statuses. In fact, there appears to be a unidirectional development (noun > verb) whereby expressions reserved for nouns, or nominal concepts, are exploited for encoding actions or events, that is, concepts that are typically expressed by verbs, while there is no evidence to suggest that verbs are regularly grammaticalized to express nominal concepts.

diachronic process can be observed whereby specific groups of nouns are grammaticalized to adjectives, such groups concerning nouns stereotypically associated with some specific quality.

For example, in English, the metal named “bronze” underwent the process of grammaticalization to become an adjective denoting the *color* of bronze (ibid.: 34, 60). The same occurred in Thai for the word /thooŋ dɛɛŋ/ ‘bronze’ which developed from a noun denoting an object to an adjective denoting the color (Engchuan, 2000: 122).

Heine and Kuteva (2007: 34) employ four parameters to qualify the process of grammaticalization, two of which are pertinent to noun-to-adjective (noun > adjective) grammaticalization: desemanticization (or semantic bleaching) and decategorialization. Desemanticization refers to “the loss or generalization in meaning content,” for example, when “the nominal meaning [of a noun] is bleached out except for some salient property,” such as the color of the item concerned (ibid.: 60). Conversely, decategorialization refers to “the loss in morphosyntactic properties characteristic of lexical or other less grammaticalized forms” (ibid.: 34), for example, when nouns do not take modifiers, determiners, or inflections nor occur in contexts commonly associated with nouns, thereby shifting from the traditional category of nouns to other secondary categories such as adjectives (Hopper, 1991: 22, 30).

The diachronic changes of adjectives in Thai in the present study can also be explained by desemanticization and decategorialization as follows:

The data from the Thai language of the Rama V era containing the 18 adjectives with noun-like properties could be said to represent intermediate stages of the noun-to-adjective pathway of grammaticalization. That is, all 18 adjectives exhibited the noun-like property of expressing the meaning or performing the function of an abstract noun, but have since lost this property in Modern Thai, in other words, desemanticization has occurred, which then led to decategorialization where these adjectives that used to be able to co-occur with the copula /pen/ during the Rama V era may now no longer do so in Modern Thai after losing their nominal meaning.

## Conclusion

When speaking of predicative adjectives in Thai, most researchers focus on prototypical adjectives by virtue of their majority status and widespread use. These adjectives have the significant syntactic property of being unable to co-occur with the copula /pen/, which is one piece of evidence supporting the idea that adjectives in Thai are a subclass of verbs.

In the present study, we have endeavored to highlight the existence of another group of adjectives in Thai, namely peripheral adjectives, which are far fewer in number compared to prototypical adjectives and have received little attention from researchers. They are nevertheless worthy of investigation due to their being able to optionally co-occur with the copula /pen/, which imbues them with both noun-like and verb-like properties. These adjectives play an indispensable role in showing the noun-verb continuum in Thai.

The present study has also shown that grammatical change has taken place in the past century for 18 adjectives. They have changed from being peripheral adjectives in the Thai language of the Rama V era to prototypical adjectives in Modern Thai. The change in grammatical structure can be represented by [Subject (+ /pen/) + Adjective] > [Subject + Adjective]. The reason behind this grammatical change is the loss of the noun-like property of expressing the meaning or performing the function of an abstract noun. This loss explains why these 18 adjectives may no longer co-occur with the copula /pen/. The change can also be explained by two parameters of grammaticalization, namely desemanticization followed by decategorialization.

In addition, certain “linguistic innovations” have been observed in Modern Thai where the copula /pen/ is used with particular adjectives such as /ŋoŋ/ ‘confused’ and /sâw/ ‘sad.’ Such adjectival constructions are not considered standard usage (i.e. they are not used in formal contexts); instead, they may only be used in informal contexts such as in chatting language. Some reasons for this “non-standard” usage could be to make the conversation unique or “cool” as it involves a conscious

violation of standard grammatical rules. In addition, the use of the copula /pen/ with these adjectives may also perform some communicative functions, such as emphasizing one's feelings.

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