

The Grammaticalization of the Copulas /pēn/ and /k^hū:/ in Thai¹

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Abstract

The present study has two main aims: 1) to contrast the syntax and semantics of the Thai copulas /pēn/ and /k^hū:/, and 2) to contrast their historical development using grammaticalization theory. The findings will help to answer two questions: 1) why are both copulas so similar in certain contexts such that they appear to be interchangeable (e.g. *Lisa pēn/k^hū: sīn.láʔ.pīn t^hi: c^hán c^hō:p*); 2) why is the switching of the pre-copula and post-copula noun phrases grammatical only for the copula /k^hū:/ (e.g. *sīn.láʔ.pīn t^hi: c^hán c^hō:p *pēn/k^hū: Lisa*)? The findings show that the copulas /pēn/ and /k^hū:/ originated from verbs meaning ‘to be alive’ and ‘to resemble’ respectively. Both words have experienced desemanticization, leading to a significant loss of lexical meaning. As a result, they may appear remarkably similar in meaning within specific contexts. In addition, the pre-copula and post-copula noun phrases can be interchanged in the case of the copula /k^hū:/ due to the grammaticalization principle of persistence, where remnants of the original meaning persist in the grammaticalized word. The meaning persistence of ‘to resemble’ equates noun phrases, allowing for syntactic position switching.

Keywords: copula, grammaticalization, Thai

¹ This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2021S1A5A2A03066059). Abbreviations used in this article: COP = copula; CLS = classifier; NEG = negative; NOM = nominalizer; RL = realis.

Introduction

In linguistics, the copula is a linking word (Tallerman, 2011: 292) that has the important functions of 1) a link between subject and predicate; 2) a syntactic “hitching post” to which verbal inflectional categories can be attached; 3) a predicator which is added to lexemes that do not form predicates on their own (Pustet, 2003: 2).

From a semantic perspective, some linguists claim that the copula is a linking word with relatively little semantic content (Tallerman, 2011: 292). One clear example of a copula would be the verb ‘to be’ in English (e.g., this *is* a cup); however, there is still an ongoing debate as to whether other verbs such as the verb ‘to become’ should be regarded as copulas. This lack of consensus may be due to the view held by some linguists that a “copula” must not add any semantic content to the predicate of a sentence, or it must be a linguistic unit that is “semantically empty” or lacks semantic content. However, if the “copula” adds an element of meaning to the construction in which it occurs, it would be called a “semi-copula” instead, such as the verb ‘to become’ (e.g., She *became* happy) (Hengeveld, 1992: 32-36; Stassen, 1997: 65; Pustet, 2003: 5-6).

A comprehensive linguistic survey by Pustet (2003) reveals that there are languages without copulas, languages with only one copula, and languages with multiple copulas. Pustet (2003: 45) states that “[l]anguages which have more than just a single copula (also termed “multiple copularization”) are not infrequent. It can be assumed that such categorial differentiation is concomitant with certain function distinctions—that is, copulas which coexist within a given language should differ in their function scope.” For example, in Lakota, there are two distinct copulas that are used in different contexts: one is used in ascriptive predicates while the other is used in all types of identificational predicates.

Thai is considered one of the languages with multiple copularization (Pustet, 2003: 45-49). The two copulas that readily come to mind are /pēn/ and /k^hū:/, which can both be translated into English

as the verb ‘to be.’ The differences between these “twin-sister” copulas are often asked about by learners of Thai as a foreign language, for example:

(1a) cō:n pēn kʰōn tʰî: cʰán rák
 John COP person that I love
 ‘John is a person that I love.’

(1b) cō:n kʰū: kʰōn tʰî: cʰán rák
 John COP person that I love
 ‘John is the person that I love.’

(Kuno and Wongkhomthong, 1981: 69)

With regard to native speakers’ perception, if some Thais were to be asked how the copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ in the two sentences above are different, some might say that they are not different or they are highly similar due to the fact that both copulas can occur in the same contexts or syntactic positions, making them appear to be interchangeable; conversely, others might say that the two copulas are different, or that native speakers might only be able to point out which sentence sounds more appropriate or natural. However, should native speakers be asked to explain the differences between the two copulas, they might find it rather difficult to pinpoint them due to the differences being so subtle (Bandhmedha, 1984a: 19; Hedberg and Potter, 2010; Kuno and Wongkhomthong, 1981: 65-66). Contrasting this against the English copula ‘to be,’ if asked for the difference between ‘is’ and ‘are,’ native speakers and even foreigners would be able to quickly point out that ‘is’ is used as a singular present while ‘are’ is used as a plural present.

In addition, the Royal Institute Dictionary, which is considered the official and prescriptive dictionary of the Thai language, even defines the copula /kʰū:/ as /pēn/ (Royal Institute of Thailand, 2013: 752), further accentuating the high degree of similarity between both copulas in Thai. It is for this reason that we wanted to find out why the copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ can occur in highly similar contexts.

There have been attempts by some linguists to illustrate the differences between the two sentences (1a) and (1b): the copula /pēn/

in (1a) is a copula used in characterizational sentences, showing that the unit succeeding /pēn/ is one of the qualifications or attributes that the subject of the sentence (‘John’) has, i.e., John has the attribute of being someone the speaker (‘I’) loves (Kuno and Wongkhomthong, 1981: 68-69). Alternatively, if the speaker intends to convey the meaning that John belongs to a group of “persons that I love” or that John is “one” of the persons that I love, /pēn/ will then be selected (Jaratjarungkiat, 2019: 9).

The copula /kʰū:/ in (1b) is a copula that is used in identificational sentences in which the speaker wishes to express that John and the person the speaker (‘I’) loves are one and the same (Kuno and Wongkhomthong, 1981: 68-69), and/or that the speaker wishes to inform the hearer that John holds some importance as somebody that the speaker loves (Bandhmedha, 1984a: 19-20).

In reality, the two copulas differ from each other both syntactically and semantically in more ways than what is described above. One of the very interesting differences can be seen when the linguistic units preceding and succeeding the copulas (henceforth referred to as “pre-copula” and “post-copula,” respectively) are switched: the sentence containing /pēn/ would become ungrammatical, while the sentence containing /kʰū:/ will remain grammatical, as exemplified by (2a) and (2b):

(2a) *kʰōn tʰî: cʰán rák pēn cō:n
 person that I love COP John

(2b) kʰōn tʰî: cʰán rák kʰū: cō:n
 person that I love COP John
 ‘The person I love is John.’

(Kuno and Wongkhomthong, 1981: 67)

The above raises the question: why is it that a switch in syntactic positions is allowed only for the sentence containing the copula /kʰū:/? An investigation into the historical development of the copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ might help to answer the question.

The two aims of the present study are 1) to contrast the syntax and semantics of the copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ with a post-copula noun phrase since this is a basic sentence structure in Thai, and 2) to contrast the historical development of both copulas using grammaticalization theory.

The present study looks at linguistic data gathered from the Thai National Corpus (TNC) of the Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University (2013). A thousand tokens of each copula from a wide range of contexts (namely fictional works, newspapers, academic publications, non-academic writings, statutes, and miscellaneous texts) are analyzed.

The present study consists of six parts. The first part is the introduction; the second part compares the copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ in multiple aspects; the third and fourth parts look at the grammaticalization of the Thai copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ respectively; the fifth part compares the grammaticalization of both copulas; the final part provides a summary and evaluation of the study's findings.

Comparing the Thai Copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ in Multiple Aspects

There have been an appreciable number of studies on the Thai copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/. We shall now summarize their findings by comparing the copulas' similarities and differences in terms of their syntactic constructions, parts of speech, and semantics.

1. Basic syntactic constructions

The analysis of the tokens gathered from the Thai National Corpus (TNC) reveals the following most common syntactic constructions in which the copulas appear:

Structure I [NP + /pēn/, /kʰū:/ + NP]

Pustet (2003: 71-78), in her study of the use of copulas in 131 languages globally, concludes that there are a total of seven types of copularization patterns, only three of which are dominant types or found in the majority of languages. The three dominant types arranged in decreasing order are the AN type (found in 54 languages, 41.2 percent),

non-copularization type (41 languages, 31.5 percent) and AV type (27 languages, 20.8 percent). An AN type language has the copula co-occurring with only adjectivals (A) and nominals (N), as in English and French. Non-copularization type languages are those that do not use copulas with nominals, adjectivals, and verbals (V) such as Tagalog and Maori. Finally, in AV type languages, the copula may only co-occur with nominals, not adjectivals or verbals such as Burmese and Mandarin.

In the case of Thai, the linguistic unit that occurs after the copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ is usually a noun phrase, hence Thai is considered an AV language (Pustet, 2003: 74-78). The copulas tend to occur in the construction [NP + COP + NP] where NP is a noun phrase or a linguistic element equivalent to a noun phrase. The pre-copula NP functions as the subject of the sentence while the post-copula NP is part of the predicate. Examples include (1a) and (1b) above and (3a) and (3b) below:

- (3a) líʔ.sâa pēn sǐn.láʔ.pīn tʰî: cʰán cʰô:p
 Lisa COP artiste that I like
 'Lisa is an artiste that I like.'
- (3b) líʔ.sâa kʰū: sǐn.láʔ.pīn tʰî: cʰán cʰô:p
 Lisa COP artiste that I like
 'Lisa is the artiste that I like.'

Another possible structure (Jarajjarungkiat, 2019: 7-8) in which /pēn/ but not /kʰū:/ may appear in is as follows:

Structure II [NP + VP + /pēn/ + NP]

The copula /pēn/ may occur in Structure II as follows:

- (4) kʰáw pʰáp kràʔ.dà:t pēn rû:p nók
 S/he fold paper COP shape bird
 'S/he folded the paper into the shape of a bird.'

The copula /pēn/ in (4) occurs after a verb /pʰáp/ and before a noun phrase /rû:p nók/, which leads to some problems regarding its part of speech, as will be discussed in the following section.

To summarize, the Thai copula /pēn/ may occur in both Structures I and II while the Thai copula /kʰū:/ may only occur in Structure I. The noun phrase is the basic linguistic unit that commonly occurs after the copulas /pēn/² and /kʰū:/.

2. Parts of speech

The analysis of the parts of speech of the copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ is based on Structures I and II mentioned in the previous section.

2.1 Part of speech of the copula /pēn/ in Structure I

The copula /pēn/ which may occur in Structure I [NP + /pēn/ + NP] may be regarded as a “copula verb” in line with the views of many grammarians and linguists, including Uppakitsinlapasan (1950), Bandhmedha (1984b), Chaithongwongwatana (1987), Warotamasikkhadit (2004), Prasithrathsint (2010), Wongwattana (2015), and Jaratjarungkiat (2019) because it shares many characteristics with other verbs such as co-occurring with negation words and auxiliaries:

(5a) pʰû:.cʰā:j kʰōn nán mâj.dâj pēn ʔā:.cā:n kʰǒ:ŋ pʰǒm
man CLS that NEG COP teacher of me
‘That man is not my teacher.’

(5b) pʰû:.cʰā:j kʰōn nán tōŋ pēn ʔā:.cā:n kʰǒ:ŋ pʰǒm
man CLS that must COP teacher of me
‘That man must be my teacher.’

In (5a), the copula /pēn/ may co-occur with the negation word /mâj.dâj/, while in (5b) the copula /pēn/ may co-occur with the auxiliary /tōŋ/.

2.2 Part of speech of the copula /kʰū:/ in Structure I

In contrast to /pēn/, the copula /kʰū:/ occurring in Structure I [NP + /kʰū:/ + NP] is not universally regarded as a copula verb.

² There is a possibility that the syntactic unit succeeding the copula /pēn/ may not be a noun phrase but rather other syntactic units, such as an adjective phrase (Jaratjarungkiat et al., 2022; Wongwattana, 2015). However, the co-occurrence of /pēn/ with adjective phrases is not a typical construction in Thai since only a small number of adjectives can co-occur with /pēn/. These adjectives need to possess noun-like properties, allowing them to function as abstract nouns or express abstract meanings. For example, the Thai adjective /cīŋ/, meaning ‘true,’ can also convey the abstract noun ‘truth.’ This characteristic allows the adjective to co-occur with the copula /pēn/. Further details can be found in Jaratjarungkiat et al. (2022).

Although it is categorized as a verb by Chaithongwongwatana (1987) and Warotamasikkhadit (2004), it is regarded as a connective, conjunction, or linker by Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom (2005) and Prasithrathsint (2010). Interestingly, the copula /kʰū:/ has been recategorized by the same grammatician: in the second edition of “Waiyakorn Thai (‘Thai grammar’)” (Bandhmedha, 1984b), the copula /kʰū:/ was categorized as a verb, but in the third edition (Bandhmedha, 2006: 101, 205), it has been reclassified as a connective.

The copula /kʰū:/ has been classified as a verb due to the fact that it is often translated as ‘to be’ in English (Prasithrathsint, 2010: 123) as well as its ability to occur in the same syntactic position as other verbs such as /cʰô:p/ and /pʰlâk/ as follows:

(6a) pʰû:.cʰā:j kʰōn nán cʰô:p ʔā:.cā:n kʰǒ:ŋ pʰǒm
man CLS that like teacher of me
‘That man likes my teacher.’

(6b) pʰû:.cʰā:j kʰōn nán pʰlâk ʔā:.cā:n kʰǒ:ŋ pʰǒm
man CLS that push teacher of me
‘That man pushes my teacher.’

(6c) pʰû:.cʰā:j kʰōn nán kʰū: ʔā:.cā:n kʰǒ:ŋ pʰǒm
man CLS that COP teacher of me
‘That man is my teacher.’

However, the copula /kʰū:/ also lacks some morphosyntactic qualities that are characteristic of verbs, such as the ability to co-occur with negation words and auxiliaries, as in (7a) and (7b):

(7a) *pʰû:.cʰā:j kʰōn nán mâj/mâj.dâj kʰū: ʔā:.cā:n kʰǒ:ŋ pʰǒm
man CLS that NEG COP teacher of me
‘That man is not my teacher.’

(7b) *pʰû:.cʰā:j kʰōn nán tōŋ kʰū: ʔā:.cā:n kʰǒ:ŋ pʰǒm
man CLS that must COP teacher of me
‘That man must be my teacher.’

In (7a) and (7b), the sentences become ungrammatical when the negation words /mâj/ and /mâj.dâj/ and the auxiliary /tōŋ/ co-occur with

the copula /kʰū:/. Therefore, it could be argued that it is not a verb, but rather a connective, conjunction, or linker, serving the function of linking pre-copula and post-copula noun phrases.

2.3 Part of speech of the copula /pēn/ in Structure II

The part of speech of the copula /pēn/ in Structure II has similarly been met with differing views as to whether it should be a verb or a preposition.

One group of linguists, including Chuwicha (1993), Thepkanjana (2006) and Jaratjarungkiat (2012), regard it as the final verb in a serial-verb construction or multi-verb construction,³ while another group, such as Prasithratsint (2010), regard it as a preposition since it occupies the same syntactic position as the other prepositions in Thai, namely after a verb and before a noun.

The table below presents an overview of the ongoing debate regarding the part of speech classification of the copula /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ in Structures I and II:

Table 1 The debated part of speech of the copula /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ in Structures I and II

Copula	Structure	Part of speech
/pēn/	I	“verb”
/kʰū:/	I	“verb” or “connective/conjunction/linker”
/pēn/	II	“verb” or “preposition”

3. Semantics

As previously described, the Thai copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/ can occur in the same syntactic position (i.e., between two NPs), making it seem like they are semantically similar to the extent that they are fully interchangeable in certain sentences. However, there are sentences in which the use of each copula changes the meaning of the sentence

³ A *multi-verb* construction is a construction consisting of at least two verbs in sequence. Other elements may come in between the verbs such as a clause-linker (e.g., /lɛ:w/ ‘and then’) or an adverbial expression (e.g., /pʰūa/ ‘in order to’) (Enfield, 2008: 83-183). Conversely, a *serial-verb* construction is a subset of a multi-verb construction (Enfield, 2008: 104) since no other elements such as a clause-linker may come in between the verbs (Haspelmath, 2016: 296; SIL International, 2022).

drastically, hence they are not actually interchangeable (Bandhmedha, 1984a: 20) as in (8a) and (8b):

- (8a) ?ép bit.kʰɔ:j pēn ?à?.rāj
 app Bitcoin COP what
 tʰəm.māj pʰəm kʰâw māj.dāj lɔ:j
 why I enter cannot at all
 ‘What is wrong with the Bitcoin app? Why can’t I access it at all?’
- (8b) ?ép bit.kʰɔ:j kʰū: ?à?.rāj
 app Bitcoin COP what
 pʰəm māj rú:.càk
 I NEG know
 ‘What is “Bitcoin app”? I don’t know it.’

There have been some previous studies on the differences between the copulas /pēn/ and /kʰū:/, which are summarized below.

Kuno and Wongkhamthong (1981) state that the copula /pēn/ is used in characterizational sentences whereas the copula /kʰū:/ is used in identificational sentences as in (1a) and (1b). Hedberg and Potter (2010) also arrived at the same conclusion in their work.

Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom (2005: 221-226) state that sentences with the copula /pēn/ are attributive where the copula /pēn/ is used to express that an object, a person, or a concept is in some state, while sentences with the copula /kʰū:/ are definitive in the sense that the copula /kʰū:/ has the function of introducing the name, label, or definition of an object, person, or concept.

Wongwattana (2015) also analyzed the two copulas according to the criteria laid out by Higgins (1979). Her findings indicate that /pēn/ is a predicational copula used to indicate the qualities of the subject. In (9a), the copula /pēn/ attributes the quality of being a child to the subject.

- (9a) kʰâw pēn dèk
 S/he COP child
 ‘S/he is a child.’

As for the copula /kʰū:/, Wongwattana (2015: 110-112) categorizes it as a non-predicational copula which can be further divided into four senses, namely *specificational*, *identificational*, *equational* and *definitional*. The first three senses were also categorized according to Higgin's criteria, whereas the fourth sense was devised by Wongwattana because it denotes a distinct communicative sense in Thai. The four senses are illustrated in the following respective order:

- (9b) pʰū:.cʰáʔ.náʔ kʰū: sě:n.sàk
winner COP Sansak
'The winner is Sansak.'
- (9c) nī: kʰū: mā:.ríʔ.ʔô:
this COP Mario
'This is Mario.'
- (9d) sàʔ.jă:m kʰū: pràʔ.tʰê:t tʰāj
Siam COP country Thai
'Siam is Thailand.'
- (9e) sàʔ.tiʔ kʰū: k̄ā:n.rú:.sùk.tūa
consciousness/mindfulness COP NOM-feel-body
'Consciousness is being aware of something within oneself. / Mindfulness is being self-aware.'

The copula /kʰū:/ in (9b) is *specificational* (i.e., to specify who (or what) someone (or something) is), while that in (9c) is *identificational* (i.e., to identify the references of the two noun phrases, the subject and predicate, both of which are referential, and also used for teaching or introducing the names of people or things), that in (9d) is *equational* (i.e., to equate the references of the subject and predicate noun phrases, both of which are fully referential), and that in (9e) is *definitional* (i.e., the subject noun phrase is a concept which is unknown or unclear, and the post-copula noun phrase defines it rather than characterizes it. Both noun phrases are non-referential) (Wongwattana, 2015: 110-112).

4. Switching the positions of the noun phrases before and after the copula

Halliday (1994: 119-120) states that identifying-type sentences in English are reversible in the sense that the pre-copula and post-copula

noun phrases can be switched around as in (10), whereas attributive-type sentences should not be reversible as in (11).

- (10) Tom is the leader.
(11) Paula is a poet.

In the case of Thai, attributive-type sentences will use the copula /pēn/ while identifying-type ones will use the copula /kʰū:/ in line with Halliday's (1994) analysis.

Jaratjarungkiat's (2019) study of the Thai copula /pēn/ found that the copula /pēn/ has three implicit meanings: 'belonging to a group,' 'having the attribute (of),' and 'to be in one's possession.' These three meanings reveal an "unequal" relationship between the pre-copula and post-copula elements, indicating their non-interchangeability. This supports Halliday's analysis (1994: 120), which views the copula as the descriptor indicating an entity's membership in a specific category or group. In sentence (11), "poet" represents the category, and the article "a" specifies that Paula belongs to the category of poets.

As for the copula /kʰū:/, Kuno and Wongkhomthong (1981: 68-69) state that Thai is similar to English in terms of how identificational sentences could have the pre-copula and post-copula noun phrases switched without rendering them ungrammatical, which is the case for /kʰū:/ in Thai as in (12). Sentences containing the copula /pēn/, however, may not switch the positions of the noun phrases without becoming ungrammatical as in (13).

- (12a) kʰā:.tʰ: kʰū: pràʔ.tʰā:.nā:.tʰíp.bō:.dī: kʰō:ŋ sàʔ.hàʔ.rát.ʔàʔ.mē:.ríʔ.kā:
Carter COP president of United States
'Carter is the president of the United States.'
- (12b) pràʔ.tʰā:.nā:.tʰíp.bō:.dī: kʰō:ŋ sàʔ.hàʔ.rát.ʔàʔ.mē:.ríʔ.kā: kʰū: kʰā:.tʰ:
president of United States COP Carter
'The president of the United States is Carter.'
- (13a) kʰā:.tʰ: pēn pràʔ.tʰā:.nā:.tʰíp.bō:.dī: kʰō:ŋ sàʔ.hàʔ.rát.ʔàʔ.mē:.ríʔ.kā:
Carter COP president of United States
'Carter is a president of the United States.'

(13b) *práʔ.tʰā:.nā:.tʰip.bō:.dī: kʰō:ŋ sàʔ.hàʔ.rát.ʔàʔ.mē:.ríʔ.kā: pēn kʰā:.tʰ:
 president of United States COP Carter

The review thus far gives rise to some interesting questions: why is it only the copula /kʰū:/ and not /pēn/ that may occur in identificational contexts, and why is it that the copula /kʰū:/ occurs in contexts where the pre-copula and post-copula noun phrases may be switched around without rendering the sentence ungrammatical? Perhaps the answers to these two questions may be found by considering the grammaticalization of both /pēn/ and /kʰū:/, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Grammaticalization of the Thai copula /pēn/

Before going into the analysis of the grammaticalization of the Thai copula /pēn/, a general summary of the relevant concepts is in order.

Grammaticalization refers to the development from lexical to grammatical forms, and from grammatical to even more grammatical forms (Heine and Kuteva, 2002: 2; 2007: 32).

Lexical or content words refer to words that describe things, actions, and qualities, namely nouns, verbs, and adjectives, whereas grammatical words refer to words that perform certain functions, e.g., *prepositions* indicate the relationships between different nominals, *connectives* link parts of a discourse, *demonstratives* show whether the referent in question is close to the speaker or hearer, and so on (Hopper and Traugott, 2003: 4).

According to Haspelmath (1999: 1044), grammaticalization goes beyond the narrow definition of a change solely from lexical to functional categories. It encompasses situations where a functional category undergoes further grammaticalization, resulting in a higher degree of grammaticality. Although one could argue that the initial stage of this change already falls within the realm of functional categories, the resulting element is undoubtedly more grammaticalized. Hence, the general definition of grammaticalization highlights the progression of linguistic expressions towards the functional end of the lexical-functional continuum.

Similarly, Delancey (2011: 89-90) and Thepkanjana (2016: 21, 169) argue against a rigid differentiation between lexical words and grammatical words. Instead, they propose a continuum where words exhibit varying degrees of grammaticality or lexicality. For instance, numerical classifiers are considered more grammatical than measure words, while measure words are more grammatical than nouns. Thus, they advocate for a nuanced perspective that acknowledges the gradation of grammaticality and lexicality along this continuum. The present study also embraces the concept of this continuum in our analysis.

As for the parameters of grammaticalization, Heine and Kuteva (2007: 34) state that there are four, namely 1) extension (i.e., the rise of new grammatical meanings when linguistic expressions are extended to new contexts and reinterpreted); 2) desemanticization/semantic bleaching (i.e., loss or generalization of lexical meaning); 3) decategorialization (i.e., loss in morphosyntactic properties characteristic of lexical or other less grammaticalized forms); and 4) erosion/phonetic reduction (i.e., loss in phonetic substance). These four parameters are also related to different aspects of language structure, namely pragmatics, semantics, morphosyntax and phonetics respectively.

Citing Alec Coupe's perspective, Pustet (2003: 54) mentions with regard to the genesis of the copulas in Thai that the Thai copula /pēn/ originated from the Proto-Tai /pēn/, which meant 'to be alive.' This was corroborated by Jaratjarungkiat (2012), who studied the historical development of each meaning and function of the word /pēn/ from the Sukhothai era to the present, its grammaticalization being one of the topics studied. The results show that the copula /pēn/ originated from the verb /pēn/ 'to be alive,' but the transformation was not direct; instead, there were two different grammaticalization paths that involved multiple lexical intermediates.

Grammaticalization path I

verb /pēn/ 'to be alive' > verb /pēn/ 'to exist' > copula verb /pēn/

Grammaticalization path I involves the crucial process of desemanticization or semantic bleaching in which the more specific meaning of 'to be alive' (i.e., the thing existing is *life*) — which applies

only to animate subjects — was generalized to mean ‘to exist,’ now being able to be used with both animate and inanimate subjects. When the word finally became a copula verb, the lexical meanings of ‘to be alive’ and ‘to exist’ were almost completely lost⁴ (Jarattjarungkiat, 2012: 334, 354-356).

Grammaticalization path II

verb /pēn/ ‘to be alive’ > verb /pēn/ ‘to be born’ > verb /pēn/ ‘to arise’ > copula verb /pēn/

In grammaticalization path II, the verb /pēn/ ‘to be alive’ first underwent semantic extension to mean ‘to be born.’ This semantic change was a metonymic change, i.e., a change in meaning involving two closely-related concepts or from one thing to another that is present in the context (Campbell and Mixco, 2007: 122-123): ‘to be alive’ encompasses the time from right after birth to right before death, while ‘to be born’ encompasses the time from birth. Subsequently, the verb /pēn/ ‘to be born’ underwent the same process of semantic bleaching (i.e., from a more specific to a more generalized meaning), as in grammaticalization path I, to mean ‘to arise’: the meaning of ‘to be born’ is used only with animate subjects, while the meaning of ‘to arise’ can be used with both animate and inanimate subjects. When the verb finally became a copula verb, the lexical meanings of ‘to be alive,’ ‘to be born,’ and ‘to arise’ were similarly almost completely lost (Jarattjarungkiat, 2012: 334, 351-353).

In summary, the Thai copula /pēn/ developed from the root verb /pēn/ ‘to be alive’ but not directly, as the meaning of ‘to be alive’ was rather specific. Instead, there needed to be a generalization of meaning first via intermediates (namely ‘to exist’ and ‘to arise’) before finally grammaticalizing into the copula /pēn/. However, the development of the copula /pēn/ is only at the part-of-speech level, hence decategorialization might have yet to take place.

⁴ Jarattjarungkiat (2019) states that although the copula /pēn/ does not have a clear lexical meaning unlike other typical verbs, it was not semantically empty as it has the implicit meaning of ‘belonging to a group,’ ‘having the attribute (of),’ and ‘to be in one’s possession.’

Grammaticalization of the Thai copula /k^hū:/

As mentioned above, there is no consensus as to whether the copula /k^hū:/ should be classified as a verb or a connective. In this regard, Prasithratsint (2010: 123) states that one might gain some insight by looking at the historical usage of /k^hū:/ from past to present as well as the use of /k^hū:/ in regional dialects of Thai. In addition, analyzing the development of the copula /k^hū:/ from a grammaticalization point of view might produce a clearer answer.

1. The word /k^hū:/ in Thai from past to present

Data on the word /k^hū:/ utilized in this study was gathered from a total of eight dictionaries, encompassing both monolingual Thai dictionaries and multilingual dictionaries. The inclusion of multilingual dictionaries offers valuable insights into the meaning of the word /k^hū:/ through its translations and equivalents in various languages. The dictionaries consulted range from the oldest dictionary published in AD 1854 (or BE 2397 around the start of the reign of Rama IV around 160 years ago) to contemporary ones as follows:

- **Dictionarium Linguae Thai** was compiled in four languages (Thai, Latin, French, English) by Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix and published in AD 1854 (BE 2397).
- **Dictionary of the Siamese Language** is a monolingual Thai dictionary compiled by Dan Beach Bradley and published in AD 1873 (BE 2416).
- **Siamese French English Dictionary** is a trilingual dictionary (Thai, French, English) that was adapted from **Dictionarium Linguae Thai**, which Pallegoix compiled, and which was revised by Jean-Louis Vey and published in AD 1896 (BE 2439).
- **Thai Dictionary** by the Department of Textbooks under the Ministry of Public Instruction (equivalent to the modern-day Ministry of Education) is a monolingual Thai dictionary published in AD 1927 (BE 2470).

- **Thai Royal Institute Dictionary (1950 edition)** is a monolingual Thai dictionary published in AD 1950 (BE 2493).
- **Thai Royal Institute Dictionary (1982 edition)** is a monolingual Thai dictionary published in AD 1982 (BE 2525).
- **Thai Royal Institute Dictionary (1999 edition)** is a monolingual Thai dictionary published in AD 2003 (BE 2546).
- **Thai Royal Institute Dictionary (2011 edition)** is a monolingual Thai dictionary published in AD 2013 (BE 2556).

In addition to the eight dictionaries, the present study also gathered data from the Vajirayana Digital Library, in particular from prose written throughout the timespan of the eight dictionaries. The Vajirayana Digital Library is a digital repository containing a wide variety of old texts written by people from all walks of life, including kings and members of the royal family and nobility, as well as texts on history and religion, reference books, fictional works, translations from other languages to Thai and so on.

The findings on /k^hū:/ from the gathered data can be summarized as follows:

First, the primary meaning of the word /k^hū:/ is the copula /k^hū:/ whose meaning is equivalent to ‘to be’ in English (as opposed to the *verb* /k^hū:/ in Thai regional dialects which will be discussed in the next section) as it is found in all eight dictionaries, while the most frequently encountered form of the word /k^hū:/ in the Vajirayana Digital Library is also the copula /k^hū:/.

Second, all eight dictionaries contained entries for /k^hū:/ and /k^hrū:/ which are differentiated in the following paragraphs.

In the past, **Dictionarium Linguae Thai** (Pallegoix, 1854: 317, 327) and **Siamese French English Dictionary** (Vey, 1896: 372, 385) indicate that the word /k^hū:/ had another form, namely /k^hrū:/. Both forms carry the meaning of ‘the question is,’ ‘that is,’ or ‘it is,’ which is likely equivalent to a copula or the verb ‘to be’ in English.

In **Dictionary of the Siamese Language** (Bradley, 1873: 107, 113), the word /k^hrū:/ is clearly defined as /k^hū:/ and has the meaning

of /pēn/ ‘to be,’ /mŭān/ ‘to resemble,’ /p^hḥ̄.dī:/ ‘well-fitting,’ /māj k^háp māj lŭām/, ‘neither too small nor too large.’⁵

In **Thai Dictionary** by the Department of Textbooks under the Ministry of Public Instruction (1927), differences between /k^hū:/ and /k^hrū:/ are manifest: /k^hū:/ is defined as /pēn/ ‘to be,’ /t^hāw.kàp/ ‘to be equal to,’ /mŭān (kàp)/ ‘to resemble,’ /dāj.kè:/ ‘namely;’ whereas /k^hrū:/ is defined as /p^hḥ̄.dī:/ ‘well-fitting,’ /māj k^háp māj lŭām/ ‘neither too small nor too large.’ The divergent meanings of /k^hū:/ and /k^hrū:/ can be found in all other dictionaries published after this.

In all editions of the **Thai Royal Institute Dictionary**, the latest one (2013) being in general use today, the word /k^hrū:/ is said to be the old word for /k^hū:/.

Third, the **Royal Institute Dictionary (2011 edition)** (2013), which is the latest edition that is used today, provides both current and obsolete definitions of the word /k^hū:/ in Modern Standard Thai.

In the **Royal Institute Dictionary (2011 edition)** (2013), the word /k^hū:/ is defined as /pēn/ ‘to be,’ /dāj.kè:/ ‘namely,’ /t^hāw.kàp/ ‘to be equal to,’ /mŭān kàp/ ‘to resemble.’

That the word /k^hū:/ has been defined as the copula /pēn/ shows how difficult it is to define a grammatical word that has lost almost all of its semantic content. The best way forward is seemingly to equate it with the word that is most similar to it in Thai.

Even though /k^hū:/ and /pēn/ are highly similar to each other, there are still some differences between them as laid out in section 2. With regard to the word /k^hū:/ with the meaning of /dāj.kè:/ ‘namely,’ it is likely to be a specificational copula according to Wongwattana’s analysis (2015) (see example (9b)), whereas the word /k^hū:/ with the meaning of /t^hāw.kàp/ ‘to be equal to’ is likely to be an equational copula (see example (9d)) since both /dāj.kè:/ and /t^hāw.kàp/ may substitute the copula in (9b) and (9d), respectively.

⁵ The meanings of ‘well-fitting’ and ‘neither too small nor too large’ of the word /k^hrū:/ deserve a closer look as our assumption is that they should be related to the meanings of ‘to be equal to’ and ‘to resemble.’ However, as this link falls outside of the scope of the present study, we recommend it for further study in the future.

As for the word /k^hū:/ with the meaning /mǔan (kàp)/ ‘to resemble,’ it is likely that this meaning has almost fully disappeared from Modern Standard Thai:

- (14) sàan t^hi: mī: tām.ruat p^hū:.t^hō:n nán
 part that have police provincial that
 hǎ: dāj k^hū: kǎn jà:ŋ t^hi: mī:
 look for RL resemble each other type that have
 kō:ŋ t^há?hǎ:n māj
 unit military NEG
 ‘Having a provincial police force is not the same as
 having a military unit.’

Example (14) was retrieved from an old document dated 1913 (BE 2456) (Government Savings Bank, 2002: 21). The word /k^hū:/ was a verb meaning ‘to resemble’ and could co-occur with the negation words /hǎ:/.../māj/ (which is equivalent to the negation word /māj/ in Modern Thai) (Royal Institute of Thailand, 2013: 1,330) as well as the auxiliary /dāj/.

In Standard Thai, the use of the word /k^hū:/ to mean ‘to resemble’ is now considered rare, perhaps found among particular groups of speakers such as the elderly, or in the form of fixed expressions like /k^hū:.kǎn/ or /k^hū:.k^hū:.kǎn/, which as a whole convey the meaning of ‘the same.’ Nowadays, the word /mǔan/ is used instead to mean ‘to resemble.’ Nevertheless, the word /k^hū:/ with the meaning of ‘to resemble’ is more often regarded as a word used in Thai regional dialects than in Standard Thai, as we shall see in the following section.

2. The word /k^hū:/ in Thai regional dialects

To assist with finding out the meaning of old words found in old texts that are now obsolete in Central Thai or Standard Thai, one can look to other Thai regional dialects that still use those words. There have been many instances where old words that have fallen into disuse in Central Thai have had their meanings recovered by looking at the regional dialects that still used them. For example, the word /lùak/ ‘to be clever’ found in the King Ram Khamhaeng Inscription of AD 1292

(BE 1835) is now obsolete in Central Thai, but is still being used in Northern Thai and Northeastern Thai (Punthok, 1983: 133-134; Na Nagara, 2002: 186-187).

The word /k^hū:/ ‘to resemble’ in (14) has almost completely disappeared from Modern Standard Thai, but is still in current use, especially in Northeastern Thai.

The Northeastern Thai data analyzed in the present study was gathered from two sources, namely 1) native Northeastern Thais, and 2) Trongdee’s (2011)⁶ research, **A Grammar of Northeastern Thai**. Examples of the word /k^hū:/ with the meaning ‘to resemble’ as used in Northeastern Thai are as follows⁷:

- (15) cǎw.bà:w nǎ:.tā: k^hū: cǎw.sǎ:w
 groom appearance resemble bride
 ‘The groom’s appearance resembles the bride.’
- (16) rǔaŋ ní: bò: k^hū: cǎŋ rǔaŋ nán
 matter this NEG resemble like matter that
 ‘This matter is not the same as that matter.’
- (17) bǒn ní: kǎ? jǎŋ k^hū: kǎw
 place this somehow still resemble as before
 ‘This place somehow still looks the same.’
- (18) ?ǎ:j hák cǎw k^hū: kǎw
 I love you resemble as before
 ‘I love you the same.’

The word /k^hū:/ in examples (15) to (17) is a verb meaning ‘to resemble.’ The equivalent word in Standard Thai would not have been /k^hū:/, but rather /mǔan/. Also, syntactically speaking, we find that the word /k^hū:/ in (16) and (17) can also co-occur with the negation word /bò:/ and the auxiliary /jǎŋ/.

⁶ The word /k^hū:/ in Northeastern Thai has many meanings and functions. It would be interesting to find out how these meanings and functions are related to one another, or if this is just a case of homonymy. See Trongdee (2011: 238-244) for more details.

⁷ The tonal markings for Northeastern Thai examples may not fully reflect their actual phonetic realizations, as they are primarily based on their Standard Thai cognates.

As for (18), the word /k^hū:/ also means ‘to resemble,’ but it could be interpreted as the second verb in the serial-verb construction /hák/.../k^hū:/ or as a compound word /k^hū: kàw/.

3. Development of the Thai copula /k^hū:/

Based on the analysis of the word /k^hū:/ in Central Thai from past to present and in Northeastern Thai, we propose the following grammaticalization path for the copula /k^hū:/:

verb /k^hū:/ ‘to resemble’ > copula /k^hū:/

The above grammaticalization path aligns well with the theory of grammaticalization: the verb /k^hū:/ with the lexical meaning of ‘to resemble’ underwent desemanticization to become the copula /k^hū:/ which has lost its lexical meaning or no longer has a clear lexical meaning. In other words, the word /k^hū:/ has gone from being a less grammatical word to a more grammatical word.

More strikingly, the verb /k^hū:/ meaning ‘to resemble’ has also seemingly undergone decategorialization since previously it could co-occur with negation words and auxiliaries and also occur in serial-verb constructions as in examples (14), (16), (17) and (18), but the copula /k^hū:/ can no longer do so as seen in (7a) and (7b).

Hopper (1991: 22-33) states that one of the five principles of grammaticalization is “persistence” in which a new, more grammatical word still possesses traces of its original meaning or has not fully lost its original meaning yet. An example would be the title, Mrs., in English whose use is reserved for females only since it was derived from the noun ‘mistress.’

In the case of /k^hū:/, it still retains its original meaning of ‘to resemble,’ causing the pre-copula and post-copula noun phrases to be syntactically equivalent and interchangeable, as in (1b), (2b), (12a) and (12b).

From what has been discussed in this section, it appears that the copula /k^hū:/ has not yet undergone grammaticalization fully since there remain traces of its original meaning of ‘to resemble.’ This is a crucial piece of evidence that confirms that the copula /k^hū:/ developed from the verb /k^hū:/ meaning ‘to resemble.’

Grammaticalization of the Thai copulas /pēn/ and /k^hū:/

When comparing the grammaticalization of both Thai copulas /pēn/ and /k^hū:/, some similarities and differences arise as follows:

1. Both the Thai copulas /pēn/ and /k^hū:/ underwent desemanticization

As to why both copulas /pēn/ and /k^hū:/ are so similar to each other, this could be because both underwent desemanticization in which their distinctive lexical content has almost completely disappeared, causing them to be indistinguishable to the point that even Thai native speakers find it difficult to explain how they are different.

2. The Thai copula /k^hū:/ is more grammatical than the copula /pēn/

Even though both copulas /pēn/ and /k^hū:/ are usually put in the same group, they do not necessarily have the same etymology. As seen above, both copulas have undergone their own different grammaticalization paths, hence they have different degrees of grammaticalness, the copula /k^hū:/ being more grammatical than the copula /pēn/ for the following reasons.

First, the Thai copula /k^hū:/ originated from the verb meaning ‘to resemble’ and this meaning has almost been completely lost in Modern Standard Thai, whereas the Thai copula /pēn/ originated from the verb meaning ‘to be alive’ and this meaning is still in use in Modern Standard Thai (Jarajjarungkiat, 2012: 307, 439).

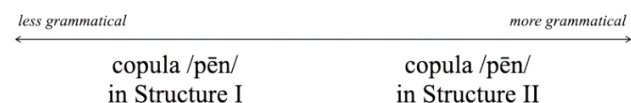
Hopper and Traugott (2003: 49, 67) postulate that a word will change from an older form to a newer form following the schematic below.

$$A > \left\{ \begin{array}{c} B \\ A \end{array} \right\} > B$$

A is the older form of the word whereas B is the newer form. The above schematic shows that there is an intermediary stage where both A and B can co-exist, which Hopper (1991: 22-23) describes as

with negation words and auxiliaries. However, the copula /pēn/ is considered more grammatical than typical verbs since it has lost its lexical meaning while still retaining its verbal morphosyntactic properties. Therefore, the copula /pēn/ can still be classified as a “verb.” On the other hand, the copula /kʰū:/ is regarded as highly grammatical due to significant loss of both lexical meaning and verbal morphosyntactic properties. Consequently, categorizing the copula /kʰū:/ as a “verb” appears debatable.

For the word /pēn/, when considering its occurrence in different constructions (i.e., Structure I [NP + /pēn/ + NP] and Structure II [NP + VP + /pēn/ + NP]), we find that the word /pēn/ is less grammatical in Structure I than in Structure II as follows:



This can be explained by the fact that /pēn/ occurs as the sole main verb in Structure I, where its verb status is evident since a sentence generally requires a verb. However, in Structure II, where /pēn/ co-occurs with other verbs, its verb status becomes less apparent, leading to a more grammatical interpretation of it as a preposition. In other words, the word /pēn/ in Structure II is still undergoing the process of grammaticalization from a verb to a preposition (Intratat, 1996).

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