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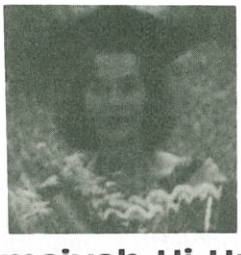
THAI-ENGLISH HYBRID LEXICAL FORMATION : IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS



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This paper is an exploratory investigation of one unique development in the Thai lexicon, i.e., the adaptation of English words into Thai to express some Thai concepts. This lexical innovation process manifests a combination of English and Thai words to form some culture bound idiomatic expressions.

Hybrid native creations in this study consist of at least a single native Thai word and English loanword which, unlike the loanblends, do not have English but Thai as a structural model. Hybrid creations arise when languages come into contact and give evidence of intimate fusion of the borrowed material and the borrowing

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language.

Thai-English hybrid creations demonstrate the rich resources of Thai lexical expansion process that range from the simple addition of a classifier to a loanword to the exploitation of metaphors in idiom formation in just the category of simple compound.

However, most of the Thai-idiomatic expressions which are hybrid native creations fall into two main categories i.e. :-

1. Simple compound
2. Semi compound

1. Simple Compound

Hybrid creations that have the structure of simple compound consist of a single word serving as classifier and a single lexical item, which could be a word or a loan compound, serving as specifier.

Example :-

/to[4]	ka : fae :/
table	coffee
(N)	(N)

'any place (setting) where people gather and talk informally' (an extension from the table Where people talk over a cup of coffee.)

2. Semi Compound

The identification of Semi Compound as a single lexical item in Thai is difficult as Semi Compound consists of a verb followed by a noun. This makes the Semi Compound look like a regular verb phrase consisting of a verb and a noun that functions as the direct object of the verb. The difference between the Semi Compound and the regular verb phrase is that the verb in the Semi compound is not complete in sense without the nominative following it even when the verb is in isolation. This incompleteness in meaning is not the same as the incompleteness of a transitive verb without a direct object when it is in use in a sentence, for there are transitive verbs in Thai like /bo : rica[2] : K/ 'to donate' or /kamca[2]t/ 'to rid' that are meaningful and do not convey a sense of incompleteness when they are not used in sentences.

What is happening in Semi Compound seems to be the incorporation of the noun into the verb for the verb to gain meaning in isolation.

Examples :-

4 /plik	4 lɒk/
turn	lock
(V)	(N)

(It refers to an expected state of affair which does not come through.)

The two types of compounds can be further divided into

1. Key Concept Foregrounding
2. Metaphor Exploitation

The difference between the two sub-types is that in Key Concept Foregrounding, the words in the idiomatic expression still come into play in one way or another whereas in Metaphor Exploitation the meaning of the words goes beyond the referent and its meaning does not refer to the original words that make up the expression, it is totally metaphoric.

1. Key Concept Foregrounding in Simple Compound

The stimuli for lexical innovation in this category are not English words or expressions. Rather they are socio-cultural practices, material objects and such things. They are things Thai but involve something foreign or modern. The lexical processes involve the selection of key concepts in practice or action or key features of an object and have them represent arbitrarily an element in that practice.

Examples :-

1

4 /to	ka : fae :/
table	coffee
(N)	(N)

'any place (setting) where people gather and talk informally' (an extension from 'the table where people talk over a cup of coffee.)

Thai Lexical Item	Structure	Stimulus Type	Process
4 /to ka : fae : /N-N/		The modern activity of people talking over a cup of coffee	A Thai word referring to the setting of the gathering where people gather to talk (a **table** is designated as classifier) and a key word in what they do (drinking **coffee** as specifier). The specifier stands as a metaphor for the activity of people gathering informally to talk.
2.	5 /hu : a head (N)		**piŋpoŋ**/ pingpong (table tennis bell) (N)

'policeman' (the innovation is descriptive of the policeman's helmet).

Thai Lexical Item	Structure	Stimulus Type	Process
5 /hu : a **piŋpoŋ**/	N-N	concrete referent	A circumlocution descriptive of the appearance of the referent, the classifier (Head of compound) points to a part of the body (the head) and the supposed specifier is expressing of the appearance of what is worn on that part of the body. The specifier does not really modify nor specify the head.

2. Metaphor Exploitation in Simple Compound

Like the previous category, the stimuli for lexical innovation in the lexical process called Metaphor Exploitation are not English words or expressions. They are local situations, practices, and events. But as in Key Concept Foregrounding, the situations and events are modern in Thai culture. The lexical process here involves imaging, the exploitation of a metaphor. A situation is likened into something concrete which, in turn, encapsulates the idea of the situation. The concrete becomes a metaphore of the situation. For example, a game /ke : m/ in sports has bounds and rules. The word /ke : m/ serves as a metaphor for a situation with activities and duties bounded by rules. The activity of keeping in check one's emotion or one's volition is also metaphorized by another established loanword, i.e. the word, brake /brék/.[2] The lexical process involves taking an established loanword to stand as metaphor and making it serve either as classifier or specifier. An additional item is chosen to make the image clearer. The result is an idiom,

Examples :-

3.	/kà : n out of bounds	**ke : m**/ game

Idiomatically, 'going beyond the bounds of one's responsibility'.

Thai Lexical Item	Structure	Stimulus Type	Process
/kà : n **ke : m**/	Adj-N	concept descriptive of an activity (com-	key word/kà:n/ is translated and designated

			plex phrase)	as head while an established loan /ke:m/ 'game' stands as a metaphor for the activities with rules and designated as the attributive word of the innovation.

4. /**bre : K** (2) brake (N) - tae̋ : k/ (2) broken (V)

Literally, 'the brake is broken'; Idiomatically, the expression refers to the release of pent-up anger or dissatisfaction.

5. /**not** (4) knot (N) lut/ (2) untie (V)

Literally, the expression means 'the knot 'unties'. Idiomatically, it means 'the break down of tolerance for someone or something intensely disliked.

Thai Lexical Item	Structure	Stimulus Type	Process
/**bre̋ : k** (2) tae̋ : k/	N-V	concept (complex phrase)	The concept is metaphorized after which the metaphor is expressed literally, using a combination of Thai and English.
/**not** (4) lut (2)/	N-V	concept (complex phrase)	Same process as in 4.

1. Key Concept Foregrounding in Semi Compound

At a cursory glance, the stimuli for some lexical innovations in this category seem to be English verb phrases with simple importation and substitution operative at once. A closer examination, however, indicates native creation as the more likely general lexical process with a non-linguistic activity as the stimuli. An established loanword and a native term are combined to capture the key ideas in the situation and present an abbreviated description of the activity.

Examples :-

6. /khaw (3) enter (V) **flɔ : /** floor (N)

'to dance' (in a club or discotheque).

Thai Lexical Item	Structure	Stimulus Type	Process
/khaw (3) **flɔ : /**	V-N	a modern/ Western activity	Noun incorporation (the construction seems to have been innovated to differentiate it from a traditional one which is encoded in a native word). The innovation reflects the difference in place where the activity is held and the starting point of the activity.

2. Metaphor Exploitation in Semi Compound

Similar to the Key Concept Foregrounding in Semi Compound category, the lexical process named here as Metaphor Exploitation is stimulated by local situations and not English expressions. As in simple compound, the specific lexical process here involves the exploitation of a metaphor encoded by an established loanword, Such loans as /ke:m/ 'game', /lok/ (4) 'lock' ,and /bre̋:k/ (2) 'brake' are usually used as metaphors with the specific sense differentiated and made clearer

by the addition of an indigenous verb.

Examples :-

7.	*4* /plik	*4* **lɔk/**
	turn	*lock*
	(V)	*(N)*

'an expected state of affair does not come through

8.	*3* /khaw	*4* **lɔk/**
	enter	*lock*
	(V)	*(N)*

'to hit the target or to get something right'.

9.	*3* /kae :	**ke : m/**
	correct	*game*
	(V)	*(N)*

'to check one's behaviour in order to regain credibility from the public'.

10.	/dən	**ke : m/**
	walk	*game*
	(V)	*(N)*

'to manoeuvre politics or to manipulate the situation (metaphor is a game of chess) in order to win in a political battle or in any contest. This is equivalent to English 'political manoeuvre'

As mentioned in the beginning, this study has been an exploratory one. It has been found that several English words have been transferred into the Thai language. The borrowing did not take place recently. These English loans are established words in Thai. However, their meanings and use in Thai idioms have been extended to such an extent that they are completely divorced from the original English meaning. As such, the idiomatic expressions characterized by key concept foregrounding and metaphorizing can only be classified as hybrid native creations, as these idiomatic expressions do not exist in the English language.

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