

A Comparison of Grammaticalization in Shan and Thai

การเปรียบเทียบการกลายเป็นคำไวยากรณ์ในภาษาไทใหญ่และภาษาไทย

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Abstract

The Thai language has been the subject of much grammaticalization research but, more information about grammaticalization in other Tai languages is needed. This study addresses this need, by investigating synchronic language corpora created to compare grammatical elements of Thai and Shan. The corpora for both languages were the result of a video elicitation method (Post 2007) that controlled the genre of the texts within the corpora. It was found that the possessive marker *k^hว้วη* appears to be more deeply grammaticalized within Thai than Shan. Both languages were found to have similar frequencies for the multi-functional morpheme *thii*. Differences in some verbal auxiliaries also imply different influences in respect to areal borrowing.

Keywords: Shan, Thai, grammaticalization

บทคัดย่อ

ภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาหนึ่งที่มีงานวิจัยในด้านการกลายเป็นคำไวยากรณ์เป็นจำนวนมาก แต่การศึกษาเกี่ยวกับการกลายเป็นคำไวยากรณ์ในภาษาตระกูลไทภาษาอื่นๆ ยังมีไม่มากนัก ผู้วิจัยเล็งเห็นถึงความสำคัญนี้ จึงศึกษาความแตกต่างขององค์ประกอบไวยากรณ์ในภาษาไทยและภาษาไทใหญ่ โดยใช้วิธีเก็บข้อมูลจากคลังข้อมูลของทั้งสองภาษาจากวีดิทัศน์ (Post 2007) ซึ่งมีการควบคุมชนิดของตัวบทในคลังข้อมูล ผลการศึกษาพบว่า คำว่า “ของ” ซึ่งเป็นคำแสดงความเป็นเจ้าของในภาษาไทยมีการกลายเป็นคำไวยากรณ์ที่ซับซ้อนมากขึ้นมากกว่าภาษาไทใหญ่ นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่า ทั้งสองภาษามีการใช้คำว่า “ที่” ซึ่งเป็นคำหลายหน้าที่ในความถี่ที่ใกล้เคียงกันและมีการใช้คำกริยาช่วยบางคำแตกต่างกันซึ่งอาจจะเป็นผลมาจากการยืมคำนั่นเอง

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาไทใหญ่ ภาษาไทย การกลายเป็นคำไวยากรณ์

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1. Introduction

Grammaticalization, the process by which lexemes come to serve grammatical functions, provides many insights into the historical origins and processes of language. Of Southeast Asian languages, the Thai language has been the focus of much grammaticalization research. A main reason being the existence of a Thai corpus containing data dating back to the Sukothai period (13th Century A.D.) which allows for the investigation of historical language development. Yet, to better frame historical developments of grammar within Tai languages and the nature of Proto-Tai, more information about grammaticalization in dialects besides Standard Thai is needed. This study addresses the need by investigating grammaticalization in the language of Shan. After identifying which Thai grammaticalizations were also present in Shan, this study used a synchronic language corpora to make a comparison of grammatical elements. The corpora for both languages were the result of a video elicitation method (Post, 2007) that controlled the genre of the texts. After cognate and analogous grammatical markers in Shan was ascertained, the corpora were analyzed for the frequency of specific grammaticalized morphemes. The aim being to compare the use and frequency of grammatical morphemes in Shan and Thai. From this analysis, it was found that possessive marker *k^h๖๖๗* appears to be more deeply grammaticalized within Thai relative to Shan. Both languages were found to have similar frequencies for the multi-functional morpheme *thii*. Differences in some pre-verbal TAM (Tense, Aspect and Modal) markers also hint to different influences in respect to areal borrowing. From these results, the researcher concluded that Shan differs from Thai in regards to grammaticalization, and that further investigation may provide significant information on the nature of Proto-Tai.

2. Literature review

Shan also known as “Tai Yai” is a language of Shan State, Myanmar. It is in the Southwestern branch of the Tai-Kadai family with 3,295,000 speakers (Lewis et al. , 2015) , of which approximately 150,000 reside in Northern Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia. Shan shares a large percentage of cognate vocabulary with other Tai languages, with variations often due to differing phonological systems (see Li, 1977). Studies in comparative Tai frequently focus on issues of phonology such as differences in tone quality and

distribution, and from these differences make inferences as to the structure of early Proto-Tai (Pittayaporn, 2009). Given all the progress made in comparative phonology of Tai languages, it seems there has been a lack of comparative Tai research regarding grammar. Absence of comparative grammatical research in this area is perhaps due to a general similarity of grammatical features across dialects and languages, and a perceived lack of explicit grammatical marking in Tai languages.

However in accounting for grammatical functions of certain morphemes in Thai, the theoretical framework of grammaticalization has provided insight into how these grammatical functions develop (Thepkanjana and Uehara 2008; Kulavanijaya, 2008; Takahashi, 2012). Hopper and Traugott define grammaticalization as “the change whereby lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions” (1993:1). But for grammaticalization to give insight into the history of Thai, theoretical issues regarding grammaticalization have been raised. Diller (2001) holds that linguistic typology is a factor in investigating grammaticalization principles, so that for isolating languages like Thai instances of grammaticalization won’t likely appear as they do in inflecting languages. For the ideas of grammaticalization to be useful in Tai languages he thinks we must look at examples of diachronic change that show “the production of the type of abstract functional linguistic relationships typically associated with closed classes or inflectional affixes” (p.141). Bisang (2004; 2008) also points out problems some theories of grammaticalization face in the case of East and mainland South-East Asian Languages (SEAL). He sees challenges for grammaticalization theory in SEAL when it comes to the aspect of “the coevolution of meaning and form”. In essence, morphemes that sit on the boundary of grammatical and lexical classes and shared areal features throughout the region, provide ambiguities that expand ideas on what constitutes grammaticalization. An example being the areal significance of ‘acquire’ words in SEAL, which has been covered by Enfield (2004). Enfield sees grammaticalization in SEAL as related to both issues of areal and genetic inheritance of grammatical morphemes. To explain the situation in Southeast Asia he says many languages may have a ‘typological poise’ that prepares them to borrow features that would fit within their syntax. This means for researchers to account for historical changes in linguistic meaning and structure, they need to show “the bridging contexts” where a pragmatic inference leads to a syntactical reinterpretation.

Despite these theoretical concerns, the Thai language has been one of the most studied Southeast Asian languages in regards to grammaticalization. This may be due to the existence of historical corpuses with data dating back over 700 years which allows for diachronic comparisons. Grammaticalization research is strongly dependent on historical linguistics especially in comparative syntax that tracks the semantic shift of individual words, as well as their syntactic behavior. Many studies in Thai have done just that by making use of diachronic corpuses to explore grammaticalization, such as Chamniyom, (2003), Kulavanijaya (2008), Meesat (1997). It is from this research that a list of Thai grammaticalized morphemes continues to grow.

However, for a language like Shan, we lack a historical corpus from which to investigate grammaticalization. But with the use of synchronic research methods, there is the potential for insight. Based on our knowledge of Thai grammaticalization, we can use a comparison of the two languages as the grounds for research. One approach is to apply of usage-based approaches to measure the frequency of types of grammatical marking in two languages. This requires comparable corpuses for each of the languages. Yet without the time and resources to compile a large Shan corpus, we can justify the use of a smaller corpuses, by controlling for the genre of the texts. Post (2007) created corpora by having two groups respond to the same film, for the purpose of comparing relative levels of grammaticalization in Thai and Chinese. By using a text-frequency approach, he compared grammaticalization and compounding in Thai and Chinese. Post's logic in this study is that even though claims of grammaticalization are ultimately historical in nature - and thus a common approach is to use historical texts - a synchronic quantitative method can be used, which then leads to a diachronic inference. This is also advantageous in that historical approaches that compare modern day corpora with ancient transcriptions may represent two different styles that may have a different kind of language use. Post clarifies that in this type of analysis there is no such thing as a "frequency threshold" for something being grammatical, but that frequency can measure relative depth of grammaticalization between two languages.

A second approach to studying grammaticalization in Shan is to see how many "grams" (grammatical morphemes) from Thai are shared with Shan. This investigation could be done through a more straightforward approach by eliciting specific grammatical functions to see whether or not Shan shares particular grams with Thai. Essentially both of

these approaches use the insights made into grammaticalization in Thai to look for similar features in Shan.

Using grammaticalization for comparative Tai research might prove interesting for the following reasons. It would bring attention to grammatical structure in lesser known Tai languages, as well as further investigation into grammaticalization by comparing closely related languages within a single language family. Even though Shan and Thai may have many similarities grammatically, differences should be noted, and grammaticalization can help to target where (and possibly why) these differences occur. Eventually, with results of this study and development of the methods, this type of research could be expanded to encompass several Tai dialects and help in the exploration of Proto-Tai.

3. Objectives

To investigate grammaticalization in Shan and Thai this study had the following 2 objectives :

(1) Identify the extent to which Shan shares specific grammaticalized morphemes and constructions with Thai (See Diller 2001 and Diller et al 2008 for Thai grams)

(2) Compare frequency of analogous grammatical morphemes in a body of Thai and Shan texts for the following functions

-Morphemes used in noun phrase syntax

-Classifiers used in quantifying constructions and as deictics with attention to specificity or generality of classifiers used

-Verbal phrase syntax

4. Methodology

To address the needs of objective 1, information about specific grammatical markers in Shan was needed. First, the researcher compiled a list of sentences displaying specific functions of grammaticalized morphemes in Thai. These sentences based off previous research into grammaticalization, and examples within those papers. This allowed direct language elicitations to target Shan cognates and analogous forms corresponding to over 40 Thai grammatical markers. The researcher conducted these elicitations with 3 Shan speakers who were also bilingual in Thai. The speakers were all males; 2 were in their early thirties and the other was 60. They were all from Southern Shan State, but are currently

living in Northern Thailand. During the elicitations the Shan speakers were asked to produce equivalent sentences in Shan based off of the Thai examples. The researcher then took note of similarities and differences between the languages. This allowed for a comparison of grammatical markers that not only provided information for examination of the corpus for objective 2, but also provided interesting insights into some differences between Shan and Thai.

To create the corpus, texts were collected using a video elicitation method. The methodology here is modeled after Post (2007) who compared grammaticalization in Thai and Chinese. Post (2007) begins construction of a corpus by first showing a short film titled “The Pear Story” to participants. The viewer of the film then relates what happened in the film to another native-speaker of the language who has not seen the film. This process was repeated with eight different speakers for each language, and audio recordings are made for each of the sessions. Each recording was then transcribed and glossed for entry into the corpus. The researcher for this study only recorded the texts for the 8 Shan speakers (3 females and 5 males ages ranging 20-40) who were living in Northern Thailand at the time of the recording sessions. These were not the same Shan speakers used for objective 1. The Thai texts come from Mark Post who personally allowed the researcher to reuse data from Post (2007).

With the texts entered into a corpus the next step was to target grammatical morphemes related to specific functions as outlined in objective (2), and compare frequency of analogous grammatical morphemes in Shan and Thai. The researcher noted patterns of usage of specific gram types and tokens for the grammatical contexts outlined in objective (2).

5. Results

This section provides some findings from the elicitations and comparison of the corpora. The elicitations first brought out differences regarding which of the Thai grammaticalizations Shan shared, in addition to some differences in verbal phrase syntax. The findings from the corpora contrast aspects of possession and relativization in noun phrases and the usage of the classifier *ǎn*.

In comparing Thai grams with Shan for objective 1, it was found that the cognate morphemes were used for several similar functions, but the two languages displayed some phonological variation. In Table (1) we see the results of a comparison of 5 Thai grammaticalizations. While phonologically different, these grams can be considered cognates by understanding the differences of each language's phonological system.

Table 1 Shared Grammatical Morphemes

Shan	Thai
ʔaŋ 'take'	ʔaŋ 'take'
jù 'to reside'	jù 'to reside'
laĵ 'able'	daĵ 'able'
jɛ̃w 'finish'	lɛ̃w 'finish'
tĩ 'relativizer'	thii 'relativizer'

Findings regarding objective (1) also revealed there are Shan grams which are not obviously cognate with the Thai grammaticalizations. In Table 2 we see some of the differences in grammatical morphemes between the two languages. Under the Shan column are morphemes which are not cognate with the corresponding Thai grammaticalizations. Yet, the Shan grams were found to have similar grammatical functions to their Thai counterpart and for the purpose of this study were considered to be analogous grammatical morphemes.

Table 2 Analogous Grammatical Morphemes

Shan	Thai
tẽ 'irrealis'	cà 'irrealis'
pañ 'to give'	haĵ 'to give'
tûk 'aspect'	kāmlaĵ 'aspect'
tá.ĵ 'nominalizer'	khwaām- 'nominalizer'
mǔ 'nominalizer'	nák- 'nominalizer'

To see differences in how these grams are used, we can see how some of the morphemes in Tables 1 and 2 are used in pre-verbal marking of aspect and modality. The following examples in sets A and B contrast some differences in Shan and Thai. In set A we see near-future aspectual marking for both languages. The construction for both of these languages follows the form [[CONT + IRR] V], but both languages use non-cognate morphemes to complete this construction.

(Thai)	<i>chaŋ</i>	<i>kāmlā</i>	<i>cà</i>	<i>kīn</i>	<i>khǎw</i>	(Shan)	<i>háv</i>	<i>tûk</i>	<i>tě</i>	<i>kīn</i>	<i>khǎw</i>
		η									
	1sg	CONT	IRR	eat	rice		1sg	CONT	IRR	eat	rice
	“I’m about to eat rice”						“I’m about to eat rice”				

Figure 1 Thai and Shan pre-verbal marking set A

In Set B we see a more distinct difference in how pre-verbal modal modification differs for Shan and Thai. The Thai example shows use of a single morpheme, which is grammaticalized from a Khmer verb (this is also the case with the *kāmlāη* ‘CONT’ in Set A), but the Shan example in set B makes use of a construction that uses two other grams. In Set B *laj̄* ‘able’ (from Table 1) as well as the other grammatical marker *tě* IRR are used for the purpose of marking deontic modality within Shan.

(Thai)	<i>chaŋ</i>	<i>t̚ŋ</i>	<i>kīn</i>	<i>khǎw</i>	(Shan)	<i>háv</i>	<i>lò</i>	<i>lāi</i>	<i>kīn</i>	<i>khǎw</i>
	1sg	MOD	<i>eat</i>	rice		1sg	MOD	<i>able</i>	<i>eat</i>	rice
		‘must’					‘must’			
	“I must eat rice”					“I must eat rice”				

Figure 2 Thai and Shan pre-verbal marking set B

In addressing objective 2, aspects of noun phrase syntax in the corpora were looked at. A noticeable difference was the marking of possession in the two languages. In Thai the possessive marker *k^hǎwŋ* is grammaticalized from a noun meaning ‘thing’. It is commonly found in a possessive construction [[N Possessed] *k^hǎwŋ* N Possessor]]. An example of this construction from the Thai corpus is shown in example (1)

(1)	<i>mùak</i>	<i>k^hǎwŋ</i>	<i>dèk</i>	<i>phúuchāj</i>	<i>khon</i>	<i>nī</i>	<i>tòk</i>
		<i>ŋ</i>					
	hat	POSS	child	male	person	this	fall

“The (this one) boy’s hat fell”

Overall, *k^hǎwŋ* was found to have a frequency of 0.3% in the Thai corpus with a mean 2.3 mentions per text. This is contrasted by a complete lack of an explicit possession morpheme in the Shan corpus. Shan possessive NPs instead relied on word order to mark possession. These noun phrases were found to take the form of [[N Possessed]] N Possessor]]. An example from the Shan corpus is shown in (2)

(2)	<i>hǎñ</i>	<i>mɔ̌k</i>	<i>hǒ</i>	<i>āj</i>	<i>tī̄</i>	<i>ǎñ</i>	<i>ǎw</i>	<i>mà:k</i>	<i>māj</i>
	see	hat		boy	REL	CLF	take		fruit

“(They) saw the hat of the boy who took the fruit”

Next regarding objective 2, the multi-functional morpheme *thīi* (note the unaspirated Shan form *tī̄*) was examined. In Kulavanijaya (2008) the Thai noun *thīi* ‘place’ is shown to have gone through several stages of grammaticalization to become one of the most frequently used words in Thai, having up to nine functions. One common function is that of a relativizer. For the purposes of this paper a simple frequency was looked for between the two languages. It was found that Thai and Shan

both use *thii* at a similar rate that of (*thii* = Thai 1.2% frequency, *tī* = Shan 1.3% frequency). An example that *tī* also functions as a relativizer in Shan can be seen in (2), where it is used to modify the noun *āj* ‘boy’.

Another finding from the corpus was the distinct usage of the morpheme *ǎn*. In Thai *ǎn* is used as a general classifier for inanimate objects. But the usages of *ǎn* in the two corpora showed a sharp difference both in frequency of appearance and how it was used. Within the Thai corpus there were only 5 tokens 3 of which appeared in Numerical classifier constructions. The Shan corpus had 29 tokens including just 3 Numerical classifier constructions. The remaining usages -and noticeable difference - come in the form of a Demonstrative Construction of [NOUN] [*ǎn*+DEM]. An example of this is shown in (3) where *ǎn* refers to a human subject.

(3)

ǎw mà:k mǎj pǎn kʰǎw nǎn sǎ:m kɔ̌ kón lűk ǎn nǎn

take fruit give them DEM 3 CLF people child CLF DEM

“(He) took some fruit and gave to the 3 people. Those kids (from earlier)”

Some additional findings were that Shan and Thai both showed similar usages of directional verbs both lexically and as success markers (grammaticalization of these is covered in Thepkanjana and Uehara, 2008). Also, the grammaticalized comparative morpheme *kwà* ‘to pass beyond’ in Thai still remains lexical (meaning ‘go’ in Shan, without the Thai grammaticalized function [verb ‘to go’] > [comparative], like in other Tai languages as mentioned in Diller (2001).

6. Discussion

The elicitations revealed that Shan and Thai do indeed share some of the same grammaticalized morphemes. The phonological variation of these morphemes can be seen as consistent with variation across other lexical cognates. As far as the differences on the pre-verbal modals, one hypothesis seems clear; Shan does not have grammaticalized Khmer loans. The Thai pre-verbal modals in Sets A, B, and are all grammaticalizations of Khmer loans. The example in Set A “near future” shows that both languages use the same construction $[[\text{CONT} + \text{IRR}] \text{ V}]$, yet each language’s near-future construction is comprised of different morphemes. Conceivably this construction is syntactically Tai, but Thai was able to supplant the morpheme choice with Khmer loans (see Enfield 2004’s typological poise). The Shan modal marker in Set B shows a construction that makes use of other grams. Perhaps most interesting here is that the morpheme *lò* in Set B may be a loan from Burmese. The status of the other morphemes in these examples is unknown, but the appearance of a Burmese loan in a context where Thai has borrowed from Khmer leaves us with some possible hypotheses or clues as to how Proto-Tai acquired some TAM markers. Other Thai pre-verbals from Khmer are not found within Shan. This is also the case with Thai’s nominalizer *nák-*. In the cases where Thai uses of the nominalizer *nák-*, Shan uses *mṵ* which is still lexical in Thai. It is well known that for centuries Thais were in contact with the Khmer civilization. The effects of this borrowing on Thai is even more apparent when we notice its lack in Shan. Shan speakers are located far more northerly, and did not acquire the Khmer loans for these grammatical functions.

The findings of the corpus showed that *k^hṵṵṇ* possessive is not used in Shan, as it is in Thai. While some Shan speakers may make use of it in a specific interrogative, in most NPs showing possession a construction based on word order is effective enough to communicate possession. It should be pointed out that this type of construction is also grammatically acceptable in Thai, but what we can take away from the corpus was that Thai speakers used an explicit possessive marker more often. This finding supports the idea of a deeper level of grammaticalization for *k^hṵṵṇ*.

The findings regarding *thii* show the similarities of the two languages here. Kullavanijaya (2008) intricately documents this morphemes grammatical evolution in Thai, but one could still asks whether Shan acquired these similar usages from Thai or whether this is a separate case of grammaticalization. To really address this question, a diachronic

study on Shan would need to be done. However within both Shan and Thai the grammaticalized function of a relativizer as well as a noun was found.

The *ǎn* deictic construction which was commonly found in the Shan corpus is unique first in its reference to human subjects. An interesting similarity here is also how Shan uses the third person singular pronoun *mán*. In Thai *mán* is used generally to refer to third person non-humans, but Shan does not seem to hold to the human/non-human distinction for *ǎn* and *mán*. A key idea in processes of grammaticalization is that as grams become more general they tend to become more abstract and are thus able to appear in new contexts, and likely to be seen more frequently Bybee (2003). That Shan *ǎn* and *mán* are more general in meaning and thus also allows them to appear in more grammatical environments or carry more grammatical weight.

7. Conclusion

Grammaticalization, the change of less grammatical items into more grammatical items, is a process that happens over long periods of time. By using the insights from diachronic research into Thai, the researcher was able to overcome the lack of historical data in Shan. This was done by using methods from Post (2007) and elicitations of specific grammatical functions in Shan. The results of the study showed that the possessive marker *khǎwŋ* is more deeply grammaticalized within Thai relative to Shan. Both languages have similar frequencies for the multi-functional morpheme *thii*. Differences in some pre-verbal TAM markers, as well as nominalizers, highlight different areal influences on these languages. From these results, the researcher concludes that Thai has more deeply grammaticalized modality and possession markers. However it is important to remember that the findings here only represent a relative level of grammaticalization. Claims of grammaticalization or lack thereof in Shan must ultimately be investigated with the aid of diachronic data. For this type of research to be expanded to other dialects the methods here should be developed. This type of research could be improved by increasing the numbers of texts and by better controlling for the backgrounds of the speakers. One recommendation would be to come up with a series of questions during the video elicitation to further control the linguistic content of the texts within the corpora.

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