

## **Beyond the paradigm: Change and expansion in Thai pronominal reference**

This paper examines the historical development of personal pronouns in Thai. Building on work examining etymology and evolving dictionary definitions of Thai pronouns beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Author xxx), this study expands its scope to all available pedagogical and reference materials about Thai, ranging from the 17th century to the mid-20th century. We show how the set of pronouns has expanded, and how both the denotative meanings and the social context of their usage has changed over the centuries.

Multiple synchronic studies have explored the social dimensions of Thai pronouns (Cooke 1965, Palakornkul 1972, Saisuwan 2016). Saisuwan, for example, theorizes pronoun selection along dimensions of formality, power, and social distance. Thai is notable for its lack of a single pronominal paradigm, or even set of paradigms; many options are available for every cell in a conventional pronoun paradigm, each with distinct socioindexical meaning. Lexical items that can behave pronominally in Thai include proper names, occupational titles, social status terms, and kinship terms, in addition to a rich assortment of ‘true’ pronouns, including both ones inherited from Proto-Tai and ones borrowed from Khmer, Pali, Chinese, and English.

Here we focus on materials produced for second-language learners of Thai, because they often provide more direct explanation of social dimensions of pronoun usage. Some primary material from early written Thai texts (13th-15th centuries) is also surveyed in order to help establish which terms were in use before European contact. Works in our survey include grammatical descriptions (*e.g.*, de La Loubere 1693, Low 1828, Buell 1840, Jones 1842, Pallegoix 1850, Noss 1954), dictionaries (*e.g.*, Jones 1833, Caswell 1846, Pallegoix 1854, Bradley 1873, Michell 1892, Hays 1894, Pallegoix and Vey 1896, Cartwright 1907, Virajbhakaya 1924, McFarland 1939, Haas 1947, 1964), textbooks and primers (*e.g.*, McFarland 1900, Frankfurter 1900, Cartwright 1906, Haas & Subhanka 1945, Noss 1964).

Reasons the history of Thai pronouns makes an interesting historical question include:

(1) A pronoun paradigm is robustly reconstructible for Proto-Tai, with reflexes across the full geographic spread of the Tai branch of the Kra-Dai family (Matsuyama 1962, Benedict 1975, Strecker 1984). This reconstructed paradigm has a three-way number distinction and three-way person distinction, plus clusivity distinction in the 1st person, and animacy distinction in the 3rd person. Thai retains just three of these in unmarked usage, indicating that Thai pronouns reflect relatively recent changes in the social structure of Thai society.

(2) Some facets of Thai pronominal usage beyond the paradigm are found cross-linguistically in Southeast Asia (*e.g.* Cooke 1965, comparing Thai, Burmese and Vietnamese). This indicates language contact as a major factor in the process of pronominal expansion, but we must also distinguish more recent areal phenomena from older ones.

Tracing changing social factors in the history of Thai pronoun usage helps us better understand how this kind of large typological shift can take place – from a closed pronoun paradigm to a relatively open system that relies heavily on situational context and awareness of one’s social relationship to everyone they interact with.

## **Selected references**

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