THE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN INDEFINITE PRONOUNS AND INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS IN THAI¹

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Abstract

This article aims to present a study of the distinctions between two types of pronouns in Thai: indefinite pronouns and interrogative pronouns, which are homophonous and homographic but different in function. The results of the study reveal that they can be distinguished both syntactically and semantically. Therefore, they can be classified into two word classes.

1. Introduction

Indefinite pronouns and interrogative pronouns show a language phenomenon that words with the same form, such as /khraj/, /ʔaraj/, /thiĩnǎj/, /m̄aràj/, /jàaŋraj/, and /thāwràj/, can function differently when occurring in different syntactic contexts. Some examples are:

(1) a. indefinite pronoun
nǎŋ rǎaŋ nǐ khraj duu kō
movie CL this who see ADV
dǎaŋ
can

‘Anyone can see this movie.’

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b. interrogative pronoun
nǎŋ rǎaŋ nǐ khraj dǎaŋ duu bǎaŋ
movie CL this who PAST see some
‘Who has seen this movie?’

(2) a. indefinite pronoun
phanākjaan khon nǐ khāw maa
employee CL this come
thamjaan tǎntēe m̄aràj
work since when
chǎn cam mǎj dǎaŋ lēew
I remember not can PAST
‘I can’t remember when this employee began working.’

b. interrogative pronoun
phanākjaan khon nǐ khāw maa
employee CL this come
thamjaan tǎntēe m̄aràj
work since when
‘From when was this employee employed?’

(3) a. indefinite pronoun
thāa ca tham ʔaraj khǒo hǎj
if will do what let
jǐt khwaamthùuktōŋ pen lāk
hold on rightness as principle
‘Whatever you do, you should abide by rightness.’

b. interrogative pronoun
thāa thamjaan kǎp khon camnuan
if work with people amount
māak khun jǐt ʔaraj pen
many you hold on what as
lāk
principle
‘If you work with many people, by what principle do you abide?’

From the above examples, /khraj/, /m̄aràj/, /ʔaraj/ have the same form but differ in function, i.e., interrogative pronouns request information from the addressee, such as /khraj/ asking about a person, /m̄aràj/ about time, and /ʔaraj/ about a thing. Indefinite pronouns, on the other hand, do not signify a question.

Both pronouns share the same meaning of indefiniteness and seem as if they cannot be absolutely distinguished. Yet, they are recognized by native speakers as separate words. The researcher, therefore wanted to study the distinctions between these two types of pronouns.

2. The aim of the study

This article aims to present a study of the distinctions between the indefinite pronouns and interrogative pronouns that have the same form with the hypothesis that they can be classified into two word classes. The study consisted of 3 stages. The first was to search for words that have the aforementioned characteristics. The second was to investigate their context in order to infer both syntactic and semantic criteria to classify them into two word classes. The third was to identify each word in the data as to what class it belongs.

3. Sources of data

The data came from three sources: two novels, two books of general knowledge, and one general article, randomly picked from the CU electronic corpus. From the last corpus, 200 samples were taken.

4. The characteristics of indefinite and interrogative pronouns

Using data survey and literature review as guidelines, characteristics about these pronouns were designated:

- 4.1 consisting of a formal element /daj/ or /raj/
- 4.2 having indefinite meanings
- 4.3 occurring in the same position as nouns

4.4 functioning as nouns or noun complements

4.5 cannot be modified by adjectives

Based on the characteristics above, 25 homophonous and homographic pairs of indefinite and interrogative pronouns have been identified. They can be classified by meaning into 7 types as follows:

person	: phûudaj, khraj
thing	: prakaandaj, sîndaj, ?arai, kraraj
place	: năj, thîinăj, thîidaj
time	: mîadaj, mîaraj, mîaraj
manner	: jàanraj, janraj, raj, chëndaj, chênraj
amount or estimation	: thâwdaj, thâwraj, thâwràj, phianraj, phianraj, khêenăj
reason	: thammaj

Mostly, these words consist of 2 morphemes. The former is a free morpheme with the meaning about human knowledge which Haspelmath (1997) called the ontological category. The ontological category is divided into 7 sub-groups : person, thing, place, time, manner, amount and reason. In some languages, the member of sub-groups can be lesser or greater. The other word is a bound morpheme with the meaning of indefiniteness: /daj/ and /raj/. It was noticeable that some words have undergone certain changes and become monosyllabic such as /khraj/ (khon+raj) and /năj/ (hôn+raj); some with sound assimilation such as /janraj/ (jàan+raj) and /thammaj/ (tham+raj); some with sound attrition such as /?araj/ (?an+raj) and /kraraj/ (kaan+raj); and some with tonal changes such as /thâwràj/ (thâw+raj), and /mîaraj/ (mîa+raj).

5. Syntactic contexts of indefinite and interrogative pronouns

The researcher analyzed the 25 pairs of indefinite and interrogative pronouns in the sentential contexts to find out how different they were syntactically. Four criteria were used to separate these two types of pronouns.

5.1 Indefinite pronouns can occur with 3 types of noun modifier: numeral classifier, demonstrative modifier, and indefinite modifier. Interrogative pronouns, on the other hand, cannot occur in these contexts. Some examples are:

- (4) a. indefinite pronoun
pâa jàak ca phûut kâp
Auntie want speak with
khraj sâk khon nîj
who CL one
'Auntie would like to speak to someone.'
- b. interrogative pronoun
pâa jàak ca phûut kâp
Auntie want speak with
khraj
who
'To whom would Auntie like to speak?'

In example (4) a., /khraj/ is an indefinite pronoun that occurs before a numeral classifier, for example, /sâk khon nîj/, whereas in example (4) b., /khraj/ is an interrogative pronoun.

- (5) a. indefinite pronoun
khăw chōp rian ʔaraj thamnoŋ
He like learn what manner
nîi
this
'He likes to learn things like this.'
- b. interrogative pronoun
khăw chōp rian ʔaraj

He like learn what
'What did he enjoy studying?'

In example (5) a., /ʔaraj/ is an indefinite pronoun that occurs before a demonstrative phrase /thamnoŋ nîi/, whereas in example (5) b., /ʔaraj/ is an interrogative pronoun.

- (6) a. indefinite pronoun
samăj nîi ʔaraj tàaŋtâaŋ
period this what various
phátthanaa paj rûatreu mâak
develop quickly very
'At present, everything is quickly developed.'
- b. interrogative pronoun
samăj nîi ʔaraj phátthanaa paj
period this what develop
rûatreu mâak
quickly very
'At present, what is quickly developed?'

In example (6) a., /ʔaraj/ is an indefinite pronoun that occurs before an indefinite modifier /tàaŋtâaŋ/, whereas in example (6) b., /ʔaraj/ is an interrogative pronoun.

5.2 Indefinite pronouns can occur as an object of a negated predicate. Interrogative pronouns, on the other hand, cannot occur in such context. Examples are:

- (7) a. indefinite pronoun
măj phóp phû:daj naj thâm nán
not see who in cave that
lăj
at all
'(I) didn't see anyone in that cave.'
- b. interrogative pronoun
thâm phóp phû:daj naj thâm
you see who in cave
nán bāaŋ
that some
'Whom did you see in that cave?'

In example (7) a., /phû:daj/ is an indefinite pronoun occurs as an object of a negated predicate, /mâj phóp phû:daj/, whereas in example (7) b., /phû:daj/ is an interrogative pronoun and as seen in the sentence is not accepted if the predicate is negated.

5.3 Indefinite pronouns can occur in a yes-no question with /măj/, /rîi/, /rîiplàaw/. Interrogative pronouns, on the other hand, cannot occur in this context. Examples are given below:

(8) a. indefinite pronoun
hótđòk mii sîndaj kiàw khôn
hotdog have what relate
kâp mǎa rîiplàaw
to dog or not
'Is 'hotdog' related to dogs in anyway?'

b. interrogative pronoun
hótđòk mii sîndaj kiàw khôn
hotdog have what relate
kâp mǎa
to dog
'Is 'hotdog' related to dogs?'

In example (8) a., /sîndaj/ is an indefinite pronoun that occurs in a yes-no question with /rîiplàaw/, whereas example (8) b., with /sîndaj/ as an interrogative pronoun is already a question and obviously needs nothing more to make it so.

5.4 Indefinite pronouns can occur in a subordinate clause of a complex sentence as well as in a co-ordinate clause of a compound sentence. Interrogative pronouns, on the other hand, cannot occur in these contexts. Some examples are:

(9) a. indefinite pronoun
khraj thîi jaŋ mii panhǎa
who that still have problem

hǎj cêeŋ kromprachaasônkhro?
let inform The Public Welfare
Department

'Anyone who has a problem, inform
The Public Welfare Department'

b. interrogative pronoun
dèk thîi maa chǔaj raw sôn
the boy that come help us deliver
khǒŋ pen khraj
goods is who
'Who is the boy who helps us to deliver
the goods?.'

In example (9) a., /khraj/ is an indefinite pronoun occurring in a subordinate clause, whereas in example (9) b., /khraj/ is an interrogative pronoun occurring in a main clause.

(10) a. indefinite pronoun
thǎa puu sǎa lòn thîidaj thîi
if spread mat down where, place
nân pen ʔanacàk khǒŋ ton
that is territory of oneself
'Whenever one spreads his mat
anywhere, that place becomes his
territory.'

b. interrogative pronoun
thǎa ca damnənkān taam
if will implement according to
khósanǎo, ráthabaan ca nam
the proposal, government will bring
ŋóp-pramaan maa càak thîidaj
budget from where
'If it is implemented according to the
proposal, from where will the
government get this budget?'

In example (10) a., /thîidaj/ is an indefinite pronoun occurring in a co-ordinate clause of a compound sentence, whereas in example (10) b., /thîidaj/ is an interrogative pronoun occurring in a main clause.

6. Semantic contexts of indefinite and interrogative pronouns

The semantic properties of indefinite and interrogative pronouns were studied following Haspelmath (1997) and Lyons (1995). Four criteria were used to separate these two types of pronouns.

6.1 Specificity

The concept of specificity is a key concept in the semantics of reference. An expression is specific if the speaker presupposes the existence and unique identifiability of its reference. This criterion identifies interrogative pronouns from indefinite pronouns: the former occur in [+specific] context, while the latter occur in [± specific] context.

6.2 Knowledge of the speaker

This criterion identifies interrogative pronouns from indefinite pronouns: the former occur in the context [-known

to the speaker], while the latter occur in the context [± known to the speaker].

6.3 Negation

This criterion identifies interrogative pronouns from indefinite pronouns: the former occur in the context [-negation], while the latter occur in the context [± negation].

6.4 Request for information

This criterion applies only to interrogative pronouns. The communicative function of a question is to obtain information about facts relatively unknown to the speaker. This criterion identifies interrogative pronouns from indefinite pronouns: the former occur in the context [+request information], while the latter occur in the context [-request information].

From these 4 semantic criteria, indefinite pronouns and interrogative pronouns can be separated as seen in this chart:

The above chart shows 5 of contextual meaning. Interrogative pronouns can occur in only one context, while indefinite pronouns can occur in four contexts. We may thus specify the semantic features of interrogative pronouns with 3 features [+specific, -known to the speaker, +request information]. For indefinite pronouns, we have 2 to 3 semantic features:

context 1: consists of 2 features

[+specific, +known to the speaker]

context 2: consists of 3 features

[+specific, -known to the speaker, -request information]

context 3: consists of 2 features

[-specific, +negation]

context 4 : consists of 2 features

[-specific, - negation]

a. Interrogative pronouns

Examples of interrogative pronouns that occur in the context:

[+specific, -known to the speaker, +request information]

In this context, the data show that interrogative pronouns do occur without any modifier, in the complex and compound sentence do occur only in a main clause. Examples are:

(11) pen jəŋŋaj phūujĩŋ naj
about how woman in
ʔudomkhatĩ?
ideal

‘How about the ideal woman?’

In the above example, the word /jəŋŋaj/ is an interrogative pronoun which occurs in a simple sentence with specificity because the speaker wants to know the manner of ideal woman about which he does not have any information and the addressee is requested to provide it.

(12) səahèt thĩi tham hāj cháaŋ
cause that make elephant
khāa khon maa càak sɪŋdaj
kill people come from what
‘What is the cause of the elephant’s
killing people?’

In (12), the word /sɪŋdaj/ is an interrogative pronoun that occurs in a complex sentence with specificity because the speaker wants to know the cause of the elephant’s killing people about which he does not have any information and the addressee is requested to provide it.

(13) khunmɔɔ rúusik jàaŋraj mɪa
doctor feel how when
cháaŋ chhāk nĩi taaj paj
elephant CL this die
‘ Doctor, how did you feel when this
elephant died?’

In (13), the word /jàaŋraj/ functions as an interrogative pronoun occurring in a compound sentence with specificity because the speaker wants to know the addressee’s feeling about which he does not have any information and the addressee is requested to provide it.

b. Indefinite pronouns

(i) Examples of indefinite pronouns that occur in the context:

[+specific, + known to the speaker]

In this context, the data show that indefinite pronouns frequently occur with a noun modifier. For example:

(14) “núu mii ʔaraj jàaŋ nĩŋ
I have what CL one
ca hāj mɛɛ” dèk jĩŋ yĩp
will give mother the girl picked up
phāapwāat ʔòok càak krapāw
drawing out from bag

"I have something to give to you, Mommy" The girl took a drawing from her bag.

In (14), the word /ʔaraj/ is an indefinite pronoun which refers to only one thing. So, it is thus specified. Syntactically the indefinite pronoun /ʔaraj/ is modified by a numeral classifier. In this context, the information is already known to the speaker, that is, it is a drawing.

(ii) Examples of indefinite pronouns that occur in the context:

[+specific -known to the speaker
-request information]

In this context, the data show that indefinite pronouns frequently occur with a noun modifier or in a subordinate clause. For example:

- (15) ʔaraj thii pen khǒŋ
what that belong
thǒŋthîn ca phāan sǐi sǎmkhan
local will past media important
tua nīi paj thǐŋ phūuchom
CL this go reach audience
'Anything local will reach the audience through this important media.'

- (16) ʔaraj jāaŋ nīŋ lòn càak
what CL one drop from
krapǎwŋən
purse
'Something dropped from a purse.'

In the examples above, the word /ʔaraj/ is an indefinite pronoun with specificity because it refers to something. Syntactically the indefinite pronoun /ʔaraj/ is modified by a relative clause or a numeral classifier and thus is a specified entity.

(iii) Examples of indefinite pronouns that occur in the context:

[-specific, +negation]

In this context, although an indefinite pronoun occurs with a [-specific] feature, it occurs in a special syntactic structure, as in a sentence with negated predicate. For example:

- (17) lūuk sǎaw phǒm mǎj khǎj
daughter my not ever
paj kháaŋ ʔāaŋ rēem thūinǎi
go stay overnight where
'My daughter has never stayed overnight anywhere.'

- (18) chǎn mǎj rúu ca tham
I not know will do
jāaŋŋai
how
'I don't know what to do.'

8. Conclusion

This study reveals that indefinite pronouns and interrogative pronouns which are homophonous and homographic can be distinguished both syntactically and semantically. Syntactically, interrogative pronouns can occur freely as an autonomous element in a main clause. Indefinite pronouns, on the other hand, cannot occur in such context but occur in restricted contexts with a noun modifier, a negative element, a yes-no question particle, or as a constituent at a phrase or a clause level.

Semantically, indefinite pronouns can occur in a more general context than interrogative pronouns: indefinite pronouns can occur either in specific or non-specific contexts, and a speaker can either have or not have previous information. Interrogative pronouns, on the other hand, can occur only in a specific context and always require information from the hearer because the speaker does not have any.

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