

The Classification of Thai Amplifiers: A Cognitive Linguistic Perspective

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Abstract

The study aims to introduce the classification of Thai amplifiers based on the cognitive linguistic perspective. The data were collected from six Thai fictional works. It was found that Thai amplifiers were largely metaphorical by nature. As a consequence, the classification involved two categories: weak and strong amplifiers, depending on the conventionality of actual use. The weak amplifiers can be regarded as standard, grammaticalized and institutionalized (Dahl 2004; Poonlarp 2009). They were มาก /mâ:k/ ‘very’ and its variations e.g. มากมาย /mâ:k mā:j/ ‘a lot’ มากทีเดียว /mâ:k tchī:aw/ ‘very much’, etc. These amplifiers had emerged from a semantic domain of quantity. The strong amplifiers can be regarded as strong, non-conventionalized and even creative as they are considered “living metaphors” and show a mark of fictional/poetic language. This involved เหลือเกิน /lû:a kḥ:n/, มาก /sḥ:n/, อิง/jing/, which can be grouped into various schema, e.g. containment schema and force schema. Therefore, the classification of amplifiers provides a contribution to expressive linguistics and translation studies into other languages i.e. English.

Keywords

Amplifiers, weak amplifiers, strong amplifiers

Introduction

Amplifiers perform a semantic function as an intensification process to “scale upwards from an assumed norm” (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik 1985: 590). They are regarded as a subclass of intensifiers (Quirk et al, 1972). In this study, amplifiers are defined as words that scale upward towards an assumed norm to emphasize a quality of any entities. A number of previous studies have classified amplifiers differently, i.e. maximizers and boosters (Quirk et al 1985; Kennedy 2012); and absolute/completive group and intensifiers of the high degree based on

semantic roles (Cacchiani 2005). Dahl (2004) groups intensifiers into two main categories, i.e. standard and strong intensifiers, based on degree of grammaticalization. However, in Thai, the classification of amplifiers seems to be lacking since the main focus is on intensifiers, i.e. restricted intensifiers and emphatic reduplications (Hass 1946; Iwasiki and Ingkaphirom 2009); and restricted and non-restricted intensifiers (Poonlarp 2009).

1 Data

The data were taken from the first 80 pages of six fictional works: 1) *A Child of the Northeast*, 2) *The Happiness of Kati*, 3) *Poon Pid Thong: Gold-pasted Cement*, 4) *Brotherhood of Kaeng Khoi*, 5) *A Walk through Spring*, and 6) *The Sweet Scent of Hay*. The data were analyzed based on a number of scholars working on the Thai amplifiers and their boundary meanings. There are 185 tokens of weak amplifiers and 251 tokens of strong amplifiers.

2 Findings and Discussions

The findings in this study reveal that Thai amplifiers are experientially grounded by metaphor, i.e. to understand of degree intensity in terms of physical experiences. This aligns with the previous notion that the intensification process is largely metaphorical by nature (Poonlarp, 2009). It is also found that there are two categories of Thai amplifiers: weak and strong amplifiers. The classification in this study emerges from semantic motivations of metaphor; conventionality of the actual use; and emotive effects underlying such amplifiers. The first aspect comes from the fact that “existing words may take on new forms” (Hopper & Traugott, 2003: 122). Such new forms are motivated metaphorically and image schemas, especially containment (i.e. quantity and level of substance in a container through มาก /mâ:k/ ‘very’ สุดขีด /sùt khi:t/ อย่างเหลือเกิน /jà:ŋ lû:a kḥ:n/ ‘in the manner of-

excess-excess’ and ท่วมท้น /thù:am thón/ ‘overwhelming’; and force dynamics (i.e. อย่างรุนแรง /jà:ŋ rŭnrē:ŋ/ ‘violently’. For conventionality, the weak amplifiers can be regarded as standard, grammaticalized and institutionalized (Dahl 2004; Poonlarp 2009). In other words, they have been used repeatedly and extensively. They are, to some extent, deemed as “dead metaphors” as people may not consider their metaphoricity and this may bring about the loss of emotive effect in an actual use. The word มาก /mâ:k/ ‘very’ tends to be the best example of this category. This aspect also occurs in other languages. Wouden and Foolen (2017) point out that English *very*, Dutch *erg* ‘very’, or German *sehr* ‘very’ are not expressive (anymore) since they are frequently used and long existing intensifiers, and they also regarded *very* as a weak amplifier (Foolen and Waksler 2013).

However, it is noticeable that variants of this word can bring about more emotive effect and higher subjectivity as they suggest either positive or negative appraisal from a speaker’s viewpoint. This can be exemplified from มากจริงๆ /mâ:k tēhī:aw/ ‘very-indeed’ or มากพอแล้ว /mâ:k phō: lé:w/ ‘very-enough’ for the entity expected to reach the ending point.

In contrast, strong amplifiers tend to be more productive since the speakers may prefer to use new degree words to express their strong feelings and they tend to avoid using frequent, conventionalized amplifiers (e.g. มาก /mâ:k/ ‘very’). This category exhibits higher lexical variety. They are considered non-conventionalized and even creative as they are considered “living metaphors” where the metaphoricity of these amplifiers is transparent-not obviously seen. That is why they provide more emotive effect compared to the weak ones. Moreover, they show a mark of fictional/poetic language, i.e. deviation from the norm, e.g. the entity which is excessive from the container boundary through เหลือเกิน/ lū:a kĕ:n/ ‘excess-excess’ เหลือขนาด /lū:a khâ:nâ:t/ ‘excess-size’, or the one which deviates from the normal reference point อย่างลึก /jà:ŋ lámlúk/ ‘deeply’, suggesting something downward and pragmatically much in intensity and often co-occurs with abstract entities. In addition, the experience of things piling up together and have more weight can bring about the expressions นึก/nák/ ‘very’ and นึกหนา/nák nă:/ ‘very many’.

Some expressions like แสน /sǎan/ ‘hundred thousand’ can be regarded as culture

specific to Thai to express intensity. This may not be found in other languages. English, for example, does not have ‘hundred thousand thanks’ but ‘million thanks’.

Another schema underlying the strong amplifiers is force dynamics. When ones perceive physical force from objects or the bodily sensation through tactile experience, the intensity of force creates a certain degree of emotional intensity. For example, the use of อย่างรุนแรง /jà:ŋ rŭnrē:ŋ/ ‘in the manner of-forceful’ and จัด /tə̀t/ ‘intense’. The other subcategory of force schema concerns negative experiences through the expressions, e.g. จะตาย /tə̀a? tǎ:j/ ‘to die’ อย่างสาหัสสาครรจ์ /jà:ŋ sǎ:hàt sǎ:kān/ ‘severe’ and ร้ายกาจ/rá:j kà:t/ ‘wicked’ which denote an exaggeration of the speaker toward something. It can also be observed that some expressions are specific to poetic language as they are unlikely to be used in daily communication, e.g. เกินจะทนเป็นที่ซึ่ง/กจิณ เต่า? thōn pēn jà:ŋ jĭn/ ‘can’t stand anymore’ จับจิต/tèp tēit/ ‘touch heart’ and สุดใจ/sùt tēit sùt tēāj/ ‘whole-hearted’ and เหลือใจ /lū:a tēāj/ ‘excess-heart’. Interestingly, the strong amplifiers consisting of the words จิต /tēit/ ‘mind’ and ใจ /tēāj/ ‘heart’ show a metonymically link between emotional states and heart before they function metaphorically to intensify things.

All in all, the classification of amplifiers can provide a contribution to expressive linguistics and translation studies into other languages i.e. English. The results of this research also help raise students’ awareness of the importance of amplifiers classifications, which can lead to the norms in translating amplifiers from Thai to English. As a result, students will realize that if a literary work loses the expressivity of feelings or emotion, it becomes uninteresting and lacks vivacity, thus losing appeal to the TL reader. Consequently, classifying the Thai amplifiers is necessary and worth studying.

Main References

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