

SOME SEMANTIC FEATURES OF FINAL PARTICLES IN THE THAI LANGUAGE

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Abstract - Final particles in the Thai language are a highly important linguistic element and appear very frequently in everyday conversation. These particles are characterized by complex semantic features that are difficult to grasp and analyze. Depending on the communicative context and the interlocutors involved, final particles can convey different meanings and communicative intentions. Although the number of final particles is not as large as that of other word classes in Thai, they play a crucial role in the language's grammatical system due to their ability to express the speaker's emotions, mood, or attitude in relation to the listener. This article aims to examine the use of final particles in Thai through real-life examples, analyze them from both grammatical and semantic perspectives, and identify their most generalizable functional characteristics. It is hoped that this study will help learners and users of Thai better understand these particles and use them appropriately in daily communication.

Key words - Final particles; Thai language; Semantic feature

1. Introduction

Currently, with the governments of Vietnam and Thailand officially upgrading their diplomatic relations to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership," cooperation between the two countries has been further strengthened and expanded across multiple fields such as economics, politics, and culture. This development has contributed to an increasing demand among Vietnamese students to learn the Thai language. Therefore, the study and understanding of Thai language and culture in Vietnam has become an urgent issue.

Thai, similar to Vietnamese, is an isolating language, characterized by words that do not undergo morphological changes, with grammatical relationships primarily expressed through word order and function words. In Thai, the order of syllables plays a crucial role in forming and conveying the meaning of lexical units. The combination of syllables in a specific order creates words with distinct semantic values and grammatical functions. Altering this order often leads to changes in meaning or syntactic relationships. For learners, mastering the rules of word order contributes to more effective use of Thai in communication, especially when interacting with native speakers.

Within the Thai lexicon, particles in general, and final particles in particular, constitute a word class with relatively few members but are used with high frequency and possess significant capacity to convey sentence meaning. However, particles in Thai, especially final particles, represent a highly complex area of linguistic

research, particularly regarding their semantics. Even native speakers, while using these particles fluently, often find it difficult to explain why they choose a particular particle in their utterances. Many Thai linguists have studied this word class and proposed various concepts and opinions regarding particles, such as:

According to Wijin Phanupong [1], final particles are elements that appear at the very end of a sentence or utterance. They are closely related to social and cultural factors in Thai communication, helping to express relationships in terms of age, generation, social status, or the degree of intimacy between speaker and listener.

Author Bhamoraput Amara [2], in her research dissertation, asserts that final particles are words positioned at the end of a sentence, carrying different semantic functions such as emphasizing the content being discussed in communication between speaker and listener; expressing evaluative opinions or questions about objects and events surrounding the conversational topic; or sometimes indicating desires, suggestions, requests, or commands that the speaker wishes the listener to receive and act upon. Final particles also serve to express relationships and the level of familiarity between communicative participants. Amara Bhamoraput contends that it is very difficult to precisely define the meaning conveyed by final particles without considering the communicative context, participants, or the content discussed in any given conversation.

According to Joseph R. Cooke [3], final particles are among the most effective means of expressing the relationship between speaker and listener, serving as indicators of whether the relationship is equal or unequal. They describe the speaker's feelings, attitudes, perceptions, and evaluations of the discussed content in relation to reality, while also clarifying the ultimate communicative purpose of the utterance.

It can be observed that the common point among these researchers is the fixed position of final particles at the end of sentences and their highly diverse and rich semantic roles. Depending on the conversational situation and communicative participants, final particles convey different meanings.

Within the scope of this article, the author focuses on analyzing the semantics of commonly used final particles in daily Thai communication, including ค่ะ / ค่ะ / คับ; ลี่ / ลี่ / ลិ; អីវី / អីវី / ី; ុុ / ុុ / ុុ. The main research method is synthesizing relevant literature and analyzing the semantic

aspects of these particles as they appear in sentences, thereby identifying the most fundamental characteristics of final particles in Thai.

2. Content – Research results

As units within the linguistic system and tools for communication, although it is highly complex to precisely define the meanings of final particles, each final particle actually possesses a stable semantic core, allowing it to fulfill specific functions. Generally, the semantic core of Thai final particles is determined by the context in which they appear, including the relationship between communicative subjects or utterances and the objective reality being reflected. Based on the collected data, the research results have synthesized and concluded several semantic features of final particles in Thai as follows:

2.1. Final particles indicating gender confirmation or affirmation of communicative subjects

Gender confirmation or affirmation plays a very important role in Thai conversational culture. When participating in a conversation, aside from using personal pronouns to identify or affirm one's gender - such as males using pronouns like ผู้ชาย/ กระหม and females using คุณ/ ท่าน - Thai speakers also use final particles to emphasize or reaffirm their gender. The final particles with this semantic function are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Final particles indicating gender confirmation or affirmation of communicative subjects

Final particles	Gender		Type of Sentence		
	Female	Male	Declarative Sentence	Interrogative Sentence	Imperative Sentence
			✓	✓	✓
ค่ะ	✓				
คะ	✓			✓	
ครับ		✓	✓	✓	✓

Consider the following examples in communicative situations:

(1) A: คุณเป็นคนที่ไหนครับ (Where are you from?)

B: ฉันเป็นคนเชียงใหม่ครับ (I am from Chiang Mai.)

From the above dialogue, it can be affirmed that A - the questioner - is male, as indicated by the final particle “ครับ” and B - the respondent - is female, as indicated by the use of “ค่ะ”.

(2) A: ไม่ทราบว่า สถานี BTS อยู่ที่ไหนครับ (Excuse me, where is the BTS station?).

B: คุณเดินตรงไป 500 เมตร แล้วเลี้ยวขวา ก็จะถึงครับ (Go straight for about 500 meters, then turn right and you will arrive).

In the dialogue of example 2, although A - the questioner - does not use the personal pronouns ฉัน / คุณ to indicate her gender, the listener can still recognize A as female through the final particle “ค่ะ”. Similarly, B confirms his male gender through the use of “ครับ”.

In Thai, the choice of final particle such as “ครับ” or “ค่ะ”

not only reflects the biological gender of the speaker but also expresses gender identity in communication. A person with a male appearance but a feminine gender identity may use “ค่ะ/คะ” in conversation to express their gender identity to the listener. Conversely, a person with a female appearance may use “ครับ” if they wish to express a male gender identity or affirm their male identification in linguistic interaction.

That is, a person with a male body but more feminine characteristics can use “ค่ะ/คะ” to affirm their gender identity to the listener during communication. Similarly, a person with a female appearance may use “ครับ” when communicating if they wish to assert their true inner gender as male.

Furthermore, in intimate relationships, such as between adults and children, Thai speakers may use final particles according to the child's gender. Consider the following examples:

(3) คุณก่อของแม่ อย่างไรครับ (My clever boy, what would you like to eat?).

(4) ลูกสาวของพ่อชอบไหมครับ (Daddy's girl, do you like it?).

From these two examples, it is evident that in communication with young children, a Thai mother can use “ครับ” when speaking to her son, while a father can use “ค่ะ/คะ” when speaking to his daughter to express affection.

This feature goes beyond the simple semantic expression of particles in sentences; it is a cultural mode of expression, reflecting the democratic perspective on gender equality, respect for gender, and the right to choose gender in Thai society.

2.2. Final particles indicating politeness, equality, and respect from speaker to listener

Thailand is a country with a cultural tradition of respecting elders, honoring older individuals, and respecting those with equal or higher social status. Therefore, in any conversation, participants must accurately assess their own social position and age as well as those of their interlocutors. Accordingly, they select appropriate communicative strategies and final particles such as “ค่ะ/คะ/ครับ”. Failure to do so may result in the conversation being deemed inappropriate, violating social norms, and leading to unsuccessful or even failed communication.

Consider two sentences in the same communicative scenario:

(5) คุณพ่อครับ หมูอุตติ่วได้ไหมครับ (Dad, may I watch TV?).

(6) คุณพ่อ หมูอุตติ่วได้ไหม (Dad, may I watch TV?).

Clearly, when comparing the expressions in examples (5) and (6), the use of the particle “คะ” in example (5) indicates greater politeness from the child to her father than in example (6). In a broader context, related to social norms, the child in example (5) is considered polite and compliant with proper communicative etiquette through the use of the final particle คะ.

2.3. Final particles expressing emotions, moods, opinions, and evaluations of the speaker regarding events or matters mentioned in the conversation.

* Final particles “ສີ” / “ຈື້” / “ດີ”

Consider the following examples:

(7) ຖຸກ...ເຫັນເກີນເຂົາສີ (Come and eat, child!)

(8) ເດືອນໜັ້ນ ເຮັດໄປດ່າງປະເທດດ້ວຍກັນນີ (Let's travel abroad together next month!)

In examples (7) and (8), the particles ສີ and ດີ are used to express the speaker's desire or request for the listener to perform an action, such as eating or traveling. In example (7), the particle ດີ also conveys the speaker's anticipation of agreement or acceptance from the listener. This group of final particles typically appears in imperative, suggestion, or request sentences.

* Final particles “ທີ່ອ້” “ເຫຼວ້” “ຮູ້”

Consider the following examples:

(9) ເມື່ອຈານເຊົ່າໄປກັນເຫຼວ້ອ (Did you go with him yesterday?)

(10) ເຫັນແຕ່ງຈັນນາກັນນາແລ້ວເຫຼວ້ອ (Have they been married for a long time?)

(11) ຄຸນວ່າຜູ້ທີ່ພູ່ງຄົນນັ້ນສາຍີ (Do you think that woman is beautiful?)

Utterances using the group of final particles “ທີ່ອ້” “ເຫຼວ້” “ຮູ້” in the above examples express the speaker's opinion or evaluation regarding the matters, objects, or content mentioned in the conversation. They also convey the speaker's surprise, as the events discussed occur outside the speaker's expectations or predictions. These final particles often appear in interrogative sentences, but their purpose is not solely to ask questions; rather, the speaker intends to elicit agreement or refutation from the listener regarding their own assessment of the discussed matters, believing that the listener has more accurate or clearer information.

2.4. Final particles emphasizing the importance of information presented in the conversation

* Final particles “ນະ” “ນໍ່” “ນໍາ”

Consider the following examples:

(12) ໄປຕີ່ຍົນນີ້ນີ້ (Go now, okay!)

(13) ເປີດປະຕຸນີ້ນີ້ (Open the door, please!)

(14) ອໍາຍົກລັບນໍານັດເຄີມ່າງ (Don't come home late, okay!)

The particles “ນະ”; “ນໍ່” and “ນໍາ” at the end of the utterances in these examples emphasize the importance and confirm the authenticity of events such as leaving (example 12), opening the door (example 13), or coming home early (example 14). These particles in Thai often appear at the end of imperative utterances or warnings and reminders.

2.5. Final particles expressing suggestions or gentle advice from the speaker to the listener regarding an event or matter

* Final particles “ໜ່ອຍ/ ເຄອະ”

Consider the following examples:

(15) ຮອດັນກ່ອຍ (Wait for me a bit, please!)

(16) ໄຈເຫັນ ນໍ່ອຍ ເດືອນຈະຈັດກາໄທ້ (Calm down a bit, I will take care of it.)

(17) ລອງຄູເຄອະ ໄກນາ ເຮັດກົ່ານີ້ແລ້ວ (Just try it, since we have already arrived.)

The final particles “ໜ່ອຍ” and “ເຄອະ” in the above utterances express the speaker's desire for the listener to perform an action, not as a strong command but as a gentle suggestion or request. In examples (16) and (17), these particles also serve to make the speaker's proposal more persuasive as advice to the listener.

3. Conclusion

Through the analyzed data and the semantic features of final particles, it can be seen that final particles play an extremely important role in Thai, with no other means or tools able to replace them. They not only make conversational sentences smoother and more natural but also accurately express the speaker's emotions and moods towards the listener and the events discussed. Therefore, understanding and correctly choosing groups of final particles will help Thai language learners achieve greater effectiveness in communication and practice.

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