THE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN INDEFINITE PRONOUNS AND INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS IN THAI

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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/, /?araj/, /?inaj/, /m?araj/, /jajraj/, and /?hawraj/, can function differently when occurring in different syntactic contexts. Some examples are:

(1) a. indefinite pronoun
n?aj r?aj n? khraj duu k? movie CL this who see ADV
daaj can
‘Anyone can see this movie.’

b. interrogative pronoun
n?aj r?aj n? khraj daaj duu b?aj movie CL this who PAST see some
‘Who has seen this movie?’

(2) a. indefinite pronoun
phan?ajnaaj khon n? kh?w maa employee CL this come
thamjaan t?nt?ee m?araj work since when
ch?n cam m?j daaj le?ew
I remember not can PAST
‘I can’t remember when this employee began working.’

b. interrogative pronoun
phan?ajnaaj khon n? kh?w maa employee CL this come
thamjaan t?nt?ee m?araj work since when
‘ From when was this employee employed?’

(3) a. indefinite pronoun
thaa ca tham ?araj kh?o haj if will do what let
j?t khwaamthuukt? pen l?ak hold on rightness as principle
‘Whatever you do, you should abide by rightness.’

b. interrogative pronoun
thaa thamjaan k?p khon camnuaj if work with people amount
m?ak khun j?t ?araj pen many you hold on what as l?ak principle
‘If you work with many people, by what principle do you abide?’

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

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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, sîrđaj, ?arai, kraj |
| Place      | : nâj, thînâj, thîdaj |
| Time       | : miadaj, mîraj, mîrāj |
| Manner     | : jānraj, jānñaj, nāj, chêndaj, chêñraj |
| Amount or estimation | : thâwraj, thâwraj, thâwrâj, phiaŋdaj, phiaŋñaj, khêñaj |

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 /nâj/ (hôn+raj); some with sound assimilation such as /jaŋñaj/ (jian+raj) and /thammaj/ (tham+raj); some with sound attrition such as /?araj/ (?an+raj) and /kraj/ (jaaan+raj); and some with tonal changes such as /thâwraj/ (thâw+raj), and /mîrāj/ (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
pāa jāak ca phūt kāp Auntie want speak with
khrāj sāk khon nīn
who CL one
‘Auntie would like to speak to someone.’

b. interrogative pronoun
pāa jāak ca phūt kāp Auntie want speak with
khrāj who
‘To whom would Auntie like to speak?’

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

(5) a. indefinite pronoun
khāw chōp rīn ʔaraj thāmnāaj
He like learn what manner
nī this
‘He likes to learn things like this.’

b. interrogative pronoun
khāw chōp rīn ʔaraj
(He like learn what)
‘Whom did you see in that cave?’

He like learn what
‘What did he enjoy studying?’

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

(6) a. indefinite pronoun
samāj nī ʔaraj tānṭānaj
period this what various thātthanaaj rūatrew māak
develop quickly very
‘At present, everything is quickly developed.’

b. interrogative pronoun
samāj nī ʔaraj thātthanaaj rūatrew māak
quickly very
‘At present, what is quickly developed?’

In example (6) a., /ʔaraj/ is an indefinite pronoun that occurs before an indefinite modifier /tānṭānaj/, 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
māj phōp phūdāj nāj thām nān
not see who in cave that
lōaj
at all
‘(I) didn’t see anyone in that cave.’

b. interrogative pronoun
thān phōp phūdāj nāj thām
you see who in cave
nān bāaj
that some
‘Whom did you see in that cave?’
In example (7) a., /phū:daʃ/ is an indefinite pronoun occurring as an object of a negated predicate, /māj phop phū:daʃ/, whereas in example (7) b., /phū:daʃ/ 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 /māj/, /tii/, /rīplāaw/. Interrogative pronouns, on the other hand, cannot occur in this context. Examples are given below:

(8) a. indefinite pronoun
hōtāk mii sīndaj kīw khōŋ hotdog have what relate kāp māa rīplāaw to dog or not
‘Is ‘hotdog’ related to dogs in anyway?’

b. interrogative pronoun
hōtāk mii sīndaj kīw khōŋ hotdog have what relate kāp māa to dog
‘Is ‘hotdog’ related to dogs?’

In example (8) a., /sīndaj/ is an indefinite pronoun that occurs in a yes-no question with /rīplāaw/, whereas example (8) b., with /sīndaj/ 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 thii jaŋ mii panhāa who that still have problem
hāj cēŋ kromprachaasōŋkhroŋ?
let inform The Public Welfare Department
‘Anyone who has a problem, inform The Public Welfare Department’

b. interrogative pronoun
dēk thīi maa chūaj raw sōŋ the boy that come help us deliver khōŋ 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
thāa puu sā lōŋ thīidaj, thīi if spread mat down where, place nān pen ?anacāk khōŋ ton that is territory of oneself
‘Whenever one spreads his mat anywhere, that place becomes his territory.’

b. interrogative pronoun
thāa ca damnōŋkaa taam if will implement according to khōŋ thīidaj, rāthbaan ca nam the proposal, government will bring nōppramaan maa cāak thīidaj budget from where
‘If it is implemented according to the proposal, from where will the government get this budget?’

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

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  semantic features
     + specific        - specific
    /     \        /     \        \     \        \     \        \     \        \     \    
+ known to the speaker - known to the speaker + negation - negation
                /     \        \     \        \     \        \     \    
           + request information - request information

indefinite pronouns      interrogative pronouns      indefinite pronouns
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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 jāṇṇaj phūijəŋ nəj about how woman in
?udomkhəi?
ideal
‘How about the ideal woman?’

In the above example, the word /jāṇṇaj/ 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) sāahət thii tham hāj chaaŋ cause that make elephant
khaa khon maa caak siŋdəj kill people come from what
‘What is the cause of the elephant’s killing people?’

In (12), the word /siŋdəj/ 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) khuməj ruusək jāṇəraj məa
doctor feel how when
chaaŋ chəak ni taaj paŋ elephant CL this die
‘Doctor, how did you feel when this elephant died?’

In (13), the word /jāṇəraj/ 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) “nii mii ?araj jaaŋ nii I have what CL one
cə hāj məe” dək jəŋ yip will give mother the girl picked up
phāapwəat ?əək caak krapəw
drawing out from bag
"I have something to give to you, Mommy" The girl took a drawing from her bag.

In (14), the word /?araj/ is an indefinite pronoun which refers to only one thing. So, it is thus specified. Syntactically the indefinite pronoun /?araj/ 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) ?araj thi penn khon what that belong
tho?hinh ca phaan sii samkhan local will past media important
tua ni paj thn phuuchom CL this go reach audience
‘Anything local will reach the audience through this important media.’

(16) ?araj jaa ni l?n caak what CL one drop from
krapawgan purse
‘Something dropped from a purse.’

In the examples above, the word /?araj/ is an indefinite pronoun with specificity because it refers to something. Syntactically the indefinite pronoun /?araj/ 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) l?uk saiaw ph?om maj khaj daughter my not ever
paj khani ?naj reem thinaig go stay overnight where
‘My daughter has never stayed overnight anywhere.’

(18) chan maj ruu ca tham I not know will do
jannaj how
‘I don’t know what to do.’

8. Conclusion

This study reveals that indefinite pronouns and interrogative pronouns which are homophones 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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