THAI IMPERSONAL PRONOUNS AND LANGUAGE POWER

Kitima Indrambarya

ABSTRACT

Impersonal subjects are subjects unspecified for their reference. While previous analyses identified man 'it' and khdw as non-referential subject in Thai co-occurring with impersonal verbs (Indrambarya 1996, 2011, Phimsawat 2011), there exists the use of third person pronoun thân ‘they’ as an impersonal pronoun. This paper aims at investigating how the three impersonal subjects in Thai exhibit the distance between speakers and reflect the language power inherited in different language registers.

The result shows that the use of the impersonal pronouns thân ‘they’ and khdw ‘they’ are much more limited than man ‘it’. The pronoun thân ‘they’ is the most distant and the most powerful among the three impersonal pronouns. While the impersonal pronouns thân ‘they’ and khdw ‘they’ cover the gaps between users leading addressees to follow what is to be done, the impersonal pronoun man ‘it’ brings speakers closer to addressees for more consolidation.

Introduction

Most pronouns are personal and unmarked. Impersonal pronouns are marked and less common. Many languages have both personal and impersonal pronoun counterparts. Some make use of third person pronouns as impersonals, such as English dummy it and French il ‘it’. Indrambarya (1996, 2011) identified the pronoun man ‘it’ as an impersonal subject in Thai. The term ‘impersonal subjects’, or non-referential subjects are identified in lexicase dependency grammar as subjects which
have no reference, as in (1) where man 'it' does not have any reference.

(1) wan nî man rôn caŋ
   day this it hot much
   ‘Today it is so warm.’
   (daily conversation)

Besides man 'it', two impersonal subjects khâw ‘they’ and thân ‘they’ are also found. The presence of the impersonal pronouns khâw ‘they’ and thân ‘they’ in (2) and (3) are not as common as the impersonal pronoun man 'it' in (1).

(2) khâw ³ lî́  kâa  wâa
    they rumor together that
    bân nî mî phîi
    house this have ghost
    ‘It is rumored that this house is haunted.’

(3) námmon thân wâa khlâŋ
    holy water they say have strong
    magical power
    ‘It is said that holy water has strong
    magical power.’

This paper aims at investigating how these impersonal subjects appear in different language registers and differ in their ability to express distance and language power.

### Data Collection

In this study, data consisting of 201,911 words were collected from both spoken and written language from five registers, namely, everyday language, academic language, media language, political language and legal language. Written language includes academic journal and newspapers, magazine advertisements, and legal documents. Spoken language data were drawn from daily conversations as well as those found on TV talk shows, TV and radio, news reports, and political speeches. Even though talk shows could be viewed as media language, conversations on topics in focus discussed by guests in these programs such as “the VIP Program” are unlikely prepared and represent daily language use. Only news reports and advertisements are classified as media language in this study. Different types of data collection can be summarized in the following table.

| Data Collection          | Spoken Language | Written Language |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Everyday language        | conversation in TV talk shows | - |
|                          | daily conversation |               |
| Academic Language        | -               | academic journals |
| Media Language           | TV news          | newspapers, magazine advertisement |
|                          | radio news       |                 |
| Political Language       | political speech | -               |
| Legal Language           | -               | legal document  |

³ khâw ‘he, she’, with the high tone mark, is a common variant of the written standard form khâw, with the rising tone mark. The two forms can be used interchangeably. While khâw is commonly found in daily speech, khâw is found in formal and emphatic speech. This paper captures how people use language in daily activities and hence khâw is used throughout the paper. Likewise, ŏûn ‘I’ can be used interchangeably with ŏûn ‘I’.
Analysis

Deictic vs. Anaphoric pronouns

Deictic and anaphoric pronouns are related terminologies which need to be clarified here. Deictic pronouns, according to Mathews (1997:9), refer to those pronouns whose references are determined by the context of speakers and addressees. Person deixis such as I, which refers to the speaker in I live here, is one of the five common types of deixis (person deixis, spatial deixis, social deixis, temporal deixis, and discourse deixis). Anaphoric pronouns, on the other hand, are those pronouns whose antecedents can be found within the text or utterance. While the first person pronoun phōm 'I (male)' and khāw1 'I' in (4) and the second person pronoun thān1 'you' in (5) are deictic pronouns, the third person pronouns thān2 'he, she' in (6) and khāw2 'he, she' in (7) and man 'it' in (8) are anaphoric.

(4) phōm / khāw1 māy hīw
I he not hungry
'I am not hungry.'

(5) thān1 cāʔ ráp tīaa
you will receive tea
rū kaafēe dīi khāʔ
or coffee good Prt
'Would you like tea or coffee?'

(6) khunyīŋ yīu khāamay //
Lady stay inside
thān2 rō ʔ yīu
he/she wait PROG
'The lady is inside. She is waiting (for you).'

(7) suthī phōm khāw
Suthhee just return
cāak tāaŋkāwāt //
from upcountry
khāw2 khāw nōm līew
he/she enter sleep already
'Suthii has just returned from upcountry. He has gone to bed.'

(8) yāa kīn phōnmamay lāŋ
Do not eat fruit after
ʔaaŋhān pr̄ōʔ man phōŋ
food because it swollen
nay thōŋ
in abdomen
'Do not eat fruit after meals because it swells in your stomach.'

The first person pronoun khāw1 'I' in (4) and the third person khāw2 'he, she' in (7) are used informally. The pronoun khāw1 'I' in (4) refers to the speaker and hence is a deictic pronoun, while khāw2 'he, she' in (7) refers to Suthii and so is anaphoric. In (5), the second person pronoun thān1 'you' refers to the addressee and so is deictic. The pronoun thān2 'he, she' in (6), on the other hand, refers to khunyīŋ 'the lady' in the sentence and hence is anaphoric. Similarly, the third person pronoun man 'it' in (8) refers back to its antecedent phōnmamay 'fruit' in the sentence and is anaphoric.

Personal vs. Impersonal Pronouns

Pronouns in Thai are mostly personal. All the pronouns mentioned in the previous section are personal. That is, they refer to persons or things and hence are referential. Within Lexicase Dependency Grammar, a personal verb is defined as having a referential subject carrying the feature
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[+rfrn] (reference) while impersonal verbs carry a non-referential subject with the feature [-rfrn] (Indrambarya 1996). The term ‘impersonal’ is created as a counterpart of the common ‘personal’ one. Phimsawat (2011:57) defines impersonal pronouns as referring to one or more unspecified persons without having any antecedents. Phimsawat (2011:59) further states that the English impersonal pronoun system can be classified into two types: generic and arbitrary. The English impersonal pronoun one is the only pure generic impersonal pronoun while you, we, and they have both generic and arbitrary readings. The impersonal pronoun one is called generic inclusive. That is, it includes both the speaker and the addressee and can be used interchangeably with you, as in (9).

(9) **One/You** has/have to pay more for organic products.

(Phimsawat 2011:59)

According to Phimsawat (2011:59), the English impersonal pronoun they can have two generic readings and four arbitrary readings based on Hofherr (2003 cited in Phimsawat 2011:60). The arbitrary impersonal pronoun they can be classified into four subtypes: specific existential, vague existential, inferred existential, and corporate reading. Phimsawat (2011:59-61) offers examples of each type of impersonal they as follows.

(10) a. **They** eat snails in France.
    (generic exclusive)

b. **They** stole my car.
    (generic quasi existential)

c. **They** are fixing your car now.
    (specific existential arbitrary)

d. **They** have found my dog.
    (vague existential arbitrary)

e. **They** have cleaned the public toilet.
    (inferred existential arbitrary)

f. **They** delivered the parcel yesterday.
    (corporate reading)

The impersonal pronoun they in (10a) carries the generic exclusive reading in excluding both speakers and addressees, maintaining the plural reading and co-occurring with the locative in France. In (10b), the impersonal pronoun they is quasi existential with the singular reading of ‘someone’ who stole my car. In (10c), the impersonal pronoun they is specific existential for being specified at a point in time and yet, they, in (10d), is vague existential in not specifying a point of time when ‘someone has found my dog’. In (10e), the impersonal pronoun they is inferred existential since the cleanliness of the toilet infers that someone has cleaned it. And the impersonal pronoun they in (10f) is a corporate reading since the only designated group of people delivering the parcel is the mail carrier.

In Thai, Phimsawat (2011:67) found generic inclusive use of impersonal raw ‘we’, as in (11) and the use of impersonal kháw ‘they’ in both generic and arbitrary readings. She considers kháw ‘they’ to be a shortened form of phûakkháw ‘they’. (12) exemplifies the generic exclusive reading while (13) and (14) show vague existential arbitrary and a corporate reading, respectively.

(11) **raw** km cee nay dian
we eat vegetarian in month tulaakhom
October
‘We have vegetarian food in October.’
(Phimsawat 2011:66)
Like the English quasi-inclusive generic we, raw ‘we’ in (11) must be present to maintain its non-referential reading. In (12), kháw ‘they’ is an exclusive generic impersonal pronoun with the plural reading with an obligatory locative. Without the locative thität mūbāan nī ‘in this village’, kháw in (12) can only have a referential reading.

(12) thität mūbāan nī kháw
at village this they
māy ḳm nīa kan ḱɔy
not eat meat each other at all
‘In this village, they don’t eat meat at all.’

(Phimsawat 2011:66)

Example (13) shows kháw ‘they’ as a vague existential since no specific time is given. Example (14) exemplifies the corporate reading in that the action of selling eggs is carried out by merchants and not other professionals.

(13) kháw bɔɔ wāa krugthēep
they say that Bangkok
nāam cāʔ thūam
water will flood
‘They said that Bangkok would be hit by floods.’

(Phimsawat 2011:67)

(14) kháw khrán raakha khāy ʔīkklēų
they raise price egg again
‘They have raised egg prices again.’

(Phimsawat 2011:67)

The present study defines impersonal pronouns as pronouns [+prnn] (pronom) which could be human or non-human [±humn] (human), having no antecedent [-ntcd] (antecedent), and having either no reference [-rfrn] (reference) or an unspecified reference [-spcf] (specified).

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\[
\begin{array}{c}
{\text{+prnn}} \\
{\pm \text{humn}} \\
{-\text{ntcd}} \\
{-\text{rfrn}} \\
{-\text{spcf}} \\
{-\text{plrl}} \\
{-\text{high}}
\end{array}
\]

Three third person pronouns are found to have homophonous impersonal counterparts: man₂ ‘it’, kháw₃ ‘they’ and thàn₃ ‘they’. Unlike Phimsawat (2011) who considers kháw ‘they’ to be a shortened form of phuakkha ‘they’, this study considers phuakkha ‘they’ and kháw ‘they’ to be different words and only the latter form has an impersonal counterpart in Thai. Let us take a closer look at each of the three impersonal pronouns in Thai.

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{man₂ ‘it’} & \text{kháw₃ ‘they’} & \text{thàn₃ ‘they’} \\
{+\text{prnn}} & {+\text{prnn}} & {+\text{prnn}} \\
{\pm \text{humn}} & {+\text{humn}} & {+\text{humn}} \\
{-\text{ntcd}} & {-\text{ntcd}} & {-\text{ntcd}} \\
{-\text{rfrn}} & {-\text{spcf}} & {-\text{spcf}} \\
{-\text{plrl}} & {+\text{plrl}} & {+\text{plrl}} \\
{-\text{high}} & {-\text{high}} & {+\text{high}}
\end{array}
\]

While the impersonal pronoun man₂ ‘it’ could be human or non-human and non-referential without any antecedents, the impersonal pronoun kháw₃ ‘they’ and thàn₃ ‘they’ are unspecified human with plurality and no antecedents. The difference between kháw₃ ‘they’ and thàn₃ ‘they’ lies in the feature [±high] (high rank). The impersonal pronoun kháw₃ ‘they’ is of equal status and thus carries the feature [-high] while the impersonal pronoun thàn₃ ‘they’ is higher in rank and thus [+high].
The impersonal pronoun *man* ‘it’ in (15) and (16) does not refer to anything, and hence is non-referential. Similar to the French impersonal pronoun *on* which appears in an informal usage, Thai pronoun *man* 2 ‘it’ may occur with true-impersonal verbs in colloquial usage, as shown in (15). The pronoun *man* 2 ‘it’ co-occurs with the true-impersonal verb *mii* ‘to exist’ denoting existence. Thai true-impersonal verbs carrying the feature [+mprs (impersonal), -psdo (pseudo)] refer to verbs which do not require the presence of a non-referential subject. Thus, the true-impersonal existential verb *mii* in (15) can occur with or without the surrogate subject *man* 2 ‘it’, but not *khwā́* 3 nor *thàn* 3.

(15) *θ/ man* 2/*khwā́* 3/*thàn* 3 máy *mii*
   it / they / they not exist
Nom +mprs -rfrn -psdo
panhā́a r̀āk
problem Prt

‘There is no problem.’
(daily conversation)

In (16), the true-impersonal verb *dīk* ‘to be late at night’ denoting temporality may appear with or without a subject. The only possible subject to co-occur with *dīk* ‘to be late at night’ is the impersonal *man* 2 ‘it’. As illustrated in (16), the presence of the first person pronoun *tfā́n* ‘I’ as well as that of the impersonal pronouns *khwā́* 3 and *thàn* 3 would not be acceptable.

(16) *kwā́* 3 *cā́* 2 *thī́y bā́n*
   more will arrive house

(17) a. *thammay wan rī́i* 3 *θ/ tfā́n /
   why day this I
Nom +rfrn
   khwā́ 1/khwā́ 2 *khīkīat* 1 3 *cā́p*
   he/she lazy much
-rfrn -psdo
   ‘By the time (we) get home, it will be very late.’
   (daily conversation)

Example (17b) shows the presence of the impersonal pronoun *man* 2 ‘it’ with the pseudo-impersonal verb *khīkīat* 2 ‘to be lazy’. Here, as proposed in Indrambarya (2011), *man* 2 ‘it’ functions as an impersonal marker and is used to convert the personal verb *khīkīat* 1 in (17a) to an impersonal counterpart in (17b). The personal verb *khīkīat* 1 in (17a) co-occurs with personal subjects such as *tfā́n* ‘I’, *khwā́ 1* ‘I’, and *khwā́ 2* ‘he or she’ as permitted by the context. When a null subject is present, it refers back to *tfā́n* ‘I’, *khwā́ 1* ‘I’ and *khwā́ 2* ‘he or she’ within the context. The pseudo-impersonal verb *khīkīat* 2 requires the presence of the impersonal *man* 2 ‘it’, and not any other impersonal subjects, as shown in (17b). The impersonal subject *man* 2 ‘it’ alienates the speaker from his/her own self and makes him/her talk more freely as if he/she is someone else.
‘Why am I so lazy today?’
‘Why is he/she so lazy today?’
b. thammay wan níi man2/why day this it
   Nom
   -rfrn
   *khâw3/*thân/ khûkhat1 caŋ	hey they lazy much
   +mprs
   +psdo
   ’Why am I so lazy today?’

Unlike the impersonal pronoun man2 ‘it’, the two impersonal pronouns khâw3 ‘they’ and thân3 ‘they’ are more limited in usage. They refer to an unspecified group of people and carry the features [-spcf] (specified). In (18), the verb wâa ‘to say’ is an impersonal verb which requires the presence of an unspecified human impersonal subject. The only two possible impersonal subjects co-occurring with verbs denoting speech are khâw3 ‘they’ and thân3 ‘they’. And yet, only the impersonal pronoun khâw3 ‘they’ sounds natural in the context of (18). It is not known to whom the pronoun khâw3 ‘they’ refers. This type of impersonal verb corresponds to Phimsawat’s (2011) vague existential arbitrary khâw3 ‘they’ for the obscure point of time of the shop’s reputation.

(18) khâw3/*man2/?thân3 wâa
    they / it / they say
    Nom
    +humn
    -spfc
    kuâyûkaw rân nîl Tarârê
    noodle shop this delicious
    ‘It is said that the noodles at this shop are delicious.’
    (daily conversation)

Like the impersonal khâw3 ‘they’ in (18), the impersonal pronoun thân3 ‘they’ in (19) is unspecified for gender. It implies a certain number of elder persons, particularly those who are wise or respected. The presence of the impersonal pronoun man2 ‘it’ is not acceptable in (19). The impersonal pronoun thân3 ‘they’ is found to co-occur only with the impersonal verbs wâa ‘to say’ and hây ‘to make, to cause’. The use of the impersonal pronoun thân ‘they’ in Thai, as in (19), would belong to the corporate reading arbitrary type of impersonal subject as classified in Phimsawat (2011:59-61) since the interpretation of thân3 ‘they’ refers to wise people of the older times. Example (19) is also acceptable with the presence of the impersonal subject khâw3 ‘they’. In this case, khâw3 ‘they’ refers to an unspecified group of people in general and falls into Phimsawat’s (2011:59-61) category of vague existential arbitrary.

(19) nâmmon khiîn canpen
    holy water night full moon
    thân3/khâw3/*man2 wâa
    they they it say
    Nom
    -spfc
    khlân
    strong magical power
    ‘It is said that holy water on a full moon night has strong magical power.’
    (daily conversation)

This section has exemplified three pairs of homophonous personal and impersonal counterparts of Thai pronouns. The next section will discuss how these impersonal pronouns behave in different language registers.
Impersonal pronouns in language registers

This section discusses the occurrence of each impersonal pronoun in the five language registers, namely, everyday language, academic language, media language, political language and legal language. The following figure illustrates the occurrence of each impersonal pronoun in the five language registers.

![Figure 1: Occurrence of Impersonal Pronouns in Various Language Registers](image)

Based on the data of 201,911 words, this study found 150 occurrences of impersonal pronouns (0.74 times out of 1,000 words). Obviously, the impersonal pronoun *man* 'it' is the most frequently used. It is found most in everyday language, followed by political language. That is, this pronoun is found at the occurrence of 0.53 and 0.18, respectively, within a text of 1,000 words. The impersonal pronoun *man* 'it' is not found in academic, legal or media language. Moreover, the other two impersonal pronouns are much less commonly used. The impersonal pronouns *kháw* 'they' and *thán* 'they' are found only in everyday language with 0.01 occurrence out of a text of 1,000 words. They are scarcely found in other language registers. The following subsection discusses how each impersonal pronoun behaves in each language register.

**Everyday Language**

Everyday language is informal spoken language used in everyday life. Impersonal subjects are found most in everyday language, especially the impersonal subject *man* 'it'. This section explores the
occurrence of the three impersonal subjects in the language of everyday use.

**The Impersonal Pronoun** *man₂* 'it'

The impersonal subject *man₂* 'it' may optionally co-occur with true-impersonal verbs or those without an overt non-referential subject, such as *kə̂t* 'to happen' as in (20), and with pseudo-impersonal verbs, those which require the presence of the dummy subject *man* 'it', such as *dɪk* 'late' as in (21a).

(20) *nîi man₂ kə̂t ʔaray khîn*

| Nom | V  | -spcf | +mprs | -psdo |
|-----|----|-------|-------|-------|
| this | it | happen | what up | 'What has happened?' |

(daily conversation)

In (20), the impersonal subject pronoun *man* 'it' co-occurs with the verb denoting existence *kə̂t* 'to happen' in informal or colloquial speech. As proposed by Indrambarya (2011), the impersonal pronoun *man* 'it', when co-occurring with the pseudo-impersonal verb *lāa₂* 'to be exhausted', in (21a), is a marker for converting the personal verb *lāa₁* 'to be exhausted' in (21b) into an impersonal one.

(21) a. *man₂ lāa₂ sûsût*

| Nom | V  | -spcf | +mprs | +rfrn |
|-----|----|-------|-------|-------|
| it | exhaust | extremely | 'I feel absolutely exhausted.' |

b. *tî̂n lāa₁ sûsût*

| Nom | -spcf | +mprs | +rfrn |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|
| I | exhaust | extremely | 'I feel absolutely exhausted.' |

**The Impersonal Pronoun** *khâw₃* 'they'

The use of the impersonal pronoun *khâw₃* 'they' is found sparingly in daily language usage, as shown in (22). The impersonal pronoun *khâw₃* 'they' does not refer to any specific person and its reference cannot be retrieved from the text. It is unknown who *khâw₃* 'they' actually is. The impersonal pronoun *khâw₃* 'they' is often found to co-occur with the impersonal verb *wâa* 'to say'.

(22) *khâw wâa kan wâa*

| Nom | -rfrn | phûyîn tîp phûtaay sâosso |
|-----|-------|-----------------------------|
| they say together say | woman | like | man | surrealistic |

'It is said that women like 'surrealistic’ men.'

(daily conversation)

**The Impersonal Pronoun** *thân₃* 'they'

The impersonal pronoun *thân₃* 'they' is used sparingly and in quite limited contexts. It can be found in legends, as well as in traditional herbal medicine, mostly in everyday language. Here in example (23), the word *thân₃* 'they' originally referred to wise elders or the wise. Like the impersonal *khâw₃* 'they', this impersonal pronoun *thân₃* 'they' is unspecified both for gender and number. It is generally acceptable to interpret *thân₃* 'they' as the elderly and the wise of an earlier time.

(23) *thân₃ háy ʔaw tônmayaràap*

| Nom | -spcf | tînkràpcakrawan maa lâay |
|-----|-------|-----------------------------|
| they make | take | mimosa plant | all purpose plant | come wash |

(daily conversation)
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Political Language

Only the impersonal subject man 'it' is found in political language. The impersonal pronoun man, 'it' can co-occur with both true-impersonal verbs, as in (24), and pseudo-impersonal verbs, as in (25).

(24) man mây pen rían dîi
     it not be story good
     Nom +mprs -rfrn -psdo
     sâmâpr prathêtfinât lé?
     for nation and
     pratâfôn loèy
     people at all
     'It is neither good for the nation nor for the people.'
     (political speech)

In political language, politicians tend to reach out to their audience and so the use of man 'it' with the true-impersonal verb pen 'to be' in (24) makes the sentence informal and easier for politicians to talk to supporters. Example (25) is an instance of the impersonal subject man 'it' co-occurring with a pseudo-impersonal verb tñâ? 'to win' to strengthen the unity of speaker and audience as members of the same group sharing a similar experience so that moving toward the same goal is simpler.

(25) phró? man yâŋ tñâ?
     because it yet win
     Nom +mprs -rfrn +psdo
     mây sût hâ? sî? phînê?
     not end Prt Prt sibling
     thâglâay
     altogether
     'Because it is not the ultimate victory, folks.'
     (political speech)

Media Language

No impersonal subject was found in news reports: newspapers, TV and radio news broadcasts, nor in any magazine advertisements. Note that the impersonal subject man 'it' can be found in the interview part of a news item but it is not counted as part of media language.

Academic Language

Academic language is the register which is formal and concise. Indrambarya (2014) found that academic language tends to use true-impersonal verbs, rather than pseudo-impersonal verbs. Impersonal subjects which co-occur with true-impersonal verbs illustrate informality and hence not expected in this language register. As expected, the impersonal subject man 'it' then was not found. However, this study found one instance of the impersonal subject khâw co-occurring with the true-impersonal verb rîak 'to call' in a medical journal for the general public, as in (26).

Here, it is an instance where the writer...
may be trying to express closeness with readers.

(26) tamnèŋ kaankhùapkhùm kaambèŋ
position control dividing
sel kháw riak proto ṭsìkhociin
cell they call proto Oncogene
-ťfrn
‘The position of cell division control
is called Proto Oncogene.’

(medical journal for the general public 2)

Legal Language

Even though legal language makes most frequent use of true-impersonal verbs such as hây 'to make, to cause', none of the impersonal subjects were found in legal language. This is because legal language is a formal language register. The presence of the impersonal man 'it' with true-impersonal verbs denotes informality (Indrambarya 2011). Instances of the archaic use of the 3rd person pronoun thàn, 'he, she' in a legal document dated between 1874 and 1933 were found. Yet, this thàn, 'he, she' is referential. Such usage is found exclusively in Military Law, Civil Law and Commerce, and regulation for civilians. The word thàn in legal language originally referred to the King who promulgated laws and regulations to signify his supreme power. Once the country became a constitutional monarchy, the word was no longer used in legal language. Therefore, thàn in (27) is a third personal pronoun found exclusively in an old legal text.

(27) Act 19. phûday pen thahâan le?
anyone be soldier and
man baŋʔàat kliaklîm
it dare persuade
khon hây pen phûak
person cause be group
râchasàttru thàn wâa
enemy they say
Nom
+ťfrn
thòot manthîŋ tîŋ
pardon it reach touch
prahâantiwiit ...
death penalty

'Any soldiers who led others to
become disloyal to the country,
deserve the death penalty...'

(Military Law 1934)

As illustrated in this section, the impersonal pronoun man2 'it' is the most prevalent. The occurrence of impersonal pronouns is limited to everyday language and political language, with the highest frequency in everyday usage. Impersonal pronouns are not found to be associated with legal, academic and media language registers, which are mostly formal language. The next section discusses how each impersonal pronoun reflects social distance.

Impersonal Pronouns and Social Distance

This section discusses how the three impersonal pronouns exhibit different degrees of social distance. The three personal pronouns in Thai convey different characteristics when co-occurring with animate subjects. While man1 'it' conveys a derogative meaning, intimacy and colloquial speed, kháw2 'he, she' is used to refer to people of equal or lower status. The personal pronoun thàn2 'he,
she' is used to refer to a respected person and/or an acquaintance of high rank. Each of these intrinsic hierarchical values is carried over to their homophonous impersonal counterparts.

**The Impersonal Pronoun** man₂ 'it'

The impersonal pronoun man₂ 'it' which co-occurs with pseudo-impersonal verbs reflects social distance quite clearly. The pronoun man₂ 'it' reflects alienation from the speaker and at the same time brings the speaker closer to listeners. In example (28), instead of calling herself phîi 'sister', the speaker prefers to lose her own self and uses man₂ 'it' instead. In this way the speaker is able to share her own experience freely with others, no matter how bad it sounds, as if she is talking about someone else, not herself.

(28) man plia // phîi máy yàak yîm // it tired older not want smile o máy yàak pay này not want go where

The impersonal pronoun kháw₃ 'they' refers to other people of equal status just like its personal counterpart. The impersonal pronoun kháw₃ 'they' can be used to secure and support a speaker's voice and opinions. That is, listeners are urged to feel there are many other people who perform a similar action. The impersonal pronoun kháw₃ 'they' is used in example (29) to show that the idea of passing under an (artificial) elephant would be widely acceptable. Many people have done this. Therefore, it is not odd to do something similar. This pronoun kháw₃ 'they' can refer to anyone out there who supports such an idea, and hence it is impersonal.

(29) kháw₃ wàa o lɔɔt thɔŋ yàak elephant then will give birth easy

The Impersonal Pronoun thân₃ 'they'

Since the personal pronoun thân₃ 'they' normally refers to someone older or in a higher position, the word thân₃ 'they' maintains this intrinsic semantic feature of being of high rank and reflects a certain distance from the addressee. A speaker could then manipulate the impersonal thân₃ 'they' to gain more credibility with regard to the topic in focus, as in (23) repeated here as (30).

(30) thân₃ hây ?aw tönmayarâap they make take mimosa plant
tônkrāp crackrawan maa làáŋ all purpose plant come wash
nàam sa?át hân pen fîy water clean chop be shred
tiak hây hêŋ khîa fay sun-dry till dry roast fire
hây sûk rm nàmyaa make fully cooked pour medicine
ráprâthan theen nàamtîa eat instead of tea

'It is said that after rinsing mimosa and the all-purpose plants clean water, and then shredding, sun-drying and roasting, they make fully cooked medicine and eat instead of tea.'

(daily conversation)
roasting till them cooked, one can
drink the juice as a tea.’
(traditional recipe for making
herbal medicine for curing
diabetes)

Example (30) is a traditional recipe for
curing diabetes. Since this recipe has
earned its reputation by a word-of-mouth
from generation to generation, it is not
known exactly who initiated it. The writer
then intentionally uses thân, ‘they’ to
convince readers that the far-fetched and
less known recipe has been highly
regarded as efficacious and that this herbal
medicine might be worth a try.

As shown in this section, the three
impersonal pronouns exhibit different
degrees of social distance. Figure 2
captures how the three impersonal subjects
reflect different degrees of social distance
from listeners. While the impersonal
pronoun man, ‘it’ brings a speaker closest
to a listener, the impersonal pronoun thân, ‘they’ pushes a listener furthest away.

Social distance correlates closely with
power over interlocutors. Hence, each
impersonal subject reflects different
degrees of power over listeners. By using
thân, ‘they’, a speaker is able to motivate
others to do as he/she wishes by claiming
the authority of wise elders while creating
a certain gap of respect and high regard
from listeners, as shown earlier in (30).

With the pronoun khâw 'they' in (29), a
speaker could consolidate his/her power
by informing listeners of what other
people have said and indirectly motivating
listeners to believe him/her and to follow
his/her lead.

While the impersonal pronouns thân, ‘they’ and khâw, ‘they’ claim an authority
of others directly, the impersonal pronoun
man, ‘it’ brings a speaker closer to a
listener so that a speaker could familiarize
him/herself with and befriend a listener.
Once the listener’s trust has been gained,
the speaker could further motivate him/
her. It is a more indirect way of expressing
power. It is not surprising to find the use
of impersonal man, ‘it’ in political
language, in addition to everyday
language. In (31), the impersonal man, ‘it’
co-occurs with the true-impersonal verb
mii ‘to exist’ and makes the sentence
informal. It is common for a politician to
use the impersonal man, ‘it’ with true-
impersonal verbs in his/her speech
because it brings politicians closer to their
supporters.

(31) man mii khon sùan nin thūi
it exist person part one that
khâw pay plûkradom wāy
they go provoke lying

Figure 2: Relations between Impersonal
Subjects and Social Distance
'There are a group of people who have been provoked.'

(political speech)

Moreover, it is natural for politicians to familiarize themselves with their advocates. The presence of man 'it' in their speech with pseudo-impersonal verbs enables politicians to express and share their feelings and opinions with their supporters, as in (32).

(32) man cèppi̯at thii̯ raw tɔŋ
it pain that we must
ɔ̂ŋ paasii tɔawbāan
pay for tax villager
hây kâp khon klùm nিঋ
for with person group one
'It is painful that our taxes need to be spent to pay off debts made by for a group of people.'

(political speech)

Here, a politician brings him/herself closer to his advocates by sharing how painful it is for both citizens to pay debts made by a group of selfish people. Once the politician gains trust and amity, it is not difficult for a politician to induce further motivation and movement.

Figure 3 illustrates how Thai impersonal subjects reflect degrees of power over listeners with thān, 'they' being the most influential pronoun and man, 'it' being the least influential.

Conclusion

The three Thai impersonal pronouns are found mainly in everyday language and political language. They are rarely found in legal language, academic language or language of news reports as well as magazine advertisements.

These impersonal pronouns exhibit different degrees of social distance and language power over listeners. It is claimed in this paper that by using the impersonal pronoun thān, a speaker creates the largest gap from a listener by appealing to the authority of past wisdom to induce listeners to do as he/she wishes. By using the impersonal pronoun khāw, a speaker makes a certain gap away from a listener and searches for power of precedence or a claim on what other people have said or done, while then allows the listener to ponder whether to believe him/her. Both thān and khāw are not commonly used and are exclusively found in everyday language.

The impersonal pronoun man 'it', on the other hand, not only makes sentences informal but also separates a speaker from his or her own self and brings closer
connection with the listener. Use of this pronoun is offer a strategy for gaining the listener’s trust, friendship and cooperation, a common tactic found in political language.

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