

On the Choice of the Discourse Deictics /นີ້/ and /ນຳ/ in Thai

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According to Levinson (1983: 86), a discourse deictic is a pronoun which refers to a linguistic expression or chunk of discourse. In Thai, the words /ນີ້/ and /ນຳ/ seem to be recognized as the discourse deictics. The words /ນີ້/ and /ນຳ/ have the high tone counterparts /ນິ້/ and /ນຳ/ and they are distinguished from each other by their different functions (Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom 2005: 83). That is, /ນີ້/ and /ນຳ/ function as demonstrative pronouns, as in (1), whereas /ນິ້/ and /ນຳ/, as in (2) and (3), function as noun modifiers. The present study aims to focus only on the demonstrative pronouns.

In many previous studies (Nakagawa 2002, Upakitsilapasarn 2003, Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom 2005, Bandumetha 2006), the choice of /ນີ້/ and /ນຳ/ is mentioned only when they are recognized as another kind of deictics, namely, the spatial deictics or the linguistic expressions that refer to people, objects or places in the immediate speech environment. That is, /ນີ້/ is used to refer to entities that are near the speaker, as in (4), whereas /ນຳ/ refers to entities that are far from the speaker, as in (5).

I have been noticing that there is no in-depth study on the discourse deictics /ນີ້/ and /ນຳ/ in Thai as well as the study on the choice of the discourse deictics /ນີ້/ and /ນຳ/. Thus, the present study aims to find out the constraints that govern the choices of these pronouns. The data in this study were collected from various types of written texts such as newspapers, novels, articles in present-day Thai.

It is found that there are two types of distance, namely, physical distance and psychological distance, that constraint the choice of /ນີ້/ and /ນຳ/ in Thai. Being determined by the physical distance or the distance between the demonstratives and a piece of text, /ນີ້/ is used to refer to a previously mentioned expression in the discourse, as shown in (6), whereas /ນຳ/ is used to refer to an upcoming piece of discourse, as shown in (7). Being affected by the psychological distance, /ນີ້/ is used when a previously mentioned expression refers to an inalienable thing or a directly related thing to the speaker/writer, as shown in (8), on the other hand, /ນຳ/ is used when a previously mentioned expression refers to an alienable or an unrelated thing, as shown in (9).

In conclusion, it is claimed here that “distance” is the major factor that affects the choice of the two discourse deictics in Thai.

Examples

(1) *chán châɔp nûi tèe kháw châɔp nân*

I like this but s/he like that
'I like this buy he likes that.'

(2) *bâan lăŋ nûi khăɔŋ khray*

house CLF this of who
'Whose house is this?'

(3) *bâan lăŋ nán khăɔŋ khray*

house CLF that of who
'Whose house is that?'

(4) *nûi ?ray*

this what
'What is this?'

(5) *nân ?ray*

that what
'What is that?'

(6) *[kaanmîaŋ kamlaŋ cà plianpleeŋ] nûi khîi sîŋ thîi prachaachon tâŋkaan*

politics PROG will change this be thing that people want
'The politics is changing. This is what people want.'

(7) *kaanmîaŋ kamlaŋ cà plianpleeŋ nân khîi [kaan dâay râtthabaan mày]*

politics PROG will change that be NOM get government new
'The politics is changing. That is we will have a new government.'

(8) *[nom mii prayòt tòɔ râaŋkaay] nûi pen sîŋ thîi raw khuan rúu*

milk have benefit to body this be thing that we should know
'Milk is good for health. This is what we should know.'

(9) *kháw bòk chán wâa [kháw cà laa?òok] chán bòk kháw wâa nân pen riaŋ khăɔŋ kháw*

s/he tell I that s/he will quit I tell s/he that that be story of s/he
'S/he told me that s/he will quit the job. I told him/her that it/that is his/her business.'

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