ABSTRACT

Reduced relative clauses in Thai and Vietnamese

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An analysis of a noun phrase with a modifier in Thai, such as *khon dii* (person-good) 'a good person', often brings about a controversy as to what linguistic category the modifier belongs to. Several syntacticians (e.g., Noss 1964, Panupong 1989, Sookasem 1996) consider it to be an adjective, whereas some others (e.g., Savetamalya 1996, Prasithrathsint 2000, Kullavanijaya 2006) maintain that it is a relative clause. Therefore, according to the latter, *khon dii* (person-good) is syntactically equivalent to *khon thîi dii* (person-that-good), a relative clause with the relativizer *thîi*. This controversial issue has interested us a great deal, and in this paper we will argue that this type of noun-modifier is a relative clause without a relativizer, that is, a "reduced relative clause."

We have observed that this type of modifier is frequently used in Thai and other Southeast Asian languages, such as Vietnamese. However, there has been no in-depth study as to why it should be regarded as a relative clause and how it is different from a marked relative clause. Therefore, based on data from both speech and writing in Thai and Vietnamese, the present study aims to justify that reduced relative clauses in the two languages are a type of relative clause and to uncover syntactic and semantic constraints that govern their occurrence. We chose to focus on Thai and Vietnamese because they are typologically much alike—both are tonal, S-V-O, and isolating languages—and seem to represent the typical mainland Southeast Asian languages.

The findings show that a reduced relative clause in Thai and Vietnamese has important universal characteristics of relative clauses; that is, it functions as a noun modifier, contains a main verb and a gap that is co-referential with the head noun (Keenan 1985, Comrie 1989, Comrie & Horie 1995, Comrie 1998). This type of relative clause is labeled "*thîi*-less relative clauses" by Susumu & Wongkhomthong (1980), "verbal relative clauses" by Savetamalya (1996), and "non-finite relative clauses" by Prasithrathsint (2000).

Regarding the syntactic and semantic constraints for their distribution, it is found that reduced relative clauses in the two languages contain **non-finite verbs** and can occur only with **generic** or **indefinite** head nouns that are co-referential with the **subjects of the relative clauses**; for example.

Thai	*chăn*	*rúucaàk*	*nákrian*	*[maa*	*càak*	*wîatnaam]*	*khon*	*nɨ̀ŋ*
	I	know	student	come	from	Vietnam	person	one

'I know a student who came from Vietnam.'

Vietnamese	*tôi*	*biết*	*một*	*sinh viên*	*[đến*	*từ*	*Việt Nam]*
	I	know	one	student	come	from	Vietnam

'I know a student who came from Vietnam.'

As can be seen from the above examples, the head nouns meaning 'student' are indefinite and co-referential with the gaps, which are indeed subjects of the relative

clauses. Also, the verbs for 'come' are non-finite—they cannot be preceded by any auxiliary. These are significant features that distinguish reduced relative clauses from relative clauses with relativizers in Thai and Vietnamese.

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