

DISCOURSE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE
UNDERSTANDING OF A ZERO PRONOUN IN A PASSAGE FROM
THE PHRÁRÂATCHAWÍCAAN¹

John A. Grima

Li and Thompson (1979) showed in a quite convincing way that the identification of the antecedents of hypothetical instances of “zero pronoun”² across sentences in Chinese texts was in no way correlated with structural, semantic, or linear properties of the sentences containing either the antecedent or the zero. Instead they found that identification was accomplished pragmatically, utilizing “speakers’ and hearers’ abilities to make inferences beyond what sentences actually say.” Despite claims which suggest the contrary in Grima and Strecker (1976), Bandhmedha (1976), Jones and Diller (1976:11), and Panupong (1970:192), the same analysis is undoubtedly indicated for Thai: there is no consistent relationship between the grammatical role, linear position, or related syntactic and semantic structure of zero pronouns and their antecedents in Thai.³

In this paper, my focus will be on only one example of zero anaphora, in which the zero and its antecedent are separated by many sentences and by over one hundred words of text. I will assume that the ultimate determination of the antecedent is a pragmatic exercise. It will be my purpose to demonstrate that aspects of the hierarchical, repetitive, and syntactic structure of the discourse that contains it are relevant to the success of this instance of zero anaphora. These factors will be said to work to contribute to the building of redundancy in an otherwise quite complex text, not as absolute determinants of the antecedent of the zero. Thus the conclusions of the paper concern the system and devices of well-formed Thai discourse and only indirectly the grammar of zero anaphora.

1. This example is taken from the *Phrârâatchawícaan* of Rama V, King Chulalongkorn (Rátchakaan Thîi Hâa 1973:54–55), written in the early part of the twentieth century.⁴ The section of the work from which it is excerpted is an attempt by Rama V to identify the author

John A. Grima

of the memoir on which his book is a commentary. In the immediately preceding paragraph he had determined that the author was a woman and asserted that she was probably a member of the Thonburi ruling family. The example paragraph is presented in support of this latter point.

Abbreviations

ES	Empty subject (independent \emptyset)
CP	Completive particle
IR	Irrealis
KS	Khun Luang S+a (a late Ayudhaya king)
LT	Lord of Thonburi (= King Tak Sin, first king after the fall of Ayudhaya, whose capital was Thonburi)
RC	Relative conjunction
Q	Quotative
SP	Sequence-marking particle (also marks predicates)
W	Writer of the memoirs
//	Signals a syntactic boundary more or less equivalent to a sentence boundary

I. khôokhwaam thîi \emptyset hěn chên níi
 material RC Rama V opine like this

II. phrố?
 because

II.A phôu khĩan nápthắ+ câw kruη thonbùrii //
 W respect LT

II.A1a \emptyset rắak \emptyset wâa phêen-din tôn
 W call LT Q reign first

II.A1b \emptyset chây thôy-kham klàaw thắη \emptyset dooy
 W use idiom speak arrive LT with
 khwaam-khaw-róp
 respectfulness

Discourse Factors

mřan yàaŋ lûuk-lăan cāw kruŋ thonbùrii phôut
 same kind descendants LT speak
 taam thîi
 according to

∅ dâi khəəy faŋ pen ʔan mâak //
 Rama V CP ever listen to a lot

II.A2a mřa ∅ klàaw thřŋ sǎnyaawípàlàat ∅ ∅ kô
 time W speak arrive mental aberration LT W SP
 klàaw dūay khwaam-hěn-cay wâa ∅ pen
 speak with sympathetic understanding Q ES to be
 kaan-baŋʔəən ∅ pen pay chên nán dūay ∅ pen
 accident ES to be go like that because ES to be
 weelaa ∅ khróʔ kam léʔ pen weelaa ∅ cà sîn
 time LT bad karma and to be time LT IR out of
 bun sîn wâatsànǎa //
 merit out of merit

II.A2b mřa ∅ klàaw thřŋ kaan-dùʔráay ∅ ∅ kô
 time W speak arrive fierceness LT what she says SP
 khôən-khâaŋ cà pen kham yùu khâaŋ ʔùatʔùat
 almost, appears IR to be word to be located side brag
 wâa ∅ kèŋkàat rřř ∅ cay-khəə dèt-díaw yàaŋ
 Q LT bold or LT character decisive kind
 diaw kan kàp lûuk-lăan khŭn lǔaŋ sřa klàaw
 same reciprocal with descendants KS speak
 thřŋ khŭn lǔaŋ sřa yók yôəŋ ∅ nay kaan thîi
 arrive KS praise KS in clausal nominalizer
 ∅ mii khwaam-hěn-lúaŋ-nâa chên ∅ rúusřk-tua
 KS have foresight an instance KS be aware

John A. Grima

wâa Ø sîn bun léew //
 Q KS out of merit CP

mfa khăw chœn (Ø) hây (Ø) bùat Ø
 time 'they' invite KS give KS become a monk KS

kô yindii priidaa thî Ø cà'ðək bùat //
 SP happy happy conjunction KS IR leave become a monk

kh rán mfa câw bunmiiraammálák pay chuan (Ø) hây
 time time lord Bunmiiraammalak go persuade KS give

(Ø) sək Ø kô mây yœm sək //
 KS leave the monkhood KS SP not agree leave mh.

Ø wâa Ø sîn bun léew //
 KS Q KS out of merit already

Ø yàa pay
 KS & Bunmiiraammalak negative imperative go

sûu khăw læy //
 fight 'them' at all

II.A3 daŋ níi pen tɔn //
 'like this for openers'

II.B lé' Ø pen phûu rúu kîríyaa 'àtchaasăy
W to be person know habits character

câw kruŋ thonbùrii sŋŋ lûuk-lăan
 LT RC descendants

khăw
 3rd person (= lûuk-lăan)

lâw kan yùu wâa mfa Ø cà ráp-sàŋ
 relate reciprocal be located Q time LT IR speak

kàp kh ray kh ray Ø kô yœm rîak
 with who who (anybody) LT SP usually call

Discourse Factors

phráʹoŋ ʹeeŋ wâa phôo //
body reflexive Q father

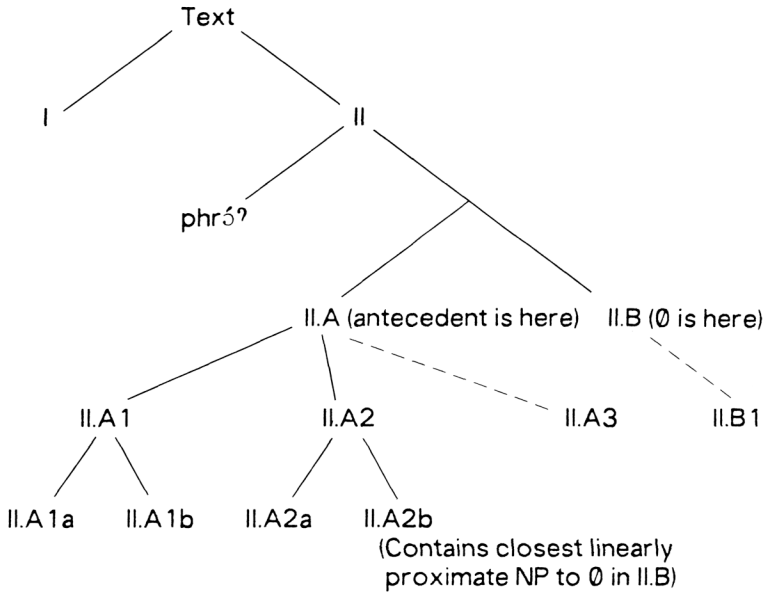
ll.B1 daŋ níi //
like this

Translation: I conclude thus because the writer respects the Lord of Thonburi. She calls him “The First Reign”; she uses a respectful idiom when referring to him, which is the same as the descendants of the Lord of Thonburi speak, as I have heard a great deal. When she refers to his mental aberration, she speaks with sympathetic understanding, saying that it was an accident that things happened like that because it was a time of bad Karma for him or a time when his merit had been used up. When she speaks of his fierceness, what she says almost appears to be bragging, saying that he was bold or decisive. This is exactly the same as how the descendants of Khun Luang S+a refer to Khun Luang S+a, praising him for having foresight in that he was aware that his merit was used up. When “they” invited him [to leave the throne] to become a monk, he was happy to do so. The time when Lord Bunmiiraammalak went to persuade him to leave the monastery [and attempt to regain the throne], he refused, saying that his merit was used up, that they should not fight “them.” It is like this for one thing. And *she* was a person who knew the habits of the Lord of Thonburi, of which his descendants relate that when he would speak with anybody, he usually called himself “father.” It is like this.

Diagram I is an attempt to abstract the hierarchical structure of the text. The numbers, letters, and labels correspond to those in the margin of the text.

The extent to which all of the divisions of this diagram can be well motivated varies. Arguments can be made from rhetorical structure for most of the decisions about grouping and hierarchy, but evidence that is independent of the content is sometimes lacking.

DIAGRAM I



Everything under node II is related to node I as persuasive argument for accepting the assertions which I summarize with the phrase *khôkhwaaan thî i hên chên ní i*; these assertions concern the unknown author of the memoir. The argument is broken into two parts, both subordinated to the rhetorical predicate *phrô?* ‘because’.⁵ The part included under node II.A claims that the author respected the Lord of Thonburi (King Tak Sin, reigned 1767–82). II.A1 and II.A2 denote subsections of the argument presented to demonstrate this claim about respect. II.A1 concerns the type of language used by the author in referring to King Tak Sin; II.A1a asserts that she called him by a highly respectful term (*phèen-din tôn* ‘the First Reign’, giving him status as the founder of a dynasty); II.A1b asserts that she used respectful language in referring to him. II.A2 concerns the way the author approached possibly embarrassing aspects of Tak Sin’s character, asserting in two examples, II.A2a and II.A2b, that she showed them in the best possible light.

II.B is, parallel to II.A, an assertion given in support of I, claiming that the author knew Tak Sin’s habits well, to the point of knowing

Discourse Factors

how he referred to himself in speaking with others.

The two nodes of the diagram whose position is most problematic are II.A3 and II.B1, the phrases *daŋ níi pen tòn* and *daŋ níi*, more or less translatable as “like this for openers” and “like this,” respectively. These function differently than do other parts of the text, marking off divisions rather than contributing to the development of the argument. They are topic, or subtopic, closing devices, and as such are metastatements that cannot be placed very well with other parts of the text. I have put them immediately under the highest node of the material they bind, with a dotted rather than a solid line, to show that their placement is tentative.

In addition to these rhetorical arguments, there is independent structural evidence for segmenting the two groupings headed II.A and II.B, and for considering the two lines II.A and II.B to be on the same level of hierarchy. After the material included under nodes II.A and II.B, there occur phrases whose function is to close off sections of text, the phrases *daŋ níi pen tòn* and *daŋ níi*, discussed above. These phrases indicate boundaries between II.A and II.B and the material that follows them. Moreover, the syntax of lines II.A and II.B is that of a single compound sentence; the /É? ‘and’ conjunction with which II.B begins can only be read as following from II.A:

phûu khʻan	náphtʻi	câw kruŋ thonbùrii	/É? Ø pen phûu
writer	respect	LT	andW to be person

rúu	kíríyaa ʔátchaasǎy	câw kruŋ thonbùrii
know	habits	LT

“The writer respected the Lord of Thonburi *and was a person who knew the Lord of Thonburi’s habits.*”

This remarkable occurrence of coordinate syntax in clauses separated by intervening syntactically independent text is good evidence of the hierarchical coordination of these two utterances in the discourse structure.

2. There are a large number of zeroes indicated in this section of text, but the one that occurs in line II.B is the focus of this paper. The antecedent of this zero, *phûu khʻan* ‘writer’, occurs in line II.A. Note that a great deal of text intervenes between the zero and its antecedent. The structure of that intervening text is quite complex, and it contains at least two other noun-phrase mentions that might

have served as the antecedent for the zero of line II.B, *khŭn lŭaŋ sŕa* and *câw bunmiiraammâlak*, both in II.A2b, both closer to the zero pronoun than the actual antecedent.

For the reader, the decision to select *phŭu khŭan* as the antecedent over the other possible nouns is based on an understanding that goes beyond what is immediately presented by the text. It can include the knowledge that neither of the other two possible antecedents was ever in a position to know or deal with the Lord of Thonburi, and it necessarily includes the awareness that in the discussion of the authorship of these memoirs, only *phŭu khŭan* is relevant to the context.

In addition to this pragmatic construal of the text, four other factors associated with its discourse structure contribute to the ability of a reader to successfully arrive at the decision that *phŭu khŭan* is the proper antecedent for the zero in II.B.

The first of these concerns the fact that the discourse has been “punctuated” so as to indicate that a closing has occurred and a new opening will follow. This has been accomplished by the insertion of the phrase *daŋ ní i pen tŏn*. This does not make it impossible that the new opening—and any associated zero reference—would continue to refer to the subject matter that immediately precedes it, but it does alert the reader to the possibility that this may not happen. As such it prepares him to reject *câw bunmiiraamâlak* and *khŭn lŭaŋ sŕa* as antecedents, without requiring that he do so and without suggesting other possible antecedents.

A second point of discourse structure that assists the reader in determining the antecedent of the zero pronoun in question is that the writer has used four sentences prior to this one in which *phŭu khŭan* also has been the referent of a zero in subject position. These are coded as II.A1a, II.A1b, II.A2a, and II.A2b. All of these sentences resume reference to *phŭu khŭan* as subject after the preceding material introduced subject matter that could conceivably have been further elaborated. In this way, the writer has established a pattern of repeatedly returning to the same subject as he advances his text, and the reader is potentially aware of this as he attends to II.B and the zero that is its subject. Thus, he can be prepared for the possibility that *phŭu khŭan* will again appear as the subject referent.

The third factor helping the reader to correctly interpret this sentence is the relationship of its syntactic structure to that of II.A, which contains the antecedent and the first and only mention of

Discourse Factors

phûu khīan. II.B is presented with /É? ‘and’ in first position, yet it follows immediately after the contentless phrase *daŋ nī pen tōn*. II.B cannot be coordinate with this phrase, although /É? demands that a preceding coordinate structure be present. /É? thus presents a contradiction, and the reader must search for the coordinate structure while he searches for the antecedent of the zero pronoun subject of II.B. This syntactic search leads him back to II.A, the only syntactically appropriate coordinate structure, just as his pragmatic evaluation of potential antecedents leads him also to II.A and *phûu khīan*. By using this unusual but perfectly grammatical floating coordinate sentence, the writer has provided the reader with reinforcement for the decision that II.B contains a reference to *phûu khīan* as subject.

The fourth aspect of the discourse structure that contributes to the identification of the correct antecedent is the fact that the sentences containing each are at the same level of hierarchy. This was discussed in section 1 and can be observed in diagram 1, in which II.A, containing the antecedent, and II.B, containing the zero, are sister nodes. Not all Thai discourse is characterized by anaphoric patterns that neatly follow the discourse hierarchies in the manner observed here.⁶ However, the controlling of anaphoric reference of this sort, in which the antecedent and the anaphor are separated by one or more developed topics so that it does not utilize antecedents distributed randomly in the discourse structure, does appear to be a characteristic of a more formal style of Thai.⁷ Because of this, the reader’s identification of *phûu khīan* as the antecedent of the zero in II.B is further reinforced. With this antecedent as subject, II.B fits into the discourse at the same level of hierarchy as II.A. This gives an interpretation of these two sentences that is consistent with the reader’s expectations for orderly anaphoric reference within a well-formed text and satisfies his pragmatic understanding of what the writer is saying.

3. This paper has presented a discussion of four aspects of discourse structure as they are observed in relation to the problem of discovering the antecedent of one particularly difficult instance of zero anaphora. None of the four, not even in combination, can be said to directly determine the reader’s identification of this antecedent. This is ultimately a different kind of decision. Instead their role must be seen as one of creating redundancy in the text, a redundancy which assists the reader in interpreting the zero pronoun

we have focused on by leading him to re-create for himself the textual structure that the writer intended. They can thus be tentatively identified, like the directional verbs discussed in Bickner (1978), as devices available, consciously or otherwise, to writers and users of Thai as they strive to create coherent, well-formed texts.

Notes

1. This paper presents a new analysis of some of the material discussed in Grima and Strecker (1976). I am indebted in this presentation to the excellent work that David Strecker has done in this area and to his willingness to share it with me. It is a great pleasure to offer this work to Professor William Gedney as he prepares to retire from teaching.
2. Also referred to by different authors as zero anaphora, zero nominal reference, pronoun omission, pronoun deletion, pronoun drop, etc. Like Li and Thompson (1979), I will speak “unabashedly” of zeroes, zero anaphora, and zero pronoun. I would not, however, accept that these terms are more than rhetorical tools.
3. See Grima (1978) for a detailed discussion of zero anaphora in Thai.
4. This section and the first two paragraphs of section 2 are taken with only minor revisions from Grima and Strecker (1976).
5. For a discussion of rhetorical predicates, see Grimes (1975).
6. One can often observe zero and other anaphoric pronominal reference to persons or objects from scattered points in a discourse, and even from outside the discourse, in the conversation of husbands and wives and other close intimates. Of course, this is also fairly common in English, where it is culturally salient as part of a stereotype of an empty-headed style of talking. It does not seem to have such salience in Thai culture.
7. See Deutsch (1974) for a related phenomenon in English.

Discourse Factors

References

- Bandhmedha, Navavan. "Noun Phrase Deletion." Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, Seattle, 1976.
- Bickner, Robert J. "Directional Modification in Thai Fiction: The Use of 'Come' and 'Go' in Text Building." Paper presented at the International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, Eleventh Meeting, University of Arizona, October 20-22, 1978.
- Deutsch, Barbara. "The Structure of Task Oriented Dialogs." Paper presented at Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Symposium on Speech Recognition, Central Michigan University, April 1974.
- Grima, John A. "Categories of Zero Nominal Reference and Clausal Structure in Thai." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1978.
- Grima, John A., and David Strecker. "Zero Anaphora in Thai Texts." Paper presented at the International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, Ninth Meeting, Copenhagen, October 22-24, 1976.
- Grimes, Joseph. *The Thread of Discourse*. Janua Linguarum, Series Minor, no. 207. The Hague: Mouton, 1975.
- Jones, Robert B., and Anthony V. Diller. *Discourse Analysis of Thai and Japanese*. HEW grant report, 1976. Unpublished.
- Li, Charles N., and Sandra A. Thompson. "Third-person Pronouns and Zero-anaphora in Chinese Discourse." In *Syntax and Semantics*, edited by Talmy Givón, 311-35. Vol. 12 of *Discourse and Syntax*. New York: Academic Press, 1979.
- Panupong, Vichin. *Inter-sentence Relations in Modern Bangkok Thai*. Bangkok: Siam Society, 1970.
- Rátchakaan Thîi Hâa [Chulalongkorn, King of Thailand]. *Còmăayhèet khwaamsoṅcam krommalūaṅ narinthṓonthewii lé' phrârâat-chaw/caan rátchakaan thîi hâa* [Memoirs of princess of the third rank Narinthṓonthewii with commentary by King Rama V]. Bangkok: Khúrúsàphaa, 1973.

