A Systemic Functional Interpretation of Thai Grammar: An Exploration of Thai Narrative Discourse

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Abstract

This research is a text-based study of the grammar of standard Thai, based on systemic functional linguistics. It is the first attempt to explore Thai in systemic functional terms, that is with the account of the grammar of Thai being interpreted as resource for making meaning that is part of language as a higher-order semiotic system. This account utilizes a corpus-based methodology and explores extensive evidence from natural narrative texts, specifically fourteen Thai folk tales. This systemic functional interpretation of Thai is also supported by an investigation of other text types (See Chapter 2). The research has both intermediate and long term implications. The description itself will be a resource for the Thai community and it will also contribute to the growing area of linguistic typology based on systemic descriptions. The long term implication of the research is that the description will be used as a model for text-based research into minority languages in Thailand.

There are two introductory chapters to the study. **The first chapter** discusses some general issues concerned with systemic functional theory and data used in the development of the description of the grammar of Thai. **The second chapter** is a preview chapter which provides an overview of the grammar of Thai in terms of three strands of meaning: textual, interpersonal, and the experiential mode of ideational meanings. The systemic functional interpretation is based on an exploration of a number of texts with a wide generic spread (e.g. news reports, topographic texts, encyclopedia, and television interview).

Chapter 3 to Chapter 7 constitute the main body of the thesis. **Chapter 3** deals with the textual metafunction: it explores the THEME system as the enabling resource for the clause grammar for presenting interpersonal and experiential meanings as a flow of information in context. **Chapter 4** is concerned with the interpersonal metafunction. It is focused on exploring the MOOD system, that is, the resource of clause grammar for enacting social roles and relationships in an exchange. **Chapter 5** is concerned with the experiential mode of the ideational metafunction: it investigates the TRANSITIVITY system, which is the resource of the clause grammar for construing our experience of the world around and inside us. As this thesis is based mainly on narrative discourse, **Chapter 6** profiles Thai narratives in terms of context, semantics, and lexicogrammar. Firstly, at the context stratum, the chapter describes the generic structure potential of Thai folk tales. Secondly, the chapter describes the realization of this generic structure by semantic properties. Finally, the chapter is concerned with quantitatively exploring the narratives on

the basis of clause-rank systems, at the stratum of lexicogrammar, across the metafunctional spectrum midway up the cline of instantiation. In the **final chapter**, the study concludes by summarizing the preceding chapters, pointing out research implications and limitations, and suggesting some areas for further studies.

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Certificate of Originality

I hereby certify that this work is the result of my own research and that the work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. I certify that the sources of information used and the extent to which the work of others has been utilized have been indicated in the thesis.

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