

CHAPTER TWO Adjective Phrases

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CHAPTER TWO

ADJECTIVE PHRASES

Chapter two is complementary to chapter one as adjective phrases are closely related to noun phrases. This chapter provides a detailed description of the adjectival phrases in English and Thai. The chapter first discusses the characteristics of the adjectival phrases in English. It next deals with Thai adjectives and their constituents.

2. 1 Characteristics of the Adjectives in English

An adjective is a part of speech or word class mainly used to pre-modify nouns and as a complement to copular or linking verbs. It describes the thing, quality, state, or action which a noun refers to. Compared with the noun phrases, the adjectival phrases are relatively simpler as they mainly consist of a head and one modifier.

According to Geoffrey Finch (2000: 82), adjectives are words which specify the attributes of nouns. Typically, they give information about the size, colour, shape and appearance of entities.

An adjective phrase is a phrase with an adjective as head, as in ‘very happy’. There are simple adjectives such as *good, bad, big, fat, young, old, simple*, etc. and derived adjectives which are formed through adding suffixes to nouns and verbs, such as -able *adorable*, -ful *careful*, -ic *economic*, -ive *talkative*, -ous *dangerous*, etc.

Adjectives are usually defined by their distribution, that is, where they can occur in word strings. They are characteristically found in two places:

first, in an **attributive** position within a noun phrase and a **predicative** position (Quirk and Greenbaum, 2008: 127).

Adjectives are attributive when they pre-modify noun. They appear between the determiner and the head of the noun phrase:

The *beautiful* painting

Our *main* objective

The *lovely* book

Some adjectives have a heightening or lowering effect on the noun they modify. Two semantic subclasses of intensifying adjectives can be distinguished : *emphasizers* and *amplifiers* (ibid, 134) :

The examples of *emphasizers* which are attributive are :

A *certain* winner a *real* hero

The examples of *amplifiers* which are attributive are:

A *close* friend *utter* folly

The *very* end A *great* supporter

Some adjectives such as *outright*, *utter*, *chief* and *former* occur in an attributive position only.

Predicative adjectives can be

a) *subject complement*: The adjectives usually come after the copula, or linking verbs (*be*, *seem*, *appear*, *become*, *look*, *feel*, etc.):

That man is *rich*. He is *afraid*.

I feel *happy*. Fish are *alive*.

b) *object complement*: The adjectives come after the object, for example:

They find her *attractive*. She will get the car *ready*.

Adjectives like *unwell*, *loath*, and *asleep* are in only a predicative position.

Adjectives can sometimes be postpositive. That is, they can follow the item they modify. A postposed adjective can usually be regarded as a reduced relative clause. Indefinite pronouns ending in *-body*, *-one*, *-thing* can be modified only postpositively:

I want to try on something *larger* (**which is** larger).

Is there anything *interesting* (**which is** interesting).

There is someone *ready* to go (**who is** ready).

In several compounds the adjective is postposed, the most common being: attorney *general*, court *martial*, heir *apparent*, president *elect*, Secretary *General*.

Postposition is usual for a few adjectives and for *absent*, *present*, *ablaze* and *concerned*, *involved*:

The house *ablaze* is next door to mine.

The people *involved* were not found.

The members *present* are very few.

Some adjectives can be used after nouns. This is common with adjectives ending in *-able*, *-ible*: the tickets *available*, the only solution *possible*, the only candidate *suitable*.

Adjectives usually follow measurement nouns: six meters *high*, ten miles *long*, and six feet *deep*.

Some postposed adjectives, especially ending in *-able*, or *-ible*, retain the basic meaning they have in attributive position but convey the implication that what they are denoting has only a temporary application. Thus, *the stars visible* refers to stars that are visible at a time specified or implied, while *the visible stars* refers to a category of stars that can (at appropriate times) be seen (Quirk and Greenbaum, 128).

Adjectives in English can often function as heads in noun phrases. They take a definite determiner, for example *the old, the young, the rich, the wise*. These adjectives have generic and plural references. It is possible to add a general word for human beings such as 'people'.

Some adjectives can function as noun-phrase heads when they have abstract references. They take singular concord, and they include superlatives:

The best is yet to come.

He ventured into *the unknown*.

We bought *the cheapest*.

Most adjectives are gradable. They can be modified by adverbs which convey the degree of intensity of adjective. Gradability includes comparison:

<i>tall</i>	<i>taller</i>	<i>tallest</i>
<i>beautiful</i>	<i>more beautiful</i>	<i>most beautiful</i>

and other forms of intensification :

<i>very young</i>	<i>so plain</i>	<i>extremely cold</i>
<i>very simple</i>	<i>quite short</i>	

All dynamic adjectives (for example, *careless, good, noisy, rude, funny*, etc.) are gradable. Most static adjectives (*tall, old*) are gradable; some are non-gradable, especially 'technical adjectives' like *atomic* and *hydrochloric* (Quirk and Greenbaum, 2008: 136).

Adverbs can act as pre-modifiers and post-modifiers of the adjectives (Leech, et al., 1994: 76). The adverbs which act as the pre-modifiers are the adverbs of degree, for example *too heavy, rather difficult, extremely hot*. Some adverbs can be repeated, for example *very very tall*. The adverbs which act as the post-modifiers are: *very good indeed, clever enough*.

2.2 Adjectival Phrases in Thai

From the preceding sections, it is apparent that attributive adjectives in English always precede the nouns. In contrast, adjectives in Thai always follow the head noun which they modify, for example /khon **yai**/ ‘man **big**’ (H+M). Adjectives in Thai are similar to their English equivalents. They can appear in the comparative and superlative constructions. They can also be modified by intensifiers. Details of these will be provided in subsequent sections.

In illustrating the examples of the adjectival phrases, the format is similar to that used in describing the noun phrases. The first line represents a Thai transcription. The second line gives a literal translation. The third line is an English translation. The head nouns in Thai are in bold face; the adjectives are in italics and other modifiers are placed in slanted lines.

There are a great number of adjectives in Thai as in English. The adjectives which are listed below are common ones in Thai.

/yai/	‘big’	/lek/	‘small’
/nao/	‘cold’	/rawn/	‘hot’
/aroy/	‘tasty’	/phet/	‘spicy’
/suay/	‘beautiful’	/law/	‘handsome’
/phaeng /	‘expensive’	/thuek/	‘cheap’
/supha:p/	‘polite’	/klom/	‘round’
/khom/	‘bitter’	/wha:n/	‘sweet’

/kao/	‘old’	/mai/	‘new’
/cha:/	‘slow’	/rew/	‘fast, quick’
/nak/	‘heavy’	/bao/	‘light’
/yao/	‘long’	/san/	‘short’
/ngai/	‘easy’	/yak/	‘difficult’
/baen/	‘flat’	/rawang/	‘careful’
/su:ng/	‘high, tall’	/tia/	‘short’
/dam/	‘black’	/khao/	‘white’
/ya:p/	‘rough, rude’	/la-iad/	‘delicate’
/antarai/	‘dangerous’	/plodphai/	‘safe’
/sombu:n/	‘complete’	/phit/	‘wrong’
/thu:k/	‘right’	/di:/	‘good’
/chua/	‘bad’	/ña:/	‘thick’
/bang/	‘thin’	/cha-la:d/	‘clever’
/ngo/	‘foolish’	/ruay/	‘rich’
/jon/	‘poor’	/~on/	‘soft’
/khaeng/	‘hard’		

Adjectives in general have two functions:

1) as modifier in a noun phrase, for example a *rich* man

2) as head of an adjective phrase, for example very *rich*

Based on these two functions, the present study first describes the first function, that is, the adjective as a modifier in a noun phrase. The second one will be dealt with later.

The adjectival phrase as one of the main elements in the syntactic structure in Thai has the following constituents (Panupong, 1979: 70-76):

1. When the adjectives in Thai modify the head noun, they always follow the nouns; on the contrary the adjectives in English which are attributives normally precede the nouns which are modified, (N+ADJ). Nouns are required in demonstrating the adjectival phrases to make the sense complete. For example:

H	M (Adj)
---	---------

khon	<i>di:</i>
-------------	------------

man	good
-----	------

‘a good man’

dek	<i>uan</i>
------------	------------

child	fat
-------	-----

‘a fat child’

hong	<i>yai</i>
-------------	------------

room	large
------	-------

‘a large room’

nalika: *lek*
clock small
‘a small clock’

m̃a: *du*
dog fierce
‘a fierce dog’

khon *phawm*
man thin
‘a thin man’

ja:n *yai*
plate big
‘a big plate’

a:ha:n *aroy*
food tasty
a tasty food’

si: *dam*
color black
‘a black color’

nangsue *na:*
book thick
‘a thick book’

2. The adjectives modify the head noun. A classifier is placed between the adjective and the head noun. In Thai, when a classifier is used, the phrase becomes more specific. The classifier has been already explained in detail in chapter one; it requires no English translation, for example:

H	CLS	M (Adj)
ma:	/ tua/	<i>yai</i>
dog	CLS	big
'the big dog' (a specific dog with a large body)		

ban	/lang/	<i>yai</i>
house	CLS	big
'the big house' (a specific house')		

ma:	<i>yai</i>
dog	big
'a big dog' (any dog with a large body)	

ban	<i>yai</i>
house	big
'a big house' (any house which is big)	

The first pair in which the article 'the' is used indicates that the words which are referred to are more specific than the second pair. Other examples of the adjectival phrases with classifiers are the following:

H	CLS	M(adj)
cha:m	/bai/	<i>yai</i>
plate	CLS	big
'the big plate'		

toh	/tua/	<i>lek</i>
table	CLS	small
'the small table'		

rom	/khan/	<i>mai</i>
umbrella	CLS	new
'the new umbrella'		

dinsaw	/taeng/	<i>yao</i>
pencil	CLS	long
'the long pencil'		

3. The adjectives modify the head noun. They are followed by a classifier and a demonstrative that comes last while a demonstrative in English precedes the phrase.

H	Adj	CLS	Demon
rot	<i>si:dam</i>	/khan	nan/
car	black	CLS	that
'that black car'			

maew	<i>si:khao</i>	/ tua	ni/
cat	white	CLS	this
'this white cat'			

tuek	<i>sueng</i>	/lang	nan/
building	tall	CLS	that
‘that tall building’			

nangsue	<i>na:</i>	/lem	ni/
book	thick	CLS	that
‘this thick book’			

4. English and Thai can have two adjectives to modify the head noun. The difference is that two or more adjectives in English are usually put in a more or less fixed order. For example, the word which describes comes before the word which classifies: *an old* (description) *political* (classification) *idea*. The word which expresses opinions, and attitudes come before the word that describes, for example: *a beautiful* (opinion) *old* (description) *house* (Swan, 2006: 11). On the contrary, two adjectives in Thai do not have a fixed order.

H	Adj	Adj
maew	<i>dam</i>	<i>yai</i>
cat	black	big
‘a big black cat’		

krapao	<i>yai</i>	<i>nak</i>
bag	big	heavy
‘a big heavy bag’		

It is also grammatical acceptable to have the word order as in the next two examples:

maew	<i>yai</i>	<i>dam</i>
cat	big	black
‘a big black cat’		

krapao	<i>nak</i>	<i>yai</i>
bag	heavy	big
‘a big heavy bag’		

Two adjectives in Thai can be followed by a classifier and a demonstrative. For example:

H	Adj	Adj	CLS	Demon
dokmai	<i>suay</i>	<i>sod</i>	/dok	ni/
flower	beautiful	fresh	CLS	this
‘this fresh beautiful flower’				

rom	<i>si:khao</i>	<i>mai</i>	/khan	ni/
umbrella	white	new	CLS	this
‘this new, white umbrella’				

tuek	<i>yai</i>	<i>si:daeng</i>	/lang	nan/
building	big	red	CLS	that
‘that red big building’				

5. The Thai adjectives post-modify the head noun and are followed by a numeral and a classifier while the English adjectives pre-modify the head nouns:

H	Adj	Card Nu	CLS
maew	<i>uan</i>	/song	tua/
cat	fat	two	CLS
'two fat cats'			

som	<i>suk</i>	/sip	bai/
orange	ripe	ten	CLS
'ten ripe oranges'			

hong	<i>lek</i>	/hok	hong/
room	small	six	CLS
'six small rooms'			

6. The adjectives modify the head nouns. They are followed by only the classifier :

H	M (adj)	CLS
---	---------	-----

som	<i>suk</i>	/bai/
orange	ripe	CLS
'a ripe orange'		

suea	<i>mai</i>	/tua/
shirt	new	CLS
'a new shirt'		

khai	<i>yai</i>	/ phong/
egg	big	CLS
'a big egg'		

7. The adjectives post- modify the head nouns. The adjectives and the numeral are put between the two auto-classifiers that are used two times:

H	CLS	Adj	Card Nu	CLS
nangsue	/lem/	ṇa:	/song	lem/
book	CLS	thick	two	CLS

‘the two thick books’

dokmai	/dok/	yai	/ṣi:	dok/
flower	CLS	big	four	CLS

‘four beautiful flowers’

ja:n	/bai/	mai	/song	bai/
plate	CLS	new	two	CLS

‘two new plates’

rongtao	/khu/	mai	/song	khu/
shoe	CLS	new	two	CLS

‘two new pairs of shoes’

8. The construction is similar to the previous one. The only difference is that it features the demonstrative which comes last:

H	CLS	Adj	Card Nu	CLS	Demon
rot	/khan/	si:daeng	/song	khan	ni/
car	CLS	red	two	CLS	this

‘these two red cars’

muak /bai/ kao /sip bai nan/
 hat CLS old ten CLS that
 ‘those ten old hats’

trakra /bai/ yai /yisib bai nan/
 basket CLS big twenty CLS that
 ‘those twenty big baskets’

nalika: /ruean/ suay /ha ruean non/
 clock CLS beautiful five CLS those
 ‘those five beautiful clocks’

It is apparent that in English the modifiers appear before adjectives while in Thai the modifiers come after adjectives. Adjectives in English can be pre-modified by noun phrases with cardinal numerals, for example:

English: He is **six feet** tall.

The room is **ten meters** wide.

The words, ‘six feet’ and ‘ten meters’ are the modifiers of the adjectives ‘tall’ and ‘wide’ respectively. In Thai, the phrases in question come after the adjectives:

H M
 /su:ng h^a foot/
 tall five foot
 ‘five feet tall’

Thai adjectives can be post-modified by adverbs while their English counterparts are pre-modified :

H	M
/di:	yangying/
good	very/really
'really good'	

Adjectives in Thai and English are similarly post-modified by a propositional phrases:

H	M
/ya:k	samrap khao/
difficult	for he
'difficult for him'	



The examples demonstrated clearly show that adjectives in English and Thai go in different directions: English modification goes to the left hand while Thai equivalent goes to the right hand. As a result, Thai learners of English make common mistakes relating to adjectives thanks to different modifications of the phrases.

Predicative adjectives in English come after the linking verbs such as *seem, appear, become, get, and turn*. The adjective '*beautiful*' in the sentence '*she is beautiful*' is predicative. Similarly, adjectives in Thai may be used as the predicate in a sentence. However, such predicate adjectives are considered intransitive verbs. This is because they do not require a linking verb as in English. Predicate adjectives are described in chapter five.

For example:

ban *mai*
house new
'the house is new.'

rao *hiew*
we hungry
'we get/become hungry.'

As a linking verb is not necessary in Thai, it is highly likely to find that Thai learners are bound to speak or write the sentences like 'we *happy*.' 'She *hungry*.' 'The man *rich*.'

Thai adjectives have the post-modification whose order is not rigidly fixed. The classifier which plays a crucial role in Thai can occur before and after the adjectives. The attributive adjectives in English have the pre-modification. When two or more adjectives are present, their order is more or less fixed.

English has some words, for example *direct, fast, hard, late, long, wrong* which can be used as adjectives and adverbs:

As Adjective preceding nouns

He is a *fast* driver.

John is a *hard* worker.

The mountain is very *high* to climb.

As Adverbs modifying verbs

They drive very *fast*.

She works *hard* this year.

Don't aim too *high*.

Likewise, Thai has some adjectives which can be used as the adverbs of manner (Iwasaki, 2005: 92-93), for example, the word /di:/ ‘good’ which is an adjective in –

khon *di:*

man good ‘a good man’

becomes an adverb in

/tham *di:*/

do good ‘to do well’.

Other words which can be used in a similar manner include /**rew**/ ‘fast, quick’, /**supha:p**/ ‘polite’, /**sa-a:t**/ ‘clean’. For example:

As an adjective

rot *rew*

car fast

‘ a fast car’

khon *supha:p*

man polite

‘a polite man’

As an Adverb

rot wing *rew*

car run fast

‘a car runs fast.’

khao phu:t supha:p
he speak polite
'he speaks politely.'

2.3 Comparative Adjectives

Adjectives in English and Thai can have a comparative construction. David Crystal has briefly explained how the adjectives in English can be compared in one of three ways (2004:136):

- 1) If we compare them to a lower degree, we use *less* or *least* : This chair is *less* heavy (than that chair).
- 2) If we compare them to the same degree, we use a construction with *as . . . as*: This chair is *as* big *as* that.
3. If we compare them to a higher degree, there are two possible methods. If the word has one syllable, we add an ending '*..er* or *..est*':

This chair is *bigger* than that.

If the word has three syllables, we use the words '*more*' or '*most*':

She is *more* beautiful than you.

She is the *most* beautiful.

There are some adjectives with irregular comparatives and superlatives, e.g. *good* – *better* – *best* ; *bad* – *worse* – *worst*; *much* – *more* – *most*.

Comparison applies only to adjectives that are gradable. Adjectives that are not gradable such as *atomic*, *previous*, *inherent*, *former*, and *mere* cannot be compared or modified by an intensifier like 'very'.

Adjectival phrases in Thai have a different way of constructing a comparison. Thai adjectives do not have comparative or superlative forms in a morphological sense. Thai is not inflected or is added by *-er* or *-est*, *more* or *most* as in English. The comparative form can be created by adding a prepositional phrase which comprises the preposition /khwaa/ 'than' after the adjective and it is followed by a noun being compared.

duang a:thit yai **khwaa** duangchan
 sun big than moon
 'the sun is bigger than the moon'

khao chala:d **khwaa** phuean
 he intelligent than friend
 'he is more intelligent than his friends'

In a superlative construction, English has the markers *-est* added to the adjective, or *most* added before the adjective, for example 'He is the tallest.' Thai does not have the comparison markers as in English. It has the word /thisut/ '*-est*, or *most*' (shortened as SPR) which is used after the adjectives being compared, for example:

Adj SPR
 sat yai **thisut**
 animal big SPR
 'the biggest animal'

nok lek **thisut**
 bird small SPR
 'the smallest bird'

dek *chala:d* **thisut**

child intelligent SPR

‘the most intelligent child’

The comparative construction of *the . . . the . . .* in English is used to say that things change or vary together.

The word order

The + comparative expression + subject + verb

The more dangerous it is, the more I like it.

The more we study, the more we learn.

The more money he makes, the more things he buys.

Thai has a comparison corresponding to this type of construction. The words /**ying . . . , ying . . .**/ is used for the comparative expression before the adjectives which are in italics:

ying *rew* **ying** *dii*
more fast more good
‘the faster, the better’

ying *phaeng* **ying** *haayaak*
more expensive more scarce
‘the more expensive, the more scarce’

ying *phom* **ying** *suay*
more thin more beautiful
‘the thinner, the more beautiful’

As Thai does not have comparative markers, inflections are problematic for the learners whose mother tongue is an isolating language which requires no inflection. There are other words for comparison. They are /**thaokan**/ 'equal', /**muean**/ 'to be the same' /**thao kap**/ 'as _____ as'.

When things on the same degree are compared in Thai, the word /thao kan/ 'equal' is used after an adjective predicate.

/nangsue n`a: thao kan/

Book thick equal

'Books are equally thick.'

Other comparative words in Thai include /muean/ 'to be the same', 'to resemble', /thao kap/ 'as _____ as'.

/khao su:ng muean khun/

he tall same you

'He is tall the same as you.'

/khao su:ng thaokap phaw/

he tall as_ as father

'He is as tall as his father.'

2.4 Intensifiers of Adjectives

Adjectives which function as the heads of adjectival phrases are pre-modified by intensifiers. In grammar, an intensifier is a word that has a heightening effect, for example *very* in *very good* or a lowering effect, for example *slightly* in *slightly fat* on the meaning of the word which is modified. Words that can be modified in this way are gradable.

Intensifying adverbs modify gradable adjectives, for example *extremely* foolish, *very* green, *slightly* green, *somewhat* green, *really* horrible (Quirk and Greenbaum, 2008 : 226).

With respect to the intensifier, Thai is significantly similar to English as adjectives in Thai can be intensified. The only difference is that the intensifier comes after the head. The common lexical intensifiers in Thai are /ma:k/ ‘very’, /nak/ ‘really’, /lueakern/ ‘extremely’, /nadu:/ ‘extremely, really’, /thi:diew/ ‘very, quite’, /jang/ ‘quite’, /nitnoi/ ‘slightly’, /jing/ ‘truly’, /awk/ ‘really, extremely’, /chiaw/ ‘very, quite’ (Iwasaki, 2005: 100):

H (adj)	M
<i>rawn</i>	lueakern
hot	extreme
‘extremely hot’	

<i>san</i>	nak
short	quite
‘quite short’	

<i>naklua</i>	ma:k
horrible	really
‘really horrible’	

<i>ya:k</i>	nitnoi
difficult	slightly
‘slightly difficult’	

suay **n^adu:**

beautiful really

‘really beautiful’

Furthermore, intensification in Thai can be made by emphatic reduplication. For example:

a:ha:n **phet phet**

food hot hot

‘very hot food’

si: **suay suay**

color beautiful beautiful

‘really beautiful color’