

On the Development of Adversative BUT in Thai: Cognitive and Discourse Perspectives

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Abstract—The notion of ‘contrast’ is among the human perceptual and conceptual primitives since human perception relies on contrast-based categorization (Taylor, 1995, 1989). Disjunctives constitute a grammatical category signaling contrast, and adversative exponents tend to develop into discourse markers (DMs), signaling diverse contrast-related notions crosslinguistically. The Thai DM *têe* and its related forms are polyfunctional across discourse domains (Khammee & Rhee, 2022). A corpus-based analysis of recent developments of *têe* reveals a range of interesting intersubjective and discursive functions, notably that of signaling the speaker’s stance toward the foregoing propositions or utterances. This development, by virtue of the lack of expressed contrast, indicates substantial semantic bleaching from the source and extensive intersubjectification between interlocutors. By deploying the DM *têe* utterance-finally, the speaker signals their tepid, non-committal attitude, whereby foregoing serious comments and statements are suddenly relegated to notions outside the speaker’s concern, thus creating a type of disalignment with the interlocutor’s expectations and a sudden withdrawal of significance of the speaker’s foregoing utterances. Thus, the utterance-final DM *têe* creates a pseudo-self-derogation or pseudo-alloofness, which often induces humorous effects and even laughter. This paper analyzes the development of the DM *têe* and its derivatives from a grammaticalization perspective.

Index Terms—discourse marker, noncommittal attitude, grammaticalization, *têe* ‘but’, Thai

I. INTRODUCTION

The notion of ‘contrast’ is among the human perceptual and conceptual primitives since humans have the innate tendency to order, classify, and structure the world around them. This activity relies on contrast-based categorization, as was observed by both Stross (1999, p. 255), who characterized humans as categorizing animals (see also Taylor, 1995), and by Lippmann (1922), who observed that humans are ubiquitously stereotyped (see also Allport, 1954). This notion of contrast is linguistically encoded in various forms but most frequently as an adversative connective. Adversatives such as the English *but* function as binary propositional operators and are known to have fused pragmatic components such as ‘and, surprisingly’ (Strawson, 1952, pp. 78-92). Thus, adversative exponents tend to develop into discourse markers (DMs) signaling diverse contrast-related notions crosslinguistically (Hancil, 2016; Hata, 2016; Izutsu & Izutsu, 2020; Mulder & Thompson, 2008; Mulder et al., 2009; Van Dijk, 1979, for English; Yokomori & Endo, 2022, for Japanese; Fedriani & Molinelli, 2019, for Italian; Horne et al., 2001, for Swedish; Kim & Sohn, 2015, for Korean; Khammee & Rhee, 2022, across languages; among many others).

The Thai adversative conjunction *têe* (แต่; often romanized as *tae* or *dtaae*) is no exception. The conjunction *têe* and its derivatives have both discourse-pragmatic and lexical functions. However, the lexeme used as a DM has not received due attention to date, with one major exception being Khammee and Rhee (2022) (see II below for more). Hence, the present paper analyzes the development of contemporary functions of *têe* and *têe*-derived forms (collectively referred to as *têe*-DMs) in Thai from a grammaticalization perspective.

The objectives of this paper are threefold: (i) to illustrate the diverse lexical and grammatical meanings of *têe* across word classes, (ii) to analyze the discursive functions of the DM *têe* and its derivatives, and (iii) to analyze the conceptual network of diverse concepts that emerged from the adversative meaning of the lexeme from cognitive-linguistic, discourse-pragmatic, and grammaticalization perspectives.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As briefly alluded to in the preceding section, studies of DMs that developed from adversative connectives, whose core semantics is ‘contrast’, are numerous across languages. Much attention has been paid to the English DM *but*, which carries diverse functions including filling pauses, signaling reluctance, prefacing upcoming contrast or surprise, signaling discontent or reproachment, etc. (Khammee & Rhee, 2022). Hancil’s (2016) extensive discussion of the final *but* focuses on both its development, subjectification, and grammatical category, as well as its diverse functions, such as contrast, doubt, anaphor/cataphor, emphasis, and filler. Mulder and Thompson (2008) analyze the development of *but* from a grammaticalization perspective, and assert that it began as the initial *but* and later progressed to the “Janus-faced *but*” (i.e., having the properties of both the initial and the final *but*) and eventually to the final *but*.

Similarly, the Korean DMs *kuntey* and *kulentey*, both denoting ‘but’, signal various attitudes such as contrastive stance, mitigating rejection, dispreferred response, etc. (Kim & Sohn, 2015). Rhee (2020), in his study of five DMs including *kuntey* and its formal-functional relatives, identifies seven major functions of *kuntey* in contemporary Korean as follows: topic presentation, topic shift, mirativity, elaboration request, feigned surprise, challenge/protest, and discontent.

Regarding the adversative connectives in Thai, existing studies of *têe* and its derivatives are mostly reference grammars, which characterize them as ‘contrast-marking connectors’. For instance, Upakitsilapasan (2002, p. 106) explains that *têe*, *têewâa*, and *têethawâa* are used to highlight a contrast of propositional contents, as exemplified in the following (note that Thai does not practice interlexical spacing, but the original data are presented with word boundaries marked by a white space for visual clarity, and further note that the examples are modified with added morpheme glosses, translations and underscores):

- (1) น้ำขึ้น แต่ ลม ลง
náam khún tēe lom loŋ
 water rise but wind go.down
 ‘Water is rising, but the wind is lessened.’
- (2) เขานอน แต่ว่า เขา ไม่ หลับ
khǎw nɔɔn tēewâa khǎw mây lâp
 3SG/PL lie but 3SG/PL not sleep
 ‘He went to bed, but he could not sleep.’
- (3) ปาก เขา ร้าย แต่ หัวใจ เขา ดี
pàak khǎw ráay tēethawâa cay khǎw dii
 mouth 3SG/PL evil but heart 3SG/PL good
 ‘He has a bad mouth, but his heart is good.’

Examples (1) through (3) illustrate the usage of *têe* and its derivatives to show contrast between two propositions of complete clausal structure, i.e., each clause consists of the subject and the predicate. The contrast, however, does not have to be between two independent clauses, as in the following examples taken from Phanuphong (1989, pp. 100-101), in which the adversative conjunction links two verb phrases (i.e., each with a shared subject), provided with modification:

- (4) ฉัน เคย อ่าน เรื่อง เมือง อุททอง แต่ ไม่ เคย ไป ที่นั่น เลย
chǎn khəy ʔàan rŭaŋ muay ʔiuthɔɔŋ tēe mây khəy pay thîinân ləy
 1F/M ever read matter city [name] but not ever go there PFV
 ‘I have read about U-thong city but have never been there.’
- (5) เขา พยายาม ทำ แต่ ไม่ สำเร็จ
khǎw phayaayaam tham tēe mây sǎmrèt
 3SG/PL try do but not succeed
 ‘He keeps trying but is unsuccessful.’

As indicated above, the DM *têe* has received little attention to date. Incidentally, DM studies in Thai are underrepresented in general, with some notable exceptions of demonstrative-based DMs by Iwasaki and Dechapraturumwan (2022), Khammee et al. (2024), and discourse particles by Cooke (1989) and Peyasantiwong (1981), among a few others. One notable study with particular relevance to the present study is by Khammee and Rhee (2022), who discuss the functions of *têe* compared to its counterparts in Korean (*kuntey*) and English (*but*). The authors note that *têe* frequently occurs at the periphery and carries functions across different domains of discourse management such as interaction, topic, information, and interlocutor. However, as the study involves multiple languages (Thai, English, and Korean), the exposition on *têe* is necessarily brief; thus, the present study builds on their findings and fills the gap.

III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH METHODS

A. Theoretical Background

The two theories that serve as the foundation of the present study are the theory of grammaticalization and the theory of DMs, although these are not distinct insofar as the development of DMs is largely regarded as grammaticalization by virtue of the fact that DMs as discourse organizing forms are grammatical in nature and grammaticalization is a process whereby grammatical forms arise (for discussion of this issue, see Diwald, 2006; Heine, 2013).

Grammaticalization is defined as a process whereby either a lexical form becomes a grammatical form, or a grammatical form becomes a more grammatical form (Heine et al., 1991; Hopper & Traugott, 2003; Kuryłowicz, 1976; Meillet, 1958). The distinction between ‘lexical’ and ‘grammatical’ is not always clear but the distinction between open-class and closed-class linguistic forms is useful in practice. Thus, open-class items such as nouns and verbs (as well as adverbs) acquiring the properties of closed-class items such as prepositions, connectives, etc., can be said to undergo grammaticalization. Common effects of grammaticalization, also called ‘grammaticalization parameters’ or ‘grammaticalization mechanisms’, include desemanticization (weakening in meaning), decategorialization (loss of categorial properties), erosion (reduction in form), and extension (expansion in usage contexts).

DMs have been variously labeled by researchers as ‘discourse particles’ (Aijmer, 2002), ‘pragmatic markers’ (Aijmer, 2013; Brinton, 1996, 2017; Fraser, 1996; Traugott, 2016, 2022; Beeching, 2016), ‘discourse connectives’ (Erman & Kotsinas, 1993), ‘discourse operators’ (Redeker, 1991), ‘style disjuncts/conjuncts’ (Quirk et al., 1985), ‘formulaic theticals’ (Heine et al., 2016), ‘discourse organizers’ (Pons Bordería, 1998), ‘discourse signals’ (Lamiroy & Swiggers, 1991), among others. The most widely used term, however, is ‘discourse marker’ (Aijmer, 2002; Fraser, 1988; Hancil, 2014, 2016; Hansen, 1988; Heine et al., 2021; Schiffrin, 1987; Koo, 2018; Rhee, 2020; Rhee & Koo, 2021; among many others). Heine et al. (2021) provide an extensive discussion of DMs on both the theoretical level and the crosslinguistic empirical level. In particular, the authors identify DMs as belonging to the category of ‘theticals’, which in their framework constitute discourse grammar vis-à-vis sentence grammar, and they characterize the process of the emergence of theticals as ‘cooptation’, an operation “whereby a chunk of sentence grammar, such as a word, a phrase, a reduced clause, a full clause, or some other piece of text, is deployed for use on the level of discourse processing, thereby turning into a thetical” (p. 67). This theory is particularly useful because there are areas in which DMs are incompatible with the traditional notion of grammaticalization. For example, DMs do not commonly develop into clitics or inflections; they do not reduce phonetically or fuse with the host; they are not obligatory; they are not syntactically fixed; and their scope expands (Brinton, 2017; Heine et al., 2021), all of which characteristics clearly contrast typically grammaticalized or grammaticalizing forms.

Functions of DMs have been variously classified by researchers. In her pioneering work, Schiffrin (1987) proposes a model of DM functions along five planes: (i) Exchange Structure, (ii) Action Structure, (iii) Ideational Structure, (iv) Participation Framework, and (v) Informational State. Brinton (1996) lists nine fundamental functions: (i) discourse initiation, (ii) floor acquisition and relinquishment, (iii) filling or delaying, (iv) boundary marking, (v) new-old information marking, (vi) sequential dependence, (vii) repair, (viii) expressing response/reaction/tentativeness (subjective), and (ix) effecting cooperation, etc. (intersubjective). More recently, Rhee (2020) proposes a four-domain model wherein DM functions are classified according to the four domains of discourse management: (i) Interaction, (ii) Topic, (iii) Information, and (iv) Interlocutor.

Among the fundamental issues of DM research is whether or not a particular form is truly a DM. Heine et al. (2021, p. 68) provide a list of common effects of cooptation as in example (6) below, which can be used as diagnostic criteria, although not definitional criteria; i.e., a form does not have to satisfy all criteria in order to qualify as a DM.

- (6) a. Meaning: not part of the sentential meaning
- b. Function: metatextual
- c. Syntax: not a syntactic constituent
- d. Prosody: often set off prosodically
- e. Semantic-Pragmatic Scope: beyond the sentence
- f. Placement: flexible

B. Research Methods

The present research is a conceptual, descriptive study involving no experimentation. The data have been collected from various authoritative dictionaries (including the *Thai Royal Dictionary*, n.d.), reference grammars (including Bundhumedha, 2011; Higbie & Thinsan, 2006; Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom, 2005; Noss, 1964; Phanuphong, 1989; Upakitsilapasan, 2002), online resources (most importantly *thai-language.com*, n.d.), corpora (notably Thai National Corpus by Chulalongkorn University and the Drama Corpus by Kyungeun Park), and fieldwork by one of the authors. Instances of *têe* ‘but’ were retrieved from the sources, classified by part of speech, and, for DMs, analyzed for their function in view of the context. The analysis also involved consultation with informants as to their nuanced meanings and intentions behind the use of the DM.

IV. RESULTS

The lexeme *têe* is polyfunctional across diverse grammatical categories, but it has two basic meanings of (i) contrast and (ii) delimitation, each with a focusing function: (i) indicates ‘this is the point of contrast (point of departure)’, and (ii) specifies ‘this is the point of the scalar limit (point of cessation)’. The focus meanings significantly reduce as the form enters the domain of discourse as a DM. Below, we describe the meanings in three classes: lexical, grammatical, and discursive.

A. Lexical Functions of *têe*

The word class to which the lexical *tèe* belongs is adverb, denoting ‘just, only, specifically’, exemplified in (7). Similarly, its derivative *tèelá* (แต่ละ) is also an adverb denoting ‘each’, exemplified in (8). In lexical use, the focus may be exclusive (‘only, just’), distinctive (‘specifically’), or distributed (‘each’).

(7) เลือก เอา แต่ ดี ๆ

lúak ʔaw tèe dii dii
select attentively just good good
‘Select only the good ones.’ (Royal Thai Dictionary)

(8) แต่ละ คน ชอบ อาหาร ที่ แตกต่าง กัน

tèelá khon chǎw ʔaahǎan thii tèektàay kan
each person like food that different together
‘Each person likes different food.’ (constructed, Modern Thai)

B. Grammatical Functions of *tèe*

The primary functions of *tèe* and its derivatives are conjunction (denoting ‘but, even, however, rather, while’) and preposition (denoting ‘since, from’ in temporal and spatial senses, respectively). Incidentally, because Thai allows free omission of contextually or situationally retrievable sentential arguments, the conjunction status of a form may often seem unclear at surface manifestation in sentences (as in (9b)); see Khammee et al., 2024, for structural fluidity and pragmatic orientation of the Thai language). These functions are exemplified in (9) and (10), respectively, reconstructed for Modern Thai.

(9) Conjunctions *tèe*, *tèewáa*, *tèethawáa*, *taamtèe*, etc.

(a) นาย เอ กิน ข้าว แต่ นาย บี นอน

naay ʔee kin khâaw tèe naay bii nɔɔn
Mr. A eat rice but Mr. B sleep
‘A is eating, but B is sleeping.’ Or ‘A is eating while B is sleeping.’

(b) ให้ กิน แต่ เต็ม ใจ

hây kin tèe tem cay
give eat as full heart
‘Eat as much as you wish.’

(c) เขา รวย มาก แต่ทว่า เขา ไม่ เคย ช่วยเหลือ คน จน เลย

khǎw ruay mǎak tèethawáa khǎw mây khǎy chúaylǎa khon con lǎay.
3SG/PL rich very however 3SG/PL NEG ever help person poor PTCL
‘He is very rich. However, he never helps poor people.’

(10) Preposition ‘since, from (time/space)’

(a) เขา มา ถึง แต่ วานนี้

khǎw maa thǔy tèe waan-níi
3SG/PL come arrive since yesterday
‘He has been here since yesterday.’

(b) ซ้อย มา แต่ บ้าน

khǎy maa tèe bǎan
1SG come from house
‘I came from home.’

Example (10b) illustrates the ablative prepositional use of *tèe*, which particular usage is characteristic of the Northern/Northeastern dialect (commonly known as the Isan dialect), while the Central dialect uses *chàak* ‘from’. It is also noteworthy that the ‘from’ meaning of *tèe* is commonly observed in many lexicalized forms in all Thai dialects, such as *tèewan* ‘early’ (< *tèe-wan* ‘from-day’), *tèehǎawan* ‘early’ (< *tèe-hǎa-wan* ‘from-head-day’), *tèenǎytèeray* ‘for a long time’ (< *tèe-nǎy-tèe-ray* ‘from-which-from-what’), etc.

C. Discourse Functions of *tèe*

In addition to the lexico-grammatical functions, *tèe* and its derivatives carry a number of DM functions. These *tèe*-DMs include *tèe*, *wáatèe*, *tèenīman*, *tèekǎw*, and *tèe-ʔaw-thà*, among others, and function variously as pause-filling & reluctance, focus-shifting, mitigating refusal & upcoming disalignment, non-committal stance, etc. Each of these is exemplified below, with excerpts drawn from corpora and fieldnotes.

(a). Pause-Filling & Reluctance

Among the most common discourse functions of *tèe* and its derivatives is filling pauses (‘fillers’, ‘filled pauses’, ‘hesitation markers’, ‘hesitation fillers’, etc.; Clark & Fox Tree, 2002; Hayashi & Yoon, 2006). Rhee (2021, pp. 344-345) notes that pause-fillers are of two distinct types: a genuine pause-filler is necessitated by the cognitive gap when the speaker is involved in lexical search, and the other is necessitated by the strategic signal of hesitation for the face of the interlocutor; thus, the former is subjective and the latter intersubjective. The distinction usually lies in the mental state of the speaker, and observers are often unable to identify the type of filler. This function carried by *tèe* and its derivatives is

exemplified in (11). (Note that the lines of dialogue, of which the morpheme gloss is less important, are given in English translation within square brackets.)

(11) (Rin and Sah are friends. Sah is reluctantly showing Rin her report card with the letter C written on its cover.)

Rin: [It's OK. Getting C is better than F, isn't it? Don't think too much about it.]

Sah: มัน ก็ ใช่ แต่ว่า นะ

man kôw chây tɛɛ.wâa ná
it also yes DM PTCL

'Yeah... DM (well..)'

[(Then she exhales heavily and continues talking.) I tried my best with the research. The teacher should have been more sympathetic with me and given me at least C+ or B.]

(Fiction *Dream land of love*, 2008, Chapter 1)

In the excerpt, Sah agrees to what her friend Rin said about grades, i.e., no need to be too worried about them, but she has something else to say as signaled by *tɛɛ.wâa*, with which Sah is buying time to formulate an utterance about something as important as the school grade and something as sensitive as potentially disagreeing with the teacher's assessment of her work. An intriguing aspect of excerpt (11) is that Sah uses *ná*, a stance particle, which tends to occur sentence-finally. Therefore, it can be assumed that Sah was momentarily indecisive between continuing and ending her statement. According to Rhee's (2020) framework, *tɛɛ.wâa* here performs functions at multiple levels: filling a pause to maintain the floor (interaction management), lexical search (information management), and reluctance (interaction management).

(b). Focus-Shifting

The next function of *tɛɛ*-DMs is to mark the shift of focus, also known as 'perspective shift' (Khammee, 2024; Rhee, 2025), where the speaker deploys *tɛɛ*-DMs to change the major focus of the ongoing interaction. The following is an example of *wâa.tɛɛ* used for this function.

(12) (At a restaurant, two friends, Matchima and Jeerada, are updating each other about their life.)

Matchima: [Anyway, you haven't told me where you have been.]

Jeerada: [Well, I do want to tell you. (Then she smirks and keeps stirring her drink.) But]

Matchima: [But what?]

Jeerada: [But I can't tell you. Well, it was a really good feeling. (She continues smirking and sinks into day-dreaming, reminiscing her happy memories).]

Matchima: [Just tell me!]

Jeerada: [Nope.]

Matchima: [You are so mean. (Deeply frustrated, she asks in an intense voice)]

ว่าแต่ แก กับ ผู้ทอง นะ

wâa.tɛɛ kɛɛ kàp phúukwɔŋ ná
DM you and captain PTCL

วันนั้น ทำไม ดู แปลก แปลก ซะ

wan.nán thammay duu plèek plèek yá
that.day why look strange strange PTCL

'DM (but anyway), why did you and the captain look so strange that day?'

Jeerada: [Nothing. We've become friends.]

(Fiction *My tricky love*, 2007, Chapter 2)

In the above excerpt, Jeerada continually piques her friend Matchima's curiosity without telling her what happened. While Jeerada beats around the bush with her tantalizing secret, Matchima becomes frustrated and changes her focus from Jeerada's secret to her strange behavior with the captain observed the other day. Her shift of focus occurs with the DM *wâa.tɛɛ* (marked with an arrow). Incidentally, the three additional occurrences of *tɛɛ* in lines 2, 3, and 4 function not as DMs but as simple adversative conjunctions (lines 2 and 4), and as an echo (line 3).

(c). Upcoming Disalignment & Attenuating Refusal

Another common discourse function of *tɛɛ*-DMs is to signal upcoming disalignment and to attenuate refusal, two functions that are often inseparable. This function is exemplified in the following excerpt, taken from a work of fiction.

(13) (A and B are talking on the phone for the first time. A, a girl who has been enamored by B, a disc jockey, is eager to know about him personally, while B is reluctant to share information about himself.)

A: [What is your full name?]

B: [Oh, I cannot (tell you). Sorry. It is a secret.]

A: [(sigh!)]

B: [Come on! You can call me this time every morning. I'll wait for you. But don't tell anybody. I beg of you!]

A: *Tɛɛ*

DM

'DM (but...)'

B: [I'm really not comfortable (to tell you my full name).]

(Fiction *DJ Sud Pop Kap Sao Hot Sud Sap*, 2008)

In the excerpt above, the girl (A), insists on learning the 'real' name of the disc jockey (B), because Thai people commonly go by nicknames (Khammee, 2024, 2025), and knowing someone's full, legal name can constitute a sign of intimate knowledge. While B is unwilling to reveal his real name and repeatedly refuses to do so, A remains undaunted and tries to persuade B, using *têe* to signal her statement to go against B's intention of not divulging personal information. More concrete reasons for her insistence, i.e., refusing to accept his refusal of information and his compromising offer to make himself available for regular talks on the phone, do not materialize because B cuts her short by reiteration of his adamant stance (last line).

(d). *Non-Committal Attitude and Mitigation*

The last function of *têe*-DMs, which we believe is the most noteworthy and recent development, is to signal the speaker's intent to mitigate the illocutionary force of an assertion and further non-committal attitude toward a proposition at issue. This is exemplified in the following excerpts, taken from our fieldwork notes of natural conversation.

(14) P1: [How are you, Nong? Have you been vaccinated yet?]

P2: [Oh, I just had my first shot. Only the first. (laughter)]

P1: [So, what vaccine was that? It was Astra Zeneca, right?]

P2: [Oh, no. It was Sinopharm.]

P1: [I see, Sinopharm. I had Sinovac.]

P2: [I see. I just had this shot, maybe about, err, about three weeks ago.]

P1: [Three weeks ago, Sinopharm. Then, you have to wait for three... Wait for how long?]

P2: [About 28 to 30 days.]

P1: [I see. 30 days are a month. It may be completely forgotten by then.]

P1 and P2: [(laughter)]

P1: [Mine is the same. Because it is an inactivated virus in the vaccine.]

P2: [Yeah. So, you've had two shots already, and yours are completed with two shots. Is that right?]

P1: [Completed. It is done.]

P2: [I see. Very good. (inaudible)]

P1: จน ป่านนี้ ไม่รู้ ภูมิ ไป โหน แล้ว นะ แต่ว่า @@@

con pàannii mâyríu phuum pay năy lèew ná tēwāa @@@
till so.far not.know immunity go where PFV PTCL DM (laughter)

'Until now I don't know where the immunity has gone (if I have immunity), DM (laughter).'

P1 and P2: [(laughter)]

(Transcribed from fieldnotes, 2023)

In the excerpt, the DM *tēwāa*, in the line marked with an arrow, signals the speaker's non-serious, belittling attitude toward the proposition. The DM in this function does not highlight any contrast of propositional contents, as the adversative conjunction usually does, but signals the speaker's non-committal attitude, a function in the domain of information management (subjective stance). By deploying *têe*-DMs, the speaker signals their tepid, noncommittal attitude, whereby foregoing serious comments and statements are suddenly relegated to an idea outside the speaker's concern, thus creating a type of disalignment with the interlocutor's expectations and sudden withdrawal of significance of what the speaker stated in the foregoing utterance. In this respect, the DM belongs to the domain of interlocutor management (intersubjective stance). Thus, *têe*-DMs in these contexts often create pseudo-self-derogation, which often creates humorous effects and induces laughter.

A similar state of affairs is observable in the following excerpt, also taken from the researchers' fieldnotes.

(15) P2: [Oh, I went there (= a gym). Nobody in the gym was wearing a mask. They used every equipment from one to another, but they didn't get infected. No wiping, no spraying with disinfectant alcohol. I used all the equipment but didn't get infected, either. And I've never heard of anyone having been infected from that gym.]

P1: [(laughter)]

P2: [I still don't understand how this was possible.]

P1: ผม ว่า แล้ว ก็ จะ มี แบบ มี แบบ. มาตรการ ดี อะ นะ

phǒm wāa kháw kǎw cà mii bèep mii bèep. mâattrakaan dii à ná
1SG.M say 3SG/PL also FUT have kind have kind measures good PTCL PTCL

'I think they have some kind of good measures.'

ผม ว่า ไม่ แน่ ทุกเช้า แล้ว อาจจะมี ติด จั๋ว เชื้อ ก็ ได้ นะ

phǒm wāa mây nêe thúkcháaw kháw àatcà mii chùit khâacháa kǎw dāay ná
I say not sure every.morning 3SG/PL maybe have spray disinfect also can PTCL

'Maybe every morning (before the opening of the gym) they may be spraying disinfectant.'

ผม ไม่ แน่ใจ นะ ใช่มะ โห แต่ว่า สุดยอด มาก

phǒm mây nêecay ná chāymá hoo tēwāa sùtyǎwt mâak
1SG.M not sure PTCL right.Q INTJ DM awesome very

'I'm not sure. Do you think so? Wow, DM, that's awesome.'

(Transcribed from fieldnotes, 2023)

In this exchange, P1 uses the DM *tèwâa* in the line marked by an arrow. This DM does not highlight any contrast of propositional contents. The speaker finishes his thought about the topic of COVID-19 disinfection, and prefaces a new comment about it with the DM, signaling his non-committal attitude and giving up on further speculation about the possible/plausible causes of the uncommon situation of no contagion at the gym. The speaker signals his ‘resignation’ on a branch of a topic (cf. “I’m not sure”) and returns to the main thread. Despite the core semantics of *tè* being ‘contrast’, the notion of contrast is extremely vague here. It is not propositional but only attitudinal, thus the function can be characterized as meta-textual and procedural, the hallmark property of DMs that have undergone a substantial degree of grammaticalization (cf. (6b) above). This function cuts across discourse domains such as information management (prefacing a new comment and speculation as to the cause of absence of contagion), and topic management (relinquishing a branch of an on-going topic).

In this context it is of particular importance that the use of the *tè*-DMs is highly frequently observed in the contemporary Southern Thai dialect. The following example was drawn from Southern Thai native speakers (Nakhon Si Thammarat and Songkhla Provinces) in spontaneous and casual conversation.

(16) S1: [How did you feel about this restaurant?]

S2: ดี นะ

kôw dii ná

also good PTCL

‘Well, it was good.’

อาหาร อร่อย ดี แต่ว่า

ʔaahāan ʔaròy dii tèwâa

food delicious good DM

‘The food was delicious DM.’

S1: [(nods)]

(Transcribed from fieldnotes, 2023)

This excerpt contains *tèwâa* ‘but’ taken from recalling a past experience in daily life settings. Two friends are talking about their experiences having food at a restaurant, in which S1 asks S2 his opinion about the food. S2 replies that the food was good and ends his turn with *tèwâa* with no further follow-up that might contrast his foregoing statement (i.e., ‘the food was delicious’). In this case, S2 is performing two different speech acts: showing his feeling and opinion about the food on the one hand, while at the same time signaling his desire to mitigate his comment regarding the food and to invite the interlocutor to make further comment about it. Thus, by use of the DM *tèwâa*, the speaker is in effect saying, “This is my assessment, but it’s not conclusive and open to your modification,” a function similar to what Rhee and Koo (2015) labeled ‘tedidity marker’ for a Korean particle, used to assert tentatively while simultaneously inviting modification of the assertion. The DM *tèwâa* in this function can be said to be both a marker of mitigation (information management) and of politeness to save the face of the addressee in case they have different opinions (interlocutor management). S1 makes no further comment, but nods to show his acknowledgement of and alignment with S2’s opinion.

Our last example is also taken from speakers of the Southern Thai dialect.

(17) S1: [Prof. Yingyot’s exam was very difficult.]

S2: [I thought so, too. I had no idea about his exam. I couldn’t finish it in time.]

S3: เราทำไม่ทัน เขียนไม่เสร็จก็ ส่งไปแล้ว แต่ว่า

S3: เรา ก็ ทำ ไม่ ทัน

raw kôw tham mây than

I also do not in.time

‘I couldn’t (finish it) in time, either.’

เขียน ไม่ เสร็จ ก็

khǎn mây sèt thii

write not finish PTCL

‘I couldn’t finish writing it.’

ส่ง ไป แล้ว แต่ว่า

sòŋ pay léew tèwâa

send go already DM

‘I submitted it anyway, DM’

(Transcribed from fieldnotes, 2023)

In this excerpt, three speakers are sharing their experiences taking an exam given by their professor. All speakers agree that their exam was very difficult. In the last line of S3’s turn, after S3 has aligned with the assessment of S1 and S2 by expressing her opinion of the exam (i.e., very difficult), she finishes her utterance ‘I submitted it anyway’ followed by the DM *tèwâa*. In this case, S3 uses *tèwâa* both to mitigate her opinion about the exam (i.e., it was so difficult that she could not finish writing the answers) and to complete her turn. Since *tèwâa* is not anchored to the last utterance (i.e., ‘I submitted it anyway’) but to her series of foregoing statements, it is evident that the scope of the DM spans across sentences consisting of a larger discourse segment (cf. (6e) above). The implicit, highly abstract and even vague proposition connected by *tèwâa* is along the line of “you or others may think otherwise”.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Conceptual Motivation

The foregoing exposition has demonstrated that the lexeme of contrast *têe* has undergone diverse semantic-functional changes in the lexical, grammatical, and discursive domains. Due to the inherent contiguity among concepts, all concepts derived from *têe* form a network, as sketched in Figure 1.

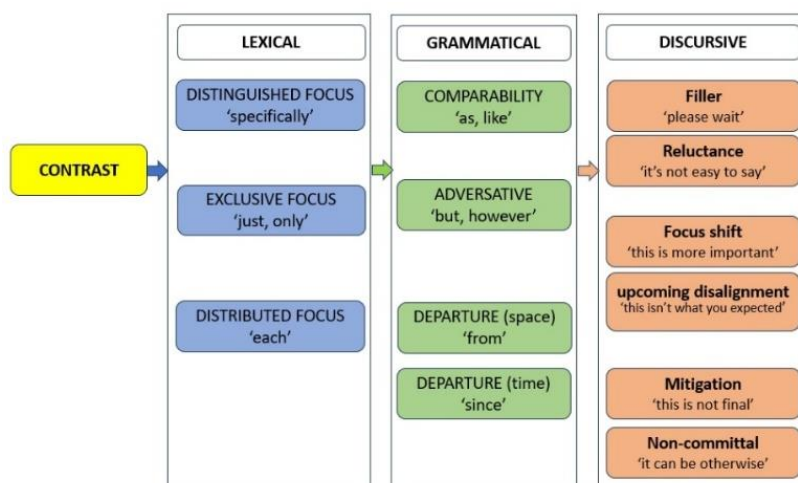


Figure 1. Conceptual Network of Adversative BUT Across Domains

The basic notion of ‘contrast’ presupposes the presence of an entity A, either concrete or abstract, implicit or explicit, against which a new entity B is compared in a schema of [(not A) but B] or [(in view of A) B]. The new entity B receives the focus, emphasizing distinction, exclusiveness, or distribution. These notions manifest themselves adverbially, i.e., in the lexical domain. In the grammatical domain, conjunctions and prepositions develop from the ‘contrast’ meaning with different foci such as ‘comparability’ of the two entities, ‘adversativity’ involved in choosing B instead of A, and ‘departure’ of B from A, either spatial or temporal.

In the discourse domain, various functions emerge: involving gaps during active conversation (Filler and Reluctance), shift or deviation (Focus Shift and Upcoming Disalignment), or acknowledging presence of alternatives (Mitigation and Non-committal). These discursive functions also show positional preferences. Pause Fillers and Reluctance Markers typically precede the intended utterances (either the freshly recalled expression or the information not welcome by the addressee), but since the speaker may not be successful in their lexical search or in formulating unwelcome information, the DM may not be followed by any linguistic expression. The *têe*-DMs of Focus Shift and Upcoming Disalignment necessarily occur before the focused information. On the other hand, the DMs of Mitigation and Non-committal attitude follow the statement being focused. Since this group has no clear group for comparison, it is the most ‘bleached’ manifestation of the core semantics of ‘contrast’. For instance, in (16) above, by saying [The food was delicious *têewāa*] the speaker is saying, in effect, ‘The food was delicious but it’s just how I felt’ (Mitigation), or even ‘The food was delicious but I’m not completely sure’ (Non-committal).

B. DM Properties

We noted in (6) above that DMs have several characteristics: (a) non-sentential meaning, (b) metatextual function, (c) extra-syntactic constituent, (d) prosodic separation, (e) semantic-pragmatic scope beyond the sentence, and (f) flexible placement. The *têe*-DMs exhibit properties largely consonant with this characterization. Regarding the properties (a), (c), and (e), when *têe* functions as a logical operator for focusing (lexical) or adversative contrasting (grammatical), it has a sentential meaning, constitutes a part of a sentence, and scopes over a constituent within the sentence. However, the situation changes when *têe* becomes a DM: it makes no semantic contribution to the host sentence, does not form a sentential constituent, and scopes over a segment larger than a sentence. Furthermore, when *têe* is used as a DM, there are often no explicit entities being compared or contrasted, and its function is (b) metatextual, conveying such procedural meanings as ‘Hold on because I have more to say’ (Filler), ‘This is difficult to say in a way that would not make you feel bad’ (Reluctance), ‘What follows needs your attention’ (Focus shift), ‘What I am going to say may not be what you expect or prefer’ (Upcoming disalignment), ‘Take what I say not so seriously’ (Mitigation), and ‘I say this but in fact I’m not completely sure’ (Non-committal).

The property (d) prosodic separation is observable with all instances of the *têe*-DM usage. Unlike lexical (‘just, only, specifically’) or grammatical uses (‘from, since, but’), which do not require a pause, *têe*-DMs are prosodically separated from the rest of the utterance and often form their own prosodic envelope. When they occur at the right periphery, i.e., utterance-finally, they often occur with a trail-off (Hata, 2016; Schegloff, 1996; also known as ‘final lengthening’, Byrd & Saltzman, 2003), signaling inability to complete the utterance due to difficulty of lexical search or inability to formulate

inoffensive wording. This, however, is not the case with the non-committal *têe*-DMs, exemplified in (13) through (16): these are usually spoken without a preceding pause, a situation observed with adversative-based DMs in other languages (cf. Kim & Sohn, 2015; Rhee, 2020; Rhee & Koo, 2021; Sohn, 2016, for Korean). As for the positionality (f), it is clear that the *têe*-DMs are not restricted to the junctions of two contrasting entities (lexical, phrasal, clausal) but can freely occur at left-periphery, right-periphery, or utterance-medial positions. Note, in particular, that the necessity for lexical search (Filler) may occur at any point of ongoing utterances, and thus at any point of a sentential structure.

C. A Brief Crosslinguistic Note

We noted at the outset that there exists a body of literature on DMs developed from adversative connectives across languages. It is beyond our immediate interest and research scope to compare all states of affairs in multiple languages in extensive discussion. However, a short note on English *but* is beneficial. Izutsu and Izutsu (2014, 2020) distinguish two types of final-*but*: retrospective *but* (e.g., *Thanks, but...*), often found in Irish English, and prospective *but* (e.g., *I could scream, but...*), often found in American English. The authors note that the retrospective *but* loses connective meaning and acquires emphatic, emotional, tag-like meaning, as it undergoes a schematic change of [X *but* Y > (X,) Y *but*] (Izutsu & Izutsu, 2014, pp. 66-67). Similarly, Van Dijk (1979) distinguishes between the semantic connective *but* and the pragmatic connective *but*, the latter signaling surprise or (dis-)satisfaction with illocutionary conditions. Heine et al. (2015), in their extensive discussion on connectives developing into final particles, including final-*but*, state that semantically, adversative, concessive, alternative, and additive meanings become bleached; syntactically, the autonomous unit becomes a syntactic appendage; and prosodically, an independent prosodic unit becomes a prosodic appendage, thus making ‘boundary loss’ the most prominent phenomenon. The final-*but* in other varieties of English has been analyzed by a number of researchers, noteworthy works being Hancil’s (2014) study of British English, and his (2016) study of Southern English and Scottish English, where he labeled the form ‘subjectified thetical’.

In this context, the final-*but* in Australian English warrants brief mention. Mulder and Thompson (2008) note that, unlike in American English where implication is left ‘hanging’, the final-*but* in Australian English does not leave an implication unstated. Additionally, Mulder et al. (2009) analyze the development of the final-*but* as an instance of grammaticalization into a ‘discourse particle’. Finally, Mulder et al. (2010) state that the final-*but* goes beyond marking contrastive content and turn-yielding to index ‘Australianness’. As for the function of the final-*but* in Australian English, its ‘softening’ effect has been noted as early as in Peters (1995).

In view of these findings, Thai *têe*-DMs exhibit a number of interesting parallels. For instance, the softening effect of the final-*but* in Australian English is equivalent to the mitigating function of the Thai *têe*-DMs. The observation that the final-*but*, in its retrospective uses in Australian English, does not leave an implication unstated, is similar to the final-*têewâa* in Southern Thai dialect, which, when used as a DM of non-committal attitude, does not yield any logical implications based on contrast. Another point worth noting is that the final-*têewâa* in Southern Thai dialect is an instance of a prospective *but* rather than a retrospective *but* in the framework of Izutsu and Izutsu (2014, 2020).

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have addressed the grammaticalization of *têe*, the primary adversative connective in contemporary Thai, the core semantics of which is ‘contrast’. The lexeme has developed over time and is still in popular use across domains of grammar including lexical, grammatical, and discursive. The connective *têe* functions as an adverb with added semantics of distinction (‘specifically’), exclusiveness (‘just, only’), and distribution (‘each’) of focus. In the grammatical domain, *têe* functions as a connective of comparability (‘as, like’) or adversity (‘but, however’), or a preposition of departure in space (‘from’) and in time (‘since’). More importantly for our purposes, *têe* and its conceptual and formal relatives function as DMs, which, as observed with other DMs in general (Heine et al., 2021; Jucker, 2002; Koo, 2018; Rhee & Koo, 2021; among others), are highly polyfunctional across such discourse domains as interaction, topic, information, and interlocutor management (Khammee & Rhee, 2022).

The notable functions of *têe*-DMs include pause-filling, reluctance, focus shift, mitigation and non-committal stance marking, and thereby exhibit a range of interesting subjective, intersubjective, and discursive functions. Of these, the function of signaling the speaker’s noncommittal attitude toward the foregoing propositions or utterances is particularly noteworthy because this development, by virtue of the lack of express contrast, indicates substantial semantic bleaching from the source and extensive intersubjectification between interlocutors in discourse scenes. By deploying the DM *têe* utterance-finally, the speaker signals a tepid, noncommittal attitude, whereby foregoing serious comments and statements are suddenly relegated to an idea outside the speaker’s concern, thus creating a type of disalignment with the interlocutor’s expectations and sudden withdrawal of significance of what the speaker stated in the foregoing utterance. This often creates a pseudo-self-derogation, frequently creating humorous effects and inducing laughter. This particular function is widely popular in the Southern Thai dialect, where *têewâa* has undergone grammaticalization processes of becoming a DM at the sentence-final position, whereby semantic bleaching is so extensive that speakers in general are unable both to recognize the ‘supposedly’ implied contrast and to pinpoint and describe its function. Its major function is to soften the statement (mitigation) and to display the speaker’s polite attitude toward the interlocutor, by way of pseudo-self-derogation or pseudo-alooftness, whereby the importance of the speaker’s assertion is strategically denied.

This paper has given special attention to the Southern Thai dialect, for which one of the researchers performed fieldwork. Expanding the number of dialects in contemporary Thai would create a fuller understanding of *tɛɛ*-DMs across more dialectal variations.

APPENDIX

DM: discourse marker; F: female; FUT: future; M: male; NEG: negation; PFV: perfective; PL: plural; PTCL: particle; Q: question; SG: singular

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