SOME REMARKS ON “MẨY QUESTIONS”

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There are two distinctive groups of Thai yes-no questions, which are illustrated in the following dialogue:

A: ดีอนขวัญ ฉันน่ารัก รักแสบ
(you)(ever)(read)(book)(title)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ชำนั่น} & \text{คุณเดย์ว้า} \\
\text{ชำนั่น} & \text{บุญ} \\
* & \text{บุญ} \\
* & \text{บุญ}
\end{align*}
\]

ต้องขวัญ ฉันน่ารัก นี่หาย ชำนั่น фан
(you)(ever)(tell)(story)(this)(give)(I)(listen to)

“You have read Pride and Prejudice before, haven’t you?
I remember you once related the story to me.”

B: ชำนั่นขวัญ ฉันถูกหัน นี่น่า
(correct)(ever)(read)(time)(one)(long time)(already)

“That’s right. I read it once a long time ago.”

In this dialogue, A believes that B has read “Pride and Prejudice” before. This belief is revealed in the second half of his utterance คุณเดย์ว้า ต้องขวัญ ฉันน่ารัก นี่หาย ชำนั่น фан “I remember you once related the story to me.” Since A is quite certain that he knows B has read this book, he is asking B this question not to check whether B has done so or not, but to obtain from B confirmation of his belief. In other words, A has enough information about what he is asking that he thinks he knows what the answer will be. The question markers ชำนั่น คุณเดย์ บุญ รัก รักแสบ and คุณเดย์ บุญ รัก รักแสบ are appropriate here, whereas รักแสบ บุญ, รัก บุญ, and รัก บุญ are not. From this, we can say that Thai yes/no questions are classified into two groups:

1. Questions whose question markers do not contain the word คุณเดย์. The question markers belonging to this group are รักแสบ, รัก บุญ, and คุณเดย์. The questions of this group will be called the ‘non-คุณเดย์ Questions.’

2. Questions whose question markers contain the word คุณเดย์. The question markers belonging to this group are คุณเดย์ บุญ, คุณเดย์ รักแสบ, and คุณเดย์ รักแสบ. The questions of this group will be called the ‘คุณเดย์ Questions.’

NON-คุณเดย์ QUESTIONS

When asking non-คุณเดย์ questions, the speaker does not have enough information or has no information at all, so he cannot be certain about the answer. He asks the question not to confirm his belief since
he does not have any belief, but to have the hearer provide him with the information he is asking for. The question markers used in the non-chày questions are r+i, r+i plāaw, and mày.

mày Questions.

Dialogue I:
The speaker simply wants to know whether the hearer has read Pride and Prejudice.

A: țiēe kʰeəy ʔāən nəŋ≠≠ r+i ʔaŋ Pride and
(you) (ever) (read) (book) (title)

Prejudice kʰôn ʃa:tən Jane Austin
(belong to)

{ r+i plāaw
   mày
   *r+i
   *mày chày r+i
   *chày mày
   *chày r+i plāaw
}

“Have you ever read Jane Austin’s Pride and Prejudice?”

B: kʰeəy ʔāən hōŋ nəŋ naa 产业基地
(ever) (read) (time) (one) (long time) (already)

“I read it once a long time ago.”

In this dialogue, A does not know whether B has read the book Pride and Prejudice and wants to know whether B has done so or not, so A is asking B this question using either the mày or r+i plāaw marker. This shows that mày and r+i plāaw questions are alike in the sense that the speakers of both questions want to show the hearer that they do not know the answer and want to get an answer to remove their ignorance. The question marker r+i is inappropriate here because in asking a r+i question, the speaker wants not only to know whether what he is asking is true or not, but also to show the hearer that he thinks what he is asking is true.

Dialogue II:
A: ʃa:n phəŋ ʒləp maa cə:l Mainland
(1) (just) (return) (come) (from)

(go) (and)


B: 产业基地 pay Chicago dūəy
(and) (go) (also)

{ r+i plāaw
   *mày
}

“Did you also go to Chicago?”

In this dialogue, B has information about A’s going to the Mainland, and since he thinks that those who have gone to the big cities like New York, Washington D.C. and Miami may also have gone to Chicago, he draws the inference that A should have done the same thing. B asks the question with r+i plāaw marker to show A that although he has some background information about the possibility of A’s
going to Chicago, he does not want to predict the answer and wants A to be fully responsible for the answer himself.

The reason why the question marker mây is inappropriate here is because in asking mây questions, the speaker does not have any information about the thing he is asking. He is completely ignorant about the answer so he asks the question hoping that the hearer will supply the answer to remove his ignorance. In this dialogue, in which it is obvious that B bases his question on the information he has, only the question with r++ plàaw, not mây is used.

The fact that in asking mây questions the speaker does not have any information about what he is asking helps to explain the limited use of mây questions when asking about something that has already happened. To clarify this point, let us consider the following sentences:

1. tcoon thii khâw taa y thoo jîu (when) (that) (he) (die) (you) (be)
   káp khâw (with) (he)
   { r++ plàaw }
   *mây
   “When he died, were you with him?”

2. pii thii laaw thoo pay (year) (that) (already) (you) (go)
   Chicago
   { r++ plàaw }
   *mây
   “Did you go to Chicago last year?”

3. pii thii laaw thoo pay (year) (that) (already) (year) (go)
   Chicago bôôy (often)
   { r++ plàaw }
   mây
   “Did you go to Chicago often last year?”

All these three questions ask about things that happened in the past. mây cannot be used in either sentence 1 or sentence 2 because in asking about specific actions in the past like pay ‘go’ or jîu ‘be’ the speaker must have some information from which he can draw inferences about these actions. For example, the speaker of sentence 1 may have the following information prior to the uttering of sentence 1:

nôông bôôy (sister) (my) (tell) (me) (that)
miawannî thoo pay (yesterday) (you) (go)
hôa khun sâm thii bàan.
(visit) (Mr.) (Sang) (at) (house)
tcoon thii khâw taa y thoo jîu káp khâw
r++ plàaw.

“My sister told me that you went to visit Mr. Sang at his house yesterday. When he died, were you with him?”

And for sentence 2, the following may be considered to be the information the speaker has before uttering 2:

thoo chîop pay Chicago chîy mây.
(you) (like) (go) (Q-marker)
pîi thii laaw thoo pay (Chicago) r++ plàaw.

“You like going to Chicago, don’t you?
Did you go there last year?”

It is unlikely that anyone can ask these two questions without having any prior assumption. So only r++ plàaw, not mây is appropriate here.

As for sentence 3, it is different from sentence 2 only in that there is the word bôôy ‘often’ in the former, but not in the latter; and this word alone triggers the use of mây. The reason behind this is that the speaker of sentence 3 may have some information about the action pay Chicago ‘going to Chicago’, but does not know anything about how often the action really took place. As he does not have any background information about how often the hearer went to Chicago last year and wants to know this, he asks the question with the question marker mây.

The question marker r++ plàaw can also be used here because the speaker might have been able to make some inferences about the hearer going to Chicago often, as illustrated below:

pîi thii laaw thoo pay Chicago bôôy r++ plàaw.

khôông bôôy si? nâ? phôô? (perhaps) (often) (particle) (particle) (because)
nôông thoo jîu thii năn (younger brother) (you) (be) (at) (there)
nîi (particle)

“Did you often go to Chicago last year? I guess you should have because your brother is there.”
From the above analysis, it is legitimate to say that ไม่ questions cannot be used to ask about specific actions in the past that require the speaker’s prior assumption. In other words, ไม่ questions are appropriate only when what is asked does not require the speaker’s assumption as shown in sentence 4:

4. ต้องกิน[e]์ไปแล้วไม่
(you) (ever) (go)
“Have you ever been to Chicago?”

It is also noteworthy that the questions in which the speaker’s assumption is not a necessary condition are those that ask about the degree of things, for example:

5. ผ่านคืนหลังฯ ถึงได้
(last night) (he) (be mad at) (you)
ไม่.
(you) (much)
“Was he very mad at you last night?”

Another point about ไม่ which is worth mentioning is the fact that the question marker ไม่ never co-occurs with the negative word ไม่ in the same sentence. So the following negative question is not acceptable in Thai:

6. ต้องไม่ชอบดื่มเคาฟเย
(you) (NEG) (like) (drink) (coffee)
ไม่.
(Q - marker)

“Don’t you like drinking coffee?” whereas the positive correspondence is:

7. ต้องชอบดื่มเคาฟเย
(you) (like) (drink) (coffee)
ไม่.
(Q - marker)

“Do you like drinking coffee?”

Linguists working on Thai syntax who have tried to explain the syntactic function of ไม่ are Upakitsilpasarn (1956) and Warotamasikkhadit (1963). They propose that ไม่ is derived from รูป ไม่ ‘or not’. Warotamasikkhadit further explains that the phrase รูป ไม่ is derived from a full negative sentence. So, for him, the sentence

8. ค้าระมา ไม่
(you) (will) (come) (Q - marker)
“Will you come?”

is derived from

กินค้าระมา รูป ไม่
(you) (will) (come) (NEG)

which originated in the deep structure as

กินค้าระมา รูป ไม่ ม้า.

We will propose an explanation of the unacceptability of sentence 6, following the analysis proposed by Upakitsilpasarn and Warotamasikkhadit. The following is the tentative deep structure of sentence 6:

This sentence is unacceptable because it offers both negative statements whereas yes/no questions must offer the choice between positive and negative statements.

This analysis seems to work well with ไม่ interrogative sentences because it can provide an explanation for the non-co-occurrence of ไม่ and ไม่ in the same sentence. But if another question marker -- รูป pl้าว -- is taken into consideration, we will see that the same analysis does not work for รูป pl้าว interrogative sentences.

Both ไม่ and pl้าว have been referred to in Thai grammar texts together as ‘negative words.’ However, when we compare the sentences in which these words occur we see that these two words have some different grammatical functions. Notice the following sentences: