THAI MODALS

David W. Dellinger

In Noss' description of Thai, he defines two classes of constituents of interest to a discussion of modals—modals and modal verbs. Modals are defined as bound lexemes occurring between a subject and predicate (subject and predicate correlating roughly with the traditional concepts in English). Modal verbs are defined as one of four subclasses of predicatives, the other three being adjectives, transitive verbs and complective verbs. Thus, a basic distinction is established between these two classes of constituents in that modals are bound and modal verbs are free.

The notion of free and bound, here, is not the usual one. 'Free' means "can substitute for the whole predicate." This characteristic is seen frequently in responses to questions. For the question:

1) khun tɔŋ pay mây
   you must go —?

a typical reply would be:

2) tɔŋ
   (I) must.

A bound morpheme cannot substitute for its predicate. If, instead of tɔŋ, the word was māk 'probably' (You are probably going?), the response could not be simply *māk. It would have to be:

3) māk
   (I am) probably going.

One of the features of Thai grammar that creates the problem of how to distinguish verbal morpheme subclasses is that verbs have a single form; there are no participle endings or infinitive markers, for example, to indicate subordinate relationships. Consequently, the language creates strings of two, three and more verbal morphemes whose precise relationships to each other are not clear. There are no semantic grounds for distinguishing groups. Many of the morphemes that express ideas belonging to the modals in English (may, can, ought, must, etc.) are defined as verbs in Thai on the basis of their distributional characteristics. And as one might expect, the defining criteria we isolate, frequently either do not apply one hundred percent of the time, or else have more than one effect on our data—or both.

To illustrate this propensity for verb strings, the following two sentences have the non-nominal elements occurring in strings un-
4) chan chak chao p naan
I rather like work

5) l'en rue thiew sæk phak nung klap maa kô than
run boat around just moment one return also on time
We can run around for just a moment and still get back on time.

Not all the morpheme classes are discussed in this paper. Adjectives correspond closely to English adjectives and intransitive verbs; transitive verbs are roughly equivalent with English transitive verbs; and the completive verbs have functions both transitival and adverbial in nature in English. These three classes are not dealt with in this paper. The decision to exclude them is partially arbitrary. In particular, completive verb have some characteristics that are modal (attributive) in nature. Mundhenk's description of the completive verbs of northern Thai, as well as Noss' discussion of those of standard Thai, clearly portray this fact. But I have chosen to deal with just the limited range of the two morpheme classes--modals and modal verbs.

What I wish to do in this paper is to discuss some of the criteria Noss uses to define modal verbs and modals and show that some of it is applicable and some isn't. In the process, it will be necessary to recategorize some morphemes. In addition, I will raise some further points that suggest a need to reevaluate the verbal system of Thai in the light of generative grammar.

To begin with, Noss has two classes of modal verbs--specific (smv) and general (gmv) modal verbs. smv occur only with complements of a verbal type; they do not take nominal complements.

6) mai mii khray s'amâat dug 'o k day
not there is someone can pull out can
There isn't anyone who can pull it out.

7) chan ca toon r'ip klap ban
I will must hurry return home
I must hurry home.

8) chan mai khâey day thamnâan
I not ever have work
I have never worked.

General modal verbs have both verbal and nominal type complements.

9) a) chan ca chuaay triam tue hay pay rop
I will help prepare self cause go fight
I'll help you get ready to go fight.
b) ph蟾 y卐akca ch卐ay khun
   I want help you
   I want to help you.

10) a) cha卐en loŋ maa c卐ak f卐akf卐a
    invite descend come from sky
    Please come down from the sky.

b) kh卐w ca cha卐en ph卐uchaay lik s卐oŋ khon
    she will invite man another two person
    She will invite two more men.

Noss also subdivides modals, here enumerating three classes. His third is the list of the negating expressions in the language, including the indicative negator m卐y 'no, not'; the imperative y卐a 'don't'; and numerous items that have equivalent negative adverbials or idioms in English, e.g. scarcely, apparently not, not really. I have also excluded this class of negative expressions as irrelevant, since it is widely accepted that negativity is a specific problem of language of its own.

The remaining two modal classes I have relabeled as the K class and the M class after the first member of each class.

K CLASS MODALS

kh卐n  'do something that's wrong' kl卐n  'make a pretense'
f卐n  'act in opposition; force' l卐  'be mistaken; get lost'
m卐  'be persistent' ခ卐  'hide; sneak'
ph卐    'have just'  ph卐c卐y    'follow suit'

11) pay h卐y phon  âaykhon ခ卐 duu
    go cause free from rascal sneak look at
    Go away, peeping tom!

12) ph卐ek n卐n kl卐n  t卐n ra卐wan s卐ngs卐n th卐wn卐n
    group that pretend set reward high only
    Those people are just pretending to offer a high reward.

M CLASS MODALS

m卐k  'must have'  duum卐nca    'appear; seem'
y卐m  'probably'  a卐tca    'maybe'
khoŋ 'possibly'  ခ卐  'almost'
kamlaŋ    be + -ing  ch卐k    'quite; rather'
kamlaŋca    'about to'

13) kamlaŋ tham khwaamddii y卐u
    I be -ing do good continue
    I am doing good deeds.
14) duumëncam pen rооу fan
   it seems be print tooth
   It seems to be tooth prints.

15) kхw àаtca hау raаhwan kёё lаан
   he maybe give reward to nephew
   Maybe he'll give a reward to you (nephews).

The characteristics that define the two classes according to Noss, are that: 1) K class modals can be imperatively negated,

16) yàа mue чаıkchaа yуu
    don't persistent slow continue
    Don't persist in being slow.

17) yàа lоŋ khаw pay thaаŋ nаataаŋ
    don't mistakenly enter into way window
    Don't go in the window by accident.

and, 2) they are negated indicatively by the expression мày díaу.

18) kхw мày díaу phíхооу pay duу nааŋ díaу
    he not follow suit go see movie too
    He didn't tag along to the movie.

19) kхw мày díaу ellido fаа kaаnsoonthanan
    he not sneak listen conversation
    He didn't eavesdrop on the conversation.

M class modals cannot occur with yàа.

20) *yàа kаamlа nооу phуut
    don't be -ing wait speak
    *Don't be waiting to speak.

21) *yàа ааtca ныи phуakman
    don't maybe flee them
    *Don't maybe flee from them.

And they are not directly negated, themselves, by any negative expression, i.e. no negative expressions immediately precede them. In any sentence in which the M class modals occur, the negative expressions мày and мày díaу follow the modal and are usually analyzed as negating one of the verbs following the negatives.

Additionally, the Noss' modals fall into two classes according to whether modal verbs would precede or follow them. The usual order in a predicate is M class + modal verb + K class. Noss does not specifically discuss this ordering relationship, but I feel it is as significant as the order relationships with the negatives in relation to defining a surface class of modals as opposed to verbs. It seems rather strained to group together as a single major morpheme