

# The status of 'auxiliary verbs' in Thai<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

This paper looks into the syntactic category of words such as *cà?* 'will', *khəy* 'ever', and *khəkhāaŋ* 'rather' which are referred to as preverbs by Kullavanijaya (1968), as modals by Noss (1964) and Sriphen (1982), and as auxiliaries in Panupong (1970), Ekniyom (1981) and Savetamalya (1987). The list of 'auxiliary' words to be tested here includes only those which precede verbs, and thus exclude words such as *yuu* which occur in a postverb position.

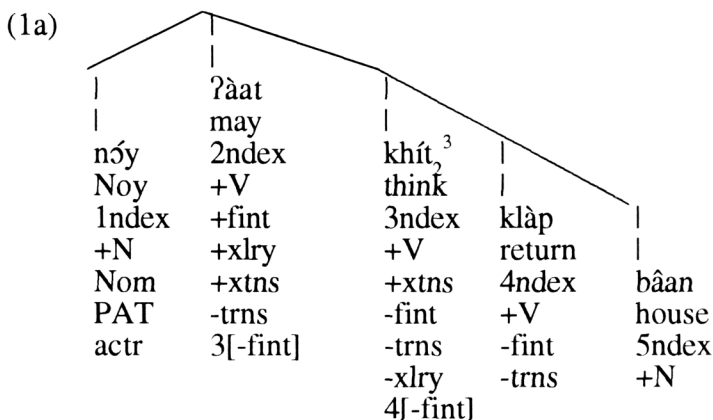
Working within the lexicase dependency framework, Savetamalya (1987) proposes a dependency analysis of auxiliaries as main verbs, in which the regent verb is the head of the construction (cf. Starosta 1977:73; 1988). In this paper, I point out certain characteristics of these 'auxiliaries' which are not accounted for in Savetamalya (1987) and test the syntactic status of these words. I then propose a more limited set of auxiliary verbs in Thai.

This paper is divided into six sections. The first section provides an introduction. The second section discusses phenomena not accounted for by Savetamalya (1987). The third section discusses the test used to identify the syntactic category of 'auxiliary verbs'. The fourth section presents the results. The fifth section discusses possible solutions to the problem raised. The final section presents a conclusion.

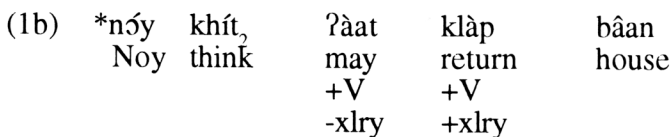
## 2. Problems

Savetamalya (1987:21), who works within the lexicase dependency grammar, identifies auxiliary verbs as words signifying the meanings of mood, aspect, intention, and obligation. She analyzes auxiliary verbs as extension intransitive verbs expecting a non-finite verb complement.

intransitive verbs expecting a non-finite verb complement. However, they differ from other verbs of this class both in their semantic limitations and in their ability to command any non-auxiliary verbs within the same finite domain.<sup>2</sup> For example, the auxiliary intransitive verb *ʔaat* 'may' precedes and commands the non-auxiliary intransitive verb *khít<sub>2</sub>* 'to think', as in (1a), but not vice versa, as in (1b). The requirement that the auxiliary verb *ʔaat* requires a non-finite verb dependent is shown by the implied contextual feature [4[-fint]] in the lexical matrix of *ʔaat*.



'Noy may consider returning home.'



'Noy thinks (she) may return home.'

Even though Savetamalya's analysis provides a nice account of the dependency relationship between auxiliary verbs and other verbs in Thai, the verb dependency analysis encounters the following problems. First of all, some of these words (e.g. *khônkhâaŋ* 'rather') may also precede sentence-final adverbs, for example, the frequency adverb *bây* 'often' in (2a) and the resultative adverb *dii* 'good' in (3a). By the definition of auxiliary verbs, they should cooccur with a non-finite verb

dependent, rather than an adverb dependent. In these examples, the requirement for a non-finite verb complement is not satisfied and yet these sentences are acceptable.

|      |       |       |       |       |                      |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------------------|
| (2a) | kháw  | pay   | thi   | nân   | khônkhâaŋ            |
|      | he    | go    | at    | there | rather               |
|      | 1ndex | 2ndex | 3ndex | 4ndex | 5ndex                |
|      | +N    | +V    |       |       | +V                   |
|      | Nom   | +fint |       |       | +xlry                |
|      | PAT   | -xlry |       |       | +xtns                |
|      | actr  | -trns |       |       | -trns                |
|      |       |       |       |       | ?([+V]) <sup>4</sup> |
|      |       |       |       |       | ?[-fint]             |

bây  
often  
6ndex  
+Adv  
+dgre

'He went there rather often.'

|      |       |       |          |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|----------|-------|-------|
| (3a) | kháw  | phûut | khôy     | dii   | khân  |
|      | he    | speak | rather   | good  | up    |
|      | 1ndex | 2ndex | 3ndex    | 4ndex | 5ndex |
|      | +N    | +V    | +V       | +Adv  | +Adv  |
|      | Nom   | +fint | +xlry    | +rslt | +path |
|      | PAT   | -trns | +xtns    |       | +slnt |
|      | actr  | -xlry | -trns    |       |       |
|      |       |       | ?([+V])  |       |       |
|      |       |       | ?[-fint] |       |       |

'He gradually spoke better.'

Moreover, examples (2a) and (3a) above and (4a) and (5a) below also illustrate the fact that non-auxiliary intransitive verbs such as *pay* 'to go', *phûut* 'to speak', *phayayaam* 'to try' and *tâtsîncay* 'to decide' may precede the supposed non-finite auxiliary verbs *khônkhâaŋ* 'rather', *khôy* 'gradually', *câ?* 'will' and *tôŋ* 'must' within the same finite domain. This fact violates the requirement that auxiliary verbs precede and command other non-finite verbs, rather than vice versa (cf. Savetamalya 1987:21) and raises a question about the status of auxiliary verbs in Thai.

|      |       |           |          |       |
|------|-------|-----------|----------|-------|
| (4a) | kôy   | phayayaam | cà?      | khăay |
|      | Koy   | try       | will     | sell  |
|      | 1ndex | 2ndex     | 3ndex    | 4ndex |
|      | +N    | +V        | +V       | +V    |
|      | Nom   | +fint     | +xlry    | +trns |
|      | PAT   | +xtns     | +xtns    | -fint |
|      | actr  | -trns     | -fint    |       |
|      |       | -xlry     | -trns    |       |
|      |       | 3[-fint]  | 4[-fint] |       |

càkkayaan

bicycle

5ndex

+N

'Koy tried to sell her bicycle.'

|      |       |                        |          |                   |       |
|------|-------|------------------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| (5a) | nát   | tàtsĩncay <sub>1</sub> | tôn      | klàp <sub>4</sub> | bân   |
|      | Nat   | decide                 | must     | return            | house |
|      | 1ndex | 2ndex                  | 3ndex    | 4ndex             | 5ndex |
|      | +N    | +V                     | +V       | +V                | +N    |
|      | Nom   | +fint                  | +xlry    | +lctn             |       |
|      | PAT   | +xtns                  | +xtns    | -fint             |       |
|      | actr  | -trns                  | -fint    | -trns             |       |
|      |       | -xlry                  | -trns    |                   |       |
|      |       | 3[-fint]               | 4[-fint] |                   |       |

'Nat decided that she must return home.'

Having discussed problems in the verbal analysis of auxiliaries, I will attempt to reexamine the syntactic categories of these 'auxiliary verbs' by testing the position in which the negation adverb *mây* 'not' occupies with relation to these putative 'auxiliary verbs' in a root predicate clause. Specifically, when these words occur after a subject, as opposed to at the end of a clause, do they precede or follow the negation word *mây*?

### 3. The Root Predicate with Negation Word *mây*

In Thai, the negation adverb *mây* 'not' may precede a verb or a sentence-final adverb. Even though *mây* may not differentiate verbs from adverbs when they occur after another verb, as shown in (6) and (7), this adverb *mây* may distinguish