wâa and complement-taking predicates
in Thai

Ngampit Jagacinski
Cornell University

The grammaticalized functions of the verb 'to say' as a marker to introduce or to link clauses are a common phenomenon in many Asian and African languages (Lord, 1976; Jaisser, 1985; Saxena, 1988). Semantic fluctuation is obvious in this type of development when a lexicon becomes generalized and acquires different syntactic functions. The verb wâa 'to say' in Thai is no exception. In reported speech wâa occurs as a quotative marker (QT). In complex constructions, wâa can occur as a complementizer (COMP) linking an argument to its predicate, or as a part of connectives linking various co-ordinate clauses. This paper focuses on the gradation of semantic changes of wâa and its relationship with the main verbs that precede it. The findings include a wide range of both loss and gain in meaning. There are cases of syntactic and semantic depletion of the original verb 'to say' when wâa together with a certain verb form a verbal compound with new meaning. There are also cases of semantic nuances in which a concept of evidentiality is expressed when a complementizer wâa occurs with certain predicates.

As a verb, wâa has two closely related meanings of 'to say': Examples are the following:

205
1. hūanâa nàan kháu wâa yâñhâi nà
   boss s/he say how PAR
   What did the boss say?

2. thâa máî dîi léêu yàa maa wâa chán nà
   if NEG good ASP NEG DR blame I PAR
   If it doesn't turn out well, don't blame me.

wâa in Example 1 simply means 'to say'. In Example 2, wâa also carries a complex meaning equivalent to 'to verbally express dissatisfaction and accusation through descriptive reasoning'. The verbal meaning of wâa has extended usage when wâa also functions as a QT marker for both direct and indirect quotes as in Examples 3 and 4, respectively, below:

3. kháu bòôk phôc wâa "phôc, khoâ hân sîp
   s/he speak father QT father request money ten
   bát dâi máî"
   baht 0
   S/He said to her/his father, "Father, may I have ten
   dollars?"

4. kháu bòôk wâa kháu pai kunmîñ sôn khrán léêu
   s/he speak QT s/he go Kunming two times ASP
   S/He said that s/he has already gone to Kunming
   twice.

Previous analyses such as Tasanee's (cited in Namthip 1989) consider wâa occurring with communication or mental state verbs to be a quotative compound verb (i.e., essentially 'say-say' or, for example, 'think-say').
Namthip (1989) further proposes that in these occurrences ｗａａ is still a verb and can take its own subject. The following discussion and examples will demonstrate that this is not so. The so-called mental state verbs consist of not just phatic and 'think' type verbs, but a large number of complement-taking predicates (CTP). There is a wide variety of both syntactic and semantic changes when ｗａａ is preceded by these predicates.

There are extreme cases in which ｗａａ occurs in a verbal compound which takes on a new meaning remotely deriving from the meaning of the main verb. Examples are:

5. ｈａा ‘to find’ ｈａा ｗａａ ‘to accuse’
6. ｔｈǚw ‘to carry’ ｔｈǚw ｗａａ ‘to consider’
7. ｔｏो ‘to continue’ ｔｏｏ ｗａａ ‘to complain’
8. ｒａｐ ‘to receive’ ｒａｐ ｗａа ‘to admit’
9. ｎａｐ ‘to count’ ｎａｐ ｗａａ ‘to be taken as’

ｗａａ in the above examples is no longer an independent verb, but becomes semantically transparent with the main verbs. The loss of the original verbal meaning ‘to say’ is clear in cases of double occurrences of ｗａａ in which the second occurrence is a grammatical marker. For example:

10. ｌｕｕκcан cùŋ ｒａｏŋ ｔhảm ｋhâu ｐai ｗａａ ｍήे ｔhोोŋdii
    ｌuukcan PT call out ask s/he DR Thoondii

ｍήे ｋee ｐen ｙaŋrai ｂaŋ ｋhá ｌuukcan ｎǎn ｔhảm
mother PRO be how PAR lukcan DM ask

khāu ｍée ｐhùa ｐhùu ｔhii ｐhaa ｒwạ ｐay ｓǎmkan ｗａａ
news mother-in-law one who row boat DR take it to be
Luukcan, with a loud voice, asked "Mēe Thōndii, how is your mother?" Luukcan was asking about (her own) mother-in-law. The woman, who was rowing a boat passing by (i.e. Mēe Thōndii), took it that Luukcan was asking about her own mother. She answered "Mother passed away last night."

Roikaeo Naegmai Khong Thai, p.79

11. --- fàai thōndii cuŋ bōok wâa chān bōok wâa
   sìde Thōndii then say COMP I say COMP
   mēe chān taai tāañhâak thammai klâp maa
   Chăn die or the contrary why in return DR
   wâa wâa chān bōok wâa mēe phōo sūtcai taai
   blame COMP I say COMP mother Sutchai died

Thōndii then said that I told you that it was my mother who died. Why are you blaming me that I said Sutchai's mother died?

Roikaeo Naegmai Khong Thai, p.80

12. thīi khāu wâa wâa khun nûŋ krapoon sān nān māi
   that s/he say COMP you wear skirt short DEM NEG
cīŋ
   true
   That they said your skirt is too short is not true.

In Example 10, sēmkan 'to be important' and the first occurrence of wâa form a verbal compound which takes on a new meaning of 'take it to be'. The second occurrence of wâa as a COMP links the complement