

# A Non-linear Analysis of Aspect in Thai Narrative Discourse

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The Serial Verb Construction (SVC) in Thai, while maintaining fundamental characteristics of Serial Verbs, i.e., the subject of a predicate is identified with an argument of some other expression, does not have the luxury of specific morphemes defining tense specification, but is built largely of verbs, adverbs, and auxiliaries that can function as Directional Forms (Hatton 1975), verbs that define a path (Thepkanjana forthcoming), Pre/Post-Serial Verbs (Kanchanawan 1978), and locative/temporal adverbials (Warotamasikkkhadit 1972).

## 1. Aspect in the Thai verb phrase

Kanchanawan's (1978) and Warotamasikkkhadit's (1972) analyses define parameters of semantic restrictions of temporal/aspectual expression in the Thai verb phrase à la SVCs. The subject ellipsis in the SVC below in [1] contrasts with the perfective aspect expressed in [2] even though the transformation appears identical in each.

[1] a. k<sup>h</sup>aw k<sup>h</sup>ap rot

3s drive car

→k<sup>h</sup>aw k<sup>h</sup>ap rot paj

b. k<sup>h</sup>aw paj

3s drive car go

3s go

'He drives/drove the car.'

[2] a. k<sup>h</sup>aw k<sup>h</sup>awcaj p<sup>h</sup>it

3s understand wrong

→k<sup>h</sup>aw k<sup>h</sup>awcai p<sup>h</sup>it paj

b. \*k<sup>h</sup>aw paj

3s understand wrong Perf.

3s Perf.

'She misunderstood.'

Sindhvananda (1970) defines *paʹ* in [2] not as a subject ellipsis auxiliary, but as a perfective marker:

*/pay/ (in [2b]) cannot convey a notion of "going" with the additional meaning of "direction away from the speaker" as it usually does when functioning as a main verb. The only sense that can be grasped from /pay/ (in [2]) is that something has already happened.... Thus, it should be concluded that /pay/ in this sense of "completion" should be considered as an auxiliary, a pure perfective marker, as opposed to /pay/ in the sense of "going" in an embedded sentence (see [1a]) (Sindhvananda 1970:30).*

Kanchanawan (1978) analysis places time phrases outside the verb phrase and time/aspect markers within the verb phrase. Time and aspect markers function within the VP as: pre-serial verbs (PREV), auxiliaries (AUX), post serial verbs (POSTV) and particles (PART) (Kanchanawan 1978).<sup>1</sup> Time expression in Thai is explained through a "combination of time phrases, time markers, aspect markers, and certain types of verbs"<sup>2</sup> (Kanchanawan 1978:73).

Kanchanawan (1978) takes the time phrase (TP) component out of the verb phrase altogether.<sup>3</sup> TPs are the greatest indicators of a point or a range of specific time in Thai discourse. Some time phrases that indicate a point in time are *muawaanii* 'yesterday', *piinaa* 'next year', etc. Some time phrases that indicate a range of time such as those that include *tantææ* 'since' (*tantææ muawaanii* 'since yesterday') and those that describe a span of time (*sɔɔŋ chuamooŋ* 'two hours'). These time phrases are distinct from time and aspect markers: *Time refers to the real point "when" an event takes place. It is generally divided into past, present, and future. Aspect indicates "how" the event takes place, e.g., continuous, continuative, and others* (Kanchanawan 1978:71).

Time and aspect markers, distinguished according to the definitions above are based on Reichenbach's tense formulas in which three elements, a speech act, an event, and a "reference" point are represented by the symbols E, R, and S, respectively.

Time is ordered left to right, dashes indicate sequentiality, commas indicate simultaneity (in [3]) (Reichenbach 1947:294):

[3]	I see John.	S,R,E
	I saw John	R,E -- S
	I have seen John	E -- S,R
	I had seen John	E --R -- S

Kanchanawan (1978:71-2) adapts Reichenbach's tense formulas toward an explanation of time expression within the Thai VP [4]<sup>4</sup>:

[4]	(a) simple past	R,E -- S
	(b) simple present	S,R,E
	(c) simple future	S--R,E
	(d) past continuous	$\vec{E}$ ,R--S
	(e) present continuous	S,R, $\vec{E}$
	(f) future continuous	S--R, $\vec{E}$
	(g) past perfect	E--R--S
	(h) present perfect	E--S,R
	(i) future perfect	S--E--R
	(j) past perfect continuous	$\vec{E}$ --R--S
	(k) present perfect continuous	$\vec{E}$ --R,S
	(l) future perfect continuous	S-- $\vec{E}$ --R
	(m) non-fulfilled past	E*--R--S
	(n) non-fulfilled past continuous	$\vec{E}$ *,R--S
	(o) non-fulfilled past perfect	E*--R--S

According to these categories, Kanchanawan (1978) has a taxonomy of time and aspect markers similar to the location/motion path-relative taxonomy developed by Thepkanjana (forthcoming). Five time markers indicate three times: past, recent past, and future (Kanchanawan 1978:76). Eight aspect markers indicate five aspects: continuous, completive, perfective, continuative, and generic (Kanchanawan 1978:81-5). These are listed in [5].

- [5] Past time markers: *daʹ* 'able, can, may, get, receive,  
have opportunity'  
*kʰəəʹ* 'experience, accustomed to'  
*waʹ* 'keep (for a certain purpose)'
- Recent Past marker: *pʰəŋ* 'just'
- Future marker: *caʔ* Volition, Assertion, Intention
- Continuous Aspect: *juu* Process of doing, Stative
- Compleitive Aspect: *cop* 'end'  
*samret* 'successful'  
*set* 'finish'
- Perfective Aspect: *lææw* 'ready, already, finish'
- Continuative Aspect: *paʹ* 'go, away'  
*maa* 'come, towards'
- Generic Aspect: *jɔm* 'naturally'

Considerable attention has been given to the application of Reichenbach's formulas to narrative aspect (Dowty 1979; McCoard 1978; Smith 1978). Based on aspect theory in application to narrative text analysis, I will develop a working hypothesis of the expression of time specifically in Thai narrative.

Smith (1978) proposes an extension to Reichenbach's system where speech time (S) is orientation time (OT) because, although in independent sentences (in English) orientation time is always speech time, "in narratives, a time of narration can be established and the sentences of the narrative are all understood as oriented to that time." (Smith 1978:77)

Smith gives examples of sentences that cannot be fully interpreted in isolation, although they are grammatical, in [6] and [7].

[6] Laurie called beforehand.

[7] John was better now.