COMPLICATIONS IN TEMPORAL PREVERBS
AND THEIR SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION
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1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'temporal preverb'\(^{2}\) is used in this paper, in some sense, overlaps with the more familiar terms 'aspect', 'tense', and 'auxiliary'. The terms 'aspect' and 'tense' which are normally used in the Indo-European languages are mostly concerned with affixing, and the term 'auxiliary', which is not concerned with affixing, covers a wider range than the term 'temporal preverb' in this paper. The author will exclude some other preverbs such as khoŋ 'may', khuan 'ought to', ʔat 'probably', and tɔŋ 'must' which are not temporal preverbs. This analysis posits that all of the Thai temporal preverbs occur preverbally in the deep structure; they, thus, are legitimately called 'preverbs'.

2. TEMPORAL PREVERBS AND THEIR SEMANTIC FEATURES

This paper presents three kinds of temporal preverbs.

2.1. cà AS A PREVERB

Normally cà is interpreted as a future particle\(^{3}\) containing the feature [+future]. Let us consider the following sentences.

(1) khʁaw cà kìn khâaw
ev future eat rice
'He is going to eat.'

(2) khʁaw cà máŋ kìn khâaw
ev future not eat rice
'He is not going to eat.'

cà in (1) and (2) signifies a regular future.\(^{4}\) A negative may be introduced to the position following cà by a negative transformation in the surface structure.
2.2. kamlaŋ-yùu AS PREVERBS

This analysis proposes that kamlaŋ and yùu preverbs can occur as syntactic echoes to each other in the deep structure where both or either one of the two may occur in the same simple sentence. The features [+progressive] and [+definite] are assigned to kamlaŋ and the features [+progressive] and [-definite] to yùu. Let us consider the following sentences.

(3) khâw kamlaŋ kin khâaw  
   he progressive eat rice  
   'He is (definitely) eating.'

(4) khâw kin khâaw yùu  
   he eat rice progressive  
   'He is (indefinitely) eating.'

(5) khâw kamlaŋ kin khâaw yùu  
   he progressive eat rice progressive  
   'He is eating.' (emphatic)

yùu, an indefinite syntactic echo of kamlaŋ, is transformed to the position following a verb phrase in the surface structure. (3) and (4) have nearly the same semantic interpretation. (3) is taken to be more definite than (4) in the speaker's view. Any one of the sentences (3) to (5) can be the answer to any one of the following questions.

(6) khâw kamlaŋ tham ?àray  
   he progressive do what  
   'What is he (definitely) doing?'

(7) khâw tham ?àray yùu  
   he do what progressive  
   'What is he (indefinitely) doing?'

(8) khâw kamlaŋ tham ?àray yùu  
   he progressive do what progressive  
   'What is he (definitely) doing?' (emphatic)

When the feature [+definite] precedes the feature [-definite] in the same simple sentence, the feature [-definite] becomes [+emphatic]. Thus either (5) or (8) conveys emphaticness in its semantic interpretation.

(9) [-definite] → [+emphatic] / [+definite] ___

(10) khâw kamlaŋ cà kin khâaw  
     he progressive future eat rice  
     'He will be eating.' ('He is about to eat.')
(11) khâw cã  kin khâaw yûu
   he  future  eat  rice  progressive
   'He will be eating.'

(12) khâw kâmlan cã  kin khâaw yûu
   he  progressive  future  eat  rice  progressive
   'He will be eating.'  (emphatic)

When cã is preceded by kâmlan, yûu, or kâmlan-yûu as in (10), (11),
and (12), kâmlan cã,⁸ yûu cã, or kâmlan-yûu cã will be interpreted as
a near future where the action will occur sooner than the one without
either kâmlan or yûu, or both. It can be stated by the following rule.

(13) [+future] → [+future²] / [+progressive] __

(11) is taken to be ambiguous with two readings. It either says
that he will be (indefinitely) eating in the near future, or (I expect
that) he will be (indefinitely) eating. The first reading is considered
regular but the second reading must be derived from a different deep
structure which will not be treated here.¹⁰

cã in (12) behaves in the same manner as cã in (10) but its semantic
interpretation of emphaticness should be taken into account because both
kâmlan and yûu appear in the same simple sentence as explained in 2.2.

2.3. lâaw¹¹ AS A PREVERB

This analysis will treat lâaw as a temporal preverb preceding kâmlan-
yûu and cã in the deep structure. lâaw is analysed to have the feature
[+cessative] and it is later transformed postverbally to the end of the
sentence in the surface structure before a performative transformation
is applied.¹²

It must be noted here that this analysis will not consider lâaw as
the past tense marker as some authors do.¹³ The author believes that
lâaw has nothing to do with the past tense: it only shows that whatever
the action is, it is ceasing and the state or condition of the action
is changing. Let us consider the following sentences.

(14) khâw kin khâaw lâaw
   he  eat  rice  cessative
   'He has already eaten.'

(15) khâw cã  kin khâaw lâaw
   he  future  eat  rice  cessative
   'He is going to eat soon.'

(16) khâw kâmlan cã  kin khâaw lâaw
   he  progressive  future  eat  rice  cessative
   'He will definitely be eating very soon.'
(17) khàw cà  kin khàw yùù  làw
he  future  eat  rice  progressive  cessative
'He will indefinitely be eating very soon.'

(18) khàw kamlàng  cà  kin khàw yùù  làw
he  progressive  future  eat  rice  progressive  cessative
'He will definitely be eating very soon.' (emphatic)

(14) indicates that the action of eating is ceasing or has ceased. When cà preceded by làw as in (15), the sentence should be interpreted as the future is ceasing; thus, the action will occur in the nearer near future and sooner than the one with kamlàng cà as in (11), and kamlàng-yùù cà as in (12) in 2.2. It can be represented by the following rule.

(19) [+future]  →  [+future3]  /  [+cessative] __

làw kamlàng cà in (16), làw yùù cà in (17), and làw kamlàng-yùù cà in (18) indicate that the near future is ceasing and their semantic interpretation becomes the nearest near future which can be expressed by the following rule.

(20) [+future2]  →  [+future4]  /  [+cessative][+progressive] __

4. CONCLUSION

This analysis of temporal preverbs is obviously different from that of many others who have written about Thai. It aims to reveal the semantic functions of temporal preverbs and their interpretation in sentences which express progressiveness, futurity, and cessativeness. Combinations of any of the three kinds of temporal preverbs lead to different semantic interpretations. Especially when futurity is involved, there are four degrees of the future, the regular future as expressed by cà, the near future as expressed by kamlàng cà, yùù cà, or kamlàng-yùù cà, the nearer near future as expressed by làw cà, and the nearest near future as expressed by làw kamlàng cà, làw yùù cà, and làw kamlàng-yùù cà. It is hoped that this analysis will be beneficial to linguists and language scholars interested in the Thai language. Further investigation of another use of cà, deriving from a higher sentence in the deep structure, is needed to support this analysis.