

COMPLICATIONS IN TEMPORAL PREVERBS AND THEIR SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION¹

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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 *khon* 'may', *khuan* 'ought to', *ʔaat* 'probably', and *tôn* '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 particle³ containing the feature [+future]. Let us consider the following sentences.

- (1) *khăw cà kin khâaw*
he future eat rice
'He is going to eat.'
- (2) *khăw cà mây kin khâaw*
he 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. kamləŋ-yùu AS PREVERBS

This analysis proposes that kamləŋ⁵ and yùu⁶ preverbs can occur as syntactic echoes⁷ 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 kamləŋ and the features [+progressive] and [-definite] to yùu. Let us consider the following sentences.

- (3) khǎw kamləŋ kin khâaw
 he progressive eat rice
 'He is (definitely) eating.'
- (4) khǎw kin khâaw yùu
 he eat rice progressive
 'He is (indefinitely) eating.'
- (5) khǎw kamləŋ kin khâaw yùu
 he progressive eat rice progressive
 'He is eating.' (emphatic)

yùu, an indefinite syntactic echo of kamləŋ, 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) khǎw kamləŋ tham ?àray
 he progressive do what
 'What is he (definitely) doing?'
- (7) khǎw tham ?àray yùu
 he do what progressive
 'What is he (indefinitely) doing?'
- (8) khǎw kamləŋ 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) khǎw kamləŋ cà kin khâaw
 he progressive future eat rice
 'He will be eating.' ('He is about to eat.')

- (11) khăw cà kin khâaw yùu
 he future eat rice progressive
 'He will be eating.'
- (12) khăw kamlan cà kin khâaw yùu
 he progressive future eat rice progressive
 'He will be eating.' (emphatic)

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

- (13) [+future] → [+future2]⁹ / [+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

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

2.3. lăaw¹¹ AS A PREVERB

This analysis will treat lăaw as a temporal preverb preceding kamlan-yùu and cà in the deep structure. lăaw 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 lăaw as the past tense marker as some authors do.¹³ The author believes that lăaw 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) khăw kin khâaw lăaw
 he eat rice cessative
 'He has already eaten.'
- (15) khăw cà kin khâaw lăaw
 he future eat rice cessative
 'He is going to eat soon.'
- (16) khăw kamlan cà kin khâaw lăaw
 he progressive future eat rice cessative
 'He will definitely be eating very soon.'

- (17) khăw cà kin khâaw yùu lắaw
 he future eat rice progressive cessative
 'He will indefinitely be eating very soon.'

- (18) khăw kamləŋ cà kin khâaw yùu lắaw
 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 lắaw 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 kamləŋ cà as in (11), and kamləŋ-yùu cà as in (12) in 2.2. It can be represented by the following rule.

- (19) [+future] → [+future3] / [+cessative] ____

lắaw kamləŋ cà in (16), lắaw yùu cà in (17), and lắaw kamləŋ-yùu 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 kamləŋ cà, yùu cà, or kamləŋ-yùu cà, the nearer near future as expressed by lắaw cà, and the nearest near future as expressed by lắaw kamləŋ cà, lắaw yùu cà, and lắaw kamləŋ-yùu 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.