

THAI MODALS¹

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In Noss' description of Thai, he defines two classes of constituents of interest to a discussion of modals--modals and modal verbs. Modals are defined as bound lexemes occurring between a subject and predicate (subject and predicate correlating roughly with the traditional concepts in English). Modal verbs are defined as one of four subclasses of predicatives, the other three being adjectives, transitive verbs and completive verbs. Thus, a basic distinction is established between these two classes of constituents in that modals are bound and modal verbs are free.

The notion of free and bound, here, is not the usual one. 'Free' means "can substitute for the whole predicate." This characteristic is seen frequently in responses to questions. For the question:

- 1) khun tŏŋ pay máy
you must go —?

a typical reply would be:

- 2) tŏŋ
(I) must.

A bound morpheme cannot substitute for its predicate. If, instead of tŏŋ, the word was mák 'probably' (You are probably going?), the response could not be simply *mák. It would have to be:

- 3) mák pay
(I am) probably going.

One of the features of Thai grammar that creates the problem of how to distinguish verbal morpheme subclasses is that verbs have a single form; there are no participular endings or infinitive markers, for example, to indicate subordinate relationships. Consequently, the language creates strings of two, three and more verbal morphemes whose precise relationships to each other are not clear. There are no semantic grounds for distinguishing groups. Many of the morphemes that express ideas belonging to the modals in English (may, can, ought, must, etc.) are defined as verbs in Thai on the basis of their distributional characteristics. And as one might expect, the defining criteria we isolate, frequently either do not apply one hundred per cent of the time, or else have more than one effect on our data--or both.

To illustrate this propensity for verb strings, the following two sentences have the non-nominal elements occurring in strings un-

derlined.

- 4) chán chắk chốop naan
I rather like work
- 5) lền ræ thîaw sàk phắk nùng klàp maa kồ than
run boat around just moment one return also on time
We can run around for just a moment and still get back on time.

Not all the morpheme classes are discussed in this paper. Adjectives correspond closely to English adjectives and intransitive verbs; transitive verbs are roughly equivalent with English transitive verbs; and the completive verbs have functions both transitive and adverbial in nature in English. These three classes are not dealt with in this paper. The decision to exclude them is partially arbitrary. In particular, completive verb have some characteristics that are modal (attributive) in nature. Mundhenk's description of the completive verbs of northern Thai, as well as Noss' discussion of those of standard Thai, clearly portray this fact. But I have chosen to deal with just the limited range of the two morpheme classes--modals and modal verbs.

What I wish to do in this paper is to discuss some of the criteria Noss uses to define modal verbs and modals and show that some of it is applicable and some isn't. In the process, it will be necessary to recategorize some morphemes. In addition, I will raise some further points that suggest a need to reevaluate the verbal system of Thai in the light of generative grammar.

To begin with, Noss has two classes of modal verbs--specific (smv) and general (gmv) modal verbs. smv occur only with complements of a verbal type; they do not take nominal complements.

- 6) mây mii khray săamăat đung òok dây
not there is someone can pull out can
There isn't anyone who can pull it out.
- 7) chán ca tôn rîp klàp bân
I will must hurry return home
I must hurry home.
- 8) chán mây khəəy dây thamnaan
I not ever have work
I have never worked.

General modal verbs have both verbal and nominal type complements.

- 9) a) chán ca chúəy triəm tuə hây pay róp
I will help prepare self cause go fight
I'll help you get ready to go fight.

b) phǒm yàakca chủay khun
 I want help you
 I want to help you.

10) a) chəən loŋ maa càak fàakfáa
 invite descend come from sky
 * Please come down from the sky.

b) kháw ca chəən phủuchaay ìik sǒŋ khon
 she will invite man another two person
 She will invite two more men.

Noss also subdivides modals, here enumerating three classes. His third is the list of the negating expressions in the language, including the indicative negator mây 'no, not'; the imperative yàa 'don't'; and numerous items that have equivalent negative adverbials or idioms in English, e.g. scarcely, apparently not, not really. I have also excluded this class of negative expressions as irrelevant, since it is widely accepted that negativity is a specific problem of language of its own.

The remaining two modal classes I have relabeled as the K class and the M class after the first member of each class.

K CLASS MODALS

khǎun	'do something that's wrong'	klĕēŋ	'make a pretense'
fǎun	'act in opposition; force'	lǒŋ	'be mistaken; get lost'
muə	'be persistent'	ĕēp	'hide; sneak'
phên	'have just'	phlɔɔy	'follow suit'

11) pay hây phón âaykhon ĕēp duu
 go cause free from rascal sneak look at
 Go away, peeping tom!

12) phûək nán klĕēŋ tâng raŋwan sǔŋsǔŋ tháwnán
 group that pretend set reward high only
 Those people are just pretending to offer a high reward.

M CLASS MODALS

mák	'must have'	duumǎenca	'appear; seem'
yôom	'probably'	àatca	'maybe'
khon	'possibly'	kǎep	'almost'
kamlan	be + -ing	chák	'quite; rather'
kamlanca	'about to'		

13) kan kamlan tham khwaamdii yùu
 I be -ing do good continue
 I am doing good deeds.

- 14) duum^hænca pen rooy fan
it seems be print tooth
It seems to be tooth prints.
- 15) kháw àatca háy raanwan kèe lăan
he maybe give reward to nephew
Maybe he'll give a reward to you (nephews).

The characteristics that define the two classes according to Noss, are that: 1) K class modals can be imperatively negated,

- 16) yàa muə chákchăa yùu
don't persistent slow continue
Don't persist in being slow.
- 17) yàa lŏn khâw pay thaan nâataan
don't mistakenly enter into way window
Don't go in the window by accident.

and, 2) they are negated indicatively by the expression mây dâi.

- 18) kháw mây dâi phlŏoy pay duu năŋ dūəy
he not follow suit go see movie too
He didn't tag along to the movie.
- 19) kháw mây dâi èep fan kaansŏnthanaa
he not sneak listen conversation
He didn't eavesdrop on the conversation.

M class modals cannot occur with yàa.

- 20) *yàa kamlan khooy phūt
don't be -ing wait speak
*Don't be waiting to speak.
- 21) *yàa àatca nŏi phūəkman
don't maybe flee them
*Don't maybe flee from them.

And they are not directly negated, themselves, by any negative expression, i.e. no negative expressions immediately precede them. In any sentence in which the M class modals occur, the negative expressions mây and mây dâi follow the modal and are usually analyzed as negating one of the verbs following the negatives.

Additionally, the Noss' modals fall into two classes according to whether modal verbs would precede or follow them. The usual order in a predicate is M class + modal verb + K class. Noss does not specifically discuss this ordering relationship, but I feel it is as significant as the order relationships with the negatives in relation to defining a surface class of modals as opposed to verbs. It seems rather strained to group together as a single major morpheme

class, subclasses of morphemes that have such distinct ordering restrictions.

The primary criterion for distinguishing modal verbs as a group from modals as a group is that, in Noss' terms, modal verbs are free morphemes (lexemes) and modals are bound. This is the crucial difference, and the notion of free/bound is defined, as previously explained, as the ability to substitute for the whole verbal expression, in particular, in response to yes-no questions.

22) Q: thəə tôn rîp bòok lun lǎə
you must hurry tell uncle eh?

A: tôn
yes (must)

23) Q: thəə kamlan̄ca rîp bòok lun chây máy
you about to hurry tell uncle right?

A: *kamlan̄ca
yes (about to)

Even though the syntactic position of occurrence of modals is apparently the same as that of modal verbs, i.e. between subject and predicate, they are classified separately on the basis of this substitutability criterion.

However, as Noss himself points out, there is one other interesting feature of distribution, and that is position of occurrence relative to the negative particle. Since M modals cannot be directly negated, that means they occur only *preceding* a negative expression (which, consequently, negates the following verbal complement rather than the modal), never following it. The other three subclasses--K modals, smv, and gmV--all take a preceding negative expression, either mây or mây dâ̄y, which are roughly equivalent in their semantic effect in at least some cases (the relevant cases).

From a structural viewpoint, the preceding data might be expected to more or less clearly define some distribution classes. Essentially on the basis of this data Noss has defined two classes of morphemes with two subclasses each. In fact, the M modals are the only group of morphemes that appear to sharply stand out. Indeed, the other three enjoy a high degree of permutability among themselves.

24) kháw lǒ̄ng rēəm yoom chūəy phūək nán
K gmV smV gmV

He erroneously initiated a willingness to help that group.

25) chán chō̄p klē̄̄ng samàk pay dū̄əy
gmV K smV

I enjoy pretending to volunteer to go too.

26) phîi khæy phlɔɔy lɔɔŋ kin aahǎan faraŋ
 smv K gmv

Brother used to copy everyone and try to eat foreign food.

Having summarized Noss' criteria and interjected some further ones, I wish to introduce some contradictory claims for some of his analysis. In discussing negation, Noss has said that the modal verbs are negated by mây (ef. example 8) and the K modals by mây dây with equivalent effect. This much is true, but apparently it is not true that K modals cannot be negated by mây also; my informants have indicated that most of the K class (but not all) can be, with identical meaning.

27) a) khun mây klêeŋ phûut
 you not pretend speak
 You didn't pretend to speak.

b) khun mây dây klêeŋ phûut
 you not pretend speak

Other K modals which apparently can be negated by either negative expression are fǎun 'to force oneself', phây 'to have just', klêeŋ 'to pretend', lɔŋ 'to err', èeɣ 'to sneak', and phaakan 'together.' An interesting fact, though, is that negative use of most of these morphemes with either negator is strained and unnatural. Apparently, there are semantic restrictions that make negativization of K modals an infrequent possibility.

K modals which take only mây dây and mue 'persistently', and klàp 'to act contrary to expectations.' Uniquely, phlɔɔy 'to go with someone', according to my informant, sounded better with mây than with mây dây, which is completely contrary to the defining criterion.

Conflicting claims such as these are not easily reconciled. The most probable answer is that these are areas that just were not covered in the original study.

By way of comparison, other verb forms--transitive verbs like hǎn 'see', adjectives like nɔɔn 'lie down'--can also be negated by both expressions, but with differences in meaning. It is possible that there is a semantic difference between the two negative expressions in combination with K modals also. I haven't found a conclusive answer. The important fact here, I think, is that K modals do negate with mây, thus making them even more similar to modal verbs.

Likewise, my informants disagree with the Noss claim that K modals are bound, i.e. non-substitutable for the whole predicate, saying that many of the class do indeed substitute.

28) Q: khun ca khǎun tham yanŋán mǎy
 you will do wrong do like that question
 Are you going to do that anyway?

A: khǎun
Yes!

29) Q: èɛp pay duu máy
sneak go look at question
Did you go sneak a look?

A: èɛp
Yes (sneak)

As to the modal verbs, it is also true that some smv can precede the negative as well as succeeding it (though Noss reports only the latter). One smv, sǎamâat 'can', cannot permute with negative máy; yàak 'to want', samák 'to volunteer', and khuən 'ought' permute with no change of meaning; and khəəy 'have ever', tôn 'must', yoom 'be willing', and phayayaam 'to try' do cause a change in meaning if permuted. This permutability thus causes them to appear strikingly similar to the M modals in many instances, where the negator follows them. In addition, the K modals also exhibit this ambivalent status toward negation. Three of Noss' K modals--phên 'to have just', lǒn 'to err', and kláp 'to act contrary to expectations'--do not reverse order with the negative (note that there is no correlation with which negative expression the modal can take and whether it permutes with the negative). phaakan 'together', maa 'action affects the speaker', and pay 'action affects other than the speaker' permute with no change of meaning. All the rest permute but with a shift in which notion in the predicate is negated.

30) kháw mây khuən pay = kháw khuən mây pay
he not should go
He shouldn't go.

31) a) mêe khəəy mây kin annán
mother ever not eat that
Mother has, on a previous occasion, not eaten that.

b) mêe mây khəəy kin annán
mother not ever eat that
Mother hasn't ever eaten that.

It is evident, then, that rather than having three distinct morpheme classes--smv, gmV and K class modals--clearly demarcated by distributional characteristics, we actually have tremendous criterial overlapping between classes and within classes. Noss doesn't discuss negation of gmV, and there is an obvious reason. It appears a verb is a case of two separate propositions, and the position of mây before or after the modal verb either negates the first proposition or the second.

32) kháw mây rəəm khǎn naŋsǎu
he not begin write book
He didn't begin writing the book.

- 33) khắw rầəm mây khĩən naŋsǎw
 he begin not write book
 He began not writing the book (he stopped writing the book.)

As mentioned above, gmV can occur with both nominal and verbal complements. Typically, when gmV have a verbal complement, the complement is preceded by one of two subordinating particles--thĩi or wăa.

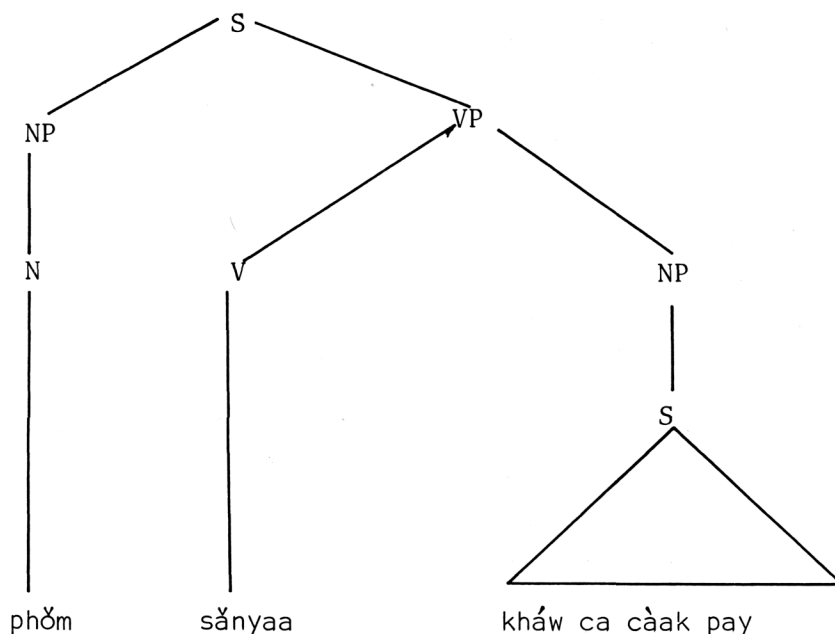
- 34) phỏm wắŋ thĩi ca hắy khắw càak pay
 I expect that will cause him leave go
 I expected him to leave.

- 35) phỏm sắnyaa wăa khắw ca càak pay
 I promise that he will leave go
 I promised that he would leave.

Sometimes the particular particle is selected by the verb; in other instances, either particle is possible with no difference in meaning. Such sentences are readily interpretable as containing embedded sentences, i.e. the verbal complement is seen to express a predication complete in itself but still subordinate to the gmV (cf. Figure 1).

- 36) phỏm sắnyaa wăa khắw ca càak pay
 I promised that he would leave.

Figure 1



Interestingly, though it isn't mentioned by Noss, many of the smv and K modals can also take these same subordinating particles.

37) smv

phǒm yàak thîi ca hây khăw càak pay
I want that will cause he leave go
I wanted him to leave.

38) K class

phǒm phlɔɔy thîi ca pay dūəy
I follow that will go also
I went along, also.

The presence of these subordinating particles again suggests that the verbal expression following the particles is an embedded sentence subordinate to the preceding verbal expression. Admittedly, many of the sentences were considered strange or non-Thai in style by the informants, but they were not declared ungrammatical as other were.

One final aspect of the grammar of Thai modals that bears examination is the measure of mutual exclusion that exists between members of the same class. gmv easily and commonly concatenate to form verb strings of two and more gmv, though the strings do not represent coordinate constituents.

39) khruu lâək chūəy nākriən
teacher stop help students
The teacher stopped helping the students.

The idea of helping the student is subordinate to 'quit'; it is that whole idea that the teacher quits. The seemingly parallel sentence below typifies a Thai sentence expressing coordinate propositions.

40) khruu rɔ chūəy nākriən
teacher wait help students
The teacher waited and helped the students.

smv likewise have been found in strings of two and three smv.

41) mǎe khəəy phayayaam thɔt plaa
mother ever try fry fish
Mother has tried to fry fish.

And also K modals.

42) khăw muə klɛən tɛə thŷən
they persistent pretend only argue
They kept on pretending to argue.

This is not an absolute privilege shared by all members of these classes. There are members of each class that either are mutually

exclusive with the other members; are quite restricted as to which other members they will concatenate with; or are restricted in the ordering arrangement in which they can occur.

For example, among the smv, khəəy 'have ever' can precede tôn 'must', yoom 'to force', yàak 'to want', and phayayaam 'to try', but it cannot precede khuen 'ought'. It cannot appear in reverse order with any but tôn. It is mutually exclusive with khuen 'ought'. yàak 'to want' can precede phayayaam 'to try' but not khuen 'ought', tôn 'must' or khəəy 'have ever'. It can follow khuen 'ought', but none of the rest, and is mutually exclusive with sāmāat 'can'.

For the K modals, Noss comments on the cooccurrence restrictions of the class, but my work indicates that there is a much greater degree of cooccurrence permitted than he notes.

M modals do not take verbal expressions preceded by thî or wāa, and they are mutually exclusive to perhaps an absolute degree, as indicated by Noss. These two characteristics further distinguish M modals from the other three morpheme classes discussed in this paper, further emphasizing their position as the sole group of surface modals in Thai.

The other three classes--K modals, gmV and smV--are most similar to verbs (transitive verbs and adjectives). I emphasize the fact that we are talking primarily of surface characteristics. The extent to which this categorization reflects any deeper level feature is the point to which we must ultimately direct our attention. It is probable that as we are better able to relate surface features with conceptualizations in Thai, that the surface class of modals will not correlate with a distinct class of concepts.

In Thai, as in any other language, one needn't look far to find vastly variant surface configurations conveying much the same meaning. The following paraphrases are offered as suggestions that what are surface modals, and modal verbs, are merely manifestations of deeper level categories that overlap surface classes and are manifested in several ways in performance.

- 43) a) khăw khəəy pay thîəw
 he ever go around
 He has gone touring (previously).

- b) khăw pay thîəw maa lèəw
 he go around past already

- 44) a) khăw yàakca thamŋaan
 he want work
 He wants to work.

- b) khăw tŋkaan thîi ca thamŋaan
 he want that will work

- 45) a) kháw muə tɛɛ thamŋaan
 he persistent only work
 He just kept on working.
- b) kháw yún yùu tɛɛ thamŋaan
 he busy be -ing only work
 He just kept working.
- 46) a) kháw phlɔɔy phǒm maa dūəy
 he follow suit me come also
 He came along with me.
- b) kháw taam phǒm tít maa
 he follow me closely come

NOTES

- ¹ This paper is a revised version of one presented at the 1973 Mid-America Linguistics Conference.

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