

KEEPING THINGS UP FRONT: ASPECTS OF INFORMATION PROCESSING IN MAL DISCOURSE STRUCTURE

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0. *Introduction*

Mal is a Mon-Khmer language spoken in Pua and Chiang Klang Districts of Nan Province, Thailand. It is also one of the many dialects spoken by the Tin tribal people who are located in this part of Thailand and across the border into Laos (Filbeck 1978). The number of Mal speakers probably does not exceed 6-7000 people but an accurate census is not available since the Thai government includes all Tin people, regardless of dialect, in a single census.

The purpose of this paper is to describe discourse-level phenomena found in the Mal language. Related phenomena occur in other Tin dialects, but it appears that only in Mal are they so extensively used. Since Mal is the most conservative of the Tin dialects, retaining more of Proto-Tin than other dialects (Filbeck 1978), we may presume that these phenomena were part of Proto-Tin as well. However, there is internal evidence showing that at least some of these discourse features are developments unique to Mal. For example, the emergence of a rising tone in Mal (Filbeck 1972) has evidently been used to signal at least one discourse feature in Mal. (See discussion in 3. below.)

The particular viewpoint taken here in describing these aspects of Mal discourse structure is information processing within a discourse.¹ As a descriptive approach to language, information processing differs from the more traditional linguistic approach. The latter views language as composed of different hierarchies or systems, e.g. phonology, morpho-syntax, semantics, and discourse, each of which is then described as a more or less autonomous part, and when all the hierarchies or systems have been described separately for a particular language, the task of the linguist is considered to be complete.

While this 'divide and conquer' approach has been productive, it has also had its costs. Logically such hierarchies or systems appear to exist, and in the way that linguists say they exist. However, in terms of process, not everything that linguists claim to exist—or to exist in the way that they claim—plays a part in the main function of language, viz. communicating or transmitting meaning. Not everything is needed or used to process, i.e.

1. At this stage, information processing should not be confused with information theory. The latter is basically a form of statistical theory dealing with the number of alternatives available in a code and the results of choosing one such alternative. On the other hand, as will be seen in various parts of the following discussion, information processing does use a number of insights drawn from the more statistically oriented information theory.

encode and decode/interpret, meaning by means of language. At least, not everything is used at all times. In short, processing in language follows its own 'rules' which, though drawing upon the traditional categories of linguistics, describe language from a different perspective and with different goals in mind.

Information processing—viewed here in perhaps a narrower sense than that which is found in the literature—is a specialised part of the encoding/decoding aspect of language. On the one hand, there is content that is encoded in a text, whether written or oral, for transmission and decoding. Yet, content is not just encoded and decoded; it is also 'processed' in various ways by means of linguistic structure—more precisely, the categories used in linguistic description. The linguistic structure of a language, therefore, plays a 'mediating role' in the encoding, transmitting, and decoding, of meaning. In this view of linguistic structure, processing may be considered a part of the total semantic structure of language, or, to state it another way, meaning as transmitted by language is composed of content plus processing.²

Content is processed in two ways. First, it is distributed or mapped linearly along a syntactic code. For example, content may be 'tightly packed' into a few sentences (as a technical exposition), or it may be distributed over many sentences (as in popular exposition). Second, content may be processed globally as theme, prominence, topic, focus, old and new information, etc., in the course of a text or discourse. In either way, what is processed is additional information 'about' the content that is similarly encoded in the code. Moreover, just as the speaker processes content for additional information while encoding content, so the hearer processes the incoming code for both content and information in the act of decoding. That is, the hearer (or reader of a text) comes to certain judgements about the content he or she has received on the basis of the code, thus providing (additional) information 'about' the content.

For Mal, this paper discusses information processing in this second way only. More specifically, Mal employs various linguistic means to signal and/or differentiate – i.e. process – various types of information flowing globally through discourse. As will be seen in the following discussion, such processing forms a crucial dimension of the Mal language. A description of such, then, is necessary for a full linguistic description of Mal. Moreover, as a by-product, it is hoped that this paper will make a contribution to describing the nature of discourse phenomena in Mon-Khmer in general.³

Data for this paper are taken from both recorded texts that I have collected and from the recently completed translation of St. Mark's

2. Or, in terms of information theory: content, plus information about content, constitutes the message of a text.

3. Some speak also of a pragmatic level of information processing (qv. Smith & Wilson 1979), where information is processed according to shared knowledge, assumptions, or beliefs, but not necessarily according to the characteristic of the linguistic code itself. This pragmatic aspect of information processing is also not discussed in this paper.

Gospel into Mal. Examples will also be taken from the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis, which is currently being translated into Mal. Illustrations from the latter two sources are especially revealing in that they show how productive discourse-level phenomena are in Mal. Greek, English and Thai obviously do not have the same type of formal means for dealing with such phenomena. Consequently, it was fascinating to observe the translator (translating from Thai into Mal in this case) determine from the context how best to structure the text formally according to Mal discourse structure.

1. A discourse characteristic

For this paper, a deductive approach, i.e. from the 'top down', to informational processing in Mal is assumed. That is, we begin by observing a general characteristic—a 'flavour'—typical of Mal discourse, whether interpersonal communication or story-telling. When we have established what this discourse characteristic is, we will then illustrate how it is realised formally or linguistically in discourse.

In analysing the following data we can observe a general 'theme' operating throughout the discourse structure of Mal, namely, the theme of inclusivity vs. exclusivity, or 'this/that-including-others' vs. 'this/that-excluding-others'. Of course, inclusivity dominates discourse activity in Mal; on the other hand, exclusivity can be forcefully and unambiguously marked with formal linguistic mechanisms. That it is so marked quite often gives Mal discourse a distinct character.

In this regard, then, we may classify exclusivity as the 'marked' process and inclusivity as the 'unmarked' process. Also, a text may be 'more or less' highly marked according to the number of marked processes it contains. Moreover, when considering the Mal language from a discourse perspective, we can observe that Mal is a comparatively 'highly marked', i.e. more complex, language with respect to the inclusive/exclusive processing of information. For, characteristically, this distinction is a real option in everyday speech, and it is an alternative that is chosen often enough in interpersonal communication as well as in other forms of discourse.

The communicative function of this inclusive/exclusive dichotomy in Mal is, as the title of this paper suggests to 'keep things up front', i.e. to keep track in a formal way of what is and is not important during the flow of discourse. It is a formal way of processing information, both for the speaker and hearer, in communication, whereby a piece of content is 'kept up front', or made prominent, in discourse. Conversely other pieces of content are 'shuttled' to the background but, should any of these need to be made prominent, it is possible to do so by 'bringing it up front', as it were, by formal linguistic means.

2. Pronouns: 'we vs. they'

The dichotomy between inclusivity and exclusivity in Mal discourse is nowhere better observed than in the pronouns, which form a well-

developed system of exclusive–inclusive relations.

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Dual</i>	<i>Plural</i>
/əñ/ 'I'	/iaʔ/ 'we (excl.)'	/ii/ 'we (excl.)'
	/aaʔ/ 'we (incl.)'	/εε/ 'we (incl.)'
/mah/ 'you'	/paaʔ/ 'you'	/pεε/ 'you'
/nam/ 'he, she'	/paam/ 'they'	/ah/ 'they'

The unmarked pronouns include the singular pronouns ('I, you, he, she') and the inclusive plural. These are used the most often in conversation and in recorded texts, while the marked pronouns—the duals and exclusives—occur more rarely in those environments. Indeed, the marked pronouns in Mal occur not just in one degree of markedness but two: marked and highly marked.

The marked pronouns are the dual and/or exclusive plurals, e.g. /iaʔ/ 'we (dual excl.)', /paaʔ/ 'you (dual)', /paam/ 'they (dual)' and /ii/ 'we (pl. excl.)'. These occur often enough in conversation and in texts to lend a flavour of exclusivity to Mal communication.

Only /aaʔ/ 'we (dual incl.)' is a highly marked pronoun. It is classified here as an inclusive dual pronoun while /iaʔ/ is classified as its exclusive counterpart. The reason for this is that /iaʔ/ is used in third-party conversation where the listener is not included, i.e. is 'excluded' from the dual grouping. For example, in a recent conversation two young boys requested leave to go somewhere. One of the boys, who was the spokesman, used the pronoun /iaʔ/ to include himself and the other boy while at the same time excluding me as the listener in the request. By contrast, the other pronoun, /aaʔ/ 'we (dual incl.)', is used to include each partner of the dyad in the conversation. Consequently it is rarely used, being limited to conversations between two people who are alone together.

In the Mal story 'The Magic Trail' (which we shall refer to again in this paper), a husband and wife set out alone to seek a fortune. In the version I have recorded, the narrator relates the story using a great number of direct quotes, especially when the husband speaks to the wife. Since the couple are poor and own no livestock, they are seeking in the forest for animals which can be taken back and raised as domesticated stock in the village. One of the first creatures they find is a wild boar, at which the husband exclaims to his wife:

oo, aaʔ haŋ əc!
Oh, we-two are-rich already

He then instructs her to take the boar back to the village and pen it up. Whenever a different forest animal is found, the husband makes the same exclamation in addressing his wife, each time using the pronoun /aaʔ/. The other dual pronoun, /iaʔ/, is not the correct pronoun here as there is no third person whom the husband is addressing. Presumably, on

returning to the village with his wife and his entourage of newly-found animals, he could announce to the villagers that /iaʔ haŋ əc/ 'we-two are now rich', since he would be excluding the villagers, in their role as listeners, from any participation in this new-found wealth.

A major role of pronouns in language is to keep track of participants, *especially on the discourse level in a way that is not excessively redundant*. Or, from the standpoint of information processing, pronouns serve to process information about participants that figure in a discourse. For example, to repeat a noun or a person's name continually in a discourse or text is tediously redundant. Substituting pronouns for such items allows redundancy to be reduced while at the same time allowing the processing of essential information regarding the participants. Obviously, then, the more complex a pronominal system the better a language is able to keep track of, or to process, information about participants in a text or discourse.

Because of a well-developed system of duals, and inclusive-exclusive relations, pronouns in Mal are able to fulfil the above role in perhaps a more refined way than that which is possible in some other languages. This can be seen through the use of the dual pronouns. Examples are found in the Mal translation of Chapter 14 of Mark's Gospel in which Jesus selects two of his disciples to go and prepare a place for the Passover meal:

And he sent two of his disciples, and said to them (dual), 'Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you (dual); follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the householder, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I am to eat the passover with my disciples?' And he will show you (dual incl.) a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us (pl. incl.)' And the disciples set out and went to the city, and found it as he had told them (dual); and they (dual) prepared the passover. (Mark 14:13-16, RSV).

These instructions were originally clearly addressed to the two disciples, but of course there are no dual pronouns in either Greek or English. Consequently, the information about the 'duality' of the participants (i.e. the two disciples) is processed in a more refined way in Mal; once it is established in the text, dual pronouns are used thereafter in order to keep track of them. Viewing the process another way, one might say that—just as in the morphology of certain languages—in Mal discourse structure a 'principle of informational agreement' is in operation. That is, once two participants have been established as a 'dual unit' in a textual discourse, subsequent anaphoric reference to them must be kept 'in agreement informationally' by employing the appropriate dual pronoun(s). Use of other plural pronoun(s) would not be in agreement and would transmit incongruous information. In Mal, then, it is necessary to use dual pronouns in order to process correctly certain types of information about participants who figure in a text or discourse.

Even in the Mal story about the magic trail, mentioned above, we can see how certain information regarding the participants is processed through the use of the pronoun /aaʔ/ 'we (dual, listener inclusive)'. At the time of recording, the story was told by a narrator to a group of people. By casting the husband's exclamation ('We are now rich!') to his wife in direct quotes, the narrator was able to use the pronoun /aaʔ/ in his narrative, thus transmitting to his listeners that not only were there two participants but that they were also alone together in their adventures along the magic trail. Again we can see the 'principle of informational agreement', mentioned above, in operation here. In the story, the actual situation of a husband and wife starting out alone on the magic trail is established immediately. Consequently, any anaphoric reference to the two of them must necessarily involve the pronoun /aaʔ/; the information transmitted by any other pronoun would not be in agreement with the established context.

Exclusive pronouns in Mal also function to process information about participants in a text or discourse. An example of this may be seen in Mark 9: 28, which tells how nine of Jesus' disciples were unable to cast out a spirit from a little boy. Jesus did so and, after they had entered the house, the disciples asked him:

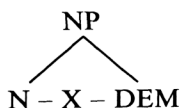
ay phiʔ naa ii yaap . . . ay pɔɔn
 why we (excl.) cast un-able
 'Why could we (excl.) not cast it out?'

For Mal, the pronoun 'we' is here translated as /ii/ 'we (pl. excl.)', which both refers unambiguously to the nine disciples and excludes Jesus; that is, the information that these participants are mutually exclusive is processed in a straightforward manner.

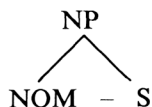
3. Demonstratives: 'keeping things up front'

Mal parallels other languages in that it has demonstratives, relative pronouns and nominalisers, i.e. words or particles that turn verbs and clauses into nominals. The Phrase Structures underlying these categories are as follows (see also Filbeck 1976):

(for demonstratives
and rel. clauses)



(for nominalization)



$\text{X} = \begin{cases} \text{Adj.} + \text{Adj.} + \text{No.} + \text{Class} \\ \text{Rel. Pro.} + \text{S} \end{cases}$

However, this is where the parallel with other languages often ends, for the information processed by these grammatical categories and structures in Mal frequently turns out to be different. To begin with, Mal demonstratives also function like determiners (e.g. 'the' in English) to introduce old information as well as to specify (e.g. 'this' and 'that'). Moreover, there are two sets of the above categories for demonstratives, relative pronouns and nominalisers, which include also a null element,⁴ as follows:

	Set 1	Set 2
<i>Demonstratives</i>	/nee/ 'this, here'	/ər ⁴² / 'this, here'
	/een ⁴² / 'that, there'	/ee ⁴² / 'that'
<i>Rel. pron.</i>	/O/ 'null'	/ee/ 'who, which'
<i>Nominaliser:</i>	/ta-/ 'that which is'	/ee/ 'that which is'

These differ in that Set 1 may be considered the unmarked set with its items being used to signal old information (in the case of 'this' and 'that'), or to process information internally on the sentence level (as in the case of the relative pronoun and nominaliser). Set 2, then, is the marked set whose items are used on the discourse level to process information on a more global scale across sentence boundaries. Also, in Set 2, /ee/ may be either a relative pronoun or nominaliser. In historical items, /ee⁴²/ 'that (dem.)' and /ee/ 'who, which (rel. pron.)' may have been the same word but, because of the development of the rising tone in Mal,⁵ it may have been split in order to process in an unambiguous manner the difference in information (demonstrative vs. relative pronoun/nominaliser) that the two words now convey.

The demonstratives may also be used as locatives, with the exception of /ee⁴²/ in Set 2. Yet even this word may have a locative sense, meaning 'there', under certain circumstances, so that it can correspond to the /ee⁴²/ 'there' of Set 1. However, this locative sense, due to the special or marked role of Set 2, is clearly secondary when used in discourse. That is, the special role of Set 2 takes precedence in the usage and interpretation of /ee⁴²/, as will be seen below.

The special role of Set 2 is to mark the focus of a discourse. More specifically, Mal employs several linguistic markers for singling out and keeping track of this focus, which may be a noun (in which case it is modified by a demonstrative), or a verb or even a clause (in which case the relative pronoun/nominaliser is used). If the focus changes during the discourse, these same linguistic markers are used to indicate that change. They stand in opposition to 'non-markers' which signal that other words are not foci. Stated another way, Mal employs certain morphemes to 'mark' certain pieces of content as more salient in discourse; other pieces

4. I am indebted to Hermann Janzen for this particular way of describing the phenomenon.

5. This single tone is signalled here and above by the raised numerals [42] showing that the tone starts on a [4] or low-level and rises to a [2] or high-level pitch.

are then left ‘unmarked’ and thus are not as salient.⁶

In terms of information processing, the function of the words contained in Set 2 is to ‘keep things up front’, i.e. to keep track in a formal way of what is, and what is not, the focus of a discourse. It is a way of processing information ‘about’ content in discourse, viz. to signal which piece of content is the focus; other pieces of content not so marked are not foci but rather form background information. But should any of these need to be made prominent, this can be achieved by ‘bringing them up front’, as it were, by means of these same linguistic devices.

We now turn our attention to a more detailed description of these two sets of demonstratives/relative pronouns/nominalisers. Most of the discussion will focus on Set 2 since it is the more interesting with regard to discourse structure in Mal.

3.1 /nee/ and /ər⁴²/: ‘this vs. *this*’

The basic meaning and usage of /nee/ is that of the demonstrative ‘this’, e.g.

/phyam nee/
person this
‘this person’

When combined with the noun meaning ‘place’, however, it has the locative meaning, eg.

/nam at taanee/
he lives place-this
‘he lives here’

In the former example, /nee/ would, in a discourse, signal old information, i.e. that the person discussed has already been introduced and is now being referred to again. In the latter example, it is not apparent that /nee/ necessarily signals old information each time it is used in this construction. As a locative, /taanee/ ‘here’ could very well be new information introduced for the first time.

The difference between /nee/ and /ər⁴²/ may be summarised as follows: /nee/, either as ‘this’ or ‘here’, is general and non-specific, while /ər⁴²/ is much more specific, especially in focusing, in both meanings.

Normally, according to their respective functions, both words are used interchangeably in a discourse. However, I have one short Mal text describing a healing ceremony in which a piglet was sacrificed. The reason for this was probably the brevity of discourse and the fact that it described sequentially the events that took place during the course of the ceremony. In other words, there was no hierarchical structuring of the description — there were no diversions to fill in background information, flashbacks,

6. Other dialects of Tin have cognates to /ee/ but, as far as I have been able to determine, their usage does not include the special functions that /ee⁴²/ has in Mal. This leads me to believe that Set 2 words in Mal may be a later development, perhaps a more explicit development of such a discourse tendency in Proto-Tin.

loops, etc. Hence nothing (noun or clause) turned out to be the focus or foci of the description. Conversely, everything in the description turned out to be a (or 'the') focus. In any event, there was no need to mark anything specifically; consequently, only /nee/ was used throughout.

As a demonstrative meaning 'this', the specificity of /ər⁴²/ may be seen in the Mal translation of Mark 8:32. In this verse, Jesus has just finished foretelling his coming Crucifixion. It was not a veiled foretelling, for, as this verse states:

ηεηη ə⁴² yeesuu mpleʔ aη məc
word this Jesus show to see
'Jesus revealed this plainly...'

so that his disciples would not misunderstand. The demonstrative /nee/ was rejected by the Mal translator; it was not specific enough and thus did not 'cohere' with the adverb 'plainly'. /ər⁴²/, on the other hand, processed the clarity or 'plainness' of the prediction in a much more straightforward manner and it also marked the foretelling of the Crucifixion as the focus of the discourse, thus turning other pieces of content into background information, a function that /nee/ could not have fulfilled.

However, it is in the locative meaning of 'here' that the difference between /nee/ and /ər⁴²/ is more apparent. Two examples will help illustrate this.

/at taa-ər⁴²/ 'stay *here*!' is the statement of choice with a Mal parent in commanding a child to 'stay put' and not to wander off as children often do. In such a pragmatic context the parent means 'here in the *immediate vicinity*', such as the child's home and/or compound where the house is located and *not* in a wider area which may include the whole village. The command /at taanee/ would amount to permission for the child to wander and play in a much wider, less specified area.

On the other hand, in answer to the question 'Where does (someone) live?', one answer may be /nam at taanee/ 'he lives here', i.e. this general vicinity (normally a village) is where he lives. But in answer to the more specific question of 'Where is (someone)?', one answer could very well be /nam at taa-ər⁴²/ 'he is here', i.e. at the time of the answer it is affirmed that the person is physically located in the immediate vicinity (e.g. inside the house where the questioning took place) and nowhere else.

In these examples the locative /taa-ər⁴²/ '*here*' marks the location of the conversation as a specific focus of the conversation as opposed to /taanee/ 'here', which leaves the location of the conversation unmarked as unspecified or background information. So, the importance or non-importance of location in the conversations above is processed formally in Mal with the use of these two locatives.

In texts, the difference between the locative meanings of /nee/ and /ər⁴²/ 'here vs. *here*' takes on an added dimension, especially when the latter is

used in direct quotations. The use of /ər⁴²/ 'here' in a direct quote in a text reflects the view of the location from the perspective of the participant(s) in the story. Two examples will help illustrate this dimension.

In a recorded story about a hunting party composed of Mal men, the narrator, who was a member of the party, recounted the instructions given to each regarding his particular place in the party as the men fanned out to 'sweep' an area of the forest in order to flush out any wild animal that might be hiding in the underbrush. The instruction to each member was given as a direct quote in the story.⁷ For the instruction given to him, the narrator stated that he was told to /at taa-ər⁴²/ 'stay *here*'. By using /ta-ər⁴²/, and phrasing it as a direct quote, the narrator was telling the story from his own perspective or position in the hunting party. Positional instructions to other men were given in relation to the position of the narrator.

The second example is taken from Mark 6:36 during the account of Jesus feeding the 5000. Before the miracle took place, however, the disciples asked Jesus to dismiss the people so they could go to buy food:

təm ŋual... at təm ər⁴²
at village... locate around here
'... at the surrounding villages'

The expression 'surrounding villages' was not translated directly into Mal; rather, the Mal translator chose the expression 'villages that are located /təm ər⁴²/ around *here*'. In Mal, the choice of /ər⁴²/ achieves the same meaning but from a different perspective, viz. the perspective of the disciples who were in the same vicinity in which the villages were also located.

In both examples, we should not forget that the location *here* as expressed by /ər⁴²/ still specifies a focus of the text. In the former, the position of the narrator in the hunting party was the focus since it served as the point from which other positions were pinpointed and described. In the latter, the area containing the surrounding villages was a focus because it was the area in which the people would have to search for food.

3.2. /een⁴²/ and /ee⁴²/ 'that vs. *that*'

The demonstratives /een⁴²/ and /ee⁴²/ parallel /nee/ and /ər⁴²/ with the exception of differences in meaning. The former in each case function to process old information while the latter in each case function to mark the focus or foci of discourse.

For example, in the following phrase:

7. It is interesting to note that certain sub-dialects of Prai (the other branch, along with Mal, in Tin) contain the two sets apparently only in the area of locatives, i.e. there are two words meaning 'here' and two words meaning 'there'. The first set is used to denote location only, while the second set is used to establish the locational focus or foci of the discourse. More investigation is needed to pinpoint the difference between the two sets more adequately in the Prai dialect.

*phyam een*⁴²
person that
'that person...'

/een⁴²/ modifies the preceding noun and also signals that the noun is old information which has already been introduced. In addition, when combined with the noun meaning 'place', this demonstrative functions as the locative meaning 'there'.

*nam at taa-een*⁴²
he lives place-that
'he lives there'

However, as in the previous section, it is /ee⁴²/ that holds more interest for this discussion, as the demonstrative that marks a noun as the focus of a discourse.

This is true in conversation or dialogue as well as in other types of discourse. For example, in a conversation with a Mal man, whom I had never met before, I asked him what village he was from. For some reason his answer was not clear. On my asking again he expanded his answer in order to help me to understand. His expanded answer did help, for when I asked if he lived in a certain village (whose name I also gave), his face lit up as he exclaimed:

*ɲual ee*⁴²
village that = 'That's the village!'

In this dialogue the noun /ɲual/ 'village' with a certain name was the obvious focus of the interrogation and, when this village was at last named, it was then affirmed formally as the focus.

In longer texts, whose content may include several nouns or items, /ee⁴²/ 'that' has a more complicated role. It not only serves to mark the focus of the text but it also reintroduces the focus (e.g. after background information has been discussed) as well as serving to mark a new focus (i.e. when the focus has changed in a text). To illustrate this, let us look again at the story about the 'Magic Trail'.

In this story a husband and wife are looking for wild animals, each of which is to be taken back to the village and domesticated. Four such trips are related in the story. After each trip to the village, to take back a wild animal, the husband and wife resume their journey along the trail, which is termed:

*yɔɔɲ ee*⁴²
trail that = 'That trail'

The use of /ee⁴²/ at these junctures of the story signals that the trail under discussion is the 'Magic Trail', the focus of the story, and not some other trail.

However, after some time the focus shifts to other items in the story. For example, a magical snake is introduced and, after some background information is added, the snake is referred to as

mar ee⁴²
snake that = 'that snake...'

to mark the snake as the focus of this part of the story. After this episode, the husband and wife travel on to a magical pond. Again, after background information is added, the pond is referred to as

nhooj⁴² ee⁴²
pond that = 'that pond...'

to signal that the focus has changed again. The snake instructs the man to splash the pond dry, after which a single fish is found. This fish takes on a human body and becomes a person. Since this fish-turned-human-body now plays a role in the story, subsequent reference to it in the story takes the form

naŋ ee⁴²
body that = 'that body...'

to mark it as the new focus of the story.

As pointed out at the beginning of this discussion, focusing in Mal discourse structure also entails a contrastive function, of signalling 'this/that-and-no-other' regarding an item of content in the discourse. This function is clearly seen in the translation of a parable in Mark 4: 26-29. In this, Jesus compares the growth of the Kingdom of God upon earth to a farmer who broadcasts his seed upon the ground. Jesus explains that the farmer does not know how the seed grows; nevertheless, he waits patiently for the ground to germinate and grow the seed so that he may harvest the grain.

In the parable, the two main participants are the seed and the ground/earth, and both are introduced in 'the farmer went out to sow seed upon the earth', hence any subsequent mention of these two participants is now old information. In verse 27 'seed' is indeed mentioned again and in the Mal translation it is tagged as:

khluŋ een⁴²
seed that
'that seed...'

It is also stated that the farmer does not understand how seed sprouts and grows. In verse 28 'earth' is similarly reintroduced; moreover, in contrast, the verse specifies the earth as the cause of the seed's sprouting

and yielding its fruits. To convey this contrast, 'earth' is translated into Mal as:

thæ *ee*⁴²
 earth that
 'that earth...'

As the real cause of the seed's sprouting, earth, then, becomes the proper focus of the parable as well as the focus for its correct interpretation as a parable about the Kingdom of God. Seed, furthermore, by being modified by /*een*⁴²/, is relegated to a background or supportive role in the structure of the discourse.

The demonstratives /*een*⁴²/ and /*ee*⁴²/ interact in still another way in Mal discourse. This interaction is associated with the word /*kyaw*/ 'to be equal to'. In the expression /*kyaw een*⁴²/ 'only', the combination is used as a sentence-level modifier without regard to any broader context:

*nam uuy piar ləʔ kyaw een*⁴²
 he has two things equal-to that
 'He has only two of them'

On the other hand, the expression /*kyaw ee*⁴²/ is often used as a discourse level modifier in the sense of 'That's the way it is!', or 'That's the summation of the matter!'

In a short recorded text, a Mal shaman explained why he would be unable to convert to Christianity. He explained that his most important role was to be a priest interceding for the villagers before the village deity. In this explanation, he gave a list of religious duties that only he as the village shaman could perform. If he converted, there would be no one to perform these duties for the villagers. Therefore, he could not become a Christian. He then ended his explanation with the final

*kyaw ee*⁴² *əc*
 Equal-to that complete
 'and that's the complete summation of the matter!'

Here /*ee*⁴²/ relates not to any single noun as its reference but to the whole discourse or, more properly, to the total content of the discourse. Thus the content is the focus of the discourse and not just a noun or item in that content.

The demonstrative /*ee*⁴²/ also has an idiosyncratic but interesting usage at the beginning of discourses which demonstrates its global effect over a discourse. If, for example, a discourse is about an event that took place in a time prior to its narration, it may begin with the time expression:

*ñaam ee*⁴²
 time that
 'at that particular time...'

in order to set the time frame for the narration that follows. This expression assumes that the listener(s) already know the time to which it refers, and, as such, the time of the event also becomes a focus of the discourse.

3.3. /ta-, Ø/ and /ee/ “*Clause* vs. *Clause*”

In this section, I shall discuss two common grammatical structures—the relative clause and nominalisation and, more specifically, shall limit the discussion to the words or morphemes that constitute the heading to this section because they are the items that process the difference between focus and non-focus information for relative clauses and nominalisations in Mal.

The items /ta-/ and the null or zero element /Ø/ may both be used as relative clause markers e.g.

phyam ta-cak een⁴² kayh aw
 person who goes that is father
 ‘That person who is going is my father’.

phyam Ø cak een⁴² kayh aw
 person goes that is father
 ‘That person (who is) going is my father’

In addition, /ta-/ may be used before a verb or before a clause, turning it into a nominal.⁸ In this structure, it can be understood as ‘that which is’.

nam εem ta-luh
 ‘he does wrong (that-which-is-wrong)’

On the other hand, the null element /Ø/ may be used only as a relative clause introducer in Mal,⁹ while the word /ee/ may be used both as a relative pronoun *and* as a nominaliser. The difference is that /ta-, Ø/ are used to process non-focused information while /ee/ is used more globally to mark the focus or foci of a discourse. It should be noted at the outset that this difference between /ta-, Ø/ and /ee/ as relative pronouns in Mal does not necessarily parallel the distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses found, for example, in English, or between /thii/ (falling tone, restrictive rel. pron.) and /sin/ (falling tone, non-restrictive

8. Direct quotes are a favourite strategy of story-telling among the Mal. While this is probably more a function of their being members of a pre-literate society, it is nevertheless interesting from the viewpoint of information processing. That is, the content of a Mal story is more often than not processed from the viewpoint of a participant and not from the viewpoint of content as autonomous information unconnected with a narrator. As more Mal become literate it may be expected that content-as-autonomous-information will be used more often as a strategy of story-telling.

9. /ta-/ appears to be the same word as /taa/ ‘place’ which figures in the discussion in previous sections. In this regard it parallels the Thai word /thii/ (falling tone) which also means ‘place’ and can be used as a relative pronoun and as a nominaliser. Indeed, this usage in Thai may have influenced that of /taa/ in Mal, extending it to be used as a relative-clause marker and nominaliser, too. Whatever the facts in this case, I have chosen to keep /ta-/ and /taa/ as separate morphemes for the purpose of this discussion.

rel. pron.) in Thai. The information that is processed by way of /ta-, Ø/ and /ee/ is different in nature from restrictive vs. non-restrictive information.

/ee/ as a relative pronoun introducing a relative clause functions to mark the focus of a discourse. In this case, however, it is not the noun (or item modified by the relative clause) that is the focus; rather, it is the relative clause itself or, more properly, the content contained in the relative clause, that is the focus. /ee/ shows that the content of the relative clause, even though encoded in a subordinate syntactic construction, is still a focus in its own right.

In Mark 11: 21 the disciples pass by a fig tree which Jesus had earlier cursed. The disciples draw Jesus' attention to the tree by exclaiming

nɔɔy lam phle? khyur ee mah thun aŋ een⁴²
 look tree fig that you curse that
 'Look at the fig tree *that you cursed!*'

The focus at this point in the discourse is not the fig tree, as it is modified by the unmarked sentence level demonstrative /ee⁴²/ in Mal. The focus is on the cursing, i.e. the embedded relative clause that begins with /ee/ 'that', thus showing that the content of the subordinate clause is a focus in its own right.

Earlier, we stated that Set 2 demonstratives in Mal also serve an exclusive function, that of signalling the information of this-and-no-other regarding an item in a discourse. /ee/, as a relative pronoun, performs this function as well. This can be seen in the translation of Mark 3: 13-19 which relates the time when Jesus chose his twelve disciples.

In this list of twelve disciples, two have the same name: Simon. The first Simon Jesus renames Peter. The second Simon is distinguished from the first by a relative clause:

siimoon ee at phiah mphuan phyam yaay
 Simon who live side-of group person dangerous
 'Simon *who was a terrorist* (Zealot).'

The inclusion of /ee/ above clearly processes the information that this second Simon is to be distinguished from the first Simon.

/ee/ may also be used as a nominaliser. In this construction /ee/ occurs before a verb or verbal clause thereby turning it into a nominal, which in turn may function as a subject or object of another verb. The special function of /ee/ as a nominaliser, however, is to signal that the content of the nominal is a focus of a discourse.

In Genesis 2: 17, a tree of the knowledge of good and evil plays a prominent part in the account of the Creation. Of course, the focus of the account is not the 'tree', but on the 'knowledge of good and evil' that arose after the creation of man. To process this information in a translation of this verse into Mal, /ee/ is used three times.

lam uay ee məc mphi? ee lə? ha? ee ay lə?
 tree knowing that-which-is good and that-which-is not good
 'The tree (of) *knowing* (that which is) *good* and (that which is) *not good*.'

The first occurrence of /ee/ turns the whole of the following construction into a nominal, and as a nominal directly following a noun ('tree' in this case) it stands in a genitive relationship to the noun (i.e. the 'of' relationship). The following nominals (/ee/ plus verb) are also genitives. In each case, the /ee/ processes the information that the content of the subsequent verb is a focus, more precisely a part of the total focus contained in the construction.

In a usage closely related in meaning to the nominal usage above, /ee/ may stand alone, in which case it functions as a 'pro-nominal' in Mal. That is, /ee/ functions something like a pronoun, except that its reference is not an 'object, place or thing' but rather an event or state of existence; it refers to, and includes, all that happens in an event or to the salient characteristics found in a state of existence. It is as though the /ee + verb/ nominal has undergone an ellipsis, which deletes the /verb/, thus leaving only the /ee/ to communicate the full scope of the nominal.

In the story about the 'Magic Trail', the husband and wife came to a pond. They splashed all the water out and found a single fish lying in the mud. This fish turned into a human body. At this point the fish-turned-into-human-body becomes a focal point in the story: it (or he) helps the husband and wife in the search for fortune. Consequently, in subsequent reference to this creature the 'pro-nominal' /ee/ is used. In this context, /ee/ could be translated as 'it', but its complete reference is to the (new) state of existence of the participant, viz. the fish-turned-into-human-body.

However, /ee/ in this usage is not restricted to events. In another story about magic, a brother and sister left home to find their fortune in a similar manner. A snake told them of a tree whose bark had magical properties. The children took this bark and eventually arrived at the king's palace in the city. There they learned that the princess had died. They made their way into the palace and sprinkled some of the bark on the princess. At this, the princess came back to life—and at this point in the story she becomes a focal participant. Not only does the princess return to life but the magical bark causes her to become very pretty. The narrator of the story next states that:

*ee at ta-ee*⁴²
 she lived like that
 'She lived in that (pretty) condition [for the rest of her life].'

/ee/, translated as 'she', refers not only to the princess but also to the event of returning to life and becoming pretty. The full meaning would be something like: 'she-who-came-back-to-life-and-became-pretty'. In this sentence, the existential state of being pretty is signalled by /ta-ee⁴²/, an

expression that also means 'there' (see above). However, the full scope of the expression in this context conveys the information that it was this state-and-no-other-state or condition that the princess existed in for the rest of her life.

In each story above /ee/ as a pro-nominal marks the focus. However, it is not merely the 'person, place or thing' that is the focus. More properly, the focus is the event or existential state of which the person, place or thing is a part and, being the focus, it excludes other events or states that could be associated with the participant in the discourse.

3.4. *Special combinations*

From the above data, two combinations deserve special comment. They both involve the nominalisation usage of /ee/ plus a demonstrative. The two combinations are:

/ee...[verb]...een⁴²/ 'that [Nominal]'
 /ee...[verb]...ee⁴²/ 'that [Nominal]'

From textual analysis it is difficult to discover any real difference between these two constructions; they each seem to process the same information of focus and/or exclusivity regarding the content contained in the nominal. Both, for example, have been used in translating Mark into Mal.

Mark 10: 35-40 records the time when two of the disciples requested seats of honour at the time when Jesus assumed complete power in his kingdom. One asked to sit on Jesus' right and the other on his left. Jesus' answer to this request begins with a nominal:

ee paa? soop ee⁴²
 that-which you-two ask that
 '(Regarding) that request of yours...'

after which he explains that such positions involve suffering and not honour. When the two disciples affirmed their willingness to suffer, Jesus explains that:

ee khuyh phiah sam phiah wi? əñ een⁴²
 to sit side right side left I that
 '(But) that sitting on my right or left...'

was in reality not his to bestow but God's.

It is difficult to detect any difference in focusing or exclusivity between these two constructions, unless the former is a higher degree of focusing, etc., than the latter.

4.0. *The /i-/ clitic: 'This one exclusively*

Mal has one clitic, /i-/, that occurs as a prefix to a few words. As a prefix /i-/ is stressless but it can be given stress and thus stand as a free morpheme in a sentence; normally, however, it occurs as a (bound) prefix

in the course of speech. Semantically, though, /i-/ carries no definite meaning in the traditional morpheme sense; rather it functions more as an 'exclusive enhancer' for the words on which it may occur as a prefix. Consequently, its productivity in Mal is limited to occurring with only those words that already contain a component of exclusivity as a major part of their semantic composition. On the other hand, given the exclusivity characteristic of Mal discourse, it is not surprising to see these few words plus /i-/ occurring often in both speech and narratives of the Mal people.

/i-/ occurs as an exclusive enhancer of two types of words in Mal, demonstratives and interrogatives. Words in both categories already contain a semantic component of exclusivity, for to modify a noun or nominal with a demonstrative is to exclude other nouns or nominals, and to ask a question often involves a decision to choose one alternative to the exclusion of others. The addition of /i-/ in these cases enhances the exclusive property of such words.

4.1 /i-/ plus Demonstratives

In the case of demonstratives, however, /i-/ occurs only with the sentence-level demonstratives and not with the discourse-level demonstratives, i.e. with Set 1 Demonstratives and not with Set 2 Demonstratives as listed in 3 above. The reason for this is that in processing information, /i-/ as an exclusive enhancer in effect 'raises the informational level' from that of old information to that of 'focused information' in the discourse. For, with the addition of /i-, there is a more explicit exclusion of some other referent, whether in text or conversation, thus throwing more attention on the referent modified by the demonstrative in question. There is therefore no semantic or informational reason for combining /i-/ with the Set 2 Demonstratives since this set already performs the same task in discourse.

On the other hand, even though they perform the same task, there is a difference. Consider these examples.

- (a) *kayh khyak inee*
 is buffalo this one
 'It's this *particular* buffalo.'
- (b) *kayh khyak ər⁴²*
 is buffalo *this*
 'It's *this* buffalo.'

Example (a) contains a Set 1 Demonstrative, /nee/ 'this', in combination with /i-. Example (b) contains the Set 2 Demonstrative /ər⁴²/ 'this'. The difference between the two is that the former is more negative or contrastive while the latter is more positive and affirmative. Both, of course, make the NP (/khyak/ 'buffalo' in this case) a focus. Yet /inee/ turns /khyak/ into a focus by means of excluding other possible buffaloes while /ər⁴²/ makes it a focus by means of highlighting.

In Mark 10: 17-20 a young man came to see Jesus to ask what must be done to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the following commandments: do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honour (your) father and mother. To these instructions the young man answered:

ηεεη σοον⁴² ineε

word teach these ones

'These *particular* teachings... (I have observed from my youth).'

The demonstrative /ineε/ in this discourse gives a 'particularising' flavour to the discourse: it was these particular commandments, in contrast to possible others, that he had especially observed in his life. This contrastive characteristic is further brought out in the discourse by what Jesus said next: 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you have and give it to the poor... and come, follow me.' In this context, the demonstrative /ineε/ processes the contrastive nature of the conversational exchange between the young man and Jesus in a better way than the more positive demonstrative /ερ⁴²/.

/i-/ does not occur with /een⁴²/ 'that' as an exclusive enhancer. The reason for this, however, appears to be phonological and not semantic. As will be seen below, when /i-/ combines with a following vowel of a stressless syllable (which means that the vowel is automatically short in duration), the vowel is assimilated with the /i/. But in this particular case /i-/ would occur with a long vowel of a stressed syllable, /i + een⁴²/, hence no assimilation takes place. That is, */ien⁴²/ or */iin⁴²/ are both unacceptable.

However, this does not mean that the exclusive enhancer marker /i-/ does not occur with 'that' in Mal. For such occasions, Mal speakers will use the Thai demonstrative /nan/ 'that' (high or falling tone) in combination with /i-/ to mean 'that *particular one*'.

In Mark 4: 10-20 Jesus explains the parable of the sower who went out to sow seed on various types of ground. Some seed fell among thorns which choked out the plants that grew from the seed. Jesus explained that this part of the parable referred to those people who upon hearing the Gospel accept it but soon fall away because of delights in riches and

σο? ποον ineε inan

want get this that

'Wanting this *particular thing* and that *particular thing*.'

In Mal the demonstratives /ineε inan/ may occur without accompanying NPs as an idiom in much the same way that 'this and that' is used in English to refer to miscellaneous things or to 'odds and ends' in one's possession. The addition of /i-/ in Mal, therefore, enhances the particularising and contrastive nature of the 'things' referred to.

Before leaving the above example, we should take note of an evident

relation between phonology and information processing that can be seen in the case of /inan/ in Mal. As in the case of /inee/ ‘this one’, it is also possible, informationally and logically, to have ‘that one also. However, a phonological rule blocks the processing, more properly the encoding, of this information using the corresponding Mal demonstrative. Thus the Thai demonstrative /nan/ ‘that’, which has a phonological structure allowing the stressless /i-/ to occur as a prefix, is used to process the enhanced exclusive nature of ‘that one in Mal.

/i-/ also occurs as an exclusive enhancer to the word /sɔɔ/ ‘other’. In such occurrences the combination /isɔɔ/ further enhances the exclusive nature of the ‘other’ (thing, person) that is referred to.

In Mark 4: 10, after Jesus had told the parable of the sower, many people returned to their homes, but

ah isɔɔ at yɔɔp⁴² yeesuu
 they others locate around Jesus
 ‘Still another group gathered around Jesus...’

to hear his explanation of the parable. The combination /isɔɔ/ enhances the ‘otherness’ of this latter group in contrast to the former group of people who returned home.

4.2. /i-/ plus Interrogatives

/i-/ also occurs with the interrogative /ehee/ ‘who?’, becoming /ihee/ under the influence of the phonological rule mentioned above. The difference in meaning between /ehee/ and /ihee/ parallels that described above, for example, for /nee/ and /inee/. That is, /ehee/ is an unspecified ‘who?’ while /ihee/ is a more selective, particularising ‘who?’, resembling perhaps the now archaic ‘whosoever’.

In Mark 8: 27 Jesus asked his disciples

ah sɔɔ khay əñ kayh ihee
 they other say I am who?
 ‘What particular person do others say I am?’

The enhanced or particularising /ihee/ is more appropriate for this context since there were rumours that Jesus was John the Baptist, or maybe Elijah, or perhaps one of the prophets. The unspecified /ehee/ in the above quote would not process this (particularising) type of information for the context in question.

A second interrogative that /i-/ occurs with is /naa/ ‘which?’. In the same manner as above, /naa/ is an unspecified ‘which?’ while /inaa/ is an enhanced ‘whichever one it is’.

In Mark 12: 28, a scribe asked Jesus a question that had caused much argument among scholars of the Torah.

ɲɛɛɲ sɔɔn⁴² inaa kayh sək lhia mphuan
word teach which is big above group

'Which particular teaching is more important than all the others.'

Since there were several possible answers, the interrogative /inaa/ processes the particularising nature of the question, something which the unspecified /naa/ is unable to do.

/i-/ occurring with an interrogative in effect throws the focus of the discourse on the question or, more properly, on the cognitive process of choosing among alternatives for the answer. And in choosing an alternative, others are excluded or eliminated. Hence, with the addition of the exclusive enhancer, /i-/, 'things are kept up front' in yet another way in Mal discourse structure, i.e. by eliminating or excluding other possibilities.

5. *Keeping things up front: 'That's the way we talk'*

In this paper, I have surveyed several aspects of information processing in Mal discourse, comprising both conversation and recorded narratives. In surveying these aspects we saw where pronouns, demonstratives, relative pronouns, nominalisers, and a clitic, function to process certain types of information regarding content in a discourse or text. Moreover, I stated that this processing gives a particular characteristic to Mal discourse, a characteristic of this-and-no-other, or of 'keeping things up front' vs. 'keeping other things in the background'.

We also included examples from Christian scripture to show how productive this characteristic is even in translating from another language into Mal. After revising a certain text from the Gospel of St. Mark, for example, to include more occurrences of /ee/ and /ee⁴²/ according to the discourse principles described in this paper, the text was read aloud to others for reactions. On hearing the text for the first time a Mal woman responded with the comment: 'That's sounds just like we talk'. Among others, the revisions met with greater acceptance and satisfaction.

In short, 'keeping things up front' is a favourite style of communication among the Mal. Of course, as was also seen above, a complete text or discourse may be unmarked with regard to focus and/or exclusivity, but such a way of communicating appears not to be very exciting. Such an unmarked discourse will transmit content well enough, but for 'real performance' in Mal, a discourse should also process information about content.

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