

# *The ?au Usages in Thai*

Ngampit Jagacinski

## Introduction

The word *?au*, generally translated as 'take', occurs very frequently and consistently in colloquial speech in Thai and across different dialects of the Tai language family. However, its usage has never been explained clearly in current grammar books of Thai. This paper explores the semantic distinctions and the syntactic functions of *?au* occurrences as a main verb, resultative verb, and coverb. The exceptional usages of *?au*, such as in set phrases and idioms will not be included. The focus is on the coverb feature, with a brief comparison to *bǎ* in Chinese to demonstrate certain typological similarities as well as functional purposes of a coverb construction.<sup>1</sup>

## Verbal Function

The closest synonym to the word *?au* in Thai is *yút* 'to obtain something and hold it in one's possession'. Therefore, 'take hold of' and 'grasp' are close equivalents, although in actual usage the nuances in meaning of *?au* vary a great deal. The meaning of *?au* as the main verb of a sentence is 'to take' or 'to get', as in the English usage of 'take' in "I took three napkins" or 'get' in "I'll get that book." Examples are:<sup>2</sup>

1. *?au*    *kɛ:ŋkài*                      *sī*    *?aròì*    *kwà:*    *kɛ:ŋnǎa*  
take   chicken curry   PAR   delicious   than   beef curry  
Take the chicken curry. (It) is more delicious than beef  
curry.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based in part on the author's 1987 dissertation, "Tai Lue of Xishuangbanna in China's Yunnan Province: Description and A Study of the OV Order in the *?au* Construction." However, the present paper is strictly based on Thai (Siamese) usage.

<sup>2</sup> Abbreviations: ASP–Aspect; CL–Classifier; DIR–Directional; EMP–Emphatic marker; NEG–Negative; PAR–Particle; PT–Potential; Q–Question marker; REL–Relativizer; TM–Topic marker.

2. *kháu chûai tamruat phrô? yà:k cà ?au nən ranwan*  
 s/he help police because want PT get money reward  
 S/He helps the police because s/he wants to get the reward.

In many cases, *?au* has the meaning 'to take/bring' depending on the additional motion verbs such as *pai* 'go', *ma:* 'come', *khâu* 'in', *?ô:k* 'out', *khên* 'up', *loŋ* 'down' that indicate directionality (DR) of the sentence from the speaker's point of view. Examples are:

3. *chán mâi dâi ?au pà:kka: ma: ná*  
 I NEG take/bring pen DR (toward) PAR  
 (I'm telling you) I did not bring a pen (with me).
4. *fôn cà tòk lé:u ná ?au*  
 rain will fall ASP PAR take/bring  
*rôm pai sí*  
 umbrella DR(away) PAR  
 It's going to rain (soon); take the umbrella (with you).
5. *?au khanôm ?ô:k cà:k tau?òp rû yan*  
 take/bring dessert DR (out) from oven Q  
 Have you taken the dessert out of the oven yet?
6. *kháu ?au hŷn?ô:n loŋ ma:*  
 s/he take/bring marble DR (down) DR (toward)  
*cà:k phu:khâu*  
 from mountain  
 S/He brought the marble down from the mountain.

In the Thai examples provided above, indication of directionality is crucial to the meaning of each sentence just as it would be in English sentences. The meanings of *?au* in these examples are closely bound with *ma:* 'toward', *pai* 'away', *?ô:k* 'out', or *loŋ ma:* 'down toward'. Without *ma:*, *pai*, and *loŋ ma:* in examples 3, 4, and 6, respectively, *?au* would carry only the basic meaning of 'to take/get'. Example 3, for instance, would be *chán mâi dâi ?au pà:kka: ná* 'I didn't take the pen', which could imply 'I didn't steal the pen' or 'It is not the pen that I took'. (There may be some other possible interpretations as well.) These implications do not exist when *ma:* occurs. Some other indications of directionality, such as *?ô:k* in example 5, give nuances in meaning. Without *?ô:k*, the meaning of *?au khanôm cà:k tau?òp* is 'to take the dessert from the oven'. The focus would be only on where one gets the dessert, and not on the action of taking it out.

Another common usage of *?au* has the meaning 'take/consider', for example:

7. *râu nĩ: cĩnthét yà:nrai ?au nê: mĩdĩai*  
 story this fact how take/consider sure/certain NEG  
 The facts about this story cannot be taken seriously.

8. *?au kháu pen phũ:nam phák*  
 take/consider s/he be example political party  
*dĩ: mĩi*  
 good Q  
 What do you think (if) we consider him/her to be the leader  
 of the (political) party?

9. *kháu ?au râu rỏt tũt pen khỏ: kỏ: tua*  
 s/he take/consider story traffic jam be excuse  
 S/He used the traffic jam as an excuse.

In example 7, *?au nê:* 'seriously consider' is the comment on *râu nĩ: cĩnthét yà:nrai* 'how true is this story', which is the topic of the sentence. The meaning of *?au* 'to take/consider' also commonly occurs in an equational structure with the verb *pen* 'to be'. In examples 8 and 9 above, *kháu* and *râu rỏt tũt* are also objects of the verb *?au*.

Other derived meanings are 'to take/want' or 'to consent', for example:

10. *?au cha: yen mĩi*  
 take/want cold tea Q  
 Do you want cold tea?

11. *mĩi ?au kradà:t ?ĩ:k rỏ:*  
 NEG take/want paper more Q  
 Don't you want more paper?

12. A. *thỏ: thỏ: mĩi pai phỏ: chán*  
 if you NEG go father I  
*mĩi hỏi chán pai rỏ:k*  
 NEG allow I go PAR  
*pai pen phũan kan nỏi thỏ nỏ:*  
 go be friend together little bit PAR PAR  
 If you don't go, my father will not let me go (either).  
 Please be a friend; go with me.

- B. *?au pai kỏ pai*  
 consent go EMP go  
 All right, (I'll) go.

The forms *ʔau* 'to take/want' as in examples 10, 11, and *ʔau* 'to consent' as in example 12B above occur mostly in spoken language.

The meaning of *ʔau* 'to marry' (literally 'take husband/wife') is also widely used in the Tai dialects. This usage is, however, considered vulgar in modern Thai since it renders the sexual connotation of 'to sleep with'. Perhaps also for this reason, *ʔau* usage is sometimes avoided in formal speech in modern Thai.

## Resultative Verb Compound

Besides functioning as a main verb, *ʔau* also occurs as a resultative verb in a verb compound (RVC). In this usage the first verb of the RVC denotes the activity while *ʔau*, which occurs after the verb, indicates the result of the activity, for example:

13. A. *phàkbûŋ nĩ: tham ʔarəi ciŋciŋ*  
watercress TM do delicious truly  
This vegetable is truly (cooked) delicious(ly).  
  
B. *mâimi: ʔarai rə:k phăt ʔau*  
NEG anything PAR stir-fry RVC  
Nothing much (to it). (I just) stir-fried it.
14. *chán dau ʔau wâa rôt kháu sǎa*  
I guess RVC that car s/he break down  
I am guessing that his/her car (must have) broken down.
15. *khun khít ʔau ʔe:ŋ sí wâ: yà:ŋ nǎi dī:*  
you think RVC oneself PAR that kind which good  
You decide (yourself) which one is better.
16. *yà:k rú: sàp yâ:kyâ:k pə:t phótcananúkrom*  
want know vocab difficult open dictionary  
*du: ʔau sí*  
see RVC PAR  
(If you) want to learn difficult words, look in the dictionary.

Example 13B demonstrates how the activity is carried out. In this case it is by stir-frying the vegetables. In example 14 *dau ʔau* indicates that, by guessing, the speaker came to a conclusion that "someone's car must have broken down." The RVC *ʔau* in examples 15 and 16 *khít ʔau* and *du:ʔau* also carries a similar meaning of 'by'.

The meaning of RVC *ʔau* can also indicate the result of an activity in terms of completion/achievement, for example:

17. **lêak ?au** sř: di:di: nòi  
select RVC color good a little  
Pick the better colored (ones).
18. **thǽŋ** **kháu cà mâi mi: ɲən kháu kô**  
even though s/he PT NEG have money s/he EMP  
**tâŋcai cà rian ?au parinya: tho: hâi dâi**  
determine PT study RVC master's degree able to  
Although s/he does not have money, s/he is determined to  
(continue) studying to obtain a master's degree.
19. **khun khít cà yá:i ?au ?arai ?ò:k pai**  
you think PT move RVC what DR (out) DR (away)  
What are the things you plan to move outside?

Although the meaning of completion/achievement is not manifest clearly in the English equivalents, the omission of the RVC *?au* in examples 17-19 above demonstrates the changes in meaning. For example, without the RVC *?au*, the meaning of example 18 would be *rian parinya: tho:* 'study in a master's degree program', which is simply describing an activity. The meaning of the RVC *?au* 'to achieve' (a master's degree) is lost.

Certain usages of RVC *?au* also carry a causative meaning. The most common one is *lên ?au*, for example:

20. **ɲa:n tênram wankò:n sanùk mâ:k ciŋciŋ**  
party dance the other day fun a lot really  
**lên ?au chán nò:n mâi lăp**  
cause I sleep NEG sleep  
**pai lă:i khə:n nê**  
DR (exceed) many night PAR  
The dance party was so much fun the other day that I  
couldn't sleep for several nights (afterwards).
21. **khanà:t ba:ŋ khon rian dâi ?e: ma: talò:t**  
even some people study obtain A DR (toward) all along  
**yaŋ sò:p wícha: nř: mâi phà:n lăi**  
still take exam subject this NEG pass beyond  
**lên ?au mòt kamləŋcai pai ta:m ta:m kan**  
cause discourage DR (exceed) following one another  
Even some people who always get As still couldn't pass this  
course. (This fact) makes (other students) feel discouraged.

Unlike a causative *tham hâi*, which expresses a simple causative (that is, A causes something to happen to B), the RVC *?au* expresses causation

with additional subjective feelings of the speaker (that is, the speaker's feelings as a result of A causing something to happen to B; B can also be the speaker him/herself).<sup>3</sup> The meaning of the RVC *ʔau*, which in this usage perhaps can be conveniently called subjective causative, indicates either displeasure or simply unexpected/surprised feelings. The form *lên ʔau* in the above examples 20 and 21 can be replaced by *tham hâi*, but there is a subtle change in meaning to simple causative. A comparison can be made to demonstrate that the subjective causative depends on the occurrence of the RVC *ʔau*. Notice the following pairs of examples:

22. A. *kháu cà khamèn ʔau phõm nâ sí:*  
 s/he PT try to find fault with I PAR PAR  
 S/He tries to find fault with me.  
 or S/He affects me by trying to find fault with me.
- B. *kháu cà khamèn phõm nâ sí:*  
 s/he PT try to find fault with I PAR PAR  
 S/He tries to find fault with me.
23. A. *námthûam hõn ní: tham hâi cha:ubâ:n ðuàtró:n mã:k*  
 flood this time cause citizen trouble a lot  
 The flood this time caused a lot of trouble for the citizens.
- B. *námthûam hõn ní: tham ʔau*  
 flood this time cause  
*cha:ubâ:n ðuàt ró:n mã:k*  
 citizen trouble a lot  
 The flood caused a lot of trouble for the citizens.
24. A. *námthûam hõn ní: tham hâi phõ:khá:*  
 flood this time cause merchants  
*khûn ra:kha: khõ:ŋ*  
 raise price thing  
 The flood this time made the merchants raise the prices.

<sup>3</sup> The subtle meaning that implies one's feelings being affected by the result of an event is expressed in different forms in different languages. For example, a certain passive structure is used in Japanese to convey an individual being indirectly affected by a certain event. An English sentence such as "I got rained on" also carries a similar connotation. In Thai, the RVC *ʔau* can also be used in a similar manner to indicate an individual's feelings being affected. However, it can also be used to express one's feelings toward the effects of a causing event.

|     |  |                |                 |                 |
|-----|--|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| *B. | <i>námthưam</i>  | <i>hồn nư:</i> | <i>tham ʔau</i> | <i>phô:kha:</i> |
|     | flood  | this time      | cause           | merchants       |
|     | <i>khôn</i>  | <i>ra:kha:</i> | <i>khô:ŋ</i>    |                 |
|     | raise  | price          | thing           |                 |
|     | The flood this time made the merchants raise the prices. |                |                 |                 |

Examples 22A and 22B demonstrate the differences in meaning depending on whether the RVC *ʔau* is present. Without the RVC *ʔau*, the sentence 22B is a simple descriptive statement (that is, A is doing something to B). The RVC *ʔau* in example 22A addresses an additional subjective feeling by the speaker. Likewise, example 23A simply states the causal relationship between the flood and the hardship of the people. Example 23B, on the other hand, has an additional meaning that the speaker is displeased over the fact that the people are affected by the flood. The words *tham hâi* and *tham ʔau* are both acceptable as long as the speaker is sympathetic toward the event. Notice that the caused event *phô:kha: khôn ra:kha: khô:ŋ* 'the merchants raise the price' in examples 24A and 24B is not (under normal circumstances) something that disadvantageously affected the merchants and that would create sympathy. Therefore, *tham ʔau* is not acceptable in 24B.

### Coverb Function

It is commonly known among teachers of the Thai language that the syntactic structures of certain *ʔau* usages make it one of the most puzzling and difficult structures for a non-native speaker to master. William Gedney, at the 1985 Council on Thai Studies (COTS) meeting, commented that students learning Thai tend to use *dûai* 'with' in a sentence where native speakers use *ʔau*. An example can be given here as follows:

25. ?? *khru:      tât      kradâ:t      dûai      tàkrai*  
          teacher   cut      paper      with      scissors  
          The teacher cuts paper with a pair of scissors.

26. *khru:      ʔau      tàkrai      tât      kradâ:t*  
          teacher   ʔau      scissors   cut      paper  
          The teacher cuts paper with a scissors.

The use of the prepositional marker *dûai* in example 25 is awkward. An acceptable structure in example 26, on the other hand, has an Oblique Object (OO); here, an instrument—*tàkrai* 'scissors'—occurs with *ʔau* before the verb phrase *tât kradâ:t* 'cut paper'. In this usage, *ʔau* has been treated in other literature as a full verb in a serial verb construction (SVC) (Stine 1968; Filbeck 1975; Kingkarn 1986). Filbeck (1975) considers *ʔau* to be

the first verb in an SVC, and therefore, *ʔau* has propositional meaning, whereas the verb that follows *ʔau* in the structure is functional.

Besides an Oblique Object, a direct object (DO) can also be preposed from a verb phrase to occur with *ʔau* in the preverbal position, as in 27A. Many occurrences of these *ʔau* sentences with preverbalized DO also have counterpart sentences with similar basic meanings in a simple VO structure, as in 27B. Notice the word order in the following pairs of examples:

27. A. *kháu ʔau rû:p na:yók khwě:n wái nâ: bâ:n*  
 s/he *ʔau* picture prime minister hang put front house  
 S/He hung the picture of the prime minister in front of  
 the house.

B. *kháu khwě:n rû:p na:yók wái nâ: bâ:n*  
 s/he hang picture prime minister put front house  
 S/He hung a picture of the prime minister in front of the  
 house.

28. A. *kháu ʔau khâ:u plhâk the: loŋ bon tó?*  
 s/he *ʔau* unhusked rice pour DR (down) on table  
 S/He poured the unhusked rice down on the table.

B. *kháu the: khâ:u plhâk loŋ bon tó?*  
 s/he pour unhusked rice DR (down) on table  
 S/He poured unhusked rice down on the table.

The structures in examples 27B and 28B have typical syntactic order for Thai. The objects *rû:p na:yók* 'picture of the prime minister' and *khâ:u plhâk* 'unhusked rice' follow the verbs *khwě:n* 'to hang' and *the:* 'to pour', respectively. Examples 27A and 28A, on the other hand, have the objects occur before the verbs essentially in the order *ʔau rû:p na:yók khwě:n* and *ʔau khâ:u plhâk the:*.

Reserving the discussion on the status of *ʔau* and the semantic distinction between the two orders for a moment, it is clear that the structure of the *ʔau* construction, such as in examples 27A and 28A, is [NP<sub>1</sub> *ʔau* NP<sub>2</sub> V X]. NP<sub>1</sub> is the subject. NP<sub>2</sub> is the object of the main verb, and this object occurs with *ʔau* in a preverbal position. X is a sentential modifier. This syntactic structure differs from a VO string order in the SVC in many respects. The structure of an SVC is [NP V<sub>1</sub> (O<sub>1</sub>) V<sub>2</sub> (O<sub>2</sub>) V<sub>n</sub> (O<sub>n</sub>)]. Notice that O<sub>1</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, and O<sub>n</sub> are all objects following their respective V<sub>1</sub>, V<sub>2</sub> and V<sub>n</sub>. It is possible for an object to be deleted. It is also possible that an object can have double functions as in a pivotal type of an SVC in which an object of the first verb functions as a subject of the following verb. However, the common characteristic of an SVC is still the succession of a V(O) string. In the *ʔau* construction, on the other hand, the object does

not follow the main verb. Instead, both *ʔau* and the main verb share the same object noun phrase, which has been preposed to a preverbal position.

There are a few SVC that appear to have a partial surface order similar to the *ʔau* construction, for example, *tàt sũa khă:i* (cut/clothes/sell) 'make clothes (to) sell'.<sup>4</sup> However, unlike *ʔau*, the occurrences of these verbs are limited to only certain cases where they happen to be sharing the same object noun phrase with a verb. For example, the co-occurrence of the verbs *tàt* 'cut' and *khă:i* 'sell' is limited. The expression *tàt ka:ŋke:ŋ khă:i* 'make trousers (to) sell' or *tàt tôn mái khă:i* 'cut trees (to) sell' are possible, but not *tàt phỏm khăi*: 'cut hair (to) sell' (except in a rare situation). In fact, the shared object noun phrase in an SVC can be deleted if it is already understood in a conversation. For example, it is possible to ask a tailor *mủawa:n tàt khă:i dãi kừ: tua* (yesterday/cut/sell/obtain/how many/CL) 'How many (clothes) did you make to sell (or for sale) yesterday?' Similar deletion is not possible in the *ʔau* construction. Notice that the occurrence of the verb *kin* 'to eat' immediately after *ʔau* in example 29B below is ungrammatical:

29. A. *dèk ʔau khanỏm kin mòt lé:u*  
 child ʔau dessert eat all ASP  
 A child ate all the dessert.

- \*B. *khanỏm ní: dèk ʔau kin mòt lé:u*  
 dessert TM child ʔau eat all ASP

Besides the versatility of *ʔau* and the preverbal object noun phrase, the *ʔau* construction also requires the presence of a sentential modifier. Notice the following examples:

30. ??A. *ʔau krapro:ŋ khwế:n*  
*ʔau skirt hang*  
 Hang up the skirt.

- B. *ʔau krapro:ŋ khwế:n (sá sủ/ lé:u/di:di. yà: hủi yủp)*  
*ʔau skirt hang (PAR PAR/ASP/good NEG let wrinkle)*  
 Please do hang up the skirt. /(Someone) has already hung up the skirt. /Carefully hang up the skirt (and) don't let it wrinkle.

<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, these verbs in series such as *tàt sũa khă:i* can be relativized, *khă:i sũa thừ: khầu tàt*. This is not the case with the *ʔau* construction sentences. More discussion and examples are presented later on in this paper.

31. ??A. *ʔau krathiam tam*  
*ʔau garlic to pound*  
 Pound the garlic.

- B. *ʔau krathiam tam (kɔ:n / lé:u/ hâi laʔiat)*  
*ʔau garlic to pound (first/ ASP/finely)*  
 Pound the garlic first/ (Someone) has already pounded  
 the garlic./ Finely pound the garlic.

The above examples, 30A-B and 31A-B, demonstrate that the acceptability of the *ʔau* construction depends heavily on a sentential modifier, whether it be a single morpheme or a complex phrase. This is not the case in an SVC in which a V(O) can be understood separately, for example:

32. *kháu kôm loŋ kèp kradà:t*  
*s/he bend DR (down) pick paper*  
 S/He bent down to pick up (pieces of) paper.

33. *dèk dɔ:n pai talà:t sù: khanǝm kin*  
*child walk DR (away) market buy dessert eat*  
 A child walked to the market to buy dessert to eat.

The above examples demonstrate that a sentential modifier does not have to occur in an SVC. This is not the case in the *ʔau* construction as shown in examples 30 and 31.

Returning to the question of concern regarding the status of *ʔau*, Kingkarn (1986) believes that when an instrument or a theme follows *ʔau*, *ʔau* is a full verb of an SVC with the meaning 'to take hold of'. Like Filbeck (1975), Kingkarn (1986) also considers *ʔau* propositional. However, further analysis reveals that many occurrences of *ʔau* in the *ʔau* construction, such as those in examples 27A and 28A, behave more like a coverb than a verb and that the propositional meaning of an *ʔau* construction sentence is carried not by *ʔau*, but by the main verb. An additional pair of examples is given here for convenience in the discussion:

34. A. *chán ʔau rót khǎ:i pai lé:u*  
*I ʔau car sell DR ASP*  
 I have already sold my car.

- B. *chán khǎ:i rót pai lé:u*  
*I sell car DR ASP*  
 I have already sold my car.

Similar to the pair of examples in 27A-B and 28A-B, the above examples 34A and 34B illustrate that with or without *ʔau* the propositional meaning of the sentence is carried by the main verb and not the *ʔau*. The co-occurrence of *ʔau* and the main verb represents one integrated activity. Phonological evidence also shows that hesitation or pause is possible in the SVC but not in the *ʔau* construction. Notice that a pause does not occur between the preposed object *rót* 'car' and the main verb *khă:i* 'to sell'. The example 34A above does not convey the two activities *ʔau rót* 'take hold of the car' and *khă:i rót* 'sold the car'. The word *ʔau* no longer retains its full verbal meaning, but instead it is a part of an overall proposition. In an SVC, although all verb phrases are a part of one overall event, each verb phrase can be understood separately. This is not the case in the *ʔau* construction in which the verbal quality of *ʔau* is reduced. Consider the following comparison:

35. A. *kháu ʔau còtmă:i sòŋ pai mɯaŋʔaŋkrìt*  
 s/he get letter send DR England  
 S/He wrote a letter and sent it to England.

- B. *\*kháu sòŋ còtmă:i thì: kháu ʔau (pai mɯaŋʔaŋkrìt)*

36. A. *kháu khŷan còtmă:i sòŋ pai mɯaŋʔaŋkrìt*  
 s/he write letter send DR England  
 S/He wrote a letter and sent it to England.

- B. *kháu sòŋ còtmă:i thì: kháu khŷan pai mɯaŋʔaŋkrìt*  
 s/he send letter that s/he write DR England  
 S/He sent a letter that s/he wrote to England.

In example 35B, *ʔau* in the *ʔau* construction cannot occur in a relative clause following the main verb phrase in a VO order sentence. The meaning of the *ʔau* that occurs as a verb in a relative clause in example 35B differs greatly from the *ʔau* that functions as a coverb in the *ʔau* construction in example 35A. In this case, *ʔau* is no longer a full-fledged verb in the *ʔau* construction. Example 36A, on the other hand, represents a typical SVC sentence. The initial verb *khŷan* 'to write' can also occur in a relative clause as shown in example 36B. The possible occurrence of example 36B is the result of changing from the coverb *ʔau* in the *ʔau* construction in example 35A to a full verb *khŷan* 'to write'. Similar attempts at relativization in other *ʔau* construction sentences also fail; for instance, example 34A would yield the unacceptable sentence *\*kháu khă:i rót thì: kháu ʔau*.

Additional evidence also demonstrates the weakening of the status of *ʔau* as a full verb. Notice the relationship between the main verb and the modifiers in the following *ʔau* constructions:

37. A. *ʔau sɛa sák bòi bòi mâi*  
*ʔau clothes wash often NEG*  
*di: ná sɿ: sɿ:t môt*  
*good PAR color fade all*  
 Washing the clothes (too) often is not good. The color will fade quickly.
- B. *sák sɛa bòi bòi mâi di: ná sɿ: sɿ:t môt*  
*wash clothes often NEG good PAR color fade all*  
 Washing the clothes (too) often is not good. The color will fade quickly.
38. A. *ʔau khanôm pân reu reu khâu nám cà dɛat lé:u*  
*ʔau dessert shape quickly water PT boil ASP*  
 Shape the dessert (dough) quickly. The water is almost boiling.
- B. *pân khanôm reu reu khâu nám cà dɛat lé:u*  
*shape dessert quickly water PT boil ASP*  
 Shape the dessert (dough) quickly. The water is almost boiling.

Examples 37B and 38B demonstrate that *bòi bòi* and *reu reu khâu* in examples 37A and 38A modify a proposition that has *sák* and *pân* as main verbs. When modifiers are attached to *ʔau*, the meaning changes completely as in *ʔau sɛa bòi bòi* 'often take/get the clothes' and *ʔau khanôm reu reu khâu* 'quickly take/get the dessert', which are not the meanings of the sentences in 37B and 38B. The basic meanings are 'wash quickly' and 'shape (the dough) quickly', but not 'take/get quickly'. This is not the case in an SVC, for example:

39. *chán chə:n khaú ma: kin kha:u thi: bā:n bòi bòi*  
 I invite s/he DR (toward) eat meal at home often  
 I often invite him/her to eat at my house.
40. *lá:ŋ thuai lá:ŋ ca:n tâŋ tó? ʔa:hă:n reu reu khâu*  
*wash bowl wash plate set table food quickly*  
*khè:k cà ma: lé:u*  
*guest PT DR (toward) ASP*  
 Quickly wash the dishes (and) set the food on the table. The guests are about to arrive.

In example 39 above, *bòi bòi* 'often' modifies the whole activity of inviting someone to eat. The emphasis is on the frequency of the propositional *chə:n* 'to invite' for the purpose of *kin khaú* 'to eat'. In example 40,

*reu reu khâu* modifies both activities, 'washing the dishes' and 'setting the food on the table'. As is shown earlier in examples 37 and 38, this is not the case in the *?au* construction. This evidence further confirms that *?au* is not a full verb in the *?au* construction and that the propositional meaning is in the main verb and not in the *?au*.

The fact that *?au* occurs in certain environments as a verb and in others as a coverb is confusing, but is nothing peculiar. A coverb can be understood as an intermediate state of development of a verb into a preposition. Li and Thompson (1974a) explain that a coverb is originally a verb that later on develops so as to function like a preposition in a certain environment. Therefore, some coverbs may have a more or less verbal property than others depending on the stage of their development. This seems to be the case for *?au*; its verbal quality is still fluctuating. Since Thai is not an inflectional language, there is no morphological marking to indicate the status of *?au*. In an inflectional language, the distinction between a coverb and a verb in a preposing object construction can be made clear by a change in the stem modification of the verb and not the coverb. The status of a coverb should not, however, be overlooked in a derivational-type language just because of the lack of surface coding.

Li and Thompson (1974a) also point out that the distinction between a verb and a coverb is that the verbal meaning is lost when a verb becomes a coverb. In the case of *?au*, the loss of the verbal meaning is not restricted only to *?au* and its relationship to the modifier, as has been discussed earlier. Additional evidence also shows the change in the prerequisites of a noun phrase that can occur with *?au* when it functions as a coverb. The preposed object noun phrase that follows *?au* in the *?au* construction can be <±concrete>. This is not the case when *?au* functions as a verb. In a VO order sentence, the object noun phrase of the verb *?au* must have the property of < + concrete >. The following examples demonstrate *?au* in the *?au* construction with an object noun phrase < - concrete >, for example:

41. *pà:n ní: man khon ?au kwa:m láp tha:ŋ thahă:n bò:k*  
 by now s/he probably ?au secret military tell  
*phûak kabôt pai lé:u*  
 rebel DR (exceed) ASP  
 By now s/he probably has already told the rebels about the  
 military secret.

42. *kháu ?au khwa:mkhít ?an ní:*  
 s/he ?au idea CL this  
*sană: khaná kammaka:n pai lé:u*  
 propose committee DR (away) ASP  
 S/he already proposed this idea to the committee.

The above examples demonstrate that in the coverb function, *ʔau* can take abstract nouns such as *khwa:m láp tha:ŋ thahǎ:n* 'military secret' and *khwa:mkhít ʔan ní* 'this idea'. The changes in the meaning and function of *ʔau* support the assumption that *ʔau* in the *ʔau* construction is no longer a verb, but a coverb. The status of *ʔau* as a coverb and the OV order of an object noun phrase make the *ʔau* construction unique. It is this unique characteristic that distinguishes the *ʔau* construction from other syntactic structures of the SVC.

The development of *ʔau* in the *ʔau* construction, as has been discussed, is certainly not an isolated case. Changes in the status of a verb have been previously observed in many African languages (Givon 1975; Lord 1973, 1976). A similar phenomenon can also be seen in the Chinese *bǎ* construction.<sup>5</sup> Comparative studies of the Chinese *bǎ* and the Thai *ʔau* constructions reveal a few striking similarities. Both constructions have similar syntactic structure: [NP<sub>1</sub> *bǎ* (/ʔau) NP<sub>2</sub> V X]. The preposed object noun phrase that occurs in the preverbal position and the essential occurrence of a sentential modifier are among the major shared features. The *bǎ* and *ʔau* constructions differ in terms of what types of verbs, object noun phrases, or modifiers can occur in each construction. A selectional restriction, such as a choice of a certain perceptual-type verb (for example, 'to have'), cannot be used in either *bǎ* or *ʔau* constructions, but there are also many verbs that can occur in one construction and not in the other. These are the distinctions that should be considered language specific, and ones that do not interfere with the overall characteristics of the two constructions.

The following are pairs of examples in Chinese (A) and Thai (B):

43. A. *Tā yǐjīng bǎ nèi zhāng juōzi*  
 s/he already *bǎ* that CL table  
*bān qù le*  
 move DR (away) ASP  
 S/He has already moved that table out.

- B. *kháu ʔau tó yái ʔò:k pai lé:u*  
 s/he *ʔau* table move DR (out) DR (away) ASP  
 S/He has already moved the table out.

<sup>5</sup> The *bǎ* construction is one of the most analyzed, but the least agreed upon, syntactic structures in Chinese. Analyses of *bǎ* range, for example, from traditional interpretations of *bǎ* as a Disposal Form to a verbal complement construction (Anne Y. Hashimoto 1971, *Unicorn* 8), and to a collapsed serial verb construction indicating word order change from a VO to an OV order in Chinese (Li and Thompson 1974b). The controversy over the *bǎ* construction and the issue of word order change goes beyond the scope of this paper.

44. A. *Zhāng sān bǎ jǔzi buō le pí*  
 Zhang San bǎ orange peel ASP skin  
 Zhang San peeled the orange.<sup>6</sup>
- B. *kháu ?au sôm pò:k plùak lé:u*  
 s/he ?au orange peel skin ASP  
 S/He already peeled the orange.

In both examples 43A and 43B, the object noun phrase 'table' is preposed before the verb 'to move'. Certain object noun phrases can be partially preposed. Notice that in example 44, the object noun phrase 'orange' is preposed, while 'its peel' remains after the main verb in both Chinese and Thai.<sup>7</sup> Both *bǎ* and *?au* in the above examples function similarly to a coverb marking the preposed object noun phrase (either partial or whole) in a preverbalized position of a sentence.

Besides the structural similarity, the historical development of *bǎ* perhaps provides the most insightful look into the study of the *?au* construction. The words *bǎ* and *?au* are semantically similar. Originally, *bǎ* was a verb meaning 'to grasp' or 'to hold'; *?au* is also a verb with similar meaning. As has been shown earlier, besides a direct object noun phrase, an oblique object, such as an instrument (note example 26), often occurs with *?au* in a preverbalized position. This was also the case at one time in the development of *bǎ*. Wang Huan (1963) points out that the occurrence of an instrumental-type noun phrase is possible in early colloquial Mandarin usage when verbs such as *ná* 'to take', *yòng* 'to use', and *bǎ* 'to hold' are interchangeable.<sup>8</sup> The distinctions among *ná*, *yòng*, and *bǎ* became more apparent later on in modern Pekingese. With few exceptions, *bǎ* in present day Mandarin usage is no longer employed as a main verb. An instrument-type, oblique object no longer occurs with *bǎ*. Unlike *bǎ*, which has pretty much ceased its verbal function, *?au* still occurs as a verb in many environments. Perhaps the dominant distinction is that *bǎ* and *?au* are in different stages of development.

Returning to the question of the semantic distinction, there is also a certain similarity between the two constructions. Like the *?au* construction, many *bǎ* construction sentences also have VO counterparts; examples of some typical *bǎ* construction sentences with their VO counterparts are the following:

<sup>6</sup> See Li and Thompson (1981), 471.

<sup>7</sup> More details of Lü's (1948) retained object construction can be found in Li and Thompson (1981).

<sup>8</sup> The early colloquial Mandarin or *báihuà* was prevalent in the Ming period, the 14th–17th century.

45. A. wǒ yǐjīng bǎ wǒ de qìchē mài le  
 I already bǎ I POSS car sell ASP  
 I have already sold my car.

B. wǒ yǐjīng mài wǒ de qìchē le  
 I already sell I POSS car ASP  
 I have already sold my car.

46. A. tāmen bǎ táng chē le  
 they bǎ candy eat ASP  
 They ate the candies.

B. tāmen chē táng le  
 they eat candy ASP  
 They already ate the candies.

Notice that the basic meaning of the above *bǎ* sentences, with slight nuances, is similar to the VO order sentences. The semantic distinction between the two orders in Chinese has first been discussed in terms of the definiteness of the preverbalized noun phrase in the *bǎ* construction (Chao 1968). For example, *táng* 'candy' in example 46A is a specific item with a definite reference since it occurs in the preverbal position of the sentence. Y. C. Li (1974) further defines definiteness in the *bǎ* construction in terms of an obligatory anaphoric element that is conveyed through the relationship between the noun phrase after *bǎ* and its verb. He believes that the noun phrase in the *bǎ* construction must be presupposed, either from an understanding of the verb or from an antecedent in the immediate context (Li 1974). With the exception of a few uncommon *bǎ* sentences, Chinese linguists generally agree that the preverbal object noun phrase in the *bǎ* construction usually refers to a specific entity about which both the speaker and the listener have shared information.

Similar to the Chinese *bǎ*, the *ʔau* construction and its counterpart VO order also differ in terms of definiteness of the object noun phrase. The preverbalization in the Thai *ʔau* construction denotes definiteness as well as an emphasis on a noun phrase. The preverbal object noun phrase that follows *ʔau* is definite in the sense that either it has to physically exist within the speakers' shared knowledge or it has already been referred to in the previous conversation. It is not possible to start a conversation with *ʔau* if neither of these conditions is met. In example 34A, for instance, *ʔau* is possible at the beginning of a conversation, if the two speakers had previously been discussing the car. Therefore, *ʔau*, marks *rót* 'car', which is known information, by highlighting it in a preverbalized position. Example 34B, on the other hand, can occur at the beginning of a conversation, since it simply gives all new information.

Further evidence also demonstrates that the preverbal noun phrase in the *ʔau* construction cannot be an item that is newly brought into the conversation. Notice the ungrammaticality of the following:

- \*47. *ʔau*      *khanǝm*    *sú:*      *ma:*              *lé:u*  
*ʔau*      dessert    buy    DR (toward)    ASP  
 I have already bought the dessert.

- \*48. *ʔau*      *mǝradǝk*      *dǎi rǎp*      *lé:u*  
*ʔau*      inheritance    receive      ASP  
 I have received an inheritance.

The noun phrases *khanǝm* 'dessert' and *mǝradǝk* 'inheritance' in the above examples cannot be preverbalized since the verbs *sú:* 'to buy' and *dǎi rǎp* 'to receive' imply that the objects are new information. Li's (1974) interpretation of a presupposition through the meaning of a verb in the *bǎ* construction, as mentioned earlier, also applies to the *ʔau* construction as used in examples 47 and 48 above.

The contrast between the emphasis and the definiteness in the *ʔau* construction and the descriptive and indefinite nature of a VO order is clear in the following examples:

49. A. *ʔau*      *satǝm*              *kǝp*  
*ʔau*      postage stamp    keep  
 Keep the stamps.

—*dǐ: dǐ:*    *ná*      *yà:*    *tham*    *hǎ:i*    *sía*              *lǎ*  
 good    PAR    NEG    cause    lose    being rid of    PAR  
 Keep the stamps well. Do not lose them. (Context I)

??—*tǎngtǝ:*    *samǎi*      *pen*    *dǝk*  
                  since      period      be      child              (Context II)  
 (Someone has been) collecting stamps since s/he was a child.

- B. *kǝp*              *satǝm*  
 keep              postage stamp  
 keep/collect stamps

—*dǐ: dǐ:*    *ná*      *yà:*    *tham*    *hǎ:i*    *sía*              *lǎ*  
 good    PAR    NEG    cause    lose    being rid of    PAR  
 Keep the stamps well. Do not lose them. (Context I)

—*tângtè*:     *samăi*     *pen*     *dèk*  
                  since     period     be     child     (Context II)  
                  (Someone has been) collecting stamps since s/he was a  
                  child.

The word *kèp* 'to keep' can mean either 'to put something in a proper place' or, with regard to items such as stamps, 'to collect'. In example 49B, either meaning of *kèp* is possible since *satəm* 'postage stamps' is non-specific. Therefore, either Context I or II is acceptable for the VO order in 49B. However, in the *ʔau* construction as in example 49A, *satəm* 'postage stamps' is definite (for example, particular stamps that one has just been given). Therefore, only the meaning of 'keep the stamps well' (that is, 'to put the stamps in a safe place'), which occurs with Context I, is acceptable. The meaning of 'to collect' as indicated in Context II through the modifier 'since s/he was a child' is ungrammatical because a noun phrase within the activity of 'collecting' cannot be a definite entity.

It appears that the two different linguistic forms, the *ʔau* and its counterpart VO order sentence, express the basic meaning of a sentence in two different ways. The regular VO order sentence simply describes an event in a declarative sentence. The *ʔau* construction, on the other hand, puts an emphasis on the noun phrase by highlighting it to a preverbal position. In the *ʔau* construction, *ʔau* appears to have lost its original verbal quality and instead has gained a prepositional quality of introducing a noun phrase that has a definite reference.

## Final note

The development of *ʔau* as a coverb still needs further research, particularly in comparison to the Chinese *bǎ*. Although some *bǎ* and *ʔau* constructions are different due to the selectional restrictions in each language, a comparative study of the two constructions does reveal unique typological similarities. The fact that both Chinese and Thai are also geographically close leads to the need for a further look into possible historical contact and an in-depth study of this type of linguistic phenomenon.

## References

Bickner, R. J.

- 1978 "Directional Modification in Thai Fiction: The Uses of 'come' and 'go' in Text-Building." Paper presented to the Eleventh International Conference of Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics.

Chao, Yuen-ren

- 1968 *A Grammar of Spoken Chinese*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cheung, Hung-nin S.

- 1973 "A Comparative Study in Chinese Grammars: The *ba*-Construction." *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 1(3): 343-382.

Cheung, Yat-shing

- 1976 "Word Order Change in Chinese: Some Contributing Factors and Implications." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan.

Filbeck, D.

- 1975 "A Grammar of Verb Serialization in Thai." In *Studies in Tai Linguistics in Honor of William J. Gedney*, edited by J. Harris and J. Chamberlain, 112-129. Bangkok: Central Institute of English Language.

Givon, T.

- 1975 "Serial Verbs and Syntactic Change: Niger-Congo." In *Word Order and Word Order Change*, edited by Charles Li, 47-112. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Greenberg, J. H. (editor)

- 1963 *Universals of Language*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press.

Hashimoto, Anne Y.

- 1971 "Mandarin Syntactic Structures." *Unicorn* [Chi-Lin] 8, Chinese Linguistics Project and Seminar, Princeton University.

Jagacinski, Ngampit

- 1987 "Tai Lue of Xishuangbanna in China's Yunnan Province: Description and a Study of the OV Order in the *?au* Construction." Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University.

Johnson, D. E.

- 1977 "On Relational Constraints on Grammar." In *Syntax and Semantics* 8, edited by Peter Cole and Jerrold M. Sadock, 151-178. New York: Academic Press.

Li, C. N. and S. A. Thompson

- 1974a "Co-verbs in Mandarin Chinese: Verbs or Prepositions?" *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 2(3): 257-278.

- 1974b "Historical Change of Word Order: A Case Study in Chinese and Its Implications." In *Historical Linguistics I: Syntax, Morphology, Internal and Comparative Reconstruction* edited by John M. Anderson and Charles Jones, 19-217. Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company.

- 1975 "The Semantic Function of Word Order: A Case Study in Mandarin." In *Word Order and Word Order Change*, edited by Charles N. Li, 163-195. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- 1981 *Mandarin Chinese: A Functional Reference Grammar*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Li, Y. C.

- 1974 "What does 'disposal' mean? Features of the Verb and Noun in Chinese." *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 2(2): 200-218.

Lord, C.

- 1973 "Serial Verbs in Transition." *Studies in African Linguistics* 4: 269-296.

- 1976 "Evidence for Syntactic Reanalysis from Verb to Complementizer in Kwa." In *Papers from the Parasession on Diachronic Syntax*, edited by S. Steever, C. Walker, and S. Mufwene, 179-191. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.

Lu, Shu-xiang

- 1955 "bǎ zì yòngfǎ de yánjiū" [A Study of bǎ usages]. *Monograph on Language Studies: Collected Essays on Chinese Grammar*. Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Press.

Schachter, P.

- 1985 "Parts of Speech Systems." In *Language Typology and Syntactic Description I*, edited by Timothy Shopen, 3-61. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Stine, P. C.

- 1968 "The Instrumental Case in Thai: A Study of Syntax and Semantics in a Generative Model." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan.

Kingkarn Thepkanjana

- 1986 "Serial Verb Constructions in Thai." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan.

Wang, Huan

- 1963 *Bǎ zì jù hé bèi zì jù* [bǎ sentences and bèi sentences]. Shanghai: Xinzhishi Chubanshe. Translated into English in *Project on Linguistic Analysis*, Report no. 4, edited by W. S-Y. Wang, 97-104. Columbus: Ohio State University Research Foundation.