**wâa and complement-taking predicates**

in Thai

Ngampit Jagacinski
Cornell University

The grammaticalized functions of the verb 'to say' as a marker to introduce or to link clauses are a common phenomenon in many Asian and African languages (Lord, 1976; Jaisser, 1985; Saxena, 1988). Semantic fluctuation is obvious in this type of development when a lexicon becomes generalized and acquires different syntactic functions. The verb *wâa* 'to say' in Thai is no exception. In reported speech *wâa* occurs as a quotative marker (QT). In complex constructions, *wâa* can occur as a complementizer (COMP) linking an argument to its predicate, or as a part of connectives linking various co-ordinate clauses. This paper focuses on the gradation of semantic changes of *wâa* and its relationship with the main verbs that precede it. The findings include a wide range of both loss and gain in meaning. There are cases of syntactic and semantic depletion of the original verb 'to say' when *wâa* together with a certain verb form a verbal compound with new meaning. There are also cases of semantic nuances in which a concept of evidentiality is expressed when a complementizer *wâa* occurs with certain predicates.

As a verb, *wâa* has two closely related meanings of 'to say':¹ Examples are the following:

---

²05
1. hüanâ̄ naan khaū pâ̄ na yaŋŋai ná boss s/he say how PAR

What did the boss say?

2. thâa mài dìí léu yâa maa pâa chán na if NEG good ASP NEG DR blame I PAR

If it doesn't turn out well, don't blame me.

wâa in Example 1 simply means 'to say'. In Example 2, wâa also carries a complex meaning equivalent to 'to verbally express dissatisfaction and accusation through descriptive reasoning'. The verbal meaning of wâa has extended usage when wâa also functions as a QT marker for both direct and indirect quotes as in Examples 3 and 4, respectively, below:

3. khaū bòōk phôō pâa "phôō, khôō nân sîp s/he speak father QT father request money ten bat dâi mài" baht C

S/He said to her/his father, "Father, may I have ten dollars?"

4. khaū bòōk wâa khaū pai kunmîŋ sôŋ khrân lêu s/he speak QT s/he go Kunming two times ASP

S/He said that s/he has already gone to Kunming twice.

Previous analyses such as Tasanee's (cited in Namthip 1989) consider wâa occurring with communication or mental state verbs to be a quotative compound verb (i.e., essentially 'say-say' or, for example, 'think-say').
Namthip (1989) further proposes that in these occurrences \( \text{wàa} \) is still a verb and can take its own subject. The following discussion and examples will demonstrate that this is not so. The so-called mental state verbs consist of not just phatic and 'think' type verbs, but a large number of complement-taking predicates (CTP). There is a wide variety of both syntactic and semantic changes when \( \text{wàa} \) is preceded by these predicates.

There are extreme cases in which \( \text{wàa} \) occurs in a verbal compound which takes on a new meaning remotely deriving from the meaning of the main verb. Examples are:

5. hǎa 'to find'  
6. thũw 'to carry'  
7. tôo 'to continue'  
8. ráp 'to receive'  
9. náp 'to count'

\( \text{wàa} \) in the above examples is no longer an independent verb, but becomes semantically transparent with the main verbs. The loss of the original verbal meaning 'to say' is clear in cases of double occurrences of \( \text{wàa} \) in which the second occurrence is a grammatical marker. For example:

10. lũ̂ukcan cun rác̄n thām kháu pai wāa mēe thoŋdii  
    lũ̂ukcan PT call out ask s/he DR Thoŋdii

mēe kee pen yãaŋrai bāŋ khā lũ̂ukcan nān thām  
mother PRO be how PAR lũ̂ukcan DM ask

khāu mēe phūa phūu thi phaaì rwa pay sãmkan wāa  
news mother-in-law one who row boat DR take it to be
Luukcan, with a loud voice, asked "Mēe Thoândii, how is your mother?" Luukcan was asking about (her own) mother-in-law. The woman, who was rowing a boat passing by (i.e. Mēe Thoândii), took it that Luukcan was asking about her own mother. She answered "Mother passed away last night."

Roikaeo Naeomai Khong Thai, p.79

11. fàai thoândii cuñ bōok wāa chān bōok wāa
    side Thoândii then say COMP I say COMP

mēe chān taa tiānhāak thammī klāp maa
    Chan die on the contrary why in return DR

wāa wāa chān bōok wāa mēe phōo sūcūai taa
    blame COMP I say COMP mother Sutchai died

Thoândii then said that I told you that it was my mother who died. Why are you blaming me that I said Sutchai’s mother died?

Roikaeo Naeomai Khong Thai, p.80

12. thī phī khāu wāa wāa khun nūŋ knpūŋ sān nān māi:
    that s/he say COMP you wear skirt short DEM NEG
    true

That they said your skirt is too short is not true.

In Example 10, sāmkān ‘to be important’ and the first occurrence of wāa form a verbal compound which takes on a new meaning of ‘take it to be’. The second occurrence of wāa as a COMP links the complement
clause 'someone was asking about her own mother' to the predicate ṣămkan wāa. It is not possible that the second occurrence of wāa is a verb. The lexicon meaning of ṣămkan wāa and the context that follows do not allow such interpretation. Examples 11 and 12 also show the unlikely redundancy if both occurrences of wāa are verbs. Phonological evidence shows that wāa is unstressed when it is preceded by a main verb. This is in contrast to, for example, a reduplicated verb such as:

13. khān khān hāi ṣet ca dāi pòok pai
write write in order to finish PT AUX out DR
lēn dāi
play able to

Finish writing it; then you can go out and play.

In Example 13, the stress is on the second khān. Both occurrences of khān are verbs.

In many cases, the COMP wāa is strictly a marker and carries no meaning. Notice the following examples:

14. phōm chūa ˈlwakaan wāa khāu pen khon dīi
I believe exceedingly COMP s/he be person good

I really believe that s/he is a good person.

15. chān nēccai wāa khun thaṃjaan nī dāi
I certain COMP you work DEM able to

I am sure you can do this work.

16. chān rūu maa naan lēeu wāa khāu māi chōop
I know ASP long time ASP COMP s/he NEG like
I knew all along that s/he doesn't like to watch movies.

I estimate I plan to go to Hong Kong next year.

What did the teacher write on the board?

The COMP wâa in Examples 14-18 is obligatory in each case. Notice that all the above CTP are mental action verbs. The adverbial clauses in Examples 14 and 16 or the locative phrase in Example 18 demonstrate that CTP and wâa do not form a verbal compound unit. The above examples also show different types of complements which can occur with the complementizer wâa. Complements can also be non-sentential. wâa in this occurrence makes semantic distinctions. Examples from historical writings and modern usages are:

There is a big river in Hell called Wettaranii. "Traiphum Phra Ruang" (15 century)
20. kham níi ðàan wâa monlaphaawá
word DEM read COMP monlaphaawá

This word is read "monlaphaawá."

The function of wâa to introduce a non-sentential complement occurs only with certain CTP such as ðàan 'to read' in Example 20 (also khâan 'to write' as in Example 18). The sequence of CTP chûw followed by wâa in Example 19 no longer occurs in modern usage. The COMP wâa such as in Example 20 makes the distinction between abstract and concrete objects for certain transitive CTP. A comparison to Example 20 is ðàan narsûwphim (read/newspaper) 'someone is reading a newspaper'. Also notice the following examples:

21. rîak khwaai
call buffalo

Someone called a buffalo.

22. rîak wâa khwaai
call COMP buffalo

(This kind of animal) is called a buffalo.

23. rîak khwaai wâa tom
call buffalo COMP Tom

(They) called the buffalo Tom.

wâa in Example 22 expresses an abstract concept that refers to a composition of an entity such as a buffalo. Similarly in Example 23, wâa expresses the designation of an abstract concept, which is a name in this case, for an entity, that of a buffalo. The occurrence of the COMP wâa with a non-sentential complement indicates
distinction in meaning. These CTP require the occurrence of wâa for their choice of objects.

Another semantic nuance of the COMP wâa is the concept of evidentiality. For example:

24. a. phôm chôopp kâu tântêê pii thîî lêêu
   I like s/he since year last
   I liked her/him since last year.

   b. phôm khîit chôopp kâu tântêê pii thîî lêêu
   I think like s/he since year last
   I got interested in (i.e. thought of liking)
   her/him since last year.

   c. phôm khîit wâa chôopp kâu tântêê pii thîî lêêu
   I think COMP like s/he since year last
   I think I liked her/him since last year.

25. a. wan nîî rûusûk màî khôi sabaai
   today feel NEG AUX well
   I don't feel good today.

   b. wan nîî rûusûk wâa màî khôi sabaai
   today feel COMP NEG AUX well
   I think I don't feel good today.

26. a. hên sîi dîî lâi súw maa fàak
   see color good so buy DR give
   The color is good so (I) bought it for you.

   b. hên wâa sîi dîî lâi súw maa fàak
   see COMP color good so buy DR give
I think the color is good so I bought it for you.

Without wâa in Examples 24a and b, 25a, and 26a, the sentences are descriptive statements. The occurrences of wâa in Examples 24c, 25b, and 26b demonstrate the uncertainty in the mind of the speaker. The optional occurrence of wâa creates semantic nuances in the predicates. wâa allows a speaker to express his/her attitude toward the truth value of an event.

Further evidence of evidentiality occurs in cases where a nominal COMP thîi can be an alternative for wâa. It is likely that historically a nominal COMP thîi developed from a nominal thîi 'place' (i.e., land/space). Its syntactic function is to specify both physical and non-physical entities. For example:

27. khăn thîi bàn
write PREP house
(I) write at home.

28. khôn thîi sâi sâa sêi dêen
person COMP wear shirt color red
the person who is wearing a red shirt

In certain predicates, thîi is an alternative for wâa. Examples are:

29a. chăn sônsâi thîi khâu dài lûak pai
I suspect COMP s/he AUX select DR
I am suspicious (at) the fact that he was selected to go.

b. chăn sônsâi wâa khâu dài lûak pai
I suspect COMP s/he AUX select DR
(I am not sure but) I suspected that he was selected to go.

Example 29a is a descriptive statement. But when wâa occurs in Example 29b, the sentence express the attitude of a speaker on the uncertainty of an event. More evidence supporting the distinction between thi and wâa is:

30a. toklon cai thi/wâa ca pai duu nân tân prathêt decide COMP PT go work-tour abroad

(1) decided to go on a work-tour abroad.

*b. toklon cai thi ca pai duu nân tân prathêt sá nôi decide COMP PT go work-tour abroad a little

(1) decided to go on a work-tour abroad.

c. toklon cai wâa ca pai duu nân tân prathêt sá nôi decide COMP PT go work-tour abroad a little

(1) decided to go on a work-tour abroad.

The phrase sá nôi 'a little bit', which indicates a less serious attitude, can be added on to 30c with wâa. However, this is not so in 30b, where thi indicates descriptive statement. The above examples demonstrate that in certain cases the COMP wâa can also be used to convey epistemically how a person thinks/feels about an event. In this case the attitude of the speaker regarding the uncertainty of an event is expressed.

The evidentiality concept does not, however, consistently occur. Unclear cases of semantic distinction are the alternative and co-occurrence of thi, wâa, and thi wâa for example:
31. dëk man tûwntên thîi/wâa/thîi wâa man ca dâi child PRO excited COMP PRO PT receive
tûkkataa pen khoôngkhvân stuffed toy be gift

The child is excited that s/he will get a stuffed toy as a gift.

32. chôck dìi thîi/wâa/thîi wâa rôt mêi sâa lucky COMP car NEG break down

It was lucky that the car didn’t break down.

33. khâu pralâat cai thîi/wâa/thîi wâa saphaa lôn máti s/he surprise COMP congress agree

than thîi
right away

S/He was surprised that the congress passed the resolution right away.

34. dìi cai thîi/wâa/thîi wâa khâu mêi krôct glad COMP s/he NEG angry

(I am glad that s/he was not angry.

35. chán plêk cai thîi/wâa/thîi wâa khâu yâng yûu I surprise COMP s/he still exist thîi nîi
here

I am surprised that s/he is still here.
36. Khâu sǐa cai thīi/vââ/thīi wâa phôo māi maa yâm
s/he sad COMP father NEG come visit

Khâu
s/he

S/he was sorry that her/his father didn't visit her/him.

Only a handful of CTP such as in the above examples can
take either thīi or vââ or both. Perhaps the
overlapping occurrence of a nominal and verbal COMP
indicates the development of a strictly grammatical
marker status of vââ. Further evidence can be seen
when vââ occurs as a COMP in a nominal. There are
occurrences of vââ which link a clause, not to a
predicate, but to a noun. Notice the following examples:

37. --- têe māi tôoŋ chái kham wâa naai taam yâaŋ
but NEG must use word COMP master follow

thai
Thai

---- but no need to use the word 'master' as in Thai.
"Phra baromrachoowâat Rama V"
wânwâcak I

38. kham wââ thêetsakit pen kham māi
word COMP thetsakit be word new

The word 'thetsakit' is a new word.

39. khun mii khwaam hên wâa rátthabaan khuan ca
you have idea COMP government should PT

tham yâaŋraí
do what
In your opinion, what do you think the government should do?

40. mii panhāa wāa khruə̃bin lon thī niī māi dāi exist problem COMP plane land here NEG can

runway māi dīi
runway NEG good

The problem is that the plane cannot land here (since) the runway is not good.

Predicates such as chāi 'to use' in Example 37, and mii 'there exists' in Examples 39 and 40 cannot occur with the COMP wāa (i.e., *mii wāa *chāi wāa), unless the object nouns also occur. wāa links a modifier to its Head noun such as kham 'word' in Examples 37 and 38, khwaamhēn 'opinion' in Example 39, and panhāa 'problem' in Example 40. The nominal COMP thī cannot occur in these examples since these nominals make reference to abstract concepts. The complementary distribution of occurrences of thī and wāa in these nominals indicates further development of wāa as a grammatical marker.

It has been pointed out that in the process of grammaticalization there is a natural shift toward the abstract and topological and away from rich lexical meaning (Sweetser 1988). In other words, the general meaning is used more frequently than the specific meaning (Bybee, 1985). This is also true for wāa. The verbal usage occurs less compared to QT, COMP, and the relatively recently increasing usage in connectives.

The occurrence of wāa in connectives is to conjoin various co-ordinate clauses. For example:
41. khâu maa nêe nêok sia cûak (wâa) khâu ca hâa
s/he come surely except COMP s/he PT find
bân mài caa
house NEG RVC

S/He definitely will be here unless s/he cannot find
(our) house.

42. yâak ca sûw têe (wâa) mài mii ēân
want PT buy but COMP NEG have money

(I) wanted to buy it, but I don't have money.

As a part of a connective, wâa is optional. The likely
reason is that the juxtaposing of clauses is a prominent
feature in Thai. Topic-comment and serial-verb
constructions are the obvious examples. Therefore a
linker can and often is optional even in a causal
construction, for example:

43. pai nêe Ø/phró/phró wâa dâi ēân dîi
go definitely because receive money good

(I) definitely will go because the pay is good.

Summary
Although there seem to be four major types of
occurrences as shown above, wâa essentially has two
syntactic functions. One is a verb. The other is a
grammatical marker to introduce a second clause,
whether it be a quotation, a complement, or a co-
ordinate clause. There is an underlying shared feature
in all these occurrences and at the same time there are
semantic nuances indicating different facets of meaning
in the course of the changes.
Syntactically, wâa changes from a verb to a linker, and semantically it extends its underlying meaning ‘to state’ to the concept of ‘to refer to’ or ‘to make reference to’. Similar to other grammaticalizations, grammatical markers are related to their lexicon sources and do have meaning in certain cases.

The parallel development of gaining and losing occurs both syntactically and semantically. The semantic development of wâa involves the depletion of the original verbal meaning ‘to say’ but also the gaining of additional meaning. The gained meaning goes in different directions depending on CTP. These changes show semantic fluctuations in the process of a verb developing into a marker and that the changes depend heavily on the CTP that wâa occurs with.

Bybee (1988) points out that grammaticalization is not motivated by communicative necessity. She concludes "... that human language users have a natural propensity for making metaphorical extensions that lead to the increased use of certain items." (Bybee 1988, p.75) For wâa, the unevenness in the course of semantic changes such as the concept of evidentiality demonstrates that it is not a need to express this concept that led to the development of the COMP wâa, but simply an extended usage of it. The variety of changes are not homogeneous and there is no consistent feature to be assigned to one particular syntactic category.

Unlike the historical stages of the verb ‘to say’ described in South Asian languages (Saxena, 1988), all occurrences of wâa, with the exception of the connective usage, can be found in historical writings such as in the 15th century writings in “Traiphum Phra Ruang” (Wannakam sãmâi Sukhothai) or in short modern
novels at the end of the 19th century. There is no diachronic evidence to suggest stages in the evolution of these functions.

Abbreviations

ASP = aspect marker; AUX = auxiliary; COMP = complementizer; CTP = complement-taking predicate; DEM = demonstrative; DR = directional; EMP = emphatic marker; NEG = negative; PAR = particle; PREP = preposition; PT = potential; Q = question; QT = quotative marker

Notes

I would like to thank Shobhana L. Chelliah who pointed out the evidential aspect of grammaticalized markers, and also Suphop Chaengrew for insight into some of the examples.

1. There are many verbs 'to say/to speak/to tell' in Thai, for example, ประเทศไทย, ประเทศไทย, and ประเทศไทย. None of these lexical items has developed other syntactic functions.

2. The second meaning overlaps with ประเทศไทย 'to verbally attack, or to reprimand/to criticize'. However, ประเทศไทย indicates the use of abusive language, while ประเทศไทย does not.

3. It is difficult to define what exactly the terms "mental-state" (Tasanee, 1984) or "mental-action" (Lord, 1976) verbs refer to. CTP in Thai generally are predicates that have something related to mental accomplishment. However, there are a few exceptions. For example, ประเทศไทย 'to want' cannot occur with ประเทศไทย, but ประเทศไทย 'to be afraid' can. Adjectival type predicates
are usually not followed by wâa, nûai ‘to be physically tired’, hûa ‘to be mentally tired’, mûai ‘to have body aches’ do not occur with wâa and yet pâai ‘to be shy’ is possible. For example:

36. pâai wâa lûuk sòop tòk lâi mài yàak phaa shiy COMP child exam fail then NEG want take

dâi yîam yâat
DR visit relatives

S/he was embarrassed that the kid failed an exam, so s/he didn’t want to bring the kid to visit relatives.

4. The meaning of tôo as in the saying:

rák yaau hâi bàn rák sân hâi tôo
love long let cut love short let link

To continue (i.e., prolong comments) is to have a short-term relationship, but to stop (i.e., cut short) is to have a long term relationship.

References


Rokkaeo Naecomai Khong Thai 1874-1910


