

TENSE AND ASPECT IN LAI CHIN*

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Lai Chin*

This paper presents a description of the aspectual system of the Tibeto-Burman language Lai Chin (or Lai).¹ The aspectual system of Lai is very rich and complex, and a complete investigation of Lai aspect is far beyond the scope of this paper, whose goal is merely to provide a general descriptive overview and to examine the semantic and morphosyntactic properties of the aspectual particles. Aspectual distinctions in Lai are mainly represented by a few pre- and post-verbal particles and adverbs with aspectual or combined temporal and aspectual meaning. There seems to be no evidence for a morphological category of aspect in Lai, contrary to the organization of many aspectual systems, as, for example, Slavic languages or, to a lesser extent, English. This is not surprising, since Lai has exclusively verb agreement morphology and is otherwise an isolating or almost isolating language.

1.2. *Aspect: Some theoretical assumptions*

This paper is more concerned with the description of Lai aspect than with making theoretical claims about it. As an organizing basis for the description of the aspectual system of Lai, I use Comrie's (1976) classification of aspectual oppositions (Figure 1) with some modifications as suggested in Sweetser (1995). I do not define continuity in terms of progressive vs. nonprogressive, even though I discuss progressives and continuatives in Lai.

As aspectual systems are usually very idiosyncratic in different languages, I will be using Comrie's classification only as a typological guideline. I will also

* I thank the language consultant Kenneth Van-Bik, who provided all the Lai data for this paper and also suggested some illuminating interpretations of the data. All the misinterpretations are, unfortunately, my own.

¹ Lai is spoken in the Chin Hills of Northwestern Burma, mostly in the town of Haka, which has approximately 25,000 residents, and the surrounding area. Around Haka and Thantlaang, Lai Chin is used as a lingua franca and spoken as a second language by the speakers of many related dialects. Lai is also spoken in Mizoram State of India and in some areas of Bangladesh.

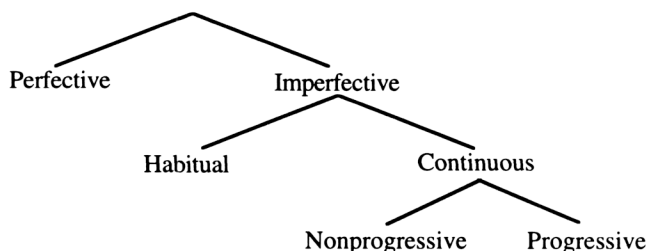


Figure 1. *Classification of aspectual oppositions (Comrie 1976).*

draw extensively from Smith's (1997) Situation Aspect theory which allows a consistent treatment of the properties of the otherwise controversial aspectual particle *rak*.

2.0. TENSE AND ASPECT PARTICLES

Lai Chin has a number of pre- and post-verbal particles and adverbs which have temporal or aspectual meaning separately or when combined together. The meaning and usage of the aspectual particles and aspect-conveying adverbs will be described in the following sections. Table 1 presents these aspectual particles.

3.0. SIMPLE TENSES

Every language has means of expressing present, past, and future relative to the moment of speech or the situation described as the present moment, but not all languages overtly distinguish these three tenses. In Lai, there is no overt present tense marker (which is a very common feature cross-linguistically). Future is always marked with a post-verbal particle *laay* (example [1]), and the simple past can in some cases be expressed using the pre-verbal particle *rak* (example [2]), which is always optional in such contexts and does not have to be present in a sentence which contains any reference to the time frame of the situation. If any contextual information about tense or explicit time reference (e.g., 'yesterday', 'last year', 'three weeks ago', 'a long time ago') is present in a sentence, *rak* can always be omitted, since the information given by such time expressions is sufficient to indicate the past nature of the event.

- (1) ka-law ka-thlo?-laay
 my-field 1SG-plow-FUT
 'I will plow my field.'

- (2) ka-law ka-(rak)-thlo?
 my-field 1SG-PAST-plow
 'I plowed my field.'

Pre-verbal:

rak	perfective
von	immediate action (in close proximity, immediately reachable)
hung	directional (may be used as aspectual)

Post-verbal:

laay	future / irrealis	
tsang	perfective / completive	(cf. <i>tsang</i> 'happen; become')
di?	completive / exhaustive	(cf. <i>di?</i> 'to finish')
be?	immanent	(cf. <i>be?</i> 'to stick')
bal	experiential	
toon	habitual	
liaw	progressive	
lengmang	continuous	
zungzaal	continuous	
tsua?ma?	iterative	
peng	continuative	
leen	continuative (with great effort)	
seek	continuous effort in vain	
hoy	repeated regretative	
taa	durative	
tshom	action for the moment / immediately	
tso?l	to V immediately	
duak	same as <i>tso?l</i>	
deeng	to be about to V	
deengmaang	to be about to V	
hnik	to be about to V (more immediate than <i>deengmaang</i>)	
ka?n	prioritive	
kaa	the beginning point of V-ing	
tsew	just (supposed to happen earlier, long overdue)	
thaan	again	
ri?	still	

Table 1. Aspectual particles.

The fact that *rak* is optional in example (2), which without *rak* could mean either 'I plow my field' or 'I plowed my field', suggests that the tense opposition in Lai is future vs. non-future; this makes Lai an example of an asymmetrical closed system in the Prague school sense. The Prague school linguists distinguished two types of asymmetrical systems, 'privative' and 'subordinative' (Smith 1997). Since the particle *laay* is required to signal future tense, and the absence of it denotes non-future, the tense system in Lai can be classified as 'privative', as opposed to a 'subordinative' system in which an element can give information about a particular property while its absence means compatibility with any property, including the one denoted by the element in question (Jakobson 1932).

4.0. PAST / PERFECTIVE: *rak*

4.1. Origin

There are several pre-verbal particles in Lai which occupy the slot between the subject and the verb. The particles *rak*, *va*, *hey*, *vung*, *hung*, and *rung*² indicate the *direction* of motion, while *von* signals the *immediateness* of motion as in examples (3) and (4). It can also be used in its grammaticalized temporal meaning 'only', without any explicit mention of the direction of motion (example [5]).

² The particles *va*, *hey* and *von* express different levels of proximity. *Von* can be called proximal, *hey* is medial, and *va* is distal; cf. examples (a)-(c):

- (a) ?a von tho?ng ?ii . . .
'He suddenly hit and . . .'
(b) ?a hey tho?ng ?ii . . .
'He reached and hit . . .'
(c) ?a va tho?ng ?ii . . .
'He went there and hit . . .'

The particles *vung*, *hung* and *rung* are used almost interchangeably by contemporary speakers. In the case of *vung* (example [d]), the speaker is away both from the actor and the place the actor is moving towards. According to my language consultant, *vung* used to mean some kind of upward movement, and *hung* used to indicate downward movement, but this distinction has been lost in the speech of his generation, and now the direction is not always vertical and these two particles are interchangeable.

- (d) ?a vung kaay
3SG towards climb up
'He climbed up.'

Hung expresses motion towards the speaker, as *rak* does, and it emphasizes the destination, while *rung* either emphasizes the starting point of the motion or is neutral in this respect.

- (e) pa tshiang kan sin ?a? ?a hung tum
god 2PL LOC 3SG towards come down
'God came down to us.'
(f) pa tshiang kan sin ?a? ?a rung tum
god 2PL LOC 3SG towards come down
'God came down to us.'

- (3) ?a-von-kal
3SG-right away-go
'He went right away.'
- (4) ?an-von-kal-hno?
3PL-suddenly-go-'confront'
'They are moving towards . . .'
- (5) von-tshi?m
right away-speak
'Come on, say something, speak up!'

rak (and, to some extent, *von* and *hung*) has two functions, unlike other directional particles: it can be either an optional past tense marker or a *venitive* marker which indicates the movement of the agent towards the speaker or deictic center, for the purpose of performing the action expressed by the verb.

It has been observed that in many languages basic verbs of motion such as *come* and *go* very often give rise to tense/aspect markers (Fleischman 1982). Lai *rak* is almost certainly related to the verb 'to come' (Form I *raa*, Form II *rat*³) which seems to be its historical source. Unfortunately, this has to remain a speculation on my part, because I do not have access to any historical sources from Lai or related languages, but the following scenario seems to be plausible: the verb 'to come' could give rise to *rak* as a grammaticalized directional marker (which is common cross-linguistically and thus fairly non-controversial), and then the directional *rak* could become the source of the aspectual meaning. There are two more directional particles which are marginally aspectual: *von* which denotes proximal imminent action and *hung* which can have continuative meaning in restricted lexical contexts (example [6]). These particles seem to be on their way to becoming aspectual markers, and this may well have been the same process that was completed some time ago in the case of *rak*.

- (6) ?a-hung-?um ?ii, tenglam tsuu ?a-hung-zaa ?ii . . .
3SG-DIR-live CONN Tenglam DEM 3SG-DIR-mature CONN
'He lived on, that Tenglam, he kept getting more mature . . .'

Several other facts suggest the same historical explanation of the development of *rak*: aspectual or temporal markers (including *tsang* 'completive' and *be?* 'immanent', where we have synchronic evidence that

³ For further discussion of the Form I/II distinction in Lai verbs, see below 4.2 and Peterson (next issue).

verbs are the sources of aspectual meaning) are always post-verbal, while all the directional particles are pre-verbal. This could mean that verbs were originally the sources of pre-verbal directional and post-verbal aspectual particles, after which some directional particles also acquired an aspectual meaning.

There is also comparative evidence which supports the proposed connection between *raa* and *rak*. In the Khuatshung quarter of Haka, speakers have grammaticalized *raa* 'to come' to use in all the situations where the other speakers of Lai would use *rak*.

4.2 Directional vs. aspectual usage of *rak*

Lai verbs have two different phonetic shapes, or forms: e.g., *bat* (Form I) / *ba?* (Form II) 'hang'.⁴ The proper form of the verb is determined by its distribution in the sentence. The Lai agreement system shows split ergativity, which is one of the many factors governing the distribution of verbal forms. The following is a brief summary of the Form I/II distribution in Lai, but a full description of the Form I/II functions is far beyond the scope of this paper.

In monoclausal sentences, Form I is used in transitive non-past tense sentences, as in example (7), where the action is not completed, is in the process of completion, or is going to be completed; while Form II is used in transitive past tense sentences, as in (8), where the action is completed. Example (8) shows an ergative construction marked by the ergative particle *ni?*.

- (7) *tsewmang* *?a-thil* *?a-bat*
 Tsewmang 3SG/POSS-clothes 3SG-hang/Form I
 'Tsewmang is hanging up his clothes.'
- (8) *tsewmang* *ni?* *?a-thil* *?a-ba?*
 Tsewmang ERG 3SG/POSS-clothes 3SG-hang/Form II
 'Tsewmang has hung up his clothes.'

In yes/no questions, which always have the question particle *moo* (example [9]), and in sentences with the negation particle *law*, only Form I of a verb can be used (example [10]). Negative or interrogative context determines the selection of Form I of the verb in examples (9) and (10), in spite of the ergative construction used in these examples.

- (9) *tsewmang* *ni?* *thil* *khaa* *?a-bat* *moo*
 Tsewmang ERG clothes TOPIC 3SG-hang/Form I Q
 'Did Tsewmang hang up the clothes?'

⁴ Word-final glottalization is often a phonological feature of Form II verbs.

- (10) tsewmang ni? thil khaa ʔa-bat law
 Tsewmang ERG clothes TOPIC 3SG-hang/Form I NEG
 ‘Tsewmang didn’t hang up the clothes.’

Thus, the distribution of Forms I and II of the *Lai* verb in monoclausal sentences⁵ seems to be as follows:

- Form I is used in negative and interrogative contexts;
- Form I is used in non-ergative contexts;
- Otherwise, in ergative affirmative constructions, Form II is used.

The form of a finite verb, if it happens to be the main verb of a sentence, determines the meaning of a clause with *rak*. When *rak* is used together with Form I of a transitive verb in a monoclausal assertoric, that is, affirmative or non-interrogative, sentence, it always indicates a change of location. The direction of motion is towards the deictic center, with some purpose in the mind of the agent. The utterances with the directional *rak* can be translated roughly as ‘X came here from some other place in order to V’. When *rak* functions as a past tense marker, the form of the verb is determined by the usual absolutive/ergative pattern of the language.

The following examples demonstrate the usage of *rak* in monoclausal assertoric sentences with Forms I and II of the different verb types. *rak* functions as an optional past tense marker which can be omitted without any change in meaning when it is followed by Form II of a verb, as in example (11), and as a directional particle which expresses motion towards the deictic center when it is followed by Form I of a verb, as in example (12).

- (11) vok ka-(rak)-tsook
 pig 1SG-PAST-buy II
 ‘I bought the pig.’
- (12) vok ka-rak-tsoo
 pig 1SG-DIR-buy I
 ‘I came from a distance to buy this pig.’

Examples (13) and (14) demonstrate that *rak* can signal change of location in its literal sense, and not only in the metaphorical sense of ‘to come to V’, i.e., ‘to happen to V’. The meaning of example (13) is ‘I want to speak to my

⁵ The Form I/II dynamics are different in multiclausal sentences, where Form II seems to be preferred in the subordinate clauses, but this topic needs further investigation.

father', but it is not necessary for the speaker to meet his or her father in order to speak to him. Even though sentence (13) could easily be interpreted in such a way that the speaker would actually be seeing the father at the moment of the conversation, it could just as well be applied to a phone conversation; whereas sentence (14) implies that the speaker has to come to the father's place to speak to him. The physical presence of the speaker during the conversation is assumed in (14), and it is also understood that at the moment of the utterance the speaker is away from the father and has to travel some distance in order to speak to him. (Note that in these examples *rak* cannot be interpreted as a past tense particle when the main clause *ka du?* 'I want' is in the present tense.)

- (13) ka-paa t^hsoʔn ka-du?
 my-father talk II 1SG-want
 'I want to speak to my father.'

- (14) ka-paa rak-t^hsoʔn ka-du?
 my father DIR-talk II 1SG-want
 'I want to come and speak to my father.'

When *rak* refers to a change of location and the verb it modifies is not the main finite verb of the sentence, the form of the verb is determined by the requirements of the ergative/absolutive pattern. As we shall see, in embedded clauses the selection of the verb form depends only on the verb's transitivity, and tense is determined in main clauses; cf. examples (15) and (16), (17) and (18). In (17) and (18) *rak* functions as a directional particle, but the verb 'to speak' is still in Form II because it is required in embedded clauses independently of *rak*.

- (15) David (hee) t^hsoʔn ka-du?
 speak II 1SG-want
 'I want to speak to David.'

- (16) David (hee) t^hsoʔn ka-rak-du?
 speak II 1SG-PAST-want
 'I wanted to speak to David.'

- (17) David khaa rak-t^hsoʔn ka-du?
 DEM DIR-speak II 1SG-want
 'I want to come and speak to David.'

- (18) David (khaa) rak-t^hso?n ka-rak-du?
 DEM DIR-speak II 1SG-PAST-want
 'I wanted to come and speak to David.'

Examples (19)-(20) show that *rak* does not change the form of a verb when used as a past tense marker. It can be used with either Form I or II depending on the ergative or absolutive nature of the sentence. In example (19) the verb is transitive because the object is overtly present in the sentence, so Form II of the verb 'to burn down' is used. The verbs in examples (20) and (21) are intransitive, so Form I is used. When the meaning is changed from present to past, as from (20) to (21), the form of the verb stays the same.

- (19) may ni? ?in khaa ?a-rak-ka?ng
 fire ERG house DEM 3SG-PAST-burn down II
 'The fire burned the house.'

- (20) ?in ?a-kaang
 house 3SG-burn down I
 'The house is burning down.'

- (21) ?in (khaa) ?a-rak-kaang
 house (DEM) 3SG -PAST-burn down I
 'The house burned down.'

There is an interesting peculiarity which can be noticed sentence-finally when *rak* is followed by a verb which has homophonous Forms I and II and that verb is the main finite verb of a sentence. For example, the verb *?ay* 'to eat' is invariant; its Forms I and II are homophonous. What one would expect is the ambiguity between the two meanings of *rak*, but it seems that the meaning of sentences (22) and (23), which are otherwise identical, depends on the tone of *?ay*: when the verb is used with the level tone as in (22), the sentence means 'I came here to eat fish'; while with the falling tone as in (23) the same utterance means 'I ate fish', with no implication of motion. Example (22) implies the speaker's physical presence at the place where the action is happening and the effort which was made to get to that place.

There are very few instances in *Lai* where there seem to be any lexical tone distinctions. Tones seem to play some role in topicalization and to distinguish a few lexical items, but these instances are very scarce and clearly marginal. In the cases with *rak*, tonal distinctions are meaningful only in assertoric

sentences, and not before negative or interrogative particles or in embedded clauses. It seems plausible that there is some kind of tone sandhi in Lai which levels out tonal or intonational distinctions non-phrase-finally, but examples like (24) and (25) where tonal distinctions still surface before the habitual marker *toon* seem to suggest restricting this process only to negative and interrogative sentences and embedded clauses. It was also suggested (Matisoff, p.c.) that the introduction of tones in Lai is an ongoing tonogenetic process.

- (22) *ngaa ka-rak-ʔay*
 fish 1SG-DIR-eat (Invariant—level tone)
 ‘I came to eat fish.’

- (23) *ngaa ka-rak-ʔây*
 fish 1SG-PAST-eat (Invariant—falling tone)
 ‘I ate fish.’

- (24) *tsaʔuk ka-rak-reel-toon*
 book 1SG-DIR-read (Invariant—level tone)-habitual
 ‘I usually come here to read books.’

- (25) *tsaʔuk ka-rak-reel-toon*
 book 1SG-PAST-read (Invariant—falling tone)-habitual
 ‘I usually read books.’

rak occupies the slot between the subject of a sentence, if it is overt, and the verb. If both the subject and the object of a sentence are overtly present, *rak* surfaces after the subject and before the object unless they are conflated as in example (26). Sentences (26) and (27) have identical meanings; the only difference is that in (26) the first singular subject and the second singular object are expressed by one morpheme, while in (27) the subject and the object are separated by *rak*:

- (26) *tsaa ka-n-rak-kuat*
 letter 1SG/SUBJ-2SG/OBJ-PAST-send II
 ‘I sent you a letter.’

- (27) *tsaa ka-rak-ʔin-kuat*
 letter 1SG/SUBJ-PAST-2SG/OBJ-send II
 ‘I sent you a letter.’

The order of *rak* and the reflexive marker is determined by the reflexivisation pattern. When reflexivity is marked on a subject, as in examples (29) and (30), the reflexive markers (*?aa* and *kaa*) precede *rak*. When *rak* or another pre-verbal particle such as *va*, *von*, *hey*, etc. is present, the reflexive marker *?ii* can be used. *?ii* marks reflexivity separately (for any person subject) as in examples (28) or (29), and it comes after *rak*. Note that forms like **ka ?ii* are ungrammatical in Haka Lai⁶ unless a pre-verbal particle surfaces between them, e.g., *ka rak ?ii*:

- (28) *ka-tsa?uk rak-?ii-ken-ding khaa phi?l-laay-law*
 my-book DIR-REFL-bring-IRR DEM forget II-FUT-NEG
 'I will not forget to bring my book (with me).'

- (29) *tsewmang khaa zaan-tiim tiang ?aa-rak-hngi?l-ri?-law*
 Tsewmang DEM midnight until 3SG/REFL-PAST-fall
 asleep II-still-NEG
 'Tsewmang didn't fall asleep until midnight.'

- (30) *zaan-tiim tiang kaa-rak-hngi?l-ri?-law*
 midnight until 1SG/REFL-PAST-fall asleep II-still-NEG
 'I didn't fall asleep until midnight.'

or

- (31) *zaan-tiim tiang ka-rak-?ii-hngi?l-ri?-law*
 midnight until 1SG-PAST-REFL-fall asleep II-still-NEG
 'I didn't fall asleep until midnight.'

4.3. The meaning of *rak*

So far, it seems that *rak* functions either as a directional or a perfective marker. It can always be omitted in the past tense situation, but it cannot be easily added to convey any kind of past situation. It is always possible to use *rak* in situations which are remote and occurred in the distant past (32), but it sounds marginal or unnecessary in sentences referring to the recent past (33).⁷

- (32) *nii kum ?a? ka-law ka-(rak)-thlo?*
 last year my-field 1SG-PAST-plow
 'I plowed my field last year.'

⁶ In Thantlaang Lai the contracted form *kaay* is used.

⁷ This example does not sound ungrammatical to the consultant, but it is marginal since it was very difficult for the consultant to decide when and how such a sentence could be uttered.

- (33) *nii-zaan ?a? ka-law ka-?rak-thlo?*
 yesterday my-field 1SG-PAST-plow
 'I plowed my field yesterday.'

Sentence (35), which can be glossed exactly the same as (34), implies that the action was completed in the more remote past. As the consultant puts it, 'the clothes have been hanging there for a long time'. The usage of *rak* shifts the point of reference from the recent or general past to the more remote past. So, it seems that the cases with *rak* represent the perfective point of view located in the past (Smith 1997). The final endpoint of the action is clearly indicated, and in (35) the sentence has a non-habitual meaning.

- (34) *thil ka-ba?*
 clothes 1SG-hang II
 'I have hung up my clothes.'

- (35) *thil ka-rak-ba?*
 clothes 1SG-past-hang II
 'I have hung up my clothes.'

The fact that *rak* is very frequently used with *khan*, a deictic marker which puts the emphasis on the remote nature of the action and, possibly, on its completeness, further illustrates the perfective nature of *rak*. The sentence in (36) is preferred with *rak* by the consultant (presumably because the state described there has a clear endpoint), which is quite unusual since *rak* is almost always optional in Lai.

- (36) *tsuu ?in ?a? khan ?uy-tsaw pakhat ?a-rak-?um*
 DEM house LOC DEM dog one 3SG-PAST-live/dwell
 'A dog lived in this house (lived for a while, but doesn't any more).'

So, in Lai *rak* is not necessary, and is sometimes marginal in recent past situations. It seems to have reference to events in the past with a natural or arbitrary endpoint. There are languages in which the 'reverse' situation seems to take place. For example, in German the use of past tense is obligatory, but future marking is not necessary in sentences which refer to the immediate future (*Morgen gehe ich ins Kino* 'I'm going to the movies tomorrow'). The same is also true of Russian: one can say *Zavtra ja idu v shkolu* which can be literally translated as 'Tomorrow I go to school', but it is marginal to use the simple present if the action is more remote, as in 'In a year I'll go to school'.

In Lai, the construction with *rak* can also occur in habitual or progressive situations which took place in the past, but ceased to exist at some time which preceded the present moment.⁸ *Rak* can be used in sentences with the progressive marker *liaw* or the habitual marker *toon*. In sentences like those in (37) and (38), the situation type in the sense of Smith (1997) is imperfective (progressive in [37] and habitual in [38]), but the viewpoint is perfective. According to Smith (1997), the perfective viewpoint focuses “a situation in its entirety, including both initial and final endpoints”. In the situations in (37) and (38) the emphasis is only on the endpoint of a generally imperfective situation.

- (37) ?a-rak-rat-liaw khaa tsa?uk ka-rak-reel-liaw
 3SG-PAST-come II-PROG DEM book 1SG-PAST-read-PROG

?a-sii

3SG-COPULA

‘When he came, I was reading a book.’

- (38) tii ka-rak-din-toon
 water 1SG-PAST-drink II-HAB
 ‘I used to drink water.’

5.0. FUTURE

5.1. Simple future and irrealis: *laay*

An event in the future can be referred to and described, but it has not happened yet, so, even though there exists a possibility of the event’s happening, sentences in the future have some kind of irrealis meaning. Such events are predicted or expected to occur at some time which follows the moment of the utterance. In Lai, any simple assertoric utterance which denotes future requires the use of the post-verbal future marker *laay*.

- (39) tu-zaan suy-mii-laam pakua ?a? ka-n-ton-laay
 night clock nine LOC 1SG-2SG-meet-FUT
 ‘I will meet you at 9 o’clock.’

- (40) falaam ?a? ka-kal-laay
 Falaam LOC 1SG-go-FUT
 ‘I will go to Falaam.’

⁸ In Spanish, simple preterite has a partly similar function: it can be used in habitual, but not progressive, situations (Nishida 1994).

tee 'at some point' adds the sense of imprecision to a statement with future reference. Sentence (41) is almost equivalent to sentence (40), except that in (41) the speaker does not have in mind any particular time when the plan to go to Falaam is announced. The particle *tee* which refers to 'some point in time' makes the statement more vague and the point of departure less important.

- (41) falaam ?a? ka-kal-tee-laay
 Falaam LOC 1SG-go-at some point-FUT
 'I'll go to Falaam at some point.'

The future marker is needed in indirect questions which denote future situations, regardless of the tense of the main clause, as in example (42). The renarrated speech also preserves the future marking.

- (42) thay-zing ?a? tsewmang khoy-kaa ?a?
 tomorrow LOC Tsewmang where LOC
 ?a-kal-laay ka-hngaal-law
 3SG-go-FUT 1SG-know-NEG
 'I don't know where Tsewmang will go tomorrow.'

5.2. *Inchoative / Imminensive: hnik, deeng, deengmaang*

In Lai, the three post-verbal particles, *hnik*, *deeng* and *deengmaang* all have approximately the same semantic force, situating the action in the immediate future. All three of them mean 'to be about to do something', or 'to be on the verge of doing something'. *Deengmaang* and *deeng* have virtually the same meaning, referring to a planned action which is about to happen (example [43]), while *hnik* denotes an unplanned action in the immediate future (example [44]). The appropriate context for sentence (43) has to include some reference to a planned or expected action. For example, if the speaker usually eats at 5 o'clock, and at the moment of speech it is 4:55, sentence (43) is the appropriate utterance, since the action is expected to happen soon.

- (43) rool ka-?ay-deengmaang-tsang
 food 1SG-eat-about to-COMPLETIVE
 'I am about to eat.'

If the action is not expected or planned, but can be inferred from the circumstances, *hnik* is used. For example, if a speaker sees somebody sitting at the table with a bowl of rice in front of him, example (44) is a completely

plausible utterance: the action is about to happen even though it was not planned or expected, but rather can be predicted from the setting.

- (44) rool ?a-?ay-hnik
 food 3SG-eat-about to
 'He is about to eat.'

Examples (45) and (46) further exemplify the difference between *hnik* and *deengmaang*. Both of these utterances can be glossed the same, but while (45) means that the child is about to be born any day, tomorrow, or in a week (the import of this statement is only that the child will be born soon, but 'indefinitely' soon), (46) signifies an immediate future meaning. According to the consultant, example (46) gives the listener the impression that the wife of a speaker is giving birth now, and the child is about to be born or is actually being born.

- (45) ka-faa ?a-tshuak-deengmaang-tsang
 my-child 3SG-to be born-about to-COMPLETIVE
- (46) ka-faa ?a-tshuak-hnik-tsang
 my-child 3SG-to be born-about to-COMPLETIVE
 'My child is about to be born.'

Since the future development of the action has to be obvious in the case of *hnik*, it can seem to refer to a more immediate future than *deengmaang* or *deeng*. Semantically all three of these particles are very close to the future marker *laay*; what differentiates the meaning of the inchoative particles and the simple future marker is that in the inchoative contexts the speaker predicts, guesses or envisions the point at which the action will happen or start happening, while the future marker is neutral with respect to the starting point of an action.

5.3. *Immediateness of action*

There are several particles in Lai, *tsoʔl*, *duak*, *tshom*, and *von*, which in various ways denote the semantics of immediate action. Even though these particles are fairly close semantically, they give fine-grained shades of meaning to the situation in question. *Tsoʔl* signifies an immediate response; *duak* brings to the utterance a sense of unexpectedness caused by an immediate action; *tshom* emphasizes immediate, unprepared and unplanned reaction or gives a

sense of something as being ‘barely enough’ for the nearest future; *von* signifies the immediate proximity of the object of an action.

5.3.1. *Immediate action: tsoʔl, duak, and tshom*

The particle *tsoʔl* signals an action which happens instantly as a response to an outside stimulus, and can be glossed as ‘immediately’ or ‘at once’. It can denote an immediate reply to a question (a possible contextual situation for example [47] is that a good student is able to answer the teacher’s question immediately), or the reaction to a request or order (example [48]).

- (47) ʔa-tshim koʔ tsoʔl
 3SG-speak able immediately
 ‘He is able to speak immediately.’

- (48) ʔa-nuu-pii niʔ rool va-tsoo ʔa-tii lee tsaang kaa
 his-wife ERG food DIR-buy 3SG-say and as soon as
 ʔin ʔa-va-tsook tsoʔl
 ADV 3SG-DIR-buy immediately
 ‘As soon as his wife told him to buy food, he went and bought it at once.’

duak, on the other hand, has a sense of unexpectedness, which *tsoʔl* lacks, and can convey the surprise caused by a sudden action. *Tsoʔl* cannot be used in example (49) to convey the intended meaning of an unexpected leave.

- (49) ʔa-thoʔ duak ʔii ʔa-kal-kaw
 3SG-stand up suddenly CONN 3SG-go-AFFIRM
 ‘He stands up suddenly (unexpectedly) and goes.’

tshom gives a picture of an action which has to be done by the agent for the immediate purpose, instantly, and without any previous preparation. It can express a reaction to something unexpected: e.g., a preacher was awakened at night and had to preach, or forgot that he had to give a sermon (example [50]); or some guests unexpectedly showed up, and the host is obliged to make food for them urgently (example [51]).

- (50) ka-pung tshim mii hii ka-tshim tshom mii
 my-sermon speak REL DEM 1SG-speak immediately
 ‘I preach my sermon as it comes (without preparation).’

- (51) rool ka-tshuan tshom mii ka-peek hnaa
 food 1SG-cook now REL 1SG-give them
 'I cook food for them who came unexpectedly.'

tshom can also convey a certain sense of immediateness as being 'barely enough'. The significance of the utterance in example (52) is that there is only enough food for the nearest future, just for one meal. The fact that food will not last longer than one meal is closely connected with the semantics of the immediate future.

- (52) rool ?ay tshom loong ka-ngay
 food eat now only 1SG-have
 'I have only as much food to eat now (immediately).'

5.3.2. Immediate directional: *von*

The pre-verbal directional particle *von* can be called proximal in the sense that it signals that the object of the action is within immediate reach, but it also conveys an aspectual meaning of the immediate or sudden nature of an action.

- (53) ?a-von-tho?ng
 3SG-DIR-hit
 'He suddenly reached and hit . . .'

Using *von* in example (54) instead of *tsoʔl* in example (48) would mean that the agent is in immediate proximity to the goal (the husband is in immediate proximity to the shop where he goes to buy food), and also that the husband's action would have to be interpreted as instantaneous. *Von* signifies immediateness of action in the sense that something is immediately reachable for the purposes of that action.

- (54) ?a-nuu-pii ni? rool va-tsoo ?a-tii lee
 his-wife ERG food DIR-buy 3SG-say and

 tsaang kaa ?in ?a-von-tsook
 as soon as ADV 3SG-DIR-buy
 'As soon as his wife told him to buy food, he went and bought it immediately.'

6.0. PERFECTIVE AND SIMILAR SENSES

I use the term 'perfective' here in the sense of Comrie (1976) when it contrasts with 'imperfective', and denotes the situation "viewed in its entirety, without regard to internal temporal constituency" or its relevance to the present moment. The basic property of a perfective situation, according to Smith (1997) is that such a situation is "closed informationally", meaning that the perfective time span consists of the situation as a whole.

6.1. *tsang*: *Completive perfective*

6.1.1. *Origin*

tsang is a perfective marker which seems clearly to be grammaticalized from a full verb. In Lai, there is still a full verb *tsang* 'to happen; to become' (example [55]). The verb 'to become' is a very common cross-linguistic source for perfectives (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994).

- (55) *zay-da?* *?a-tsang?*
 what 3SG-happen
 'What happened?'

Sentence (56) is an example of the co-occurrence of the verb *tsang* and the grammaticalized perfective marker *tsang* in the same utterance, in which becoming something (a fish, in this case) is completed.

- (56) *ngaa* *?a?* *?a-tsang* *tsang*
 fish LOC 3SG-become PERF
 'He had become a fish.'

6.1.2. *The meaning of tsang*

tsang signals a temporally bounded action which is finished or thoroughly completed by the moment of speech. It presents the situation as a whole, without either emphasizing its beginning or endpoint or concentrating on a particular part or internal instance of a situation (example [57]). Lai distinguishes simple perfective which can be signaled by *rak*, and completive perfective which is denoted by *tsang*.

- (57) *ka-rool* *ka-?ay* *tsang*
 1SG-food 1SG-eat PERF
 'I have eaten my food.' = 'I finished my food.'

In example (58), *tsang* signifies a certain accomplishment. The semantics of accomplishment is roughly equivalent to the semantics of completive which allows for the reading of the utterance in (58): the completion of 'being able to do something' is interpreted as the ability to do so.

- (58) *tsaa na-reel khaw tsang moo, hngak-tshia paa?*
 letter 2SG-read able PERF Q child male
 'Can you read yet / already, little boy?'

In its completive sense, which can be roughly rendered into English by the word 'finished', *tsang* occurs only with non-stative verbs. If *tsang* is used with a stative verb like *know* (example [59]), it retains its completive meaning, but its semantics is in a way 'reversed': instead of the expected 'I finished knowing' (using the inherently telic situation in [57] as an example), the semantics of (59) is derived from the knowledge of the fact that the completion of the action denoted by the verb 'to know' pragmatically means 'knowing'.

- (59) *ma hii ka-thay tsang*
 this 1SG-know PERF
 'I know it now.'

6.1.3. Pluperfect: *rak tsang*

The combination of past/perfective *rak* and completive *tsang* denotes the pluperfect sense of an action, referring to a point in time in the past which happens to be before some other past reference.

- (60) *ka-rool ka-rak-ʔay tsang*
 1SG-food 1SG-PAST-eat PERF
 'I had eaten my food.'

- (61) *na-rat liaw-ʔa? khan, thil ka-rak-ba? tsang*
 2SG-come when DEM clothes 1SG-PAST-hang PERF
 'When you came, I had finished hanging my clothes already.'

6.1.4. Immediate future: *tsang laay*

The combination of *laay* and *tsang* gives the sentence the meaning of intention in the immediate future (example [62]). The difference between this immediate future expressed perfectly and the immediate future expressed by the particles *hnik* and *deengmaang* (see section 5.2) is that of the strong intention expressed by the former (62).

- (62) falaam ?a? ka-kal-tsang-laay
 Falaam LOC 1SG-go-PERF-FUT
 'I am going to Falaam now.'

6.1.5. *Future perfect: rak tsang laay*

The combination of the pluperfect and future expresses the future perfect situation (example [63]), in which the speaker asserts that some action is going to be completed in the future before some other action. The general time reference of (63) is future, but the order of the events remains as specified by the co-occurrence of *rak* and *tsang*.

- (63) na-rat tik-?a? tsun, rool ka-rak-?ay-di?-tsang-laay
 2SG-come when TOP food 1SG-PAST-eat-EXH-PERF-FUT
 'When you come, I will have eaten my food.'

6.2. *Completive exhaustive: di?*

di? is a completive exhaustive marker. Lai distinguishes between the completion (rendered by *tsang*) and the exhaustive completion of an action. Exhaustiveness is very close to perfectivity semantically, as perfectivity frequently indicates a completed action or the achievement of the final goal or the reaching of a final point in a particular situation. By its very nature, *di?* can only be used when the semantics of quantity is present in the verb's meaning. The exhaustive nature of *di?* refers either to the object of a transitive verb (example [64]) or the subject of an intransitive (example [65]). When the verb is transitive, *di?* always refers to the object, but it does not transitivize intransitive verbs as many other particles do.⁹

- (64) ka-rool ka-?ay di?
 1SG-food 1SG-eat EXH
 'I ate all my food.' = 'I finished my food.'

- (65) ?a-paa ?in tual khat khan ?an-tshuak
 father house front yard full DEM 3PL-come out

 di? ?an-tii
 EXH 3PL-say
 'They say that her father's house's front yard was full: all of them came.'

⁹ See Peterson, next issue.

Quite often, *di?* is used together with the perfective *tsang* to emphasize that an action has been exhaustively completed.

- (66) ka-rool ka-ʔay di? tsang
 1SG-food 1SG-eat EXH PERF
 'I had finished all my food.'

di? seems to be grammaticalized from the verb *di?* 'to finish' which is still a full verb in Lai:

- (67) ka-thil-tii-khoʔ-naak hii ʔa-di?
 1SG-thing-do-able-NOMLZR DEM 3SG-finish

 ʔa-dong-khaw-mi ʔa-sii
 3SG-end-able-REL 3SG-COP
 '... my ability to do things will finish, it will end.'

7.0. STATE: POINTS OF REFERENCE WITHIN A TIME FRAME

It is possible in Lai to express different points in an action using the post-verbal particles *laay* and *kaa*. The specific action points can be referred to as something which is about to begin, has just begun, is about to end, or has just ended. So, four specific time referential points can be specified about a dynamic verbal action, two 'inside' the action and two 'outside' of it.

Without interacting with the completive *di?*, *laay* and *kaa* can be represented as follows according to their positioning of the time reference in the verbal action:

kaa ---- V ---- *laay*
 'just' 'about to'

All the situations described above are punctual, since they make reference not to the action as a whole, but to a particular point in time relative to this action. The fact that the use of the copula is required in such utterances gives additional evidence that, rather than concentrating on the action, the emphasis is on the state of the agent or action at the point in time which is being referred to.

kaa signifies the beginning point of an action when something has just occurred and is in process at the moment, so the speaker is situated inside the frame of the verbal action, and also at some particular point of it. *bak*, which means roughly 'at this point', adds a sense of precision to the utterance, signaling the exact moment when something is about to happen.

- (68) ka-ʔay kaa (bak) ʔa-sii
 1SG-eat just at this point 3SG-COPULA
 'I just started eating.'

It is also possible to use *diʔ* when the action has just ended, but the emphasis is still not on the action itself or its completion, but rather on the exact point of reference. The combination of *diʔ* and *kaa* gives the situation an additional sense of completeness. Comrie (1976) calls such utterances as (69) and (70) "perfect of recent past".

- (69) ka-hooy-paa ka-boʔm diʔ (bak) ʔa-sii
 my-friend 1SG-help EXH at this point 3SG-COPULA
 'I just finished helping my friend.'

- (70) ka-ʔay diʔ kaa (bak) ʔa-sii
 1SG-eat EXH just at this point 3SG-COPULA
 'I just finished eating.'

laay and *hnik* refer to specific points in time just outside of the temporal domain of a verbal action. The future/irrealis marker *laay* refers to a state when the action is about to begin:

- (71) ka-ʔay-laay (bak) ʔa-sii
 1SG-eat-FUT at this point 3SG-COPULA
 'I am about to start eating.'

If *hnik* is used instead of *laay*, as in example (72), the meaning of the sentence will be slightly changed. Sentence (71) signals that the eating is about to begin, but does not concentrate on the immediateness of the action (for example, the dinner might start in ten minutes or so), while (72) implies that the speaker has the food practically in his or her mouth.

- (72) ka-ʔay hnik (bak) ʔa-sii
 1SG-eat IMM-FUT at this point 3SG-COPULA
 'I am about to start eating.'

diʔ, which usually gives the situation the sense of completeness, makes it possible to refer to the state which is closer to the end of the action rather than to

(73) ka-ʔay diʔ hnik / laay bak
 1SG-eat-FUT COMP IMM-FUT / FUT at this point

 ʔa-sii
 3SG-COPULA
 'I am about to finish eating.'

di? kaa?di? ----- di? hnik / laay bak ----- kaa ----- laay (bak) / hnik (bak)

just finished — about to finish — just started — about to start
[<----- *action* ----->]

Table 2. Lai aspectual particles and the unfolding of an action.

8.0. PRIORITY: ka?n

There is presumably some kind of competition in example (74). The meaning either has to be available from the context or constructed by the listener.

- (74) ka-kal kaʔn
1SG-go before
'I go before him.'

The situation in example (75) is more transparent; presumably there was some competition as to who would get the job, and the agent got it 'before' the speaker. It is irrelevant in this case if the speaker ever got a job; what is important is how the contention is resolved.

- (75) rian ?a-ka-hmu? ka?n
 work 3SG-1SG-see / get before
 'He got the job before me.'

The situation in (76) is closely connected to cultural norms. This sentence could be uttered only in the situation when it is assumed and culturally reinforced that the older brother has to get married before the younger one.

- (76) ka-naw-paa ni? nuu-pii ?a-ka-?hiit ka?n
 my-younger brother ERG wife 3SG-1SG-marry before
 'My younger brother got married before me.'

9.0. IMPERFECTIVE AND SIMILAR SENSES

9.1. *Habitual: toon*

Comrie (1976) defines habitual meaning as imperfective, leaving continuousness to be defined negatively as imperfectivity which is not habitual. Habitual describes a situation which is characteristic of an extended period of time, which makes it different from iterativity. Even though habitual and iterative meanings have many common properties, it is misleading to define one in terms of the other. The main distinction between habitual and iterative meanings is that the habitual situations are the ones which are "customarily repeated on different occasions" (Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 1994), while iterative situations need not involve a characteristic feature or property of a period of time when the action in question takes place; an iterative situation can as well be an unplanned event or an action which happened a number of times in a row on a single occasion. In Lai, the post-verbal habitual particle *toon* denotes habitual meaning both in the past and in the present (example [77]).

- (77) falaam ?a? ka-kal-toon
 Falaam LOC 1SG-go-HAB
 'I usually go to Falaam / used to go to Falaam.'

In accordance with our previous discussion, *rak* is optional in sentence (78), but if is present and does not function as a directional marker, the only

possible interpretation of (78) is that the habitual action used to happen in the past.

- (78) *falaam* *ʔaʔ* *ka-rak-kal-toon*
Falaam *LOC* *1SG-PAST-go-HAB*
 'I used to go to Falaam.'

toon cannot be used with the future/irrealis *laay* to express an action in the future.

- (79) *tsewmang* *niʔ* *maʔ* *bia* *hii* *ʔa-tshim*
Tsewmang *ERG* *DEM* *word* *DEM* *3SG-say*

bal / **toon* *laay* *law*
EXP / **HAB* *FUT* *NEG*
 'Tsewmang could not say this.' = 'Tsewmang will not say this.'

However, it can be used together with *laay*, if the affirmative particle *kaw* is present. In this case, the sentence as a whole expresses uncertain probability, rather than future.

- (80) *falaam* *ʔaʔ* *ʔa-kal* *toon* *kaw* *laay*
Falaam *LOC* *3SG-go* *HAB* *AFFIRM* *FUT*
 'He might usually go to Falaam.'

9.2. *Experiential: bal*

The experiential marker *bal* refers to a particular experience without concentrating on the duration of an action, its repetitive or habitual nature. The example in (81) provides the listener with the information that the speaker has had the experience of going to Falaam, but it is not important if they visited it once or many times, for a short period of time or for longer duration.

- (81) *falaam* *ʔaʔ* *ka-kal-bal*
Falaam *LOC* *1SG-go-EXP*
 'I had the experience of going to Falaam.'

The experiential *bal* (example [81]) in place of *toon* (example [80]) gives the utterance the sense of certainty. In both (80) and (82) the speaker does not know if the event had really happened because they did not witness it, but in the case of (82) they have some non-controversial or irrefutable evidence that the

event in question did really happen. The sentence in (82) has inferential meaning without any sense of uncertainty.

- (82) falaam ?a? ?a-kal bal kaw laay
 Falaam LOC 3SG-go HAB AFFIRM FUT
 ‘He must have had the experience of going to Falaam.’

In some cases, the experiential or the habitual marker can be used interchangeably. Utterances (83a) and (83b) are almost equivalent, and the difference between them is quite subtle. If *toon* is used as in (83a), the sentence implies that the cat lived in the house for some time. The time span of an action is much shorter in (83b). The consultant notes that in (83b) the sentence could mean that the cat stayed in the house just for one day, which is an impossible interpretation for (83a).

- (83) falaam ?a? ka-rak-kal ?ii, ?in pakhat
 Falaam LOC 1SG-PAST-go CONN house one
 ka-rak-hmu?;
 1SG-PAST-see
 ‘I went to Falaam, and I saw a house . . .’

- (83a) ma? ?in ?a? tsun ma? tshii-zo? hii
 DEM house LOC DEM DEM cat DEM
 ?a-rak-?um toon
 3SG-PAST-live HAB

- (83b) ma? ?in ?a? tsun ma? tshii-zo? hii
 DEM house LOC DEM DEM cat DEM
 ?a-rak-?um bal
 3SG-PAST-live EXP

‘and this cat used to live in this house (but it doesn’t live there any more).’

9.3. *Immanent:* be?

For the lack of a better term I am going to call the particle *be?* ‘immanent’. It can almost always be translated as ‘remained’ or ‘stayed’. The consultant

provided the first gloss for example (84) as ‘He disappeared’, and when he was asked to clarify the meaning of a rather peculiar ‘disappearance’ particle, he explained that the agent went somewhere from the place where the speaker was at the moment of the utterance, never came back, and presumably is still there.

(84) ʔa-kal-beʔ

3SG-go-IMM

‘He went there and stayed (never came back).’

The verb *beʔ* ‘to stick’ seems to be the source of the ‘immanent’ particle since they have identical shape and similar semantics, and we have already established that Lai aspectual particles tend to become grammaticalized from full verbs.

(85) ʔa-beʔ

3SG-stick

‘It sticks.’

beʔ is often used with the verb *taang* ‘to remain’, emphasizing the result of the verbal action, as in example (86).

(86) paabel muy lee pum-rua ʔaʔ tsun ʔa-ʔar
 Paabel features and body LOC TOP 3SG-surprised

vee hoy ʔii, ʔiin khaw law
 also REP-REGRET CONN return able NEG

ʔin ʔa-taang beʔ
 ADVZR 3SG-remain IMM

‘She was also surprised by Paabel’s features and body, and she was not able to return home and stayed.’

beʔ can be used with habitual *toon* (example [87]) to mean that the situation of remaining somewhere happened several times,

(87) ʔa-tlaaw beʔ toon
 3SG-disappear IMM HAB

‘He disappeared several times.’

or with experiential *bal* (example [88]),

- (88) ?a-tlaaw be? bal
 3SG-disappear IMM EXP
 ‘He had the experience of disappearing.’

or with perfective *tsang* (example [89]) to signal the change of state in which the ‘disappearing’ resulted,

- (89) ?a-tlaaw be? tsang
 3SG-disappear IMM PERF
 ‘He disappeared now.’

or with future *laay* (example [90]):

- (90) ka-tlaaw be? laay
 1SG-disappear IMM FUT
 ‘I’ll go and remain there.’

9.4. *Progressive: liaw*

Progressive signifies an action which is ongoing relative to the time of reference. The progressive marker in Lai is a post-verbal particle *liaw*:

- (91) ka-?ay-liaw
 1SG-eat-PROG
 ‘I am eating.’
- (92) ?a-law ?a? tsewmang rian ?a-ʈuan-liaw
 3SG-field LOC Tsewmang work 3SG-do-PROG
 ‘Tsewmang is working in his field now.’

The progressive marker can be used with present (example [93]) or past (example [94]), but it cannot be used with the future marker *laay*.

- (93) tsewmang rian ?a-ʈuan-liaw na-hmuu moo?
 Tsewmang work 3SG-do-PROG 2SG-see Q
 ‘Do you see Tsewmang working in his field?’
- (94) tsewmang rian ?a-rak-ʈuan-liaw na-hmuu moo?
 Tsewmang work 3SG-do-PROG 2SG-see Q
 ‘Did you see Tsewmang working in his field?’

The example in (95) was judged ungrammatical by the consultant. The simple future marker *laay* seems to be restricted to non-progressive situations, and that restriction renders (95) ungrammatical.

- (95) *ka-kal liaw laay
 1SG-go PROG FUT
 *'I will be going.'

When asked for the approximate translation of the English sentence in (95), the consultant offered example (96), which can also mean 'I'll go at some point' (see section 5.1). The semantics of future progressive is inherently vague, which is the possible source of the progressive interpretation in this case.

- (96) ka-kal tee laay
 1SG-go at some point FUT
 'I will be going.'

It has been noticed that in many languages progressive cannot be used with stative verbs. The same holds for Lai. Sentence (97) is ungrammatical because of the co-occurrence of the stative verb 'to understand' and the progressive marker.

- (97) ka-tha?y tshiam *liaw
 1SG-understand say PROG
 'I understand you.'

Even though *liaw* cannot be used with stative verbs, it can be used in punctual utterances which indicate the exact time point of the action, and which also emphasize the progressive nature of it (note that the first *liaw* in (example [98]) is not a progressive marker but a part of the adverbial construction *liaw ?a?* meaning 'when').

- (98) nii huu ?a-rat liaw ?a? khan tsewmang
 Ni Hu 3SG-come when TOP Tsewmang

 khaa ?aar-saa ?a-tsook liaw ?a-sii
 DEM chicken 3SG-buy PROG 3SG-copula

'Tsewmang was buying a chicken when Ni Hu came.'

9.5. 'Still': *ri?*

ri? means that the action of the predicate is in process contrary to expectations. It is very close to the progressive *liaw* semantically. The difference between examples (99) and (100) is that while example (99) is an assertion about the current action, example (100) conveys surprise or disbelief, because the action is happening contrary to the speaker's expectations (Tsewmang is still eating even though he was supposed to have finished his meal a long time ago).

- (99) tsewmang rool ?a-?ay liaw
 Tsewmang food 3SG-eat PROG
 'Tsewmang is eating.'

- (100) tsewmang rool ?a-?ay ri? hee
 Tsewmang food 3SG-eat still EXCL
 'Tsewmang is still eating!'

The negation of a sentence with *ri?* signals the fact that the action has not been accomplished yet. *ri? law* refers to the situation as a whole without specifying its beginning or its endpoint. Example (101) can be interpreted as a statement, with the implied or stated context as, e.g., in (example [102]).

- (101) tsewmang rool ?ay ri? law
 Tsewmang food eat still NEG
 'Tsewmang has not eaten yet.'

- (102) tsewmang rool ?ay ri? law, bu?
 Tsewmang food eat still NEG cooked rice

 thoong paal ?in ta?n piak
 little leave-BEN
 'Leave Tsewmang some rice; he has not eaten yet.'

9.6. *Continuative*

9.6.1. *Continuative: peng*

According to the definition offered in Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca (1994), continuative "includes progressive meaning—that a dynamic situation is ongoing—and additionally specifies that the agent of the action is deliberately keeping the action going".

- (103) ?uy-tsaw ni? kan-rool ?a-?ay peng
 dog ERG 1PL-food 3SG-eat CONT
 'The dog kept eating all our food.'

peng can be used in the future time frame, as in example (104).

- (104) na-ka-kal-taak mii khaa kaa-?uay
 2SG-1SG-go-abandon REL DEM 1SG/REFL-deflate

 pii peng kaw laay
 COMIT CONT AFFIRM FUT
 'Your abandoning me will always deflate me.'

9.6.2. *Continuative effort: leen*

leen is very similar to *peng* in the sense that the action is dynamic, ongoing, and deliberately kept going by the agent, but it additionally specifies the strenuous effort that is made by the agent in order to continue the action.

- (105) ?a-?uan leen
 3SG-work CONT
 'He worked continuously with great effort.'

9.7. *Continuous*

The "continuous" aspect is closely related semantically to both continuative and progressive, except it has a more general meaning. It does not imply any deliberate effort by an agent, and can be used with both dynamic and stative predicates. It is unclear whether continuous markers which are described in this section should be called particles or adverbs. This cannot be determined from their syntactic or semantic properties, but the fact that all lexical items in question are formed by partial reduplication (which is not an uncommon source for such markers) is suggestive. The other lexical items in Lai which are formed through reduplication or partial reduplication are adverbs (e.g., *ngay-ngay* 'very') or psycho-collocations. Further study is needed to answer this question satisfactorily.

*leengmang*¹⁰ can mean roughly 'several times', 'continuously', or 'always', depending on the context. (The consultant feels that *zungzaal* is almost or completely identical to *leengmaang*.)

¹⁰ Phonetically, the vowels in *leengmaang* are either both long or both short. This seems to be a case of free variation.

(106) ʔa-kal-leengmaang

3SG-go-CONT

‘He goes there continuously.’

leengmaang can indicate either a general statement about a situation which happens always (example [107]) or often (example [108]).

(107) ʔuy-tsaw niʔ kan-rool ʔa-ʔay leengmaang

dog ERG 1PL-food 3SG-eat CONT

‘The dog always eats our food.’

(108) ʔhaal-tsaan ʔaʔ haka ʔaʔ ka-kal leengmaang

spring LOC Haka LOC 1SG-go CONT

‘I often go to Haka in spring.’

It may also signal continuity of action (example [109]).

(109) ziaʔ tenglam, maʔ-tii-tsun khan hnii lee

why Tenglam in this way DEM sarong and

ka-ʔaan-kii tsuu na-ʔhiit tshiʔ diʔ lengmang

1SG-shirt DEM 2SG-sew forcefully EXH CONT

kaw ʔee tiaʔ ʔa-tii

AFFIRM INTERJ QUOT 3SG-say

‘“Tenglam, why are you (forcefully and continuously) sewing together my shirt and sarong?” she said.’

leengmaang can also denote a series of separable events, as in examples (110) and (111).

(110) ʔa-rak-ka-kal-leeng leengmaang

3SG-PAST-1SG-go-visit CONT

‘He visited me several times.’

(111) maʔ ʔuy-tsaw niʔ hin ʔa-ka-seʔ leengmaang

DEM dog ERG DEM 3SG-1SG-bite CONT

‘This dog bit me several times.’

The difference between *leen* and *leengmaang* can be rather subtle in some situations. By using *leengmaang* rather than *leen* in the situation in (112), the speaker involves him- or herself more in the narrative:

- (112) falaam ?a? ka-rak-kal ?ii, ?in pakhat
 Falaam LOC 1SG-PAST-go CONN house one
- ka-rak-hmu?; ma? ?in ?a? tsun ma? tshii-zo?
 1SG-PAST-see DEM house LOC DEM DEM cat
- hii ?a-rak-?um leengmaang / leen
 DEM 1SG-PAST-live CONTINUOUS / CONTINUATIVE (with effort)
- 'I went to Falaam, and I saw a house; and this cat used to live in this house (but it doesn't live there any more).'

leengmaang emphasizes the fact that the cat lived in the house continuously, and in addition, according to the consultant's judgment, the action is described as if the starting point of it coincided with the moment when the speaker saw the cat. The use of *leen* puts the emphasis on the present moment. With *leen*, it is more important that the speaker can imagine the cat at the moment of the utterance and can almost see it in the process of narration, as if that cat is living in the house at the moment of narration.

9.8. Continuous effort in vain: seek

seek is a particle which signals the great effort and continuity, or repetitiveness, of an action, which does not result in any accomplishment: the effort made by the agent is in vain. I would not want to classify *seek* as continuative since the agent does not have to keep the action going deliberately, and he or she is not necessarily aware of the fruitlessness of their efforts. The situation is presented from the speaker's point of view, and the evaluation is made solely by the speaker.

- (113) ?a-tuan seek
 3SG-work CONT-in vain
- 'He worked continuously with great effort (in vain).'

If the speaker is different from the agent, the failure of the action is evident to the speaker, but it is not necessarily obvious to the agent; if the speaker and the agent are the same person, than *seek* can be used to show that the agent is aware of his or her failure.

- (114) na-zii pakhat tshung kaa-leem seek
 hour one within 1SG/REFL-persuade CONT-in vain
 'I tried to persuade him for an hour (in vain).'

Very often, *seek* is used together with *leen* to denote a fruitless action which is deliberately kept going by the agent.

- (115) ka-thoon seek leen naan, ?aa-thoon law
 1SG-push CONT-VAIN.EFF CONT.EFF 3SG-REFL-move NEG
 'I pushed it several times, but it didn't move.'

9.9. Repeated 'regretative': *hoy*

The particle *hoy* emphasizes the repeatedness of an unsuccessful action or event. As opposed to *seek* (see section 9.8), the judgment is not questioned, and the point of view of the speaker does not play any role. *hoy* seems to be connected with past action, since it implies that the event in question had already happened more than once.

- (116) tsewmang ni? ?a-bu? ?a-?ut-ter
 Tsewmang ERG 3SG-cooked rice 3SG-burn-CAUS

hoy
 REPET-REGRET
 'Tsewmang burned his rice again.'

- (117) ?a-sung hoy
 3SG-fail REPET-REGRET
 'He failed again.'

9.10. Iterative: *tsua?ma?*

Iteratives or repetitives describe 'an event that is repeated on a particular occasion. The notion of iteration is particularly relevant to telic predicates—those that have a "well-defined end point" (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994). Iteratives signal that the action was repeated on a single occasion (the consultant often suggested the gloss 'now' for *tsua?ma?*), as opposed to habitual which means that the repetitions occurred on different occasions.

- (118) ?uy-tsaw ni? kan-rool ?a-?ay tsua?ma?
 dog ERG 1PL-food 3SG-eat ITER
 'The dog keeps eating our food.'

9.11. 'Again': *ṭhaan*

ṭhaan is best translated as 'again', denoting the repeated nature of an action as generally as possible without emphasizing intention, regret, or the speaker's attitude towards the agent's action.

- (119) *ʔa-kal hnik ṭhaan*
 3SG-go IMM again
 'He is going to go again.'

9.12. *Durative: taa*

taa is a durative marker, which can mean that the action was happening temporarily or for a period of time.¹¹ When *taa* is used, the destination or direction of the action has to be specified overtly. It is not enough for the direction to be encoded in a verb (as in cases of 'come' and 'go'). All the instances of the usage of *taa* have either an overt directional particle as in (120) or (121), a destination specification as in example (122), or both as in example (123).

- (120) *ʔa-va-kal taa*
 3SG-DIR-go DUR
 'He goes there temporarily.'
- (121) *ʔa-rak-kal taa*
 3SG-DIR-go DUR
 'He came here for a while.'
- (122) *ʔin-ʔaʔ ʔa-kal taa*
 house-LOC 3SG-go DUR
 'He went home for a while.'
- (123) *rool-ʔaʔ ʔa-va-ʔay taa*
 food-LOC 3SG-DIR-eat DUR
 'He went there and ate.'

Of the two following examples, example (124) is ungrammatical since it has no destination or direction specification, while example (125) is an acceptable sentence since direction is overtly specified by the directional particle *va*.

¹¹ The historical origin of *taa* seems to be Proto-Tibeto-Burman **s-ta* 'put, place' (cf. Lahu *tā* 'DURATIVE'), as suggested by Matisoff (p.c.).

- (124) *ʔa-zoo taa
 3SG-sick DUR

- (125) ʔa-va-zoo taa
 3SG-DIR-sick DUR
 'He was sick there for a while.'

10.0. SUBORDINATE CONJUNCTIONS OF TIME

A number of forms which function as aspectual particles post-verbally can denote both spatial and temporal location as set adverbial expressions. These adverbials are used as subordinate conjunctions of time when followed by the locative postpositions *ʔa?* or *ʔin*.

The particle *liaw*, which post-verbally functions as a progressive marker, when followed by the locative *ʔa?* forms a set expression meaning 'when' or 'while' (example [126]). Progressive semantics is compatible with the semantics of the temporal adverbial 'when', which makes me suspect that *liaw* in the *liaw ʔa?* construction and progressive *liaw* are basically the same particle.

- (126) khii ram khii kan hnu-lay kum hni?
 DEM place DEM 1PL back year two

 liaw ʔa?, kan-tlaak
 when 1PL-settle
 'We settled that place two years ago.'

liaw ʔa? can be used as a set expression to begin stories; the consultant tends to translate it as the English 'once upon a time'. Example (127) is a typical beginning of a Lai fairy tale in which the opening phrase *ʔa-hlaan liaw pii ʔa?* sets the environment for the narrated past.

- (127) ʔa-hlaan liaw pii ʔa? tsongtee khua ʔan
 3SG-before PROG LOC Tsongtee village 3PL

 tii mii ʔa? khan ʔa-thaa ʔa-thuu ngay mii
 call REL LOC TOP 3SG-nerve 3SG-stink very REL

 tlang-vaal paa pakhat ʔa-ʔum ʔii zay
 bachelor male one 3SG-exist CONN any₁

'Once upon a time, in a village called Tsongtee, there lived a very lazy bachelor who didn't want to do any work (didn't have the experience).'

(128) ka-ʔay kaa ʔaʔ nii huu ʔa-(rak)-raa
1SG-eat 'just started' TEMP-LOC Ni Hu 3SG-(PAST)-come
'I (had) just started eating when Ni Hu came by.'

(129) ?a-tuu tsew ?a? ?a-phaan
 now 3SG-arrive
 ‘He was supposed to come earlier, but he just arrived.’

(130) ka-kal tshung ʔa? / kar ʔa? ʔa-thlii
1SG-go during 3SG-run away
'While I was going, he ran away.'

(131) ?a-tshim buu ?in / pa ?in, ?a-tial
3SG-speak while 3SG-write
'While he speaks, he writes.'

11.0. POSITION CLASSES, ORDERING AND THE COMPATIBILITY OF POST-VERBAL PARTICLES

The ordering of Lai post-verbal particles is of special interest. There are three issues in the particles' ordering which I am going to consider briefly in this paper, even though this topic requires much more attention than I am able to give to it at the present moment. First, there are certain particles which are incompatible with one another mainly for semantic reasons (as, for example, progressive and habitual). Second, certain particles have fixed or partially fixed order within the post-verbal particle group, as I am going to call it; and third, for some particles the relative order is not important, so they can be interchanged with no change of meaning.

The following is a table of position classes in Lai as determined so far (Table 3). This topic requires much more detailed investigation, and only some preliminary results and partial orderings have been worked out.¹²

				<i>Affirmative</i>	<i>Perfective</i>	<i>Future</i>
di?	be?	bal	toon	kaw	tsang	laay
	kaa	deengmaang	liaw			
	hnik	deng	leen			
	seek		tsua?ma?			
			bak			
			lengmang			
			ṭhaan			

Table 3. *Position classes in Lai (so far determined).*

Not all of the sequences implied by the table actually exist. I have attempted to present some of the problematic cases above, and below I will give a brief overview of certain facts which were not included in the typology of Lai Chin aspect presented in this paper.

11.1. *Some notes on the compatibility of the aspectual particles*

Progressive *liaw* cannot be used with habitual *toon* or future *laay* (see section 9.4 for the possible progressive future) unless the affirmative particle *kaw* is present. The future meaning of *laay* is changed to epistemic when it is used with *kaw*. The example in (132) is not a prediction of some future action, but rather a strong epistemic statement. As far as the speaker is concerned, the action must undoubtedly be in process at the moment of speech.

¹² Since the negation particle *law* is not aspectual, it is not included in this table. It always occurs after the tense/aspect particles, as does the question particle *moo* which is always the very last particle in a sentence.

- (132) ?a-kal liaw kaw laay
 3SG-go PROG AFFIRM FUT
 'He must be going now' (= 'He must be on his way.')

As discussed in section 9.1, habitual *toon* (and also progressive *liaw*) cannot be used with the future/irrealis *laay* to express an action in the future, but if the affirmative particle *kaw* is present, the sentence as a whole expresses uncertain probability, rather than future:

- (133) falaam ?a? ?a-kal toon kaw laay
 Falaam LOC 3SG-go HAB AFFIRM FUT
 'He might usually go to Falaam.'

toon is also incompatible with the experiential *bal* unless the affirmative *kaw* (example [134]) or the irrealis *laay* (example [135]) is present.

- (134) ?a-tshim bal toon kaw
 3SG-say EXP HAB AFFIRM
 'He surely used to have the experience of saying it several times.'
- (135) ?a-tshim bal toon laay
 3SG-say EXP HAB FUT
 'He must have said it several times.'

The difference between examples (134) and (135) is that in (134) the speaker is undoubtedly sure that the information he or she is giving is correct, but in (135) the statement is no more than an assumption, even though presented rather forcefully.

The meanings of *kaw* and *laay* can be summarized as follows:

kaw	'definitely V'
laay	'probably V'
kaw laay	'definitely did V' / 'probably will V'

11.2. Some notes on the relative positioning of the post-verbal particles

It seems to me that the exhaustive *di?* is a particle which is more closely bound to the verb than the others, since it is always the innermost in the post-verbal particle group, and the other particles cannot occur between *di?* and the

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