Imperfective Markers in Thai:
An Analysis of *kamlaŋ* and *yùu* in Natural Spoken Discourse

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I. Introduction

While tense is the relation of a given situation (an event, a state or a process) to a defined reference point, usually the time of speech, aspect refers to "the internal temporal constituency of a situation" (Comrie 1976:3), i.e., the internal nature of an event viewed by the speaker. For example, these two sentences, *John ran* and *John was running*, are both in the past tense; what distinguishes them is aspect.

Interpreted aspectual meaning comes from two main sources, grammatical aspect which comes from grammatical morphemes, and inherent lexical aspect of the verb. In this study, two Thai grammatical aspectual markers, *kamlaŋ* and *yùu* were examined.

II. Grammatical Aspect

Two main aspectual categories that are clearly distinguished are perfective and imperfective. Perfective views a situation as a whole, "without regard to internal temporal constituency" (Comrie 1976: 12). On the other hand, imperfective "views an event from within, without explicit beginning or end" (Andersen 1990b: 7). Imperfective has general aspectual meaning that includes habitual, i.e., a typical event or state, as well as progressive. While progressive has more specific aspectual meaning, with a limited and temporary duration, imperfective involves more extended temporal duration, and can be used for both stative and dynamic events.

III. Diachronic Development of Imperfectivity

The most typical source of progressive markers is locative expressions meaning "to be located in or at an activity." Bybee, Perkins, & Pagliuca (1994) predict that the progressive occurs early in the process of development, and then evolves into the more general meanings. Figure 1 shows the path of development of imperfective aspect, which may eventually develop into present.

Figure 1
Diachronic Development of Locative into Imperfective Markers
(Bybee, Perkins, & Pagliuca 1994)

Locative
↓
Progressive
↓
Continuous
↓
Imperfective
↓
Present
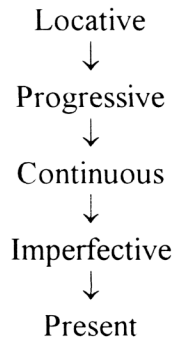
The lexical meaning of locative is gradually lost due to the shift from locative meaning to temporal meaning. As the locative meaning weakens while the temporal meaning becomes more stabilized, the meaning of the progressive aspect eventually arises. At this stage of development, the progressive is restricted to dynamic verbs and predicates. Later on, its grammatical meaning becomes more general, and the characteristic of a time period is extended. It develops from progressive to continuous, which is no longer limited to dynamic verbs but can be used with stative verbs and predicates, according to Comrie (1976). Then, the aspectual marker develops into imperfective, and possibly present. Since the development of aspectual markers is a gradual process, it is

possible to find them in various stages of development, marking more than one aspect in any language at any particular time.

IV. Research Rationale

Unfortunately, most studies, if not all, in the area of Thai tense, mood and aspect have been conducted on the sentential level and used invented sentences as examples, instead of the discourse-pragmatic level and using natural spoken data. Much of the literature does not try to distinguish the aspectual meanings of *kamlaŋ* and *yùu*.

It is true that in some contexts, these two aspectual markers convey the same meaning, i.e., progressive aspect. However, an aspectual marker that has been claimed to have a particular meaning can actually convey other related aspects, depending on the discourse context. The original meaning and grammatical development of an aspectual marker may have an influence on the distribution of its functions and meanings. *Kamlaŋ* is primarily used as a noun meaning 'power, strength, energy,' for example, *kamlaŋ cay* in (1):

(1) PT: 648

P: *phŏm ləy mòt kamlaŋ cay ləy thî ca maa*
1.m   EMP all.gone power   heart EMP that IRR come
"So I have lost my will to come (here to ask for help)."

On the other hand, the primary lexical meanig of *yùu* is a verb meaning 'to live, to reside, to stay, to be in/at,' as in (2):

(2) PT: 967-968

FT: *ʔacaan ʔanoŋ kɔ̂ bɔ̀k yùu hɔ̌ɔ*
teacher Anong HL tell live dorm
"Ajarn Anong said she lived in the dorm."

tὲ mây lúu (hh) yù(hh) toŋ năy(hh) (.)
but NEG know   be   at   where
"But she didn't know where exactly the dorm is."

In terms of the positions of *kamlaŋ* and *yùu* when they function as an aspectual marker, they are placed differently in a verb phrase. *Kamlaŋ* is placed before the main verb, for example in sentence (3):

(3) EQ3: 1252

    T: *kɔ̂ kalaŋ¹ khít wâa*
       HL PROG   think that
       "I'm thinking that..."

Yùu, on the other hand, is placed after the verb phrase, i.e., after the main verb, or the verb and the object, for example, sentence (4):

(4) EQ4: 452

    T: *khon thîi   bὲp duulεε   law yùu*
       person REL like take.care 1   IMP
       "a person who, like, takes care of us."

Yùu is not necessarily placed at the end of the sentence. It is usually followed by a time expression, for example:

(5) EQ3: 819

    T: *kin lúsὺk kin thuunâa sεεnwít yù săam wan*
       eat think eat tuna   sandwich IMP three day
      máŋ
       probably
       "I think I was probably eating tuna sandwiches for three days."

In addition, both *kamlaŋ* and *yùu* can occur in the same clause, for example:

(6) EQ5: 381

    M: *tɔɔn nán nà yùu thîi nǎy*
        when that PRT be   place where
        "At that time, where were you?"

      kalaŋ   nɔɔn yùu
      KAMLANG sleep YUU
      "You were sleeping"

According to Bybee et al. (1994), when there are two constructions that signal the same or similar meaning, one of them is recently developed and takes over some functions of the older construction, whereas the older one has extended its meaning. Therefore, the two constructions do not have exactly the same meaning, although they both may express the same aspectual meaning in certain contexts. Based on the diachronic development of imperfective aspectual markers shown in Figure 1, we would expect that *yùu*, which is primarily a locative verb, has developed along this imperfective pathway, whereas *kamlaŋ* does not follow this pathway.

V. The Study
5.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine and distinguish the functions and meanings of the two aspectual markers in Thai, *kamlaŋ* and *yùu*, on a discourse-pragmatic level, following Bybee et al.'s (1994:127) developmental pathway of imperfective aspect. Using a functional approach, the study determines the functions and meanings of the two aspectual markers used by native Thai speakers.

This paper attempts to answer two research questions:

(1). Can Bybee et al.'s (1994) theoretical framework for the development of temporal aspectual markers provide a basis for distinguishing the functions and meanings of the two aspectual markers, *kamlaŋ* and *yùu*?

(2). What is the "basic meaning" of each aspectual marker in the study, separate from how the marker is interpreted in specific contexts (Andersen 1990b)?

5.2 Methodology

The data used in the study is five recorded Thai conversations between native speakers.[2] The conversations were transcribed into phonetics. Each data set was separated into units. The basic unit that was used to separate line boundaries in the data is the intonation unit. The tokens of *kamlaŋ* and *yùu* found in the data were counted and categorized according to their semantic function and basic meaning in the discourse: Lexical meaning, i.e., Noun (n.) for *kamlaŋ* or Locative marker (loc.) for *yùu*, Progressive marker, and Imperfective marker.

The main part of my analysis is the qualitative analysis on the discourse-pragmatic level. This reevaluates and explains the basic functions and aspectual meanings of *kamlaŋ* and *yùu*, their semantic influence on the inherent lexical aspect of the verb/predicate, as well as how their aspectual meanings are influenced by the discourse context.

VI. Analysis and Results
6.1 Quantitative Analysis

From five data sets, there are 5,384 intonation units. Table 1 shows the frequency of *kamlaŋ* and *yùu* found in the data, and Table 2 shows the frequency of different functions of *yùu*.

Table 1: Frequency of *kamlaŋ* and *yùu*

Function	*kamlaŋ*		*yùu*	
Lexical Meaning	(n.) 4	36.36%	(loc.) 241	75.31%
Aspect marker • Progressive • Imperfective	7 • 7 • 0	63.63%	77 • 15 • 62	24.06%
Ambiguous	0	0%	2	0.63%
Total	*11*	*100%*	*320*	*100%*

Table 2: Frequency of different functions of *yùu* tokens

Function	Frequency
Aspect marker • Progressive function • Imperfective function	77 • 19.48% (15) • 80.52% (62)

Table 1 demonstrates that *kamlaŋ* is used much less frequently than *yùu* for all functions. While only 7 tokens of *kamlaŋ* were used as an aspectual marker, there were 77 tokens of *yùu*. *Kamlaŋ* is used only as a progressive marker; it does not convey an imperfective function in the data. On the other hand, *yùu* is used more frequently and conveys both progressive and imperfective aspects.

Table 2 shows that 77 *yùu* tokens are used as aspectual markers. While only 19.48% (15) of *yùu* tokens used as an aspectual marker convey progressive meaning, most of the *yùu* tokens, i.e., 80.52% (62), are used to convey imperfective.

6.2 Progressive Function of *kamlaŋ*

Data fragment (7) shows when *kamlaŋ* is used as a progressive marker.

(7) Parking situations (EQ3: 1252-1257)

    In this context, T is talking about parking situations in Los Angeles. She has an experience with her uncle when people, especially those who come as a group, take the parking spot that she is about to take. She is always afraid of those people because they are bigger than her. T is giving a hypothetical situation that if she had to face that kind of situation by herself, what she would do. If she let other people take her parking spot all the time, she would be bullied forever.

→ 1   T: *kɔ̂ kalaŋ khít wâa*
            HL PROG think that
            "I'm thinking that..."

   2   *nî thâ pay khon diaw*
            PRT if   go person alone
            "if I had gone there alone,"

   3   *thamŋay dii wá (.5)*
            how   good PRT
            "what would I have done?"

   4   *thâ yɔɔm   kháw*
            if   surrender 3
            "If I surrendered to them,"

   5   *kɔ̂ tɔ̂ŋ (.2) s- (.)*
            HL have.to
            "I would have to..."

   6   *thùuk kháw laŋkɛɛ talɔ̀ɔt pay   ʔà*
            PSV 3   bully   forever go.DIR PRT
            "I would be bullied forever."

Khít 'to think' is prototypically a stative verb, meaning 'to hold an opinion or idea.' It can also be a dynamic verb implying the process of thinking about an idea. In this context, T is thinking

about a particular hypothetical situation (line 1), and conveys her thinking as a progressive activity by using *kamlaŋ*, showing her control or agency over the situation. Therefore, *khít* is an activity, rather than a state. If *yùu* were used instead of *kamlaŋ* in this context, the aspect conveyed would be imperfective, meaning 'to have an opinion.' Therefore *kamlaŋ* makes stative verbs such as 'think' more dynamic, and implies an energy input from the agent. The difference in the aspectual meanings of *yùu* versus *kamlaŋ* comes from their primary lexical meanings, since the primary lexical meaning of *kamlaŋ* 'power, strength, energy' denotes dynamicity and agency.

6.3 Imperfective Function of *yùu*

Yùu is used both as a progressive and imperfective. Data fragment (8) gives an example of when *yùu* is used as an imperfective marker.

(8) Caretaker (EQ4: 444-455)
      A is talking about what he did when the Northridge earthquake happened. While it was shaking, he hid himself under the table in his dorm room. When it stopped, he as well as other students on his floor in the dorm came out of their rooms and stayed in the hall way in order to wait for the 'caretaker' on the floor to tell them what to do.

   1 A: *yùu nay hɔl wee*
              be   in   hall way
              "(We) were in the hall way."

   2 T: *léw (..) ʔâw kh- kháw hây   yùu ŋán*
              CONJ EXC   3   CAUS stay therefore
              "And...Oh! they told (you) to stay (there) so..."

3   *lέw   lέw   man pɔ̀ɔt[phay]*
CONJ CONJ it   safe
"And it was safe?"

4 A: *[mây] chây kháp*
                               NEG   right PRT
"No! (I didn't mean that.)"

5   *kɔ̂ ʔɔ̀k ma-*
HL out come
"We came out"

6   *ʔɔ̀ɔk maa   phɨ̂a ca duu wâ*
out come.DIR for   IRR see that
"came out to see"

7   *tɔ̂ŋ tham yaŋŋay*
must do   how
"what we were supposed to do."

8   *phɔ́   wâa .hhh thúk chán nî*
because that   every floor PRT
ca mii bèpwâa
IRR have like
"Because on every floor, there's, like,"

→ 9   *khon thîi bèp duulεε   law yùu*
person REL like take.care 1   IMP
"a person who, like, takes care of us."

10 T: *ʔɔ̌ɔ [(ca dây)]*
BC   IRR DAY[3]
"I see. So you could..."

11 A: ·[*lέw*] *ca dây*· *duu wâ*
      CONJ   IRR DAY   see that
      "Then we could wait and see"

12 *kháw bɔ̀k wâa hây   law tham (yaŋŋay)*
    3   tell that CAUS 1   do   how
    what he would tell us to do."

Unlike the locative marker *yùu* in lines 1 and 2, *yùu* in line 9 in this data fragment conveys an imperfective meaning of the verb 'take care.' The speaker is saying that there is a person on every floor who takes care of other students. This event of taking care of the students, which is marked by *yùu*, does not have an implication of a beginning or an end. The action of taking care does not stop when the earthquake stops, for instance. Instead, it is a responsibility of the 'caretaker,' a student who is hired as a resident assistant, to take care of others and make sure everyone and everything on his floor is all right whenever problems arise. Thus, the imperfective *yùu* in this case carries a general temporal aspectual meaning of the verb 'take care.'

6.4 Imperfective with Habitual Implication

Data fragment (9) shows a habitual implication conveyed by *yùu*.

(9) Tuna sandwiches (EQ3: 816-820)
P has asked T about her food situation after the earthquake. T did not have a lot of food left in her house at that time. She ate whatever she had and ate tuna sandwiches for a few days.

1 T: *Ɂɔ̌ɔ   tɔɔn nán lúsὺk*
    EXC when that think
    "Oh, at that time, I think ..."

2   *ca   mii (.2) sɛɛnwít ʔalay kɔ̂ kɨn pay*
IRR have   sandwich what HL eat go.DIR
"I had some sandwiches, and I would eat any
kinds."

3 P: *mnŭm=*
BC
"Mmm."

→ 4 T: *=kɨn lúsừk kɨn thuunâa sɛɛnwít yừ*
      eat think eat tuna   sandwich IMP
      sǎam wan máŋ   huh huh
      three day probably
      "I think I was probably eating tuna sandwiches
      for three days."

5 P: *=ʔohǒoy huh huh*
    BC
    "Oh!"

In line 4, *yừu* is used to convey an aspectual meaning of an
extended duration, i.e., about three days. From the context,
yừu also carries a habitual implicature of the actions eating tuna
sandwiches. According to Brinton (1988), habitual refers to
repeated actions on multiple occasions. That is, the speaker
repeatedly ate tuna sandwiches on multiple occasions during
that time period. As normal human beings, we know that a
person cannot continuously eat for that length of time without
stopping. The habitual meaning, therefore, comes from both
the discourse context with the use of *yừu* and our pragmatic
knowledge.

VII. Conclusion

In summary, the developmental pathway of imperfective
markers proposed by Bybee et al. (1994) provides a basis for

distinguishing the functions and meanings of the two Thai aspectual markers, *kamlaŋ* and *yùu*. *Yùu*, which is primarily used as a locative verb, has had a longer development than *kamlaŋ*. It has developed from a locative marker to a temporal marker, and can be used to convey not only progressive meaning like *kamlaŋ*, but imperfective meaning as well. On the other hand, *kamlaŋ*, which does not follow this imperfective developmental pathway, tends to be used as only a progressive marker, and thus is more restricted in its use.

The nature of how each aspectual marker is used illustrates the basic aspectual meaning of each marker, separate from how it is interpreted in specific contexts (Andersen 1990b). The basic meaning of *yùu* is abstract "locative" for both time and space. While it can convey locative meaning, it can also carry both progressive aspect and imperfective aspects, the aspectual meaning of extended temporal duration that can include a habitual implicature. The use of *kamlaŋ*, on the other hand, is more restricted to limited and specific temporal duration. Therefore, *kamlaŋ* is used to convey only progressive aspect, requiring an energy input from the agent.

This study has provided some implications. I hope that the description of the functions and meanings of *kamlaŋ* and *yùu* drawn from the analysis of the study will be beneficial not only to the research in the area of tense, mood and aspect, but also to second or foreign language learners as well as heritage language learners of Thai. Furthermore, research on functions of aspectual markers used by adult native speakers, such as this study, can be a good basis for future research on the acquisition of aspectual markers by first and second language learners of Thai.

Glossary

BC	backchannel	CAUS	causative
CONJ	conjunction	DAY	*dây*
DIR	directional marker	EMP	emphatic

EXC	exclamation	HL	highlighting device
IMP	imperfective	IRR	irrealis
NEG	negative marker	PERF	perfect *lɛ́ɛw*
PRT	particle	PROG	progressive
PSV	passive	REL	relative pronoun
1	1st person	3	3rd person

Endnotes

1. *Kalaŋ* is a variation of *kamlaŋ*. The transcription is according to the actual pronunciation of the speaker.
2. The data used in the study was collected by Shoichi Iwasaki, and was transcribed and translated by myself.
3. *dâَy*, as a preverb auxiliary, is called a past tense marker in some studies, e.g., Kanchanawan (1978). As a lexical verb, *dây* means 'to have an opportunity to..., to get to..., which carries an implicature of past tense (Sindhvanandha, 1970). Neill (1988) states that *dây* carries a perfect aspect, rather than a past time reference (p. 108).

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