

# **Speech act verbs in Tai languages: Theoretical background and research methods**

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper deals with speech act verbs (SpAV). By this we mean a rather loosely defined class of verbs (see part 2) which denote the meaning aspect of utterances (vs. e.g. roaring), and include not only performatives, e.g. 'to promise', but also verbs invoking actions through utterances causing actions by others, e.g. 'to incite' (Kurzon 1998) or by oneself, e.g. 'to state'.

This paper proposes preliminary concrete steps for the research of SpAV and related aspects in Thai (and surrounding languages). To this purposes, we take a three-pronged approach. After reasoning for our approach and providing necessary scientific background in part 2, we discuss data from three areas in part 3 which include an elementary dictionary research (3.1), native speaker cooperation in two questionnaires (3.2) and discussion of two selected problem areas (3.3). Part 4 concludes with some ramifications for theory building and part 5 opens up future research tasks.

## **2. Approach**

### *2.1 Definition of speech act verbs*

To demonstrate our approach, this part provides the definitions for this paper, the research methods, and a brief review of the research history and other related linguistic aspects.

SpAVs are a very diversified set, but definitions should not include all and everything (cf. Wierzbicka 1987, 1.8, p. 18). This situation calls for definitions, which have to be flexible at their edges to be able to cope for varying conditions, circumstances, changes and differences. Such flexibility would show one strength of the theory.

Throughout the research history of SpAVs, there have been a good number of attempts at defining them. In simple terms, all speech act verbs denote actions which are (usually) done verbally, i.e. social actions by self or other, in which uttering is made use of to do or achieve something. To comprise the most important trends in definitions, we take the revised version of Reinelt (1996): Speech act verbs, in a wider sense, denote “actions usually performed by speaking (to tell, to describe) or, in a narrower sense, verbs which constitute actions by their virtue of being uttered under the appropriate conditions (such as: to name a street X avenue)” (Reinelt 1996:924), (cf. Austin 1962, Searle 1969).

## *2. Research methods*

In this paper, we can only try to pave the way for more extensive research. The following approaches seem reasonable:

### *1. Dictionary research.*

Checking for entries which denote speech actions in the sense defined in 2.1 above, the result of such a search through Tongsopit (n.d.) are presented in part 3.1. below. However, the limits of dictionary research have to be taken very cautiously. Bilingual dictionary research shows us how the authors of the dictionary have come to terms with the problem that very often there are no easily fitting equivalents. Since it is not usual to leave out items just because no ready equivalent is available in the other language, other strategies are common, to at least give the user an idea of how to say what he intends to.

These may be conventionalized circumscriptions or others made up only in the dictionary. To check on this source, we will consider German FRAGEN and Thai expressions for to SCOLD. Furthermore, bilingual dictionaries as one way to cope with variations in expressions between languages, are especially in the case of SpAV, also a way to cope with the differences of codification of societal differences and their wording. SpAVs can be a special FL learning problem, especially if the L2 has considerably more or less SpAVs, and if (the frequency and area of) their uses differ widely.

### *2. Using native speakers.*

Two approaches are possible here:

1. Questionnaire to be filled out by native speakers. The linguistic results of a rigidly structured questionnaire in list 1 and 2 are presented in part 3.2.1 below. These short lists contain different SpAV categories, mainly to enable research in SpAV differences, i.e. between them and in sentences. This list mainly employs methods from infra-language research, e.g. minimal pairs, and a number of sentences.

A word of caution is necessary in this place too. It is difficult to elicit equivalents, if the whole concept of a certain class of words is not present or not very elaborated. To research this, much more elaborate methods are necessary, c.f. 3.2.2 below.

2. Observational data collection: Recording the spoken language. Although this approach is ultimately necessary for assessing the present state and use of SpAVs, it is also the most laborious and costly one. For logistic reasons, this has to be left for a large project in the future. To make any sense at all, such a project would have to cover a wide area of situations where speech act verbs can occur.

3. Interlinguistic comparison of selected areas can lead to the discovery of corresponding problem areas and structural solutions. An example discussion for the Thai equivalents for the German erotetic verb FRAGEN and v.v. for the Thai varieties of to SCOLD is given below in 3.3.

4. Philological research of the traditional and modern literature can reveal trends and corroborate research results.

5. The role of social institutions.

Societal institutions may play a certain role, as for example confession, a purely oral institution, seems to have done in Europe. A look at Benveniste (1978) might be enlightening. Similar trends account for the vast number of SpAVs from Greek and Latin, although this might be an Indo-European strain, which could perhaps also have reached Thailand through buddhism (e.g. *plaka:t*).

## 2. 3 Background and research history

The development of speaking about speech, i.e. metalanguage, is a precondition for the development of SpAVs; animals have no speech act verbs. Additionally, for the development of a larger number of SpAVs, there must be some societal value to speak about a language or someone's use of language, for example in relationship to reality.

Already Buehler (1934) treated the action aspects of our verbal actions, Wittgenstein (1953) their limitlessness. But it was left to Austin (1962) to refocus our attention on an important part of the vocabulary of European languages, conspicuously in his philosophical approach. His early classification was refined by Searle (1969), whose analysis of promise also led us to recognizing the restrictivity of sentential analysis. With the pragmatic turn in Germany, the philosophical aspects of the SpAV discussion were settled in the societal context (Maas/Wunderlich 1972, Wunderlich 1976). The discussions of the performative analysis (I hereby) and of what constitutes an indirect speech act, resolved by Burckhardt (1986), lead to a change in focus, only to be regained by Vanderweken's (1990-91) tries at a formal logic.

Kubo's (1996) list of English-Japanese correspondences seemed to prove Heeschen (1980) right, who had declared the large amount of SpAVs a specific development of European languages. Reinelt (1996) found the extensive use of the SAY character for SpAV in Chinese, and the considerable number of SpAV this language has had and still has. That paper and the preliminary results presented in part 3 of this paper are vivid proof that Heeschen was not right at least in these cases.

Wierzbicka (1987) compiled a dictionary for English SpAVs. Marui/Nishijima's (1991) comparative English-German-Japanese re-ordered list provided a first extensive overview of SpAV across different cultures, but much more cross-linguistic research is necessary. One way to cope with the variegated circumstances is to propose classifications. Various criteria for the classes have been given, but most do not hold too well and undecided cases are legend.

As for the many classification which have been proposed so far after the initial classification proposal by Austin (1961), see Wierzbicka (1987) for an overview. She distinguishes 37 categories with altogether 270 members, including some multiple-classifications, a recent cross-linguistic attempt deserves special mention. Marui/Nishijima (1991) use the following classification for cross-linguistic comparisons (adapted from Austin 1962):

#### **(1) Marui/Nishijima (1991)**

Verdictives (e.g. to acquit),  
 Exercitives (to order),  
 Commissives (to promise),  
 Behabitatives, e.g. for thanks (to thank) attitudes (to resent) etc., and  
 Expositives (to agree)



These categories share the following characteristics:

verdictives: with words: saying something and thus establishing a fact  
 exercitives: to say something to have a state brought about  
 commissives: to commit someone else or self to some action  
 behabitatives: to do something by saying and in doing something  
 expositives: to put outside something by and in saying something

This classification will be used as the basis for the lists 1 and 2 in 3.2.1 and their discussion below.

Reinelt (1998) outlined the development of a SpAV in Japanese and considered reasons for the variety of signs that is used in writing it.

Although research on SpAVs is rampant, a computer search in commonly available scientific journals for research on speech act verbs in Thai produced no results.

In the rest of this paper, we will not go into any detail of the following linguistic aspects, although they will finally have to be considered:

- the syntactic category of speech act verbs

While the situation is simple in languages with a clear distinction between verbs and other categories, e.g. nouns, the situation is more complicated in languages with frequent category switch, e.g. in languages without clear distinction between verbs and adjectives (ask vs. asking) or verb and noun (ask vs. question). Even in English, the situation is not so simple: 'to be called, to apologize, to express thanks/gratitude/be grateful' (see also Wierzbicka 1987:9-10). But this problem becomes moot, if only the "meaning" is considered, i.e. doing something with or by utterances as defined in the revised definition given above.

- the reported speech marker

Some languages employ a speech marker (such as *that* in English and *wāa* in Thai) to separate the contents of the speech act utterance from the speech act verb, while others have no such marker (Chinese).

Such a marker between the verb and the contents is not even necessary. Especially indirect speech, such a marker can allow for distancing and differentiating, e.g. of roles, such as utterer.

In the dictionary examples, the reported utterances were separated from the SpAV mostly by *kan-wâa*, and addressees are often indicated by *thuŋ*.

- negative SpAV

An especially intricate situation arises from negative speech act verbs, depending on whether the content or the act itself is negated. The first are SpAVs, such as *pà-tì-sè:t* 'to refuse, to deny'; while the latter probably are not: to omit, i.e. to say that someone doesn't do the act, e.g. *ʔuŋ* 'to keep silent'.

- illocutionary force

To a certain degree, illocutionary force is differently regulated from society to society, such as the problem of promise in Tunesian Arabic (Nabil p.c.). It cannot be solved intralinguistically, as Searle's example of promise has shown. Explanations only go so far, and then the boundary of the sentence has to be surmounted, as well as the border to the societal circumstances.

### 3. Thai speech act verbs: Preliminary results

In this part, we present the results of three preliminary approaches to SpAVs in Thai. Of course, native speaker checks, observation and recording, and eventually extensive hypothesis testing is necessary later.

To get an impression of the whole range of SpAV in this language

- a Thai-English dictionary was consulted;
- to controll the results, at least in part, native speakers were asked at the occasion of the conference. Finally a cross-linguistic check in both directions to and from Thai provides information on how two selected, limited areas are structured.

#### 3.1 Thai-English dictionary check

With a widely diversified situation across languages, and a variety of definitions (see 2.1 above), the resulting different counts lead to widely varying figures. Ehlich (p.c.) found about 4,000 in a wider definition. Kubo (1996) lists 284 (62 original Japanese, 24 combinations and the rest Sino-Japanese) SpAVs for Japanese, Vanderweken (1990-1) discusses 234 English SpAVs. To approach the inventory in Thai (as it is made available to us in dictionaries), Tongposit (n.d.) was searched for

entries of SpAV according to the definition in 2.1 above. This Thai-English dictionary gives most one-word and, based on these, a restricted number of two-word expressions. Overall, the lexicon consulted had 321 entries for SpAV.

Of these, about one third, i.e. 90 entries, are probably of Indian origin. Since most of them have preserved a number of conspicuous characteristics (retention of certain letters in spelling, two-or more-syllable structure, unpronounced consonants), this check is possible even on the surface of dictionary research. Of course the results will have to be corroborated by etymologists. Informal native speaker information hints at a preference for non-Indian words if there is a choice.

### *3.2 Native speaker checks*

For various reasons, a native speaker check is always necessary in dictionary studies. For one thing, age of gathering of the entries and year of publication can be as much apart as 20 years. To check at least a limited area, the following lists 1 and 2 were developed (3.2.1). To find out how much these SpAV are really used, however, requires much more refined techniques, some of which we can only hint at below (3.2.2).

#### *3.2.1 Native speaker check of designed lists*

##### *3.2.1.1 Reasoning for the two lists*

In this part, we discuss some results from using lists 1 and 2 for the analysis of SpAVs in Thai. Since lists 1 and 2 lead to only very basic data, they are to be treated with caution. Some results, however, can be used to derive research questions.

#### *Description of the lists:*

List 1 gives representative members of all the classes in the classification of Marui/Nishijima (1991). SpAV1 'to acquit' is performative, while SpAV2 'to rank' is usually not. Similarly, SpAV3 'to appoint' is performative, while SpAV4 'to order' is descriptive (and rarely performative). Similarly, SpAV5 'to promise' is usually performative, while SpAV6 'to plan' is descriptive. Many languages in Asia do not clearly separate SpAV7 'to apologize' and SpAV8 'to thank' (cf. for Japanese Coulmas/ Marui/ Reinelt (1983) and for a Chinese development Reinelt (1998). SpAV9 'to condole' and SpAV10 'to resent' have negative contents as background. SpAV11 'to greet' is an everyday expression and performative in some cultures, while SpAV12 'to bless' is originally limited to religious contexts, but has moved out of these in some language contexts. Both are limited to fixed positions within everyday conversation, i.e.

either at the begining or at the end. SpAV13 'to protest' was performative in the late middle ages in Europe, but has since lost that power considerably. While SpAV14 'to tell' focusses on the act of uttering, SpAV15 'to agree' and SpAV16 'to object' exhibit a speaker's positive and negative attitudes to some matter. SpAV17 'to define' decides on the contents of some notion, and SpAV18 'to call' is used for attaching a name to something.

In contrast to list 1, list 2 makes use of linguistic analytic methods to approach speech act verbs. SpAV21 'to define' and SpAV22 'to demote' can only be effectively uttered by authorized personnel, i.e. a doctor or a person with special rights to (not necessarily in) a hierarchy. SpAV23 'to beg' and SpAV24 'to claim' are opposites to some degree, depending on the positions of the utterers, while sharing an utterance for their performance. SpAV25 'to ask' is a general verb for an action which is either intensified or designed in a special way, if expressed with SpAV26 'to question'. SpAV27 'to accept', and SpAV28 'to refuse' and SpAV29 'to deny' are speech actions leading to opposite results, with the latter not always clearly separated. SpAV30 'to explain' just goes farther than SpAV31 'to describe' by incorporating a real or purported background. SpAV32 'to say', SpAV33 'to speak', and SpAV34 'to tell' are not always clearly separate in all languages (for a discussion, see Wierzbicka 1987:21-23). Sentences 35 'He said he will/would come' and 36 'He said, "I will come"' check on the speech marker, but this may be used in both cases to separate the utterance contents from the speech act verb. Sentence 37 checks the same for a performative verb. Sentence 38 is the possible result after the speech action of Sentence 39 has taken place. Sentences 40 and 41 are performatives, but instead of Sentence 40, usually a different expression is used performatively in English, and Sentence 42 makes use of the endpoint of the cooperation.

### *3.2.1.2 Asking native speakers*

Lists 1 and 2 were given to the participants during my presentation, and I would like to thank everyone, who filled them out.

The results given here are for Thai only. Due to the severe time limit, for some items no data were obtained.

## **(2) Summary of Thai results for lists 1 and 2**

Results are from the questionnaires filled out at the presentation.

(- = no result obtained (i.e not filled in more than 2 times, T (Thai=13, Lao=1, Zhuang (partly=1)) =15, o.= others,

List(1)

Category	English	Thai
verdictive	1 to acquit	
	2 to rank	
exercitives	3 to appoint	tæŋ tɔŋ 3 nát 1
	4 to order	sàŋ 12
commissives	5 to promise	sǎnya: 10
	6 to plan	wa:ŋphǎ:n 9+1
behabitatives		
for apologies:	7 to apologize	khǎ:thót 11
for thanks	8 to thank	khò:phkun 9, khò:pcaj
for sympathy	9 to condole	plò:p 4+1
for attitudes	10 to resent	khàtcay 3
for greetings	11 to greet	thákhtha:y 3
for wishes	12 to bless	hâypho:n 3
for challenges	13 to protest	prahthúaj 3, pô:ŋkan 1
expositives	14 to tell	bò:k 11
	15 to agree	tòkloŋ 8, hěchô:pdúay 1
	16 to object	patisè:t 4, khàt 2, thǎ:m 1,
	17 to define	?athíbá:y 1
	18 to call	ríak 9, others 2

## List(2)

Category	English	Thai
Speech act verbs	21 to define 22 to demote 23 to beg 24 to claim	truat 1 kòt hũa 1 khố: 5 râak rỏ:ŋ 2 khố:l
Contrastive minimal pairs (1)	25 to ask 26 to question	thả:m 7, khố: 3 thả:m 6, tâŋkhamthả:m 2
minimal pairs (2)	27 to accept 28 to refuse 29 to deny	ráp 4, ? 3, yỏ:mráp 2 patisẻ:t 5 bỏ:kpát 1 patisẻ:t 5 ?athỉba:y 1, lỉaŋ 1
minimal pairs (3)	30 to explain 31 to describe 32 to say 33 to speak 34 to tell	?athỉba:y 5 patisẻ:t 1 banya:y 2 ?athỉba:y 2 bỏ:k 3, phủ:t 3 klỏ:w1 phủ:t 7 bỏ:k 7 lỏw 1 phủ:t 1
sentences (1)	35 He said he will/would come 36 He said, "I will come"	khỏw phủ:t wỏ: khỏw cỏ ma: khỏw phủ:t wỏ: chỏn cỏ ma:
sentences (2)	37 He promised to come 38 They called him XY 39 He named his child	khỏw sỏnya wỏ: cỏ ma:   
sentences (3)	40 I apologize for... 41 I thank you for your cooperation	chỏn khố: thỏ:t  

### 3.2.1.3 Thai SpAV construction

As a further control for the data obtained from the native speakers at the presentation, we checked the entries in a number of dictionaries (Rochga (1968), Tongsopit (n.d.)). At the same time, we checked for composita, if there were any. The results show the strategies for constructing SpAVs in Thai.

#### (3) Speech act verbs in Thai: Strategies for their construction (Culled from lists 1, 2 and dictionaries)

##### 1. Original (morphologically simplex) speech act verbs:

sàŋ	‘to order’
sǎnya:	‘to promise’
thák	‘to greet’
tha:y	‘to say, to predict’
hây pho:n	‘to bless’
lâw	‘to tell, to inform’
bô:k	‘to speak, to inform’
rîak	‘to call etc, demand, etc.’
thǎ:m	‘to ask’
sák	‘to demand (ask)’
?athíba:y	‘to explain, to describe’

Most others are composita built according to one or more of the following construction methods: Compositionality, i.e. the composite meaning of the compositum consists of an “addition” (or other accountability) of the meaning of its parts, does hold in many example, but this is of course by no means necessary.

##### 2. Action as speech act:

e.g. by using independent lexical items  
 ‘to plan from’ *tria:m* ‘to prepare’ + *tâŋ* ‘to regulate’  
*camkàt* ‘to define from = to limit’  
*le:w* ‘bad’ + *loŋ* ‘to put down (literally) combined for: to demote’

## 3. Evaluation of an action:

*khǝː + thôːt* / i.e. 'want + punishment combined for to apologize'

## 4. Evaluation of a state:

As in other languages, descriptive or situational characteristics can be integrated to construct different speech act verbs.

*khòːp + cay* 'full (of my) heart for: thanks'

*sĩacay* 'bad (for your) heart for: apology and condoling'

## 5. SpAV+SpAV

All derivations of SpAVs only are SpAVs, but of course, this is not necessary either. In some cases, rhetorical patterns are employed, such as the hendyadyoin: one meaning by two words, a common principle of word formation in Chinese and Thai (in the latter case both parts often with resembling pronunciation) as well.

*thák* 'to greet' + *thaːy* 'to say, to prophecy'

*rîaːk* 'to call' + *wâː* 'to call (by a name)'

*rîaːk* 'to call' + *rɔːŋ* 'to utter, for demands, order'

*sák* 'to ask intensely' + *thǎːm* 'to ask, combined for to question, interrogate'

## 6. Undergoing an action:

Grammatical processes are rare in SpAV generation:

*hây + sîn* 'to be blessed'

## 7. Action + SpAV:

*khát* to sort + *kháːn* 'to be against, combined for to protest'

*yin* to hear + *yɔːm* 'to agree, to consent, to allow, to give in, combined for: to agree'

## 8. SA+ object

*rîak + sây* 'to call'

*bôːk + pàt* 'to say and wipe away, combined for to refuse, deny'

Of course, other construction methods are possible. It may just be the case that they did not surface in our data.



### 3.2.2 Native speaker check to evaluate usage

Generally, the following observations seem to be correct: a minimal number of SpAV is present in every society (cf. Wierzbicka's SAY), but SpAVs are extremely more or extremely less frequent in different societies. For example, while English and Chinese use different lexical items for each of a number of speech act purposes, other languages use variations and combinations of, on the extreme contrary, only a few words (to say, to tell). However:

1) Any language can probably, with more or less cumbersome circumscriptions, express the meaning denoted by any SpAV found in any other language.

2) Languages make use of SpAVs quite differently: some use more, some use less. Also the areas of use may be different, e. g. SpAVs may be very common in jurisprudence, while they may be very rare in speech accompanying practical activities.

3) Everyday speech may be a different matter again, with SpAVs common in English and German, but rather rare in, e.g. Japanese everyday conversation. Their use may have stylistic relevance, e.g. sounding high-nosed, etc.

4) There are languages with a vast number of hardly related verbs: Arabic (Tunisian), German and Chinese.

The dictionary search results so far does not tell us how much the SpAV are really used within the Thai society. Two considerations can help us here:

1. We can assume that all languages will have a certain basic number of speech act verbs as defined in this paper. For the sake of this discussion, we call them primitive speech act verbs (pSpAV). The Longman Defining Vocabulary of 2000 most frequent English words contains the following: advise, agree, beg, claim, complain, excuse, forgive, forbid, greet, instruct, permit, promise, propose, say, thank. Many other SpAVs include in this list are English ideosyncrasies, such as the tell, say, speak etc. distinction. We call these SpAVs primitive, simply and only because they and probably a few more are present in most if not all human languages, and are thus a characteristic of the *conditio humana*. They are not primitive in the sense of semantic primitives, which can serve as the basis for theory building. Neither are they all easy to do or perform, as the quite extensive recent research literature to apologizing attests.

2. Similarities in parts of the social systems across different societies lead to similarly structured lexicons. If a society has, as one of its parts or dominatingly, a modern Western system, including bureaucracies, a jurisdictional system and all, it will in all probability have developed a vocabulary for managing it, consisting of

complex construction, loan words, etc. The structure of this vocabulary will be similar in all such societies, and in part even the vocabulary itself. For example, modern jurisprudence is an entirely language-based system, and any society which has adopted this, will have developed expressions for accusing, witnessing, and sentencing.

These two cases rather concern societal and sociolinguistic differences. As extremes, they are not immediately relevant for our discussion. The focus of this kind of inter- and interlinguistic research in SpAVs, then, is the area between these extremes.

At least the following methodology would have to be employed:

- A variety of lists, each with a different focus, e.g. on everyday conversational versus business, or educational/academic language and the SpAVs therein.
- Native speaker information on frequency of and situational conditions on the use of carefully selected SpAVs. For this, selected questionnaires have to be designed. Conscious consideration usually influences judgements of frequency, meaning of use and users in general. For technical reasons, we were not able to do this in this paper.

### *3.3 Linguistic cross-checking of selected areas*

To see how individual areas, e.g. the lexicon for certain types of speech actions, are structured, it is useful to cross-check directly between different languages. In this paper, we consider two cases. In the first case, *erothetic* (question-asking) SpAVs, in German fairly well covered by FRAGEN and its derivations, and the corresponding equivalents in Thai, are compared. In the second case, Thai expressions for *to SCOLD* are considered. Incidentally, there are a large number of such expressions and Chinese letters with this meaning, but remarkably only a few made it into Japanese, when the writing system was adopted.

#### *3.3.1 Erothetic SpAVs*

FRAGEN (i.e. ask) can be reformulated as saying that one does not know plus a societal requirement to solve such a deficit. This is the condition of the *erothetic* type of speech act (Wunderlich 1976). This example shows a vital point in the consideration of speech act verbs. In most cases, they denote that something is said (or some utterance made) plus a societal “requirement” of a certain kind, e.g. to fulfill, i.e. bring into

accordance with reality what one has said (as in the case of Searle’s famous analysis of “promise”). Often other conditions are valid, too. All this results from the characteristic of societal speech act. This also shows why any intrasentential analysis is doomed to fail, and societal circumstances have to be taken into consideration.

- Construction of SpAV

As already shown in 3.2 above, very often, SpAVs are formed by putting categorically different elements together (often different lexical items, independent words, etc.). For example, from the German verb FRAGEN, the following related verbs are derived, all of them SpAVs: fragen, anfragen, abfragen, ausfragen, befragen, erfragen, hinterfragen, nachfragen. If we compare this to the situation in Thai and the equivalents there, we arrive at the following results:

- Equivalent given

(4) Equivalents for fragen-derived words

Source: German Thai dictionary (Rochga 1967/2511)

German	Thai	English
- fragen	thǎ:m	‘to ask’
- befragen	sák thǎ:m	‘to interrogate (to wash, to ask)’
- erfragen	thǎ:m con dâ:y ruǎŋ	‘until, to get, story/case’
- abfragen	sô:p thǎ:m	‘to find out’
- ausfragen	sák thǎ:m	‘to ask’
- anfragen	suǐ:p thǎ:m	‘to inquire’
- hinterfragen		‘to put into question’
- nachfragen	thǎ:m thuǎŋ	‘to ask about’

Counterchecking the entries for *thǎ:m*, we get: to ask, to inquire (Tongsopit n.d.), and the following composita entries:

Thai *thǎ:m* to ask and composita

Compositum	meaning of its parts
<i>sák thǎ:m</i> ‘to interrogate’	(to wash)
<i>tây thǎ:m</i> ‘to inquire’	(to climb)
<i>thǎ:m thuǎŋ</i> ‘to ask after, for’	(to arrive)

<i>thǎ:m thày</i> ‘to inquire, to ask, to question’	(to interrogate)
<i>thǎ:m thúk sùk</i> ‘to inquire after’	(suffering, ups and downs =ask after one’s health)
<i>thǎ:m hǎ:</i> ‘to inquire for’	(to find out/ to look for)
<i>thu:n thǎ:m</i> ‘to ask’	(to tell/ say)
<i>rian thǎ:m</i> ‘to ask’	(to learn/ inform/ tell)
<i>sò:p thǎ:m</i> ‘to question, to inquire into, to ask, to interrogate’	(to examine)
<i>sui:p thǎ:m</i> ‘inquire into, to make inquiries’	(to search for/find)

## Comments

Rather than discussing all details, only a few summarizing remarks should suffice:

- In the case of *fragen* a number of verbs are formed by attaching prefixes, some derived from prepositions such as *ab aus an hinter nach*, some derived from prepositions, which highlight certain aspects of the action of asking: ERFRAGEN (to ask to find out a certain point) contains a goal orientation, NACHFRAGEN (to ask again for confirmation) indicates repetition, etc. In the case of English and German, as in most other Indo-European languages, prepositional elements are made use of.

For the Thai equivalents, most of the construction methods shown in 3.2.1 above seem to hold, too.

- Compositionality seems to hold. This can be demonstrated by looking at the Thai correspondents to the German *fragen* above, where only in one case a prepositional element is used, and in most other cases independent lexical items are used.

- Furthermore, the following constructions as in 3.2.1, can be found to hold:

- SpAV derivations are also SpAV

- Descriptive and situational characteristics and the extensive use of e.g. hendiadyoin

- Only in one case, a prepositional element is used: *thǎ:m thúŋ*.

- Note that in some cases, exchangeability is nearly achieved: sometimes we can say ‘to call for’ to mean ‘to name’, e.g. even in christening.

### 3.3.2 To scold

SCOLDing is usually a series of linguistic actions in which the utterer A uses utterances towards partner B personally to indicate that A does not approve of actions, traits or other things within the realm (and supposed responsibility) of B, and that A is articulating the problem (and not just silently suffering). Usually A is in a stronger social position than B, and later actions may become violent. Related lexical items in English include 'to blame', 'to chide', 'to reproach', and in the extreme 'to condemn' (and probably even 'to curse').

#### (5) Entries whose equivalent was to scold

These meanings were given as equivalents to the following words (Tongsopit (n.d.): ('i' indicates probable Indian descent, for criteria in 3.2.1, 'T' are meanings given in Tomita 1987)).

##### *to blame*

bɔːriphâ:t 'to criticise' T

phoːthana: 'to criticise in front of others'

wâ: '(all other meanings given, too)'

##### *to scold*

phóy 'mainly to animals' T

lênɲa:n 'to take hard measures' T

sûak 'to scold in the original sense' T

ʔèt 'to scold in a loud voice' T

##### *to reproach*

bɔːriphâ:t 'to criticise' T

##### *to condemn*

praca:n 'to lay a fault/sin open, to disgrace' T

pra:mâ:t 'to tell someone's bad intentions, to hurt' T

prākpram 'to reproach, to say someone is bad, to load a sin on someone' T

lɔ̃nthô:t 'to penalize'

## Comments

Next to the surprisingly large number of SpAV in this area, the first and most conspicuous point is that 7:5 such SpAV are of Indian origin. The others cover various parts of this complex activity and emphasize these, such as in public. In this case, as in the case of the asking verbs, native speaker checks and observations are invaluable. Without these it is next to impossible to structure the field of SCOLD expressions in Thai. In any case, we can only be baffled by the large number of linguistic means, be they frequent or not, available in this quite problematic area of human communication.

## 4. Ramifications for theory building

If only for their variance, SpAVs have to be a genuine topic of any theory of language or linguistics. Especially the following points have to be addressed:

- Every theory of language/ linguistics has to cover SpAVs, i.e. explain why there are more or less of them in a certain language, and how they are used.
- Every theory of language has to assign a place to SpAVs.
- Every theory has to find a place for the discussions addressed in this paper.

Many of the topics raised in this paper probably have to be treated in a theory of language contact, but so far there is nothing in this respect, even in the seminal HSK 13. 1 and 2.

If we are able to distinguish several steps of reduction or increase of SpAVs, e.g. in certain areas, we can at the same time develop a theory of the societal developments from one language group to the other, and prove tendencies in the linguistic development within one group of languages. This can also serve as an important tool for theory building.

- Finally, clearing up historical developments of SpAV may help find out how languages and societies developed, in our example in the East Asian region.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, we could only present an approach to the analysis of SpAV in Thai. Therefore, all results presented here should be taken with due care. On the other

hand, since the number of such verbs is considerable, a more detailed analysis is certainly necessary.

In such future analyses, the relationship of SpAV to those points excluded in 2.3 will also have to be considered.

Future analysis will then be able to compare the situation of SpAV in Thai to that in China and in India. The influence from both sides is only too obvious, as 3.3.2 should have intimated.

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