A Non-linear Analysis of Aspect in Thai Narrative Discourse

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The Serial Verb Construction (SVC) in Thai, while maintaining fundamental characteristics of Serial Verbs, i.e., the subject of a predicate is identified with an argument of some other expression, does not have the luxury of specific morphemes defining tense specification, but is built largely of verbs, adverbs, and auxiliaries that can function as Directional Forms (Hatton 1975), verbs that define a path (Thepkanjana forthcoming), Pre/Post-Serial Verbs (Kanchanawan 1978), and locative/temporal adverbials (Warotamasikkhadit 1972).

1. Aspect in the Thai verb phrase

Kanchanawan's (1978) and Warotamasikkhadit's (1972) analyses define parameters of semantic restrictions of temporal/aspectual expression in the Thai verb phrase à la SVCs. The subject ellipsis in the SVC below in [1] contrasts with the perfective aspect expressed in [2] even though the transformation appears identical in each.

[1] a. kʰaw kʰap rot
   3s  drive car
   \rightarrow kʰaw kʰap rot paʲ

  b. kʰaw paʲ
     3s  drive car go
     'He drives/drove the car.'

[2] a. kʰaw kʰawcaeʲ pʰit
    3s understand wrong
    \rightarrow kʰaw kʰawcaeʲ pʰit paʲ

  b. *kʰaw paʲ
     3s  Perf.
     'She misunderstood.'
Sindhvananda (1970) defines /pa/ in [2] not as a subject ellipsis auxiliary, but as a perfective marker:

/pay/ (in [2b]) cannot convey a notion of "going" with the additional meaning of "direction away from the speaker" as it usually does when functioning as a main verb. The only sense that can be grasped from /pay/ (in [2]) is that something has already happened.... Thus, it should be concluded that /pay/ in this sense of "completion" should be considered as an auxiliary, a pure perfective marker, as opposed to /pay/ in the sense of "going" in an embedded sentence (see [1a]) (Sindhvananda 1970:30).

Kanchanawan (1978) analysis places time phrases outside the verb phrase and time/aspect markers within the verb phrase. Time and aspect markers function within the VP as: pre-serial verbs (PREV), auxiliaries (AUX), post serial verbs (POSTV) and particles (PART) (Kanchanawan 1978).¹ Time expression in Thai is explained through a "combination of time phrases, time markers, aspect markers, and certain types of verbs"² (Kanchanawan 1978:73).

Kanchanawan (1978) takes the time phrase (TP) component out of the verb phrase altogether.³ TPs are the greatest indicators of a point or a range of specific time in Thai discourse. Some time phrases that indicate a point in time are muawaanii 'yesterday', piinaa 'next year', etc. Some time phrases that indicate a range of time such as those that include tantae 'since' (tantae muawaanii 'since yesterday') and those that describe a span of time (scoon chuamoong 'two hours'). These time phrases are distinct from time and aspect markers:

*Time refers to the real point "when" an event takes place. It is generally divided into past, present, and future. Aspect indicates "how" the event takes place, e.g., continuous, continuative, and others* (Kanchanawan 1978:71).

Time and aspect markers, distinguished according to the definitions above are based on Reichenbach's tense formulas in which three elements, a speech act, an event, and a "reference" point are represented by the symbols E, R, and S, respectively.
Time is ordered left to right, dashes indicate sequentiality, commas indicate simultaneity (in [3]) (Reichenbach 1947:294):

 I saw John  R,E -- S
 I have seen John  E -- S,R
 I had seen John  E -- R -- S

Kanchanawan (1978:71-2) adapts Reichenbach's tense formulas toward an explanation of time expression within the Thai VP [4]^4:

[4]  (a) simple past  R,E -- S
(b) simple present  S,R,E
(c) simple future  S--R,E
(d) past continuous  $E, R--S$
(e) present continuous  S,R,$E$
(f) future continuous  S--R,$E$
(g) past perfect  E--R--S
(h) present perfect  E--S,R
(i) future perfect  S--E--R
(j) past perfect continuous  $E--R--S$
(k) present perfect continuous  $E--R,S$
(l) future perfect continuous  S--$E--R$
(m) non-fulfilled past  E*--R--S
(n) non-fulfilled past continuous  $E*, R--S$
(o) non-fulfilled past perfect  E*--R--S

According to these categories, Kanchanawan (1978) has a taxonomy of time and aspect markers similar to the location/motion path-relative taxonomy developed by Thepkanjana (forthcoming). Five time markers indicate three times: past, recent past, and future (Kanchanawan 1978:76). Eight aspect markers indicate five aspects: continuous, completive, perfective, continuative, and generic (Kanchanawan 1978:81-5). These are listed in [5].
Past time markers:  
- *da'i* 'able, can, may, get, receive, have opportunity'
- *k'aa'e* 'experience, accustomed to'
- *wai* 'keep (for a certain purpose)'

Recent Past marker:  
- *p'aa* 'just'

Future marker:  
- *ca*? Volition, Assertion, Intention

Continuous Aspect:  
- *juu* Process of doing, Stative

Compleitive Aspect:  
- *cop* 'end'
  - *samret* 'successful'
  - *set* 'finish'

Perfective Aspect:  
- *laæew* 'ready, already, finish'

Continuative Aspect:  
- *pa'i* 'go, away'
  - *maa* 'come, towards'

Generic Aspect:  
- *jam* 'naturally'

Considerable attention has been given to the application of Reichenbach's formulas to narrative aspect (Dowty 1979; McCoard 1978; Smith 1978). Based on aspect theory in application to narrative text analysis, I will develop a working hypothesis of the expression of time specifically in Thai narrative.

Smith (1978) proposes an extension to Reichenbach's system where speech time (S) is orientation time (OT) because, although in independent sentences (in English) orientation time is always speech time, "in narratives, a time of narration can be established and the sentences of the narrative are all understood as oriented to that time." (Smith 1978:77)

Smith gives examples of sentences that cannot be fully interpreted in isolation, although they are grammatical, in [6] and [7].

[6] Laurie called beforehand.

[7] John was better now.
These sentences "require a specification of the time to which they are oriented, or anchored." (Smith 1978:77)

Dowty (1979:332) credits Smith (1978) with this insight into the order of sentences in a narrative; i.e., "indefinitely identified times in a sequence of sentences in a narrative are understood to be ordered." Dowty argues that sequences of sentences with contextual identifiability in a narrative are distinctively simple past, because of their $R,E -- S$ formula. And, that if reference time were to be distinct from the others, i.e., $R--E--S$, or past perfect, then the referential information is of pragmatic value to the narration as a whole, not to the independent sentence (Dowty 1979:330-334).

The assumption by Kanchanawan (1978:134) is that there will always be time indication in any Thai sentence, if not a specific time indicator, then the only time implication is in the verb itself. *If a time phrase is not present, the time implication in the time marker will take precedence. Last, the time implication in the verb will be significant if there is neither a time phrase nor a time marker.* (Kanchanawan 1978:74)

In order to avoid relying on a semantic taxonomy of verbs that contain time indications, I will investigate a hypothesis based on the above theory of narration. That is, according to the Reichenbach (1947) tense formulas and Smith's (1978) and Dowty's (1979) theories, Thai would express narrative storyline with an unmarked past case. It is unmarked because it is indistinguishable from simple present. Orientation time (OT) can be set with overt past time phrases (TP) that are outside the VP and time/aspect markers within the VP that can be applied across sentence boundaries.

Overt time expression is *highlighted* in the portion of Thai narrative text below:

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S 1    siithanonchai kae raeam wito nai ruan t'ii juu aasai
       then begin worry about story place live
'Srithanonchai then began to worry about where he
would live.'
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S2 tagtæe baa¹ maa lææew kʰaaw met diaw since afternoon cont. perf. rice kernel single jæŋ ma¹ tok tʰæŋ thæŋ yet not fall to stomach 'Since that afternoon, not a kernel of rice had reached (his) stomach.'

S3 hiu con taa laaj hungry until eye specks '(He) was hungry and faint.'

S4 tææe koɔ cam toŋ tʰon deen kraseʔ kraseeng but then necessary must bear walk aimlessly ock pa¹ caak muu baan out go from village 'But he must continue wandering out from the village.'

S5 tʰii kʰæ¹ juu aasa¹ maa tææe con tææe ock that pst tm live cont. since young (idiom) 'that (he) grew up in.'

S6 deen pa¹ jaŋ ra¹ cut maa¹ con kraʔtʰæŋ walk go Attrib. without purpose until muut sanit darkness completely '(he) walked devoid of purpose until complete darkness.'

S7 siithañonchaj cuŋ lææe hen wat ja¹ hæŋ nuŋ s then see monastery big place one jeun tʰamen juu na¹ kʰwaam muut stand erect loc. in darkness Srithañonchaj then saw a large monastery standing erect in the darkness.'
S8 caw chai no kʰo mii kaʔca
3sm informal add. s little slowly have hope 'Srithanonchai eventually took heart.'

S9 proʔ kʰit waa jaŋ no kʰuŋ nii kco pʰo because think compl. at least night this at least caʔ mii tʰi suk hua
irr. have place hide head 'Because, (he) thought, at least this night he would have a place to rest (his) head

noon taam saalaa naŋ wat nan daŋ sleep along resting shelter in monastery that can and sleep along the pagoda in the monastery

kco pʰo kan fon kan naam kʰaan at least prevent rain prevent dew sufficient to prevent rain and dew.'

S10 paʔmoʔ aat caʔ kʰo kʰaaw caak luckily probably irr. request rice from sompʰaan kin sak mue abbot eat only+one meal ' Appropriately, (he) probably could request from the abbot just one meal to eat.'

S11 cʰuŋ riip saaw tʰaw kaaw paŋ jaŋ then hurry pull feet step dir. attrib. ruat rew quickly 'So, (he) walked forward very quickly.'

S12 mua kʰaw kʰeet wat cai kʰo kʰo when enter area monastery heart throat begin chʰuŋ kʰuŋ
damp increase
'When (he) entered the monastery area, (he) began to feel refreshed with hope.'

S13 siithanonchai dæen duu taam kuti
s walk look along monk cloisters
noj ja1 na1 boriwen wat
little big in area monastery
'Srithanonchai walked and looked at the large and small monk cloisters in the monastery area.'

S14 lææw pa1 jut jœn juu naa kuti ja1 lan nœn
then go stop stand Loc front cloister big Class. one
'Then, (he) went and stood in front of a big cloister.'

In S1, raem 'begin' establishes ET and ST in the story either as ET,ST or ET--ST. According to this information, it is ambiguous whether ET and ST are synchronic or diachronic. That is, while according to Smith (1978) and Dowty (1979), the default unmarked case would be past tense for narrative, nothing in the syntax of raem as an aspect marker within this sentence marks it as specifically as past tense (ET-ST) or present tense (ET,ST). In S1, OT is synchronic with ET.

However, in S2, tantææ baa1 maa lææw 'since the afternoon' and jaŋ 'yet' establishes a pre-chronic OT. That is, when raem 'begin' established ET in S1, it is clear that the comment in S2 is a prior reference to ET (OT--ET--ST, cf. R -- E-- S), confirming the distinctive past perfect usage of the TP in S2 (marked by maa.). Basing the OT tantææ baa1 maa lææw 'since the afternoon' and jaŋ 'yet' in S2 and con kra?tnaŋ meut sanit 'until complete darkness' in S6 on a single 24 hour period would place ET for S1 through S4 somewhere in-between. S5 retreats into the more distant past with the use of the past time marker kʰa1 and the perfective maa.
But in S6, the non-event reference time (OT--ET) has once again become OT,ET based on the TP marker *con kraʔ than mut sanit* 'until complete darkness'.

Specifically, when was he hungry (S3) and when did he remember (S4)? Based on the TPs in S2 and S6, it is unclear which formula characterizes the action in S3 and S4. According to Smith (1978) and Dowty (1979), the order would determine the sequentiality in series of sentences lacking definite identifiable time.

Further evidence of the unmarked past tense that foregoes the marking of order with identifiable time phrases is in S7, S8, S11. These sentences contain events that are required as events of sequential time reference to immediate post-ceding clauses.

S7 and S8 do not contain TPs to give temporal reference to the discovering of the temple. But, the evaluation marked by the thought act complementizer *waa* in S9 refers to this discovery. *waa* (also in S15), which I choose to label as a non-past time expressor is, in fact, the speech/thought act marker which would be sequential in the storyline, and thus past time. But, the corpus of the speech or thought therein is a non-past irrealis evaluation (marked by *caʔ* and *kʰwun nii* in S9 and S10).

While these clauses show evidence through the use of TPs and iconic ordering of the unmarked past case in Thai, overt sequential markers of events (SM) are textually marked by *koo, cuŋ, laeæw*, 'then' in S1, S4, S7, and S11 which serve to highlight events by marking their boundaries.

Sequential markers in Thai have been examined by Burusaphat (1991) who gives credit to Kanchanawan (1978) for developing a good working taxonomy of time expressions in Thai, but Burusaphat (1991:107) specifies some additional sequential markers relevant to Thai narrative: *The sequentiality of storyline in Thai narratives is frequently detected by the use of temporal clauses, phrases, or words, and the use of auxiliaries, pre-serial verbs, and post-serial verbs. The sequential markers focused on here are the completere*
markers cop 'end', samvet 'successful', and set 'finish', the perfective marker lææw 'already', the auxiliary koo 'then', and the preserial verb cun 'consequently'. (See Hopper (1979) for other examples of languages with overt narrative sequence marking.) Below is a list of time expressions operative in the selected Thai narrative portion.

S1 sequential marker koo, ream 'begin'
S2 tanţææ baa1 maa (Cont.) lææw (Perf.), yan 'yet'
S4 koo
S5 kʰæj(Past Time Marker), maa (Continuous)
S6 con kraʔ+hán mɯt sanit
S7 sequential marker cun
S9 non-past complementizer waa, irrealis marker caʔ
S10 irrealis marker caʔ
S11 cun
S12 mua 'when'
S14 sequential marker lææw

This can be expressed below as a string of sentences in which overt time expression is marked with association lines.

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koo koo kʰæj cun waa caʔ cun lææw
maa caʔ

In this series of clauses S3, S8 and S13 do not have overt time expression. The economy of Standard Thai has a high capacity use of pro-forms in sentences: often sentence subjects, aspektual markers, (and sometimes propositions, cf. Hatton (1975)) are "covert" and ambiguous and can render a sentence
seemingly incomplete. As such, in order to clarify ambiguity of syntactic analysis in these areas, parameters beyond the sentence boundary are needed to correspond with the economy of the language as it is employed in narrative text, i.e., the anaphoric chaining of subjects vis-a-vis topic formation and the limited use of overt time markers.

Pro-forms are actually "zero" anaphors that represent previous material in an economical way. A discourse level analysis is necessary to investigate the use of "zero time-aspect anaphora" in Thai. At this point, I will employ the use of a model of nonlinear analysis borrowed from autosegmental phonology towards establishing a multi-clausal investigation.

Topic chaining, as a descriptive analysis of pronominalization in "cool" discourse-type languages such as Thai is possibly compatible within this nonlinear paradigm. I will use principles of autosegmental phonology to more clearly describe this phenomenon in Thai as it occurs with aspect and juxtapose it with topic.

2. Non-linear analysis of aspect in Thai narrative

2.1. Autosegmental analysis

In generative phonology, features that compose sounds are viewed as units. Autosegmental phonology challenges this by viewing features as autosegments, i.e., free from the constraints of the whole set of features of the segment. Autonomous features are on tiers that individually associate with the consonants and vowels on the skeletal tier, such as tone in the definition of the Association Convention (Goldsmith 1990:14):

Association Convention
When unassociated vowels and tones appear on the same side of an association line, they will be automatically associated in a one-to-one fashion, radiating outward from the association line.
Viewed on separate horizontal tiers with vertical pre-association lines connecting them, autosegmental features can "radiate" outward to associate with other Cs or Vs.

In the example of tone, tone features and CVs are on separate tiers. A pre-defined association line is overt within the structure of the language. When a tone that is associated with a single vowel is adjacent to a vowel that has no additional tone with which to apply an association, then spreading, or assimilation, can occur. Language specific rules define parameters of spreading whether unbounded rightward spreading, unbounded leftward spreading, spreading in both directions or bounded spreading that may be restricted only to doubling. Rules of this nature are important to discover when investigating a string of pre-associated tones such as those in [36], i.e., which way and how far does the spreading occur?

[36] C V₁ C V₂ C V₃ C V₄ C V₅ C V₆ C V₇

H        L        H

2.2 Autosegmental formalism applied to aspect in Thai

Applying this formalism to characterize aspect in Thai narrative discourse provides a strong argument for parameters that are beyond the sentence boundary. S₃, S₈ and S₁₃ are ambiguous in time expression, unless they associate in order with S₇ and S₁₂, respectively, which are preassociated to an aspect tier (T) by overt time expressions (below):

| 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 |
| T T T T T T T T T T T T |

Let me now apply this formalism to a continuation of the discourse S₁-S₁₄ to demonstrate its value. This portion is more revealing of null aspect in clauses that need to associate with
those that are pre-associated, i.e., those that contain overt expressions of time in the story (italicized).

S15 kʰiːt daw aw waa kʰonŋ pen kuti tʰan
think guess compl. may is cloister 3 formal add.
somphaan caw aawaat
abbot lord abiding place
'(He) guessed that it must be the living quarters of the abbot, lord of the place.'

S16 pʰrō? jai kwaa laŋ ʊŋ
because big compar. building (Class.) other
'Because (this building) was bigger than the others.'

S17 cuŋ tat sin cai kaaw kʰun bandai
then decide step up staircase
'Then (he) decided to ascend the staircase.'

S18 kʰran kʰun pai tʰun nook chaan kuti jai nan
then up dir. reach outside edge cloister big that
'After ascending to the perimeter of that big house.'

S19 læʔ hen tʰaan somphaan naŋ iŋ
and see 3 form.add. abbot sit lean
saw chaan kuti juu
post edge cloister cont.
'And (he) saw the abbot sitting leaning against a post on the porch of the cloister.'

S20 caw chai noj kʰOi kʰOi kom loŋ kraap
3s inform. add. S little slowly down down prostrate
'Srithanonchai slowly prostrated himself.'
S21 læææw kʰlaan kʰaw pai
then crawl enter dir.
'Then (he) crawled inside.'

S22 moop sanøp saniep juu bhaŋ naa
bow silently humbly Loc front
'(He) silently and humbly bowed down in front (of him).' 

S23 kom lon kraap iik kʰran
bow down respect one more time
'(He) bowed down in respect once again.'

S24 naam taa laŋ rin lon maa aap kææm
tears run down come wash cheeks
'Tears came flooding down and washed all over (his) cheeks.'

Time is overtly marked in these clauses by previously identified time expressions (cf. Kanchanawan), and other expressions including kʰran as a sequence marker and iik kʰran 'again' as a time phrase. Also, juu operates as a continuous marker for the propositions in S19 and S22.

S15 waa
S17 cuŋ
S18 kʰran 'at that time'
S19 juu (continuous)
S21 læææw
S22 juu (continuous)
S23 iik kʰran 'again'
The applied formalism (above) indicates the propensity for Thai to adopt an association-driven non-linear multi-clausal discourse analysis of aspect. As I mentioned earlier, aspect could be placed on a tier separate from other constituents, such as topic, the multi-clausal association of which could be juxtaposed with the aspect tier to be used in analyzing discourse level phenomena such as: paragraph formation, eventline and non-eventline, participant reference, etc.

Notes

1Kanchanawan (1978) identifies specific subcategorical restrictions for each constituent label: PREV, AUX, and POSTV. She excludes POSTV from this PS rule because it is developed from VPS (Kanchanawan 1978: 41) which is similar to Filbeck's VP*. Thus, VPS is described as such:
VPS → VP PVP
PVP → POSTV (Q)

2Kanchanawan actually develops a taxonomy of verbs that is discussed with reference to time expression in Thai narrative in Chapter 3 Section 3.3.1. (cf. Burusphat 1991:99-105)

3Warotamasikkhadit (1972) describes TP as Tm within the verb phrase, ( PS2 in his phrase structure description of Thai.)

4"**" and "→" refer to event continuation and irrealis which Kanchanawan (1978) argues as distinctive aspect designations in Thai.

References


