

SOME ASPECTS OF THAI SYNTAX

by

KANJANEE JIRATATPASUT

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MASTERS OF ARTS

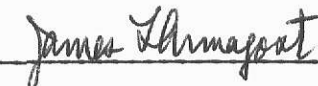
Department of Speech

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

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## Introduction

There are two main purposes for this paper. First, I have tried to write a basic transformational/generative grammar of Thai, which is a relatively new field of study. Secondly, this paper is intended to be used as a reference for Thai syntax for my students who major in English. Supposedly they will be able to see the structural differences between English and Thai sentences analyzed transformationally, and this will help them both in studying these two languages and in their teaching careers.

The paper provides some aspects of Thai syntax starting from tense/aspect, negatives, and questions, and gradually moving to more complex structures including relative clauses. I also discuss certain common sentences whose correct analysis is not entirely clear.

### Section I : Tense/Aspect

There are at least two reasons for taking tense/aspect as the place to begin. First, this section provides kernel structures of sentences for those who have no acquaintance with the language, and second it forms some foundation for what follows in the later sections.

Consider the following data:

1.1 / khaw du: ti:wi: /

he watch T.V.

" a) He watches T.V. "

" b) He watched T.V. "

1.2 / khaw kamlan du: ti:wi: /

he prog. watch T.V.

" He is watching T.V. "

1.3 / khaw ca du: ti:wi: /

he fut. watch T.V.

" He will watch T.V. "

1.4 / khaw ca kamlan du: ti:wi: /

he fut. prog. watch T.V.

" He will be watching T.V. "

Sentence 1.1 : Comparing it with the other sentences, no tense/aspect marker can be seen in the surface structure. Without any adverbs of time in the sentence, it is ambiguous. The sentence can be interpreted as present or past tense as in the translation (a) and (b). To disambiguate this sentence, an adverb is needed.

1.5 / khaw du: ti:wi: thukwan /

he watch T.V. everyday

" He watches T.V. everyday. "

1.6 / khaw du: ti:wi: m4:a\wa:n /

he watch T.V. yesterday

" He watched T.V. yesterday. "

Sentence 1.2 : / kamləŋ / is the aspect marker of progressive. There are three possible progressive aspects: progressive at present, in the future and past. The present and past are identified by adverbs and the future is indicated by an additional tense marker / ca / right in front of / kamləŋ /, plus optional adverbs.

1.7 / khaw kamləŋ du: ti:wi: di:ani: /  
 he prog. watch T.V. right now

" He is watching T.V. right now. "

1.8 / khaw kamləŋ du: ti:wi: mɛ:a\wa:n yen /  
 he prog. watch T.V. yesterday evening

" He was watching T.V. yesterday evening. "

1.9 / khaw ca kamləŋ du: ti:wi: phuŋni: /  
 he fut. prog. watch T.V. tomorrow

" He will be watching T.V. tomorrow. "

Sentence 1.3 : / ca / is the tense marker for future. As already mentioned, / ca / itself with some kind of verbs such as / set / " complete, finish " indicates that the actions will be completed in the future.

1.10 / khaw ca du: ti:wi: set to:nba:y /  
 he fut. watch T.V. finish in the afternoon

" He will finish watching T.V. in the afternoon. "

At this point, one thing that can be concluded is that either adverbs or tense/aspect markers are used to indicate time of action. For sentences that depend only on adverbs to signify tenses, there will be two possible analyses of the structure. The first one is that there is no tense/aspect marker at all in the deep structure. The other one is that there is a tense/aspect marker in the deep structure and whatever it is, it is deleted by a transformation so that it does not show up in the surface structure.

The first analysis is probably simpler, so phrase structure rules

to cover all the data that has been already given will be:

- 1.11      a) S      ----> NP VP ( Adv. )  
             b) VP      ----> ( Tns. ) V ( NP )  
             c) Tns. ----> ( ca ) ( kamlan )

Rules developing NP will be given below in section IV. Rule (c) depends on the usual convention that in such situations at least one element must be chosen. As long as we group / ca / and / kamlan / as elements for a higher unit, this is the only way to avoid awkward rules such as :

Tns. ----> { ca ( kamlan )  
                   kamlan } .

One thing that should be worked out now is adverbs. The correct analysis of adverbs is a difficult and complicated topic. For the purpose of this paper, (only what is relevant is going to be dealt with.

1.12 / khaw pai ba:n\ m̄:a\wa:n /  
           he go house yesterday  
           " He went home yesterday. "

1.13 / m̄:a\wa:n khaw pai ba:n\  
           yesterday he go house  
           " Yesterday, he went home. "

1.14 \* / ba:n\ khaw pai m̄:a\wa:n /  
           house he go yesterday  
           " Home he went yesterday. "

/ ba:n\  
 / " home " and / m̄:a\wa:n / " yesterday " are adverbs of sentence 1.12 . / m̄:a\wa:n / is preposed in sentence 1.13 which is still grammatical, but if / ba:n\  
 / " home " is preposed in 1.14, it is ungrammatical in Thai.

Structurally there are two kinds of adverbs, namely adverbs dominated by S which can be preposed and adverbs dominated by VP which can not be preposed. This fact answers why 1.13 is grammatical but 1.14 is not.

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