

The (non-) progressive in Thai*

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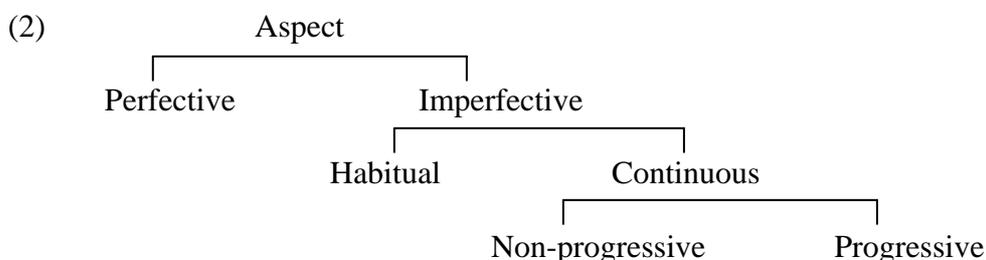
The lexical meanings of *k1aml3ang* and *y3u:I* are readily clear: ‘strength’ and ‘stay’, respectively. But when the two behave like auxiliaries, their semantics are not as transparent. They have been treated both as temporal markers conveying present time and as aspect markers specifying progressiveness, continuation, and imperfectivity. In this essay, the proposal that they express the time coterminous with the utterance time is refuted. Looking at their occurrences in ordinary language use, with aspectual verb types and temporal measure adverbs taken into consideration, it is found that *k1aml3ang* and *y3u:I* are better seen as aspect markers conveying progressiveness and non-progressiveness, respectively. To represent *k1aml3ang* and *y3u:I* in Discourse Representation Theory, the aspectual operator PROG may be applied to the predicate.

1 INTRODUCTION

Out of context, *k1aml3ang*¹ and *y3u:I* are typically thought of as an abstract noun and a location verb with lexical meanings of ‘strength’ and ‘stay’, respectively. Nevertheless, there are other apparently auxiliary-like uses of *k1aml3ang* and *y3u:I*. In these, *k1aml3ang* immediately precedes and *y3u:I* immediately follows verb phrases, though the two may also co-occur. Possible constructions thus include the following:

- (1) a. *k1aml3ang* VP
- b. VP *y3u:I*
- c. *k1aml3ang* VP *y3u:I*

From Bybee et al.’s (1994) remark that grammatical markings for the progressive aspect derive most frequently from locative constructions and tend to evolve as imperfective markers, it is expected that *y3u:I*, a location verb meaning ‘stay’ is a progressive/imperfective marker in Thai when it behaves like an auxiliary. Even though *k1aml3ang* is an abstract noun whose meaning has nothing to do with location, it usually occurs with *y3u:I* when it is an auxiliary, making it highly likely that it too is a progressive/imperfective marker. However, if we look at the aspectual contrasts presented in Comrie (1976: 25) and repeated in (2) below, it becomes clear that the progressive/imperfective distinction may not be the appropriate one.



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¹ The Thai transliteration system used here is that which is found in Diller (1996).