

léew kamlaj and jùu revisited

1. Introduction¹

Thai has been known to have no tense. If this is true then how does Thai encode events in time? According to Frawley (1992: 294), “an event is a relation that makes essential reference to time”. If Thai is tenseless (in the traditional sense), it still must be equipped with certain devices to deal with time.

Thai employs nouns or adverbs of time to assign temporal locations². Temporal expressions situate the whole situation (including all (sub)-events) in time) with respect to the absolute locus which is always the speech time (i.e., the here-and-now) and ‘yesterday’ is relative to that, as shown in (1).

- (1) *mîawaan níi dɛɛŋ paj talàat tɔɔn fɔn kamlaj tòk*
yesterday Daeng go market when rain PROG fall
‘Yesterday, Daeng went to the market when it was raining.’

The word ‘yesterday’ in (1) signals that both events (Daeng’s going to the market and raining) precede the time of speaking. And if the speaker continues talking about Daeng, the listener will know immediately that all the events occur one day before the time of utterance without repeating the word ‘yesterday’.

It is, however, insufficient for a language to simply locate all events in time with respect to a fixed reference point because time is complex. Any language must be supplied with various devices to deal with this complexity.

One of the facets of time in language is the internal composition of an event. This internal facet is where aspect comes into play. The two clauses in (1) have different internal temporal contours. The main clause ‘Daeng went to the market’ expresses the event as a completed act. The other clause ‘it was raining’ expresses that the event is extended into a progressive event.

The question is, are these devices (i.e., temporal expressions and aspectual markers) sufficient for communication? What about temporal relations between (sub)-events (i.e., ‘Daeng’s going to the market’ and ‘raining’), then? How is one event temporally related to another? One might say that conjunctions (e.g. *tɔɔn* ‘when’) would do the work. However, from the point of view of economy, there should be something else, which is succinct enough to express such a native and ubiquitous experience as time without invoking another clause as *tɔɔn* does. I suggest that *léew*, *kamlaj*, and *jùu* do this job in Thai. They serve a dual function. That is, they do not simply modify the internal contour of an event, but also signal how (sub)-events are temporally related. In addition to their aspectual effect, they serve as, ‘temporal linkers’, i.e., signaling how an event is distributed in relation to another event, which is typically the speech event.

This paper is organized in the following way: Section 2 explicates conceptual features of *léew* important to our understanding of its aspectual and temporal

¹ This is on-going research. Please do not cite.

* = syntactically ill-formed

= semantically ill-formed

² In addition to temporal expressions, we can say Thai relies on context for determining the temporal setting of a proposition.