

# TEMPORAL PROXIMITY: AN ORGANIZING FACTOR OF FOUR MAJOR ASPECTS IN THAI\*

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This paper examines an aspectual notion “temporal proximity” (conceptualized closeness between the realization of a reference situation and a certain current time in any time frame) expressed in the Thai language. It is argued that Thai distinguishes four major aspects that are organized in terms of temporal proximity: “recent retrospective,” “beginning,” “imminent prospective” and “reaching” aspects. Based on their modal implication, these aspects are divided into two main types: “actual” and “fictive” types. The actual type, including recent retrospective and beginning aspects, relates a current situation to an experienced realization of a reference situation; the fictive type, including imminent prospective and reaching aspects, relates a current situation to an imagined realization of a reference situation. Each type is further classified into two categories according to different perspectives taken in viewing an evolutionary situation, namely “global” and “internal” perspectives. The recent retrospective and imminent prospective aspects view a static situation from a global perspective. The beginning and reaching aspects, on the other hand, view a dynamic situation in an internal perspective. Thus, the concept of temporal proximity subsumes symmetrically related notions that constitute a well-composed structure.

## 1. Introduction

Aspect involves reference to one of the temporally distinct phases in the evolution of an event or situation (including agentive activity, non-agentive process and state) through time. That is, aspect relates event time to reference time that is strictly earlier or later than that event time (Johnson 1981: 125, 152). The Thai language has a number of lexical items which function as aspectual devices to relate a given situation to a “proximately” preceding or subsequent situation in the discourse time. Examples include *phâη*, *chák*, *thêep* and *kamlaj cà?*, as below.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) *kháw* *phâη* *klàp* *maa*  
PRONOUN<sup>2</sup> \*\*\* turn:back come  
'S/he has just got back.'
- (2) *chák* *hîw*  
\*\*\* hungry  
'I am beginning feeling hungry.'
- (3) *thêep* *róoy hây*  
\*\*\* cry

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<sup>1</sup> I collected the data for this study mainly from the Thai language corpora which belongs to the National Electronics and Computer Technology Center (NECTEC) of the National Science, Technology Development Agency (NSTDA), the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, Thailand, and the Institute of the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (LICAA), the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan. I wish to thank these organizations for permission to use the corpora.

<sup>2</sup> The third person pronoun *kháw* in Thai specifies neither its referent's gender and number nor any grammatical relations. Therefore, *kháw* can be translated multiply into English unless the context is clear. To avoid unnecessary elaboration, in this paper I give all of Thai pronouns, except relative pronouns, the same plain gloss, i.e. PRONOUN, and translate each of them in a default-like manner.

- ‘I almost cry.’  
 (4) *kháw kamlay cà? dâ? satî?*  
 PRONOUN \*\*\* gain consciousness  
 ‘S/he is becoming conscious.’

The lexical items (so-called aspectual auxiliaries) that represent “temporal proximity” are not only considerably large in number but also quite frequently used in Thai discourses. In this study I call those lexical items temporal proximity aspect markers.<sup>3</sup> By the term “temporal proximity,” I mean conceptualized closeness between the realization of a reference situation and a given current time in any time frame.<sup>4</sup> The current time is a certain point within the span of a current situation that the speaker wants to characterize in relation to the realization of a reference situation. In (1), for example, the reference situation is a person’s getting back and the current time is the time shortly after the realization of that reference situation. The current situation, which is the speaker’s concern, is the situation as a result of the realization of that reference situation. It should be noted that the main verb phrase in temporal proximity expressions denotes a reference event, relative to which a current state is situated.

Examples (1) to (4) above respectively illustrate Thai temporal proximity aspect of four types. The “recent retrospective” aspect, as in (1), relates a current static situation to a shortly prior realization of a reference situation (getting back). The “beginning” aspect, as in (2), relates a current dynamic situation to a shortly prior realization of a reference situation (feeling hungry). The “imminent prospective” aspect, as in (3), relates a current static situation to a shortly posterior realization of a reference situation (crying). And the “reaching” aspect, as in (4), relates a current dynamic situation to a shortly posterior realization of a reference situation (becoming conscious). The recent retrospective and beginning aspects require a shortly prior “actual” or experienced realization of a reference situation, while the imminent prospective and reaching aspects require a shortly posterior “fictive” or imagined realization of a reference situation. Concurrently, the recent retrospective and imminent prospective aspects involve a current “static” situation holistically viewed, while the beginning and reaching aspects involve a current “dynamic” situation

<sup>3</sup> Apart from temporal proximity aspect markers, Thai has a number of other particular aspect markers, such as the progressive marker *kamlay* and the perfect marker *lêw* (cf. Scovel 1970; Boonyapatipark 1983; Sookgasem 1990). Moreover, motion verbs (e.g. *khuîn* ‘ascend,’ *pay* ‘go,’ *thûy* ‘arrive’) and other verbs (e.g. *lâw* ‘take,’ *wây* ‘store,’ *sîa* ‘lose, waste’) are often used as a subsidiary verb indicating aspectual notions (cf. Thepkanjana 1986). Opinions vary as to how far those verbs have proceeded along the path of grammaticalization, however. Take *yîu* for example. This lexical item is used to mean ‘be or do something continuously’ (e.g. *kháw này yîu bon tiay* ‘S/he is sitting on the bed’) as well as ‘be located’ (e.g. *kháw yîu bon rua* ‘S/he is in the boat’). The former usage can be regarded as exclusively marking imperfective aspect or as carrying both of the original spatial sense of location and the derived aspectual sense of continuation. As such, it is difficult to identify Thai aspect markers proper. In this study I will not explore the whole aspect system in Thai, but focus on four major, albeit unfairly neglected, aspects involving temporal proximity in Thai. Highly grammaticalized temporal proximity aspect markers are dealt with in this paper.

Temporal proximity is a less familiar aspectual notion. Only the imminent prospective subtype, which is roughly equated with what Heine (1992) named ALMOST-aspect and Heine (1994) called proximative, is rather widely known. It seems to me, however, that Heine’s studies on proximative overlook the overall systematic configuration of temporal proximity.

successively viewed. Table 1 below summarizes these four aspects' compositional entailments.

TABLE 1: FOUR TYPES OF TEMPORAL PROXIMITY IN THAI

	<Existential status of reference situation> <b>Actual</b> (experienced)	<b>Fictive</b> (imagined)
<Configurative nature of current situation> <b>Static</b> (holistic)	(1) <b><u>Recent Retrospective</u></b> <b>Actual</b> reference situation <b>Static</b> current situation	(3) <b><u>Imminent Prospective</u></b> <b>Fictive</b> reference situation <b>Static</b> current situation
<b>Dynamic</b> (successive)	(2) <b><u>Beginning</u></b> <b>Actual</b> reference situation <b>Dynamic</b> current situation	(4) <b><u>Reaching</u></b> <b>Fictive</b> reference situation <b>Dynamic</b> current situation

The notion of temporal proximity has been given little attention in previous studies on aspect in Thai. This paper, therefore, aims at giving an in-depth analysis of the neglected four major aspects involving temporal proximity in Thai. I claim that they reflect a conceptual structure organized in terms of temporal proximity. The concept of temporal proximity in Thai has a well-structured construct. This conceptual structure, I assume, is motivated by psychological reality or mental images that involve such notions as boundedness in time, perspective, salience, certainty, and so forth.

This paper is organized in the following way. Section 2 first explicates key concepts relevant to my analysis of Thai temporal proximity aspect of four types, and then examines in detail the nature of the four aspects. Section 3 discusses differences among the four aspects. Section 4 suggests possible paths of semantic extension of the concept “proximity” in Thai, which are observable in synchronic linguistic data, and in Section 5, I will give concluding remarks.

## 2. Types of temporal proximity in Thai

As stated in the preceding section, Thai temporal proximity can be classified into two main types based on the existential status of a reference situation, namely “actual” and “fictive” temporal proximity.<sup>5</sup> Actual temporal proximity refers to conceptualized closeness to a point of reference in actual or experienced preceding time; fictive temporal proximity refers to conceptualized closeness to a point of reference in fictive or imagined subsequence time. Actual and fictive time, respectively, is time before and after a certain current time in any time frame. A current time is the dividing point between actual preceding time and fictive subsequent time, and a given current situation entails this dividing point. The temporal span of a current situation is graphically represented in Figure 1 below. In this image schema, the horizontal long arrow stands

<sup>5</sup> My terms “actual” and “fictive” are similar to Johnson’s (1981) terms “manifest” and “imminent,” respectively. Johnson (1981: 146-147) states that existential status of an event may be either manifest, i.e. at least one complete instance of the event is a historical fact, or imminent, i.e. no complete instance of the event is a historical fact.

for time axis, and the vertical short line on it indicates the position of a certain current time, to the left and right of which are actual and fictive time, respectively. The dotted thick line parallel with the time axis arrow stands for the span of a current situation, which indefinitely extends over both actual preceding time and fictive subsequent time.

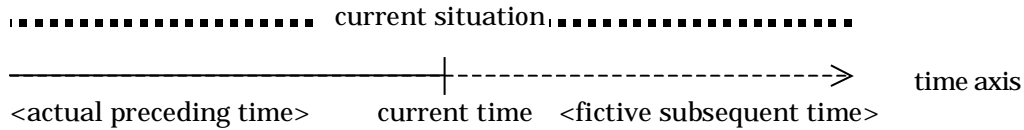


FIGURE 1: TEMPORAL SPAN OF CURRENT SITUATION

The span of a current situation may be bounded at some point in actual preceding time or fictive subsequent time, as respectively illustrated in Figures 2 and 3.

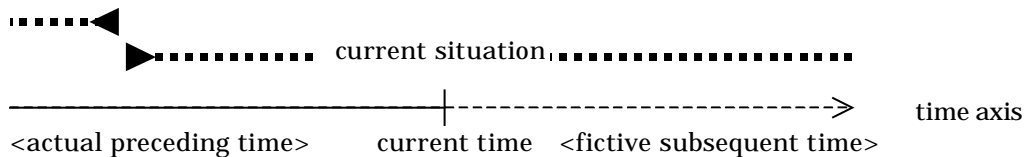


FIGURE 2: ACTUALLY BOUNDED CURRENT SITUATION

Figure 2 shows a current situation bounded in actual preceding time. A previous situation is represented by another dotted thick line, whose endpoint meets with the starting point of the current situation.

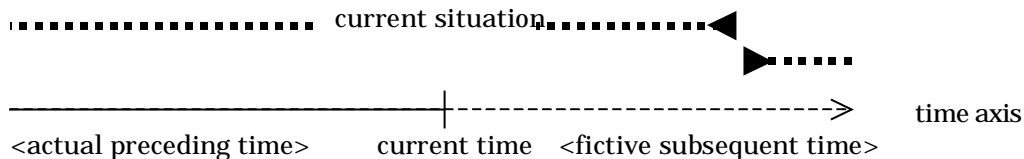


FIGURE 3: FICTIVELY BOUNDED CURRENT SITUATION

Figure 3 shows a current situation bounded in fictive subsequent time. An imagined following situation is represented by another dotted thick line. In this schema, the endpoint of the current situation meets with the starting point of the following situation.

It is our common metaphor that TIME IS MOTION (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 52). This is one of the primary metaphors that pair subjective experience and judgment with sensory motor experience. In this metaphor, abstract situation is mapped onto a concrete spatial motion model. My claim is that temporal proximity can be understood as temporal motion, that is, actual temporal proximity is analogous to a little motion from a point of reference in actual preceding time and fictive temporal proximity is

analogous to a little motion toward a point of reference in fictive subsequent time. Put differently, the former motion is experienced to have just begun, while the latter motion is imagined to nearly terminate.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 4 below represents an image schema for actual temporal proximity. In this schema, the two dotted thick lines stand for previous and current situations, and the two opposite triangles stand for the termination of the previous situation and the beginning of the current situation. The series of asterisk under the current situation line stands for the marked short period immediately after the beginning of the current situation.

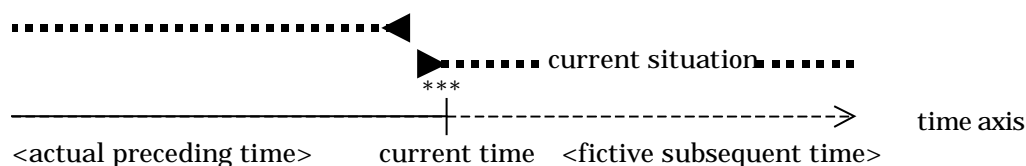


FIGURE 4: ACTUAL TEMPORAL PROXIMITY

The fictive temporal proximity aspect, on the other hand, marks a short period preceding a fictive result of a current situation. Figure 5 below represents an image schema for fictive temporal proximity. Here, the current situation has the endpoint in fictive subsequent time, which corresponds to the starting point of a following situation. The marked short period right before that endpoint is indicated by the series of asterisk.

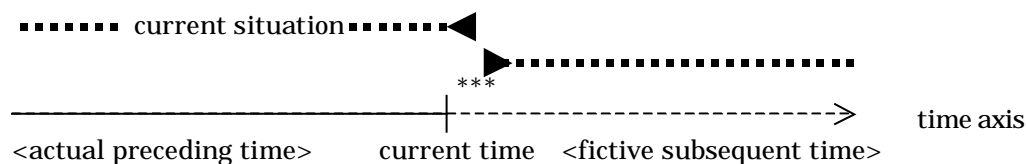


FIGURE 5: FICTIVE TEMPORAL PROXIMITY

I would like to emphasize that the import of Thai temporal proximity expressions like those in (1) to (4) is not simply the realization of a situation overtly expressed by the main verb phrase. The speakers' motive for uttering the expressions is the need to express how a given current situation is. The function of the expressions is to

<sup>6</sup> Langacker (1991b: 330-333) mentions two types of motion: spatial and temporal motion. According to him, the moving entity of spatial motion is a certain object that traverses a spatial path while that of temporal motion is the speaker or conceptualizer who mentally scans the motion through time. It is obvious that in conceptualizing temporal proximity, an instantiation of temporal motion, there is no longer 'objective' basis for the conceptualizer's mental scanning. The basis for it entirely resides in the conceptualizer's activity, that is, the process of conceptualization itself. Therefore I consider temporal proximity to involve the final stage of subjectification in Langacker's sense (cf. Langacker 1999, Ch.10). In terms of Traugott's broader notion of subjectification (cf. Traugott 1995), temporal proximity should be regarded as greatly subjective, too, because it is grounded in the speaker's world of reasoning and belief. In other words, conceptualization of temporal proximity is completely speaker-based.

characterize a current situation in question as temporally near from/to the realization of a situation denoted by the main verb phrase, but not to straightforwardly state that a situation denoted by the main verb phrase happened in the immediate past or will happen in the immediate future. The current situation, which is the speaker's concern, is characterized relevant to the realization of some event in the immediate past or future. For example, the import of (1) is not the realization of a person's getting back a short while ago but a certain current situation as a result of her/his getting back; the import of (3) is not the realization of a person's crying in the imminent future but a certain current situation in which her/his crying is about to occur. The speaker conceives of some cause-effect relationship between the given current situation and the reference event in the immediate past or future.

A current situation in question and a reference situation denoted by the main verb phrase may be apparently different, as in (1), (3) and (4), or may seem to be the same, as in (2). For example, a current situation the speaker of (1) wants to describe is a state resulting from someone's return. The event of someone's return, which is denoted by the main verb phrase, is not identical with the current situation. On the other hand, a current situation the speaker of (2) wants to describe is a state of feeling hungry which seems to be identical with a situation denoted by the main verb phrase. However, they are not totally identical. The current situation is not simply a state of feeling hungry, but a state of being gradually feeling hungry that has just started. The realization of feeling hungry denoted by the main verb phrase is the starting point of the current situation.

The distinction between realis and irrealis assertion bears on demarcation between actual and fictive temporal proximity in that actual temporal proximity typically appears in realis predication with logical truth whereas fictive temporal proximity typically appears in irrealis predication with epistemic uncertainty. Taking it for granted that the systems of aspect and modality in a language are interrelated and there is no absolute boundary between them, I consider that temporal proximity is primarily an aspectual notion but it is capable of involving such an epistemic sense.

Both actual and fictive types, in turn, are categorized into two subtypes according to different perspectives taken in viewing the event evolution, namely "global perspective"<sup>7</sup> and "internal perspective." Langacker (1991b: 12; 1999: 207-208) regards perspective as a dimension of 'imagery' (viz. the human capacity to construe a situation and organize it by means of alternative images). It subsumes several specific factors such as orientation, assumed vantage point (viewpoint), directionality, and how objectively an entity is construed. Our visual or mental scanning through a scene entails these construal factors. Talmy (1983: 255-256; 1988: 183-184, 188-189, 194) also considers the 'perspectival mode' (viz. the deployment of perspective) as a principal imaging system of language. This system specifies how one places one's 'mental eyes' or conceptual perspective point to look out over a scene, including the

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<sup>7</sup> Here I intentionally use the term "global perspective" instead of "external perspective" in order not to be confused with Langacker's (1991b: 329) term "external perspective" which is equivalent to "objective perspective" as opposed to "subjective perspective."

perspective point's location, distance away, and movement pattern. In Talmy's terms, the global and internal perspectives proposed here are explained as involving "a steady-state long-range perspective point (with synoptic scope of attention)" and "a moving close-up perspective point (with local scope of attention)," respectively. The former perspective is reflected in an expression like *There are a number of houses at various points in the valley* and the latter perspective is reflected in an expression like *There is a house every now and then through the valley*.

The global perspective is a bird's-eye view, as it were. The relationship among different phases of an evolutionary situation is holistically viewed as a single gestalt from a global perspective point. The internal perspective, on the other hand, is concerned with substance of evolutionary situations undergone by the speaker or conceptualizer either actually or fictively. Viewing a situation from within, we recognize the ongoing nature of the situation.<sup>8</sup> We should notice that these perspectives employed for viewing temporal proximity (temporal motion) are completely subjective, viz. they are purely mental scanning.

Considering the perspective from which it is construed, actual temporal proximity aspect is classified into two subtypes: (1) "recent retrospective" type viewing a static situation from a global perspective; (2) "beginning" type viewing a dynamic situation in an internal perspective. Similarly, fictive temporal proximity aspect includes two subtypes: (3) "imminent prospective" type viewing a static situation from a global perspective; (4) "reaching" type viewing a dynamic situation in an internal perspective. Below, we shall look closely at each type of temporal proximity in Thai.

## 2.1. Recent retrospective type

My concept of recent retrospective temporal proximity corresponds to what Comrie (1976: 60) calls "perfect of recent past" which relates a state to some recent preceding situation. Perfect aspect is "retrospective" since it carries an implicit reference to a point or period of time preceding that of its primarily temporal reference (Comrie 1976: 64; Lyons 1977: 715). English expressions of perfect of recent past cited by Comrie are: *I have recently learned that the match is to be postponed*; *Bill has just (this minute) arrived*. This type of aspect is indicated by *phêṇ/phûṇ*<sup>9</sup> in Thai, as illustrated below.

<sup>8</sup> In this connection, Langacker (1991a: 207-211; 1999: 226-229) comments on the English progressive construction (*be V-ing*) that "the construction always views a perfective process from an internal perspective and thereby renders it imperfective." From this comment we can see his idea that it is the speaker or conceptualizer's internal perspective to impose the imperfective character onto situations construed by her/him. Recently (at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Japanese Cognitive Linguistics Association, Osaka, September 2001), he explicitly related the concept "global vs. local view" (alternatives of the immediate scope delimited by the viewing frame) with the grammatical contrasts 'count vs. mass noun' and 'perfective vs. progressive aspect.' In his opinion, adopting an alternative view can change an entity's contour, that is, we conceive of a thing or situation as bounded with a global view, e.g. *I see a red spot* (count noun); *It rained last night* (perfective), or as unbounded with a local view, e.g. *I see (nothing but) red* (mass noun); *It was raining last night* (progressive). By contrast, my concept "global vs. internal perspective" simply indicates the location of a perspective point with respect to a conceived situation (outside or inside the situation) irrespective of the scope of the viewing frame.

<sup>9</sup> Since the two lexical items *phêṇ* and *phûṇ* are synonymous when used as recent retrospective aspect marker, I refer to them together as *phêṇ/phûṇ*. Probably *phêṇ* is phonetically deviated from *phûṇ*.

- (5) *sămràp chaaw tàay cháat thîi phêw mii*  
 as:for foreigner RELATIVE:PRONOUN \*\*\* have  
*ʔookàat maa yîam yuan muay thay ...*  
 chance come visit Thailand  
 ‘As for the foreigners who have just got the chance to visit Thailand, ...’<sup>10</sup>
- (6) *thaay yúròop nán wâaw phêw cà? phrêe lăay khâw pay*  
 way Europe TOPIC kite \*\*\* IRREALIS spread enter go  
*nay raaw khritsatawát thîi sîp săam*  
 in approximately Christian:Era 13th  
 ‘In Europe, kites have just spread in about the 13<sup>th</sup> century.’
- (7) *khâw phêw ʔòk pay muâ kîi nîi ʔeeŋ*  
 PRONOUN \*\*\* exit go just:now  
 ‘S/he has just now gone out.’
- (8) *phêw cà? pràap pràam loŋ pay màat màat*  
 \*\*\* IRREALIS suppress descend go newly  
 ‘They have just suppressed.’

These expressions highlight the recent realization of a reference situation, i.e., foreigners’ having a chance to visit Thailand (state verb phrase) in (5), kites’ spreading over Europe (process verb phrase) in (6), a person’s going out (achievement verb phrase) in (7), and some people’s suppressing something (accomplishment verb phrase) in (8). There is no limitation with respect to aspectual classes of verb phrases, i.e. state, activity/process, achievement and accomplishment (cf. Vendler 1967), to co-occur with recent retrospective aspect markers *phêw/phûw*.

It is worth noticing that while the other three types of temporal proximity in Thai are not compatible with ‘directives’ (viz. a category of speech act concerning the speaker’s volition including commanding, requesting, entreating, exhorting, etc.), the recent retrospective type is compatible with negative command. As (9) shows, *phêw/phûw* can co-occur with *yàa* ‘don’t.’ Idiomatically, *yàa phêw/phûw V* ‘don’t V yet’ expresses the speaker’s request not to perform an action yet.

- (9) *yàa phêw pay ləy*  
 don’t \*\*\* go at:all  
 ‘Don’t go away just yet.’

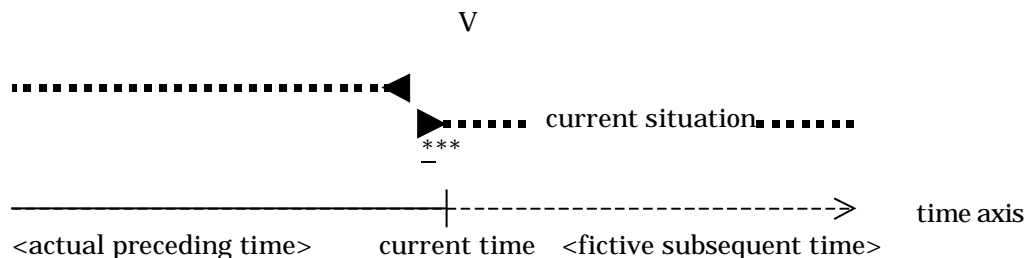


FIGURE 6: RECENT RETROSPECTIVE TEMPORAL PROXIMITY

<sup>10</sup> Combined with the recent retrospective aspect marker *phêw*, the state verb phrase *mii ʔookàat* ‘have a chance’ is interpreted as ‘have come to have a chance’ or shortly ‘have got a chance.’



Figure 6 schematically represents recent retrospective temporal proximity. This schema highlights as the reference point the starting point of temporal motion, or the beginning of a current situation, which is marked by the underlined asterisk. The situation as a whole is viewed from a global perspective. The position of the perspective point represented by V is fixed at the current time. From this fixed perspective point, the speaker looks back the reference point in actual preceding time.

## 2.2. Beginning type

The beginning temporal proximity aspect is an elaboration of the common aspect called inchoative or inceptive. It characteristically involves an inceptive ‘ongoing’ current situation. This aspect is represented by *chák* and *ʔɔk* in Thai, as illustrated below.

- (10) *ʔɔk* *càʔ* *kròot*  
 \*\*\* IRREALIS angry  
 ‘S/he is beginning feeling angry.’
- (11) *chák* *ʔay*  
 \*\*\* cough  
 ‘I am beginning coughing.’
- (12) *chák* *dùat*  
 \*\*\* boil  
 ‘It is beginning boiling.’

What is highlighted in these examples is the ongoing phase of a current situation that has just begun, i.e., feeling angry (state verb phrase) in (10), coughing (activity verb phrase) in (11), and coming to a boil (accomplishment verb phrase) in (12). The beginning temporal proximity is incompatible with achievement aspect that is punctual and never has a duration period. (13), where the beginning aspect marker *chák* is followed by the achievement verb phrase *thǔŋ* ‘reach,’ is not acceptable.

- (13) \* *chák* *thǔŋ*  
 \*\*\* reach

Buraphacheep (1996: 397-404) has noticed that the co-occurrence of *chák* with activity verbs is unacceptable if the situation is interpreted as a single incident, as in (14). But it is acceptable if the situation is interpreted as an activity with some change, as in (15), or a repeated activity, as in (16).

- (14) \* *kháw* *chák* *dəən*  
 PRONOUN \*\*\* walk  
 ‘S/he is beginning to walk.’
- (15) *kháw* *chák* *dəən* *rew* *khûn*  
 PRONOUN \*\*\* walk fast ascend  
 ‘S/he is beginning to walk faster.’
- (16) *kháw* *chák* *ʔaan* *nǎjsǔu* *phim*  
 PRONOUN \*\*\* read newspaper  
 ‘S/he has come to read newspaper more often.’

Sookgasem (1990: 65-69) regards *chák*, *ʔɔk*, *kùap* and *thêep* (markers for

beginning aspect and imminent prospective aspect in my terminology) as mood markers. But it is debatable whether they have become mood markers or yet. I admit that *ʔə̀ək*, *kùap* and *thêep* have advanced along path of semantic extension to the extent to be able to express “relational proximity” which is normally accompanied with some modal sense (see Section 4). But the same may not be said of *cháak*. Based on examination of corpus specimens, I would say that *cháak* is still a typical beginning aspect marker signaling an ongoing development that has just begun.<sup>11</sup>

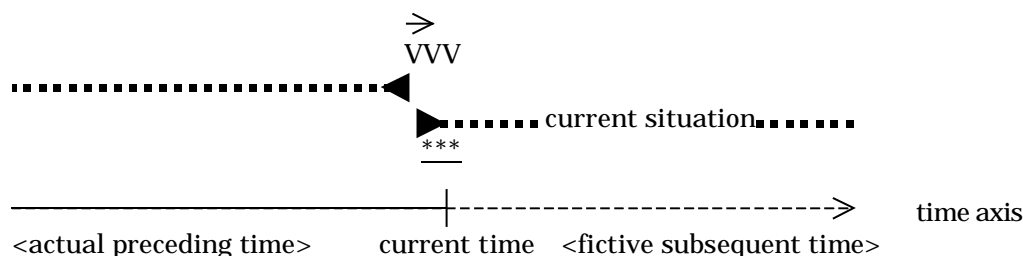


FIGURE 7: BEGINNING TEMPORAL PROXIMITY

Figure 7 represents an image schema for beginning temporal proximity. This schema highlights the very short path of temporal motion, or a little development from the beginning of a current situation, which is marked by the underlined asterisks in series. The speaker views the situation in an internal perspective. That is, the perspective point continuously moves inside the situation. The perspective point's shift along the path is indicated by the series of V with the horizontal short arrow.

### 2.3. Imminent prospective type

My term “imminent prospective” stems from the term “prospective” of Comrie’s (1976: 64-65). The prospective aspect describes a state related to some subsequent situation. His examples of English prospective expressions are: *The ship is about to sail*; *The ship is on the point of sailing*; *Bill is going to throw himself off the cliff*.<sup>12</sup>

Thai has a variety of lexical items that indicate imminent prospective temporal proximity: *kùap*, *thêep*, *klây*, *rim*, *cuan*, *cian*, *cuan cian*, *wît*, *wît wît*, *chïat*, *chùat chïat*, *ramram*, *lamlam*, *càkkàlèn* and so on.<sup>13</sup> These imminent prospective aspect markers represent a temporary state shortly before a highly possible appearance of some resultative phase. (17) to (20) illustrate Thai imminent prospective expressions.

- (17) *thóɔŋ thalæɛ lúik thêep wâaŋ plàaw càak sàt nám*  
           sea                    deep      \*\*\*      empty                    from    aquatic:animal

<sup>11</sup> However, some lexical items for temporal proximity in Thai are apt to imply a certain particular modal sense, indeed. They may be subcategorized by their possible different modal senses. But such a task is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>12</sup> I think the English construction *be going to* is used to signify temporal proximity of the reaching type (see Section 2.4) rather than the imminent prospective type.

<sup>13</sup> An etymological explanation for some of these lexical items is given in Section 4.

- (18) 'The deep sea is almost empty of aquatic animals.'  
 phôc mêe thalô? kan yày  
 father mother quarrel RECIPROCAL enormous  
 kùap tii kan dûay sám  
 \*\*\* hit RECIPROCAL moreover  
 'The parents quarreled to the point of nearly hitting each other.'
- (19) cuan cian taay  
 \*\*\* die  
 'I am about to die.'
- (20) baay phan klây cà? sũun phan  
 some species \*\*\* IRREALIS disappear species  
 'Some species are nearly extinct.'

These examples highlight an imagined termination of a current situation which corresponds to an imagined realization of a new situation, i.e., being empty (state verb phrase) in (17), hitting each other (activity verb phrase) in (18), dying (achievement verb phrase) in (19), and a species' becoming extinct (accomplishment verb phrase) in (20). The speaker conceives as if such a new situation were about to take place. The imminent prospective aspect is compatible with any aspectual classes of the following verb phrase.

Dowty (1979: 58-59) noticed that the English adverb *almost* has different effects on aspects of different classes, as below.

- (21) *John almost walked.* [Activity]  
 'John had the intention of walking but changed his mind and did nothing at all.'
- (22) *John almost noticed the painting.* [Achievement]  
 'John almost but not quite noticed the painting.'
- (23) *John almost painted a picture.* [Accomplishment]  
 'John had the intention of painting a picture but changes his mind and did nothing at all.' or  
 'John did begin work on the picture and he almost but not quite finished it.'<sup>14</sup>

For Thai expressions of imminent prospective aspect to be received the latter interpretation in (23), a lexical item representing completion such as *sèt* 'finish' should be added, as in (24).

- (24) a. cōn wâat phâap kùap sèt  
 John draw picture \*\*\* finish  
 'John drew a picture and almost finished it.'
- b. cōn kùap wâat phâap sèt  
 John \*\*\* draw picture finish  
 'John almost finished drawing a picture.'

In (24a) where the imminent prospective aspect marker *kùap* is located between

<sup>14</sup> Wierzbicka (1991: 361) has noticed that *almost* has both gradual and non-gradual uses, e.g., *He is almost bold* (gradual); *He almost killed her* (non-gradual). From her perspective, the former interpretation in (23) is regarded as non-gradual and the latter as gradual. These gradual (or dynamic) and non-gradual (or static) senses of *almost* substantially correspond to the two subtypes of fictive temporal proximity, viz., the reaching aspect involving an internal perspective and the imminent prospective aspect involving a global perspective.

the first verb phrase *wâat phâap* ‘draw a picture’ and the second verb phrase *sèt* ‘finish,’ drawing a picture named by the first verb phrase is presupposed to have been already actualized. But it is not necessarily presupposed so in (24b) where *kùap* is located before the first verb phrase. This is because they differ in the scope of aspectual modification by *kùap*. In (24a) only the second verb phrase, while in (24b) the combination of the first and the second verb phrases, is within the scope.

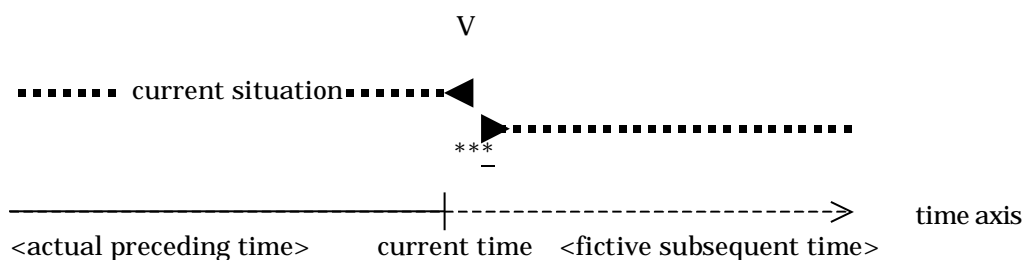


FIGURE 8: IMMINENT PROSPECTIVE TEMPORAL PROXIMITY

Figure 8 represents an image schema for imminent prospective temporal proximity. In this schema, a fictive endpoint of temporal motion, or an imagined result of a current situation which is linked with an imagined beginning of a new situation, is highlighted as the reference point, which is marked by the underlined asterisk. From the perspective point fixed at a current time, the speaker looks ahead toward the reference point in fictive subsequent time.

## 2.4. Reaching type

“Reaching” is my original term. I need it to characterize a subtype of the Thai fictive temporal proximity that has connotation of duration. To my knowledge, nobody has so far distinguished the reaching aspect from the imminent prospective aspect in Thai.<sup>15</sup>

(25) to (28) exemplify the Thai reaching temporal proximity aspect. Reaching aspect markers *khayàp cà?* and *kamlay cà?* signify a dynamic situation right before reaching a new situation represented by the main verb phrase.

- (25) *kamlay cà?*    *pen muay yôot níyom khǎy nák thǎy thǎw*  
 \*\*\*                      be city    best    popular of    tourist  
 ‘It is becoming the most popular city for tourists.’

- (26) *naay kamlay cà? dǎn ?ǎk pay*  
 PRONOUN \*\*\*                      walk exit go<sub>16</sub>  
 ‘She is going to walk toward the outside.’

<sup>15</sup> For example, Sookgasem (1990: 66) lists on a par *cuan*, *cuan cà?*, *klây*, *klây cà?* and *kamlay cà?* as pre-inchoative aspect elements, without offering any further classification.

<sup>16</sup> It is ambiguous whether Thai motion expressions including directional verbs like (26) represent a perfective (temporally bounded) or imperfective (temporally unbounded) event when no context is provided. The function as a subsidiary verb of the Thai directional verb *?ǎk* ‘exit’ is not totally equal to the function of the English adverb *out*. English verb phrases including *out* indicate completion, but Thai verb phrases including *?ǎk* do not always so.

- (27) *rót thua kamlaj cà?* *lòòk*  
 bus tour \*\*\* exit  
*řik mây kii naathii khây nâa*  
 more not:many minute ahead  
 'The tour bus is leaving in a few minutes.'
- (28) *řaakàat khayàp cà?* *năaw khûn*  
 weather \*\*\* cold ascend  
 'The weather is getting colder.'

The above examples highlight the developmental phase of a current situation toward the realization of an imagined reference situation. The imagined reference situations are: a city's being the most popular for tourists (state verb phrase) in (25); a person's walking toward the outside (activity verb phrase) in (26); a bus's leaving (achievement verb phrase) in (27); getting colder (accomplishment verb phrase) in (28). The developmental phase is extending beyond a current time by virtue of the speaker's imagination. The reaching aspect represented by *khayàp cà?* or *kamlaj cà?* entails the speaker's expectation of something happening as a result of a given current situation with some ongoing change observed by the speaker. Such an epistemic sense of *khayàp cà?* and *kamlaj cà?*, I assume, stems from their indispensable constituent, namely modal marker *cà?*.<sup>17</sup>

*kamlaj cà?* can co-occur with an achievement verb phrase, as in (27). The main verb phrase in reaching temporal proximity expressions denotes a new situation resulting from an ongoing current state, and that resultant situation is possibly punctual.

It sounds odd to take a temporary state right before the realization of some situation as an ongoing situation when we see no physical development in that state. Even though there is no visible development, however, the speaker certainly conceives of the situation as ongoing or reaching some reference point. Usually the speaker indeed sees something ongoing, and so s/he expects that something could happen very soon. For example, the person in (26) may change in the posture to prepare for walking and the bus in (27) may rev up its engine to prepare for leaving.

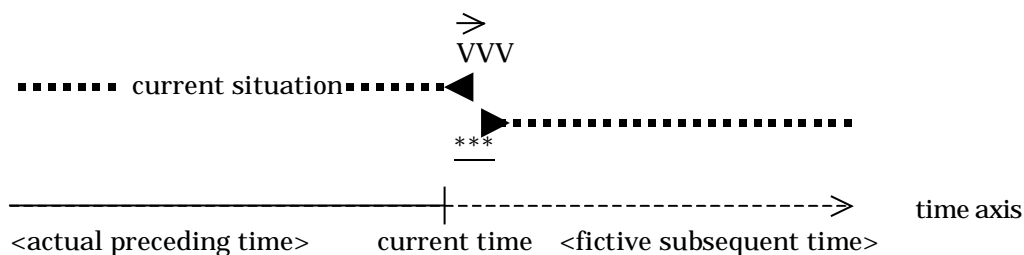


FIGURE 9: REACHING TEMPORAL PROXIMITY

Figure 9 shows an image schema for reaching temporal proximity. This schema

<sup>17</sup> Previous studies on Thai mostly treat *cà?* as tense or aspect marker rather than modal marker. But I consider it a modal marker whose main function is to express irrealis or epistemic uncertainty. At any rate, in this study I regard *khayàp cà?* and *kamlaj cà?* as a single conventionalized unit.

highlights the very short path of temporal motion, or a little development toward the termination of a current situation or the beginning of a new situation, which is marked by the serial asterisks underlined. The current situation is successively viewed in an internal perspective.

### 3. Differences among four types of temporal proximity in Thai

Differences among the subtypes of Thai temporal proximity are summarized as follows. The recent retrospective type highlights the initial phase of a current situation (Figure 6) while the beginning type highlights the developmental phase after the initial phase (Figure 7). Likewise, the imminent prospective type highlights the resultative phase of a current situation (Figure 8) while the reaching type highlights the developmental phase toward the resultative phase (Figure 9). Those different phases of a current situation are metaphorically mapped onto basic components of a motion event, i.e. starting point, endpoint and path. The recent retrospective type is opposed to the imminent prospective type in terms of profiled components: the former profiles the starting point and the latter profiles the endpoint. On the other hand, the beginning and reaching types have the same salient component: both have the salient path.

The profiled starting point and endpoint of temporal motion are, respectively, the beginning of a current situation (recent retrospective aspect) and the result of a current situation (imminent prospective aspect), both of which correspond to the realization of a situation named by the main verb phrase. The salient path of motion is the development of a current situation, which has just started with the realization of a situation named by the main verb phrase (beginning aspect) or almost ends up with the realization of a situation named by the main verb phrase (reaching aspect).

The demarcation between the two subtypes of each main type is due to perspective taken in viewing temporal motion. While the recent retrospective and imminent prospective aspects involve a global perspective, the beginning and reaching aspects involve an internal perspective. We construe different facets of a situation on the grounds that we view the situation in different perspectives according to pragmatic necessity. To put it another way, different properties of a situation emerge from different perspectives we employ case by case. Consider the examples below.

- (29)=(1) *kháw*      *phên*      *klàp*      *maa*  
 PRONOUN \*\*\* turn:back come  
 ‘S/he has just got back.’
- (30)=(2) *cháak*      *hǎw*  
 \*\*\* hungry  
 ‘I am beginning feeling hungry.’

In the static situation characterized by recent retrospective temporal proximity shown in (29), we do not necessarily have to be concerned with the developmental phase of the situation (i.e. the ongoing situation after s/he gets back), but we have to look over the whole situation from a global point of view in order to locate the initial phase of the situation (i.e. the time when s/he gets back). In the dynamic situation characterized by beginning temporal proximity shown in (30), we do not have to

precisely locate the initial phase (i.e. the time when starting feeling hungry), but we must be aware of the developmental phase (i.e. feeling hungry gradually) by viewing in an internal perspective.

#### 4. From spatial to temporal proximity and from temporal to relational proximity

Some of the lexical items representing imminent prospective temporal proximity (*thêep*, *klây*, *rim*, *cian*, *chhât*, *wît*) represent spatial proximity as well. Their usages involving the concept of spatial proximity are shown below (*cian*, *chhât* and *wît* in (34) to (36) are verbs for manner-of-motion involving spatial proximity).

- (31) *fúp tua loŋ thêep tháw mêe*  
crouch body descend near foot mother  
'S/he crouched at her/his mother's feet.'
- (32) *yùu klây bâan*  
be:located near home  
'It is near home.'
- (33) *yùu rim thanǎn*  
be:located close:by road  
'It is on the road.'
- (34) *cian phâa*  
cut:off:an:edge cloth  
'S/he clipped a hem.'
- (35) *chhât khoo*  
pass:near neck  
'It passed by the neck.'
- (36) *thîŋ wît pay*  
throw pass:near go  
'S/he threw something which passed by some reference point.'

It is likely that the spatial proximity that resides in these lexical items gives rise to imminent prospective temporal proximity. In other words, the original senses of these lexical items are spatial and their temporal senses derive from the original spatial senses through certain conceptual processes of Thai speakers.<sup>18</sup> We become aware of contiguity between a given state and a reference resultative event owing to the global perspective we take in viewing the whole situation. Presumably the global perspective is a significant factor of this semantic extension.

On the other hand, the origins of lexical items representing beginning and reaching temporal proximity, besides *kamlay cà?*, are achievement motion verbs: *khayàp* 'move a little,' *chák* 'draw' and *ʔəɔk* 'exit.' The most important factor for those motion verbs to come to mean temporal proximity might appear to be the fact that they represent an achievement event. We recognize achievement events only when we perceive their momentary appearance. That very short period of achievement might be

<sup>18</sup> Markers of imminent prospective temporal proximity, or proximative, in languages investigated by Heine (1992, 1994) are attested to derive from verbs for volition such as *want*, *desire*, *search*, *seek*, *look for*. In Thai, interestingly, not imminent prospective aspect markers but recent retrospective aspect markers (*phây/phuiy*) might appear to stem from a volitional verb, i.e. *phuiy* 'ask the favor of, rely on someone's aid.' But this is a mere speculation and of course there are other ways of looking at this matter. I leave the matter open because I do not have enough data in hand.

interpreted as virtually momentary development from the beginning or toward the result. The origin of the reaching aspect marker *kamlaj cà?* is not a motion verb, but the noun *kamlaj* meaning ‘power.’ Thus, all of the origins of beginning and reaching aspect markers involve dynamics. The inherent dynamic meaning of these lexical items seems to have something to do with the internal perspective that is sensitive to the dynamic development of a situation.

Furthermore, the beginning aspect marker *ʔə̀k* and the imminent prospective aspect markers *kùap* and *thêp* also often represent “relational proximity.” To be precise, they express “quantitative proximity,” as in (37), and/or “qualitative proximity,” as in (38) to (40). Quantitative proximity specifies a quantity that is only a little less or more than some particular quantity that is readily expected (such as all, half, nothing, some large quantity, some small quantity, and so on). It tends to be a considerably large or small quantity. Qualitative proximity specifies a quality that reaches only a little less than a proper degree.

- (37) *mii lûuk câaj kùap sǎam sǐp khon*  
 exist employee \*\*\* thirty CLASSIFIER  
 ‘There are nearly thirty employees.’
- (38) *ʔə̀k cà? phêp*  
 \*\*\* IRREALIS expensive  
 ‘It is considerably expensive.’
- (39) *sěj phûut kùap mûan takoon*  
 Seng say \*\*\* be:the:same shout  
 ‘Seng said like (almost the same) shouting.’
- (40) *wan nuŋ nuŋ thêp mây khəy hěn nâa lûuk*  
 each:day \*\*\* never see face child  
 ‘Each day they hardly (almost never) see the face of their child.’

These observations on the ubiquitous notion of proximity in Thai leads us to think that temporal proximity derives from more concrete spatial proximity and also is expanding to more abstract relational proximity. However, there are actually few lexical items representing all of the spatial, temporal and relational proximity. As far as I know, there is only one: *thêp* (see (3), (17), (31) and (40)). Lexical items for temporal proximity largely represent either spatial proximity or relational proximity. That is, some represent spatial and temporal proximity (*klây*, *rim*, *cuan*, *chiat*, *wit*) and some represent temporal and relational proximity (*kùap*, *ʔə̀k*). It follows that there are two different plausible paths of semantic extension: ‘from spatial to temporal proximity’ and ‘from temporal to relational proximity.’ To throw light on the mechanism of semantic extensions of these lexical items, diachronic studies on their usages are required. The full understanding of semantic extension of temporal proximity awaits further research.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> It is also intriguing to cross-linguistically investigate semantic extensions of the proximity concept. In Japanese, for instance, there are a number of lexical items that basically denote spatial proximity and are also used to express temporal proximity, e.g., *giwa* (*kiwa*) ‘edge’ in (doing something) *ma-giwa da* ‘be on the point of doing something,’ *jika* (*chika*) ‘close’ in (something)-*ga* {*ma-jika da* / *ma-jika ni semaru*} ‘be on the verge of something,’ *semaru* ‘approach’ in (something)-*ga* (some particular future time)-*ni semaru* ‘something will soon be realized in some particular time,’ etc.



## 5. Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to show how the conceptual structure of temporal proximity is organized in Thai. It has been found that the concept of temporal proximity in Thai has a well-composed structure. This study offers a good example of conceptual structure composed of interrelated concepts fairly systematically. It may serve as a piece of evidence of our capacity to coherently assemble constructions of cognitively relevant concepts.

Thai has no tense, but abounds in aspectual devices whereby temporal modification in discourse is done in a complex manner. It is unfair if temporal proximity is considered a minor linguistic concept on the grounds that it is scarcely utilized and grammaticalized in tense languages like English. I hope that the findings of this study provide us with deeper understandings on what aspectual conceptualizations are and how they are systematized as they are in languages.

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