The Thai $c1a^1$: A Marker of Tense or Modality?*

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In this paper, I investigate the use of the Thai $c1a$ and support the view that it is a modal marker. It is demonstrated that $c1a$ does not stand for the future tense but is compatible with expressions of various types of modalities. The fact that it is optional when it expresses futurity and co-occurs with modal expressions but obligatory when, in the absence of modals, it co-occurs with past temporal adverbs, where counterfactuality may be pragmatically inferred, shows that although it may not be instrumental in expressing modality in the presence of modal expressions, this is not the case when there are no modal markers. This in turn strongly suggests that perhaps all its uses involve modality. The status of $c1a$ is also confirmed in the framework of Discourse Representation Theory. As the Discourse Representation Structure of a sentence with $c1a$ but without a temporal adverb cannot be completed due to lack of necessary temporal information, it is shown that $c1a$ does not essentially make temporal contribution to a sentence in which it occurs and is thus better analysed not as a tense marker but as a marker of modality.

1 INTRODUCTION

The word $c1a$ in Thai is often translated as will in English and behaves similarly to will both syntactically and semantically. That is, it occurs before a verb and may combine with verbs from all aspectual classes. Like will, it can have future time reference as in (1), may co-occur with an expression of epistemic necessity, as in (2), and may express dispositional necessity, as in (3).

(1) m3ae:r3i:I $c1a$ p1ai1 d1u: ’1op1e:r3a:I khu’:n ph3r3ungIn3i:II
Mary $c1a$ go see opera night tomorrow

Mary will go to the opera tomorrow night.

(2) m3ae:r3i:I kh3ong $c1a$ d1u: ’1op1e:r3a:I y3u:I t1o’:nn3i:II
Mary may $c1a$ see opera PROG now

Mary will be in the opera now.

(3) b1a:ngkh3r3angII m3ae:r3i:I $c1a$ p1ai1 d1u: ’1op1e:r3a:I n3ai2 ch3udw3o’m
sometimes Mary $c1a$ go see opera in tracksuit

Mary will sometimes go to the opera in her tracksuit.

While it is frequently argued that will expresses the degree of commitment, on the part of the speaker, to which something is said, and not the placement of an eventuality somewhere on the time line in relation to some specified point, $c1a$ is often classified as a future tense morpheme. However, the purpose of this paper is to study the use of $c1a$ in naturally occurring language use including news articles, magazine articles, journals, excerpts from

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

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fiction and conversations among Thai native speakers and propose that it is a marker of modality rather than a tense marker.

The paper is organised as follows. First, I mention some previous treatments of *clα*, and say why they are less than adequate. Then, I present my analysis of *clα* as a modal and not tense marker, and discuss how it may be represented in Discourse Representation Theory. Lastly, I conclude that the facts that (i) *clα* does not stand for the future tense, (ii) it optionally co-occurs with expressions of various types of modalities, and (iii) it is essential in expressing possibility in the past and giving rise to counterfactuality in the absence of other modal expressions seem to strongly suggest that all its uses perhaps involve modality and that it is thus better analysed as a modal marker.

### 2 PREVIOUS TREATMENTS OF *CLΑ*

*Clα* has been analysed as both an absolute and relative future tense morpheme. Scovel (1970) and Supanvanich (1973) agree that it conveys an absolute future tense in (4), the future relative to the utterance time. According to Kanchanawan (1978), however, *clα*, as in (5), is a relative future tense marker. That is, it refers to the future that has a point of time other than the utterance time as its deictic centre. In (5), the deictic centre is a past time point.

(4) m₃ae:r₃i:I clα plₐai₁ d₁u: 'l₁o₁p₁e:r₃a:₁ khu':n ph₃r₃ungIn₃i:II
Mary FUT go see opera night tomorrow

Mary will go to the opera tomorrow night.

(5) m₃ae:r₃i:I clα plₐai₁ d₁u: 'l₁o₁p₁e:r₃a:₁ m₃u'₁ₐlkhu':nn₃i:II
Mary FUT go see opera last night
t₁ae:I f₃o:n t₁o:k h₂n₃ak l₁oₑ:y m₃aiI d₁aiIII plₐai₁
but rain fall heavy so not can go

Mary would have gone to the opera last night. But it rained heavily so she did not go.

Muansuwan (2002) proposes that *clα*, as in (6), is an aspect morpheme that means ‘be about to’ and thus encodes the preliminary stage of an eventuality.

(6) m₃ae:r₃i:I clα p₁aI₁ d₁u: 'l₁o₁p₁e:r₃a:
Mary be about to go see opera

Mary was/is will be about to go to the opera.

Rangkupan’s (2000) is by far the most explanatorily adequate analysis presented here. *Clα* is identified as a modal and may occur as a single modal in simple sentences such as (7), with a verb of seeming such as *th₃a:₁ ‘seem’*, as in (8), and after other modals, as in (9), where *clα* follows *kh₃uan* and together they mean ‘should’.

(7) m₃ae:r₃i:I clα p₁aI₁ d₁u: 'l₁o₁p₁e:r₃a: kh₃u’:n ph₃r₃ungIn₃i:II
Mary modal go see opera night tomorrow

Mary will go to the opera tomorrow night.

(8) d₁u: th₃a:₁ m₃ae:r₃i:I clα p₁aI₁ d₁u: 'l₁o₁p₁e:r₃a: kh₃u’:n ph₃r₃ungIn₃i:II
look seem Mary modal go see opera night tomorrow
It seems that Mary will go to the opera tomorrow night.

(9) m3ae:r3i:1 kh3uancl1a p1ai1 d1u: ’1op1e:r3a: khu ’n ph3r3ungln3i:II
Mary should go see opera night tomorrow

Mary should go to see the opera tomorrow night.

Lastly, \textit{Cl1} is also analysed as a lexical item. Savetamalya (1988) says that it means ‘intend to’, as in (10).

(10) m3ae:r3i:1 cl1a p1ai1 d1u: ’1op1e:r3a:l khu’n ph3r3ungln3i:II
Mary intend to go see opera night tomorrow

Mary intends to go to the opera tomorrow night.

To summarise, there seem to be five possible standpoints as far as the semantics of \textit{cl1} is concerned. Does it express absolute or relative future tense, or lexical meaning ‘intend to’, encode aspectual meaning ‘be about to’, or modality, or is it ambiguous between these meanings? The ambiguity position is easily rejected by Grice’s principle of Modified Occam’s Razor: Senses (linguistic meanings) are not to be multiplied beyond necessity (1978). It is more appealing to attempt to come up with a unified semantic account of \textit{cl1} since it is clear that the apparent differences are not lexical, unlike, for example, the meanings of the word \textit{bank}. Now I will give counter-examples to the analyses of \textit{cl1} as an aspect morpheme, a tense morpheme, and a lexical word. Counter-examples of this sort are extremely easily found. All we need to do is to look back at the examples (1) – (3). First, in (1), \textit{cl1} apparently does not encode the preliminary stage of an eventuality. In (2), it is clear that \textit{cl1} does not express future time reference, and it does not seem right to say that \textit{cl1} is always a future tense marker. Lastly, \textit{cl1} does not always have the lexical meaning ‘intend to’ because it can also be used in (3), where it cannot possibly mean ‘intend to’.

3 \textbf{Cl1: A MARKER OF MODALITY}

In this section, more evidence will be given in favour of the analysis of \textit{cl1} as a modal marker. That is, I agree with Rangkupan (2000). However, although Rangkupan also classifies \textit{cl1} as a modal, she does not make it clear what semantic contribution \textit{cl1} has on its own, and she does not seem to be interested in accounting for the optional nature of \textit{cl1}, either. These are two points that I add to her analysis.

3.1 \textit{Will} as a modal proposals

Here I mention two proposals that treat \textit{will} as a modal and not tense marker because the same arguments are applicable to \textit{cl1} in Thai. The first one is by Enç (1996). Theoretically, \textit{will} clearly has non-future uses, where it expresses epistemic necessity or propositional necessity. When it has future time reference, the modality involved is prediction. Other modal verbs such as \textit{may} and \textit{must} has future time reference, too. Empirically, \textit{will} patterns differently from the past tense and patterns exactly like a future-shifting modal. Unlike the past tense, \textit{will} does not exhibit sequence of tense effects. The present tense embedded under \textit{will} and the past tense behaves differently, and the present tense embedded under modals such as \textit{must} behaves like when it is embedded under \textit{will}. Lastly, modals may come in pairs; one expresses necessity and the other expresses possibility; if \textit{will} is treated as a modal expressing necessity, \textit{may}, which expresses possibility, is the dual of \textit{will}. 
Another proposal to treat *will* as a modal is that of Jaszczolt (2003). *Will* has future time reference in (11), expresses epistemic necessity in (12), and dispositional necessity in (13). The three readings are different in terms of their degrees of modality. As it corresponds to the weakest informative and referential intentions, from the Primary Intention Principle, in Default Semantics (Jaszczolt, 1999): The primary role of intention in communication is to secure the referent which can be either object or eventuality of the speaker’s utterance, *Will* in (11) is most modal. *Will* in (12) is less modal as it corresponds to stronger intentions. And *will* in (13) is least modal as it corresponds to the strongest intentions. Therefore, *will* is modal because it displays this gradation of intentions. This gradation means that *will* has a unified semantics, which Jaszczolt (2003) represents by introducing a modal operator to Discourse Representation Theory.

(11) Mary will go to the opera tomorrow night.
(12) Mary will be in the opera now.
(13) Mary will sometimes go to the opera in her tracksuit.

If what Enç (1996) and Jaszczolt (2003) say about *will* is true, it is also the case with *c1a*. Therefore, it seems that, like *will*, *c1a* is not a tense but modal marker. However, more evidence can be found in support of *c1a* as a modal marker in Thai. The following sections deal with this evidence.

3.2 *C1a does not stand for the future tense*

This section shows that *c1a* does not stand for the future tense even though it has future time reference. When it is present in an utterance with future temporal adverbs, as in (14), it looks as if it was an absolute future tense marker. However, as it is optional there, it is unlikely to be best treated as a grammatical marking of the temporal location of an eventuality. Besides, when *c1a* co-occurs with past temporal adverbs, that is, when the point of reference is shifted from the time of utterance to a point of time before the utterance time, as in (15a), and the meaning of counterfactuality may arise as in (15b), it is obligatory. This seems to suggest that it is essential in expressing possibility in the past and giving rise to counterfactuality. However, when *c1a* also co-occurs with past temporal adverbs but no counterfactuality is intended, i.e. when it seems to express what can be called a relative future tense, as in (16), it is optional. This again shows that it should not be treated as a future tense marker, whether it is taken to be an absolute or relative one. Lastly, (17) is given to confirm that the analyses of *c1a* as a future tense marker is not adequate as no future time reference seems to be present in the utterance. Rather, *c1a* co-occurs with *kh3ong* ‘may’, which, combined with the present temporal adverb *t1o’:nn3i:II ‘now’, expresses epistemic necessity.

(14) ph3i:Is2aow (c1a) p1ai1 ch3iangh2m3ai1I ph3r3ungIn3i:II
older sister (*c1a*) go Chiang Mai tomorrow

My older sister will go to Chiang Mai tomorrow.

(15a) ph3i:Is2aow c1a p1ai1 ch3iangh2m3ai1I m3u’alw3a:nn3i:II
older sister *c1a* go Chiang Mai yesterday

My older sister might have gone to Chiang Mai yesterday.

(15b) ph3i:Is2aow c1a p1ai1 ch3iangh2m3ai1I m3u’alw3a:nn3i:II
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My older sister would have gone to Chiang Mai yesterday. But it rained heavily so she did not go.

3.3 C1a is compatible with expressions of different types of modalities

In fact, c1a may also optionally co-occur with expressions of other types of modalities. It can be noticed that in all these examples, time is left unspecified. This apparently confirms that c1a does not contribute temporally to the sentences. The fact that c1a is compatible with markers for dispositional necessity in (18), epistemic necessity in (19), epistemic possibility in (20), deontic necessity in (21) and (22), and deontic possibility in (23), suggests that each of its uses here probably primarily involves a degree of modality, too.

(18) th3oe: m3ak c1a b1onI w3e:l3a: r3ot t1it she often c1a complain time car stick

She would/will often complain when there is a traffic jam.

(19) k1ae: c1a t1o’:ngII s2iac1ai2 n3ae:In3ae:I l3oe:y he c1a must sorry certainly particle

He must have been/must be/will certainly be sorry.

(20) ’1a:c1a:n kh3ong c1a m3o’:ng w3al teacher may c1a see that

student be like computer

Teachers may have thought/may think that students are like computers.

(21) r3aw c1a t1ongII p1r3abp1r3ung r3ab1op k1a:ny3u’:mkh3u’:n we c1a must improve system circulation

My older sister went to Chiang Mai yesterday so she booked the tickets the night before.

My older sister will be on the way to Chiang Mai now.

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We had to/must improve our circulation system.

(22) r3aw kh3uan c1a m3i: w3eːl3a: m3aːk kh2u’nII
we should c1a have time much up

We should have had/should have more time.

(23) r3aw (c1a) d1ai1II p1ai1 d1uː l3akh3oː’ns2at d1uayIIk1an
we (c1a) can go see circus together

We were allowed to/may go to the circus together.

3.4 When c1a is optional and obligatory

c1a is optional when it expresses absolute futurity, as in (14), relative futurity, as in (16), and when it co-occurs with expressions of different types of modalities, as in (18) – (23). On the other hand, c1a is obligatory when, in the absence of expressions of modalities, it co-occurs with past temporal adverbs, as in (15a) and may give rise to counterfactuality, as in (15b). This pattern seems to show that it is compulsory only when it co-occurs with past temporal adverbs when there are no other modal expressions around and when it gives rise to unreal conditional, or counterfactuality. This in turn strongly suggests that its uses definitely involve modality. It is thus better to analyse c1a as a modal marker.

4 C1A IN DISCOURSE REPRESENTATION THEORY

This section discusses how c1a may be represented in Discourse Representation Theory (DRT). To represent grammatical tenses in English, DRT assigns the value of the feature TENSE according to the verb tense of a sentence. According to Kamp and Reyle (1993:512-513), “TENSE has three possible values, past, present, and future, signifying that the described eventuality lies before, at, or after the utterance time, respectively. The value of TENSE for a given sentence S is determined by the tense of the verb of S. When the main verb is in the simple past, TENSE = past; when it is in the simple present, TENSE = pres; and when the verb complex contains the auxiliary will, TENSE = fut.” To represent fut, DRT uses n < t, where n ‘now’ refers to the utterance time, t refers to the eventuality time, and < stands for temporal precedence.

Now (24) is the Discourse Representation Structure (DRS) of (17). If c1a is a future tense marker, n < t should be present in the DRS. But to put it there would be incompatible with the meaning of (17) arrived at compositionally. Rather, the temporal adverb tloː’nn3iːII ‘now’ introduces n = t in the DRS. The other piece of temporal information in (24) is e ⊆ t. To represent kh3ong (c1a) there, I follow Jaszczolt (2003, forthcoming), who places will in the framework of Grice’s Equivocality Thesis: epistemic and deontic modalities are univocal, derived from one concept of acceptability (2001). According to Jaszczolt, Grice’s acceptability can be introduced to DRT as a modal operator on eventualities in the form of ACCA_n p, which is read ‘it is acceptable of the type \( \Delta \) to a degree n that p’, where \( \Delta \) stands for a type of modality: epistemic or deontic. The formal way of introducing ACCA_n to DRT is prosecuted in Jaszczolt (forthcoming). The whole DRS in (24) can be read as, it is acceptable of the type \( \Delta \) to a degree n that it is the case that the event of the speaker’s older sister going to Chiang Mai is temporally included in the eventuality time which lies at the same time as the utterance time.
Next, let us see how we may go about representing $c1a$ when it is obligatory, that is, when it co-occurs with past temporal adverbs but there are no other modal expressions. The modal operator $\text{ACC}_n$ may also be introduced in (25), which is the semantic representation of (15a). The relationship between the utterance time $n$ and the eventuality time $t$ is specified by the temporal adverb $m3u'alw3a:nn3i:II$ ‘yesterday’ in (15a) and is represented by $n > t$ in (25). The DRS can be read as, it is acceptable of the type $\Delta$ to a degree $n$ that it was the case that the event of the speaker’s older sister going to Chiang Mai was temporally included in the eventuality time which lies before the utterance time.

Lastly, when $c1a$ occurs with a modal expression but with no temporal adverbs, the modal operator $\text{ACC}_n$ can be introduced to represent $kh3uan$ ($c1a$). However, the construction of the DRS in (26), supposedly the semantic representation of (22), cannot be completed. This is because the eventuality time is not grammatically nor lexically specified in (22). The incompleteness of (26) is shown in $n ? t$. We need to look at the context to see whether this should be replaced by $n > t$ (for ‘should have had’) or $n = t$ or $n < t$ (for ‘should have’). This is as rightly observed by Diller (1993:412): temporal and aspectual interpretation in Thai is usually ‘a matter of contextual interpretation’. To complete the DRS-construction in (26), one needs to establish how to incorporate utterance meaning available only from the context, and not just from lexicon and grammar, into the DRT representation. The fact that the construction of DRSs for sentences that contain $c1a$ can be completed only when there are also temporal adverbs but cannot be completed when there are no temporal adverbs in them also suggests that $c1a$ does not significantly make temporal contribution in the sentence where it appears. Once again, this is why it is not quite adequate to treat it as a tense marker.
5 CONCLUSION

It has been shown that (i) \( c1a \) does not stand for the future tense, (ii) \( c1a \) optionally co-occurs with expressions of different types of modalities, and (iii) it is essential in expressing possibility in the past and giving rise to counterfactuality in the absence of other modal expressions. All this suggests that perhaps all its uses involve a degree of modality and so \( c1a \) is more adequately analysed as a modal marker than a tense marker. This is also confirmed when \( c1a \) is represented in DRT because in the absence of temporal adverbs the DRS cannot be completed. At this point, however, I must say that my DRSs here are simplified versions and are not final. Certain points for further research include how to arrive at values for \( \Delta \) and \( n \) of \( \text{ACC}_{\Delta} \) for different modal expressions and how to represent in DRT temporal utterance meaning that does not come from tenses or temporal adverbs.

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