

# Reciprocal and cooperative in Tai

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**Reciprocal and cooperative** are two universal functional categories which are used here as a background for the comparison of Tai languages. Foreshadowing the end of this article, I may state that data on the Tai languages, at least of the greater part of them, demonstrate that the Tai-speaking peoples hardly discriminate these two categories explicitly. It looks as if these two categories manifest themselves in Tai languages as one syncretic reciprocal/cooperative category (RC). It comes from the fact that both meanings are rendered with the same means. The interpretation depends on the nature of the verb: if the predicate is a transitive verb then a given marker of the RC bears the idea of reciprocal, and if the predicate is an intransitive verb then it denotes the meaning of cooperative, cf. Lao: *khaw<sup>1</sup> bòð<sup>5</sup> njòòm<sup>2</sup> fang<sup>2</sup> kan<sup>1</sup>* 'They did not want to listen to each other' (lit. they not agree listen RC); St. Thai: *phuu<sup>3</sup>-khon<sup>1</sup> thuk<sup>4</sup> wai<sup>1</sup> duu<sup>1</sup> rýng<sup>1</sup>-raa<sup>3</sup> kan<sup>1</sup>* 'People of every age looked joyful.' (lit. people every age look joyful RC).<sup>1</sup> This general rule has one important reservation, i.e. if the transitive verb has an object either interpretation is possible. Cf. Lao: *tii<sup>2</sup> lek<sup>5</sup> kan<sup>2</sup>* 'to hammer metal together' (lit. hammer metal RC) and *hen<sup>1</sup> naa<sup>6</sup> kan<sup>2</sup>* 'to see each other' (lit. see face RC).

Another peculiarity of Tai languages is that the RC category appears not only with active but also with stative/adjectival and existential verbs; e.g. St. Thai: *khaw<sup>5</sup> ruai<sup>1</sup> kan<sup>1</sup>* 'All of them are rich' (lit. they be rich RC); Lao: *khaw<sup>1</sup> pen<sup>2</sup> phua<sup>1</sup> mia<sup>1</sup> kan<sup>2</sup>* 'They are a married couple' (lit. they be husband wife RC); Thai-Nung: *pi<sup>1</sup> noong<sup>5</sup> to<sup>4</sup> pi<sup>1</sup> kan<sup>1</sup>* 'They are of the same age' (lit. older sibling younger sibling RC age RC). So, in the first and third examples markers of RC remind us that antecedents share the same state, and in the second sentence this unit signals that the antecedents belong to the same class.

Cross-linguistic investigations attest that the Tai languages originally used syntactic phrases and constructions to denote the meaning of reciprocity and cooperativeness. Evidence of it still can be found in some Tai languages. For instance, J. Cushing (1871) quotes Shan; *kò<sup>5</sup> nyng<sup>3</sup> le kò<sup>5</sup> nyng<sup>3</sup>* 'each other' which consists of the classifier for human beings *kò<sup>5</sup>*, numeral *nyng<sup>3</sup>* 'one' and a conjunction *le* 'and', i.e. lit. 'person one and person one' that occupies a postverbal position in the phrase.

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<sup>1</sup> Specific Tai phonemes are rendered by the following symbols: *è* stands for front low vowel, *y* - for high middle (or back unrounded) vowel, *ÿ* - for central vowel, *ò* - for low back rounded vowel.

A rather similar way of expressing reciprocity is used in Sui (Zhang Junru, 1979): *haam<sup>1</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> man<sup>1</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> to<sup>5</sup> ni<sup>4</sup>* ‘Three persons taught each other’ (lit. three clf. (classifier for people) they clf. teach clf.), i.e. reciprocity is expressed by the repetition of the classifier for people which enframes the verb *to<sup>5</sup>* ‘to teach’.

Later on there appeared a number of units or morphemes designating reciprocal/cooperative. Here I abstain from defining these morphemes as lexical or grammatical, full words or auxiliaries etc. It is important that they constitute a regular way for conveying the meaning of reciprocity/ cooperativeness.

Among the most widespread and well-known markers of reciprocal is the morpheme *kan* (*kyn*, *kin*) which predominantly occurs in the Tai languages of the Southeastern branch. Various authors treat and define it differently. For instance, R. Noss (1964) calls it a mutual pronoun, Vichin Panupong (1978) and N. Solntseva (1986) refer to it as a reciprocal adverb, R. N. Campbell (1969) considered it as a marker of plurality, P. Bee (1972) defined it as an adverb of compresence, and J. Plam (1972) labelled it as an auxiliary morpheme to mark the reciprocal voice.

In spite of various definitions and linguistic estimations of its position in the grammatical system, authors agree in their views about its function. This morpheme displays either a relation of subjects to an action, or their relation to each other, or their relation to an object; on the whole it demonstrates that each of the subjects does the same as the others do.

In all probability the morpheme *kan* is a corruption of a phrase such as Shan; *kò<sup>5</sup> nyng<sup>3</sup> le kò<sup>5</sup> nyng<sup>3</sup>* (lit. *person one and person one*) via intermediate form *kan<sup>1</sup> le kan<sup>1</sup>* ‘each other’ which is still widely used in modern Thai and Lao. So, I venture to posit that this morpheme derived from a syntactic construction in the process of phonetic contraction.

The shaping of this morpheme happened in Tai languages long ago. At least, the earliest epigraphic inscription in Tai, i.e. the Rama Khamhaeng inscription made at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, shows the morpheme *kan*, cf. *thyy<sup>5</sup> baan<sup>3</sup> thyy<sup>5</sup> myang<sup>1</sup> kan<sup>1</sup>* ‘(people) respect (their) country’ (lit. respect house respect district RC). Middle Lao also reveals this morpheme. For instance, in the poem “Intian instructs children” there are such lines as: *phua<sup>1</sup> mia<sup>2</sup> si<sup>3</sup>-dai<sup>3</sup> hang<sup>5</sup> kan<sup>2</sup> lèèw<sup>3</sup>* ‘Husband and wife should have divorced’ (lit. husband wife Modal separated RC completed).

So we can see that the morpheme *kan* substitutes for the noun phrase which is considered coreferential to the subject (or actor, doer in the terms of other systems). The antecedent of this reciprocal morpheme usually is present in the same clause, but it sometimes can be omitted, i. e. St. Thai *ruu<sup>4</sup> kan<sup>1</sup>* ‘it is known’ (lit. know RC); Lao *lyy<sup>4</sup> kan<sup>2</sup>* ‘it is rumoured’ (lit. rumour RC).

So, unlike other auxiliaries in Tai languages, the morpheme *kan* is not transparent semantically. It allows being treated as an auxiliary. Simultaneously, it substitutes for a noun phrase, which enables us to define it as a pronoun which in some modern Tai languages (St. Thai, Lao etc.) can combine with prepositions as

other personal pronouns, e.g. Lao: *khaw<sup>1</sup> ngyk<sup>3</sup> hua<sup>1</sup> hen<sup>1</sup>-dii<sup>2</sup> tò<sup>5</sup> kan<sup>2</sup>* ‘They approvingly nodded to each other’ (lit. they nod head approve towards RC).

This morpheme is also common to the languages of the Central branch (after Li Fanggui), such as Tho, Nung. In Saek which belongs to the Northern branch it appears as *kin<sup>4</sup>*. The area of this morpheme is quite wide, and stretches from Upper Burma to Northeast Vietnam.

But the languages of the SE branch, such as Phuthai, Thai-Yang, Thai-Muey spoken in North-eastern Laos and North-western Vietnam prefer to use for this purpose the morpheme *diaw<sup>1</sup>/liaw<sup>1</sup>/dew<sup>1</sup>/lew<sup>1</sup>* which is an indigenous Tai word. Its etymological meaning is ‘one, single, common’, e.g. Thai-Muey *thiang<sup>1</sup> diaw<sup>1</sup>* ‘to quarrel (with each other)’. This way of presentation of the meaning ‘reciprocal’ is undoubtedly syntactic. The morpheme *diaw<sup>1</sup>* functions as an adverb and shows least of all signs of grammaticalization.

The same mode of conveying the meaning reciprocity we find in the Li language (Hainan). The difference is that in Li the word *thoong<sup>3</sup>* ‘same’ is used, e.g. *zui<sup>3</sup> dang<sup>1</sup> zui<sup>3</sup> tshaa<sup>1</sup> thoong<sup>3</sup>* ‘to look at each other’ (lit. look at nose to look at eyes RC).

Another way of expressing reciprocity and cooperativeness is bound up with the Tai morpheme *to<sup>4</sup>*, which occurs mostly in the languages of the Northern branch and partly in the languages of the Central branch (alongside with *kan<sup>1</sup>*). It always precedes a verb as in Zhuang: *to<sup>4</sup> paw<sup>6</sup> ram<sup>4</sup>* ‘to splash water at each other’ (lit. RC scoop water); Tai-Nung *to<sup>4</sup> au<sup>1</sup>* ‘to get married’ (lit. RC take).

Cross-linguistic examination explicitly reveals that this morpheme goes back to a polysemantic verb *to<sup>4</sup>*, one of the etymological lines of which is ‘to oppose, to confront, to be correlated with’. Used in series with other verbs it underwent the process of desemantization as had happened with many Tai words in serial construction. Eventually, in some languages it has become a marker of reciprocity and cooperativeness, while in others it has turned into a preposition exhibiting the relationships of address or correlation, cf. St. Thai: *klaaw<sup>2</sup> tò<sup>2</sup> thii<sup>3</sup>-pra<sup>2</sup>-chum<sup>1</sup>* ‘to declare to the meeting’, *saam<sup>1</sup> tò<sup>2</sup> haa<sup>3</sup>* ‘3:5’, *saam<sup>5</sup> khrang<sup>4</sup> tò<sup>2</sup> wan<sup>1</sup>* ‘three times a day’.

I have not enough data on these languages at my disposal in order to come to a definite conclusion about this morpheme. But it looks as if in the Northern Tai languages the categorization of the notion ‘reciprocity’ went rather far. The Russian scholar A. Moskalev (1971) and some Chinese linguists defined it as a prefix of reciprocity in Zhuang. I venture to conjecture that the morpheme *to<sup>4</sup>* together with the morphemes *teng<sup>1</sup>* for passive and *hay<sup>3</sup>* for causative align a paradigm of preverbs as a prerequisite for the appearance of the category of voice or diathesis in this group of Tai languages.

This morpheme in the form *tu<sup>3</sup>* exists in some Tai languages of Kam-Sui group, as Sui, Maonang, e.g. Sui *ya<sup>2</sup> ai<sup>3</sup> man<sup>1</sup> tu<sup>3</sup> njum<sup>3</sup>* ‘They hate each other’ (lit. two person he/they RC hate); Maonan *ya<sup>1</sup> tò<sup>2</sup> kwi<sup>3</sup> tu<sup>3</sup> taaw<sup>3</sup>* ‘Two buffaloes are butting each other’ (lit. two clf. (for animate objects) buffalo RC butt).

Besides that, this morpheme occurs also in Tai languages of the Central branch where it competes with the morpheme *kan* and sometimes draws it into a contaminated construction *tò ... kan*, cf. Tho *luuk<sup>5</sup> laan<sup>1</sup> tò<sup>2</sup> chung<sup>1</sup> kan<sup>1</sup>* 'Children lead each other by hand' (lit. child grandson RC lead [by hand] RC); Nung *pii<sup>6</sup> nòng<sup>2</sup> tò<sup>2</sup> tap<sup>5</sup> kan<sup>1</sup>* 'Brothers kick each other' (lit. elder brother younger brother RC kick RC).

The usage of either of three possible constructions is admissible. But as Hoang Van Ma et. al. posit (1971:38), in practice the construction *tò<sup>2</sup> V kan<sup>1</sup>* is now preferable. In this instance, as well as many others, the area of the Central branch can be considered as transitional between the Southeastern and Northern branches.

The last way of displaying the functional category in question is the morpheme *tong<sup>1</sup>/tung<sup>1</sup>/tang<sup>1</sup>* borrowed by some Kam-Sui languages from Chinese. This unit precedes the verb as it does in Chinese, for instance, Kam (Dong) *tong<sup>1</sup> hew<sup>1</sup>* 'to quarrel'. This Chinese auxiliary must have been taken over in some kind of periphrastic construction from the morpheme *to/tu*.

Thus, we can resume that there is no common way for displaying reciprocal and cooperative in the Tai languages. Different Tai languages resort to specific means to manifest this category. One is the usage of a pronominalized noun phrase, i.e. the morpheme *kan<sup>1</sup>*, the second is the adaptation of the preverb *tò<sup>4</sup>* and the third is the exploitation of the adjunct *diaw<sup>1</sup>*. Each of them occurs in a different area. But in some cases the isoglosses of RC intersect or run in parallel. Such multiformity should be regarded as an evidence of rather recent and separate origin of the reciprocal/cooperative in Tai.

Lastly, in spite of different ways and means of expressing the meaning reciprocal/cooperative, this universal functional category on the whole turned out to be a syntactic category. From the standpoint of formal grammar the data on Tai languages do not adhere to the definition of a 'grammatical category' in its conventional sense which requires that the reciprocity be a relationship which obtains within the category of diatheses or voice and finds its overt exhibition in a set of verbal forms, syntactic or analytical. When so, the reciprocity in Tai should be considered as a separate phenomenon outside any grammatical category. It should be a subject of special study.

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