Final Particles in Conversational Mal (Thin)

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to give a preliminary study of the final particles in the Ban Sakat Klang dialect of Mal,[1] i.e., to present the basic meanings and functions of most of the commonly used final particles in conversational Mal.

2. Sentence position and function of final particles in Mal

Final particles are sentence ending words which have no lexical meaning of their own. They can also occur medially, i.e., at the end of clauses or phrases, even though these clauses or phrases are not in the sentence-final position. They usually contribute extra meaning to the meaning of the whole sentence, clause or phrase. In Mal, final particles almost always occur in sentence-final position (see examples 1, 2) but may also occur medially (see examples 2, 3).

(1)　cɔy　lian　kam　luaʔ　ʔaŋ　heʔ
　　　help　teach　language　lua　give　Fp.
　　　"Please teach (me) the Lua language."

(2)　ʔəə　cak　heʔ　ŋeʔ　mɛʔ　toʔ　pɔɔŋ　nooy　nəʔ
　　　O.K.　go　Fp.　day　new　come　to have fun　together　Fp.
　　　"O.K. Go ahead. Do come again the next day."

(3)　ʼ　bɔʔ - ʔət　yəʔ　ʔet　phuay　lɛʔ　ʔaŋ　nooy　ʔɔɔk
　　　good　already　Fp.　bring　water　seek　give　together　drink
　　　"Thank you for bringing the water (for us) to drink."

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[1]Mal and the closely related Prai belong to the Khmuic branch of Mon-Khmer (Filbeck 1976). They are both called Thin or Lua' by local people. The term Thin has been variously spelled as T'in, Tin, Htin, H'tin. The term Lua', or Lawa, has also been used for a Palaungic language in Maehongson and Chiangmai provinces.

　　In Thailand Mal-speakers inhabit Pua, Chiang Klang and Thung Chang districts of Nan province, while in Laos they live in the Northwest part of Sayaboury province. For the data used in this paper, we are indebted to Mr. Toi Rokphrai and Mr. Phong Rokphrai of Ban Sakat Klang in Pua district. According to Ferlus (1974), the dialects of Thin are classified into 3 groups: 1) Tin de Nam Yo 2) Tin de Sakat and 3) Tin de Ban Teuy.

When a noun or a phrase or a clause which is a subject of a clause or a sentence is in focus, or when a noun or a noun phrase is moved to be the topic of the utterance a final particle /mih/ is used to mark the topic (see examples 4, 5).

(4)   luat   kuu   mih   cak   thoon   mɛɛʔɛɛ
        then, how about   teacher   Fp.   go   buy   what
        "How about you, the teacher, what are you going to buy?"

(5)   luat   see   mih   mah   ɲəp   cia   naa   pɔɔn
        then, how about   bird   Fp.   you   catch how   which get
        "How about the birds, how did you catch them?"

3. Types of final particles

On the basis of syntactic and semantic criteria, Amara (1972:16) classified the Thai final particles into seven groups: Intensifying particles, emphasizing particles, hortative particles, definite particles, question particles, post-question particles, and status particles. Patcharin (1981:28) in her study of Thai final particles divided them into 3 main groups "according to their similarity among themselves" as follows: those that are status particles, those that are question particles and those that are mood particles. And Cook (1989:5) roughly divided sentence final particles into four types on the basis of their semantic and contextual functions as follows: "Those signalling speaker-addressee relationships, those calling for a response from the addressee, those signalling the speaker's response to the verbal or situational context and those signalling the context orientation of the utterance in question." Among these three linguists, who studied the final particles in Thai, there may be some minor differences in their opinions about what should be included as final particles, but in general they agree on the major types of final particles.

In this study of final particles in Mal, the status particles, or those signalling speaker-addressee relationships, may not be exhaustive due to the limitations of the data available.[2] The other two types of final particles in this study are question particles or those calling for a response from the addressee, and mood particles or those signalling the speaker's response to the verbal or situational context and those signalling the contextual orientation of the utterance in question.

One of the unique characteristics of final articles is variation of forms. In normal pronunciation, final particles may undergo a process of phonological variation which involves vowel shortening, deletion of initial or final consonants, or changes of pitch or length. These changes also produce a change in the shade of meaning of the final particles. However, the data for this study is limited; therefore, these variations will not be included in this study.

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[2]The data is taken from *Language and Culture of the Lua?: A Study from 30 conversational lessons* by Suriya Ratanakul and others (1996).

3.1 The status particles

The status particles found in this study are politeness particles; they show relationships between speaker and addressee. They indicate the level of formality. In example 6 below (and elsewhere throughout this paper) the symbols S1 and S2 stand for two speakers in a conversation.

haa   polite and somewhat formal; used in response to the yes/no questions.

(6)   S1   haanuaʔ   phuaʔ   ʔuy   saʔ   loʔ   pəʔ
            now   still   have   forest   go round for pleasure   Qp.
            "Now, is there any forest to go to for pleasure?"

      S2   ʔuy   haa   phuaŋ   ʔɛɛ   cak   loʔ   saʔ
           have   Fp.   group   we   go   go round for pleasure   forest

           liʔ   khɔɔn   cak   bɔŋ   bɔh
           often   ascend go   path   mountain
           "Yes, there still is. We often go to the forest for fun, and go along the path to the mountain."

haʔ   polite and somewhat formal; used in response to the yes/no questions. Possibly a variant of /haa/.

(7)   S1   pɔŋ   liʔ   pəʔ
           eat   often   Qp.
           "Do you eat (it) often?"

      S2   pɔŋ   liʔ   haʔ
           eat   often   Fp.
           "We eat (it) often."

nuu   polite and somewhat formal; probably used by females.

(8)   liik   gii   mah   muan theʔ ŋeʔ nuaʔ pɔɔ   taw   nɛɛ   waa   nuu
      speak   with   you   fun   real day this enough be equal   this first Fp.
      "It's real fun to speak with you, but it's enough for today."

3.2 The question particles

Question particles are those particles which are used in the formation of a question requesting a yes/no type answer. The two basic question particles in Mal are /pəʔ/ and /yoʔ/ which occur at the end of a statement. These final particles /pəʔ/ and /yoʔ/ differ from the rest of the final particles in that they have a grammatical function whereas the others do not.

pəʔ   simple yes/no question; signals a simple question calling for a yes or no response.

(9)   ʔuy   pham   sɔɔ   ʔɔɔk   phuay   miaʔ   pəʔ
       have   man   other drink   water   rain   Qp.
       "Is there any person (who) drinks rain-water?"

(10)   phuay   kway   ʔuy   tabɔt   waaŋ   pəʔ
       water   stream have   through out year   Qp.
       "Is there always water in the stream year-round?"

(11)   S1 ʔuy   pham   phək   bɔɔ   phuay   laʔ   pəʔ
          have   man   dig   well   water   for   Qp.
          "Is there any person (who) digs wells for drinking water?"

       S2 If the answer is positive.
          ʔuy
          have
          "Yes, there is."

       S2 If the answer is negative.
          səə   ʔuy
          not   have
          "No, there is not."

yoʔ   yes/no question; used in questions when the speaker already has some idea
           about the answer.

(12)   S1 ŋwaay   nɛɛ   liik   ŋɛɛŋ   may   tiah   yoʔ
          village this   speak   language   lua   all   Fp.
          "(In) this village (all people) speak the Lua language, don't they?"

       S2 ʔɨɨ
          yes
          "Yes."

3.3 The mood particles

        Mood particles are those particles which are used by a speaker to reveal his
or her attitude, opinion, emotions or knowledge concerning the subject being
discussed, or towards the situation or contextual orientation at the time of speaking.
These particles generally do not have a syntactic function, i.e., when they are left
out, the utterance is still grammatical and the informational content is still intact.

        These particles show a wide variety of feelings, so they are very
complicated to discuss and give direct translation in English. The complexity is
doubled because some of the particles overlap in some contexts. Each particle often
has more than one implication.

        The following inventory comprises a listing of mood particles found in the
data:

nə? response desired; signals that the speaker wants or expects some response from the addressee, somewhat pleading or asking for permission.

(13)   lɔ? - ?ət   mah   coy   duah   ?aŋ   ?ən   kuu   ŋe?   nə?
      good already   you   help   tell   to   I   every   day   Fp.
      "Thank you. Could you please teach me everyday?"

nə? urging or persuading; used with a statement of invitation, signalling a mild insistence.

(14)   ?əə   cak   he?   ŋe?   mɛ?   to?   pɔɔŋ   nooy   nə?
      O.K.   go   Fp.   day   new   come   to have fun   together   Fp.
      "O.K. go ahead. Come again tomorrow."

nə? action desired; demanding as if one had a right.

(15)   ?uy   ?at   ta?   nɛɛ   ?at   təp   waa   nə?
      have   stay   place   this   stay   wait   for a while   Fp.
      "Here I am. Wait for a while."

yo? besides being a yes/no question particle, it is also an action desired; used in responding positively to a request or to show that the speaker is willing to grant or to help gain the requested permission.

(16)   S1 ?ən   yo?   cak   təm   mah
          I   Fp.   to   follow   you
          "I will go with you."

      S2 cak   yo?   khɔɔn   təm   lɔŋ   kwaay
          go   Fp.   ascend   along   path   stream
          "Yes go. Go along the stream."

he? action desired; used mainly in requests. The speaker generally is older than the addressee. The use of this particle softens the request.

(17)   cɔɔy   lian   kamlua?   ?aŋ   he?
      help   teach   lua language   give   Fp.
      "Could you please teach (me) the Lua language?"

he? action desired; used in commands. The speaker usually has more authority than the addressee. The use of this particle softens the command.

(18)   səə   mɛɛn   ?ə?   lɨik   mɛ?   he?
      not   right   Fp   say   again   Fp.
      "That's not right. Say it again."

he? invitation confirmed; generally used in host-to-guest situation. The speaker offers some kindness to the addressee.

(19)   ?uy   mɛɛ?ɛɛ   ?aŋ   cɔɔy   kuu   to?   lɛ?   he?
      have   what   give   help   then   come   seek   Fp.
      "(If) you have anything for me to help with, come to see me."

he?   offhanded permission; used in sentences which give the addressee permission to do something and at the same time indicate that the speaker is not interested in the matter.

(20)   ?ɘɘ   cak   he?
          O.K.   go   Fp.
          "O.K. Go ahead."

he?   action-inducement; used in making the demand more gentle.

(21)   taam   ?ɘn   to?   he?   mah   ca?   ?ii   pɔɔn   loŋ   lɔɔŋ
          follow   I   come   Fp.   you   will   not   able   lost   path, way
          "Please follow me,(so) you will not get lost."

ha?   striking or critical relevance; signals some fact. The speaker is reacting in surprise or special interest to something that has just caught his attention and has made a significant impression.

(22)   mah   liik   ŋɛɛŋ   may   pɔɔn   ?ɘt   ha?
          You   speak   language   lua   able   already   Fp.
          "You are able to speak Lua already!"

pɘ?   besides being a yes/no question particle, it can also occur with a statement to intensify what has been said.

(23)   ?at   ɲoh   ɲoh   nɛɛ   pɘ?
          stay   near   near   here   Fp.
          "(I) stay pretty near."

mih   shift of focus; signals a shift of focus from one concern to another directly related one, occurs with noun phrase topics.

(24)   luat   kuu   mih   cak   thoon   mɛɛ?ɛɛ
          then, how about   teacher   Fp.   go   buy   what
          "How about you, teacher, what are you going to buy?"

yɘ?   response confirmed; used in answering yes/no questions to intensify the response.

(25)   S1 ?uy   pham   ?at   ta?   ciaŋ   nɛɛ   pɘ?
              have   man   stay   place   home   this   Fp.
              "Any one at home?"

              S2 ?uy   khɔɔn   nɛɛ   yɘ?
              have   ascend   this   Fp.
              "Yes. Please come upstairs."

yɘ?   invitation confirmed; usually used in a host-to-guest situation. This is an example to show that final particles can appear in groups. In example 26, a yes/no question particle /pɘ?/ is followed by a final particle /yɘ?/ to intensify the invitation.

(26) pɔŋ   saa   gɨɨ   nooy   pəʔ   yəʔ
      eat   rice   with   together Qp.   Fp.
      "Would you like to have a meal with us?"

yəʔ particular relevance; usually used to call the addressee's attention to some referent or event. This example also shows that two particles can co-occur; i.e., the intensifying particle /pəʔ/ followed by the intensifying particle /yəʔ/ to emphasize what has just been said.

(27) tɛɛ   kɛɛn   ŋwaay   theʔ   lɨɨk   phaasaa   thai   kwɛɛn   pəʔ   yəʔ
      but   head   village true   speak language Thai   be good at Fp. Fp.
      "But the head of the village can speak Thai, (he) is very good at Thai."

yəʔ minor matter; signals that some fact or event is a simple matter but desirable. The speaker does not expect the addressee to make any adjustment, so he conveys his agreement.

(28) lɔʔ - ʔət   yəʔ   ʔet   phuay   lɛʔ   ʔaŋ   nooy   ʔɔɔk
      good already   Fp.   bring water   seek, find give   together drink
      "Thank you for bringing the water (for us) to drink."

yəʔ action inducement. The speaker is prompting the addressee to do some particular action; in this case an invitation.

(29) ʔɔɔk   phuay   waa   yəʔ
      drink   water   first   Fp.
      "Please have a drink first" or
      "Please drink some water first."

day response desired; used to make declarative statements milder or more gentle. The speaker is looking for affirmative response or for some acknowledgement or for some permission from the addressee.

(30) lɔʔ - ʔət   ʔən   caʔ   cak   ʔət   day
      good already   I   will   go   be able to Fp.
      "Thank you. I'm leaving now." or
      "Thank you. I'm about to leave now." or
      "Thank you. I have to go now."

day correction; used in negative statements to correct a statement, belief, attitude, etc.

(31) sɛɛm   laʔ   thət   ʔah   səə   bəy   pɔŋ   day
      raise for   sell   they not   kill eat   Fp.
      "(They) raise (them) for sale, they do not kill (them) for their own consumption."

naʔ expectable response; used to make very positive response to a question. The implication is that something is expectable, natural and obvious under the circumstances, and that the question itself is unnecessary.

(32) kan   ɲan   ʔee   sɛʔ   kɔɔ
      if   grass, weeds   it   a lot then

      caʔ   thoʔ   ɲan   naʔ
      will   clear the way grass, weeds   Fp.
      "If there are a lot of weeds, then (we) will remove them."

ʔəʔ   simple yes/no response; used in response to a yes/no question. It usually occurs after the word /mɛɛn/ "to be right, correct".

(33) S1   ʔiyay   mɛɛn   pəʔ
            chicken   to be right   Qp.
      "(I say) "chicken". Is it the right pronunciation?"

      S2   mɛɛn   ʔəʔ
            to be right   Fp.
      "Yes. (that's) right."

pheʔ   shift of focus; used in content questions to indicate surprise, doubt or curiosity. It signals a shift of focus from one question to another directly related one.

(34) S1   taʔ   ŋwaay   nɛɛ   bʔ   kwaa
            at, place   village this   good   more
      "This village is better."

      S2   caʔ   naa   pheʔ
            how   which   Fp.
      "But, why?"

Examples 35 to 40 are examples of final particles found in just one utterrance for each particle, so it is difficult to say anything about the function and meaning of these final particles.

tɔʔ
(35) hiʔ   pɔŋ   tɔʔ
      Exclamation particle   eat   Fp.
      "O.K. Eat."

teh
(36) ʔən gay kuu   ʔat   kuŋtheep, tɔʔ lian kam   luaʔ teh
      I   be teacher at, stay Bangkok   come learn language lua Fp.
      "I am a teacher in Bangkok, but (I have) come to learn the Lua language."

ʔan
(37) S1   tɔʔ   ŋeʔ   naa
            come   day   when
      "When did you come?"

      S2   tɔʔ   kiyay   ʔan
            come   night   Fp.
      "(I) came last night."

ʔen

(38) mah   ʔɛɛm   mɛɛʔɛɛ   ʔen
      you   do   what   Fp.
      "What are you doing?"

nuʔ possibly a variant of the polite particle /nuu/.

(39) lɔʔ   yɨɨm   taʔ   lɔɔn   ʔaŋ   ŋeeŋ   ŋeeŋ   ʔee   lɔʔ   muan   nuʔ
      good   heart   that tell   give listen listen pronoun   good   fun   Fp.
      "(I) am glad that you told me the story, it's very enjoyable."

kaa possibly a self-directed question; somewhat equivalent to "I wonder" in English.

(40) sɘɘ   pɔɔn   cak   sɛɛ   sɛʔ   ŋeʔ
      not   get   go   field many   day

      ʔɘt   ɲan   cuah   ʔɘt   kaa
      already grass, weeds long   already Fp.
      "(We) haven't been to the field for many days, the weeds must have grown very high by now!"

Various modifications of forms and meanings remain for further study, and any general statements about these phenomena in Mal still need more careful study.

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