

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF MODALS
IN ENGLISH AND THAI.

by

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It is very obvious that there is a distinction between languages whose verbal features are expressed by inflexion and those which have no inflexional features at all. This article is attempting to illustrate the difficulties for Thai speakers of English to manipulate the uses of English modals which do not exist in Thai.

<u>English</u>			<u>Thai</u>			
<u>m.</u>	<u>s.</u>	<u>s.</u>	<u>s.</u>	<u>m.</u>	<u>v.</u>	<u>interr. part.</u>
Will	you	come?	khun	da	ma:	mai
Can	he, she, it		khun	khun		
May	you		khaw	ton		
etc.	they			etc.		

The problem arises when Thai students tend to use the primary auxiliary DO in interrogative with modals. The reason is that they are taught about the use of primary auxiliary first. So they transfer this when they come to learn about the use of modal auxiliaries later:

You come.

You will come

Do you come?

Do you will come?

As far as the form of the non-present modal auxiliary and the full verb is concerned, there is no difficulty in learning to build the structure. The reason is that in English the full verb following the modal auxiliary is uninflexional and this is exactly the same in Thai since the full verb in Thai is quite uninflexional.

<u>English</u>			<u>Thai</u>		
s.	m.	v.	s.	m.	v.
I	will	go	tʃán	dʒa	pai
You	can		khun	khon	
He, she, it	may		kháw	khuan	
They	etc.			etc.	

In the negative, both in Thai and English, the negative particle follows the modal auxiliaries. Difficulties arise with some particular meanings of the modals, but I think that such difficulties occur when foreigners (British) learn Thai more than when Thai people learn English, since Thai negative particle can be placed before some of the modal verbs.

What I am going to consider is the difference and similarity in form and meaning of each different use of each modal, and also what the most appropriate and nearest translation equivalent from the source language (Thai) to the target language (English) is and vice versa.

1. WILL/SHALL - dʒa

Meaning and Translation Equivalence

From English Point of View:

<u>English</u>	<u>Thai</u>
1. WILL Putative	khon/khon dʒa + kramar
2. WILL Induction	jám /jám dʒa
3. WILL Characteristic/Willingness	dʒa
4. WILL Evidential	(untranslatable by a modal - only by simple form of verb)
5. WILL Insistence	nâ:/thâid nâ:
6. WILL Imperative	nâ/dʒa.. nâi tʃai /dʒa.. tʃai mâi
7. SHALL Promissive	dʒa
8. SHALL External Authority	nâ/dʒa.. dâi mâi

From Thai Point of View:

	<u>Thai</u>	<u>English</u>
1.	dʒa Future	WILL
2.	dʒa Willingness/Agreement	WILL
3.	dʒa Promise	SHALL
4.	dʒa..mâi tʃâi / tʃai mâi Mild Imperative	WILL
5.	dʒa..dâi mâi External Authority	SHALL
6.	dʒa Miscellaneous Use	to + (full verb)

It is obvious that dʒa alone is equivalent to WILL willingness/ characteristics and SHALL promissive, but other meanings of WILL can be translated appropriately by other Thai modal verbs and modal sentence particles (some of which include modal dʒa).

Thai students have difficulty in using WILL evidential and WILL insistence since these two senses of WILL do not exist for dʒa. The use of WILL which they bear in their minds is WILL future. The reason is that the traditional approach is the method used to teach Thai students. Another reason is that every use of dʒa conveys future. Therefore, Thai students never use WILL evidential and WILL insistence; and they hardly use or understand the senses of WILL putative, WILL induction, WILL imperative, SHALL external authority, and SHALL promissive. Furthermore, the use of WILL imperative and SHALL external authority tend to confuse Thai students who, thus, misuse them, since those uses of WILL and SHALL are equivalent to the sentence particle ná in Thai.

The following are examples of typical mistakes Thai students make. These examples show how Thai students misuse and misunderstand different uses of WILL:

He'll be at home now. (Putative)
misunderstood as
He is going home now.

She will act the fool. (Insistence)
 misunderstood as

She has willingness to act the fool.

You will stay here. (Imperative)
 misunderstood as

You have willingness to stay here.

You shall have your money tomorrow. (Promissive)
 misused as

You will have your money tomorrow.

2. CAN - dai

Meaning and Translation Equivalence

From English Point of View:

	<u>English</u>	<u>Thai</u>
1.	CAN Ability	dai
2.	CAN Perception	(untranslatable by modal - only by simple form of verb)
3.	CAN Sporadic Aspect	ko .. dai
4.	CAN Permission (MAY)	dai
5.	CAN Suggestion	si / pai
6.	CAN Willingness/Request (WILL)	hai naj
7.	CAN Physical Possibility	ko dai
8.	CAN Inferential (MUST)	mai dai rok

From Thai Point of View:

	<u>Thai</u>	<u>English</u>
1.	dai Ability	CAN
2.	dai Permission	CAN / MAY

From the comparison above we see that *dái* is the Thai equivalent to CAN ability/permission and also MAY permission. The other meaning of CAN is suitably rendered by other combinations of *dái* and some modal sentence particles. CAN perception is expressed by non-modal in Thai and it is untranslatable by a modal; therefore, Thai students do not understand the use of CAN perception at all and this leads to the misuse of CAN perception and CAN ability. This also happens to other uses of CAN apart from CAN ability and permission i.e. other uses of CAN are misused as CAN ability and permission.

The following are examples of sentences which are misunderstood by Thai students:

I can smell something burning.

misunderstood as

* I am able to smell something burning.

(I smell something burning).

She can be very silly.

misunderstood as

* She is able to be very silly.

(Sometimes she is silly).

You can lay the table.

misunderstood as

* You are allowed to lay the table.

(I suggest that you lay the table).

You can get in through the window.

misunderstood as

* You are able to get in through the window.

or* You are allowed to get in through the window.

(It is possible for him to get in through the window).

3. MAY - á d / á d dya

Meaning and Translation Equivalence

From English Point of View:

<u>English</u>	<u>Thai</u>
1. MAY Permission	dai
2. MAY Possibility/perhaps/ it's possible that	a:d / a:d dʒa / ba:nthi..kʰ/ a:d dʒa..kʰ dai
<u>From Thai Point of View:</u>	

<u>Thai</u>	<u>English</u>
a:d / a:d dʒa Possibility	MAY

MAY by translation is equal to a:d/a:d:d a which is used only for possibility not for permission. Thus, Thai students tend to use CAN permission, not MAY. They never use MAY permission or even realize that MAY can be used to express permission like CAN.

In negative form MAY NOT, there is no difficulty for Thai students because it is exactly a direct translation word from word i.e. a:d dʒa mai. The difficulty for Thai students to use MAY possibility is that they confuse this use of MAY with CAN physical possibility. They often make mistakes with these uses of MAY possibility and CAN physical possibility. For examples:

He may come tomorrow.
misunderstood as

- * It's possible for him to come tomorrow.
(It's possible that he'll come tomorrow.)
or Perhaps he'll come tomorrow).

He can work in the library.
misunderstood as

- * It's possible that he works in the library.
or Perhaps he works in the library.
(It's possible for him to work in the library).

4. MUST - t^hngMeaning and Translation EquivalenceFrom English Point of View:

<u>English</u>	<u>Thai</u>
1. MUST Inferential (CAN)	t ^h ng + n ^h / n ^h :n ^h :
2. MUST Obligation	t ^h ng
negative: needn't/necessary for..to	m ^h i t ^h ng / m ^h i dzampen t ^h ng
mustn't/necessary that	t ^h ng m ^h i
HAVE TO	t ^h ng / dzam t ^h ng

From Thai Point of View:

<u>Thai</u>	<u>English</u>
t ^h ng Obligation	MUST Obligation/Inferential
	HAVE TO

It is clearly seen that MUST in both meanings is equivalent to t^hng except that MUST inferential can be rendered in Thai by adding adverbs n^h / n^h:n^h:. Although MUST inferential is translated as t^hng, this sense of t^hng is very rare. The frequent and common use of t^hng is to express obligation or necessity. So Thai students find it difficult to understand MUST inferential. Most of them understand that MUST only expresses obligation or necessity.

Another difficulty is caused by the negative form of MUST obligation i.e. NEEDN'T where in Thai retains the same word i.e. m^hi t^hng. Thai students tend to use MUSTN'T more than NEEDN'T. They also find it easier to use not necessary for..to instead of NEEDN'T, because there is exactly an equivalent translation in Thai i.e. m^hi dzampen t^hng. Although can be a suitable translation of HAVE TO, and thus make it different from t^hng (MUST), it is only used in written Thai, in spoken we always use either for external or internal obligation. Therefore, difficulty arises when they learn to differentiate between MUST and HAVE TO; Thai students tend to use MUST in every

case i.e. they use MUST where they should use HAVE TO.

These are examples of mistakes they make:

* I must go now. My mother is waiting for me
instead of using:

I have to go now. My mother is waiting for me.

* I must go to the dentist at 10 o'clock.
instead of using:

I have to go to the dentist at 10 o'clock.

* We must buy fruit here because it is the only one shop in this
town. instead of using:

We have to buy fruit here because it is the only one shop in
this town.

5. SHOULD / OUGHT - khuən dʒa / nâ: dʒa

Meaning and Translation Equivalence

From English Point of View:

<u>English</u>	<u>Thai</u>
1. SHOULD/UGHT Obligation negative: Needn't shouldn't/oughtn't	khuən / khuən dʒa mâi dʒampen tɔŋ mâi khuən dʒa
2. SHOULD/UGHT Likelihood negative: Shouldn't/oughtn't	khuən / khuən dʒa mâi khuən dʒa

From Thai Point of View:

<u>Thai</u>	<u>English</u>
khuən / khuən dʒa	SHOULD/UGHT Obligation/ Likelihood
nâ: dʒa	SHOULD/UGHT HAVE

SHOULD/UGHT TO in two meanings are rendered in Thai by khuən or khuən dʒa . But the past time reference of SHOULD/UGHT TO i.e. SHOULD/ OUGHT TO HAVE is equivalent to nâ: dʒa in Thai. So the present and past time references of SHOULD/UGHT TO are rendered by two different morphemes in Thai i.e. khuən dʒa and nâ: dʒa .

The difficulty for Thai students in learning SHOULD/UGHT TO is about the negative form of SHOULD/UGHT TO obligation i.e. NEEDN'T because the negative form in Thai is equivalent to SHOULDN'T/UGHTN'T. Therefore, the Thai students do not use NEEDN'T as negative form of SHOULD/UGHT obligation.

Examples of mistakes:

* I ought to come but John oughtn't.

instead of using:

I ought to come but John needn't.

* He should do it but you shouldn't.

instead of using:

He should do it but you needn't.

6. Past Tense Forms of English Modals in Contrast with Thai.

Due to the lack of distinction in Thai between present and past tense forms of modals which are distinct in English i.e. WILL - WOULD, CAN - COULD, MAY - MIGHT, Thai students often make errors with past tense forms of English modals. The chart below illustrates that the translation of present and past tense forms of English modals in purely temporal use are the same in Thai. lɛ:w is the past time marker added to the sentence where English use modal + HAVE except SHOULD/ OUGHT TO HAVE.

<u>English</u>	<u>Thai</u>
work	verb
will work	d ₃ a + verb (1)
would work	d ₃ a + verb (1)
will have worked	d ₃ a + verb (1) + l :w
shall work	d ₃ a + verb (1)
should work	khuan d ₃ a + verb (2)
shall have worked	d ₃ a + verb (1) + lɛ:w
should have worked	nā: d ₃ a + verb (3)
can work	verb + dái (4)
could work	verb + dái (4)
can have worked	verb + dái (4) + lɛ:w

<u>English</u>	<u>Thai</u>
may work	a:d dʒa + verb (5)
might work	à:d dʒa + verb (5)
may have worked	à:d dʒa + verb (5) + 1/2:w
must work	tõŋ + verb (6)
have to work	tõŋ + verb (6)
had to work	tõŋ + verb (6)
must have worked	tõŋ + verb (6) + 1/2:w
ought to work	khuən dʒa + verb (2)
ought to have worked	ná: dʒa + verb (3) 1 :w

Therefore, the difficulty for Thai students is about past time reference since it may be conveyed by the preterite forms or perfect HAVE in different circumstances. As mentioned before in Chapter 4, each English modal has its own characteristics of modality, this leads to the misuse of past time reference of different uses of each modal, especially the misuse of preterite forms. The preterite forms i.e. WOULD, COULD, MIGHT, SHOULD are often used by Thai students when HAVE is required. In the traditional grammar of English which is used to teach Thai students in secondary schools, WOULD, COULD, MIGHT are regarded as past tense forms of WILL, CAN, MAY. Thus, Thai students tend to overuse these preterite forms for past time reference.

The examples given below are some mistakes that Thai students make about past time reference:

- * He would see her last night. (WILL Putative)
(He will have seen her last night).
- * You would finish by the time I return! (WILL Imperative)
(You will have finished by the time I return!)
- * She can have seen the ghost last night. (CAN Perception)
(She could see the ghost last night).
- * You could lay the table last night. (CAN Suggestion)
(You could lay the table now).

- * You might stay last night. (MAY Permission)
(You could stay last night).
- * He might go last night. (MAY Possibility)
(He may have gone last night).
- * She must see the doctor yesterday. (MUST Obligation)
(She had to see the doctor yesterday).
- * You should pass the exam if you worked hard.
(You should pass the exam if you work hard).

Furthermore, Thai students find a great difficulty in using the past tense form of modals for non-temporal reference since such uses of modals never occur in Thai. In the very beginning of learning English verbs, they are taught to use present forms as present time reference, and past tense forms as past time reference. Therefore, they transfer this when they come to meet the past tense form of modals i.e. WOULD, SHOULD, COULD, MIGHT, which do not refer to the past time i.e. tentative uses. They hardly achieve mastery of them.

The tentative use of the preterite forms of English modals are not rendered by modals in Thai but by polite words i.e. *prò:d*, *kàrúna:*, *t|ûj* and the simple form of verb and some modal sentence particles, which have been mentioned in Chapter 5. Such polite words in Thai are rendered by 'please' in English. Thus, most Thai students misunderstand the tentative use of English modals i.e. they misunderstand them as past time reference.

The examples given below are understood by Thai students as past time events.

- I would help you.
- You could sing a song.
- She could reach it.
- He might fail.
- Might I go?

It is hoped that this contrastive studies will assist the teachers

in defining the problems that Thai students are likely to have in learning English as a second language. Furthermore, by contrasting the difference in the patterns, structures, and meanings of the two languages - it is hoped that the teacher will be able to present his material more clearly and effectively to the Thai students.

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