

Chapter 3

Time Structure and Time-Marking in the Thai Language and Their Cultural Significance

3.1. Introduction

"Si Phaendin" is a conventional piece of narrative prose literature. A narrative is broadly defined as referring "[...] to a series of real or fictional actions or events that take place in the past relative to the time of the narration [...]" (GUELICH & QUASTHOFF, 1985: 169). Forster defines a story as "[...] a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence - dinner coming after breakfast, Tuesday after Monday [...]". (FORSTER, 1976: 42.) It makes the readers want to know *what happens next?* (ibid.) Chronology is the "natural" time structure of such a conventional narrative because chronological narration places events and actions according to the "natural" time of their occurrence. What happens first will be narrated first. "Si Phaendin", a woman's life-story, strictly follows this fundamental order, beginning when the heroine is ten years old and ending with her death 55 years and 1495 pages later.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the implications of the absence of morphological time-marking in Thai. I will then look at the non-morphological means to mark time and continue with a paragraph on possible inaccuracies as a result of non-morphological marking of events within the past. Finally, I will examine the representation of historical events in "Si Phaendin".

3.2. The Absence of Morphological Indications of Time in Thai

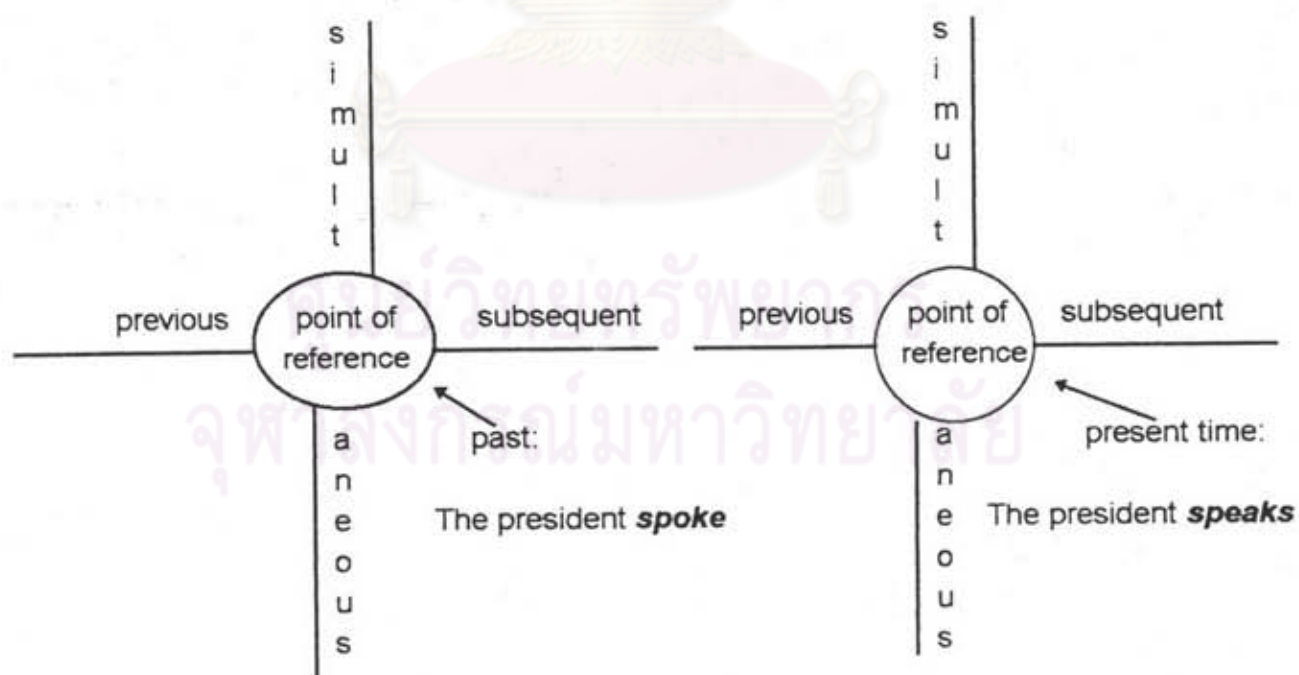
One of the distinctive characteristics of Indo-European languages is the morphological structure of their vocabulary. Words have "built-in" devices to indicate tense (*I call / I called*), person (*I do / he does*), number (*house / houses*), gender (as in German: *das Hemd [the shirt: neuter], die Hose [the trousers: feminine], der Mantel [the coat: masculine]* or case (as in German: *ein Tisch [a table: Nominative] / einen Tisch [a table: Accusative]*). Monosyllabic languages like Thai have no morphological structure. If tense, person, number, gender or case have to be marked, it has to be done by non-morphological means, i.e. by extra words. The fundamental difference between morphological and non-morphological marking also has an impact on the marking of time. The speaker of English can indicate two time levels with morphological means, either present or past, as for instance in "*The president speaks*" and "*The president spoke*". No additional identification of time is necessary. In Thai, past tense is marked non-morphologically, for instance by adverbial expressions such as *เมื่อวานนี้* (*yesterday*). The predicate remains unchanged.

The difference between morphological and non-morphological time-marking corresponds with the difference between the indication of absolute time and the indication of relative time. Non-morphological time-marking puts events in temporal relation to other events. They can be classified accordingly as marking events **previous** to a given time reference, **simultaneous** with a given time reference or **subsequent** to a given time reference. (GREENBAUM & QUIRK, 1993: 439) The adverb *yesterday*, for instance, is an indication of relative time because it marks an event as happening on the day before *today*. Absolute time, however, is set independently. It is expressed through morphological devices. The past tense as in "*The president spoke.*" does not stand in relation to any other temporal point of reference. Thus, the past tense becomes a point of reference in itself. Events can be marked as happening before, after or simultaneously in relation to this point

of reference. Morphological time-marking allows the speaker of English to mark two points of time reference, one in the present time and one in the past. In the absence of morphological time-marking, the speaker of Thai can only establish one point of time reference. It has to be assumed as being located in the present time.

The following chart shows the two points of reference provided by morphological time-marking for the speaker of English. The first point of reference is located in the past, morphologically marked in the example sentence (*The president spoke*) by the change of the principal vowel in the verb to speak (*to speak → spoke*). The second point of reference is located in the present (*The president speaks*.) It does not need any additional non-morphological time-marking. Thai only has the *point of reference in the present* since it does not know any vowel changes or other morphological means to mark another point of reference.

Chart 2: Possible Points of Time Reference with Morphological Time-Marking in **English**



Morphological marking of time is unavoidable in English. Using a verb automatically means selecting one of the "built-in" time levels. Non-morphological time-marking, however, is optional. The decision on the use of non-morphological time-marking depends on how the speaker or writer judges the necessity of such indications of time. Indeed, there are many instances where Thai dispenses with time-marking altogether or gives way to a somewhat vague sense of time.

The following passage from "Si Phaendin" shows how the absence of morphological time-marking in Thai allows for a certain leniency in matters of time-marking while the speaker of English is forced by the structure of his language to make a decision on how to indicate the temporal structure of the text.

"ผิดไปแล้ว" คุณอ่อนเริ่มพูด "ผิดไปมากทีเดียว แม่พลอยยกโทษให้พี่เสียเถิด แต่พี่ทำกับแม่พลอยมามาก ถึงแม่พลอยจะโกรธเคืองพี่ก็ไม่ว่าอะไร... ยอมรับผิดทุกอย่าง พี่เป็นคนมีกรรม เห็นผิดเป็นชอบ เอาแต่ใจตัว กว่าจะได้คิดมันก็ช้าไป เมื่อครั้งพ่อแม่ยังอยู่ พี่ก็ไม่รู้สึก เพราะบารมีท่านคุ้มครองไว้ ยิ่งพ่อแม่ตามใจ พี่น้องกลัวเกรงก็ยิ่งแต่จะเอาตามใจตัวใครเขายกยอปอขึ้นก็เชื่อถือคนนั้น[...] (คึกฤทธิ์, 2523: 740)¹

("I was very wrong", Khun Oon started, "very wrong indeed. Mae Ploi, please forgive me for all I have done to you. I can't blame you for being angry with me. I admit to everything I have done. I am a person with bad karma. When I saw something wrong, I liked it. I only had my own interests at heart. And when I got to think about it, it was too late anyhow. When father and mother were still alive, I wasn't aware of this at all because I was protected by father's authority. As long as my parents gave in to my wishes and the more my brothers and sisters stood

¹ For all further quotations from "Si Phaendin" (คึกฤทธิ์, 2523), page numbers at the end of the quotation will always refer to this edition of the text.

*in awe and diffidence towards me, I just had to have my own way. I just believed everything anyone who was flattering me made up.)*²

When Khun Oon starts to talk about herself (*I am a person with bad karma.*) there is no additional time-marking. It is thus not clear if she **had liked** evil or if she still **likes** evil (เห็นผิดเป็นชอบ), if she **had been** selfish or still **is** selfish (เอาแต่ใจตัว). It is clear that she **has** bad karma (พี่เป็นคนมีกรรม) since this is a permanent condition determined before birth but not if she has exhausted her bad karma by now or not. The context of this passage, however, leads the reader to assume that Khun Oon is indeed going to change for the better so that the English translation can use the past tense.

The absence of morphological indications of time automatically enhances the importance of chronology. Since there is no possibility to set another point of time reference, chronology is the only structural order of a text. Specific or additional marking of chronology is not always necessary. In English, however, the necessity of morphological time-marking allows the speaker or narrator to switch between two points of time reference, one in the present time and one in the past. It becomes thus easier to indicate different time levels and switch between them freely. Non-morphological time-marking becomes less important. The following example from Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" is just a show-case of the artistic possibilities morphological time-marking offers to a skilled writer:

"We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush of a short day that comes and departs for ever, but in the august light of abiding memories. And indeed nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes, 'followed the sea' with

² All translations of quotations from Thai into English are mine. The English version of "Si Phaendin" (PRAMOJ, 1981) written by Tulachandra is not a translation but an adaption. Especially towards the end of the novel, this adaption takes on the character of a summary. Not only paragraphs but even whole chapters are merged. For this reason alone, it was not possible to use Tulachandra's version for this study.

reverence and affection, than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames. The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea." (CONRAD, 1973: 28-29)

In this passage we find several morphological markings of time: the past tense as in "*We looked at the venerable stream [...]*", the present tense as in "[...] *a short day that comes and departs [...]*", the present perfect as in "[...] *a man who has [...] followed the sea*" and the past perfect as in "[...] *men and ships it had borne to the rest of home [...]*". There is no non-morphological time-marking.

In the absence of morphological time-marking, Thai relies on the order of chronology and on other non-morphological indicators of time such as adverbs and conjuncts to convey the temporal structure of a text.

3.3. Non-Morphological Means of Indicating Time in Thai

Instead of morphological indications of time, the Thai language uses non-morphological means to mark time. The following non-morphological time markers may be used:

- (1) conjuncts such as *เมื่อก่อน* (*before*), *เมื่อ* (*when*), *พอ* (*when, as soon as*) *ขณะที่* (*when*), *ระหว่าง* (*during, while*), *หลังจาก* (*after*), *ตั้งแต่* (*since*), *ตั้งแต่บัดนั้นมา* (*since then*), *ต่อจากนั้นมา* (*from then on*) or *ต่อไปนี้* (*from now on*)
- (2) adverbs such as *เคย* (*ever*), *แล้ว* (*already*), *จะ* (*indicator of future*), *กำลัง* (*indicator of simultaneity*), *เมื่อวานนี้* (*yesterday*), *วันนี้* (*today*), *พรุ่งนี้* (*tomorrow*)
- (3) the verb *ได้* (*did*), usually in its negative form *ไม่ได้* (*did not*) and the verbs *ไป* (*to go*) and *มา* (*to come*)

These words mark events as happening *before*, *after* or *at the same time* as other events and can be categorized as marking events *previous* to a given time reference, *simultaneous* with a given time reference or *subsequent* to a given time reference (see Chart 2 on the following page). Because of the absence of morphological time-marking, this point of reference is identical with the speaker's or narrator's time of reference. The past is, in very general terms, everything that has happened previously. The future is what will happen subsequently and the present time is what happens simultaneously.

Since chronology is directed towards the answer to the question *what happens next?*, the marking of events subsequent to a given time reference appears to be the natural way of time-marking. There are many conjuncts and adverbs to mark subsequent action. One of the most common markers of chronological succession is the conjunct *ก็*. In the first chapter of "Si Phaendin" alone, I counted 325 appearances of *ก็*. A typical marking of subsequent action looks like this:

เจ้าคุณพ่อจับไม้ระนาดขึ้นลองไล่ลูกดูก่อน แล้วก็ขยับกายให้เข้าที่ [...] (186)
 (Chao Khun Father took the xylophone sticks to have a trial run of the scale first.
Then he positioned himself properly [...])

In the case of a rapid succession of events that "borders" on simultaneity, additional time-marking can be left out completely as for instance in the continuation of the above passage:

เจ้าคุณพ่อ [...] ยกไม้ระนาดทั้งสองซู้ขึ้นจบเพียงหน้าผาก สองมือพนมระลึกถึงคุณ
 ครูอยู่ครู่หนึ่งแล้วก็เริ่มตี (186)
 (Then he positioned himself properly, lifted both xylophonesticks up to his
 forehead, put the palms of his hands together [while holding the xylophonesticks]
 in a gesture of respect towards his teacher and then began to play.)

Chart 3: Non-Morphological Means to Mark Relative Time in Thai³

marking of previous events	marking of simultaneous events	marking of subsequent events
<u>conjuncts</u> เมื่อก่อน (<i>before</i>) ตั้งแต่ (<i>since</i>) ตั้งแต่นั้นมา (<i>since then</i>)	<u>conjuncts</u> เมื่อ (<i>when</i>) พอ (<i>when, as soon as</i>) ขณะที่ (<i>when</i>) ระหว่าง (<i>during, while</i>)	<u>conjuncts</u> หลังจาก (<i>after</i>) แล้วก็ (<i>and then</i>) ก็ (<i>so, then</i>) ต่อจากนั้นมา (<i>from then on</i>) ต่อไปนี้ (<i>from now on</i>)
<u>adverbs</u> เคย (<i>ever</i>), เมื่อวานนี้ (<i>yesterday</i>) อาทิตย์ที่แล้ว (<i>last week</i>) แล้ว (<i>already</i>) in final position	<u>adverbs</u> กำลัง (<i>indicator of simultaneity</i>) ตอนนี้ (<i>now</i>) วันนี้ (<i>today</i>)	<u>adverbs</u> จะ (<i>indicator of future</i>) พรุ่งนี้ (<i>tomorrow</i>)
<u>auxiliary</u> ได้ (<i>did</i>) ได้แล้ว (<i>did already</i>)		
<u>subsidiary verbs</u> ไป (<i>to go</i>) มา (<i>to come</i>)		

³This is, of course, not a complete chart of all conjuncts and adverbs marking time. Adverbial expressions of time are, as in any language, abundant (*last week, last year, next month ...*)

The two verbal expressions that are put together without marking are ยกไม้ระนาด (*lifted both xylophonesticks*) and พนมระลึกถึง (literally: *to demonstrate remembrance*, here in the sense of *to demonstrate respect*). A sequence of actions is often described by a string of verbal expressions put together without any marking of the chronological order. Often, it is difficult to decide if it is a string of subsequent or simultaneous actions. In the following example, we find both a sequence of chronological and simultaneous actions:

พลอยอุ้มหลานคนผู้ชายขึ้นใส่ตัก กอดจูบเหมือนกับมีรู้จักวางลงได้ วาง
หลานผู้ชายลง (304)

(Ploi **took** her nephew in her arms, **lifted** him up, **put** him in her lap. She **held** him tight, **kissed** him as if she didn't know how to let go of him. She **sat** him **down**.)

The sequence of chronological action starts with อุ้มหลาน (*took [her] nephew*), goes on with ขึ้น (*lifted him up*) and ends with ใส่ตัก (*put him in [her] lap*). The following string of verbs, กอด (*hold [him] tight*) and จูบ (*kissed [him]*) points at action that is easily perceived as happening simultaneously. The passage ends with the split verbal expression วาง_____ลง (*sat [him] down*), another section of unmarked chronology.

Of course, simultaneity can also be marked by conjuncts or adverbs as is done by the conjunct ระหว่าง (*during, while*) in the following example:

ระหว่างที่นั่งฟังสวดอยู่นั้น พลอยนั่งอย่างสงบเสียงมและสำรวม (174)
(While listening to these prayers, Ploi sat quietly and composed.)

Non-morphological marking of events previous to a given time reference is not only done by conjuncts and adverbs but also by verbs. The subsidiary verbs ไป (*to go*) and มา

(to come) relate to a stretch of time passed either away from or towards the speaker's or narrator's point of reference.⁴ In the following example, time has passed "away" from Ploi.

วันคืนผ่านไป พลอยยังระลึกถึงพี่เนืองอยู่มิรู้ลืม (228)
(The night had passed and Ploi was still thinking about Neung and could not forget him.)

The subsidiary มา (to come) refers to a stretch of time reaching from some time in the past up to the present point of reference. In the following example, Ploi has spent a couple of days at the house already and it is there that she is going to receive bad news:

พลอยมาอยู่ที่บ้านคลองบางหลวงได้ไม่นาน ก็ได้ข่าวว่าตาอืดเจ็บ (1430)
(Ploi had not been at the house at Bang Luang Canal for many days, when she received the news that Oat was sick.)

To indicate that an event or action has been completed from the speaker's or narrator's point of reference, the adverb แล้ว (already) is often put at the end of the clause. Sometimes, แล้ว (already) is used in combination with the auxiliary verb ได้ as in the following example. The auxiliary ได้ just emphasizes the aspect of completeness expressed by แล้ว (already). The sentence would be grammatically correct without ได้ but not without แล้ว (already).

พี่เนืองจากไปอยู่นครสวรรค์ได้หลายเดือนแล้ว (245)
(It had already been several months that Neung had left for Nakorn Sawan)

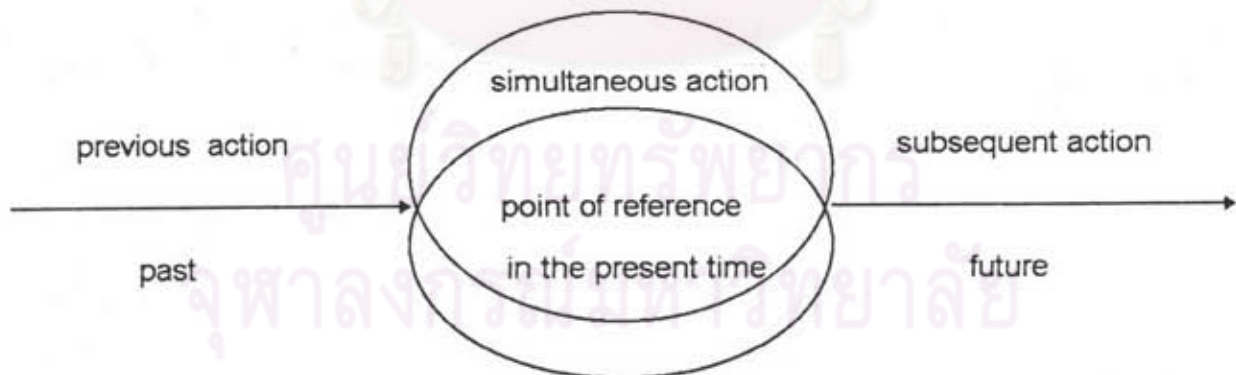
⁴The spatial meaning of the subsidiary verbs ไป (to go) and มา (to come) will be discussed in detail in chapter 6. For details see also Rangkupan (1992).

3.4. The Linguistic Marking of Events in the Past

The marking of time with non-morphological means poses no problem as long as their relation to the point of reference in the present time is clear. This is always the case with the marking of subsequent, simultaneous and previous action. Subsequent action starts at the point of reference in the present time. It is directed towards the future. Previous action has started in the past and is directed towards the point of reference. Simultaneous action takes place at the time where the point of reference is located.

In the following chart, simultaneity is marked by two overlapping circles. Previous and subsequent action are marked by arrows. The arrow of the previous action starts in the past and points towards the point of reference. The arrow of subsequent action starts at the point of reference and is directed towards the future.

Chart 4: Previous, Simultaneous and Subsequent Action in Their Relation to the Point of Reference in the Present Time



Problems may, however, arise if the time of events in the past has to be determined more precisely than just as being completed from the narrator's point of reference in the present, in other words, if events of the past are going to be related to a point of reference in the past and not the narrator's point of reference in the present time. Since Thai does not provide an independent point of time reference within the past, it may be difficult to exactly situate events in the past. To find out how accurately events of the past can be related to each other, I have looked at the use of the conjunct **เมื่อก่อน** (*before*).

The conjunct **เมื่อก่อน** (*before*) stands at the beginning of a clause that indicates the event before which something else has happened. The following three passages are examples for the use of **เมื่อก่อน** (*before*) and show that, indeed, ambiguities concerning the temporal relationship of events in the past may occur. The first example is taken from the opening passage of the novel. The co-text of the passage and the use of the aspect of completeness marked by the word **แล้ว** (*already*) leave no doubt that the conjunct **เมื่อก่อน** (*before*) refers to the narrator's point of reference in the present time. Thus, there is no problem to clearly convey the temporal relationship between the two events.

(1) [...] **และเมื่อก่อนที่จะออกจากบ้าน** แม่ก็บอกแล้วว่า **ไปแล้วเป็นไปเลย** เป็นตายชาตินี้จะไม่กลับมาเหยียบหัวกระไดบ้านนี้อีก (13)

([...] *and before they left the house, mother had said that this was forever and they would die without ever setting their feet again on the entrance stairs of that house.*)

The narrator's point of reference is the event of leaving the house. Mother's statement, marked by **แล้ว** (*already*), is given before that. Therefore, the marking of time with the conjunct **เมื่อก่อน** (*before*) is clear and unambiguous.

A couple of pages later, the clause that starts with the conjunct **เมื่อก่อน** (*before*) is repeated in almost identical form. The only difference between the two **เมื่อก่อน** (*before*) -

clauses is that the subject of the first one is omitted while the subject of the second one, พลอย (Ploi), is mentioned. Both clauses refer to the same event, the departure of Ploi and her mother from the house at the Bang Khlong Luang canal. But in the second case, the event before the departure obviously did not happen immediately before the departure but some time earlier. Just using the conjunct *เมื่อก่อน* (*before*) leaves the reader somehow in the dark as to when all this really happens. The only other indicator of time in this passage, the adverb *คืนหนึ่ง* (*one night*), is vague and doesn't help to clarify the temporal situation. On the contrary, it confuses matters. The conjunct *เมื่อก่อน* (*before*) leads the reader to assume that the event has taken place just before Ploi's departure from the house, the indefinite adverb *คืนหนึ่ง* (*one night*) indicates a wide range of possible periods of time for the event to take place.

(2) **เมื่อก่อนที่พลอยจะออกจากบ้าน** พลอยสังเกตเห็นความตึงเครียดระหว่างแม่และคุณอุ้น มีมากกว่าปกติ ในกระบวนปาวสาว ๆ ที่คุณอุ้นมีอยู่หลายคนนั้น มีคนหนึ่ง ชื่อเยื้อน หน้าตาดีกว่าเพื่อน แม่บอกกับพลอยว่า "คุณใหญ่กำลังจะยกนางเยื้อนให้เจ้าคุณ" และพลอยก็รู้สึกว่เรื่องใหญ่กำลังจะเกิดขึ้นในที่สุด เรื่องใหญ่ที่ทำให้ชีวิตของพลอยเปลี่ยนแปลงไปมากก็เกิดขึ้นจริง ๆ *คืนหนึ่ง*แม่ขึ้นไปหาเจ้าคุณพ่อ [...]

(19/20)

(Before Ploi left the house, Ploi noticed that the tension between her mother and Khun Oon had been greater than usual. Among Khun Oon's female entourage there was a girl named Yeun who looked better than her friends. Ploi's mother told her daughter: "Miss Big [= Khun Oon. The name Big (ใหญ่) refers to her premier position in the household] is going to present Yeun to Chao Khun [= Ploi's father]," and Ploi had a feeling that something big was going to happen. Finally, the big event that was going to change Ploi's life fundamentally was indeed happening. One night, mother went upstairs to see Chao Khun Father [...])

It is not clear when exactly before Ploi's departure the two events that are marked by *เมื่อก่อน* (*before*) take place, but the co-text of both passages confirms that they do not take place at the same time. In the first passage, Ploi's mother vows never to come back. She could only do so after her decision to leave. The second passage, however, gives the reasons for the explosive domestic situation that causes Ploi's mother to go. Obviously, that must have happened before she decided to leave. Both passages use the same marking of a previous event but refer to different times. There is no other time-marking to show when exactly these events take place.

In the third passage, the ambiguity is even stronger. *เมื่อก่อน* (*before*) refers to an event of seeing the King previous to the present event of watching the royal parade. Thus, the conjunct *เมื่อก่อน* (*before*) refers to a point of reference within the past and not to the narrator's point of reference in the present time. There are three layers of time, first the event marked by *เมื่อก่อน* (*before*), then the time of a previous event of seeing the king and finally the present time.

(3) แต่ความจริง ข้อยดูเหมือนจะพูดตรงกับความรู้สึกในใจของคนทั้งปวงที่ไปชุมนุมกันอยู่ในวันนั้น เมื่อก่อนที่ได้เห็นในหลวงนั้น ต่างคนต่างมีความจงรักภักดีและความสนใจ แต่ความรู้สึกนั้น เป็นความรู้สึกที่กว้างขวาง พอในหลวงเสด็จผ่านไปได้แลเห็นพระองค์ ความรู้สึกอีกอย่างหนึ่งก็บังเกิดขึ้นทันที อย่างรุนแรงและรวดเร็ว คือความรักอันใกล้ชิดและเป็นส่วนตัวของทุกคนไป (1201)

(But the truth is that Choi had spoken from the heart of everyone present that day. When they had seen the King before, everyone had a strong feeling of loyalty and sincere interest but this feelings were of a general nature. [But] when the King walked past and everyone had seen His Majesty, another kind of feeling immediately arose strongly and quickly, a feeling of close and genuine love.)

Since the present event is the first parade of King Rama VIII., a previous event of seeing the King can refer to either seeing pictures of him⁵ or witnessing the parade of another King. It is more likely, that the demonstrative particle ^๕ นั้น at the end of the เมื่อก่อน - clause (เมื่อก่อนที่ได้เห็นในหลวงนั้น *When they had seen the King before*) refers to the parade of another King. The ambiguity of the demonstrative particle ^๕ นั้น is retained in the use of the direct article *the King*. It can also mean both the same King or another King. No matter how one interprets the use of the demonstrative particle ^๕ นั้น - as either referring to the King or to the event of a royal parade in general - the conjunct เมื่อก่อน (*before*) doesn't help at all to accurately locate the event in the past and thus give a hint towards the point of reference of the demonstrative particle ^๕ นั้น. The understanding of the whole passage is related to this point. It may either mean that the feelings towards King Rama VIII. changed in intensity from being of merely loyal nature to personal love or that the feelings towards King Rama VIII (affectionate love) differ from the feelings towards former kings in general (loyalty).⁶ The English version of "Si Phaendin" avoids a direct translation of this and the immediately preceding and following passages altogether and just very generally explains how special and unusual the feeling towards King Rama VIII was.⁷

⁵The fourth part of "Si Phaendin", dealing with the Reign of King Rama VIII, opens with a scene of Ploi looking at a picture of the new King.

⁶It is interesting to note that there is no linguistic marking as to which event the พอในหลวงเสด็จ ฯ ผ่านไปได้แลเห็นพระองค์ (*when the King walked past*) - clause refers to, the present one or the previous one (whatever it was). The reader can only deduct from the co-text that it must refer to the present event.

⁷The passage in the English version of "Si Phaendin" reads as follows: " Like Choi, they [other citizens, M.S.] were not in awe of him but simply loved him. They had brought their loyalty to welcome him home and now they had seen him that loyalty had been strengthened with love - the kind they felt for their dear young ones very close to them, of the same bloodstream as we say in Thai. The love was nothing new but their feeling it for their Sovereign was new and this gave another dimension to what is called *kwam chongrak pakdi* (love and loyalty) from a citizen towards a King. (PRAMOJ, 1981: 333)

3.5. The Representation of Historical Dates and Events

Conjuncts, adverbs and auxiliaries are not the only means of non-morphological time marking. Especially in historical or realistic novels such as "Si Phaendin", historical dates and historical events can be used to establish an accurate system of temporal references. In order to assess non-morphological time-marking, it is, therefore, necessary to look at the employment of historical dates and references towards historical events in a given narrative.

The setting and the time frame of "Si Phaendin" are historical: Bangkok from the second half of the Fifth Reign to the end of the Eighth Reign. It is not unusual to find references towards historical *dates* and *events* in such a novel. In the foreword to the novel, the author states that he has made every effort to keep strictly to the historical truth.⁸ But given the sometimes ambiguous presentation of the time of past events on account of grammatical conditions, I thought it would be interesting to see how accurately historical time is rendered.

3.5.1. Historical Dates

There are seven historical dates with their exact number of years in the whole text, given at the beginning, towards the end and within the first third of the novel.⁹ The first date indirectly indicates the time Ploi spent at the house at the Bang Khlong Luang canal before her departure. The second date gives the time when she leaves the house. The third and fourth dates give the time of King Chulalongkorn's trip to Europe. The fifth historical date refers to the introduction of the bicycle to Thailand in 1900. The sixth date indicates the

⁸ "[...] คือฉากทั้งหลายทั้งปวงที่ผู้เขียนได้นำมาใช้ในการเขียนเรื่องนี้เป็นของจริงทั้งสิ้น และได้พยายามสอบสวนให้ตรงกับความจริง [...]" (ฉีกฤกษ์, 2523: 8)

⁹ One historical date, the Japanese invasion, is mentioned without the year but with the correct day: ความตระหนกตกใจที่เกิดขึ้นชั่วครู่เมื่อวันที่ ๘ ธันวาคมนั้น จะหมดไปโดยรวดเร็ว (ฉีกฤกษ์, 2523: 1313)

(*The feeling of shock that had gripped [everyone] on that 8th December quickly passed.*)

change to the constitutional monarchy and the last historical date is that of Ploi's death, coincidentally the day of the death of King Rama VIII.

The first mentioning of time is vague. It comes as part of a description of Ploi's childhood home and gives a range of time: between 2425 and 2435 B.E. (1882 and 1892) which is specified as being a timespan within the Reign of King Chulalongkorn.

(1) บ้านพลอยอยู่ในคลองบางหลวง เรียกได้ว่าเป็นบ้านใหญ่ จะพูดไปก็เป็น
ตึกทันสมัยสำหรับระยะเวลาระหว่าง พ.ศ. ๒๔๒๕ ถึง พ.ศ. ๒๔๓๕ อันเป็น
เวลาในรัชสมัยของสมเด็จพระพุทธเจ้าหลวงมหาราช (14)

*(Speaking about it, the building was considered modern at the time between the
years 2425 and 2435 B.E. [1882 - 1892], which fell into the Reign of King
Chulalongkorn the Great.)*

One page later, after the description of the house at Khlong Bang Luang is completed, the next precise reference of time is given:

(2) เมื่อ พ.ศ. ๒๔๓๕ พลอยมีอายุได้สิบขวบ ถ้าใครไปถามพลอยในขณะ
นั้นว่าใครเป็นบิดา พลอยก็จะตอบว่าชื่อพระยาพิพิช ๕ มารดาชื่อแฉ่ม (15)

*(In the year 2435 B.E. [1892], Ploi was ten years old. If someone asked her who
her father was, she would say: "His name is Phraya Phiphith and my mother's
name is Chaem.")*

The reader can assume from the co-text that the age mentioned here is Ploi's age at the time she leaves for the palace and that the opening scene on the boat is thus set in the year 1892. From this it can be concluded that the historical time frame mentioned on page 14 (2425 and 2435 B.E. [1882 - 1892]) not just vaguely refers to a timespan within the Fifth Reign but marks the time Ploi lived at her home at the Bang Luang Canal - from her birth

until she left for the palace at the age of ten. But this is not stated directly. All the text ever says is that Ploi's home was fashionable between 1882 and 1892 and that in 1892, at the age of ten, she was asked questions about the identity of her parents.

While the historical dates given so far are important to establish the historical time frame of the novel, the next three historical dates are of a more accidental nature. The first two refer to King Chulalongkorn's first trip to Europe and the third one to the introduction of the bicycle in Thailand.

(3) พี่เนื่องจากไปตอนท้ายของปี ร.ศ. ๑๑๕ ระหว่างนั้น ก็มีข่าวลือกันในวังว่า พระเจ้าอยู่หัวจะเสด็จฯ ยุโรป (245)

(Pi Neuang had left at the end of the year 115 R.E. Since then, there had been rumors in the palace that His Majesty would pay a visit to Europe.)

(4) [...] จะเสด็จฯ ประพาสยุโรป กำหนดจะเสด็จพระราชดำเนินก่อนสงกรานต์ ปี ร.ศ. ๑๑๖ ไม่กี่วันนัก (246)

(As for the trip to Europe, the date was set for a few days before the Songkran festival of the year 116 of the Rattanakosin Era [1898].)

(5) พลอยจำได้ว่า ปีนั้นเป็น ร.ศ. ๑๑๘ และพอกลับมาถึงในวังได้ไม่เท่าไร ก็บังเกิดความตื่นเต้นนิยมขี่รถจักรยาน หรือที่เรียกกันในขณะนั้นว่ารถ "ไบซิเกิ้ล" อย่างขนานใหญ่ (401)

(Ploi remembered that year was the year 118 of the Rattanakosin Era [1900] and not many days after her return to the palace a new and exciting fashion broke out: bicycle riding, or "bicycle" as it was called [in Thai pronunciation of the English word] at that time.)

The historical date of King Chulalongkorn's first trip to Europe does not add any vital information to the correct historical location of the story while the date of the introduction of the bicycle has obviously been considered as so insignificant that it has been left out of the English version of "Si Phaendin" altogether. (PRAMOJ, 1981:217) Dates of important historical events such as the two World Wars or the end of the first three Reigns are not given with one exception, the change from absolute to constitutional monarchy:

(6) เหตุการณ์สำคัญที่เกิดขึ้นในปี ๒๔๗๖ นั้น สำหรับคนส่วนมากอาจเห็นว่าเป็นเรื่องการเมืองโดยเฉพาะ (1062)

(As for the important event of the year 2476 B.E. [1932]¹⁰ people mostly thought it was only a matter of politics.)

The last historical date, found in the last sentence of the novel, concludes the historical time frame given in the beginning. It is the most precise date giving not only the year but also the month, the day and the time of the day.

(7) เย็นวันนั้น วันอาทิตย์ที่ ๙ มิถุนายน พ.ศ. ๒๔๙๐ น้ำในคลองบางหลวงลงแห้งเกือบขุดคลอง หัวใจพลอยที่อ่อนแอลงด้วยโรคและความทุกข์ทั้งหลายทั้งปวง ก็หลุดลอยตามน้ำไป..... (1508)

(On the evening of Sunday the 9th of June 2490 B.E. [1946],¹¹ there was hardly any water left in the Bang Luang canal. Ploi's heart, weakened by sickness and all kinds of sorrows, gave up and drifted away with the water.)

¹⁰The dates given by Kukrit for the change from absolute to constitutional monarchy and the death of King Rama VIII are one year later than according to the Western counting of years. The year 2476 B.E. is the year 1933 Ch.E. According to Western historiography, however, the change from absolute to constitutional monarchy took place in 1932. The same holds true for the year of King Rama VIII's death. The year given by Kukrit is 2490 would be 1947 according to the Christian calendar. The King actually died in 1946. Perhaps this discrepancy is due to the differences in the dates of the New Year (1st of January in the West, 1st of April in Thailand at that time).

¹¹ see footnote 10

There are only two dates that refer directly to a historical event: King Chulalongkorn's trip to Europe and the political changes of 1932. The last date refers indirectly to a historical event, the end of the Eighth reign. The first two historical dates do not refer to historical events but are important to establish the historical time frame of the novel. The date of the introduction of the bicycle to Thailand is more of an atmospheric detail. Interestingly, the author of the English version leaves it out altogether. On the other hand, he adds five more historical dates to tighten the historical anchorage of the story: King Rama VI's coronation anniversary in 1925 (II, p.179), the years of the Reign of King Rama III., 1824 - 1851 (II, p. 180) and the abdication of King Rama VII. in March 1935 (II, p.288), the year of the beginning of World War I in 2457 B.E. [1914] (II, p.377) and the year of the big flood in 1917 (II, p.404). The English version of the novel also mentions the "1940's" (p.406) as a temporal background for Pibulsonkhram's cultural mandates.

3.5.2. Historical Events

Although historical dates are scarce, historical events are mentioned frequently. World War I and World War II, the appearance of Halley's comet, the end of Reigns and changes of governments, field marshal Pibulsongkhram's cultural mandates and the appearance of the bicycle provide the historical background of Ploi's life. But attention is not always paid to the exact historical or even probable dating of such events. The time of appearance of Halley's comet is a point in case. The rare and unusual event is linked to the deaths of two Kings: King Edward VII. and King Chulalongkorn. It is described as follows:

ฤดูกาลผ่านไป จากหน้าร้อนเข้าหน้าฝน และตอนท้ายหน้าฝนในคืนวันหนึ่ง
 อากาศเริ่มจะเย็นเข้าแล้ว พลอยต้องสะดุ้งตื่นขึ้นในตอนดึก เพราะคุณเปรม
 เขย่าตัวปลุกเบา ๆ "म्म่มพล ลุกมาดูอะไรที่หน้าตางน้อย" คุณเปรมกระซิบ

[...] "อะไรนั่น คุณเปรม" พลอยกระซิบถาม "ดาวหาง... ดาวใหญ่เหลือเกิน"
คุณเปรมกระซิบตอบ [...]

(641)

(The seasons passed from the hot season to the rainy season and one night at the end of the rainy season, when the weather already started to become cool, Ploi woke up abruptly in the darkness because Khun Prem shook her slightly. "Mae Ploi, get up and look at what you can see through the window" Khun Prem whispered. [...] "What is it, Khun Prem?" Ploi asked in a whisper. "A comet ... a very big one" answered Khun Prem.)

One night at the end of the rainy season must be somewhere around the end of October. This marking of time appears to be in conflict with the historical dates of the deaths of King Edward VII and King Chulalongkorn which are linked to the appearance of Halley's comet. Shortly after the scene quoted above, the text goes on stating that the comet remained visible for more than ten days:

ดาวหางดวงนั้นอยู่นาน อาทิตย์หนึ่งแล้ว สิบวันกว่าแล้ว ดาวหางก็มา
ปรากฏให้เห็นทุกคืนเป็นประจำ

(643)

(This comet stayed for a long time. One week already. More than ten days already. The comet appeared regularly every day.)

Then the death of King Edward VII. is announced:

วันหนึ่ง คุณเปรมกลับออกมาจากในวัง และขณะที่นั่งกินข้าวอยู่ก็พูดกับ
พลอยอย่างหัวเราะ ๆ ว่า "แม่พลอย ดาวหางของแม่พลอยเห็นจะไม่เกี่ยวกับ
เราเสียแล้ว" "ทำไมคุณเปรม?" พลอยถาม กลับสนใจขึ้นมาใหม่ทันที "ฉัน
เพิ่งได้ข่าวจากในวังตอนกลางวันวันนี้เองว่า พระเจ้ากรุงอังกฤษสวรรคต" (643)

(One day, Khun Prem returned from the palace and while he was sitting and eating with Ploi he laughingly remarked: "Mae Ploi, your comet is of no concern to us at all." "Why, Khun Prem?" Ploi asked, her interest in the matter immediately revived. "I got news from the palace around noon that the King of England has died.")

Then the comet disappears:

ตั้งแต่ได้รับข่าวสวรรคตของพระเจ้ากรุงอังกฤษ ดาวหางดวงนั้นก็เริ่มเดินทาง
ห่างจากโลกออกไป ดูดวงเล็กลงเรื่อย ๆ จนในที่สุด ก็มองไม่เห็น (644)
(Since the news of the death of the King of England was received, the comet
started to leave the world. It grew smaller and smaller until it became invisible.)

Some time later, King Chulalongkorn falls ill:

ในระยะเวลาอีกไม่กี่วันต่อมา คุณเปรมกลับออกมาจากในวัง แล้วบอกพลอย
ว่า "แม่พลอย วันนี้พระเจ้าอยู่หัวประชวร (644 / 645)
(Not many days later, Khun Prem came back from the palace and told Ploi:
"Today, the King does not feel well.")

After about five more days, the news of the King's death is spread:

[...] ไม่มีใครพูดถึงอาการประชวรนี้เลยหลังจากไต่ทราบข่าวประชวรราว ๆ ห้าวัน
[...] แล้วรุ่งขึ้นอีกวันหนึ่ง ยายเทียบกลับจากตลาดตอนสายเดินร้องไห้โฮ ๆ
เข้ามาในบ้าน [...] "คุณเจ้าขา เขาพูดกันในตลาด ว่าในหลวงสวรรคตเสียแล้ว
[...] (645)

(Nobody spoke about the King feeling unwell for about five days after first hearing about it. [...] Then, at the morning of the next day, Grandmother Tieb came back from the market late, sobbing all the way long. [...] "Madame, people on the marketplace say the King has died.")

From these passages the reader learns that the comet appeared towards the end of the rainy season, that it was visible for more than 10 days, that it started to disappear after the death of King Edward VII had been announced, that a few days after its complete disappearance King Chulalongkorn fell ill and that about another five days later he died. It is not clear whether the visibility for more than ten days refers to the period when the comet appears to be big and impressive or whether it covers the whole span from the first sighting to complete disappearance. But however inexact this time frame is, one can assume that at least 20 days passed from the first sighting of the comet to King Chulalongkorn's death, calculating the 10 days of the comet's appearance and the days of King Chulalongkorn's illness. Considering the historical date of the King's death on October 23, Ploi must have observed the appearance of the comet at the very beginning of October, if not earlier, which normally is not considered to be *the end of the rainy season, when the weather already started to become cool*. As for the historical date of the death of King Edward VII., it doesn't fit in at all. The King died on May 6, 1910 which is not a few days but more than five months before the death of King Chulalongkorn. More than that, it occurs **before** the comet becomes visible so that the celestial appearance can hardly be interpreted as a foreboding of the King's demise. Even if one takes into account that news traveled slowly at the time, it is not likely that it took five months and even then one would have known that the actual death had occurred much earlier. It is highly unlikely that the author was not aware of the correct historical dates. His rearrangement probably had the purpose to give more evidence in support of the traditional belief that the appearance of Halley's comet was indeed a very bad omen. Be that as it may, the passage indicates that accuracy time-

marking seems to be of lesser importance than other considerations even in a narrative that is realistic and generally attaches much importance to the historical background of the plot.

3.6. Conclusion

Thai marks time by non-morphological means, either through chronological ordering alone or with the help of additional marking, for instance, by adverbs, conjuncts, auxiliary and subsidiary verbs. This kind of linguistic marking of time is unproblematic as long as it is clearly related to the narrator's point of reference. The temporal relation of events to other points of reference within the past, however, may cause some ambiguities and inaccuracies. An examination of the use of the conjunct *เมื่อก่อน* (*before*) has shown that such ambiguities may indeed occur. The survey of the historical dates in the novel has revealed that not many are given and that historical importance does not seem to be among the criteria for their selection. Furthermore, the temporal location of historical events serves more the poetic intentions of the author than the historical truth. All this adds to the impression that accuracy with regard to the time of occurrence of past events does not seem to play a very important role in the Thai perception of time in general. This may have to do with the Buddhist concept of time as a continuous and perpetual flow, comparable to water as can be seen in the metaphorical description of Ploi's death:

น้ำในคลองบางหลวงลงแห้งเกือบขาดคลอง หัวใจพลอยที่อ่อนแอลงด้วยโรค
และความทุกข์ทั้งหลายทั้งปวง ก็หลุดลอยตามน้ำไป..... (1508)

(There was hardly any water left in the Bang Luang canal. Ploi's heart, weakened by sickness and all kinds of sorrows, gave up and drifted away with the water.)

Exact marking of time is alien to such a concept of perpetual continuity because it gives the wrong impression that the flow of time can be divided and certain events can be

nailed down to certain dates. This, according to Buddhist perception, is an illusion. Events are subject to the law of impermanence. They are the result of other events and they will be among the many causes for future events and as such they will gradually fade away like the ripples on the surface of water caused by a stone that has been thrown into it. Within such a perception of time it is inconsequential and therefore not essential to give exact dates. What counts is **what** happens but not the exact date when it happens.



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