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## The quotative complementizer in Lao and Thai

### ABSTRACT

Previous studies on Lao and Thai grammar all agree that the cognate *waa-wa* is a complementizer in the two languages (see Higbie and Thinsan 2003, Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom 2005, Enfield 2007). In my previous study on “Complementizers and verb classification in Thai” (Prasithratsint 2007), *wa* is found to occur with “communicative” verbs, such as *phu* ‘to say’, *athi* ‘to explain’, *tha* ‘to ask’, as in the following example.

kha<sup>o</sup>w **phu** *wa* thu<sup>o</sup>k-ya<sup>o</sup>na<sup>o</sup>dii kh<sup>o</sup>na<sup>o</sup> IE<sup>o</sup>Ew  
 he speak COMP everything good rise already  
 ‘He said that everything had been better (improved).’

It is also pointed out in the study that the *wa* complementizer conveys the sense of ‘quoting’ and introduces something quoted. However, no elaboration of this point has been provided, and it is still not clear how this function word behaves. Also, it may be interesting to find out about this cognate word in Lao since Lao and Thai are very closely related.

The present study therefore aims to analyze the syntactic function of *waa-wa* in Lao and Thai. It is hoped that the findings will shed light on this obscure grammatical word and also contribute to the formation of a more comprehensive grammar of Lao or Thai.

Based on an approximately two-million-word corpus of Standard Thai and written documents in Standard Lao of about one million words of length, the study shows that in addition to being a **complementizer**, the word *waa-wa* also functions as a **verbum dicendi** or **declaratory word**, which introduces a quotation or paraphrase, similar to *say*, *like*, or *go* in English. It is thus labeled in this study “**the quotative complementizer**”, which behaves the same in Lao and Thai. The findings also reveal that there is no distinction between direct and indirect (reported) speech in the two languages. Indeed, the word *waa-wa* introduces both the direct and the reported speech clause, either in statements and questions.

The study has certain significant implications. It confirms the theory of grammaticalization—the function word *waa-wa* is grammaticalized from the lexical word of the same form meaning ‘to say’. It also shows a great discrepancy between the grammar of English and that of Lao and Thai, as far as complementation is concerned.

**REFERENCES**

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