

Force Dynamics and the Semantic Extension of a Thai Modal Verb: A Cognitive Study of *t*

Talmy's introduction of force dynamics as a semantic category that describes how entities interact in relation to force (Talmy 2000) has received a substantial amount of attention, mostly from cognitive linguists, who are attracted by its psychological plausibility and wider application than the traditional "causative" notion. Indeed, it has been much appreciated that the theory of force is applicable to not only the physical dynamics, but also the (intra-/inter-)psychological domains of modality, as evidenced by several accounts of modals across languages. In Sweetser (1900), the application of force dynamics as a unified theory in explaining the semantic extensions of English modals, in particular from their deontic meanings to the epistemic domain, is adopted. Yet, the instance constituting the central concern of this paper, *t* in Thai, exhibits even a more interesting, and probably more challenging, path of semantic extension. The synchronically polysemous and polyfunctional nature of the form is illustrated in examples (1) and (2). It is found that the basic image schema of *t* is: an agent exercising a physical activity resulting in contact with some external object and the transmission of energy to that object. The basic sense of the verb, which is the earliest attested sense, is PHYSICAL CONTACT. The derived senses include ENCHANTMENT/LIABILITY, PASSIVITY, and (DENOTIC/EPISTEMIC) MODALITY. In this paper, elaborating on Sweetser's strong suggestion of the important role of force schema in metaphorical extension, it is proposed that the notion of force dynamics can be used to account for the semantic extensions of modals that develop from full lexical verbs, and that the force schema pertaining to a particular modal, e.g. *t*, is consistent along the semantic extension path, either in the lexical or grammatical stage.

- (1) n n prom nán má:nwâ: m : t
 flesh Brahma that even.when hand **touch**
 k : b mí rú:s k cèp sò:t
 CONJ not feel hurt at.all
 'The flesh of Brahma cannot feel any hurt even when touched by a hand.'
- (2) man t pen f:m :ph: ta àm
 it **touch** be deed ghost Ta-am
 'It must have been done by Ta-um Ghost for sure.'

References

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