

Book Review: Mary R. Haas, Thai-English Student's Dictionary<sup>†</sup>

Those of us with a special interest in Thai have long known of the existence of the Thai Dictionary Project directed by Mary R. Haas at the University of California, Berkeley. This dictionary, the first public output of the Project that I know of,<sup>1</sup> is obviously going to make life easier for students of the Thai language as well as for linguists involved in Southeast Asian studies. The assistants who collaborated at different stages of the work were George V. Grekoff, Ruchira C. Mendiones, Waiwit Buddhari, Joseph R. Cooke and Søren C. Egerod.

The front matter of the book contains much well-ordered information that facilitates use of the dictionary. The thirteen-page chapter called "Brief Description of Thai" will interest readers of Word most, since it pulls together and slightly revises Haas's treatments of Thai over the years since 1942.<sup>2</sup> Because of its practical consequences for the phonemic transcription used in the entries, major attention will be given in this review to the phonological part of the Description.

The familiar analysis of the vowels and consonants of Thai<sup>3</sup> is presented once again. Although I accept most of this analysis in my own view of Thai, I should like to call attention to three problems. Two of them, the phonological status of the glottal stop and the instability of the /r:/l/ opposition, may require further work for a solution. The third, the phonetic nature of word-final stop consonants, can be handled now.

In specifying Thai utterances, is it necessary, as Haas as-

serts, to include glottal stop in the phonemic representation? Let us take four words from the dictionary: /ʔin/ 'to lean,' /ʔaa/ 'younger paternal uncle or aunt,' /saʔʔyn/ 'to sob,' and /láʔ/ 'to leave, desert.' The distribution of the posited /ʔ/, as shown in these examples, is (1) word-initial position before any vowel, single or geminate (short or long), (2) intervocalic position at a syllable boundary, and (3) word-final position after a single vowel. A sign of the instability of this consonant is the likelihood of its not appearing in positions (1) and (3) under certain conditions of rhythm and sentence intonation. When the glottal stop does appear, it seems to be no more than a kind of demarcative feature signaling certain kinds of syllable boundaries. In beginning the phonation of an initial vowel, the Thai speaker apparently often does so with a closed glottis. If the subglottal air pressure is built up sufficiently before release, the listener will hear a fairly loud glottal stop; if not, or if the speaker starts phonating with the vocal folds slightly apart,<sup>4</sup> no glottal stop will be heard. At a syllable boundary between vowels, the speaker signals the end of one vowel and the beginning of the next by interrupting phonation with [ʔ]; without this, one might suppose, on general phonetic grounds, that there would be a linking semivowel or a coalescing of the two vowels. Only in a few marginal cases of onomatopoeia and unassimilated Chinese loans do utterances seem to be distinctively marked by final [ʔ]. In short, then, until more convincing evidence is produced, I remain dubious about the phonemic standing of the glottal stop in Thai. On the pedagogical side, the presence of /ʔ/ in the dictionary surely does no harm and might be defended as a reminder to students of the correct vowel allophones in certain environments.

An opposition between /r/ and /l/ is normally posited for Thai, although it is clearly unstable,<sup>5</sup> if not, for a large por-

tion of the population, nonexistent. Why should a dictionary conceal a situation that the realistic teacher will have to explain sooner or later? Of course, the diligent student will soon discover for himself that when he looks up a word that he has caught on the fly as containing any of certain phone-types, he must look under both r and l before deciding that it is not in the dictionary. The difficulty does not normally arise in working from printed texts, although it might in the case of letters written by the semiliterate.

Haas's analysis of initial stops as showing a three-way contrast<sup>6</sup> in terms of voicing and aspiration has been supported recently by acoustic phonetic evidence but reformulated as a matter of three degrees of voice onset time.<sup>7</sup> That is, for /b d/ voicing begins during the stop occlusion, before the release (voicing lead); for /p t k/ it begins at the moment of release or just after it; for /ph th kh/ there is something of a lag after release before voicing begins. Turbulent air rushing through the open glottis during voicing lag is heard as aspiration. The difficulty arises in word-final position where the contrasts at each place of articulation are suspended. Haas regards the single representatives of the labial, dental and velar places as voiced, thus aligning them with initial /b d/ and, in the case of the velar position, with a /g/ not otherwise required. Now if this statement is phonetically sound, the final stops should reveal a mirror image of the voicing lead of initial /b d/; i.e., after the vocal tract is closed at the appropriate place of articulation, there will be audible laryngeal pulses during the occlusion. Since I could not really hear such voicing, I decided to go through my collection of Thai spectrograms to see if I could at least find signs of its physical presence. The 34 examples of word-final stops thus uncovered were divided into utterance-final and utterance-medial stops; the latter were further

divided into those that occurred before voiced phones and those that occurred before voiceless phones. An examination of the spectrograms for acoustic consequences of glottal pulses yielded the data in the table below.

Incidence of Voicing in Word-Final Stop Occlusions  
(4 speakers)

|                         | No. Examined | Voicing Present |
|-------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Utterance-final         | 14           | 0               |
| Utterance-medial        |              |                 |
| Before voiced phones    | 12           | 1               |
| Before voiceless phones | 8            | 0               |
| Totals                  | 34           | 1               |

For the purpose of writing this review I certainly did not wish to launch a separate investigation of final stops in Thai; nevertheless, the sampling at hand seems consistent enough not to support a description of word-final stops as voiced. Even in voiced environments in which assimilation might be expected, only one out of twelve stop occlusions showed voicing. It would seem phonetically more reasonable to consider these final stops allophones of /p t k/. Haas's view, then, is regrettable on two counts: (1) It obscures an aspect of Thai phonology, and (2) it provides the student, who will take the transcription /-b -d -g/ seriously, with a non-native rule for his phonetic output.

I heartily endorse Haas's continued support of the traditional analysis of Thai as having only five phonemic tones. The "high emphatic" tone is viewed by her simply as a result of giving accentual prominence to the normal high tone.<sup>8</sup> Her treatment of emphasis, stress and terminal intonation contours is somewhat more complicated than before. A lengthier exposition published separately would be of considerable interest.<sup>9</sup>

The notes on grammar begin with a useful - indeed, for users of a Thai dictionary, essential - presentation of derivation,

which includes compounding, elaborate expressions and reduplication. Haas then goes on to pack a remarkably clear sketch of Thai syntax into three pages. Today, of course, many a linguist would probably like to see the principles of transformational grammar applied to Thai.<sup>10</sup> I doubt, however, that research has reached a point where it is possible to produce a transformational sketch that is short enough for a preface and yet illuminating enough for the users of a dictionary.

Each entry in the dictionary includes the orthographic form, a phonemic transcription with variant pronunciations indicated, and a word class label as well as definitions. Where needed, usage labels and clarifying notes are added. The definitions are so clear that it is difficult to misinterpret a word in context. Cross-referencing of component morphemes of compounds is by and large good, with occasional lapses.

The compilers of the dictionary make no claims to exhaustiveness;<sup>11</sup> it is supposed to "meet the needs of the American student who wishes to read Thai newspapers and other Thai source materials..." In an attempt at a reasonable test of the size of the vocabulary and the quality of the definitions, I simply read a short semipopular anthropological article in a magazine and looked up all the words I did not recognize. Out of ten such words I found nine in the dictionary. All nine were defined in some detail with examples of usage that enabled me to fit a definition to the context in each case. As a non-lexicographer I offer this evidence for what it is worth as a cause for satisfaction.

The book is handsomely composed. Had it been printed in Thailand, a printing press could have been used to good effect instead of a typewriter for the Thai script, but the English would certainly have been riddled with mistakes! In ranging through the volume, I have stumbled upon only one misprint. On

page xi, the word /too/ 'to be big' is spelled with the Thai character for /kh/.

In conclusion, I should like to state categorically that of the several Thai-English dictionaries that have appeared over the last two decades, all published in Thailand, none compares in overall quality and usefulness with the one under review. This opinion is based on considerable experience with all of them and is not vitiated by the knowledge that in some areas of vocabulary one or another of them might be more comprehensive. If I may make the suggestion, officials of the Thai Ministry of Education would be well advised to recommend this dictionary to Thai students of English if only for its idiomatic English definitions as compared with those of other bilingual dictionaries in common use in Thai schools.

With such a worthwhile product in hand, it is to be hoped that the Thai Dictionary Project will receive sufficiently generous financial support to enable it to come out in the near future with its projected larger work, the Modern Thai-English Dictionary .

† To appear in Word

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#### Footnotes

1. A publication that drew upon the files of the Project was Mary R. Haas, Thai Vocabulary (Washington, D.C., 1955).
2. See p. xxiii for a full list as well as references to other sources.
3. As stated, e.g., in Mary R. Haas, The Thai System of Writing (Washington, D.C. 1956).
4. In this case the folds are pulled together for the first cycle by the Bernoulli effect (a drop in air pressure along the

- margins of the folds caused by air rushing through the glottis).
5. A.S. Abramson, The Vowels and Tones of Standard Thai: Acoustical Measurements and Experiments (Bloomington, 1962), 6-9.
  6. Except for the velars. There is no initial voiced velar stop.
  7. L. Lisker and A.S. Abramson, "A Cross-Language Study of Voicing in Initial Stops: Acoustical Measurements," Word XX (1964), 384-422. See 390, 396, 404-406 and 411 for Thai data.
  8. One way to handle this high emphatic tone is to provide an intensifier rule as an optional transformation. See Udom Waretamassikkhadit, Thai Syntax: an Outline (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1963), 72-73.
  9. For a recent discussion of these matters see Panninee Rudaravanija, An Analysis of the Elements in Thai that Correspond to the Basic Intonation Patterns of English (Ed.D. dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1965).
  10. An early attempt, prepared for a contrastive analysis, is to be found in Chalao Chaiyaratana, A Comparative Study of English and Thai Syntax (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1961). A later, more detailed transformational grammar is Udom Warotamasikkhadit, op.cit.
  11. A more comprehensive Modern Thai-English Dictionary is planned as the ultimate outcome of the Project.