

Final Particles in Conversational Mal (Thin)

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to give a preliminary study of the final particles in the Ban Sakat Klang dialect of Mal,¹ i.e., to present the basic meanings and functions of most of the commonly used final particles in conversational Mal.

2. Sentence position and function of final particles in Mal

Final particles are sentence ending words which have no lexical meaning of their own. They can also occur medially, i.e., at the end of clauses or phrases, even though these clauses or phrases are not in the sentence-final position. They usually contribute extra meaning to the meaning of the whole sentence, clause or phrase. In Mal, final particles almost always occur in sentence-final position (see examples 1, 2) but may also occur medially (see examples 2, 3).

- (1) cɔy lian kam lua? ?aŋ he?
help teach language lua give Fp.
“Please teach (me) the Lua language.”
- (2) ?ə cak he? ?e? me? to? pɔɔŋ nooy nə?
O.K. go Fp. day new come to have fun together Fp.
“O.K. Go ahead. Do come again the next day.”
- (3) ɔ? - ?ət yə? ?et phuay le? ?aŋ nooy ?ɔk
good already Fp. bring water seek give together drink
“Thank you for bringing the water (for us) to drink.”

¹Mal and the closely related Prai belong to the Khmuic branch of Mon-Khmer (Filbeck 1976). They are both called Thin or Lua' by local people. The term Thin has been variously spelled as T'in, Tin, H'in, H'tin. The term Lua', or Lawa, has also been used for a Palaungic language in Maehongson and Chiangmai provinces.

In Thailand Mal-speakers inhabit Pua, Chiang Klang and Thung Chang districts of Nan province, while in Laos they live in the Northwest part of Sayaboury province. For the data used in this paper, we are indebted to Mr. Toi Rokphrai and Mr. Phong Rokphrai of Ban Sakat Klang in Pua district. According to Ferlus (1974), the dialects of Thin are classified into 3 groups: 1) Tin de Nam Yo 2) Tin de Sakat and 3) Tin de Ban Teuy.

When a noun or a phrase or a clause which is a subject of a clause or a sentence is in focus, or when a noun or a noun phrase is moved to be the topic of the utterance a final particle /mih/ is used to mark the topic (see examples 4, 5).

- (4) luat kuu mih cak thoon mɛɛʔɛɛ
 then, how about teacher Fp. go buy what
 “How about you, the teacher, what are you going to buy?”
- (5) luat see mih mah ɲəp cia naa pɔɔn
 then, how about bird Fp. you catch how which get
 “How about the birds, how did you catch them?”

3. Types of final particles

On the basis of syntactic and semantic criteria, Amara (1972:16) classified the Thai final particles into seven groups: Intensifying particles, emphasizing particles, hortative particles, definite particles, question particles, post-question particles, and status particles. Patcharin (1981:28) in her study of Thai final particles divided them into 3 main groups “according to their similarity among themselves” as follows: those that are status particles, those that are question particles and those that are mood particles. And Cook (1989:5) roughly divided sentence final particles into four types on the basis of their semantic and contextual functions as follows: “Those signalling speaker-addressee relationships, those calling for a response from the addressee, those signalling the speaker’s response to the verbal or situational context and those signalling the context orientation of the utterance in question.” Among these three linguists, who studied the final particles in Thai, there may be some minor differences in their opinions about what should be included as final particles, but in general they agree on the major types of final particles.

In this study of final particles in Mal, the status particles, or those signalling speaker-addressee relationships, may not be exhaustive due to the limitations of the data available.² The other two types of final particles in this study are question particles or those calling for a response from the addressee, and mood particles or those signalling the speaker’s response to the verbal or situational context and those signalling the contextual orientation of the utterance in question.

One of the unique characteristics of final articles is variation of forms. In normal pronunciation, final particles may undergo a process of phonological variation which involves vowel shortening, deletion of initial or final consonants, or changes of pitch or length. These changes also produce a change in the shade of meaning of the final particles. However, the data for this study is limited; therefore, these variations will not be included in this study.

²The data is taken from *Language and Culture of the Lua?: A Study from 30 conversational lessons* by Suriya Ratanakul and others (1996).

3.1 The status particles

The status particles found in this study are politeness particles; they show relationships between speaker and addressee. They indicate the level of formality. In example 6 below (and elsewhere throughout this paper) the symbols S1 and S2 stand for two speakers in a conversation.

haa polite and somewhat formal; used in response to the yes/no questions.

(6) S1 haanua? phua? ʔuy sa? lo? pə?
 now still have forest go round for pleasure Qp.
 “Now, is there any forest to go to for pleasure?”

S2 ʔuy haa phuaŋ ʔε cak lo? sa?
 have Fp. group we go go round for pleasure forest
 li? khɔɔn cak lɔŋ bɔh
 often ascend go path mountain
 “Yes, there still is. We often go to the forest for fun, and go along the path to the mountain.”

ha? polite and somewhat formal; used in response to the yes/no questions. Possibly a variant of /haa/.

(7) S1 pɔŋ li? pə?
 eat often Qp.
 “Do you eat (it) often?”

S2 pɔŋ li? ha?
 eat often Fp.
 “We eat (it) often.”

nuu polite and somewhat formal; probably used by females.

(8) liik gi mah muan the? ɲe? nua? pɔɔ taw nε waa nuu
 speak with you fun real day this enough be equal this first Fp.
 “It’s real fun to speak with you, but it’s enough for today.”

3.2 The question particles

Question particles are those particles which are used in the formation of a question requesting a yes/no type answer. The two basic question particles in Mal are /pə?/ and /yo?/ which occur at the end of a statement. These final particles /pə?/ and /yo?/ differ from the rest of the final particles in that they have a grammatical function whereas the others do not.

pə? simple yes/no question; signals a simple question calling for a yes or no response.

- (9) ʔuy pham sɔɔ ʔɔk phuay miaʔ pəʔ
 have man other drink water rain Qp.
 “Is there any person (who) drinks rain-water?”
- (10) phuay kway ʔuy tabɔt waɲ pəʔ
 water stream have through out year Qp.
 “Is there always water in the stream year-round?”
- (11) S1 ʔuy pham phək bɔɔ phuay laʔ pəʔ
 have man dig well water for Qp.
 “Is there any person (who) digs wells for drinking water?”

S2 If the answer is positive.

ʔuy
 have
 “Yes, there is.”

S2 If the answer is negative.

səə ʔuy
 not have
 “No, there is not.”

yoʔ yes/no question; used in questions when the speaker already has some idea about the answer.

- (12) S1 ɲwaay nɛɛ liik ɲɛɲ may tiah yoʔ
 village this speak language lua all Fp.
 “(In) this village (all people) speak the Lua language, don’t they?”

S2 ʔii
 yes
 “Yes.”

3.3 The mood particles

Mood particles are those particles which are used by a speaker to reveal his or her attitude, opinion, emotions or knowledge concerning the subject being discussed, or towards the situation or contextual orientation at the time of speaking. These particles generally do not have a syntactic function, i.e., when they are left out, the utterance is still grammatical and the informational content is still intact.

These particles show a wide variety of feelings, so they are very complicated to discuss and give direct translation in English. The complexity is doubled because some of the particles overlap in some contexts. Each particle often has more than one implication.

The following inventory comprises a listing of mood particles found in the data:

nəʔ response desired; signals that the speaker wants or expects some response from the addressee, somewhat pleading or asking for permission.

- (13) ɓəʔ - ʔət mah coy duah ʔaŋ ʔən kuu ŋeʔ nəʔ
 good already you help tell to I every day Fp.
 “Thank you. Could you please teach me everyday?”

nəʔ urging or persuading; used with a statement of invitation, signalling a mild insistence.

- (14) ʔəə cak heʔ ŋeʔ məʔ toʔ pɔɔŋ nooy nəʔ
 O.K. go Fp. day new come to have fun together Fp.
 “O.K. go ahead. Come again tomorrow.”

nəʔ action desired; demanding as if one had a right.

- (15) ʔuy ʔat taʔ nəɛ ʔat təp waa nəʔ
 have stay place this stay wait for a while Fp.
 “Here I am. Wait for a while.”

yoʔ besides being a yes/no question particle, it is also an action desired; used in responding positively to a request or to show that the speaker is willing to grant or to help gain the requested permission.

- (16) S1 ʔən yoʔ cak təm mah
 I Fp. to follow you
 “I will go with you.”

- S2 cak yoʔ khɔɔn təm lŋ kwaay
 go Fp. ascend along path stream
 “Yes go. Go along the stream.”

heʔ action desired; used mainly in requests. The speaker generally is older than the addressee. The use of this particle softens the request.

- (17) ɔɔy lian kamluaʔ ʔaŋ heʔ
 help teach lua language give Fp.
 “Could you please teach (me) the Lua language?”

heʔ action desired; used in commands. The speaker usually has more authority than the addressee. The use of this particle softens the command.

- (18) səə məɛn ʔəʔ liik məʔ heʔ
 not right Fp say again Fp.
 “That’s not right. Say it again.”

heʔ invitation confirmed; generally used in host-to-guest situation. The speaker offers some kindness to the addressee.

- (19) ʔuy məɛʔɛ ʔaŋ ɔɔy kuu toʔ lɛʔ heʔ
 have what give help then come seek Fp.
 “(If) you have anything for me to help with, come to see me.”

he? offhanded permission; used in sentences which give the addressee permission to do something and at the same time indicate that the speaker is not interested in the matter.

- (20) ʔəə cak he?
O.K. go Fp.
“O.K. Go ahead.”

he? action-inducement; used in making the demand more gentle.

- (21) taam ʔən to? he? mah ca? ʔii pɔɔn ləŋ lɔŋ
follow I come Fp. you will not able lost path, way
“Please follow me,(so) you will not get lost.”

ha? striking or critical relevance; signals some fact. The speaker is reacting in surprise or special interest to something that has just caught his attention and has made a significant impression.

- (22) mah liik ŋɛɛŋ may pɔɔn ʔət ha?
You speak language lua able already Fp.
“You are able to speak Lua already!”

pə? besides being a yes/no question particle, it can also occur with a statement to intensify what has been said.

- (23) ʔat ɲoh ɲoh nɛɛ pə?
stay near near here Fp.
“(I) stay pretty near.”

mih shift of focus; signals a shift of focus from one concern to another directly related one, occurs with noun phrase topics.

- (24) luat kuu mih cak thoon mɛɛʔɛɛ
then, how about teacher Fp. go buy what
“How about you, teacher, what are you going to buy?”

yə? response confirmed; used in answering yes/no questions to intensify the response.

- (25) S1 ʔuy pham ʔat ta? ciaŋ nɛɛ pə?
have man stay place home this Fp.
“Any one at home?”

S2 ʔuy khɔɔn nɛɛ yə?
have ascend this Fp.
“Yes. Please come upstairs.”

yə? invitation confirmed; usually used in a host-to-guest situation. This is an example to show that final particles can appear in groups. In example 26, a yes/no question particle /pə?/ is followed by a final particle /yə?/ to intensify the invitation.

(26) pəŋ saa gi̯i nooy pəʔ yəʔ
 eat rice with together Qp. Fp.
 “Would you like to have a meal with us?”

yəʔ? particular relevance; usually used to call the addressee’s attention to some referent or event. This example also shows that two particles can co-occur; i.e., the intensifying particle /pəʔ/ followed by the intensifying particle /yəʔ/ to emphasize what has just been said.

(27) tɛɛ kɛɛn ŋwaay theʔ li̯k phaasaa thai kwɛɛn pəʔ yəʔ
 but head village true speak language Thai be good at Fp. Fp.
 “But the head of the village can speak Thai, (he) is very good at Thai.”

yəʔ? minor matter; signals that some fact or event is a simple matter but desirable. The speaker does not expect the addressee to make any adjustment, so he conveys his agreement.

(28) ləʔ - ʔət yəʔ ʔet phuay lɛʔ ʔaŋ nooy ʔɔk
 good already Fp. bring water seek, find give together drink
 “Thank you for bringing the water (for us) to drink.”

yəʔ? action inducement. The speaker is prompting the addressee to do some particular action; in this case an invitation.

(29) ʔɔk phuay waa yəʔ
 drink water first Fp.
 “Please have a drink first” or
 “Please drink some water first.”

day response desired; used to make declarative statements milder or more gentle. The speaker is looking for affirmative response or for some acknowledgement or for some permission from the addressee.

(30) ləʔ - ʔət ʔən caʔ cak ʔət day
 good already I will go be able to Fp.
 “Thank you. I’m leaving now.” or
 “Thank you. I’m about to leave now.” or
 “Thank you. I have to go now.”

day correction; used in negative statements to correct a statement, belief, attitude, etc.

(31) sɛɛm laʔ thət ʔah səə bəy pəŋ day
 raise for sell they not kill eat Fp.
 “(They) raise (them) for sale, they do not kill (them) for their own consumption.”

naʔ expectable response; used to make very positive response to a question. The implication is that something is expectable, natural and obvious under the circumstances, and that the question itself is unnecessary.

- (32) kan ɲan ʔee seʔ kɔɔ
if grass, weeds it a lot then

caʔ thoʔ ɲan naʔ
will clear the way grass, weeds Fp.
“If there are a lot of weeds, then (we) will remove them.”

ʔəʔ simple yes/no response; used in response to a yes/no question. It usually occurs after the word /mɛɛn/ “to be right, correct”.

- (33) S1 ʔiyay mɛɛn pəʔ
chicken to be right Qp.
“(I say) “chicken”. Is it the right pronunciation?”

S2 mɛɛn ʔəʔ
to be right Fp.
“Yes. (that’s) right.”

pheʔ shift of focus; used in content questions to indicate surprise, doubt or curiosity. It signals a shift of focus from one question to another directly related one.

- (34) S1 taʔ ɲwaay nɛɛ lɔʔ kwaʔ
at, place village this good more
“This village is better.”

S2 caʔ naa pheʔ
how which Fp.
“But, why?”

Examples 35 to 40 are examples of final particles found in just one utterance for each particle, so it is difficult to say anything about the function and meaning of these final particles.

- tɔʔ**
(35) hiʔ pɔŋ tɔʔ
Exclamation particle eat Fp.
“O.K. Eat.”

teh
(36) ʔən gay kuu ʔat kɯŋtheep, toʔ lian kam luaʔ teh
I be teacher at, stay Bangkok come learn language lua Fp.
“I am a teacher in Bangkok, but (I have) come to learn the Lua language.”

- ʔan**
(37) S1 toʔ ɲeʔ naa
come day when
“When did you come?”

S2 toʔ kiyay ʔan
come night Fp.
“(I) came last night.”

- ʔen**
 (38) mah ʔɛm mɛɛʔɛ ʔen
 you do what Fp.
 "What are you doing?"
- nuʔ** possibly a variant of the polite particle /nuu/.
- (39) ɔʔ yim taʔ ɔɔn ʔaŋ ɲeɲ ɲeɲ ʔee ɔʔ muan nuʔ
 good heart that tell give listen listen pronoun good fun Fp.
 "(I) am glad that you told me the story, it's very enjoyable."
- kaa** possibly a self-directed question; somewhat equivalent to "I wonder" in English.
- (40) sɔə pɔɔn cak sɛɛ sɛʔ ɲeʔ
 not get go field many day
 ʔət ɲan cuah ʔət kaa
 already grass, weeds long already Fp.
 "(We) haven't been to the field for many days, the weeds must have grown very high by now!"

Various modifications of forms and meanings remain for further study, and any general statements about these phenomena in Mal still need more careful study.

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