

A study of the Aspect Markers **kamləŋ** and **jù:**Tasanalai Burapachep<sup>\*</sup>**Abstract**

This paper deals with the aspect markers **kamləŋ** and **jù:**, adopting Comrie's definition of aspect (1976) while the classification of verbs and situations is based on Vendler's (1967) and Smith's (1991)

Significant differences in the behaviour of **kamləŋ** and **jù:** will be expounded, namely: only the progressive marker **kamləŋ** can be used to refer to an on-going situation involving a very short period of time, whereas only **jù:** can co-occur with situations involving a long duration. Moreover, **jù:**, unlike **kamləŋ**, can co-occur with durative time adverbials indicating a length of time such as **sǎ:m wan** "three days", **sǐ: pi:** "four years" and those depicting frequency such as **b̀̀i b̀̀i** "often" and **tal̀̀t we:la:** "all the time".

It is suggested that with the use of **kamləŋ** the speaker is focusing his/her attention on the actual on-going situation at a reference time and is interested in locating the situation at a particular moment rather than viewing it as continuing through time; hence, its use is compatible with situations involving a very short span of time. On the other hand, with the use of **jù:**, the speaker views a situation as continuing or extending through time rather than focusing his/her

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attention on an on-going situation at a particular moment; and hence, the use of the continuative is not compatible with very short time span situations but rather with situations involving a long period of time and with adverbials indicating a length of time and frequency.

**Keywords:** Aspect; Cognitive Semantics

## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ศึกษาคำบอกการณลักษณะ กำลัง และ อยู่ โดยใช้คำจำกัดความ การณลักษณะของ Comrie (1976) และใช้หลักการจัดกลุ่มคำกริยา และประเภทของเหตุการณ์ ของ Vendler (1967) ร่วมกับของ Smith (1991)

ในการศึกษานี้ มุ่งพิจารณาความแตกต่างที่สำคัญของ กำลัง และ อยู่ โดยชี้ให้เห็นว่า คำบอกการณลักษณะ กำลัง เท่านั้น ที่สามารถใช้เพื่อบ่งบอกเหตุการณ์ที่กำลังเกิดในที่ใช้ระยะเวลาอย่างมาก ขณะที่คำบอกการณลักษณะ อยู่ เท่านั้นที่สามารถปรากฏใช้กับเหตุการณ์ที่ใช้ระยะเวลายาวนาน นอกจากนี้ อยู่ สามารถปรากฏร่วมกับวิเศษณ์วลีที่บอกระยะเวลา เช่น สามวัน สี่ปี หรือวิเศษณ์วลี ที่บอกความถี่ เช่น บ่อย บ่อย และ ตลอดเวลา

ในบทความนี้ได้เสนอว่าในการใช้ กำลัง ผู้พูดเน้นถึงเหตุการณ์ที่เกิดขึ้น ณ เวลาอ้างอิง และให้ความสนใจกับเหตุการณ์ ณ ช่วงเวลานั้น โดยไม่ได้มองเหตุการณ์ในลักษณะมีความต่อเนื่อง ดังนั้น กำลัง จึงสามารถปรากฏใช้ได้กับเหตุการณ์ที่ใช้ระยะเวลานั้น ต่างกับ การใช้ อยู่ ซึ่ง ผู้พูดมองเหตุการณ์ในลักษณะที่มีความต่อเนื่องไม่ได้เน้นความสนใจเฉพาะเหตุการณ์ที่เกิดขึ้น ณ เวลาอ้างอิงเท่านั้น ดังนั้น อยู่ จึงไม่สามารถใช้บ่งบอกเหตุการณ์ที่ใช้เวลาน้อยมาก แต่สามารถใช้ได้กับเหตุการณ์ที่กินเวลายาวนาน รวมถึงสามารถปรากฏร่วมกับวิเศษณ์วลี ที่บอกระยะเวลา และวิเศษณ์วลีบอกความถี่ของเหตุการณ์

**คำสำคัญ:** คำบอกการณลักษณะ; อรรถศาสตร์ปริธาน

## Introduction

The subtle differences between the aspect markers *kamlan* and *jù:*, have puzzled many linguists. While there are sentences where the two forms can occur interchangeably yielding similar or no significant differences in meaning, there are also cases where the two exhibit significant differences. These differences present an interesting area which needs further light, specifically the differences in their function and meaning, which will, in turn, reveal insights into their behaviour. Different theories and approaches have been proposed to account for these differences, each contributing to our understanding of the two aspect markers. Certain significant themes, however, have not been touched upon. It is the aim of the present study to address them here, with a particular focus on the type of situations that can combine with only one of the two forms. Moreover, in dealing with sentences in which *kamlan* and *jù:*, seem to be interchangeable with a similar meaning, contexts of utterance have proved to be useful in revealing the subtle nuances in meaning between the two.

## Aspect, Verbs and Situations

The present study adopts Comrie's treatment of aspect (1976) in which aspect is considered as "different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation". In the system of aspect, Dahl (1985) in Saeed (1997:122) points out that the aspectual distinction between perfective and imperfective aspects is very widespread among the world's languages. As Comrie (1976) puts it, the perfective looks at the situation from outside, without necessarily distinguishing any of the internal structure of the situation, and the whole situation is subsumed as

a single whole; whereas, the imperfective looks at the situation from inside and is crucially concerned with the internal structure of the situation.

The classification of Thai verbs and situations in the present work is based on Vendler's (1967) and Smith's (1991). Vendler (1967) proposes four types of situations, namely: 1. state 2. activity 3. accomplishment and 4. achievement and four classes of verbs indicating each of the proposed situations: 1. verbs indicating states 2. verbs indicating activities 3. verbs indicating accomplishments and 4. verbs indicating achievements.

In classifying the verb classes and situations, semantic features [static], [telic] and [punctual] are used. Of the four situations only states are [+static], unchanging for its duration. The rest are dynamic, involving change, and only achievements are [+punctual] with no internal duration. Accomplishments are [+telic] indicating processes (situations with duration) with a clear terminal point, while activities are [-telic] or processes without a natural end point.

Smith (1991: 30), building on Vendler's system, proposes another type of situation: semelfactives. As she points out, semelfactives and achievements are both punctual but they differ in that the former are instantaneous atelic events, while the latter are instantaneous changes of states with an outcome of a new state.

Examples of English verbs and verb phrases exemplifying each type of situations are given below:

states :                      love    hate    know    have    understand

activities:	eat	run	walk	work	swim
accomplishments:	make a decision			run a mile	
	walk to school			paint a picture	
achievements:	end	arrive	stop	die	win the race
semelfactives:	knock	cough	blink	shoot	flash

Examples of each situation type are as follows:

Tim loves chocolate. (state)

Mary watched television. (activity)

He walked to school. (accomplishment)

John has won the race. (achievement)

She coughed. (semelfactive)

It should be noted that verbs designated as indicating a particular kind of situation when combined with the other elements in a sentence can also be used to refer to other situations. For example, while He is running. is an activity. He is running a mile. is an accomplishment.

#### Previous Studies on *kamləŋ*, and *jù:*

At this point, it will be useful to lay out some of the previous studies on the aspect markers *kamləŋ*, and *jù:*

Panupong (1970: 129-132) classifies *kamləŋ* as a pre-verbal auxiliary and *jù:* as a post-verbal auxiliary. Further, she points out that *jù:* may also function as a nucleus, which either occupying the first position of a verb phrase or the second position if there is a pre-nuclear auxiliary present.

Scovel (1970:83-5, 93-6) considers *kamlan* as the present time preverb indicating the idea of progressiveness or continuity as well as that of present time. *jù:* is classified as a main verb, meaning “to be located at, to stay” and a time/aspect postverb correlate of the present preverb *kamlan*.

Warotamasikkhadit (1976:1-2) classifies *kamlan* and *jù:* as preverbs. He considers that *jù:* is an indefinite doublet of *kamlan* which is transformed to the position following a verb phrase in the surface structure. Further, he points out that both *kamlan* and *jù:* possess the feature [+progressive] but they differ in that *jù:* is [-definite] whereas *kamlan* is [+definite].

Boonyapatipark (1983) considers *kamlan* as a marker of the progressive indicating an on-going situation at a reference time. Moreover, it is pointed out that with the use of *kamlan*, the speaker is focusing his attention on a situation which is going on at the time of speech or other specified time; where as with the use of the continuative *jù:*, the speaker is viewing a situation as extending through time and not just referring to what is going on at the given time. It is also suggested that the aspect marker *jù:* may have developed from the verb *jù:* through a process of grammaticalization, and that there is a clear semantic connection between the two.

P. Kullavanijaya and W. Bisang (2007:61-86) analyse aspect in Thai in the framework of the Selection-Theory approach developed by Breu and Sasse (1991) and study all possible co-occurrences of the aspect markers *kamlan*, *jù:* and *lé:u* with the proposed classes of

verbs and states of affairs. In their study, *kamlan* is considered as a progressive aspect marker indicating that a state of affairs is in progress at a reference time. *jùn* is classified as a continuative aspect marker describing a situation as continuous through time or along time without references to boundaries.

K. Tansiri (2007: 54-79) analyses an internal temporal constituency of situations denoted by alternating intransitive constructions (AIC) in Thai. In his work, *kamlan* is considered as a dynamic imperfective aspect marker as it profiles the dynamic phase of the situations and causes them to be construed as on-going processes. It is compatible with dynamic durative situations but incompatible with static and punctual ones. *jùn*, on the other hand, functions as a stative imperfective aspect marker which can profile either a static or a dynamic phase. If *jùn* co-occurs with a static situation, that situation will be viewed as a persistent state. If it co-occurs with a dynamic one, it refers to a dynamic situation which is viewed as static. In other words, he views *kamlan* as only compatible with dynamic situations, unlike *jùn*, which can co-occur with both dynamic and static ones. My following treatment of the two aspect markers would differ from his on this point. Although *kamlan* is typically used with dynamic situations, I believe its combination with states is also possible when the meaning of temporariness of the situation is denoted. Moreover, there are certain cases in which only *kamlan* or *jùn* is acceptable which may not be satisfactorily accounted for by his treatment.

## Present Treatment

As an attempt to gain a better understanding of the behaviour of the two aspect markers, the present study will pay particular attention to the cases where there are significant differences in the function and meaning of *kamlaŋ* and *jù:*. We will also look at sentences where *kamlaŋ* and *jù:* seem to have a similar meaning. This is generally the case when they occur with activity verbs such as *kin* “eat”, *tham ɲa:n* “work” and *wîŋ* “run”. Cases where the two can co-occur will not be treated. The treatment of *kamlaŋ* and *jù:* will be based on Boonyapatipark’s (1983), with some added clarifications. In the present study *kamlaŋ* is considered a progressive marker indicating an on-going situation at a reference time. With the use of *kamlaŋ* an emphasis is placed on the actual on-going of a situation at a particular time without an implication of the continuance of the situation; whereas the continuative aspect marker *jù:* indicates the continuance of a situation at a reference time. With the use of *jù:*. The situation is viewed as extending through time and not just going on at the time. For the purposes of this paper, the time of reference will be taken as the speech time.

To begin with, let’s consider sentences (1) and (2) below which are often judged by native speakers to denote a similar meaning :

- |     |               |               |            |
|-----|---------------|---------------|------------|
| (1) | <i>khǎu</i>   | <i>kamlaŋ</i> | <i>kin</i> |
|     | he            | prog.         | eat        |
|     | He is eating. |               |            |
| (2) | <i>khǎu</i>   | <i>kin</i>    | <i>jù:</i> |
|     | he            | eat           | cont.      |
|     | He is eating. |               |            |



Out of context, sentences such as (1) and (2) are usually considered to have similar or no important differences in meaning. However, when contexts in which such sentences are uttered are brought into consideration, differences in their use and meaning can be found. To illustrate this, examples of contexts in which sentences with *kamlan* and *jù:* are used will be provided.

Consider first a context in which A had given his friend, B, some vitamins and food supplements and advised the latter to take them regularly. Sometime later when they met A asked B whether B had taken any of the vitamins and supplements. If B wanted to tell A that he has been taking them for some time up to the time of speaking, he could say (3) below :

(3)	(chan)	kin	jù:
	I	eat	cont.

I am eating. (The situation started some time before the time of utterance and is expected to continue until some later time.)

The answer with *kamlan* as in (4) does not convey the same meaning and is not an appropriate answer or would sound odd if such meaning is intended.

(4) ?	(chan)	kamlan	kin
	I	prog.	Eat

I am eating (now).

(4) may, however, be acceptable if the speaker wants to convey the meaning that he is actually taking the vitamins and supplements at the utterance time.

In another situation, a husband had lost his keys and asked his wife to help look for them while he went to work. When he came home he may ask his wife whether she had found them. His wife may answer (5) below to convey the meaning that she had not found the keys but had been looking for them for some time.

(5)	(chan)	hǎ:	jù:
	I	look for	cont.

I am looking for them. (The situation started some time prior to the time of utterance and is expected to continue until some later time.)

Sentence (6) with *kamlan* is not suitable as an answer to express this same meaning. However, his wife may utter (6) to indicate that the situation of searching for the keys is going on at the utterance time.

(6)	(chan)	kamlan	hǎ:
	I	prog.	search
	I'm looking for them (now).		

To account for the differences in the use and meaning of *kamlan* and *jù:* as in the situations above, it is suggested that with the use of *kamlan* the speaker focuses his/her attention on the actual on-going situation at the reference time. With the use of *jù:* however, the speaker views a situation as continuing through time and not just referring to what is going on at this given point in time.

To further clarify this, we will now turn to consider cases where *kamlan* and *jù:* cannot occur interchangeably. To begin with, it is

suggested that only the progressive *kamləŋ* can be used with situations involving a very short duration of time. Consider, for instance, (7) (8) and (9) below:

- |     |                                 |        |           |
|-----|---------------------------------|--------|-----------|
| (7) | khǎu                            | kamləŋ | dò:trôm   |
|     | loŋma                           | cà:k   | khruŋbin  |
|     | He                              | prog.  | Parachute |
|     | down                            | from   | airplane  |
|     | He is parachuting from a plane. |        |           |

- |     |                     |        |         |
|-----|---------------------|--------|---------|
| (8) | práa:thít           | kamləŋ | àtsadoŋ |
|     | sun                 | prog.  | set     |
|     | The sun is setting. |        |         |

- |     |  |                  |      |
|-----|--|------------------|------|
| (9) | khǎu   | kamləŋ           | klâi |
|     | thuŋ   | cùtmă:ipla:ithaŋ |      |
|     | He   | prog.            | near |
|     | Reach  | destination      |      |
|     | He is now getting very near his destination. |                  |      |

Situations (7), (8) and (9) involve a very short period of time and all have a natural terminal point, i.e. in (8) when the parachuter reaches the ground, in (9) when the sun is out of sight and in (10) when the person reaches his destination. These three situations can be considered as a subset of accomplishments which last only a short period of time. It can therefore be suggested that only the progressive *kamləŋ* can be used with accomplishments spanning a short duration of time. The use of the continuative *jù:* in this type of situations results in odd sentences as in (10) – (12) below:

- |        |                   |           |       |
|--------|-------------------|-----------|-------|
| (10) * | khău              | dò:trôm   | loŋma |
|        | cà:k              | khruaŋbin | jù:   |
|        | He                | parachute | down  |
|        | from              | plane     | cont. |
|        |                   |           |       |
| (11) * | práa:thít         | àtsadoŋ   | jù:   |
|        | sun               | set       | cont. |
|        |                   |           |       |
| (12) * | khău              | klâi      | thuŋ  |
|        | cùtmă:ipla:itha:ŋ |           | jù:   |
|        | He                | near      | reach |
|        | Destination       | cont.     |       |

Because with the use of *jù:*, the speaker views the situation as continuing through time, its meaning is not compatible with situations lasting only a short duration as in the above three sentences.

Now if we were to alter the situation, for instance, in (10) from *dò:trôm loŋma cà:k khruaŋbin* “parachuting from a plane” to *fùk dò:trôm* “practise parachuting”, this altered situation can be viewed as occupying a longer period of time, in which the actor may have to engage repetitively in the activity. The use of *jù:* is acceptable with this reading.

- |      |                               |          |           |       |
|------|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|
| (13) | khău                          | fùk      | dò:trôm   | jù:   |
|      | He                            | practise | parachute | cont. |
|      | He is practising parachuting. |          |           |       |

Note, also that *kamlaŋ* can be used in this same situation as in (14) below :

- (14)      khǎu                      kamləŋ                      fùək  
             dò:trôm  
             He                      prog.                      practise  
             parachute  
             He is practising parachuting.

One can therefore refer to this type of situation with either **kamləŋ** or **jù:**. But note that the situation will then be construed very differently. Instead of viewing it as extending through time as in (13), with the use of **kamləŋ** in (14) the speaker pays attention to an on-going situation at a particular time. One important difference between (13) and (14) is that in (13) with **jù:**, because the situation is viewed as extending through time it is possible to indicate how long the situation lasts as in (15), whereas this is not possible with **kamləŋ** as in (16)

Compare (15) and (16) below

- (15)      khǎu                      fùək                      dò:trôm  
             jù:                      sǎ:m                      a:thít  
             He                      practice                      parachute  
             cont.                      three                      week  
             he practised parachuting for three weeks.

- (16) \*      khǎu                      kamləŋ                      fùək  
             dò:trôm                      sǎ:m                      a:thít  
             He                      prog.                      Practice  
             Parachute                      three                      week.

It is suggested that **jù:**, unlike **kamləŋ**, can co-occur with adverbials indicating a duration of time such as **Sǎm wan** “three days”

and *sì pi:* “four years” as well as those conveying frequency or habituality such as *samɣ:* “always” and *talòt we:la:* “all the time”. As *jù:* indicates the continuance of a situation, it is compatible with these types of adverbials, in which case, the situation can then be construed as continuing to last two hours or four days or continuing to happen occasionally or regularly, etc. With *kamlaŋ*, however, the speaker is interested instead in locating an on-going situation at a particular time and therefore its use is not compatible with these groups of adverbials.

Further examples of acceptable sentences where *jù:* co-occur with these adverbials together with unacceptable sentences where *kamlaŋ* co-occur with the same adverbials are given in (17)–(20) below:

- |        |                                |               |                 |
|--------|--------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| (17)   | <i>khǎu</i>                    | <i>tham</i>   | <i>ŋa:n</i>     |
|        | <i>jù:</i>                     | <i>sǎ:m</i>   | <i>chúamo:ŋ</i> |
|        | He                             | do            | work            |
|        | cont.                          | three         | hour            |
|        | He worked for three hours.     |               |                 |
|        |                                |               |                 |
| (18)   | <i>khǎu</i>                    | <i>tham</i>   | <i>jà:ŋ</i>     |
|        | <i>ní:</i>                     | <i>jù:</i>    | <i>pen</i>      |
|        | <i>pracam</i>                  |               |                 |
|        | He                             | do            | manner          |
|        | This                           | cont.         | regularly       |
|        | He regularly does it this way. |               |                 |
|        |                                |               |                 |
| (19) * | <i>khǎu</i>                    | <i>kamlaŋ</i> | <i>tham</i>     |
|        | <i>ŋa:n</i>                    | <i>sǎ:m</i>   | <i>chúamo:ŋ</i> |
|        | he                             | prog.         | Do              |
|        | work                           | three         | hour            |

(20) *	khǎu	kamləŋ	tham
	jà:ŋ	ní:	pen
	pracam		
	he	prog.	do
	manner	this	regularly

Another notable difference between the two aspect markers is that the use of jù: is applicable in situations involving a long period of time, whereas the occurrence of kamləŋ in such contexts is not acceptable. Examples of acceptable sentences with jù: (21)–(23) and unacceptable sentences (24)–(26) with kamləŋ are given below:

(21)	khon	rau	mi	chí:wít	jù:	kô
	khuan	màn	tham	khwa:mdi:		
	Human	us	have	life	cont.	part.
	ought to	keep	do	good deeds		
	While we are alive, we ought to keep on doing good deeds.					

(22)	nǔ:	pen	dèk	jù:	nǔ:	kô
	khuan	cà	pai	ro:ŋrian		
	You	be	child	cont.	you	part.
	ought to	asp.	go	school		
	As you are a child, you ought to go to school.					

(23)	khon	khâi	hǎ:i	cai	jù:	khǎu
	mii	o:kà:t		rô:t		
	Patient		breathe		cont.	he
	have	opportunity		survive		

The patient is breathing. He has a chance to survive.

(Maybe said by a doctor to a colleague after seeing that a critical patient continues breathing.)

- (24) \* khon rau kamlanmi chi:wít kô  
 khuan màn tham khwa:mdi:  
 Human us prog. Have life part.  
 ought to keep do good deeds

- (25) \* nũ: kamlan pen dèk  
 nũ: kô khuan cà  
 pai ro:ɲrian  
 You prog. Be child  
 you part. ought to asp.  
 go school

- (26) \* khon khâi kamlan hă:i  
 cai khău mi: o:kà:t rô:t  
 Patient prog. Breathe  
 he have opportunity survive

With the use of *kamlan*, the speaker focuses his/her attention on a segment of a situation at a reference time. Therefore when *kamlan* is used with situations involving a long span of time, both dynamic and static, it conveys an emphasis on the temporariness of the situations so that they are normally interpreted as lasting a short period of time. However, the state of being alive and being a child as in (24) and (25) cannot be considered as existing only temporarily. This renders the use of *kamlan* unacceptable. Similarly, the activity of breathing in (26) is



what we do continually and habitually instead of at any particular point in time. Hence, the unacceptability of (26). The use of *jù:*, on the other hand, does not put an emphasis on the temporariness of a situation. The speaker simply construes the states in (21) and (22) and the activity in (23) as continuing or extending at the reference time. Thus the acceptability of *jù:* in the contexts.

To further explicate this, the following examples illustrate the compatibility of *kamləŋ* when an emphasis on the temporariness of a situation is intended:

- (27) *khǎu kamləŋ mi: chí:wít*  
*thî sùk sabə:i*  
 He prog. Have life  
 That happy comfortable  
 He is having a happy and comfortable life. (now).

- (28) *khǎu kamləŋ pen khon le:u*  
*nai sǎ:ita: khǎŋ thɤ:*  
 He prog. Be man bad  
 in eye of her  
 He is now a bad guy in her eyes.

- (29) *khǎu kamləŋ hǎ:i cai mǎi sadùak*  
 He prog. Breathe neg. convenient  
 He is having some difficulty breathing (at the moment).

- (30) *chûaŋ ní: dǝ:kkulà:p kamləŋ ŋa:m*  
 Period this roses prog. beautiful  
 The roses are beautiful during this period.

- (31)      tɔ:n ní:      a: kà:t      kamləŋ      jen saba:i  
              now                weather      prog.                cool

Now the weather is cool.

## Conclusion

This paper examines the aspect markers *kamləŋ* and *jù:*, with the focus on their differences in meaning and use. In order to account for the differences, the study suggests that with the use of *kamləŋ* the speaker focuses his/her attention on the actual on-going situation at a reference time and is interested in locating a segment of the situation at a particular moment. With the use of *jù:*, however, the speaker views a situation as continuing or extending through time rather than directing his/her attention at an on-going situation at a specified time. This explains the acceptability and unacceptability of their use in the contexts discussed here. This study has shown that only *kamləŋ* can combine with accomplishments spanning a short duration of time, whereas only *jù:*, can co-occur with situations involving a long period of time. By illustrating these, perhaps subtle, differences in context, the researcher hopes that a deeper understanding of the two aspect markers has been achieved.

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