

NOTES

Some observations on Khmer discourse markers¹.

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During March–May 1993, I completed my fieldwork collecting data on subordination in Cambodian Khmer at Aranyaprathet, Prachinburi Province, Thailand.

Working on the data, I have found that some discourse markers appear to be crucial for the understanding of how Khmer discourse is organized. Here I will discuss only two phenomena dealing with discourse pragmatics.

. *ka:* and *taə*

As shown in Figure 1, *ka:* and *taə* occur in the same structural positions; they occur optionally before verb phrases and occasionally before subject noun phrases. (Figure 1, examples [1] to [3])

Sometimes these two words precede the subject of sentences, as in examples (4), (5), and (6).

ka: and *taə* are used to join important information to a preceding discourse. Although these two markers share the same syntactic position, it is noticeable that *ka:* precedes *affirmative* sentences while *taə* introduces *interrogative* sentences.

Nevertheless, one question word, /məc/ or /mdəc/ 'why' cannot co-occur in juxtaposition with *taə*. It always co-occurs with *ka:*. This awaits further investigation. (Figure 1, examples [7] and [8])

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There were a few problems of data collecting since Khmer speakers near the border tended to mix Khmer with Thai, especially when they talked to a speaker of Thai people. Language samples given here are drawn from textbooks, short stories and recorded plays.

II. *niŋ*

Khmer has two optional demonstratives: *nih* used with an object near the speaker and *nuh* with an object far from the speaker. Demonstratives in Khmer follow head nouns and indicate a noun phrase boundary. (*Figure 2, examples [9] and [10]*)

There is another word which can occur in roughly the same position as these two demonstratives. The word *niŋ* seems to share the same features as demonstratives. In the *Khmer Dictionary* (Buddhist Institute, 1967–1968), *niŋ* is glossed as *nuh*, one of Khmer demonstratives. Headley's *Cambodian–English Dictionary* (1977) translates *niŋ* as “1. this, that” and “2. here, there, right here, right now”. (*Figure 2, examples [10] to [12]*)

Semantically *niŋ* only expresses definiteness; it has an article–like function in Khmer. This ‘article’ is also optional as are demonstratives.

According to my informant, *niŋ* can occur with *nuh* although in his opinion it appears to be superfluous. *niŋ - nih* is not acceptable by some speakers, but perhaps it should not be considered ungrammatical. (*Figure 2, example [13]*)

niŋ in Khmer may be borrowed from *nìŋ* in Thai. It is written as / ញឹង / which marks it clearly as a Thai loanword. Nevertheless, *nìŋ* in Thai expresses indefiniteness while *niŋ* in Khmer expresses definiteness.

The shift from indefiniteness to definiteness could be because Khmer already has the word *muəy* ‘one’ for indefinite expressions. But then, as we saw above, it also has two demonstratives. Perhaps *niŋ* represents a more neutral relationship more appropriate for anaphoric discourse definiteness.

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Abbreviations :

| | |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| BE | verb of existence/presence |
| CAUS | causative |
| COMP | complementizer |
| <i>D.M.</i> | discourse marker |
| DEM | demonstrative |
| <i>excl.</i> | exclamation |
| <i>ints.</i> | intensifier |
| <i>IRRL</i> | irrealis |
| NEG | negative particle |
| <i>part.</i> | final particle |
| PRN | [personal] pronoun |
| REC | reciprocal |
| REL | relative marker |
| wh– | relative question marker |

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(1) pe:l nuh p̄əh ka:l lun sansəm-sansəm coul knoŋ kəmpo:t pri:y mun nuh bat tiw
 time that snake ka:l crawl slowly-Redup enter in bush kəmpo:t pri:y mun nuh bat disappear . go

‘At that time the snake then crawled slowly into the bush and disappeared.’ [SOURCE: saen cambaŋ]

(2) A: ?ou! baŋ ... baŋ-wicət tha: məc dae
 excl. title, Wichet COMP how as well

‘Oh! What did he say?’

B: ke: tha: ke: ni:k knom nah! ta: ke: kmah daoysa: ke: tʰə: khoh
 PRN say PRN think PRN Part but PRN ashamed because PRN do wrong

pi: mit-phěə? t̄əŋlay
 from friend all

knom ka: ban pənyə:l ke: kom ?aoy ke: kit douc-ndh ...
 PRN ka: past explain PRN don't CAUS PRN think like that ...

‘He said [that] he thought of me but was ashamed because he did [something] different from all of us [his close friends].
 So I explained to him not to think like that.’ [SOURCE: t̄əsəy sne:ha:]

Figure. 1 *ka:l* and *taə* in modern Khmer discourse

(3) *knom* *yüə* *haəy* *knom* *ɔəŋ* *haəy* *səmdəy* *naakrii* *təəŋ* *pənmən* *ɔə* *mɔ:k*
 PRN understand already PRN know PRN already speech Nakree together how many REL come
 seek *knom*
 PRN

pəntae *pəntae* *knom* *kɔət* *niŋ* *cət* *cinda:* *mɪn* *bən* *te!*
 but PRN PRN betray with mind Chinda NEG able part.

cinda: *ke:* *lʔa:* *niŋ* *knom* *nah* *cinda:* *mɪən* *kun* *niŋ* *knom* *nah* *tlay* *sala:* *siəwphiw*
 Chinda PRN good with PRN ints. Chinda BE merit with PRN ints. price school price book

niəŋ *ʔcuəy* *krup-sap* *təəŋ* *ʔah*
 Ms. help complete [redupl.] all

taə *ʔaoy* *knom* *kɔət* *cət* *niəŋ* *yaŋ-məc* *niŋ* *kaət* *ɔəuc* *niəŋ* *lʔa:* *niŋ* *knom* *ʔəncəŋ*
taə CAUS PRN PRN betray heart Ms. how IRRL happen as Ms. good with PRN so

‘I understood already. I knew already what Nakree talked to me but ... but I could not betray Chinda. Chinda was very kind and good to me. She helped [me pay] complete school fees and book expenses. How then could I betray her since she is so good to me?’ [SOURCE: *kampūəŋcam cam sne!*]

Figure. 1 *kn* and *taə* in modern Khmer discourse

- (4) haəy soum maʔ kom plic tha: sat-kʔaek wiə niw-tae kʔaek
 and then ask mom don't forget COMP crow PRN still crow
 tũəhbəyciə maʔ kham yɔ:k tik-miəh mɔ:k liəp rəcana: lə: sambol kmaw kra:-kwaʔ
 although mom try hard take melt, gold come paint decorate on skin black dirty
 rəbah wiə yaŋ-na:
 of PRN how
- ka:** wiə min ʔac tiw ciə haŋ kaət dae
ka: PRN NEG able go BE swan happen as well

‘And then, Mom, please don't forget that a crow is always a crow. No matter how hard you try to paint gold on its dirty black skin, it cannot become a swan either.’ [tiəsəy sne:ha:]

- (5) thari: knom soum toh tiw coh! tae knom haʔ-fouc-ciə min yüəl niy nih sah
 Tharee PRN excuse (me) go Part but PRN as if NEG understand remain DEM part.
- thari: metta: prap knom ʔaoy cam-cam phəŋ ba:n te:
 Tharee mercy tell PRN let direct-Redup too able part.
- tũəh-bəy-ciə yaŋ-na: **ka:** thari: niw-tae ciə mitp hěəq rəbah knom ciə nic nah!
 although anyhow PRN still Tharee BE close friend of PRN BE always part.

‘Excuse me, Tharee, but it seems that I don't understand this implication at all. Could you please tell me frankly? Anyhow, you are always my close friend.’ [tiəsəy sne:ha:]

Figure. 1 *ka:* and *taə* in modern Khmer discourse

- (6) ʔəi! cinda: ʔəyləw pukae riəpröep piəʔ niyiəy nah
 excl. Chinda now good at narrate word speak ints.
 ɓæc ɓaŋ pənman khae səh ceŋ craən taə-mədaŋ
 separate PRN how much month at all know much really
 taə ʔoun ʔaəŋ miən kru: na: ke: ɓaŋriən ʔoun nah!
 taə PRN -self BE teacher wh- PRN teach PRN part.

‘Oh! Chinda now you are very good at selecting words [to speak]. It’s only a few months that we have not seen each other. [You] know a lot. Who then is your teacher?’ [SOURCE: *kampūŋcaam cam sne!*]

- (7) [After *Chum* has taken a poster from his pocket, *Som* said]

- yi! chum mdəc kaɪ ʔaəŋ hiən haek ɓamram dʊc-neh
 excl. Chum why **kaɪ** PRN dare tear warning poster like this
 ‘Oh! Chum how dare you tear the poster?’ [SOURCE: *səyləthəə*]

Figure. 1 *kəɔ* and *taə* in modern Khmer discourse

- (8) yi! kniə niw kmah thari: min tōən bat te!
 excl. REC remain embarrass Tharee NEG on time disappear part.
- nah! ?aen niyɔy ?əncəŋ məc ka: min khəŋ thari: mə:k ?aŋkuy
 part. PRN speak so why ka: NEG see Tharee come sit
- ɲam ?əy ciəmuəy-niŋ ke: ?ah!
 eat what together PRN part.

‘Oh! I am still embarrassed [to see] Tharee. Speaking of which—why ... don’t [I] see Tharee sitting [and] eating with them?’ [SOURCE: *təsəy snei:ha!*]

Figure. 1 *kor* and *taə* in modern Khmer discourse

- (9) samnaŋ kanlaeŋ nih twə:ʔaoy kniə nik khəŋ dəl ʔanusə:wəri: tɛəŋ paŋmam
 Samnang place DEM CAUS REC think see arrive memory together how many
 dʌel kniə tʌəp miən ciəmuəy ʔaeŋ taŋ-pii dʌəm mɔ:k nuh haəy
 REL REC used to BE together PRN since origin come DEM already

‘Samnang, this place made me think of all the memories I used to share with you since the first time we met.’
 [SOURCE: *tiəsəy sne/ha:*]

- (10) mədom nuh miən pʰəh dʌp
 area DEM BE house 10

‘There are ten houses in that area.’

- (11) baŋ-pisət camka: pot niŋ baŋ twə: kluən ʔaeŋ həy!
 Phisit field corn you do body -self hay!
 part.

‘Pisit, do you look after [lit. do] the cornfield by yourself?’ [SOURCE: *kampūəŋcam cam sne!*]

Figure. 2: *niŋ* in modern Khmer discourse

(12) A: ʔoun kom pruəy tɕay na: muəy bəmnaŋ yəŋ koŋ niŋ bəm samrəc
 you. don't worry day wh- one wish we certainly IRRIL get succeed

'Don't worry, some day our wish will certainly succeed.'

B: hi! taə ka:l na: tiw ɗael haw tha: tɕay niŋ
 excl. D.M. time wh- go REL call COMP day wh-

'Oh! whatever day would that be called?' [SOURCE: *tiəsəy snei:ha:*]

(13) kepal niŋ nuh mək pi: na:
 ship DEM come from wh-

'Where did that ship come from?'

Figure. 2: *niŋ* in modern Khmer discourse