OBSERVATIONS ON THE USES OF REDUPLICATION AS
A POETIC DEVICE IN KHMER

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The constant use of alliterative and other reduplicative forms is a striking feature of Khmer poetry. The purpose of this short study of a vast subject is to analyse some of the forms of reduplication which occur in traditional Khmer poetry. The reduplicative structures of modern spoken and written prose (Gorgoniyev 1963: 58-61; Huffman 1967: 129-40; Jacob 1968: 188-93; Jenner 1969: 63-73; Nacaskul 1971: 354-62) are taken as a basis for the examination.

The Khmers enjoy using an elaborate language style in descriptive, consciously literary prose and tend to adopt the poetic vein quite suddenly and rather more readily than we do now in the West. Lewitz (1970: 108) remarks on the occurrence of rhyme in prose in her introduction to No. 3 of the "modern" inscriptions of Angkor. Many of the poetic compound words which will be discussed below are to be found in descriptive prose writing. The contrast which is to be borne in mind, then, with regard to the vocabulary described in the following pages, is rather between the "plain language" of speech and factual prose and the "poetic language" of stylish literature and poetry. Where devices other than the choice of vocabulary are concerned, it will be clear from the citations and references that only poetry is involved.

The poems which have been consulted are listed at the end of the paper with, where possible, dates or approximate dates. The material has been arranged under six headings:

1. Reduplication in the structure of simple words
2. Reduplication in the structure of compound words
3. Grammatical categories of reduplicative words
4. Reduplication in syntactical structures
5. Reduplication and lexical meaning
6. Reduplication in relation to style.

Under each heading comment and examples are given, first for the plain language and then for the poetic language.
1. Reduplication in the structure of simple words

Reduplication occurs in the extended initial sequences of monosyllables and in the sequences of consonants which precede the vowel nucleus in restricted disyllables (Henderson 1952: 164-73).

Plain language

/kəkaːy/ to scratch or dig with hands or paws constantly
\[<\]
/kəkəːk/ with repeated sounds of laughter
\[<\]
/təntən/ close on the heels of
\[<\]
/tən/ to catch up, be in time for

Poetic language

/lələːt/ to spring about
\[<\]
/ləːt/ to jump

/səsəroc/ pouring all over
\[<\]
/səroc/ to sprinkle

A poetic example of a restricted disyllable with reduplication has not been noted but the form is not of very common occurrence in Khmer at all.

No special development of reduplication in simple words has been noticed in the poetic language. There is a tendency, perhaps greater than in the plain language, to use a reduplicative initial consonant before each of the two components of a reduplicative compound, however:

/pəprəːŋ-pəprəːŋ/ constantly
\[<\]
/prəːŋ-prəːŋ/ sparkling

2. Reduplication in the structure of compound words

In reduplicative compound words, the two components are usually structurally alike, i.e. both are monosyllables with simple initial consonant or both have a two-place initial sequence, etc. It is only in the second of the following patterns that the components often have different forms.
Plain language

Normally one component is a free form (+) and the other bound (0).

i. Repetitive compound (with reduplication of the whole form)

/toːc-toːc/ small and numerous, very < /toːc/ small ++
small

This live word-forming process is applied with great frequency to attributive verbs and to nouns with concrete meaning.

ii. Rhyming compound (with reduplication of vowel nucleus and final consonant)

/mɛːn-tɛːn/ really (true /0)
/sruːal-buːal/ with ease (comfortable, easy /0)
/craːaəh-baːh/ disrespectful (to overdo, go beyond the limit /0)

iii. Chiming compound (with reduplication of initial and final consonant)

/kaen-kaon/ very contemptuous (0/ haughty)
/kmeːŋ-kmaːŋ/ children, a crowd of children (young /0)
/bɔntəc-bɔntuːəc/ to a certain extent, a few (plural)

(a little /0)

iv. Alliterative compound (with reduplication of initial consonants; one bound form)

/lɪːˈeɪ-ləm/ jumbled up (mixed /0)
/præə-præh/ to use generally (to use /0)
(suggests plurality of things used)
/præpəp-præpal/ bustling along (to hurry /0)
/bɔndəh-bɔnday/ to use an excuse to avoid some (to free v.tr. /0)
commitment (cf. /døh-day/
to shake off responsibility)

v. Alliterative compound (with reduplication of initial consonants; two free forms)

/cat-caen/ to organise (to send people/ to clarify)
/sɔn-slaʊ/  to show signs of
great shock  (to feel faint/with
eyes widely open)
/prəlak-prələh/  very dirty  (sprinkled all over/
dirty all over)
/bɔndaet-bɔndaʊ/  to make (someone)
do as one wishes  (cause to float/
cause to follow)

Poetic language

Free and bound forms are not marked here since a considerable span of
years is under review and it is not in all cases possible to know whether
a component which is not now a free form was always a bound form.

i. Repetitive compound (with reduplication of the whole form)
/yək(s)-yək(s) sva:-sva:/  ogres and monkeys (plurality stressed)

ii. Rhyming compound (with reduplication of vowel nucleus and final
consonant)
/cuːə-buːə/  row upon row  < /cuːə/  row
/slaŋ-kaŋ/  faint and pale  < /slaŋ/  pale
/trælaŋ-kæŋ/  having four sides

iii. Chiming compound (with reduplication of initial and final
consonant)
/rʊŋ-rʊŋ/  splendid
/thkæŋ-thkæŋ/  elevated  < /thkæŋ/  lofty
/kroːp-kroːp/  delightfully fragrant  < /kroːp/  fragrant
/kɔntre:k-kɔntra:k/  in tatters  < /kɔntra:k/  ragged

iv. Alliterative compound (with reduplication of initial consonants; at
least one component cannot be demonstrated to be free)
/yʊən-yʊəl/  to catch sight of,  < /yʊəl/  to see
to see
/skʌm-skay/  huge, vast
/rʊmcʌm-rumcɛːŋ/  to crash (of waves)

v. Alliterative compound (with reduplication of initial consonants; both
components may be demonstrated to have occurred as free forms in
poetry)