

SOME COMMENTS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KHMER WORDS HAVING IDENTICAL VOWEL NUCLEI AND FINAL CONSONANTS

In Khmer we are familiar with the build-up of words by prefixation and infixation from a base having the form CVF. E.g. from the base *gāp* /kəp/ ¹ 'fitting' we have, by prefixation, *phgāp* /phkəp/ 'to suit' and *paṅgāp* /bəṅkəp/ 'to order' while, by infixation, we have *gaṇṇāp* /kūmnəp/ 'salute n.' However, a considerable number of sets of words are to be found which also have comparable meanings but which have only VF, not CVF, in common and which are not therefore derivatives by affixation. The following two pairs of words are examples of this:

khūñ	/kho:ŋ/	'sunken, hollowed'
sralūñ	/srəlo:ŋ/	'very deep; very high'
tās	/da:ʰ/	'widespread'
bās	/pi:əʰ/	id. ²

Words related in this way have interested the writer for a long time, particularly since they sometimes elucidate the meaning of vocabulary which occurs in poetry or in older texts and which is not found in dictionaries. This paper is concerned with the search for an explanation of the occurrence of such sets of words.

At least two ways have been suggested to account for the origin of some of them. First,³ Maspero 1912:82,85 demonstrated that in Viet-Muong phonetic changes in the initial consonant or consonants had taken place, varying from one dialect to another, and had thus produced several words from the same base having similar meaning, similar VF sequences but different initial consonants. In Khmer we have some sets of words which may be the result of this kind of change, e.g.

crak	/crə:k/	'to stuff'
jrak	/crə:k/	'to hide under, take shleter'
prahak	/prəhə:k/	'to bore into'
šak	/sə:k/	'to thrust in v.tr.'

in which, if the presence of /r/, a possible infix, is ignored in the first two examples, the four pre-vocalic consonants are suspiciously similar and might easily have been differentiated by dialectal change. Such sets as this, in so far as I have recognized them, have been excluded from consideration here so that they may not confuse the issue before us.

Second, Jenner 1969:61-62 discussed the analysis of some pairs of words, differentiated only by the initial consonant, where one of the two

has initial glottal stop:

īep	/ʔiəp/	'to squeeze'	kīep	/kiəp/	'to nip'
īek	/ʔiək/	'to grip'	kīek	/kiək/	'to hold (e.g. under the arm)'
ap	/ʔə:p/	'connected'	kap	/kə:p/	'related'
āk	/ʔak/	'thwarted'	cāk	/cak/	'to suffer internal pain'

He suggested that the second word might have been formed when the first acquired a prefix and then lost the glottal stop. (There are many other cases in Khmer, of course, where the glottal stop has been retained when prefixation has taken place, e.g. *op* /ʔaop/ 'to hold by putting the arms round' > *ph-op* /phʔaop/ 'to brace tightly together'.) This suggestion, which may account for some instances, would not, however, cover all cases since we could not assume that all bases originally had initial glottal stop.

It seemed that far more occurrences were to be found than could be accounted for by either of these ways and I decided to try to investigate the origin of the VF relationship. My procedure was to examine, using some lists of words collected over many years, all the acceptable Khmer VF sequences and to extract examples of groups of words which have the same VF, but not the same CVF, and similar meanings. Thus words related by affixation processes, e.g. words in which pre-vocalic /r/ infix might be present, were excluded and, as has already been stated, groups with suspiciously similar initial consonants were omitted. Wishing to be sure of the existence of a relationship rather than to proliferate examples, I omitted all groups unless at least three separate bases had been noted. It is interesting that some VF sequences produced more than one set of words. The VF *aeñ* /ʔaen/ for example yielded a set of words having the meaning 'division' and a set of words having the meaning 'clarity'. However, personal judgement concerning similarity of meaning is involved here and the choice of a translation may be used, even unconsciously, to persuade the writer as well as the reader. The two *aeñ* sets, for example, might easily seem to have associated meanings: 'to divide; set out (as if for analysis) separately' and 'to set out clearly'. Thus difficulty arose sometimes about the inclusion of some words in a given set. Was it right, for example, to add to the *uol* group (set 18), which carry the meaning 'choking, upset' the words *muol* /mūxəl/ 'to twist v.tr.; dysentery'? I decided that the meanings are separate, the group meaning 'heaving agitatedly' and *muol* meaning 'to turn round and round' but the decision is personal and arbitrary. I have listed, in Appendix A, 35 sets of words for consideration. The examples have for the most part the form CVF, the simplest Khmer word-form, and involve every Khmer initial consonant except /n/ and all except three of the final consonants.⁴ In order to present all my relevant material, I have added in Appendix B the groups for which I found only two examples.

With the aim of explaining the similarity of the VF sequence in these sets of words, I first tried a traditional approach and asked the question: are the CVF forms, after all, the irreducible roots or bases we always think them to be or might they be analyzable into parts? Could there be a stem or root which is not CVF but VF, even though this would mean assuming

that all consonants, except possibly /n/, may precede such stems? In support of this idea we may first note how easily a different initial consonant may be substituted in the formation of reduplicative words in Khmer, Khasi, Bahnar and Ngeq, to name just a few languages. The following are examples from Khmer:

pan' /bən/	'to pray for something	>	pan' sran' /bən-srən/	id.
maen /mɛ:n/	'actual'	>	maen daen /mɛ:n-tɛ:n/	'really'
rāy /rɪ:əy/	'scattered'	>	rāy māy /rɪ:əy-mɪ:əy/	'littered about'

In fact Mon-Khmer initial consonants and clusters generally may be said to be highly subject to change while the VF sequence tends to remain intact. It is indeed due to the stability of the VF sequence in Khmer, as I have suggested in a recent article (Jacob 1979:119), that the interpretation of unfamiliar reduplicatives, for example in poetry, is possible at all. It sometimes happens that one VF sequence is the only recognizable part of the word, even to a Cambodian. Thus the word *krañev krañoeñ* /krəpɛv-krañəp/ is to be understood by looking for another word with final *oeñ*. This is found in the word *kamñoeñ* /kəmɲəp/ 'threatening'. Definitions of words in the Cambodian Dictionary, *Vacanānukram khmaer*, also indicate the meaningfulness of the VF sequence. The definition, for example, of *jaek* /crɛ:k/ 'to infiltrate, enter through curtains, creepers, etc.' is given by using three others words with VF *aek*: *jaek vaek*; *ñæk cūl* /cɛ:k vɛ:k; ɲɛ:k co:l/ 'to part (some obstruction) and make a way through; to put aside (so as to) enter'. It seemed reasonable to conclude, therefore, that definite meaning may be attached to the VF sequence. However, though it has not, I think been stated categorically by anyone, the Mon-Khmer root is generally held to have the form CVF as its minimum and, in any case, even if the VF sequence were the root, the same difficulty would arise as Jenner's suggestion would entail, that of presupposing that almost every Khmer initial consonant is a prefix. It seemed best therefore, not to think of the VF sequences as roots but simply to bear in mind that this part of the word did seem to have the potentiality of carrying the meaning when other parts of the word underwent change.

I then took another line of enquiry, also based on established methods of grammatical analysis. Was it possible that the similarity of vowel was accidental in such groups of words and that the final consonant was a suffix? There is some slight evidence for suffixation in Khmer, as is well known, and as the following examples suggest:

lā /li:ə/	'to part company'	lāt /li:ət/	'to open out v.tr.'
ghlā /khlɪ:ə/	'to be separated'	ghlāt /khlɪ:ət/	id.
roe /rɪ:z/	'to sift through'	roes /rɪ:ʰ/	'to choose'
loe /lɪ:z/	'above'	loek /lɪ:k/	'to raise'
		loēn /laəŋ/	'to rise, climb'
		loes /lɪ:ʰ/	'over and above, exceeding'

Henderson found in Khasi some examples of final consonant variation associated with meaning (1976a:508-9). The Khmer lexicon provides many examples of words having final /p/ and the meaning 'pressing upon' (See A, sets 1, 2, 25 and 34); having final /m/ and the meaning 'closure' (see A, sets 14 and 35) or having final /k/ and the meaning 'breaking away' (see A, sets 4 and 28). However there is also a connection in meaning between words having homorganic plosive and nasal final consonants, for example between /p/ and /m/ (see A, sets 34 and 35 where all examples have a meaning associated with 'encirclement') and between /k/ and /ŋ/ (see A, sets 28 and 29 where the meaning of 'separation' is involved). I had also noticed some pairs of words with similar meaning of which one had a plosive final consonant and the other the homorganic nasal consonant, e.g.:

ṭak /dɔ:k/	'to pull out, uproot'	ṭaŋ /dɔ:ŋ/	'to draw water'
yok /yò:k/	'to sway'	yoŋ /yò:m/	'to haul up on a rope'
naep /nê:p/	'next to'	ṣaem /sê:m/	'to add on top'
ap /ʔɔ:p/	'to fix a splint'	am /ʔɔ:m/	'to flank'

All this suggested not the suffix which bears grammatical meaning but an association between the actual sound or point of articulation of the final consonant and the meaning. And, in any case, the sets involve ten final consonants, and one really cannot postulate so many suffixes with so few examples of each, quite apart from the question: to what would these consonants be suffixed?

A little research into the Khmer lexicon soon revealed that vowel nuclei too may be associated with meaning. The following examples illustrate that *o* /ao/ may be associated with the idea of 'curving', *ā* /a: ~ i:ə/ with that of 'spreading' and *oe* /aə ~ ɤ:/ with that of 'being or feeling above others':

koŋ /kaon/	'bent'	poŋ /paon/	'inflated'
on /ʔaon/	'to bow'	op /ʔaop/	'to hold with arms around'
cay /cary/	'to spend'	ṭāp /dɔ:p/	'to seep'
bās /pi:əh/	'throughout'	rāl /ri:əl/	'to spread'
oet /ʔaet/	'to raise one's head'	ñoep /ŋɤ:p/	id.
kantoe /kɔntaəy/	'uncaring'	khboem /khpɤ:m/	'to despise'

Thus it looked as though the explanation of the relationship between the vowel nuclei and final consonants of the individual sets was that it was due to sound symbolism, not to grammatical construction. The words in the 35 sets had not been chosen for any phonaesthetic properties they might have; they had been collected entirely because they had the same VF sequences and similar meaning. Arriving, therefore, at the conclusion that these features must be iconic, I looked eagerly to see what kind of word, plain or expressive, was involved. It was interesting to find that most of them are