SOME OBSERVATIONS ON KHMER VERBAL USAGES

This study has arisen as a result of encountering some lexicographical problems. During the preparation of some Khmer-English dictionary material, it became clear that the information provided about the usage of verbs was not always precise. The following four groups of sentences illustrate the kinds of usage about which there was a lack of clarity:

a. pêng nih pêŋ haəy 'This cup is full'.
   tûk pêŋ srae 'The water is filling the ricefield'.

b. khnom tûv phsa(r) 'I go to market'.
   vîa môk phsa(r) 'He is coming to the market'.
   vîa prənáp môk phêəh 'He is hurrying home'.

c. khnom hâl khao-yâv 'I put the clothes in the sun'.
   khao-yâv hâl thêay 'The clothes are in the sun'.

d. khnom cól knôn bôntûp 'I am going into the room'.
   tûk cól prêək 'The water goes into the river'.

The points raised by these groups are as follows:

a. Is /pêŋ/ actually to be entered in a dictionary with both fill and full as its translations, since it may in fact give rise to either voice in English translation?

b. How is the dictionary-user to know that /daə(r)/ 'to walk' and /prənáp/ 'to hurry' may not—like other verbs of motion: /tûv/ 'to go', /môk/ 'to come', and /dôl/ 'to arrive'—be followed directly by the noun expressing the destination?

c. How does one understand the grammatical association with a following noun of a verb such as /hâl/? The sentences suggest that the noun following the verb may express a direct object (/khao-yâv/) in the first sentences, a kind of locative (/thêay/) in the second.

d. What is to be done about /cól/ 'to enter'? Must it sometimes be followed by /knôn/ 'in' and sometimes not? If so, when?

In order to state the use of these verbs clearly, some instruction is required about their relationship with a following noun. Is this a part of grammar or of lexicon? If, as seems likely, it should be included in grammar, what kind of reminder about grammatical usage is to be given in a dictionary?

The pursuit of an answer to these questions has led to a re-examination of some relationships between verb and noun in Khmer. For the
expression of grammatical relationships, as Yu. Gorgoniiev showed, word-formation plays a very small part; there are some word-forms which indicate the categories to which the words are likely to belong, but the internal form takes us no further than that. The two chief means of expressing the grammatical relationships between the main, meaningful words in a sentence are word-order and the use of connectors. Both terms need amplification. By word-order is meant the order in which words occur in combination with features of junction, intonation, pause, and stress. Thus the process of attaching an attribute to a noun is carried out by placing the attribute after the noun and pronouncing the two or more words in close junction, with a potential slight rise in pitch and pause following the attribute; stress usually accompanies the pronunciation of the attribute. By connectors are meant both particles and "down-graded" verbs. The process of negating a verb, for example, is carried out by using a particle, /mûn/, /pûm/ or /kom/, before the verb.

Taking the first of these exponents of Khmer grammatical relationship, then, let us re-examine the function of word-order in its application to nouns and verbs, and especially to verbs with a following noun, since the four sets (a through d) of problem contexts given above involve sequences of verbs and nouns. It is proposed to limit the linguistic context to that of unemphatic, initiating statements consisting of one-phrase sentences. By taking several sentence-frames, it is hoped to classify different verbal usages in relation to the following noun. Some or all of these may be indicated in a lexicon.

I. Sentence frame nv, characteristically extensible by the addition of one of the particles (/nas/ 'very', /pèk/ 'too much').

1. phtëah lɔː 'The house is beautiful'.
2. viː chur: 'He is ill'.

II. Sentence-frame v, characteristically extensible by the addition of one of the particles (/nas/ 'very', /pèk/ 'too much').

3. tracèak! 'It's cool!'3

III. Sentence-frame vn.

4. dol maon 'It's time! (arrive-at + hour)'
5. rabaak tviː(r) 'The door's open (is-opened + door)'.
6. cheh phtëah 'The house is on fire (is-on-fire + house)'.

IV. Sentence-frame nvn(v)n.

7. khjom ʔaoy siwpʰyu (tɨʔu) nɛak 'I give the book to you'.

2It is assumed that there is general agreement among readers about the categories of noun and verb. My own criteria for establishing these and other categories are given in my Introduction to Cambodian, London 1968, pp. 330-332.
3This use is to be distinguished from the same pattern when it occurs as a response—for example, nɛak thː phtëah nih lɔː tɛː 'Do you think this house is nice? lɔː 'Yes (is-nice)'.

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8. lòk bôrnèn khmae(r) (tṳu) nisv 'He teaches Cambodian to the students'.
9. lòk bônhanta phloa(v) (mòk) khnom 'He showed me the way'.

V. Sentence-frame nvp-vn.4

10. khnom daa(r) tṳu phthèah 'I walk home',
11. khnom cên pîr phnum-pèn 'I am leaving Phnom-Penh'.
12. khnom niyîtay tṳu lòk núh 'I spoke to that gentleman'.
13. phthèah sông lý: contuôl 'The house is built on stilts'.
14. 'arv thvît 'ompìr sotti(r) 'The blouse is made of silk'.

VI. Sentence-form nvn.

15. mdazy lûk phka 'Mother sells flowers'.
16. 'opoûk sông phthèah 'Father builds a house'.
17. khnom tṳu phsaar(r) 'I go to market'.
18. viâ mòk phthèah 'He is coming home'.
19. viô chuô kbaî 'He has a headache (he + is-ill + head)'.
20. viô côk cûn 'He has a lame foot (he + is-lame + foot)'.

The verbal constructions defined by sentence-frames I, II and III are clear-cut. They form separate sections of grammar and are easily named, e.g. "attributive" (I), "impersonal" (III),5 and a combination of both (II). The label attributive verb would imply that the verb characteristically occurs also in the construction n, used in close junction with a noun and forming only part of a sentence, as does /thom/ 'big' in the sentence /phthèah thom nih lôk nas/ 'This big house is very nice'. The term impersonal does not necessarily exclude the possibility of a personal use as well; both would be noted in a lexicographical description.

Sentence-frame IV classifies verbs expressing the idea of doing something for someone and as such also forms a clear section of grammar. The use could be indicated somehow in a dictionary even if only by some such formula as +n(v)n. The fact that the second verb is not always present will be referred to later.

In each of the verb-patterns shown in sentence-frames V and VI, however, more than one grammatical process (from a Western grammatical point of view) is represented. Thus verbs occurring in the same sentence-pattern, V, pronounced with the same intonation-pattern, produce in translation both an intransitive active verb (sentences 10 to 12) and a transitive verb in the passive voice (sentences 13 and 14). The understanding of such sentences as 13 and 14 depends in fact on meaning at the semantic level. It is precisely because the house cannot build and the blouse cannot make that the word-order can stand. The sentences must be taken as 'The house, (someone) built on stilts' and 'The blouse, (someone)

4p = particle. The v which is alternative to p is a verb of motion.
5See F. Martini, "Tournures impersonnelles em cambodgien et en viêtînamièn," in BSLF, 1959, p.40, where the interpretation of such sentences as these as impersonal uses is preferred to the traditional interpretation of them as examples of inverted subject.
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made of silk'. It is not of interest to know about the agent, which is therefore not mentioned. I think that from the Cambodian grammatical angle the two types of sentences are the same and should be discussed together. Again a formula could make the use in a dictionary: + p ~ vn.

The sentences given as examples of sentence-frame VI represent, from a notional viewpoint, three kinds of statement: 15 and 16 are examples of subject + verb + object, 17 and 18 of subject + verb + destination, and 19 and 20 of subject + verb + sphere of action. There is no doubt about the importance of the word-order nvn in connection with the expression of the relationship actor + action + object of action. If one wishes to know who hit whom, the answer is found by reference to the word-order: A hit B. However, I think we Westerners tend to cling to this apparently firm rock, feeling deprived of many other footholds to clarify such as exponents of number, person and tense. We consequently dismiss as exceptional the other two meanings of the word-order nvn. The meaning of destination in sentences 17 and 18 is extremely limited. Not many verbs of motion apart from /tûu/, /mûk/ and /dol/ occur in the nvn construction. The third class of meanings, however, those given in sentences 19 and 20, is of wide application, and the vn relationship there found is comparable with the vn relationship in the impersonal verb (sentences 4 to 6). In these cases the meaning is best arrived at by a dissecting method, making a preliminary separate translation of the first noun, if there is one, as 'As to X...', a separate translation of the verb as 'an action or state Y occurs', and a similar separate translation of the second noun as 'directed towards Z'. For example, /cheh phtèah/ would be dissected as 'The action of catching fire occurs, directed towards the house', while /kñnom chúr kbaal/ would be 'As to me, the state of being ill occurs, directed towards the head'. This suggests vagueness in comparison with Indo-European syntax but in fact, in a Cambodian grammatical way, the noun which follows the verb occurs in very close junction with it. Many sequences of verb + noun which occur with frequency might well be regarded as compound words, e.g. /tôtaol tian/ '(receive + gift) to take (food, drink, rest)', /thvî: kâz(r)/ (do + work) to work', /sok(h) cvt(t)/ (happy + heart) to be willing to'. The first n, on the other hand, is not so closely bound to the rest, again in a Cambodian sense.

In a slightly more emphatic speech style than the one we have been considering, it may be separated from the rest of the sentence as a complete phrase by occurring with potential rise in pitch on the last syllable and pause following it. The whole sentence is then pronounced as two phrases, e.g.

10. kñnom, das(r) tûu phtèah 'Me? I'm walking home'.
13. phtèah, sônh lî: contäal 'The house is built on stilts'.
19. vi:â, chúr kbaal 'As to him, he's got a headache'.

However, in a still more emphatic context, the noun which might be

6 Except for some metaphorical uses. For example, /rûât/ 'to run' and /coh/ 'to go down' occur with the vn construction in /rûat siklo:/ 'to run a cyclo-pousse' and /coh chmûâh/ 'to put one's name down'.

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