PRONOUN RETENTION IN KHMER AND THAI RELATIVE CLAUSES

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Abstract
The construction to be investigated here is the ‘Relative Clause’ in Khmer (Cambodian) and Thai. This study aims to consider only one aspect or one characteristic of relative clauses in both languages, namely, pronoun retention. The occurrence of resumptive pronouns, pronouns which are coreferential with head noun phrases, in relative clauses will be investigated and some of the constraints on their occurrence in the two languages will be discussed.

1. Pronoun Retention
According to Comrie (1981), pronoun retention is typologically a way to encode the role of the head noun in the embedded sentence (relative clause). The head noun remains explicitly in the embedded sentence in pronominal form. Pronoun retention is one strategy used to form relative clauses in many languages. An example of pronoun retention in non-standard English is this is the road that I know where it leads. In this example, the relative clause is that I know where it leads functions to modify the head noun phrase the road in the main clause. The resumptive pronoun it in the relative clause refers to the head noun road and it remains in the normal position of the clause subject, the grammatical relation that it encodes.

The following examples illustrate relative clauses formed by pronoun retention in Khmer and Thai.

Khmer
(1) kprorn skol kruu m-nea k [ dael koat lagrien phiesa ?agklei h]
    I know teacher one-person REL s/he teach language English
    ‘I know a teacher who teaches English.’

    The noun phrase being relativized in the above example is kruu mneak ‘a teacher’. The resumptive pronoun koat ‘s/he’ which is coreferential with the noun phrase kruu mneak occurs in the normal position of the subject in the relative clause, that is, preceding the main verb lagrien ‘teach’(the basic word order in Khmer is S-V-O).

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Thai

(2) ค้น รูคัก ครู [ที่รู้ คำว สื่อน ภาษาอังกฤษ]
  I know teacher REL s/he teach language English
  ‘I know a teacher who teaches English.’

The pronoun คำว ‘s/he’ in the relative clause above is coreferential with the
head noun ครู ‘teacher’ in the main clause. The grammatical role of that pronoun is
subject of the embedded clause and the pronoun occurs in the subject position, that is,
precedes the verb สื่อน ‘teach’ (the basic word order in Thai is also S-V-O).

With the pronoun retention strategy, it is found that it allows more NPs to be
relativized. Some languages like Basque don’t normally allow relativization on Genitive
NPs. But with this strategy, Genitive NPs are relativizable. (Keenan 1985).

2.  Relative Clauses in Khmer and Thai

2.1  Relative Clauses in Khmer

Relative clauses in Khmer are marked by the word ดาเอล, the general marker for
linking subordinate clauses with head nouns (Comrie & Horie 1995). Typologically,
relative clauses in this language are of the postnominal type, that is, relative clauses
occur following head NPs, as in (3).

(3) ค่ำครอง ที่เหาฮะส่าแลก ฮะแวด ที่มอทส์ทวย หม่ำย [ดาเอล ริยูทูก ทำ]
  crow fly toward river one REL dry ‘The crow flies to a river which is dry.’ [written text]

In (3), the relative clause which modifies the head NP ที่มอทส์ทวย หม่ำย ‘a
river’ is ดาเอล ริยูทูก ทำ ‘which is dry’. The marker ดาเอล occurs clause-initially and the
relative clause follows the head NP.

Besides the pronoun retention strategy, relative clauses in Khmer can be formed
by the gap strategy, the least explicit way of encoding the role of the head NP in
embedded clauses. Instead of having a personal pronoun remaining in the relative
clause, there is a missing NP which is coreferential with the head noun. In example (3)
above, from the basic word order S-V-O and from the argument structure of the main
verb in the embedded clause, there is a missing argument in the relative clause ดาเอล
ริยูทูก ทำ ‘which is dry’, that is, the subject NP of the clause. Since the missing noun
phrase in the relative clause formed by the gap strategy is coreferential with the head
NP, the missing subject argument in the example (3) can be retrievable as ที่มอทส์ทวย
หม่ำย ‘a river’.

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2 Although relative clauses in Khmer and Thai allow the omission of the relative clause markers,
the present study includes only relative clauses with the overt markers.
Both written and spoken data were collected in the two languages. Examples from written
texts are marked as [written text], all other examples are elicited spoken examples. There are
around 150 relative clauses collected in each language.
Restrictive and non-restrictive types are not distinguished in the study.
3 The written data were collected from newspapers, journals, and short stories. The spoken data
were elicited from two native Khmer informants in Thailand, one male graduate student and
one female graduate student at Chulalongkorn University)
Concerning the NP positions that can be relativized in Khmer, subjects, direct objects, indirect objects and possessors can all be relativized. Subjects and indirect objects can be relativized by using either the gap strategy or pronoun retention. Direct objects are relativized only by the gap strategy whereas possessive NPs can be relativized only by pronoun retention. The examples (4) – (7) will illustrate the relativization of those NP positions.

(4) ត្រូវេជ្រូវការឈ្នះ បារីេហ ចមារ [ដារ ខោ មិន] តែវីលេង
day one fox invite cat REL be friend visit
ស្លឹក កាលឈ្នះ រុបីេអ្ួួ គ្រួសា
village birth belong to him
‘One day, the fox invites a cat which is his friend to visit his hometown.’
[written text]

The subject NP ចមារ ‘cat’ is relativized and leaves a gap in the subject position of the relative clause.

(5) ក់ន់ ស្តេង់ ក់អ័ង ពី កាលេ ឈ្នះ មិន ឈ្នះ ចម ហាទិេះ [ដារ ណាម]
daughter their two CLF not know do exercise REL person
គឺេ ដារ ៖ អេ ឈ្នះ កាលេ ទី ដារ មិន ផុត
teacher assign work at house
‘Their two daughters don’t know how to do the exercise which the teacher assigns to be done at home.’
[written text]

The direct object NP ចាហជញែង ‘exercise’ is relativized in the above example and leaves a gap in the direct object position, that is, after the verb ឈ្នះ កាលេ ‘work’.

(6) កែល់ [ដារ ក្រីេអ្ួួ ផុត ឈ្នះ ផុត ណាម] ឆាន់ ឆាន់ ទី មិន ណាម ណាម
child REL I give money age five year
‘The child to whom I gave some money is five years old.’

The indirect object កែល់ ‘child’ is relativized and leaves a gap in the clause-final position of the relative clause ដារ ក្រីេអ្ួួ ផុត ឈ្នះ ណាម.

(7) ការ់ ឈ្នះ ចាហជញែង វី បន បាល ជឺ ការ់ នារី រុបីេអ្ួួ ក់អ័ង
chair REL leg it PAST break be chair of him
‘The chair the leg of which leg is broken is his chair.’

The possessor ការ់ ‘chair’ is relativized. The personal pronoun វី ‘it’ occurs in the relative clause to encode the possessive role of the head noun ការ់ ‘chair’.
2.2 Relative Clauses in Thai

Unlike relative clauses in Khmer, relative clauses in Thai can be introduced by one of the three markers, namely, ที่, ซึ่ง, and ที่ฉัน. The ที่ marker is the most frequent and neutral choice whereas ซึ่ง is used in more literary and formal style. ที่ and ซึ่ง are mostly used interchangeably. The ที่ฉัน marker is quite archaic. It is still used in present day Thai as the least frequent choice.

Relative clauses in Thai are also typologically of the postnominal type and can be formed by the two strategies, the gap strategy and the pronoun retention strategy. Unlike Khmer, subjects, objects (direct and indirect objects), and possessors can be relativized by either the gap strategy or pronoun retention. However, the gap strategy is more frequently used in both written and spoken Thai. The examples (8) – (11) will illustrate the relativization of all possible NPs.

(8) ที่ฉันเห็น ที่ดิน ที่จะเกิดด้านตะวันออก ที่ชายทะเล

you see land REL adjoin with side west of us Q

‘Do you see the land which is next to our west side?’ [written text]

The subject NP ที่ดิน ‘land’ is relativized. The gap in the subject position, preceding the verb ที่, in the embedded clause is coreferential with that NP.

(9) พวกก้าวค่ำ พวกม่าย พวกฟินที่บริเวณ สวน ลุมพินี ที่ซึ่งชาย

they still not return area around garden Lumpini REL use

เท่าที่รั้ว

be office temporary

‘They haven’t returned the area around the Lumpini Garden which is used as the temporary office.’ [written text]

The direct object ฟินที่บริเวณ สวน ลุมพินี ‘the area around the Lumpini Garden’ is relativized and then leaves a gap in the direct object position in the relative clause, that is, after the verb ชาย ‘use’.

(10) พ่อ [ที่ พ่อที่ม่ญ์ ค่อย ที่น่าจะเป็น] หยาบ ที่พอที่凡本网มา

child REL parents give money easily often PASS spoil

‘The child to whom the parents easily give money is often spoiled.’

The indirect object ที่ ‘child’ is relativized and then leaves the gap after the direct object พอ ‘money’ in the relative clause.

(11) พ่อ [ที่ พ่อที่น้ํา พอ ป่วย]

I know man REL wife sick

‘I know the man whose wife is sick.’

The written data were collected from the online Thai corpus (newspapers, magazines, short stories, etc.) via the program Thai Concordance Online by the Department of Linguistics, Chulalongkorn University. URL: http://www.arts.chula.ac.th/~ling/ThaiConc

The spoken Thai data used in this study were elicited in the workshop on relative clauses in Thai at Chulalongkorn University, May 2003.