ASPECTS OF INTER-CLAUSAL
RELATIONS IN KHMU

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0. *Introduction*

This paper attempts to investigate certain mechanisms involved in the
manifestation of inter-clausal relations in Khmu,[1] and will discuss the
Khmu that is spoken in Huoyen village, Chiengkhong district, Chiengrai
province, Thailand. This variety is also found widely spoken in the Park
Bang area of northern Laos.

Khmu is a Mon-Khmer language spoken by a group of hill tribesmen
found primarily in northern Laos, northern Thailand—especially the area
along the Thai–Lao border—northern Vietnam and southern China.
They are believed to have previously occupied a larger area than at
present, their arrival to this area predating that of Thai speakers and other
more recent hill tribes such as Miao, Yao, Lisu, Karen, and others.

A. *General syntactic structure*[2]

Words in Khmu are mainly monosyllabic, though disyllabic words are
still numerous. It is possible that Khmu once had a very complex system
of affixation even though nowadays many affixes are found only in
fossilised form and have often lost their meanings.

In text materials, although most of the items can obviously be defined
as belonging to the natural word classes such as noun, verb, adjective,
adverb, preposition, demonstrative, etc., there are a number of 'syntactic'
particles that do not seem to have meaning by themselves but do have
certain functional meanings. They have a possible word shape, Cv(C), but
they are never stressed. A number of them occur before the main verb.
Many seem to be semantically related to the verb morpheme while in
other cases they are related to the whole clause or even to a higher level.
Without a knowledge of functional meanings of the particles (PT) it is
almost impossible to understand the subtlety of the expressions and thus
to follow a conversation, story, or talk thoroughly, even though the
meanings of all the major words are clearly known. In order to give a
clearer view of this curious syntactic feature which may lead to the
understanding of inter-clausal syntax in Khmu, an overview will be given
here, including a discussion of the verb phrase.

The normal word order in Khmu is SVO. In case of emphasis the OSV order is very common. Examples of normal clause patterns are:

Intransitive clause
- *kɔ́:n   jam*[3]
child   cry
'The child is crying.'

Transitive clause
- *nɔ: pə?   mah*
they   eat   rice
'They are having a meal.'

Bi-transitive clause
- *?o?   ?úan   ma? joŋ   te?   kmú:l*
I   give   parents   take   money
'I gave my parents some money.'

Semi-transitive clause
- *ja?   jat   ta   ka:ŋ*
grandmother   stay   at   home
'My grandmother is at home.'

Equative clause
?o?   məh   kʰrú:
I   am   teacher
'I am a teacher.'

Existive clause
ta   ka:ŋ   ?ah   h?iər,   ?ah   sɔ́?,   ?ah   síəŋ
at   home   have   hen,   have dog,   have pig
'There are hens, dogs and pigs at home.'

Quotative clause
joŋ   pra:k   law jɔh lə? lə?
father   say before   say go well well
leaving
'My father wished them a safe trip.'

Modifiers (Mod.) in a noun phrase normally follow the head noun (HN).

HN + Mod.

sɔ́?   híəŋ   pa:r (to:)   kam   nám kəna:j
dog black two (class.)* which big   that
'those two big black dogs'

However, it is noticeable that the reversed orders of clause pattern, (O)VS, and of noun phrase, Mod. + HN, have also been found in text materials.

(1) *lam   mah lam   má:r*
delicious   rice delicious   salt
'Have a good life.'

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3. ´ refers to the clear tense register of this Khmu variety, whereas the breathy lax register is unmarked.
* = classifier (Ed.).

(2) *puh kmá?*
    fall rain (n.)
    'It is raining.'

The Khmu verb phrase normally consists of one or more main verbs (MV) and their modifiers (auxiliaries and preverbal adverbs) occurring mainly in the pre-verbal positions. The pre-verbal modifiers (preV) can be classified into 5 categories according to their positional occurrences away from the main verb.

    preV 5   preV 4   preV 3   preV 2   preV 1   MV

PreV 1 indicates state of existence like /piən/ 'able', /jat/ 'to have been happening, still', /hó:c/ 'already', /cú?/ 'want to', /?ɨk/ 'not want to', /kɔ:j/ 'slowly, gradually', /lak/ 'completely', /pʰɔ́:n/ 'never,' etc.

PreV 2 indicates negative meaning like /pé/ 'not', /plɔ́?/ 'not any more'.

PreV 3 indicates intention, determination and future action like /ce/ 'will'.

PreV 4 indicates tense and aspect like /há/ 'already (past action)', /nɔ́:ŋ/ 'still, will'.

Some of the pre-verbals of category 1 and category 2 like /piən/, /hó:c/, /lak/, and /plɔ́?/ may sometimes be shifted to the post-verbal position.

Examples of verb phrases containing preV 1, 2, 3, and 4 functioning in the clause are

    na: pʰɔ́:n ?ɨək   pu:c
         1   MV
    she never drink wine
    'She has never drunk wine.'

(3) *snǎ:*   *há*   *rɔ:t*
               4   MV
    they (two) already arrive
    'They have come.'

(4) *?o? pé piən jɔh ta jú?*
       2 1 MV
    I not able go to forest
    'I did not have a chance to go to the forest.'

(5) *?o? nɔ́:ŋ ce jɔh mɔ:t kmú:l ká:l*
       4   3   MV
    I still will go take money before
    'I still have to go to take the money first.'

(6) *nɔ: há   ce plɔ́?   piən ?ə́h ja:ŋ ki:*
        4   3 2   1 MV
    they already will not any more able do   like this
    'They will not be able to act like this any more.'

PreV 5 indicates modality such as the actor's volition, obligation, necessity or ability in doing something. Since it involves a relationship between a causer which may be stated or unstated and the actor and the action it is more like a clause rank notion than a phrase one. In Khmu it contributes a good deal to the inter-clausal relationship. This category includes /taŋ/, /le/, /cen/, mák/, /kaj/ and /tʰa/.[4] These will be dealt with in detail in the next section. Examples of Khmu utterances with various pre-verbal particles including the category 5 pre-verbals[5] are

(1) *prap lɔh las   ʔìʔ mák pé pìən jɔh*
                          5 2 1 MV
dress body quickly we afraid not able go
'Dress quickly otherwise we will not be able to go.'

(2) *náj   ʔoʔ law ce pé jɔh ʔoʔ taŋ   ha   ce*
                          3 2 MV   5   4   3
a moment ago I say will not go I certainly already will
pé jɔh jɛʔ jɔh ʔoʔ le   jɔh
2 MV   MV   5   MV
not go you go I therefore go
'I said that I would not go so I should not go. But you will go so I will too.'

(3) *pɔ: jɔh ká:l   ʔìʔ taŋ   ce nɔ́:ŋ jɔh*
                          5   3   4 MV
you go before I certainly will still go
'You go first and I will follow you.'

It should be noted here that the preV 3 /ce/ which indicates the future and the speaker's intention and determination can also function at the inter-clausal level (as will be seen in the next section) whereas the preV 5 /taŋ/ which also indicates the speaker's determination or obligation (though in a higher degree) can be manifested at the clause level.

B. *Inter-clausal Relations*
In the context of speech, a semantic sentence represents a minimum speech act consisting of one or more predications (semantic clauses). A structural sentence is therefore composed of at least one main independent clause with or without subordinate clauses and occurs with a distinct illocutionary force (mood) which may be a statement, question or command. In Khmu, two clauses or series of clauses whose meanings are related are structurally joined by various devices. The formal linguistic devices used may be conjunctions, pre-verbal particles, and reversed word

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4. Since these pre-verbal particles do not have any content meaning, the explanation here is presented without giving the meaning of each item. However, in the following examples the approximate meaning of each item has been attempted.
5. The category 4 pre-verbals can appear after the category 3 in certain cases.
   It is noticeable that consciously and off context the co-occurrence between the category 4 pre-verbals /há/ and /nɔ́:ŋ/ and the category 3 pre-verbal /ce/ is considered as 'possible' but 'not quite right'. The /ce/ seems to be the main item.