

ADJECTIVES OR STATIVE VERBS IN MODERN KHMER

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1. Introduction

In Modern Khmer, the sequences of these types of words: *kméey lqaa* and *siiəwphəw thlaj* can be translated into English as “the child is good” or “the good child”, and “the book is expensive” or “the expensive book”. Thus the words *lqaa* “good”, and *thlaj* “expensive” are interpreted as adjectives or verbs.

First, in this paper, I will briefly define the terms adjective, verb, and compound words according to lexicase dependency grammar. Second, I will summarize the previous studies by Jacob, Ehrman, and Huffman. Third, I will illustrate the problem on sequence of these type of words. Fourth, syntactically, I would like to propose and demonstrate that the words in questions or the ‘adjective-like’ words are: (1) not adjectives; but are stative verbs (subject-predicate); (2) not part of a compound noun; but are stative verbal relative clauses (part of NP) through various strategies of proof.

Evidence that they are stative verbs is based on: (a) synchronic, and diachronic analyses, (b) negation test, and (c) a strong support from the language typology.

2. Definition of adjective, verb and compound word

In lexicase dependency grammar, Starosta (1988:51) defines adjective, verb and compound word as follows: (1) an adjective as the head of an adjective phrase, an endocentric non-predicational attribute of a noun; (2) a verb, as the lexical head of an endocentric clause, bears [+prdc] = predicate as its lexical feature, and doesn’t allow adjective [+Adj] or determiner [+Det] attributes (but [+prdc] Ns may); (3) and a compound word as a single word composed of two or more free forms.

3. Previous studies

Jacob’s (1968:113) analysis does not have ‘adjective’ among Khmer word-classes. Her word classification is mostly based on word order and distribution. She refers to words which translate as English adjectives as ‘attributive verbs’. By her definition, an ‘attributive verb’ may follow a noun in close junction. This implies that the head noun and the ‘attributive verb’ form a constituent. Jacob said the English sequence verbs ‘to be’ plus adjectives, e.g. “is small”, must be translated into Cambodian by verbs. She noted that such verbs are not usually followed by a noun and are often followed immediately by the ‘adverbial particles’, *nah* ‘very’ and *péek* ‘too much’¹.

In Ehrman's (1972:59) *Grammatical Sketch*, 'adjectives' are 'stative verbs'. She said that: "in English, adjectives are classed as nominal, however, in Cambodian they are verbs. They occur in the same syntactic positions as action verbs".

In Huffman's (1986:164) prediatives section, "an adjective verb is any predicative which may precede the intensifying adjective *nah* ² 'very'." Adjectival verbs never occur in construction with a substantive object. Besides occurring as prediatives, adjectival verbs also occur as attributes in attributive constructions with both noun and verb heads³. Thus Huffman is using the total range of occurrences to define a word class, so he needs two distinct classes here.

In a lexicase grammar, by contrast, each grammatical environment defines a word class, so that a form that appears in two different environments is analyzed as two homophonous words.

4. The Problem of sequences of these types of words

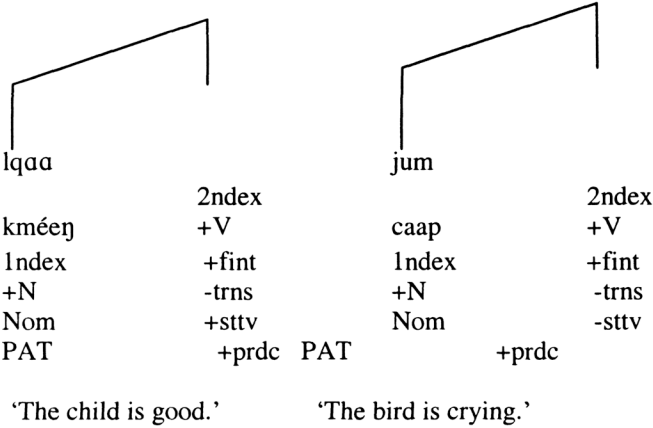
Now let us examine these four examples in Modern Khmer:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. kmèej lqaa
child be good
'the child is good'
'the good child' | 2. síəwphəw thlaj
book be expensive
'the book is expensive'
'the expensive book' |
| 3. ckeə khcil
dog be lazy
'the dog is lazy'
'the lazy dog' | 4. caap jum
bird cry
'the bird is crying'
'the crying bird' |

Jacob (1968: 59) called the first group of words (in examples 1-3) *lqaa* "be good", *thlaj* "be expensive", and *khcil* "be lazy" 'attributive verbs', and the second group of words, such as *jum* "to cry" (in example 4), 'operative verbs'.

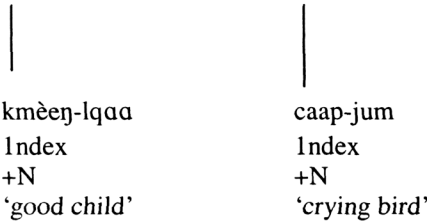
Ehrman (1972: 54-62) labeled the first group 'stative verbs' and the second group 'active verbs'. Huffman (1986: 164-166) identified the first group as 'adjectival verbs' and the second group as 'intransitive verbs'. I, however, start by saying that, given this kind of sequence of word structures, one can speculate that there are two major types of constructions: (1) subject-predicate, where the word in question functions as the main verb and has the noun N as its nominative subject (Figure 1a), and (2) noun phrase NP. Within this NP, we have three interpretations: (a) the word in question forms a compound noun with the first noun (Figure 1b); (b) the word in question is analyzed as an adjective and is the dependent attribute of the regent noun (Figure 1c); (c) the word in question is a verb, and functions as the head of a verbal relative clause (Figure 1d).

Figure 1a:



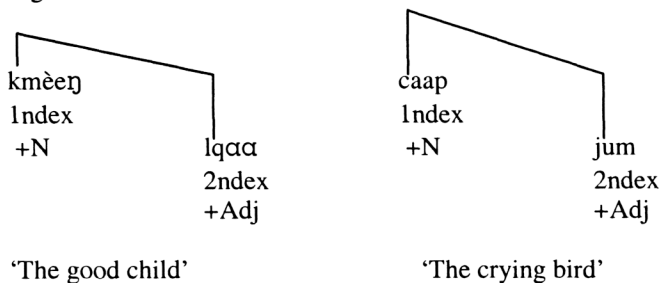
In examples (1-4), the nouns *kmèeη* ‘child’, *síəwphḗw* ‘book’, *ckεε* ‘dog’, and *caap* ‘bird’ are the dependent nominative subjects of the predicate verbs *lqaa* ‘be good’, *thlaj* ‘be expensive’, *khcil* ‘be lazy’ and *jum* ‘to cry’ (see figure 1a), respectively. The verbs *lqaa*, *thlaj*, and *khcil* are intransitive stative verbs and *jum* is an instructive non-stative verb.

Figure 1b:



However , if the independent lexical items *kmèeη*, *lqaa*, *síəwphḗw*, *thlaj*, *ckεε*, *khcil*, *caap*, and *jum* are bound together thus, they form new compound words *kmèeη-lqaa*, *síəwphḗw-thlai*, *ckεε-khcil*, and *caap-jum* as illustrated in figure 1b.

Figure 1c:



In figure 1c, suppose that the words *lqaa*, *thlaj*, *khcil*, and *jum* are adjectives and function as the dependent attributes of the regent nouns *kmèeŋ*, *sīəwphəw*, *ckεε*, and *caap*, respectively.

Figure 1d:

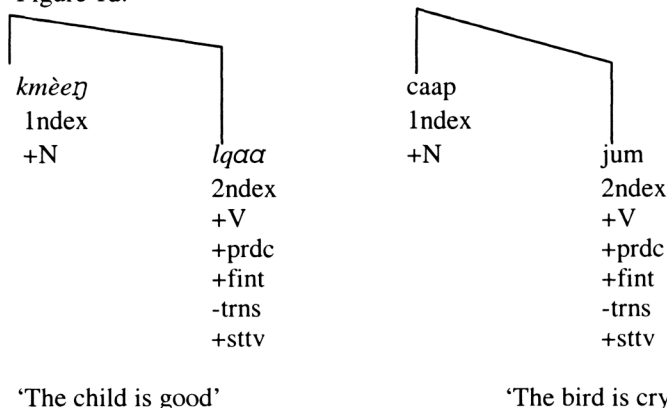


Figure 1d shows that the words *lqaa* 'be good', *thlaj* 'be expensive', *khcil* 'be lazy' are intransitive stative verbs, and *jum* 'to cry' is an intransitive non-stative verb. They function as the heads of the intransitive stative and non-stative verbal relative clauses⁴, and as dependent attributes of the regent nouns 'child', *sīəwphəw* 'book', *ckεε* 'dog', and *caap* 'bird', respectively.

5. Proposed Solutions

In my analysis, based on these sequences of words, I propose that the words in question or the 'adjective-like' words *lqaa* 'be good', *thlaj* 'be expensive', and *khcil* 'be lazy', in examples 1-3 are: (1) not adjectives; but (2) intransitive stative and non-stative verbs (predicates taking subjects); (3) are not part of a compound noun; and (4) are stative verbal relative clauses