LOGICAL-SEMANTIC APPROACHES TO KHMER GRAMMAR: THE CATEGORY OF NUMBERS

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Logical-semantic analysis has contributed a lot to our better understanding of language categories and function. In fact, many of the categories it reveals as pertaining to the logical-semantic level of representation of utterances in discourse can be found as surface phenomena in South-East languages. Although they are often referred to as languages lacking many of the grammatical categories found outside the so-called isolating type, they still possess a grammar which is no less rich in categories but they are often of a logical-semantic nature.

In Khmer, in many languages outside the isolating type, not all NPs with a common noun in head position are marked for number in sentences in discourse. That is generally accepted to be a good reason to consider that there is no such grammatical category in Khmer. The non-obligatory character of marking for number in languages like Khmer has always been explained in terms of redundancy, that is whenever a number is expressed otherwise or is understood from the situation, number markers become non-obligatory. There are no strict rules to follow, just common sense. That is one of the reasons why languages like Khmer are often called «exotic» in handbooks of linguistics and linguistic typology (see for instance [Croft 1993: xi]), which implies that in «normal» languages all NPs should be marked for a number. But if we come to look upon the grammar of a language as a means of organizing cognitive and communicative content [Hopper, Traugott 1994: 17] we often find that grammars of the traditionally studied languages are no less if not even more «peculiar» and «exotic» in the way they organize content, and their grammatical categories are often misleading when we come to analyze the logical structure of utterances.

A «does not exist» verdict in respect to the grammatical category of number in languages like Khmer says little or nothing about the real complexity and sophisticated nature of the grammar fragment in question; even worse, it leaves unnoticed some universal aspects which might have contributed to our better understanding of how a language functions.

The examination of a number expressions in Khmer, i.e. the expressions muay [\(CLF\)] - used for singular, and muay cumnuen, tênh laay etc. - used for plural, shows that the rules of their usage / non-usage are no less obligatory than the rules of using number markers in traditional languages where number is grammaticalized, though they are formulated in different terms. In Khmer it is the logical-semantic and functional type of the description (the notion introduced by B.Russel in respect to a common noun or an NP with a common noun in head position) that determines the rules of marking for number.

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The number expressions are obligatory in introductory descriptions - referential NPs, introducing a specific object or objects into the discourse. So the grammatical function of number expressions is more like that of a determiner, and in fact in introductory NPs number expressions are co-functional with other types of determiners or determining expressoins: when the latter are present, the number expressions are not used. Consider the following examples where introductory NPs are marked for number, in (1) and (3) plurality is marked by reduplication of the modifier:

(1) mʊɛy srʊbɔk sɔu sɪŋɛ comriɛŋ lɔvɛy lɔvɛy
one moment sound sound singing faint faint
rɔsaat mɔɔk pah saat busaat yuvɛʔɔn
float come collide ear sense young man
‘For a single moment faint sounds of singing reached his ears’

(2) yuvɛʔɔn chɔc aep nʊŋ pʰtɛŋ thʊmə muŋ
young man stand touch COMIT CLF stone SG
sʊmtʊŋ rɔɔk mɔːl mcah comriɛŋ
peer look for; DIR look owner song
‘The young man stood touching a stone, trying to see who was the person singing’

(3) yuvɛʔɔn boŋtʊŋ domnaɛ taam ksaɛ tuŋ
young man continue moving along rope water
kruommluŋ rʊkha thʊm thʊm
under shade tree big big
‘The young man continued his way along the river under the shade of big trees’

In co-referential identifying descriptions - that is NPs which are the second and the following nominations of the same object or objects in the discourse and which are co-referential with the corresponding introductory NPs, number expressions become zero anaphoric. The rule ordering this type of anaphora is motivated by the function of identifying NPs: their purpose is not to repeat all the meaningful components of the preceding nomination but to provide reference to the same object or objects by means of co-reference. This way the task of discourse binding is being fulfilled. The mechanism of semantic anaphora becomes very important in establishing co-reference, and this is actually the reason why identifying NPs is often a sort of semantic reduction of the preceding nomination, and pronouns used anaphorically are not the only means of that semantic reduction.

Number expressions can be used but are not obligatory with another functional type of identifying descriptions: relational identifying descriptions - that is NPs which are the first nomination of object or objects whose identification is possible because they stand in some sort of specific relation to the object already introduced into the discourse. Consider the following example where the introductory NP₂ is marked for, while the identifying NP₄ (co-referential with NP₁) and NP₅ (co-referential with NP₂) are left unmarked. The identifying NP₁ is the first nomination of objects standing in the
"part - whole" relation to an object already introduced into the discourse and therefore it is non-obligatorily marked for number:

(4) viə thmec phneek təŋ suŋ khaŋ srap tae

3SG close eye MDF both sides suddenly

rumpic nuh viə khəŋ məən khvay muəv

moment that 3SG see chicken roast SG

nuə khnəy caaŋ viə kəv baek phneek yaŋ

be; at in plate 3SG LNK open eye MDF

rəhəh məən khvay kuə vənɪəh baat

quick chicken roast LNK disappear disappear; REZ tuə go; away

'He closed his eyes (NP₁) and suddenly saw a roast chicken (NP₂) on a plate (NP₃). He opened his eyes (NP₄) - the chicken (NP₃) dissapeared'

**Predicative descriptions** - that is NPs with a common noun in head position used predicatively, and **non-referential descriptions** - NPs that do not introduce a specific object or objects, are generally not marked for number in Khmer. Consider the following examples: in (5) the introductory NP₁ is marked for number, the non-referential NP₂ and NP₄ are not marked for number, NP₃ is a "part-whole" identifying description and therefore is not obligatorily marked for number; in (6) the predicative NP₁ is not marked for number:

(5) viə khəŋ saət lʔwut muəv dael prəhfak prəhæl

3SG see creature little SG REL alike

nuə saət kənlaat bəntoc prntə viə

with creature cockroach a little but 3SG

məən kbaəl douc kəndoɔp

have head like grasshopper

'He saw a creature (NP₁) a little bit like a cockroach (NP₂), but with a head (NP₃) like that of a grasshopper (NP₄)'

(6) məəl pii cʊŋəŋ khəŋ hæk dooc ciə

look from distance see like COP

moəha kəmpəŋ khvəw

huge wall blue

'From a distance (it) looked like a huge blue wall (NP₁)'

Logical-semantic factors are not the only ones which can determine the functional type of an NP. There are pragmatic factors which must be taken into account: the speaker's attitude and the purpose of communication can influence "participant / non-participant" attribution of a particular NP. Pragmatic factors are often important with instrument and locative NPs. In (4) the locative NP₃ is non-participant (circumstantial), therefore non-referential and not marked for number. In (7), (8) and (9) the instrument NPs which are first nominations of a specific object are supposed to be referential
introductory descriptions and therefore should be marked for number. In fact in (7) such instrument NP are marked for number, while in (8) and (9) they are not (note that in (8) the NPs deek chuuh robh kōt and deek chuuh are not first nominations in the discourse, so they are not introductory but identifying). The explanation is that in (7) the speaker is being a little bit didactic and playing instructors with his unimaginative friend and the instrument is part of his instruction. That is why the NP labelled «participant» gets a referential status and therefore is marked for number:

(7)  khnomniyiy kaa put nih dol kaaloo aey
     1SG speak NOM true this ADR K. 2SG
    yok kumbut muay chlaak ciu ruup
    take knife SG carve COP form; CLF
    tukranu nuw lōo vkgot chōō nih
    doll LOC on log tree, wood this

‘[—What use to take this log home if I have no stove there?] —I am talking sense to you: take a knife and carve a doll of it’

(8)  kōt kow cap yok deek chuuh robh kōt
     3SG LNK begin take plane POSS 3SG
    ḥaey yok pncnaa am tuw lōo deek chuuh
    and take hammer hit go on plane

‘He took his plane and hit it with a hammer’

(9)  kōt cap bongvel vkgot oh nih bongvel haey bongvel
     3SG begin turn log wood this turn REZ turn
    tīt ḥaey riap kat vio nuay puuthaw
    more and get ready cut 3SG INSTR axe

‘He began to turn the log this way and that way and was about to cut it with an axe...’

There are situations when logical, semantic and pragmatic factors come into conflict. It is then that conflict over the strategies of marking arises. One such situation is when a predicative NP normally not marked for number includes a modifier which opens a semantic valency which actually requires a referential NP to fill it. In Khmer such predicative NPs are obligatorily marked for number. Consider the following examples:

(10)  phnum  kuulencia  rěmčiyniyęʔthaan teesacqpp  muay
    mountain K. COP place of interest tourist SG
    sthut nuw iisaan ney tii kronŋ siemrięp
    located in north-east POSS place; CLF town S.

‘The mountain Kuulen is a tourist place of interest situated north-east from Siemrięp’