

# Derivatives in Khmer compound words\*

**ORAWAN Boonyarith<sup>1</sup>**  
Silpakorn University, Thailand

## Abstract

Normally compound words in Khmer and Thai languages are formed by at least two base words. This article, however, compares some particular Thai and Khmer compound words. It is found that Thai usually creates compound words with base words whereas Khmer forms compound words with a base word and a derivative. Derivatives used to form Khmer compound words can be nominal, causative, reciprocal or intensified ones. This article aims to help Khmer learners, especially Thai students, to use Khmer compound words properly.

Derivation and compounding are two very important types of word formation in Khmer. Morphologically derived words – here called ‘derivatives’ – are formed by a base word and affixes (mostly a single affix in Khmer) whereas compound words are formed by at least two base words or free morphemes. These two types of Khmer word formation are explained in detail in many textbooks of Khmer grammar, for instance Lak Phāsā Khamēn [Principles of the Khmer Language] by Cham Thongkhamwan (1977); The Khmer Language by Gorgoniyev (1966); An Outline of Cambodian Grammar by Huffman (1967); A Lexicon of Khmer Morphology by Jenner and Pou (1980-1981); Introduction to Cambodian by Jacob (1990); La grammaire du khmer moderne by Khin Sok (2002), among others.

Thai native speakers first learning the Khmer language are fascinated by derivative words, which rarely occur in Thai, rather than by compound words,<sup>2</sup> which are very common in Thai. Although Thai grammar books mention derivation in the Thai language (Upakitsilpasarn 1988:29-35, Kamchai 2004:90-128, etc.), most examples in derivation are Khmer or Pali-Sanskrit loans. Thai native speakers themselves seem not to perceive derivation as one way to form words in their language. (Poets or writers, trying to create new

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<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor at the department of Oriental Languages, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University, Wang Tha Phra Campus.

<sup>2</sup>Uraisi Varasarin (1984) discusses in detail Khmer derivation and Khmer loan words in Thai whereas Karnchana Nacaskul (1971:294-329) compares the parallelism between Thai and Khmer compound words. All her examples are real compounds, formed by base words.

words for their work, may be the exception to this claim.) Moreover, Thai native speakers use “the derivative word” in Thai as one free word. For example, when they say the word มหาวิทยาลัย [màʔhǎ:wíttháʔja:laj] “university” จำเริญ [camrə:n] “to progress, develop, grow”, they think of them as one word rather than words formed by [màʔhǎ: + wíttháʔjaʔ + a:laj], originally from Sanskrit or เจริญ [carə:n] + an infix -am-, originally from Khmer. In contrast, Thai people have no difficulties to understand that a compound word โรงเรียน [ro:ŋrian] “school” is formed by โรงเรียน [ro:ŋ] “building” and เรียน [rian] “to study, learn.”

To classify which words are derivatives is not difficult for Thais who learn the Khmer language, however, to use them properly is not an easy matter. For instance, the verb [fùk] in Thai can be either a transitive verb or a causative verb, as shown in (1) and (2). When sentence (1) is translated into Khmer, the base form [fək] “to train” is used just in the same way as Thai uses [fùk]. This is shown in (3). However, when sentence (2) is translated to Khmer, as in (4), the causative derivative [baŋvək] “to practice”, not the transitive base form, has to be used. Thai students have to select a base word or a derivative in the right position when speaking or writing the Khmer sentences.

- 1) dèk dèk      fùk      tham      ʔa:hǎ:n  
children      practice      do      food  
“Children are practicing cooking.”
- 2) khru:      fùk      dèk dèk      tham      ʔa:hǎ:n  
teacher      practice      children      do      food  
“The teacher is teaching children to cook (the children do the cooking themselves).”
- 3) koon      kmeɛŋ      fìk      tvəə      mhoop  
small      children      train      do      food  
“Children are practicing cooking.”
- 4) look kruu      baŋvək      koon      kmeɛŋ      tvəə      mhoop  
teacher      practice      small      children      do      food  
“The teacher is practicing children to cook (the children do the cooking themselves).”

Although compound words are formed by at least two base words, it is observable in Khmer that derivatives can also be co-occurred with another base word to form compound words. In this article, Khmer compound words will be classified into 3 major types, based on types of words compounded; free or base forms and derivatives. The Khmer data will also be compared to Thai words.

### 1. base form + base form

This is the normal type of Khmer compound words. They are formed by at least two free forms: the first base word is the head word, and the second

modifier can be either a noun or a predicate<sup>3</sup>. As this type of compound words is very common in both Khmer and Thai, I will just show only two examples.

The data will have the English and Thai translation of the compound words, the glossing as well as information about the base form of each derivative. The Thai equivalences are illustrated to compare the sameness or the difference with the Khmer examples. Some discussions may be added to examples when needed.

5) អ្នកធ្វើម្ហូប “a cook” (คนทำอาหาร)

អ្នក	ធ្វើ	ម្ហូប	(Th)	คน	ทำ	อาหาร
neak	tvəə	mhoop		khon	tham	ʔa:hǎ:n
person (pt.)	do (p.)	food (n.)		person (pt.)	do (p.)	food (n.)

6) ទីស្អាត “a clean place” (ที่สะอาด)

ទី	ស្អាត	(Th)	ที่	สะอาด
tii	sʔaat		thî:	sàʔʔà:t
place (n.)	clean (p.)		place (n.)	clean (p.)

## 2. derivative + base form

In this second type of Khmer compound words, derivatives, occurring in the first position of compound words, are usually nominal derivatives. Thais don't have problems understanding or using derivatives in this position, as the head word of Thai compounds is normally a noun. If a predicate ចែក is used instead of a noun ចំណែក /camnaek/ in (7), ចែកបាយ /caek baay/ “to distribute a meal” is considered as a verb phrase, not a compound word. Thai learners understand why nominal derivatives have to be used in this position.

7) ចំណែកបាយ “a portion of meal” (ส่วนแบ่งอาหาร)

ចំណែក	បាយ	(Th.)	ส่วนแบ่ง	อาหาร
camnaek	baay		sùanbèŋ	ʔa:hǎ:n
part, portion (n.)	meal (n.)		share (n.)	meal (n.)

The noun ចំណែក /camnaek/ “part, portion” is derived from the predicate ចែក /caek/ “to divide, to distribute, to share.”

8) កង្វះដី “a shortage of land” (การขาดแคลนที่ดิน)

កង្វះ	ដី	(Th.)	การขาดแคลน	ที่ดิน
kanvah	dəy		ka:n khà:t khle:n	thî: din
shortage	land		shortage(n.)	land (n.)

<sup>3</sup>Adjectives and verbs are grouped in the class predicate as I follow the classification in the Cambodian-English Dictionary (Headley 1977). The transcription and the meaning of most Khmer words in this article is also based on Headley's Cambodian - English Dictionary. The Thai glossing is from Haas's Thai - English Dictionary (1964).

The noun កង្វះ /kaŋvəh/ “shortage” is derived from the predicate ខ្វះ /kvəh/ “to be lacking, to be short or running short of (something), less, insufficient.”

9) ដំណក់ទឹក “a drop of water” (หยดน้ำ)<sup>4</sup>

ដំណក់	ទឹក
damnak	tik
action of accumulating or making puddles (n.) water (n.)	

(Th.)	หยด	น้ำ
	jòt	ná:m
	drop (n.)	water (n.)

The noun ដំណក់ /damnak/ “action of accumulating or making puddles” is derived from the predicate ដក់ /dak/ “to make puddles, to accumulate (of liquid).”

10) ទំហំដី “a size of land” (ขนาดที่ดิน)

ទំហំ	ដី	(Th.)	ขนาด	ที่ดิน
tumhum	dəy		khà:nà:t	thí: din
size (n.)	land (n.)		size (n.)	land (n.)

The noun ទំហំ /tumhum/ “size” is derived from the predicate ធំ /thom/ “to be big, tall, vast, important.”

I cannot find other types of derivatives which can occur in this position. More data needs to be collected.

### 3. base form + derivative

The third type of Khmer compound words has a base form as the head noun and various types of derivatives as the modifier in the second position. It can be further classified as follows:

#### 3.1 base form + nominal derivative

There are many examples of compound words with nominal derivatives in the second position. The head noun អ្នក /neak/ “person, one who (used as an agentive particle to create nouns from predicates)” is normally followed by a nominal derivative to specify types of person in Khmer, as in (11) - (13).

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<sup>4</sup>The word หยด [jòt] can be classified as a noun, a classifier or a verb, meaning “a drop or to drip, drop” (Royal Institute 2003:1264). Thai would not consider หยด [jòt] in this position as a verb. I have found out that in the old version of Royal Institute’s Thai dictionary, หยด [jòt] is classified only as a verb or a classifier (Royal Institute 1982:875). The different classification of the two versions of the dictionary may be due to the fact that there is no clear cut line between nouns and classifiers in Thai.

## 11) អ្នកដំណើរ “a traveler” (คนเดินทาง)

អ្នក	ដំណើរ	(Th.)	คน	เดินทาง
neak	damnaə		khon	də:ntha:ŋ
person (pt.)	way, trip, travel (n.)		person (n.)	travel (p.)

The nominal derivative ដំណើរ /damnaə/ “way, trip, travel” is derived from the predicate ដើរ /daə/ “to walk, to go, to move.”

## 12) អ្នកជម្លៀស “a refugee” (ผู้อพยพ)

អ្នក	ជម្លៀស	(Th.)	ผู้	อพยพ
neak	cumliəh		phû:	ʔəppháʔjóp
person (pt.)	mobilization (n.)		person (n.)	to imigrate (p.)

The nominal derivative ជម្លៀស /cumliəh/ “mobilization; requisitioning confiscation” is derived from the predicate ឈ្លៀស /cliəh/ “to mobilize (due to an emergency).”

## 13) អ្នកជំងឺ “a patient” (คนไข้ คนเจ็บ คนป่วย)

អ្នក	ជំងឺ			
neak	cumŋii			
person (pt.)	disease, illness (n.)			
(Th.)	คน	ไข้	/คน	เจ็บ, ป่วย
	khon	khâj	khon	cèp, pùaj
	person (n.)	fever (n.)	person (n.)	to be sick, hurt, be in pain (p.)

The nominal derivative ជំងឺ /cumŋii/ “disease, illness” is derived from the predicate ឈឺ /chii/ “to be sick, ill, have a disease, to be hurt.”

អ្នកជំងឺ /neak cumŋii/ can be translated to Thai as either คนไข้ /khon khâj/, formed by a head noun and a noun, or คนเจ็บ /khon cèp/ คนป่วย /khon pùaj/, formed by a head noun and a predicate.

It can be seen from the Thai translation of the above examples that Thai normally uses predicates rather than nouns to modify the head noun. Khmer, in contrast, does not use predicates in this position, as shown in the following ungrammatical compound words \*អ្នកដើរ /neak daə/ \*អ្នកឈ្លៀស /neak cliəh/ \*អ្នកឈឺ /neak chii/.

More examples which have nominal derivatives in the second position are as follows:

## 14) ឡានឈ្នួល “a bus” (รถเช่า)

ឡាន	ឈ្នួល	(Th.)	รถ	เช่า
laan	cnuəl		rót	châw
car (n.)	rent (n.)		car (n.)	to rent (p.)

The nominal derivative លួល /cnuəl/ “rent, a hired hand” is derived from the predicate ជួល /cuəl/ “to rent, hire.”

15) ស្រុកកំណើត “a hometown, birthplace, native country” (บ้านเกิด)

ស្រុក	កំណើត	(Th.)	บ้าน	เกิด
srok	kamnaət		bâ:n	kə:t
country (n.)	birth, origin (n.)		country (n.)	to be born (p.)

The nominal derivative កំណើត /kamnaət/ “birth, origin” is derived from the predicate កើត /kaət/ “to be born, to be created.”

16) សិស្សកំហុច “a bad student” (นักเรียนเลว)

សិស្ស	កំហុច	(Th.)	นักเรียน	เลว
səh	kamhouc		nákrian	le:w
student(n.)	bad person (insult) (n.)		student (n.)	to be bad (p.)

The nominal derivative កំហុច /kamhouc/ “bad person (insult)” is derived from the predicate ខូច /khouc/ “bad (of behavior), vile, nasty.”

17) ប្រាក់កម្ចី “loaned money” (เงินกู้)

ប្រាក់	កម្ចី	(Th.)	เงิน	กู้
prak	kamcəy		ŋən	kû:
money (n.)	loan (n.)		money (n.)	to borrow (p.)

The nominal derivative កម្ចី /kamcəy/ “loan” is derived from the predicate ខ្ចី /kcəy/ “to borrow.”

18) គ្រែស្តែង “a litter, palanquin” (แคร่หาม)

គ្រែ	ស្តែង			
krɛɛ	snaeŋ			
bed, couch (n.)	bar used to carry a load between the shoulders of two or more persons (n.)			
(Th.)	แคร่		หาม	
	khre:		hă:m	
	litter, a bed floored with bamboo slats (n.)		to carry (p.)	

The nominal derivative ស្តែង /snaeŋ/ “bar used to carry a load between the shoulders of two or more persons” is derived from the predicate សែង /saen/ “to carry something by means of a pole supported on the shoulders of two (or more) persons.”

19) ទ័ពជំនួយ “a supporting troop” (ทัพหนุน)

ទ័ព	ជំនួយ	(Th.)	ทัพ	หนุน
toap	cumnuəy		tháp	nŭn
troop (n.)	assistance (n.)		troop	to support (p.)

The nominal derivative ជំនួយ /cumnuəy/ “assistance, aid, help” is derived from the predicate ជួយ /cuəy/ “to assist, to help, to provide help or assistance.” ជំនួយ /cumnuəy/ is literally translated to Thai as การช่วยเหลือ /ka:n chûaj luə/, however, Thai does not use the verb ช่วย /chûaj/ “to help” in this context.

- 20) ទឹកជំនន់ “inundation, flood” (น้ำท่วม)  
           ទឹក                  ជំនន់                  (Th.)      น้ำ                  ท่วม  
           tik                  cumnɔn                          ná:m                  thûam  
           water (n.)      flood (n.)                          water (n.)      to flood (p.)

The nominal derivative ជំនន់ /cumnɔn/ “flood” is derived from the predicate ជន់ /cɔn/ “to flood, to rise (of water).”

Although most of the above examples show that Khmer uses derivative in compound words, it is found that some Khmer compound words can co-occur with either a base word or a derivative. In (21.a), the compound is formed by a head noun and a derivative whereas in (21.b), the word is compounded with a head noun and a base word. The meanings of these two compound words are slightly different. The one with a derivative is more intensified than the latter one with a base word.

- 21.a) ស្រីចំណាស់ “a very old woman” (หญิงชรา)

          ស្រី                  ចំណាស់  
           srəy                  camnah  
           woman (n.) agedness, old age (n.)  
           (Th.) หญิง                  ชรา  
                   jǐŋ                  cháʔra:  
                   woman (n.) to be old, aged (p.)

- 21.b) ស្រីចាស់ “an old woman” (หญิงแก่)

          ស្រី                  ចាស់                  (Th.) หญิง                  แก่  
           srəy                  cah                  jǐŋ                  kè:  
           woman (n.) old, mature (p.) woman (n.) to be old, aged (p.)

The nominal derivative ចំណាស់ /camnah/ “agedness, old age” is derived from the predicate ចាស់ /cah/ “to be old, mature.”

The head noun ក្តី /kəy/ “loom” can also be followed by either the derivative, as in (22.a) or the base word, as in (22.b). However, the meaning of these two examples are the same. Khmer native speakers, whom I asked, said that they cannot see the difference between the examples (22.a) and (22.b).

- 22.a) ក្តីតម្បាញ “a loom” (กี่ทอผ้า)

          ក្តី                  តម្បាញ                  (Th.) ក្តី                  ทอผ้า  
           kəy                  tambaañ                  kî:  
           loom (n.) art of weaving (n.) loom (n.) to weave cloth (p.)

## 22.b) ក៏ត្បាញ “a loom” (ក៏ត្បាញ)

ក៏	ត្បាញ	(Th.)	ក៏	ត្បាញ
kəy	tbaañ		kî:	tho:phâ:
loom (n.)	weave (p.)		loom (n.)	to weave cloth (p.)

The nominal derivative ត្បាញ /tambaañ/ “art of weaving” is derived from the predicate ត្បាញ /tbaañ/ “to braid, to weave.”

These data are also found in the written language. In one of the Khmer popular magazines, ប្រជាប្រិយ /praciəprɨy/, it is observed that the writer switches between derivative and base words to form the word “loom.”

## 3.2 base noun + predicative derivative

The last type of Khmer compound words are formed by a base noun and a predicate. Derivatives in this type can be either causative, reciprocal or intensified predicates. Thai also uses predicates in this position but Thai people never distinguish if predicates in this position are transitives, causatives or reciprocals. Examples with causative predicates are illustrated in 3.2.1 whereas those with reciprocal predicates are in 3.2.2. I have found only one example of intensified predicate in my Khmer data.

## 3.2.1 base noun + causative derivative

There are quite a number of examples with causative predicates as modifiers. Some causative predicates in this section can also function as nouns. However, I classify them as predicate according to the translation.

## 23) កូនបង្កើត “a legal child, rightful child, one’s own child” (កូនបង្កើត)

កូន	បង្កើត	(Th.)	កូន	បង្កើត
koon	ban̄kaət		lû:k	thé: thé:
child (n.)	to give birth to (p.)		child (n.)	to be real (p.)

The causative predicate បង្កើត /ban̄kaət/ “to create, to produce, to give birth to” is derived from the predicate កើត /kaət/ “to be born, to be created.”

## 24) គូដណ្តឹង “a fiancée” (គូដណ្តឹង)

គូ	ដណ្តឹង	(Th.)	គូ	ដណ្តឹង
kuu	dandəŋ		khû:	mân
pair (nc.)	to ask for (esp. for a girl in marriage) (p.)		couples (n.)	to be engaged (p.)

The causative predicate ដណ្តឹង /dandəŋ/ “to ask for (especially to ask for a girl in marriage)” is derived from the predicate ដឹង /dəŋ/ “to be informed.”



## 25) ក្រុមជញ្ជូន “a transportation group” (กลุ่มขนส่ง)

ក្រុម	ជញ្ជូន	(Th.)	กลุ่ม	ขนส่ง
krom	cwǎñcuun		klùm	khǎnsòŋ
group (n.)	to move, to transport (p.)		group (n.)	to transport (p.)

The causative predicate ជញ្ជូន /cwǎñcuun/ “to move, to transport” is derived from the predicate ជូន /cuun/ “to give, to present to.”

## 26) អ្នកបំរើ “a servant” (คนใช้)

អ្នក	បំរើ	
neak	bamraə	
person (n.)	to be at someone’s service (p.)	
(Th.)	คน	ใช้
	khon	cháj
	person (n.)	to use, spend (p.)

The causative predicate បំរើ /bamraə/ “to be at someone’s service or at someone’s disposal, to serve” is derived from the predicate ប្រើ /praə/ “to order, give an order, to command.”

## 27) ទំពាំងស្លឹកឫស្សី “The bamboo shoot grows up to be bamboo. (Children reflect their parents; students reflect their teachers).” (หน่อไม้แทนไม้ไผ่)

ទំពាំង	ស្លឹក	ឫស្សី
tumpeaŋ	snaaŋ	rihsəy
bamboo shoot (n.)	to represent (p.)	bamboo (n.)
(Th.)	หน่อไม้	แทน
	nə:má:j	thə:n
	bamboo shoot (n.)	to represent (p.)
		ไม้ไผ่
		má:jphàj
		bamboo (n.)

The causative predicate ស្លឹក /snaaŋ/ “to represent” is derived from the predicate សង /saŋ/ “to return (an object), to pay back (debt), to pay for damage, to refund, to make restitution for something, to reimburse.”

## 3.2.2 base noun + reciprocal derivative

When the action is performed by at least two actors, Khmer will automatically apply reciprocal predicates. They are normally formed by derivation.

## 28) កន្លែងប្រជុំមាន់ “a place for chicken fighting” (ที่ชนไก่)

កន្លែង	ប្រជុំ	មាន់
kanlaeŋ	pracwəŋ	moan
place (n.)	to cause to confront one another and fight (p.)	chicken (n.)
(Th.)	ที่	ชน
	thî:	chon
	place (n.)	to fight (of certain animals, esp. cocks, bulls) (p.)
		ไก่
		kàj
		chicken (n.)

## 29) មាន់ប្រជល់ “fighting chicken” (កៃឆន)

មាន់	ប្រជល់		
moan	pracwəl		
chicken (n.)	to cause to confront one another and fight (p.)		
(Th.)	កៃ	ឆន	
	kàj	chon	
	chicken (n.)	to fight (of certain animals, esp. cocks, bulls) (p.)	

The reciprocal derivative ប្រជល់ /pracwəl/ “to cause to confront one another and fight” is derived from the predicate ជល់ /cwəl/ “to collide, to hurt, to hit, to stumble, to fight one another.”

## 30) កីឡាប្រដាល់ “boxing sport” (កីឡាឆកម្ម)

កីឡា	ប្រដាល់	(Th.)	កីឡា	ឆកម្ម
kəylaa	pradal		ki:la:	chókmuj
sport (n.)	to box (p.)		sport (n.)	to box (p.)

The reciprocal derivative ប្រដាល់ /pradal/ “to box, to hit frequently” is derived from the predicate ដាល់ /dal/ “to box, to hit with the closed fist, to fight with the fist.”

Khmer never uses the base form in these compound words, that is, they never use កន្លែងជល់មាន់ /kanlaen cwəl moan/ \*មាន់ជល់ /moan cwəl/ \*កីឡាដាល់ /kəylaa dal/, since the action is never performed by one actor.

## 3.2.3 Intensified derivatives

I have found only one example of an intensified derivative. Similar to the example (21.a) - (21.b) shown above, a derivative word in this example can be replaced by its base word. The meaning of the compound word with an intensified derivative is more intensified than that of the compound with a base word.

## 31.a) កន្លែងកញ្ចស់ “a very old mat/ a very worn out mat” (ស្លើមខាតៗ (ជាមួយ ភាពចាស់))

កន្លែង	កញ្ចស់	(Th.)	ស្លើម	ចាស់	ខាតៗ
kanteel	kañcah		sùə	kàw	mâ:k mâ:k
mat (n.)	worn out, very old (p.)		mat (n.)	old (p.)	very (adv.)

## 31.b) កន្លែងចាស់ “an old mat” (ស្លើមចាស់)

កន្លែង	ចាស់	(Th.)	ស្លើម	ចាស់
kanteel	cah		sùə	kàw
mat (n.)	old, mature (p.)		mat (n.)	old (p.)

One possible reason for allowing both base words and derivative words to occur with a slightly different meaning may be that both the base and derivative words are adjectival predicates.

The data about different types of derivatives in Khmer compound words can help Thai students to be aware when using Khmer words or translating some Thai words to Khmer. While Khmer word classes, either a noun, a causative predicate or other type of predicate, have to be properly used in the context, Thai hardly distinguish which word classes are used.

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Faculty of Archaeology,  
Silpakorn University,  
THAILAND  
<borawan@su.ac.th>