VARIABILITY IN CAMBODIAN COPULAR CONSTRUCTIONS:
A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CAMBODIAN ‘TO BE’

Cambodian, like most of the world’s languages, does not have a single element which
corresponds to all of the senses of English ‘to be’: rather, as many as seven different forms
are used in existential, locative, and copulative constructions. In general, each Cambodian
construction corresponds to a distinct part of the range of functions and meanings of ‘to be’,
although some constructions appear to overlap partially with others. The basic inventory of
Cambodian forms of ‘to be’ can be summarised as follows:

1) existential: mian
2) locative: (kii) nəw
3) copulative
   a) with predicate adjectives: zero, kii
   b) in equative constructions with predicate NPs:
      kii – sometimes exclusively, sometimes in variation with the less preferred options cia,
      kii cia (formal style) and zero (informal style)
   c) in non-equative constructions with predicate NPs: cia and kii usually judged equally
      acceptable, but cia sometimes preferred; kii cia (formal style) and zero (informal style)
      always possible but less preferred options

1.2 PREVIOUS ANALYSES

I am not aware of any detailed treatment of this issue in the literature on Cambodian. Some
discussion can be found in basic grammars such as Ehrman (1972), Jacob (1968), and Noss
and Proum (1966). However, the descriptions offered in these grammars are incomplete, and
they differ on some important points, especially where copulative constructions are
concerned.

For example, in Ehrman, no semantic distinction is made between the copulas cia, kii, kii
cia and the zero copula. The copula cia is defined as a copula which indicates that “the subject
is a member of the class of objects named by the predicate”; it is the copula used in sentences
such as ‘This is a pencil’ (1972:75). Concerning kii, Ehrman says that it “may be used with

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1 I have been assisted in my fieldwork on Cambodian by Mr Van So Chau, a native speaker of Cambodian.
the same meaning as *cia*, except that where it is followed by more than one proper name, it is obligatory”; an example which requires *kii* is ‘This is Sok, Suon, and Sos’ (p.75). No examples are given for *kii cia*, but Ehrman claims that it is “used like *cia*” (p.76). Finally, the use of the zero copula is said to occur “in some cases...especially in predicates containing time words”; for example, in ‘Today is Saturday’ (p.76).

Jacob (1968:140–141) suggests that *cia* and *kii* are semantically distinct. She claims that “*cia* ‘to be’...may be used when two nouns are linked by it”, and she gives examples such as ‘I am a teacher’ and ‘That girl is Mr. X’s daughter’ (p.140). Concerning *kii*, she notes that it is used “like *cia* in linking two nouns but has the lexical meaning ‘to be in essence, to be by nature’”, as in the example ‘What’s this? It’s coral’ (p.141). Finally, she points out that two noun phrases may be linked by zero where *cia* or *kii* would be expected; these are regarded as “ad hoc verbalisations of nominal constructs” as in the example ‘She’s a widow’ (p.141).

Noss and Proum (1966:118–119) offer the most detailed account of which I am aware. They draw clear semantic distinctions between *cia*, *kii*, and the zero copula. The word *cia* is defined as ‘to be a member of the class of’, as in ‘I’m a student’ (p.119). In contrast, *kii* is defined as ‘to be equivalent to’, as in ‘The biggest book of all is the one on the bottom’ (p.118). Finally, the zero copula is interpreted as ‘to be characterised by’, as in ‘My book is white’ (p.118). In addition, Noss and Proum discuss the use of *naw* as the locative ‘to be (somewhere)’, as in ‘The blue book is on the bottom’ (p.118), and the use of *mian* as the existential ‘to be (in existence)’, as in ‘There are two books’ (p.118).

Of the three descriptions, the one offered by Noss and Proum seems to be the best; in addition to being the most detailed, it is the one which, in general, most closely matches the material which I have elicited in fieldwork sessions with Mr Van So Chau. However, the match between Noss and Proum’s description and the system exhibited by Mr Chau is not always exact. In addition, the overlap of functions of some variants, which is mentioned in Ehrman and Jacob but not in Noss and Proum, is abundant in my elicited material.

2. THE FORMS OF ‘TO BE’

In the following sections, the various Cambodian forms and uses of ‘to be’ as given by Mr Chau are discussed individually.

2.1 EXISTENTIAL ‘TO BE’: *mian*

The verb *mian* is used for existence (EXT): ‘there is/are’, ‘to be in existence’. No other copula is possible.

(1)  
Mian siawphəw bey.  
EXT book three  
There are three books.

The same verb is used for possession (‘to have’); the possessor NP precedes the verb:

(2)  
Kñom mian siawphəw bey.  
I EXT book three  
I have three books.
2.2 LOCATIVE ‘TO BE’: (kii) nəw

The Cambodian verb nəw means ‘to be located’ and is used to link a subject to a predicate indicating temporary or permanent location in space or time. In all contexts, nəw can be optionally preceded by the equative kii; there is no change in meaning, but the expanded form is characterised by Mr Chau as “unusual” and likely to occur in formal rather than informal styles. Locatives (LOC) are not formed with mian, ciə, kii ciə, or zero.

Examples (3)–(6) illustrate the use of (kii) nəw to indicate, respectively, temporary location of non-events in space, permanent location of non-events in space, spatial location of events and temporal location of events:

(3) Tidaa (kii) nəw pnum.piən.
    Tidaa COP LOC Phnom.Penh
    Tidaa is in Phnom Penh.

(4) Pnum.piən (kii) nəw kmer.
    Phnom.Penh COP LOC Cambodia
    Phnom Penh is in Cambodia.

(5) Tii pracug (kii) nəw / kii / ?ciə sabaə.
    place meeting COP LOC COP COP school
    The meeting is at school.

(6) Peil pracug (kii) nəw / kii / ?ciə maon prampii.
    time meeting COP LOC COP COP hour seven
    The meeting is at seven o’clock.

In examples (5) and (6), the copulas kii and, more marginally, ciə can be used in place of nəw to link a subject NP with a predicate NP. In Cambodian, these constructions must be regarded as copulative rather than locative, although this distinction is lost in the English translations. The use of copulas in such constructions is treated in detail below, in the discussion of Cambodian copulative constructions.

2.3 COPULATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS WITH STATIVE PREDICATES: zero, kii

Statives in Cambodian, unlike adjectives in English, are full verbs and so do not require any other accompanying verb, such as a copula (COP). It may be noted that nəw, mian, ciə, and kii ciə are never possible in stative constructions. The behaviour of kii is unique; while it is nearly always less preferred than zero, it is “less bad” than the other variants in combination with a stative verb:

(7) Tidaa (?kii) lʔaa.
    Tidaa COP good
    Tidaa is good.

Choice of copula does not seem to depend on whether the predicate indicates permanent or temporary qualities:

(8) Tidaa (?kii) lʔaa krup peil.ve.liə.
    Tidaa COP good all time
    Tidaa is good all the time.
(9)  Tidaa (ʔkiʔ) kampuŋ lʔaa.
    Tidaa COP PROGRESSIVE good
    Tidaa is good right now.

    Zero is generally preferred in sentences with an expletive subject:

(10)  Viʔ (ʔkiʔ) lʔaa dael tidaa ʔəmlap trəy.
    it COP good that Tidaa kill fish
    It’s good that Tidaa killed the fish.

    There is one exception to the preference for zero with stative verb predicates. In complex
    sentences in which the lack of an overt copula would result in ambiguity, ʔkiʔ is preferable to
    zero:

(11)  Dael tidaa ʔəmlap trəy ʔki ʔaa.
    that Tidaa kill fish COP good
    That Tidaa killed the fish is good.

    The problem with zero in this sentence is that it can allow lʔaa to be interpreted as a
    modifier of fish, giving the reading ‘that Tidaa killed the good fish’. If the order of the clause
    constituents is changed to avoid the possibility of this reading, as in example (10), then the
    zero copula is preferred.

2.4 IDENTIFICATION AND ATTRIBUTION: COPULATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS WITH NP
    PREDICATES: ʔkiʔ, ciə, ʔkiʔ ciə, zero

    This is an area where there is a high degree of overlap between variants; the lack of
    consensus in the literature regarding the meaning and use of the different forms can probably
    be attributed to the fact that they are interchangeable in many contexts. The most important
    distinction to be made in this area is between ʔkiʔ and ciə; ʔkiʔ ciə and the zero copula are
    stylistic variants which, in general, can replace ʔkiʔ or ciə regardless of semantic context.
    Constructions with ʔkiʔ ciə are characterised by Mr Chau as “needlessly wordy” and
    appropriate in more formal registers, while the zero copula is characterised as “incorrect, but
    sometimes heard in rapid speech”. The form ʔkiʔ ciə and the zero copula were given as
    possible but of marginal status for all copulative sentences, except in the case of purely
    equative constructions (see below), in which ʔkiʔ is the only possibility. The focus of the
    following discussion will be limited to the distribution of the stylistically unmarked options
    ʔkiʔ and ciə.

    In general, ʔkiʔ is an equative copula, whose function is to identify one NP with another;
    the basic meaning of A ʔkiʔ B is something like ‘(the thing named by) A is equal to (the thing
    named by) B’. In contrast, ciə is a copula with attributive function; it links a subject NP with
    a predication. The basic meaning of A ciə B is something like ‘(the thing named by) A can be
    characterised as B’ or ‘B is a characteristic of (the thing named by) A’.

    This seems to correspond to the distinction that Lyons (1977:185) makes between
    equative and predicative copulative sentences. According to Lyons, a sentence like (12) can
    have two readings:

(12)  Giscard d’Estaing is the president of France.
In the equative reading, both NPs function as referential expressions; each refers to an individual, and the copula simply indicates that there is identity between the two referents. In the predicative reading, the predicate NP does not have a referential function; it does not refer directly to some individual, but rather tells something about the subject of the sentence. In the predicative reading, ‘is the president of France’ describes the referent of the subject NP in the same way that predicates such as ‘likes to play tennis’, ‘was born in France’ or ‘is six feet tall’ give information about the referent of the subject NP.

The distinction between predicative and equative copulas is one that is of little importance in English, since the same copula is used for both functions. However, the distinction can be shown even in English; when (12) has a predicative reading, the article can be optionally omitted. When it has an equative reading, the article cannot be omitted.

In Italian, the distinction between these two types of copula sentences has clearer syntactic consequences. Compare the following (from Moro 1991:21):

(13)  
Una foto del muro fu la causa della rivolta.  
A picture of the wall was the cause of the revolution.

The predicate NP of this sentence can be replaced by the clitic lo, which precedes the copula:

(14)  
Una foto del muro lo fu.  
A picture of the wall was it.

However, if the order of the NPs in the original sentence is reversed, then clitic replacement of the predicate NP is not possible:

(15)  
La causa della rivolta fu una foto del muro.  
The cause of the revolution was a picture of the wall.

(16)  
*La causa della rivolta lo fu.  
The cause of the revolution was it.

To explain the difference between (13) and (15), Moro (p.22) appeals to the notion of referentiality versus non-referentiality of NPs. A referential NP “points to” a referent, while a non-referential NP describes another NP. In Italian, a predicate NP can be replaced by the clitic lo only if the predicate NP is non-referential. In (13), clitic replacement is possible because ‘the cause’ is non-referential; ‘a picture’ can be assigned the property of being ‘the cause’. A property is a predication and can be replaced by a clitic. In (15), clitic replacement is not possible because ‘a picture’ is referential; ‘the cause’ cannot be assigned the property of being ‘a picture’.

The distinction which Moro makes between copulative constructions with a non-referential predicate NP and copulative constructions with a referential predicate NP corresponds to the distinction made by Lyons between predicative and equative copulative constructions. Perhaps instead of the terms non-referentiality/referentiality and predicative/equative, the terms ‘attribution’ and ‘non-attributive identification’ might be used to distinguish these two types of copulative constructions.

The distribution of kii and ciō in Cambodian can be analysed in terms of the distinction between these two types of copulative constructions. In equative constructions, in which the predicate NP is referential, or identification rather than attributive, kii is preferred, sometimes exclusively, sometimes with ciō as a less preferred option. In predicative
constructions, in which the predicate NP is non-referential, or attributive, kii is never preferred over cia; usually, the two copulas are judged equally acceptable, but sometimes cia is preferred, with kii as a secondary option.

2.4.1 PROTOTYPICAL EQUATIVE/IDENTIFICATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS: kii

The word kii is used exclusively in sentences with a clearly equative sense, such as (17)–(20) below, in which the copula can be translated as 'is equal to'. The order of constituents can be changed without changing the meaning of these sentences, or the choice of copula; the copula functions here much like an equals sign:

(17) Pīi bok nən pīi kii buən.
    *cia
    two plus 'and two COP four
    Two plus two is four.

(18) Buən kii pīi bok nən pīi.
    *cia
    four COP two plus and two
    Four is two plus two.

(19) Pīi rıəl kii muy dolar.
    *cia
    two riel COP one dollar
    Two riels are one dollar.

(20) Muy dolar kii pīi rıəl.
    *cia
    one dollar COP two riel
    One dollar is two riels.

Equative sentences are not limited to mathematical statements of equivalence; in (21) and (22), the copula does not introduce a predication, but simply indicates identity of subject and predicate. Only kii can be used in these sentences:

(21) Cam.laay kii 'baat'.
    *cia
    answer COP yes
    The answer is 'yes'.

(22) 'Baat' kii cam.laay.
    *cia
    yes COP answer
    'Yes' is the answer.

(23) Viə kii ƙnom.
    *cia
    it COP I
    It's me.
(24) \( \textit{K\textit{ñom} k\textit{ii} viə.} \)  
\( ^*\textit{ciə} \)  
I COP it  
I am it.

When the subject NP is formally identical to the predicate NP, as in (25), the sense of the construction is one of identification rather than predication, and \( \textit{k\textit{ii}} \) is the only possible copula:

(25) \( \textit{K\textit{ñom k\textit{ii} k\textit{ñom}.} \)  
\( ^*\textit{ciə} \)  
I COP I  
I am I.

Exclusive use of \( \textit{k\textit{ii}} \) is often found where the head of the subject NP is formally identical to the head of the predicate NP, although the subject NP and the predicate NP may have different modifiers:

(26) \( \textit{Si\textit{əwp\textit{haw thom.c\textit{iən.k\textit{ee} k\textit{ii si\textit{əwp\textit{haw p\textit{ða khiew.} \)  
\( ^*\textit{ciə} \)  
book biggest COP book colour blue  
The biggest book is the blue book.

(27) \( \textit{Si\textit{əwp\textit{haw p\textit{ða khiew k\textit{ii si\textit{əwp\textit{haw thom.c\textit{iən.k\textit{ee. \)  
\( ^*\textit{ciə} \)  
book colour blue COP book biggest  
The blue book is the biggest book.

The same holds for constructions with \( ?\textit{aa} \) ‘one’ as the head of the predicate NP:

(28) \( \textit{Si\textit{əwp\textit{haw thom.c\textit{iən.k\textit{ee k\textit{ii ?aa p\textit{ða khiew. \)  
\( ^*\textit{ciə} \)  
book biggest COP one colour blue  
The biggest book is the blue one.

(29) \( \textit{Si\textit{əwp\textit{haw p\textit{ða khiew k\textit{ii ?aa thom.c\textit{iən.k\textit{ee. \)  
\( ^*\textit{ciə} \)  
book colour blue COP one biggest  
The blue book is the biggest one.

To summarise, constructions in which \( \textit{k\textit{ii}} \) is the only possible copula seem to be limited to constructions which have a purely equative or identificational sense, and which retain the sense of equation or identification (and exclusive use of \( \textit{k\textit{ii}} \) when the order of constituents is reversed.

2.4.2 PREFERENCE FOR \( \textit{k\textit{ii}} \)

In the majority of copulative sentences with a predicate NP in my elicited material, what we have is either relative preference for \( \textit{k\textit{ii}} \), with \( \textit{ciə} \) as a less preferred option, or else \( \textit{k\textit{ii}} \) and \( \textit{ciə} \) are judged equally acceptable. The relative degree of preference for \( \textit{k\textit{ii}} \) can be changed by changing the order of constituents. For the variants which correspond to the Italian sentence in (13) (in which clitic replacement is possible in Italian), with an attributive (or ‘non-referential’) predicate NP, \( \textit{k\textit{ii}} \) and \( \textit{ciə} \) are judged equally acceptable. For the variants
which correspond to (15) (in which clitic replacement is not possible in Italian), with a non-attributive, identificational (or ‘referential’) predicate NP, *ciə* is possible but *kii* is preferred.

Why should free variation be the norm in attributive copulative sentences? In some sense, when you attribute a property to an NP, you are at the same time identifying it; thus, in general, whenever *ciə* is acceptable, so is *kii*. But the reverse is not true; you can identify something without attributing a property to it. In such sentences, there is a clear preference for *kii*.

Here are several minimal pairs of this type:

(30)  
\[
Rup.taat \quad muy \quad kii \quad mul.hac \quad naisankriəm. \\
\quad ciə
\]
picture one COP reason war
A picture was the reason for the war.

(31)  
\[
Mul.hac \quad naisankriəm \quad kii \quad rup.taat. \\
\quad ?ciə
reason war COP picture
The reason for the war was a picture.

(32)  
\[
Tidaa \quad kii \quad nea?.kruu \quad knuŋ \quad phum \quad nih. \\
\quad ciə
Tidaa COP teacher in village this.
Tidaa is the/a teacher in the village.

(33)  
\[
nea?.kruu \quad knuŋ \quad phum \quad nih \quad kii \quad tidaa \\
\quad ?ciə
teacher in village this COP Tidaa
The/a teacher in the village is Tidaa.

(34)  
\[
Baay \quad kii \quad məhop \quad kmə \quad cənən. \\
\quad ciə
rice COP food Cambodian delicious
Rice is a delicious Cambodian food.

(35)  
\[
Məhop \quad kmə \quad cənən \quad kii \quad baay. \\
\quad ?ciə
food Cambodian delicious COP rice
A delicious Cambodian food is rice.

(36)  
\[
Tii.kroŋ \quad dael \quad yən \quad kii \quad tii.kroŋ \quad thom.cioə.kee. \\
\quad ciə
city that we see COP city biggest
The city we saw is the biggest city.

(37)  
\[
Tii.kroŋ \quad thom.cioə.kee \quad kii \quad tii.kroŋ \quad dael \quad yən \quad kii. \\
\quad ?ciə
city biggest COP city that we see
The biggest city is the city we saw.

The copulative variants of examples (5) and (6), given above in the section on *nəw* and repeated here as (38) and (39), follow the same pattern. When the predicate NP is one of identification rather than attribution, as in these examples, then *kii* is preferred over *ciə*. 
However, when the order of constituents is reversed, the predicate NP is attributive, and kii and ciə are equally acceptable:

(38) Tiì pracug (kii) nəw / kii / ?ciə sabaa.
place meeting COP LOC COP COP school
The meeting is at school.

(39) Peil pracug (kii) nəw / kii / ?ciə maon prampiı.
time meeting COP LOC COP COP hour seven
The meeting is at seven o’clock.

(40) Sabaa kii tiì pracug.
ciə
school COP place meeting
School is the place of the meeting.

(41) Maon prampiı kii peil pracug.
ciə
hour seven COP time meeting
Seven o’clock is the time of the meeting.

Examples (42) and (43) suggest that pronouns are more ‘referential’ than proper names in Cambodian:

(42) Niən kii tidaa.
ciə
she COP Tidaa
She is Tidaa.

(43) Tidaa kii niən.
?ciə
Tidaa COP she
Tidaa is she.

Examples (44) and (45), which follow the same pattern, suggest that a first name is more ‘referential’ than a title in Cambodian:

(44) Tidaa kii nea?.srəy kuit.
ciə
Tidaa COP Mrs Kuit
Tidaa is Mrs Kuit.

(45) Nea?.srəy kuit kii tidaa.
?ciə
Mrs Kuit COP Tidaa
Mrs Kuit is Tidaa.

2.4.3 DEMONSTRATIVES

Demonstratives appear to be inherently ‘referential’ in Cambodian; this seems logical, since demonstratives have the inherent function of ‘pointing to’ a referent. In non-interrogative constructions, when either the subject NP or the predicate NP contains a demonstrative, kii is preferred over ciə:
(46) Nih kii mdaay robah kmeyn.sray.  
  ?ciə  
this COP mother of girl 
This is the mother of the girl.

(47) Mdaay robah kmeyn.sray kii nih.  
  ?ciə  
mother of girl COP this 
The mother of the girl is this one.

(48) Srəy nih kii tidaa.  
  ?ciə  
woman this COP Tidaa 
This woman is Tidaa.

(49) Tidaa kii srəy nih.  
  ?ciə  
Tidaa COP woman this 
Tidaa is this woman.

2.4.4 WH-QUESTIONS

Similarly, interrogative constructions with the WH-element nah ‘which’ inherently ask for identification rather than description; kii is always preferred over ciə in such constructions:

(50) Muy nah kii trəy?  
  ?ciə  
one which COP fish  
Which is a fish?

(51) trəy muy nah kii trəy l?aa?  
  ?ciə  
fish one which COP fish good  
Which fish is a good fish?

The behaviour of the WH-elements wəy ‘what’ and nea?naa ‘who’ is exceptional. In constructions with wəy, kii and ciə are judged equally acceptable, whether the sense of the construction is one of asking for identification, as in (52), or one of asking for a definition or description, as in (54) (example (53) can have either reading):

(52) Nih kii wəy?  
  ciə  
this COP what 
What is this?

(53) Viə kii wəy?  
  ciə  
it COP what 
What is it?
(54)  
\[ Baay \ kii \ w\text{\-}y? \]
\[ ci\text{\-}a \]
rice COP what
What is rice?

In constructions with *nea?naa* ‘which person, who’, *ci\text{\-}a* is always preferred over *kii*:

(55)  
\[ Nih \ ci\text{\-}a \ nea?\text{\-}n\text{\-}aa? \]
\[ ?kii \]
this COP who
Who is this?

(56)  
\[ Ni\text{\-}an \ ci\text{\-}a \ nea?\text{\-}n\text{\-}aa? \]
\[ ?kii \]
she COP who
Who is she?

(57)  
\[ Tidaa \ ci\text{\-}a \ nea?\text{\-}n\text{\-}aa? \]
\[ ?kii \]
Tidaa COP who
Who is Tidaa?

2.4.5 PREFERENCE FOR *ci\text{\-}a*

Other than the ‘who’ sentences, I was able to elicit only a few sentences for which Mr Chau expressed a preference for *ci\text{\-}a*, with *kii* as a secondary option. My data contain no sentences in which *ci\text{\-}a* is chosen exclusively; wherever *ci\text{\-}a* is possible, *kii* is available, at least as a secondary option.

Sometimes, there is a correspondence between preference for *ci\text{\-}a* and the use of the indefinite article with the predicate NP in the English translation. The English translations for (58) and (59) differ only in that (58) has an indefinite article where (59) has a definite article; (58) has preference for *ci\text{\-}a*, and (59) has preference for *kii*:

(58)  
\[ Vi\text{\-}a \ ci\text{\-}a \ si\text{\-}awph\text{\-}aw \ l?aa. \]
\[ ?kii \]
it COP book good
It is a good book.

(59)  
\[ Vi\text{\-}a \ kii \ si\text{\-}awph\text{\-}aw \ l?aa. \]
\[ ?ci\text{\-}a \]
it COP book good
It is the good book.

However, this correspondence does not always obtain; compare example (32) above, repeated here as (60), in which *kii* and *ci\text{\-}a* are judged equally acceptable, whether the English translation has a definite article or an indefinite article as part of the predicate NP:

(60)  
\[ Tidaa \ kii \ nea?\text{\-}kruu \ knu\text{\-}Ng \ phum \ nih. \]
\[ ci\text{\-}a \]
Tidaa COP teacher in village this.
Tidaa is the/a teacher in the village.
The opposition of identification and attribution seems to play a more important role in the distinction between preference for ciə and preference for kii than the distinction between definiteness and indefiniteness of predicate NPs. Sentence (58), with preference for ciə, is a likely response to a question which asks for a description, such as ‘What kind of book is it?’. Sentence (59), with preference for kii, is a likely response to a question which asks for identification, such as ‘Which book is it?’.

Similarly, ciə is preferred in (61) below, a response to the question ‘Can you tell me something about Tidaa?’, while kii is preferred in (62), a response to the question ‘Who is Tidaa?’:

(61) Tidaa ciə nea?.kruu.
     ?kii
Tidaa COP teacher
Tidaa is a teacher.

(62) Tidaa kii nea?.kruu.
     ?ciə
Tidaa COP teacher
Tidaa is a teacher.

I was surprised by the judgments given for two minimal pairs which seem structurally equivalent to examples (30) to (37). For those sentences, the variants with an identificational NP have preference for kii, and the variants with an attributive predicate NP have kii and ciə judged equally acceptable. In the following examples, the variants with an identificational predicate NP also have preference for kii, but the variants with an attributive predicate NP have preference for ciə:

(63) Rud.tieni kmer kii pnum.piən.
     ?ciə
capital Cambodia COP Phnom.Penh
The capital of Cambodia is Phnom Penh.

(64) Pnum.piən ciə rud.tieni kmer.
     ?kii
Phnom.Penh COP capital Cambodia
Phnom Penh is the capital of Cambodia.

(65) Pratiniətapəday kii George.Bush.
     ?ciə
president COP George.Bush
The president is George Bush.

     ?kii
George.Bush COP president
George Bush is the president.

Mr Chau explained that he prefers ciə in (64) and (66) because “everyone knows that these are so, so there’s no need to identify them”. In other words, the sense of (64) and (66) is felt to be strongly descriptive or attributive, and not likely to be a question of identification. It seems then that, at least in some cases, there may be an element of subjective judgment involved in the use of kii and ciə, which is related to how the speaker perceives the relative
plausibility of identificational and attributive readings. The fact that \textit{kii} and \textit{cia} are judged equally acceptable in structurally similar examples such as (30) to (37) may be due to the fact that for these sentences, identificational and attributive readings are interpreted as equally reasonable.

In conclusion, it appears that despite the high degree of overlap in the distribution of \textit{kii} and \textit{cia}, the two copulas have essentially distinct functions; \textit{kii} functions primarily as an equative copula, linking a subject NP with a referential, or non-attributive, identificational predicate NP, while \textit{cia} functions primarily as a predicative copula, linking a subject NP with a non-referential, or attributive, predicate NP. At least some of the overlap of the two copulas in my data appears to result from the fact that many sentences permit both equative and predicative readings, especially when elicited in isolation, in the absence of any particular context. In a future study of Cambodian copulative constructions, the hypotheses which I have presented here might be confirmed or refined through examination of the use of the copulas as they occur in particular contexts in Cambodian discourse or written texts.

REFERENCES


\textbf{Moro, Andrea}, 1991, Referentiality and non-referentiality in Italian copula sentences. MS, University of Venice.