

THE WORD ȁc IN KHMER: A SEMANTIC OVERVIEW¹

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1.1. Modern Khmer (mod.K.) ȁc /ʔaac/ is not what would normally be called a problem word. It is a verb pure and simple, and as such is likely to be modified by adverbs and, in particular, post-posed resultative verbs covering the ideas of '*to be possible*' and '*to be not possible*'. It belongs to the written language more because of its refined associations than because of any obsolescence.

1.2. Turning to our two Khmer dictionaries, we find ȁc defined as follows:

VK, 1719b: ȁc. a) *to be brave, courageous, fearless*; b) *to be entitled to; to be possible, can*.

DCF, 35b: ȁj.² *to dare; daring, bold*.

Although there is no apparent semantic problem, in reality these glosses and their illustrations in the two dictionaries are far from adequate.

The best-known derivative of ȁc is ȁȁȁc /ʔəmnaac/, which is glossed as follows:

VK, 1848a: ȁȁȁc. a) *courage, boldness*; b) *capacity, title*;
c) *strength, force, power*.

DCF, 80b: ȁȁȁc. a) *power, authority*; b) *right, title, liberty, permission*.

It is clear enough from the foregoing that ȁȁȁc is a nominal derivative of ȁc, but once again the glosses provided by our two dictionaries are far from satisfactory and far from complete.

Another derivative, formed with prefix /bən-/, is glossed as follows:

VK, 533b: Paȁȁc. a) *capacity, right*; b) *to encourage, make bold* (causative derivative).

DCF, 915a: Pañ-āc. *daring, fearless.*

Here we note an obvious discrepancy between the two dictionaries; in my view, this points up the obsolescence of this derivative. The editors of the dictionaries have definitely failed to pinpoint the full sense of the item, and have therefore failed to assign it to the same wordclass.

1.3. Borrowed by Siamese, probably before the appearance of the earliest written document (end of thirteenth century), āc seems to have followed the same lines of development as in Khmer, as is suggested in

TEĐ, 989b: Āc. *daring; bold; fearless; valiant; undaunted...; ...capable; proficient; qualified; fitted.*

Siamese also has the same two derivatives of āc as does Khmer, and I am inclined to believe they were borrowed at approximately the same period as the wordbase.

TEĐ, 996b: Āṇnāc. *power; authority; right; jurisdiction; ability; capability; ...licence.*

TEĐ, 475a: Pāñ-āc. *to be very bold, daring or fearless; to overstep the bounds of propriety.*

The striking similarity between the Khmer and Siamese glosses is significant insofar as it shows that their editors' investigations were limited to the modern languages.

1.4. This much leads us into problems raised by the interpretation of āc as it occurs in older documents, namely of the Old Khmer and Middle Khmer periods. It must be mentioned here and now that these problems are not recognisable as such in translations of the Old Khmer inscriptions edited successively by Aymonier, Finot and Cœdès (cf. 2.2.).

For example, I myself was quite satisfied with the definitions of āc given in various dictionaries until I began, some five years ago, to analyse the Middle Khmer texts. It was only then that it occurred to me that the semantic range of āc was markedly broader and richer than I had suspected, and that it required further consideration and a reworking of its definition. The next step was intensive analysis of the Old Khmer inscriptions independently of their translations. Here again all occurrences of āc pointed to a breadth of meaning previously unknown to myself and previously unrecorded in the dictionaries. But the problem is even larger: Professor Alexander B. Griswold, the well-known student of the Old Siamese inscriptions, has recently called my attention to the fact that the various dictionaries cited (cf. 1.2., 1.3.) likewise do not cover all the senses that āc has in Siamese texts.

1.5. Sensing a need for external evidence, I next turned to Mon³ with a view to finding a cognate which would throw light on the problem. It was a disappointment at first to find that $\bar{a}c \sim \bar{a}t$ in Old Mon and modern Mon alike is confined to the notions of '*to ask, to request*', which seemed to rule out any possibility of comparison. However, it was not long before I was brought back to this question, for my most recent comparative studies⁴ seem to show the importance of the pre-inscriptional stage of Khmer and Mon, when these languages probably had more in common than is visible through written documents. This supposition led me to ask myself, "Could Khmer $\bar{a}c$ ever have meant '*to request*', as in Mon?"

2. The answer to this question calls for re-examination of representative texts of all three periods. In presenting the results of my analysis I choose, for the sake of clarity and the reader's convenience, to work forward from the earliest texts rather than in the contrary direction. At the same time, data from modern Khmer are adduced whenever they seem to throw light on data from earlier periods.

2.1. $\bar{a}c$ is one of the most current lexical items in the Old Khmer inscriptions, being particularly common in the Angkorian inscriptions.

Analysis calls first of all for consideration of the kinds of speech involved. Briefly, occurrences of $\bar{a}c$ in a) "actual" speech (narrative, statement) must be distinguished from occurrences of $\bar{a}c$ in b) "virtual" speech (wish, injunction, potentiality). We turn first to consider virtual speech, the more complicated of the two types, since any light thrown on it will elucidate actual speech, whereas the contrary does not apply.

Occurrences of $\bar{a}c$ in virtual speech conform to the following pattern:

I. Actual speech	II. Virtual speech
A. _____	_____
$\bar{a}c \text{ ti}$ $vva\bar{m} \bar{a}c \text{ ti}$	

This means that $\bar{a}c$ introduces a clause in virtual speech (II) connected with a clause in actual speech (I) that precedes it. To pinpoint its sense and function it may be helpful to consider similar patterns of virtual speech in Old Khmer and modern Khmer:

I. Actual speech	II. Virtual speech
B. (OK) _____	_____
$le\bar{n}$ $kam\bar{p}i \text{ } le\bar{n}$	
C. (OK) _____	_____
$j\bar{a}$ $vva\bar{m} \text{ } j\bar{a}$	

D. (mod.K.) _____ sūm _____
sūm kuṃ _____

(OK $v_{\text{v}\bar{u}}$ and $k_{\text{u}\bar{u}}$ and mod.K. $k_{\text{u}\bar{u}}$ are negative particles.)

Regarding A, B and C, our first readings of the texts do not make us aware of any difference between $\bar{a}c$, $leñ$ and $j\bar{a}$. All three appear in similar constructions indicating that an actor, following the predication in I, next gives a kind of "warning" or "injunction", which may be expressed as follows:

I. _____, 'let (the object mentioned) _____.'

_____, 'let (it) not _____.'

○九:

_____, 'let (the recipient) _____. '

_____, 'let (him, her, them) not _____. '

2.2. Moreover, one is made even less aware of differences between $\bar{a}c$, $leñ$ and $j\bar{a}$ by French translations.⁵ As it happens, French has only one way of rendering all three, namely by the conjunctive particle *que* plus a verb in the subjunctive, the effect of which is to conceal all the nuances of the original. Be this as it may, analysis of the French subjunctive itself shows that it includes a range of aspects such as the optative, the potential, and an injunctive of various shades (which permits the subjunctive sometimes to overlap with the imperative), all of which offer clues to differentiating the senses intended in Khmer.

2.3. With reference to French translations, leñ (B) is shown by the texts to mark the optative. I shall not dwell on this case, as it has little bearing on the question at hand; however, I should at least note the fact that this use of leñ disappeared during the Middle Khmer period.

The case of jā (C) calls for a sharper focus. In Old Khmer as well as modern Khmer this lexical item means *'to be in such and such a condition; to be in good condition; to be good, proper; to be free (not a slave), of good breed; to be in good health'*.⁶ Thus what the actor in I means to say in II is:

I. _____, 'it is good (it behooves) _____.'

II. _____, 'it is not good (does not behoove)' _____.'

In other words, he expresses his way of thinking and/or his desire regarding the object of the preceding clause (I).

The case of *āc* (A) is a particular problem, since no known modern senses of it (cf. 1.2., 1.3.) fit the contexts; hence the need for comparative investigation.

2.4. In sorting out the data of virtual speech in modern Khmer, I chanced upon constructions with *sūm* (D), a marker of the optative but primarily a verb meaning '*to ask, request, ask for a favour, wish*'. This brought me back to Mon *āc* ~ *āt*, of similar meaning, and led me to posit '*to ask, to request*' for proto-Khmer /*ʔaac*/ in order to account for the semantic and grammatical development of *āc* in historical times. Before entering into details on this point, it may be useful to sum up the foregoing comparative considerations:

Pre-inscriptional Khmer

Optative	<i>āc</i>
Desiderative	<i>jā</i>
Injunctive	?

Inscriptional Khmer

Optative	<i>leñ</i>
Desiderative	<i>jā</i>
Injunctive	<i>āc</i>

Modern Khmer

Optative	<i>sūm</i>
Desiderative	<i>guor</i>
Injunctive	<i>trūv</i>

3. While the above table helps elucidate the changes which took place in the system, they emphasise in particular the change which occurred with *āc* early in the history of Khmer, probably within or before pre-Angkorian times (sixth to eighth century A.D.). We turn now to consider how *āc* passed from virtual speech to actual speech.

3.1. We first posit for virtual speech *āc* '*to wish*':

(Optative)	<i>āc ti</i> _____	' <i>wishes that...</i> '
	<i>vvaṃ āc ti</i> _____	' <i>does not wish that...</i> '

This optative notion, taking on force, blends into an injunctive or jussive encompassing "orders" of various nuances. Thus:

= *Only the religious, etc.*
(recipient)

may not
are allowed not
(VP₁)

[to] provide rice, etc.
(VP₂)

b. *It is ordered to*
(VP₁) *persons not providing ritual rice*
(recipient)

not to stay in the hermitage of this land
(VP₂)

= *Those who do not provide ritual rice*
(recipient)

may not
are not allowed
(VP₁)

[to] remain in the hermitage, etc.
(VP₂)

The first semantic shift may hence be summarised as follows: '*it is requested of X to do*' > '*it is ordered of X to do*' > '*X must, is allowed (entitled), has the right, to do*', or the corresponding negative.

3.3. From the idea of '*to be entitled*' the semantic development proceeds one step further:

c. K.33, IC III, p.150 (30-32):

ti	añ	svaṃ	leñ	āc ti	añ	ta
passive marker	I	ask	optative marker	be entitled	I	linker
paṃnvas	pvās	paripāla	vvaṃ	āc ti		
religious	enter clergy	take care	not	be allowed		
āyatva	ta	kaṃloñ	phoñ			
depend on	linker	dignitaries	collective particle			

'It is my request, I who am a religious in the clergy, to be entitled to take care of [this foundation], not to have [it] depend on the mandarins.'

d. K.933, IV, p.48, B (15-16):

nau	anak	pvās	ta	mān	dharmma	pi
as for	religious	linker	have	virtue	marker of coming	action

āc paripālana pi vvaṃ pidā noḥ
 be up to take care marker of coming action not oppress that
 gi ta āc stap vartamāna caṃnyar dau
 linker be entitled listen to news future translatable marker

'Religious endowed with virtue who would be up to taking care of [the āśrama] and would not do harm to it would be entitled to receive of-
 ficial information from now on.'

e. K.693, IC V, p.205, B (27-28):

vraḥ sabhā tantyañ daha āc vyavahāra nu vāp
 Royal Court inquire whether be up to sue then male title
 vrahmaputra kathā man vvaṃ āc
 personal name declare particle not be up to

'The Court asked vāp Vrahmaputra if he meant [or was up] to
 bringing suit; he then declared that he did [or was] not.'

The following is a typical verbal phrase found in descriptions of
 land or ricefields:

f. K.817, IC V, p.201 (12-13):

bhūmi noḥ ti duñ ta anak ta roḥ noḥ
 land that passive marker buy linker person linker like that
 phoñ āc ti vroḥ bhay mvay tap
 plural marker capable linker sow twenty one ten

'The land bought from those people has a capacity of thirty sowings
 of grain.'

g. K.258, IC IV, p.179, A (11-12):

bhūmi noḥ nu vraī vnur mvat āc ta vroḥ
 land that and forest hill put together capable linker sow
 śata 1
 hundred one

'The land together with the forests and hills has a capacity of a
 hundred sowings of grain.'

3.4. Another aspect of the semantic development of āc involves the
 moral connotation growing out of the idea of capability, which is to be
 borne in mind if we are to account for āc in Middle Khmer texts.

- h. K.227, BEFEO XXIX, p.309 (22):

cāmpa srom̐ s̐ntac ayat anak mvay ta āc
 Cham surround [His] Majesty without person one linker capable
 chpañ ley
 fight ever

*'The Cham surrounded His Majesty [Yasovarman] without any of his men
 being capable [or having the courage] to fight back.'*

- i. K.659, IC V, p.146 (28-29):

nau sādhu ta āc varddheya neḥ
 as for good linker have courage make prosperous this
 pūnya neḥ ge m̐n svargga
 good deed this they have heaven

*'Good people who have the courage [or are determined] to take good
 care of this deed [the cult of a śivaliṅga] will obtain the
 heavenly reward.'*

- j. K.705, IC V, p.199 (10-11):

ri ta āc paripālana ge svey divyaloka
 as for linker have courage take care they enjoy celestial world
 aṃval nu gaṇa phoṇ
 together with group plural marker

*'Those who have the courage [or have the merit] to take care of
 [the cult] will enjoy [the bliss] of the celestial world together
 with their folk.'*

Before moving on to the Middle Khmer texts, it seems worthwhile to consider a few of the more involved instances of āc illustrating its semantic effect.

- k. K.292, IC III, p.208 (lines unnumbered). This is the famous oath of allegiance of royal officers to Sūryavarman I.

daha āyuḥ yeñ āc dan ta vraḥ rājakāryyavelā lvoḥ ta
 if life we can reach linker time of Royal Corvée arrive linker
 kāla nau prakāra leha yeñ slāp hetu bhakti
 death as for kind whatever we die cause devotion
 gi pi yeñ thve
 future marker we do

'In the event that our lives can [fortunately] last as long as the

time of the Royal Corvée, whatever manner of death befall us, we shall accept it out of devotion [to His Majesty].'

The best of these instances are provided by a text engraved at different places (K.444, IC II, pp.63-5; K.868, IC VI, pp.170-2; K.175, IC VI, pp.175-8) reporting the creation of two *varṇa* or 'corporations of Royal Officers' by Jayavarman V and consequently containing a number of regulations expressed by means of *āc* or *vvaṃ āc*. I choose only one case:

1. K.444, IC II, B (9-13):

nau rū kule ta anak si man ka āc ti
as for relative linker person male linker capable

paryyann hoñ nāṃ mok oy ācāryya... pre paryyann
teach indeed bring to teacher order teach

siksā āy nagara pi pre nā vraḥ
learn at city marker of coming action order at Royal

rājakāryya nā pamvās vvaṃ āc ti bhāgavata
Royal Corvée at religious not be entitled Bhāgavata

*'Male members of the family capable of receiving education [will be] brought to the ācāryya. These are instructed to teach and train the former in the City and to employ them as religious in the Royal Corvée [but] not as Bhāgavata.'*⁸

3.5. The results of the foregoing analysis (c to l) may be summarised as follows:

āc has the following nuances:

- 'to have the ability, capability, competence, to; to be up to';*
- 'to have the power, right, title, mandate, to';*
- 'to have the intention of, mean to';*
- 'to have the courage to';*
- 'to have the merit, good fortune, to';*
- 'to have the (supernatural) power to'.*

4. Bearing the last value in mind, we may now move on to the Middle Khmer texts.

m. IMA 31 (between 1684 and 1687 A.D.), lines 11-13:

braḥ aṅg jā bvūṇṇāk trey trān rohān saṃbau
sacred being body be refuge shore shelter like junk

ratn ruñ ūtuñ samār ḥā nū āc nām satv
gem wide noble capable that is capable lead creature

phoñ chloñ leñ vattasañsār
plural marker cross leave cycle of transmigration

'The Lord [Buddha] was the refuge, the sheltering shore like unto a precious, broad, and majestic sea-going junk capable of transporting all creatures across and beyond the [Ocean] of transmigrations...'

This passage illustrates the type of equational expression that arises in a community of people employing two languages, a learned and a popular idiom - in the case of Cambodia, Sanskrit and Khmer. The group samār ñā nū āc is tantamount to saying or writing samār = āc or, better yet, samār (= āc). In other words, samār (< Skt. samartha 'capable') is synonymous with our āc.

Here are instances from the cpāp', ethical and didactic texts in verse composed by religious teachers for their disciples:

n. C.Kr., stanza 4:

mtāy ūbuk sot ñā
mother father moreover

āc mak paṃpuos
have courage come cause to enter clergy

hetu cañ sambhār
because want accumulation

'Your parents, moreover, ...had the courage [or the virtue or merit] to bring you here and make you a religious because they wanted to accumulate [merits for themselves and for you].'

o. C.Kr., stanza 33:

rī grū pādhyāy
as for guru preceptor

praṭūc nūv mtāy
compare with mother

ūbuk eñ hoñ
father indeed

āc oy ktī cpā'p
 have capacity give principles
 praṭau dharm phoṇ
 instruct Dharma collective marker

'As for your preceptors, they are comparable to your parents, [since] they are qualified [or have the merit or virtue] to teach you all the principles and the Dharma...'

Slightly different are the two following cases:

p. C.K.C., stanza 67:

kra bāky biroḥ
 rare word harmonious
 kra citt āc smoḥ
 rare heart capable devoted

'Rare are sweet [agreeable] words, rare is the heart brave [bold] enough to be devoted [to others in distress]...'

q. C.K.C., stanza 68:

kra man baky saty
 rare be word true
 kra citt āc kāt'
 rare heart capable cut off
 sralaḥ bī sneh
 free from love

'It is hard to find true words and a heart bold enough to get free from attachment...'

4.1. I have so far concerned myself with the wordbase rather than any derivatives of āc, on the grounds that the occurrences of the former greatly outnumber occurrences of the latter. Moreover, I have assumed that the semantic expansion of āc over the centuries has to some extent had a bearing on the development of the derivatives. Here I shall confine myself to the most common of these, amṇāc (cf. 1.2.) and mention one aspect of its development.

Taking it as understood that amṇāc has progressed from the sense of *'request' to that of 'title, right; ability, capacity; strength, energy,

(personal, political, administrative) power' and on to 'virtue, merit; courage, boldness', I find still another connotation which goes beyond the moral and religious implications of the term. In its sense of 'power', *aṃṇāc* also includes the domain of the supernatural and conveys the idea of force emanating either from the divine world above us or from magic. One can possess *aṃṇāc* 'potential force' because (a) he has accumulated merit in the past, even in previous existences, or because (b) he has acquired magical knowledge. This personal *aṃṇāc* enables him, consciously or otherwise, to perform quasi-miracles, and in this sense the word is equated with Skt. *tejas* 'hot and piercing power'. This point is illustrated by the following passages:

r. IMA 39 (1747 A.D.), p.113 (29-31):

noḥ	vā	cor	kaṃṇāc	pāk	papp	khlap	khlēc	toy	nū	braḥ
then	bandits	evil	routed			submit		thanks	to	sacred
aṃṇāc	braḥ	pāda	anak	jā	aṃcass	noḥ	pān			
power	His Majesty	person	be	lord	then	obtain				
parapūr	sruk	khsem	khsān	sāpāy	dūlāy...					
abundance	country	pacified	comfortable	well off						

'These evil bandits were then routed and submitted, thanks to the supernatural power of His Majesty our Lord, and the country resumed abundance, peace, comfort, and prosperity...'

s. IMA 39, p.114 (40):

[The General came out victorious and dispersed the enemy]

toy	nū	tejah	aṃṇāc	braḥ	pād	anak	jā	aṃcass...
thanks	to	power	power	His Majesty	person	be	lord	

'...thanks to the supernatural power of His Majesty our Lord...'

Both of these texts refer to victories won by the same outstanding general. Both, moreover, reflect the collective mind of the times which interpreted all happenings as manifesting an immanent supernatural power.

4.2. To bring our inquiry to a close, I propose the following statement of the semantic range of *āc* and its derivative:

<i>āc</i>	<i>to ask, request, require; (impersonal) to be desired, ordered to do;</i>
	<i>to be required, obliged, expected (supposed) to do; to be allowed (entitled), have the right, to do; to be able</i>

(capable), competent, qualified to do; to mean (intend), be determined to do; to have the courage, have the merit (virtue) or good fortune to do; to have the power (authority) or supernatural power to do.

amṇāc *request, wish;*

liberty, permission, right, title, capacity;

force, (personal, political, administrative, judicial, supernatural) power, (personal, local, national) authority.

NOTES

1. All extracts from texts are given in transliteration, indicated by bold ("Courier") type, thus: **āc ti**; **vvaṃ āc ti**, etc.
2. Obsolete spelling.
3. H.L. Shorto, *A Dictionary of Modern Spoken Mon*. London, Oxford University Press, 1962; and, in particular, his *A Dictionary of the Mon Inscriptions from the Sixth to the Sixteenth Centuries*. London, Oxford University Press, 1971.
4. Cf. my attempt to reconstruct the semantic evolution of Mon-Khmer /siŋ/ in a forthcoming article, "Recherches sur le vocabulaire cambodgien: VIII. Du vieux khmer au khmer moderne", in *Journal Asiatique*.
5. It is not my intention to blame the translators of the Old Khmer inscriptions, most of whom were eminent scholars, for having rendered **āc** so vaguely. Their chief aim, after all, was to make these texts available for historical use. For this we must be thankful. My point here is that we must seek to improve upon their translations by applying the techniques of linguistic analysis.
6. It is sometimes forgotten that the so-called particles of Khmer are originally lexical items with full meaning and that they tend to carry part of their original meaning even when grammaticalised. Exceptions to this general rule are a very few particles such as **nu** ~ **nau** 'and', **dañ** ~ **doñ** ~ **dāṃh** 'and, together with', and **pi** ~ **pī** 'marker of coming action'.
7. In the glosses I use the English passive to show the rôle of **ti** as a passive marker.
8. My translation, which differs from that of Cœdès (1942), is intended to achieve greater accuracy by reflecting the structure of this passage.

Cœdès's comment (1942:67, note 5) on **bhāgavata** is worth reproducing:
"The Bhāgavata represented, together with the Pāñcaratra and Sāttvata, one of the Viṣṇuite sects of Cambodia (cf. BEFE0, XXXII, p.106). According to this last text, they were not considered regular religious (**paṃnvās**), probably because monkhood was the privilege of the Śaivite sects."

ABBREVIATIONS

BEFEO	<i>Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient.</i>
C.K.C.	Cpāp' kūn cau, included in Cpāp' phseñ-phseñ, 4th edition. Phnom-Penh, Institut Bouddhique, 1970.
C.Kr.	Cpāp' kram, included in Cpāp' phseñ-phseñ (as above).
DCF	J. Guesdon, <i>Dictionnaire cambodgien-français</i> , 2 volumes. Paris, 1930.
IC	G. Coedès, <i>Inscriptions du Cambodge</i> , 8 volumes. Paris and Hanoi, 1937-1968.
IMA	<i>Inscriptions modernes d'Angkor</i> , 2nd edition. Phnom-Penh, Institut Bouddhique, 1958.
K.	Inventory number of Old Khmer inscriptions in IC.
Skt.	Sanskrit.
TEO	G.B. McFarland, <i>Thai-English Dictionary</i> . Stanford, 1956.
VK	<i>Vacanānukram khmaer</i> , 5th edition. Phnom-Penh, Institut Bouddhique, 1968.

