Imperative constructions in Cambodian

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1. Grammatical notes

Cambodian is an isolating language having no word inflection, i.e. every word occurs in a sentence in its basic form. The position of a word in a sentence is the important information for recognizing its syntactic role. The basic word order is SVO. Adverbials may occur before or after the verb. In the noun phrase, the noun precedes the attribute.

Meanings that in some other languages are expressed by morphological devices, in Cambodian can be denoted lexically or syntactically, i.e. by the word order or auxiliary words.

Auxiliaries are the most common devices used to express various submeanings of the imperative. The formal features of imperative, prohibitive and preventive constructions are:

1. Usage of special auxiliaries, including the prohibitive particle kum
2. Impossibility of using aspect and tense markers (such as ning, pam), as well as the negatives used in indicative and interrogative sentences.

2. Markers of the imperative

The imperative markers divide into prepositional and postpositional. The former are: (duk)oį, an'jeĩ, sum, cur; the latter are: daw, cuh, phang, Nat. There is one marker, i.e. meil, which can be used in both positions.

The prepositional markers are used just before the verb or before the subject of the verb:

1Cambodian examples are transliterated. The symbols of the transliteration correspond to the letters of the Indian alphabet on which the Cambodian writing is based. Arranged in the alphabetical order of both, they are: k, kh, g, gh, ng, c, ch, j, jh, n', T, TH, D, DH, N, t, th, d, dh, n, p, ph, b, bh, m, y, r, l, v, s, h, L, a. Additional signs: m - anusvara, h - visarga, "- sign of changing the register, ' - sign of short vowels. Signs of vowels, arranged in the traditional Cambodian order: a, ae; i, ii; i, j; u, u, ua, ei, ia, ja, e, ae, aj, o, aw.
(1) 

\[
\text{curr (anak) dhvei y"aeng neh} \\
\text{IMP you do kind, way this} \\
\text{"(You) do it this way!"}
\]

Postpositional markers are placed at the end of the sentence:

(2) 

\[
daw phsar jamuay pansri: aeng cuh \\
go market with sister you IMP \\
"Go to the market with your sister."
\]

All the markers can express submeanings of factitive causation (order, request, instruction, offer), but only some of them can express submeanings of permissive causation (permission, advice). (I use the classification of particular semantic interpretations of the imperative suggested in Xrakovskij & Volodin 1986.)

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Table 1.

So, as seen in Table 1, there are markers which can express both factitive and permissive submeanings. When such markers are used, semantic interpretation of the imperative sentence depends on the context.

Usage of these markers when addressing various persons is shown in Table 2.

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<tr>
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<th>1st sing.</th>
<th>1st pl.</th>
<th>2nd</th>
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<td>daw cuh</td>
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<td>Na:</td>
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Table 2.

As may be seen, in Cambodian the choice of the imperative markers depends on the person of the executor and on the number of the executors in case of the 1st person. All the markers, except oj, can be used in imperative sentences addressed to the 2nd person. When addressing the 1st and the 3rd person, only a few markers can be used.

3. Imperative constructions

3.1 Imperatives with 2nd person subject

These are the only imperatives where different variants of sentence structure are possible: presence/absence of the subject, or presence/absence of the imperative marker. Compare the following examples:
If the subject is present and the imperative marker is absent, an imperative sentence does not differ from an indicative one. Thus (4) may also be translated as “The child comes/came to eat”. (In oral speech the difference shows itself by the intonation, but suprasegmental means are not considered in this article.) The imperative construction of this type allows the introduction of an imperative marker, cf. (3), as well as the word of address (e.g. the name of the person addressed), which can be placed at the beginning or at the end of the sentence:

Presence/absence of the word of address is not correlated with presence/absence of the subject. So, in (7) and (8), the subject kun ‘child’ may be omitted. (It should be noted that (3) and (4) may be pronounced with a pause between kun and the verb, in which case kun will be interpreted as the word of address, and not as the subject.)

Absence of both the subject and the marker is possible only in imperatives with 2nd person subject.

3.2 Special features of the markers used with the 2nd person subject

The marker daw expresses factitive as well as permissive meaning e.g. am daw “Read!” has the meaning of order, request or even permission according to the situation:

“May I read? - Okay, read.”
In Cambodian, there is the directive verb *daw* ‘to go’ which is considered to be a homonym of the imperative marker *daw*. It is possible to suppose that these two words are related by their meaning: the directive verb *daw* in postposition to another verb may be used as an auxiliary to express prolongation of the action in the future, and a verb with the imperative marker *daw* also denotes the future action. This opinion is confirmed by the fact that the imperative marker *daw* is not possible in those cases when the directive verb *mak* ‘to come’, antonymous to the verb *daw*, is used:

(10) thae mmsaw diat mak  
    add flour more come  
    “Put in some flour.”

The marker *cuh* is used for both factitive and permissive causation. In the former case an offer or request is expressed:

(11) pei cang pam noh daw yak cuh  
    if want obtain that go take IMP  
    “If you want to have it, go and take it.” (The sentence is an offer, made by the captor to his captor.)

(12) mae khnu m sum daw cuap mitt khnu m - pamhei y daw cuh  
    mum I beg go meet friend I okay go IMP  
    “Mum, may I go to meet my friend? - Okay, go.”

The imperative marker *cuh* has a homonym - the directive verb *cuh* ‘to descend, come down’. As was the case with *daw*, one may suppose that these two words are etymologically connected.

The word *an’jein* ‘to invite’ in an imperative construction corresponds to the English word ‘please’ and is used to express both factitive and permissive causation. It means that the action is executed to the benefit of the addressee-executor:

(13) an’jein’ blsa:  
    please eat  
    “Help yourself!”

(14) sum lia - an’jein’ lia  
    beg leave please leave  
    “May I leave? - Okay, do, please.”

The verb *sum (sum)* ‘to ask, beg’ is used only for factitive causation and also means ‘please’. This is a polite request which may mean either ‘I ask you to...’ or ‘may I..., allow me to...’.

(15) sum an atthapad nih  
    beg read text this  
    “Please, read this text” or “May I read this text, please?”
To avoid the ambiguity existing in this example, to express a request the pronoun anak ‘you’ is inserted between sum and the verb, i.e in the position of the imperative clause subject; to ask for permission the pronoun an’ ‘I’ is placed before sum, i.e. in the position of the subject of this verb. Cf.: sum anak am “Read, please”; an’ sum am “May I read?”. It is also possible for both pronouns to be used in the sentence: an’ sum anak am “I ask you to read”, which may be called “indirect imperative”.

Concerning sum, the problem arises whether it is a performativ verb or has turned into an auxiliary. The performativ character of sum is obvious when it is preceded by the subject an’ ‘I’. In those cases when the executor of the action is the addressee the subject of sum is normally absent, though indicative sentences without the subject are not usual for Cambodian. This is an argument for considering such sentences as imperatives. Another argument is that the imperative markers daw and cuh can be used with sum in such sentences:

(16) sum ming metta: santos dos khn'um mtang daw beg aunt pity condescend guilt I once IMP
    “Take pity on me, Aunt!”

So, I am inclined to consider that in the sentences with the 2nd person executor of the action, the verb sum ‘to ask’ has the function of an imperative marker.

The marker phang is used to express a request which is often interpreted as asking somebody a favour. The use of this marker underlines that the action is done for the benefit of the speaker:

(17) pang dasmngbir a:Nit daw cuaj jak ajut yeing phang brother both pity IMP help take age I IMP
    “Brothers, take pity and help me save my life!”

(18) sum aeng sarser daw gatt’ phang beg you write go he IMP
    “Please, write to him (instead of me).”

The marker cuv expresses factitive causation: order or instruction. It is used mainly in texts (written speech) when addressing a person younger in age or lower in rank:

(19) pei kük va: büm ceh njiazi de cuv aeng laeng va: daw cuh if crane it not can speak no IMP you let go it go IMP
    “If the crane can not speak, let it go.” (An order to a servant.)

(20) cuv rap’ ning panghan’ camNaek nimiuy nimiuy IMP mention and show part every every
    “Mention and show all the parts (of the body).” (A task in a textbook.)

The interjections meil and Na: are used as “additional signals” to fulfil the action, strengthening causation. They are used only in factitive imperatives:
(21) aeng niyai mtang diat meil simbali:
you tell once more INTJ Sampoli
“Well, Sampoli, tell once more...”

(22) jak muaj neh daw jum duat Na:
take one this go give granny INTJ
“Take this (cake) and go to give it to your granny, will you?”

3.3 Imperatives with 1st person subject

In those cases when the action must be executed by the 1st person (singular or plural), the interjection meil and the marker oj are used:

(23) meil oj khn’um sakt la: meil
INTJ IMP I try try INTJ
“Well, let me try!”

(24) oj yeing dhveir karr neh
IMP we do work this
“Let us do this work!”

Native speakers say that oj (etymologically ‘to give’, having an auxiliary function as the universal causative verb) is addressed to the 2nd person who is not included in the number of executors denoted by ‘we’. It may be an argument for considering oj not as a mere imperative marker, but a causative verb used here in an imperative function. According to this interpretation the sentences like (23) and (24) must be considered as imperative with a 2nd person subject. But it should be noted that there are some counter-arguments to this interpretation. For instance, the subject of oj (subject of causation) is normally absent and can not be inserted, while in other imperatives with a 2nd person subject this subject quite naturally can be placed before the verb.

The marker curr is used in imperatives with the 1st person plural only. In such cases both the speaker and the addressee(s) are the executors:

(25) curr yeing prabritt ning ge Turc yeing cang’ oj
IMP we behave with they like we want CAUS

anak dham prabritt ning yeing
person big behave with we
“Let us treat them the same way we want highranking people to treat us.”

3.4 Imperatives with 3rd person subject

In the imperatives of this type, use of the marker oj, expressing both factitive and permissive causation, is obligatory. Use of the markers daw and cuh is optional. In the case of permissive causation oj is often combined with the verb duk ‘to keep’:
(26) oj gat' am daw
    IMP he read IMP
    "Let him read!"

(27) srualheiye duk-oj gat' naw cuh
    okay IMP he stay IMP
    "Okay, let him stay."

Here, the same problem arises: is oj an imperative marker or a causative verb in an imperative sentence? It is important to note that only a few of the imperative markers can be used in imperative constructions of this type. If oj were a verb, all the markers could be used which is normal for the imperatives with a 2nd person subject. This makes me consider oj an imperative marker. The imperative and causative meanings are certainly closely related, so it is possible to speak about two functions of one word.

4. Prohibitive constructions

Prohibitive constructions are formed with the help of the prohibitive particle kum. This particle is placed immediately before the verb; in constructions with oj, it is placed before oj (in this case oj is more similar to a verb than an imperative marker). The subject of a prohibition may be any person except the 1st person singular.

(28) yeing kum niyay ambi: riang neh
    we PRHB speak about matter this
    "Let us not speak about the matter."

(29) kum mak yam naw di: neh Na: samniang
    PRHB come cry stay place this INTJ Samniang
    "Do not come here to cry, Samniang!"

(30) kum oj gat' suar samnuar rapiap Ingangkhmaw Tucneh
    PRHB IMP he ask question kind silly such
    "He should not ask such silly questions!"

Besides prohibitive constructions, the particle kum can also be used in causative constructions before the auxiliary causative verb oj. In these constructions all other negative particles are also possible. This is more evidence of the semantic and formal closeness of imperative and causative constructions and meanings.

5. Preventive constructions

Preventive constructions (warnings) are formed with the aid of the verb prayatn ‘to be careful, take care’. A preventive sentence is always addressed to the 2nd person, though another person may be the executor of the action. If the verb, denoting an undesirable action, is used with the markers kum oj, a warning for the future is meant:
(31) prayatn kum oj Tual
    take care PRHB IMP fall
    "Mind you do not fall."

    If an immediate reaction is needed, kum is not used:

(32) prayatn Tual
    take care fall
    "Take care! You may fall!"

6. Combinations of the imperative markers

    In one imperative construction several imperative markers may be used, see
    (16), (18), (19), (26), (27), (29). But some combinations of markers are forbidden.
    For instance, interjections meil, Naː are not used together with sum (polite
    request), anjein' (invitation) and cur ("official" order) because they are not
    compatible in style; phang (action in favour of the speaker, the speaker depending
    on the addressee) is not used together with anjein' (action in favour of the
    addressee) and cur (the addressee depending on the speaker) because of their
    semantic incompatibility.

7. Summaries

    The words with imperative meanings described in this article differ in a
    number of formal and semantic characteristics and cannot be considered a
    homogeneous means of expressing imperative semantics. But the way these words
    are used in imperatives with 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person subjects answers the minimal
    requirements necessary for them to form a functional paradigm. Forms
    constituting such a paradigm a) must be regularly produced from all the lexemes
    with semantics not contradicting imperative meaning; and b) must be recognized as
    imperative forms in the context. (For details see Xrakovskij & Volodin 1986:28.)

    The Cambodian imperative paradigm is fourfold-consisting of four
    categories (see Table 2). The center of this paradigm, as in other languages, is the
    2nd person imperative forms: any imperative marker, except oj, can be used in a
    2nd person imperative, and only 2nd person imperatives can be used without any
    marker and without a subject.

    The number of listeners is not taken into consideration when choosing a
    marker, but it can be expressed by lexical means.

    The other imperative categories may be called peripheral. The least number
    of markers have been found with the 1st person singular subject, so it is the most
    defective member of the paradigm.

    In peripheral imperatives the causative verb oj is used as an imperative
    marker, as is characteristic of languages with little verb morphology. Thus, it may
    be stated that Cambodian is a language in which the semantic closeness of
    imperative and causative manifests itself on the formal level: a) the universal
causative verb *aj* is used as an imperative marker;\(^2\) b) the prohibitive particle *kum* can be used in the indicative only in causative sentences (and not in others!).

**REFERENCES**


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\(^2\)Imperative constructions with *aj*, which may on the surface seem to be 2nd person imperative constructions, actually are 1st/3rd person imperative constructions, because only the 1st/3d person is the executor of the action and the 2nd person is just a transmitter of the speaker's will.