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 muoy [CLF] - used for singular, and muoy cumnuən, təəŋ 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) **muay srobpak sou sion cmriey luvay luvay**
    one moment sound sound singing faint faint
    r.saat m.ok pah saat busaat yuvê?con
    float come collide ear sense young man
    ‘For a single moment faint sounds of singing reached his ears’

(2) **yuvê?con choo aep nuy phteâ thmou muay**
    young man stand touch COMIT CLF stone SG
    smtluq r.uk mòol mcah cmriey
    peer look for; DIR look owner song
    ‘The young man stood touching a stone, trying to see who was the
    person singing’

(3) **yuvê?con bontow dumnac taam ksa e tuok**
    young man continue moving along rope water
    kraommlup rukkha thom thom
    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 thmeə phnēeək təʔŋ swəŋ khəaŋ əpəl tæə
3SG close eye MDF both sides suddenly
rum'pik nuh viə khəŋ mōən khvəy mʊəy
moment that 3SG see chicken roast SG
nuw khnəy caan viə kəv baek phnēeək yaŋ
be; at in plate 3SG LNK open eye MDF
rəhəh mōən khvəy kəv viniəh baat
quick chicken roast LNK disappear disappear; REZ tuw
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 sat ləwu mʊəy dæəl prəhak prəhæəl
3SG see creature little SG REL alike
nuə sat kənlaat həntoc ponəə viə
with creature cockroach a little but 3SG
məən kbaal douc kəndooə
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 cəmŋəəy khəŋ hək dooc əpəl
look from distance see like COP
məhəa kəmpəeŋ khʊəw
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 robbh kōst* 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) kʰphonmniː领跑 kaa puut nih dəl kaaloo aŋ
1SG speak NOM true this ADR K. 2SG
yōk k硚mbút mʊuy chlaak ciə ruup
take knife SG carve COP form; CLF
twkətən nuu n tō oequt chōo 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) kōst kʊŋ cap yōk deek chuuh robbh kōst
3SG LNK begin take plane POSSE 3SG
hɑy yōk pɔmjna dəm tuu tuu lōo deek chuuh
and take hammer hit go on plane

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

(9) kōst cap ʰɔrgbəl ʰequt oh nih ʰɔrgbəl hɑy ʰɔrgbəl
3SG begin turn log wood this turn REZ turn
tiə hɑy riət kat viə nʊy 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 rəmɛnɨɲiːŋʔhɑan teesaccpp mʊuy
mountain K. COP place of interest tourist SG
sthušt nuu n iisaan ney tii kroŋ siɛmrɪŋp
located in north-east POSS place; CLF town S.

’The mountain Kuulen is a tourist place of interest situated north-east from Siemriep’
We find a similar situation with determiners in English when a non-referential NP changes its determiner when a modifier is added. Compare the following: She never goes to the cinema, Once she went to the cinema and Once she went to a large local cinema; He was taken to hospital and He was taken to a general hospital; Her children go to school and Her children go to an elementary school. In both Khmer and English the conflict of strategies of marking in non-referential NPs means that on the surface level a non-referential NP is marked as a referential one.

Identifying NPs also become marked for number when they include certain types of modifiers, for example:

(12) haet ney baan ciə phsam na bhānh muay nih trəw why market old SG this PASS

baan cōn huvrteeh niyum cool cət PASS people foreign like like

‘Why do foreigners then like this old market?’

Another situation when logical semantic and pragmatic factors come into conflict is when an introductory NP is repeated where we would normally expect an identifying NP. This happens for a variety of reasons and has often to do with the emotive aspect of utterances in discourse. Full or partial repetition of an introductory NP in the second (and the following) nominations of the same object in a discourse is a device found in many languages. But in Khmer of all the descriptive components of the introductory NP it is often precisely the number expression that is repeated, while the other descriptive components may be omitted. The emotions involved may be different: surprise, irony, anger etc. When the speaker applies the introductory strategy instead of the identifying one to refer to an object or objects already introduced into the discourse, his intention is to hold this referent in focus. Consider the following example where the number expression is repeated in the second nomination of the same object of reference:

(13) ciə miən mut phēk snət snaal mnēk mun

3SG have friend close SG+CLF NEG

NEG NOM nation ItalianNEG go walk play evening

ciə muay khniə moel kon ciə muay khniə haət

together look film together and

aa mnēk nəh kən pum khcey dəm

PEJOR SG+CLF that LNK quickly know

thaə əwpuk mdaay rəbəh koon khnom ciə noonea daə
‘She had a close friend, non-Italian, they used to go out in the evenings together, go to the cinema together, then soon this bastard learned who her parents were’

Consider also the following example where the identifying description is not only marked for number, but is marked for number twice - with and with the help of reduplication of the last modifier in the chain. No doubt it is done because the emotional involvement of the speaker is very strong and it is expressed otherwise: by way of many formal or semantic reduplications (and even triplications) throughout the whole sentence, almost in every syntactic position:

(14) kua aoy saok suvreey pòn pèek nah kée
    ATR     grieve  griev  very very very  3SG/PL
khōn prćiçōn tōη nuh mían phiap sleek
see     people all; PL that MDF withered, faded
skaj skōom skaj heew hōt haem
withered, faded thin weary tired swell up

sōmprou sōmprou
swollen  swollen; PL

‘What grief it was to see all those people, withered, thin, weary, tired swollen’

To conclude, the examination of the usage of number expressions in Khmer takes us back to the initial stages of grammaticalization of number, when number expressions have more to do with reference rather than with the expression of quantity as such. The universal character of the grammaticalization of number in languages is connected with the most fascinating as well as mysterious phenomenon of a natural language, that is the dualistic nature of the common noun, which is used both to refer to specific objects and general notions. This dualism is structurally blurred in languages with a fully grammaticalized number and is clear and transparent in languages like Khmer. In the former, NPs are marked for number even in statements like What is a rose? Roses are beautiful, A rose needs a lot of sunshine, where grammatical number has nothing to do with the expression of quantity, and the rules of choosing the right number form are very intricate, sometimes illogical, always language specific and often purely idiomatic (cf. go on foot, make by hand, All women were in evening dress, People recognized him in the street, Look me in the eye and say you love me, etc.). In languages like Khmer, which lack the fully grammaticalized category of number, the rules of marking for number, though no less intricate are more in accordance with the logical structure of a statement. The common noun is not supposed to refer to objects: it has an extention, that is the multitude of all potentially possible referents, which is an abstract multitude, which exists due to the abstraction of actual infinity [Paducheva 1985: 84]. As it seems, grammaticalization of the category of number is motivated by the fact, that number makes it possible to single out specific objects of reference and make an NP referential.

In the northern dialect of Khmer we can find a still earlier stage of grammaticalization of number. There are two structural types of introductory NPs: in one of them the number expression is introduced by a classifier as in standard Khmer,
while in the other it is introduced by a copula [Poopatwiboon Samkiet 1983], for example:

(15)  mìañ knom koon  knom muuy

  have   girl  child  CLF  SG
‘There lived a daughter’

(16)  mìañ mee  cah  née muay

  have   mother  old  COP  SG
‘There lived an old mother’

The second type suggests that number expressions once used to be a separate dependent predication which underwent syntactic compression. In standard Khmer we find the element ciɔ which can be used both as a copula and as one of the markers of dependent predication. In the second function it is used with modifiers of quantity.

So, the specific character of the grammaticalization of number expressions in Khmer suggests that the category of number is connected with reference and with functional type of descriptions in discourse. As a matter of fact, the authors of Por-Royal Grammar have pointed to the fact that the category of number has to do with reference, they explained it the following way: “The indefinite meaning of common nouns... forces us to use nouns in two numbers - singular and plural, so that to limit this meaning. There is another way to define the vague meaning of common nouns. Almost in all languages particles were introduced called articles, which define this vague meaning in a different way both in singular and plural” [Grammatica...1998: 115].

REFERENCES