

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 *muəy* [CLF] - used for singular, and *muəy camnuən*, *těəŋ 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 expressions: 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 srɔbɔk sou siəŋ cɔmriəŋ lɔvəəy lɔvəəy*
 one moment sound sound singing faint faint

rɔsaat mɔɔk pah saot bɔsaat yuvěəʔcɔn
 float come collide ear sense young man

'For a single moment faint sounds of singing reached his ears'

- (2) *yuvěəʔcɔn chɔɔ aep nuŋ phtěəŋ thmɔv muay*
 young man stand touch COMIT CLF stone SG
sɔmluŋ rɔɔk məəl mcah cɔmriəŋ
 peer look for; DIR look owner song

'The young man stood touching a stone, trying to see who was the person singing'

- (3) *yuvěəʔcɔn bɔntɔv dɔmnaə taam ksae tuɔk*
 young man continue moving along rope water
kraommlup rukkhə 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 thmec phnɛɛk tɛ̃əŋ sɔvɔŋ khaaŋ srap tae*
 3SG close eye MDF both sides suddenly
rumpic nuh viə khə̀əŋ mɔ̃əŋ khvay muəy
 moment that 3SG see chicken roast SG
nuw khnoŋ caan viə kɔv baek phnɛɛk yaan
 be; at in plate 3SG LNK open eye MDF
rɔhah mɔ̃əŋ khvay kɔv 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 (NP₅) disappeared’

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 khə̀əŋ sat lʔut muəy dæl prɔhak prɔhael*
 3SG see creature little SG REL alike
nuŋ sat kɔnlaat bɔntəc pɔntae viə
 with creature cockroach a little but 3SG
miəŋ kbaal douc kɔndoop
 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) *mə̀əl pii cɔmɣaay khə̀əŋ hak dooc ciə*
 look from distance see like COP
mɔhaa kɔmpaen khuiəw
 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 rəbəh kōət* 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) *khnomniyəy kaa put nih dpl kaaloo aəŋ*
 1SG speak NOM true this ADR K. 2SG
γək kəmbuət muəy chlaak ciə ruup
 take knife SG carve COP form; CLF
tvkətvv nuw ləə vŋkəp chəə 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) *kōət kvv cap γək deek chuuh rəbəh kōət*
 3SG LNK begin take plane POSS 3SG
haəy γək ɲəɲuə əvm tuw ləə deek chuuh
 and take hammer hit go on plane
 'He took his plane and hit it with a hammer'

- (9) *kōət cap bəŋvəl vŋkəp oh nih bəŋvəl haəy bəŋvəl*
 3SG begin turn log wood this turn REZ turn
tiət haəy riəp kat viə nuŋ 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 kuulenciə rəəmĕəniyəə?thaan teesaacvv muəy*
 mountain K. COP place of interest tourist SG
sthut nuw iisaan ney tii kroŋ siəmriap
 located in north-east POSS place; CLF town S.
 'The mountain Kuulen is a tourist place of interest situated north-east from Siemriep'

- (11) *kèe baan khàən miətoʔphuum ciə tii sneihaa [...]*
 3SG/PL PRF see native land ATR love
prae klaay ciə tii liən muəy prəkəpp tuw daoy
 change become COP place SG ATR
kaa thvuutuk tòo mnèn [...]

NOM cause sorrow be miserable

'They saw the beloved native land become a place of sorrow and grieve [...]'

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 the 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 vvey baan ciə psaa cəmnah muəy nih trəw*
 why market old SG this PASS
baan cəən bəvrvteeh niyum cool cet
 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) *viə miən muət phěək snət snaal mněək mun*
 3SG have friend close SG+CLF NEG
məən cəən ciət iitaalii tēə tuw daə lèəy yup
 NEG NOM nation Italian NEG go walk play evening
ciə muəy khniə mətəl kon ciə muəy khniə haəy
 together look film together and
aa mněək nuh kəv pum khcey duəy
 PEJOR SG+CLF that LNK quickly know
thaa əvpuk mdaay rəbəh koon khnom ciə nəənaa 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) *kuə aoy saok svŋgreen pən pèek nah kèe*
 ATR grieve grieve very very very 3SG/PL
khə̀əŋ prɔciəcən tɛ̀əŋ nuh miən phiəp sleek
 see people all; PLthat MDF withered, faded
slaŋ skɔəm skaŋ heew hvɔt haem
 withered, faded thin weary tired swell up
svmprou svmprou
 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 extension, 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) *miiən kmom koon kmom muuy*

have girl child CLF SG

'There lived a daughter'

(16) *miiən mɛɛ cah nəə 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 *ciə* 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].

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