

# The pronoun system of Uon Njuñ Mnong Rølom

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## 1. Introduction.

Mnong Rølom is a dialect of Mnong, which in turn is a member of the Mon-Khmer language family.<sup>1</sup> It is spoken in Lac Thien district, Darlac Province, Vietnam. There are approximately four thousand speakers of the dialect. The 'Uon Njuñ'<sup>2</sup> sub-dialect is spoken by about a thousand people in the general vicinity of the district center.

## 2. The Pronouns and Pronoun Pluralizers.

### 2.1. Pronouns.

The pronoun system of Uon Njuñ Mnong Rølom is composed of

1 The material for this paper was obtained during our two years of residence in Lac Thien district, South Vietnam.

2 This name is given because it was the name of the village of the language teacher. It is not an official name.

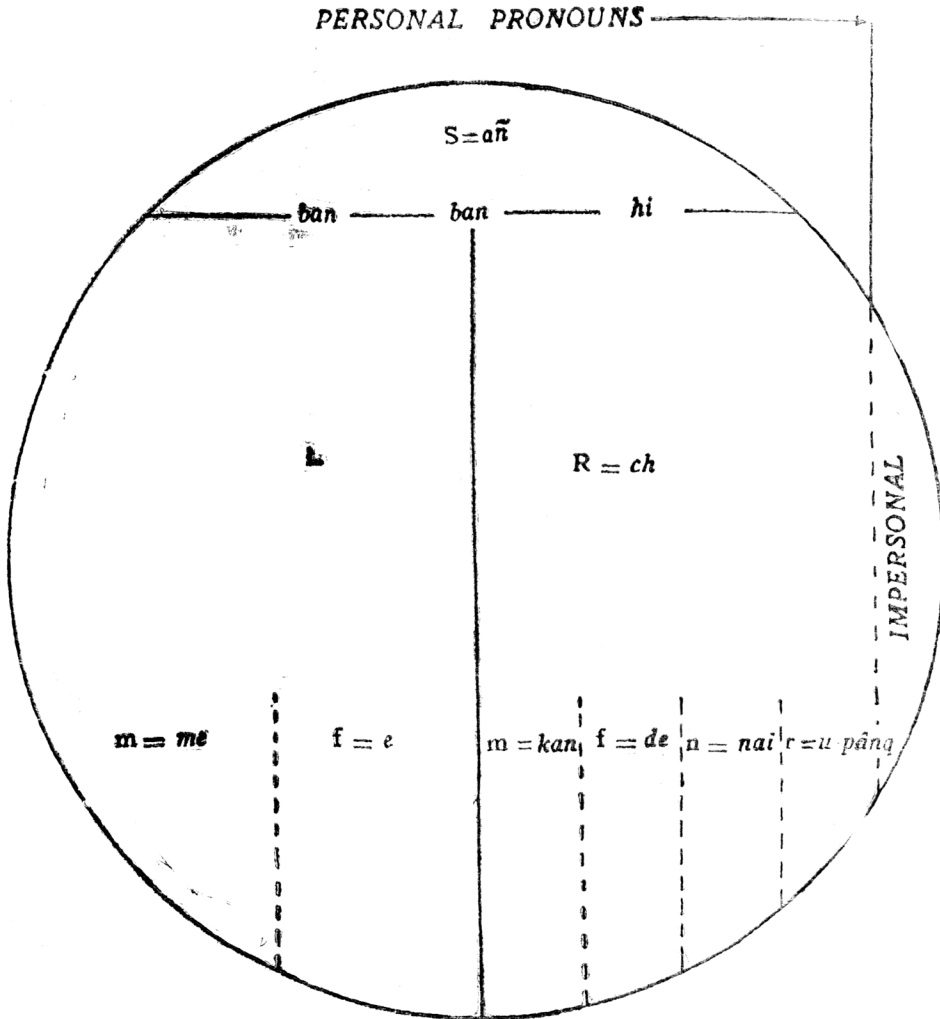
The consonants of Mnong Rølom, as represented in this paper, are: voiceless stops: p, t, c, k, glottal stop is indicated by breve/˘/ over a vowel; voiced stops: simple: b, d, j, g; prenasalized: mb, nd, nj, ngg; preglottalized: ɓ, ɗ, dj; nasals: m, n, ñ, ng; liquids: l, r; semivowels: w, y; fricatives: s, h. The vowels are (from high to low): front: i, i, ie/iə (glided), ê, e; central: u, â, ɔ, a and â (with u, â and a phonetically short and ɔ and â phonetically long); and back: u, ù, ú, uo/ua (glided), ô, o.

ten pronouns and two pluralizers. The ten pronouns represent the three principal person components of *Speaker*, *Listener*, and *Referent*.

*Listener* is further sub-divided in to *masculine* and *feminine*.

The *Referent* component is represented by those pronouns which refer to someone or something other than the speaker or listener(s). The general *Referent* pronoun is *eh*. *Referent* is further subdivided into *masculine*, *feminine*, *special respect*, and *non-specific*.

The relationship of the Uon Njun pronoun system to the semantic components it represents may be shown by the following diagram



S = Speaker L = Listener R = Referent m = masculine f = feminine  
 r = special respect n = non-specific,

The solid lines on the chart divide the three principal person components. The dotted lines separate subdivisions of these components. Forms found on the line include the person components on both sides of that line.

The pronouns are as follows:

*an̄*— 'I', (S). Speaker

*ban-* 'we all' (inclusive), (S + L ± R). This word refers obligatorily to the speaker and listener(s), and optionally to referent(s) other than these but referred to as belonging in the same group.

*hi*— 'we' (exclusive)' (S+R). This word refers to the speaker and referent(s) (his companions or his group—not necessarily present). It will be noted that the only distinction between *hi* and *ban* is that *hi* excludes Listener.

*me*— 'you' (masculine), (Lm). Masculine Listener.

*e*— 'you' (feminine), (Lf). Feminine Listener. This pronoun is also used in addressing all non-human members of the animal kingdom, both male and female. This latter use occurs principally in myths and legends.

*eh*— 'he/she/it/they', (R). *Eh* is the general Referent. It is non-distinctive as to gender and number, personal or impersonal. However, since it is the only pronoun which may be used impersonally, its principal use is in reference to animals and things.

It is also sometimes used to refer to children, and, less frequently, to adults. A common instance of the latter use is by parents or grandparents in reference to their children or grandchildren. It may also be used personally for variety or simplicity where the referent is clearly known to the listener. (e.g. *An̄ sak bak eh hau*, I go with it here='I go with him/her.')

*Bal Yuon tang mhõ ndang eh tom*. Group Vietnam together do among themselves = 'The Vietnamese did it among themselves.'

*kan*— 'he', (Rm). Masculine Referent.

*de*— 'she', (Rf). Feminine Referent.

*u-pâng* = *pâng*<sup>3</sup>— 'he/she/it', (Rr). Special respect Referent. This word carries a connotation of respect, pity, or endearment for the referent. (e.g., *u-pâng* was sometimes used in Bible translation in reference to the

apostles, sometimes, by implication, of the Lord, *Dan bẽ lai han u-pâng mra an ta bõr me*. Ask, command particle, and he shall give to you-all = 'Ask and it shall be given you.' *U-pâng kuon nai han jham ngan*. He child people there gravely-ill very = 'The child of those people is very gravely ill'. *U-pâng gom*. 'He smiles.' (said of a baby.)

*nai*— '(other) person(s)'. Non-specific personal Referent. This word is not only non-distinctive as to gender number, but it is also non-specific in that the referent is frequently unknown to the listener. Sometimes *nai* is used primarily because this *non specific* aspect is in focus. For example *Nai lah*, 'They say' or *An̄ m̄hõ brua nai*, 'I do work for somebody'. This use of *nai* is very common as it often avoids much involved explanation. Another Common use of *nai* in which its non-specific character is in focus, is as the subject of a verb in expressions equivalent to those employing the passive voice in other languages (e.g., *Nai troh an̄*, somebody send-out me = 'I was sent.')

Sometimes the *personal* character of *nai* is in focus. It is then used to indicate that which pertains to people in contrast to that which does not. For example, domestic birds and animals are frequently referred to as being owned by *nai*. (*yo nai*, 'domestic elephant' stands in contrast to *yo bri*, 'forest elephant'). *Hih nai* could be used to distinguish a 'people house' from a house used for storing rice or for other purposes.

Sometimes the fact that *nai* represents a *referent* other than the speaker or listener(s) or their group is what is in focus. With this connotation, *hih nai* would be used primarily to distinguish an 'other people house' from 'my/our house'. Some expressions such as *sai nai* 'other person's husband' or *uon nai* 'other people's village', would almost always be used with this connotation, as their personal reference is taken for granted. Most things owned by the Vietnamese or other 'foreigners' are referred to as being owned by *nai* (e.g., *An̄ hao deh nai*. I ride vehicle people = 'I ride other people's vehicle.' *an̄ rout djũ nai*. 'I buy other people's tobacco.')

## 2.2 Pronoun Pluralizers.

The general pluralizer is *bõr*. It is used with all pronouns which are distinctive as to gender, occurring before the pronoun which it pluralizes.

*bơ me*— 'you all' (masculine), (P L<sub>m</sub>). Plural masculine Listener. This expression refers to two or more male listeners or a mixed group with the male listener(s) in focus.

*bơ e*— 'you all' (feminine), (P L<sub>f</sub>). Plural feminine Listener. This expression refers to two or more female listeners or a mixed group with the female listener(s) in focus. It is also used for animals in a manner parallel to *e*.

*bơ kan*— 'they' (masculine), (P R<sub>m</sub>). Plural masculine Referent. This expression represents two or more masculine referents or a mixed group with the masculine referent(s) in focus.

*bơ de*— 'they' (feminine), (P R<sub>f</sub>). Plural feminine Referent. This expression represents two or more feminine referents or a mixed group with the feminine referent(s) in focus.

The special respect pluralizer is *hìn*. It is used only following the special respect Referent pronoun *u-pâng*<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. Relationship of *bal* to the Pronouns.

One word, which, while not a pronoun itself, is frequently closely associated with the pronouns, is *bal*, 'group'. Because of the similarity of meaning between such expressions as *bal kan*, which we have glossed as 'his group' and *bơ kan*, 'they' (masculine), *bal* might at first appear to be an alternate form of *bơ*. This appearance is heightened by the fact that, with one possible exception,<sup>4</sup> we have never yet discovered *bal* as

3 The forms *u-pâng* and *pâng* are in free variation. *U-pâng* is the more common. In the plural the common form is *pâng hìn*.

4 The one possible exception which we have mentioned is not a clear-cut one. It occurs in the sentence: *Bal sak wơ-wang han dâng bơ Yưk Uon Nđham truh ta Yưk Uon Nđâng Krieng*. (group go hunting there from Uon Nđham mountain to Uon Nđâng Krieng mountain). 'They went hunting from Uon Nđham to Uon Nđâng Krieng.' *Bal sak wơ-wang han* would normally be taken to be the subject of the sentence since the expression ends in *han* (that/there) a word which frequently co-occurs with *bal* in noun expressions. However, with this interpretation the sense of the sentence would be 'that group who went hunting from U.N. to U.N.K.' lacking a predicate. The best interpretation of the sentence then would seem to be: 'The group went hunting there from U.N. mountain to U.N. K. mountain', with *han* there as a place expression expanded by the following *dâng bơ... truh ta...* expression. ('from... to...').

the only member in a subject or object expression. Furthermore informants insisted that *bal kan* and *bo kan* were essentially the same, but admitted that *bal bo kan* would generally be used in reference to a rather large group.

The form *bal bo kan* shows that *bal* is not simply an alternate form of *bo*. The fact that *bal*, unlike *bo*, may precede all the pronouns substantiates this.

That *bal* is not simply a pronoun pluralizer is shown by the fact that, whereas *bo kan* may refer to as few as two people with no individual in focus, *bal kan* refers to a minimum of three people with one person in focus.

Also *bal* may be used in many constructions other than pronoun expressions. *Bal han*, mentioned above, is an example of one such expression. Other examples are: *bal yuon*, group Vietnam = 'Vietnamese'. *bal lut jang ti* group missing leg arm = 'amputees', *bal yuk cuor*, group mountain land = 'tribal people'.

*Bal han* is frequently used in place of *bo kan* or *bo de* when gender is not in focus. Some sub-dialects have a pronoun *hen* which is equivalent to the phrase *bal han*.

#### 4. Usage.

All of the pronouns can be used as subject, object or possessor.

##### 4.1 Subject Pronoun Position.

The position of the subject pronoun may be either before or after the verb expression.

###### A. Subject Pronoun Before the Verb.

When there is an action verb, the subject pronoun occurs before the verb, except in cases of emphasis or politeness.

*leo e lang siem de Cindy*. Now you (fem.) make eat her Cindy = 'Now you feed Cindy.' This sentence also illustrates the optional occurrence of the masculine or feminine Referent pronoun preceding the proper name.

###### B. Subject Pronoun After the Verb.

In certain polite expressions, the pronoun subject comes after the verb.

*Luor me*. Be-first you (masc.) = 'You go first.'

*Plă e di to.* Return-home you (fem.) unanalyzed form, polite particle = 'Goodbye.'

C. *Subject Pronoun Either Before or After the Verb.*

Certain verbs occur always, or almost always, preceded by the pronoun *eh*. In such expressions, *eh* plus the verb act as a unit verbal expression. Verbs with *eh* and certain other stative verbs may have the subject pronoun either before or after the verb.

*Eh so-sō ān.* It lost-way I = 'I lost my way.'

*Ān eh so-sō.* I it lost-way = 'I lost my way.'

*Ar ngan ān.* tired very I = 'I am very tired.'

*Ān ar ngan.* I tired very = 'I am very tired.'

In such expressions, the more common order is the subject pronoun to follow the verb.

D. *Subject Pronoun both Before and after the Verb.*

To give special emphasis to the fact that the subject is the actor, the subject pronoun is repeated after the verb. Usually the pronoun occurs both before and after the verb, but in rapid speech, the first pronoun is frequently unstressed or omitted altogether.

*Ān peh ān.* 'I pound.'

*Ān ĩ ah ān, me ĩ ah me.* 'I row myself and you row yourself.'

### 3.2 Direct Object Pronoun Position.

All of the pronouns can be used as direct object of the verb. The position of the direct object pronoun is normally post-verb, but sometimes the object pronoun is placed before the subject if the object pronoun is more in focus than the action of the verb.

*Sau kap kan.* (dog bite him) 'The dog bit him.'

*Kan sau kap.* (him dog bite) 'He is the one that the dog bit.'

Post-verb subjects and post-verb objects can be distinguished only by context. They always occur singly, never together.

*Jut ān.* 'Wipe me.'

*Ān jut.* 'I wipe.'

*(Ān) jut ān.* 'I will wipe.'

### 3.3 Position of Pronouns as Object of Preposition.

Pronouns as objects of the preposition come after the preposition.

*Ān khon ta me.* (I like to you) 'I like you.'

*De sak bak kan.* 'She goes with him.'

### 3.4 Possessive Pronoun Position.

All of the pronouns can be used as possessor. They occur after the possessed noun, either alone or in combination with possessive indicators and/or *tom*, 'own/self.'

#### A. Alone.

*Ān sak mdrao kuon nai.* (I go medicine child their) 'I go to give medicine to their child.'

B. In combination with *dī* or its allomorph *jī* (*jī* usually follows *ān*, *dī* follows all other nouns and pronouns). *Dī* and *jī* are possessive indicators.

*Hih kan dī* 'His house.'

*Hih ān jī* 'My house.'

*Hih may bap ān dī.* (House mother father I possessive indicator) 'My mother and father's house.'

(So far, no general rule has been discovered which will predict whether *jī* or *dī* will be used in a given environment following *ān*.)

C. With *dī* or *jī* followed by *tom*, self/own.'

*pieng ān jī tom | pieng ān dī tom* (rice I poss-indic. own) 'my own rice'.

*Hau, e dī tom ya?* (this you (fem) poss.— indic, own question-particle) 'Is this yours?'

D. With *tom* alone following the pronoun.

*Yo ban tom.* (grandparent we own) 'Our own friend.'

### 5. Remarks.

No pronoun which includes the speaker may be pluralized. Rather than the pluralization of the Speaker (*ān*), there are the forms *hi* and *ban* which add person components to the Speaker,



*Eh* and *nai* are the only pronouns which are non-distinctive as to number. They may not be pluralized.

*Eh* is also unique in that it precedes certain verbs as an integral part of the verbal expression (see section 4.C). Also, as the general Referent pronoun, it may optionally be used as a substitute, not only for a noun or noun expression, but also, in certain constructions, for particular Referent pronouns (*kan*, *de*, *u-pâng*, *nai*) in successive references to the same person or thing. (e. g., *Bal yuon tang mhõ ndang eh tom*. 'The Vietnamese did it among themselves.')

*Nai*, the non-specific Referent, is unique in that it is the only Referent pronoun which requires no antecedent or any type of context, visual or verbal. All other Referent pronouns demand some sort of context, explicit or implied. The unique non-specific character of *nai* may be shown by the fact that, while all the other Referent pronouns are frequently followed by *hau* or *han*, ('this or that'), (e. g., *kan han* 'that man'), *nai* has never been found followed by *hau/han*.

The pronoun systems of some of the other Mnong Rôlôm sub-dialects differ somewhat from that of Uon Njũn. In the Uon Njũn dialect, *hin* may be easily analyzed as the special respect pluralizer. In the Uon Biep dialect, however, there are three added pronouns, all containing *-hên* (the Uon Biep equivalent of *hin*). They are *mhên* and *hên* (apparently special respect equivalents of *bơ me* and *bơ e*) and *hên*, 'they.'

The fact that the form *hên* has two meanings would suggest that one form may have originally been different. It would appear that *mhên* and *hên* are contractions of *me hên* and *e hên*, just as *pong hên* is a contraction of *u-pong hên* (In Uon Njũn, the plural form is occasionally heard as *u-pâng hin*.)

Apparently the basic meaning of *hin/hên*, when used pronominally is 'people there'. Thus, *mhên* and *hên* would mean 'you people there', *hên* means 'people there' (i. e. 'they'), and *pong hên* means 'great/poor/dear people there'. In other sub-dialects *han*, 'that/there', becomes *hin*.

