

The Functions of *kʌʔ* in Oral Kui Narrative

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the functions of *kʌʔ* in oral Kui narrative in terms of the bipartite structure of discourse information, i.e. story line vs. non-story line. When *kʌʔ* functions as a story line marker it marks the following four types of relationships: temporal sequence, consequence, change of orientation, and simultaneous events. Within non-story line information *kʌʔ* functions as a conditional connector or adversative connector. It also functions to mark conclusion and formulaic finis or sequential nonevents.

0. Introduction

This paper presents discourse functions of the auxiliary *kʌʔ*¹ in oral Kui² narrative. The data were drawn from three texts narrated by a native speaker³ of

¹*kʌʔ* may be translated as 'Well,...; so then; also', and it is often not translatable (Prasert 1978).

² Kui or Kuai is a language of the Mon-Khmer subfamily of the Austroasiatic phylum. It belongs to the Katic Branch (Thomas and Headley 1970). The Kui people are sometimes called Suai by the Thai and Lao. Suai (in Thai) means 'those who pay tribute' whereas Kui (in the Kui language) means 'human being' (Oranuch 1984:1).

³Miss Somklin Cajkwang, aged 23 years, was my informant, fluent both in Kui and Thai. She came from Khuton village, Surin province, in which half of the population speak either the northeastern Thai dialect, another dialect of Kui or a dialect of Khmer, and the other half of the population speak her Kui dialect. She came to Bangkok to work with me for a year. In transcribing the texts narrated by this informant, I also used Prasert 1978 and Wanna et al. 1975 as references.

Kui from Khuton village, Amphoe Kapchoeng, Surin province. As the functions of *kA?* are closely related to the notion of information structure of narrative discourse, it is necessary to discuss this notion first.

The information in a narrative discourse is classified into the following types: participants (and props), events, and nonevents (Grimes 1975). Participants (and props) are concerned with the agent line, which tracks the main participant through the discourse. Events which are successive determine an event line or story line, i.e. the theme of narrative backbone. They include any happening that pushes the story forward. Nonevents are all supportive material other than the story line or the main line of development in a discourse. They include setting, background, evaluation, and collateral (Grimes 1975).

The auxiliary *kA?* usually occurs before a verb phrase and occasionally before a noun phrase. It first appears in Kui narrative when the story line actually gets underway. After that, *kA?* appears throughout the text. It has been found that *kA?* occurs with great frequency in the parts of the text which are story line information. If we write down all the clauses introduced by *kA?* we have a good abstract of the whole text. In a ten-page text, *kA?* occurred forty-two times. It occurred within story line information thirty-four times and within non-story line information only eight times. The functions of *kA?* within these two kinds of discourse information are different, so its functions will be discussed in terms of this story line vs. non-story line structure.

1. Functions of *kA?* as occurring within story line information

The major function of *kA?* in Kui narrative is to mark relationships between events on the story line. *kA?* marks the following four types of relationships: temporal sequence, consequence, change of orientation, and simultaneous events.

1.1 *Marking temporal sequence*

Example 1

Paragraph 1

| | | | | | | |
|---------|---------|----------|---------|-------|-------|----------------------------------|
| Event 1 | ndɛɛl | n̄tee | paaj | mɔɔŋ | bah | 'The wife asked [her husband] |
| | wife | tell | say | you | throw | "Can you throw the wood well |
| | | | | | | [enough not] to hit me?" |
| | ʔalaan | ʔaan | ʔaa | kAat | nɔɔ | |
| | wood | let- | well | to-be | pt. | |
| | nun | kraj | haj | | | |
| | will | hit | me | | | |
| Event 2 | kjaa? | kA? | paaj | ʔɿɿ | | 'The husband then said "yes. [I] |
| | husband | then | say | yes | | did not intend [to hit you]." |
| | phu? | buuun | tan̄caj | | | |
| | not | able/get | intend | | | |

Within Paragraph 2 all five events are linked chronologically by *kaʔ*. Within the fourth event *kaʔ* not only functions to signal temporal sequence but also functions together with the introductory particle⁴ *sneε* to signal change of orientation. (See Sec. 1.3)

Paragraph 2 is linked to Paragraph 3 by the *kaʔ* in the first event of Paragraph 3. The first two events of Paragraph 3 are tied chronologically by the *kaʔ* that appears within the second events. The third event does not have *kaʔ* because the second event and the third event are interrupted by non-story line information. As the third event is a consequence of the previous action, it is also on the story line.

Besides *kaʔ*, the two paragraphs are also linked by the adverbial clause *phaa taa phuj khlaaj leεw* ‘When the belly was already broken open’ which repeats the fourth event within Paragraph 2 and thus marks the completion of the preceding event, whereas *kaʔ* introduces a new event which chronologically succeeds the previous event. This adverbial clause is also tagged by the completive marker *leεw* which confirms the completion of the previous event.

1.2 Marking consequence

Besides signalling temporal sequence, *kaʔ* can also signal a consequence of the prior events, as in Ex.2. This consequence is considered a new event.

Example 2

Event 1 *sneε kjaaʔ kaʔ soŋsaj* ‘Then the husband was suspicious
intro.pt. husband then suspicious who the wife was pregnant from.
(because the husband did not sleep
with [the wife]).’

paaj mphaʔ nuŋ daj
that pregnant with whom

(*phaa paaj kjaaʔ naw*
because that husband he

phiʔ buun biʔ nuŋ
not get sleep with)

Event 2 *kjaaʔ thon soŋsaj phiʔ* ‘The husband could not stand being
husband stand suspicious not suspicious so [he] sneaked to watch
[the wife].’

buun kaʔ tuac baŋ
able so sneak watch

⁴ The term ‘introductory particle’ is taken from Oranuch 1984:133 in which *saneɿ* and *neɿ* are referred to as the introductory particles used in Kui narrative text “to focus the event and participant, or change the main participant or start a new event”. In Northern Khmer there are also *neeħ* and *sneeħ kəʔ* which function as time markers and are translated as ‘then’. These time markers signal non-specific time change (Somkiet 1982). Their function is similar to the introductory particle *nee kaʔ* or *snee kaʔ* as discussed in this paper.

In this example, the second event (watching) is a consequence of the first event (suspicion). The suspicion is referred to again in the second event, and the two events are linked by *kʌʔ*.

1.3 *Marking change of orientation*

Change of orientation includes changes of location, time, activity, and/or participants in focus. To mark change of orientation, *kʌʔ* functions together with the introductory particle *sneɛ* or *neɛ* as in exs.1 and 3.

Example 3

Paragraph 1

Event 1

| | | | | | |
|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--|
| Final event | <i>kʌʔ</i> | <i>ntee</i> | <i>kaan</i> | <i>paaʃ</i> | ‘Then [he] told the child “I am going”.’ |
| | then | tell | child | that | |
| | ʔaw | tɕii | dʌʌ | | |
| | father | go | final pt. | | |

Paragraph 2

| | | | | | | |
|---------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|--|
| Event 1 | <i>neɛ</i> | <i>kʌʔ</i> | <i>duun</i> | <i>duun</i> | <i>kua</i> | ‘Long time [passed] one day the tiger then came across [the child].’ |
| | intro.pt. | then | long | time | be | |
| | thʌʌn | tɕoo | thʌʌn | muaj | | |
| | another | come | another | one | | |
| | tɕaj | <i>kʌʔ</i> | ʔaadɕɿɿl | | | |
| | day | then | tiger | | | |
| | tɕoo | pthəh | | | | |
| | come | meet | | | | |

In this example *neɛ kʌʔ* signals the change of time and the change of the participant in focus, and it introduces a new event.

1.4 *Marking simultaneous events*

As mentioned earlier, the events usually occur in succession. But sometimes two events may occur simultaneously. Simultaneous events may be of various kinds as described by Callow (1974:41):

Simultaneous events may completely overlap, beginning and ending together; they may partially overlap, without matching exactly; or a quick, momentary event may occur within the time-span covered by a process-type event.

Ex.4 illustrates the partial overlap of two happenings which is signalled by *kʌʔ*. In this example, *kʌʔ* also gives prominence to the main participant *ʔaatɕian* ‘elephant’.

Example 4

| | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Simultaneous Event 1 | tam ʔaadʒʒʒɪ hit tiger | kee leh that die | ‘[The elephant] hit that tiger [until the tiger] died.’ |
| Simultaneous Event 2 | lɛw snɛ already intro.pt. | | ‘[He] himself was also bitten [and] then died.’ |
| | ʔɛɛŋ oneself | kaʔ pah also pass.mk. | |
| | ʔaadʒʒʒɪ tiger | kap leh tʃɛ bite die also | |

2. Functions of *kaʔ* as occurring within non-story line information

As *kaʔ* occurs with great frequency in the parts of text which are on the story line, it is regarded as a marker of the main event line of a discourse. In other portions of text which are non-story line, *kaʔ* scarcely occurs and appears to be randomly distributed. When *kaʔ* occurs within non-story line information, it has other functions as discussed below.

2.1 Conditional connector

kaʔ may function as a connector within a conditional sentence as in Ex.5.

Example 5

| | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---|
| nɛ intro.pt. | kaʔ then | tʃaj daytime | ‘[If it was] daytime, [the elephant] made [the child] stay home.’ |
| kaʔ condit. conn. | ʔaan let | kua duŋ be home | |
| tweeʔ nighttime | kaʔ condit.conn. | ʔaan let | ‘[If it was] nighttime, [the elephant] made [the child] close all doors and windows.’ |
| pit close | patuu door | pit close | naataaŋ dʒim window all |

2.2 Adversative connector

Adversative *kaʔ* may occur within non-story line information when the story develops a conflict between two participants, or when there is an expectancy reversal which results in frustration. In Paragraph 3 of Example 1, *kaʔ* expresses the man's frustration.

| | | | | |
|------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|--|
| tam hit | mahnaa how | kaʔ adver.mk. | phiʔ not all | dʒim ‘but no matter how [he] hit, [he] could not hit all [of them].’ |
|------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|--|

2.3 Marking conclusion and formulaic finis

At the end of a text, there may be a concluding result of all preceding events, as in Ex.6, or there may be a formulaic finis⁵ as in Ex.7. Both examples are interpolations of the speaker bringing the listener back to the real time. They are introduced by *kʌʔ*.

Example 6

| | | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------------------|------------|
| <i>kʌʔ</i> | <i>lʌʌj</i> | <i>kʌʌt</i> | | ‘Therefore, snakes came into being | |
| concl.mk. | therefore | is | | and exist to this day.’ | |
| <i>ksan</i> | <i>kua</i> | <i>tʌon</i> | <i>khjuu</i> | <i>tʂaj</i> | <i>nɛɛ</i> |
| snake | be | until | every | day | this |

Example 7

| | | | | |
|------------|-------------|---------------|--|---------------------------|
| <i>kʌʔ</i> | <i>tʌop</i> | <i>mahnɛɛ</i> | | ‘(The story) ended here.’ |
| concl.mk. | end | this much | | |

2.4 Marking sequential nonevents

Nonevents or unreal events belong to a different situation from the situation reflected in the text. They tell what did not happen and include all possible events and things which set up alternatives, for example quotations having the form of a denial, a question, or a prediction (cf. Grimes 1975).

A nonevent may be sequentially linked to the previous story line or to another nonevent by *kʌʔ*. As found in Kui texts it may include either future actions within a quotation or nonverbal negative responses.

Future actions are off the story line, but *kʌʔ* can sometimes be used to mark a sequence of future events (cf. Sec.1.1), as near the end of the quotation in Ex.8.

Dialogue involves a sequence of speakers. In dialogue within narratives the speech of one participant may not be followed by that of the other participant but by a nonverbal response which may be an event or a nonevent. In Ex.8, the nonverbal response is introduced by *kʌʔ*, which signals that the action sequentially follows the verbal proposal and is a nonverbal response to it. The nonverbal response is not an event because it is a negation.

Example 8

| | | | | | |
|------------|------------|----------------|-------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| <i>ʔaw</i> | <i>kʌʔ</i> | <i>suantee</i> | <i>paaj</i> | | ‘Then the father told [the children] |
| father | then | tell | say | | "I rushed [back] to tell [your] |
| | | | | | mother to hurriedly cook rice for |

⁵According to Longacre (1983:25), the formulaic finis is a feature only of the surface and it is expressed by "a formulaic sentence like *That's all; we're through* or even the printed word *Finis*."

| | | | | |
|--------|-------|------|------|---|
| "ʔaw | waj | tʰoo | ntee | you [When] you come [back and] |
| father | hurry | come | tell | are tired then [you] can eat rice right |

| | | | |
|--------|------|-------|------|
| mɛɛ | ʔaan | waj | ʔaŋ |
| mother | let | hurry | cook |

| | | | |
|------|-----|------|-------|
| dooj | kua | tʰam | kaan |
| rice | be | wait | child |

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|-------|
| kaan | tʰoo | lkeh | lkeh |
| child | come | tired | tired |

kʌʔ buuun tʰaa dooj lʌŋj"
then able eat rice right-away

| | | | | |
|-------|-------|------------|------|----------------------------|
| kaan | kaan | <i>kʌʔ</i> | phiʔ | Then the children were not |
| child | child | then | not | suspicious at all.' |

| | |
|------------|--------|
| soŋsaj | knɔɔ |
| suspicious | at-all |

3. Discussion

The functions of Kui *kʌʔ* have been discussed in terms of the bipartite structure of narrative discourse, i.e. story line vs. non-story line. Functioning as a story line marker, which is its normal function, *kʌʔ* marks the following four types of relationships: temporal sequence, consequence, change of orientation, and simultaneous events. When *kʌʔ* occasionally occurs outside the story line it may have the following functions: conditional connector, adversative connector, marking conclusion and formulaic finis, and marking sequential nonevents.

In comparison to the functions of *kʌʔ* in oral Thai narrative (Yajai 1985), the functions of *kʌʔ* in Kui narrative are not very different. Both *kʌʔ* and *kʌʔ* function as a marker of temporal sequence. Both function as a cohesive marker sequentially linking two paragraphs. Both function adversatively to highlight the conflicts in the story. In view of these similar functions of *kʌʔ* and *kʌʔ*, it would be worth investigating whether other Southeast Asian languages also have this kind of marker, and, if there has been areal diffusion of this feature, determining its source.

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