NOTES

Some observations on Khmer discourse markers[1]

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During March–May 1993, I completed my fieldwork collecting data on subordination in Cambodian Khmer at Aranyaprathet, Prachinburi Province, Thailand.

Working on the data, I have found that some discourse markers appear to be crucial for the understanding of how Khmer discourse is organized. Here I will discuss only two phenomena dealing with discourse pragmatics.

I. kɑː and taə

As shown in Figure 1, *kɑː* and *taə* occur in the same structural positions; they occur optionally before verb phrases and occasionally before subject noun phrases. *(Figure 1, examples [1] to [3])*

Sometimes these two words precede the subject of sentences, as in examples (4), (5), and (6).

kɑː and *taə* are used to join important information to a preceding discourse. Although these two markers share the same syntactic position, it is noticeable that *kɑː* precedes *affirmative* sentences while *taə* introduces *interrogative* sentences.

Nevertheless, one question word, /məc/ or /mdəc/ 'why' cannot co–occur in juxtaposition with *taə*. It always co–occurs with *kɑː*. This awaits further investigation. *(Figure 1, examples [7] and [8])*

II. niŋ

Khmer has two optional demonstratives: *nih* used with an object near the speaker and *nuh* with an object far from the speaker. Demonstratives in Khmer follow head nouns and indicate a noun phrase boundary. *(Figure 2, examples [9] and [10])*

There is another word which can occur in roughly the same position as these two demonstratives. The word *niŋ* seems to share the same features as demonstratives. In the *Khmer Dictionary* (Buddhist Institute, 1967–1968), *niŋ* is glossed as *nuh*, one of Khmer demonstratives. Headley's *Cambodian–English Dictionary* (1977) translates *niŋ* as "1. this, that" and "2. here, there, right here, right now". *(Figure 2, examples [10] to [12])*

Semantically *niŋ* only expresses definiteness; it has an article–like function in Khmer. This 'article' is also optional as are demonstratives.

According to my informant, *niŋ* can occur with *nuh* although in his opinion it apperas to be superfluous. *niŋ - nih* is not acceptable by some speakers, but perhaps it should not be considered ungrammatical. *(Figure 2, example [13])*

niŋ in Khmer may be borrowed from *nìŋ* in Thai. It is written as / ญึ่ง / which marks it clearly as a Thai loanword. Nevertheless, *niŋ* in Thai expresses indefiniteness while *niŋ* in Khmer expresses definiteness.

The shift from indefiniteness to definiteness could be because Khmer already has the word *muǝy* 'one' for indefinite expressions. But then, as we saw above, it also has two demonstratives. Perhaps *niŋ* represents a more neutral relationship more appropriate for anaphoric discourse definiteness.

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Abbreviations :
BE	verb of existence/presence
CAUS	causative
COMP	complementizer
D.M.	discourse marker
DEM	demonstrative
excl.	exclamation
ints.	intensifier
IRRL	irrealis
NEG	negative particle
part.	final particle
PRN	[personal] pronoun
REC	reciprocal
REL	relative marker
wh–	relative question marker

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(1) pei   nuh   pũəh   **kɑɪ** lun   sɑnsəm-sɑnsəm   coul   knoŋ   kəmpott   priy   mun   nuh   bat   tiw
    time that snake **kɑɪ** crawl slowly-Redup   enter   in   bush   forets before   DEM   disappear go

'At that time the snake then crawled slowly into the bush and disappeared.' [SOURCE: *saen cambaŋ*]

(2) **A:** ʔou!   ɓɑŋ ... ɓɑŋ-wicɛt   thaː   mɛc   ɗae
           excl. title, Wichet   COMP   how   as well

'Oh! What did he say?'

B: keː   thaː   nik   kɲom   nah!   tae   keː   kmah   ɗaoysaː   keː   twəː   khoh
        PRN   say   PRN   PRN   Part   but   PRN   ashamed   because   PRN   do   wrong

        pii   mit-phẽəʔ   tẽəŋlary
        from   friend   all

        kɲom   **kɑɪ**   pənyũəl   keː   kom   ʔaoy   keː   kit   douc-nɑh   ...
        PRN   **kɑɪ**   explain   PRN   don't   CAUS   PRN   think   like that ...

'He said [that] he thought of me but was ashamed because he did [something] different from all of us [his close friends].
So I explained to him not to think like that.' [SOURCE: *tiəsəy sneıhaɪ*]

Figure. 1 *kɑɪ* and *taə* in modern Khmer discourse

(3) ɲɔm   yŭal   haəy   ɲɔm   dəŋ   ɲɔm   haəy   samɗəy   naakrii tĕəŋ   pɔnmaːn   ɗael niyiəy mɔɪk
    PRN   understand already PRN   know   PRN   already speech   Nakree   together how many REL   speak   come

    rɔːk   ɲɔm
    seek   PRN

    pɔntae   pɔntae   ɲɔm   kɓat   niŋ   cət   cinɗaː   min   ɓaːn   teʔ!
    but   but   PRN   betray with   mind   Chinda   NEG   able   part.

    cinɗaː   keː   lʔaː   ɲɔm   nah   niŋ   ɲɔm   nah   cinɗaː   miən   kun   niŋ   ɲɔm   nah   tlay   salaː   tlay   siəwphiw
    Chinda   PRN   good   PRN   ints. with   PRN   ints. Chinda   BE   merit   with   PRN   ints. price   school price   book

    niəŋ   cuəy   krup-sap   tĕəŋ ʔɑh
    Ms.   help   complete [redupl.]   all

    tae   ʔaoy   ɲɔm   kɓat   cət   niəŋ   yaːŋ-mec   niŋ   kaet   ɗouc   niəŋ   lʔaː   niŋ   ɲɔm   ʔəɲcəŋ
    tae   CAUS   PRN   betray heart   Ms.   how   IRRL   happen   as   Ms.   good   with   PRN   so

'I understood already. I knew already what Nakree talked to me but ... but I could not betray Chinda. Chinda was very kind and good to me. She helped [me pay] complete school fees and book expenses. How then could I betray her since she is so good to me?' [SOURCE: kampŭəŋcarm cam sneʔ]

Figure. 1 kɒː and tae in modern Khmer discourse

(4) haəy   soum   maʔ   kom   plic   tha: sat-kʔaek   wiə   niw-tae   kʔaek
    and then ask   mom   don't   forget   COMP   crow   PRN   still   crow

    tŭəhɓəyciə   maʔ   kham   yɔːk   tik-miəh   mɔːk   liəp   rɔːcana: lɤː   sambol   kmaw   krɑː-kwɑʔ
    although   mom   try hard   take   melt, gold   come   paint   decorate   on   skin   black   dirty

    rəɓah   wiə   yaːŋ-naː
    of   PRN   how

    kɑː   wiə   min   ʔaːc   tiw   ciə   hɑːŋ   kaət   ɗae
    kaɪ   PRN   NEG   able   go   BE   swan   happen   as well

'And then, Mom, please don't forget that a crow is always a crow. No matter how hard you try to paint gold on its dirty black skin, it cannot become a swan either.' [tiəsəy sneːhaː]

(5) thari: kɲom   soum toh   tiw   coh!   tae   kɲom   haʔ-ɗouc-ciə   min   yŭəl   niy   nih   sɑh
    Tharee   PRN   excuse (me)   go   Part   but   PRN   as if   NEG   understand   remain   DEM   part.

    thari: metta: prap   kɲom   **kɑː**   cam-cam   phaŋ   ɓaːn   teː!
    Tharee   mercy   tell   PRN   **kaɪ**   direct-Redup   too   able   part.

    tŭəh-bəy-ciə   yaːŋ-naː   niw-tae   ciə   mitp   hĕəq   rəɓɑh   kɲom   ciə   nic   nah!
    although   anyhow   still   BE   close   friend of   PRN   BE   always   part.

'Excuse me, Tharee, but it seems that I don't understand this implication at all. Could you please tell me frankly? Anyhow, you are always my close friend.' [tiəsəy sneːhaː]

Figure. 1 *kɑː* and *taə* in modern Khmer discourse

(6) ʔɤː!   cindaː   ʔɤylɤw pukae   riəprŏəp piəʔ   niyiəy nah
    excl.   Chinda   now   good at   narrate   word   speak   ints.

    ɓaek   ɓɑŋ   ʔoun   ʔaeŋ   pɔnmaːn   khae   sɑh   ceh   craən   tae-mədɑŋ
    separate   PRN   -self how much   month   at all   know   much   really

    taə   ʔoun   ʔaeŋ   miən   kruː   naː   ke: ɓaŋriən   ʔoun   nah!
    taə   PRN   -self BE   teacher   wh-   PRN   teach   PRN   part.

'Oh! Chinda now you are very good at selecting words [to speak]. It's only a few months that we have not seen each other. [You] know a lot. Who then is your teacher?' [SOURCE: *kampŭəŋcaam cam sneː*]

(7) *[After Chum has taken a poster from his pocket, Som said]*

    yiː!   chum   mɗɑc   **kaɪ**   ʔaeŋ   hiən   haek   ɓɑmraɪm   ɗouc-neh
    excl.   Chum   why   *kaɪ*   PRN   dare   tear   warning poster   like this

'Oh! Chum how dare you tear the poster?' [SOURCE: *səylethŏə*]

Figure. 1 *kaɪ* and *taə* in modern Khmer discourse

(8) yi:!   knɪə   niw   kmah   thari: min   tŏən   ɓat   te:!
    excl.   REC   remain embarrass   Tharee   NEG   on time disappear   part.

    nah!   ʔaeŋ   niyiəy   ʔəɲcəŋ   məc • **kaɪ**   min   khəəŋ   thari: mɔ:k   ʔaŋkuy
    part. PRN   speak   so   why   *kaɪ*   NEG   see   Tharee   come   sit

    ɲam   ʔəy   ke: ʔah!
    eat   what   PRN   part.
          ciəmuəy-niŋ
          together

'Oh! I am still embarrassed [to see] Tharee. Speaking of which—why ... don't [I] see Tharee sitting [and] eating with them?' [SOURCE: *tiəsəy sneːhaː*]

Figure. 1 *kɔ:* and *taə* in modern Khmer discourse

(9) samnaŋ kɑnlaeŋ nih   twɤː ʔaoy knie nik   kheɲ dɑl   ʔanusaːwɤriː tɛ̆əŋ   pɑnmaːn
     Samnang place   DEM   CAUS REC   think see   arrive memory   together   how many

     dael   knie   tlŏəp   mien ciəmuəy   ʔaeŋ taŋ-pii dʔaəm   mɔːk   nuh   haɤy
     REL   REC   used to BE   together PRN   since   origin come   DEM   already

'Samnang, this place made me think of all the memories I used to share with you since the first time we met.'
[SOURCE: tiəsəy snehaː]

(10) mədom nuh mien ptĕəh dɑp
     area   DEM BE   house 10

'There are ten houses in that area.'

(11) ɓaŋ-pisət camkaː poːt niŋ ɓaŋ twɤː kluən ʔaeŋ hɤy!
     Phisit   field   corn *niŋ* you do   body   -self part.

'Pisit, do you look after [lit. do] the cornfield by yourself?' [SOURCE: kampŭəŋcam cam sneː]

Figure 2: *niŋ* in modern Khmer discourse

(12) A:

ʔoun	kom	pruəy	tŋay	naː	muəy	ɓamnaŋ	yəːŋ	koŋ	niŋ	ɓan	samrəc
you	don't	worry	day	wh-	one	wish	we	certainly	IRRL	get	succeed

'Don't worry, some day our wish will certainly succeed.'

B:

hiː!	taə	kaːl	naː	tiw	ɗael	haw	thaː	tŋay	naː	niŋ
excl.	D.M.	time	wh-	go	REL	call	COMP	day	wh-	niŋ

'Oh! whatever day would that be called?' [SOURCE: tiəsəy sneːhaː]

(13)

kəpal	niŋ	nuh	mɔːk	piː	naː
ship	niŋ	DEM	come	from	wh-

'Where did that ship come from?'

Figure. 2: *niŋ* in modern Khmer discourse