

A DIACHRONIC SURVEY OF SOME KHMER PARTICLES (7TH TO 17TH CENTURIES)

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Introduction

In modern spoken Khmer, grammatical relationships between the clauses of a sentence may be understood without the use of clause particles. Intonation and pause, together with the context in which the sentence is spoken, make the meaning clear. Thus, when a speaker says /mtāy dau phsār, kūn dau phañ/,¹ intonation and pause mark off two separate phrases and the hearer will know from the context whether he is being told that it is 'because', 'if' or 'when' the mother is going to the market that the child will go too. Particles to express 'because', 'if' and 'when' are available but are not felt to be necessary. In modern written Khmer, the roles of intonation and pause are played by punctuation, in the form of full stops and of spaces between phrases; context still plays an important role, more so than in European languages, and particles occur frequently. When we turn to the inscriptions and the earliest non-inscriptional texts, punctuation is minimal and the contexts are unfamiliar to us in comparison with the communities for whom the texts were composed. On the inscriptions, punctuation occurs rarely, usually in the form of a circle indicating the end of a phrase. In poetry, the only formal pauses indicated are at the ends of verses and stanzas. The function of particles is, therefore, very important to our understanding. This paper is the result of the writer's interest in the form, meaning, grammatical usage and provenance of the particles occurring in Old and early Middle Khmer.

The period under review saw great change and development in the written Khmer language. The early texts have been regarded as struggling attempts to write prose; the complexities of Angkorian sentences seemed to show how difficult it was for the language to express the growing complications of Angkorian life. It is only on the Middle Khmer inscriptions that an easy style was found.

In order to consider the use of particles in these ten centuries, the following texts, (given here with an abbreviation which will be used throughout), have been used:

P.A. Pre-Angkorian inscriptions, seventh–ninth centuries A.D.;

A. Angkorian inscriptions, ninth–fourteenth centuries A.D.;

1. The transliteration used for all Khmer citations is that of Lewitz (1969). For modern pronunciation the writer's transcription is used (Jacob 1968).

- Mid. Middle Khmer inscriptions. Special attention was paid to texts dated between A.D. 1574 and 1630 (q.v. Lewitz 1970-72, nos. 1-16c).²
- R. *Reamker*, the Khmer literary version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Special attention was paid to the first five Parts or 2542 stanzas, much or all of which was probably composed during the sixteenth century A.D. (q.v. Pou 1977a: 59).
- L. *Lpoek Aṅgar Vat*. Poem about the creation of Angkor Vat, dated A.D. 1620.³
- C. The old *Cpāp'*. Didactic moral poetry, regarded by Pou and Jenner (1979: 134) as dating from before the mid seventeenth century.
- Mod. Modern, twentieth century. Examples are either colloquial or from twentieth-century writing.

The P.A., A., and Mid. texts of the seventh to seventeenth centuries are pre-eighteenth-century dated inscriptions on stone. They constitute the whole body of Khmer literature in prose. Although all are associated with religious foundations, the subject matter and style develop from the terse pre-Angkor texts chiefly concerned with lands, duties and provisions, to the Angkor texts in which more information is given about individuals or about historical events, territorial rights, disputes, etc., and to the Middle inscriptions in which the good works and Buddhist fervour of royal and other persons are described in fluent prose.

The *Reamker* represents, along with the old *Cpāp'*, the earliest extant Khmer poetry. Though undated, it may be assigned to the early Mid period (at least as far as the early part of it is concerned). The oldest stanzas may well precede the earlier Mid. inscriptions. The first five Parts (i.e. the first 2542 stanzas) have been examined thoroughly and the results used for this paper because it was felt that the text would supply useful additional information, being a continuous narrative with many colloquial or semi-colloquial passages and having a more varied content and style than the inscriptions.

It was not expected that the *Lpoek Aṅgar Vat* would produce as great a variety of syntactic constructions as the *Reamker*, because insofar as it has a story, the narrative style is very simple and the non-narrative part of the poem is, on the whole, descriptive. The reason for its inclusion here as a text for examination is that it is now dated and the date, A.D. 1620, falls within the Middle period chosen for this study.

The old *Cpāp'*, though assigned to a suitably early period, have a restricted range of syntactic constructions owing to the gnomic character. They were included for the sake of completeness.

The results of this research are presented in three sections. The first consists of comment, under various headings, on all the particles studied;

2. The so-called "Middle" Khmer period is from the 16th to the 19th centuries A.D. Only the early Middle inscriptions (for which see Lewitz 1970-72; Pou 1977b; Khin Sok 1978, 1980a, 1980b) are relevant to this paper.

3. See Pou (1975a) for dating, Aymonier (1878) for text.

the second comprises six tables which show the grammatical usages of all the particles at various periods; the third gives citations from a text for each particle with each grammatical usage in each period. The indications of word categories are made in accordance with the writer's analysis of Khmer (Jacob 1968: 330-2).

SECTION I: *Comment*

Forms of the particles

As may be seen from looking at the examples, many Khmer particles have operated in the language constantly from the seventh to the twentieth centuries. Some, eg. *neh*, *noh*, *nai* and *sot* are still spelled exactly as they were in the P.A. period. Others have undergone spelling changes in accordance with regular phonetic or orthographic developments.⁴

However, not quite all the changes of spelling can be explained away. The form *njñ* would not be anticipated from old Khmer *nu*. It has developed alongside *nu ~ nū*. There was confusion over the word already in pre-Angkor Khmer, when it was written *nau* occasionally. Modern Khmer uses the form *njñ*, pronounced according to modern rules, except in formal circumstances, when *nūv* may be used for 'with' instead of *njñ*. *nūv* is, however, then pronounced exactly like the verb and particle *nau*.

The particle *pi* also develops in a puzzling way. The modern forms of the combinations *toempī* 'so as to', *sūmpī* 'even (with following noun)', *gappī* 'it behoves (one) to', are as expected (all are heralded in Mid. or C.) but, alongside *pi* in the combination *doh pi* in Mid. (See Table 1: *Condition*), is the form *peh*, with the same meaning 'if'. In the Mid. period, open syllables were spelled with final *-h*. The form we are considering therefore is *pe*, Mod. *poe* 'if'. Were the forms *pi* and *pe*, future *pī* and *poe*, variants of the same word? If so, why did *pi* have such an unprecedented variant? Lewitz (1972: p. 110, n.3) does not comment on the relationship, if any, between the two words *pi* and *pe*, but relates *pe* to Mid. *poe*.

Compounded particles

Various combinations of particles occur, seeming to answer a need for reinforcement or greater precision, e.g. the relative pronoun *man* occurs in the P.A. period in combination with *ta*, another particle which fulfils the

4. Improved devices, copied from the Thais, for representing different vowels, produced the changes from *ley* to *loey*, *dep* to *doep*, *temp* to *toempi*, *hey* to *hoey* and *tel* to *tael*. Vowels in open syllables were probably always pronounced long but were rarely written so; the more modern spellings of *nu*, *ra*, *ru*, *pi*, and *amvi* mark the long vowel. The diphthongisation of vowels in Angkorian Khmer, followed by a return to a pure vowel, is shown in the spellings of *vom ~ vvam ~ bum*, *syani ~ sjiñ*, *loh ~ lvañ ~ luñ*. Old Khmer initial *t* became an imploded, voiced dental consonant, spelled with *t*. The diacritic *˜* was added in modern times to mark the characters *t* and *k* off as complete words. *v* was frequently written for the initial consonant which was later written *b*. Finally, the vowel *o* became an inherent vowel in many modern words and was shortened before *h*. Hence, *phon ~ phañ* and *daha ~ doh*. Old spellings with final *h* instead of *ñ* account for the transcription *daha*. The transcription *kāla* is due to omission of the killer sign in the Khmer spelling.

relative pronoun function. *man* also occurs in combination with *gi*, both as a relative pronoun and as initiator of discourse, 'i.e., then...'.⁵

gi also seems to reinforce *pi* in its occurrences in which it may express either purpose or result. By the Mid. and Modern periods, however, *pi* is combined with *tem* and clearly then expresses purpose. In literary Khmer, *pi* 'as it were' is much used to introduce attributive verbs. Gradually *pi* in this use was combined with *hāk'* and *tūc*. *hāk' pi tūc* became current in modern times as a literary and poetic way to introduce a comparison. In C. *sūmpī* 'when; even' and *gappī* 'it behoves' are attested.

The use of *nau* as a final phrase particle, (f.) meaning 'still' is in evidence in modern Khmer only in combination with *loey* and usually in negative statements.

One sequence of particles which must not be construed as a combination of constituents which reinforce each other is *vvaṃ tel ~ buṃ tael* 'never'. Here, both particles contribute different meanings 'not' and 'one who', respectively.

Changes of word-order ~ category

A sphere in which changes seem to have taken place both within one period and from one period to another is that of the word order in which some forms occur. In the case of particles⁵—which are catalysed according to their position in relation to verbs, nouns and phrases—this amounts to a change of word category.⁶ Five areas of change (with a possible sixth) have been observed:

1. *Position of the demonstrative particles neḥ 'this, these' and noḥ 'that, those'*

Tables 3 and 4 and the examples show these particles preceding the noun in the pre-Angkor period but following it from the Angkor period onwards. Although the movement from pre-Angkorian to Angkorian Khmer involves a change of area as well as of time, such a reversal as this does seem unusual (and the P.A. order is uncharacteristic of Mon-Khmer). Jenner (1982) discusses the possibility that *neḥ/noḥ* (and often *gi ~ gui neḥ/gi ~ gui noḥ*) placed before the noun are, in fact, the 'phrasal head', while the noun is attributive to it. *neḥ sre* or *gi neḥ sre* would then be 'These are the ricefields'. It is tempting to see some such explanation of the word order, though one has also to explain sentences such as *oy gui noḥ sre sot* (K.79.18) 'gives this ricefield also' where *sre* is required as the object of the verb *oy*. Another possibility would be that *sre*, if given modern punctuation, would be in parentheses or follow a colon: 'gives this (the ricefield) also'. Whatever theory is offered, however, it is very difficult to explain why there is no occurrence at all in P.A. of what we would call the normal order.

5. A change of word order has also taken place in Khmer in the sequence of numeral and classifier. (See Jacob 1965: 161-2).

6. That is to say: a recognisably consistent form with a recognisably consistent meaning has to be regarded as performing more than one grammatical function.