Some observations on Khmer discourse markers\textsuperscript{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.

.\textit{ka}: and \textit{tao}

As shown in Figure 1, \textit{ka}: and \textit{tao} occur in the same structural positions; they occur optionally before verb phrases and occasionally before subject noun phrases. \textit{(Figure 1, examples [1] to [3])}

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

\textit{ka}: and \textit{tao} are used to join important information to a preceding discourse. Although these two markers share the same syntactic position, it is noticeable that \textit{ka}: precedes \textit{affirmative} sentences while \textit{tao} introduces \textit{interrogative} sentences.

Nevertheless, one question word, /m\textit{oc}/ or /md\textit{oc}/ ‘why’ cannot co–occur in juxtaposition with \textit{tao}. It always co–occurs with \textit{ka}. This awaits further investigation. \textit{(Figure 1, examples [7] and [8])}

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There were a few problems of data collecting since Khmer speakers near the border tended to mix Khmer with Thai, especially when they talked to a speaker of Thai people. Language samples given here are drawn from textbooks, short stories and recorded plays.

MON–KHMER STUDIES 23: 119-137
II. nɨŋ

Khmer has two optional demonstratives: nɨh used with an object near the speaker and nʉh 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 nɨŋ seems to share the same features as demonstratives. In the Khmer Dictionary (Buddhist Institute, 1967–1968), nɨŋ is glossed as nʉh, one of Khmer demonstratives. Headley’s Cambodian–English Dictionary (1977) translates nɨŋ as “1. this, that” and “2. here, there, right here, right now”. (Figure 2, examples [10] to [12])

Semantically nɨŋ only expresses definiteness; it has an article–like function in Khmer. This ‘article’ is also optional as are demonstratives.

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

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

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

Abbreviations:

BE verb of existence/presence
CAUS causative
COMP complementizer
D.M. discourse marker
DEM demonstrative
excl. exclamation
ints. intensifier
IRREL irrealis
NEG negative particle
part. final particle
PRN [personal] pronoun
REC reciprocal
REL relative marker
wh- relative question marker
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(1) pet: nhu phūh kar lu:n sansom-sansom coul knōŋ kōmpō:t priy mun nhu bat tiw
time that snake kar crawl slowly-Redup enter in bush forests before DEM disappear go

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

(2) A: ?ou! bāŋ ... bāŋ-wicōt that: māc dāe
excl. title, Wichet COMP how as well

'Oh! What did he say?'


pi: mit-phē:r tēŋlāry from friend all

knōm kar: bāŋ pēnyūl ke: kom ?aoy ke: kit douc-nah ...
PRN kar past 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: tīsāy sne:hat]
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: kampúəncam cam snei]
(4) haay soum ma? kom plic that sat-k?aek wiə niw-tae k?aek and then ask mom don’t forget COMP crow PRN still crow
tūeẖbøyciə ma? kham yok tik-miəh moł liə pəcana: lə: sambol kmaw kra:-kwa?
although mom try hard take• melt, gold come paint decorate on skin black dirty
rebah wiə yəŋ-naə
of PRN how
ka: wiə min ?aə tiw ciə həŋ kaət dəe
ka: 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.’ [tiəsøy sneːhat]

(5) tharri: knom soum toh tiw coh! tae knom haʔ-douq-ciə min yuəl niy nih sah
Tharee PRN excuse (me) go Part but PRN as if NEG understand remain DEM part.

tharri: metta: prap knom ?aoy cam-cam phan ɓain te!
Tharee mercy tell PRN let direct-Redup too able part.

tūeẖ-bøy-ciə yəŋ-naə ka: tharri: niw-tae ciə mitp həeq rebah knom ciə nic nah!
although anyhow ka: Tharee 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.’ [tiəsøy sneːhat]
(6) 丏! cindar ?option now good at narrate word speak ints.
excl. Chinda
 跟 doppel pukae 丏 prōep pie? niyiey nah

haak 仏 ponmam khae sah ceh crahn tae-mđam
separate PRN how much month at all know much really

tae 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: kampūəŋcaam cam sne]\n
(7) 仏 After Chum has taken a poster from his pocket, Som said

yi! chum mdəc kar ?aen hien haek bāmram douch-neh
excl. Chum why kar PRN dare tear warning poster like this

‘Oh! Chum how dare you tear the poster?’ [SOURCE: səylətʰoə]

Figure. 1 kar and tae in modern Khmer discourse
(8) yi! kni∡ niw kmah thatri: min tôen bat te!
excl. REC remain embarrass Tharee NEG on time disappear part.

nah! ?aŋ niyiŋy ?oŋəŋ məc *ka: min khəŋ thatri: mək ?oŋkuy
part. PRN speak so why *ka: NEG see Tharee come sit

ŋam ?aŋ ciəmy-niŋ ke: ?aŋ
eat what together PRN part.

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

Figure. 1 ka and təo in modern Khmer discourse
(9) ស្តារ កំណាត់ ញូថៃ ពីរាប់ ជាមួយ កនឹង កំណាត់ ទ័យ ដោយ ស្វែង មាន មនុស្ស ជាង ពួក យុទ្ធសឹង ហើយ ស្តារ Samnang place DEM CAUS REC think see arrive memory together how many
d៏ាល កនឹង ទេសពី មីន កុម្មុយ ចាប់ពី នាយ សំពី ដំណីល មក នុះ ហារ 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: ពីរាប់ អង្គ ស្តីញsnehat]

(10) ម៉ូបន នុះ មីន ព្រៃឈឺ ដំណីល area DEM BE house 10

‘There are ten houses in that area.’

(11) បូង-ពីរាប់ ជាតិរដ្ឋ ពីរាប់ នូវ បូង ទេស ក្មេះ ចាប់ពី នាយ ហារ! Phisit field corn nih you do body -self part.

‘Pisit, do you look after [lit. do] the cornfield by yourself?’ [SOURCE: គឺពីរាប់ ទេស Cam sne]

Figure. 2: nih in modern Khmer discourse
(12) **A:** ʔoun kom pruey ṭjay na: muey bannot yaj yaj koŋ niŋ baml samreć
you. don't worry day wh- one wish we certainly niŋ baml samreć
IRRL get succeed

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

**B:** hi! tœ kal na: tiw dael haw that ṭjay na: niŋ
excl. D.M. time wh- go REL call COMP day wh- niŋ

'Oh! whatever day would that be called?' [SOURCE: tièsay sneṭhai]

(13) kəpəl niŋ nhu matk pi: na:
ship niŋ DEM come from wh-

'Where did that ship come from?'

Figure. 2: niŋ in modern Khmer discourse