Aspect and tense in Katu of the Lao P.D.R.

Nancy A. COSTELLO

Katu is a Mon-Khmer language spoken by approximately 37,000 people in Vietnam and by 15,000 in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao P.D.R.). In Vietnam the Katu live in Quang Nam and Thua Thien provinces. In the Lao P.D.R. they are across the border from Quang Nam mainly in Kalum district in Xe Kong province, as well as in Salavan province. I have already described Katu affixes in the Lao P.D.R. in Mon-Khmer Studies Vol. 28. Now I wish to describe another feature of these affixes, namely the aspect markers. These were not found in Katu in Vietnam (hereafter referred to as Katu-VN.) There are both perfective and imperfective aspect markers, which are further distinguished for aspect. Perfective aspect markers can express both past completeive and present completeive aspect, while imperfective aspect markers express continuable aspect. An interesting feature is that nouns as well as verbs can have past and present completeive aspect markers.

1. Perfective aspect markers on verbs

Perfective aspect markers are frequently used on verbs. They can further be divided into past completeive aspect and present completeive aspect. The past completeive aspect is mainly marked by sar prefix, and less frequently by yar; sar occurs with both transitive and stative verbs.

1A. Past completeive aspect

Examples of sar:

- yoh ‘to spill’  saryoh ‘already spilled’
- lo ‘to ruin’  sarlo ‘already ruined, destroyed (words etc.)’
- yoh ‘to peck’  saryoh ‘already pecked’
- yeel ‘to argue’  saryeel ‘already argued’
- kuul ‘to wrap around’  sarkuul ‘already wrapped around’
- teek ‘to tear’  sarteek ‘already torn’
- leen ‘to mourn’  sarleen ‘already mourned’
- klœc ‘to finish’  sarklœc ‘already finished (work, life)’
- leh ‘to free’  sarleh ‘already freed’
Stative verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>kol</th>
<th>sarkol</th>
<th>'to be already twisted'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>li</td>
<td>sarli</td>
<td>'to be even'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of yar:

yiis   'to collect sap'       yaryis  'already collected sap'
yiik   'to hoe'               yaryiik 'already hoed'
yiin   'to conceal'          yaryiin 'already hid(talk)'
yiin   'to hang up'          yaryiin 'already hung up'
yiil   'to look for fish'    yaryiil 'already looked for fish'

An example of a stative verb is:

yɔɔt   'to be undecided'      yaryɔɔt 'already undecided'

1B. Present completive aspect

Perfective aspect markers on verbs may express present completive aspect by the use of prefixes. The most frequently used is tar, while ya is used less frequently. Many verbs which can occur with tar can also occur with sar, and the same verbs which occur with ya, can also occur with yar.

Examples of tar:

bil    'to lose'               tarbil  'lost now'
phoc   'to pull'              tarphoc 'pulled out now'
leeng  'to mourn'            tarleeng 'mourned now'
?boon  'to acquire'          tar?boon 'acquired now'
vvt    'to get rid of'       tarvvt  'got rid of now'
dos    'to stub'             tardos  'stubbed now'
phoʔ   'to go one'           tarphoʔ 'went one after the other'

Examples of ya:

yiing  'to hang up'          yayiing 'hung up now'
yiiik  'to hoe'              yayiiik 'hoed now'
yiit   'to drip'             yayiiit 'drippled now'
yiit   'to peck'             yayiiit 'pecked now'
yiil   'to suck'             yayiiil 'sucked now'
yʔn    'to sway'             yayʔn  'swayed, swung now'
yakening 'to weave'          yayaking 'woven now'
yuul   'to hang'             yayuul 'hung now'
2. Imperfective aspect markers on verbs

These are expressed by the use of a prefix which comprises an initial consonant which matches the initial consonant of the verb it occurs with and the vowel a or i. The prefixes include: a, ba, bi, ca, ka, la, ma, na, ra, ri, si, ta, va, ya.

Examples:

- aʔeeʔ 'to ask many times'
- bibuah 'to keep on grumbling'
- babil 'to keep losing'
- caca 'to keep on eating'
- kakah 'to keep on looking'
- mamooč 'to keep hunting'
- mamong 'to continue living'
- nanŋyl 'to keep singing(women)'
- papi 'to continually speak'
- rareet 'to be continually tired'
- ræet 'to boil continually'
- riram 'to keep dancing'
- sasæt 'to speak a lot on the same subject'
- sisɔt 'to harvest rice for many days'
- tatak 'to continue to work'
- tatiik 'to continually dig for food(animal)'
- vava 'to echo many times'
- vavak 'to dip something many times'
- vavɔyç 'to continue to go'
- yayuul 'to keep hanging don'
- yayɔh 'to peck continually'
- yayyyuŋ 'to sway, swing continually'

3. Completive aspect markers on nouns

Katu-Lao also has past and present completive aspect markers on nouns. This is not surprising since verbaliser prefixes occur on nouns in Katu, as described in Costello (1998). The prefixed noun has the meaning of being involved in an action as the subject, object, or instrument.

3A. Past completive aspect

This is marked by the prefixes ar and sar, sar being the most frequently used. Many of the verbs which occur with tar present completive aspect, also occur with sar past completive aspect.
Examples of *sar*:

- neh  
  sarnəh  
  ‘a hammer (already used)’
- naac  
  sarnaac  
  ‘a whip (already used)’
- nhəh  
  sarnəh  
  ‘muntjak deer (already dead)’
- niih  
  sarniih  
  ‘stick for beating drum, gong (already used)’
- miat  
  sarmiath  
  ‘a ring (already worn)’
- laang  
  sarlaang  
  ‘shoulder (already dead)’
- kənu?  
  sarkənu?  
  ‘scissors (already used)’
- klaah  
  sarklaah  
  ‘sheet, layer (already made)’
- bəh  
  sarbəh  
  ‘beak of bird (already dead)’
- rung  
  sarrung  
  ‘jail (already used)’
- ngyu  
  sarngyu  
  ‘a chair (already made)’

Examples of *ar*:

- aap  
  araap  
  ‘jaw (already dead)’
- ngyl  
  arngyl  
  ‘tree stump (already hewn)’
- nang  
  arnang  
  ‘sorcery (already blown)’
- kuuuh  
  arkuuuh  
  ‘stony ground (already in place)’

3B. Present completive aspect

This aspect also occurs with nouns and is marked by the prefixes *tar* and *kar*. The prefix gives the meaning to a noun of “something which has been involved in an action recently”. Many of the nouns which occur with *sar*, can also occur with *tar*.

Examples of *tar*:

- neh  
  tarməh  
  ‘hammer (while using it)’
- nhəh  
  tarnhəh  
  ‘muntjak deer (recently killed)’
- niih  
  tarniih  
  ‘stick for beating drum, gong (recently used)’
- miat  
  tarmiath  
  ‘a ring (being worn)’
- poon  
  tarpoon  
  ‘meat from animal’s back (recently cut)’
- kal  
  tarkal  
  ‘section (recently cut)’
- kənu?  
  tarkənu?  
  ‘scissors (recently used)’
- nu  
  tarnu  
  ‘wedding feast (recently held)’
- cyn  
  tarcyn  
  ‘ritual between 2 villages (recently held)’
- lə  
  tarlə  
  ‘drum (recently played)’
- aap  
  taraap  
  ‘jaw (recently killed)’
- rung  
  tarrung  
  ‘jail (recently used)’
- koh  
  tarkoh  
  ‘iron stand for fire (recently put in place)’
Examples of *kar*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nuuk</th>
<th>karnuuk</th>
<th>‘necklace’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>höö?</td>
<td>karhöö?</td>
<td>‘area of villages’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vaang</td>
<td>karvaang</td>
<td>‘empty space’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vaang</td>
<td>karvaang</td>
<td>‘a circle’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ding</td>
<td>karding</td>
<td>‘a bell’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kliang</td>
<td>karliang</td>
<td>‘locked’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lias</td>
<td>karlias</td>
<td>‘stub of branch’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tenh</td>
<td>kartenh</td>
<td>‘ashes in field (recently burned)’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Conclusion

As we have seen Katu spoken in the Lao P.D.R. makes use of perfective and imperfective aspect markers on verbs and nouns. These aspect markers can be further subdivided into past completive and present completive markers.

REFERENCES


Received: 25 January 1999

8 Thornley Street
Leichhardt 2040
Sydney
AUSTRALIA