SOME OBSERVATIONS ON KHMER VERBAL USAGES

Judith M. JACOBS
School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London

This study has arisen as a result of encountering some lexicographical problems. During the preparation of some Khmer-English dictionary material, it became clear that the information provided about the usage of verbs was not always precise. The following four groups of sentences illustrate the kinds of usage about which there was a lack of clarity:

a. ពេញ នូវ ពេញ ហារ 'This cup is full'.
    ត្រែក ពេញ ស្រាយ 'The water is filling the ricefield'.

b. ក្មេះ ទេះ phsaː(r) 'I go to market'.
    ṇឈ ម្កុម phsaː(r) 'He is coming to the market'.
    ហិ ព្រហ្ខាច់ ម្កុម phtesh 'He is hurrying home'.

c. ក្មេះ ហាវ khaoʔ-aiː 'I put the clothes in the sun'.
    khaoʔ-aiː ហាវ thay 'The clothes are in the sun'.

d. ក្មេះ សុឃ koːl knoʔ bontup 'I am going into the room'.
    ត្រែក សុឃ prəːk 'The water goes into the river'.

The points raised by these groups are as follows:

a. Is /pœn/ actually to be entered in a dictionary with both fill and full as its translations, since it may in fact give rise to either voice in English translation?

b. How is the dictionary-user to know that /daː(r)/ 'to walk' and /prəːpə/ 'to hurry' may not—like other verbs of motion: /tvuː/ 'to go', /məːk/ 'to come', and /dol/ 'to arrive'—be followed directly by the noun expressing the destination?

c. How does one understand the grammatical association with a following noun of a verb such as /haːl/? The sentences suggest that the noun following the verb may express a direct object (/khaoʔ-aiː/) in the first sentences, a kind
of locative (/thɔy/) in the second.

d. What is to be done about /coːl/ 'to enter'? Must it sometimes be followed by /knoŋ/ 'in' and sometimes not? If so, when?

In order to state the use of these verbs clearly, some instruction is required about their relationship with a following noun. Is this a part of grammar or of lexicon? If, as seems likely, it should be included in grammar, what kind of reminder about grammatical usage is to be given in a dictionary?

The pursuit of an answer to these questions has led to a re-examination of some relationships between verb and noun in Khmer. For the expression of grammatical relationships, as Yu. Gorgoniyev showed, word-formation plays a very small part; there are some word-forms which indicate the categories to which the words are likely to belong, but the internal form takes us no further than that. The two chief means of expressing the grammatical relationships between the main, meaningful words in a sentence are word-order and the use of connectors. Both terms need amplification. By word-order is meant the order in which words occur in combination with features of junction, intonation, pause, and stress. Thus the process of attaching an attribute to a noun is carried out by placing the attribute after the noun and pronouncing the two or more words in close junction, with a potential slight rise in pitch and pause following the attribute; stress usually accompanies the pronunciation of the attribute. By connectors are meant both particles and "down-graded" verbs. The process of negating a verb, for example, is carried out by using a particle, /mûn/, /pûm/ or /kom/, before the verb.

Taking the first of these exponents of Khmer grammatical relationship, then, let us re-examine the function of word-

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order in its application to nouns and verbs, and especially to
verbs with a following noun, since the four sets (a through d)
of problem contexts given above involve sequences of verbs and
nouns.² It is proposed to limit the linguistic context to that
of unemphatic, initiating statements consisting of one-phrase
sentences. By taking several sentence-frames, it is hoped to
classify different verbal usages in relation to the following
noun. Some or all of these may be indicated in a lexicon.

I. Sentence-frame NV, characteristically extensible by
the addition of one of the particles (/nas/ 'very', /pè:k/ 'too
much').

1. phtèəh l?ɔ: 'The house is beautiful'.
2. vî:ə chû: 'He is ill'.

II. Sentence-frame V, characteristically extensible by
the addition of one of the particles (/nas/ 'very', /pè:k/ 'too
much').

3. trećəek! 'It's cool!'³

III. Sentence-frame VN.

4. dɔl maŋ 'It's time! (arrive-at + hour)'.
5. rəbaæk tvî:ə(r) 'The door's open (is-opened +
door)'.
6. cheh phtèəh 'The house is on fire (is-on-fire +
house)'.

IV. Sentence-frame Nvn(v)n.

7. khnop ?aoy siəvphûu (t'yu) nèək 'I give the book
to you'.
8. lô:k boonriən khmae(r) (t'yu) nissyt 'He teaches
Cambodian to the students'.

²It is assumed that there is general agreement among read-
ers about the categories of noun and verb. My own criteria for
establishing these and other categories are given in my Intro-

³This use is to be distinguished from the same pattern when
it occurs as a response—for example, nèək thâ: phtèəh nî:h
l?ɔ: tè:i? 'Do you think this house is nice?' l?ɔ: 'Yes (is-
nice)'.
9. lò:k bopha:n phlo:v (mò:k) khnom 'He showed me the way'.

V. Sentence-frame НВП-ВП. 4
10. khnom dae(r) t'yu phtèh 'I walk home'.
11. khnom cên plî: phnûm-pèn 'I am leaving Phnom-Penh'.
12. khnom nîyî:ey t'yu lò:k nûh 'I spoke to that gentleman'.
13. phtèh sôŋ lî: contëel 'The house is built on stilts'.
14. ?a:v thv'y: ?ompî: sòt(r) 'The blouse is made of silk'.

VI. Sentence-frame НВН.
15. mda:y lò:ek phka: 'Mother sells flowers'.
16. ?o:pùk sôŋ phtèh 'Father builds a house'.
17. khnom t'yu phsa:(r) 'I go to market'.
18. vî:e mò:k phtèh 'He is coming home'.
19. vî:e chu:k kba:1 'He has a headache (he + is-ill + head)'.
20. vî:e cok cû:y 'He has a lame foot (he + is-lame + foot)'.

The verbal constructions defined by sentence-frames I, II and III are clear-cut. They form separate sections of grammar and are easily named, e.g. "attributive" (I), "impersonal" (III), 5 and a combination of both (II). The label attributive verb would imply that the verb characteristically occurs also in the construction НВ, used in close junction with a noun and forming only part of a sentence, as does /thom/ 'big' in the sentence /phtèh thom nîh lò:ç: nas/ 'This big house is very

4p = particle. The V which is alternative to p is a verb of motion.

5See F. Martini, "Tournures impersonnelles en cambodgien et en viêtnamien," in BSIP, 1959, p.40, where the interpretation of such sentences as these as impersonal uses is preferred to the traditional interpretation of them as examples of inverted subject.
nice'. The term *impersonal* does not necessarily exclude the possibility of a personal use as well; both would be noted in a lexicographical description.

Sentence-frame IV classifies verbs expressing the idea of doing something for someone and as such also forms a clear section of grammar. The use could be indicated somehow in a dictionary even if only by some such formula as $m(n\nu)n$. The fact that the second verb is not always present will be referred to later.

In each of the verb-patterns shown in sentence-frames V and VI, however, more than one grammatical process (from a Western grammatical point of view) is represented. Thus verbs occurring in the same sentence-pattern, V, pronounced with the same intonation-pattern, produce in translation both an intransitive active verb (sentences 10 to 12) and a transitive verb in the passive voice (sentences 13 and 14). The understanding of such sentences as 13 and 14 depends in fact on meaning at the semantic level. It is precisely because the house cannot build and the blouse cannot make that the word-order can stand. The sentences must be taken as 'The house, (someone) built on stilts' and 'The blouse, (someone) made of silk'. It is not of interest to know about the agent, which is therefore not mentioned. I think that from the Cambodian grammatical angle the two types of sentences are the same and should be discussed together. Again a formula could mark the use in a dictionary: $p\sim m$.

The sentences given as examples of sentence-frame VI represent, from a notional viewpoint, three kinds of statement: 15 and 16 are examples of subject + verb + object, 17 and 18 of subject + verb + destination, and 19 and 20 of subject + verb + sphere of action. There is no doubt about the importance of the word-order $\nu\nu\nu$ in connection with the expression of the relationship actor + action + object of action. If one wishes to know who hit whom, the answer is found by reference to the
word-order: A hit B. However, I think we Westerners tend to cling to this apparently firm rock, feeling deprived of many other footholds to clarity such as exponents of number, person, and tense. We consequently dismiss as exceptional the other two meanings of the word-order N VN. The meaning of destination in sentences 17 and 18 is extremely limited. Not many verbs of motion apart from /t̞əru/, /m̩ə:k/ and /dɔl/ occur in the N VN construction. The third class of meanings, however, those given in sentences 19 and 20, is of wide application, and the VN relationship there found is comparable with the VN relationship in the impersonal verb (sentences 4 to 6). In these cases the meaning is best arrived at by a dissecting method, making a preliminary separate translation of the first noun, if there is one, as 'As to X...', a separate translation of the verb as 'an action or state Y occurs', and a similar separate translation of the second noun as 'directed towards Z'. For example, /chéh ph̩təəh/ would be dissected as 'The action of catching fire occurs, directed towards the house', while /kʰnom ch̩w: kbaːl/ would be 'As to me, the state of being ill occurs, directed towards the head'. This suggests vagueness in comparison with Indo-European syntax but in fact, in a Cambodian grammatical way, the noun which follows the verb occurs in very close junction with it. Many sequences of verb + noun which occur with frequency might well be regarded as compound words, e.g. /t̠ət̠ːəl t̠l̠ːən/ '(receive + gift) to take (food, drink, rest)', /θv̩ː kaː(r)/ '(do + work) to work', /sɔk(h) cvt(t)/ '(happy + heart) to be willing to'. The first N, on the other hand, is not so closely bound to the rest, again in a Cambodian sense. In a slightly more emphatic speech style than the one we have been considering, it may be separated from the rest of the

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6Except for some metaphorical uses. For example, /r̩ət/ 'to run' and /coh/ 'to go down' occur with the N VN construction in /r̩ət sǐ:klɔː/ 'to run a cyclo-pousse' and /coh chməːh/ 'to put one's name down'.

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sentence as a complete phrase by occurring with potential rise in pitch on the last syllable and pause following it. The whole sentence is then pronounced as two phrases, e.g.

10. khnop, daer(t) tyu phtheah 'Me? I'm walking home'.
13. phtheah, sog ly: contuel 'The house is built on stilts'.
19. vla:e, chu:k bair 'As to him, he's got a headache'.

However, in a still more emphatic context, the noun which might be thought of as the object of the verb has separate phrasing and emphatic first position, e.g.

15. phka:nlih, mdary lueak 'These are the flowers mother sells'.

Once sentences with two phrases are admitted, the "subject" or "object" is no different grammatically (Khmerwise) from a general referent or sentence topic, as in the following sentence: daem nih, cen phka: 'This tree is flowering (tree + this + come-out + flowers)'. This point elucidates the different relationships expressed by NV... in the examples given under sentence-frame V, where NV... does not always represent what we think of as subject + active verb (cf. phtheah sog... 'The house [someone] built...').

We arrive therefore at an understanding of the NVN construction (in one phrase) with subject-verb-object meaning. In spite of the apparently close connection between its members, we must have the will to regard the sequence as three separate

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7For many sequences of verb + noun, however, there is no emphatic form. For example, /khnop sok(h) cvt(t)/ 'I am willing'; /cvt(t), khnop sok(h)/ is nonsense.

components and supply the precise connection between them ourselves, e.g. /mdal_y lunq phka:/ 'As to mother, the action of selling takes place, directed toward flowers'. Verbs taking part in this construction might be marked by some formula such as 'n.

We may now look again at the verbs cited at the beginning under a, b and c. None of them fits sentence-frames I, II or III. 9

a. /pèn/. This verb may occur in sentence-frame VI. It has the meaning 'to fill' but not in a causative sense. 10 It may be used, for example, of water filling a ricefield, /tèk pèn srae/, or of people filling by their presence a cinema, /mènus(s) pèn ròrn-kon/; but if a human agent intentionally fills a bottle, the causative verb is needed in the same construction: /kè: bòmpèn dòrp/. This point needs clarification in a lexicon, while the causative prefixes form part of grammar. A usage such as the first cited under a, /pèn nít nh pèn haey/, is most naturally translated as 'This cup is full', but the translation full would probably be omitted in a dictionary as being misleading. The sentence is perhaps best thought of by the foreigner who aims to use the language correctly himself as 'As to this cup, the action of filling occurs, completed' or, to analyse it in the same way as sentence 3, discussed under sentence-frame V, 'This cup, (someone) filled already'. A similar contrast between the causative and noncausative uses may

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9Some of these verbs may occur in a sentence-frame VN, for example in a command (/tèy phèsh/ 'Go home!') or in a comment in a mooted context (/pèn srae/ '[It's] filling the ricefield', where speaker and hearer are watching the floodwater). These occurrences, however, do not fit our chosen linguistic context of unemphatic, initiating statements.

10Little is now left of the Khmer opposition between causative and noncausative verbs. Contrast Bahnar as described by J. E. Banker, "Transformational Paradigms of Bahnar Clauses," in Mon-Khmer Studies I, Saigon 1964, pp.7-39.
be seen in the usages of /bak/ 'to break, snap (intr.)' and /bombak/ 'to break (tr.)': /bak ch'én/ 'The piece of wood broke', /khanom bombak ch'én/ 'I broke the piece of wood'. This dissecting approach helps with other words which may not have prefixed forms. Thus /mût/ 'to cut' may occur as follows: /khanom mût day/ 'I've cut my hand (as to me, action of cutting, directed towards hand)' and /kambyt n'ih m'un mût/ 'This knife doesn't cut, isn't sharp (as to this knife, no action of cutting occurs)'. In this case intentional cutting must be expressed by another verb, /kat/ 'to cut'.

b. The very common verbs of motion /mò:k/, /t'ru/ and /dol/, which play a varied role both alone as main verbs and as "down-graded" verbs, prove on closer examination to be rarities in occurring in sentence-frame VI, as was pointed out above. Their occurrence is so frequent that one tends not to regard them as such, but in fact other verbs expressing motion usually have to be used in the construction illustrated in sentence-frame V.\footnote{In their "down-graded" use as minor verbs /mò:k/, /t'ru/ and /dol/ do in fact occur as connectors in sentence-frame V, but their major use as main verbs is our concern.} This might be indicated if necessary by a formula such as \(t_p\~m\) in a dictionary.

c. /ha:l/. The meaning of this verb is 'to expose to the atmosphere'. It occurs in sentence-frame VI, but may resemble either sentences 15 and 16 or sentences 19 and 20 in translation---that is to say, it may need in translation either a direct object or the statement of a sphere of reference. In order to feel that this versatility is grammatically understandable, application of the dissecting method is again helpful: thus /ha:l khao-\(?a:i\~v/ 'the action of exposing to the atmosphere takes place, directed toward clothes', /ha:l thqay/ 'the action of exposing to the atmosphere takes place, directed towards the sun'. The word /tram/ 'to soak' may be cited here
because it needs, like /haːl/, to be understood in different ways on different occasions. It may be used in the VN construction with the sense of verb + direct object, as in /tram ʔəŋkɔ: (r)/ 'to soak husked rice'. But it very commonly occurs with /tʊŋ/ as /tram tʊŋ/ 'to soak in water' (cf. also /hael tʊŋ/ 'to swim', /lœːŋ tʊŋ/ 'to drown', /ʔɔndæt tʊŋ/ 'to float'). As a final illustration of the need to dissect and then reconstruct with the appropriate connectors in mind, the verb /lèːc/ will be used. It may occur as follows:

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\begin{align*}
tʊŋ \ lèːc & \quad \text{The (flood-) waters abate}. \\
\text{thŋg} \ lèːc & \quad \text{The sun sets}. \\
phtə̂ːh \ lèːc \ tʊŋ & \quad \text{The houses are partially covered by water}. \\
\text{kaː (r) ?aː (rth)-kɔmbaŋ nəɛk lèːc cəp mɔːk həʔy} & \quad \text{Your secrets are coming out}.
\end{align*}
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The dictionary entry must cover the ideas of sinking, merely appearing to sink, and even of being not on the way out of sight but on the way into sight. Cover only partially might be a useful dictionary entry, while the necessity to bridge the gaps between the nouns and verbs should be explained in grammar.

We come now to the second Cambodian means of expressing grammatical relationships: the use of connectors. This has a bearing on the last problem-verb, /coːl/, which was illustrated at the beginning under \textit{d} as being used with and without the particle /knoŋ/.

There are one or two particles whose use is exclusive to the written language. They in fact merely reinforce grammatical constructions based on word-order and word-grouping, which in the colloquial language are made perfectly clear without particles but by means of intonation, pause and stress. Thus /dɔː:/ 'the one which' attaches an attribute to a noun; this is accom-
plished in the colloquial language by word-order combined with intonation and pause.\textsuperscript{12} /rì:/ or /rì: ?æ/ precedes the sentence topic placed in the emphatic first position; this is carried out in the rapid colloquial language by separate phrasing of the first noun or nominal sequence in the sentence. /nèy/ attaches a noun attribute denoting possession to a noun headword; this relationship is expressed in the colloquial simply by the succession of the two nouns. One of the literary particles, /n'ru/ (spelt nù:v), reinforces the link between the V and N of a VN construction, as in the following example from a newspaper, part of a statement about the President of the Cambodian Red Cross:

...bain n'èm yëk n'ru ?'omnacy nèy krom nìh....tr'ù caek cùn dol nèsk cùmì: '...took [particle] the gifts of [particle] this society....to distribute to the sick'.

The use of the literary particles may be described as optional in the literary language, although in long involved sentences the two just illustrated are very useful.

Literary particles are in a class of their own. However, quite apart from such special particles, there is a tendency in a literary or formal style of speech or writing to use the everyday connectors with greater frequency than in the colloquial language and in contexts in which they are not essential for understanding. Thus, from being an aid to understanding a written text, particles have developed into an embellishing feature; this is not to say that they do not add some nuance to the meaning as well. The following examples, taken from some Cambodian folktales,\textsuperscript{13} illustrate this point:


\textsuperscript{13}Recueil des contes et légendes cambodgiens, Phnom-Penh 1963.
Instead of /tŏu phṭéh cau kromium/ 'go to the house of the judge', we find /tŏu kan phṭéh cau kromium/ 'go directly towards the house of the judge'.

Instead of /cap ṭemptyu/ 'took hold of the sugar cane', we have /cap àe ṭemptyu/ 'took hold towards the sugar cane', with slightly more emphasis on the sugar cane, which, in the story, comes as an interesting new item of food.

Instead of /prap nĭeŋ thaː.../ 'tell the girl...', we have /prap tŏu nĭeŋ thaː.../.

The very slight difference in the last two Cambodian phrases is very difficult to render in the English translation. These examples reveal that the verbs in question, /tŏu/, /cap/ and /prap/, can take part in both constructions, +p-VM and +t, and this would ideally be noted in a lexicographical description. In Cambodian there is not only considerable freedom, as compared with most Western languages, about whether or not a connector is used; there is also a great variety of possibilities as to which of a number of connectors should be used. The verb /prəkúel/ 'to deliver', for example, may be followed by /ʔaoy/, /tŏu/ or /dol/; for example, /prəkúel ʔaoy kəː:/ 'Hand [it] over to someone'.

As we descend from the elevated literary language towards the level of the everyday colloquial speech, we find that sometimes particles and "down-graded" verbs are still necessary for understanding, for example to express precise location. Thus, /kʰnom dak sîəvphγu lỳ: ᵃyp/ 'I put the book on the trunk' but /kʰnom dak sîəvphγu knəŋ ᵃyp/ 'I put the book in the trunk'.

Then there are verbs expressing movement or mental activity which need a link with the noun which expresses the destination (as was shown in the discussion of sentence-frame 𝑽); for example, /prəŋap tŏu phṭéh/ 'to hurry homewards', /cəŋʔol tŏu tʃiːə(r)/ 'to point to the door', /nūk dol kʰnom/ 'think of

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14 The possibility of this alternative is discussed by Gorgoniye, Грамматика..., p.252.
me'. Nevertheless, the more colloquial the style, the more readily are connectors dispensed with. There are in fact contexts from which they are regularly absent. Thus there may be no connector in an emphasised expression of place or time; for example, /konlaeq nìh, cap trvγ cræn/ 'They catch plenty of fish here'. This may be contrasted with the more prosaic and less colloquial /këː: cap trvγ cræn nìru konlaeq nìh/, where the connector /nìru/ 'at, in' is used in the unemphasised expression of place. Connectors are regularly absent in the colloquial speech also when sentence-frame IV is used. For the more formal /këː: ?aoy siævprìv mòik khñom/ 'He is giving the book to me' one hears /këː: ?aoy siævprìv khñom/ or even, if the book has already been introduced into the conversation, /këː: ?aoy khñom/. This last has the construction ñvñ but the Westerner, at least, does not like to feel that it is the same as /këː: ?aoy siævprìv/ 'He gives the book' since in one case ñv represents verb and indirect object and in the other verb and direct object. I feel that the difference is grammatical but closely connected with style. The dictionary must still indicate for /?aoy/ the use +ñ(v)n, and grammatical explanation must show that in rapid colloquial style some parts of the sequence may be absent if the meaning is clear.

Apart from constructions in which actual giving, teaching or doing something for someone is involved, many other verbs which might involve two nouns tend to be used with one noun only or to have both nouns but no connector. One hears, for example, /sraoc phka:/ 'water the flowers' or /sraoc tûk/ 'sprinkle water' or even /sraoc tûk phka:/, but /sraoc tûk lû: phka:/ 'sprinkle water on the flowers' would be too heavy and precise.

Nouns and the following connectors may be absent when an action is spoken of in which the destination is obvious.¹⁵

¹⁵Gorgoniyev, ibid., p.223, cites colloquial /?oŋkûy kau?vy/ 'sit (on) the chair'.

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When palm-juice is brought down from the tree, /dak ðyv/ 'Put [it] (down on) the ground' is enough. When goods are being bought in the market, /dak kɔmpray/ 'Put [them] (in) the basket' is enough. These particular usages throw light on the phrase /dak kɔk/ 'to imprison'. This phrase puts the foreigner in a quandary when he wants to say 'put this man in prison' without being colloquial and in an initiating context. Is one to make up a phrase on the lines of /kɔ: ?aɔy siəpΥu mɔ:k kɔnom/? In fact the Cambodians have another way of expressing this kind of action involving two nouns, as the following sentences show:

yb:k khao-?aiv tru hai1 thnay 'Take the clothes to put in the sun'.

yb:k ?eŋko:(r) tru tram tɔk 'Take the husked rice to soak in water'.

nɔem neŋk niŋ tru dak kɔk 'Take this man and put (him) in prison'.

We come back, therefore, via the use of particles in colloquial speech to the conclusion which was implied in the discussion of word-order, namely that a basic economy in the use of connecting links is characteristic of Cambodian.\textsuperscript{16} So long as the meaning is clear through the situation itself or through word-order and intonational features, the use of connectors is a matter of style or precision. This, therefore, explains the last kind of ambiguity, which was cited under ǝ at the beginning. /co:1 knɔŋ/ and /co:1/ are both correct. /co:1 knɔŋ/ gives just a little more emphasis to the idea of entering, and is not characteristic of rapid colloquial speech. The styles of speech involved should be dealt with in grammar; /co:1/ would

\textsuperscript{16}This basic economy is not paralleled by economy of words in other grammatical contexts, even in the colloquial language. It is a feature of the language to amplify the meaning of a noun or verb by using two nouns together or a string of verbs together.
belong to the +n class because of its occurrence in that sentence-frame. With so common a verb as /co:l/ examples of each use might be given in a dictionary.