KHMER LOANWORDS IN THAI

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When the Thais moved into the Chao Phaya River valley in the eighth to the twelfth centuries,[1] they came into contact with an established Khmer civilization, and they borrowed heavily from Khmer religious, cultural, linguistic, and literary sources. Then, after the defeat of Angkor by the Thais in the fifteenth century, Khmer culture underwent a decline——a kind of 'Dark Ages'——during which it nevertheless continued alive and well in Ayutthaya. During the Bangkok period the Khmers had to borrow back many aspects of their former art forms, literature, and language, frequently modified by the Thais. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the influence of Thai on Khmer was so strong that even Khmer syntax was affected by Thai.[2] As Lewitz put it, "For centuries [the thirteenth to the nineteenth], Khmer and Thai existed in veritable symbiosis."[3] Thus, as the result of mutual borrowing over a long period of historical contact, and common borrowing of learned terminology from Pali and Sanskrit, a high percentage of the lexicons of the two languages stems from common sources.[4]

For hundreds of shared lexical items that have not been found in early texts or are not attested in closely related languages of either family, it is difficult to determine the direction of borrowing. There are certain criteria, however, upon which the identification of Khmer loanwords can be based.

1. Comparative morphology is useful in many cases. If you eliminate Pali and Sanskrit loanwords,[5] Thai is basically a mono-syllabic language, while Khmer has a pervasive pattern of derivation by prefixation and infixation. Below are some examples of the most common patterns of affixation in Khmer.

Causative prefix /p-/:

dac 'severed'	> pdac 'to sever'
kaət 'be born'	> pkaət 'to create'
saŋ 'tame'	> psaŋ 'to domesticate'

Reciprocal prefix /CrV-/:

kham 'to bite'	> prɑkham 'to bite each other'
clŭəh 'to argue'	> prɑclŭəh 'to argue against each other'
douc 'alike'	> prɑdouc 'to compare'

Causative prefix /CVN-/:

baek 'broken'	> bɑmbaek 'to break, smash'
cəñ 'to exit'	> bɑñcəñ 'to expel, chase out'
riik 'to bloom'	> pŭəŋriik 'to spread, propagate'

Instrumental infix /-n-/:

cuəl 'to rent'	> cnuəl 'rent, hire payment'
siət 'to insert'	> sniət 'insert, wedge'
baek 'broken'	> pnaek 'section, piece'

Causative infix /-Vm-/:

sqaat 'clean'	> sɑmqaat 'to clean'
slap 'to die'	> sɑmlap 'to kill'
tlĕəq 'to fall'	> tumlĕəq 'to overthrow'

Nominalizing infix /-VN-/ (occurs with initial clusters):

kdaw 'hot'	> kɑmdaw 'heat'
klaŋ 'strong'	> kɑmlaŋ 'strength'
criəŋ 'to sing'	> cɑmriəŋ 'song'

Nominalizing infix /-Vmn-/ (occurs with single initials):

dəŋ 'to know'	> dɑmnəŋ 'knowledge, news'
suə 'to ask'	> sɑmnuə 'a question'
t+ñ 'to buy'	> tumn+ñ 'merchandise'

Thus it is a fairly safe assumption that whenever one finds a base and a derivative in Thai, it is of Khmer origin. For example,

Khmer Loanwords in Thai

KHMER	THAI
kaət 'to be born'	kə̀ət 'to be born'
> kɑmnaət 'birth'	> kamnə̀ət 'birth'
craən 'much, many'	caraən 'to progress'[6]
> cɑmraən 'increase'	> camraən 'to progress'
daə 'to walk'	dəən 'to walk'
> dɑmnaə 'trip, process'	> damnəən 'to proceed (royal)'
trɑŋ 'straight'	troŋ 'straight'
> dɑmrɑŋ 'to straighten'	> damroŋ 'to straighten'

This assumption is complicated by the fact that Thai may have borrowed so many derivatives of this kind that it perceived this derivational process as a subsystem in Thai and infixed some basic Thai roots by analogy. Who is to say, for example, that /kə̀ət/ > /kamnə̀ət/ is not a Thai root and derivative which was borrowed by Khmer? A further complication is that Khmer apparently applied this derivation to some Thai roots. For example,

KHMER	THAI
siəŋ 'sound, voice'	sĭaŋ 'sound, voice'
> sɑmniəŋ 'sound'	> sămniaŋ 'pronunciation, accent'

Khmer /siəŋ/ is almost certainly a Thai loan. In fact, Khmer has affixed some Indic roots, for example, Sanskrit *śuddha* 'pure', Thai /(bɔɔri)sùt/ 'pure', Khmer /sot/ 'pure' > /bɑnsot/ 'to purify'. Another possible candidate is Sanskrit *gita* 'song; sung', Thai /khít/ 'to think', Khmer /kɨt/ 'to think' > /kumnɨt/ 'thought'.[7]

2. More reliable evidence for identifying Khmer loanwords are shared sets which have a consistent derivational function in Khmer but not in Thai. For example, the most common function of infixation in Khmer is the derivation of a disyllabic noun from a monosyllabic verb, while in Thai the derivative is typically a stylistic variant of the

base verb or a semantically specialized noun. For example,

KHMER

THAI

qaoy 'to give'

ʔuay 'to bestow
(in compounds)'

> qɑmnaoy 'gift'

> ʔamnuay 'to bestow (elegant)'

daə 'to walk'
> dɑmnaə 'trip, process'

dəən 'to walk'
> damnəən 'to proceed (royal)'

klaŋ 'strong'
> kɑmlaŋ 'strength'

khlǎŋ 'powerful, magic'[8]
> kamlaŋ 'strength'

claəy 'to answer'
> cɑmlaəy 'response'

chalɤ̌əy 'to answer'
> camləəy 'defendant'

3. But the best evidence for identifying Khmer loans are Khmer derivational sets of which Thai has the derived form but not the base. For example,

KHMER

THAI

baek 'broken'
> pnaek 'section, piece'

(None)
phanɛ̀ɛk 'division, section'

tuk 'to put, place'
> bɑntuk 'to load'

(None)
banthúk 'to load'[9]

sruəl 'easy'
> sɑmruəl 'to ease'

(None)
samruan 'cheerful'[10]

cɑŋ 'to want, want to'
> cɑmnɑŋ 'desire (n)'

(None)
camnoŋ 'to desire, wish'

clɑɑŋ 'to cross'

(chalɤ̌ɔŋ 'to celebrate')

> cɑmlɑɑŋ 'to copy'   camlɔɔŋ 'to copy'

kdaw 'hot'   (None)
> kɑmdaw 'heat; to heat'   kamdaw 'blood from a nosebleed'

tiəy 'to predict'   (None)
> tumniəy 'prediction'   thamnaay 'to predict'

snaq 'to stop over'   (None)
> sɑmnaq 'residence'   sămnàk 'residence, office'

kɑt 'to jot down, record' (None)
> kɑmnɑt 'to decree;   kamnòt 'to limit; a schedule'
  a decree'

4. There are, of course, some bases shared by both languages for which Khmer has a derivative and Thai does not, but these examples are less conclusive than those in (3) above, since in these cases Khmer could possibly have infixed a Thai loan. For example,

KHMER   THAI

cɨə 'to believe'   chûa 'to believe'

> cumnɨə 'belief'   (None)

cuəy 'to help'   chûay 'to help'
> cumnuəy 'help (n)'   (None)

sqaat 'clean'   saʔàat 'clean'
> sɑmqaat 'to clean'   (None)

sŋat 'quiet'   saŋàt 'peaceful'
> sɑmŋat 'secret'   (None)

kɨt 'to think'   khít 'to think'

> kumnɨt 'thought'   (None)

5. Orthographic evidence is useful in identifying large numbers of Khmer loans in Thai, most of which appear to have been spelling loans. In such cases the Khmer orthography is preserved in Thai, but the pronunciation conforms to the rules of Thai phonology. For example,

KHMER	THAI
āc /qaac/ 'able'[11]	*āc* /ʔàat/ 'might'[11]
srec /srac/ 'finished'	*srec* /sèt/ 'finished'
stec /sdac/ 'king'	*stec* /sadèt/ 'go (royal)'
beñ /p+ñ/ 'full'	*beñ* /phen/ 'full (of moon)'
phlāñ /plaañ/ 'to destroy'	*phlañ* /phlǎan/ 'to destroy'
jaṃnāñ /cumniəñ/ 'skilled'	*jāṃnāñ* /chamnaan/ 'skilled'
saṃrual /sɑmruəl/ 'to ease'	*sāṃrual* /sǎmruan/ 'cheerful'
trās /trah/ 'to say (royal)'	t_2ras /tràt/ 'to say (royal)'
kruas /kruəh/ 'gravel'	*kruas* /krùat/ 'gravel'

Sometimes, in more common items, Thai apparently changed the spelling to conform with Thai pronunciation. For example,

KHMER	THAI
ṭoer /daə 'to walk'	*toen* /dəən/ 'to walk'
khlāc /klaac/ 'afraid'	*khlāt* /khlàat/ 'afraid'
thnal /tnɑl/ 'road'	*thanan* /thanǒn/ 'road'
bhnā'l /pnŏəl/ 'to bet'	*banan* /phanan/ 'to bet'
ṭaṃnāl /dɑmnaal/ 'to relate'	t_2*āṃnān* /tamnaan/ 'history, legend'

In some cases, a Khmer final *n* is changed to Thai *ñ* as a kind of hyperurbanism or overcorrection, and a Khmer final *l* is changed to a Thai *ñ*, a confusion resulting probably from the fact that the two graphemes are very similar in shape. For example,

KHMER	THAI
croen /craən/ 'much, many'	*caroeñ* /caraən/ 'to progress'
paŋ'oel /bɑŋqaəl/ 'to startle; suddenly'	*paŋ'oeñ* /baŋʔəən/ 'suddenly, accidentally'

There is one interesting example of a doublet involving this phenomenon in which the Thai misspelling of a Khmer loan was borrowed back into Khmer with the Thai pronunciation! Khmer *sgā'l* /skŏəl/ 'to know, be familiar with' > *saṃgā'l* /sɑmkŏəl/ 'sign, signal' > Thai *sāṃgañ* /sǎmkhan/ 'important' > Khmer *saṃkhā'n* /sɑmkhan/ 'important'.

There is a class of words of which the Khmer orthographic initial clusters, unpronounceable in the Thai spelling loans, are simplified to initial /s-/ in Thai. For example,

KHMER	THAI
draby /trŏəp/ 'treasury'	*draby* /sáp/ 'treasury'[12]
draŋ /trŭəŋ/ '(royal pron.)'	*draŋ* /soŋ/ '(royal aux.)'
drāy /triəy/ 'deer'	*drāy* /saay/ 'deer'
drūṃ /truuŋ/ 'chest, breast'	*druaŋ* /suaŋ/ 'breast'
jrāp /criəp/ 'to learn, know'	*drāp* /sâap/ 'to know'[13]
jrɛk /crɛɛk/ 'to squeeze through'	*drɛk* /sɛɛk/ 'insert between'
jrah /crĕəh/ 'clean, cleared away'	*srah* /sàʔ/ 'to clean'[14]

6. There is good evidence that most Khmer words having the diphthong /ɨə/, as well as a number of words having the diphthongs /iə/ and /uə/, are of Thai origin.[15] For example,

KHMER	THAI
r+əŋ 'story'	rêaŋ 'story'
l+əŋ 'yellow'	lŭaŋ 'yellow'

kr+əŋ 'thing, instrument' khrŭaŋ 'thing, instrument'

c+ə 'to believe' chŭa 'to believe'

(but Khmer has the infixed form /cumn+ə/ 'belief')

siəŋ 'voice' sĭaŋ 'voice'

suən 'garden' sŭan 'garden'

cuəy 'to help' chûay 'to help'

(but Khmer has the infixed form /cumnuəy/ 'help')

There remains a set of shared monosyllabic vocabulary, consisting primarily of function words, general classifiers, and verbs, which fit the phonological systems of both languages equally well, and whose origin will have to be determined by comparison with related languages in both families. However, the fundamental role of classifiers in Tai languages, as opposed to their rather facultative use in Mon–Khmer languages, might argue in favor of a Thai origin for the classifiers.[16]

KHMER	THAI

General classifiers:

yaaŋ 'kind, variety'	yaaŋ 'kind, variety'
tii 'place, occurrence'	thîi 'place, occurrence'
kuu 'pair, couple'	khûu 'pair, couple'
khaaŋ 'side'	khâaŋ 'side'
rooŋ 'hall, building'	rooŋ 'hall, building'
baep 'kind, way'	bὲɛp 'kind, way'
maoŋ 'hour'	mooŋ 'o'clock'
ciəŋ 'artisan'	châaŋ 'artisan'

Function words:

r++ 'or'	rŭʉ 'or'
tae 'but, only'	tὲɛ 'but, only'
k++ 'such as'	khʉʉ 'such as'
daoy 'by'	dooy 'by'
laəy 'at all, ever'	ləəy 'at all, ever'

caaq 'to leave'	càak 'from'
taam 'by; to follow'	taam 'by; to follow'
cɑp 'finished'	còp 'finished'
yuu 'long (time)'	yùu 'to live, stay, reside'

Verbs:

haam 'to forbid'	hâam 'to forbid'
nŏəm 'to lead'	nam 'to lead'
taeŋ 'to adorn, create'	tɛ̀ɛŋ 'to adorn, compose'
(dɑmnaeŋ 'position'	tamnɛ̀ɛŋ 'position')
baeŋ 'to divide'	bɛ̀ɛŋ 'to divide'
baək 'to open'	bə̀ək 'to cash (a check)'
thɑɑy 'to retreat'	thɔ̌ɔy 'to retreat'
thaok 'cheap'	thùuk 'cheap'
bət 'to close'	pìt 'to close'

The close similarity of these examples in both form and meaning suggests that they are fairly recent Thai loans in Khmer.

Notes

1. This is the traditional time frame given by such authorities as Coedès and Hall. I do not wish to become involved here in the arguments, based primarily on archeological evidence, which would place the Thai in present-day Thailand at a much earlier date.

2. See Franklin E. Huffman, "Thai and Cambodian: A Case of Syntactic Borrowing?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 93, no. 4 (1973):488–509.

3. Saveros Lewitz, "La dérivation en cambodgien moderne," *Revue de l'École Nationale des langues orientales* 4 (1967): 81.

4. See Karnchana Nakaskul, "A Study of Cognate Words in Thai and Cambodian" (Master's thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1962), which contains a large but not exhaustive list of such words.

5. A task which has been greatly facilitated by Professor

Gedney's excellent dissertation, "Indic Loanwords in Spoken Thai" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1947).

6. Khmer has a large number of initial clusters that are unpronounceable in Thai, requiring the insertion of the short vowel /a/ between the first and second members of the cluster. This pattern will be observed in subsequent examples, but will not be referred to again.

7. Professor Gedney was dubious about this particular etymology. The semantic relation between 'to sing' and 'to think' is admittedly rather tenuous, but semantic shifts of this kind are not uncommon between Indic words and Southeast Asian languages.

8. The orthographic aspirates (both the voiceless and the voiced series) are aspirated before vowels (as in Thai) but structurally unaspirated as the first member of an initial cluster in Khmer. In other words, in Khmer there is no structural contrast /CC–/ vs. /ChC–/ as there is in Thai. This pattern will be observed in subsequent examples, but will not be referred to again.

9. The Indic voiced unaspirated series (orthographic *b, d, j, g*) are voiceless unaspirated in Khmer but voiceless aspirated in Thai. This pattern will not be referred to in subsequent examples.

10. Both the Khmer and the Thai written forms have final orthographic –*l*, pronounced /l/ in Khmer but /n/ in Thai. See also subsequent examples.

11. The transliteration system used here represents the Indic values of the Khmer and Thai orthographies. For vowels having no counterpart in the Indic system, I have followed the conventions established in Franklin E. Huffman and Im Proum, "Transliteration System for Khmer," *CORMOSEA Newsletter* 8, no. 1 (1974–75):8–11.

12. Although this example is admittedly an Indic loan, it follows the pattern of orthographic *dr–* > /s–/. If it were a direct loan from Indic sources, one would perhaps expect */thɔɔráp/, as in *drmān* /thɔɔramaan/ 'to torment'.

13. The fact that this example and the following one are spelled *dr–* rather than *jr–* might possibly indicate that the spelling *dr–* had become an established pattern for initial /s–/.

14. This example may represent simply a Thai misspelling. It

nevertheless conforms to the pattern, Khmer orthographic *dr-* and *jr-* > Thai /s-/.

15. See Yasuyuki Sakamoto, "The Sources of Khmer / ɯə /," in *Mon-Khmer Studies VI,* edited by Philip N. Jenner (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1977), 273-78.

16. See Robert B. Jones, "Classifier Constructions in Southeast Asia," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 1 (1970):1-12.

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