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Demonstratives and construction of reference in Khmer

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0 Introduction

In this talk, I will deal with a set of deictics in Khmer, namely those called demonstratives. In the linguistic tradition, the term "deictic" refers to a set of words whose semantic value directly comes from the situation parameters (S₀, T₀), cf. M.-A. Morel & L. Danon-Boileau, ed. (1990), Ph.-P., Nguyễn (1995), C. Kerbrat-Orechioni, (2002).

This conception of deixis will appear rather restrictive regarding how the demonstratives appear to work in Khmer and what "referring to the world" exactly means. These questions are notably broached in the theory of the predicative and enunciative operations through the notion of "enunciative stage" worked out by D. Paillard (2009). Within the framework of this theory, getting the world be represented through words involves three parameters : the world, the language and the locutors. In this study we will examine how these three parameters combine together in the demonstrative system of Khmer

In Khmer grammar books and mono- or multi-lingual dictionaries, only five demonstratives are to be met : *nih*, *nuh*, *neh*, *noh*, *niŋ*.

nih – *neh* – *niŋ* are considered as synonyms, and usually translated by "here, this, that", pointing things close to the locutor ;

nuh – *noh* are also considered as synonyms and translated by « this one or that one over there », pointing things far from the locutor.

These grammars and dictionaries only take into account demonstratives occurring in written texts, and moreover restricted to nominal uses : nominal determiners (1) and presentatives (2) In the present PP way of speaking and in the internet social networks, ten demonstratives are actually to be met : *nih*, *nuh*, *niŋ*, *neh*, *nuŋ*, *niəʔ*, *nuəʔ*, *noh*, *na:ʔ*, *ne:ʔ*. It must be pointed out that this list is liable to geographical variations. In addition to the two main uses above, all these demonstratives have also discursive uses (3-4).

The aim of this talk is mainly to show that there are correlations between the morphology and the semantic value of these different forms of demonstrative and that each form has a specific semantic value.

Nominal uses:

(1)

| | | | | |
|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| <i>koat</i> | <i>caŋ</i> | <i>ba:n</i> | <i>la:n</i> | <i>nih</i> |
| 3SG. | to want | to obtain | car | <i>nih</i> |

« He wants (to get) this car »

(2)

| | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>nih</i> | <i>Laan</i> | <i>kɲom</i> |
| <i>nih</i> | Car | 1SG. |

« Here is my car! »

Discursive use

(3)

Koat *Coap* *kuk* ***nih*** *kʰi* *daɔj-saa* *ʔaɛŋ*
 3SG. Attached prison ***nih*** copula because of 2SG.
 « His being in prison is because of you! »

(4) Dialogue :

S₁: *tah* *tʰw* *daə-leeŋ* *moat* *tɔnlee*
 part. to go go for a walk mouth river
 « Let's go for a walk along the river »

S₀: *Phlieŋ* ***nʰiŋ*** !
 to rain ***nʰiŋ***
 « But can't you see it's raining! »

I. Remarks on the morphology and the syntactic constructions of the demonstratives

Morphology

- The ten forms begin by /n/
- According to the final phoneme, it is possible to distribute these ten forms into three groups:

| | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>Nih</i> | <i>niəʔ</i> | <i>nʰiŋ</i> |
| <i>Nuh</i> | <i>nuəʔ</i> | <i>nuŋ</i> |
| <i>neh</i> | <i>ne:ʔ</i> | |
| <i>Noh</i> | <i>na:ʔ</i> | |

Uses

- *nih* – *nuh* : are used in oral or written mainly narrative texts.
- *neh* – *noh* – *nʰiŋ* – *nuŋ* : are seldom used in written texts, except in narrations where the narrator calls upon the reader as a witness, or else in retranscribed dialogues. There are mainly to be met in oral speaking.
- *niəʔ* - *nuəʔ* - *ne:ʔ* - *na:ʔ* : oral form only

1 Syntactic constructions

The syntactic combinations of the demonstratives can be distributed into three groups: pronominal, noun modifier and discursive.

- Pronominal (5-6): corresponds to a presentation of an object or a state of affairs (R) by the enunciator (S₀) to an interlocutor (S₁), either virtual or not.

(5a) S₀ takes a book out of his bag and says to S₁

Nih *sievphəv* *dael* *kʰɨŋm* *tʰŋ* *prəʔ* *meŋ*
Nih Book REL. 1SG. to buy morning past.
 « Here is the book I bought this morning » or « This is the book I bought this morning »

(5b) meaning quite similar to that of (5a)

Nih *Cie* *sievphəv* *dael* *kʰɨŋm* *tʰŋ* *prəʔ* *meŋ*
Nih to be Book REL. 1SG. to buy morning past.
 « Here is the book I bought this morning » or « This is the book I bought this morning »

(6) S₀ and S₁ are waiting for a taxi, and when S₀ sees the taxi, he says:

nuh *Laan* *mɔk* *haəj*
nuh Car to come already
« Here is the taxi coming! »

In these two examples, R refers to existing entities of the world to which qualities are attributed. In (5), R refers to an object of the world qualified as « book bought this morning ». In (6), R corresponds to the arrival of something which is identified as « the car waited for». In both cases, « book» and « car» have been mentioned previously.

- Nominal modifier: in this use, the scope of the demonstrative is the left nominal group. The demonstrative always stands in the final position of a nominal group. R corresponds to a given object being pointed out.

(1)
koat *caŋ* *ba:n* *la:n* *nih*
3SG. to want to obtain car *nih*
« He wants to get this particular car»

(7)
tʰŋaɣ *nih* *koat* *ʔat* *mɔk* *tʰvəə-kaa* *tee*
day *nih* 3SG. NÉG. to come to work PART.
« Today, he doesn't come to work»

- Discursive : the scope of the demonstrative is the left predicative sequence. R corresponds to the actualization of the process or of the state of affairs.

(3)
koat *Coap* *kuk* *nih* *kʰi* *daɔj-saa* *ʔaen*
3SG. Attached prison *nih* copula Because of 2SG.
« His being in jail is because of you! »

(4) Dialogue :

S₁: *tah* *tiv* *daə-leeŋ* *moat* *tɔnlee*
part. to go go for a walk mouth river
«Let's go for a walk along the river»

S₀: *phlieŋ* *nʰŋ !*
to rain *nʰŋ*
« But can't you see it's raining !»

(8)
ʔaen *Caŋ* *sɔm* *lɔy* *kʰɔm* *haəj* *nie?*
2SG. to want beg for money 1SG. already *nie?*
« If I'm not wrong, you want to ask me money! »

II. Semantic analysis

The Khmer demonstratives involve alternative (contrast) at three levels: 1. that of the locutors participating in what is said ; 2. that of objects or events of the world involved in what is said; 3. that of the 'distance' from the object to the speaker.

A. Semantic interpretation of the three groups (horizontal level)

/-h/: what the term under the scope of these demonstratives refers to is presented apart from any type of intersubjective confrontation

This series is centered on how what is to be said about the world (R), matches up to it.

/-ʔ/: means strong intersubjective confrontation involving opposite points of view. The locutor (S₀) reasserts his prior point of view as being the right suitable way to match up to R with words, excluding and rejecting that of his interlocutor (S₁): ((11a), (12c), (13c)).

/-ŋ/: the same representation is shared by the locutor and the interlocutor : S₀ agrees, confirms or grants the interlocutor's point of view about a shared topic of discussion (R). S₀ speaks talks about R that S₁ already knows.

(9)

| | | | | | | |
|-------------|------------|--------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>koat</i> | <i>tɨŋ</i> | <i>p^hteah</i> | <i>nɨh</i> | <i>pɨi</i> | <i>cnam</i> | <i>haəy</i> |
| 3SG. | to buy | house | <i>nɨh</i> | two | year | already |

« It's already two years since he bought this house »

(10a)

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>p^hteah</i> | <i>neh</i> | <i>koat</i> | <i>tɨŋ</i> | <i>pɨi</i> | <i>cnam</i> | <i>haəy</i> |
| house | <i>neh</i> | 3SG. | to buy | two | year | already |

« This house (not that one / not the other ones), It's already two years since he bought it »

(10b)

| | | | | | | |
|--------------|------------|--------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>*koat</i> | <i>tɨŋ</i> | <i>p^hteah</i> | <i>neh</i> | <i>pɨi</i> | <i>cnam</i> | <i>haəy</i> |
| 3SG. | acheter | maison | <i>neh</i> | Deux | année | Déjà |

(11a-b)

| | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| <i>koat</i> | <i>tɨŋ</i> | <i>p^hteah</i> | <i>muəy</i> | <i>niəʔ</i> |
| 3SG. | buy | hous | one | <i>niəʔ</i> |
| <i>mɨn</i> | <i>mɛɛn</i> | <i>p^hteah</i> | <i>nɨŋ</i> | <i>tee</i> |
| NEG. | true | house | <i>nɨŋ</i> | PART. |

« He's buying this red house, not the one you are talking about »

(12a)- Somebody knocks at the door

| | | |
|-------------|------------|-------------------|
| <i>Keak</i> | <i>naa</i> | <i>nɨŋ</i> |
| pers. | INDEF. | <i>nɨŋ</i> |

« Who is there? »

NB : The other forms are not possible

(12b)- same context

| | | |
|--------------|------------|-------------------|
| <i>*neak</i> | <i>naa</i> | <i>nɨh</i> |
| pers. | INDEF. | <i>nɨh</i> |

(12c)- same context

| | | |
|--------------|------------|--------------------|
| <i>*neak</i> | <i>naa</i> | <i>niəʔ</i> |
| pers. | INDEF. | <i>niəʔ</i> |

(4a) Dialogue :

| | | | | | |
|------------------|------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------|
| S ₁ : | <i>tah</i> | <i>tɨv</i> | <i>daə-leeŋ</i> | <i>moat</i> | <i>tɔnlee</i> |
| | part. | to go | go for a walk | mouth | river |

« Let's go for a walk along the river! »
 S₀: *phliɛŋ* ***nɪŋ !***
 to rain ***nɪŋ***
 « But can't you see it's raining! »

(4b) same context

S₀: **phliɛŋ* ***nih !***
 to rain ***nih***

(4c) same context

S₀: **phliɛŋ* ***nie? !***
 to rain ***nie?***

(13a)- The interlocutor is busy with something

tvəə ***ʔəy*** ***nɪŋ***
 to do INDEF. ***nɪŋ***

« What are you doing? ». (I can see you're busy with something, there is no denying it)

(13b)- The interlocutor is busy with something

tvəə ***ʔəy*** ***nih***
 to do INDEF. ***nih***

« What are you doing? » (I am interested in knowing what you are doing).

(13c)- The interlocutor is busy with something

tvəə ***ʔəy*** ***niə?***
 to do INDEF. ***niə?***

« (Hey!) But what are you doing ? (I don't exactly know what you are doing, but you mustn't do it !)

(8a)

ʔaɛŋ *Caŋ* *sɔm* *lɔy* *kʰɔŋm* *haəj* ***nie?***
 2SG. to want to beg for money 1SG. already ***nie?***

« You want to ask me some money for sure»

1. I suppose you want to ask me some money ;
2. the way you behave or your way of speaking could lead to supposing otherwise ;
3. but since I'm not to be fooled, I think I'm right in saying so.

In this context, the other groups of demonstratives are not possible.

(8b)

ʔaɛŋ* *Caŋ* *sɔm* *lɔy* *kʰɔŋm* *haəj* *nih***
 2SG. to want to beg for money 1SG. already ***nih***

(8c)

ʔaɛŋ* *Caŋ* *sɔm* *lɔy* *kʰɔŋm* *haəj* *nɪŋ***
 2SG. to want to beg for money 1SG. already ***nɪŋ***

But (8c) is possible with a question

(8c')

ʔaɛŋ *Caŋ* *sɔm* *lɔy* *kʰɔŋm* *haəj* ***nɪŋ?***
 2SG. to want to beg for money 1SG. already ***nɪŋ?***

« So, it appears you want to ask me some money? ».

Seeing the way you behave, I beg you confirm this is your strategy to ask me some money.

B. Semantic values of each group (vertical level)

a. Group of demonstratives with /h/: *nih*, *nuh*, *neh*, *noh*

- With *nih* et *nuh* what is at stake is the object or event of the world just for what it is, with no consideration for any type of contrast, alternative, opposition to other items.

- With *neh* et *noh*, an opposition is taken into account and is the starting point of what is said.

(14a)

Nih *laan*
Nih car
 « This is a car »
 « Here is the car! »

(14b)

neh *laan*
neh car
 « Look, the car is there ». Context: S₀ wants to attract S₁'s attention in order to show him the key of the car.
 « The car is this way (not that way)! »

/nih/ : refers to the location of the locutor (L₀), or the present of the text.

/nuh/ : corresponding to (L₀'), a location (/reference) presented as other than that of the locutor, meaning the location of the object or event.

(14c)

Nuh *laan*
Nuh car
 « The car is right over there! (it's coming)»

(15a)

pteah ***nih*** *mɨn* *mɛɛn* *hootel* *tee*
 House ***nih*** NEG. be true hotel PART.
 « This house is not a hotel! »
 Context :
 ○ A mother upbraids his son for often bringing friends round at home (a special prosody is required)
 ○ informative

(15b)

pteah ***nuh*** *mɨn* *mɛɛn* *hootel* *tee*
 House ***nuh*** NEG. be true hotel PART.
 « This house is not a hotel! »

The informative context only is possible. The house in question I have already mentioned but means nothing special to me or it is no longer a stake.

(16a)

Koat *caj* *cnaot* ***nih*** *daoy-saa* *tii-prəʔsaa* *Koat*
 3SG. loose elections ***nih*** because of adviser 3SG.
 « The fact that he lost the elections (at that time), is because of his adviser(s) »

The event is considered as part of the actualization of what is said. It is important for now.
(16b)

Koat caŋ cnaot nuh daoy-saa tii-prəʔsaa Koat
3SG. loose elections **nuh** because of adviser 3SG.
« The fact that he lost the elections (at that time), is because of his adviser(s) »

The event is presented as distinct from the moment of enunciation: it is a past mistake, no way coming back to it, it must just be forgotten.

- /*neh*/ : the object considered as part of the location (/reference) of the speaker (L₀), is presented as deriving from another object or from another location of the object, different from the one of the speaker. (10b)
- /*noh*/ : The object considered as part of a location (/reference) other than that of the speaker (L₀'), is presented as deriving from the location of the speaker.

(14b)

neh laan
neh car
« Look, the car is there ». Context: S₀ wants to attract S₁'s attention in order to show him the key of the car.
« The car is this way (not that way)! »

(14d) the same context

**noh laan*
Noh car

(17a-b))

pteah niw traəy khaaŋ neh saalaa niw traəy khaaŋ noh
house to be at Bank side **neh** school to be at bank Side **noh**
« My house is on this side of the river and my school is on the other side »

b. Group final /ŋ/

- /*niŋ*/ : the object is supposed to be known by the interlocutor and is considered as part of a reference shared by the locutor and the interlocutor, right in the actuality of what is being said.
- /*nunŋ*/ : the object supposed to be known by the interlocutor is considered as part of a reference other than that of the locutor.

(18a)

Bav ruəc haəy nŋ mɨn dəŋ cie yum ʔəy tiət
suckle finished already **nŋ** NEG. know be cry INDEF. more
« He already had his feeding (and you know that!), and I don't understand why he keeps crying!(?) »

(18b)

**bav ruəc haəy nunŋ mɨn dəŋ cie yum ʔəy tiət*
suckle finished already **nunŋ** NEG. know be cry INDEF. more

(19a)

koat tiŋ p^hteah nŋ pii cnam haəy
3SG. buy house **nŋ** two year already
« It's already two years since he bought this house (that one close to me we are just talking about) »

(19b)

| | | | | | | |
|-------------|------------|--------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>koat</i> | <i>tɨŋ</i> | <i>p^htɛah</i> | <i>nun</i> | <i>pɨi</i> | <i>cnam</i> | <i>haəy</i> |
| 3SG. | buy | house | <i>nun</i> | two | year | already |

« It's already two years since he bought this house (that one all this is about) »

(19a) : the house is considered as close to me (spatially or not) and part of my own reference : I am concerned by this house just as much as you.

(19b) : the house is not close to me, and belongs to another area of reference. I am not directly concerned by this house, but you.

(20a)

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>t^hŋay</i> | <i>nɨŋ</i> |
| day | <i>nɨŋ</i> |

« Today » or « you know the day I'm talking about » (I'm am concerned as much as you)

(20b)

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>t^hŋay</i> | <i>Nun</i> |
| day | <i>Nun</i> |

« you know the day I'm talking about » (I am not concerned, but you)
The day in question cannot be today

(4a) Dialogue :

S₁ : *tah* *tɨv* *daə-leen* *moat* *tɔnlee*
part. go go for a walk mouth river
« Let's go for a walk along the river ! »

S₀ : *phlieŋ* ***nɨŋ !***
rain ***nɨŋ***
« But can't you see it's raining ! » (and I'm concerned by this just as much as you)

(4a') Dialogue :

S₀ : (?) *phlieŋ* ***nun !***
Rain ***nun***

The utterance (4a') is not correct in the context where the rain makes it unlikely to go for a walk both for S₀ and for S₁.

nɨŋ : S₀ stands for an intermediate indifferenciated position regarding the actualized relation S₁-R.

nun : S₀ keeps a position of exteriority and contingency regarding the actualized S₁ -R relation. Its your story, not mine.

c. Group /ʔ/

The semantic differences between the various forms of the /ʔ/ series are quite similar to those of the /h/ series.

(13c)- The interlocutor is busy doing something

| | | |
|-------------|------------|-------------|
| <i>tvəə</i> | <i>ʔəy</i> | <i>niəʔ</i> |
| to do | INDEF. | <i>niəʔ</i> |

« But what are you doing just THERE? » I don't know what you are doing, but you certainly must not do it, since I don't want it or it disturbs me.

(13d)- The interlocutor is busy doing something

| | | |
|-------------|------------|-------------|
| <i>tvəə</i> | <i>ʔəy</i> | <i>nuəʔ</i> |
| to do | INDEF. | <i>nuəʔ</i> |

« But what are you doing just THERE? » I don't know what you are doing, but you know very well you must not do it, but after all this is no business of mine».

(21a)

| | | | |
|-------------|------------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| <i>neeʔ</i> | <i>t^haa</i> | <i>haəy</i> | <i>t^haa</i> |
| <i>neeʔ</i> | to say | already | to say |

« Here we are ! Didn't I tell you about what was going to happen ! »

I have almost been outsmarted by you. S₀ is surprised to see that he was right.

(21b)-Same context.

| | | | |
|-------------|------------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| <i>naaʔ</i> | <i>t^haa</i> | <i>haəy</i> | <i>t^haa</i> |
| <i>naaʔ</i> | to say | already | to say |

« Here we are! Didn't I tell you again and again! ». (To bad, now!).

Conclusion

- The Khmer deictic system is not a question of distance (close to / medium / far from the locutor) ;

- The locutor does not necessarily stand as the first and prior position in the localization of objects or events (in space and time) ;

- The semantic value of the demonstratives is less a question of distance from the locutor than how R is worked out in the enunciative scene. The way R is taken into account stems from an articulation between three types of alternative: alternative regarding the objects (R-p / R-p'), alternative regarding the subjects' points of view (S₀ / S₁), and alternative regarding the distance from the object to the speaker.

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