

Imperative constructions in Cambodian

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1. Grammatical notes

Cambodian is an isolating language having no word inflection, i.e. every word occurs in a sentence in its basic form. The position of a word in a sentence is the important information for recognizing its syntactic role. The basic word order is SVO. Adverbials may occur before or after the verb. In the noun phrase, the noun precedes the attribute.

Meanings that in some other languages are expressed by morphological devices, in Cambodian can be denoted lexically or syntactically, i.e. by the word order or auxiliary words.

Auxiliaries are the most common devices used to express various submeanings of the imperative. The formal features of imperative, prohibitive and preventive constructions are:

1. Usage of special auxiliaries, including the prohibitive particle kum¹
2. Impossibility of using aspect and tense markers (such as ning, pam), as well as the negatives used in indicative and interrogative sentences.

2. Markers of the imperative

The imperative markers divide into prepositional and postpositional. The former are: (*duk*)*oj*, *an'jein'*, *sum*, *cur*; the latter are: *daw*, *cuh*, *phang*, *Na*. There is one marker, i.e. *meil*, which can be used in both positions.

The prepositional markers are used just before the verb or before the subject of the verb:

¹Cambodian examples are transliterated. The symbols of the transliteration correspond to the letters of the Indian alphabet on which the Cambodian writing is based. Arranged in the alphabetical order of both, they are: k, kh, g, gh, ng, c, ch, j, jh, n', T, TH, D, DH, N, t, th, d, dh, n, p, ph, b, bh, m, y, r, l, v, s, h, L, a. Additional signs: m - anusvara, h - visarga, " - sign of changing the register, ' - sign of short vowels. Signs of vowels, arranged in the traditional Cambodian order: a, a:, i, i:, i, i, u, u:, ua, ei, ia, ia, e, ae, aj, o, aw.

- (1) cur (anak) dhvei y"ang neh
 IMP you do kind, way this
 "(You) do it this way!"

Postpositional markers are placed at the end of the sentence:

- (2) daw phsar jamuay pangsri: aeng cuh
 go market with sister you IMP
 "Go to the market with your sister."

All the markers can express submeanings of factitive causation (order, request, instruction, offer), but only some of them can express submeanings of permissive causation (permission, advice). (I use the classification of particular semantic interpretations of the imperative suggested in Xrakovskij & Volodin 1986.)

	daw	cuh	(duk)oj	an'jein'	sum	phang	cur	meil	Na:
Factitive	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Permissive	+	+	+	+					

Table 1.

So, as seen in Table 1, there are markers which can express both factitive and permissive submeanings. When such markers are used, semantic interpretation of the imperative sentence depends on the context.

Usage of these markers when addressing various persons is shown in Table 2.

	daw	cuh	(duk)oj	an'jein'	sum	phang	cur	meil	Na:
1st sing.			+					+	
1st pl.			+				+	+	
2nd	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	+
3rd	+	+	+						

Table 2.

As may be seen, in Cambodian the choice of the imperative markers depends on the person of the executor and on the number of the executors in case of the 1st person. All the markers, except *oj*, can be used in imperative sentences addressed to the 2nd person. When addressing the 1st and the 3rd person, only a few markers can be used.

3. Imperative constructions

3.1 Imperatives with 2nd person subject

These are the only imperatives where different variants of sentence structure are possible: presence/absence of the subject, or presence/absence of the imperative marker. Compare the following examples:

(3) *kum mak n'a:m cuh*
 child come eat IMP
 “You (=child) come to eat!”

(4) *kum mak n'a:m*
 child come eat
 “You come to eat!”

(5) *mak n'a:m cuh*
 come eat IMP
 “Come to eat!”

(6) *mak n'a:m*
 come eat
 “Come to eat!”

If the subject is present and the imperative marker is absent, an imperative sentence does not differ from an indicative one. Thus (4) may also be translated as “The child comes/came to eat”. (In oral speech the difference shows itself by the intonation, but suprasegmental means are not considered in this article.) The imperative construction of this type allows the introduction of an imperative marker, cf. (3), as well as the word of address (e.g. the name of the person addressed), which can be placed at the beginning or at the end of the sentence:

(7) *sa:li: ku:n mak n'a:m bhlam*
 Sali child come eat at once
 “Sali, you come to eat at once!”

(8) *ku:n mak n'a:m bhlam sa:li:*
 child come eat at once Sali
 “Come to eat at once, Sali!”

Presence/absence of the word of address is not correlated with presence/absence of the subject. So, in (7) and (8), the subject *ku:n* ‘child’ may be omitted. (It should be noted that (3) and (4) may be pronounced with a pause between *ku:n* and the verb, in which case *ku:n* will be interpreted as the word of address, and not as the subject.)

Absence of both the subject and the marker is possible only in imperatives with 2nd person subject.

3.2 Special features of the markers used with the 2nd person subject

The marker *daw* expresses factitive as well as permissive meaning e.g. *am daw* “Read!” has the meaning of order, request or even permission according to the situation:

(9) *an' su:m am pantic - pamheiy am daw*
 I beg read a little - okay read IMP
 “May I read? - Okay, read.”

In Cambodian, there is the directive verb *daw* 'to go' which is considered to be a homonym of the imperative marker *daw*. It is possible to suppose that these two words are related by their meaning: the directive verb *daw* in postposition to another verb may be used as an auxiliary to express prolongation of the action in the future, and a verb with the imperative marker *daw* also denotes the future action. This opinion is confirmed by the fact that the imperative marker *daw* is not possible in those cases when the directive verb *mak* 'to come', antonymous to the verb *daw*, is used:

- (10) thaem msaw diat mak
add flour more come
"Put in some flour."

The marker *cuh* is used for both factitive and permissive causation. In the former case an offer or request is expressed:

- (11) pei cang pam noh daw yak cuh
if want obtain that go take IMP
"If you want to have it, go and take it." (The sentence is an offer, made by the captive to his captor.)

- (12) mae khn'um sum daw cuap mitt khn'um - panheiy daw cuh
mum I beg go meet friend I okay go IMP
"Mum, may I go to meet my friend? - Okay, go."

The imperative marker *cuh* has a homonym - the directive verb *cuh* 'to descend, come down'. As was the case with *daw*, one may suppose that these two words are etymologically connected.

The word *an'jein* 'to invite' in an imperative construction corresponds to the English word 'please' and is used to express both factitive and permissive causation. It means that the action is executed to the benefit of the addressee-executor:

- (13) an'jein' bɪsa:
please eat
"Help yourself!"
- (14) su:m lia - an'jein' lia
beg leave please leave
"May I leave? - Okay, do, please."

The verb *sum* (*sum*) 'to ask, beg' is used only for factitive causation and also means 'please'. This is a polite request which may mean either 'I ask you to...' or 'may I..., allow me to...'

- (15) su:m am atthapad nih
beg read text this
"Please, read this text" or "May I read this text, please?"

To avoid the ambiguity existing in this example, to express a request the pronoun *anak* 'you' is inserted between *sum* and the verb, i.e. in the position of the imperative clause subject; to ask for permission the pronoun *an'* 'I' is placed before *sum*, i.e. in the position of the subject of this verb. Cf.: *sum anak an* "Read, please"; *an' sum an* "May I read?". It is also possible for both pronouns to be used in the sentence: *an' sum anak an* "I ask you to read", which may be called "indirect imperative".

Concerning *sum*, the problem arises whether it is a performative verb or has turned into an auxiliary. The performative character of *sum* is obvious when it is preceded by the subject *an'* 'I'. In those cases when the executor of the action is the addressee the subject of *sum* is normally absent, though indicative sentences without the subject are not usual for Cambodian. This is an argument for considering such sentences as imperatives. Another argument is that the imperative markers *daw* and *cuh* can be used with *sum* in such sentences:

- (16) *sum ming metta: santos dos khn'um mtang daw*
 beg aunt pity condescend guilt I once IMP
 "Take pity on me, Aunt!"

So, I am inclined to consider that in the sentences with the 2nd person executor of the action, the verb *sum* 'to ask' has the function of an imperative marker.

The marker *phang* is used to express a request which is often interpreted as asking somebody a favour. The use of this marker underlines that the action is done for the benefit of the speaker:

- (17) *pang da:mngbir a:Nit daw cuaj jak a:ju: yeing phang*
 brother both pity IMP help take age I IMP
 "Brothers, take pity and help me save my life!"

- (18) *sum aeng sarser daw gat' phang*
 beg you write go he IMP
 "Please, write to him (instead of me)."

The marker *cur* expresses factitive causation: order or instruction. It is used mainly in texts (written speech) when addressing a person younger in age or lower in rank:

- (19) *pei kuk va: bum ceh nijai de cur aeng laeng va: daw cuh*
 if crane it not can speak no IMP you let go it go IMP
 "If the crane can not speak, let it go." (An order to a servant.)

- (20) *cur rap' ning panghan' camNaek nimuay nimuay*
 IMP mention and show part every every
 "Mention and show all the parts (of the body)." (A task in a textbook.)

The interjections *meil* and *Na:* are used as "additional signals" to fulfil the action, strengthening causation. They are used only in factitive imperatives:

- (21) aeng niya_i mtang diat meil simbali:
 you tell once more INTJ Sampoli
 “Well, Sampoli, tell once more...”

- (22) jak muaj neh daw jum duat Na:
 take one this go give granny INTJ
 “Take this (cake) and go to give it to your granny, will you?”

3.3 Imperatives with 1st person subject

In those cases when the action must be executed by the 1st person (singular or plural), the interjection *meil* and the marker *oj* are used:

- (23) meil oj khn'um sa:k la: meil
 INTJ IMP I try try INTJ
 “Well, let me try!”

- (24) oj yeing dhveir kar neh
 IMP we do work this
 “Let us do this work!”

Native speakers say that *oj* (etymologically ‘to give’, having an auxiliary function as the universal causative verb) is addressed to the 2nd person who is not included in the number of executors denoted by ‘we’. It may be an argument for considering *oj* not as a mere imperative marker, but a causative verb used here in an imperative function. According to this interpretation the sentences like (23) and (24) must be considered as imperative with a 2nd person subject. But it should be noted that there are some counter-arguments to this interpretation. For instance, the subject of *oj* (subject of causation) is normally absent and can not be inserted, while in other imperatives with a 2nd person subject this subject quite naturally can be placed before the verb.

The marker *cur* is used in imperatives with the 1st person plural only. In such cases both the speaker and the addressee(s) are the executors:

- (25) cur yeing prabritt ning ge Tu:c yeing cang' oj
 IMP we behave with they like we want CAUS
 anak dham prabritt ning yeing
 person big behave with we
 “Let us treat them the same way we want highranking people to treat us.”

3.4 Imperatives with 3rd person subject

In the imperatives of this type, use of the marker *oj*, expressing both factitive and permissive causation, is obligatory. Use of the markers *daw* and *cuh* is optional. In the case of permissive causation *oj* is often combined with the verb *duk* ‘to keep’:

(26) *oj* *ga:t'* *a:n* *daw*
 IMP he read IMP
 "Let him read!"

(27) *srualheiy* *duk-oj* *ga:t'* *naw* *cuh*
 okay IMP he stay IMP
 "Okay, let him stay."

Here, the same problem arises: is *oj* an imperative marker or a causative verb in an imperative sentence? It is important to note that only a few of the imperative markers can be used in imperative constructions of this type. If *oj* were a verb, all the markers could be used which is normal for the imperatives with a 2nd person subject. This makes me consider *oj* an imperative marker. The imperative and causative meanings are certainly closely related, so it is possible to speak about two functions of one word.

4. Prohibitive constructions

Prohibitive constructions are formed with the help of the prohibitive particle *kum*. This particle is placed immediately before the verb; in constructions with *oj*, it is placed before *oj* (in this case *oj* is more similar to a verb than an imperative marker). The subject of a prohibition may be any person except the 1st person singular.

(28) *yeing* *kum* *niya:y* *ambi:* *riang* *neh*
 we PRHB speak about matter this
 "Let us not speak about the matter."

(29) *kum* *mak* *yam* *naw* *di:* *neh* *Na:* *samniang*
 PRHB come cry stay place this INTJ Samniang
 "Do not come here to cry, Samniang!"

(30) *kum* *oj* *ga:t'* *suar* *samnuar* *rapiap* *lngangkhwaw* *Tu:cneh*
 PRHB IMP he ask question kind silly such
 "He should not ask such silly questions!"

Besides prohibitive constructions, the particle *kum* can also be used in causative constructions before the auxiliary causative verb *oj*. In these constructions all other negative particles are also possible. This is more evidence of the semantic and formal closeness of imperative and causative constructions and meanings.

5. Preventive constructions

Preventive constructions (warnings) are formed with the aid of the verb *prayatn* 'to be careful, take care'. A preventive sentence is always addressed to the 2nd person, though another person may be the executor of the action. If the verb, denoting an undesirable action, is used with the markers *kum oj*, a warning for the future is meant:

- (31) prayatn kum oj Tual
 take care PRHB IMP fall
 “Mind you do not fall.”

If an immediate reaction is needed, *kum* is not used:

- (32) prayatn Tual
 take care fall
 “Take care! You may fall!”

6. Combinations of the imperative markers

In one imperative construction several imperative markers may be used, see (16), (18), (19), (26), (27), (29). But some combinations of markers are forbidden. For instance, interjections *meil*, *Na:* are not used together with *sum* (polite request), *an'jein'* (invitation) and *cur* (“official” order) because they are not compatible in style; *phang* (action in favour of the speaker, the speaker depending on the addressee) is not used together with *an'jein'* (action in favour of the addressee) and *cur* (the addressee depending on the speaker) because of their semantic incompatibility.

7. Summaries

The words with imperative meanings described in this article differ in a number of formal and semantic characteristics and cannot be considered a homogeneous means of expressing imperative semantics. But the way these words are used in imperatives with 1st, 2nd, and 3d person subjects answers the minimal requirements necessary for them to form a **functional paradigm**. Forms constituting such a paradigm a) must be regularly produced from all the lexemes with semantics not contradicting imperative meaning; and b) must be recognized as imperative forms in the context. (For details see Xrakovskij & Volodin 1986:28.)

The Cambodian imperative paradigm is fourfold-consisting of four categories (see Table 2). The center of this paradigm, as in other languages, is the 2nd person imperative forms: any imperative marker, except *oj*, can be used in a 2nd person imperative, and only 2nd person imperatives can be used without any marker and without a subject.

The number of listeners is not taken into consideration when choosing a marker, but it can be expressed by lexical means.

The other imperative categories may be called peripheral. The least number of markers have been found with the 1st person singular subject, so it is the most defective member of the paradigm.

In peripheral imperatives the causative verb *oj* is used as an imperative marker, as is characteristic of languages with little verb morphology. Thus, it may be stated that Cambodian is a language in which the semantic closeness of imperative and causative manifests itself on the formal level: a) the universal

causative verb *oj* is used as an imperative marker;² b) the prohibitive particle *kum* can be used in the indicative only in causative sentences (and not in others!).

REFERENCES

Xrakovskiy, V.S. and A.P. Volodin. 1986. *Semantika i tipologija imperativa* [*Semantics and Typology of Imperative*]. Contributing editor: V.B. Kasevich. Leningrad: Nauka.

Received: 18 September 1996

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²Imperative constructions with *oj*, which may on the surface seem to be 2nd person imperative constructions, actually are 1st/3rd person imperative constructions, because only the 1st/3rd person is the executor of the action and the 2nd person is just a transmitter of the speaker's will.