

The Noun Phrase in the Kuy Language

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Abstract

The paper discusses the noun phrase of Kuy (Suay), classified as (< West Katuic < Mon-Khmer), the mother tongue of the author. Kuy is spoken around the Thai-Lao-Cambodian border. It has no script. The examined data is from the Kuy-Kuay dialect of Tamom Village, Sangkha District, Surin Province, Thailand. The data for this paper is based primarily was collected from the author, and 5 other family members who currently live in Thailand.

The author's main interest is in Kuy grammar. The method used in collecting the data was to use the author's intuition about acceptability of various examples and through fieldwork to Tamom Village, collect pragmatic conversations, and Kuy tales. Through this method, the author intended to collect a variety of acceptable NPs structures, so as to examine which word orders are possible for NPs in Kuy.

The paper firstly provides an overview of the Kuy language including the phonology of Kuy, and discusses previous studies focusing on the NP of Kuy. It also gives the definition of noun and phrase in Kuy. It then examines the structure of the NP in Kuy in detail, which includes complex NPs and the relationships between various constituents and their word orders. The modifiers examined are the quantifier, possessor, demonstrative, nominal modifier, and verbal modifier.

The paper shows that a modifier in Kuy normally follows a head noun. The position of the nominal modifier is the most fixed, i.e. it always precedes another modifier. The demonstrative has a little more flexibility, i.e. it tends to be the last element in a NP. The position of the verbal modifier is more flexible when a relative pronoun or a relative clause marker appears. The presence or absence the rel-

ative pronoun or relative clause marker may result in distinct meanings.

The paper also points out that when a Thai-loaned classifier is used, the position of the verbal modifier will be more flexible. This is one of the features in which Kuy is similar to Thai. In contrast, one of Kuy and Khmer's common characteristics is that both languages have only a few classifiers compared to Thai. In addition, the classifier is not a necessary element in a NP both in Kuy and Khmer. Finally, I show that the NP in Kuy has looser word order than that of Khmer, but has a more fixed word order than that of Thai.

1 Introduction

The Kuy people live in the trisected area of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. The total number of speakers is 380,000 (Mann and Markowski (2005)): 300,000 in Thailand (Wanna (1994)), 50,000 in Laos (Chazee (1999)), and 14,200 in Cambodia (Asian Development Bank(ed.) (2002)).

There are two main dialects of Kuy in Thailand, Kuy-Kuy and Kuy-Kuay. The Kuy language spoken in Tamom Village is the Kuy-Kuay dialect.

A distinct phonetic feature of the Kuy language is that it has breathy voice, which is quite uncommon among South East Asian languages. Old Khmer also used to have this distinctive feature. However, the present Khmer language spoken in Cambodia has lost this phonetic feature.

The Tamom Village Kuy-Kuay dialect has 22 initial consonant phonemes, which are: /p, t, c, k, ʔ, ph, th, (ch), kh, b, d, m, n, ɲ, (f), s, h, r, l, w, y/.

The vowels of Kuy occur in two registers, the clear register-normal vowels, and the breathy register-breathy vowels. The Tamom Village Kuy-

Kuay dialect has 12 normal monophthongs: /i, u, u, e, ə, o, ɛ, ʌ, ɔ, æ, a, ɑ/, and 3 normal diphthongs: /ia, ua, ua/. For the breathy vowels, there are 9 phonemic monophthongs: /i̤, ṳ, ṳ, e̤, ə̤, o̤, ɛ̤, ʌ̤, ɔ̤/, and 3 diphthongs: /i̤a, ṳa, ṳa/.

A typical Kuy word is normally either monosyllabic or disyllabic. The structure of a monosyllabic word is C((C)(C))V(V)C. In a disyllabic word, a minor syllable always precedes a major syllable. The structure of a minor syllable is CV(C), and the structure of a major syllable is C(C)V(V)(C).

It is also important to point out that Kuy is an isolating language and its basic word order is SVO. Finally, Kuy places the head noun before the modifier.

1.1 Previous studies

In a previous study by Oranuch (1984), data is taken from the Kuy-Kuay dialect of Wan Village, Bukraeng Sub-district, Chomphra District, Surin Province, Thailand.^{◊1}

Concerning classifiers, Oranuch pointed out that “[a]ll classifiable nouns must be accompanied by a classifier if a number is present.” In contrast to Oranuch’s findings, a noun in the Kuy-Kuay dialect of Tamom Village need not always be accompanied by a classifier, especially when the noun is not human.

As for demonstratives, Oranuch stated that “khaŋ/haŋ+demonstrative, [gives] more specific meaning,...” However, the Tamom Village dialect of Kuy does not use demonstratives in this way.^{◊2}

2 The definition of Noun in Kuy

A noun in Kuy is a referential expression of an entity, and may appear as a subject, or as an object, if it follows a predicate, or if it is the object of a preposition. A noun in Kuy normally precedes other modifiers, such as a stative verb, a demonstrative, a number, a possessor, a relative pronoun

or a relative clause. A noun in Kuy cannot be directly negated by a negator.

3 The definition of Phrase

A noun phrase in Kuy can be defined as a series of words that are integrated together and have the noun as its head, forming an element of a complex sentence.

4 The structure of the Noun Phrase in Kuy

4.1 Quantifier

“Noun + quantifier (+classifier).” Quantifier phrases usually do not need a classifier, except when the head noun of the phrase is a human being, in which case the presence of the classifier is preferable.

4.2 Possessor

“Noun + possessor.” The word /khaŋ/ or /haŋ/ which are shortened forms of khaaŋ “object, article” can appear between the noun and the possessor, as in “noun + /khaŋ/(/haŋ/) + possessor.”

4.3 Demonstrative

“Noun + demonstrative.” Tamom Village Kuy-Kuay uses 4 demonstratives: proximate /nææ/ “this,” medial /kii/ “that,” distal /thɯh/ “that (over there),” and the most distal /thoŋ/ “that (far away over there).” When making a reference to something that is not at the place where the conversation takes place, the demonstrative used is usually the medial distance demonstrative /kii/.

4.4 Nominal Modifier

Normal Nominal Modifier: “noun + nominal modifier.”

Plural Nominal Modifier: “plural nominal modifier + noun.” However, this construction may not be a phrase which consists of “modifier + head noun”, but may be a sequence of two appositive nouns. In general, Kuy puts the noun /mɯ/ “class/companion” before a head noun to express plural.

^{◊1}There is also a brief explanation concerning the NP in Kuy in Somsong (1994) which stated that the word order of the NP in Kuy (the Kuy-Kuay dialect) is similar to that of Thai in that, for example, the modifier follows the noun.

^{◊2}The words /khaŋ/ and /haŋ/ in the Tamom Village Kuy-Kuay come from the noun /khaaŋ/ which means “object, stuff.” These words appear in possessor expressions, but cannot be used as conjunctions.

4.5 Verbal Modifier

“Noun + verbal modifier.” A relative pronoun /haw/ “that” or a relative clause marker /dɛɛl/ “that/left-over” may appear between them. The presence of a relative marker sometimes changes the meaning of the phrase. When /haw/ appears, it expresses contrastive meaning. In addition, if the relative marker is absent, the phrase can sometimes stand as a sentence. When /dɛɛl/ appears, it implies the existence of the agent, or the cause of the verb.

5 The relationship between noun phrase constituents and word order

5.1 Noun phrases with 2 modifiers

Table 1 shows the possible word order in a noun phrase with 2 modifiers. ^{◦3} ^{◦4}

In the table, ‘Yes’ means that the word order is possible, ‘Fixed’ means that the two elements may co-occur but the word order is fixed, ‘No’ means that the word order is impossible, and ‘-’ means that the same type of modifier does not appear twice within a noun phrase.

Table 1: The co-occurrence of 2 modifier within a noun phrase in Kuy

1st\2nd	Qnt	Pos	Dem	NM	VM
Qnt	-	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Pos	Yes	Fixed	Yes	No	Yes
Dem	No	Yes	-	No	Yes
NM	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fixed	Yes
VM	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

5.2 Noun phrases with 3 modifiers

A noun phrase that has 3 or more modifiers rarely occurs in real conversation.

^{◦3}Qnt, Pos and Dem here refer to Quantifier, Possessor and Demonstrative, respectively. NM refers to the Normal Nominal Modifier, and VM refers to the Verbal Modifier.

^{◦4}The table does not show the word order of the Plural Nominal modifier, since the construction may not be a phrase that consists of “modifier + head noun,” but may be a sequence of two appositive nouns.

Table 2 and Table 3 show the possible word orders of 3 modifiers in a noun phrase.

The positions of a normal nominal modifier and a demonstrative are quite fixed compared to the others. In general, the normal nominal modifier always precedes the other type of modifiers, and the demonstrative tends to be at the end of the phrase. The position of a verbal modifier is more flexible when the relative pronoun /haw/ or the relative clause /dɛɛl/ is present. When /haw/ or /dɛɛl/ do not appear, the verbal modifier precedes all other elements, except the normal nominal modifier.

Table 2: The possible word orders of a 3-modifier noun phrase

Order of Modifiers			Possibility
Qnt	Pos	Dem	Yes
Qnt	Dem	Pos	No
Pos	Qnt	Dem	Yes
Pos	Dem	Qnt	No
Dem	Qnt	Pos	No
Dem	Pos	Qnt	No
Qnt	Pos	NM	No
Qnt	NM	Pos	No
Pos	Qnt	NM	No
Pos	NM	Qnt	No
NM	Qnt	Pos	Yes
NM	Pos	Qnt	Yes
Qnt	Dem	NM	No
Qnt	NM	Dem	No
Dem	Qnt	NM	No
Dem	NM	Qnt	No
NM	Qnt	Dem	Yes
NM	Dem	Qnt	No
Pos	Dem	NM	No
Pos	NM	Dem	No
Dem	Pos	NM	No
Dem	NM	Pos	No
NM	Pos	Dem	Yes
NM	Dem	Pos	No

5.3 Noun phrases with more than 4 modifiers

A noun phrase that includes more than 4 modifiers almost never occurs in real conversation. It is,

Table 3: The possible word orders of a 3-modifier noun phrase with a Verbal Modifier

Order of Modifiers			Possibility without /haw/ or /dɛɛl/	Possibility with /haw/ or /dɛɛl/
Qnt	Pos	VM	No	Yes
Qnt	VM	Pos	No	Yes
Pos	Qnt	VM	No	Yes
Pos	VM	Qnt	No	Yes
VM	Qnt	Pos	Yes	Yes
VM	Pos	Qnt	Yes	Yes
Qnt	Dem	VM	No	No
Qnt	VM	Dem	No	Yes
Dem	Qnt	VM	No	No
Dem	VM	Qnt	No	No
VM	Qnt	Dem	Yes	Yes
VM	Dem	Qnt	No	No
Qnt	NM	VM	No	No
Qnt	VM	NM	No	No
NM	Qnt	VM	No	Yes
NM	VM	Qnt	No	Yes
VM	Qnt	NM	No	No
VM	NM	Qnt	No	No
Pos	Dem	VM	No	No
Pos	VM	Dem	No	Yes
Dem	Pos	VM	No	No
Dem	VM	Pos	No	No
VM	Pos	Dem	Yes	Yes
VM	Dem	Pos	No	No
Pos	NM	VM	No	No
Pos	VM	NM	No	No
NM	Pos	VM	No	Yes
NM	VM	Pos	No	Yes
VM	Pos	NM	No	No
VM	NM	Pos	No	No
Dem	NM	VM	No	No
Dem	VM	NM	No	No
NM	Dem	VM	No	No
NM	VM	Dem	No	Yes
VM	Dem	NM	No	No
VM	NM	Dem	No	No

therefore, difficult to determine the exact word order. However, a normal nominal modifier normally precedes the others and a demonstrative tends to follow the others.

The most likely word order for a noun phrase containing 5 modifiers is: “nominal modifier + verbal modifier + possessor + quantifier + demonstrative” word order.

6 Conclusion

This paper analyzes noun phrases in Kuy that have 1 to 5 modifiers. The examined modifiers are the quantifier, possessor, demonstrative, nominal modifier, and verbal modifier. A modifier in Kuy normally follows a head noun, except for a plural nominal modifier, a subcategory of the nominal modifier which precedes a head noun. Among the five, the position of the (normal) nominal modifier is the most fixed, that is, it always precedes the others. The demonstrative is in the next most fixed position. That is, it tends to appear at the end of the phrase. The position of the verbal modifier is freer when the relative pronoun /haw/ or the relative clause /dɛɛl/ appears. The presence or absence of the relative pronoun or relative clause marker may result in distinct meanings.

Furthermore, noun phrases with 4 or more modifiers, almost never occur in real conversation in Kuy.

In addition, if the speaker uses a Thai-loaned classifier, the word order of the phrase may be freer.^{◦5} This is one of the features of Kuy that is similar to Thai.

One characteristic that Kuy and Khmer have in common is that both languages have only a few classifiers compared to Thai. Furthermore, the classifier is not a necessary element in a noun phrase both in Kuy and Khmer.^{◦6}

The word order of the noun phrase in Khmer seems to be more fixed when compared to that of Thai. The noun phrase in Kuy has freer word order than Khmer, but is more fixed than in Thai.

^{◦5}See Minegishi(2006)(in Japanese) for the noun phrase structure in Thai.

^{◦6}See Ueda and Okada(2006)(in Japanese) for the noun phrase structure in Khmer.