

## Grammatical Functions in Mon-Khmer Morphology

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- What Was Studied

Types of semantico-syntactic morphological categories in 30 languages of 11 sub-branches of Mon-Khmer

NOTE: Munda languages were not included due to significant typological differences. There is not enough published material to make claims about Pearic morphology.

- Numbers of Categories

a-Almost two dozen semantico-syntactic affixation and reduplication word-formation strategies were identified (excluding compounding and historically recoverable forms).

b-About 15 of these categories are either grammatical (e.g., aspect, case-marking, etc.) or semi-grammatical (e.g., marking of time deictics, mood, etc.) in nature.

- Core Findings

a-There is a larger range of morphological categories than generally supposed (e.g., the well-known reconstructable causative \*pV- prefixes and nominalizing \*-N- infixes), especially if one focuses on Khmer (but see Pou and Jenner 1980)

b-Morphological productivity is fairly limited in most branches, with Aslian as the exception for its productivity in aspect and subject-marking (Why?).

c-Katuic, Bahnaric, and Khmuic have large numbers of categories.

d-Reduplication also plays a role in expressing grammatical functions.

e-Affixes and reduplicants have very little overlap in the morpho-syntactic categories.

f-Almost no suffixes appear (Why?).

- Historical Notes

a-The data suggests MK connections to Austronesian (causative, nominalizer, and reciprocal (See page 7 for notes on a hypothetical proto-MK reconstruction)), and thus by extension hypothetically to STAN

b-The data also highlights the development of MK in (a) its diversification of morphology within sub-branches, (b) degree of stabilization corresponding to amount of literary standardization, and (c) its relationship to Munda as a sister sub-branch within AA rather than Munda forming a group under MK.

## Sources

Sub-branches	Languages and Primary Sources
Aslian (Peninsular Malaysia)	Entire branch (Matisoff 2003); Jah-Hut (Diffloth 1979); Jahai (Schebesta 1926 and 1931; Burenhult 2002); Kentakbong (Omar 1976); Semelai (Kruspe 2004); Semai/Sengoi (Diffloth 1976a and 1976b; Means and Means 1986); Temiar (Benjamin 1976 and 2011; Means 1998)
Bahnaric (Central Vietnam)	Bahnar (Banker 1964a and 1964b); Chrau (Dorothy Thomas 1969; David Thomas 1971); Halang (Cooper 1966); Jeh (Cohen 1966; Gradin 1976) Koho (Hoàng, Lý, Tạ et. al. 1984; Tạ 1998; Tạ Văn Thông 1998); Mnong (Dinh 2007); Rengao (Gregerson 1979); Sedang (Smith 1969); Sre (Manley 1972)
Katuic (Central Vietnam)	Entire branch (Hoàng Văn Hành 1993); Bru (Nguyễn, Hoàng, and Tạ 1984; Vương 1997; Hoàng and Tạ 1998); Katu (Costello 1966, 1998, and 2001; Ngeq (Smith 1973); Nguyễn and Nguyễn 1998; Nguyễn Hữu Hoàn 1998); Pacoh (S. Watson 1964 and 1966; R. Watson 1966a, 1966b, 1976, and 2011; Nguyễn, Đoàn, and Phan 1986; Alves 2004; R. Watson 2011)
Khasic (NE India)	Khasi (Gurdon 1914; Nagaraja 1985)
Khmeric (Cambodia)	Khmer (Karnchana 1978; Jenner and Pou 1982; David Thomas 1987; Dorothy Thomas 1990)
Khmuic	Khmu (Svantesson 1983; Premsrirat 1987); Mal (Filbeck 1996); Mlabri (Rischel 1995)
Mangic/Pakanic	Bugan (Li 1996; Li 2005); Mang (Nguyễn, Nguyễn, and Tạ 2008)
Monic (Thailand and Burma)	Mon (Bauer 1982 and 1989; Jenny 2003 and 2005)
Nicobarese (Nicobar Islands of India)	Nancowry Nicobarese (Man 1889; Radakhrisnan 1976 and 1981)
Palaungic (Burma and China)	Palaung (Milne 1921; Shorto 1963); Riang-Liang (Shorto 1963)
Vietic (Vietnam)	Kri (Enfield and Diffloth 2009); Muong reduplication (Hoàng Văn Hành 1998); Ruc (Nguyễn Văn Lợi 1993); Vietnamese (Thompson 1965; Nguyễn Tài Căn 1996; Nguyễn Đình Hoà 1966); Vietnamese reduplication (Hoàng Văn Hành 1985; Viên Ngôn Ngữ Học (Institute of Linguistics, Hanoi) 1995; Vu 2007);

## Approach and Notes

- Method

The table contains categories for which at least two sub-branches exhibit a trait (other categories exist for single sub-groups). For some, only one main speech variety has been described. However, generally, one than one in a sub-branch showed any category.
- Research Scope

The initial scope of the study on was all aspects of word formation, including affixation, reduplication, and compounding, with inventories of allomorphs for primary categories. The focus on strictly derivational morphology, not grammatical/inflectional morphology, will be published in a separate article.
- Affix and Reduplication Types

a-Non-Munda Mon-Khmer languages have almost exclusively prefixes and infixes, with suffixes only in very limited instances in Khasi and Nicobarese.  
b-Alternating reduplication is found throughout, with both certain recurring categories (e.g., alliteration) but also substantial phonological diversity (e.g., incopyfixation in Aslian, separable alternating reduplication in Vietnamese and Katuic, etc.).
- Caveats

a-The use of general categories masks diversity specific to those categories (e.g., blending of causative with other semantic categories in many languages, more parameters of aspect in Aslian languages than other sub-branches, etc.).  
b-The table does not indicate the degree of productivity, which is difficult to quantify precisely, but in general, it is either fossilized or with minimal productivity.  
c-The study is limited to what resources I could find and interpret.  
d-Consideration of areal features has not been deeply explored yet.

**TYPOLOGY OF MODERN SEMANTICO-SYNTACTIC CATEGORIES OF MON-KHMER MORPHOLOGY (AFFIXATION AND REDUPLICATION)**

SUB-BRANCHES	K S	M G	P L	K U	A S	N C	M N	K R	B N	K T	V T	V N
<b>CATEGORIES</b>												
<b># OF TOTAL</b>	6	8	8	9	11	2	5	5	16	17	9	5
<b># OF AFFIXATION</b>	5	4	6	7	8	2	4	5	10	14	5	0
<b># OF REDUP.</b>	1	4	2	2	3	0	1	0	6	3	4	5
<b>VERBS</b>												
1. *Causative	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	*
2. *Reciprocal	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	-
3. *Stativizing	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-
4. Aspectual: completive	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	?	-
5. Verbalizing	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
6. Involuntary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-
7. Desiderative	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
8. Negation	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-
9. Pretence	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
10. Stative verbs with plural subjects	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
<b>NOUNS</b>												
11. *Nominalizing	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	*
12. Pronominal	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-
13. Case-marking	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
14. Singular	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-
15. Plural nouns	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
16. Existential/locative	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
17. Number of days/months	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
<b>REDUPLICATION</b>												
18. Time adverbials	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	+
19. Degree of intensity	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	+
20. Aspectual: Progression/iteration	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
21. Generalizing meaning	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+
22. Derogatory/Dismissive	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+
23. Distributive/Plural nouns	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+

**NOTE: This chart is preliminary. If anyone knows of additions to make to this chart, please contact me at [markalves2004@yahoo.com](mailto:markalves2004@yahoo.com).**

## Table 2: Overview of Semantic-syntactic Categories and Subcategories

1. Aspect: completive, progressive, time adverbials
2. Case roles: subject agreement, case-markers, existential
3. Deriving lexical categories: nominalizing, verbalizing, stativizing
4. Mood functions: involuntary, pretence, desiderative, derogatory
5. Plurality: plural nouns, singular nouns, stative verb with plural subject, distributive
6. Other grammatical changes: negation, reciprocal, degree of intensity
7. Other semantic changes: causative, number of days/months, semantic generalization

## Samples

### Aspect

- Bahnar (Bahnaric): /k<sup>h</sup>an/ ‘to say’ → /jə-k<sup>h</sup>an/ ‘to have said’ (Banker 1964a:112)
- Katu (Katuic): /te:k/ ‘to tear’ → /sar-te:k/ ‘already torn’; /bil/ ‘to lose’ → /babil/ ‘to keep losing’ (Costello 2001:121-123)
- Kentakbong (Aslian): /ciʔ/ ‘to eat’ → /ʔu-ciʔ/ ‘has eaten’ (Omar 1976:956);  
Kentakbong (Aslian): /sapoh/ ‘sweeps’ → /sənapoh/ ‘is sweeping’ (Omar 1976:968)
- Khmu (Khmuic): /cɲàk/ ‘one being nods once’ → /ɲàk-kín-ɲàk/ ‘one being keeps nodding downwards’ (Svantesson 1983:57)

### Subject Prefixes

- (1) Pacoh (Katuic)  
ʔitaʔ      pəllɔ:    ʔalɔ:ŋ  
One-make tube    wood  
‘One makes a wooden tube.’ (Alves 2004:39)
- (2) Temiar (Aslian)  
ye:ʔ      ʔitərsəg cəp  
1s      1s-trap bird  
‘I trapped the bird.’ (Benjamin 1976:175)

### Case-Marked Pronouns

- Taoih (Katuic): /hɛ/ ‘we’; /ʔəŋhɛ/ ‘our’; /ʔahɛ/ ‘to us (accusative)’; /ʔihɛ/ ‘to us (locative)’ (Solntseva 1996:34)
- Ruc (Vietic): /mi<sup>2</sup>/ ‘you’ → /pami<sup>2</sup>/ ‘(to) you’ (Nguyen Van Loi 1993:97)

### Adjectivals Marked for Plural Subjects

- Pacoh (Katuic): /kaket/ ‘small (in regards to a plural subject)’ (Alves 2004:39)
- Khmu (Khmuic): /cɲák/ ‘one being nods once’ → /r̄ɲàk/ ‘many beings nod once at the same time’ (Svantesson 1987:57)

### Plural Nouns

- Ple-Temer (Aslian): /bamug/ ‘tiger’ → /mən<sup>h</sup>mamug/ ‘tigers’ (Schebesta 1931:646)
- Temiar (Aslian): /taaʔ/ ‘sir’ → /tataaʔ/ ‘old man’ → /tɛʔtaaʔ/ ‘old men’ (Benjamin 2011:12)

### Desiderative/Inclination

- Bru (Katuic): /taʔ/ ‘to do’ → /ʔi-taʔ/ ‘wants to do/about to do’ (Hoàng and Tà 1984: 36-39)
- Kentakbong (Aslian): /ciʔ/ ‘to eat’ → /maʔ-ciʔ/ ‘wants to eat’ (Omar 1976:955)
- Khasi (Khasic): /juŋ/ ‘to urinate’ → /sam-juŋ/ ‘urge to urinate’ (Nagaraja 1985:26)

### Time Ordinals

#### Pacoh (Katuic)

GLOSS	FORM	GLOSS	FORM
day	ʔi.ŋaj	Year	ku.mə:ŋ
today	ʔi.ŋaj-ki: / ʔi.ŋaj-ʔŋ.koh	this year	ku.mə:-ʔn.nɛh
yesterday	ʔi.ŋaj-ʔi.no:	last year	ku.mə:-ʔi.no:
2 days ago	ʔi.ŋaj-ʔn.tro:	2 years ago	ku.mə:-ʔn.tra:
3 days ago	ʔi.ŋaj-ʔn.trɛ:	3 years ago	ku.mə:-ʔn.trɛ:
4 days ago	ʔi.ŋaj-ʔn.trɯən	4 years ago	ku.mə:-ʔn.trɯən
5 days ago	ʔi.ŋaj-ʔn.tro:ŋ	5 years ago	ku.mə:-ʔn.tro:ŋ
6 days ago	ʔi.ŋaj-ʔn.trat	6 years ago	ku.mə:-ʔn.trat

7 days ago	ʔi.ŋaj-ʔn.trɔ:l	7 years ago	ku.mɔ:-ʔn.trɔ:l
8 days ago	ʔi.ŋaj-ʔn.trɔ:l	8 years ago	ku.mɔ:-ʔn.trɔ:l
9 days ago	ʔi.ŋaj-ʔn.trjəʃ	9 years ago	ku.mɔ:-ʔn.trjəʃ
10 days ago	ʔi.ŋaj-ʔn.trit	10 years ago	ku.mɔ:-ʔn.trit
tomorrow	ʔi.ŋaj-pər.no:	next year	ku.mɔ:-ʔn.nɛh
2 days later	ʔi.ŋaj-pər.ra	2 years later	ku.mɔ:-ku.mɔ:
3 days later	ʔi.ŋaj-pər.rɛ:	3 years later	ku.mɔ:-ku.mɛ:
4 days later	ʔi.ŋaj-pər.rɯən	4 years later	ku.mɔ:-ku.mɯən
5 days later	ʔi.ŋaj-pər.ro:ŋ	5 years later	ku.mɔ:-ku.mɔ:ŋ
6 days later	ʔi.ŋaj-pər.rat	6 years later	ku.mɔ:-ku.mat
7 days later	ʔi.ŋaj-pər.rɔ:l	7 years later	ku.mɔ:-ku.mɔ:l
8 days later	ʔi.ŋaj-pər.rɔ:l	8 years later	ku.mɔ:-ku.mɔ:l
9 days later	ʔi.ŋaj-pər.rjəʃ	9 years later	ku.mɔ:-ku.mjəʃ
10 days later	ʔi.ŋaj-pər.rit	10 years later	ku.mɔ:-ku.mit

## INTERPRETING THE DATA

- **Geography**

Least diversity in the center, most diversity on the periphery

- **Literacy, Standardization, and Widespread Usage**

Mon, Khmer, and Vietnamese have the smallest number of categories, all of which have literary traditions and had status as major languages, unlike the language groups with more diversity.

- **Increased Complexity**

Given time, languages find their own complexity to express a complex range of both more and less necessary communicative functions.

- **Note on the Reciprocal and Potential Proto-MK Form**

The likely reconstructable form of the MK reciprocal prefix is something like \*CaR-, very much like that posited for proto-AN by Zeitoun.

Chrau (Bahnaric): /pəm/ ‘to hit’ → /**tam**-pəm/ ‘to fight’ (Thomas 1971:154)

Khmer (Khmeric): /cum/ ‘to surround’ → /**pra**-cum/ ‘to join together’ (Jenner and Pou 1982:85)

Khmu (Khmuic): /pók/ ‘to bite’ → /**tr**pók/ ‘to bite each other’ (Svantesson 1983:39)

Palaung (Palaungic): /ʔɛ:h/ ‘to scold’ → /**kər**-ʔɛ:h/ ‘to abuse each other’ (Milne 1921:52)

Rengao (Bahnaric): /ʔwaj/ ‘to reside’ → /**ta**-ʔwaj/ ‘to live together’ (Gregerson 1979:108)

Bru (Katuic): /sa-**r**-baw/ ‘to call each other’ (Hoàng and Tà 1998:82)

- **Age**

Most ancient forms potentially related to AN and even ST (\*pV-, -N-, \*CaR-; role marking in nominalizing infixes) seen throughout

- **No Suffixes?**

Virtually complete lack of suffixes and reduplicants with alternating segments are distinct from AN and ST (apparent spread of this among other language groups in the region)

- **More Data Needed**

Likelihood of there being additional categories beyond what was found for this study as many of the languages are still not fully described.

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