

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

While collecting various oral narratives in Khmu, I realized that repetition structures in Khmu oral discourse are widespread; not only in density, but also in variety. There seemed to be many different repetition structures in Khmu oral narratives. The repetition structures which occur sentence final (cf. the following example) have especially caught my interest.

### (1) Poor.013

Poor.013

Ya'            ni'    go'    o        maak   nwm   maak   pi    lè' go'    thav   lè'    bat    gi  
grandmother   there   then   oh        many   year   many   year   and.then   old   then   time   this  
N                DET   CN   TVF   ADJ   N        ADJ   N     CN        ADJ   EMPH   TAM   DEM

thav.

old

ADJ

The grandmother there then: Oh, many, many years, and so, old (is she) then, at this stage, old.<sup>1</sup>

In example (1), the adjective *thav* 'old' is repeated sentence final.

Many of these sentence final repetition structures seem like final conclusions. However, a further systematic examination of the different grammatical structures and the context of these sentence final repetition structures revealed a much wider range of discourse functions. This thesis investigates the grammatical and discourse functions of these sentence final repetition structures, referred to as 'right-dislocated repetition structures'. In order to give a more complete overview of repetition structures in Khmu in general, other repetition structures were also included and discourse functions assigned. Others also have made some basic suggestions for the role of repetition structures in Khmu discourse. However, this thesis aims to give a more comprehensive view of the relation between various Khmu repetition structures and their discourse functions in oral narratives.

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<sup>1</sup> The free translations in this thesis do not represent fully colloquial English, but rather a more literal translation.

## 1.1 What is right-dislocated repetition (RDR)?

The grammatical term “right-dislocated repetition” includes two different morphosyntactic operations.<sup>2</sup> First, there is repetition of lexical items. Repetition of lexical items is distinguished from reiteration<sup>3</sup>, reduplication and elaboration of semantic concepts (see below).

Second, there is dislocation. Dislocation refers to constituents which are situated apart from the clause (and its predication), but are still adjoined to the clause within a single sentence (Payne 1997:273f). Dislocated elements are separated “both phonologically and syntactically from the clause, having their own intonation contours” (Van Valin 1993:12ff cited in Dooley and Levinsohn 2001:67, compare also Radford 1988:530-33). Right-dislocation represents a specification of dislocation in that the dislocated elements are removed to the very end of a sentence. Therefore right-dislocation is sometimes referred to as “postposing” (cf. Payne 1997:273). Other terms like “afterthought topicalization” or “repair device” (cf. Givón 1990:760) do not only describe the grammatical form or position in the sentence, but also indicate a certain semantic function in the discourse.<sup>4</sup> For instance Lambrecht (1994) refers to right-dislocation as “antitopic construction”. He defines antitopic as “a lexical topic NP [which] is positioned AT THE END of the clause containing the information about the topic referent” (Lambrecht 1994:202).<sup>5</sup>

However, I have not encountered a discussion of both different morphosyntactic operations together in one structure in the literature so far. Thus, the term “right-dislocated repetition” is coined by me, to distinguish it from right-dislocation in general.

There may be several reasons, why the combination of (right-) dislocation and repetition in the term ‘right-dislocated repetition’ is not widespread.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Payne (1997:7), a morphosyntactic operation is “a relation between one linguistic form and another that correlates with a conventionalized meaning distinction.”

<sup>3</sup> Reiteration is a much broader concept than repetition. Halliday and Hasan (1976:278) provide the following definition for reiteration: “Reiteration is a form of lexical cohesion which involves the repetition of a lexical item ... A reiterated item may be a repetition, a synonym or near-synonym, a superordinate, or a general word”. Thus a repetition is only one subtype of the class of reiteration structures.

<sup>4</sup> Lambrecht (1994:202f) presents a whole list of other terms for right-dislocation or “right-detachment” in literature: “epexegesis” (a term from classical grammar), “inverted word order” (Erguvanli 1984), “extraposition” (Jespersen 1933/ 1964), “de-focused NP”, “afterthought NP”, “post-predicate constituent”, “tail” (Dik et. al. 1980, Vallduví 1990) and “antitopic” (Chafe 1976). Except for Kuno (1978, Japanese), Erguvanli (1984, Turkish), Larsson (1979, French) and Lambrecht (1981, French), right-dislocation has received little attention in generative syntactic theory (according to Lambrecht 1994:203).

<sup>5</sup> Hence, according to Lambrecht (1994:204), right-dislocation is not used to indicate a new topic or topic shift, whereas left-dislocation is utilized for topic-announcing and topic-shifting contexts. This is denied by Givón (1990:758), saying that left-dislocation “is *not* used as a device for introducing new topics” into the discourse. Against that, Givón (1990:761) notes that in Ute, a language in Colorado, right-dislocated independent pronouns “are used as devices to indicate the *end of a thematic paragraph* ... they signal to the hearer the cataphoric discontinuity of the referent – and also of theme.” Fujii (1989) made similar observations for Japanese.

First, according to Lambrecht (1994:354.55), a number of authors like Vennemann (1974), Hyman (1975), Givón (1976), Harris (1976), and Bailard (1981) interpret right-dislocation solely as an afterthought construction, which is opposed by Lambrecht (1981:75ff). Regarding right-dislocation merely as an afterthought construction does not leave room for right-dislocated repetition, as an 'afterthought' in the proper sense of the word does include additional information (cf. Dik 1997:401) and thus does not represent repetition.

Alternatively, viewing right-dislocation as a repair device excludes the presence of a repetition structure also, as by definition 'repaired' information cannot be repeated information. According to Dik (1997:403), right-dislocation (or "tails") is used as a repair strategy especially in unplanned spoken conversation. Dik (1978), cited in Dooley and Levinsohn (2001:71), provides the following English example for a repair device:

(2) John won't even be invited, eh... Bill I mean.

The tail *Bill I mean* is considered as a repair device in right-dislocated position.

A third option is that the semantic function of right-dislocation is usually regarded as an antitopic device. Antitopic devices make sure that the topic is understood correctly and is being referred to exactly.<sup>6</sup> According to Dik (1997:401), right-dislocated elements "add a further specification to a term" and are "meant to clarify or modify (some constituent contained in) the unit to which they are adjoined." Compare the English example below, cited from Lambrecht (1994:203):

(3) He is a nice guy, your brother.

Here, the lexical topic expression *your brother* is placed in post-clausal position and represents a reiteration which refers back to the pronominal topic expression *he* within the clause. In order to make sure that the interlocutor would get the right participant reference, the lexical topic expression *your brother* is used as a concept specification device.<sup>8</sup> It must, according to Lambrecht (1994:205), "immediately follow the clause which contains the co-referential pronominal topic expression" in many languages.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Actually, when Lambrecht (1994) refers to antitopic or detachment constructions, he is more concerned about the promotion of a topic referent from a non-active (or "not-yet-active") to an active state in the addressee's mind. The topic referent is in the form of a lexical noun phrase in a 'detached' position, "which contains the propositional information about the topic referent." The topic referent is usually "indicated via an intra-clausal 'resumptive' pronoun or other unaccented pronominal" (Lambrecht 1994:181f)

<sup>8</sup> Givón (1983) refers to a similar example in Ute, translated in English as '...he used to behave like that, porcupine did...' (Givón 1983:148). Givón (1983:198.14) notes that in cases when "a pronoun is used first, then the full NP is added for 'insurance' sake, presumably as an 'escalation' of the topic-marking strategy."

<sup>9</sup> Lambrecht (1994:203) mentions that the interlocutor would not be able to understand the proposition properly, if there was only the intra-clausal unmarked topic pronoun. The pronoun *he* must be a salient (an accessible) concept, which was mentioned before. Therefore Lambrecht (1994:203) states that "high accessibility of the referent is a general condition for appropriate use of the antitopic construction across languages". See also Lambrecht 1986, chapter 8, on spoken French (not available to me).

A mere repetition of the pronoun *he* (which creates an ungrammatical sentence in English, like *\*He is a nice guy, he*) would not provide an unambiguous reference to the topic your brother, but would only update the sentential theme (in contrast to the rheme *a nice guy*).<sup>10</sup> The sentence final repetition of a pronoun can actually be encountered in Khmu right-dislocation repetition structures (cf. Poor.119 and Poor.123B) and is referred to as thematic updating.

The mere repetition of the rheme (like in *He is a nice guy, a nice guy*) would be a (dis-)continuous summary of a highly accessible referent, instead. This is also encountered in Khmu right-dislocated repetition structures (cf. Poor.013 and Poor.145).

Thus, the term 'right-dislocated repetition' (RDR) refers to repeated lexical items in right-dislocated position in a sentence, which have a number of discourse functions. Right-dislocated repetition structures in Khmu oral narratives appear to have three main discourse functions:

First, RDR is utilized for floor-holding. The narrator repeats a certain phrase at the very end of a sentence via non-prominent pitch in order to gain time to think about the ongoing discourse (or to make sure that he holds the floor).

Second, thematic updating is handled by RDR (and other devices like tail-head linkage). The interlocutor is given the opportunity to catch up with the pace of the discourse, as main elements of the discourse theme are repeated at the end of a clause.

Third, regular summaries are intertwined in the discourse by using RDR. This happens either in between of a thematic grouping or macrostructure (see below) as a continuous summary, or at the end of a thematic grouping as a discontinuous summary, which is thus followed by a thematic change. When RDR is used as a discontinuous summary, I call it final-focus repetition and is hypothesized to be maintained in written discourse. The other occurrences of RDR however may only be features of oral narratives in Khmu.

This thesis is a detailed investigation of the general observations put forth in this section.

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<sup>10</sup> The theme is the first element and the focal point of a sentence. It may represent a single word, a phrase, or an entire clause. "The rest of the sentence, called the rheme, must be about the theme" (Chimombo and Roseberry 1998:88).

## 1.2 Introduction to the Khmu language

### 1.2.1 Ethnographic information

With a population of 500,957 people (in 1995) the Khmu language represents the largest minority language of Laos PDR (Schliesinger 2003:150). It belongs to the Austro-Asiatic language family, being situated in the Khmuic branch of the Northern Mon-Khmer language group. There are three dialect groups, which differ considerably from each other, due to geographical and socio-economical factors like borrowing words from surrounding languages independently from each other (Souksavang et al. 1994:50').<sup>11</sup> The Khmu data analyzed in this thesis is based on the Khmu Ou dialect (derived from the river Ou), which is the most numerous Khmu subgroup. The Khmu Ou mainly live in the Luang Prabang and Chiang Khwang area in the central and eastern part of Northern Laos. They are also referred to as Khmu Ceuang (Souksavang and Preisig 1997:188) or more informally as Khmu "Am", as they use the negative particle *am* 'not' for negation. The Khmu Ou comprise 450,000 people, followed by the Khmu Rook with more than 50,000 people. The Khmu Ou, Rook, Lue, Khong and Me [or Be, (MS)] are closely related (Chazée 2000:58, 72).

These Khmu subgroups usually maintain their own language, even though they are bilingual and many of the younger generation are literate in the national language Lao, which they use for trade, education, and government (Proschan 1989:89). However, the majority of the Khmu people still preserve their traditional lifestyle. They live in predominantly monogamous nuclear families and cultivate dry rice in swiddens (shifting cultivation) supplemented by hunting, fishing and gathering wild forest products. Additionally, they raise pigs and poultry (Schliesinger 2003:153f).

### 1.2.2 Khmu phonology and orthography

The orthography used herein is adopted from Souksavang et al. (1994) in the *Khmu'-Lao-French-English Dictionary*. The Khmu Ou variety (or Eastern Khmu) does not have tone or register, but there is a voiced/ voiceless initial consonant contrast. Against that, the two northern Khmu dialect clusters (or Western Khmu dialects) have been replacing the initial consonant contrast by tone or register contrast, which is referred to as tonogenesis (cf. Souksavang et al. 1994:50' and Suwilai 1999:49). As a result of that, there are 36 initial consonants in Eastern Khmu, whereas Western Khmu dialects have only 22 (Suwilai 2002:xxxiii). The number of final consonants, vowels and diphthongs is the same in all Khmu dialects, namely 19 single vowels, three diphthongs, and 15 final

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<sup>11</sup> Suwilai (1999:48) uses a slightly different separation of only two divisions, which she refers to as Western and Eastern Khmu. Together they spread over Laos, north-west Thailand, southern China, and western Vietnam. In Laos, Eastern Khmu (comprising of the dialect Khmu Ceuang (derived from the Khmu hero Ceuang) or Khmu Ou (derived from the Ou river) is spoken in Hua Phan, Phongsaly, Luang Prabang and Chiang Khwang, whereas the Khmu dialects spoken in Udomsay (Khmu Lue, Khmu Rook and Khmu Khong), Bokeo [Khmu Be, (MS)] and Luang Namtha (Khmu Yuan) belong to Western Khmu.

consonants. However, the phonetic realization of the phonetic final alveolar fricative can vary between [s], [ç], and [h] (Suwilai 2002:xxxiv).

According to Suwilai (2002:xxxix), the phonological word in all Khmu dialects is similar and consists of one to three syllables. Most of the words are mono or disyllabic and have syllables with the CV-structure 'C(C)V(C) with the stress on the main final syllable. The presyllable C(C)V(C) of a di- or trisyllabic word is unstressed and its vowel reduced or sometimes even deleted.

In the following I present an initial consonant, final consonant and vowel and diphthong phoneme chart (for the Khmu Ou dialect or Eastern Khmu, which is used herein), which are adopted from Suwilai (2002:xxxiiif and xli). Special notations of the Roman-based Khmu orthography used for some of the phonemes are adapted from Souksavang et al. (1994:57'ff). This orthography is used in the remainder of the thesis and in the glossed interlinear text which appear in the appendix.

Phonemic initial consonants (ph) + roman-based orthographic representation (ro)										Phonemic final consonants (ph) + roman-based orthographic representation (ro)									
ph	ro	ph	ro	ph	ro	ph	ro	ph	ro	ph	ro	ph	ro	ph	ro	ph	ro	ph	ro
p	p	t	t	c	c	k	k	ʔ	ʔ	p	p	t	t	c	c	k	k	ʔ	ʔ
p <sup>h</sup>	ph	t <sup>h</sup>	th	c <sup>h</sup>	ch	k <sup>h</sup>	kh											h	h
b	b	d	d	ʃ	ʃ	g	g												
f	f	s	s					h	h			s[ç,h]	s						
m	m	n	n	ɲ	ɲ	ŋ	ng			m	m	n	n	ɲ	ɲ	ŋ	ng		
<sup>h</sup> m	hm	<sup>h</sup> n	hn	<sup>h</sup> ɲ	hɲ	<sup>h</sup> ŋ	hng												
<sup>ʔ</sup> m	ʔm	<sup>ʔ</sup> n	ʔn	<sup>ʔ</sup> ɲ	ʔɲ														
		l <sup>h</sup>	l									l	l						
		r <sup>h</sup>	r									r	r						
		r	hr																
w	v			j	y					w	v			j					
<sup>h</sup> w	hv			<sup>h</sup> j	hy														
				<sup>ʔ</sup> j	ʔy														

Table 1: Initial and final consonant chart for Khmu Ou

(adopted from Suwilai 2002:xxxiiif).

Phonemic vowels and diphthongs (ph) + roman-based orthographic representation (ro)													
ph	ro	ph	ro		ph	ro	Ph	ro		ph	ro	ph	ro
i	i	i:	ii		i	w	i:	ww		u·	u	u:	uu
e	é	e:	éé		ə	e	ə:	ee		o	ô	o:	ôô
					ʌ	ê	ʌ:	êê					
ɛ	è	ɛ:	èè		a	a	a:	aa		ɔ	o	ɔ:	oo
		iə	ia				iə	wa				uə	ua

Table 2: Vowels and diphthongs in Khmu dialects (adopted from Suwilai 2002:xli).

Note: If short vowels and diphthongs occur syllable final, they are marked with (V').

### 1.3 Goal of the Study

This thesis aims to investigate all sentence final repetition structures in a set of five Khmu oral narratives and tries to establish patterns between the various grammatical structures and observed discourse functions.

It is expected that Khmu narrators often utilize right-dislocated repetition in order to state discontinuous summaries to finally highlight a global theme of a macrostructure (cf. van Dijk 1997:90). This discourse function of right-dislocated repetition (RDR) I call final-focus repetition (FFR), which simultaneously includes the discourse categories of chunk delimitation, thematic discontinuity and discontinuous summary.

### 1.4 Scope and limitations of the study

The scope of this thesis entails five different aspects. First, it grammatically defines different repetition structures. Second, the grammatically defined repetition structures are marked with the discourse functions they have. Third, this thesis tries to find patterns between various grammatically defined repetition structures and observed discourse functions. Fourth, this research aims for a description of the discourse functions of right-dislocated repetition structures in Khmu oral narratives. Finally, this thesis increases the awareness of multiple types of repetition structures in Khmu.

It is hypothesized that less educated Khmu speakers use more repetition in spoken discourse than educated speakers do.<sup>12</sup> However, as this research focuses on the description of repetition structures in their grammatical form and discourse function, which is preliminary to any investigation into the structures preserved or lost in the transition into a literate culture, there will be only limited further discussion about the ethnographic implications of the transition from orality to literacy.

Additionally, apart from my suggestion to maintain final-focus repetition structures also in written discourse, there is no further attempt to evaluate the current praxis or opinions of different Khmu editors to retain final-focus repetition structures in written texts. This would involve much additional editorial approval from other Khmu speakers, which is beyond the scope of this thesis that focuses only on oral narratives.

Furthermore, in terms of dislocated grammatical structures, this thesis delimits itself to right-dislocation. Left-dislocated structures like tail-head linkage are not in focus here.

## 1.5 Benefits of the Study

First, this study should benefit other research into repetition structures as well as further research into the markers of discourse functions in related languages. Second, it should increase our knowledge of the role that right-dislocation can play in discourse. Finally, it is hoped that the results of this study would be applicable to the development of written discourse in Khmu, in that final-focus repetition<sup>13</sup>, which is used in Khmu oral narratives, might be maintained in written form. Final-focus repetition would then be a further marker to separate paragraphs, which introduce a new global theme.

## 1.6 Methodology

As a basis for my research, I use five oral narratives, which I elicited and recorded from Bunthay, a 20-years old Khmu Am speaker from Vientiane province in December 2006. The first story (“Poor becomes rich”) was elicited in the presence of his friend Bunleng, who made some dispersed comments throughout the story. In the second story (“Bus ride”), he tells an experience from his hometown. The third story (“French girl”) represents one of his dreams in earlier times. The fourth story (“Fleeing from tiger”) is one he has learned from elders, and the fifth story (“Water pond”) is an established story as well.

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<sup>12</sup> From my experience with a Khmu teacher I know that he teaches his students to reduce some typical features of spoken discourse (like emphatic adverbs) when they speak publicly. More educated Khmu people are probably influenced by the style of written texts (in Lao and Thai language), which usually includes less repetition than spoken discourse.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Final-focus repetition’ (FFR) is my own term, which refers to a right-dislocated repetition (RDR) structure (at clause final position). The discourse function of this RDR structure is a discontinuous summary, which refers to a summary statement at the end of a thematic macrostructure.



I transcribed all the stories with the help of my Khmu Am language assistant Vanh in Vientiane and entered the data into Toolbox. The data is then evaluated with the help of Microsoft Excel.

In order to support the claim that repetition is widespread in Khmu oral narratives (including right-dislocated repetition), I refer to another story (“Eating testicles”), which I elicited and recorded from Somlit, a 19-years old Dongdok University student, a Khmu Ou speaker from Phongsaly province in November 2006. Furthermore, the elicited Khmu narratives in Osborne (n.d.) also show many similar repetition structures (including right-dislocated repetition structures).

In order to see which of these frequent repetition structures in oral narratives are maintained in written discourse, I edited the first story (“Poor becomes rich”) together with Phoon, a 19-years old student, who is a Khmu Am speaker from Luang Prabang province. Playing the recorded story to him, he told me which sections are to be omitted in written discourse. Additionally, I asked a team of four Khmu speakers, who are all considered as more educated with under 30 years of age (my language assistant Vanh, Mr. Som, Mr. Thoongkham, and Ms. Khamhwan) to revise the ‘Poor’ text for good written style within the setting of a group discussion. However, in order to support their decisions, I would need to get additional editorial approval from some other Khmu speakers (see above).

From data analysis emerged twelve different grammatical categories of repetition structures, which are matched with ten different discourse categories.

The theoretical orientation of this research is based on grammatical structures from Payne (1997) and applies discourse categories from Dooley and Levinsohn (2001), Brown and Yule (1983) and van Dijk (1977/1997).