

# Tense-Aspect Markers in Modern Cambodian and their Interaction: Grammatical Category Interactions Revisited<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Preliminary remarks

On the face of it, the issue of grammatical category interactions seems to be irrelevant for the isolating languages of the Indochina Sprachbund, including Modern Cambodian as one of its typical representatives. A widely spread opinion, shared by the present authors, is that languages like Cambodian lack traditionally recognized grammatical categories since they lack, for example, adverbial or adnominal markers whose omission would render utterances grammatically infelicitous. Moreover, where these languages do express meanings correlative with grammatical meanings found in “European-standard” languages (e.g., via auxiliary words as in mainland languages of the Southeast Asia), these do not build paradigms. For instance, even the availability of specialized future or perfect markers in a given language does not imply that they are opposed, respectively, to the past, to the imperfect, or to unmarked forms with default past or imperfect reading. This said, we shall, however, endeavor to explore here some cases of interaction between the meanings of what most experts in Cambodian believe to be grammatical markers.

This paper builds on the material collected by the authors during their field research backed by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (in 2013) and the Russian Foundation for Humanities (in 2014-2016). Other sources include texts from Cambodian fiction, online periodicals, and, to a lesser degree, the Cambodian National Corpus (<http://sealang.net>). Examples provided by consultants (or generated by the authors and later elicited from consultants) are marked below with (Cons.). Other examples from Cambodian fiction and periodicals come from the authors' private card file.

## 2. The system of aspect-tense markers in Modern Cambodian

Although Cambodian tense and aspect markers have been targeted in many linguistic publications, none of their descriptions seem to be complete or exhaustive, with some markers ignored or treated as lexical, rather than grammatical devices. Proposed below is our own perspective on the system of these markers in Cambodian.

Cambodian totally lacks inflectional morphology. Its word-formation processes, fairly productive in its earlier history (in the Old and Middle Khmer periods), have practically stopped, although word-formation affixes, both prefixes and infixes, are still identifiable; for more detail, see [Long Seam 1975], [Elovkov 1977], and [Bisang 2015b: 683–686] among others. Grammatical (voice, tense, aspect, taxis, modal, etc.) meanings are rendered by auxiliary words occupying their relevant structural slots in verb phrases, clauses, or bipredicative constructions. By their major phonological characteristics such as syllable structure and syllable component features (initials, medials, terminals), these auxiliaries fully coincide with respective lexical words and can be likewise represented by single (“strong”) syllables, or by combinations of “strong” and “weak” syllables or of two “strong” syllables, etc.; see, e.g., [Krylov 2014: 111–156].

Considered below, are only markers of tense and aspect meanings. Their occurrence with verbal or serial-verb predicates is always optional and irregular. They are rare in oral speech, and their frequency in written texts, although perceptibly higher, is rather a reflection of authors' personal preferences.

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Thus a plethora of factors speak against the existence of corresponding grammatical categories (e.g., of aspect or tense) in Cambodian. These include: a) optional occurrence of markers, b) dependence of their use on the speaker's communicative intent, and c) lack of any semblance of paradigmatic relations between their meanings. Cambodian auxiliaries marking tense and aspect meanings are discussed in 2.1–2.8 below.

**2.1. *nuŋ*.** We treat *nuŋ* as the irrealis marker. In what follows, “irrealis” is understood as a specific meaning pertaining to the semantic domain of “reality of situations” [Urmanchieva 2004; Plungian 2011: 427]. When using *nuŋ*, the speaker/observer ascribes the situation to a “possible world”, in most cases represented by an unrealized (at the speech moment) situation whose alleged realization is relegated to the future time frame. That is why *nuŋ* typically has future reading (1). It is also commonly found in constructions with modal verbs which impart the sentence a context of potential possibility or irrealis (2).<sup>2</sup>

(1) *khnom nuŋ maok* (Cons.)

1SG IRR come

‘I’ll come.’

(2) *kəat mun a:c nuŋ bamphlə:c niəŋ tɛ:* (Cons.)

3SG NEG can IRR forget girl NEG

‘He won’t be able to forget her.’<sup>3</sup>

This marker is also common in dependent clauses of posteriority taxis constructions – again, in irrealis contexts where the dependent situation is treated as irreal from the main situation’s perspective and either can, or cannot be realized. In such cases, *nuŋ* may be more aptly described as a part of a compound posteriority taxis conjunction, which rather supports the “irreal interpretation” of its underlying meaning:

(3) *təe mun nuŋ ca:ŋ sat prauh nuŋdaum rəka: ka: miəŋ*

butbefore IRR tie beast sambar PREP tree wild.kapok NARR have

*phniəw maok si:1 cok2 bə:t sra: bandau*

visitor come eat<sub>1,2</sub> take.in alcohol together

‘But before they tied the sambar to a wild kapok, visitors came to eat and drink together.’

This marker is also fairly frequent in conditional and concessive constructions.

**2.2. *Ba:n*** marks the perfect meaning, understood here in terms of [Plungian 2011: 388–389]: *The situation, described by the verb with the corresponding marker, has taken place by/preceded the speech/observation moment.* Furthermore, the speaker views the consequences of a given situation as essential for understanding the state of affairs at the speech/observation moment [ibid.].

(4) *ka:l dæl kəat nɔw touc niəŋba:n tɔw riəŋ aksa:*

time REL 3SG CONT be.little girl PRF go learn letter

*nɔw sa:la: vət pə:thi'viəl*

be.situated.in school monastery Pouthiviel

‘When a little girl, she learnt reading and writing at the Pouthiviel Monastery school.’

For a proper interpretation of (4), which was gleaned from a novel, it is important to know that the heroine could read and write. This was rarely typical of provincial Cambodian girls in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so the information is crucial for understanding the plot: in particular, this means that the girl could exchange letters with her beloved. It was, apparently, for this reason that the author chose to mark the corresponding verb with *ba:n*.

The source of the following example is a modern rendition of a fairytale where a character attempts to replicate the sequence of steps accomplished earlier by the central figure. Since the reader is already familiar with the chain of events, it is presented in a truncated version to quickly bring the story to its dramatic end. The storyteller achieves this by putting *ba:n* before every verb/serial construction:

<sup>2</sup> This marker gets various interpretations in literature. Most researchers define it as a future marker [Elovkov 2004: 8; Gorgoniev 1966: 152–153, Haiman 2011: 263; Thon Thin 2011: 127–128; Bisang 2015b: 706] or, sometimes, as an unrealized action marker [Spatari 1990; Elovkov 2004: 10]. Notably, Enfield treats the Lao markers *ca'* and *si'*, fully matching the Cambodian *nuŋ* in both function and meaning, as irrealis markers that often admit future reading [Enfield 2007: 214–216]. As mentioned earlier, we treat the meaning of the Cambodian *nuŋ* along the same line.

<sup>3</sup> See, however, a different treatment of similar examples in [Elovkov 2004: 10], where *nuŋ* is classified (at least, on several occasions) as a formal connector in constructions with predicate arguments.

- (5) *thɨaj<sub>1</sub> bantɔap<sub>2</sub> maok<sub>3</sub> mut rɔbah kɔat nuh ba:n thvɜ: trap daoj*  
 on.next.day<sub>1,2,3</sub> friend POSS 3SG that PRF pretend imitate AUX  
*trw kap camka: <...>. bantɔap<sub>4</sub> maok<sub>5</sub> mut kɔat ka: ba:n cuəp nuŋ*  
 go ax kitchen.garden then<sub>4,5</sub> friend 3SG NARR PRF meet PREP  
*bari'va: trəj hauj puək<sub>6</sub> kɛ: ba:n nɔam cuəp nuŋ sdec kɛ: dae*  
 escort fish CONJ 3PL<sub>6,7</sub> PRF lead meet PREP king 3SG/PL also

‘The next day the old man’s friend, imitating him, went to ax down the forest for a kitchen garden <...>. Then he met the Fish King’s escort, who also led him to their king.’

*Ba:n* is also found in contexts that admit exclusively future (or irrealis) reading:

- (6) *ae prauh luh khɜ:ɲ ca:ca:k maok dal hauj kraok chɔ:*  
 and sambar when see red.wolf come reach IAM stand.up stand  
*lauŋ sapba:j ət<sub>1</sub> u'pama: sraek prap tha: “au samləŋ auj!*  
 rise rejoice exceptional<sub>1,2</sub> shout say that INTRJ friend PTCL  
*coul samləŋ a:nət kat a:n-teak nuh chap chap daumbɛj aoj khɲom*  
 IMP friend pity cut snare that quickquickin.order.to CAUS 1SG  
*ba:n ruəc khluən*” (<http://khmerbasak.blogspot.ru/>)  
 PRF free REFL

‘And Sambar, seeing that the Red Wolf has come, jumped up and, unspeakably rejoicing, shouted: “Hey, friend! Take pity on me! Cut down this snare quickly to get me free”.’

In (6), *ba:n* marks an irreal situation: the speaker describes a future outcome that is only possible on the condition that the sambar comes free if his vis-a-vis does take pity on him and cuts down the snare. What is noteworthy here is the absence of the irrealis marker (although *ba:n* is used), the author apparently finding it redundant in a situation that is “surreal” enough as it is. One might assume in such cases that that “part of the meaning” of *ba:n* which is involved in “flagging” the importance of the marked situation for further developments (see above) is foregrounded. Albeit infrequent, similar examples can be found in other Cambodian texts as well:

- (7) *puk mae ba:n cəŋcəm mən ciə<sub>1</sub> craun<sub>2</sub>*  
 father mother PRF feed chicken many<sub>1,2</sub>

‘My parents have a lot of chickens to feed.’

One cannot exclude, of course, that in the last two examples *ba:n* carries the modal meaning ‘can’, since the prepositive marker *ba:n* has a postpositive homonym (?), the modal verb *ba:n* ‘have’. The latter can also be treated as a grammatical habilitive marker.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, both the prepositive and the postpositive *ba:n* emerged through grammaticalization of the verb *ba:n* ‘have’ (the modern *ba:n* results from the monosyllabization of the Old Khmer *amban*, a morphological causative of the verb *man* ‘have’). For a review of the various uses of *ba:n* in Cambodian, see [Bisang 2105a], and a detailed study of its meanings and functions, including in the areal setting, is provided in [Enfield 2003] and [Haiman 2011]).

**2.3. *Hauj*** is the iamitive marker. The iamitive combines two meanings: one is the perfect, and the other is that rendered in many languages by lexical instruments like the Russian *uzhe* or the English *already* [Olsson 2013]. Unlike both markers considered in 2.1 and 2.2 above, *hauj* is found after the verb and can be separated from it by noun phrases (adjuncts with attributes). In addition, *hauj* can serve to delimit the right-hand boundary of the utterance. The affinity between the iamitive and the perfect can explain why *hauj* and *ba:n* ‘perfect’ frequently occur together in texts (for more detail, see 3. below).

- (8) *ɑŋ chup khəŋ nuŋ kɔat hauj*  
 1SG stop be.angry PREP 3SG IAM

<sup>4</sup> One can find widely varying interpretations of *ba:n* in literature. D. Elovkov believes that *ba:n* “combines the meanings of: transition between two states; completion of action; result of action; possibility of action; and logical emphasis on the fact of an action or state”, with the “basic”, invariant meaning of *ba:n* being “logical emphasis on the fact of action” [Elovkov 2004: 37-38]. We subscribe to this definition of *ba:n* as the most integrated one. W. Bisang also notes the varying contextual readings of *ba:n* [Bisang 2015a]. Other researchers treat *ba:n* as the marker of: the perfective aspect [Gorgoniev 1966: 146-148]; the past tense [Thon Thin 2011: 123-125]; the inchoative [Haiman 2011: 345-347]; or the perfect [Spatari 1990].

‘I have already stopped being angry with him.’

(9) *ʔou!* *prapən khnom slap hauj*  
INTRJ wife 1SG die IAM

‘Ah! My wife has died.’

Similarly to *ba:n*, *hauj* is commonly used where the situation already took place before the speech/observation moment. The difference, however, is that *hauj*, unlike *ba:n*, does not imply any connection with the posterior developments. Also, *hauj* seems to convey a stronger emphasis on the completed status of the situation.<sup>5</sup>

Optional variants of *hauj* are mostly characteristic of the written speech: *ruəc hauj*, *ruəc srec hauj*, *srap hauj*.<sup>6</sup>

(10) *a:le:w phdam lə:k nuh ruəc<sub>1</sub> hauj<sub>2</sub> ka: dau coul tɾw knoŋ*  
PN advise master that IAM<sub>1,2</sub> NARR walk enter go in  
*phteah cən haw cən nuh ce:ŋ maok*  
house Chinaman call Chinaman that go.out come

‘Having given the Master that advice, Aleu entered the Chinaman’s house to call him (= to request to come out).’

(11) *thvɾ: ja:ŋ na:ʔ – ta:su: douc khnom taey niʔjiəj prap*  
do method Q fight be.like 1SG ITER speak say  
*baŋ mun mun srap<sub>1</sub> hauj<sub>2</sub>*  
elder.sibling earlier earlier IAM<sub>1,2</sub>

‘What to do? To fight! As I have already told you many times.’

**2.4. *Thlɔap*** is the experientive marker denoting that the situation took place in the past for an indefinite number of times; e.g., see [Vostrikova 2010]. Historically, *thlɔap* goes back to the verb of the same form meaning ‘get used to’, ‘have habit’, which is practically extinct in Modern Cambodian (in contrast to its derivative noun *tɔmlɔap* ‘habit’).<sup>7</sup>

(12) *kraeŋ mlih aeŋ thlɔap jum daoŋ<sub>1</sub> sa:₂ kɔat tɛ:₃ tauu₄*  
after.all PN 2SG EXP cry because.of<sub>1,2</sub> 3SG really<sub>3,4</sub>

‘After all, Mlih, you, too, had to cry because of him.’

As its extended version, the marker *thlɔap* includes the formant *tae*:

(13) *muʔni:cap<sub>1</sub> phdaum<sub>2</sub> samnuə dæl neak thlɔap<sub>3</sub> tae<sub>4</sub> suə pɛ:l cuəp*  
PN begin<sub>1,2</sub> question REL 3SG EXP<sub>3,4</sub> ask time meet  
*om<sub>5</sub> proh<sub>6</sub>*  
father’s/mother’s.elder.brother<sub>5,6</sub>

‘Muni began with the question he would always ask when meeting his uncle.’

Its experiential meaning does not prevent *thlɔap* from occurring with adverbials like ‘once’ (14), whereby its prototypical meaning is neutralized and it is actually transformed into a past marker:

(14) *oun thlɔap khoh mda:ŋ maok hauj mɛ:n<sub>1</sub> tɛ:₂*  
younger.sibling EXP make.mistake once come IAM actually<sub>Q1,2</sub>  
*ba:ŋ*  
elder.sibling

‘I have indeed made a mistake once, did not I?’

<sup>5</sup> Grammars treat *hauj* as: a completion marker or a situation-change marker [Elovkov 2004; Bisang 2015]; “the marker of a turning point or qualitative leap in the progression of an action” [Gorgoniev 1966: 155-157]; or a lexical component [Haiman 2011]. Enfield interprets its equivalent in Laotian (*lɛ:w*) as the perfect marker [Enfield 2007: 200, 206].

<sup>6</sup> D. Elovkov proposes a different solution and identifies four completion markers in Cambodian (*hauj*, *ruəc*, *srec*, *srap*) that can combine with each other [Elovkov 2004: 24-29].

<sup>7</sup> This marker is defined in literature as: the marker of usual, repeated past action [Elovkov 2004: 19]; the marker of the past in combination with “indefinite reiteration of action” [Gorgoniev 1966: 151-152]; the marker of the habitual past [Bisang 2015b: 366]; the habitual marker [Thon Thin 2011: 175]; or the marker of indefinite quantity of action [Spatari 1990]. Enfield interprets its equivalent in Laotian *khɾ:j* (also traceable to a verb with the meaning ‘get used to’) as the experiential perfect marker [Enfield 2007: 200, 243].

**2.5. *kampuy*** functions as a progressive marker signaling that the situation is in progress at the speech/observation moment:<sup>8</sup>

- (15) *niəŋkampuy khəŋ khɲom*  
 girl PROGR be.angry 1SG  
 ‘She is angry with me.’

Although *kampuy* is often classified as “the present marker” both in traditional Cambodian grammars (e.g., [Thon Thin 2011: 121]), and in grammars by foreign authors (see [Gorgoniev 1966: 149-151]), examples are plentifully available where its present reading is evidently impossible. A present interpretation of (16), for example, is ruled out absolutely: this example comes from a newspaper chronicle covering an accident that took place a few days prior to the publication. Here *kampuy* expressly signals that the situation was unfolding at the observation moment.

- (16) *pɛ:l nuh kəat kampuy chə: doh liəŋ nɔw pralah snaeŋ*  
 Time that 3SG PROGR stand clean wash be.placed.in space horn  
*krabɛj*  
 buffalo

‘He was standing near the buffalo then (lit. ‘between the buffalo’s horns’), washing it.’

As its extended version, the marker *kampuy* includes the formant *təe*:

- (17) *pu: mak kampuy, təe<sub>2</sub> thvɔ: həp*  
 unclePN PROGR<sub>1,2</sub> make box  
 ‘Uncle Mok is making a box.’

**2.6.** The continuative meaning can be explicated as follows: *although the situation is in progress at the speech/observation moment, it is essential for the speaker that it was also taking place prior to the speech/observation moment.* This meaning can be expressed in Cambodian in a number of ways:

- 1) By means of the preverbal marker *nɔw* (18), traced back to the verb ‘be located in’ which is still current and fairly frequent in Modern Cambodian. As its extended version, the marker *nɔw* includes the formant *təe* (19).
- 2) By means of the distant postverbal continuative marker *nɔw lauj* used in negative constructions (20).
- 3) By simultaneous use of both the preverbal and the postverbal continuative markers as components of a bracket construction: *nɔw(təe) ... nɔw lauj* (21), (22).<sup>9</sup>

- (18) *neak nɔw sraləŋ niəŋnah*  
 3SG CONTlove girl very

‘He continued to love her.’

- (19) *viəjɔ: nɔw<sub>1</sub>təe<sub>2</sub> bak bok thiəŋ douŋ slək trabaek*  
 wind CONT<sub>1,2</sub> blow hit palm.branch coco leave guava

‘The wind was still swaying coco branches and guava leaves.’

- (20) *thmau nih lɔ:k əwpukpum<sub>1</sub> tɔan<sub>2</sub> samra:n lək nɔw<sub>3</sub> lauj<sub>4</sub> tɛ:*  
 time this master father not.yet<sub>1,2</sub> rest sleep CONT<sub>3,4</sub> NEG

‘Father was not asleep yet at the time.’

- (21) *pɔw nɔw chə: nɔw<sub>1</sub> lauj<sub>2</sub>*  
 PN CONTstand CONT<sub>1,2</sub>

‘Peu was still standing.’

- (22) *sambot nɔw<sub>1</sub>təe<sub>2</sub> miəŋ klin kra’oup cəap nɔw<sub>3</sub> lauj<sub>4</sub>*  
 letter CONT<sub>1,2</sub> have smell scent strong CONT<sub>3,4</sub>

‘The letter still had a strong smell of scents.’

<sup>8</sup> A similar treatment of this marker is also found in [Haiman 2011: 267].

<sup>9</sup> D. Elovkov treats *nɔw* (*təe*) as a lexical unit (the verb ‘be, be located’), and *nɔw lauj*, as a continuative marker [Elovkov 2004: 23] that is also found with the *nɔw* (*təe*) component. Yu. Gorgoniev defines *nɔw(təe)* as a “continuative aspect” marker [Gorgoniev 1966: 145]. In [Bisang 2015b: 706], it is described as an uncompleted action marker (‘still, emphasis of incompleteness (live, be at)’). N. Enfield, speaking of the identical Laotian marker *ŋaŋ*, only provides its lexical translation (‘still’), but treats it expressly as an aspectual uncompleted-action marker while describing its postverbal cognate *yu:* as a continuative marker [Enfield 2007: 174].

**2.7. *Lauj*** is an incontinuous marker used at the end of the sentence where it can only be followed by the final component of a “bracket” negator. Specifically, it occurs exclusively in negative constructions as opposed to the continuative marker *nɔw lauɔj* (above) which can be found in non-negative sentences as well; see (21) и (22). *Lauj* marks “continuous absence” of the corresponding situation and signals that ‘*situation p did/does/will not take place for a period of time*’ (cf. in this connection the behavior of *lauj* as a part of the continuative marker in (23) – (25)). Thus in (23), *lauj* together with the negator ‘never’ signals that the situation did not take place prior to/at the speech moment. In (24) the speaker emphasizes that the situation is not taking/will not take place either at the speech moment, or in the future. In (25) the speaker treats the situation as totally impossible – in the past, present, or future. In the absence of a more pertinent designation for this marker, we shall gloss it after G. Himan as AT.ALL.<sup>10</sup> *Lauj* was first attested in this auxiliary function as early as in Old Khmer texts (9<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.); see (26), an example gleaned from a 13<sup>th</sup> Century inscription at the temple complex of Banteay Srei).

(23) *khnom mun<sub>1</sub> dael<sub>2</sub> khɔ:ɲviə lauɔj* (Gorgoniev 1984: 799)

1SG never<sub>1,2</sub> see 3SG AT.ALL

‘I have never seen him.’

(24) *neak pra:kat knoŋ cət nah tha: neak mun a:c phdal sophea<sup>3</sup>məŋɔl*  
3SG be.sure in soul very that 3SG NEG can bring happiness

*aɔj niəŋ ba:n lauɔj*

BENEF girl can AT.ALL

‘At heart, he was absolutely sure that he would not be able to make her happy.’

(25) *sralaŋ mənuh mneak mun<sub>1</sub> dael<sub>2</sub> kuət tha: caŋ miən neak*  
love person one.CLF never<sub>1,2</sub> think that want have person

*thməj lauɔj*

new AT.ALL

‘When one loves someone, one does not want anyone else.’

(26) *cāmpa srom saŋtac ‘ayat ‘anak mvaɣ ta ‘āc chpaŋ ley* (K.227:22)

Chams surround king NEG person one ATTR can fight AT.ALL

‘The Chams surrounded the king, and no one could fight (for him).’

2.8. A peculiar feature of the tense-aspect system in Cambodian is a large number of preverbal auxiliaries with widely varying meanings, all of which, despite semantic differences, commonly show involvement with the aspectual-temporal domain. Sometimes their meanings overlap with those of verbal plurality (see [Marchenko 2017]) or with modality. They normally include the abovementioned formant *tae* (or, less frequently, *ciə*): *ɬp tae* ‘just a moment before’, *krɔan tae* ‘just’, *str: tae* (= *vih tae*) ‘barely’, *taeŋ tae* ‘often’, *ceh tae* (= *kuət tae*) ‘constantly’, *craun tae* ‘usually’, *kan tae* (= *rut tae*) ‘more and more’, *chap tae* (= *praŋap tae*) ‘quickly’, *muk tae* (= *muk ciə*) ‘by all means’, etc. As is evident from this list, paired synonymy features prominently in this cluster.<sup>11</sup> Yu. Gorgoniev, who was apparently the first to identify this group, described them (rather infelicitously) as ‘semi-autosemantic adverbs’ [Gorgoniev 1966: 299-214].

In examples below, these auxiliaries, although treated as grammatical markers, are provided with lexical translation.

(27) *kɔat chap tae cuə* (Cons.)

3SG QUICKLY believe

‘He believed [this] immediately (*too hastily, from the speaker’s standpoint*).’

(28) *kan tae skɔal kan tae sa:sau* (Cons., a cigarette brand commercial)

MORE.AND.MORE know MORE.AND.MORE praise

‘The more [you] know [it], the more [you] praise [it].’

(29) *kɔat taeŋ ni<sup>3</sup>jiəj douc nih daumbej luəŋ<sub>1</sub> lɔ:m<sub>2</sub> niəŋ*

3SG OFTEN speak be.like this in.order.to calm.down<sub>1,2</sub> girl

<sup>10</sup> G. Himan gives a lexical translation of this marker — ‘at all’, treating it as a part of a bracket negator. N. Enfield, in his turn, proposes the following interpretation for the Laotian marker *leej2*, which is syntactically, semantically, and, apparently, etymologically equivalent to the Cambodian *lauj*: “In its postverbal aspectual-modal usage, *leej2* conveys the idea that a state of affairs is the case without anything else happening — e.g., without hesitation or other delaying action” [Enfield 2007: 188].

<sup>11</sup> This list is probably not exhaustive.

‘He often spoke like this to calm her down.’

- (30) *niəri:khmae craun ta eiən* (Cons.)  
girl Khmer MOSTLY be.shy

‘Khmer girls are commonly shy.’

- (31) *khnom cih la:n mun ba:n tɛ: pruh cih la:n ka:l na: hauj*  
1SG ride car NEG can NEG because ride car time which IAM  
*khnom ceh tae vil muk*  
I COMMONLY spin face

‘I cannot ride in a car, because every time I rode in a car I always felt dizzy.’

- (32) *kɔat srəp tae lu: mɔat kɛ: sraek suə*  
3SG SUDDENLY hear mouth 3SG/PL scream ask

‘Suddenly, he heard someone scream.’

- (33) *mae ha:m kom aɔj maok lɛ:ŋ tuk knoŋ prɛj aŋ mun sdap*  
mother forbid PROHCAUS approach playwater in forest 1SG NEG listen  
*samdej kɔat vih tae ɔŋ tuk slap*  
speech 3SG NEARLY drown water die

‘Mother forbade me to go to the forest to bathe, I did not listen to her and nearly drowned.’

- (34) *pɛ:l ana:kɔt trɔp muk tae rɔt rɔ:k mnuh douc<sub>1</sub> ciə<sub>2</sub>*  
time future property CERTAINLY run seek person be.like<sub>1,2</sub>  
*kɔat nih mun<sub>3</sub> kha:n<sub>4</sub>*  
3SG this by.all.means<sub>3,4</sub>

‘In the future, wealth will certainly find a person like him.’

- (35) *khnom tɔ:p tae prap ka:1 pɔut<sub>2</sub> dal əwpuk khnom* (<http://sogi.sithi.org>)  
1SG JUST.NOW tell truth<sub>1,2</sub> PREP father 1SG

‘I have just told Father the truth.’

The bounds of this group of markers are rather fuzzy as it is not clear, e.g., if they should include a number of predicates which regularly occur before other verbs and express meanings gravitating toward grammatical meanings, although in other environments they function as regular predicates. For instance, *kra:* ‘be poor’, when used in this position, denotes ‘rare occurrence of *p*’; *luəc* ‘steal’ has the meaning ‘do *p* secretly, on the sly’; and *thvɔ:* *ciə*, ‘pretend, feign *p*’.

These markers’ combinations with other tense and aspect markers fall outside the scope of the present paper but, in principle, they are possible in some cases:

- (36) *ha:ŋ jɔ:ŋ khnom tɔ:p tae ba:n nɔam coul sac dael miən kunaphiəp*  
shop 1SG/PL 1SG JUST.NOW PRF lead enter meat REL have quality  
*khpuh bamphot pi: pratɛ:h cɔpon*  
high most PREP country Japan

‘Our shop has just received meat of highest quality from Japan.’

- (37) *ruəŋ nihbaumun dah<sub>1</sub> sra:j<sub>2</sub> rɔhɔah tɛ: muk tae nuŋ nɔam aɔj jɔ:ŋ*  
problem this if NEG solve<sub>1,2</sub> quickly NEG CERTAINLY IRR lead CAUS 1PL  
*khouc<sub>3</sub> kha:t<sub>4</sub> kamləŋ hauj* (khmerstorylovers1.yolasite.com)  
lose<sub>3,4</sub> force IAM

‘As to this problem, if we don’t solve it quickly, we shall certainly lose [our] potential.’

### 3. Co-occurrence of tense and aspect markers

This section considers cases where adverbial tense and aspect markers co-occur in the same sentence. Subsection 3.1 deals with co-occurrence of preverbal tense and aspect markers, and 3.2, with that of preverbal and postverbal markers. Both types are captured in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 where “forbidden” and “allowed” combinations are demonstrated, followed by examples and brief comments. As mentioned above, co-occurrence of “semi-autosemantic adverbials” falls outside our present scope.

#### 3.1. Co-occurrence of prepositive tense and aspect markers

Allowed combinations of prepositive tense and aspect markers are shown in Fig. 1.

Figure 1. Co-occurrence of adverbial tense and aspect markers

	IRR	PRF	EXP	PROGR	CONT
IRR		+	-	+	+
PRF	-		+	+	-
EXP	-	+		-	-
PROGR	-	-	-		+
CONT	-	+	-	+	

IRR – PRF

As demonstrated in (6) above, irreal contexts do not exclude the use of the perfect marker. It is also found in grammatically felicitous sentences with irreal perspective explicitly marked by a special marker:

- (38) *pələ'ka:rə'nəj khmae 2 neak dael rəŋ<sub>1</sub> krəh<sub>2</sub> daoj mə:khjal<sub>4</sub> nɔam jə:k*  
 female.worker Khmer CLF REL suffer<sub>1,2</sub> AUX chief<sub>3,4</sub> lead take  
*trw bamrau ka: ta:m phteah nɔw prate:h ma:le:si: nuŋ ba:n vuul*  
 go serve action PREP house in country Malaysia IRR PRF return  
*tralap maok dal kampuciə vuŋ nɔw thəj ti: 21 khæ*  
 return approach reach Cambodia back PREP day AUX month  
*mi'thu'na: chnam 2015 pruuk s'aek* (www.fpmonline.net/article/103521)  
 June year morning tomorrow

‘Two Khmer female workers that suffered from their employer’s actions, who had brought them to Malaysia to work as domestic servants, will return to Cambodia tomorrow morning, on June 21, 2015.’ It was apparently important for the author of the quoted sentence to “flag” the situation as one that refers to the future, has not been realized by the speech moment but is extremely significant for the public opinion (these women’s misadventures had broad coverage in the local media). It is these multiple goals that call for the combined use of the markers. Another interpretation of this example (not incompatible with the first one) is possible, if one assumes that the combination of *ba:n* with the irrealis marker triggers its reanalysis and “foregrounds” its habitual meaning which is normally available only where *ba:n* follows the verb. In this case, the ending of this sentence may actually read ‘...will be able to return to Cambodia on June 21, 2015.’ The same interpretation of such examples is also suggested in [Bisang 2015a]. The following example from a modern novel by Chut Khai can be interpreted similarly:

- (39) *lə:k neak a:n nuŋba:n jəəl ruəŋ nih nɔw pə:l kraoj*  
 sir madam read IRR PRF understand story this in time afterwards  
*bantəc tiət*  
 a.little yet

‘You, dear readers, will be able to understand this after a little while.’

IRR – PROGR

Co-occurrence of the irrealis (*nuŋ*) and the progressive (*kampuŋ*) markers is possible, e.g., where the speaker anticipates progression of the situation in the future; see (40):

- (40) *bantəp<sub>1</sub> pi: latthea'p'al prala:ŋ bak<sub>3</sub> dup<sub>4</sub> trw<sub>5</sub> ba:n<sub>6</sub>*  
 after<sub>1,2</sub> result exam higher.education.diploma<sub>3,4</sub> PASS<sub>5,6</sub>  
*praka:h ruəc<sub>7</sub> rəal<sub>8</sub> hauj<sub>9</sub> nuh səhsa:nu'səh nuŋ kampuŋ svaen jəl pi:*  
 announce IAM<sub>7-9</sub> that students IRR PROGR search understand PREP  
*damnau phlɔw chpuh trw 'a'na:kuət ceak ciə<sub>10</sub> mun<sub>11</sub> kha:n<sub>12</sub>* (http://sopheapfocus.com)  
 way road head.for go future clear surely<sub>10-12</sub>

‘After the exam results are announced and diplomas received, the students will surely think about (their) future.’

IRR – CONT

Co-occurrence of the irrealis (*nuŋ*) and the continuative (*nɔw(tae)*) markers is admissible where the speaker believes that the situation, which is in progress at the speech moment, will continue into the future.

- (41) *The China Post ba:n aoj dəŋ tha: iPhone 6 rəbah Apple nuŋ nɔw<sub>1</sub> tae<sub>2</sub>*

PRF CAUS know that POSS IRR CONT<sub>1,2</sub>  
*prau<sub>3</sub> prah<sub>4</sub> ka:me:ra: 8 megapixel dadael* (<http://m.camnews.com.kh>)  
 use<sub>3,4</sub> camera the.same

‘The China Post informed that Apple’s iPhone 6 will use the same 8-megapixel camera.’

(42) *kea<sup>2</sup>na<sup>2</sup>pak kommujni<sup>h</sup> kujba: nu<sup>h</sup> n<sup>h</sup>w<sub>1</sub> tae<sub>2</sub> ci<sup>ə</sup> kea<sup>2</sup>na<sup>2</sup>pak tae mu<sup>ə</sup>j*  
 party communist Cuba IRR CONT<sub>1,2</sub> be party only one  
*r<sup>ə</sup>bah prate<sup>h</sup>:h* ([www.akp.gov.kh](http://www.akp.gov.kh))  
 POSS country

‘The Cuban Communist Party will continue to be the only party in the country.’

EXP – PRF

Co-occurrence of the experientive (*thlɔap*) and the perfect (*ba:n*) markers is fairly frequent (if this definition is applicable to Cambodian tense and aspect markers at all). Both *thlɔap ba:n* and *ba:n thlɔap* sequences are allowed, with the first found much more often. The “motivation” behind the simultaneous use of the two markers is apparently clear: it serves to emphasize, on the one hand, the past reference and the present relevance of the situation, and on the other, its potential reiteration.

(43) *traj<sub>1</sub> ri<sup>ə</sup>c<sub>2</sub> ci<sup>ə</sup> praph<sup>ə</sup>:t traj mja:ŋ dael kampun<sup>h</sup>*  
 giant.catfish<sub>1,2</sub> be variety fish one.kind REL PROGR  
*t<sup>ə</sup>tu<sup>ə</sup>l<sub>3</sub> r<sup>ə</sup>:ŋ<sub>4</sub> ka: s<sub>5</sub> k<sup>ə</sup>mri<sup>ə</sup>m<sub>6</sub> kamhae<sup>ŋ</sup><sub>7</sub> n<sup>h</sup>w kampuci<sup>ə</sup> j<sup>ə</sup>:ŋ (...)*  
 be.exposed.to.threats<sub>3-7</sub> in Cambodia IPL  
*tau p<sup>ə</sup>oun thlɔap ba:n kh<sup>ə</sup>:ŋ vi<sup>ə</sup> t<sup>ə</sup>:?*  
 Q younger.sibling EXP PRF see 3SG Q

‘Giant catfish is a variety of fish that is now under the threat of extinction in Cambodia. Have you seen, my young friend, a (fish) like that?’

PRF – HAB

(44) *tau neak ba:n thlɔap t<sup>ə</sup>w kan Websit<sup>ə</sup> r<sup>ə</sup>bah Honda hauj ru:n<sup>h</sup>w*  
 Q 2 PRF EXP go PREP POSS IAM Q

‘Have you already visited Honda’s website (or not)?’ (Facebook)

PROGR – CONT

The motivation behind the co-occurrence of the progressive (*kampun<sup>h</sup>*) and the continuative (*n<sup>h</sup>w*) seems to be clear: they equally involve situations unfolding at the speech moment, although the continuative meaning is more complex as it purports that the situation was also taking place prior to the speech/observation moment. Just as the previous pair, the continuative and the progressive markers are mutually unordered and either can precede or follow the other.

(45) *soumbaj<sub>1</sub> tae<sub>2</sub> n<sup>h</sup>w<sub>3</sub> kno<sup>h</sup><sub>4</sub> prate<sup>h</sup>:h ri:k<sub>5</sub> camraun<sub>6</sub> douc<sub>7</sub> ci<sup>ə</sup><sub>8</sub> aŋkle<sup>h</sup>:h ru: sahar<sup>ə</sup>:t<sub>9</sub>*  
 even<sub>1,2</sub> in<sub>3,4</sub> country developed<sub>5,6</sub> as<sub>7,8</sub> England or US<sub>9,10</sub>  
*a:me<sup>h</sup>:rik<sub>10</sub> bo<sup>2</sup>rah s<sup>ə</sup>traj dael srala<sup>ŋ</sup> phe<sup>h</sup>:t douc<sub>11</sub> kni<sup>ə</sup><sub>12</sub> bo<sup>2</sup>rah s<sup>ə</sup>traj dael*  
 man woman REL love sex the.same<sub>11,12</sub> man woman REL  
*srala<sup>ŋ</sup> tea<sup>ŋ</sup><sub>13</sub> pi:<sub>14</sub> phe<sup>h</sup>:t nu<sup>h</sup>ŋmnu<sup>h</sup> kae phe<sup>h</sup>:t kampun<sup>h</sup> n<sup>h</sup>w ta:su:*  
 love both<sub>13,14</sub> sex and person correct sex PROGR CONTstruggle  
*n<sup>h</sup>w<sub>15</sub> lau<sup>h</sup><sub>16</sub> kno<sup>h</sup> ka: ti<sup>ə</sup>m<sub>17</sub> ti<sup>ə</sup><sub>18</sub> si<sup>2</sup>t<sup>h</sup>i<sup>?</sup> sma<sup>u</sup> kni<sup>ə</sup>* (<http://mstylekhmer.com>)  
 CONT<sub>15,16</sub> PREP NOM demand<sub>17,18</sub> right equal REC

‘Even in developed countries like England or US, homosexuals, bisexuals, and transsexuals still continue (their) struggle, demanding equal rights.’

CONT – PROGR

(46) *dao<sup>h</sup><sub>1</sub> laek<sub>2</sub> mneak ti<sup>ə</sup>t mi<sup>ə</sup>n chmu<sup>h</sup> mawthu:t phe<sup>h</sup>:t proh a:yu<sup>?</sup> 23*  
 separately<sub>1,2</sub> one.person another have name PN gender man age  
*chnam ... n<sup>h</sup>w kampun<sup>h</sup> samra:k pji<sup>ə</sup>ba:l n<sup>h</sup>w m<sup>ə</sup>nti: p<sup>ə</sup>:t<sub>4</sub> 21*  
 year CONT DUR rest cure be.at hospital<sub>3,4</sub>  
*dadael ...* (<http://cambn.com>) the.same

‘Another person, a 23 year old man by the name of Mau Thut, is still under treatment at the same Hospital # 21.’  
CONT – PRF

Co-occurrence of the continuative (*nɔw*) and the perfect (*ba:n*) is rare, but possible:

(47) *tuh<sub>1</sub> bəj<sub>2</sub> ciə<sub>3</sub> ja:η<sub>4</sub> na:5 ka:6 daoj<sub>7</sub> khnom ka: nɔw<sub>8</sub> tae<sub>9</sub> ba:n tha:t<sub>10</sub> ru:p<sub>11</sub>*  
for.better.or.for.worse<sub>1-7</sub> ISG NARR CONT<sub>8,9</sub> PRF take.pictures<sub>10,11</sub>  
*jɔ:k ba:n ru:p phiəp ba:n ja:η lʔɔ: (http://camnews.com.kh)*  
take obtain image can kind good

‘For better or for worth, I still could take good pictures.’

PRF – PROGR

By using the perfect (*ba:n*) and the progressive (*kampuj*) simultaneously, the speaker apparently indicates that the event: a) is important at the speech moment; b) has already taken place; c) is still in progress:

(48) *krom kajla:ka: kampuciə ba:n kampuj ca:k ce:n pi: santhəkiə*  
team athlete Cambodia PRF PROGR leave go.out PREP hotel  
*chpuh tɔw ti:1 liən<sub>2</sub> dau mbəj prakuət<sub>3</sub> ciə<sub>4</sub> muəj<sub>5</sub> ma:ka:w*  
head.for go field<sub>1,2</sub> in.order.to play.against<sub>3,4,5</sub> Makao  
*jup nih (http://www.freshnewsasia.com)*  
evening this

‘The Cambodian team left the hotel and was heading for the field to confront the Makao (team).’

It is also interesting to note that the perfect and the progressive markers can be linked by a coordinating conjunction. Such combinations are rather frequent in modern writings:

(49) *sat prəj touc thom ba:n nuɔj kəmpuj samlap ja:η rəŋiəl nɔw*  
animalforest smalllarge PRF and PROGR kill kind cruel in  
*khaet məndəlki:ri: (skcnews.com)*  
province Mondolkiri

‘Large and small wild animals were, and continue to be, cruelly killed in Mondolkiri Province.’

### 3.2. Co-occurrence of prepositive and postpositive tense and aspect markers

As mentioned in 1 above, Cambodian has three postpositive markers: the iamitive *hauj*, the continuative *nɔw* *lauj*, and the negative *lauj*. Occurrences of the first two with prepositive tense-aspect markers are considered in this subsection.

3.2.1. The postpositive iamitive marker *hauj* shows the broadest range of co-occurrence with all preverbal tense and aspect auxiliaries (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Co-occurrence of prepositive and postpositive tense and aspect markers

	CONT	IAM
IRR	—	+
PRF	+	+
HAB	—	+
PROGR	+	+
CONT	+	+

HAB — IAM

(50) *thləp khɔ:n ju: hauj ka:l khnom nɔw thvɔ:1 ka:2 nɔw ...*  
EXP see long.ago IAM when ISG be.located.in work<sub>1,2</sub> be.located.in  
*khaet rətata'na'ki'ri:*  
province Ratanakiri

‘I saw such (a tree) already, when I was working in Ratanakiri.’

IRR — IAM

(51) *pɛ:l dael ba:η a:n sambot nih khnom nuɔj coul<sub>1</sub> mətənaphiəp<sub>2</sub>*  
timeREL elder.sibling read letter this ISG IRR die<sub>1,2</sub>  
*bat<sub>3</sub> ru:p<sub>4</sub> tɔw hauj*  
die<sub>3,4</sub> go IAM

‘As you are reading this letter, I will be already dead.’

PRF — IAM

- (52) *baucaŋ tralap tɾw vuŋ niəŋtɾɾw rɔt*  
 if want return go back girl be.obliged run  
*kɛ:c ce:ŋ pi: tɔap siəm hauj dau:ta:m sat*  
 hide go.out PREP army Siam CONJ go follow animal  
*dael prateah khɾ:ŋ nuh nuŋba:n tɾw cuəp cum sac<sub>1</sub>ŋiət<sub>2</sub>*  
 REL meet see that IRR PRF go meet gather relatives<sub>1,2</sub>  
*vuŋ hauj*  
 again IAM

‘If you want to return, you must secretly run away from the Thai soldiers and follow the animals you meet. Then you will see your relatives again.’

PROGR — IAM

- (53) *viə pra:kat<sub>1</sub> ciə<sub>2</sub> kampuj thae rɔbuəh juttha<sup>?</sup>niə hauj*  
 3SG surely<sub>1,2</sub> PROGR look.after wound PN IAM

‘(Now) she is surely looking after Yuthannia’s wounds.’

CONT — IAM

- (54) *na:<sub>1</sub> na:<sub>2</sub> auj kɛ: nuŋ cou<sub>3</sub> dandui<sub>4</sub> aey nuh bau kɛ: dəŋ tha: aey*  
 who<sub>1,2</sub> EMPH 3SG/PL IRR propose<sub>3,4</sub> 2SG that COND 3SG/PL know that 2SG  
*nɾw cɔap<sub>5</sub> piək<sub>6</sub> samdəj<sub>7</sub> nuŋ cək bun tha:n tɾw hauj*  
 CONT give.word<sub>5,6,7</sub> PREP uncle PN go IAM

‘Who will come to propose, indeed, when everyone knows that you have already given your word to Uncle Bun Thon?’

Although the free occurrence of the progressive and the continuative markers with the iamitive appears somewhat surprising, the explanation may be that in both (53) and (54) *hauj* serves to emphasize that the situation progressing/continuing at the speech moment began in the past, and its beginning is treated as an “accomplished fact.”

**3.2.2.** Apart from combining with the prepositive continuative marker as in (21) and (22), the postpositive continuative marker can also occur with the progressive and the perfect markers:

PROGR — CONT

- (55) *sta:nəphiəp cəmŋu: rɔbah lɔ:k Lee Kuan Yewkampuj sthət knoŋ*  
 State disease POSS mister PN PROGR remain in  
*sta:nəphiəp thɿɔn<sub>1</sub> thɿɔ:<sub>2</sub> nɾw<sub>3</sub> lauuj<sub>4</sub> (<http://hangmeasdaily.com/index.php>)*  
 state grave<sub>1,2</sub> CONT<sub>3,4</sub>

‘Mister Lee Kuan Yew’s condition remains grave.’

PRF — CONT

- (56) *pɛ:l nuh khnom pum<sub>1</sub> tɔan<sub>2</sub> ba:n cuəp mut<sub>3</sub> pheak<sub>4</sub> khmae jɾ:ŋ*  
 time that 1SG not.yet<sub>1,2</sub> PRF meet friend<sub>3,4</sub> Khmer 1PL  
*nɾw<sub>5</sub> lauuj<sub>6</sub>*  
 CONT<sub>5,6</sub>

‘At that time I had not yet met anyone of our Khmer friends.’

#### 4. Conclusion

As the above shows, Cambodian tense-aspect markers are freely compatible with each other. All prepositive markers show roughly the same mutual “co-occurrence potential” with a few exceptions. For example, the experientive marker *thlɔap* can only combine with the perfect marker *ba:n*. The iamitive *hauj* stands out among the postpositive markers in that it can co-occur with absolutely every prepositive marker. This behavior of Cambodian tense-aspect markers provides yet more proof that they form neither oppositions, nor paradigms, nor make up a full-fledged grammatical category.

An earlier attempt by one of the present authors to describe Cambodian adverbial markers in terms of the position classes grammar (see [Dmitrenko 1998]), led to similar conclusions: the tense-aspect markers discussed above fall into different slots of the positional pattern as distinct from standard grammatical category grammeme markers that normally tend to occupy the same slot.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, interactions between these markers often resemble interactions between lexical, rather than grammatical units (see also [Elovkov 2004: 18]), which may be, among other things, indicative of an ongoing process of grammaticalization with at least some of them. It is also noteworthy that practically all combinations identified here are of the “compositional” type, i.e. each marker continues labeling its own lexical meaning, which evidently represents a classic case of *trivial interactions* between grammatical meanings [Malchukov, Xrakovskij 2016: 64]. The only exception seem to be relations between the irrealis marker *nuŋ* and the perfect marker *ba:n* which appear to demonstrate *non-trivial interaction* [ibid.: 65]. In this combination, *nuŋ* retains its irreal or future meaning, while *ba:n* is reanalyzed as a marker of “logical emphasis” on the importance of the provided information from the speaker’s viewpoint, or as a habitive marker. In the latter case, the standard meaning of *ba:n* it expresses in other positions is foregrounded.

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<sup>12</sup> Only mutually unordered markers (like the perfect and the experientive on the one hand, and the continuative and the progressive on the other) can be assigned to the same slot – as members of different sub-slots, though. For more detail on mutually unordered markers, see [Revzin, Yuldasheva 1969].

**Abbreviations**

ATR	attribute	NARR	narrative marker
AUX	auxiliary word	NEG	negation
BENEF	benefactive	NOM	nominalizer
CAUS	causative	OPT	optative
CLF	classifier	PASS	passive
COND	conditional conjunction	PL	plural
CONJ	conjunction	PN	personal name
CONT	continuative	POSS	possessive marker
DUR	durative	PREP	preposition
EMPH	emphatic word	PRF	perfect
EXP	experientive	PROGR	progressive
F	feminine gender	PROH	prohibitive
IAM	iamitive	PTCL	particle
IMP	imperative	Q	interrogative auxiliary
INTRJ	interjection	REC	reciprocal
IRR	irrealis	REFL	reflexive
ITER	iterative	REL	relative auxiliary
		SG	singular

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