

COUNTING KHMER NOUNS: A PLURAL AND CLASSIFIERS THAT CO-OCCUR

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THESIS. In this paper, I show that Khmer (Cambodian) allows both plural morphology and classifiers to surface together (1), contrary to the typological predictions by both Borer (2005) and Chierchia (1998).

- (1) Pu mien kon.srey toi?.toi? bey niə?.
Uncle has daughter small-small.PL three person.CL

‘Uncle has three small daughters.’ (*All data provided comes from Author’s own fieldwork*)

In (1), the plural is indicated by the reduplicated adjective, *toi?.toi?* ‘small’, which unexpectedly co-occurs with the classifier *niə?*. I propose that the Khmer classifier is different than both Borer- and Chierchia-type classifiers, since (i) the classifier is dependent on the numeral for grammaticality rather than the reverse (Bale & Coon, 2014), and (ii) the classifier and plural are not in complementary distribution. I show that Borer’s analysis of the plural can be maintained while providing evidence for a distinct position for the classifier, thus allowing the two to co-occur.

DATA. Khmer is the official language of Cambodia, with 15 million speakers world wide. A member of the Mon-Khmer language family, it is head-initial with SVO word order. Khmer nouns are bare and are interpreted as GENERAL NUMBER; they are underspecified for number and correspond to ‘one or more’ (Rullman and You, 2006). Notably, Khmer classifiers must co-occur with overt cardinals, as in (2-4).

- (2) Pu mien kon.srey bey. (4) *Pu mien kon.srey niə?
Uncle has daughter 3. Uncle mien daughter person.CL
‘Uncle has three daughters.’ ‘Uncle has one or more daughters.’

- (3) Pu mien kon.srey bey niə?
Uncle has daughter 3 person.CL
‘Uncle has three daughters.’

In (2) the noun *kon srey* ‘daughter’ and cardinal *bey* ‘three’ surface together, and in (3), may appear with the classifier *niə?* ‘person’. However, (4) contains only the noun and the classifier, which is ungrammatical. The Khmer classifier requires the cardinal to be present, (Bale and Coon 2014). Further, (6) shows the adjectives may reduplicate and trigger a plural interpretation.

- (5) srey toi?. (6) srey toi?.toi?
woman small.GENERAL NUMBER. woman small-small.PL
‘One or more small girls.’ ‘Small girls.’

In (5) and (6) the noun is modified by an adjective. In (5), the noun is interpreted as GENERAL NUMBER and the modification by the adjective maintains that interpretation. In (6), however, the adjective is reduplicated, and the noun now has a plural interpretation. Similar behavior has been attested in Nez Perce (Deal 2016); Khmer thus adds to the current attested typology of adjectives, alone, indicating plural. However, going against the expected typological behavior, the Khmer data in (1) shows that both its classifier and the reduplicated adjective, that triggers a plural interpretation, may surface together. I propose this is possible in Khmer, because the classifier and plural do not compete for the same structural position, but rather occupy different ones.

CONCLUSION. The co-occurrence of Khmer plural and classifiers presents an important counter-example to the typological claim that classifiers and plural cannot surface together, a standard assumption in the mass/count literature (see Chierchia 1998). Khmer thus offers an opportunity to test claims made with respect to the interaction of mass and count, plural, and classifiers.

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