

# CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF THE FINAL REINFORCEMENT PARTICLES IN KHMER

## STUDY OF THE PARTICLES *sah* AND *la3j*

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In Khmer, the term "final particles" refers to a quite heterogeneous set of units put together through their discursive function. Those described as "reinforcement": *te:*, *sah* and *la3j* form a special subset. The particle *te:* is used in assertive utterances (whether positive or negative), as well as in interrogative ones (Khoun and al., 2002, Thach, 2007). On the other hand, the particles *sah* and *la3j* tend to be used in somehow negative utterances, even though they cannot be characterized as negative terms proper: in such utterances, the negation is actually marked either by such terms as *m3n*, *ʔat*, *pum* or *kɔm* which are negative terms proper, or by verbs or adverbials which hold a negative value.

In this talk, a systematic study of the uses and values of *sah* and *la3j* will lead to a better understanding of what should be understood as "reinforcement". In a negative or negatively oriented utterance, the negative value of the process (noted  $\bar{p}$ ) is at stake. This value is second regarding the positive value *p*. The particles *sah* and *la3j* specify on what grounds and from which point of view the value  $\bar{p}$  is given, introducing a new relation to the positive value *p*.

*sah* considered as an adjective / predicate means 'flavourless', 'tasteless' or else 'physically exhausted' (ex. (1) and (2)): *sah* refers to the *exhaustion* of a prior state. In example (1) the dried fish is presented as having lost all its prior taste. Two values are therefore taken into account: a prior positive value and a negative value presented as the exhaustion of this prior positive value. The particle *sah* specifies the value  $\bar{p}$  through this presentation of the positive value as *exhausted*, which excludes all positive residual content in  $\bar{p}$ , as shown by examples (4), (5) and (6). It should be noted that *sah* is defined by '(not) at all' in the dictionaries

Alike *sah*, *la3j* operates on  $\bar{p}$  through its relation to *p*, but whereas the former grounds on *p* to define  $\bar{p}$ , *la3j* grounds on  $\bar{p}$  characterized as (intentionally or not) keeping out of *p*, owing either to a negative valuation of *p* (ex. (7), (8)) or to  $\bar{p}$  persisting not to come to *p*, in accordance to the fact that *la3j* can very often be met together with *nəi* 'still, not yet' : ex. (9) and (10).

Such a semantic difference between *sah* and *la3j* accounts for the possible combination of the two, but only in the order *sah* then *la3j* (the opposite order *la3j* then *sah* being impossible): examples: (11).

*Reinforcement* therefore means that a value of the predicate comes to a new definition through its relation to the opposite value of the predicate: it has nothing in common with the opposite value. This characterization can also be used for *te:* (Thach, 2007) *modulo* the fact that *te:* can have either *p* or  $\bar{p}$  for its scope, whereas  $\bar{p}$  is the only possible scope for *sah* and *la3j*.

(1)- *kʰɔm le:n keɣla: pi: maɔŋ kʰɔm sah kʰlu3n*  
1SG. play sport two hours 1SG. **sah** body  
"I did two hours of exercise, I am exhausted"

(2)- *treŋɣɔt nih sah nah ɲam m3n kaɔt te:*  
dried-fish DEM. **sah** very eat NEG. happen PART.  
"This dried fish is flavourless, we cannot eat it"

(3a)- *kʰɔm ʔat d3ŋ rɛŋ ʔej sah*  
1SG. NEG. know story INDF **sah**  
*koat caɔt tʰa: kʰɔm kbat koat*  
3SG. accuse that 1SG. betray 3SG.  
"I didn't know anything at all, and he accused that I betrayed him"

(3b)- *\*kʰɔm ʔat d3ŋ rɛŋ ʔej la3j*  
1SG. NEG. know story INDF **la3j**

- koat* 3SG. *caɔt* accuse *tʰa:* that *kʰɨm kbat* 1SG. betray *koat* 3SG.
- (3c)- \**kʰɨm* 1SG. *ʔat* NEG. *dɔŋ* know *rɨŋ* story *ʔɛj* INDF *te:* **te:**
- koat* 3SG. *caɔt* accuse *tʰa:* that *kʰɨm kbat* 1SG. betray *koat* 3SG.
- (4)- *pi:* two *cʰnam* year *hazj* already *kʰɨm* 1SG. *ʔat* NEG. *miɔn* have *damnɔŋ* news *pi:* from *koat* 3SG. *sah* **sah**  
 “Since two years already that I haven’t had any news from him at all”
- (5)- In a hospital, a doctor asked a patient’s relative if the patient ate his meal. The relative answered:  
*koat* 1SG. *ʔot* NEG. *miɔn* have *ɲam* eat *bontec* little **sah**  
 “He didn’t eat it at all (he didn’t even touch it)”
- (6)- *wiɔ* 3SG. *loɔla:* make-noise *pe:k* too-much *kʰɨm* 1SG. *de:c* sleep *ʔat* NEG. *ba:n* possible **sah**  
 “he made too much noise that I couldn’t sleep at all”
- (7) *taŋ-pi:* since *prɔtteɲkar* event *nəɪ* at *preahwihiz* Preahvihear *ba:n* PST *kaɔt* happen *laəŋ* up  
*kʰmiɔn* NEG. *kɔmɔɔn* project *cuɔp* meet *kʰniɔ* RÉCP. *ɔ:wiɔŋniɔjuɔ* between head *roaɔmɔntreɲ* minister  
*teəŋ* all *pi:* two *prɔ:tehlazj* country **lazj**  
 « Since the vent at Preahvihear happened, no meeting has been planned between the Primes of the two countries. »
- (8) *ɔla:ka:* law-court *ɔ:ɔk* look-for see *kʰɨ:ŋ tʰa:* that  
*koat* 3SG. *mɔn* NEG. *miɔn* have *kamhɔh* offense *doɔc* like *ka:caɔt-pra:kan* charge **lazj**  
 « The court found out that he didn’t offend the law as what are in the charge. »
- (9)- *kʰɨm* 1SG. *mɔn* NEG. *caŋ* want *miɔn* have *kruɔsa:* family  
*pruɔh* beause *kʰɨm* 1SG. *kampɔŋ* PROG. *riɔn* study *nəɪ* REMAIN **lazj**  
 « I don’t want to get married, because I am still in University »
- (10)- *ti:pʰsa:* market *ʔaɔɔɔɔnaɔtroap* real-estate *mɔn* NEG. *toan* on-time *miɔn* have *ɔɔɔna:* movement *nəɪ* remain **lazj**  
*kʰɨm* in *cʰnam* year *2010* 2010  
 « In 2010, the real estate market still remains at the same point »
- (11)- *kʰɨm* In *ci:wɔt* life *nih* DEM. *niɔŋ* 3SG-F. *mɔn* NEG. *daɛl* ever *skoal* know *ka:saɔba:j* happiness **sah** **sah** **lazj**  
 « In her life, she has never known any moment of happiness »

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