A STUDY OF THE PARTICLE *kɒː* IN KHMER :

kaː is a particle to be found in many languages in a large area : Thai (S. Iwazaki and P. Ingkaphirom: 2005), Lao (N. J. Enfield: 2008), Kui (a Môn-Khmer language, B. Somsong : 1992). In those languages, *kɒː* presents quite similar uses, and meets the same translations in English : *also, so, too, then, therefore*.

In Thaï, the two above mentioned authors refer to *kɒː* as a *'linking particle'* with five major functions: 1. 'nominal linker' ('also'), 2. 'clause linker' ('so'), 3. 'discourse linker' ('and then'), 4. 'response maker' ('well'), and 5. 'marker of criticism and disappointment'.

For his part, N. J. Enfield characterizes *kɒː* in Lao as a *'focus particle'* ; it always stands on the left of the verb. This author notes that the interpretation of *kɒː* depends entirely on the context and the situation.

In Khmer, *kɒː* is an independant unit standing before a predicate or a clause. Standing before a noun, *kɒː* gives this noun a predicative value ((2)). One of the syntactic characteristics worth noting is that *kɒː* can only be met in assertive clauses, excluding interrogative ones. In this talk, I will study four types of uses of *kɒː* :

1. Concession. Two constructions are possible for this use :

   V+*kɒː*+V ; the two V are the same ones ((1)) ;

   N+*kɒː*+N ; the two N are the same ones ((2)) ;

2. Contrast – competition : Subject+*kɒː*+V ((3)-(4)),

3. Consecution – concomitance : *kɒː* links two clauses ((5)-(6)),

4. Causality : in this case again, *kɒː* links two clauses ((7)).

The terms 'concession', 'contrast' etc. are only temporary labelling.

In this study, I put forward the following characterization for *kɒː* :

kɒː means that the predicative sequence working as its scope (noted **p) is asserted but at the same time presented as problematical or in no way obvious.**

This problematical character of **p** is owing to the fact that **p** is put in an alternative with **p'**. Coming back to **p** comes as a result of a confrontation between **p** and **p'**.

In the examples below, I complete the translation with a comment showing what stands for **p'** confronted with **p**.

(1a)- The co-locutor suggests to the locutor to go to the movie. The latter answers :

tɘɨ **kaː**   *tɘɨ* !

   go   **kɑː**   *go*
   « If I must go, let's go! » :I resign myself to go (**p**), but I really don't feel like going (**p'**).

(1b)- In the same context:

   *tɘɨ   **∅**   *tɘɨ* !

go **ø** *go*

(2a)- Khmer popular saying :

    ka:ʔ   ***ka:***   *ba:j*   *me:ma:j*   ***ka:***   *srɛj*

    rice cold   ***ka:***   *rice*   *widow*   ***ka:***   *woman*

« Cold rice is always cold rice; a widow is always a woman! » :
The locutor points out that accepting the cold rice, and the fact that "cold rice is cold rice" and that "a widow is a woman" (**p**) is in no way easy, natural, acceptable, obvious (the reverse **p'** could be argued for)

(2b)-* *ka:ʔ*   **ø**   *ba:j*   *me:ma:j*   **ø**   *srɛj*

    rice cold   **ø**   *rice*   *widow*   **ø**   *woman*

(3a) *baʒ*   *koat*   *tʰwə:*   *ba:n*   *kʰɲɔm* ***ka:***   *tʰwə:*   *ba:n*

    si   3SG.   do   possible   3SG. ***ka:***   do   possible

« Since he can do it, there is no reason why I should not be able to do it myself ».
Asserting "I'm able to do it myself' (**p**) takes into consideration the fact that I may be considered as unable to do it (**p'**).

(3b) *baʒ*   *koat*   *tʰwə:*   *ba:n*   *kʰɲɔm* **ø**   *tʰwə:*   *ba:n*

    si   3SG.   do   possible   3SG. **ø**   do   possible

« He can do it, and I can do it». 'I' is on the same level as 'he'

(4)- *sɔ:mbɛj-tae*   *kʰme:ɲ* ***ka:***   *cɛh*   *tʰwə:*   *dae*

    even child   ***ka:***   know -do   PART.

« Even children can do it!». The fact that children can do it (**p**) is in no way obvious (**p'**)

(5)- *koat*   *niji3j*   *cap*   *pʰli3m* ***ka:***   *koat*   *ce:ɲ*   *pi:*   *bantɔp pra:cɔm*

    3SG. speak finish instant ***ka:***   3SG.   get out of   meeting room

« He had hardly finished speaking when he left the meeting room». 'leaving the meeting room' (**p**) is not the expected way of behaving (**p'**).

(6)- *pe:l*   *koat*   *kampuŋ*   *mi3n*   *paɲha:*

    when 3SG.   having   problem

    kʰɲɔm   ***ka:***   *kampuŋ*   *cʰɨ:*   *tʰŋɔn*

    1SG.   ***ka:***   being suffer heavy

    ʔaɔj   *kʰɲɔm cu3j* *koat* *ja:ŋ*   *me:c*

    give 1SG. help 3SG. way   how

« He had serious problems, and I was seriously ill. How could I have helped him ?! ».
Blaming me for not helping Dara, the co-locutor acts as if he didn't know I was ill

(7)- *kʰɲɔm*   *mɔ:k* *nəɨ* *pʰnɔmpe:ɲ* ***ka:***   *daɔjsa:*   *koat*

| 1SG. | | come | live | Phnom Penh | **kɑː** | because of | 3SG. |

*kʰɲɔm c^hɔp t^hwɘːkaː***kɑː** *daɔjsaː koat*

| 1SG. | | stop | work | **kɑ** | because of | 3SG. |

« If I went to Phnom Penh, it's because of him, if I stopped working, it's also because of him! ». The co-locutor (or whoever may be concerned) acts as if he weren't aware of the reasons why I behaved as I did

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