

CHAPTER 2

SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of sociolinguistic information as provided by Kuy speakers in Cambodia in response to a sociolinguistic questionnaire. Only two main areas of sociolinguistic information will be examined here, even though the questionnaire explored many other possible areas for discussion. However, the focus of this thesis is identification and comparison of the speech varieties, so analysis of the responses to sociolinguistic questionnaires will be limited to those which are most relevant to the main goal of the study. This includes: first, location and dialect information as reported by Kuy speakers; and second, domains of language use and attitudes towards use of Kuy. Analysis of these areas follows a brief introduction on the sociolinguistic questionnaire used and the method of collection of sociolinguistic information.

2.1 Methodology

The particular questionnaire used was geared toward exploring broad areas of sociolinguistic relevance to potential language development such as language identity, language use, perceived comprehension, bilingualism, attitudes, language shift and vitality. This questionnaire is intended to provide very basic information relevant to these areas using a minimum of questions. The English and Khmer versions of the questionnaire are found in Appendix A. Only a portion of the questions and responses are analyzed in this study.

The language used for eliciting sociolinguistic information was Khmer. Subjects responded to the sociolinguistic questionnaire primarily in Khmer,¹⁶ and the

¹⁶ A few responses were also made in Kuy which one of the translators was able to comprehend.

responses were subsequently translated into English during the interview. Responses to the sociolinguistic questionnaire were collected in the same twelve villages where wordlists were collected. Additional informal questioning was done wherever possible (again using Khmer). Questions were aimed primarily at gathering information on language use, locations of Kuy-speaking villages, and dialect groupings. Of the two varieties used for comprehension testing (discussed in Chapter 6), a minimum of ten sociolinguistic questionnaires were collected in each representative village. In other locations, sociolinguistic questionnaires were collected as time allowed. In locations where Kuy is no longer spoken regularly, finding respondents willing to answer sociolinguistic questionnaires about Kuy was more difficult.

Village leaders were sought out first for sociolinguistic information on a village level, supplemented by other village residents. An attempt was made to target groups of subjects who were stratified demographically, such as older men, older women, younger men, and younger women, though overall this study does not represent a systematic sampling of sociological subgroups. In Prame and Rumchek, during comprehension testing, more care was taken to select at least ten individuals for sociolinguistic interviews from a range of ages and educational levels.

Information on village locations was also gathered through informal questioning of outsiders with experience in areas reported to have Kuy speakers. This includes workers from various non-governmental organizations, as well as local leaders at provincial, district or commune levels, even if they were not Kuy speakers. This preliminary information was then followed up and confirmed by other sources.

The results of the questionnaires and informal interviews as presented in this chapter are based on self-reported information, with very limited opportunities for observation. Other possible limitations in the current study may result from the translation process, as the researcher did not have command of either Kuy or Khmer, and translators were not experienced in sociolinguistic data collection.

2.2 Reported Kuy villages

In both formal and informal questioning, a main objective was to gather as complete a listing of villages with Kuy speakers as possible. The full questionnaire included questions about particular dialects and where those are spoken. With informal questioning, especially with non-Kuy speakers, usually only names and locations of villages with Kuy speakers was sought, without regard to the Kuy dialects spoken. When possible, names of communes, districts and provinces were also requested. Information on the location of Kuy villages received from both sociolinguistic questionnaires and informal questioning was cross-referenced to confirm locations by more than one source. Romanized spellings of names of villages, communes, districts and provinces used in this thesis will follow those of the Cambodian census report (National Institute of Statistics 1998).

Approximately 85 Kuy villages in Cambodia were identified. (See Appendix B.) These villages are located in four provinces: Kampong Thum, Kracheh, Preah Vihear and Stueng Traeng. During these interviews, there was no specific threshold as to a minimum percentage of people needed before identifying a village location as Kuy. The list presented is merely a source of potential Kuy-speaking locations as reported during the course of these interviews and was not verified independently by traveling to all of the sites. The list is presumed to be fairly thorough, but not exhaustive. Also, the locations identified in this section do not distinguish between those areas currently using Kuy as the main medium of communication and those in which Khmer is more frequently used. Often a certain village was noted by outsiders as being a Kuy village, but on arrival in that village, residents said that Kuy was no longer spoken. Tentative notes on this aspect are included in the last column of the table in Appendix B. See Section 2.3 for further discussion on language use.

2.2.1 Reported information on varieties of Kuy

Subjects were asked to list other villages where Kuy was spoken, according to the following categories:

- a) Villages where Kuy is spoken the same as in their village
- b) Villages where Kuy is spoken differently, but can still be understood well
- c) Villages where Kuy is spoken so differently that it is difficult to understand

They were also asked what the language is called in those villages. The responses to these questions were used in compiling the list in Appendix B. Other questions about different types of Kuy include the following:

- a) Are some Kuy dialects more important than others?
- b) What is the most important dialect? Why is it important? Where is it located?

The majority of Kuy speakers surveyed in Cambodia readily identified different varieties of Kuy, namely Kuy Ntua, Kuy Ntra, and Kuy Mla. The main identifying feature mentioned is the term ‘what’, spoken as *ntua*, *ntrə*, and *m̄la*: respectively. The first two names are occasionally expressed as *cəntua* and *cəmprə*, which are fuller expressions for ‘what thing’, used in Kuy Ntua and Kuy Ntra, respectively. Some speakers indicated that they didn’t really know about different kinds of Kuy but were “told by others that we are Kuy Ntra,” for example.

Speakers were also asked these questions:

- a) Where is the best (purest/sweetest) Kuy spoken? Why is it best? What is it called?
- b) What is the best village in which to learn to speak your language?

The information gathered from these questions was used to determine the villages within a given variety to be chosen for the reconstruction in Chapter 5. For Kuy Ntua, results were unanimous that the villages of Prame commune were the best location. When outsiders were asked where Kuy speakers are found, Prame was one of the first names mentioned. This included Kuy Ntra respondents (possibly influenced by the visits of two Kuy Ntua speakers from Prame who previously conducted cultural and linguistic survey research in many Kuy villages). The

place of Prame as the best representative for Kuy Ntua is supported by the fact that the language use is strong in Prame. Kuy in Prame is used in nearly all domains, is being spoken by children, and is reportedly being learned by some Khmer people who marry into the village. An example of this is a woman who reported herself as a Kuy Ntua speaker who grew up in Prame, and who is currently doing research on Kuy throughout Cambodia. Later this woman admitted that both her parents were Khmer who moved to Prame when she was quite small, and even though her parents never learned to speak Kuy well, she still feels her identity is strongly Kuy rather than Khmer.

For Kuy Ntra, there were a few possible locations for the strongest center of the area. The Kuy spoken in Srae, Rumchek, and Chi Aok is reportedly very similar and these villages are located in close proximity to one another. A few respondents mentioned Rumchek as the best place to learn Kuy; a few said that Srae is more “harsh” sounding while Chi Aok is “sweeter.” Srae is a larger village; however, it was reported in Srae that in the past an influential monk urged the villagers not to use Kuy. Based on this and based on the responses from other Kuy Ntra villages outside of the three villages under consideration that showed a slightly higher preference for Rumchek, Rumchek was chosen as the site for eliciting a full wordlist for reconstruction.

Though most of the Kuy are found in Preah Vihear province and along the borders of adjacent provinces, a small, more isolated cluster is also found in Kracheh province. Only a few of the Kuy speakers in Preah Vihear and neighboring provinces were aware of the Kuy in Kracheh, and there was not a consensus on what type of Kuy they speak. During the current research, two locations were visited, Chranaol and Thmei. In both locations, it was difficult to find speakers still fluent in Kuy. In Thmei,¹⁷ residents were extremely reluctant to give a wordlist, so only a short list was taken, and they suggested that in Chranaol Kuy

¹⁷ It was reported that a portion of Thmei village is made up of Pnong speakers, though the percentage is not known.

was more widely spoken. It was possible to obtain a full wordlist in Chranaol on a later trip, though it was reported that only older residents still use Kuy in daily communication. It was also difficult to find respondents for the sociolinguistic questionnaire. Residents of Chranaol and Thmei were unable to identify what type of Kuy they spoke. This may perhaps be due to their relative isolation from speakers of other types of Kuy. Since the other three types of Kuy (Ntra, Ntua, and Mla) were identified based on their word for ‘what’, the same index is applied to the Kuy speakers in Chranaol and Thmei for the purposes of this thesis. These speakers use *məj* ‘what’, so the Kuy spoken in Chranaol and Thmei is tentatively termed Kuy Mai.¹⁸ The Kuy Mai variety used for phonological analysis and comparative phonological reconstruction in this thesis is from Chranaol.

Krala Peas is the only village where Kuy Mla is known to be spoken in Cambodia, so this village was the obvious representative for this variety.

Sometimes, when asked which types of Kuy were different (i.e. which they could not understand well) respondents listed ‘Kuy Por’ (several pronunciations) as another type of ‘Kuy’. This is a Pearic language¹⁹ which is spoken in proximity to some Kuy-speaking areas. The Kuy interviewed may have grouped the Por together with Kuy because they are the only other non-Khmer speakers in the immediate area, and because the term *kuj* means ‘person’ in Kuy. So when asked to name “villages where *kuj* ‘people’ speak so differently that it is difficult to understand,” they responded appropriately. A few words were collected in one Por village, and a rough comparison shows it is very different from Kuy.²⁰

¹⁸ Seidenfaden reports ‘Kui M’ai’ in Thailand in 1917, and both Dufossé (1934) and Lévy (1943) report Kuy ‘Mahaj’ or ‘Mahai’, respectively, though the later two locate them further north, in southern Laos. It is not known whether these are related to the Kuy in Kracheh studied in this thesis.

¹⁹ Pearic languages are classified as Eastern Mon-Khmer, along with Katuic languages.

²⁰ The Por wordlist was insufficient in quantity for lexicostatistical comparison with the Kuy varieties. Smith (1981) found Kui of Thailand to have 34% similarity with Pearic.

2.2.2 Subvarieties of Kuy

Two additional varieties not yet discussed were mentioned by some respondents, terming them Kuy O' and Kuy Wa'.²¹ Finding speakers of these varieties was difficult, and often information given on these two varieties was not consistent. No speakers reported that the variety of their own village was Kuy Wa'. Some speakers did report that the variety in other villages was Kuy Wa'. However, when those villages were visited, none of the speakers interviewed in those locations called their variety Kuy Wa'.

For example, it was reported that Tralaek residents speak Kuy Wa'. However, those interviewed in Tralaek village had not heard of this type of Kuy. They did admit that they sometimes use a particle *wa?* (which is some type of final confirmative particle), but suggested that residents of other nearby villages, such as Srae, use the particle *wa?* with more frequency. The variety spoken in Srae was consistently reported (both by village residents and outsiders) to be Kuy Ntra.

The Kuy O' variety was similarly difficult to identify. Some villages were reported to be Kuy O' by a few respondents of other speech varieties. Only in one location, Svay Damnak, did villagers actually report that some of the older residents are able to speak Kuy O'. One 70-year-old man gave examples of several sentences using *ʔʔ?*, which is a type of final confirmative particle similar in use to *wa?*. However, it was reported that he and others who formerly spoke Kuy using *ʔʔ?* frequently, have in the past several years dropped the use of *ʔʔ?*, and "now speak Kuy Ntra." The only difference between O' and Ntra was reported by residents of Svay Damnak to be the use of this particle. (This is supported by lexical similarity percentages, as discussed in Section 3.3.) Loss of the particle was reported to be due to embarrassment at speaking differently.

²¹ 'Kuy O' is perhaps the same as Dufossé's (1934) 'Kouys Auk' and Lévy's (1943) 'Kuy O'.

Figure 11 illustrates the relationship between these subvarieties of Kuy Ntra as suggested by the present research, with Kuy Ntra having the subvarieties of Kuy O' and Kuy Wa', and Kuy Mla and Kuy Ntua having no reported subvarieties.

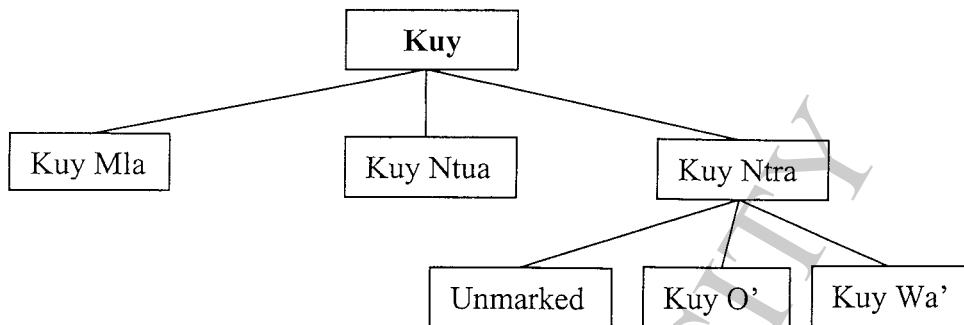


Figure 11. Kuy varieties and subvarieties

Further investigation would be helpful to confirm the status of these subvarieties within Kuy Ntra. However, since so few speakers of Kuy O' and Wa' were identified, and O' and Wa' appear to be subvarieties of Kuy Ntra, the Kuy as spoken in Tralaek and Svay Damnak will be treated as Kuy Ntra in this thesis.

2.3 Language use

Language choice and domains of use appear to vary among the Kuy communities studied in Cambodia. A brief discussion is given here on reported bilingualism and patterns of language use.

2.3.1 Reported bilingualism

Most Kuy interviewed were able to communicate reasonably well using Khmer. This could lead to the assumption that all Kuy are bilingual in Khmer. However, without sufficient random sampling throughout the village or actual bilingualism testing, it is not possible to know whether the Kuy interviewed are representative of the entire community. No formal study of the level of bilingual ability has yet been done to assess the proficiency of Kuy speakers in Khmer. Some questions

were asked regarding self-assessment of bilingual ability. Less than 15% of those asked indicated that they are sometimes embarrassed or nervous when using Khmer; the rest expressed a sense of confidence in speaking Khmer. There was no indication of bilingualism in any other languages.

The following three questions were asked about Khmer proficiency:

- a) What part (all, most, half, some, none) of Kuy people in this village can speak Khmer?
- b) What part (all, most, half, some, none) of Kuy people in this village speak Khmer as well as they speak Kuy?
- c) What part (all, most, half, some, none) of Kuy people in this village speak Khmer better than they speak Kuy?

Two-thirds of the respondents said that “most” or “all” of the people in their village speak Khmer as well as they speak Kuy. In response to the third question, almost all answered that “none”, “a few” or “some” of the villagers were able to speak Khmer better than they speak Kuy.

In Kuy Ntua and Kuy Ntra villages, when asked about what language children use, 82% of the respondents said Kuy, while the rest of the respondents said Kuy and Khmer are both used. When asked if it was good or bad if their children used Kuy, some responded that it is good for Kuy children to be able to continue the traditions of their ancestors, while a few also said that both languages are necessary. No formal data is available for Kuy Mla and Kuy Mai; however, the speakers of these dialects said that everyone in the village speaks Khmer, and only a few older residents are able to speak Kuy. Informal interactions and observations indicated that children do not seem to be using Kuy in these villages.

2.3.2 Domains of language use

Questions in Section 4 of the sociolinguistic questionnaire (Appendix A) deal with domains of language use, particularly as to when members of different age and gender groups typically use Kuy or Khmer. Table 3 gives a brief summary of the information collected. Due to inconsistencies in the data collection process and

small numbers of questionnaires administered in most villages, the conclusions given here are best considered tentative.

Table 3 shows the number of respondents in each village who reported that they, or other speakers of their same age level in general, would use Kuy (K) or Khmer (N) or both (B) in the domains listed. The general trend is that among the Ntua or Ntra speakers, 50-100% use Kuy with parents and with spouses. With their children, some use Kuy exclusively (mainly in Prame and Rumchek), but most use a mixture of Kuy and Khmer, or only Khmer. Use of language at the market depends on the location of the market and the language of the seller. Some respondents remarked that they must speak Khmer well with Khmer sellers or they risk being cheated, so most use Khmer exclusively. Except in Prame, funerals are mostly in Khmer or mixed, although many gave further explanation that the ceremony is conducted in Khmer (or even Pali, a religious language used by the monks) but that general conversation will be in Kuy, especially with older people. At village council meetings the language used is most often Khmer, mixed with some Kuy. For both funerals and meetings, many respondents said that when a microphone is used, Khmer will be spoken, but in general conversation, Kuy will be used.

In the Mla and Mai villages, Khmer is spoken almost exclusively, except occasionally Kuy is used with parents (or was when the parents were still living) or older residents of the village.

A special note should be made about Prame. Among the Kuy in Prame there is a strong sense of identity and pride linked to their language, as discussed in 2.2.1 and 2.3.2. They reported that they are not embarrassed to speak Kuy even around Khmer speakers. Some respondents suggested that their grandchildren will continue to speak Kuy in the future. Khmer is spoken at the market (outside of the village) and at official meetings or with visiting officials, but in all other domains Kuy is used.

VILLAGE	#	at home			w/parents			w/spouse			w/children			at market			at funeral			at meeting										
		K	N	%	K	N	%	K	N	%	K	N	%	K	N	%	K	N	%	K	N	%								
NTUA	Prame	18	0	0	100	18	0	0	100	15	0	0	100	15	0	0	100	1	14	3	5	14	1	3	78	1	11	5	6	
	Pal Hal	2	0	0	2	0	0	1	50	1	0	1	50	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	50	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	
	Anlong Svay	2	1	0	1	50	2	0	0	100	1	0	1	50	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
	Samraong	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1	0	0	100	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Rumchek	15	12	2	1	80	11	1	0	92	9	2	2	69	7	5	1	54	1	1	4	17	4	7	3	28	3	10	2	20
NTRA	Chi Aok	2	2	0	0	100	2	0	0	100	2	0	0	100	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
	Srae	1	1	0	0	100	1	0	0	100	1	0	0	100	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Svay Dannak	1	1	0	0	100	1	0	0	100	1	0	0	100	1	0	0	100	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Tralaek	1	1	0	0	100	1	0	0	100	1	0	0	100	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Krala Peas	3	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
MAI	Thmei	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
	Chranaol	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	50	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0

Table 3. Domains of language use by village

K=Kuy; N=National language (Khmer); B=Both (Kuy and Khmer); %=percentage of respondents using Kuy exclusively

2.4 Summary

During the process of collecting sociolinguistic information on Kuy varieties spoken in Cambodia, it at first appeared that there were many varieties. After cross-checking and limited analysis, self-reported information shows that there are potentially at least three separate types of Kuy. Three varieties confirmed both by insiders (native speakers) and outsiders (speakers of other Kuy varieties) are Kuy Ntra, Kuy Ntua and Kuy Mla. Further, there may be a fourth variety, which is spoken in Kracheh. This variety was not named by native speakers, but is called Kuy Mai in this thesis. Other methods of analysis in the following chapters will help determine whether this variety is distinct from the others. There are potentially other varieties, Kuy O' and Kuy Wa', though these apparently are subvarieties of Kuy Ntra and seem to be low in language vitality.

Of the four main varieties, Kuy Ntua and Kuy Ntra are reported to be more stable, used in home and family domains, and used by children. Kuy Mla and Kuy Mai appear to be less in use. In public settings such as at the market, funerals and meetings, speakers of all of the varieties reported that Khmer is used more often than Kuy, though sometimes both Kuy and Khmer are used.

The next chapter provides a lexicostatistical comparison to confirm or disconfirm the self-reported sociolinguistic groupings.