CHAPTER 4

OVERVIEW OF FOUR KUY DIALECTS

4.0 Introduction

Based on sociolinguistic and lexicostatistical evidence, four different dialects of Kuy spoken in Cambodia have been identified. This chapter provides background information on each of the dialects and a phonological overview for Kuy (with differences noted for each dialect). Analysis is based on the full wordlists from Rumchek, Prame, Chranaol and Krala Peas villages, as presented in Appendix E. These villages were chosen based on sociolinguistic evidence (presented in 2.2.1) pointing to these particular villages as being good representatives of Kuy Ntra, Kuy Ntua, Kuy Mai and Kuy Mla, respectively.

This chapter does not constitute a complete phonological description of Kuy or any of the dialects, it is simply a brief outline of main features, including the syllable structure, consonant and vowel inventories, and distribution of phonemes. All four dialects of Kuy have most features in common. Since they appear to be dialects of a single language, the phonological features in this chapter will be presented only on an overall language level, not for each dialect separately. Where the dialects do differ, the inventories and specific distribution for each dialect will be described.

4.1 Background information on each dialect

This section provides more detailed population and geographic information than Section 1.2, specific to each dialect. There is no known published literature which provides population figures or village locations by dialect. Information given on each dialect in these sections are rough estimates, based primarily on information gathered through sociolinguistic questionnaires, coupled with census data. As seen in Appendix B, the particular dialect of many Kuy villages has not been identified, so the estimated number of speakers of each dialect will presumably be lower than

the actual number. The dialects are ordered here from largest number of speakers to smallest.

4.1.1 Kuy Ntra

The largest dialect of Kuy in Cambodia is Kuy Ntra, which is spoken in three provinces: Kampong Thum, Preah Vihear and Stueng Traeng. The current research identified at least 26 Kuy Ntra villages, with an estimated population of more than 15,000, though not all of these are currently speaking Kuy. Approximately half of the 37 villages for which a dialect has not yet been identified (see Appendix B) could also be Kuy Ntra.

In Kampong Thum province, Kuy Ntra villages are located in the following districts: Kampong Svay district (Chey commune), Prasat Balangk district (Phan Nheum, Sala Visai and possibly Tuol Kreul communes), Prasat Sambour district (Chhuk and Sambour communes), and Sandan district (Ngan commune). Villages in Preah Vihear province are found in the following districts: Chey Saen district (Chrach, Thmea, and Putrea communes) and Rovieng district (Romtom and Romoniy communes). In Stueng Traeng province, Kuy are found in Thala Barivat district. Within Thala Barivat district, only those Kuy in Anlong Chrey commune are known to be Kuy Ntra. The dialect spoken in other communes is not known. Among these areas of Stueng Traeng, Kuy appears to be giving way to Khmer.

Many of the Kuy Ntra villages are located along main roads, such as the highway connecting Preah Vihear and Kampong Thum provincial seats. This facilitates greater interaction with Khmer speakers.

The Kuy Ntra locations where wordlists and sociolinguistic questionnaires were collected for this study are the following five villages: Chi Aok, Rumchek, Srae, Svay Damnak and Tralaek (see Table 2, Section 1.4.1). The phonological information about Kuy Ntra presented in this chapter is taken from the Rumchek wordlist, shown in Appendix E.

4.1.2 Kuy Ntua

Speakers of Kuy Ntua are only known to be located in Preah Vihear province. The current research identified at least 16 Kuy Ntua villages, with an estimated population of more than 11,000, making Kuy Ntua the second largest dialect after Kuy Ntra, though not all of these are currently speaking Kuy. At least 15 of the 37 villages for which a dialect has not yet been identified could also be Kuy Ntua.

Kuy Ntua speakers are located in the following districts of Preah Vihear province: Chey Saen district (S'ang, Tasu, and Putrea communes), Chhaeb district (Mlu Prey Pir commune), Choam Khsant district (Tuek Kraham commune), Rovieng district (Reaksa commune), and Tbaeng Mean Chey district (Pal Hal, Prame, and Preah Khleang communes). It is not known whether any of the Kuy in Stueng Traeng province speak Kuy Ntua.

Some Kuy Ntua villages are located along the roads, some are more isolated. The villages appear to be in several small clusters. Comments were made by two Kuy Ntua speakers who had traveled extensively throughout the Kuy community that within Kuy Ntua there is less variation than within Kuy Ntra. This statement is consistent with the similarity percentages in this study, since within Kuy Ntra they range from 96% to 100%, while within Kuy Ntua they range from 98% to 100%, though this difference is admittedly minimal. There are no known subvarieties of Kuy Ntua.

The Kuy Ntua locations where wordlists and sociolinguistic questionnaires were collected for this study are the following four villages: Anlong Svay, Pal Hal, Prame and Samraong (see Table 2, Section 1.4.1). The phonological information about Kuy Ntua presented in this chapter is taken from the Prame wordlist, shown in Appendix E.

4.1.3 Kuy Mai

The Kuy dialect spoken in Kracheh province was not given a specific name by any of the Kuy interviewed. For the purposes of this thesis, the name Kuy Mai is used as the dialect name for the Kuy spoken in Chranaol and Thmei.

Kuy Mai is found only in Kracheh province, particularly in Thmei commune of Kracheh district. There are possibly seven Kuy villages in Thmei commune with a total population of around 5,000; however, in the two villages visited, only older residents claimed to be Kuy speakers, and in the other five villages it is suspected that Kuy is no longer spoken.

The villages in Thmei commune of Kracheh district are located well off the main road and within a few kilometers of one another. During the first visit in March 2002, the road was very sandy, passable only by motorcycle or ox cart. On the second visit to this area, December 2003, the road had been rebuilt. It was still not paved but was a firm dirt road, so that travel in and out of the villages was much more convenient.

Kuy is reportedly also spoken in Sambour and Snuol districts within Kracheh province. Three of those villages were identified as possibly having a higher percentage of speakers still using the Kuy language. However, since these villages were not visited, it is not yet known whether the varieties spoken in those locations are similar to that in Thmei commune of Kracheh district or not.

The Kuy Mai locations where wordlists and sociolinguistic questionnaires were collected for this study are the following two villages: Chranaol and Thmei (see Table 2, Section 1.4.1). The phonological information about Kuy Mai presented in this chapter is taken from the Chranaol wordlist, shown in Appendix E.

4.1.4 Kuy Mla

Kuy Mla is only known to be spoken in one village in Cambodia, Krala Peas village (Pring Thum commune, Choam Ksan district, Preah Vihear province). The

population of the village is 743; however, it was reported that only a few of the oldest people in the village still speak Kuy. The primary language currently spoken in the village is Khmer. Middle-aged residents interviewed could name some individual vocabulary items in Kuy, but claimed Khmer as the language they speak.

Krala Peas village is somewhat isolated from other villages. However, with the recent development of tourist roads and a new bridge to access Preah Vihear temple in the north of the province, it is becoming easier to travel to Krala Peas. The nearest Kuy neighbors are Kuy Ntua speakers in Prame and Pal Hal, a few kilometers away by oxcart trail. Kuy Mla speakers are familiar with Kuy Ntua to the extent that they are aware of some vocabulary differences between the dialects.

Kuy Mla is one of the Kuy dialects spoken in Thailand.[25] Research has not yet been done comparing the Kuy Mla spoken in Thailand with that spoken in Krala Peas village in Cambodia. The phonological information about Kuy Mla presented in this chapter is taken from the Krala Peas wordlist, shown in Appendix E.

4.2 Syllable structure

Kuy words are monosyllabic or sesquisyllabic (one and a half syllables). Sesquisyllabic forms are composed of a minor and a major syllable. The minor syllable, an optional initial unstressed syllable, will be termed *presyllable* in this study, and the major, stressed syllable will be termed *main syllable*. Only the main syllable is required; presyllables are optional in the general syllable structure. Monosyllabic words, therefore, consist simply of a main syllable, while sesquisyllabic words consist of a presyllable bound to a main syllable. The presyllable is often unstable, and tends to become reduced or to disappear completely over time, such that dialects of the same language may show more

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[25] Seidenfaden (1952), based on data collected in 1917-19, gives a figure of 72,000 "Kui M'lô" speakers in Thailand.

variety in the presyllable than in the main syllable. The distribution of these two syllable types in the data collected is about 65-70% monosyllabic words and about 30-35% sesquisyllabic words.

There are two types of presyllables found in the Kuy data. The most common type of presyllable consists of three elements: the initial consonant C_{P1}, the mid central unrounded vowel /ə/, and an optional final consonant (C_{P2}). The template for this presyllable is therefore C_{P1}ə(C_{P2}). The precise phonetic realization of the central presyllable vowel sometimes varies, but this variation does not appear to be contrastive. Since this syllable is normally unstressed, it is transcribed throughout as /ə/.

The second type of presyllable is a syllabic nasal Ṇ which assimilates to the point of articulation of the initial consonant of the following main syllable. This syllabic nasal presyllable accounts for 15% of the presyllables in Prame and Rumchek, and 9% in Krala Peas and Chranaol; all other presyllables are of the first type. It is suspected that this syllabic nasal is not actually a separate type of presyllable, but a remnant from a presyllable which originally had the form C_{P1}əN. The evidence for this expanded presyllable form is not consistent in the current Kuy data, so at this point the syllabic nasal is described as a separate presyllable type.

The following list shows presyllables with more than three examples found in the data: /cə-/, /cəŋ-/, /kə-/, /kən-/, /kər-/, /mə-/, /pə-/, /sə-/, /tə-/ and /Ṇ-/ (with clear examples of [n̩-], [ɲ̩-] and [ŋ̩-]). The presyllables /ʔə-/ and /rə-/ are found more than three times only in Kuy Mla (Krala Peas). In regard to presyllables, there is much inconsistency across the data, and the form (and presence or absence) can vary by speaker. The most common, consistent examples will be discussed in Section 5.5. The others will not be looked at in this study.

The structure of the main syllable is $C_1(C_2)V(C_3)$. C_1 is a syllable-initial consonant, (C_2) is the optional second consonant in an initial cluster, V is the vowel nucleus and (C_3) is an optional final consonant. The vowel nucleus can be a

short vowel, long vowel or diphthong, and can have register distinction. Discussion on phonotactics can be found in Section 4.5. Shapes of main syllables in the present data include CV, CVC, CCV and CCVC.

4.3 Consonants

A phonemic inventory of Kuy consonants is shown in Table 12.

	Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Voiceless stop	p	t	c	k	ʔ
Voiced stop	b	d			
Nasal	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
Trill		r			
Voiceless fricative		s			h
Approximant	w		j		
Voiced lateral approximant		l			

Table 12. Kuy consonant inventory

Table 12 shows seventeen phonemes, arranged by place of articulation in the top row and by manner of articulation in the left column. All seventeen phonemes occur in all four Kuy dialects (of Cambodia) as syllable-initial consonants, C_1. The distribution in other syllable positions varies slightly by dialect (see Section 4.5, Phonotactics). Note that the phoneme /c/ has two allophones. In syllable-initial position it is realized phonetically as the alveolo-palatal affricate [tɕ], while in final position it is a palatal stop [c].

There is notably no series of aspirated stops in the Kuy speech varieties studied. A few words were collected in the wordlist with aspirated main syllable initials; however, they are rare and appear to be borrowings from Khmer in almost all cases. Further investigation is needed for some of the other words which do not seem to be borrowed from Khmer, but aspirated stops do not seem to be native to the Kuy dialects of Cambodia.

In research on Kuy in Thailand there is varied interpretation as to the status of aspiration of initial stops. Some researchers suggest that there is a phonemic series of voiceless aspirated stops in initial position (Johnston 1976, Prasert 1978,

Preecha 1993 and others). This may be particular to certain varieties of Kuy. Some researchers (Pailin 1980 and others) report that this aspirated set is allophonic and not phonemic. That is, aspirated stops are found only with breathy register vowels, and so the aspiration is seen to be an effect of the breathiness of the vowel spreading to the initial consonant. Prasert (1978:viii-ix) found that speakers of Mon-Khmer languages hear initial stops followed by breathy vowels as aspirated stops (and hence he chose to spell these in Kuy using symbols for Thai aspirated consonants). In the present study, these stops do not show phonemic contrast and are written as unaspirated. The few words in the wordlist written with aspirated initials appear to be almost exclusively words borrowed from Khmer, which has an aspirated series.

In the data, both voiced stops, [b] and [d], and voiced implosives, [ɓ] and [ɗ], occur. They appear to be in free variation with one another, [b] with [ɓ], and [d] with [ɗ], with the implosives noted more clearly in some speakers than in others. To determine their phonemic status, it is important to look at historical evidence in other Katuic languages. As shown in Diffloth (1982), Proto-Katuic likely had a voiceless stop series, a voiced stop series, and an implosive series. In most Katuic languages, the voiced stops have merged with the voiceless series, while the implosive series have become simple voiced stops. This is consistent with the present Kuy data, except that some speakers retain the implosion, particularly in certain words. Further study is needed with a number of speakers of different varieties to determine if there are patterns and environmental influences on the usage of voiced plosives. However, based on the current data, there is no clear evidence for positing both the voiced stops and voiced implosives as separate phonemes. For the purposes of this study these phones are considered to be in free variation, positing the simpler forms /b/ and /d/ as phonemic, sometimes realized as [ɓ] and [ɗ], respectively. Note that in the literature on Kuy, what are described here as implosives are sometimes analyzed as preglottalized voiced stops /ʔb/ and /ʔd/ (Peiros 1996).

As for sonorants, the trill /r/ can sometimes be realized as a flap, especially in second position in a cluster (C₂). The labial-velar approximant /w/ often shows a degree of friction in initial position, though not so much as a true fricative [v], and is sometimes realized as a labio-dental approximant [ʋ]. The realization of this phoneme appears to be in free variation, so will be written phonemically as /w/.

It could be argued that there is a voiceless alveolar lateral approximant [l̥]. However, as there are no other voiceless sonorants, it is plausible that the sound historically comes from *sl, and in this study the sound is analyzed as a cluster /hl/ in the present dialects of Kuy.

4.4 Vowels

The phonemic inventory of vowels in Kuy is shown in Table 13.

	Short			Long			Diphthongs	
	Front	**Central**	**Back**	**Front**	**Central**	**Back**	**Front**	**Back**
Close	i	ɨ	u	iː	ɨː	uː	ia	ua
Close-mid	(e)	ə	o	eː	əː	oː		
Open-mid	ɛ	(ɐ)	ɔ	ɛː		ɔː		
Open	a		ɑ	aː		ɑː		

Table 13. Kuy vowel inventory (for all four dialects)

The open-mid back vowel /ɔ/ (both short and long form) has less rounding than the proto-type form. Also, the front and back open vowels are somewhat centralized, as indicated by their position in the table.

In the literature on Kuy as spoken in Thailand (Prasert 1978, Van der Haak and Woykos 1990, Wanna 1994, and others), it is generally agreed that there are eleven vowels, four levels of front and back vowels, and three levels of central vowels (though Pailin 1980 lists only nine vowel positions for one variety). What are analyzed as central vowels here are sometimes interpreted as back unrounded vowels /ɯ/, /ɤ/ and /ʌ/, which seems a valid option. Actually it is quite difficult to identify the precise position of these vowels in the Kuy varieties in Cambodia

without an extensive acoustic phonetic study. In reality, they may lie somewhere in between central and back. These vowels are transcribed in this thesis as central vowels /ɨ/, /ə/ and /ɐ/, respectively, though the phonemic status of /ɐ/ is in question. There is also some question regarding the open-mid back vowel and the open back vowel in the varieties studied, as there is very little phonetic difference between these vowels. For now, they are both posited as phonemic vowels, on the strength of other research, but since the two vowels differ only slightly, more research should be done with a native speaker assessing possible environmental influences on the phonetic variations.

The diphthongs /ia/ and /ua/ are at times realized as [iə] and [uə], particularly in fast speech, but in this study these are analyzed to be variants of /ia/ and /ua/, respectively. A third diphthong /ɨa/ is found in three items, but never across all four dialects, and all three items appear to be borrowed from Khmer. Therefore it is not considered phonemic for Kuy as spoken in Cambodia.

As to register in Kuy of Cambodia, extensive study has not yet been done. Some discussion will be made here from Kuy varieties in Thailand, based on research by Theraphan (1989) and Preecha (1992). Each of these researchers states that in the dialects they studied, there is a two-way register complex including the following main features: Register 1 is characterized mainly by clear voice quality and higher pitch; Register 2 is characterized mainly by breathy voice and lower pitch. This register distinction appears to be consistent with the Cambodian Kuy data collected in this study. The two Thai studies go on to explain which initial consonants may occur with each register, as well as other correlate effects on vowel quality and length. In terms of the Cambodian Kuy varieties, this type of in-depth study of the register system would be very useful (see discussion on register in other Katuic languages, Section 5.2); however, it is outside the scope of this thesis.[26]

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[26] There is also some speculation as to a third register in Kuy. See Diffoth (1982:64).

As a general observation regarding register in Kuy of Cambodia, about 16% of the words have breathy register vowels, the rest are clear. The breathy register is less commonly found in the data with short vowels, and is very rare with long low vowels. There are some other occasional effects found on some vowels, such as nasalization or tenseness on some words, and some diphthongization (most noticeably by a few Kuy Mai speakers). Some limited discussion of these will be given in Section 5.4.

Breathy register is marked in the data by two small dots under the vowel, for example, #7 *ma:* 'rain'. However, the marking of register in the data is not consistent enough to make clear statements about the patterning of register or the potential for using register in reconstructing initial consonants. Further study with native speakers will be necessary to clarify register.

4.5 Phonotactics

This section describes the phonotactics in Kuy. Phonotactics refers to the "sequential arrangements of phonological units which occur in a language–what counts as a phonologically well-formed word" (Crystal 1997:292).

The Kuy syllable structure is described in Section 4.2. In the presyllable type $C_{P1}ə(C_{P2})$, the initial consonant position C_{P1} permits voiceless stops /p/, /t/, /c/, and /k/ and the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/. There are also a few items in the data with the sonorants /r/ and /l/ in the presyllable initial position, but less than three examples of each, and some of these appear to be borrowed. The optional final consonant (C_{P2}), allows nasals /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/ as well as the trill /r/. The final presyllable consonant /r/ (and more rarely /l/) sometimes appears to undergo metathesis with the central vowel, creating an initial cluster as in the following presyllables: /krə-/, /crə-/, and /prə-/, with only about a dozen examples total, and never across all four dialects. Further investigation is needed to confirm whether this is a legitimate initial cluster in the presyllable or whether the /r/ is a final

consonant of the presyllable which has metathesized. An alternative interpretation is a cluster without a presyllable vowel.

The second type of presyllable is a nasal, N̩, which assimilates to the point of articulation of the initial consonant of the main syllable. This nasal presyllable can be realized as [m̩], [n̩], [ɲ̩], or [ŋ̩], though in the present data there are only two examples of /m̩/. Note that final nasals in the more common presyllable type $C_{P1}ə(C_{P2})$ do not always agree in place of articulation with the initial of the following main syllable, as the syllabic nasal presyllable does.

As described in Section 4.2, the template for main syllables in Kuy is $C_1(C_2)V(C_3)$. All of the segments in the Kuy consonant inventory shown in Table 12 (Section 4.3) may occur in the initial position of main syllables, C_1. Only /l/ and /r/ occur in the optional second position of an initial cluster. The following table shows the segment combinations which occur in the first and second positions of a cluster in the data.

Initial element	Second element of cluster							
	/-l-/				/-r-/			
	Ntra	Ntua	Mai	Mla	Ntra	Ntua	Mai	Mla
/p-/	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
/b-/	+	+	+	(+)	(+)	+	(+)	(+)
/t-/	(+)				+	+	+	+
/s-/					+	+	+	+
/k-/	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
/h-/	+	+	+	+				

Table 14. Consonant clusters by dialect

In Table 14, a plus indicates that the combination occurs in the data, a blank indicates it does not occur in the data. Those pluses in parentheses occur in less than three cases. The initial cluster /tl-/ occurs twice in Kuy Ntra, but in the other varieties, a vowel is inserted so that what could be a cluster becomes a presyllable /tə-/ before a main syllable-initial /l-/. To summarize Table 14, the possible consonant clusters occurring three or more times in the data are as follows: /pl-/, /pr-/, /bl-/, /br-/, /tr-/, /sr-/, /kl-/, /kr-/, /hl-/. (See further discussion of /hl-/ in 5.3.2.)

In regard to optional final consonants of the main syllable, (C$_3$), voiced stops /b/ and /d/ and the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ do not occur as finals in any of the varieties. In addition, in Kuy Mla, the voiceless velar stop /k/ is extremely rare in word-final position. In Kuy Mai, both the voiceless velar stop /k/ and the alveolar trill /r/ are very rare in final position of the main syllable. Kuy Ntua and Kuy Ntra therefore have 14 final consonants, Kuy Mla has 13 final consonants, and Kuy Mai has 12 final consonants.

4.6 Summary

In summary, the Kuy villages throughout Cambodia tend to be grouped by dialect. Kuy Ntra, the largest dialect, is spoken in villages in three provinces, Kampong Thom, Preah Vihear and Stueng Traeng. The second largest, Kuy Ntua, is spoken only in Preah Vihear. The third largest, Kuy Mai, is spoken only in Kracheh province. Kuy Mla is spoken in one village in northern Preah Vihear.

As presented in this chapter, the four dialects of Kuy identified in Cambodia are phonologically very similar. The syllable structures of all four dialects are identical, as well as the initial consonant inventories and the vowel inventories, while the allowable final consonant inventory varies only slightly. Kuy has 17 consonant phonemes, all of which occur in initial main syllable position in all four dialects, and 12-14 of which occur in final position of the main syllable, varying by dialect.