

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.0 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the following research questions: Where are Kuy speakers located in Cambodia? What varieties or dialects of Kuy do they speak? What are the relationships between the different varieties or dialects spoken in Cambodia? The following sections will summarize the findings in this thesis, present recommendations for improvements in methodology and areas for further study, and suggest useful application for these findings.

#### 7.1 Summary of findings

Four areas were studied in regard to the comparison of Kuy varieties in Cambodia: sociolinguistic data, lexicostatistical comparison of 100-item wordlists from twelve locations, a comparative phonological reconstruction based on a 566-item list from one location in each of the four identified dialect groupings, and comprehension testing between the two most viable dialects. Findings from each of these approaches were already discussed in the respective chapters. This section will summarize and compare these findings.

Each of the four methodological approaches seems to confirm information found in the others. For the first research question, “Where are Kuy speakers located in Cambodia?”, Kuy speakers are located in four provinces of Cambodia: Kampong Thum, Kracheh, Preah Vihear and Stueng Traeng. A list of Kuy-speaking villages in these provinces is provided in Appendix B. Sociolinguistic considerations and lexical similarity findings both indicate that, at least of the twelve villages studied in detail, all are related varieties of the Kuy language.

The second research question, “What varieties or dialects of Kuy do they speak?”, was also answered by a combination of sociolinguistic data and lexicostatistical

comparison. Four distinct dialects of Kuy were found among the varieties in Cambodia: Kuy Ntra, Kuy Ntua, Kuy Mai and Kuy Mla. The two largest of these are Kuy Ntra and Kuy Ntua, which are still in use in many villages. Kuy Mai and Kuy Mla appear to be much lower in vitality, and fluent mother tongue speakers of these dialects were difficult to find.

The final research question, “What are the relationships between the different varieties or dialects spoken in Cambodia?”, was answered by lexicostatistical comparison, comparative phonological reconstruction, and comprehension testing. The speech varieties of Kuy in Cambodia are closely related. Of the twelve locations tested, all Kuy speech varieties relate at a lexical similarity percentage of between 82% and 100%, with the higher percentages showing dialect groupings. Comprehension testing suggests that Kuy Ntua and Kuy Ntra speakers understand approximately 87% of a text in each other’s dialect. Vitality in Kuy Mai and Kuy Mla was too low for comprehension testing. Kuy Ntua and Kuy Ntra are somewhat more closely related, Kuy Mla less closely, with Kuy Mai in between.

Comparative phonological reconstruction between the four dialects of Kuy spoken in Cambodia shows that all four varieties are closely related, as there are not a large number of phonological rules. Some tentative vowel change rules are suggested but not proposed, since the understanding of register or of causal conditioning for vowel changes is not complete. Kuy Ntra and Kuy Ntua (with higher vitality) show consistent vowel correspondences, while Kuy Mai and Kuy Mla (with lower vitality) show more variation. Kuy Ntra is the most conservative, followed by Kuy Ntua and Kuy Mla, with Kuy Mai as the most innovative. This pattern is consistent even when tentative vowel change rules are included.

In reference to the vowel changes Diffloth (1982) proposed for Kuy from Proto-Katuic, it appears that the varieties of Kuy spoken in Cambodia have undergone these changes to varying degrees. Kuy Ntua most closely follows the vowel changes proposed by Diffloth for a Kuy variety in Thailand, while Kuy Ntra retains most of the Proto-Kuy forms suggested in this thesis (which are similar to

the Proto-Katuic forms identified by Diffloth). Van der Haak and Woykos (1990) observed that the Kuuy and Kuay villages in Thailand exhibit irregularities in the vowel correspondence patterns, suggesting that the Kuy varieties may form a dialect continuum. This is feasible for the varieties spoken in Cambodia as well, since Kuy Mai shares some changes with Kuy Ntua, and shares other changes with Kuy Ntra and Kuy Mla.

## **7.2 Recommendations**

Several recommendations can be drawn from the current research. Some of these recommendations involve improvements to methodology or the application of methodology in this study. Other recommendations are for further research which may provide more in-depth answers to the research questions. These recommendations are presented in this section.

### **7.2.1 Regarding methodology**

In regard to sociolinguistic research, clearer information could be collected if the questionnaires were administered in Kuy. This would allow for greater access to all members in the Kuy population, but requires training a capable Kuy speaker to administer the questionnaire. More rigorous sampling methods, such as quota sampling or ideally, random sampling could be used to give more reliable sociolinguistic results.

Methodological recommendations for comparative phonological reconstruction include deeper phonological analysis of the varieties with the assistance of native Kuy speakers. This in particular applies to the vowels and register distinctions, perhaps using rhyming charts to elicit and sort out rhyme combinations to help discover patterning. Reconstructions from other related languages would also add to the knowledge derived from comparing the present varieties.

In regard to comprehension testing, it is recommended that more experience be gained in developing and administering RTTs, to insure greater validity in results.

Having a trained Kuy assistant would aid in recognizing which subjects are not able to continue the testing, and would also help in preparation of better instructions and practice tests. Test results could then reliably reflect comprehension of the text rather than testing ability of the subject.

### 7.2.2 Regarding further research

Several additional reported locations should be visited and surveyed, to determine what Kuy varieties are spoken, and how these compare to the varieties identified in this study. Recommended locations for further data collection could include any of those listed in Appendix B which were not yet visited. More specifically, several potential villages are listed here by province. In Kracheh province: Nee (Boeng Char Commune, Sambour District), A Chen (Kampong Cham C., Sambour D.), Doung (Khsuem C., Snuol D.), and Ou Krieng commune (Sambour D.). Since no villages from Stueng Traeng province were included in the current study, the following areas should be surveyed: Anlong Chrey and Veal Daenh (Anlong Chrey C., Thala Barivat D.); all villages of Kang Cham, Chamkar Keu and Anlong Phe communes (Thala Barivat D.) and villages of Ou Mreah and Siem Bouk communes (Siem Bouk D.) (Note that in all but the first two locations listed, it is suspected that only the oldest villagers still speak Kuy.)

In Preah Vihear province, it would be desirable to visit Mlu Prey, to compare data with Levy's (1943) work. However, it was reported that Kuy is not spoken in the district center of Mlu Prey, but possibly in the more rural surrounding area. One possible location is Praeus K'ak (Mlu Prey Pir C., Chhaeb D.). Other areas which should be explored include Chrach, Thmea, S'ang and Tasu communes of Chey Saen, though it is not certain whether Kuy is still spoken in these areas.

Some reported locations in Kampong Thum province which have not yet been explored include the following: Kbith (Ngan C., Sandan D.) and some villages of Sala Visai commune (Prasat Balangk D.).

In regard to the current level of analysis of the data collected, many areas are still lacking. A deeper investigation of historical processes throughout Katuic and Mon-Khmer languages would provide a clearer interpretation of features present in Kuy, for example, with voiced stops and implosives, register, and other features.

A more thorough phonological description of each variety could also be written, looking further into some of the intricacies which were not yet understood, such as register correspondences, vowel formants, and presyllables. Some vowels were also noted to be phonetically tight or nasalized, and since these features were not addressed in this analysis, further study could be done, especially as to how these features may or may not relate to register. A few speakers of the Chranaol and Thmei varieties had more unusual diphthongization of vowels. Study could be done to determine whether this feature might be conditioned, or if in free variation, whether it is merely idiolectal or characteristic of the village as a whole. Much of this recommended analysis will require a larger data corpus and acoustic phonetic analysis.

For a broader historical perspective of the Kuy varieties in Cambodia, a lexical comparison could be done between previous wordlists collected by Dufossé (1934) and Levy (1943) and the wordlists in the current study. Further comparative study should be done comparing varieties currently spoken in Cambodia with those spoken in Thailand and Laos.

A grammatical comparison could be done, to look for patterns between varieties or help in confirming dialect groupings. A grammatical comparison was initially intended for the current study; however, it was difficult to collect data consistently, and the Khmer translation of the grammar questionnaire was not a natural translation, contributing to the collection of unnatural Kuy constructions. A careful Khmer translation and trained elicitor are essential for a useful comparison.

Additional analysis of the responses to sociolinguistic questionnaires, along with further sociolinguistic survey, including more careful sampling procedures, would provide a more accurate understanding of Kuy language vitality and language attitudes in Cambodia. Testing the level of bilingualism in Khmer among Kuy speakers would further clarify the issues of language use.

### **7.3 Applications**

A possible application of the research findings is the potential for written language development among the Kuy in Cambodia. Two trial story books in Kuy Ntua from Prame have been printed by an NGO, using a Khmer-based script. Speakers of other dialects expressed difficulty reading and understanding these story books, and the materials do not appear to be used much in Prame either. Using the findings of the current research and taking into account the sound change rules, it may be possible to create a single orthography for the Kuy speakers of Cambodia. This would allow the development of materials in a single script which would be usable for multiple Kuy dialects in Cambodia, or at least the two more viable dialects.

The data here may also help in filling out the larger picture of Katuic languages, even while it must depend on Proto-Katuic for explanation of some correspondences. Comparisons can be drawn between the data and analysis in this thesis and other Kuy varieties or closely related languages.