

## **The phenomenon of monosyllabization in the Kiengiang dialect of Khmer**

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### **1. Introduce**

Besides Cambodia , the country which uses Khmer as a national language , Khmer is spoken by a large population in Thailand and Vietnam . In Vietnam , Khmer is the language of more than six hundred thousand native Khmer people living in provinces in the Mekong delta such as Travin , Vinhlong , Soctrang , Angiang , Kiengiang , Minhhai and along the Vietnam - Cambodia border ( see appendix 1 ) . After a long process of interaction with various ethno- linguistic groups , especially the Kinh people and Chinese , The Khmer in this area of Vietnam has undergone a number of changes in pronunciation . One of the most clear changes is , especially in the Kiengiang dialect , the phenomenon of monosyllabization . This is also a common phenomenon for other polysyllabic languages in South East Asia . It is suggested that the phenomenon of monosyllabization in the Kiengiang dialect of Khmer came about as the result of the following conditions :

1.1. After a long ongoing process of interaction with the Kinh people and Chinese , various inevitable contacts occurred . One of these contacts is linguistic contact with tonal language such as Vietnamese . This contact is an important factor in the phenomenon of monosyllabization in the Kiengiang dialect . This phenomenon occurred more quickly than in other Khmer dialects such as the Khmer dialect in Cambodia .

1.2. The second condition is the principle of “ least effort “ in pronunciation . This is a common principle for the polysyllabic languages in the Southeast Asian area . This principle has had different influences on each language . We assume that this principle has strongly influenced the phenomenon of monosyllabization of Kiengiang dialect . It speeds up the occurrence of phonetic changes faster .

1.3. The third condition is the necessity of improving the means of communication in order to suit to the social development

This phenomenon has led to a number of results . One of them is the gradual fading out of polysyllabic words which are being replaced by monosyllabic words in the linguistic system . Now the word and the phoneme have become the same . The occurrence of words which contrast in pitch in the Khmer dialect of Kiengiang is also a result of this phenomenon . Monosyllabization has different influences on the language . For example , for Chamic language it is tone , for Khmer language it is pitch . There are more and more words which contrast by pitch in the Kiengiang dialect . The Kiengiang dialect has been chosen for this study because it displays these changes the most clearly as compared with other dialects such as Travin ,

Angiang ... Furthermore , data that we have collected shows that the changes in the Kiengiang dialect are representative for all Khmer dialects in Vietnam . For example , in the Travinh dialect , there are many more initial consonant clusters . Of these clusters , the nasal cluster is pronounced more clearly than in the Kiengiang dialect . There are not many words which contrast by pitch . But in the Kiengiang dialect , the initial consonant clusters are decreasing . Nasal consonants of the initial consonant clusters are pronounced slightly ; There are more and more words that contrast in pitch . The reason why the Kiengiang dialect has a lot of changes is because of the following distinct conditions : Kiengiang is an area where the Khmer people and the Kinh have interacted for a long time . They have many close relations with each other . Moreover , Kiengiang is also an area where transportation is very difficult . Therefore , the Khmer people in Kiengiang have less relationship with the other Khmer groups . These difficulties probably are important reasons create number of changes in the Kiengiang dialect . In this paper , we will consider the following changes :

- A. The phenomenon of monosyllabization .
- B . The reduction of trill initial consonant clusters of the main syllable in the pattern C1C2VC3 . In this pattern , C2 is a trill ed / r / .
- C. The shift from trill consonant / r / to fricative glottal / h / ( R > H )
- D. The occurrence of pitch in the dialect of Kiengiang Khmer ( the linguistic data shows contrast by pitch as a result of the phonetic changes in the Kiengiang dialect )

1.4. Characteristic of Khmer consonants consists of 21 initial consonants , there are four aspirate consonants . All can occur as initial consonants and 12 as final consonants ( based on Khmer in Kiengiang ) . The final consonants will be indicated by the bold and italic characters in the table below .

	bilabial	Alveolar	palatal	velar	Glottal
Stops vl	<b><i>p</i></b>	<b><i>t</i></b>	<b><i>c</i></b>	<b><i>k</i></b>	?
asp	ph	th	ch	kh	
vd	b	d			
Fricatives		s			<b><i>h</i></b>
Nasals	<b><i>m</i></b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b><i>ɲ</i></b>	<b><i>ŋ</i></b>	
Lateral		<b><i>l</i></b>			
Trill		r			
Semi-vowels	<b><i>w</i></b>		<b><i>y</i></b>		

Among these initial consonants , initial aspirative consonants are different from Khmer in Cambodia . In Cambodian Khmer , there are no initial aspirated consonants . The aspirated consonants are pronounced clearly in areas such as Travinh , Minhhai , Vinhlong and they contrast with the unaspirated stops . But these consonants have been pronounced slightly in Kiengiang and Soctrang dialect . It is suggested that aspirated consonants are changing to unaspirated consonants .

1.5. Data collection . In order to prepare this study , we have had to collect from the field . A list of 1360 words have been used for this research . However , not all of the words have been used in this study . The subjects were from Kiengiang province . We also have collected data in other provinces such as Travinh , Vinhlong , Minhhai in order to compare with the Kiengiang dialect . The subjects vary in age , sex and education . They have lived in the area since they were born and they use Khmer in their daily life . All of them are fluent native speakers in these dialects , while only some others are literate in Khmer . The subjects were asked to pronounce each word in the wordlist . The data that we collected shows the phenomenon of monosyllabization has taken place for young people . It seems that the phonetic changes have taken place more significantly in the language of people who are under 30 years old .

1.6. The dialect of Khmer in Vietnam has not been studied by many linguists . This research contains only the first steps in studying this dialect . Therefore , it is probably that there are some instances of mis-analysis . There are still many interesting matters that have not been researched . We hope that these matters will be studied in the future . The term “ standard “ that is used in this paper refers to modern Khmer orthography which is generally considered the base for standard pronunciation of Khmer . The standard pronunciation here refers to the variety of Khmer that is taught in school and spoken by educated Khmer especially in their careful speech . Comparision between modern Khmer orthography and standard Khmer pronunciation as presented in the Khmer - Viet dictionary of Hoang Hoc ( 1979 ) .

## 2. Phenomenon of monosyllabization .

2.1. Syllabic pattern : There are two kinds of syllables : Pre-syllable and mainsyllable . In the dialect of Khmer in Vietnam , main syllable consists of four elements : initial consonant - medial - vowel - final consonant . The full syllable pattern will be C ( C1C2 ) SVC3 . A Presyllable consists of three factors : initial consonants - vowel - final consonant . The full syllabic pattern will be : C'(C'1C'2)V'C3 . There are two kinds of presyllables . These are open presyllables and closed presyllables . The final consonant of a closed pre-syllable is one of four nasal consonants / m / , / n / , / ɲ / , / ŋ / . The presyllable usually does not display the complete pattern . Nowadays , there are only a few people who pronounce the full presyllable . Most of the presyllables now only contain one or two factors . Therefore , monosyllabization is an active and common phenomenon in the Khmer dialect in Vietnam , especially for young people . There are a number of initial consonant clusters as the result of this process . The phonemes of consonant clusters combine with each other according to the following rules :

2.1.a. In the pattern C1C2SVC3 , the voiced consonants do not occur in the C1 position ; In the C1 position , a fricative voiced consonant does not combine with other consonants .

2.1.b. In the C1 position, nasal consonants combine with only other consonants that have the same place of articulation.

2.1.c. There are not more than two elements in an initial consonant cluster of a main syllable. There are some consonant clusters which consist of three elements. These are the nasal consonant clusters. Nowadays, the nasal consonants have been reduced and it probably will be reduced completely in the syllable, but the meaning will not change. This phenomenon can be seen very clearly in Kiengiang dialect

The process of monosyllabization takes place according to the three main following tendencies:

2.2. The first tendency: Initial nasal consonant clusters of main syllable. These are the result of monosyllabization. In the Khmer language, there are number of pre-syllables having final nasal consonants. In the process of monosyllabization, initial consonants and main vowels are reduced. The final nasal consonants combine with the initial consonants of the main syllable that have the same place of articulation. It creates initial nasal consonant clusters. This phenomenon takes place variety in the dialects. The data that we collected showed that this phenomenon took place according to three main following tendencies:

2.2.1. The nasal consonant clusters consist of three elements. Appearance of these consonant clusters has broken the rule that a consonant cluster can only have two elements. The syllable pattern must be C(C1C2C3)SVC4. In this pattern, C1 is nasal consonant, C3 is trill consonant. However, the nasal consonants are only recognized when they are pronounced very clearly, slowly and carefully. We assume that reduction of nasal consonants is a phenomenon more suited to the pronunciation of Khmer dialect in Vietnam, especially in the Kiengiang dialect. Therefore, the full pattern of a main syllable will be C1C2SVC3. We hypothesize a three-stages change as follows:

standard	KG dialect			
	1	2	3	
cincra:m	ncra:m	?cra:m	cra:m	to chop
congkra:n	nkra:n	?kra:n	kra:n	kitchen

2.2.2. The nasal consonant clusters consist of two elements. In the pattern C1C2SVC3, C1 is a nasal consonant and C2 are consonants which have the same place of articulation. This process takes place according to the two following tendencies:

2.2.2.1. final nasal of pre-syllable combines with initial consonant of main syllable which have the same place of articulation. This process takes place as in the following examples (for more example, see appendix 3)

standard	KG dialect	gloss
thumphia	mphia	to sew
banthup	nthup	room