A note on colloquial Phnom Penh Khmer
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Noss (1968:95) and Huffman (1967:248) both noted
that the colloquial Khmer in Phnom Penh prominently had
undergone an \( r > h \) shift accompanied by a low rising pitch.
Noss emphasised the exceptionlessness of the shift; i.e. all
standard syllable-initial /r/ had undergone both an \( r > h \) shift
and the emergence of a rising pitch. This was the hallmark
of Phnom Penh speech before 1975.

1. Dialect spread

Huffman also noted that the Phnom Penh shift had
spread through Kandal province surrounding Phnom Penh
and to some provincial capitals, notably Kampong Cham.
This bears witness to the growing social importance of
Phnom Penh.

In 1975 the Khmer Rouge killed or drove out the
inhabitants of Phnom Penh, scattering the survivors across
the country. A Phnom Penh accent became a potentially
deadly liability rather than an asset.

Upon the eviction of the Khmer Rouge regime in
1979 and the establishment of Phnom Penh hundreds of
thousand of Khmer, including many of its former
inhabitants, flocked into the city, revitalising the city as a
centre of prestige. The former Phnom Penh dialects, with its
\( r > h \) shift and low rising pitch, also reestablished itself,
though mixed with the speech of new inhabitants from other
provinces. Many provincial dialects may be heard
unchanged in Phnom Penh.

At the same time traces of Phnom Penh speech have
begun to become popular in some of the other provinces.

A recent linguistic survey in Phnom Penh
(November 1998—January 1999) shows that the \( r > h \) shift
is more widespread among pre-1975 residents of Phnom
Penh than among the newer arrivals. But it also showed that
even among pre-1975 residents the $r > h$ shift is no longer exceptionless; exceptions to the rule may be heard.

2. Linguistic characteristics

2.1. Falling rising pitch with out /h/ shift

The following falling rising pitch is sometimes heard on /r/-/ words that did not shift to /h/, especially among younger people. For instance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Phnom Penh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ຜານ.ເຊ ມຸ້າຍ.ເຣ ທານ.ເຣ ທານ.ເຣ</td>
<td>ຜານ.ເຊ ມຸ້າຍ.ເຣ ທານ.ເຣ ທານ.ເຣ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ຜານ.ເຊ ມຸ້າຍ.ເຣ ທານ.ເຣ</td>
<td>'pestle'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ມຸ້າຍ.ເຣ ທານ.ເຣ</td>
<td>ນັງ.ັ່ງ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ທານ.ເຣ</td>
<td>'hundred'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ທານ.ເຣ</td>
<td>'cigarette'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ທານ.ເຣ</td>
<td>ທານ.ເຣ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ທານ.ເຣ</td>
<td>'to teach'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Monophongisation of diphthongs

There is occasional monophongisation of a vowel after /r-/. For instance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Phnom Penh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ວາເຣ</td>
<td>ວາເຣ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ວາເຣ</td>
<td>'paddy field'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ຝານ</td>
<td>ຝານ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ຝານ</td>
<td>'to use'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ໄາອ</td>
<td>ໄາອ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ໄາອ</td>
<td>'after, behind'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Diphongisation of monophongs

There are some cases of diphongisation of a vowel after /r-/. The $a > ia$ diphongisation occurs only after /r/, though in neighbouring Kandal province the $a > ia$ shift is not so restricted. (A similar $a > ia$ shift is reported by Crowley (1998: 47) for the Kairiru language spoken near Wewak in Papua New Guinea.)
### Standard | Phnom Penh
---|---
krah | kʰňah | ‘thick’
praŋ | phïiaŋ | ‘hot season’
traaw | thïiaw | ‘eggplant’
kräː | khũuaŋ | ‘poor’
traŋ | thũuaŋ | ‘straight’

### 3. Some Phnom Penh influences upcountry

It has also been observed that other provinces have now also adopted the \( r > h \) shift plus falling-rising pitch, such as in Takeo, Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Thom, Kratie, and others, presumably under the influence of Phnom Penh. The village of Lowea-am near Phnom Penh has adopted many Phnom Penh features.

### Standard | Kratie
---|---
pram | phãaam | ‘five’
koŋ.traa | koŋ.thaña | ‘contact’
craan | chaan | ‘to push’
sraal | sãal | ‘lightweight’

And in some of these areas the \( r > h \) shift does not have the accompanying falling-rising pitch. For instance:

### Standard | Kampong Cham
---|---
rṳŋ | huuŋ | ‘five’
kree | khër | ‘bed’

### Standard | Kratie
---|---
sam.raam | sam.haam | ‘rubbish’

In some cases, vowels may be altered.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Lowea-am</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kan.teel</td>
<td>ktæ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?aŋ.ree</td>
<td>nhëe^i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tray</td>
<td>thëey^i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proh</td>
<td>phaoh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?oh</td>
<td>?uæh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daæm</td>
<td>daen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thaæp</td>
<td>thaem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiæ</td>
<td>teiæ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and many others.

4. Range of variation

Some examples may help to show the range of variation found in colloquial Phnom Penh speech.

**Standard** baa.raŋ  
'French'
Phnom Penh:
baa.raŋ, baa.raŋ, baa.lan, baaræŋ, pæ раŋ, pæ.rianŋ,
pa раŋ, pa раŋ, pæ.hïan, praŋ, phïian, phëe^iŋ

**Standard** baa.rey  
'cigarette'
Phnom Penh:
pæ ray, pæ.hëy, pa ray, pa ray, pa rëy, pa höy, prøy,
play, pay, phëy, phay

**Standard** ban.riïen  
'to teach'
Phnom Penh:
ban.riïen, ban.riïen, ban.liïen, ban.hïïen, ban.hïian,
pæ.riïen, pæ.hïïen, pæ.riïen, pæ.riïen, pæ.riïen,
pæ.riïen, pæ.liïen, pæ.hïïen, hïïen

**Standard** bam.rae  
'to serve'
Phnom Penh:
bam.rae, bam.ree, bam.ræe, bam.læe, bam.læe, ban.ree,
ban.lee, ben.ree, ban.hæe, pæn.łae, pæn.łae, pæn.hee,
pæn.hæe, phëe