

Cambodian Caretaker Speech and Teaching Routines
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Introduction Language teaching methodology such as the Natural Approach of Krashen and Terrell is primarily based on research on the linguistic and social environment of middle class American children learning English. Many teachers of Southeast Asian children in America wonder whether the linguistic environment and the socialization process of Southeast Asian children matches that of these Americans, and, if not, what implications this has for language teaching methodology. Early studies of the talk directed at children in middle class American homes indicated that this talk (often called "baby talk", "motherese", and most recently, "caretaker speech") had several features, some of which researchers felt might facilitate language learning. These features included: reductions and simplifications in the phonological structure of a word; repetitions, expansions, and use of short utterances; limiting topics to the here-and-now; and use of a high proportion of questions and commands. (See Ferguson 1964, Snow and Ferguson 1977). Ferguson (1964) showed that this particular language register was found in cultures throughout the world, and later he indicated that this simplified register is also used when native speakers of one language speak to second language learners (Snow and Ferguson 1977). Subsequently, however, the universal nature of this simplified speech register was called into question in studies such as those by Heath (1983), Ochs (1988), and Schieffelin (1990).

Methodology This paper reports on the findings of a longitudinal study of the linguistic and socializing environment of two Cambodian children who, although born in America, have been raised in a Cambodian language environment. The Cambodian children chosen for the study are the first-born children, one boy and one girl, of two middle-class Cambodian couples. The parents of the girl received a university education in Cambodia, and the parents of the boy are finishing their college education in the United States. All of the parents are working, are literate in English and Cambodian, and have made a conscious decision to create a primarily Cambodian language environment for their children. Thus, for example, when they are at work, they have managed to have their children taken care of by Cambodian caretakers, in the one case a baby-sitter and in the other case a grandparent. To do this study, the Cambodian

parents have agreed to become co-researchers. Approximately every two weeks, they have videotaped their children in everyday routines and interactions with themselves (the parents) and others, in the case of the girl since the day she was brought home from the hospital and in the case of the boy since around his second birthday. The parents have helped in the Cambodian transcription of the interactions. The videotapes have been shared with other Cambodian parents and have, thus, helped instigate further discussions on parenting, on differences in child-rearing among Cambodians, and differences in interactions between parents and their children.

Results The results of the study of the socializing and linguistic environment of these two children and the discussions carried on with other Cambodian parents indicate that (1) there is a Cambodian baby talk or caretaker register which Cambodian caretakers use with prelinguistic children. It has many of the characteristics that I have mentioned above. I will say more about this later. (2) Whereas Cambodian caretaker speech seems to be very much alike across Cambodian households, the routines which Cambodian parents engage their children in differ from household to household. I shall say more about this below also. (3) Whereas Cambodian children are often engaged in dyadic conversations with their caretakers, most Cambodian children become part of households which contain many family members. It is not unusual to find children living with parents, uncles, aunts, or grandparents. It is often the case that a young couple will move into a house or an apartment with the mother's parents. Thus, the first child of that young couple will be surrounded by the parents and grandparents along with uncles and aunts, many of whom are still in elementary school. Cambodian children are never left alone. Typically, they sleep with their parents. They are accompanied from the moment they get up in the morning to the moment they go to bed at night. Even if they go to bed early, they are not alone. Someone will stay with them until they fall asleep. When Cambodian children are held or when they are being fed solid food, they are positioned so as to face the group. Furthermore, Cambodian babies are not left crying. When they cry, they are immediately picked up and attended to. If they are fussing, their attention is distracted. If they cannot be immediately soothed, someone will pick them up and carry them out of the room, distracting them or tending to their needs. As they get older, fussing is laughed at or ignored by the parents. Older children in the vicinity are expected to remove and attend to a fussing child. Thus,

Cambodian children are socialized to be members of a group and to be dependent on that group for their needs.

Routines By routines, I mean those interactions which caretakers repeatedly engage their child in, routines such as mealtime routines and bedtime routines. The nature of these interactions, the number and type of routines, and the length and participants involved appear to differ from household to household. For example, whereas in every household, parents engage in a mealtime routine with their toddler, the nature of the routine,—whether the toddler eats with the family sitting at the table, whether the toddler is made to sit upon a mat in a particular position and expected to stay there, or whether the child is allowed to wander about while eating—differs from household to household. What particularly interested me in the households of the two Cambodian children I have been observing is the teaching routines which the parents in these two households engage their children in. These routines appear to be directly related to the role expectations that these Cambodian parents have for their children. Thus, for example, in the routines I have chosen for this paper, the routines I call "Putting things away" and "Nurturing," the Cambodian mother is teaching her daughter the role of child-caretaker and mother's helper in the house. This is the role that the eldest daughter usually assumes in a Cambodian household, helping her mother both to take care of the younger children and take care of the house. These routines were begun as soon as the child began to respond to her mother's commands, shortly after her first birthday. The mother and father of the boy have not been engaging their son in these routines. When they saw the tapes of the girl's mother teaching her child in the nurturing and putting things away routines, they commented on the fact that these routines would be for a daughter. The parents of the boy are both involved in education, the father studying to be a teacher of mathematics and the mother working as an aide in the school system. Their expectations for their son are for him to be a good student. It is not surprising then that the teaching routines that these parents engage their son in are educational routines such as putting the letters of the alphabet in order and correctly saying each letter. (The interactions occur in Cambodian, but the letters may be from the English alphabet or from the Cambodian alphabet.) For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen three routines to serve as examples of Cambodian parent-child interaction. All of these routines were taken from the videotapes filmed by the father of the girl, however, the

language on the tape, the caretaker register, is very similar in both the household of the girl and the boy. Table 1 indicates the routines I have chosen and the age of the child at the time these routines were taped.

Table 1. Routines

Nurturing	1;1year
Bedtime	1;1year
Putting things away	1;3years

Characteristics of Cambodian Baby Talk From the very beginning Cambodian parents talk to their children, responding to their child's movements, noises and facial expressions as if they were legitimate turns-at-talk. Mothers may respond to their child's gurgles, smiles and expressive jargon with *nuṃhəəy* "That's right!" *ʔə:mec* "What did you say?" and *ʔə:mɔɔɲtiət* "Say that again." Examples of this occur in the nurturing routine in Table 2 below. This interaction takes place just before the child is put to bed. While her mother is heating her baby bottle, the child has wandered into the living room and sits down next to her teddy bear. She lays the bear on the carpet and covers it with a small blanket. At this point the mother responds to the child's actions and to her expressive jargon (which I have not included in the table but which occurs throughout).

Table 2. Nurturing routine

See the following page.

The child's expressive jargon at this stage is quite tuneful. It sounds like language but not necessarily like Cambodian. Regardless of the fact that the child's babbling is clearly not interpretable, the mother responds to this jargon with "That's right." (Line 20, Table 2) and "uh huh" (as in lines 18, 19, and 26 in Table 2).

The nurturing routine also exemplifies another characteristic of Cambodian baby talk: parents prefer to refer to their children by a word indicating their role relationships rather than by name. Thus, Cambodians refer to their children as "child" [*kɔɔn*], "younger-one" [*ɔɔn*], and the "last one" [*pɔɔu*]. These are sometimes modified as, for example, with a diminutive such as [*æŋ*]. In the nurturing routine, the mother teaches her child to call the baby by the term "younger-one" [*ɔɔn*] which the child will, in turn, use to refer to her younger siblings when they are born. The preference for terms which label role relationships also holds for adults referring to other

Table 2. Nurturing routine

Cambodian	Morpheme by morpheme translation	English Gloss
1. on ʔe:ŋ haəy kɔ:n	little-one sleep already child	Is the baby sleeping, child?
2. on bear ke:ŋ haəy hv:	little-one bear sleep already huh	Is the little bear sleeping, huh?
3. mpe: ʔɔ:n pʰɔ:ŋ	lull little-one too	Sing a lullaby to the baby, too.
4. pe: ʔɔ:n bear pʰɔ:ŋ	lull little-one bear too	Sing a lullaby to the baby bear, too.
5. hv:	huh	Huh?
6. pe: ʔɔ:n pʰɔ:ŋ	lull little-one too	Sing a lullaby to the baby, too.
7. kueh ʔɔ:n pʰɔ:ŋ	pat little-one too	Pat the baby, too.
8. kueh aoy ʔɔ:n ʔe:ŋ	pat make little-one sleep	Pat so that the baby will sleep.
9. kueh aoy ʔɔ:n bear ʔe:ŋ	pat make little-one bear sleep	Pat so that the baby bear will sleep.
10. v:	huh	Uh/huh.
11. kueh	pat	Pat.
12. kueh	pat	Pat.
13. kueh tvu	pat go-ahead	Pat, why don't you
14. kueh haəy pe: pʰɔ:ŋ	pat and lull too	Pat and sing a lullaby, too.
15. ʔv: ʔv: ʔv: kɔ:n na:	la la la child softener	Go "la la la" child.
16. pe: ʔɔ:n bear pʰɔ:ŋ na:	lull little-one bear too softener	Sing a lullaby to the little bear, too.
17. ʔa: ʔv: ʔa: ʔv: tvu kɔ:n na:	la la la go-ahead child softener	Go "la la la" child.
18. ʔv:	uhhuh	That's right!
19. ʔv: hv	uhhuh	Uh/huh!
20. nuŋ haəy	that's right	That's right.
21. vie ke:ŋ haəy kɔ:n na:	it sleep already child softener	The bear's sleeping, child.
22. ke:ŋ haəy	sleep already	It's asleep already.
23. kɔ:n bear vie ke:ŋ nv:	child bear it sleep or-not	Is the baby bear sleeping?
24. ke:ŋ haəy	sleep already	It's asleep already.
25. kɔ:n bear ke:ŋ haəy hv:	child bear sleep already huh	Is the baby bear sleeping? Huh?
26. ʔa ha:	uhhuh	Uh/huh.
27. mpe: pʰɔ:ŋ	lull too	Sing a lullaby, too.

adults. It is not surprising that children call their teacher by the term "teacher". So do their parents. Indeed, Cambodian teachers refer to themselves as "Mr. Teacher" or "Madame Teacher" rather than by a pronoun or a personal name, e.g., "Mr. Teacher will call the role now."

The here-and-now nature of the topics found in Cambodian baby talk can also be seen in the nurturing routine: the mother is talking about what the child is doing right at that moment with an object that the child is focusing on (the bear). Notice, too, that the mother has accepted the pretend play of the child. Throughout the tapes of this child there are examples of the mother encouraging her child to carry out some pretend play, e.g., filling up a basket and "going to market", rocking and singing a lullaby to a child (stuffed bear) lying in a hammock strung across a staircase. Almost all the pretend play that we have observed the mother encouraging the child to do is related to the role that the oldest daughter in a Cambodian family will play ("going to market" and "nurturing a child" are typical examples but so for this family is "reading a book", the role of a student). Cambodian parents tell their child what to say and sometimes they talk for the child. In the nurturing routine, the mother tells the child exactly how to soothe the little baby (bear) while patting it on its back. She tells her to sing and provides the melody (which I indicate with "la la la"):

1. *ʔʔʔʔʔʔkoɲnaː*
(sounds) child softener
(Sing) la la la, child.
2. *ʔaːʔʔ ʔaːʔʔʔʔʔʔkoɲnaː*
(sounds) go child softener
Go ahead (and sing) la la la, child.

This, telling the child what to say, is also exemplified in the next routine, the bedtime routine found in Table 3. This event occurred just after the previous routine. The mother walks into the living room where the child is playing with the bear and picks her up. She then carries her over to her father and teaches her daughter how she should say good night to her father. Finally she carries her out of the room and up to bed.

Table 3. The Bedtime Routine
See the following page.

In this routine the mother both tells the child what to say and talks for the child. In line 13, the mother says:

Table 3. The Bedtime Routine

	Mother's Talk	Translation	English Gloss
1.	Good night, daddy.		Good night, daddy.
2.	Good night, bear.		Good night, bear.
3.	Good night, daddy.		Good night, daddy.
4.	po:n	Press your hands together	Press your hands together
5.	po:n	Press your hands together	Press your hands together
6.	Good night		Good night.
7.	Good night.		Good night.
8.	Good night		Good night.
9.	po:n mo:ʔ	Press your hands together come	Come on and press your hands together.
10.	cu:mɹəp ʔə	say good night	Good night.
11.	cu:mɹəp həy	say already	Good night now.
12.	ʔru ke:p həy	go sleep already	I'm going to bed now.
13.	əy:ə: əy:ə:	(sound)	oops
14.	bye bye		bye bye
15.	ʔə: bye bye	say bye bye	bye bye
16.	bye bye		bye bye
17.	ʔru ke:p həy	go sleep already	I'm going to bed now.
18.	bye bye		bye bye
19.	ʔɹɹp ʔɹɹp	kiss kiss	Kiss kiss
20.	ʔɹɹp pə: muəy	kiss pa one	Give father a kiss.
21.	ʔru ke:p	go sleep	(I'm) going to bed
22.	lo:ʔ pə: muəy mo:ʔ	mister pa one come	Father, give me one.
23.	ʔru ke:p	go sleep	(I'm) going to bed.
24.	bye bye		bye bye
25.	bye bye		bye bye
26.	bye bye		bye bye
27.	po:n mo:ʔ	press your hands together come	Come on and press your hands together.
28.	po:n po:n	press press	Press, press
29.	po:n pə:	press father	Press them together for your father.
30.	po:n pə:	press father	Press them together for your father.

3. ʔa:bye bye
say bye bye

Then she demonstrates, changing the pitch of her voice to a higher "baby" pitch with a greater pitch range and says for the baby:

4. bye bye ʔyukeŋhaəy
bye bye go sleep completive
bye bye (I'm) going to bed now

This talking for the baby, or modeling, occurs often in Cambodian baby talk routines. Another example of it occurs in this routine when the mother demonstrates the more formal language found in Cambodian leave-taking, language often accompanying the polite greeting and leave-taking gesture of pressing one's hands together in a fashion similar to what Westerners do at church while praying. The adult word for this gesture in Cambodian is *sompɛəh* but the baby talk equivalent which the mother uses in this routine is *poŋ*. Thus, the mother tells her child to *poŋ*, pressing her daughter's hands together to demonstrate, and then speaks for her, using the formal word *cumriep* "say" in this, the more formal and formulaic, leave-taking expression. She says:

5. *cumriep liə*
say goodbye
"Good bye"
cumriep haəy
say completive
"Good bye"
ʔyukeŋhaəy
go sleep completive
(I'm) going to bed now.

Another indication of formality in this routine is the mother's use of the title *lo:k* which is often translated into English as "Mister". Here the mother appends it to the word she is using for father, *paa* French borrowing:

6. *lo:ŋpa:muəy mo:ʔ*
Mister father one come
Father, give me one. (a kiss)

It has been said that greetings and leave-takings are often the site for formality and pleasantries because in these occasions human relationships are in the most danger of breaking. It is certainly the case that for Cambodians proper behavior and the proper use of language on these occasions are extremely important because it is there where one Cambodian value is clearly demonstrated, the importance of respect and of recognition of social hierarchy. Indeed, children who do not know how to greet properly are

considered "uneducated" and lacking "respect". It is therefore not surprising that mothers teach children these routines, simultaneously teaching proper language and respect for one's father and one's elders. If this child later goes on to a Cambodian language school, the proper greeting and leave-taking formulas will be stressed again. (See Longmire 1992)

Not all routines between parents and small children in Cambodian households in America have this much English in them. The parents of this child, like many Cambodian parents, want their child to learn Cambodian and try to speak to their child as much as possible in Cambodian. What I have found is that when English does appear in these Cambodian routines, it appears in greetings, leave-takings, labels and exclamations. Naturally, living in America, Cambodians are exposed to the formulas found in greetings, leave-takings and exclamations quite frequently. These are often learned even when no other English is learned. They often become almost automatic. Cambodian children participate in greetings and leave-takings everyday. They are greeted by English speakers who come to the house and whom they meet when they go with their parents to the market, the hospital or other houses. Thus, one could argue that not only does English appear in routines like the bedtime routine because the parents have assimilated the formulas in these routines to the point where the use of English in them has become automatic, but also because the child must eventually use the English in these routines on their own and thus the parents teach it. As for labels, these especially appear as references to items found in the U.S. and not in Cambodia. Thus, English terms are often used for toys, e.g., "bear" for a Teddy bear instead of the Cambodian *kle:kmun* "honey bear". English words are also given as labels for animals and characters in English story books, although these English labels are elicited with Cambodian questions or presented within a Cambodian phrase.

Another characteristic of Cambodian baby talk illustrated in Table 2 and Table 3 is the kind of reduction found in baby talk words: for 'lull' or 'sing a lullaby' the adult word [*bəmpeh*] becomes [*mpɛz*] or [*pɛz*], 'sleep' [*keɔŋ*] becomes [*ɲeɔŋ*]. Cambodians reduce and sometimes omit the first syllable of a two-syllable word. They simplify initial consonant clusters, and sometimes devoice these initial voiced consonants. The changes Cambodians make in Cambodian baby talk are similar to sound changes that are occurring in the Cambodian language or that are found in informal or unmonitored speech, e.g., deletion of the first syllable, reduction of initial consonant

clusters, devoicing of [b] or [d]. Further examples of baby talk words can be found in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Baby Talk Words

Adult Word	Baby Talk Word	
kiss	tʰaəp	ʔəp
nose	crəməh	moh
tooth	tʰmɛp	mɛp
book	siəvpʰy	pɻu
blanket	pʰuəy	puəy
hot	kʰau	tau
hand	ʰay	tay
flower	pʰkaː	kaː
eat	nam	ʔam-ham
rice	ʰay	pa:y

Three important Cambodian baby talk characteristics, exemplified in the previous routines, but also perhaps more so in the following "Putting things away" routine, are the characteristics: high frequency of repetition, use of commands, and use of short utterances. In the "Putting Things Away" routine, the mother first holds out a magnet-sticker that is used for holding messages to the refrigerator door, and she tells her daughter to take it and put it on the refrigerator. When her daughter manages at last to do this, she then has her take her shoes and put them away in a cupboard.

Table 5. The Putting Away Things Routine
See the following page.

Within the first twelve lines on Table 5, constituting the entire text of the "put the sticker on the refrigerator" instructions, the verbs were repeated as follows: ʔoːʔ "take," three times; ʰyʰt "stick," six times; ʰaːʔ "put," two times; tɻu "go," four times. The noun tuːtuːʔkoːʔ "refrigerator" was repeated six times. Eight of those twelve lines were commands. Notice also that teaching routines often end with congratulations (e.g., shouts of "yeah" and hand clapping by the caretakers) along with the caretakers helping or encouraging the child to clap hands also.

Several characteristics of grammar of Cambodian which may interest teachers can also be seen in the teaching routines I have presented here. For example, there is the use of topic plus comment sentence structure as opposed to the subject plus predicate structure of English sentences. Not all Cambodian

Table 5. The Putting Away Things Routine

Cambodian	Morpheme by morpheme translation	English Gloss
1. យ៉ា នេវ៉ា នូ	take come here	Come and take this;
2. ត្រូវ ទៅ ត្រូវ កែវ យ៉ា កែវ	go put refrigerator back child	Put it back on the refrigerator, child.
3. យ៉ា ត្រូវ ទៅ ត្រូវ កែវ	take go put refrigerator	Take it and put it on the refrigerator.
4. ត្រូវ ប្រយ័ត្ន: ត្រូវ កែវ	go place-against on refrigerator	Go stick it on the refrigerator.
5. យ៉ា ប្រយ័ត្ន	take place-against	Take it and stick it.
6. ប្រយ័ត្ន: ត្រូវ កែវ នេវ៉ា កែវ នេវ៉ា	go place-against on refrigerator softener child softener	Stick it on the refrigerator, child.
7. ត្រូវ ប្រយ័ត្ន: ត្រូវ កែវ នេវ៉ា កែវ នេវ៉ា	go place-against on refrigerator softener child softener	Go stick it on the refrigerator, child.
8. ត្រូវ កែវ	refrigerator	The refrigerator.
9. ប្រយ័ត្ន ចៀប ចៀប	place-against stick polite-and-question-marker	Did you stick it on?
10. ឧ: អេ	uh huh	Uh huh.
11. ប្រយ័ត្ន ចៀប	place-against then	You've stuck it on then.
12. យេ: យេ: យេ: យេ:	yea clap hand yea	Yea, Clap your hands. Yea.
13. កែវ យ៉ា ប្រយ័ត្ន ចៀប ត្រូវ ត្រូវ កែវ ត្រូវ	child take shoe go put-away in cupboard	Child, Go take the shoes and put them in the cupboard.
14. ប្រយ័ត្ន ចៀប ប្រយ័ត្ន អេ	shoe last-one st.	Your shoes.
15. កែវ កែវ ប្រយ័ត្ន ចៀប អេ ប្រយ័ត្ន	here here shoe complete-then	Here! Here! These shoes.
16. កែវ	here	Here!
17. យ៉ា ប្រយ័ត្ន ចៀប ត្រូវ ត្រូវ	take shoe go put-away	Take the shoes and go put them away.
18. ប្រយ័ត្ន ចៀប ត្រូវ កែវ ត្រូវ	shoe put-away in cupboard	Put the shoes away in the cupboard.
19. ត្រូវ ត្រូវ	put-away cupboard	Put them away in the cupboard.
20. កែវ ត្រូវ	in cupboard	In the cupboard.
21. អេ	[exclamation]	Ah!
22. ឧ	let's-go	Let's go.
23. យ៉ា យ៉ា យ៉ា យ៉ា	take together two	Take both of them.
24. យ៉ា យ៉ា យ៉ា យ៉ា	take together two	Take both of them.
25. យ៉ា យ៉ា យ៉ា យ៉ា	take together two	Take both of them.
26. កែវ កែវ ត្រូវ កែវ	be-in in cupboard child	They stay in the cupboard, child.
27. កែវ កែវ ត្រូវ ត្រូវ	child in cupboard	Child, In the cupboard
28. ត្រូវ	cupboard	The cupboard.
29. ប្រយ័ត្ន ចៀប	shoe	The shoes.

sentences will have this topic-comment structure, because the topic may be omitted if it is understood or was previously mentioned. An example of a sentence using topic-comment structure is:

7. *koʒn beaʀ viə keʒnɿ*
 child bear it sleep or-not
 Is the baby bear sleeping?

The topic is "baby bear" and the comment is the question, "Is it sleeping?" It is also not unusual to have subject-less comments. Thus, not only are the subjects missing in the commands, but they are also missing in sentences like the following:

8. *keʒhaəy*
 sleep already
 It's asleep already.

Cambodian adjectives follow the nouns rather than precede them. Thus, for example, in the following, where the mother is using the term "last-one" to refer to her child (i.e., she is/will be the last child the mother will have), she puts this modifier after the head noun.

9. *sbaʏʔcəʒpʉu*
 shoes last-one
 "your shoes"

Cambodian does not have suffixes. Furthermore, there is no requirement that each noun be marked, as it is for English countable nouns, as to whether it is plural or singular. Cambodian has no past tense, although it has perfective and completive markers (words that are inserted in the sentences to mark these concepts when the speaker wishes). Finally, Cambodian words are often created by compounding. In the teaching routines presented, for example, the word *tʉʔtʉʔkəʒ* "refrigerator" is made up of the words *tʉ* "cabinet," *tʉʔ* "water," and *kəʒ* "cold" (i.e., "cold water cabinet"). This is also another example of the fact that in Cambodian modifiers follow the head noun. In example eight above, the word "shoes" is actually a noun compound made up of the words *sbaʏʔ* "leather" and *cəʒ* "foot" or "leg" or "foot leather" where again the modifier follows the head noun.

Conclusion. I began this paper by mentioning that language teaching methodology in the United States is primarily based on research into the linguistic environment of middle class American children, and that recent research into the linguistic environment of other children sheds doubt on the universal nature of this environment. What I have found in my research is that for some Cambodian children, at least, the linguistic environment does resemble that of American children. Thus, for

example, language teaching methodology which encourages teachers to use commands, short utterances, and repetitions matches the first language environment of these children. Furthermore, for Cambodian children, a methodology which encourages group work would also match the home environment of these children. As someone who learned Cambodian in a traditional foreign language classroom and subsequently spent hours in the homes of Cambodians, listening to them speaking to their children, I can tell you that I envied the children. Their parents were constantly encouraging. The short utterances, constant repetition, relationship of their talk to the activities presently taking place and the objects near at hand created an ideal language learning environment.

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