

# LANGUAGE PLANNING AND LANGUAGE POLICY OF CAMBODIA

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The people of Cambodia called themselves Khmer and referred to their language as /phi:esaakhmae/<sup>1</sup> or simply Khmer. Khmer is one of the most important members of the Mon-Khmer group of the Austro-Asiatic family of languages. The number of speakers as of the 1970s was over 7,000,000 in Cambodia, in the Mekong Delta region of South Vietnam, in the Thai provinces bordering Cambodia and in lower Laos.

Khmer is a language with a literary tradition dating at least from the early 7th century. It was attested in the early Khmer inscriptions at Ak Yom in 609 AD, Angkor Borey in 611 AD and Prasat Toch in 620 AD. But the most important one was the inscription of Kdei Ang Chumnik with 12 lines in archaic Khmer dated 629 AD. The historical periods of Khmer may be divided into three main parts: Old Khmer, Middle Khmer and Modern Khmer. In this paper, the most recent part of the development of Modern Khmer is dealt with. It covers the period from the French occupation of Cambodia to the present.

Indian influence is apparent in the vocabulary of Khmer. Native Khmer words are either monosyllabic or disyllabic. Words referring to literature, administration, royalty, religion and specific subjects in the field of education are mostly borrowed from Pali and Sanskrit. From the 7th century AD to the heyday of Angkor, Khmer and Sanskrit existed side by side. They were the languages of stone inscriptions. From the 13th century, Pali took the place of Sanskrit following the spread of Theravada Buddhism.

For two centuries from the time of ransacking of the capital city of Angkor in the 14th century AD, and the capital city of Longvek in the late 16th century AD by the Thai, Khmer was in the darkest period of its history. For a long period, the Thais had political supremacy over Cambodia. Cambodian princes and Buddhist monks were educated in Thailand. Thai influence on Cambodian language, literature, culture and administration was inevitable. It was a kind of re-borrowing from Thai which included much that the Thai had previously borrowed from Cambodia at the time of Angkor. During this period Khmer suffered a serious setback as the result of the loss of territorial integrity. The western and north-western provinces became part of Thailand. Khmer in Thailand became a separate dialect: the dialect of Surin and of Chantabun. The delta of the Mekong river became part of Vietnam where another dialect was spoken, Khmer Krom. From the arrival of French in Cambodia to the 1950s, three main languages were used in Cambodia: Khmer, the native language; Pali, the language of Buddhism - which was also the lingua franca of South-east Asia; and French. Language planning in Cambodia thus involves at least these three languages; but in this paper, emphasis is given to Khmer.

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### 1.1 General linguistic background of Modern Khmer

The Khmer alphabet had been borrowed from one of the languages which was used in the south of India in the 6th century. Three types are currently used. The italic type and the straight type are used for handwriting and printing. The round script type (which is a careful and artistic writing) is used in transcribing religious texts of the Pali language. It is also commonly used as capital letters for title of books, general notices and commercial advertisement boards. The main punctuation is the full stop ។; the symbol ្ក្ក្ក្ក្ក្ក is used at the end of a chapter or of a book. The words used in a phrase or a short sentence are usually written with no spaces between them. In Khmer, capital letters are not used to start sentences or to write proper names; but bold scripts can be used for emphasis.

The Khmer writing system is syllabo-phonemic.<sup>2</sup> The presence of two inherent vowels /aa/ and /oo/ is one of the characteristic features of the Khmer alphabet which influences the choice of consonants and vowels in consonant clusters and syllables of the forms CCV, CCVCV and CVCV. There are a number of rules to determine the dominant group of consonants which can retain its inherent vowel and those that cannot. Khmer words are predominantly of one or two syllables. Syllables are of the form V, VC, CV, CVC, CCV and CCVC. Khmer is like English in that it has syllable stress and intonation patterns associated with sentences. Some characteristic features of Khmer syllables are as follows:

- a consonant cluster is composed of only two consonants, occasionally with a connecting schwa;
- only some consonants may occur in syllable-final position;
- consonant clusters do not occur at the end of a syllable;
- a glottal stop can assume the function of an initial consonant, a second element of a cluster, or a final consonant;
- final consonants are not released.

The tendency of Khmer toward mono- and disyllabic words with a definite internal syllable structure leads to shortening of polysyllabic loanwords, known as a Khmerisation process. The process consists of:

- contracting of consonants into consonant groups;
- dropping of intermediate vowels;
- dropping of syllables or part of a syllable.

Although Khmer was considerably enriched by words borrowed from foreign languages, it has lost none of its own characteristics. It has preserved its basic word stock and its grammatical features. Khmer has derivational prefixes and infixes which can alter the meaning of the word or change its part of speech. Affixation is also used to coin new words from roots or stems borrowed from Pali and Sanskrit. Apart from derived words formed by affixation, the morphological aspects of Khmer words do not enable us to determine their parts of speech.

The sentence structure is basically SVO. Khmer does not express grammatical relationship by means of suffixes as in English. It has recourse to auxiliary words. The plural of a noun is expressed by adding words which mean many or few or simply by repeating the same word twice. Khmer questions are formed by adding the question particles /taəə/ in front of an affirmative sentence, and /teé/ at the end of it and pronouncing the sentence with rising intonation. In casual speech, only the particle /teé/ is used and it is similar in meaning to the English tag-question. The substance questions of the types *who*, *whom*, *where*,

*what* and *when* are formed by placing the particle /teé/ in front of the affirmative sentence and placing the question word in the sentence where the corresponding noun or phrase would go.

## 2. MONASTERY SCHOOL AND LANGUAGE PLANNING<sup>3</sup>

Education has been a major concern in Cambodia for centuries. Monastery schools run by Buddhist monks were in operation in mediaeval times. The French took over Cambodia in 1863, and a Western school system was slowly introduced. The monastery school operated in most villages until Cambodia got its independence from France in 1953. Instruction in these schools was open to boys only. Subjects taught were reading, writing, basic arithmetic, woodwork, masonry, blacksmithing and basketry. The last year in the monastery school included principles of Buddhism, the code of ethics for boys, religious literature and poetry. Pali was taught only to novice Buddhist monks in the elementary schools for Pali.

The monastery schools throughout the country were the institutions which promoted the Cambodian language and Buddhism. Though Khmer was used as a medium of instruction, there were neither formal curriculum nor proper teaching methods. They varied from one school to another, even within the same province. Spelling and writing style depended mainly on the ability of the Buddhist monk teachers who ran the schools. Each school has its own method, teaching practices and choice of texts. One common factor was the school timetable; classes were held in the afternoon. The principal textbooks were poetry, novels with religious themes and codes of ethics. All the texts were written on palm leaves or on scrolls.

In 1911, a royal decree ordered that Khmer was to be taught throughout the kingdom. The first attempt to modernise the teaching of Khmer and to set up a uniform curriculum in the monastery schools was undertaken in 1908 by Mr Boudoin in Kampong Cham. Unfortunately, it was abandoned a few years later. In 1921, a second attempt was carried out in Kampot by Mr Ménétrier with the full support of the French governor and the Buddhist diocese. They agreed on the following points:

- confer the traditional education to Buddhist monks;
- open a teaching method workshop centre for Buddhist monk teachers;
- Khmer was to be the medium language of instruction;
- basic curriculum was based on Cambodian morals, reading, writing and basic arithmetic.

At the end of the workshop, the Buddhist monk teachers returned to their monasteries and ran their renovated monastery schools on their own. From 1924 to 1930, 58 monastery schools were opened with a school population of more than 3,000 children. A similar system was put into practice in other provinces after the example of the province of Kampot. It was well accepted by the local people and the Buddhist monks. It was a great success in upholding Khmer and updating the traditional education in Cambodia. And once again Khmer had regained its pride among the local people.

The renovated monastery schools operated side by side with the public schools up to 1953. From 1954, the monastery schools became public elementary schools or primary schools. And those in a large agglomeration of villages could expand to accommodate high schools.

### 3. MODERN KHMER IN RELIGIOUS CIRCLES AND SCHOOLS

The primary schools and the high schools of Pali and the Buddhist University have been the second most important agency in promoting Khmer in religious circles. Khmer has at all times been the medium language of instruction in these institutions. In the 1930s, the Buddhist Institute organised a religious tour headed by outstanding Buddhist monks who visited important monasteries in South Vietnam and preached Buddhist doctrine in Khmer. This tour also used mobile library vans. They visited monasteries and villages in the remote areas in Cambodia. Buddhist monks and villagers were able to buy or borrow Cambodian books. It was a great success and an efficient means of promoting Khmer and Buddhism.

In the 1930s, a group of educated Buddhist monks and well-known Buddhist lay people promoted the translation of basic Buddhist texts such as daily prayers into Khmer, and started to use Khmer in chanting instead of Pali. This move to Khmerise Buddhist texts sparked a serious quarrel between the conservative religious leaders and the innovative group. Buddhist monks and Buddhist lay people were split in two opposing camps, the conservative school and the renovative one. The religious confrontation dragged along for two decades. Finally, in 1950, the renovating group won the battle. This was a big step in revising Buddhist teaching for the common people who did not understand Pali. The renovative group completed the translation of the Tripitaka, the book of Buddhist doctrine and teaching, in 1969 which was followed by a nationwide inauguration of the holy text in the same year.

Pali was the second most important language after Khmer before the arrival of French in Cambodia. The schools of Pali were organised by Buddhist monks with the support of religious leaders and Buddhist lay people. Pali schools were opened in most important monasteries, for Buddhist monks who wanted to gain deep insight into Buddhism. Pali was the lingua franca of Buddhism in South-east Asia. The growth of the Pali schools was mainly the work of the Buddhist monks. They organised their own curriculum which was partly for religion and partly for modern education. The language of instruction was Khmer from primary to tertiary level. The head of the monastery and his two deputies were recruited from student monks of the Pali schools. This made the religious school education more attractive. The religious education opened a High School of Pali in Phnom Penh in 1914. In 1925, a committee for the examination of books published by the school of Pali was formed. In the 1960s, the highest religious institution, the Buddhist University, was opened in Phnom Penh. The religious institutions and the Buddhist monks were the spearhead of Khmerisation from the very early 20th century in the history of Cambodian education. Khmer progressed gradually behind the religious shield of Buddhism. During this period, a certain degree of standardisation of Khmer went on in the monastery.

### 4. FRENCH LANGUAGE IN CAMBODIA

The French implemented a French language policy in Cambodia. They introduced modern education and gradually established primary schools in most of the important provinces. French was the language of instruction. Most Cambodians were not enthusiastic about this new system of education. They stuck to the monastery school of their own village.

The French authorities were desperately in need of Cambodians who could speak French to assist them in running the country. The first public primary school was opened in Phnom Penh in 1873. A school for training Cambodian interpreters was opened in Phnom Penh in 1885. Upon the completion of six years in

this French primary school, the students sat for an examination and the successful candidates would get a certificate. Sisowath High School was the first French high school opened in Phnom Penh in 1911. The curriculum was based on the French system of education. In 1925, a centre for the training of Cambodian primary teachers was opened. French was used as official language in the administration of the Indochinese colony. Khmer was not part of the school curriculum until the early 1930s when reading and writing in Khmer was introduced. It was not well covered at all and only for the first two grades in primary school. In short there were three types of schools with their own language policies: the religious schools for Pali, the monastery schools for Khmer, and the public schools for French.

## 5. THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN KHMER<sup>4</sup>

Khmer spelling had no uniformity up to the early years of the 20th century. French scholars were the first to be interested in this matter. They compiled Khmer-French dictionaries and wrote articles and books on Cambodian grammar long before the Cambodians. It took nearly half a century before the first movement of Cambodians into this area of scholarship. From 1915 a movement for a standard form of Khmer spelling was started among the educated Buddhist monks and the staff of the Royal Library. By Royal Decree of 4 September 1915, a National Commission was formed to compile a Cambodian Dictionary. The Ministry of Education was to be responsible. His Excellency Pich Pon, the Minister of Education and Defence, was appointed as president of the commission. The commission started its work in October of the same year; the manuscript was finished and ready to be published by 1924. Unfortunately, there was a split among the members caused by a row over the proposal by a group of conservative members on the way of using diacritic marks to denote short and long vowels in the script. The matter could not be settled by the Ministry of Education; and it was brought to the King who issued another decree on 19 July 1926, to nominate a new commission.

In 1932, an ad hoc committee was formed to assist the commission. Its task was to collect words from Cambodian novels and poetry in the Modern Khmer period. The scope and range of the collection of Cambodian words were limited. The words collected were submitted to the commission and they decided whether to include or exclude them from the dictionary.

The first volume of the Cambodian dictionary was published in 1939 and the second followed in 1943. The two volumes were accepted as the official and correct spelling of Khmer which was widely used in schools and in offices. The majority of the members of the commission were well versed in Pali and Sanskrit. They preferred the etymological spelling of Pali and Sanskrit words loaned to Khmer. They left out the Khmerised pronunciation of the borrowed words and restored the non-Khmerised spelling of Pali and Sanskrit words. There were many cases of confusion of the origin of the borrowed words and the origins of many were wrongly attributed. As a result, there was a wide gap between the popular spelling and the pronunciation of well-assimilated Pali or Sanskrit words even if they were included. Conversely, the tendency towards Khmerisation of borrowed words was strongly felt among French scholars and French-educated Cambodians. The Cambodians were not outspoken. The last part of the dictionary in the early 1960s saw some adjustment, which was given as an appendix.

In 1932, a textbook committee was appointed by the Ministry of Education. Its task was to examine Cambodian textbooks submitted by individuals or educational institutions and to make suggestions to the Ministry for approval. Approved texts were used in primary schools and monastery schools. It was the first time that Khmer textbooks were published and made available to schools. Learning to read and write Khmer before the Second World War was very hard work. Cambodian children had to spend at least three years in the monastery schools before they could write their native language. Children were encouraged to attend public schools where facilities were provided free. The committee remained in operation up to early 1975 with constant changes of committee members and the expansion of their task to include also the approval of textbooks from other subjects.

To catch up with the progress of science and technology and to meet the needs of modern education and administration in general, a cultural committee was formed among the group of French-educated Cambodians in 1934. Their task was to compile French words used in general administration, jurisprudence, science and modern technology and then to coin corresponding Khmer words either from Khmer roots or from Pali and Sanskrit. The list of new words or rehabilitated Khmer words was published in a bilingual dictionary, Khmer-French and French-Khmer. These new words were used in Khmer newspapers, textbooks and legal documents and were always followed by their corresponding French words in parentheses. This common practice was carried on until the late 1960s.

In the second half of the 1930s an underground movement opposing French occupation of Cambodia was formed among the elite of the Buddhist Institute and the Cambodians who worked in the French administration.<sup>5</sup> They published the first Cambodian newspaper in 1936. The group was concerned about the wide gap of communication created by the French authority between a large segment of the population who received only the traditional education and a handful of French-educated Cambodians. The newspaper, *Kaset Nokor Vat* was widely read by the majority of Cambodians. The French authorities felt the danger of the growing number of supporters and sympathisers of this movement. The newspaper was closed in 1942 and the group disbanded. It was the first time that Khmer was used as a means to arouse the public opinion and gear it to challenge French colonialism.

From the early 1940s, the Ministry of Education encouraged Cambodian writers to produce didactic books and to write novels for schools and the public in general. A committee was appointed by the Ministry of Education to judge Cambodian novels which were submitted for prize-winning awards. From the 1960s to 1974, it was sponsored by the Association of Khmer Writers. Some of the best novels were introduced to schools.

In the field of grammar and linguistics, a well-known Khmer, Iv Koeus, published a book entitled *La langue cambodgienne (essai et étude raisonnée)* in 1947. It was the first Cambodian descriptive grammar ever written in Khmer by a Khmer scholar and politician. His insight into the Cambodian language drew to the attention of the Cambodians that Cambodian grammar was completely different from Pali and Sanskrit grammar. The work revealed many important principles of Khmer that had been forgotten for centuries. His ideas played an important part in Khmerisation. It took two decades before they could be expounded and promoted among students of the Arts Faculty of Phnom Penh University. Dr Keng Vansak was another leading and ardent promoter of Khmerisation. The political situation had disrupted his work a long time. His book entitled *Principes de création des mots nouveaux*, published in 1964, has been an inspiration for secondary teachers and linguists as well. His ideas added a new dimension in the principles of

Khmerisation. The insight brought into the field of Cambodian language by these two scholars has been invaluable to all Khmers who love and care for their language. But unfortunately, it has never been fully developed or implemented because the authors were victimised in the 1960s by the dominant ruling class and the opposition political party.

## 6. THE ROMANISATION OF KHMER

In 1943, the Royal Government of Cambodia and the French Governor of Cambodia embarked on the romanisation of Khmer. The system was devised by Georges Coedès and the Ministry of Education was in charge of implementing it. In an interview with the *Kambuja* newspaper the Minister of Education stated as follows:

- Romanisation would bring progress in the domain of Cambodian literature and arts in general.
- The need for the progress of Cambodia required it.
- Romanisation facilitated reading, writing and learning. It saved twice the time required with the old and traditional script. It gave correct spelling and pronunciation and it can get rid of irregularity in the grammar. It brought a lot of help in coining or borrowing new terms into Khmer.
- Printing and making Cambodian typewriters were the most beneficial in the romanisation of Khmer.<sup>6</sup>

The Cambodian romanised alphabet was composed of 26 letters and a group of diacritic symbols for short and long vowels, with some punctuation marks borrowed from French. I will not discuss the linguistic side of Khmer romanisation. It is outside the scope of this paper. The writing system can be summarised by a few points:

- Proper nouns were written as they were in French.
- Words borrowed from Pali and Sanskrit were Khmerised in script as well as in pronunciation. They were transcribed according to the popular speech, and there was no account of any etymology.
- Any irregularity in spelling and pronunciation was to be corrected and standardised.
- Consonants in a syllable-final position which were not pronounced were dropped.
- Exceptions were made to distinguish homonyms.

The *Kambuja* newspaper was the medium of this writing system. From September 1943 to early 1945, this newspaper covered one tenth of its pages with news from overseas, local advertisements and government notices in romanised Khmer.

The Ministry of Education had established a textbook committee, as noted above. Textbooks in romanised Khmer were published and used in monastery schools in place of the old textbooks. The Royal Government issued a decree in 1943 to legalise the use of romanised Khmer in the local administration. The birth certificate was one example of its use. Under the auspices of the French governor, a committee was set up to compile a romanised Khmer dictionary.<sup>7</sup> It was published in 1944 and used as reference in the local administration and in schools. It was a romanised Khmer version of the latest edition of the Cambodian dictionary published at that time.

According to the opinion of the Minister of Education, it seemed that the romanisation of Khmer was a great success and very well accepted by Cambodians of every walk of life. But in fact only about two-fifths of Cambodians ever used it. A large proportion of the people was not enthusiastic or strongly opposed it but they were also not vocal. They were religious leaders and members of the nationalist group which were against the French occupation of Cambodia. Romanisation had not been introduced to public schools.

Romanisation and the use of the Gregorian calendar<sup>8</sup> were the two most hurtful reforms that affected the majority of Cambodians. The aspiration for independence and the wish to rally the local people to support its cause led the pro-Japanese government of Cambodia to abrogate these two reforms in July 1945.

The failure of the Cambodian romanisation was due to the lack of interest or hostility of the French-educated Cambodians, the religious group and the people in the countryside. The disputes in 1924 between the conservatives and the renovators in the adoption of a Cambodian writing system for the Cambodian Dictionary, and in the early 1930s about the translation of the daily religious prayers from Pali into Khmer and its use in the monastery highlighted how conservative they were and how strong was their opposition. The Cambodian script was considered sacred. It was widely used to transcribe the holy texts of Buddhism and in making amulets not only in Cambodia but also in the neighbouring countries. The majority of Cambodians did not understand that romanisation of Khmer was only a reform of the script. They saw it as an attempt to eradicate the Khmer language and destroy the culture and heritage of their ancestors. From 1941 to the end of the Second World War, Cambodia was politically insecure. Social and economic conditions of the country were in disarray. In short, the time was not favourable, and the campaign was limited in scope and publicity. It would have been surprising for the romanisation of Khmer to be successful at that time.

A less well-known reform of the Cambodian writing was proposed by venerable Ouk Chea. He called it Aksar Chneah Lok, victory script of the world. This system of writing was to simplify the traditional way of writing consonant clusters and vowel symbols. Consonant clusters, consonant underscripts and vowels were arranged on the same line as the English system of writing. Its aim was also to reduce the number of keys in the manufacturing of a Cambodian typewriter.

## 7. MODERN KHMER UNDER THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

The presence of the Japanese forces in Cambodia from 1941 to 1944 did not affect the language policy of the Cambodian government because France was still in control of Cambodia. But the seven month government backed by the Japanese in 1945 restored the use of Khmer script in its traditional form. The aim of the government was to use Khmer as language of instruction and to make some reforms in the public system of education. But it was not possible because there was a shortage of materials and qualified staff to carry out the work. French was still the language of instruction in public schools. A Japanese language course was offered in the evening to the public and to Cambodians who joined the Japanese forces.

The romanisation of Khmer was not revived by the French government when they took control over Cambodia again. The Indochina peninsula was insecure and tension between French rulers and the local people was high. Cambodia got self-rule in 1946 and became a member of the 'Union Française'. This brought new interest in primary and secondary education, and a concern for developing literacy in Khmer.



## 8. MODERN KHMER UNDER THE HOME RULE GOVERNMENT 1946-1952

A commission in charge of translating the Cambodian Constitution from French into Khmer which was headed by Prince Sisowath Yutevong faced many problems in finding suitable words. Some of the members were well versed in Pali as well as in Thai. They had recourse to the corresponding Pali terms which had been borrowed into Thai. The most striking one was the term *Rathathamani*, literally *law of the state*, which had been borrowed to mean *constitution*. The translation had also brought new terms into Khmer. It made some degree of reinforcement of the native language.

To meet the growing demand for new terms in the administration as well as in other fields, a National Cultural Commission was formed in 1947. It was an enlargement of the Cultural Committee established in 1934. Its task was to coin new words. Suggestions and requests were put to the commission from private or governmental institutions. They published a bilingual dictionary, the *Lexique Franco-Khmer*.

Cambodian grammar textbooks were prescriptive in their content. Two trends of development were found in them, the Pali and the French. French scholars put a lot of effort into this field. The grammar of the Khmer language by Henri Maspéro has been an outstanding one. Within two decades after the Second World War, there were at least 15 Cambodian grammar books and most of them were influenced by Pali prescriptive grammar. The three Cambodian scholars, Iv Koeus, Keng Vansak and Khuon Sokhamphu, were pioneers in this field and their works gave new insights to the problems of Cambodian grammar.

In the late 1960s, a Committee for Cambodian Grammar which was part of the Department of Khmerisation had been engaged in preparing a Cambodian grammar book for the secondary schools. Three tenths of this work was finished and ready to be published in 1975. As of today, Cambodian schools do not have any suitable grammar book.

## 9. LANGUAGE POLICY OF THE ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF CAMBODIA - 1953-1969<sup>9</sup>

Up to 1955, French was still the language of instruction in schools, the language of written legislation, decrees and proclamations, the means of intra-government and intergovernment written communication, and the tongue of commercial documents, advertising and banking. Khmer was, however, used extensively in spoken form in government offices and in commerce along with Chinese. Some of the Cambodian élite believed French was superior to Khmer. After 17 years of national independence, the progress made in public education was well beyond the primary and secondary levels. It was in the early stage of tertiary education. The politics of prestige and window dressing in tertiary education led to the opening of more universities than were really needed.

For an estimated population of 7,000,000 in 1968, Cambodia had a total of 1,067,385 school children and students. On 9 October 1964, the government launched a massive literacy campaign for adults. The program was carried out by the Ministry of Education with the assistance of other ministries such as defence, interior and religion. By that time there were about 1,000,000 illiterates. Teachers, Buddhist monks, civil servants in the administration, soldiers and community leaders worked voluntarily for the benefit of the nation. Schools were improvised in every village, monasteries, and in public institutions. There were no problems of communication between the teachers and adult illiterates because all of them spoke the same language. The government did not spend much

money on this program, except the cost of printing the literacy certificates. The course consisted of Khmer literacy and basic arithmetic. After four to six months, students sat for a test on writing skill, reading skill and short arithmetic problems. Successful candidates received the certificates of literacy as testimony of their knowledge of Khmer. By the end of 1966, 261,509 Cambodians had received their literacy certificates. In 1967, there were 900,000 Cambodians who enrolled in the course. To reinforce the program, a bill was passed by parliament on 31 May 1965, obliging all Cambodians between 10 and 50 years old to learn to read and write Khmer as well as basic arithmetic skills.

In 1961, the Khmer Writers' Association organised a program of public audience with Samdech Chuon Nath on Cambodian language, literature and culture. It was broadcast on the radio every Friday night. The program was carried on for more than eight years from 1961 to September 1969.

France left Cambodia with a rigid pro-French language policy which it continued to watch with great interest. The government and the French-educated Cambodians had been reluctant to abandon it. The development of Khmer at this stage did not supply the necessary terminology for new ideas and concepts on technological and scientific innovation for secondary and tertiary education. New terms had to be coined or borrowed into Khmer to fill the gap. In order to catch up with the progress of the world and to give a new turn to public education, the Ministry of Education set up a Department of Khmerisation in the second half of the 1960s. Its task was to prepare textbooks for various disciplines in secondary schools. The department was composed of:

1. Committee for Agriculture
2. Committee for Geography
3. Committee for Grammar
4. Committee for History
5. Committee for Mathematics
6. Committee for Natural Science
7. Committee for Physics and Chemistry
8. Committee for Woodwork and Handcraft.

The task of these committees was to enrich the Cambodian lexicon with new terminology. The committee members were primary teachers, high school teachers and lecturers with the exception of the Committee for Grammar which had some prominent Buddhist scholars as members. The inter- and intra-committee cooperation was very good. The department published its magazine every three months; each committee had a part of its work in the magazine. Their work was also broadcast on the radio every Tuesday and Thursday evening. The department also published its first dictionary of the terms used or coined by the committees. Overall, Khmerisation was warmly accepted from the beginning of its existence.

Khmer was dragged along behind French in public schools for a decade. This was due to the absence of incentives for mastering Khmer, since economic and social advancement came most readily through mastery of French. The teaching of French assumed less importance from the early 1960s, after which French was taught only from the fourth grade in primary school as a second language. In 1967, Khmer was introduced to secondary schools as language of instruction. The Arts Faculty and the Faculty of Education of the university of Phnom Penh started using Khmer as the language of instruction from the early time of their establishment.

Ethnic Chinese had their own schools open in most important centres. Their curriculum included Khmer as a second language. Vietnamese schools were opened for a short time in the early 1950s. French Catholic schools were operating until April 1975.

In 1968, a Committee for Examining the Work on Cambodian History was formed. Its task was to check all works on Cambodian history prior to their publication in order to eradicate errors of dates and events and also to conform to the policy set by the Ministry of Education.

#### 10. MODERN KHMER UNDER THE KHMER REPUBLIC, 1970-1975

The language policy of the new government in Khmerisation was to carry on and improve the planning left by the previous government. The government of the Khmer republic joined the SEAMEO movement in 1970. Exchange of students and teaching experts in the region followed. The policy of the government was more open to the West than that of the previous one. Young Cambodians were more enthusiastic to learn English than French.

A Mon-Khmer Institute was created under the initiative of the Prime Minister in 1970. One of its objectives was to undertake research on Old and Middle Khmer to bring new insights to further the development of Modern Khmer. At the tertiary level, within the Arts Faculty, a Centre for the Research and Documentation in Arts was established. Besides its research, the centre collected and published old books and articles related to Cambodian literature, normative grammar and linguistics in Cambodian, English and French. At the national level, a National Council for Education and Culture was appointed by the president of the republic in 1974. Its task was to examine and counsel various public education institutions and to follow up the implementation of the policy formulated by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture.

The progress made by the government in the domain of education and Khmerisation was remarkable. Khmerisation of public education was planned to reach the tertiary level in the late 1970s. Unfortunately, it was disrupted by the Pol Pot regime in April 1975. School children, students and teaching staff were displaced and killed. Schools and educational infrastructure were abandoned or demolished.

After five years of complete abandon by the Khmer Rouge government, the spirit of Khmerisation became active again under the government of Heng Samrin. A few members of the Khmerisation Department and teachers who survived the hardship have joined the government to revive the policy of the Khmerisation.

#### 11. THE LANGUAGE POLICY OF THE KHMER ROUGE, 1975-1978<sup>10</sup>

The Cambodian education system and its infrastructure were completely disrupted. Teachers and students were the victims of this regime. April 1975 was the last day of the century-long established formal education of Cambodia. Khmer Rouge policy on education and the Cambodian language was known only through interviews with refugees, radio broadcasts from Phnom Penh and the scarce reports of Western magazines which were mostly second-hand. The strange thing in the Khmer Rouge policy was that there was no mention of public education in the national constitution. It was frequently stressed by Khmer Rouge cadres that a renovation of the Cambodian language for revolutionary purposes had been going on for several years. The language of the old regime did not offer a direct route for the development of this new and classless society. To the eyes of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia was still living in an atmosphere of feudalistically determined relationships between the oppressed and the oppressors, exploited and

exploiters. As a result, Khmer had been developed to match the hierarchical structure of the society. The confusing multiplicity of pronouns and special terms for addressors and addressees manifested the traditional status relationships between Cambodians. Revolutionising the language was of primordial importance for the Khmer Rouge government because it was an effective means of brain-washing.

Obsolete words came to the foreground while others retreated to the background. The principal agents of the Khmer Rouge policy on language were their political cadres. They spread the news by word of mouth. They gave the displaced Cambodians a new form of Cambodian language which allowed them to rethink the conditions of their new lives. Language was not a cultural heritage but an effective brain-washing device. Their language reform was mainly in verbal communication. Cambodian kingship and monkhood terms were the first to be eliminated. For example, the Khmer Rouge cadres used the word /puu/ *uncle*, instead of the widely used term Samdech to address Prince Sihanouk.

Firstly, they reactivated words or expressions which were used by simple peasants in the countryside. Here are some examples. There had been at least 12 Cambodian words corresponding to the English verb *eat*, but only one word, /hop/, was allowed. The French borrowed word /pa:/ contracted form of *papa* for *dad*, and the Cambodian word /mak/ *mummy* were not allowed. The first was the remnant of the French colonialism and the second was a symbol of the exploiters' class. The Cambodian words for Sir, Madam, Mister, Mrs, Miss, gentleman, Highness, Venerable and Excellency were replaced by /mit/ *friend*.

Secondly, they avoided using the terms which were used by the old regime. The Khmer Rouge adopted the word /pañacun/ *intellectual*, instead of /pañavoən/, which was used by the previous government. Both were compound nouns borrowed from Pali. Literally, the former means *people endowed with intelligence*. The latter was originally an adjective which means *wise and intelligent*.

Thirdly, they used the same words but with different meanings. The loanword /pulikam/ *sacrifice*, was used in the sense of *labour*. The word /som/ *ask for* or *beg* was replaced by /snaaə/, which formerly meant *request*.

Fourthly, they added new words to the well-established Cambodian phrases. They thought these were incorrect. The phrase like /thnam chýy kbaal/ *tablet* or *pill* for *headache* was changed to /thnam bambat chýy kbaal/ which literally meant *medicine cures headache*.

People had to learn and use all new words and terms because nobody dared to reveal their social status. The Khmer Rouge policy on education was to proceed in close connection with practical work, production, national defence and edification. In the industrial centres, the children studied for two or three hours a day and spent the remaining hours in the factories. In the agricultural co-operative farms, they participated in all kinds of works outside their classroom timetable. The highest level of education in the countryside was at the third grade. In the big cities, they could continue to the fifth grade and then enrol to do apprenticeship. Post-primary education was mainly reserved for the children of the cadres. Adult literacy training was also carried out at the workplace, in the improvised shelters or in the open air. The results were not satisfactory because of hardship and too much time spent on ideological education.

The language planning and language policy of the Khmer Rouge were by no means effective. They did not employ qualified teachers and there was no proper education system, organisation or supportive infrastructure. Their language policy was politically oriented and it went against the inspiration of the users

and the norms of the development of the language itself. Their preoccupation was to establish and achieve a utopian ideology of a classless society and especially to maintain their so-called dictatorship of the proletarian class.

## 12. LANGUAGE POLICY OF THE HENG SAMRIN GOVERNMENT, 1979-1982<sup>11</sup>

The five years of war caused a lot of disruption in schooling and the four years without formal education under the Pol Pot regime increased the number of Cambodian illiterates. The Ministry of Education of the new government faced a very serious crisis in the field of education. A large majority of school-aged children and Cambodian adults were illiterate. The Ministry of Education re-established the educational system from scratch. The first move was to change the number of the schooling years. The previous six year primary and seven year secondary system of education was reduced to ten years. Besides literacy and numeracy, the school curriculum for primary and secondary stresses basic vocational skill either in agriculture or in industry. It is work combined with study. In the countryside, primary and secondary school boys and girls have to work in the rice fields two or three times a month depending on villagers' requests, as part of the national edification of the country and practical work in agriculture.

The government also launched a three year literacy campaign for adults. Classes have been organised in many villages all over the country. At the village level, literacy classes were conducted for three or four evenings per week. Shortage of teachers and facilities for this sort of special education was the main concern of the government. In the cities, adult literacy classes have been conducted in factories. The workers were given two hours off to attend the class. The government provided teachers and basic educational supplies.

The Second Annual Congress of the Ministry of Education for 1980-1981 was held in September 1981. In this address the Minister of Education had released the following figures:

- 211 kindergartens with a population of 15,077.
- 4,334 primary schools with 1,328,033 school children.
- 63 high schools with 17,886 students.
- 14 tertiary institutions with 555 students.
- 624 students have been sent to further their studies abroad.
- 1,418,767 adult illiterates with only 411,253 enrolled for literacy training.<sup>12</sup>

A committee composed of ex-teachers was formed in early 1979 to prepare textbooks for primary and secondary schools. The policy of the committee is to revive and put in practice again what had been done by the Department of Khmerisation in the 1960s. Their two main sources of reference for vocabulary are the Cambodian Dictionary published by the Department of Khmerisation and the Cambodian Dictionary published by the Buddhist Institute. In late 1982, the Ministry of Education had published 120 different school textbooks. In general, the Cambodian language and the cultural background used in readers for lower and upper primary schools are the same as the previous readers published from 1950 to 1975 with the exception of a few politically oriented terms. The Cambodian language for every walk of life has been restored. There is no more strain on the language, no more obligation or restriction of used and prescribed terms. Overall, modern Khmer is back again on the trail of development. It is in the state of recovering from the lack of manpower and expertise.

Language planning and language policy in Cambodia has been very much intermingled with the political development of the country itself. War and insecurity, political upheaval and the many drastic changes of government seriously affected language policy and language planning. National institutions, committees, commissions and private organisations have in the course of time shifted or remoulded their emphasis from one function to another. They have abandoned functions or adopted new ones to meet new needs, new demands or policies of the regime in power. This forward and backward swing made language planning in Cambodia very wide-ranging. It covered language purification, revival, reform, standardisation, rehabilitation and modernisation.

### NOTES

1. The transcription used here is based on that of Jenner and Pou 1981.
2. Gorgoniev 1966:14-17.
3. See Direction générale de l'instruction publique 1931.
4. See Coédès 1938 for more details.
5. See Reddi 1970:66-70.
6. *Kambuja*, 28 September 1943.
7. *Kambuja*, 14 April 1944.
8. Reddi 1970:74-75.
9. Chau Seng 1968:52-53.
10. This section is based on interviews with Cambodian refugees, ex-teachers and Cambodian children who were enrolled in the Khmer Rouge schools in Phnom Penh from 1975 to 1978.
11. In writing this part of the paper, I have benefited greatly from discussions with Chanthou Boua, who has been in Cambodia twice and travelled to most important parts of Kampuchea since 1979.
12. *Kampuchea* 103, September 1981.

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