On the $r > h$ shift in Phnom Penh Khmer*

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1. Introduction

Before my first visit to Cambodia in 1991, I collected some useful vocabulary from Khmer-English dictionaries to help in my work in Cambodia. The pronunciation of these words was mostly given according to the standard written language, but I soon discovered that many of them are pronounced differently in Phnom Penh, creating problems for non-native listeners.

The Phnom Penh dialect is used daily by natives of Phnom Penh, be they educated or not, rich or poor, civil servants or ordinary citizens. My data on it was collected during 1991-1993 from various people. The most help has come from Ms. Phoumy Ouch, who was born and has lived in Phnom Penh since 1958, and the forms given here are based on her idiolect. The standard Khmer forms and meanings are given here largely as in Huffman’s and Jacob’s dictionaries.

I could not find any records on the history of the Phnom Penh dialect, but the current pronunciation is at least 100 years old, as indicated by the speech of a grandmother of Ms. Phoumy who is now 82 but still speaks the way she did as a child.

From 1975 to 1978 the Khmer Rouge scattered Phnom Penh inhabitants throughout the country, with the result that Phnom Penh pronunciation has become widely known. And since 1979, with the return of many Khmer people to their homes, the Phnom Penh pronunciation has become quite popular. At present it is accepted and used unofficially by Phnom Penh people and others at all levels of society in their daily lives. One can predict that it will be the Khmer language of the future.

One of the most noticeable features of Phnom Penh Khmer is the variation between initial $r$ and $h$, with its other concomitant features.

* I would like to thank Dr. David Thomas for editing and offering valuable suggestions for presentation of this note, and also to Dr. Suwilai Premsrirat for providing encouragement and advice in writing this note.

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2. Phoneme inventories

2.1 Standard Khmer

The pure vowels in Standard Khmer are: i, ii, e, ee, e, ee, a, aa, a, o, o, u, uu, w, wu, e, ee.

The glided vowels are: ia, ia, ii, ai, ai, a, ao, au, ae, aa, ua, ue, uu, ea.

The initial simple consonants are: m, n, n, n, b, d, p, t, c, k, ?, pʰ, tʰ, cʰ, kʰ, f, s, h, w, y, l, r

The initial consonant clusters are: pr, tr, cr, kr, sr
The final consonants are: m, n, n, n, p, t, c, k, ?, h, w, y, l

2.2 Phnom Penh

The pure vowels in Phnom Penh Khmer are as in Standard Khmer, but lacking /i/ and /e/ (Noss lacked /o/ [1966:91]). The glided vowels are as in Standard Khmer but lacking /ea/ and /o/. The finals and the initial simple consonants are as in Standard Khmer except /f/, but Phnom Penh lacks the clusters (Noss lacked /f/ [1966:90]).

3. The r > h shift

The shift described above as r > h is in reality a registral shift involving several aspects of the phonology. There seem to be no restrictions on the occurrence of this shift; it may occur in all phonological environments (see Appendix 1, co-occurrence chart). Samples of the shifts are given below; for more examples see Appendix 2.

3.1 r > h

This is a shift of voiced > voiceless and rhotacized > nonrhotacized. The r > h initial words are marked by falling-rising pitch. For example:

ʔoŋræ > ʔoŋhɛɛ ruam > hũuam rion > hũion
ruŋŋ > hũuŋŋ ruup > hũup reɛɛ > hɛɛɛ
ruoy > hɔɔy samrap > samhiiap ruh > hɔɔh

3.2 Stop + r > aspirated stop consonant

This is similar to the above except that the h is just a voiceless aspirated release /ʰ/ of a stop rather than a fully segmental /h/. The clusters pr, tr, cr, kr become aspirates pʰ, tʰ, cʰ, kʰ. For example:

praɛ > phɛɛ praɛ > phɛɛɛ praŋ > phɛɛŋ
truŋ > th均价 træŋ > th均价 træc > thɛɛɛc
croï > ch₃ɔi croŋ > ch₃uŋ criɔ? > ch₃iɔ?
3.3 \( sr > s^h > s + \text{ tone} \)

I hypothesize a two-step change in which the \( r \) after \( s \) is devoiced and derhotacized to form an aspirate \( s^h \), which in turn becomes \( s \) plus falling-rising pitch. In a two-syllable word this results in reduction to one syllable. For example:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sroot} & > s^h\text{oot} & > s\text{oot} \\
\text{srueol} & > s^h\text{uuel} & > s\text{uuel} \\
\text{sraa} & > s\text{hiia} & > s\text{iia} \\
\text{somraan} & > smhiian & > sm\text{nian}
\end{align*}
\]

3.4 \( bVr > ph + \text{ tone} \)

In a two-syllable word where the first syllable has a voiced stop and the second has \( r \), the word may collapse into a monosyllabic word with aspirated voiceless stop and falling-rising pitch.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{baaran} & > b\text{hiian} & > b\text{ian} & > p^h\text{nian}
\end{align*}
\]

3.5 Diphthongization

The simple vowels /a, aa/ and /a, ao/ change to /ia/ and /ua/. For example:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{kran} & > k^h\text{ian} \\
\text{tran} & > t^h\text{uan}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{kraap} & > k^h\text{iap} \\
\text{traan} & > t^h\text{uan}
\end{align*}
\]

3.6 Monophthongization

The vowel glides to mid height /ae/, /ao/, and /ao/ change to simple vowels /ee/, /oe/, and /oo/, respectively. And there are other occasional changes. For example:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{cræe} & > c^h\text{e}\text{e} \\
\text{praæ} & > p^h\text{oe} \\
\text{kraol} & > k^h\text{ool}, k^h\text{ool} \\
\text{cran} & > c^h\text{e}\text{n}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{kraen} & > k^h\text{en} \\
\text{sraen} & > s\text{e}\text{n} \\
\text{kraok} & > k^h\text{e}\text{ok}, k^h\text{e}\text{ok} \\
\text{sraom} & > s\text{e}\text{om}, s\text{e}\text{om}
\end{align*}
\]

3.7 Vowel lengthening

Many short vowels are lengthened. For example:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{criæ} & > c^h\text{ia}\text{e} \\
\text{riæp} & > h\text{iap} \\
\text{traæm} & > t^h\text{e}\text{am} \\
\text{pruh} & > p^h\text{uuh}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{proh} & > p^h\text{e}\text{eh} \\
\text{præh} & > p^h\text{e}\text{eh} \\
\text{ruam} & > h\text{uam} \\
\text{ruæ} & > h\text{uæ}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{præn} & > p^h\text{e}\text{en} \\
\text{truæ} & > t^h\text{uæ}\text{eh} \\
\text{ruæ} & > h\text{uæ}
\end{align*}
\]
3.8 Vowel height change

The change of $r > h$ may also affect vowel height; /u/ may lower to /əə/ and /o/ may raise to /uu/. For example:

ruh $>$ h3əh
proah $>$ pʰuuh

In summary, this is a complex register shift in syllables containing $r$. It involves simultaneous shift in common register components such as devoicing, pitch, vowel gliding, vowel length and vowel height.

Appendix 1. Distribution of Phnom Penh final consonants and vowels in syllables with original initials /r/, /pr/, /tr/, /cr/, /kr/, /sr/.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>r-</th>
<th>pr-</th>
<th>tr-</th>
<th>cr-</th>
<th>kr-</th>
<th>sr-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ii</td>
<td>-ŋ</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-ŋ,?</td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
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<td>-m</td>
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<td>-ŋ,?</td>
<td>-ŋ, h</td>
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<tr>
<td>ee</td>
<td>-ŋ</td>
<td>-n</td>
<td>-ŋ, h</td>
<td>-ŋ, k</td>
<td>-ŋ, l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>-ŋ, p, c</td>
<td>-m, -ŋ, p, -ŋ, -h</td>
<td>-m, -ŋ, p, c, ?</td>
<td>-ŋ, c</td>
<td>-ŋ, ?</td>
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<td>-ŋ, k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-ŋ, c, w</td>
<td>-ŋ, h</td>
<td>-ŋ, l</td>
<td>-ŋ, k</td>
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<tr>
<td>cc</td>
<td>-ŋ</td>
<td>-ŋ</td>
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<td>-ŋ, h</td>
<td>-ŋ, h, l</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>iœ</td>
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<td>-ŋ, p, y</td>
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<td>-ŋ, p, ?, -w</td>
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<td>-ŋ, p, y</td>
<td>-ŋ, p, ?</td>
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<td>-ŋ, p, ?, -w</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-ŋ, p, ?</td>
<td>-ŋ, p, ?, -w</td>
<td>-ŋ, p, y</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-ŋ, p, y</td>
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<td>-ŋ, p, y</td>
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<td>-ŋ, p, ?</td>
<td>-ŋ, p, ?, -w</td>
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<td>-ŋ, p, ?</td>
<td>-ŋ, p, ?, -w</td>
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### Appendix 2. List of $r > h$ words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Phnom Penh</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>?an.rae</td>
<td>?an.hże</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?aa kruɔʔ</td>
<td>?aa kʰuəʔ</td>
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<td>?aa səam</td>
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<tr>
<td>cruuəh ruh</td>
<td>chʰuəh.huəh</td>
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<td></td>
<td>chʰuəh.hoəh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kon.traa</td>
<td>kɔŋ.tʰiəa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
khuun praan  kʰiɯun pʰiían  body
kroŋ  kʰroach  city; to catch by placing net, pot, etc.,
over; to protect
kroaa  kʰʊuəa  poor, rare, difficult
kroaaʔ  kʰʊuəaʔ  sausage
kroaŋ  kʰʊuəŋ  to plait one’s hair
krai kroaa  kʰʊəi kʰʊuəa  poor
kraiʔ  kʰiaʔ  heartwood of tree which has fallen
through natural causes
kraaŋ  kʰʃən  to urge
kranŋ  kʰʃian  a huge book for official registration in
the King’s palace or temples
kraa  kʰʃia  a kind of insect
kraaʔ  kʰʃiaʔ  sound of an object pulled out
kraam  kʰʃiám  kilogram
kraap  kʰʃiap  to prostrate
krae  kʰʃe  bed
kraŋ  kʰʃen  to have regard for others and their
feelings
krai  kʰʃiái  extremely
kraok  kʰʃoik/kʰo曦  to wake up
kraol  kʰʃol/kʰoɊl  stable, cattle-shed
kraom  kʰʃoːm/kʰoɊm  under
kraoy  kʰʃoʒ/kʰoɕ  behind
krau  kʰʃiau  outside
kriaʔ  kʰʃiaʔ  ugly appearance; to tie to a post
kriap  kʰʃiap  a kind of snack; sound of brittle
object being crushed
kriaw  kʰʃiaw  to castrate
kroop  kʰdoop  a cover
kruuŋ  kʰʊuəh  accident, casualty
kruəp  kʰʊuəp  seed, gain
kruam  kʰʊuam  extremely weak
kruu  kʰʊu  teacher
kruuəc  kʰʊuəc  a kind of bird
kruuəh  kʰʊuəh  gravel, small rounded stones
kruaŋ  kʰʊuəŋ  ingredient
prəh  pʰəh  male
praʔ  pʰuəʔ  to roof, thatch, to be roofed with
praap  pʰuəap  next to, adjacent, very near
praŋ  pʰuəŋ  a kind of tree
praäh  pʰuəah  to sprinkle
praŋ  pʰəŋ  to make an effort
praŋ praŋ  pʰəŋ pʰəŋ  to try hard to
praəh/prauh  pʰəh/pʰɯuəh  a kind of deer; conical bamboo entry
to a fish trap
prai  pʰəi  forest
praŋ  pʰəŋ  unmarried and old
praʔ  pʰiaʔ  silver, money
praŋ  pʰəŋ  to use
praŋ (khæ)  pʰián  dry, hot (season)
praac: intelligent
praaw: sound of crushing brittle objects
prae: to alter, change
praec(k): small river, a part of cart
praet: demon, ogre, monster, inhabitant of hell
prah: to toss and turn in sleep; roll along the ground; move, struggling to free oneself
prai: salty
pram: five
prap: to tell
preño: oil
preen: ancient
preen: food offered to spirits
priño: to do in rough, do as a practice before the real thing
priño: pigeon
priño: ghost, demon, malevolent spirit
priño: to be guarded; to be ready to; to intend to; to plan for; to try to
priño: to be kind to, square, deliver from death
proom: to be ready, agree to, consent to, accept
pruñah: because; to sow, scatter, broadcast
pruñah: to bark
pruñal: a bus conductor
pruñah: to spit onto
pruñal: a bit at a time, trying it out; wicker work frame with various uses
pruñal: arrow
raño: to winnow, sift
riño: shape, form, appearance
riño: to learn
riño: to prepare
riño?: shallow
riño: to have had enough of, give up
riño: platform, stage
riño: flap
riño: small change
roño: hundred
ruño: to count
ruño: to rake
ruño: to dance
ruño: to push
ruño: to finish, achieve, get through to the end
ruño: to shrink, shrivel
ruño: picture, shape, statue, likeness
ruaŋ  hùnuŋ  matter, issue, story, event, play
ruh  hùnuŋ/hùŋ  root
ruec  hùen  to carry on one's shoulder
sam.raan  smìian  to sleep
sam.rac  sam.hìiac  to decide; to achieve
sam.rap  sam.hìiap  for
sraad?  sùua?  to decrease (water)
sraap  sùuap  to follow closely; to agree with
tsraŋ  sùuāŋ  to bathe (Buddhist monk); to pick something out of a liquid, save from drowning
srah  sùuah  fresh, vivid before one's eyes, nice-looking, pretty
srai  sìēi  female
sram  sìōm  appearing bit by bit
srap sraal  sìōp sìial  to get excited
sra?  sìia?  stack; to tie round tightly
sraen  sìëen  scurf
sraŋ  sìëan  a kind of insect
sraa  sìà  alcohol
sraaŋ  sìàŋ  glimmer, opaque
sraal  sìal  light in weight; not serious
sraap (khæ)  sìap  July-August (lunar system)
sraat  sìat  to take off clothes, undress
sraaw  sìaw  to wind in, wind up
srac  sìac  to finish, complete
srae  sìē  paddy-field
sraec  sìec  to shout
sraen  sìëen  leprosy
srah  sìah  lake, pond
sram  sìam  to be cracked
sraoc  sìēc/sìoc  to sprinkle
sraom  sìōm/sìōm  envelop
sraop  sìōp/sìōp  to cover all over the surface
srap  sìiap  already complete
sriw  sìow  to feel a chill of fear; to shiver
sroop  sìōp  to suck in
sroot  sìōt  swiftly and directly
sruec  sìuēc  pointed, sharp
sruei  sìuēl  easy, comfortable
srueom  tìōm  to be weakened
srueŋ  tìùuāŋ  to catch liquid in a container
srueŋ  tìùuāŋ  direct, straight
srueŋ  tìùuāŋ  a kind of tree
srueŋ  tìēŋ  to be silent and halt, unable to continue what one's doing
srue  tìēh  than
srei  tìēi  fish
sreom  tìēm  exact, just up to the same point as
srem  tìēm  tìēw  right, accurate, proper
srew  tìēw  must, correct, right
traʔ | tʰiaʔ | an anonymous letter
traŋ | tʰiaŋ | a kind of tree
traac | tʰiiaŋ | a kind of tree
traaw | tʰiiaw | taro
trac cɔɔ | tʰiiaŋ cɔɔ | to go, walk, move forward
trac | tʰiɛ | horn
traeŋ | tʰiɛŋ | a kind of tree
tram | tʰiiam | to soak
trap | tʰiiap | to imitate
triœp | tʰiœp | a kind of sweet
troom | tʰiœm | go down (of elephants going into bent position)
trœp | tʰiœp | sag, flop down on
trœp | tʰûœp | wealth, possessions, belongings; to spread out under
truŋ | tʰûŋ | pen, enclosure
truŋ triœy | tʰûŋ tʰiœy | form, shape
truam | tʰûuaŋ | to put up with, endure, suffer
truŋ | tʰûuh | to harm
truŋ | tʰûuŋ | a cylindrical fish-trap
truŋ | tʰûuŋ | chest
truŋ | tʰûuh | than