

Chapter 2 Language and Mother Tongue

2.1 Language used in Cambodia

2.1.1 Language by Sex and Urban and Rural Areas

Most of the population in Cambodia speaks the Khmer language, the country's official language. Others include Vietnamese, Lao, Chinese, Thai, English and etc., reflecting such cross-border migration from neighboring countries and international migration from other foreign countries. French, once the language of government in Indochina during 1863 to 1953, is still spoken in by some older Cambodians. English is widely spoken among young Cambodians and foreign businessmen.

In the survey, all persons in the selected households were asked to state their mother tongue. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 indicate absolute and relative distributions of population by mother tongue, sex and urban-rural residence in 2008 and 2013. As of 2013, the overwhelming majority is population speaking in Khmer, 97.1 percent of total population. The proportion speaking in minority languages accounts for 2.3 percent, followed by Vietnamese (0.4%), and Lao (0.2%). Among the population other than Khmer and minority languages, Vietnamese has the highest percentage of the mentioned population, followed by Lao, Chinese, English, Korean and Thai. Population speaking in French and Japanese are very few. In comparing with the results of 2008 Population census, the proportions speaking in Khmer is by 0.4 percent higher (change from 96.3% to 97.1%), however those speaking in minority languages is by 0.6 percent lower (change from 2.9% to 2.3%) in 2013 (Table 2.2).

Table 2.1 Population by Mother Tongue by Sex: Urban/Rural, 2008, 2013

Mother Tongue	Total			Urban			Rural		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
2013									
Total	14,676,591	7,121,508	7,555,083	3,146,212	1,527,479	1,618,734	11,530,378	5,594,029	5,936,349
Khmer	14,244,330	6,913,869	7,330,461	3,069,843	1,489,799	1,580,045	11,174,487	5,424,071	5,750,416
Vietnamese	61,293	29,515	31,779	45,749	23,055	22,694	15,545	6,460	9,085
Chinese	6,928	3,511	3,417	5,072	2,131	2,941	1,856	1,380	476
Lao	24,613	12,208	12,404	178	114	64	24,434	12,094	12,340
Thai	837	560	277	0	0	0	837	560	277
French	263	239	24	207	207	0	56	32	24
English	1,591	1,584	7	716	716	0	875	868	7
Korean	1,168	686	482	298	298	0	870	388	482
Japanese	91	20	71	0	0	0	91	20	71
Minority Languages	331,068	157,357	173,710	24,112	11,122	12,990	306,956	146,236	160,720
Others	4,410	1,958	2,451	37	37	0	4,373	1,921	2,451

Mother Tongue	Total			Urban			Rural		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
	2008								
Total	13,395,682	6,516,054	6,879,628	2,614,027	1,255,570	1,358,457	10,781,655	5,260,484	5,521,171
Khmer	12,901,447	6,271,981	6,629,466	2,545,285	1,220,370	1,324,915	10,356,162	5,051,611	5,304,551
Vietnamese	72,775	36,857	35,918	30,289	15,178	15,111	42,486	21,679	20,807
Chinese	6,530	3,653	2,877	4,374	2,366	2,008	2,156	1,287	869
Lao	18,515	9,203	9,312	842	430	412	17,673	8,773	8,900
Thai	2,458	1,574	884	1,340	884	456	1,118	690	428
French	873	566	307	711	479	232	162	87	75
English	2,360	1,466	894	1,993	1,234	759	367	232	135
Korean	904	599	305	787	537	250	117	62	55
Japanese	396	239	157	319	194	125	77	45	32
Minority Languages	383,273	186,631	196,642	26,641	12,990	13,651	356,632	173,641	182,991
Others	6,151	3,285	2,866	1,446	908	538	4,705	2,377	2,328

Table 2.2 Percentage Distribution of Population by Mother Tongue by Sex: Urban/Rural, 2008, 2013

Mother Tongue	Total			Urban			Rural		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
	2013								
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Khmer	97.1	97.1	97.0	97.6	97.5	97.6	96.9	97.0	96.9
Vietnamese	0.4	0.4	0.4	1.5	1.5	1.4	0.1	0.1	0.2
Chinese	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lao	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.2
Thai	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
French	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
English	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Korean	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Japanese	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Minority Languages	2.3	2.2	2.3	0.8	0.7	0.8	2.7	2.6	2.7
Others	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table 2.2 Percentage Distribution of Population by Mother Tongue by Sex: Urban/Rural, 2008, 2013

Mother Tongue	Total			Urban			Rural		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
	2008								
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Khmer	96.3	96.3	96.4	97.4	97.2	97.5	96.1	96.0	96.1
Vietnamese	0.5	0.6	0.5	1.2	1.2	1.1	0.4	0.4	0.4
Chinese	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lao	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.2
Thai	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
French	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
English	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Korean	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Japanese	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Minority Languages	2.9	2.9	2.9	1.0	1.0	1.0	3.3	3.3	3.3
Others	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

The proportion of Khmer speaking population is slightly higher in urban area (97.6%) than that in rural area (96.9%) in 2013 (Table 2.2). Population who speak Vietnamese, Chinese, and French in urban area are much more than those in rural area. In contrast, population speaking in Lao and minority language are much more in rural area. Most minorities live in forest and hill areas in rural area. In comparing with 2008 population census, however, a strange result in 2013 that population who speak English, Korean and Japanese in urban are less than those in rural area is appeared in Table 2.1. This might be owing to sampling in this survey.

Table 2.3 Sex Ratio of Population by Mother Tongue: Urban/Rural, 2008, 2013

Mother Tongue	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
	2008			2013		
	Total	95	92	95	94	94
Khmer	95	92	95	94	94	94
Vietnamese	103	100	104	93	102	71
Chinese	127	118	148	103	72	290
Lao	99	104	99	98	177	98
Thai	178	194	161	202	-	202
French	184	206	116	995	-	132
English	164	163	172	21725	-	11901
Korean	196	215	113	142	-	81
Japanese	152	155	141	28	-	28
Minority Languages	95	95	95	91	86	91
Others	115	169	102	80	-	78

Note: Sex ratio is males per 100 females.

Table 2.3 shows the sex ratios of population by mother tongue. The sex ratios of population by Japanese (28), minority languages (91), Vietnamese (93), Khmer (94), Lao (98) are less than 100, which mean more females than males speak in these languages. On the other hand, the sex ratios of population of English (21,725), French (995), Thai (202), and Korean (142) are more than 100, implying that more males than females speak these languages. Clearly, it seems that high sex ratio in these languages may be due to male domination in international labour migration for business and trade. The extremely low sex ratio of Japanese and high ratio of English might be affected by the survey, considering sex ratios of Japanese (152) and English (164) in the population census of 2008 (Table 2.3).