

Chapter 1 LANGUAGE AND MOTHER TONGUE

1.1 LANGUAGE USED IN CAMBODIA

1.1.1 Language by Sex and Urban-Rural

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 businessmen.

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 indicate absolute and relative distributions of population by mother tongue, sex and rural-urban residence. The overwhelming majority is population speaking in Khmer, 96.3 percent of total population. The proportion speaking Minority languages account for 2.9 percent, followed by Vietnamese (0.5%), and Lao (0.1%) as presented in Table 1.2. Among the population other than Khmer and minority languages, Vietnamese has the highest percentage of the mentioned population, followed by Lao, Chinese, Thai and English. Population speaking Korean, French and Japanese are very few.

Table 1.1 Population by Mother Tongue by Sex: Urban/Rural, 2008

Mother Tongue	Total			Urban			Rural		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
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 1.2 Percentage Distribution of Population by Mother Tongue by Sex: Urban/Rural, 2008

(%)

Mother Tongue	Total			Urban			Rural		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
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 (97.4%) than that in rural area (96.1%) (see Table 1.2). Population who speak Vietnamese, Chinese, Thai and English in urban area are more than those in rural area. In contrast, population speaking in minority language in rural area (3.3%) are three times as much as that in urban area (1.0%), which means most minorities live in rural area.

Table 1.3 Sex Ratio of Population by Mother Tongue: Urban/Rural, 2008

Mother Tongue	Total	Urban	Rural
Total	95	92	95
Khmer	95	92	95
Vietnamese	103	100	104
Chinese	127	118	148
Lao	99	104	99
Thai	178	194	161
French	184	206	116
English	164	163	172
Korean	196	215	113
Japanese	152	155	141
Minority Languages	95	95	95
Others	115	169	102

Note: Sex ratio is males per 100 females.

Table 1.3 shows the sex ratios of population by mother tongue. The sex ratios of population by Khmer (95), Lao (99) and minority languages (95), are less than 100, which mean more females than males speak in these languages. On the other hand, the

sex ratios of population of Korean (196), French (184), Thai (178), English (164) and Japanese (152) 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.

1.1.2 Language by Age

Table 1.4 indicates the distributions of population by language and age group. The proportions of population by language differ from age to age. The age composition of population who speak Khmer, Minority languages, Lao and Vietnam are same as that for population of Cambodia. On the other hand, the age compositions of population who speak Chinese, Thai, French, English, Korean and Japanese concentrate at the working age between 25-29 and 35-39. The age composition of foreign language may reflect international migration.

Table 1.4 Population and Percentage Distribution of Mother Tongue by 5-year Age Group, 2008

Age Group	Total Population	Khmer	Minority Language	Vietnamese	Lao	Chinese	Thai	French	English	Korean	Japanese	Others
Total	13,395,682	12,901,447	383,273	72,775	18,515	6,530	2,458	873	2,360	904	396	6,151
0 - 4	1,372,615	1,317,963	45,742	5,302	2,256	268	29	35	115	36	16	853
5 - 9	1,470,672	1,412,844	47,436	6,451	2,553	248	42	56	111	56	16	859
10-14	1,670,505	1,607,002	52,562	7,392	2,467	298	20	54	94	51	12	553
15 - 19	1,619,290	1,561,239	46,366	8,258	2,163	380	63	68	160	61	18	514
20 - 24	1,369,202	1,319,176	38,008	8,723	1,700	567	184	52	240	32	31	489
25 - 29	1,233,361	1,190,478	31,996	7,258	1,453	724	381	72	279	92	48	580
30 - 34	693,235	665,974	18,689	5,561	967	735	377	61	242	84	68	477
35 - 39	844,948	816,247	20,563	4,953	1,079	827	374	88	239	109	32	437
40 - 44	737,451	711,610	18,592	4,590	896	627	321	78	255	105	47	330
45 - 49	653,650	630,579	16,818	4,028	824	504	240	70	153	99	35	300
50 - 54	490,726	472,360	13,232	3,404	607	393	146	83	150	90	27	234
55 - 59	391,116	377,179	10,104	2,583	459	262	110	69	133	35	20	162
60 - 64	277,611	267,457	7,630	1,605	354	174	76	43	97	33	14	128
65 - 69	216,839	209,434	5,688	1,026	288	136	43	31	61	10	3	119
70 - 74	158,945	153,384	4,305	762	221	145	35	6	24	4	2	57
75 & over	195,516	188,521	5,542	879	228	242	17	7	7	7	7	59
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
0 - 4	10.2	10.2	11.9	7.3	12.2	4.1	1.2	4.0	4.9	4.0	4.0	13.9
5 - 9	11.0	11.0	12.4	8.9	13.8	3.8	1.7	6.4	4.7	6.2	4.0	14.0
10-14	12.5	12.5	13.7	10.2	13.3	4.6	0.8	6.2	4.0	5.6	3.0	9.0
15 - 19	12.1	12.1	12.1	11.3	11.7	5.8	2.6	7.8	6.8	6.7	4.5	8.4
20 - 24	10.2	10.2	9.9	12.0	9.2	8.7	7.5	6.0	10.2	3.5	7.8	7.9
25 - 29	9.2	9.2	8.3	10.0	7.8	11.1	15.5	8.2	11.8	10.2	12.1	9.4
30 - 34	5.2	5.2	4.9	7.6	5.2	11.3	15.3	7.0	10.3	9.3	17.2	7.8
35 - 39	6.3	6.3	5.4	6.8	5.8	12.7	15.2	10.1	10.1	12.1	8.1	7.1
40 - 44	5.5	5.5	4.9	6.3	4.8	9.6	13.1	8.9	10.8	11.6	11.9	5.4
45 - 49	4.9	4.9	4.4	5.5	4.5	7.7	9.8	8.0	6.5	11.0	8.8	4.9
50 - 54	3.7	3.7	3.5	4.7	3.3	6.0	5.9	9.5	6.4	10.0	6.8	3.8
55 - 59	2.9	2.9	2.6	3.5	2.5	4.0	4.5	7.9	5.6	3.9	5.1	2.6
60 - 64	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.2	1.9	2.7	3.1	4.9	4.1	3.7	3.5	2.1
65 - 69	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.6	2.1	1.7	3.6	2.6	1.1	0.8	1.9
70 - 74	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.2	2.2	1.4	0.7	1.0	0.4	0.5	0.9
75 & over	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.2	3.7	0.7	0.8	0.3	0.8	1.8	1.0

1.1.3 Language by Province

Table 1.5 indicates the distributions of population by mother tongue and province. The provinces where major languages are Khmer (around 90% of total population) are 22 provinces among 24 provinces. The provinces where major languages are minority languages are Ratanak Kiri (minority languages:56.1%, Khmer:32.8%) and Mondul Kiri (minority languages 52.5%, Khmer:43.4%). The percentage of population speaking Lao is also high in Ratanak Kiri (7.5%) and Mondul Kiri (3.4%), both provinces are located near the border between Cambodia and Laos. The percentage of population speaking Vietnamese is relatively high in Kampong Chhnang (2.0%), Kandal (1.6%) and Phnom Penh (1.2%),

Table 1.5 Percentage Distribution of Population by Mother Tongue: Province, 2008

Province	Total Population	Total	Khmer	Vietnamese	Chinese	Lao	Thai	French	English	Korean	Japanese	Minority Languages	Others
Cambodia	13,395,682	100.0	96.3	0.5	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.9	0.0
Banteay Meanchey	677,872	100.0	98.8	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0
Bat Dambang	1,025,174	100.0	98.9	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0
Kampong Cham	1,679,992	100.0	94.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.8	0.0
Kampong Chhnang	472,341	100.0	93.7	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.3	0.0
Kampong Speu	716,944	100.0	99.5	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0
Kampong Thom	631,409	100.0	98.5	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.0
Kampot	585,850	100.0	99.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0
Kandal	1,265,280	100.0	97.3	1.6	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0
Koh Kong	117,481	100.0	98.4	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	1.0	0.0
Kratie	319,217	100.0	85.7	0.7	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.5	0.0
Mondul Kiri	61,107	100.0	43.4	0.4	0.2	3.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	52.5	0.2
Phnom Penh	1,327,615	100.0	97.2	1.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0
Preah Vihear	171,139	100.0	87.9	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	11.7	0.0
Prey Veng	947,372	100.0	98.9	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0
Pursat	397,161	100.0	96.4	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	0.0
Ratanak Kiri	150,466	100.0	32.8	0.4	0.2	7.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	56.1	3.0
Siemreap	896,443	100.0	99.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0
Preah Sihanouk	221,396	100.0	97.2	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	1.8	0.1
Stung Treng	111,671	100.0	90.8	0.5	0.2	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.0	0.0
Svay Rieng	482,788	100.0	99.4	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	0.2	0.0
Banteay Meanchey	844,906	100.0	99.5	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0
Oddar Meanchey	185,819	100.0	99.7	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.2	0.0
Kep	35,753	100.0	99.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	0.0	0.0	-	-	0.8	0.0
Pailin	70,486	100.0	98.6	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0

Table 1.6 presents the distribution by province for each mother tongue. The distribution of Khmer language by province is naturally same as the population distribution by province in Cambodia. Vietnamese is mostly used in province Kandal (28.1%), in Phnom Penh (21.7%) and in Kampong Chhnang (12.9%). Lao is used in Ratanak Kiri (61.2%), and Thai is used in Banteay Meanchey (55.2%).

Chinese, French, English, Korean and Japanese are mainly used in Phnom Penh. Minority languages are mostly used in Kampong Cham (25.6%), in Ratanak Kiri