

2. Phonology of Khmu dialects in Laos

2.1 Syllable and word structure

The phonological word in the three Khmu dialects is similar. That is; it may consist of one, two or three syllables. However, there is only one main stress, which occurs on the main syllable at the end of the word.

Monosyllable	'C(C)V(C)	réʔ	'plantation'
		k ^h a:ŋ	'house'
		t ^h rá:k	'water buffalo'
Disyllable	C(C) ^v (C)'C(C)V(C)	l ^a ŋjɿ	'dark'
		k ^h i'r ^h úʔ	'to shake'
		h ⁱ m'ɲaŋ	'to listen'
Trisyllable	C(C) ^v (C)C ^v (C)'C(C)V(C)	t ^a l ^a m'pa:m	'butterfly'
		t ^h iŋ ^e ŋ'teŋ	'grasshopper'

The majority of the words in Khmu dialects are either monosyllabic or disyllabic. Only a few trisyllabic words are found.

There are two kinds of syllables: the main syllable which is stressed 'C(C)V(C), and the presyllable which is unstressed C(C)^v(C). The vowel in the presyllable is just a transitional vowel.

Sometimes it may be reduced or deleted and thus become very much like consonant clusters especially when an initial stop or fricative consonant occurs with a liquid *l* or *r* as in *kʰrúʔ* 'to shake something' or *sɾi:l* 'gold'. However, when the initial consonant is not a stop consonant, or the following consonant is not a liquid consonant, syllabicity can still be heard, as in *ʔɛjɪn* 'dark' or *cʰɔlɔŋ* 'boat'. Many words that are disyllabic in other dialects are monosyllabic in Khmu Rook dialect as in the following examples.

hʰɛʔ	-	ʔéʔ	'firewood'
hʰiær	-	ʔiær	'chicken'
hʰiær	-	ʔiær	'fragrant'
hʰuʔ	-	ʔuʔ	'bad smell, rotten smell'

Laos is the homeland of Khmu. It is where the majority of the Khmu are found. Phonologically Khmu dialects in Laos can be classified into Eastern and Western Khmu. Khmu Cuang or Khmu Uu or Hua Phan Khmu (*ls*) belongs to the Eastern Khmu. It has no tone and no register. Words are distinguished by the voicing contrast of the initial consonants. This dialect has a full set of voiced and voiceless consonants. The Khmu Lue or Nalae Khmu (*lk*) and Khmu Rook or Muang Hun Khmu (*lb*) belong to the Western Khmu. Instead of having voicing contrast for distinguishing the meaning of the word the register contrast is used in *lk* whereas the tone contrast (with aspiration) is used in *lb*. The consonant inventory of Khmu dialects in Laos are presented as Western and Eastern Khmu consonantal systems.

2.2 Consonant inventory

A: Western Khmu consonant phonemes (*lb* and *lk*)

p	t	c	k	ʔ
pʰ	tʰ	cʰ	kʰ	
b/ʔb	d/ʔd			
	s			h
m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
ʔm/ʔb	ʔn/ʔd			
	l			
	r			
w		j		

B: Eastern Khmu consonant phonemes (*ls*)

p	t	c	k	ʔ
pʰ	tʰ	cʰ	kʰ	
b	d	ɟ	g	
	s			h
m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
ʰm	ʰn	ʰɲ	ʰŋ	
ʔm	ʔn	ʔɲ		
	l			
	ʰl			
	r			
	ʰr			
w		j		
ʰw		ʰj		
		ʔj		

All consonants can occur in initial position in both Western and Eastern Khmu. The difference of consonant inventories of the Khmu dialects in Laos can be explained in terms of the suprasegmental systems. However there are only 15 consonants that can occur as final consonants in both Western and Eastern Khmu.

p	t	c	k	ʔ
	s [s~ç]			h
m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
	l			
	r			
w		j		

The reader will observe that in the Khmu Rook and Khmu Lue dialects there is a series of voiced nasals of approximants, and corresponding to these in Khmu Cuang dialect there is both voiced and voiceless nasals and approximants. In this dictionary the voiceless series of sonorants are symbolized with a small raised *h* preceding the phonetic symbol. This is done because the voicelessness turns out to be an interesting sociolinguistic feature that correlates with age groups of speakers in some Khmu dialects spoken in Thailand. That is sometimes the nasal or approximant has been lost and only the aspiration has been retained. Apart from that the preglottalized bilabial nasal ²*m* in EK corresponds to the preglottalized bilabial nasal ²*m* in WK (*lb*) and corresponds to the preglottalized bilabial stop ²*b* in WK (*lk*). At the same time the preglottalized alveolar nasal ²*n* in EK corresponds to the preglottalized alveolar nasal ²*n* in WK (*lb*) and corresponds to the preglottalized alveolar stop ²*d* in WK (*lk*).

The phonetic description of the consonants is as follows.

1. /p/ [p] is a voiceless unaspirated bilabial stop. It can occur in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

<i>lb</i> : pán [pân]	<i>lk</i> : pán [pân]	<i>ls</i> : pít [pít]	'to open'
<i>lb</i> : k ^h rip [k ^h rip]	<i>lk</i> : krip [krip]	<i>ls</i> : grip [grip]	'to arrest, to catch with claws'

2. /b/ [b] is a voiced unaspirated bilabial stop. It only occurs in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

<i>ls</i> : ba: [ba:]	'you (female)'
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This sound corresponds in *lk* dialect to the voiceless unaspirated stop *p* in a word with lax voice quality as in *pá:* and in *lb* dialect to the voiceless aspirated stop *p^h* in a word with low pitch as in *p^há:*.

3. /p^h/ [p^h] is a voiceless aspirated bilabial stop. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position.

<i>lb</i> : p ^h án [p ^h ân]	<i>lk</i> : p ^h án [p ^h ân]	<i>ls</i> : p ^h án [p ^h ân]	'to kill'
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4. /t/ [t] is a voiceless unaspirated alveolar stop. It can occur in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

<i>lb</i> : tɪʔ [tɪʔ]	<i>lk</i> : tɪʔ [tɪʔ]	<i>ls</i> : tɪʔ [tɪʔ]	‘hand’
<i>lb</i> : cáʔ [tɕát]	<i>lk</i> : cáʔ [tɕát]	<i>ls</i> : cat [tɕat]	‘sour’

5. /d/ [d] is a voiced unaspirated alveolar stop. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

<i>ls</i> : deʔ [deʔ]	‘to take’
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This sound correspond in *lk* dialect to the voiceless unaspirated stop *t* in a word with lax voice quality as in *teʔ* and in *lb* dialect to the voiceless aspirated stop *t^h* in a word with low pitch as in *t^heʔ*.

6. /t^h/ [t^h] is a voiceless, aspirated alveolar stop. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position.

<i>lb</i> : t ^h ɹɪp [t ^h ɹɪp]	<i>lk</i> : t ^h ɹɪp [t ^h ɹɪp]	<i>ls</i> : t ^h ɹɪp [t ^h ɹɪp]	‘to hold onto a branch (chicken)’
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7. /c/ [tɕ-, [-c] is a voiceless unaspirated alveo-palatal affricate when it occurs in the syllable-initial position, but is a palatal stop when it occurs in the syllable-final position.

<i>lb</i> : cáʔ [tɕát]	<i>lk</i> : cáʔ [tɕát]	<i>ls</i> : cat [tɕat]	‘sour’
<i>lb</i> : mec [mɛc]	<i>lk</i> : mec [mec]	<i>ls</i> : mec [mec]	‘to hear, to feel’

8. /ɟ/ [ɟ] is a voiced palatal stop. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

<i>ls</i> : ɟoŋ [ɟoŋ]	‘tall’
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This sound corresponds in *lk* dialect to the voiceless unaspirated palatal stop *c* in a word with lax voice quality as in *coŋ* and in *lb* dialect to the voiceless aspirated stop *c^h* in a word with low pitch as in *c^hoŋ*.

9. /c^h/ [tɕ^h] is a voiceless aspirated alveo-palatal affricate. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position.

<i>lb</i> : c ^h ɪət [tɕ ^h ɪət]	<i>lk</i> : c ^h ɪət [tɕ ^h ɪət]	<i>ls</i> : c ^h ɪət [tɕ ^h ɪət]	‘to insert, to stick in’
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10. /k/ [k] is a voiceless unaspirated velar stop. It occurs in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

<i>lb</i> : káʔ [káʔ]	<i>lk</i> : káʔ [káʔ]	<i>ls</i> : kaʔ [kaʔ]	‘fish’
<i>lb</i> : mok [mók]	<i>lk</i> : mok [mok]	<i>ls</i> : mok [mok]	‘hill, mountain’

11. /g/ [g] is a voiced unaspirated velar stop. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

<i>ls</i> : ga:j [ga:j]	‘to return’
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This sound corresponds in *lk* dialect to the voiceless unaspirated velar stop *k* in a word with lax voice quality as in *kaɹj*, and in *lb* dialect to the voiceless aspirated velar stop *k^h* in a word with low pitch as in *k^haɹj*.

12. /k^h/ [k^h] is a voiceless aspirated velar stop. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position.

lb: k^hú:l [k^hú:l] *lk*: k^hú:l [k^hú:l] *ls*: k^hu:l [k^hu:l] 'hair, fur'

13. /ʔ/ [ʔ] is a glottal stop. It occurs in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

lb: ʔóm [ʔóm] *lk*: ʔóm [ʔóm] *ls*: ʔom [ʔom] 'water'

lb: neʔ [nɛʔ] *lk*: ɲeʔ [ɲeʔ] *ls*: ɲeʔ [ɲeʔ] 'small'

14. /s/ [s-], [-ç] is an alveolar fricative when it occurs initially. It is an alveolar fricative when it occurs in syllable-final position in *lb* dialect but is a palatal fricative in *lk* and *ls* dialects.

lb: sɪm [sɪm] *lk*: sɪm [sɪm] *ls*: sɪm [sɪm] 'bird'

lb: k^hrás [k^hrás] *lk*: k^hrás [k^hráç] *ls*: k^hras [k^hraç] 'to laugh'

15. /h/ [h] is glottal fricative. It occurs in both syllable-initial and syllable-final position.

lb: hɪəŋ [hɪəŋ] *lk*: hɪəŋ [hɪəŋ] *ls*: hɪəŋ [hɪəŋ] 'black'

lb: jəh [jəh] *lk*: jəh [jəh] *ls*: jəh [çh] 'to walk, to go'

16. /m/ [m] is a voiced bilabial nasal. It occurs in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

lb: muh [múh] *lk*: muh [muh] *ls*: muh [muh] 'nose'

lb: ma:m [ma:m] *lk*: ma:m [ma:m] *ls*: ma:m [ma:m] 'blood'

17. /^hm/ [^hm] is a voiceless bilabial nasal. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

ls: ^hməh [ʰməh] 'what'

This sound corresponds in *lk* and *lb* dialects to the bilabial nasal *m* in a word with high pitch as in *máh*.

18. /ʔm/ [ʔm] is a preglottalized labial nasal. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *lb* and *ls* dialects.

lb: ʔmet [ʔmet] 'fishing hook' *ls*: ʔmét [ʔmét] 'fishing hook'

This sound corresponds in *lk* dialect to the preglottalized labial stop *ʔb* as in *ʔbét*.

19. /n/ [n] is a voiced alveolar nasal. It can occur in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

<i>lb:</i> nīm [nīm]	<i>lk:</i> nīm [nīm]	<i>ls:</i> nīm [nīm]	‘year’
<i>lb:</i> hām [hām]	<i>lk:</i> hām [hām]	<i>ls:</i> hām [hām]	‘to die’

20. /^hn/ [n̥] is a voiceless alveolar nasal. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

ls: ^hniəc [n̥iəc] ‘to stamp, to squash or crush with foot’

This sound corresponds in *lk* and *lb* dialects to the voiced alveolar nasal *n* in a word with high pitch as in *n̄iəc*.

21. /ʔn/ [ʔn̥] is a preglottalized alveolar nasal. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *lb* and *ls* dialects.

lb: ʔniən [ʔn̥iən] ‘month’ *ls:* ʔniən [ʔn̥iən] ‘month’

This sound corresponds in *lk* and *lb* dialects to the preglottalized alveolar stop ^ʔ*d* as in ^ʔ*d̄iən*.

22. /ɲ/ [ɲ] is a voiced palatal nasal. It can occur in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

<i>lb:</i> ɲam [ɲam]	<i>lk:</i> ɲam [ɲam]	<i>ls:</i> ɲam [ɲam]	‘time, season’
<i>lb:</i> ma:ɲ [ma:ɲ]	<i>lk:</i> ma:ɲ [ma:ɲ]	<i>ls:</i> ma:ɲ [ma:ɲ]	‘to ask’

23. /^hɲ/ [h̥ɲ] is a voiceless palatal nasal. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

ls: ^hɲip [h̥ɲip] ‘to catch, to arrest’

This sound corresponds in *lk* and *lb* dialects to the voiced palatal nasal *ɲ* in a word with high pitch as in *ɲ̄ip*.

24. /ŋ/ [ŋ] is a voiced velar nasal. It occurs in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

<i>lb:</i> ŋam [ŋam]	<i>lk:</i> ŋam [ŋam]	<i>ls:</i> ŋam [ŋam]	‘goose’
<i>lb:</i> moŋ [moŋ]	<i>lk:</i> moŋ [moŋ]	<i>ls:</i> moŋ [moŋ]	‘moon’

25. /^hŋ/ [h̥ŋ] is a voiceless velar nasal. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

ls: ^hŋa:p [h̥ŋa:p] ‘to yawn’

This sound corresponds in *lk* and *lb* dialects to the voiced velar nasal *ŋ* in a word with high pitch as in *ŋ̄a:p*.

26. /l/ [l] is a voiced lateral. It occurs in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

<i>lb:</i> lə:c [lə:c]	<i>lk:</i> lə:c [lə:c]	<i>ls:</i> lə:c [lə:c]	‘to steal’
<i>lb:</i> k ^h ɔ:l [k ^h ɔ:l]	<i>lk:</i> k ^h ɔ:l [k ^h ɔ:l]	<i>ls:</i> k ^h ɔ:l [k ^h ɔ:l]	‘to whistle’

27. /^hl/ [ʰl] is a voiceless lateral. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

ls: ʰloŋ [ʰloŋ] 'to forget'

This sound corresponds in *lk* and *lb* dialects to the voiced lateral *l* in a word with high pitch as in *lóŋ*.

28. /r/ [r] is a voiced trill. It occurs in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

lb: re:t [rɛ:t] *lk*: re:t [rɛ:t] *ls*: re:t [rɛ:t] 'rhinoceros'

lb: mar [már] *lk*: mar [mar] *ls*: mar [mar] 'snake'

29. /^hr/ [ʰr] is a voiceless trill. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

ls: ʰreʔ [ʰreʔ] 'field'

This sound corresponds in *lk* and *lb* dialects to the voiced trill *r* in a word with high pitch as in *réʔ*.

30. /w/ [w-, ʊ-, -w] is a voiced bilabial semivowel [w] in *lk* and *ls* dialects, and a dental-labial approximant [ʊ] in *lb* dialect when it occurs in the syllable-initial position and a voiced bilabial semi-vowel [w] when occurs in the syllable-final position.

lb: wit [ʊit] *lk*: wit [wit] *ls*: wit [wit] 'feel dizzy'

lb: cé:w [tɕé:w] *lk*: cé:w [tɕɛ:w] *ls*: cé:w [tɕɛ:w] 'chili paste'

31. /^hw/ [ʰw] is a voiceless bilabial semivowel. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

ls: ʰwaʔ [ʰwaʔ] 'monkey'

This sound corresponds in *lk* and *lb* dialects to the voiced bilabial semivowel *w* in a word with high pitch as in *wáʔ*.

32. /j/ [j] is a voiced palatal semivowel. It can occur in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

lb: jim [jim] *lk*: jim [jim] *ls*: jim [jim] 'red'

lb: jɔ:j [jɔ:j] *lk*: jɔ:j [jɔ:j] *ls*: jɔ:j [jɔ:j] 'a balance'

33. /^hj/ [ʰj] is a voiceless palatal semivowel. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position in *ls* dialect.

ls: ʰja:ŋ [ʰja:ŋ] 'female animal'

This sound corresponds in *lk* and *lb* dialects to the voiced palatal semivowel *j* in a word with high pitch as in *já:ŋ*.

34. /ʔj/ [ʔj] is a preglottalized palatal semivowel. It occurs only in the syllable-initial position.

lb: ʔján [ʔján] *lk*: ʔján [ʔjân] *ls*: ʔjan [ʔjan] 'to pull'

Consonant Clusters. Many clusters are found in Khmu dialects of Laos. They comprise a stop consonant followed by a liquid /l/ or /r/ or w. Examples are drawn from Khmu Rook (*lb*).

cr-	cro:n cro:n	'sound of silver against each other'
c ^h r-	c ^h ru?	'deep'
kl-	klé:m	'gnaw'
kr-	kriək	'move with a lever'
kw-	kwə:j	'above'
k ^h l-	k ^h la:n	'shut up, open'
k ^h r-	k ^h ra:n	'hard, strong'
k ^h w-	k ^h wa:r	'spin'
pl-	plí:n	'leech'
pr-	pru:n	'sound of jumping into water'
p ^h l-	p ^h lo:n	'rattan'
p ^h r-	p ^h ri:t	'shift slightly'
tr-	tráh	'apply, compress'
t ^h r-	t ^h ri:k	'small frog (kind of)'

Apart from these examples, there are many disyllabic words that have stops as syllable-initial consonants and /l/ or /r/ as syllable-final consonants. The presyllable in a disyllabic word is normally unstressed syllable and the vowel is just a transitional or reduced vowel, and in natural speech this vowel is deleted. The final consonant /l/ or /r/ then becomes more like part of a consonant cluster as in the following examples which are drawn from Khmu Rook (*lb*):

sr-	sə:ma? ~ sɹma?	'sickness'
kl-	k ⁱ lpa: ~ klpa:	'fluctuating movement'
kr-	k ⁱ rnə:k ~ krnə:k	'lean against'
pr-	pə:rka? ~ prka?	'earth dam'

When (a) the presyllable-final consonant is a consonant other than /l/ or /r/, or, (b) when the presyllable is an open syllable, or, (c) when the presyllable-initial consonant is not a stop and the presyllable vowel is deleted, then the presyllable will be pronounced as a syllabic consonant as in the following examples.

cə-	cəlo:n ~ c,lo:n	'ship'
c ⁱ N-	c ⁱ nt ^h a:p ~ c ⁱ ,t ^h a:p	'flat'
h ^e -	h ^e ?e? ~ h,?e?	'firewood'
kə-	kətam ~ k,tam	'heavy'
kəN-	kəntúər ~ k ⁱ ,túər	'neck'
lə-	lənɲi ~ l,ɲi	'dark'
ləN-	ləmta:n ~ lm,tə:n	'eggplant'
pə-	pənir ~ p,nir	'wing'

p ^ə N-	p ^ə nruk ~ p ⁿ ,ruk	'make dirty'
r ^ə -	r ^ə wa:j ~ r [,] wa:j	'tiger'
r ^ə N-	r ^ə m [?] a:ŋ ~ r ^m , [?] a:ŋ	'bright, healthy and colorful'
	r ^ə nt ^h en ~ r ⁿ ,t ^h en	'chair, bench'
r ^ə t-	r ^ə tu:ut ~ r ^t ,mu:t	'sticky rice cooling tray'
t ^ə -	t ^ə lə:p ~ t [,] lə:p	'cover'
	t ^ə nɔh ~ t [,] nɔh	'mouth'
t ^ə N-	t ^ə mlu:j ~ t ^m ,lu:j	'hang down'
s ^ə -	s ^ə nt ^h ri:l ~ s ⁿ ,t ^h ri:l	'dazzled eyes'
	s ^ə ca:ŋ ~ s [,] ca:ŋ	'elephant'
s ^ə N-	s ^ə mpor ~ s ^m ,por	'amarind'

Final Consonants. All Khmu dialects have 15 consonants which occur in final position. They are *p t c k ʔ s h m n ŋ ɿ r w* and *j* which are the typical Mon-Khmer final consonants. The following are examples drawn from Khmu Rook (*lb*) words with these final consonants.

-p	ke:p	[ke:p]	'to grip'
	k ^h rip	[k ^h rip]	'to seize'
-t	sna:t	[s ^ə n ^h ã:t]	'gun'
	cit	[tɕit]	'grass'
-c	wec	[uɛc]	'return'
	lə:c	[lɛ:c]	'to steal'
-k	p ^h rɔ:k	[p ^h rɔ:k]	'squirrel'
	cá:k	[tɕá:k]	'to tear'
-ʔ	sóʔ	[sóʔ]	'dog'
	k ^h leʔ	[k ^h lɛʔ]	'husband'
-s	k ^h rás	[k ^h ras]	'to laugh'
-h	jɔh	[jóh]	'to go'
	móh	[mɔh]	'what'
-m	ʔóm	[ʔóm]	'water'
	ma:m	[ma:m]	'blood'
-n	klin	[klin]	'smell'
	k ^h lan	[k ^h lan]	'lazy'

-ɲ	píɲ	[píɲ]	‘to shoot’
	kíɲ	[kíɲ]	‘full’
-ŋ	k ^h ɛŋ	[k ^h ɛŋ]	‘to dig’
	riŋ	[ríŋ]	‘intestine’
-l	ká:l	[ká:l]	‘in front of’
	t ^h má:l	[t ^h má:l]	‘garbage’
-r	mar	[mar]	‘snake’
	hmpó:r	[h ^h mpó:r]	‘tamarind’
-w	k ^h miəw	[k ^h miəw]	‘sickle’
-j	t ^h aj	[t ^h aj]	‘bag’
	k ^h rúj	[k ^h rúj]	‘to be sad’

2.3 Vowel Phonemes

All Khmu dialects have similar vowel phonemes. There are nine short monophthongs, nine long monophthongs and three diphthongs. There is only a long central mid-low unrounded long vowel *ɜ:* in all Khmu dialects. Even though some Khmu dialects have developed voice quality, the vowel quality is still the same. The Khmu monophthongs and diphthongs are as follows.

i	i:	ɪ	ɪ:	u	u:
e	e:	ə	ə:	o	o:
ɛ	ɛ:	ʌ	ʌ:	ɔ	ɔ:
		a	a:		
ia		ia		ua	

The phonetic descriptions of these monophthongs and diphthongs are as follows.

1. /i/ [i] is a high front unrounded short vowel.
/cít/ [tɕít] ‘grass’
2. /i:/ [i:] is a high front unrounded long vowel.
/sím/ [sím] ‘cooked’
3. /e/ [e] is a mid front unrounded short vowel.
/t^heʔ/ [t^heʔ] ‘to take, get’
4. /e:/ [e:] is a mid front unrounded long vowel.
/p^hle:k/ [p^hlě:k] ‘eel’
5. /ɛ/ [ɛ] is a low front unrounded short vowel.
/jɛʔ/ [jěʔ] ‘you (male)’

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| 6. | /ɛ:/ [ɛ:] | is a low front unrounded long vowel. |
| | /srkɛ:p/ | [sɪrkɛ:p] 'pincer' |
| 7. | /i/ [i] | is a high central unrounded short vowel. |
| | /hɪl/ | [hɪl] 'gum' |
| 8. | /i:/ [i:] | is a high central unrounded long vowel. |
| | /jɪ:t/ | [jɪ:t] 'flood tide' |
| 9. | /ə/ [ə] | is a mid central unrounded short vowel. |
| | /məh/ | [məh] 'what' |
| 10. | /ə:/ [ə:] | is a mid central unrounded long vowel. |
| | /rəm/ | [rəm] 'heap of fallen tress' |
| 11. | /ʌ/ [ʌ:] | is a mid-low central unrounded long vowel. |
| | /nʌɾ/ | [nʌɾ] 'delighted (dog)' |
| 12. | /a/ [a] | is a low central unrounded short vowel. |
| | /c ^h am/ | [tɕ ^h am] 'to soak' |
| 13. | /a:/ [a:] | is a low central unrounded long vowel. |
| | /ma:ɲ/ | [ma:ɲ] 'to ask' |
| 14. | /u/ [u] | is a high back rounded short vowel. |
| | /kut/ | [kut] 'to be shortened' |
| 15. | /u:/ [u:] | is a high back rounded long vowel. |
| | /k ^h u:t/ | [k ^h u:t] 'to enter' |
| 16. | /o/ [o] | is a mid back rounded short vowel. |
| | /k ^h on/ | [k ^h on] 'traditional Khmu skirt' |
| 17. | /o:/ [o:] | is a mid back rounded long vowel. |
| | /sɔʔ/ | [sɔʔ] 'axe' |
| 18. | /ɔ/ [ɔ] | is a low back rounded short vowel. |
| | /lɔŋ/ | [lɔŋ] 'if' |
| 19. | /ɔ:/ [ɔ:] | is a low back rounded long vowel. |
| | /kɔm/ | [kɔm] 'child' |
| 20. | /iə/ [iə] | is a glide from high front vowel to mid central vowel. |
| | /liət/ | [liət] 'short' |
| 21. | /iə/ [iə] | is a glide from high central vowel to mid central vowel. |
| | /piət/ | [piət] 'squeeze, press (using fingers)' |

22. /uə/ [uə] is a glide from high back vowel to mid central vowel.
 /c^hrúət/ [tɕ^hrúət] 'morning'

2.4 Suprasegmental phonemes

The Khmu Cuang dialect (*ls*) has no tone nor register whereas Khmu Lue dialect (*lk*) has registers and Khmu Rook (*lb*) has tones.

Khmu Cuang dialect (*ls*) has the voiced/voiceless distinction of the initial consonant as in the following examples.

Table 1. Voiced/voiceless contrast in Khmu Cuang

1. Stop consonants:

voiced stop consonants:		voiceless stop consonants:	
bak	'to ride'	pak	'to break (wood)'
bu:c	'rice wine'	pu:c	'to take off clothes'
bok	'to cut down a tree'	pok	'to take a bite'
bum	'to chew'	pum	'to fart'
glɑ:ŋ	'eagle'	klɑ:ŋ	'stone'
jaŋ	'to weigh'	caŋ	'astringent'

2. Continuant consonants:

voiced continuant consonants:		voiceless continuant consonants:	
ŋɔ?	'to fear'	^h ŋɔ?	'paddy rice'
məh	'to be'	^h məh	'what'
ra:ŋ	'flower'	^h ra:ŋ	'tooth'
la?	'to go out'	^h la?	'leaf'
wa?	'to chase'	^h wa?	'monkey'
ja:ŋ	'animal basket'	^h ja:ŋ	'female animal'

In Khmu Lue (*lk*) and Khmu Rook (*lb*) the prosodic feature are contrastive, instead of the Khmu Cunag (*ls*) voicing contrast of the initial consonant. The *lk* dialect has register contrast; the *lb* dialect has tonal contrast. A word which has a voiced initial consonant in *ls* corresponds to an *lk* word with lower pitch and lax/breathy voice quality. A word which has a voiceless initial consonant in *ls* dialect corresponds to a word with higher pitch and clear tense voice quality in *lk* dialect (symbolized as ʔ). Even though the lax register in Khmu does not have the strong breathy voice quality of other Mon-Khmer languages such as Mon, Chong, Kuy or Iduh yet it is quite distinctive for the Khmu native speakers. It is obvious that when the initial consonant is a stop consonant the breathy voice quality is quite clear. The tense register with all consonant types in *lk* dialect is clear and tense. The *lb* dialect has a tonal contrast with voiceless aspirated stop initial. This is a step developed after the register

contrast. Instead of having the voice quality it has the aspiration and the whole syllable is clear and lower pitch. It is also noticeable in some words with long vowels sometime the raising pitch is pronounced instead of rising or rising-falling. However for the words with syllable-initial continuants when the voiced/voiceless of consonantal system (as in *ls*) had decayed and the languages were forced to exploit prosodic differences for contrastive purposes (as in *lk* and *lb*) the voiced consonants stay the same but the voiceless consonants (^hm, ^hn, ^hŋ, ^hr, ^hl ^hw, ^hj) become voiced consonants (m, n, ŋ, r, l, w, j) in words with high tone. These three Khmu dialects of Laos show different stages of tone development. The following examples show the three Khmu dialects (*lb*, *lk* and *ls*) in different stages of tonogenesis.

1) Words with syllable-initial stops

Gloss	<i>ls</i>	<i>lk</i>	<i>lb</i>
'rice wine'	bu:c [bu:c]	pu:c [pʉ:c]	p ^h u:c [p ^h ù:c]
'to take off clothes'	pu:c [pu:c]	pú:c [pû:c]	pú:c [p ^h ú:c]
'to cut down a tree'	bok [bok]	pok [pɔk]	p ^h ok [p ^h òk]
'to bite'	pok [pok]	pók [pɔk]	pók [pók]
'to chew'	bu:m [bu:m]	pu:m [pʉ:m]	p ^h u:m [p ^h u:m]
'to fart'	pu:m [pu:m]	pú:m [pû:m]	pú:m [pú:m]
'to weigh'	jaŋ [jaŋ]	caŋ [câŋ]	c ^h aŋ [c ^h aŋ]
'bitter'	caŋ [caŋ]	cán [cán]	cán [cán]
'rock'	gla:ŋ [gla:ŋ]	kla:ŋ [klà:ŋ]	k ^h la:ŋ [k ^h la:ŋ]
'hawk, eagle'	kla:ŋ [kla:ŋ]	klá:ŋ [klâ:ŋ]	klá:ŋ [klá:ŋ]

2) Words with syllable-initial continuants

Gloss	<i>ls</i>	<i>lk</i> and <i>lb</i>
'to fear'	ŋɔ? [ŋɔ?]	ŋɔ? [ŋɔ?]
'paddy rice'	^h ŋɔ? [^h ŋɔ?]	ŋó? [ŋó?]
'to chase'	wa? [wa?]	wa? [wa?]
'monkey'	^h wa? [^h wa?]	wá? [wá?]
'flower'	ra:ŋ [ra:ŋ]	ra:ŋ [ra:ŋ]
'tooth'	^h ra:ŋ [^h ra:ŋ]	rá:ŋ [rá:ŋ]

It is obvious that the lax/breathy register in *lk* is rather weak especially when it occurs in a word with initial continuant. In phonemic writing used in this dictionary a word with tense register is symbolized as ʋ while the low lax/breathy register is unmarked. It is also noticeable that the low pitch in *lb* is somewhat higher than the same word with voiced initial consonant in *ls* and the same word with low lax/breathy register in *lk*. In phonetic writing in this dictionary the relatively higher pitch feature is therefore symbolized with high pitch mark ʋ and the relatively lower pitch is unmarked. The *lb* dialect has two phonemic tones but six phonetic tones are found. The low tone has four variations. They are level (unmarked), or low (v̇), half high (ý) and falling-rising (v̇). The high tone has two variations. They are high and rising-falling. The words with final continuant, when occurring with lower tone, normally have level or low pitch as in *mam* [mā:m ~ m̃:m] 'blood', *jəj* [jəj ~ j̃əj] 'balance'. In words with final stop or final fricative after short vowel have half high pitch as in *kʰrip* [kʰɹip ~ kʰɹ̥ip] 'to seize', *je?* [je? ~ j̃é?] 'you', *kʰle?* [kʰl̥e? ~ kʰl̥é?] 'husband', *mec* [mec ~ m̃éc] 'to hear, feel', *joh* [joh ~ j̃oh] 'to go'. Words with final stop after long vowel have falling-rising tone as in *kʰut* [kʰūt ~ kʰūt̃] 'to enter', *pʰlek* [pʰl̥ɛ:k ~ pʰl̥ɛ:k̃] 'eel', and *sñat* [sñāt̃] 'gun'. Words with final glottal stop or final fricative, when occurring with high tone, normally have high pitch as in *só?* [s̃ó?] 'Khmu axe'. Words with final continuants normally have either high or rising-falling pitches as in *kóm* [k̃óm ~ k̃óm̃] 'child', *tʰm̃il* [tʰm̃il̃ ~ tʰm̃il̃] 'garbage', *kntúar* [kntúar ~ kntúar̃] 'neck'. These are the phonetic characteristics of the tonal contrasts in this Khmu dialect.

5. Intonation patterns

In general the intonation pattern in various Khmu dialects is similar. It starts with mid pitch then rises a little and falls down at the end of the sentence. The question and request or persuasion have the falling pitch but not as abrupt and low as in other sentences.

Statements	kʰə:	kʰa:j	tʰa	kʰa:ŋ ↗	'He has gone home.'
	He	return	at	home	
Commands	ta:	klih	jo?	rak jo? ↗	'Don't fight'
	don't	quarrel	together	long together	
Request	pʰə?	mah	ʔəm	↘	'Let's eat'
	eat	rice	fp.		
Question	je?	joh	m̃əh	↘	'Where are you going'
	You (m)	go	where		

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