Proto-Mon–Khmer language

The **Proto-Mon–Khmer language** (Proto-Austroasiatic) is the reconstructed ancestor of the Mon–Khmer languages, a purported primary branch of the Austroasiatic language family. However, Mon–Khmer as a taxon has been abandoned in recent classifications, making Proto-Mon–Khmer synonymous with Proto-Austroasiatic; the Munda languages, which are not well documented, and have been restructured through external language contact, have not been included in the reconstructions.

Much work has been done on the reconstruction of Proto-Mon–Khmer in Harry L. Shorto's *Mon–Khmer Comparative Dictionary*. Sidwell (2007, 2009, 2011) suggests that the likely homeland of Austroasiatic is the middle Mekong, in the area of the Bahnaric and Katuic languages (approximately where modern Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia come together), and that the family is not as old as frequently assumed, dating to perhaps 2000 BCE.[1]

1 Phonology

Proto-Mon–Khmer has a total of 21 consonants, 7 distinct vowels which can be lengthened and glottalized, and 3 diphthongs (Shorto 2006).

Proto-Mon–Khmer is rich in vowels. The vowels are:

- *a, *aa
- *e, *ee
- *ə, *əə
- *i, *-iʔ, *ii, *-iiʔ
- *o, *oo
- *ɔ, *ɔɔ
- *u, *uu, *-uuʔ

The diphthongs are:

- *iə, *uə, *ai

2 Morphology

Common structures include *CV(C) and *CCV(C) roots. *CVC roots can also be affixed either via prefixes or infixes, as in *C-CVC or *C⟨C⟩VC (Shorto 2006). Sidwell (2008) gives the following phonological shapes for two types of stems.

- **Monosyllabic** - C(R)V(V)C
- **Sesquisyllabic** - CCV(V)C

Note: R is one of the optional medial consonants /r, l, j, w, h/.

Sidwell (2008) considers the two most morphologically conservative Mon–Khmer branches to be Khmuic and Aslian. On the other hand, Vietnamese morphology is far more similar to that of Chinese and the Tai languages and has lost many morphological features found in Proto-Mon–Khmer.

The following Proto-Mon–Khmer affixes, which are still tentative, have been reconstructed by Paul Sidwell (Sidwell 2008:257-263).

- Nominalizing **-n-** (instrumental in Kammu, resultative in Khmu)
- Nominalizing agentive **-m-**
- Expressive of repetitiveness/numerousness **-l-**
- Nominalizing instrumental **-p-**
- Causative **p-** (allomorphs: *p-, pn-, -m-*)
- Reciprocal **tr-**

3 Syntax

Like the Tai languages, Proto-Mon–Khmer has an SVO, or verb-medial, order. Proto-Mon–Khmer also makes use of noun classifiers and serial verb constructions (Shorto 2006).

4 References

[1] Family Diversity and the Austroasiatic Homeland, Paul Sidwell (abstract)

- Shorto, Harry L. Sidwell, Paul, Doug Cooper and Christian Bauer, eds. 2006. *A Mon–Khmer Comparative Dictionary*. Canberra: Australian National University. Pacific Linguistics. ISBN 0-85883-570-3.

- Sidwell, Paul. 2008. "Issues in the morphological reconstruction of Proto-Mon–Khmer." In Bowern, Claire, et al. (eds). *Morphology and language history: in honour of Harold Koch*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

- Mon–Khmer.com: Lectures by Paul Sidwell

5   External links

- Mon–Khmer languages at SEAlang

- Mon–Khmer.com: Lectures by Paul Sidwell

- Mon–Khmer languages at Ethnologue

- Classifications of Mon–Khmer languages

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6.1 Text

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