

province of Kanchanaburi, which borders Tak to the south.³

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the dialectal situation among the Pwo Karen living in northern Thailand. Particular focus will be given to identifying dialect groupings. The analysis is based on data that was collected between May 1991 and August 1992. Extensive research was carried out in five of the seven northern provinces where Pwo Karen villages are found: Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai. Research in the sixth province, Mae Hong Son, was limited to two word lists and a limited number of interviews with Pwo Karen from the area and various expatriates who have worked among the Pwo Karen in Mae Hong Son. Research in the seventh province, Tak, was not possible due to time limitations.

In each of these six northern provinces, bilingualism in Northern Thai among the Pwo Karen ranges from low to very high. In most villages a majority of the inhabitants are reportedly capable of communicating in Northern Thai at least well enough to purchase goods at the market. This is particularly true in villages that are located near Thai villages or towns. In Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae and Chiang Rai there are a very limited number of villages where Northern Thai is not spoken by the majority, at least to some degree. In Chiang Mai and eastward into Mae Hong Son, toward the Burmese border, bilingualism decreases. Even in villages where Northern Thai is a second language, however, Pwo Karen remains the language of preference in daily village life.⁴

2. Methodology

In order to expedite locating the villages, help ensure a good reception in each village, and improve the quality of the data, a Pwo Karen assistant was employed. For

³It should be noted that Cooke, et al, make it clear that their divisions were based on limited familiarity with the variety of Pwo Karen spoken in the provinces listed in Group 3.

⁴I should also note that in the course of my research I investigated the two Karen villages that are located in Sukhothai province and found that they are both populated by Sgaw Karen with the exception of a few Pwo Karen who have married into these villages.

the majority of the project Apinan Phutsuay, an evangelist working under the Karen Baptist Convention, served as my research assistant. Prior to taking any research trips I trained the research assistant by taking him through the steps outlined below. We carefully went over the type of information that I expected to elicit in the interviews (Step 4) and the type of person we would need for eliciting language data (Step 5). I then elicited a word list from him so that he would be familiar with the lexical items that we would be seeking to elicit.⁵

The actual research and analysis comprised six steps: library research, identifying Pwo Karen villages, conducting interviews, eliciting word lists, performing a lexicostatic analysis, and performing a phonostatic analysis.

2.1 Library Research

Through library research a list of the Karen villages found in each province was written out and photocopied. (See Appendix A for a sample list.) This information came primarily from the *Directory of Tribal Villages in Northern Administrative Divisions (DTVNAD)*. From this list of villages a rough map of the province was drawn marking the districts where Karen villages were located. An itinerary was then planned which included visits to each district.

2.2 Identifying Pwo Karen Villages

Since the *DTVNAD* does not specify which Karen villages are Pwo Karen and which are Sgaw Karen, the next step was to eliminate villages from the list that were Sgaw Karen. This could often only be done by visiting the villages, or the areas where the villages were located, and asking the Karen there what they called themselves. The Sgaw Karen call themselves *pyākàpā* while the Pwo call themselves *p^hlōŋ*.

⁵In going through the word list with him it was found that #151 'buttocks' was likely to be problematic. Thus, it was not used on the research trips.

2.3 Interviews

Once we had established which villages were Pwo Karen, interviews were conducted in these villages. The interviews were conducted in an informal manner and generally involved between five and twenty villagers taking part in the discussion. Decisions were always by consensus, although there was seldom any disagreement.

The purpose of the interviews was to determine from the villagers' perspective the nature of the language spoken in other Pwo Karen villages that they had had contact with. Questions that we were seeking to answer included: Where are there Karens who speak exactly the same as you? Where are there Karens who you understand completely but they speak slightly differently? Where are there Karens who speak differently, and you can only understand them if they speak slowly? Where are there Karens who speak so differently that you cannot understand them at all?

This information was recorded on a list of the villages, one list for each village where an interview was conducted. Generally, we would only note "S" (for exactly the same), "D" for (very different), or a more specific note, e.g., "slightly different" (see Appendix A).

As the researcher, I played a minimal role in the interview process. Sometimes I asked for clarification (in Northern Thai) or directed questions to members of the group who tended not to take part, such as women and young people. However, the bulk of the interview was conducted by the research assistant using the Pwo Karen language.⁶ Villagers were not asked to comment on every village on the list. Rather, data was usually recorded only for those villages on the list for which the villagers offered information.

Information gathered in one village would then be verified through interviews in several other villages. Thus, a cluster of four villages in one area was considered to

⁶Through long-term exposure to Pwo Karen throughout the region, the research assistant had become proficient in a number of different varieties of Pwo Karen. This proved very useful in the elicitation sessions.

speak a uniform dialect,⁷ if there was agreement in the interviews conducted in each of these villages that the language spoken in each of the other villages within the cluster was the same. Similarly, if there was agreement in each of these same villages that the variety of Pwo Karen spoken in another cluster of villages was different, this information was then checked against data gathered in the second cluster to determine if they also viewed the variety of Pwo Karen spoken in the first cluster to be different from their own.

2.4 Word Lists

Based on the information gathered through the interviews, a decision was made as to where word lists should be taken. To be safe, where speakers from one group of villages identified another group of villages as being locations where the language differed even slightly, the latter were selected as word list locations. Thus, the interviews provided the researcher with an idea of which villages formed clusters of villages speaking the exact same dialect, as well as ideas of where other sub-dialects were located. The word list which was used consists of 405 common words which are arranged by semantic domains (see Appendix B).

The elicitation process was conducted in one of three languages. In many places we were able to use Northern Thai to elicit the word list. However, in some cases it was necessary, or preferable, to use either Sgaw Karen or Pwo Karen alone.

2.5 Lexicostatistics

The data from the elicited word lists were subjected to a lexicostatistic analysis which can provide the analyst with a measure of the relative lexical similarity between

⁷As Chambers and Trudgill (1980:5) have noted, the term "dialect" is often used in a very ad hoc manner by linguists. I do not seek to change this practice. In this paper it is chosen as a convenient term for indicating a subdivision within a language which is highly similar, to the degree that 100% intelligibility between speakers of such a variety would be expected.

two or more speech varieties. Words that derive, or appear to derive, from a common lexical ancestor are deemed "lexically similar."⁸ It is possible to go beyond lexical similarity and seek to determine which forms are actually cognate and to reconstruct an earlier stage of the language. However, for the purposes of this study, which involved very similar language varieties, it did not seem prudent to seek to reconstruct proto-forms from the lexically similar forms. The researcher, who had a reasonable degree of familiarity with the language in question, was able to readily draw conclusions about whether pairs of elicited items were, or were not, phonetically similar.

For this study, I sought to reduce the percentage of dissimilar items by ruling out differences that could be attributed to synonymy. The respondents were encouraged to give multiple responses where appropriate and the context in which the elicitation generally took place facilitated the elicitation of multiple synonyms. Since a group of five to twenty people would typically gather for the unusual event, there was often spontaneous discussion as to what was the most appropriate, or simply possible, equivalent to each lexical item being elicited. Subsequently, in comparisons between any two word lists using the inspection method, if one of a set of responses from one word list matched one of a set of responses from the other list this particular entry on these two word lists was considered to constitute a lexical correspondence.

The affect of this process on the statistics given below can be illustrated by the difference between the initial lexicostatistic analysis that was done in Lamphun province and a revised analysis that took into account the existence of synonyms. The preliminary analysis was as much as 11% lower between the word list locations than

⁸There are at least two methods used to determine the degree of lexical similarity between speech varieties, the comparative method and the "inspection method." The comparative method identifies regular correspondence sets and uses these as the basis for determining which forms are apparent cognates. The inspection method, on the other hand, determines which forms are apparent cognates (lexically similar) simply on the basis of phonetic similarity. The comparative method is the more rigorous of the two and is necessary for understanding historical relationships and determining which forms are actually cognate. However, for doing initial comparisons among dialects of the same language, as in this study, the inspection method can serve as a means to arrive at fairly adequate conclusions in a relatively short period of time.

the revised analysis.

2.6 Phonostatistics

Finally, a preliminary phonostatistic analysis was employed to help clarify and substantiate the conclusions of the lexicostatistics. In this part of the analysis a degrees of difference approach was used. After determining which words were cognate, each set of cognates was compared phone by phone. Each correspondence (pair of phones) was given a numerical figure representing their degree of difference.

There are many ways of assigning such figures. Some base the figures on the number of distinctive features that differ between the two phones, while others have sought to determine significant articulatory dimensions and assign ranks to the variables within each dimension. For this study, a "minimal step" approach was used (see Loving and Simons 1977:178), although not rigidly.

In this approach, degrees of difference are assigned based on the steps necessary to derive one phone from the other. For example, [p] and [b] involve only a change in voicing. There is no intermediate stage that could be posited between the two sounds. Therefore, there is only one degree of difference between the two phones. However, [p] to [w] could be said to involve two intermediate stages, a voiceless bilabial fricative stage and a voiced bilabial fricative stage. There would be three steps between [p] and [w] and therefore three degrees of difference.

Clearly, it will not always be wise to apply such a system rigidly. In using phonostatistics we are seeking to predict intelligibility between speech varieties. Certain sounds which only involve a minimal step will nevertheless represent significant problems for intelligibility. Similarly, other sounds, such as [p] and [w], which involve one or more intermediate steps may not adversely affect intelligibility, at least not to the degree that the putative intermediate steps would seem to indicate.

Therefore, although I have made use of the notion of minimal steps in assigning

values for degrees of difference, I have also taken into account correspondences that are common, i.e., that native speakers are conscious of, and assigned degrees of difference lower than the difference in terms of steps where appropriate.

3. A Lexicostatistic Analysis of Pwo Karen in the Northern Provinces of Thailand

In the following sections we will consider the varieties of Pwo Karen spoken in each of the six provinces where research was conducted. A lexicostatistic analysis and other pertinent information will be provided for each province.

3.1 Lamphun Province

In general, the Pwo Karen of Lamphun province have had less contact with Sgaw Karen and Christian missionaries than those living in the other northern provinces. In Chiang Rai, Phrae, Lampang and Chiang Mai there has been contact with missionaries in varying degrees for many years. Christian Pwo Karen can be found in each of these provinces. In contrast, the Pwo Karen of Lamphun seem to have held more closely to their traditional beliefs and have had only limited contact with expatriate researchers and missionaries, or with Thai government workers. While some of the villages located near major roads have adopted Buddhist beliefs the majority remain animists and there is no evidence of Christian influence at all. On the other hand, bilingualism in Northern Thai tends to be fairly high.

The *Tribal Population Summary in Thailand (TPST)* indicates that there are 62 Karen villages in Lamphun province, although the only list of villages available comes from the *DTVNAD*, which lists only 44 Karen villages. Using the 44 villages that could be identified, I supplemented that list through interviews in sixteen villages and discovered a total of 46 villages. Of the 46 villages identified, thirty were discovered to be strictly or mainly Pwo, and sixteen were identified as strictly or mainly Sgaw (contra Dhananjayananda 1983:7 who reports that HUA TOM is the only Sgaw Karen village in