

## Chapter 5

### Sociolinguistic survey analysis II: investigating the readiness

This chapter presents an analysis of the sociolinguistic data to answer research questions set under Goal 2: investigating the readiness of Meung Yum for vernacular language development. In particular language vitality, population size; interest and unity are investigated under this broad goal.

#### 5.1 Language vitality

This section seeks to answer the following research questions:

**Research Question 2.1:** Does it appear likely that the Meung Yum varieties will continue to be spoken by future generations?

##### 5.1.1 Language identity

A strong sense of identity as a people group greatly contributes to the vitality of the speech variety (Landweer 2000). The following question was therefore asked.

**Do you think of yourself first as Meung Yum, Kachin, Burmese or something else? (09-ISQ52)**

In response to this question, 44/48 [91.66%] reported that they think themselves first as Meung Yum. 4/48 [8.33%] of the subjects gave different answers: one subject does not know how to answer; one of them reported they belong to Shan and Wa and another one reported that their language is a dialect of Wa. Wa was not mentioned as an example in the question since at the time the author did not know that they are closely related to Wa. Furthermore, prior to the first fieldtrip, no one mentioned that they are related to Wa.

Are there people in this village who can only speak your mother tongue? (09-KIQ45 & 11-KIQ37)

24/96[25%] of Meung Yum individual subjects are monolingual, that means they reported that they can speak only their mother tongue. 3 of these are male and 21 are female. According to the responses from village leaders to the KIQ, old people above 40 and a few women in Man Phan, Man Kyu, Namt Yoke, Man Pein and Kaung Sang can speak only Meung Yum. None of the subjects from Kaung Sar, Pan Tan and Man Kan is monolingual.

**Table 43: Monolingual Meung Yum by village and gender**

Village	Male	Female
Kaung Sar	1	3
Pan Tan	0	0
Man Kyu	0	1
Man Phan	1	1
Namt Yoke	0	5
Man Pein	0	4
Kaung Sang	1	5
Man Kan	0	2
Total	3	21

Another important aspect of language vitality is transmission from one generation to another. Therefore the following question was asked.

Normally, what language do the children in this village speak first? (11-ISQ54)

All Meung Yum subjects, 36/36 [100%] reported that children in their village speak Meung Yum first in childhood.

Of all the languages you speak, which language do you speak best? (09- ISQ27 & 11-ISQ22)

84/84 [100%] of Meung Yum subjects from the seven villages (excluding Namt Yoke) said that they speak Meung Yum the best.

**Are there people in this village who can speak Meung Yum, but not very well? (09-KIQ46 & 11-KIQ38)**

Among all the Meung Yum villages in the survey, only some young people and children in Kaung Sar and some youth and adults in Man Kyu, speaks Meung Yum poorly.

**Are there people in this village who cannot speak Meung Yum at all? (09-KIQ44 & 11-KIQ39)**

According to responses from village leaders, the only people in all the Meung Yum villages surveyed who cannot speak Meung Yum at all were 4 or 5 people from Man Kyu village.

**Do people from this village intermarry with people from other people groups? (09-KIQ48 & 11-KIQ52)**

Intermarried with outsiders are rarely found among the Meung Yum people. Among the surveyed villages the following were reported: 1 inter-marriage with a Karen, 4 to 5 with Kachin, and 6 with Burmese in Namt Yoke, 3-4 mixed families with Burmese and Chinese were found in Kaung Sang. There are no mixed families in Man Pein and Man Kan.

**Do you think the young people (from your group) in this village speak your language well? (11-ISQ54)**

36/36 [100%] of the Meung Yum subjects 36/36 [100%] believe young people (from their group) in their village speak Meung Yum language well.

### **5.1.2 Language use**

This section presents data about language use in several domains: within family and outside.

#### **5.1.2.1 Language use in family domain and outside**

**What language do the children (from your group) in this village speak when they play together? (11-ISQ56)**

36/36 [100%] of the Meung Yum subjects reported that the children (from their group) in their village speak their mother tongue, when they play together.

Table 44 lists language use in the family domain, that is, within the subjects' own home. The total numbers of subjects are different due to applicable situations of the

question asked. Almost everyone speaks their mother tongue with their family members at home, but 1 or 2 persons speak Lachid at home.

Table 44: Language use in family domain

When speaking to....	Meung Yum	Lachid	Total (100%)
Parents	47 (100%)		47
Grandparents	46 (100%)		46
Siblings	46 (100%)		46
Spouse	44 (98%)	1 (2%)	45
Children	42 (100%)		42
Grandchildren / nieces /nephews	37 (95%)	2 (5%)	39
Language mostly used at home	43 (98%)	1 (2%)	44

Table 45 describes languages use outside of the home.

Table 45: Language use outside of the home

When speaking to....	Meung Yum or L1	Other	Total (100%)
Wa Friends	43 (93%)	Wa-3 (7%)	46
Non-L1 friends	39 (81%)	Wa-3 (6%), Lachid; Burmese- 2 (4%), Chinese-1 (2%)	48
Non-L1 coworkers	17 (35%)	Wa-2 (4%), Lachid-19 (39.6%), Lhaovo -3 (6.2%), Burmese -6 (12.5%), Chinese-4 (8.3%), Shan -4 (8.3%)	48
At the market with L1 people	40 (83%)	Lachid-4 (8%), Burmese -3 (6%), Chinese-1 (3%)	48
At the market with non-L1 people	15 (31%)	Lachid -14 (29%), Burmese -9 (19%), Chinese-8 (17%), Shan -6 (13%)	48
At a funeral	37 (77%)	Lachid -11 (23%), Shan -5 (10%)	48
At a village meeting	28 (58%)	Lachid -20 (41%), Lhaovo -1 (2%), Burmese -1 (2%), Chinese-1 (2%)	48
At a temple/ a church	28 (58%)	Lachid -19 (40%), Burmese -5 (10%), Shan -6 (13%)	48
A government worker	0 (0%)	Lachid -4 (8%), Burmese -23 (48%)	48
With L1 classmate at school	7 (78%)	Lachid -1 (11%), Burmese -1 (11%)	9
Non-L1 classmate at school	0 (0%)	Lachid -5 (56%), Burmese -4 (46%)	9
Teachers	0 (0%)	Lachid -1 (10%), Burmese -8 (80%), Shan -1 (10%)	10

Meung Yum is mostly used outside home by Meung Yum people. When they meet with Wa friends, only a few people speak Wa but most people speak their mother tongue to communicate with Wa people. However, in government related centres such as offices and schools, the subjects have to use the LWCs, Meung Yum language is not spoken in this situation.

### **5.1.2.2 Religious language use**

Religious language use among the Meung Yum community was surveyed through interviewing a few monks from two villages. The majority of Meung Yum people believe in Buddhism. Religious Leader interviews were done with two young Buddhist monks who live in Namt Yoke and Man Pein villages. The Religious Leader Questionnaire used during this survey trip is shown in Appendix B. The monks were very young and they could not answer most questions.

The monks showed the team a few Buddhist scriptures those are used in the two monasteries, including charms, spells, mantras, and incantations (for cleansing houses of spirits). All the materials are written in a Taic script. Only a few monks, novices, and astrologers can read them and these materials are very difficult to understand.

Taic scripts are used in the two monasteries. The subjects reported that the Meung Yum language is spoken for most religious activities in both villages. Meung Yum is used for worship, meditation, preaching, making announcements, visiting, in funeral services and when they talk with their family. However, they use both Shan and Meung Yum when they have ceremonies for monk noviciation, for celebrating religious festivals, for reciting, and when teaching. Generally, they read Buddhist scriptures in a kind of Shan but speak in Meung Yum.

Only a few Meung Yum villages are Christian, namely, Man Phan, Man Kyu, Loi Yang, Kham Deng and Laijong. There are about 60 Meung Yum families who have converted to Christianity. They are under the church membership of the Lashio Kachin Baptist Association. Although in the past, there were no worship services conducted in their mother tongue, since April 2011, worship services in the Meung Yum language have begun, and they have started to have a separate Meung Yum church under the supervision of the Baptist association.

In the Christian community in general, Bible reading is in Burmese and Jingphaw, but speaking and preaching are in Lachid. Mostly, however, Meung Yum Christians do not understand the scriptures in these languages.

### 5.1.3 Language attitudes to Meung Yum

If a non-Meung Yum person overhears you speaking Meung Yum, how do you feel? (09-ISQ45)

38/48 [82.6%] subjects mentioned that they are not shy in speaking their mother tongue outside their community and they will continue speaking when outsiders overhear during the conversation. 5/48 reported that they are shy of speaking Meung Yum in front of outsiders, one subject said she is shy not because of speaking the language but because of their dress and earring. Their dresses and earrings make them obvious in appearance that they are hilltribes.

Are the young people abandoning the customs of your ancestors? (09-ISQ46)

36/36 [100%] of Meung Yum subjects said the young people are not abandoning their customs at all.

## 5.2 Population size

This section presents data to answer the following research question.

Research Question 2.2: What is the approximate population of the Meung Yum?

In the survey sites, there are 423 households and about 2230 people in all the eight visited Meung Yum villages. The total number of households and villagers of each village are listed in Table 46.

Table 46: Number of people and households in Meung Yum visited sites

Village	No. of households (Meung Yum only)	No. of people (adults and children)
Kaung Sar	20	100
Pan Tan	30	150
Man Kyu	13	70
Man Phan	42	210
Namt Yoke	50	300
Man Pein	86	400
Kaung Sang	90	400
Man Kan	92	600
Total	423	2230

The Kachin Baptist Association estimated<sup>9</sup> the total Meung Yum population to be 30,000. However, according to the information collected in the survey, the total population of Meung Yum people is estimated to be 8000 and they are living approximately in 50 villages in northern Shan State. 21 villages are in Kunlong and 30 villages are in Wa-SAR. Based on the approximate number of households, it seems that the total Meung Yum households in Kunlong township is about 790 with a total population closer to 4,000.

The people live with other ethnic groups in most of the villages but seven villages are pure Meung Yum villages in Kunlong Township; Namt Yoke, Pang Kaw, Pang Wan, Man Pein, Pa Paw, Kaung Sang and Man Kan villages. All the names of the Meung Yum villages and number of households are shown in Appendix C.

According to the responses from KIQ as well as informal interviews, Meung Yum people are living in a total of approximately 50 villages. However, most of these villages are mixed with other people groups, such as Savaiq, Lachid and Lhaovo. Two pure Meung Yum villages are located in the Wa-SAR. Based on the number of villages given by village leaders, the number of Meung Yum people in the Wa-SAR is estimated to be 4,000.

### **5.3 Interest in language development**

This section presents data relating to the following research question.

**Research Question 2.3:** How interested are the people in language development in their own language?

This interest is considered among different groups in the following subsections: people in general and religious leaders.

#### **5.3.1 Interest of people in general**

Individual subjects were asked the following question.

Do you have printed materials at home (a) (If yes) what kind of books do you have? (If yes) What languages are they written in? (11-ISQ48 & 11-KIQ 67)  
13/36 [36.1%] of Meung Yum subjects have printed material at home. 23/36 [63.8%] do not have printed materials at home. Those materials are school text

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<sup>9</sup> personal communication

books in Burmese language and religious books in Shan. 12 responses for school text books and only 2 responses for religious books in Shan were found in the result.

The Meung Yum subjects from most of the villages surveyed reported that they would like to write Meung Yum using Shan or Burmese script, because it is easy and some people are already literate in Shan. However, the subjects from Man Pein reported that they would like written Meung Yum to be in Roman script.

All the Meung Yum village leaders reported there are no printed materials in Meung Yum, except that one person had tried to write Meung Yum sounds using Shan letters.

**If someone came to your village and wrote down your language, is it good or bad? What kinds of things would you like to have written in your language? (09-ISQ 47-48)**

46/48 of the subjects said it would be good to have their mother tongue written down. The subject's opinions on the advantages of having a writing system in the mothertongue are listed in Table 47.

**Table 47: Reasons for willing to have a writing system in the mothertongue**

Advantages in having a writing system in the mothertongue	No. of subjects
Good and we want to have our language written.	24
We would like to be intelligent and developed like others.	12
Our people would not be extinct	4
I want to learn to read and write	2
Can able to read Bible, pray in my mother tongue	1
I want to see and learn before I died.	1

12/48 [25%] subjects mentioned that their writing can help them to develop in several aspects of their lives and develop in several ways. None of the subjects reported that they did not want writing in their mother tongue. This shows that Meung Yum people are generally keen to see language development in Meung Yum.

### **5.3.2 Interest of religious leaders**

Among the Meung Yum and Savaiq, there have been no language development efforts. A few people individually have tried to write down the Meung Yum language with Shan and Lachid letters.

Religious leaders from both villages mentioned that they would like to have Meung Yum writing. They would like to teach literacy in Meung Yum to all novices and monks in their monastery and use it in their village. Both monks reported that using Shan script would be the most convenient for writing Meung Yum writing system because Shan script looks like their current religious literature, and it is easy to use.

Kachin Baptist churches in Lashio who are involved in outreach to the Meung Yum people would like to develop written language for the Meung Yum. The literature committee for all the Meung Yum villages in Kunlong Township is organized currently so that people from both religions are involved. The 17 committee members have been meeting with each other since 2010. However, no Meung Yum people from the Wa-SAR are on the existing literature committee.

#### **5.4 Unity of the people and potential language development leaders**

This section presents data relating to the following research question.

**Research Question 2.4:** How unified is the language and religious community throughout the region about orthography and language development?

The team observed that the Meung Yum people have good relationships with each other, regardless of their different religions. Buddhists and Christians live together in the Pan Tan village, and a temple and church are both built in the same village. It can be observed that the Meung Yum people in Kunlong have frequent contact with each other. According to responses to 11-ISQ, 33/48 [68.75%] subjects reported that they have traveled to many other Meung Yum villages, mainly for visiting the people there.

Any negative attitude toward a certain Meung Yum village is not found in the sociolinguistic interviews, 36/36 [100%] subjects have positive attitudes toward the storyteller's Meung Yum variety (from Namt Yoke village). Most of the subjects felt good about intermarriage with someone like the storyteller.

**Would you like to have written Meung Yum? For what purpose? (11-KIQ67)**  
4/4 [100%] of the village leaders mentioned that they would like to have their language written. Namt Yoke village leader gave the reasons that we want it because

they never had it before and there is no teacher among them. Kaung Sang village headman said that they can write names, record dates of birth and keep financial records. The other two village leaders did not to give a reason.

What kind of alphabet would be most appropriate/ convenient for Meung Yum alphabet? (Roman script, Burmese script or Shan script) Why? (11-KIQ68 & 11-RLQ53)

The responses to this question are listed in Table 48.

Table 48: Preferred script for Meung Yum alphabets

Interviewee	Preferred script	Reasons
Namt Yoke village leader	Burmese	Easier
Man Pein village leader	Roman	Easier
Kaung Sang village leader	Shan	Older people know how to read and write Shan
Man Kan village leader	Shan or Burmese	Most of us know how to read and write Shan and Burmese
Namt Yoke monks	Shan	Our religious books are written in Shan language.
Man Pein monks	Shan	Easier

All the interviewees do not agree on the script that they think it would be appropriate for Meung Yum writing. However, Shan is mostly mentioned because it is used in their sacred writing and older people are familiar with it. Two people mentioned that Burmese is appropriate because they think that it is easier. Only one leader mentioned that Roman script is more appropriate for the writing. The Shan and Burmese alphabets have many characters in common, so the choice between those two scripts would not be between two completely different scripts. The Roman script however is completely different in appearance. However, since both Wa and Lachid use Roman scripts, a Roman-based orthography for Meung Yum would provide for high transfer from literacy in Meung Yum to literacy in Wa and/or Lachid.

**Would you like to have Meung Yum written? For what purpose? (11-RLQ51)**  
Monks from Namt Yoke and Man Pein said that they want to have their language written and want to use it for their villagers and in their monasteries.

**What would help the people in your village use the Meung Yum language more for their religious life? (11-RLQ56)**

Monks from Namt Yoke mentioned that they would like to help their villagers to be devoted to their religion. Monks from Man Pein village want to help the villagers to love each other and to be able to teach Meung Yum letters to all novices and monks.

The final research question relating to Goal 2 is as follows:

**Research Question 2.5: How many Meung Yum speakers have sufficient education to help with language development?**

There are primary schools in 5 out of 8 visited Meung Yum villages. Most children from Namt Yoke and Man Pein go to school. Only 5 children from Kaung Sang attend school and some children from Man Kan attend school. The language of instruction in these schools is Burmese and teachers speak Lachid. A few Meung Yum children go to nearby villages for middle school. A very few children go to bigger towns for high school, including Lashio, Kutkai, Kunlong and Ho Pang Towns. About two thirds of the Meung Yum individual subjects had no education at all. Only 22% of them had studied at Burmese primary school and 9% had studied in Shan monasteries.

According to a background interview with a few church leaders, among all the Meung Yum, there are about ten people who completed high school. These ten young people could be potential workers for Meung Yum language development work in the future.

## **5.5 Summary of findings relating to Goal 2: readiness**

The answers to research questions 2.1 to 2.5 were presented in Sections 5.1 to 5.4. Taken together the answers to these questions allow us to assess the readiness for vernacular language development for Meung Yum.

Language vitality among Meung Yum people is high. All the Meung Yum individual subjects speak Meung Yum as their first and best language and they think of themselves first as being Meung Yum ethnically. They speak Meung Yum in almost

every domain of their daily lives, including speaking with their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings, spouses, children, grandchildren, at funerals, in village meetings, at the market and with their Meung Yum co-workers. In fact, 25% of ISQ subjects are monolingual in Meung Yum.

All Meung Yum children speak Meung Yum as their first language and most do not speak any other languages before they start school, although a few children in mixed villages learn Lachid by playing with Lachid children before starting school. All the children can speak Meung Yum very well and they mainly speak Meung Yum with their friends while playing. All the individual subjects thought that Meung Yum children will still be speaking Meung Yum 20 years from now. All the subjects reported that the Meung Yum young people are proud of their mother tongue and they value their customs.

However, according to the 2009 KIQ results, in mixed villages; such as Kaung Sar, Man Kyu, Taptu, Man Phan and Man Kaung villages children and young people speak Meung Yum poorly and they are speaking Lachid. Meung Yum people are shy to speak their language. However in pure Meung Yum villages the language vitality is very high.

Meung Yum people are estimated to be 8000 and they are living approximately in 50 villages in northern Shan State. 21 villages are in Kunlong and 30 villages are in Wa-SAR.

It has been found that the Meung Yum people mainly have good relationships with each other, regardless of their different religions. All the Meung Yum knowledgeable and religious leader subjects reported that they would like to have their language written because they want to know how to read and write Meung Yum, and they want to record the birthdays of their children and keep financial records. The religious leader subjects would like to teach written Meung Yum to all the novices and monks in their monastery and use it in their village.

Only a few people among the whole Meung Yum population are educated. However, a few individuals from various villages have been identified who could possibly help with language development efforts in the future.

## 5.6 Conclusions relating to readiness

The following conclusions can be drawn relating to the goal of assessing the readiness for language development in Meung Yum.

Strong evidence of language vitality including the use of Meung Yum in almost every domain shows that Meung Yum is likely to be spoken by future generations, as their mother tongue. Strong positive attitudes towards Meung Yum language suggest that Meung Yum language and culture will continue to be passed on to future generations.

It has been found that the Meung Yum people predominantly have good relationships with each other, regardless of their different religions. Meung Yum people are interested in reading and writing their own language, even though most of them are illiterate and uneducated. There are a few people among the Meung Yum population who are educated. They could possibly be helpful people for language development efforts in the future. The Meung Yum community in Kunlong Township is unified for language development. However, there is no collaboration between Meung Yum people in Kunlong and Wa-SAR currently.