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Letalanyah: A Buddhist writing system of Sgaw Karen

Atsuhiko Kato

Abstract

The Buddhist Sgaw Karen people, who live in Karen State, Myanmar, have a writing system called Letalanyah. While the most well-known Sgaw Karen writing system is the Christian Sgaw Karen Script created by the Baptist missionary Rev. Jonathan Wade, recently Letalanyah has also gained a significant degree of popularity. In this article, after presenting the phonological system of the dialect of Sgaw Karen spoken around Hpa-an, the capital of Karen State, I will discuss the correspondence between Letalanyah and its phonology. A study of the correspondence of Letalanyah with the phonological system shows it to be a highly systematic writing system.

1. Introduction

Some of the Buddhist Sgaw Karen people in Karen State, Myanmar, use a writing system called Letalanyah. The spelling of the name of this script in Letalanyah itself is လေလံတလဒ်ညှာ် /ləʔtəɫāʔnà/. This can be written as လံာ်တလးညှာ် using the Christian Sgaw Karen Script, which is the most widespread Sgaw Karen script. Since /ləʔ/ (or /liʔ/) means ‘script’ and /təɫāʔnà/ means ‘wisdom, intellect’, /ləʔtəɫāʔnà/ as a whole means ‘script of wisdom’. The purpose of this article is to detail how Letalanyah corresponds to the Sgaw Karen phonological system. Notably, Letalanyah was briefly introduced by Kato (2001, 2006), but there have been no previous studies discussing this writing system in detail.

I still do not have accurate information as to how the Letalanyah system was created. From one Karen intellectual, I was informed Sgaw Karen Buddhist monk(s) created Letalanyah sometime after 1960. While this appears to be unreliable

information, it is still possible this is indeed its origin. In fact, Sgaw Karen has what I call the Christian Sgaw Karen Script—a script created by the American Baptist missionary Rev. Jonathan Wade in the 1830s—which is so widespread that it is generally regarded as the orthography of Sgaw Karen. By the time Letalanyah was introduced, this Christian script was already considerably popular in Sgaw Karen communities. Despite this, the new script was created probably for two primary reasons.

The first reason is religious awareness. The Christian Sgaw Karen Script was originally created for the compilation of the Sgaw Karen Bible and the dissemination of Christianity. Therefore, we can imagine that there may be Buddhist Sgaw Karen speakers who hesitate to use this script.

The second reason is that mixing the Burmese-Pali and Christian Sgaw Karen scripts can create a sense of discomfort. In Buddhist communities in Myanmar, a textual compilation method called *nissaya* is used in the study of the Buddhism doctrine. According to Okell (1965: 186), “Nissaya are works in which each word or phrase of a Pali text is followed immediately by its Burmese translation.” This particular method is also used among Sgaw Karen Buddhists, in which Pali words and phrases written in the Burmese style are followed by Sgaw Karen explanations written in Letalanyah. If one uses Christian Sgaw Karen Script to create a *nissaya* text, certain difficulties arise; that is, the consistency of reading vowel symbols would be lessened. The Christian Sgaw Karen Script is a writing system based on the Burmese script, but with vowel signs assigned a phonetic value that cannot be inferred from a knowledge of Indic scripts. For example, in the Burmese style of Pali writing, ဝိ and ဝိ represent the vowels *i* and *ī*. In the Christian Sgaw Karen Script, however, the same symbols represent the vowels /o/ and /ɔ/, respectively (see Table 9). When these two systems are mixed in the same text, the text should cause substantial discomfort to a reader of Sgaw Karen *nissaya* and should also create obstacles to a correct reading. In *nissaya* with Letalanyah, this problem does not arise. The same problem can also arise in transcribing Pali loanwords with the Burmese style in a prosaic text written in the Christian Sgaw Karen Script.

I assume that these were the reasons that Letalanyah was designed. Besides these

aspects, some native speakers state that the inability to write the vowel /u/ in the Christian Sgaw Karen Script motivated them to create Letalanyah (see Section 3.4). However, it is unlikely that this was a strong motivating factor in the creation of Letalanyah, since only a slight modification of the Christian Sgaw Karen Script is needed to write this vowel.

The system of Letalanyah reflects the phonology of the dialect of Sgaw Karen spoken around Hpa-an, the capital of Karen State, Myanmar. Specifically, I call this dialect the Hpa-an dialect; given this, when I use the term “Sgaw Karen” without reservation, this dialect is the one being referred to.

Regarding the rest of this article, in Section 2 the method of the present study is explained. Then, Section 3 presents the phonological system of the modern Hpa-an dialect. Section 4 shows the relationship between Letalanyah and the phonology; Section 5 is a sample text; and finally, Section 6 presents a summary of this article.

2. Method of study

I carried out my research using a Letalanyah textbook (Anonymous 1988), which I obtained in Karen State, Myanmar, in the late 1990s. The sound values of the various symbols were estimated by reading the words and example sentences. The estimated sounds were presented to Ms. Naw Snow Paw, a native Sgaw Karen speaker living in Japan, to identify the sound values of the symbols. In addition, I gathered information by reading articles in magazines in which Letalanyah is used. Moreover, information was obtained from the lyrics of Sgaw Karen song videos uploaded to the Internet—which are sometimes written in Letalanyah. The consultant, Naw Snow Paw, was born in the late 1980s in the suburb of Hpa-an and spent her language-forming years there. She is therefore a speaker of the Hpa-an dialect of Sgaw Karen, which Letalanyah reflects. She is also a speaker of Eastern Pwo Karen.

3. Phonology of the Hpa-an dialect

The phonological system of the Hpa-an dialect of Sgaw Karen is briefly described here. The explanations of Sgaw Karen in Kato (1993) and Kato (2021b) are based on research conducted in the early 1990s with native Sgaw Karen speakers from

Myanmar in Mae Sariang, Thailand, and Tokyo, Japan. Although these descriptions deal with the Hpa-an dialect, the consultants for the study conducted in Japan included some speakers of the dialects of the Ayeyarwady Delta, so the phonetic features of the Delta dialect were inadvertently mixed into the analysis. Therefore, in the following, if there are descriptions that should be corrected to those of the Hpa-an dialect, they will be adjusted to their correct form.

3.1. Syllable structure

The syllable structure of the Hpa-an dialect can be represented as C1(C2)V(?)/(T), where C1 is the initial consonant, C2 is the medial consonant, V is the vowel, ? is the glottal stop that appears at the end of a syllable, and T is the tone that covers the entire syllable. Furthermore, the part -V(?) is called the rhyme.

3.2. Tones

There are six tones in the Hpa-an dialect, as shown in the left column of Table 1.

Table 1: Tones in the Hpa-an dialect

This paper			Kato (2021b)		
à	[a41]	low-falling tone	à	[a11]	low-level tone
ā	[a33]	mid-level tone	ā	[a33]	mid-level tone
á	[a44]	high-level tone	á	[a55]	high-level tone
â	[a51]	high-falling tone	â	[a51]	falling tone
à?	[a?11~21]	low-checked tone	à?	[a?11]	low-checked tone
ā?	[a?33]	mid-checked tone	á?	[a?44]	high-checked tone
ə		atonic	ə		atonic

As shown in the right column of Table 1, Kato (2021b) explains that the Hpa-an dialect has the following tones: /à/ [a11] low-level, /ā/ [a33] mid-level, /á/ [a55] high-level, /â/ [51] falling, /à?/ [a?11] low-checked, and /á?/ [a?44] high-checked. However, of these, /à/ [a11] “**low-level**” should be changed to /à/ [a41] “**low-falling**” (the parts in bold font have been corrected); /á/ [a55] “high-level” to /á/ [a44] “high-level”; /â/ [51] “falling” to /â/ [51] “high-falling”; and /á?/ [a?44] “high-checked” to /ā?/ [a?33] “mid-checked”. These mistakes were due to mixing the phonetic features of the Delta dialect into the description of the Hpa-an dialect.

There are two possibilities for the phonological status of the glottal stop at the end of the low-checked and mid-checked tones. That is, it could be an intrinsic feature of the tones or a syllable-final stop. This issue is very difficult and requires a variety of examinations to resolve. Therefore, in this article, I tentatively consider this glottal stop to be both an intrinsic feature of the tones and a syllable-final stop.

For the notation of the low-checked tone, the same grave accent mark as for the low-falling tone is used in consideration of the possibility that the low-checked tone can be interpreted as a phonetic realization of the low-falling tone appearing in a syllable with a final glottal stop. Similarly, a macron is used for the notation of the mid-checked tone in the same way as for the mid-level tone in consideration of the possibility that the mid-checked tone can be interpreted as a phonetic realization of the mid-level tone appearing in a syllable with a final glottal stop. Both possibilities are only hypotheses at the present stage and need to be examined in the future. In fact, it is also possible that checked tones would have nothing to do phonologically with plain tones.

Furthermore, Sgaw Karen has atonic syllables, in which the only rhyme that can appear is /ə/. They are thus indicated by the absence of tone marking.

3.3. Initial and medial consonants

Simple onsets consisting of only C1 are shown in Table 2. There are a total of 27 phonemes that can occur as a simple onset.

Table 2: Simple onsets in the Hpa-an dialect

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Voiceless unaspirated stops	p	θ	t	c	k	ʔ
Voiceless aspirated stops	ph		th	ch	kh	
Voiced stops	b		d		g	
Voiceless fricatives				ç	x	h
Voiced fricatives			z		ɣ	ɦ
Nasals	m		n	ɲ	ŋ	
Semivoiwels	w			j		
Lateral			l			
Trill			r			

The phonetic values of simple onsets are as follows: /p-/ [p], /θ-/ [t̥θ~θ], /t-/ [t], /c-/ [tɛ~s], /k-/ [k], /ʔ-/ [ʔ], /ph-/ [pʰ], /th-/ [tʰ], /ch-/ [tɛʰ~sʰ], /kh-/ [kʰ], /b-/ [β~b], /d-/ [d̥~d], /g-/ [g], /e-/ [ɛ], /x-/ [x], /h-/ [h], /z-/ [z], /ɣ-/ [ɣ], /fi-/ [fi], /m-/ [m], /n-/ [n], /ɲ-/ [ɲ], /w-/ [w], /j-/ [j~j], /l-/ [l], and /r-/ [r~ɾ].

/b/ and /d/ are implosives, i.e., [β] and [ɗ], but may be pronounced [b] and [d] in fast speech. Furthermore, /b/ and /d/, which appear in borrowings from Burmese and Pali, are typically pronounced with an egressive [b] and [d]. /b/ and /d/ in /būʔdâ/ ‘Buddha’ (< Burmese /bouʔdâ/ < Pali *buddha*) are examples.

The phonemes /g/, /z/, and /ɲ/ appear in borrowings from Burmese or those from Pali that entered via Burmese, e.g., /gù/ ‘dignity’ (< Burmese /gòun/ < Pali *gūṇa*), /zɛ/ ‘market’ (< Burmese /zɛ/), and /ɲá/ ‘to rent’ (< Burmese /hɲá/). However, /ɲ/ may appear in a very small number of pure Sgaw Karen words—for example, /ɲóŋāʔ/ ‘stupid’.

The realization of the consonants /c/ and /ch/ should also be mentioned. In Kato (1993) and Kato (2021b), the phonemes /s-/ [s] and /sh-/ [sʰ] were set up. The dialects of the Ayeyarwady Delta (including the Bassein dialect of Jones [1961]) and Mon State (including the Moulmein dialect of Jones [1961]) certainly have the phonemes /s-/ and /sh-/. However, in the Hpa-an dialect, [s] and [sʰ] can be seen as free variants of /c/ [tɛ~s] and /ch/ [tɛʰ~sʰ], respectively. The more formal the situation of utterance, the more frequently /c/ and /ch/ are realized as [s] and [sʰ] instead of [tɛ] and [tɛʰ]. However, in borrowings from Burmese, when the original Burmese form has /c/ or /ch/, they are always pronounced with [tɛ] and [tɛʰ], not with [s] and [sʰ], e.g., /có/ [tɛó] ‘school’ (< Burmese /cáun/), and /chōʔ/ [tɛʰōʔ] ‘to bind’ (< Burmese /chouʔ/).

Next, the phonemes that can appear as C2 are /-w-/ [w], /-l-/ [l], /-r-/ [r~ɾ], /-j-/ [j~j], and /-ɣ-/ [ɣ~u]. Possible combinations of C1 and C2 are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Possible combinations of C1 and C2 in the Hpa-an dialect

		C1																		
		p	θ	t	k	ph	th	kh	b	d	c	ch	x	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	j	l	r
C2	w	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	l	+			+	+		+	+						+					
	r	+	+	+	+	+	+	+				+	+		+					
	j	+				+			+						+					
	ɣ	+				+			+		+	+		+						

Attention should be paid to the behaviors of the medial /-ɣ-/ [ɣ-ɰ]. It often alternates with /-w-/ after a labial, e.g., /pɣā ~ pwā/ ‘person’. /cɣ-/ and /chɣ-/ often alternate with /e-/ , e.g., /cɣā ~ eā/ ‘be few’ and /chɣó ~ eó/ ‘to send’. In the word /mèʔchɣāʔ/ ‘be shy’, the alternation of /chɣ-/ and /e-/ may occur or the omission of /-ɣ-/ may occur. Thus, there are at least three ways to pronounce this word: /mèʔchɣāʔ ~ mèʔeāʔ ~ mèʔchāʔ/. Furthermore, since /ch-/ may be pronounced [sʰ], there are yet more possibilities for the pronunciation of this word.

3.4. Rhymes

As has been mentioned, the rhyme has a structure that can be represented as -V(?). Rhymes can be divided into two types: open rhymes without the syllable-final /-ʔ/ and stopped rhymes with /-ʔ/.

There are 10 open rhymes, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Open rhymes in the Hpa-an dialect

i	ĩ	ɯ	u
e	ə	o	
ɛ	a	ɔ	

These rhymes are realized as follows: /-i/ [i], /-e/ [e], /-ɛ/ [ɛ], /-ĩ/ [ĩ], /-ə/ [ə], /-a/ [ä], /-ɯ/ [ɰ], /-u/ [u], /-o/ [o], and /-ɔ/ [ɔ~ɒ].

It should be noted that the vowel represented as /u/ in Kato (1992) and Kato (2021b) is represented as /ĩ/ in this article. This change is because, as Sarvestani (2018: 65) correctly pointed out by means of experimental phonetics, this vowel phonetically can be represented as [ĩ].

Furthermore, in this article, the vowel phoneme /u/ is established separately from /i/ as one of the close vowels. Note that the phoneme /u/ is a different vowel phoneme from that represented as /u/ in Kato (1993) and Kato (2021b). This vowel phoneme has never been posited in previous studies dealing with Sgaw Karen, including Jones (1961), Ratanakul (1986), Brunelle (2011), Jitwiriyanont (2012), Kerdpol (2012), Rattanaporn (2012), Fischer (2013), Olson (2014), Sun (2016), West (2017), Sarvestani (2018), and Lee (2020). In fact, words containing the open rhyme /-u/ are very limited in number. So far the words that have been found to contain it are /lú/ ‘at; from; to’ (a preposition), /θú/ ‘surely’ (a sentence-final particle), /fú/ ‘you know?’ (a sentence-final particle), and /hú/ ‘hey!’ (an interjection). Of these, /lú/ is the emphatic form of the locative preposition /lǎ/ ‘at; from; to’. For example, /lú hî pū/ (at / house / inside) ‘inside the house’ is used more frequently than /lǎ hî pū/ (at / house / inside) ‘inside the house’ when one wants to emphasize a location. As will be mentioned in Section 4.3, in Letalanyah, /lú/ is regarded as the representative form of the locative preposition.

As for the phoneme /u/, one might argue that there is no need to establish it, because there are few forms that contain /u/; moreover, all of the forms have functional word-like properties. In such a view, [ɯ] would be considered a variant of /ə/, /i/, or /u/. In this article, however, /u/ is considered a phoneme for the following two reasons: (1) there is a semantic difference between /lú/ and /lǎ/; namely, whether they carry an emphatic meaning or not; as long as there is a semantic difference between the two forms, it would be desirable to treat them separately in terms of phonemics; and (2) /u/ minimally contrasts both with /i/ and /u/ in the words /θú/ ‘surely’, /θî/ ‘to anoint (the head)’, and /θú/ ‘liver; to build’. An additional reason is that many learned speakers of the Hpa-an dialect consider [ɯ] a distinct sound from [ə], [i], or [u]. Owing to such an awareness among native speakers, a spelling for this sound exists in Letalanyah. Some of the speakers of the Hpa-an dialect have told me that Letalanyah was created because [ɯ] could not be written in the Christian Sgaw Karen Script.

There are 9 stopped rhymes, as shown in Table 5. These are rhymes that appear when a glottal stop is present at the end of a syllable. As stated in Section 3.2, the

glottal stop at the end of a syllable may be an intrinsic feature of the checked tones, rather than a syllable-final consonant.

Table 5: Stopped rhymes in the Hpa-an dialect

iʔ		uʔ	uʔ
eʔ	əʔ	oʔ	
ɛʔ	aʔ	ɔʔ	

These rhymes are realized as follows: /-iʔ/ [iʔ], /-eʔ/ [ɛʔ], /-ɛʔ/ [ɛʔ], /-əʔ/ [əʔ], /-aʔ/ [äʔ], /-uʔ/ [uʔ], /-uʔ/ [uʔ], /-oʔ/ [oʔ], and /-ɔʔ/ [ɔʔ]. Below, some notes on these rhymes are given.

Very few words have a rhyme /-eʔ/. Examples are: /xɛ̀ʔ/ ‘gripped, pinched’ and /xɛ̀ʔxɛ̀ʔ/ ‘for a long time’. Furthermore, the rhyme /-iʔ/ tends to be pronounced /-eʔ/. Thus, there might be no opposition between /-iʔ/ and /-eʔ/ in the Hpa-an dialect. Since I have not yet reached a conclusion on this issue, I regard /-iʔ/ and /-eʔ/ as distinct rhymes in this article.

In the Hpa-an dialect, the rhyme /-oʔ/ is often confused with /-ɔʔ/. Thus, as will be seen in Section 4.3, /-oʔ/ is frequently written with the symbol for /-ɔʔ/ in Letalanyah. /-oʔ/ might thus be seen as merging into /-ɔʔ/.

/-uʔ/ is most commonly pronounced [-uʔ], but may also be pronounced [-iʔ]. There seems to be no phonological distinction between [-uʔ] and [-iʔ]. In this article, I interpret these as /-uʔ/ instead of /-iʔ/, which is in accordance with the most frequent pronunciation [-uʔ]. Therefore, /-iʔ/ is not present in the interpretation of this article and [-iʔ] is a phonetic variation in the realization of /-uʔ/.

/-uʔ/ is sometimes confused with /-uʔ/. Thus, /l̩t̩uʔ/ ‘be cut off (as supplies)’, for example, may be pronounced /l̩t̩uʔ/.

At the end of this section, I will discuss a possible explanation for the emergence of the vowel /u/. The Christian Sgaw Karen Script, which was created by Rev. Wade and has a history of nearly 200 years, probably reflects the pronunciation of the Hpa-an dialect or its close variation. However, there is no symbol for writing /u/ in this script, and ၀၁ representing /ə/ is used for it. Given the highly precise nature of this writing system, it is difficult to believe that Wade overlooked the presence of /u/. Thus, I believe that /u/ did not exist when Wade created the Christian Sgaw Karen

Script and it emerged relatively recently. [-ɰ] probably emerged as a variant of /i/ in syllables ending with a glottal stop, i.e., /-iʔ/ [-ɰʔ], and was then phonologized as /u/ by occurring in open syllables as well.

4. Letalanyah and the phonological system of the Hpa-an dialect

This section discusses the correspondences between Letalanyah and the phonological system of the Hpa-an dialect.

4.1. Initial consonants

Initial consonants—in other words, consonants appearing in the C1 position—are generally written with the basic letters, as shown in Table 6. This table is also used in primary education involving Letalanyah. These letters are the same as the basic letters of the Burmese script, except for the letters that will be seen later in Table 7.

The top line of each column shows a basic letter of Letalanyah; the middle line shows the phoneme represented by that basic letter. In addition, shown in parentheses in the bottom line is the basic letter of Christian Sgaw Karen Script for each sound shown in the middle line, which is shown for reference only. Given this, “(no)” indicates that Christian Sgaw Karen Script does not have a letter for that sound. Let us take the leftmost letter in the top row as an example. ၵ is the basic letter. The “k-” below it is the phoneme that this basic letter represents. The hyphen after the “k-” indicates that this sound is an initial consonant. The “(ၵ)” below it indicates that the initial consonant /k-/ is represented by this letter in the Christian Sgaw Karen Script.

The bracketed Letalanyah basic letters are essentially used to write Pali itself or borrowings from Pali. They may also be used for borrowings from Burmese.

Table 6: Basic letters

က k- (က)	ခ kh- (ခ)	(ဂ) g- (ဂ)	(ဃ) g- (ဂ)	c ၵ- (c)
စ c- (စ)	ဆ ch- (ဆ)	ဇ z- (ဇ)	(ဈ) z- (ဇ)	ည ၵ- (ည)
တ t- (တ)	ထ th- (ထ)	(ဒ) d- (ဒ)	(ဌ) d- (ဒ)	(ဍ) n- (န)
တ t- (တ)	ထ th- (ထ)	(ဒ) d- (ဒ)	(ဈ) d- (ဒ)	န n- (န)
ပ p- (ပ)	ဖ ph- (ဖ)	(ဗ) b- (ဘ)	(ဘ) b- (ဘ)	မ m- (မ)
ယ j- (ယ)	ရ r- (ရ)	လ l- (လ)	ဝ w- (ဝ)	သ θ- (သ)
ဟ h- (ဟ)	(င) F (လ)	အ ʔ- (အ)	*ဂ γ- (ဂ)	*ဃ x- (ဃ)
	*ဘ b- (ဘ)	*ဒ d- (ဒ)	*ဇ h- (ဇ)	

An important point to note is that the basic letters with “*” in Table 6 are officially written as shown in (1) through (5) in the bottom row of Table 7. These are new letters that are not found in the Burmese or Mon scripts.

Table 7: New letters

*ဂ	*ဃ	*ဘ	*ဒ	*ဇ
(1) ၵ	(2) ဃ	(3) ဘ	(4) ဒ	(5) ဇ

The new letters were probably created because the creator(s) of Letalanyah thought that these sounds could not be written correctly with the Burmese script because Burmese does not have the equivalent sounds. In this regard, it should be noted that /b/ [b̥] and /d/ [d̥] were recognized as different sounds from the egressive Burmese /b/ and /d/. In other words, the creator(s) must have been aware that the Sgaw Karen /b/ and /d/ are “implosives”, although it is unlikely that they knew this

phonetic term.

The letters shown in Table 7 are very frequently substituted by ဝ, ဝ, ဘ, ဒ, and ဧ, respectively. This is probably due to the difficulty of writing the original shapes when they are handwritten and the lack of movable types or fonts when they are printed. Such substitutions do not cause significant practical problems because ဝ, ဝ, ဘ, ဒ, and ဧ appear only in Pali itself or in borrowings from Pali or Burmese. In this article as well, because of the constraints of printing, the letters shown in Table 7 are substituted by ဝ, ဝ, ဘ, ဒ, and ဧ. When it is necessary to use ဝ, ဝ, ဘ, ဒ, or ဧ with their original usage (i.e., when representing Pali words or borrowings from Pali or Burmese), the entire notation of the syllable using that letter will be italicized, as in ဝ.

The following are other notes on writing initial consonants.

- The initial consonant /ɛ/ is represented by ရှ, i.e., the basic letter ရ with the symbol ဝ indicating the medial consonant /-y-/ added (see Section 4.2). It may also be represented by ဝှ, i.e., the basic letter ဝ with ဝ added. It is unknown whether ရှ and ဝှ have any differences in use.
- /c-/ and /ch-/ may be represented by ကျ and ချ, respectively, instead of using စ and ဆ. The symbols က and ဆ are the basic letters for /k-/ and /kh-/, and ဝ is the symbol for the medial consonant /-j-/ (see Section 4.2). These are mainly used in Burmese borrowings that have /c/ and /ch/ in the original Burmese forms, e.g., ကျို/ခို/ 'school' (< Burmese /cáun/) and ချိန်/ချိန်/ 'to bind' (< Burmese /chou?/). In addition, as mentioned in Section 3.3, /c/ and /ch/ are sometimes pronounced with [s] and [s^h]; thus, when one wants to pronounce a word with [te] and [te^h] instead of [s] and [s^h], ကျ and ချ are used.

Examples of Sgaw Karen words written with each basic letter are shown below. Among the letters used for writing loanwords, examples of စျ, ငှ, ငှ, ခှ, ဝ, ဆ, စ, and ငှ, are excluded.

ကတ် /ká/ 'to grill', ဆတ် /khâ/ 'be bitter', ဝှင်/ဂှင်/ 'dignity' (< Burmese /gòun/ < Pali *gunā*), ညောဝကန် /ဂှိဝဲကန်/ 'Ghosaka (a name of a deva)', ငှိ/ဂှိ/ 'to rent' (<

Burmese /hŋá/), စသ် /cà/ ‘young’, ဆား /chá/ ‘to sell’, ဇး /zé/ ‘market’ (< Burmese /zé/), ညုတ် /nâ/ ‘fish’, တသ် /tâ/ ‘thing’, ထဒ် /thā?/ ‘iron’, ဒိုတ် /dó/ ‘Karen don dance’ (< Burmese /dóun/), နုတ် /nà?/ ‘a kind of basket’, ပတ် /pà?/ ‘to put’, ဖဒ် /phā?/ ‘to read’, ဗုဒ္ဓ /bū?dâ/ ‘Buddha’ (< Burmese /bou?dâ/ < Pali *buddha*), ဘဝနာ /bāwəná/ ‘meditation’ (< Pali *bhāvanā*), မတ် /mā/ ‘to do’, ယုတ် /jū/ ‘to fly’, ရဲတ် /rê/ ‘to pour (water)’, လား /lá/ ‘moon’, ဝတ် /wâ/ ‘bamboo’, သဒ် /thā?/ ‘heart’, တဒ် /hā?/ ‘to walk’, အား /?á/ ‘be many’, ဂုတ် /γi/ ‘snake’, ယား /xá/ ‘to mix’, ဘတ် /bâ/ ‘be correct’, ဒါး /dá/ ‘to spread’, and ဧတ် /fiḥ/ ‘him/her’.

4.2. Medial consonants

The medial consonants /-w-/, /-l-/, /-r-/, /-j-/, and /-y-/ are written as shown in Table 8, using subscripts.

Table 8: Medial consonants

◌◌	◌◌	◌◌	◌◌	◌◌
-w-	-l-	-r-	-j-	-y-
(◌◌)	(◌◌)	(◌◌)	(◌◌)	(◌◌)

Example words with medial consonants follow: ကွား /kwá/ ‘ax’, ပိုတ် /plī/ ‘rope’, ပြား /prá/ ‘be scattered’, ဖျား /phjá/ ‘market’, and စုတ် /cγā/ ‘be few’.

4.3. Vowels and tones

Table 9 shows how the vowels/rhymes and tones are written. The rhymes of the same vowel are placed in the same row and the rhymes of the same tone are placed in the same column. Note that this table shows how to write and read Sgaw Karen native words. Pali loanwords are often read with pronunciations that deviate from the correspondences shown in this table.

Table 9: Rhymes and tones

	low-falling	mid-level	high-level	high-falling	low-checked	mid-checked	atonic
i	ိသ် -i (ိ်)	ိယ် -ī (ိ်)	ိး -í (ိ)	ိတ် -i (ိ်)	ိလ် -i? (ိ်)	ိဒ် -ī? (ိး)	
e	ေသ် -è (ေ်)	ေယ် -ē (ေ်)	ေး -é (ေ)	ေတ် -è (ေ်)	ေလ် -è? (ေ်)	ေဒ် -ē? (ေး)	
ε	ဲသ် -ê (ဲ်)	ဲယ် -ē (ဲ်)	ဲး -é (ဲ)	ဲတ် -è (ဲ်)	ဲလ် -ê? (ဲ်)	ဲဒ် -ē? (ဲး)	
i	ိသ် -i (ိ်)	ိယ် -ī (ိ်)	ိး -í (ိ)	ိတ် -i (ိ်)			
ə	ဲးသ် -ə (ဲး်)	ဲးယ် -ā (ဲး်)	ဲး -á (ဲး)	ဲးတ် -ə (ဲး်)	ဲးလ် -ə? (ဲး်)	ဲးဒ် -ā? (ဲးး)	○ -ə (○)
a	ာသ် -à (ာ်)	ာယ် -ā (ာ်)	ား -á (ာ်)	ာတ် -à (ာ်)	ာလ် -à? (ာ်)	ာဒ် -ā? (ား)	
u	ုသ် -ū (no)	ုယ် -ū (no)	ုး -ú (no)	ုတ် -ū (no)	ုလ် (ုလ်) -ū? (ု်)	ုဒ် (ုဒ်) -ū? (ုး)	
u	ုသ် -ū (ု်)	ုယ် -ū (ု်)	ုး -ú (ု)	ုတ် -ū (ု်)	ုလ် -ū? (ု်)	ုဒ် -ū? (ုး)	
o	ိသ် -o (ိ်)	ိယ် -ō (ိ်)	ိး -ó (ိ)	ိတ် -o (ိ်)	ိလ် -o? (ိ်)	ိဒ် -ō? (ိး)	
o	ိသ် -ò (ိ်)	ိယ် -ō (ိ်)	ိး -ó (ိ)	ိတ် -ò (ိ်)	ိလ် (ိဒ်) -ò? (ိ်)	ိဒ် (ိဒ်) -ō? (ိး)	

The following are notes on writing rhymes and tones:

- သ်, ယ်, ဝး, ဝတ်, ဝလ်, and ဝဒ် are tone markers, rather than indicating syllable-final consonants as in the Mon script. ဝး also indicates the vowel /ə/.
- Atonic syllables are represented with zero marking.
- When the tone marker ဝတ် is followed by the basic letter ဝ or ဝ, the two

consecutive letters are sometimes superimposed; in that case, the symbol ṽ is omitted. For example, ခံတံထေဒ် /khāthē?/ ‘basis’ may be written ခံထေဒ်. Such a spelling is not obligatory. Similarly, ထွီတံအိုတ်တဒး /thwí ?ô tã dí/ (dog / be / one / NCa) ‘There was a dog’ may be written ထွီတံအိုတ်တဒး. As is evident from this example, this spelling may be used beyond a word boundary.

- The tone marker ṽ is officially written with the letter shown in (4) of Table 7.
- The symbol ˆ indicating the high-level tone may be omitted in an informal writing style. Thus, ˆi, ˆe, ˆu, ˆo, and ˆuː may be written i, e, u, o, and uː, respectively. In fact, the symbol ˆ is not necessary for the purpose of distinguishing the tones of the native Sgaw Karen words. Nevertheless, there is a reason to add the symbol ˆ in a formal writing style: This symbol makes it easier to distinguish between native Sgaw Karen words and Pali borrowings. The vowel symbols added with the symbol ˆ to indicate the high-level tone are all also used in the notation of Pali words, and the presence or absence of this symbol allows a reader to distinguish between native Sgaw Karen words and Pali loan words: If a word is marked with the symbol ˆ, it is a Sgaw Karen word; and if not, it is a Pali word. For example, ˆe /cé/ ‘silver; money’ and the first syllable of the Pali word ˆeˆoˆtãṇā <cetanā> ‘thought’ (Sgaw Karen reading: /cēdānā/) would have the same spelling if not for the symbol ˆ; however, they must be pronounced differently. In such cases, using this symbol is helpful.
- As mentioned in Section 3.4, /-i?/ tends to be pronounced /-e?/. Thus, /-i?/ is often written with the symbol indicating /-e?/.
- As mentioned in Section 3.4, /-o?/ is often confused with /-ɔ?/. Thus, /-o?/ is often written with the symbol indicating /-ɔ?/.
- There is no symbol indicating the open rhyme /-u/ in the Christian Sgaw Karen Script. The notation “(no)” indicates this.
- As mentioned in Section 3.4, /lú/ is the emphatic form of the locative preposition /lá/ ‘at; from; to’. In Letalanyah, /lú/ is regarded as the representative form of the locative preposition and is always written ṽlú, not ˆe /lá/.
- In Section 3.4, I noted that /-u?/ is usually pronounced [-ɯ?], but may also be pronounced [-i?]. Thus, the rhymes /-ù?/ and /-ū?/ may be pronounced [-i?] and [-ɯ?], and are sometimes written ṽi and ṽɯ, so as to indicate these sounds. These spellings

are shown in parentheses in the line of the vowel /u/.

- In Section 3.4, I noted that /-uʔ/ is sometimes confused with /-uʔ/. Thus, syllables that should be written ၵ်လ် or ၵ်ဒ် are sometimes written ၵ်လ် or ၵ်ဒ်, respectively.
- The vowel /ɔ/ is spelled with ၵ in open syllables, whereas it is spelled with ော in syllables ending with a glottal stop. However, /ɔ/ with a glottal stop is sometimes spelled with ၵ. Therefore, ၵ်လ် and ၵ်ဒ် are shown in parentheses.

Below are examples of how to write Sgaw Karen rhymes in Letalanyah:

- /i/ ဝိသ် /wi/ ‘to winnow’, မိယ် /mī/ ‘name’, ထီး /thí/ ‘water’, ထီတ် /thî/ ‘to see’,
လီလ် /liʔ/ ‘letter’ (usually pronounced /lèʔ/ and spelled လေလ်), သီဒ် /θīʔ/
‘alcohol’ (usually pronounced /θēʔ/ and spelled သေဒ်)
- /e/ မေသ် /mè/ ‘to be’, ကေယ် /kē/ ‘to return’, ဆေး /ché/ ‘shirt, dress’, အေတ် /ʔè/ ‘to
bite’, လေလ် /lèʔ/ ‘letter’, သေဒ် /θēʔ/ ‘alcohol’
- /ɛ/ လဲသ် /lè/ ‘be wide’, လဲယ် /lɛ/ ‘to go’, ကဲ /ké/ ‘to become’, အဲတ် /ʔè/ ‘to love’,
မဲလ် /mèʔ/ ‘eye’, ဆဲဒ် /chēʔ/ ‘to prick’
- /i/ မုယ် /mī/ ‘sun’, တုယ် /tī/ ‘to arrive’, စုး /cí/ ‘hand’, လုတ် /lí/ ‘thread’
- /ə/ ဂးသ် /ɣə/ ‘be still’, လးယ် /lɔ/ ‘be warm’, ဆး /chá/ ‘be sweet’, ထးတ် /thə/ ‘bag’,
လးလ် /ləʔ/ ‘be ended’, ဒးဒ် /dɔʔ/ ‘room’, ကပံယ် /kəpə/ ‘light (n.)’
- /a/ တသ် /tà/ ‘thing’, မသ် /mā/ ‘to do’, လး /lá/ ‘moon’, ညုတ် /jâ/ ‘fish’, ပလ် /pàʔ/
‘to put’, ဖဒ် /phāʔ/ ‘to read’
- /u/ လုံ /lú/ ‘at; from; to’ (locative preposition), သုံတ် /θú/ ‘surely’ (a sentence-final
particle), နုံလ် /nú/ ‘to enter’ (also spelled နလ်), ဖုံဒ် /phúʔ/ ‘to jerk’ (also spelled
ဖဒ်)
- /u/ ယုသ် /jù/ ‘to swallow’, လုယ် /lū/ ‘to chase’, ထုး /thú/ ‘gold’, ခုတ် /khú/ ‘to dig’,
ကုလ် /kù/ ‘to chop (as trees)’ (also pronounced /kòʔ/ and spelled ကိုလ်), ကုဒ်
/kūʔ/ ‘to cough’
- /o/ ကိုသ် /kò/ ‘be hot’, တိုယ် /tō/ ‘bridge’, ဆို /chó/ ‘be early’, ထိုတ် /thò/ ‘bird’, ကိုလ်
/kòʔ/ ‘neck’ (also pronounced /kòʔ/ and spelled ကောလ်), ကိုဒ် /kōʔ/ ‘to call’ (also
pronounced /kōʔ/ and spelled ကောဒ်)
- /ɔ/ ယံသ် /jò/ ‘to tread’, မံယ် /mō/ ‘to bark’, ကံ /kó/ ‘be difficult’, အံတ် /ʔò/ ‘to eat’,

ကောလ်ကောလ် /kəʔkəʔ/ ‘onomatopoeia for a crackling sound’, ကောဒ် (ကံဒ်)
/kəʔ/ ‘island’

5. Sample text

A text written in Letalanyah will be shown in this section as a sample. A folktale is quoted from the following book (pp. 198–199), for which its bibliographic information is provided in Burmese.

Book title: နှစ်သစ်စိန်ရတုစာစောင် [New year magazine, diamond jubilee]
Editor and place of print: ကရင်ပြည်နယ်၊ ကြာအင်းဆိပ်ကြီး မြို့နယ်၊ ဝင်းရော်ဒေသ၊
ကရင်အမျိုးသား နှစ်သစ်ကူးနေ့ ကျင်းပရေးကော်မတီ [Karen New Year
Committee, Win Yaw Area, Kyain-seikkyi Township, Karen State], 2013.

The title of the text is ဖုးဝံသ်ရံကျိ တသ်လုံပုးယံ /phúwə̀rək̀lò tàlúplə̀/ ‘Phu Wawrawklo’s fairy tale’ in Sgaw Karen, and the name of the author is တီးအဲတ်စးယံ (ကနံလ်) /tíʔéçə̀ (kənùʔ)/, both of which are written in Letalanyah. Section 5.1 shows the original story written in Letalanyah, and Section 5.2 shows the same story I rewrote in Christian Sgaw Karen Script for comparison. Section 5.3 is a phonemic transcription and translation of the story. In the original text, the story is written using the scheme in which a grandfather tells it to his child; however, I omitted the parts concerning such a background because of space limitations.

Notable differences between Letalanyah and Christian Sgaw Karen Script include the following:

- Christian Sgaw Karen Script is generally written based on the pronunciation of the 19th century when the Bible was written, regardless of how the modern language is pronounced. In contrast, Letalanyah is written based on the modern pronunciation. For example, while the form meaning ‘and’ is written as ဒီး /dɿʔ/ in Christian Sgaw Karen Script, it is written as ဒးဒ် /dɿʔ/ in Letalanyah. /dɿʔ/ is the form of the word during the 19th century when Christian Sgaw Karen Script was created, and this form is also used in the Bible. In the modern Hpa-an dialect, this form sounds formal and is usually

pronounced /dɔʔ/ in daily speech. As in this example, the spelling of Letalanyah is based on the modern pronunciation.

● Texts written in Christian Sgaw Karen Script are often significantly influenced by the vocabulary and style used in the Bible. However, texts written in Letalanyah generally reflect the modern colloquial style.

5.1. The original text in Letalanyah

- (1) လုံညားခံနေတ် ထွီတ်အိုတ္တုဒုး အိုတ်လုံပွတ်ကူးဒးဒ် အတကောဒ် ဒိဒုတ်နေတ်လံယ်။
- (2) ထွီတ်တဒုးနေတ် ဟဒ်ဟုတ်အံတ်ဝဲတတ် လုံတဝံပူယ်နေတ် ကောဒ်မုတ်ဟားဒဲဒ်လံယ်။
- (3) မုတ်အိုတ္တုနီယ် ပွယ်ငါးယူတ်တတ်ဖိုတဂယ် ယူတ်နေးပွယ်တတ်ဝီယ် ဟီးနေးဝဲ တပးယ် ဖဒ်ဒိုတ် တဖူးတ် ကွဲလံယ်ဝဲထီးလား လုံတပးယ် ဖဒ်ဒိုတ်ပူယ်ဝီယ် ကစုတ်လား တတ်ကူး တတ်ကယ်နေတ်လံယ်။
- (4) ထွီတ္တတ်ဘုတ်တဒုးနေတ် လဲယ်ထံတ်ဟုတ် အံတ္တတ်လုံ ပွယ်ဟီတ်ပူယ်ဘုံ ပွယ်ကောဒ် ဃားဇံယ် အဝဲဖုတ်တဘုံ ဖုးလံယ်ဝဲဝီယ်တဘုံ ဘတ်ဝဲဒတ်လုံ ထီးလားတပးယ်ပူယ် အပိုး လားဝဲဒိဒုးနေတ်လံယ်။
- (5) မုတ်ဝါးထံတ်ဘုံ အတကောဒ်ဟဲဒိဒုတ်နုတ်ကေး ပွယ်ကွတ်နုတ်ဇံယ် တဘတ်လးယ်ဝဲ ဘတ်လံယ်။
- (6) အဝဲသီတ်ညားလုံ ပွယ်ကွတ်နုတ်ဇံယ် တဘတ်လးယ်ဘုံ အဝဲတဲနေးအတကောဒ် ယယ် အီယ် တတ်လုံ မူးဒိုတ်ပွတ်ကူးလံယ် မးစဟဲကဲနေး တတ်ဖိုးတတ်ဃတ် အစံယ်ပယ်လံယ်။
- (7) ပွယ်မးလံယ်ယယ်အပို စဘတ်ဟဲကဲနေးဝဲ သုးစံယ်ပယ်ယယ်။
- (8) နေတ်တဘုံ ဖဲဗီယ်လလ်ပွတ်ဒိုတ်ပူယ်နေတ် ကယဲယ်တတ်ဖိုတတ်ဃတ်တဖတ်နေတ် ထွီတ်လားကဲနေး အသေတ်ဝဲ စံယ်ပယ်လံယ်။
- (9) စဒ်ထံတ်ဖဲနေတ်တဘုံ အဝဲမယ်တကောဒ်လုံ ဘံတ်သိုတ်ခေးဘွေးလံယ်။
- (10) ဘံတ်သိုတ်ခေးဘွေးသေတ်ခံ ဃုးအံတ် တတ်ဖိုးတတ်ဃတ် မေးနေတ်ဘုံ လဲယ်ဒုး အံတ်ဝဲ ထွီတ်လားနေတ်လံယ်။
- (11) ထွီတ်လားခံ ဒေးယေလ်ဒေးတနုတ်လးယ်အတကောဒ်ထွီတ်ဘတ်။
- (12) ထွီတ်လားနေတ် အိုတ်ဝဲထွဲဘတ်ထွဲဘတ်ဘုံ တုယ်ဝဲလုံ ဆေဒ်မုတ်လားနေတ်လံယ်။
- (13) တုယ်ဝဲလုံ ဆေဒ်မုတ်လားဘုံ ထွီတ်သေတ်တစိုတ် ကလ်ဂူးထံတ်ဝဲ ဒိဒုတ်နေတ်လံယ်။
- (14) နေတ်တဘုံ ထွီတ်လားခံ နုတ်ဟူးဝဲလုံ ထွီတ်ဒိဒုတ်ကလ်ဂူးတဘုံ ထွီတ်လားနုတ်ကေး အိုတ်ဃိုတ်တနေတ်ဘတ် မိုတ်ကလ်ဂူး ဘတ်သဒ်လီး။
- (15) ဟူးဘတ်သဒ်လုံ ထွီတ်ကလ်ဂူးဒိဒုတ်တဘုံ အဝဲတတ်ပလံယ် လံယ်တုံလဲဝဲဒဲဒ် ကလ်

ဝူးထံတဲဝဲလံယ်။

(16) နေသံတဘွံ ဘံတ်သိုတ်ခေးဘွေးသေတ်တဖတ် သီတ်ညားဝဲလုံထိုတ်တံတံဘွံ သဒ်ထံတ် ဖိုတ်ဝဲ ထိုတ်လားနေတ် ဒးဒ်နယ်အေတ် ယယ်အေတ် ပွယ်အေတ်ဖိုတ်ဝဲ ထိုတ်လားနေတ်လံယ်။

(17) မေးလုံအတကောဒ် ထိုတ်တစိုတ်ခံ သဒ်ထံတ်ပလဲဇံယ် လုံပူးယံလီလီယံအယို တဟဲရိုစးယံဝဲဘတ်နေတ် မယ်တသ်ကဒါး စိတ်တဒတ်ဝဲလုံ အယီယံလံယ်။

5.2. The same text rewritten in Christian Sgaw Karen Script

- (1) လၢညါနီန့ၣ် ထွံၣ်အိၣ်တဒု အိၣ်လၢပုၣ်ကျါဒီး အသကိးဒီးဒုၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ.
- (2) ထွံၣ်တဒုန့ၣ် ဟးဟ့ၣ်အိၣ်ဝဲတၢ် လၢတဝီပူၤန့ၣ် ကိးမုၢ်ဟါဒီးလီၤ.
- (3) မုၢ်အိၣ်တနံၤ ပုၤငါဆူၣ်တၢ်ဖိတဂၤ ဆူၣ်န့ၣ်ပုၤတၢ်ဝံၤ ဟံးန့ၣ်ဝဲ တပၤဖးဒိၣ် တဖျါၣ် စဲလီၤဝဲထံလါ လၢတပၤ ဖးဒိၣ်ပူၤဝံၤ ကစ့ၣ်လါ တၢ်ကူတၢ်ကၤန့ၣ်လီၤ.
- (4) ထွံၣ်တၢ်ဘျၢၣ်တဒုန့ၣ် လဲၤထီၣ်ဟ့ၣ် အိၣ်တၢ်လၢ ပုၤဟံၣ်ပူၤဘျီ ပုၤကိးဃါအီၤ အဝဲဖးတဘျီ ဖုလီၤဝဲဝံၤတဘျီ ဘၣ်ဝဲဒုၣ်လၢ ထံလါတပၤပူၤ အယိ လါဝဲဒီးဒုန့ၣ်လီၤ.
- (5) မုၢ်ဝါထီၣ်ဘျီ အသကိးဟဲဒီးဒုန့ၣ်က့ ပုၤကွၢ်နီၣ်အီၤ တဘၣ်လၢၤဘၣ်လီၤ.
- (6) အဝဲသ့ၣ်ညါလၢ ပုၤကွၢ်နီၣ်အီၤ တဘၣ်လၢၤဘျီ အဝဲတဲန့ၣ်အသကိး ယၤအံၤ တၢ်လၢ မူခိၣ်ပုၢ်ကျါလီၤ မၤစဟဲကဲန့ၣ် တၢ်ဖိတၢ်ဃာ် အစီၤပၤလီၤ.
- (7) ပုၤမၤလီၤအယိ စဘၣ်ဟဲကဲန့ၣ်ဝဲ သုစီၤပၤယၤ.
- (8) န့ၣ်တဘျီ ဖဲမံၤလၢပုၢ်ဒိၣ်ပူၤန့ၣ် ကယဲၢ်တၢ်ဖိတၢ်ဃာ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ် ထွံၣ်လါကဲန့ၣ် အသ့ၣ်ဝဲ စီၤပၤလီၤ.
- (9) စးထီၣ်ဖဲန့ၣ်တဘျီ အဝဲမၤသကိးလၢ ဘီၣ်သိၣ်ခ့ဘ့လီၤ.
- (10) ဘီၣ်သိၣ်ခ့ဘ့သ့ၣ်ခီ ဃုအိၣ် တၢ်ဖိတၢ်ဃာ် မုၢ်န့ၣ်ဘျီ လဲၤဒုးအိၣ်ဝဲ ထွံၣ်လါန့ၣ်လီၤ.
- (11) ထွံၣ်လါခီ ဒီးယံၣ်ဒီးတနီၣ်လၢၤအသကိးဘၣ်.
- (12) ထွံၣ်လါန့ၣ် အိၣ်ဝဲထွဲဘၣ်ထွဲဘၣ်ဘျီ တုၤဝဲလၢ ဆံးမုၢ်လါန့ၣ်လီၤ.
- (13) တုၤဝဲလၢ ဆံးမုၢ်လါဘျီ ထွံၣ်သ့ၣ်တစိၣ် ကံၤန့ၣ်ထီၣ်ဝဲ ဒီးဒုန့ၣ်လီၤ.
- (14) န့ၣ်တဘျီ ထွံၣ်လါခီ နုၢ်ဟူဝဲလၢ ထွံၣ်ဒီးဒုန့ၣ်ကံၤန့ၣ်တဘျီ ထွံၣ်လါန့ၣ်က့ အိၣ်ဃိတန့ၣ်ဘၣ် မိၢ်ကံၤန့ၣ် ဘၣ်သးလံၤ.
- (15) ဟူဘၣ်သးလၢ ထွံၣ်ကံၤန့ၣ်ဒီးဒုန့ၣ်တဘျီ အဝဲတၢ်ပလီၤ လီၤတူၣ်ဝဲဒီး ကံၤန့ၣ်ထီၣ်ဝဲလီၤ.

(16) နှာ်တဘျီ ဘီာ်သိာ်ခ့ဘ့သ့ာ်တဖာ် သ့ာ်ညါဝဲလၢထွံာ်တီတီဘျီ သးထီာ်
 ဖျိာ်ဝဲ ထွံာ်လါနှာ် ဒီးနှၢအာ် ယၢအာ် ပှၢအာ်ဖျိာ်ဝဲ ထွံာ်လါနှာ်လီၤ.

(17) မ့ၢ်လၢအသကိး ထွံာ်တစိာ်ခီ သးထီာ်ဟံအီၤ လၢပှၢလဲၤလံၤအပၤ
 တဟဲရိၤစၢၤဝဲဘာ်နှာ် မၤတၢ်ကဒါ စံာ်တဒာ်ဝဲလၢ အယံၤလီၤ.

5.3. Transcription and translation

(1) líú ná khó nê thwí ?ò tə dí,
 LOC front side that dog be one NCa
 ?ò líú pwà klá dɔ́? ?ə takɔ́? dɔ́ dù nê lɔ̃.
 be LOC forest between and 3SG friend whole tribe that AST
 There once was a dog, and he lived in the woods with his pack mates.

(2) thwí tə dí nê hā? hí ?ó wé tà
 dog one NCa that walk steal eat EMP thing
 líú təwɔ́ pū nê kɔ́? mihá dɛ́? lɔ̃.
 LOC village inside that every evening every AST
 The dog would roam the village every evening, stealing food and eating it.

(3) mì ?ò tə nī pwāŋəɛ̀təphó tə ɣā
 sun be one Ncd laundry one NCh
 ɛ̀i né pwā tà wī, híné wé
 wash BEN person thing finish take EMP
 təpɔ́ phā?dó tə phló, cé lɔ́ wé thí lá
 pot big one NCr fill down EMP water blue
 líú təpɔ́ phā?dó pū wī,
 LOC pot big inside finish
 kə cí lá tàkútākā nê lɔ̃.
 IRR soak blue clothes that AST
 One day, a launderer washed a customer's clothes and then brought a large jar,
 and put blue liquid in it to dye the clothes.

(4) thwí tàblá tə dí nê lē thó hí ?ó tà
 dog thief one NCa that go up house eat thing
 líú pwā hí pū bló, pwā kɔ́?xá fɔ̃,
 LOC person house inside once person call 3SG
 ?əwé phū? tə bló, phí lɔ́ wé wī tə bló,
 3SG be.startled one time jump down EMP finish one time

bâ wédâ lú thí lá təpɔ̃ pū ʔəxó,
 hit EMP LOC water blue pot inside because
 lá wé dó dí nê l̩.
 blue EMP whole NCa that AST

When the dog, a thief, went up into a man's house to steal and eat, the man called him, and, being startled, he jumped down and fell into a jar, so that his whole body turned blue.

- (5) m̩ wá thô bló, ʔə təkɔ̃? hé dó dú nàʔké
 sun white up once 3SG friend come whole tribe although
 pwā kwànô fiɔ̃ tə bâ l̩ wé bâ l̩.
 person recognize 3SG NEG right anymore EMP NEG AST
 After dawn, his whole pack came, but they could no longer recognize him.

- (6) ʔəwé θiɲá lú pwā kwànô fiɔ̃ tə bâ l̩ bló,
 3SG know that person recognize 3SG NEG right anymore once
 ʔəwé té né ʔə təkɔ̃?,
 3SG tell BEN 3SG friend
 jā ʔi tà lú múkhôpwà klá l̩,
 1SG this thing LOC celestial.world between AST
 m̩ cə hé ké né tàphótàxà ʔə cɔ̃pā l̩.
 command 1SG come become BEN animal 3PL king AST
 Realizing that his companions could not recognize him, he said to them, "I am of Heaven. I have been commanded to be the king of the animals."

- (7) pwā m̩ l̩ ʔəxó,
 person command down because
 cə bâ hé ké né wé θí cɔ̃pā jā.
 1SG must come become BEN EMP 2PL king don't.I?
 "I had to come to be your king because I was commanded to do so."

- (8) nê tə bló phé m̩l̩áʔpwà d̩ pū nê
 that one time in jungle big inside that
 kəjè tàphótàxà təphá nê
 all animal PL that
 thwí lá ké né ʔəθêwé cɔ̃pā l̩.
 dog blue become BEN 3PL king AST
 Then, in the big jungle, the blue dog became the king of all animals.

- (9) s̩áʔ thô phénê tə bló,
 begin up there one time

ʔwé mǎ təkʔ lú bʔθòkhébwé l̩.
 3SG do friend LOC tiger AST

From that moment on, he became friends with the tigers.

- (10) bʔθòkhébwé θê khó xí ʔô taphótàxà mé nè bló,
 tiger PL side search eat animal if get once
 lē dí ʔô wé thwí lá nê l̩.
 go CAUS eat EMP dog blue that AST

As for the tigers, if they looked for an animal and caught it, they fed it to the blue dog.

- (11) thwí lá khó dé jèʔ dé tə nô l̩
 dog blue side the.more long the.more NEG remember anymore
 ʔə təkʔ thwí bâ.
 3SG friend dog NEG

As for the blue dog, he did not remember his companions as time went on.

- (12) thwí lá nê ʔô wé thwébâthwébâ bló,
 dog blue that be EMP one.by.one once
 tī wé lú chēʔmilá nê l̩.
 arrive EMP LOC September that AST

While the blue dog spent his days doing so, September came.

- (13) tī wé lú chēʔmilá bló, thwí θê tə cò
 arrive EMP LOC September once dog PL one group
 kàʔwú thô wé dó dû nê l̩.
 howl up EMP whole tribe that AST

In September, the whole pack of dogs begin to howl.

- (14) nê tə bló thwí lá khó nàhú wé lú
 that one time dog blue side hear EMP that
 thwí dó dû kàʔwú tə bló,
 dog whole tribe howl one time
 thwí lá nàké, ʔôxó tə nè bâ,
 dog blue although stay.still NEG get NEG
 mò kàʔwú bâθāʔ lí.
 want.to howl want.to PFV

Then, the blue dog heard the pack of dogs howling, and even though he was a blue dog, he couldn't stay and wanted to howl.

- (15) hú bâθāʔ lú thwí kàʔwú dó dû tə bló,
 here want.to LOC dog howl whole tribe one time

ʔəwé	tàpəlò	lǝtùrʔ	wé	dǝʔ
3SG	attentiveness	be.interrupted	EMP	and
kàʔwú	thò	wé	lǝ.	
howl	up	EMP	AST	

Wanting to hear the pack of dogs howling, he lost his attention and began to howl.

(16)	nê	tə	bló	bòθòkhébwé	θétəphâ	θɪɲá	wé	lú	
	that	one	time	tiger	PL	know	EMP	that	
	thwí	tótó	bló,	θāʔthò	phò	wé	thwí	lá	nê
	dog	actually	once	be.angry	together	EMP	dog	blue	that
	dǝʔ	nā	ʔê	jā	ʔê				
	and	2SG	bite	1SG	bite				

pwā	ʔê	phò	wé	thwí	lá	nê	lǝ.
person	bite	together	EMP	dog	blue	that	AST

Then, the tigers found out that he was in fact a dog, and they all became angry at the blue dog and rushed to bite him.

(17)	mé	lá	ʔə	təkǝʔ	thwí	tə	cò	khó
	COP	that	3SG	friend	dog	one	group	side
	θāʔthò	pàʔ	hō	lú	plǝliʔli	ʔəxó,		
	be.angry	put	3SG	from	long.ago	because		
	tə	hé	rócǝ	wé	bâ	nê		
	NEG	come	assemble	EMP	NEG	that		
	mātākədá	cí	tədá	wé	lú	ʔəjī	lǝ.	
	conversely	run	back	EMP	LOC	remote.place	AST	

His companions, who had already been angry with him, did not come to his rescue and; on the contrary, they ran far away.

6. Concluding remarks

In this article, I presented the phonological system of the Hpa-an dialect of Sgaw Karen, and then showed the relationship between Letalanyah and the sounds of the dialect. From the discussion in this article, it will be seen that Letalanyah is a highly systematic writing system.

Here I will discuss briefly what writing systems influenced Letalanyah at the time of its creation. Basically, it can be said that Letalanyah follows the Burmese writing system. However, the influence of the Mon script can be seen in spelling the medial

consonant /-l-/ as ၉. This spelling of the medial consonant in Mon style might have been adapted via that of the Buddhist Pwo Karen Script (for Pwo Karen writing systems, see Kato [2021a, 2022]). Spelling the vowel /ɔ/ as ၀ may also reflect the Mon script because the spelling ၀ in the Mon script can indicate the pronunciation /-ɔʔ/.

Furthermore, I assume that Letalanyah was also strongly influenced by Christian Sgaw Karen Script created by Wade. The reason is that Letalanyah shares the following characteristics with Christian Sgaw Karen Script: (1) The consonant /x/, which is difficult to represent in the Burmese/Mon script, is written with ဝ; (2) the notation of the high-level tone is unmarked (except when ၀: is added); (3) /i/ and /u/ are represented with ၀ and ၀, respectively; and (4) atonic syllables are represented by zero marking. Thus, I assume that the creator(s) of Letalanyah would have known the system of Christian Sgaw Karen Script. Presumably, the highly systematic nature of Letalanyah owes much to Christian Sgaw Karen Script, which is also a highly systematic writing system. Letalanyah may be seen as a further elaboration of Christian Sgaw Karen Script in that it distinguishes ten vowels, whereas Christian Sgaw Karen Script distinguishes nine.

Abbreviations

AST = particle indicating assertion; BEN = benefactive; CAUS = causative; COP = copular verb; EMP = emphatic; IRR = irrealis; LOC = particle indicating location, goal, and source; NCa = numeral classifier for an animal; NCd = numeral classifier for a day; NCh = numeral classifier for a human; NCr = numeral classifier for a round thing; NEG = negativity; PFV = perfective; PL = plural; SG = singular; 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person.

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Errata for Kato (2022)

1. p. 40, the fifth line from the bottom.

Incorrect: ɛJ /ɸà/ ‘question marker’

Correct: ɛJ /ɣà/ ‘question marker’

2. p. 41, the second line below Table 20.

Incorrect: ʧɰɰ /prə̀N/ ‘to compete’

Correct: ʧɰɰ /práN/ ‘to compete’