

Title	Letalanyah : a Buddhist writing system of Sgaw Karen
Sub Title	
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Publisher	慶應義塾大学言語文化研究所
Publication year	2023
Jtitle	慶應義塾大学言語文化研究所紀要 (Reports of the Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies). No.54 (2023. 3) ,p.27- 52
JaLC DOI	
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Notes	論文
Genre	Departmental Bulletin Paper
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN00069467-00000054-0027

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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 လေလံတလံညာ် /ləʔtəlaʔɲà/. This can be written as လံာ်တလးညာ် using the Christian Sgaw Karen Script, which is the most widespread Sgaw Karen script. Since /ləʔ/ (or /liʔ/) means ‘script’ and /təlaʔɲà/ means ‘wisdom, intellect’, /ləʔtəlaʔɲà/ 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 ဝီ 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 [a 41] low-falling tone	à [a 11] low-level tone
ā [a33] mid-level tone	ā [a33] mid-level tone
á [a 44] high-level tone	á [a 55] high-level tone
â [a51] high-falling tone	â [a51] falling tone
à? [aʔ11~21] low-checked tone	à? [aʔ11] low-checked tone
ā? [aʔ33] mid-checked tone	á? [aʔ44] 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?/ [aʔ11] low-checked, and /á?/ [aʔ44] high-checked. However, of these, /à/ [a11] “**low-level**” should be changed to /à/ [a**41**] “**low-falling**” (the parts in bold font have been corrected); /á/ [a55] “high-level” to /á/ [a**44**] “high-level”; /â/ [51] “**falling**” to /â/ [51] “**high-falling**”; and /á?/ [aʔ44] “**high-checked**” to /ā?/ [aʔ33] “**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-/ [k̚θ̚], /t-/ [t], /c-/ [tɛ̃s], /k-/ [k], /ʔ-/ [ʔ], /ph-/ [pʰ], /th-/ [tʰ], /ch-/ [tɛ̃h~sʰ], /kh-/ [kʰ], /b-/ [b̃~b], /d-/ [d̃~d], /g-/ [g], /ɛ-/ [ɛ], /x-/ [x], /h-/ [h], /z-/ [z], /ɣ-/ [ɣ], /h̃-/ [h̃], /m-/ [m], /n-/ [n], /ɲ-/ [ɲ], /w-/ [w], /j-/ [j̃~j], /l-/ [l], and /r-/ [r̃~ɾ].

/b/ and /d/ are implosives, i.e., [b] and [d], but may be pronounced [b̃] and [d̃] in fast speech. Furthermore, /b/ and /d/, which appear in borrowings from Burmese and Pali, are typically pronounced with an egressive [b̃] and [d̃]. /b/ and /d/ in /būʔdā/ ‘Buddha’ (< Burmese /bouʔdā/ < 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*), /zɛ̃/ ‘market’ (< Burmese /zɛ̃/), and /ɲá/ ‘to rent’ (< Burmese /hɲá/). However, /ɲ/ may appear in a very small number of pure Sgaw Karen words—for example, /ɲóɲāʔ/ ‘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/ [tɛ̃~s] and /ch/ [tɛ̃h~sʰ], respectively. The more formal the situation of utterance, the more frequently /c/ and /ch/ are realized as [s] and [sʰ] instead of [tɛ̃] and [tɛ̃h]. However, in borrowings from Burmese, when the original Burmese form has /c/ or /ch/, they are always pronounced with [tɛ̃] and [tɛ̃h], not with [s] and [sʰ], e.g., /có/ [tɛ́o] ‘school’ (< Burmese /cáun/), and /chōʔ/ [tɛ̃h̥ōʔ] ‘to bind’ (< Burmese /chouʔ/).

Next, the phonemes that can appear as C2 are /-w-/ [w], /-l-/ [l], /-r-/ [r̃~ɾ], /-j-/ [j̃~j], and /-ɣ-/ [ɣ~ɰ]. 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~w]. It often alternates with /-w-/ after a labial, e.g., /pɣā ~ pwā/ ‘person’. /cɣ-/ and /chɣ-/ often alternate with /ɛ-/ , e.g., /cɣā ~ ɛā/ ‘be few’ and /chɣó ~ ɛó/ ‘to send’. In the word /mèʔchɣāʔ/ ‘be shy’, the alternation of /chɣ-/ and /ɛ-/ may occur or the omission of /-ɣ-/ may occur. Thus, there are at least three ways to pronounce this word: /mèʔchɣāʔ ~ mɛʔɛāʔ ~ mɛʔchāʔ/. Furthermore, since /ch-/ may be pronounced [s^h], 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	u	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], /-u/ [u], /-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), /θû/ ‘surely’ (a sentence-final particle), /hú/ ‘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 /θû/ ‘surely’, /θû/ ‘to anoint (the head)’, and /θû/ ‘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], /-ʔɛ/ [ɛʔ], /-əʔ/ [əʔ], /-aʔ/ [äʔ], /-uʔ/ [ʊʔ], /-uʔ/ [ʊʔ], /-oʔ/ [oʔ], and /-ɔʔ/ [ɔʔ]. Below, some notes on these rhymes are given.

Very few words have a rhyme /-eʔ/. Examples are: /xɛʔ/ ‘gripped, pinched’ and /xɛʔxɛʔ/ ‘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 [-ʊʔ], but may also be pronounced [-iʔ]. There seems to be no phonological distinction between [-ʊʔ] and [-iʔ]. In this article, I interpret these as /-uʔ/ instead of /-iʔ/, which is in accordance with the most frequent pronunciation [-ʊʔ]. 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 /-wʔ/. Thus, /lɔʔtùʔ/ ‘be cut off (as supplies)’, for example, may be pronounced /lɔʔtùʔ/.

At the end of this section, I will discuss a possible explanation for the emergence of the vowel /w/. 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 /w/ in this script, and ၀ 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 /w/. Thus, I believe that /w/ 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- (no)	(ဃ) g- (no)	c η- (c)
စ c- (စ)	ဆ ch- (ဆ)	ဇ z- (ဇ)	(ဈ) z- (ဇ)	ည j- (ည)
တ t- (တ)	ထ th- (ထ)	(ဒ) d- (ဒ)	(ဌ) d- (ဒ)	(ဏ) 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 y- (ဂ)	*ယ x- (ယ)
	*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	*ယ	*ဘ	*ဒ	*ဇ
(1) ဂ	(2) ယ	(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, ဃ, 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, ဃ, 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, ဃ, ဘ, ဒ, and ဧ. When it is necessary to use ဝ, ဃ, 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 ဝ̃.

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 ျ indicating the medial consonant /-y-/ added (see Section 4.2). It may also be represented by ယှ, i.e., the basic letter ယ with ျ added. It is unknown whether ရှ and ယှ 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 ျ 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/ cò/ ‘school’ (< Burmese /cáun/) and ချိန်/ chōʔ/ ‘to bind’ (< Burmese /chouʔ/). In addition, as mentioned in Section 3.3, /c/ and /ch/ are sometimes pronounced with [s] and [sh]; thus, when one wants to pronounce a word with [te] and [teʰ] instead of [s] and [sh], 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, ဇှ, ဇှ, ခှ, ဖ, ဖ, ဖ, and ဇှ, are excluded.

ကတ်/ kâ/ ‘to grill’, ဆတ်/ khâ/ ‘be bitter’, ဂုဏ်/ gù/ ‘dignity’ (< Burmese /gòun/ < Pali *guṇa*), ဃောသကန်/ góʔakāʔ/ ‘Ghosaka (a name of a deva)’, ငါး/ ṅá/ ‘to rent’ (<

Burmese /hŋá/), စသ် /cà/ ‘young’, ဆား /chá/ ‘to sell’, ဇေး /zé/ ‘market’ (< Burmese /zé/), ညှတ် /ŋá/ ‘fish’, တသ် /tà/ ‘thing’, ထိန် /thā/ ‘iron’, ဒို /dó/ ‘Karen don dance’ (< Burmese /dóun/), နုလ် /nà/ ‘a kind of basket’, ပလ် /pà/ ‘to put’, ဖိန် /phā/ ‘to read’, ဗုဒ္ဓ /bū?dā/ ‘Buddha’ (< Burmese /bou?dā/ < Pali *buddha*), ဘာဝနာ /bāwəṇā/ ‘meditation’ (< Pali *bhāvanā*), မလ် /mā/ ‘to do’, ယူလ် /jū/ ‘to fly’, ရဲတ် /rê/ ‘to pour (water)’, လား /lá/ ‘moon’, ဝတ် /wā/ ‘bamboo’, သိန် /thā/ ‘heart’, တိန် /hā/ ‘to walk’, အား /ʔá/ ‘be many’, ဂုသ် /γi/ ‘snake’, ယား /xá/ ‘to mix’, ဘတ် /bā/ ‘be correct’, ဒါး /dá/ ‘to spread’, and ဧ်လ် /fiṣ/ ‘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’, ပိုလ် /plī/ ‘rope’, ပြား /prá/ ‘be scattered’, ဖျား /phjá/ ‘market’, and စုလ် /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 -ိ (ိ်)	ိယ် -ိ (ိ်)	ိး -ိ (ိ)	ိတ် -ိ (ိ်)	ိလ် -ိ? (ိ်)	ိဒ် -ိ? (ိး)	
e	ေသ် -ေ (ေ်)	ေယ် -ေ (ေ်)	ေး -ေ (ေ)	ေတ် -ေ (ေ်)	ေလ် -ေ? (ေ်)	ေဒ် -ေ? (ေး)	
ε	ဲသ် -ဲ (ဲ်)	ဲယ် -ဲ (ဲ်)	ဲး -ဲ (ဲ)	ဲတ် -ဲ (ဲ်)	ဲလ် -ဲ? (ဲ်)	ဲဒ် -ဲ? (ဲး)	
i	ိသ် -ိ (ိ်)	ိယ် -ိ (ိ်)	ိး -ိ (ိ)	ိတ် -ိ (ိ်)			
ə	းသ် -ə (ာ်)	းယ် -ə (ာ်)	း -ə (ာ)	းတ် -ə (ာ်)	းလ် -ə? (ာ်)	းဒ် -ə? (ား)	○ -ə (○)
a	ာသ် -ာ (ာ်)	ာယ် -ာ (ာ်)	ား -ာ (ာ)	တ် -ာ (ာ်)	လ် -ာ? (ာ်)	ဒ် -ာ? (ား)	
u	ုသ် -u (no)	ုယ် -u (no)	ုး -u (no)	ုတ် -u (no)	ုလ် (ုလ်) -u? (ု်)	ုဒ် (ုဒ်) -u? (ုး)	
u	ုသ် -u (ု်)	ုယ် -u (ု်)	ုး -u (ု)	ုတ် -u (ု်)	ုလ် -u? (ု်)	ုဒ် -u? (ုး)	
o	ိသ် -ိ (ိ်)	ိယ် -ိ (ိ်)	ိး -ိ (ိ)	ိတ် -ိ (ိ်)	ိလ် -ိ? (ိ်)	ိဒ် -ိ? (ိး)	
o	ိသ် -ိ (ိ်)	ိယ် -ိ (ိ်)	ိး -ိ (ိ)	ိတ် -ိ (ိ်)	ိလ် (ိဒ်) -ိ? (ိ်)	ိဒ် (ိဒ်) -ိ? (ိး)	

The following are notes on writing rhymes and tones:

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

consecutive letters are sometimes superimposed; in that case, the symbol ၵ is omitted. For example, ခံတ်ထေၣ် /khàthē?/ ‘basis’ may be written ခံထေၣ်. Such a spelling is not obligatory. Similarly, ထွီတ်အိုတ်တဒဲး /thwí ʔò tə dí/ (dog / be / one / NCa) ‘There was a dog’ may be written ထွီတ်အိုထွီတ်ဒဲး. As is evident from this example, this spelling may be used beyond a word boundary.

- The tone marker ၵ is officially written with the letter shown in (4) of Table 7.
- The symbol ◌း indicating the high-level tone may be omitted in an informal writing style. Thus, ◌း, ◌း, ◌း, ◌း, and ◌း may be written ◌, ◌, ◌, ◌, and ◌, respectively. In fact, the symbol ◌း 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 ◌း 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 ◌း 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 ◌း, it is a Sgaw Karen word; and if not, it is a Pali word. For example, စေ /cé/ ‘silver; money’ and the first syllable of the Pali word စေတနာ <cetanā> ‘thought’ (Sgaw Karen reading: /cēdānā/) would have the same spelling if not for the symbol ◌း; 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 ငို /lú/, not ငး /lá/.
- In Section 3.4, I noted that /-u?/ is usually pronounced [-ʊ?], but may also be pronounced [-i?]. Thus, the rhymes /-ù?/ and /-ū?/ may be pronounced [-i?] and [-ɪ?], and are sometimes written ငို and ငို, 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 /-u//. Thus, syllables that should be written ၵလ် or ၵ် are sometimes written ၵ်လ် or ၵ်, respectively.
- The vowel /ɔ/ is spelled with ဝ် in open syllables, whereas it is spelled with ဝာ in syllables ending with a glottal stop. However, /ɔ/ with a glottal stop is sometimes spelled with ဝ်. Therefore, ဝ်လ် and ဝ် 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 /li/ ‘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 /ʔē/ ‘to
bite’, လေလ် /lèʔ/ ‘letter’, သေဒ် /θēʔ/ ‘alcohol’
- /ɛ/ လဲသ် /lè/ ‘be wide’, လဲယ် /lē/ ‘to go’, ကဲ /ké/ ‘to become’, အဲတ် /ʔē/ ‘to love’,
မဲလ် /mèʔ/ ‘eye’, ဆဲဒ် /chēʔ/ ‘to prick’
- /i/ မုသ် /mì/ ‘sun’, တုယ် /tī/ ‘to arrive’, စုး /cí/ ‘hand’, လုတ် /lî/ ‘thread’
- /ə/ ဂဲသ် /ʔə/ ‘be still’, လဲယ် /lā/ ‘be warm’, ဆေး /chá/ ‘be sweet’, ထေးတ် /thā/ ‘bag’,
လဲလ် /ləʔ/ ‘be ended’, ဒဲဒ် /dāʔ/ ‘room’, ကပံယ် /kəpā/ ‘light (n.)’
- /a/ တာသ် /tà/ ‘thing’, မာယ် /mā/ ‘to do’, လား /lá/ ‘moon’, ညုတ် /jā/ ‘fish’, ပာလ် /pàʔ/
‘to put’, ဖာဒ် /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’, ထူး /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 /thô/ ‘bird’, ကိုလ်
/kòʔ/ ‘neck’ (also pronounced /kàʔ/ and spelled ကောလ်), ကိုဒ် /kōʔ/ ‘to call’ (also
pronounced /kāʔ/ 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: နှစ်သစ်စိန်ရတုတုစာစောင် [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 /phíwə̀rə̀kló tə̀lúplā/ ‘Phu Wawrawklo’s fairy tale’ in Sgaw Karen, and the name of the author is တီးအဲတ်စးယံ (ကနိုလ်) /tíʔə̀cə̀ (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 /dʒʔ/ 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 အိုတ်လုံပွသ်ကူးဒးဒ် အတကောဒ် ဒ်ဒူတ်နေတ်လံယံ။
- (2) ထွီတ်တဒုးနေတ် ဟဒ်ဟုတ်အံတ်ဝဲတသ် လုံတဝံပူယံနေတ် ကောဒ်မုသ်ဟားဒ်ဒ်လံယံ။
- (3) မုသ်အိုတ္တုနီယံ ပွယ်ငါးယူတ်တသ်ဖိုတဂယ် ယူတ်နေးပွယ်တသ်ဝီယံ ဟီးနေးဝဲ တပးယံ ဖဒ်ဒိုတ် တဖူးတ် ကွဲလံယံဝဲထီးလား လုံတပးယံ ဖဒ်ဒိုတ်ပူယံဝီယံ ကစုတ်လား တသ်ကူး တသ်ကယ်နေတ်လံယံ။
- (4) ထွီတ္တသ်ဘုတ်တဒုးနေတ် လဲယံထံတ်ဟုတ် အံတ္တသ်လုံ ပွယ်ဟိတ်ပူယံဘုံ ပွယ်ကောဒ် ဃားဇံယံ အဝဲဖုဒ်တဘုံ ဖုးလံယံဝဲဝီယံတဘုံ ဘတ်ဝဲဒတ်လုံ ထီးလားတပးယံပူယံ အဃိုး လားဝဲဒ်ဒုးနေတ်လံယံ။
- (5) မုသ်ဝါးထံတ်ဘုံ အတကောဒ်ဟဲဒ်ဒူတ်နုသ်ကေး ပွယ်ကွသ်နံတ်ဇံယံ တဘတ်လးယံဝဲ ဘတ်လံယံ။
- (6) အဝဲသီတ်ညားလုံ ပွယ်ကွသ်နံတ်ဇံယံ တဘတ်လးယံဘုံ အဝဲတဲနေးအတကောဒ် ယယ် အီယံ တသ်လုံ မူးဒိုတ်ပွသ်ကူးလံယံ မးစဟဲကဲနေး တသ်ဖိုးတသ်ဃသ် အစံယံပယ်လံယံ။
- (7) ပွယ်မးလံယံယယ်အဃို စဘတ်ဟဲကဲနေးဝဲ သုးစံယံပယ်ယယ်။
- (8) နေတ်တဘုံ ဖဲမီယံလလ်ပွသ်ဒိုတ်ပူယံနေတ် ကယဲယံတသ်ဖိုတသ်ဃသ်တဖတ်နေတ် ထွီတ်လားကဲနေး အသေတ်ဝဲ စံယံပယ်လံယံ။
- (9) စဒ်ထံတ်ဖဲနေတ်တဘုံ အဝဲမယ်တကောဒ်လုံ ဘံတ်သိုတ်ခေးဘွေးလံယံ။
- (10) ဘံတ်သိုတ်ခေးဘွေးသေတ်ခံ ဃုးအံတ် တသ်ဖိုးတသ်ဃသ် မေးနေသ်ဘုံ လဲယံဒုး အံတ်ဝဲ ထွီတ်လားနေတ်လံယံ။
- (11) ထွီတ်လားခံ ဒေးယေလ်ဒေးတနံတ်လးယံအတကောဒ်ထွီတ်ဘတ်။
- (12) ထွီတ်လားနေတ် အိုတ်ဝဲထွဲဘတ်ထွဲဘတ်ဘုံ တုယံဝဲလုံ ဆေဒ်မုသ်လားနေတ်လံယံ။
- (13) တုယံဝဲလုံ ဆေဒ်မုသ်လားဘုံ ထွီတ်သေတ်တစိုတ် ကလ်ဂူးထံတ်ဝဲ ဒ်ဒူတ်နေတ်လံယံ။
- (14) နေတ်တဘုံ ထွီတ်လားခံ နုသ်ဟူးဝဲလုံ ထွီတ်ဒ်ဒူတ်ကလ်ဂူးတဘုံ ထွီတ်လားနုသ်ကေး အိုတ်ဃိုတနေသ်ဘတ် မိုသ်ကလ်ဂူး ဘတ်သဒ်လီး။
- (15) ဟူးဘတ်သဒ်လုံ ထွီတ်ကလ်ဂူးဒ်ဒူတ်တဘုံ အဝဲတသ်ပလံသ် လံယံတုံလ်ဝဲဒးဒ် ကလ်

ဂူးထံတဲဝဲလံယ်။

(16) နေသံတဘွံ ဘံတ်သိုတ်ခေးဘွေးသေတ်တဖတ် သိတ်ညားဝဲလုံထွိတ်တံတံဘွံ သဒ်ထံတ် ဖိုတ်ဝဲ ထွိတ်လားနော် ဒးဒ်နယ်အေတ် ယယ်အေတ် ပွယ်အေတ်ဖိုတ်ဝဲ ထွိတ်လားနော်လံယ်။

(17) မေးလုံအတကောဒ် ထွိတ်တစိုတ်ခံ သဒ်ထံတ်ပလံဇံယ် လုံပွယ်လီလီလီယံအယို တဟဲရိုစးယံဝဲဘတ်နော် မယ်တသ်ကဒါး စိတ်တဒတ်ဝဲလုံ အယီယံလံယ်။

5.2. The same text rewritten in Christian Sgaw Karen Script

(1) လၢညါဒီန့ၣ် ထွံၣ်အိၣ်တဒု အိၣ်လၢပုၣ်ကျါဒီး အသကိးဒီဒုၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ.

(2) ထွံၣ်တဒုန့ၣ် ဟးဟုၣ်အိၣ်ဝဲတၢ် လၢတဝီၤန့ၣ် ကိးမုၢ်ဟါဒီးလီၤ.

(3) မုၢ်အိၣ်တနံၤ ပုၤငါဆူၣ်တၢ်ဖိတဂၤ ဆူၣ်န့ၣ်ပုၤတၢ်ဝံၤ ဟံးန့ၣ်ဝဲ
တပၤဖးဒိၣ် တဖျါၣ် စဲလီၤဝဲထံလါ လၢတပၤ ဖးဒိၣ်ပုၤဝံၤ ကစုၣ်လါ
တၢ်ကူတၢ်ကၤန့ၣ်လီၤ.

(4) ထွံၣ်တၢ်ဘျၢၣ်တဒုန့ၣ် လဲၤထီၣ်ဟုၣ် အိၣ်တၢ်လၢ ပုၤဟံၣ်ပုၤဘျီ
ပုၤကိးဃါအီၤ အဝဲဖးတဘျီ ဖုလီၤဝဲဝံၤတဘျီ ဘၣ်ဝဲဒုၣ်လၢ ထံလါတပၤပူၤ
အယိ လါဝဲဒီဒုန့ၣ်လီၤ.

(5) မုၢ်ဝါထီၣ်ဘျီ အသကိးဟဲဒီဒုန့ၣ်န့ၣ်ကု ပုၤကွၢ်နီၣ်အီၤ တဘၣ်လၢဘၣ်လီၤ.

(6) အဝဲသ့ၣ်ညါလၢ ပုၤကွၢ်နီၣ်အီၤ တဘၣ်လၢဘျီ အဝဲတဲန့ၣ်အသကိး
ယၤအံၤ တၢ်လၢ မူခိၣ်ပုၤကျါလီၤ မၤစဟဲကဲန့ၣ် တၢ်ဖိတၢ်ဃၢ် အစီၤပၤလီၤ.

(7) ပုၤမၤလီၤအယိ စဘၣ်ဟဲကဲန့ၣ်ဝဲ သုစီၤပၤယၤ.

(8) န့ၣ်တဘျီ ဖဲမံၤလၢ်ပုၤဒိၣ်ပုၤန့ၣ် ကယဲၢ်တၢ်ဖိတၢ်ဃၢ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်
ထွံၣ်လါကဲန့ၣ် အသ့ၣ်ဝဲ စီၤပၤလီၤ.

(9) စးထီၣ်ဖဲန့ၣ်တဘျီ အဝဲမၤသကိးလၢ ဘီၣ်သိၣ်ခ့ၣ်လီၤ.

(10) ဘီၣ်သိၣ်ခ့ၣ်သ့ၣ်ခီ ဃုအိၣ် တၢ်ဖိတၢ်ဃၢ် မုၢ်န့ၣ်ဘျီ လဲၤဒုးအိၣ်ဝဲ ထွံၣ်လါန့ၣ်လီၤ.

(11) ထွံၣ်လါခီ ဒီးယံၣ်ဒီးတနီၣ်လၢအသကိးဘၣ်.

(12) ထွံၣ်လါန့ၣ် အိၣ်ဝဲထွဲဘၣ်ထွဲဘၣ်ဘျီ တုၤဝဲလၢ ဆံးမုၢ်လါန့ၣ်လီၤ.

(13) တုၤဝဲလၢ ဆံးမုၢ်လါဘျီ ထွံၣ်သ့ၣ်တစိၣ် ကံၤန့ၣ်ထီၣ်ဝဲ ဒီဒုန့ၣ်လီၤ.

(14) န့ၣ်တဘျီ ထွံၣ်လါခီ နၢ်ဟူဝဲလၢ ထွံၣ်ဒီဒုန့ၣ်ကံၤန့ၣ်တဘျီ ထွံၣ်လါန့ၣ်ကု
အိၣ်ဃိတန့ၣ်ဘၣ် မိၢ်ကံၤန့ၣ် ဘၣ်သးလံၤ.

(15) ဟူဘၣ်သးလၢ ထွံၣ်ကံၤန့ၣ်ဒီဒုန့ၣ်တဘျီ အဝဲတၢ်ပလီၤ လီၤတုၤဝဲဒီး
ကံၤန့ၣ်ထီၣ်ဝဲလီၤ.

(16) နှာ်တဘျီ ဘီာ်သိာ်ခ့ဘုသ့ာ်တဖာ် သ့ာ်ညါဝဲလာ်ထွံာ်တီတီဘျီ သးထီာ်
 ဖျိာ်ဝဲ ထွံာ်လါန့ာ် ဒီးန့ာ်ယာ်အ့ာ် ပုၤအ့ာ်ဖျိာ်ဝဲ ထွံာ်လါန့ာ်လီၤ.

(17) မ့ၢ်လာ်အသကိး ထွံာ်တစိာ်ဒီ သးထီာ်ဟံာ်အီၤ လာ်ပုၤလံၤလံၤအပံၤ
 တဟဲရိၣ်စၢၤဝဲဘာ်န့ာ် မၤတၢ်ကဒါ စံာ်တဒာ်ဝဲလာ် အယံၤလီၤ.

5.3. Transcription and translation

(1) lúu ná khó nê thwí ʔò tə dí,
 LOC front side that dog be one NCa
 ʔò lúu pwà klá dɔʔ ʔə təkɔʔ dɔ́ dù nê lɔ.
 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 hāʔ hî ʔɔ́ wé tà
 dog one NCa that walk steal eat EMP thing
 lúu təwɔ́ pū nê kɔʔ mihá dɛʔ lɔ.
 LOC village inside that every evening every AST
 The dog would roam the village every evening, stealing food and eating it.

(3) mì ʔò tə nī pwāŋáɛtəphó tə yā
 sun be one NCd laundry one NCh
 ɛi né pwā tà wī, híné wé
 wash BEN person thing finish take EMP
 tɔpɔ́ phāʔdɔ́ tə phlɔ́, cɛ́ lɔ́ wé thí lá
 pot big one NCr fill down EMP water blue
 lúu tɔpɔ́ phāʔdɔ́ pū wī,
 LOC pot big inside finish
 kə cī lá tàkútàkā nê lɔ.
 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 tàblā tə dí nê lē thɔ́ hî ʔɔ́ tà
 dog thief one NCa that go up house eat thing
 lúu pwā hî pū blɔ́, pwā kɔʔxá hɔ́,
 LOC person house inside once person call 3SG
 ʔəwé phūʔ tə blɔ́, phí lɔ́ wé wī tə blɔ́,
 3SG be.startled one time jump down EMP finish one time

bâ	wédâ	lú	thí	lá	təp̄	pū	ʔəxó,
hit	EMP	LOC	water	blue	pot	inside	because
lá	wé	dó	dí	nê	l̄.		
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) m̄ wá thō bló, ʔə tək̄ʔ h̄é dó dū nàʔké
 sun white up once 3SG friend come whole tribe although
 pwā kwànô f̄ī tə bâ l̄ wé bâ l̄.
 person recognize 3SG NEG right anymore EMP NEG AST
 After dawn, his whole pack came, but they could no longer recognize him.

- (6) ʔəwé θ̄j̄ná lú pwā kwànô f̄ī tə bâ l̄ bló,
 3SG know that person recognize 3SG NEG right anymore once
 ʔəwé té né ʔə tək̄ʔ,
 3SG tell BEN 3SG friend
 j̄ā ʔ̄ī tà lú múkhôpwà klá l̄,
 1SG this thing LOC celestial.world between AST
 m̄ cə h̄é ké né tàphótàxà ʔə c̄pā l̄.
 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 m̄ l̄ ʔəxó,
 person command down because
 cə bâ h̄é ké né wé θ̄ī c̄pā j̄ā.
 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 m̄l̄áʔpwà dô pū nê
 that one time in jungle big inside that
 kəj̄è tàphótàxà təphā nê
 all animal PL that
 thwī lá ké né ʔəθ̄ēwé c̄pā l̄.
 dog blue become BEN 3PL king AST
 Then, in the big jungle, the blue dog became the king of all animals.

- (9) s̄āʔ thō phénê tə bló,
 begin up there one time

ʔəwé mā takʔ lú bʔəðəkhébwé l̩.
 3SG do friend LOC tiger AST

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

- (10) bʔəðəkhébwé θê khó xí ʔə taphótàxà mé nè bló,
 tiger PL side search eat animal if get once

l̩ dí ʔə wé thwí lá nè 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 jè? dé tə n̩ l̩
 dog blue side the.more long the.more NEG remember anymore

ʔə takʔ thwí bâ.
 3SG friend dog NEG

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

- (12) thwí lá nè ʔə wé thwébâthwébâ bló,
 dog blue that be EMP one.by.one once

tī wé lú chē?milá nè l̩.
 arrive EMP LOC September that AST

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

- (13) tī wé lú chē?milá bló, thwí θê tə cō
 arrive EMP LOC September once dog PL one group

kà?wú th̩ wé dó dû nè l̩.
 howl up EMP whole tribe that AST

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

- (14) nè tə bló thwí lá khó nàhú wé lú
 that one time dog blue side hear EMP that

thwí dó dû kà?wú tə bló,
 dog whole tribe howl one time

thwí lá nàké, ʔəxó tə nè bâ,
 dog blue although stay.still NEG get NEG

mò kà?wú bâθā? 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 bâθā? lú thwí kà?wú dó dû tə bló,
 here want.to LOC dog howl whole tribe one time

ʔəwé	tàpəlò	lǝtùʔ	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 bôθòkhébwé θétəphâ θɪná wé lúí
that one time tiger PL know EMP that
- thwî tótó bló, θāʔthò phô wé thwî lá nê
dog actually once be.angry together EMP dog blue that
- dǝʔ nā ʔê jā ʔê
and 2SG bite 1SG bite

pwā	ʔê	phô	wé	thwî	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 thwî tə cō khó
COP that 3SG friend dog one group side
- θāʔthò pǝʔ hō lúí plǝliʔlī ʔəxó,
be.angry put 3SG from long.ago because
- tə hé rócǝ wé bâ nê
NEG come assemble EMP NEG that
- mātākədá cī tədā wé lúí 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 ၵ. 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 ၵ may also reflect the Mon script because the spelling ၵ 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 ဃ; (2) the notation of the high-level tone is unmarked (except when း is added); (3) /i/ and /u/ are represented with ၵ and ၶ, 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: Ḡḋḋ /prə̀N/ ‘to compete’

Correct: Ḡḋḋ /prə́N/ ‘to compete’