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 လေလ်တလဒ်ညသ် /lèʔtəlāʔɲà/. This can be written as လံာ်တလးည့ာ် using the Christian Sgaw Karen Script, which is the most widespread Sgaw Karen script. Since /lèʔ/ (or /lìʔ/) means 'script' and /təlāʔɲà/ means 'wisdom, intellect', /lèʔtəlāʔɲà/ 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 *nissay*a 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, ိ and ီ 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 /ɯ/ 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(ʔ)/ (T), where C1 is the initial consonant, C2 is the medial consonant, V is the vowel, ʔ 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(ʔ) 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
àʔ	[aʔ11~21]	low-checked tone	àʔ	[aʔ11]	low-checked tone
āʔ	**[aʔ33]**	**mid-checked** tone	áʔ	[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, /àʔ/ [aʔ11] low-checked, and /áʔ/ [aʔ44] 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 /áʔ/ [aʔ44] "**high-checked**" to /āʔ/ [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				ɕ	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-/ [t̪~t̪θ~θ], /t-/ [t], /c-/ [tɕ~s], /k-/ [k], /ʔ-/ [ʔ], /ph-/ [pʰ], /th-/ [tʰ], /ch-/ [tɕʰ~sʰ], /kh-/ [kʰ], /b-/ [ɓ~b], /d-/ [ɗ~d], /g-/ [g], /ɕ-/ [ɕ], /x-/ [x], /h-/ [h], /z-/ [z], /ɣ-/ [ɣ], /ɦ-/ [ɦ], /m-/ [m], /n-/ [n], /ɲ-/ [ɲ], /ŋ-/ [ŋ], /w-/ [w], /j-/ [j~ʝ], /l-/ [l], and /r-/ [r~ɹ].

/b/ and /d/ are implosives, i.e., [ɓ] 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 /ŋ/ appear in borrowings from Burmese or those from Pali that entered via Burmese, e.g., /gù/ 'dignity' (< Burmese /gòuɴ/ < Pali *guṇa*), /zé/ 'market' (< Burmese /zé/), and /ŋá/ 'to rent' (< Burmese /hŋá/). However, /ŋ/ may appear in a very small number of pure Sgaw Karen words—for example, /ŋóŋā́ʔ/ '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/ [tɕ~s] and /ch/ [tɕʰ~sʰ], respectively. The more formal the situation of utterance, the more frequently /c/ and /ch/ are realized as [s] and [sʰ] instead of [tɕ] and [tɕʰ]. However, in borrowings from Burmese, when the original Burmese form has /c/ or /ch/, they are always pronounced with [tɕ] and [tɕʰ], not with [s] and [sʰ], e.g., /có/ [tɕó] 'school' (< Burmese /cáuɴ/), and /chōʔ/ [tɕʰɵ̄ʔ] 'to bind' (< Burmese /chouʔ/).

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

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

C2		p	θ	t	k	ph	th	kh	b	d	c	ch	x	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	j	l	r
C1	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 /ɕ-/, e.g., /cɣā ~ ɕā/ 'be few' and /chɣɔ́ ~ ɕɔ́/ 'to send'. In the word /mɛ̀ʔchɣāʔ/ 'be shy', the alternation of /chɣ-/ and /ɕ-/ may occur or the omission of /-ɣ-/ may occur. Thus, there are at least three ways to pronounce this word: /mɛ̀ʔchɣāʔ ~ mɛ̀ʔɕāʔ ~ mɛ̀ʔchāʔ/. 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(ʔ). 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	ɨ	ɯ	u
e	ə	o	
ɛ	a	ɔ	

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

It should be noted that the vowel represented as /ɯ/ in Kato (1992) and Kato (2021b) is represented as /ɨ/ 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 [ɨ].

Furthermore, in this article, the vowel phoneme /ɯ/ is established separately from /ɨ/ as one of the close vowels. Note that the phoneme /ɯ/ is a different vowel phoneme from that represented as /ɯ/ 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 /-ɯ/ are very limited in number. So far the words that have been found to contain it are /lɯ́/ 'at; from; to' (a preposition), /θɯ̂/ 'surely' (a sentence-final particle), /ɦɯ́/ 'you know?' (a sentence-final particle), and /hɯ́/ 'hey!' (an interjection). Of these, /lɯ́/ is the emphatic form of the locative preposition /lɔ́/ 'at; from; to'. For example, /lɯ́ hî pū/ (at / house / inside) 'inside the house' is used more frequently than /lɔ́ 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, /lɯ́/ is regarded as the representative form of the locative preposition.

As for the phoneme /ɯ/, one might argue that there is no need to establish it, because there are few forms that contain /ɯ/; moreover, all of the forms have functional word-like properties. In such a view, [ɰ] would be considered a variant of /ə/, /ɨ/, or /u/. In this article, however, /ɯ/ is considered a phoneme for the following two reasons: (1) there is a semantic difference between /lɯ́/ and /lɔ́/; 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) /ɯ/ minimally contrasts both with /ɨ/ and /u/ in the words /θɯ̂/ 'surely', /θɨ̂/ 'to anoint (the head)', and /θû/ 'liver; to build'. An additional reason is that many learned speakers of the Hpa-an dialect consider [ɰ] a distinct sound from [ə], [ɨ], 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 [ɰ] 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		ɯʔ	uʔ
eʔ	əʔ	oʔ	
ɛʔ	aʔ	ɔʔ	

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

Very few words have a rhyme /-eʔ/. Examples are: /xèʔ/ 'gripped, pinched' and /xēʔxēʔ/ '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/.

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

/-uʔ/ is sometimes confused with /-ɯʔ/. Thus, /lɔ̄tùʔ/ 'be cut off (as supplies)', for example, may be pronounced /lɔ̄tɯ̀ʔ/.

At the end of this section, I will discuss a possible explanation for the emergence of the vowel /ɯ/. 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 /ɯ/ in this script, and ○ı 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 /ɯ/. Thus, I believe that /ɯ/ did not exist when Wade created the Christian Sgaw Karen

Script and it emerged relatively recently. [-ɯ] probably emerged as a variant of /i/ in syllables ending with a glottal stop, i.e., /-iʔ/ [-ɯʔ], and was then phonologized as /ɯ/ 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. က 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 "(က)" 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)	ə kh- (ə)	(ဂ) g- (no)	(ဃ) g- (no)	c ŋ- (c)
ဎ c- (ဎ)	ဆ ch- (ဆ)	ဧ z- (ဧ)	(ဈ) z- (ဧ)	ဿ ɲ- (ည)
ၡ t- (ဋ)	ၡ th- (ဌ)	(ၟ) d- (ဒ)	(ဎ) d- (ဒ)	(ဏ) n- (ၐ)
ဘ t- (ဘ)	ဎ th- (ဎ)	(ဒ) d- (ဒ)	(ဓ) d- (ဒ)	ၐ n- (ၐ)
ပ p- (ပ)	ဖ ph- (ဖ)	(ဗ) b- (ဘ)	(ဘ) b- (ဘ)	မ m- (မ)
ဎ j- (ဎ)	ရ r- (ရ)	လ l- (လ)	o w- (o)	သ θ- (သ)
ဿ h- (ဿ)	(ၡ) l̥- (လ)	ၾ ʔ- (ၾ)	*ဂ ɣ- (ဂ)	*ဿ x- (ဿ)
	*ဘ ɓ- (ဘ)	*ဒ ɗ- (ဒ)	*ဧ ɦ- (ဧ)	

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	*ဿ	*ဘ	*ဒ	*ဧ
(1) �	(2) ဿ	(3) ဿ	(4) ဒ	(5) ဧ

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/ [ɓ] and /d/ [ɗ] 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 ဂ, ဃ, ဎ, ၒ, and ၕ, 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 ဂ, ဃ, ဎ, ၒ, and ၕ 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 ဂ, ဃ, ဎ, ၒ, and ၕ. When it is necessary to use ဂ, ဃ, ဎ, ၒ, or ၕ 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 *ဂါ*.

The following are other notes on writing initial consonants.

● The initial consonant /ɕ/ is represented by ၡ, i.e., the basic letter ၡ with the symbol ္ၖ indicating the medial consonant /-ɣ-/ added (see Section 4.2). It may also be represented by ဃ္ၖ, i.e., the basic letter ဃ with ္ၖ added. It is unknown whether ၡ and ဃ္ၖ have any differences in use.

● /c-/ and /ch-/ may be represented by ကျ and ချ, respectively, instead of using ၐ and ဆ. The symbols က and ခ 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 /có/ 'school' (< Burmese /cáuɴ/) and ချို̂ဒ် /chō?/ 'to bind' (< Burmese /chou?/). 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 [tɕ] and [tɕʰ] 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 ၒျ, ၕ, ၕ, ၒ, ဟ, ဃ, ၐ, and ၕ, are excluded.

ကတ် /kâ/ 'to grill', ခတ် /khâ/ 'be bitter', *ဂုသ်* /gù/ 'dignity' (< Burmese /gòuɴ/ < Pali *guṇa*), *ဃောသကဒ်* /gɔ́θəkā?/ 'Ghosaka (a name of a deva)', ငါး /ŋá/ 'to rent' (<

Burmese /hɲá/), စဉာ် /cà/ 'young', ဆၢး /chá/ 'to sell', ဇေး /zé/ 'market' (< Burmese /zé/), ညာ် /ɲâ/ 'fish', တၢ် /tà/ 'thing', ထဒ် /thā?/ 'iron', ဒ္ၟ /dó/ 'Karen don dance' (< Burmese /dóuɴ/), နလ် /nà?/ 'a kind of basket', ပလ် /pà?/ 'to put', ဖဒ် /phā?/ 'to read', ဗုဒ္ဓ /būʔdâ/ 'Buddha' (< Burmese /bouʔdâ/ < Pali *buddha*), ဘၢဝနၢ /bāwənā/ 'meditation' (< Pali *bhāvanā*), မယ် /mā/ 'to do', ယူယ် /jū/ 'to fly', ရဲတ် /rê/ 'to pour (water)', လၢး /lá/ 'moon', ဝတ် /wâ/ 'bamboo', သဒ် /θā?/ 'heart', ဟၢ် /hā?/ 'to walk', အၢး /ʔá/ 'be many', ဂုသ် /ɣì/ 'snake', ယၢး /xá/ 'to mix', ဘတ် /bâ/ 'be correct', ဒါး /dá/ 'to spread', and ၔယ် /ɦō/ 'him/her'.

4.2. Medial consonants

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

Table 8: Medial consonants

○ -w- (○)	○ -l- (○)	ြ -r- (ြ)	ျ -j- (○)	○ -ɣ- (○)

Example words with medial consonants follow: ကွၢး /kwá/ 'ax', ပ္လီယ် /plī/ 'rope', ြပၢး /prá/ 'be scattered', ဖျၢး /phjá/ 'market', and စုယ် /cɣā/ '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	ဗိသ် -ì (ံိ)	ဗိယ် -ī (ံိ ι)	ဗိး -í (ံိ)	ဗိတ် -î (ံိ ည်)	ဗိလ် -ìʔ (ံိ ်)	ဗိဒ် -īʔ (ံိ း)	
e	ေသ် -è (ေ ိ)	ေယ် -ē (ေ ι)	ေး -é (ေ)	ေတ် -ê (ေ ည်)	ေလ် -èʔ (ေ ်)	ေဒ် -ēʔ (ေ း)	
ɛ	ဲသ် -ɛ̀ (ဲ ိ)	ဲယ် -ɛ̄ (ဲ ι)	ဲ -ɛ́ (ဲ)	ဲတ် -ɛ̂ (ဲ ည်)	ဲလ် -ɛ̀ʔ (ဲ ်)	ဲဒ် -ɛ̄ʔ (ဲ း)	
ɨ	သ် -ɨ̀ (ိ)	ယ် -ɨ̄ (ι)	း -ɨ́ ()	တ် -ɨ̂ (ည်)			
ə	းသ် -ə̀ (ᴐ ိ)	းယ် -ə̄ (ᴐ ι)	း -ə́ (ᴐ)	းတ် -ə̂ (ᴐ ည်)	းလ် -ə̀ʔ (ᴐ ်)	းဒ် -ə̄ʔ (ᴐ း)	○ -ə (ᴐ)
a	သ် -à (ᴐ ိ)	ယ် -ā (ᴐ ι)	ᴐး -á (ᴐ)	တ် -â (ᴐ ည်)	လ် -àʔ (ᴐ ်)	ဒ် -āʔ (ᴐ း)	
ɯ	ံသ် -ɯ̀ (no)	ံယ် -ɯ̄ (no)	ံ -ɯ́ (no)	ံတ် -ɯ̂ (no)	ံလ် (လ်) -ɯ̀ʔ (်)	ံဒ် (ဒ်) -ɯ̄ʔ (း)	
u	သ် -ù (ိ)	ယ် -ū (ι)	း -ú ()	တ် -û (ည်)	လ် -ùʔ (်)	ဒ် -ūʔ (း)	
o	ိုသ် -ò (ို ိ)	ိုယ် -ō (ို ι)	ို -ó (ို)	ိုတ် -ô (ို ည်)	ိုလ် -òʔ (ို ်)	ိုဒ် -ōʔ (ို း)	
ɔ	ံသ် -ɔ̀ (ံ ိ)	ံယ် -ɔ̄ (ံ ι)	ံ -ɔ́ (ံ)	ံတ် -ɔ̂ (ံ ည်)	ေလ် (ံဒ်) -ɔ̀ʔ (ံ ်)	ေဒ် (ံဒ်) -ɔ̄ʔ (ံ း)	

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 တ or ထ, the two

consecutive letters are sometimes superimposed; in that case, the symbol ◌် is omitted. For example, ခံတ်ထေဒ် /khɔ̂thē?/ 'basis' may be written ခံ‍ထွေဒ်. Such a spelling is not obligatory. Similarly, ထွီတ်အိုတ်တဒုး /thwî ?ô tə dí/ (dog / be / one / NCa) 'There was a dog' may be written ထွီတ်အိုတ်တွဒုး. As is evident from this example, this spelling may be used beyond a word boundary.

● The tone marker ◌် 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, ေစး /cé/ 'silver; money' and the first syllable of the Pali word ေစတနာ <cetanā> 'thought' (Sgaw Karen reading: /cēdənā/) 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 /-ɯ/ in the Christian Sgaw Karen Script. The notation "(no)" indicates this.

● As mentioned in Section 3.4, /lɯ́/ is the emphatic form of the locative preposition /lə́/ 'at; from; to'. In Letalanyah, /lɯ́/ is regarded as the representative form of the locative preposition and is always written လၟံ /lɯ́/, not လး /lə́/.

● In Section 3.4, I noted that /-ɯ?/ is usually pronounced [-ɰ̩?], but may also be pronounced [-ɨ?]. Thus, the rhymes /-ɯ̀?/ and /-ɯ̄?/ may be pronounced [-ɨ̀?] and [-ɨ̄?], and are sometimes written ◌ﬞလ် and ◌ﬞဒ်, so as to indicate these sounds. These spellings

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

● In Section 3.4, I noted that /-uʔ/ is sometimes confused with /-ɯʔ/. Thus, syllables that should be written ်ၞလ or ်ၞဒ် are sometimes written ်ၟလ or ်ၟဒ်, respectively.

● The vowel /ɔ/ is spelled with ်ဲ in open syllables, whereas it is spelled with ေၥ in syllables ending with a glottal stop. However, /ɔ/ with a glottal stop is sometimes spelled with ်ဲ. Therefore, ်ဲလ and ်ဲဒ် are shown in parentheses.

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

/i/ ဝီသ် /wì/ 'to winnow', မီယ် /mī/ 'name', ထီး /thí/ 'water', ထီတ် /thî/ 'to see', လီလ် /lî/ 'letter' (usually pronounced /lèʔ/ and spelled ေလလ်), သီဒ် /θīʔ/ 'alcohol' (usually pronounced /θēʔ/ and spelled ေသဒ်)

/e/ ေမသ် /mè/ 'to be', ေကယ် /kē/ 'to return', ေဆး /ché/ 'shirt, dress', ေအတ် /ʔê/ 'to bite', ေလလ် /lèʔ/ 'letter', ေသဒ် /θēʔ/ 'alcohol'

/ɛ/ လဲသ် /lè/ 'be wide', လဲယ် /lē/ 'to go', ကဲ /ké/ 'to become', အဲတ် /ʔê/ 'to love', မဲလ် /mèʔ/ 'eye', ဆဲဒ် /chēʔ/ 'to prick'

/ɨ/ မၞသ် /mì/ 'sun', တၞယ် /tī/ 'to arrive', စၞး /cí/ 'hand', လၞတ် /lî/ 'thread'

/ə/ ဂးသ် /ɣà/ 'be still', လးယ် /lā/ 'be warm', ဆး /chá/ 'be sweet', ထးတ် /thâ/ 'bag', လးလ် /làʔ/ 'be ended', ဒးဒ် /dāʔ/ 'room', ကပံယ် /kəpā/ 'light (n.)'

/a/ တသ် /tà/ 'thing', မယ် /mā/ 'to do', လား /lá/ 'moon', ညတ် /ɲâ/ 'fish', ပလ် /pàʔ/ 'to put', ဖဒ် /phāʔ/ 'to read'

/ɯ/ လၟံ /lúɯ/ 'at; from; to' (locative preposition), သၟံတ် /θûɯ/ 'surely' (a sentence-final particle), နၟံလ် /nùɯʔ/ 'to enter' (also spelled နၟလ်), ဖၟံဒ် /phūɯʔ/ 'to jerk' (also spelled ဖၟဒ်)

/u/ ယၞူသ် /jù/ 'to swallow', လၞူယ် /lū/ 'to chase', ထၞူး /thú/ 'gold', ခၞူတ် /khû/ 'to dig', ကၞူလ် /kùʔ/ 'to chop (as trees)' (also pronounced /kòʔ/ and spelled ကိုလ်), ကၞူဒ် /kūʔ/ 'to cough'

/o/ ကိုသ် /kò/ 'be hot', တိုယ် /tō/ 'bridge', ဆို /chó/ 'be early', ထိုတ် /thô/ 'bird', ကိုလ် /kòʔ/ 'neck' (also pronounced /kɔ̀ʔ/ and spelled ေကာလ်), ကိုဒ် /kōʔ/ 'to call' (also pronounced /kɔ̄ʔ/ and spelled ေကာဒ်)

/ɔ/ ယဲသ် /jɔ̀/ 'to tread', မဲယ် /mɔ̄/ 'to bark', ကံ /kɔ́/ 'be difficult', အံတ် /ʔɔ̂/ 'to eat',

ကောလ်ကောလ် /kɔ̀ʔkɔ̀ʔ/ 'onomatopoeia for a crackling sound', ကောဒ် (ကံဒ်) /kɔ̄ʔ/ '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 ဖှးဝံသ်ရ့ကိ့ု တသ်လုံပှးယ် /pʰɨ̀wɔ̀rɔ́kló tàlɨ́plā/ 'Phu Wawrawklo's fairy tale' in Sgaw Karen, and the name of the author is တီးအဲတ်စးယ် (ကနံလ်) /tíʔêcɔ̄ (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, Letalanya is written based on the modern pronunciation. For example, while the form meaning 'and' is written as ဒီး /dɔ̄ʔ/ in Christian Sgaw Karen Script, it is written as ဒးဒ် /dɔ̄ʔ/ in Letalanya. /dɔ̄ʔ/ 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 /dɔ́ʔ/ 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 ထွီတ်အို့တ္တုဒုး အိုတ်လုံပွယ်ကွားဒးဒ် အတကောဒ် ဒံဒွတ်နေတ်လံယ်။

(2) ထွီတ်တဒုးနေတ် ဟဒ်ဟုတ်အံတ်ဝဲတယ် လုံတဝံပူယ်နေတ် ကောဒ်မုဒ်ဟွားဒဲဒ်လံယ်။

(3) မုဒ်အို့တ္တုနီယ် ပွယ်ငါးယူှတ်တယ်ဖိုတဂယ် ယူှတ်နေးပွယ်တယ်ဝီယ် ဟီးနေးဝဲ တပးယ် ဖဒ်ဒိုတ် တဖူးတ် ကဲ့လံယ်ဝဲထီးလား လုံတပးယ် ဖဒ်ဒိုတ်ပူယ်ဝီယ် ကစုတ်လား တယ်ကူး တယ်ကယ်နေတ်လံယ်။

(4) ထွီတ္တဒ်ဘွတ်တဒုးနေတ် လဲယ်ထံတ်ဟုတ် အံတ္တဒ်လုံ ပွယ်ဟီတ်ပူယ်ဘုံ ပွယ်ကောဒ် ယွားဇံယ် အဝဲဖုံဒ်တဂ့ံ ဖူးလံယ်ဝဲဝီယ်တဂ့ံ ဘတ်ဝဲဒတ်လုံ ထီးလားတပးယ်ပူယ် အဃုံး လားဝဲဒံဒုးနေတ်လံယ်။

(5) မုဒ်ဝါးထံတ်ဘုံ အတကောဒ်ဟဲဒံဒွတ်နယ်ကေး ပွယ်ကွဒ်နံတ်ဇံယ် တဘတ်လးယ်ဝဲ ဘတ်လံယ်။

(6) အဝဲသီတ်ညားလုံ ပွယ်ကွဒ်နံတ်ဇံယ် တဘတ်လးယ်ဘုံ အဝဲတဲနေးအတကောဒ် ယယ် အီယ် တယ်လုံ မူးခိုတ်ပွယ်ကွားလံယ် မးစဟဲကဲနေး တယ်ဖိုးတယ်ဃဒ် အစံယ်ပယ်လံယ်။

(7) ပွယ်မးလံယ်ယယ်အဃုံ စာတ်ဟဲကဲနေးဝဲ သုးစံယ်ပယ်ယယ်။

(8) နေတ်တဂ့ံ ဖဲမီယ်လလ်ပွဒ်ဒိုတ်ပူယ်နေတ် ကယဲယ်တယ်ဖိုတယ်ဃဒ်တဖတ်နေတ် ထွီတ်လားကဲနေး အသေတ်ဝဲ စံယ်ပယ်လံယ်။

(9) စဒ်ထံတ်ဖဲနေတ်တဂ့ံ အဝဲမယ်တကောဒ်လုံ ဘံတ်သိုတ်ခေးဘွေးလံယ်။

(10) ဘံတ်သိုတ်ခေးဘွေးသေတ်ခံ ဃုးအံတ် တယ်ဖိုးတယ်ဃဒ် မေးနေဒ်ဘုံ လဲယ်ဒုး အံတ်ဝဲ ထွီတ်လားနေတ်လံယ်။

(11) ထွီတ်လားခံ ဒေးယေယ်ဒေးတနံတ်လးယ်အတကောဒ်ထွီတ်ဘတ်။

(12) ထွီတ်လားနေတ် အိုတ်ဝဲထွဲဘတ်ထွဲဘတ်ဘုံ တုယ်ဝဲလုံ ဆေဒ်မုဒ်လားနေတ်လံယ်။

(13) တုယ်ဝဲလုံ ဆေဒ်မုဒ်လားဘုံ ထွီတ်သေတ်တစိုတ် ကလ်ဝူးထံတ်ဝဲ ဒံဒွတ်နေတ်လံယ်။

(14) နေတ်တဂ့ံ ထွီတ်လားခံ နဒ်ဟူးဝဲလုံ ထွီတ်ဒံဒွတ်ကလ်ဝူးတဂ့ံ ထွီတ်လားနဒ်ကေး အိုတ်ဃုံတနေဒ်ဘတ် မိုဒ်ကလ်ဝူး ဘတ်သဒ်လီး။

(15) ဟူးဘတ်သဒ်လုံ ထွီတ်ကလ်ဝူးဒံဒွတ်တဂ့ံ အဝဲတယ်ပလံဒ် လံယ်တုံလ်ဝဲဒးဒ် ကလ်

ဝူးထံတ်ဝဲလံယ်॥

(16) နေၤ်တဘုံ ဘံတ်သိုတ်ခေးဘွေးသေတ်တဖတ် သီတ်ညၢးဝဲလုံထွ့ဲတ်တံတဘုံ သဒ်
ထံတ် ဖုံတ်ဝဲ ထွ့ဲတ်လၢးနေၤ် ဒးဒ်နယ်အေတ် ယယ်အေတ် ပွယ်အေတ်ဖုံတ်ဝဲ ထွ့ဲတ်လၢး
နေၤ်လံယ်॥

(17) မေးလုံအတကောဒ် ထွ့ဲတ်တစိုတ်ခံ သဒ်ထံတ်ပလ်ဇံယ် လုံပူးယ်လီၤ်လီယ်အဃို တ
ဟဲရိၢ်စးယ်ဝဲဘတ်နေၤ် မယ်တသ်ကဒၢး စိတ်တဒတ်ဝဲလုံ အဃီယ်လံယ်॥

5.2. The same text rewritten in Christian Sgaw Karen Script

(1) လၢညါခီနၟ်ၣ် ထွ့ဲအိၣ်တဒ့ အိၣ်လၢပှၢ်ကျၢ်ဒီး အသကိးဒီဒ့ၣ်နၟ်ၣ်လီၤ.

(2) ထွ့ဲတဒုနၟ်ၣ် ဟးဟုၣ်အိၣ်ဝဲတၢ် လၢတဝီပူၤနၟ်ၣ် ကိးမုၢ်ဟါဒဲးလီၤ.

(3) မုၢ်အိၣ်တနံၤ ပှၤငါဆ့ၣ်တၢ်ဖိတဂၤ ဆ့ၣ်နၟ်ၣ်ပှၤတၢ်ဝံၤ ဟးနၟ်ၣ်ဝဲ
တပၢၤဖးဒိၣ် တဖျၢၣ် စဲလီၤဝဲထံလၢ လၢတပၢၤ ဖးဒိၣ်ပူၤဝံၤ ကစုၣ်လၢ
တၢ်ကွၤ်တၢ်ကၤနၟ်ၣ်လီၤ.

(4) ထွ့ဲတၢ်ဘျုၣ်တဒုနၟ်ၣ် လဲၤထိၣ်ဟုၣ် အိၣ်တၢ်လၢ ပှၤဟံၣ်ပူၤဘျီ
ပှၤကိးဃါဒီၤ အစဲဖုးတဘျီ ဖုလီၤဝဲဝံၤတဘျီ ဘၣ်ဝဲဒၣ်လၢ ထံလၢတပၢၤပူၤ
အဃိ လၢဝဲဒီဒုနၟ်ၣ်လီၤ.

(5) မုၢ်ဝါထိၣ်ဘျီ အသကိးဟဲဒီဒ့ၣ်နၟ်ကွ့ ပှၤကွၢ်နၟ်ၣ်အီၤ တဘၣ်လၢၤဘၣ်လီၤ.

(6) အစဲသ့ၣ်ညါလၢ ပှၤကွၢ်နၟ်ၣ်အီၤ တဘၣ်လၢၤဘျီ အစဲတဲနၟ်ၣ်အသကိး
ယၤအံၤ တၢ်လၢ မ့ခိၣ်ပှၢ်ကျူၤလီၤ မၢစဟဲကဲနၟ်ၣ် တၢ်ဖိတၢ်ဃာ်ယ် အစီၤပၤလီၤ.

(7) ပှၤမၤလီၤအဃိ စဘၣ်ဟဲကဲနၟ်ၣ်ဝဲ သ့စီၤပၤယၤ.

(8) နၟ်ၣ်တဘျီ ဖဲမၤလာ်ပှၢ်ဒိၣ်ပူၤနၟ်ၣ် ကယဲၢ်တၢ်ဖိတၢ်ဃာ်တဖၣ်နၟ်ၣ်
ထွ့ဲလၢကဲနၟ်ၢ် အသ့ၣ်ဝဲ စီၤပၤလီၤ.

(9) စးထိၣ်ဖဲနၟ်ၣ်တဘျီ အစဲမၤသကိးလၢ ဘီၣ်သိၣ်ခ့ဘ့ၤလီၤ.

(10) ဘီၣ်သိၣ်ခ့ဘ့ၤသ့ၣ်ခီ ဃုအိၣ် တၢ်ဖိတၢ်ဃာ်ယ် မ့ၢ်နၟ်ၣ်ဘျီ လဲၤဒုးအိၣ်ဝဲ ထွ့ဲလၢနၟ်ၣ်လီၤ.

(11) ထွ့ဲလၢခီ ဒးယၢ်ဒးတနီၣ်လၢၤအသကိးဘၣ်.

(12) ထွ့ဲလၢနၟ်ၣ် အိၣ်ဝဲထွဲဘၣ်ထွဲဘၣ်ဘျီ တုၤဝဲလၢ ဆံးမှၢ်လၢနၟ်ၣ်လီၤ.

(13) တုၤဝဲလၢ ဆံးမှၢ်လၢဘျီ ထွ့ဲသ့ၣ်တစိၣ် ကၢ်ဇူထိၣ်ဝဲ ဒီဒ့ၣ်နၟ်ၣ်လီၤ.

(14) နၟ်ၣ်တဘျီ ထွ့ဲလၢခီ နၢ်ဟူဝဲလၢ ထွ့ဲဒီဒ့ၣ်ကၢ်ဇူတဘျီ ထွ့ဲလၢနၢ်ကွ့
အိၣ်ဃိတနၟ်ဘၣ် မိၢ်ကၢ်ဇူ ဘၣ်သးလံ.

(15) ဟူဘၣ်သးလၢ ထွ့ဲကၢ်ဇူဒီဒ့ၣ်တဘျီ အစဲဝဲတၢ်ပလီၢ် လီၤတူၢ်ဝဲဒီး
ကၢ်ဇူထိၣ်ဝဲလီၤ.

(16) နူာ်တဘျို့ ဘိာ်သိာ်ခ့ဘ္ၤသ္ၣ်တဖၣ် သ္ၣ်ညါဝဲၤလၢထွံာ်တီတီဘျို့ သးထိာ်
ဖိုာ်ဝဲ ထွံာ်လၢန္ၣ် ဒီးန္ၤအ္ၣ် ယၤအ္ၣ် ပုၤအ္ၣ်ဖိုာ်ဝဲ ထွံာ်လၢန္ၣ်လီၤ.
(17) မ့ာ်လၢအသကိး ထွံာ်တစိာ်ခီ သးထိာ်ဟ်အီၤ လၢပျၤၤလံၤလံၤအယိ
တဟဲရိစၤၤဝဲဘၣ်န္ၣ် မၤတၢ်ကဒါ စံာ်တဒၣ်ဝဲလၢ အယၤၤလီၤ.

5.3. Transcription and translation

(1) lúɯ   ɲá   khɔ́   nê   thwî   ʔô   tə   dɪ́,
    LOC front side that dog   be one NCa

    ʔô   lúɯ   pwà   klá   dɔ̄ʔ   ʔə   təkɔ̄ʔ   dɔ́   dû   nê   lɔ̄.
    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) thwî   tə   dɪ́   nê   hā̄ʔ   hî   ʔô   wέ   tà
    dog   one NCa that walk steal eat EMP thing

    lúɯ   təwɔ́   pū   nê   kɔ̄ʔ   mìhá   dɛ̄ʔ   lɔ̄.
    LOC village inside that every evening every AST
    The dog would roam the village every evening, stealing food and eating it.

(3) mì   ʔô   tə   nī   pwāŋáɕîtàphó   tə   ɣā
    sun be one NCd laundry   one NCh

    ɕî   né   pwā   tà   wī,   híné   wέ
    wash BEN person thing finish take EMP

    təpɔ̄   phāʔdô   tə   phlâ,   cέ   lɔ̄   wέ   thí   lá
    pot   big   one NCr   fill down EMP water blue

    lúɯ   təpɔ̄   phāʔdô   pū   wī,
    LOC pot   big   inside finish

    kə   cî   lá   tàkútàkā   nê   lɔ̄.
    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) thwî   tàblâ   tə   dɪ́   nê   lɛ̄   thô   hî   ʔô   tà
    dog   thief   one NCa that go   up   house eat thing

    lúɯ   pwā   hî   pū   blɔ́,   pwā   kɔ̄ʔxá   ɦɔ̄,
    LOC person house inside once person call   3SG

    ʔəwέ   phūɯʔ   tə   blɔ́,   phɪ́   lɔ̄   wέ   wī   tə   blɔ́,
    3SG   be.startled one time jump down EMP finish one time

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bâ	wɛ́dâ	lúɯ	thí	lá	təpɔ̄	pū	ʔəxó,
hit	EMP	LOC	water	blue	pot	inside	because

lá	wɛ́	dɔ́	dɨ́	nê	lɔ̄.
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)
mì	wá	thô	blɔ́,	ʔə	təkɔ̄ʔ	hɛ́	dɔ́	dû	nàʔkɛ́
sun	white	up	once	3SG	friend	come	whole	tribe	although

pwā	kwànɔ̂	ɦɔ̄	tə	bâ	lɔ̄	wɛ́	bâ	lɔ̄.
person	recognize	3SG	NEG	right	anymore	EMP	NEG	AST

After dawn, his whole pack came, but they could no longer recognize him.

(6)
ʔəwɛ́	θîɲá	lúɯ	pwā	kwànɔ̂	ɦɔ̄	tə	bâ	lɔ̄	blɔ́,
3SG	know	that	person	recognize	3SG	NEG	right	anymore	once

ʔəwɛ́	tɛ́	né	ʔə	təkɔ̄ʔ,
3SG	tell	BEN	3SG	friend

jā	ʔɨ̄	tà	lúɯ	múkhôpwà	klá	lɔ̄,
1SG	this	thing	LOC	celestial.world	between	AST

mɔ́	cə	hɛ́	kɛ́	né	tàphótàxà	ʔə	cɔ̄pā	lɔ̄.
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	mɔ́	lɔ̄	ʔəxó,
person	command	down	because

cə	bâ	hɛ́	kɛ́	né	wɛ́	θɨ̄	cɔ̄pā	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	blɔ́	phɛ́	mīlàʔpwà	dô	pū	nê
that	one	time	in	jungle	big	inside	that

kəjè	tàphótàxà	təphâ	nê
all	animal	PL	that

thwî	lá	kɛ́	né	ʔəθêwɛ́	cɔ̄pā	lɔ̄.
dog	blue	become	BEN	3PL	king	AST

Then, in the big jungle, the blue dog became the king of all animals.

(9)
sā́ʔ	thô	phɛ́nê	tə	blɔ́,
begin	up	there	one	time

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ʔəwέ   mā   təkɔ̄ʔ   lúɯ   bɔ̂θôkhébwé   lɔ̄.
3SG   do   friend   LOC   tiger   AST

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

(10) bɔ̂θôkhébwé   θê   khɔ́   xɨ́   ʔɔ̂   tàphótàxà   mé   nè   blɔ́,
tiger   PL   side   search   eat   animal   if   get   once

lɛ̄   dɨ́   ʔɔ̂   wέ   thwí   lá   nê   lɔ̄.
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) thwî   lá   khɔ́   dé   jὲʔ   dé   tə   nɔ̂   lɔ̄
dog   blue   side   the.more   long   the.more   NEG   remember   anymore

ʔə   təkɔ̄ʔ   thwî   bâ.
3SG   friend   dog   NEG

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

(12) thwî   lá   nê   ʔɔ̂   wέ   thwέbâthwέbâ   blɔ́,
dog   blue   that   be   EMP   one.by.one   once

tī   wέ   lúɯ   chē̄ʔmìlá   nê   lɔ̄.
arrive   EMP   LOC   September   that   AST

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

(13) tī   wέ   lúɯ   chē̄ʔmìlá   blɔ́,   thwî   θê   tə   cô
arrive   EMP   LOC   September   once   dog   PL   one   group

kà̀ʔwú   thɔ̂   wέ   dɔ́   dû   nê   lɔ̄.
howl   up   EMP   whole   tribe   that   AST

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

(14) nê   tə   blɔ́   thwî   lá   khɔ́   nàhú   wέ   lúɯ
that   one   time   dog   blue   side   hear   EMP   that

thwî   dɔ́   dû   kà̀ʔwú   tə   blɔ́,
dog   whole   tribe   howl   one   time

thwî   lá   nàké,   ʔôxó   tə   nè   bâ,
dog   blue   although   stay.still   NEG   get   NEG

mò   kà̀ʔwú   bâθā̄ʔ   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   bâθā̄ʔ   lúɯ   thwî   kà̀ʔwú   dɔ́   dû   tə   blɔ́,
here   want.to   LOC   dog   howl   whole   tribe   one   time

ʔəwɛ́	tàpəlɔ̀	lɔ̄tùʔ	wɛ́	dɔ̄ʔ
3SG	attentiveness	be.interrupted	EMP	and

kàʔwú	thɔ̂	wɛ́	lɔ̄.
howl	up	EMP	AST

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

(16)
nê	tə	blɔ́	bɔ̂θôkhébwé	θêtəphâ	θîɲá	wɛ́	lúɯ
that	one	time	tiger	PL	know	EMP	that

thwî	tɔ́tɔ́	blɔ́,	θāʔthɔ̂	phô	wɛ́	thwî	lá	nê
dog	actually	once	be.angry	together	EMP	dog	blue	that

dɔ̄ʔ	nā	ʔê	jā	ʔê
and	2SG	bite	1SG	bite

pwā	ʔê	phô	wɛ́	thwî	lá	nê	lɔ̄.
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	lɔ́	ʔə	təkɔ̄ʔ	thwî	tə	cô	khɔ́
COP	that	3SG	friend	dog	one	group	side

θāʔthɔ̂	pàʔ	ɦɔ̄	lúɯ	plɔ̄lìʔlī	ʔəxó,
be.angry	put	3SG	from	long.ago	because

tə	hɛ́	rócɔ̄	wɛ́	bâ	nê
NEG	come	assemble	EMP	NEG	that

mātàkədá	cî	tədâ	wɛ́	lúɯ	ʔəjī	lɔ̄.
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 ◌ၞ. 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 ◌ံ may also reflect the Mon script because the spelling ◌ံ 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 ◌ိ and ◌ု, 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: ɕɹ /ʁà/ 'question marker'

Correct:　ɕɹ /ɣà/ 'question marker'

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

Incorrect: ɠɟɂ̰ /prə̀ɴ/ 'to compete'

Correct:　ɠɟɂ̰ /prə́ɴ/ 'to compete'