

# Romei: A Latin-based writing system of Sgaw Karen

Atsuhiko Kato

## Abstract

Romei is a Latin-based writing system used to write Sgaw Karen. This writing system was first developed in Burma. However, it was later used mainly in Thailand, and was influenced by dialect(s) on the Thai side. This article shows the correspondence between the Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation (SKSP) in Myanmar and Romei and includes an attempt to write SKSP in Romei. This study aims to clarify the Romei system using this process. When writing SKSP in Romei, /θ-/ is to be written as *s*, and /s-/ and /sh-/ are to be written as *c* and *hs*, respectively. Furthermore, in this article, I propose the spellings *ky*, *hky*, *sy*, and *z* for the initial consonants /c-/ , /ch-/ , /ɕ-/ , and /z-/ , for which Romei lacks spellings. Regarding rhymes, the spellings *eix*, *eiv*, *ox*, and *ov*, which are not required when writing Thai Sgaw Karen, are necessary when writing SKSP. Although Romei is generally systematic, it cannot distinguish between the syllables /ʔə/ and /ʔāʔ/. I suggest writing the latter as *a'v* when necessary.

## 1. Introduction

The Karen people are among the various ethnic groups living in Thailand and Myanmar. Their languages belong to the Karenic branch of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic stock. The languages of the Karenic branch, which include Karen (Pwo Karen and Sgaw Karen in the narrowest sense), Pa-O, Kayah, Kayan, and Geba, are unique as they have SVO-type characteristics, in contrast to most Tibeto-Burman languages, which are of the SOV-type (see Kato [2021b]).

Ethnic Karens have various writing systems. Drawing from the phrase “a fertile zone for the invention of new scripts” used by Kelly (2018b:189) to describe West

Africa, the Karen society can be described as “a fertile society for the invention of new scripts.” The Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen, which consist of the Karen people in the narrowest sense, have widely used writing systems: (a) the Christian Sgaw Karen script, the most known Karen script created by the American Baptist missionary Rev. Jonathan Wade in the 1830s; (b) the Buddhist Pwo Karen script, notable in that it was created by the Karen people themselves between the late 18th and mid-19th centuries (see Kato [2021a]); and (c) the Christian Pwo Karen script, created by American Baptist missionaries in the 1840s (see Kato [2021a], [2022a]). Other scripts used by more limited communities also include: (d) the Buddhist Sgaw Karen script called “Letalanyah” (see Kato [2023]); (e) the Leke script, a Pwo Karen script generally known as the “chicken scratch script”, which is used by Leke followers worshipping Maitreya (see Stern [1968] and Kelly [2018a]); (f) Romei, a Romanized Sgaw Karen script, mainly used by Roman Catholic Karens living in Thailand (see Seguinotte [2007]); and (g) Lae Kwekaw, a newly created “ancient” writing system for Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen (see Kato [2024]). For the shapes of these scripts, see Kato (2022b).

This article addresses the writing system listed in (f) above, which is called “Romei” (/rómé/ in Sgaw Karen). It is a Latin-based writing system used to write Sgaw Karen, and it is mainly used by Catholic followers living around Chiang Mai, Thailand. In this article, I show the correspondence between the standard pronunciation of Sgaw Karen in Myanmar (see Section 2) and the spelling of Romei, and I attempt to write this standard pronunciation using Romei. Through this process, this article aims to clarify Romei’s linguistic system. To the best of my knowledge, no previous study has discussed Romei from a linguistic perspective. In reality, it would be preferable to deal with the phonology of the dialect spoken around Chiang Mai, the main area in which Romei is used. However, precise data on the dialects around Chiang Mai<sup>1</sup> were not available, so I used the standard pronunciation of Sgaw Karen

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1 With regard to Sgaw Karen, I conducted research on some dialects of the Ayeyarwady Delta in Japan in the late 1980s. Since the early 1990s, I have been conducting research mainly in Hpa-an and Yangon in Myanmar. For Sgaw Karen on the Thai side, I conducted research in Mae Sariang for about a month from March to April in 1991.

in Myanmar. I believe it is possible to demonstrate a Romei system sufficiently using this method.

According to Seguinotte (2007:1), Romei was created by a Protestant missionary, who came to Burma (now “Myanmar” in English) around 1930 to spread Christianity and was further developed and used in Thailand by Reverend Joseph Seguinotte, a French Roman Catholic missionary, when he brought Christianity to Karen communities around 1950. Today, Karen groups use this writing system in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Chiang Mai (ibid.). There are also publications written in Romei, such as P’dof Cauztauv (2005) and S’raf Laurei Keihpo C’rekoo (2005).

Seguinotte (2007) compiled a Sgaw Karen dictionary including Thai, French, and English translations. The Sgaw Karen forms in the dictionary were provided by Romei. Its spelling shows that, although Romei was created in Burma, it was modified under the influence of Sgaw Karen from the Thai side. For example, the spelling *s* appears in correspondence to the phoneme /θ/ of the various dialects from the Myanmar side. As Romei is used in the Chiang Mai area, it is highly likely that its system was influenced by dialects from the Chiang Mai area. However, it is not possible to determine exactly which dialects’ phonological systems reflect this most strongly by examining Romei alone. There are various reports on the Sgaw Karen dialects in Thailand, including Ratanakul (1986), Jitwiriyant (2012), Kerdpol (2012), and Rattanaporn (2012); however, these studies do not help identify the dialect reflected in Romei. Although it is not possible to identify the dialect, we can show the correspondence between the spelling of Romei and the standard pronunciation of Sgaw Karen based on the explanations in Seguinotte (2007) and the spellings of many Sgaw Karen words in the dictionary.

Section 2 describes the system of Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation, which is the standard pronunciation used in Myanmar when reading the Christian Sgaw Karen script. Section 3 discusses the correspondence between Romei and the Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation and includes an attempt to write the Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation in Romei. Section 4 provides a sample text of the Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation written in Romei. Section 5 presents a summary.

This article can also be used as an introductory explanation of the Christian Sgaw

Karen script. For the spellings of the Christian Sgaw Karen script, I refer to Wade (1849) and the Drum Publication Group (2000).

## 2. Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation

The Christian Sgaw Karen script (see Section 4.1) was created by the American missionary Rev. Jonathan Wade in the 1830s. Since it has the largest number of publications among the scripts used in Karenic languages, it is often considered the standard script of Sgaw Karen. Furthermore, the pronunciation of Sgaw Karen speakers from Karen State and Mon State in Myanmar when reading texts written in the Christian Sgaw Karen script best matches this writing system; therefore, it is often regarded as the standard pronunciation of Sgaw Karen. Thus, in this article, I call the pronunciation and the phonological system deduced from it the “Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation”. It should be noted that this pronunciation may differ from the one used in daily speech in various dialects, both phonetically and phonologically. For example, /c/ in the dialect of Hpa-an, the capital of Karen State, Myanmar, corresponds to /s/ in the Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation, and /ch/ corresponds to /sh/. Furthermore, the Hpa-an dialect has a rhyme /-u/, but the Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation does not have it. For the phonological system of the Hpa-an dialect, please refer to Kato (2023). Among the Sgaw Karen dialects I was able to access through fieldwork and literature, the Moulmein dialect reported by Jones (1961) seems to have the closest phonological system to that of the Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation. The Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation is currently used in various media on the Internet.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1. Syllable structure

The syllable structure of the Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation, abbreviated as

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2 The following YouTube channels are typical media that use this pronunciation (checked on November 20, 2024):

- The Karen News (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/@TheKarenNews>)
- Karen Society of Nebraska (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/@karensocietyofnebraska7196>)
- RVA Sgaw Karen (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/@rvasgawkaren5623>)

SKSP below, can be represented as C1(C2)V(?)/(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(?) is called the rhyme. In the following discussion, hyphens are used to indicate C1 as “C-” (C is any initial consonant), C2 as “-C-” (C is any medial consonant), and the rhyme as “-R” (R is any rhyme).

## 2.2. Tones

SKSP has six tones: low-falling, mid-level, high-level, high-falling, low-checked, and mid-checked, as shown in Table 1. There are also atonic syllables, in which the only rhyme that can appear is /ə/, and they are indicated by the absence of tone marking. Atonic syllables are weakly pronounced and do not have a fixed pitch.

**Table 1: Tones in SKSP**

à	[a41]	low-falling tone
ā	[a33]	mid-level tone
á	[a44]	high-level tone
â	[a51]	high-falling tone
àʔ	[aʔ11~21]	low-checked tone
āʔ	[aʔ33]	mid-checked tone
ə		atonic

Like Kato (2023), who discussed the tones of the Hpa-an dialect, I assume two possibilities for the phonological status of the glottal stop at the end of the low- and mid-checked tones. This could be an intrinsic feature of a tone or a syllable-final stop. However, this issue is difficult to resolve and requires further investigations. Therefore, I tentatively consider this glottal stop to be simultaneously an intrinsic feature of tone and a syllable-final stop.

The particles /nê/ ‘that; TOPIC MARKER’ and /bâ/ ‘NEGATIVE MARKER’ both have a high-falling tone, but are often pronounced with a pitch [11]. Presumably, this is a type of intonation.

When speakers of dialects of the Ayeyarwady Delta attempt to pronounce words with SKSP, both low-falling and high-falling tones are pronounced with a low flat pitch, as in [a11]. In addition, the mid-checked tone is pronounced at a high pitch,

which can be transcribed as [aʔ55].

### 2.3. Initial and medial consonants

Simple onsets consisting of only C1 (i.e., the initial consonant) in SKSP are shown in Table 2. A total of 28 phonemes can occur at a simple onset. The phonemes in parentheses, i.e., /c/, /ch/, /ɛ/, and /z/, only appear in loanwords from languages such as Burmese and English. In addition, forms with the phoneme /ŋ/ are rare.

**Table 2: Simple onsets in SKSP**

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Voiceless stops	p ph	θ	t th	(c) (ch)	k kh	ʔ
Voiced stops	b		d			
Voiceless fricatives			s sh	(ɕ) (ç)	x	h
Voiced fricatives			(z)		ɣ	ɦ
Nasals	m		n	ɲ	ŋ	
Semivowels	w			j		
Lateral			l			
Trill			r			

The phonetic values of simple onsets are as follows: /p-/ [p], /ph-/ [pʰ], /θ-/ [t̪~t̪ʰ~θ], /t-/ [t], /th-/ [tʰ], /c-/ [tɕ], /ch-/ [tɕʰ], /k-/ [k], /kh-/ [kʰ], /ʔ-/ [ʔ], /b-/ [b~b̥], /d-/ [d~d̥], /s-/ [s], /sh-/ [sʰ], /ɛ-/ [ɛ], /x-/ [x], /h-/ [h], /z-/ [z], /ɣ-/ [ɣ], /ɦ-/ [ɦ], /m-/ [m], /n-/ [n], /ɲ-/ [ɲ], /ŋ-/ [ŋ], /w-/ [w], /j-/ [j~j̥], /l-/ [l], and /r-/ [r~ɾ].

/b/ and /d/ are basically implosives, i.e., [ɓ] and [ɗ], but may be pronounced [b] and [d] in fast speech.

An explanation is needed for the oppositions /c/ vs. /s/ and /ch/ vs. /sh/.

In many Sgaw Karen dialects, no opposition exists between /c/ and /s/. Similarly, no opposition is found between /ch/ and /sh/. For example, in the Hpa-an dialect, as Kato (2023) describes, it is sufficient to establish /c/ and /ch/ as phonemes. These originate from the Proto-Sgaw Karen \*/c/ and \*/ch/, respectively. In Karen State and Thailand, there are many dialects in which /c/ and /s/ are not contrasted. The same is true of /ch/ and /sh/. 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, the more frequently /c/ and /ch/ are realized as [s] and [sʰ] instead of [tɕ] and [tɕʰ]. For example,

/cé/ ‘silver’ and /chó/ ‘hen, cock’ are most commonly pronounced [tɛ́] and [tɛʰó] in everyday conversation; however, they are often pronounced [sé] and [sʰé] in formal situations. In contrast, in the SKSP, the phonemes corresponding to Proto-Sgaw Karen \*/c/ and \*/ch/ are /s/ and /sh/, respectively. If we only consider vocabulary specific to Sgaw Karen, it is sufficient to set up /s/ [s] and /sh/ [sʰ]. The equivalent forms meaning ‘silver’ and ‘hen, cock’ in SKSP are /sé/ [sé] and /shó/ [sʰó], respectively. It is necessary to set up /c/ and /ch/ in SKSP because they appear in frequently used loanwords; e.g., /có/ [tɛ́ó] ‘school’ (< Burmese /cáun/), and /chōʔ/ [tɛʰōʔ] ‘to bind’ (< Burmese /chouʔ/). The /c/ and /ch/ in such loanwords are never pronounced as [s] or [sʰ].

The SKSP phonemes corresponding to Proto-Sgaw Karen \*/c/ and \*/ch/ have become /s/ and /sh/, respectively, for two possible reasons: (1) the Christian Sgaw Karen script symbols  $\phi$  and  $\phi^h$ , which are used to write /s/ [s] and /sh/ [sʰ], represent /s/ [s] and /sh/ [sʰ] in Modern Burmese, which is the official language of Myanmar taught at elementary schools (in Burmese, these symbols used to be pronounced [tɛ] and [tɛʰ]); and (2) in Myanmar, the Sgaw Karen dialects of the Ayeyarwady Delta and Mon State have the phonemes /s/ and /sh/ corresponding to Proto-Sgaw Karen \*/c/ and \*/ch/, respectively, and their speaker populations are large.

Next, the phonemes that can appear as C2, i.e., a medial consonant, are /-w-/ [w], /-l-/ [l], /-r-/ [r~ɹ], /-j-/ [j~ɟ], and /-ɣ-/ [ɣ~w]. The possible combinations of C1 and C2 are presented in Table 3. Initial consonants that could not be followed by a medial consonant were omitted.

**Table 3: Possible combinations of C1 and C2 in SKSP**

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

## 2.4. Rhymes

As mentioned, a 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/.

Table 4 shows the nine open rhymes.

**Table 4: Open rhymes in SKSP**

i	ĩ	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], /-o/ [o], and /-ɔ/ [ɔ̃~ɔ̄].

As shown in Table 5, there are nine stopped rhymes. Stopped rhymes appear when a glottal stop is present at the end of a syllable. As stated in Section 2.2, the glottal stop at the end of a syllable may be an intrinsic feature of the checked tone rather than a syllable-final consonant.

**Table 5: Stopped rhymes in SKSP**

iʔ	ĩʔ	uʔ
eʔ	əʔ	oʔ
ɛʔ	aʔ	ɔʔ

These rhymes are realized as follows: /-iʔ/ [iʔ], /-eʔ/ [eʔ], /-ɛʔ/ [ɛʔ], /-əʔ/ [əʔ], /-aʔ/ [äʔ], /-ĩʔ/ [ĩʔ], /-uʔ/ [uʔ], /-oʔ/ [oʔ], and /-ɔʔ/ [ɔʔ].

Among these, the pairs /-iʔ/ and /-eʔ/ and /-oʔ/ and /-ɔʔ/ are often confused.

### 3. SKSP and Romei

This section presents the correspondence between SKSP and Romei. According to Seguinotte (2007:1), Romei was created by a Protestant missionary who came to Burma to spread Christianity around 1930. Seguinotte, a Roman Catholic missionary, reused it when he brought Christianity to the Sgaw Karen communities in Thailand around 1950. After Seguinotte began using it in Thailand, Romei was modified to match the sounds of Sgaw Karen spoken in Thailand. Therefore, Romei consists of unnatural and insufficient aspects when used to transcribe SKSP, which is the standard pronunciation in Myanmar. Thus, in this section, I will not only show the correspondence between SKSP and Romei but will also discuss the issues that arise when using Romei to write SKSP and will propose how to correctly write SKSP in Romei.



### 3.1. Initial consonants

Regarding initial consonants, SKSP and Romei correspond, as shown in the leftmost and middle columns of Table 6. The rightmost column shows the corresponding symbols in Christian Sgaw Karen script. A “?” in the Romei column indicates that the corresponding Romei spelling for the relevant SKSP initial consonant cannot be found in Seguinotte (2007). After each “?”, the spellings proposed in this paper are indicated in parentheses.

**Table 6: SKSP initial consonants and Romei**

SKSP	Romei	Christian Sgaw
p-	p	ပ
ph-	hp	ဖ
θ-	s	ဆ
t-	t	တ
th-	ht	ထ
c-	? (ky)	က <sub>2</sub>
ch-	? (hky)	ခ <sub>2</sub>
k-	k	က
kh-	hk	ခ
ʔ-	no marking	အ
b-	b	ဘ
d-	d	ဒ
s-	c	စ
sh-	hs	ဆ
ɕ-	? (sy)	ရှ
x-	q	ဃ
h-	h	ဟ
z-	? (z)	ဇ
ʎ-	g	ဂ
fi-	Vh	ဧ
m-	m	မ
n-	n	န
ɲ-	ny	ဉ
ŋ-	ng	င
w-	w	ဝ
j-	y	ယ
l-	l	လ
r-	r	ရ

The following seven notes discuss writing SKSP initial consonants in Romei. In the notes, I propose using the symbols *ky*, *hky*, *sy*, and *z* to represent the initial consonants /c-/ , /ch-/ , /ɕ-/ , and /z-/ , for which the symbols are lacking in Romei.

- The SKSP initial consonant /θ-/ corresponds to *s* in Romei because, from a comparative linguistics perspective, /θ-/ in the dialects of Myanmar corresponds to /s-/ in many Thai Sgaw Karen dialects. Since Romei was created by a Protestant missionary who came to Burma around 1930, it is difficult to believe that the forms written with *s* at present were also written with *s* in the first version of Romei. It is true that /θ-/ and /s-/ in Sgaw Karen dialects can be traced back to Proto-Sgaw \*s. However, since the corresponding sound is spelled *th* in Mason (1846:viii), it can be assumed that \*s became an interdental sound in the dialects of Myanmar by the 19th century. I assume that Seguinotte probably changed the spelling of *th* to *s* to match the pronunciation on the Thai side when he began to engage in missionary activities in Thailand around 1950. I propose using this spelling as it is. Therefore, when using Romei to write SKSP, *s* is to be read with the initial consonant /θ-/ . This may cause some discomfort for speakers on the Myanmar side, but since [θ], one of the allophones of /θ/, has a similar manner of articulation as [s], this discomfort can be resolved through the process of acclimation.

- The SKSP initial consonants /s-/ and /sh-/ correspond to *c* and *hs* of Romei, respectively. Based on the pronunciation guide in Seguinotte (2007:2), *c* and *hs* in Romei are probably pronounced as /c-/ [tɕ] and /ch-/ [tɕʰ] in dialects around Chiang Mai. I assume that *c* in Romei was probably written as *s* in the early Romei created in Burma around 1930 and that Seguinotte changed it to *c* based on the IPA symbol [c] for a palatal plosive. This is because in Romei, aspirated consonants are written as *hp*, *ht*, and *hk*, and the corresponding unaspirated consonants are written as *p*, *t*, and *k*. Therefore, it seems likely that the non-aspirated consonant corresponding to the aspirated consonant *hs* was written as *s*. I propose using these spellings as they are. Therefore, when using Romei to write SKSP, *c* and *hs* are read using the initial consonants /s-/ and /sh-/ , respectively. For speakers in Myanmar, reading *c* as /s-/ may

cause some discomfort, but since *c* in English is also pronounced as [s] before *i* and *e*, this discomfort can be resolved through acclimation.

- There is no corresponding spelling in Romei for /c-/ and /ch-/ in SKSP. This is because the oppositions /c/ vs. /s/ and /ch/ vs. /sh/ do not exist in many dialects of Karen State and Thailand (see Section 2.3). For the Sgaw Karen dialects spoken around Chiang Mai, it is also probably sufficient to set up the phonemes /c/ [te] and /ch/ [te<sup>h</sup>]. These phonemes /c/ and /ch/ correspond to /s/ and /sh/ in SKSP. As discussed above, /c/ and /ch/ in Thai Sgaw Karen are written as *c* and *hs*, respectively, in Romei, which means that other spellings are not necessary. It is unknown how /c-/, which contrasts with /s-/, and /ch-/, which contrasts with /sh-/, were written in the early Romei. In this article, I propose that /c-/ be written as *ky* and /ch-/ as *hky*. In the Christian Sgaw Karen script, /c-/ in SKSP is represented by adding the symbol ๐ to indicating /-y-/ to the symbol ๐ indicating /k-/. Similarly, /ch-/ is represented by adding the symbol ๐ to the symbol ๐ indicating /kh-/. My proposal to write /c-/ as *ky* and /ch-/ as *hky* follows these spellings. Note that the word meaning ‘school’ is spelled *co* in Seguinotte (2007: 185). If we adopt this spelling to write /có/ ‘school’ in SKSP, a problem emerges in that it is read as /só/. Therefore, when using Romei as the notation for SKSP, the spelling *co* for ‘school’ is inappropriate. I propose it be written as *kyo*.

- There is no spelling in Romei that represents /e-/ in SKSP. I propose the spelling *sy* to represent /e-/. This follows the spelling of /ɲ-/, which is represented by a combination of *n* and *y*. In addition, since I have decided to use *ky* and *hky* to represent /c-/ and /ch-/, if I also use *sy* to represent /e-/, then all of the sounds around the palatal area, i.e., /c-/, /ch-/, /e-/, /ɲ-/, and /j-/, will be written using spellings that include *y*, i.e., *ky*, *hky*, *sy*, *ny*, and *y*. This consistency is another reason for proposing the spelling of *sy*.

- There is no spelling in Romei that represents /z-/ in SKSP. I propose the spelling *z* to represent /z-/. As we will see in Section 3.3, although *z* is a symbol for the mid-level tone in Romei, there is no risk of confusion because the *z* used as a tone marking is

placed at the end of the syllable, whereas the *z* used to represent the initial consonant /*z*-/ is placed at the beginning of the syllable. However, when the letter *z* is used to represent the initial consonant /*z*-/, a space is always required before it.

- The initial consonant /ʔ-/ is indicated by using “no notation” in Romei. This method can also be used to represent /ʔ-/ in SKSP.
- The initial consonant /fi-/ in SKSP is to be represented by the letter *h* placed after the vowel symbol in Romei. Although Seguinotte (2007) only lists the spellings *ah* and *eh* to represent /fiá/ and /fié/, respectively, this method of placing an *h* after a vowel symbol can be applied to the other vowels as well.

When writing the initial consonants of SKSP in Romei, it is best to use the correspondences shown in Table 6. For /*c*-/, /*ch*-/, /*ɕ*-/, and /*z*-/, which do not have a corresponding spelling in Romei, I propose *ky*, *hky*, *sy*, and *z*, respectively, as shown in the notes above. In line with this principle, we can consider an attempt to transcribe words containing the initial consonants shown in Table 6. Below, after each initial consonant, SKSP words that include the initial consonant in phonemic notation are listed. Next, I present the spellings of the Romei and Christian Sgaw Karen scripts. The initial consonants marked with an asterisk, such as /*c*-\*/, are those for which no spelling exists in Romei. Thus, this article proposed new spellings for them.

In passing, in Romei, spaces are placed between words (or sometimes between morphemes that can stand alone as a word within a compound word). However, if any of the five tone marks, namely, *j*, *z*, *f*, *x*, and *v* (see Section 3.3), appear in a word, a space must be inserted after it (Seguinotte 2007:11–12). As only the high-level tone is indicated without a tone mark among the six tones, sentences written in Romei appear, at first glance, to have a space between each syllable (see Section 4.3).

/p-/ /pà/ ‘father’, Romei *paj*, Christian Sgaw ၵ

/pétró/ ‘window’, Romei *paitrau*, Christian Sgaw ၵ

/pôlê/ ‘sea, ocean’, Romei *pauf laif*, Christian Sgaw ၵ

- /ph-/ /phó/ ‘flower’, Romei *hpau*, Christian Sgaw ဖိ  
 /pháti/ ‘uncle’, Romei *hpatij*, Christian Sgaw ဖိတံ  
 /phíbákhô/ ‘shoulder’, Romei *hpibaf hkof*, Christian Sgaw ဖိဘန်ခိန်
- /θ-/ /θāʔ/ ‘heart’, Romei *sav*, Christian Sgaw သး  
 /θû/ ‘liver’, Romei *soof*, Christian Sgaw သူန်  
 /θé/ ‘be capable’, Romei *sei*, Christian Sgaw သ့
- /t-/ /tá/ ‘one’, Romei *te*, Christian Sgaw တၢ  
 /tâ/ ‘be thick’, Romei *tauf*, Christian Sgaw တိန်  
 /té/ ‘to speak’, Romei *tai*, Christian Sgaw တဲ
- /th-/ /thí/ ‘water’, Romei *hti*, Christian Sgaw ထံ  
 /thóbó/ ‘always’, Romei *htaubo*, Christian Sgaw ထီဝိ  
 /thô/ ‘bird’, Romei *htof*, Christian Sgaw ထိန်
- /c-/ \* /có/ ‘school’ (< Burmese /cáun/), Romei *kyo*, Christian Sgaw ကို  
 /cōʔ/ ‘be brittle’ (< Burmese /cuʔ/), Romei *kyov*, Christian Sgaw ကိုး  
 /cēʔ/ ‘jack’ (< English *jack*), Romei *kyaiv*, Christian Sgaw ကဲး
- /ch-/ \* /chōʔ/ ‘to bind’ (< Burmese /chouʔ/), Romei *hkyov*, Christian Sgaw ခိုး  
 /chēʔ/ ‘cheque’ (< English *cheque*), Romei *hkyaiiv*, Christian Sgaw ခဲး  
 /chōʔkəlēʔ/ ‘chocolate’ (< English *chocolate*), Romei *hkyauv k’laiv*, Christian Sgaw ခိုးကလဲး
- /k-/ /kâ/ ‘grill’, Romei *kaf*, Christian Sgaw ကန်  
 /kó/ ‘difficult’, Romei *kau*, Christian Sgaw ကိ  
 /kā/ ‘be rare’, Romei *kaz*, Christian Sgaw ကၢ
- /kh-/ /khá/ ‘time’, Romei *hka*, Christian Sgaw ခါ  
 /khélòʔ/ ‘all’, Romei *hkailex*, Christian Sgaw ခဲလၢန်  
 /khî/ ‘be cool’, Romei *hkuf*, Christian Sgaw ခုန်
- /ʔ-/ /ʔó/ ‘to eat’, Romei *auf*, Christian Sgaw အိန်  
 /ʔô/ ‘to live’, Romei *of*, Christian Sgaw အိန်  
 /θəʔé/ ‘ginger’, Romei *s’ei*, Christian Sgaw သအ့
- /b-/ /bâ/ ‘be correct’, Romei *baf*, Christian Sgaw ဘန်  
 /bí/ ‘paddy’, Romei *bu*, Christian Sgaw ဘု  
 /būʔ/ ‘be near’, Romei *boov*, Christian Sgaw ဘူး

- /d-/ /dǎ/ ‘to spread’, Romei *da*, Christian Sgaw ဒါ  
 /dɪʔ/ ‘wing’, Romei *div*, Christian Sgaw ဒီး  
 /dó/ ‘sword’, Romei *dau*, Christian Sgaw ဒီ
- /s-/ /sé/ ‘silver’, Romei *cei*, Christian Sgaw စု  
 /sɔ̃pā/ ‘king’, Romei *cauz paz*, Christian Sgaw စီၤပၤ  
 /sìʔ/ ‘paddy field’, Romei *cix*, Christian Sgaw စိံ  
 /sh-/ /shó/ ‘hen, cock’, Romei *hsau*, Christian Sgaw ဆီ  
 /shû/ ‘be strong’, Romei *hsoof*, Christian Sgaw ဆူ  
 /shá/ ‘be ill’, Romei *hsa*, Christian Sgaw ဆါ
- /c-/\* /cɛʔnê/ ‘lawyer’ (< Burmese /cêñè/), Romei *syeyv neif*, Christian Sgaw ရှီးနီ  
 /dɛɛnèrɪ/ ‘dictionary’ (< English *dictionary*), Romei *deiz sy’nej riz*, Christian Sgaw ဒုၤရှ်နီရိ
- /x-/ /xilā/ ‘be beautiful’, Romei *qilaz*, Christian Sgaw ဃီလၢ  
 /xá/ ‘be heavy’, Romei *qe*, Christian Sgaw ဃာ  
 /xɔ̃θâ/ ‘coconut’, Romei *qauz saf*, Christian Sgaw ဃီၤသုင်
- /h-/ /hé/ ‘to come’, Romei *hai*, Christian Sgaw ဟဲ  
 /hê/ ‘to hate’, Romei *hei*, Christian Sgaw ဟ့  
 /hó/ ‘be salty’, Romei *hau*, Christian Sgaw ဟီ
- /z-/\* /zé/ ‘market’ (< Burmese /zê/), Romei\* *zei*, Christian Sgaw ဇု  
 /zāʔ/ ‘jataka’ (< Burmese /zaʔ/), Romei\* *zav*, Christian Sgaw ဇး
- /ɣ-/ /ɣẽ/ ‘be good’, Romei *geiz*, Christian Sgaw ဂု  
 /ɣì/ ‘snake’, Romei *guj*, Christian Sgaw ဂု  
 /ɣì/ ‘root’, Romei *gij*, Christian Sgaw ဂိ
- /fi-/ /fiá/ ‘QUESTION MARKER’, Romei *ah*, Christian Sgaw ဧါ  
 /fiá/ ‘Oh!’, Romei *eh*, Christian Sgaw ဧါ  
 /fiû/ ‘INTERJECTION’, Romei *oohf*, Christian Sgaw ဧူ
- /m-/ /mí/ ‘to sleep’, Romei *mi*, Christian Sgaw မိ  
 /mò/ ‘mother’, Romei *moj*, Christian Sgaw မိၣ်  
 /mẽ/ ‘rice’, Romei *meiz*, Christian Sgaw မ့
- /n-/ /nè/ ‘to get’, Romei *nej*, Christian Sgaw နိ  
 /ná/ ‘to smell’, Romei *ne*, Christian Sgaw နါ

	/nĩ/ ‘day’, Romei <i>niz</i> , Christian Sgaw နီ
/ɲ-/	/ɲâ/ ‘fish’, Romei <i>nyaf</i> , Christian Sgaw ညှ်
	/ɲáθũ/ ‘tobacco’, Romei <i>nyasoov</i> , Christian Sgaw ညါသူး
	/ɲó/ ‘be easy’, Romei <i>nyau</i> , Christian Sgaw ညီ
/ŋ-/	/ŋá/ ‘to rent’ (< Burmese /hŋá/), Romei <i>nga</i> , Christian Sgaw ငါ
	/ŋó?ŋà/ ‘be stupid’, Romei <i>ngaux ngax</i> , Christian Sgaw ငိင်
	/ŋĩ/ ‘ONOMATOPOEIA (as a dog whining)’, Romei <i>ngingi</i> , Christian Sgaw ငံ
/w-/	/wĩ/ ‘be delicious’, Romei <i>wif</i> , Christian Sgaw ဝံ
	/wā/ ‘husband’, Romei <i>waz</i> , Christian Sgaw ဝါ
	/wè/ ‘elder brother’, Romei <i>waij</i> , Christian Sgaw ဝဲ
/j-/	/jĩ/ ‘mouse’, Romei <i>yuj</i> , Christian Sgaw ယု
	/jòdɛ/ ‘waist’, Romei <i>yauj dei</i> , Christian Sgaw ယိင်ဒဲ
	/ji/ ‘be long (as time)’, Romei <i>yix</i> , Christian Sgaw ယိ
/l-/	/lá/ ‘moon’, Romei <i>la</i> , Christian Sgaw လါ
	/lwi/ ‘four’, Romei <i>lwij</i> , Christian Sgaw လွိုင်
	/li/ ‘thread’, Romei <i>luf</i> , Christian Sgaw လု
/r-/	/rā/ ‘much’, Romei <i>rav</i> , Christian Sgaw ရး
	/ró/ ‘to assemble together’, Romei <i>ro</i> , Christian Sgaw ရို
	/kərá/ ‘fence; organization’, Romei <i>k’re</i> , Christian Sgaw ကရါ

### 3.2. Medial consonants

Regarding medial consonants, i.e., /-w-/, /-l-/, /-r-/, /-j-/, and /-y/, SKSP and Romei correspond to each other, as shown in Table 7. There are no medial consonants in SKSP that cannot be written in Romei.

**Table 7: SKSP medial consonants and Romei**

SKSP	Romei	Christian Sgaw
-w-	w	ဝ
-l-	l	လ
-r-	r	ရ
-j-	y	ယ
-y-	g	ဂ

Words with medial consonants:

/-w-/	/kwà/ ‘look’, Romei <i>kwaj</i> , Christian Sgaw ကွၢ်
/-l-/	/khlô/ ‘mat’, Romei <i>hklauf</i> , Christian Sgaw ချီၣ်
/-r-/	/pétró/ ‘window’, Romei <i>paitrau</i> , Christian Sgaw ပဲတြီ
/-j-/	/phjá/ ‘shop, market’, Romei <i>hpya</i> , Christian Sgaw ဖျါ
/-ʏ-/	/pyākəjón/ ‘human; Karen’, Romei <i>pgaz k’nyaw</i> , Christian Sgaw ပုၤကညီ

### 3.3. Rhymes and tones

SKSP and Romei correspond in terms of rhymes and tones, as shown in Table 8. Rhymes with the same vowel are placed in the same row, while rhymes with the same tone are placed in the same column. As seen from this table, the SKSP vowels /i/, /e/, /ɛ/, /ɪ/, /ə/, /a/, /u/, /o/, and /ɔ/ correspond to the Romei spellings *i*, *ei*, *ai*, *u*, *e*, *a*, *oo*, *o*, and *au*, respectively, while the SKSP low-falling, mid-level, high-level, high-falling, low-checked, and mid-checked tones correspond to the Romei spellings *j*, *z*, *ø* (unmarked), *f*, *x*, and *v*, respectively.

Regarding rhymes and tones in SKSP, there are no sounds that cannot be written in Romei. Below are notes on writing rhymes and tones:

- As mentioned in 2.2, the only rhyme that can appear in an atonic syllable is /-ə/. Attention is required when writing atonic syllables in Romei. When the initial consonant is other than /ʔ-/ , the atonic syllable is indicated by an apostrophe placed after the consonant. Some examples are:

/kəʃhó/ ‘elephant’, Romei *k’hsau*, Christian Sgaw ကဆီ

/mətā/ ‘who’, Romei *m’laz*, Christian Sgaw မတၢ

/təkəjā/ ‘one hundred’, Romei *t’k’yaz*, Christian Sgaw တကယၢ

However, when the initial consonant is /ʔ-/ , an apostrophe is not used, probably because /ʔ-/ is represented by no marking in Romei. The atonic syllable /ʔə/ is represented by the spelling *av*. Some examples are:

/ʔəkʰô/ ‘upper part’, Romei *av khof*, Christian Sgaw အခိၣ်

/ʔəyā/ ‘the other’, Romei *av gaz*, Christian Sgaw အဂၢ

/ʔəb/ ‘place’, Romei *av lauj*, Christian Sgaw အလီၣ်



**Table 8: SKSP rhymes/tones and Romei**

	low-falling	mid-level	high-level	high-falling	low-checked	mid-checked	atonic
i	-ì ij ᵒᵒᵒ	-ī iz ᵒᵒ	-í i ᵒ	-î if ᵒᵒᵒ	-iʔ ix ᵒᵒ	-īʔ iv ᵒᵒᵒ	
e	-è ej ᵒᵒᵒ	-ē eiz ᵒᵒ	-é ei ᵒ	-ê eif ᵒᵒᵒ	-èʔ (eix) ᵒᵒ	-ēʔ (eiv) ᵒᵒᵒ	
ɛ	-è aij ᵒᵒᵒ	-ē aiz ᵒᵒ	-é ai ᵒ	-ê aif ᵒᵒᵒ	-èʔ aix ᵒᵒ	-ēʔ aiv ᵒᵒᵒ	
i	-ì uj ᵒᵒᵒ	-ī uz ᵒᵒ	-í u ᵒ	-î uf ᵒᵒᵒ	iʔ ux ᵒᵒ	īʔ uv ᵒᵒᵒ	
ə	-ə ej ᵒᵒᵒ	-ē ez ᵒᵒ	-á e ᵒ	-ê ef ᵒᵒᵒ	-əʔ ex ᵒᵒ	-ēʔ ev ᵒᵒᵒ	-ə , av ᵒ
a	-à aj ᵒᵒᵒ	-ā az ᵒᵒ	-á a ᵒ	-â af ᵒᵒᵒ	-àʔ ax ᵒᵒ	-āʔ av ᵒᵒᵒ	
u	-ù ooj ᵒᵒᵒ	-ū ooz ᵒᵒ	-ú oo ᵒ	-û oof ᵒᵒᵒ	-ùʔ oox ᵒᵒ	-ūʔ oov ᵒᵒᵒ	
o	-ò oj ᵒᵒᵒ	-ō oz ᵒᵒ	-ó o ᵒ	-ô of ᵒᵒᵒ	-òʔ (ox) ᵒᵒ	-ōʔ (ov) ᵒᵒᵒ	
ɔ	-ò auj ᵒᵒᵒ	-ō auz ᵒᵒ	-ó au ᵒ	-ô auf ᵒᵒᵒ	-òʔ aux ᵒᵒ	-ōʔ auv ᵒᵒᵒ	

The problem with the spelling *av* is that it also represents the syllable /ʔāʔ/. Thus, Romei is currently unable to distinguish between the two syllables /ʔə/ and /ʔāʔ/. This syllable /ʔāʔ/ only appears in a few words, such as:

/ʔɛʔʔāʔ/ ‘be dumb’, Romei *uv av*, Christian Sgaw ʔɛ:ʔə:

Therefore, using the spelling *av* to represent both /ʔə/ and /ʔāʔ/ does not cause a significant practical problem. However, from a linguistic point of view, Romei lacks

systematicity as it has two ways of writing atonic syllables and is unable to distinguish between /ʔə/ and /ʔāʔ/. In particular, the inability to distinguish between /ʔə/ and /ʔāʔ/ is a problem. I propose that the spelling *a'v* be used for /ʔāʔ/ when it is necessary to distinguish between these two syllables. In this method, /ʔɪʔʔāʔ/ can be written as *uv a'v*.

- The Romei spellings *eix* and *eiv* are bracketed in Table 8 because Seguinotte (2007) did not provide any examples of these spellings. This may be because in many dialects of Sgaw Karen, the distinction between the rhymes /-iʔ/ and /-eʔ/ is unclear. It is believed that one of the following two situations exists in the dialect(s) of Sgaw Karen in Thailand, which is reflected in Romei: (1) there is no rhyme /-eʔ/, and only /-iʔ/ exists; and (2) both /-iʔ/ and /-eʔ/ exist, but the frequency of /-eʔ/ is extremely low. Since SKSP distinguishes between /-iʔ/ and /-eʔ/, the spellings *eix* (/ -èʔ/) and *eiv* (/ -ēʔ/) should be prepared to represent the SKSP rhyme /-eʔ/.

- The Romei spellings *ox* and *ov* are bracketed in Table 8 as no examples of these spellings are found in Seguinotte (2007). This may be due to the merger of the rhyme /-oʔ/ into /-ɔʔ/ in some Sgaw Karen dialects. This merger is also beginning to emerge in the Hpa-an dialect, as Kato (2023) discussed. Additionally, in the Sgaw Karen dialect reflected in Romei, the rhyme /-oʔ/ may have already merged into the rhyme /-ɔʔ/. Since SKSP distinguishes between /-oʔ/ and /-ɔʔ/, the spellings *ox* (/ -òʔ/) and *ov* (/ -ōʔ/) should be prepared to represent the SKSP rhyme /-oʔ/.

Below are examples of how SKSP rhymes are written in Romei. Examples of all six tones of each vowel are provided below. An example of an atonic syllable is also given for /ə/.

/i/    /wì/ ‘to fan’, Romei *wij*, Christian Sgaw ၵိ  
       /mī/ ‘name’, Romei *miz*, Christian Sgaw မိ  
       /khí/ ‘two’, Romei *hki*, Christian Sgaw ၵိ  
       /thí/ ‘to see’, Romei *htif*, Christian Sgaw ထိ

- /liʔ/ ‘writing’, Romei *lix*, Christian Sgaw လိခ်
- /sɪʔ/ ‘to say’, Romei *civ*, Christian Sgaw စိး
- /e/ /mè/ ‘to be’, Romei *meij*, Christian Sgaw မှ်
- /kē/ ‘to return’, Romei *keiz*, Christian Sgaw က့ၤ
- /shé/ ‘shirt, dress’, Romei *hsei*, Christian Sgaw ဆု
- /ʔê/ ‘to bite’, Romei *eif*, Christian Sgaw အုၣ်
- /xèʔ/ ‘jumbled’ (= /xiʔ/), Romei *qeix*, Christian Sgaw ဃုၣ်
- /hēʔ/ ‘SENTENCE-FINAL PARTICLE’, Romei *heiv*, Christian Sgaw ဟ့း
- /ɛ/ /lè/ ‘be wide’, Romei *laij*, Christian Sgaw လဲၣ်
- /lē/ ‘to go’, Romei *laiz*, Christian Sgaw လဲၤ
- /ké/ ‘to become’, Romei *kai*, Christian Sgaw ကဲ
- /ʔê/ ‘to love’, Romei *aif*, Christian Sgaw အဲၣ်
- /mèʔ/ ‘eye’, Romei *maix*, Christian Sgaw မဲၣ်
- /shēʔ/ ‘to stab’, Romei *hsaiv*, Christian Sgaw ဆဲး
- /i/ /mì/ ‘sun’, Romei *muj*, Christian Sgaw မုၣ်
- /tɪ/ ‘to arrive’, Romei *tuz*, Christian Sgaw တုၤ
- /sí/ ‘hand’, Romei *cu*, Christian Sgaw စု
- /ʔá/ ‘be rotten’, Romei *uf*, Christian Sgaw အုၣ်
- /nìʔ/ ‘to enter’, Romei *nux*, Christian Sgaw န့ၣ်
- /phīʔ/ ‘be scared’, Romei *hpuv*, Christian Sgaw ဖုး
- /ə/ /ʏə/ ‘be still’, Romei *gej*, Christian Sgaw ဂၢ်
- /lā/ ‘be warm’, Romei *lez*, Christian Sgaw လၢၤ
- /shá/ ‘be sweet’, Romei *hse*, Christian Sgaw ဆၢၤ
- /thā/ ‘bag’, Romei *htef*, Christian Sgaw ထၢၣ်
- /lāʔ/ ‘be ended’, Romei *lex*, Christian Sgaw လၢ်
- /dāʔ/ ‘room’ (‘house’ in Thai Sgaw), Romei *dev*, Christian Sgaw ဒၢး
- /kəpā/ ‘light (n.)’, Romei *k’pauz*, Christian Sgaw ကပိၤ
- /a/ /tà/ ‘thing’, Romei *taj*, Christian Sgaw တၢ်
- /mā/ ‘to do’, Romei *maz*, Christian Sgaw မၤ
- /ʔá/ ‘many’, Romei *a*, Christian Sgaw အၢ
- /shâ/ ‘star’, Romei *hsaf*, Christian Sgaw ဆၢ်

/màʔ/ ‘son-in-law’, Romei *max*, Christian Sgaw မ်  
 /phāʔ/ ‘to read’, Romei *hpav*, Christian Sgaw ဖး  
 /u/ /jù/ ‘to swallow’, Romei *yooj*, Christian Sgaw ယူ  
 /lū/ ‘to chase’, Romei *looz*, Christian Sgaw လူ  
 /thú/ ‘gold’, Romei *htoo*, Christian Sgaw ထူ  
 /khú/ ‘to dig’, Romei *hkoof*, Christian Sgaw နှို  
 /kùʔ/ ‘to chop (as trees)’, Romei *koox*, Christian Sgaw ကွ  
 /kūʔ/ ‘to cough’, Romei *koov*, Christian Sgaw ကူး  
 /o/ /kò/ ‘be hot’, Romei *koj*, Christian Sgaw ကို  
 /tō/ ‘bridge’, Romei *toz*, Christian Sgaw တိ  
 /shó/ ‘be early’, Romei *hso*, Christian Sgaw ဆိ  
 /khô/ ‘head’, Romei *hkof*, Christian Sgaw ခို  
 /kòʔ/ ‘neck’, Romei *kox*, Christian Sgaw ကို (kaux in Seguinotte [2007: 89])  
 /kōʔ/ ‘to call’, Romei *kov*, Christian Sgaw ကိုး (kauv in Seguinotte [2007: 86])  
 /ɔ/ /jə/ ‘to tread’, Romei *yauj*, Christian Sgaw ယိ  
 /mɔ/ ‘to bark’, Romei *mauz*, Christian Sgaw မိ  
 /thó/ ‘be high, long’, Romei *htau*, Christian Sgaw ထိ  
 /phə/ ‘to catch’, Romei *hpauʔ*, Christian Sgaw ပှို  
 /kəʔkəʔ/ ‘ONOMATOPOEIA (crackling sound)’, Romei *kaux kaux*, Christian Sgaw  
 ကွကွ  
 /kəʔ/ ‘island’, Romei *kauv*, Christian Sgaw ကူး

#### 4. Sample text

Here, we will attempt to write an SKSP text in Romei. A folktale is quoted from a Sgaw Karen reader (Thara Mo Lo, Taungoo, n.d.:6–8) titled as “Karen Reader for Second Standard” in Sgaw Karen, which I obtained from Mae Sariang, Thailand, in March 1991. The reader does not list the publishers or places of publication (probably printed in the area controlled by the Karen National Union in Myanmar). This folktale is written in the Christian Sgaw Karen script, as presented in Section 4.1. ထိန်မိန်နဲထိန်အဝို in the first line is the title. Punctuation follows the original text. The phonemic transcription of this text based on SKSP phonology is presented in Section 4.2. The

same text written in Romei is presented in Section 4.3.

#### 4.1. The original text in the Christian Sgaw Karen script

- (1) ထိုင်မိနူကဲထိုင်အဂ္ဂ
- (2) ပတဲဝဲဒ်လၢပျၢန့ၣ်, ပုဒီဒုၣ်ညါန့ၣ် မံတခၢ်ဒ်ဝၣ်ထီၣ်ဒုတဘိယီလီၤ.
- (3) တးဒီးလၢ သဝီတဖျၢၣ်အပူၤန့ၣ်ပုဒီပုၣ်ဝဲၣ်တဖုအိၣ်ဝဲနွံဂၤဒီး  
အသဒါတဂၤမ့ၢ်ဟံၣ်မုၢ်, ဒီးမံဆူၣ်မံကဲ, တုၤအမံလံန့ၣ်  
တသ့ၣ်ညါသ့ၣ် တသ့ၣ်ညါသး, ပုၤထီၣ်ဂဲၤအိၤဆဲးအါဆဲးအါတပၢ်ထီၣ်ဘၣ်.
- (4) တၢ်မၤစ့ၢ်ကိးအသး လၢသဝီတဖျၢၣ်အံၤအပူၤ, တမုၢ်ဒုးတၢ်ခဲအံၤခဲအံၤလီၤ.
- (5) တနၤတခိၣ်ဖိမုၢ်သဒါတဂၤအံၤ အသကိးကိးမံအိၤလၢ အဟံၣ်ဒီး  
အဝဲက့ၤဃုအခွဲးလၢအမိၤလီၤ.
- (6) အမိၤစံးအိၤ, “သဒါနီ, နမံဆူၣ်မးအယိဟးမံလၢပုၤဟံၣ်တဂ့ၤ.  
ခဲကိၢ်တမုၢ် မ့ၢ်ထီၣ်ဘၣ်ဖုးပုၤဟံၣ်, ပုၤထီၣ်ဂဲၤနၤတန့ၢ်  
နကအိၣ်တ့ၢ်ဒီးတမုၢ်ကဖိၣ်န့ၢ်လီၤ.”
- (7) ပုၤဟံၣ်မုၢ်ဖိအံၤအိၣ်ဒီးဟးမံလၢ အသကိးအကျါဒိၣ်မးအယိ,  
ဃုအမိၤသပုၢ်ပုၢ် ဒီးလၢခံကတၢ်အမိၤဟ့ၣ်အိၤအခွဲးလီၤ.
- (8) ဘၣ်လၢနၤအဝဲန့ၣ် တမုၢ်လဲၤထီၣ်ဒုးဟံၣ်တဖျၢၣ်လၢပုၤဟံၣ်မုၢ်တဂၤလဲၤမံဝဲ  
သတးဒီး ဟံၣ်ကစၢ် တုၤအသ့ၣ်ညါ တမုၢ်ကဝီၤဟံၣ်  
ဒီးထီၣ်ဂဲၤထီၣ်အဟံၣ်ဖိန့ၣ် တလုၢ်ကွံာ်ဝဲဝၣ်တဘိလၢ  
အဟံၣ်ဖိဒီဒုၣ်ညါမံတခၢ်ဝဲ ဒီးတဘျီယီအဟံၣ်ဖိခဲလၢပၢ်ထီၣ်ဒီး  
မၤအယုၢ်ကွံာ်ဒီး အတၢ်ယုၢ်ကွံာ်လၢလီၤ.
- (9) မ့မ့ၢ်ပုၤဟံၣ်မုၢ်လၢအဟဲမံတဂၤ အခိၣ်လီၤတၢ်န့ၣ်က့, တပၢ်ထီၣ်ဘၣ်,  
ပုၤထွၣ်အိၤ တသ့ၣ်ညါလီၤအသး,  
ပုၤဒုး ဆ့ၣ်နီၤအိၤ, ပုၤပျၢ်အမၢ်လၢထံ ဒုးဆၢထၢၣ်အိၤဒၣ်လံာ်  
တသ့ၣ်နီၣ်အသးဘၣ်.
- (10) မၤယံာ်ယံာ်ဒီး ပုၤတၢ်တုၤကွံာ်အိၤဒီး ဃုၢ်သဒ်အိၤန့ၣ်လီၤ.
- (11) ပုၤဟံၣ်မုၢ်ဖိသၣ်အံၤ မံတုၤလၢဟံၣ်ပူၤဒီး  
တမုၢ်တဖုထံၣ်န့ၢ်အိၤဒီး စၢယၢ်အစုၣ်မၤလီၤဘၣ်မံၢ်အိၤဆူ ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်လီၤ  
ဒ်သိးကမၤသံကွံာ်အိၤလီၤ.
- (12) ဖဲအခါအဝဲပၢ်ထီၣ်ဒီး ထံၣ်ပုၤကမၤသံအိၤဒီး  
လၢတၢ်ပျၢ်တၢ်ဖုးဖးဒိၣ်အပူၤ, ကိးပသုထီၣ်ဝဲလၢ တၢ်ကနိးကစုၢ်ဒီး

တၢ်ဟံၣ်တၢ်ယၢ၊ မိၣ်နူ၊ မိၣ်နူ၊ ဒီးတၢ်မၤသံကွၢ်အီၤလီၤ.

- (13) ပုၤဟံၣ်တၢ်အံၤ တမုၢ်မၤသံအီၤဝံၤ  
ကဲထီၣ် လၢထီၣ်တဘျုးဒီးပုၤဝဲ, မိၣ်နူ, မိၣ်နူ, တုၤခဲအံၤဒီး  
ပုၤကိးအီၤလၢ ထီၣ်မိၣ်နူလီၤ.

#### 4.2. Phonemic transcription and translation

- (1) thômòhú kέ thဝ် ?əyέ  
cuckoo (Asian koel) become up about  
About the origin of the cuckoo

- (2) pə té wédâ ló plō nê  
1PL tell VPemp LOC old.days TOP  
pyā dódùǵá nê mí təkʰô dâ wâ thódú  
person whole.tribe TOP sleep bolster VPlim bamboo long  
tə bó xó lō.  
one NCl just AST

In the old days, members of the same family would sleep using a single long piece of bamboo as a pillow.

- (3) tãʔdɔʔ ló θəwó tə phlô ?əpū nê  
then LOC village one NCr inside TOP  
pyā dópwiè tə phí ?ô wé nwí yā dɔʔ  
person siblings one group be VPemp seven NCh and  
?əθədá tə yā mē pòʔmî,  
youngest.child one NCh COP woman  
dɔʔ mí shû mí kέ,  
and sleep strong sleep well  
tĩ ?ə mí lí nê,  
when 3SG sleep PFV TOP  
tə θêǵá θû tə θêǵá θāʔ,  
NEG know liver NEG know heart  
pyā thô yē ?ɔ shĩʔʔá shĩʔʔá  
person shake move 3SG how.much how.much  
tə pò thô bā.  
NEG wake up NEG

Seven siblings lived in a village, and the youngest was a girl. She was a deep sleeper, and once she fell asleep, she would not wake up no matter how much they shook her.

- (4) tà mā sèkɔʔ ʔə θāʔ,  
 IPS do also 3SG MID  
 ló θəwɔ́ tə phlô ʔi ʔəpū  
 LOC village one NCr this inside  
 təmláʔ dɪʔ tà khéʔikhéʔi lɔ.  
 burglar attack thing often AST

As time passed, robberies began to occur frequently in their village.

- (5) tənātəkhô phómí θədá tə yā ʔi  
 one.night daughter youngest.child one NCh this  
 ʔə θəkɔʔ kɔʔ mí ʔɔ́ ló ʔə hí dɔʔ  
 3SG friend call sleep 3SG LOC 3SG house and  
 ʔəwé kē xé ʔəkhwēʔ ló ʔə mò lɔ.  
 3SG return ask permission LOC 3SG mother AST

One night, the youngest daughter was invited by a friend to stay over, so she went back home and asked her mother for permission.

- (6) ʔə mò sɪʔ ʔɔ́, “θədá hí,  
 3SG mother say 3SG youngest.child hey  
 nə mí shû māʔ ʔəxó,  
 2SG sleep strong very because  
 hāʔ mí ló pyā hí təyē.  
 walk sleep LOC person house don't  
 khékòʔ təmláʔ mē thô bâ phīʔ pyā hí,  
 later burglar if go.up hit VPsud person house  
 pyā thô yē nā tə nè,  
 person shake move 2SG NEG get  
 nə kə ʔô tē dɔʔ  
 2SG IRR be remain and  
 təmláʔ kə phô nè nā lɔ.”  
 burglar IRR catch get 2SG AST

Her mother said, “You sleep so deeply, so do not go to sleep at someone else’s house. If a burglar suddenly attacks their house later, they would not be able to wake you up, and you will be left behind and captured by the burglar.”

**Note:** /mè/ ‘if’ is also often pronounced /mé/.

- (7) pyā pòʔmíphó ʔi ʔêdɔʔ hāʔ mí ló  
 person girl this love walk sleep LOC  
 ʔə θəkɔʔ ʔəklá dômāʔ ʔəxó,  
 3SG friend among very.much because

xé	ʔə	mò	θəpyàpyà	d5ʔ		
ask	3SG	mother	strongly	and		
lā	khíkətə	ʔə	mò	hê	ʔ5	ʔəkhwēʔ l5.
LOC	last	3SG	mother	give	3SG	permission AST

The girl really wanted to stay at her friend's house, so she pleaded with her mother very strongly, and in the end her mother gave her permission.

- (8) bâ lā nā ʔəwénê  
hit LOC night that.one
- |             |                 |             |        |         |        |         |                |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|----------------|
| təmlāʔ      | lē              | thô         | ḏḏʔ    | hî      | tə     | phlā    | lā             |
| burglar     | go              | up          | attack | house   | one    | NCr     | LOC            |
| pyā         | pòʔmî           | tə          | yā     | lē      | mí     | wé      |                |
| person      | woman           | one         | NCh    | go      | sleep  | VPemp   |                |
| θətāʔd5ʔ    | híkəsà          |             | tī     | ʔə      | θêná   | təmlāʔ  | kəw5 hî        |
| then        | master.of.house |             | when   | 3SG     | know   | burglar | surround house |
| d5ʔ         | thô             | yē          | thô    | ʔə      | hîphó  | nê      |                |
| and         | shake           | move        | up     | 3SG     | family | TOP     |                |
| tələ        | kwiʔ            | wé          | wā     | tə      | bó     | lā      |                |
| roll        | VPthr           | VPemp       | bamboo | one     | NCI    | REL     |                |
| ʔə          | hîphó           | dóḏḏná      | mí     | təkhā   | wé     | d5ʔ     |                |
| 3SG         | family          | whole.tribe | sleep  | bolster | VPemp  | and     |                |
| təblóxó     | ʔə              | hîphó       | khéləʔ | pə      | thô    | d5ʔ     |                |
| in.one.time | 3SG             | family      | all    | wake    | up     | and     |                |
| má          | ʔə              | xè          | kwiʔ   | d5ʔ     |        |         |                |
| command     | 3PL             | run         | VPthr  | and     |        |         |                |
| ʔətā        | xè              | kwiʔ        | ləʔ    | l5.     |        |         |                |
| IPS         | run             | VPthr       | end    | AST     |        |         |                |

That night, the burglar attacked the house where the girl was staying. When the master of the house realized that the burglars were surrounding the house, he rolled up the piece of bamboo that his family was using as a pillow. The whole family woke up immediately, so [he] ordered them to flee, and they all escaped.

- (9) mémè pyā pòʔmî lā ʔə hé mí tə yā  
even.if person woman REL 3SG come sleep one NCh
- |        |       |       |          |      |      |     |      |
|--------|-------|-------|----------|------|------|-----|------|
| ʔə     | khô   | l5têʔ | nàʔké,   | tə   | pə   | thô | bā,  |
| 3SG    | head  | fall  | although | NEG  | wake | up  | NEG  |
| pyā    | thwā  | ʔ5    | tə       | θêná | l5   | ʔə  | θāʔ, |
| person | shove | 3SG   | NEG      | know | down | 3SG | MID  |



pyā	đĩ?	shênō	ʔō,		
person	CAUS	sit.down	3SG		
pyā	plà	ʔə	mê?	lô	thí
person	wash	3SG	face	LOC	water
đĩ?	shóthô	ʔō	dâlê?		
CAUS	stand.up	3SG	in.spite.of		
tə	θênô	ʔə	θā?	bā.	
NEG	remember	3SG	MID	NEG	

The girl who had come to stay did not wake up, even though her head had fallen off [the pillow]. Even when they shook her, she was unconscious. Even after they sat her upright, washed her face with water, and helped her to stand up, she did not wake up.

- (10) mā      jĩʔjĩ?      dō?
- do      a.while      and
- pyā      pà?      tē      kwi?      ʔō      dō?
- person      put      remain      VPthr      3SG      and
- xè      θədā      ʔō      nē      lō
- run      leave      3SG      that      AST

After a while, they left her behind and ran away.

- (11) pyā      pò?mĩ      phóthā      ʔĩ
- person      woman      child      this
- mí      tē      lō      hĩ      pū      dō?
- sleep      remain      LOC      house      inside      and
- təmlà?      tə      phĩ      thĩ      nē      ʔō      dō?
- burglar      one      group      see      get      3SG      and
- sá      xà?      ʔə      sí      wĩ
- bind      VPres      3SG      hand      finish
- mō      lō      bĩ      mē?      ʔō      shú      hókhô      lō
- drag      down      blindfold      eye      3SG      to      ground      on
- đĩʔθō?      kə      mā      θĩ      kwi?      ʔō      lō.
- so.as.to      IRR      CAUS      die      VPthr      3SG      AST

The girl remained asleep inside the house, so the burglar found her and, to kill her, dragged her down to the ground with her hands tied and her eyes blindfolded.

- (12) phé      ʔəkhá      ʔəwé      pà      thō      dō?
- when      time      3SG      wake      up      and

thî	pyā	kə	mā	θí	ʔ̥s	d̥sʔ	
see	person	IRR	CAUS	die	3SG	and	
lā	təplītəphīʔ	phāʔdō	ʔəpū				
LOC	fear	big	inside				
kōʔpəθú	thō	wé	lā	təkənōʔkəsiʔ	d̥sʔ		
cry.out	up	VPemp	LOC	trembling	and		
tā	hō	tā	jō	mō	fiú	mō	fiú d̥sʔ
IPS	cry	IPS	recite	mother	hey!	mother	hey! and
tā	mā	θí	kwiʔ	ʔ̥s	l̥s.		
IPS	CAUS	die	VPthr	3SG	AST		

When she woke up, she saw that they were going to kill her, and she screamed in terror. She cried out, “Mother! Mother!” but she was killed.

- (13) pyā      pòʔmî      tə      yā      ʔī  
 person      woman      one      NCh      this
- təmlāʔ      mā      θí      ʔ̥s      wī  
 burglar      CAUS      die      3SG      finish
- ké      thō      lā      thō      tə      bē      d̥sʔ  
 become      up      LOC      bird      one      NCf      and
- pyē      wé      mō      fiú      mō      fiú      tī      khéʔī      d̥sʔ  
 sing      VPemp      mother      hey!      mother      hey!      until      now      and
- pyā      kōʔ      ʔ̥s      lā      thômōfiú      l̥s.  
 person      call      3SP      LOC      htof.moj.ooh      AST

After this girl was killed by the burglars, she turned into a bird and still calls out “Mother! Mother!” to this day, so people call this bird *htof moj ooh* (bird of “Mother!”).

### 4.3. The same text rewritten in Romei on the basis of the transcription in 4.2

- (1) Htof moj ooh kai htauf av geij
- (2) P’tai wai daf le plez nef, pgaz dau doof nya neif mi t’hkef daf waf htaudoo t’bo xau lauz.
- (3) Tav dauv le s’wau t’hplef av pooz neif pgaz dau puj waij t’hpu of wai nwi gaz dauv av s’da t’gaz meij pov muf, dauv mi hsoof mi kai, tuz av mi li neif t’sEIF nya soof t’sEIF nya sav, pgaz htof gaiz auz hsiw a hsiw a t’pej htauf baf.
- (4) Taj maz ceij kauv av sav le s’wau t’hplef iz av pooz, t’mIax duv taj hkai iz hkai iz lauz.
- (5) T’naz t’hkauf hpo muf s’da t’gaz iz av s’kov kov mi auz le av hif dauv av wai

keiz qei av hkwaiv le av moj lauz.

- (6) Av moj civ auz, “S’da eh, n’mi hsoof mav av qo hax mi le pgaz hif t’geiz. Hkaikox t’mlax mej htauf baf hpuv pgaz hif, pgaz htof gaiz naz t’nej n’k’ of teij dauv t’mlax k’hpauf nej naz lauz.”
- (7) Pgaz pox muf hpo iz aif dov hav mi le av s’kov av kla dof mav av qo, qei av moj s’pgaj pgaj dauv le hki k’taj av moj heif auz av hkwaiv lauz.
- (8) Baf le naz av waineif t’mlax laiz htauf duv hif t’hplef le pgaz pox muf t’gaz laiz mi wai s’tav dauv hif k’caj tuz av seif nya t’mlax k’wauz hif dauv htof gaiz htauf av hif hpo neif t’leif kwix wai waf t’bo le av hif hpo dau doof nya mi t’hkef wai dauv t’blau qau av hif hpo hkailex pej htauf dauv me av qej kwix dauv av taj qej kwix lex lauz.
- (9) Mei mej pgaz pox muf le av hai mi t’gaz av hkof lauz taix nax kei, t’pej htauf baf, pgaz htwaif auz t’sEIF nya lauz av sav, pgaz duv hseif nauz auz, pgaz plaj av maix le hti duv hse htef auz daf laix t’sEIF nauv av sav baf.
- (10) Maz yix yix dauv pgaz pax teij kwix auz dauv qej s’daf auz neif lauz.
- (11) Pgaz pox muf hposaf iz mi teij le hif pooz dauv t’mlax t’hpu htif nej auz dauv ce qax av cu wiz moz lauz bif maix auz hsoo hauf hkof loz div sov k’maz si kwix auz lauz.
- (12) Hpai av hka av wai pej htauf dauv htif pgaz k’maz si auz dauv le taj pliz taj hpuv hpav dof av pooz, kov p’soo htauf wai le taj k’nov k’cux dauv taj hauf taj yez, moj ooh, moj ooh, dauv taj maz si kwix auz lauz.
- (13) Pgaz pox muf t’gaz iz t’mlax maz si auz wiz kai htauf le htof t’beif dauv pgeiz wai, moj ooh, moj ooh, tuz hkai iz dauv pgaz kov auz le htof moj ooh lauz.

## 5. Summary

Romei is a Latin-based writing system used to write Sgaw Karen and was first developed in Burma. However, the center of its use later moved to Thailand, and it was influenced by dialect(s) on the Thai side (probably dialect(s) around the Chiang Mai area). In this article, I showed the correspondence between the Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation (SKSP) and Romei and attempted to write SKSP in Romei. When using Romei to write SKSP, the letter *s* represents /θ/, and *c* and *hs* represent /s-/

and /sh-/, respectively. Furthermore, when writing SKSP in Romei, it is necessary to consider how to write the initial consonants /c-/, /ch-/, /ɕ-/, and /z-/. Thus, I propose the spellings *ky*, *hky*, *sy*, and *z* for these consonants. For rhymes, although the spellings *eix*, *eiv*, *ox*, and *ov* are not used when writing Sgaw Karen on the Thai side, they are necessary to write the SKSP. Moreover, in relation to the spelling of rhymes, Romei lacks systematicity: atonic syllables are written in two ways, and it is not possible to distinguish between the two syllables /ʔə/ and /ʔāʔ/. Thus, I suggest that /ʔāʔ/ be written as *a'v* when it is necessary to distinguish between the syllables /ʔə/ and /ʔāʔ/.

This study aims to clarify Romei's system in terms of linguistics. I hope that this has been achieved to some extent by writing SKSP in Romei. Although Romei is generally a systematic writing system, its inability to distinguish between /ʔə/ and /ʔāʔ/ becomes a problem in terms of systematicity, even if it does not impair functionality. The inability to write the initial consonants /c-/, /ch-/, /ɕ-/, and /z-/ is a problem caused by dialectal differences and is not related to systematicity.

When Sgaw Karen speakers on the Thai side read an SKSP text written in Romei, they may experience a slight sense of discomfort, which can be classified into three types: one occurs when they see the spellings *ky*, *hky*, *sy*, and *z*, which are not used on the Thai side. The second occurs when they see combinations of vowel and tone symbols that they do not see in Thailand, namely *eix*, *eiv*, *ox*, and *ov*. The third occurs when they encounter words or expressions that are not used in Thailand. For example, the word for 'dog' is listed in Seguinotte (2007:233) in the form *hswif*. This is probably the standard form used in the Chiang Mai area. Based on the SKSP form /thwî/, 'dog' is spelled *htwif*, and this would probably seem strange to speakers who are used to the form *hswif*. All three cases are fundamentally caused by dialectal differences. Since there is no standard language for all dialects spoken in Myanmar and Thailand, it is inevitable that this kind of discomfort will arise regardless of the spelling adopted. However, these problems are minor from a broader perspective. Romei texts based on SKSP can be easily read and understood by users of Romei in Thailand. For example, if a user of Romei in Thailand reads the text in Section 4.3, he or she will easily understand its content.

Finally, I would like to end this paper with a proposal. Using the correspondences

shown in Tables 6, 7, and 8, the Christian Sgaw Karen script can be Romanized using Romei. Many people, including researchers and librarians, are motivated to Romanize the Christian Sgaw Karen script. I recommend the use of Romei for such people.

## Abbreviations

AST = particle indicating assertion; CAUS = causative; COP = copular verb; IPS = impersonal subject ((?ə)tà, whose original meaning is “thing”); IRR = irrealis; LOC = particle indicating location, goal, and source; MID = middle voice marker; NCf = numeral classifier for a flat thing; NCh = numeral classifier for a human; NCl = numeral classifier for a long thing; NCr = numeral classifier for a round thing; NEG = negation; PFV = perfective; PL = plural; REL = relative clause marker; SG = singular; SKSP = Sgaw Karen Standard Pronunciation; TOP = topic; VPemp = verb particle wé or wédâ indicating emphasis; VPlim = verb particle dá indicating limitation, i.e., ‘only’; VPres = resultative verb particle xà?; VPsud = verb particle phĩ? indicating suddenness; VPthr = verb particle kwi? indicating thoroughness; 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person.

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