

We can also make some observations regarding the relationship of NORTHERN PWO KAREN and LAMPANG PWO KAREN to the varieties of Pwo Karen spoken in Burma. Once again, our data are limited. However, it is clear that the Burmese varieties represent different dialect groupings than the varieties spoken in northern Thailand. The Kawareik variety is 78.4% lexically similar to NORTHERN PWO KAREN and 76.7% lexically similar to LAMPANG PWO KAREN. It is 88% lexically similar to the MOULMEIN/BASSEIN²¹ variety. It is 83% lexically similar to the Phetburi varieties, 85.5% lexically similar to the Kanchanaburi varieties, and 88% lexically similar to the Uthai Thani variety, the northernmost of the three. It is likely that there is a continuum of Pwo Karen dialects running north to south in Thailand. How the Burmese varieties tie into this continuum is unclear. However, based on the data from KAWAREIK it is possible that the KAWAREIK variety would be most closely related to the Pwo Karen spoken in the Mae Sot area (of Thailand). Of the varieties of Pwo Karen considered for which data are available, it is closest lexically to the variety spoken in Uthai Thani province which is in central Thailand, south of Mae Sot.

The Moulmein/Bassein variety spoken in Burma is 82.8% lexically similar to NORTHERN PWO KAREN and 82.3% lexically similar to LAMPANG PWO KAREN. It is 86.5% lexically similar to the Kanchanaburi variety and 84.7% lexically similar to the Phetburi varieties. It is closest to the Uthai Thani variety with 90% lexical similarity. Thus, the Burmese varieties of Pwo Karen in this study appear to be most closely related to the varieties of Pwo Karen that are spoken in central Thailand.

6. Conclusions

In this study I have sought to clarify the relationship of the various varieties of Pwo Karen spoken in northern Thailand. We have seen that there is evidence to

²¹Lexically these two speech varieties are nearly identical.

suggest that there are two principal dialect groupings in the northern provinces of Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son. I have suggested that we label these LAMPANG PWO KAREN and NORTHERN PWO KAREN. The former is spoken in only seven villages, four of which are located in Lampang province and three of which are found in Chiang Rai province. NORTHERN PWO KAREN, on the other hand, is spoken in five of the six provinces, the exception being Lampang.

The geographical boundaries of NORTHERN PWO KAREN extend north to where Chiang Rai province borders Burma and Laos, east into Phrae province, west to the Burmese border, and south to the southern part of Mae Hong Son below Sop Moei, the southern part of Chiang Mai below Omkoi, and the extreme south of Lamphun province.

Although, there is a range of lexical and phonological variation within NORTHERN PWO KAREN, the lexicostatistics, phonostatistics, and the data from interviews all suggest that intelligibility between the various varieties remains very high. LAMPANG PWO KAREN, on the other hand, has only limited lexical and phonological variation.

Not surprisingly, some varieties of Pwo Karen spoken in northern Thailand do not fit nicely into either the NORTHERN or LAMPANG PWO KAREN dialect groupings, e.g. the HUAI LA and HUAI MUANG varieties. Such varieties appear to have resulted from recent migration from outside the dialect grouping area or to have simply had a different migration pattern than the more typical varieties that are found in the North. Other varieties, such as LEKHO, belong to another dialect grouping altogether.

It is hoped that further research will clarify the relationships between the varieties of Pwo Karen spoken in northern Thailand and those spoken south of Mae Hong Son as well as in Burma.