

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Historical, Cultural, and Geographic Background of Karen

#### 1.1.1 Overview

Most Karen are in Myanmar. They are divided up into many groups of Karen such as Sgaw, Pwo, Pa'O, Bwe, Geba, Yintale, Manu, Kayan (Padaung), Kayah Li, etc. Each group uses its own language to communicate. Many linguists are interested in these minority languages because the studies and the literature on these minority languages are not complete. Haudricourt (1975) stressed the importance of studying minority languages saying that it gives us anthropological knowledge and is of educational importance. Moreover, it is very useful for comparative linguistic study and classifying relationships between languages. According to Saw Lar Baa, the Karenic languages of northern Karen State in Myanmar are at risk for two reasons. First, these Karenic languages are spoken by relatively small numbers of speakers and they are situated between two large and vigorous languages, Sgaw Karen and Burmese. Secondly, speakers of the Northwest Karenic languages do not have their own orthographies with which to read and write their own dialects in their daily activities.

Thus, recognizing the importance of minority languages and of maintaining these minority languages in order to avoid language death because of strong influence from the surrounding languages, I have decided to study three Central Karenic languages: Bwe, Geba 1 and Geba 2.

### 1.1.2 General Information on the Karen

The largest minority ethnic group in Thailand is the Karen. Lewis and Lewis (1984) suggest that the Karen may have originated in Southeastern Tibet or southwestern China and then migrated into eastern Myanmar. The majority of the Karen (approximately 4 million) still live in Myanmar. Most Karen in Thailand belong either to the Sgaw or the Pwo ethnic group. The Sgaw Karen began migrating from Myanmar to Northern Thailand at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while the Pwo followed early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lewis, 1984 : 12).

### 1.1.3 Geographical Location<sup>1</sup>

In Thailand, the Karen live in both lowland and highland villages. The lowland Karen live on hills of lower elevation (200 to 400 meters) with narrow valleys. The highland Karen villages are situated among the rolling hills and small valleys of the highlands. The highland Karen live at altitudes of 600 to 2,000 meters. (Lewis and Lewis, 1984: 14). In Burma, Karen settlements are in the low flat clears of the Irrawaddy, Sittang and Salween river deltas, and the coast of Tenasserim, the Pegu range, a hilly region and narrow valleys lying between the Irrawaddy and Sittang and in the Kayah and Karen states and interior Tenasserim and in the Shan upland. (Puttachart, 1983: 1)

From the encyclopedia of ethnic groups in Thailand **SGAW KAREN** (Suriya Rattanakul and Somsong Burasphat, 1995: 2), there are four major groups of Karen in Thailand: Sgaw, Pwo, Bwe, and Taungthu. Sgaw are widely distributed in the western half of the north and along the Thai-Myanmar border downwards to the south. Pwo are found nearby the Sgaw settlements. Bwe are found in northern Thailand near the Thai-Myanmar border especially in Amphoe Khun Yuam, Amphoe Hua Sia Toa, Amphoe Khun Hua Daim, Amphoe Hua Daim, Mae Hong

---

<sup>1</sup> Since 1989, many geographical location names have been reassigned. When quoting others, I maintain the names used in the original document. Otherwise, I use the current recommended name and spelling. See Appendix B for a comparison of old and new names.

Som Province. There are very few Taungthu in Thailand; they can be found in the Amphe Muang, Mae Hong Son Province. The distribution of Karen in the four main groups is represented in Figure 1.

Besides the four major groups, there are two small groups of Karen: Kayan (Padaung) and Geba which have more recently migrated from Myanmar to northern Thailand.

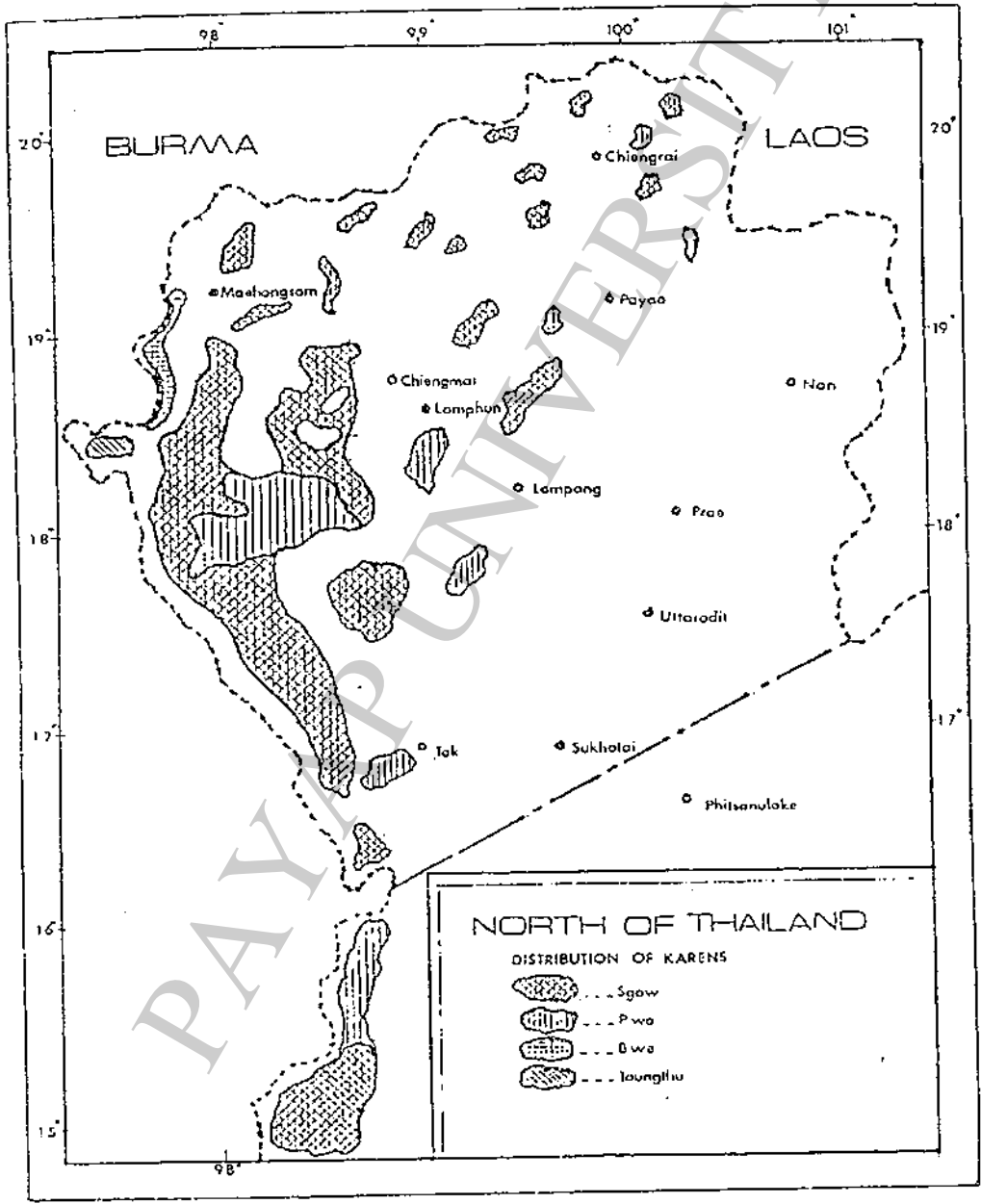


Figure 1: Map showing the distribution of Karens in the North of Thailand (Puttachart1983: 4)

From Renard's research (1980: 12-13), in Thailand, Sgaw Karen settlements are generally north of Pwo Karen settlements, for example, Sgaws greatly outnumber Pwos in the northern districts of Mae Hongson and Chiang Mai Provinces. Of course Sgaws do live further south also, but in generally diminishing proportions to the Pwo in the provinces of Tak, Kamphaeng Phet, and Uthai Thani. Only scattered Sgaw villages are found south of Uthai Thani. These few Sgaws live in the most remote upland areas of Suphanburi, Kanchanaburi, Ratburi, Phetburi, and Phrachuab Provinces. No Sgaws live as far south and east as the central clears of Thailand or on the flatlands of the Malay Peninsula. In northern Thailand, Sgaws live as far east as Chiang Rai city. In Myanmar, several thousand Sgaws also live in the Southern Shan States. The vast majority of Sgaws reside in the northern Myanmar Delta, the Pegu Yoma (mountains) and the dry zone of central Myanmar. Historically they lived in areas near Burman habitation and were once known as the 'Burman Karens.'

The Pwo tend to live south of the Sgaws and in the past have preferred a proximity to water. Sometimes called the 'Water Karens,' Pwos resided in the southern Myanmar Delta and Tenasserim close to Mons, where they were also once known as 'Mon Karens.' With changing conditions, Pwos have migrated into non-Mon areas in Bassein and to locales far from the Bay of Bengal in Thailand. Pwos dwell in Thailand from southwestern Chiang Mai Province along the entire Thai-Myanmar border. From Uthai Thani to Phetburi provinces they are the dominant Karen group. (Renard, 1980: 13)

According to the National Statistical office of Thailand, Pwo Karen live in the province of Kanchanaburi, Tak, Prachuapkhirkhan, Phetchaburi, Ratchaburi, Suphan Buri, Kamphaeng Phet, Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Lampang, Lumphun, Sukhothai, Uthai Thani, Mae Hong Son, and Phrae.

According to Saw Lar Baa, the exact location of the Karen people is rather difficult to pinpoint. They are scattered all over Myanmar. The areas where most of the Karen are found, however, are the southern part of Shan State, Kayah State, Karen State, Pegu Division, Yangon Division, Teninthayi Division, Mon State and the Irrawaddy Division in Myanmar. Karen are also found in Myanmar in the Irrawaddy and Sittang valleys from the coast to about 19 °N., and in the entire length of Tenasserim from 10 °N. up through the hills along the Thai border and into the Shan plateau as far as 21 °N. The majority of Karen live in the central Irrawaddy Delta and in the southern of Tenasserim at the head of the Gulf of Martaban.

The three Karen groups included in this research (Bwe, Geba 1, and Geba 2) can be found in the map in Figure 1 and 2. Bwe are found on the east and west banks of Daylo stream in Thandaungyi township in Myanmar. Geba are situated in Taungoo township.

#### 1.1.4 Population

The National Statistical office of Thailand recently published a census of the hill tribe population in Thailand for the period between 1985 and 1988. There were a total of 554,171 Thai hill tribal peoples from 9 different tribes. The Karen have the largest population with a total of 275,615, 49.74% of the total Thai hill tribe population. The total of Karen population in four major groups is shown in Table 1.

Tribe/Groups	Villages	The population	Percentage
Sgaw	280	45,000	63.5
Pwo	150	24,000	33.8
Bwe	20	1,300	1.8
Taungthu	5	600	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>70,900</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1: The population of Karen in four major groups in Thailand  
(Young D.G 1962: 16)

The detail of Karen population in Myanmar and Thailand is shown as below.

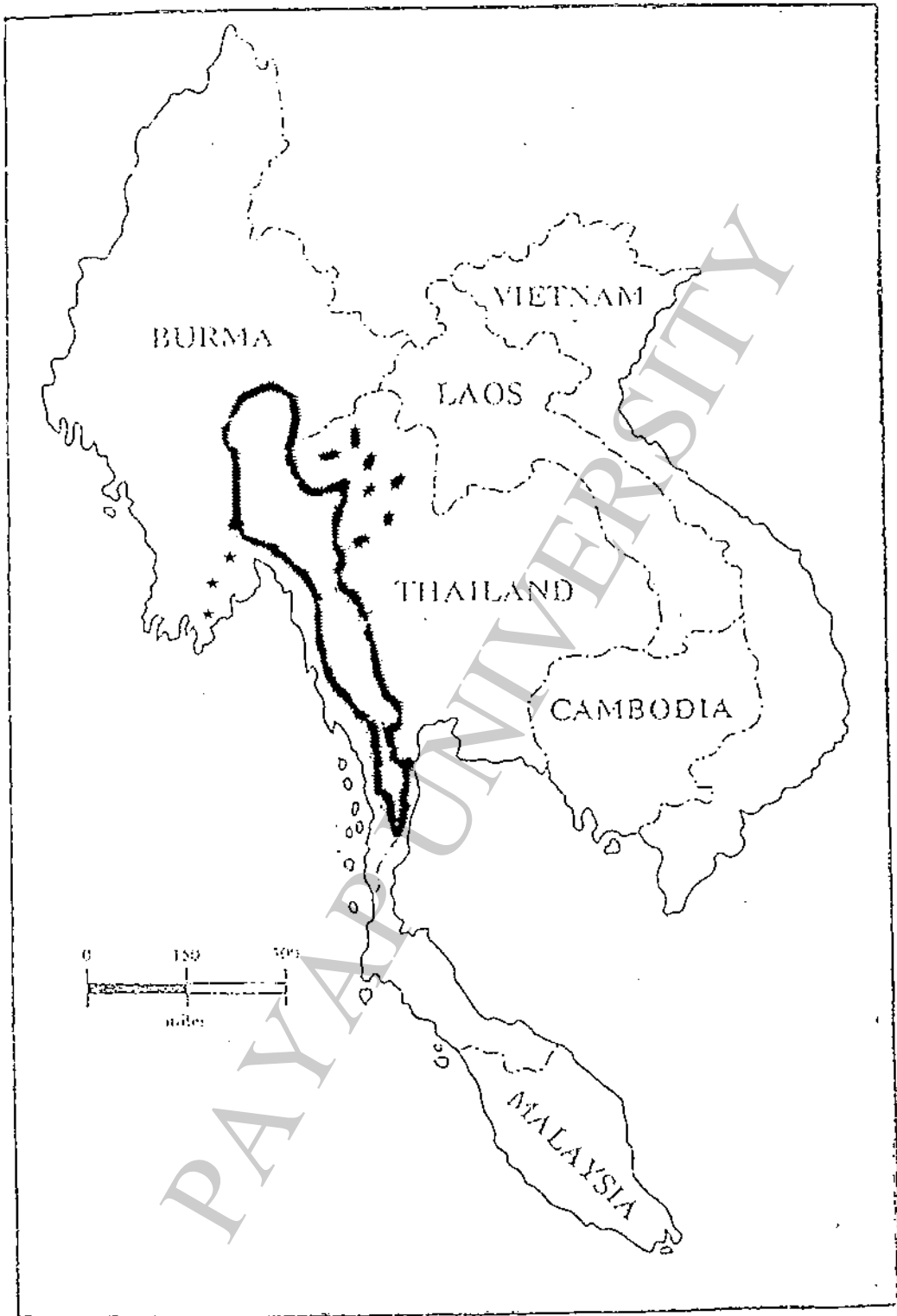


Figure 2: Map showing the location of Karen Populations (Keyes 1979: 9)

Province	The quantity of Population
Kanchanaburi	23,555
Kamphaeng Phet	1,121
Chiang Rai	6,328
Chiang Mai	123,630
Tak	67,630
Prachuapkhirikhan	786
Phetchaburi	3,659
Phrae	8,160
Mae Hong Son	77,280
Ratchaburi	8,307
Lampang	3,591
Lumphun	24,709
Sukhothai	687
Suphan Buri	1,185
Uthai Thani	2,445

Table 2: The population of Karen  
(Sujaritrak Depadung and Sarinya Kummuang 1997: 3)

Lewis (1984) reported that approximately 80% of all Karen belong to the Sgaw ethnic group, while the remaining 20% are Pwo in the lowlands. No data is available on the specific percentages of Pwo vs. Sgaw in the highlands. For the two central Karenic groups (Bwe and Geba groups), the population is unknown. According to Saw Lar Baa (2001), in Myanmar there are 40 villages and 6,000 Bwe Baptist Christians in total. For the Geba, there are altogether 36 villages and 3,500 Geba Baptist Christians. Fraser Bennett (1997) said that the number of speakers of Bwe is 17,200 and 9,500 for Geba.

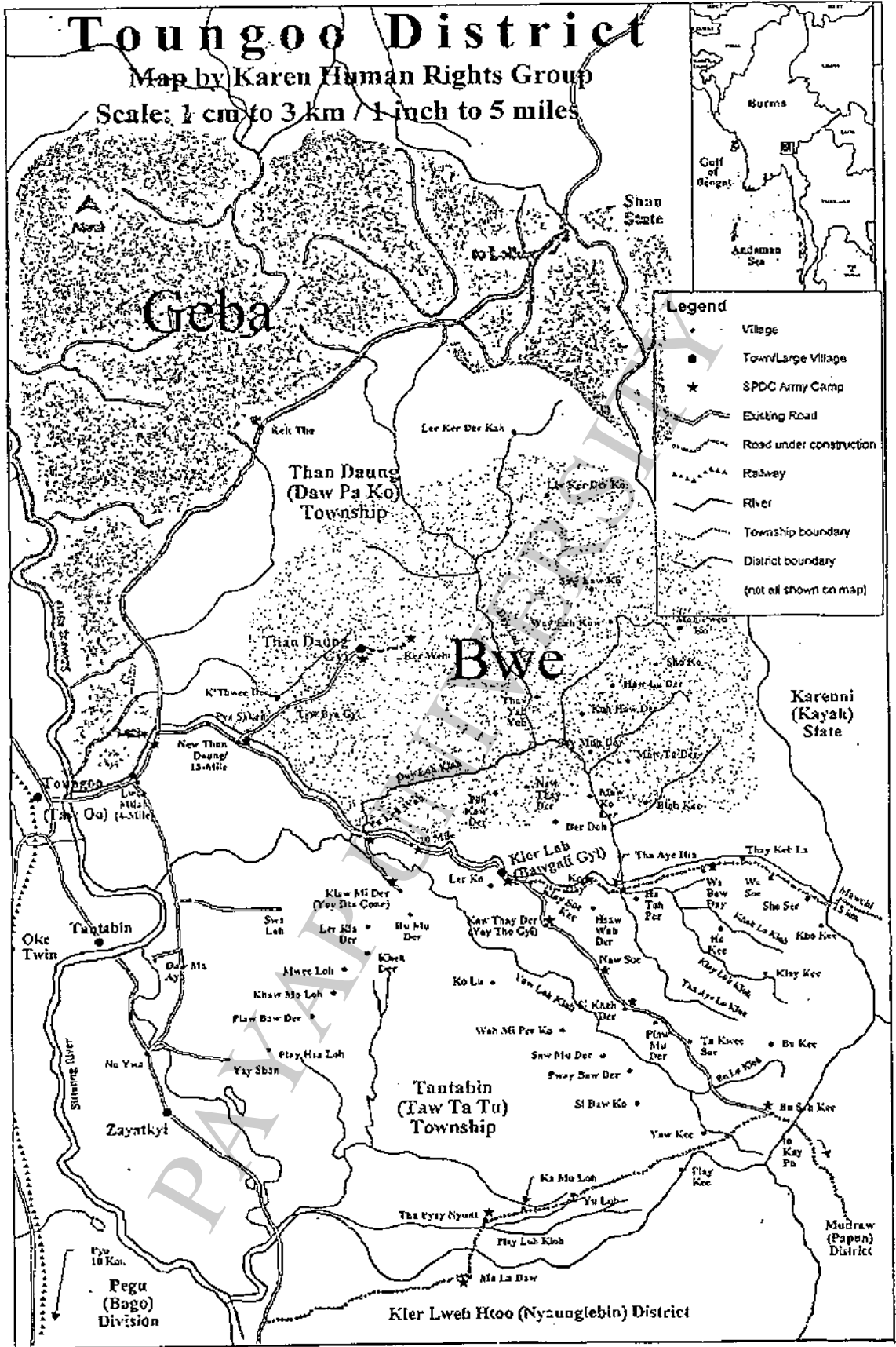


Figure 3: Map showing the location of Bwe and Geba (Ken Manson 2002)



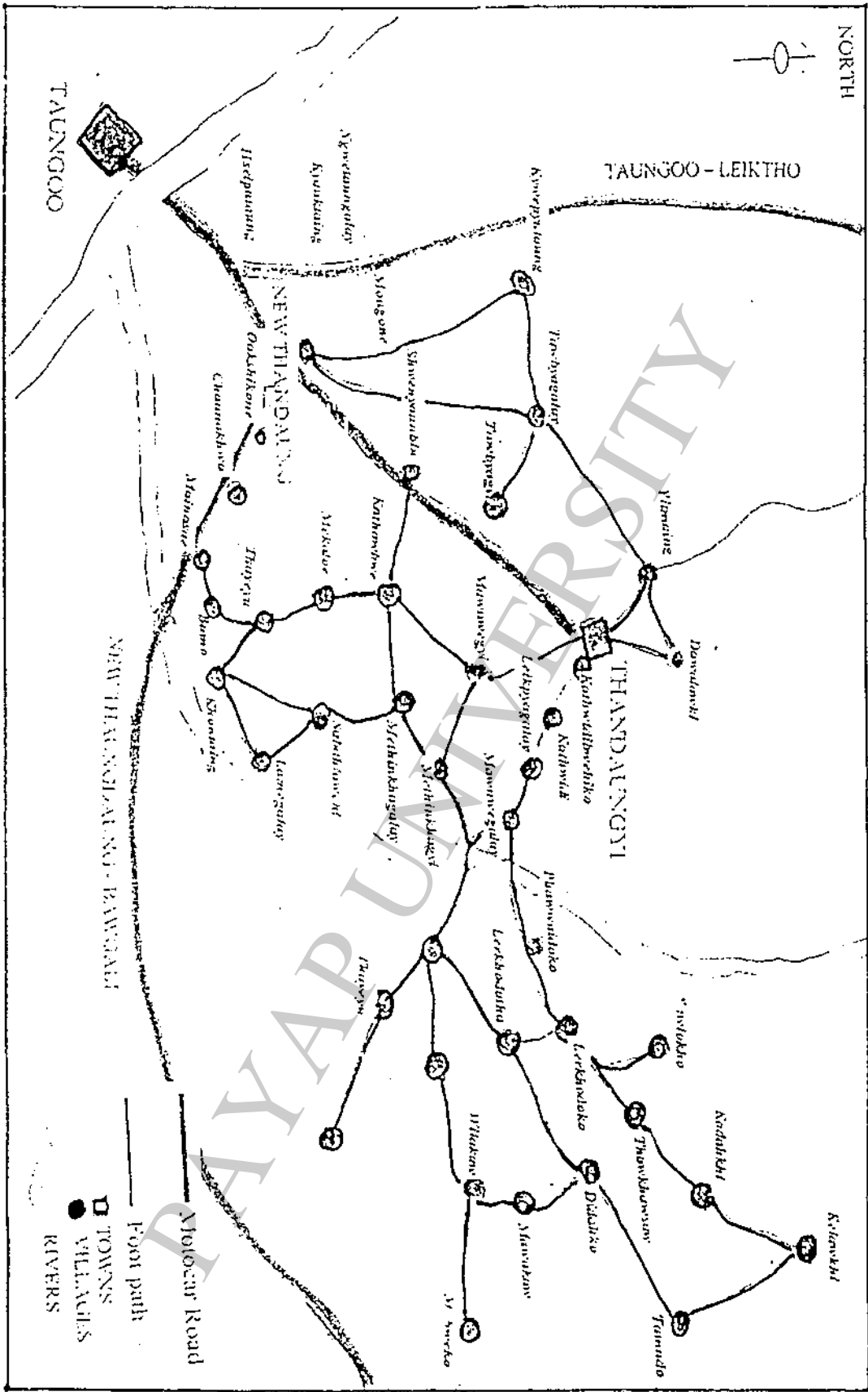


Figure 4: Map showing the location of Bwe 1 and Bwe 2 (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 147)

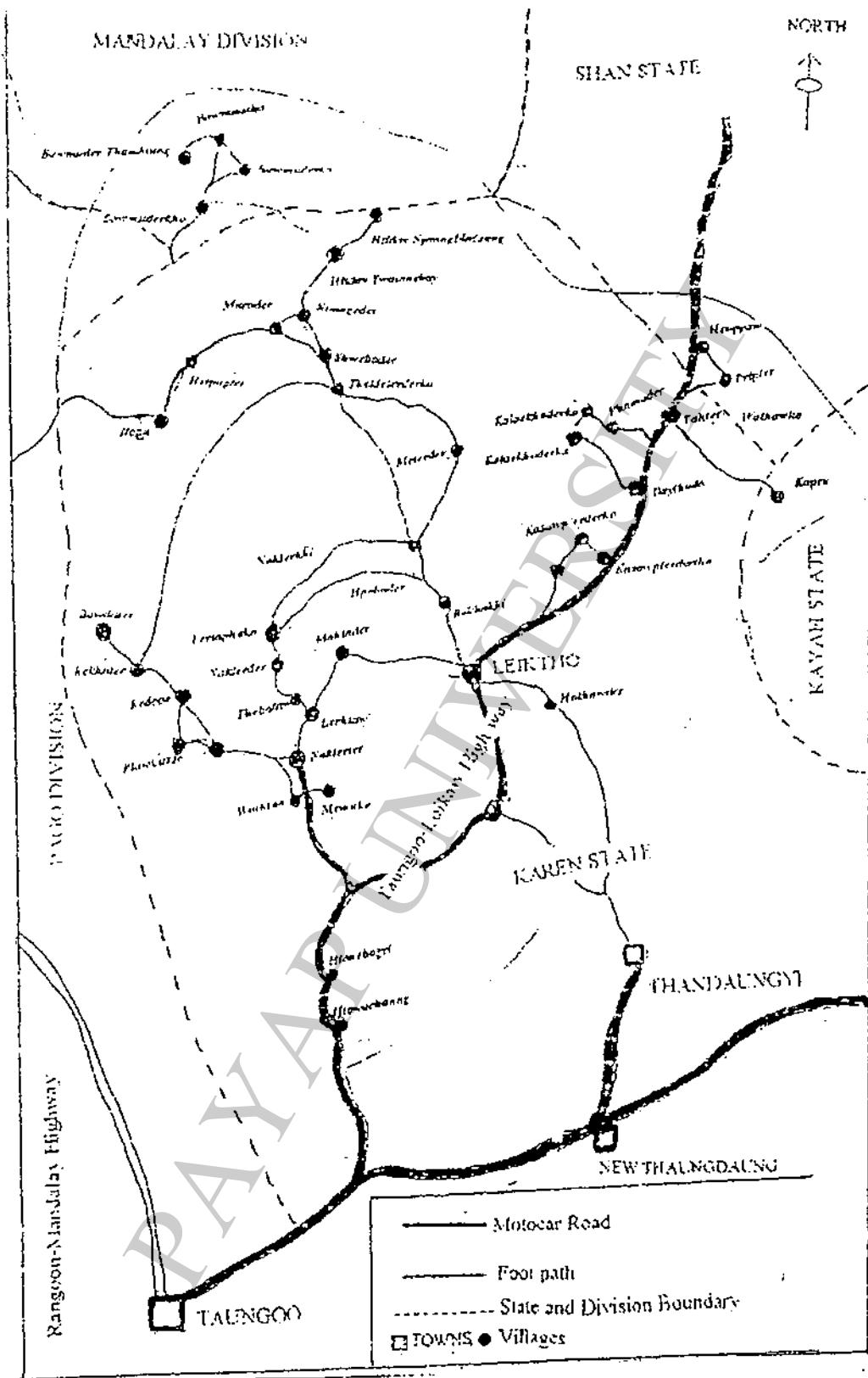


Figure 5: Map showing the location of Geba (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 148)

### 1.1.5 Linguistic Classification of Karen and Subgroups

Benedict (1972) classifies the Karenic language as belonging to the Sino-Tibetan language family under the Tibeto-Karen due to the SVO structure of Karenic language. While Matisoff, on the other hand classifies it under Tibeto Burman (as shown in Figure 5). Thus its position among Tibeto Burman languages has been disputed.

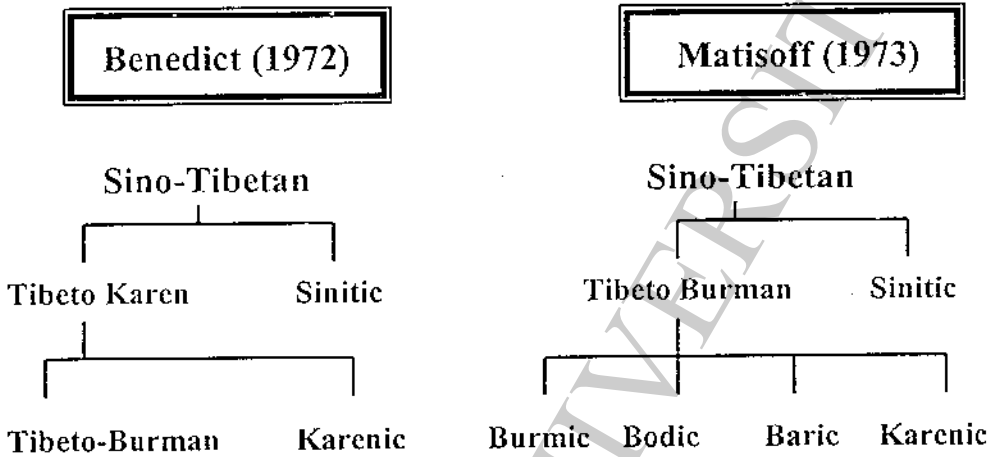
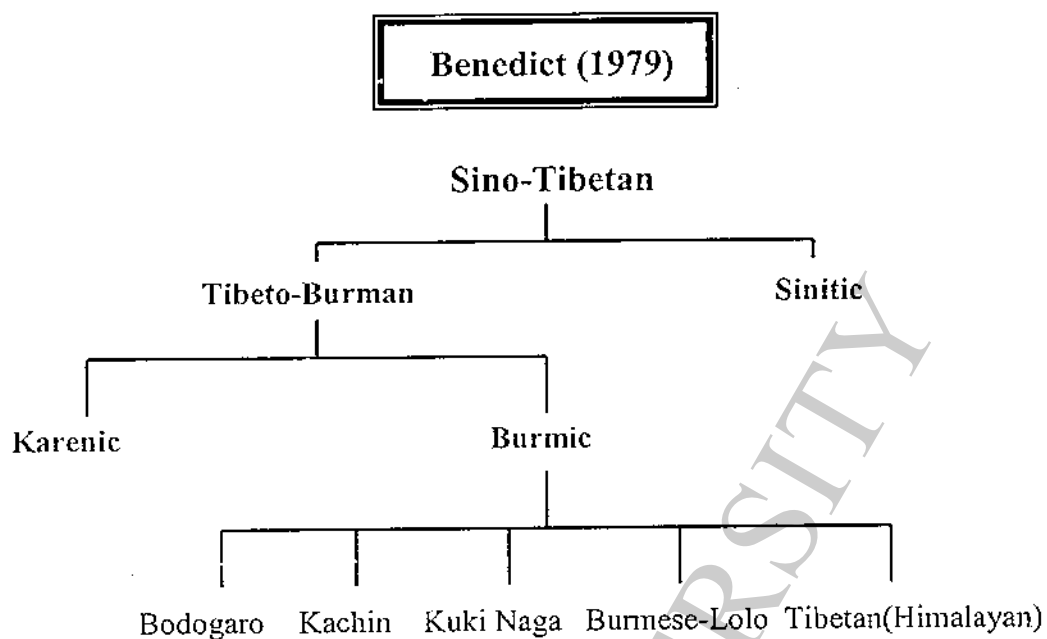


Figure 6: Alternate places of Karenic languages within Sino-Tibetan (Fraser 1995: 159)

After a re-analysis based on lexicostatistic analysis of shared vocabulary, Benedict (1979) rejected the Tibeto-Burman/Karen dichotomy and suggested the following Stammbaum diagram:



**Figure 7:** The Sino-Tibetan language stock (Saw Lar Baa, 2001: 6)

Karen is classified into three main groups by geographical designation: the Southern, Central, and Northern groups. The northern group is the Pa'O. The southern group has the two largest groups of Karen, the Sgaw and the Pwo. The central Karen refers to the following Karenic languages: Western Kayah, Eastern Kayah, Yintale, Kayaw, Manu, Kayan (Padaung), Yeinbaw, Gheko., Bwe, and Geba.

Kauffman (1993) provides a suggestion to define the Central Karenic languages in geographical terms as shown in Figure 7.

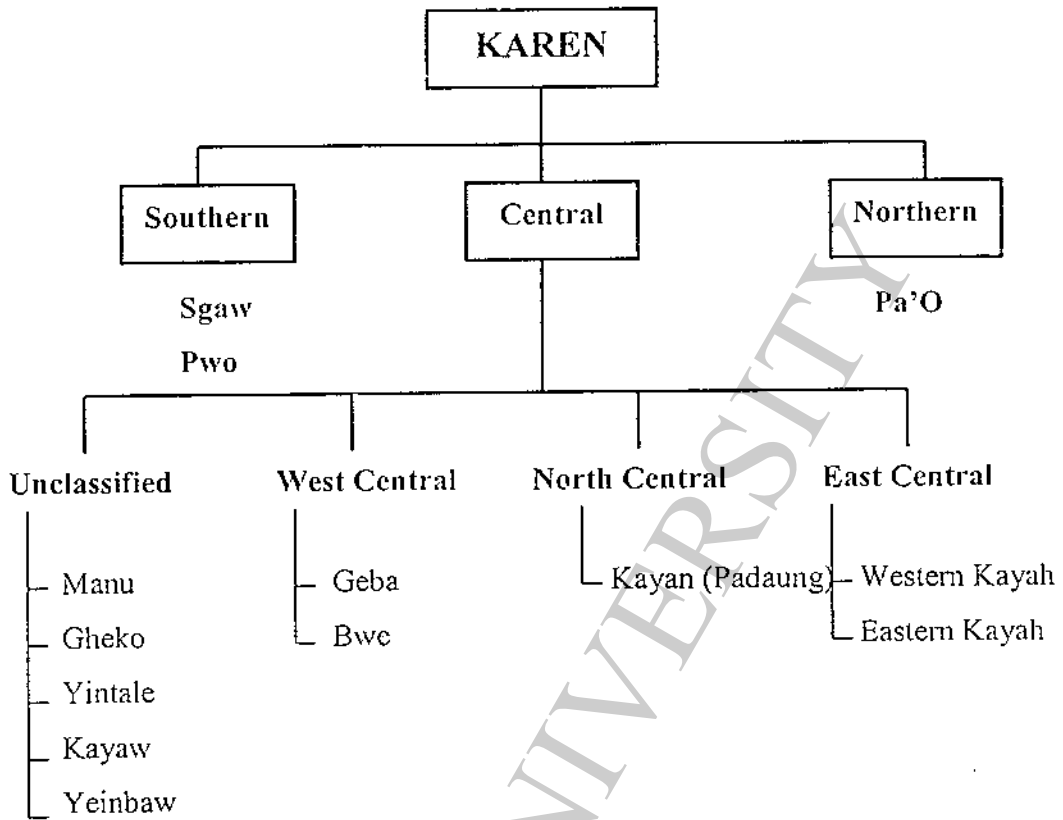


Figure 8: Karenic language Relationship (Kauffman 1993)

Ken Manson (2002) says David Bradley has done the most complete classification of Karenic languages but he does not provide any evidence for the classification presented. It is shown in Figure 8.

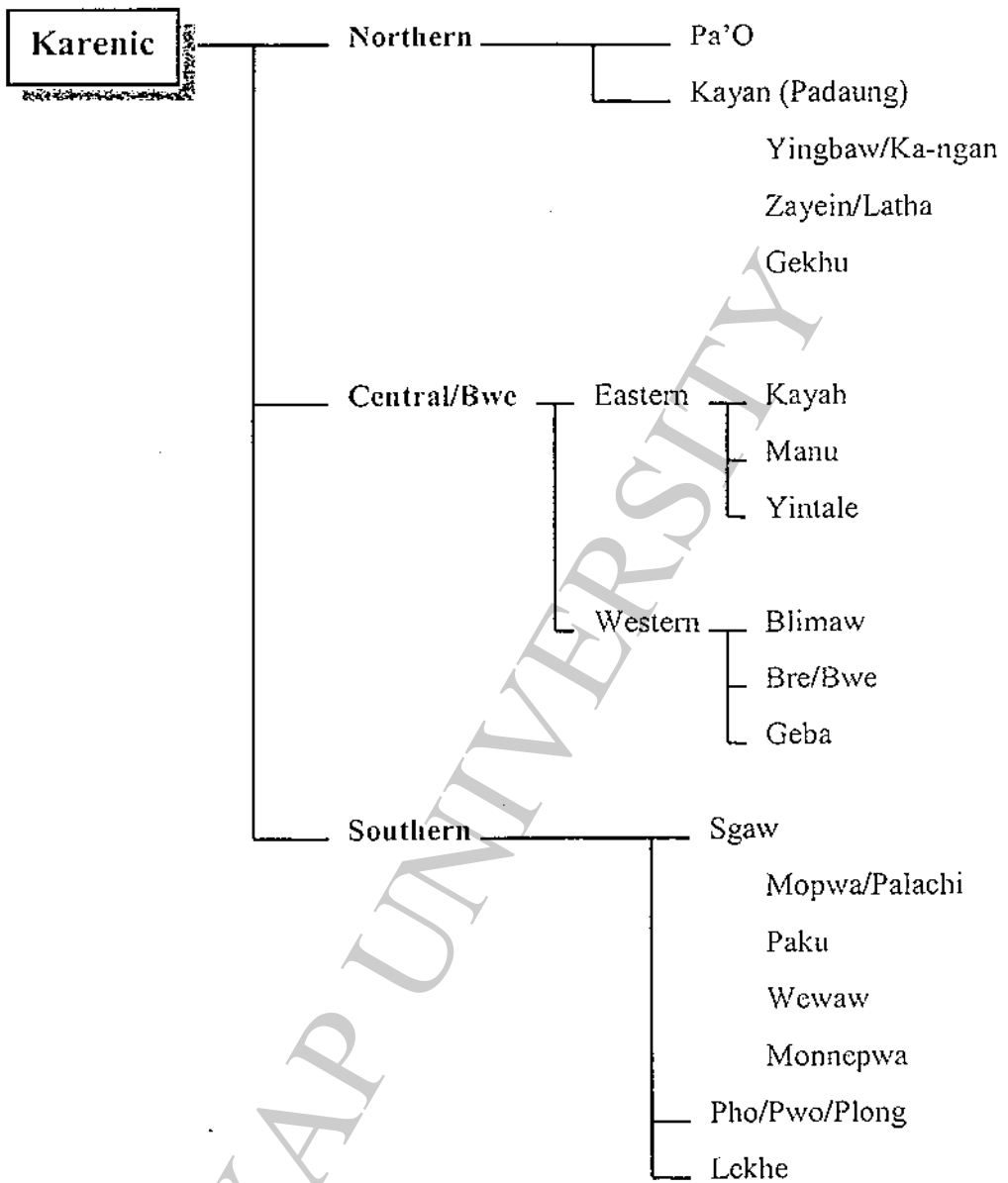


Figure 9: Karenic Language Relationships (Ken Manson 2002: 6)

### 1.1.6 General Ethnography

The highland Karen live in simple bamboo or wooden houses on stilts. There is usually one large main room, with a fireplace for cooking in the center of the room. Karen daily life is relatively simple. Adult women and girls pound the paddy rice twice a day, first in the early morning (4:30 AM to 6:30 AM) and then in the afternoon (3:30 PM to 5:00 PM), for their family meals. Women and children also usually collect firewood (except during the rainy season), carry water a few times a day for cooking and drinking, and take care of domestic animals such as pigs and chickens. Adults of both sexes and older boys and girls also farm, fish, and gather wild foods. Women weave and sew when they have the time. Though men and women do share many everyday chores, only the men in the village hunt. Older men hunt primarily for food, while older boys and young men sometimes also hunt for pleasure. (Kinuko Omori 1994: 14)

### 1.1.7 Agriculture

Rice planting usually runs from May to June after the start of the rainy season. Most adults and children older than 12 or 13 years of age participate in swidden and/or irrigated rice growing activities. All Pwo highland Karen and approximately 70% of the Sgaw in the study population practiced swidden rice production; approximately 1/3 of the Sgaw practiced wet rice production, though no Pwo used this method of farming (Kinuko Omori, 1994: 15).

The harvest season, which falls between October and the beginning of December, is the most active period of the agricultural cycle. Many men and older boys, some women and older girls, and sometimes even the whole family, camp near their fields for the harvest, since fields are usually one and a half to three hours walk away. Most villagers usually have more free time than usual for a few months after they have finished carrying the rice to their granaries in the village after harvest (Kinuko Omori 1994: 15).

## 1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.2.1 Phonology of Central Karenic languages

#### 1.2.1.1 Eastern and Western Kayah

The Kayah language is a Central Karenic language. There are two main divisions of Kayah, known as Eastern and Western Kayah. The previous research of David Solnit (1986) and John R. Bryant (1993) studied the phonological system of Kayah including Eastern and Western Kayah. Solnit's work details Eastern Kayah phonology while Western Kayah phonology was the focus of Bryant's work.

Solnit (1986) describes the phonology and grammar of the Eastern Kayah (Red Karen) language spoken at Khun Huay Dya village located on the right bank of the Paaj river and at Huaj Sya Thaw and Huaj Dya villages located on the left bank of the Paaj river, Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand.

The phonological description of the Eastern Kayah language is as follows:

The syllable structure is  $(C_1)(C_2)^T(G)V$

- $C_1$  is any consonant
- $C_2$  is a liquid
- G is a glide
- V is a vowel
- T is a tone



**Consonant Phonemes:** There are 21 single consonant phonemes, as follows:

	Labial	Dental	Alveolar Palatal	Retroflex	Velar	Glottal
VI. Unasp	p	t	c		k	(ʔ)
VI. Asp	p <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>	c <sup>h</sup>		k <sup>h</sup>	
Voiced	b	d	(j)			
Nasal	m	n				
Voiceless Fricative		s				h
Voiced Continuant	w	l	(j)	r		

Table 3: Eastern Kayah consonant inventory (Solnit 1986: 14)

Solnit notes that /j/ varies between a standard palatal glide and a voiced palatal fricative. It also occasionally appears as a slightly prenasalized alveopalatal affricate [ʎdz], especially in the low falling tone (1986:14). He further describes 'zero initial: in non-particles this is realized as either glottal stop or zero, the former more common after a pause or in emphatic speech, the latter more common in connected speech. In particles it is always zero: the clitic nature of particles finds phonetic expression in their being fused to the preceding morpheme if they begin with a vowel' (1986:15).

**Vowel phonemes:** There are 10 single vowels /i, e, ε, a, ɯ, ɤ, ʌ, u, o, ɔ/.

**Tones:** There are 4 major tones and one marginal tone: mid level tone, low level tone, low falling tone, high tone, and high falling tone.

The marginal tone is a high-falling tone. Solnit mentions about the marginal tone that 'the high falling-tone is quite rare, occurring most often in animal names and some other polysyllabic morphemes.' He treats the high-falling tone as an allotone of the high tone.

Bryant (1993) gathered data from speakers of the Kyebugyi dialect area who have come to reside in Thailand. The phonological description of the Western Kayah Li language is as follows:

There are three syllable types in Western Kayah Li: V, CV and CCV.

C is any consonant

V is a vowel

Bryant described that the nucleus of the syllable can occur without consonantal margins, or it can be preceded by a consonant or a consonant cluster. Closed syllables are never found in Kayah, though glottals can occur after vowels. The CV syllable pattern is by far the most common.

**Consonant Phonemes:** There are 22 single consonant phonemes, as follows:

		Labial	Inter Dental	Alveolar	Alv retroflex	Alv Pal	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	Vl	p		t				k	
	Vl asp	p <sup>h</sup>		t <sup>h</sup>				k <sup>h</sup>	
	Vd	b		d					
Affricate	Vl					tʃ			
Fricative	Vl		θ		ʂ				h
	Vl asp			s <sup>h</sup>					
	Vd	v		z					
Nasal	Vd	m		n				ŋ	
Tap				r					
Lateral				l					
Approximant	vd	w					j		

**Table 4:** Western Kayah Li consonant inventory (Bryant 1993: 5)

**Vowel phonemes:** There are 9 single vowels.

	FRONT		CENTRAL		BACK	
	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded
Close	i		ə		ɯ	u
Half-Close	e					o
Half-Open	ɛ					ɔ
Open			a			

**Table 5:** Western Kayah Li vowel inventory (Bryant 1993: 14)

All vowels can also be breathy. The diphthongs /w<sup>ə</sup>/ is also found in Western Kayah Li Language.

**Tones:** There are 4 tones in Western Kayah Li language.

Low tone

Mid tone

Regular tone (no marking)

High tone

Bryant suggested that the regular tone is higher than the mid tone, but almost imperceptibly.

### 1.2.1.2 The Central Karenic Languages

Saw Lar Baa (2001) studied the phonological description of the seven northwest Karen varieties and one dialect of Kayah in order to compare these with the standard Sgaw Karen phonology.

This research deals with Bwe, and Geba languages. So the phonological description below will be shown following these languages.

### 1.2.1.2.1 Eastern Bwe

Bwe is spoken in northwestern Karen State, western Kayah State, and the adjoining areas of Shan State. There are two main divisions of Bwe: Eastern and Western Bwe.

According to Saw Lar Baa's analysis, the phonological description of the Eastern Bwe language is as follows:

The syllable structure is CVT and CCVT

C is any consonant

V is a vowel

T is a tone

Saw Lar Baa described the onset of a major syllable in Eastern Bwe is composed of an initial consonant, an optional medial consonant (most commonly the labial approximant /w/, or the lateral /l/, or rarely the voiced velar fricative /ɣ/ or alveolar approximant /r/). The nucleus is composed of a vowel. The final aspect in the syllable structure is tone. Every major syllable carries a tone. The syllable is always open.

Minor syllables are always stressless, and never bear a distinctive tone. Minor syllables are composed of an initial consonant and mid central vowel /ə/. The initial consonant of a minor syllable is generally a fortis unaspirated stop /p t k/, though initial /l/, /s/, and /dʒ/ are also found.

### Consonant Phonemes

The inventory of eastern Bwe consonant is shown in Table 6.

		Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Postalv	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	fortis vl	p	t̪	t		k	ʔ
	fortis asp	p <sup>h</sup>		t <sup>h</sup>		k <sup>h</sup>	
	lenis vd	b		d		g	
Implosive	lenis vd	ɓ		ɗ			
Affricates	fortis vl				tʃ		
	lenis vl				dʒ		
Fricative	fortis vl			s s <sup>h</sup>	sʰ	(x)	h
	lenis vd			(z)		(ɣ)	
Nasal	voiced	m		n		(ŋ)	
	voiceless	(m̥)		(n̥)			
Lateral				l			
Lateral	Fricative			ɬ			
Trill				(r)			
Approximant		w			j		

Table 6: East Bwe consonant inventory (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 40)

He noted that phones which occur so rarely in the data that their phonological status is uncertain are included, but enclosed in parenthesis.

**Vowel phonemes:** The inventory of eastern Bwe vowels is shown in the following table.

	Front	Central	Back
	Unrounded	Unrounded	Rounded
Close	i	ɨ	u
Mid	e	ə	o
	ɛ		ɔ
Open		a	

Table 7: East Bwe vowel inventory (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 42)

Saw Lar Baa noted that a nucleus generally contains a monophthong. Diphthongs are found in borrowed words from Burmese and Sgaw.

**Tones:** Saw Lar Baa noted that eastern Bwe has five different pitches in his data: (55, 44, 33, 22, 11). There are also high falling and low falling tones, which co-occur with creaky voice quality. Tone in minor syllables is non-contrastive and realized as mid tone.

The phonological description of the western Bwe language is as follows:

The syllable structure is CVT, CCVT and CCVVT

C	is any consonant
V	is a vowel
T	is a tone

The syllable of western Bwe is composed of an initial consonant and an optional medial consonant, (most commonly the labial approximant /w/, the lateral /l/ or rarely the alveopalatal /r/ or alveolar approximant /j/). When clusters are present, the initial consonant is usually a stop. The nucleus is composed of a vowel or diphthong. The syllable is always open.

Minor syllables are always stressless, and never bear distinctive tone. Minor syllables are composed of an initial consonant and mid central vowel /ə/. The initial consonant of a minor syllable is generally a stop, though initial /l/ and /dʒ/ are also found.

#### 1.2.1.2.2 Western Bwe

**Consonant Phonemes:** The inventory of western Bwe consonants is shown in Table 8.

		Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Postalv	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	fortisvl asp	p <sup>h</sup>		t <sup>h</sup>		k <sup>h</sup>	
	fortis vl	p	t̪	t		k	ʔ
	lenis vd	b		d		g	
	lenis vd impl	β		d̪			
Affricate	fortis vl				tʃ		
	lenis vl				dʒ		
Fricative	fortis vl			(s)	s <sup>ʃ</sup>	x	h
	lenis vd			(z)		ɣ	
Nasal		m		n		(ŋ)	
Lateral				l			
Approximant		w		(r)	j		

Table 8: West Bwe consonant inventory (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 45)

He noted that phones which occur so rarely in the data that their phonological status is uncertain are included, but enclosed in parenthesis.

Consonant clusters: Initial clusters (C<sub>1</sub>C<sub>2</sub>) noted in the western Bwe data are shown in Table 9.

pw		bw	βw	t̪w	d̪w	t <sup>h</sup> w	mw	nw	lw	jw	s <sup>ʃ</sup> w	xw	kw	k <sup>h</sup> w	gw
pl	p <sup>h</sup> l	bl	βl										kl	k <sup>h</sup> l	gl
				ɹr, tr										kr	
pj		bj													

Table 9: West Bwe consonant clusters (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 47)

**Vowel phonemes:** There are 10 vowel phonemes. The western Bwe vowel inventory is shown in Table 10.

	Front	Central	Back
	Unrounded	Unrounded	Rounded
High	i		u
			ɯ
Mid	e	ə	o
	ɛ		ɔ
Low		a	

**Table 10:** West Bwe vowel inventory (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 47)

Saw Lar Baa noted that all vowels are allowed in the  $V_1$  position. Diphthongs ( $V_1V_2$ ) are rare and are found only in borrowed words.

**Tones:** There are five level tones in western Bwe: 55, 44, 33, 22 and 11. There are a few cases of 31 and 51 tones in Saw Lar Baa's data.

### 1.2.1.3 Geba

The phonological description of the Geba language according to Saw Lar Baa (2001, 49-52) is as follows:

The syllable structure is CVT, CCVT and CCVVT

The syllable of Geba is composed of an obligatory consonant followed by an optional medial consonant. The nucleus can be any vowel. As for diphthongs, they are rare and occur in borrowed words only. Tone (T) maps over vocalic elements.

Minor syllables are composed of an initial consonant and a central mid-open vowel /ə/. /ə/ is present only in minor syllables. The initial consonant is typically a stop; however, the lateral /l/, and the voiceless lenis affricate /dʒ/ also appear as the initial consonant of minor syllables.



**Consonant Phonemes:** The inventory of Geba consonant is shown in Table 11.

		Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Postalv	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	fortis vl asp	p <sup>h</sup>		t <sup>h</sup>		k <sup>h</sup>	
	fortis vl	p	ɟ	t		k	ʔ
	lenis vd	b		d		(g)	
Implosive	lenis vd	ɓ		ɗ			
Affricate	fortis vl				tʃ		
	lenis vl				(dʒ)		
Fricative	fortis vl asp			s <sup>h</sup>			
	lenis vl			s	ʃ	(x)	h
	lenis vd					ɣ	(ɦ)
Nasal	voiced	m		n		(ŋ)	
	voiceless	(m̥)		(n̥)			
Trill				(r)			
Approximant		w		l	ʝ		
Lateral Fricative				ɬ			

**Table 11:** Geba consonant inventory (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 50)

Saw Lar Baa noted that phones which occur so rarely in the data that their phonological status is uncertain are included, but enclosed in parenthesis.

**Consonant clusters:** Initial clusters (C<sub>1</sub>C<sub>2</sub>) attested in the Geba language are shown in table 12.

pw		bw	ɓw	tw	t <sup>h</sup> w	ɟw	mw	nw	lw	sw		xw	kw	k <sup>h</sup> w		hw
pl	p <sup>h</sup> l	bl	ɓl										kl	k <sup>h</sup> l	ɡl	
pr				tr	t <sup>h</sup> r					sr			kr			
											s <sup>h</sup> ɣ					

**Table 12:** Geba consonant clusters (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 51)

**Vowel phonemes:** The Geba vowel inventory is shown in Table 13.

	Front	Central	Back
	Unrounded	Unrounded	Rounded
High	i	ɯ	u
Mid	e	ə	o
	ɛ		ɔ
Low		a	

**Table 13:** Geba vowel inventory (Saw Lar Baa, 2001: 52)

**Tones:** There are only three level tones in Geba: high tone, mid tone and low tone.

From his analysis, the comparison shows that some Karenic languages have more phonemes or different phonemes than Sgaw which require different symbols to represent them.

He concludes that the present Sgaw alphabet lacks symbols for eleven consonants that Northern Karenic varieties require: [b, d, f, v, ʈ, z, g, m̥, n̥, ɲ, ŋ]. For the vowel system, there are identical elements with the existing Sgaw vowels, and the inclusion of more vowels in some dialects. In reference to the tonal system, he noted that seven northwest Karen varieties of Sgaw and Kayah have mid-high, mid and mid-low tones. Sgaw, Kayah and Palaychi (Palachi) have six well attested tonal categories, while Bwe 1, Bwe 2, Paku 2 have seven tonal categories. Geba and Paku I have only five. The tonal categories which are lacking from Sgaw are high tone, high falling tone, and low falling tone.

## 1.2.2 Phonology of Northern Karenic language

### 1.2.2.1 Kayan (Padaung)

According to Bradley in his dissertation of the classification of Karenic languages, Kayan (Padaung) is the Northern Karenic language which is spoken in Loikaw City in north western Kayah State, the adjacent town of Phekon in southern Shan State and southwest of Kayah State. A smaller number of Kayan (Padaung) speakers also reside in Mae Hong Son province, Thailand.

In Sarinya's research, The Phonological Study of Kayan (Padaung) (Long-Necked Karen) at Ban Naisoi, Tambol Pang Mu, Muang District, Mae Hong Son Province, she groups Kayan (Padaung) as a Central Karenic language following Bennett's dissertation. The aim of her study is primarily to describe the phonological system of the Kayan (Padaung) language spoken at Ban Naisoi, Tambol Pang Mu, Muang district, Mae Hong Son Province. The secondary aim of her research was to study the history and way of life of the Kayan (Padaung) people.

### 1.2.2.2 The Phonology of Kayan (Padaung)

The phonological description of the Kayan (Padaung) language is as follows:

The syllable structure is C (C) V<sup>T</sup> (C).

**Consonant Phonemes:** An inventory of the Kayan (Padaung) consonants is shown in Table 14. The phonemes will be grouped according to their manners and point of articulation.

		Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosives	vl. unasp	p	t	tʃ	k	ʔ
	vl. asp	p <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>	tʃ <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup>	
	voiced	b	d	dʒ	g	
Nasal		m	n		ŋ	
Fricative			θ			h
Trill			r			
Lateral			l			
Approximants		w		j		

Table 14: Kayan (Padaung) consonant inventory (Sarinya 1998: 52)

She noted that there are 22 consonant phonemes in Kayan (Padaung). All of these phonemes can occur initially in a syllable. The phonemes /l, r, w/ can also occur as the second element in the consonant cluster. There are seven final consonants: /k, ʔ, m, n, ŋ, w, y/.

Vowel phonemes: The Kayan (Padaung) vowel inventory is shown in Table 15.

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i	ɯ	u
Half-close	e	ə	o
Half-open	ɛ		ɔ
Open		a	

Diphthongs	Front	Central	Back
High	ia	ɯɯ	ua
Low		ai	

Table 15: Kayan (Padaung) vowel inventory (Sarinya 1998: 66)

**Tones:** There are four level tones in Kayan (Padaung) language including mid tone, low falling tone (or low falling tone with breathy voice), high falling tone and high rising tone (or high rising tone with breathy voice). She noted that the breathiness is in the process of being lost as seen in the speech of young informants who speak with barely audible breathiness.

### 1.2.3 Sgaw Karen in Moulmein and other Karen dialects

B. Robert Jones (1961) studied the Sgaw Karen in Moulmein, and Karen dialects in order to compare and reconstruct these languages. In the first section in his research, he analyzed the phonological system of Moulmein Sgaw Karen. The next section described the phonological description of Karen dialects including Pho (Pwo), Taungthu (Pa'O) and Palachi. The last section included a comparison and reconstruction of these languages.

The phonological description of Pho (Pwo) and Palachi, which are the southern Karenic languages following Bradley's dissertation, are presented in this section.

#### 1.2.3.1 Pho (Pwo)

There are two varieties of Pho including Moulmein Pho and Bassein Pho in Jones's research. The phonological description of Pho language is as follows:

p	t	c	k	s			ʔ
p <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>		k <sup>h</sup>	s <sup>h</sup>	θ	x	(h)
b	d					ɣ	
w		j		s			
m	n	(n̄)					
	l	r					

Table 16: Pho consonant inventory (Jones 1961: 68)

He noted that /h/ and /ñ/ do not occur in Bassein Pho and occur only rarely in Moulmein Pho. Aspirated consonants are more heavily aspirated in Moulmein Pho than in Bassein Pho. In final position /n/ is nasalization of the preceding nucleus. No other consonants occur in final position.

**Vowel phonemes:** The vowel systems are closely related in Moulmein Pho, and Bassein Pho. Moulmein Pho and Bassein Pho vowel inventories are shown in Table 17.

i	y	u
e	ə	o
ɛ	a	ɔ

Moulmein Pho

i	y	u
ɕ	ə	o
ɛ	a	ɔ
ai		au

Bassein Pho

**Table 17:** Moulmein Pho and Bassein Pho vowel inventories (Jones 1961: 66-67)

Diphthong nasalization is found in Moulmein Pho and Bassein Pho as follows:

	yn	
en	ən	on
ɛn	an	ɔn

Moulmein Pho

en	ən	on
ɛn	an	ɔn

Bassein Pho

**Table 18:** Moulmein Pho and Bassein Pho vowel inventories in diphthong nasalization (Jones 1961: 66-67)

**Tones:** There are three tones including high tone, mid tone, and low tone in Moulmein Pho. Bassein Pho has only two tones: high tone and low tone.

### 1.2.3.2 Palachi

Palachi is a Southern Karenic language. Jones and Saw Lar Baa analyzed the phonological system of Palachi (which Jones spells 'Palaychi'). The phonological description of Palachi is represented in this section.

According to Saw Lar Baa, the syllable structure is C<sub>1</sub> (C<sub>2</sub>) V<sub>1</sub> (C). Syllable types in his data include: CVT, and CCVT

**Consonant Phonemes:** The Palachi consonant inventory is shown in Table 19.

		Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Postalve	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	fortis vl asp	p <sup>h</sup>	t̚	t <sup>h</sup>		k <sup>h</sup>	
	fortis vl	p		t		k	ʔ
	lenis vd	b		d			
Implosives	lenis vd	β		ɖ			
Affricate	fortis vl				(tʃ)		
	lenis vl				(dʒ)		
Fricative	fortis vl		f	s s <sup>h</sup>	sʃ	x	h
	lenis vd		v	z	ʒ	ɣ	ɦ
Nasal		m		n		ŋ	
Syllabic nasal		m̩		n̩			
Trill				r			
Approximant		w		l	j		

**Table 19:** Palachi consonant inventory (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 66)

From Saw Lar Baa's analysis the consonant system differs at several points from Jones's consonant inventory for Palachi. Jones's consonant inventory is reproduced in Table 20.

p		t		c	k	s	ʔ
p <sup>h</sup>		t <sup>h</sup>		c <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup>	s <sup>h</sup>	(q)
b		d		ɟ		z	
	f	ɸ			x	s	h
w	v			j			
m		n					
	l		r				

**Table 20:** Palachi consonant inventory (Jones 1961: 75)

The following consonant clusters are found in Saw Lar Baa's research, as shown in Table 21.

pw		bw	βw	tw	ɸw	kw	k <sup>h</sup> w	gw	ɟʒw	nw	lw	s <sup>h</sup> w	jw
pl	p <sup>h</sup> l		βl			kl	k <sup>h</sup> l	fl					
pr													
pʁ													

**Table 21:** Palachi consonant clusters inventory (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 68)

**Vowel phonemes:** There are 10 vowel phonemes in Saw Lar Baa's inventory which differ from Jones' vowel phonemes in Palachi. The data are shown as follows:



	Front	Central	Back
	Unrounded	Unrounded	Rounded
High	i	ɨ	u
			(u)
Mid	e	ə	o
	ɛ		ɔ
Low		a	

Table 22: Palachi vowel inventory (Saw Lar Baa 2001: 69)

i	y	u
e	ə	o
ɛ	a	ɔ

Table 23: Palachi vowel inventory (Jones, 1961:74)

**Tones:** There are three tones in Saw Lar Baa's data: mid high tone, mid tone and mid low tone. He noted that the high falling and low falling tone co-occur only with creaky voice quality.

Note that Jones (1961) gives two well attested tones including high tone and low tone.

### 1.3 THE GOAL OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is primarily to describe the phonological system of three Central Karenic languages: Bwe, Geba 1 and Geba 2. The secondary aim of the study is to identify the relationship between these Central Karenic languages by comparing their similarities and differences.

## 1.4 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study will deal with the syllable, the consonant system, the vowel system and the tonal system of the three Central Karenic languages: Bwe, Geba 1 and Geba 2, as found in three word lists only. Limitations due to data format.

## 1.5 THE BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

1. This study will provide a description of the phonology of the three Central Karenic languages: Bwe, Geba 1 and Geba 2.
2. It will provide a guide for further studies on the Karen.
3. The study of these languages will help the Karen people to increase their understanding of their own languages including the local people.
4. It will confirm the language typology (Central Karenic languages)

## 1.6 METHODOLOGY

This study began with library research on the Karenic languages. Library research was undertaken at Payap University, Chiang Mai University, the SIL library in Bangkok, Mahidol University, and Chulalongkorn University. The wordlists are from J. Fraser Bennett. He collected this data in 1991, from a bilingual Bwe-Geba speaker. The informant had one parent from each group. The Bwe list was representative of Thandaung. The Geba list was representative of Leikthoo. There are 1,218 words in total which are divided in three languages: 406 words in Bwe, 406 words in Geba 1 and 406 words in Geba 2.

After manually checking the data, the phonological analysis was done by using Speech Manager (SIL Software 1996-2000 Version 1.52) to make a phonetic chart and separate the consonant chart from the vowel chart. After making the charts, there are three steps to follow in phonological analysis. The first step is to find the analogous environments or minimal pairs in the three word lists by using the contrastive and complementary distribution principles. The second step is to find the phonological rules which can be observed in the wordlists. The last step is to find the consonant phones, the vowel phones and pitches which occur at a low rate in this

study and have been assigned to residuc. The following figures show the data flow in phonological analysis of three Central Karenic languages as in this study.

The comparison of phonological inventories and the distribution of phonological units in these Karenic languages is considered in the last procedure to produce a brief phonological summary of these varieties.

PAYYAP UNIVERSITY

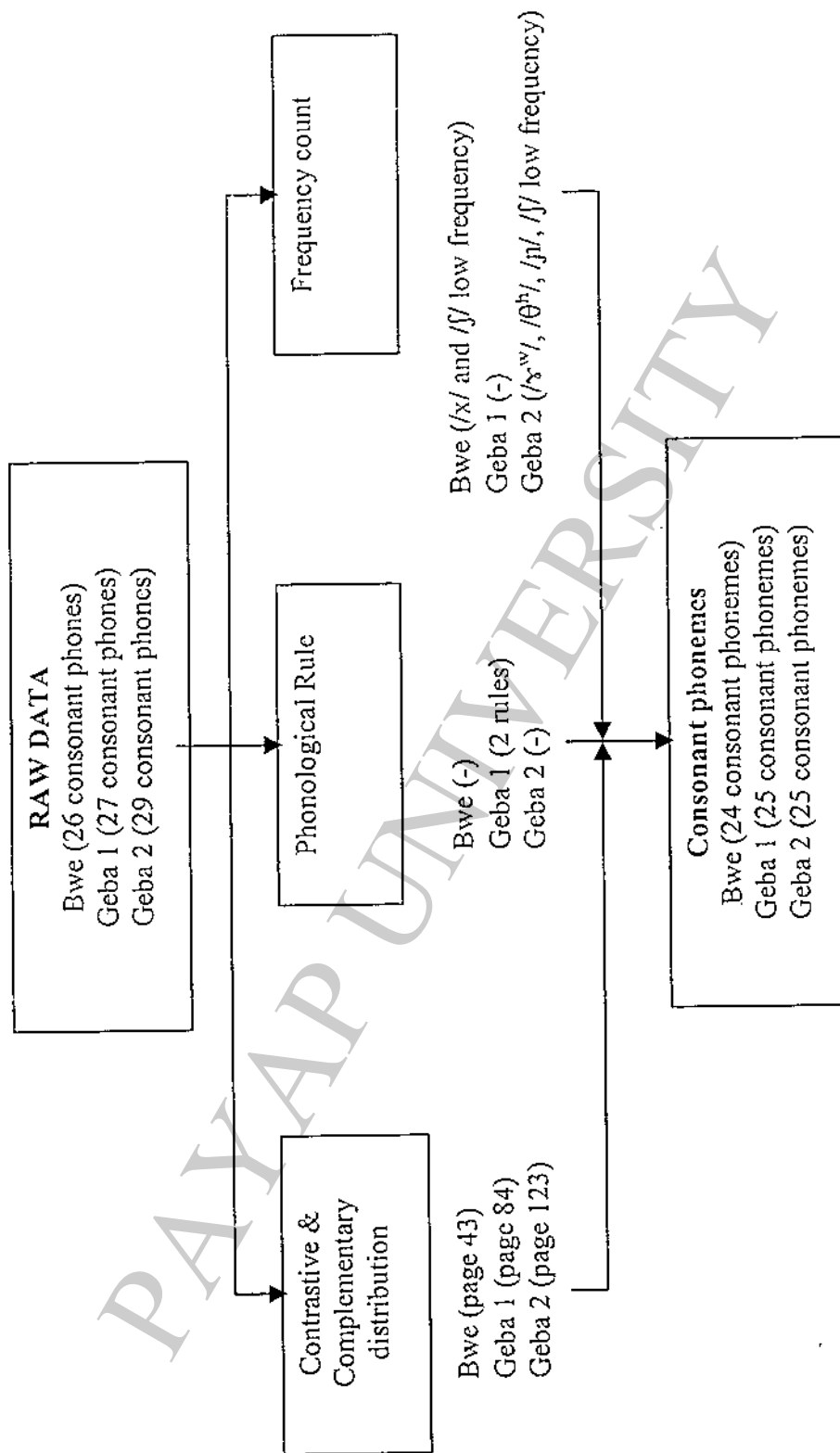


Figure 10: The data flow diagram in consonant phonological analysis

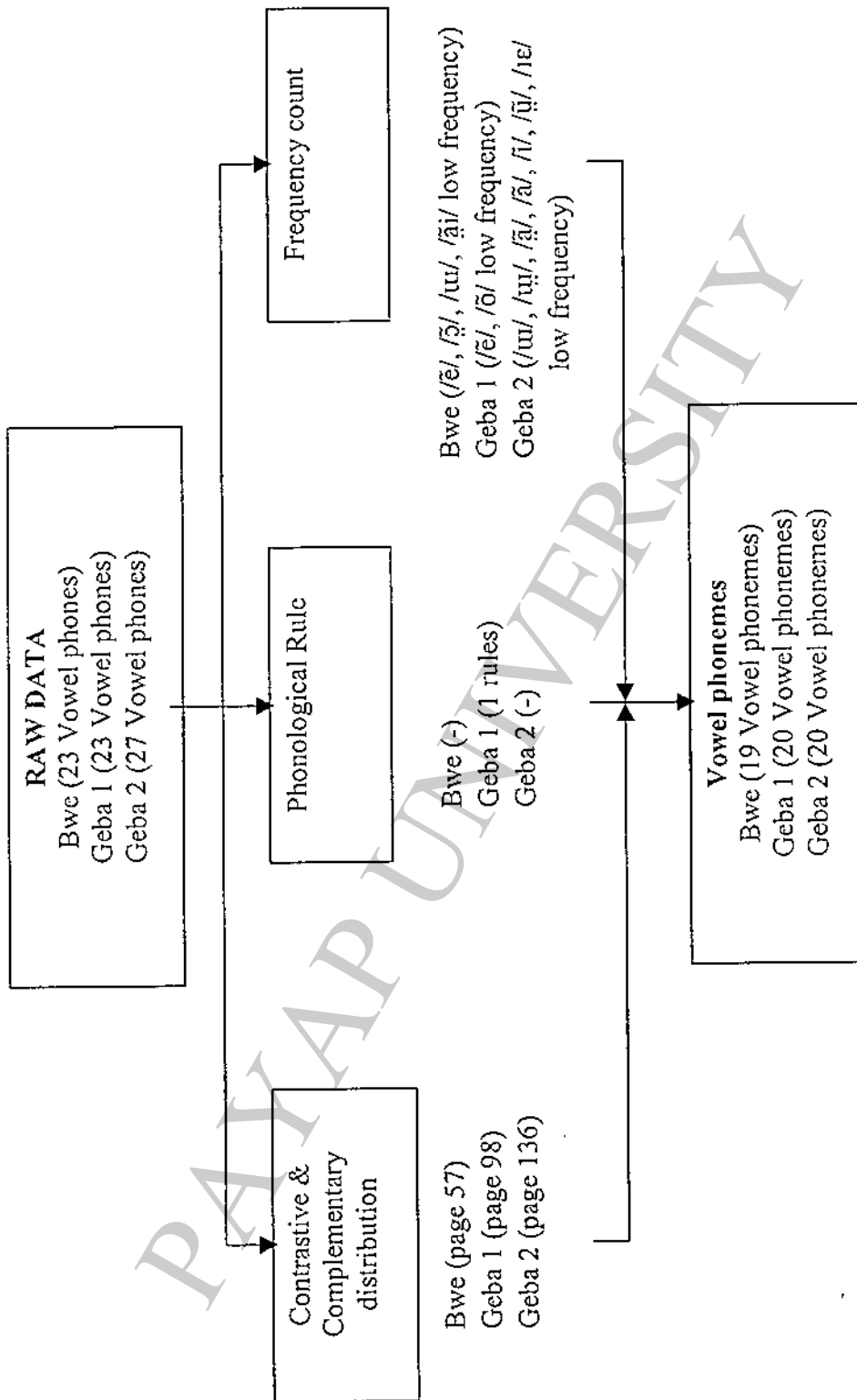


Figure 11: The data flow diagram in vowel phonological analysis

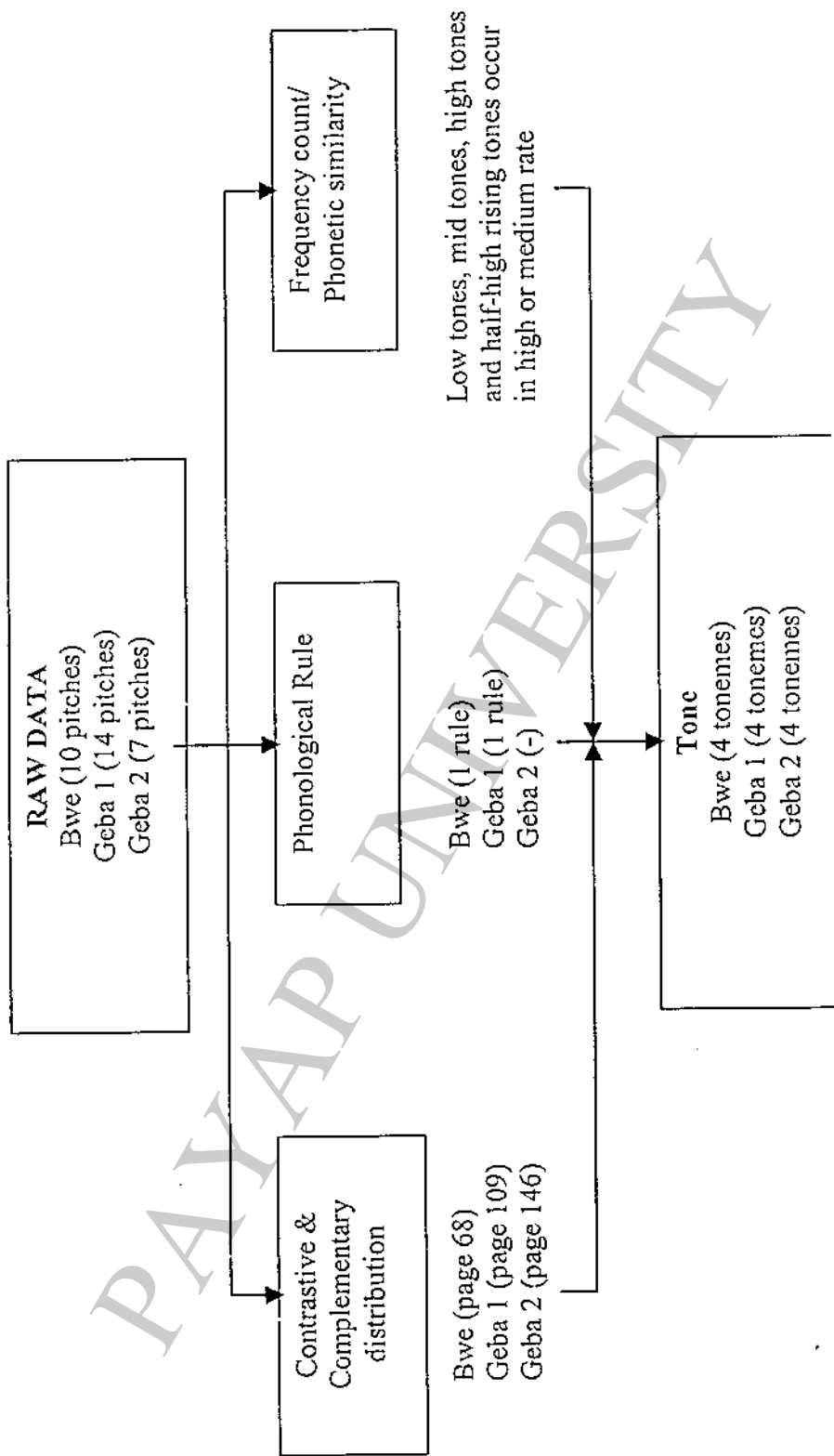


Figure 12: The data flow diagram in tone phonological analysis