

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions

This chapter presents an overview of the research findings, conclusions and suggestions for further research.

#### 7.1 Overview of the study

The main purpose of the research presented in this thesis is the assessment for the need of Meung Yum language development. The data of this thesis was collected on two survey field trips conducted in eight Meung Yum-majority villages and two Savaiq villages in Kunlong Township, Northern Shan State, Myanmar.

The first field trip was conducted in four Meung Yum villages and data collected included wordlists and Knowledgeable and Individual Sociolinguistic Questionnaires (KIQ and ISQ). The KIQ collected information about demographics, ethnic group, village name, group name, schools, language maintenance, LWC, contact, festivals, intermarriage, prestige dialect, orthography and language development. The ISQ collected information about demographics, contact, attitudes toward LWCs literatures, interest in literacy, bilingual proficiency, children language use and language maintenance, domain of language use, ethno-linguistic identity.

The second survey trip was conducted in another four Meung Yum-majority villages and two Savaiq villages. The same survey instruments were used with some revision in the second survey. Moreover, three more instruments were added: Religious Leader Interview Questionnaire, Recorded Text Test (RTT) and Dialect Mapping Tools to research further information which had not been covered in the first survey. The Religious Leader Interview Questionnaire was designed to collect information about, subject demographics, village monastery information, religious festivals, religious language use, literatures, and orthography and language development. RTT was designed to discover the comprehension of the people in the various villages visited on the Mung Yum-Namt Yoke variety. The Dialect Mapping Tool collected data about dialect perceptions and intelligibility of neighbouring varieties.

Wordlist data was analysed in two ways: phonetic comparisons and lexical comparisons among the Meung Yum varieties and the comparison with the related Waic varieties and varieties from different branches of the Palaungic language family. The sociolinguistic data were analysed to answer the research questions which combined to achieve the goals of the study. The RTT data gave insights into the level of intelligibility of the Namt Yoke variety among subjects in the four villages. The data collected using the Dialect Mapping Tools did not provide many useful insights.

## **7.2 Conclusions relating to the goals of the study**

In this section the goals of the study are stated in brief and a summary of the conclusions that can be drawn relating to each goal is presented.

### **7.2.1 Goal 1: Assess the need for Meung Yum language development**

The first goal was to determine the need for vernacular language development for Meung Yum speakers. Ten specific questions were used to investigate the potential for Meung Yum speakers to use existing literature or written materials in the LWCs: Shan, Lachid, Burmese, Chinese and Wa.

The survey revealed that the attitude toward the writing in Shan was positive. The present literacy rate and speaking proficiency in Shan is low. 42/96 [43.75%] reported that they can speak Shan, however, only 11/36 [30.5%] reported that they can speak Shan well and 4/48 (8.3%) said that they can speak Shan as well as a Shan person. So it can be observed that even though many people can do easy tasks in Shan, very few people are fluent in it. The Shan literacy rate for Meung Yum speakers is 5/36 [13.8%]. All of them are males who have received monastery education for some years. So it can be clearly seen that ordinary villagers are not literate in Shan. These factors are likely to prevent the Meung Yum from developing Shan literacy skills in the future.

The evidence shows that Lachid has very low potential as an alternative for Meung Yum language development. 38/96 [39.58%] of all the subjects said they can speak Lachid, of these only 5/38 [13.2%] subjects are from Buddhist villages and 33/38 [86.8%] are from Christian villages. Lachid is an LWC spoken in the Christian community but not by the Buddhist majority. The literacy rate in Lachid is 5/36

[13.8%] according to the research and it is surprising that none of these subjects are from Christian villages. No negative attitudes were found toward Lachid or bilingualism in Lachid.

Concerning Burmese language evaluation, negative attitudes toward Burmese or bilingualism in Burmese were not found. 36/96 [37.5%] of subjects reported that they can speak Burmese, however only 3/36[8%] can speak Burmese well. 26/96 [27%] of Meung Yum people had received some formal education, but only 2/36[5.5%] reported that they are fluent in reading Burmese. This evidence indicates little potential for Meung Yum speakers to use Burmese as an alternative to vernacular language development due to their low oral proficiency in Burmese,

As far as Chinese is concerned, it has been found that although many Meung Yum speakers are able to use Chinese for oral communication, none of them are able to read Chinese and none of them are interested in written Chinese. This factor also rules out the use of Chinese as the language for literacy for the Meung Yum.

Relating to the bilingualism and attitude towards Wa language, 9/96 [9.37%] reported that they can speak Wa and the literacy rate in Wa is low, i.e.,1/36 [2.77%] or only one person out of three villages reported that he can read Wa. Negative attitudes toward bilingualism in Wa were not found among the people, however, the people want language development in their own language and only 2/36 [3.5%] subjects mentioned that they are very interested in reading and writing Wa. This evidence shows there are barriers to the use of Wa as the language for literacy for Meung Yum speakers. However, since Meung Yum is a Waic variety with high lexical similarity to Wa intelligibility testing should be done to provide further evidence on which discussions about literacy can be made.

### **7.2.2 Goal 2: Investigating the readiness**

Five specific research questions were designed to meet the second goal of the survey which is to investigate the readiness for vernacular language development, especially by investigating language vitality, population size, interest and unity of the people.

44/48 [91.66%] identify themselves as Meung Yum and 24/96[25%] of Meung Yum individual subjects are monolingual. 36/36 [100%] reported that children in their village speak Meung Yum first in childhood. 84/84 [100%] speak Meung Yum the

best. 36/36 [100%] reported that the children speak their mother tongue, when they play together. Meung Yum is the language most used by Meung Yum people both inside and outside the home. These factors all show that that language vitality among Meung Yum people is very high.

The size of the Meung Yum population in Kunlong and Wa-SAR is estimated as 8,000 according to this survey and this population is big enough to support a language development project.

Meung Yum people in general, village leaders and religious leaders reported that they are interested in language development in their own language and people mainly have good relationships with each other although speakers in Kunlong Township are geographically remote from those in the Wa-SAR. Only a few people among the whole Meung Yum population are educated. They could possibly be helpful people for language development efforts in the future.

### **7.2.3 Goal 3: Determine the most suitable variety**

The lexical similarity percentages, intelligibility level on the Meung Yum RTT, and the attitude of the people towards their mothertongue were the factors used to determine the most suitable variety/varieties for development.

All the evidence shows that there is no substantial variation among Meung Yum varieties. All Meung Yum varieties share lexical similarity percentages of 96% to 100% which means that differences in vocabulary would present few problems in comprehending speakers of other varieties. Also a deeper level of intelligibility testing (RTT) produced Meung Yum village' scores, 92% and 97%. This showed that the Namt Yoke variety is understood in other villages about as well as it was understood in Namt Yoke village itself. Namt Yoke is found to be the most prestigious variety among the people. Though no Meung Yum village was chosen by everybody as the most prestigious, Namt Yoke is by far the most commonly given name as the most prestigious variety among the people. There is regular contact between Meung Yum people in different villages in Kunlong Township but less contact with the people in the Wa-SAR.

#### **7.2.4 Goal 4: Could Savaiq be incorporated in a Meung Yum language program?**

Three specific research questions were asked to meet the final goal, which was to determine whether Savaiq language development could be achieved by a joint program with Meung Yum.

The RTT results show that Savaiq speakers understand simple narrative texts in Meung Yum well. Savaiq shares high lexical similarity with Meung Yum, i.e. 88% to 93%. The two people groups have regular contact with one another. Attitudes toward Meung Yum writing system of Savaiq people were not found very strong through the data. Among 13/24 [54%] of subjects who reported that they are very interested in learning written Meung Yum; most of them, 11/24 [46%] were from Thein Tan and only, 2/24 [8%] were from Man Gyat. Likewise the report shows that none of the Man Gyat subjects were interested in Meung Yum written. One of the reasons given was that Savaiq is spoken more widely than Meung Yum. So it can be assumed that some Savaiq villagers see themselves as more prestigious than the Meung Yum people.

Despite high lexical similarity, high intelligibility and regular contact between Savaiq and Meung Yum, language attitudes of the people indicate that it is unlikely for Savaiq to join in the Meung Yum language development program. Further survey is needed before a firm conclusion is drawn about the best approach for Savaiq language development.

#### **7.3 Suggestions for further research**

Further research is needed among Meung Yum and Savaiq. The evidence suggests that Meung Yum is likely to be identified under the Wa node of the Waic branch of the Palaungic language family. Further linguistic investigation is needed to firmly establish the linguistic classification of Meung Yum and Savaiq.

Moreover, deeper intelligibility testing of standard Wa among Meung Yum speakers is needed. Meung Yum shares very high lexical similarity, 81-93%. with the Wa varieties in this analysis, including the Standard Wa variety, Yong Shuai and other varieties which are En, Lawa, Sava, Savaiq, Mongmaw, Mantong or Kawng Meung. This means Meung Yum and all these Wa varieties have good potential to understand each other. Further analysis using Standard Wa RTT is needed to test how much Meung Yum can actually understand the Standard Wa language, Yong

Shuai. The Wa RTT should be tested in various Meung Yum villages in Kunlong and the Wa-SAR on a continuum of more to less contact with Standard Wa. Two kinds of RTT methods are suggested: recorded personal experience stories and recorded reading of non-religious written Wa materials.

Further Savaiq language survey should also be done in broader area, since this thesis has very limited data and limited scope on Savaiq.

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