

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis is to describe the phonology of Dermuha with the secondary purpose to compare Dermuha, Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen from phonological and lexical perspectives in order to determine the classification of Dermuha as to which group this language belongs; either Sgaw Karen or Pwo Karen. The following sections will summarize each chapter, the findings in this study and give suggestions on further study.

6.1 Summary of findings

For this study, 1,180 words were elicited by interviewing the language resource persons in Burmese and Sgaw Karen. The words were transcribed while interviewing the resource persons and additional information was noted down in the notebook. Moreover, the sounds of the resource persons were recorded on tape. Each language resource person for this study is the native speaker of their respective languages with normal articulatory organs. The collected words were put into the Field Works Language Explorer from which the data can be easily exported to Phonology Assistant for analysis.

The findings show that Dermuha has thirty-two consonant phonemes, ten vowel phonemes, and four tones. The syllable structure of Dermuha is $C_1(C_2)V^T$ where C_1 represents any consonant; C_2 represents either a voiced alveolar approximant /l/, voiced bilabial approximant /w/, voiced alveolar trill /r/, voiced palatal approximant /j/, or voiced velar fricative /ɣ/; V represents any vowel; and T represents any tone.

This study also makes a phonological comparison of three languages; Dermuha, Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen. The correspondence sets of consonants, vowels, and tones between these three languages are established. The purpose of establishing correspondence sets is not to reconstruct the proto-form of the related languages but to try to understand how closely related the phonological systems are of those three languages. According to the phonological comparison, there is not much difference in the numbers of consonants between Dermuha, Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen.

However, Dermuha seems to have a more similar vowel system to Sgaw Karen as Pwo Karen vowel system is much more complex than Dermuha. For the tones, the tone inventories of Dermuha and Pwo Karen are similar in general. Therefore, it is hard to say whether Dermuha is closer to Sgaw Karen or Pwo Karen based on this phonological comparison. For the correspondence sets, the numbers of correspondence sets between Dermuha and Sgaw Karen is greater than the number of correspondence sets between Dermuha and Pwo Karen when combining the correspondence sets of consonants, vowels and tones. Therefore, it can be concluded that Dermuha is more closely related to Sgaw Karen than Pwo Karen when combining all the sets of correspondence.

Lexicostatic analysis of Dermuha, Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen is also demonstrated for the purpose of understanding how closely related the lexical items are of the three languages. The resulting analysis of lexicostatistics shows that Dermuha is more closely related to Sgaw Karen as the lexical similarity percentage is 77% which is 8% higher than its lexical similarity percentage with Pwo Karen. It could be best considered as less closely related to Pwo Karen. Therefore, the classification of Dermuha could be considered as being in the Sgaw Karen group.

6.2 Problems in the study

Dermuha is a language with a limited number of speakers. The number of villages where the speakers of Dermuha can be found is only one. The number of speakers of Dermuha is approximately 390 only which is relatively few in number and some of the Dermuha speakers counted in this population are not pure Dermuha. The intermarriage system and migration to Dermuha village are the reasons for them to start speaking Dermuha and to be counted as the speakers of Dermuha.

Although this study concludes that Dermuha is from Sgaw Karen group, it is hard to argue strongly that Dermuha is from this group in reality. The reason is that, the language is more like Pwo Karen in verbal communication. The speakers themselves proudly consider that their language is from the Pwo Karen branch. However, when the lexical items of Dermuha are spoken in isolation, almost all are understandable to the speaker of Sgaw Karen. The researcher is a native speaker of Sgaw Karen, and the researcher could guess nearly all the lexical items of Dermuha when said in isolation.

6.3 Suggestions for further study

Having summarized the results from the lexicostatistic comparison, Dermuha is more closely related to Sgaw Karen than Pwo Karen. However, as Palaychi is one of the dialects from Mopwa and as Dermuha speakers are living among Bwe speaking villages, the classification of Dermuha would be clearer if the comparison between Dermuha, Palaychi and Bwe is carried out.

For further study, a further detailed phonetic study on tone will be a very interesting contribution as the pitch and intonation between mid tone and low tone are very similar for the researcher. Moreover, the study on the sound [fi] and the consonant cluster [pj] should be carried out to be able to confirm whether they exist in the sound system of Dermuha.

In addition, it will be helpful to study grammar, etymology, lexicology, and linguistic typology to be able to categorize this language more clearly than in this study. It also would be interesting to consider other information such as geography, history of the people, oral tradition, people's attitudes, culture, social relationships, etc. to gain a better understanding on this language group. In other words, it would be interesting to carry out the sociolinguistic study to have a better understanding on Dermuha language.

The wordlists of Dermuha, Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen collected in this study will be useful to students of Karen and will contribute to a detailed historical reconstruction of the Karen language family.