Scattered amongst my Bwe Karen\(^1\) material collected many years ago are a number of expressions described by my informant as 'baby language'. Material of this kind often escapes attention in formal grammars and dictionaries, and may at first sight seem to offer little of value to philologists, and yet it is not unknown for such linguistic by-paths to conserve forms that have disappeared elsewhere.\(^2\)

Since the items on my list have come together by accident, so to speak, in the course of research with a quite different purpose in mind, there must inevitably be many gaps. As might be anticipated, the great majority of the items are nominal, and refer in the main to members of the infant's immediate family circle, to food and drink, simple articles of clothing, and to domestic animals. The only verbal form in the material is the word for 'sit'; it seems likely that a more comprehensive list would include terms for other everyday actions. Among the nominal forms, the occurrence of a word for 'moon' is, perhaps, surprising, and I regret not having pursued this further with my informant at the time. Are there words for other natural phenomena such as 'sun', 'rain', 'thunder', etc., or is there some special reason why 'moon' is introduced so early into the vocabulary of Karen babies? (Via a well-known lullaby or nursery tale perhaps?)

The items collected are here first arranged and examined with reference to similarities of phonetic pattern, and subsequently with reference to their relationship to the language of adults. The transcription used is that of the International Phonetic Association and is, as such, largely self-explanatory. It is pointed out, however, that \(b\) and \(d\) represent 'pre-glottalised' plosives as contrasted with \(b\) and \(d\), which represent the more familiar plain voiced plosives. There are also preglottalised glides, \(?y\) and \(?w\). Bwe Karen has three tones, high, mid and low, which are here represented by the raised numerals, 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

**Phonetic Patterns**

Syllable structure is, as might be expected, of the \((C)\)\(V\) type only. It is to be noted, however, that in Bwe Karen this is not characteristic of just baby language as such, as in some other languages, but of adult language as well.

The following phonetic patterns are found:

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1. By 'Bwe [bwε\(^1\)] Karen' is here meant the Karen local dialect spoken in the Mehbyu area, which includes the village from which my informant came.

2. Editor's note: The etymological editor's notes found below are a confirmation of the validity of that observation.
(a) Straightforward reduplicated disyllables.

e.g. yɛ¹yɛ¹  'older brother or sister'³
    phi¹phi¹   'grandmother'
    phu¹phu¹   'grandfather'
    ne²ne²     'buffalo'
    qa¹qa¹     'duck'
    pi¹pi¹     'fish'
    ge²ge²     'fruit'
    do¹do¹     'upper garment'
    ko²ko²     'shoes'
    na¹na¹     'to sit'⁴

(b) Reduplicated disyllables with tonal differentiation. This tonal differentiation is a characteristic feature of word- and sentence-building in the adult language.⁵

e.g. mo¹mo²  'mother'
    pa¹pa²     'father'
    to¹to²     'aunt'
    di¹di²     'uncle'
    nə²nə²     'milk; water; sweet'
    ko¹ko²     'rice-cake'
    ¿yu¹¿yu²   'pig'

(c) Non-reduplicated disyllables, with tonal differentiation.

e.g. ku¹ri²  'puppy'
    ma¹mu²     'cooked rice'

³ Cf. Proto-Lolo-Burmese *?wyik, 'elder sibling'.
⁴ Cf. Written Burmese nə, Lahu nə, 'perch, alight'; Sun's Trung ᵇ⁵¹ na³¹ 'rest', Nuijiang Trung ᵇ³¹ na³¹ 'rest'.
It may or may not be characteristic that tonal differentiation in the disyllables recorded is always of the high-mid type. In adult language, tonal differentiation as a word-building device is frequently of this type, but may also be low-high etc.

(d) Trisyllables, with reduplication of two adjacent syllables, usually the first two, and with or without tonal differentiation.

\[ \text{e.g. } \text{na}^1\text{na}^2 \text{v}^1 \ 'milk' \]
\[ \text{or } \text{na}^1\text{na}^2\text{v}^1 \]
\[ \text{te}^1\text{te}^2\text{v}^1 \ 'mother's milk; breast' \]
\[ \text{na}^2\text{na}^1\text{o}^2 \ 'dog' \]
\[ \text{ba}^1\text{ba}^1\text{pho}^2 \ 'bird' \]
\[ \text{yu}^1\text{yu}^2\text{pho}^2 \ 'piglet' \]
\[ \text{be}^1\text{he}^1\text{he}^1 \ 'goat' \]
\[ \text{go}^3\text{go}^1\text{v}^2 \ 'cock' \]
\[ \text{pi}^1\text{pi}^1\text{pho}^2 \ 'fish' \]
\[ \text{fa}^2\text{kwa}^1\text{kwa}^2 \ 'frog' \]
\[ \text{ko}^1\text{ko}^2\text{i}^1 \ 'baby' \]
\[ \text{ma}^3\text{ma}^3\text{mo}^1 \ 'moon' \]

(e) Trisyllables without reduplication.

\[ \text{e.g. } \text{na}^2\text{m}^1\text{yo}^3 \ 'cat' \]
\[ \text{ku}^1\text{ri}^2\text{pho}^2 \ 'puppy' \]

Relation to adult language

Regarded from the point of view of their relationship to adult language, the expressions listed above may be re-classified under the following heads:-

(a) Directly derived, by reduplication of the corresponding adult term, or of a selected syllable of the corresponding adult term, with no tonal change:--

\[ \text{Corresponding adult term} \]
\[ \text{e.g. } \text{phi}^1\text{phi}^1 \ 'grandmother' \text{ phi}^1 \]
\[ \text{phu}^1\text{phu}^1 \ 'grandfather' \text{ phu}^1 \]

6 Cf. Fraser's Lisu a'na5 'dog' and Qu's Gyarong (Zhuokeji k'ena 'dog').
phu₁phu₁ 'grandfather' phu₁
ne₂ne₂ 'buffalo' bane₂
θe²θe² 'fruit' θe²
do₁do₁ 'upper garment' hi₂do₁
kɔ²kɔ² 'shoes' kha²təkɔ²
na₁na₁ 'sit' je₁na₁
ʤi²kwa₁kwa² 'frog' ʤi²kwa₁kwa² is the adult word for 'bull-frog', but is used by infants for frogs in general. The adult word for frogs in general is ʤi².

To this series one may also add ba₁ba₁pho² 'bird', which is to be compared with the adult form cu₂ba₁pho².

(b) Directly derived, by reduplication of the corresponding adult term, or of one syllable of the corresponding adult term, but with tonal differentiation or (in one instance) by change of tone.

e.g. mo₁mo² 'mother' mo²
pa₁pa² 'father' pa²
di₁di² 'uncle' ki²
to₁to² 'aunt' to²
ko₁ko² 'rice-cake' təko²

(c) Indirectly derived from the corresponding adult term. Under this heading one may tentatively include ye₁ye₁ 'elder sibling', which is perhaps to be related to the adult form we₁.7

(d) Of onomatopoetic origin. Under this head we may probably include the following:-

ga₁ga₁ 'duck' Contrast adult ʃi²be₁ (from Burmese), or tho²da³ (where tho² = 'fowl, bird').
go³go¹v² 'cock' Contrast adult ʃi¹phe₁
be¹he¹he¹ 'goat' Contrast adult pe²kvo², but compare be₁, the word for the cry of a goat.

7 This alternation fits perfectly with the Proto-Lolo-Burmese reconstruction *ʔwyik 'elder sibling'.