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 ɓ 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 [bwɛ] 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.

- ยกย่อม 'older brother or sister'
- ëนิ 'grandmother'
- ëหนิ 'grandfather'
- เน่ 'buffalo'
- กา 'duck'
- ปิ 'fish'
- ฤ่ 'fruit'
- ด้อ 'upper garment'
- โค่ 'shoes'
- นา่ 'to sit'

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

- มะ 'mother'
- บา 'father'
- ต่อ 'aunt'
- ดี 'uncle'
- ฤ่ 'milk; water; sweet'
- โค่ 'rice-cake'
- ยู 'pig'

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

- กุ 'puppy'
- มา่ 'cooked rice'

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3 Cf. Proto-Lolo-Burmese *?wyik 'elder sibling'.
4 Cf. Written Burmese န่า 'perch, alight'; Sun's Trung nw 31 na 53 'rest', Nuijiang Trung nw 31 na 73 '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.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{e.g. } ne^1ne^2u^2 & \quad \text{'milk'} \\
\text{or } ne^1ne^2u^1 & \\
tse^1te^2u^1 & \quad \text{'mother's milk; breast'} \\
na^2na^1o^2 & \quad \text{'dog'} \\
ba^1ba^1pho^2 & \quad \text{'bird'} \\
yu^1yu^2pho^2 & \quad \text{'piglet'} \\
bte^1he^1he^1 & \quad \text{'goat'} \\
gto^3go^1u^2 & \quad \text{'cock'} \\
p\bar{t}^1pi^1pho^2 & \quad \text{'fish'} \\
k\bar{t}^2kwa^1kwa^2 & \quad \text{'frog'} \\
k\partial^1ko^2\partial^1 & \quad \text{'baby'} \\
ma^3ma^3mo^1 & \quad \text{'moon'}
\end{align*}
\]

(e) Trisyllables without reduplication.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{e.g. } na^2m\bar{t}^1yo^3 & \quad \text{'cat'} \\
k\bar{u}^1ri^2pho^2 & \quad \text{'puppy'}
\end{align*}
\]

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:-

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Corresponding adult term} \\
\text{e.g. } phi^1phi^1 & \quad \text{'grandmother'} \\
\text{phu}^1phu^1 & \quad \text{'grandfather'}
\end{align*}
\]

\footnote{Cf. Fraser's Lisu a\textsuperscript{1}na\textsuperscript{5} 'dog' and Qu's Gyarong (Zhu'o\text{\'e}k'é) k\textsuperscript{\'e}na 'dog'.}
phu phu 'grandfather' phu
ne ne 'buffalo' bane
θeθe 'fruit' be
do do 'upper garment' hi do
ko ko 'shoes' kha tako
na na 'sit' je na
θiθiκwa kwa 'frog' θiθiκwa kwa is the
adult word for 'bull-frog', but is used by infants for frogs
in general. The adult word for frogs in general is θi.

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

(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. mo mo 'mother' Corresponding adult term
pa pa 'father' mo
di di 'uncle' pa
to to 'aunt' di
ko ko 'rice-cake' to

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

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

\[ ga ga 'duck' \]
Contrast adult r be (from Burmese), or
\[ tho da (where tho = 'fowl, bird'). \]

\[ go go 'cock' \]
Contrast adult t ph e

\[ be he 'goat' \]
Contrast adult pe kv e, but compare be ,
the word for the cry of a goat.

7 This alternation fits perfectly with the Proto-Lolo-Burmese reconstruction
*?wyik 'elder sibling'.
ku₁ri²(pho²) 'puppy' is clearly derived form the word ku₁ri², which, usually accompanied by snapping of the fingers, is used to call puppies. the element pho² in this word and in bu¹mi¹pho², τyu¹τyu²pho², etc. is a very common suffix meaning 'young, offspring'. It is also found in the (otherwise unrelated) adult form for 'puppy', chu²pho² (cp. chu² 'dog').

τyu¹τyu² 'pig' Contrast adult tho². This form, like the preceding one, is derived from the word used to call the animal in question. τyu¹ in adult language is used both to call pigs, and with the meaning 'to call pigs'. τyu¹τyu²pho² 'piglet' is, of course, merely the baby word for 'pig' with the suffix pho² added. (See under ku₁ri²pho² in preceding paragraph.)

The forms na²na¹o² and na²mi¹yo³ are not directly derived from the corresponding adult terms, which are chu² or thwi² and mi¹ya² respectively, but appear to be of partial onomatopoeic origin. The 'na' in both is perhaps to be related to the na² used in adult language as a rather formal title for women. na²mi¹yo³ might thus be translated as 'Madam Miaow'. The o² in na²na¹o² is probably from o², the call used to dogs in adult language, which is also used to mean 'to call a dog', and 'to bark'.

(e) Unrelated to any forms in the adult language, so far as can be discovered in the material to hand.

    e.g. ne¹ne¹u² 'milk' Contrast adult nu²chi¹ or ne¹ne²u²
    u¹u² 'milk; water; sweet' Contrast adult nu²chi¹; chi¹; jil.
    te¹te²u¹ 'mother's milk; mother's breast' Contrast adult nu²chi¹; nu².
    ma¹mu² 'cooked rice' Contrast adult di¹.
    ma³ma³mo¹ 'moon' Contrast adult le¹.
    ko¹ko²i¹ 'baby; new-born child' Contrast adult bu³di³pho².
    pi¹pi¹ 'fish' Contrast adult da³pho³.

The last syllable of the trisyllabic variant pi¹pi¹pho² is the diminutive suffix already referred to.

It occurs to me that it might one day be well worth while taking a serious professional look at the special language used by and to infants in the Southeast Asian area in general to discover whether any characteristic patterns emerge.