

West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen Phonology

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1. Introduction

This paper represents a start at a phonological description of West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen. Speakers of West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen live in Tak, Kanchanaburi, Uthaithani, Suphanburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi and Prachuapkhirikhan provinces. The reported population is 20,000 (Tribal Research Institute 1986).

West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen is one of the Karenic languages, a branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family (Namkung 1996). At least three distinct, mutually unintelligible Pwo Karen languages exist in Myanmar and Thailand (Atsuhiko 1995; Phillips 1996). These are the Western Pwo Karen in Myanmar, Eastern Pwo Karen (Myanmar)/West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen (Thailand), and Northern Pwo Karen (Thailand). “Phrae” Pwo Karen in east-northern Thailand is a possible fourth distinct language, although more research is required. The locations of the Pwo Karen languages are listed in Figure 1 below.

Language Name	Location
Western Pwo Karen (Bassein)	Irrawaddy Delta, Myanmar
Eastern Pwo Karen (Moulmein)/West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen	Karen State, Mon State, Tennasserim Division, Myanmar; West-Central Thailand
Northern Pwo Karen	Northwestern Thailand
“Phrae” Pwo Karen???	Eastern-northern Thailand

Figure 1. Pwo Karen Languages

Dialectal variation studies of West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen show at least two major dialects (Phillips 1996). The northern variety is spoken in Kanchanaburi province and the southern variety is spoken in Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi and Prachuapkhirikhan provinces. The results of intelligibility testing in these provinces show that the variety of Pwo Karen spoken in Sisawat district, Kanchanaburi, is the most widely understood by Pwo Karen throughout the testing area. As for Tak, Uthaithani and Suphanburi provinces, Pwo Karen report mutual intelligibility and I have seen this demonstrated at meetings of Pwo Karen of the language area. Phonological differences center mainly in the vowels. No tonal variation has been observed and variation in the consonants is minimal.

Previous research on Pwo Karen phonology is abundant. The first was Jones 1961 which includes short descriptions of Bassein and Moulmein Pwo Karen phonology. Cooke et. al. 1976 describe Phlong (Northern Pwo Karen) phonology in detail. Atsuhiko Kato (1995) describes and compares the phonological systems of three Myanmar Pwo Karen dialects: Kyonbyaw (Western Pwo Karen), Hpa-an and Tavoy (Eastern Pwo Karen). West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen phonologies have been written for a number of areas: Sisawat district, Kanchanaburi: Griffiths (1976), Potchanat (1983); Ban Rai District, Uthaithani: Chutima (1982); Suanpheung District, Ratchaburi: Weerawat (1973); Phop Phra District, Tak: Wasana (1996).

The paper will begin in Section 2 with a description of the syllable patterns of Pwo Karen. Section 3 follows with comments on stress and rhythm, including suggestions for some possible directions for future research. Section 4 focusses on the segmental phonemes, tonemes, tonal variation and intonation. Finally, Section 5 provides a portion of a text. Data for this paper has been collected at different times since 1992. At present, I am living with the Pwo Karen in Plainasuan village, Sisawat district, Kanchanaburi.

2. Pwo Karen Syllable Patterns

All Pwo Karen syllables are open and of two kinds: reduced “minor” syllables and full “major” syllables. Minor syllables are bound syllables comprised of a single consonant (C_I) with [ə] as the vowel. No tonal contrast is present. They also never occur word-final. In many cases, minor syllables have no apparent morphemic status, for example, the word /pəna/ ‘buffalo’. In other cases, the source is clear as in /chəchə/ ‘disease; sick one’. The meaning of /chə/ is ‘thing’ and /c^hə/ is ‘pain’. Thus, ‘thing’ + ‘pain’ = ‘disease; sick one’. The Pwo Karen minor syllable is diagrammed in Figure 2 below.

$C_I[ə]$

Figure 2. Pwo Karen minor syllable

In major syllables, all consonant phonemes are possible in initial position (C_I). In medial position (C_M), only the consonants /j, w, r, l/ occur. Vowels (V) are either plain, nasalized or glottalized with no distinctive vowel length. The four distinctive tones (T) are high-rising, mid, low-falling and high-falling. Glottalized vowels co-occur with the high-rise and low-falling tones only. The Pwo Karen major syllable is diagrammed in Figure 3 below.

T
 C_IC_MV

Figure 3. Pwo Karen major syllable

3. Stress and rhythm

Pwo Karen, for the most part, exhibits two rhythmic patterns in words. The first is the unstressed-stressed iambic pattern which is typical of languages of mainland Southeast Asia, including Mon-Khmer languages, Thai and Burmese (Donegan et. al. 1983; Wheatley 1987). The other rhythmic pattern is combinations of major syllables where the first major syllable is stressed, which is more typical of Tibeto-Burman languages, including Burmese (Wheatley 1987), as in /mɔ̃' mɔ̃'/ ‘sun’.

Cooke et. al. (1976:216), Griffiths (1976) and Atsubiko (1995:81,88,92) report an inventory of atonic/proclitic morphemes with unstressed [ə]. These include the subject/possessive pronouns, [mə] ‘IRR’, [c^hə] ‘thing’ and [lə] ‘one, a’. All of these morphemes have stressed variants in other contexts. Except for [c^hə] ‘thing’ which serves as a nominalizer in words and is unstressed in that context, I have not observed a Pwo Karen awareness of these proclitic morphemes. It seems more likely that these destressed variants are due to the rhythmic patterns at the phrase and clause level. Donegan et. al. (1983:345) suggest that most Southeast Asian languages have stress-

timed rhythm, "...an unmistakable symptom of which is the polarization of their accented and unaccented syllables into...“major” and “minor” types, the latter having a vowel we would call “reduced” in English.” It is likely, then, that Pwo Karen rhythm also functions similarly to English stress-timed rhythm where syllables are reduced based on their position in a phrase or clause rather than their inherent morphemic quality.

As yet, evidence is limited on Pwo Karen rhythm, intonation and word boundaries, although Cooke et. al. (1976:205) report for Northern Pwo Karen that “...all utterances must have at least one phrase or sentence stress which is superimposed on a normal syllable, causing the syllable in question to be pronounced with slightly more loudness and duration than other adjacent syllables....”

4. Pwo Karen Phonemes and Distribution

The phoneme inventory of Pwo Karen is fairly standard for Pwo Karen languages. The possible consonant clusters with medial approximants are extensive. The nasalized vowels seem to be undergoing a change where nasalized vowels are being diphthongized with a lessening of the nasalization effect. Finally, the tonal system seems to be transparent with some typical tonal alteration.

4.1. Consonant Phonemes

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Unaspirated Stops	p		t		c	k	ʔ
Aspirated Stops	ph		th		ch	kh	
Implosives (pre-voiced)	b		d				
Nasals	m		n			ŋ	
Voiced Fricatives						ɣ	
Voiceless Fricatives		θ		ʃ		x	h
Approximants			r		j	w	
Lateral Approximant			l				

4.1.1. Labials

- /p/ voiceless unaspirated bilabial stop [p].
/pî/ ‘little’, /pə/ ‘1pl’, /pěi/ ‘tease’, /plè/ ‘allow’ /pé/ ‘CL:thread hank’
- /ph/ voiceless aspirated bilabial stop [pʰ].
/phî/ ‘rice husk’, /phə/ ‘cooking pot’, /phài/ ‘skin’, /phĩ/ ‘younger sibling’, /phí’lò/ ‘weed out’, /phĩ/ ‘pus’
- /b/ voiced bilabial implosive [ɓ].
/bài/ ‘pull’, /blè/ ‘full, satisfied’, /bài/ ‘massage’, /bĩ/ ‘paddy rice’, /bí/ ‘goat’, /bé/ ‘correct’, /bě/ ‘CL:flat things’
- /m/ voiced bilabial nasal [m].
/mè/ ‘drunk’, /mé/ ‘tooth’, /mĩ/ ‘female’, /mí/ ‘fire’, /mái/ ‘fun, well’, /mè/ ‘do, want’

4.1.2. Alveolars

- /t/ voiceless unaspirated alveolar stop [t].
/tăi/ 'do', /tú/ 'CL:pills', /tái/ 'CL:week', /tô/ 'thick', /tè/ 'basket'
- /th/ voiceless aspirated alveolar stop [t^h].
/thài/ 'go, return', /thú/ 'bird', /tho/ 'gold', /thài/ 'arrive',
/thĩ/ 'CL:instance'
- /d/ voiced alveolar implosive [ɗ].
/dú/ 'hit, spank', /dái/ 'put in', /dài/ 'still', /dĩ/ 'egg', /dăi/ 'sesame seed'
- /n/ voiced alveolar nasal [n].
/nè/ '2s', /nái/ 'enter', /nĩ/ 'patung', /nê/ 'win'
- /θ/ voiceless dental fricative [θ]. On occasion, some speakers will pronounce /θ/ with [s]. However, there seems to be no pattern to this and I do not hear it often.
/θú/ 'sheep', /θô/ 'CL:night', /θĩ/ 'medicine', /θê/ 'three', /θá/ 'fruit'
- /r/ voiced alveolar approximant [ɹ]. As an initial consonant, /r/ is rare.
/rwí/ 'choose', /rái/ 'burlap bag'
- /l/ voiced alveolar lateral approximant [l].
/lè/ 'one, a', /lái/ 'completely', /lĩ/ 'four', /lăi/ 'motorcycle'
- /ʃ/ voiceless postalveolar fricative [ʃ].
/ʃô/ 'poor', /ʃú/ 'lunge', /ʃá/ 'star'

4.1.3. Palatals

- /c/ voiceless unaspirated palatal stop [c].
/cí/ 'left', /cái/ 'walk', /cê/ 'tie', /có/ 'wet'
- /ch/ voiceless aspirated palatal stop [c^h].
/chí/ 'some', /chái/ 'sour', /chô/ 'chicken', /chá/ 'animal feed'
- /j/ voiced palatal approximant [j].
/jí/ 'some', /jăi/ 'pound', /jè/ '1s', /jô/ 'easy', /já/ 'fish, meat', /jé/ 'five'

4.1.4. Velars

- /k/ voiceless unaspirated velar stop [k].
/kwè/ 'play', /ká/ 'difficult', /kó/ 'lamp', /kĩ/ 'INTENS' /kài/ 'cough',
/ke/ 'is',
- /kh/ voiceless aspirated velar stop [k^h].
/khwè/ 'crawl', /khá/ 'chin', /khô/ 'cutting board', /khwì/ 'nine'
- /ŋ/ voiced velar nasal [ŋ]. Thus far, I have only discovered three instances of this phoneme.
/?èŋê/, 'fin, hackles', /ŋě/ 'confused', /thốmà'ŋí/ 'chant'
- /x/ voiceless velar fricative [x].
/xwì/ 'buy', /xê/ 'heavy', /xài/ 'field', /xè/ 'mushroom', /xá/ 'winnow'
- /ɣ/ voiced velar fricative [ɣ].
/ɣá/ 'evening', /ɣài/ 'husk (v)', /ɣê/ 'hear', /ɣĩ/ 'cleanse', /ɣè/ '1pl',
/ɣé/ 'spicy',
- /w/ voiced labial-velar approximant [w ~ v ~ β].
/wé/ 'older sibling', /wí'lě/ 'sweep', /wĩ/ 'first, before', /wé/ 'not',
/wě/ 'fishnet'

- /ʔ/ glottal stop [ʔ].
 /ʔá/ 'much', /ʔe/ 'narrow'
 /h/ voiceless glottal fricative [h].
 /há/ 'Grandfather Ha', /he/ 'dear'

4.2. Consonant Clusters

Pwo Karen has four consonants that can occupy the C_M position in the syllable. These are /j, w, r, l/. The distribution of initial and medial consonants discovered thus far is illustrated in Figure 4 with examples.

C _I	/j/	/w/	/r/	/l/		
/p/	+	+	+	+	/pjù/	'vomit'
/ph/	+			+	/pwài'θà/	'tired'
/b/	+		+	+	/prě/	'thresh'
/m/	+	+		+	/plò/	'plain'
/θ/		+			/kəmâitwè/	'small yellow metal bowl'
/t/		+			/cjò/	'saute'
/th/		+			/kjəθà'/	'lazy'
/d/		+			/kwè/	'play'
/n/	+	+			/krúcăicě/	'depressed'
/r/	+	+			/klà'/	'crow'
/l/		+			/ʔwà/	'white'
/ʃ/		+			/phja/	'temple'
/c/	+				/phlé/	'fast'
/ch/		+			/thwê/	'dish'
/j/		+			/chwí/	'beetle'
/k/	+	+		+	/khwà'/	'scratch'
/kh/		+	+	+	/təkhriʔá/	'sugar'
/ŋ/					/khlú/	'snail'
/x/		+			/bjǝ/	'treat'
/y/					/brə/	'quick'
/w/	+				/blè/	'full, satisfied'
/ʔ/		+			/mjá'bǝ/	'granule'
/h/					/mwe/	'is'
					/mlǝ/	'elephant trunk'
					/njá/	'Tuesday'
					/nwè/	'seven'
					/θwǝ/	'clear (v)'
					/ʃwémjù/	'siblings'
					/xwí/	'buy'
					/jwà/	'mirror'
					/phúthəwjá/	'Wednesday'
					/chərjá'/	'noodle-kneading bowl'
					/rwí/	'choose'
					/lwí/	'fine pieces'

Figure 4. Pwo Karen consonant clusters

4.3. Vowels

The Pwo Karen vowel phonemes are of three types: oral, nasalized and glottalized.

4.3.1. Oral Vowel Phonemes

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i	ɨ	u
Close-mid	e	ə	o
Open-mid		a	

- /i/ Close front unrounded oral vowel [i].
/mí/ 'fire', /phî/ 'rice husk', /cì/ 'money, silver', /chí/ 'some', /dì/ 'navel', /lì/ 'go'
- /e/ Close-mid front unrounded oral vowel [ɛ ~ ε ~ æ].
/mé/ 'tooth', /phê/ 'necklace', /nè/ 'believe', /ʔè/ 'garlic' /yé/ 'spicy', /khwé/ 'type of forest fruit'
- /ɨ/ Close central unrounded oral vowel [ɨ].
/chí/ 'write', /khí/ 'PROG', /dì/ 'CL:animal', /phí/ 'short'
- /ə/ Close-mid central unrounded oral vowel [ə].
/chó/ 'mortar', /khó/ 'dig', /lè/ 'one, a', /nè/ '2s', /ʔè/ '3s', /phè/ 'cooking pot', /thó/ 'ant', /jè/ '1s'
- /a/ Open-mid central unrounded oral vowel [ɐ].
/là/ 'moon, month', /nà/ 'night', /ʃá/ 'star', /klà/ 'middle', /mâ/ 'wife'
- /u/ Close back rounded oral vowel [u].
/khú/ 'top', /ʔù/ 'beyond', /phú/ 'child', /ju/ 'look', /kú/ 'sweets'
- /o/ Close-mid back rounded oral vowel [o] ~ [ɔ]. When stressed, /o/ is pronounced [ɔ]. For example, /jò/ 'this, here' is often pronounced [jɔ] when calling someone's attention to something so you can give it to them.
/khó/ 'CL:hand', /ʔò/ 'drink', /lò/ 'tell, answer', /phô/ 'flower', /phlò/ 'coconut'

4.3.2. Nasalized Vowel Phonemes

	Front	Central	Back	Diphthong
Close	ĩ	ĩ	ũ	
Close-mid	ẽ	ẽ	õ	ãi
Open-mid			õ	

Nasalized vowel phonemes /ĩ, ũ, õ, ã/ are articulated as steady-state monophthongs with strong nasalization, often involving a post-vocalic velar coda [Vŋ]. The remaining vowel positions /ĩ, ẽ, ẽ, ãi/ are diphthongized phonetically with weak nasalization and no postvocalic nasal effect.

- /ĩ/ Close front unrounded nasalized diphthong [ĩ̃].
/mĩ/ 'fruit for making alcohol', /nĩ/ 'pasin'¹ /phĩ/ 'grandmother', /lĩ/ 'wind (n)', /chĩ/ 'urine', /lĩ/ 'four'

¹ A pasin is the lower garment typically worn by women in Southeast Asia.

- /ẽ/ Close-mid front unrounded nasalized diphthong [ẽⁱ].
/mế/ ‘first, before’, /nế/ ‘year’, /θế/ ‘tree’, /γế/ ‘house’, /khê/ ‘scale’
- /ĩ/ Close central unrounded nasalized vowel [ĩ].
/phĩ/ ‘jump’, /θĩ/ ‘medicine’, /mĩ/ ‘female’, /khĩ/ ‘wind (v)’,
/phĩ/ ‘younger sibling’
- /ã/ Close-mid central unrounded nasalized diphthong [ãⁱ].
/phã/ ‘time’, /θã/ ‘liver’, /mã/ ‘CL:thousand’, /bã/ ‘lime (betel chewing)’,
/nã/ ‘win’, /phã/ ‘in’
- /ũ/ Close back rounded nasalized vowel [ũ].
/phũ/ ‘grandfather’, /thũ/ ‘roll’, /jũ/ ‘mouse’, /kũ/ ‘round’, /thũ/ ‘bridge’
- /õ/ Close-mid back rounded nasalized vowel [õ ~ ɣⁱ]. Some words pronounced [õ] by older speakers are pronounced with the close-mid back unrounded diphthong [ɣⁱ] by younger speakers. For example,
[nú’thɣⁱ/nú’thòn] ‘spoon’,
/phõ/ ‘raft’, /thõ/ ‘gold’, /bõ/ ‘CL:long/thin’, /lõ/ ‘chase’, /phlõ/ ‘Karen’,
/dõ/ ‘place’
- /õ/ Open-mid back rounded nasalized vowel [õ].
/bõ/ ‘yellow’, /lõ/ ‘down’, /dõ/ ‘mountain top’, /nõ/ ‘grass’
- /ãⁱ/ Open-mid central front unrounded nasalized diphthong [ãⁱ].
/mãi/ ‘done, ripe’, /bãi/ ‘pull’, /kãi/ ‘ache’, /thãi/ ‘return’, /nãi/ ‘back basket’,
/cãi/ ‘walk’

4.3.3. Glottalized Vowel Phonemes

	Front	Central	Back	Diphthongs	
Close	i’	ɨ’	u’		
Close-mid	e’	ə’	o’	ai’	aɨ’
Open-mid		a’			

- /i’/ Close front unrounded glottalized vowel [i’].
/mí’/ ‘eye’, /lí’/ ‘switch (for spanking)’, /blì’/ ‘grind’, /phí’/ ‘weed out’
- /e’/ Close-mid front unrounded glottalized vowel [e’ ~ ɛ’ ~ æ’].
/né’/ ‘Nae’, /cè’/ ‘bit’, /khwé’/ ‘cup’, /xè’/ ‘deliberate, careful’
- /ɨ’/ Close central unrounded glottalized vowel [ɨ’].
/kí’/ ‘intensifier’, /pí’/ ‘Pue’
- /ə’/ Close-mid central unrounded glottalized vowel [ə’].
/pé’/ ‘Poe’
- /a’/ Open-mid central unrounded glottalized vowel [ə’].
/θà’/ ‘heart’, /kà’/ ‘tight’, /ʃá’/ ‘gold’, /klà’/ ‘crow’
- /u’/ Close back rounded glottalized vowel [u’].
/khú’/ ‘sting with pain’, /ʔù’/ ‘peel’, /phú’/ ‘beat’, /kú’/ ‘every’, /thù’/ ‘pig’
- /o’/ Close-mid back rounded glottalized vowel [ɔ’].
/lò’/ ‘ten thousand’, /dò’/ ‘more, again’
- /ai’/ Open-mid central front unrounded glottalized diphthong [eⁱ’].
/θài’/ ‘liquor’, /kài’/ ‘kapok’, /bài’/ ‘massage’, /thái’/ ‘cut’, /phài’/ ‘skin’,
/chái’/ ‘rice field’
- /aɨ’/ Open-mid central unrounded glottalized diphthong [eⁱ’ ~ əⁱ’].
/kài’/ ‘cough’, /ʃái’/ ‘busy’, /bài’/ ‘close’, /thái’/ ‘ride’, /jài’/ ‘already’

4.4. Tone and Intonation

The Pwo Karen tonal system is straightforward. No co-occurrence restrictions between tones and initial consonants have been observed. The study of intonation is in the beginning stages with one intonational pattern observed thus far.

4.4.1. Tonemes

West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen has four phonemic tones. These are:

High rise / ' /

Mid / /

Low Falling / ` /

High Falling / ^ /

- / ' / : [45] The high rising tone is pronounced with a rise from high to extra-high. It co-occurs with plain, nasalized and glottalized vowels.
/mí/ 'fire', /má/ 'wrong', /ní/ 'pasin', /thí/ 'instance', /mí/ 'face',
/thá/ 'small drum'
- / / : [33] The mid tone is pronounced at mid-level with a slight rise before a slight fall. It co-occurs with plain and nasalized vowels.
/yi/ 'rattan', /mi/ 'tail', /chə/ 'thing', /nĩ/ 'laugh, smile',
/thõ/ 'pound (in mortar)'
- / ` / : [21] The low falling tone begins a little lower than the mid tone and falls to low. It co-occurs with plain, nasalized and glottalized vowels.
/yì/ 'good', /mà/ 'do', /mĩ/ 'cooked rice', /nĩ/ 'two, CL:day',
/mì/ 'box', /thà/ 'iron, needle'
- / ^ / : [51] The high falling tone begins high and quickly falls to low. It co-occurs with plain and nasalized vowels.
/mâ/ 'wife', /chê/ 'sweet', /thî/ 'water', /mĩ/ 'sleep', /thô/ 'gold'

4.4.2. Alternation of Tones

Several tonal alterations have been observed in utterances. These are presented in informal rules below.

45 → 33/___	$\begin{Bmatrix} 45 \\ 51 \end{Bmatrix}$	/phúθá/ → [p ^h uθé]	'child'
		/núthî/ → [nūt ^{hi} î]	'milk'
51 → 45/___	$\begin{Bmatrix} 45 \\ 21 \end{Bmatrix}$	/thî khlé/ → [t ^h ĩ k ^h lé]	'cold water'
		/mĩnõ/ → [m ^h ĩnõŋ]	'lie down'
31 → 33/___	21	/yõ jài/ → [yõ jè ⁱ]	'finished'

4.4.3. Intonation

In yes/no questions with no question particle, rising intonation (↗) serves to indicate a question.

/ʔò thî/	[ʔò t ^{hi} ↗]	'Do you want a drink?'
/khùlà nê/	[k ^h ùlè nê↗]	'Did the foreigner win?'
/nè mái' lô/	[nè mē ⁱ lo↗]	'Are you well?'

5. pədè de khlú 'The Rabbit and the Snail'²

(1) pədè ʔó là dī lì thố cái kwè lə khúlồ dồ dá khlú là phlố
 rabbit exist one CL:animal go up walk play at mountain mountain.top see snail one CL:fruit:snail
 A rabbit went walking for fun up to the top of a mountain and saw a snail.

(2) khlú là phlố nó cái xè' DUP lô
 snail one CL:fruit:snail that walk deliberate:careful INTENS !!
 That snail walked very carefully!

(3) cái ʔwì kí'
 walk slow INTENS
 (He) walked really slow!

(4) pədè juphề wê dá ʔó là njàdĩ
 rabbit watch so ? exist one hour
 The rabbit watched for one hour.

(5) juphề khlú cái ʔwì
 watch snail walk slow
 (He) watched the snail walk slowly.

(6) khlú dá pədè chínồ ʔók^hù' juphề
 snail see rabbit sit wait watch
 The snail saw the rabbit sitting, waiting and watching.

(7) ʔà lò wê dá nà mà nó lè pədè
 3p tell so ? 2p do what QUES rabbit
 He asked, "What are you doing, rabbit?"

(8) nè juphề jà bá DUP jò
 2p watch 1s INTENS INTENS here
 "You have been really watching me."

(9) pədè cái' châ nè cái chà jò khlú ʔé là nĩ nĩ là cè' lô
 rabbit answer bitings:sarcastic 2p walk like:kind this snail EXCLM one CL:day able one bit !!
 "You go like a snail. In a day you cover very little."

(10) mə thố thố dài' ʔá khlú cái' wê dá
 IRR to until still QUES snail answer so ?
 "Is there anything else?" the snail responded.

(11) nè mə cái prề de jà ʔá pədè
 2p IRR walk compete with 1s QUES rabbit
 "Will you race with me, rabbit?"

² From Griffiths (n.d.), with minor alterations by the Pwo Karen of Plainasuan village. CL:classifier, DUP:reduplication, EXCLM:exclamation, INTENS:intensifier, IRR:irrealis, NEG:negative, QUES:question, 1s:First person singular, 1PL:First person plural, 2p:Second person, 3p:Third person, NOM:Nominalizer.

(12) nə cài' wê nə cái thi
2p answer so 2p walk fast
"You say that you walk fast."

(13) nə chômố jè cái ?wĩ nái nə dài'
2p think 1s walk slow comparison.marker? 2p part.of.comparison??
"You think that I walk slower than you."

(14) mwe jè mə cái prề báθà' de nə chí lô
to.be 1s IRR walk compete want with 2p some !!
"If that's the way it is, I want to race with you."

(15) jè cái thi nái nə dài' pədè lò
1s walk fast comparison.marker? 2p part.of.comparison??? rabbit tell
"I walk faster than you," said the rabbit.

(16) jè ?ó k'ù' nə nồ njàđĩ ká jài'
1s exist wait 2p part hour almost already
"I've waited for you almost one hour already."

(17) nə cái nồ phlaθĩ ni dài' ?é
2p walk part 50.centimeters able yet NEG
"You have not been able to walk even 50 centimeters yet."

(18) khlú cài' wê ?é mwe ca nó θù' keyokhú yêthài jò
snail answer so EXCLM to.be like that ? tomorrow_morning return here
The snail responded, "If it's like that, tomorrow morning (we'll) come back here."

(19) pə mə cái prề lú'θà'
1PL IRR walk compete together
"We'll race together."

(20) pə mə θíjā bá po là cái thi là yà là
1PL IRR determine able who QUES walk fast one CL.person QUES
"We will be able to determine who walks faster."

(21) khlú cái thi nái pədè ?á pədè cái thi
snail walk fast comparison.marker? rabbit QUES rabbit walk fast

nái khlú ?á
comparison.marker? snail QUES
"Does the snail walk faster than the rabbit? Does the rabbit walk faster than the snail?"

(22) po là mə nồ là khlú lò ca nó yồ nó
who QUES IRR win QUES snail tell like that finish that
"Who is going to win?" the snail finished.

(23) pədè thài lô
rabbit return !!
The rabbit went back then.

(24) là keyo là khô pədè yêthài mố cái prề lú'θà' de
one morning one section:part rabbit return IRR walk compete together with

khú lú' khúồ đở ?ù
snail yonder mountain mountain.top beyond
The next morning, the rabbit returned to race with snail to the very top of the mountain beyond.

(25) ?éyò bá ?à khâ me cái prê khú nó ná' wè ?à ðà' là phlố
 next:then ? NOMtime IRR walk compete snail that count remain 3p heart one CL.fruit:snail

là phlố là phlố nwè phlố ?ó lú' khúlồ khú
 one CL.fruit:snail one CL.fruit:snail seven CL.fruit:snail exist yonder mountain top

là phlố là phlố là phlố
 one CL.fruit:snail one CL.fruit:snail one CL.fruit:snail

Before the time of the race, that snail arranged for seven (snails) to be on the tops of the mountains.

(26) bá ?à khâ cái nó pədè cái lô pədè cǎitəlǎi brè
 ? NOMtime walk that rabbit walk !! rabbit run quick

When it was time to walk, the rabbit walked. The rabbit ran quickly.

(27) khú ?ó wè thō nó lì dài' ?é
 snail exist remain to that go still NEG

The snail stayed right there. (He) hadn't gone yet.

(28) pədè phĩ thố chố' chố' chố'
 rabbit jump to thump! thump! thump!

The rabbit jumped. Thump! Thump! Thump!

(29) thō lú' khúlồ khú ?ù hē khú hũ
 to yonder mountain top beyond EXCLM snail ***

When he got to the top of the mountain, he called the snail.

(30) pədè mà ?à na ðô lú' lỏ khâi khô yê thō ?à ?ó dài' wá
 rabbit do 3p ear loud yonder down back section:part come to 3p exist still NEG

The rabbit heard something loud behind him. He (the snail) was not there yet.

(31) ?éyò phĩ thố dò' là jê dò' phĩ phĩ phĩ phĩ
 next:then jump up more one CL.period.of.time more jump jump jump jump

Then (he) continued jumping....

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