Adverbs in Sgaw Karen

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This paper is based on extensive materials compiled from 1975 to the present day. The data were originally collected for the preparation of a Karen - Thai, Thai - Karen Dictionary which was published in 1986. Since then the author has been working on Sgaw Karen grammar. Adverbs are very interesting in Sgaw Karen, in that, in this language we can divide adverbs into ordinary adverbs, expressives, and intensifiers. In so doing, we might also find that the study of iconicity is helpful.

The People

The Karen are a distinct group of people in the Sino-Tibetan linguistic super-stock. Benedict (1972: 6) thinks that Karen is sufficiently distinct to warrant a classification separate from Tibeto-Burman. According to Keyes (1977 : 49), they are the largest tribal minority in both Myanmar and Thailand, numbering three million or more in Myanmar, and 200,000[+] in Thailand. In the map appended to Lebar et al. (1964) it is shown that the Karen cluster in dispersed groups in the basins of the Irrawaddy river, the Sittang river and in the hill areas which separate eastern Myanmar and western Thailand. In Thailand, the Karen, the second largest minority group after the Northern Khmer which number more than 800,000 (Smalley 1976: 43), can be found in villages in every northern and western province, from Mae Hongsorn down south to Ranong. There are settlements of Karen in the central basin, especially in the pocket-areas of Uthaithani, Petchburi and Suphanburi provinces. Only the north-eastern plateau and the southernmost provinces lack Karen settlements. The Karen are the first hill-tribe people who immigrated to Thailand, more than 200 years ago (Ratanakul 1986:XXI). Unlike other new-comer hill people of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic groups (such as the Lahu, Lisu, Akha etc.) the Karen have been known to the Thai for a long time. The Thai called them *Jaaŋ*, which was an abbreviation of the name that the Burmese called them: *Karyaaŋ*.

Brief overview of phonological system of Mae Chaem Sgaw Karen dialect

Consonant system

		Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
stops	Voiceless Unaspirated	p	t	c	k	ʔ
	Voiceless aspirated	ph	th		kh	
	Voiced	b	d	j		
fricatives	Voiceless		s(θ)	sh	x	h
	Voiced		z(j)		ɣ	
Sonorants	Semivowel	w(v)				
	Nasal	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
	Lateral			l		
	Trill			r		

Table 1. Initial consonants

All of these 24 consonants in table 1 can occur as initial consonants.

The distribution of consonants clusters is presented in this chart.

C₂				C₁							
w		b	d	c	n	k	kh	s	sh	l	ʔ
l	p	ph	b ، m			k	kh				
ɣ	p	ph	b	m		c	k	kh		sh	
r	p	ph	b				k	kh		sh	
j	p	ph		m					s		

Table 2. Consonant clusters

Final consonant

Sgaw Karen has only one final consonant: /ʔ/.

Vowel system

Mae Chaem, Sgaw Karen vowels are not unlike the 9 vowels of Thai. This calls for further research into the phonological system of Sgaw Karen dialects in Myanmar in order to reconstruct the phonological system of Proto Sgaw Karen. At present we know: that the low front vowel /ɛ/ of Sgaw Karen is relatively higher than the Thai low front vowel; that Sgaw Karen high central /i/ is lower in tongue

position than the Thai high central vowel; and that Sgaw Karen low back /ɔ/ is farther back than the Thai /ɔ/. The /ɔ/ has lip-rounding, and it is frequently found in expressive words and onomatopoeia. Sgaw Karen does not have diphthongs except in loan words from Thai and in onomatopoeia.

Parts of Tongue	front	central	back
Position of Levels of tongue Lips	unrounded		rounded
high	i	ɨ	u
mid	e	ə	o
low	ɛ	a	ɔ

Table 3. Vowels

Tones   •

Sgaw Karen has 3 tones :

1. *low level* This tone is comparable to the Thai tone*aek*. In Y.R. Chao's presentation this is a 22 tone. In my Thai-Sgaw Karen Dictionary, it is written as tone 1.
2. *mid level* This tone is comparable to the Thai tone*saaman*. This is a 33 tone. In my Thai-Sgaw Karen Dictionary, it is written as tone 2.
3. *high* This tone is comparable to the Thai tone*tri*. This is 55 tone. In my Thai-Sgaw Karen Dictionary, it is written as tone 3.

It is significant that Sgaw Karen generally has only level tones. However, contour tones are beginning to make their presence felt in some informants' pronunciation, with a high-falling tone occuring as a free variant of the low level tone. This is a 52 tone. In my Thai-Sgaw Karen Dictionary this tone is not represented because its occurence is sporadic, and there are many informants who do not use it at all.

Another contour tone, the rising tone, is used more extensively. This tone is comparable to the Thai tone*cattawaa*. This is a 35 tone. In my Thai-Sgaw Karen Dictionary, it is written as tone 4. Strictly speaking, we should not assign this tone as tone 4 in Sgaw Karen as its occurrence is predictable. We never find this tone in ordinary affirmative sentences. If it occurs in affirmative sentences at all, those sentences must have nuances of self-pity or doubt as to the outcome of fortune or events; the tone 4 then occurs on the last word of the sentence. Also the last word of yes/no question sentences must carry this tone 4. We can say that this tone is not a toneme in that it is predictable. Semantically it is emotive, emphatic and doubt/question loaded. The emotive and emphatic quality of this tone 4 are apparent if we consider the color words. Any adverb which modifies a color word must carry tone 4 on its first syllable. We can call such adverbs "intensifiers" (see below).

Ordinary adverbs

Sgaw Karen has, like most languages of the world, words to modify verbs and adjectives. These are ordinary adverbs. However, ordinary adverbs in Sgaw Karen can be subclassified only according to their meanings; their forms tell us nothing because Sgaw Karen does not have prefixes nor suffixes. And the distinction between adjectives and adverbs is sometimes not clear : some words can function both as an adjective and an adverb, and some words can function both as a verb and an adverb. Examples can be found in the Thai-Sgaw Karen Dictionary (1986) and we need not say more about them here.

Expressives in Sgaw Karen are more difficult to describe and could be the subject of a long monograph or dissertation. We use the term "expressives" after G. Diffloth (1972). This term has been used by researchers working on languages of Southeast Asia, such as Ratree Wayland's Handling of "Lao expressives" (1998).

In Sgaw Karen expressives can occur as verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. Two characteristics of expressives in Sgaw Karen are: first, expressives occur only as polysyllabic words, starting from two syllables and with a high incidence as three syllabic and four syllabic words; second, some kind of iconicity plays a part in the repetition of vowels, in the gradation of vowels and in the mutual pushing of front and back vowels, for example. Many examples of these plays on the vowels of the expressive words appear to be sound-imitating (onomatopoeia), and shape-imitating, and even smell-imitating.

The following are examples of expressives taken from volume I of the Thai-Sgaw Karen Dictionary.

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Thai		Phonetic		English
กร้อน	=	ʔɔ²ˀlkə¹ilo²	=	to be thin (as in worn out shirt or towel)
กร้อย	=	bla²bla²	=	to have no taste such as in badly prepared soup
กระจุ๊ดกระจาย	=	səli² səlla¹	=	to spread out in different directions
กระเจิดกระเจิง	=	kə²ˀldi²kɔ²da²	=	to flee from dabger in a hasty and unorganized fashion
กระโชกกระชั้น	=	shyɛ²³shyi²she²da²³	=	(of sound or actions that are) loud and swift
กระเพื่อม (เทิ่ม น้ำ)	=	ki²ˀlki²ˀ	=	moving (like the surface of water)
กระลิ้นกระลั่ง	=	pə²ˀlciˀlpə²ˀlte²	=	(to wait/to see with) impatience
กลับนอกเป็นใน (เชิ่น เสื้อ)	=	brə²ˀlbri²³	=	to have the inside out (such as shirt, bag)
(มาอย่าง) เป็นกลุ่มเป็นก้อน	=	kollo¹	=	(to come) in groups
(ขาด) กระรุ่งกระริ่ง	=	polliˀpolyɔ²	=	worn out (like old shirts or rags)
ยับเยิน (อย่างคนถูกเสือกัด)	=	lɔ²swɛ²³lɔ²swɔ²	=	serious wound that was torn out (as by a tiger)
ขรุขระ (ทาง)	=	do²mo²do²khlo²	=	bumpy (road)
แฮ่บๆ (อย่างเสียงคราชของคนเจ็บ)	=	kə²ˀljɔ²kə²ˀljɔ²	=	(to cry with) low voice
คร้าวๆ (ทำอย่างลวกๆไม่เรียบร้อย)	=	kəlɔˀkəlla²ˀl	=	to do things in a sloppy way

(ฉลาด) แบบแยบยลโกง (ครีนฉฎชิ)	= sheʔ²³ʔɛ²³	= dishonestly clever
นิ่ง, ไม่เอาใจใส่, ไม่ทำอะไร	= khɔ²dɔ²	= (to stay) quietly without care nor enthusiasm
ช้าๆ (ทำช้าๆ พูดช้าๆ ฯลฯ)	= kəˡbɛ²³kəˡbɛ²³	= of actions that are slow
ยุ่งเหยิงวุ่นวาย	= kəʔphuˡliˡlu²	= describing actions/situations that are unorderly
ชุ่มช่าม	= cɔʔˡklɔʔˡ	= describing actions that are clumsy
ร่วน (อย่างดิน)	= kəʔˡsweʔ²kəʔˡswɔ²	= describing soil that can let water pass freely
เดี๋ยวเดียว	= shiˡ²³kɛ²	= for a little moment
ทีละน้อย (เพื่อไม่ให้หมด/เสร็จเร็วๆ)	= pəˡdiʔ	= (to do things) bit by bit
(บาง) แจ้วแหวว	= teˡ²xɛ²	= see-through (describing paper, cloth etc.)
ประณีต	= səˡxiʔˡdiʔˡ	= (to do things) with care/attention to details

The examples above are expressives in Sgaw Karen. In this study, attempts are not made to classify and analyse them. A lot of research needs to be done before we can say that we understand the Sgaw Karen expressives. But we think that the examples above are sufficient to show that Sgaw Karen makes use of vowels in the formation of the expressives. Tones have no role here. This is in contrast to the intensifiers.

Intensifiers

Intensifiers in Sgaw Karen are modifiers that are used to maximize or minimize the description of colors. In all examples, one finds that intensifiers are two-syllable words that have tone 4 on the first syllable (see supra about tone 4). It is interesting that color words should be modified by such a specially built form. We can offer no explanation for this.

The followings are examples of intensifiers in Sgaw Karen.

จ๊วก   phɔ²la²ˀ¹   very (describing the white colŏr)
        ขาวจ๊วก
        wa²   phɔ⁴la²ˀ¹
        white very

จั๊ด   -------------
        แดงจั๊ด
        ɣɔ²   cɔ⁴la²ˀ¹
        red   very

        เหลืองจั๊ด
        bɔ²   hɔ⁴la²ˀ¹
        yellow very

        เขียวจั๊ด
        la²   tu⁴la²ˀ¹
        green very

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that, with a closer look, adverbs in Sgaw Karen can be divided into three groups i.e. ordinary adverbs, expressives and intensifiers. Expressives make use of an inter-play of vowels in different syllables. Intensifiers bear tone 4 which does not have the full status of toneme in this language. Areas of future research that might prove fruitful could include the study of the formation of words, the role of vowels and stress rules; and also the appearance of new tones on intensifiers or other meaning-laden words in other languages which might help us to understand more about tones in general.

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